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Dear All,

Welcome to your Fifth Year!

Following you'll find a prospectus for Thesis Section 9; including a brief introduction to the *Wild Forms Initiative*, as well as a declaration of what I consider a thesis to be and an outlined methodology for getting us there.

You have a lot to consider over the next several days as you review the studio prospectuses and complete your studio selection forms. If you have any questions, or would like to meet in person or over zoom to discuss your plans for the thesis year, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would love to hear from you.

In the meantime, I look forward to reviewing your statements and to spending the next year helping you to develop those interests.

All my best,
Brian

Hyperspecific
Caroline Fletcher, Section 9 Class of 2018
Thesis Honorable Mention
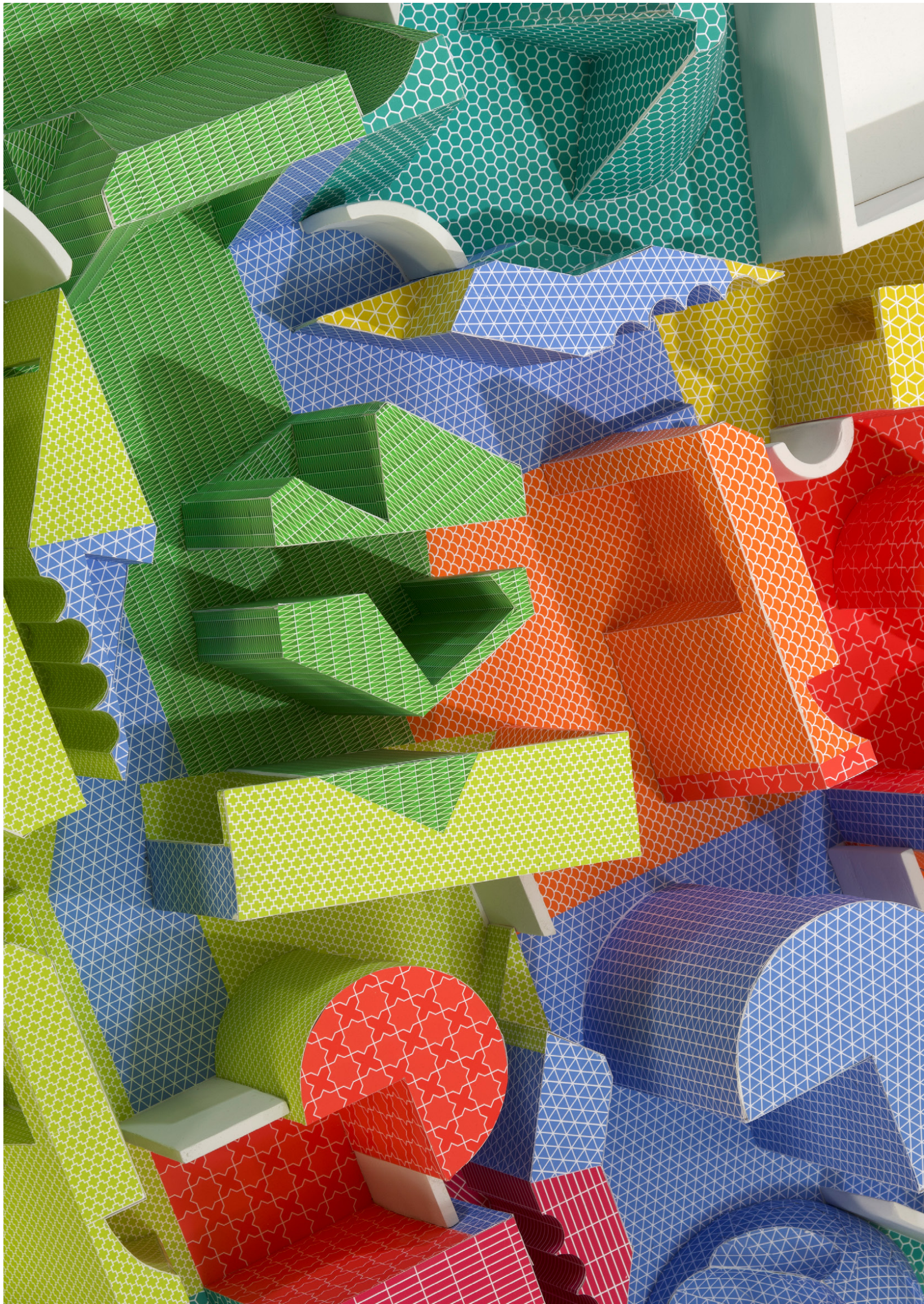
WILD FORMS INITIATIVE

During the 22/23 academic year, Thesis Section 9 will continue its *Wild Forms Initiative*—a platform for spatial and formal speculation based on an interrogation of the methods and conventions of architecture and its discourse.

