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Demolition or (de)con- struction

exhibiting alter-
native ways of
valuation

Gele Scheikunde: demolition or (de)construction

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Conclusion: "dit is gebouwd om nog 500 jaar te staan"

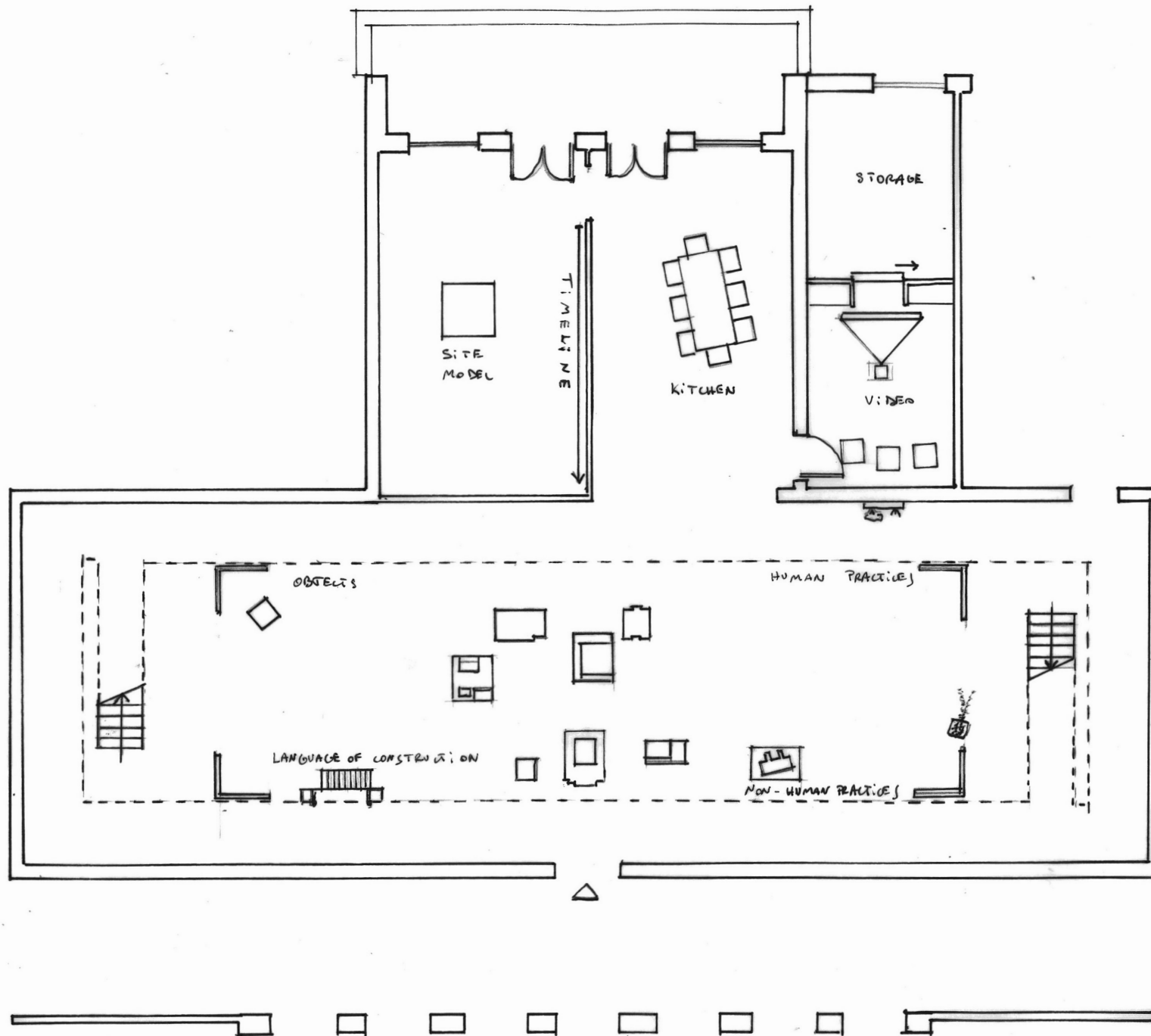
Demolition or (de)construction

Exhibiting alternative ways of valuation

In the final week of our living inside Chemistry, this exhibition also marked the shift from observing the building, which happened within the Real, to intervening in the building, which would happen on paper.

It was our way to show people from within the building what was about to disappear. The design of the exhibition molded itself into the former library of Chemistry, putting central a modelled version of the building that was 'embraced' by four panels presenting the perspectives we constructed in order to value properly those (modelled) spaces properly.

Three parallel stories are told after: the one of our kitchen, shedding light on where this new understanding was hatched; the one of the film, capturing in sound and movement Chemistry's last dwellers; and the one of the site's history, explaining how we got here.



Gele Scheikunde

Demolition or (de)construction

Exhibiting the ongoing process of our graduation is an attempt to provoke a discussion about the chemistry building's near future. As inhabitants of the building, it comes at a crucial moment when its dwellers must move out to make room for the project of its demolition. While facing such premature obsolescence, we would like to look at the building with different lenses than the one of financial speculation and imagine a sense of continuity for this place.

