The Allegory of Site and the Resettling of Smith Cove

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FRAMEWORK

# 1. ARCHITECTURAL SPECULATION

1.

1. AA Tutor, 'Make me a Mountain'
2. Matt Sartain, 'Misadventures'
3. Bartlell Student, 'Concert Hall'

"A literary mode rather than a distinguishable genre, magical realism aims to seize the paradox of the union of opposites. For instance, it challenges polar opposites like life and death and the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present. Magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society. According to Angel Flores, magical realism involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic, or as he claims, «an amalgamation of realism and fantasy». The presence of the supernatural in magical realism is often connected to the primeval or «magical' Indian mentality, which exists in conjunction with European rationality. According to Ray Verzasconi, as well as other critics, magical realism is «an expression of the New World reality which at once combines the rational elements of the European super-civilization, and the irrational elements of a primitive America.» Gonzalez Echchevarria believes that magical realism offers a worldview that is not based on natural or physical laws nor objective reality. However, the fictional world is not separated from reality either."[1]

-Lindsay Moore, Emory University

There are (and always have been) disparities in the world of architectural education and practice. However, with the rise of building technologies and design tools, these discrepancies are vaster than ever before. Today, architecture schools branch in numerous trajectories from the same focal point, a focal point where lies the idea of "Architecture." In the world of architectural education, there is, in these times, more variety of architectural paradigms than in any previous era. There are the highly pragmatic schools, the landscape-focused schools, the theory-centric schools, schools focused on digital technologies, on craft, on tectonic composition, etc. In

London, schools such as The Bartlett at University College London and Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA) are said to emphasize the final image and the power of that image to contribute to the world of architecture[2]. The AA and Bartlett have been criticized as being overly dystopian, merely producing the same imagery again and again, all the while, students are deprived an education in regard to– what the majority of practicing architects might argue– is precisely at the aforementioned focal point of legitimate architecture: "a dialogue between structure, space, tectonics, form and programme (sic)."[3] On the other hand, proponents might find the speculative projects stemming forth from these schools, to be at the forefront of architectural investigation.
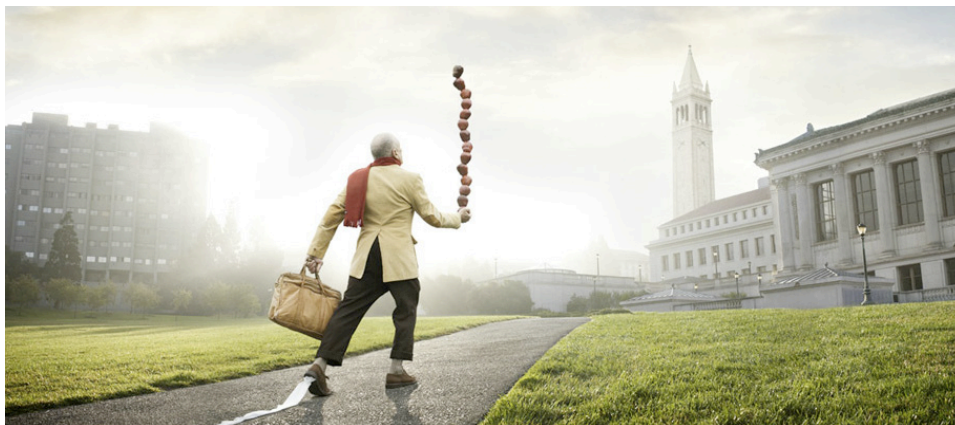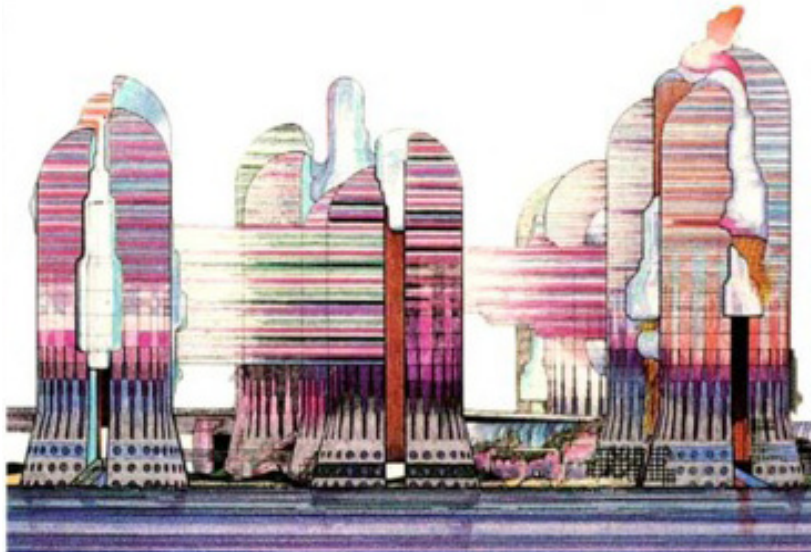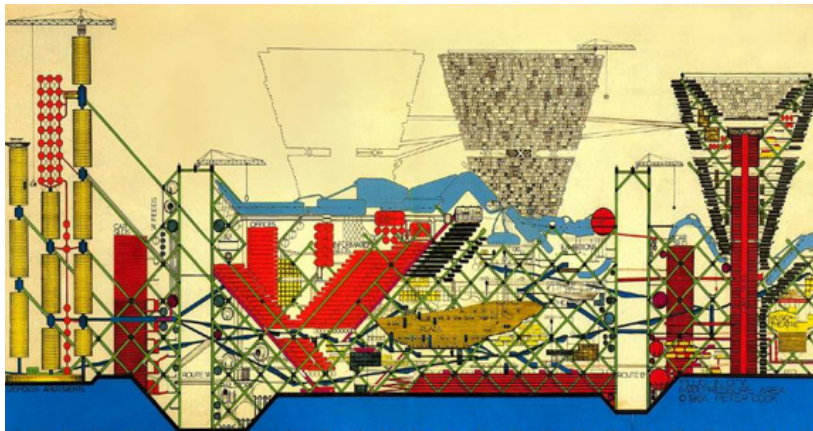

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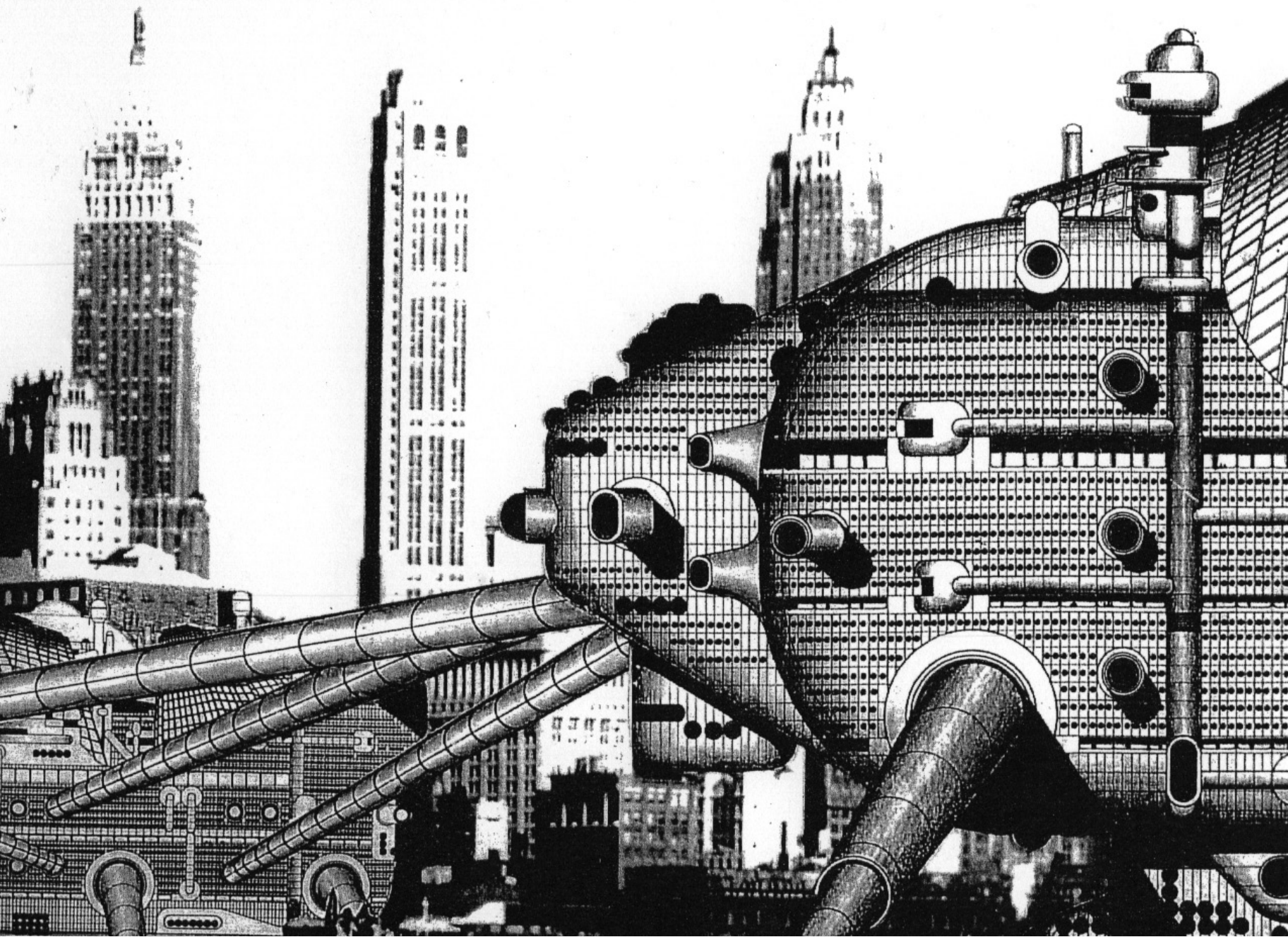
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6.

"Some people still find it funny that Christine Hawley and I are running the architecture school that was always regarded by ourselves and all our friends as 'that dreary place up the road.' The Bartlett in the sixties, seventies and eighties (as well as in deep history) was a place where spotty, very clever, rather pompous and aesthetically brain-dead people seemed to hang out... Could the Bartlett actually be made into an instrument for drawing as well as discussing? Could it actually consider the encouragement of the 'eye' in architecture as well as the deliberation of motive? Could it retain intelligence in the face of creativity?... in the end, architecture lies all around us: for the highly creative and experimental nature of such projects – belies their common intention. It is an intention that remains central to my own work since the time of Archigram... and which must surely be re-iterated again and again... that we must extend architecture... by discovering new programmes (sic), new forms, new objects. Architecture must never be allowed to lie dormant, fester and creep in on itself."[4]

-Peter Cook, *Mechanical Landscapes*

4. Peter Cook, 'A Walking City'
5. Peter Cook & Christine Hawley, 'Arcadia City'
6. Peter Cook, 'Plug-In City'

7.

7. Vladamir Tatlin, "Tatlin's Tower"
8. Cedric Price
9. Lebbeus Woods

Similarly to magical realism in literature, speculative design projects allow the architectural designer to access a world beyond the concrete, which this thesis argues is a whole greater than the sum of its parts. By incorporating not only the primary concerns of architecture (structure, spatial relations, etc.) speculative projects that address modern day circumstances through the imaginative and allegorical have the potential to cover the gamut of architectural implications. To not only address the material motifs of architectural influences but also the "amalgamation of realism and fantasy," fanciful projects of design have the capacity to merge design proposals for specific locations with space, time and culture beyond the visible.

The historical framework for speculative imagery and design dates back to the early 20th century with Russian Constructivism and again appears, in its hey-day, around the 1960s with the era of Peter Cook, Christine Hawley and Cedric Price continuing into the late 20th/early 21st century with work by the infamous Lebbeus Woods, as well as, Wellington Reiter and Douglas Darden, among others. In Drawing the Motive Force of Architecture, by Peter Cook, Cook addresses the notion of speculative design as conveyed through the technique of drawing. He writes: " Another issue... is the question as to whether architects' drawings owe more to the demands of architecture or to an artistic inheritance where the particularization of a building matters little. Into this come the issues of consciousness, state of mind and motive.[5]" He elaborates on this issue by stating, "From whatever starting point, it seems that clarity of priorities is at the centre (sic) of the issue. The need for illustration comes into play... for the sake of communication."[6] He furthermore supports architectural representation, through drawing of speculative, i.e. magical realist designs, calling them a "challenge to conventional, pragmatic architectural thought built up by the accumulation of information."[7] To balance today's wealth of information, which architects now have at readily disposal, is the imaginative.

