

2023

# Miscellaneous Architectural Explorations

EDITION THREE

Dankitecture's Architectural Universe

**What is this?**

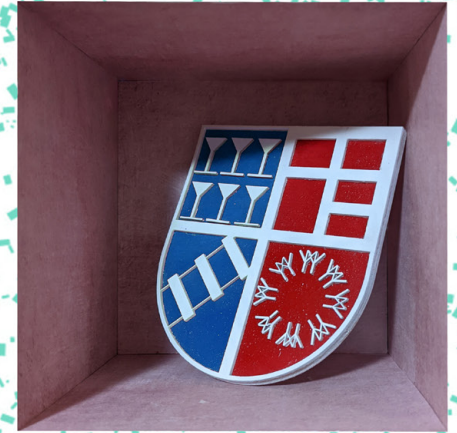
Well, that's a good question. I suppose it's an architectural portfolio.  
Something to document my academic projects.  
Something to promote myself and my ideas.  
Hopefully something that'll land me an job.  
Who knows, something that may even land me a built project or two someday.

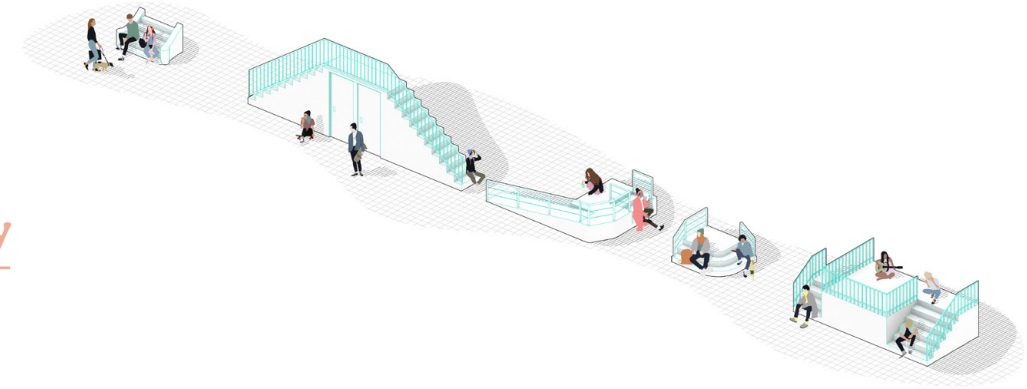
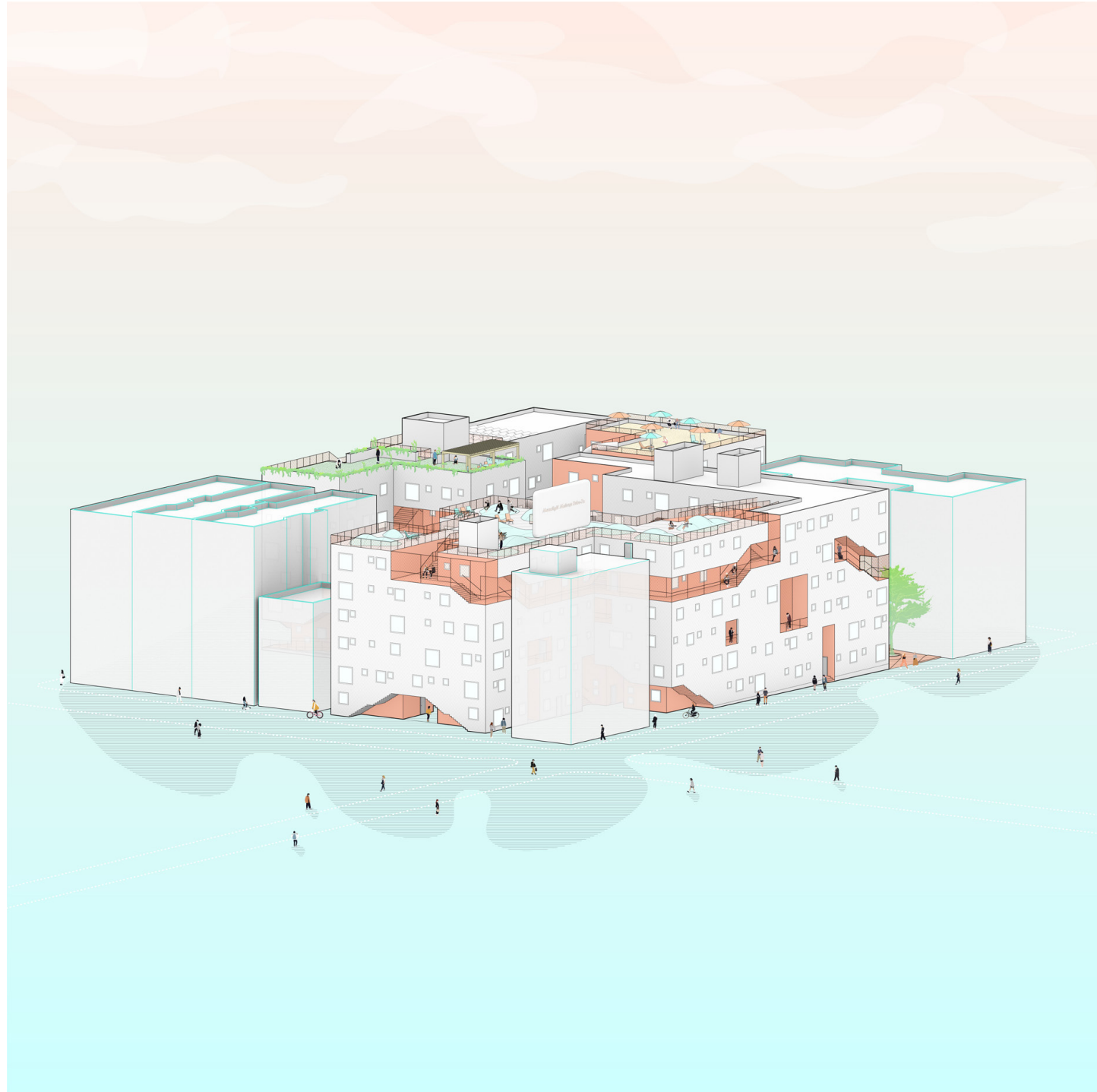
This is where I used to include my take on the architect's personal statement. My manifesto. How I believed in an architecture where form follows fun. Where I embrace the thoughtfully wacky and whimsical. Where somehow in some universe I thought that this would create a better and brighter future for all of us.

But forget about that. I'm not here to speak superfluously about what my architectural interests are and how I aspire to change the world through design. What student of architecture doesn't? Although maybe I'm actually not detailing what my interests are and what the theme of this portfolio is because I can't exactly pinpoint what it is anymore. Not to build too much on the trope of the architect who believes that each of their projects is unique and contain no aesthetic or conceptual similarities, but I guess this portfolio is meant to be an honest and somewhat raw view into how my architectural process works.

A portal into Dan's brain. A bit non-hierarchical. A lot non-linear. Hopefully a little fun.

Welcome to my cabinet of curiosities.





