

MUTED

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a revisit to a collection of projects

December 2021

Advisors:

Val K. Warke

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MUTED:
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Architectural acts inevitably involve a production of narratives that surge from the interaction between observer and the object (in architecture this object can be a model, a plan or a building). Such definition of narratives speaks of the cycle of invention and reinvention that interaction between observer and object, designer and design implies: things that exist in the world inevitably affect the subjects that interact with them, and in the same way, these subjects affect and condition the things that exist in the world.

Awareness of the crucial role of narratives, and the urge to expand architecture's boundaries to account to pressing environmental, social, economic issues today, have resulted in narratives becoming instrumentalized as a core element of the design process—perhaps as a way to escape the excessively restricted ground in which architecture has room to play in modifying our lives: materials, elements that negotiate boundaries, drawings. Such preponderance of the narrative determines the design process to the extent that it defines an agenda as to how a certain act of architecture must be interpreted; it sets out a larger 'truth', an intention that can diverge when imagined or translated into the terms that define an architectural artefact—plans, sections, boundaries that define spaces, materials.

This compilation of projects revises some of the academic exercises produced during one year in an attempt to render visible the disconnection between the narrative proposed by the designer and the multiple possible narratives that can emerge for a reader in the absence of an explanation. Such architectures without explanation embrace the flexibility of meaning and invite interpretation; they generate multiplicity instead of imposing a singular functionality to the architectural object. This doesn't mean that the projects fail. It invites consideration of the act of architecture as one that generates questions, and not as one that intends to solve problems through the meaning it creates.

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Muted: A Revisit to a Collection of Projects

*We have to watch ourselves become
ourselves in order to be ourselves,
over and over again.*

Rob Horning

In 1853 Charles Thurston Thompson captured a Venetian Mirror in a photograph (Fig. 1). It depicts the exuberance of a curved frame over a white background. The frame contains a mirror with the reflection of a human-like figure: an uncanny presence of a dark silhouette with three legs, a wide torso and a head. It is standing in the grass. The figure opposes—both in light and in appearance—to a foliage background. It opposes nature. The photograph portrays a man with a machine. A machine with a man. One recognizes the humanity of the figure and yet it is not clear if it is a man turned machine or a machine turned man; it is none and it is both. We cannot make such a distinction. Humans are the entwining of the designed, the built and the bodies. And it is the role of humans, too, to build the stories that give meaning to such entwinement. The multiplicity of narratives that can be present in a designed object are open-ended, and it is through these narratives that we reinvent, find (or define) beauty, upgrade or destroy ourselves. Narratives are our very particular way of observing. Narratives problematize, tell and retell.

As important as the presence of such narratives is, architecture should not be reduced to the story that an act of architecture has to tell. In designing, we, the humans, are playing God. We are redefining ourselves, our interactions, our desires and fantasies. Architecture implies a physicality: we take pride in defining the spaces where our life occurs and the spaces where we tribute our death. It is *“in redesigning itself that [human] redesigns the planet, and the redesigned world redesigns the designing animal”* (Colomina and Wigley, 12). A game of facing mirrors that creates an infinite loop of invention and reinvention, of design and redesign. And this loop parts from the design process that exists inside the excessively restricted ground in which architecture has room to play: materials, elements that negotiate boundaries, drawings. Even if it is meant to be unbuilt, the act of architecture relies on the imagination of the built object, not on an explanation of a building or a particular drawing. Narratives are intended to arise from the existent, and shouldn't be forced, perhaps not even suggested a priori. The architecture act must not need a voice over that explains the story that it



fig. 1

tries to convey; it should set the ground for several stories to arise. An architecture without the explanation of a narrative is like a muted television: it is left alone to express itself through images that are prone to misinterpretation; images that demand an action of the spectator and not only the voice of the narrator or the dialogues. There is no right or wrong in interpretation.

In the urge of architecture to expand its boundaries, to result more accountable to pressing environmental, social, economic issues today, narratives have become instrumentalized as a core element of the design process, as a response to the complexity of the physical elements of architecture to exercise their agency in redefining our lives. The thirst for narratives often tend to be the center of academic projects, in which it is often common to hear phrases praising “*how the story is told*”, or asking for “*more work in the narrative*”, or suggesting that the “*story is coherent*”. But this focusing on the narrative may push the architecture production to walk on a tightrope: by trying to predefine (to design) a narrative that is charged with a functionality, the open endedness of the stories that can be weaved from experiencing an act of architecture become truncated. If the designer defines one true narrative which sets a ground for how spectators of a drawing or users of a building are intended to interact, the possibility to generate a different narrative from individual experience is threatened, upon the urge to understanding, of staying true to the narrative originally defined by the designer.

By considering the transmission of a narrative as the efficacy of a project, architecture is loaded with another layer of functionality (apart from that of being habitable), and conditions its role as a vehicle to generate meaning. I would say that this is an analogous anxiety and skepticism that can be found today upon visiting a contemporary art exhibition: there is always the fear of not understanding, the feeling of misinterpretation. Referring to art, Jacques Rancière problematizes this partition and this functionality: “*The efficacy of art resides not in the model (or counter-model) of behaviour that it provides, but first and foremost in partitions of space and time that it produces to define ways of*

being together or separate, being in front or in the middle of, being inside or outside” (Rancière, 137). Although Rancière gives art an efficacy, he suggests that it has nothing to do with a predetermined behaviour intended by the artist. Instead, it deals with more complex understandings of how we inhabit the world—with the creation of meaning, with the appropriation of the object, with the understanding of our place in relation to surroundings, and it is in this complex appropriation that the spectator can define and redefine him or herself. We have forgotten that the important thing about art is what we make of it, not what the artist wanted it to be. And I would argue that architecture is close to the realm of art in this sense.

In a similar way, to think of narrative as another element that constitutes the spaces we design is to think small. It is to constrain the infinitude of stories that can rise upon the interaction with a particular drawing, with a particular building. Design has an effect, design affects. Not only an instrumentalization of the narrative closes the possibility of a spectator “*to create its own poem with the elements of the poem before her*” (Rancière, 13) but it also defines an agenda in which architecture must act. An agenda that was already questioned by Koolhaas in the introduction of *S, M, L, XL* (1995) when he put into doubt the role of the manifesto or the search for coherence in a project (Walker, 142). If a project needs to be explained through one particular narrative, if a project needs to be explained in order to be understood properly, if it pursues a particular intention, there is an impossibility of redefining the nature of architecture—an impossibility of defining and redefining ourselves. There is a limiting frame.

Instead, narrative being a part, but not the center of the architecture act, opens room for several interpretations to emerge; it promotes discern. Then, after the architectural act exists in any form (as a model or as a plan or as a building) other discourses may arise. Here the role of narrative is multi-levelled: it can take the form of a description of someone who walked by the building, someone who saw a set of drawings; it can be a piece of criticism like those of Ada Louise Huxtable; it can be a book, a story and a poem. This multi leveling of narratives runs parallel and yet conditions the process of invention

and reinvention, of designing and redesigning to which we humans are subject to upon interaction with the objects or spaces that we interact with. It is because of this that Koolhaas relies a large portion of his work in the form of retroactive manifestos—one that relies on the existent as a driver for narrating, and not the other way around. This methodology is also present in the production of narratives in the work of Atelier Bow Wow's *Made in Tokyo*, which relies on the observation of findings—on previous evidence. These retroactive observations rely on interpretation and appropriation, unlike predetermined narratives, which tend to build a framework of truth and impose a notion of correct and incorrect readings.