Speculative projects, or those that need to be visually conveyed via means of drawing and abstract representation, are valuable in a project's ability to challenge banal modern day discourses of politics and motivations. This is done by fusing a hypothetical design project with a heightened sense of "consciousness, state of mind and motive." Or as Cook writes, "Propositional architecture dominates... because it carries with it the conscious wish to state a position, almost always distinct from the commonplace, the vernacular or that with which the public is familiar."[8]

Traditional design projects typically involve a defined program and, usually, a limited and precise site location. In the conventional approach to architectural design, a designer might begin by developing a conceptual idea to program as a design generator. Or he or she may look to existing urban patterns as a means by wish to generate form on a given site. However, if an architectural designer has the desire to acknowledge, address and work through a large scope of ideas, spanning across space, time, and culture, a magical realist approach possesses the greatest potential in communication about an abstract idea that is immeasurable. What is fundamental to this speculative design approach is twofold. As Peter Cook iterates: consciousness and a rigor in drawing technique, both which are necessary to visually convey and evoke emotion in regard to the subject matter at hand.


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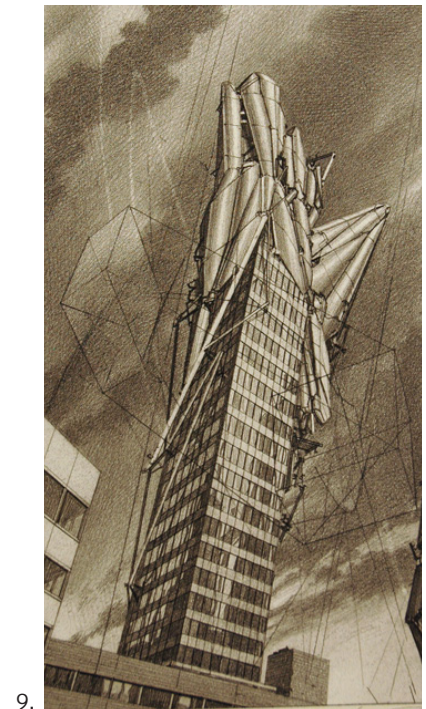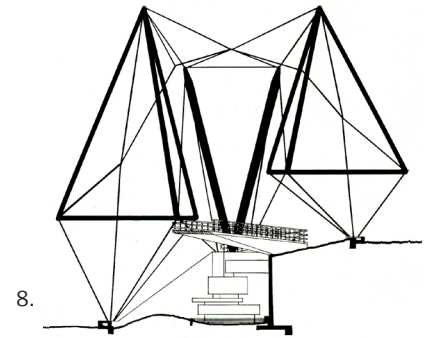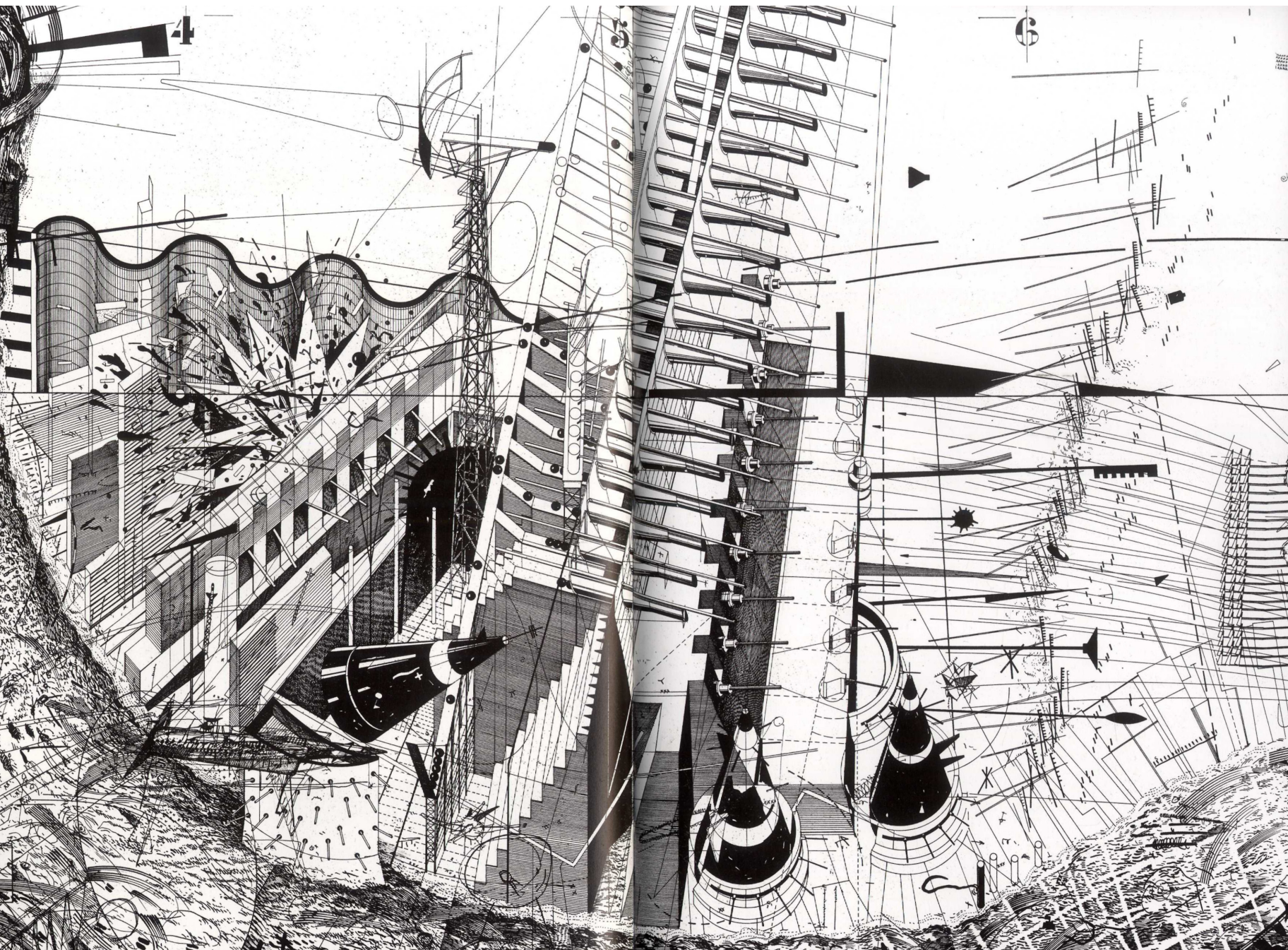
In her Foreword for Wellington Reiter's compilation of drawings, Vessel and Fields, Patricia Phillips reiterates the two key components for speculative design: intent (or seemingly lack of) and the use of drawing as a communicative apparatus. She writes, Reiter's interests lie in the:

> "connective tissue between imagined or forgotten pasts and a shifting present and future, as well as supple metaphors for the urban condition. Always negotiating fantastic fictional accounts with incisive observation, his propositions disclose the restless, transitive character of all cities. If particular structures and spaces offer metaphors for the city, the painstaking excavation of meaning is always an orchestration of exactitude and exigency. This mediation of intent and fortuity is represented in a body of exquisitely restless drawings that both procure and obscure evidence. Vessel and Fields is an idiosyncratic epic of the modern city. Contexts and conditions are established; characters and stories unfold, intersect, and overlap, creating an atmosphere from which a vivid... depiction of the city emerges... Reiter draws to complicate and question. If not entirely estranged from a will to make or build, his drawings beckon us back to more essential questions about why we build, about how cities have come to look and feel the way that they do."[9]

Phillips notes that as a result of Reiter's "mediation of intent" and "restless drawings" is the unfolding and overlapping of context, characters and stories in regard to toiling with the idea of the modern city. This spin-off of characterization and stories coupled with drawing and intent is the backbone for this thesis' culturally contextual design proposal.