The Wild Forms Initiative is based on the premise that architecture reifies our ontological assumptions—it gives physical form to our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. More importantly, if approached critically, architecture also has the potential to enable new ways of seeing—of situating—ourselves, both physically and philosophically, within a selected context.

I use the term *wild* in an effort to think with the work of Jack Halberstam. In their introduction to *Wildness,* the July 2018 volume of the South Atlantic Quarterly, Halberstam and co-editor Tavia Nyong'o note that wildness has always functioned as a foil to civilization. It is a dumping ground for all things *other*—the unmanageable, the undomesticated, the politically unruly. Wildness, they continue, names what hegemonic systems would interdict or push to the margins.[1] While this label—*Wild*—has been used to cast out that which does not fit; to assure us of the correctness of past decisions, it also provides us with an opportunity to confront and challenge them. To do so, Halberstam and Nyong'o call for a general *re-wilding* across all of the critical disciplines. This action—*to make wild*—includes, as Halberstam has said elsewhere, the unmaking, or undoing, of the logics and ideological systems of *this* world in an effort to move towards a new and better world.[2] Thinking in this way, can architecture also be *wilded*? What logics, ideological systems, and spatial orders, which underpin our built environment either quietly or overtly, require undoing?

One after another, catastrophic events call into question our past assumptions. For instance, Global Warming calls into question our relationship with nature, the environment, and its resources. The speed of global communication raises questions about the authenticity of cultural identities and practices. The recording and broadcasting of violence against black bodies exposes deep-seated racism within our society. The routine failure of industries reveals the effects of technology on contemporary culture and the role of labor and production in the shaping of our built environment. With each event comes an opportunity for new ideas: new forms of urbanization, new potentials for public behavior, new definitions of the domestic, new relationships between us and our objects and property, new theories of aesthetics, new ways of telling our histories...

The thesis year is an opportunity to question current values and related systems of order. We will try to be polemical—to say, *this* is how things are done now and we can all agree on that. But *here* is the problem with how things are, and *here's* how we might think differently about it. We will try to take a stand. To take risks with our thinking. To see design as a form of protest, or détournement, which does not only call attention to problems but also incites actions around them. Finally, we will work to withhold assumptions about what *must be*, in order to allow for the possibility of what *could be*. We will use naïveté as an advantage by following it up with a lot of good guesses.

This studio does not have a specific topical or formal agenda. Instead, the Wild Forms Initiative is interested in your individual concerns and interests related to architecture and the built environment. The studio will provide a methodology for developing that critique and inventing new formal and spatial strategies in an effort to confront architecture's status quo.

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[1]   Jack Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o, "Introduction: Theory in the Wild", in *The South Atlantic Quarterly, 117:3, July 2018.*

[2]   Jack Halberstam, "After All: On Dereliction and Destitution", Keynote, *39th Annual Gender Studies Symposium, Lewis & Clark College, April 2020.*

ARGUMENT FIRST...
OR WHAT'S A THESIS AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO A PROJECT?

Section 9 understands an architectural thesis to be a specific type of design research. It should question existing cultural and disciplinary protocols and practices in order to imagine new potentials—*new methods* and *new materialities* with *new formal outcomes* that result in *new behaviors*. A good thesis makes a speculative proposition about what architecture *could be* that is based on an informed critique of what *has been* and *what is*. I agree with the Architecture Department website where it says that a thesis should include 4 things:

> *"a critical assessment of architecture's current values and practices, a proposition for a valuable new idea for the direction of architecture, research of existing discourse and precedents in support of this idea, and a demonstration of the value of this idea in the form of a thesis design project."*

It is important to note from this quote that a "thesis" is not synonymous, nor interchangeable, with a "project". Instead a thesis *includes* a design project, among many components, for the purpose of testing its ideas. In this way, the thesis has implications beyond the scope of any single design project and utility to a larger constituency than a single work of architecture can possibly serve.

The fifth year studios at Cal Poly offer a wide range of approaches to thesis in order to accommodate the wide ranging interests of our student body. Section 9 places an emphasis on speculation and conceptual thinking, and uses the language of architecture (form, space, structure, material, etc...) to communicate those ideas. In this way, where some sections may be focused on the project, Section 9 is more focused on the crafting of your *argument*. As a result we will spend more time worrying about *how* and *why* you make things than on *what* you make.

Through the design studios that you have been a part of up to now you have worked on a number of projects. These projects have given you experience with a range of design approaches, offered ways of responding to contextual and programmatic types, allowed you to test formal methods, and integrate various building systems and material concerns into the design of a building. Of course, a thesis does include a project and, so, is a chance to experiment further with and demonstrate your competence in all of the areas above. In addition to this, though, the most important work of the thesis is in *framing the project*—defining a problem worth working on, crafting an argument for how the problem should be approached, developing the formal and spatial methods you'll use to respond to the problem, determining the appropriate context to test your response in, and finding representational methods to communicate your work.

