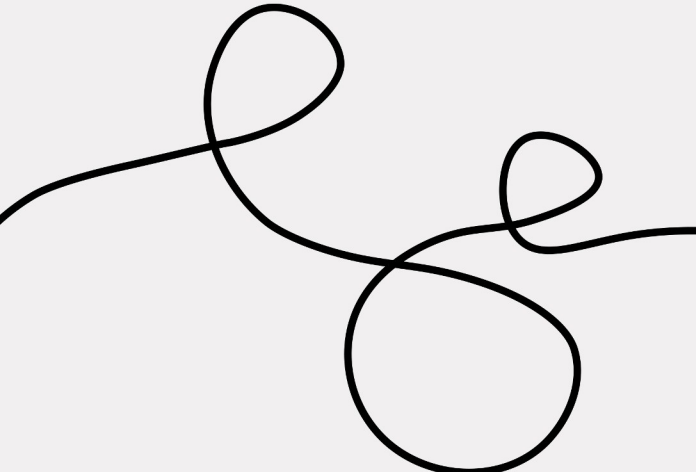




EXPERIMENTAL ENTANGLEMENTS

A COLLECTION OF QUESTIONS IN ARCHITECTURE.

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*MASTERS OF SCIENCE, ADVANCED ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN, 26'
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, GSAPP*

FOREWORD

A BODY OF WORK BUILT THROUGH CRITICAL INQUIRY AND EXPERIMENTATION.

This portfolio is a collection of explorations developed throughout my master's journey, shaped not by definitive answers, but by continuous questioning. From the very first semester, I was introduced to a fundamentally different approach to architectural thinking - one grounded in critical inquiry and positioning rather than problem-solving alone. Instead of beginning with solutions, I began by asking questions: Questions about systems, agency, labour, ecology, infrastructure, identity, representation, and the role architecture plays within larger political, social, and environmental frameworks.

That approach became the foundation for navigating the year. Every project framed its own set of questions, using them as tools to investigate tensions, uncover hidden relationships, and test spatial possibilities. Rather than seeking singular resolutions, the work embraced uncertainty, contradiction, and experimentation as productive methods of design thinking. Through research, mapping, drawing, and speculation, architecture became a medium for analyzing broader systems and imagining alternative futures.

The projects collected here move across different scales, territories, and practices, yet all remain connected through inquiry. Together, they form a body of work that positions architecture not as a fixed answer, but as an evolving process of questioning, reflection, and critical engagement.

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Q1:
WHO DECIDES WHAT IS TRASH
AND WHAT IS VALUABLE?

Q2:
CAN IRREGULARITY BECOME
A CRAFT THAT RESISTS
HOMOGENEITY

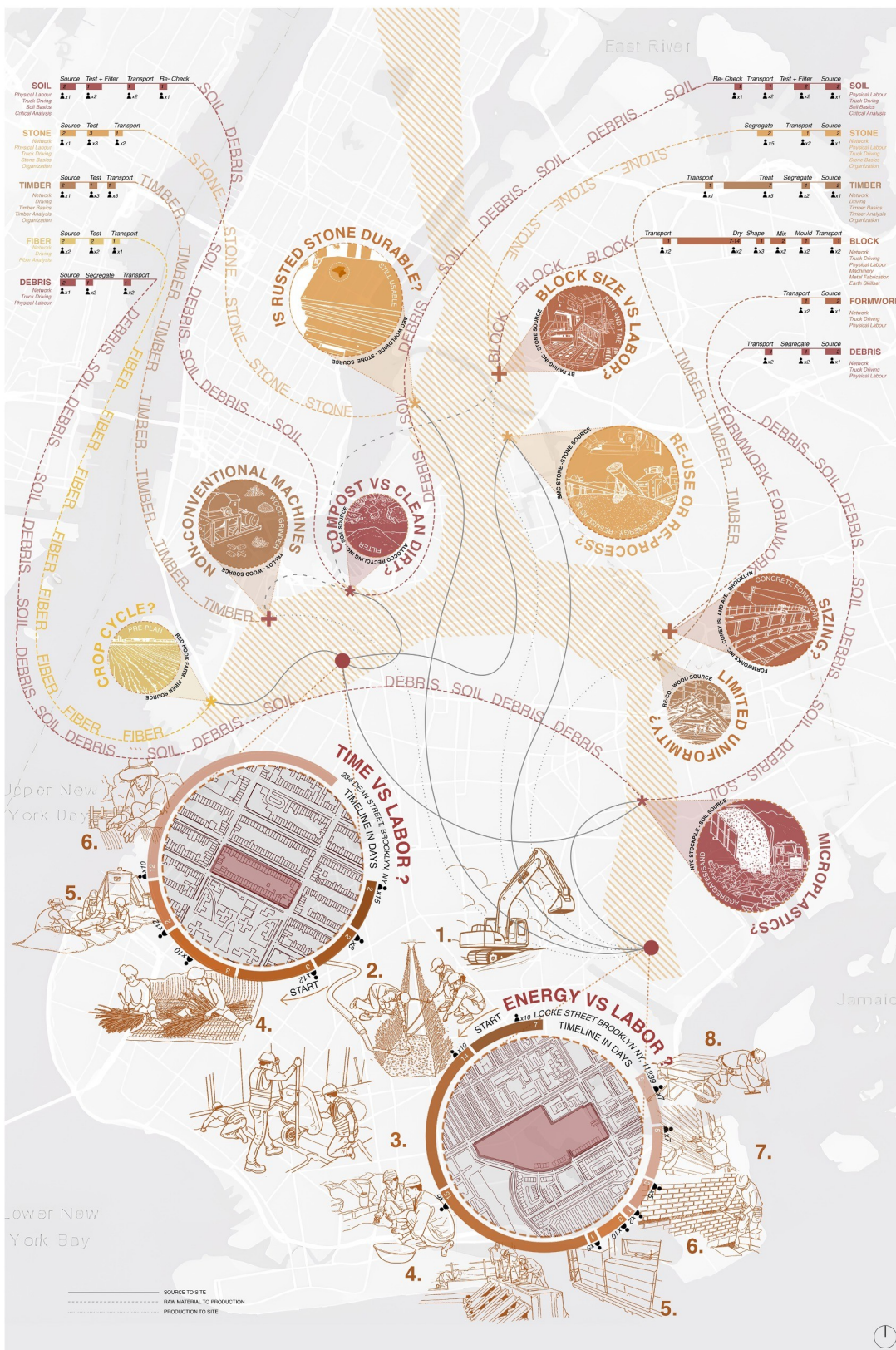
SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

EARTH + WASTE + MEMORY

This project works with the soil of today, a mix of earth, waste, and labor - to reimagine clay as a contemporary construction system. Rather than idealizing purity, it embraces contamination, embedding plastics and debris into compressed earth blocks and rammed earth walls, reframing waste as structure. Mapped within a "zone of possibility" of local soils, stone yards, fiber sources, and informal economies, the design foregrounds endogeneity: materials, labor, and processes that exist on site and within the borough.

Here, architecture is not a finished outcome but a choreography of making through dry stacking stone offcuts for rammed wall shuttering, imprinting soil provenance into blocks, and aligning production with site rhythms. Design and passive systems grow from these choices, not as add-ons but as integral to the act of building.

The project challenges assumptions that earth is obsolete and waste invisible, proposing instead an architecture that is crafted, situated, and grounded in the conditions of the present.



CRAFTING ASSEMBLIES

PEOPLE + DISTANCE + TIME

Our collective research asked: Can clay become a viable construction system within Brooklyn's material economy and what does that reveal about how we build today? We mapped waste streams alongside soil, stone, timber, and fiber sources, framing a series of critical questions: What counts as usable material? How do we value contamination? Who performs the labor, and how is time sequenced in the making process?

By treating clay as both method and matter, we examined not only its structural capacity but also how it exposes the hidden systems of acoustics, labor, ecology, and craft. Waste from demolition yards, brownfields, and informal economies was recast as resource, expanding the zone of possibility for building without leaving the borough.

Ultimately, our approach was less about outcomes than about process - interrogating each step, recognizing the entanglement of time, labor, and material, and asking: in construction, whose decisions shape what gets built?

