

To my parents



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis professors. John McLeod, for having faith in me; Wendy Cox, for encouragement and guidance.

I am fortunate to be a student of Jeff Howarth who introduced me to planning, architecture and cartography. I appreciated the inspiring conversations I had with various teachers throughout the development of this project. These include Elizabeth Morrison, Andrew Corrigan, Eric Nelson, Stephen Whiteman and Glenn Andres. Bonnie Coulter and Dharman Rice answered my questions with patience when I visited Vermont Zen center. Thanks to my good friend, Michaela Skiles, for providing useful suggestions all through the project. Lyn DeGraff has offered me tremendous help in the production of this book.

Finally, I am grateful for the advice John Elder has given me on life, learning and ambition among many other things; I have found my passion, John.

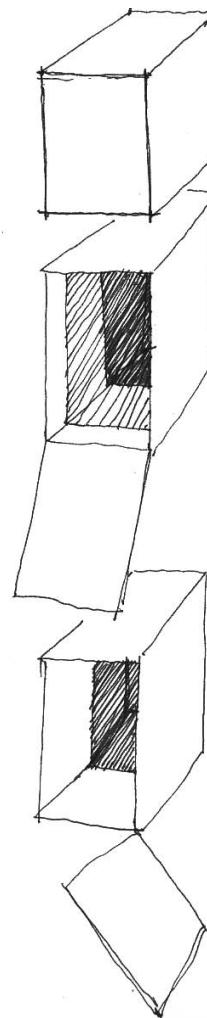


I used to equate Buddhism to superstition because everything was done with little explanation. My mom practices Buddhism - she lights up the incense every morning before breakfast and recites the vows. We have a Buddha room at home in Shanghai that has the best lighting and ventilation. My mom told me that Buddha and Bodhisattvas should always be in a room like this. "Respect," she said.

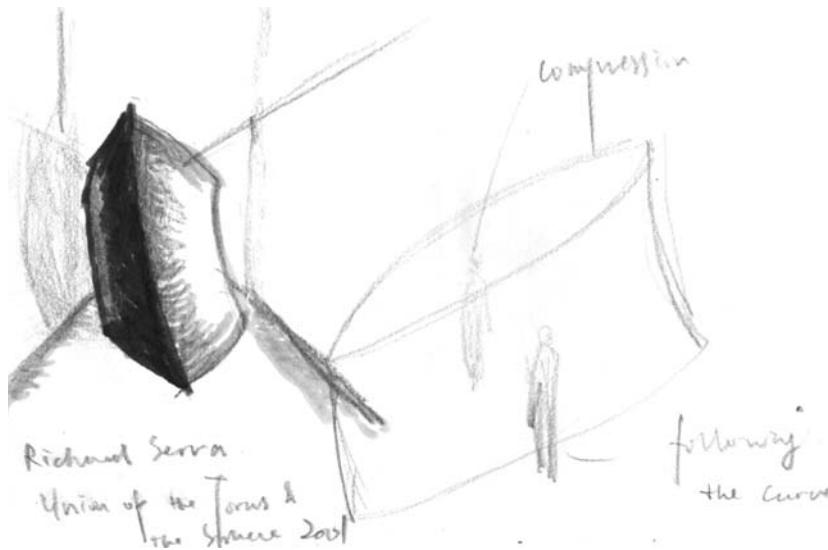
I never quite got it. The rituals, the objects, the belief - they all seemed somewhat superficial. When I was a child I went to temples with my parents. I did what they told me to do. I prostrated with my knees on those silk, yellow cushions. My forehead touched the cold stone floor. There were many Buddha-like figures and many stone steps to get to the rooms in which they dwelled. Worshippers held the burning incense whose smell permeated the entire temple complex. My dad would donate money to the monk who sat next to the wooden threshold, writing down the names of the donators and the amount they gave. I did not understand why one person needed to buy his or her fortune from Buddha. When I asked my mom, she was shocked that I referred to the donation as a purchase. "The child says silly things," she talked to the air as if Buddha was listening attentively across the table. She never answered my question.

My parents just followed the rules that had been established without ever questioning. So did many others. Almost everyone knew how to hold a gesture of pray, hum part of the sutra and say his or her own wishes in front of Buddha. But no one seemed to know why. My inquiries about Buddhism became fewer and fewer because I realized no one really understood the religion. The knowledge of Buddhism had become so dense that a lay person rarely bothered to research. The meanings were all muddled in the symbols.

Those childhood confusions affirmed my choice to reinvestigate, after many years, what Buddhism really entails. How can architecture house a religion? It is the architect's job, I think to myself,



to reveal.



My tracing roll remained empty in the beginning because no form came to mind. On the January thesis trip, I visited works by Richard Serra at Dia Beacon, a modern art foundation one hour north of New York City. I walked twice around *Union of the Torus and the Sphere*. I was intrigued, both physically and intellectually, by the curve Serra induced in that space.

I went downstairs and found *Torqued Ellipses*. “Can I go in?” I asked the museum assistant, not knowing what to expect out of the giant sheets of steel.

“Of course.”

I could not stop
moving in between
the patined steel

My heart pounded
fast

As I reached the center
all I could see was the ceiling
The outside felt remote

With a smile
I exclaimed
over and again

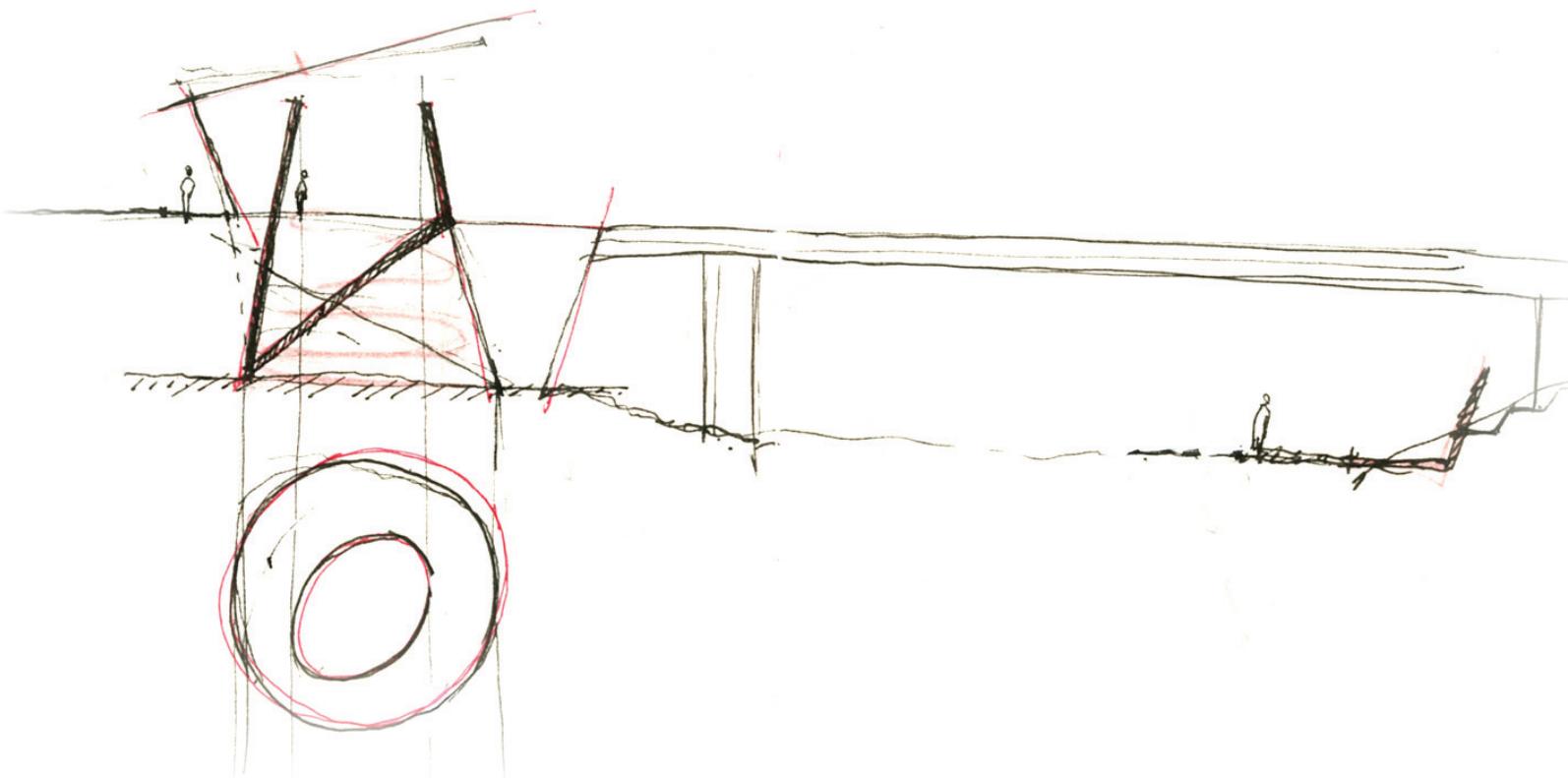
Wow.

