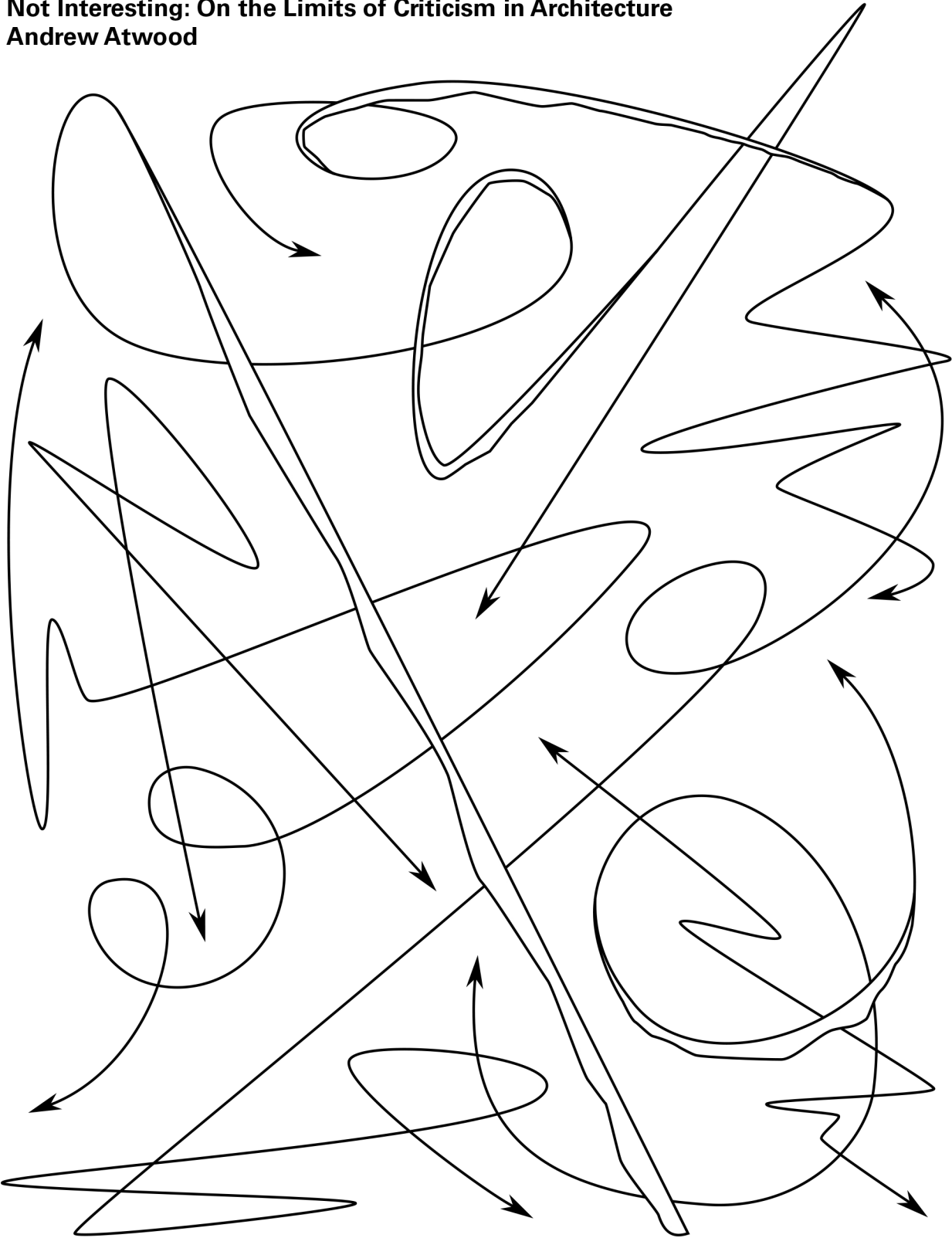
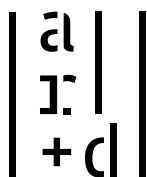


Not Interesting: On the Limits of Criticism in Architecture
Andrew Atwood



Not Interesting



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Not Interesting: On the Limits of Criticism in Architecture

Andrew Atwood

A criticism of criticism... with no logical conclusion.

**For Mom,
A.K.A. Audrey Kroupa Atwood (1948–1991)**

10
Acknowledgements

12
Attention

14
Interesting

63
Boring

119
Confusing

175
Comforting

222
Index

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been my biggest supporter. And finally, to my dad, Bill Atwood, who was the first architect I ever knew and continues to support and inspire.

LA, I love you.

ATTENTION

When I was younger, people often explained my meandering descriptions of the world by saying I had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). It's unclear if a professional ever diagnosed me with ADD; different parents said different things. But the ambiguity surrounding my diagnosis sparked in me a lifelong interest in the subject of attention.[1] Why should I pay attention, I asked. What is attention? Why is it so important? As a kid, I was being cheeky. But slowly, as those around me struggled to define attention in a way I found satisfactory, I started to develop my own ideas about what kinds of things deserved attention and what kinds of attention those things deserved. Once I started teaching architecture and talking with colleagues and students, I began to articulate these differences and—silently at first—to question why only certain kinds of things and certain kinds of attention were rewarded when reviewing architectural work.

It took years of conversations with many of the people mentioned in the acknowledgements before I could assemble enough ideas to fill a book on the subject. Now I have four chapters of text on four kinds of attention, and more than 100 images to illustrate what the kinds of things that provoke them might look like—but even now, I still don't have a good definition for attention itself. Of course I've read and unpacked various textbook definitions of the word, both on the Internet and in

most of the dictionaries in the UC Berkeley library system. They are all super interesting, so precise and focused—nothing like the ongoing haze I experience whenever I force myself to “pay attention.” Maybe some will see this as an admission of failure, dismiss my ideas, and claim that this book and my interest in attention has been a gigantic waste of time, but I don't see it that way.

Historian of science Lorraine Daston, whose work addresses both attention and interest, writes:

Attention sorts out the world. To attend is to distinguish the urgent from the humdrum, signal from the noise, foreground from background. Without attention, our senses would be useless: we would look without seeing, hear without listening, touch without feeling. All experience would be as bland as pabulum, without accents or interest.[2]

By “distinguishing” the urgent, the signal, and the foreground—by expecting our senses to see, to listen, and to feel—Daston slips into an easy association between attention and interest. Like other descriptions of attention, I find this one frustrating in its pithiness: in the fast, focused path it draws between the first word and the last; in the efficiency and clarity with which it juxtaposes and then isolates its terms; in the confident way it dismisses the terms it judges as negative.

Perhaps my problem defining attention is just a lack of interest in the brevity and focus that interest seems to demand. In other words, attention's connection to interest brings with it the expectation of clarity and immediacy. But what if we were careful to uncouple attention from interest? Would this remove the expectation that attention requires us to sort, distinguish, and discriminate between things? Might we get rid of the negative connotations of things that are not interesting? What if we deliberately tried to look without seeing, listen without hearing, touch without feeling? What if we forced ourselves to turn from the interest of the urgent, the signal, the foreground, and deliberately attend to the boredom of humdrum, the confusion of noise, the comfort of background?

It's worth a shot.

1

The subject of attention is a serious one. Others have addressed it in far more interesting and rigorous ways that extend well beyond the scope of this book. For a more thorough account of the subject of attention, as it specifically relates to issues of cognition and psychology, see Harold Pashler, *Attention* (Studies in Cognition) (New York: Psychology Press, 1998).

2

Lorraine Daston, "Attention," *Curiosity and Method: Ten Years of Cabinet Magazine* (New York: Cabinet Books, 2012): p. 467.

INTERESTING

This book is neither an attempt at architectural criticism nor an explanation of my own architectural work.[1] It is not a monograph, a case study book, a reference book, a dictionary of architectural terms, a novel, a history book, a book of architectural theory, an autobiography, a manual of graphic standards, a catalog or archive, a primer in rendering techniques, a coloring book, a pattern book, a utopian manifesto, or a guidebook of architecture landmarks. No, it is none of those things—but it has some aspects of each of them. As such, this book is a bit messy at times. It could be more rigorous and scholarly, less arbitrary, more careful, more logical or ordered, better looking, more colorful, more exciting, and easier to read. In short, it could be more like what we expect when we set out to describe and critique architecture. And, if the book did those things, it would probably be a much more interesting book to read and to look at and flip through. But this book is not interesting.

Instead, this book attempts to develop a language and structure to talk about architecture, without requiring that it be interesting. The modes of attention and discourse presented here lie outside our current habit of focusing on increasingly interesting things. I write, then, not as a critic writing about architecture, but rather as an architect writing about criticism. [2] By criticism,

I refer not only to a form of judgment, but also to a specific form of attention meant to differentiate and understand something—a form of attention we initiate when we find something “interesting.” [3] Whereas interest requires spontaneous focus on one thing and discrimination between things, [4] this book explores a set of alternative modes of attention that stand in opposition to the immediacy and clarity of interest. While focusing on interesting things may seem like an obvious and worthwhile pursuit, it is my position that the interesting, through criticism, often limits the kinds of things to which we turn our attention and reduces the range of things we might discuss. As architects, we have long been subjected to the power of criticism to tell us what is important; consequently, the definition of interesting has become inextricably tied to the institutionalized power of architectural criticism. Now, it is time for us to seek out other forms of power. This requires that we move beyond critique as the only venue for producing knowledge and value in architecture and become more tolerant of a set of weaker, fuzzier, more ambiguous modes of attention, which are in fact incredibly well suited to contemporary architecture.

To be sure, we have heard similar calls before, calls to expand architectural discourse by advocating different forms of pluralism. Most notably, in their once iconoclastic works which are now canon, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi

argued against the purity of modernism by discussing a wide range of styles and forms that operated against modernism and against each other. In the 1990s Deborah Berke and Steven Harris sought a "critical" position around "everyday architecture." [5] More recently, Sarah Whiting and Robert Somol sought to include the cool ease of moody shapes in addition to the hot difficulty of indexical form. [6] But these calls for pluralism were still fairly exclusive, as they still relied on interest (through different models of criticism) as a primary justification in their calls for expansion. They justified looking outside the established architectural discourse with the appeal, "Isn't this other stuff interesting too?" The purpose of this book is not to discount the pluralistic ambitions of *Complexity and Contradiction*, *Learning From Las Vegas*, *Everyday Architecture*, or more recent "post-critical" texts. Instead, this book argues that we can be even more pluralistic by acknowledging those things around us about which we do not at first feel so strongly. What about the stuff we don't know if we want to argue for or against? To acknowledge those kinds of feelings and those kinds of things is to acknowledge the power of interest, the limitations of criticism, and the shortcomings of over fifty years of architectural discourse.

Aspects of Interest

I have no idea when I first heard the word "interesting" used to describe architecture, but I do remember when I first became aware of it [7] and that I subsequently became aware of its ubiquity in architectural discourse. [8] Once I was sensitized to it, "interesting" was everywhere. I could not escape it. Judging by the frequency of its use, to walk into an architecture school, to scroll through an architecture blog, to scan the pages of an architecture magazine, or to read an architecture book is to be confronted with a lot of interesting stuff. And the more I looked around, the more I listened, and the more I read, my attention to the "interesting" grew into a curiosity about the word itself. A search revealed that interest has a long and complicated history. [9] At first, I was lost in the face of its lack of specificity and its presence everywhere. The word showed up in a diversity of contexts, and it was used in a lot of different ways. I was surprised to find it in essays and texts I was very familiar with and considered important but would never have associated with the use of the term. [10] I was surprised by all the different ways it was defined and all the different words with which it was placed in opposition. I encountered interest as the opposite of beauty, the opposite of boredom, the opposite of disinterest, and the opposite of tedium, among others.

As my awareness of it grew, the more suspicious I became of the

word and the more I began to doubt that it held any definite meaning. Interest, it seemed, could be used to support almost anything. There seemed to be no consistency in what people deemed interesting, no consistent set of ideals or ethics, no ideas or concepts, no awareness of scale, and, consequently, no impact. It also seemed to be used in contradictory ways. Once, in the same sentence and without awareness, someone explained to me that one thing was interesting because it was “smart” and that he was interested in another thing because it was “dumb.”

I share this last experience because it encapsulates all my initial frustrations with the topic of interest—frustrations that, while vexing, are also useful in formulating a list of aspects of interest and the different ways it is used to discuss architecture. This list is not a definition of interest, as it does not attempt to affix meaning to a word. Rather, it describes how interest is used tactically as a specific method for critiquing and defending architecture. [11]

1

With interest, the difference between a subject’s feelings and an object’s qualities doesn’t seem to matter much. Colloquially, to call something interesting is to express one’s own interest in it, and vice versa. For instance, “X is interesting” and “I am interested in X” are practically interchangeable. The fluidity between “interesting” and “interested in” creates strange congruencies

between subjective and objective states, placing the term in a category of words that can simultaneously describe qualities in an object and one’s feelings upon encountering an object. Whether something is interesting or someone is interested often has the same effect; as a result, people use the word with little or no awareness of its precise definition. This may seem like an obvious point, but imagine someone describing something as attractive and someone describing feeling attraction and then imagine those two statements meaning the same thing. [12] In contrast to interesting, which hardly discriminates between an object’s interesting qualities and one’s own feelings of interest about that object, describing something as attractive and saying you feel attraction suggest very different things. The former suggests a universal objective quality, closer to beauty, inherent to something and to its position in the world. The latter suggests a subjective state with personal implications, admitting the bias of one’s own personal feelings about something. Saying “X is attractive” has a very different effect than saying “I am attracted to X.”

2

Interest is often empty of its own specific content and usually requires the presence of another quality. Claiming something is interesting is rarely enough; instead, interest requires further justification and evidence in support of an initial intuition. In many cases, the term

interesting functions as a common substrate for a specific form of conversation but does not provide any specific content for that conversation. For instance, when someone calls something interesting, the natural follow-up question is “why?” By contrast, when someone calls something “beautiful,” a response would never take the form of “why?” but rather “I disagree that is beautiful” or “I agree, it is beautiful.” As such, the judgment that something is interesting might be provoked by almost any quality, even by contradictory qualities: “this is smart” and “this is dumb” both might follow “this is interesting.” Its initial vagueness opens conversations up to stronger and more definitive arguments. As such, interest often serves as a conduit or medium between an initial attention to something and a stronger aesthetic judgment. [13]

3

Interest never assumes a positive or negative evaluation. As with the “smart”/“dumb” example, we might just as easily find something interesting because it is “bad” as we might find something interesting because it is “good.” How many times have you watched something specifically because you thought it was bad? We do this every time we stare at a car accident, watch a video clip of someone singing poorly, or laugh at a movie for reasons other than its intended humor. Because interest does not resolve itself so quickly and predictably into stronger positive or stronger

negative categories, it can allow for a sustained pause or delay, extending the time spent around an object as we figure out how, exactly, we feel about it. This open-endedness makes the term weak when compared to other forms of attention or judgment. By initially avoiding stronger categories, interest does not quickly align itself to fixed positions that are loaded down by historical and referential baggage. As a result, interest may lead to unexpected, less explored areas of debate and discussion. At first, I thought this list of three aspects was unique to interest as a form of attention, but once I wrote it out I realized the list describes, at least partially, other terms that describe other modes of attention—terms that are used with similar frequency but with even less awareness. Like interest, these terms provide a transition from language to convey specific meaning, to language used tactically to construct different structures and methods of attention. Instead of applying solely to interest, then, this list uses interest as a barometer to contextualize a set of terms. Interest is just one possibility within a larger field of types of attention.

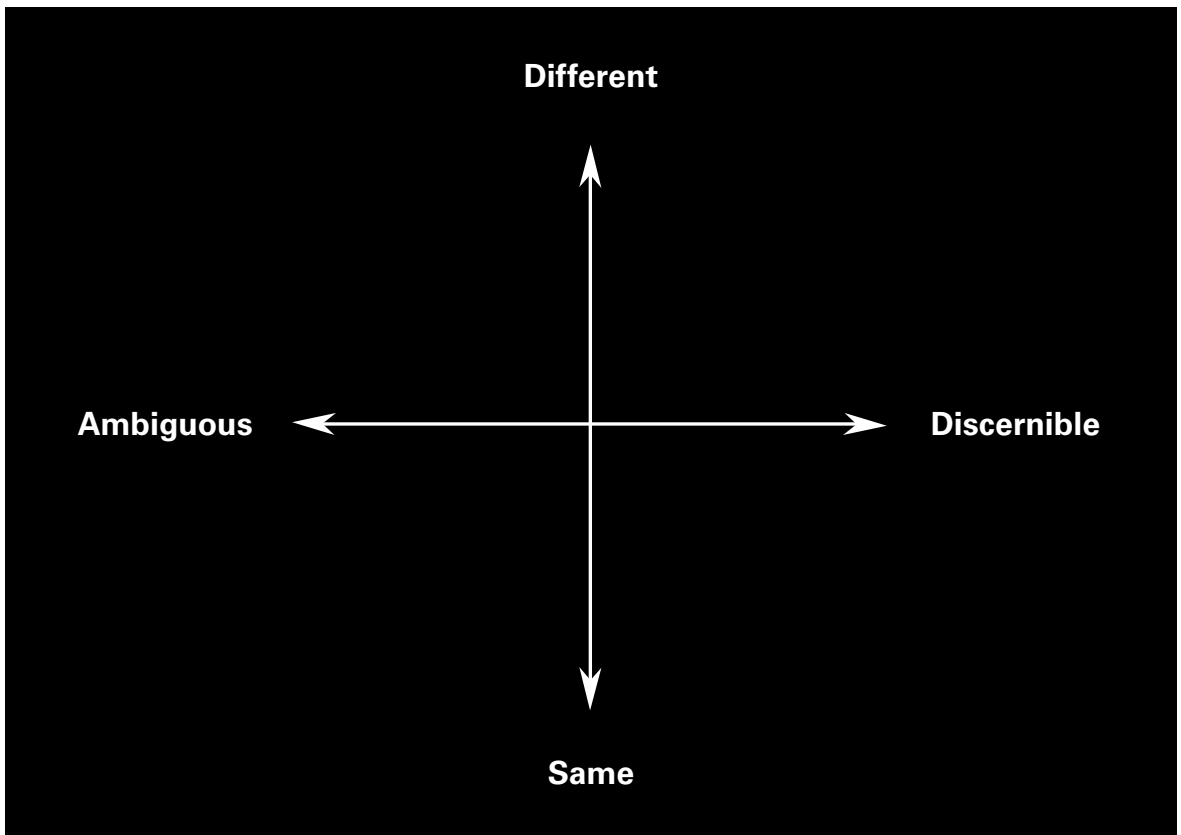
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provide a transition from language used to convey specific meaning, to language used tactically to construct different structures and methods of attention. Instead of applying solely to interest, then, this list uses interest as a barometer to contextualize a set of terms. Those terms—boredom, confusion, and comfort—reposition interest as just one possibility within a larger field of types of attention.

This book is an attempt to describe these four terms and their specific value to architecture through the aspects I have laid out and the issues they raise both in isolation and when their weaknesses force them to rub up against each other. As a result, the structure and form of the book also borrow heavily from the terms. The chapter on boredom adopts a structure inspired by my understanding of forms of boredom. The chapter on comfort uses a comfortable structure, while the chapter on confusion adapts a form that might be a bit confusing at times. This crossover between form and content is intended to highlight the ways these terms can also be applied to discourse itself. The book is, after all, a specific format for presenting and digesting the architecture defined by these terms.

A Field of Attention

The field of attention contains terms that share with interesting the three aspects listed above but force attention in different ways. So, using interesting as an initial barometer, the field is constructed using two different continuums to measure and evaluate levels of interest. I imagine these as two perpendicular axes which extend well beyond interesting—in theory, infinitely—on to alternative territories in the field. First, interest implies a comparison between things along a spectrum from difference to sameness. To provoke interest, something has to stand out from a field of other things. We are most often interested in things that are different, and not interested in things that are the same. Often this is related to novelty, but not always. Second, interest relates to our ability to understand something; it implies an axis of discernibility versus ambiguity. Interesting things are discernible; their opposites are often ambiguous or difficult to specifically define. A coordinate system to describe this field is charted along the two axes defined by these continuums.[14] The vertical axis represents the space between difference and sameness, while the horizontal axis represents the space between discernibility and ambiguity. An initial system would look like this: [15]

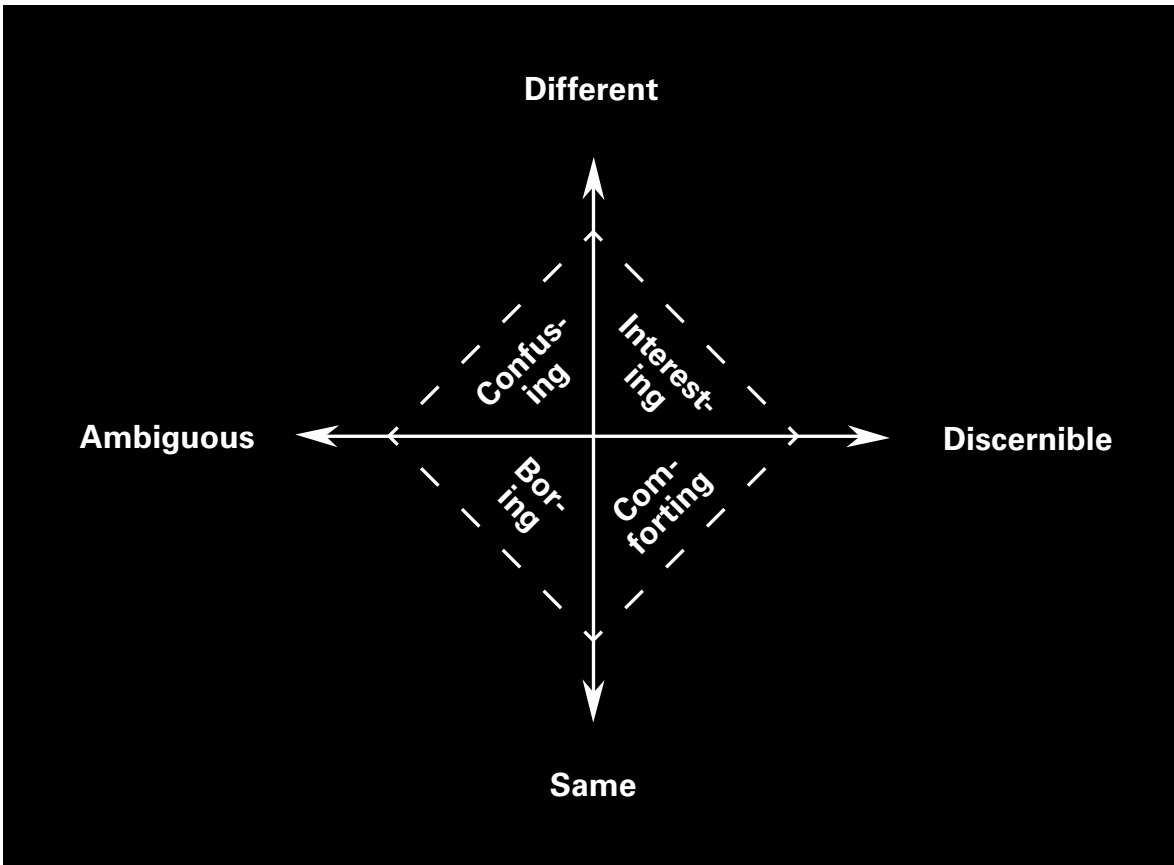


The two axes define a field with four territories, each of which represents a different category of attention. As interesting requires both difference and discernibility, it describes all things provoking the types of feelings that fall in the upper right quadrant. That leaves three quadrants that might each be described by a different term that shares the characteristics of interesting articulated above.

It turns out that the other three quadrants can also be described by terms which are used with great frequency in discussing architecture. Similarly to interesting, these words typically serve as a precursor or segue to another, stronger form of judgment

and are therefore overlooked as modes of attention in their own right. These terms, which are the subject of this book, are boring, confusing, and comforting. Like interesting, these terms are often used as an opening line when someone decides to give attention to a specific aspect of architectural work. Increasingly, it seems, these different modes of attention are directed to things which are not interesting because they tend towards sameness and familiarity (comforting) or difference and indiscernibility (confusing) or a monotonous combination of both (boring). Nevertheless, they still rely on a structure and context similar to those of interest pointed out above. Using

these three words, the expanded field of attention looks like this:



Now seems an appropriate time to clarify what goes into this field of attention. What do the four categories of the field relate to? Is it a field of feelings? Or a field of objects? The answer is that it is both. Recall that one aspect of this field is a level of ambiguity toward subjective and objective states. Just as interesting simultaneously describes something about a subject's feelings and an object's qualities, so do boring, comforting, and confusing. Thus, the field is a coordinate system constructed around terms that describe feelings, into which we

might place specific objects whose qualities provoke those feelings to different degrees along two axes.

Thinking in terms of a coordinate system clarifies the characteristics of and relationships between these four modes of attention. The axes describe hard boundaries, so that an object cannot be at the same time confusing and comforting, or boring and interesting. However, the two-dimensionality of the system allows for objects to provoke the same mode of attention in quite different ways. For instance,

some objects might fall closer to one axis than the other. The boringness of an object that lies closer to the vertical axis is understood to rely less on its ambiguity and more on its sameness. Thus it is closer to comforting than it is to confusing; one might assume then that it would never be confusing. However, as the coordinate system relies both on subject and object, perhaps the same object might sometimes, for a different subject, fall to the right of the vertical axis, meaning that at that moment the object would be comforting rather than boring. If we follow the mathematical analogy exactly, it must be possible for a point to fall exactly on the axis as well, meaning that sometimes an object might not fall neatly into one territory, creating ambivalent conditions between, for instance, boring and comforting. Or, in the most intense instance, something might fall at the intersection of both axes. Depending on how you look at it, this is the most interesting point, or the most boring, or the most confusing, or the most comforting. Or it is so neatly balanced that it is none of those things; it provokes no reaction at all—quite a feat in the face of architecture critics.

That the most intense position is the origin point is important as it relates to the extent of this field. Notice that I have placed the terms rather close to the origin. This is because the further attention gets from the origin and from the other three quadrants, the less related it is to my initial observations, as it

occupies less and less ambiguous territory. Because of their shared proximity to the center of the graph, there are bound to be intersections, overlaps, and similarities between each of the words and objects they describe, particularly if you ask different subjects. These intersections and ambiguities are unavoidable and useful. In fact it is critical that some of the categories are questionable and debatable; their weakness is necessary to produce deferral of judgment and an ongoing conversation.

The overlaps underscore the weakness of each of the terms. Like the word interesting, boring, comforting, and confusing are not strong qualifiers. Once something moves further from the origin, it starts to become very interesting, very boring, very comforting, or very confusing, at which point there is less to discuss. These extremes often have the opposite effect to the intensity of an origin point; with less ambiguity between terms and things, there is usually less to discuss and less to articulate. In these cases, judgments happen faster as seemingly unimportant details are overlooked or dismissed. For that reason, I consider those extreme positions to be outside the field shown above. In this outside territory, we can use different terms to describe these extremes, in order to differentiate them from the field. Again, consider the example of the interesting. While a mildly different and mildly discernible thing

is interesting, a highly differentiated and highly discernible thing produces excitement. Exciting, like interesting, has its own history. [16] Whereas interest can go on and on, excitement is quickly exhausted and often replaced by a search for the next even more exciting thing. Instead of a productive friction between a set of related but weakly oppositional terms, excitement produces only the search for more excitement. The same goes for the other quadrants. Interest leads to excitement. Confusion risks escaping to chaos. Comfort can be reduced to laziness. And boredom may lead to death.

These extremes represent the nebulous boundaries of this book. It might seem counter-intuitive to set boundaries in order to expand a discussion. However, I am much more interested in closely examining and understanding infinitesimal tendencies towards the intersections of terms—and eventually towards that elusive origin point—than I am in expanding ever outward. Consequently, this book uses the dynamics between a set of related, weakly oppositional terms to enhance and expand the things we talk about when we talk about architecture. By placing them so close to each other, I hope to exploit their weakness to explore how they might encounter each other productively. Throughout this book, I attempt to make each term more articulate, but also ultimately to accept and embrace their ambiguity.