To provide this experience, the thesis year is broken into 4 courses each with specific objectives. The Thesis Seminar (ARCH 492, Fall) will focus on defining your thesis topic, informing your position within that topic, and crafting a speculative argument for architecture. I'll talk a lot more about the seminar later in the prospectus. In the fall, the Thesis Studio (ARCH 481, Fall) will focus on developing design methods that best suit your research. Whether these are specific formal techniques, contextual analyses, zoning speculations, event planning, fabrication experiments, etc.… we'll work to find them by conducting a series of design experiments at a variety of scales including object, furniture, and building. In the winter, the Thesis Studio (ARCH 481, Winter) will focus on testing your argument through an architectural intervention in a specific context. Finally, in the spring, the Thesis Studio (ARCH 481, Spring) will focus on projecting our work and research back into the world. We will sharpen our methods of representation by producing final drawings and models, we'll refine our arguments through writing, and we'll exhibit the work at our own Studio Show, at the 5th Year Thesis Show, and in your own Thesis Books.

Instruments of a Liquid Kingdom, or...A Love Letter to the World
Kate Black, Section 9 Class of 2022
Thesis Award
RIBA President's Medal Nominee

MAKING ARCHITECTURAL PROBLEMS

A fundamental aspect of every thesis is defining a problem to work on. In your normal life, I imagine that you spend a good deal of your energy trying to avoid problems. In a thesis, though, without a problem you have nothing to work on and no way to know if you're making any progress. Through our work, especially in the ARCH 492 seminar, we'll tease out your initial insights and interests in order to create an *architectural problem*.

Good problems are specific and significant. Problems need to be specific enough that they can be worked on. They should elicit a response and provide some way of evaluating its success. They should also be significant enough that they cannot be responded to easily, and haven't already been responded to too many times by others. Answers to the problem should not be obvious. While a good problem is born out of a personal insight and interest of yours, your work on the problem should be of value to others as well, and so the problem should be relevant to architectural discourse and the world beyond.

Importantly, a successful thesis defines a problem that can be worked on through architecture—that is through material, formal, and spatial means. A thesis explores the discipline's capacity to engage the world. It addresses culture through architecture and vice-versa. While your reading and research should draw from a wide range of sources within and outside the conventional boundaries of architectural discourse; including philosophy, art, science, current events, and popular culture, the method of exploration will ultimately employ (or push the limits of) the tools of architectural production and critique. Therefore, it is important that you define a problem in a way that allows you to work on it through architecture.

Finally, all this talk about problems and not a single mention of solutions. A thesis doesn't need to 'solve' the problem. And we want to be careful that we don't create a scenario where solving the problem is our only measure of success. Instead, a better goal would be that, through your work on the problem, you are able to disrupt common understandings and challenge current practices. Your work on the problem will be your contribution to an evolving lineage of architectural ideas.

Unordained Ordinary
Nadthachai Kongkhajornkidsuk, Section 9 Class of 2021
Thesis Award

