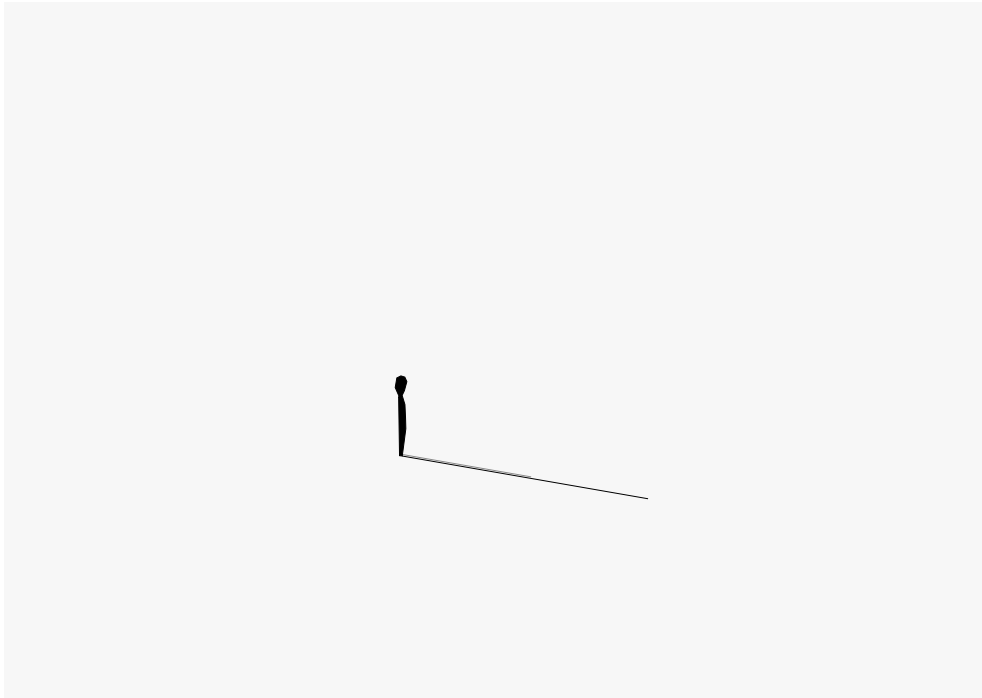


Spirited Back

*Exploring the notion of architecture as a place with
perceptual experience*



MASTER THESIS
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SPRING SEMESTER 2020
MATTER SPACE STRUCTURE
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CHALMERS

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-exploring the notion of architecture as a place with perceptual experience

Jingyao Ji, 2020

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Life is a practice, and throughout this life, what we have been searching for is our naturally true identity. Identity is actually how we understand the world based on perception. But this search process might be hindered a lot. Some people are lost or institutionalized, and some people have always been using other people's definitions of the good life to set their own life. Maybe the reasons are that our natural perception is numb due to the working and living pressure, or the influence of other people's language overwhelms our perception. This thesis explores the way to strengthen natural perception in the architectural aspect. Therefore, phenomenal experience is considered as the starting point of architectural design in this thesis to situate people themselves in the world.

This thesis aims to explore how architecture can strengthen people's perception through spatial experience.

The research of this thesis contains exploring the theories of Steven Holl's phenomenological approach to architecture, the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Heterotopia elaborated by Michel Foucault to find a solution and then put into practice and test it in the design.

The thesis results in creating an introspective space for a certain group of people who work in Financial Street in Beijing. Through phenomenal experiences of the particular situation materialized by architectural means, people's perception is gradually amplified in the space where they can prepare themselves step by step to feel the infinity of time and space physically and psychologically. In this way, people perceive the world and themselves.

Keyword: Identity, experience, perception, psychological preparation, materialization

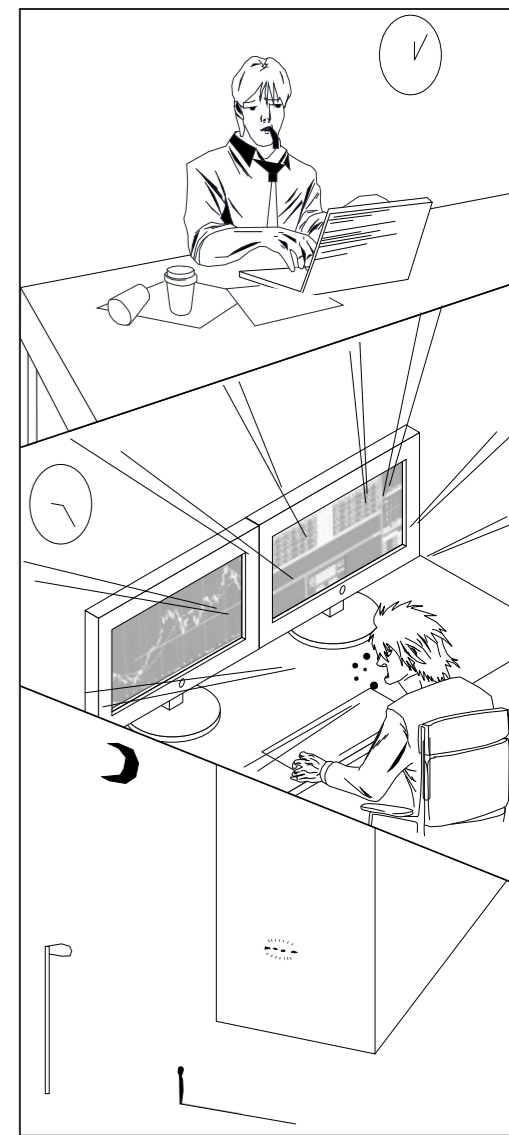
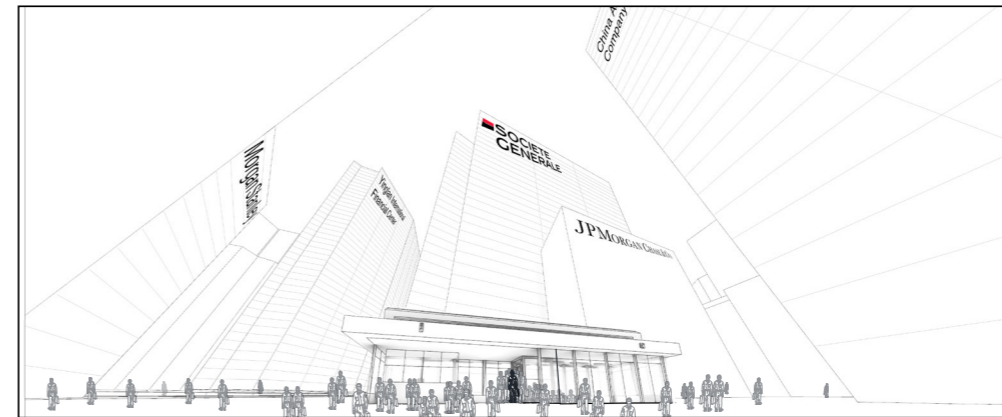
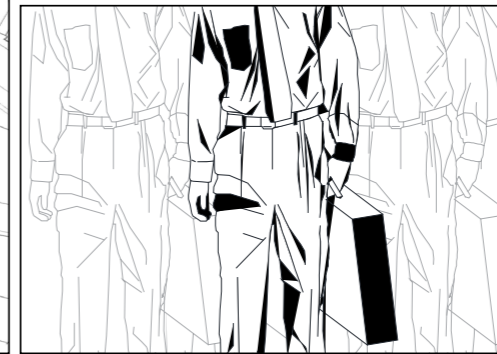
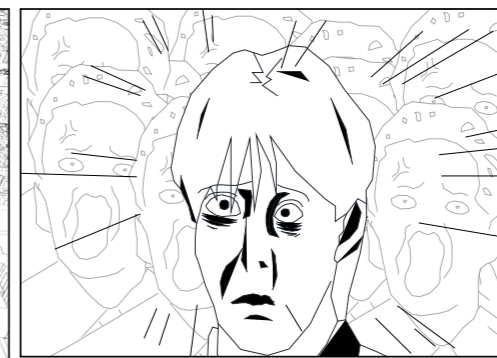
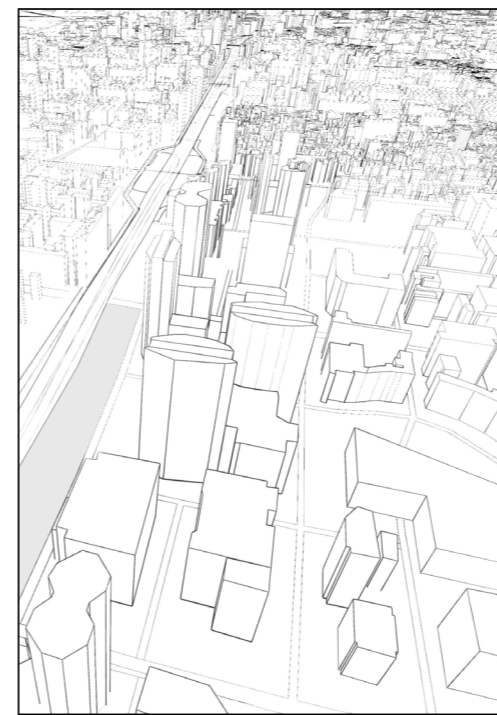
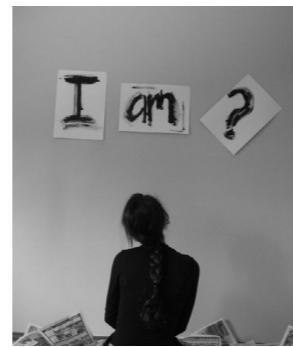
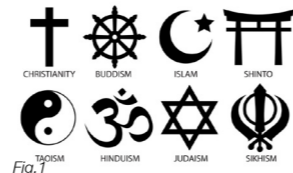
1. Introduction
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1. Introduction

Background

Religious disciples believe that living under the guidance of doctrine is the existence of life. Schopenhauer believes that consciously restraining all the will of human beings is the existence of life. Nietzsche believes that abandoning all man-made constructions and the so-called morality, struggling to become the strong is the existence of life. Hegel even thinks that the whole history is purposeful, and the purpose of personal life is to strive for history.

There is no right or wrong or better. It does not matter you believe in which one as long as it follows our nature. Identity is about how you perceive the world inside out and how you see yourself outside in. We understand the world through being a body situated in it. At the same time, my existence as subjectivity is conscious through the perception of the world. It's like, I can't see my feet in the shoes, but I know they are there because they are squeezed by the shoes. We perceive the world and ourselves through experience.



But sometimes the perception is distorted by the sophisticated "secular world". For instance, are you institutionalized? In the movie The Shawshank Redemption, there is a description of institutionalization:

"These walls are kind of funny like that – First, you hate them, then you get used to them. Enough time passed, you get so dependent on them."

Or, have you always been using other people's definitions of good life to set your own life? Or, have you ever done something contrary to your intentions for the benefit or a moment of happiness. And what's more terrifying is that in China, especially in Beijing, the intensity of work is huge. Everyone is tired, they are also tired of thinking, and there is no time to introspect. The reasons for these phenomena might be that our natural perception is numb due to the working and living pressure, or the influence of other people's language overwhelms our perception.

So, this thesis explores the place which could reawaken the sensibility of the body through specific and strong situations. Through offering spatial experiences, the building gives people some inspiration to understand the world naturally. Through the experience in situations step by step, people might refresh themselves, follow their nature.

Comics: Made by author

Main question

In a sophisticated society that is easy to get lost, how architecture can strengthen people's perception through spatial experience.

Purpose & Aim

Take Beijing as an example, select a certain group of working people as the target and create an introspective space for them to strengthen their natural identity. The aim is to investigate the power of architecture that makes people prepare themselves for enhancing experience and to explore how to materialize it.

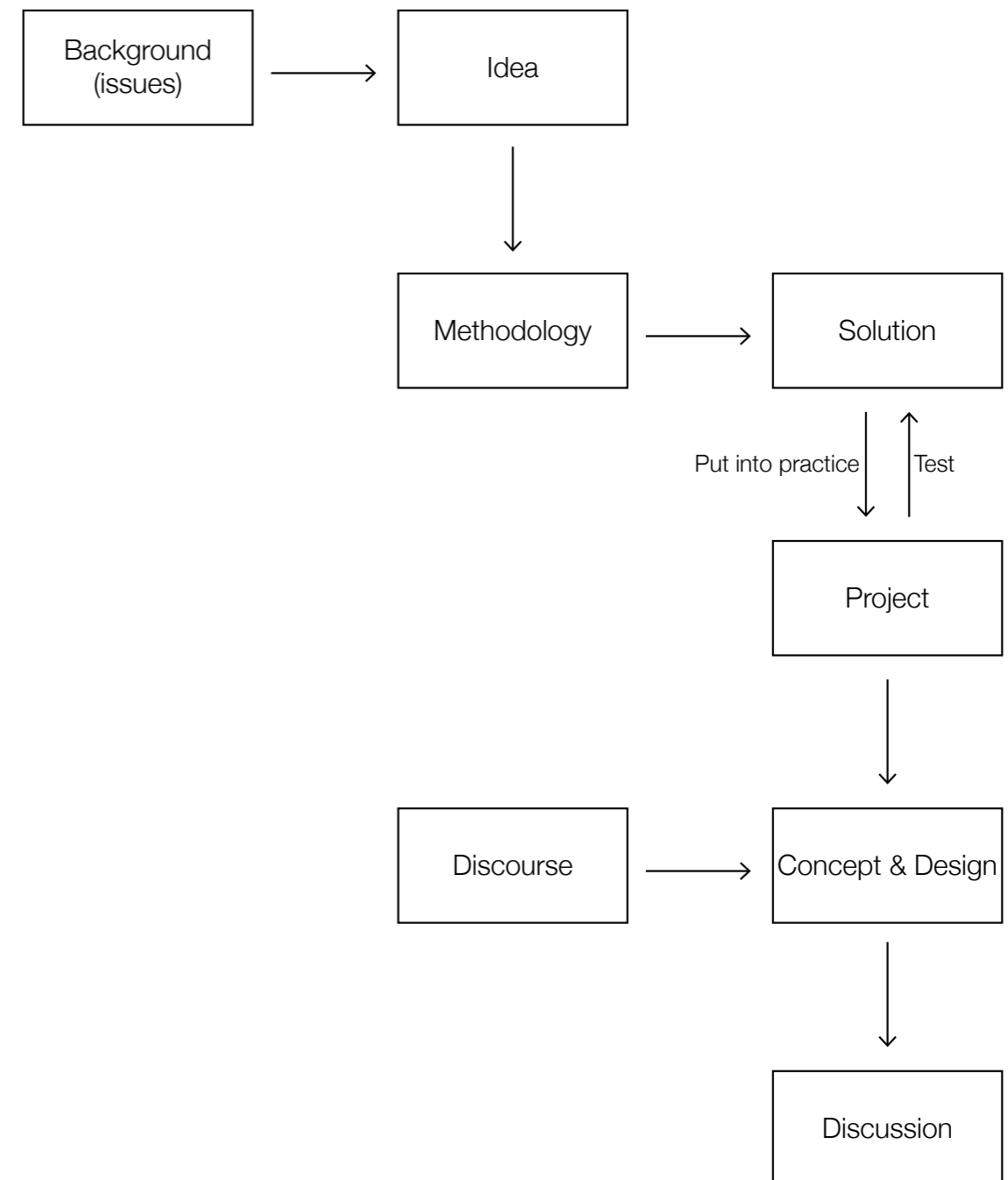
Delimitations

Beijing financial street, one of the employment-intensive areas, was selected as the research object. People who work here are the target. Exploring the preparation of human beings in experience (psychological journey) and creating atmosphere through design strategies and architectural elements are the focus of this thesis.

Reading instruction

After the chapter of Introduction, the thesis explores how to achieve the aim which consists of three aspects:

- How to strengthen their perception of the world and themselves*
- How to prepare themselves for enhancing experience*
- How to materialize it*



2. Methodology

Theory

Steven Holl's phenomenological approach to architecture & phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty

The concept of perception and embodiment is focused on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy through which the relation between body-subject and the world is clarified and it is regarded as depending on lived experiences.

Steven Holl absorbed Merleau-Ponty's concepts of "perception", "body" and "world", trying to use this as a basis to explore the meaning of the lived world. He believes body and the world support each other and the relationship acts as "the reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968, p. 138)

He puts forward that the essence in the realm of architecture is a construction with phenomenal qualities intertwined within a human's perceptual experience.

Holl states:

Architecture is bound to situation. Unlike music, painting, sculpture, film, and literature, a construction (non-mobile) is intertwined with the experience of a place. (Holl, S., 1989, p. 9.)

It contains two aspects. One is the architect's perception of the building; the other is the attempt to create an opportunity in the building that allows perceivers to experience or guide them to feel the world.

To achieve that in a building, the concept is materialized by architectural elements of space, light, color, material.

Holl states:

Structure, material, space, color, light, and shadow intertwine in the fabrication of architecture. (Holl, S., 1998 (first published in 1996), p. 11.)

Materialization makes architecture a reality. It provides experience which enables the perception of specific situations in architectural forms.

Theory

Michel Foucault's theory about Heterotopias

When exploring psychological experiences, Michel Foucault's theory about Heterotopias has been used as the theoretical foundation. Heterotopia is a place of collective perception which have overlapped more layers of meaning than we intuitively experience as "other". If utopia is a place that does not exist, then heterotopia does, but it depends on imagination.

Six principles

1. In a broad sense, "heterotopia" includes something created by culture in a real space, but there is not only one culture in the world, the multicultural situation is "heterotopia".

In the primitive society
Crisis heterotopia:

Today

Deviation from heterotopia:

Privileged, sacred places that prohibit others from entering (adolescents, menstrual women, parturients, elderly people, etc.)

Rest houses, psychiatric clinics, prisons, nursing home

2. Heterotopias function in very different ways in the history of a society. Due to cultural development, heterotopia may play different roles in the city

3. Heterotopia has the power to juxtapose several spaces and venues that cannot coexist with each other in a real place. The cinema is the place where the two-dimensional screen reveals three-dimensional space projected on it.

4. The relationship between heterotopia and time. Because time and space are symmetrical and inseparable elements, isolates time while isolating space, which Foucault calls "heterochronies". For example, the creation of all cultural relics and documents at different times stored in one place, makes museums and libraries the places of the collection of all time, all culture types, and all interests.

5. Heterotopia consists of an open and closed system. For some heterotopic places, people believe that they have entered, but they are actually excluded by the illusion.

6. It is the two poles of space. On the one hand, it creates an illusory space, but on the other hand, this most illusory space reveals the real space. Thus, heterotopia spaces operate via a double logic: they are real spaces that show the reality to be the illusion, or they are perfected spaces, more rational and ordered than normal spaces. The former one is to set off and critique the reality and cruelty of the real world, the other one is to create an over-real space to the metaphor that the real world is actually the illusion.

Experiential Time

Time can be perceived through movement.

The time in which a subject experiences a work of architecture (Holl, Mcvay, & Futagawa, 2012, p. 20).

A different, impressive, and shocking experience might make people have a clearer perception of time because we more easily focus on aspects as the light and the weather. We see things moving (clouds) or changing (light/shadow). Our experience in the building gives it a chance to intertwine the suspense in the time of movement by holding still now and then, and thus having the possibility of being affected by those meteorological and cosmological qualities.

Duration

The building presents the meaning of time in the macro scale which can be decades.

Time related to either the change, transformation, and/ or decay of the building (Safont-Tria et al., 2012, pp. 124- 126)

If we move to a macro scale of time, it also gives building a gradually changing face through the weathering of material. The building slowly takes on the force of nature, making itself unique in different stages of time in its life. Then the time of the weather acquires 'texture' (it will come alive). Then and only then will the different perceptions as the result of different positions add up to an experience in the sense that your experience is changed during time.

Methods

How to strengthen their perception of world and themselves

Through the study of the theories above, I got the idea to strengthen their perception of the world and themselves which is creating situations for preparing themselves to perceive the infinity of space and time. The reason to strengthen our perception is that sometimes it is distorted in the sophisticated “secular world” or it goes against our nature. Maybe because our natural perception is numb due to the working and living pressure, or the influence of other people's language overwhelms our perception. So this place is supposed to reawaken the sensibility of the body through specific and strong situations which is the process of preparing themselves to feel the infinity of time and space. In a series of preparations, people gradually get rid of the distractions in “real” life, and focus on the body and situation--the experience of a place. In this way, their perception is gradually amplified. On the other hand, the infinity of time and space gives an impression that in front of the infinity, people's life is fleeting so why not save your time and follow your natural perception. Be brave being out of institutionalization. Do not care that much about others' language.

