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.... and many many more.

Editor's Note

Discourse is uncomfortable. It forces an idea from the insulated and echoey safety of one's mind into the garish arena of public opinion, where it is sure to collide with correction, contradiction, or outrage. By the time it stumbles back to its shelter, weary from an unrelenting journey, it may no longer resemble the tentative formulation it set out as. Refined and tempered, it becomes the currency of genuine intellectual progress.

Last fall, we looked around and were greeted by the isolation of thought: between and within studio levels, between the CoA and larger institutional context, and between differing stages of development. Above all, we saw the fear to misstep overriding the free flow and mingling of ideas.

So, Sandbox, an independent architectural publication by students at Georgia Tech, was founded around the simple notion that a culture of open discourse is the single most valuable quality of an academic environment. We have spent the last two semesters holding debates, guiding conversations, platforming beautiful community work, and calling for submissions in an effort to eradicate echo chambers and lure out critical positioning on pressing issues facing the built environment.

Sandbox Issue 01: Drafts on Place and Placelessness, is the first installment of our Drafts series, the tactile supplement to our digital web presence. Its name, Drafts, serves as a reflection of our approach to written discourse. Collaborative approachability, malleability, and rawness take precedence over the silent pursuit of perfection. What results is a vignette of diverse submissions at various stages of development, all thoughtful, yet none crystalized beyond the point of interaction.

The contents of this issue situate diversely around the theme of place and placelessness in the built environment... (specific run through of each section/submission's take on place. Mention contemporary relevance)

You hold in your hands Issue 01: Drafts on Place and Placelessness. Please feel free to read, enjoy, despise, refute, or set this publication on fire in Hinman courtyard.

Sincerely,
John Parrack, on behalf of Sandbox

Call for Submissions: Place and Placelessness

What compels us to imbue a place with meaning and power? While the notion of place is crucial to our existence and evolution, it remains a subject to its complex, ever-changing context and inhabitants. We can understand places through multiple, intersecting forces – such as physical form, geographical location, human experience, personal and collective memory, evolution over time, functionality, accessibility, uniqueness, cultural and political contexts, and environmental impact. Yet, contemporary forces such as globalization, homogenization, and rapid development may threaten to flatten these complexities to singular, oversimplified entities. To understand place – and placelessness – we must embrace this plurality, recognizing that no single lens can fully capture the layered realities that constitute them.

Since its emergence in the mid-19th century, prominent place discourse has emphasized that the richness of place as a concept lies, in part, in its ambiguity, multiplicity, and deeply personal nature. In our modernized world, the necessity of contemporary recontextualization has only increased. What are the current formative criteria of place and placelessness, and the significance between new landscapes, memory, and their culmination at individual and collective scales? Does physical space remain the context for all action, and regardless, what type of space is receptive to the depth of place?

Contemporary infrastructure and the Technosphere collapse Cartesian distance, making unlikely connections between disparate spaces, cultures, and environments. Is this merely an evolution of place into that which is fluid, transient, virtual, and cooperative, or does it suggest its thinning-out and eventual cessation? How do historical conceptions of place withstand in a world increasingly mediated by devices and artificial intelligence, blurring the boundaries between physical and virtual, as well as body and location?

In *Place and Placelessness*, Edward Relph states that the “essence of place lies in the unselfconscious intentionality that defines them as centers of human existence,” (43). Can place be conceived with intention if its processes of formation are largely understood as organic, ever-changing, and contingent on personal interaction and memory? Is this formation, and its continuity, the responsibility of the designer or inhabitant? If aspiration and possibility of meaningful, significant places do exist, how then do we balance forces of the contemporary market economy and pressures of commerce which prioritize efficiency, profit, and insensitive development?

For Issue 01, Sandbox aims to compile a diverse set of explorations on the historical and contemporary state of place, placelessness, and the architect’s role in and in-between. We ask all who are interested to view our submission guidelines and contact us at sandboxatgt@gmail.com.



Event Overview

We organized this open forum to see what might happen when the usual architecture-school hierarchies softened for an evening. Conversations about place and placelessness often stay in the realm of theory, but we wanted to ground them in a setting where no one arrived more prepared than anyone else—where speaking came from instinct rather than expertise.

What unfolded was the reason we wanted this gathering at all: students, faculty, and peers across levels of experience sat in the same shifting circle, responding not as “ranks” but as people. The room itself kept changing—rings of chairs gradually drifting as conversations opened, splintered, and reformed. Some stayed for the entire duration; others stepped in for twenty minutes or wandered in near the end. The door was porous, and so was the dialogue.

We welcomed thoughtful silences, and they became part of the conversation. Those who often command a room leaned back; those who are usually quiet found space to step forward. Voices rose, receded, re-entered—each carrying its own definition of place.

What mattered most was the shared attentiveness: a temporary equilibrium where everyone present listened, spoke, and shaped the space together. It’s the kind of culture we hope Sandbox continues to cultivate.



Submissions Open Now, Nour Khalifa, 2025.
A tiled assemblage of 9 posters; together they served as outreach for Sandbox's first open forum event on the topics of place and placelessness.



There is this roof outside, right, facing over the track. It's very popular. And for me, it's a combination of both the moments that I've had there and also the actual physical aspects of it. My friends have taken me there, and I've gone there alone as well just to think. A lot of the reason why it's so helpful for me to think there—especially alone—is it's just yourself and the lights of the city. The lights are one of the most important parts, especially when thinking about it as an architecture student. It's what you could do; it's what you could eventually bring to someone else. Even when you can't see the full form of the structure, just knowing there's inhabitation around you that you can help create puts things into perspective. That space is important to me not just because I've shared a lot of amazing memories there and come to a lot of breakthroughs, but also because it's a reflection of my aspirations and dreams—and a lot of that is because of what's physically there, despite the emotional nostalgia.

A lot of people have been talking about—I'm going to assume—spaces you may not be able to access anymore. The first space I thought about when the question was posed was my grandmother's courtyard in Colombia. They no longer own that home. I could describe that place. I could draw it, paint it—I could tell you everything about it—but another reason why this space has such a sweet spot in my mind, and I think it will forever, is because of that inaccessibility. I can't go to it anymore. Even though I can feel it and visualize it and smell it, it's not a place I'll ever be able to go back to again. I think it probably got torn down. So there's inaccessibility in the past, and there's also inaccessibility in the present you have right now. *Yeah, I don't know—I just started thinking about the fact that not being able to access was... maybe a little sad, but—yeah.*

In terms of inaccessibility, I think of my family's home that we left during my first year in college. That house was the longest we ever lived anywhere—probably eight years. Growing up, we would move around every single year, so it was the first time we felt ownership over a space and it wasn't temporary. In terms of nostalgia, a lot comes up from that—very positive and extremely negative. Leaving that place was so painful because it was like, What am I leaving? Who am I going to be after I can't visit this place anymore? It's funny because we moved down the street—literally three minutes away—so to get anywhere important, you still have to pass by that driveway where our house used to be. The house is still there and new people live in it.



Untitled. Ryan Yin, 2025.
Student recounting place.



Untitled. Ryan Yin, 2025.

That's weird—someone else claiming ownership over the place where you have such distinct memories that shaped who you are. *The physical form is so distinct—I could draw it—but maybe that's distorted, right?* Memory distorts the things that are important to you—some grow, some shrink.

A place for me that comes up is Harmony Park in the city I grew up in—around 20 minutes east. We moved to Decatur when I was maybe six and I lived on that street for the next thirteen years. Just around the corner was Harmony Park and surrounding it were restaurants and areas I have a lot of memories in. They were the places I went that were immediately connected to me. I moved away, and when I recently came back, I walked through the park and it struck me how small everything was. I had grown up there—run around as a little kid so many times—but coming back, everything had shrunk. *Obviously, I'm a different person now. That's somewhere I grew up, and that's what makes it a place for me.*

I'm not going to answer what people should be paying attention to; I want to argue what we should not be paying attention to. Cheap, economical, maximum-efficiency architecture is, on one hand, beneficial for people who need affordable housing or community centers that can quickly sprout up. But I think the overemphasis on cheap, fast, developer-driven construction is monotonizing the built environment and killing distinct places. Sometimes it makes me feel uninspired.

This question is interesting in relation to what you already mentioned. From what people shared in the first question, we gathered that place is much more than its physical dimension. It has to do with personal experiences, memories, associations—which, pushed to an extreme, could imply a beautiful physical dimension isn't necessary for the formation of a meaningful place.

That could be an argument a developer would use to justify pushing out monotonous developments: if meaningful centers of existence can occur in any framework, why spend more time and resources on a beautiful apparatus for living if it's just going to be “fleshed out” by experiences? So what role does personalization or difference-making in architecture play? *Why push beyond that monotonous sphere if place is such a personal concept?*

People find place with buildings and the businesses around them, but if there's a complete shift—maybe a complete demolition of what was there—it loses its effect. Where I'm going with this: when we design, if there's something that exists there, how can we preserve it? Preserving what was there before is really important. In our designing, we should really look at what exists on our sites, what exists around them, and how we continue that legacy. One of the things that makes place important is its history. A lot of people find place with buildings and the businesses around them, but if there's a complete shift—maybe a complete demolition of what was there—it loses its effect. Where I'm going with this: when we design, if there's something that exists there, how can we preserve it? Preserving what was there before is really important. In our designing, we should really look at what exists on our sites, what exists around them, and how we continue that legacy.

In a world that's changing fast—and where everyone has different tastes—what do you think designers should be paying attention to most?

A little bit of preservation—and preservation of future, in a way. What you’re talking about—cheap, fast, efficient things—seems like, from developers I’ve talked to, efficiency is always the number one thing. But it’s always efficiency for now, profit for now, experience for now. They talk about “placemaking” all the time, but it’s placemaking for now. It feels like many developers and designers, when thinking about housing or quick builds, aren’t trying to preserve for the future at all. In the past, there’s been more emphasis on preservation, which is why we have buildings that are 200 years old. You look at some of these completely planned housing developments that were put up yesterday and you’re like, “Can I imagine that standing in 100 years?” I don’t think so. Which is unfortunate because then it loops back to sustainability.

Everyone talks about sustainability in terms of the environment, but it’s also an economic issue and a social issue. These developers want quick profit, but they’re not thinking about preservation in terms of economic sustainability—like, it might actually be more economically sustainable to build something that will last longer, versus trying to build something quicker and make a profit.

My first thought seeing the question—it’s vague and not specific—but I thought design should try to improve the human condition. That’s the fundamental goal. Economically and in society, that often lends itself to “let’s build the most housing units, as cheaply as possible.” But as society moves on, people being housed becomes less the only problem, and design can become more. We’re living in these new developments—but now design should take a step forward toward the standardized, then beyond.



Untitled. Ryan Yin, 2025.
Everyone listening in.

I want to bounce off that about new development. What we as designers should pay attention to more is longevity. So many things getting built—you can see the cheapness, even when it's marketed as luxury. When you start paying attention, you realize, "Oh my God, this isn't going to last five years, let alone fifty." I have a weird obsession with touring new apartments. I went to one last month, attached to Kinetic; the rates they charge are wild. Everything in that place felt cheap. The door was barely an inch thick; you could hear everything from across the apartment. That's the mindset right now, "We just want money, we'll make it seem like it's something, but it's nothing, really."

A question relating to longevity: we're taught to respond to a brief in the most specific way. We aim for a perfect response to a program. But in terms of longevity, I wonder when I'm designing—say, a bathhouse on a beltline with tall walls and a chimney—isn't I creating something a fleeting business inhabits and then, when it decays in the next recession, I've left a ruin that can't become anything else? *So how exactly should we respond to the problem at hand, and how much should we balance future uses?*

Going off that, in relation to place, I think it's important to allow for a sense of identity to be formed. I've been thinking about third spaces. My family loves to play cards; we were in a hotel in Florida and found a spot next to this huge palm. It became our spot to play cards every time we went. If we have to work with developers—if there isn't a symbiotic relationship between architects and developers—how do we allow some leeway for the people we're designing for to create that identity? Personally, I tend to say "my idea is my idea," but I haven't always paid attention to the place itself. *How can we pay attention to letting people make that place their place?*

Circling back to longevity: not only is the longevity of what we build important, but the longevity of our profession is incredibly important. There's a race to the bottom—who can charge less, who can be most "efficient." When thinking about that race, architects need to help all boats stay afloat—valuing your work, learning when to say no. If you can do that, the profession can get the value it deserves.

To build on that: find ways to be innovative in cost-cutting. If we have to be bare bones and create a super simple building, how can we create a detail that can be duplicated and modularized across? What small, simple gesture can shift everything? Small budgets are something we'll probably deal with our entire career. *We just have to be very good at our jobs.*

In a world that's changing fast—and where everyone has different tastes—what do you think designers should be paying attention to most?

I've done a couple psychology studies as a hobby—and there's a documentary on this—but social media ties people into this extra space completely outside of “reality.” There's this spread of information, databases—everything online is like a point for how we think or structure ideas. It's forming a platform that feels like an extension of ourselves. You almost feel like you can live in an alternate reality—something we couldn't do before technology. Place takes itself out of the mind and into this library of ideas and connections. *With AI emerging, how do we continue to engage people outside of something purely digital—something formed completely in your head?*

Thinking about placelessness here: with Instagram and stuff, you're technically not in a real place. You're in a place in your mind, but it's not concrete or defined. Does that make it placeless? How does that compare to personal memories of concrete places we can visit and draw?

Social media is one of the rawest functions of our identity—curation. When you're online, you're by yourself, doing whatever you want within the minor lines. That echo chamber is a kind of place. If you log into someone else's account, you can see their process, their taste, their style. It's a place.

Another way to think about it: Minecraft. It's non-physical; if the servers get wiped, it's gone. But it's a place you may hate because you died and lost your stuff, or love because you had good times with friends or created something beautiful. I don't think a virtual world like that is placeless. Left by itself—without intervention—what is it? During COVID, we were on Discord talking to friends, gaming together, talking after class. That is a place in my mind. I have memories not associated with the room I was in, but with the full-screen on late at night. In that sense, maybe it's placeless physically, but it still constitutes a place.

There's also a semantic barrier between “place” and “location.” Location is physical. Maybe there isn't a location for a digital place—though in Minecraft there is. Another angle is the design of digital places. We've been talking about our experiences, but there's design put into making these possible—coding and interface. *How are these places “places” not just for users but for designers?*

Semantics aside, we say “mind space,” “shared group space” on a messenger or Zoom. Are space and place the same? I separate them: place as a physical manifestation; space as a theoretical container—an idea. That could tie into placelessness.

We are looking at our computers all the time—we are in virtual space, our own personal virtual space, and we create it all semester long. As architects, we're making 3D models; we live in this virtual world. The interesting part is the translation from virtual to real. We go from a very exact virtual space with tiny tolerances to creating real things that, in construction, are quite different. I don't really care about VR or social media; I'm thinking about how our immersive virtual work becomes real.





This question focuses on digital/virtual, but the idea of a place in our minds that's inaccessible to our bodies exists outside digital. The old house or grandma's courtyard—these are places we can only inhabit in our minds. When we read great novels that transport us, you catch yourself on a page and realize you were in that world. That was painted by an author—just words on a page—and you translated your consciousness there. Virtual place isn't only strengthened by visual immersion; it can be text. Spaces always exist in one's memory.

I keep a list of places I've lived. These places you can't visit anymore—there's sadness, but also a weird sense of responsibility. You are the steward of that space for the people who share that memory. The physical thing is gone as a record. My grad-school place was long ago torn down.

It's like: I'm part of this exclusive group who know what it was like to live in that crappy building in Cambridge. *The fragility of a space that exists only in the mind makes it more special.*

Does photographing corrode the expansiveness of memory? Before I left my apartment last year, I took pictures so I wouldn't forget it. Now I have a token I can show people. It exists as a photo, almost bound. Maybe the photo denies the ability for memory to grow into nostalgia of its own—like your hometown before you went to it. Are we imprisoning it?

As a photographer/videographer, I hate that answer—kidding—but think about your childhood home. My memories are so faded that when I look at a photo, I instantly get back those memories. So the memories come back from the photo. It might trap something, but you're also trapping it somewhere you can always go back to.

I looked at photos of a house I lived in when I was two. I had zero to no memory, but seeing the album unlocked memories. Then I tried Apple's spatial photos demo. Somehow I felt attached to those demo photos—even though they weren't mine. Technology is changing rapidly and changing how we're attached or immersed in a place.

Another thought: family stories. "When you were three, you pulled up the blinds and broke them." They remember because they were old enough; I didn't. They tell me, and it's almost like I remember it now—because they remember, so I remember. It creates another place in my head that's fake because it's constructed from their telling. Photos can do that: if you don't remember well, a photo re-corrects your refracted memory, as a visual confirmation of "this is what it was," not what you think it was.

For a photo of a place, I take ordinary photos of ordinary rooms to remember a specific memory from that day. To anyone else, it's just a living room. I'll go back to the photo and remember my intent.

Rather than constricting memory, I think photos are a key to accessing it—a key to a door rather than what's inside the room. Your memory can still balloon into something else. You own the memory; the photo may unlock it, but it can't change how you experienced it. You're taking a photo of the physical, and at some point trying to capture the emotional—but that remains with you.

| Photos are important for remembering your crazy night out! [laughter]

I'll tie this to my dream of going to Japan. I haven't experienced that exact place yet, so I don't know its exact design—I've seen photos, but that's not really experiencing space yet. I've met people, made friends, spoken in Japanese. Cultural aspects are something I hope to hear and learn. When I think of a space I want to be in, it isn't necessarily tied to an exact building; it's how the place brings me together with other people—diverse people.

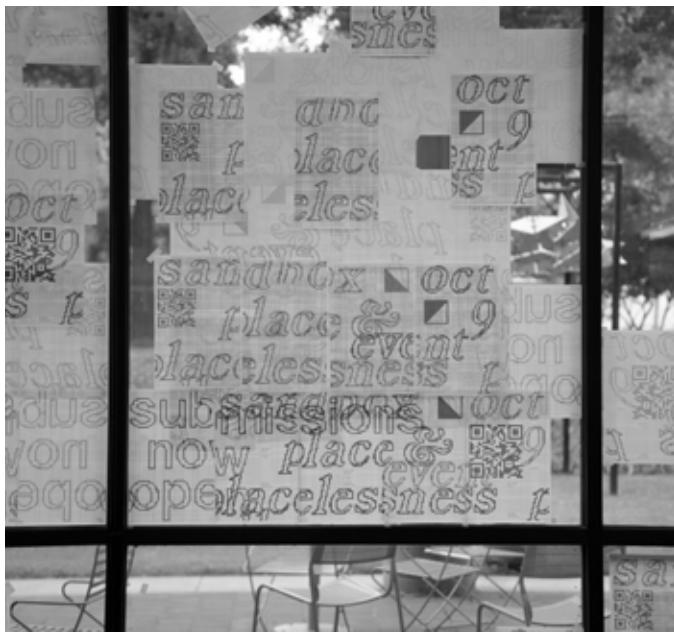
I want to talk about it both ways. Sometimes the place I want is tied to people—like my mom in Cincinnati, which is eight hours away; that's far for me. Other times there's a necessity for personal, almost isolated spaces—a good kind of isolated. That brings me back to the courtyard and the trees and the silence it gives. We heard this summer from Mark and Sabir: in a city, you're there to be with strangers—to be alone with others. There's value in wanting a place because of a person, but that can't exclude wanting a place because of the design or the feeling of the space.

Going back to my patio—right now it's a space I go to by myself, but the reason I started going was other people. I helped build the patio but never used it. We had a family reunion; it was raining; all the chairs were wet. We pushed them aside and everyone sat on the floor, talking for hours. The design of the place and the people came together. People used the cabinets and railing to lean back. By the end everyone's backs ached. That experience sparked this idea that I wanted to come back. I didn't realize it until now: that was why I started going there—because I felt really happy. There was an evolution of place from what it was to what it is now—because of the design and the people. The design influenced how we behaved, which influenced how I see the space.

Untitled, Ryan Yin, 2025.
Discussion circle.



Untitled, Ryan Yin, 2025.
Assemblage of posters on window.



It's interesting you brought a specific memory, but if you contrast that with studio, we design "my building" and assume we know exactly the pathways people will take. In real places, you have no ownership; you're just moving through. Whether that aligns with the designer's intent doesn't matter. You might be there for class, passing through, or spending hours. There's no way a designer could anticipate every movement. We need to humble ourselves and realize we can't micromanage circulation. You can encourage a main path, sure—but people will do what they do.

In response to that, I went to a bathhouse this summer. It felt controlled and choreographed—one way in and out of intimate spaces. There were acoustical tricks, but you couldn't explore beyond the set path. And earlier you mentioned a place that emerged solely from conversation on your patio. I was there, but I didn't know anyone; they spoke a different language, but I still would have been as struck and attached to that place without saying a single word. One of the beauties of place is it's on a spectrum—experientially and physically. *We exist at a strange intersection as architects.*

When I was planning a trip to Paris or Rome, I had a huge list of places to see. Retrospectively, it wasn't about those "cool" things; it was about being there and wandering. Can you separate that? *Would it have been different alone?*

In general, people don't want to be controlled. Earlier, there were spaces where the value held even if the design wasn't the best. I don't think I heard a single example where a space held its value when the experiences and people's investment were taken away. For those spaces, was the design the most important aspect—or did it subtract? *If the design were more conventionally "well-designed," would it improve the value?*

No. It wouldn't. Spaces are an intersection between design and you. The design affords interaction, which creates experiences you place value on. You want to go to a jump park because it's designed to be fun; then you create experiences there. It's not fair to separate the two entirely. The design sets the stage, but people shape it. The design provides; the people animate.

This goes back to the patio: if it was more light or more spacious, would it be the same place? If those physical things weren't there—the cabinet to lean on, the rail—then there would have been a different approach to space, and maybe it wouldn't have activated in that way.

| Suddenly the patio is just a patio—not your place.

World monuments and architecture of history were designed for a purpose, but they evolve over time. People still find interest. Factories get reintroduced as schools or housing. The design no longer shapes the people alone; the people interpret and inhabit beyond original intentions.

I go back almost every year. Every time, there's change. Stores I used to go to change or disappear. I still have the connection; I still want to go back. It's amazing sometimes to see the change. Being detached, in my head I think it will be the same, but it's not. It's a reflection of how I'm changing, too. It's scary, but it's a sign of progress. Architecture isn't stable: you don't design a building, call it a day, and expect no change. People operate differently; things change. It's interesting seeing how fast.

I'm going back to the Yard. Three weeks ago, I was sitting there and a grad student came up—she's trying to renovate the courtyard. She asked what we wanted, kind of feeding us ideas like a “swing table.” I told her I don't want it to change. It's perfectly fine as it is. It's already a space that's been scored in my head. I don't care for it to become something else.

This goes back to whether “better design” would make the memories better. I agree: there's a natural human thing about having a space to call your own. People enjoy being given a space where they can create their own memories. That's how you end up saying, “I don't want this thing to change—I've made my memories here.” Then you become part of an exclusive group who share collective memory of what it once was; later, others will share a collective memory of the changed version.

We're mostly architecture people here. It feels like we have two lenses: the architecture lens and the human lens. I worked in a Chinese restaurant with my high school friends—you could not have designed that building worse. Fake roof slope, no windows, horrible red tile floors. But the memories could not have been better. The inverse is true: you can be in the best architecture and not make memories if you're alone. Sometimes mixing them makes it better—like being at the Barcelona Library with friends. But it can also be just as lit if you're alone. *[laughter]*

Sometimes it's comforting to have a place that stays—you can count on it remaining the same while everything else changes. Many of us rely on home to be that. But other times you go home and it's completely the same and you feel like they expect you to be the same—and maybe you're not. *That can be depressing.*

Even when you're living in a space, you're changing it: scratches on the floor, marks on the wall. You don't notice because you're there. When you leave and come back after a break, you notice the differences. Those changes are proof it's been lived in.

I want to connect conscious vs. unconscious design. There's the person who designs the apartment, and then there's how you actually use it: maybe the bedroom becomes an office. There's flexibility and everyday design by the user. Designers should be aware and design for that informal design—allowing growth and change. For me, light is huge. *If my childhood room had no window, would it feel the same?* Probably not. So we should allow the growth and change of user design.

I lived in an apartment called The Hub. My room had no window—it was a concrete bunker. I had no idea what time it was. It was ironic as an architecture student. The design definitely impacted my memories: I hated it; I moved.



We were talking earlier about changing spaces and change of use—offices into bedrooms, etc. One way to approach this is: should architects tackle top-down problems, or should we give people opportunities to solve their own problems? Place exists at city scale too. Think urbanistically: place identity in Barcelona is different from Atlanta, or from a highway exit. Transportation matters: suburbia, wealth moving, car access—design at the urban scale affects individual and collective agency.

We should try to solve problems that are possible. We can't fix everything with a building. We should design sustainably, create good spaces to work and live, and accommodate affordability where we can. But we shouldn't think we'll solve the energy crisis with one building. Do our small part.

We often like to think design can solve every problem. We chase things that don't like us sometimes. "If I can just figure out this problem with this proposal..." That isn't always the case. On the same note, people don't consult designers enough on some issues. Being overly idealistic is an issue.

Is design something that should solve larger problems, or evoke individual and collective agency in self-determination?

Building on that: thinking back to how you can't micromanage people—maybe solving problems through architecture isn't the right approach; think about the benefits we can provide. We can only work with what we have. That presents an opportunity to ask: what statement do you want to leave behind? *What lasting impact do you want beyond immediate problems—an artifact that outlasts us?*

I don't like the wording of the question. It's a good conversation starter, but these aren't opposites. We should solve larger problems and evoke agency.

We're often posed with "how is this beltline building going to solve all of Atlanta's problems?" We bite off more than we can chew. Saying "a building can only do so much, and I'm doing my small part" is good—but if we ever say "good enough," we might stop trying to push beyond. I think back to the Bolton lecture where they said they tried to put affordability in one project and couldn't; "we'll get it in the next one." If that helps me sleep at night, fine—but we should still try.

Ship of Theseus thought: if a place changes so much, who "holds" that place? I'm Gujarati. Every time I go back to India, something's different. I don't have attachment because it changes. As designers, if we change a place, who are we solving for, and who are we harming? We could solve an individual's problem but worsen a larger-scale one—or aim at the larger scale and harm someone else. My brain keeps going back and forth.

In relation to place: when people have agency—when they invest themselves in making a space—their place attachment heightens. In a freshman studio on a refugee camp, we designed sub-communal spaces and my professor told me to extend the apparatus of my scheme into that space, but leave it empty—let people take ownership rather than prescribing everything. That's how I approach it.

This might be off, but individual agency is part of solving larger problems. *You want to amplify tools for individuals—that's part of social change.*

We've seen in the past that individuals or firms believed in universal solutions—Haussmann's Paris, for example. Do you think our answer now is time-bound? That in the past, people believed they could solve large problems without collective agency?

Larger problems inherently involve the collective. *A teacher educates all; designers set conditions, but a collective acts. Individuals have ideas, but it takes the collective to make change.*

When discussing place and placelessness, it's easy to view such a conceptual exploration as inaccessible and impersonal. Yet, place and placelessness do not exist solely within academia—they can be argued as the very foundation of architecture, embodying the inherently human experience within a space. In this way, they extend beyond a discussion between experts and instead exist more accurately as human conversation, independent from expertise or field of study.

Sandbox achieves this wonderfully by breaking past artificial walls of pseudo-intellectualism to create a conversation that does not exclude anyone, while still engaging the subject matter in a thoughtful way. By encouraging every voice to be heard, the conversation brings architecture back to its human roots, leaving behind the notions of a detached science. If anything, the conversation reinforced that architecture represents far more than the physical manifestation of buildings; it is deeply intertwined with human experience and memory.

During the discussion, I wrote down my own personal equation for place:

$$\text{place} = \text{objective material} + \text{subjective experiential}$$

While it is a simplistic distillation of a complex idea, I think it can summarize what we think of when we consider “place”. The discussion brought up place existing as both what we see, but also what we feel. The physical qualities of the building fuse together with spatial experience and memory to create something infinitely more complex than just physical structure. In a sense, place can become almost human—it exists so differently among experiences, as we begin to give places personality, as if bringing it to life within our minds.

“Placelessness” then, in my view, could exist as the removal or lack of one of these elements: design without memory, or memory without location. It exists incomplete: a puzzle missing the last piece.

In this way, these concepts of place and placelessness represent how critical Sandbox discussions have the potential to become. They can bring to light these other halves of place that we may not even conceptualize within the moment. This includes the physical details that create our sense of comfort at home, as well as the memories in places we claim unremarkable. By breaking down barriers to entry, we begin to create a more holistic picture of spaces, evolving them from placeless design or memory into fully realized and living “place”.

With more discussions like these, the inherent humanity of architecture can be reprioritized. It can break down the walls that separate inhabitant and architect, ultimately reminding designers of the potential of design: the privilege to shape the human experience— in other words, the privilege to create place.

- Miguel Pita-Ruiz
B.S Arch '28

The proposal of Sandbox held a simple premise: a discussion of place in the absence of images. No pin-up wall, no drawings, no models, and no displays with precedents. Without drawings to point at, participants were asked to point at themselves, referencing the personal and the autobiographical. While the arrangement felt ceremonial there weren't any prescribed rules: students and faculty drifted in and out, passing around a microphone, unsure of whether to contribute or to avoid contaminating the experiment.

Perhaps in reaction to the culture of architectural critique, the language pointed towards a quiet recalibration of values, toward a broader, more human register with a capacity for the everyday, the banal, the unglamorous, the subjective, the perceptual, the embodied. These sentiments echo elsewhere in the discipline: in the perception-centric work of architects like Thomas Phifer or Steven Holl, in the material-forward work of Anne Holtrop or RCR Arquitectes, and in the everyday, participatory approach of Alejandro Aravena or Lacaton & Vassal, among many, many others.

The conversation asks – if the discipline's usual machinery is not built for the kinds of questions students want to ask, what structure is called for? What tools and platforms might facilitate these types of discussions and respond to what students understand to be a shortcoming of architectural education? If the structure of an architecture school, with its reliance on technique and production, does not make space for these kinds of discussions, how might we rethink the education of an architect? What could a conversation of architecture look like if we were to center memory, attachment, ordinary space, and the archive of personal geographies we each carry?

- Michael Stradley
Ventulett NEXT Fellow
Georgia Tech, School of Architecture

During the latter half of my undergraduate studies, I supported myself as a valet where the city's past and future intersected in a forgotten parking lot of a bar tucked behind an underdeveloped stretch of the Atlanta Beltline - an urban redevelopment project transforming old railways into city trails and green spaces. Once a metal yard, the parking lot was a remarkably brutish and forgotten type of space, untouched by the conveniences of contemporary development. The parking lot sat, nestled behind worn bricks of warehouses now turned lofts - home to a wide assortment of people - including artists in studio lofts, bar patrons stumbling about, and locals cutting through the fading underbelly of the city's evolving fabric.

The parking lot stood as a quiet observer, disconnected from the liveliness around the corner where the bar remained active, positioned directly on the Beltline's busy path. The memory of the neighborhood that once defined this place lay dormant, cloaked in darkness. Whispers of an uneasy feeling, expressed by many walking through, were surely given no assurance from the street lamps, which were no longer active and stood proudly over eroding asphalt, now turned gravel. The drunken laughs and cheers of the bar drifted into the barren environment. Though less than 100 yards away, the atmosphere around the bend felt distant and alien.

Best described as the city in a forest, Atlanta offered some sense of calm to the forgotten space. Outlined by trees, the parking lot felt otherworldly, as if misplaced within its own city. In purpose, it is a simple passageway caught between developing infrastructure and the sprawling blocks of disadvantaged historic neighborhoods. Although weathered and with the appearance of something once removed, the space somehow clung stubbornly to its past identity, refusing to fade or transform.

The surrounding trees framed the night sky on those clear nights, and a somber effect often occurred. Leaves on twisted branches wrestled in the evening breeze as the gentle hum of planes flew above. For many months, I would spend forty hours a week here, and the parking lot and I grew fond of one another, offering an unlikely companionship. Characters of the night passed by, stumbling as the gravel shifted under their feet, laughing, crying - continuing through this little passage, a growing city kept hidden. But, as the night's end grew near, and the smoke in the air dissipated, the passersby lessened, and the laughs from afar dimmed. Over time, in these moments, I found reflection in the silence and peace in the pause. Once a means to an end, the space took on a new meaning and purpose, presenting an opportunity that is difficult to find in our fast-paced modern life. The parking lot became a space for understanding. Its contradictions mirrored the complexity of urban life, teaching me to see beauty in the forgotten and to embrace the layers of history that shape every space. In places like these, quiet and unassuming, I learned to appreciate the power of design to honor what was while envisioning what could be.

In the stratigraphy of memory

Introduction

This study examines how dwellings persist once our occupation of them ends and how their recollection through memory reshapes and redefines the architecture of everyday life. Central to this inquiry is the afterlife of domestic space—a working category that describes the various ways former dwellings continue to inhabit consciousness long after their material presence has receded. Its boundaries remain intentionally open, broad enough to hold diverse forms of experience while still allowing patterns to emerge. It encompasses the persistence, alteration, or erosion of memories, as well as the affective charge that may intensify or dissipate over time.

Toward a Regenerative Research Methodology

As a new research methodology, this malleable system offers limitless potential. Utilizing the rawest form of recollection - spoken word - and regarding it as data is regenerative by nature. The words can be read and reread, each time with new meanings, contexts, connotations, and lenses. Its strength materializes from a scaffolding of themes that emerge only after one conducts the interviews, allowing surprises and contradictions to manifest themselves rather than be filtered out before they ever exist. Its coupling with automation through theme tagging, sorting, and interpreting text snippets provides for this to become a replicable process in the field of architectural research, theory, or whatever else. It is the ambition of this project's trajectory to continue developing the means by which automation can be optimized and expedited, as well as how it might merge with human intuition and hand.

