

UN MAKING

MATERIALS,
LANGUAGE,
PROCESSES &
ARCHITECTURAL
PRODUCTION

Preface

(Un)Making is a reflection and an attempt to **decolonize my senses and thinking** to unlearn some of the ways in which I was taught. The last year at GSAPP has made me question my beliefs and values about what constitutes **architecture and the agency** we have as spatial designers. This has allowed me to constantly examine and rethink my position and **what's at stake**. **(Un)Making** is thus, **an evolving archive**; it is an accumulation of ideas brewing. Even though these projects have been documented at a point in time, they continue to grow and become a part of different lenses I adopt to see the world around me.

The last year has been seminal in learning to acknowledge objects, materials, ideas, and bodies both **human and non-human** that may be **neglected, disenfranchised, and convoluted with dominant narratives**. These narratives need (un)making by questioning the language of architecture, assessing who gains by these **shifting power dynamics**, and how we as spatial thinkers disrupt these hierarchies by small gestures. Engaging in **speculative practice** has been a way to attempt this **disruption and fabulate possibilities** for us to undo this violence or in some ways reach a point of developing tension. The emergence and active participation in these ways of thinking adds a layer of **political rigor** that responds to the culture, socio-economic conditions, and ideas of equity critically.

As a result, each investigation is an opportunity to push the limits of what constitutes “architecture” and what can be achieved through **conscious advocacy** through our practice. The projects that are part of this (un)making or concepts in flux respond to these ideas of advocacy by testing out **counter-mapping, speculative cartographies, and hacking the system(s)** to reimagine the world we live in. They propose summoning alliances that are **transnational, multi-specie, and jump scales and time**.

Language and writing also become ways to respond to some of my investigations on **gender, sexuality, inequity, and violence** that are expressed in **(un)assuming: reflections**.

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(un)orthodox : practices

Dormant Re-appropriation of the Golf Course: Turning Around the White Man's Footprint challenges the notion of what it means to be "green" and the biases that exist between what is wanted/ unwanted and invasive/ non-invasive. I question the language of how we describe things around us and how that **language operates as architecture**. This language is intentional and loaded with political agendas that need to be revisited and **(un)made**. The project is centered around Broadleaf Plantain and employs the same techniques as the white man's project to go against them by using the dormant capacity of the seed to reappropriate the golf course which is coded in ideas of **power, colonialism, labor, and toxicity**.

Re-peat: Counter- Mapping Indigeneity questions the **territorialization of air** and how that operates transnationally to counter haze. The project explores peat as a material and system that stores carbon and its relationship with the indigenous Dayak tribe. This relationship is closely tied to issues of **indigeneity, land ownership, and mapping** that are countered to **undo** the colonization and extractivist attitudes of the West. The interventions also re-imagine ways of mapping to explore sectionality to move away from colonial ways of top-down mapping that negate aspects of history and time.

Spectral Cartographies : Erasure of Oceanic Indianness re-imagines the notion of islands and **alliances** by exploring the entanglements between **gustemic identity, sexuality, and law** concerning Indian **indentured labor**. It also dissects the hierarchies on ships through the lens of liminality to understand these relationships to identify and extrapolate spaces and **gestures**

Dormant Re-appropriation of the Golf Course: *Turning Around the White Man's Footprint*

advanced studio IV

studio critic

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Summer 22

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feedback

Expand on weaponizing with the plant. How do you imagine a new space that could be doing something anti productivist?

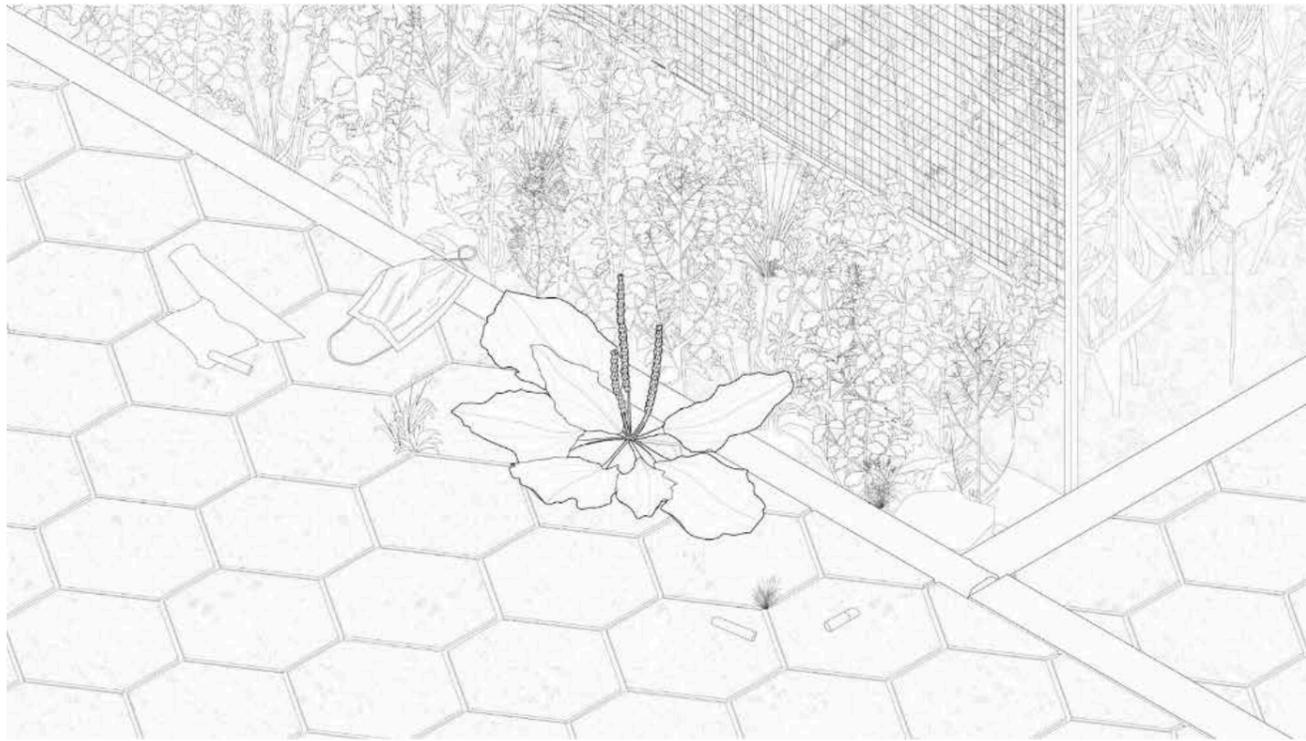
What is the opposite of capitalism? Lazy landscapes? Castro 1959 did take over a golfcourse, which is a symbol of excess. What happens with all the golf parks? The park is a machine of waste.

How can you challenge the labor needed for a golf course? What are the humans doing in this landscape? How can new relationships beyond exploitation and extraction, and also other beauty?

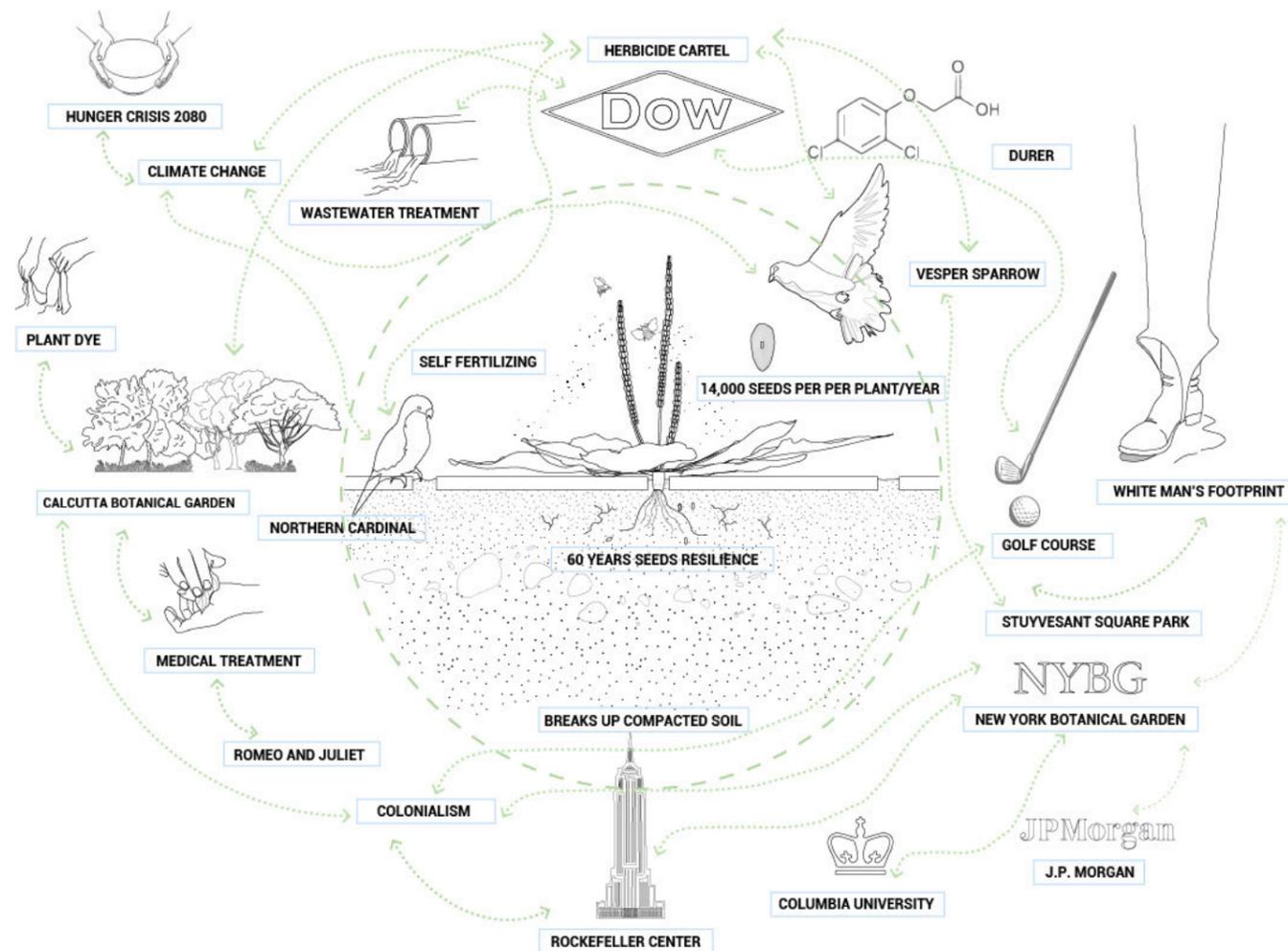
Broadleaf Plantain is known as the “white man’s footprint” as it came to the US through colonizers by accident where it was wanted as an exotic herb. Yet, it became **unwanted** due to the **aesthetics of the elite**. This idea of unwantedness was reinvigorated by chemical companies like DOW and Trump as it **disrupted the aesthetic** quality of grass and thus became a weed.

The Golf Courses are sites of ecological disruption and inequity. They are landmarks of **exploitation of labor** and **exorbitant use of water** and chemicals for maintenance of the “**pristine**” nature. This speculative project aims at dispersing broadleaf plantain seeds over time silently to take over the Trump Ferry Point Golf Course through the foot, air, and water. It uses the same techniques as the white man’s project to go against them and use the dormant capacity of the seed to reappropriate the golf course.





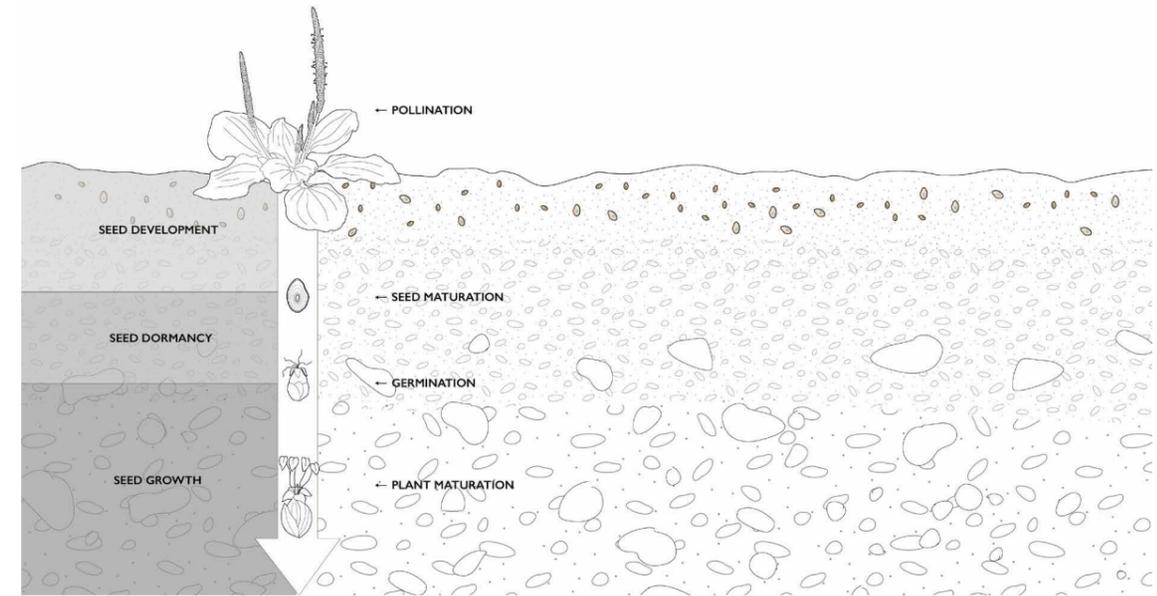
Kito at Stuyvesant Square Park



Actor Network



Seeds stick to the foot which facilitates its dispersal



Dormant capacity of the seeds

This is Kito. It is also known as broadleaf plantain, waybread, and *Plantago major*. Its ancestors were brought to the US by **European colonists** and thus native Americans called it the **“white man’s footprint”** as it seemed to follow where the settlers went. We found Kito in Stuyvesant Park located on the lower East Side of New York thriving between tiles in **spaces of no transit**. It is a perennial plant that grows in Spring and decays in Autumn. It tends to grow in compacted soil in meadow pastures, lawns, and roadsides, and loosens the soil for other species to grow. Kito is also part of an ecosystem with pollinators such as Lincoln’s sparrow and the northern cardinal. Its seeds rich in oil are a **food source** for the birds that are facing shrinking habitats due to climate change. However despite its virtues it is considered as a **“wild”, “weedy”, “inva-**

-asive” and **“unwanted”** plant. Kito disperses through the seeds on the long stem such that the **dormant seed** can remain viable in the soil for 60 years.

Kito has been part of England’s imperial project. In 1786, Kito’s ancestors were **wanted**. They were among the first herbs to be grown by the British in the **Calcutta Botanical Garden** in India, which the **East India Company** established as a plant repository and distribution center for **exotic plants** with health benefits. They worked with the **New York Botanical Garden**, formerly known as the **Elgin Botanical Garden**. It was started by David Hosack, a medical professor here at **Columbia University**. His vast network of friends in England and the West Indies including former **US President Theodore Roosevelt**, served as allies who sent their

plants to Hosack. These rare and exotic plants were to be housed in the Elgin Botanical Garden which is now home to the Rockefeller Center. The New York Botanical Garden went on to finally get its home in the Bronx with major trustees **Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller and JP Morgan**. Kito's family thus became part of the definition of the US supported by its early elites. These white men invested money in herbicide companies in the 1900's. They advertised Kito's as a major weed that is **"pesky"** and should be eliminated. One major stakeholder of this herbicide cartel is the **Dow Chemical Company**. It is the biggest manufacturer of 2,4D chemicals used for the herbicide, which is entangled in pollution lawsuits currently. The Dow Chemical Company is also a major sponsor for many **golf tournaments**.

The media along with DOW has put Kito's family in jeopardy by promoting it as a disturbance that damages and **reduces the usability** of athletic fields and golf courses.