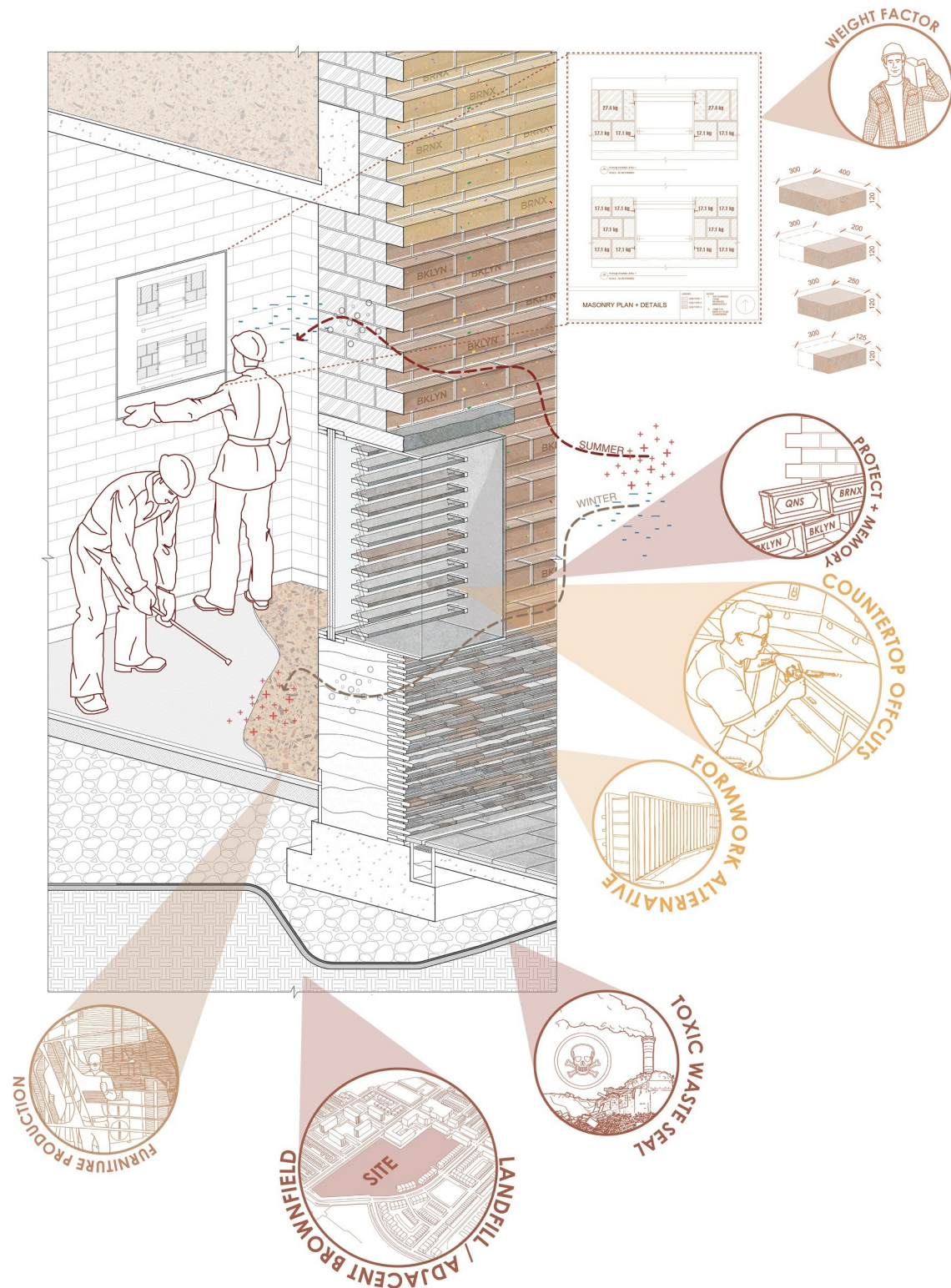
SYSTEM + STRATEGY

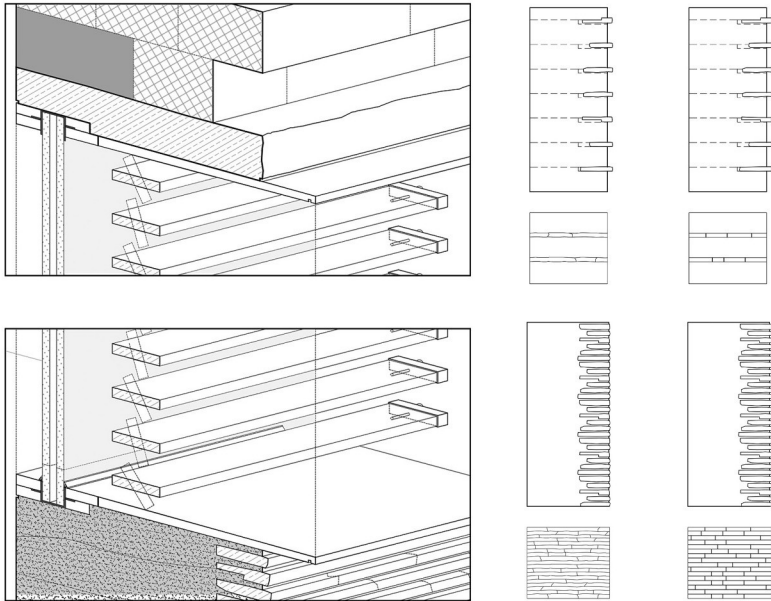
More than Thermal Comfort

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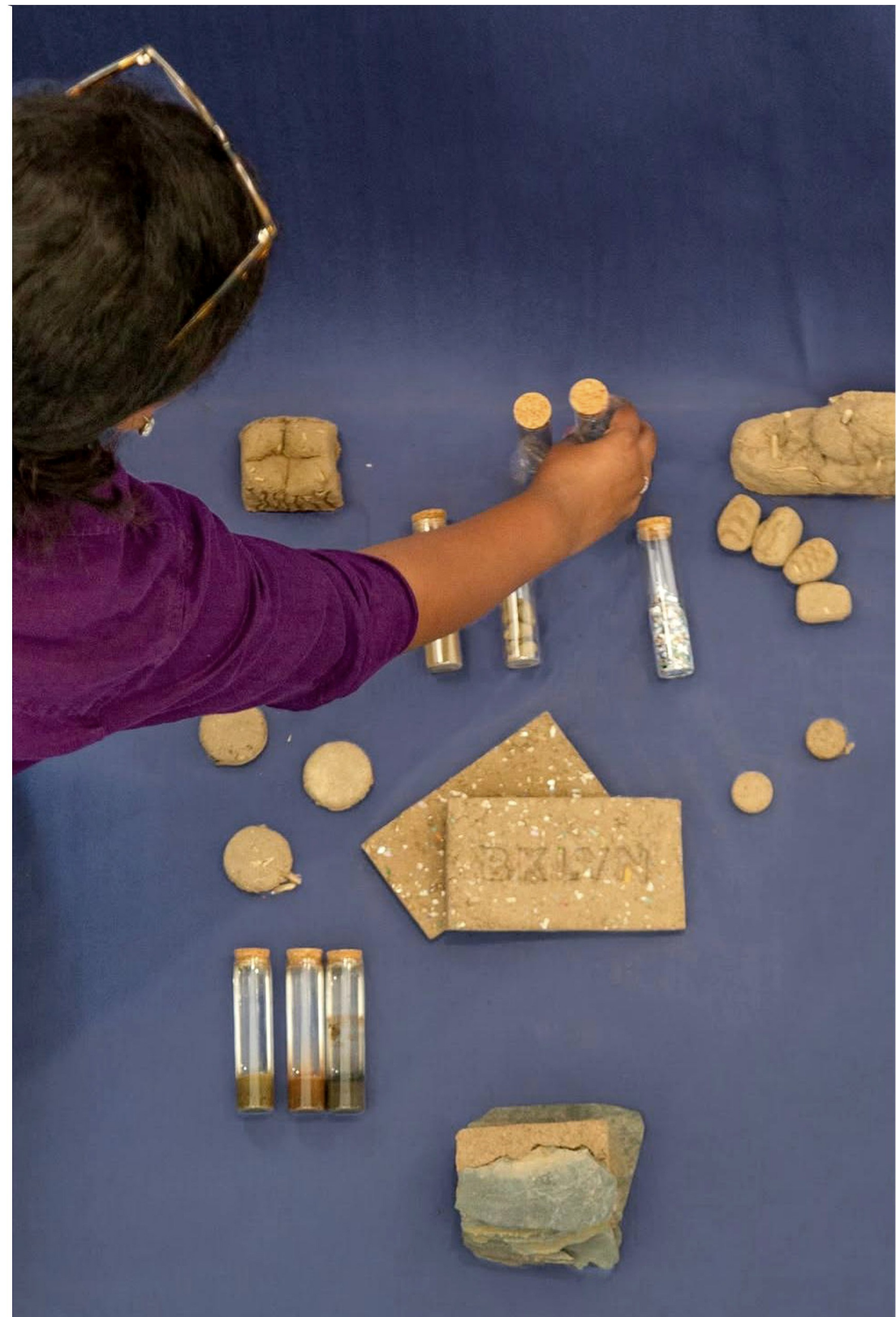


AGING AS PROCESS

Weathering through Materials

Weathering is understood not as decay, but as an active part of the architectural process. As materials age through exposure, use, and time, buildings begin to reveal new textures, surfaces, and details that were not visible at completion. Facades shift in tone, joints expand, oxidize, stain, and soften, allowing architecture to continuously evolve rather than remain fixed.

The project embraces this transformation as a form of material intelligence, where time becomes a design agent that reshapes perception and identity. Rather than resisting change, the architecture is designed to register it, allowing weathering to produce new spatial and aesthetic conditions over time.



MATERIAL + Experiments + Samples

The project began with testing site soil through sedimentation to understand its composition and potential as a building material. On a former landfill, I explored composite rammed earth and compressed earth blocks, embedding shredded plastics from polluted soil as aggregate. Rather than removing contamination, waste was reframed as structure, acknowledging the realities of the "soil of today." Simplified block systems, air-drying methods, and the reuse of stone and timber waste emphasized process, craft, and labor.

The design asks how architecture can build with what is already present - waste, time, and memory rather than with imported ideals.



Q1:
WHO AM I?
WHO AM I ALLOWED TO BE -
AND WHO DECIDES?

Q2:
CAN IDENTITY EVER BE FULLY
CONTAINED WITHIN SYSTEMS
OF DOCUMENTATION?

IDENTITY VS. IDENTIFICATION

Identity vs. Identification investigates the tension between fluid human identity and rigid systems that define, categorize, and control it. While identity is shaped by memory, relationships, culture, and continuous change, identification reduces this complexity into fixed data - passports, forms, borders, and biometric systems.

Drawing from Stan Allen's Field Conditions, Behnaz Farahi's Gaze to the Stars, Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi's Dadaab Commons, and border studies by Kripa and Mueller, the project explores how architecture, surveillance, and bureaucracy shape who is seen, validated, or excluded. In contexts of displacement and monitoring, identity becomes a site of negotiation between self-definition and external classification. The project critiques systems that flatten lived experience into legible categories while questioning the role of design in reinforcing or resisting these structures.

Ultimately, it asks: if identity is constantly evolving, who has the authority to define it and at what cost?

BEHNAZ FARAHİ

Q4: As meaningful social interactions continue to decline, even among close confidants - conversations are limited to surface level topics like the weather. Is turning to artificial intelligence for engaging in vulnerable conversations the right way forward, or should greater emphasis be placed on reviving human social skills to facilitate more authentic interpersonal connections?

ANOO RADHA IYER

Q5: Refugee camps are often seen as temporary and uncertain. However, when a place like Dadaab has existed for decades, how do people try to integrate into an urban setting or even create a sense of home and stability? Given that political decisions could change substantially overnight and take away their given "access" to land, resources, or even identity?