Methods

How to prepare themselves for enhancing experience

Sequence

In this building, people's perceptual experience is the key point that is affected by the sequence to a great extent. The entire space clues to people preparing themselves to feel the infinity of time and space to amplify their perception. The sequence can connect different atmospheres in scenarios to create the coherence storyline. People can perceive a strong intention when walking through and at the same time have a strong sense of experience. Psychologically, scenarios of illusion created by atmosphere mobilize people's awareness and produce empathy. I will use 3D models and section drawings to explore humans' experience physically and psychologically in different steps of preparation in scenarios.

Methods

How to materialize it

The perceptual experience is materialized by means of architectural elements through which a certain atmosphere of situation is created. I will mainly focus on the effect of material, the haptic feeling and smell of texture, the details, and the qualities of light, the form, through which the reality of architecture is materialized.

Different materials have different functions creating an atmosphere. I will use rendering or collage to compare the qualities in space when using different materials. Light can trigger our sensibility of haptics and vision. Thus, I regard light as an important element. It will be experimented with the qualities of the space through working models and 3D models. Different ways of transmitting natural light directly or not will be tested to create artistic effects or meteorological and cosmological qualities. Color and form will also be tested in working models.



Fig.6 Spirited away



Fig.7 The Shawshank Redemption



Fig.8 Therme vals--Peter Zumthor



Fig.9 Translucent concrete



Fig.10 Capilla San Bernardo--Nicolás Campodonico



Fig.11 Theater in 18th

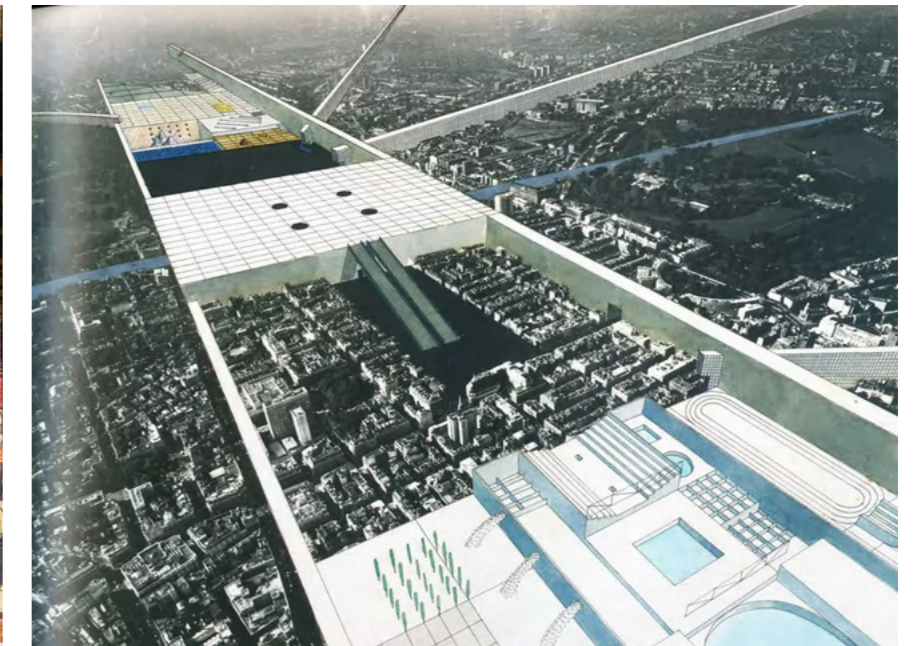
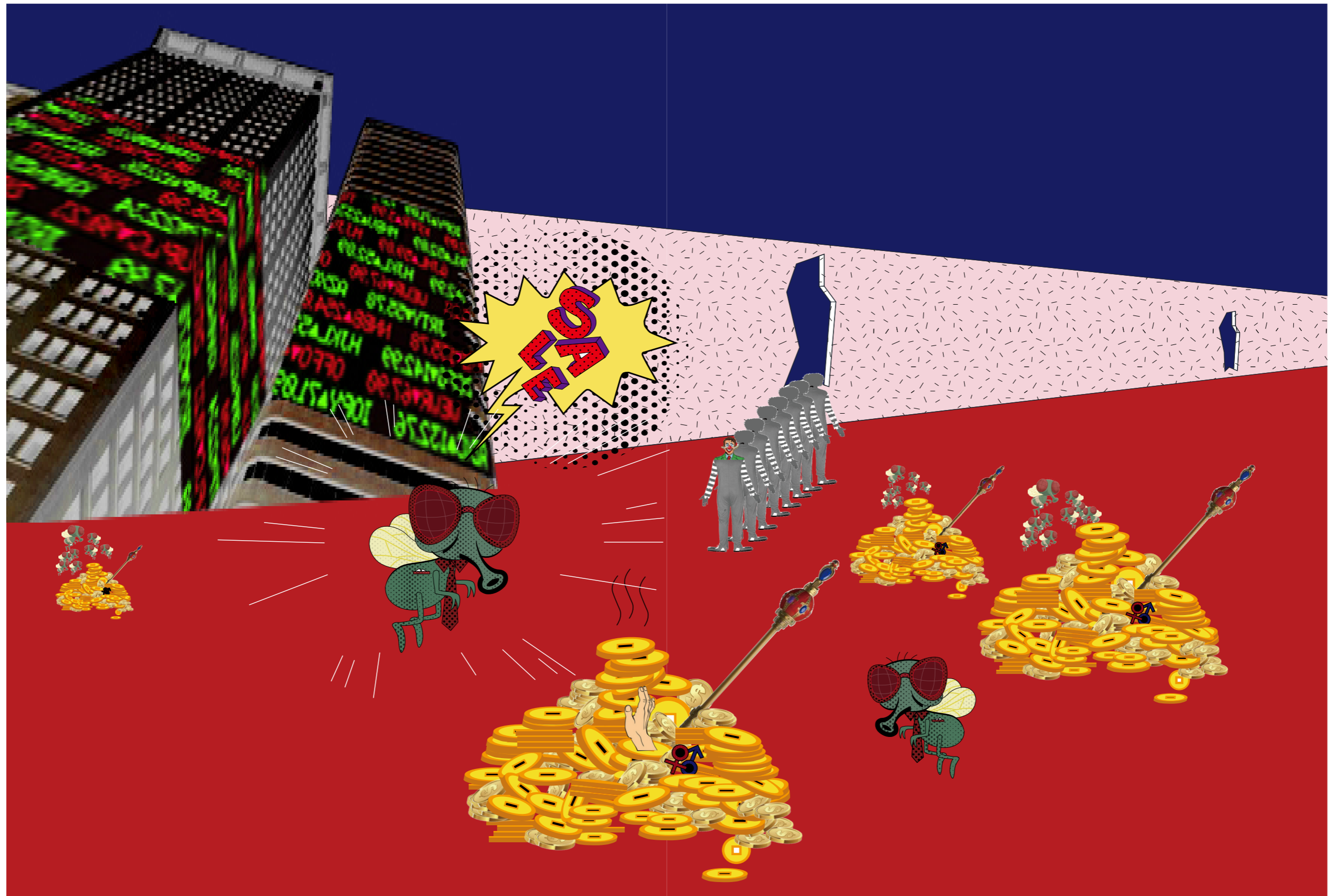
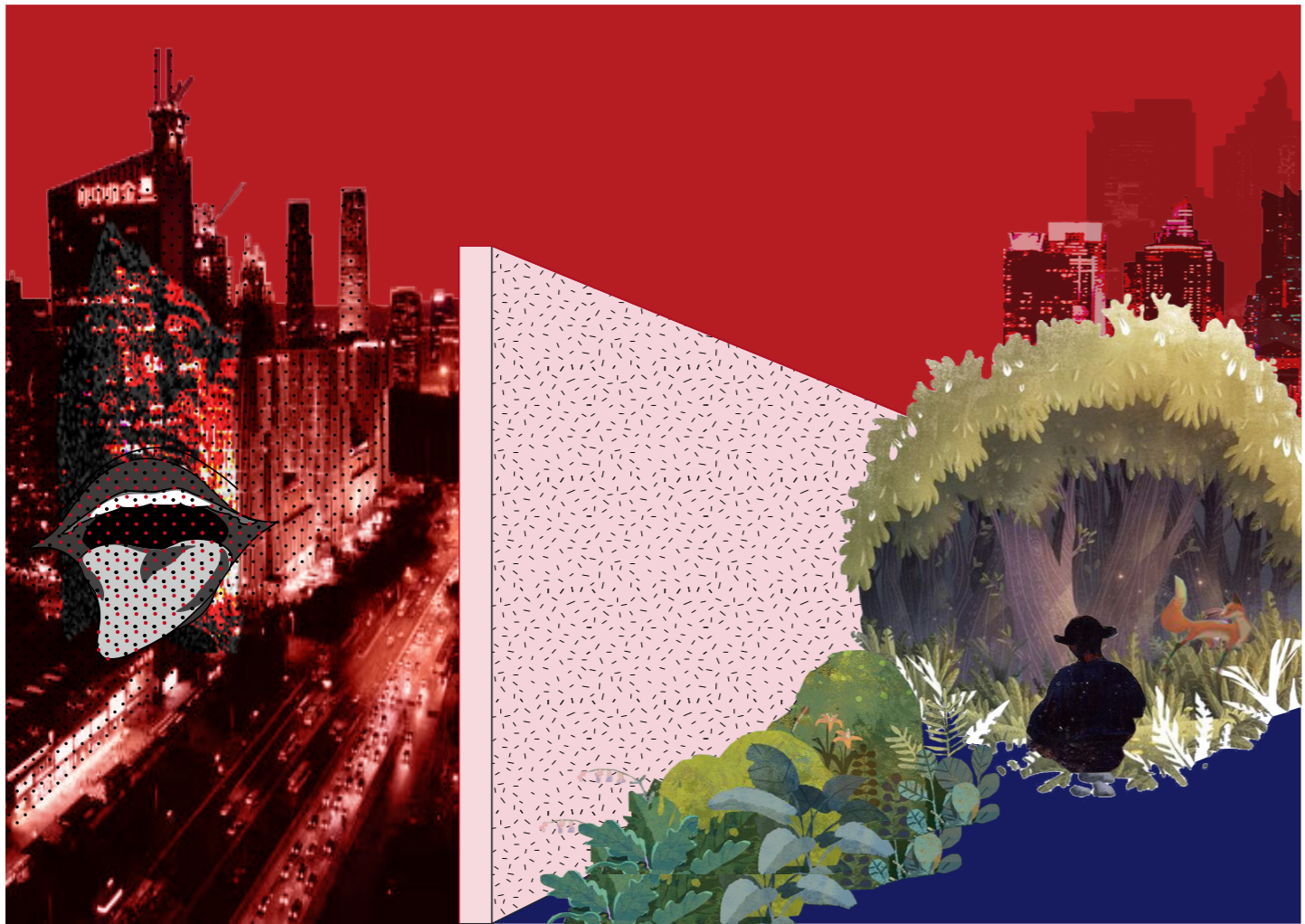


Fig.12 Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture

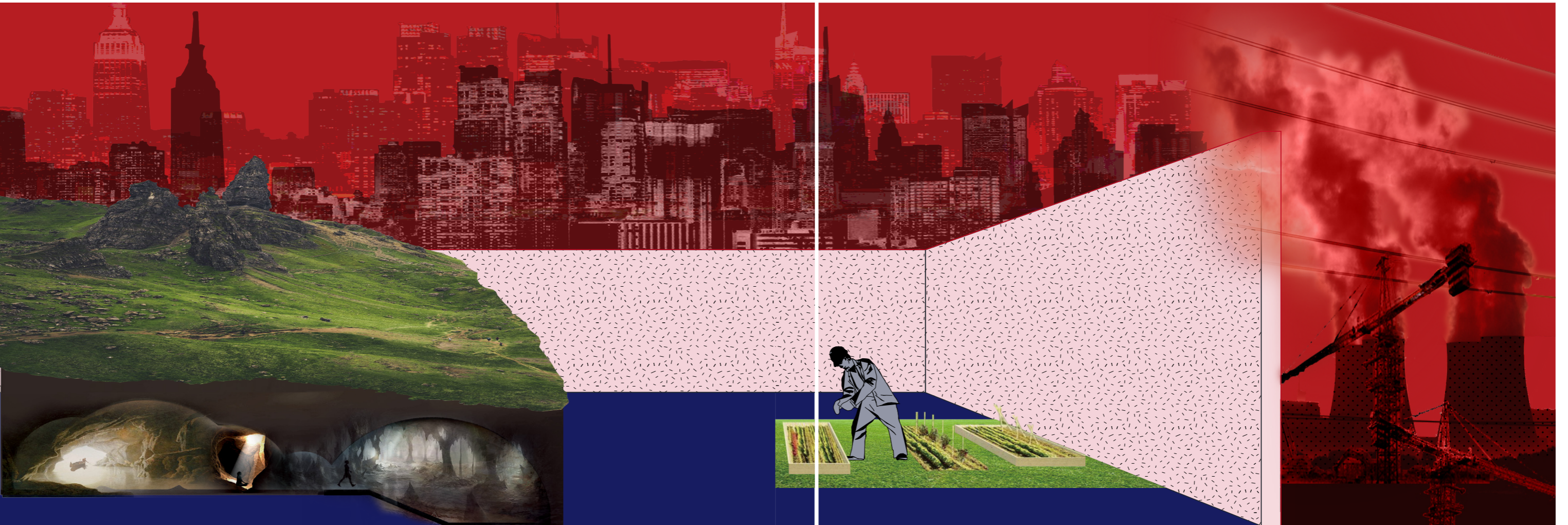
3. Project



A wall, on one side is the "secular" world, on the other side is the perceptual world. Sometimes we struggle to survive in the "secular" world.

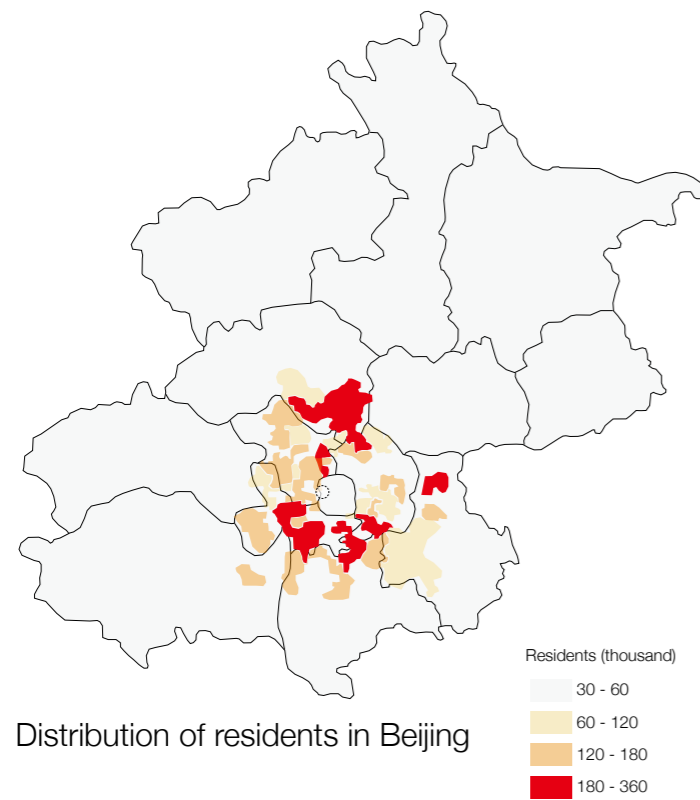


Sometimes we have to refresh ourselves and reawaken the sensibility of the body to perceive the world naturally.



Experience enables the perception.

Site analysis



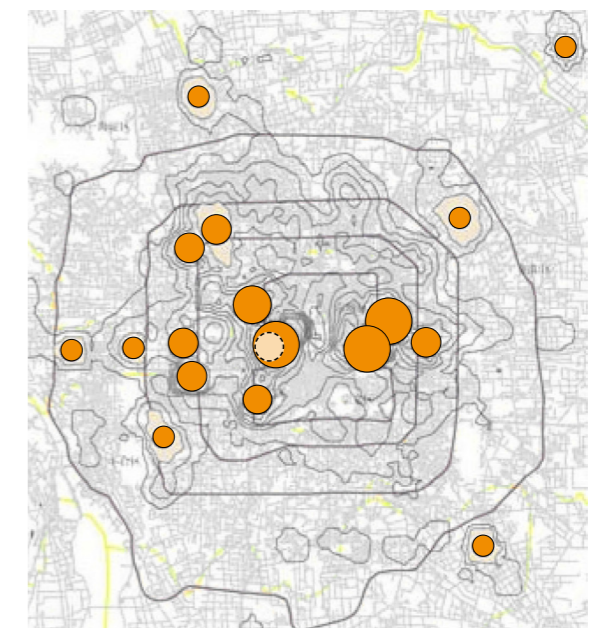
The location is Financial Street in Beijing. The target is office workers who work here. However, due to the excessively expensive housing prices and rents, most people have to live out of the center of the city.

Diagrams: Made by author



Commuting Trips in Beijing

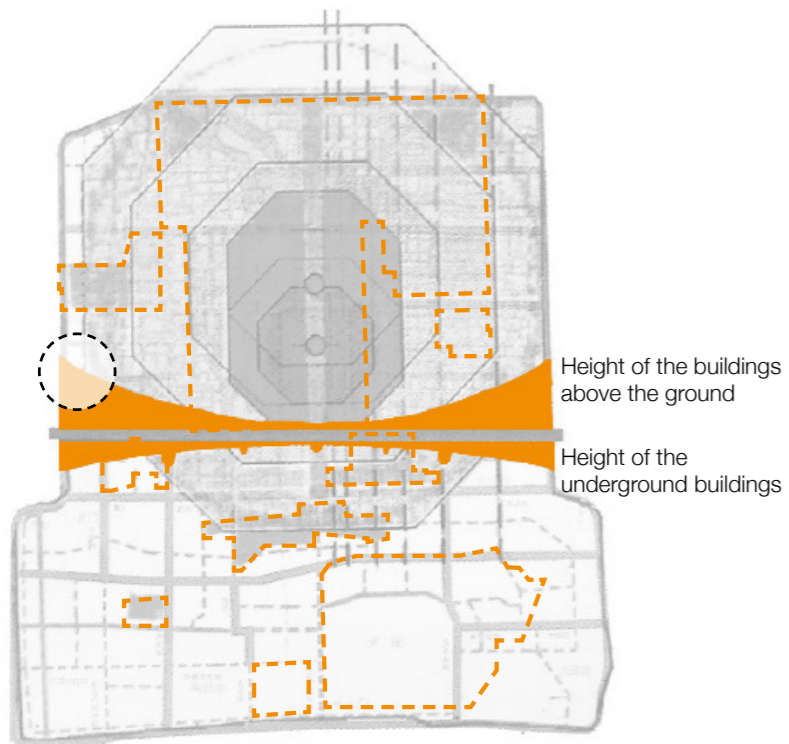
Usually, they have to spend a lot of time on commuting. If this introspective space is connected with their commuting trip, the introspection could become a daily activity.



Employment centers in Beijing

Zoom in, Finance Street block as one of the densest areas of employment is a place closest to the wealth and desire.

Diagrams: Made by author



Historical block

 Cultural boundaries
 Site

The site is located in a protected historic area. According to the regulation. It is possible to build an underground building on the site.