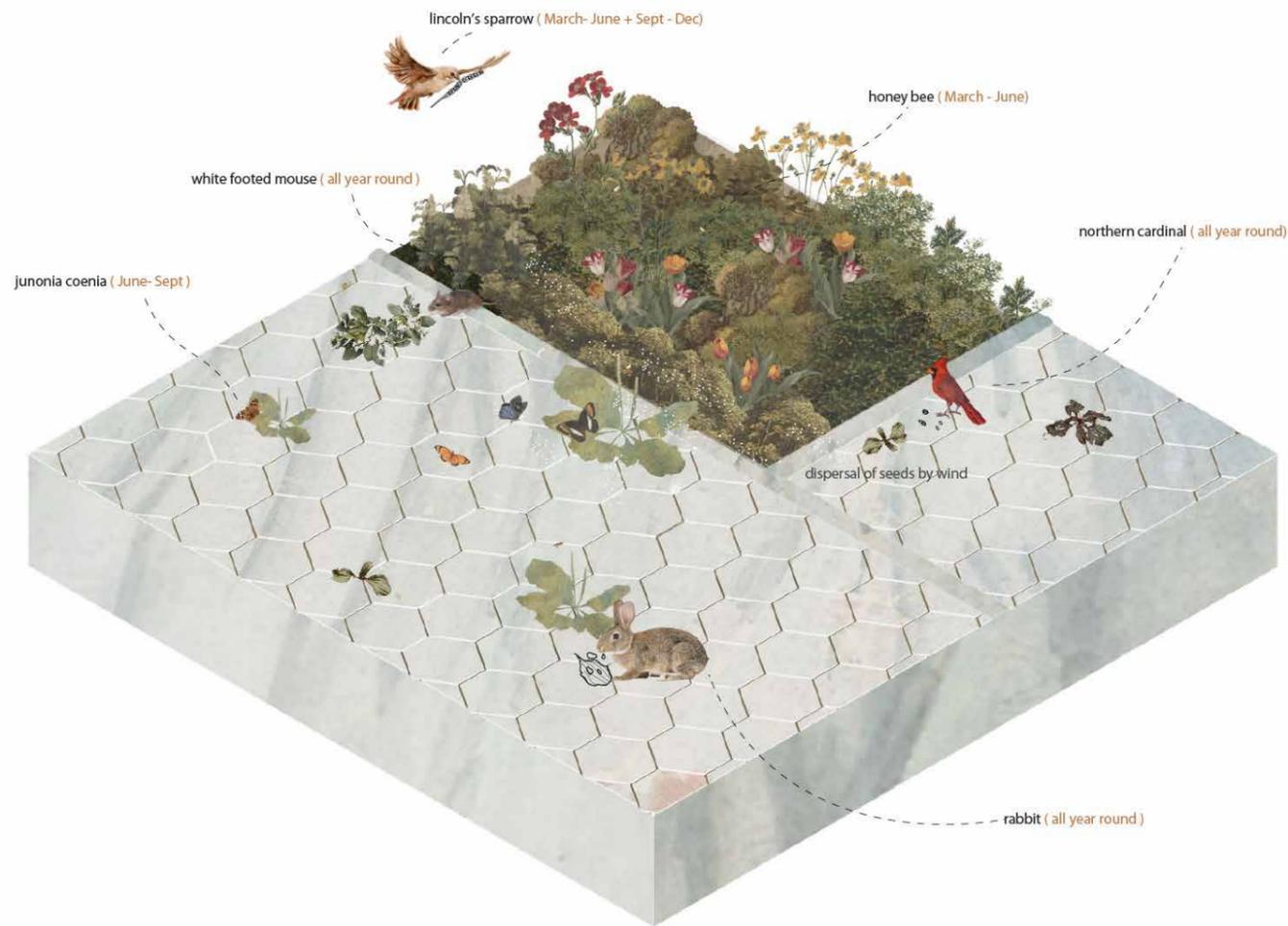
It's texture and color are seen as disrupting the aesthetic quality of turfgrass and US lawns. Kito's family came to the US through colonizers by accident where it was **wanted as an exotic herb**. Yet, it became unwanted due to the aesthetics of the elite. This was reinvigorated by DOW, Trump, and other actors that made it a weed. Therefore, this speculative project aims at dispersing Kito's seed over time silently to take over the Trump's Ferry Point golf course through foot, air and water, which uses the same techniques as the white man's project to go against them and use the dormant capacity of the seed to reappropriate the golf course.

Kito's reappropriation is initiated with its proliferation through the act of decaying as it enables the mobilization of seeds rapidly. The brown fluid from the **decaying** process becomes a natural dye for degradable fabric, which was one of its uses in the Calcutta Botanical Garden. These fabrics, when dried, contain seeds in fiber, forming a balloon for the seed dispersal process in the air.

The dye remaining from the fabric dyeing is poured into the East River via underground sewage channels, which pour its waste into the river 70 times a year. This is done to **treat the wastewater** in the East River with Kito's natural coagulation abilities.



Dispersal of seeds via air, water and foot across NYC



01. Stuyvesant Square Park:

This silent rebellion begins at the Stuyvesant Square Park where Special Agents from the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) deploy volunteers who are fighting against the chemical euphoria deployed by DOW to dig holes for preparation.



Initiation at the Stuyvesant Square Park by Special Agents from the NRDC to dig holes for preparation.



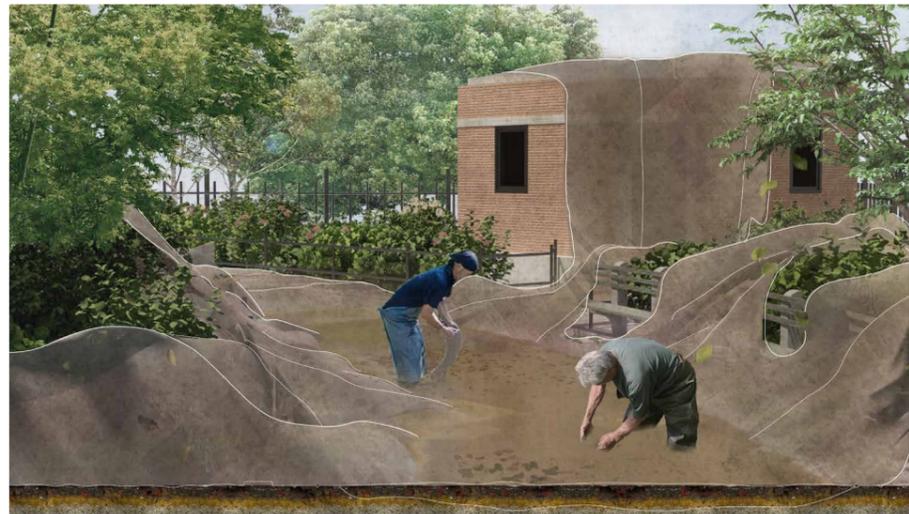
Plantains reappropriation is initiated with its proliferation through the act of decaying as it enables the mobilization of seeds rapidly.



Initiating dyeing



Proliferation



The brown fluid from the decaying process becomes a natural dye for degradable fabric.



These fabrics, when dried, contain seeds in the fiber, forming a balloon for the seed dispersal process in the air.

02. Rockefeller Center:

Along with the agents of **balloon, air, and foot**, Kito's arrival is awaited at the Rockefeller Center, where the lantern celebration further facilitates its dispersal. This secret intervention is carried out during the Christmas festivities funded by JP Morgan in order to redeem itself from the scandalous funding of the New York Botanical Garden.



Seed Vision to unveil the fugitive practice of seed dispersal at the Rockefeller Center.



03. Trump Ferry Point Golf Course:

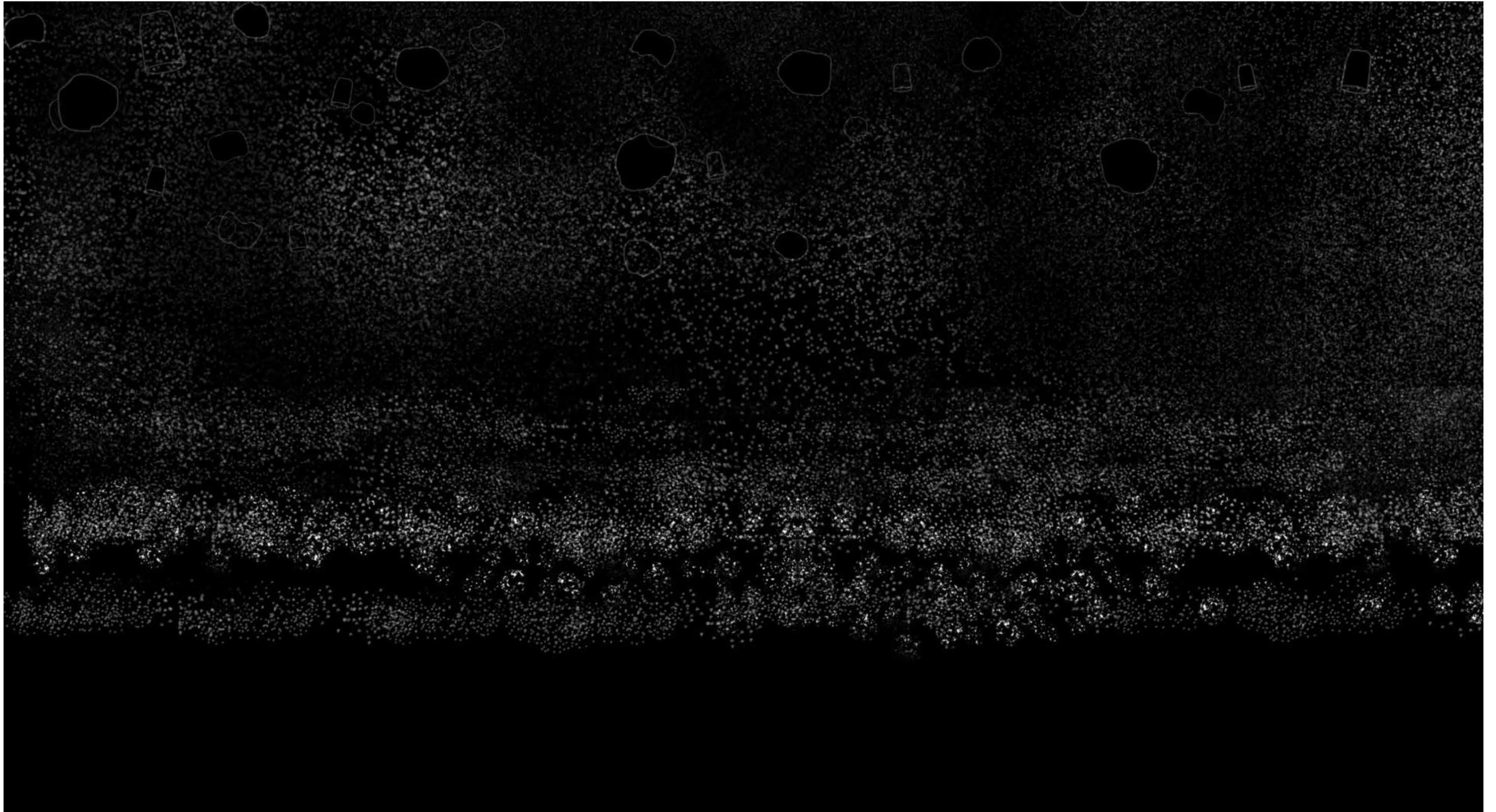
Kito and its relatives gradually take root in New York City's **sites of capitalism** including the golf course which is loaded with toxicity of the 2,4 DOW Chemical that has lynched the soil.



In 2042 Columbia Universities Dept of Ecology, Evolution and Environment Biology, joined forces with the New York Botanical Garden to undo its wrongdoings that promote capitalistic endeavors of the white man. This is a **contemporary aesthetic-political regime** that starts at the Trump Ferry Point Golf Course which justifies the **spatial segregation, cleansing, and protection of the “landscaped” environment** as opposed to the “weedy” and “unwanted”.



It's time to redeem Kito's image by applauding it for its ability to heal wounds like Shakespeare did in **Romeo and Juliet**. It's time to acknowledge its aesthetics like **Albrecht Durer's** did in the Great Piece of Turf . The guerilla war that started in 2022 at the Stuyvesant Square Park now pays fruition at the Trump Ferry Point Golf Course.



As time passes and Kito agents are at work, 61 million pounds of herbicides is prevented from lynching the soil by DOW Chemical. 222 acres of **land is reclaimed** by northern cardinals and Lincoln sparrows as their new habitat. It is 2062, DOW and Trump Ferry Point Golf Course begin to incur losses as their **stocks crash**. By 2082, Kito is able to subvert the externally imposed values on it and override the White Man's capitalistic endeavors and rearticulate colonialism .



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feedback

How do we measure productivity? This project could also be about challenging the notion of productivity. Maybe it is a different kind of “market.” Envision a constitution about a different values and assets. Define a new sense of productivity, and the architectural design might follow.

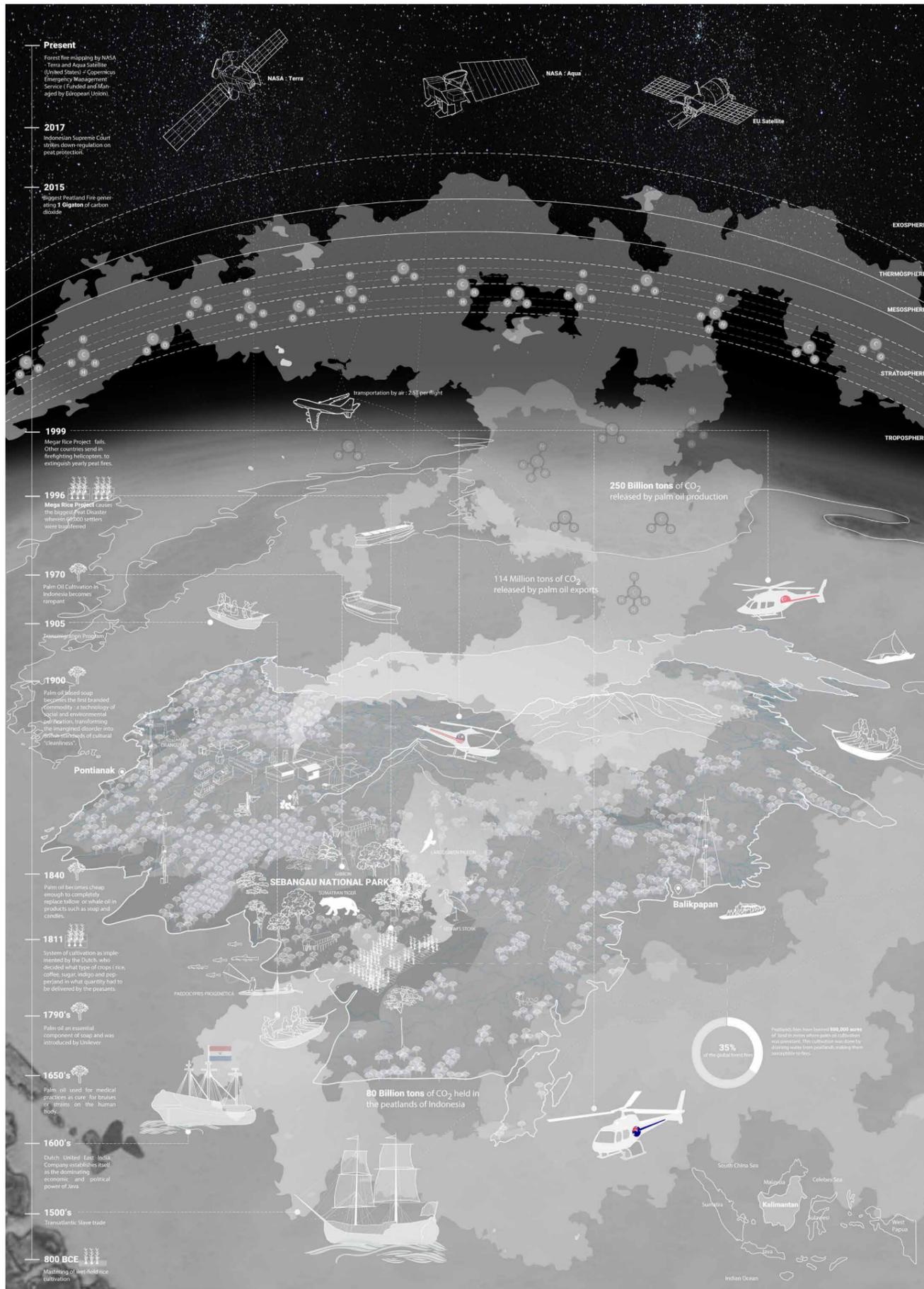
The land was deemed “unproductive” by colonizers and this “legitimized” the occupation and extraction from this land. Perhaps it is about re-visualizing / counter mapping this land—what data we use or don’t.

This is Peat. It may seem like regular soil but it’s composition actually allows it to act like solidified air. Although peatlands cover only 3% of the earth’s surface, they contain twice as much carbon as all the world’s forests, about 500 tonnes every square meter. Not only does **peat pack in air at a one-to-one scale**, the lack of oxygen also preserves bodies, artifacts, and fossils, **sequestering culture** along with carbon. Our interest began with an exhibit by Patagonia Peatlands, where we became aware of the current risks they are facing globally such as agricultural expansion, canals, and deforestation. Draining water from peatlands dries it out, causing massive **underground smoldering fires**. Dried peat acts like coals and catches fire easily, releasing all the air contained inside as a toxic haze. Peat cannot be replaced when it disappears as it takes 1,000 years to grow 1m².