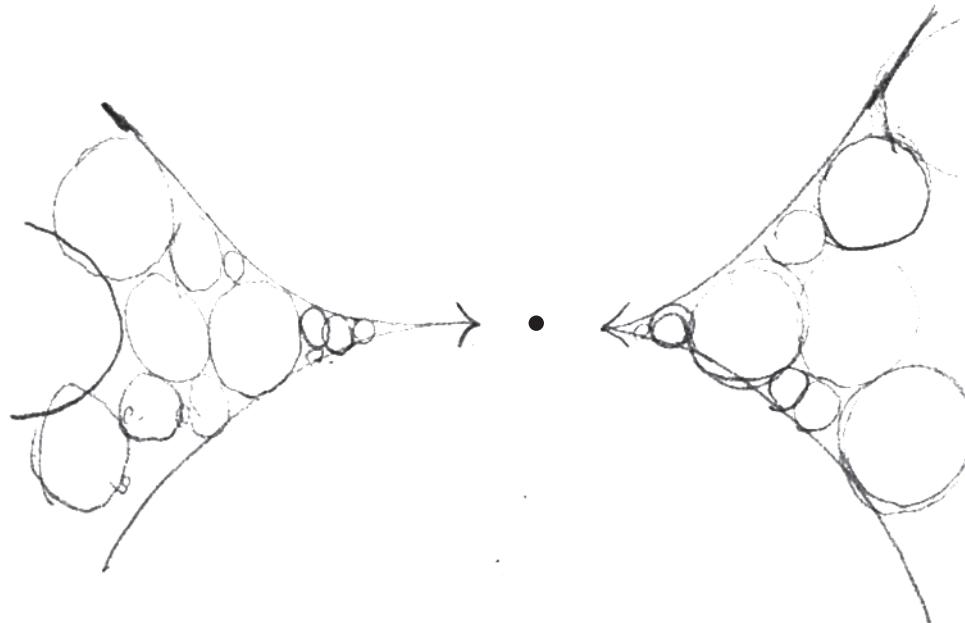


Richard Serra
Serpentine, 1993
Weatherproof steel, two units, each comprised of two conical
sections, each section: 13'2" x 52" (4 x 15.85 m); length overall:
104' (31.7 m); plate thickness 2" (5 cm).
Collection of Frances and John Bowes. Sonoma, California.

I encountered what I would call a religious experience. It is the physicality of religion - the ineffable sensation that you are experiencing something different from the ordinary life - that makes you understand what it is.

It is visceral.





The one amazing thing I found out about architecture as a discipline is the amount of synthesis involved in the design process, which happens on many levels. First of all the architect experiences life as a person. She travels and cooks and reads. She recognizes what is beautiful and remembers it. Then the architect meets a set of constraints presented in a specific project: program, site, budget, et cetera. She asks many questions: what are the qualities of the site? What are the challenges? What speaks to the local yet contemporary vernacular? By constantly organizing what she knows and learning what she does not, the architect **crystallizes knowledge**

into something
meaningful in the
built landscape.

I chose South Pleasant Street among two other sites because the location is fitting for what I try to convey through architecture. The recently-built Cross Street Bridge has created new typology in Middlebury, offering new view points, travel routes and room for conversations. It opens up the west facade of buildings on the creek side of the street. The Buddhist space, nestled in what is now part of downtown Middlebury, becomes a highly accessible and visible place.

Cross Street Bridge

20 ft
N

“

In contrast to the generally iconic nature of Buddhist art in Asia, the emergence of Buddhism in Western culture has generated the potential for another metamorphosis, another turning of the wheel. Rather than repeating the same forms over and over again, today's artists, Eastern and Western, have the opportunity to reinterpret Buddhist insights in a contemporary context.

”

Mark Epstein, *Sip My Ocean*
in *Contemporary Mind and Buddhist Art*

The form of a temple reinforces cultural stereotypes. It speaks a language of ancient Asia with an “iconic nature,” as Epstein pointed out, that once expressed local ideas and ideologies. When building in an environment outside the locality with the same set of vocabulary, architecture is reduced to mere visual symbols instead of real experiences. It loses its depth and becomes unattainable.

When I visited the temple in Chinatown on the thesis trip, it reminded me of my childhood experiences - only this time it was in New York. The motifs which would be common in China felt strangely out of place in lower Manhattan, as if someone had tried to transplant one culture into another. The temple provides a worshipping and gathering place for the Chinese immigrants, which contributes to the building of that specific community. Although not a choice by the residents, such enclave community excludes, and is excluded by, people who come from other cultural backgrounds.

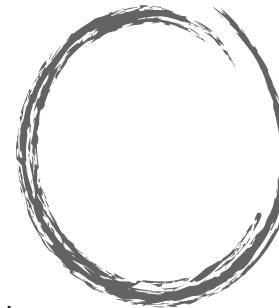
To build a Buddhist space in Middlebury “in the contemporary context,” therefore, is to rethink about the term community and its relationship to the religion. How would the space of a relatively foreign religion engage the local cultural rhythm? How would the community embrace the unfamiliar and remain open-minded in using the space?

The Buddhist space in Middlebury should thus be different from what is considered traditional - both in form and in program. It welcomes people with different backgrounds; from those who have been practicing a certain sect of Buddhism to those who are just interested in learning more about the religion in general. The space facilitates mutual learning, breaking the barrier between

the inside and the outside.



When I started to
I had studied my
envisioned a form that
from street level to a
realized that the form
It called for an organization
path. The space is unfolded through different levels with a continuous thread.
Each level serves a distinctive function, each requiring different spatial qualities.



concretize the program,
sloping site and had
gradually ramped down
lower elevation. I
itself indicated circulation.
of spaces along the descending