the Art of the Deal

welcome to the post american agora
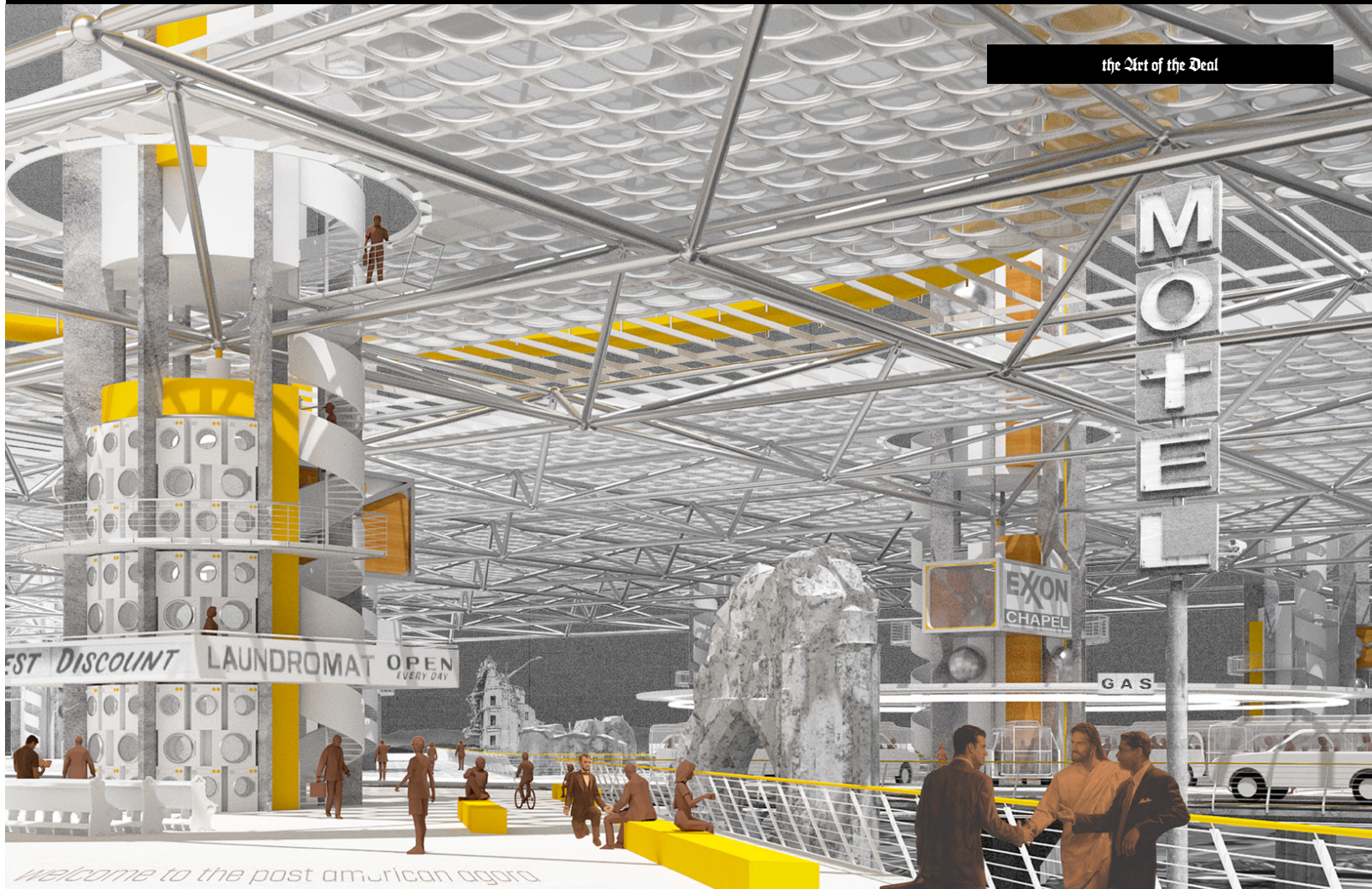
ARCH 492 SEMINAR: FROM INSIGHT TO ARTICLE

We will use the ARCH 492 seminar as a space for developing the written component of your thesis, which we will produce in short iterative pieces over the course of the fall quarter. I emphasize the written thesis because I can see that taking the time in the fall to draft a clear thesis argument provides the best foundation for the production of a radical formal proposition over the remainder of the year. The thesis article situates your own ideas and work within the context of cultural and disciplinary history. In this way, the article establishes you as an agent in that history, with the capacity to shape it rather than only react to it.

Although design and research are both iterative rather than linear processes, we can think about the development of the written thesis over several phases...

Getting started requires that you **begin with an insight**. An insight could be something you've experienced or observed, something you are suspicious of or curious about. Whatever the starting point for your thesis, it is important that it inspires excitement and wonder in you. W*onder, as Mark Lee notes in his explanation of his curatorial approach to the 2017 Chicago Architecture Biennial, "does not imply complete understanding but instead triggers further inquiry."* As you inquire further into your initial insight you will work to **define a problem** that can be worked on through material, formal, and spatial means. Part of working on that problem will require that you **position your work within an existing discourse**. We will draw on a wide range of sources within and outside the boundaries of architectural discourse; including philosophy, art, science, current events, and popular culture in order to shape our positions. We will dedicate much of our seminar time to reading and discussing texts together, which will provide a place to start and some common threads through our studio. Other references you will find and review on your own and with my help. In seminar we will discuss ways of becoming active participants in that discourse. While some of this research will focus on reference collection, we will also **pursue projective design research methods** that are born of making and experimentation. While much of the design work will occur in the ARCH 481 studio, we'll use the seminar to find the tools and techniques of exploration that are best suited for your particular interests.

Your thesis article will put all of the above together in order to **articulate an architectural argument.** One of the best, and most exciting, pieces of instruction that I have received on crafting a strong argument is that *arguments are in fact arguable.* A good argument is not safe, it does not state the obvious, or reiterate the status quo. Instead an architectural argument is inherently risky, original, and asserts a critical position. As a result, the things you make in response to that argument will also be risky...they'll be radical, and they'll inspire your audience to question their past assumptions.