10. Wellington Reiter, 'A History of New Orleans'
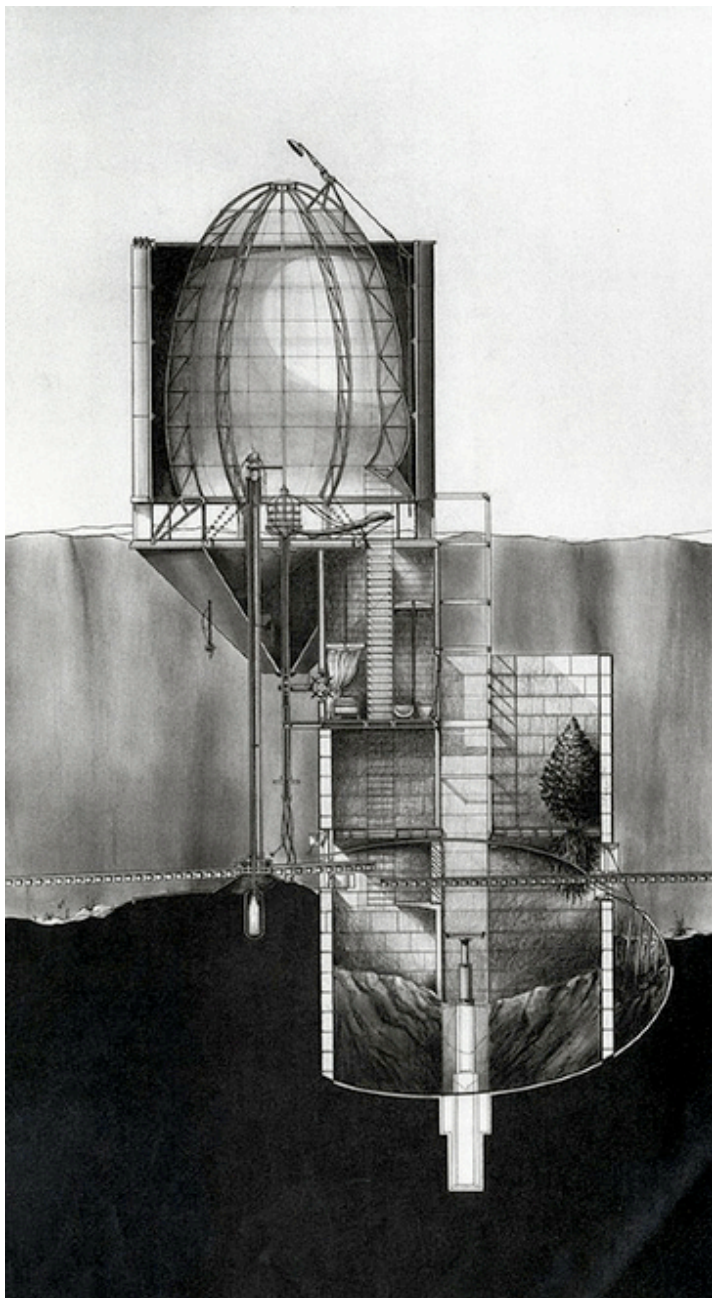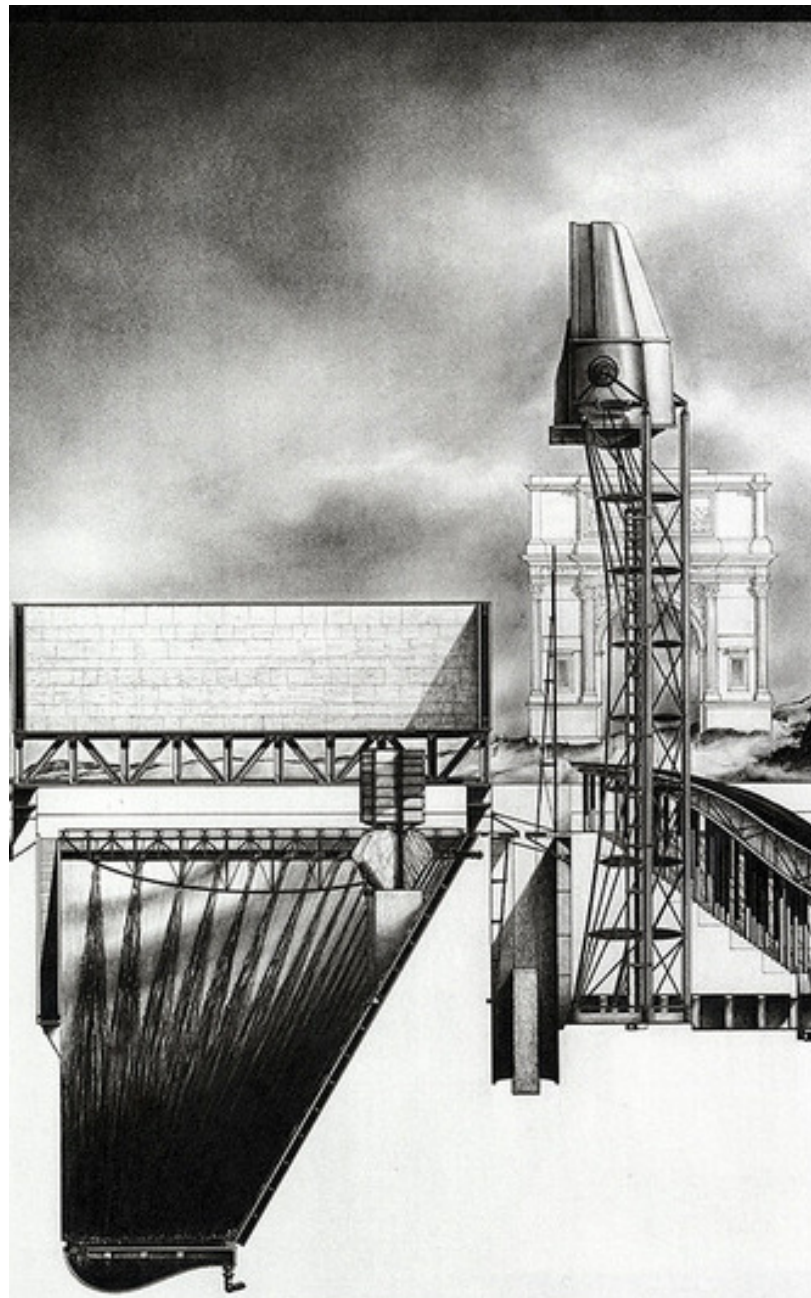11. Wellington Reiter
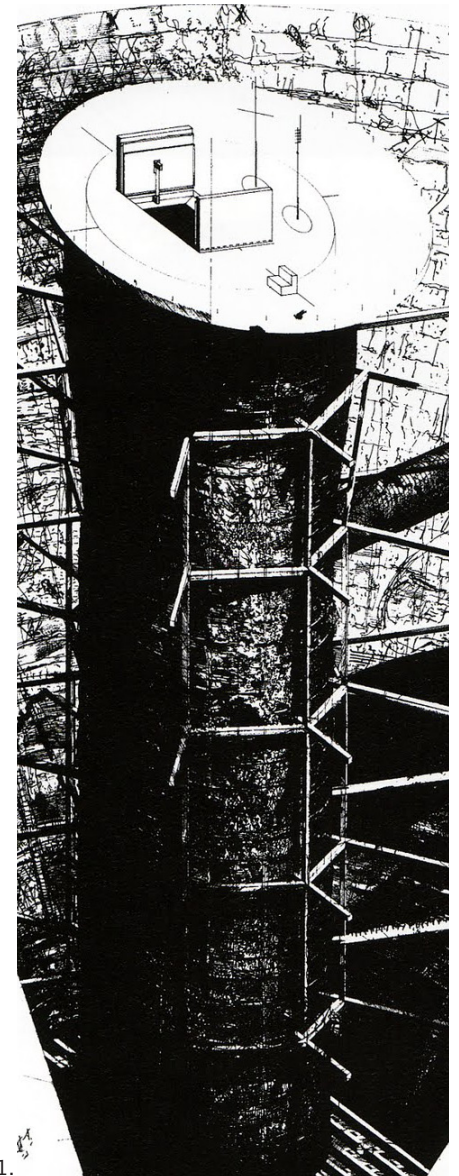
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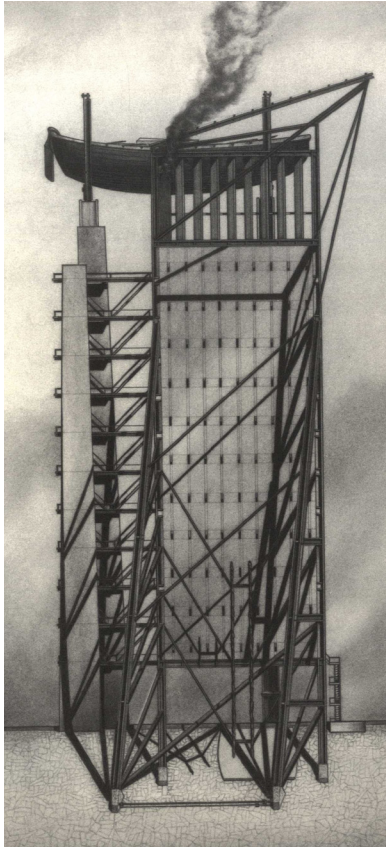
12.

Douglas Darden is another professor and architect who combined motive, drawing and characterization in his design proposals. In this way, he was reactive and proactive to the current times in which he lived. In his monograph, Condemned Buildings, His approach to architectural propositions included not only an honesty to structure, space, tectonics, form and program, but also to the legitimacy of narrative. His program proposals, drawings and textual accompaniments convey a sense of a raison d'être in their beautiful execution and evocative sentiment. What is so fascinating (and successful) is his ambiguous inclusion of fiction/nonfiction alongside his drawings. It is for the most part, unclear whether the stories mentioned are fact, fiction or a combination of both. In this regard, Darden sets the stage for the reader to add a layer of his or her own speculation. At times there are quotes, such as, "I'll have grounds / More relative than this: / the play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch / the conscience of the King"[10] where authorship is unclear. Did Darden write this? Is this a quotation? There is no citation. In addition, adding to the uncertainty of the previous quote is the supplemental inclusion of letters, hospital reports, witness accounts and confessions sprinkled throughout the monograph. These stories appear factual, though one is not too far off the mark to entertain the notion that they may indeed be completely contrived. In addition, the very fact that so many of the included stories, are conveyed via first person narration, in a subjective framework, the reader must also question the very authenticity of these narratives. One reaches the end of Condemned Buildings left with more questions, more wonderment than one had upon opening the front cover of the book. This sense of wonderment is the jewel of what this thesis seeks.

12. Douglas Darden,
13. Douglas Darden, 'Oxygen House'
14. Douglas Darden,'Temple Forgetful'
15. Hooverville in Interbay (over)
16. Composite overlay (over)

13.

14.

15.

16.

2. GAMBLED LAND & ENGINEERED MEANS

17.

18.

17. Composite overlay
18. Composite overlay
19. Interbay existing site section
20. Composite overlay
21. Railway Advertisement (over)
22. Railway Advertisement (over)

"It can be a great inspiration for any entrepreneur to take a fresh look at what he is doing through the eyes of young people whose imaginative and uncompromising ideas project the image of a future which aims to merge ecological, cultural, historic, technological and economic considerations in a sensible and sensitive way... my heartfelt thanks go the young people [sic] all over the world who have called our attention to the delicate balance of nature and culture, technology and history." [11]