spiritual

Buddha hall 30 
courtyard 30 

social

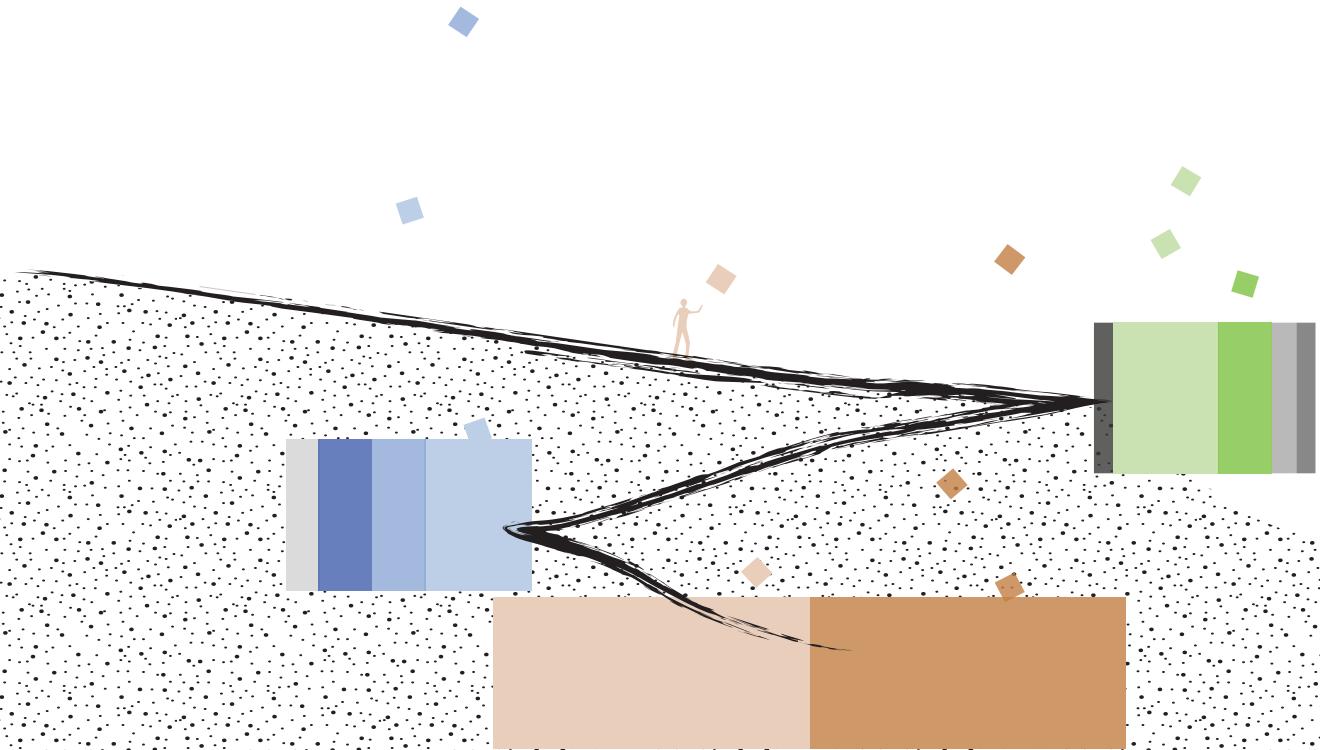
kitchen 6 
dining room 12 

educational

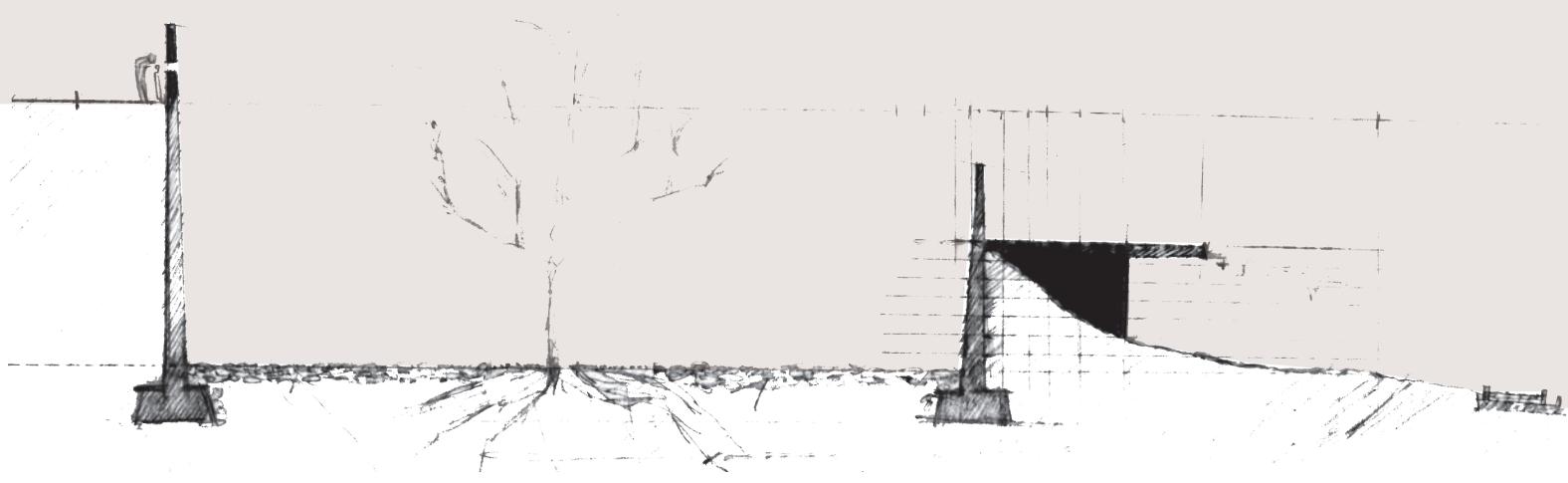
bookshop 6 
reading room 6 
classroom 18 