In Formal Terms

Until now, this discussion has not been about architecture. Instead, I have categorized and contextualized a set of terms that describe different types of attention that could be directed at almost anything. From this point forward, I will focus on these terms and their more specific relationship to architecture. To begin, I will consider the different way each term might describe a reaction to something based on how its parts are arranged in relation to the whole. This strategy of coupling each term with a formal description of part-to-whole relationships is intended to establish an initial connection between these four terms and the modes of attention they might provoke when we encounter architecture. I am not suggesting that part-to-whole relationships are the only way we might use these terms to critique and describe architecture. Instead, part-to-whole relationships represent a customary set of assumptions and habits that architects often use to start a conversation quickly and easily. I would also point out that “part-to-whole” is not limited to form and can readily be extended to a diverse set of issues in architecture including tectonics, structure, technique, scale, and program. However, part-to-whole has its limitations, and there are, undoubtedly, applications of these terms that do not require discussing architecture in this way. Thus it is given that the following part-to-whole descriptions are limited in scope and not entirely

sufficient in application; I hope they will provoke more conversations that apply these terms in different ways and with different sets of criteria.

As a starting point, a basic formal description of each term:

Interesting architecture establishes discernible part-to-whole relationships through the composition of new and/or differentiated parts. The areas of attention are typically clear, and the methods we use to discern and describe them are known or knowable. In its total composition, the whole appears different from other similar arrangements, and while there may be some degree of novelty, its origins or process or "logic" is traceable. Interesting architecture never appears arbitrary and is often described as "rigorous." This is the type of work that lends itself to close reading. The following three alternatives operate in a different paradigm, something that has been called "close attention." [17]

Boring architecture is the opposite of interesting architecture. Its parts are monotonous, repetitive, and inexhaustible in their limits. There is no variation from part to part; it goes on and on, so that its discernibility is limited by our abilities to stay attentive. This internal monotony forces attention to the periphery, to the context, which it usually meets abruptly, as if the parts seemed ready to extend forever. The periphery or boundary is indifferent to the internal repetition of parts and resists

focused attention. There is no awkwardness or surprise, only repetitive and redundant familiarity between all things, which reaffirms established norms and expectations.

Comforting architecture is similar to boring architecture. Its parts are familiar, and they are arranged in familiar ways to produce familiar wholes. All formal relationships can be understood through prior experience, as they generally conform to everyday situations and experiences. However, unlike boring architecture, comfortable architecture has higher tolerances, creating looser arrangements of parts which settle into more casual wholes. This settling creates a soft periphery; comforting architecture fits easily into its context. The peripheries are not abrupt, but seamless with their surrounding environment such that it is often difficult to understand precisely the transition from one comfortable building to another or from a comfortable building to its site. They are surrounded by something like a peripheral fuzz. This is not to say that there aren't hierarchies and transitions; there are, but the delineation between them is often blurred by their more relaxed positions relative to each other and to the world.

Confusing Architecture is the opposite of comforting architecture. It cannot be explained based on established conventions. All attempts to align or understand parts based on expectations and commonly agreed-upon standards are futile, as there is

no discernible logic between parts and whole or between parts and other parts. While parts are different, they are not always discrete. Parts are blurry and inscrutable. Wholes are awkward and strange. As such, confusing architecture is difficult to describe or discuss in known terms. Its process isn't legible or logical. Confusing architecture is often felt to be unconventional, arbitrary, and without rigor.

The title of this book refers to these last three categories of attention. They escape the clarity and novelty in interesting things and instead flush out forms of attention that welcome the blur of boring, confusing and comforting things.

Post-Construction Documents [18]

Along with text, the book contains images. These images are mostly drawings and renderings of existing buildings, but there is some other stuff as well: mountains, dolmens, the moon, etc. The buildings were made by others but are represented here in a set of images which I drew and rendered. In order to make them, I used publicly available information but had limited or no contact with anyone who was directly involved in the design or execution of the work. I did this for three reasons. First, some of the projects have no critical positioning, no clear histories, no clear intention, and not a single known architect or designer. Second, the images in this book draw parallels

across different things which evoke the set of terms laid out above. While these descriptions are meant as a starting point and do not represent an exhaustive account of all the ways we might discuss architecture and its relationship to boredom, confusion, and comfort, these descriptions are allied to a consistent method of representation applied to the projects presented in this book. To achieve this level of consistency and evenness, I felt it necessary to apply a set of graphic standards that would serve as a common denominator for all projects. Each project is represented here using orthographic drawings and a single rendered perspective. Third, all the images take a polemical position through the method and form of their re-presentation. I refer here to a category of representation called post-construction documents.

Under the umbrella term of post-construction documents we find various types of documentation: as-built drawings, record drawings, and measured drawings.[19] All three types of post-construction documentation differ with respect to authorship and contractual responsibility, but they share a similar distance from the design process and represent an ambition to document something as it is, and nothing else. These drawings operate outside of the boundaries of early schematic design visualizations, which must function as rhetorical devices used to convince clients or other project stakeholders. They differ from forms of representation produced in the

middle stages of a project's development that are subject to the needs of various building systems and details and are used to convince officials of the building's safety, code compliance, and constructability. And while some, like as-built drawings, are often made on top of a set of construction drawings, they do not represent the architect's conflicts and struggles with the contractor, client, and other end users in the way a set of construction documents would. More than any other form of architectural representation, post-construction documents are meant to represent a project without bias. I do not mean to suggest that they're neutral. They are bound to certain conventions, expectations, and contractual obligations that make neutrality impossible. Even so, of all the forms of representation we encounter in architecture, these documents get closest to a suggestion of objectivity. These drawings aren't without judgment, but they are produced to represent all projects evenly through an intentionally dull tone and lack of hierarchy or specific focus. In fact, we might say that they are not interesting.

Unlike drawings produced before the building, which are loaded with the combined rhetoric and politics of various members of the design and construction process, post-construction documents must do the opposite. As documents of a survey, they must possess a "rhetoric of objectivity," which has been described as an "oscillation

between aestheticization and documentary survey." [20] In this book, I take this rhetoric one small step further. Instead of an oscillation, these images are a combination of the documentary survey and its aestheticization. By combining the existing blank aesthetic of each project with the blank rhetoric of "documentation," this book extends the conversation about its four central terms to implicate the images we make as much as the buildings we design and the language we use to describe it.

The idea of the "survey" includes more than just a series of measurements taken from the final built thing. In the case of each building, because I was not responsible for the design or construction of the projects, I had less information, less documentation of the project before it was built, and limited contact with those responsible for its execution and construction. I contacted people and was able to compile information and receive image rights for some of the more "well-known" projects completed by "well-known" architects, but many of my requests were ignored, or the people responsible for specific buildings could not be located. For many of the projects, I relied on books, image searches, and other people's websites as part of my survey. Low-res and blurry, these images were often insufficient as a complete documentation of a project, making it unclear whether actual details were suppressed in the building or erased by the JPEG's compression algorithm.

I take the position that this distinction is usually unimportant but that it adds another layer to the blankness of the projects represented in this book. Not only are the buildings blank; so are the images. Searching for the precise location of each project's boredom, comfort, or confusion (whether of the building or of its image) forces us to look more closely and focus attention in different ways on the buildings, their images, and the increasingly confusing relationship between the two.

The Social Capacity of Architecture

Lastly, I will admit, there is an absurd component to the premise and general orientation of this book. The initial conceit is ridiculous at a certain level: asking that we force our attention to things that we do not feel strongly about or that we would typically ignore, overlook, or avoid might seem like a joke—a joke which in its simplicity and obviousness is easy to dismiss as frivolous or trivial and not worth our time. I will just point out that it is precisely this kind of reaction which this book seeks to combat. [21] Our instinct to turn away from those things that do not seem to warrant our attention is to concede to established systems of power in architecture and to refuse to challenge some of the aesthetic habits of critique embedded in our contemporary debates. Indeed, those debates work hard to exclude things and people that do not subscribe to

the habits and conventions of those conversations. Please do not read this book as an attempt at irony. The speed with which irony works has made it an attractive tool for some architects as a way to make work quickly. It has in turn been co-opted by architectural institutions as a label to condemn and dismiss just as quickly all work that does not subscribe to established conventions and standards embedded in what they deem interesting or “good” architecture. Instead, I ask that we all dig in, get closer, stare longer. To do so is to expand architecture's capacity to give attention to things and people that do not operate inside its increasingly hermetic bubble.

By questioning this bubble and the terms that help to define it, I hope to expand the social capacity of architecture. I do not mean the social issues which pass through architecture and attempt, in one step, to solve larger “societal problems.” I believe architects have a role to play in these issues, but I also believe these applications run the risk of narrowing architecture's scope while trivializing the scale of societal problems. I also do not refer to the social relations that lie within architecture. While this is a book about the conversations architects have about architectural work, it aims to expand those conversations in search of new audiences and new constituencies for architecture. As such, it is not focused on the disciplinary micro-politics of architecture. Such navel-gazing would only reinforce

the bubbles I want to burst. Instead, I write here about the social relations of architecture. [22] What are the structures and terms of architectural critique? What are the forms of work we critique? Who is responsible for the production of this work? For whom is it produced? How is it circulated and distributed? How is it positioned? How is it received? To what audience? How is architecture more broadly and more collectively understood? What are the terms of those collective understandings? How can we redefine those terms inside and outside of architecture? This book is part of an early, ongoing attempt to address these questions, to broaden the terms of architecture and engage new audiences by better understanding the motivation behind the weak terms used within architecture and imagining what words from outside of architecture we might import to make those judgments more precise.

In 1936, Walter Benjamin distinguished between two different modes of attention in art. The first describes the individual effort of a concentrated “lover” or expert who is absorbed by the work. The second describes the collective effort of the distracted “masses” who absorb the work. Famously, architecture is the type of art Benjamin associates with absorption by a collective. [23] Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and others have expanded on these ideas in subsequent years. [24] Most recently, Beatriz Colomina doubled down on Benjamin’s claim but defined

distraction as the predominant mode of attention in contemporary culture—not just in art, but everywhere. [25] However, the terms that most closely align with distraction and other “new forms of attention,” as well as their subsequent aesthetic categories, are rarely questioned or discussed in depth inside of architecture, even though critics use the words freely while buying time to respond to work. In other words, the terms that describe how architecture is typically experienced rarely work their way into architectural discourse, at least not productively. This book argues that expanding the terms of our own debates to include and to understand fully these other terms will empower architecture to engage more directly with larger audiences.

1

In Robert Venturi's preface to *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, he writes, "This book is both an attempt at architectural criticism and an apologia—an explanation, indirectly, of my work." One could argue that that book laid out a theory of interesting stuff. This book is my humble attempt to extend Venturi's efforts to include an additional set of terms. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977): 13.

2

I am thinking again of Venturi's preface, when he says, "I write, then, as an architect who employs criticism rather than a critic who chooses architecture." Venturi, *Complexity*, 13.

3

Cultural theorist, literary critic, and feminist scholar Sianne Ngai explains how "Interest" as a form of judgment mediates cultural discourse and disagreement in her foundational essay on the topic, "Merely Interesting," in *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 4 (2008): 777–817.

4

I first encountered the formulation of "interest" and "the interesting" as a spontaneous and discriminating focus in two essays by Richard Lind: "Attention and the Aesthetic Object," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39, no. 2 (1980): 131–142; and "Why Isn't Minimal Art Boring?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 45, no. 2 (1986): 195–197.

5

Deborah Berke and Steven Harris address "the critical political aspects of everyday life in their book" in *The Architecture of the Everyday* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997): 3.

6

Sarah Whiting and Bob Somol, "Notes Around the Doppler and Other Moods of Modernism," in *Perspecta* 33 (2002): 72–77.

7

I first became aware of the ubiquity of "interest" in architecture when reviewing the work from Andrew Zago's studio, "Of Marginal Interest" (Vertical Studio, SCI-Arc, Los Angeles, CA, Spring 2012). Zago has given various lectures and more

informal talks on the idea of "marginal interest." These earlier investigations on this topic provided great insight to the early formulation of my own interest on the topic of "The Interesting." For a brief introduction to Zago's own ideas, please see his lecture at the Rice School of Architecture, "Of Marginal Interest" (lecture, Rice School of Architecture, Houston, TX, March 13, 2014).

8

This is anecdotal. However, if you happen to find yourself in an architecture school in the near future, count the number of times you hear the word "interesting" used as an initial reason for giving attention to anything.

9

For an exhaustive theory of the term *Interesting* (as well as *Cute* and *Zany*) see Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories*, which provides a study of these terms. Along with Andrew Zago, her ideas helped shape many of my initial thoughts on the subject of interest in architecture. Sianne Ngai. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Cute, Zany, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

10

For example, Michael Fried uses some variation of "interest" eleven times in his essay "Art and Objecthood," in *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967): 12–23. Clement Greenberg uses it seven times in "Towards a Newer Laocoön,"

in *Partisan Review* VII, no. 4 (July–August 1940): 296–310.

11

For a different account of specific forms of architectural criticism (and review) see John May, "Under Present Conditions Our Dullness Will Intensify," in *Project Journal*, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 18–21.

12

This idea originated in early conversations about this book with Ryan Roark. In those conversations *attraction* replaced *beauty* as a term that might oscillate between objective description and subjective feeling.

13

This concept is handled in depth in Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 112–115.

14

The idea of a "field" as a way to structure the terms of this book is borrowed from Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (1979): 31–44.

15

This coordinate system is similar to a coordinate system found in Paul Silvia's article, "Confusion and Interest: The role of knowledge emotions in aesthetic experience," in *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 4, no. 2 (May 2010): 75–80. The primary thrust of that article is different from the structure of this book, and the terms, quadrants, and axes have been changed and expanded for the purposes of this book.

16

In the chapter "Boredom and Excitement" in *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), Bertrand Russell constructs a history of boredom. Before his essay, boredom had received little critical attention. Russell argues that boredom is the result of the rise of agrarian society and is one of the greatest motivating powers in contemporary life. He observes, "We are less bored than our ancestors were, but we are more afraid of boredom. We have come to know, or rather to believe, that boredom is not part of the natural lot of man, but can be avoided by a sufficiently vigorous pursuit of excitement." Bertrand Russell, "Boredom and Excitement," in *The Conquest of Happiness* [1930] (New York: W. W. Norton &

Company, 2013):
para. 3.

17

Jeffrey Kipnis
in discussions
with the author,
January 2017–
May 2017.

18

A portion of the
chapter was pub-
lished previously
in an exhibition
catalog for an early
career retrospec-
tive on my work
with First Office.
Andrew Atwood,
“Post Construction
Documents,” in
*Estrangements,
Messes and
Fictions, Exhibition
Catalog*, ed.
Hadrian Predock
(Los Angeles:
USC School of
Architecture, 2016).

19

An exhaustive
legal definition
and distinction to
these terms can
be found in var-
ious documents
produced by the
AIA. Of these, AIA
Best Practices is
the most concise.

AIA Best Practices
(June 2007): 1–2.

20

Martino Stierli
uses this phrase
in his book on Las
Vegas during a
discussion of the
documentary style
of Scott-Brown
and Venturi,
among others.
Martino Stierli,
*Las Vegas in the
Rearview Mirror*
(Los Angeles:
Getty, 2013): 135.

21

The idea for the
book that would at
first seem ridicu-
lous was inspired
by the following
quote: “The dif-
ference between
the sophistica-
tion of getting
the joke and the
greater sophisti-
cation of refusing
to get the joke
depends on how
closely one reads
a work that seems
to ask only that
it not be read.”
Craig Dworkin,
No Medium
(Cambridge: MIT
Press, 2015): 78–79.

22

This structure
borrows from
Dworkin’s
description of Jed
Rasula’s formu-
lation regarding
the politics of
poetry. While my
interpretation
of his interpre-
tation shifts the
terms slightly, the
basic structure of
this formulation
can be found in
Dworkin’s book,
*Reading the
Illegible* (Chicago:
Northwestern
University Press,
1998): 4. See
also: Jed Rasula,
“The Politics of,
the Politics in,”
in *Politics and
Poetic Value*,
ed. Robert von
Hallberg (Chicago:
University of
Chicago Press,
1987): 317.

23

Walter Benjamin,
“The Work of
Art in the Age
of Technological
Reproduction,”
in *Illumination:
Essays and
Reflections* (New

York: Harcourt,
Brace & World,
1968): 239–240.

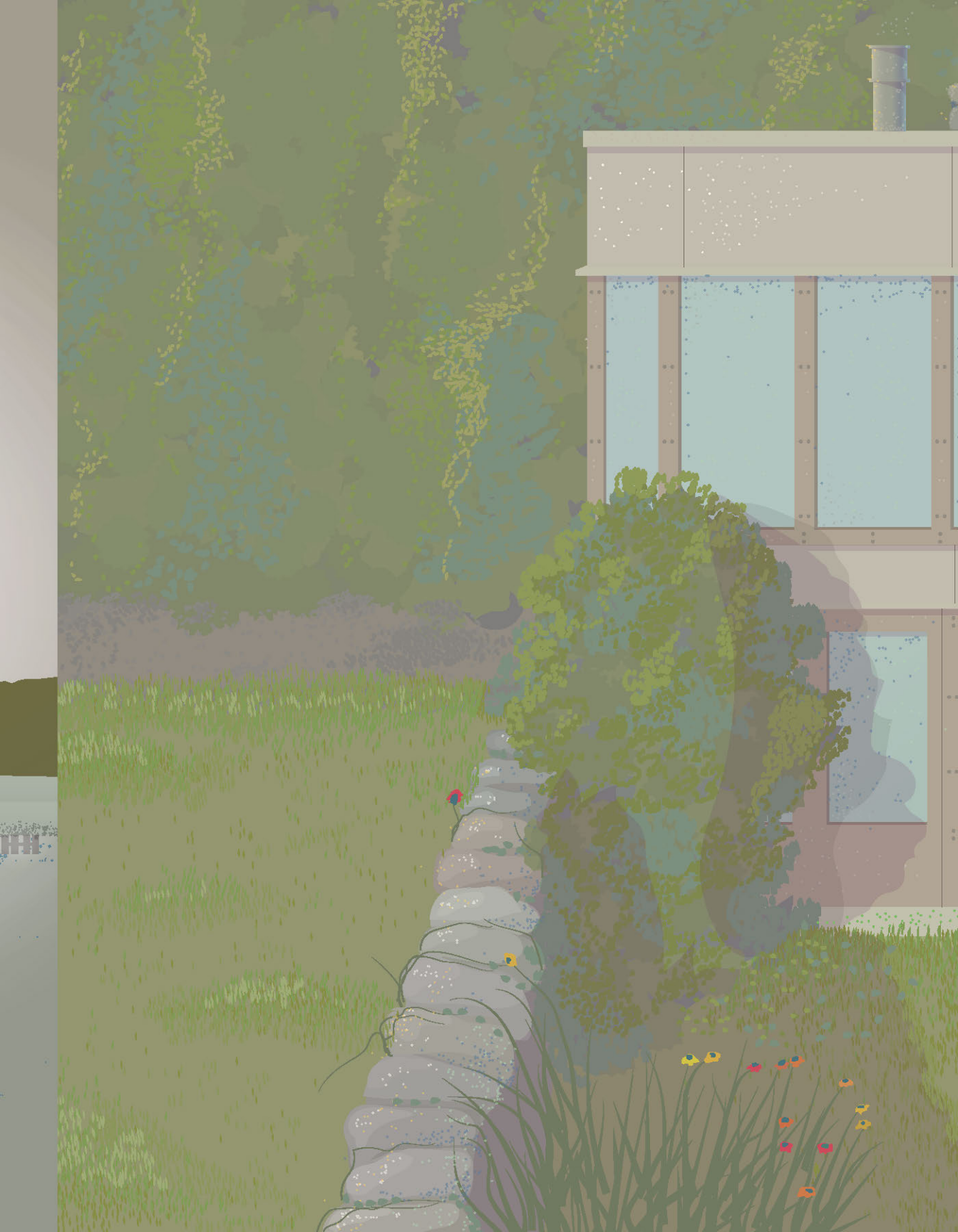
24

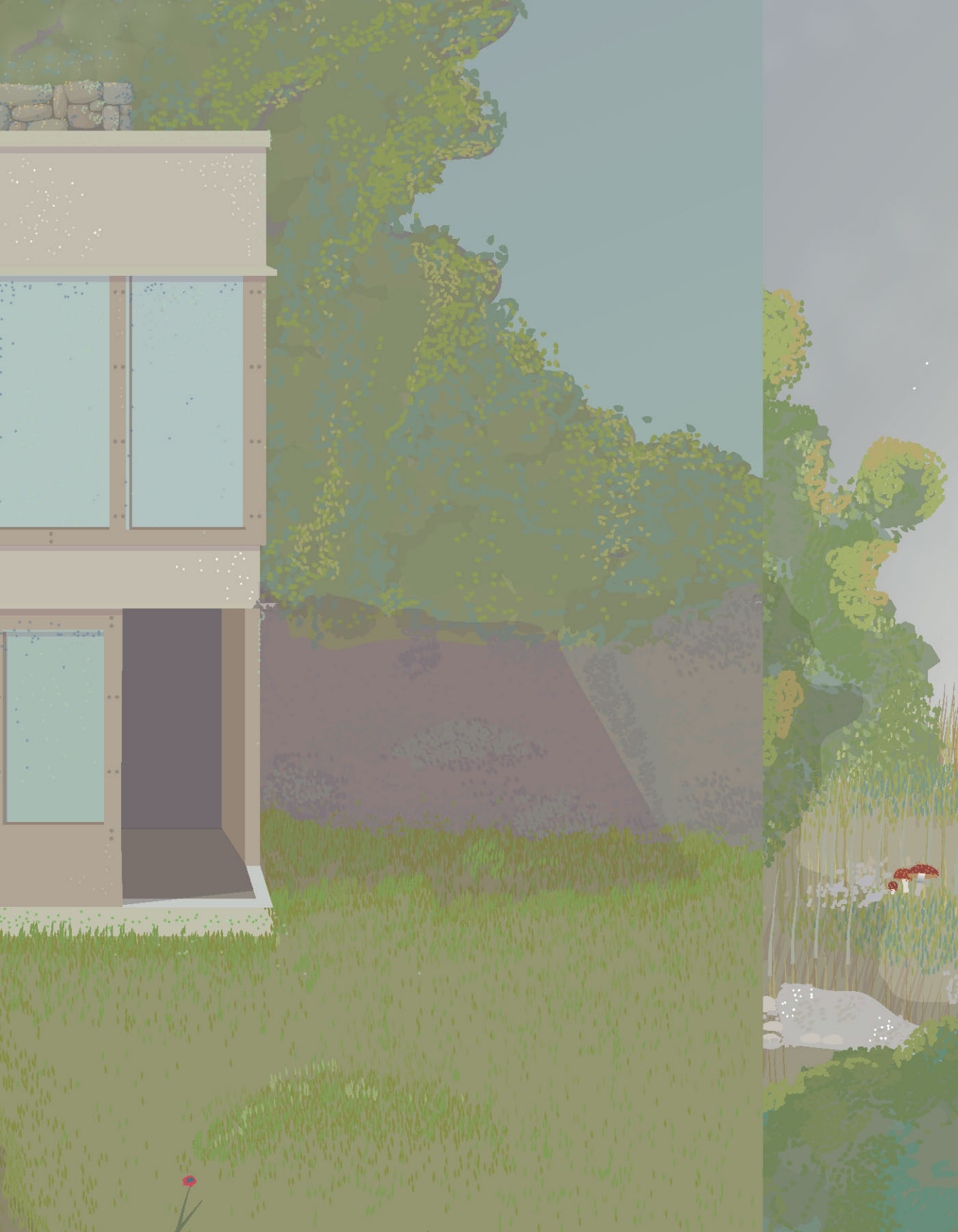
Guy Debord, *The
Society of the
Spectacle*, trans.
Donald Nicholson-
Smith (New York:
Zone Books): 38.
Jean Baudrillard,
“The Beaubourg-
Effect: Implosion
and Deterrence,”
in *Simulacre
and Simulation*,
trans. Sheila
Faria Glaser (Ann
Arbor: University
of Michigan Press,
1994): 61–74.

25

Beatriz Colomina,
“Enclosed by
Images:
The Eameses’
Multimedia
Architecture,”
in *Grey Room 2*
(Winter, 2001):
5–29. In this arti-
cle, Colomina
introduces the
idea of a “new
form of attention.”
This essay gives
one version of the
history of new and
evolving forms of
attention.

