

Bathhouse of Enchantments

and other tales of Heterotopia

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A) I. Heterotopias in theory

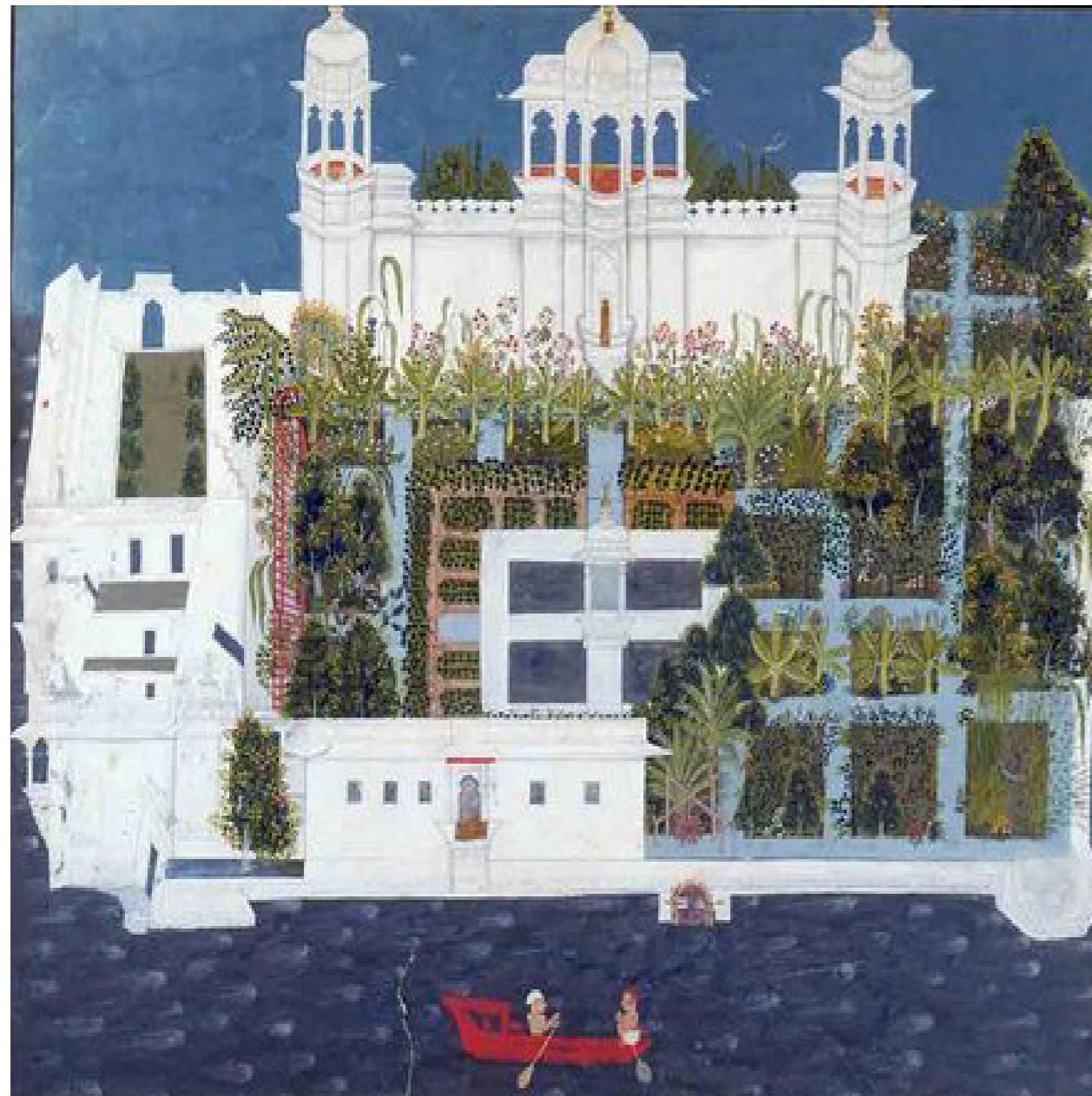
Research themes & questions, references

A story about a friche (Schaerbeek, Brussels)

Within the proliferating urban fabric of Brussels, there exists a derelict piece of land, a “friche” that is contested by humans in the midst of a pressing housing shortage. The friche once operated as a marshalling yard that saw the comings and goings of freight wagons but discontinued its operations in 1994. Owing to a lack of human appropriation and a lapse in policy making, this yard began to rewild itself, becoming a safe haven for non-human inhabitants. Development authorities found themselves at odds with locals, ecologists and naturalists who advocated for the emergent landscape to be left to its own devices, eventually leaving the friche in a state of limbo and uncertainty.

And thus, with this passage of time, a heterotopia was born.





Depiction of the Persian Chaharbagh (Center for art & archaeology, VMIS, India)

What is a Heterotopia?

As Foucault elucidates, the city constitutes two kinds of spaces - spaces of banality, where regular life unfolds and spaces which are "other" or lay outside the realm of time-space regularity. What then happens in this counter space, which is removed from the daily rhythms of life? What kind of a world does it constitute? Akin to the traditional Persian / Egyptian garden, which within its four walls was believed to bring together the four parts of the world, this heterotopia begets several worlds within its singular place. These worlds are indeed juxtaposed and layered upon one another - an assemblage of various elements which may or may not directly affect each other.



The Gardens of Alexandria (Paul Delvaux, Antheit 1897-1994 Veurne, Oil on panel 100 x 125 cm)



LA FRICHE SCHAERBEEK

Brussels

Counter-space imaginaries

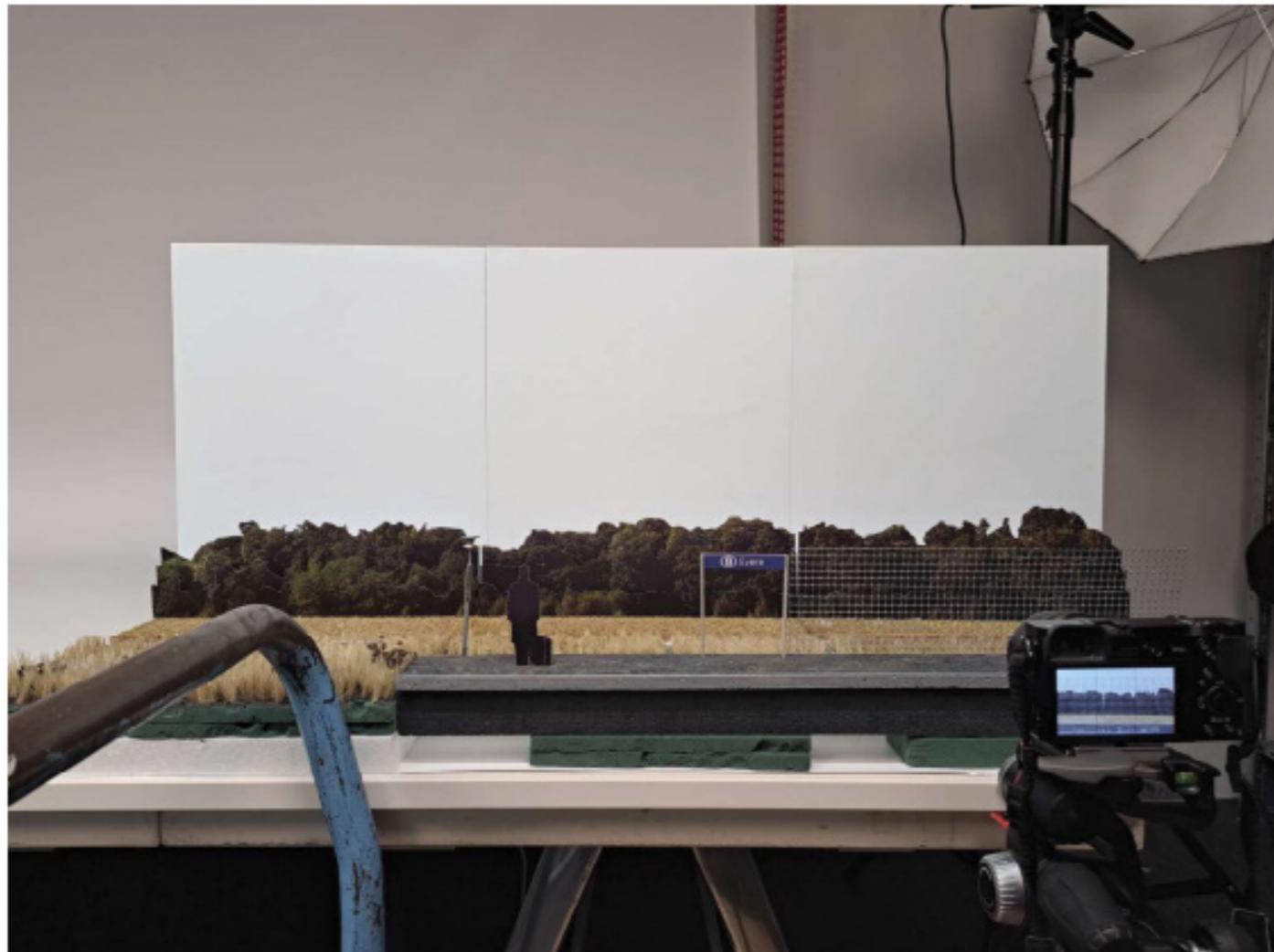
La friche as an imagined desert in the city (Image by Author), Inspired by Denis Villeneuve's Dune

In the otherness of the Heterotopia, sudden visions and spectres come to mind.

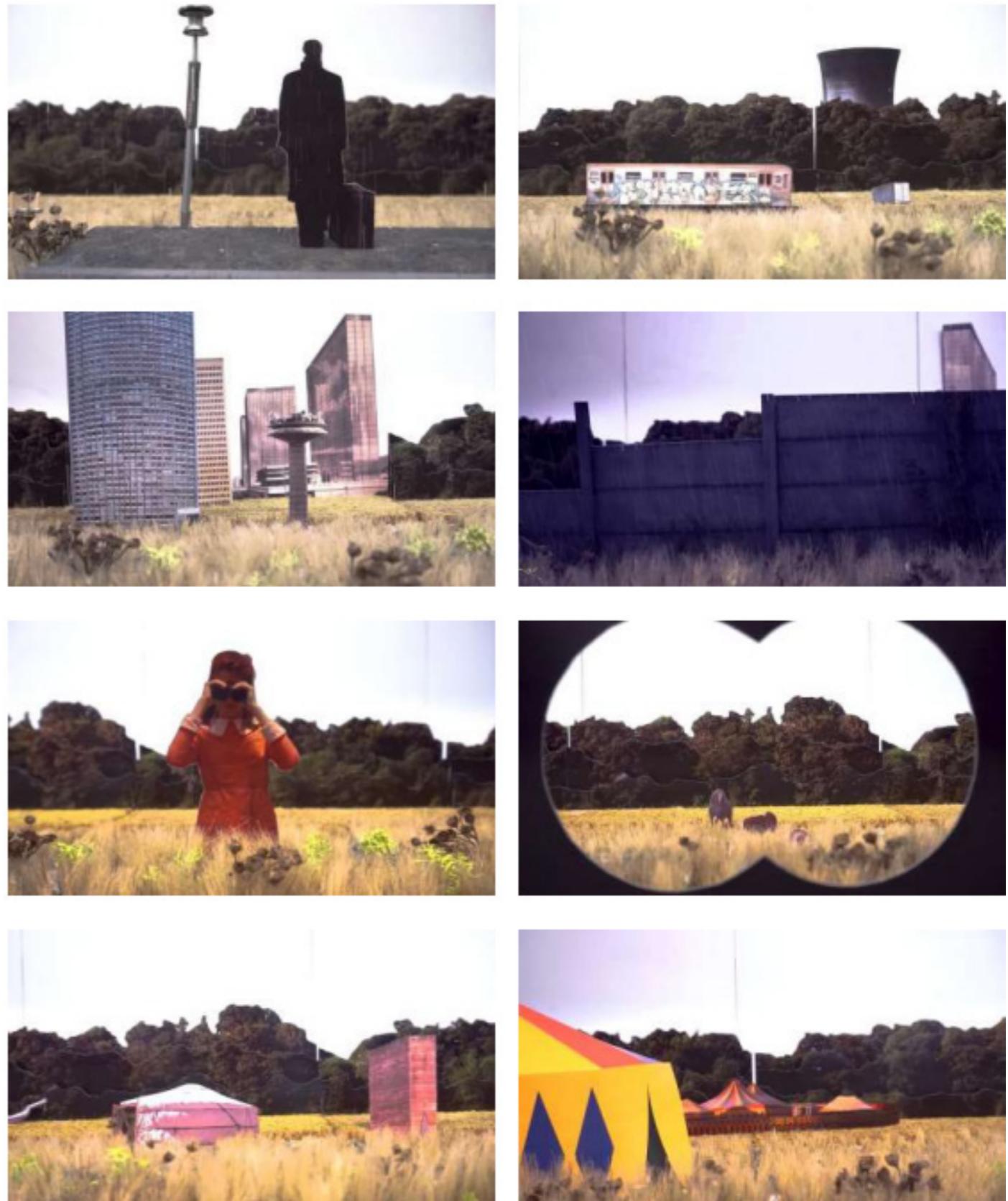
What may happen here? What lies beyond the thickets of grass?

There is fear and pleasure in this phantasmagoria.

Through a series of evocative imageries, we tried to imagine these several lives of the friche, in changing space and time. Films and film sets became our tools of analysis, where we thought of the friche as a set with changing scenes



Behind the scenes of the short film, Camera on a trolley



Stills from the film, *A phantasmagoria of our imaginations surrounding La friche*
(By Danil. Paik, Jackie, Joris, Luca & Tarini)

The friche is now a counter-space in the city, removed from the constructs of traditional time and space¹. It is bordered by a thick shroud of trees and cannot be accessed without permission. It is a terrain vague². It has lived and therefore embodies several lives - that of a once terraneous landscape which turned to an earth filled marshalling yard, that of a marshalling yard that saw the comings and goings of trains, things and people, that of an inconspicuous home for the frequenting homeless and now, that of site with a contested future.

Therefore, this is an invitation to imagine the future of such derelict, post - industrial landscapes.

The derelict void in the city no longer waits to be colonised and put to use, but rather embraces its condition of stasis. In the burgeoning backdrop of urbanisation, nature and the emergent landscape thus becomes exalted and sublime - a heterotopic monument, just like a Persian Hayat or Garden of Eden. The city's tapestry remains unwoven for a change. Buildings cannot rush in to fill the vaccuum. There are gaps, holes, pauses, halts, discontinuities. These are places of rest, counter sites of nothingness as opposed to the hyper-mediated³ continuity of the city.

The future of such Heterotopias is threatened - dwindling between the pressures of urban acquisition and their own, inherent qualities of “otherness” in the traditional functioning of a city. Can architectural and urban strategies mediate between the two ends of this spectrum? Do such heterotopias reveal a potential to become sites of de-densification by focussing on the inherent need for pause in the city?

The answers to the questions posed must begin with a delayering and unveiling of their virtues - what makes them heterotopias? Which qualities do they embody? Can these qualities become clues for an imagined (possibly built) future?



Garden of Mughal Emperor Babur in Kabul Afghanistan (Fatima Zahra Hassan commissioned by Aga Khan Development Network)

¹ Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (Eds.). (2008). *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*. Taylor & Francis.

² Mariani, M., & Barron, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*. Routledge.

³ Andreotti, L., & Lahiji, N. (2016). *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Spectres of the City*. Taylor & Francis.

II. Heterotopias in cases

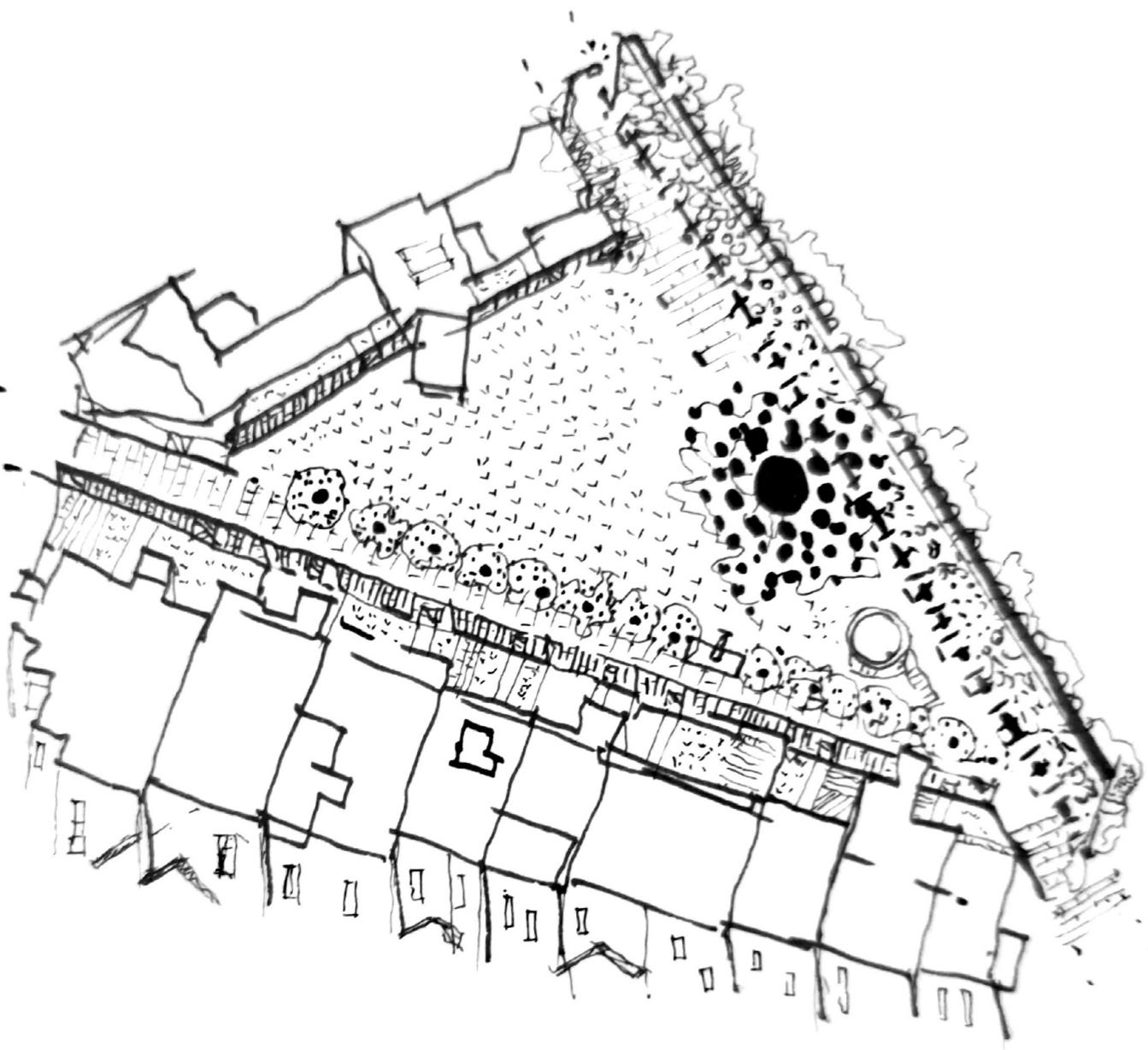
Studying the Heterotopia in precedents and cases :

-Tales

-Inventories

-Spatial & Sequential analyses

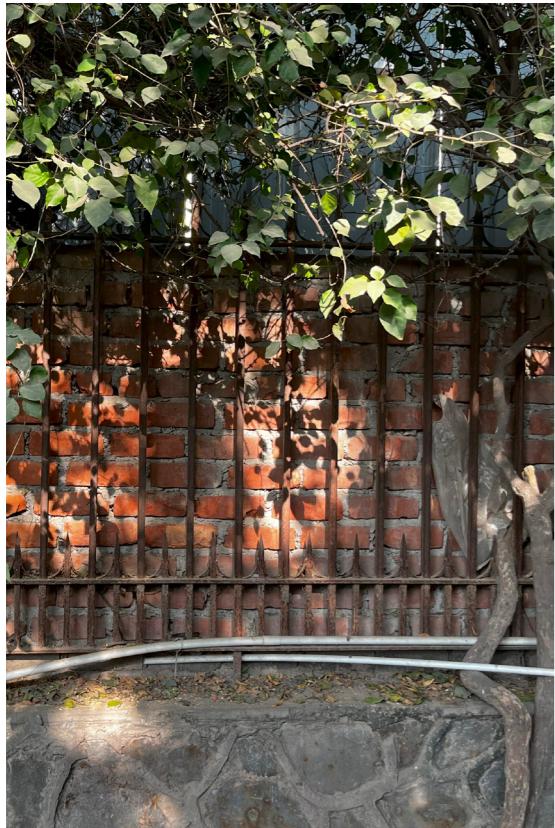
1. The secret garden back home
(New Delhi, India)



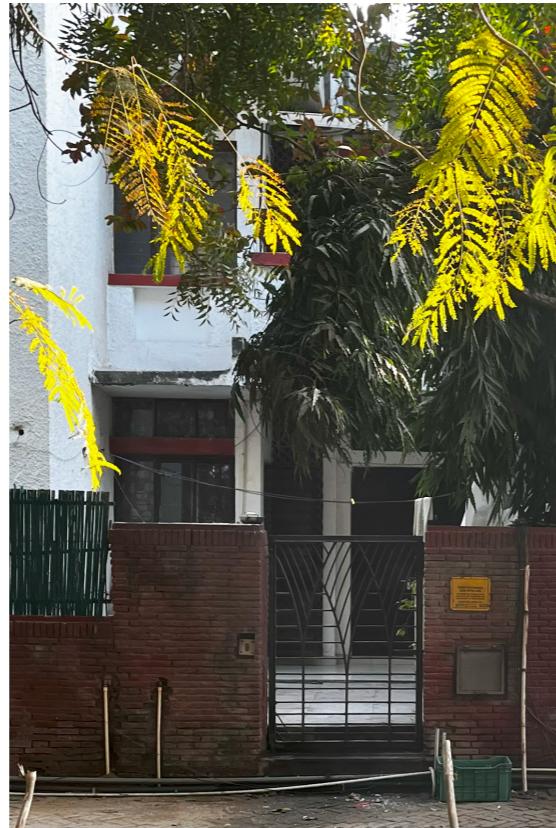
Two labyrinthian passages lead to a garden,
Paths less travelled,
Grasses less traversed.
Once a play zone, it is now forgotten.
Here is a list of all that is found :
Walls, on all three sides.
A long wall of stone with barbed wire
And two short walls of brick
A banyan tree,
An idol of Buddha,
A small well,
A hand pump,
Thickets of bougainvillea that engulf the barbed wire
Wrought iron gates of backyards - rusted.
A single lamppost at the entrance of one of the passages
Relics of flowers that once bloomed and swayed with the wind,
Short mango trees planted at the edges of the grass,
Steps that lead up to the well,
Silence.
The cries of cicadas
The occasional chirping of sparrows
The smell of a hearty meal
The sizzling of a pan from a distant backyard kitchen.
The slow and steady passage of time,
only silence,
And a pause.