This compilation of works proposes a creation of narratives in a similar fashion to that of a retroactive manifesto, yet its role as manifesto is shy (if such a thing is possible) as it invites no other action than questioning the narrative as a static truth that needs to be understood. Instead, it tries to build from the existing evidence present in the drawings, and not from the original narrative in which they were conceived. Such a look invites discern and welcomes the passing of time. To try and stay fixed with a narrative is to disown the course of time, in the same way that architecture narratives or social practices develop fixed cultural identities, only to see them change: "*Eventually any identity, any act[s] of identification will be revealed in its performance to have fractures and inabilities, distortions and excesses that point at its precarious and contingent constitution (...) Any success in breaking down prior identities will turn also fail, as rather than undoing identity, new identities will develop in turn to fill in the lack*" (Rakatansky, 30). **These changes in the person who creates the narrative for a project, or in the person who creates a discourse out of an observation, or in the conception of an architectural act, are unavoidable and constitute the greater part of the creation of architecture and the subsequent production of discourse. Sufficient proof of such is, for instance, the evolution of the conception of Renaissance architecture traced by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour from symbolism to space and back to symbolism in their *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972) (Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour, 104, 105). Or, for the present task,**

the gap that exists between the ambitious, if not grandiloquent, narratives that accompany architectural academic projects and the often frustrating translation that they adopt in their manifestation as material acts of architecture.

Not to say that the works presented here are examples of failure because they detach from the narrative that framed them in the first place. Indeed they are a manifestation of the huge gap that divides the making and the imagining of a narrative—a proof of certain futility when the building is left alone without an explanation.

To interact with architecture is to stare at a mirror. It is to see the reflection of oneself, to give meaning and to define oneself by giving meaning. One sees desires, looks for beauty. In recognizing oneself there is an urge to enhance, there is a consciousness of entwinement with the act of architecture with the surrounding: we see ourselves inventing ourselves. To be an spectator of architecture is to frame and to connect, no need of an explanatory voice. It is to redefine ourselves, and to redefine ourselves is to redefine architecture.

The reflection is the reality.

i. A Flour Mill in Rochester, New York

*Project done in Jesse LeCavalier's
Studio: The Infrastructures of the
Food System. Fall 2020. With: Leanna
Humphrey, Nusaibah Khan, Jaeha
Kim, Demetri Lampris*

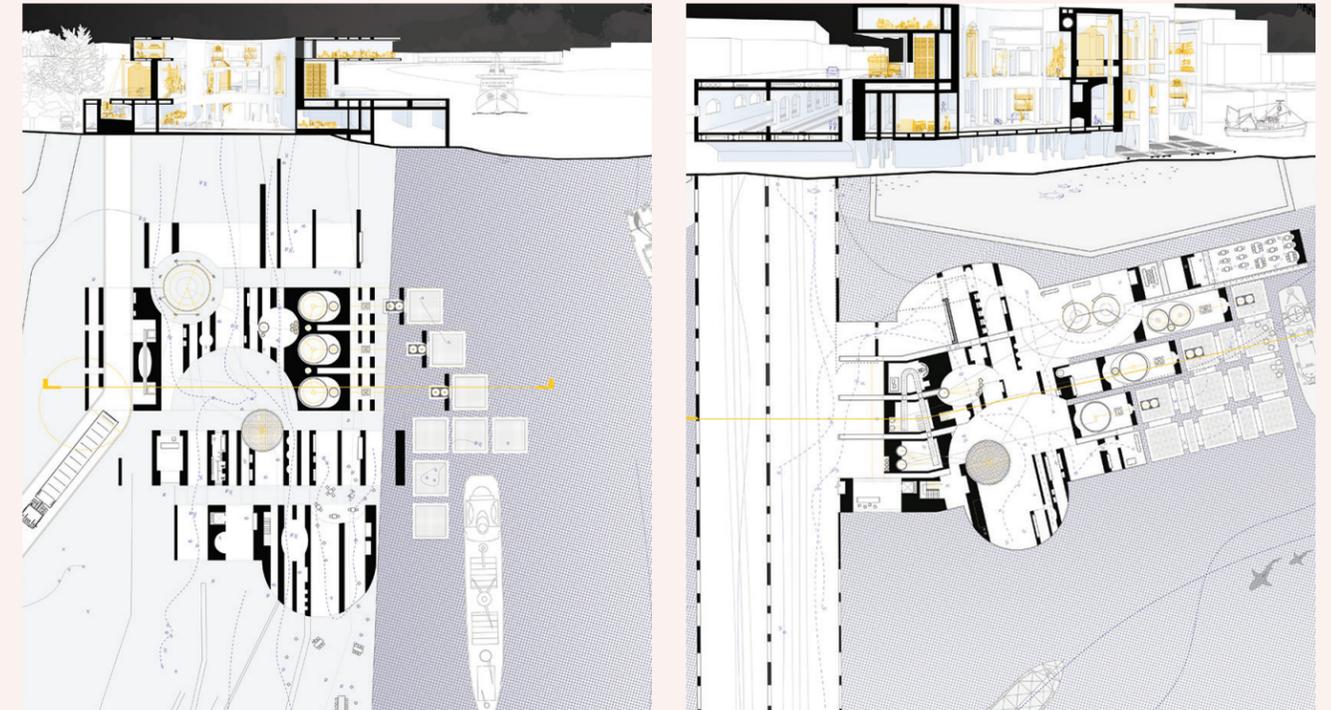
The infrastructure of the food system resides between invisibility and monumentality. The commodification of products pushes processes to their limit. The production of food requires particular machines and supply chain. This results in over scaled buildings informed only by profitability and efficiency. In the midst of these processes, some things are left veiled: exploitation of workers, use and abuse of chemicals, death. The infrastructure of the food system remains invisible because we don't want to see what it houses: it satiates the human primal needs in the most inhuman ways.

It all starts with wheat harvesting. Around 45 millions acres of land are dedicated to wheat monocultures in the United States. The landscape of rural America is marked frequently by storing silos for the grain that awaits to be ground. It moves in barges, trains or trucks. We observed this specific process to understand the transformation of the grain into powder. Every step has an implication in the built face of a mill. It is all controlled by machines: there is one to do the cleaning, one to do the sifting, one to do the grinding. A mill is an enclosed space for machines fueled by electrical energy unlike former methods that used wind or water as energy source, which led to iconic nodes in the landscape. The processing of flour relies mainly on the appropriate functioning of machines.

What if we understand humans in the building as the support system? If the *poché* is usually the support system for architecture, should humans start navigating the *poché* yielding the spaces to machinery? Should we invert the logics of these spaces?