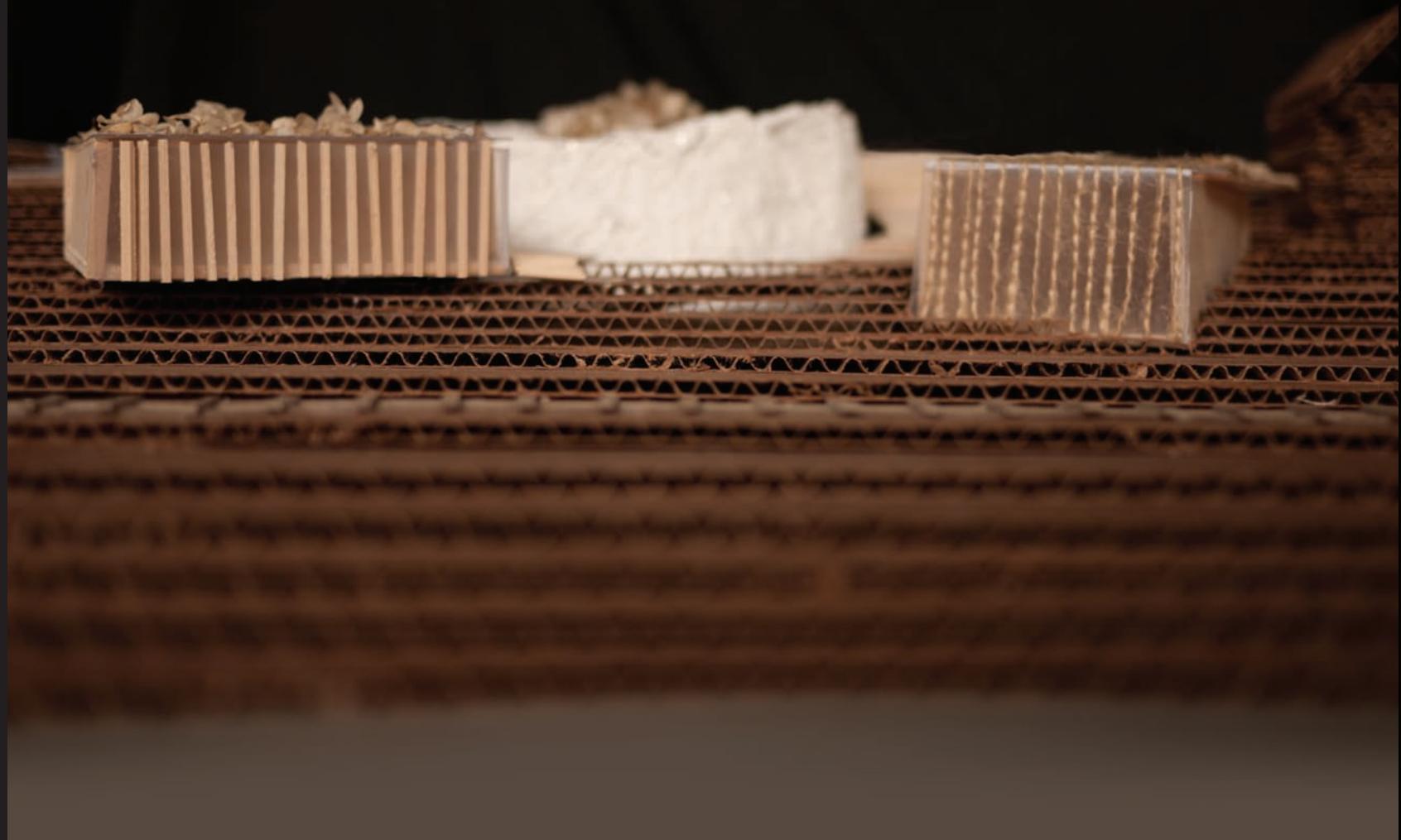
logistical

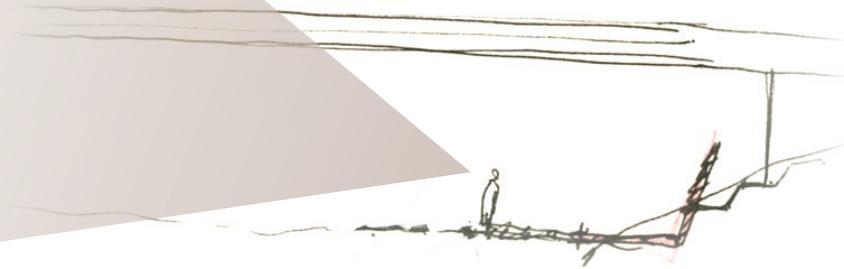
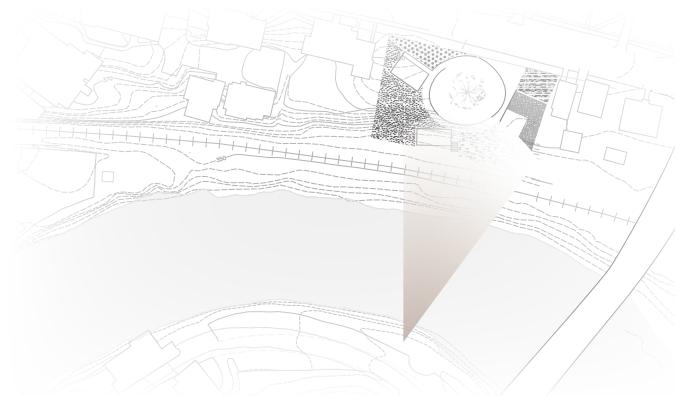
office 2 
bathroom 2 
storage 3 
guest room 3 