-J.E. Weidinger, Architectural Association commentator

This thesis proposes that the legitimacy of speculative architecture is tied to the notion of narrative and of a design project's potential to incorporate sentiment that cannot exist in a physical sense to the discourses of today. More specifically, this thesis proposes an imagined resettlement of Smith Cove, in the area known as Interbay, in Seattle, WA. The historical narrative, grounded in the reality of Smith Cove, cannot be divorced from the project and the resultant magical design is the outcome of, through the means of allegory, the realization of historical forces on a site as design generator. Not only in form and in program but also in regard to the "dialogue between structure, space, tectonics, form and program." In this way, this speculative proposal not only reaches the level of credibility that architecture is said to be accountable in addressing, but adds a layer of design and (un)familiarity with a project that allows designer and critic to engage with deeper notions of the magical. To ultimately "conflate sight and insight and thus collapse the literal and figurative meanings of 'vision'... to create 'magical' meaning by seeing ordinary things in extraordinary ways."[12]
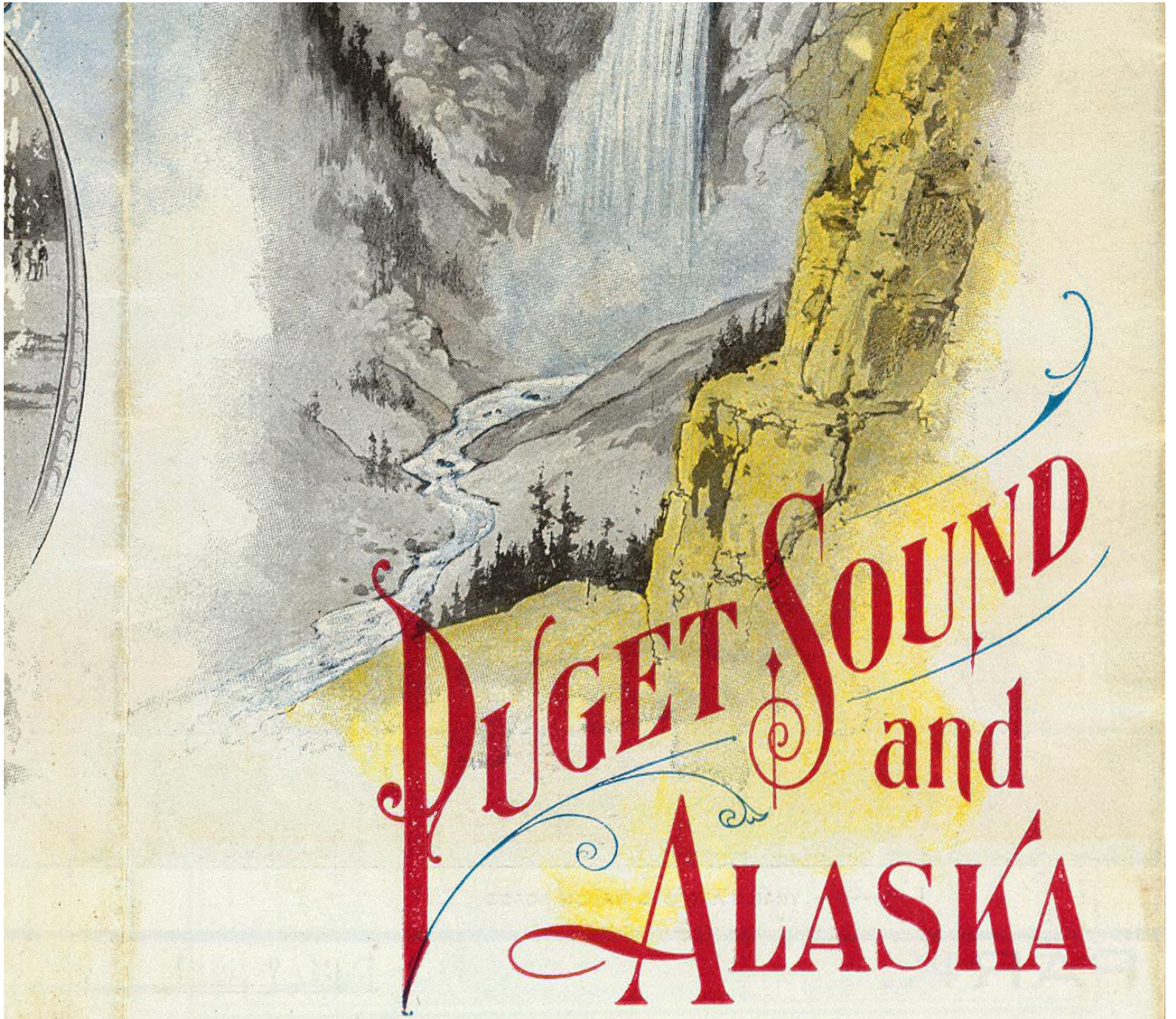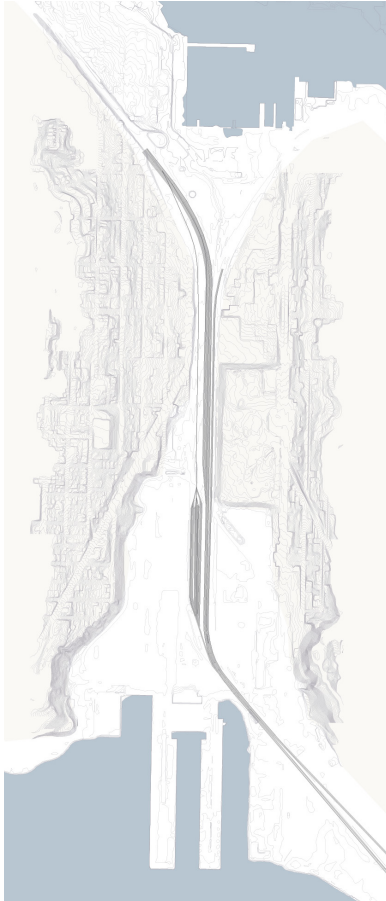
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VIA Northern Pacific Railway
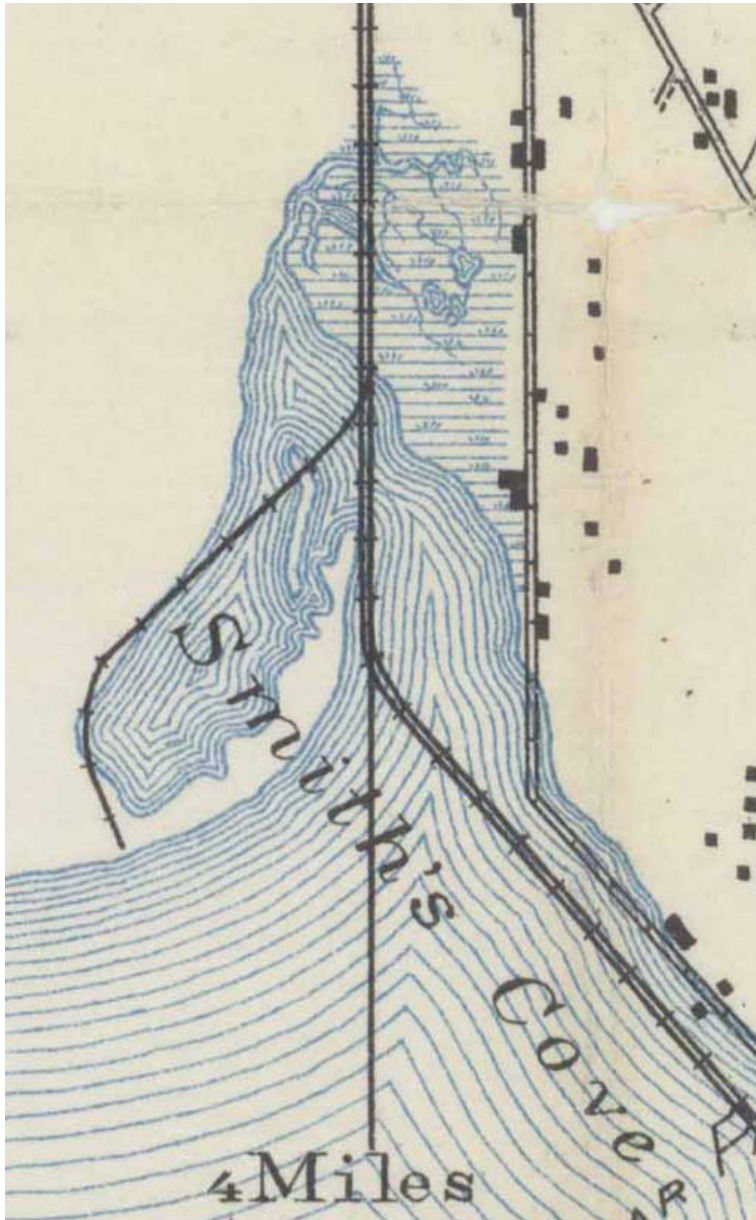
Puget Sound and Alaska
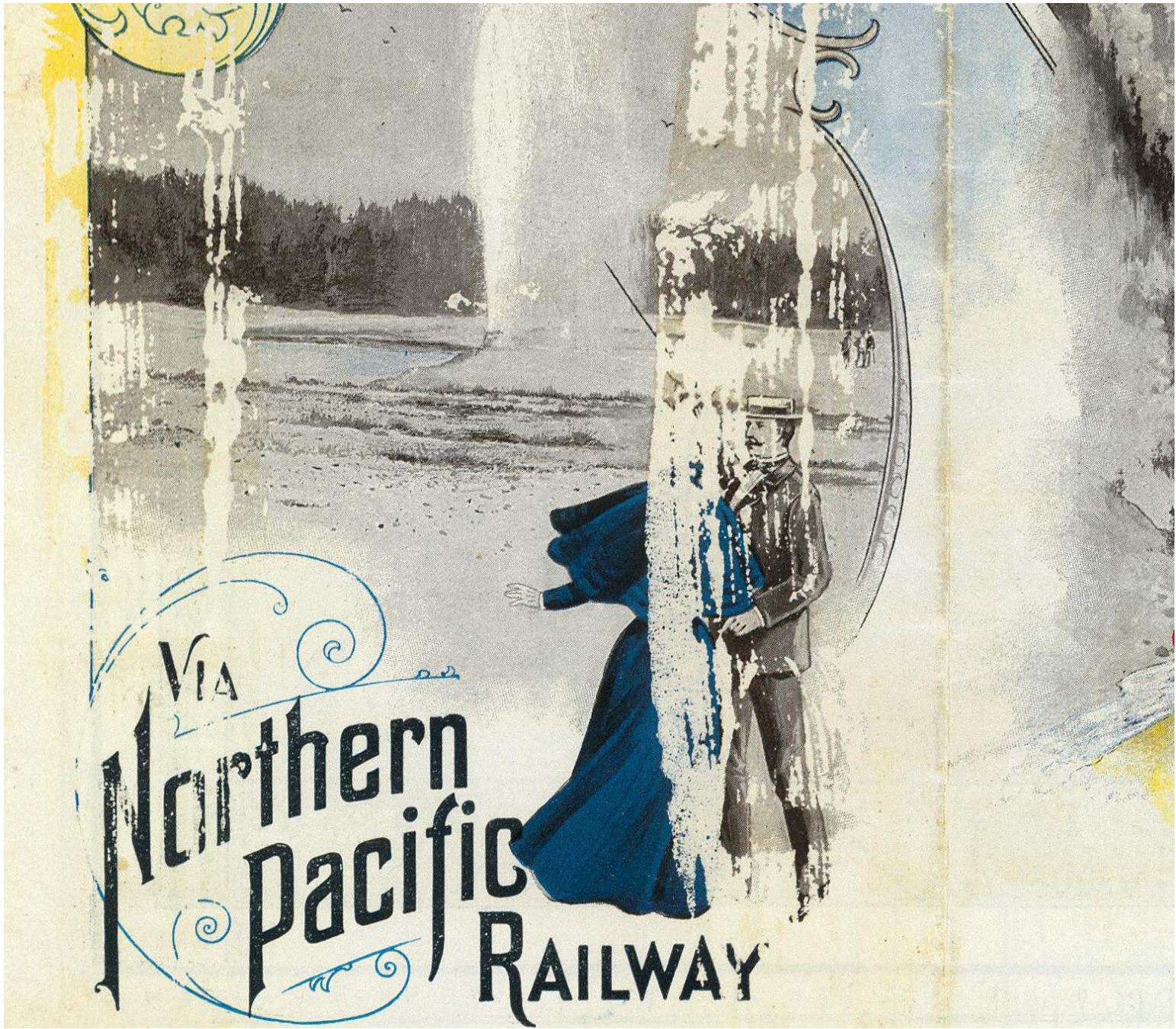
I. INTERBAY AND SMITH COVE

23.

23. The Valley
24. The Waterway Cove
25. The Asphalt Cove
26. Interbay, 1929 (over)
27. Interbay, 1929 (over)

The site of this thesis project is Interbay between Magnolia and Queen Anne and was chosen for its embodied magical qualities. Forces on the site that can be imagined, but cannot be seen. As it stands today, Interbay is the industrial switching yard of Seattle situated in a valley between Queen Anne hill and Magnolia hill. What began as a single train track in the late 19th century has grown to 20 train tracks today, running in a strong North-South direction through the site. As part of Interbay's geomorphology, a large earthquake roughly 1,000 to 1,100 years ago caused a tsunami to drape a layer of sand onto older sediment, which settled below the seawater amongst the tidelands of the region. In 1911, with the formation of the Port of Seattle and the construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, these tidelands were filled in with fill from the canal dredging. About 150 acres of tidelands stand today capped by parking lots, buildings or structure and minimal landscape. A large parking lot, measuring 56 acres, covers the former cove area in the southern portion of Interbay. Considering climate change and the rising sea levels, the seawater will inevitably return, reclaiming its previous domain. The site as it exists today, is an engineered landscape, a relic of Seattle's industrial past.

In particular, the area of Smith Cove has seen the greatest manipulation of its natural landscape over the course of time. Henry Smith in 1853 took a gamble as the first settler to stake claim to the southern region of Interbay and the cove became known as the Smith Cove Waterway. Henry Smith also envisioned this area as a city center and gambled on building the rail yard in this location directly over mudflats and tidelands. Early maps demonstrate the almost absurdity of this early risk taker. It was a dramatic undertaking. His dream of building a railroad over muddy land that becomes covered by seawater at low tide made the settling of Smith Cove was a magical feat.
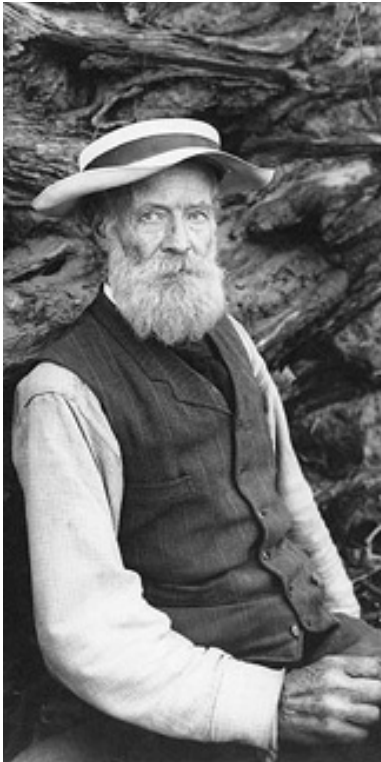
24.

25.

26.

ROPE WALK·PORTLAND CORDAGE CO. SEATTLE

2300 W. Wheeler St Bridge 4-17-14

27.

II. RELICS OF THE PAST

28.

Henry Smith and other early settlers brought to the site his and her pioneering attitudes, overlaying the notion of risk taking, gambling, and modern engineering on the natural land. In Jack London's novel, the Valley of the Moon, London captures the spirit and character of the early pioneer. From his story: "Whenever a man lost his stake, all he had to do was to chase the frontier west a few miles and get another stake. Their laws were gambling laws—how to play the game. Everybody chased the frontier for fresh stakes... they gobbled and gambled from the Atlantic to the Pacific... gambling for any little stakes they'd overlooked... And then was the funniest time of all. The losers couldn't get any more stakes, while the winners went on gambling among themselves."[13]

The ghosts of these early settlers still exist as forces on the site, the relics of the past. The embodied character of gambling and engineering engulf the landscape. These are the forces that can be felt but not seen when visiting Interbay. This magical quality, captured by these forces, permeates the site, spanning across space and time. This thesis looks to these forces as the dominant component of site analysis and proposes a magical realist resettlement of Smith Cove. In translating these magical forces of the site into a tangible concept, the persona of the early settler is developed as two characters: the gambler and the engineer. These representative titles were chosen based on the notion of manipulating the landscape through chance and opportunity.

28. Henry Smith, 1904
29. Valley of the Moon
30. Land Claims, 1853

29.