MICHAEL YOUNG

Q6: Since architecture is fundamentally a spatial and embodied sensorium or rather a designed sensorium, how can it intervene in the hyper homogeneous aesthetic landscape shaped by digital mediation? Do maximalist or eccentric design strategies challenge perceptual monotony, or do they merely intensify the overstimulated blur of contemporary attention?

JINGRU CYAN CHENG & CHEN ZHAN

Q7: The Jewel at Changi Airport is widely celebrated as a spectacle of design by captivating visitors with its simulated natural wonder. But behind this spectacle lies an energy-intensive system only a few acknowledge. Increasingly, public spaces incorporate nature as a visual and experiential aspect - claiming sustainability while relying on extractive systems that quietly erode distant ecologies. In this context, what does "sustainability" even mean today? Has it become more of a branding tool than a genuine ecological ethic?

ARETI MARKAPOLOU

Q8: Can sustainable materiality remain ecologically accountable when its value is increasingly driven by image, novelty, and marketability?

ERSELA KRIPA + STEPHEN MUELLER

Q9: Architecture often creates invisible barriers that exclude marginalized groups. At the scale of international borders, AGENCY asks: "Who does infrastructure exclude?" In navigating such politically charged terrain, how can architects responsibly advocate for both sides of a border while balancing the needs of marginalized populations with national interests, especially when the design process often relies on sensitive or strategic data? How can architecture intervene critically without disclosing information that could be misused or compromise national security?

DENNIS POHL

Q10: In the West, construction often operates in tandem with economic growth strategies that prioritize national benefit while excluding the interests of other nations. Given that architecture is deeply intertwined with both the economy and politics, how can architects act as mediators to challenge this conventional model by promoting equitable and sustainable practices without destabilizing the systems on which the nation depends?

Identity is typically defined as who or what a person is, essentially a set of self-perceived or socially constructed traits, values, and affiliations. Yet, everyone at some point confronts the existential question: Who am **I**? This introspection often emerges most intensely during political or even during daily **societal** conflicts - moments when the world tries to **categorize** individuals rigidly, ignoring the multiplicity of factors and events that actually shape who we are.

In the context of design, Alan Allen's concept of Field Conditions offers a compelling parallel. He argues that functionality, or rather efficiency, arises when a system composed of similar modules operates collectively, where a coherent identity of parts forms a whole. But this raises a critical question: what happens to individuality? Or further, what happens to the idea of storytelling where everything is not black and white but rather grey, because not everything can be **defined** so clearly, or that all problems have a similar answer. How is context and specificity given adequate justice? Are we meant to blend into a system to function, or is there room and courage to be different, to stand out?

We live in a society that constantly sanitizes every aspect of our existence. It is often safer to stay hidden in the crowd than to state our identity. The tension between **self-expression** and social conformity is constant. While daily judgments and biases are prevalent based on identity and **identification**, a crucial point is raised in scenarios where identity becomes a form of political risk.

Similarly, Behnaz Farahi's Gaze to the Sky explores how humans tend to give more importance to the way they are perceived rather than being vulnerable and really express their true feelings. The eyes, in particular, act not just as organs of sight, but as symbols of how we are perceived or want to be. The gaze is **political**; it structures identity from the outside in. We are not just what we believe ourselves to be, but also what others see, expect, or fear in us.

This dilemma is even more profound for displaced communities. In Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi's Dadaab Commons, the question arises: how does one register oneself as **belonging** to a home when they have been displaced for decades? What defines identity in such a context? Is it their true origin or is it rooted in a place they now call "home"? Are they considered Kenyan? Or Somali? Or do they just hover under the bracket of African cause they legally do not know what **defines** them correctly. It further pushes us to question Is it your appearance? The gender you're expected to list on a form? A **data** point in a faceless bureaucracy? Refugee camps are labeled "temporary," yet when places like Dadaab persist for generations, a new sense of urbanism emerges, one marked by **uncertainty**, resilience, and a fragile sense of belonging. In the end, identity becomes a today's question for affirmation.

Q11:
CAN A DAILY CHORE BECOME
AN EXPERIENCE OF
ARCHITECTURE RATHER
THAN INVISIBLE LABOR?

Q12:
CAN THE OPTIMISM OF
INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES BE
REIMAGINED AS AN
ECOLOGICAL CONDITION?

LAUNDRY IS FUN

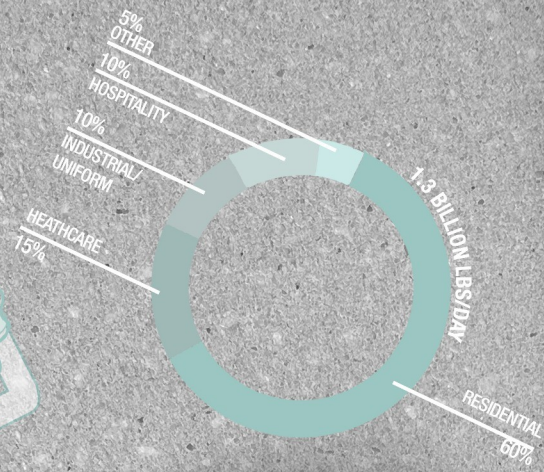
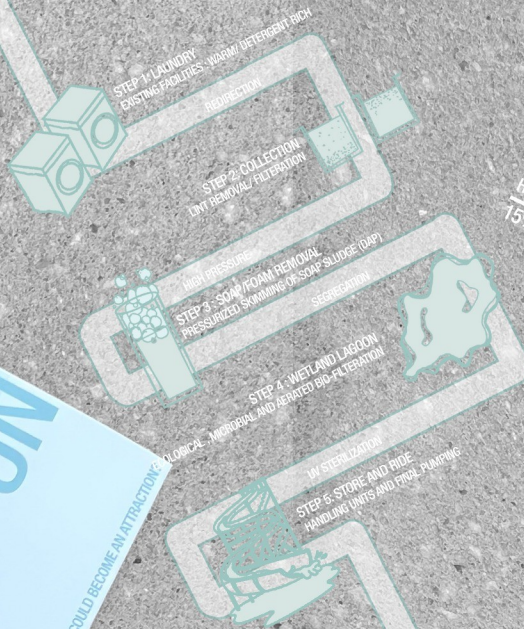
MAINTAINENCE + MAGIC

Behind the scenes at Walt Disney World, vast laundry facilities quietly wash hundreds of thousands of textiles each day. This essential work water-intensive, repetitive, and unseen keeps the magic running.

Metabolism of Magic reframes this hidden chore as a public, magical experience.

Laundry wastewater is not discarded, but processed, cleansed, and transformed into ride water. Moving through a series of biofiltration stages, it flows into an expanded wetland system that reimagines EPCOT's existing lagoon as a living filter - where plants, microbes, and time purify water before it returns to lagoons and water attractions across the park.

Guests follow this journey from wash cycle to ride cycle - walking through water gardens, along glowing heat pathways, and past soft, cloud-like pavilions made from reclaimed textiles. What was once a back-of-house routine becomes an immersive landscape of care, renewal, and wonder.



Q13:
**HOW CAN FOOD REVEAL THE
TEMPORAL SYSTEMS WE LIVE
WITHIN?**

Q14:
**CAN FOOD BECOME A MEDIUM
FOR UNDERSTANDING LABOR,
ECOLOGY, AND CARE?**

CRUNCH TIME

AN EDIBLE ARCHITECTURE OF SLOWNESS + CYCLES

In today's world, eating has become a series of micro-decisions, fueled by speed, shaped by habit, and entangled with consequence. "Crunch Time" turns the act of eating into an investigative process: spoons are replaced by tongs, servings shrink to nano-portions, and plates resemble petri dishes.

Food is no longer just nourishment.

It's data.

It's labor.

It's culture under a microscope.

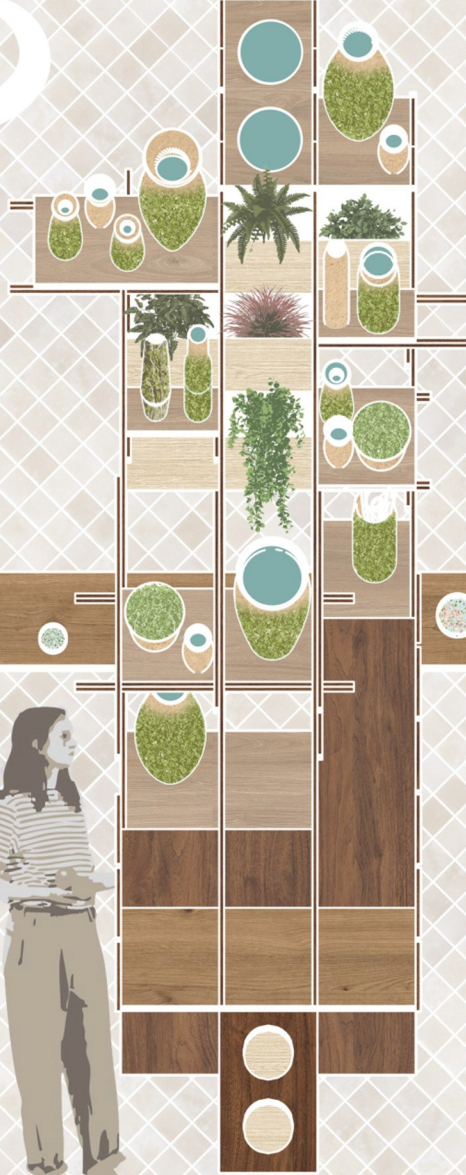
By framing time as currency, this edible encounter explores how we measure, consume both time and elements of nature. A juxtaposed arrangement of microgreens and produce unfolds over time across the table, illustrating a delicate and interconnected system. The greens are grown hydroponically, supported by terracotta surfaces that retain and distribute moisture. Leftover greens are repurposed into fermentation jars, initiating a cycle of preservation and transformation. These jars are stored underground, away from light, allowing time and microbes to perform their slow work.