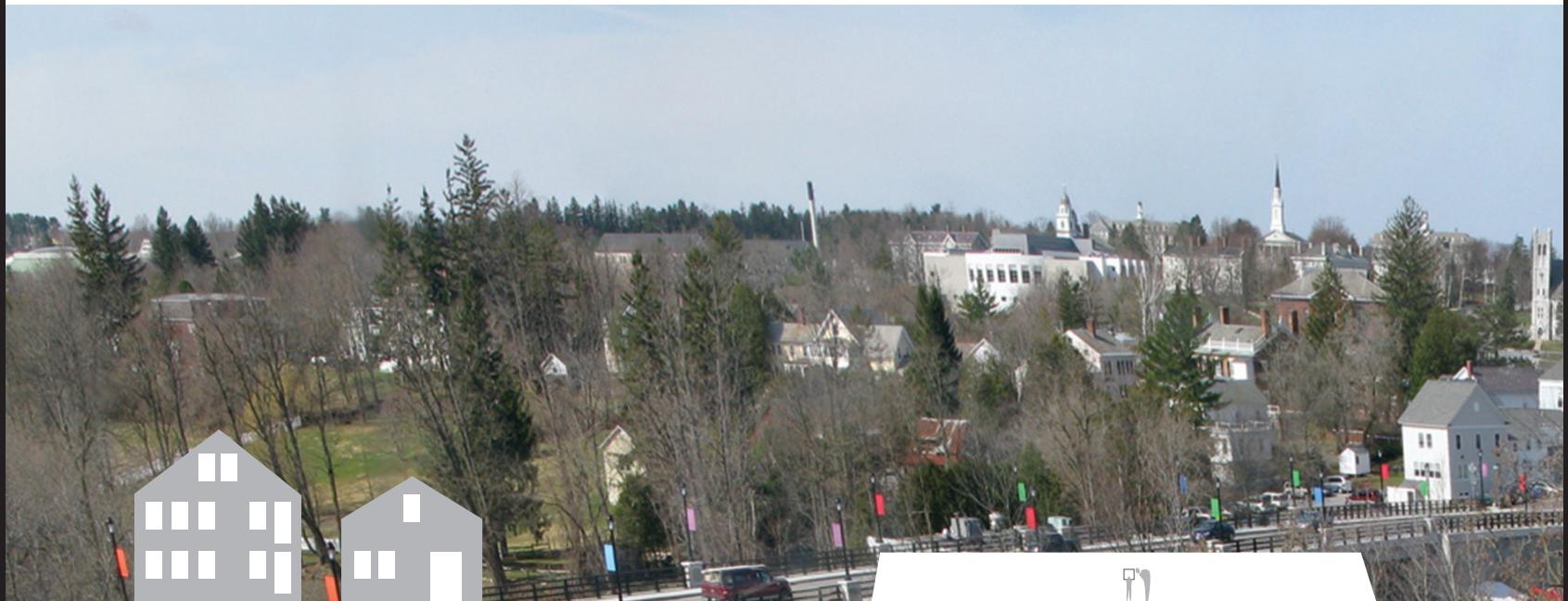






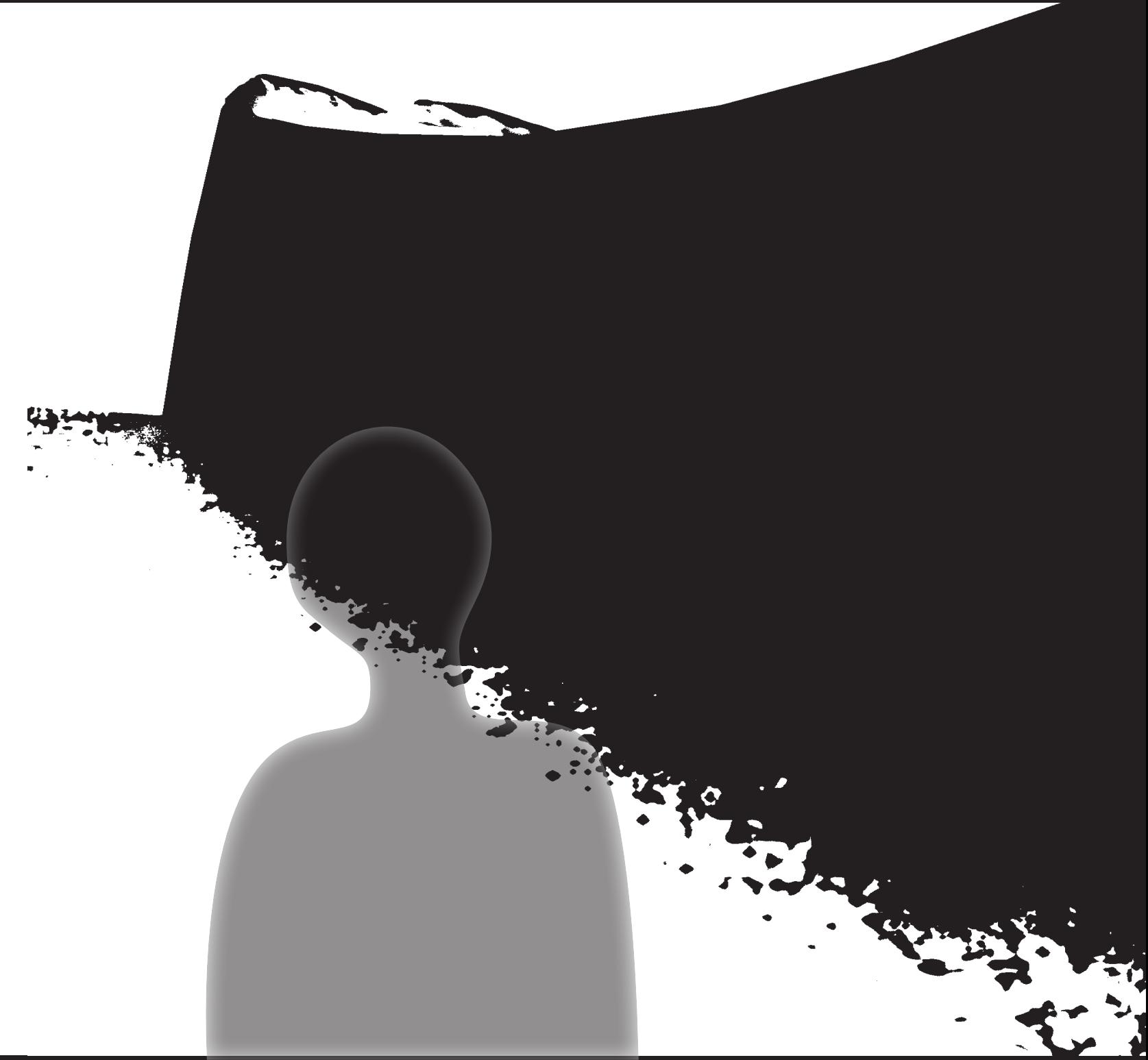






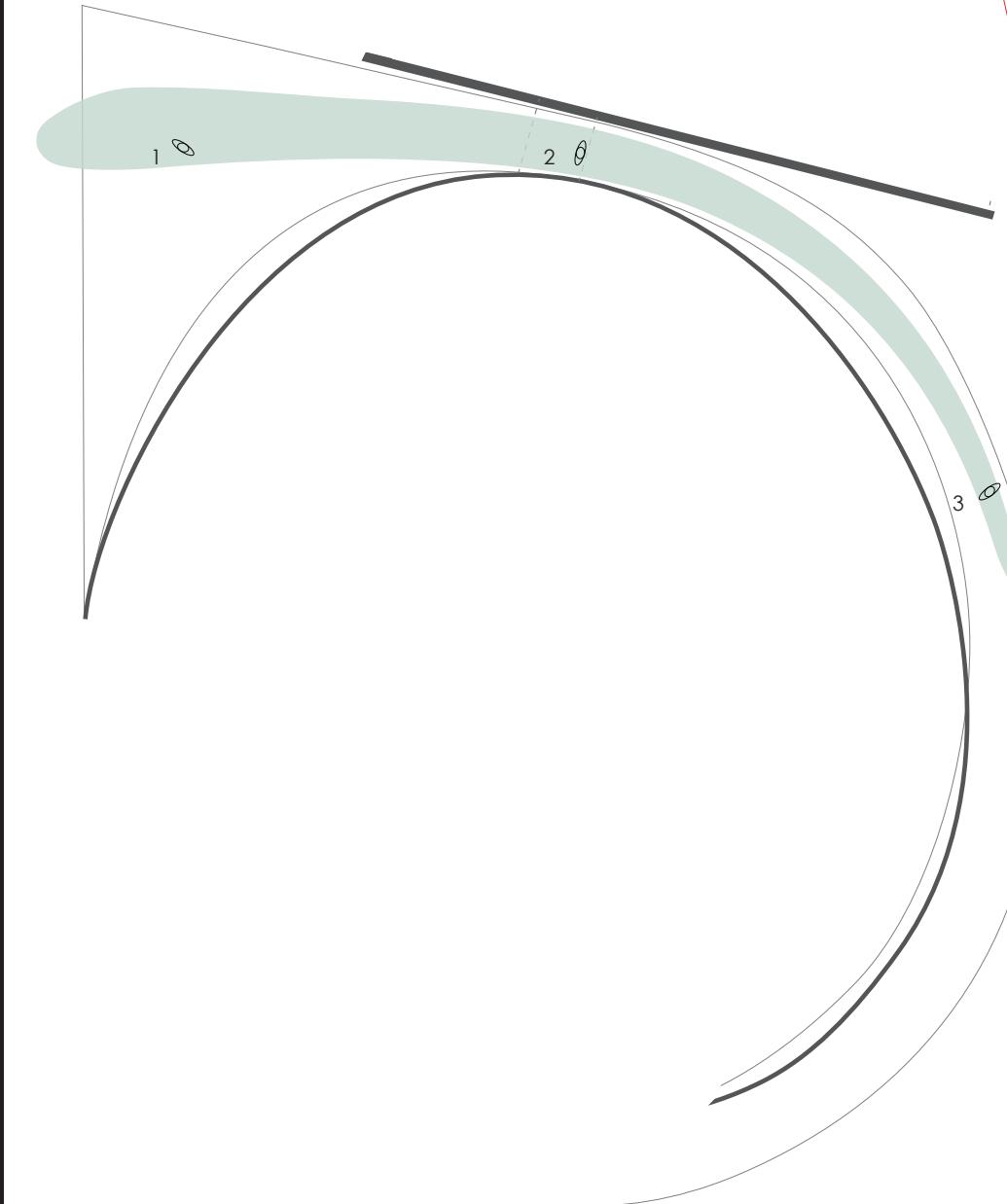


The building of the Buddhist space opens the view toward Main Street from the east. This view, capturing a previously unseen part of downtown Middlebury, adds a new perception of the local geography.



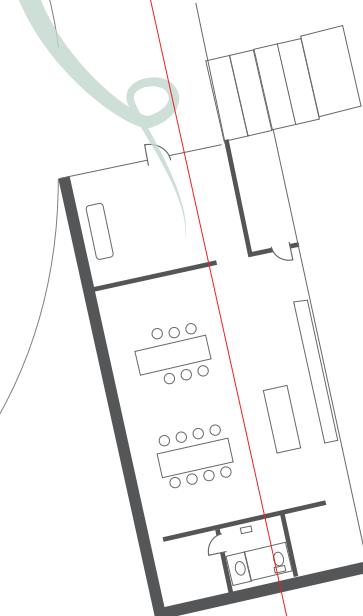


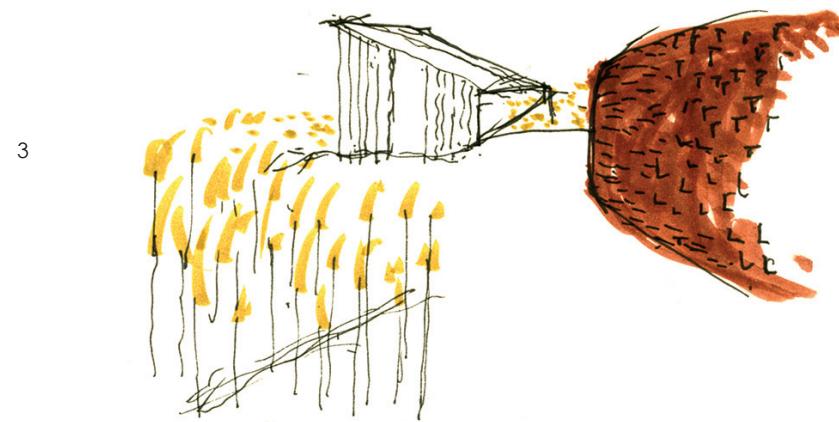
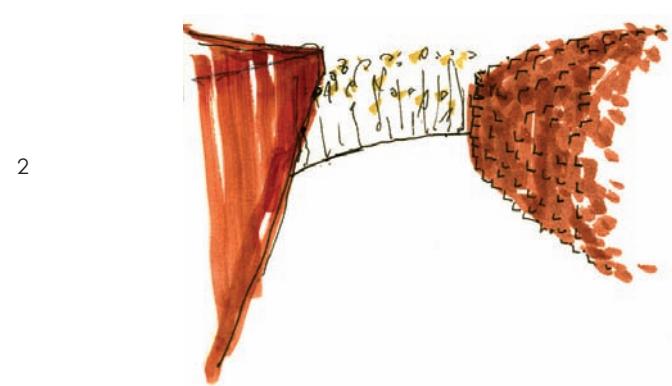
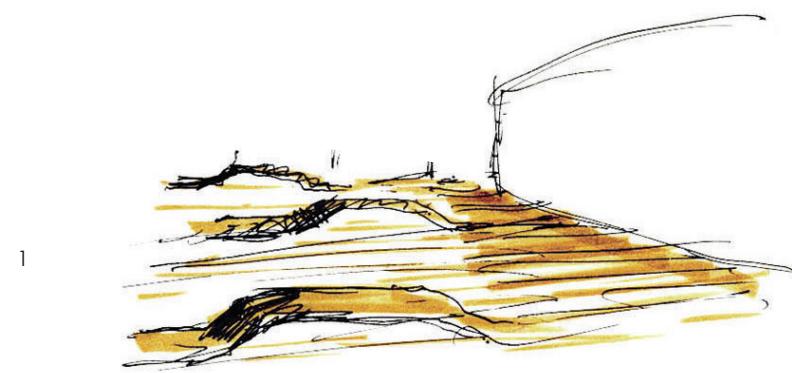
The architect imagines.