Post-American Agora
Scott L-Esperance, Section 9 Class of 2021
Thesis Honorable Mention
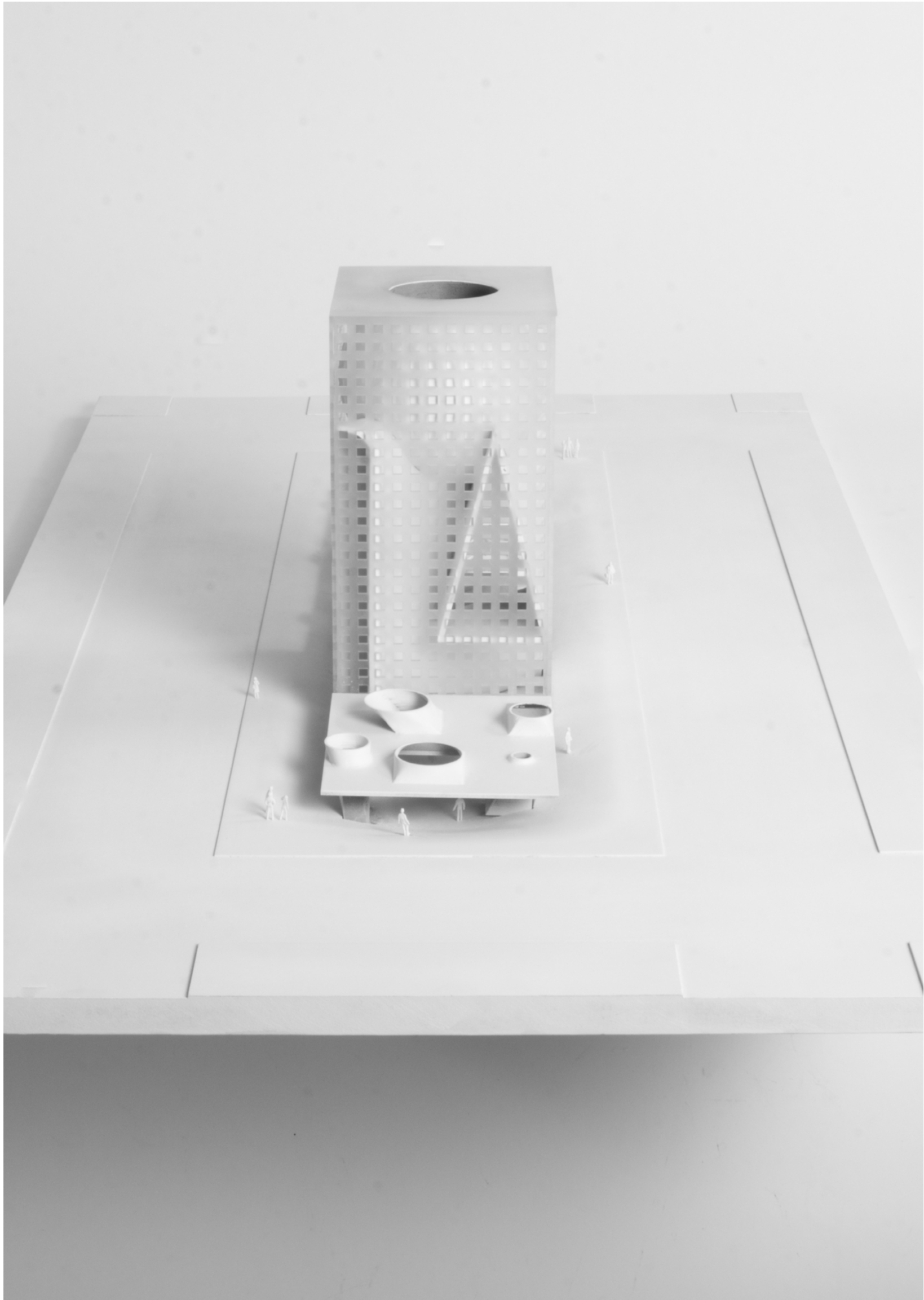
NOTES ABOUT DESIGN RESEARCH

Research is a term that we use often but rarely take the time to define. We tend to limit our use of *research* in design to passive tasks such as collecting information, whether it be at the library, over the internet, in a lab, or on a site.

But, in architecture, research is also about exploration and experimentation; the testing of architectural ideas. In this way, research is projective.

Research methodologies are different for every field. As it relates to the projective practice of design, research is less about proving a fact than it is about finding an opportunity. Data alone is not research. Research is equally about finding *and* making. It includes gathering evidence and experimenting with what can be done with that evidence.

In the context of an architectural thesis, the rigor with which you develop and apply research methods will be the single most important factor in your work. What tools and techniques of exploration are best suited to your particular interests? How do you transform available tools and make those techniques your own?