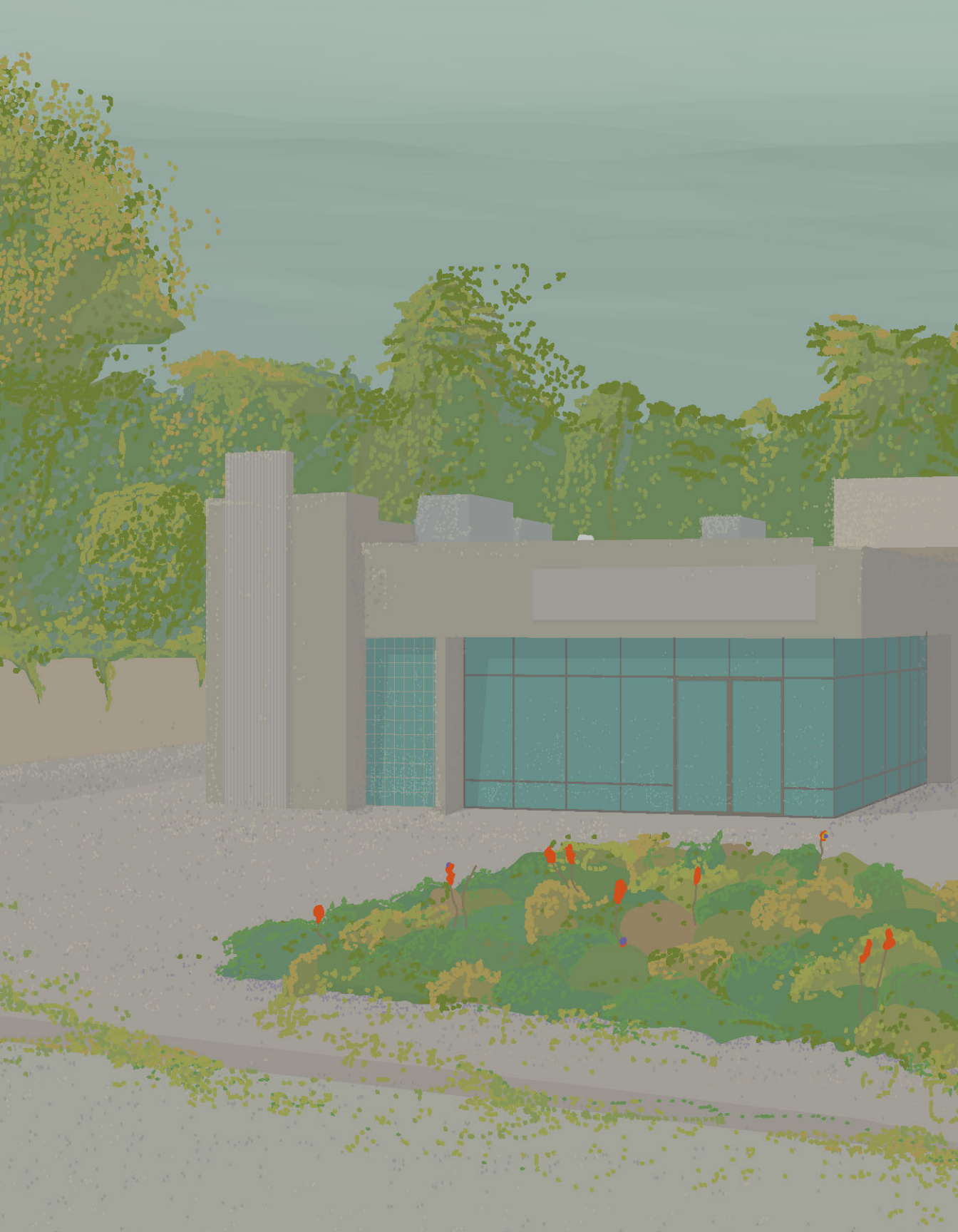


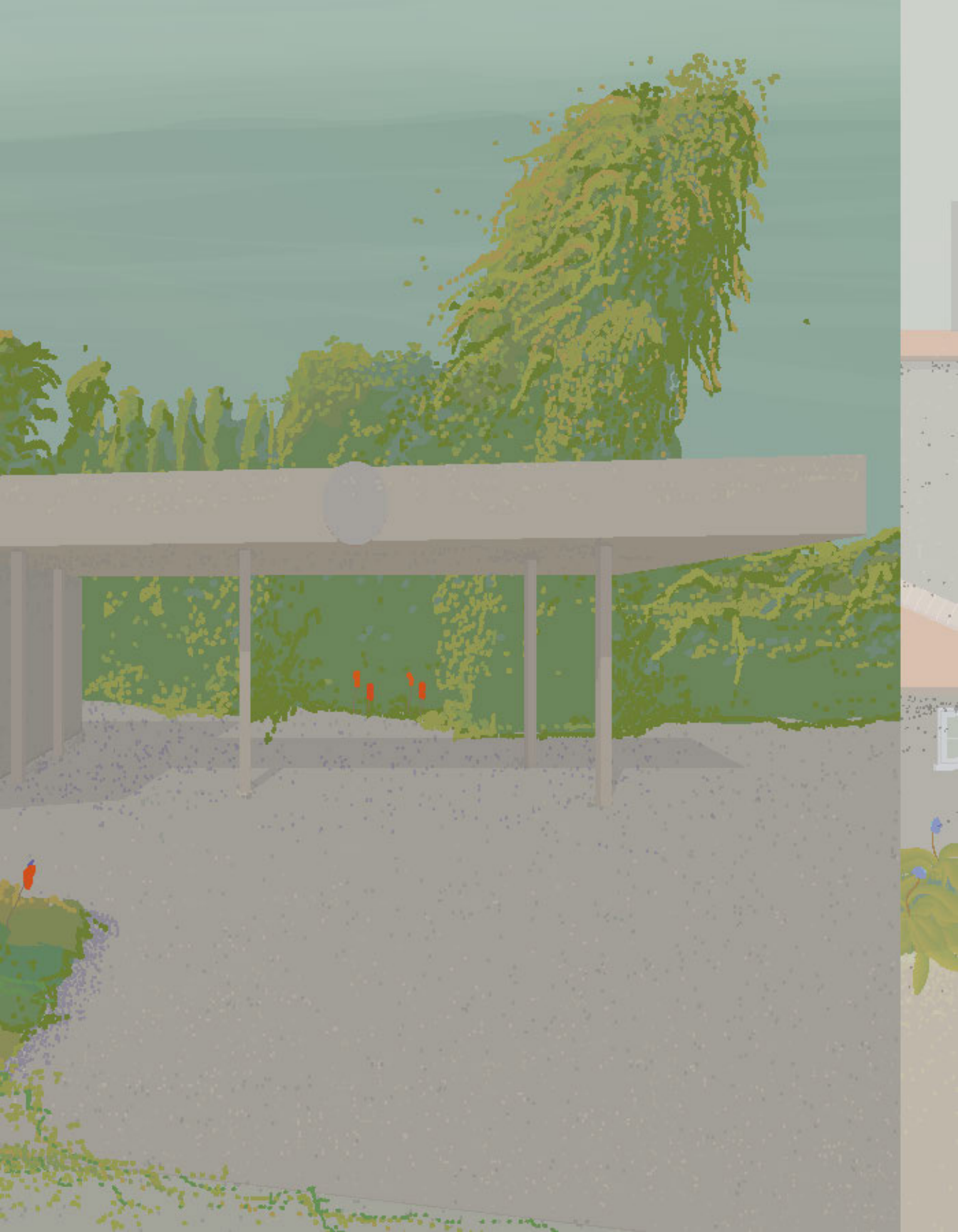






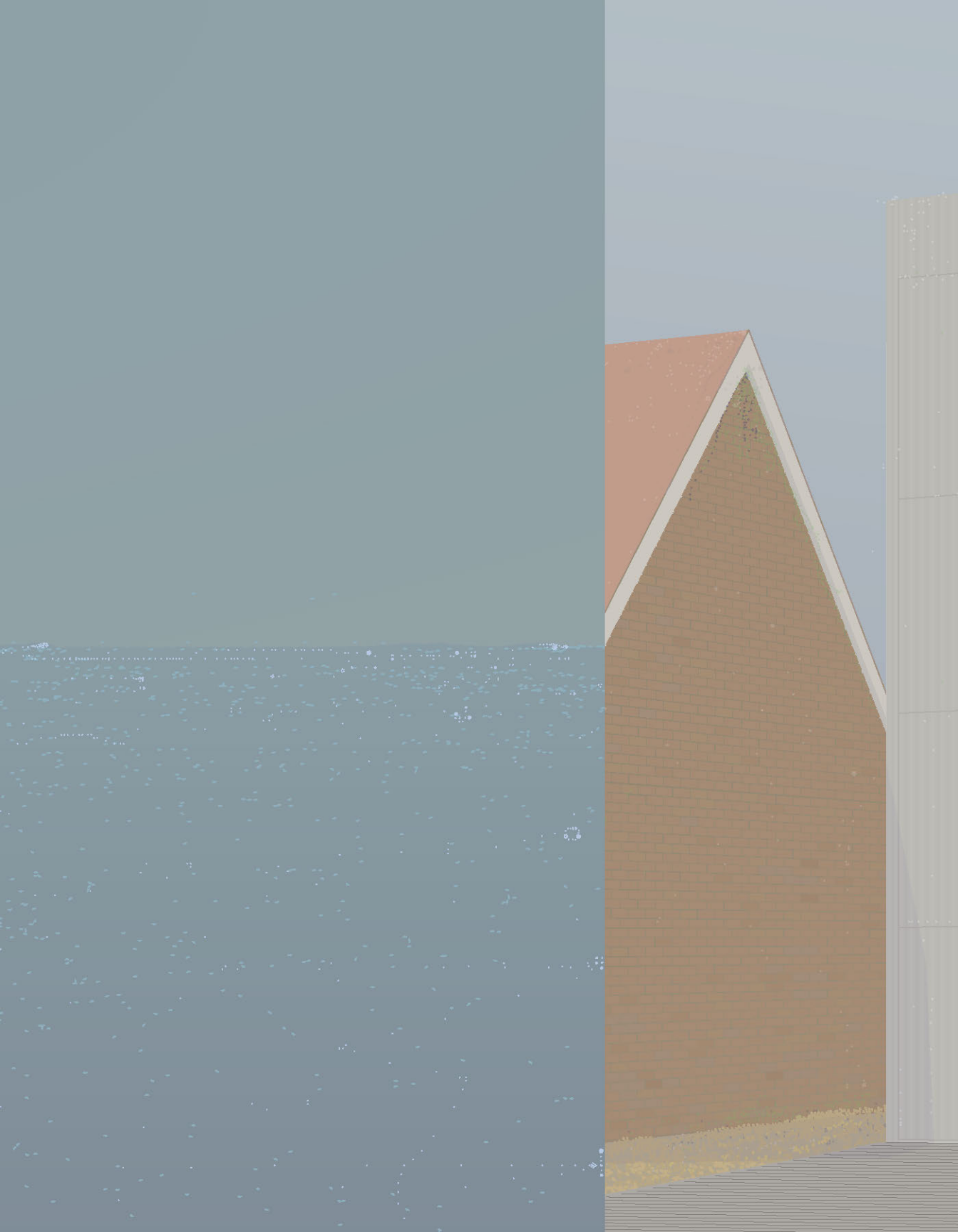


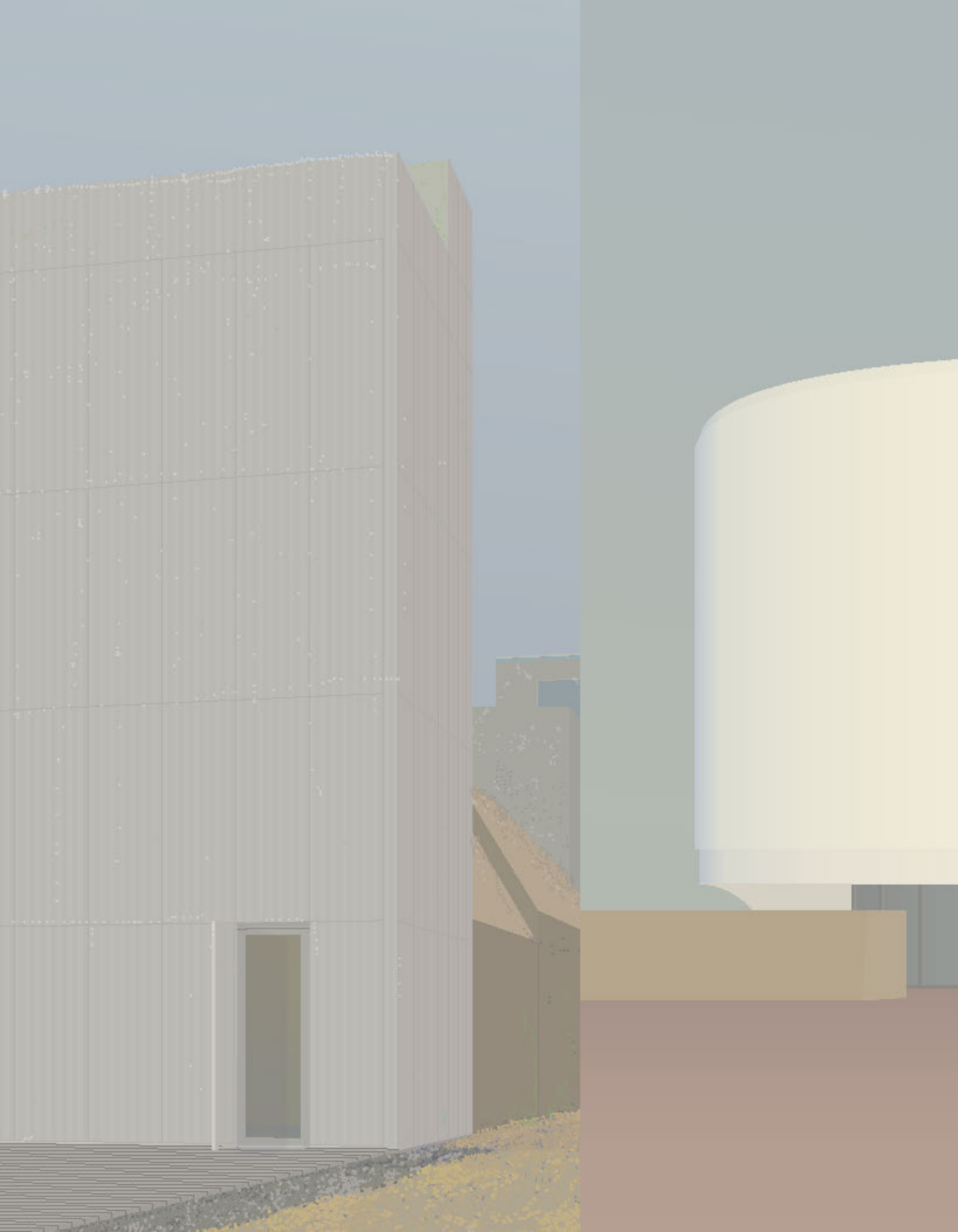


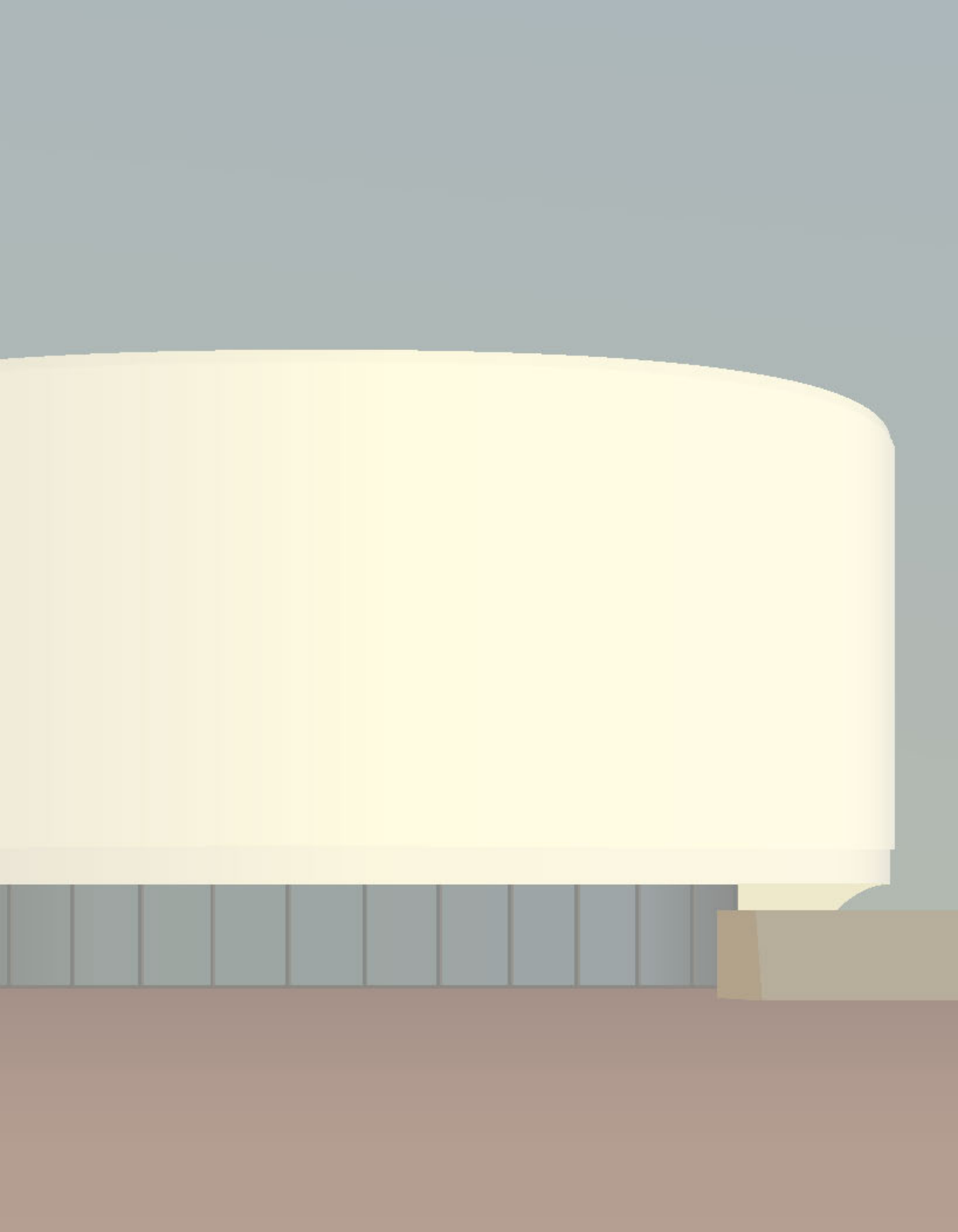






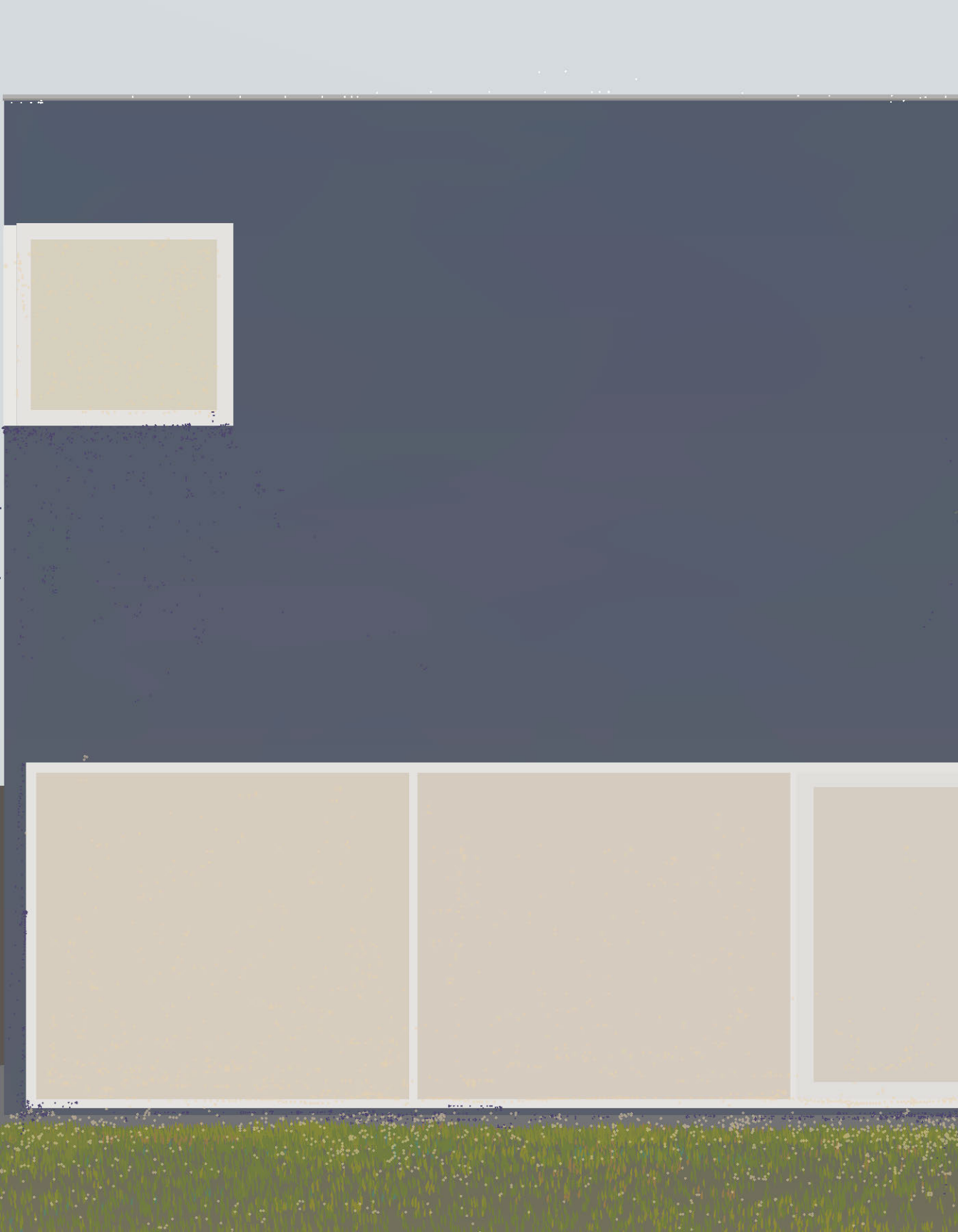


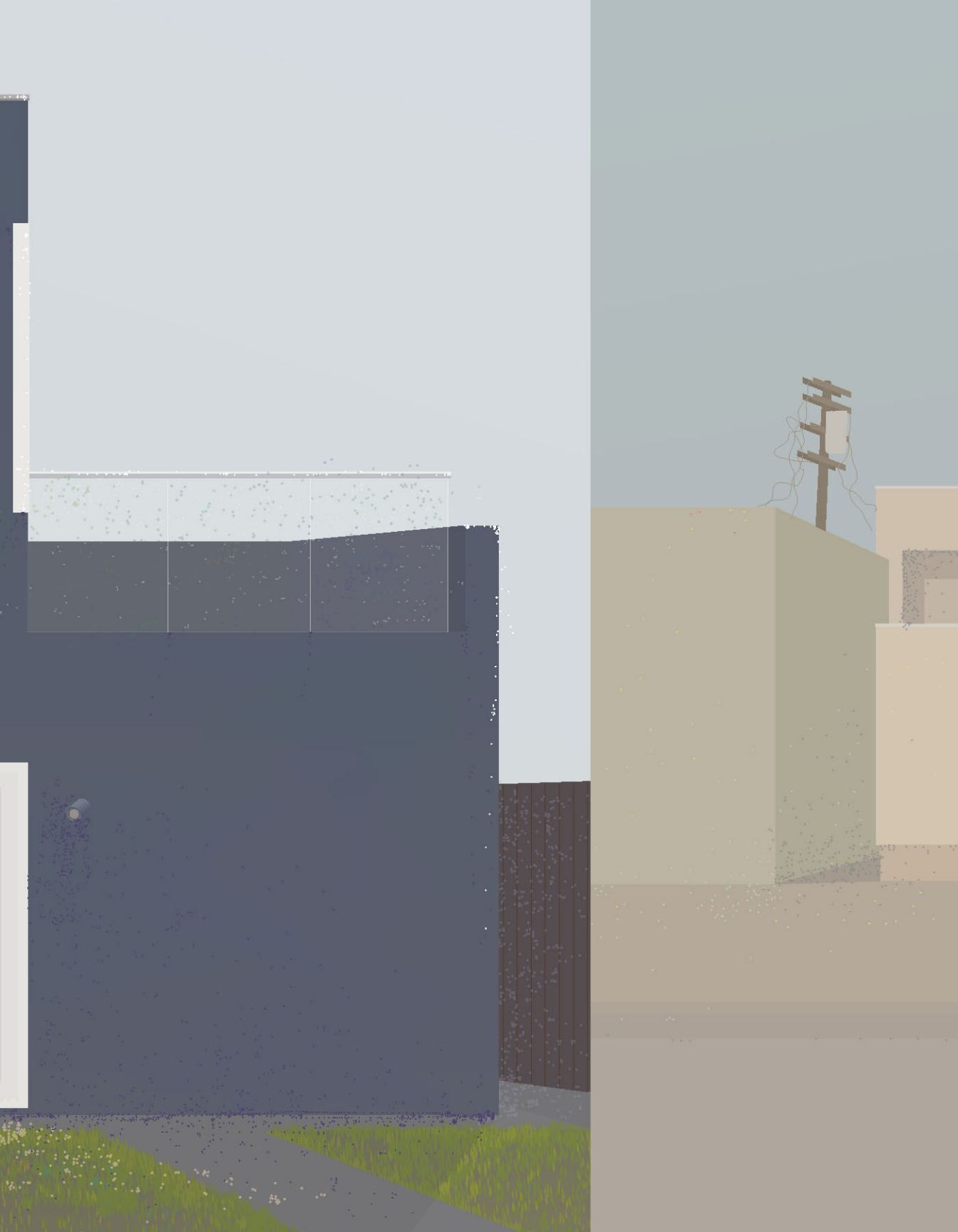










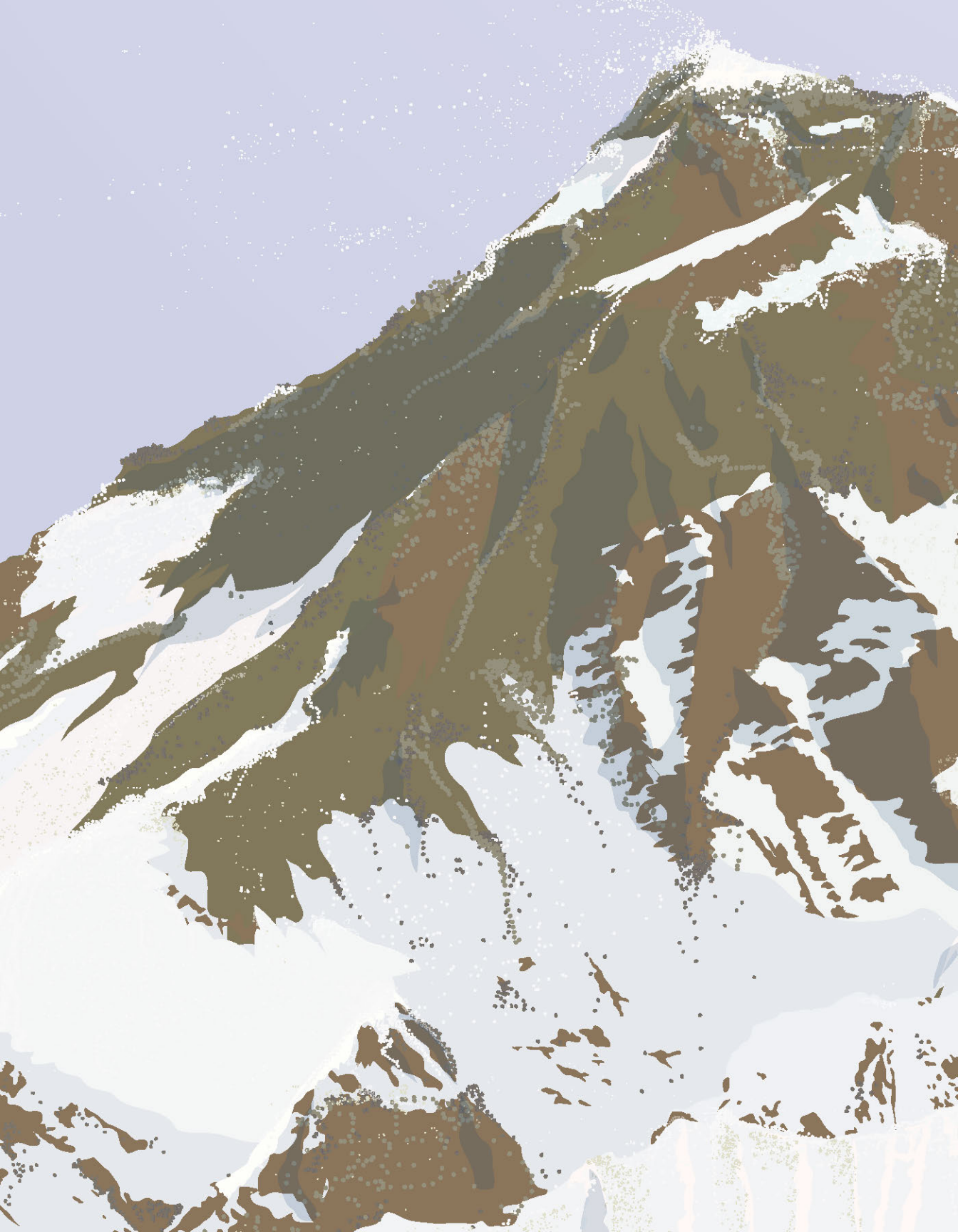


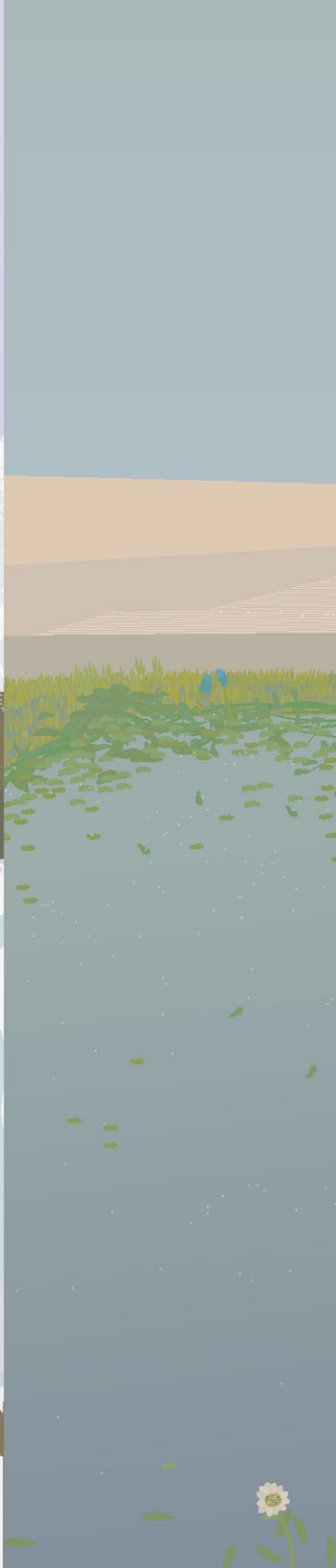
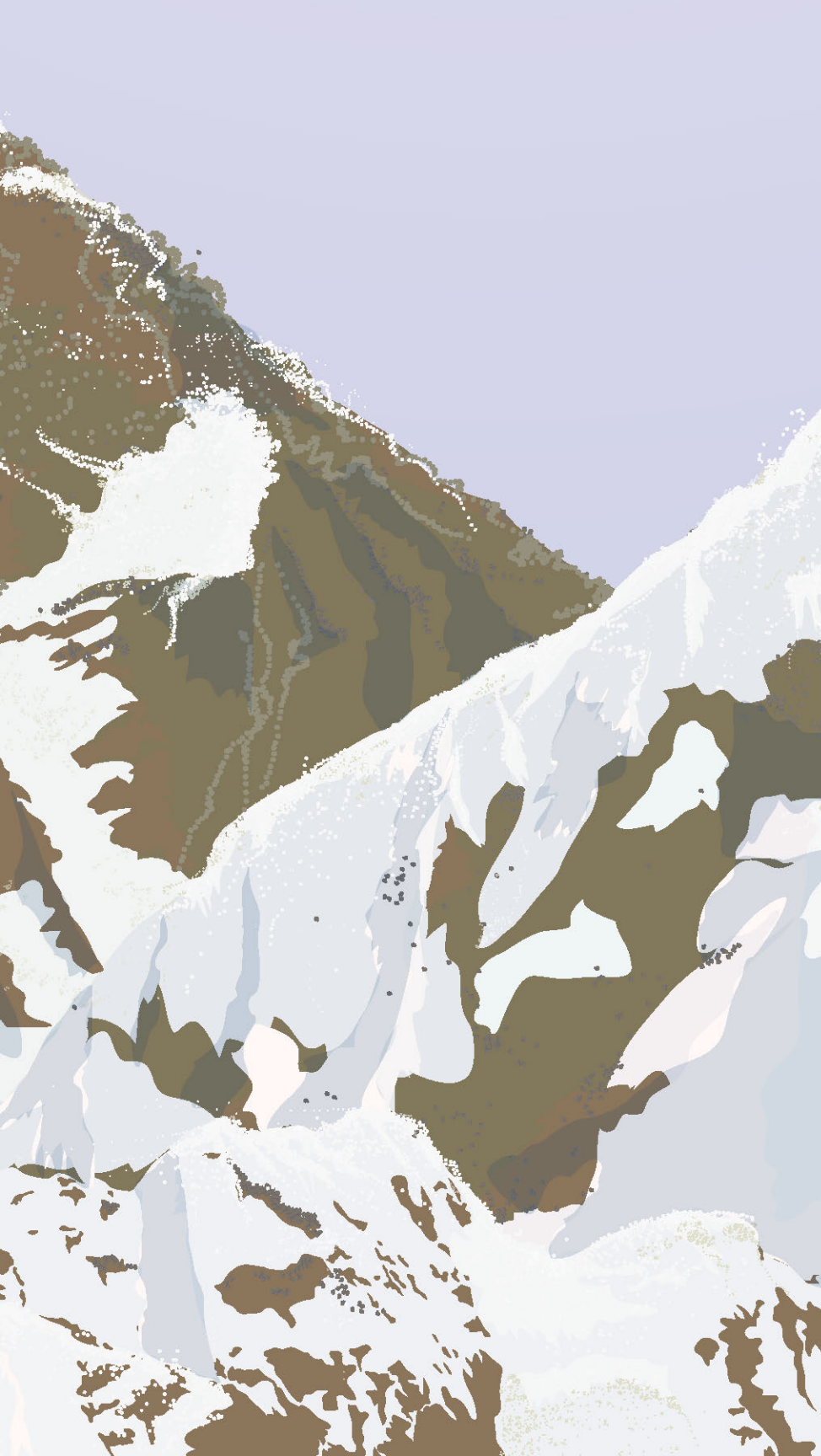