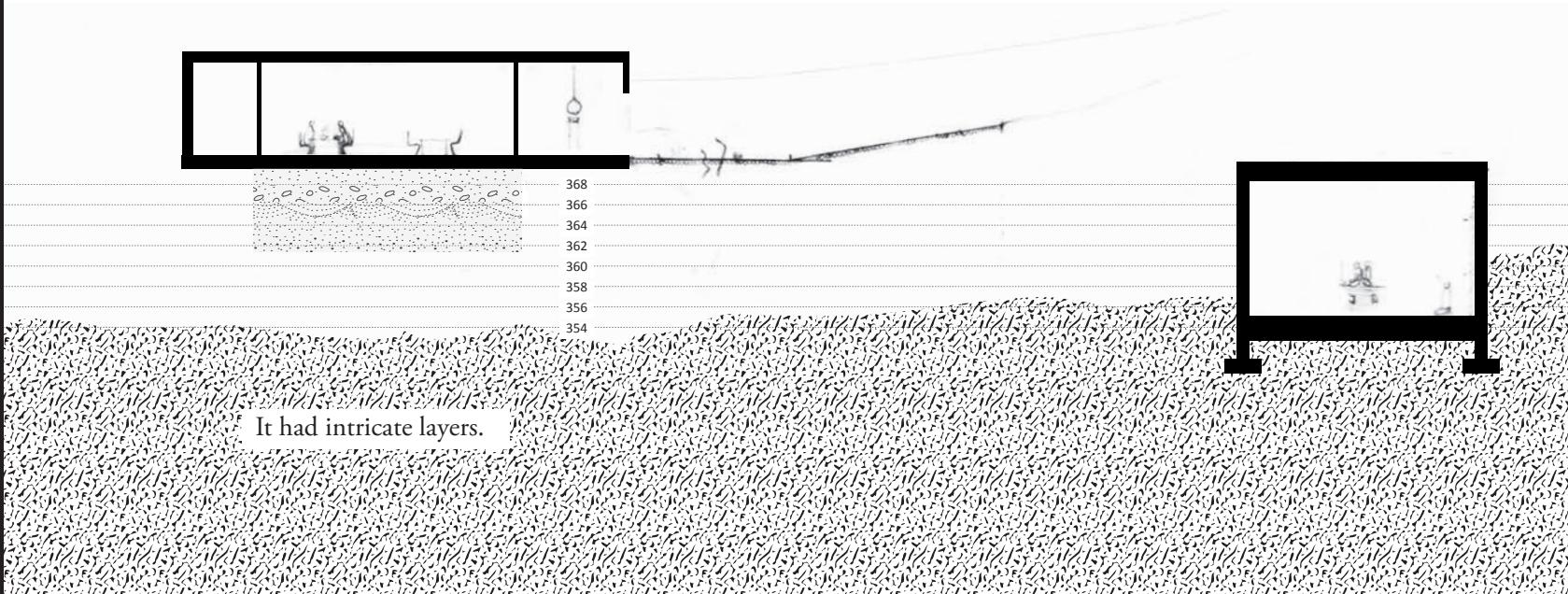
I walked down the wooden path. It did not feel like a path until a wall emerged on my left, then a sea of maiden grass ahead of me. Their sand-colored flower heads waved softly in the air. I slowed down my footsteps and started counting as I descended.

One, two, three. On the twenty-third step I entered the building.

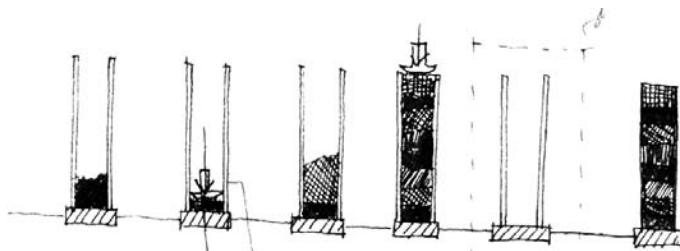




The kitchen was spacious - big enough to seat twenty people. The foundation was built on the earth excavated from the building process.



 RAMMED
EARTH

moist earth:

- sand.
- gravel.
- clay.
- concrete

reinforced plywood frame

pneumatic backfill tamper

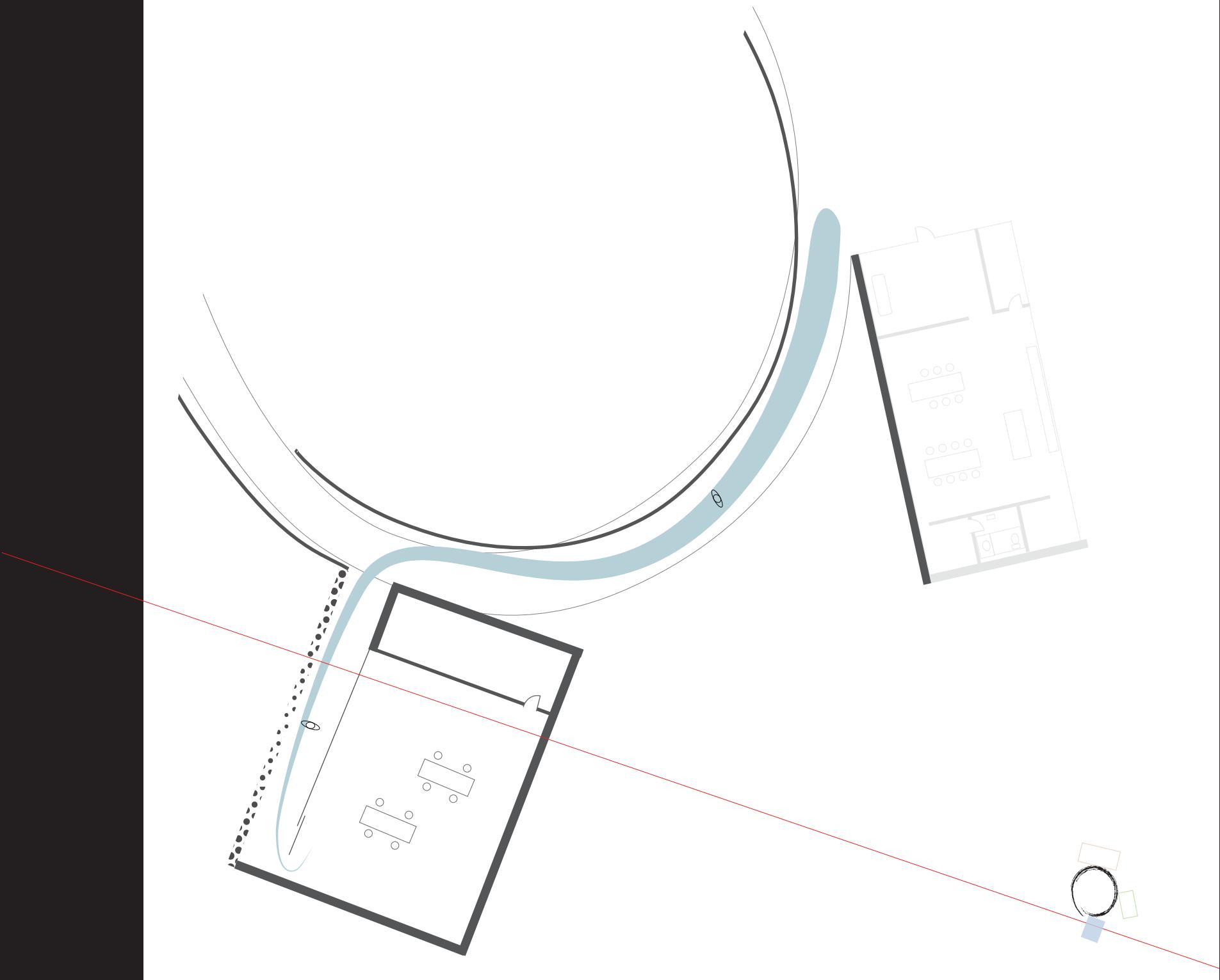
Step 1:
framework
is built &
a layer of
moist earth
is filled in