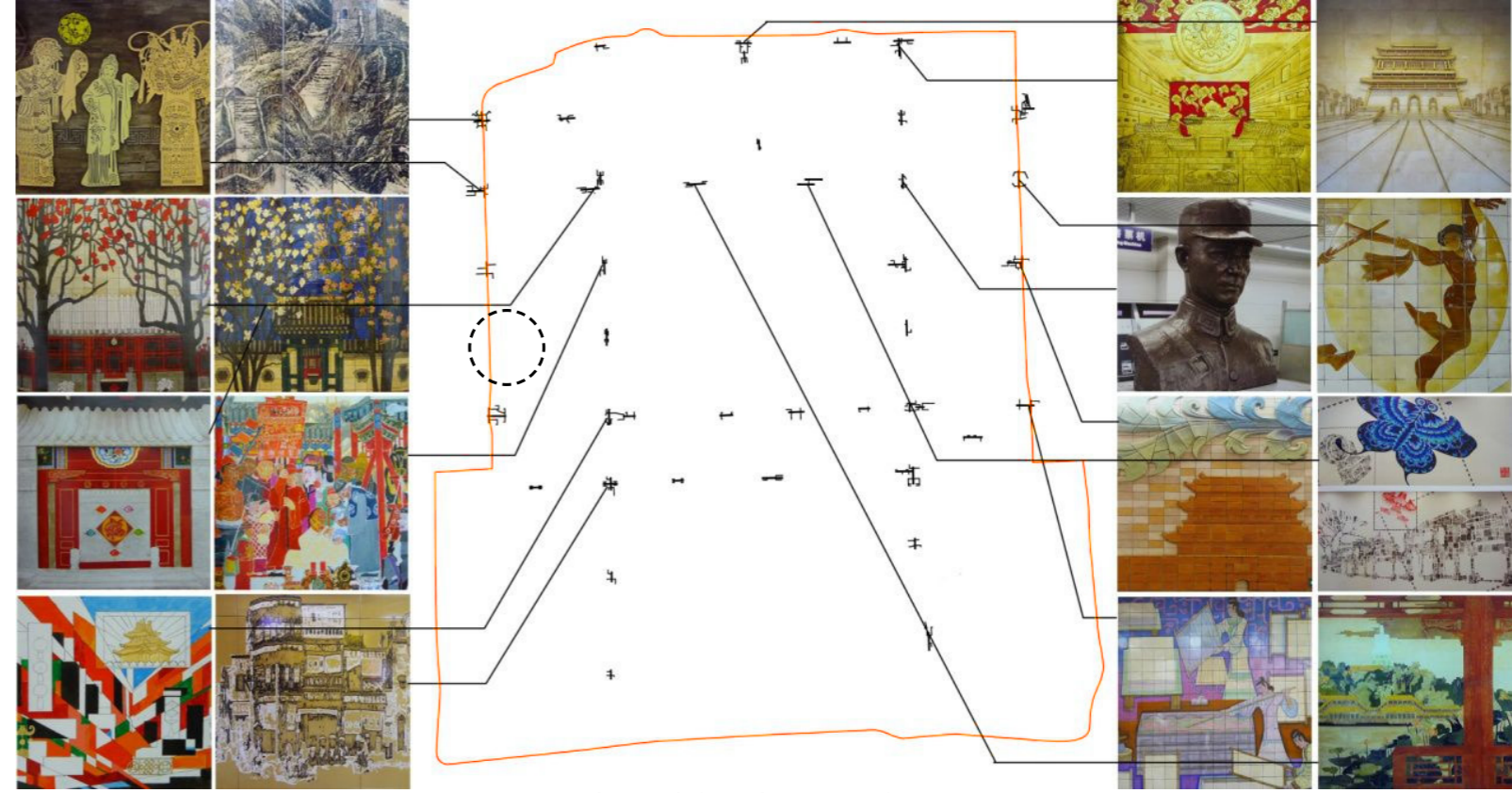


Parking

Employment centers
 Parking

Driving their own vehicle to work is one way of commuting. There are parking lots located on the site.

Diagrams: Made by author



Artwork in subway stations

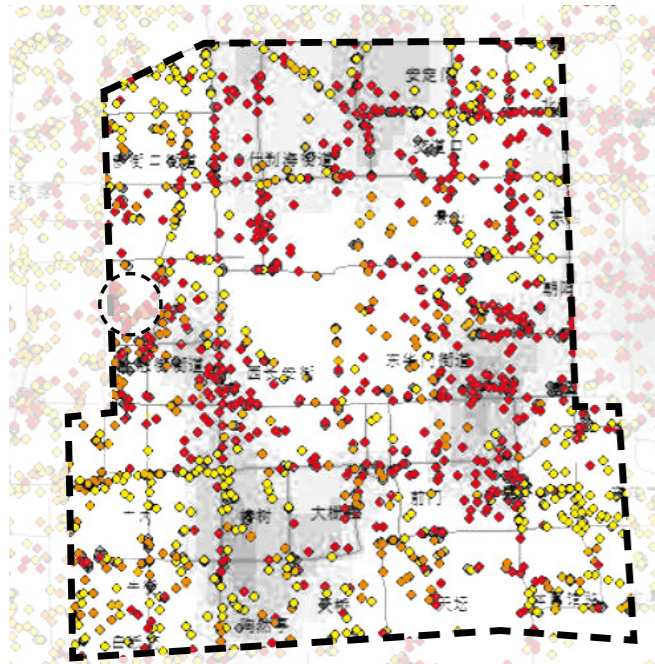
The stations near the site miss artwork.



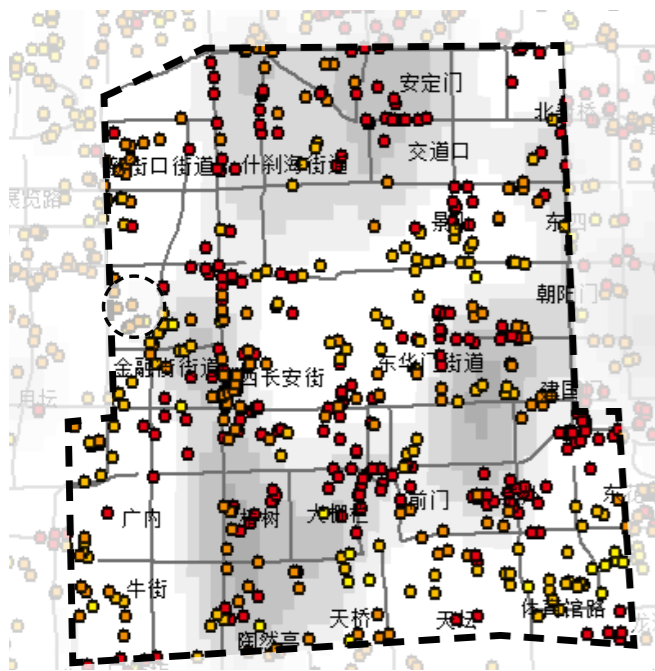
Main subway station

The site is in the middle of two subway stations about 800m away from each. It is not too nearby the stations that will not be a large number of people stranded causing traffic jams but it is also accessible.

Diagrams: Made by author



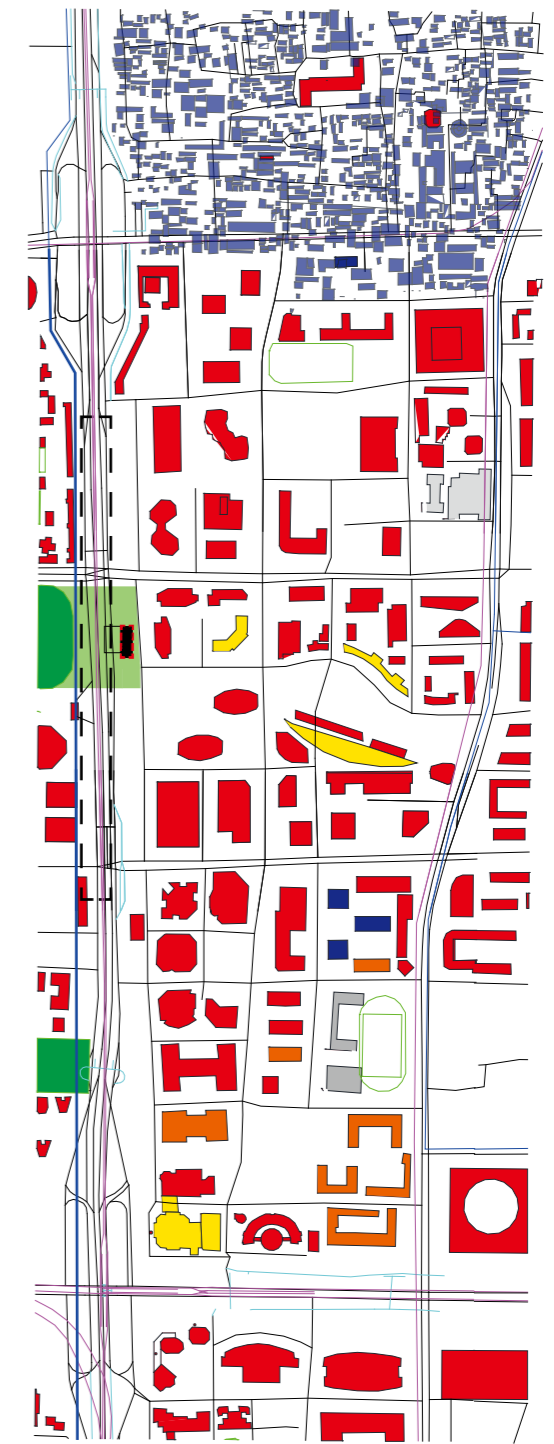
Distribution of pick-up and drop-off locations on weekdays



Distribution of pick-up and drop-off locations on weekends

Taxi

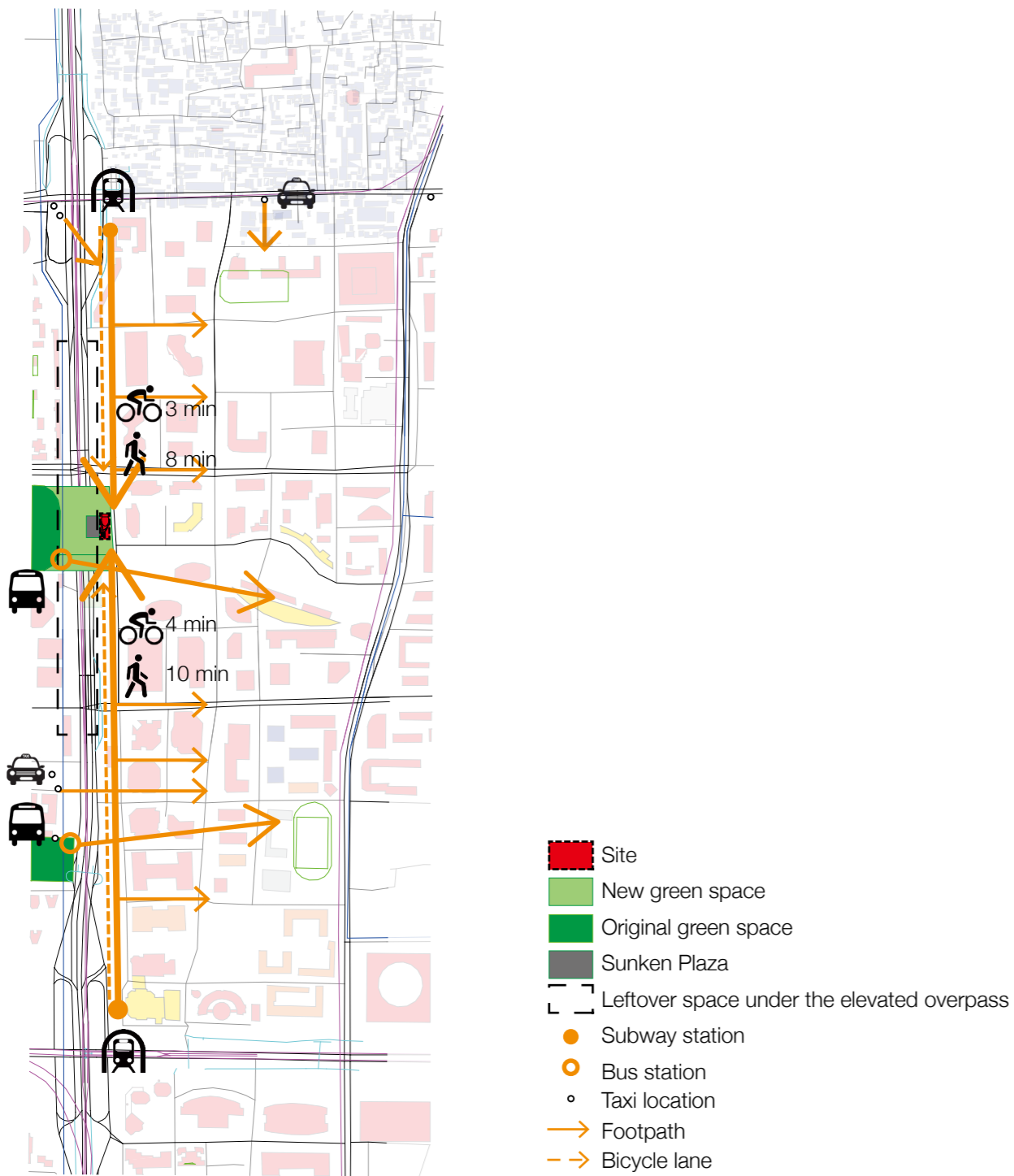
The illustrations show the pick-up and drop-off location of taxis during the day and night on weekdays and weekends. Hailing a taxi is also a way for commuters here.



- Site
- Finance institution
- Office
- Commercial area
- Education institution
- Government institution
- Residence area
- Original green space
- New green space
- Leftover space under the elevated overpass
- Old moat

Land use

The site is located next to the main road in the Financial District. It was originally the median strip of the overpass. On the west side, there is a space of urban greenery which the site can combine with to become a city park.



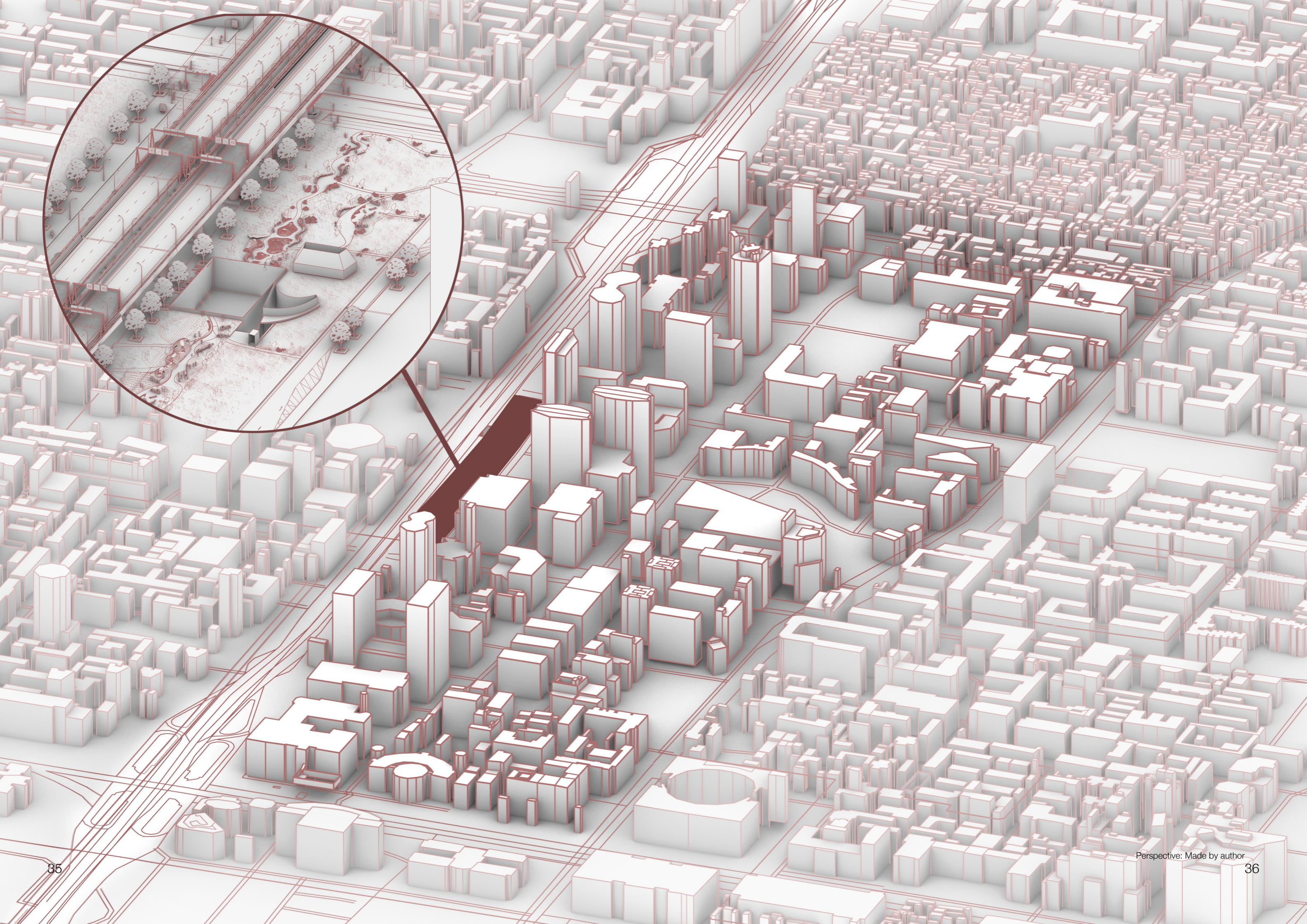
Flow of going to work

Having experienced the super busy and crowded commuting, people may get irritated. They can come here along the main street of the Financial District to calm down, by thinking about what is the intention of working, to adjust their mentality before a day's work.



Flow of finishing the work

After the long day, people can come to this space to introspect whether their behavior follows their nature. Then you can go to the subway station, commercial area or parking lots from the sunken plaza next to it, or you can go back to the ground and wait for a taxi or a bus in the park.



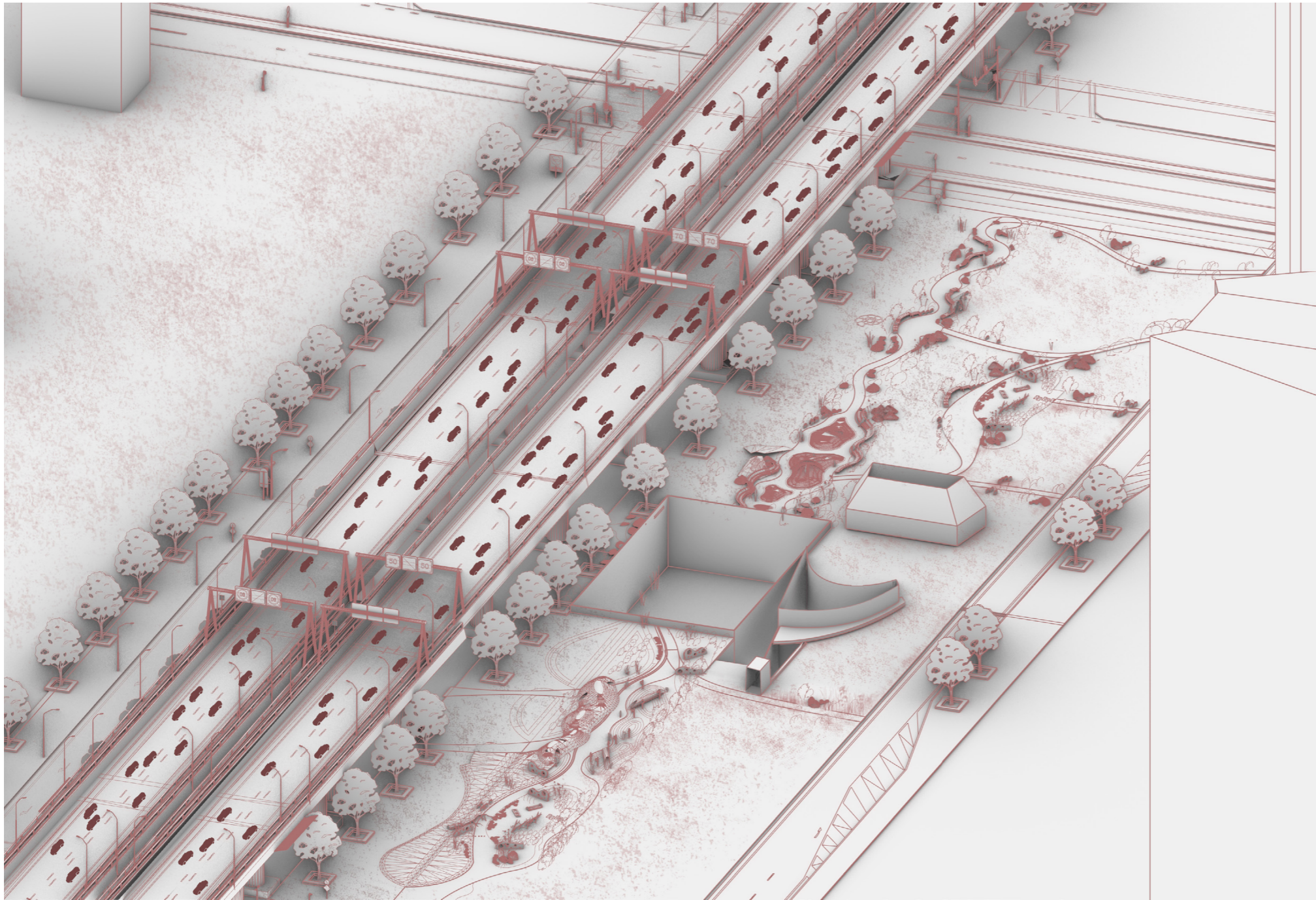
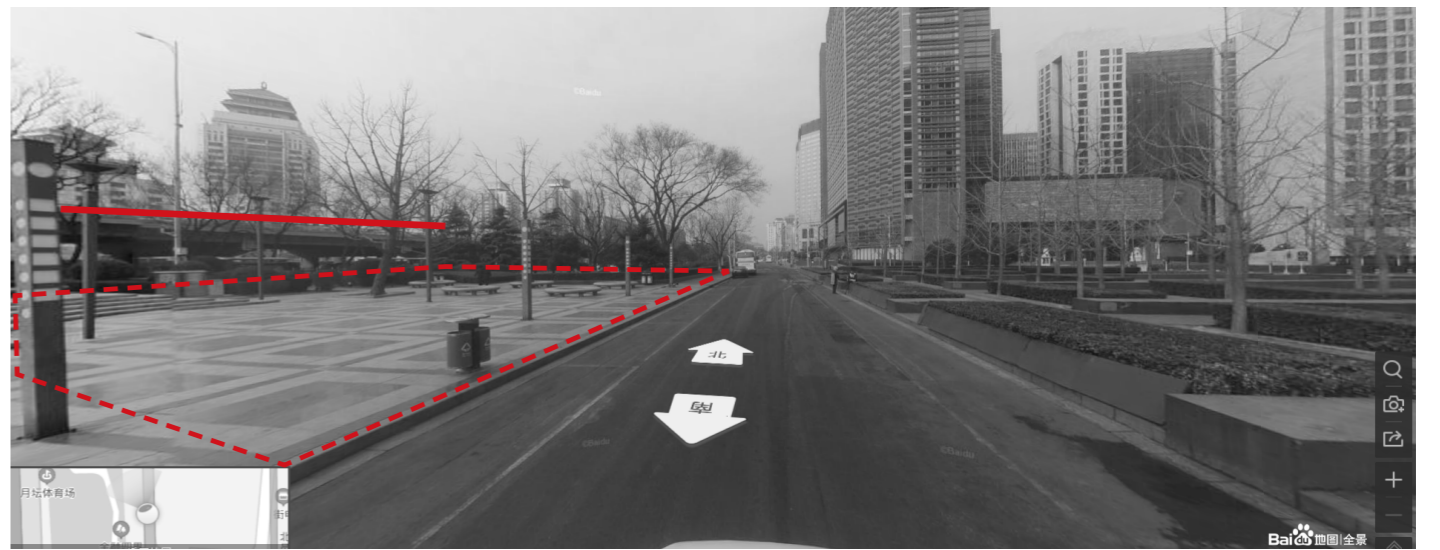