In Loving Memory
Christian Salkeld, Section 9 Class of 2019
Thesis Award
RIBA President's Medal Nominee
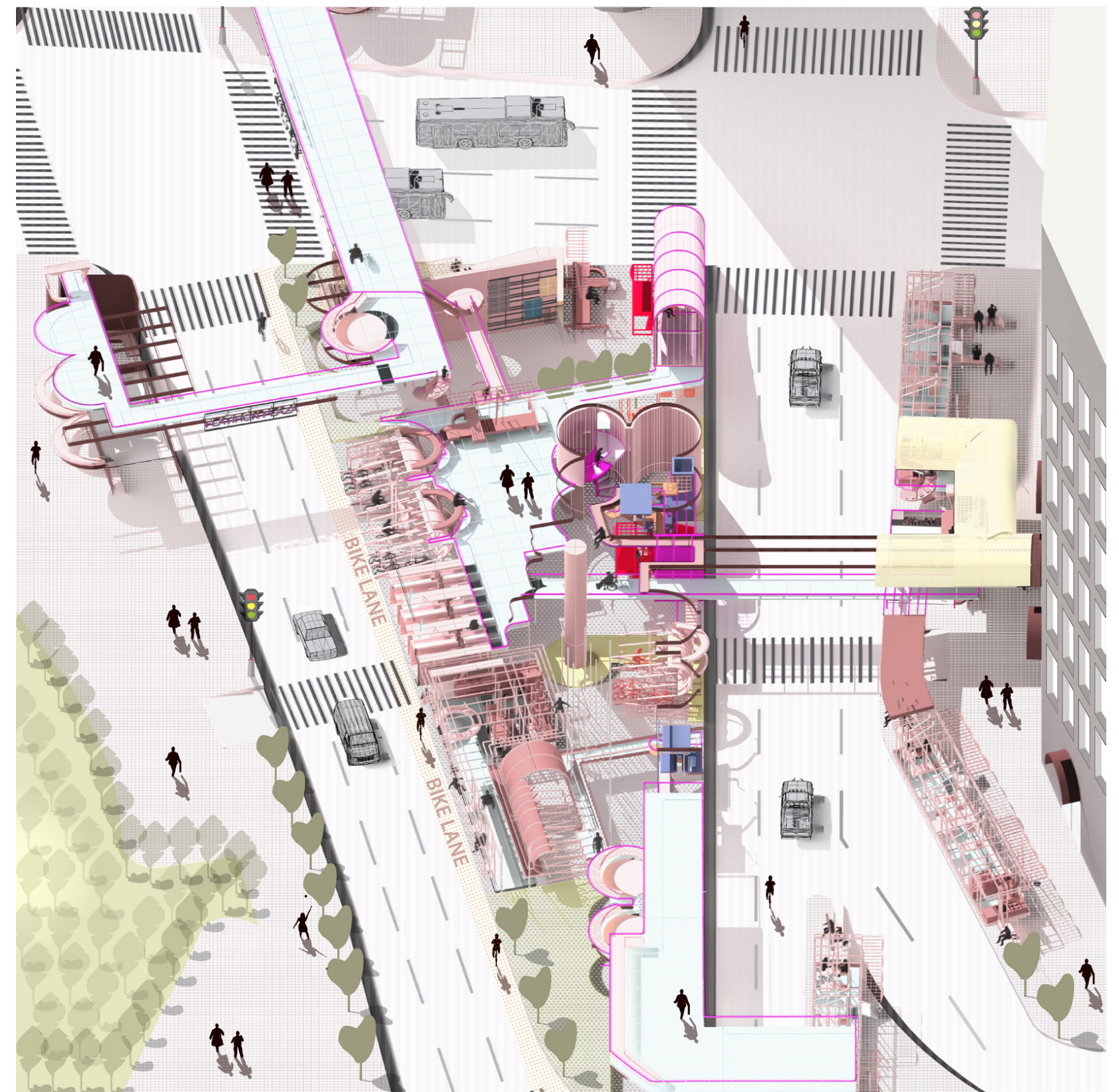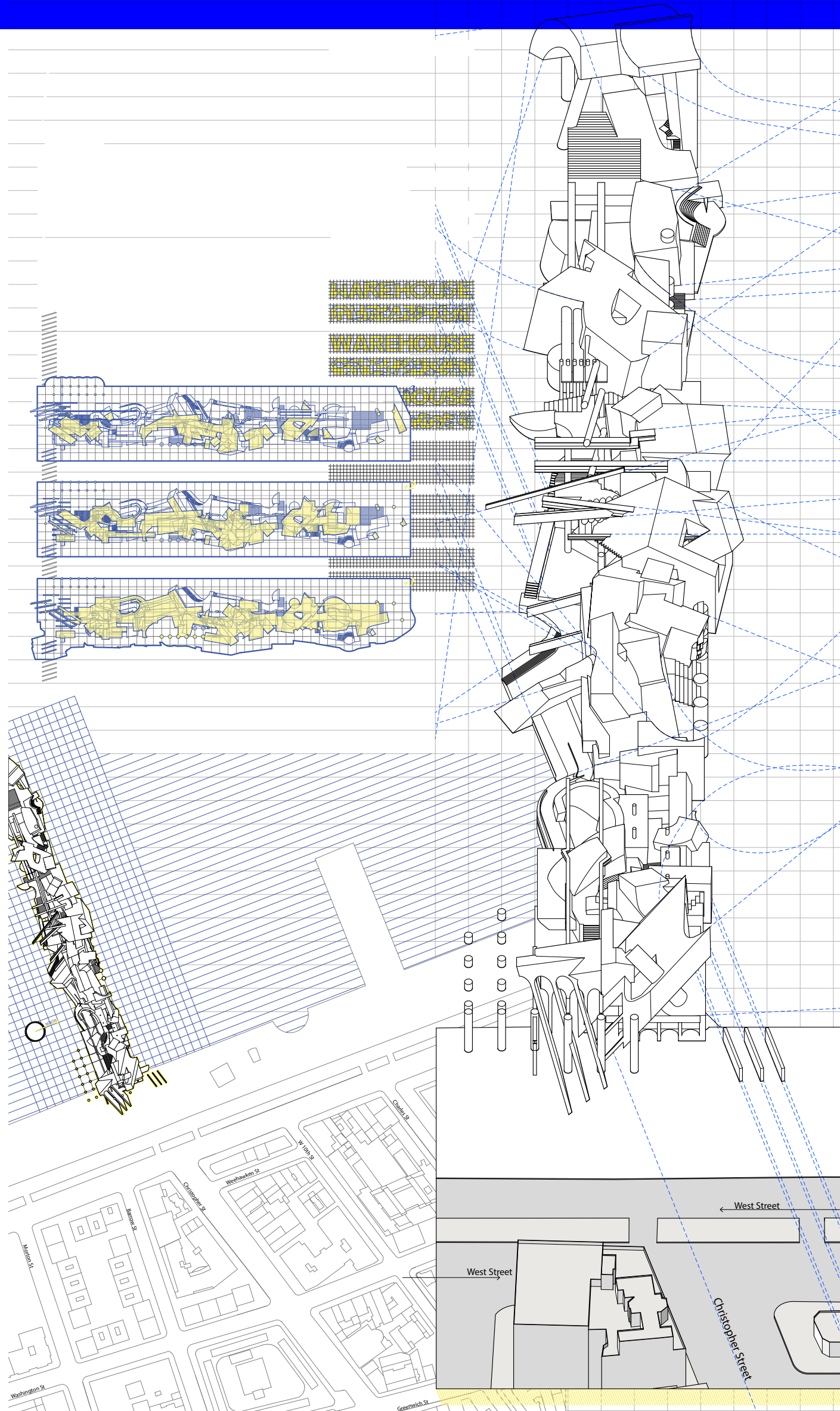
"Yes, please come in. I wasn't expecting anyone."
John Lin, Section 9 Class of 2019
Thesis Award