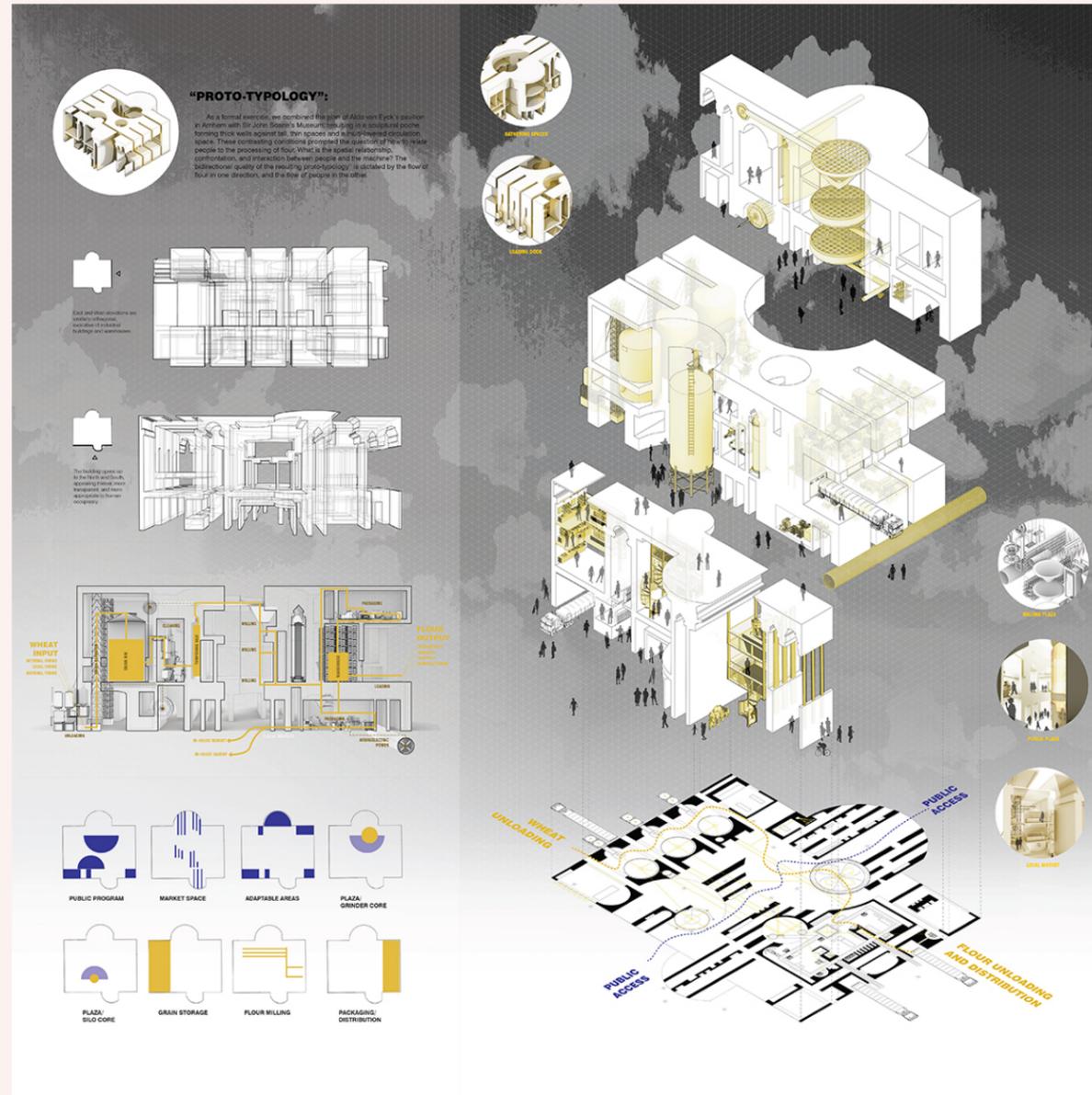
The orientation of the design is informed merely by functionality. On one direction the flows of people are accommodated, and on the other the flows of flour. Some machines are left uncovered to create a dialogue between the two actors—they form a public installation where the materiality of flour and its necessary processes of milling and grinding create an accessible and inhabited industrial atmosphere. The multileveled core of the building houses the grinding process, while below a plaza unfolds revealing a public building that connects and exposes the machine processes of flour production systems to the public. Machinery Unveiled.

The image from the exterior is one of a mass. Some spaces are carved as moldings and are filled with machines and silos that can be seen from the outside. The spatiality is also present in the drawings: the thickness of walls indicate the opportunity to



house additional program. A technical rigor derived from the machinery is expressed both in plan and section. The temporality is dubious and contradictory: one can not identify its time: is it Roman stereotomy? Is it a futuristic machine-driven building? As much as it concerns the narrative proposed to the project, the intention of exploring the machinery of the process of making flour is at the core of the proposal, as it pretends to create an installation-like experience of the building and the process of wheat grains.

Even if as a design prompt this sounds appealing, the plans and sections accommodate the machinery as if dealing with an old grain elevator. Several of the new machinery has evolved, which is why most of the flour processing plants have a flat layout in which machinery has a horizontal way of functioning. Even if as an architectural provocation the proposal seeks to render visible the processes of flour, the interaction of machines, the solidity of the blocks and the intended use of *poché* for machine purposes is a useful tool for architectural form finding and architectural question, but doesn't address directly the issues that is set to address: like working inequalities or good production of food.

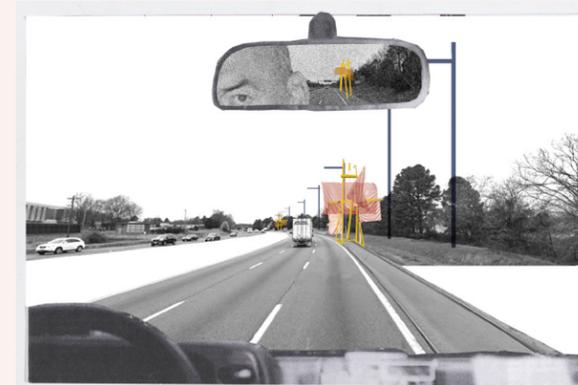


ii. A set of artifacts and a map of Richmond, Virginia

Project done in Jeremy Foster's Studio: Learning From Monument Avenue. Fall 2020. With: Leanna Humphrey, Nusaibah Khan, Seerat Athwal

We tend to forget that memory is physical. As the trace that actions leave behind, memory is more than an image in our minds or a feeling in our body. It records the trace of our remembrances. Memory is the cherished object that we lose, but also the mine of gold where it came from; the hug of a relative who passed away, but also the hole that turned into the grave in which she was buried; the commemoration of a day, but also the invisible borders of the city where it happened. Memory is physical and hides in its layers that can be excavated. This proposal digs into the material memory of Richmond in the search for intertwined stories. These stories speak of the daily life of a city charged with historical episodes that are often stripped of their quotidian physicality.

We understood the site by observing the marks that daily life left behind in other times: yesterday, fifty, or a thousand years ago.