Fig.13



Fig.14

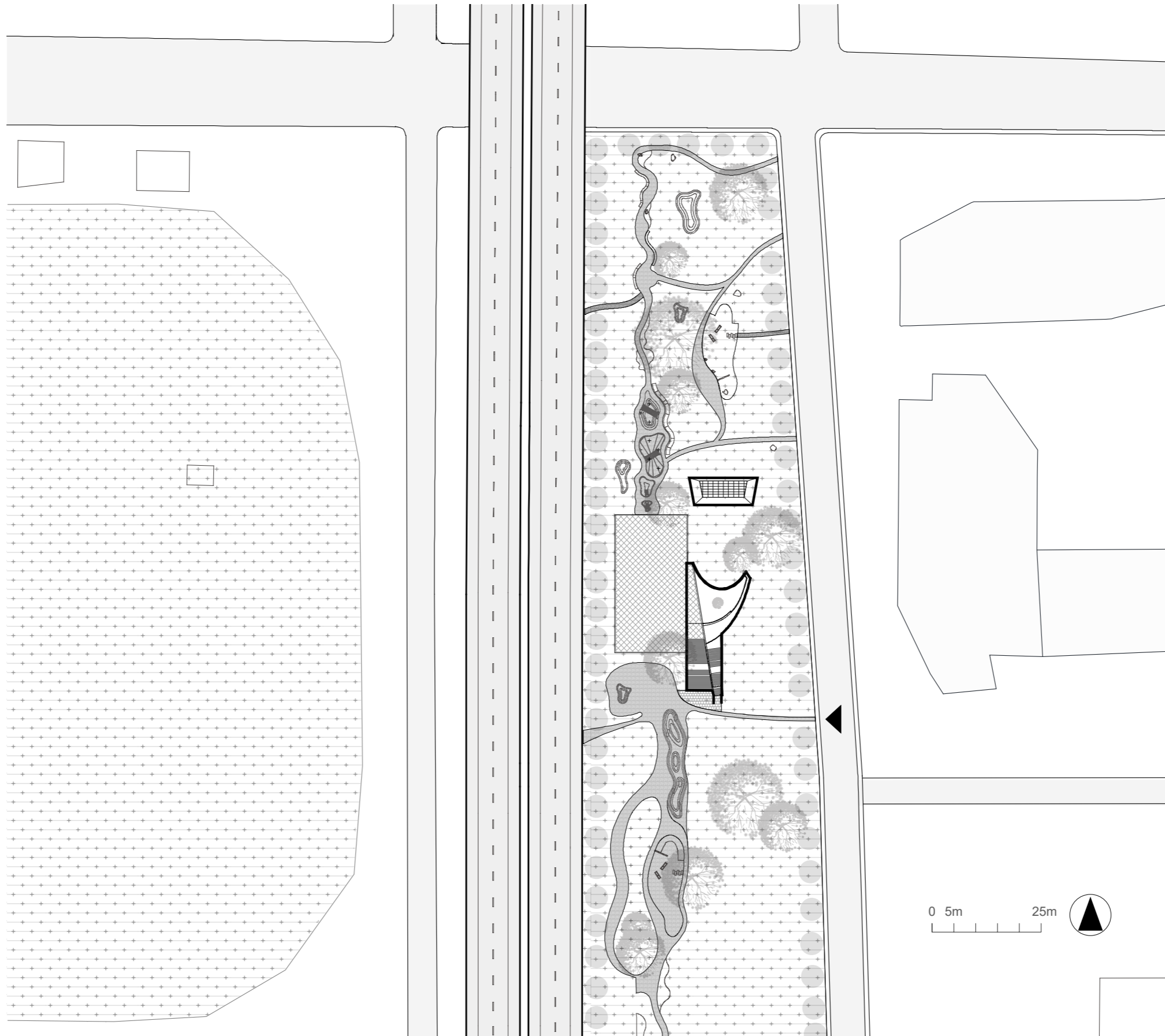


Perspective: Made by author

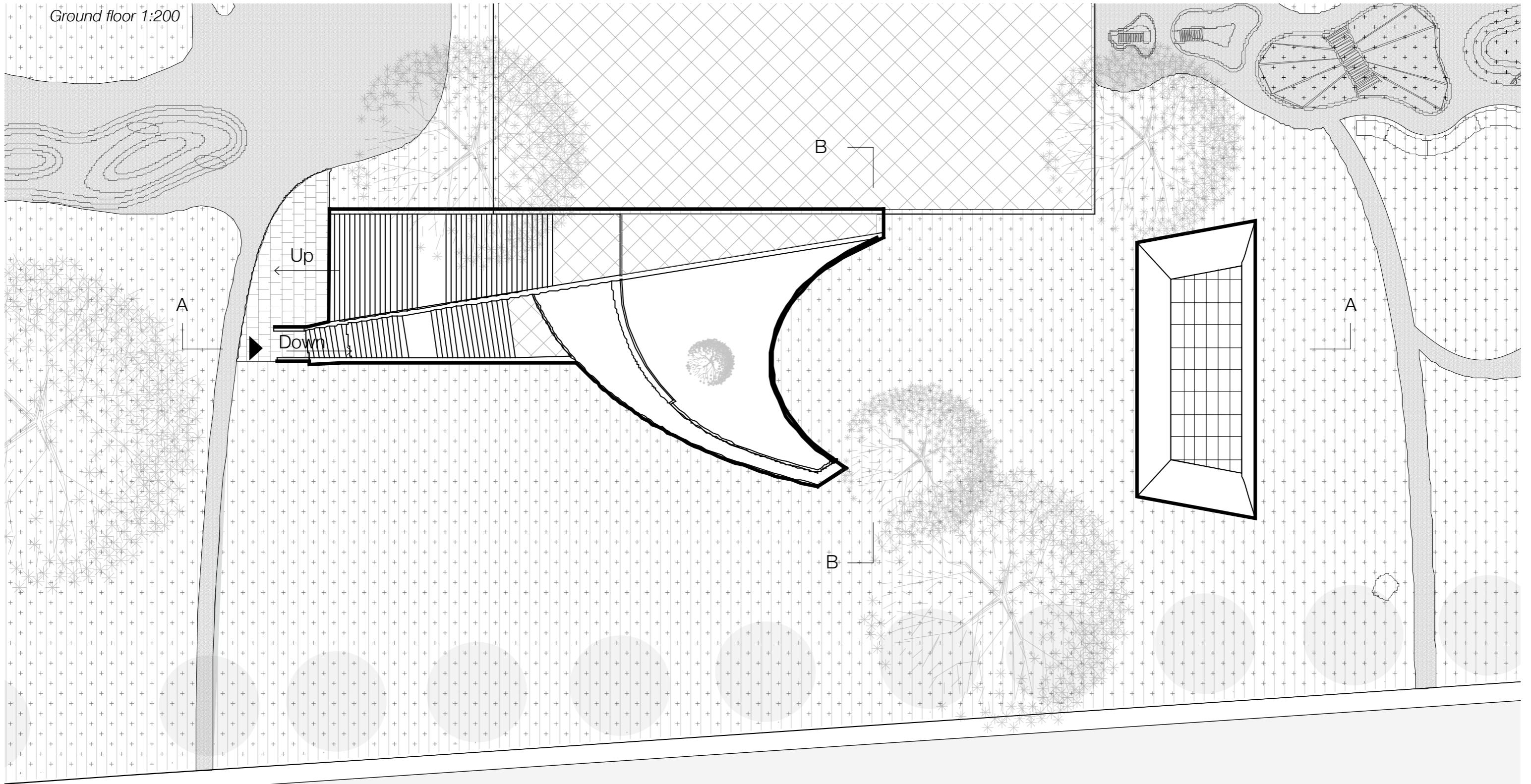
Diagram: Data from Baidu map street view, made by author

Site 1:1000

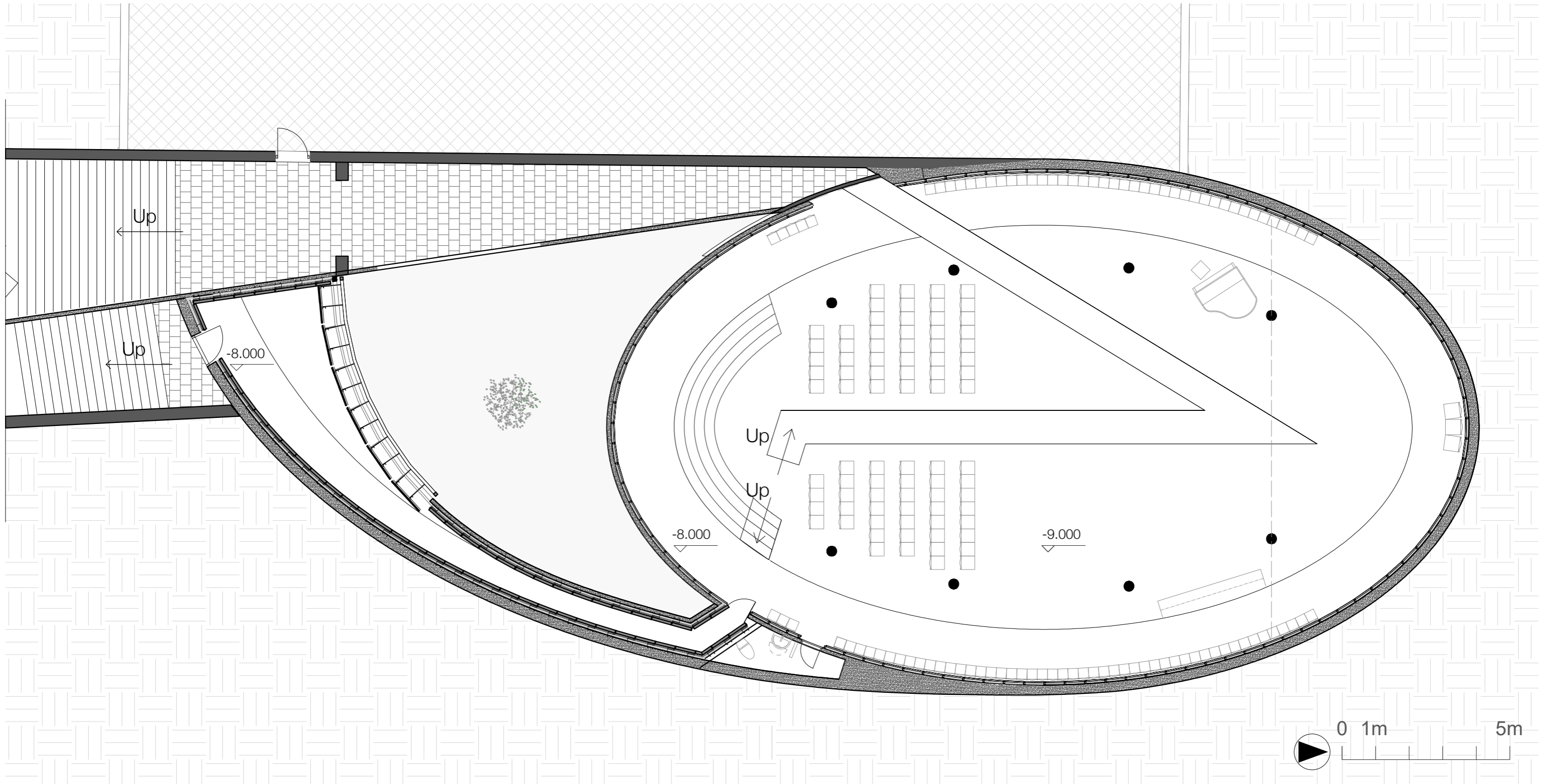
The building is part of the park. Walking along the main road, there are trails leading people into the park and the building.



Ground floor 1:200

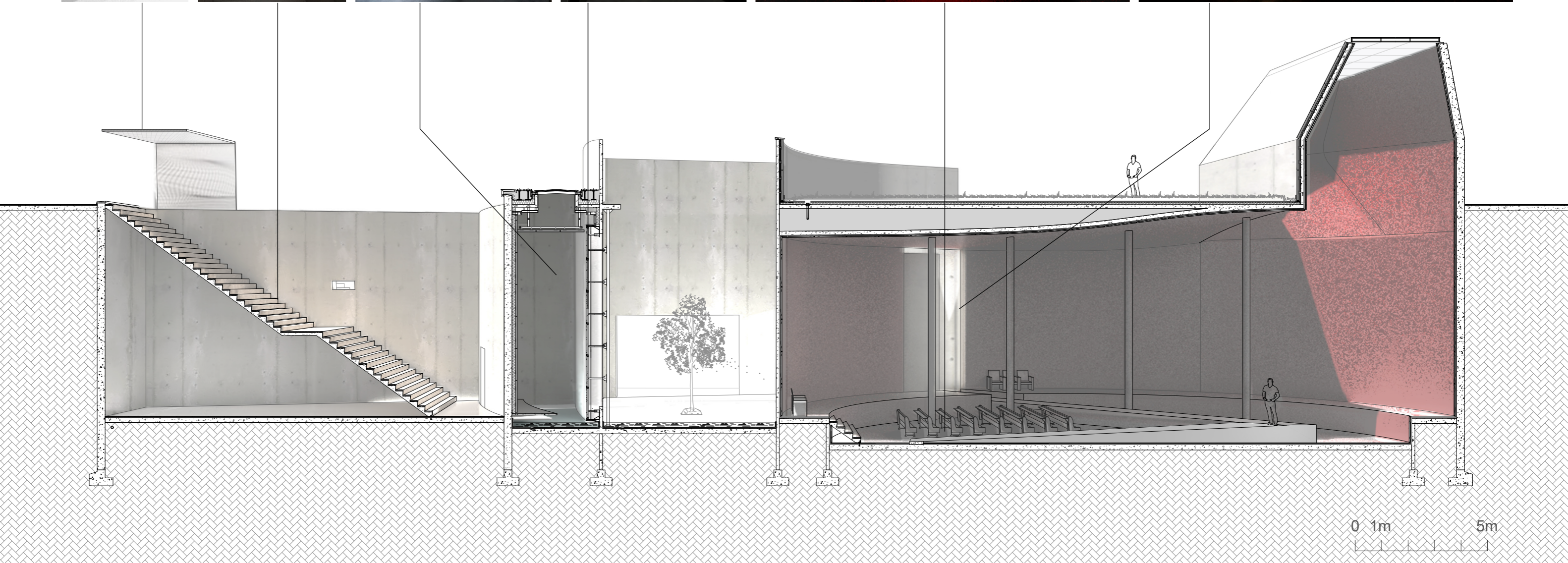
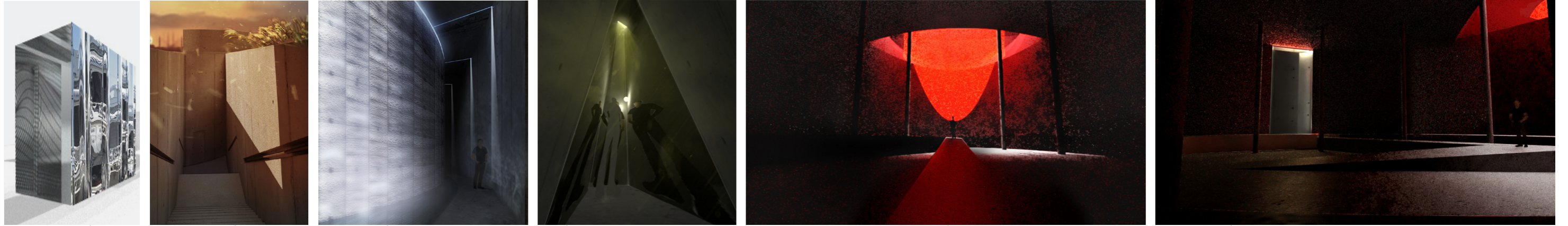


Drawing: Made by author



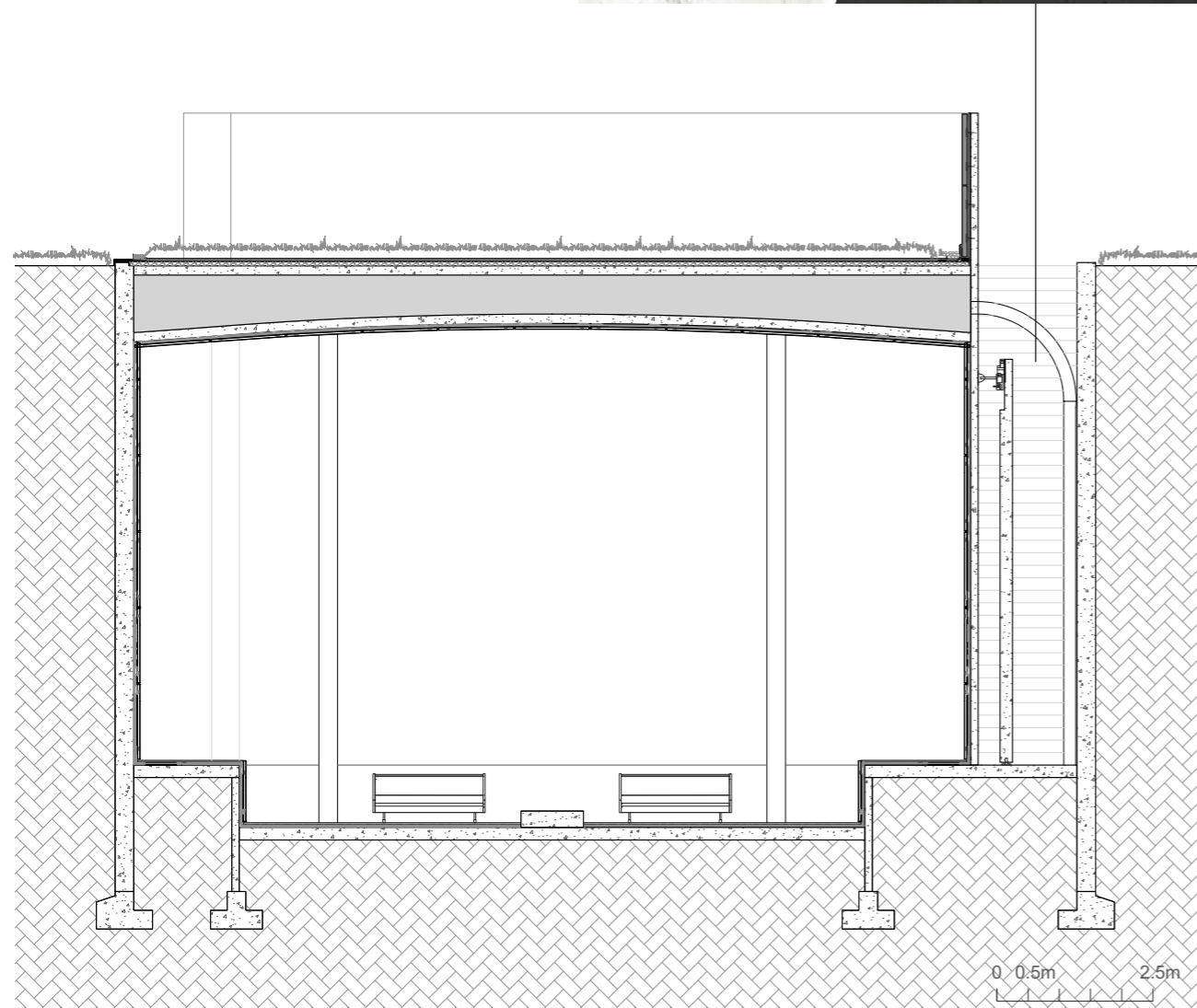
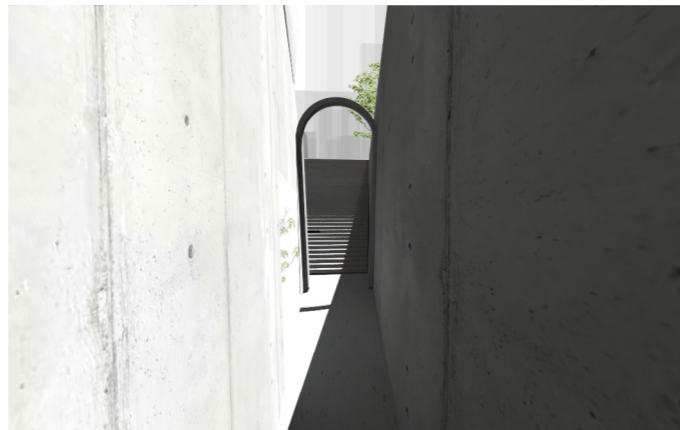
From the entrance, you enter this underground space. First, you come to a corridor that curves around the courtyard which becomes more and more narrow and dark. Then it is the hall with light from the rising roof. Then, it's the corridor again.