The display of our working documents is organized in four interwoven parts. Four central issues aim to reveal the existing qualities of this place: (1) the language of construction, (2) the objects contained within this envelop, (3) the diversity of human practices sustained by the objects and the envelope, (4) the existential territory¹ of the non-human practices.

These lenses are framing the 1:33 fragments of the building where their content is spatialized. The models expose convergences of situated qualities where the generosity of the building is at play. They re-evaluate the obsolete label of the building, asking the questions : "what to keep?", "what to leave out?" and "what to amplify?".

The video is an archive of sounds, lights, movement that a model cannot quite capture. The room displays the specific atmospheres of the building in a raw form.

The site model examines the urban condition of the ensemble. At the break of the modernist campus and the historical city, the project could mediate the historically increasing strict zoning between the city and campus by intensifying the building's diversity of ongoing practices that belong to both zones.

The aim of this exhibition is to reconsider the articulation between the way the building is valued (a mode of valuation) and the way a project can take form (a mode

of production). The mode of valuation is constituted by an array of laws, economic schemes, and investor semantics. In this case, it is the discourse which produces obsolescence², and therefore destruction. This mode of valuation is what is being deconstructed in this exhibition. The mode of production, the project, is dependent on the mode of valuation and will be an added layer to this exhibition at the end of the project in January.





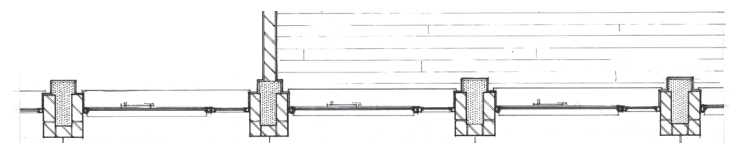
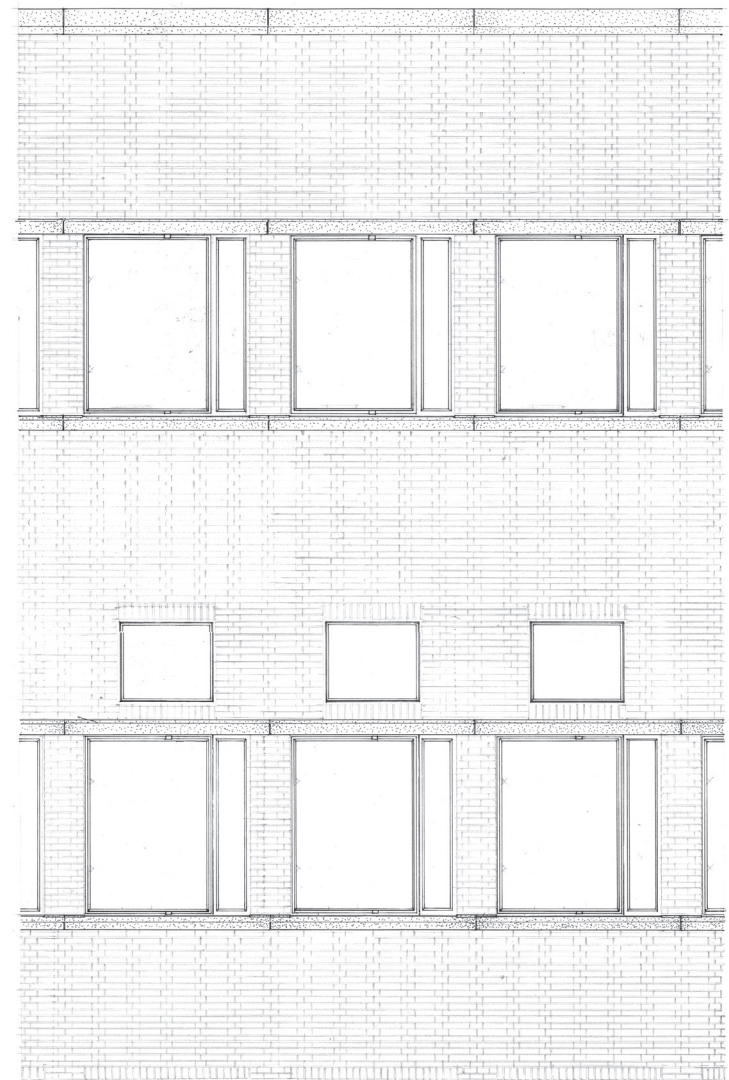
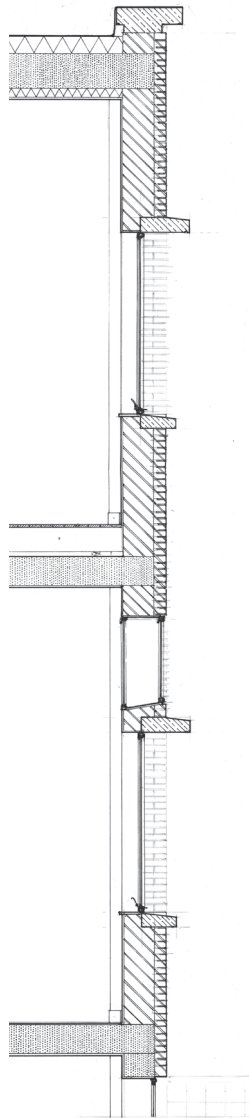
Language of construction

A rational building

Very few standardized elements are capable of producing the entire building. It is striking that such a reduced architectural language satisfies the multiplicity of inside uses and the façade's coherence. Repetition is the central logic in the building's construction language but compromises neither the craft of its elements nor the composition of the whole. Steel windows, entry roofs, brick walls etc... are rationally but craftily built with the positivist³ ideal of the 1930s.