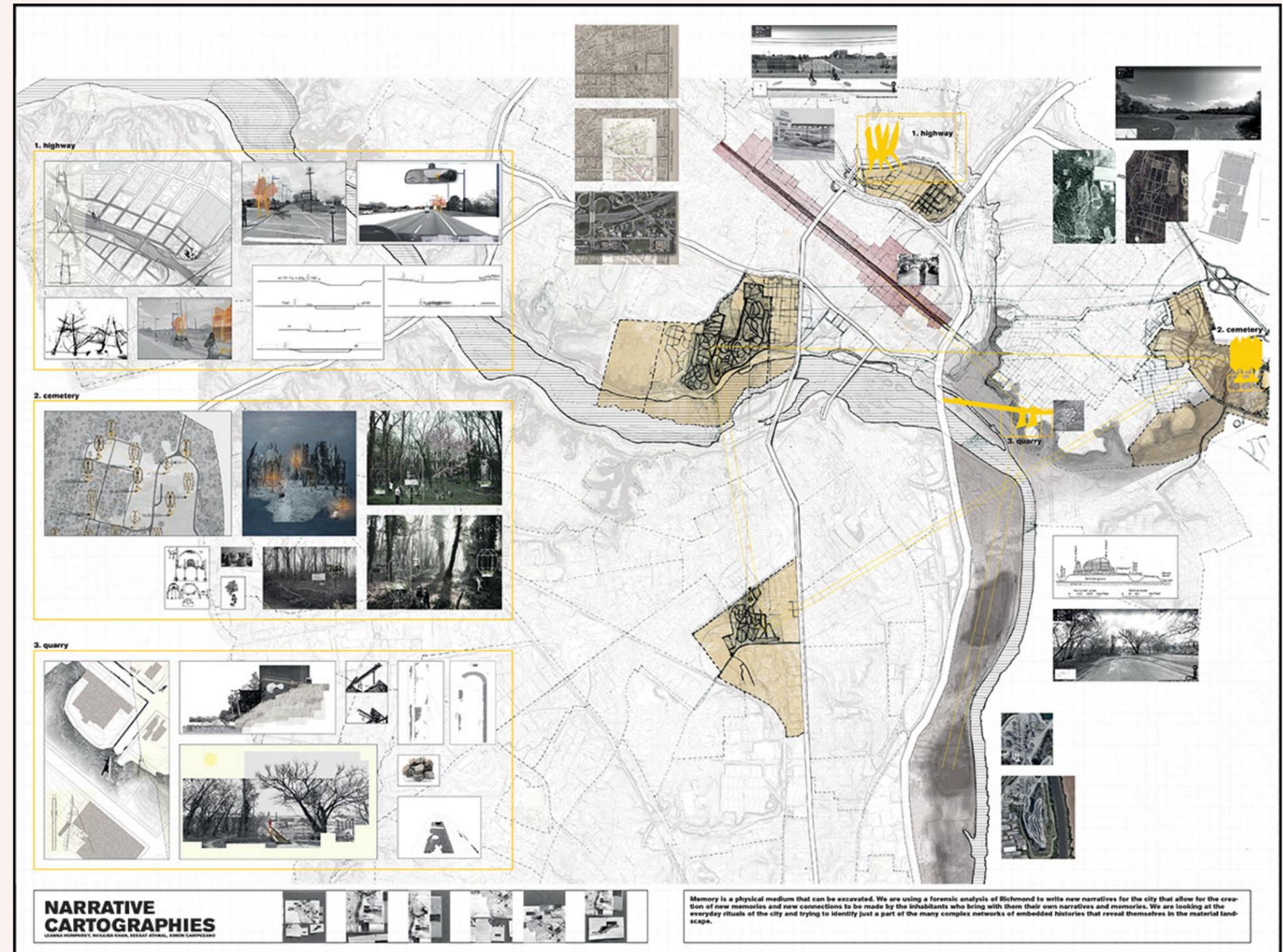
We defined four sites to intervene:

A quarry, deeply linked to the activity of mining reveals the landscape of extraction. As a way to relating the extraction of stone to the life in the city, we found layers of cobblestones in some streets of the city. The insertion of an artifact that points in the direction of the location of the quarry becomes a place to overlook the landscape. By making use of the difference in the terrain, the platform balances, while opening a line in the ground, leaving a mark that speaks of the modification of the landscape; a process analogous to the traces left in quarries. A highway, as a piece that occupies enormous portions of land. Highways transmit the discourse of connection while hiding their power for division. We placed a rail in the edge of an isolated neighborhood limiting the highway. The land of no one that divides two spaces: the realm of automobiles and the neighborhood of the people, is now to be inhabited by an animate object that can be seen from afar. It makes visible a line that was intended to be left unseen, that was intended to be covered under the narrative of progress.

The animate object moves with the wind and is scheduled to depart at an hour of the day and wander through the line that divide neighborhood. In its visible condition, it provides shade and points into the non desirable residual space as something that could be desirable.

The narratives that these devices awaken vary from person to person, like memory does. These do not intend to solve the social or ecological problems, nor they pretend to create a monument or a memorial for reflection. They belong instead to the quotidian realm, the day to day rituals of the city. They create new interactions that are to be incorporated in daily rituals, and that start to configure new stories and narratives that are together intertwined. Just like the stories in the city are all tangled together.

The device, as a character that creates a ritual, an image in the city, becomes an icon not only for the invisible, the socially divided, but also for the particular place in the city. It becomes part of the daily life of those who pass through. As much as narrative is used as part of the design process to

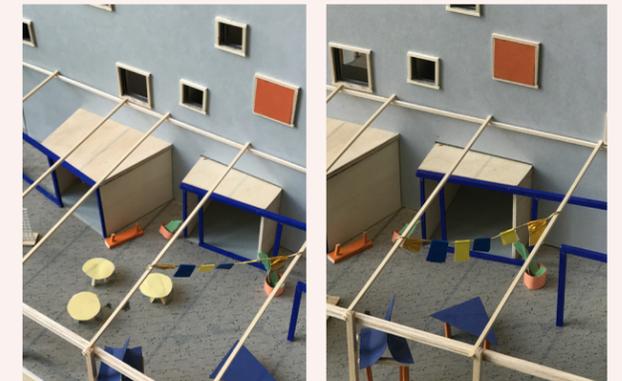


determine the idea of the artifacts, the final proposal speaks nothing about the ideas of exploitation, labor and segregation. They lie in the city as pieces of urban furniture, that await to be used or interpreted in various ways, probably never reflecting upon the themes intended.

project

iii. A Community Center in South Los Angeles

*Project done in Gesa Büttner Dias'
Studio: Marginal Landscapes.
Spring, 2021.*



Los Angeles, the city of dreams. People dream of living there. A city where dreams come true. Or sometimes don't. It is, perhaps, a city that dreams. It has dreamt of having a suburban landscape that extends in its plains, and has dreamt too of becoming a corporate metropolis. In South LA, front yards are instead spaces for expression. They are an extension of the house. They foster encounters of identities on a same street.

These front yards are constituted by the spilling of program to the exterior. Hammocks, tents, playgrounds, barbecues. The front yard is an inhabited margin: It conciliates the private with the public, mine from yours, house and street. This project learns from the front yards in South LA. Unlike front lawns in regular suburbia across america, these reject homogeneity with the flourishing of identity; with use. A use very aligned with what CCO's mission is: to create community, to foster expression and freedom in identities.