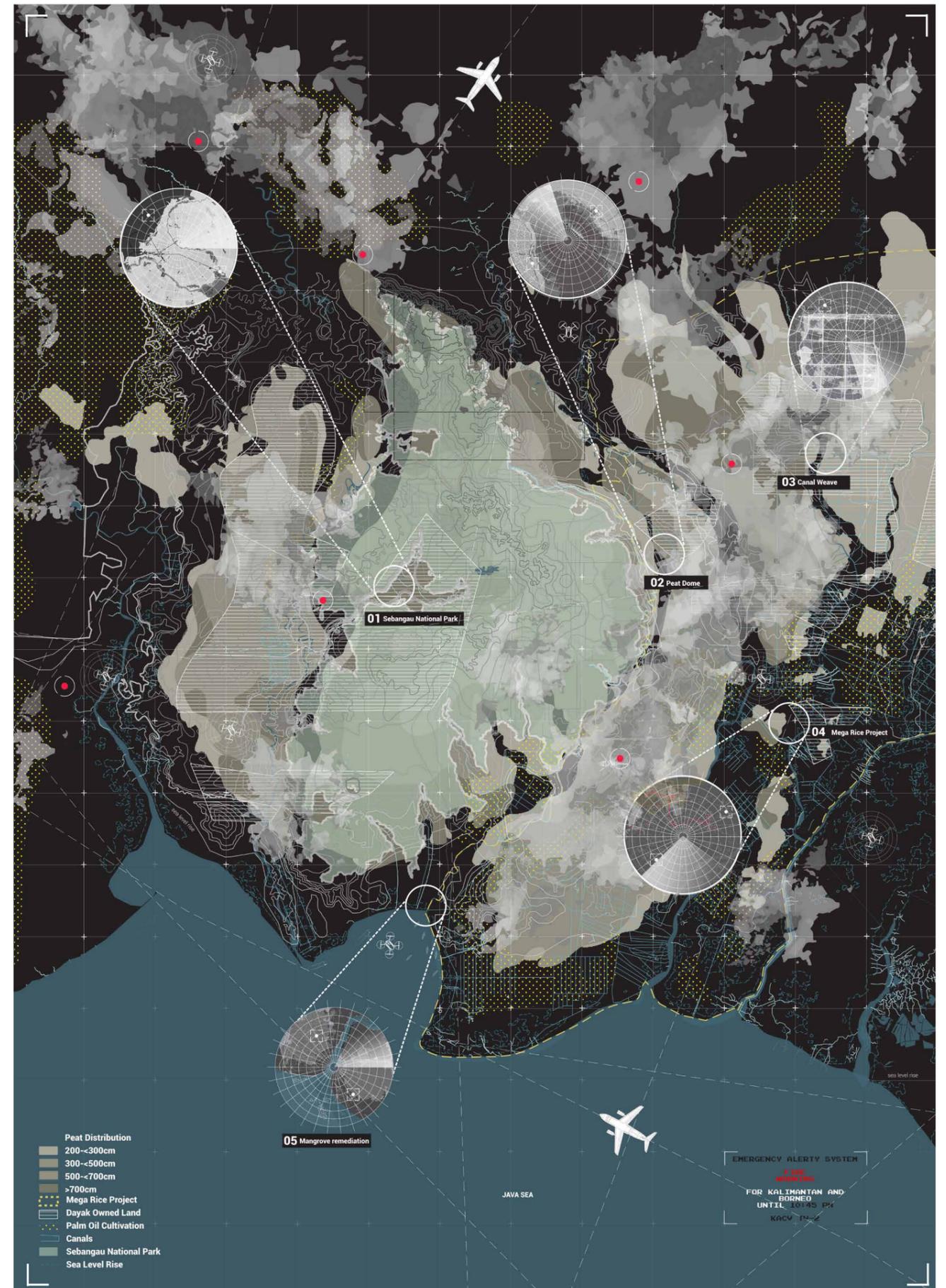
For our project, we looked at the site of the largest and most consistent peat fires, which are in Kalimantan, Indonesia. The peatlands here were predominantly occupied by the Dayak tribe, who formed a sustainable relationship with peatlands. The Dayak tribe was marginalized, first by Dutch colonizers in the 1600’s who mapped the **peatlands as wastelands**. In 1990s the Indonesian government, saw this land as a new “frontier for development”.

Palm oil and cash crops were grown on peatlands and associated with the technology of social and environmental purification. This displaced the Dayak tribe, deforested peatland, and zoned Indonesian land into spaces for monocultural production. The government also cleared over 2.2 million acres of peatlands for their “**Mega Rice project**”, which failed due to their lack of knowledge of peat composition causing one of the countries major forest fires. This zone and current plantations now catch fire yearly, creating a **toxic haze** that envelops Indonesia and travels across borders to other countries. Indonesian peat haze is a **transnational** problem where countries including Malaysia, and Australia now send out helicopters to put out **peat fires**.





Kalimantan Research Drawing

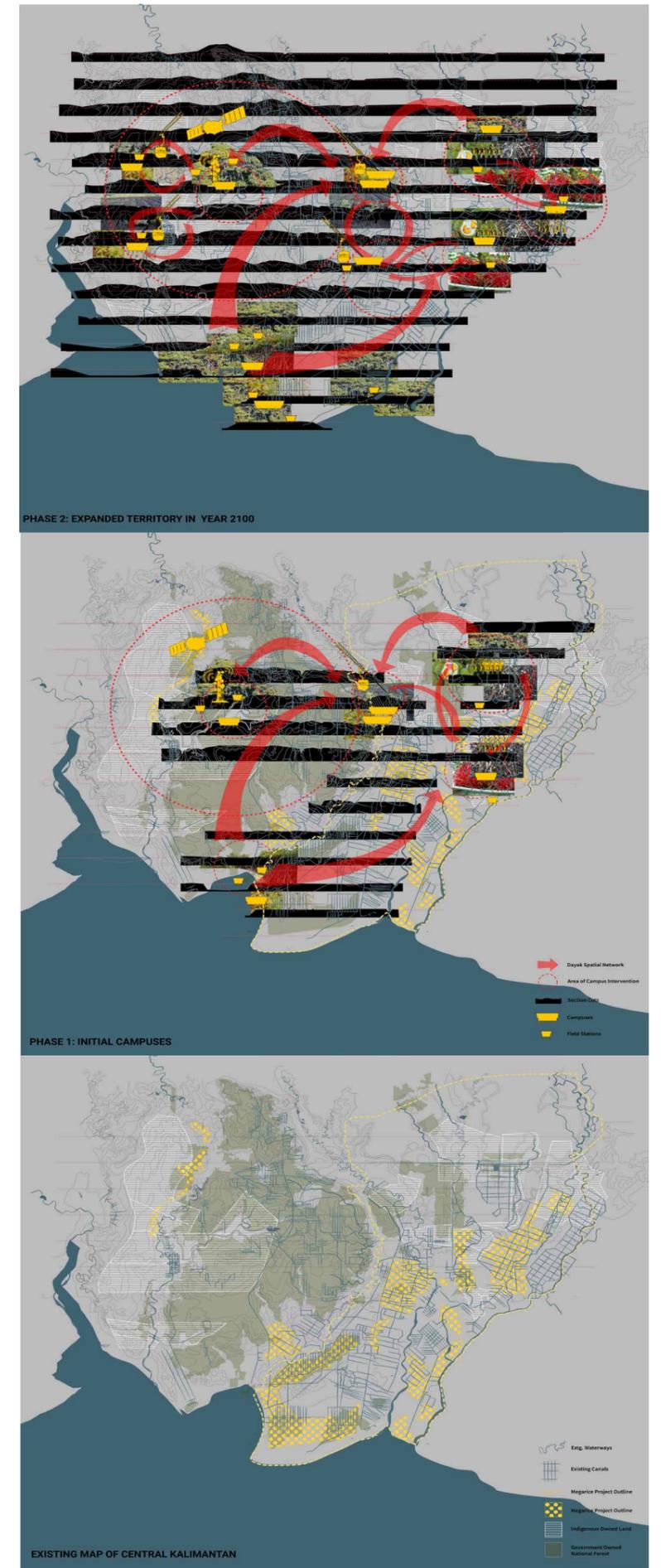


Orthographic drawing of 5 sites of intervention

Currently, the Indonesian government has recognized the problems associated with growing on peatland as well as the **inaccuracy of the existing documentation** of peat. They are in the process of establishing agencies and rehabilitating degraded peatlands with foreign partners who help map peat with satellite technology like WWF and the Ford Foundation. However, the Dayak tribe, who have been stewards of peatlands for 1,000's of years, are not included. Their forests are being turned into national parks by the government. Areas of the same forest are sold back to **palm oil companies** when the government runs out of funding from NGOs. If the same companies, whose interests are entangled with megacorporations, continue to take control of peatlands as they have in the past, **exclusion and expropriation of indigenous communities** will continue. Currently, national interests involve growing the GDP through cash crops. However, overpopulation, need for accessible agriculture makes understanding how to live on peat a necessity for national interests.

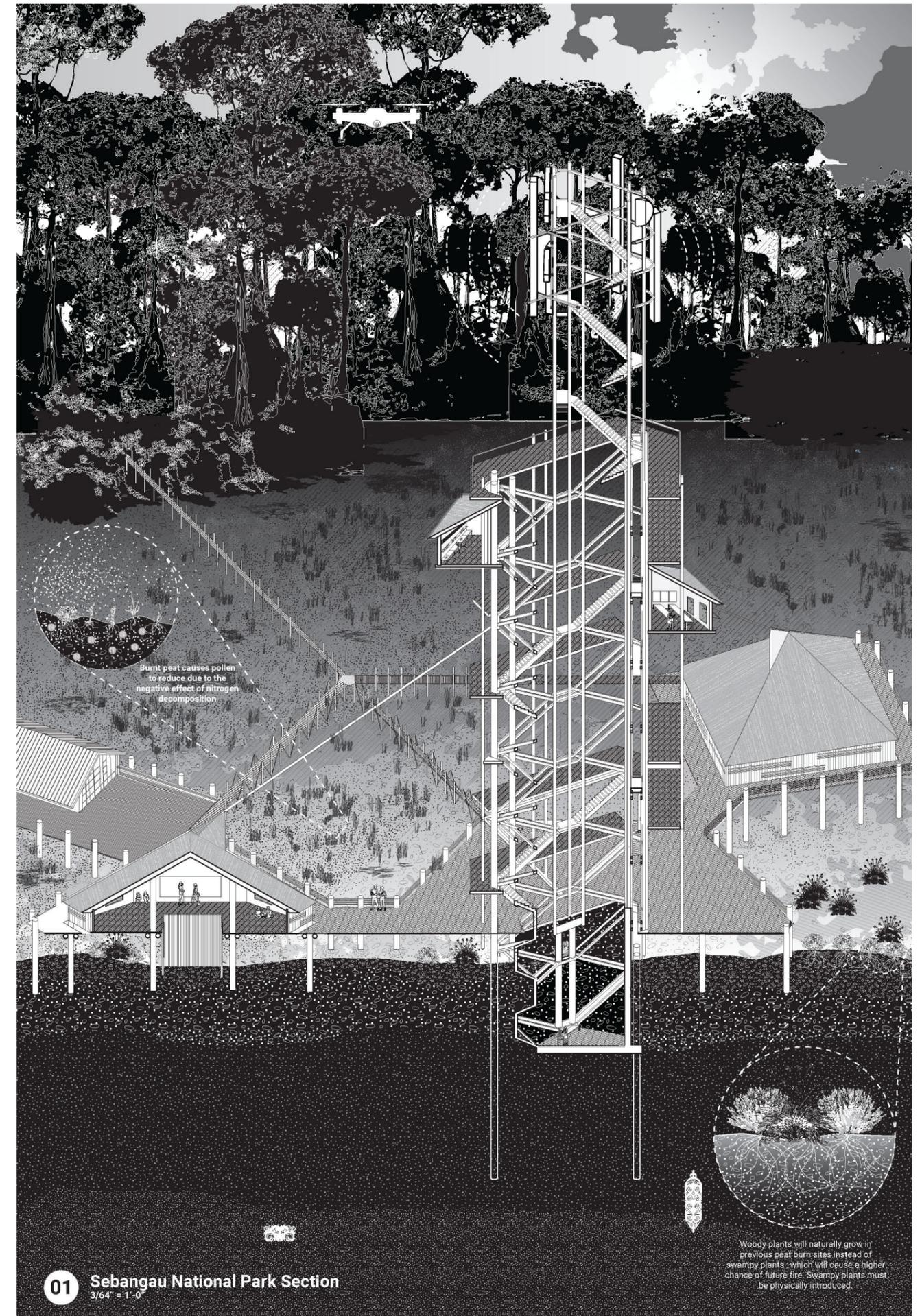
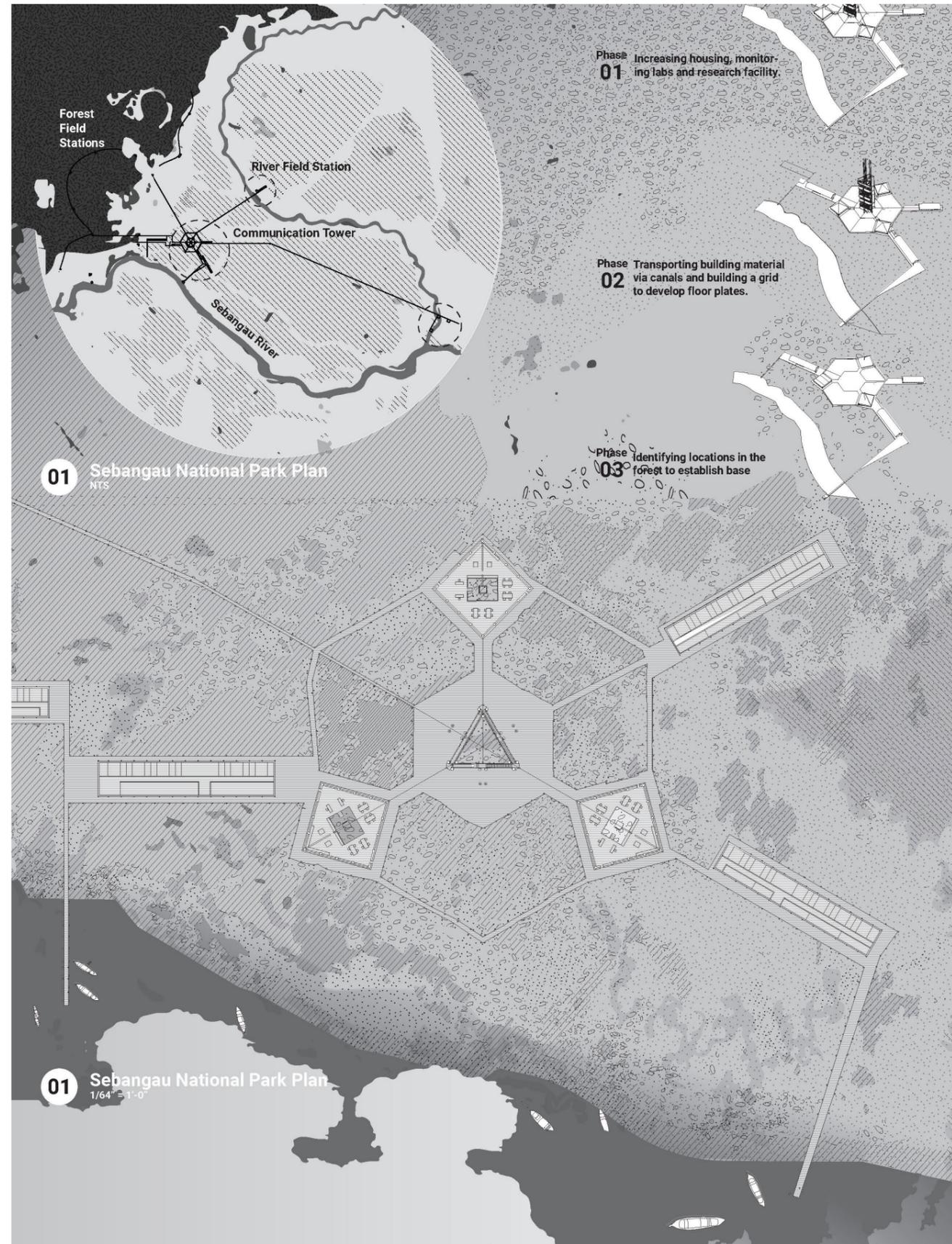
However, a potential break in this cycle can be through the recognition of Dayak ownership. Current maps used by the Indonesian govt lack recognition of indigenous land which can be overturned by the act of **counter-mapping**. Counter mapping for us moves away from the colonial top down gaze such as zoning that looks at mapping geographical features in one dimension. Colonial mapping also **negates history and aspects of time**. Counter mapping introduces a more dynamic understanding of land that stems from peat itself such that it brings to the forefront **human behavior, soil dynamics and nuances of geological time**. We believe it will be an essential tool to enable the Dayaks to subvert processes that are hegemonic and static.

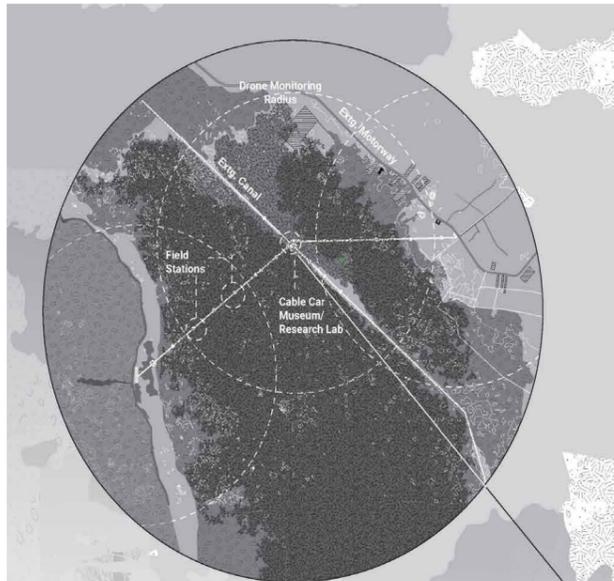
To counter these existing power structures, 5 field laboratories for learning are proposed on Dayak-owned land. There, they will begin to create the counter maps and address the **microbiotic and human scale experience** of living on peat.