The expression of these construction principles addresses Delft in a singular way and contributes to the architectural diversity in the city. The signifying system of its rational design and the embodied energy contained in its matter have become an embedded historical layer of Delft. Erasing layers of this palimpsest⁴ in the name of sustainable progress seems to extend the modernist delusion towards the homogenization of cities⁵. Rather we favour a sense of continuity in future transformations by building onto the 'as-found' qualities to avoid noxious rupture in the urban fabric and its dwellers.

The repetitiveness of this building gives importance to objects to precise the particularity of the use of each space. Office beside office and laboratory beside laboratory becomes kitchen beside bedroom and workshop beside living room almost only by virtue of the furnitures, use objects and things⁶ that we have set in generic spaces.



Objects

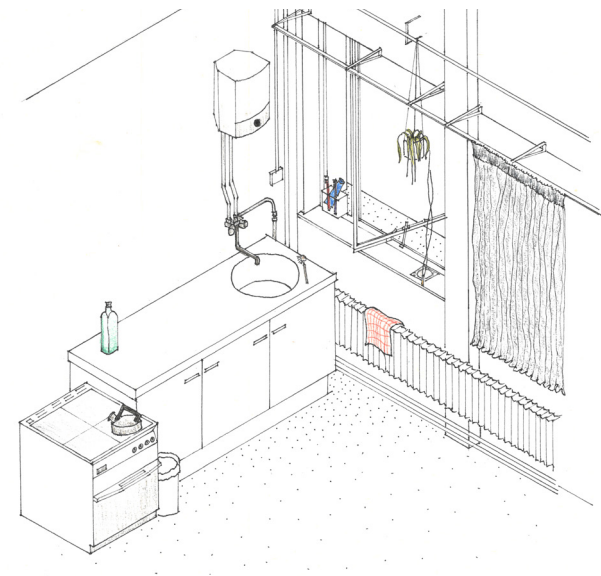
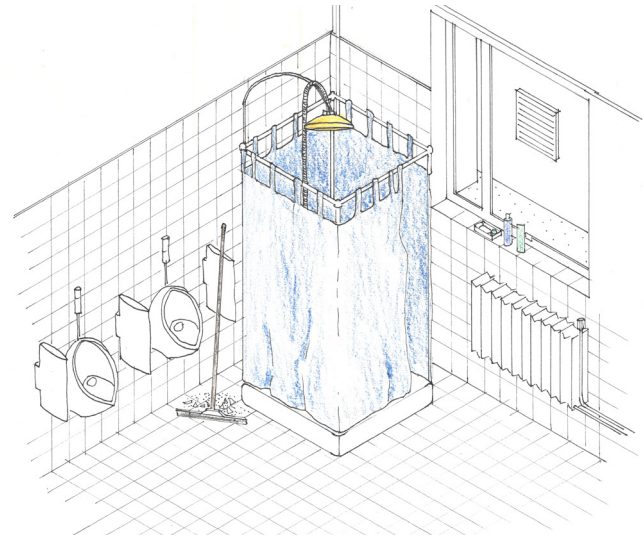
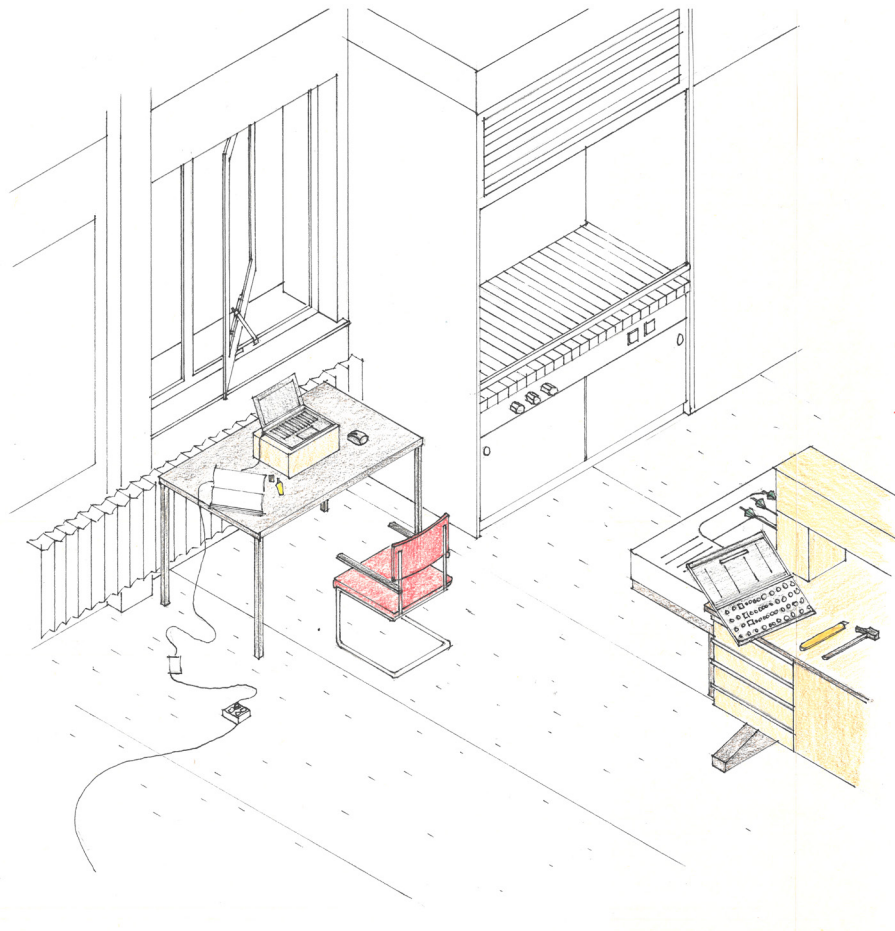
The technological condition