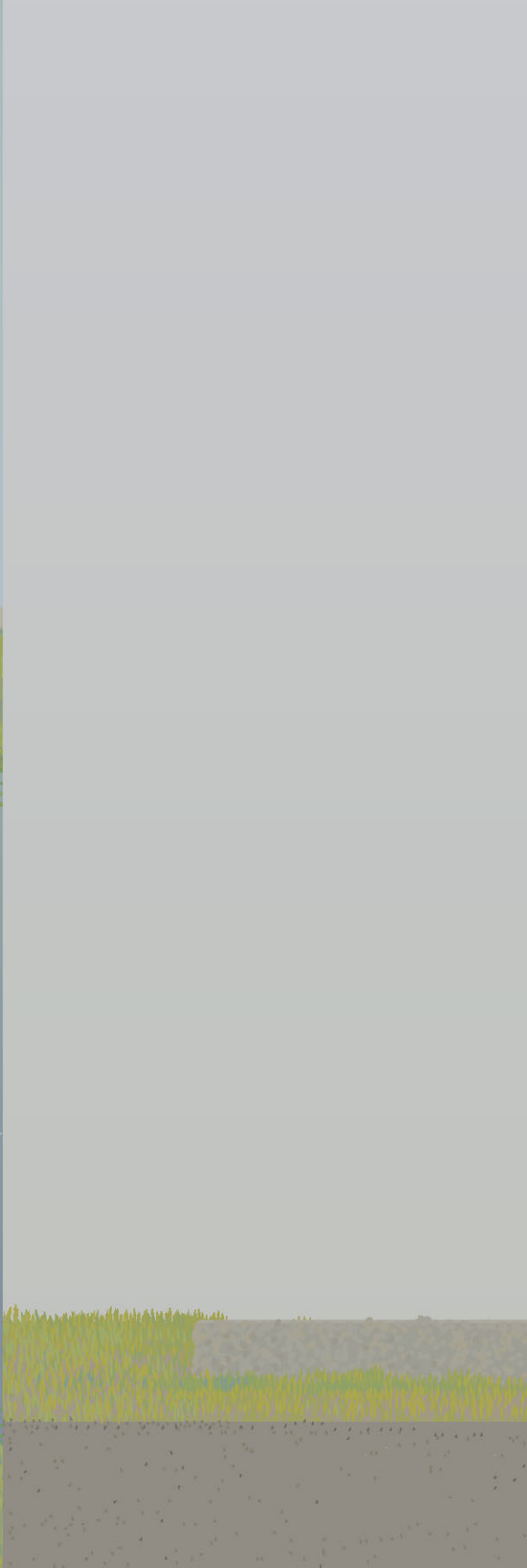








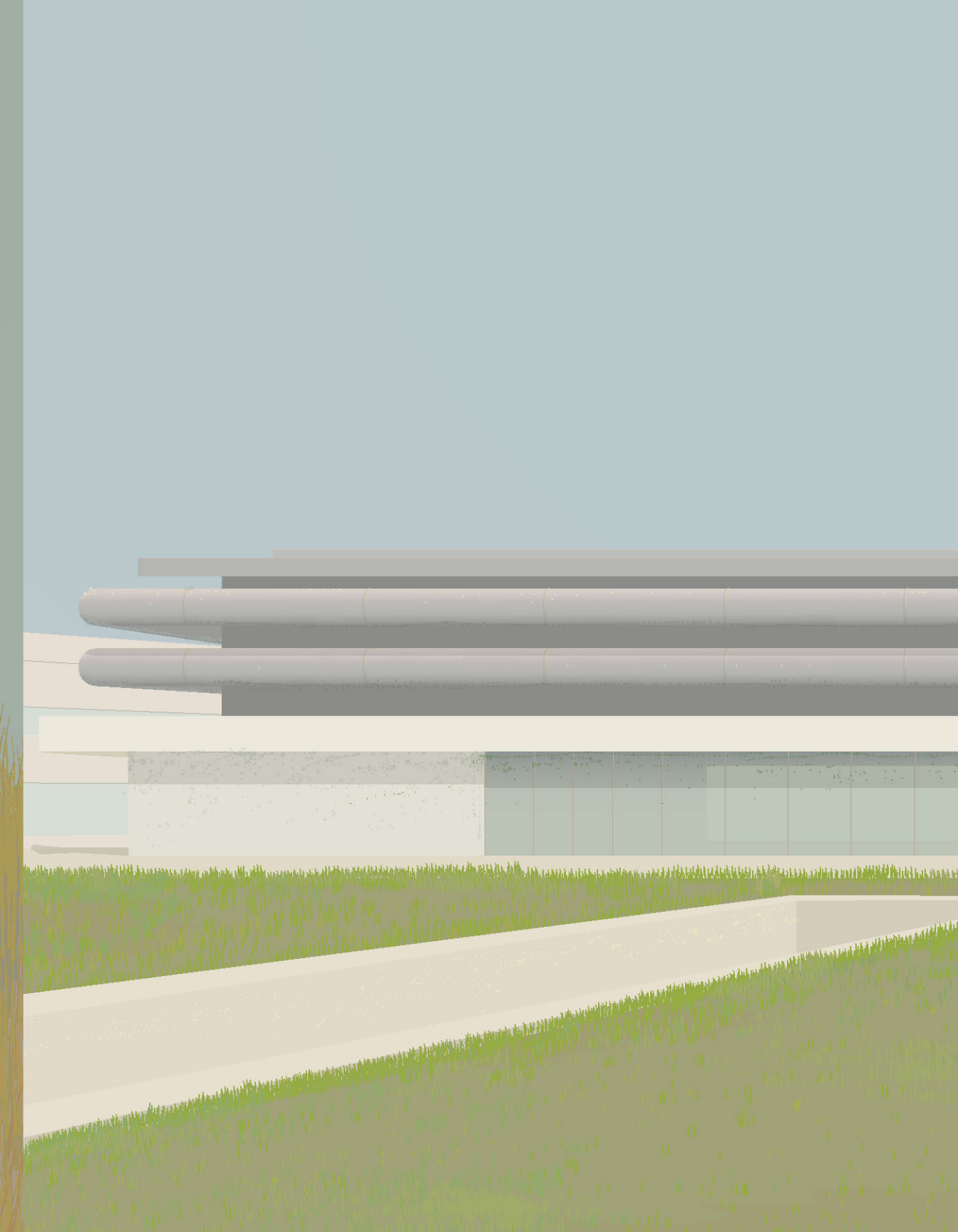


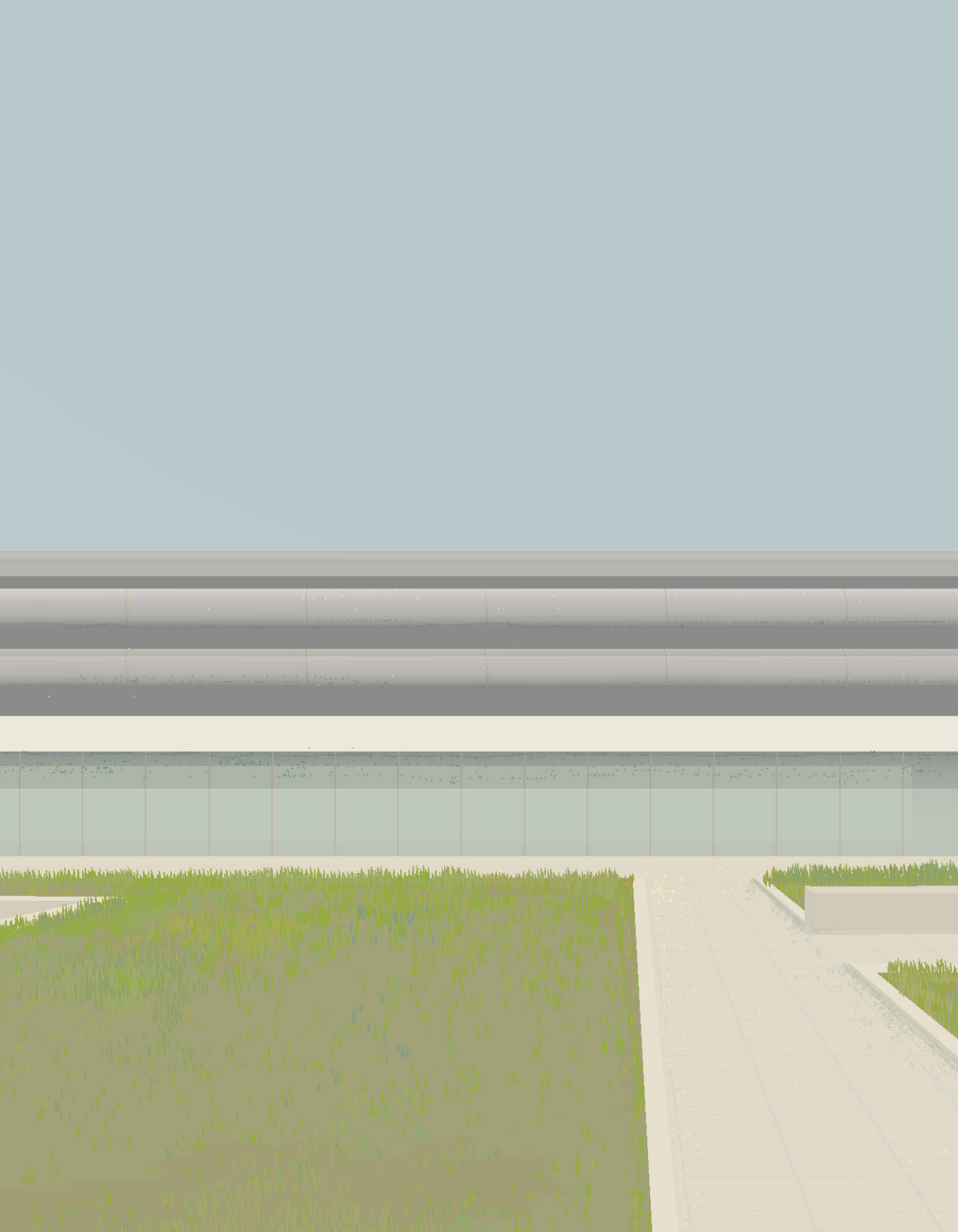












BORING

In 1969 Denise Scott Brown wrote about Los Angeles, "It's the same even, open-ended system with multiple possibilities for the definition and redefinition of focus depending on where you're at. Sometimes the yellows shine brightest, sometimes the blues." In the same essay, she uses similar language to describe Ed Ruscha's documentary-style photographs published in *Some Los Angeles Apartments* and *Every Building on Sunset Strip*. She describes the "deadpan" look of his photographs of Los Angeles as "open-ended ... more receptive ways of seeing." [1] For Scott Brown, Ruscha's photographs were important not just for their open-ended style or their open-ended subject matter, but for the permissive mode of seeing implied by this combination.

Ruscha was of course well aware of combining sympathetic content and style in his photographs. Fellow photographer and art historian Jeff Wall has described Ruscha's efforts to make his photographs appear "generic" as "rigorous." Wall enumerates a series of intentional "mistakes" Ruscha makes in pursuit of this effect, including "improper relation of lenses to subject distances, insensitivity to time of day and quality of light, excessively functional cropping, with abrupt excisions of peripheral objects, [and] lack of attention to the specific character of

the moment being depicted." Here, Wall uses different words than Scott Brown but describes a similar effort to document something in a way that is consistent with the thing itself and the type of attention it commands, fragmentary and fleeting. These are mundane things photographed mundanely. According to Wall, Ruscha's willful conflation of style and content strips the photographs of their status as "Representations" and produces an art object that is singularly "boring" in the eyes of the viewer. [2]

Scott Brown and Wall make these observations in the course of two very different arguments, which are outside the scope of this book; what is important here is their overlapping terminology in describing Ruscha's photographs. I have compiled a list of these terms, in the interest of understanding what makes an image or object "boring" [3]—and ultimately to make my case about the boring:

- | | |
|----|-------------------|
| 1 | Open-ended |
| 2 | Generic |
| 3 | Lack of Attention |
| 4 | Amateur |
| 5 | Non-judgmental |
| 6 | Non-directional |
| 7 | Deadpan |
| 8 | Permissive |
| 9 | Ambiguous |
| 10 | Dull |
| 11 | Insignificant |
| 12 | Etc. |

In 1997, a few years after Wall wrote on Ruscha, and more than

twenty-five years after the publication of Ruscha's books and Scott Brown's article, Los Angeles-based photographer Catherine Opie's eponymous show opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles.[4] In this show, Opie presented two series of photographs. The first, a series of seven 16"x 41" prints from her Mini-mall series, invites comparison to Ruscha's photographs. The subject matter and setting are similar, and both photographers show their work in black and white. Beyond that similarity, however, their styles of presentation differ. First, Opie's photographs do not attempt to hide her skill as a professional photographer. Her photographs are well composed, perfectly framed, full-contrast images. Instead of pairing the generic subject matter with generic photographic styling, as Ruscha does, Opie's mini-mall images lend dignity and importance to their mundane subject matter. Her photographs draw focused attention to the strange overlaps and socio-cultural intersections that occur in Los Angeles mini-malls. These images are far from indifferent; instead they are sensitive to the specific identities represented in every sign on every building, however mundane they may seem. Whereas Ruscha's photographs are shot from many different viewing angles, Opie's mini-malls are almost always framed as one-point perspectives, pulling the viewer's focus immediately to the center of the image. Furthermore, the mini-malls are photographed

as wide-format panoramas, making the perspective more inclusive as she strains to capture as much information as possible. In short, unlike Ruscha, Opie photographs her seemingly boring subjects in a way that makes them more interesting to the viewer.

Or so it would seem.

Freeways, the second series of photos in the MOCA show, was comprised of forty platinum prints and had quite a different effect. These photographs are much smaller than those in Mini-malls, measuring only 2-1/8" x 6-1/5". Unlike the Mini-malls, these are soft and a little blurry. Described as "silver prints," they refer back to an earlier style of photography. They seem to look back in other ways too: their size and dimension evoke images in a car's rear-view mirror.[5]

In these photographs, Opie once again captures mundane subject matter, but this time in an anachronistic style, complicating any nostalgic notions one might have for the heroism of freeways as symbols of progress and American expansion. Once she moves to the freeway, her subject matter risks being too interesting, as freeways teeter on the edge of an infrastructural sublime, so she prints these small—too small to be mistaken as heroic. These images are decidedly smaller than life with the freeways cropped tight to produce an unconnected frayed edge of chunky lines cut short by the photograph. Here, in stark contrast to the mini-malls, Opie suppresses scale,

decreases resolution, and tinges everything with a static fuzz.

The fuzzy style of the photographs strips away the look of “the new” (or “the interesting”) and makes the photos appear more vague. When combined with the open-ended crop and frayed free-ways ends, this antique look presents us with something similar to Scott Brown’s descriptions of Los Angeles and Wall’s descriptions of Ruscha’s photographs. And so it would seem that we are back to where we started: mundane things, photographed in mundane ways.

But Opie’s Freeways, with a little help from her Mini-malls, do more than that. Ruscha uses books to display his photographs, forcing the viewer to peruse them linearly. When combined with titles that reveal their precise geographic location, there are a limited number of ways to connect them. Every Building on the Sunset Strip replicates the order of the buildings as a driver experiences them moving down Sunset Boulevard; Twenty-Six Gas Stations lists the locations of the gas stations Ruscha encountered as he traveled from Los Angeles to Oklahoma; and he uses the street address to title each photograph in Some Los Angeles Apartments. The open-ended, fuzzy order that Denise Scott Brown mentions when referring to Los Angeles, one that allows for shifts of focus and the permissive connection of different things, is severely limited in the viewing of Ruscha’s photographs because of the decisions he makes



Installation view of
Focus Series: Catherine Opie,
October 5, 1997–February 8, 1998
at MOCA Grand Avenue.
Courtesy of the Museum of
Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.
Photo by Brian Forrest.

about how to display them. Instead of permissive and blurry, Ruscha’s book format and titling decisions are strict and focused.

It is Opie who truly captures the fragmentary, unfocused experience of Denise Scott Brown’s Los Angeles. The backward-looking viewpoint of her Freeways makes them strangely inaccessible to the viewer, while their arrangement as a group disrupts any linear understanding

of the images. The photographs are displayed in a single row, occasionally interrupted by vertical columns of three photographs or a 2x2 grid of four photographs. This subtle adjustment might be said to evoke the intersections and interruptions of transportation infrastructure—but the grid of photographs does not line up clearly with the ends of the cropped freeways. Sometimes the arrangement seems to suggest connections between freeways in adjacent photos, but more often than not they don't seem to point to anything in particular, suggesting that their order is arbitrary. Their titling seems to reinforce their arbitrariness; titled "Untitled #1," "Untitled #2," and so on, they are almost impossible to locate geographically. We can assume they are in Los Angeles, but little else. The network the photographs create on the wall, with the rows and intermittent columns and grids, might refer back to how these freeways are connected in the real world—but it just as easily might not.

Adding to the confusion, the Freeways are not displayed in the order in which they are numbered. The numbers might depict the order in which they were taken, but probably not: Opie has already shown us that she does not care for the order of numbers. What's more, across the gallery, the Mini-malls on display in the same room are titled using the same convention. This creates the odd situation of having two pieces of art in the same gallery with the same title. What relationships might

we discover between Untitled #3 in Freeways and Untitled #3 in Mini-malls? And because Opie continues to use this naming convention in subsequent series, the network of Untitled #3 continues to grow, as does the confusion.

As the number of Untitled #3s grow and as Opie's oeuvre expands, she continues to reject a consistent style. Whereas many artists, especially ones who work within a specific medium, evolve slowly, letting stylistic shifts occur gradually if at all, Opie changes style from one series to the next at an almost frenzied rate. The juxtaposition of radically different styles of photographs in the MOCA show is evidence of a career-long deliberate effort to reject stylistic pigeonholing. Not only is her style changing all the time, but it changes in a decidedly non-progressive, non-linear fashion: these changes cannot be charted to fabricate a narrative of evolution. In this sense, Opie's career, as well as her specific series, could be described in the words Scott Brown used for Los Angeles, as an "open-ended system with multiple possibilities for the definition and redefinition of focus." [6]

Opie's freewheeling connections between style and subject, between adjacent photographs, between the formal lines of non-neighboring freeways—all of these contradict the linearity of Ruscha's work and reflect the type of attention available mid-thought, as the mind jumps from one association to the next in often

unpredictable ways. Like the unfiltered workings of the brain at any given moment, Opie's work, much more so than Ruscha's, is truly open-ended, non-directional, permissive, blurry, and extremely difficult to bring into focus. While the discourse about Ruscha provides a list of descriptors I associate with the boring, Opie's images to my mind more fully achieve those characteristics and, consequently, provide a strong visual model for what the boring might look like and how it works as a mode of attention. To be clear: it's not that her work doesn't invite thought—but it does very little to guide or organize it and it works very hard to resist immediacy and prevent focus. In other words, Opie presents us with an example that stands in opposition to the spontaneous focus of interest. It gives us a model for something not interesting, something that deliberately lacks focus, something closer to a willful blur.

My Own Boring Work

To begin to discuss what boring looks and feels like in architecture, I will talk about one of my own projects. This is not because I think my work represents an ideal in boring architecture. In fact, there are many aspects of the project I'm about to present that fail to bore me. Rather, I want to start with a story about a gallery installation I did a few years ago in the hope that beginning with a description of my own work as boring might lessen the negative

associations of describing the work of others as boring. I also choose to start with this story because it includes all three of the modes of attention that form the foundation of this book: along with boredom, comfort and confusion also come into play. So, while this story is foremost an exploration of boredom in architecture, it also illustrates the overlaps and nebulous boundaries between the three modes. This closeness is what I refer to when I say willful blur.

But before I get ahead of myself, I will introduce the project, which I called *...And Pedestals*.



**Installation view of
...And Pedestals at SCI-Arc Gallery.
Photo by Joshua White.
Courtesy of SCI-Arc.**

A Description of the Installation

The gallery is a 24'-6" x 59'-2" rectangular space inside a much larger rectangular space. It is bounded on five sides by an east wall, a west wall, a south wall, a north wall, and a floor. The gallery has no ceiling; it is open

to the space above, where a catwalk allows people to look down into the gallery. From the catwalk, you can access a small room that hangs above the south end of the gallery. The space in the gallery under this room serves as an entry threshold to the rest of the gallery space.

The installation divided the gallery across its short dimension with a new wall. This new wall was the same height as the underside of the room above the south end of the gallery. It ran parallel to the north wall at a distance of 13'-2", connecting the east and west walls of the gallery and creating two rooms out of one. The room south of the wall was larger than the room north of the wall. In this larger room I placed wall-to-wall carpeting from the edge of the new wall to the threshold created by the room above. I marked this threshold with a metal edge between the carpet floor on one side and the existing concrete floor on the other. On top of the carpet I placed three large, truncated cones. All three cones were the same dimension. The bottom diameter was 12'-0". The top diameter was 6'-0". The center of the top was shifted 1'-6" off-center from the bottom. The cones were all 3'-0" tall and made of wood. They were all painted using white paint supplied by the gallery. There were six projectors hung from the double-height ceiling above using extruded aluminum struts. The struts were secured to concrete joists on one end and to small white boxes on the other end. These boxes concealed the projectors and were suspended

10'-0" off the floor. The projectors projected animated bright light onto the pedestals. They were cooled by ten 1'-8" gray box fans that sat on top of the east wall, spaced 4'-0" on-center. Both the larger room and the smaller room were painted white using paint supplied by the gallery. The smaller room was left mostly empty.

A Brief Explanation of the Installation

The installation was completed in the summer of 2013 at the SCI-Arc Gallery in downtown Los Angeles. From the images, the space looks mostly empty except for the three large truncated cones, which I called "pedestals." As I would soon discover, the project could be described in many ways, but I understood it as an attempt to reveal a series of norms and expectations embedded in the production of architecture installations. I am referring to the obvious things, the objects and images that are always part of any show, but also to the other things—the things that take up much of the labor, time, and budget for an installation but remain peripheral, and typically invisible, when we start to address the content of the show. These things include posters, mailers, bios, headshots, white paint, videos/trailers, websites, social media "blasts," skilled labor, "volunteer" helpers, construction schedules, specification manuals, and all the other text-based descriptions of the project. At the time, it seemed to me that architecture

installations take on a series of things, more and more things, whose visibility and status as content might be questioned.

In this project, each of these things, each task, each document, each text, each image, everything, was viewed in isolation and stripped bare of all content in an attempt to reveal its latent form, structure, and habits—in other words, its norms. The gallery itself was painted white. The floor was carpeted white. Three empty white “pedestals” were placed in the middle of the gallery. For the promotional poster (a contractual obligation by the host institution) a piece of paper was folded three times, creating a 2’x3’ grid. It was then photographed, and the photograph was printed for the poster, which was also a piece of paper folded in the exact same way so that it could be mailed for promotional purposes. Outlets, vents, and other wall coverings were added to the walls to enhance a set of compositional concerns found when drawing the interior elevations of the gallery. Some of the new outlets and vents worked. Some did not. Projectors projected moving images of rotating white spheres into an already bright white room. The fans which cooled the projectors provided a dull ambient sound that muted outside noise. The gallery’s track lights were organized in a grid and pointed down, lighting the gallery evenly, never intentionally highlighting any specific object.

As mentioned, I painted the walls white. Not because I have an

affinity for white (I am more interested in gray), but because that’s what the gallery mandated. At that time, the gallery used a very particular brand of white paint they called SCI-Arc White (I later found out it was Sherwin William SW 6203, Spare White, matte interior paint). The gallery had been painted countless times before, at least once for every installation, with this very same paint. In an effort to reveal some of the layers and layers of stuff that previous installations had left behind, I masked the gallery with blue tape before adding another layer of SCI-Arc White. The pattern of the masking tape was inspired by a set of dimension lines found in the gallery’s as-built drawings. Like the layers of white paint, these as-built drawings represent the combined changes to the gallery room that all previous installations contributed to the gallery. Subtle changes in outlets, lighting tracks, bolt holes in the floor, new metal trim around the doors, pieces of extruded aluminum and other metal struts, and various other things that have been changed or modified by previous installers had all been meticulously added to these continuously updated drawings after the end of each show. Coupling the accumulated layers of white paint on the walls with the accumulated layers of information in the as-built drawings did two things. First, it allowed me to acknowledge the ongoing and inexhaustible limits of the architectural space of the gallery, its always overturning, always being between

one “built” thing and the next. Second, in a crude way, it allowed me directly to inscribe aspects of representation (the dimension lines from a set of architectural drawings) onto the gallery walls themselves, inserting the documentation that is typically unseen into the installation and, to my mind, further blurring the boundary between the real thing and the represented thing.