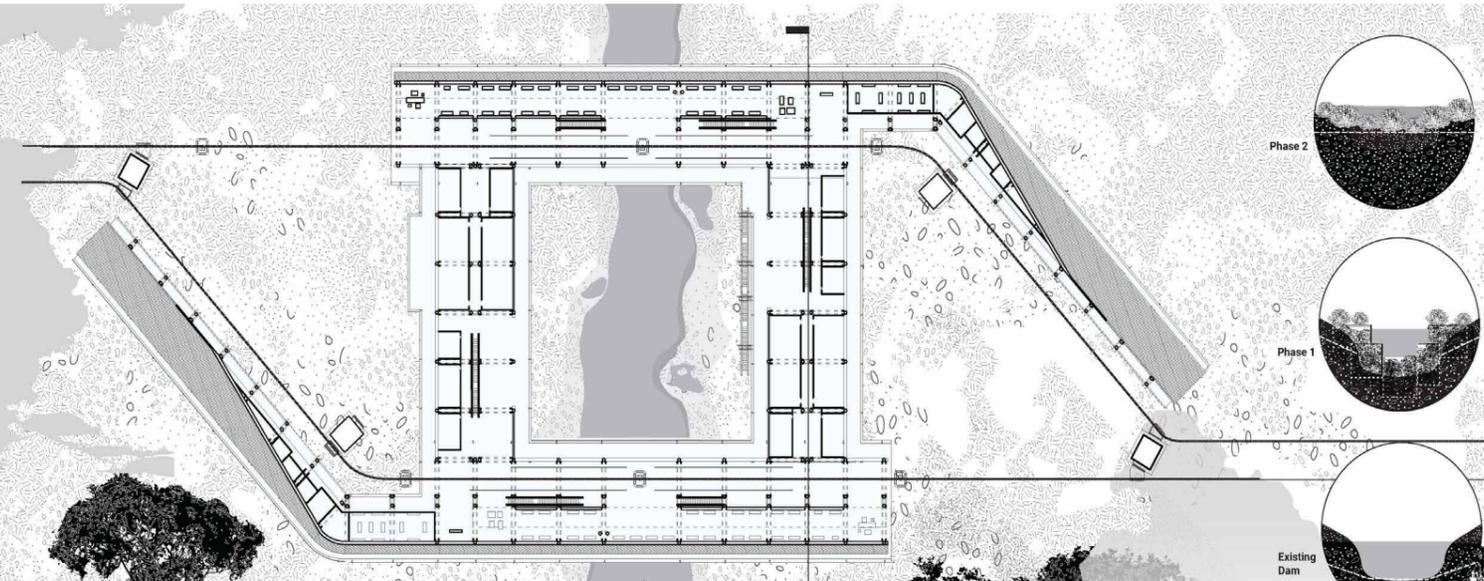
01. field lab:

In the first field lab, a communication tower is placed at the site of a **previous burn zone** in the Sebangau National Park. It creates a digital network over the National Park while recreating the underground network of plants and bacteria in peatland. Forest and river field stations, and underground peat labs form an interconnected network that facilitate **data dissemination**.

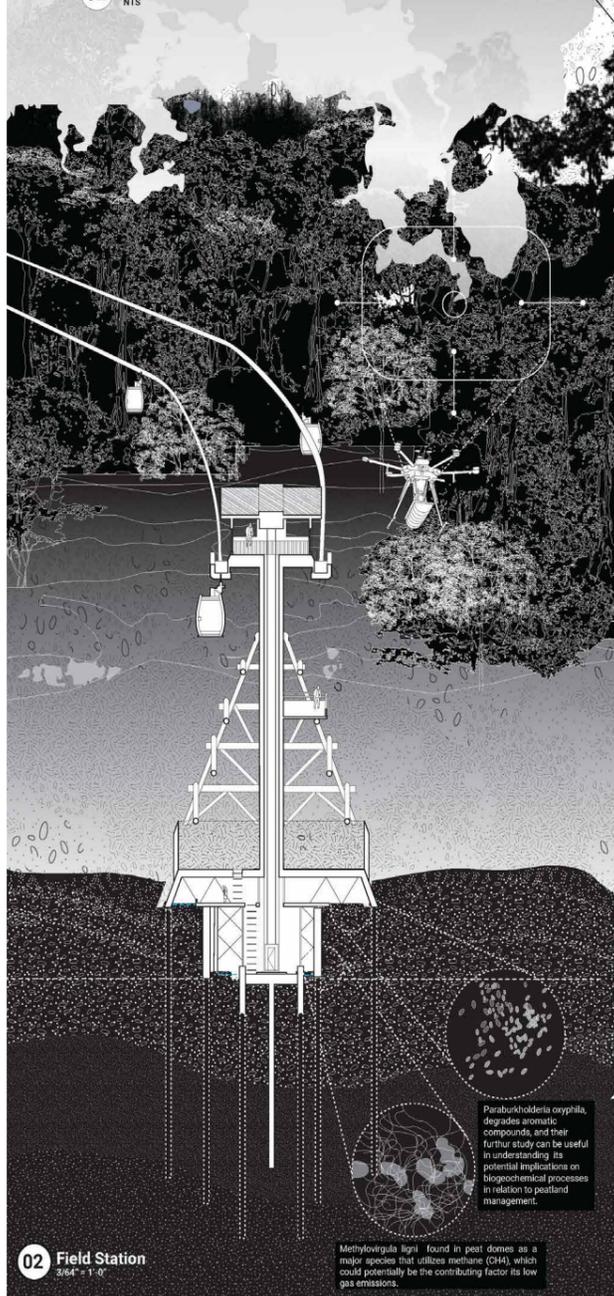




02 Key Plan: Cable Car Preservation + Research Lab
NTS



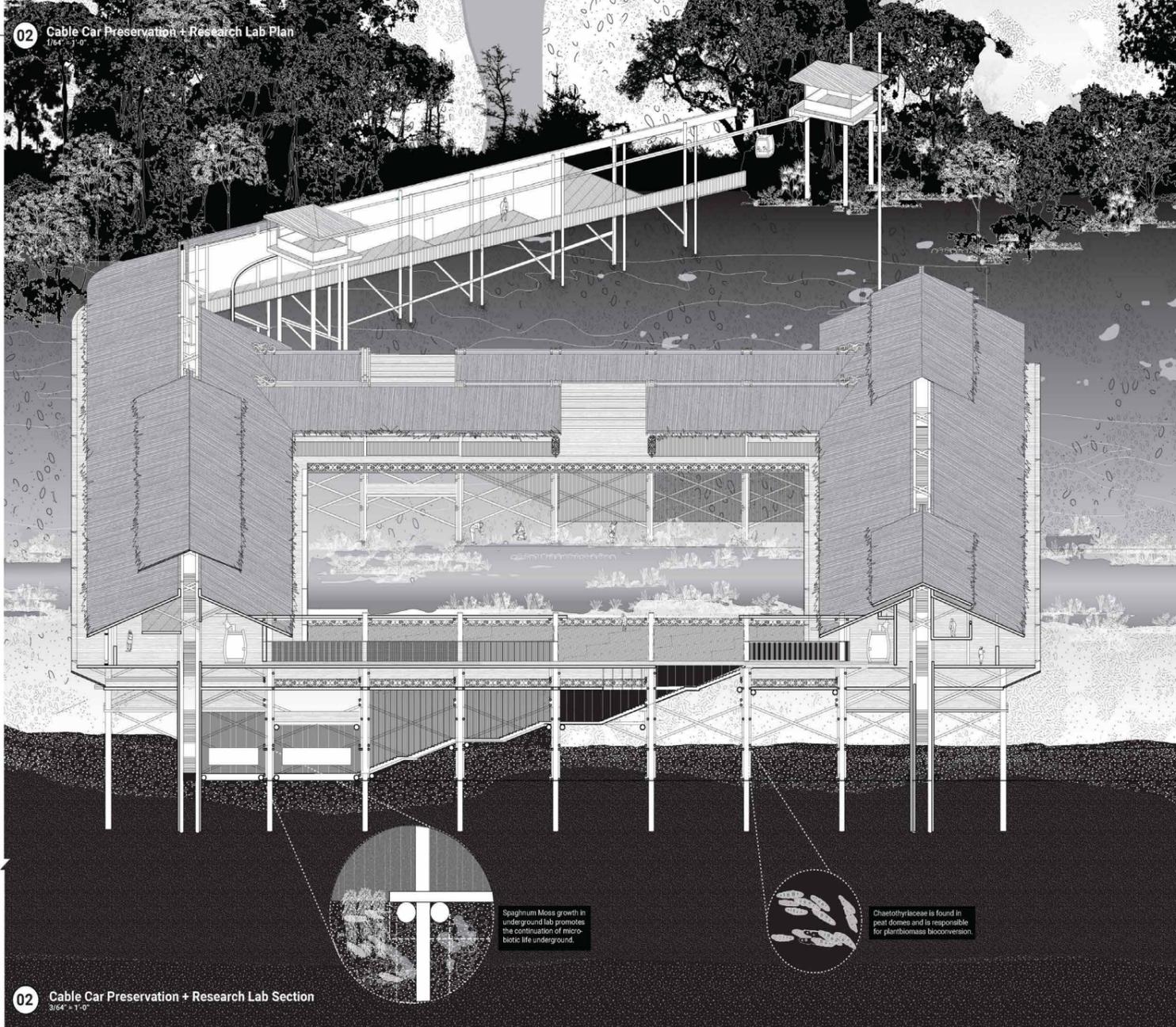
02 Cable Car Preservation + Research Lab Plan
1/4" = 1'-0"



02 Field Station
3/64" = 1'-0"

Methylogate light found in peat domes as a major species that utilizes methane (CH₄), which could potentially be the contributing factor its low gas emissions.

Paraburkholderia oxypilis, degrades aromatic compounds, and their further study can be useful in understanding its potential implications on biogeochemical processes in relation to peatland management.

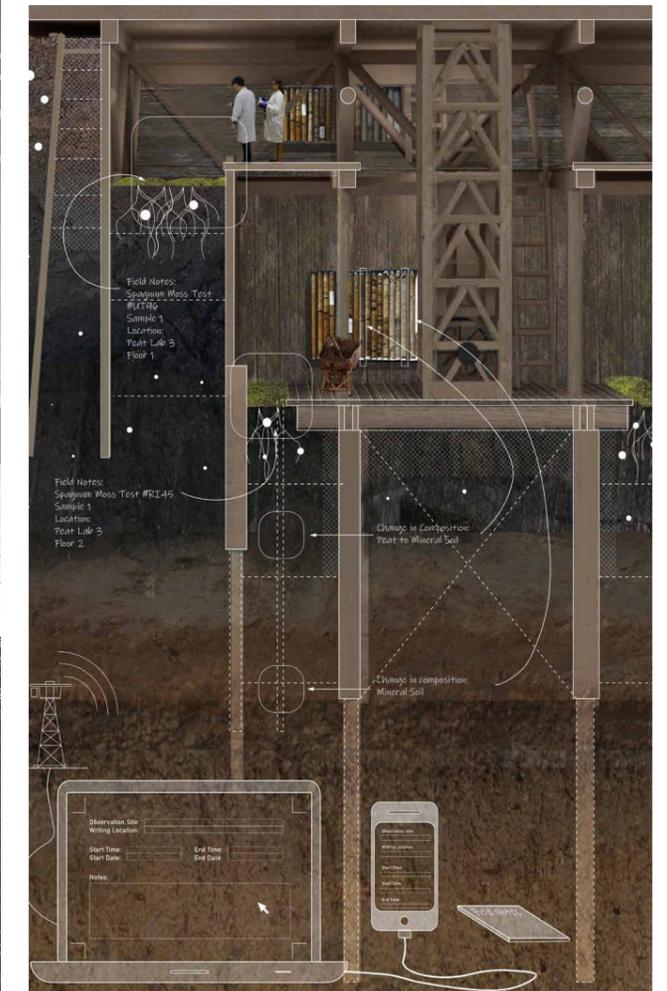


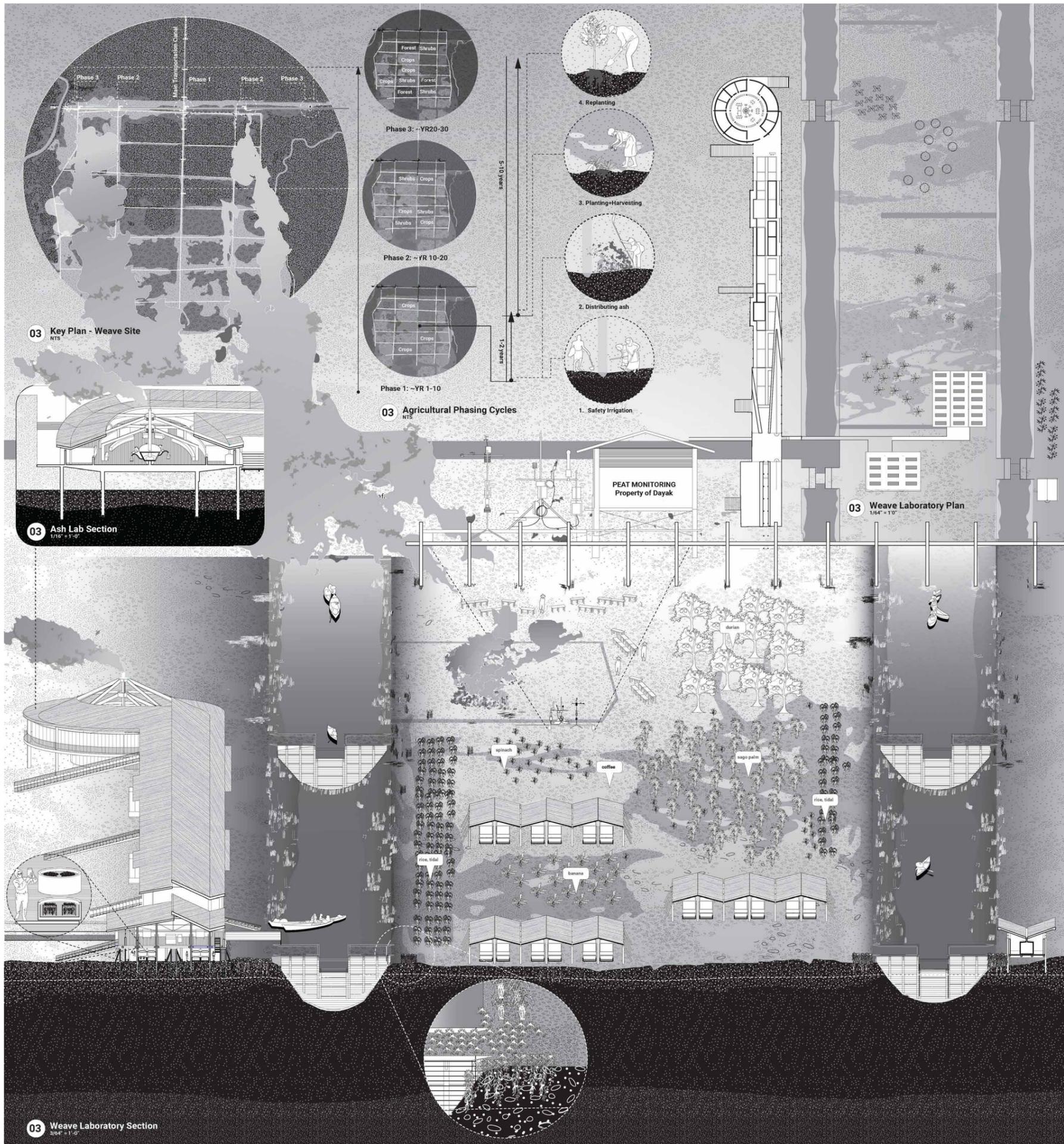
02 Cable Car Preservation + Research Lab Section
3/64" = 1'-0"

Spaghnum Moss growth in underground lab promotes the continuation of microbial life underground.

Chaetothyriceae is found in peat domes and is responsible for plant biomass bioconversion.

02. cultural centre:
The second intervention takes place on the **largest peat dome** between the national park and major villages. A cable car preservation center creates an alternative to intrusive infrastructure such as asphalt motorways. The center allows visitors and researchers to experience peat from above and below ground. Here the study of Dayak culture is carried out with the study of peat, **linking cultural and geological history.**





03. farming:

The site is at the border of a peat forest and the **mega rice project**. Here, indigenous farming techniques such as traditional **slash and burn** are practiced. They are recognized as a stable form of farming that does not contribute to the mega haze of large scale projects. In cyclical planting phases, trees and sphagnum moss are grown and replanted to rehabilitate land after each agricultural harvest.