Step 2:
+1st layer of
moist earth
is compressed

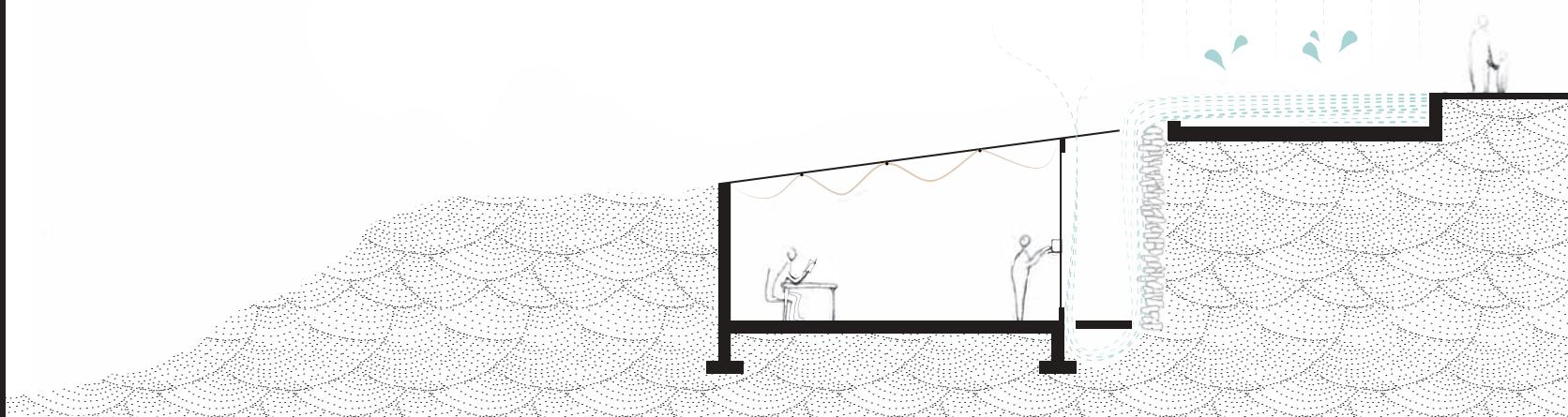
Step 3:
next layer
of moist
earth is
added.

Step 4:
successive layers
of moist earth
are added & are
compressed

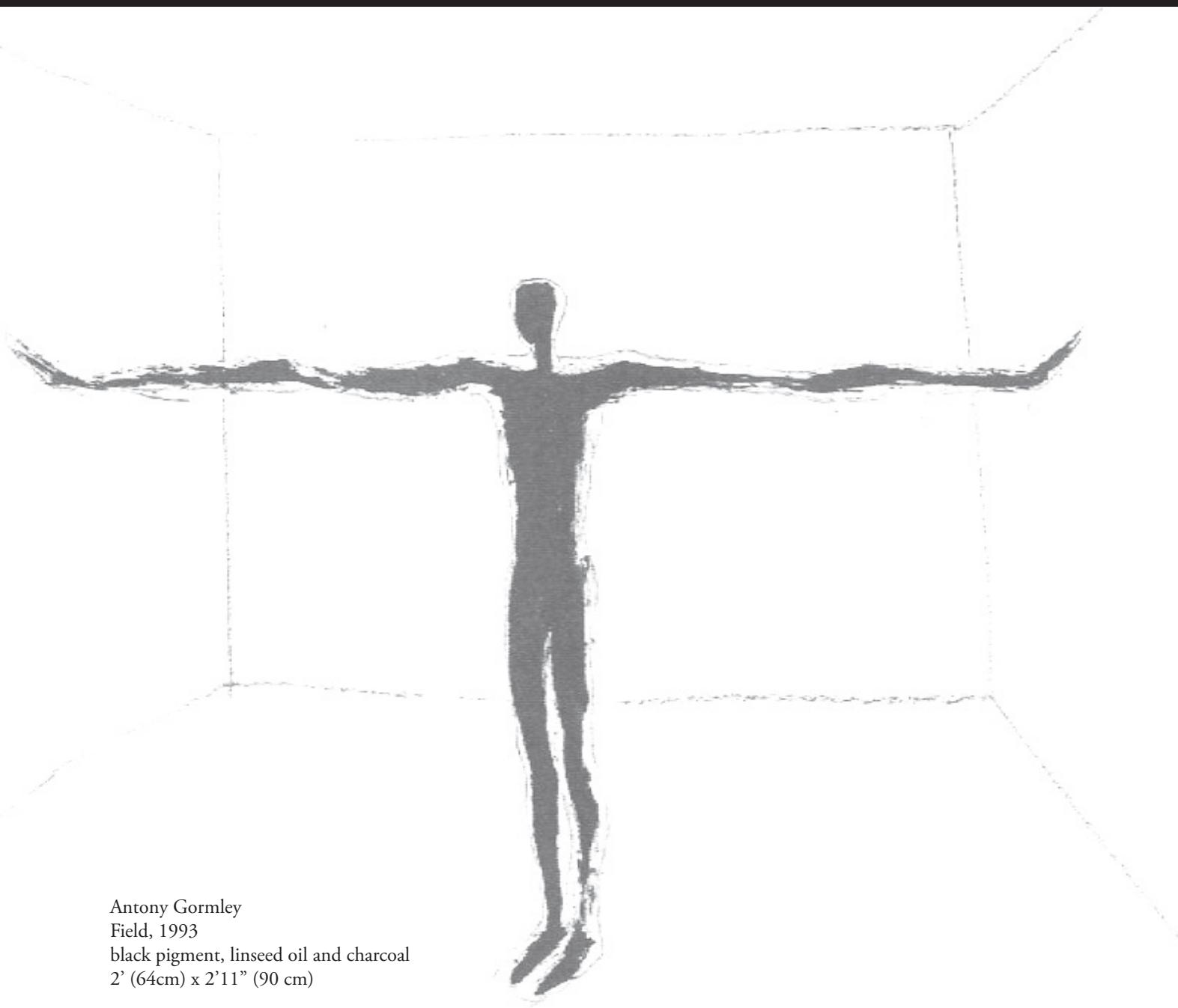
Step 5:
framework is removed.
leaving the rammed earth
wall.



The sutra hall was soft and quiet.
Tan linen hung from the ceiling.
A shallow pool at the street level
collected water when it rained - the
same water that fed the tall grass.