Since we arrived in the building, we installed ourselves with the objects in our rooms. Some of these we found in the building were left behind as worthless leftovers but became part of our daily life. From shelves to tables, chairs to screws, radiators to kitchen cabinets, all take part in most of our daily habits. Given the standardized condition of the building these things are conditional to construct a feeling of appropriation, a sense of home and a scale more fit for a dwelling human.

This principle reveals the “technological condition”⁷ on which our modern human lives rely: we are permanently augmented by external organs: technicities. This augmentation reaches so far that the very structure of our lives relies on them. Yet the standardised and financial lenses of the developer are unable to recognize these technicities, thus leading them to not only remove the objects, but also their reliant practices. By naming and drawing the objects we expose their presence so that they can no longer be ignored but valued as parts of a habitat.

The drawing shows how the ordinary practice of everyday life behind the same windows of different un-domestic rooms can install itself through the setting of things. This might seem obvious, but it has the power to adapt strange spaces into places that we call “kitchen”, “bedroom” or “bathroom” and together “home”.







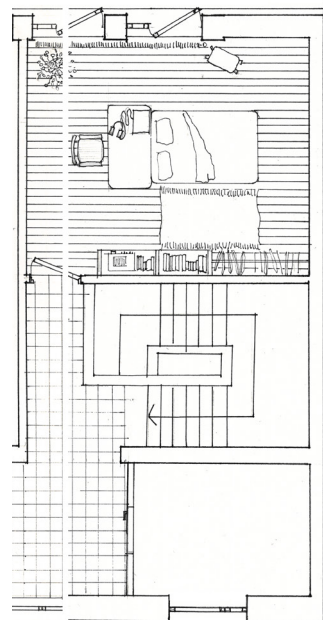
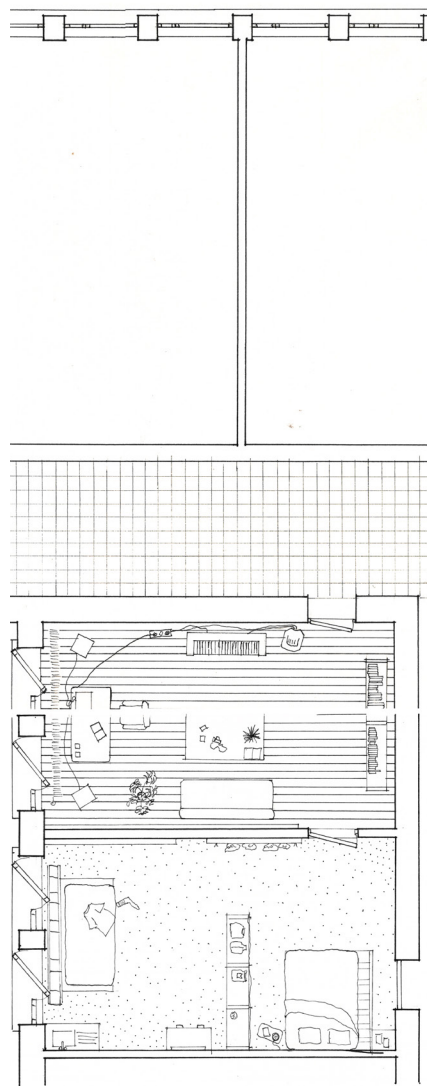
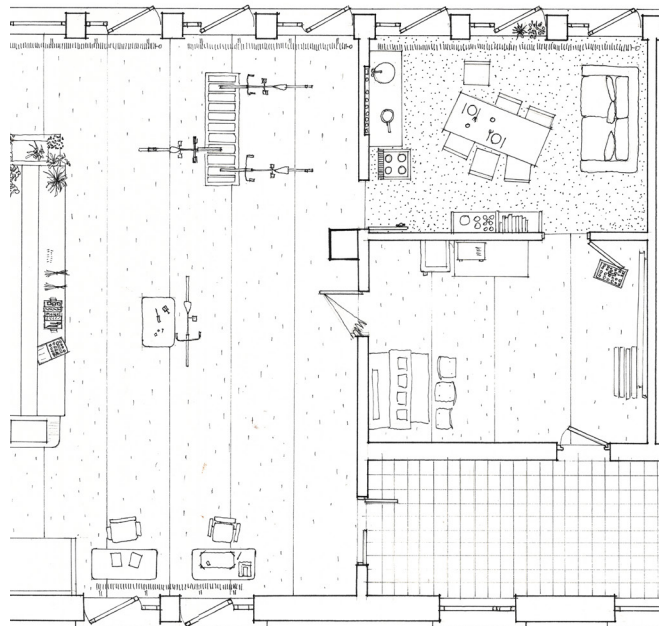
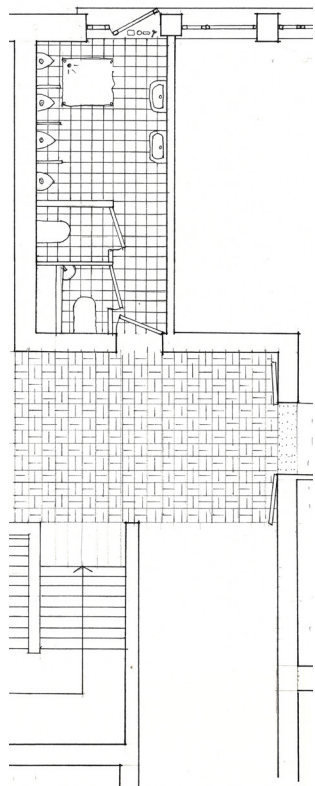
Human Practices