Section & Sequence



Section A-A

Drawing and perspectives: Made by author

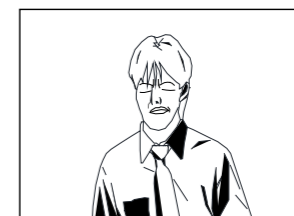


Section B-B

Drawing and perspectives: Made by author

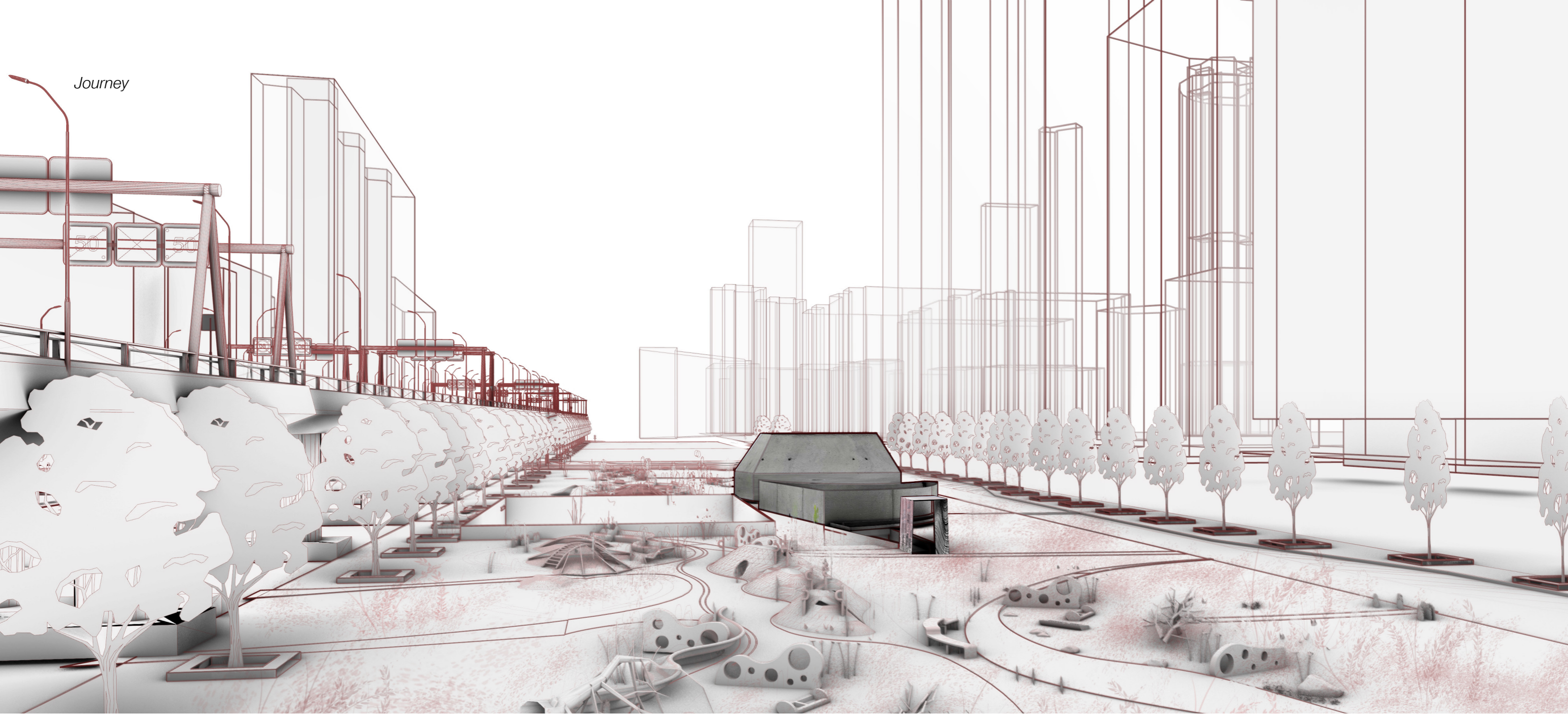
Sequence & Preparation

The whole process of the preparation starts from the gate which is the mark indicating the beginning of this journey. Then it is a grand staircase surrounded by greenery. Walking down the staircase, there might be a still of scene acting as the suspense in the time of lived life when you suddenly aware that you should clear your mind, leaving yourself free of distractions because something is going to happen at the end of the stair. Just like you are about to step on the stage. Then it is the underground corridor. It is mystical, blurry, full of uncertainty which drives our curiosity to explore the dark inside. And then it is the darkest space where you return to a closed introverted space. Since you can barely see things with your eyes, your body tries to use all your senses to perceive the space, such as the sound, the humidity. And then there is slight light acting as a hint before you perceive the infinity. Finally, you reach the space of infinity. After all of these, you go back to the "secular" world.

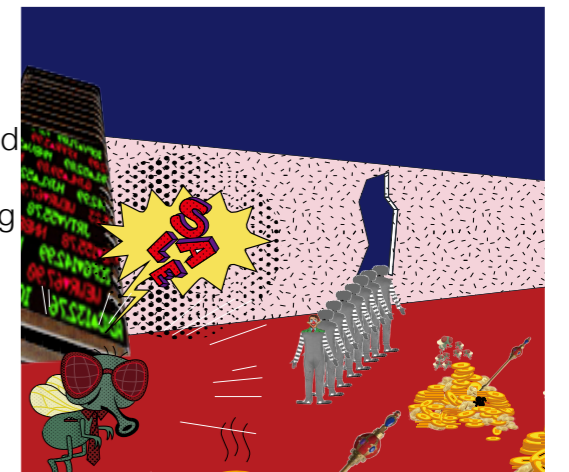


Comics: Made by author

Journey



First, here is the boundary where the "secular" world and the "perceptual" world meet. The gate acts as the mark indicating the beginning of this journey.

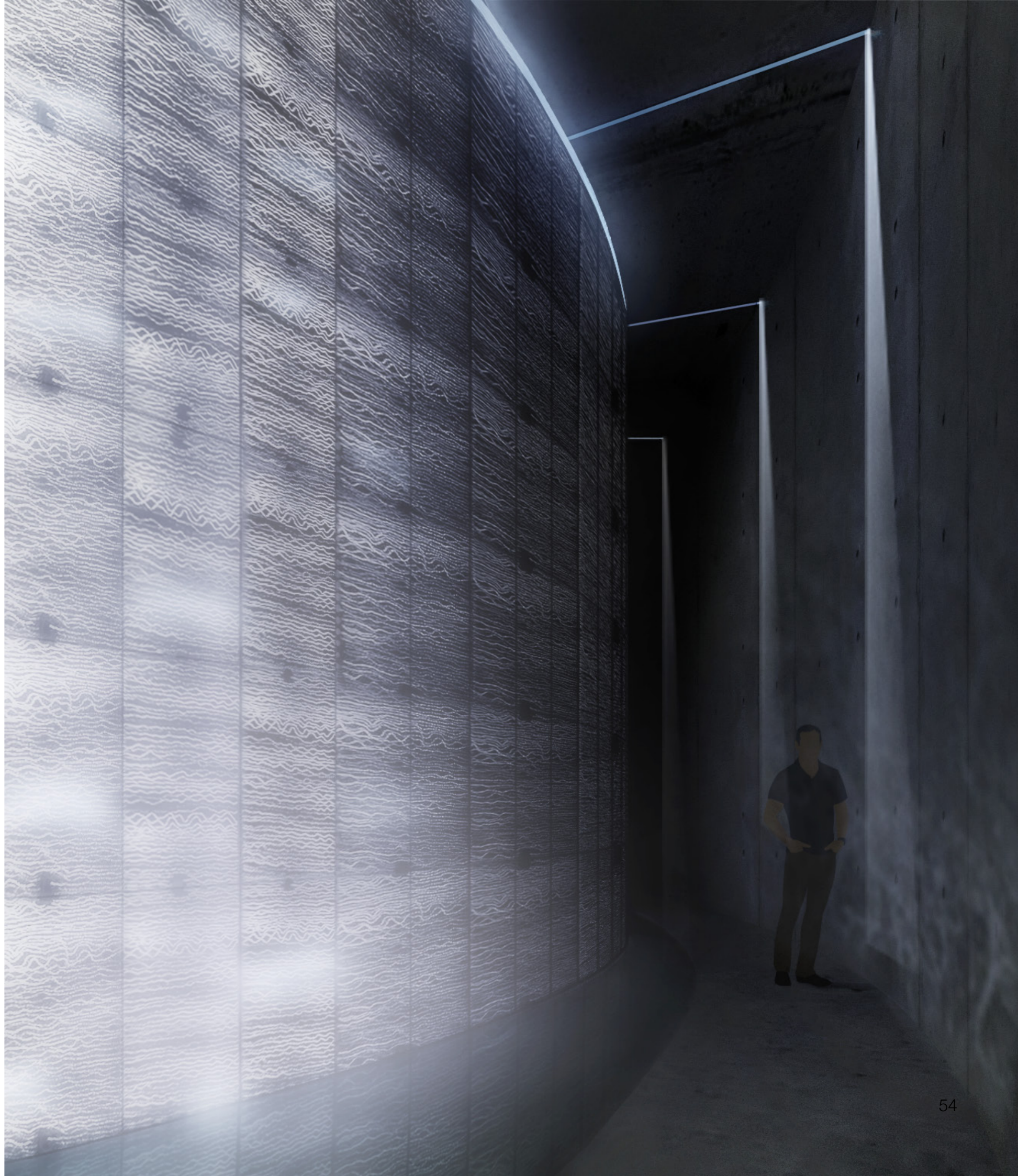


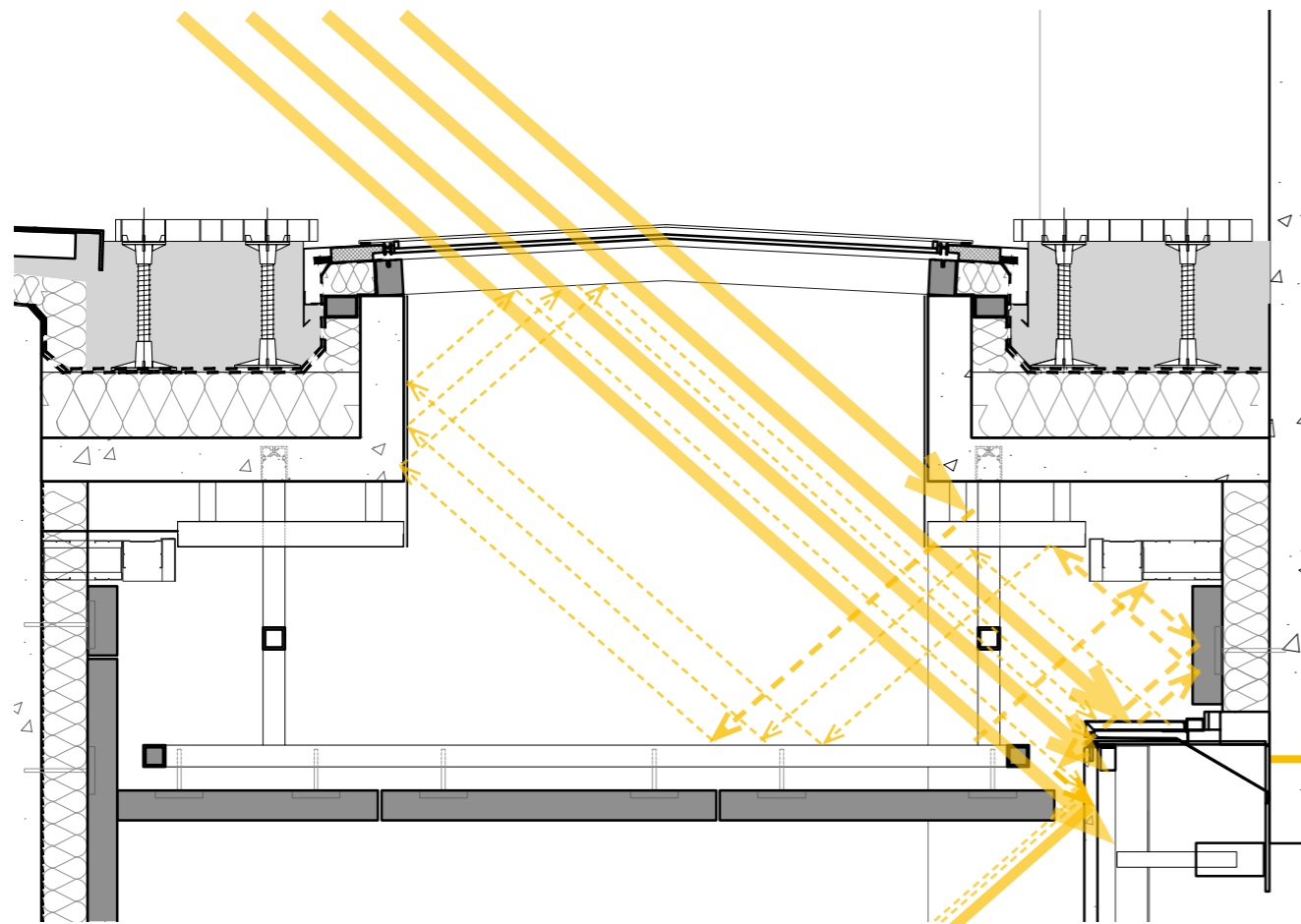
Perspective and collage: Made by author



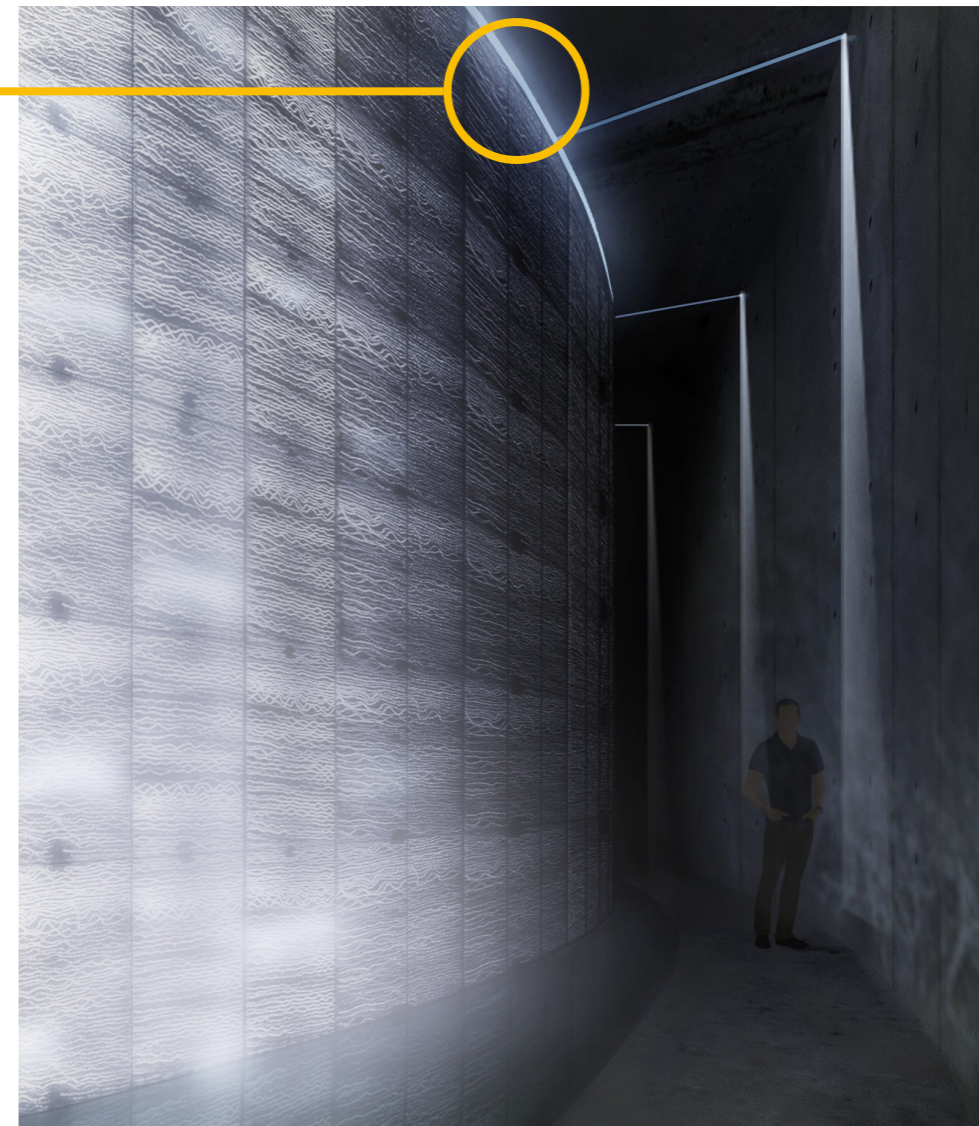
Next, it is the grand staircase. Walking down the staircase, in a breeze, catkins fluttering in the air, you might be touched. It is like a still of scene acting as the suspense in the time of lived life when you suddenly aware that you should clear your mind, leaving yourself free of distractions because something is going to happen at the end of the stair, behind that wall. Just like you are about to step on the stage. Dandelion's language is faithfulness and confidence.