Peat section in National Park



Peat section in former Mega Rice Project



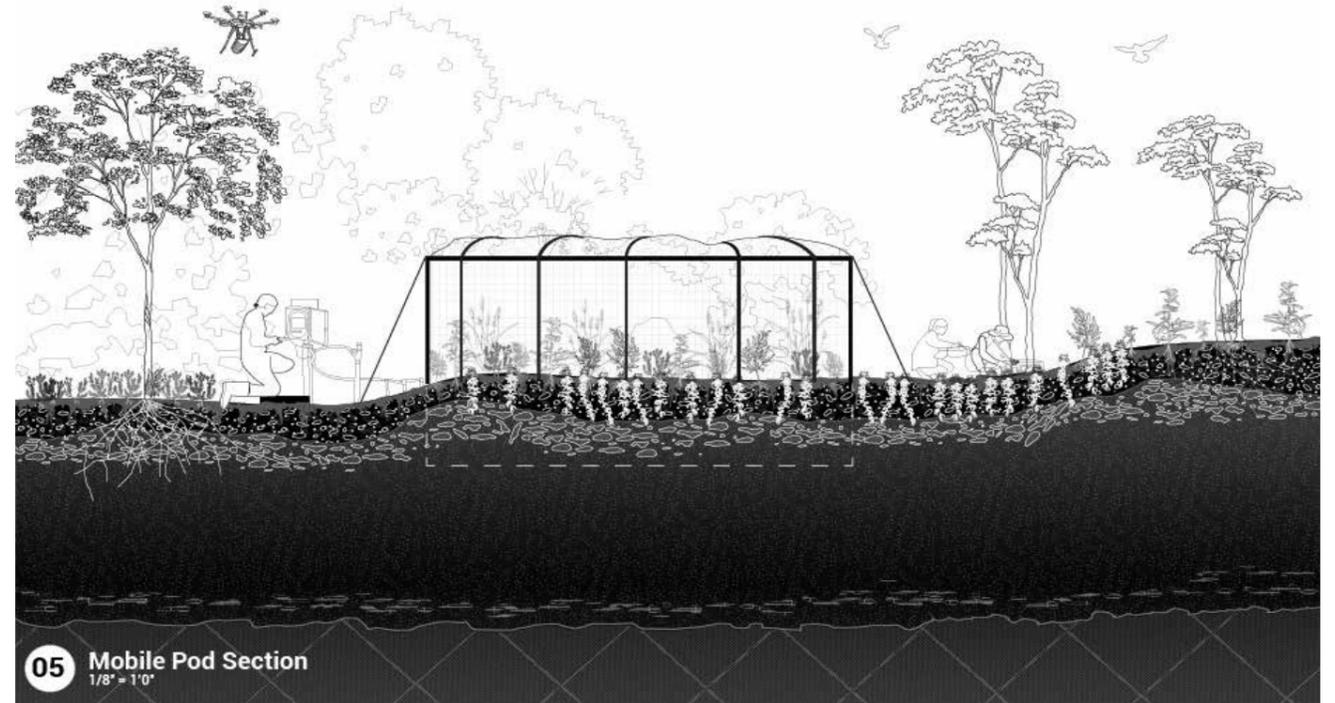
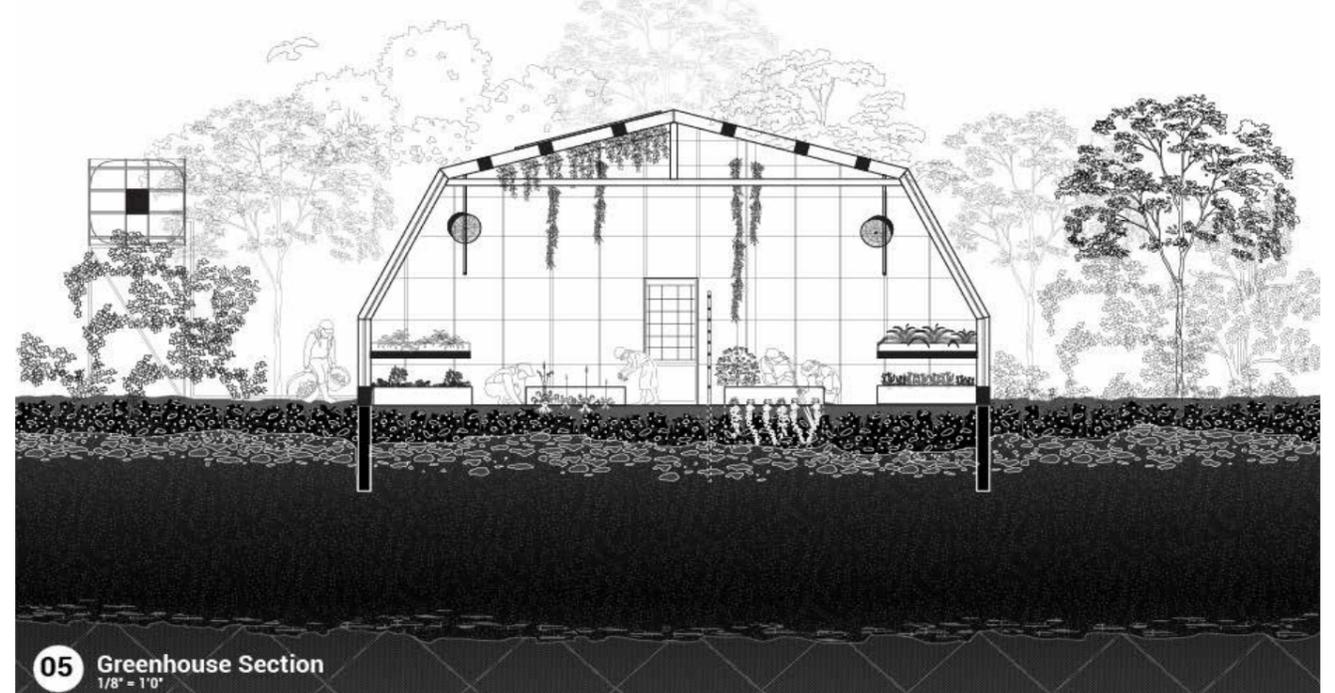
Peat section near coastline

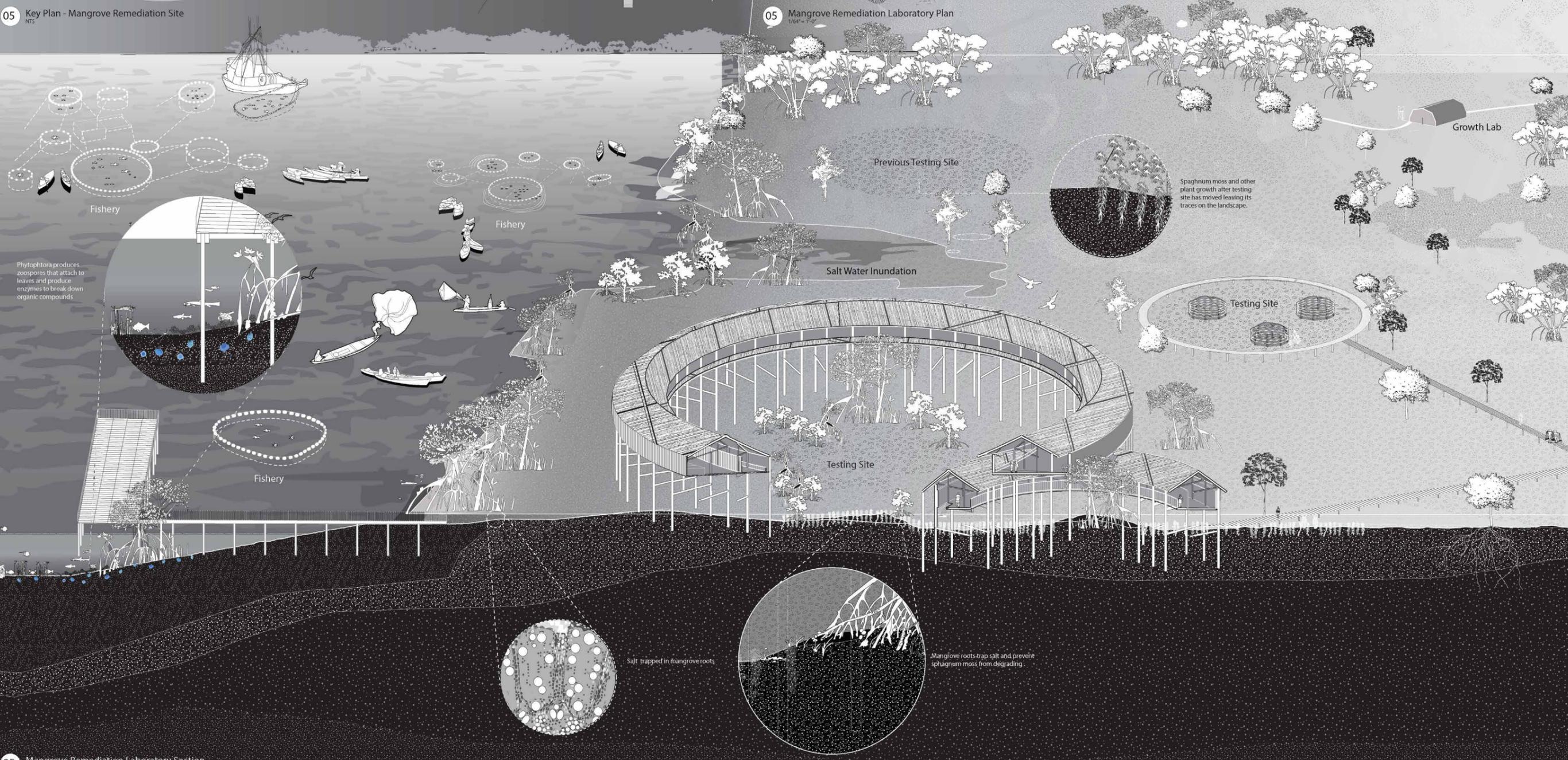
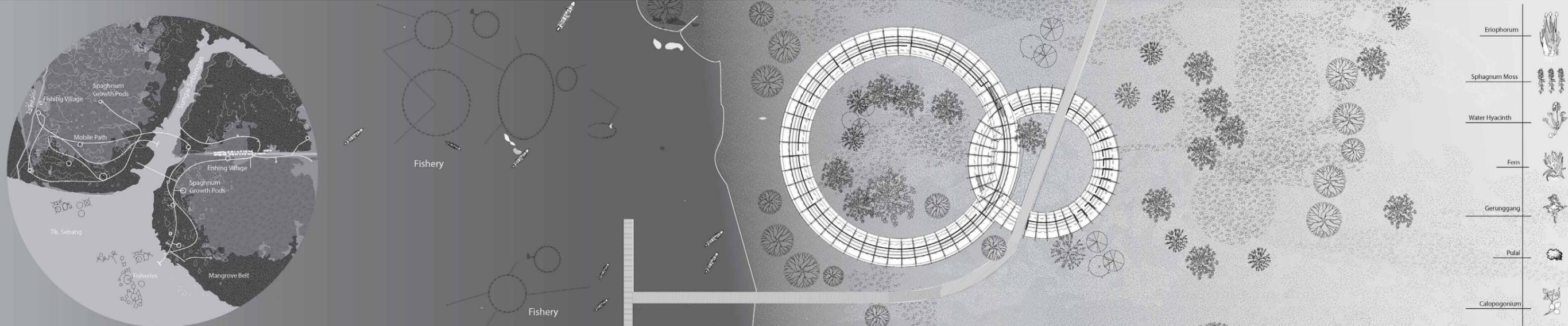
04. market & testing zone:

The intervention lies close to a former rice cultivation site and palm oil cultivation zone. Here, a network of testing zones are mobilized that are navigated via technological aids like Geoprobes and Ground Sensing Radars that allow the Dayak's to take charge of these ecological data sets. A field of heat-sensing lights mounted on geoprobes help monitor the underground conditions of peat, thereby alerting the villagers of developing underground fires. This is also mobilized by activating the canals that act as **surveillance channels to monitor palm oil.**

05. testing pods & greenhouse:

Lastly the edges of the island is looked at as a response to sea level rises in the future, which will degrade peatlands. We attempt to counter its effects by mangrove remediation. Mangroves trap sea salt before it travels inland. Salts prevent the growth of sphagnum, a crucial species to keep peatlands intact. Small-scale interventions like mobile testing pods and greenhouses are also proposed to allow the growth of plants like gerunggang to help with peatland restoration.







View from under the longhouse

Spectral Cartographies: Erasure of Oceanic Indianness
 advanced studio VI

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 Spring 23

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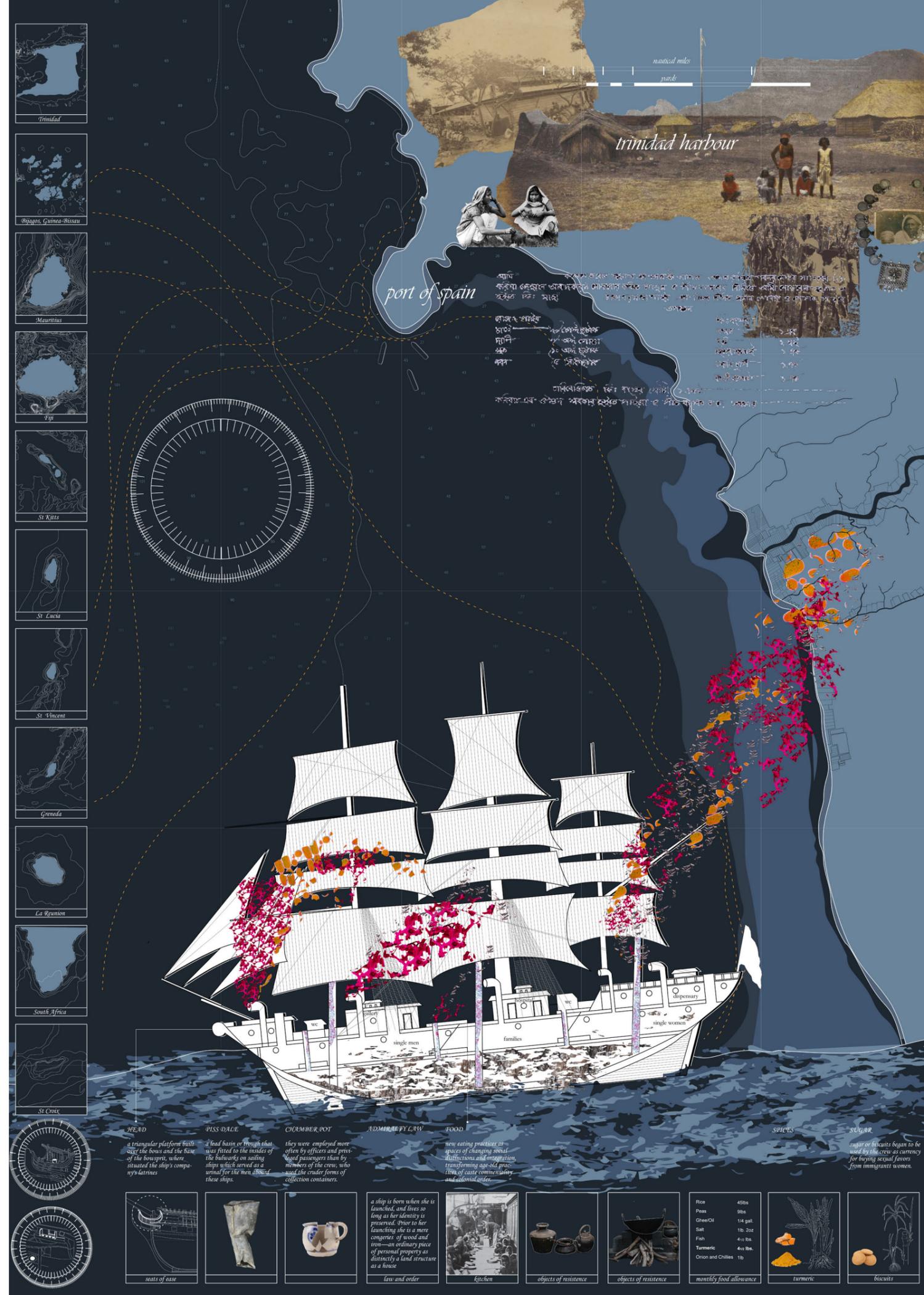
feedback
 Time is subjective and past is re-created in every moment. Working with media in a fluid way makes a contribution to a discourse in the school of architecture to push back against facts and stories being subjective rather than objective. This produces different realities.

Does embroidery have a phenomenological meaning that's used for liberation?

Considering ships as an architecture of violence, the project examines the Erasure of Oceanic Indianness and their association with indentured labor. It explores spectral cartographies that house **violence, extraction, and exploitation** by rendering visible spatial relationships in the ship crossings of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans during the transport of indentured laborers. I critically engage with tools and language of representation and mapping through the process of embroidery to propose spectral cartography as a counter-map. This process leaves **traces of error, punctures, and accidental knots**. This embodied process is one of layering of mediums and materiality that reveals itself through the ritual of **dyeing, drying, rubbing, and stitching**.

These are inscribed on scrolls, which I call **"folding architecture"** that aim to reveal the spectral lives and that carry these histories through water and across the vast ocean. These cartographies operate as **mobile sanctuaries of histories** to re-narrate, challenge, and build the narrative of indentured servitude across the islands of the Indian diaspora. Generations that experience the afterlife of the violent past, add on to it.

Hand stitching becomes a way to call for **collective remembrance** and acknowledgment of colonial histories of violence and erasure. It's also a way of challenging representation as the language of architecture, especially now that it thrives on **erasure via drawings** since technology renders the perfect output. The drawing development process is hidden and one often only receives the final image. Thus, embroidery as a technique critiques the larger questions of **deception, erasure, and error in architecture**.



Men always photographed as a collective of "jahaji bhai" or ship brothers - looking into the camera with a gaze - unfrazzled. Women in this narrative are expressed in the absences.



The indentured bodies replace the black bodies that once occupied the plantations in the colonies.

Women or "coolie belles" photographed as individuals with jewellery purchased from the earnings of their slavery. Thus, they literally wear the symbols of this violence as markers of beauty. These bodies are then disseminated via postcards globally.

Turmeric assisted the long journey across the Atlantic as it was a part of their monthly ration on the ship and broke many settled habits, cultural protocols and hierarchies. Food also served as a way to offer **resistance** to the colonial powers and thus culinary negotiations allowed for **dietary victories** as Indian labour fought to maintain linkages to their culinary habits as a way to be connected with their homeland. Turmeric eventually became a significant part of cuisine in these islands as it shaped the culinary landscape.



This **folding architecture** is enabled by dyeing fabric with turmeric and tea and then embroidering on it. These scrolls express 3 key moments and re-invigorate the discussion on indenture and **ships as plantations**. This counter narrative is crucial as the discussion on indenture is rarely acknowledged as it disturbs the preferred narrative of an Empire that abolished slavery, rather than one that attempted to forge a different system from its ashes.