30.
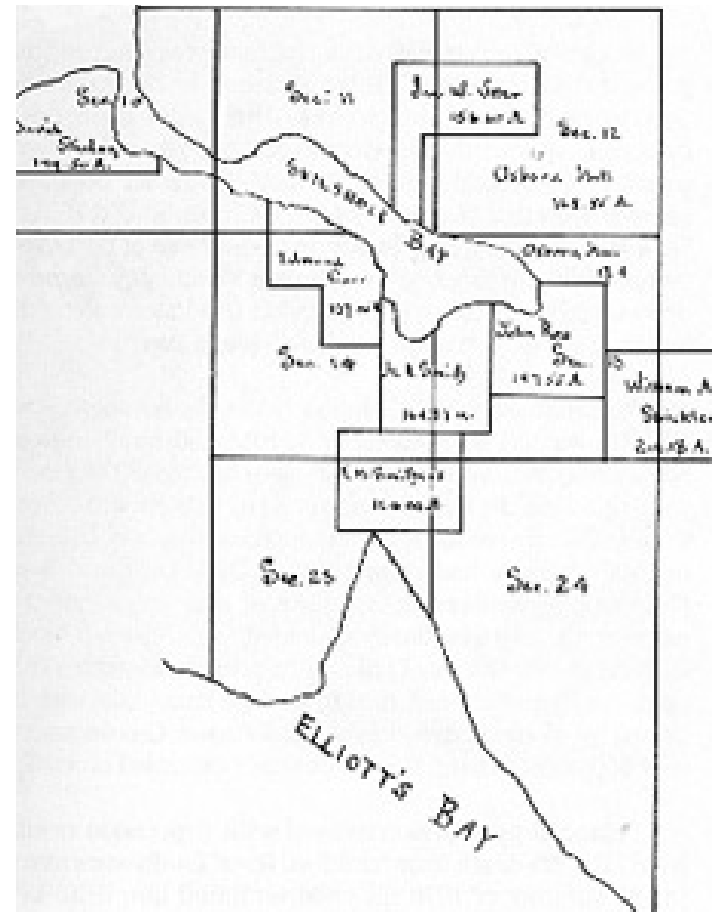
"SO THEY IDLED THEIR WAY UP THE BROAD, FERTILE VALLEY, SO HAPPY THAT THEY FORGOT THAT WORK WAS EVER NECESSARY, WHILE THE VALLEY OF THE MOON WAS A GOLDEN DREAM, REMOTE, BUT SURE, SOME DAY OF REALIZATION."

-JACK LONDON, VALLEY OF THE MOON

"WEST THEY HAD FARED UNTIL THE PACIFIC ITSELF HAD STOPPED THEM, AND HERE THEY HAD MADE THEIR CLEARING, BUILT THEIR RUDE HOUSES, AND SETTLED. IN THEM FARTHEST WEST HAD BEEN REACHED."

-JACK LONDON, *VALLEY OF THE MOON*
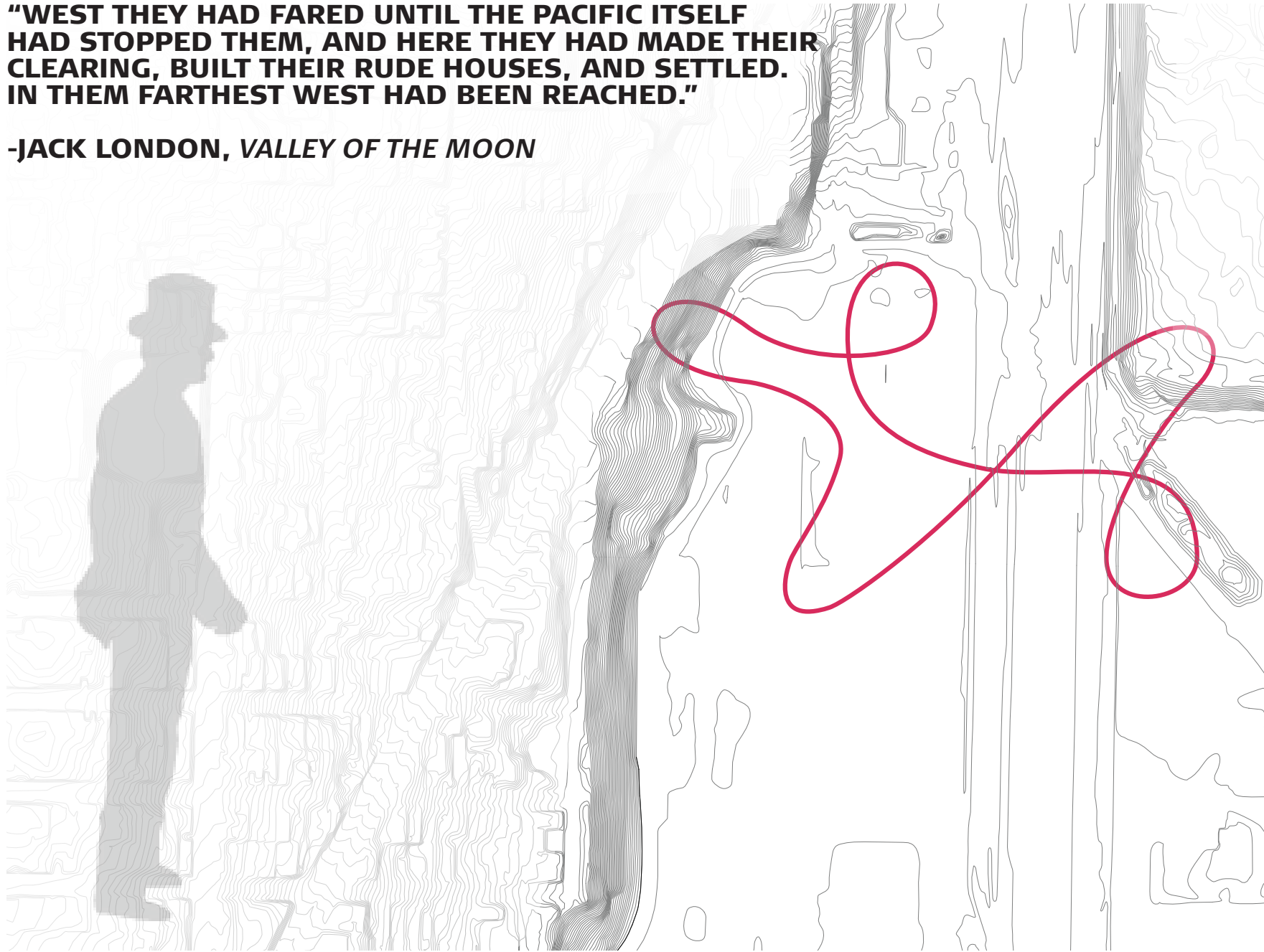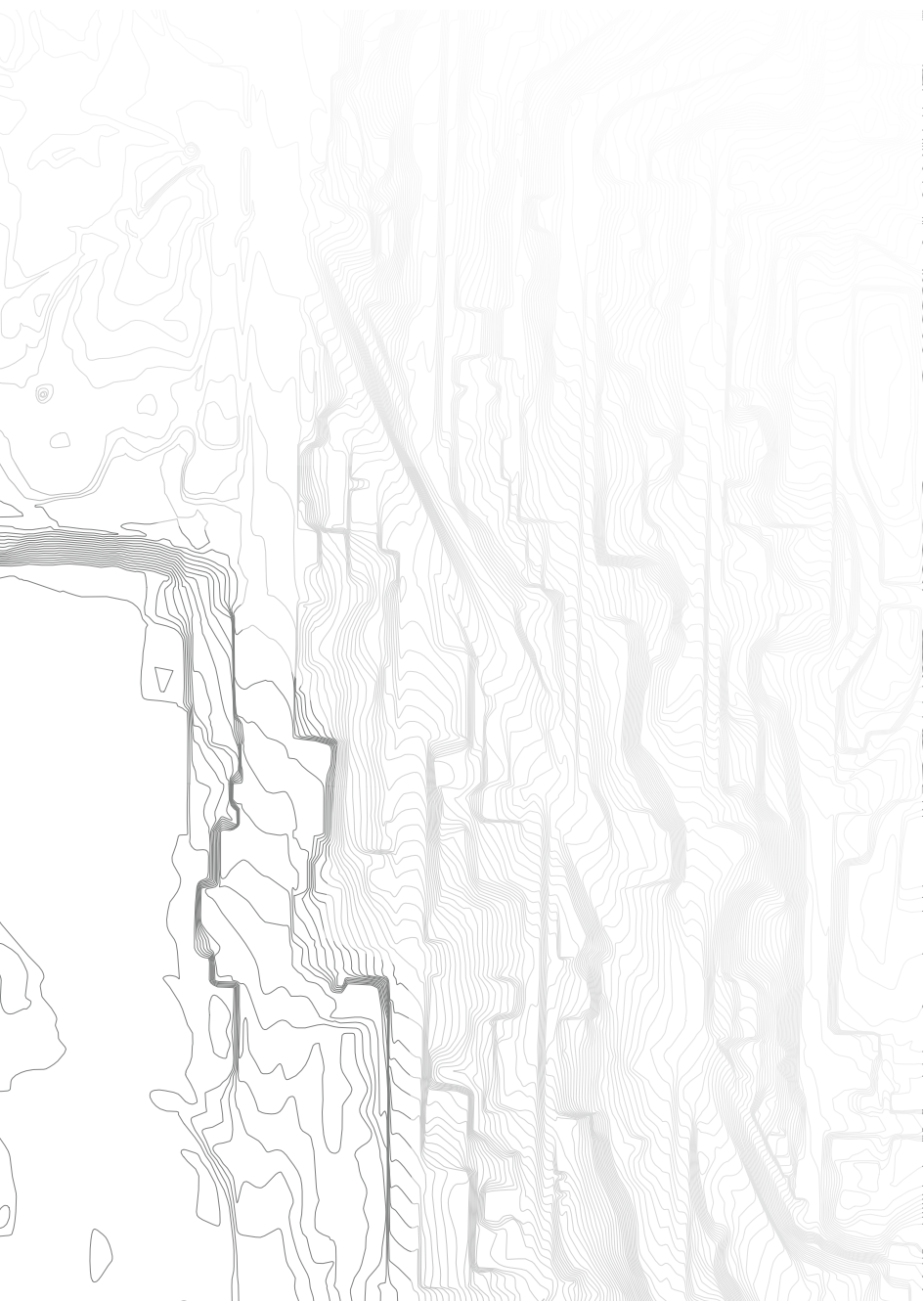
3. ENCOUNTERING THE FRONTEIR

Play the socio-psycho game
The chips are down
The stakes are low
Man in the city the ultimate goal
Throw the dice and
Learn about yourself and how
You fit in the pattern
That is Living City.[14]

-Living City Catalogue

31. Into the Frontier

I. THE GAMBLER

The gambler takes risks without probable stakes, again and again, all the while hopeful of a positive payoff, projecting chance on the landscape. A primary example of gambling the landscape is building a railroad on a mudflat, a precarious proposition for water turned into land. As the character of the gambler is developed, her image is recreated as an introvert who hides her true emotions behind a warm façade. In reality, she is skeptical of the world; her bona fide nature is focused on protecting her winnings and she is always ready to make a quick getaway.


32. Author's Collage
33. High Stakes
34. Interbay, 1929

32.

33.