Borders

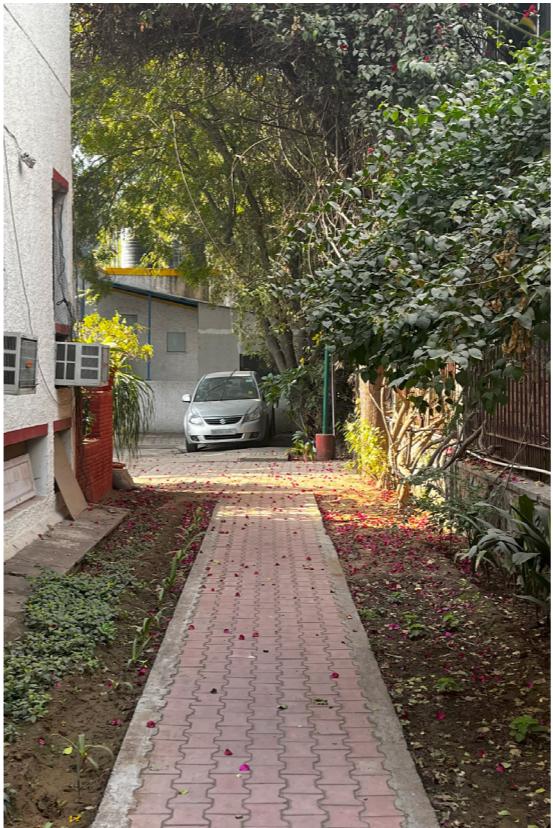


An original stone wall, a grill and now a brick wall



Backyards of houses border the garden

Passage



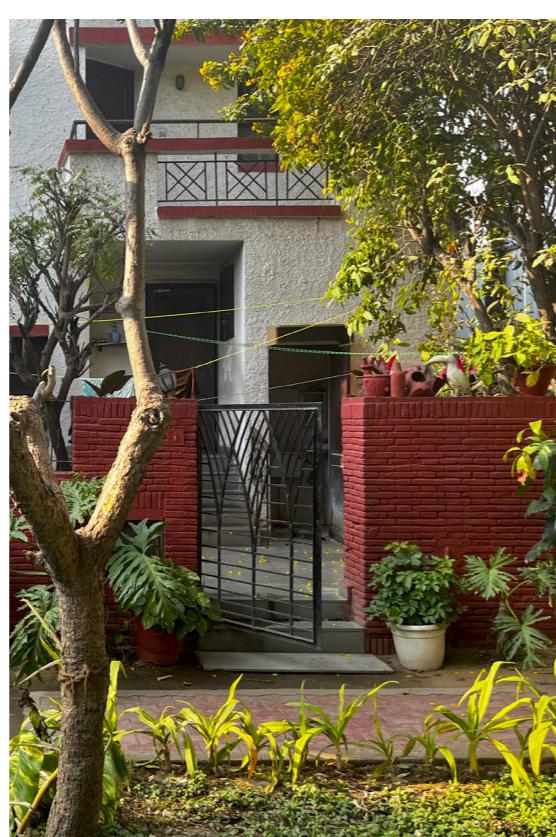
The first passage, bordered by a house and boundary wall



A lampost becomes a marker of entry



Beginnings of soft ground



A peripheral pavement runs along the backyards



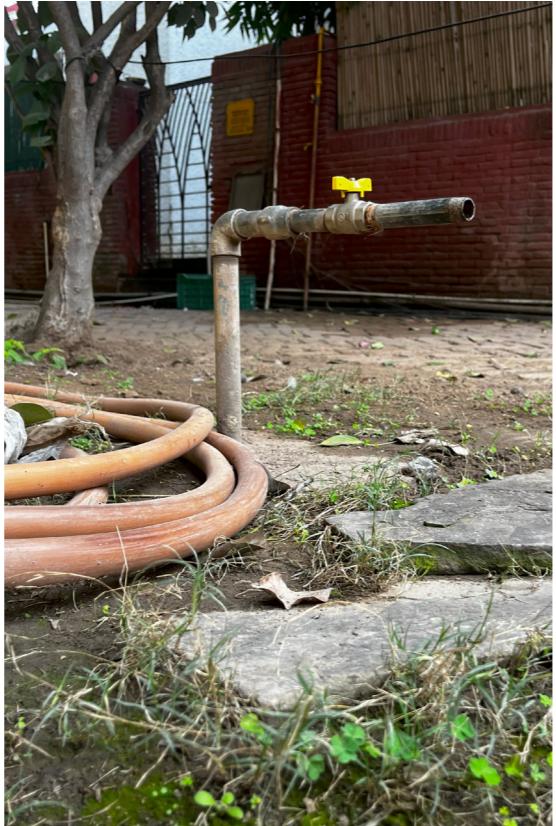
The edge of the passage, the end of paving



Shedded Bougainvillae adorn the pavement



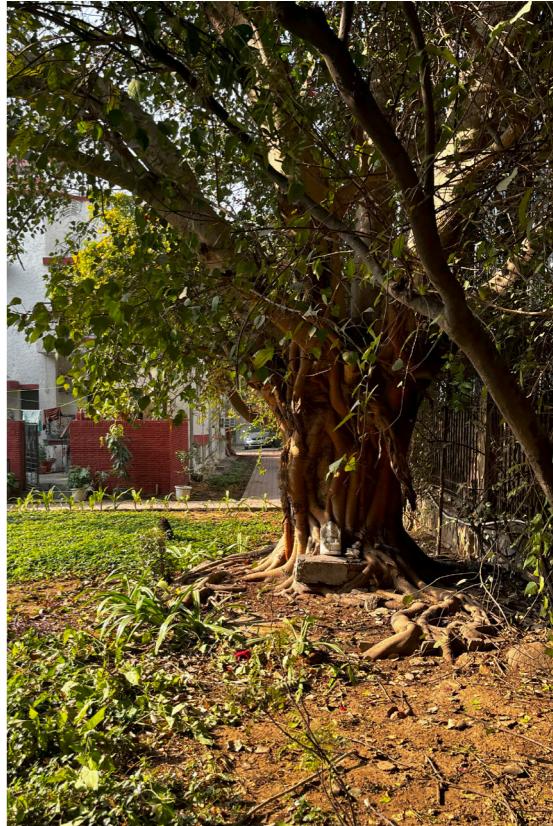
Remnants of the concrete well



The garden is not completely forgotten.
It is watered sometimes



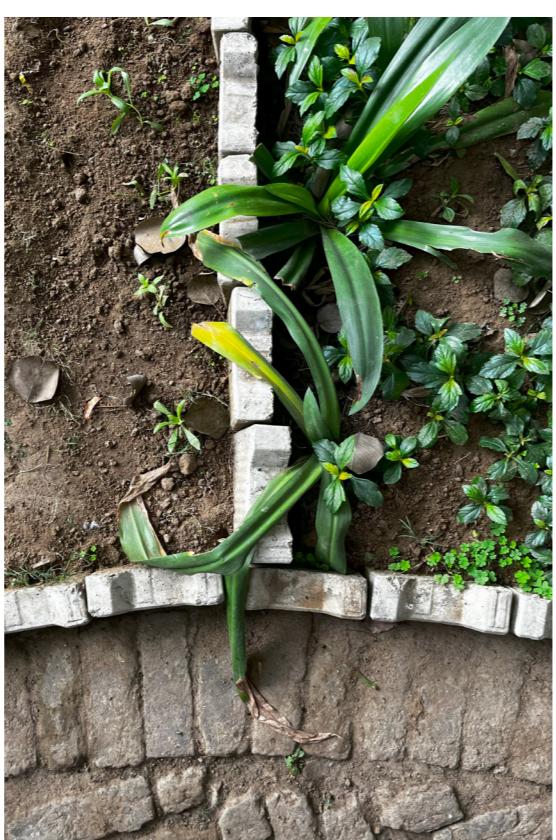
Steps leading to the well (also a spot to sit)



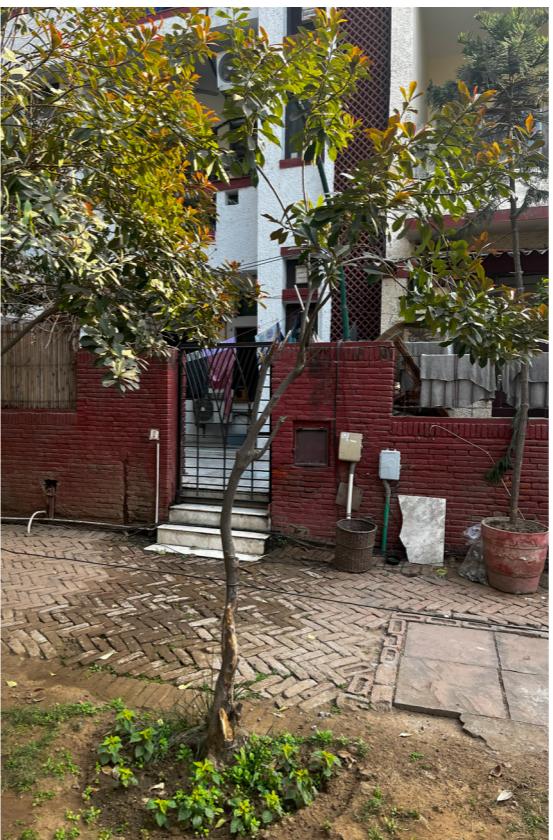
The sanctum, the bodhi tree



A lone bench



Myriad grounds meet.



Short planted lemon trees



The Banyan tree has lived longer than the garden it seems



Van Nien Pagoda - Main shrine (on a windy evening)

2. Chùa Van Niên (Van Niên Pagoda) Hanoi, Vietnam

The sky has turned a teal blue and the clouds move swiftly past the thin trace of a crescent moon. I sit behind my father on a scooter and we zip through lanes of honking cars and bikes laden with three, sometimes four people in a scurry to make it home for dinner. It will rain soon, as it does every evening these days, but I don't mind. The bellows of the monsoon winds are rather comforting - gentle caresses on a face scorched with angry fumes from car vents.

In the distance, I see now, a faint glimmer of light that marks the entrance of a pagoda, a Buddhist shrine. Although it sits on the edge of a busy road, it exudes a mystical force..In this jungle of concrete and asphalt, the soft swaying of the banyan tree behind its wooden boundary wall is calling out to us.

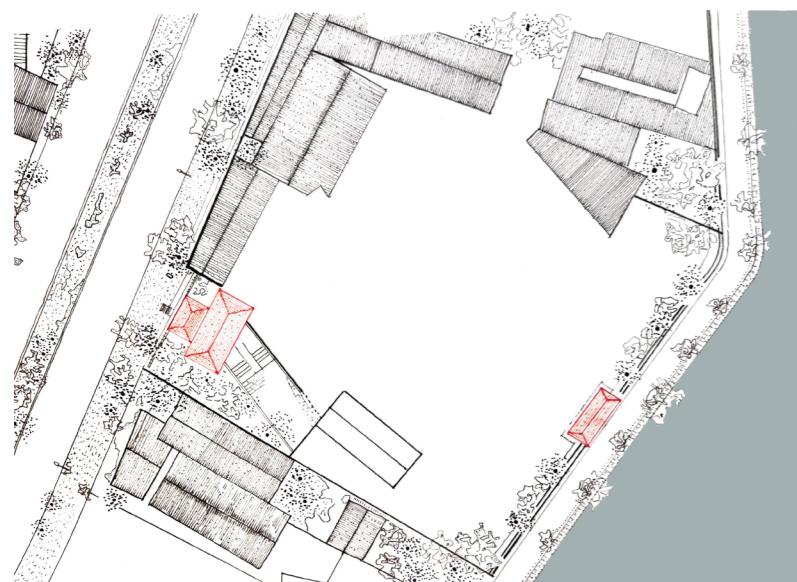
We watch our steps upon entering, there is a wooden threshold at the doorstep which needs to be crossed. Beside my feet, fallen leaves swirl and dance, threaded upon an invisible string of wind that is being pulled inside. Ahead of the gated entrance, a small courtyard leads to a bigger one. The asphalt beneath our feet has changed to an aged and weary cobblestone. The faint smell of sandalwood lingers, the velvety smoke from the incense dissipates into the damp air. We learn that the glimmers of light had come from the shrine itself, where priests dressed in red and yellow are now offering prayers. Whispered chants, echoes of singing bowls and the light fluttering of prayer flags have filled the air. We do not utter a word.

In order to enter the shrine, we have to remove our shoes. We circumambulate along the periphery with our hands folded and finally arrive at the sanctum sanctorum, where we join the chanting priests and other visitors.

Returning to the main courtyard, my eyes fall upon a marble statue of the Mother Goddess, exquisite and delicately carved, sitting atop a giant lotus. As I close my eyes to offer a prayer, she whispers to me, "Don't speak. In the silence of this four walled court, your thoughts I can hear and your prayers I will accept." It begins to rain. The rain washes away the dancing leaves, the ashes of the incense and the dirt that came with my shoes.



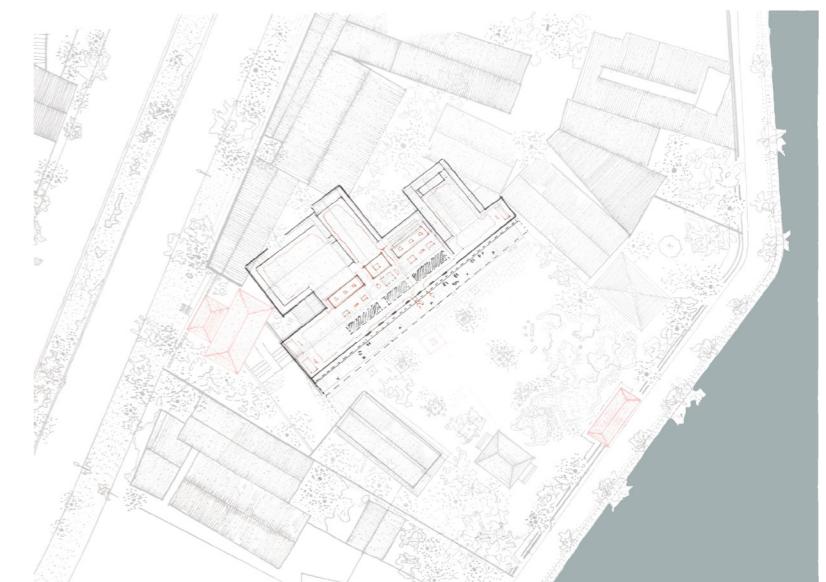
Layers of heterotopia



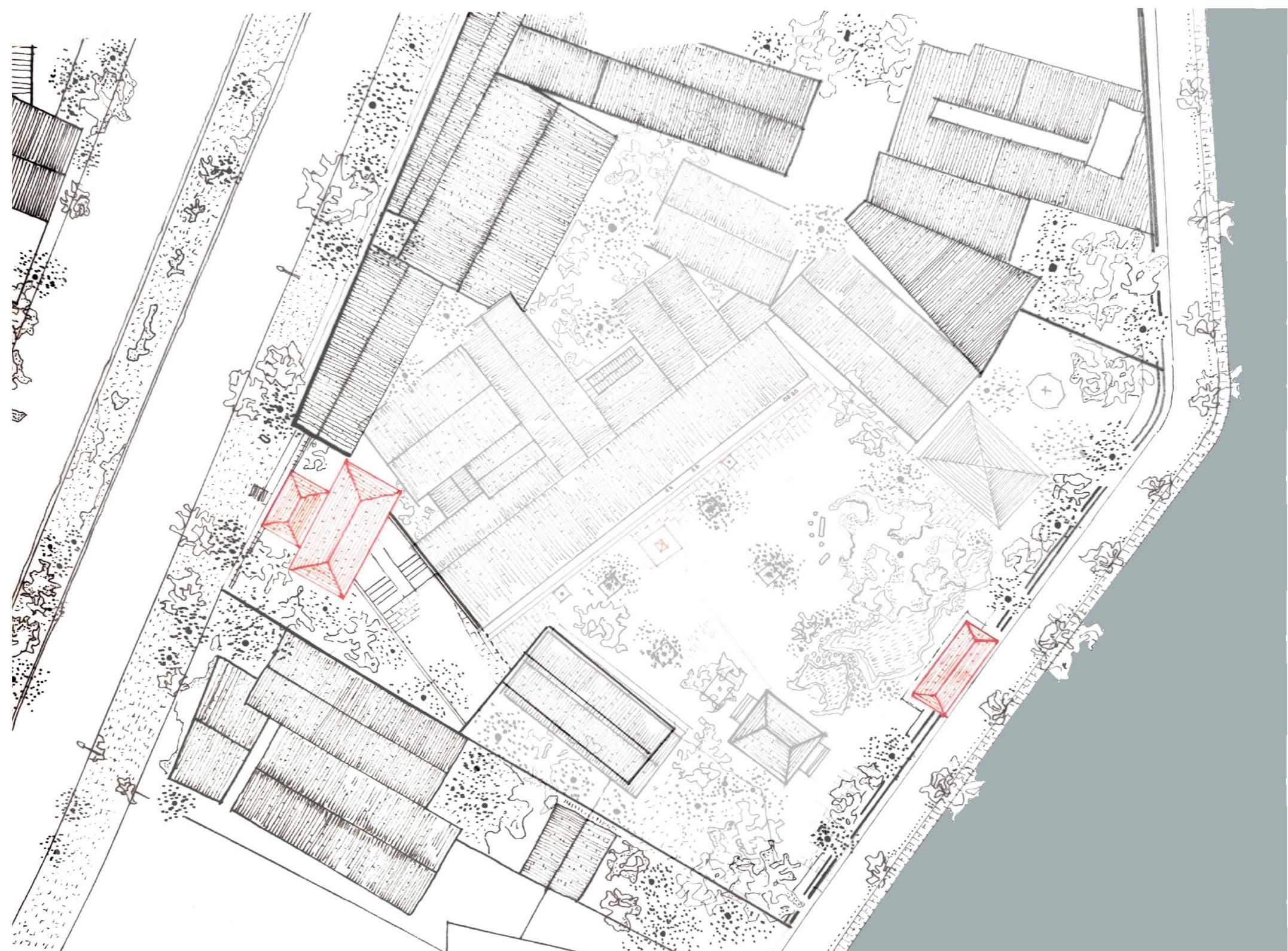
Layer 1 - Borders & passage (in trees, paving, buildings, waterbodies, roads, gates, entries and dead walls)



Layer 2 - Enclosure (A juxtaposition of several places, activities and rituals)



Layer 3 - Sanctum (The heart of the shrine and its circumambulation)



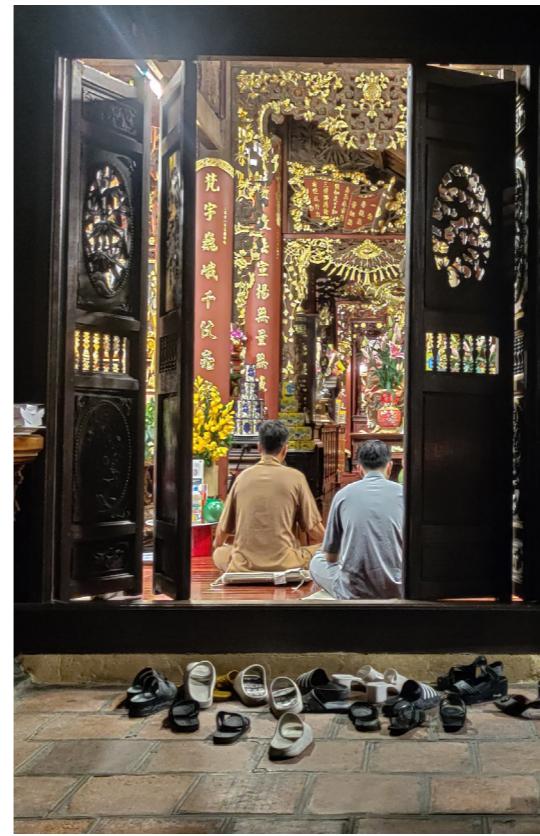
Overlaid sequences - Borders, Passage, Sanctum (and ritual)