Fresh and fermented elements share the plate, creating a closed loop of consumption that resists linear waste. At the heart of the work is a deliberate contrast between two temporalities: the microgreen, fast growing, fragile, consumed in seconds; and the fermented jars, slow, preserved and cultured over days. One demands immediacy; the other rewards patience. Together, they form a dual portrait of time as both instant and fulfilling.

This is not just a meal - it's a system. One that invites reflection on the visible and invisible processes that shape what, how and why we eat.

As architecture students, we see this as a platform to stretch beyond buildings - to explore time, ecology, and the deeply human ritual of eating. In a world of urgency, this project lets us pause, reflect, and design for intention and care.

cru



time



**Q15:
HOW CAN CARBON BE
REIMAGINED AS A MATERIAL
AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE?**

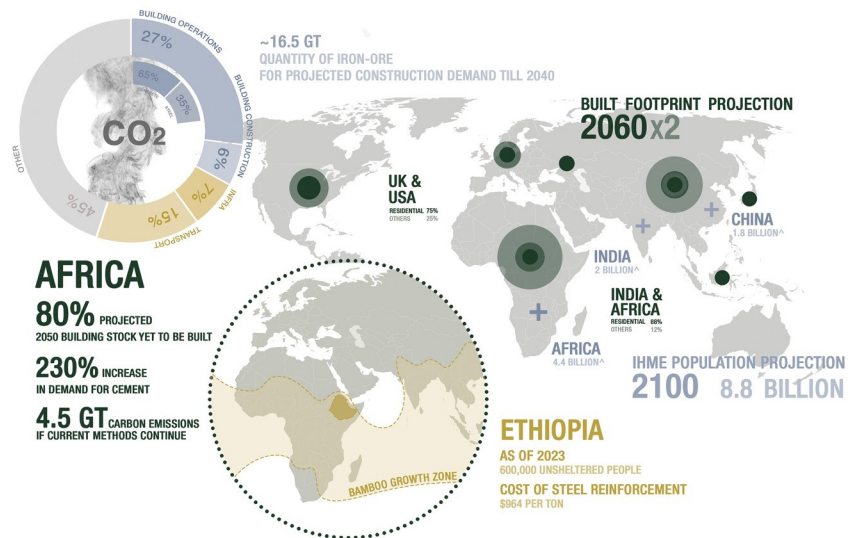
**Q16:
CAN CYCLICAL MATERIAL
REPLACEMENT BECOME A
FORM OF COLLECTIVE
AUTHORSHIP?**

LOCKED.

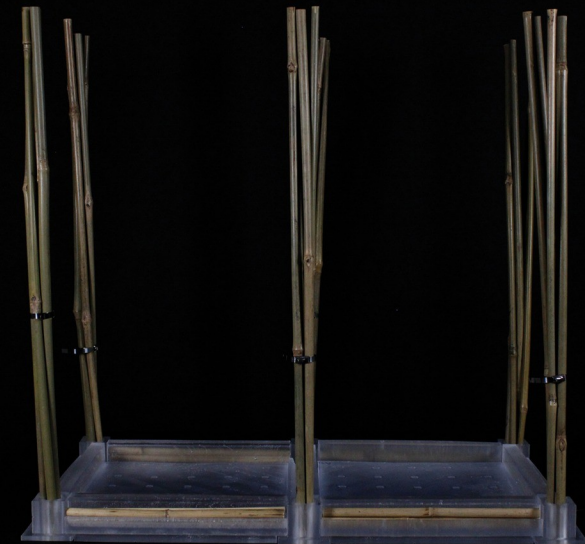
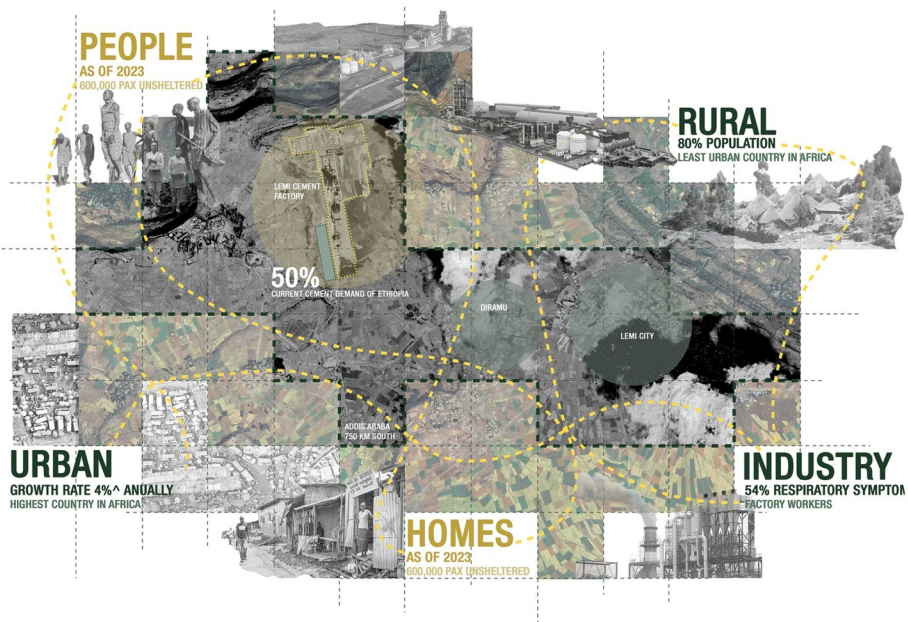
DESIGNING FOR 2040

The studio explored scalable strategies to counter rapidly rising carbon emissions, emphasizing the urgency of immediate action and the potential role of design in a sector with high environmental impact. While many projects are framed around distant end goals, our proposal foregrounds what can be enacted in the present, leveraging existing resources and local skills. It envisions a dynamic relationship between the permanent and the adaptable.

Sited adjacent to a major cement factory, the project proposes multifamily housing for laborers, with the intention that this model can eventually extend to the broader community. The design mediates between urban density and rural edges, responding to local context. Using carbon-captured concrete and untreated, unsorted bamboo, the project establishes a permanent carbon center around which modular units can plug in and out over time. Each module incentivizes community participation in cyclical structural bamboo replacement, keeping the system regenerative and positioning both social relationships and carbon at the core.



Irregular bamboo sits freely within CO₂-captured precast concrete, meeting precision.



Bamboo is bundled for enabling removal, replacement, and adaptability.



Community and process serve an integral part of the design and construction sequence

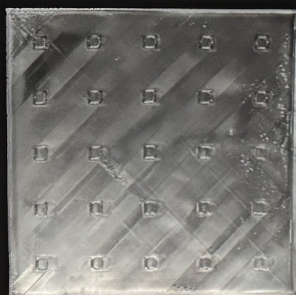


Policy and Ownership

1P: 250 sqft 3P: 750 sqft
 2P: 250 sqft 2P1F: 750 sqft
 1P1F: 250 sqft 1P2F: 750 sqft