## Stoop City

**Semester:** Fall

**Year:** 2020

**Class:** Studio III

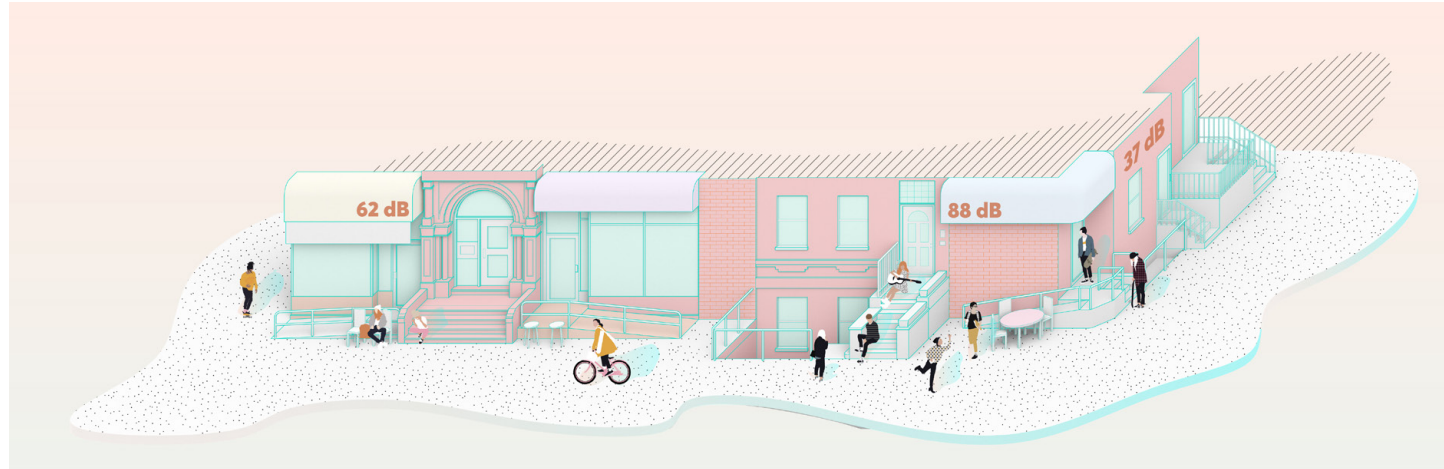
**Type:** Multi-Unit Residence

**Studio Critic:** Hilary Sample

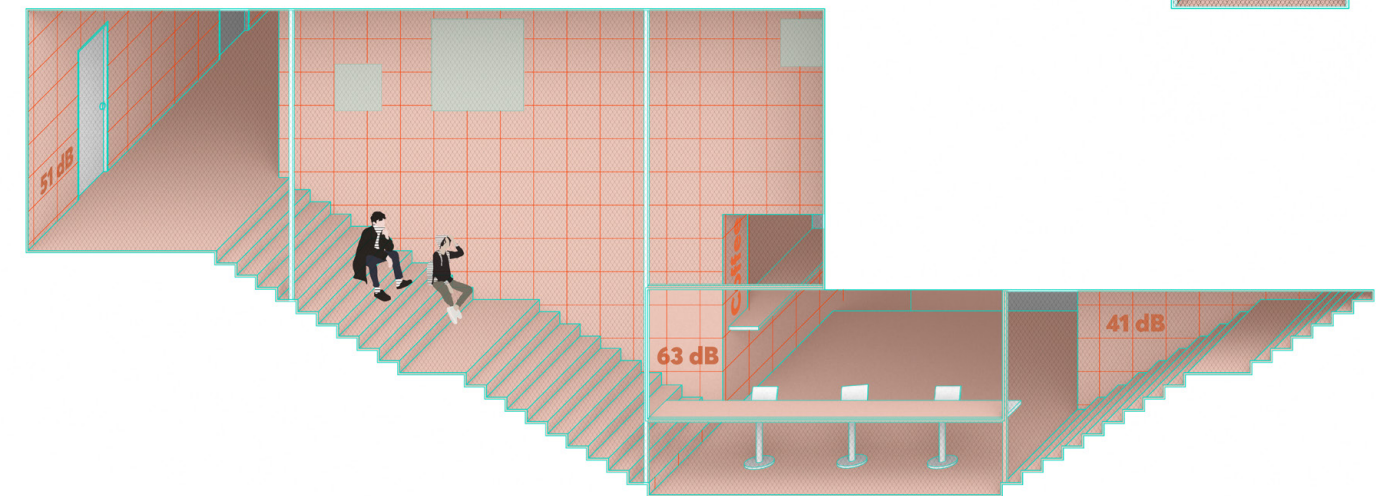
**Partner:** Jonathan Chester

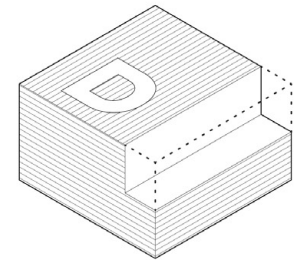
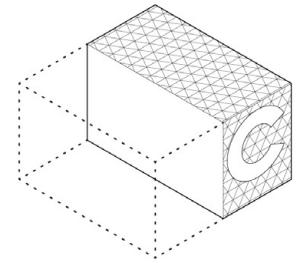
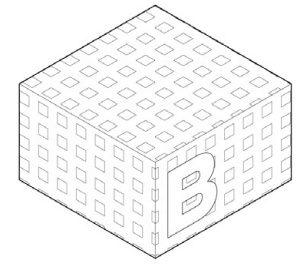
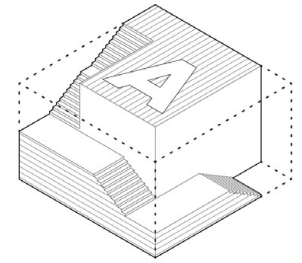
What makes a housing project an interesting environment to inhabit? What's stopping a building from being explored the way a city's streets can be explored? Where visitors and local residents alike can endlessly wander through the winding corridors. Stoop City is a housing project in the Bronx that attempts to create an environment full of wonder and excitement in its public realm. An environment that draws you in with its own unique flavors, smells, and noises. Its 4 standardized module types each with distinct circulatory routes combine in near-infinite configurations to create a variety of unique stoop-like conditions. This abstraction of the stoop throughout the circulation of the building allows the corridors to act as social engagement spaces.

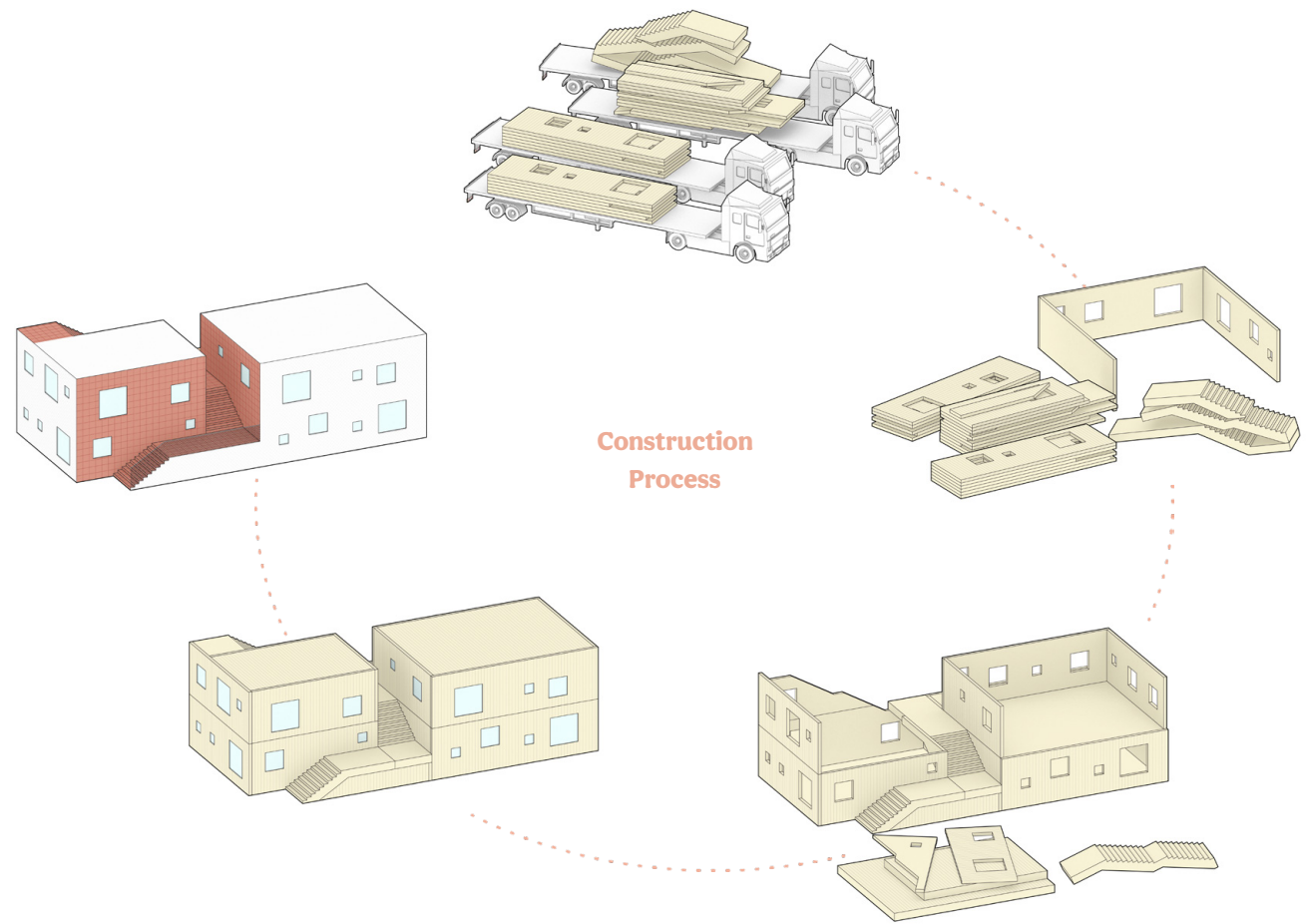
Spaces to enjoy a slice of pizza. Spaces to enjoy the music of a local artist. Spaces to play a game of chess. Spaces to meet new people. Spaces to explore...



Acoustic analysis of the sidewalk conditions prevalent throughout the Melrose neighborhood of the Bronx (left page). Followed by a series of vignettes illustrating how the conditions necessary for such spaces of informal social interaction have been replicated in Stoop City via a network of winding and weaving corridors.