Of course, once the masking tape was removed, the painted lines were barely visible. One layer of paint is not very thick, and the difference in tone and color between two layers of the same color paint, applied three months apart, isn’t much. Yet, when I looked closely, there were small differences in tone and hue. Whether the differences were the result of three months of dirt or subtle calibration differences in the paint mixing machine or my own wishful thinking—or a combination of all three—is difficult to know. But like the intended closeness between the lines on the as-built drawings and the painted lines, the closeness between these two layers of paint produced a blurriness and a consequent desire to see something, even if you weren’t totally sure there was anything to see. Considered in its entirety, the project was not an attempt to stray from expectations or norms, but rather an attempt to locate and present (or represent) norms. The result was a seemingly blank installation—an installation that was somewhat confused as it attempted to make visible the things we do not typically

see, but used methods of low saturation and low contrast to bring them closer together.[7]

The Installation Opening

When it was complete and the gallery hosted the opening, the reaction to the work was not what I expected. Sure, a few people offered a token “Congratulations!” but most people didn’t say much. They wandered around the gallery looking at different things, expecting that something would eventually come into focus. A few lingered, some left quickly. Looking back, I can honestly say most of them seemed bored. Those who did say something pointed out things they saw in the show. These things ranged from compositional issues, to details in the pedestals, to the grain of the carpeting, to flecks of blue paint in the floor, to smudges on the painted white walls. There was very little consistency in the things they paid attention to. Some of the things they pointed out were things I intentionally “designed”; others were not. I did not put flecks of blue paint on the floor, for instance. Of the unintended things, some I had previously noticed, but most were new even to me. Of the intended things, most were small details, things I’d placed there as part of a larger idea, but rarely with the hope that they would be pointed out by an attendee of the opening. In almost all cases, whether intentional or not, it would be difficult to describe any of these things as

individually interesting, and certainly not in a way that would warrant any lingering attention or conversation. After all, how interesting can a slightly rotated electrical outlet be? Yet, what did seem productive was the deliberateness of the search itself. The lack of a specific and obvious focal point at first produced boredom, but when combined with the context of the gallery this boredom produced an expectation that there must be something here to see if you looked hard enough, even if you didn't know exactly what it was you were looking for. What followed was a series of individual searches, a free-floating and ongoing lingering with the expectation that something, at some point, would grab your attention.

The Installation Photographs

The documentation of the search brought on by the audience's bored reaction to the installation occurred in a variety of ways, but is perhaps best represented by the reaction of that key member of any installation team,[8] the installation photographer.[9]

The gallery hired the installation photographer, and I had no input in the staging or specific subject matter of the installation photographs. This photographer has photographed installations in this particular gallery space numerous times; it is probably safe to say he had photographed this gallery more than a dozen times prior to this show. After taking the installation shots, he remarked to me that

he had never photographed the space in this way and that he was unsure what parts of the room were part of the installation and what parts were not. Did you put the "CCTV" sticker there? And the security camera? What about the fans? Were those your light bulbs? Or the gallery's? Each of his photographs seemed to be a question. He photographed all the light switches and all the outlets; he took close-ups of the light bulbs and fans. When he asked me, I did not respond directly, but he ended up photographing a number of things that were there before I did my installation. And as I write this book more than three years after the installation ended, many of those things remain there today, along with other things that I installed and never took out.

I tell this story of how the installation bored the person who is typically responsible for performing the final act of authorization in any installation because of the productive set of questions raised in the context of disciplinarily specific boredom—the type of boredom that occurs only when an audience expects a certain degree of interest or excitement and is then confronted (repeatedly) by a situation that fails to meet those expectations. In the case of the photographer and the dilemma he faced while trying to document the installation, the result is a strangely sufficient set of photographs. It's not that individual photographs are particularly "good" or "interesting," but as one scrolls through the entire set of

them, starting with photographs of the whole space, then groups of pedestals, then individual pedestals, then detail shots of pedestals, then blank walls with outlets, then individual outlets, then light bulbs, one feels the search brought on by the photographer's boredom. His search reveals how we react and respond to boring things. If interest can be understood as a spontaneous and discriminating focus toward a specific thing,[10] the story of the photographer describes an opposing form of attention. Instead of immediately zeroing in on something and then unpacking or analyzing that thing, the photographer, when forced to point at something, enters into something like what Denise Scott Brown describes as "permissive" and what Catherine Opie produces with her Freeway Series, a deliberately free-floating, open-ended, and unbiased search. Here, the installation photographer searches for things to pay attention to, if only for a minute—the amount of time it takes to position and point the camera, frame a view, focus the lens, and trigger the shutter—before moving on to the next thing. The resulting photographs are not particularly good at documenting a single, discernible object. In the case of this show that would be impossible. Instead, if there is something "good" about the set of installation shots, it is that we might find a representation of boredom in its lack of coherence, its lack of focus, and its lack of specific moments of interest or excitement.

However, these photographs do not lack coherence or focus in the way a "snapshot" might. In this way they share more in common with Opie's Mini-malls and less in common with Ed Rushca's gas stations. Unlike these installation photographs, snapshots are spontaneously taken and create images that may lack composition and formality. They are often out of focus and oddly cropped and typically convey an amateurism [11] that is reinforced by their informal and humdrum subject matter.[12] In contrast, the installation photographs of ...And Pedestals are not spontaneous; they are professional, serious, and deliberate. Each photograph is well composed, perfectly framed, and in focus. They are not oddly cropped or tilted, and their subject matter could not be defined as "everyday." Yes, they document "normal" things, but normal [13] only in the context of a gallery inside an architecture school. The extent of their normality is confined to the narrow and ultimately arbitrary boundaries and norms of a specific discipline. Further still, these photos stand in stark contrast to "street photography," a particular type of snapshot that documents individual moments and non-sequiturs of "everyday life." By contrast, these installation photographs are best understood as a set. Perversely, as a set, they can be said to lack focus and to share similarities with snapshots—not because they are individually out of focus like snapshots, but because there is no particular way to look at them as a

set. There is no specific order, no linear narrative, no singular story to be told. The installation's lack of focus is underscored by the fact that the photos can be viewed in any number of arrangements, each of which lends a different understanding to the show. The photographs, like their different readings, begin to blur when you look at them together. The nebulousness of the various connections between the photographs in the set, combined with the deliberate and earnest nature of the photographer's search, describes the alternative form of attention I term willful blur.

I admit willful blur is not a perfect term. I did not come upon it through an experience of boredom, nor did I coin it out of a genuine desire to define boredom in a positive way. Instead, in the spirit of not interesting, I defined it in opposition to interest, as interest's negative. If interesting is spontaneous, not interesting is willful; if interest is focused, non-interest is blurry. Furthermore, if interest's sharp focus discriminates, the fuzziness of non-interest blurs and unites.[14] These components may not define boredom perfectly, but they do a good job of structuring a way to think about boredom and to define boredom as it relates to architecture. That is to say, willful blur does two things. First, it gives us a way to make things that are without interest, by intentionally making them blurry, low contrast, dull, etc. The gallery installation mentioned above is an attempt at that. Second, it gives us a way to look at things

that are not interesting, through an intentionally unfocused, or blurry, search. The installation photographer's work is an example of that.

A Very Boring List

For a relatively new word, boredom has received quite a bit of attention. Of the three terms that make up the not interesting content of this book, boredom is the most studied, the most written about, and the most used. The paradoxical relationship between boredom and people's sustained interest in boredom is worth examining. At first glance, this paradox is almost too obvious to address and we might quickly dismiss it as clever or ironic or superficial and move on to the more important aspects of the word and its implications as part of the book. But a second look at boredom's obvious power to hold people's interest reveals a set of contradictions that get to the heart of its importance. For instance, there are not just a lot of texts and ideas about boredom, but also a great variety of texts and competing ideas about boredom—what it means, how it's felt, what it looks like, and how it might be useful or if it's useful at all.[15] Boredom's fluidity of meaning is nothing new; its historical narrative is also varied and shifting. Boredom has multiple histories as well as multiple meanings.[16] Perhaps this is what English literary critic Patricia Meyer Spacks means when she writes, "Boredom defies narration." [17]

For these reasons, laying out a perfectly logical and linear description of boredom in architecture seems inappropriate and against the spirit of the word. To pinpoint one definition of boredom would be to discriminate, to force into focus the inherently nebulous, excluding many of the tangents and non-sequiturs afforded by boredom as a mode of attention. Like the subtle shifts in shades of white in the gallery installation, and like the free-floating search by the installation photographer, which allowed him to document almost anything without worrying about representing a clear order or linear sequence or logical relationship found in the show, the form for a text of boredom must represent its form as a useful tool. So, in place of an essay with an introduction and a clear thesis statement followed by a linear arrangement of connected ideas that build on each other and culminate in a conclusion, boredom is presented here as a list of notes. [18] Please do not mistake this list of notes as lacking structure. These notes have been edited and arranged, and by the time this book is published they will have been subjected to the thoughts and ideas of dozens of people. They are not random. They are deliberate, constructed, and intentional, but not in a way that is meant to produce a specific argument toward a specific, focused, singular definition of one type of boredom. Instead, these notes on boredom are presented in the manner of boredom itself. Deliberate, yes,

but also free-floating and fuzzy. The notes might add up to things; they might mean things, different things to different people. They sometimes coalesce into coherent moments of intensity between them, at times even drifting into the structure of a shallow outline. At other moments the form of the notes takes cues from the display of Catherine Opie's Freeway Series, slipping and/or coalescing into a 2x2 grid or a row of three notes placed next to each other. This is done as a suggestion but nothing more. As a part of a list, each note stands loosely in relation to what's around it but might just as quickly drift and lose focus, allowing some readers' minds to wander as they rearrange them in their minds. The notes never need add up to something more than just a set of individual thoughts, each experienced as an autonomous thing before moving on to another thought or idea. To present them in any other way would be to discuss boredom in a manner that lessens its impact and its productive effects as a way we give attention to things—lots and lots of things.

001—Boredom can be interior and exterior. This helps explain our own sustained interest in boredom despite the obvious and immediate contradiction between interest and boredom. Something can be intrinsically boring, meaning its content is boring. Yet, it might remain extrinsically not boring, meaning the structures or phenomena that surround the content might be of interest.

002—Formal relationships in boring architecture can be explained in terms of their part-to-whole arrangement. As described in the first chapter, boring architecture's parts are monotonous, repetitive, and inexhaustible, with no variation from part to part. In the face of such monotony of parts, the viewer's attention moves to the context. It is often the perimeter of a boring building that first catches one's eye.

003—Boredom is blurry because we are seeing double (or triple or quadruple or septuple). There is not a single form of boredom; there are multiple boredoms. To borrow a phrase, it is "semantically permeable." [19] Boredom has been used to represent a wide variety of subjective feelings and emotions. The same could be said about boring, which can denote multiple objective features and qualities. [20]

004—Boredom is blurry because it is always in motion. Its multiple meanings are never fixed but always fluid, open-ended, and never stable over time. Indeed, boredom has many histories that have already been told. [21] These histories often vary with respect to origin, impact, and meaning. [22]

005—Boring things are often blurry because they are ambiguous and resist discernibility.

006—Boring things are often blurry because they blend into the background.

007—Sometimes boring things contradict themselves.

008—Two important forms of boredom have been labeled the "Existential" and the "Everyday." [23] For the purposes of this list I have focused on existential forms of boredom. When we speak of the "everyday" we are more closely aligned to a form of attention I call "comfort." For more on this, see the fourth chapter of this book.

009—There is a blurry distinction between boredom and the “boring.” Boredom can be understood as the feeling of boredom, its subjective component. The “boring” can be understood as the qualities in things that we find boring, its objective component. However, as in the distinction between interest and interesting discussed in the first chapter, the uncoupling of boredom’s subjective and objective components is not so easy. To be bored with something and to find something boring are often the same thing. But not always.

011—Walter Benjamin wrote, “We are bored when we do not know what we are waiting for.” This is likely still true, but for the purposes of this book, I would rephrase it slightly. Boredom is the act of waiting when we do not know what we are waiting for—which is to say that boredom, as a mode of attention, requires deliberate action.[24]

010—There are two primary responses to boredom: avoidance and/or endurance.[25]

012—Often, what we find interesting about boring architecture is not what is there, but what is not there. What’s missing? What could be added? What are the minimal conditions of interest? Or boredom? Where is the threshold between them?

013—Boredom describes a way objects receive attention, as well as a way subjects construct modes of attention. Boredom has at times been dismissed as the opposite of interest and as the opposite of attention, suggesting equivalency between attention and interest. Alternately, one might consider attention and interest as two different things. In many ways, the distinction between interest and attention is the point of this book. We can give attention to things without being interested in them. Boredom is the first step in explaining this distinction.

014—As opposed to interest, which describes a spontaneous focus on something, boredom is a form of free-floating attention that actively and willfully resists a singular and biased focus on one thing. Interest is often objective; the interested party differentiates things in order to understand and gain knowledge about them. Boredom is often subjective; the bored party pays attention to as many things as possible in an effort to encounter new subjectivities and explore new creative and imaginative possibilities.[26]

015—Interest is often the initiating mechanism for “criticality” and “close reading.”[27] In close reading the focus is on particular things and parts of things. Close reading unpacks structures and hierarchies to “see things that cannot be seen” by reading into things.[28] Somewhat paradoxically, close reading often requires a degree of critical distance from things in an effort to attain a level of objectivity. By contrast, boredom aligns more closely with “projection” and “close attention.”[29] It forces attention out and onto many things, instead of into and through a single thing. It is projective rather than critical.[30] Boredom, through close attention, does not unpack things or dig into things as much as it projects new possibilities and sensibilities onto things.

016—We give attention to interesting things when we want to understand them better.

017—We give attention to boring things when we want to understand ourselves better.

018— Boredom is a deliberate act.

019—What leads to boredom? Boredom occurs when the expectation for interest is not met. This raises questions about audience and intent. For boredom to be intentional, an author of a “boring” work must first understand and anticipate her audience and then construct her work such that it does not meet her audience’s expectations.[31] In this book, whether or not a work is intentionally boring is not important. Boringness can be productive as a mode of attention whether the author intended it or not. However, it is crucial to note that boredom can be the intentional outcome of a particular work.

020—The following statements are strongly worded. I do not think these statements are always true, but it occurs to me that it’s sometimes productive for architects to think of the distinction between interest and boredom in the following ways:

- A Interest results in research. Boredom results in a search.**
- B Interest tends to be objective. Boredom tends to be subjective.**
- C Interest results in scholarly work. Boredom results in creative work.**

021—Some questions to ask upon encountering a boring work:

- A Did the author intend the work to be boring?**
- B What does this say about the audience?**
- C What expectations did the audience have?**
- D Which of those expectations can be linked to their interest (as opposed to other categories of expectations that are discussed in subsequent chapters)?**
- E What qualities might be attached to those expectations?**

022— Finding new interest in a boring work should not be confused with finding interest in nearby sources. Responding to boredom by avoiding it, by turning to something else, is just changing the subject. Boredom is creative only when one confronts and then endures the subjective limits of a boring experience by actively working to create interest inside the work itself.[32]

026—Boring is associated with boring.

027—What does boredom produce? To answer this question, I will start with a claim that has been made by others that “no one wants to be boring,” at least not creative people. Creative people don’t usually set out to make boring work. This establishes a contract between creative people and their audiences, promising that every creative act contains a good faith effort to make something interesting. However, if this is not met, whether by intention or not, this contract might be reversed, placing the creative act in the hands of the audience.

029—Boredom is blurry because its many productive effects work interchangeably between author and audience. Put bluntly, it blurs author and audience.

024— Some qualities of boring things:

- c Slow
- d Redundant
- e Repetitive
- f Anachronistic
- g Low-saturation
- h Low-contrast
- i Dull
- j Monochrome
- k Uniform

023—Some terms that are often used synonymously with boring:

- s Humdrum
- t Mundane
- u Ongoing
- v Monotonous

- x Nothing but too much of anything gets boring.
- y Detached Deadpan

028—Because boring work requires the audience to confront its own creative (and subjective) limits, in some ways boredom displaces authorship. It asks that viewers do more work in constructing their individual experiences, implicating the audience in the success or failure of the work. It also forces the viewer to deal with basic struggles that usually reside in the realm of the “author”: struggles like “where to begin,” or the terror when confronted with “the blank page.”

025—There is a paradox embedded in boredom. Properties of boredom include slowness, monotony, and repetition. But these qualities alone will not usually lead to an impression of boredom. Only when these things are combined with excess do things become boring. Boredom happens when things are too slow, or slow for too long, for instance. In fact, one could argue that excess alone can lead to boredom.

030—One conclusion we might reach is that boredom befalls people when they confront something that supplies form but works hard to remove all content. It provides a blank(er) substrate onto which viewers are asked to confront their own subjective limits and then might project their own creative interests and ideas.[33]

031—Boredom equates to the absence of meaning. By “meaning,” I mean significance (in an object) and purpose (in a subject).

032—Architecture is boring when nothing seems to happen but something might actually be happening.[34] This description could be used for many aspects of architecture in formal, social, political, tectonic, and programmatic terms. For instance, “Nothing seems to be happening programmatically” describes a building that is programmatically boring. This way of thinking opens up possibilities for viewing architecture as more than an exciting novelty, instead implicating it in a much more complex network of forms of experience and experiences of forms.

032— _____

033—Boring architecture has much in common with minimalist art. This might have something to do with the accusation that minimalist art is “theatrical.” Like architecture, it too requires an audience to complete the work and cannot be understood as just the “work, itself.”[35] Boring architecture is rarely about the work itself. Whether it shifts focus to the periphery, allows the beholder to encounter his or her subjective limits, or forces a change of subject altogether, boring architecture rarely allows for a fixed focus on a single thing at a single moment. Unlike a lot of interesting art, architecture doesn’t exist in a single frame, as a single thing. Its representation, image, and physicality are never compressed into one object immediately consumable in a single spontaneous moment. These things are always different. Unlike painting, whose integrity allows it to remain about the work itself, architecture is in a constant state of dispersal and projection between its various objects and subjects. Boring architecture does a good job of making us aware of these facts.

035—Sometimes things are just bad. Bad is not the same as boring. We experience this every time we find something interesting because it is bad. A car crash, for instance, is not boring, but it's usually bad.

036—Some have argued that boredom isn't a quality or affect of architecture, but that it rests solely in the realm of a subject's feelings or emotions as he or she struggles to find a work of architecture interesting.[36] I disagree with this. I think there are qualities in architectural objects that can be described as boring. However, these qualities are not universal. Boredom is not a phenomenology. It does not make universal claims about individual experiences. Like interest, it combines subjective and objective states. In much the same way that it produces a free-floating and wandering subject, it also produces architecture that might be described and defined using similar terms. Boring architecture is contingent and mercurial, wandering and blurry.

037— ...

038—A lot of architecture that we find boring is just old. However, boring architecture is not old in the way that some architecture is old and familiar (I call that comforting). Instead, boring old architecture is usually something that we have not yet come to understand. This helps explain why, for instance, when we look back, as we often do, boring buildings can become interesting. Just as the definition of boredom changes, the canon of boring objects

38—Boring architecture usually involves a repetition of parts and is full of unchanging patterns at a multitude of scales. These scales can be formal but they can just as easily be experiential and temporal.[37]

38—Just as an interesting building might be experienced through curiosity, suspense, and surprise, a boring building is often experienced through indifference, sedation, and routine.

039—The temporal component to boredom in architecture engages duration through slowness. However, boring architecture is deliberately non-hierarchal, and while it accommodates routine, there is not a single prescribed order to how boring architecture is experienced.

040—But still, the ultimate expression of boredom, “this is interesting because it is boring,” cannot be avoided. Perhaps, with these notes in mind and in the spirit of this book, the best we can hope for is the inverse: that we might find things boring because they are interesting.

1
Denise Scott Brown, “On Pop Art, Permissiveness and Planning,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 3 (1969): 184–186.

2
Jeff Wall, “‘Marks of Indifference’: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” in *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Walker Art Center, 2003): 43–44.

3
To be clear, Scott Brown never describes Ruscha’s

photographs as “boring,” but she does use similar language as Wall, who calls Ruscha’s work boring. I admit to taking some liberties here (as everywhere), but my point is that both Scott Brown and Wall intentionally conflate style and content when discussing Ruscha’s photographs. In doing so, they both use similar language to describe the results of this conflation—and at least one of them views these results as “boring.”

4
For two different reviews (and descriptions) of the show,

see Christopher Knight, “Edge-Cities, Minus the Edge: Catherine Opie’s collection of photos at MOCA explores L.A.’s landscape of mini-malls and freeways, but where are her essential portraits?” *LA Times*, October 09, 1997, 4; and Terry R. Myers, “Reviewed Work(s): Catherine Opie. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles October 5, 1997–February 8, 1998,” *On Paper* 2, No. 3 (January–February 1998): 41–42.

5
Knight, “Edge Cities,” 4.

6
Scott Brown, “On Pop Art,” 186.

7
For more ideas about how we distinguish things from each other by making them more similar than they actually appear, see Bruno Latour, “Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together,” in *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, ed. H. Kuklick (JAI Press, 1986): 1–40.

8
Claire Bishop, *Installation Art*, (London: Tate, 2005): 6.

9

The story of the installation photographer and ... *And Pedestals* was previously published in an earlier essay. Andrew Atwood, "Great Expectations," *Shaping New Knowledges: 104th ACSA Annual Meeting 2016 Paper Proceedings*, eds. Robert Corser and Sharon Haar (ACSA, 2016).

10

I first encountered the formulation of "interest" and "the interesting" as a spontaneous and discriminating focus in two essays by Richard Lind: "Attention and the Aesthetic Object," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39, no. 2 (1980): 131–142; and "Why Isn't Minimal Art Boring?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and*

Art Criticism 45, no. 2 (1986): 195–197.

11

Wall, "Marks of Indifference," 44.

12

For a brief history of "snapshots," see Mia Fineman, "Kodak and the Rise of Amateur Photography," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, October 2004, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/kodk/hd_kodk.htm.

13

While the parallels do not always work, in this book "Norms" are linked with Boredom, "Conventions" are linked with Confusions, and "The Everyday" is linked with Comfort. Two texts have greatly informed my understanding of norms: S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific*

Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970): 35–42; and Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 125–126. Canguilhem writes: (1) normal is that which is such that it ought to be; (2) normal, in the most usual sense of the word, is that which is met with in the majority of cases of a determined kind, or that which constitutes either the average or standard of a measurable characteristic. He goes on to point out the ambiguous nature of normal: Finally, an analogous confusion in medicine should be emphasized, where the normal state designates both the habitual state of the organs, and their

ideal, since the reestablishment of this habitual ideal is the ordinary aim of therapeutics [67]. Also see Joan Ockman's "Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture" in *The Architecture of the Everyday*, eds. Deborah Berke and Steven Harris (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997): 122–152.

14

At first this might seem like a leap. But this claim is based on Richard Lind's definition of interesting as a spontaneous and discriminating focus. It follows that boredom would unite things as opposed to discriminating between things.

15

An incomplete list of boring books would include: Adam Phillips, *On*

Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Greice Schneider, *What Happens When Nothing Happens: Boredom and Everyday Life in Contemporary Comics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016); Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1995); Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005); Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005); and Julian Jason Haslyn, *Boredom and Art: Passions Of The Will To Boredom* (Winchester UK: Zero Books, 2015). In addition, some boring edited volumes include: Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani, eds. *Essays on Boredom and Modernity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009); Michael E. Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn, eds. *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2017); and Tom McDonough, ed. *Boredom* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017). There is additionally an inexhaustible list of book chapters, articles, and essays on the subject of boredom. The length of this list would exceed the capacity of the book. Here are a few: Frances Colpitt, "The Issue of Boredom: Is It Interesting?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, no. 4 (1985): 359–365; Peter Conrad, "It's Boring: Notes on the Meanings of Boredom in Everyday Life," *Qualitative Sociology* 20, no. 4 (1997): 465–475; Richard Lind, "Why Isn't Minimal Art Boring?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 45, no. 2 (1986): 195–197; Derek Matravers, "Is Boring Art Just Boring?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 4 (1995): 425–426; Richard Misek, "Dead time: Cinema, Heidegger, and Boredom," *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 5 (2010): 777–785; Dan Moller, "The Boring," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 2 (2014): 181–191; Joe Moran, "Criticism: Benjamin and Boredom," *Critical Quarterly* 45, no. 1–2 (2003): 168–181; Patrice Petro, "After Shock/Between Boredom and History," *Discourse* 16, no. 2 (1993–94): 77–99; and Eugenie Shinkle, "Boredom, Repetition, Inertia: Contemporary Photography and the Aesthetics of the Banal," in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 37, no. 4 (December 2004): 165–184. The idea that these books, articles, chapters, and essays represent multiple boredoms can be traced back to one of the books in the list. In *On Kissing, Tickling*

and Being Bored, Adam Phillips writes, "Clearly, we should speak not of boredom, but of the boredoms, because the notion itself includes a multiplicity of moods and feelings that resist analysis; and this, we can say, is integral to the function of boredom as a kind of blank condensation of psychic life" (78). Phillips is, of course, speaking of the psychological aspects of boredom's multiples. I am extending that to include its psychological as well as its aesthetical dimensions and combine them into one big blurry ambiguous mess.

16 Many of the publications listed above give different definitions of boredom. For me, one useful

approach to the multiple definitions of boredom can be found in "Defining Boredom(s)," the introduction to Lee Anna Maynard's *Beautiful Boredom: Idleness and Feminine Self-Realization in the Victorian Novel* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2009): 9–11. In this section, Maynard proposes a type of productive boredom that she describes as fluid. The realization that boredom was simultaneously fluid in nature and fluid in meaning was helpful during the formulation of my own ideas about boredom.

17 Spacks, *Boredom*, 61.

18 Using "notes" as the structure for this chapter

references many texts. Perhaps most directly, the structure of this chapter was inspired by Susan Sontag's iconic essay "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (London: Penguin, 2009): 275–292. In addition, my use of notes can be credited to Peter Eisenman's "Notes on Conceptual Architecture" (*Design Quarterly* 78/79 [1970]: 1–5); Sarah Whiting and Bob Somol's "Notes Around the Doppler Effect" (*Perspecta* 33 [2002]: 72–77); and Andrew Holder's "Notes on More" (*Harvard Design Magazine* 43 [2016]). My interest in "notes" as a means to write about boredom originated from a series of conversations with Andrew Holder.

19 Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002): 61.

20 Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 78.

21 Petro, *Aftershocks of the New*, 61.

22 Many of the books listed above include different histories of boredom (Petro, Schneider, Spacks, Toohey).

23 The general differences are clear, and others have done an excellent job at explaining these differences in depth. Grace Schneider outlines the distinction between "existential" and "trivial" boredom

in *What Happens When Nothing Happens* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2017): 18–20.

24

I found this Benjamin quote in Susan Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1989): 105. Benjamin's ideas on the subject are similar to those of Adam Philips, who writes: "Boredom, I think, protects the individual, makes tolerable for him the impossible experience of waiting for something without knowing what it could be. So that the paradox of the waiting that goes on in boredom is that the individual does not know what he was waiting for until he finds it, and that often

he does not know what he is waiting. ..." Philips, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, 77.

25

Schneider, *What Happens When*, 37.

26

This idea is partially credited to Hasalyn, specifically the following quote discussing the creative and imaginative possibilities brought on by boredom: "One way to view boredom, is not to position it in opposition to interest, but as a source for alternative forms of imagination and creativity, producing interest in places it did not previously exist." Hasalyn, *Boredom and Art*, 4.

27

Pierre Machery convincingly makes the connection between

"interest" and "criticality" in *A Theory of Literary Production* (London: Routledge Classics, 1986).

28

This quote comes from a course syllabus for a formal analysis class taught by Peter Eisenman. Eisenman has made the connection between "the critical project" and "close reading" in various texts, but he states it most clearly in this course syllabus when he writes, "It could be argued that any critical architecture requires close reading." Peter Eisenman, *Formal Analysis: Close Reading and the Formal Design Course Syllabus* (New Haven, CT: School of Architecture, Yale University, 2014).

29

Jeffrey Kipnis introduced the term "close attention" to me; many of my ideas about "attention" and its relationship to this book stem from my conversations with him about my own work and the work of others. More reading on the nature of "attention" can be found in Lind, "Attention and the Aesthetic Object," 195–197.

30

My use of the term "projective" as opposed to "critical" comes from Sarah Whiting and Robert Somol in "Notes Around the Doppler Effect," 72–77.

31

Moller, "The Boring," 188.

32

Dan Moller expands on the connection

between audience expectations and the dialectic between boredom and interest. He distinguishes between the psychological dimension of being bored and an aesthetic category of "The Boring." I have not been so careful, instead relishing in the messy overlaps and ambiguities between different forms of boredom. Moller, "The Boring," 183.

33 Others have proposed similar ideas. One particularly good example is provided by Julian Jason Haladyn with support from Jonas Mekas: Whereas art and "good entertainment" are supposed to shake you up, Mekas tells us, a Warhol film "asks that it be shaken up; by you, filled up with ideas, by you!"