SLABS

132KG CO2 LOCKED IN
117 CUBIC FEET VOLUME



SLAB MOULD



CONNECTOR

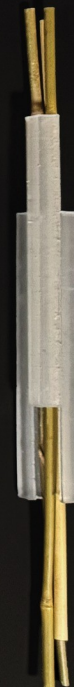
16KG CO2 LOCKED IN
14 CUBIC FEET VOLUME



CONNECTOR MOULD

BAMBOO

45KG CO2 LOCKED IN
BEAMS



BAMBOO

60KG CO2 LOCKED IN
COLUMNS



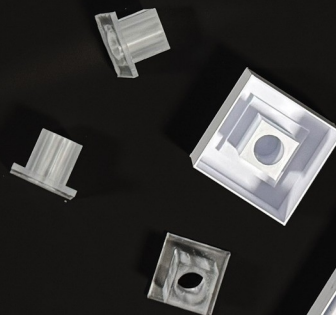
PLATE MOULD

PLATES

12KG CO2 LOCKED IN
11 CUBIC FEET VOLUME

BEAMS

90KG CO2 LOCKED IN
80 CUBIC FEET VOLUME



BEAM MOULD

TIES

90KG CO2 LOCKED IN
80 CUBIC FEET VOLUME





**Q17:
WHAT INVISIBLE GEOGRAPHIES
EXIST WITHIN A SINGLE
ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL?**

**Q18:
CAN MATERIAL TRACING
TRANSFORM ARCHITECTURE
INTO AN ACT OF INVESTIGATION?**

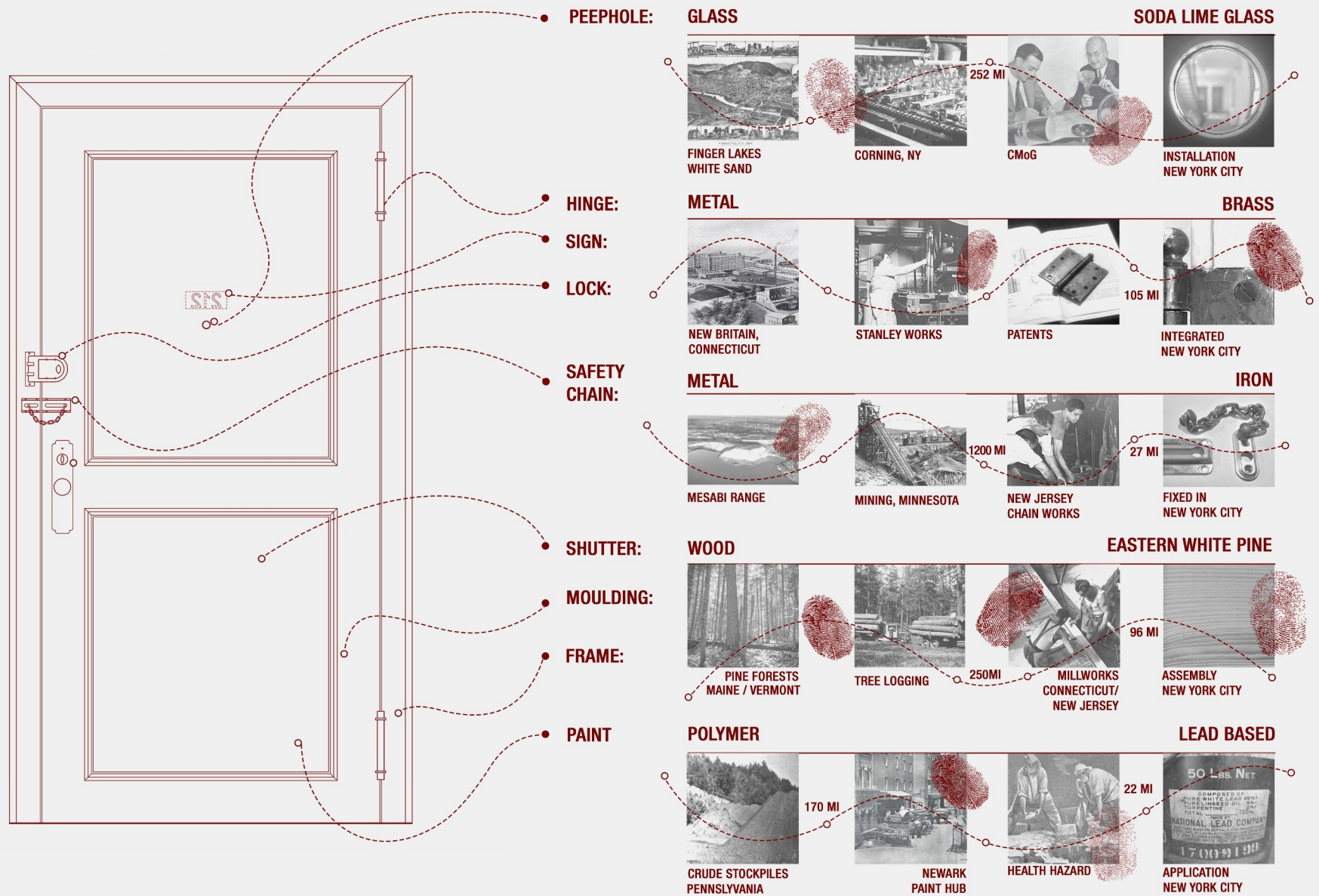
DO YOU KNOW YOUR DOOR?

TRACING HIDDEN HISTORIES

Is an investigative research project that exposes the hidden infrastructures embedded in one of the most mundane architectural objects, the door. Using material forensics, spatial politics, photographic documentation, and supply chain backtracking, the project transforms a familiar portal into a site of global labor networks, invisible factories, and everyday encounters with power.

The project builds a True Catalog of a door, deconstructing its components, tracing their origins, revealing their timelines, and mapping their flows across time. Through visual atlases, diagrams, and fieldwork across Manhattan, the project reanimates the door as a complex, charged object that holds histories, extraction, logistics, and identity.

The project focuses on a door from the pre war era of the 1920s, tracing the histories of the regions and resources that shaped them. It seeks to uncover the fingerprints of labor at every stage from sourcing raw materials through manufacturing and assembly to installation, connecting these global and local histories to the everyday object we touch and pass through.



Q19:
**CAN ARCHITECTURE
OPERATE THROUGH FLUX
RATHER THAN PERMANENCE?**

Q20:
**CAN ARCHITECTURE RECLAIM
AGENCY WITHIN LANDSCAPES
SHAPED BY TRANSIENT
ECONOMIES?**

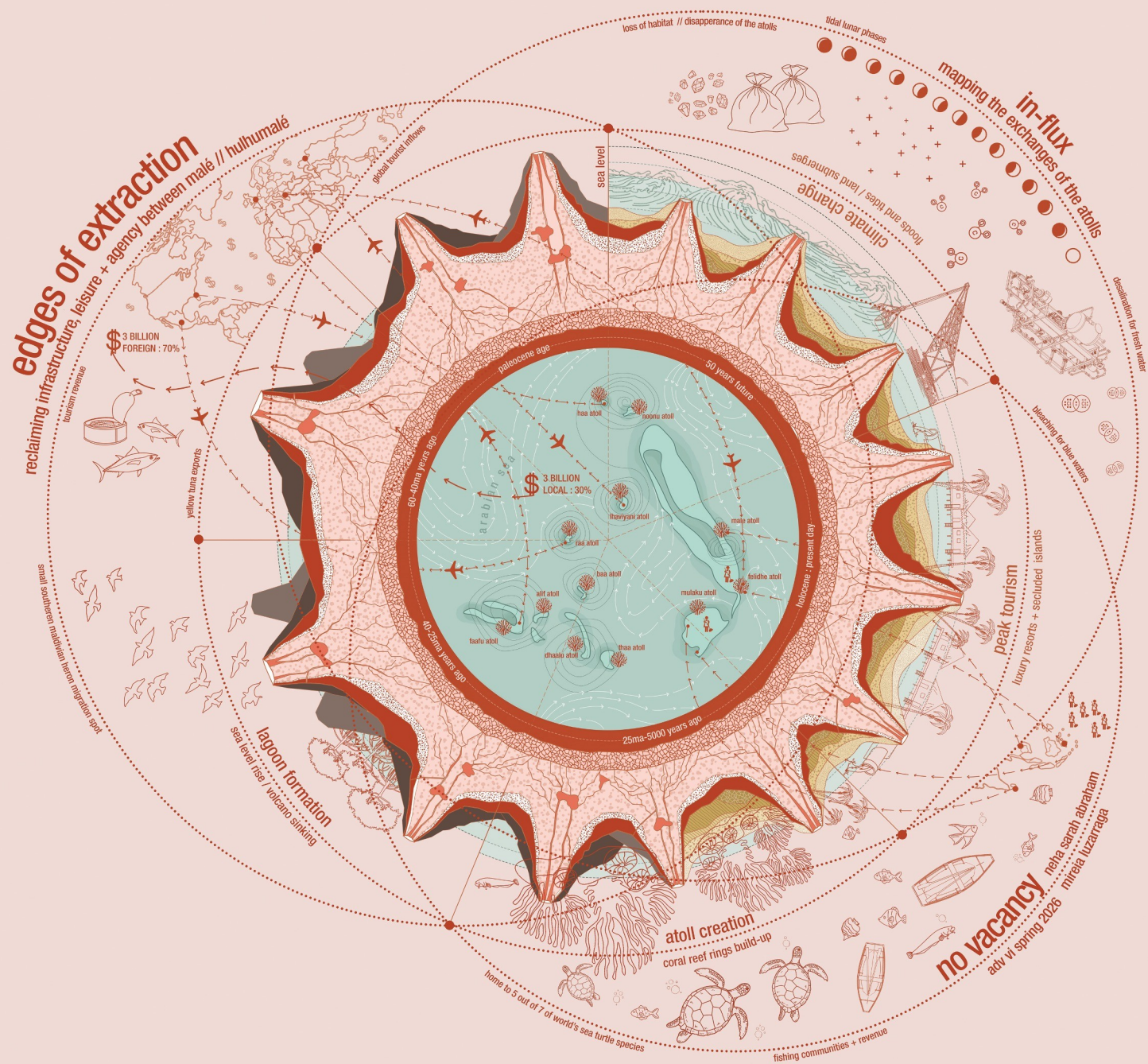
EDGES OF EXTRACTION

RECLAIMING INFRASTRUCTURE, LEISURE & AGENCY
BETWEEN MALÉ AND HULHUMALÉ

The Maldives is globally imagined as a paradise of leisure, yet beneath this image lies a spatial and economic imbalance where tourism-driven wealth coexists with ecological strain, national debt, and limited local access to infrastructure and leisure.

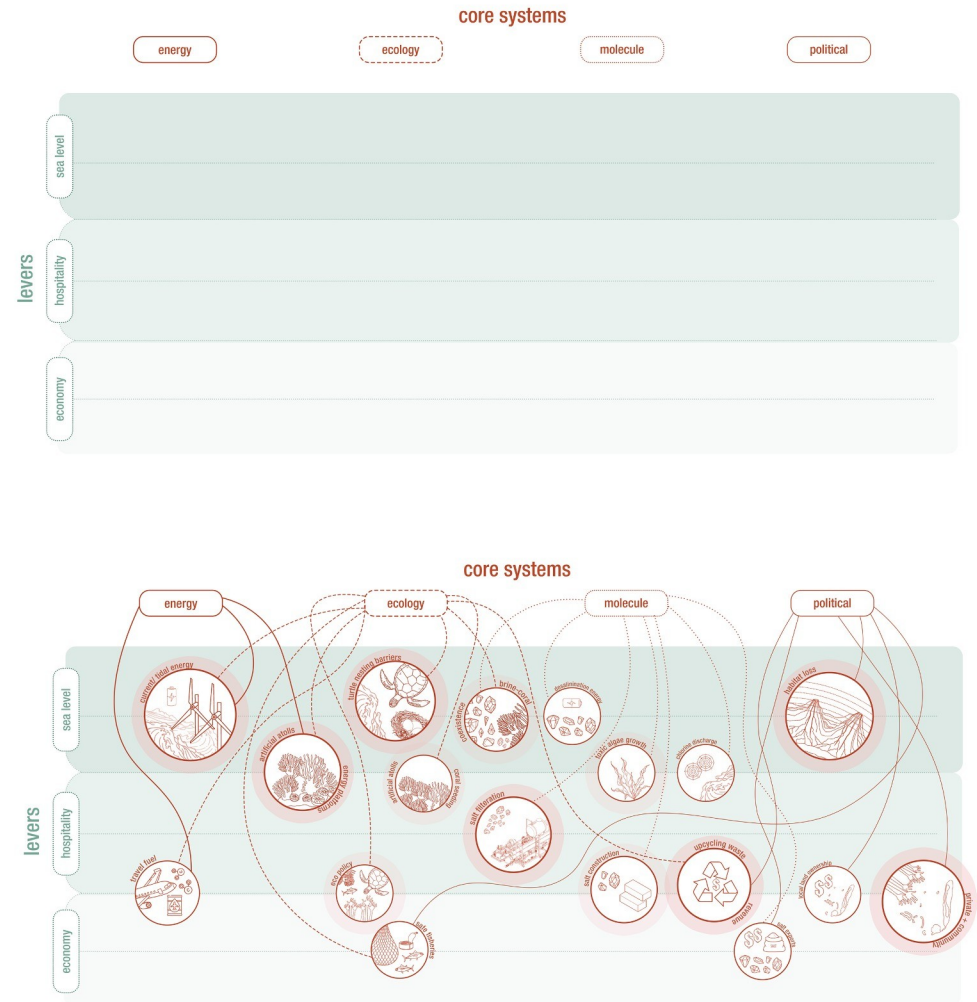
Focusing on the Malé - Hulhumalé corridor, this project exposes how flows of tourists, labour, and resources systematically bypass local life within one of the most densely engineered yet uneven territories in the archipelago. Through on-site mapping, spatial analysis, and design strategies that operate through conditions of flux, it reveals a tightly interlinked system of environmental degradation, economic leakage, and labour extraction.