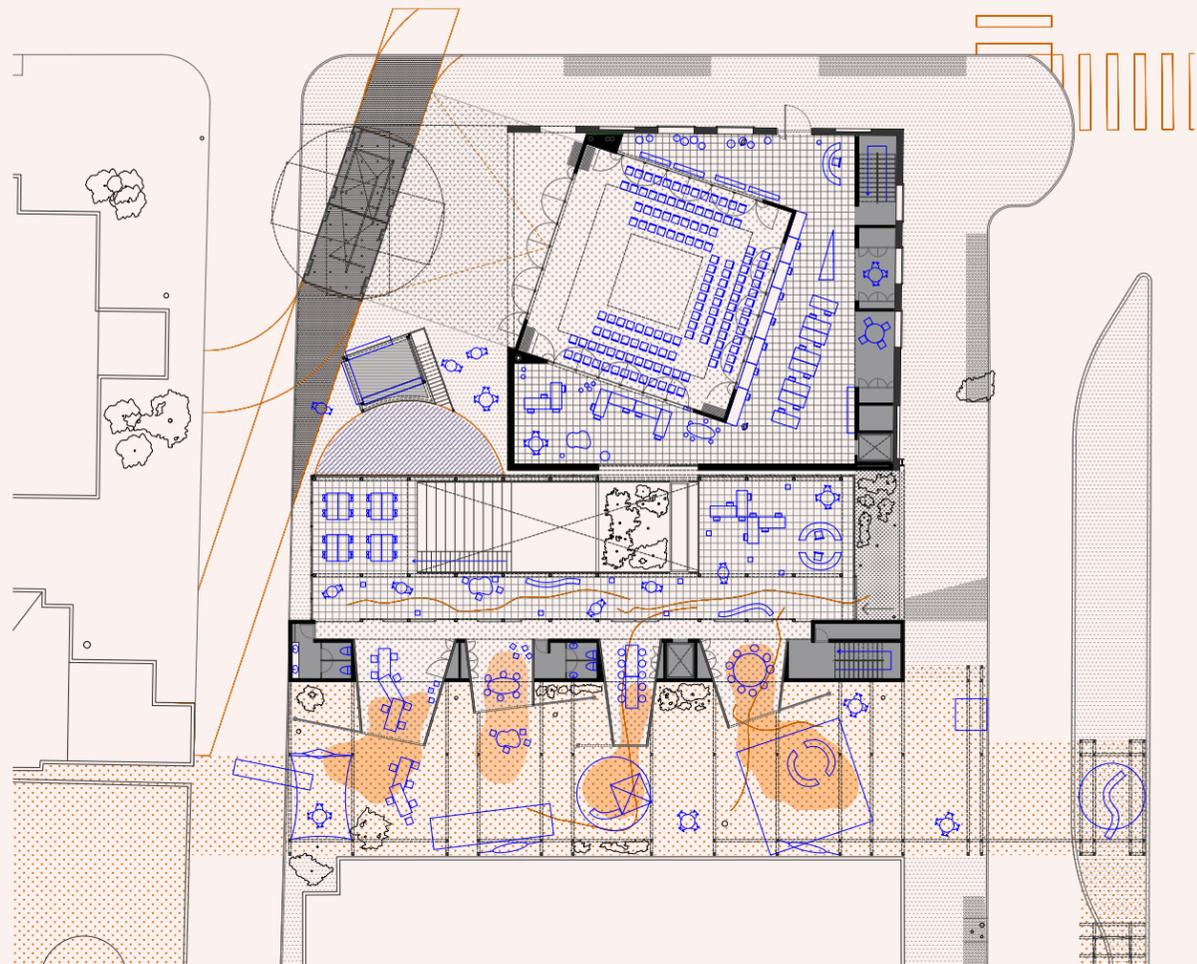
The front yard as margin is, in the end, a line. A line just like the ones that were once overlayed to quote unquote organize the Los Angeles plains; This time a dream of order. The lines in a grid intersect and organize, and in its aspired homogeneity they seek to allow freedom. A zoom of the grid reveals its thickness: The line is space.

Such grid was also used to draw boundaries between the official city of Los Angeles and unincorporated areas. There are invisible lines in LA that divide the edge of the city. South Los Angeles has plenty of these edges. It is the margin of the city. What if we considered this line as a thickened one? Just like the front yards in South LA express the identity of the community, the front yard of the city could express the identity, this time, of everyone: say, of a neighborhood. The margin becomes a face.

So how would the front yard of south LA look like?

The center for community organizing belongs to the community and exalts the multiplicity of identities. Its existence in such line would encourage expressiveness and community life. If





there was to be a front yard around the whole city, a place of exchange, the center of community organizing would become just one piece in a network of buildings across this face. A thickened line that was originally intended to divide becomes a space for encounter.

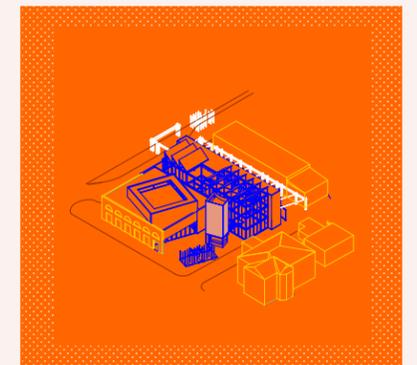
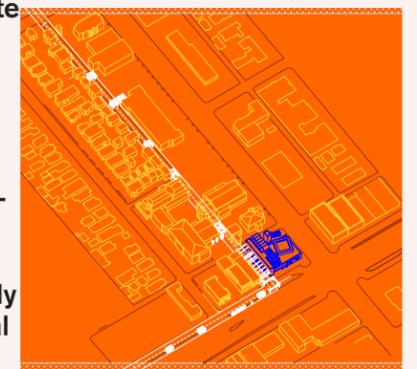
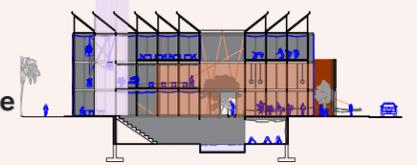
The project is located at the crossing of Manchester and Vermont. On one side the unincorporated area of Westmont and on the other side the official city of Los Angeles. It represents a clash between what is considered urban, or an official city, and what not. And the project is constituted as an ensemble of pieces: The building in the middle is semi public. It grabs people from the exterior inside. It mediates between the front yard and the existing building and it is filled with the program for the center. An oversized space that people can use freely lies as mediator between the volumes. The existing building houses an incubator for other organizations to be in the city. And the carved space can act as a public space or as an auditorium. Spaces of a more urban scale. Which also happens in the different levels.

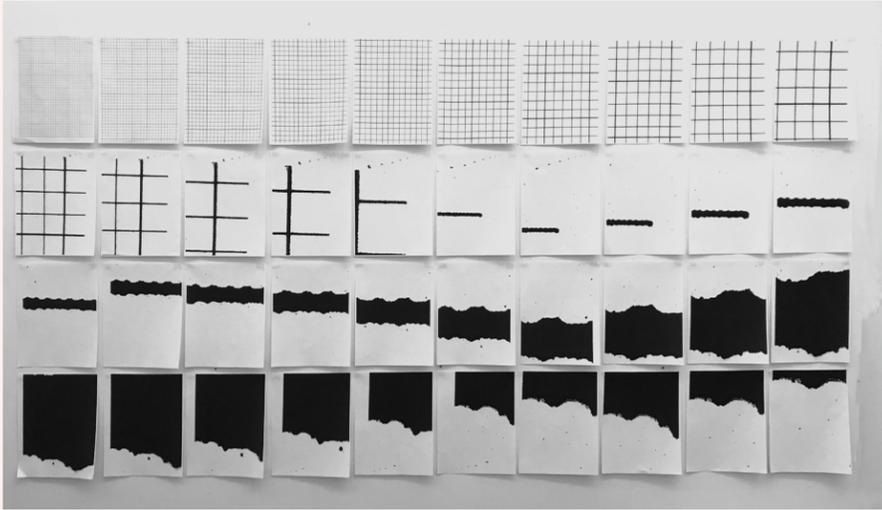
In terms of amount of activity, the program is equally distributed throughout the four levels. Spaces for dance, spaces for meetings, crafts, lectures. Multivalent rooms. Rooms that are connected visually. Contained under a roof, the space for the center is noisy, crowded, filled with a variety of activities. It fosters the expression and promotes the free use by the users. The exterior shell organizes services or private spaces where intimate activities can occur.