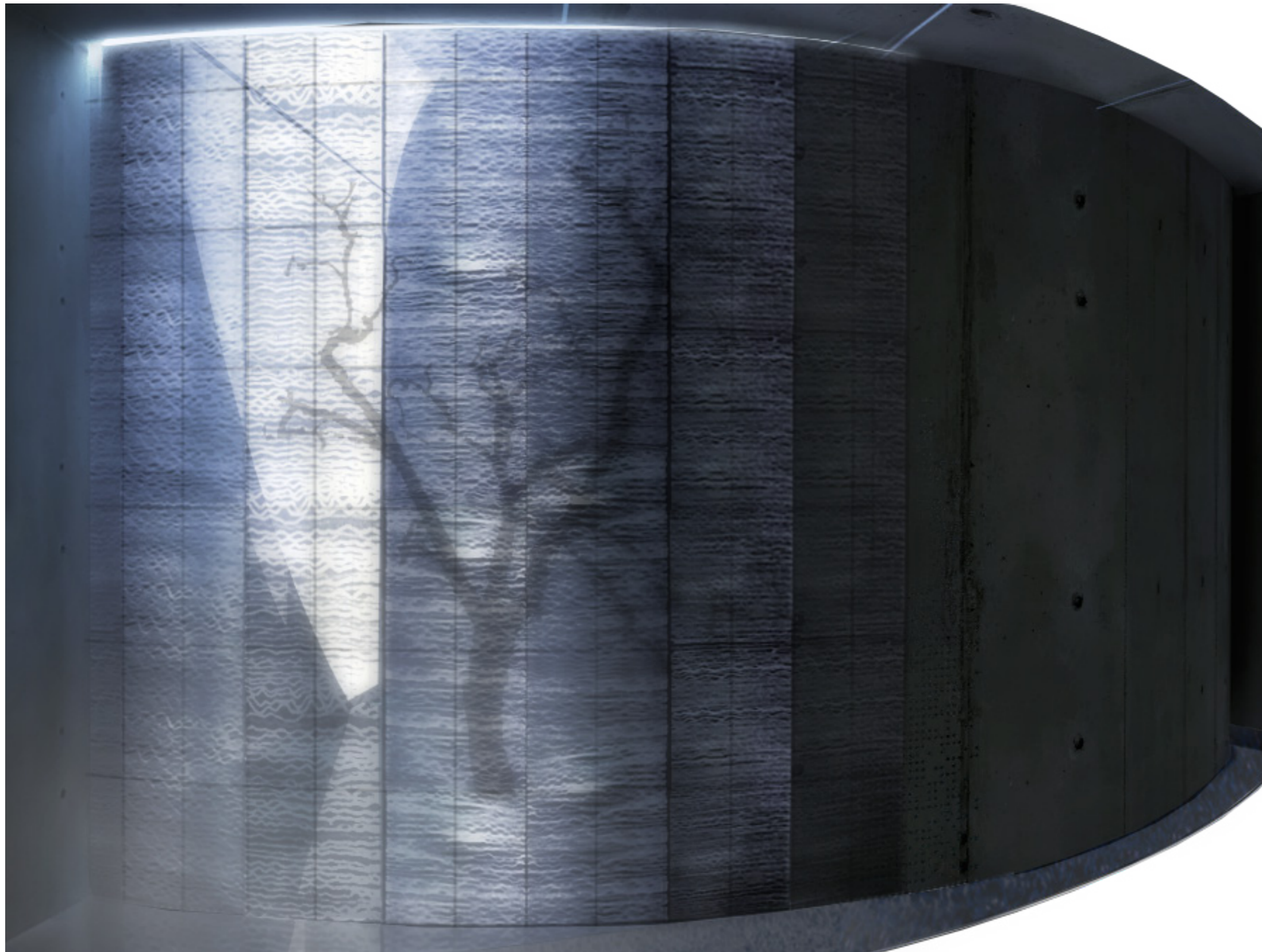
Then, it's the passage, right from which, there is an atmosphere of mystical and blurry nature of the world. It is full of uncertainty which drives your curiosity to explore the dark inside. It is created through the fading skylight, through light and darkness, through the diffusion of light in steam-filled air, through the reflection of shimmering light on the concrete wall, and the different sounds that water drop makes. The imagination in your mind might be the path leading to the depths of the spirit.





Detail of sharp light beam on the roof





Corridor & Courtyard

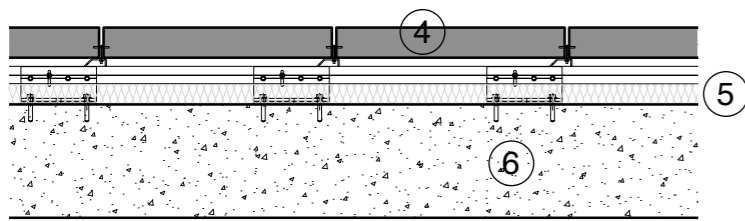
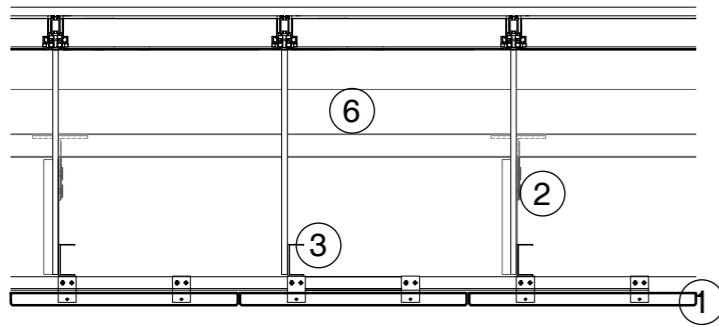
As you walking along the narrow concrete deck, the view of the courtyard becomes more and more blurry relying on the light transmittance properties of translucent concrete panel. The space is getting darker and darker. Your attention is diverted from the vision to the sensation of the whole body to perceive the situation.



Fig.15
Material: Translucent concrete panel

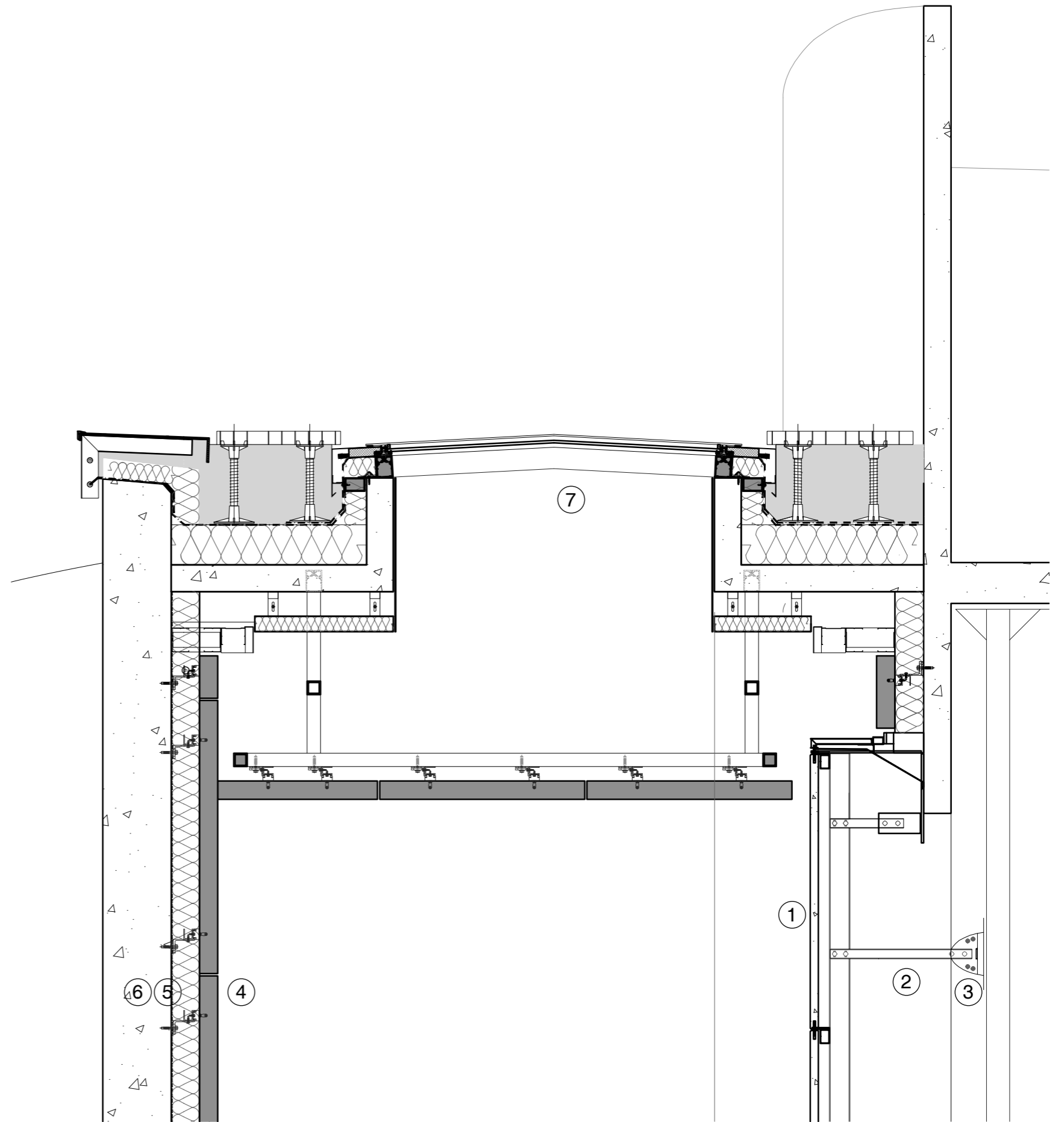
Perspective: Made by author

1:20 scale
1:10 scale



Horizontal section 1:20

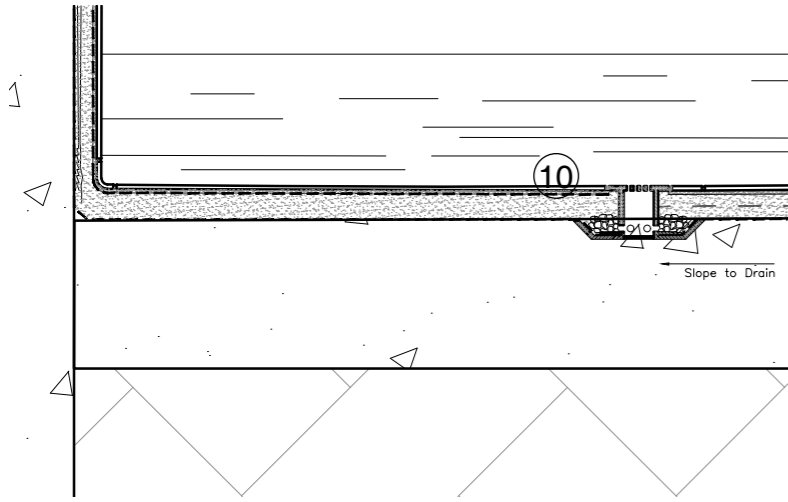
1. Precast translucent concrete panel
2. Extruded aluminium carrier system
3. Stainless steel fixing pins
4. Precast fair-faced concrete panel
5. Insulation
6. Backing wall
7. Rooflight
8. Concrete slabs
9. Warm water
10. Stone panel



Vertical section 1:20

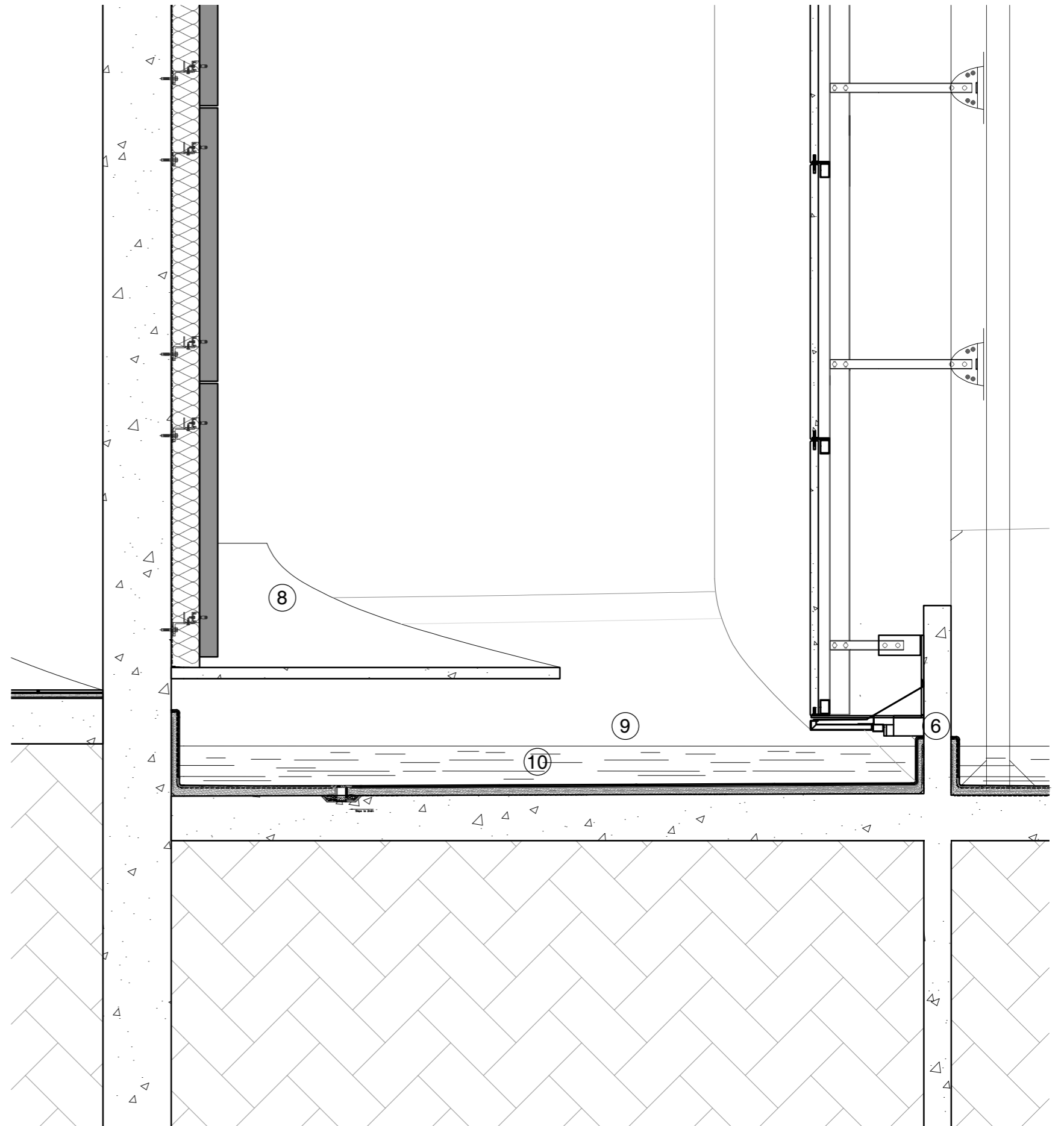
Details: Made by author

1:20 scale
1:10 scale



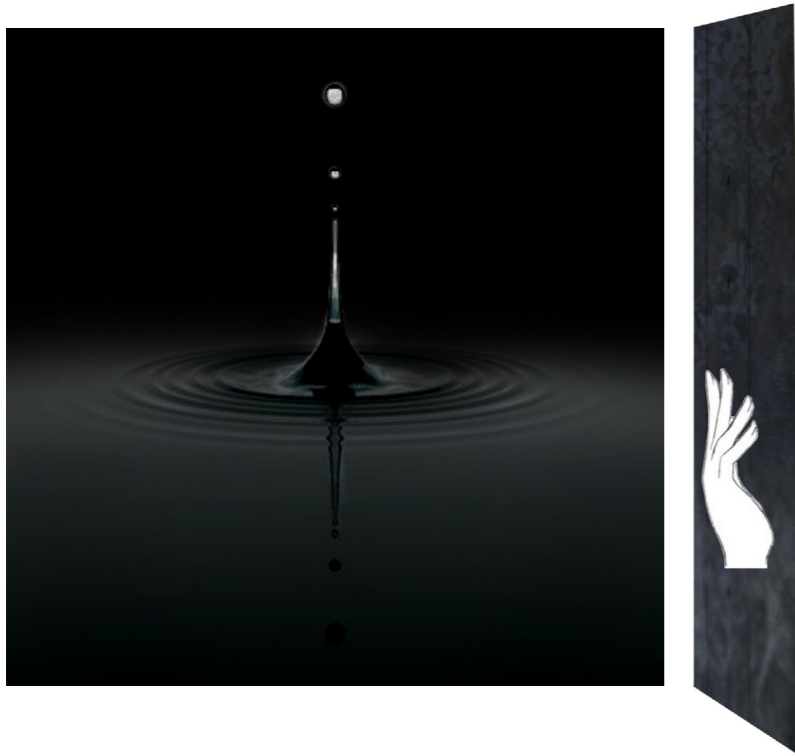
Vertical section 1:10

1. Precast translucent concrete panel
2. Extruded aluminium carrier system
3. Stainless steel fixing pins
4. Precast fair-faced concrete panel
5. Insulation
6. Backing wall
7. Rooflight
8. Concrete slabs
9. Warm water
10. Stone panel



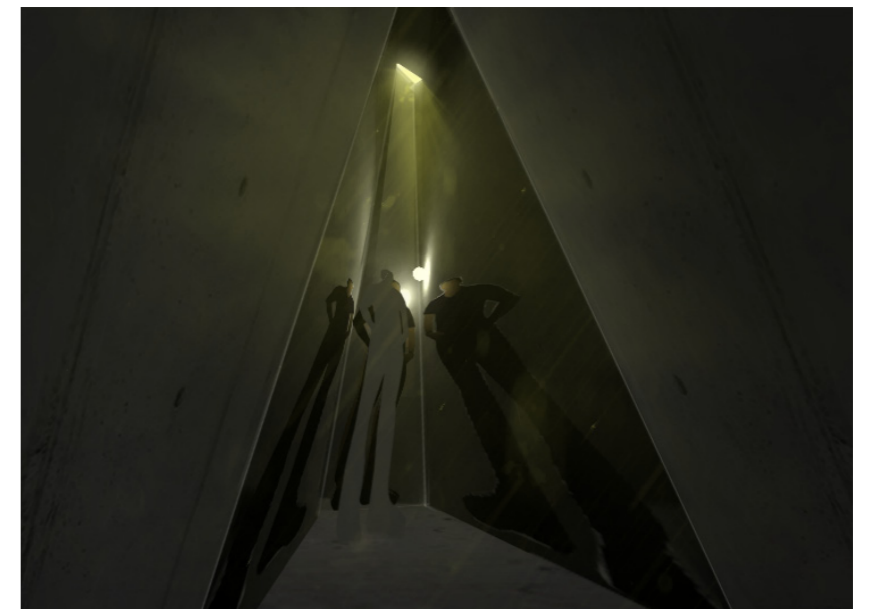
Vertical section 1:20

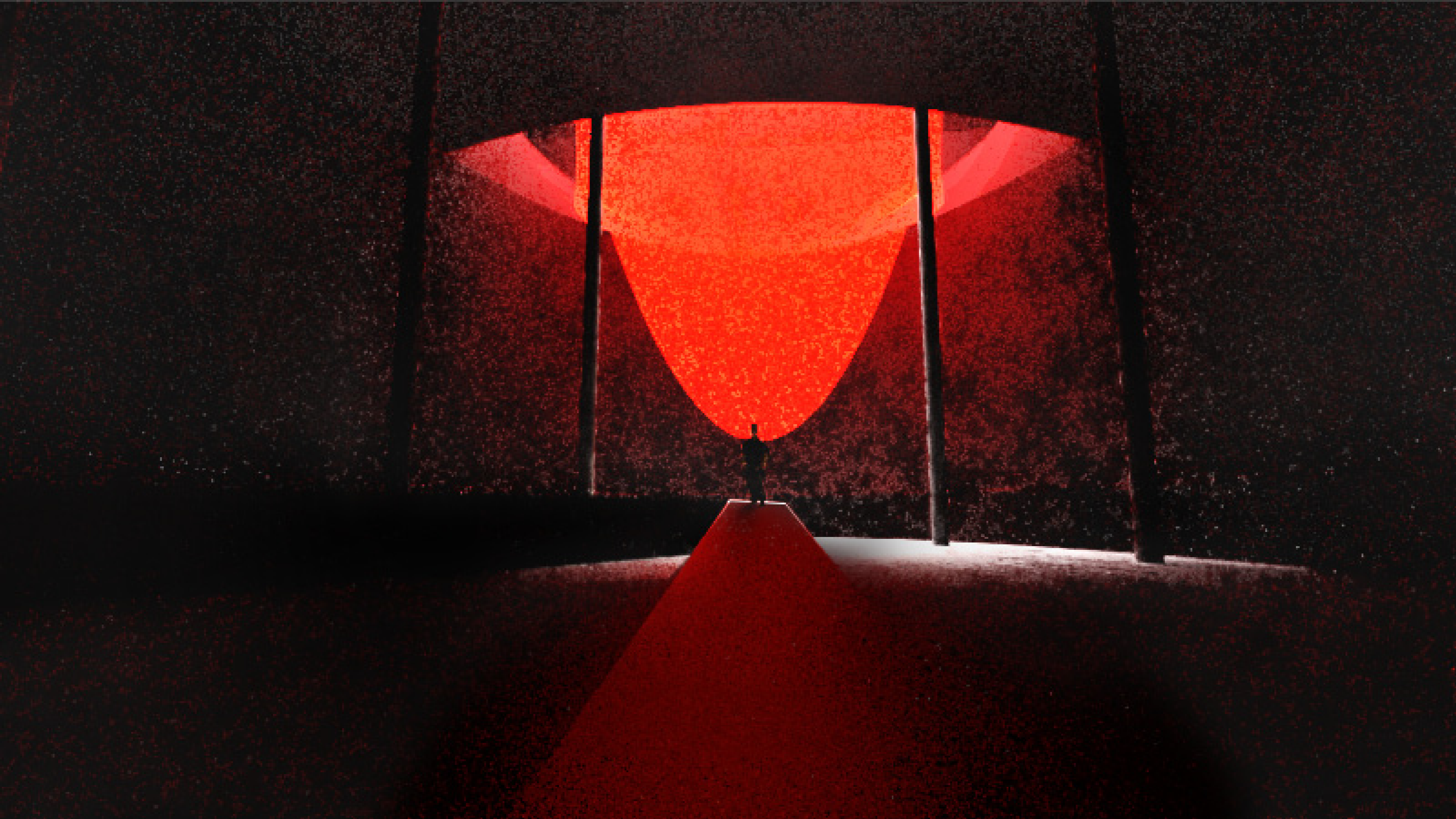
Details: Made by author



And then it is the darkest space where you return to a closed introverted place. Since you can barely see things with your eyes, your body tries to use all your senses to perceive. The echo of the sound made by the water drop; the moist surface of the wall; the slippery concrete deck. You return to some original place where you get some natural perception.