Memory as Fragmented Terrain

Across the interviews, what resurfaced was rarely a single, unified narrative. Instead, each account arrived as an entanglement of positive and difficult associations that resisted clear division. Memories re-emerged in layers: sensory flashes, spatial habits, emotional ruptures, and small architectural details that carried disproportionate weight. The process of listening revealed how challenging it is to categorize these recollections definitively. Every spoken word seemed to gesture toward something unspoken—a subtext, an atmosphere, an image that existed only in the mind of the narrator. What appears on the surface of a story is only a fraction of its depth.

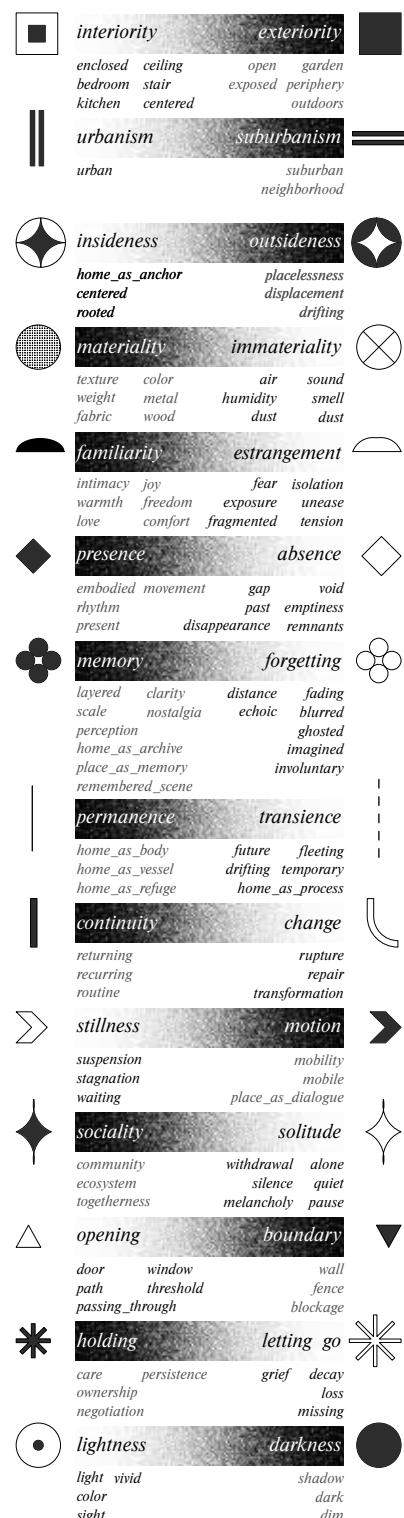
It is within this complexity that the value of a systematic yet open-ended method becomes evident. The fluidity of memory demanded a structure that could hold contradictions without collapsing them—one that accepts that attachment and unease can coexist, that belonging and estrangement can imprint themselves with equal force. The body of work that follows attempts to articulate a way of engaging with the instability of remembered space, acknowledging its partial, shifting, and sometimes incompatible layers. It welcomes its many contractions in both its framings of place and the degree to which memory alters it. What persists long after we leave a dwelling is not a single truth but a constellation of impressions—held in the body, in language, and in the shifting architectures of memory itself.

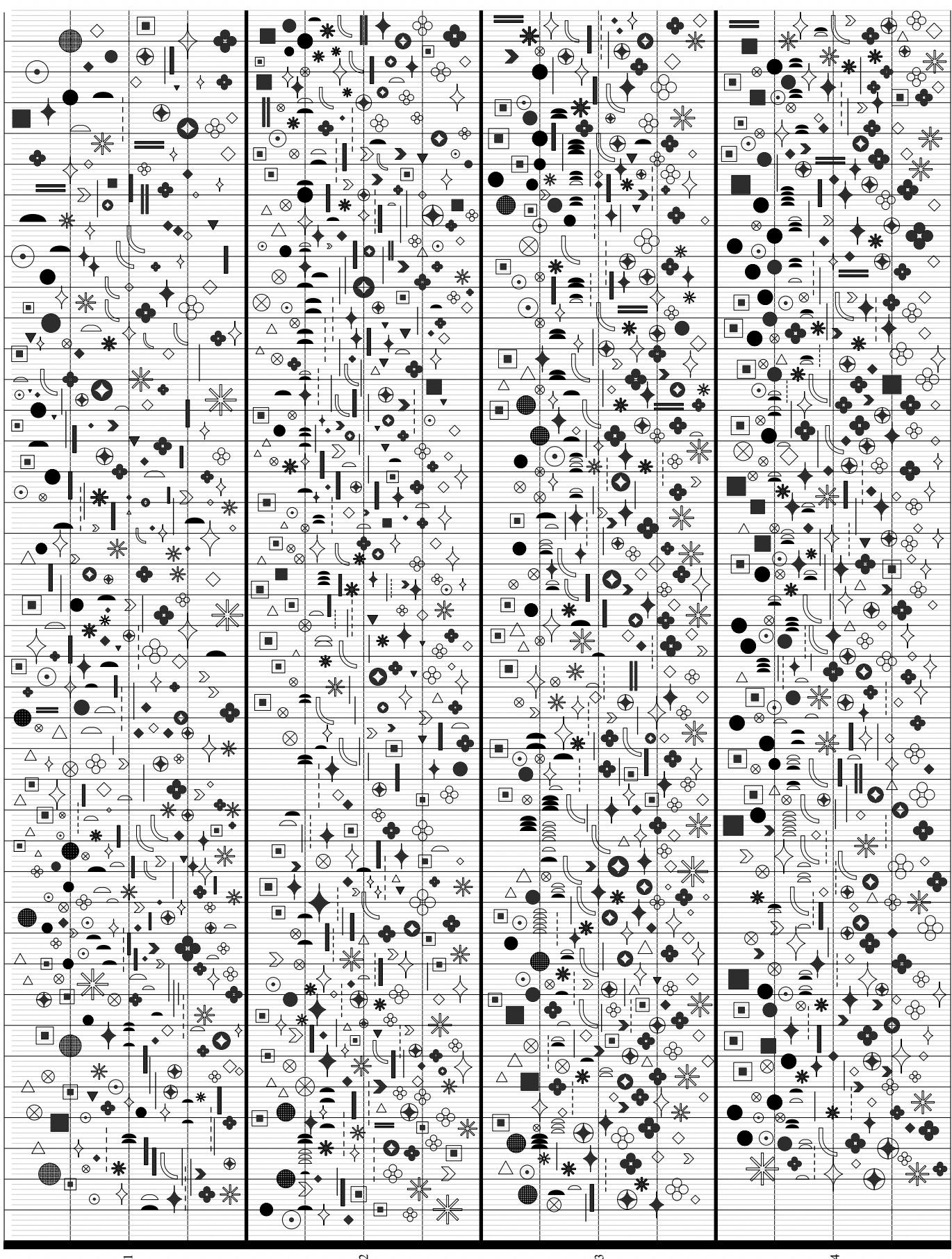
The Layers We Keep

As human beings, we remember selectively; memories congeal and recenter, expanding into a definition of our existence that we hold as true. The time that accrues between a former dwelling and its present recall produces a rift—sometimes of accuracy, sometimes of sharpness—but not one that follows a predictable trajectory. Memories do not simply fade; they stratify. They become hierarchical. And when tethered to the physical manifestations of a place, the significance of that place subtly determines what maintains retained and what falls away.

Given the nature of the topic of domestic space, we must acknowledge its hypersensitivity and potentially immense sway over a person's development. These environments often occupy a peculiar register: intensely private, sometimes even sacred, yet outwardly unremarkable to those who pass by. Each carries layers of experience that remain largely invisible to the next inhabitant, who inherits only the shell, unaware of the rituals, conflicts, routines, and emotional climates that once animated it.

The smallest spatial habits may bind a person to a place, and that place to the person's future demeanors and disposition. In this sense, domestic space mediates relationships as much as it shelters them. A home can draw someone inward with a feeling of insideness and belonging, or it can sharpen the experience of outsideness—producing distance, vigilance, or withdrawal. Both conditions, though opposite in tone, can root themselves just as deeply in memory. A dwelling need not be comforting to be unforgettable; estrangement leaves its own vivid architecture.





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(1) (2) (3) (4)

Do you think the place has its own afterlife apart from you—in the lives of new inhabitants, in pictures, in the context it sits in?



I mean, yeah, I guess. I don't know why that question made me think of Encanto, with the house talking and stuff. That's kind of crazy to think about—the house watching everything that happens there. People lived there before us; they had their own lives. They left their own remnants.



I would say no. I wonder how many of the other neighbors' houses are still there. I haven't been back since the early 2000s - twenty years after mine was demolished.



Unless a place is demolished, places remember us. This apartment—I sublet it from a friend. There's a scratch in the bedroom I actually made when I visited him before living here. When I moved in, that scratch was still there. I thought, "Oh—my mark."



I often wonder how many people have lived in my New York apartment since me. For a place to have an afterlife, I think it has to be, in part or whole, physically still there. That's a metaphysical question, but I think so.



Yeah, the house is its own entity, I suppose. Yes, it has its own life apart from our experiences, but it's impossible to say it's independent of what we did in it... the space is dependent on the human being. You can really mess up a place, and the place itself can't fix itself.



The two places I've lived in Boston are full of place—old, clearly showing age, and through lack of maintenance have accumulated layers of traces and rituals. In one, the lower floor had a perimeter of objects against the walls—foldable kayak, bike, books, drawing supplies—piled neatly at the edges, with dust silhouettes on the floor showing they hadn't moved in months... but in student housing, monthly cleaning revealed lines and traces under couches, but those were created by us, not by a time outside our occupancy. As a sublessee now, I'm a stranger moving into a calibrated house; I view it like an exhibition. The still-life quality—objects unmoved for a while—feels museum-like.



In my current house back home, the front door is next to a sharp corner. As a kid, when the door opened, I'd hit my head there. My dad grabbed a rock and broke the corner off so it wouldn't hurt me anymore. It's still broken today... The place remembers the act; we remember the why.



When you take all your stuff out, the dwelling is different than it was before you came. Those things can be replaced and fixed, sure. But when I think about buying a house or a space to live in, it's kind of a scary thought to imagine everything that happened there before us... we joked about ours being haunted. I don't think the new owners understand everything that happened in that house.

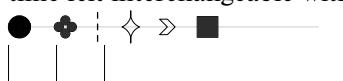


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Do you think places remember us—or are we their only archive?



Both. In traces, aging, weathering—places remember us. We also remember places through documentation—pictures, videos, relationships formed there... But my use of the space at the time felt interchangeable with any other place.



Even if someone renovates, you see the difference—the plaster line, the color shift. I've never seen a repair so perfect you couldn't tell... Materials retain memory unless you demolish them entirely... If it's gone, the memory exists only in people—and in drawings, photos, maps, archives. Maybe even the earth remembers—foundation traces in the soil...



There's a lot that happened. There's no way for a human being living there now to know all the things that dwelling has experienced silently... You could really do a psychoanalysis of the house, but I don't think anyone really does.

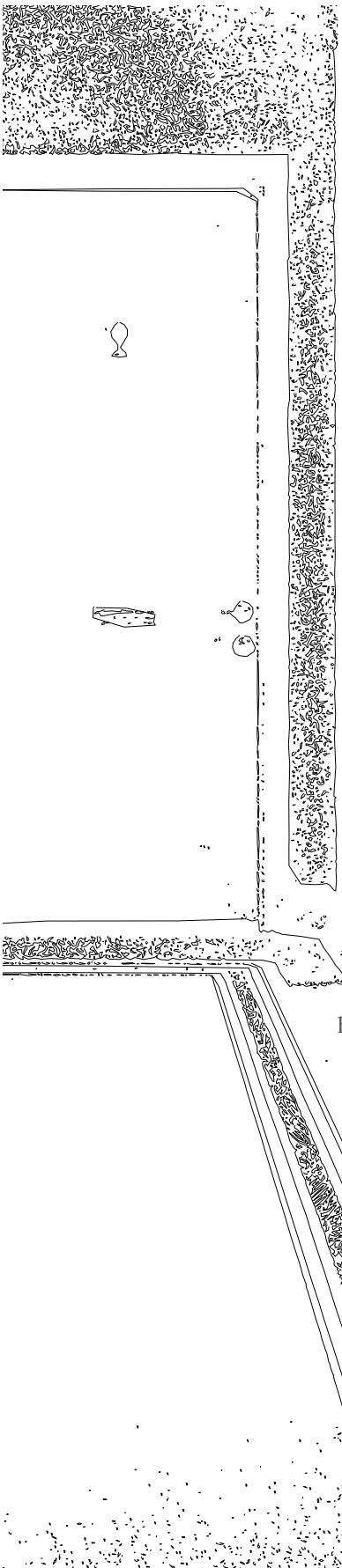


It's interesting to see how places shape memory—or how memories shape place. I'd never compared the three places I've lived. I didn't realize my memories of the second house feel "cold" until today. Because it's ongoing—I still "live" there, in a way—I never treated it as past. Looking at it as past, next to the first home, gives me a new view.



Memories hold so much power over how a place is shaped. No matter how meticulously an architect designs something to feel a certain way, it won't succeed unless the person wants it, and makes the memories that produce that feeling. I've tried to make my apartment feel homey—and it does, a bit—but it'll never be home, because I'm not making "home-worthy" memories here.





At the far end of things

1

Yeah... I remember, the problem was that my bedroom is at the very end of the hallway, after my parents' bedroom... That long hallway we had felt like a barrier between everything else in the house and my room. I used to lie on the hallway floor in that house—between our rooms and our parents' room—just lying on the floor... I would never do that anywhere else, but there, I did. The hallway was so long...There was a turn, and I could sit there for hours without anyone finding me.

When I got agitated, I would close myself off in my room... locking it, having that whole wing to myself... My room was the furthest away from everyone possible. I would sit there for hours, not talking to anyone... I could lock my doors and sit for hours, and no one would say anything... My door was always closed.

After my mom died and my sister moved out, I was really able to isolate in that room, and the space facilitated that. My dad's door was always closed after that, and my brother was just getting lost in video games or doing something random in a room alone... It became very isolating, but at that time, I felt like I needed that...

But I was always in my sister's room anyway. She used to get so upset whenever she'd come into my space, because I'd shoo her out. It made me uncomfortable—it felt like an intrusion. But shortly after, I'd be walking into her room, just lying on her bed, eating food, dropping crumbs everywhere... Her bedroom had built-in desks, so much seating, and so much light. She made this photo wall; it was just a nice place to be... Our mom also loved my sister's photo wall, so we'd sit there together, staring at it... It was small enough to feel still intimate. Even if we were both doing our own thing—if I was reading and she was on her computer—I was close enough to see what she was doing... Having a Jack-and-Jill really changed my relationship with her because we couldn't avoid each other. You get in a fight—it doesn't matter. You don't have a choice but to confront it... In the mornings, we'd get ready in the same bathroom.

But then she moved out for college, and I realized her room wasn't any better. I used to sleep in there, but halfway through that year, I realized it was pretty much the same... After I made it messy, it lost its appeal.

The only healthy way to think about it is breaking up my time in that house into phases... It would be unfair to say it was horrible living there because there were indeed good memories at one point. It all builds on itself, you know... But it is challenging for me not to think of my mom dying when I think of that house. It's upsetting that the thing at the forefront of my mind is the most troubling thing that happened there... It blurs the good memories sometimes. Bad things have a way of being remembered more... It's hard to picture a day-to-day routine in that house, because most of the time when you remember things, you don't recall the normalcy—you remember the abnormal moments.

It's always interesting to leave a place—and also the city... It's never just the house you say goodbye to, but the whole routine, the whole ritual. It was bittersweet... the last few months in the apartment weren't the same. The year before, it was me and two roommates, but one graduated early... In spring, we had a new guy who rarely left his room. He didn't bother anyone, kept mainly to himself... and my other roommate got busy with their partner, so that last month I rarely spent much time at the apartment at all.

I've only lived in temporary situations since I left my parents' home... and in my first apartment, I told my parents I wanted decorations and lights, but then realized I spent no time there. Any effort to curate the space didn't affect me because I came home delirious to sleep and woke up ready to leave... my mom asked why I felt the need to decorate when growing up, I never asked for any of it. I told her I never had a room to make my own... Her practical mindset—why decorate a place that you'll leave in a year or two—filtered into how I treat places now.

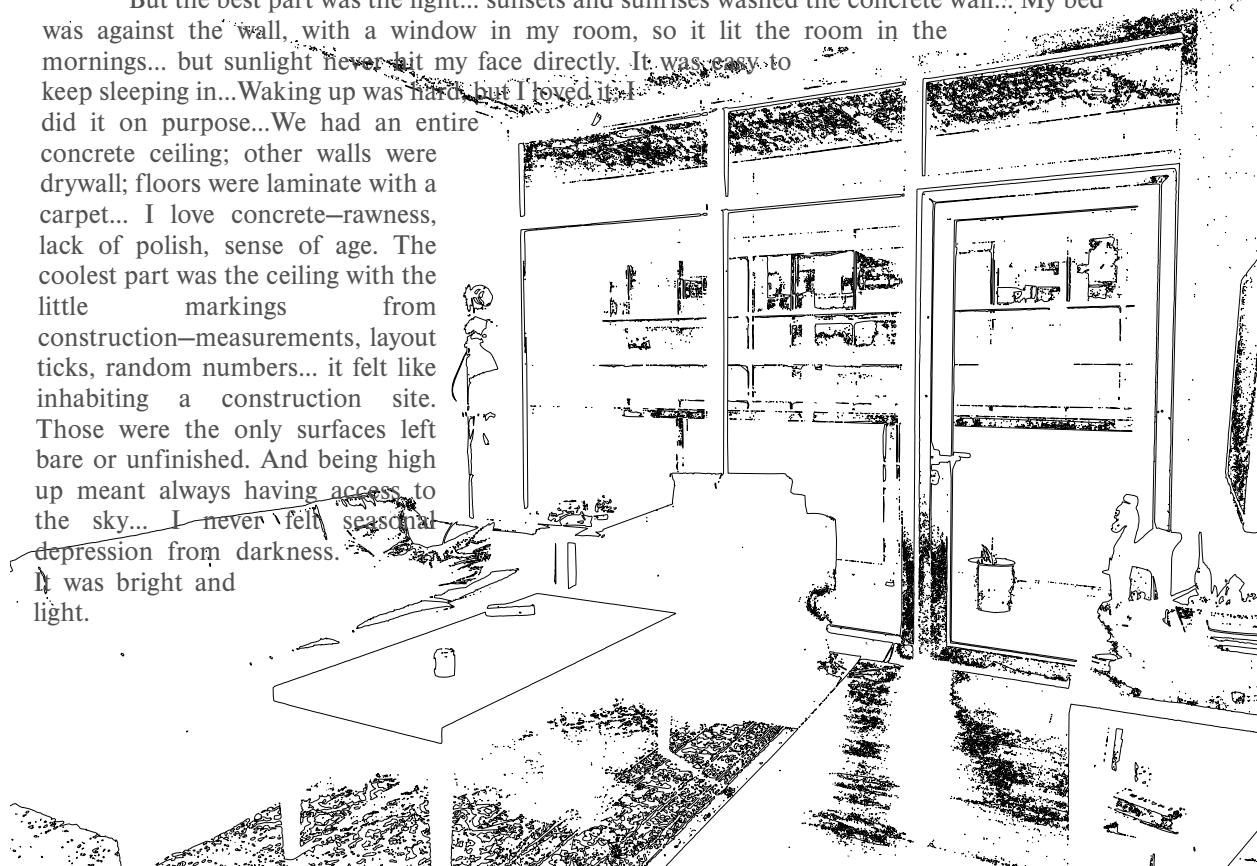
It was so temporary... I knew I'd be there for two semesters. Purposefully, it was bare bones, superimposed with the previous sublessor's things... and subleasing is odd: you clear out rituals others set up to insert your own, but you still see traces of how they used the space. The fading memory of a place becomes the understanding that I'm only passing through... one temporary user in a sequence of temporary users... which is oddly more straightforward to grasp than the thought of someone else occupying your parents' home.

By nature of student housing, it cycles residents and has no permanent presence... the building is alive because it charges high rent that increases with each year. The types of people living there shift as fewer can afford to live there. Many decorate in specific ways, but in that apartment, you get placeless placemaking... choosing SQ5 to discuss inherently must acknowledge that it is student housing with cycles of occupancy. The architecture is neutral to who lives there... rules about nails, paint, and modification. The repetition doesn't create a place where people can truly make a home to the highest degree. The building may not develop meaning as an autonomous object; people imprint and then erase their imprints... traces between occupants are small, unnoticeable push-pin holes. Otherwise, the walls get painted over—tabula rasa every time.

But the best part was the light... sunsets and sunrises washed the concrete wall... My bed was against the wall, with a window in my room, so it lit the room in the mornings... but sunlight never hit my face directly. It was easy to keep sleeping in... Waking up was hard, but I loved it. I

did it on purpose... We had an entire concrete ceiling; other walls were drywall; floors were laminate with a carpet... I love concrete—rawness, lack of polish, sense of age. The coolest part was the ceiling with the little markings from construction—measurements, layout ticks, random numbers... it felt like inhabiting a construction site. Those were the only surfaces left bare or unfinished. And being high up meant always having access to the sky... I never felt seasonal depression from darkness.

It was bright and light.



3

For each time I return

I remember being emotional and asking my mom, "We're not going back to the old house?" She said, "No, this is our new house." ... It was cold! It was the first time in a long time that I slept in my own bed—a supposedly exciting thing—~~independence~~—but it felt cold. The distance started there: physical distance. Even sharing a room, the beds were farther apart. I had a larger bed—only two beds to a room instead of three. The family room was across the hall; my parents' room was even farther. Moving from the older space to the newer felt... weird.

Years later, packing my life into two bags... It's surprising how much you can fit... I've learned that over four years. I can fit a lot—identity, memory—not all of it, but a good chunk—in two bags. My mom helped me pack. I can still hear the tremble in her voice as it became real: no longer an abstract plan. I gave my mom and dad the biggest hugs and left. I didn't even have an apartment in the U.S. yet—I crashed with my cousin for a week... I was leaving these memories, this huge part of myself, and going to a place where I didn't even have a place yet.

Even though it's been only four years, it feels like a lifetime—so much has happened. But I still get flashes from the older places. Talking about the family house today is hard; I feel myself losing memories of it. I go back once or twice a year—though it's been a little over a year now—and every time I return, it feels a little different... like moving in again. A little cold, a little weird. Even the door handles feel different. When I return from the U.S., the handles back home feel heavier... I never notice them getting lighter in the U.S., but when I go back, they always feel heavier. Things are different in ways I cannot predict, and the memory never sticks—except the door handles...

The cultural shift here makes me forget older memories... dealing with landlords and management here, versus back home where my dad is my landlord—we own the land... the change in language... even the strength of the sun... it consumes older memories; the newer apartment

memories are more vivid because I'm still in this chapter... but they eat away at the older ones. It's like a plan drawing printed with low ink... the lines are faint until a memory darkens them. This apartment life is entangled with a dream I had since I was 13 or 14—to study abroad, have my own space... Younger me tries to hold onto these memories because they were the fantasy... but living the dream feels a little nightmarish sometimes... I'd still do it again, but it's consuming... these places now seem to take away from places I lived most of my life.

Every time I go back, things have changed—as they should—and that reflects my own change... I remember houses through memories, not just plans. Every time I unlock a memory, a new part of the house becomes clear... I wonder: in 10 to 20 years, when I no longer inhabit this apartment, will memories be what remind me of it, as with the older places?

In my head, time pauses... I don't think about it daily. But when I do, I know there's life continuing—like the growing cracks in the walls, or the stone discoloring. In my mind, there's this last still image; then I arrive, and it's different—furniture moved, cracks, the white stucco turning brown from sand and weather. Maybe I even exaggerate differences because of time away. Now, before flights home, I catch myself wondering, "What changed?"

As big as it ever was

I loved that house. It was idyllic - I felt totally safe and comfortable... But when we moved to the new house, which was one story, with eight-foot ceilings and built during the energy crisis... it was dark, especially the living room. The last few years of high school, when I had to live in it, I was eager to get out. But the first house was, I mean... the breezes that would come through, when you opened the windows, 'cause my bedroom had two windows on one wall and one on the other, and you could open the door, and the air would just get drawn in by that fan, you know, in the attic.

The window in my bedroom opened to a roof, because the roof covered a laundry room down below on the first floor... There was a pump house for the well—we had well water, not city water... You could jump from one roof to the other. It wasn't that far. I liked getting a friend to come over, and we would jump from roof to roof... And I would force my brother into games: I was Batman, he was Robin. We would ride our bicycles on the porch—you had enough room to start from the back of the porch and try to jump over these holly bushes with the bike. With Batman and Robin, I'd ride the bicycle past the porch, and he had to jump on the back of it... You can imagine there were some painful moments there.

I loved my room because I had a chest, like a pirate's chest, and Frederick Remington prints on the walls—galloping horses and cowboys... I practiced drawing horses when I was pretty young... There's nothing more difficult than drawing a galloping horse accurately. My mother, because I liked to draw so much, bought these big rolls of newsprint, and we had a freezer with a lid that opened up. She would roll out the newsprint, and while she was cooking or doing laundry, I would be on top of the freezer drawing...

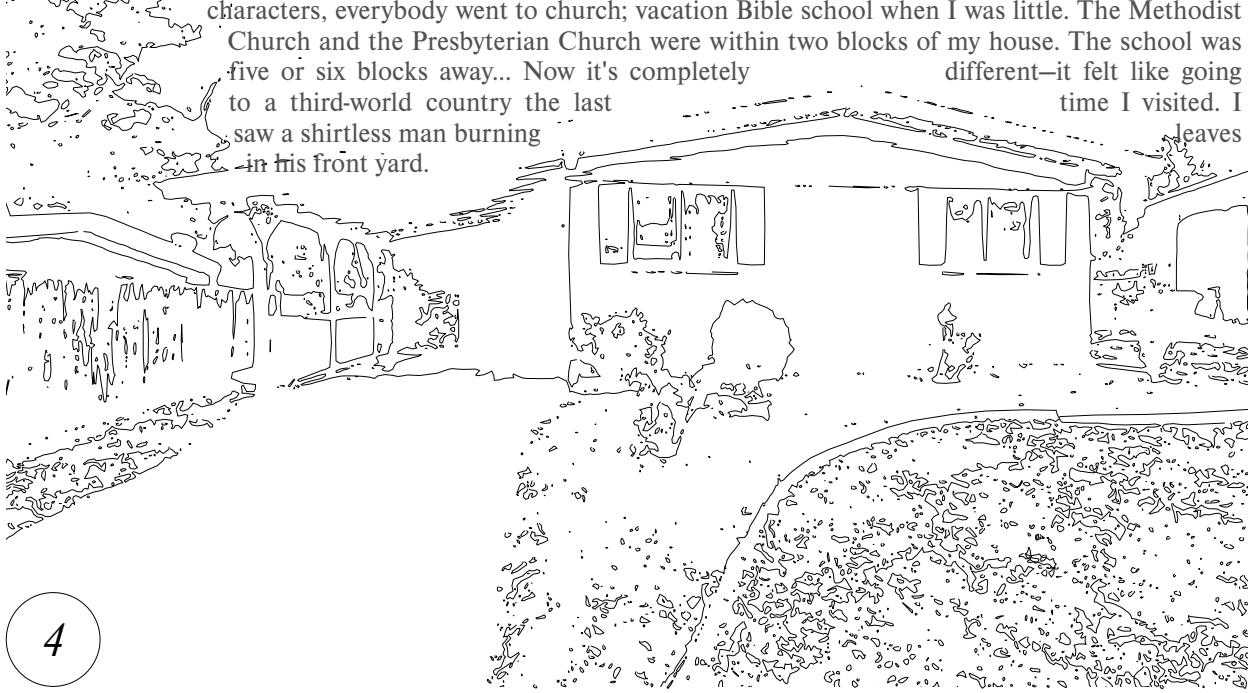
The house was demolished—late '70s or early '80s, maybe... I drove by after several years and looked at the vacant lot... I thought, "That looks so small," and marvelled at how big it seemed as a child. I think I repressed the memory of moving away. It's hard for me to remember exactly how old I was—around 10th grade. I took no part in the physical moving—maybe I was forced to carry boxes—but I don't remember.

I'm thinking of Gaston Bachelard—*The Poetics of Space*. It describes phenomenological conditions involving memory and sensory experience—attics versus basements—and has a beautiful chapter on the almost architectural space of a chest of drawers, how you can project yourself into pieces of furniture... it makes me think back to the poetics of that house.

I'm surprised that I've hung on to as many memories as I have. I had an idyllic childhood... I could probably redraw the floor plan today. I think it exists as pure nostalgia... I revisited a few years back, and it was too sad. When I was growing up, three families owned sawmills and made board lumber. International Paper came in, bought out all three families, consolidated into plywood, and built a huge plywood plant. If you weren't lucky like me, you either drove a log truck or worked in the plywood plant... It was a blue-collar, middle- to low-income situation. Then, International Paper closed the plant in the 1980s, I think... The economy dried up. It used to be like Mayberry—businesses, interesting characters, everybody went to church; vacation Bible school when I was little. The Methodist

Church and the Presbyterian Church were within two blocks of my house. The school was five or six blocks away... Now it's completely different—it felt like going

time I visited. I



Place As A Wicked Problem

Introduction

Why should we observe, study, and devote our time to place discourse? The fundamental question of “who cares” is imperative to address for the continued renewal of place theory. Many would argue that place is a fundamental component of life. Whether consciously or not, we are shaped by the places we grow up in, the ones we inhabit, and even the one where we sit and read this text. Yet, like many theoretical concepts, place resists definition. The geologist, the humanist, and the designer all see it differently. It anchors human experience as something stable, yet remains in constant flux. It is understood, yet elusive. Out of that tension, I am compelled to observe place as a wicked problem—a condition too interwoven with human values to ever be neatly solved. Drawing from Rittel and Webber’s 1973 essay “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” I ask: what is lost when designers stop caring about place, and why should anyone still fight for it?

Formulation

To answer this question, we must first unpack the complexity of place itself.

1. Defining Wickedness

The first characteristic of a wicked problem is that it cannot be definitively formulated—and place is no exception. It resists consensus. Place refuses to give us a clean answer. We argue about whether it can be designed, run endless loops of theory and critique, and still end up right where we started: unsure. Phenomenology, post-phenomenology, and the in between, they don’t resolve the puzzle, they just multiply the angles. In the end, place remains elusive: a problem we keep circling because every perspective reveals something new and hides something else. Each attempt to define it exposes competing architectural, social, ecological, and cultural perspectives, each claiming part of the truth. The challenge is not merely that place is difficult to define, but that every attempt to do so reveals new conflicts about what it should mean and how it should be shaped.

2. Solutions Create New Problems

Any attempt to “solve” place inevitably generates new problems. If we conclude that it is too elusive to be designed and disengage from it entirely, a vacuum emerges: how do we then define, describe or shape the environments we inhabit? What happens to designers whose practice depends on placemaking as a guiding principle? Yet if we overcorrect and try to master place through design, we risk reducing its cultural and emotional depth to formulaic expression (as critics of post-phenomenology may contend). Either way, the fix simply redefines the problem.

3. Measuring Success Becomes Impossible

A third feature of wicked problems is that their success cannot be measured objectively. Solutions are judged through value statements like “good” or “bad,” not “right” or “wrong.” If, for instance, a firm abandons its emphasis on place to focus on productivity, it might double its output and profits, yet lose the human connection that once grounded its work. By one metric, that appears successful; by another, it marks a profound loss. The question isn’t whether the solution worked, but what values it served.

4. Temporal Open-Endedness

Finally, a wicked problem has no endpoint. No matter how many solutions are proposed or how they are judged, the problem remains open. Since place is constantly changing, constantly reinterpreted— as best evidenced with the recent emergence of virtual place— it will never yield a single correct definition or method. Its wickedness lies in its endurance: a question that cannot be solved, only continually re-engaged.

5. Accountability

I want to spend the latter half of this essay exploring the implications of the final characteristic of a wicked problem: the planner has no right to be wrong. Every decision carries lasting, irreversible consequences, and in the realm of place design, those effects reach far beyond building aesthetics.

For instance, imagine a world where architects are replaced by AI algorithms— where a building’s form, program, and performance are generated automatically based on input data. Every requirement is met, every system optimized, yet something vital goes missing. The result is architecture that works, but does not speak. It shelters without meaning, and performs without empathy. If place design becomes obsolete, so too does the dialogue between people and the environments they inhabit.

And here’s the irony: this entire last paragraph was written by AI. If that revelation makes you feel tricked, uncertain, or detached, questioning whether this is my authentic voice, imagine that feeling for the building you are currently in. Maybe it manifests as fear for safety as you look out the window on the 32nd floor of a high-rise designed by a computer. Or maybe that unease is developed in realizing what a world without human authorship of space would feel like: stable, efficient, and profoundly hollow.

The point is simple. When we boil design down to algorithms, we risk stripping away the very thing that makes architecture meaningful: the human pulse within it. In that world, people are left to scrape together a sense of place only through whatever organic moments emerge from the automation and lifeless design. But swing too far the other way, an over-engineering of experience which choreographs how people ought to move, feel, and discover, and you suffocate the autonomy that gives a space life. Instead of fostering agency, it boxes people into a prescribed way of living. The result isn’t wonder; it’s alienation. Hence, the planner has no right to be wrong, as pushing too far in either application of place design leads to dystopian worlds void of life.