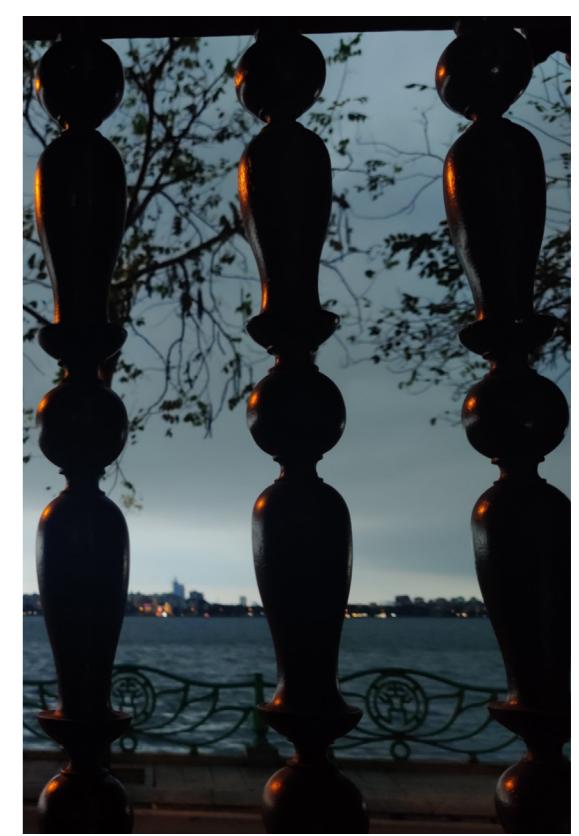
Bordering trees



A change in paving



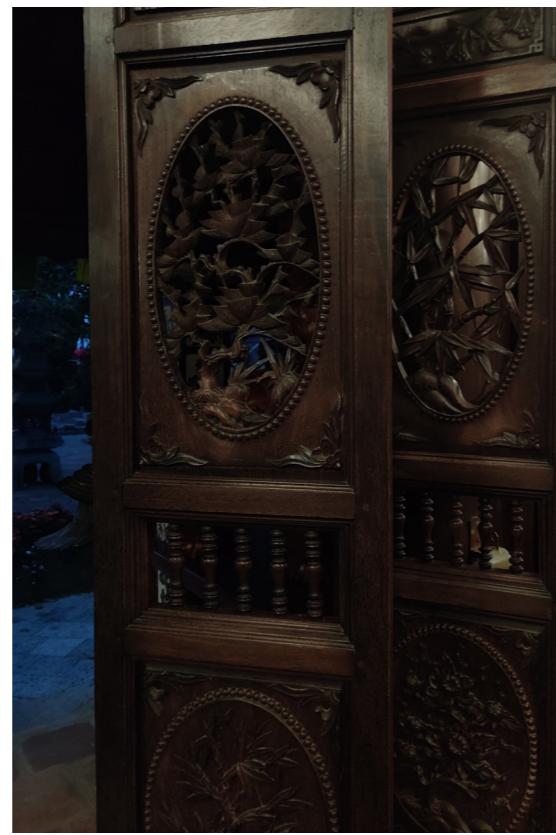
Shoes to be left at the entrance



Borders of the east entrance
overlooking the lake



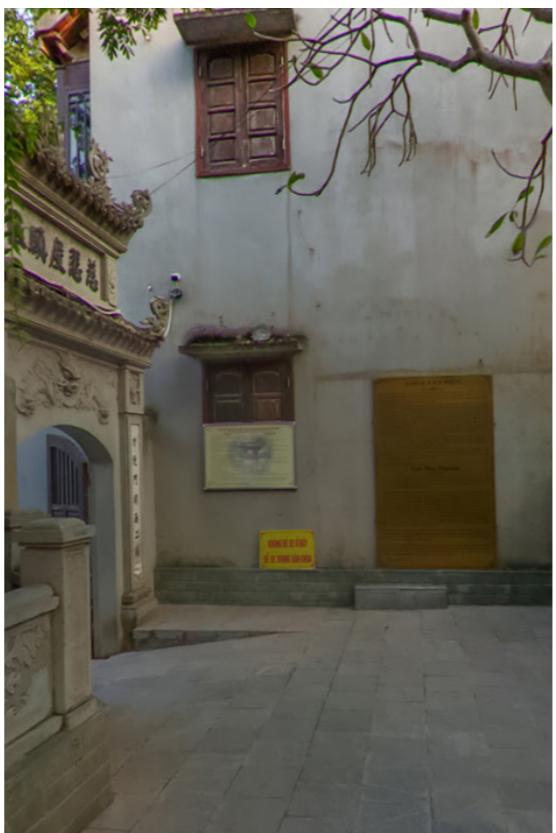
Three torii gates as markers of passage



Wooden folding doors at the threshold of
the sanctum



Through the main entrance portal



The smaller courtyard flanks the main enclosure



Bordering shrine



Colonnaded porch of the main shrine, prayer flags flutter in the wind



Passage for circumambulation inside the shrine



Entrance steps and the ramp in stone



Buddha under the Banyan tree



Roof shingles in terracotta - a recurring element



The bodhi tree as shelter

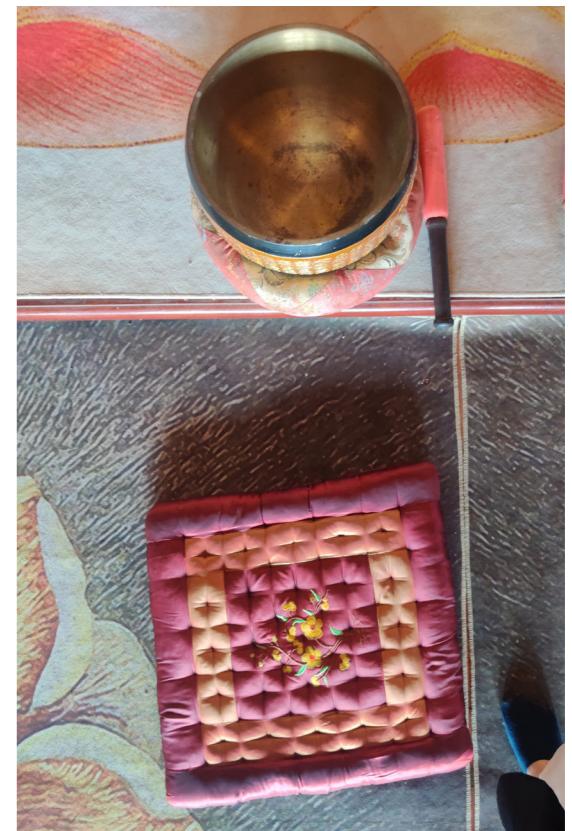


Smaller shrines dot the courtyard

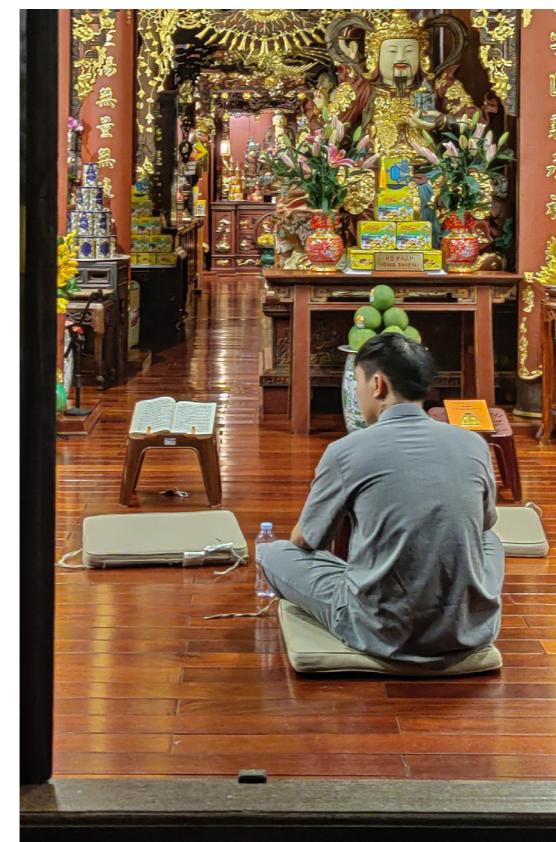
Sanctum



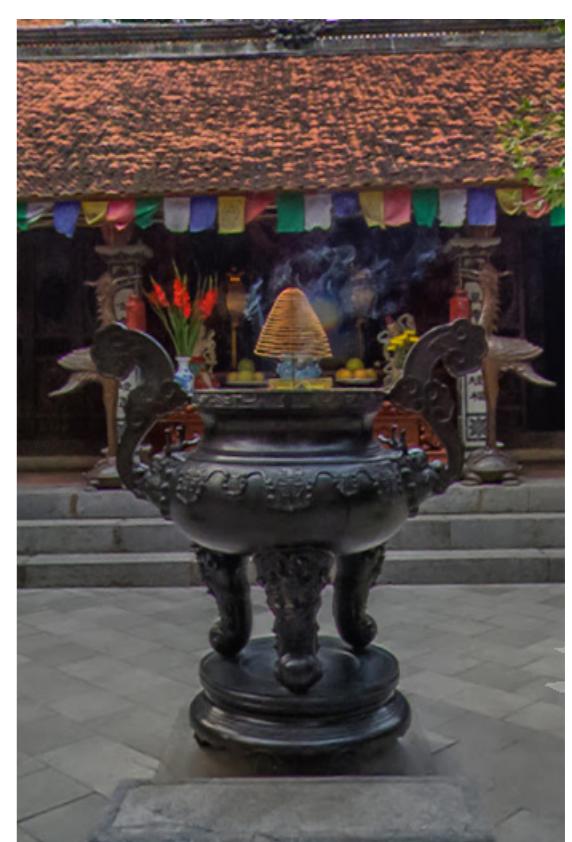
Offerings of fruit, biscuits and incense



Singing bowl & prayer mat



Daily evening chanting



The act of burning incense is often seen as a prayer rising with fragrant smoke to heaven



*The Pantheon
Rome, Italy*

6 winding streets lead to an enclosure,
carved out and caving in.
The enclosure is inconspicuous,
until one turns a corner
and is faced with its mammoth facade.

16 corinthian columns and a pediment,
an enormous porch,
and a coffered dome in concrete.
The eyes cannot seem to fathom,
the magnificence of this gargantuan temple.

But the enclosure is all embracing
even in its sheer magnitude,
even in its opulence,
even in the hoards of people that dot its marble floors.
For my eyes, they look not at what lies ahead of them.
But follow in endless circles,
the changing light from the heavens above.

Time now passes by, not in the ticking of a clock,
but the ritual of the sun.
For my eyes, they look not at the roughness of the concrete,
but can almost touch
the baring of its grain.

The enclosure is all embracing,
even in its sheer magnitude,
even in its opulence,
even in the hoards of people that dot its marble floors,
for my eyes look not at what lies ahead of them,
But follow in endless circles,
The ritual of the sun.

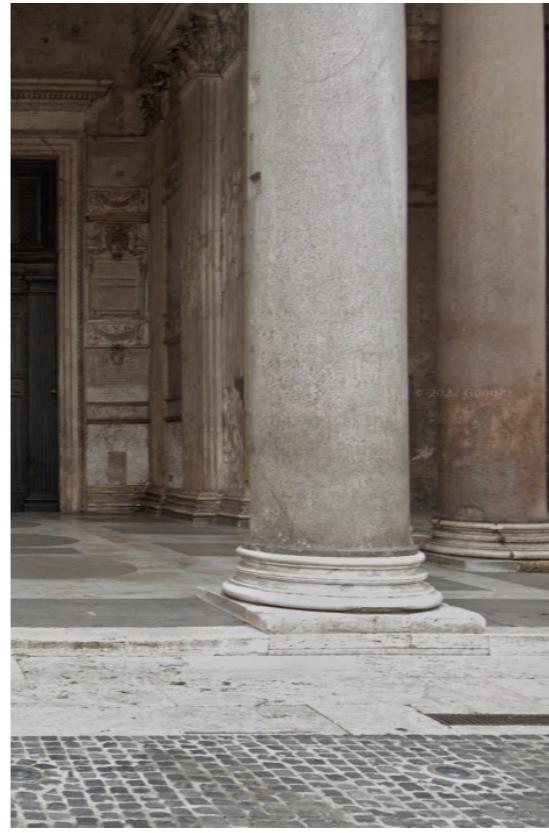




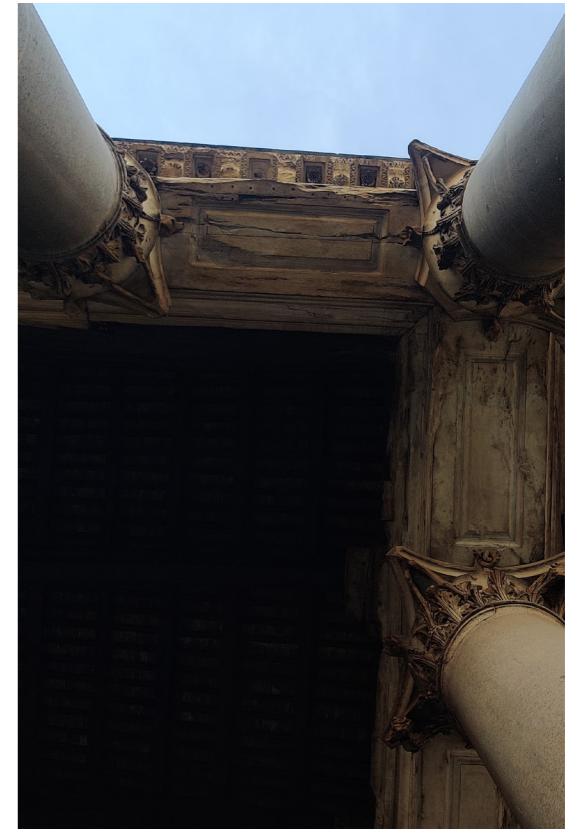
Residences & hotels closely border the Pantheon



The fountain and Piazza della Rotunda act as a prelude



Corinthian columns, a change in paving & a slight step up



The pediment



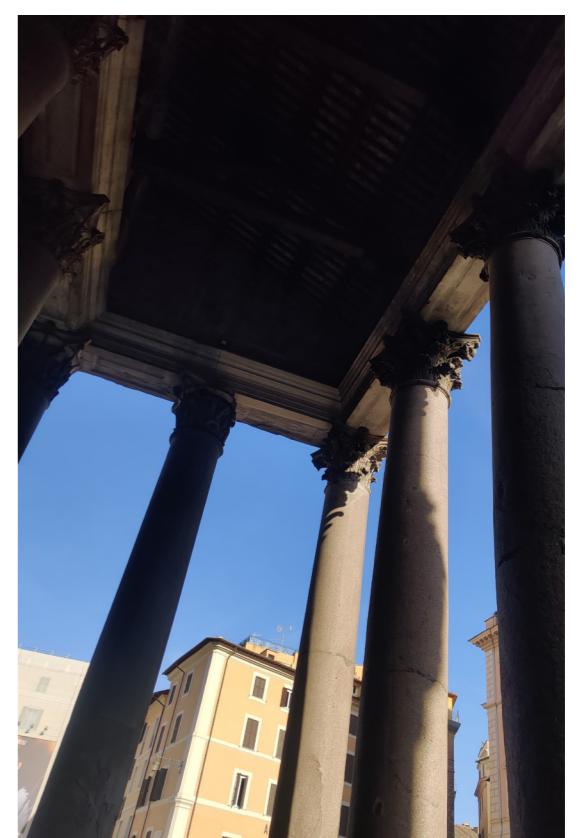
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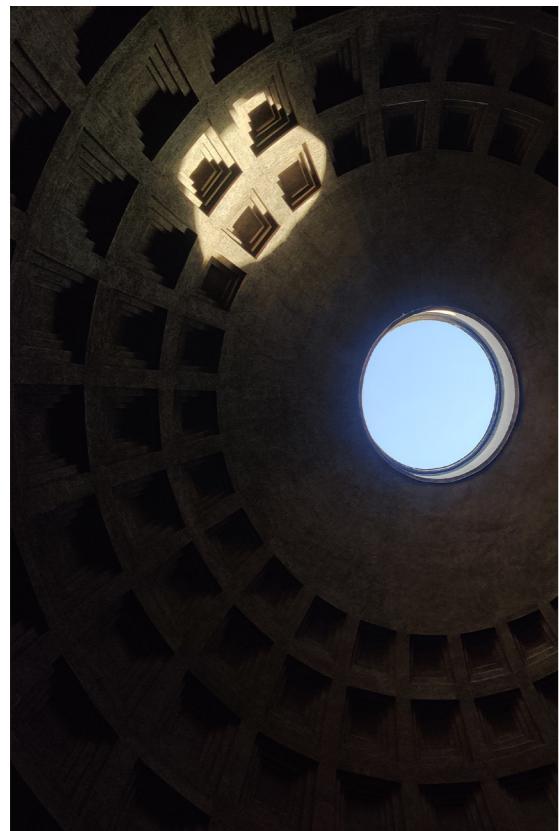
The Piazza is flooded with tourists and small eateries



Portal to the interior



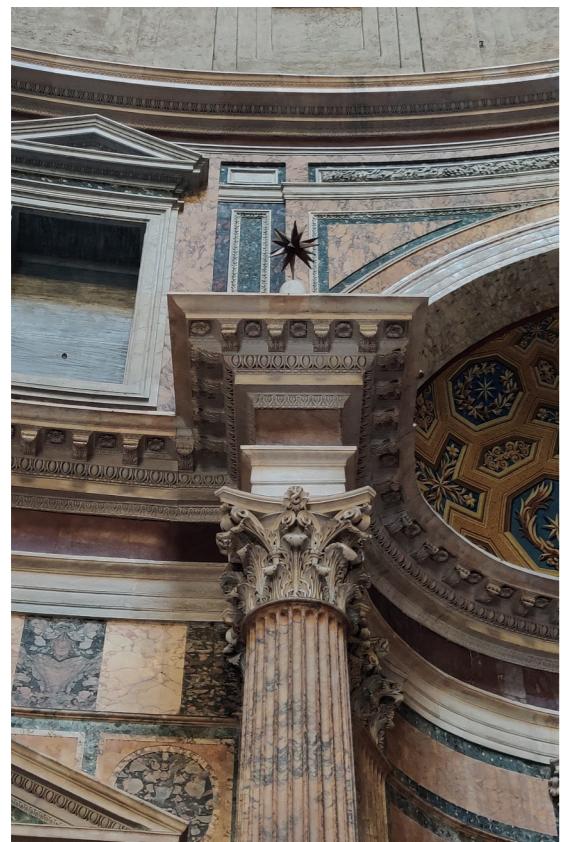
In passage / Semi-interiority within the porch



Rituals of the afternoon sun



Rituals of the afternoon sun



Within the enclosures are several smaller enclosures/ niches



Humans for scale



Hortus Erasmi
Anderlecht, Belgium

My time spent in the city has made me weary. There is a haste, a rush to move forward and on, without catching a breath. Days go by and I feel sickly in this metropolis. I now set out to look for a cure. During my travels, I had once met with a sorceress who was kind and bright eyed. Through my eyes, she had seen my soul and found that it aches for a resting place. She told me to search for a flower that would heal me from my perils and bring me peace. The flower would be found in a land far, in a garden or "hortus" that grew healing herbs and plants within its four walls, she said. She left me with something wrapped in a muslin cloth and asked me to only open it when I reached the inner courtyard of the hortus. It seems to be a stone perhaps.

It will take me a fortnite to reach it, but I must keep going.

In this foreign land, the city still moves in haste and I begin to wonder how I will find the flower in this cacophony of asphalt and steel. There are no trees, no soft ground, not an inkling of a garden. The only gardens I see are glimpses of backyards which are either fenced off or guarded by high walls or manicured bushes. They pique my curiosity but alas, they don't welcome travelers from lands afar. If only the metropolis would let its walls down.

I am surprised when I arrive at the gates of the hortus. The garden is situated in the midst of a busy neighborhood. The gates in fact, are barely discernible behind a dense shrubbery of ivy. The walls peek through holes in the foliage of trees that droop menacingly onto the pavement. The walls of the hortus are indeed, as high as those of the city gardens but here, they offer a portal to the inside.

At the threshold, the flatness of the concrete pavement has been traded for the playful undulations of rubble and stone. The air is cool and damp from the mists of a gently flowing fountain. Yet, the heat from the surrounding city seems to make its way in occasionally.

A sprawling tree arches to make the next passage which leads to the medicinal gardens. In this second courtyard, I hope to find my flower. 16 neat squares grow a myriad variety of plants and herbs. The rest is paved. The air here is much cooler, it seems as though the mist from the fountain blew this way, gently settling on the waxy leaves of a chrysanthemum. I search long and hard but no plant bears flowers here.

It is strange, I am not too disappointed. Meandering through the garden, I begin to enjoy my own company, and the company of the singing birds and chirping crickets.

Inadvertently, I stroll into the final courtyard - an expansive and lush walled garden, adorned with bunches of flowering trees and overflowing fruit. I suddenly remember the muslin wrapped stone that the sorceress had given me. As I unwrap it, I find a seed and not a stone - a seed the size of an acorn. Confused and perplexed, I lay myself down under the shade of a plum tree and begin to wonder if the story of the flower was ever true to begin with.

In that moment, the seed slips from my palm and onto the damp, soft earth, transforming immediately into a yellow tuberose.

The seed had traveled with me far and wide, but perhaps, it needed soft ground and a gentle breeze to be transformed.