And then there is slight light acting as a hint before you perceive the infinity. You see yourself in the mirror. It reminds you to recall your nature.



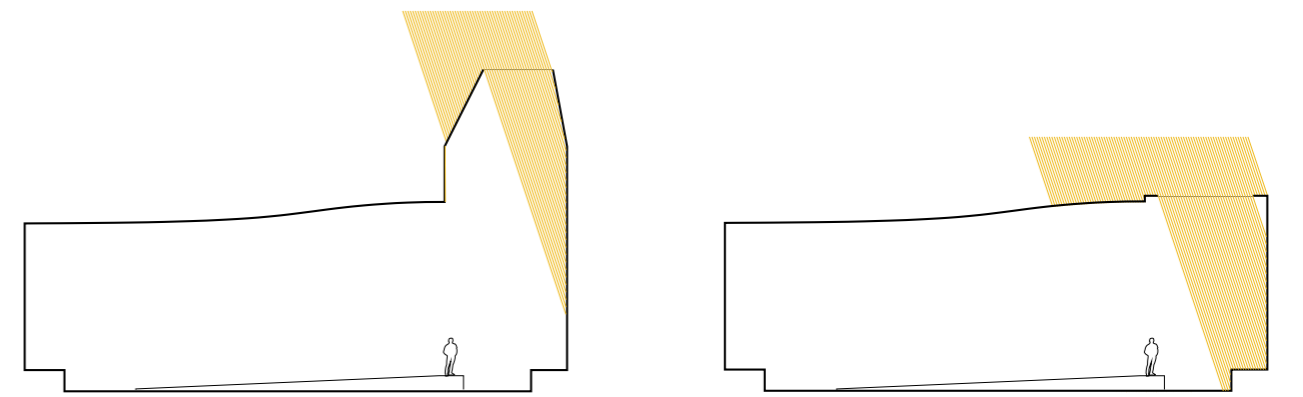
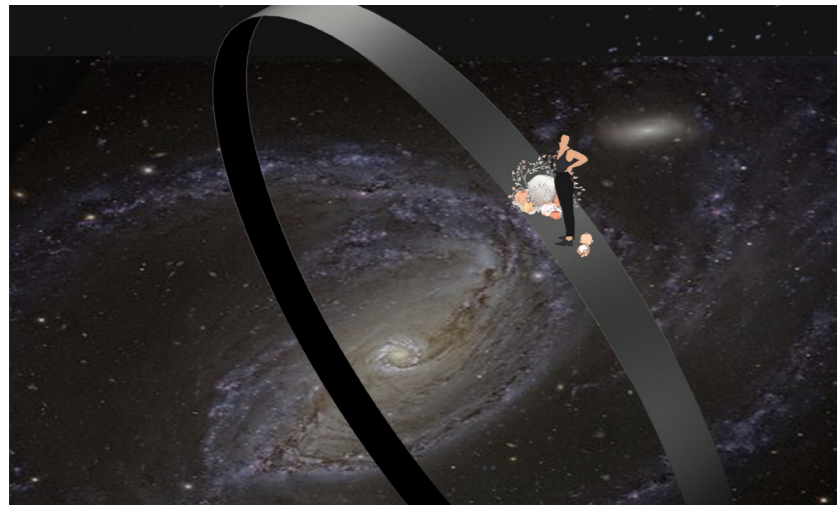


The infinity of space and time.

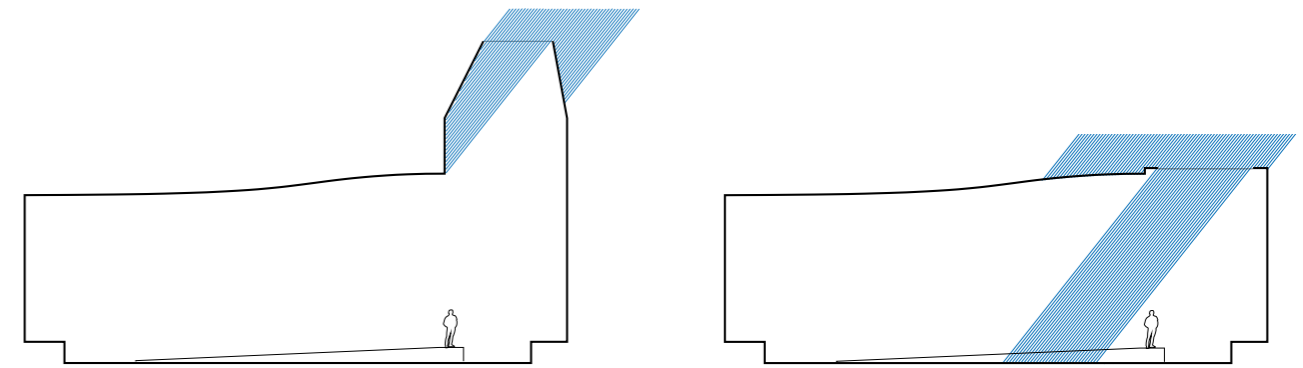
Perspective: Made by author

After all these preparations, finally, you enter the hall. The situation here is giant, sharp, dramatic, harsh, strong and powerful. People might catch their breath. They might reflect themselves and thus gain peace of mind. They might perceive the world and themselves a little more profoundly.

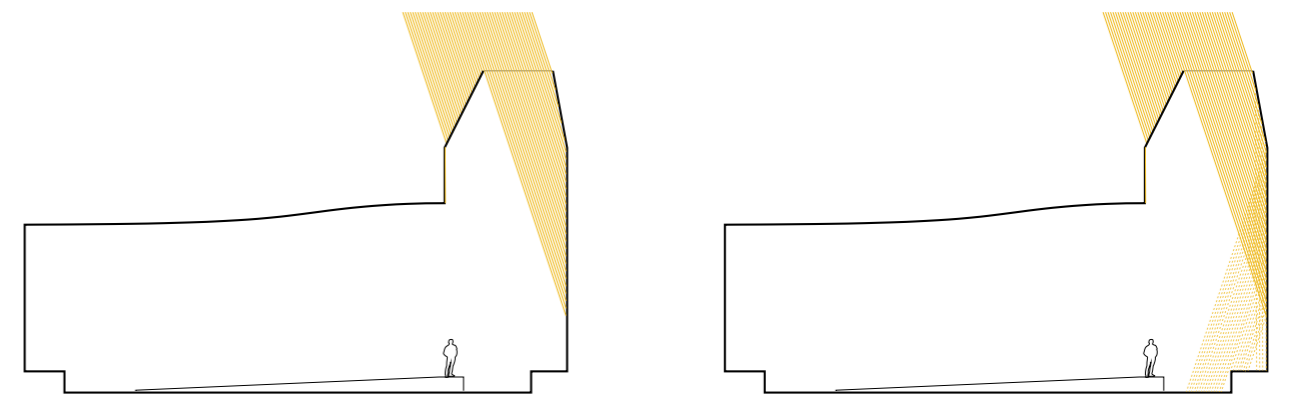
In your imagination, there might be a giant universe of space and time. Human beings are so inappreciable in the giant universe. What's the difference between living three days and three generations in the face of infinite time. So why not save your time and follow your natural perception. Be brave being out of institutionalization. Do not care that much about others' language.



Rise in the roof



Comparison

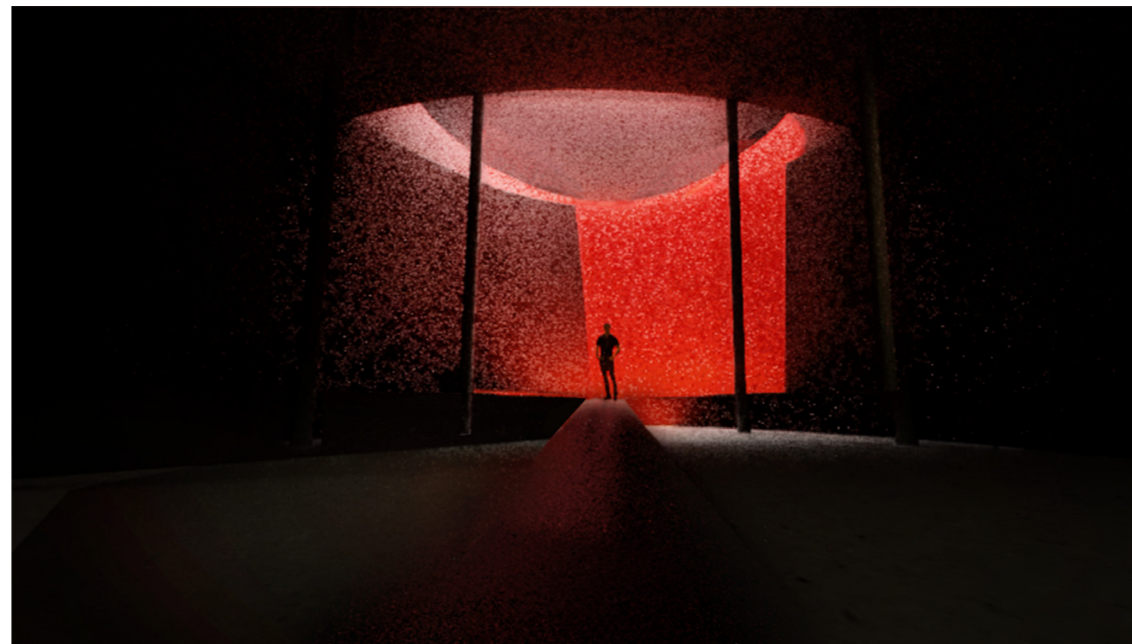
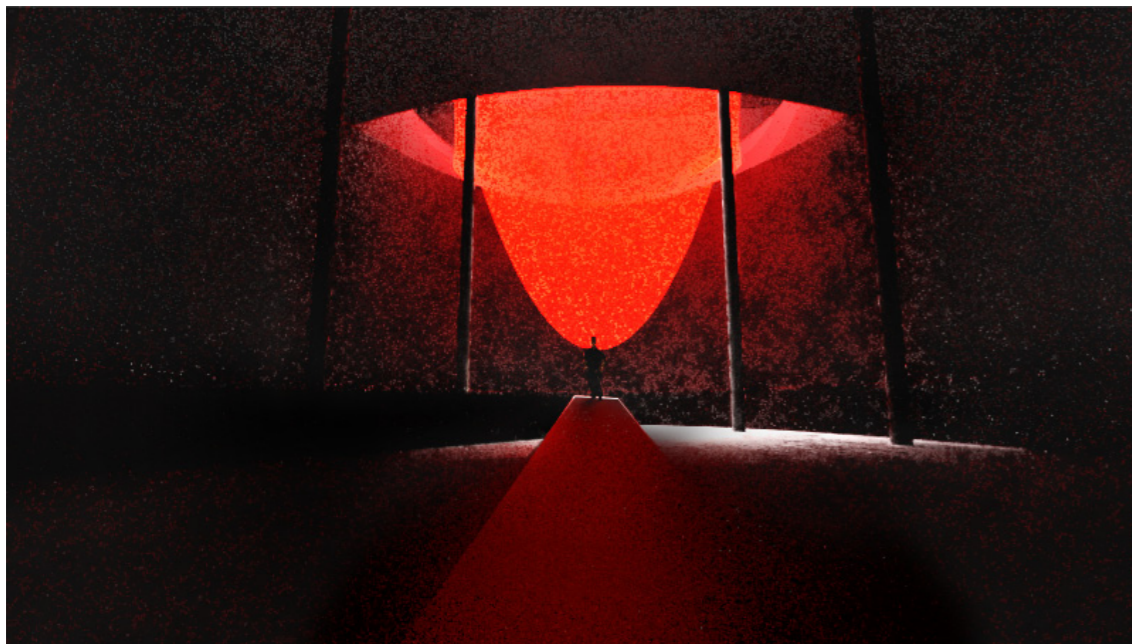
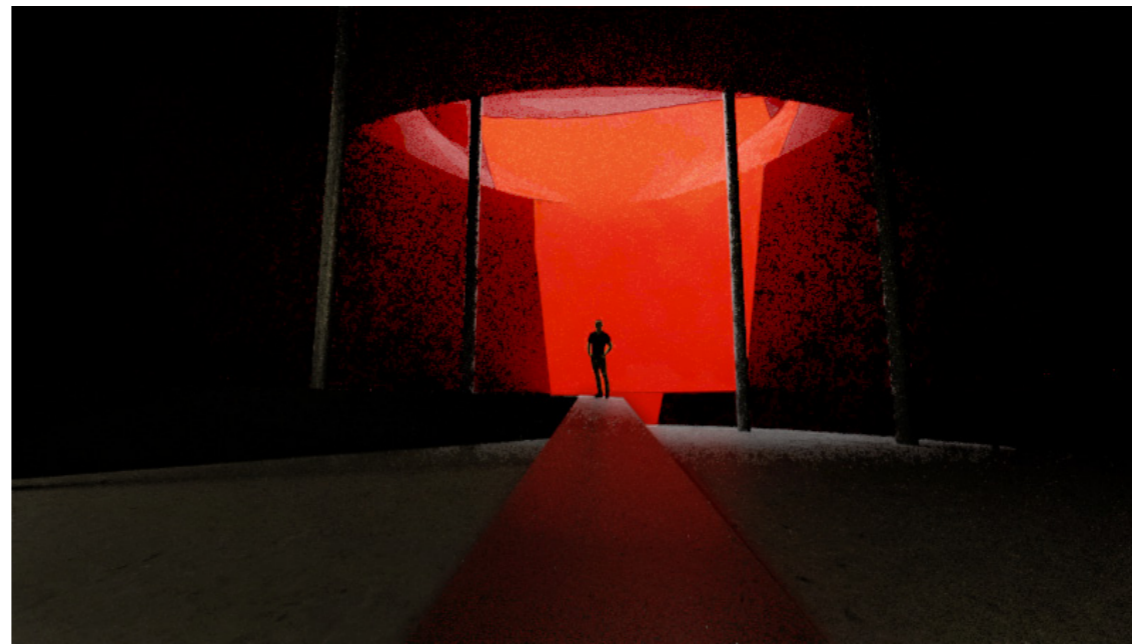
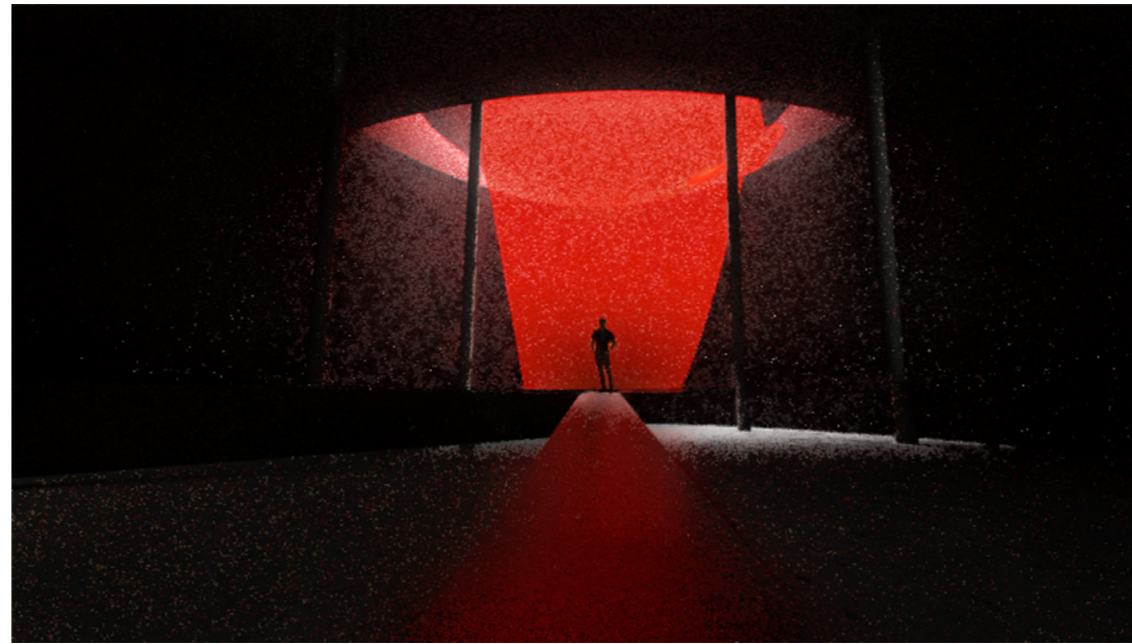
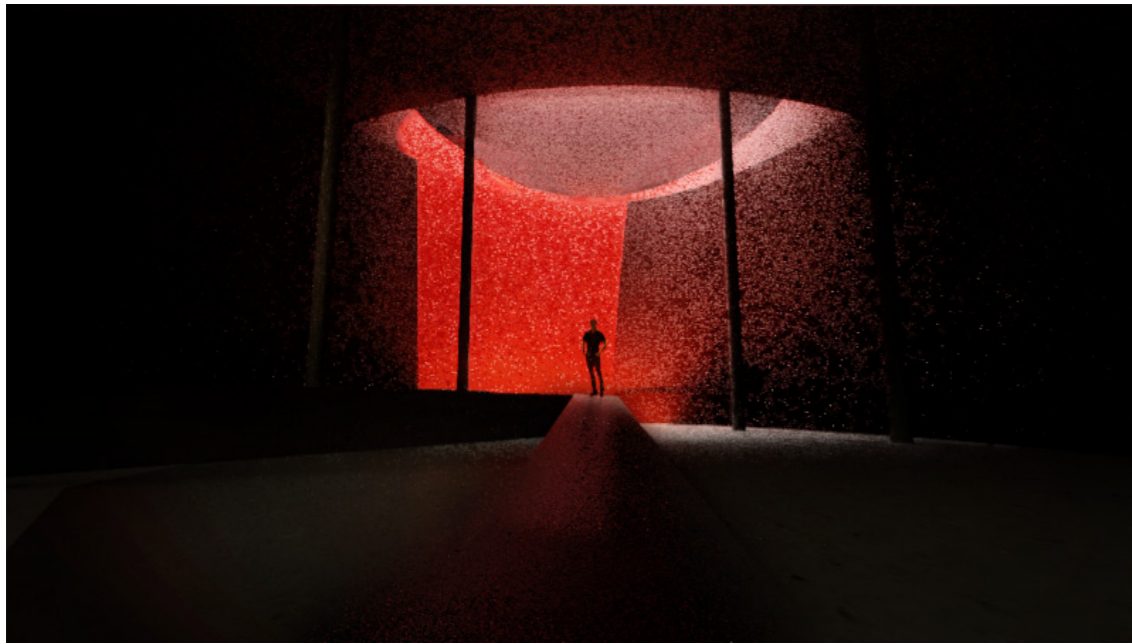


Rough material with less reflection

Comparison

The big contrast of light and shadow

The harsh atmosphere is created through the dramatic light. So, this space needs to increase the contrast of the light and shadow. It is achieved in two aspects. One is raising the roof to reduce the direct sunlight as well as the reflected light. Another one is to use rough material in dark color to reduce reflected light.