In other words, even though it is Warhol who structures the film—chooses where to point the camera and who will be in front of it—it is the spectator of the film that must fill it with ideas and, more importantly, meaning. Julian Jason Haladyn, *Boredom and Art: Passions Of The Will To Boredom*, 153–154. Jonas Mekas, "Notes After Reseeing the Movies of Andy Warhol," Andy Warhol Film Factory, Michael O'Pray, ed. (London: BFI Publishing, 1989): 39.

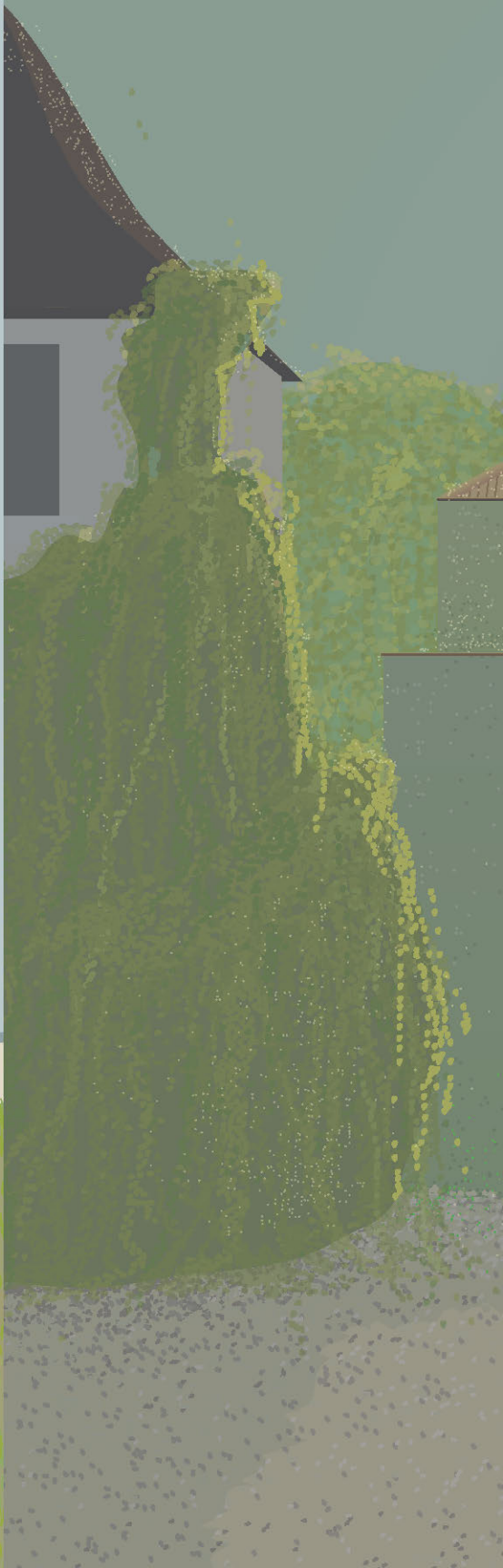
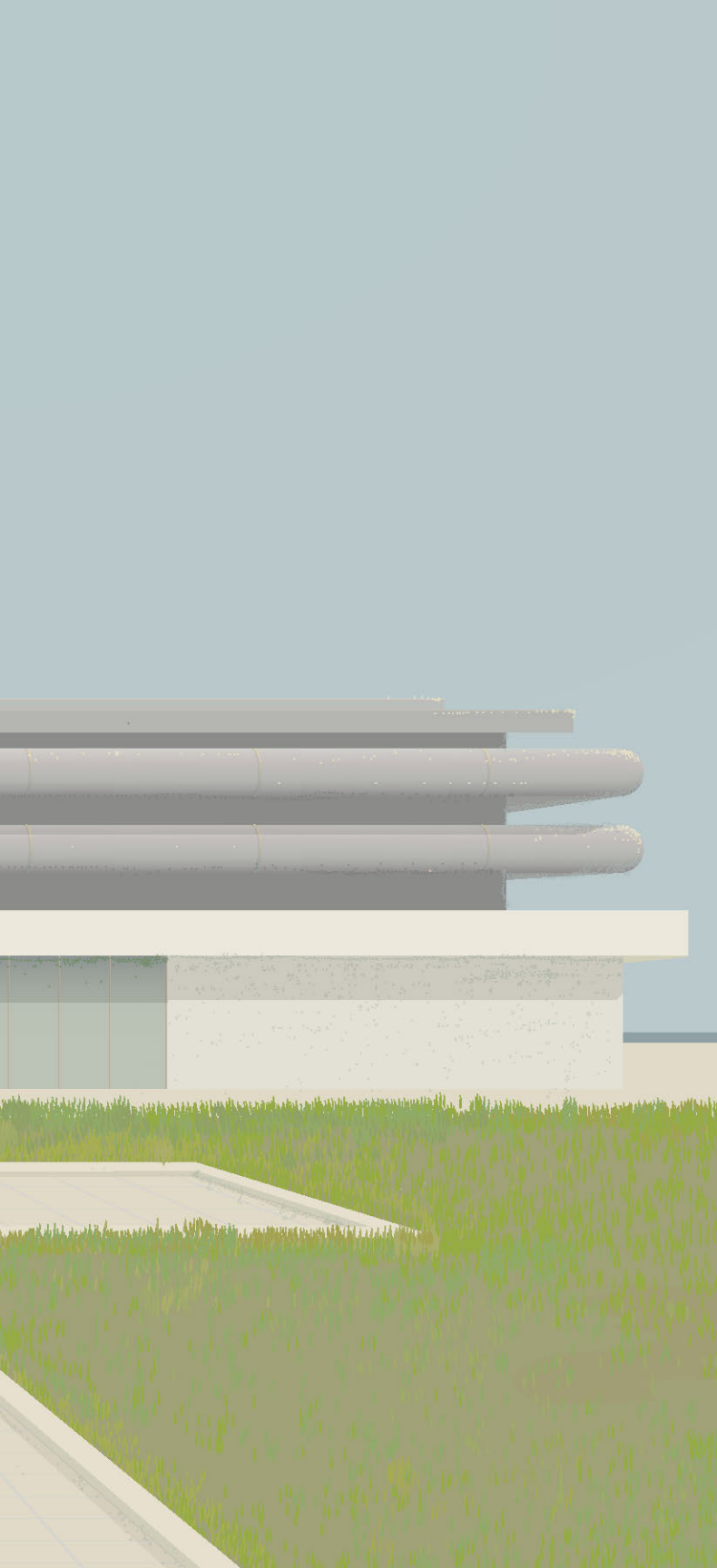
34 Grace Schneider repeatedly addresses similar feelings in *What Happens When Nothing Happens*. One instance occurs on pp. 22–23.

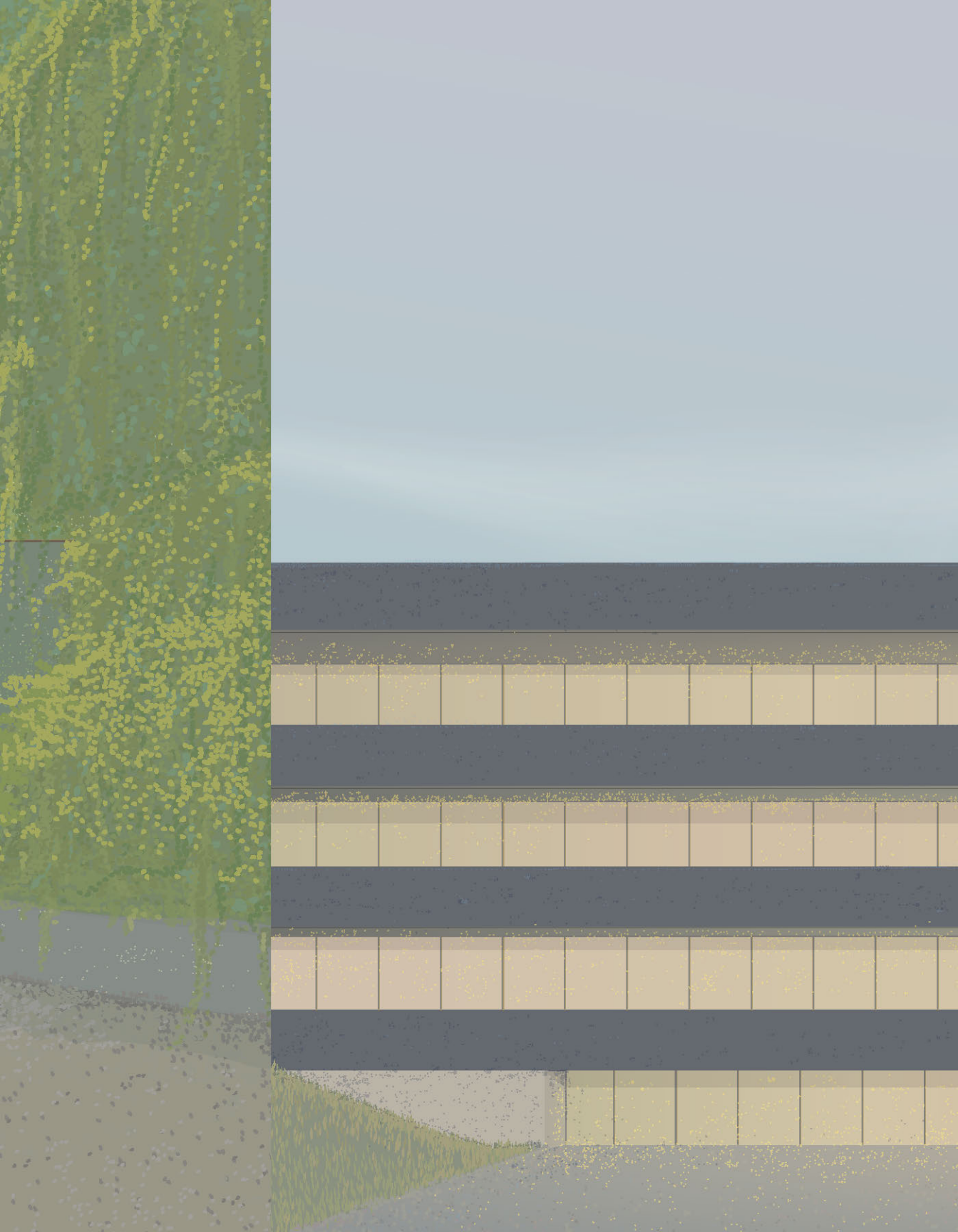
35 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1986): 152.

36 This is the position of Frances Colpitt. Interestingly, the essay by Richard Lind, "Why Isn't Minimal Art Boring?" is a response to Colpitt's essay. Frances Colpitt, "The Issue of Boredom: Is It Interesting?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43, no. 4 (1985): 359–365.

37 More on repetition and its relationship to boredom can be found in my favorite essay on the subject, given in the form of a commencement lecture by

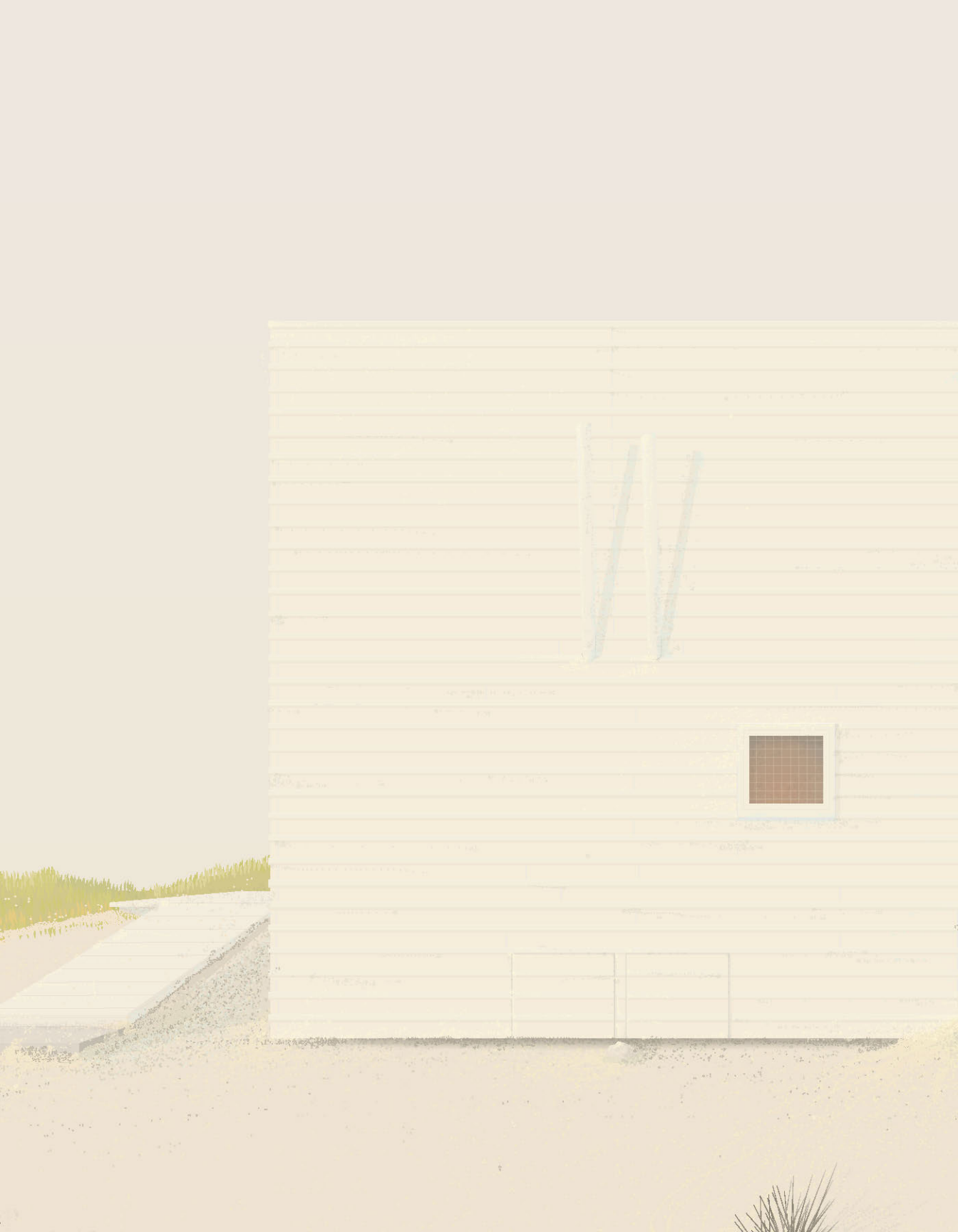
Joseph Brodsky at Dartmouth College in 1995 and then later published as an essay. In that essay he says, "Everything that displays a pattern is pregnant with boredom." And later, "Boredom is a complex phenomenon and by large a product of repetition. It would seem, then, that the best remedy against it would be constant inventiveness and originality. That is what you, young and new-flanged, would hope for. Alas, life won't supply you with that option, for life's main medium is precisely repetition." Joseph Brodsky, "In Praise of Boredom," in *On Grief and Reason—Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994): 104–113.