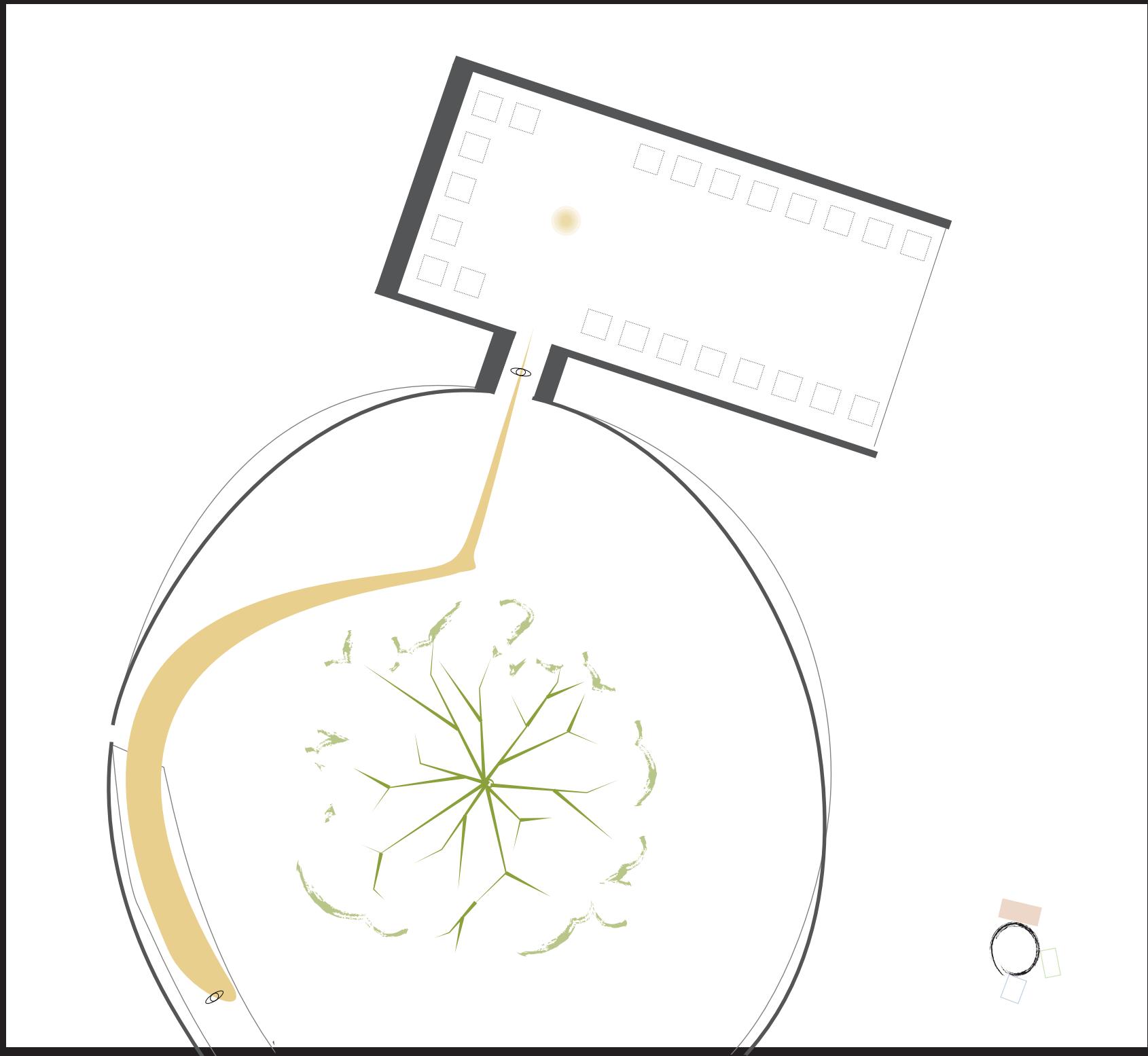


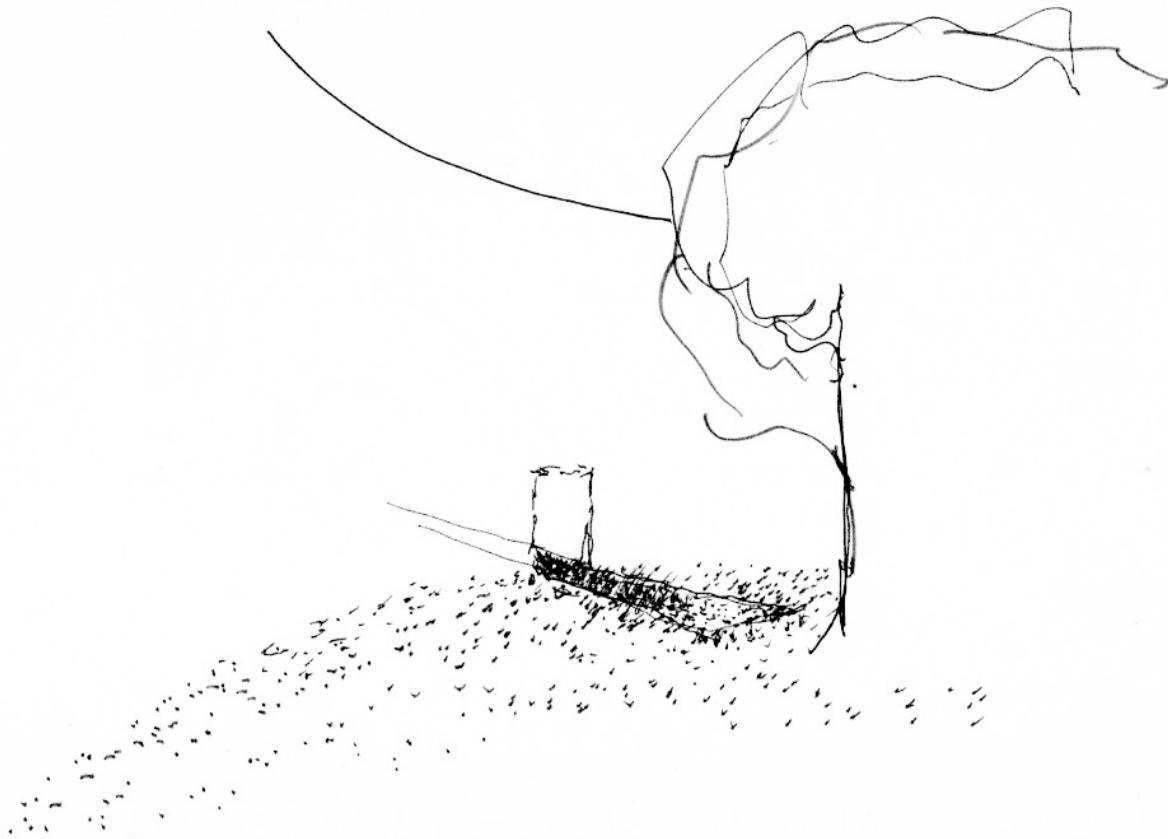


Antony Gormley
Field, 1993
black pigment, linseed oil and charcoal
2' (64cm) x 2'11" (90 cm)

This is the back of the vellum page

Snowmelt dripped down the stone wall.
Plip, plop, plip. Spring travels at 16 miles every day.
My left hand ran through the grass. They rustled as
my footsteps led me to the wooden door.





I picked up the rake next to the beech tree,
their silver leaves rattling in the wind.

“Find your own path,” said the sign.



silence

a warm breeze
and
a full moon





Afterword

Compiling the thesis book is another layer of synthesis. The book is not only a curation of the design process, but also a conscious reflection on how I think and communicate as an architect. Indeed, architecture can be as encompassing as you would like it to be. Every project elicits values that add to what you have previously known. In this sense, the architect never stops learning. The reservoir of knowledge stretches over space and time from which the architect retrieves bits and pieces every time she designs.

Jim Cutler, the visiting architect of my intermediate studio in 2009, once told me he would draw all day in order to think. This statement bewildered me for a long time. But now I know - and have been practicing - what he said. What an architect values is embedded in her drawings.



The connection between each volume is realized via vegetation.

A field of reeds waving in the air.
verb + noun.



Something stable
low-grown shrub.
offers a view, but
no physical access.
soft.

Something delicate
~~(resistant)~~ as poppy.
seasonal wild flowers)



fairy cue



As I went through the sketchbooks I have kept throughout the class, I found patterns of thinking in which nuanced thoughts inform big ideas. Passages I wrote in the back of a car, quick portraits I drew for my friend at a restaurant, and metaphors that I felt compelled to visualize - they have all become part of my thinking. I have published my sketchbooks on a digital magazine platform to supplement this book with the link:

issuu.com/jueyang



The final presentation for this project happened on April 15th, 2011, in which I experimented with representation methods that included senses other than sights. The CD in the back of the book contains two soundtracks I created for the presentation. I consider them as important as the visual rendering because architecture itself engages the whole body.

On a recent walk
in the woods

I put my hands deep down the mulch
along the stream
and pulled out
the roots of the ramps

Spring ephemeral
people call them

I took a deep breath -
my hands smelt of earth.



All writings and graphics by Jue Yang unless cited otherwise. 2011.