Rather than treating these conditions as isolated crises, the project intentionally reframes them as sites of potential. It proposes adaptive, locally grounded interventions, including coastal buffers, salt-based economies, and community infrastructures that transform existing systems into productive, accessible, and resilient spatial frameworks. The impact lies in redefining leisure as a shared right, restoring local agency, and repositioning the corridor as a space of collective use, production, and environmental coexistence.



Designing with Flux and Levers

The drawings operate as instruments of analysis, mapping flows, dependencies, and temporal change rather than fixed form. Through this process, the project identifies intersections where interventions can produce integrated impacts -linking environmental resilience, economic redistribution, and local agency. The research becomes a continuous feedback loop between representation and system thinking, exposing latent spatial potentials.



DYNAMIC

Salt Ecologies of a Living Infrastructure

The project proposes a dynamic system of adaptive pods operating within the Malé - Hulhumalé corridor, where architecture is redefined as a responsive field shaped by environmental flux, labour, and everyday use. Rather than fixed functions, the pods are driven by actions:

flip, attach, float, grow, crystallize

allowing them to continuously reorganize in relation to tides, seasonal shifts, and communal needs.

Central to the system is salt, a material traditionally associated with extraction, waste, and tourism infrastructures such as desalination and lagoon degradation. Here, salt is reimagined as both residue and resource: a crystallizing agent that forms, dissolves, and reconfigures spatial conditions. It becomes a medium through which structures grow, harden, and transform, enabling architecture to exist in a state of continuous becoming.

The pods operate as lightweight, distributed infrastructures for leisure, gathering, and local production, forming an evolving communal network across water and shoreline. By reclaiming tourism byproducts and embedding them into spatial production, the project reframes environmental excess as agency.

In doing so, it restores fragmented forms of communal life that have been eroded by centralized tourism economies. The result is a living infrastructure where architecture is no longer static, but adaptive, participatory, and co-produced through ecological and social exchange.

WAVE BREAKERS



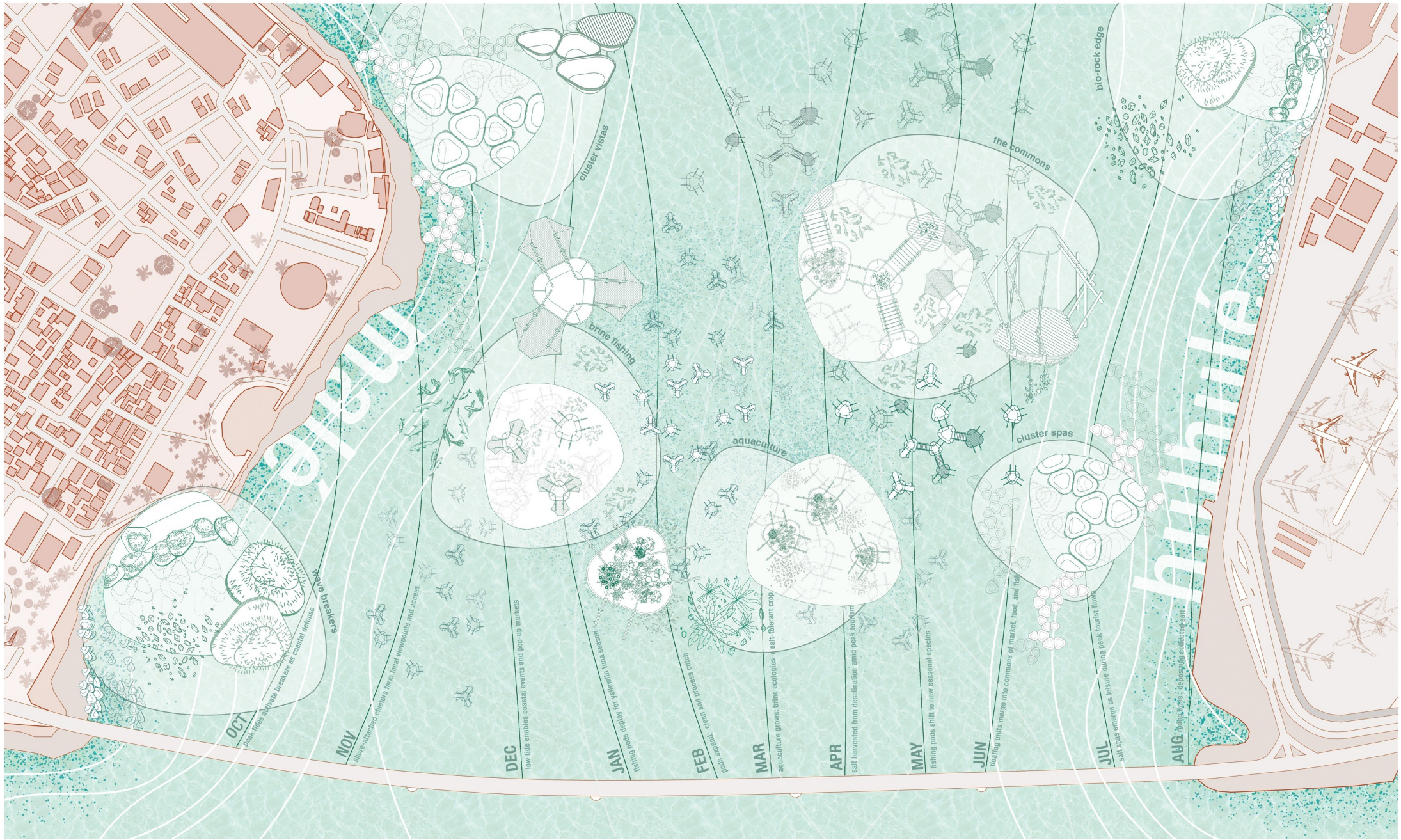
SALT CRYSTALLIZATION



BRINE ECOLOGIES



COMMUNAL BRIDGES



MALE The Forgotten Urban Core

Built from coral foundations, Malē is the dense civic core of the Maldives, shaped by local fishing communities and constrained urban growth. While tourism drives the nation's economy, the island is largely bypassed by resort infrastructure, exposing severe pressures on housing, public space, and infrastructure within an increasingly unequal urban landscape.

HULHULÉ Infrastructure of Isolation

Once tied to local fishing economies, Hulhulē has been transformed into an airport island serving commercial planes and seaplanes. Hardened concrete edges and tourism infrastructure replaced coastal ecologies and displaced local communities, turning the island into a controlled transit gateway that reinforces separation between tourists and everyday Maldivian life.





**Q21:
WHY DOES ARCHITECTURE
REPEATEDLY DISCARD THE
VALUE IT ALREADY PRODUCES?**

**Q22:
HOW CAN SHARED TECHNICAL
KNOWLEDGE RESHAPE THE
FUTURE ECONOMY OF
ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE?**

DETAIL X

A NEW ECONOMY FOR CONSTRUCTION

Detail X rethinks the traditional economic model of architectural practice by repositioning technical knowledge as a long-term asset rather than disposable labor. In a profession where construction detailing consumes a significant portion of working hours yet generates little lasting value, the project proposes an alternative framework for how architects produce, share, and profit from expertise.

The platform functions as a digital marketplace for construction details, allowing architects to upload, purchase, and reuse assemblies, junctions, and technical drawings across projects.

By transforming repetitive documentation into shared architectural intelligence, Detail X challenges the isolated workflows that dominate the industry today. Through a royalty-based system, architects can generate passive income from reusable technical solutions, shifting the profession toward a more collaborative, scalable, and financially sustainable model where knowledge is no longer redrawn and discarded, but continuously circulated and valued.