34.
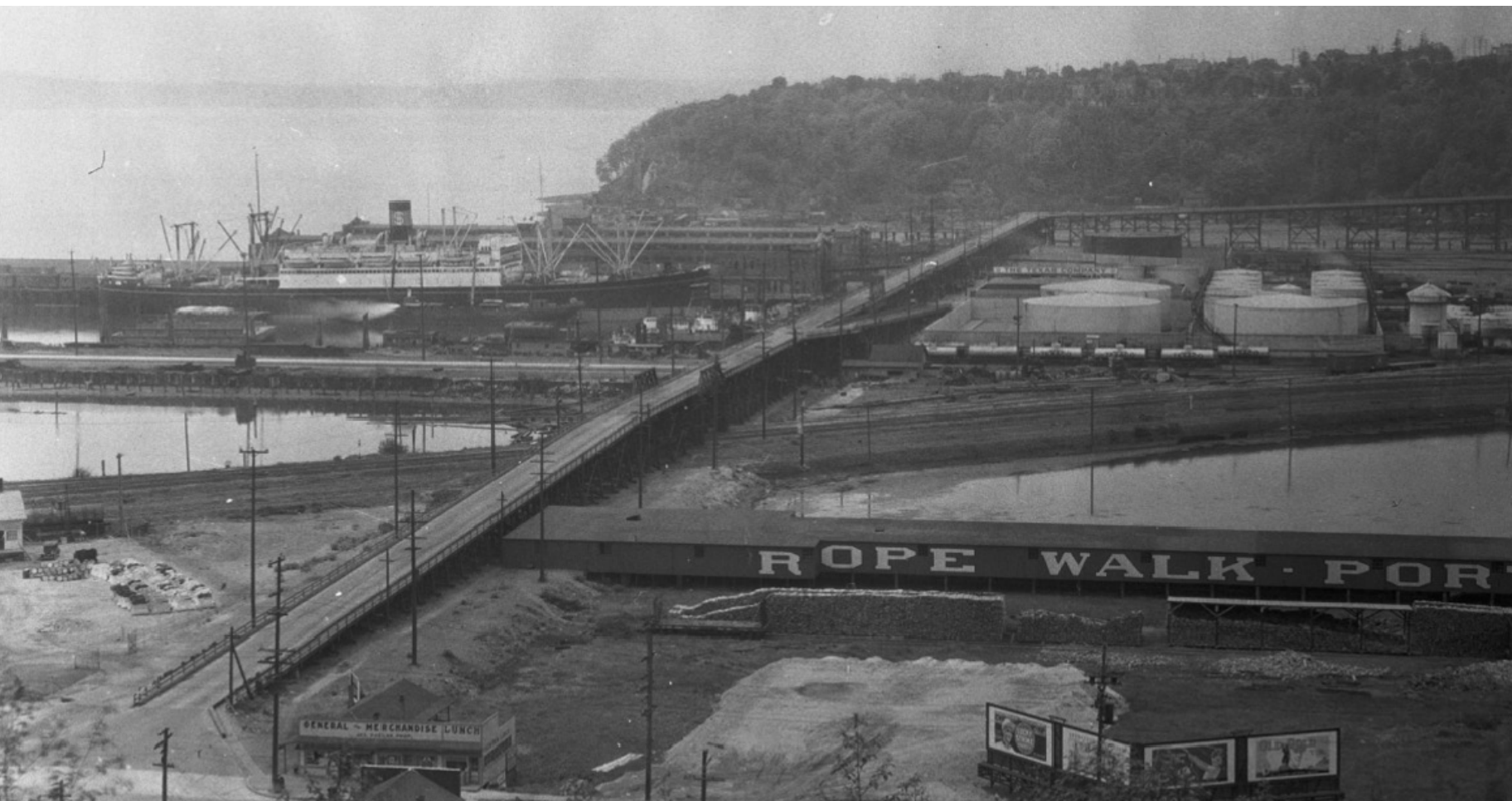
II. THE ENGINEER

The engineer methodically calculates ways to bring dreams into reality. He builds and builds and builds—the railway and the infrastructure to create the modern world; a grand vision of the 'future'. As the character of the engineer is developed, in order to have such monumental success in his undertakings, he is conceived to be regimented, orderly and obsessive, always problem solving and looking for problems to solve. He doesn't like to leave things up to chance.

35. Chief Steam Engineer, circa 1902
36. Author's Collage
37. Interbay, circa 1929

35.

36.

37.
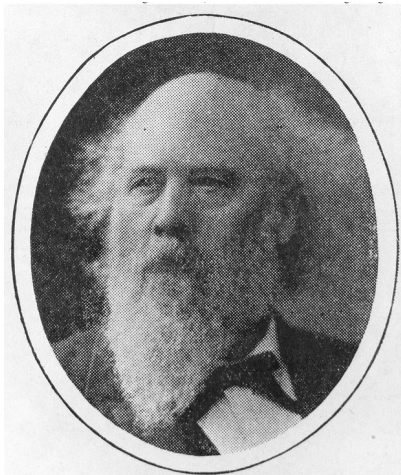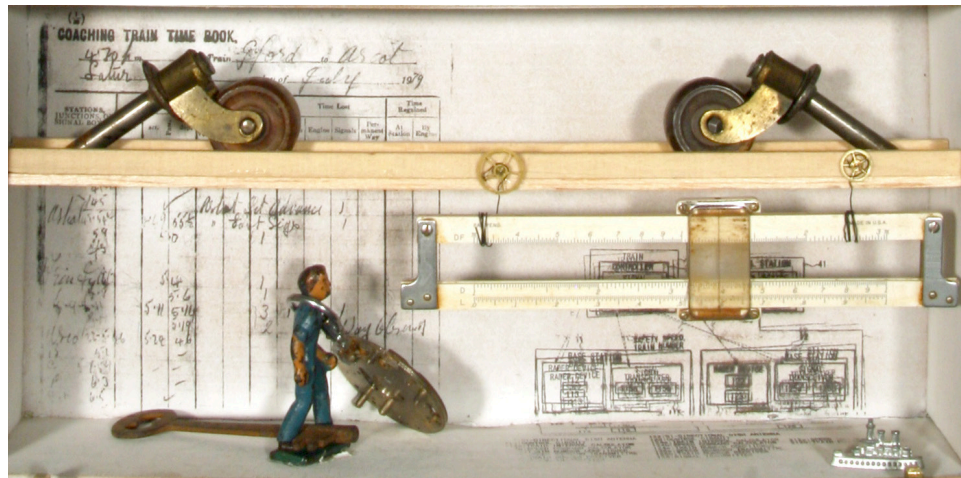
III. OVERLAP

38.

Although apparently opposed, at the heart of their worlds, the gambler and the engineer are both acting out of notions of risk and opportunity: while one is chance, the other is calculated. In the world of the frontier, where anything goes and with very high stakes, it took a pairing of both acting on a whim and measured problem solving to dream of and to create the infrastructure for settling in a new land. In this way, the gambler and the engineer operate in the same world and their paths inevitably overlap.

Currently, the world has been about sustaining the infrastructure that was created by the early pioneers. The risks and gambles required to settle the site have faded away in favor of the monotony of maintaining this existing infrastructure, for example patching and repairing the tracks. The remnant of the gambler has been suppressed by this lack of need to take large-scale risks, such as in settling the Wild West.

38. Sustaining Infastructure
39. Gamble + Engineer

39.

IV. ITS ALL IN THE SEA

Completing the cycle from historical sea levels to rising sea levels, whether by choice or not, we will most likely encounter a new frontier in the next 300 to 500 years. Once again encountering an uncharted territory that will require resettlement. The gambler will return afresh to address these untamed and pristine high stakes. The engineer will return, seizing the opportunity to construct this new infrastructure for yet another grand vision of the future.

The thesis merges these two forces on the site, proposing a resettlement of Smith Cove and a new frontier, based on the projection of the rising sea level. In response to this rising sea level, this project proposes both an engineered and gambled solution—this is the role of the architect.
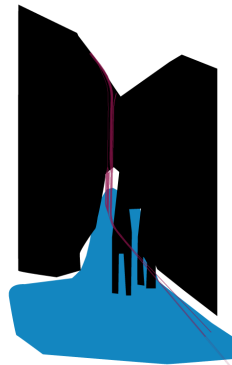
40. Cycle of Seawater
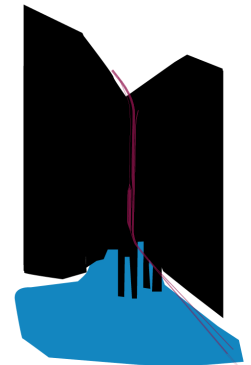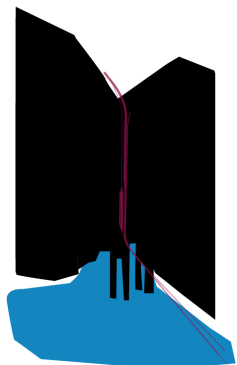41. Hurricane Sandy (over)

HISTORICAL SEALEVELS

1863   **1901**   **1934**   **1947**

RISING SEALEVELS
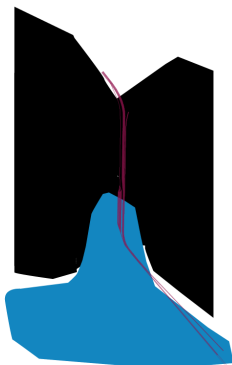
PRESENT   **5FT,**   **12FT,**   **25FT,**
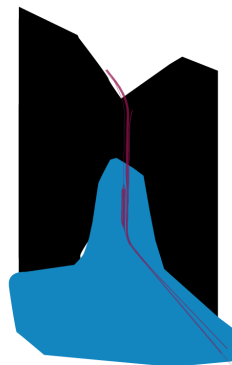   **100-300 YEARS** **2300 AD**   **BASED ON**
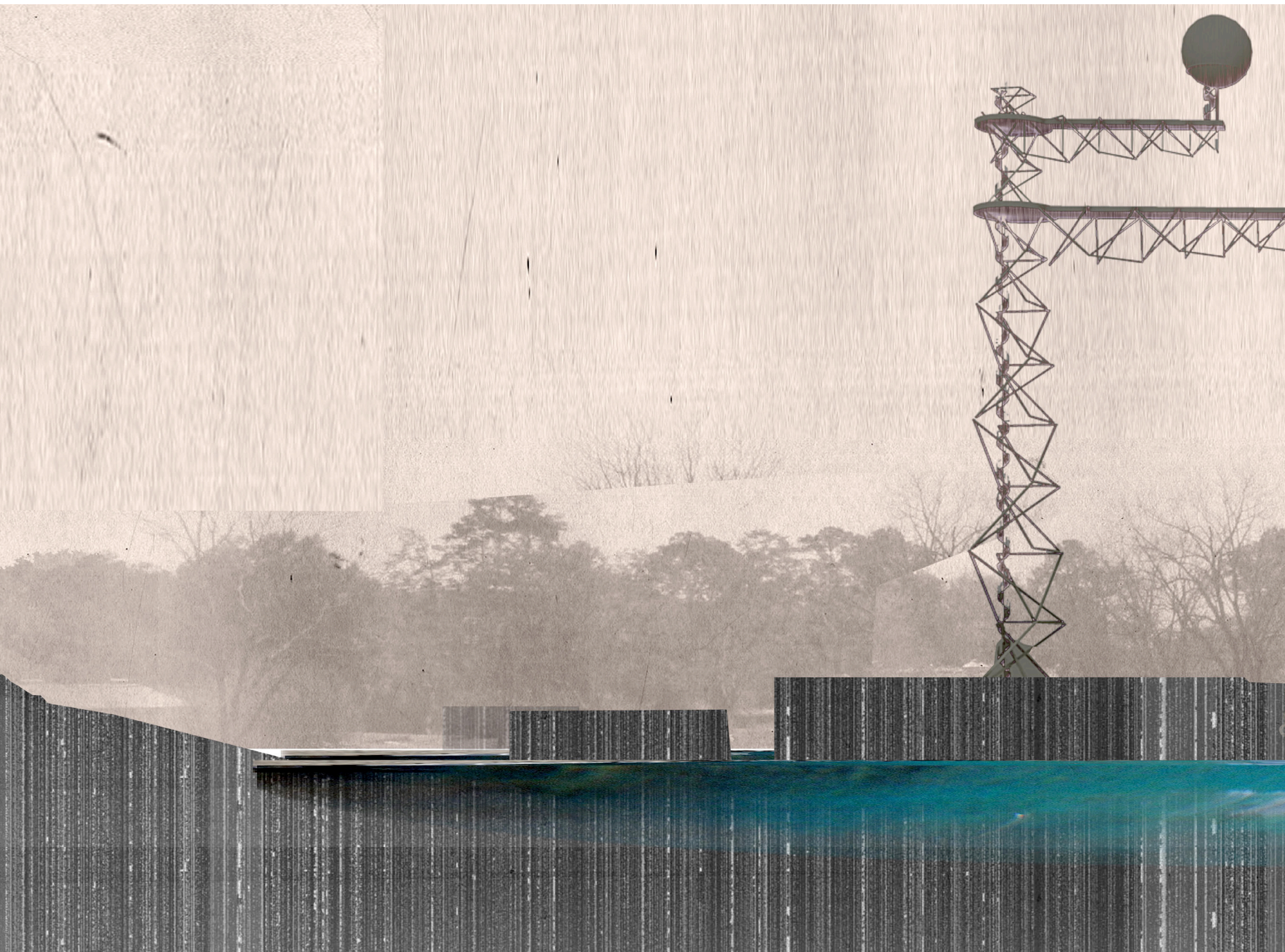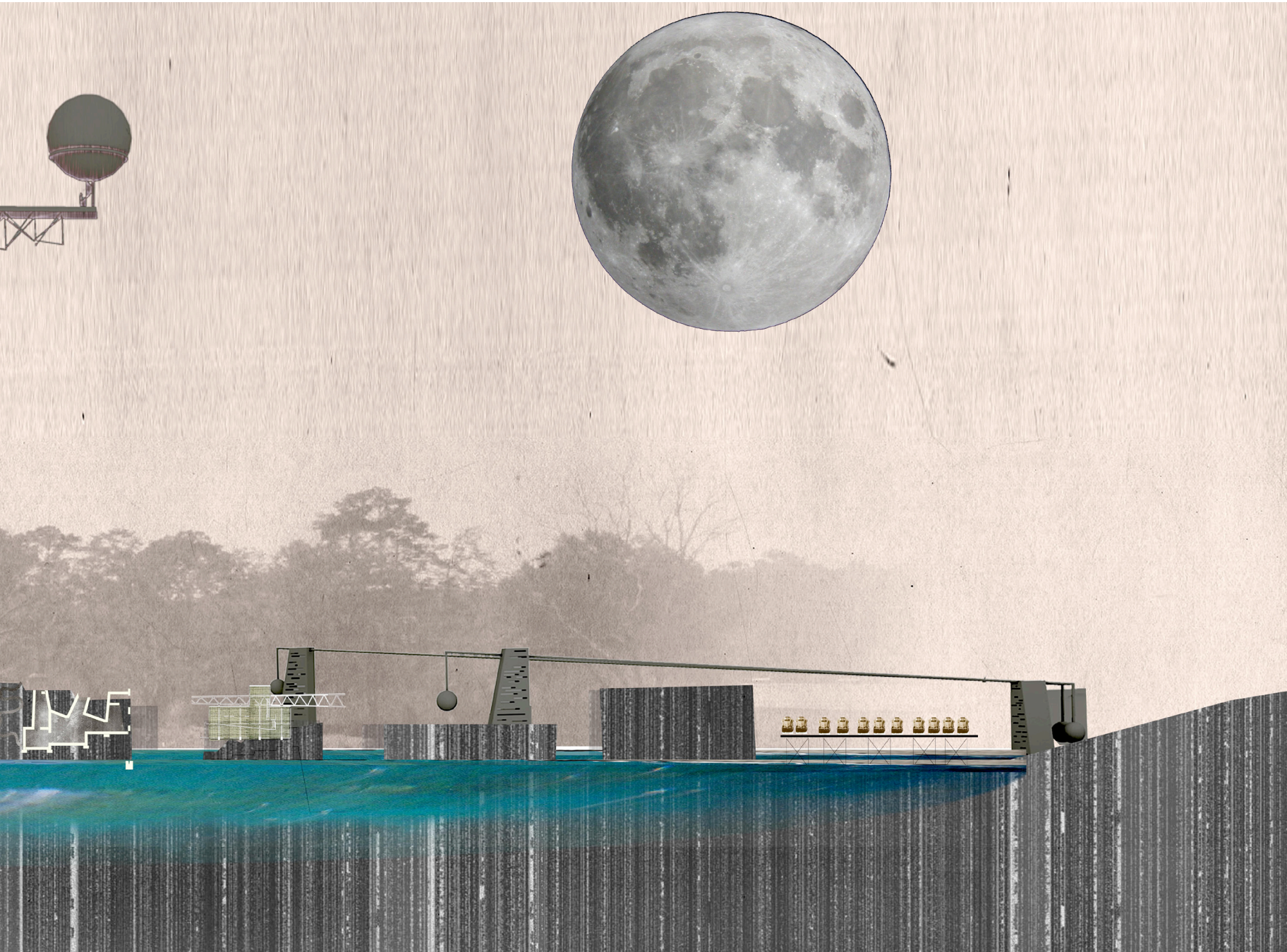   **CLIMATE DATA**