Drone view of Villa Verde in Constitución, Chile by Elemental. Image via 99 Percent Invisible

An overhead view of the Half House project emerging from a blanket of look-alike suburban roofs, its exposed cut slicing through the otherwise placeless sprawl.

Applicability and Place “Design”

Having framed place as a wicked problem, the obvious follow-ups show up fast: Who cares? Now what? The better question might be, “How is this useful?” And that’s a fair challenge. We’ve just established that place can’t be neatly defined, can’t be quantified, and never really reaches a final form. At first glance, that makes it seem unhelpful—too vague to guide real decisions.

But those very traits are what make it powerful in design. Its openness pushes us to move beyond rigid formulas, to question assumptions, and to design with nuance instead of shortcuts. Place isn’t a roadblock to practical design; it’s the reason design stays thoughtful, responsive, and genuinely human.

Whether or not a place can be designed remains up for debate. But what is universally accepted is that place can emerge from design that makes room for it. Thus, the most powerful architecture may not choreograph calculated movement or dictate experience, but create the conditions for life to unfold freely, for people to build meaning through autonomy and care. Alejandro Aravena’s Half House embodies this spirit.

At first glance, it appears placeless: a repetitive matrix of concrete shells, each identical to the next, an image of mass production and control. But look closer, and the project begins to breathe. Each home is only half complete, an unfinished invitation, walls awaiting the imprint of the people who will inhabit them. In time, a monotony of structure transforms into a collaged mosaic of individuality and expression. One resident may add a balcony while another paints the façade. Extensions sprawl, gardens bloom, and colors collide. What began as standardization evolves into an architecture of participation, a collective portrait of lives lived in conversation and in tension with design.

The Half House becomes a place because it resists total authorship and embraces autonomy. It is both designed and discovered, ordered and improvised. Regardless of how we may problematize place, or what solutions we propose, I end by claiming that the most powerful architecture is that which embraces the human hand, where the essence of place is not fully prescribed or eradicated, but allowed to grow.

It's exactly for this reason—now that we've pushed through the tangle of place discourse—that we can't stop studying it. Forgetting it, or pretending we've already "figured it out," clears the path for top-down, prescriptive design that confuses control with care. And that's when places stop being lived and start being managed. Young designers often assert they can "make place," as if it were a lego set awaiting assembly. But place is both designed and not designed; it emerges both prescriptively and organically. It grows from lived moments, unplanned interactions, and the freedom of users to inhabit and reinterpret space. Architecture grounded in place understands its humility, it knows it is only one actor in a much larger system of human life.



Villa Verde expansion under construction. Image via 99 Percent Invisible
Individual construction and development of the "other half"



From "Pritzker Prize winner Alejandro Aravena releases free housing designs to fight homelessness" – the image titled "Incremental Housing Full Width" in the slideshow.

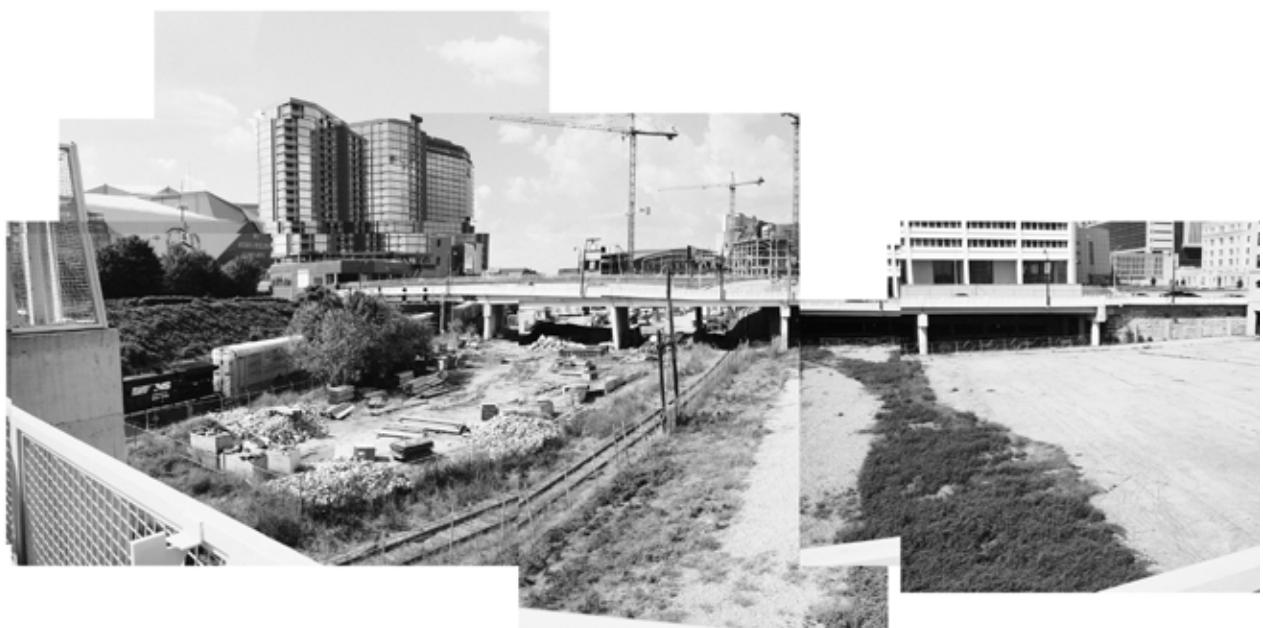


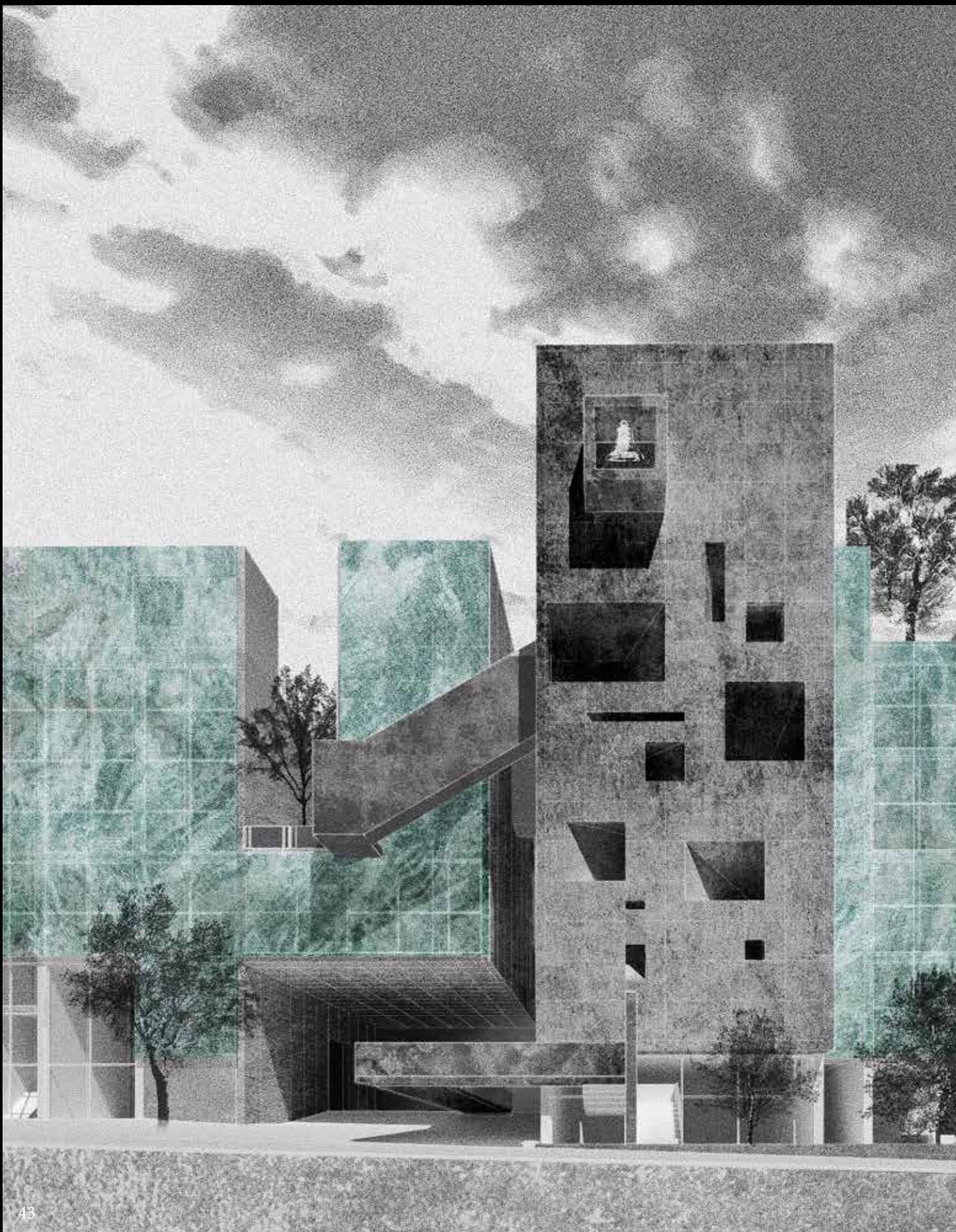
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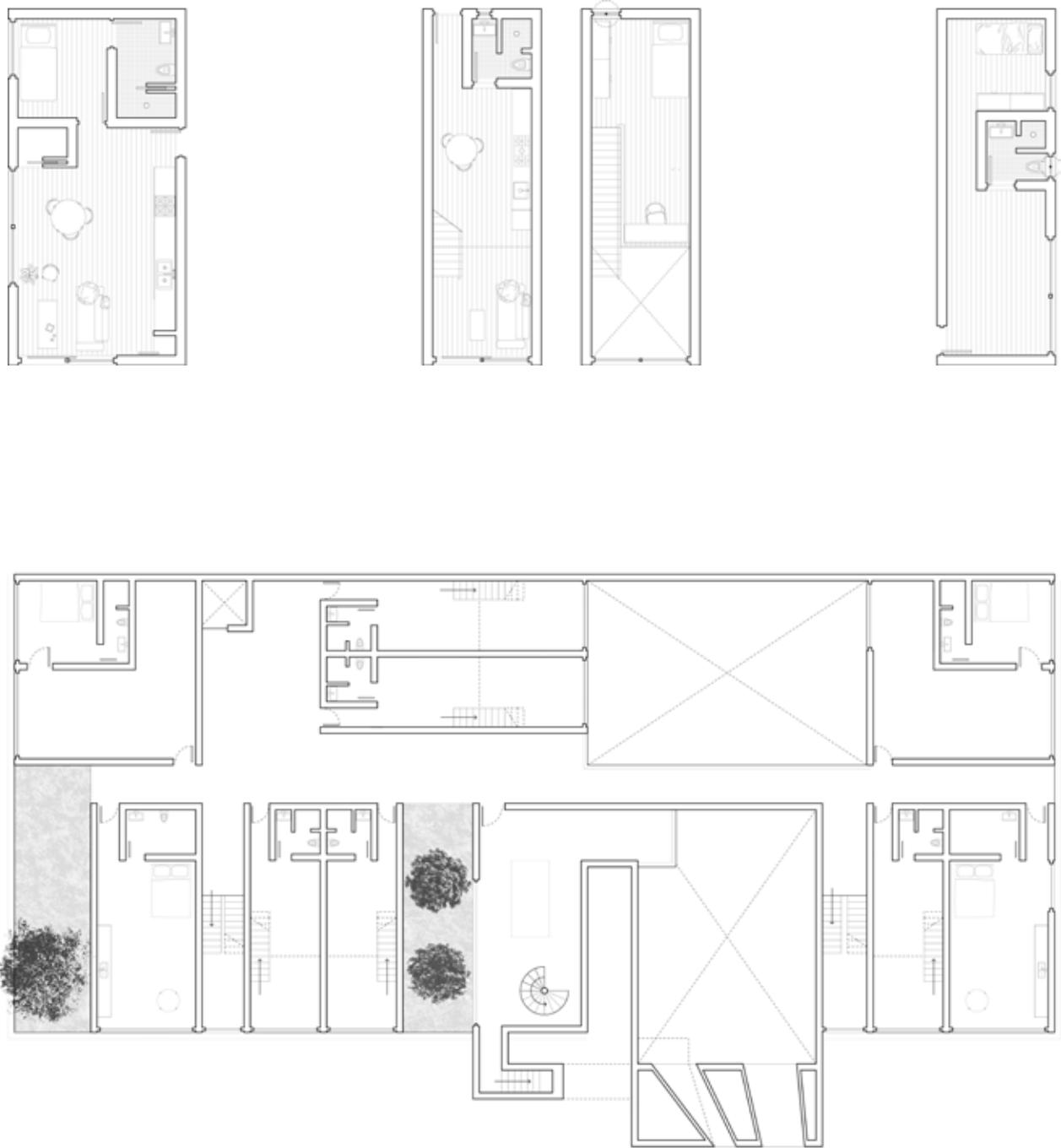
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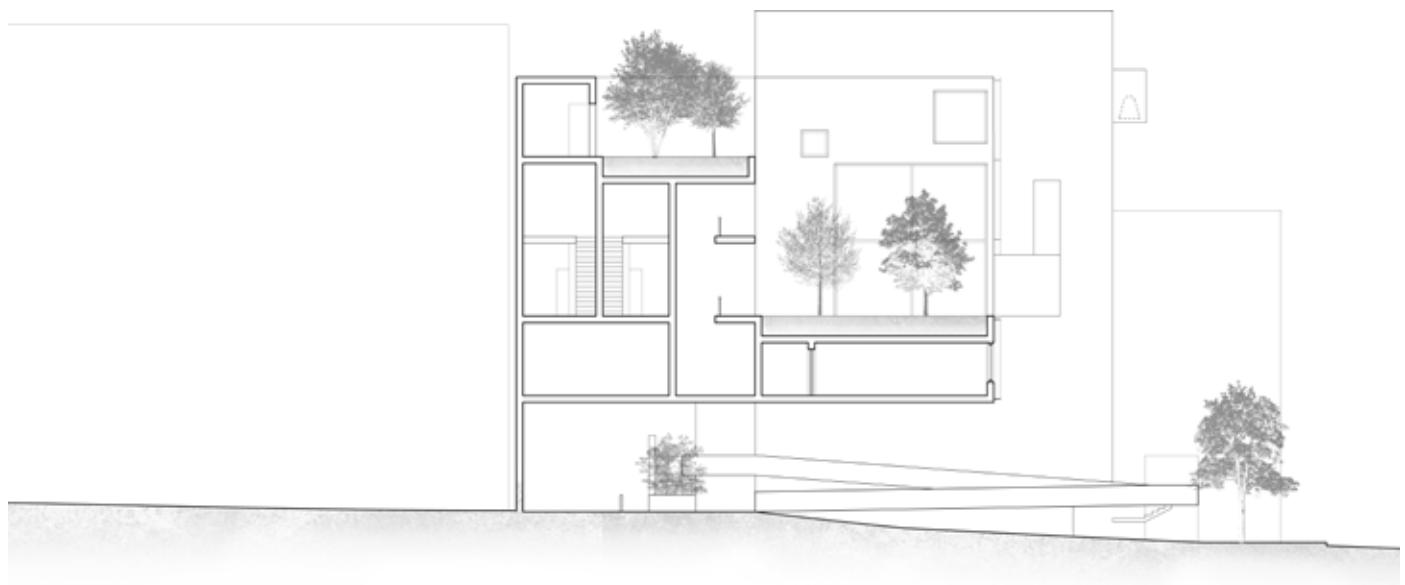
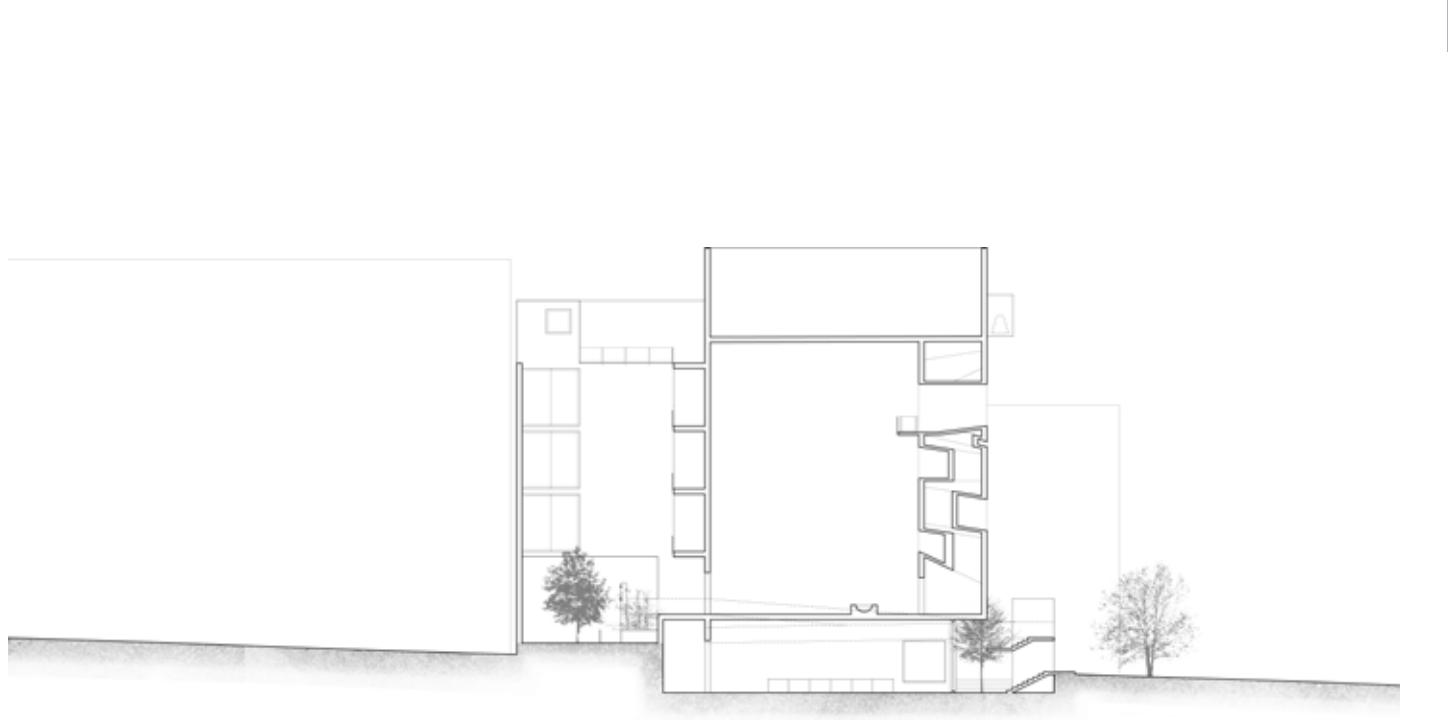


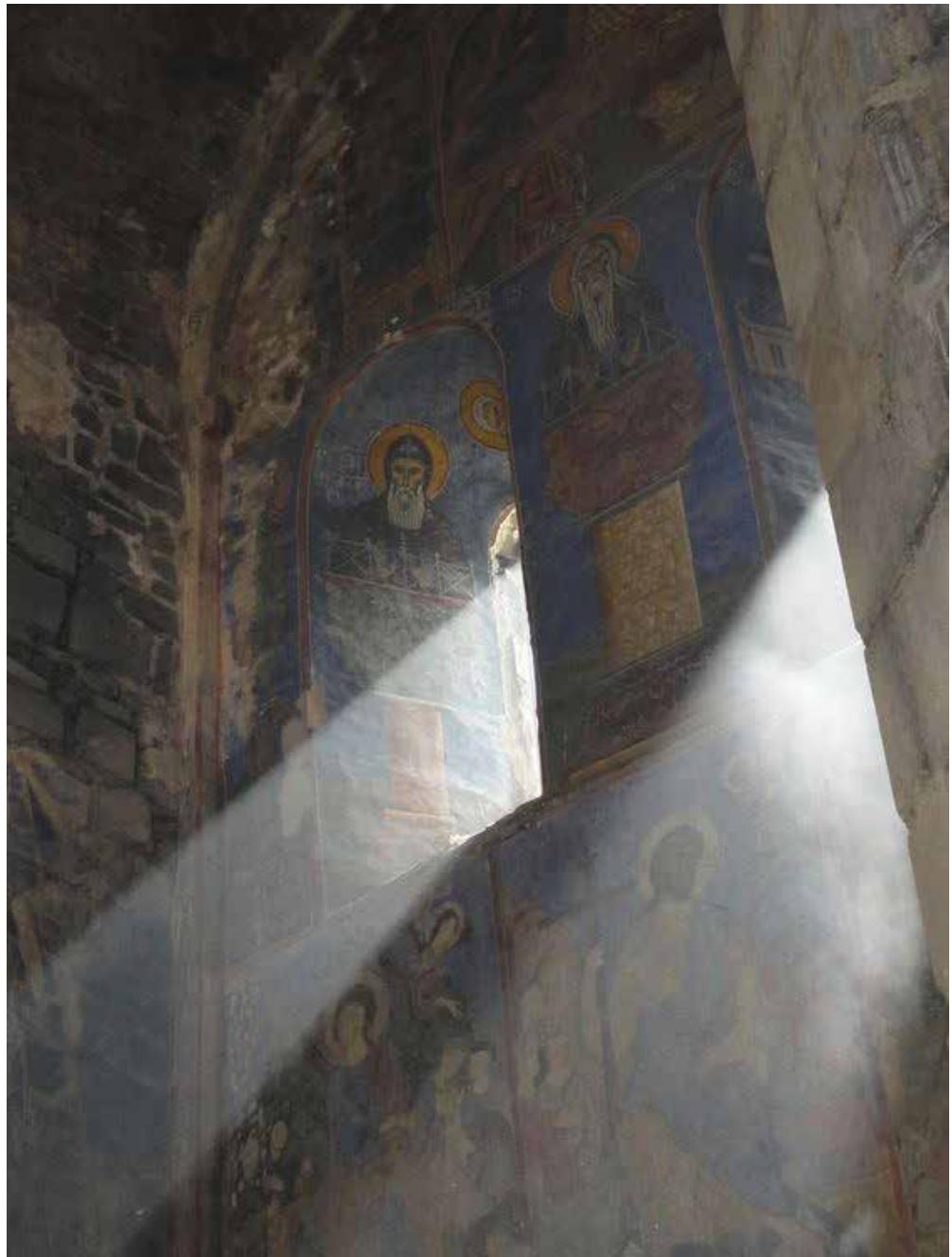


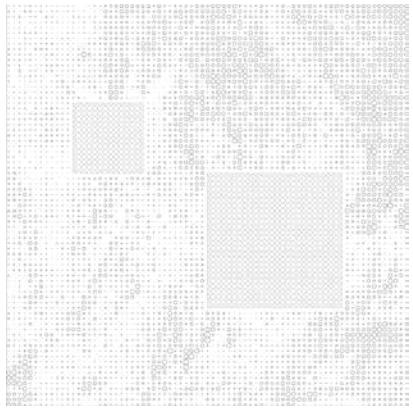
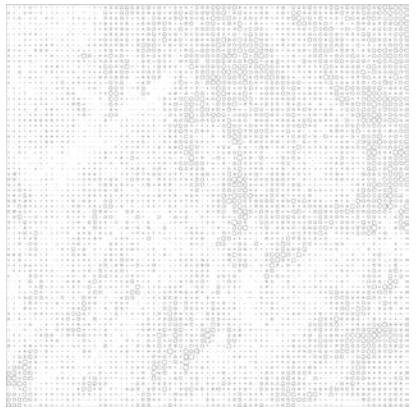




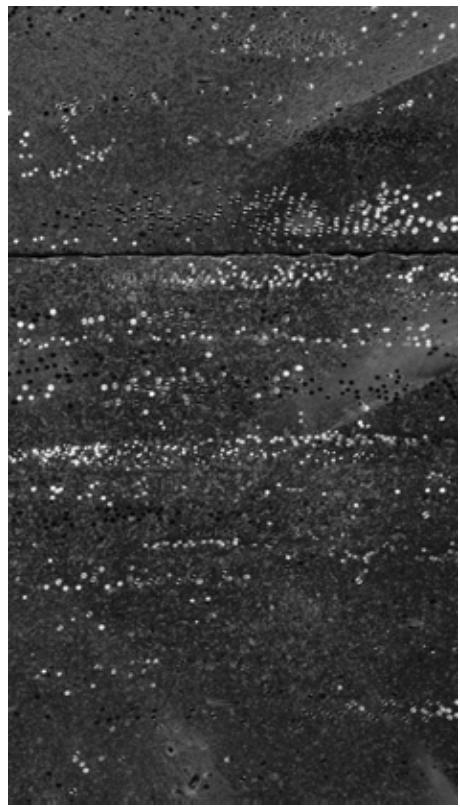
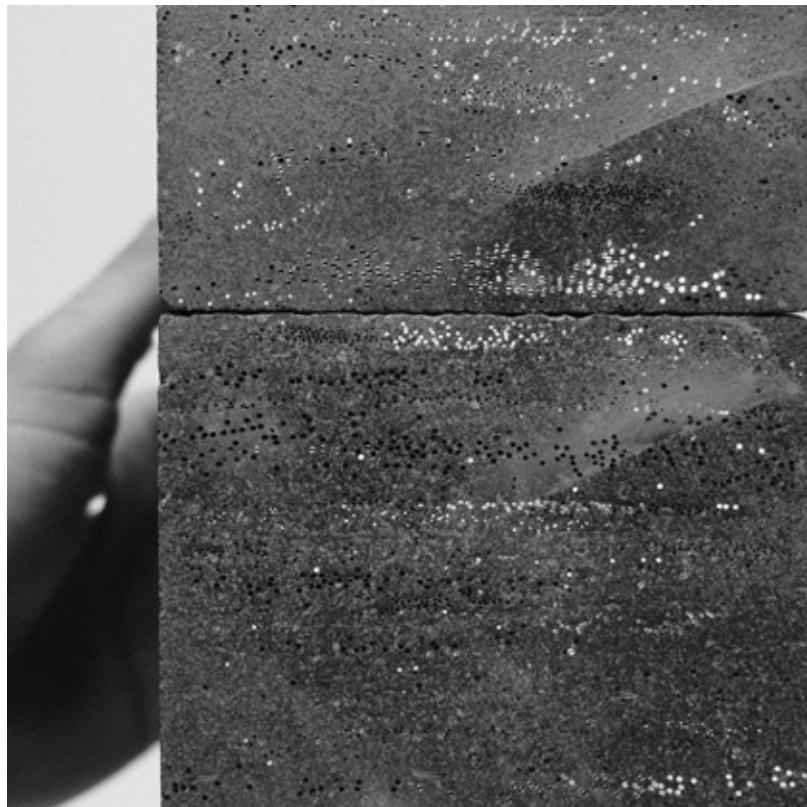








Facade Strategy



Iconostasis

Place and Digital Media

The increasing dominance of digital spaces, supplementing or even replacing physical ones, has become an undeniable feature of contemporary life. Although physical spaces can be defined by their tangible permanence, digital spaces in contrast offer a fluid and easily participatory environment. This affordance has allowed the digital world to host places rather than exist merely as engines and liminal spaces. By allowing for such accessible participation, users can create their own spaces, flock to one or another instantaneously, explore, shape, and inhabit constructed domains. Even without physically being together, users can fabricate their own experiences in a shared place. Janet Murray describes computers to be “liminal objects,” a threshold between what lies in our mind and what we see, a deeply intimate yet publicly shared sphere. The unique affordances of digital places are profound and compelling in this way, however it leaves them uniquely vulnerable to placelessness. The ability of digital spaces to be digital places hinges on both user participation and uniqueness. When either is eroded by the homogenization of user interfaces or algorithmic flattening, the result can become digital placelessness.

The early internet was a goldmine for innovation. With a plethora of unprecedented affordances, untapped reserves of novelty lie everywhere. Possibilities were seemingly endless and it was a time when digital spaces weren’t ruled by virality and algorithms, rather, creativity and authenticity established their structure. Edward Relph defines place as, “... a profound center of human intention, experience, and identity...a significant center of meaning and experience.” (Relph 2). Users emulated this digitally by creating and holding intimate interactions, something that could be described as existential insideness. The foundations these early creators made in user interfaces and functionality later became iconic in defining individual platforms, specifically social media. For example, YouTube used to be defined as the platform for posting multitudes of videos, often candid ones early on. Instagram was for posting photos, Facebook for connecting people, each had its individual branding and functions. MySpace and Tumblr were also very prominent platforms at this time—they both allowed users to curate, customize, and to an extent, inhabit their profiles.

They fused digital tools with users’ emotion, identity, and memory, forming meaningful digital places. Additionally, the introduction of online game lobbies allowed users to not just tie visual memories to these digital spaces, but also interactions with other dynamic users. They were fully immersed in these environments, as Murray describes, “The pleasure of immersion is enhanced by the possibility of agency, by the feeling that we not only enter an imaginary world but can also act within it.” (Murray 99). Players were enabled to wander through lobbies and interact with other players to create their own experience and impression. Although these places continue to exist in the memories of those who inhabited them, many are now abandoned in reality. The fall in popularity of these games has led to dead lobbies where players no longer visit. Visiting these today is similar to passing through an abandoned mall: remnants of experiences linger, but the attributes that allow for spaces to become places are faint. There no longer exist the subjective attributes of a place; the interactions, innovation, and lived experience. The shift from such intimate and user-driven spaces to deserted digital ruins marks not just the end of an era, but also the emergence of digital placelessness.

In the modern day, digital platforms have grown exponentially in scale, while the niche, personally curated characteristics of the early internet have drastically diminished. As a result, design homogenization, standardized interfaces, and calculated algorithms have overtaken the internet. Priorities have shifted, or have rather been established: the internet and its spaces are now a place for quick monetization where convenience, efficiency, and profit tend to trump all. Relph warns of this as placelessness arises from, “the replacement of the many diverse and unique places by a few standard types.” (Relph 90). This description characterizes much of the contemporary internet.

With minimalistic, cookie-cutter user interfaces and something of a standardized design, the internet has become a placeless version of its early self. Algorithms show the mainstream and immediately lock on to what it thinks a user may want to see. It can be so accurate that the displayed feed is hard to break out of. This reduces the possibilities of users branching out and finding unexplored corners.

Like all things, minimalism and standardization may exist on a cultural pendulum—now it swings toward massive homogeneity and minimalism, but in the upcoming years it will swing back towards local identity and place. However, the scale at which this technology has pervaded society may cause everlasting changes that set design norms—and possibly large-scale placelessness for future generations. This is not to say that place is inherently good and placelessness bad; as Relph mentions, “The experience of place is inevitably shaped by its context, and in the modern world that context includes placelessness. If we long for place, it is partly because placelessness is always present.” (Relph 25). What is important, however, is that the existence of placelessness serves to supplement place rather than overtake it. It should heighten our awareness of place, not erase it.

Yet another facet of such algorithmic flattening is the loss of what Walter Benjamin calls the “aura” of original content. Benjamin defines aura as the unique presence an artwork has in its temporal context and that its context, ritualistic function, and originality are essential to the retention of its aura. Now, in the age of excess and access, seemingly anything in the digital sphere can be endlessly replicated. Memes and video content especially are duplicated endlessly from account to account and from platform to platform.

The very definition of a meme is to copy an element of culture rapidly. In the past few years, users have even started to consume media from one platform solely from copies of it on another. For example, copies via screenshot of viral tweets on Twitter make their way to every other platform- Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, even Pinterest.

No longer do individuals have to hop from app to app, they can experience everything vicariously through such replications. In a way, these iterations can flatten the experience of an individual site, a post one might encounter on Instagram is the same post that is encounterable on another. One platform is no longer meant for one specific type of humor, function, or experience. Further, the explosion of success of TikTok’s scrolling layout and uber-accurate algorithm has inspired other large sites to imitate this- Facebook and Instagram have “Reels” as well as YouTube with its “Shorts”. All videos are typically sixty-seconds or less and formatted in a scroll-down layout. This may be the most profitable and addictive structure for engagement, but they are not novel nor are they individual. In Relph’s terms, this is a proliferation of placelessness, brought about by the replacement of many unique places by a few standard types. When every space offers the same experience, it becomes hard to recognize it as a place.

A different development in the realm of replication is the advent of travel vlogs, 3D maps, and nostalgic video edits. Be it traveling to another country, a local coffee shop, or even setting a winter cabin and fireside ambiance, users may indirectly experience what it is like to exist in that physical space through another user’s lens. This phenomenon can be best expressed as “vicarious insideness,” a term coined by Relph and described as occurring, “... when we experience a place secondhand – for example, through novels, films, or media representations. Although we are not physically present, we engage empathetically with the lives and settings of others, imagining what it might be like to be there.” (Relph 52). Additionally, physical spaces are not the only kind that can be experienced: temporal places can be accessed or emulated through nostalgic video edits or digital images of a past time.

Liminal space, vaporwave, and Frutiger Aero/Metro aesthetics have gained popularity as curated emulations of the past, allowing both those who lived through these eras and those who did not to experience a sense of place through visual and emotional reconstruction.

Not only are these aesthetics a call to a physical place in time, but more specifically digital places in time, the early internet. Frutiger Aero is the glossy, gradient, and skeuomorphic look of UI in game consoles and operating systems from the early 2000's. The name itself is a combination of the Windows Aero design language from 2006 and the Frutiger font family. Although these media evoke emotions from viewers, it is a false sense of place—the memories are merely invoked or emulated. One may remember or imagine what it was like to exist and experience the emulated place, but no longer are there new experiences that can be had from a time already past. Similarly, the places shown in vlogs and maps are but replicated spaces, their aura diminished and unable to afford placemaking. Though the modern internet trends towards digital placelessness, communities in the digital realm continue to make reassessments of place through fellowship and personalization. Platforms like Discord allow users to create servers: private chats in which they can text, call, and stream media with others. These servers rose in popularity during the 2020 pandemic by sharing a sense of belonging, experience, and placemaking. Similarly, modern games have packed lobbies in which users can interact in a multitude of ways, echoing the communal feeling of early online presences. In both cases, digital spaces reclaim a sense of place in a largely placeless setting via intentional and continued human interaction.