Excerpts from the multimedia presentation to experiment with change in scale, time and space to express the counter-cartography of Oceanic Indianness.

“It’s Saturday the 10th of May 1845
With strong warm winds at noon in the port
at Calcutta.

Captain Rundle is ready to dispatch Fatel
Rozack across the Atlantic

I am Sheojari, an upper-class Brahmin who
is an indentured laborer.

I am 4 months pregnant as I enter the Fatel
Rozack and travel across the Atlantic.

I am a coolie - a term used to describe some-
one carrying luggage in India which is now a
slur to discriminate against immigrant Indian
labor like myself .

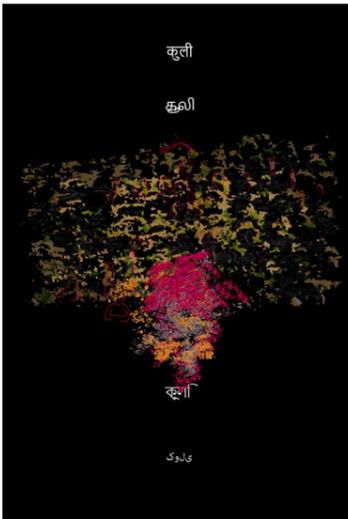
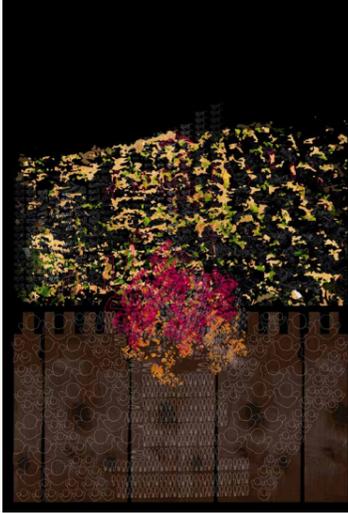
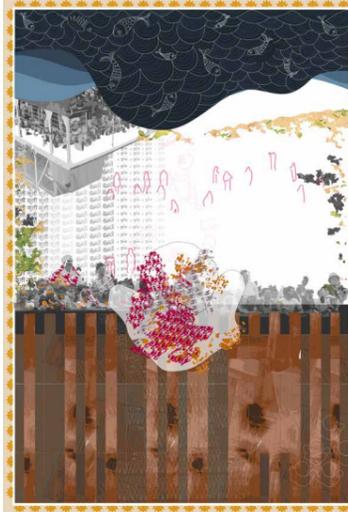
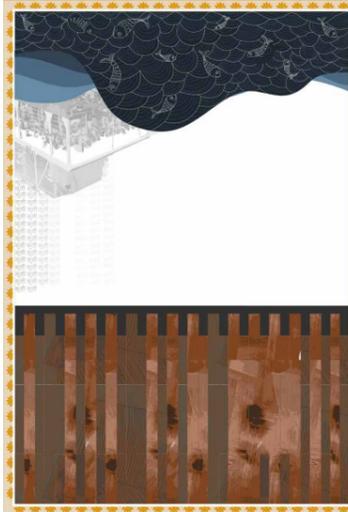
The British crown has recruited me and sev-
eral others to replace black bodies that once
worked on their colony plantations as slaves
to continue “profitable production”.

The ships on which we embark this journey
are liminal spaces -a threshold- a period of
transition - of being tutored but also a refus-
al to accept transforming of identities

This vessel is now a specter and a “site”
of investigation. A mobile island that tran-
scends beyond the dotted “plot line” used
to express architectural sites that are
bound, static, and measurable.

How does one express the cartography
of sexuality and violence in a site that
ceases to exist?

How do we draw deeply entangled his-
tories of bodies that were colonized, tu-
tored, and extracted.”



(un)ravelling : objects

(un)ravelling objects expands on what it means to engage with material both tangible and intangible through still photography. It gives voice to all that's **muddled, tainted and disguised**. by exploring unseen forms, material and objects.

Found in Fragments is an experiment in working with materials repeatedly to act on my instincts whether it's deciding what form of material to work with or how to shape a volume. This intuition based engagement allows unexpected revelations and pushes for non-conformity.

Unveil is a documentation that counters ideas of pristine spaces. It brings to the forefront bodies and objects that occupy places that are often **concealed, unseen and veiled** to reinforce the dominant narratives of sanitary spaces. It brings together material and objects that create **disjunction**.

Found in Fragments

MAKE

studio critic

Prof. Ada Tolla | Prof. Giuseppe Lignano

semester

Fall 22

review critic(s)

Thomas De Monchaux

feedback

Take these material explorations further in your design process and explore what it means to keep working and re-working with a material.

Stay soft and sensitive - there is deep strength in that and architecture needs it.

What does it mean to see and engage with materials around us- the leftovers, the discarded, the ignored...things that are domestic and urban? How does one reflect on their potential to "be" something based on our instinct? How does one **make and re-make** these volumes to radically transform and discover different facets of a material such that we work with it but also **resist and think with it**? Engaging with Found in Fragments has allowed me to do just that.

This constant engagement with material has made me cognisant of what it means to **trust your work, how do you let it speak, how do you speak with your writing and your voice and lastly,how do you perform a volume.**



Dusted

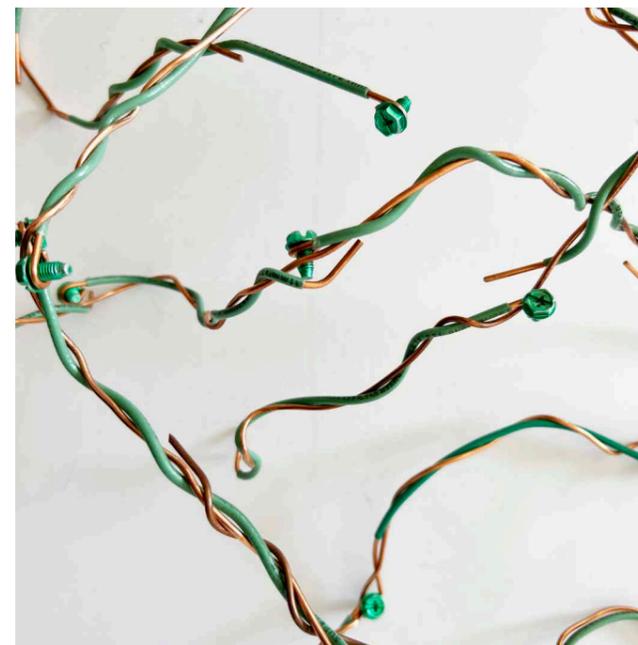
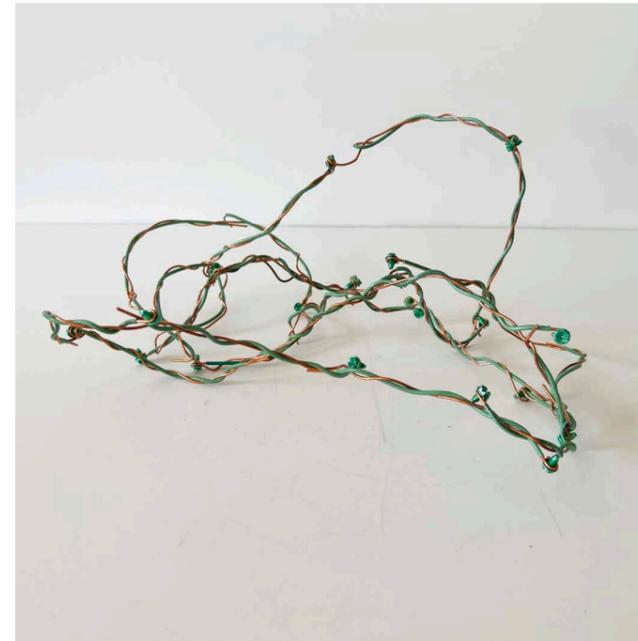
The quest to find the material began in the SHOP where I dived and cleaned the equipment to gather sawdust. This bag of sawdust then went home with me and I kept wondering how to contain it as it flew. I thought of pasting it and making a huge ball but then instead thought of playing with the volume by bagging it and putting different quantities of sawdust in different bags - tying them and finally piecing them together with knots and rubber bands .

Taking off from the previous iteration where we couldn't feel the textures of sawdust, the second attempt at remaking it is done by swapping the approach and turning things inside out. I took a bag full of sawdust and mixed wood glue and waited to see how much was held. I did this over and over again with 4 plastic bags but the same quality of sawdust. Once the sawdust was exhausted air was exhausted and the bags tied together to create this volume.



Rags from my kitchen

When we were given this assignment initially I wanted to dye the fabric in turmeric and beetroot and experiment with that. However, when my aunt gave me 8 cleaning clothes which were printed and so I was prompted to think of something else. These fabrics sat on my table for 3 days and I kept wondering what to do. Alas! as the submission deadline dawned on me on my way back home and I was thinking of how to make a volume by starching the fabric did I come across a house discarding a bunch of hangers. I tore the cloth every inch according to the pattern on it to create longer sections. The hangers were then untwisted and so they became my sewing needles to stitch the kitchen cloth together. There are moments in this volume when the cloth slips, wires collide and there is a lot more resistance and compression, counter to the delicate nature of the cloth.



Metal Mess

This volume was built to unleash the copper which is hidden by the green coating only suggestive of the copper on the inside. I wrapped it around a copper framework, entangling it around like a creeper. It is so deeply intertwined that it's only when you go closer do you get a sense of who is wrapping whom.

The art of drinking coffee

Coming from a very different context where drinking tea is a leisurely activity, drinking coffee in the States is like running a marathon. It's grabbed on the go and becomes a frequent beverage that's consumed. Its afterlife is lived by the coffee cup which is left in lecture rooms, on benches and sometimes on the ground as "trash". This object specifically the **Starbucks cup** becomes my medium to create a volume to commemorate this object of prestige with straws and lids interlocked. Slits are created in the cup so they lock easily without the need for an external fastener. The cups also bear order slips which is an archive of the person who once slurped the caffeine.



Unveil

Photography: From the Models to the Built World

studio critic

Prof. Michael Vahrenwald

semester

Fall 22

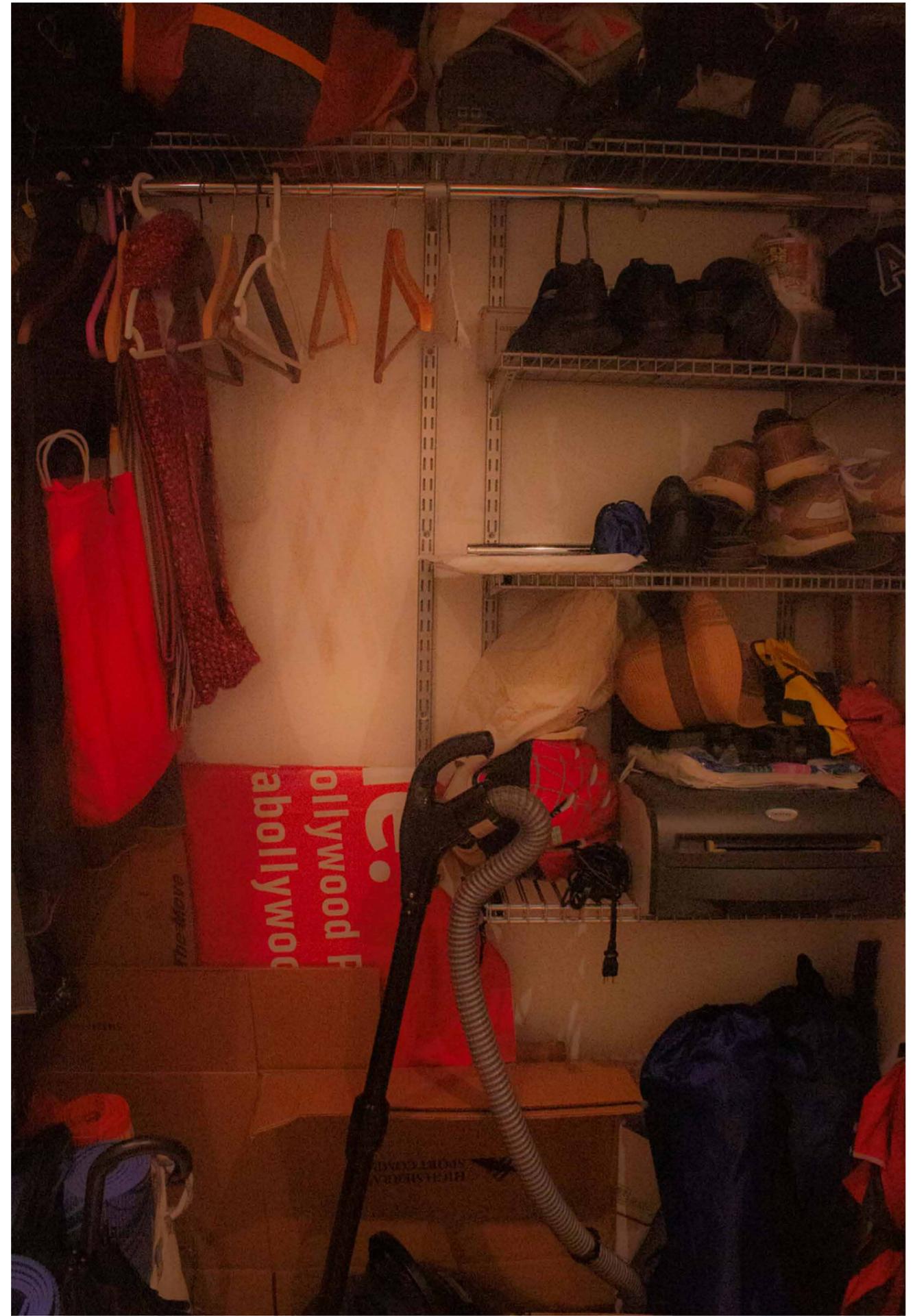
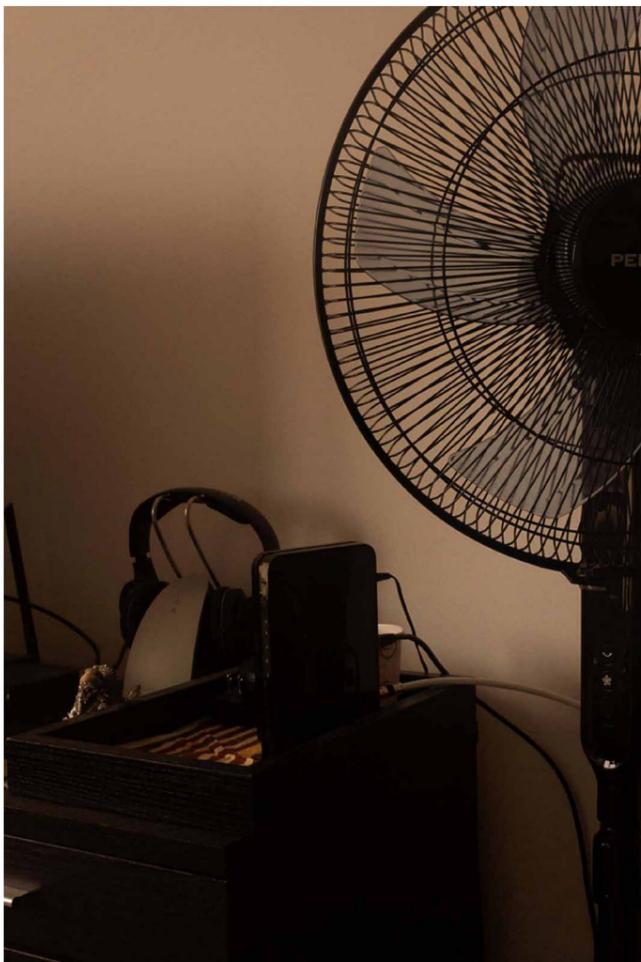
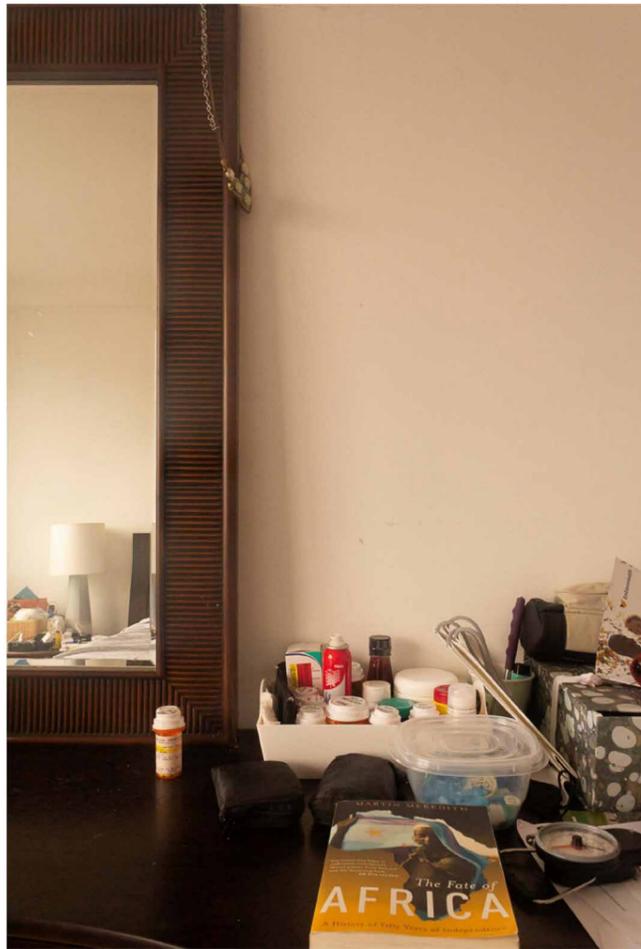
Capturing spaces has been an exercise in thinking about **color, motion, center line of the frame, edges of the frame, scale, pattern, reflections, volumes, people and places**. It has also been about thinking critically with the tools we have at our disposal and how they give us power as individuals to show/hide, unveil/erase certain evidences, details and stories of time.