The cork-clad CLT shear walls of the 2-storey modules create complete acoustic segregation between units, allowing for a great diversity of work/live/study living scenerios next to one another.



## Sargatopia



An urbanism fostered from a community reliant on a natural, carbon sequestering material?

Sargatopia is a coastal Caribbean community deeply tied to Sargassum, a macro-algae that has grown uncontrollably in the Atlantic Ocean over the past decade. It is sourced before it reaches the Puerto Rican shores, after which it is processed to create raw material for construction blocks. The blocks offer low embodied carbon along with opportunities to experiment with load bearing masonry construction. After agreeing upon a localized building and ethical framework, members are given the freedom to build on their own, resulting in a ground up, iterative approach that can explore new ways of living in an eco-based urbanism.

**Semester:** Fall

**Year:** 2022

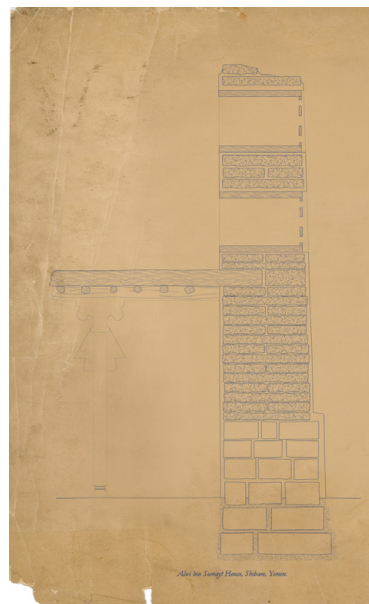
**Class:** Studio V

**Program:** Urbanism Model & Material Prototype

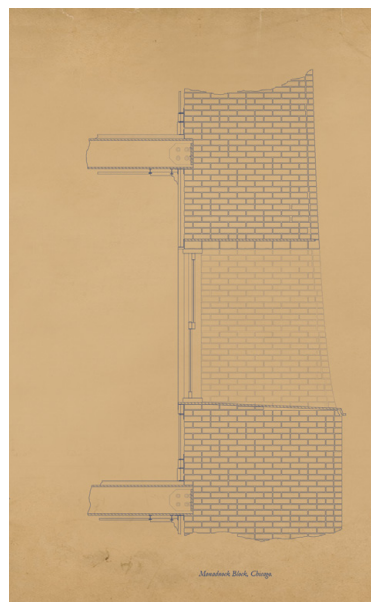
**Studio Critic:** David Benjamin

**Partner:** Haseeb Amjad

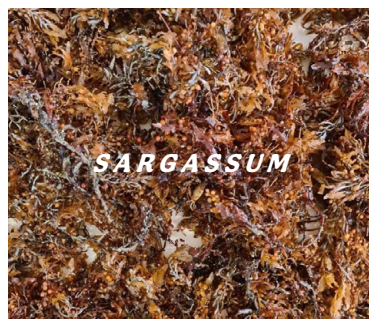
*Encyclopedia*



*of load-bearing*



*masonry walls*



*SARGASSUM*







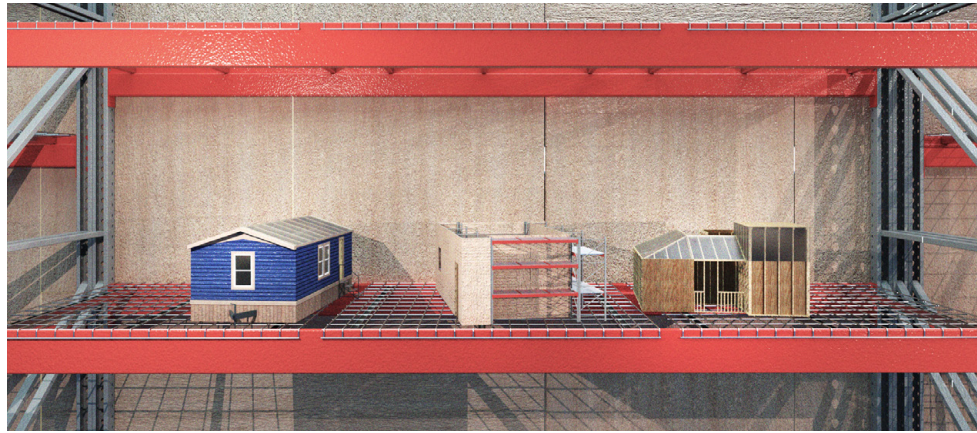
The central totem mythologizes the ethical and construction framework for the community. A code of laws: those instructing how to live, and those instructing how to build.

From this central totem and surrounding workshop, the community will gradually grow beyond. Nico will build an affordable housing complex of sarga-brick. Sammy will build a rammed-earth style chapel. Alex and Gina will attempt to 3-d print house.

Some will succeed. Others will fail and get washed away by the salty tide.



As such is the story of life on the Sargatopian shores of Puerto Rico.



## Thinking Inside the Box

**Semester:** Spring

**Year:** 2023

**Class:** Studio VI

**Type:** Big box store adaptive re-use

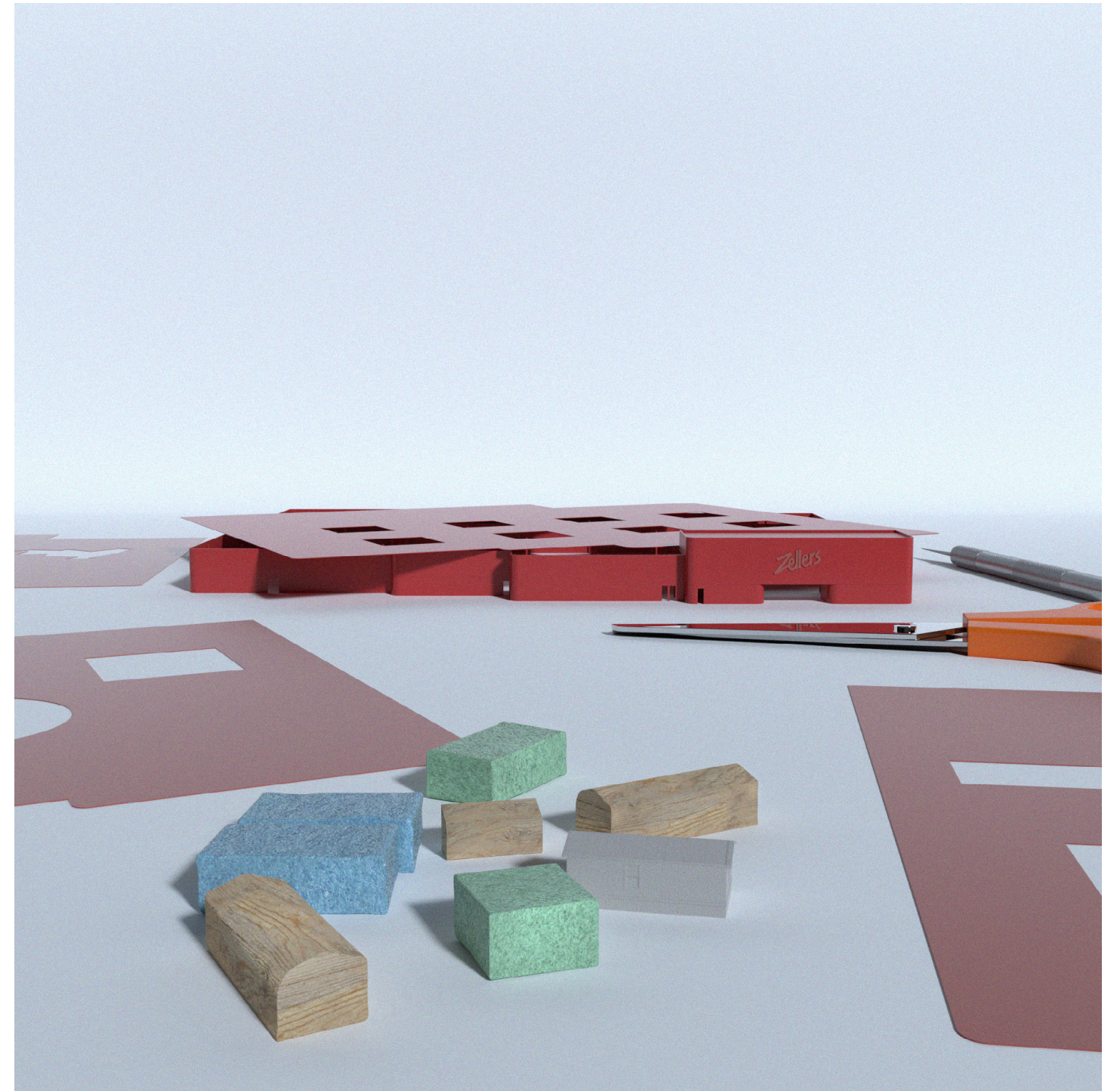
**Studio Critics:** Olga Aleksakova & Joel McCullough

**Location:** Waterdown, Canada / any suburban hellscape

This is not an adaptive re-use of a suburban big box store into a residential building. It's an inquiry into how and why we value what we value.