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The evolution of digital space divulges the ongoing tension between placelessness and placemaking—a tug between user needs and corporate convenience. There is no denying that the widespread replication of content and rise of algorithmic homogeneity has eroded the strong sense of place that existed in the early internet. As Benjamin warned, such large-scale reproduction can diminish the aura of media, and in turn, the sense of place associated with it. Yet through these losses, users continue to search for experience, meaning, and individuality. Relph affirms that placelessness is not inherently bad or something to avoid, but rather a condition that intensifies our longing for place. Through curated communities and intentional connection, users assert their presence and build place. This may be the expected response to any isolating adversity—the human instinct to dwell, be seen, and to belong. In a digital realm increasingly defined by sameness, these quiet forms of resistance become deeply personal assertions of presence and place.

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Abstract

Video games have become more than entertainment; they are now cultural environments that influence how individuals perceive, remember, and navigate space. These digital worlds offer new landscapes where players develop memories in ways that parallel experiences in the physical world. As such, spatial memory and perception are becoming shaped by lived environments as well as time spent exploring, building, and inhabiting virtual worlds.

This transformation matters because it reshapes the cultural baseline of how people understand place. Video games, by successfully utilizing architectural principles, have altered how users view real-world environments. Traditional theory would assume memory and identity are rooted in physical environments, yet contemporary society also has begun to map itself through digital worlds. Generations are now raised with hybrid spatial experiences that blend digital familiarity with physical perception. Spaces are judged not only by their material qualities but also by their capacity to engage, orient, and immerse their audience.

For designers and architects, this shift exposes a gap in current conversation. Conventional design practice often overlooks the extent to which spatial memory is now produced alongside digital and physical environments. Without addressing this, the built environment risks becoming disconnected from the experiential realities of its inhabitants. By acknowledging the influence of video game worlds, architects can better respond to the evolving cultural perceptions of place. The rise of video games as sites of memory calls for a reassessment of design application: one that considers place as a hybrid of physical and digital experiences, and that creates environments resonant with the ways people now remember and inhabit space.

What is Place in the Digital Age?

Defining place and space in the digital age can serve as a strong starting point in the discussion of our changing spatial landscape. Merriam-Webster defines *space* as “a limited extent in one, two, or three dimensions” and *place* as “a physical environment (Merriam-Webster).” Game worlds almost precisely fit the definition of *space*, as they have extents in three dimensions where objects and events occur. In a geometrical and technical sense, game worlds are spaces. However, *place* is also defined as “a building or locality used for a special purpose”, and this often occurs in video games (Merriam-Webster). Players often anchor their experience with a specific, revisited location. And when this location builds up purpose, familiarity, and experience, does it not become a place? In *Place and Placelessness* by Edward Relph, he makes the argument that place cannot just be where something is (Relph). Place is built by the location plus all the things that inhabit it and the experiences that go along with it (Relph). In this sense, digital worlds become a place- for the individuals experiencing them- when they are used, inhabited, and emotionally invested in.

Before game worlds became a common part of cultural conversation, the same space was filled by literary landscapes. The dystopian authoritarianism of George Orwell’s *1984* or the fantastical expanses of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* served as imagined environments that readers inhabited mentally. Consumers of these works know how transportive these landscapes can be and how easy it is to feel present in them. Digital worlds- as simply a contemporary form of storytelling and collective experience- have filled this gap; and the conversations remain strikingly similar. Due to the cultural shift game worlds have had on our perceptions of place, a definition bridging both digital and physical environments is necessary: place should be understood as any environment, digital or physical, used for a special purpose and shaped through experience.

How Are Digital Worlds Influencing our Real One?

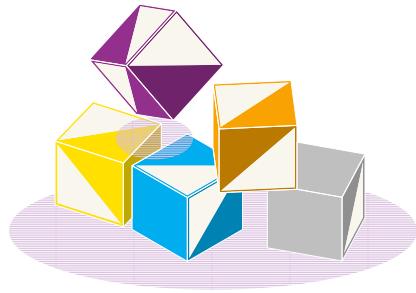
This transformation matters because it is a cognitive shift in our thinking and it is not purely physical. In fact, our development is happening parallel to digital worlds. Psychological and neurological studies are showing that virtual and physical place navigation occur in remarkably similar ways. As one moves through digital landscapes, they form cognitive maps similar to

those made in real environments. Understanding this is key to recognizing how digital worlds are reshaping our perceptions of place. Researchers at the University of London studied 822 participants to see how interaction with digital space improved navigation and wayfinding within physical space. What they found was that reliance on a GPS in real-world wayfinding had no correlation with wayfinding efficiency (Yavuz et al. 2023, 16-17). What they found was that those with over 10 hours of video games per week, across all devices, were significantly better navigators than those with less than 5 hours of games per week (Yavuz et al. 2023, 16-17). There was no difference in gender (Yavuz et al. 2023, 17-22). Another study at the University of Colorado Boulder found that video games in the Action genre bolstered “spatial reasoning” in participants, even after adjusting for previous ability (Puscher, 2025). To find this, they had players of Action games participate in the “Block Design Test,” which involved three-dimensional object operations (Puscher, 2025). This assessment is thought to test spatial visualization and is a strong indicator of how an individual understands manipulations in 2-D and 3-D space. It is clear that digital environments can be meaningfully tied to strengthening real-world tasks.

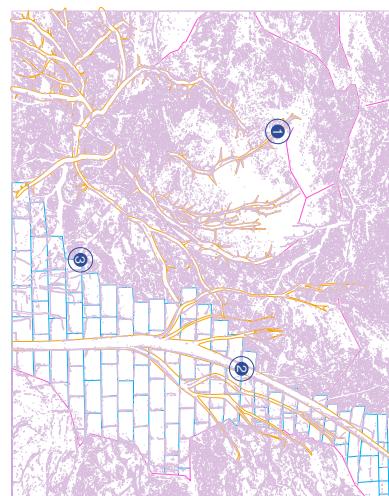
To make these findings practical, generations are now developing with hybrid mental maps. Their cognitive abilities are being built with 3D environments and physical media running parallel to one another. How we navigate space is no longer determined solely by our previous real-world experiences, but also now our digital ones. Game world experiences are no longer niche either. According to a study by the International Trade Administration, over 190 million Americans play video games and 78% of households report playing a gaming device in the past year (International Trade Administration, 2023). This staggering number is evidence that the wayfinding efficiency and spatial reasoning improvements are not isolated instances, but are likely occurring across populations that are interacting with the very same digital experiences. Because there is a cognitive shift in how we navigate space, our perception of it is changing.

How do Architects and Designers Respond?

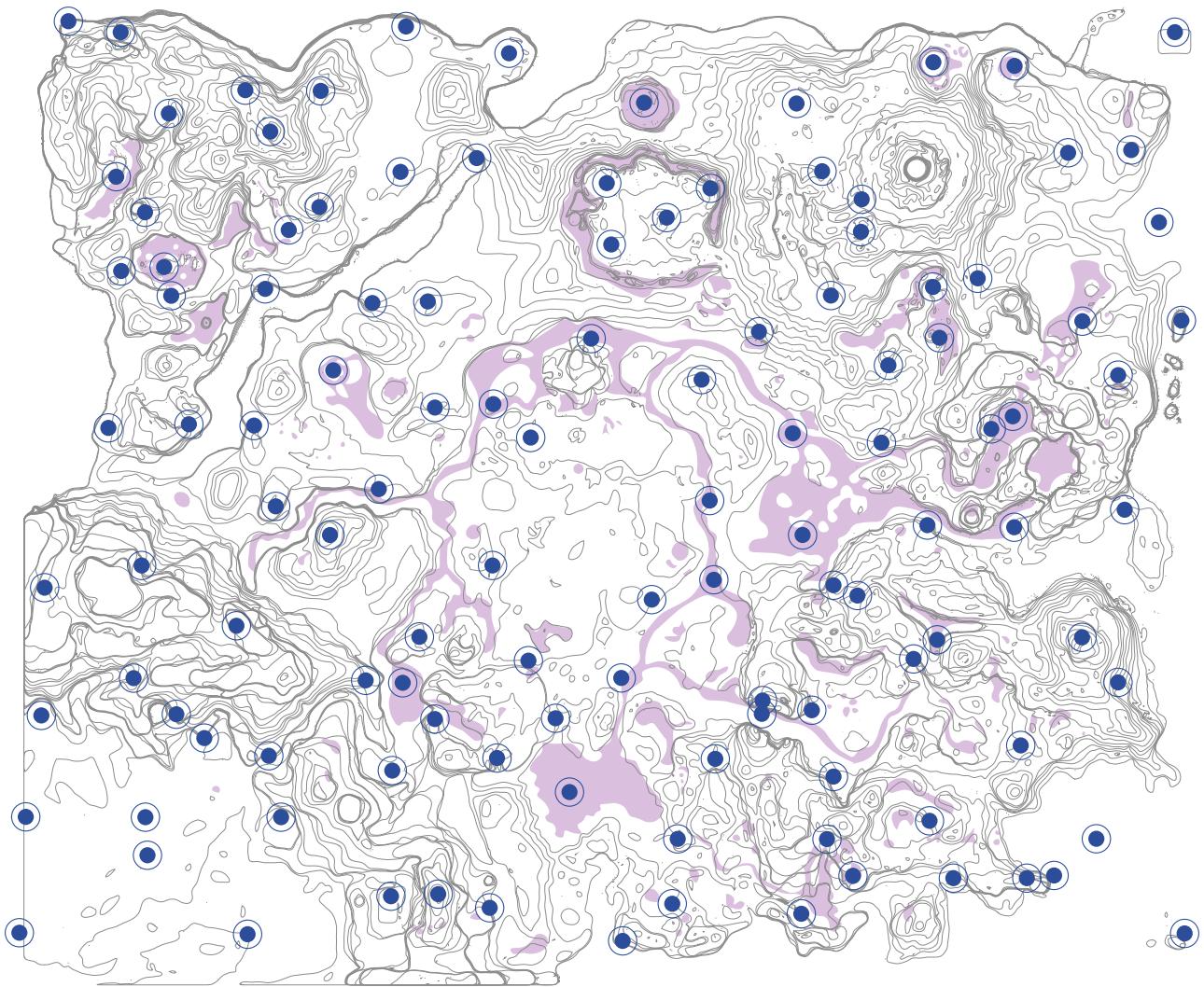
How we as designers and architects respond to this change is more important than ever. Traditionally, game designers borrowed from the architect’s toolbox: levels transitions pull from program or spatial syntax, while environmental storytelling communicates intent and history similar to an architect’s use of texture or materials. Generations are growing up with expectations for legibility, narrative cues, moments of discovery, and opportunities for agency—expectations shaped by their online experiences—that rarely appear in even the most contemporary architecture. Too many modern architectural works are more technically sophisticated than ever before, yet experientially flat and efficiency-focused. To meaningfully advocate for the physical world, architects can look towards the principles game designers use so effectively in order to create built environments that are compelling enough to meet the spatial expectations of those shaped by digital and physical worlds.



Block Design Test. Michael Chick, 2025.
The block design test involves the user being given a pattern and tasked with manipulating the blocks in 3D physical space to re-create said pattern.



Stormveil Castle. Michael Chick, 2025.
1.) Thorny overgrowths. 2.) Dead or decaying plants. 3.) Crumbling walls from centuries ago.



The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild Shrine Locations. Michael Chick, 2025.
Shrines are dotted throughout Breath of the Wild as a form of wayfinding. Many are placed atop advantageous positions, allowing the player to get a clear view of more shrines to travel to and explore.

Games design prioritizes impact and memorability, often achieved by creating a sense of place. *Elden Ring* exemplifies this approach from the beginning. In the game's starting area, a golden foreboding fortress-Stormveil Castle-looms in the distance, perched impossibly along the cliff edges. As you begin your ascent towards it, characters you meet speak its name and invoke a sense of anticipation and unease. Its walls are battered by cannon fire and strangled by an overgrowth of thorns upon your arrival. As you traverse the ramparts, courtyards, and passages of the castle, a constant presence of abandonment and decay are embedded in every scene (*Elden Ring Wiki*). These elements hint at an unspoken past and a time before the player's arrival. While the example may be ominous, it clearly illustrates the effectiveness of environmental storytelling in forging a sense of place. Through purely environmental storytelling, *Elden Ring* makes Stormveil Castle an immediately recognizable place with emotional weight, memory, and meaning. These are all qualities architects are equipped to channel; these principles are not new.

Memorable spaces breed attachment, and the surfaces, thresholds, and geometries we design can help people perceive a space. If architects can deliberately design spaces that communicate history, atmosphere, and intention they can create environments that resonate with inhabitants and leave lasting impressions. By doing so, they enrich the built environment and foster deeper senses of place for those that inhabit it. If game designers can do it, architects should do it too.

Environmental storytelling gives digital worlds meaning, movement and wayfinding gives them life. By enticing the player to move, designers encourage the player to discover. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* does this through architectural and landscape cues that subtly guide the player. As the player's character, Link, awakens from a century-long slumber the ruined kingdom of Hyrule stretches before the player (Nintendo). On the horizon, shrines, towers, and abandoned fortresses dot the landscape. The structures act as visual anchors for the player, able and encouraged to be explored. The scale, contrast, and visibility of these locations create sightlines that reveal new structures and frame old ones. As the player progresses through *Breath of the Wild* their curiosity and expectations are shaped by the world encouraging and rewarding discovery. In the physical world, architecture sets the stage for the play that is movement. Axes, frames, thresholds, landmarks, light, and hierarchy are among the multitude of design techniques utilized to encourage and guide movement through spaces. Architects utilizing these techniques effectively, in turn, communicate implicitly why a place is worth exploring. By giving a place gravitas through successfully setting the stage for people's movements and interactions, architects create memories for those inhabiting the space. The memories then create a place in the mind and in the physical world. One of an architect's greatest challenges is considering how spaces evolve over time. If architects aren't designing for their structure to live beyond eighty years or more, are they designing effectively? Ensuring spaces remain flexible enough to be adapted into new uses is of growing importance in the practice; and in digital worlds, flexibility is no different. Digital environments are consistently tweaked, updated, and reshaped to accommodate the needs and interests of their players. For more than a decade, *Minecraft* has exemplified this adaptability, implicitly incorporating the principle of flexibility into its gameplay. Its design philosophy is well-documented and among its central principles, "Creativity" is among the most illuminating. Jens Bergensten—one of *Minecraft*'s creators—claims that creativity forms the basis of "story-telling, role-playing, art, music, and much more" in the game (Bergensten). He also acknowledges that making creativity a core component of the game helps it resonate in today's "social media and 'click collecting' culture (Bergensten)." In order to have creativity as a core principle of *Minecraft*, the game must have systems that support and enable it: voxels being that system (Mitchell, 39). The voxel system gives *Minecraft* an intuitive method for player engagement, allowing player creativity to take precedence. In other words, gameplay systems do not get in the way of the player; instead, they make creativity easier. These methods make *Minecraft* an incredibly flexible game for players. Players can choose how to engage and express their interest within this virtual world. This adaptability gives *Minecraft* longevity, enabling it to evolve alongside those who inhibit it. If architects want to design for the long-term, they must ensure their building has the potential to evolve as well: to accommodate new users, support change, and remain meaningful during cultural changes just as *Minecraft* has been able to do.

Conclusion

Digital worlds will continue to shape people's understanding and perception of space. This cultural shift redefines the baseline of spatial understanding, yet much of contemporary architecture treats digital worlds as unimportant and peripheral forms of influence. In reality, they have the potential to become generative, meaningful forms of precedent. If architects continue to overlook the application of design principles in digital worlds, the built environments risk becoming detached from the expectations and habits of those raised within them. If architects embrace this multidisciplinary understanding of place they have the potential to create works that resonate more deeply. Architects can design places that engage with memory, promote legibility, encourage discovery, and acknowledge the digital worlds that influence us as we progress through the world. Ultimately, the goal is to create architecture of beauty and significance, places that people remember, value, and preserve.

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An Exploration of Augmented Reality and Place

Introduction

As you live, you are the subjective creator of your reality through perception... But does a shared physical space act as a limiting factor in this? Augmented reality brings this into question as it makes an infinite potential of space into something that is visual and tangible. The expansion of perception with augmented reality becomes a stepping stone that dissolves this barrier between the infinite imagination and a limited world.

However, within this, there is a great splice in this perception, and as a result, also a great splice in place as a concept. The first splice is augmented reality that is rooted in the individual; the second splice is augmented reality that is rooted in the physical environment; the third splice is the reality of those who do not perceive augmentation at all. Each one of the three relates to a different aspect of our current digital system, but within a new medium entirely as the digital aspects start to blur with the physical world. To explore this splicing, it is necessary to look at each reality in turn, starting with the one rooted in the individual.

Reality 1: “Decentralized Meaning”

One side of the coin with augmented reality is the way that it can amplify individual perception. This is similar to how current technological systems tailor themselves to us with personalized wallpapers, curated feeds, or endlessly customizable themes for the device. In this case, augmented reality has the ability to extend this personalization into the outside world and outside of a device. Scholars like Lev Manovich describe this aspect as the “softwarization” of culture in how the digital becomes the main driver of media, making it increasingly more hybrid in its ability to be customized. Augmented reality takes this “softwarization” and brings it to the physical plane, dissolving the boundary of the device between the interface and the environment. Through the tailoring of everyone’s environment in this way, the digital individuality that used to live only within a singular screen within reality now can spill into streets, parks, and hallways – places that we once thought were stable. Every moment in reality can become an individual’s reflection of utility, desire, and mood.

This is how placelessness may emerge: not through sameness but rather through over-individualization. Through augmented reality, each person can carry their own customized world with them, a world that can be placed on any physical site. Thus, reality becomes a decentralized system where there is a layer of perception unrooted in the environment itself but rather in the overlays that the user can apply. Just as a McDonald’s can be placed anywhere in the world and can feel essentially the same, this digital place made by the user can also be summoned anywhere identically.

Question: If anyone can summon a portable world at any moment, what happens to how we perceive the place underneath it?

Reality 2: “Centralized Meaning”

The other side of the equation with augmented reality emerges in the possibility of a centralized meaning system. While each person drifts into their own individualized realities, augmented reality also can produce a digital reality that is rooted in the shared physical world. This layer exists parallel to all of the individual overlays, a communal digital atmosphere that is suspended over reality. These would be equivalent to the internet, but instead of information coming out of a search, this information populates in relation to the environment. This aligns with the ideas within José Sanchez’s Architecture for the Commons, which argues for communal modes of interaction that arise when people collectively build systems. Rather than emphasizing augmented reality as a personal bubble creator, the author’s viewpoint reimagines it as a participatory structure where the value comes from co-creation instead of isolation.

Digital layers become shared authorship. In this framing, it becomes a platform where meaning is negotiated and added onto through the collaboration with others.

This is where AR may become a tool for place rather than placelessness. Imagine being at a landmark and you are able to have the collective histories, stories, and memories unfold around you – not as distractions but rather as extensions. It functions almost like a living archive stitched into the architecture and landscape. Instead of a subtraction of the physical world, it can give people a new way to interact with places they inhabit.

Question: When layers of shared meaning become instantly visible, does it enrich the site or flatten its meaning by anchoring its interpretation?

Reality 3: “Unmediated Reality”

However, the third reality is the one that many will confront: a world where augmented reality is prevalent but not everyone is inside of it. Whether this is through choice or through inaccessibility, many become spectators to a world that is not fully mutual. There may be a kind of perceptual divide that happens to the outsider, with many occupying a reality that is parallel yet inaccessible without the technology. These outsiders don't just lack augmentation, but rather they experience a different reality entirely.

Two people in this system can stand in front of a singular tree and inhabit two alternate versions of it in a singular moment. One person only perceives the physical reality of the tree – the bark, the leaves, the color – nothing more than what the senses already offer. The other can potentially see what type of tree it is, the history of the tree, or even community-placed memories related to it. For one, the tree remains a material presence; for the other, it becomes a digitally mediated object with layers that inherently reshape that specific tree's meaning on an individual level.

Question: When layers of shared meaning become instantly visible, does it enrich the site or flatten its meaning by anchoring its interpretation?

Conclusion

In the end, augmented reality does not give us one future place but many – whether individualized, collective, or unaugmented. Being at the cusp of this technology, there is an inherent level of ambiguity associated with how people will interact with it and how it can manifest into the environments around us. What lies ahead with this technology is not a singular trajectory but a field of possibilities, where place is something that is no longer a given but rather something that is constantly negotiated. Thus, within this unknown field, it is through questioning that we may have a clearer path forward in its constant development and in its application to humanity.

Making Social-Ecological Place Across Spacetime Scales

Narrative

We propose a work of process are based in the ranch's situated knowledges (1) that we believe can operate across its diverse issues and spacetime scales to fulfill this aspiration. If 'change is a characteristic of all systems and all aspects of systems,' (2) in process art, the processes of making and the initiation of actions and change are as important as the finished things they produce.

The process of developing our mappings of Water, Biome, Energy, and Place precipitated the personal and collaborative discoveries that have resulted in the first element of our art proposal: a new interactive, software tool we call Mapper that adapts ArcGIS with open-source software and databases to build powerful 'maps' that interconnect layers of visual, computational, and textual information with those of Fly Ranch across spacetime scales. A four-dimensional 'collage machine,' Mapper joins analysis with synthesis and art with science to help users around the globe discover relationships between layered things and processes.

Growing from Mapper3 and our mapping process is the second element of our process art proposal: Sensor-Field, a work of infrastructural land art in the form of an array of 57 polished, stainless-steel Sensor-Poles positioned on the USGS half-kilometer-grid the length and width of the ranch. Sensor technologies record and transmit a wide range of data essential to landscape and ecosystem management at micro-to-mid scales for all three site zone-types.

Growing within Sensor-Field's network of environmental monitoring stations is the third element of our proposal: a system of interventions and processes for human inhabitation called Spine-Line Interventions: a linear settlement plan the length of the ranch, oriented north-south along its central spine of road, irrigation canal, and reservoirs.

The final element of our renewable-energy art infrastructure is the Wind-Light Tower—oriented to the compass points at the northwest corner Sensor-Point site—a place for elemental encounter with wind, light and breathtaking panoramic views across the ranch and valley into Black Rock Desert.

glossary of terms

Mapper: a new, globally networked planning-process software interconnecting community with diverse information sources across scales

Sensor-Field: the network of all Fly Ranch sensor sites on USGS 1 kilometer/1/2 kilometer coordinate grid monitoring a wide range of Fly Ranch biosystems processes

Sensor Point: an individual sensor site within Sensor Field comprised of one Sensor Rod and monitoring equipment

Sensor Pole: an individual polished, stainless steel poles containing a environmental monitoring and communication technologies at each Sensor Point in Sensor Field

Spine Line Inventions: the larger settlement plan of 50-meter 'dashes' that locates Rib Cages within Sensor Field to organize the process of incremental growth

Rib Cage: a 50-meter steel scaffold of 17 ribs supporting sensor-kinetic parabolic-mirror troughs, deck + habitation units within

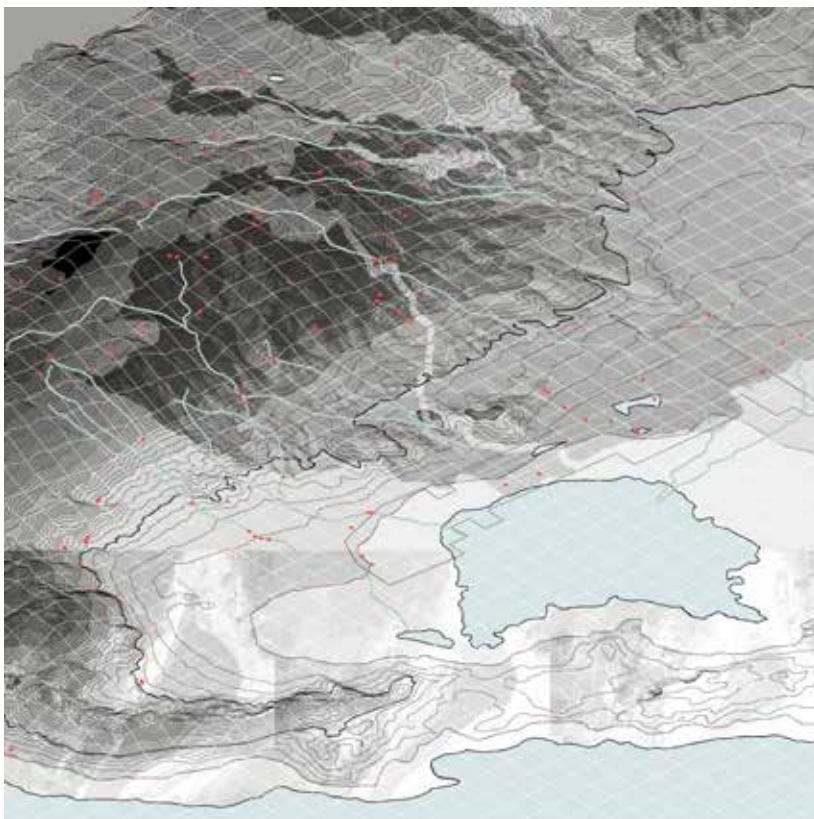
Wind/Light Tower: place for observing of wind, light and panoramic views at the highest topographic Sensor Point site within the Sensor Field of Fly Ranch.

Conclusion

We believe that Sensor-Field and its infrastructural process art fully embody the Fly Ranch Project's nature as 'unfolding and experimental process' and the community's goal of becoming 'a catalyst for innovation and creativity in the world,' doing this in the following ways:

- 1 By integrating all five competitions systems into one larger, inclusive social-ecological system laboratory for researching and managing causation between natural and cultural systems;
- 2 By imbuing its material-constructional-technological code with a beauty, flexibility, durability and circular economy that galvanize its singular nature as a cold desert landscape; and
- 3 By making accessible to fellow planetary citizens inspirational stories of the rewilding of life in its field through pulsing plant, animal and technological 'sensors'—ancient and new.

I. mapper



① water

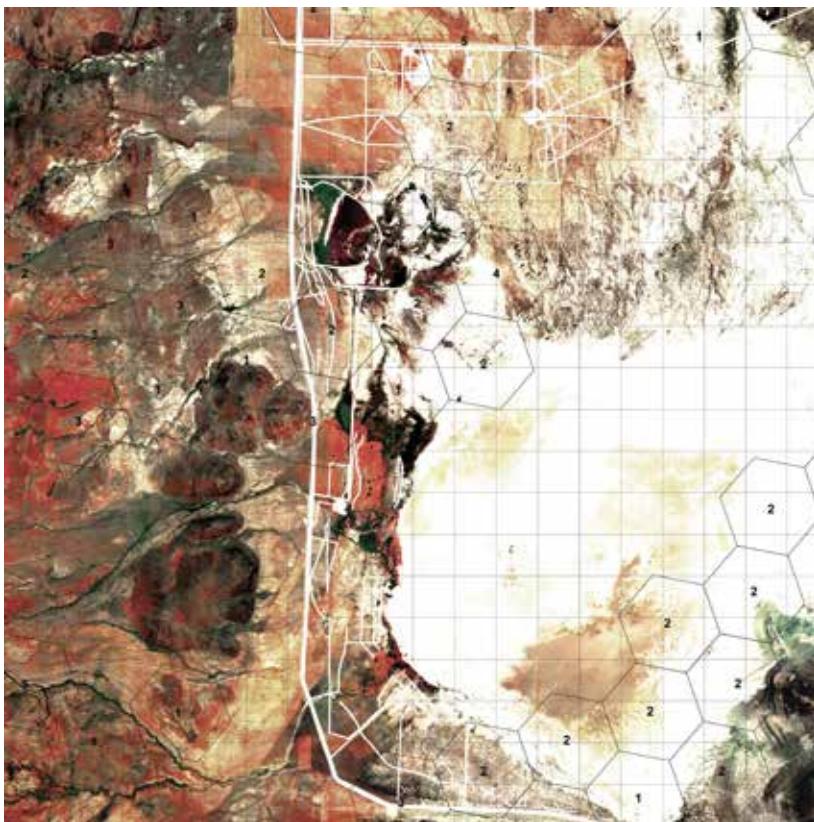
relating to topography, geology, climate + culture

question:

How best to sustain water and its cultural significance at Fly Ranch?

answer:

Monitor its shifting levels, remember water stories, then educate, conserve, and develop accordingly.



① biome

relating to water, landscape-ecosystem structure and function

question:

How best to sustain water naturally and culturally at Fly Ranch?

answer:

Monitor full range of processes key to conservation , then educate, conserve & develop accordingly.

key texts:

- Adams, K. & Sada, D. (2013) "Surface water hydrology and geomorphic characterization of a playa lake system."
- Fowler, C. (1990) Tule Technology: North Paiute Uses of Marsh Resources in Western Nevada.
- Sinclair, W. (1962) Ground-Water Resources of Hualapai Flat, Washoe, Pershing, and Humboldt Counties.

key layers:

- _ primary flow systems: cultural + natural dendritic bodies of water (temporary and annual)
- _ human extraction points (wells)
- _ gradient topography (indication of basin depth)
- _ watershed region
- _ USGS 1 kilometer 1 ½ kilometer coordinate grid
- _ USGS topography model built by our team

Between wet and dry cycles at Fly Ranch and its hydrological processes interacting with geological ones-water [pa in Paiute] is the substance most critical to its formation and evolving life-forms. Annual precipitation, limited by the sectional 'rain shadow effect' of the Granite Range, now varies from 20 inches at higher elevations to 5 inches in the lower ones of the Flat. Drops flow downhill in a dendritic pattern of ephemeral streams of variable volumes and speeds, eroding and depositing silt and nutrients in deep-cut creeks or broader alluvial fans at entry points to the site along Route 34, to be absorbed, recharging groundwater or intercepted by irrigation canals and reservoirs or channeled to the wetlands via creeks, creating a mosaic of surfaces of variable moisture. The network of wells perforating the ranch provide additional logics of conservation and development. Beyond these current waterrelated phenomena, this mapping recognizes the significance of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan's still visible shoreline 270 feet above the ranch that reveals its aquatic system history before transitioning to its current cold desert, terrestrial system. A core concept of water emerges of ebb & flow in endorheic basins within larger ones-of their mirrored surfaces 'reflecting' the collective memory of indigenous peoples living along its fluctuating shores for millennia-revealing its deeper, social-ecological meaning.

key texts:

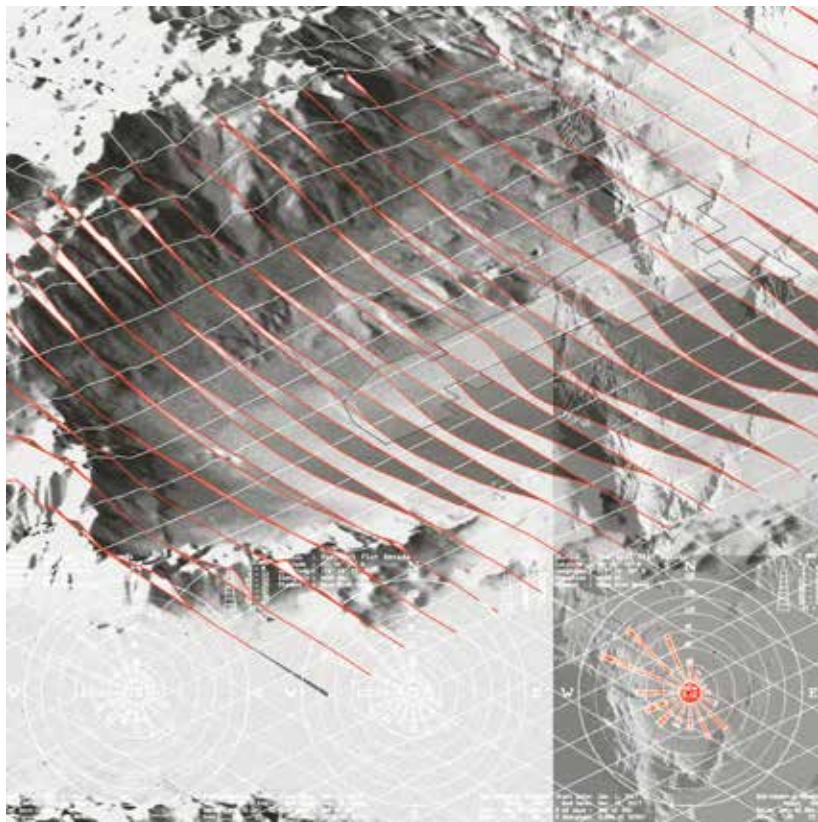
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key layers:

- _ Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool for biodiversity site paths_human + animal
- _ Landsat saturated
- _ Fly Ranch species list I biod iversity graph
- _ land parcel system
- _ USGS 1 kilometer 1½ kilometer coordinate grid
- _ USGS topography model built by our team

With the greatest area of Fly Ranch and surrounding Federal land being devoted to conservation, this mapping looks at available information on ecosystem structure and function-those processes that can best conserve its natural 'assets.' It focuses on drivers of biodiversity like climatic and hydrological processes, primary productivity, biophysical habitat formation, movements and interactions between species, and natural disturbance regimes like lightning-strike wildfires, and adaptation cycles that will follow. It looks at the particular structure of its patches, edges, corridors, and mosaics, and their causes: a.) patches of varied composition, size, number- a function of location relative to topography, soil types, and natural sources of water (e.g. creeks, alluvial washes, wetlands, etc.), and man-made sources (e.g. canals, reservoirs, etc.) and b.) natural and man-made corridors of long, straight edges determining connectivity and interior- versus edge-located habitats where its 140+ plant species live. Natural edges and boundaries in this landscape mosaic transact with man-made ones (e.g. road, fences) as well as virtual, cadastral ones of County, State and Federal jurisdictions located within changing mapping coordinate systems, collectively co-producing the singular landscape of Fly Ranch. The importance of tracking cultural systems transacting with natural biotic/abiotic processes is understanding shifting dynamics of biodiversity and resilience within the greater social-ecological system within a broader reference system.