Facing the face of the front yard, the thickened shell is broken by rooms that spill to the exterior. And that are available to be enclosed for the sole use of the building, opened for the sole use of the front yard, or as communication spaces between interior and exterior.

The narrative of the project here played a crucial role in the architectural form of the building. not only in the attempt to create doubled walls that were to house programs and to create a mediation between the exterior and the interior, analogous to the exploration of the thickness of the line, but also, originally, intended to represent the possibility of appropriation that the thickness of a margin can offer. Although this approach was intended to speak about identity and appropriation, the thresholds that appear in the drawings as thick inhabited walls are probably only perceived to someone who sees the plan. In the case of this building, the idea of inhabiting the margin is merely a design strategy, that little or nothing has to do with the social interactions of the people who would use the building.

The center for Community Organizing and a front yard for LA constitute, perhaps, a new dream of identity and expression. A dream of margins that are seen as faces, not fences. It is a building that while gluing landscapes, generates new ones. An example of negotiation between neighbors in a front yard. A dream of a city that, hopefully this time, will happen.





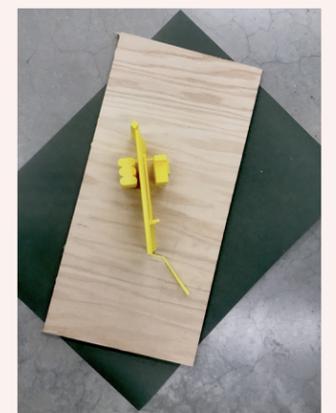
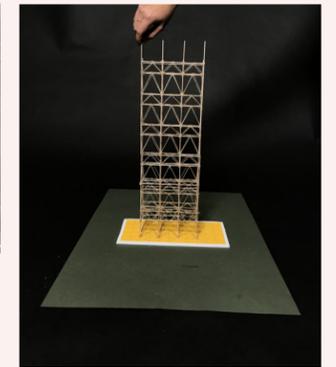
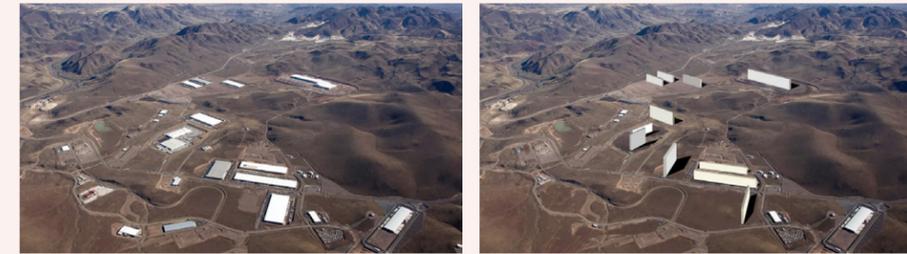
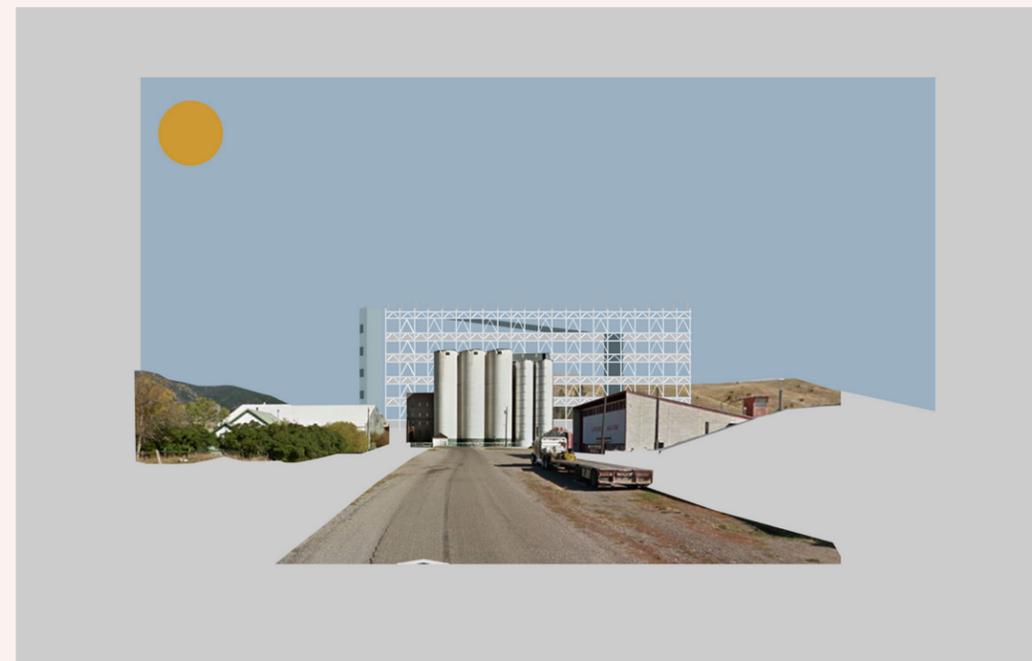
iv. A Data Center in an old flour mill in Bozeman, Montana

*Project done in Barkow Leibinger
Sequero Studio: Occupying Structure:
The Vertical Factory
Fall, 2021.*

It is upon a technological glitch that we become aware of the materiality of data; of the non-fluffiness of the cloud. The places where information is stored occupy a physical space, and it is often hiding in front of our eyes. Following logics of functionality and seeking protection against outages, Data centers separate from the exterior by large white surfaces that don't allow views of the interior. Spaces made mostly for machines. Perhaps this is a similar situation to that of storage architectures and infrastructures of the last century. Grain elevators amongst them. Buildings that, by answering mainly to functionality result in particular formal outcomes. But hide their own specific logics; like flour mills over the american plains.

Apart from functioning similarly, data centers and mill elevator play a similar role in the landscape. While Grain elevators occupy the vertical plane with white cylindrical shapes, Data centers occupy it in horizontal with solid white volumes.