Mechanism of becoming

The building hosts just under fifteen inhabitants. We are all spread out over every wing of the building to care for the whole place. Since the new owner (the developer), the amount of people using the building during the day has increased. Work spaces rented out to architecture students, young start-ups, architecture and design offices and a care center for children host the daily habits of its users.

The practices in the building are the core of what the building and the objects together enable. These practices are sustained by the material conditions and reciprocally give meaning to those. While the ad-hoc installation of our things is now only a marginal occurrence, it could serve as an approach to extend the building's life. We aim to employ these drawings of current practices not only as a registration of "[how] they are", but of "[how] they may become"⁸.

The drawing shows how different rooms as much as 70 meters apart still hold together a sense of home and gradually expand in the adjacent vacant spaces. It is the starting point of both understanding what these practices require spatially, and the affordances of the spaces that envelope these practices. It became important to deconstruct the relations between the existing envelope, the objects contained and the practices as a mechanism of becoming with what is already there.



Non-human practices

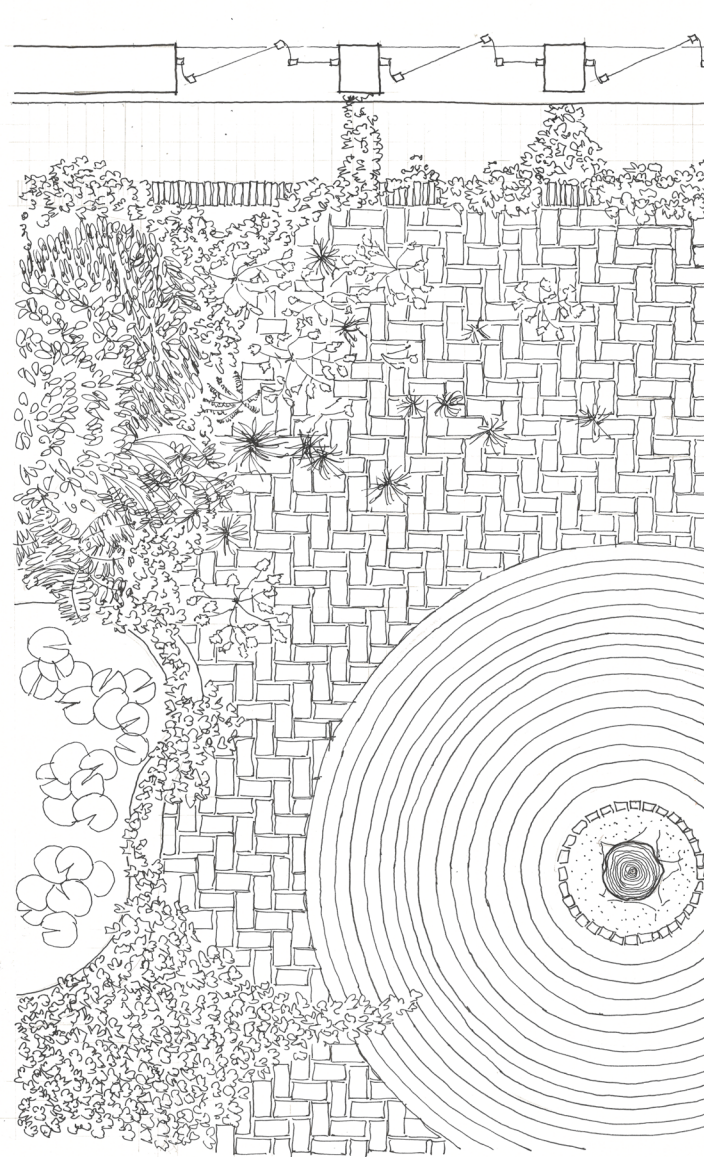
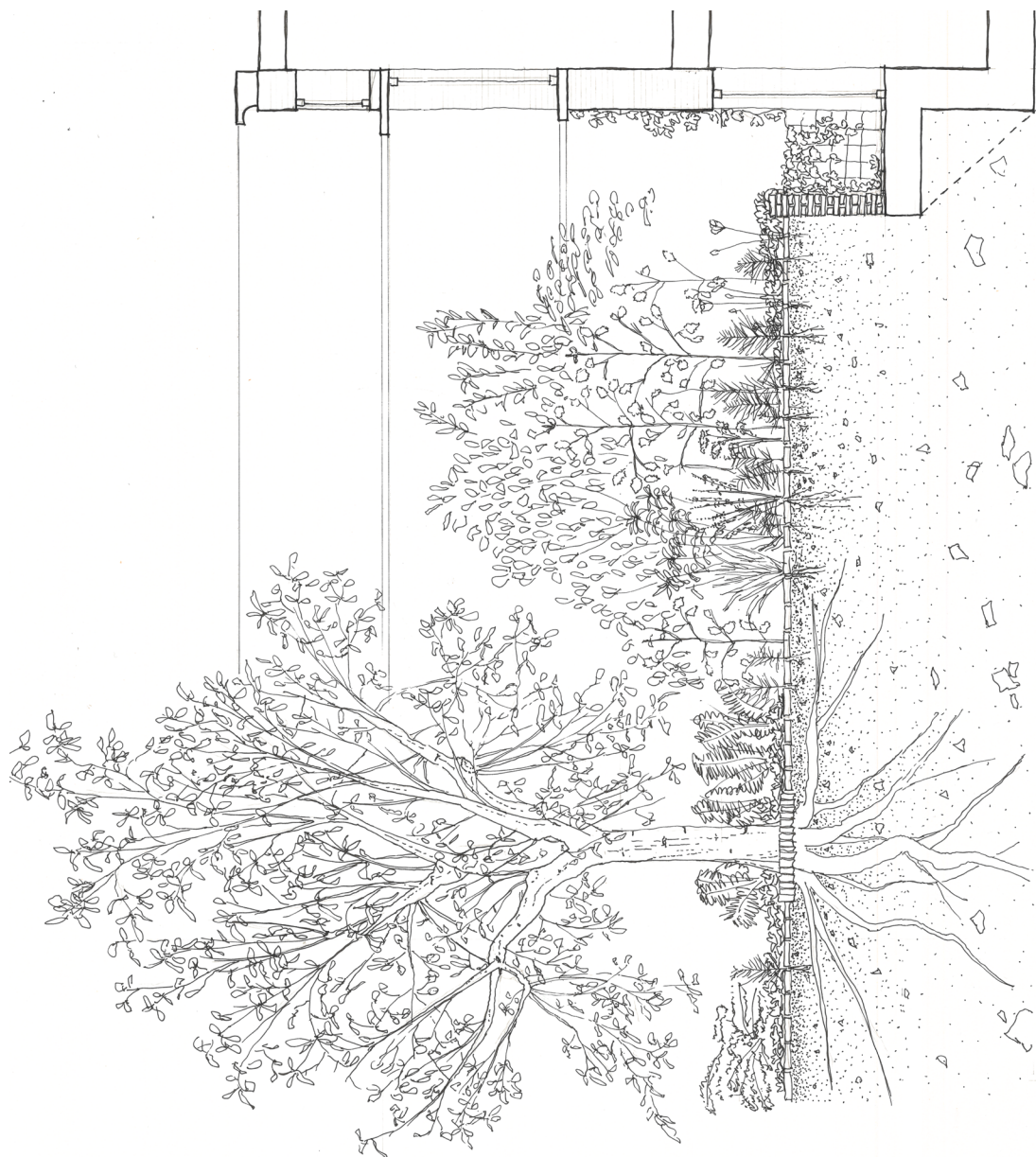
Reservoir of biodiversity

The great danger in a chemistry faculty is fire. To address that risk, each wing of the faculty is spread out and separated from the other wings so that a fire on one side would not reach another. The spatial consequence is a building organized around enclosed gardens. These sheltered spaces grew into genetic reservoirs rich with biodiversity. Yet they do not appear in the developer's plan as a criteria of relevance. Rather they are reduced to simplified patches of green colour and their vegetation dismissed for being in a bad state of 'maintenance'⁹.

The section shows the different levels at which the plants organise themselves. Some need more sun than others, some grow faster, some are pioneers to prepare the ground for others. These layered habitats result in a volumetric and spatial organisation that change over time through shifting equilibriums. This process sustains the habitats of the different plants in relation to for instance sun or humidity. The drawing is a momentary recording of how plants are situated in relation to the ground treatment, the presence of water and the building's façade.