40.

41.

"WE CAN EITHER RESIST CHANGE OR RESPOND TO IT. FOR ME THAT IS A CENTRAL ISSUE FACING ARCHITECTURE. ONE CAN DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND THE ABSORPTION OF FACETS OF A PREVIOUS GENERATION'S TASTE. ONE CAN DISTINGUISH BETWEEN REITERATIVE, ALMOST MECHANICAL, ABSORPTION AND THE REJECTION OF NEW PHENOMENA."[16]

-PETER COOK

3. RESETTLEMENT OF SMITH COVE

"It is through hypothetical propositions that we begin to identify and encounter the inestimable forces and human choices that inscribe the character of contemporary cities"[15]

The first task of this resettlement is to address how the water will reenter the site. Stemming forth from today's dominantly engineered world, the initial response– an engineered response– is to redirect the water. Building up the site as finger-like islands raises the ground plain well above the anticipated continuously rising seawater. It also breaks down the flow of the water by diverting it between the islands. The form of the islands was inspired by the delta of the train tracks—the nearby spatial configuration that ensues from the convergence and divergence of the long North-South tracks. Canyons were naturally formed by the gaps between the islands.

43.

44.
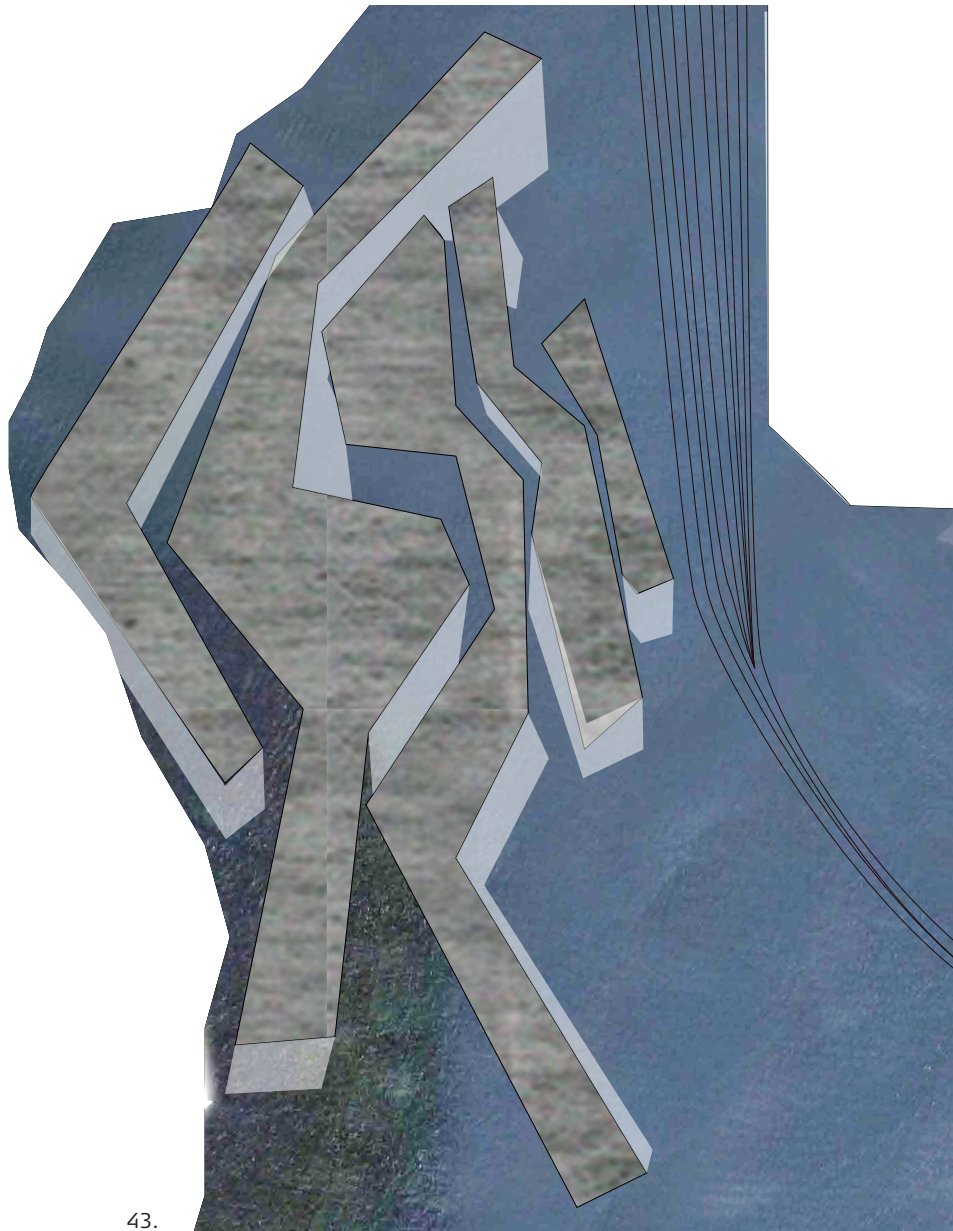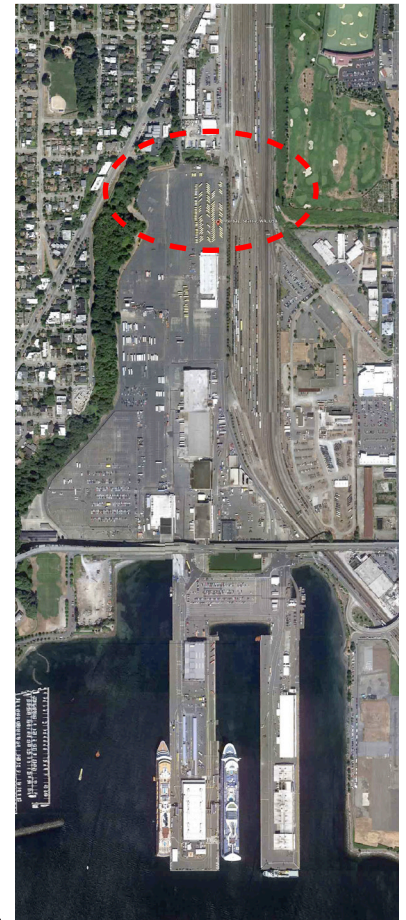
46.

I. SETTLE

Each of these islands is programmed with a necessary element to survive—to sustain settlement. There are five islands. Four are programmed with grazing, farming, energy harvesting, and an open landscape. The last is reserved as the center of the settlement. While this first part was largely the force of the engineer speaking to the site, the next piece of resettling Smith Cove was to overlay the gambler's willingness to take risks. The settlement itself is a gamble on this tentative landscape created by the engineer. In this way the new settlement is once more a collaboration between the essential qualities of the gambler and those of the engineer.

The gambler's visionary world for resettlement consists of all required necessities for survival and leisure. Currently realized are the basic structures necessary to navigate this new territory.

ENERGY
HARVESTING

CENTER

OPEN LANDSCAPE

FARMING

GRAZING

47. Site plan
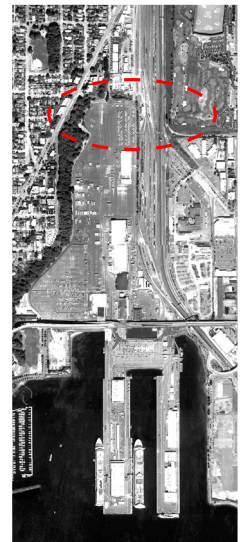
II. BRIDGES

Bridges are the first elements placed on the site. They are necessary to span from land to land, across the valley, connecting each of the islands to one another and merging the new landform with the old. The bridge is designed by merging two tectonic languages, each representing the character of the engineer and the gambler—two solid anchoring elements and a tenuous spanning element.
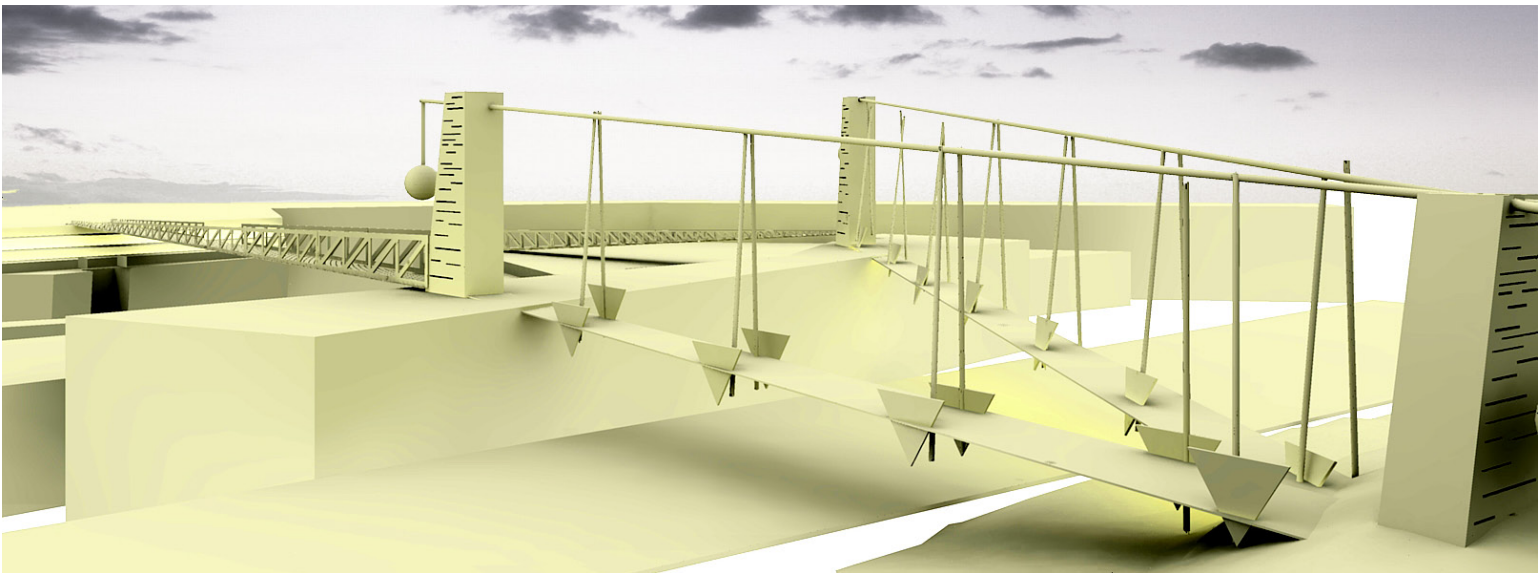
48. Bridge Tectonics