I questioned: What if this logic was inverted? What if we under-

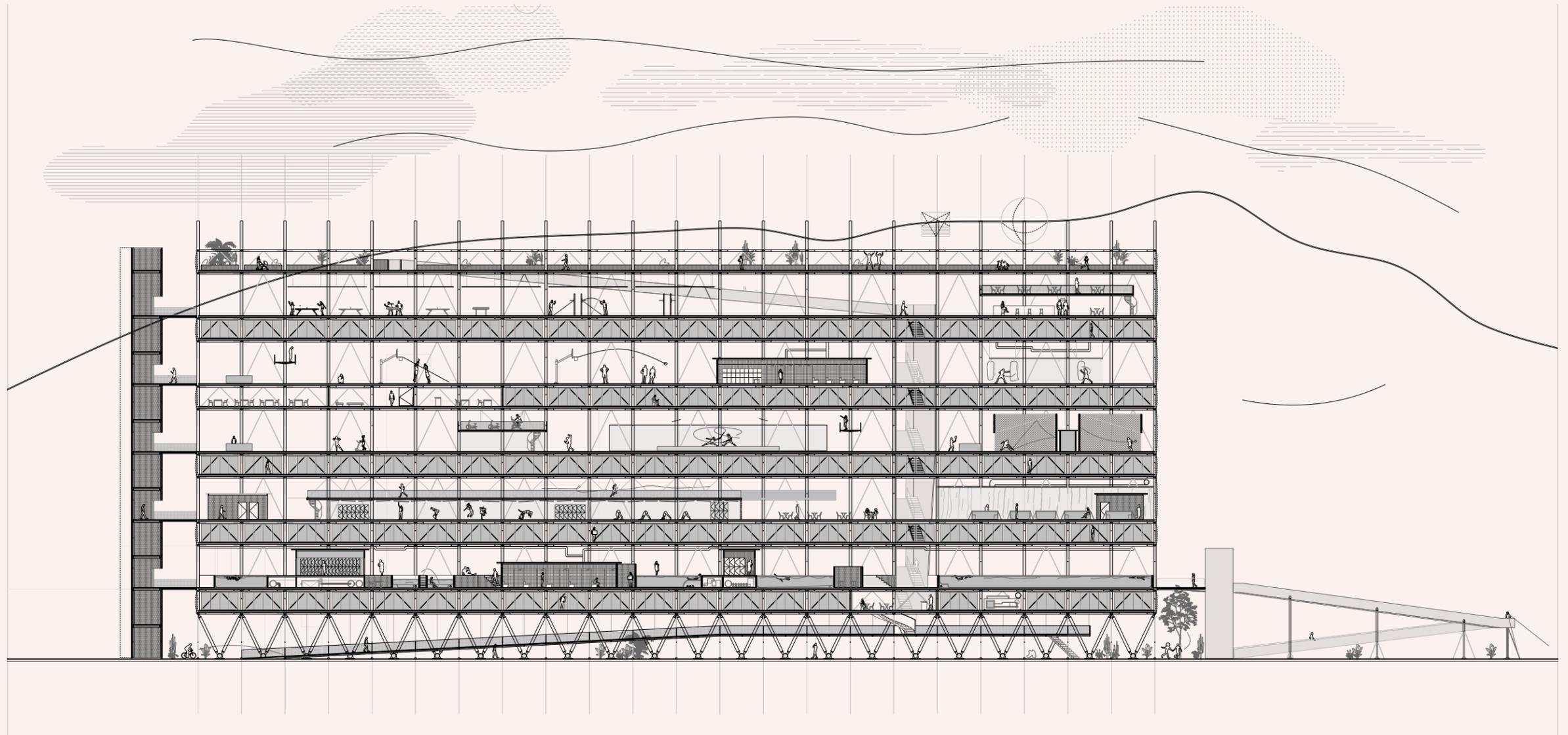


stand these infrastructures as a new quotidian monumentality? If we, instead of ignoring them, instead of being distanced, interact with the places where our information is stored?

I explored the logics of data centers to find a possibility of stacking them into various levels. They work in a very particular fashion: The servers are big producers of heat, hence need one corridor to be empty, non available for human exploration and only destined to ventilation. While having another corridor of cold air, where humans can walk. By stacking them, I sought to disappear the hot corridor, leaving the servers in contact with the exterior, and resulting in one row of servers and one row of circulation that sum up to 3 meters. And by stacking them, they began to speak the same language of architectures that aim to go higher, not wider. Architectures similar to billboards or over the horizon radars. Structures that are minimally thin, but ridiculously tall.

I started interacting with the old story mill elevator in Bozeman montana. I considered it already as a monument, as a node in the landscape in that is perceived from different points. A study in the shape of postcards allowed me to see the perception of the building in the landscape, already playing an analogous role to that of a billboard. How to exaggerate this perception? If i was to propose a data center, how to make shorter the distance that we have with the places that store our information?

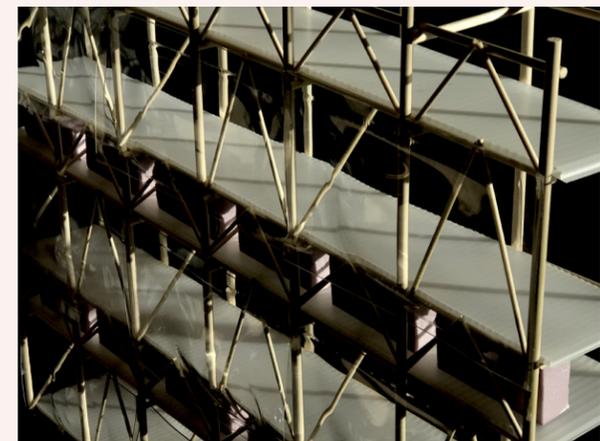
The project is a stacked data ceneter that acts as a backdrop for the already existing mill. Two storage systems in dialogue. A building that as a thin line stitches the pieces in the site. I studied space frame like structures that would allow to house the servers of the data center, while also allowing some variations to house another program. Until by modifying them I accomplished this structural model, in which some floors are 2.5 meters (for the servers) and others are double, 5 meters tall, that would allow another program. Paradoxically, it is a structural system that conveys some fragility, which is the worse enemy of data storage. In order to use the energy produced by the data centers, I imagined leisure and exercise spaces. Pools that would use the heat produced in order to be warm.



But I also imagined other programs, in the thinner upper part, in which the structure is thin only leaving three meters wide. What could happen? How would living spaces look like there? The overall project proposes two additional volumes that are in dialogue with the existing buildings and that allow to distribute the public circulations and the circulations for maintenance of the servers that belong to the data center.

In the end the project cristalizes the idea of a new monument for information that would become a part of the Bozeman landscape. A city which is increasingly housing more tech jobs. A building that would negotiate the storage of technology and would give a payback to the people of Bozeman.

But overall, a casual monument to visibility. A monument to different ways of storage, of wheat, of information.



Some Short Texts

MUSIC

a walk in rockefeller center

ELEVATOR

To find an escape in Manhattan is to silence its roaring noise. Alarms and honks, trains and sirens and screams and chats blend in a constant white noise that is embedded in the everyday. It reaches the middle of the parks where one ceases to see the buildings and the edges of the city where one would expect to be out of the urban. Perhaps a place of escape could be a cinema or the opera. Scenarios isolated from the outside and filled with their particular sound. Or perhaps an elevator with a neutral music that covers the sound of movement.

As isolated as Rockefeller Center pretends to be from the city—its life unfolds in the interior of the block—it wouldn't be perceived as an escape if it weren't for the investment in a soundtrack. The production of the experience is intended to be invisible yet atmospheric—it needs to be witnessed in person. It varies depending on the season and its complexity relies on the flag-ers that pass unnoticed amongst flowers, poles or camouflaged amongst flowers. Music builds the image that contemporary culture has inserted into the place. Iconography is not only created by famous movie scenes or documented historical moments, but also because itself produces the feeling of being part of a movie. It has a soundtrack, it has ice in winter. To walk in Rockefeller Center is not to be in Manhattan. The experience is specific to that exact block.