I. mapper



② energy

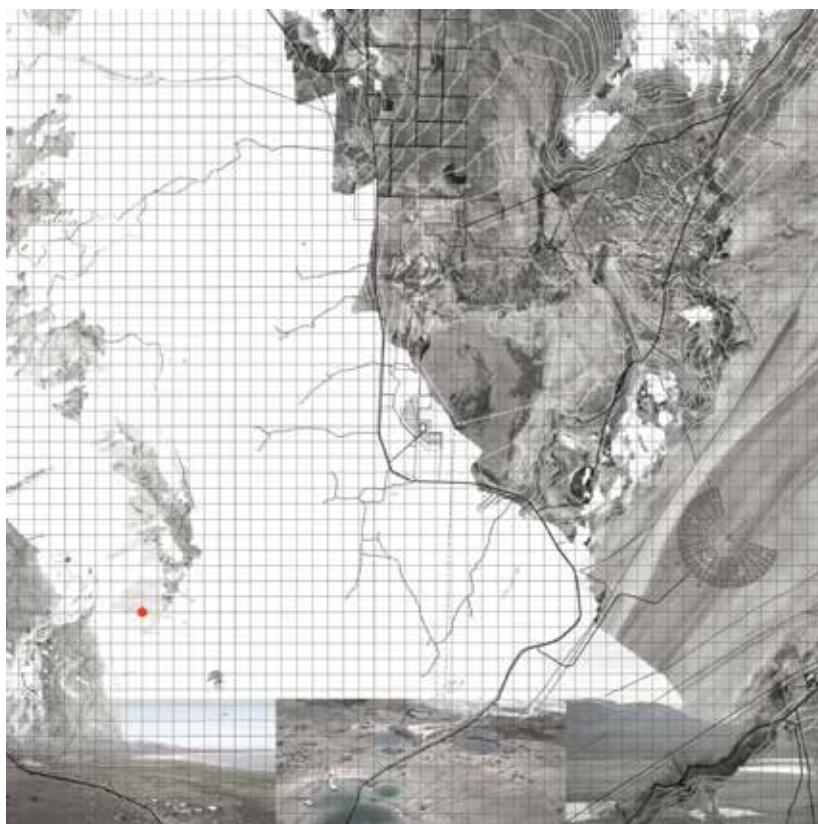
relating to solar, wind and geothermal systems fluxes + flows

question:

How best to deploy energy in comprehensive ways at Fly Ranch?

answer:

Monitor the full continuum, then educate, develop and conserve accordingly.



③ place

relating to position, viewshed, horizon, light + sensate-body phenomena

question:

How best to sustain social-ecological place at Fly Ranch?

answer:

Fully-engage and remember it, then educate, conserve, and develop it according.

key texts:

Grose, L.T. & Sperandio (1978) "Geology of the Gerlach Hualapai Flat Geothermal Area, Northwestern Nevada." Hualapai Flat, Nevada Weather Station, "Historical Weather Data," and "Data Table for Graphs." Welch, A. + Preissler, A. (1990) "Geothermal Resources of the Western Arm of Black Rock Desert, Northwestern Nevada."

key layers:

- _ subsurface water + soil movement potential above bedrock
- _ composite annual wind rose
- _ composite shading study
- _ USGS 1 kilometer I 1/, kilometer coordinate grid
- _ USGS topography model built by our team

This mapping considers the energy continuum in every dimension of Fly Ranch: planetary scale of biosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere and atmosphere (e.g. surface albedo, greenhouse effect and climate change); micro scale flowing through its ecosystems (e.g. primary production to consumption to decomposition to the recycling of nutrients), to the key renewable energy resources available on site. It searches for those phenomena, and laws of energy flows and storage under transformation on site to guide the greater project of conservation and development. Carbon capture and storage on site is also important to know as well as any ongoing contribution from the ranch to atmospheric CO₂ through things like landuse and the burning of fossil fuels. Solar is an optimal source renewable energy the length of the ranch zones of shadow. Wind is a less consistent natural phenomenon but enhanced by air channeled through the valley. Geothermal sources exist but require a costly process of discovery. Understanding of the site's greater need for heating than cooling by national averages, a concept of energy emerges of things that can respond to seasonal weather/thermal conditions and the shifting availability of solar, wind, and geothermal conditions on site, by opening and closing themselves as energyefficient active and passive systems.

key texts:

Cutting, J. & Vishton, P. (1995) "Perceiving Layout and Knowing Distances," Perception of Space and Motion. Fowler, C., et al. (2010) "Great Basin: people and place in ancient times." Gibson, J.J. (1979) The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception.

key layers:

- _ Landsat viewshed study or Fly Ranch Light Data
- _ Primary paths
- _ drone video: key internal + external views (3)
- _ Google Earth texture gradients
- _ Fly Ranch landmarks/artifacts: natural/man-made
- _ USGS 1 kilometer coordinate grid
- _ USGS topography model built by our team

Central to lived experience at Fly Ranch the are perceptions of its layout by humans and non-humans in relation to the spatial distance around them—personal space, action space, and vista space. Information like occlusion, relative size, and height in the visual field determine their grasp of viewshed and horizon in relation to fluxuating texture gradients of vegetation, ground surfaces, and bodies of water reflecting light. Our mapping finds key optical phenomena framed by Lake Lahontan's nested basins: its 'foot-slope' valley sloping up to the horizon north, and west to the Granite Range ridges stepping down around to the southern 'bay spit' and across to the one of the Calico Hills, separating the ranch's playa from the lower one of Black Rock Desert. Within this, networks of diverse paths subdivide the ranch into a mosaic of diverse optical terrain types with lived experience situating differently within and between them, along the primary (yellow) boundary. Acuity of perception is determined by light-shadow conditions shifting dawn to dusk; orientations pivoting from horizontal ones of the day to vertical ones of brilliant night-skies while the ground comes alive with wildlife and human visitors roaming the site. A core concept emerges of a full sensory, spacetime relational experience grounded in this sublime landscape-situated knowledges of its scents, wildness and the expanding imagination these give rise to.

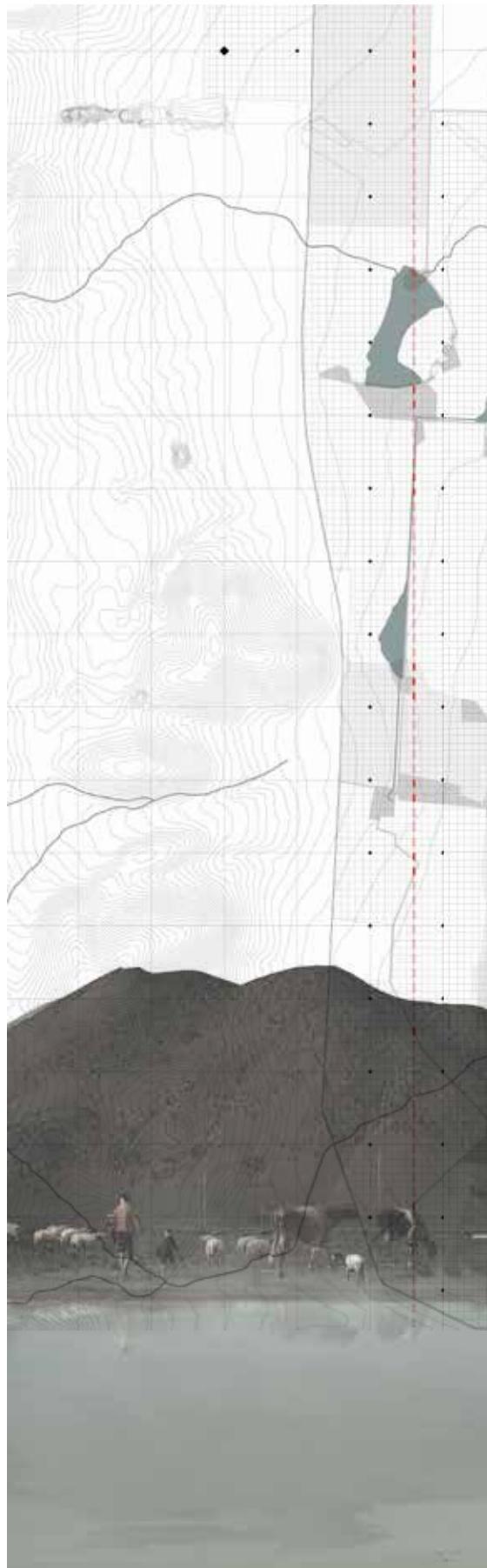
II. sensor field

1_ A wireless network of 57 bi-directional sensor nodes located on the USGS 1 kilometer/ $\frac{1}{2}$ kilometer grid and powered by micro solar cells, monitor water-quality (pH, conductivity, salinity, dissolved oxygen, etc.) for remote access and understanding of chemical qualities and human activity impacts, seasonal fluctuations by researchers to support and guide the Fly Ranch Project conservation and development decision-making process.

2_ Additionally, the wireless network of sensor nodes (on the same kilometer point-grid) monitor critical habitat data (abundance, distribution, condition, etc.) at micro-to-mid scales in all three site zone types for remote access, computation, and understanding of trends by researchers around the globe to further guide the Fly Ranch Project conservation decision-making process.

3_ The same wireless network of sensor nodes also collects climate and weather-related data at micro-to-macro scales in coordination with the Hualapai Flat Weather Station for remote access, tracking and understanding of shifting macro-to-micro-climate trends by researchers to contribute to larger climate computational databases and support Fly Ranch Project conservation and development processes.

4_ A network of 57 polished, stainless-steel poles on the sensor-grid, contains telecommunication and lightning-rod technologies—linking site to world and guarding against lightning-strikes—and operating as a land art installation whose tops align in a single, horizon-framing plane when viewed from the northwest corner of the ranch, heightening perception of landscape space and light, season-to-season, day-to-night.





III. spine-line interventions

① integrated ranch context water system

Systems involved: Food & Regeneration

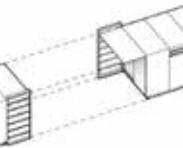
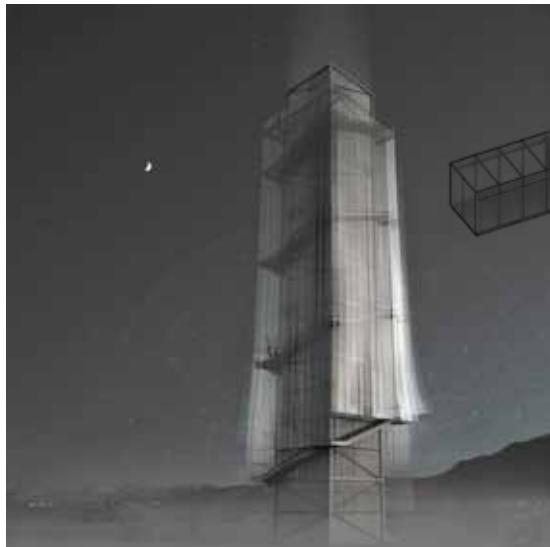
- a. new Spine-Line Invention settlement pattern: works with existing water, landscape, land-use, land art installation and movement systems
- b. flexible programming / mixing of uses: art-building and display, community event-space and/or long-term leasing acreage
- c. location change with changing needs: nothing needs to remain fixed in the proposed system of movable interventions
- d. stormwater harvesting: new bioswale system extends existing water system with regenerative 'constructed wetlands'
- e. small ecological footprint: circular economy design principles minimize resource use and disturbance that foster ecological re-wilding



② habitation, greenhouse, + energy units

Systems involved: Shelter, Regeneration, & Food

- a. flexible, re-programmable habitation units: function as spaces for dwelling, studios, offices, research labs, and education, etc.
- b. passive + active systems: externally-clad / R5-insulated modules are well-ventilated with all heating & cooling energy generated on site
- c. on-site greywater-toilet/food composting system: the greywater system irrigates hydroponic greenhouses and constructed wetlands of native tule
- d. wildlife + ecosystem-friendly: all built forms are designed to minimize their impact on conservation of native species
- e. affordable, prefabricated: recycled shipping containers found in the Gerlach area are adapted in local shops
- f. small ecological footprint: circular economy design principles minimize resource use and disturbance



③ parabolic trough solar collector + scaffold

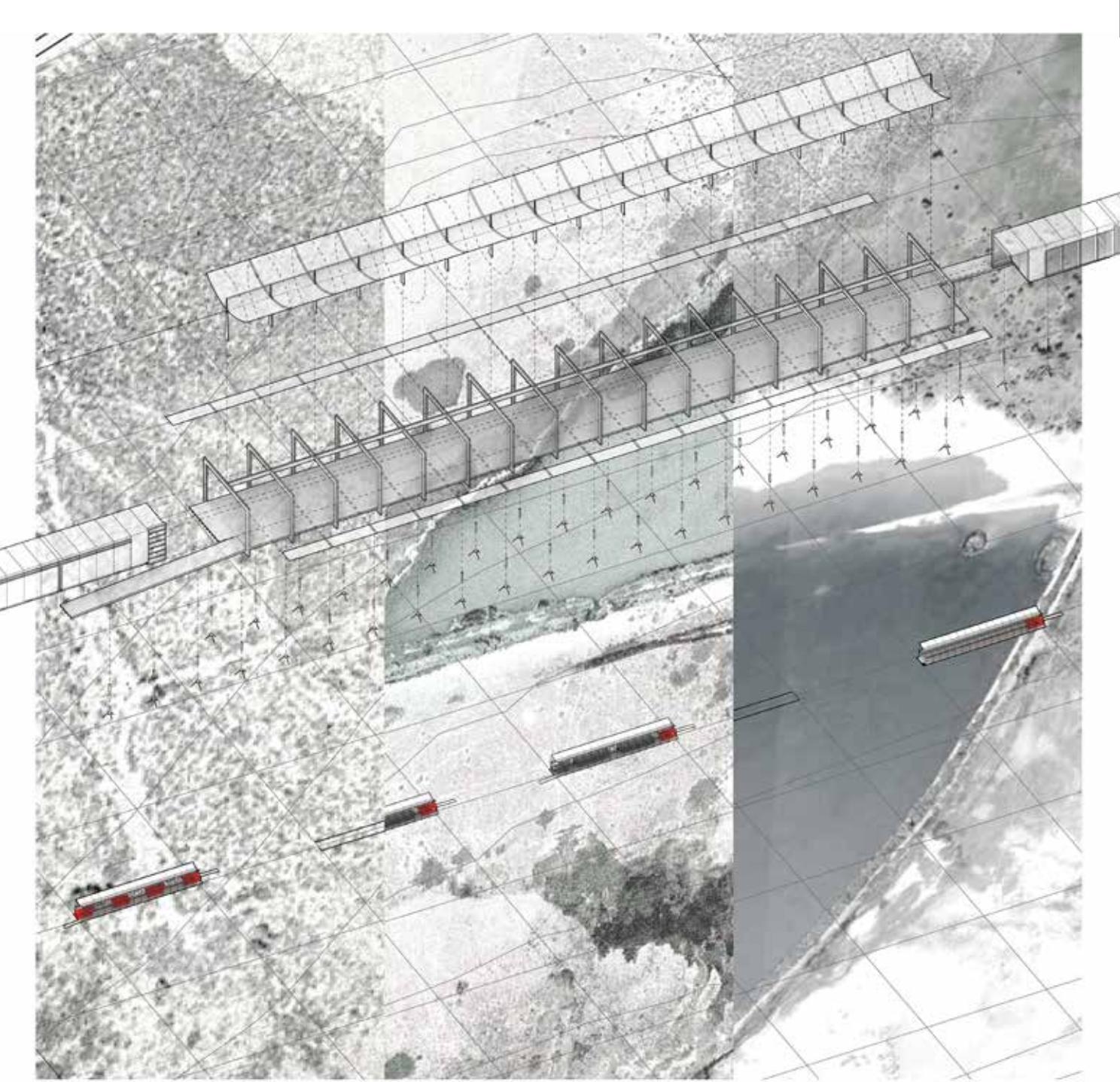
Systems involved: Shelter & Energy

- a. affordable, prefabricated: lightweight, portable galvanized steel frames on portable footings; also easily disassembled & re-located
- b. cost-effective CSP technology: parabolic mirrors pivot with sensors to sun's path, telling 'solar time,' and producing surplus energy
- c. net positive / near-zero carbon emissions: energy powers scaffold systems; surplus energy re-charges ranch vehicles + equipment
- d. sun-rain shield: troughs on scaffolds shelter open-air porches and living units; frames and 'reflects' the surrounding landscape
- e. wildlife / ecosystem-friendly: elevated scaffold avoids disturbing wildlife + ecosystem flows and processes on the ground
- f. small ecological footprint: scaffold and inhabitation systems touch down lightly on sites with circular economy design principle.

④ Fly Ranch wind-light observation tower

Systems involved: Energy & Regeneration

- a. site marker: material lower half marks Sensor-Field high point, virtual upper half marks Pleistocene Lake Lahontan plane
- b. split-program types outer half of tower = lookout tower; inner half of town = skyspace-chapel for contemplation
- c. open-air / heat-stack core: neutral plane of air pressure (equal air exfiltration/infiltration) to experience and educate
- d. windbelt technology: powers tower systems; net positive with surplus energy used as an electrical charging station
- e. affordable, prefabricated system: easily-transported and assembled on site from locally-fabricated steel and -reclaimed wood planks
- f. small ecological footprint: carbon emissions approaching zero with circular economy design principles embodied throughout



Reflections from an Exchange Program's Design Studio

As we approach the end of our bachelor degrees, I hope we feel lost about our career paths and unsettled by the uncertainty of it all. What field of architecture? What type of company? Which graduate program? Do I even like architecture? It is a beautiful moment that calls us to reconnect with our aspirations. This doubt can guide us inwards in an attempt to notice what seems to excite us the most.

In the midst of this natural crisis, my exchange program host university, ETSAB, has been gifting me with new understandings of how I wish to engage with architecture. This reflection celebrates how invigorating it is to rediscover ways we wish to contribute to the world, and how rewarding it can be to learn architecture through methodologies inherent to a different context or language.

I ultimately enrolled in a studio called Public Space and Landscape; it was originally my second choice, due to oversimplified assumptions of what landscape architecture entailed. The course is structured in an exceptionally thoughtful and distinctive way by my fantastic professors Joan Florit, Mònica Tàrrega, José Toral, and Pepa Morán, even compared to other courses at ETSAB.

In offering a synthesis of what I have absorbed over the past two months – from what I could understand of a mix of lectures in Catalan and Spanish – I hope not only to retain these lessons but to share pertinent questions about Barcelona's urban issues with my peers. This is also a recommendation to seek opportunities to engage with a methodology of design that highly regards transcalar analysis in service of an augmented encounter between natural landscape and residents; an approach relatively uncommon in our program.

Introduction

Due to its success, the Public Space and Landscape thematic studio has been offered to fifth year students for about seven years. When Monica Tarrega Klein began to lead it, she altered the scope of the proposition. The course used to prioritize public space interventions in critical situations, such as inundation zones in Valencia or urbanizations with risk of landslides, which certainly have its importance in the discipline. She, however, prefers that her students wrestle with ambiguous and ordinary sites. Architectural and social responses in such contexts are less obvious and less explored, encouraging students to propose interventions they feel they have genuinely discovered for themselves. It advances the idea that every ordinary site should be designed to reconcile with nature, which positions architects to contribute to fewer catastrophic ecological encounters altogether.

Monica, who inhabits the line between architecture and landscape, believes that we should design for people and ecology and assign them equal weight. In her doctoral thesis, *Sown Architecture: Atlas of Encounters between Vegetation and Architecture* she investigated the extensive catalogue of quiet sociological agreements made with nature.

With her work as the studio's foundation, plots that students might quickly dismiss as "boring" or "empty" gain the possibility of becoming public spaces grounded in a more meaningful accord with the natural world. Our anthropocentric approach to studio sites occur, in part, from a lack of an education on the relationship between ecology and materiality, and an absence of discussions on landscape projects as it relates to urban morphology.

This line of thought—of reconciliation with nature—threads through the work of each professor: in Joan Florit's analyses of the role of geography for the positioning of public infrastructure and resources in metropolitan suburbs; in Jose Toral's urban applications of permeable retaining walls and decentralized systems for water management; and in the relationships between forest-fire management, agricultural activation, and ecological continuity in park rehabilitations which Pepa Morán has lead. This mix of expertise is especially relevant given that we are not given a site, but an entire region, therefore, the feedback refers to multiple scales. The studio days include a set of lectures from faculty that often feel perfectly timed; and the accumulation of them, like sufficient resources to develop a good proposition.

In arriving at different conclusions of what the region calls for, each group then proposes a strategy for the placement of a chosen typology of public space. Then separated, each member selects one site to resolve at the architectural scale, where one of these nodes can respond to its immediate context while keeping in mind a greater system proposed.

Differing from all of the studios I have taken at Georgia Tech, students are not assigned to a specific instructor. Here, for better or worse, we present our work to the entire class and receive feedback from all four professors. Individual projects have been developing in such unique directions that this constellation of proposals, scattered around an extensive region, allows us to gain something from each person's project that serves us beyond this submission. This format also sets the tone for a more independent design process where attention and contribution to the discussions gradually reward you with answers to a multitude of questions.

To situate the project, I summarize the investigations I did into the major demographic and housing trends of metropolitan Barcelona, in addition to the resulting ecological issues. The decision to dive into these topics arose from my need to better understand a territory that was entirely unfamiliar to me. I will also share a few of the maps I developed in working towards a proposition that expresses the emphasis of the course on mapping as a tool for understanding the territory and arriving at a proposition.

The American Dream in Catalunya: Suburban Patterns and The Imbalance in Public Services and Infrastructure

In recent years, the Barcelona metropolitan area has been involved in discussions around its future development from a multitude of facets. Most relevant to the course is the objective to provide access to basic public services to residents of isolated suburbs. Catalan single-family urbanizations emerged in two phases. Between 1959 and 1980, they were developed as second homes for the middle class. In a second wave, from 1980 until 2008, they were either constructed as primary residences, or transitioned into them, often under irregular legal conditions. With a metropolitan area defined by a beautifully entrancing natural environment, the plots of land that suffered less from the market speculations were the ones sufficiently distant from urban centers or fully disconnected from them. In this process, subdivisions of agricultural plots became permanent or temporary residential parcels in a spontaneous process guided by the private market, with little or no regularization or support of public entities. The gradual conversion into permanent housing was prompted by an urban exodus in response to the limitations of the housing market in Barcelona and favored by the proliferation of the car. It is impossible not to credit the importation of the single-family housing model representing the "American dream." In conclusion, automobile accessibility, the successful propagation of the detached suburban home, and the beauty of the metropolitan area combined to produce a powerful narrative of refuge into the natural world enabled through market preferences for secluded and complex plots.

Without being officially planned by public entities, single-family housing aggregations came to occupy geographically unfavorable terrains with complicated sloping territories, only poorly connected to minor towns in the metropolitan areas. Because the territory was not originally analysed, and resources of the landscapes not properly taken advantage of, the potential for sustainable development was mostly ignored. In Catalonia, 335 out of 673 housing developments show urban planning deficits (UDUs), 75% of which are concentrated in five counties; one of them encompassing the region for this course. In their totality, these developments occupy more than the area equivalent to the city of Barcelona.

Environmental Concerns of the Metropolitan Territory

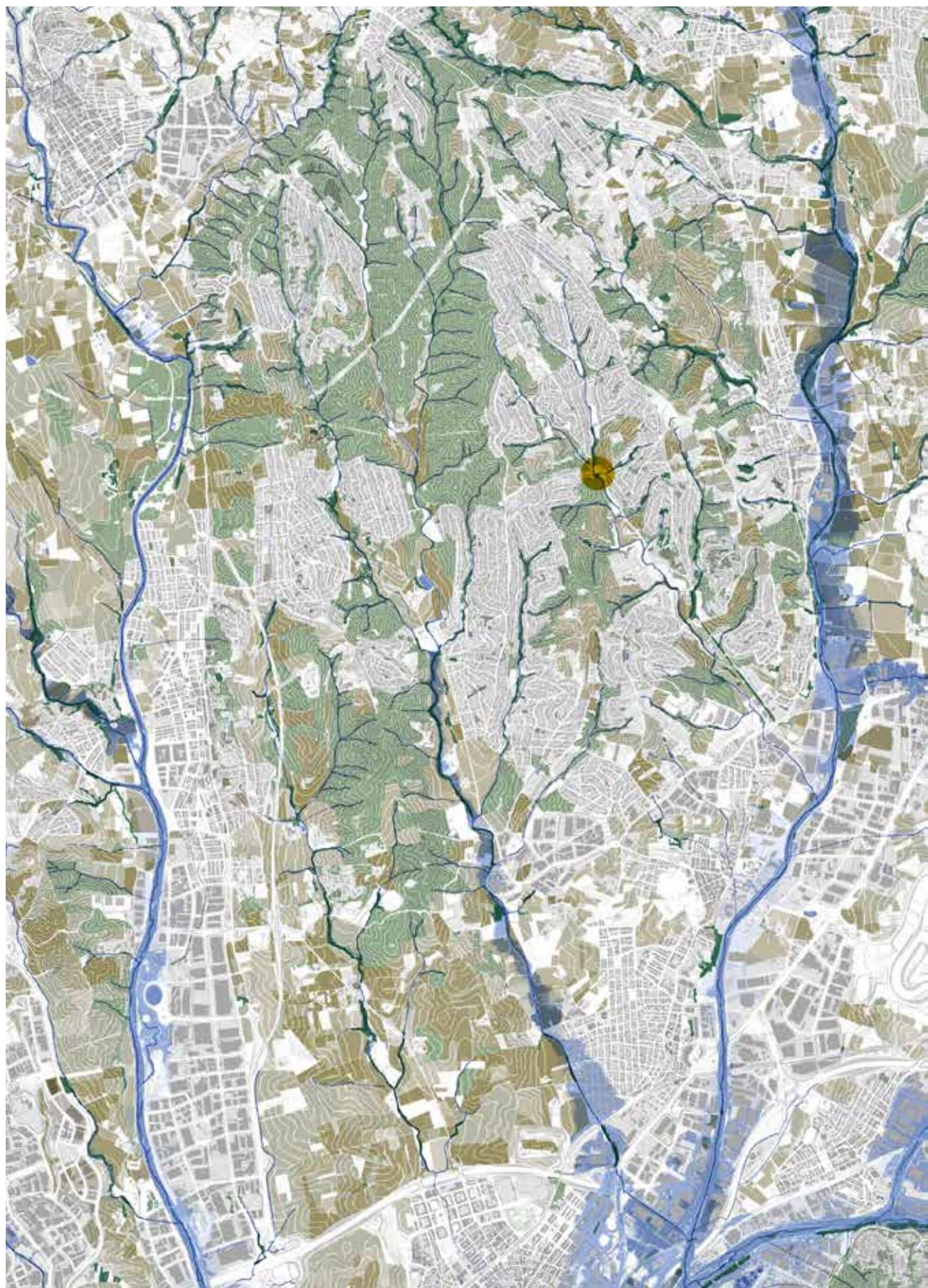
In parallel with urbanization trends, the metropolitan region's natural environment is shrinking and becoming an increasingly fragmented agroforestry mosaic. Lorena Maristany explained in a lecture about metropolitan ecological corridors that the Plan for Sites of Natural Interest (PEIN) protects an extensive network of ecosystems such as agricultural habitats, forests, wetlands, and coastal and marine environments that would otherwise be threatened by several discrete, or simply ignored, issues. Biodiversity is declining as heterogeneous traditional agriculture gives way to industrialized monoculture in larger plots. Abandonment of small agricultural plots is intensified by financial policies favoring large producers, effectively rewarding monoculture over more sustainable practices. Riverbeds and riparian forests are degraded by canalization of rivers and transportation infrastructure, while soil quality suffers from nitrate contamination and poor waste management. In addition, many forests are left abandoned or poorly managed, increasing wildfire risks. Across the landscape, old trails fall into disuse, and "mancillas"—traditional houses associated with a historic agricultural system—remain abandoned, signalling a gradual erosion of the region's cultural and ecological heritage.

The current administration of Gallecs, a park protected by PEIN and situated in the studio project area, aims to establish a model of agrarian management for public benefit, rehabilitating existing structures while ensuring compatibility between cultural, recreational, and agricultural uses. Following the example of Gallecs, other fragmented abandoned fields adjacent to urban areas also have the potential to revive traditional agriculture while providing much-needed public space. While it is utopian to imagine self-sufficiency of food production for the metropolitan region, restoring these practices remains valuable for their social benefits and the ecological restoration they bring.

With recurring water draughts and floods, managing this resource at different scales by decentralizing the water assessment system is an essential architectural task for landscape projects. The severity is evident: in 2024, the Catalan Water Agency allocated an 80% cut for agriculture from February to May, significantly impacting crop production. In order to reduce the strain on the region's overloaded combined sewer network, alternative water collection and management systems are needed. Despite these challenges, Catalonia receives a substantial amount of rainfall each year, a resource that could be better harnessed to support the resilience of local ecosystems and contribute to a more decentralized water infrastructure.

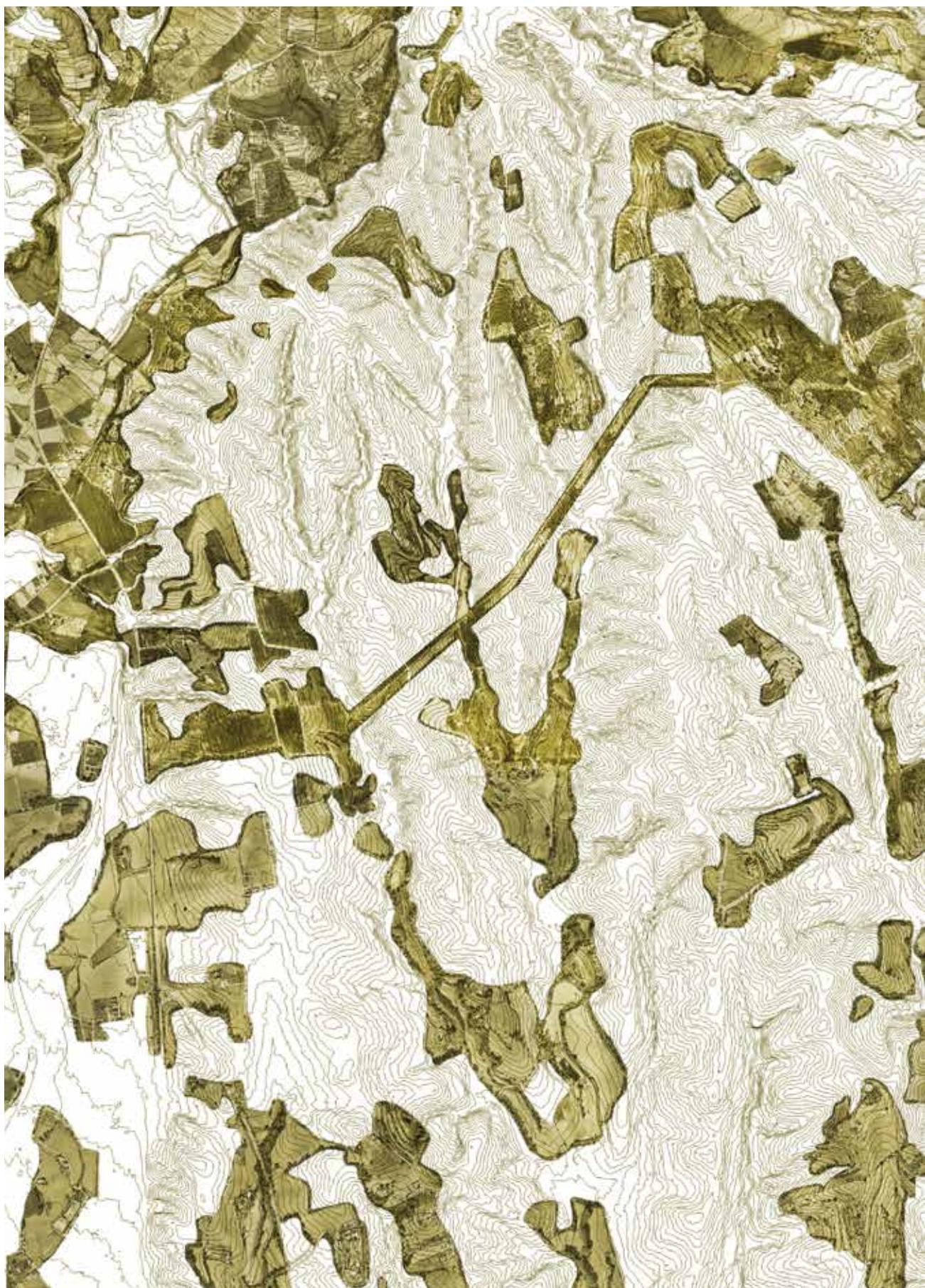
An Ambiguous, Fragmented, and Heterogenous Territory of Mosaics

This initial exercise of leaving the compact city to take the metropolitan territory as the field of operation allows the landscape to become an essential part of the project, rather than being conceived merely as a decorative background element. One of the greatest lessons of this course is the practice of reading the structure and dynamics of the landscape. Through a few maps I developed while working toward a proposition, I



Full Studio Site
Defined by abrupt ruptures in landform and transportation continuity, the terrain between the Cañadas and Tenerife rivers, north of the Gallego Agricultural Park, is highly articulated.