Borders



A side alley is marked by a change in paving



Overlooking the main road

Passage



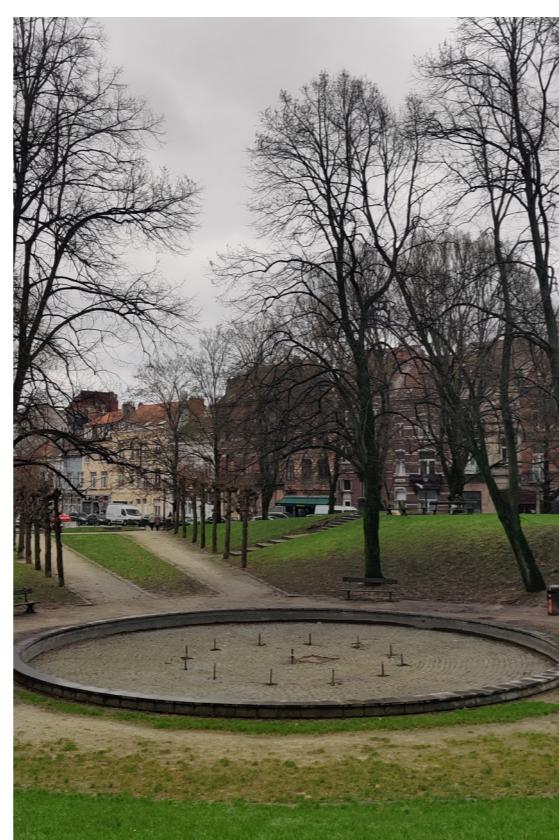
The primary passage is a an arched opening



Arches as recurring markers of passage



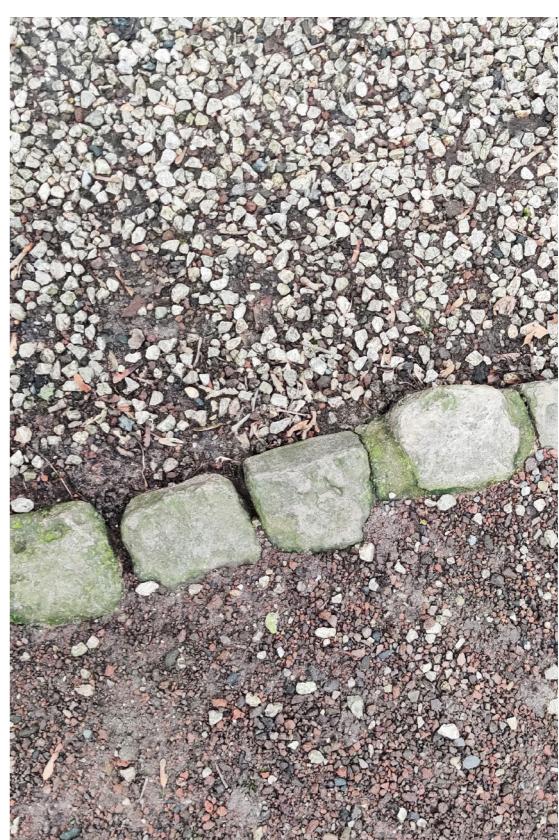
Tall, short and natural borders in layers



The backside overlooks a public park



Grills at the second passage



A change in paving as one moves from one enclosure to the next

Enclosure



The fountain is the heart of the first courtyard

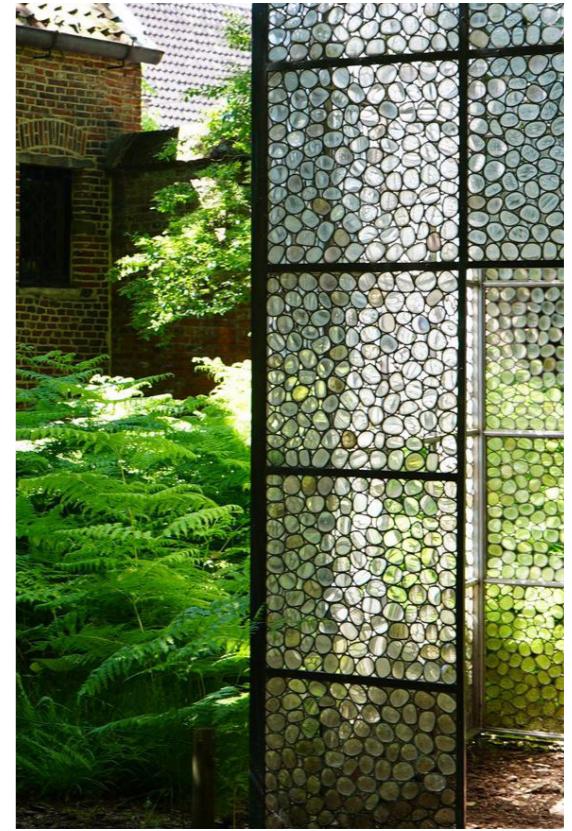


Enclosures within enclosures

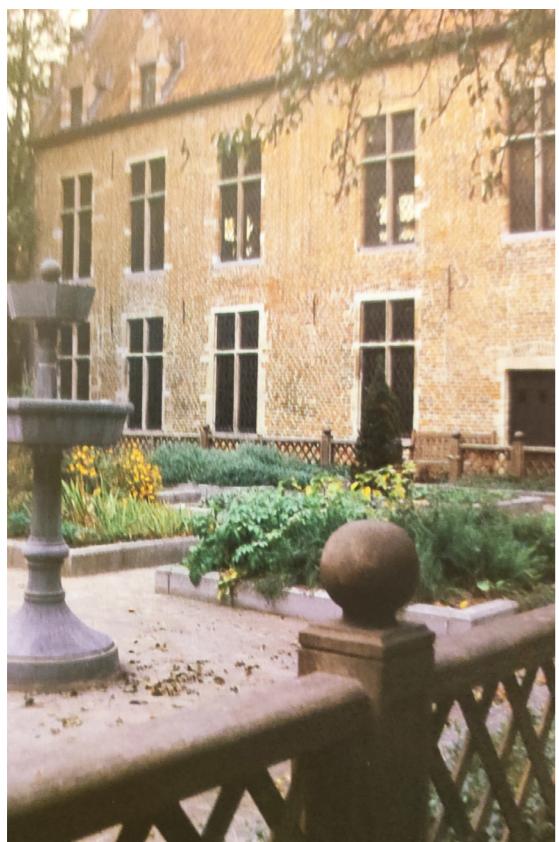
Sanctum



Reflection ponds in the philosophical garden



A stained glass installation - The shrine



A peak into the medicinal garden



The philosophical garden within 4 walls

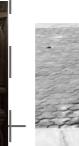
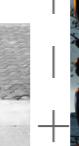
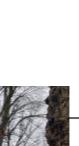


Places of rest



Places of rest

Heterotopian inventory (To be continued)

	Borders (Built)	Borders (Paved)	Borders (Natural)	Borders (Other)	Passage (spatial)	Passage (Element)	Enclosure (Built)	Enclosure (Natural)	Enclosure (objects/ people)	Enclosure (Texture)	Sanctum (Rituals)	Sanctum (Space)	Sanctum (Nature)						
Secret Garden																			
Van Nien Pagoda																			
Pantheon																			
Hortus Erasmi																			

III. Heterotopia of the friche

Essay

An "As found" investigation dissecting the friche through field study and a theoretical framework



La friche in winter months (Image by Author)

Introduction

Friche

noun

[feminine] /frɪʃ/

terrain qui n'est pas cultivé
piece of fallow land

A story about a friche (Schaerbeek, Brussels)

Within the proliferating urban fabric of Brussels, there exists a derelict piece of land, a "friche" that is contested by humans in the midst of a pressing housing shortage. The friche once operated as a marshalling yard that saw the comings and goings of freight wagons but discontinued its operations in 1994. Owing to a lack of human appropriation and a lapse in policy making, this yard began to rewild itself, becoming a safe haven for non-human inhabitants. Development authorities found themselves at odds with locals, ecologists and naturalists who advocated for the emergent landscape to be left to its own devices, eventually leaving the friche in a state of limbo and uncertainty.

And thus, with this passage of time, a heterotopia was born.

The friche is now a counter-space in the city, removed from the constructs of traditional time and space¹. It is bordered by a thick shroud of trees and cannot be accessed without permission. It is a *terrain vague*². It has lived and therefore embodies several lives - that of a once terraneous landscape which turned to an earth filled marshalling yard, that of a marshalling yard that saw the comings and goings of trains, things and people, that of an inconspicuous home for the frequenting homeless and now, that of site with a contested future.

Therefore, this is an invitation to imagine the future of such derelict, post - industrial landscapes.

The derelict void in the city no longer waits to be colonised and put to use, but rather embraces its condition of stasis. In the burgeoning backdrop of urbanisation, nature and the emergent landscape thus becomes exalted and sublime - a heterotopic monument, just like a Persian Hayat or Garden of Eden. The city's tapestry remains unwoven for a change. Buildings cannot rush in to fill the vaccuum. There are gaps, holes, pauses, halts, discontinuities. These are places of rest, counter sites of nothingness as opposed to the hyper-mediated³ continuity of the city.

The future of such Heterotopias is threatened - dwindling between the pressures of urban acquisition and their own, inherent qualities of "otherness" in the traditional functioning of a city. Can architectural and urban strategies mediate between the two ends of this spectrum? Do such heterotopias reveal a potential to become sites of *counter-brusselization*⁴ and de-densification by focussing on the inherent need for pause and arrhythmia in the city?

The answers to the questions posed must begin with a delayering and unveiling of their virtues - what makes them heterotopias? Which qualities do they embody? Can these qualities become clues for an imagined (possibly built) future?

This essay is a critical dissection of post industrial heterotopias through the specific case of the La friche Josaphat, located in the Schaerbeek municipality of Brussels. Drawing parallels to the secret garden, the essay maps the "as found" nature of the friche. It seeks to address ways of investigating such cases, their embodied values and what those may entail for their eventual development, making a case towards their place in the city and how they transcend the status quo of mindless construction on any and every plot of available land.

A combined lens of theoretical discourse and field observations will enable this critical reading, delving into three key themes and short discussions

¹ Dehaene, M., & De Cauter, L. (Eds.). (2008). *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*. Taylor & Francis.

² Mariani, M., & Barron, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*. Routledge.

³ Andreotti, L., & Lahiji, N. (2016). *The Architecture of Phantasmagoria: Spectres of the City*. Taylor & Francis.

⁴ Bruxellisation (in Dutch: verbrusseling) is a term used by urban planners to describe the anarchic development of an old city delivered to developers. This phenomenon owes its name to the city of Brussels, where it was particularly sensitive in the 1960s and 1970s, when the city was left to the dreams of uncontrolled developers as a city of the future. (Brusselization - Habitat Worldmap. (2019, September 5). Habitat Worldmap. Retrieved December 17, 2023, from <https://habitat-worldmap.org/en/key-words/brusselisation>)

1. The juxtaposition of several places at once

"The heterotopia has the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible"

As Foucault elucidates, the city constitutes two kinds of spaces - spaces of banality, where regular life unfolds and spaces which are "other" or lay outside the realm of time-space regularity. What then happens in this counter space, which is removed from the daily rhythms of life? What kind of a world does it constitute? Akin to the traditional Persian garden, which within its four walls was believed to bring together the four parts of the world, this heterotopia begets several worlds within its singular place. These worlds are indeed juxtaposed and layered upon one another - an assemblage of various elements which may or may not directly affect each other.

In the friche, this theory comes to light in an interesting observation - The friche is not only a lateral juxtaposition of several places at once, but also a vertical one. Laterally, in its present condition, the friche contains at once - a travelling theatre company (*The Nouveaux Disparus*), a commoning group with its bee farm and kitchen gardens (*Jardin Latinis*), an artificially constructed pond which is now home to many species of dragonflies, the Evere train station, railways tracks which are now green corridors for migratory birds, remnants of the marshalling yard, patches of lush trees which become nesting habitats and acres of grassland. A patch of sand is found nestled within the tall grasses and a strange structure made of construction junk stands as some kind of marker to its immediate west. Despite a halt in its functioning, the friche reveals human as well as non-human occupation.

Vertically, this juxtaposition of several places is revealed in a palimpsest of its historical layering. After the marshalling yard ceased to function, the earth was dug up to remove the polluted soil that had resulted from industrial activity, to be filled back with a new layer of soil followed by an additional layer of topsoil. Analysing historical mapping of the area reveals that certain fragments of the friche (triangle zone) were possibly excavated to larger depths (see Fig. 4) and filled back with a deeper layer of soil, leading to a varied kind of biodiversity in these patches. The soil that was refilled may have also brought with itself varieties of seeds that developed into unique flora. On the other hand, the fringes remained untouched, still constituting the old soil and original tree line from the marshalling yard.

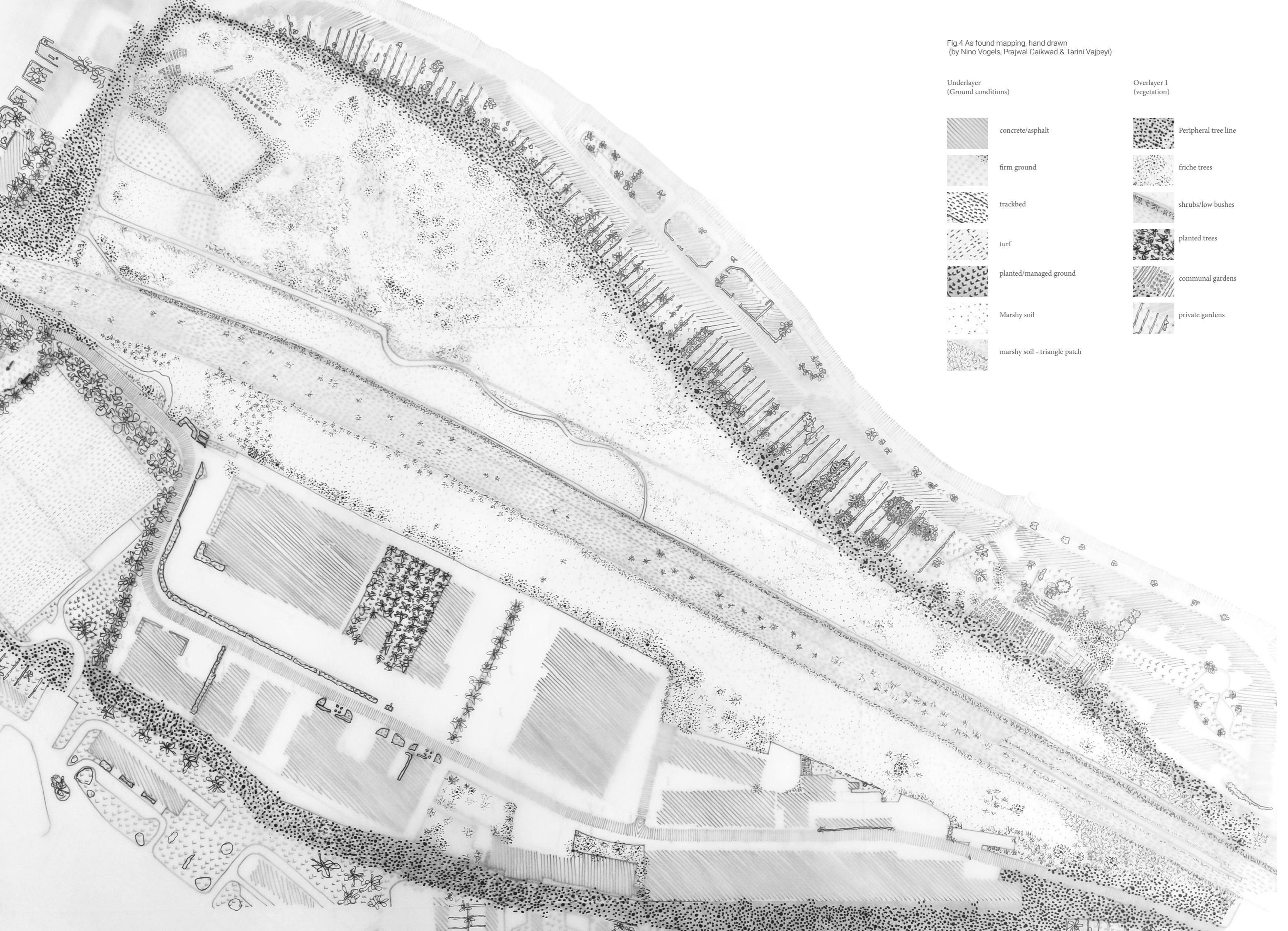
On closer analysis, it can be speculated that these several worlds are not entirely aloof from each other, but contribute to a complete imagery of the friche, which just like the paradise gardens, possess a capacity to mediate and negotiate meanings and shapes of nature, culture, history and society⁶. To imagine the future of the friche as this assemblage of myriad components, it would then be essential to approach an intervention as a kind of mediator and negotiator itself, which is not built upon a *tabula rasa*. The friche is therefore far from a clean slate to be built upon but rather requires a sensitised response to the "as found"⁷, an attentiveness and passion for what exists and what clues it will reveal.

⁵ Foucault, M., & Miskowiec, J. (1986). *Of other spaces*. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>

⁶ Girot, C., Fahmi, F., & Uzor, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Lost in Paradise: A Journey Through the Persian Landscape*. gta Verlag.

⁷ Lichtenstein, C., & Schregenberger, T. (Eds.). (2001). *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary*. Prestel Publishing.

Fig.4 As found mapping, hand drawn
(by Nino Vogels, Prajwal Gaikwad & Tarini Vajpeyi)



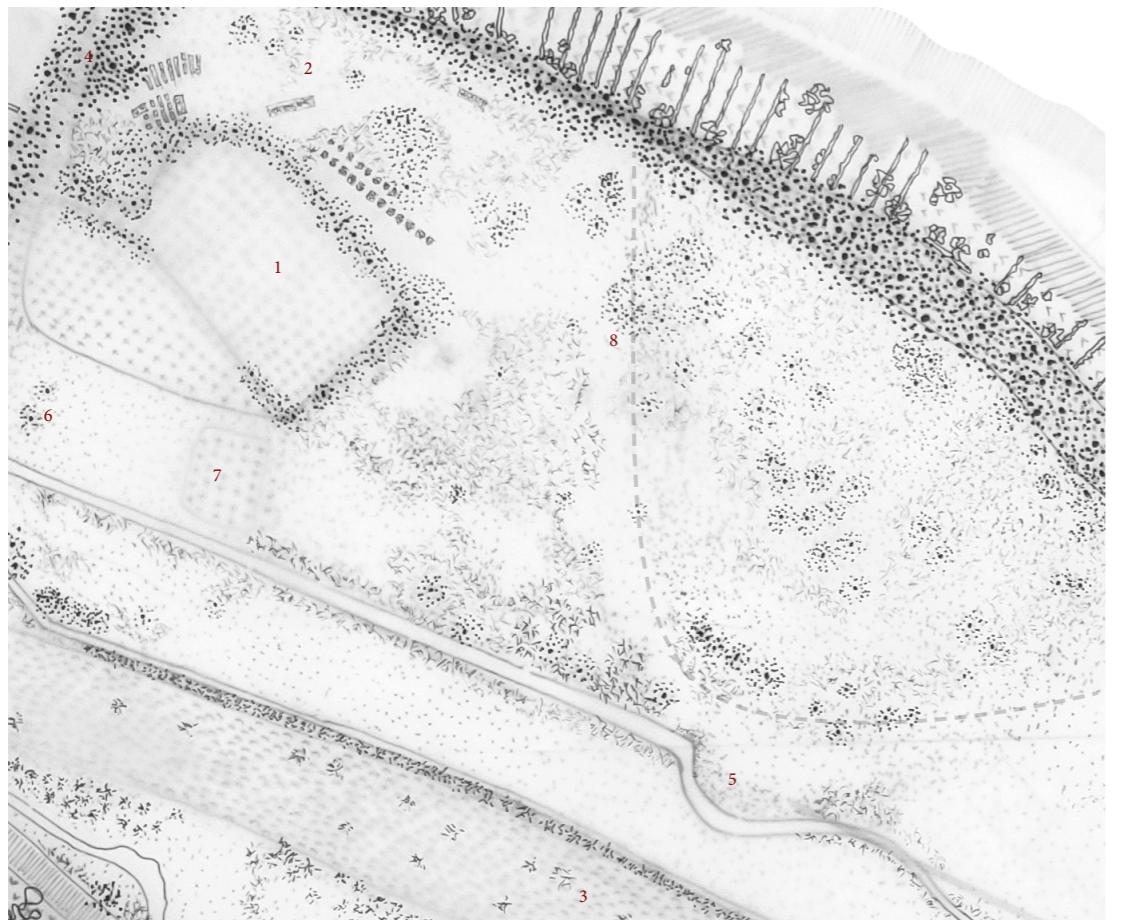


Fig.5 (a) As found atlas (The juxtaposition of several places at once)

2. Borders and passages

"Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.. either one is constrained, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else one has to submit to rites and to purifications. One can only enter with a certain permission and after having performed a certain number of gestures"

Context matters. Heterotopias gain virtue by relativity. The secret garden contrasts the otherwise public parks around my home. Similarly, these heterotopias gain a new meaning in the context of a city such as Brussels, as opposed to, say, the context of acres of post industrial ruin. Therefore, the ability of the heterotopia to retain its mystical and strange charm depends not merely on what happens within it, but also on what happens *around* and *about it*. The border of the heterotopia is like a cell membrane, allowing a certain degree of isolation and penetration. The borders are neither entirely open to the city, nor entirely closed, but demand a kind of purgatory action - perhaps, a shedding of the traditional time and regularity that comes with living in the city. Just as the Hammam and ablution tank of the mosque purify the body and soul before one is permitted to offer prayers, the heterotopia requires a rite of passage to the other side.

The friche, just as the paradise garden is enclosed within walls - a dense shroud of trees to the west and south, a bridge to the north and a border of industrial buildings to the east. The border is further accentuated by a subsequent drop in level, where the friche sits like a lowered basin amidst the rest of the neighbourhood, making its access even more difficult. Where access is easy,



1. Nouveaux Disparus - travelling theatre group

2. Jardin Latinis



3. Railway tracks



4. Remnants of the marshalling yard



5. Artificial pond



6. Junk structure



7. Sand pit



8. Birdwatcher

Fig.5 (b) As found atlas
(The juxtaposition of several places at once)

it is fenced off, allowing only certain kinds of people to enter - people belonging to the commons, naturalists, bird watchers and seldom, students. One must pass the border with an intention of care, traversing the friche with caution and silence. Upon my last visit to the friche at the break of dawn, I followed a bird watcher silently into the grassland, each step calculated, each move manoeuvred. *"If we stay silent, we will be able to find them"*, he said. The cacophony of the city has been left behind, and one must adhere to the new rules of this microcosm.

In such a case, an intervention aimed at rescuing this heterotopia must become the filter between the city and the friche - a careful, selective border that prevents both, its complete isolation from the city where *border vacuums*⁸ are created and its complete dissolution into the city. The biodiversity that has flourished over the past two decades is the result of not only a careful degree of *disconnection*, but also a small degree of *intervention* (in the form of commons) from the city. Any future architectural or urban scheme must facilitate this balance.