Is there a future possible where we embrace big box stores for their architectural heritage and value? Not just in a surface level way that fetishizes their cool 90's graphics and vibes, but in a way that uses and actually builds upon their organizational logic and architecture itself? Living in off-the-shelf housing under the drop ceiling of a big old box store. It would be a wild time.









# UNITY OF CHURCH & REAL ESTATE:

The Means by which Trinity Parish Became a Commercial Real Estate Power in New York City

Written By:

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d j v 2 1 3 6

Under the Advisory of:

*Prof. Kate Ascher & Prof. Thomas Mellins*

Produced for the Faculty of:

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PRESERVATION, AND PLANNING

NOVEMBER 2022



**Semester:** Fall

**Year:** 2022

**Class:** New York Rising

**Type:** Essay

**Advisors:** Kate Ascher & Thomas Mellins

*My apologies for an inconveniently long paper. As the old adage goes: I didn't have time to write a short paper, so I wrote a long one.*



*From the Durst Collection*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Sitting at the foot of Wall Street and Broadway in the Financial District of New York's lower Manhattan lies the historic Trinity Church. To the passerby and tourist, the sight of this brown sandstone chapel might appear an out-of-place object. Some might even perceive it to be a relic from a bygone era: an era when church steeples dominated colonial New York's skyline as both the tallest structures and highest goods to be served amongst the citizens. One cannot help but notice how its glory and splendor are now overshadowed by the glass modernist skyscrapers, who, with their corporate capitalist tenants, have come to represent the new America that has evolved from the small colony in which Trinity was first founded. The curiosity in this posturing lies in the fact that Trinity Parish is actually a corporate giant in its own right, owing most of its wealth to real estate development.

While one could understandably make the case for a faith-based organization getting involved in residential development as a way to serve the public good, it must be noted that the real estate that Trinity Church owes most of its wealth to is not residential, but commercial. And so it is here that one can ask: how and why did Trinity Church become a major commercial landlord in New York City? The answer to this question is simultaneously simple yet obscure, obvious yet a complex result of a half century's worth of politics, economics, development, and theology. Simply put, Trinity made the move to commercial real estate development because it was lucrative. However, more obscurely, it was the result of wily decision-making to redeem their image after 50 years of public scrutiny. Through investigating everything from Trinity's deep and storied history, to their era as a slumlord, to the theological arguments framing the Episcopalian worldview on the role of the church at the time, the underlying causes driving Trinity's transformation into a commercial real estate giant and one of the wealthiest churches in world will be examined.

## **II. HISTORY OF TRINITY PARISH**

In order to understand how Trinity became a commercial real estate landlord, one must first understand how Trinity became a real estate landlord to begin with, and to understand this necessitates one to understand the very history of Trinity Church right since its founding. The story begins in 1697; 71 years after the Dutch bought Manhattan from the Manates indigenous tribe in 1626 to establish a fur trading post on the southern tip<sup>1</sup>. After switching hands between the Dutch and British several times, Nieuw Amsterdam was now New York: a diverse and religiously tolerant town of about 5000 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>. The town housed about 20 places of worship, home to many congregations, including Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Lutheran, Huguenots, Quakers, Sabbatarians, Anti-Sabbatarians, Anabaptists, and Jews all living alongside each other<sup>3</sup>. However after the 'Glorious Revolution' caused religious upheaval in Europe, leading to the Protestant William of Oranje and Mary II coming to power in place of the Roman Catholic James II, religious tones began to shift in the New World<sup>4</sup>. These newly appointed European monarchs appointed Colonel Henry Sloughter to be the new governor of New York, with the mission to

<sup>1</sup> Dena Merriam and David Finn. "Trinity: A Church, a Parish, a People" (New York, NY: Cross River Press, 1996.), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



establish a strong Anglican presence in the colony, ordering him to ensure “that God Almighty be devoutly and duly served throughout your Government ... according to the rites of the Church of England”<sup>5</sup>. While Colonel Sloughter died the next year, his successor, the devout Anglican Benjamin Fletcher, helped the Church of England petition to purchase land so they could build their own house of worship in 1696<sup>6</sup>. After the petition was accepted by Fletcher, the Church chose William Vesey, the namesake of the lower Manhattan street, to be rector and they settled on a piece of land at the head of Wall Street as an appropriate site<sup>7</sup>. The former wall that gave Wall Street its name was long gone, but the site was still on what was then the outer extents of the town: it bordered the city’s burial grounds and beyond that lay plentiful apple and peach orchards in an agrarian setting<sup>8</sup>.

All of this is important because the land which Trinity grew from is integral to the story of how it became a real estate magnate in a city so intricately tied to real estate profits throughout history. In this year - 1697 - the Charter of the Parish of Trinity Church was granted in the name of King William III and the first church building was erected on its site in lower Manhattan<sup>9</sup>. As an attempt to further establish the church, Governor Fletcher subsequently granted it a lease of the King’s Farm, a large crown-owned property north of the city limits<sup>10</sup>. A few years later, in 1705, Queen Anne added a large plot of new acreage as a grant in perpetuity and from that point on, the land became known as the Queen’s Farm<sup>11</sup>. This incredibly large plot of land that Trinity was gifted from the Crown allowed it to become the second largest landowner in the colony after the Crown itself, and played a substantial role in Trinity’s rise to prominence over the next centuries.

### III. RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

Originally Trinity only gained low revenue on the Queen’s Farm land, mostly in the form of small scale tenants and a few farms comprising the majority of the 1000 lots<sup>12</sup>. However, a piece from the Architectural Record shows that after about 80 years, Trinity “grew tired of the small rents received from the land, and decided that if poor people would not move there, it would improve the property and make of it a fashionable neighborhood”<sup>13</sup>. In order to accomplish this, they chose to build St. John’s Chapel and the adjacent St. John’s park (which colloquially became known as Hudson Square), an elite private park they believed would serve as anchors attracting wealthy residents to their land.<sup>14</sup> It was during this decision in 1807 that Trinity first began acting as not only a landlord, but a developer in their own right - albeit one only involved in garnering residential land profits.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “When Trinity Ruled Lower Manhattan: Disney’s New Headquarters Site Was Once Home to the Church’s Empire,” *When Trinity Ruled Lower Manhattan: Disney’s New Headquarters Site Was Once Home to the Church’s Empire* (Washington, DC: Vox Media, 2018), <https://ny.curbed.com/2018/8/22/17764064/trinity-church-real-estate-history-hudson-square>.

<sup>13</sup> Rawson W Haddon, “St. John’s Chapel, Varick Street, New York City,” *Architectural Record, An Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Architecture and the Allied Arts and Crafts*, May 1914, pp. 389-404, 395.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Trinity’s venture into luxury residential development proved to be successful for quite some time, but eventually changing demographics and development patterns forced them to change their approach. The Hudson Square lots were initially slow to attract investment, but when Trinity erected an iron fence around the park - the exclusivity and private nature of the neighborhood was bolstered, thus allowing them to draw in the clientele and revenue they desired.<sup>15</sup> While the neighborhood served as an upscale enclave throughout the early 19th century, its prosperity began to wane as development along Fifth Ave gradually began to draw many of the city’s elite upper class farther north.<sup>16</sup> The middle decades of the 19th century were a time of great migration, growth, and technological change in America, the effects of which were felt especially strongly in New York. As masses of immigrants - hailing from Germany, Ireland, and Italy - were sailing into the ports of lower Manhattan, the wealthy elite of Trinity’s parishioners were moving further and further uptown.<sup>17</sup> The hollowed out neighborhoods left abandoned in Hudson Square by the wealthy served as the prime real estate for the often low-income newcomers to settle down in.<sup>18</sup> Again, these migrations were indicative of greater changes happening across American society at the time. An era of increased socioeconomic stratification that juxtaposed the exuberant glamor of grand mansions, high society, and philanthropy with the exorbitant growth of dangerous working environments, mass unemployment, and last but not least - the tenement house.<sup>19</sup> It was this inescapable inequality across American society that served as a chief spark lighting the fuse of a powder keg of religious and moral debates that ensued in the New York Episcopal Church during the latter half of the 19th century; a move that ultimately led to Trinity leaving residential real estate, along with its moral quandaries, altogether for the world of commercial development.