DESIGN/PROJECT



DESIGNERS/ARCHITECTS

FIRMS /FREELANCERS / STUDENTS

DESIGN/PROJECT

CROSS - LEARNING

ITERATIONS

FASTER TIMELINES

REFINED DETAILS

TRUE COMMUNITY

DESIGN POTENTIAL

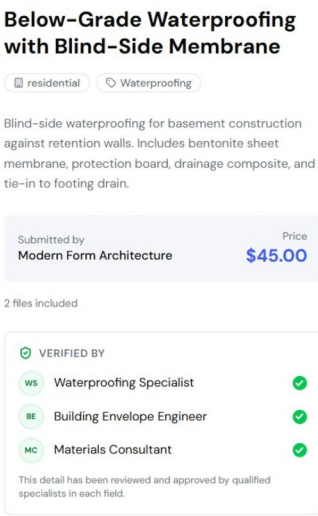
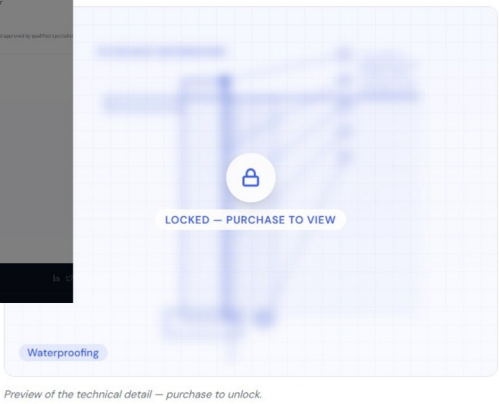
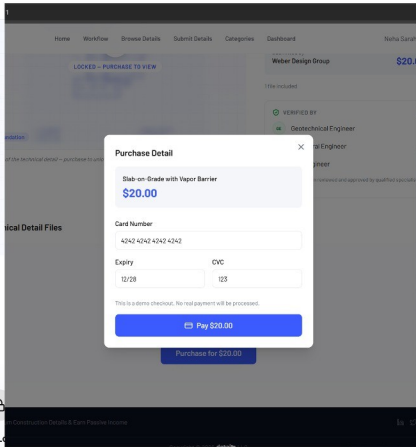
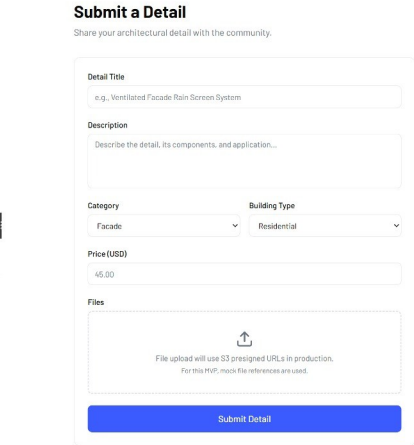
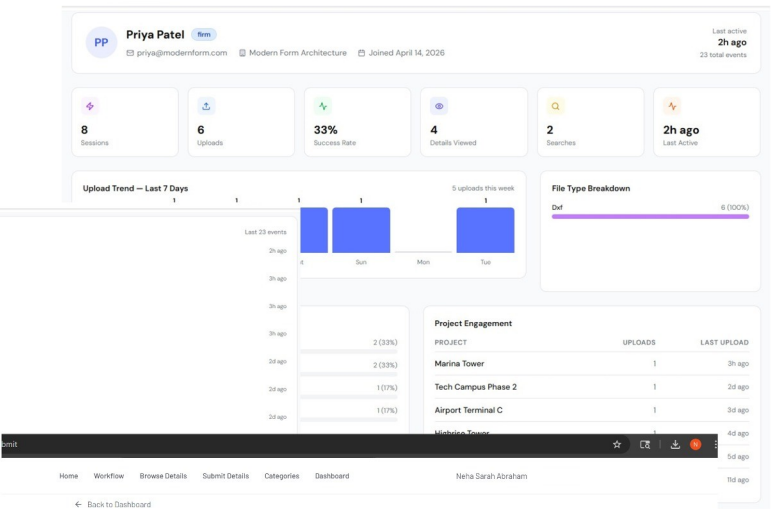
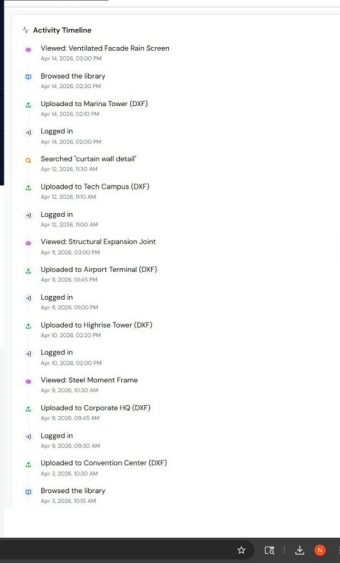
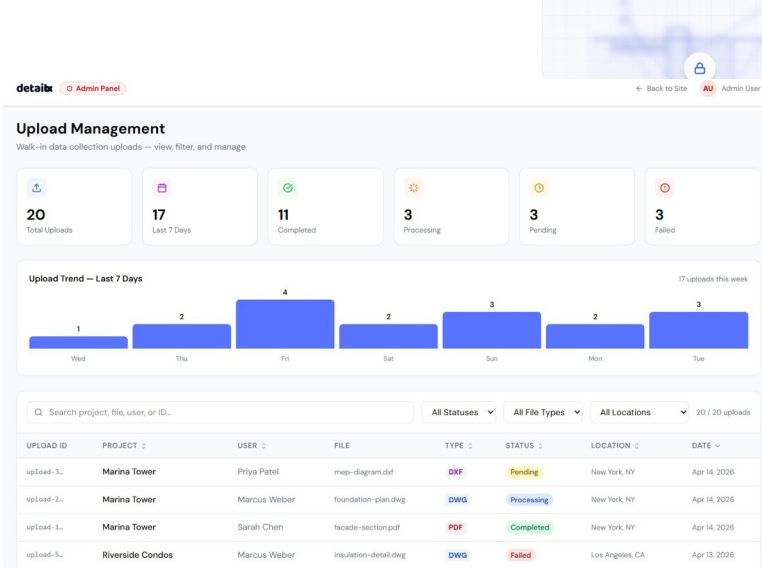
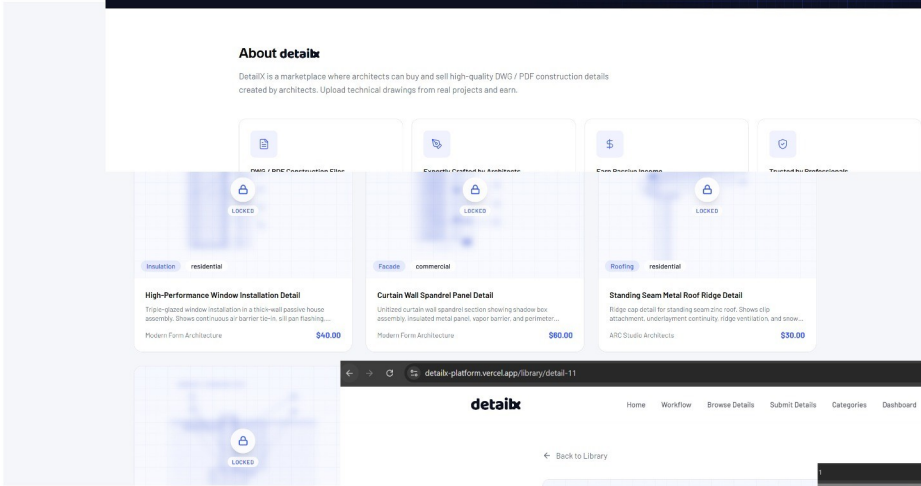
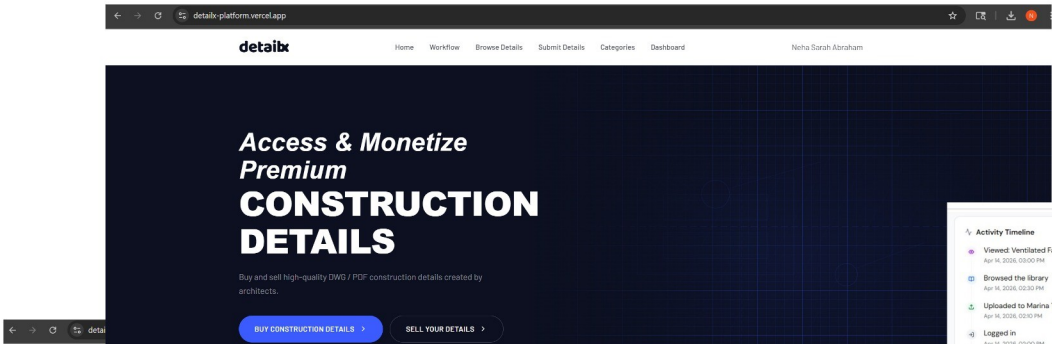
DUAL INCOME

DESIGNERS/ARCHITECTS

FIRMS /FREELANCERS / STUDENTS

OPPORTUNITY

detailx
draw once, **earn forever.**



Q23:
**CAN SPECTACLE BE
UNDERSTOOD AS A SPATIAL
SYSTEM OF CONTROL?**

Q24:
**HOW DO CITIES SHIFT WHEN
INTERACTION BECOMES
PERFORMANCE?**

Q25:
**CAN A FRAGMENT OF THE
BODY BECOME AN INDEX OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
EXTRACTION?**

DISNEY DOES NEW YORK

*TECHNOLOGICAL WIZARDRY AND THE
COMMODIFICATION OF JOY*

This paper examines how capitalist logic shapes contemporary urban space through processes of "Disneyfication," where architecture becomes a tool for spectacle, control, and consumption. Focusing on New York City, it analyzes EPCOT, Times Square, and Little Island as case studies that reveal how urban environments are increasingly sanitized, curated, and designed as predictable experiences rather than open civic spaces.

Across these sites, architecture functions as a mechanism for producing illusion - masking systems of exclusion, privatization, and surveillance behind narratives of public enjoyment and accessibility. Drawing on theorists such as Guy Debord, as well as critiques of Disney's utopian planning and contemporary "experience economy" urbanism, the paper argues that cities are no longer primarily spaces of democratic encounter but staged environments shaped by corporate and philanthropic capital.

Ultimately, it questions how urban design constructs happiness as a commodity and asks who benefits, who is excluded, and what is erased in the production of these controlled urban fantasies.

CAPITALISM + ILLUSION

Sale of Happiness

This section culminates the previous two by revealing the connection between illusion, leveraging modern man's desire for escapism, and the inherently philanthropic potential of architecture. It examines the role of fantasy and illusion in architecture as a tool of contemporary capitalism and argues that the promise of happiness curated through design is not neutral, but deeply entangled with exclusion, control, and commodification. Urban spaces increasingly present joy and comfort as commodities, offering immersive environments that seem to foster belonging. Yet beneath these aesthetics lies a carefully constructed illusion. Architecture, in these cases, does not serve the public equally; it performs for capital.

Walt Disney's vision for EPCOT provides a historical precedent. In his own words: "There will be no slum areas because we won't let them develop. There will be no landowners, and therefore no voting control." As Priscilla Hobbs explains in Walt's Utopia, EPCOT's structure relied on external management and the removal of democratic processes in favor of corporate order, a logic that continues to shape developments today.