Drawings are never complete enough to satisfy the complexity of these continually evolving living habitats. Nevertheless, the richness of the site imposes us to think and draw with them. To draw or to name something means to expose and value its existence. In this case, representing with care also means to care for what is represented. Plants are not an ornament added to the world, they are our world, they are us, we breathe with them¹⁰.







8 Fragments of the building

The ordinary and exceptional

This model is a selection of 8 fragments of both the most exceptional and the most typical spaces in and around the building. It is an instrument to open the inside and value the spatial qualities of the different parts of the building. The fragments are scaled in 1:33 and arranged together in the shape of the building. The level of detail sets a hierarchy and catches the attention on specific moments in the building, also leaving currently unused parts in suspense of definition.

Among the chosen fragments, our own living spaces enable a precise representation of how living and working in the building takes form. In addition, all the important entry systems are represented and show the systematic architectural language used for each one of them as well as the relation between the entries and their adjacent public spaces or private gardens. The main lecture hall, the warehouse and the library are three exceptional moments of the building.

Every fragment is made with the intention of being modified. The 'as found' state of the building now becomes the starting point for the continuation of this project. The MDF structure will be cut, unscrewed, unpasted, repainted, covered etc... and enable future mutations of the existing and explore the potentialities of a development rooted in what is.



GEBOUW VOOR SCHEIKUNDE



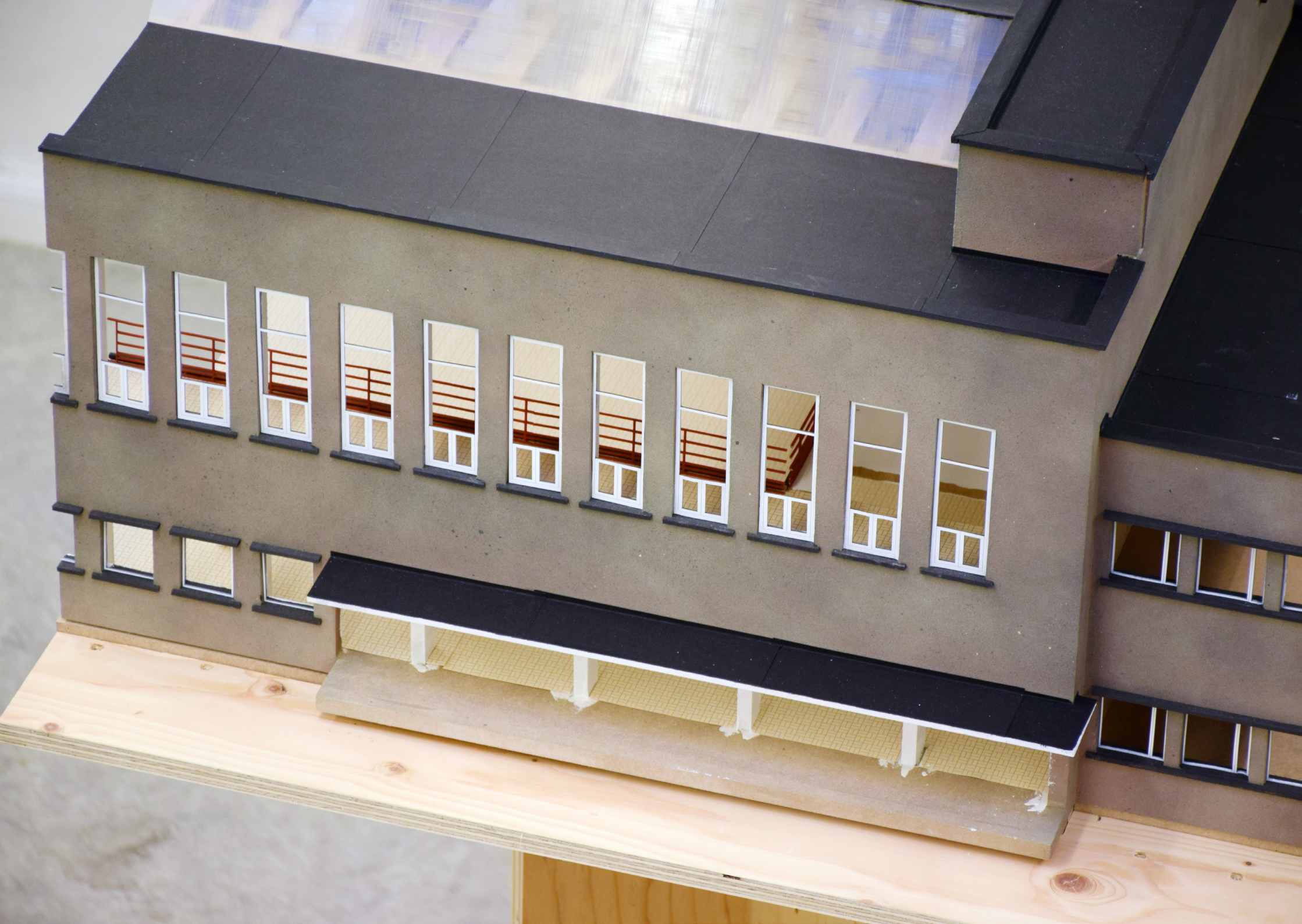


















A chronology of the site

The city and the campus

While originally the TU Delft campus was a patchwork of faculties interwoven in the city centre, it has since the sixties gradually moved to the isolated campus south of the city. This change was led by a variety of urban and political visions from the municipality, the university boards, the market, the different faculties, etc. On this wall the timeline shows these vectors of changes in the plot of Chemistry, unfolding the continuous interventions and visions that took place in and about the building.