### IV. THEOLOGICAL DEBATES

While this expose primarily examines a real estate development issue from the lens of an urbanist, the real estate in which it examines is owned and developed by a religious organization, and so the theological tenets underlying the reasons for this development cannot and should not be ignored. The chief theological matter that underlies Trinity’s shift out of residential real estate is the result of a schism that formed in the New York Episcopal Church in the late 19th century. Before this schism, there were certainly intense theological debates the diverse denomination faced throughout history, but it primarily retained one unified identity and set of values. Trinity had allied herself with New York’s ruling class, becoming what Elizabeth Mensch refers to as a “bastion of Tory power and privilege” out of which figures like Alexander Hamilton and John Jay emerged.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this was inherent in the Church’s mission since its very inception, which some claim was expressly structured by the British

<sup>15</sup> “When Trinity Ruled Lower Manhattan: Disney’s New Headquarters Site Was Once Home to the Church’s Empire,” *When Trinity Ruled Lower Manhattan: Disney’s New Headquarters Site Was Once Home to the Church’s Empire* (Washington, DC: Vox Media, 2018), <https://ny.curbed.com/2018/8/22/17764064/trinity-church-real-estate-history-hudson-square>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Dena Merriam and David Finn. “Trinity: A Church, a Parish, a People” (New York, NY: Cross River Press, 1996.), 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, “Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church,” *Buffalo Review* 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 429.

to “quell democratic disorder and promote hierarchy and authority in the province.”<sup>21</sup> Regardless, the Church had remained unified throughout her long history, despite religious revivals such as the Great Awakening and the Anti-British sentiment following the American revolution.<sup>22</sup>

It was only during the aforementioned socioeconomic stratification and political division of the 19th century that the Church began to fracture and split. At this point, Trinity operated up to 8 separate parishes throughout the city, serving as their mother church.<sup>23</sup> Reverend William Rainsford - an Episcopalian minister that served St. George’s Parish (a subsidiary of Trinity) - began to distance himself from Trinity, citing that “Trinity’s refusal to use more of her wealth to benefit the poor [was] a disgrace.”<sup>24</sup> Rainsford became increasingly critical of the ‘haughty and imperious’ Trinity Church and their rector - Dr. Morgan Dix - disagreeing on the Church’s role in society and the notion of whether the Kingdom of God was here on earth or in the metaphysical realm.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Dr. Dix retained more of a traditional conservative perspective aligned with the ‘high church’, Reverend Rainsford held the belief that the Church ought to serve the public good to the greatest extent as a way of serving God whilst on earth.<sup>26</sup> For Rainsford, this meant administering social outreach to many of the poor and impoverished citizens of the new immigrant class that were arriving in New York at this time. It also meant taking aim at powerful corporations and landlords with undue political influence - including Trinity - that he believed were neglecting the needs of the neediest in society. Dr. Dix and many of his theological contemporaries differed from Rainsford in that they believed it was typically either a result of their own laziness or God’s unfortunate providence that the poor were poor, and that the often dire conditions that the poor lived in could be attributed to their immorality and lack of faith in God.<sup>27</sup> A sarcastically written excerpt from Dr. Dix’s personal diary details the extent to which the two men disagreed:

*“Mr. Rainsford was very earnest as usual; announced himself as a “Christian Communist;” . . . inveighed against piling up enormous fortunes. He also wanted rich men to buy up the tenement house blocks, pull them down, build good houses for people & be content with 4% instead of 14%; and rich women to go as district visitors & city missionaries. He also said that he had been at some of the meetings of the Socialists in this city.... He also eulogized the self-sacrifice and devotion of the Nihilists, saying that they renounced everything, and braved every danger, simply with the aim of helping people whom they pitied as pure and trodden down.”*<sup>28</sup>

The grave divide between these two men cannot be understated. It was not a mere debate contained within the halls of seminaries and chapels, but eventually led to Rainsford leading the charge in a series of attacks that drew massive media attention, public scrutiny, and eventually legal action against Trinity Church.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Dena Merriam and David Finn. “Trinity: A Church, a Parish, a People” (New York, NY: Cross River Press, 1996.), 36.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, “Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church,” *Buffalo Review* 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 549.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 548.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 549.

## V. PUBLIC SCRUTINY

For clarification, Rev. Rainsford's heaviest criticism of Trinity's tenement house dealings in 1894 was not the beginning of the public scrutiny directed towards Trinity, but perhaps the climax after 40 years of gradual resentment building. The first real scrutiny against Trinity relative to their tenement ownership and conditions emerged in the 1850s. In 1855, a Senate Committee testimony shed light upon how Trinity "tended to discourage improvement (of her buildings) and to debase surrounding land values."<sup>29</sup> Then in 1878, a collective of middleman landlords organized to reduce rents over concerns over the mass unemployment aftereffects from the 1873 depression that they thought would cause a class war and serious uprising.<sup>30</sup> These middlemen were concerned that they were not able to extract rent from the low income tenants on these properties and although Rev. Dix claimed to be sympathetic to their cause, he refused to lower rents as he claimed "the corporation is desirous of treating its tenants fairly, [but has to] at the same time to keep its own interests in view."<sup>31</sup> Both of these instances - the 1855 senate testimony and 1878 landlord petition - along with the various other media grumblings directed at them were largely dismissed by Trinity as populist fodder not worthy of addressing. However what they did achieve is they lit a moral fire inside Rev. Rainsford that could not be quelled easily. Spurred on by both the reports of dire housing conditions in Trinity Tenements as well as Dr. Dix's harsh apathy, Rainsford decided to investigate the conditions of Trinity's holdings on his own. After discovering that Trinity was receiving rent money from saloons and at least one brothel, as well as having abysmal housing conditions in their tenements, he pleaded with the vestry to re-examine their portfolio and reform their developments.<sup>32</sup> Since they once again disregarded his pleas, he threatened to present this information to the Episcopalian diocese.<sup>33</sup> While the threat did elicit a minor response from the Trinity vestry, the larger consequence it had was when a local newspaper called *The Index* heard news of Rainsford's threat.<sup>34</sup> The hit piece, titled: 'Astounding Facts about Trinity' blew Rainsford's finding wildly out of proportion, claiming that Trinity Church owned and operated 5000 lots worth \$70 million without paying any taxes, as well as owning 764 liquor saloons and 74 brothels.<sup>35</sup> This article caused so much public outcry that Trinity was forced to respond, thus pulling the initial thread that would eventually unravel their residential real estate empire (or at least obscure it). Although Dr. Dix proved the majority of the allegations to be false, the fact that the high and mighty Trinity Church descended from its lofty and esteemed position to respond to such crass populist positions brought it to the forefront of scrutiny in the debate surrounding housing conditions of NYC in the late 19th century.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> W. A. Swanberg, *The Rector and the Rogue*. (Scribner, 1968), 80.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," *Buffalo Review* 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 550.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> W. A. Swanberg, *The Rector and the Rogue*. (Scribner, 1968), 81.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

## VI. SLUM CONDITIONS

Shortly thereafter, the New York legislature, with Rainsford's cooperation, once again reopened the case concerning Trinity's holdings, in particular, looking into tenement house conditions as well as the "financial conditions" that had allowed Trinity to become the single largest tenement house owner in all of New York City.<sup>37</sup> As a part of this, the Tenement House Committee was formed in 1894, which was headed by Richard Watson Gilder, described as a 'zealous housing reformer' with a "deeply rooted sense of moral obligation."<sup>38</sup> The investigation by the Tenement House Committee that ensued focused primarily on fire hazards caused by overcrowding and filth, lack of fire escapes, and lack of running water. During the investigation alone, seven tenement houses burned down, killing fifteen people.<sup>39</sup> The Board of Health tried to enforce a law requiring water supply on every floor of residential buildings, but Trinity opposed this before the Tenement House Committee, stating that "lower class tenants could not be trusted to use water; "slop" would go into the sinks, and "the whole place will be dirty and nasty".<sup>40</sup> In his book 'Progressives and the Slums', Roy Lubove explains how the findings of the Tenement House Committee "aroused much public indignation against the squalor and sanitary defects of the tenements" perhaps most prevalent in the slums surrounding Trinity Church.<sup>41</sup> While these old and rickety structures were enriching Trinity, they simultaneously had a death rate a third higher than rest of New York at the time.<sup>42</sup> A flurry of criticism befell Trinity at a seemingly unstoppable rate afterwards. The *New York Times* reported that : "The wealthiest church in America was not only an un-Christian and uncharitable landlord, but a stubborn offender against a "public sentiment fully enlightened by scientific sanitation and aroused by University Settlement Work and the Tenement House Commission."<sup>43</sup> Graphic political cartoons (*see Appendix*) and anecdotal descriptions of Trinity's tenements were becoming all-the-more common as America became increasingly interested with how the other half lived. Some accounts claimed that Trinity's tenements were often stuffed with barrels of refuse, dead carcasses of dogs and cats and rats underneath piles of rubble, putrid meat, old bedding, and straw.<sup>44</sup> The buildings were said to have holes in the wall so big that wind could pass through, with ceilings that were slanted and falling, stairs that were rickety and dark, and yards were filled with trash and standing water. It was also said that child labor was commonplace in the units throughout the tenements.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," *Buffalo Review* 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 549.