III. TOWER

The next is a tower that acts as a compass, always orienting one in relation to the center. In keeping with merging the character of the gambler and engineer in the tectonics of the tower, it exists as a precarious structure. The gambler plays upon the engineer's truss. Trusses, known to be highly efficient in regards to structure, are twisted in a way that its structural stability appears to be a game of chance.

IV. SHELTER

Shelter is the final expression of the gambler and the engineer. Here, one can observe the character, quirks, tectonics and private life of each character manifested in his and her unique ways. The gambler and the engineer are separated into his and her own dwelling spaces yet their shelters are still essentially connected. Conceptually, they are connected through facing each other in opposition across the canyon. In physical form, this connection takes place via a winding staircase connecting the two structures as a bridge across the canyon.

The gambler's shelter is sunken into the earth, reaching towards the water in a risky manner. Her primary structure is heavy and deeply rooted, while her façade appears to the world in a warm manner, made of wood. The engineer is suspended to the truss of one of the bridges. His house is made of steel. Its spatial configuration is very orderly. There is a regular grid pattern and custom fasteners supporting the shelter. He is reaching upwards, aiming higher and higher. However, the gambler, safely in her shelter looks to the sky, in a dream like manner, while the engineer can look to the earth. His understanding of the world is grounded stemming forth from pragmatic problems and solutions that arise. The gambler has a floating raft, which she may hop into to travel through the canyons and the engineer has a constructed walkway, anchored into the land. Of course, they often travel together.
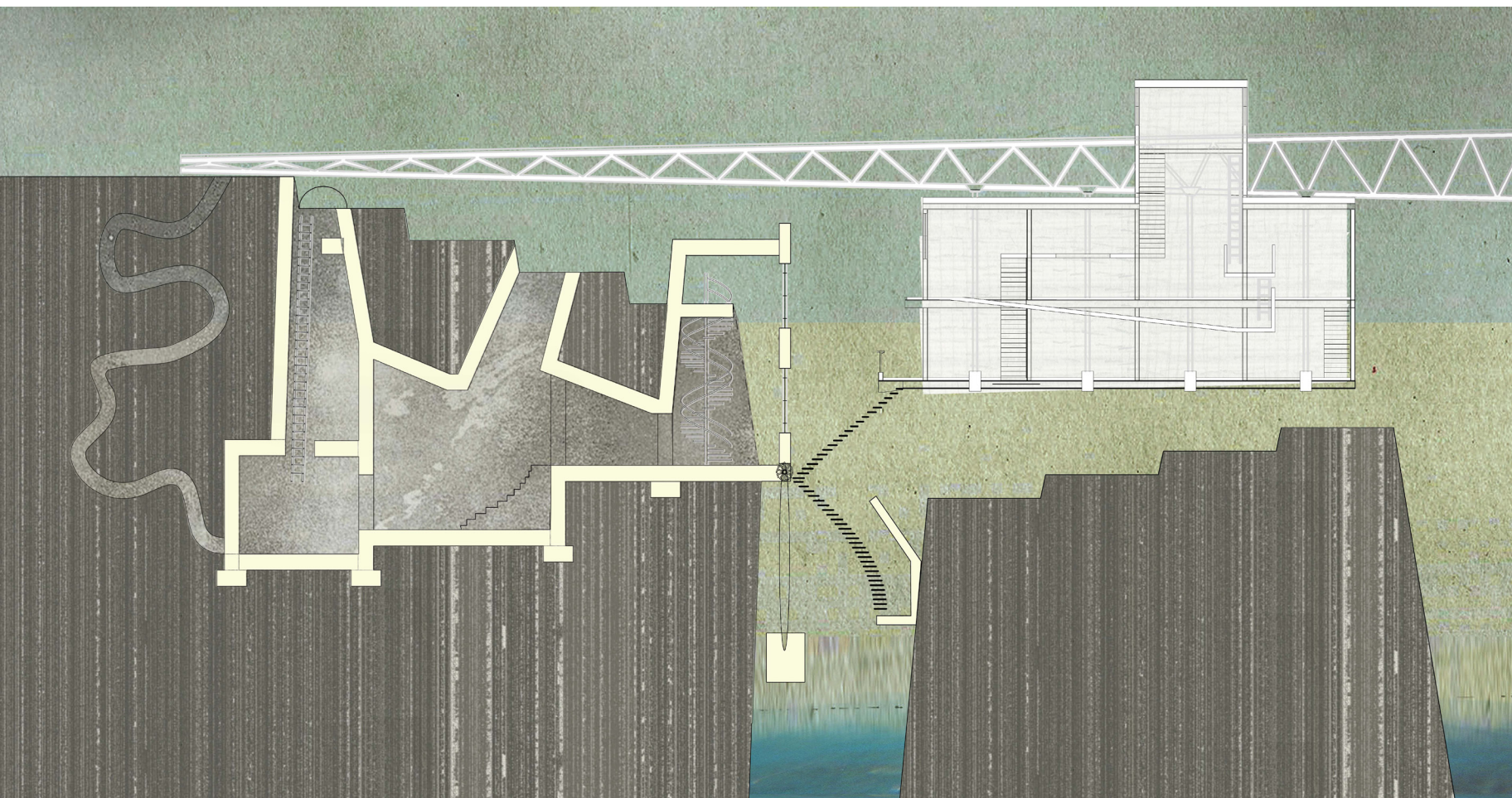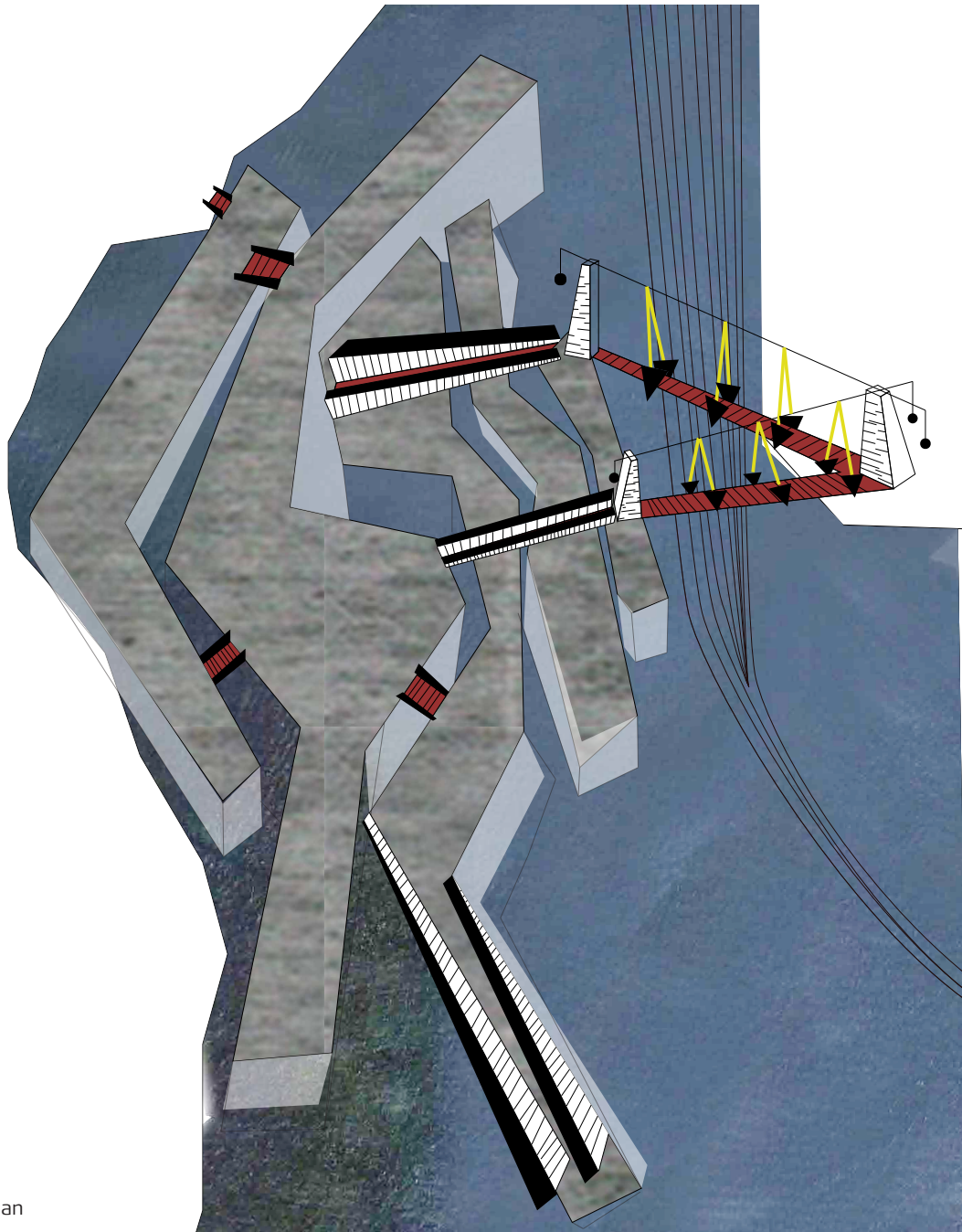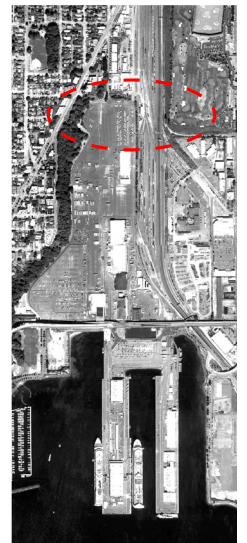
49. Gambler and Engineer Section

V. RESETTLEMENT

"Ever since Genesis, architecture has been conceived as both physical and temporal, metering the space between heaven and earth, ephemeral vapors and the topographic imagination,"[17]

Ultimately, this thesis is not meant to be a concrete proposal nor divert from some of the real issues of today. This is a project meant to unpack the complex 21st century challenges that we face and to inspire a subjective relationship to these matters. The primary motivation for this thesis is to add to the dialogue of our times and most importantly to enhance architecture's normative approach for a-historical, pragmatic short-term problem solving. The value of this speculative architectural undertaking is to unite, past, present and future and to employ architecture at the maximum of its potential. Experience of space, the way we conceive of it, navigate it¬ and create stories in relation– from an individual scale to city scale– exists in both the practical and in the magical. By visualizing the architectural implications and opportunities for the future we can each start to bring to the story our own imaginations: players, plots and resolutions. This narrative is meant to inspire, to be left partially undefined and significantly untold.

50. Site Plan

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