Gele Scheikunde, together with Rode Scheikunde, formed the southern end of Delft at the time of their construction. By the 1960s both the Chemistries formed the link between the old city centre and the newly constructed modern(ist) campus. Still twenty years later the urban vision drew a strict line around the campus, assigning the Chemistries to the centre, away from the campus. Currently this break is being constructed with Gele Scheikunde's demolition in favour of housing. Rode Scheikunde, the current architecture faculty, is the last university building reaching out to the city while the campus is still expanding to the south and affirming its independence by claiming the train station Delft Zuid as station Delft Campus.

The ongoing isolation of the campus spatialises the increasing break with the past by turning its back to the (historical) center and growing into a "technological hub" instead. The condition to achieve progress seems to entail cutting the links with the past, putting at risk the urban continuity of Delft. With Gele Scheikunde on the border between the two zones, we have the chance to challenge this break.

Conclusion

"Dit is gebouwd om nog vijfhonderd jaar te staan"

The project's attention to the existing building originated from a deep concern about the irreversible ecological mutations at play. With developers taking the peaceful pathway of sustainable marketing and green growth as a viable mode of production, its destructive impact is quietly changing the faces of cities and landscapes.

In the past years, the developer's mode of valuation designed arguments to demolish most of this building. In opposition, this research tries to show how obsolescence is a rhetorical construct to sustain a more profound process: "Creative Destruction"¹¹. In order to keep economic growth going, old structures must be replaced. This "tyranny of the new"¹² has obvious damaging effects locked into, for instance, the single-dimension of sustainable certifications for new buildings that only focus on the performance of its lifetime and not the emitted carbon during new construction processes, nor the embodied energy of demolished structures. Depending on the way of calculation: «more carbon is emitted during the construction of the asset than during its entire lifetime»¹³. That is not to speak of the high quality materials, the solid constructions, the living habitats embedded in and related to the old "underperforming" buildings facing demolition.

If it is too late for sustainable development¹⁴, the most sustainable building is one that we do not build. As one of the (de)construction workers at our kitchen table said: "dit is gebouwd om nog vijfhonderd jaar te staan"¹⁵.

1. The material and immaterial environment of one's life. «Guattari, F., Pindar, I., & Sutton, P. (2011). The three ecologies (Reprint, Ser. Continuum impacts). Continuum.»
2. Understood as "the process of sudden devaluation and expendability" by «Abrahamson, M. A. (2016). Obsolescence, An Architectural History. The University of Chicago Press».
3. At the time of the construction of the chemistry faculty, the sciences were flourishing with new materials and new technologies that sparked a general sense of problem-solving: if rationally approached, any problem can be solved with scientific method.
4. Palimpsests are historical handwritten parchment where the past layers of writings are superimposed. Corboz A., used it as a metaphor to describe the territory and its layered structure in «Corboz, A. (1983). The land as palimpsest. Diogenes, 31(121). p.12-34.»
5. The "Gridding of the socius" from «Guattari, F., Pindar, I., & Sutton, P. (2011). The three ecologies (Reprint, Ser. Continuum impacts). Continuum. p.42.»
6. "The parliament of things" is a metaphor used by Bruno Latour to describe a politic of the things on which our lives rely. «Latour, B. (2008). A cautious Prometheus? A few steps toward a philosophy of design.»
7. «Moore, G. (2013). Adapt and Smile or Die!. In: Stiegler and Technics. Edinburgh:Edinburgh University Press, pp 17-33.»
8. «Stengers, I. (2005). Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices. Cultural Studies Review. 11.»
9. The "informatiebijeenkomst" that took place on the 29th of april between all the parties involved in the redevelopment project and the neighbours.
10. «Coccia, E. (2018). La vie des plantes: une métaphysique du mélange. Éditions Rivages.»
11. Considered by Schumpeter as the essential fact about capitalism in «Schumpeter, J. A. (1976). Capitalism, socialism and democracy. Allen and Unwin.»
12. «Caruso, A. (2008). The feeling of things. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa.»
13. "The emission impact of this embodied carbon happens today, while post-construction energy savings occur over the ensuing 30 to 50 years, which is too late." Retrieved from «green buildings conveniently ignore the emissions from their construction» on fastcompany.com
14. As argued by Dennis Meadows in the article "Is it Too Late for Sustainable Development?" (from smithsonianmag.com), 40 years after his publication «Limits to Growth», published in 1972 with a group of researchers from MIT for the Club of Rome.
15. "This is made to last another five hundred years."