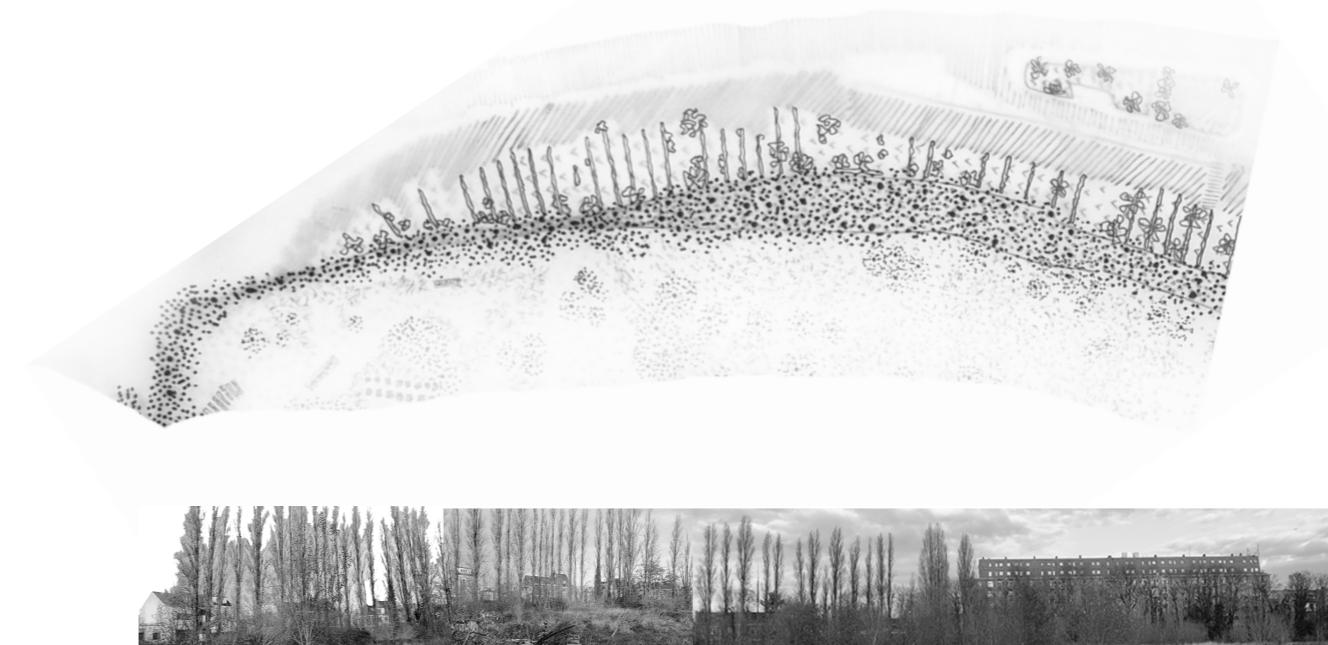
3. Time in events, rhythms and rituals

"The heterotopia begins to function fully when people find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time"

The city's fabric is continuous, ever-moving, dynamic - layer upon layer. Then there are these heterotopias as breaks in this continuity, where time holds a different meaning to one who ventures into them. These spaces become pauses and halts in the regular functioning of urban life, and within them is a certain strangeness and charm - of an unknown, unwitnessed and unventured world. In daily life, the friche is completely removed from traditional time for most people in Schaerbeek, yet it becomes a place that is ventured into from time to time by those who look for a place away from the rituals of working, earning and living. A member of the commons will make an occasional visit to the vegetable gardens, or to host a set of students interested in learning about the biodiversity of the place, a birdwatcher seldom comes in the mornings, sometimes the theatre group hosts performances and sometimes the friche becomes a film set for a group of young film students.

It is interesting, however, to note that this arrhythmia of the friche holds true only for humans and the human-made city. On the contrary, the friche simultaneously facilitates an opportunity for the rhythmic life of non-human actors - berries and plants which grow and decay with changing seasons, soil that turns fallow, fertile and marshy over the year, migratory birds that mark the onset of winter, dragonflies of the pond which thrive during the rains and the blades of grass that oscillate between hues of green and yellow.

Therefore, this dichotomy of the friche and its inherent paradox of rhythmic and arrhythmic time is what must become a point of departure for an emergent intervention in its mutual respect and understanding of both domains - human and non-human. There is indeed, an immediate need for pause and stasis in the city, yet there is also a need for an unimpeded flow of non-human ecology that will otherwise vanish in the burgeoning colonisation of urban space. The architecture of the post-industrial heterotopia must negotiate between the two, establishing that this condition of stasis is afterall, derived from the dynamic flows of non-human inhabitants. Without these flows, the post industrial heterotopia would be an absolute vacuum. It would never exist and impede future construction initiatives if nature had not taken over it.



Western fringes (view from the friche)



Eastern fringes (view from the friche)

⁸ Jacobs, J. (1992). The Curse of Border Vacuums. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (pp. 257-269). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Conclusion - A manifesto

This essay ends in a manifesto and call for action - it is an urge to look at a new narrative of derelict plot development, shifting the focus from looking at sites as always preparing for top-down human appropriation schemes to a more sensitised framework of intervention. The need for development cannot be disregarded. However, the kind of solution that is born out of this need can become a driving force in maintaining an equilibrium between ecology and human need. With a keen eye for the "as found", a careful approach towards mediating between the city and the counter space, and finally, a symbiotic means of building - where human and non-human actors benefit in synergy, the heterotopia of the friche can still prevail.

Lastly - as architects, planners and urbanists, it becomes crucial to understand the role of the heterotopia in the city. In the saturated cityscape, these are portals to a place of pause, rest and magic. They are sacred and ephemeral, purging the frenzy of a hyperactive urban culture. As future visionaries of cities, we must look towards these inherent qualities as opportunities, rather than hindrances in development and planning. The heterotopia must not disappear with new interventions, but can rather be enhanced and valued as a moment of stasis in the city.

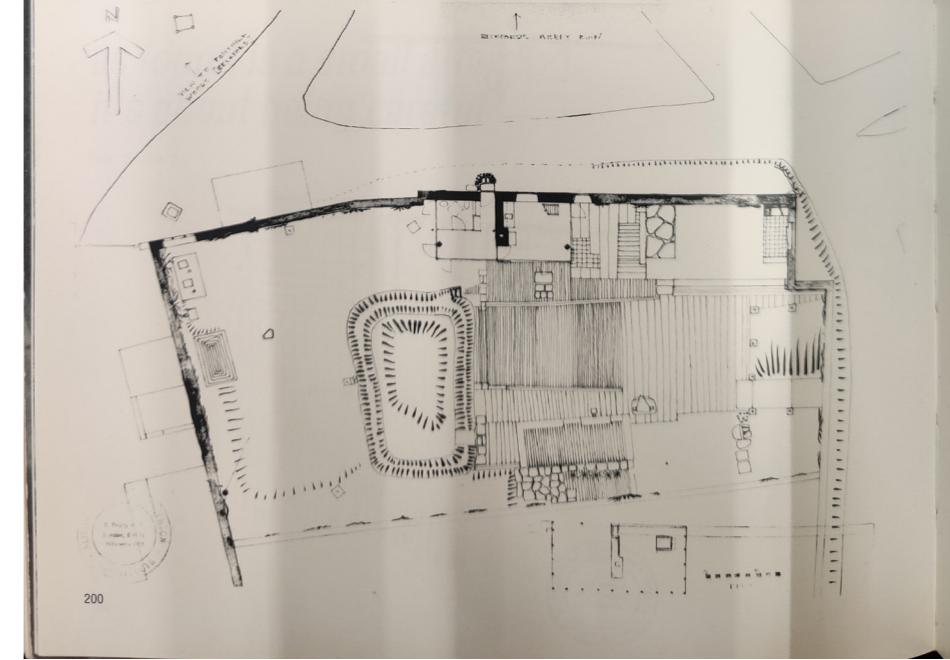
B) Masterplanning

Manifesto, schemes and proposals



*as found is a small affair:
it's about being careful*

Peter Smithson



Manifesto - As found

We started our master planning with a study of the "as found" friche. What exists already and how can we draw conclusions and make investigations from this data? What are the existing ground conditions? What kind of vegetation grows here and why? What are the ecological hotspots and why only those areas? What are the traces of human intervention? Finally, how do these factors lead to a holistic understanding of this palimpsest?

The friche is a palimpsest - layer upon layer, soil upon soil. The west side already reveals remnants of this layering where a triangulated zone becomes exclusively lush with trees, contrasting the other more grassy areas of the friche. It is most likely that this area was more polluted than others, which led to a different kind of intervention in this particular zone - possibly, the removal of more soil or the refilling of a deeper layer of topsoil. The area is now the most biodiverse on the friche. We wondered why it was so? Interestingly, the commons sit adjacent to this triangle. We speculate that the two work in symbiosis and conjunction and possibly fuel one another.

Making this study our point of departure, we now speculate on the future of this friche. What if, like this triangulated fragment, other plots within the friche had been exposed to a specific kind of removal and refilling of soil? What if the concrete that sits atop the eastern front would be peeled off? Would the friche grow back here? Perhaps, yes. Remnants of the wild friche already dot the industrial landscape.

We look at the hard edge of this industrial "port" as an opportunity waiting to be "rewilded". The hard surfaces will be punctured and the friche will slowly reveal itself, flowing towards the city, extending its fingers beyond the boundaries of the bordering trees and thus, the architecture will follow. Simultaneously, the city begins to infiltrate the friche with its "urban green".

1. The peeling off of concrete in parts where the friche has already begun to reveal itself. These punctures grow and form connections between the wild nature of the friche and the city.

2. As a rule, we retain the ground surfaces of the industries as outlines or borders within which we build. We do not exceed the limits of these boundaries in order to let the friche erupt from the remaining paving. We retain the Rova industrial buildings and move the remaining industries to other parts of Brussels. The primary access road is also retained.

3. For the masterplan vision, we imagine a new kind of living environment - where housing, industry and nature are intertwined. A kind of densification of functions that prevents isolated operations.

4. The zoning of programmes in this new neighbourhood masterplan is determined in a layered system with varying degrees of "living with nature". Typologies of mixed housing and retail towards the city in the east reinvigorate the surrounding urban fabric, low rise housings with mediator community functions are placed in the middle, and finally, scattered housing with commoning/ research activities are closest to the wild friche.

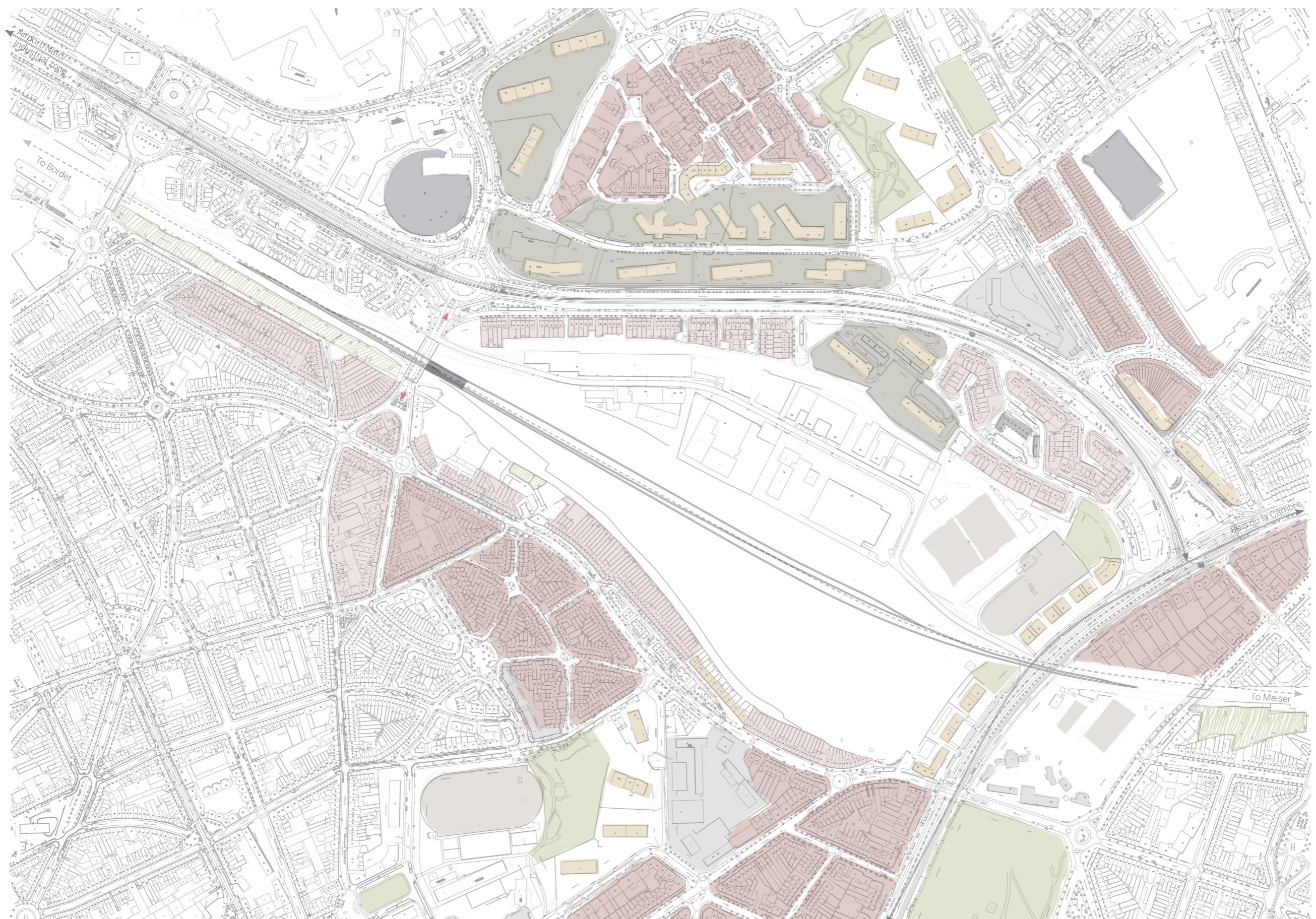
5. Each rewilded, peeled off zone cannot exist by itself for long. This we conclude through our study of the western part. Thus, the wild friche needs a mediator, just as the commons facilitate the triangle and mediate between the city and the wild friche. Therefore, the mediator function is born, where human interventions aid natural flows while keeping them in a healthy state and connected to the new urban environment. These functions support the wild friche and the wild friche feeds their commercial/productive/residential/ educational/ ecological functions.

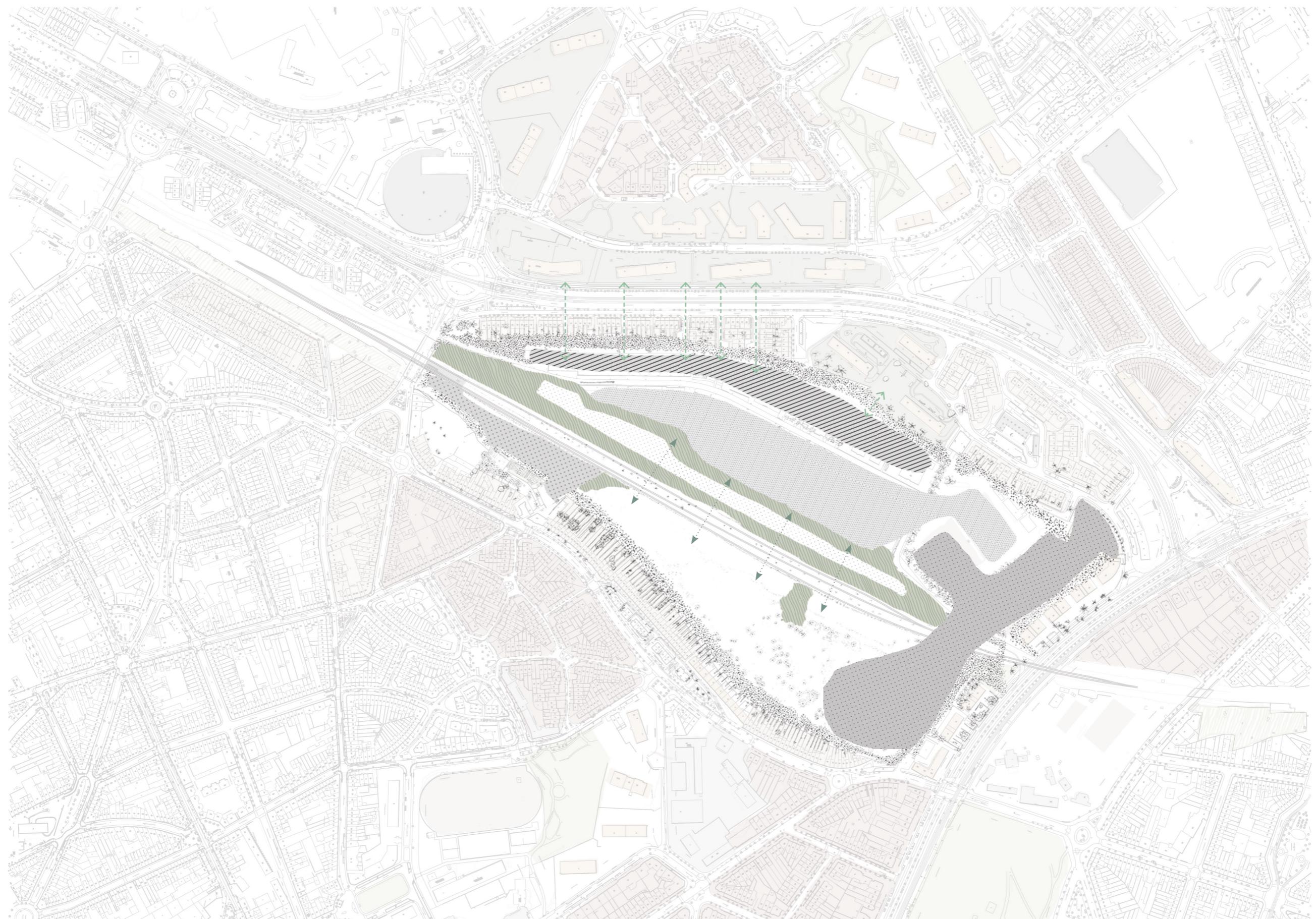
6. Mediator functions can be defined as an intervention which negotiates between two or more types of ecosystems, two or more types of programs, two or more types of green. One can imagine architecture that may be functionally ambiguous or flexible, or some kind of infrastructure that aids the confluence of these ecosystems, or even landscapes. We hope to find our own proposals in these mediators.

7. The train tracks are green corridors where migratory birds perch on electrical poles. We imagine a wetland that runs along the tracks, forming a buffer and resting place for them and other non-human species.

8. On the two ends are the bridging functions - the train station and the wahis park, connecting the two ends of the friche to one another. Another kind of mediator function, negotiating between two kinds of zones.

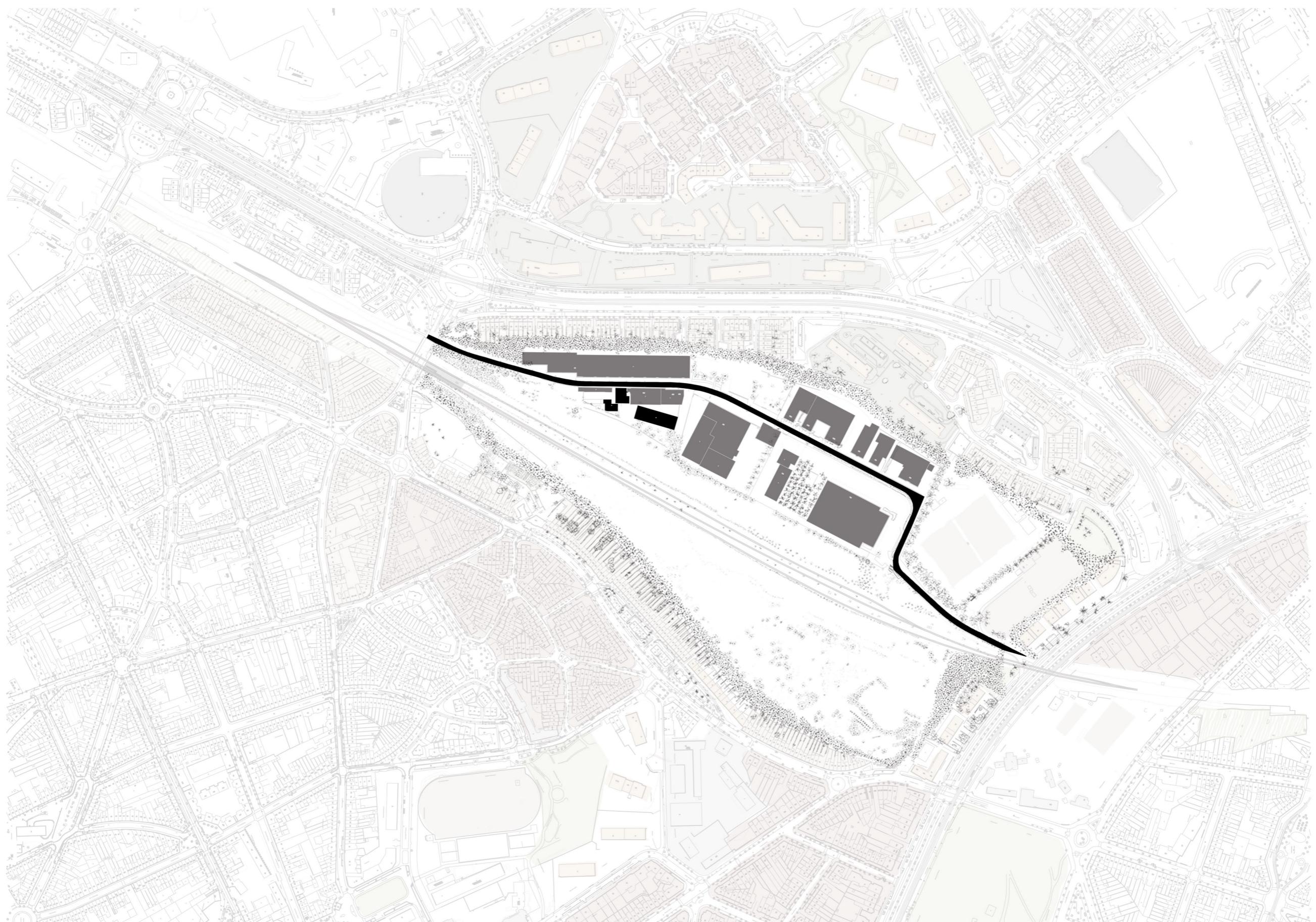
9. The eventual aim is to allow nature to take precedence, and to let architecture follow. What kind of architecture will come about when nature takes the lead? How will boundaries be negotiated? How will it create its space in the as found?