<sup>38</sup> Roy Lubove, "Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917." (Pittsburgh, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press.), 88.

<sup>39</sup> R W Gilder and Emily Dinwiddie, "Report of the Tenement House Committee of 1894," 118th Session Report of the Tenement House Committee of 1894 § (1895), 539

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Roy Lubove, "Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917." (Pittsburgh, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press.), 114.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>44</sup> R W Gilder and Emily Dinwiddie, "Report of the Tenement House Committee of 1894," 118th Session Report of the Tenement House Committee of 1894 § (1895), 426

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

## VII. DENIAL OF NEGLECT

Despite allegations coming from countless different sources at this point, Trinity steadfastly denied the claims and would either downplay the seriousness or push the blame onto others. In some instances, Trinity (at least the corporation of Trinity) chose to flat out deny the claims, getting into vehement disagreements with Richard Gilder, the aforementioned Tenement House Committee head. Whereas Gilder would declare the buildings filthy, blighted, and unfit to live in, Trinity's inspector would say they are clean and adequate and continue his daily business.<sup>46</sup> In other instances, Trinity would say that middleman landlords would actually become angry when they tried to fix the conditions that arose because the landlords had neglected the building conditions, and so they claimed a laissez-faire approach worked best towards their interests.<sup>47</sup> And in yet other instances, Trinity claimed the already mentioned position of Dr. Dix that the problem was not systemic (as Rev. Rainsford suggested), but rather the root of the problem was the individual moral impurity of the residents, who were lazy, criminal 'waifs of society' that needed proper discipline to be rehabilitated.<sup>48</sup> They claimed that housing reform and Rainsford's favored alternative models of housing policy would not fix the tenement problem, and that it was the personal responsibility of the tenants alone.

Trinity's denial and avoidance of blame even carried into the lawsuits filed against them at the time, often appealing in order to keep operating their tenements without reform. After being taken to the Court of Common Pleas, they appealed the legal allegations against them, citing loopholes in the law and definitions surrounding ideas of what can be legally required of a private property owner, the unconstitutional seizing of private property without sufficient remuneration, overreaching of authoritative state and police power over individual rights, etc.<sup>49</sup> The court sided with them, stating that competition in the private market would allow tenants to find better buildings with running water and less crowding if they so desired. The court also said they agreed with Trinity that the legal argument to strengthen the protection of private property rights is integral to the genius of American institutions, and that any argument contrary would inevitably lead to 'socialism'.<sup>50</sup> However this decision was eventually overturned by the New York Court of Appeals, as it claimed that the modern conception of property carries with it a 'semi-public obligation' and that the addition of water to these tenements was not only for the benefits of the tenants, but it was also for the greater public good (especially when it comes to disease).<sup>51</sup>

## VIII. NEW LEADERSHIP & 'REFORM'

The combination of campaigns, investigations, and lawsuits against the Church coincided with new leadership at the Trinity vestry to finally produce the ingredients needed to change their approach to tenement housing and real estate. At the turn of the century, the *Tenement House Law of 1901* was passed, alongside affirmation that the government would fiercely enforce this new law regulating proper private bathrooms with

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>49</sup> *Health Department v. Rector of Trinity Church* (Court of Common Pleas of the State of New York 1892), 514.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Health Department v. Rector of Trinity Church* (Court of Appeals of the State of New York February 26, 1895), 839.

running water, among many other improvements.<sup>52</sup> Around the same time, Dr. Dix died and his successor, William T. Manning made it his mission to modernize the Church for the needs of the 20th century.<sup>53</sup> While Manning was concerned about the legal ramifications of Trinity's neglect of their tenants' housing conditions, he also spent one of his first sermons preaching that it was his "most earnest desire that this whole matter of our property shall be dealt with not merely from the business point of view, but from the standpoint of religion, of social responsibility, and of enlightened citizenship."<sup>54</sup> This marked the first time in history that the entire body of Trinity Parish seemed genuinely open to housing reform; the result of which was Manning inviting the Tenement House Committee to conduct a survey of their housing stock and work with them to come up with adequate solutions on what to do with the blighted buildings.<sup>55</sup> The ensuing report from the Tenement House Committee - mostly the work of the secretary Emily Dinwiddie - categorized the Trinity owned and operated homes into three categories: "those with only minor defects (62%); those with some or many defects (34%); and those in truly abhorrent condition (4%)".<sup>56</sup> Since the optimistic findings showed that most of the Trinity owned and operated tenements only needed minor repairs, the Trinity Corporation hired Dinwiddie directly to oversee the tenement houses and reform them, along with the aiding in the creation of a few model tenements.<sup>57</sup> She annually reported on the conditions and served as a social worker, part of which involved the careful selection of tenants to live in these buildings.<sup>58</sup> This entire process proved quite successful, creating significantly better housing conditions and helping to redeem Trinity's tarnished reputation, rebranding them as a 'benevolent landlord'.

#### **IX. COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT**

However a few things were not mentioned in Trinity's rebranding and reform; the first of which is that the favorable findings in the report by the Tenement Housing Committee only applied to a small selection of their holdings. Dinwiddie only surveyed the housing directly under Trinity's supervision, not including the approximately 300 tenement houses on Trinity plots that were still leased to middleman landlords.<sup>59</sup> The vast majority of these tenements, which were located in the Hudson Square area, were in deplorable condition.<sup>60</sup> It did not make sense to improve these tenements as the middleman landlords had no incentive to fix them up and invest in property which would eventually revert to Trinity as the lease ran up.<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Mensch shows that when Trinity then did acquire these buildings on the property they already owned, they would simply demolish them and replace them with high-yield commercial buildings.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," Buffalo Review 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 557.

<sup>53</sup> Dena Merriam and David Finn. "Trinity: A Church, a Parish, a People" (New York, NY: Cross River Press, 1996.), 40.

<sup>54</sup> Trinity Vestry. Condensed Report - Trinity's Tenements 1. (New York, NY: Trinity Pamphlets, 1909.), 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," Buffalo Review 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 563.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

What remains even more interesting however is the way in which Trinity used this commercial real estate to pay off debt that they had accrued from fixing up existing tenements. In his telling of Trinity's history, Charles Thorely Bridgman makes the poignant point that the Trinity Parish borrowed \$2 million on bonds to fix up derelict tenement buildings right before they invited Dinwiddie and the Tenement House Committee to do their survey and work 130. Immediately afterwards, the Trinity vestry's new policy was an aggressive one to vigorously develop commercial property, which allowed it to very quickly make up for the money it lost on loans.<sup>63</sup> While from the outside it appeared that Trinity was making a valiant effort to clean up its act and serve as the benevolent landlord, effectively reforming its blighted housing stock, building model tenements, and hiring Dinwiddie to administer the social work, it was really just a guise as this reform only happened to a small segment of their property. The vast majority of it - especially the most dilapidated tenements in Hudson Square - was rapidly torn down and replaced by commercial warehouses, often displacing the former residents. To this day, Trinity still owns many 'commercial income-producing properties' debt-free, including some 25 office and mixed use buildings in Hudson Square, and it is the income from these that continue to fuel the growth of the Parish.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps their initial transition to commercial real estate at the turn of the 20th century was driven by the fact that this allowed them to avoid the many moral, theological, and political debates surrounding residential development that previously subjected them to so much public scrutiny. A NY Times interview from the 1980s with their then managing director for commercial real estate, Walter Spardel, seems to hint at this when he refused to consider converting any of the buildings to apartments or coops, proclaiming: "We're not interested in residential, we might be too susceptible to tenant complaints, and the last thing we need is a little old lady saying she's being mistreated."<sup>65</sup> The Parish's change of policy in the 1900s to one based heavily on commercial development proved to be both a lasting and lucrative decision, and although 90% of the original Queen's farm has been sold, the remaining holdings operated as commercial lots draw in millions of dollars, making the Parish one of the richest in the world.

#### **X. AFTERWORD**

The complex past of Trinity Church's real estate history warrants many other stories that could be told in addition to those already mentioned, but that would turn this expose from a research paper into a research novel (which I'm afraid is already happening). One could ponder what Trinity would have looked like if it stayed in the residential market and made a stronger effort to contribute to the greater public welfare of New York. Perhaps they actually did contribute to the public good in a meaningful way and Rev. Rainsford was too critical of them. Recently anthropologists, such as James C. Scott, are revealing how 'slums' that offered temporary housing to new immigrants were actually relatively effective bottom-up solutions for helping newcomers get settled. It is these perhaps chaotic scenarios that were necessary for cities like New York to grow into the diverse metropolises they

<sup>63</sup> Charles Thorely Bridgeman, A History of the Parish of Trinity Church in the City of New York, Part 6 (New York, NY: Putnam, 1962), 130.