This tension between curated fantasy and economic control also plays out in Times Square. Yann Kebbi's illustration, originally for The New Yorker, portrays familiar children's characters like Elmo, Mickey and SpongeBob essentially competing for attention in a hyper-commercialized landscape. As the city sought to increase pedestrian space, these costumed performers eventually became part of a growing informal economy. Times Square Remade describes this as an "economic battleground," where "competition was lessening what the characters could earn." The accompanying graph (Figure 6) shows a sharp rise in retail asking rents after pedestrianization, revealing how public space was instrumentalized to boost private capital. Far from democratic, the transformation of Times Square demonstrates how urban design becomes a stage which is constructed less for the sub-cultured life than for spectacle and profit.

Ultimately this paper hopes to reveal how illusion has become architecture's most powerful tool under capitalism - used not to elevate public life, but to stage it. From Little Island's performative ecology to EPCOT's utopian script and Times Square's spectacle economy, each space conceals its true motives behind charm, novelty, and control.

These spaces are not neutral; they are engineered narratives that regulate who belongs, who benefits, and who disappears. As Sorkin warns, we become "unpaid extras" in a fantasy designed to distract us from the economic and political forces at play. Redefining architecture today means confronting this fantasy by dismantling the illusion, reading design critically, and empowering even the casual viewer to understand how space shapes behavior, access, and power.

Architecture must stop hiding behind aesthetics. It must be understood and practiced as a political act. Only then can it serve not as a spectacle, but for society.



Image:
Charles Lamb, Official Renderings for Diagonal Boulevard from Times Square to 5th Avenue at 59th Street, 1911. Charles Lamb Collection, 1897–1911, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University

Image:
Yanni Kebbi, Times Square (illustration, The New Yorker, July 2, 2012), Reproduced in Lynne B. Sagalyn, Times Square Remade.

CLOSED WORLDS

Q26: Are luxury housing developments or bespoke “community” housing a modern expression of the 'closed world', where private entrances and more exclusive amenities influence autonomy over collective belonging or even self-sufficiency over civic responsibility?

Q27: Are luxury housing developments or bespoke “community” housing a modern expression of the 'closed world'- where private access, exclusive amenities, and self-sufficiency replace shared space, civic responsibility, and social interdependence? How do you tackle the consequences of designing for isolation over interaction?

POLITICAL ECOLOGIES

Q28: In *Staying With Trouble* : Haraway urges humans to step away from hierarchical systems and instead follow a 'sympoiesis' approach through collective and multispecies world making - similar to a democracy. However, even in a democracy an individual must still act, take stances, and lead decisions. Who decides what gets composted and how?

Additionally, if multispecies justice is to be served, how can it be pursued when only humans possess access to articulated language? Can non-human voices ever truly be heard, or are they lost in translation?

UTOPIA EXTOTIA

Q29: In most architectural practices, revenue-generating 'balloons' often support only a few culturally or ethically driven 'brick' projects. Is it possible to envision a shift where design integrity becomes the norm and not the exception? Or is the idea of architecture guided by meaning rather than money simply a utopian dream - one that resists the structural realities of capitalism embedded in the discipline itself?

Q30: Can architectural practice claim ecological ethics while accepting commissions that serve 'elite' interests and degrade ecosystems? Where should we draw the line between professional survival and environmental responsibility?

In an era where climate change is no longer denied but treated as an unavoidable cost of doing business, does this so-called realism reflect mature pragmatism - or a deeper form of complicity?

BUILDING & BIG OIL

Q31: Should construction machinery design be evaluated not only by the efficiency of its finished output but also by the toll it takes on the people who operate it?

For instance, the hazards of stone cutting have resulted in the development of Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) - a vibration-induced neurological disorder seen widely among the workers in the sandstone quarries of Rajasthan. Is the absence of health-based parameters in the construction industry a gap or just a symbol of hierarchical biases?

Q32: Systems where migrant labour is tightly controlled almost mirror the conditions of a criminal out on parole - with restricted movement, monitored access to resources and limited autonomy.

How do nations or large corporations claim to uphold their nation's labour laws while simultaneously but indirectly exploiting cheap labour through sub-contracts? Is this a widely recognized loophole in the system that is deliberately ignored?

AUTONOMY

Q33: Can architecture ever truly balance function and representation, or does one always reduce the other? Is this tension simply a “metonymic” rephrasing of the age-old debate between form and function, or can a more contextual and symbolically rich synthesis emerge today?

Q34: How do we determine when a design is reductive in its cultural symbolism or integrity? Who has the authority to decide what counts as meaningful representation and what is just surface-level branding disguised as “culture-rich” design?

In a time when cultural narratives are often commodified - do we need clearer criteria or systems in place to assess the depth and intent of architectural gestures? Or would such systems risk constraining the open-ended expressionism that non-design celebrates?

ANARCHITECTURE

Q35: Architecture is a field where women are evidently present in education but steadily marginalized in large scale practice. Can Haraway's post-identity, cyborg feminism offer an effective mode of resistance? Or does its rejection of essentialist feminism risk erasing feminist agency in a profession still silently shaped by implicit gendered hierarchies and perceptions of authority?

Q36: In a proposed system where power increasingly operates through miniaturized, coded, and automated systems embedded invisibly within our environments, how can architecture, feminism, and politics effectively confront and democratize these elusive forms of control? If miniaturization fragments and conceals power, shifting us from transparency and accountability toward opacity and automation, what new strategies must we develop to reclaim agency, resist domination, and ensure meaningful critique in the face of imperceptible power?

LAND & EQUITY

Q37: In contemporary architecture, where bespoke craftsmanship and indigenous techniques are marketed as symbols of authenticity and luxury, how do we confront the fact that these works often rely on systems of exploitation that echo the structures of slavery? Typically the laboring body is rendered invisible, underpaid, and disposable, yet the aesthetic is celebrated and commodified? What forms of design practice, authorship, and crediting are needed to dismantle these hierarchies and truly center the craftsman as a co-creator rather than a silent tool?

Q38: Thomas Jefferson believed that architecture could embody the ideals of a nation, that a building's form and symbolism could assert power, identity, and direction. In an age saturated with media imagery and spectacle, does bold architectural form or monumentality still function as a genuine expression of authority and civic values? Or has architecture lost its directive force and been reduced instead to consumable image and aesthetic branding?

ATLAS & THE MANIFESTO

Q39: As we decentralize the human in design, should we also decentralize the architect? Have architects overstepped by acting as experts across fields in which they are not essentially trained, thereby sustaining the fantasy of the architect as master orchestrator? Or is this shift towards a genuine evolution from creator to facilitator and from authority to mediator?

COSMOLOGY OF DAILY OBJECTS

Scratching The Surface

The bi-weekly nail appointment as a ritual of self-care has resulted in the boom of the global beauty industry. Carefully buffed, painted, extended, and polished into a multi-million dollar empire. From acrylic gels to press-on extensions, the market has only begun to 'scratch the surface' of its environmental cost. For every pair of manicured hands, each nail serves more than just an aesthetic accessory. It essentially is a polymer - a thermoplastic forged from fossil fuels, layered over keratin and hardened with UV light.

These glossy coated nails are part of an endless loop we like to call self-care or rather high maintenance. They chip. They break. They are removed and discarded, only to be replaced by a fresh set which eventually gets filed into dust. This dust comprised of microscopic shavings and chemical residues is usually rinsed down salon drains or swept off tiled floors; thus, resulting in the true evil of the 21st century-microplastics. The nail, then, is a microcosm. It exists at the intersection of beauty and toxicity, of labor and waste. The acrylic nail disguises the realities of its own production - low-wage, feminized labor and mounds of single use of disposables right from the gloves to the artificial nail itself.

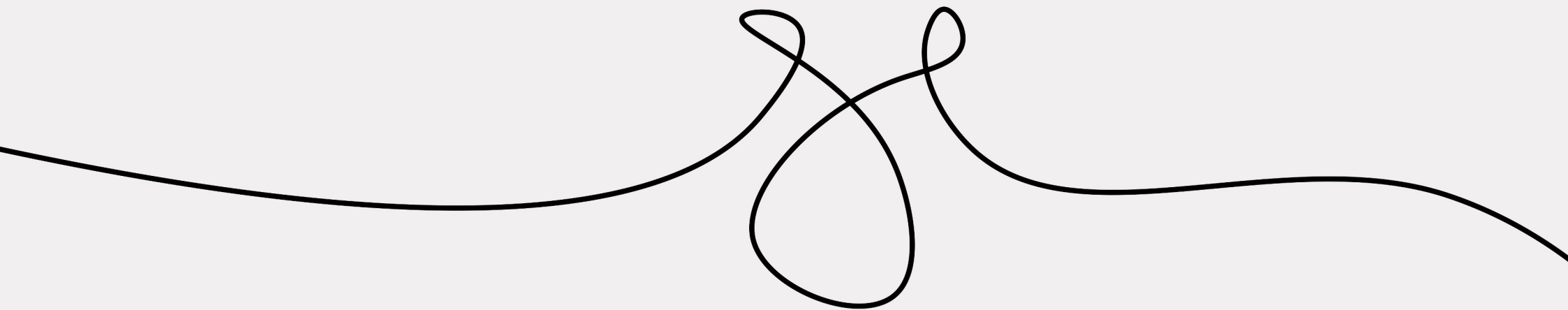
Although marketed as empowerment, hygiene and femininity by promising to transform banal natural nails into sleek surfaces - the nail's gloss is a myth. It is essentially a mirror-polished lie that reflects back an image of individual care while masking collective harm. Beneath the gloss lies residue of extraction and slow pollution.

*In the age of climate change, the artificial nail although small, feminine, and seemingly insignificant yet speaks volumes. The scale at which climate collapse is anticipated is not only in oil rigs and skyscrapers but in salons, in rituals, and in **dust**.*

Image:

Artful Swirls of Plastic Marine Debris Documented by Mandy Barker. Superimposed with a fresh set of acrylic extension nails.





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