2. Masterplanning vision

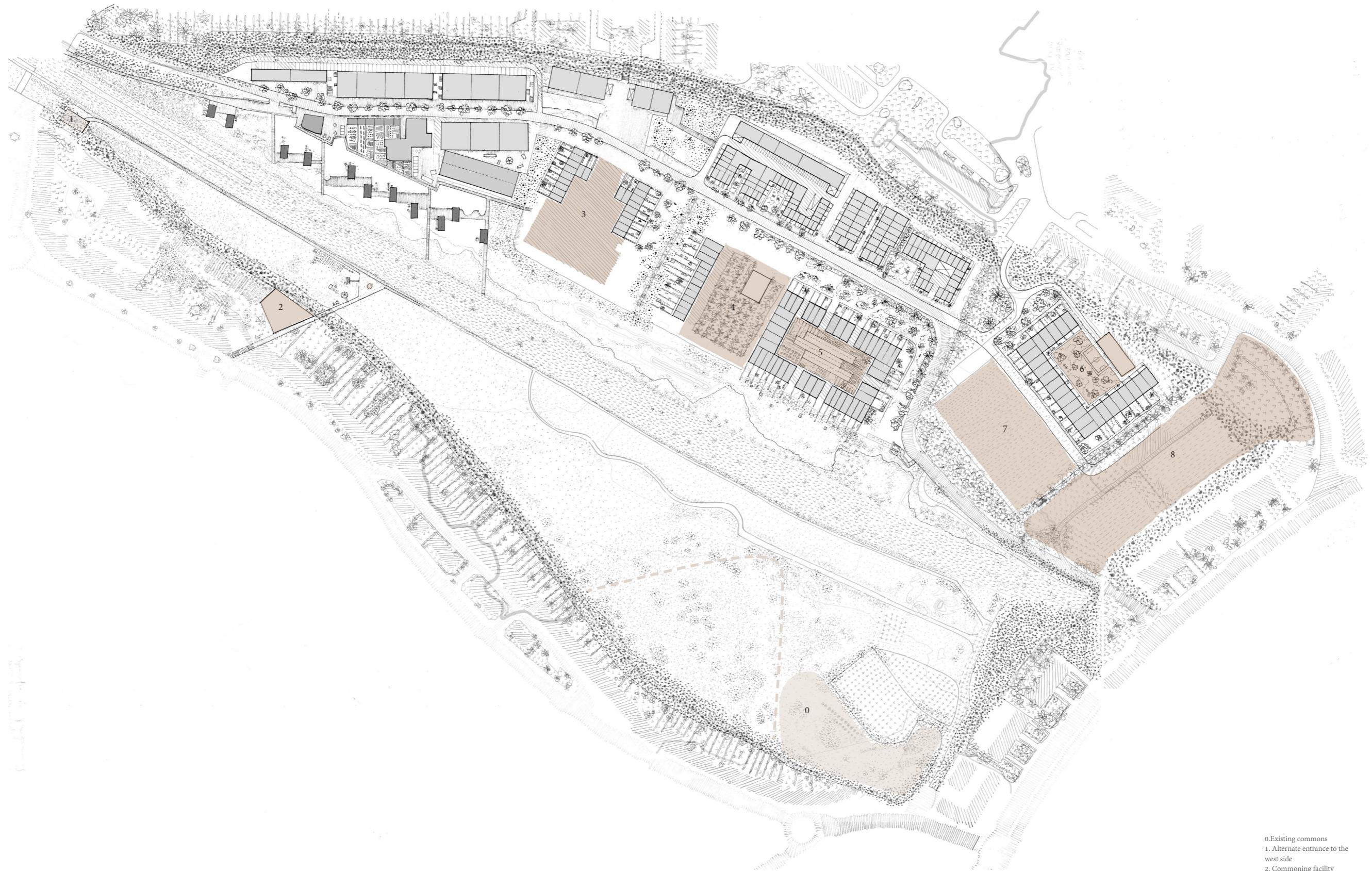
■ Housing with public front
■ Low rise housing with mediator
■ Friche housing/commoning
■ Educational/ research zone
■ Wetland
↔ Bringing in the friche
↔ Bringing in the urban greens



3. What to keep?

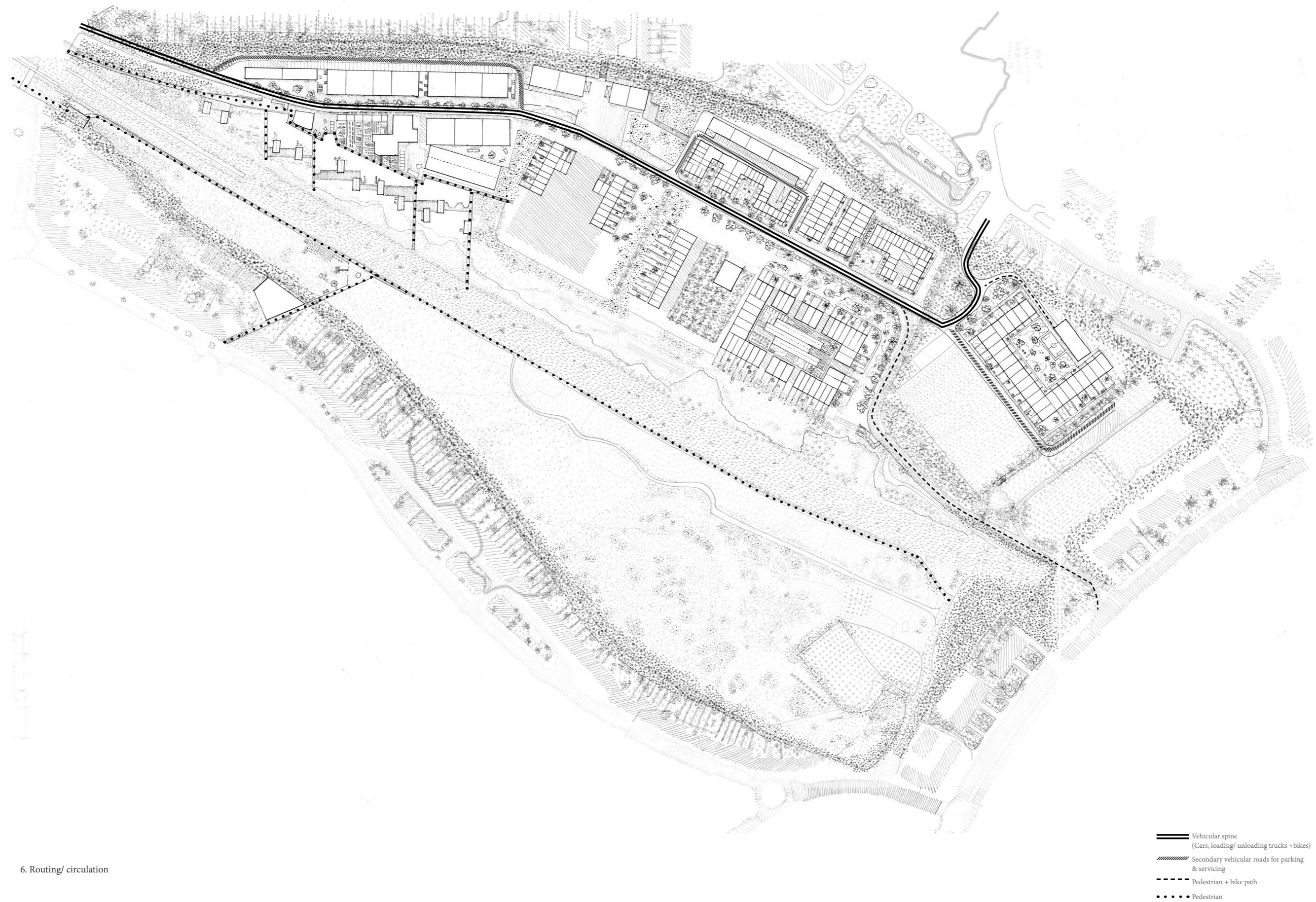
■ As found/ original entities
■ Building extents & Surfaces
■ Existing entities



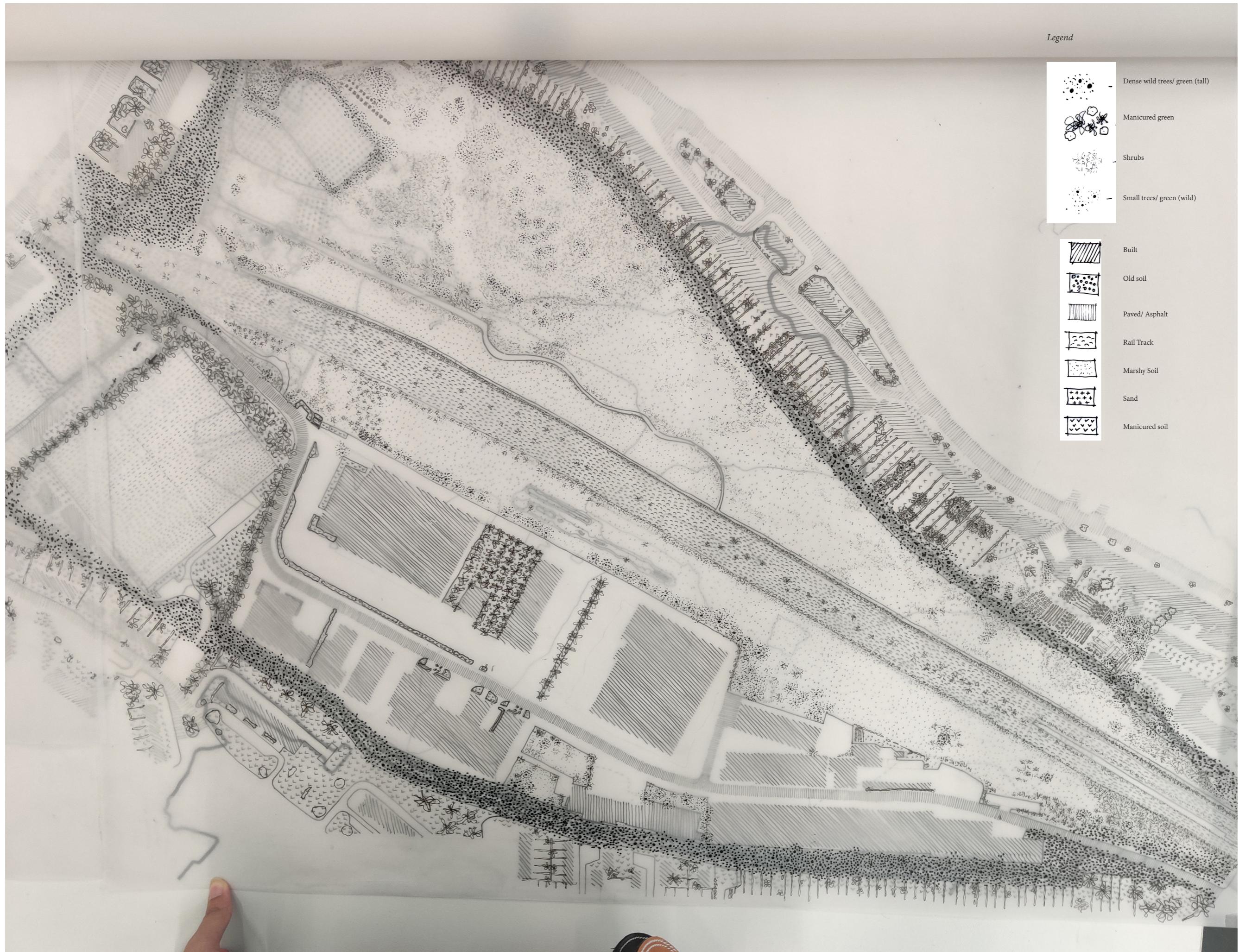
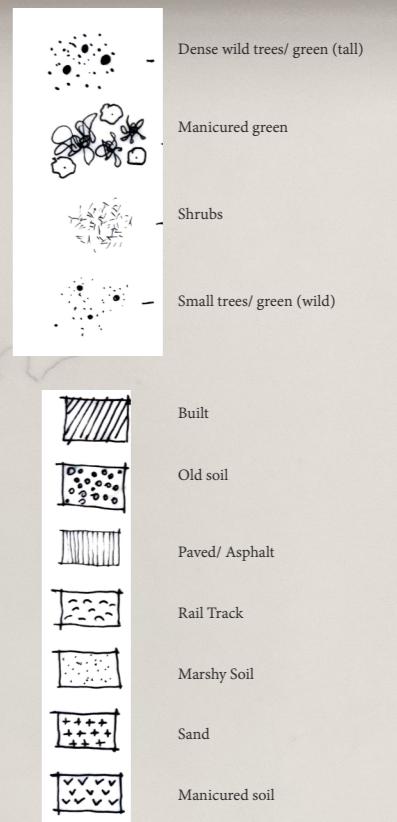


5. Mediators

- 0.Existing commons
- 1. Alternate entrance to the west side
- 2. Commoning facility
- 3. Bathhouse of enchantments
- 4. Repository of remembrance
- 5. Urban farming incubator
- 6. Sports/ public park
- 7. School
- 8.Knowledge production and dissemination



Legend







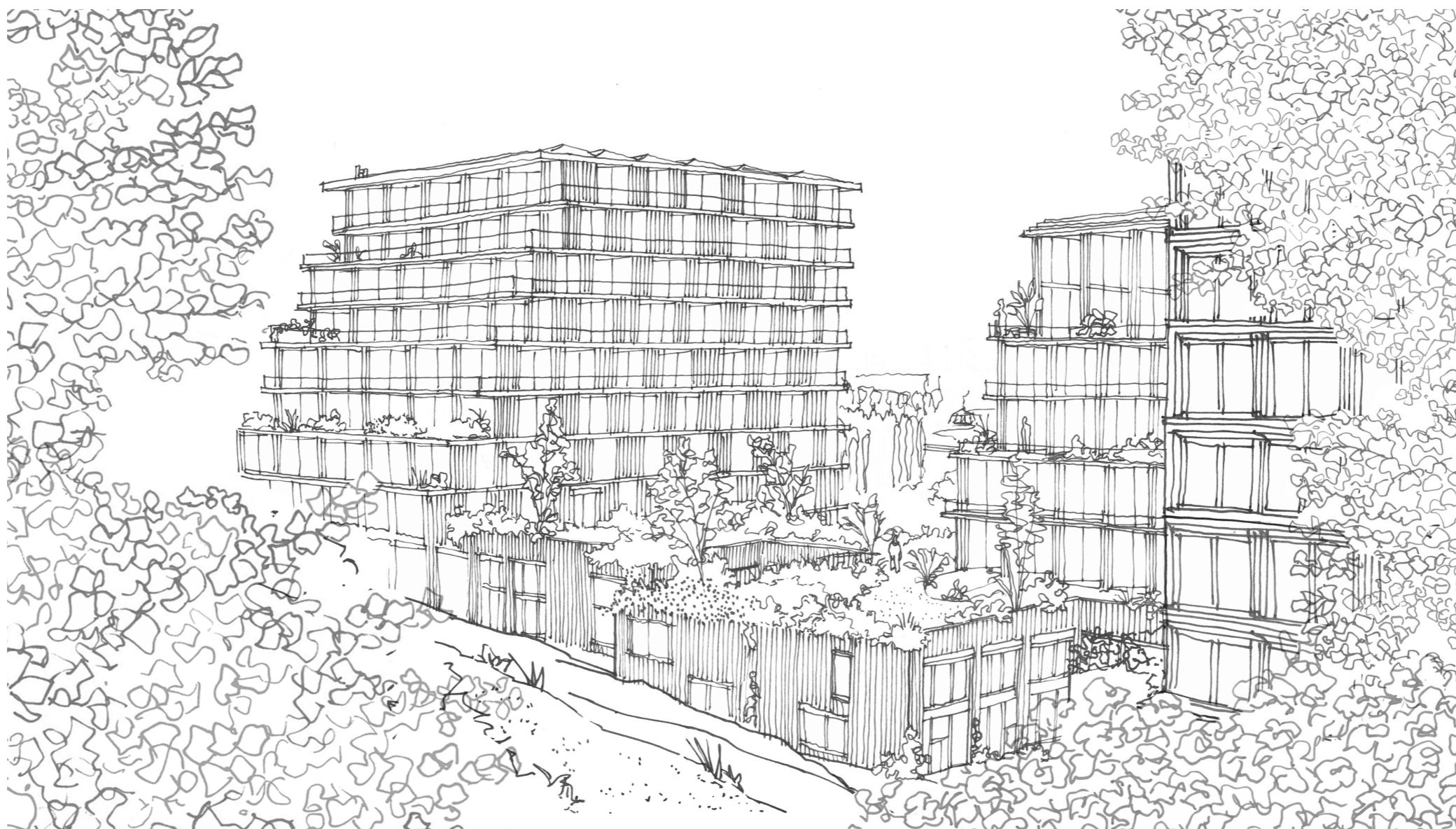


Legend





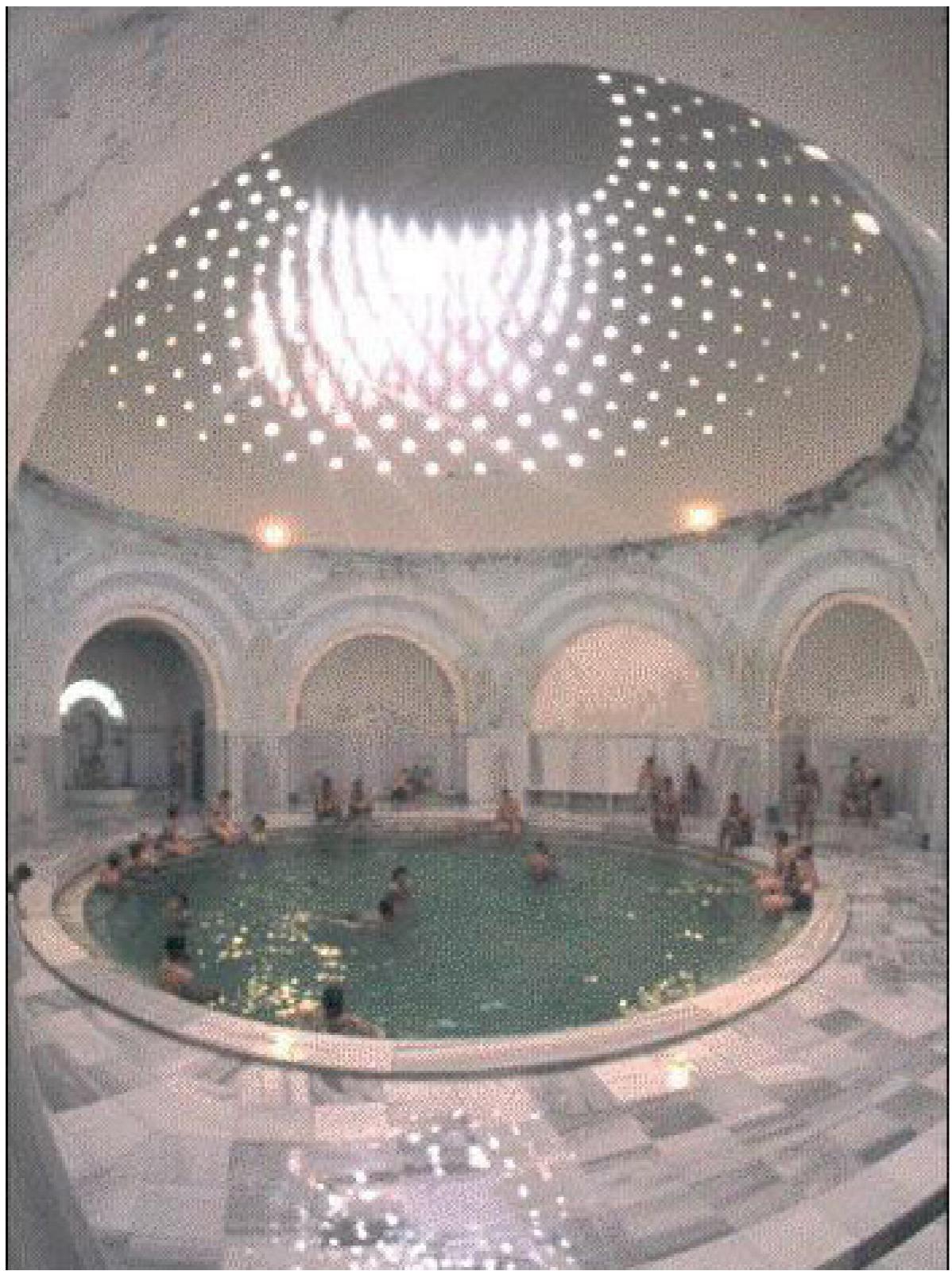
View of mixed use apartments towards the Rova industry - Public plinth and terraced housing



View towards the large multi-housing block from the east side - A pedestrian pathway cuts through the slope, connecting the east side garden city to the masterplan

C) Proposal - A bathhouse

Concepts, Site, Programme



Turkish bath, Bursa, Turkey

A place of rest & cleansing

Not too far away from my home
 Is a secret garden hidden away by thickets of Bougainvillea,
 and a quaint shrine with a courtyard that i onced chanced upon.
 Here, i find time stopping in its tracks,
 here i find pause
 stasis, rest

Imagine -
 Like them, La friche is a counter space in the city of hyper mediation.
 The city's tapestry remains unwoven for a change.
 Buildings cannot rush in to fill the vacuum.
 There are gaps, holes, pauses, halts, discontinuities.
 These are places of rest, counter sites of nothingness

I can now hear the sweet songs of birds from lands afar,
 I can now feel the morning dew beneath my tired feet,
 i can now see a sky that had once disappeared in the frenzy of monstrous
 glass and steel
 The friche must be paradise!
 A garden of pleasure and leisure,
 like the persian "hayat".