Fragmentation of Open Spaces in Quadrant A
Among the characteristics of this territory is the predominance of "unoccupied" spaces of various kinds, weaving through urbanized and forested areas with equally diverse forms and uses.



Dense Forest Revealing the Path of Water and Structure of the Landscape in Quadrant A
Gradually, built infrastructure interrupted the ecological flow of the landscape at several points. The dark green, fine lines that "glue" these mosaic pieces reveal the moments where the riverside forest has been reduced to its minimum expression.



*Orthographic Pictures of 1957 Revealing the Prevalence of Heterogeneous Crops
Discrete patches form the basic units of a mosaic structured within a predominantly forested
and agricultural matrix connected by riverbank corridors of riparian forest. These corridors
are of extreme value to the territory and should be preserved to ensure the continuity of
preexisting natural systems and processes.*



Single-family Developments Aggregating Around Two Valleys that Discharge into the Urban Center

Regarding the potential to establish new nodes of connectivity, an intriguing aspect of the territorial structure lies in the organization of these single-family developments clustering around the two valleys. Because suburban residents seek to live as far as possible from the populated, industrialized, and urbanized areas—here, the Caldes and Tenes rivers—the smaller interior valleys became the limit of construction. In this sense, the riverbank acts as a datum for these conglomerations and discharges southward into two different sections of the urban core. This configuration appears to favor geography as a guide for a connected network of communal nodes for suburban residents, and at a larger scale, suggests the possibility of redistributing centrality within the municipality.



Due to the position of irrigated crops adjacent to stream valleys, the surviving agricultural patches are mostly situated between disconnected urbanizations. In the pervasive absence of public spaces, these patches of agricultural recovery could serve as counterparts and restore connections between the complex landscape and the dispersed residents who occupy it. For me, they became clear sites for public-space intervention.

Working with the assumption that a system of open spaces holds great potential to act as the structural framework of the city and that nodal interventions could become catalysts, the proposed network would follow the course of the riera (stream) until its confluence with the urban core. Along this axis, parks are added, serving as zones for agricultural recovery, social recreation, and water collection. Together, they form a necklace of multifunctional public spaces at points of geographic convergence. These nodes happen when three fundamental conditions coincide: the passage of the stream, the proximity of two or more residential areas, and the presence of former agricultural fields that can be reactivated.

Ecological and Urban Fragmentation at a Site of Geographical Confluence

Regarding the potential to establish new nodes of connectivity, an intriguing aspect of the territorial structure lies in the organization of these single-family developments clustering around the two valleys. Because suburban residents seek to live as far as possible from the populated, industrialized, and urbanized areas—here, the Caudes and Ténes rivers—the smaller interior valleys became the limit of construction. In that sense, the riverbank acts as a datum for these conglomerations and discharges southward into two different sections of the urban core.

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Unfortunately, I have yet to share pictures of my final project, which addresses the architectural scale, because it will come together in its final format in three weeks. Still, I hope you've gathered something about the lack of public space in the metropolitan region of Barcelona. The importation of the American single-family suburb was a rapidly spreading pattern that sprawled over a traditional agricultural landscape and interrupted natural processes, all while rejecting the human need for basic services and recreation. Projects must now wrestle with the complicated morphology of these developments in ways that attempt to reconcile the relationships that previous architects and developers neglected.

At the beginning of my bachelor's degree, I had a simple question I hoped to answer: what is the intersection of architecture and urban planning? What types of projects fall within that "category"? Through this course, I developed a clearer sense of how architecture can leverage other fields I have always been intrigued by, such as geography and agriculture. Most importantly, I learned that the intellectual pleasures of that intersection arise naturally from both analysis and intervention that center a transcalar methodology.

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Habitat and Form: Bolton Prize Studio Fall 2025

Food shapes how we gather, work, and connect — yet even in a city as strong as Cincinnati, where Kroger's headquarters towers over downtown, access to fresh produce remains limited. Nearly a quarter of Cincinnati's neighborhoods are food deserts — four times the national average — and many are also food swamps. The issue isn't just food access, it's access to healthy food which is even shown in the growing number of community garden initiatives. Near our site, there are ninety-seven food-related buildings but only one grocery store. Zooming out, there's a contradiction: farmland is disappearing, food prices are soaring, and yet Cincinnati — a hub of highways, rail lines, and the Ohio River — still struggles to access fresh food.

Fields of convergence is a proposal that responds directly to Cincinnati's food dilemma: an urban farm residency. The housing complex operates on a federally subsidized model that ties rent reduction to participation in community gardening — empowering residents to grow food for themselves and their neighbors. It targets groups who face barriers to affordable food and would benefit from rent assistance like young adults, new families, elders in retirement, and community anchors. Each unit includes a garden "punch", where the kitchen can fully open out blurring the boundary between cooking, growing, and gathering. These individual and sub-communal gardens connect to a large, south-facing vertical farm which becomes the social heart of the complex, while the exchange connects residents to the larger community through open markets, education, and recreation. These three scales of gardening functions are angled and aligned to the cardinal axis to maximize solar exposure throughout the day. These adjustments formally reflect a tension between adhering to Cincinnati's built environment yet integrating and conversing with the natural.

The scheme has also pushed itself as a community magnet for gardening, putting the entire process on display through active facades, glass elevator portals, ground permeability, and programmatic considerations including a grocery store supported by the residents and over 15,000 sq feet of food processing functions open to the public. This scale of production doesn't just improve food access—it builds community resilience, reduces transportation costs and emissions, and anchors a new kind of local economy centered on nutrition and shared resources. In a district where fresh food availability has historically been uneven, the farm becomes more than an amenity; it becomes essential infrastructure.

For dwelling, the schemes rigidity fosters nested moments of play like suspended courtyards, basketball courts, flex spaces, zip lines, multistory slides and more. As the title suggests, there are multiple scales of conversion around food production. Residents gather in the vertical farm to do their duties and be social. Residents and greater OTR converge at the farmers market and self supplied grocery store. Thus, the proposal is not simply about serving oneself or keeping residents the sole participants in the project. Rather, the scheme puts the process of urban farming and food production on full display. From the active green facade which is constantly being transformed to the three glass tubes upon which food descends into distribution, keeping the larger community invested in the process of growth is a primary concern.

Site

E12th St and Sycamore St
Cincinnati OH

Project Type

Medium Density Multifamily Housing
5 Stories
42-49 Units

Number of Occupants

70-130

Size of Units

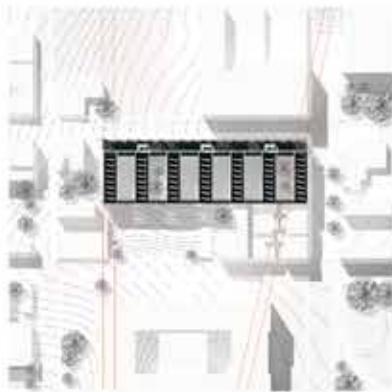
Studio Apt. 725 sq ft
Studio Loft, 825 sq ft
Elderly, 725-850 sq ft
Single/Couple, 850 sq ft
Community Anchor, 1000 sq ft
Single Family, 1,200 sq ft
Larger Family, 1,400 sq ft

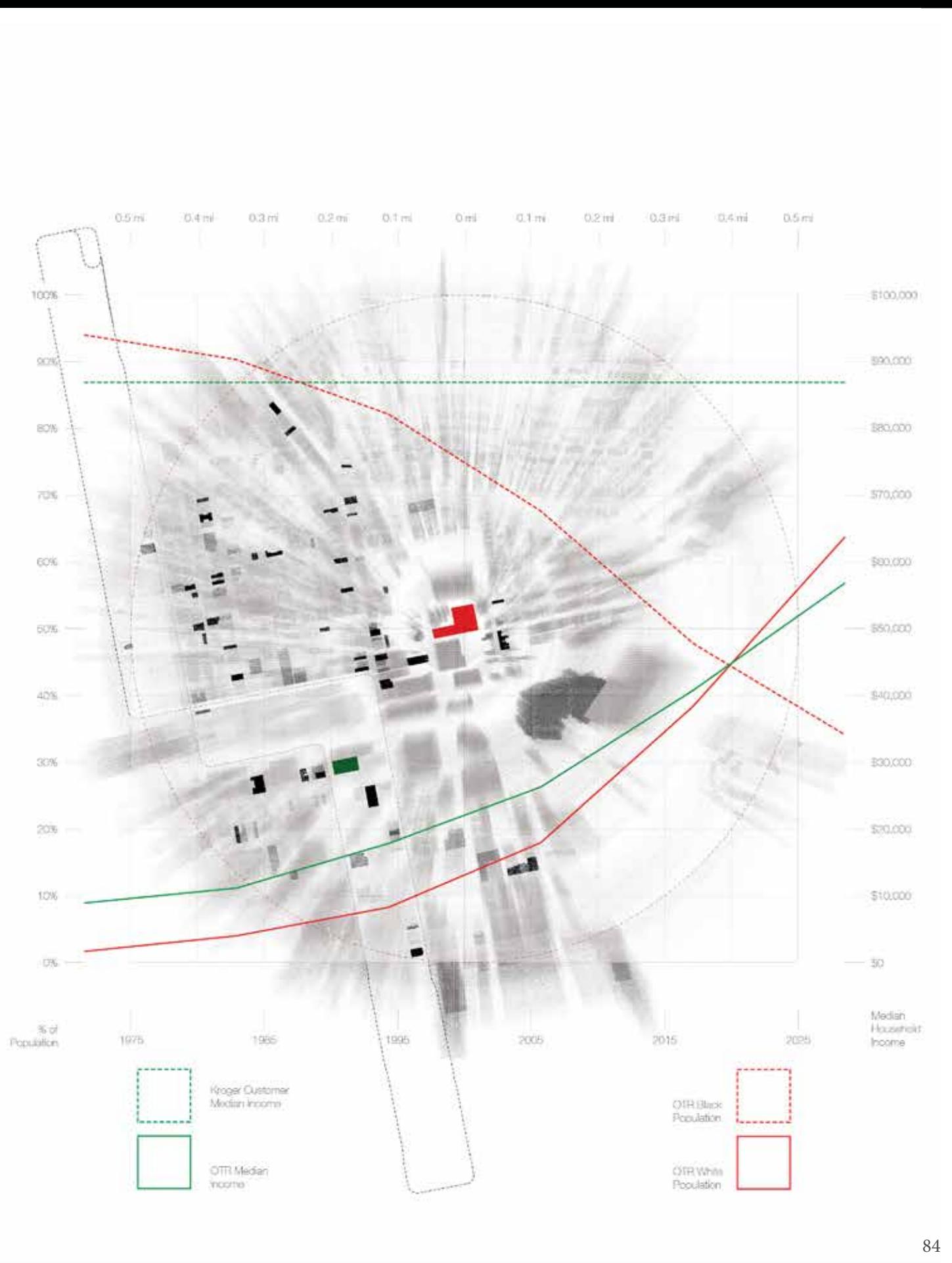
Additional Program

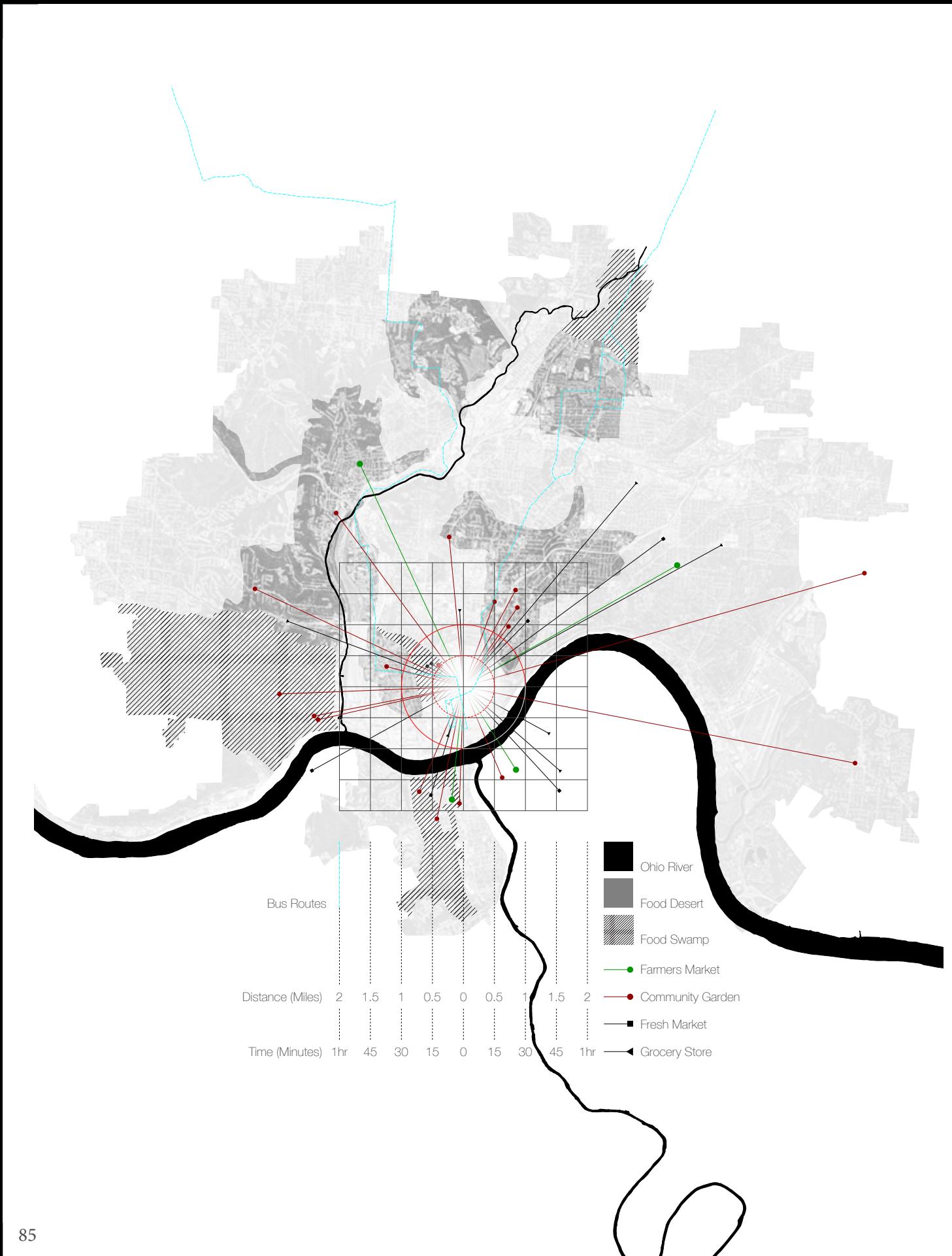
Vertical Farm, 40,000 sq ft
Food Processing, 11,000 sq ft
Food Circle>Loading Doc, 4,000 sq ft
Grocery Store, 5,000 sq ft
Farmers Market 15,000 + sq ft
Roof Garden 11,000 sq ft
Suspended Courtyard 2,500 sq ft
Childcare + Playground 3,500 sq ft
Gym, 3,400 sq ft
Pool, 2,600 sq ft
Basketball Court, 4,000 sq ft
Auditorium (258 capacity), 5,000 sq ft
Zip Line, 130 feet
Flex Space, 3,000 sq feet
Leasing Office, 2,000 sq feet

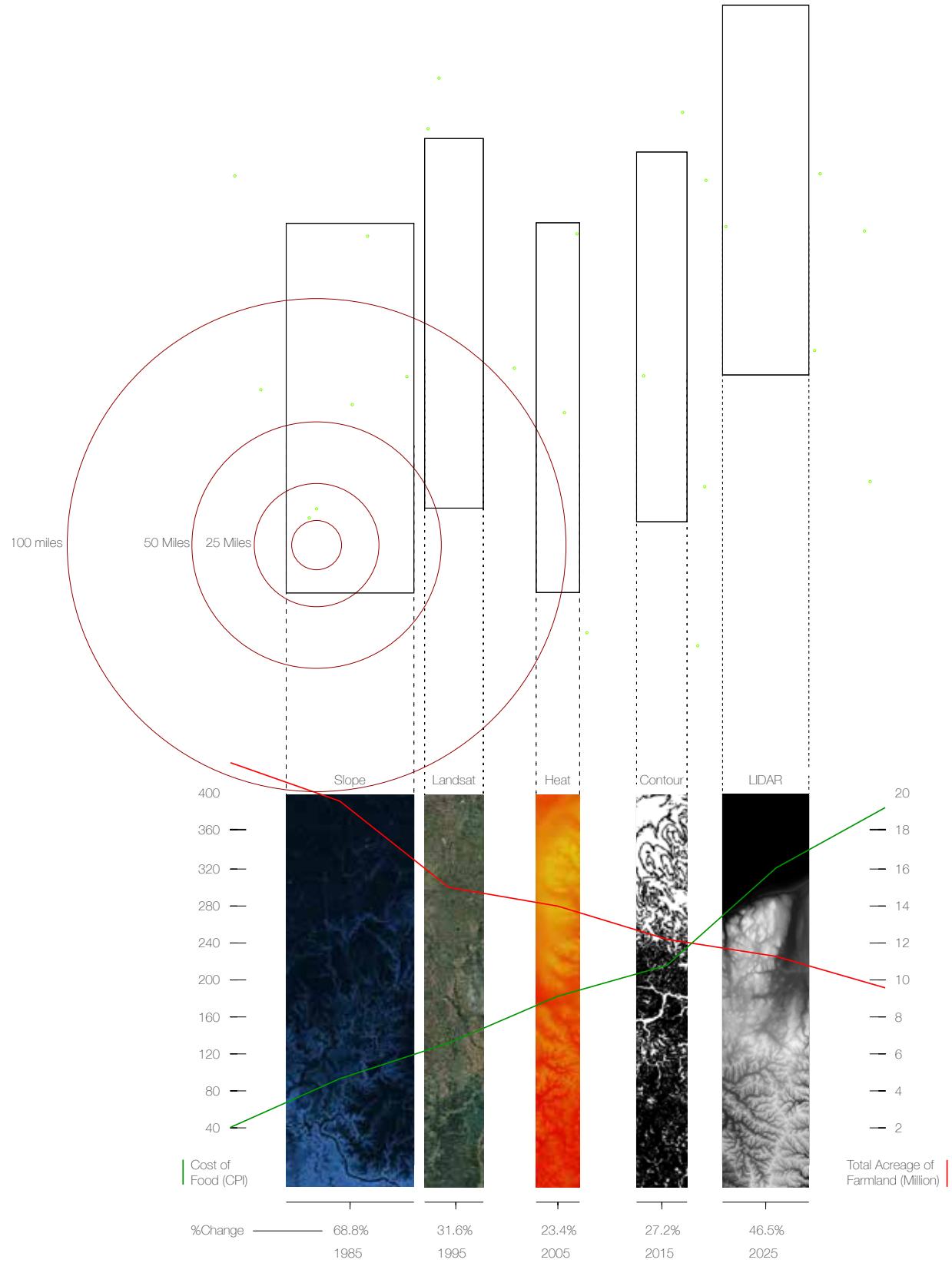
Unprogrammed Service

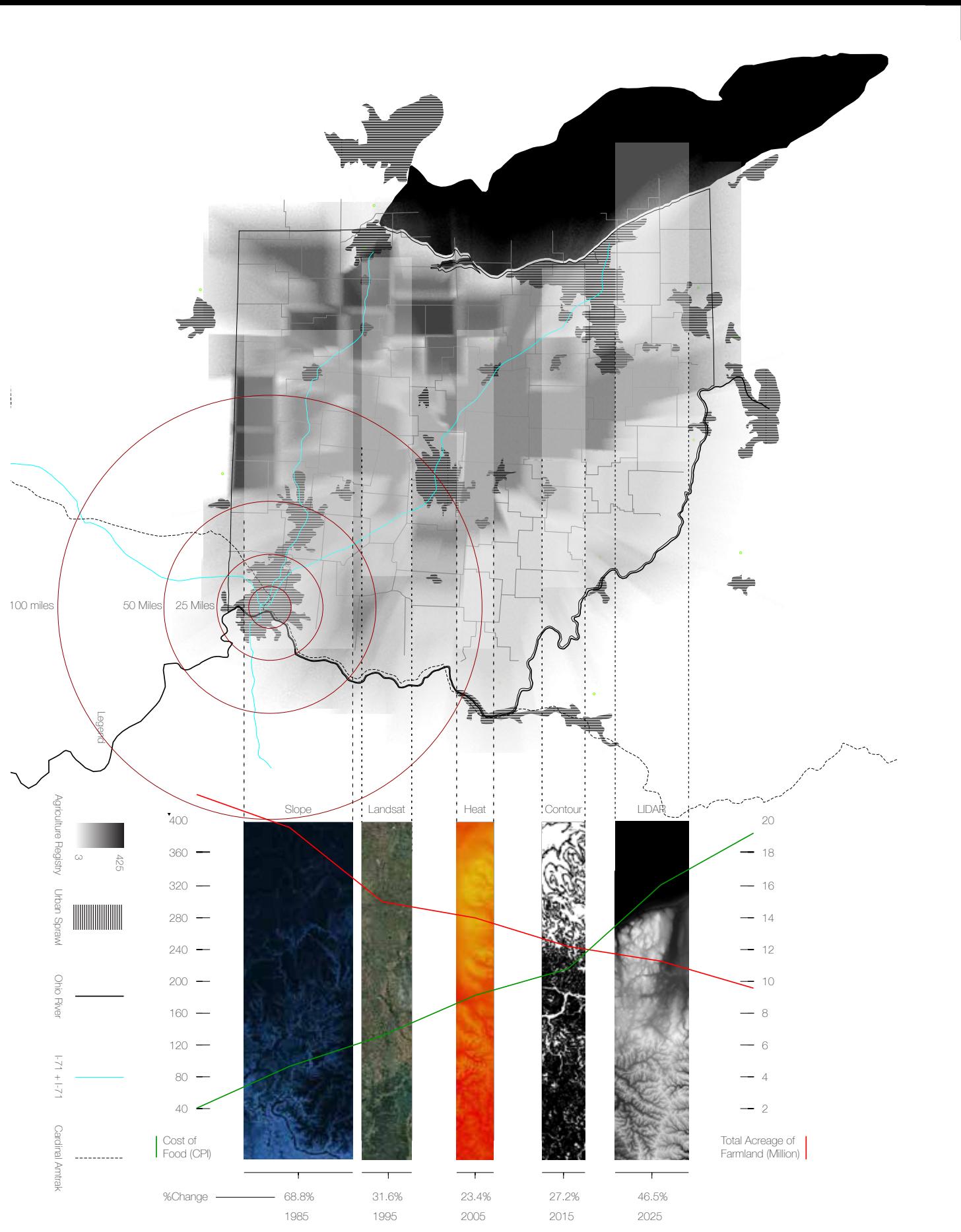
Circulation, 25,000 sq feet
Solar v Farm, 12,000 sq feet
Parking Garage, 16,000 sq feet, 45 spaces

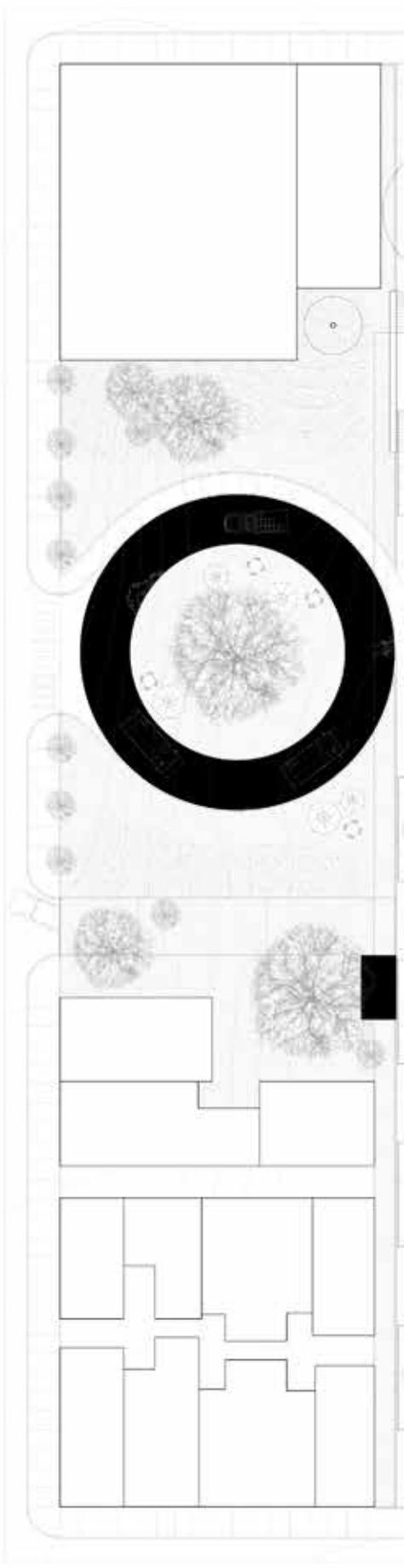
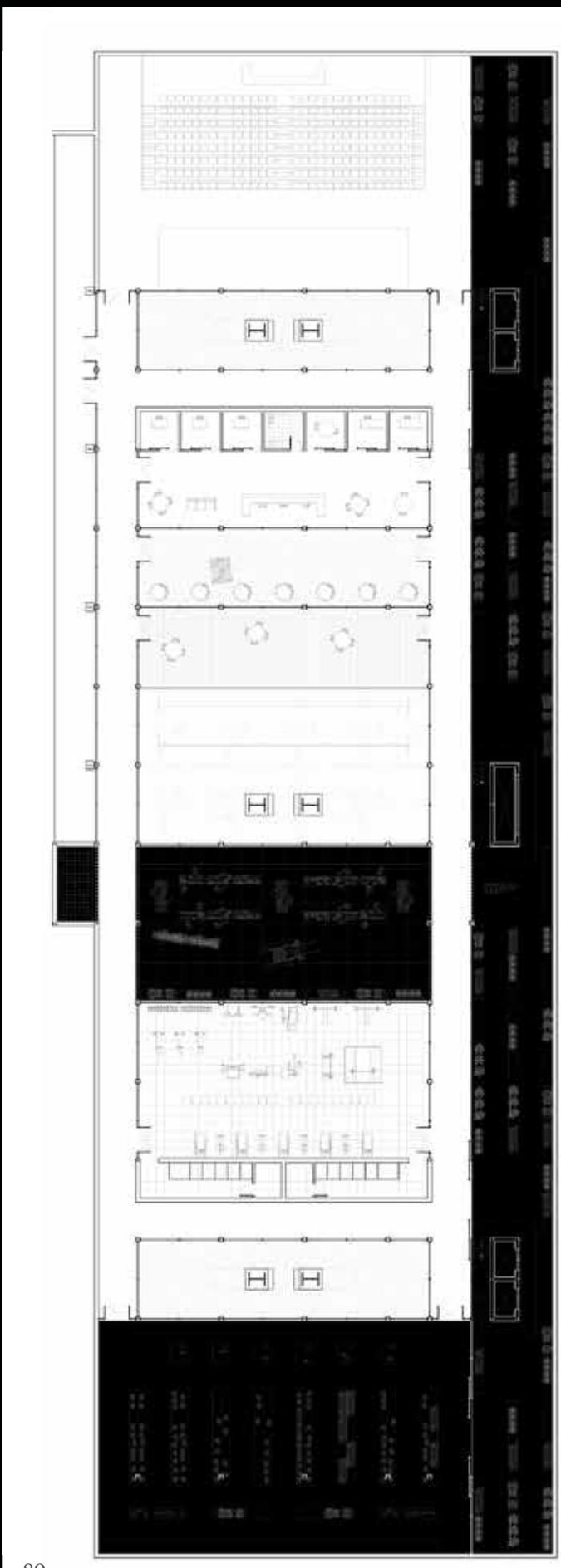


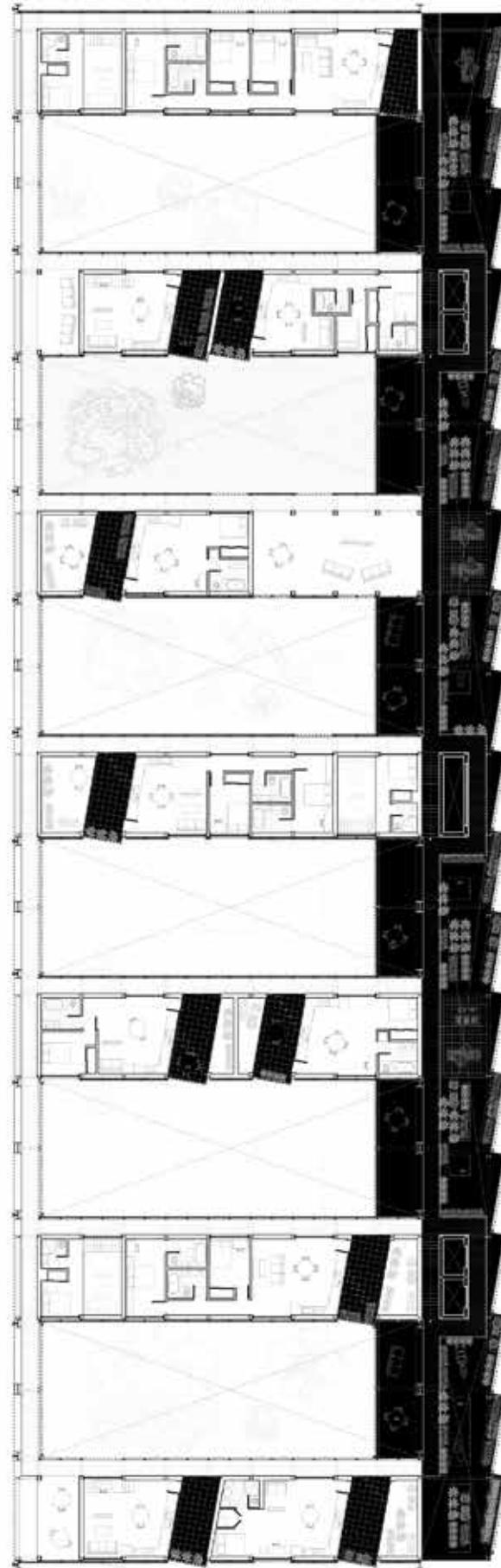
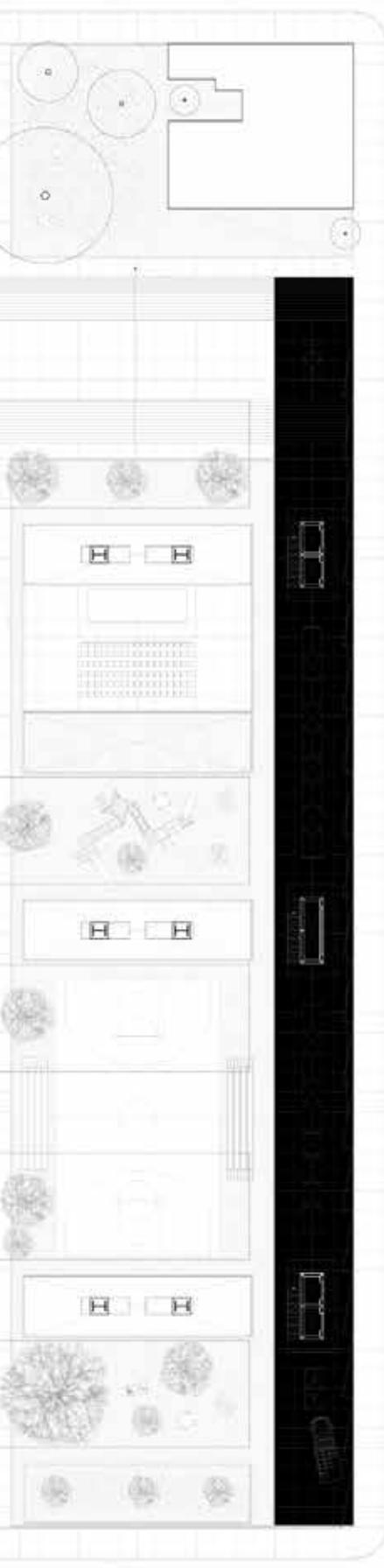
















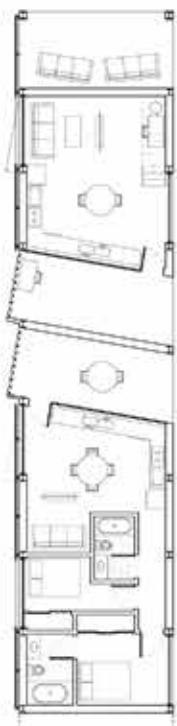




al (+6)
(+1)
(+2)
(+1)
(+1)
(+0)
(+1)
0 sq ft



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6 SF (+0)
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5 Stu (+1)
4 CA (+1)
5 E (+1)
Flex 1,710 sq ft