Constructing Impermanance
Serah Kallerackal, Section 9 Class of 2021
AIA Design Citation.

STUDIO SHOWS

Throughout the year you will have several opportunities to present your work and receive input from your faculty members and colleagues. Each review will have a different format and we will discuss the deliverable requirements for each as a group as they come up. These may include: *Abstract, Vellum, Section, Detail, Qualifying Review*, and the *End-of-the-Year Show*, as well as those reviews and shows dedicated to our own studio section alone.

In the spring quarter we will have the opportunity to mount an exhibition of the work of our studio. After working throughout the year on an individual project, the challenge of the studio show is to develop an approach to curating the work of the studio as a whole. This provides a useful format for looking back at your own thesis project with a fresh perspective late in the year.

(left) **Yours Truly Show**
Section 9 Class of 2019

*(above)* **I DO Show**
Section 9 Class of 2022

STUDIO TRAVEL

I believe that it is important that you develop your thesis in the broadest possible setting and I see group travel as an excellent way to expand the influences on the work that happens within the studio.

Over the past several years in Section 09, we have had great travel experiences. In the 2017-18 year we traveled to Chicago to visit the 2017 Chicago Architecture Biennial. The format of the biennial provided a great set of references for our theses. In 2018-19 we went to Miami. In the last decade Miami has initiated a campaign to become a center for contemporary architecture, with landmark projects by OMA, Herzog & De Meuron, Arato Isozaki, Foster and Partners, Leong Leong, Jurgen Mayer, Aranguren + Gallegos Arquitectos, and many more. In 2021/22 we traveled to New York City. I am excited that covid-related travel restrictions are lifting and look forward to our planning a 2022/23 trip!