In this paradise are flowers exquisite, trees myriad and water
 Water as in a turkish hamam,
 There are so many in schaerbeek
 Water as in an ablution tank of a mosque.
 Water as in the reservoirs of farmlands
 Water cleanses, purges and purifies.
 The city and its fatigue is washed away with this water,

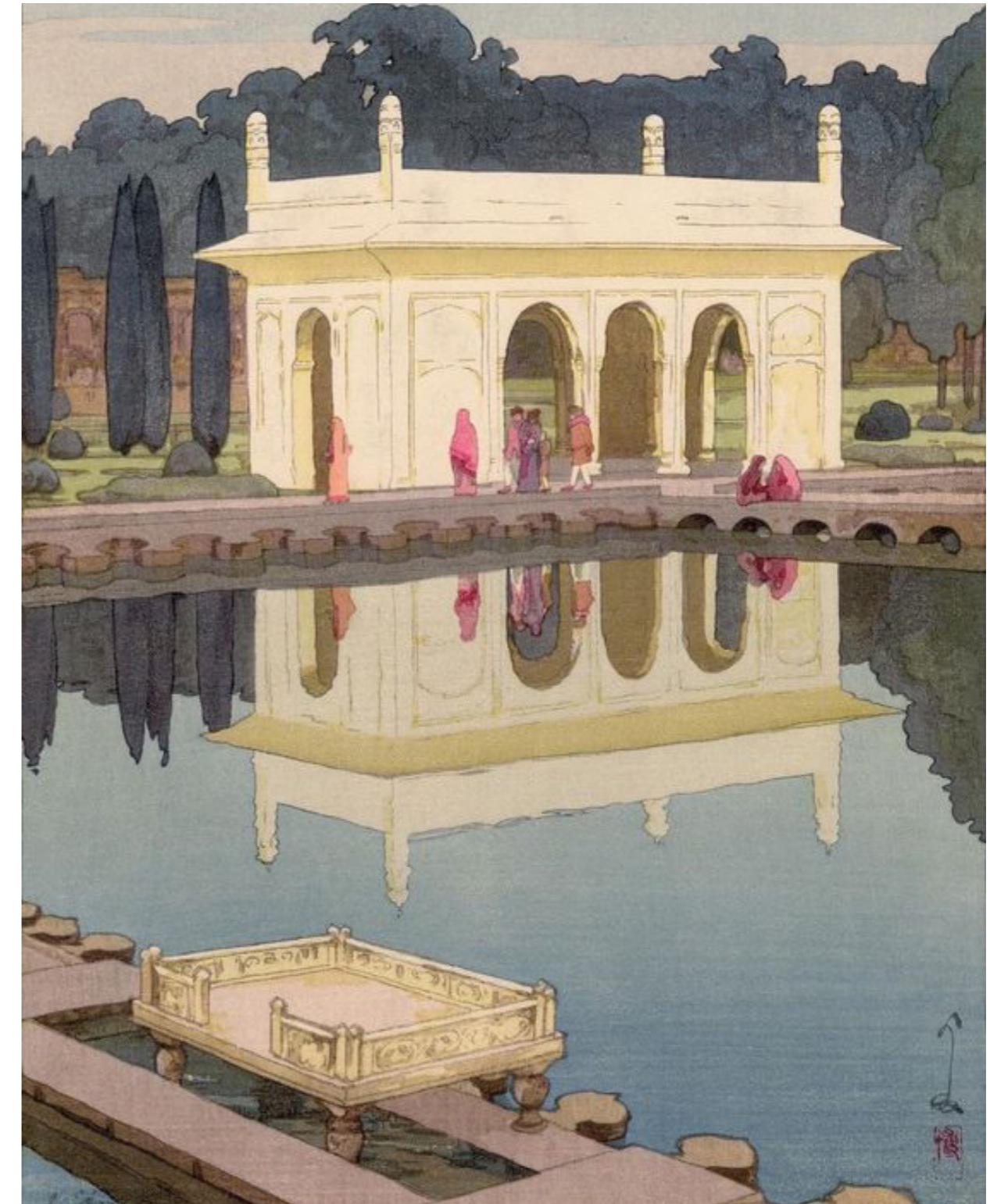
A heterotopia is born
 And so i must ask,
 In this constant fight for space in the city,
 Where else can we find a little magic?
 Where else can we break free from the rhythms of daily life?
 Where else can we rest our weary souls?
 If not here, where?

What will I build though?
 Perhaps, An architecture that hides beneath nature's flow
 Perhaps. an architecture that may not reveal itself on first glance,
 A little snippet from Geneva
 Perhaps, an architecture of the border,
 an architecture that becomes a passage between the city and the friche.
 An architecture that mediates between two worlds.

Also, an architecture of ritual like the egyptian garden - both personal
 and collective
 An architecture of community, alleviating a burgeoning lack of leisure
 gardens and spaces for those that come from lands afar especially.
 Yes, There are public parks, but where is one's own paradise?
 A piece of soil that one can call their own?
 A space of democracy.
 Therefore, an architecture of belonging.
 An architecture of pause
 stasis, rest



Ablution (Frederick A. Bridgeman, 1800's)



Shalimar Garden, Lahore (Yoshida Hiroshi, 1932)



Mosaic at the entrance of a bath-house in Timgad, North Africa, reads 'Have a good bath'



An oil flask and strigils. Oil was rubbed on the skin after the bath, and the strigil was used to scrape off the mixture of sweat and oil

Of Roman Bathhouses

These buildings have survived well enough to provide some idea of common shapes and materials. Though referred to as Baths here, two different labels, “thermae” and “balneae” were applied to the bathing structures. Distinguishing between the two, while often tricky and unnecessary, is basically done by size. The larger thermae, both expansive and expensive, were frequently funded by the city or state (Yegül, 1992). Balneae were smaller, less grand, and frequently received their funding from private individuals (Yegül, 1992). Baths could also be built symmetrically or asymmetrically. The latter usually describing a smaller building while the symmetrical complexes tended to have rooms going out concentrically from a circular room at the center (Yegül, 1992).

Separate rooms housed changing areas (one would not wear street clothes into the baths), pools of various temperatures, oil and massage stations, steam baths, areas for grooming practices like hair plucking, locations for academic pursuits or entertainment, and areas for exercise (Yegül, 1992). In some cases, the floors bore tiled outlines of sandals indicating the direction from one room to another (Yegül, 1992). The rooms, adorned with numerous columns and curved walls, were often of immense vertical height (Yegül, 1992). They relied on large, sometimes beautifully arched, windows for light and had vaulted ceilings (Yegül, 1992).

The decorations, detailed and rich, reminded visitors of the grandeur of the empire. Stones from around the empire tiled floors and formed mosaics while marble in rare colors brightened rooms (Fagan, 1999). Granite and concrete, a reasonably new material, also contributed to the grand structures (Fagan, 1999; Yegül, 1992). The ostentatious decorating included fountains and statues throughout bathing complexes and the silver basins and spigots adorning the plumbing (Yegül, 1992). Awe-inspiring on a different level was the innovative technology used to heat and deliver water to the baths. Heat came from volcanic springs or from the hypocaust system, by which heat originated under the floors of the baths and rose up into the water and the rooms (Smith, 2007). Water splashed into pools and fountains from the complicated aqueduct systems (Yegül, 1992).

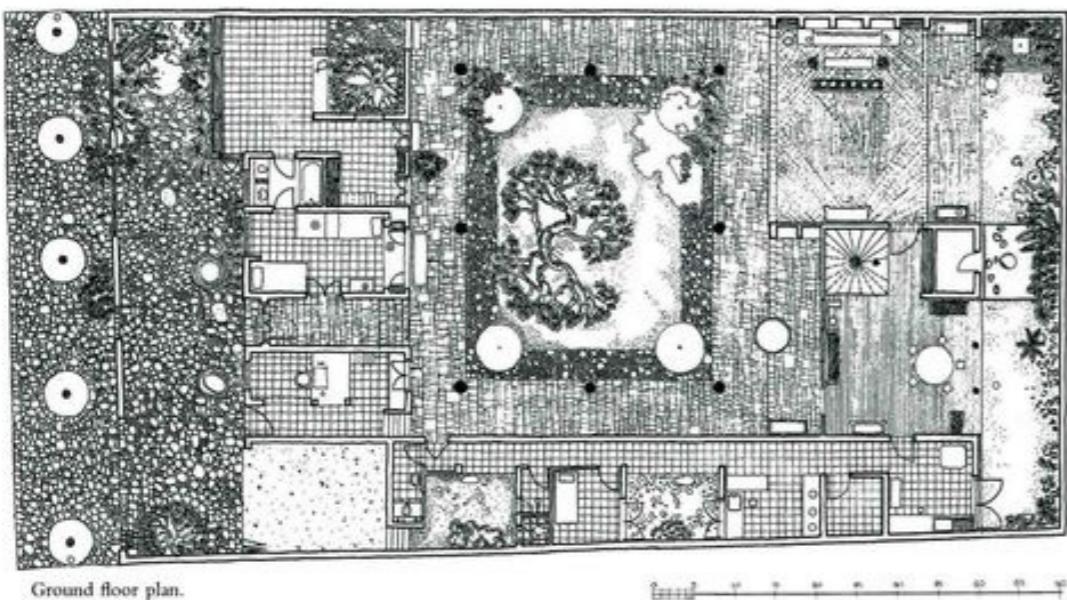
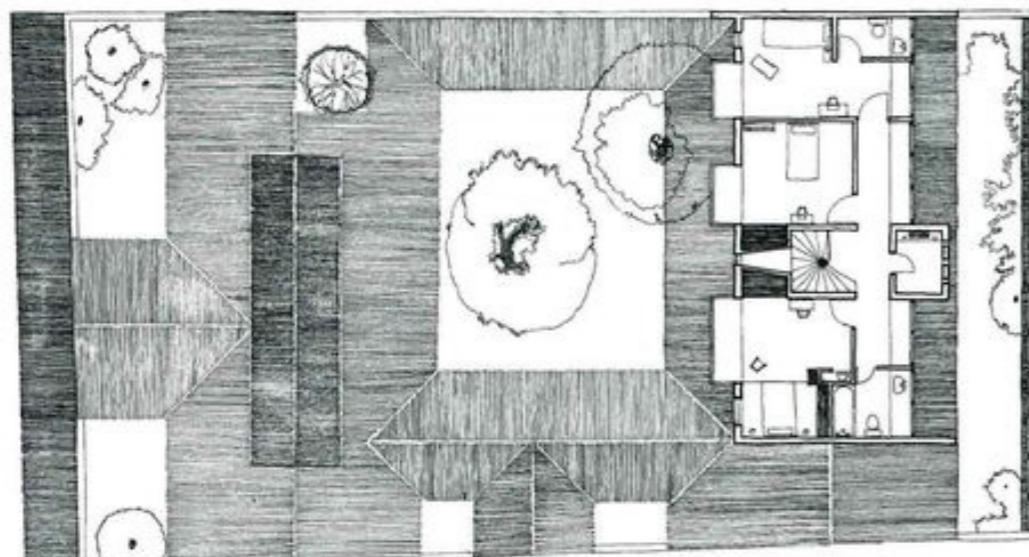
Morris, E. (2008, July 9). Bene Lava: Enjoying a bath in Ancient Rome. Bene Lava: Enjoying a Bath in Ancient Rome. <https://honorsaharchive.blogspot.com/2008/07/bene-lava-enjoying-bath-in-ancient-rome.html>



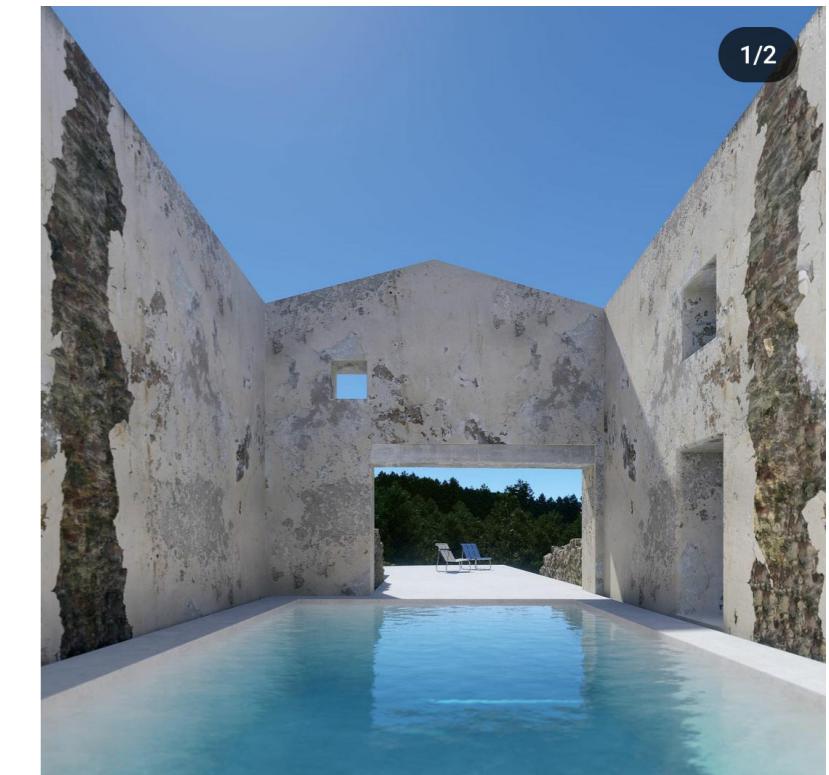
Baths of Caracalla, Rome

Virtues of the bathhouse - Sequential space

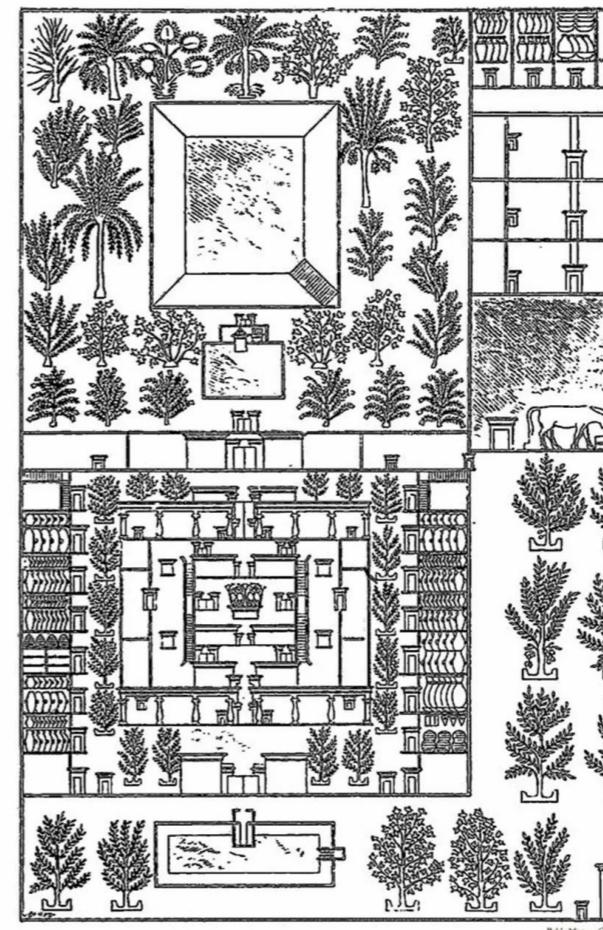
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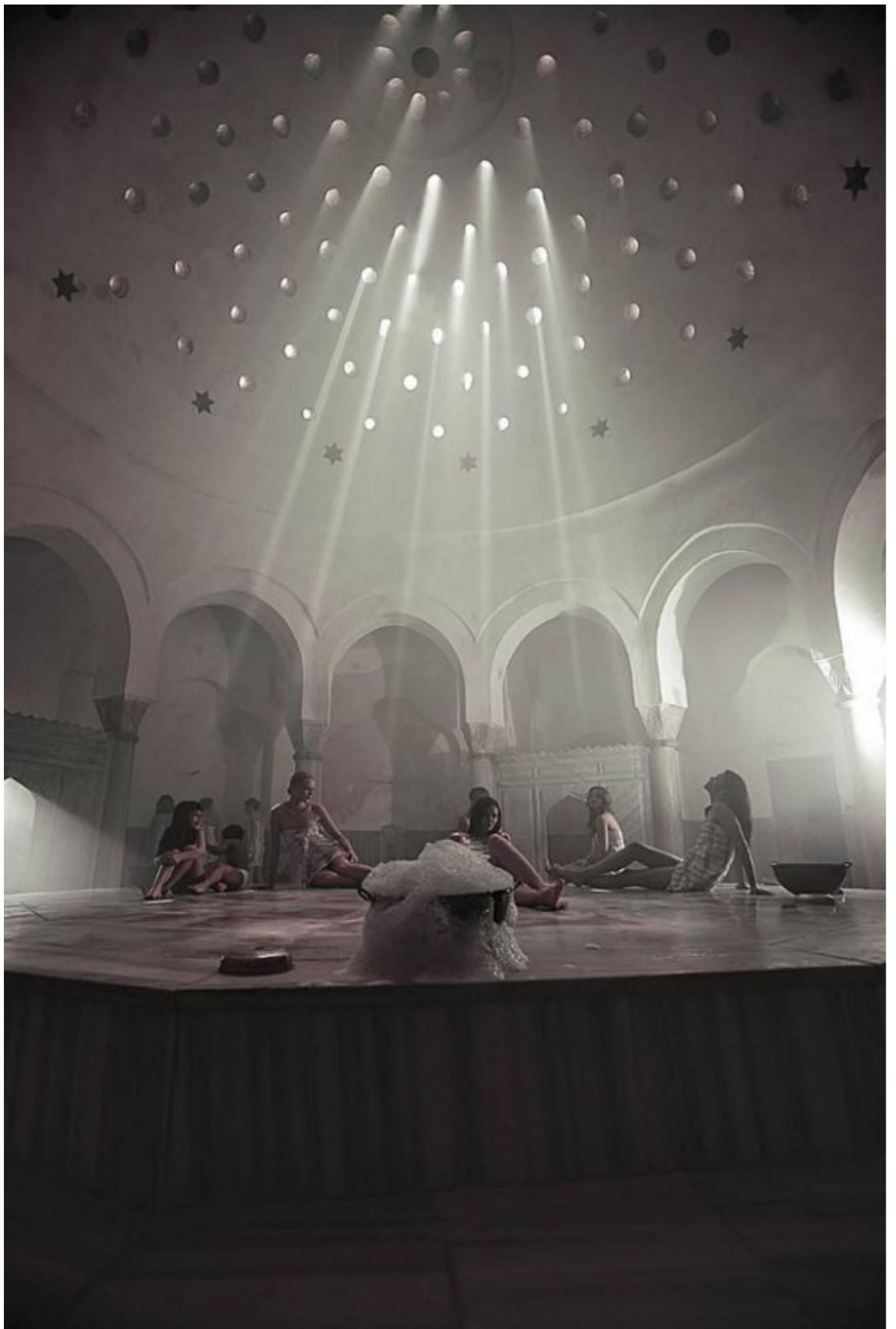