<sup>64</sup> Dena Merriam and David Finn. "Trinity: A Church, a Parish, a People" (New York, NY: Cross River Press, 1996.), 41.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," Buffalo Review 36, no. 3 (1987): pp. 427-572, 501.

now are. Alas, there are evidently many different lights in which one could cast the fabled Trinity Church. Maybe a good way to conclude is to return to the physical manifestation of the Parish at the foot of Wall Street. Next time one walks by Trinity Church, let it be known that although lesser in stature, it holds a wealth and power perhaps greater than any of its contemporaries that tower over it. An institution that has stood the test of time, operating one of the wealthiest churches in the world and largest commercial real estate empires in New York.

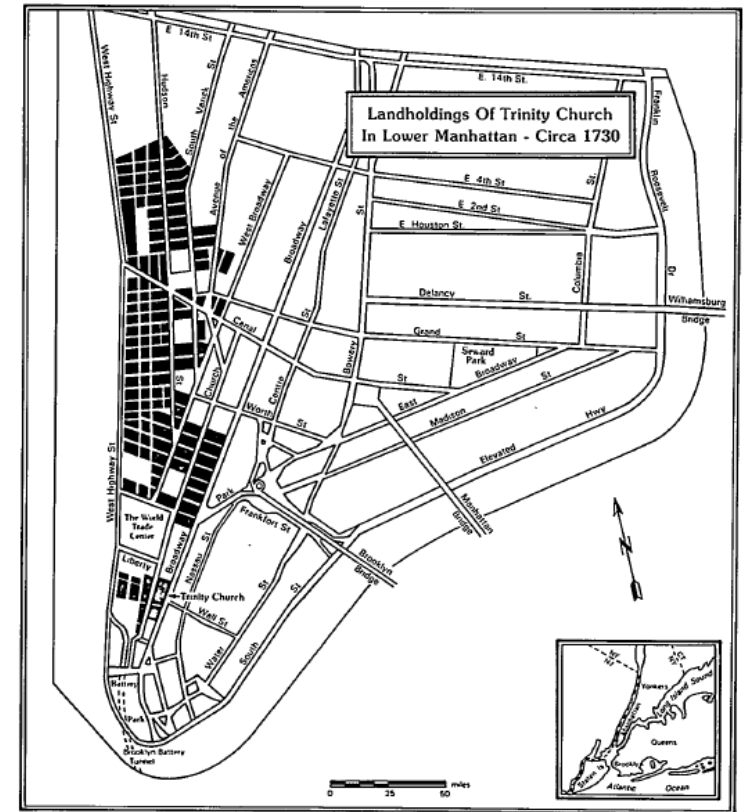


From Evening World, 1894.

From Evening World, 1894.

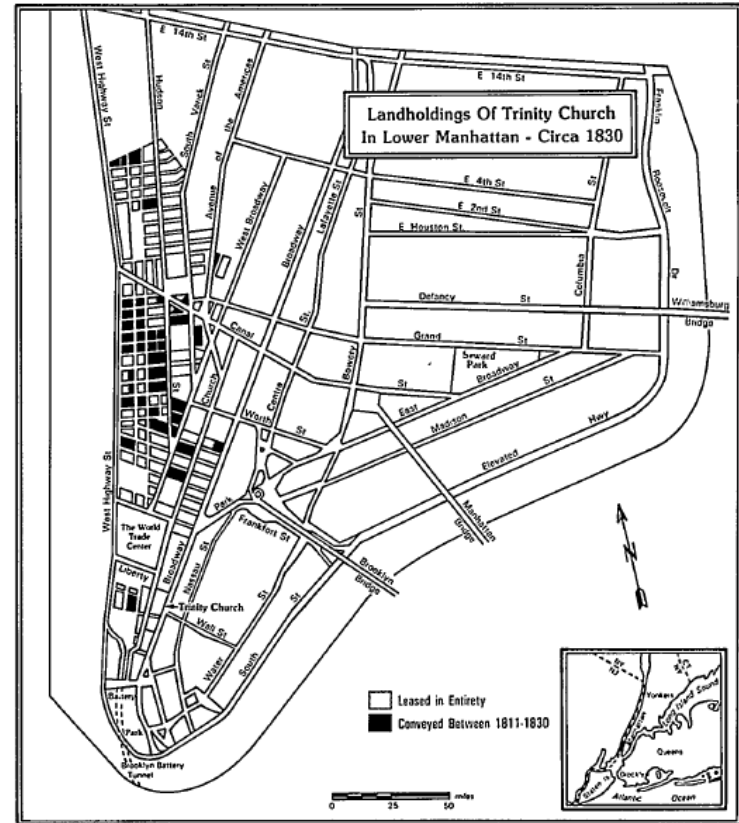


Map 1730



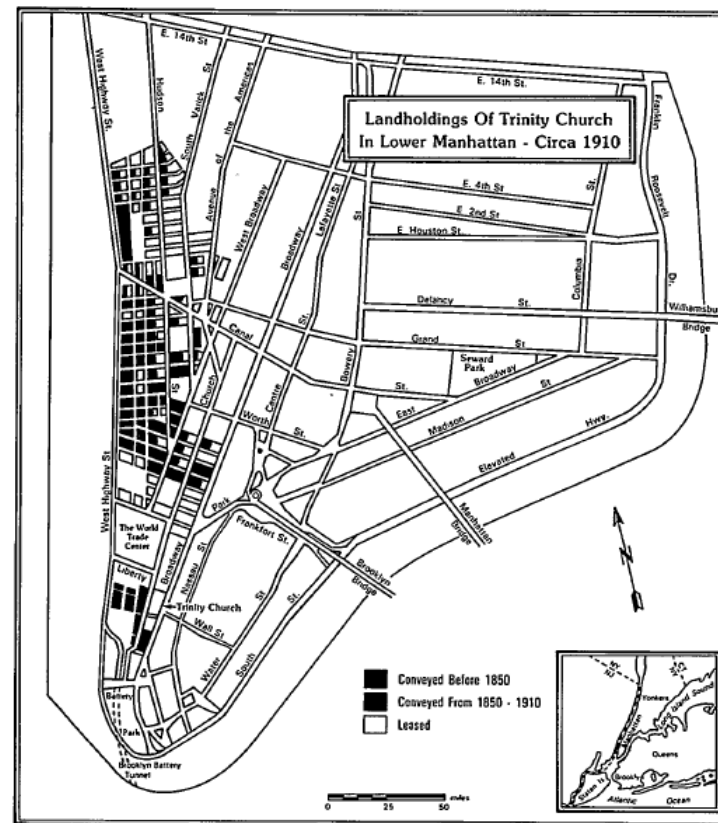
From Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," Buffalo Law Review 36, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 427-572, 571.

Map 1830



From Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," Buffalo Law Review 36, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 427-572, 572.

Map 1910



From Elizabeth Mensch, "Religion, Revival, and the Ruling Class: A Critical History of Trinity Church," Buffalo Law Review 36, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 427-572, 573.