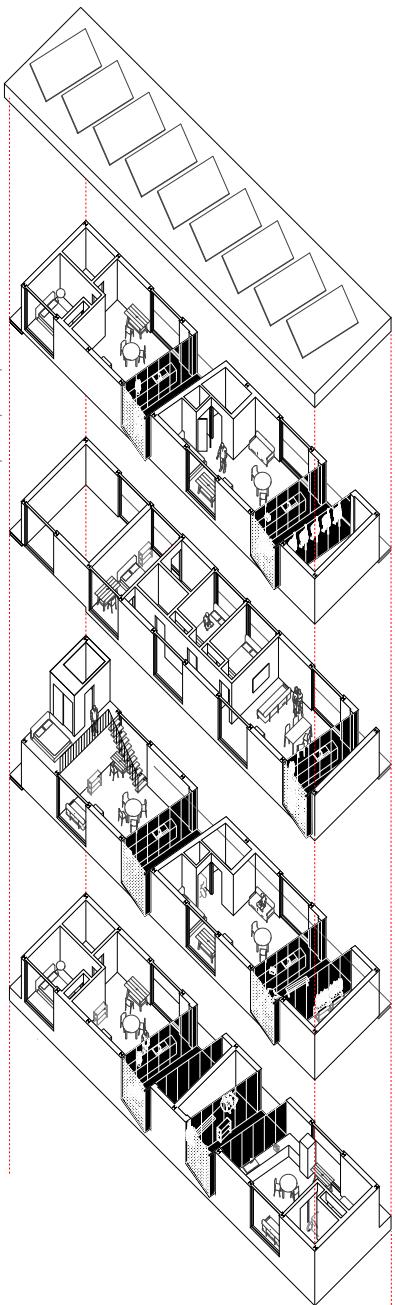


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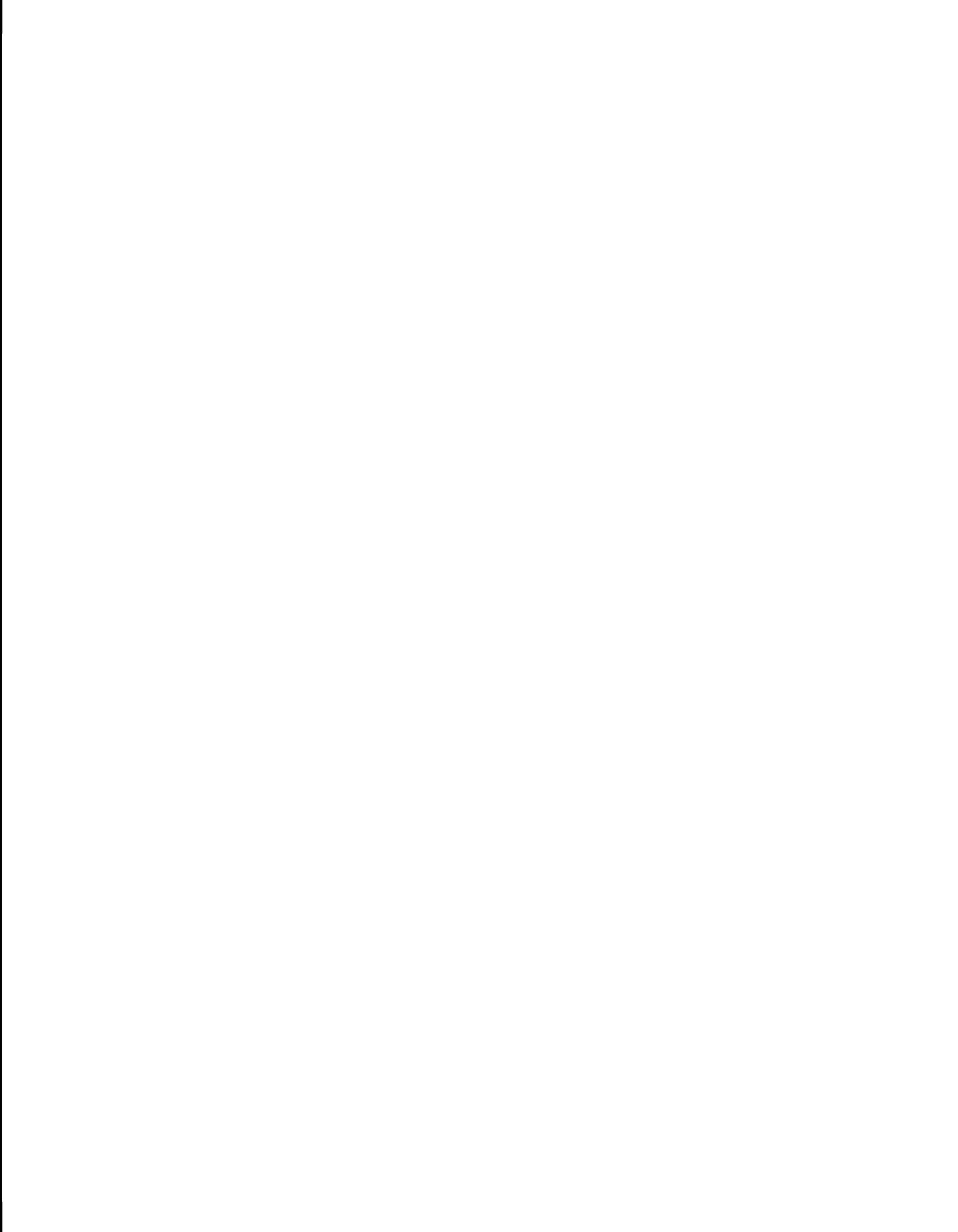


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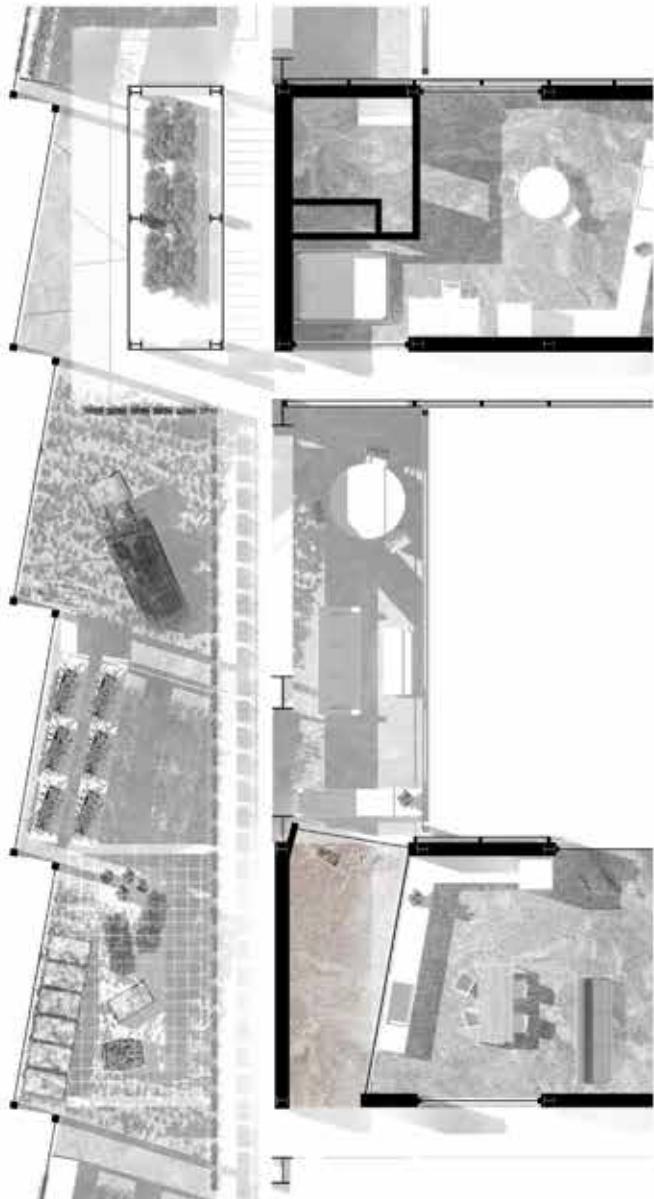


Crop	Category	Season	Difficulty	Yield	Vertical Farm Feasibility	Light	Water
Romaine Lettuce	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Medium
Green Leaf Lettuce	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Medium
Red Leaf Lettuce	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Medium
Butterhead Lettuce	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	Medium	✓	Medium	Medium
Spinach	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	Medium	✓	Low	Medium
Kale	Leafy Green	Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Medium
Swiss Chard	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Medium
Arugula	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Low
Mizuna	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Low
Tatsoi	Leafy Green	Fall	Easy	Medium	✓	Low	Low
Mustard Greens	Leafy Green	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Medium	Medium
Collards	Leafy Green	Fall	Moderate	Medium	✓	Medium	High
Basil	Herb	Summer	Moderate	Medium	✓	High	Medium
Thai Basil	Herb	Summer	Moderate	Medium	✓	High	Medium
Parsley	Herb	Spring/Fall	Easy	Medium	✓	Medium	Medium
Cilantro	Herb	Spring/Fall	Easy	Low	✓	Low	Medium
Mint	Herb	Spring/Summer	Easy	High	✓	Low	High
Chives	Herb	Spring	Easy	Medium	✓	Low	Medium
Oregano	Herb	Summer	Moderate	Medium	✓	Medium	Low
Thyme	Herb	Summer	Moderate	Low	✓	Medium	Low
Sage	Herb	Summer	Moderate	Low	✓	Medium	Low
Rosemary	Herb	Summer	Tricky	Low	■	High	Low
Radishes	Root	Spring/Fall	Easy	High	✓	Low	Medium
Beets	Root	Spring/Fall	Moderate	Medium	■	Medium	High
Carrots (short)	Root	Spring/Fall	Moderate	Medium	■	Medium	High
Turnips	Root	Spring/Fall	Moderate	Medium	■	Medium	High
Daikon (mini)	Root	Fall	Moderate	Medium	■	Medium	High
Green Onions	Root	Spring/Fall	Easy	Medium	✓	Low	Medium
Garlic Greens	Root	Spring/Fall	Easy	Low	✓	Low	Low
Cherry Tomatoes	Fruiting	Summer	Tricky	High	■	High	High
Grape Tomatoes	Fruiting	Summer	Tricky	High	■	High	High
Bell Peppers	Fruiting	Summer	Moderate	Medium	■	High	Medium
Banana Peppers	Fruiting	Summer	Moderate	Medium	■	High	Medium
Jalapeños	Fruiting	Summer	Moderate	Medium	■	High	Medium
Mini Cucumbers	Fruiting	Summer	Tricky	High	■	High	High
Eggplant (compact)	Fruiting	Summer	Tricky	Medium	■	High	Medium
Zucchini (dwarf)	Fruiting	Summer	Hard	Medium	✗	High	High
Snap Peas	Legume	Spring	Moderate	Medium	■	Medium	Medium
Snow Peas	Legume	Spring	Moderate	Medium	■	Medium	Medium
Pole Beans	Legume	Summer	Moderate	Medium	■	High	Medium
Strawberries	Berry	Summer	Tricky	Low	■	High	High
Ever-bearing Strawberries	Berry	Summer	Tricky	Low	■	High	High
Microgreens (sunflower)	Specialty	Year-round	Easy	High	✓	Low	Medium
Microgreens (radish)	Specialty	Year-round	Easy	High	✓	Low	Medium
Edible Flowers (nasturtium)	Specialty	Summer	Moderate	Low	■	Medium	Medium

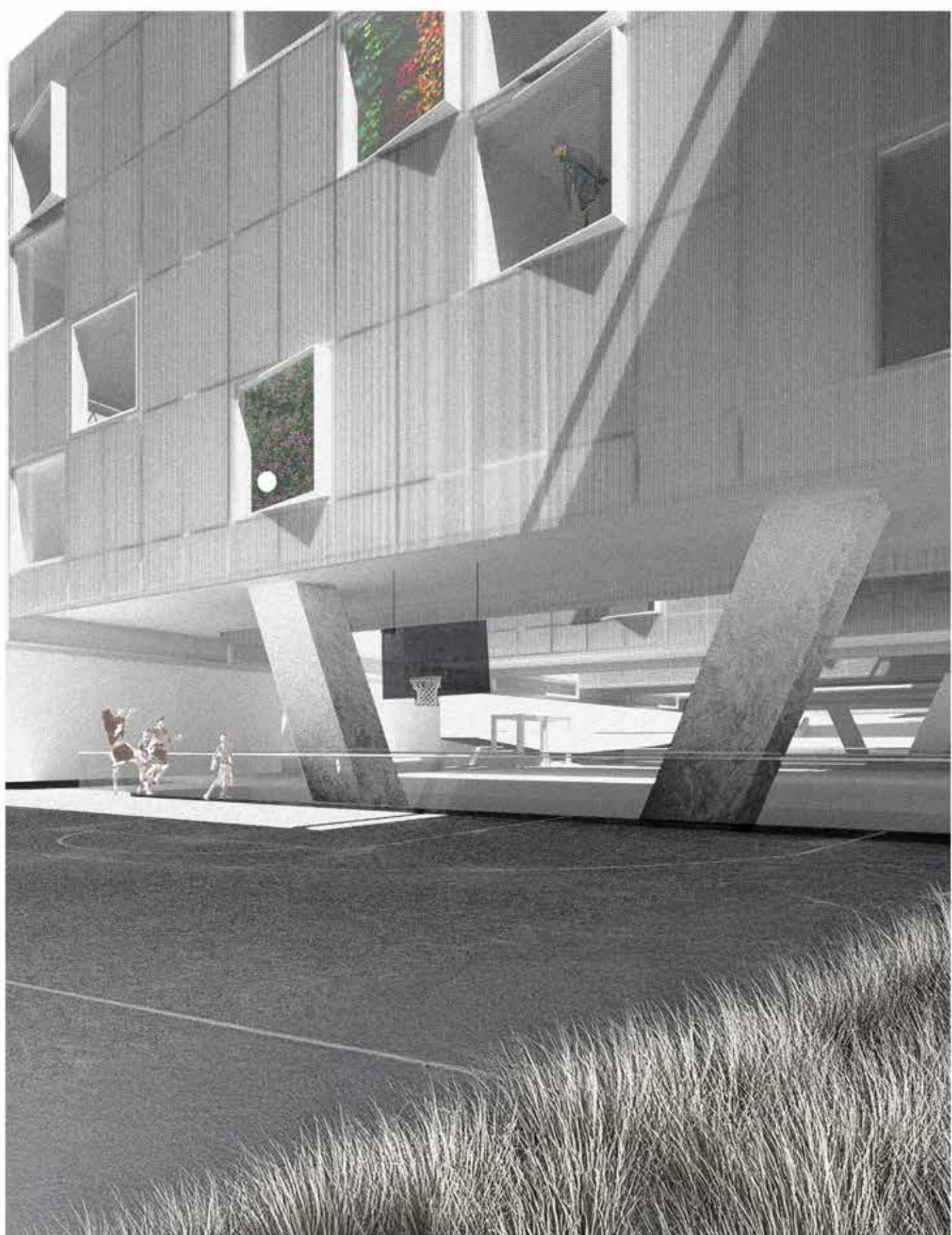












Birth

A Parthenon was constructed in 438 BCE in Athens, Greece, from over 20,000 metric tons of pentelic marble. It loomed 150 meters above the city atop the storied site of the acropolis, situated within the footprint of the Old Temple of Athena demolished by Persians almost a half century before. The masterful display of proportion and craft through its structural and sculptural expression materialized a Greek pursuit of human perfection and permanence, and became an immortal broadcast of Athenian prowess. The Ottoman traveler Evliya Celebi declared in 1667 that the parthenon, “a work less of human hands than of Heaven itself, should remain standing for all time.”

Human hands built another Parthenon out of brick and plaster, atop a ten foot berm in Nashville, Tennessee, for the Centennial Exposition in 1887. *It was intended to remain standing for six months.*

This Parthenon, to the formal minutia, replicated a design deeply tailored to a foreign and ancient context. And yet, even excluding the material and technical intentionality of the first, its construction became a point of identity and pride to the denizens of its newfound home. The Tennessee Encyclopedia states:

“The Parthenon crystallized for Nashvillians their image of themselves and their city, and although all the buildings of the Centennial were built to be temporary, they were loath to tear it down at the conclusion of the exposition.”

Pride in this achievement often took the form of offensive comparison in writings contemporary to the Centennial, such as one commenting on the burgeoning Greco-Turkish War of 1897.

“...while the press chronicled the events of that fatal conflict and the further humiliation of Ancient Greece, day after day it was telling the story of the successful completion of the Parthenon at Nashville.”

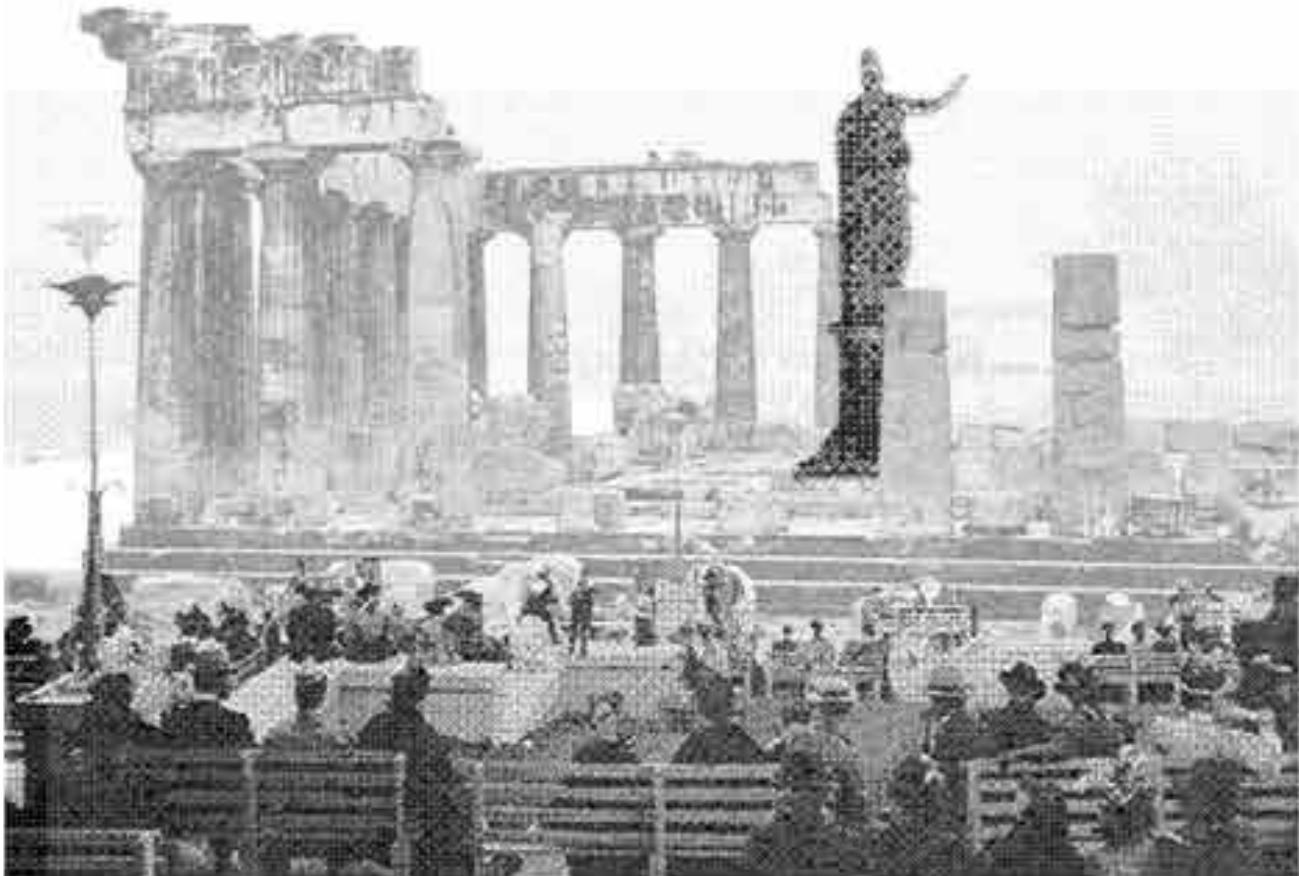
Escaping demolition through the social pressures of unchecked popularity, it remained until its plaster and brick required a permanent reinforced concrete substitute in 1931. A full scale Athena Parthenos –concrete and gold leaf rather than ivory and gold plate– was added in 2002. But the question lingers:



"But it might furnish a half-hour's pleasant reflection in some shady corner, to ... consider... whether the large simplicity, the wide repose, and the impressive stability of it did not belong to that old life, from Virginia downward, which can never come again."

-Chambers, 1897

How can a single monument service two cities, two millenia, a defunct religion, and a hemisphere apart?



"...while the press chronicled the events of that fatal conflict and the further humiliation of Ancient Greece, day after day it was telling the story of the successful completion of the Parthenon at Nashville."

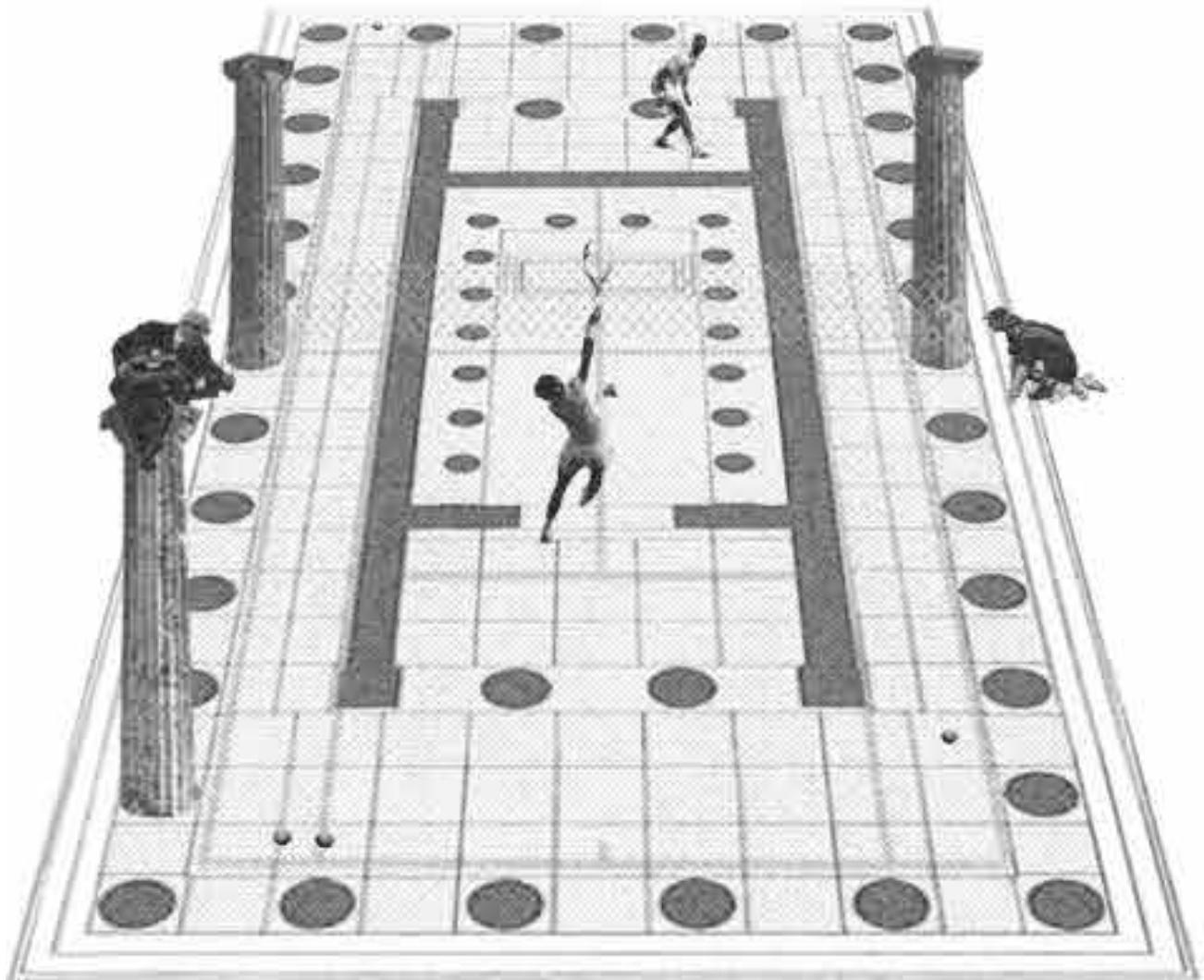
-Official Guide to the Tennessee Centennial Exposition

Death

When Celebi cast his decree of immortality at the Athenian Parthenon, it had already lived and died twice. The first occurred when it passed into Byzantine hands in the sixth century to be converted to a Christian church, with many of its sculptures defaced and its cella (originally home to a 40 foot ivory and gold plated Pallas Athena lost to history) made into the central nave. Following a millennium of Christian operation, the temple fell into Ottoman hands, which saw its conversion into a mosque, the further defacement of statuary, and the addition of a minaret. The third and most famous of the Parthenon's deaths would occur in 1687 - five years after that of the Ottoman Traveler- when a "fortunate shot" from a Venetian cannon struck a Turkish artillery barrel housed within the Parthenon. The 18th and 19th centuries saw European interference with and acquisition of Parthenon artifacts with the rise of interest in architectural antiquity. The culmination of this is seen in the controversial removal of the "Elgin Marbles," extracting them from their context for display at the British Museum, where they remain today.

If one has walked the marble floors of the Athens Parthenon in its ruinous state, though not spent the afternoon in the British Museum examining the contextless stolen statuary, or beheld the Nashvillian Athena Parthenos in its intact -though concrete- shelter, can they claim to have experienced the Parthenon? What about the numerous statues destroyed without proper documentation by reckless invaders, or the countless marble chips lining the pockets, mantles and junk drawers of handsy tourists?

The Parthenon is a thoroughly fragmented place. The pristine temple of two millennia past no longer exists in a single geography, or even medium. Nor does that pristine image of a temple shining with an unblemished coat of fresh paint in 487 BCE carry all the connotations of what the word Parthenon has come to mean. A holistic contemporary view of the Parthenon essentially relies on each entry within a fluctuating assemblage of artifact, replica, history, memory, and mythology. The fragment of the parthenon in Athens tells an incomplete story without its Nashvillian twin, uncanny though she may be.



Original Collage

Players couldn't ask for better conditions today here at the Acropolis Open

Reincarnation

Today, a Parthenon in Athens, Greece, sees methodical restoration of select elements, bringing it baby steps closer to its original form, while attempting to evidence the layers of history which brought it to its ruinous state. Twenty thousand people climb the Acropolis each day to feast their eyes.

Some grumble at the petty pace of restoration, and how they'll be long dead before they see it fully restored. Some cross "Parthenon" off of a mental list, and happily set sights on dinner. Some acknowledge that what stands before them is one beautiful fragment in a scattered assemblage spanning nations, fractured long before any venetian cannonball struck marble.

In Nashville, I return to the park I've walked the grounds of a hundred times before. I think back to my high school soccer team- my school, stranded in a sea of parking lots downtown, would hold practices on the Parthenon lawn. I would retrieve an overshot ball from the peristyle of a Grecian Temple, and bound back down the hill to my team, only vaguely conscious of the fact that I lingered in the shadow of the shadow of a 2500 year old monument.

Now, seeing the pediment framed by trees against the November sky, still blue in southern defiance, I realize I am grateful that this is the fragment of the Parthenon I grew up with. In the monetarily motivated substitute of marble for concrete, it skirted the arms length that extravagant monuments are trained to keep their viewers at, and, in doing so, surpassed the inflexible, shallow connotation of a "replica."

I smile at the perversion of it all, and at the answer I've decided to give to anyone inquiring the difference between the Athens and Nashville Parthenons:

"One's on a hill, one's on a berm."

Introduction

Shelter is one of the three basic needs, and yet, simply to pay for housing will always be the most expensive cost. It's also an experience a lot of us share, living in homes, small or big, as well as sharing that home with others, to invite others over. This installation, aims to show two sides of the housing discussion. Bankhead and Buckhead. One area where 30% of people earn a household income of over 200K and one area where 30% of people earn a household income of less than 20K.

The installation itself is composed of 30 2x4's, that make up the frame of a stereotypical house. 4 foot gaps are left for 3 mapping plots on each side, one for Bankhead and one for Buckhead. A dataset, geography map, typography map, word map, and industry map are dedicated to each "wall" of the structure.

The installation itself was chosen to be put on a walkway near Tech Green, one of the busier walkways on Georgia Tech campus to reach as much of a public audience as possible.

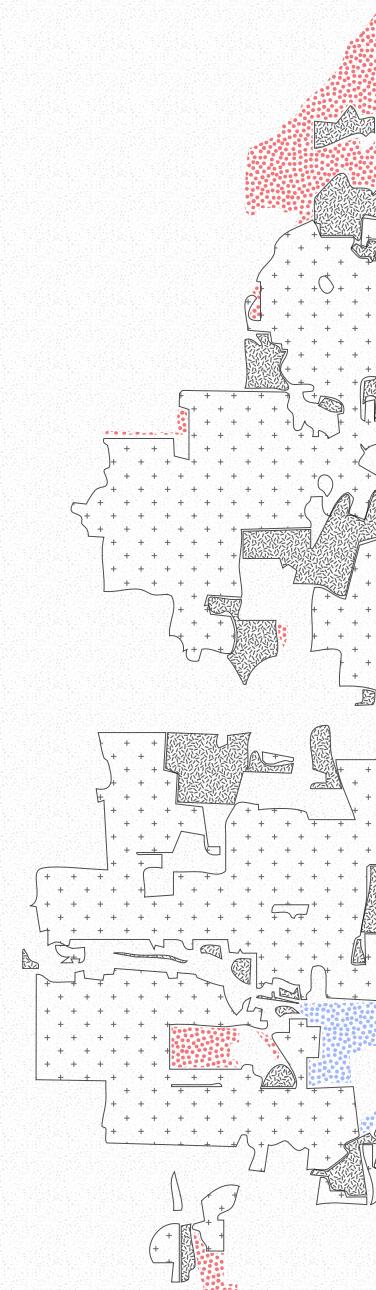
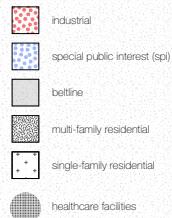
Disparity

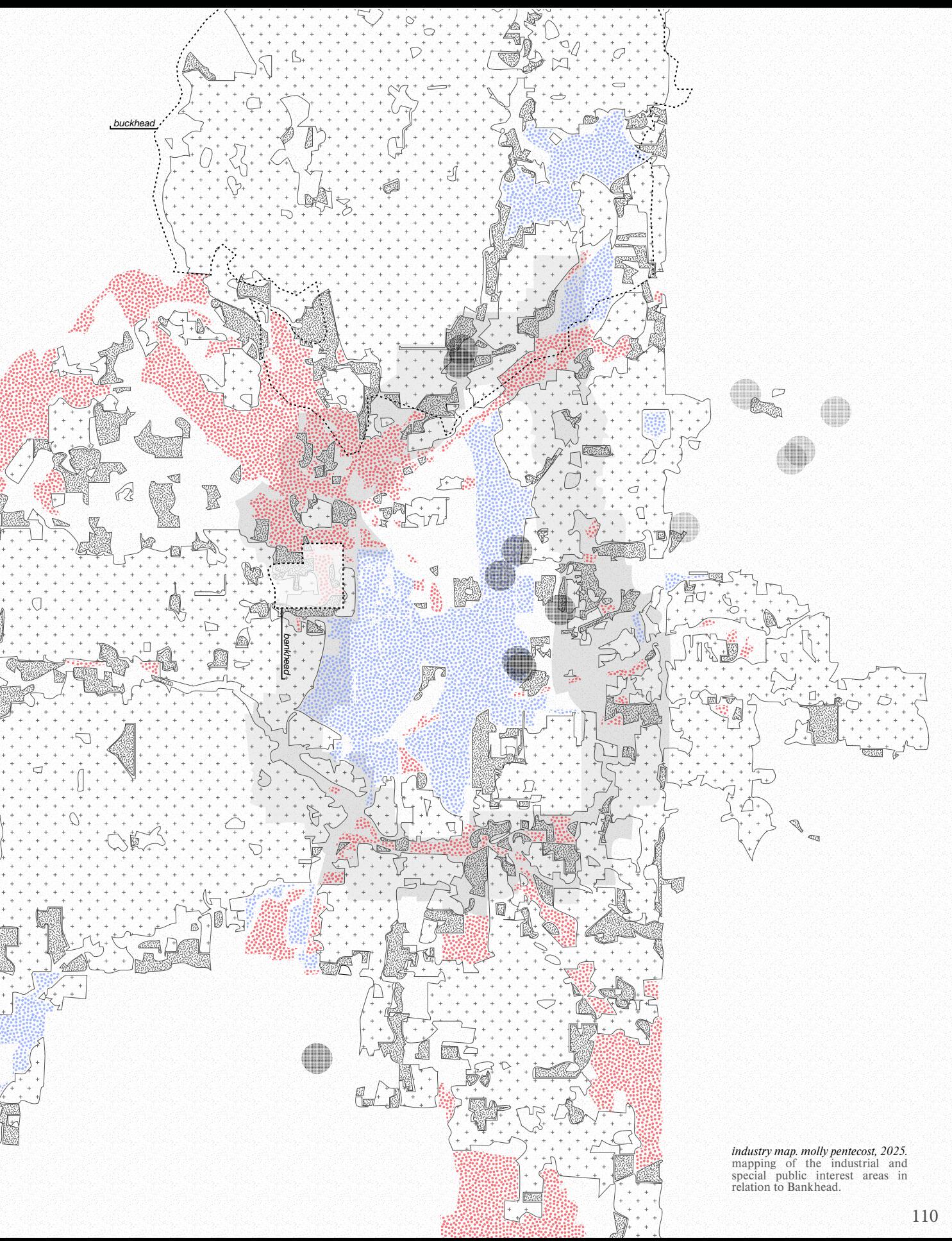
The median rent price of a 1 Bedroom Home in Bankhead is 1000-1200 on average, per rental sites. In comparison, the average in Buckhead for a similar size is about 1700 or higher. Originating in the 1950's, Bankhead is no stranger to the constant forces of increasing rent and ongoing development. Just imagine living what you presume as a steady and normal life, until suddenly your rent increases by 70-100%. Yet, this story is one that gets told over and over as westside Atlanta develops more and more. Whether it's the commercial development of west midtown, or the public project of the west phase of the Beltline, what is the cost of these developments? What if the very people that give the space it's unique character and charm are the ones forced out?