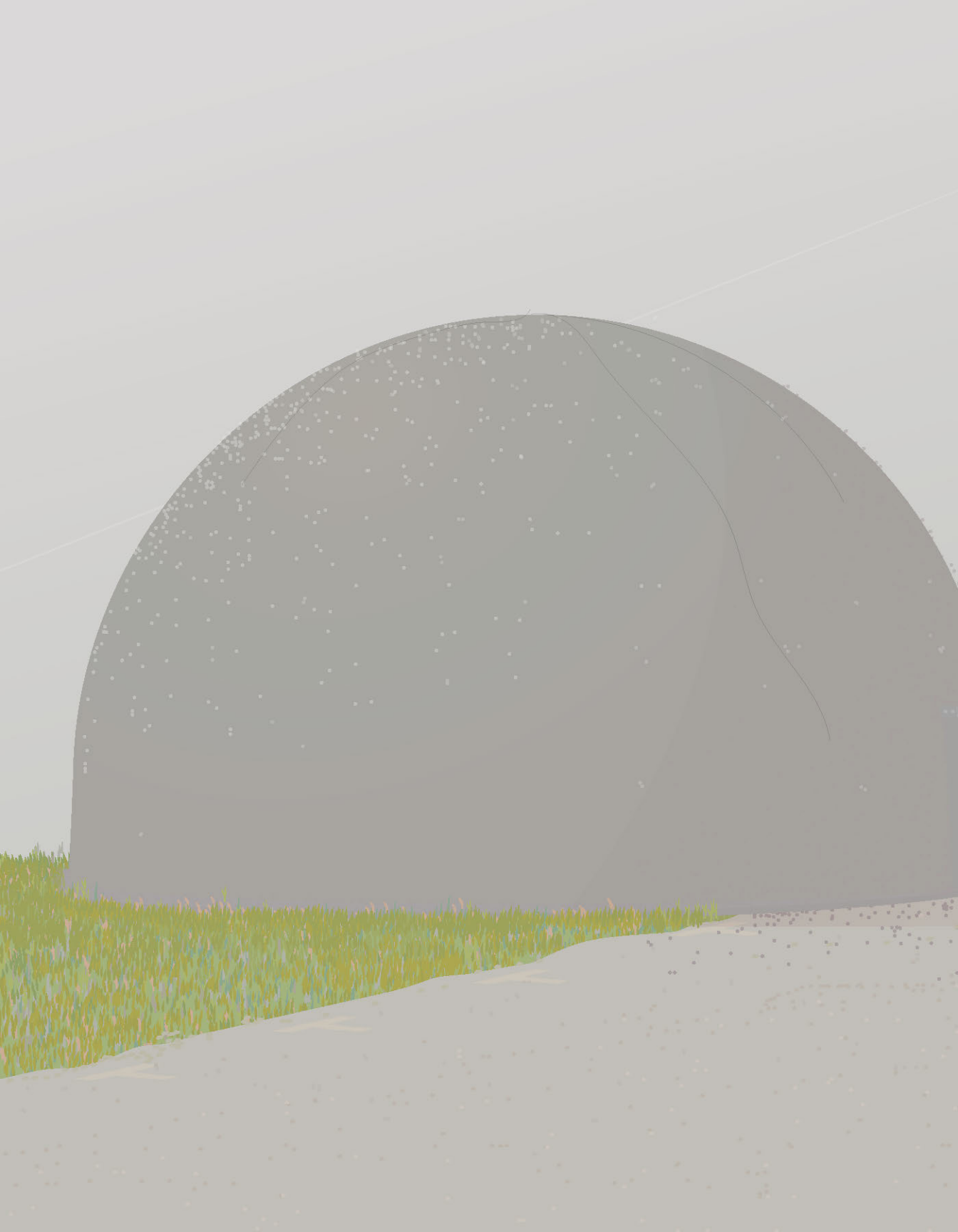


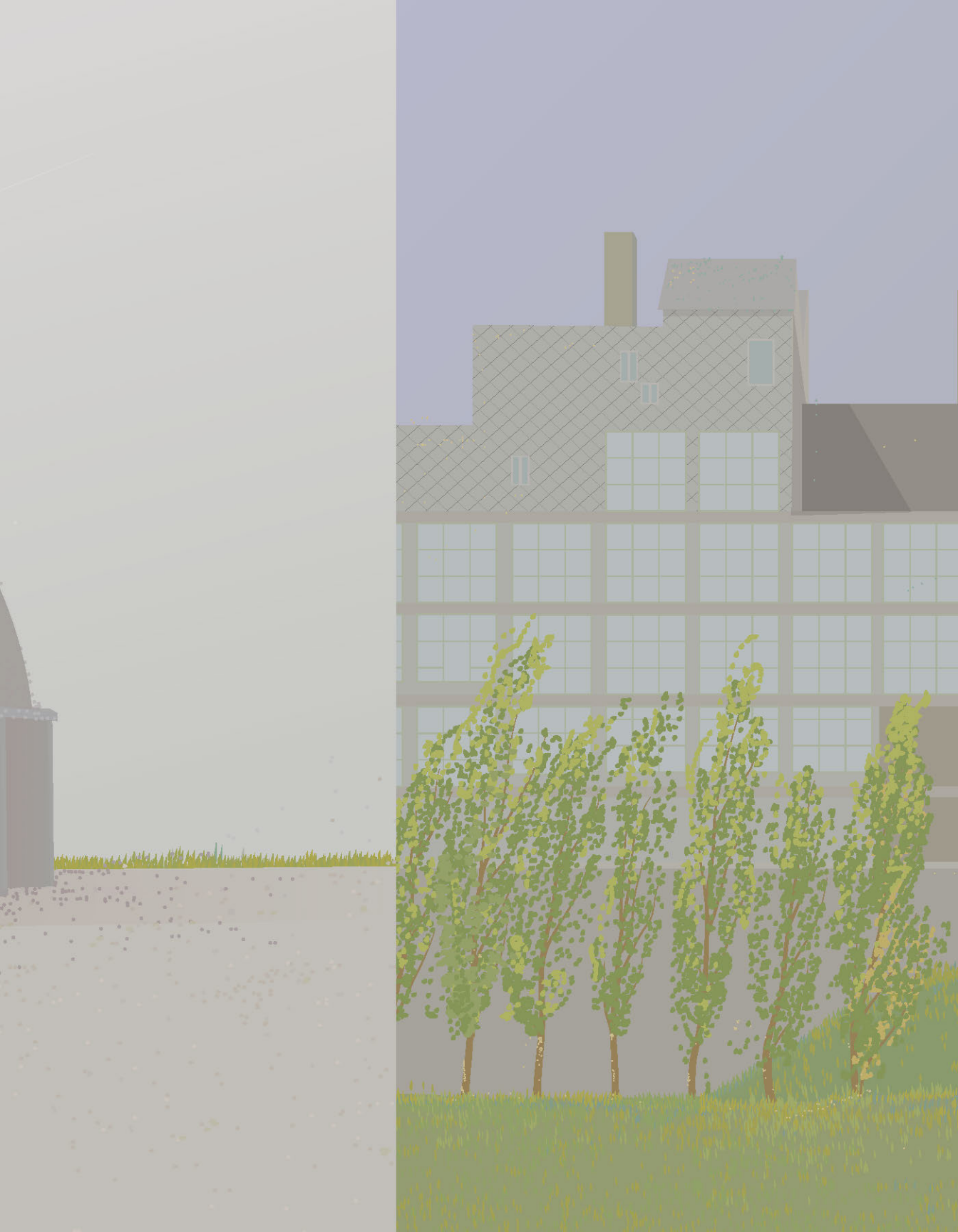






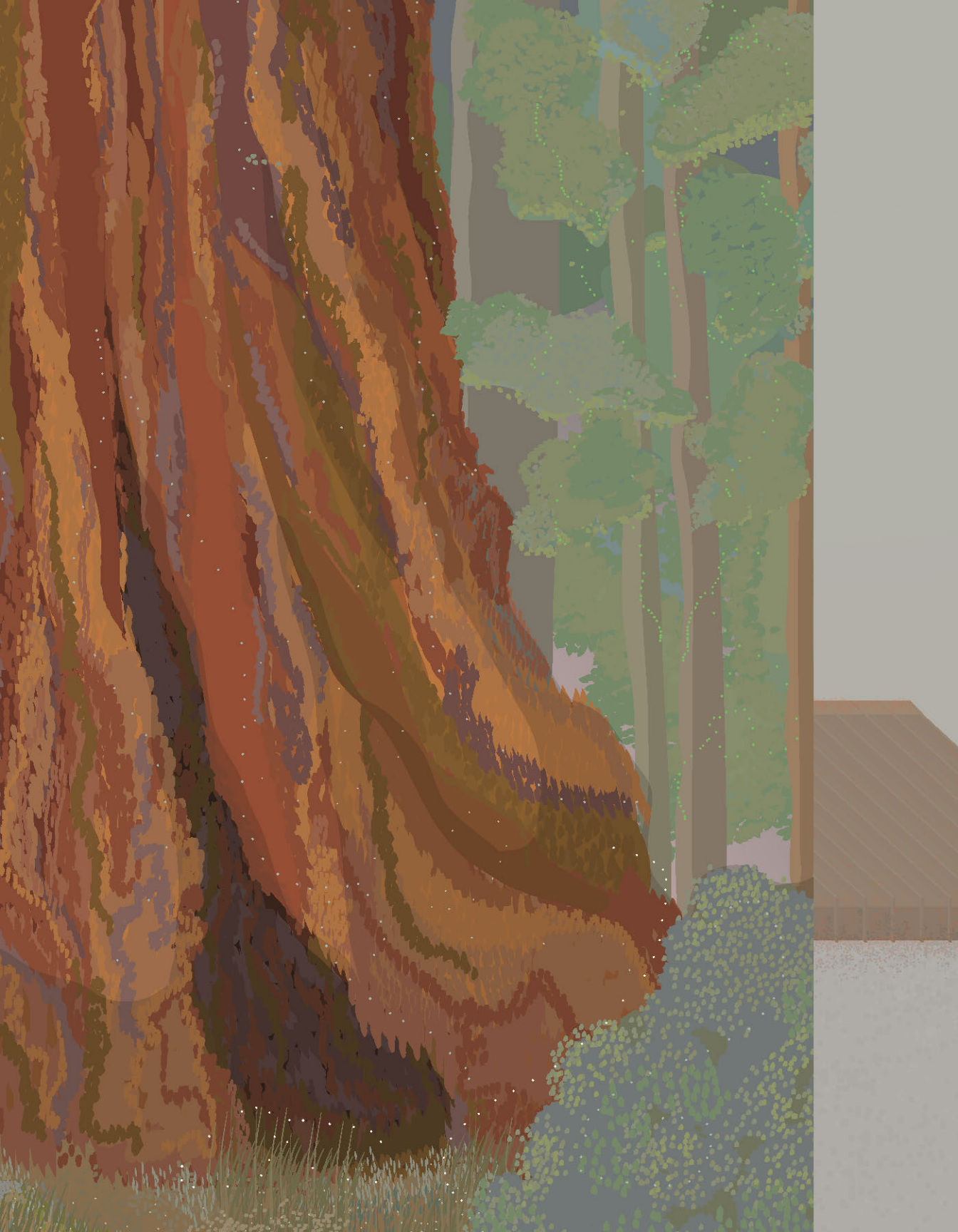


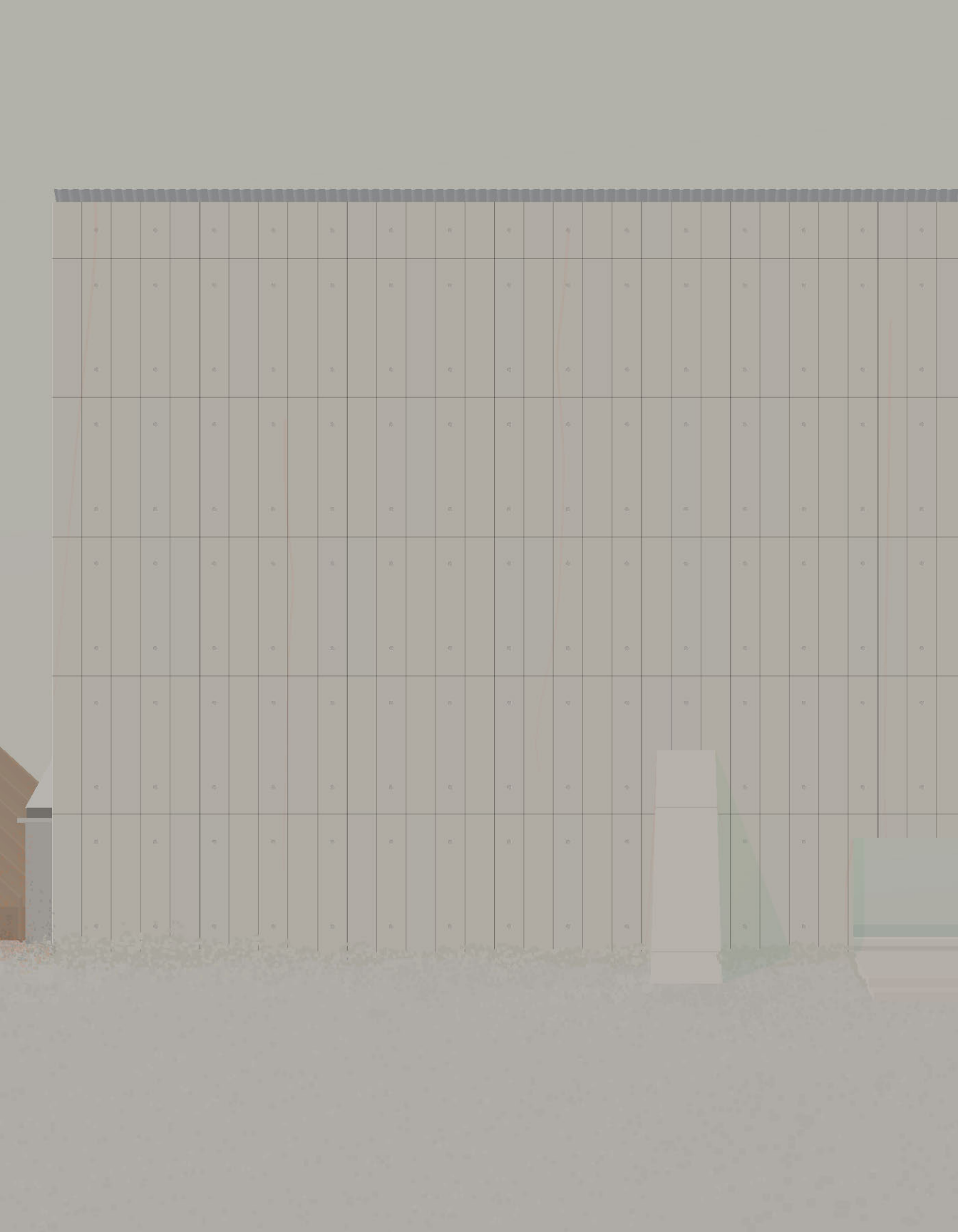


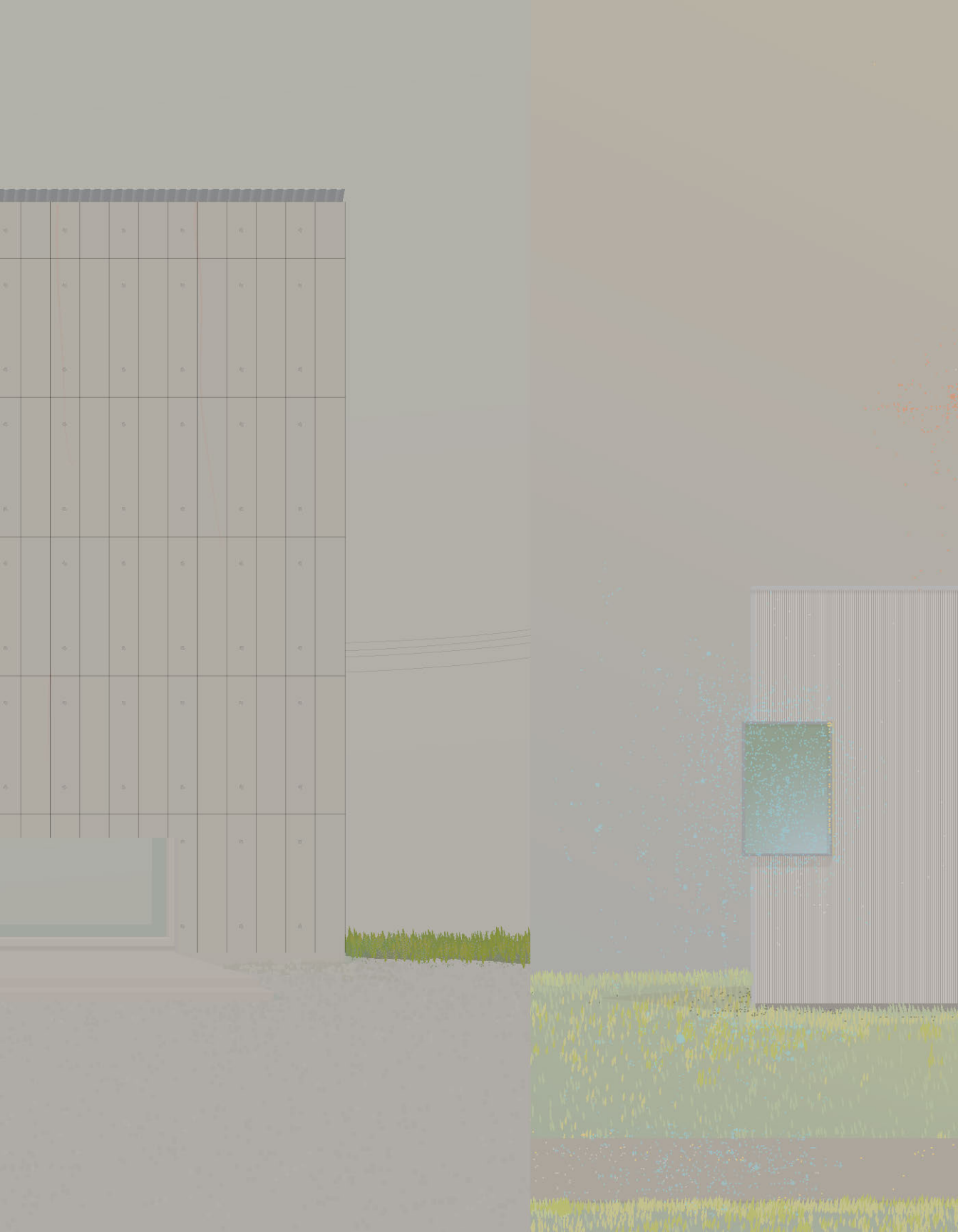










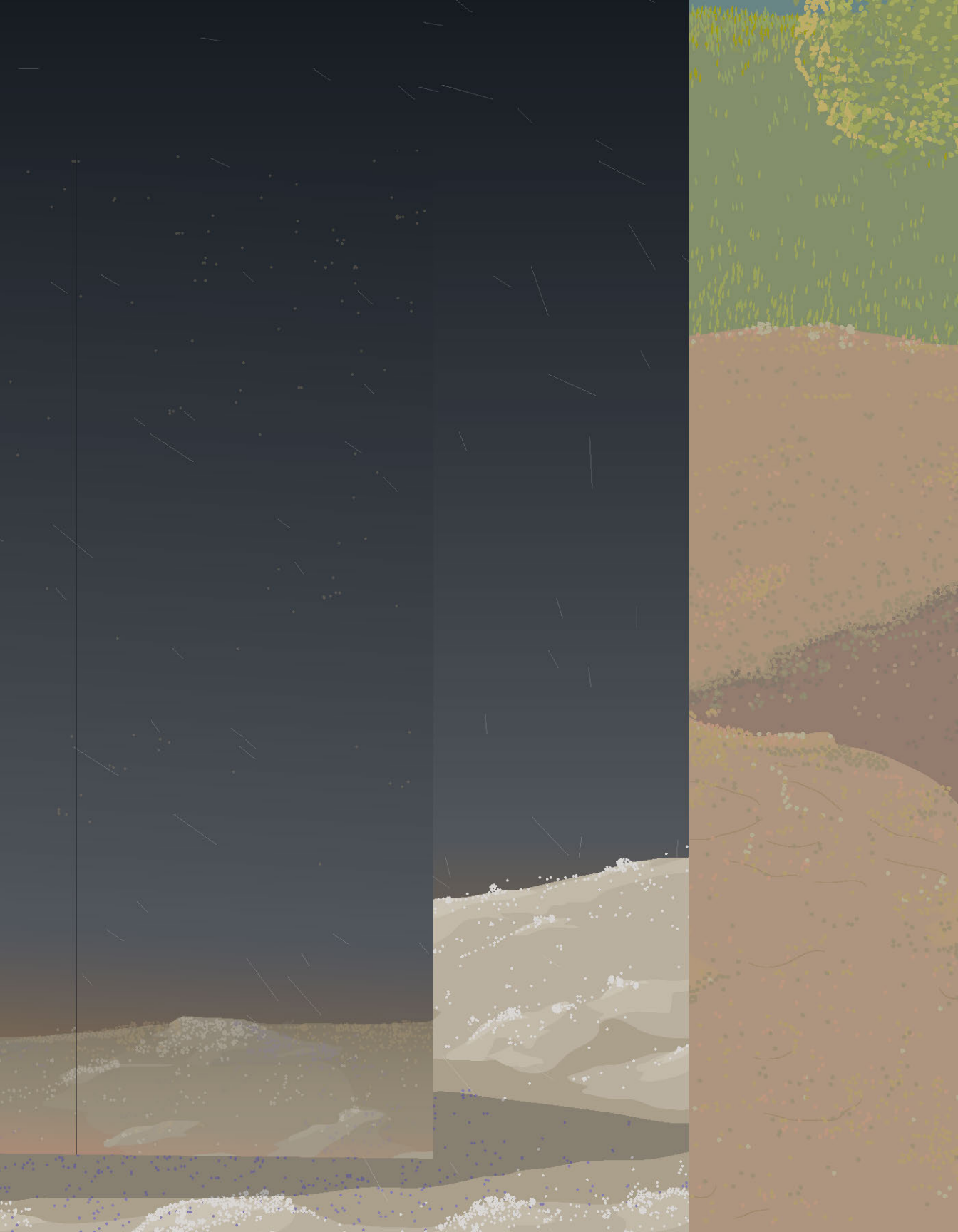






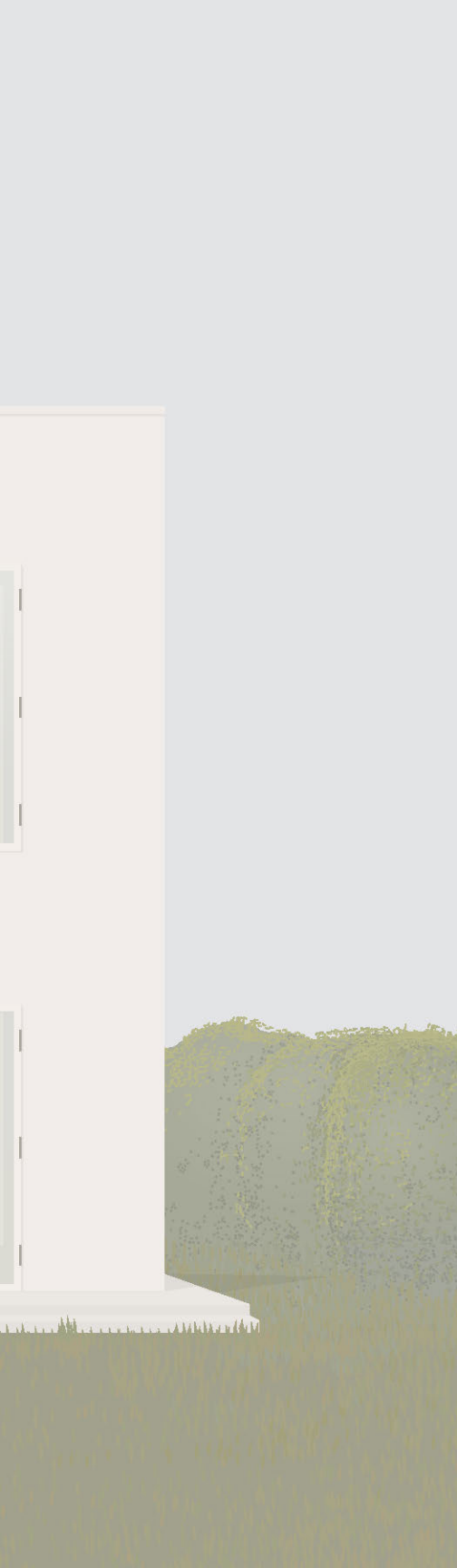




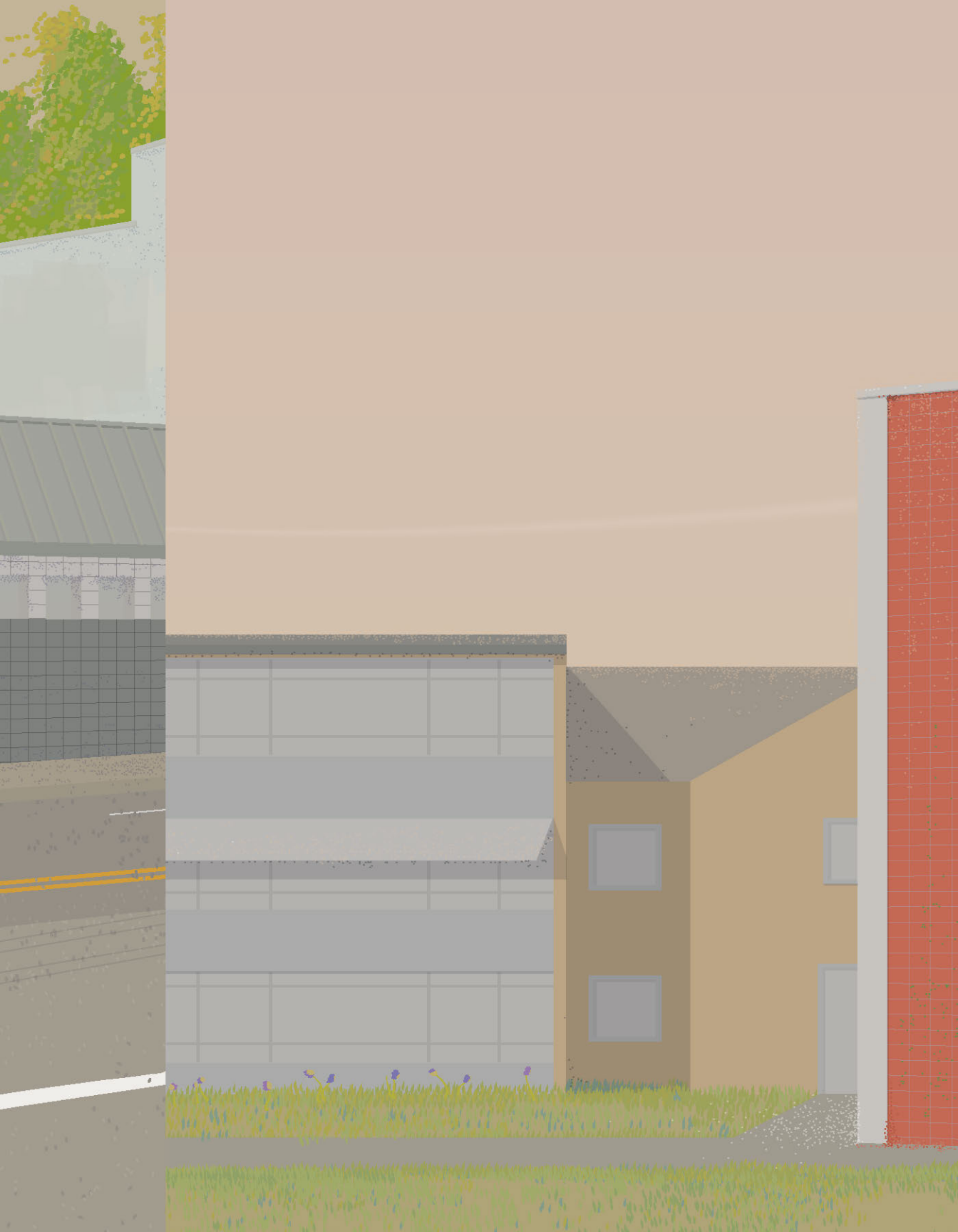


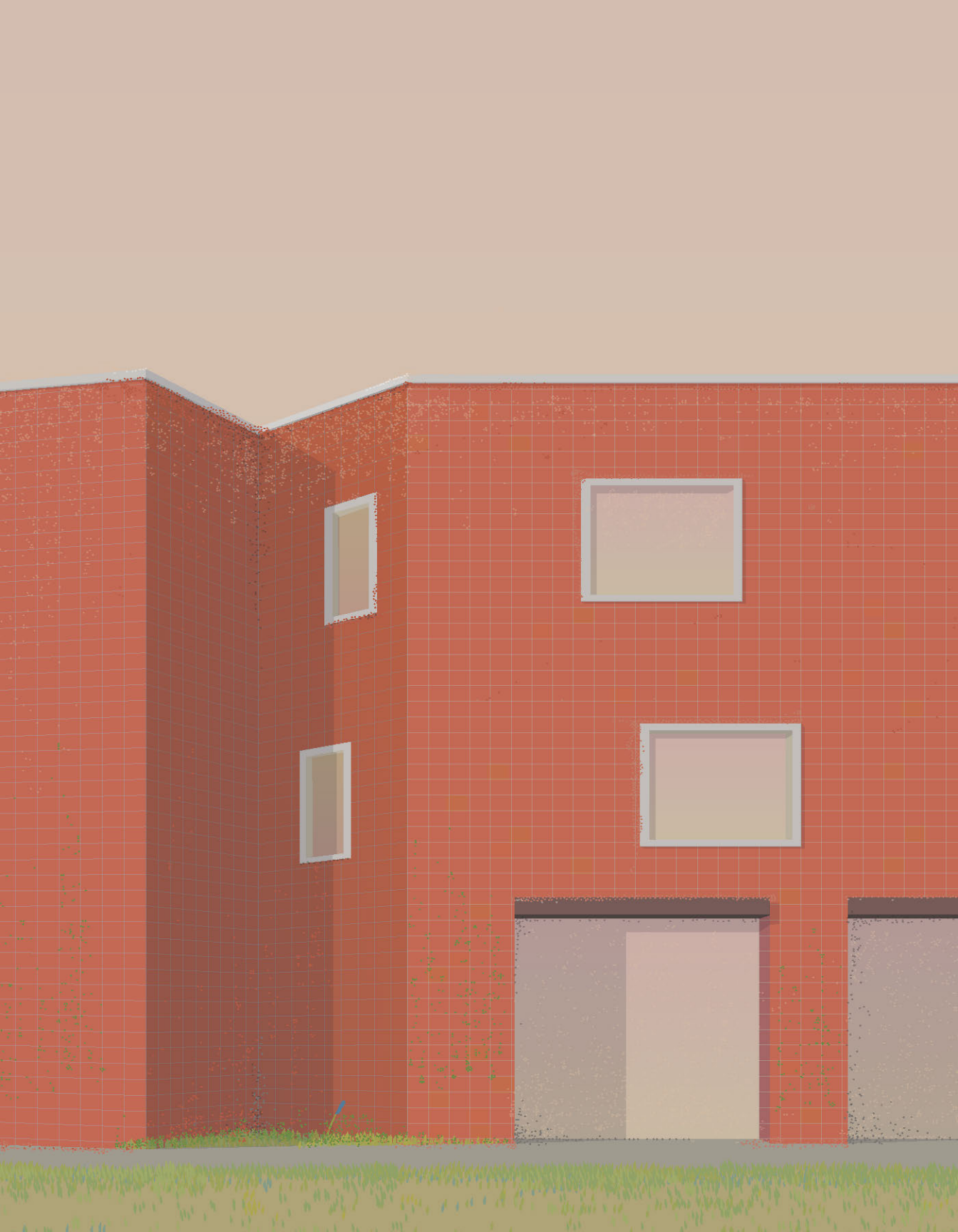














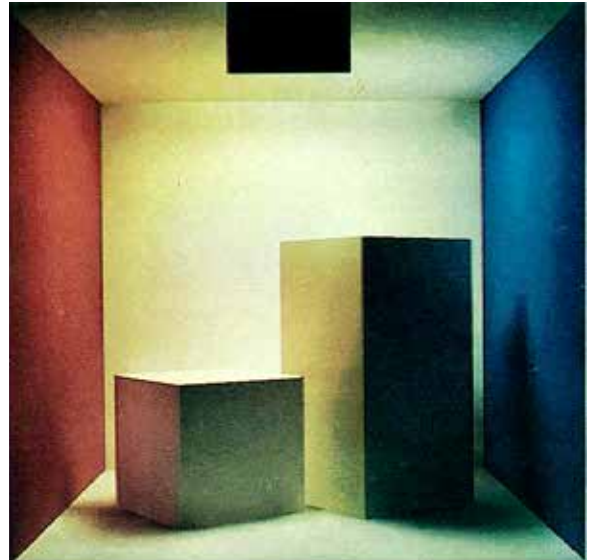






CONFUSING

To continue, consider these two images:



The Cornell Box, As published by Gary W. Meyer, et al, "An Experimental Evaluation of Computer Graphics Imagery," in ACM Transactions on Graphics 5, no. 1 (1986): 48.

These are images of the Cornell Box, or rather of two different representations of two different models of the Cornell

Some Slightly Confusing Notes

As in the other chapters, the form of the notes in this chapter is intended to reinforce the content. The notes in the Boring chapter take the form of an exhausting list, while in the Comforting chapter they take the form of an informal outline. The

Box: a photograph of a physical model constructed out of plywood and paint (left) and a rendering of a digital model comprised of zeros and ones (right).

These models were built in a closet and in a computer, respectively, in the early 1980s in the computer science department at Cornell University, where they were used to test early rendering algorithms. They were compared side-by-side as one of the first tests of photography versus rendering, in the interest of making what we now casually call "photo-realistic rendering." [1]

As you look at these two images, they may at first appear the same. This is, of course, the point. They have been carefully designed and constructed to look as similar as possible. As a result, if we compare them based on familiar art historical forms of

analysis, there is not much to discuss. They both depict the inside of a box. In both images, the left interior face of this box is red, the right interior face is blue, and the remaining three faces are some shade of white. Inside the box are two smaller boxes. The

notes in this chapter can best be described as margin notes. I chose this format because confusion often puts the most pressure on the margins. The peripheral structures that support the events of everyday life are often noticed only when they fail. Here the marginalia, which typically contains asides, individual thoughts, and references to support the main body of the text, instead contains much (but not all) of the text's main content. This balance creates a back-and-forth reading, constantly shifting attention between texts, like the side-by-side visual comparison of the Cornell Box described in the main text of the chapter. Thus the structure of this chapter is meant to destabilize traditional notions of the conventions and hierarchy of

left one is a cube; the right one is taller and more oblong. Both boxes have the same square dimensions in plan and are rotated askew to the sides of the larger box. The cube appears to be rotated approximately 30 degrees and sits slightly in front of the taller box, which appears to be rotated a little more, maybe 35 or 40 degrees.

In short, the objects in the images have apparently indistinguishable massing, form, overall structure, and shape. Even above and beyond these similarities, the images themselves appear very like each other.

But as you might have noticed, there are some differences. These appear subtle at first, but the longer you look—the more your vision blurs as you scan from one image to the other and back, looking for something, anything, to be of interest—you eventually see the shifts and differences in tone and color between the two images. It would be hard to pinpoint where, exactly, this happens, where the differences begin or end. There is no sharp transition. But as your eyes adjust, you notice that the blue in the right image is darker, yet the shadow cast on the blue wall from the taller of the two interior boxes is not quite as well defined. This seems to be the case for all the shadows: the ones in the left image appear to be a little bit lighter but a little crisper, a little sharper. The comparative darkness of the right image creates the illusion of a black ring surrounding the whole view. This gives the right image the appearance of a vignette. The left image does not share this feature. Instead, the lack of darkness in the left image makes the left face of the left cube appear to glow red. The corresponding cube face in the right image is more subdued; it doesn't glow as much. The back face of the cube in the right image glows a warm yellow, bounded by the dark

shadows in each of the corners, while the back face of the cube in the left image appears to have almost no color, blown out under the intensity of the light source above. If you look closely enough, this intensity in the left image seems to overtake the upper left corner

of the taller box. There are many such differences between these two images. No single one is particularly clear or attention-grabbing. Finding, describing, and discussing these differences requires a purposeful mode of attention which most of us probably don't engage on a daily basis.

In other words, the Cornell Box is not interesting. The images resist the spontaneous focus on individual features that we use to differentiate interesting things. Because of the construct of image comparison, we know we should look for differences between the two pictures, but the apparent closeness of the images makes it difficult to discern the threshold between sameness and difference. As a result, the Cornell Box creates a situation in which we know we are supposed to look for something

text by drawing the margins towards the center and pushing the center slightly aside. Of course, there is a limit to what you can do with the traditional structure of a book when working with publishers and graphic designers. After all, my intent is not to push so hard on the conventions that they break and the book devolves into a chaotic pile of words that mean nothing. Instead, in this book these margins have been stretched to create varying widths of parallel columns. This makes the book easier to print—something that cannot be overlooked when one is trying to get a book contract—but it also helps to suppress the supremacy of the main body of the text. Stretching the margins to the width of a page confuses the status of the notes: they are marginal notes

but we are unsure *how* exactly we are supposed to look. I call this mode of attention *confusion*. Confusion shares the deliberate vagueness, or *willful blur*, of those other two alternatives to interest presented in this book: boredom and comfort.

but they are something else too. Sometimes they are more like a list, sometimes more like an outline, sometimes more like an essay; this lack of clear identity illustrates the fluidity and blurriness of confusion.

You will notice that this chapter, like all the chapters, still has endnotes. The confusing marginalia do not replace them; in fact, they use them too. The result is a chapter with two separate but related texts that can be read together or enjoyed independently but that both share the same set of notes. This allows for the somewhat confusing possibility that a reader of one text will encounter a note count that will jump from 1 to 3 to 6, while a reader of the parallel text will encounter notes 2, 4, and 5, for example—unsettling the most

When considering boredom, comfort, and confusion as different forms of a similar thing, the one-dimensional spectrum between spontaneous focus and willful blur quickly becomes insufficient. As explained previously, the term willful blur is an initial reaction to spontaneous focus and is defined by negation: it is *not interesting*. As a reaction, *not interesting* is useful as

a catch-all for the terms that are the focus of this book, but we can also define the terms against each other to understand them as more than simple acts of negation and, in some cases, as something new.

Of the three alternatives to interest, confusion is the most likely to result in something new. Unlike comfort and boredom, confusion requires a degree of difference and novelty. On the coordinate system presented in the introduction to this book as the “field of attention,” confusion and comfort are placed in opposing quadrants, meeting each other only at the origin. Confusion shares the characteristic of ambiguity with boredom, which it meets along the axis of (in) discernibility. Confusion differs from boredom in its relationship to sameness and difference. Unlike boredom, which relies on similarity to produce even, similar, non-hierarchical effects, confusion relies on difference to produce unfamiliar and often new effects.

basic expectation of the order of numbers as one counts up.[2]

Some
Confusing
Forms
of Confusion

Confusion is a type of instability brought on by situations that resist everyday habits and expectations.[3] As these notes indicate, there are many different forms of confusion, but most, if not all, forms rely on the failure to meet an expectation based upon conventions. We can understand conventions as social contracts to which we collectively subscribe as a way to solve problems of coordination.[4] When conventions are adjusted we often end up

confused. As such, it is impossible to talk about confusion in architecture without discussing its social components. As mentioned in the first chapter of the book, there are at least three forms of the “social” in architecture. Here again, I refer to the social relations *of* architecture. In a sense, confusion in architecture is a disruption of the *of*—which is to say confusion is often a disturbance in the architectural conventions that help structure and support architecture in all its different forms.

1 A Coordinated
 Confusion

I’ll start with a dumb example. Let’s say I make a drawing of a room. Confusion between

Confusion and interest both share the search for novelty through difference. Interest entails differentiating things in an

attempt to understand them and learn more about them. For this reason, we often use this word when we want to be “critical”—not in the sense of strictly negative judgment, but in the sense of trying better to understand something through description and explanation.[5]

That is to say, interest is epistemic. Confusion is similar: we feel confused when we expect difference and novelty but cannot immediately locate the expected differences. Instead of spontaneously found differences, the differences we find with confusion are often vague or ambiguous. In boredom, ambiguity produces indifference; in confusion, ambiguity produces frustration, as known terms, techniques, and methods of description and evaluation are insufficient. If interest expands the limits of knowledge by focusing on the “thing itself,”[6] confusion contributes to knowledge by testing the terms, techniques, and methods we use when trying to focus on things. In this way, it puts pressure on the conventions and other structures of understanding that exist between object and subject.[7]

the drawing and the room happens when the two things are not properly coordinated. If the conventions we associate with drawings and rooms are not sufficiently met, coordination breaks down and confusion results. Note that, for this example to work, we must know that we are looking at a drawing and that it represents a room. If either of these two conditions is not met, we will experience a total disconnect, something much stronger than the mild frustration brought on by confusion. Like all the terms of the book, confusion is a weak term. It does not result in a total breakdown. Instead, confusion stems from more subtle agitations and disturbances. We must expect

the room and the drawing to be related, but the representational conventions associated with that expectation must not be fully realized. These representational conventions are arbitrary social constructs: at some point architects collectively chose to use them as a convenient way to exchange and discuss information with others.[8]

2 The Real Confusion

Confusion in architecture occurs not only when the coordination between represented and representation breaks down, but also when represented and representation are insufficiently distinct from one another.