Drawings for De Silva House Geoffery Bawa



1/3





Virtues of the bathhouse- Scale, geometry and light

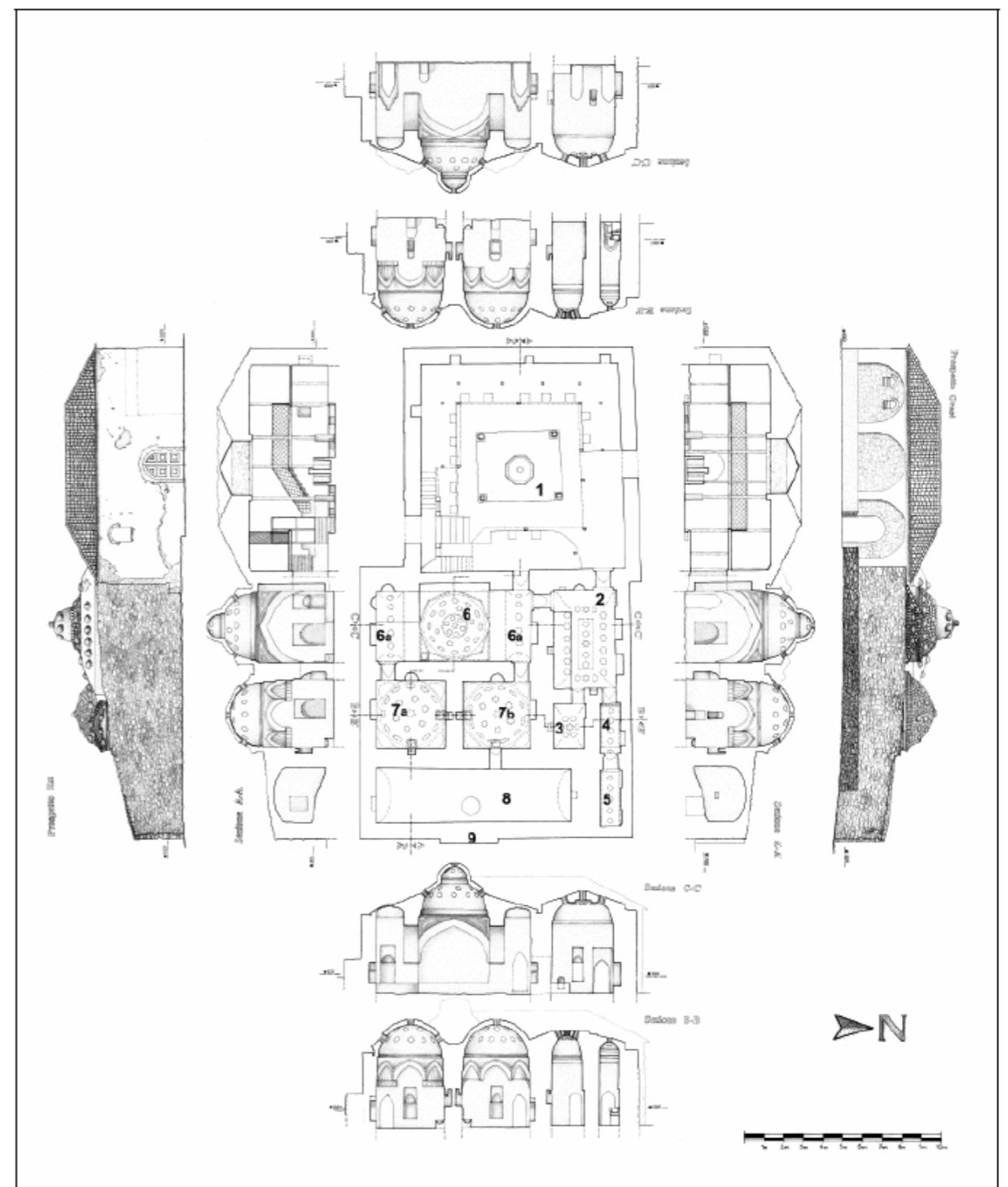
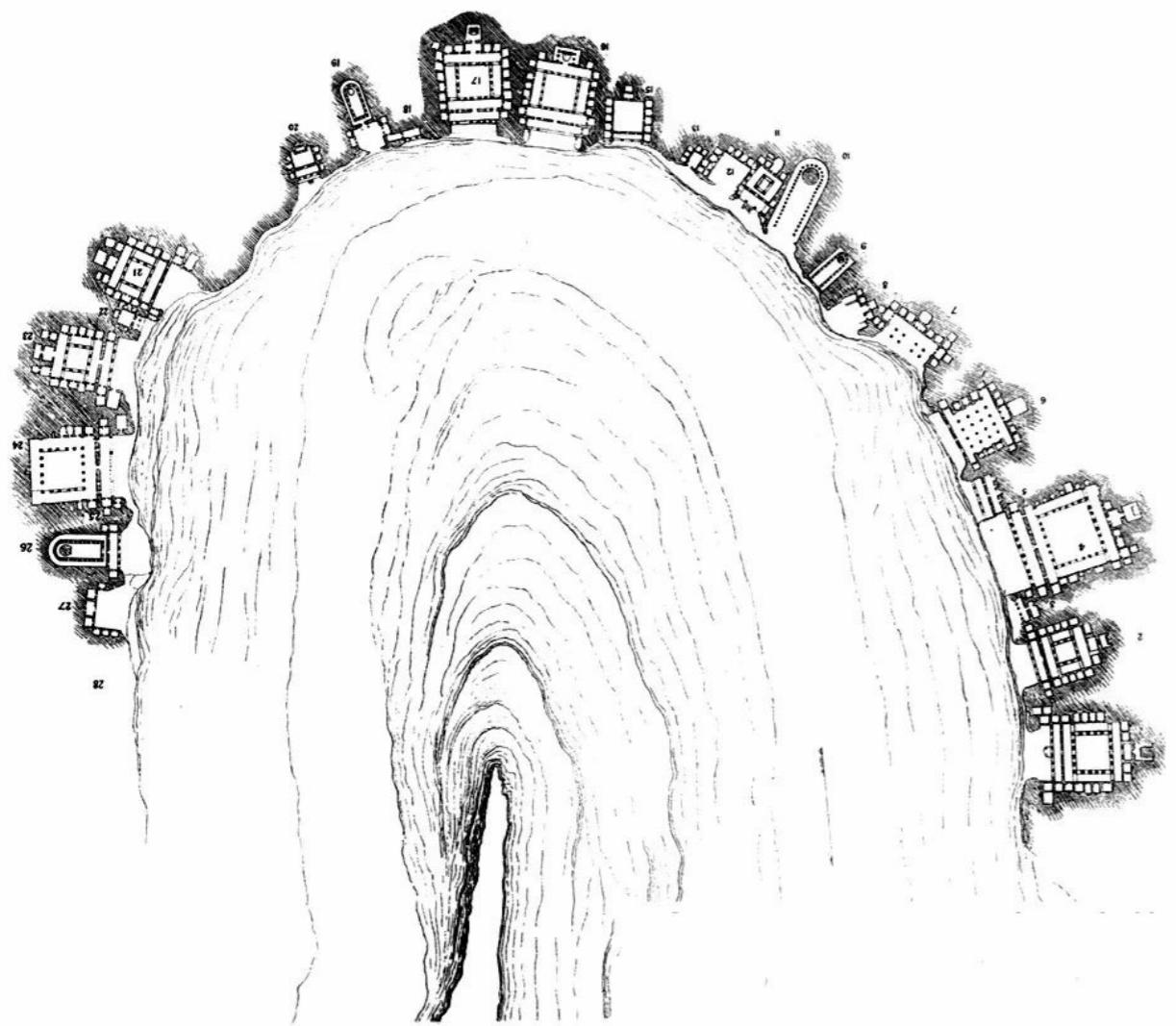
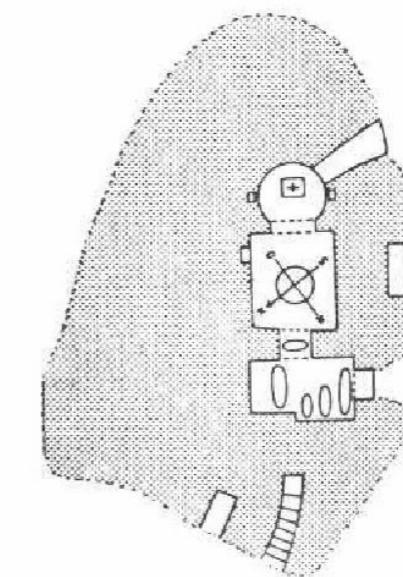


Fig. 2. The architectural survey of the *hammam* of the Bazaar. Plan, vertical sections and facades.
Drawing by A. Cartei, F. Degl'Innocenti, J. Farsetti, A. Ferrara



Rock cut Ajanta caves, Maharashtra, India.



*Plans of carved spaces inhabited by saint Simeon the Styliste
(Source: Poiesis of space)*

The borders of a heterotopia are neither entirely open to the city, nor entirely closed, but demand a kind of purgatory action - perhaps, a shedding of the traditional time and regularity that comes with living in the city. Just as the Hammam and ablution tank of the mosque purify the body and soul before one is permitted to offer prayers, the heterotopia requires a rite of passage to the other side.

Drawing from this, I aim to create a proposal that serves as a vessel for the purification of the being (human or non-human) as it transitions from the surrounding city into the haven of the heterotopic friche, purged from the weights of regular life and time.

I aim to create a "bathhouse of enchantments", a physical and metaphorical place where people and the other migratory guests of the friche come to rest their weary minds and bodies after their traditional day is over. They enter the enchanting world of the heterotopian friche and are refreshed anew. It is a place of wellness, healing and leisure.

In addition to the bathhouse itself, the proposal also aims to become a water collection and management system for the east side of the friche, where it can facilitate the growth of a constructed wetland as a habitat and resting place for the growing species of migratory birds, bees, dragonflies and others.

The bathhouse becomes not only a spiritual vessel of wellness, but also performs a social function of synergizing communities around the site, particularly towards the eastern ends and rekindling an intimate relationship with the nature of the friche that is so far missing. In the bathhouse, all are equal. It is a democratic space.

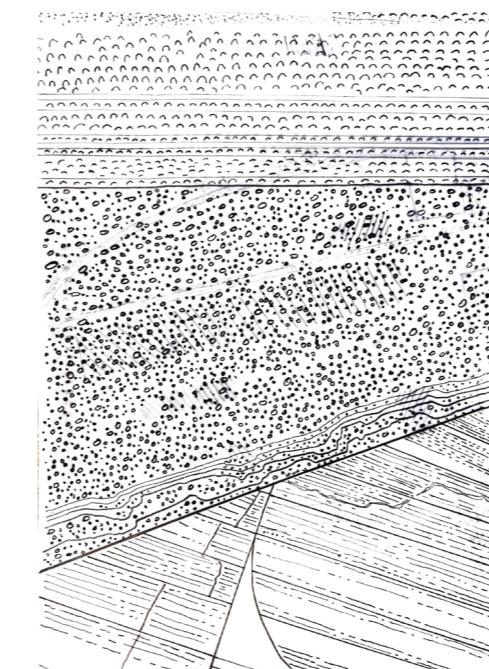
It also aims to bring focus towards the lore and tales that surround nature, revealing the many offerings and stories of the friche which have happened in the past, and continue to happen in daily and seasonal cycles. It attempts to bring back the magic of awareness, surprise and enchantment, which is afforded time and again by the unique heterotopia of the friche



Site Studies



Present day Map of the east side zone



Soil study - 1931
Old soil & Agricultural land



Soil study - 1978
Part paved, part open soil. Buildings
emerge



Soil study - 1996
Friche returns, buildings disappear.
The road remains



Passage to the edge of the slope

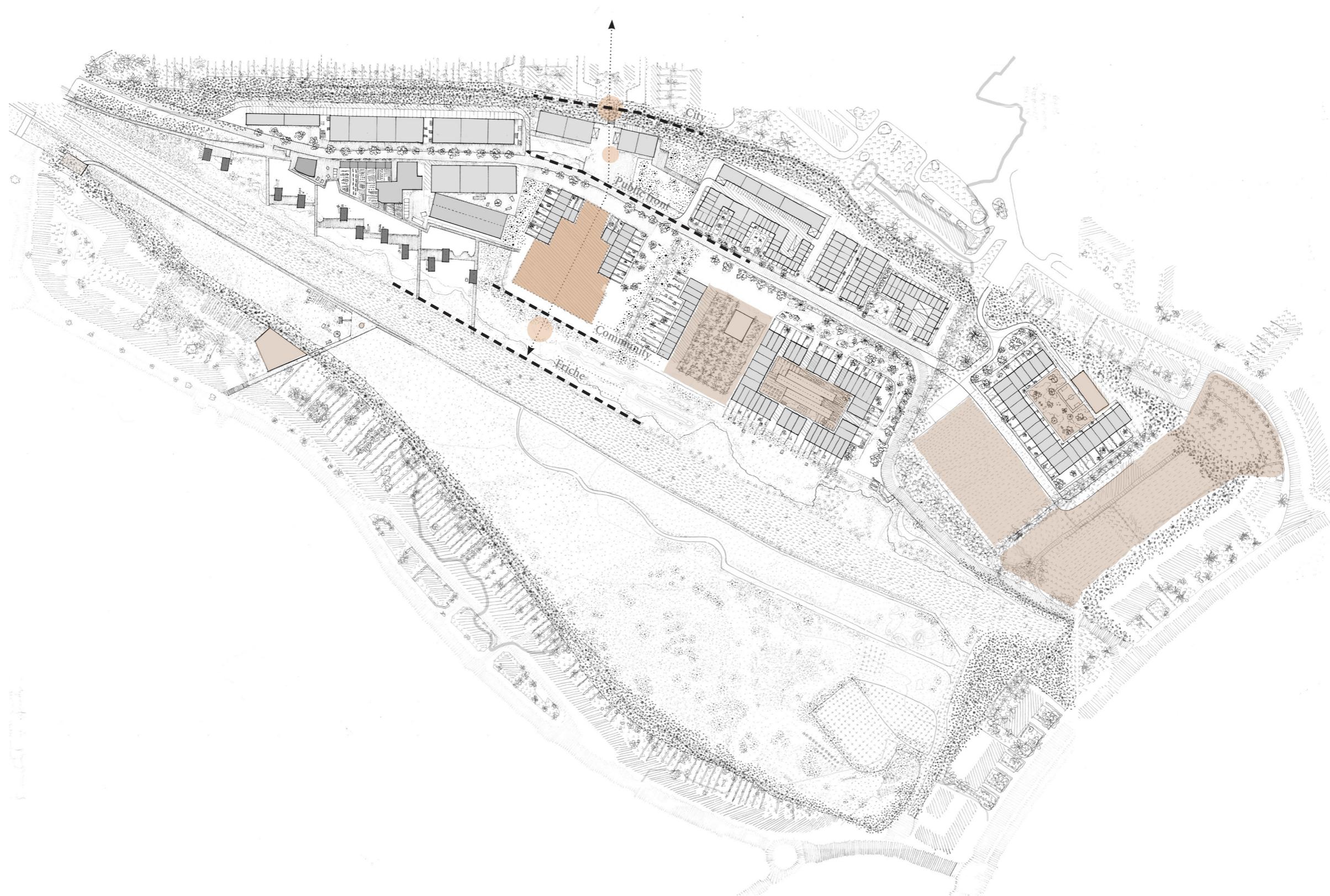


Views of the friche from the east side



East side neighbourhood

Site Selection



Areas and Brief

approx 7500 sqm built up

The Primary passage - 800 sqm

The bath house complex begins at the border between the city/ immediate eastern context of garden city houses and the friche.

It marks the transition from the traditional city towards heterotopia and is a passage/portal

1. Entrance point at the border - 150 sqm
2. Passage - 100 sqm
3. Administration - 300 sqm
4. Information points - 200 sqm
5. Storage - 100 sqm

The Enclosure - 4500 sqm

Once the rite of passage is completed and the border penetrated, one is engulfed and enclosed in the Heterotopia. This is where the bathhouse begins its key functions. It is also the largest part of the complex, where time is stretched and space is expanded in every dimension. This space is between city and friche, mediating both qualities. Time is forgotten. The mind and body have entered a new spiritual journey

6. Undressing / storage - 200 sqm
7. Toilets - 150 sqm
8. waiting area - 200 sqm
8. Treatments/massage/healing zone - 500 sqm
9. Sweating/purging zone - 500 sqm
10. Frothing/cleansing zone - 500 sqm
11. Washing/ resting zone - 600 sqm
12. pools of various kinds - 400 sqm
13. Gardens and garden houses - 100 sqm
- Botanical & healing
- Productive
- contemplation
14. short-term stays and hide outs - 500 sqm
15. Communal zones/ meeting spots - 400 sqm
16. Eateries - 300 sqm
17. Kitchen - 200 sqm
18. Library - 100 sqm

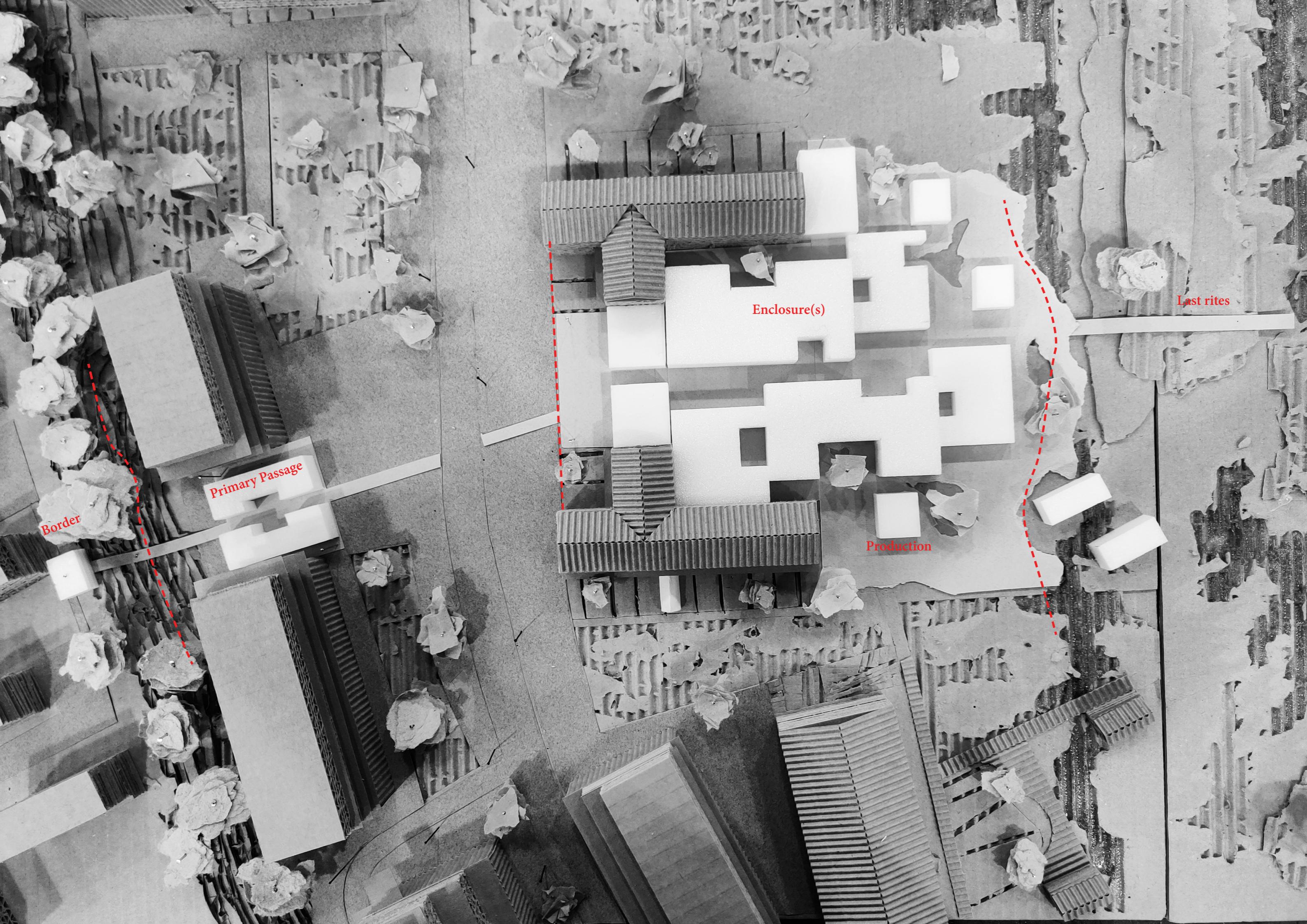
The last rite - 400 sqm

The enclosure opens up again, this time towards the friche, as it eventually dissolves completely into the oblivion of the Heterotopia. It becomes one with the nature, topography and physicality of the friche. The city is erased.

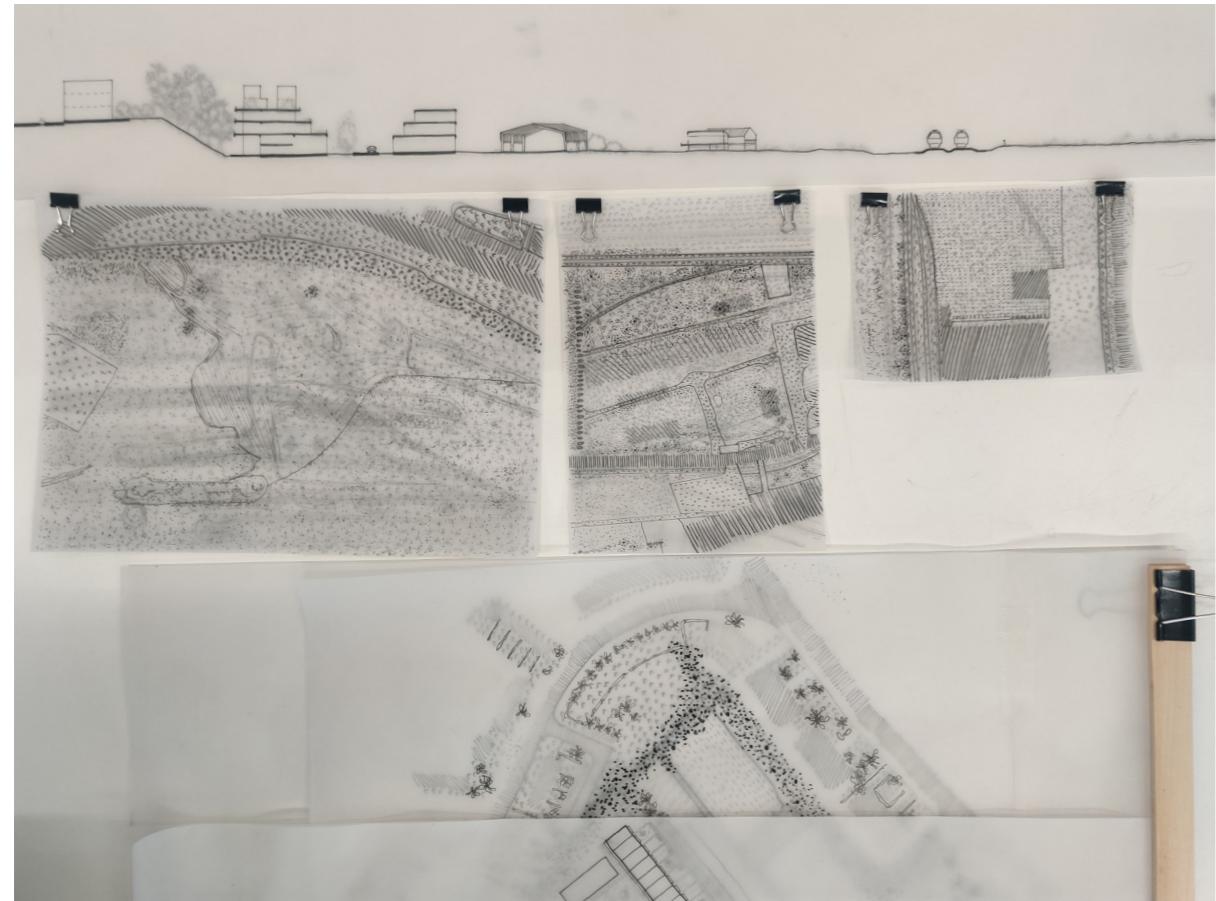
19. Nesting/resting gardens & habitats for friche wildlife
20. Observatory

Supporting functions - 1500 sqm

1. Productive area (small units) - 300 sqm
2. Water management/ treatment facility - 1000 sqm
3. Other ancillary functions - 200 sqm









I don't want realism. I want magic.
Magic.

Further Research :

1. On Hammams in Schaerbeek
2. On bathhouses - theoretical & design & BT based
3. On constructed wetlands
4. Continuation of the tales of Heterotopia through more case studies
5. Continuation of the as found studies

Fin.