Domestic and International travel is a great opportunity to learn from unfamiliar cultures as well as share your thesis work with professionals from outside the comfort of Cal Poly. I encourage this opportunity and we will discuss as a group when and where the most appropriate travel will be.

*(left) **Miami 2019***

*(above) **New York 2022***
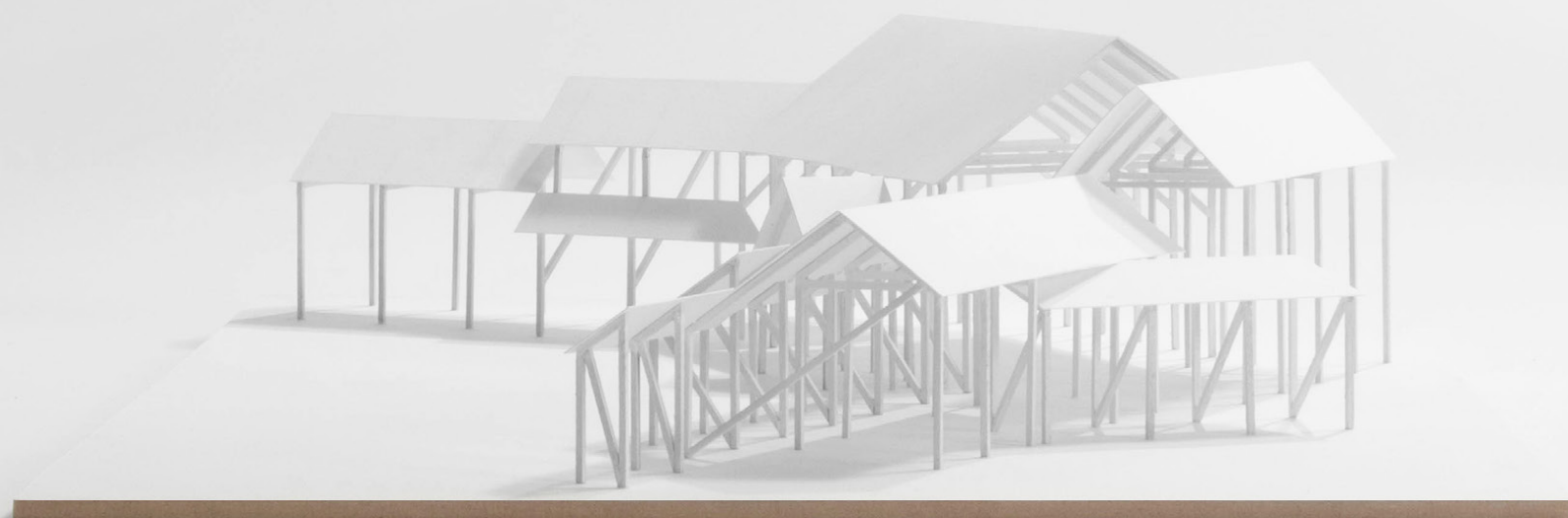
BIOGRAPHY

Brian is trained as both an Architect and a Landscape Architect. He received the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from Cal Poly and worked as a Landscape Designer and Planner for seven years in San Luis Obispo. He moved to New York City in 2006 to study at Pratt Institute, where he earned the Master of Architecture. While in New York, Brian worked as an architectural designer for SYSTEM ARCHITECTS, a practice led by Jeremy Edmiston and Douglas Gauthier, as well as the Design Office for Research and Architecture (DORA) led by Peter Macapia.

Brian remained in New York until 2012, launching his design practice, *BOTH*, with partner Carmen Trudell and beginning teaching with simultaneous appointments at Rutgers University and Pratt Institute from 2008 to 2012. Brian was awarded the 2012-14 Virginia Teaching Fellowship at the University of Virginia and moved to Charlottesville. In 2014 he accepted a tenure track appointment in the Landscape Architecture Department at UVA where he remained until 2016. Most recently, Brian has held the position of Associate Professor of Architecture at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, where he directs a section of 5th year thesis and lectures on Architectural Technology topics related to sites and contextual systems.

Brian's personal research interests hover around topics of building and site technologies and the way that we engage them, as designers, through drawing and expanding modes of representation. His contributions to the evolving field of computational techniques in landscape architecture can be found in publications including *Landscape Architecture and Digital Technologies* (Jillian Wallis and Heike Rahmann), *Codify: Parametric and Computational Design in Landscape Architecture* (eds. Bradley Cantrell and Adam Mekies), and *Representing Landscapes: Hybrid* (ed. Nadia Amoroso).

Cage-free Labor
Min Ho Kim, Section 9 Class of 2022
Thesis Honorable Mention