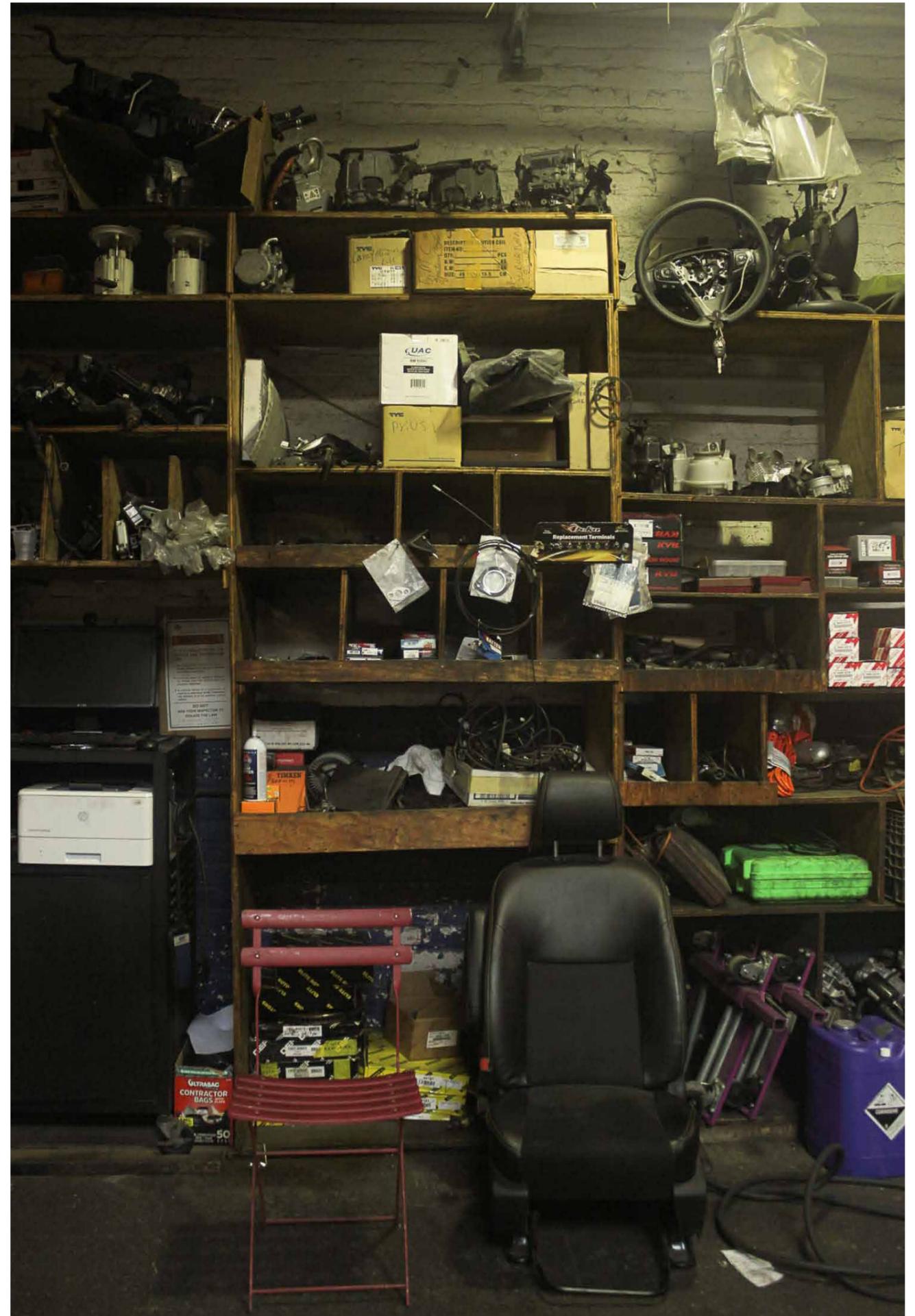
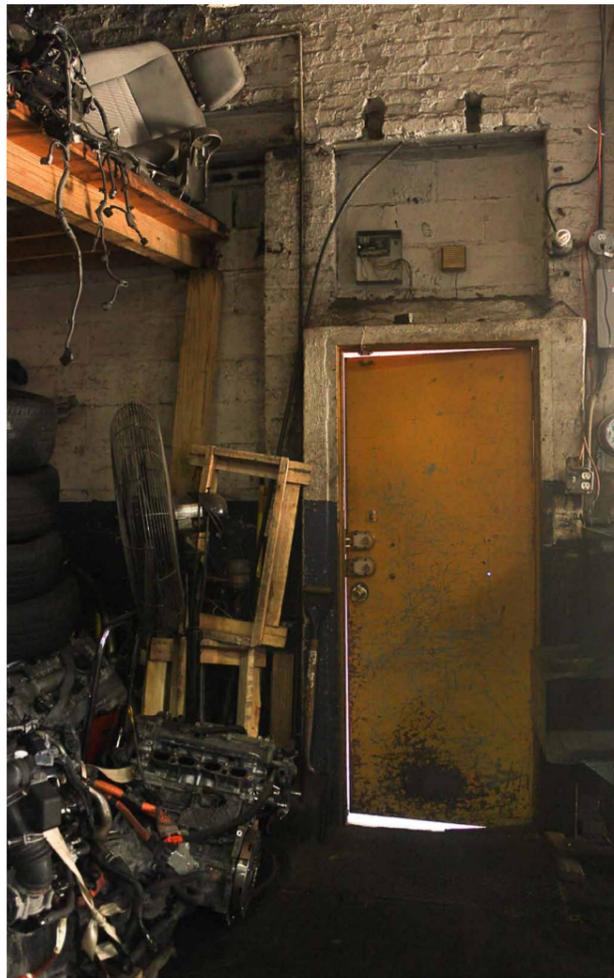
Series 1:

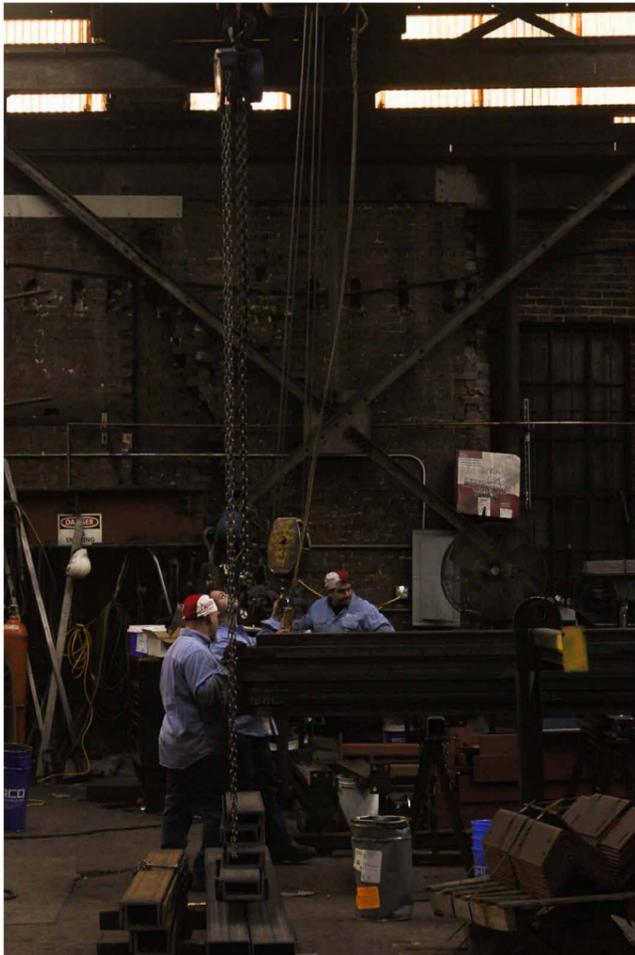
Objects at home - As sanitized and proper as we may want our homes to be there are always spaces that become magnets to other objects. These spaces are hidden, often shoved in deeply personal corners. What drew me to these spaces is the **oddity of objects** that come together and how that challenges the preconceived notions of what an ideal home should look like.

Series 2:

This series explores the spaces of hidden labor and unveils what's behind the facade. These places are charged with **materiality** and serve as montages of **gunk, residue, and tools** that come together to create an architecture of service and repair.







unassuming : reflections

The essay **Intersectionality in Geeli Pucchi** is an analysis of the ways in which themes like caste, gender, and privilege collide and overlap to create systems of disadvantage and discrimination. The scene analyzed in the film is between two women and plays out how they navigate these themes such that it allows one of them to gain agency and disrupt the established social order by **subverting the “ privilege”** that the protagonist was bestowed with. It investigates **caste as a senatorial regime** and the ways in which it is expressed on screen through **anti-caste aesthetics**. This piece is extremely relevant as it responds to the current political affixation in India regarding the recognition of same-sex marriage legally and how that's complicated by ideas of caste which is still very much rooted in different layers of society.

X-Ray Architecture presents a graphic essay critiquing Beatrice Colomina's book X-ray Architecture's Chapter 3. This analytical paper allowed me to dissect and analyze ways in which a piece of writing works to make a compelling argument to convince the reader. It was a fundamental exercise in understanding ways in which a reader is **interpellated**. Techniques like **language, framing devices, images, typography, and historical evidence** were looked at closely to acknowledge things the writer takes for granted and reinforces them at junctures to convince the reader of their initial intent.

Labor in Limbo is a confluence of reflections that gave voice to season 3 of rAADio, a podcast by the AAD students at GSAPP. Our concerns as an editorial board were centered around the ideas of how **ethics operate in architecture**. This season we question and investigate how this shapes the architecture we produce which is loaded with **biases** and ultimately creates a strong shift in **power dynamics**.

The different lectures curated as part of my time at GSAPP, whether through studio, arguments, or the dean's lecture series, have been seminal in this quest to probe and dive deeper into how to engage with the built environment through **non-human alliances and multi-media work (art, film, music)**. **Afterthoughts** is a culmination of such discussions with various thinkers that stayed with me and became **points of departure** for my practice with the culmination of the program.

studio critic
Prof. Debashree Mukherjee

semester
Spring 23

review critic(s)
Ankush Bhuyan and Saumya Daboo

"We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts,"

- Kimberle Crenshaw

Geeli Puchi (Sloppy Kisses, Neeraj Ghaywan, 2021) is a 30 minute short film part of the anthology *Ajeeb Daastaans*. It traces the stories of a Dalit worker Bharti Mandal and Priya Sharma, a Brahmin data operator at her factory. *Geeli Pucchi* explores their relationship as they navigate patriarchy, gender politics and ingrained prejudices. In this paper I will unpack the themes of caste, gender and privilege to explore intersectionality¹ in the film. The director Neeraj Ghaywan weaves it seamlessly in the film especially in the opening shots after Bharti walks out of her supervisor's office upset that a job promised to her was offered to Priya.

Caste:

The scene begins with Bharti expressing her displeasure at being denied the position of a data operator to Dashrath, her co-worker. She does this by asking a series of questions like how long does it take to learn excel or tally and even testifies having a B.Com degree in her defense. This helps in denoting that she is a meritorious candidate and capable for this position. Dashrath, having seen life longer than Bharti, shrugs this by stating that despite Bharti's ability to learn these skills she is a Mandal and that her surname is not Sharma, Banerjee or Mishra (Fig.1). These surnames that Dashrath exemplifies are strong indicators of the most privileged castes in India and thus become markers of an individual's entitlement in society (Fig. 2). Dashrath even furthers this discussion by cautioning Bharti with the statement "*wahan pohnchte pohnchte tak kahi tum jali padi na milo*" reiterating caste based violence which included hate crimes against Dalits by locking them in their homes and burning them alive. This cautionary tale informs Bharti's responses during her interaction with Priya later on in the scene when Priya asks Bharti her full name, which compels her to lie and say Bhar



Fig 1: Dashrath talking about caste being a precursor to judge merit



Fig 2: Dashrath questioning Priya about her last name.



Fig 3: Priya questioning ideas of femininity



Fig 4: Bhupesh's male gaze



Fig 5: Bhupesh's inappropriate comment about Bharti's sex life

-ti Banerjee instead of Mandal. The act of repetition of these surnames via dialogues early on in the film between these three characters helps register that caste, privilege and merit are intersecting themes in the film .

Femininity and gender politics:

Ideas of femininity are also at play in this scene which are accentuated by the contrast between the protagonists .Priya is a Brahmin and thus well respected by her co-workers who refer to her as "madam". She is also seen wearing traditional Indian clothes, gold earrings, bindi, sindoor and mangalsutra which are clear markers of matrimony. All these aspects work towards demonstrating her privilege and acceptance in society as she is seen conforming to very traditional roles of a wife, daughter and daughter-in law. Bharti on the other hand reinforces the 'butch lesbian'² stereotype wearing a blue jumpsuit "uniform" with no makeup and jewelry. She questions this idea of patriarchal femininity by asking Dashrath if she was not given the job because she doesn't do makeup like Priya (Fig. 3).

The fight between Bharti and her co-worker Bhupesh in this scene is also a testament of the conformity to patriarchal notions of femininity. Bhupesh appreciates Priya joining the workplace and equates her to being an embodiment of Lordess Laxmi.³ Contrary to this he disregards Bharti's existence by saying "India has progressed but not a single woman in the factory". This clearly indicates that the men see women from a certain patriarchal gaze that conform to ideas such as docility, wearing traditional Indian clothing and makeup, matrimony, engaging in delicate work and not having a voice (Fig. 4). All these attributes are defied by Bharti as she is queer and has different forms of self expression. She even goes on to beat up the man when he makes an inappropriate comment- "*zyaada dekhengi toh inke chehre se daari , mooch nikal aayegi*".... *Kya hai na din bhar haath se machine chalati hai...haath se hi santusht rehna padta hai*". This comment underlines that Bharti may be seeking self pleasure due to lack of a partner to satisfy her as she is not married (Fig. 5). These instances thus work to highlight the collision between ideas of femininity, gender, caste and how much agency is possible depending on who is the person in question.

Privilege

Privilege as a theme also does work in adding a layer of complexity as Dashrath is firm in telling Bharti that “*Table par sirf khanna milega, table kursi wali naukri nahi*”. He is trying to look out for her as a member of the Dalit community by convincing her that she is not going to move up the ladder and command respect no matter what she does. It is a privilege members from this community will never be able to experience. Another instance when this is heightened is Priya’s entry into the canteen where only workers eat from a stage of elevation. As she enters her gaze is top down and thus the location of the stairs show that Priya is at the top of the ladder literally in space and with respect to her social standing in society (Fig. 6). The camera work also heightens this as it tilts down to place Bharti who is at a lower level than her.

Other spaces that women occupy are also under discussion as questions of a woman’s toilet come up. For the factory Bharti’s needs were not enough for them to provide the facility. It was only taken seriously because Priya, an upper class Brahmin questions it and thus the toilet is eventually built later in the film. Props such as utensils also further the theme of privilege by stark distinction in the food and utensils they eat with. Priya comes with a home cooked tiffin with an extra cover and purified water in a bottle (Fig. 7) contrary to Bharti who is given the same food that is cooked for each worker in the factory.

Geeli Pucchi does a fine job of layering complexities of gender, caste, merit and privilege to unpack the ideas of intersectionality via dialogues, spaces, costumes and props. These themes often collide with each other and become the anchors for Bharti to take charge to escape from the oppression, domination, and discrimination that these conditions perpetuate. This opening scene does work to discuss ideas of technical knowledge as a form of racial property and the ways in which patriarchy deals with casteism. It also helps in building the arc for Bharti’s character as she knows that her life is difficult and in spite of her merit, diligence and grit she will have to continue to fight and claim public space for herself. As Ajantha Subramanian writes collective belonging and claims to merit are eminently commensurable and

become more so when **subaltern assertion** forces historical privilege into the foreground which comes through as Bharti uses this historical privilege to work in her favor to eventually get the job.



Fig 6: Priya’s top down gaze



Fig 7: Priya and Bharti eating together in the canteen

NOTES

1. Intersectionality refers to the simultaneous experience of social categories such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation and the ways in which these categories interact to create systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination.
2. Traditionally, in lesbian culture, the word “butch” refers to a woman whose gender expression and traits present as typically “masculine”.
3. Lordess Laxmi is the goddess of wealth, fortune, power, beauty, fertility and prosperity in Hindu culture.