The giant of time

The giant of time will be reflected in two aspects.

Experiential time

One is the experiential time. The time in which a subject experiences a work of architecture (Safont-Tria et al., 2012, p. 20). The building presents the meaning of time in the micro-scale. The concept of time can be as short as a visit. You can perceive the suspense in the time of movement by holding still now and then through the light and shadow.

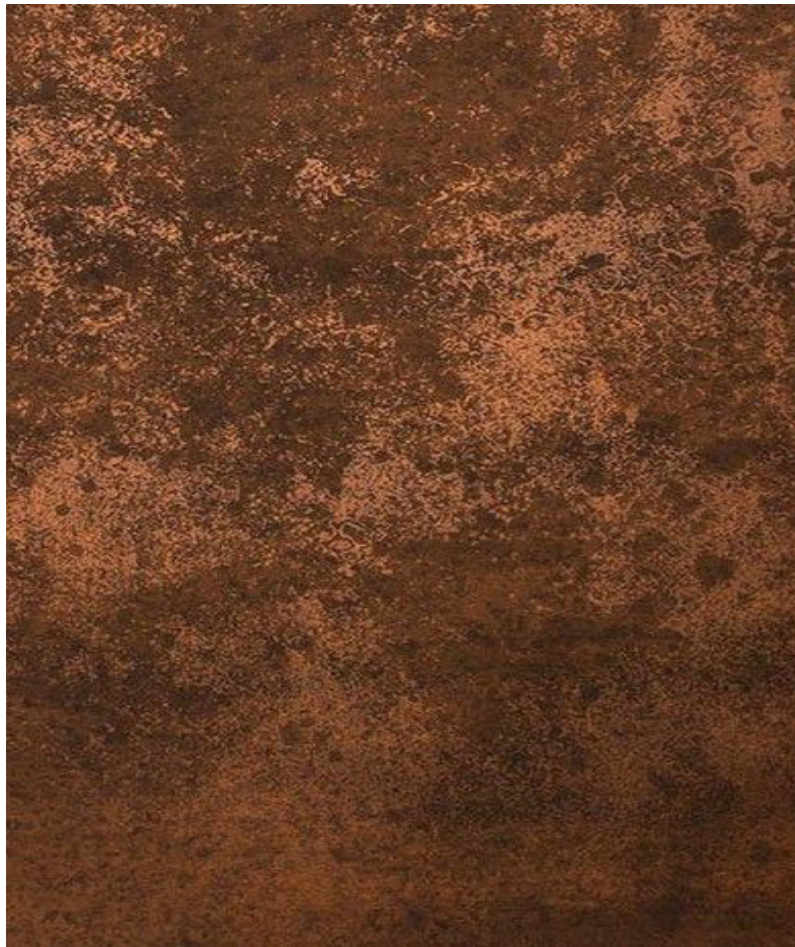


Fig.16

The weatering of material

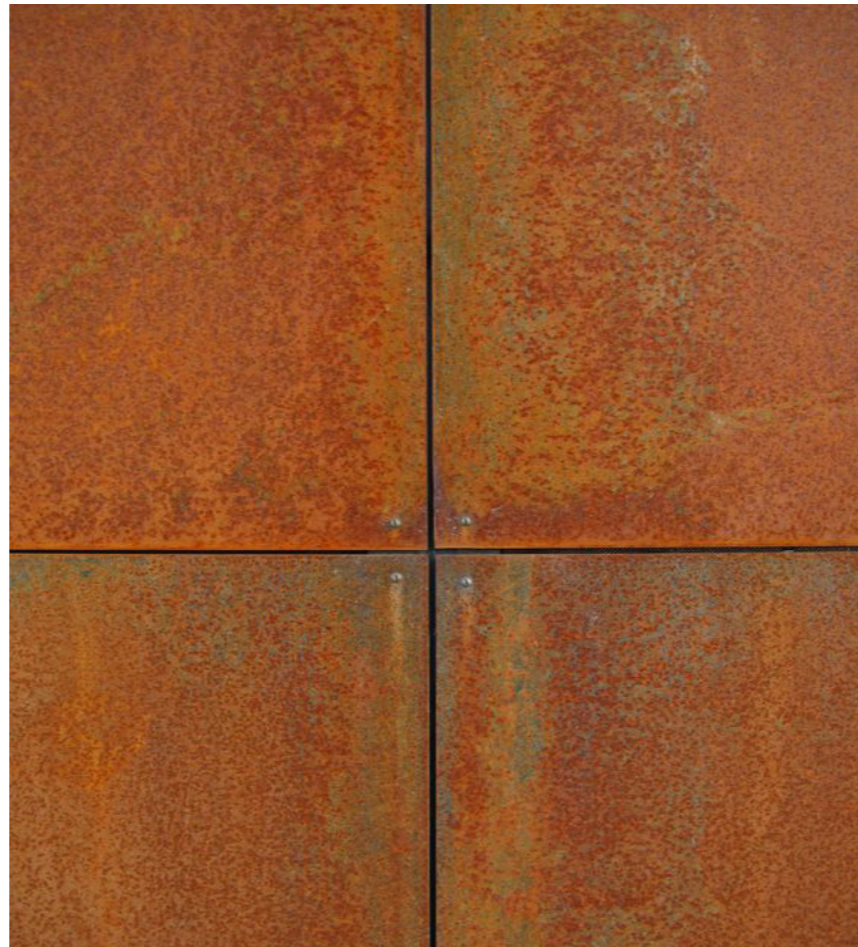
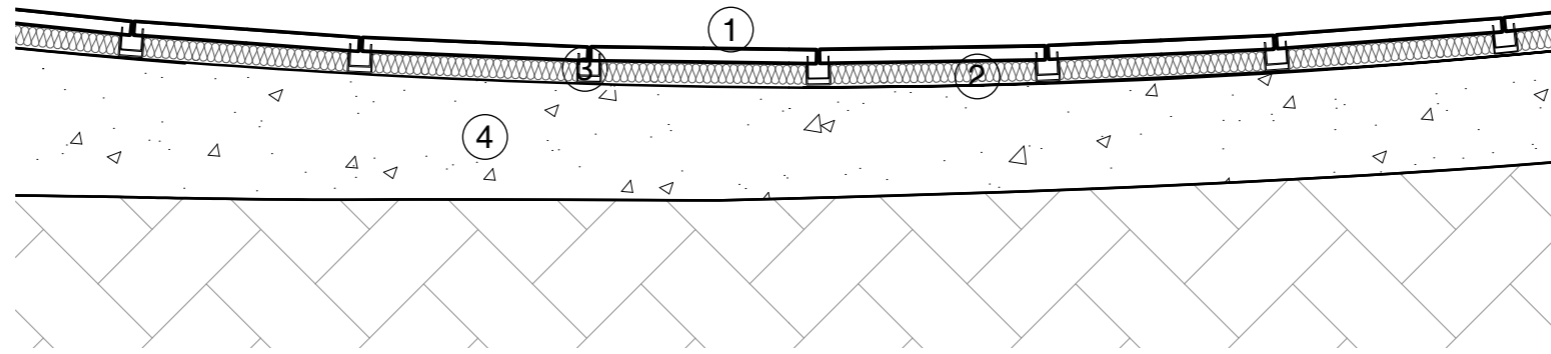
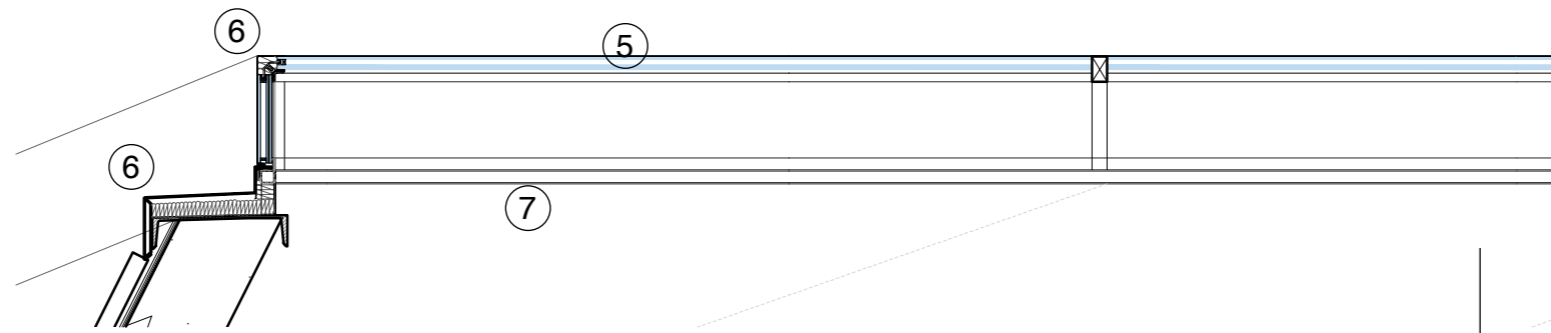


Fig.17

Duration
Another one is duration. The building presents the meaning of time in the macro scale which can be decades through the weathering of metal panels in the hall.

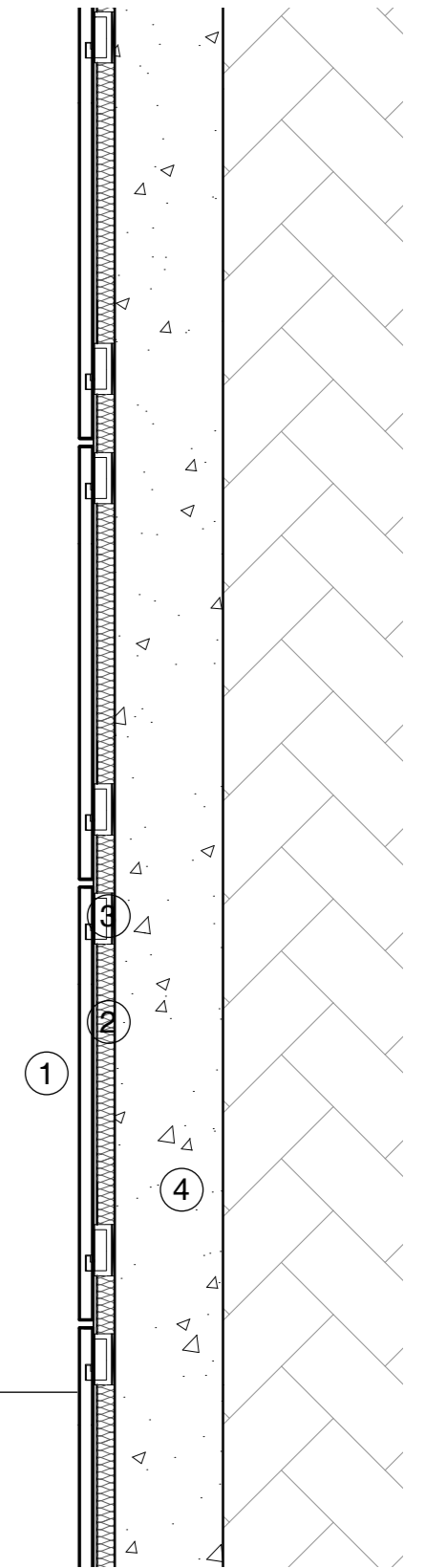
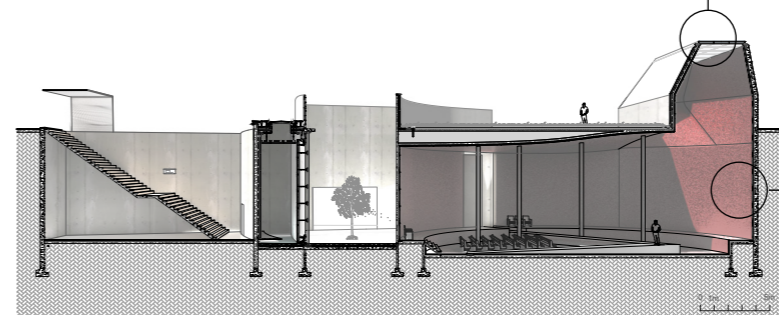


Horizontal section 1:20 Metal interior wall assembly



Vertical section 1:10 Rooflights

1. Dark red rust metal panel
2. Insulation
3. Support Bracket
4. Backing wall
5. Single glazed laminated
6. Folded metal flashing
7. Mild steel support frame



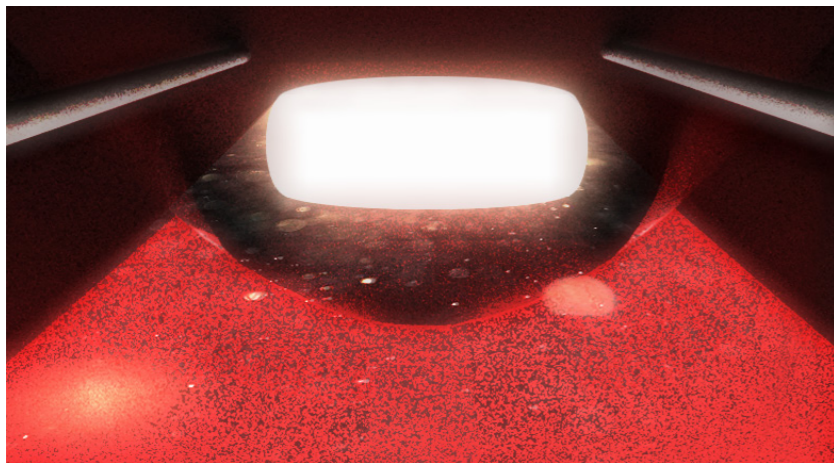
Vertical section 1:20
Metal interior wall assembly



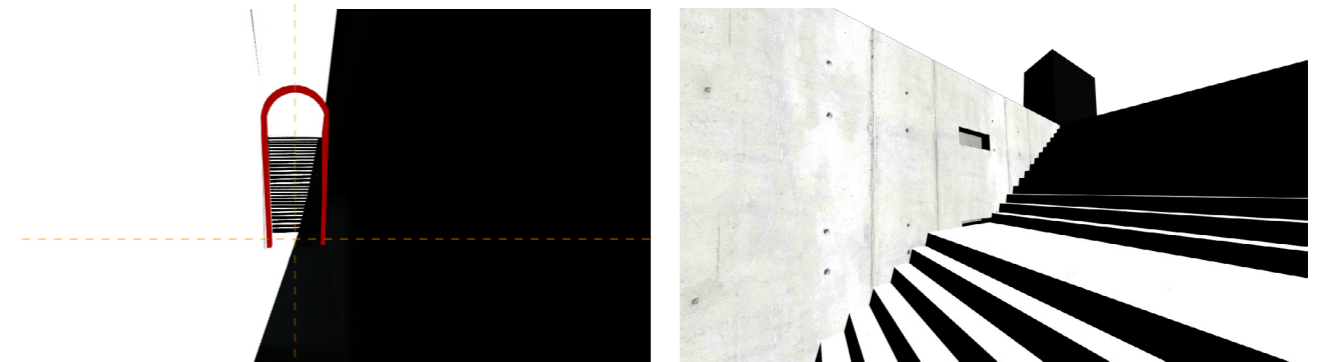
The exit where you can leave.



Straight corridor



The imagination is the transition from a macro perspective in the universe to a micro perspective in life.



On your way back to the ground, there is a small opening which indicate the beginning of this journey. And now it is the end. Do you feel some difference in yourself?

Element 1 Material

Translucent concrete is utilized to transmit the diffused light and make it gradually fading to create a mystical, quiet, and blurry atmosphere. Concrete walls are used to receive the slightly shimmering reflection of the light reflected from water to enhance the mystical feeling. Metal panels in dark red are used to reveal the philosophy of time through the dark color which increases the contrast of light and darkness.

Element 2 Texture

Tactility and auditory sensation also help us to perceive. The sound can be created through the water in the corridor and the humidity feeling of the concrete wall can be made through the steam-filled air. The rusty of the metal panels in the hall also indicate the duration of time which increases the temporal properties of space.

Element 3 Light and shadow

Diffused light with slight and soft shadow helps to create a mystical atmosphere, while direct sunlight with sharp shadow can emphasize the temporal properties of space. Reflection of light is also considered in creating an atmosphere. The shimmering reflection of light on the concrete wall like heartbeat tickles your mood. Limits on reflected light increases the contrast of light and shadow.

Element 4 Color

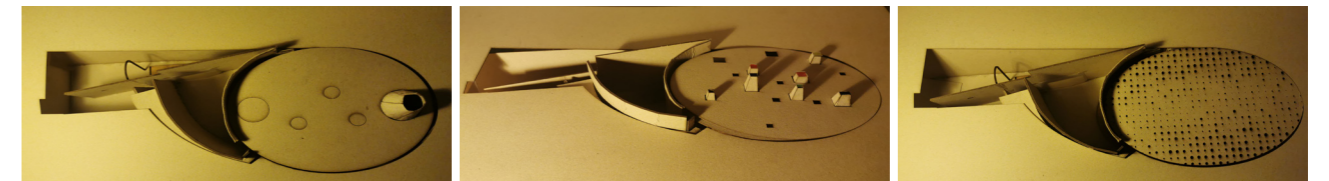
Warm color and cool color are utilized separately in the interior and exterior. The contrast is also a way to stimulate people's perception. There is mainly diffused light in the corridor so that the scene is depicted by cool color, while the direct light in the exterior causes warm color.

Element 5 Architectural form

The curve form of the corridor makes the end of it invisible. It creates darkness and also helps to emphasize the mystical feeling which excites perceivers' curiosity. While the exterior corridor is straight to indicate the bright feeling after the journey. In the hall, the giant of space is reflected from the perspective of scale in contrast to the space and human being. This place is simple and empty to enhance this feeling. The form of the roof also helps to increase the atmosphere of infinity through reducing the natural sunlight.

Element 6 Details

The certain tectonic structure applied to the space plays a significant role in terms of architectural techniques, to make the atmosphere of building a reality. For instance, the sharp skylight in the curved corridor is achieved through the details of the roof and ceiling.



These are the working models that help me to investigate the color, the light and shadow, the form of the roof, and so on.

4. Conclusion

The thesis results in creating an introspective space for a certain group of people who work in Financial Street in Beijing. Through phenomenal experiences of the particular situation materialized by architectural means, people's perception is gradually amplified in the space where they can prepare themselves step by step to feel the infinity of time and space physically and psychologically. In this way, people perceive the world and themselves.

The intension of this thesis is to reawaken the sensibility of the body to perceive the world and themselves if their perception in the sophisticated "secular" world is gradually numb or distorted by others' language. In the realm of architecture, specific and strong situations bond with architecture provide opportunities for perceivers to experience or encourage them to feel. Architecture is a strong force. The situations can make people prepare their minds to clarify themselves, focus on the body and perceive something that they usually ignore or cannot feel. The reality of the architecture is achieved through materialization, such as space, light, color, material. But it transcends just being a physical environment, rather being a particular situation. That makes architecture unique from literature or music.

But we people also choose how we will be affected. We meet architecture in different moods. We visit architecture in different routine. We observe architecture from different angles. Different people might have different perception of the situation. The power of human being is also huge.

As an architect, we shouldn't overestimate either the power of architecture or people. We provide a chance but people have the choice to engage.

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Fig2: Schäfer, J. (1859). Portrait photograph of Arthur Schopenhauer [Image]. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Schopenhauer#/media/File:Arthur_Schopenhauer_by_J_Sch%C3%A4fer,_1859b.jpg

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Fig4: Schlesinger, J. (1831). Hegel-Porträt. [Image]. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm_Friedrich_Hegel#/media/File:Hegel_by_Schlesinger.jpg

Fig5: Richard, W. (2017). Recovering from Loss of Identity. [Image]. Retrieved from: <https://wake-up-world.com/2017/01/24/recovering-from-loss-of-identity/>

Fig6: Huang, H. (2019). A poster for Spirited Away. [Image]. Retrieved from: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1155353.shtml>

Fig7: Robbins, T. (1994). The Shawshank Redemption Movie Poster. [Image]. Retrieved from: <https://www.amazon.com/27x40-Shawshank-Redemption-Movie-Poster/dp/B000KA2D8C>

Fig8: Guerra, F. (2016). Peter Zumthor's Therme Vals. [Image]. Retrieved from: https://www.archdaily.com/798360/peter-zumthors-therme-vals-through-the-lens-of-fernando-guerra/580fb5b6e58ecef67000093-peter-zumthors-therme-vals-through-the-lens-of-fernando-guerra-photo?next_project=no

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