What if the very community you align yourself with suddenly forced you out of it?..

Complexity

It was never as cut and dry as housing was made to be. The goal was to highlight and showcase a real difference in Housing within Atlanta, at a 1:1 Scale. The mappings delve further in to these nuances, with mappings of the different industries and typologies, even comparing certain elements of development to monopoly.





industry map. molly pentecost, 2025.
mapping of the industrial and
special public interest areas in
relation to Bankhead.

Summary

Shelter is one of the three basic needs, and yet, simply to pay for housing will always be the most expensive cost. It's also something we all share, we all live in homes, small or big, and we also share that home with others, to invite others over, or be with others, so it's a language we all speak. This sequence of mapping diagrams seeks to introduce you to a two-sided housing issue. Bankhead and Buckhead. Old and New. \$ and \$\$\$.

It was never as cut and dry as housing is made to be.

Disparity

A monopoly board was chosen as the comparison and metaphor point for the comparison between Bankhead and Buckhead.

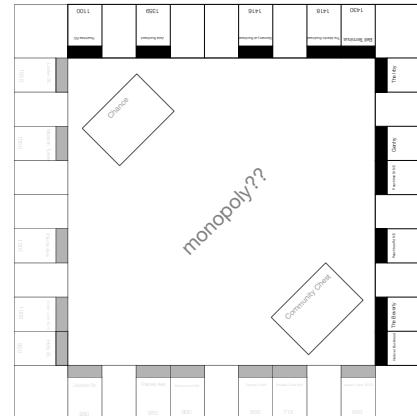
We think it's pretty well. On two sides of the board, you have objectively cheaper priced homes. These houses represent Bankhead in the comparison given their cheaper price point and home value compared to that of Red, Yellow, Green, and Dark Blue.

The median rent price of a 1 Bedroom Home in Bankhead is 1000-1200 on average, per rental sites. In comparison, the average in Buckhead for a similar size is about 1700 or higher.

Buckhead's story is one that is fairly common around cities that experienced sprawl, their citizens not living in the center but rather, sprawling out into suburbs around the city. Atlanta and Buckhead fit such a description exactly.

In the early history of atlanta in the 19th century, the wealthy all lived in downtown and the city center, but of course, today the cards are reversed. Very few live in downtown, with many areas such as Bankhead being less wealthy, while Buckhead continues to thrive and grow off people deciding to move out towards the suburbs.

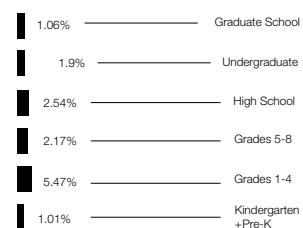
What light does a "white picket fence" home contribute towards this sprawl?



Educational Attainment

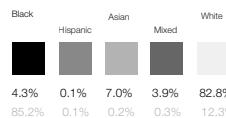


Active School Enrollment



The first portion of statistics represent the level of educational attainment in terms of degrees, while the second merely represents the percentage of the current population in Bankhead that are students.

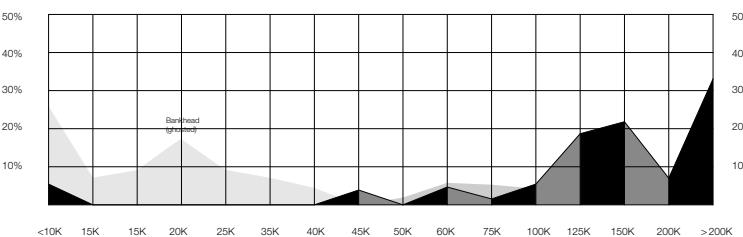
Within the study area (Tuxedo Park) of Buckhead, there are 6-10 schools of varying degree. A majority of these are paid institutions such as private religious or non-religious pre-schools or elementary schools. Sutton Middle School and Sarah Smith reside as the nearest elementary and middle school. Atlanta international school serves as one of the major schools in the area, serving k-12, although private.



Radical Composition

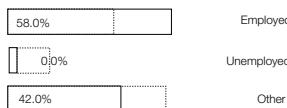
One major comparison to be made between Bankhead and Buckhead is the radical difference in racial composition. In Buckhead, the narrative is flipped. 82-83% of the case study neighborhood is white, with another 7 percent being asian. This in comparison to Bankhead's demographic split is drastic, two completely different sides of the gentrification coin. This number seems to have been pretty stable, while Bankhead's is still ever-changing.

Household Income Levels (By percent)

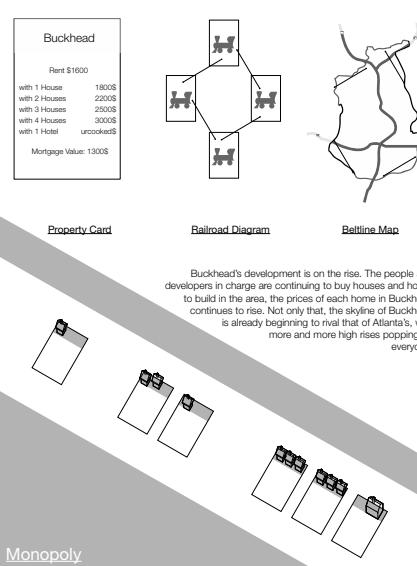
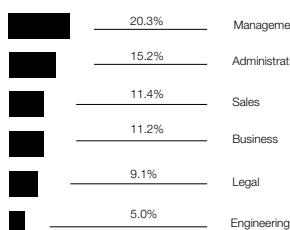


Of course, household income is a very wide ranging subject, but there is a correlation to be made between Bankhead v Buckhead status, and their wide difference in their population's household income. As stated in the summary, 30 percent (the large majority) of people in Buckhead earn a household status of over 200K, while 30 percent are making less than 15K in Bankhead. The household income of a demographic connects to a lot of factors. Your household income is tied to what schools and educational institutions are in your area, what businesses want to be nearby, or what your community looks like.

Employment Status



Common Occupations



Monopoly

Maybe now you'll see the comparison to a monopoly game and as a system.

Do you remember the front of a monopoly card you would get when you first buy a monopoly property? Unlike the other side of this map, playing monopoly from the developer side feels more associated with Buckhead, while Bankhead feels like playing as the normal citizen. Developers continue to develop more and more properties in Buckhead, knowing that people there are willing and able to pay higher rent prices. In turn, more and more development elevates the status and rent of Buckhead, and we can see this with the household income of the individuals who live there.

As for the refined metaphor, both the MARTA line as well as the North part of the beltline have sections that visit Buckhead. Yet, an incoming station or section of the beltline doesn't mean the same thing to Bankhead as it does to Buckhead. A smaller and less affluent neighborhood is more likely to treat developments as scaries.

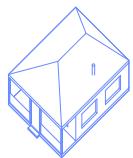
In Buckhead, there was push-back against a MARTA station from more affluent members of the community, wanting to stay disconnected with other areas of Atlanta. Of course, other factors of race and economics came into play, with that MARTA station replacing a historically black community of Johnsontown.

data and type. ryan yin, 2025.
census data diagrams explaining the demographics of the site,
and the housing typologies of both bankhead or buckhead.

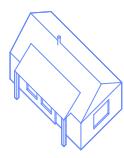
all models are at a rough, but accurate 1/16th scale



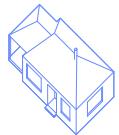
single half porch
936 Jett St NW, Atl, GA, 30314



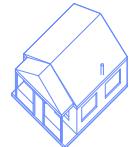
single full porch
3510 Roswell Rd NE, Atl, GA, 30305



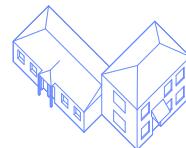
gabled townhomes (garage)
423 W Lake Ave NW, Atl, GA, 30314



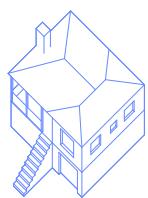
side porch
444 Woodlawn Ave NW, Atl, GA, 30318



single full porch v2
492 Holly St NW, Atl, GA, 30318



two block typ
809 Proctor St NW, Atl, GA, 30314



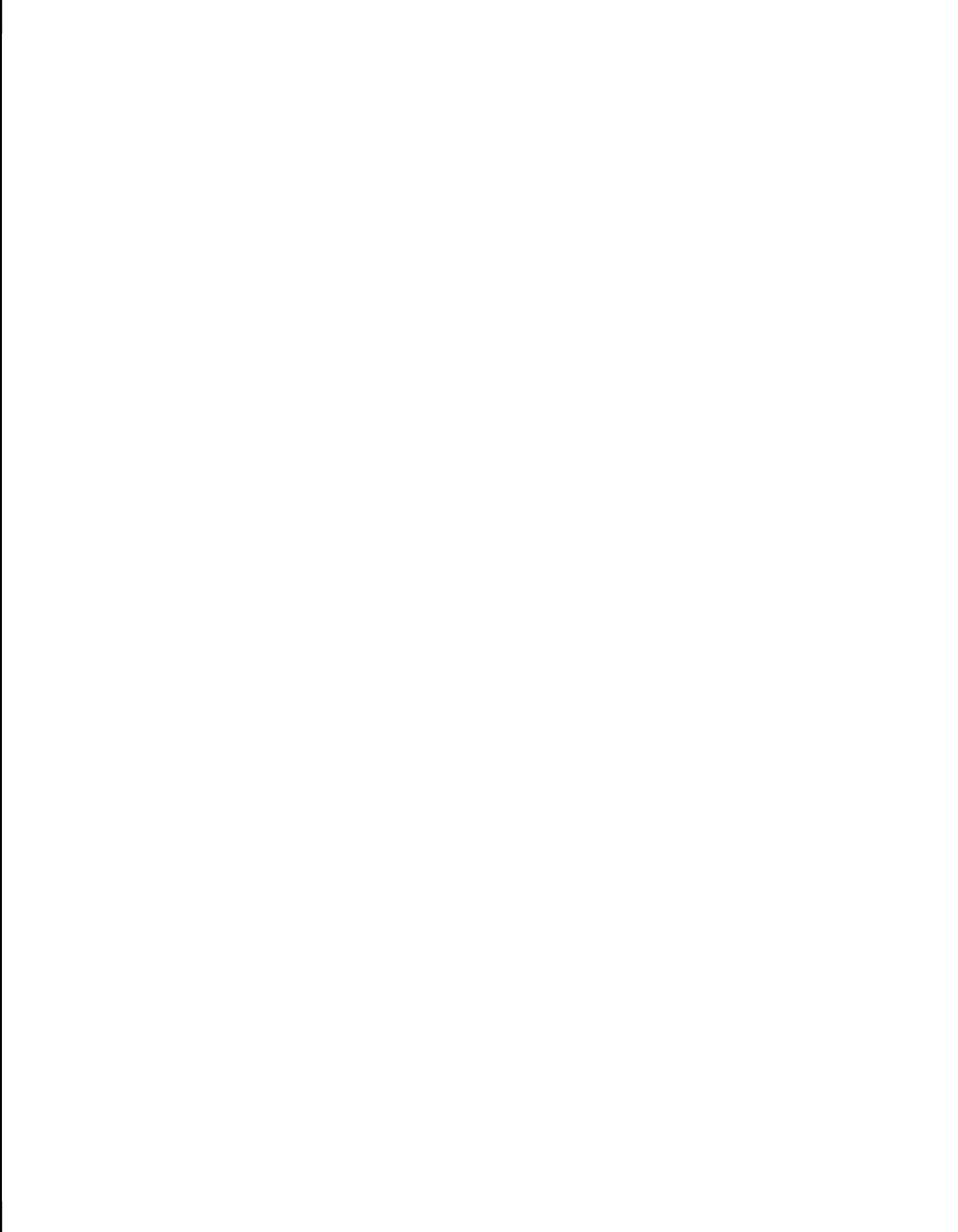
ground garage
937 Jett St NW, Atl, GA, 30314



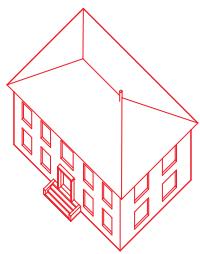
2 story porch-balcony
426 Holly St NW, Atl, GA, 30318



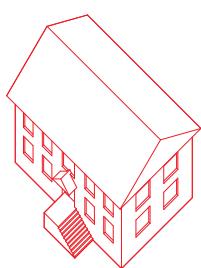
4-family unit
399 Joseph E Lovers Blvd NW, Atl, GA, 30314



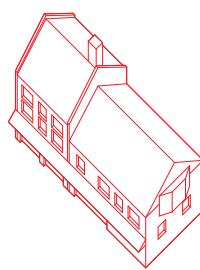
all models are at a rough, but accurate 1/16th scale



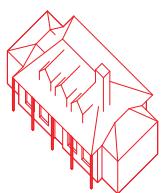
home alone mansion
3445 Valley Rd NW, Atl, GA, 30305



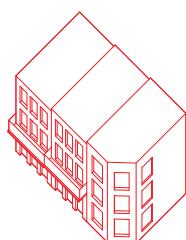
home alone mansion (multifamily)
3510 Roswell Rd NE, Atl, GA, 30305



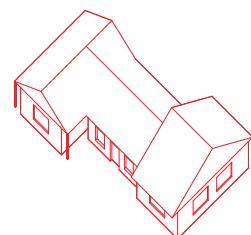
gabled townhomes (garage)
151 E Andrews Dr NW, Atl, GA, 30305



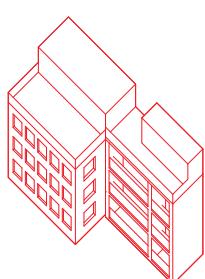
mid-mansion typ
3405 Valley Rd NW, Atl, GA, 30305



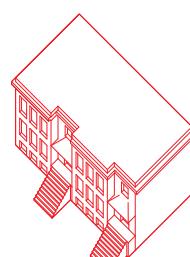
boujee rowhomes
Camden Paces, 77 E Andrews Dr NW, Atl, GA, 30305



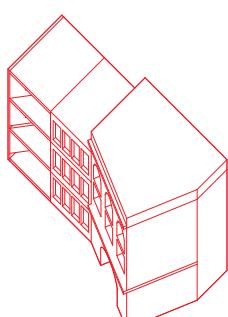
one story mid-mansion
3435 Valley Rd NW, Atl, GA, 30305



niles bolton headah
Camden Buckhead, 3300 Roswell Rd NE, Atl, GA, 30305

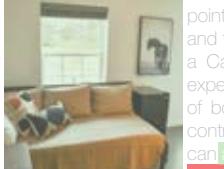


home alone mansion (multifamily)
Camden Paces, 77 E Andrews Dr NW, Atl, GA, 30305



mid-rise (expensive af)
Gramercy at Buckhead, 3315 Roswell Rd, Atl, GA, 303

URBANIZE ATL +++++ blighted rentals on the beltline are being bulldozed, with more to come + + + + photo tour: first new beltline section of '25 highlights beauty, problems + + + + has officially arrived! + + + + longest beltline stretch (almost 7 miles) is this close to finish + + + + beltline formally seeks developers to kickstart massive westside project + + + + project tops out + + + + first look: massive project moves forward on the westside beltline + + + + fresh renderings: unique bankhead development officially a go + + + + affordable westside + + + + beltline unveils plan for 3300 westside homes, commercial village + + + + massive bankhead proposal on beltline takes step forward + + + + Images: vision for rem + + + + beltline ponders bankhead site redevelopment: any big ideas? + + + + marta wants your 2 cents on bankhead station's extreme makeover + + affordable housing + + + + prices slashed at upscale bankhead townhome community + + + + High-rise apartment, marta picks team for westside's first station redevelopment GOOGLE +++++ Bankhead is a neighborhood located west of downtown Atlanta Georgia it is surrounded by Grove Park to the west Washington Park and are Hills Park Knight Park English Avenue and Blandtown it is also flanked by Rockdale to the northwest at its center is MARTA Bankhead station and the BEST Academy Grove Park Elementary AD Williams Elementary School Carter G Woodson Elementary School Alfred Blalock Elementary School and name comes from Bankhead Highway a thoroughfare that has since been renamed the Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway for a civil rights attorney who lived Collier Heights neighborhood the boundaries of Bankhead are Jefferson Street to the north a few blocks north of Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway Joseph E Boulevard to the east and Chappell Road to the west +++++ "I am a white guy it kinda matters in this case who moved into a house on Whitaker which is porches I see the homeless I see the drugs and foot traffic but none of it really phases me only thing I am worried about is walking home at two am from of being robbed or should I be safe since I live in the neighborhood should I take a taxi home at night I work only a mile away but I really do not want to get neighborhood makes me feel like I have a target on my back" +++++ "There is not real events in this neighborhood we mostly stay inside unless at school +++++ "Bankhead is a neighborhood in Atlanta Georgia with a population of one thousand two Bankhead is in Fulton County living in Bankhead offers rent their homes in Bankhead there are a lot of restaurants and parks residents of Bankhead tend to be liberal" +++++ "Bankhead is a historic Atlanta known for its hip hop culture and the Bankhead Seafood food truck it is a diverse area undergoing revitalization with affordable housing and easy access hop music scene and acclaimed artists like TI calling it home Bankhead has witnessed a surge in homebuyers following the completion of the Atlanta multi use trails greenspace and transit development to better connect Atlanta neighborhoods and the Westside Reservoir Park Bankhead residents can or venture downtown to notable Atlanta landmarks like the Georgia Aquarium and World of Coca Cola just minutes down the road prospective buyers are outdoor amenities and a quick four mile commute to downtown Atlanta as the neighborhood continues to gain interest and popularity the community experiences like Trap City Cafe and the interactive exhibits at the Trap Music Museum Bankhead is a growing community attracting area savvy individuals the neighborhood is on its way up says Julian Jackson Real Estate Agent at eXp Realty with over a decade of experience selling in Atlanta" +++++ among Atlanta neighborhoods it has been cemented in the rap canon of the city by artists like Outkast Shawty Lo and TI in this What Is In A Name we its name the Bankhead Highway was an early twentieth century auto trail one of the informal network of roads that predated the US highway system the through the Sun Belt states to San Diego Bankhead is an up and coming neighborhood in Atlanta that is poised for massive growth the neighborhood is just west of the English Avenue neighborhood +++++ "While the neighborhood has been disadvantaged historically there have been new developments many consider it a neighborhood in transition that is ripe for improvement let us delve into Bankhead rich history and find out why it is on track to become residents according to the most recent Census data gender wise forty nine asked the Bankhead community members about the journalism they needed our Fellows to learn reporting skills to better serve their community Kimya Trotter Buckhead and Bankhead two areas that are a few miles apart but have different others they are completely different we are going to talk about the main features thinking about moving or are curious about how Atlanta neighborhoods different" +++++ "Bankhead is a popular neighborhood for home buyers who match your budget expand your search to include homes in popular Bankhead these days three of the main reasons are high foreclosures in the area the rental market and the several years ago real estate financing was plentiful everyone was getting loans this allowed homeowners income area many people especially investors purchased properties in the area homeowners generally the southern region in two thousand eight the real estate recession hit financing dried up and as a result many properties to be boarded up which is what you still see when you drive through Bankhead now" +++++ developments reshape the area rising property values and investor speculation are increasing displacement ensure redevelopment benefits current residents key insights low incomes and high vacancy median house crime and public health concerns Bankhead crime rate is significantly higher than the city average and schools like Hollis Innovation Academy face high student mobility and low proficiency scores investor protection limited protections for renters Bankhead located in Atlanta Georgia is a place to live with a vibrant diverse community affordable with monthly midterm and short term rental options the area is serviced by public transportation with spaces and parks for outdoor activities Bankhead is a place to live with affordable rent convenient amenities one c three nonprofit organization inspired by the communities surrounding Bankhead Highway in Atlanta public assistance the organization strives to improve and progress the lives of families and individuals



longest **beltline** section to date (nearly 7 miles) in bankhead, mixed-use transformation center **e housing** concept like no other bound for atl's made bankhead marta station comes into focus images: **blighted** hotel officially reborn as building pitched for bankhead + + + +

er Hills to the south to the east and northeast Maddox Park the neighborhood **schools** are the Merck Douglass High School the **neighborhood** Bankhead in the nearby affluent and historic Boulevard to the south Joseph E Lowery in the center of Bankhead I see the people on job as a waiter do you think I should be scared ged and being a preppy white kid in the work there are a few shootings here and there" ents a dense suburban feel and most residents **neighborhood** with a strong sense of **community** downtown with a profound influence on the hip **line** which represents a twenty two mile loop of hot hoops at Maddox Park within the **community** advantage of the low entry prices proximity to retains its roots through vibrant local dining investors hoping to capitalize on future growth Bankhead is one of the most recognizable names stigate the highway that gave the **neighborhood** Bankhead Highway stretched from Washington DC southwest of the Georgia Tech campus and initiatives aimed at revitalizing the **neighborhood** of Atlanta next great **neighborhoods** Bankhead seven percent of locals are male and fifty point this story emerged from that feedback Canopy Canopy Atlanta Fellow is one of the reporters niences to residents and visitors it is like looking both **neighborhoods** like living costs how safe contrast this gives you a solid understanding of how afford to buy a home in the median price range **neighborhoods** around Bankhead there are several two thousand eight closure of Bowen Homes and investors to purchase **properties** since the purchased in the northern part and investors many investors allowed their properties to return "Bankhead a historically Black **community** in it risks this research analyzes the forces driving household income is under thirty thousand and one access to fresh food healthcare and public ensure institutional and absentee ownership is **community** it is a safe and peaceful **neighborhood** with several bus routes and access to the MARTA and a **community** oriented atmosphere" ++++ Atlanta Georgia it was formed in September two impacted by economic disparity from lack of

can cause well-documented adverse health ion method of **lead-contaminated** soil, called ke up or stabilize **lead** in soil and also examined the most promising candidate for taking up and d, furthermore, cowpea and chinese cabbage oil can be dangerous. we also found that the search is needed." ++++ atlanta's **westside** collaboration in predominantly african-american adium, drawing on interviews and participant offers examples of local efforts to resist sport patterns of colonial infringement." ++++ structure planning that includes environmental, **ine** to provide walking and bicycling access to this study uses remote sensing and geospatial ed in 2007, demonstrated an alarming influx of proposed **westside** segment of the **BeltLine** has ns of homes adjacent to the **westside** **BeltLine** y concept agent-based simulation model (abm) baseline method to record and identify social and greenway **development** project currently under and **displacement** associated with the trail raise d **gentrification** related to an urban greenspace filled importance-performance analysis, multiple similar projects how to best engage with nearby with **affordable** retail and office space, marta and e. holmes marta station."

word map. molly penecost, 2025.
map that finds most frequently mentioned words from both credible sources and internet searches.



away. ryan yin, 2025.
context shot of the installation, showing the makerspace and campus buildings behind it.



throughway. ryan yin, 2025
cole fox is shown reading one of the plots on the bankhead side of the installation





Reimagining Urban Domesticity Through Thresholds, Conclusions

If architecture, at its best, attends to life before it is lived – to the rhythms, bodies, movements, encounters that will inhabit space – then housing must be judged not only on its floor plans or cost-efficiency, but on its capacity to sustain living as a relational practice. Thresholds, as we have defined them, are not marginal additives that can be sacrificed: they are spatial arteries. They carry potential for connection, for inclusion, for a healthy community. They blur the once-rigid boundaries of zones, edges, overlaps, and designations. They return agency to those who actually inhabit these dwellings and allow those who seek broader definitions of connection and place to pursue them organically.

To reimagine multifamily housing as infrastructure for well-being requires, first, a shift in design ethics and normative expectations: toward elasticity, adaptability, and openness in spatial sequencing; toward porous boundaries that enable a gradation of exchange rather than isolation. Its implementation must permeate every scale of the proposal's facets – from the operators within a single unit that shape spatial opportunities for connection within a family, to the way that unit relates to a smaller cluster of adjacent units, to how those clusters facilitate encounters among diverse residents (from single occupants to multigenerational households, from younger families to older adults, across ethnicity, gender, and occupation). It must also consider how these subcommunities articulate a broader sense of collective identity – how outdoor spaces nurture this emergence, and how the gradation and calibration of communal environments generate forms of belonging that exceed the reductive divide between “public” and “private.”

To enact this spatial ethic, however, demands more than design ingenuity; it requires a transformation in the very structures that underwrite the built world. The relational logics articulated at the unit and cluster scales must carry through into the institutional and economic systems that determine what may be constructed and how it may endure. Policy must move past the numerical shorthand of units per acre toward a finer-grain vocabulary capable of apprehending spatial richness – the proximities, thresholds, and shared infrastructures through which communal life might take shape. Likewise, developmental practice must shift its orientation from short-term returns to privilege long-term social and ecological well-being. In the same vein, the financial and governance structures that underwrite housing must begin to accommodate reciprocity rather than singular ownership. This shift gestures toward forms of shared responsibility and long-term stewardship, where the spaces residents hold in common can evolve with them—expanding, contracting, or reconfiguring as lives change and new forms of inhabitation emerge. Architectural education must also undoubtedly reform to teach the ideals of housing in this way, as the education of the future is the crux of change.

The speculative proposal laid out here – while grounded in a site, tradition, and method – is best read not as a final design but as a provocation: a call to re-value what housing could be. As such, the question is not merely “what happens on this 1.15-acre site in Charleston,” but “what might city-housing become if we treat thresholds as essential infrastructure – and design accordingly.”

To realize this potential, it demands a collective commitment from architects, planners, residents, policymakers, and researchers. Together, they might build housing that does more than shelter: housing that nurtures health, sociality, belonging, resilience, and dignity. In that sense, the project is not for a moment – it is for practice. And that practice begins with a reimagining of what we mean by “home.”

Excerpts: Commonscape, Bolton Studio, 2024, Charleston, South Carolina
 Top: Slice of Life drawing, illustrating activation of domestic thresholds.
 Bottom: unit plans.



1-bed variations, 585 sq ft



2-bed variations, 880 sq ft



communal unit stack, 2970 sq ft



3-bed stack, 1200 sq ft



katalina flores

let's meet at the bars



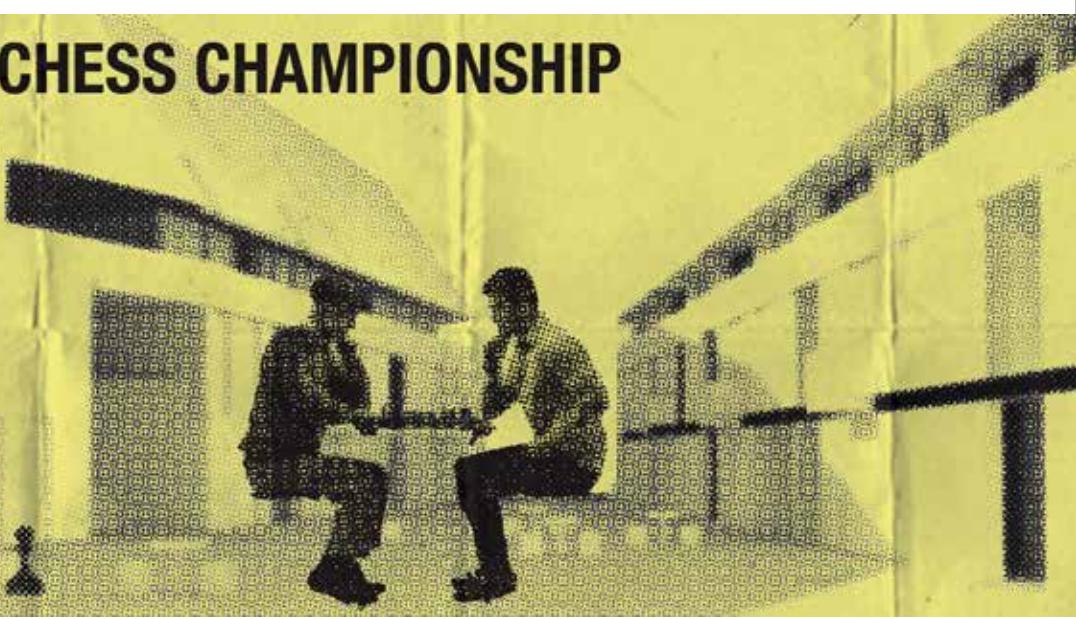
Statement

Located in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, this project centers on the idea that architectural form can spark everyday connection. The project addresses gaps in nearby childcare and senior-oriented spaces by creating a mixed-use residential environment constructed from three former bar buildings. The most active bar features food stalls, a biergarten, and even a nightclub below grade. The middle bar blends housing with shared community spaces, and the quietest bar houses senior living facilities. Together, the bars create a gradient from lively to calm, inviting residents of all ages to move between them as naturally as they would choose different "bars" to meet, gather, and interact. Rooted in OTR's mixed-use character with German flair, the project positions intergenerational encounter as both a spatial driver and a community catalyst.

CINCINNATI CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

MARCH 3RD

BYOB
BRING
YOUR
OWN
BOARD



Cincinnati Chess Championship. Katalina Flores. 2025.



Relevance

The project counters placelessness by using architectural form to create conditions for genuine, everyday connection. In a neighborhood shaped by layered histories and cultural hybridity, the three-bar composition restores specificity by organizing life along a gradient of activity (lively, mixed, and quiet), reflecting the varied rhythms of Over-the-Rhine rather than flattening them. By integrating these spaces into a single, walkable system, the project acknowledges that place emerges from overlapping experiences, memories, and encounters across generations. Instead of treating the community as an abstract ideal, it builds spatial catalysts that encourage people to choose where to gather, linger, or retreat, reinforcing Edward Relph's idea that place depends on unselfconscious, intentional human presence. In resisting homogenized development and prioritizing social texture over efficiency, the project demonstrates how contemporary design can cultivate meaningful place rather than contribute to its erosion.

Oktoberfest Cincinnati. 2026. Katalina Flores. 2025.

The statistic that “50% of architecture students are women” is often thrown around as a defense for the obvious lack of women represented in the field. Despite there being a growing number of licensed (women) architects, women still only make up 27% of NCARB licensed architects, and to look at an even greater discrepancy, only 2% of NCARB licensed architects are black, 1% men and 1% women. The field of architecture (in the United States) has been systematically structured to support one type of architect, proven by both statistics and sociological fact.

“The Self-Expressive Edge of Occupational Sex Segregation” by Erin A. Cech begins to explain why statistics alone do not truly account for the discrepancy between men and women in so-called “male-dominated fields”. Cech found through a study of students at four different colleges in the United States that students “self-conceptions on their likelihood of entering occupations with a high or low proportion of women... theorizes the consequences of this mechanism for gender inequality.” Regardless of the perceived change in some industries, internal biases, developed through gender socialization, have effects on how students and many young professionals view their place in the workforce, with clear gendered tones. In the results of her study Cech remarks that of the students surveyed “men and women who perceive themselves as less emotional are more likely to enter careers with a higher proportion of men.” Otherwise speaking, emotional stereotypes associated with different career paths are also gendered, allowing for both men and women to view every job, subconsciously or not, with some gender parallel. This leads to under-representation in statistics, but also in daily practice, a dataset much more difficult to pinpoint.

During the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Women’s Leadership Summit this fall, I heard many (women) architects discuss not being heard, not receiving ample maternal leave or assistance, not being recognized for doing extra work, and not being taken as seriously as their male counterparts. By just hearing these (women) architects’ stories, it is clear the injustice that still exists in the industry. The graphic to the left is a ‘mock’ movie poster, for a film that does not exist, but a reality which does. The poster juxtaposes quotes from a sociology study on invisible work with quotes from the AIA WLS, highlighting the many roles that (women) architects take on and representing the gap between recognition and work.

Invisible work, in simple terms, is the work that is not defined as a part of the job and not recognized as labor. Amit Kaplan, a sociologist, in her article “Just Let it Pass by and It will Fall on Some Woman’ Invisible Work in the Labor Market” describes different typologies of ‘invisible work’ such as emotional labor, teamwork, physical care, and administrative. She also explains the ‘office housework’ theory: the idea that certain office tasks are undervalued “housework” in the workplace. We have seen a problem with representation in architecture. But even now, with the increasing representation, we lack equal recognition. Kaplan expresses the importance of this ‘invisible work’ in reinforcing gender inequalities stating that “in the context of a neoliberal economy, gendered organizations produce another “exploitation” mechanism—invisible work practices not only at home, but also in the labor market, performed primarily by women but also by men.”

The question then becomes, how do we recognize this work? Further, how do we resist and reconstruct gender socialization within institutional organizations? The answer is complex yet simple, because accessibility, through visibility and action, is the start to social change. Passion, in your work, your home, your government, is how we inspire and create action. To the current, growing generation of talented (women) architects: I encourage you to write your own script, don’t act out theirs.

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'The (woman) Architect', M Pentecost. 2025.
A faux movie poster, commenting on the role of gender in the architecture profession.

Closing Remarks

In the spring semester of 2026 Sandbox will shift themes, applying the pertinent and ubiquitous lessons of our yearlong meditation on place and placelessness to a different critical issue of the built environment. We will hold an event distributing a large quantity of Issue 01: Drafts on Place and Placelessness, providing a formal window for informal synthesis, as well as gauging community thoughts on the desired direction of our publication. We will continue to accept submissions on the current theme through this date, to be published on sandboxatgt.com or in the spring distributions of Issue 01. Until then, please direct questions, thoughts, and submissions to sandboxatgt@gmail.com.

Thank you to all contributors, readers, and lovers of discourse who made this publication possible.

Contact Us

For submissions, inquiries, or other matters, contact us through our email:

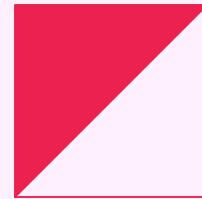
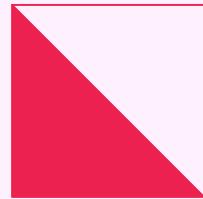
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