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## **RuinScape**

**Semester:** Spring

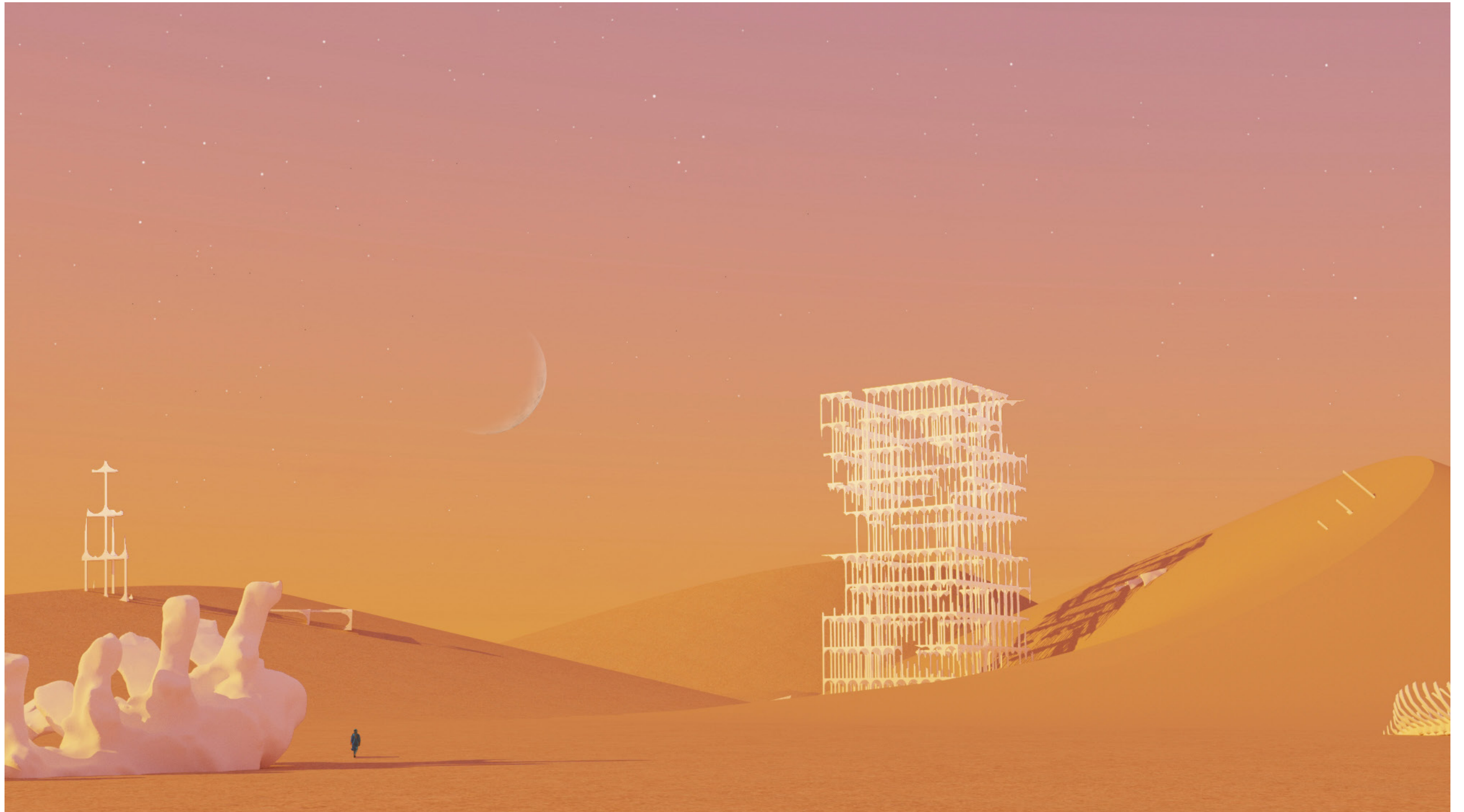
**Year:** 2021

**Class:** Techniques of the Ultrareal

**Type:** Visualization & Storytelling

**Advisors:** Joe Brennan & Phillip Crupi

**Teammates:** Novak Djogo, Ethan Davis,  
Karan Matta



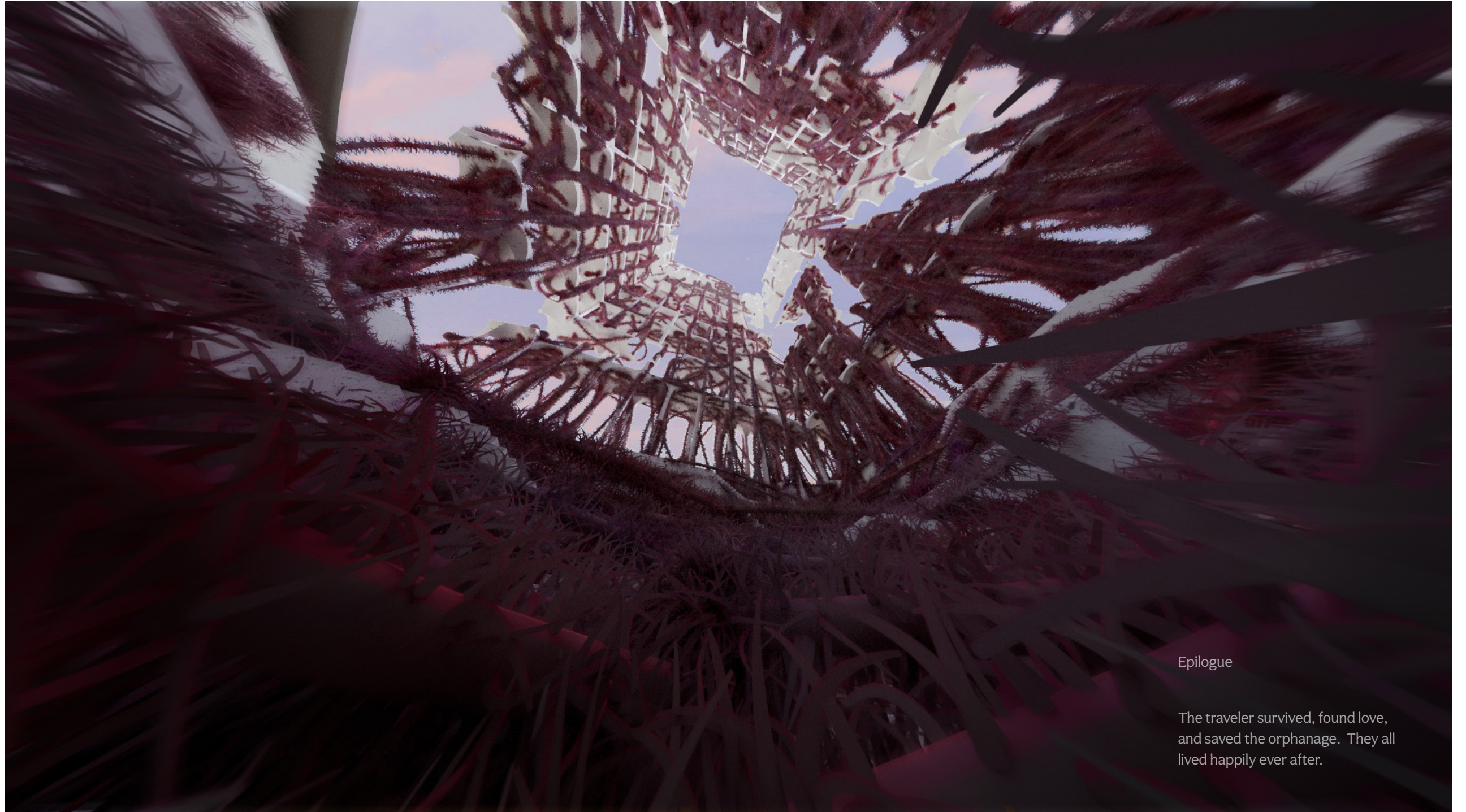


A solitary traveler traverses the endless desert landscape in trusty biplane

He encounters a monolith. A mysterious formation rising from the endless golden dunes. The weary traveler approaches the strange structure.

## *Too late...*

his senses cry out in warning. The being that calls this monolith home has awoken. It is hungry. It stretches its thorned limbs for the first time in centuries. The traveler looks for the last time at the light of the alien sun.



Epilogue

The traveler survived, found love, and saved the orphanage. They all lived happily ever after.



**At the start of my final semester of grad school, my studio professor asked me to write an essay on living. This is what I wrote:**

If I were to write an essay on living, it would probably revolve around my childhood. Where I grew up, who I grew up with, what I did, and what I didn't do. You see, I grew up on a big old farm in rural Canada. A veal farm with barns and laneways, fields and a forest. Central to this was a big old farmhouse. A classic southern Ontario red brick farmhouse. And I suppose it's a good thing that it was big, because it had to house my 5 brothers and I. My family was big, as was the 52 acre farm we called home. And I suppose this was also a good thing as apart from us and our farm, there wasn't exactly a whole lot around us. To the outsider, we were surrounded by a whole lot of (seeming) nothingness. There were no restaurants or schools in what you could call my neighborhood (my little slice of a Jeffersonian grid block), only a tiny store and park, and a handful of other homes. I couldn't walk to school, or even walk to hang out with my friends. In this sense, it could be argued that it is an inefficient neighborhood - poorly planned, non-walkable, and low access to the necessities of life. A bad rating on the human livability scale.

However the endless fields and forests that surrounded my home were hardly empty. No, these were places full of opportunities. And what these places and spaces offered that a perfectly designed community could never offer was access to the unknown. A chance to explore and wander, and through that: a way to feed my curiosity. There were no art studios nearby that my parents could enroll me in classes with to expand my creativity, but there were forests and farmland and abandoned farmsteads that I was given free range to discover. And that is exactly what I did. I'd spend countless hours climbing through the timber rafters of an old bank barn long abandoned. The architecture of my childhood. I would race my bike and later dirtbike through long dirt trails and meandering laneways, always trying to see how far from home they could take me. The pond that froze every winter offered a great space for the locals to informally gather over a game of hockey. A winter tradition around these parts, borderline even ritual. And when the leaves began to fall, I'd search the woods for the tallest tree to climb to give me the best vantage point of the place I called home.

That's how I lived.

And I don't think I'd change a thing.