X-Ray Architecture

history of architectural theory

studio critic
Prof. Mark Wigley

semester
Fall 22

review critic(s)
Andrea Molina Cuadro



Fig-1: Bertha Rontgen’s X-Ray

Beatriz Colomina’s *X-Ray Architecture’s* Chapter 3: *X-Ray Intimacy* introduces the reader to X-rays as an association with patients who suffer from tuberculosis. The theory is placed in a setting that brings together illness, architecture, and technology. The first paragraph of the chapter begins with Susan Sontag’s (who is assumed to be known to the reader) dramatic quote that lays the ground for these themes. She associates illness with a place by introducing the term “geography of health” like there is a destination to get to in order to be healthy. Sontag addresses the TB patient as a “wanderer” and “traveler” who undertakes a nomadic journey to recover from this illness. The way she frames this argument is evocative of ideas of vacation or pilgrimage to seek enlightenment. The cure for this illness is then proposed to lie with modern buildings which according to Sontag becomes another medical apparatus in which the patient is a “client”. She does this by challenging the role of architecture for being not only for seeking shelter but also for providing exposure like X-rays. Thus, Beatriz Colomina uses another “established” person to write the first paragraph such that it paints the scene for Colomina to take off from in order to unfold these themes in the remaining thirty-two pages.

The intended audience for this piece of writing is clearly architects and design students who may be interested in themes of transparency, architecture, or navigating concepts of visible and invisible in architecture as the title of the book is *X-Ray Architecture*. This is also substantiated by a well-conceived cover which is the façade of a building with x-ray-like qualities rendered in glossy shades of grey and black which serves as a hook for architects. As a result, the choreography of the title with a well-curated cover for the intended audience work to make the reader want to flip and see what Beatriz Colomina has to say. X-ray as an architectural tool is the main argument of the paper. It responds to a very specific time in history when TB was considered a major illness. Its detection becomes the starting point to justify the invention of X-ray which revealed unseen symptoms or developments in the body

that caused a disease. It tries to persuade architects that technology, illness, and architecture are strongly interlinked and that one may influence the other. This argument is made by talking about its discovery and its changing relationship with human beings. It starts with poetic quotes about a TB patient and goes on to describe how Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen discovered it. Roentgen is an important figure in the first half of the paper. He is described as an intelligent man who loved his wife as is seen in images of her X-ray with a big wedding band (Fig-1). He is painted as a messiah who did charity for the world as he never patented the technology he discovered. The reader is made to empathize with this figure by the use of phrases such as “self-effacing” and “sadly, he died in near poverty”. There is also an intentionality in talking about

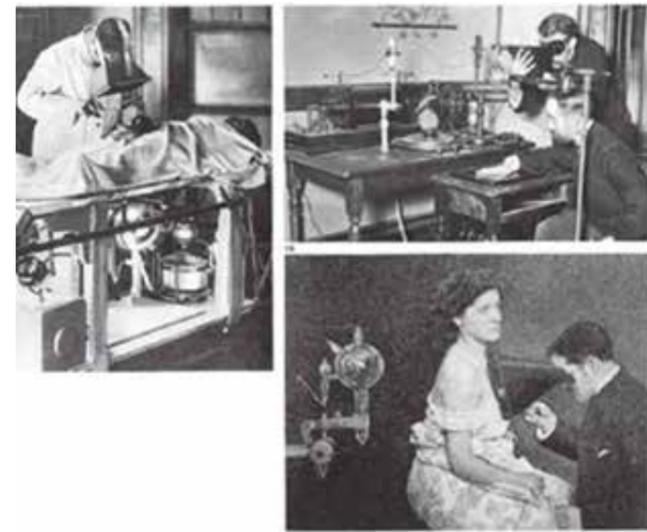


Fig-2: Women as sites of experimentation

his wife’s X-ray images with the giant ring. The reader’s only association with his wife is the images of her hand’s X-ray. This is reminiscent of times when women were veiled; the only part of a woman’s body that was revealed was often only their hands which were also gloved sometimes. The hand is the most X-rayed part and its status as an “intimate portrait” is justified by quoting notable names like anatomist Albert von Kolliker, Emperor Wilhelm II, Empress Augustus Victoria, Duke and Dutchess of York, and Emperor and Empress of Russia whose hands were X-rayed. This pedestalizes the invention as it becomes sought after by people of higher ranks as intimate portraits as opposed to those that adorn their lavish palaces. cussed, the fact that he studied the transparency of the glass is also slid in subtly.

Among the different materials and inanimate objects items on which Röntgen tested the x-rays are discussed, the fact that he studied the transparency of the glass is also slid in subtly. The agenda that the X-ray’s discovery made a huge impact is also pushed by calling it the “icon of a new worldview”. The discovery as a sensational phenomenon is addressed and explained with evidence of it being part of exhibitions in Berlin. The fact that this discovery was acknowledged globally is credited to the production of images of hand X-rays. Something is also interesting about X-ray images being part of an exhibition in Crystal Palace as glass is the equivalent of X-ray architecture in the latter half of the chapter. The author also acknowledges publications that raved about this discovery such as Die Presse in Vienna and the Standard newspaper in London.



As soon as the Standard is quoted the contents of the article are promptly justified which which misspelled Röntgen’s name and interpreted his wife Bertha’s hand as that of a man. Quotes from this article about the news being “no joke” and the discovery being “serious” are overemphasized. The extent to which x-ray has affected architecture is discussed time and again and built on in Chapter 3. Colomina emphasizes the role of the X-ray as being architecturally significant by stating – “the X-ray was architectural from the beginning and remains so as can be seen image after image”. If it was clear that X-ray is important to the discipline of architecture or for architects to even consider then we would not need more images and text in the remaining twelve pages to prove this point.

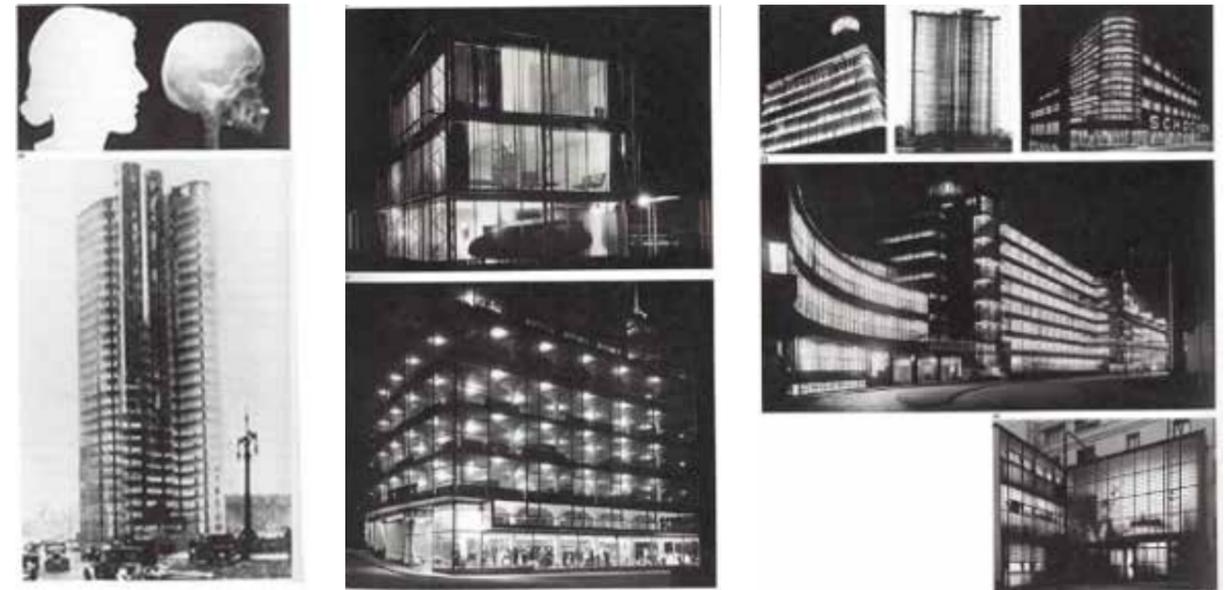


Fig-3: Fusion of technology and buildings

Visually, the chapter begins with only one small image of Roentgen in the left-hand corner followed by images of his wife’s X-ray images with her wedding ring. These stand out as they are printed as fairly large images that have two pages dedicated to them. X-ray images of animals and insects like chameleons and frogs are then displayed with dedicated spreads. After a few pages, images mix and are composed such that images of people and animals are displayed together. We see a strong portrait of Annie Besant floating among images of a chest X-ray, Roentgen’s wife’s hand again, and the X-ray of a frog. This essentially puts the human and the animal on one level suggesting that it does not matter what’s on the outside as inside it’s fundamentally all bones.

Something that has also crept into the way the images are curated is a clear gender bias. Most images have women who are a part of this experiment. These images show how an X-ray is done with a contraption mounted on the doctor’s head which is heavy and serves as a second set of eyes for them. It has a woman partially dressed looking away as the male doctor examines her chest. The image has very strong body language that comes through as it highlights the man being in charge and knowing what he is doing while the woman simply sits and stares into space. Architecture slowly creeps in with an exhibition poster followed by a rather large image of Grands Magasin Dufayel. The sub-heading “Building the New Visual Field” marks the transition from people, animals, and buildings being separate to being composed in a set of images together.

In Fig. 2 we see the man’s back but see a blonde woman elegantly seated with her hair done in curls looking away. The caption accompanying this picture argues the case of X-ray exposure being negligible and the woman’s expressions in the photograph make a strong case for that as she sits motionless, with no expression of displeasure on her face. These images are a set with a third image showing three women gathered around a table with the screen aimed at a fourth woman who stands on the table revealing a liquor bottle hidden under her clothing. These images suggest surveillance and look at the visibility of the invisible as good and overcompensate for this goodness by justifying that there is no harm from the radiation from the x-ray. Since the book is meant for architects all of these discussions of X-rays, testing and animals have to tie up to buildings and so Walter Gropius’s illustration and a magazine titled Glas im Bau und Als Gebrauchsgegenstand are shown together suggesting a parallel between X-Ray and its ability to unveil the hidden with glass of different clarities glowing. The last set of images have the silhouette of a woman and her skull’s X-ray with Mies Van Der Rohe’s skyscraper insinuating that they are similar phenomena (Fig 3). These images visually work to draw parallels between buildings rendered with light and bodies with X-rays. The skull is revealed with a special light just like how the interior reveals itself as glass responds to light. Beatriz Colomina thus looks at the x-ray as a tool to “unveil the mysteries of the interior brought to the surface” which translates into architecture as well as echoes the logic of the X-ray .

collaborator(s)

Francisca Alliende Covarrubias

Max Lauter (Director and producer)
Alex Hamadey (Composer and audio engineer)
Alana de Vito (Recording engineer)

rAADio is an investigation by Advanced Architectural design students in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University. As a cohort from a plurality of diverse backgrounds, we aim to observe the many polycentric entanglements of architecture. We explore the questions of how we expand the traditional role and associations of architecture between assemblages, interrelationships, bodies, and technologies; beyond simple scalar translations. This third season, rAADio discusses ethics in architecture

Episode 5 : Labour in Limbo

Intro sound

FAC: Hi, This is rAADio, in this third season we are discussing Ethics in Architecture. I am Francisca Alliende.

SR: And I am Simran Raswant.

FAC: Join us as we dwell deep into labor practices, rights, and ethics

SR: as we unpack their journey as they build architectural marvels.

(Break transition)

FAC: Hey Simran, did you watch the FIFA World Cup final?

SR: Ummmm.... Don't be mad but not so big on football. But in case this is a saving grace I do know who made the stadium.

FAC: Well of course you do. I ask this because I have been watching some of the BTS of the stadiums getting built and the amount of labor involved in getting these 8 stadiums ready is phenomenal.

SR: I know!!!.... I was reading some stats earlier last week and I was taken aback by the numbers. Migrant workers essentially make up 80% of Qatar's population.

FAC: No way !!! To think of it... it's like they essentially run the economy of Qatar.

SR: I mean that's one way to look at it. You'd think that since they are the majority, they would have some privileges..... but that's definitely debatable.

FAC:What has been a shocker for me was the response of architects who have said "I have nothing to do with the workers"

SR: You cannot be serious!!!The biggest issue at this point is the state of labor. They were

brought to a completely different country with big promises, non of which have materialized in practice.

FAC: As far as I remember they were brought in from countries like Sri Lanka, Philippines and India under the Kafala system where employers sponsor the immigrant worker.

SR: This is exactly like sponsorship by employers for international students.

FAC: Exactly! Just as some students took loans to be here, migrant workers also took loans to fund their journey, medical tests, visas, flight tickets, and more. For someone who is coming from a small town, the amount of initial expenditure to get a job internationally with high rates of interest is a tough spot to be in.

SR: Of course. They left home with big aspirations and took that leap of faith not fully knowing what's in store for them. They had unsanitary conditions of living and 14hr work day in extreme heat. To top this they faced wage theft despite all of this and now are stuck there after the World Cup.

FAC: What do you mean stuck?

SR: The labour can't just go back to their home countries easily. They haven't been able to make the money they anticipated and have loans waiting to be repaid. In case they want to go home nonetheless they need to pay their employer a "fee". They are trapped no matter what they choose to do.

FAC: Things like this make me wonder..... Is this the human cost of passion projects? Does the aspiration for an iconic project become bigger than ethics and basic human rights?

SR: These are big questions to think about. In a situation like this who responds to these labour- the The UN? The governments of respective countries from where the labor came like India, Philippines, Bangladesh, Kenya, and Uganda ? or do the architecture firms step up?

(Break transition)

SR: I have been thinking about our relationship with labour since undergrad and have

always wondered why we as architects tend to dissociate ourselves from the labor who make buildings possible?

FAC: Absolutely. It's almost weird to think that during my undergrad in Chile, I don't think I worked with labor till I went to the site.

SR: I couldn't agree more. I remember in first year of college we had courses in carpentry and masonry and not once did we have labor, who essentially does this on-site work with us. They were always on the "outside", away from the institutions of academia. No wonder we face issues on-site straight out of college.

FAC: Exactly!! We sit in the office and spend all this time on CAD, Rhino, and Revit to make drawings and send them on-site and the labor approaches it entirely differently. When asked why they didn't follow the drawing the answer is usually "well that's how it's done on-site"

SR: I don't entirely blame them. Most people who are involved in this manual labor are not trained the way we are. They have learnt these skills on the job or through their ancestors who have been doing this for generations now.

FAC: Hmm.. I see where you are getting at. Do you think we should make drawings differently? Or involve labour early on, while we are getting introduced to carpentry, plumbing, and masonry?

SR: I guess it's both. We primarily have the language of architectural education to re-assess in some ways and also how we respond to labor once we practice. Is it ethical to start architectural education with this distance from the workforce? Is it okay to engage them only for manual work and not as active participants of the architectural practice?

(Break transition)

FAC: Our engagement with labour works at different stages and at varying scales - from construction sites to cities

SR: Of course. We engage with them on site as they work towards making buildings physically possible but also design for them at a domestic scale.

FAC: This reminds me of Frieda Escobedo's Domestic Orbits. In this book she spoke about how the domestic space is configured around orbits of exclusion that shape the trajectories of the domestic workers. I think erasure of these domestic orbits also operates at different scales in architecture and planning

SR: Fran I would also argue that we have a very casual approach to our association with labour and where they stay is always an afterthought. In India for example the labour builds temporary shelters for themselves and their families at the construction site. The contractor employing them takes no responsibility of where or how they live.

FAC: This is insane. Back home in Chile I have seen cities for labour especially in places of extraction like El Salvador. Its literally a city dominated by men who are predominantly engaged in mining and extraction. They stay there for 10 days and then go home for 5 days and then come back again. This population is always in transit and migrates based on work.

SR: This is very similar to Qatar labour camps. I was reading 'Who builds Your Architecture' and they spoke about how despite all this tech "efficiency" an area that remains shockingly unregulated is the human labor used to construct such designs of the future.

FAC: Absolutely. In my opinion, architects many times needs to design for labour and in some cases its a whole city . These are two extreme scales. One so intimate - a tiny room in a home and then this massive city.

SR: You are right Fran. Our relationship with labour has 2 extreme sides- there is lack of acknowledgement on construction sites and then we design cities for them. I think the design of such spaces also reflects this sense of detachment because of which they are poorly designed. Some of my discussions with clients have landed in arguments because for them a window in a labour quarter is "unnecessary".

FAC: That's right. These spaces are coded in concealed power and inequity and raises big questions about what it means to be ethical and our responsibilities as practitioners.

SR: Taking a stand is crucial as we are in an age where architecture is constantly redefining itself and expanding its limits as a practice. We need to move beyond just thinking about form and function and begin to think critically about the larger impacts of our choices on the ecosystem that labor operates in and how it informs other disciplines.



Afterthoughts

lectures

semester
Summer 22

semester
Fall 22

semester
Spring 23

synthetic naturalism :

laws of nature in metabolism translated into buildings- not just a shelter but to produce nature.

- Lydia Kallipoliti

culture of political patronage :

colonial plantation lines drawn by the colonizers through ecological bodies....the work provides utility to activism groups, lawyers and policy makers- archival work is important and powerful.

- Imani Jacqueline Brown

air as archive/ rhetorical object:

air as more than the substance that fills the pneumatic structure.. its a product of historically produced residue.

- Mark Wasjuta

decolonizing the senses:

emerging discourse from people as an active knowledge source- shifting the ground and un-learning time - learning what the body holds and what it can do.

- Samita Sinha

notes on legibility:

Land and the world as something that can be measured, divided and owned. This legibility establishes violent borders between bodies and land, humans and nature, space and architecture.....done by expunging indigeneous cosmologies.

- Emanuel Admassu

on refuge:

Swamps -sites on entanglement- assemblage of interpenetrating forces - non binary places- refuge in swamps - monstrosity-orientalist-colonial. Ecological life disorganises form and makes it legible even if it was for a moment.

- C Riley Snorton

conceal:

rethink architecture's tendency to conceal labor

- Frieda Escobedo

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