Jingle Bells and *Silent Night* play in a loop during the Christmas season to reinforce the presence of the colossal Christmas tree. By the arrival of spring—and probably throughout the year—the soundtrack is neutral: an uplifting beat accompanied by a cheap cover of a jazzy song. The neutrality of the music is intentional: it is not looking to distract the visitor from the experience to focus on the lyrics. Instead, it is playing on a loop just to lift the mood of the wanderers. Rockefeller center orchestrates an experience as much as it is orchestrated itself to represent something. Music isolates us from the noise of the city because it creates the fantasy of living life with a predetermined soundtrack; one that is coherent with the images that culture has inserted to the site in order to preserve it as a landmark. The drums and beats and sporadic choruses that say nothing isolate the noise of the city by adding another layer of sound. One that proves that Manhattan is about contrast as much as it is about overlaying. And that the fantasy of being in such a place needs more than simply being there. It requires a production; a reinforcement of the experience, of the fantasy. Rockefeller Center is all about scenography.

Written during Cynthia Davidson's seminar on Writing the City, Spring 2021.

DOING

a lesson from a generic object

What if I started counting the voids I can cross? I mean, the ones that allow me to flow into another space, the holes through which I fit, those that hold no restraint. I can think of many doors. The ones that I pass through and the ones I see while I'm in the bus. I think of arches, though in the city where I live there are none. Many windows come to mind too, but I'm conscious that those would require more effort: they occupy inconvenient places and shapes, shapes that would force my body to bend and contort. But oddly those voids which are not fitted to my body are the ones that get my attention: I want to cross barriers.

The truth is that my movements are defined by the size of certain voids. They determine the paths through which I move. They allow but also restrain.

I have no problem doing the dishes unless there is a strainer involved. A dirty strainer turns the task into a labour, because a strainer is an object of power: it decides what passes through and what stays behind. When washing my rounded and metallic strainer I am able to see the pieces that didn't fit, the ones that stayed behind. Water flows through it as if the object wasn't there, as if it were invisible. But getting rid of the dirty pieces caught in the small holes is a task that requires dedication. The strainer is an object that tricks the properties of matter: depending on the size of its holes, flour, a solid, is able to pass through as if it were a liquid.

But in the midst of its power, of its guardianship that decides what can cross and what cannot, it is also a useful object.

DISHES

It can hold the pieces that are of worth; it divides the pasta from the water and the lentils from the little stones. It is proof that a barrier is not necessarily negative; that there are some things meant to fit and others meant to be restrained.

Facades—walls with voids—are strainers. Powerful surfaces that allow and restrain. Surfaces that define movements and paths. The size of the voids in the facades of a city define the movements of people. They define the life that flows from the outside into the inside and the other way around. They play with permission, with the possibility to cross, they make the decisions for the people.

I believe there is a common curiosity that I share: the wish to cross barriers. To know what would it be like to enter a house through a window, or a door too small for the body. But then, one could remember the act of using a strainer: a reminder that some things are meant to stay behind.

I WEAR MASKS

an observation of a building

I wear masks. I am not who I pretend to be when I'm with you. I adopt a different character for every situation. Recently I discovered a building that wears a mask too. With its brick facade, Bradfield Hall could pass unnoticed, like any brick building. One of its sides presents a face: a single thin eye, a long wide nose, a small mouth and two pointed ears. By wearing the mask of a face, it ceases to be a building and becomes a character. It resembles my humanity. It adapts to different situations like humans do when performing characters—when wearing masks for everyday life.

In its mysterious creatureliness, Bradfield Hall becomes an object of desire in the same way as the guy I see on the screen or the girl across the street. The impossibility of knowing what hides behind the masks I see makes me want to know everything about those who wear them. So I opt to fabricate their stories: he smells like wood and lavender; she wakes up early to a cup of tea; he dreams of going back to his hometown. By wearing masks they arouse my curiosity; they all become sources of same feelings, this thirst for knowing the unknown, how others perceive the world. I don't know what hides behind the door of Bradfield Hall because it is always locked. As much as I fantasize of knowing everything about the people I meet, I fantasize of going up to the top floor of the building, to its eye, just to be able to look out through its eyes as if seeing through someone else's eyes. Bradfield Hall expresses the difficulty of empathy, of understanding things as the other; of discovering the world as others do.

But a mask, too, draws a division between appearance and reality. It is a line. Bradfield Hall's mask hides a face and wraps a core. One could say that it projects an image and hides an essence. It tricks those who face it to think that behind the presented face there is no utility; it distracts the observers from thinking that it houses people; that there is someone going up the stairs or someone sitting at his desk. It gives the illusion of a shift in the purpose of the built: from utility to mere expression, from space to surface. In this way, Bradfield Hall—a building with a mask—portrays the complexity of social relationships. It embodies the artifice of society; the lies in dialogues, the creation of images and the repression of feelings. What is contained in Bradfield Hall? Is it a container without content? Is it empty and dark inside? Is it a void full of stairs? Does it house fifty floors with very low ceilings? All I know is what the mask shows. It doesn't look for honesty. An honest building exposes itself by revealing everything that it houses: how many floors, where people move, how big the spaces are. A masked building asks to be discovered; it presents itself through interaction. One discovers something new when facing it. It is presented in a particular way, with a different every time I face it.

Does it wear a mask or a mirror?

LANDSCAPES OF THE FRESH

an ongoing research proposal

Walk through the fruit and vegetable aisle of a high-end grocery store: a landscape of freshness. Greens, reds and pinks and yellows: every leaf and every peel recently sprinkled with fresh water. A misty atmosphere. Thousands of kilometers divide the mango tree and the shelf where the mango is displayed. And yet, the mango looks fresh. There is a set constructed to stage this appearance, a theatricality.

Freshness is a double faced fantasy. On one side it gives a sense of responsibility—to one's body, to more accountable agriculture, to other species. On the other side, it masks, with a cosmetic paraphernalia, the duration of time: lengthy cycles become simulated immediacy. It is, thus, a landscape analogous to aspects of contemporary life. A life that unfolds with the anxiety and competitiveness of what is happening now. How are advertisement and architectural scenarios of the "fresh" speaking to—or building—contemporary life?

In academia, freshness can be traced to the eagerness of thinkers to theorize about events that have not yet developed, but that have merely been initiated (perhaps under pressure to generate "original research"). In politics, "freshness" is an invitation for laziness and comfort, as it evades observation and invites the repetition of harangues and slogans—hence rushed judgement. In media, it deals with the velocity of facts and the access to statistics derived from a surplus of information, which, in the midst of confusion, is usually misinterpreted. In architectural practices, freshness is expressed in the quest for uniqueness, the

usage and development of highest technologies—as environmentalism—the increased rapidity of publishing cycles and lectures or the praising of "young fresh talents". Freshness tricks one into thinking that one is acting responsibly.

The elements that create the "fantasy of the fresh"—the surge of farmers markets, the scenography of organic aisles, floral aromas, cosmetically perfect skin, peppermint breath, unpolluted greens and the bright colors in advertisement pieces—are mainly perceived as beneficiary because they convey an idea of good deeds: they benefit the skin, it is healthier for the body to process recently picked fruits, farmers are the ones who bring the products directly to the market, or merely because they are symbols of youth. But what is the system that supports this fantasy?

I would like to observe and describe these "landscapes of the fresh" with a non-fresh eye; at another, slower, pace. Maybe as a way to understand more about current life. Or to understand that responsibility is not always tied to impulsive action and activism, but can be linked to careful observation. Or maybe just to avoid assuming that buying green leaves and apparently fresh fruits is, per se, an act of responsibility.

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