Two Models, Two Images

As we’ve established, the Cornell Box is not interesting.[9] As an object or composition of objects, it’s not much to look at: the interior of a well-lit, multi-colored box with two smaller boxes inside. As an image, one might even call it boring. However, when two of these images are presented

together in a conventional side-by-side comparison, the viewer is likely unable to ignore certain expectations and impulses. This oppositional setup references a method of art historical analysis familiar to many from art and architecture history classes, but in those cases the two images are usually significantly different from each other. Outside of art history—for instance in scientific research papers, medical

Increasingly, the distinction between “real” and “represented” is intentionally blurred. Forays into virtual and augmented reality, for instance, exploit this confusion as to what is “reality.” Further, some have claimed that we are no longer in a world of representation, but rather one of presentation, where all forms of communication in architecture operate in real-time or near real-time.[10] Whatever the cause, the rise of ambiguity in architecture (and other disciplines) produces increasing fluidity among things that were conventionally distinct and stable. American art critic and sometime curator Bob Colacello has even dubbed our current

situation “The Age of Ambiguity.”[11]

I have no idea if this is truly an “Age,” but one result (or perhaps cause) of the intrusion of representation into the real and vice versa may be the call for the end of abstraction.[12] The conventional steps taken to remove our representations from reality have typically involved a series of moves drawing representations away from the represented. In almost all cases these steps involve the introduction of different degrees of abstraction, often steps of translation from 3D object to 2D surface. About this, Bruno Latour writes, “In the debates around perception, what is always forgotten is this simple

diagnoses, or forensic tests—side-by-side comparisons typically pair two mostly alike images in order to highlight at least one significant difference, which is usually a point of interest. Yet another genre of side-by-side comparison, the “Spot the Difference” games found in children’s books and celebrity gossip magazines may be frustrating, but they are ultimately not confusing, as the differences are discrete and finite, with a given number.

At some point, the differences are definitively spotted. The instincts derived from these familiar types of comparison do not work to analyze the Cornell Box, and it is this disjuncture—and the new layers of techniques and processes of comparison that arise as a consequence—which produces confusion.

When we look at the Cornell Box test, we are not looking at two different boxes. Instead we are looking at two different images of two different models of one box, one digital and one physical. But one can never actually see a digital model. This means comparing the two models is actually impossible, as at least one of them

doesn't exist. We must render them into two comparable impressions by projecting each of them onto a two-dimensional surface. In the case of the Cornell Box, the computer scientists used a camera lens and a screen to make the two models appear more similar than the models themselves really are. The steps taken to make two similar images, each made from two different models, are often strange and counter-intuitive.

1 The Photographic Image, The Plywood Box

Instead of photographing a model and working backwards to create a rendering that looked like the photograph—what we usually do when we set out to make a “photo-realistic rendering”—the physical model of the Cornell Box was constructed to take on qualities found in the rendering when it was photographed. In other words, the plywood model was constructed to make a “render-realistic photograph” as much as drift from watching confusing three-dimensional objects, to inspecting two-dimensional images which have been *made less confusing*.”[13] One could argue that we are currently in the process of reversing that drift. Instead of reduction and simplification through techniques of abstraction, which make clear and focused things so that we can discriminate, classify, and understand them, now there is an increased

the digital model was constructed to make a “photo-realistic rendering.” The basic steps of this backwards-seeming process highlight some of the biggest challenges.

First, the computer rendering required a hermetically sealed box in order to create a total “rendering environment.”[14] This is not possible for the plywood box, as there would be no way to light it or to photograph it. The solution was to build a box around the box, to house the various technologies. This big box allowed for the creation of a dedicated hole in the smaller box to position the camera so the researchers could tune the distance required to capture an image that corresponded to the view angle of the computer image. In addition, the bigger box provided additional space to place lamps behind the smaller box to light the interior of the scene with a diffuse source through the invisible “wall” of the smaller box.

Second, the researchers had to match the sheen and color of the perfectly diffuse rendering “materials” produced by the computer. Selecting a paint that looked like and reflected like the rendering materials—both the flat colors of the cubes and the apparent material qualities of the digital image, such as the liquid crystal of a pixel—was necessary to make the photographic image of the physical scene look like the digital image of the digital model. In every case, the process of constructing the experiment to test the digital algorithm matched reality to virtuality, not the other way around.

2 The Rendered Image, The Digital Box

Although reality was matched to the virtual in these tests, the Cornell Box's express purpose was to test the virtual, including the rendered image, the digital model, and the specific rendering algorithm the Box was designed to test: *radiosity*.

Radiosity and ray tracing are the two primary processes used, either together or separately, to make the computer-generated images we now

suspicion of the order imposed on the world through abstraction and a rising desire to present, amplify, and learn from the confusing noise of the world.

I would argue for a blurry middle ground between these two extremes. On the one hand we have the move toward abstraction; on the other hand we have a move toward the amplification of the noise of the world than can be found in images described as "hyperreal." To mediate between these two positions so seemingly at odds with each other, we might examine things that seem initially to resist our conventional systems

of representation and abstraction in architecture: things like mountains, asteroids, grassy clumps, trees, and air. In doing so, we force a loosening of the tolerances between the world itself and the world as we see it though architecture's conventional tools of visualization. If abstraction is dead, perhaps the confusing middle ground between abstraction and the world might be its replacement.

3 A Confusing Order

Perhaps the most fundamental concept in architecture is *Order*. As seen in the work of

call "renderings" in architecture. The easiest way to understand these two processes is in contrast to one another. Ray tracing is used to calculate direct lighting and produces the high-gloss, specular reflections and focused details of shiny things. In renderings made by ray tracing, the shadows are dark and crisp and the transitions of light as it casts across surfaces appear sharp. Radiosity, by contrast, produces the dull soft bleed of indirect lighting as it diffuses between and across surfaces.

As opposed to the high-contrast, full-saturation effects in images produced by ray tracing, where the focus of lens and light is obvious and immediate, radiosity produces a soft blurriness on things—and, more interestingly, between things, as one thing's colors, qualities, and attributes bleed onto another thing, and vice versa. This subtle fluidity between objects in an image generated by radiosity makes discerning the differences and transitions between discrete things in a scene more difficult. As a result, these images can be slightly more confusing to look at and understand.

The differences between these two

rendering algorithms are not just aesthetic, but also technical. In ray tracing, the process starts by projecting a ray from a single point; there is a simulated "eye" and "focal point." In radiosity, there is no set point of view (POV). There is no eye to orient and nothing is explicitly pointed out; the algorithm runs independent of any specific way of looking

or seeing. In place of a single point of view, it starts from the assumption of a theoretically infinite number of points on triangulated meshes and calculates light as it bounces between these points, rendering each in color. As opposed to focused and clear, the process is dispersed and always a little blurry. For these reasons, the dispersal and diffusion of indirect light sources between objects in radiosity renderings is typically called "global." Whereas ray tracing constructs a discriminating image from a singular POV, ray tracing calculates a global, all-inclusive environment that considers every element in a scene and the relationships between all of them as light bounces from one object to another and as colors bleed between objects.

Claude Perrault and E.H. Gombrich,[15] tolerance is the intentional loosening of order, where order is understood as an authoritative arrangement of things based on a repeatable method or system. Orders in architecture occur everywhere, from the canonical to the mundane. In his "Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns,"[16] Perrault revealed the arbitrariness found in the classical orders and exposed the subjective basis of some deeply rooted conventions. More commonly, in architecture we have a prescribed order of operations that describe not only the nature of our tasks but also the sequence in which we do them. This includes things like the standards regulated by the profession's legal

This lack of focus rendered by radiosity contributes to the confusion evoked by the side-by-side comparison of the Cornell Box images. The details of construction and calculation of these two models and their images begin to suggest an approach to confusion in architecture—both how to make something

contracts: we start with Concept Design, then Design Development, next Construction Documents, and finally Construction Administration. A breakdown in this order leads to coordination conflicts between the concerned parties—and possibly to lawsuits. It's no coincidence that law is the discipline most bounded by conventions.

Beyond the classical and the legal, there is an assumed order of operation found in the more mundane work of architecture. The drawing and model come before the building, the rendering is done on top of the drawing, the building comes before the photograph, and so on. The list of expectations around these everyday tasks is endless and completely arbitrary, as are

confusing and how to look at it. In the case of the plywood box and the photographic image, the counter-intuitive reversal of matching the photograph to the digital standards of renders frustrates expectations about re-presentation. Instead of a clear relationship between reference and referent, with a linear sequence of construction and evaluation, these two models are held in simultaneous reference to each other, neither one assuming a privileged position over and before the other one. Architecture is typically conceptualized as a progression from concept to design to detail to construction, with each step building on the previous one and pointing toward the next thing until the building is complete. This model is often reiterated in post-construction narratives of the project, as well as in analysis by third parties, although of course the real story is never so simple or so linear. The Cornell Box comparison

negates this model, forcing instead a constant and ongoing oscillation between things instead of prioritizing one thing. Paradoxically, this oscillation is perhaps the clearest case of willful blurring of start and end point. The resulting confusion forces questions instead of definitive results or conclusions. Are we making a photograph of a rendering? Or a rendering of a photograph? What is the model? What comes first? Which model? Which image? Is the distinction between photograph and rendering even useful?

Mountains, Galleries

Some of the questions raised by the Cornell Box appear in two related projects Anna Neimark and I have done in recent years. As with projects discussed in other chapters, these projects are not given as ideal examples of confusing architecture. They



Installation view of *Paranormal Panorama*
at MAK Center Mackey Garage Top, Los Angeles. Photo by First Office.

do, however, illustrate attempts to deploy some of the ideas and techniques mentioned above to make architecture, using similar content and contexts—a mountain and a gallery, respectively—but to different ends.

The first project, entitled *Paranormal Panorama*, was a show at the MAK Center's Mackey Garage Top Gallery in Los Angeles, California.

The program was a small screening room for the film *Cold Rehearsal* by Austrian video artists Constanze Ruhm and Christine Lang. I will focus here on three elements that worked together to confuse the viewer: the gallery context, the screening room design, and a large mountain panorama that spanned several of the gallery's walls.

The Mackey Garage Top Gallery is a rectangular space perched above a five-car garage in the backyard of the Mackey Apartments, a building designed by the Viennese architect Rudolph Schindler. The gallery consists of a large open room, a small kitchen, and a bathroom. The exterior is black, while the interior walls are painted white. A large sliding glass wall opens along the

side that faces the apartment building. When the glass wall is open, the full space of the gallery is visible from the apartment building and the courtyard between the garage and the apartments, giving the gallery the appearance of a deep, framed shadow box. Because of this large expanse of glass, the gallery light varies drastically over the course of

conventions. Assuming we are comfortable with a little confusion, one way to test the stability and strength of any convention is to agitate or rearrange its order.

4 A Context of Confusion.

Along with *order*, context has traditionally been a primary concern in architecture. Even those architectural projects which have eschewed "site" have situated themselves within the project of autonomy, which ultimately became its own context with its own (internal) set of pressures and constraints. But the question of where we locate a work of architecture now is even more confusing. Beyond physical site,

locating architecture in its buildings, its drawings, or even somewhere between them along a spectrum of translation seems woefully inadequate considering the diversity of things that people point at and call architecture these days. The rapidly increasing number of images, the increasing number of ways in which they are made available, and the increasing speed with which they circulate mean that the vast majority of things we call architecture are consumed through an image of one kind or another. Alongside the increase in images, the digitization of images has also confused distinctions between different traditional media: drawings, renderings, diagrams, photographs, models

a day. The changing light is not conducive to film projection, so we built a box inside the gallery to house the screening room. To distinguish this box from the rest of the gallery, we rotated it slightly with respect to the gallery's permanent walls.

The permanent walls performed like the outer box of the plywood Cornell Box with its one open face permitting external light. Accordingly, we treated the inside of the gallery as a rendering environment and painted a rendering of a mountain on its inside walls. The mountain was selected as the subject to render because a mountain plays a central role in Ruhm and Lang's film and

because Anna and I had been working with mountains as forms for several years. To make the image, we started by making a computer-generated radiosity rendering of a large alpine landscape based on Mount Tendre, the mountain in the film. To make a rendering long enough to span the length of the room we used a technique called slit-scanning. Slit-scanning seemed appropriate because it requires animation and uses each frame to produce a single point of view. Each viewpoint corresponds to a column of pixels in the final image, aggregating columns as the image builds with each added frame. The bigger the

...all might simply be called images today. We might take cues from the capacity of images to blur boundaries, through shared formatting and speed of circulation, and use them as a metaphor for how context operates in architecture today. Instead of things that are grounded in a single physical context and medium, context in architecture today is a much more confusing proposition. Creating vast and ever changing networks of things and proximities that have nothing to do with geographic location. We might just as easily

move a mountain from Los Angeles, CA, USA to Sydney, NSW, Australia using Skype and paint as we change a drawing from a vector file to a raster one.

Because of this capacity to blur boundaries through shared formatting and speed of circulation, the JPEG is an appropriate metaphor for how context operates in architecture today. Things are no longer grounded in a single physical context and medium, giving way to vast and ever-changing networks of things and proximities that have nothing to do with

image, the more frames required, adding more viewpoints, effectively dispersing a single point of view into hundreds of points of view as the image stretches across the wall.[17] We initially rendered this image at a high resolution with thousands of shifting viewpoints, so that it appeared as a series of smooth continuous gradients spanning the image. However, to execute the panorama in the gallery we had to convert millions of discrete pixels from the computer into five discrete contours that could be matched to five different colors of

white paint. Like many galleries, the MAK Center dictated that we use white paint, so we assigned each of these five different contours a base white paint found at five different paint stores around Los Angeles. The various whites were different enough to see shifts in tone between them, but it was confusing at first to discern one white from another and to decide which whites were closer to each other than to others.

However, after many hours of staring at different pairings of whites, our eyes adjusted and we decided on the basic color relationships for the painting. Despite the discrete layers, the combination of the original radiosity rendering and the closeness in tone of the five paints produced a blurry, soft image.

Aluminum conduit and decorative molding, both painted white, were layered on top of the image. Just as the painting turned corners and spanned several walls of the gallery, both temporary and permanent, these off-the-shelf building elements were also installed continuously around corners, helping to embed the full length of the image into the gallery, confusing the order of foreground and

background, temporary and permanent, substrate and application.

When viewed from the outside, the gallery, the rotated screening room box, the conduit, the molding, and the subtly shifting hues of white paint produced a single image as they wrapped indifferently around the gallery, never fully aligning with each other. Just as the mountain painting ignored the folds and corners of the

geographic location.

Context is a much more confusing proposition than it has ever been before. We might just as easily move a mountain from Los Angeles to Sydney using Skype and paint as we change a drawing from a vector file to a raster one.

5 Medium Confusion

The task of medium specificity is criticism. Perhaps this is an inscrutable comment, but I believe it to be true. Throughout this book, criticism is defined broadly as judgment, but also as a test of the limits of knowledge. Medium specificity was an attempt to reaffirm an "area of competence" and to expand the potential of *the procedures*

themselves.^[18] After modernism, various new understandings of media emerged: mixed-media, multimedia, transmedia, cross-media, post-medium, to name a few. Not all of these are associated with visual arts (or architecture); some are more aligned with journalism or with storytelling, but the stable relationship between content and form remains intact. One could argue that "post-medium" is really an argument for conflating all artistic media into a single medium, the "art itself" or *the architecture itself*.^[19]

I have always been suspicious of medium-based narratives about architecture. Of course, it's true that architecture uses different media and that different architects

walls, the conduit and molding did not align to the painting. The elbow pieces of the conduit and the mitered joints of the molding also missed each other and intentionally overran the corners of the walls. By forcing these things together and then creating tension by loosening the tolerances between them, we produced a slightly blurry background for Ruhm and Lang's show.

Blurriness in this case can be understood as the subtle loosening of tolerances and misaligning of things such that it becomes more difficult to

and forms of architecture bias particular architectural procedures—with some architects preferring to work in models, some preferring drawings, some preferring renderings, and some privileging "the building." In other cases architects prefer to work between media and with a specific order or process, always starting with a sketch, then building a model before turning to drawing, for instance. But the wide range of ways of working and of different things that are called "architecture" has always made the idea of medium specificity difficult to apply to architecture—and as a result makes many of the

post-modern reactions to medium specificity even less applicable. If architecture was never medium specific, how could it claim a post-medium condition? As such, attempts to discuss architecture through these art historical terms always seemed confusing to me.

If this sounds harsh, it's not meant to be. Instead, I would argue that the confusing intersection of media and architecture should be embraced. If architecture has no specific medium, then a critical project through media isn't possible. Instead, the bad fit of media and architecture should be explored precisely

understand them from any stable reference point or in any prescribed order. Our intent was to blur the architecture to the extent that it forced attention off of itself and onto the things in the gallery that were meant to be the focus of the show – in this case, the film and a handful of still images from the film hung in the gallery.

In this we were somewhat successful. The odd details, rotated room, and subtle color shifts in paint attracted attention at first. As little novelties, they were clearly willful acts of design. Unlike ...*And*

Pedestals, where no one was sure what was part of the architecture, in *Paranormal Panorama*, everyone was clear about what we, the architects, added to the exhibition. However, the lack of a coherent order of process and priorities and the blurring of spatial sequences seemed to frustrate people, forcing them to shift their focused attention to other more discernible things.

Peripheral Vision,
Peripheral
Structures

Paranormal Panorama produced confusion in other ways too. The few people who did linger on the architecture

were confronted with a series of things that seemed not to make much sense. Vents and registers were attached to the walls but didn't connect to ducts. The electrical conduit did not connect in any logical way: outlets were connected to other outlets and switches to other switches. Outlets were never connected to switches, and switches were never connected to lights. Our switches were nonfunctional, unlike the existing gallery switches, but as some visitors became more comfortable interacting with "fake" switches they would unknowingly stumble on a

"real" switch. The intermittent flickering of the lights told the story each time someone had pushed their discovery about the fake light switches too far. As mentioned, the molding did not always align with itself or with the gaps it is typically used to cover. In places this echoed the loose tolerances found in typical wood frame and drywall construction.

In each case, these peripheral things resisted their expected function. As the things that support the events of everyday life they are rarely the objects of attention; we usually only ever notice them when they fail.

because it cannot play by any of the arbitrary rules and grand narratives of "purity" or their opposites. No special distinction should be given to any single medium or sequence of media. For instance, how does one make a rendering of a mountain like a model of a room? Or how does one make a model of a building by diagramming a dolmen?[20] Questions like these arise among the arbitrary distinctions and confusing nature of media in architecture and suggest fluidity among things as one medium takes on the qualities of another medium and vice versa.

6 Confusing Identities

Typically we are taught history in architecture through the narratives of movements and styles. I assume we use the word "movement" because it refers to the active organization of people towards a collective cultural agenda.[21] We take it for granted that movements move—forward it seems. Movements are stacked in a more or less linear fashion, moving forward until their novelty runs out (when it may turn into boredom), the movement stops, and another movement replaces it. Along with

By forcing their failure we created a confusion that allowed visitors to question their own expectations surrounding the exhibition and the conventions that created those expectations. For some, it was the automatic nature of switches and the taboo of adjusting lighting in an art gallery. For others it was the cheap, temporary, and wasteful nature of drywall construction in exhibition design. For me, the most powerful challenge was to the convention of white paint in art galleries. The strange blotchiness on the white walls was the peripheral element

that attracted the most attention and generated the most conversation. Of course, much has been written about this tendency and the potential implications of this expectation of white in galleries.[22] By showing that “base white paint” is not a uniform standard, we revealed the arbitrariness embedded inside one of the most universally held conventions. Each of the base white paints from the different stores was a different color. By placing them together we revealed this

difference and exposed the deeply subjective nature of something as seemingly automatic as “base white” and introduced color into the gallery in a way that greatly confused and irritated the gallery staff.

Deinstallation, Reinstallation

As well as calling into question assumptions about the material practice of architecture, *Paranormal*

movements we use terms like “styles,” “genres,” “sensibilities,” and other aesthetic packaging to describe and classify work.

I know there is some assumed hierarchy among these terms. Perhaps some would place styles inside of larger movements, for instance. I don’t mean to dismiss the usefulness of categorization and hierarchies. However, what I find curious is the lack of separation and hierarchy and the apparent evenness of the terms in the everyday lexicon of most architects. “Modern” usually means white and boxy, as opposed to a historical moment that occurred sometime in the early 20th

century. Furthermore, “modern” and “minimal” are sometimes used interchangeably, which is odd because, historically speaking, about twenty years separate the movements and styles associated with each. Further still, we now seem to be in the midst of an ongoing acceleration of terms coined to classify and discuss work—more and more terms competing to claim specific overlapping territories. One could argue this happens because there is more work being produced or maybe just more formats to look at and discuss the same work. Either way, the sheer number of movements, styles, and genres that make up contemporary

visual culture brings into question the efficacy of any system of classification. How useful can a system be if the terms are typically misused and the number of types overwhelms anyone’s ability to keep up?

Some will think my position is anti-historical or even anti-intellectual, but it’s not intended that way. I understand the necessity of such systems in other disciplines, but their effectiveness as tools for architects is limited. Instead, I think we might embrace the confusion that has resulted in the slow erosion of style as a way to discuss architecture. The soft blurry zone between styles should be embraced not just in

Panorama also raised questions about issues of discipline, authorship, and the confusing status of architecture as it creeps into an art gallery. Despite our effort to produce a background for Ruhm and Lang's show by using the most conventional materials in low contrast to each other, the gallery billed the exhibition as a "collaboration." This confusion about whose work was on display was somewhat uncomfortable for me.

We were hired to perform an architectural service to the gallery and the artist; accordingly, we fulfilled the brief we were given, to prepare the gallery to display Ruhm and Lang's work. We had nothing to do with making the work on display, the film; the mountain we painted wasn't even our mountain!

Throughout the process, the distinction between architect and client, architect and artist, gallerist and artist, and gallerist and architect often felt jumbled and confused when it came to the expectation and delegation of tasks involved in putting on the exhibition. This confusion sometimes produced very real discomfort. In particular, the relationship between gallerist and architect was legally challenged when the time came to deinstall the show. While the issue of authorship raises interesting

the terms used, but also in our own self-consciousness about what specific qualities those terms describe. Think of all the things we might discover: blurring the lines used to identify and classify will ultimately lead to new aesthetic territory. (There is nothing new in this suggestion!) I also suggest such a conscious embrace to frustrate those who would indict the novelty or importance of a given work by applying

a damaging style label: "that's so post-modern," for instance. If we care less about styles and their value, these sorts of critiques can be met with a well-deserved and intentional shrug.

7 Confusing Authors

During a recent presentation, an unnamed young architect presented work by describing all the different processes and references used in

questions about responsibility for the work, it also raises confusing questions about timing, scheduling, and the organization of labor and financial responsibility for different tasks. Suffice it to say that the confusion created by deinstallation blurred creative and contractual roles and made us question our own understanding of the role of the architect.

In the years since Ruhm's exhibition closed, we have reinstalled some parts of the show in at least two different galleries. In Sydney, Australia, we repainted a full-scale version of the mountain panorama and displayed a 1" = 1'-0" scale model of the MAK Center show. Ruhm's film was not part of this exhibition. The painting and model were part of an exhibition at the UTS Art Gallery at the University of Technology Sydney,

entitled “Fieldwork” and curated by Sarah Hearne. The exhibition presented a range of architectural work made outside of the studio, “in the field.” Hearne did an excellent job of establishing clearly defined goals and tasks for all of those involved, and we came prepared with a better contract and a better understanding of what we needed in order to execute our contribution to the exhibition. As a result, this show was not confusing in some of the ways that the original show was confusing.

However, the replication of part of the show in another gallery presented us with a series of productive questions without clear answers. First, the nature of the show shifted

the work. The pronouns switched fluidly between *I, we, it, they, he, she...* It was a dizzying display of ownership and deferral of credit all mixed up into one confusing bundle. After the presentation, during the Q & A, an audience member asked the architect while pointing at the architect’s project, “So, would you say *you* designed that?” The architect shrugged. Immediately, the audience began a spirited debate about “the question of authorship,” with the unspoken assumption that the architect’s

shrug meant “I don’t know.” Eventually the audience moved on, on the advice of a particularly well-respected audience member who suggested that “the question of authorship is not new; it’s an old question, and I would like to discuss some other aspects of the work.”

Fair enough. Authorship is not a new question, but the young architect’s shrug struck me as a new kind of response. The assumption of naiveté led the audience to conclude that the architect was not prepared

the audience’s focus onto our work. Instead of being a background for another show, our work was now a series of objects in the show. The oscillation between architecture of display and displaying architecture destabilized our traditional notions of site and context, as well as function and use. When a project moves from one context to another, it necessarily undergoes shifts and changes which begin to create the sort of blurriness I have set opposite to “interesting”; the project becomes at least a little more confused with each new iteration. When a project changes site, it often loosens in terms of its function, goals, and audience perspective, while remaining stable in terms of its form

and aesthetics. In the case of the Sydney exhibition, this shift in focus from background of display to object of display forced us to confront some unforeseen aspects of the project—not only how it should now be viewed, but also how we should remake it.

In order to explain the original context of the project, we built a model of the MAK Center show. This put us in the strange position of constructing a scale model of something that had already been designed, built, and torn down. Building or drawing

scaled representations of projects after they have been built (and destroyed) is not uncommon but does represent a reversal of the conventional order of things. But more than that, deciding what aspects to include in the model produced confusion (and disagreement) between Anna and me about what to include in the model. While most exhibition models built after the fact are icons making the objects of display clear, this project was a background constructed in an existing building that was designed by other people and displayed the work of other people. Rebuilding an exhibition model of an exhibition created strange overlaps and congruencies that, at times, undermined the initial goals of the project and underscored the strangeness of building things outside the conventional order of things in architectural design.

When it came to repainting the full-scale panorama, selecting paint colors with the subtlety achieved in the first show proved very difficult. The painting was executed on a different continent with different

to answer such a big question. They understood “I don’t know” to mean that knowledge was what the young person lacked when confronted with a more experienced audience and faced with such an old question. Instead, I think the response was different and far more dangerous and potentially liberating. Instead of I don’t know, I understood the shrug to mean alternately, I don’t care or It doesn’t matter.[23]

Rather than viewing the architect’s inconsistent pronouns and shrugging display of confusion as representing naiveté, *I don’t care* repositions the shrug as a willful act of presentation that puts pressure on the assumptions around “old” questions of authorship. What

are the structures that require that question? What are the formats of presentation that expect it? Who cares about “authorship”? and why?

8 A Disciplined Confusion

Many of the arguments I have made above about the increased confusion between things could be applied to the productive effects of increased fluidity and intersections between most conventional constructs, including the arbitrarily defined branches of knowledge we call “disciplines.” In the spirit of a chapter that forces you to look back and forth between things, I will leave it to you to connect the multiple strains of an argument that would

paint companies, and shipping paint was not feasible, so selecting the same five base white paints was not possible. We had paint samples sent to us but could not judge shifts in tone and hue accurately using the small chips provided. Compounding the problem, the gallery insisted on using a sign painter instead of domestic house painters. Unlike house painters who have experience

blur the boundaries between art and architecture (or architecture and sociology, or architecture and economics). For many of the reasons that Clement Greenberg wanted to limit confusion in the arts, I would like to blur them.[24] I hope it is clear by now that I encourage blurriness not in the service of chaos or complete bewilderment, but as a lens on architecture's current intolerance of unconventional ways of discussing and thinking about the things that architects produce.

with paint specifications and the high tolerances of light frame construction, sign painters operate in a world of technical precision that extended well beyond our ability to communicate effectively with them. They had too many questions that we couldn't answer and required drawings and specifications that were beyond our abilities to produce. This was made immensely more confusing because we were talking about five similar colors of a forty-foot-long painting over the low-resolution interface of Skype video calls. With the deadline approaching, forced to confront an imperfect and incomplete tool set, frustrated by our lack of control, and following a series of confusing Skype conferences with the sign painter, we guessed.

1

For a brief history of the Cornell Box, see Holly Rushmeier, "Comparing the Real and the Synthetic: Building the Cornell Box," in *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 20, no. 2 (1998): 46–47. For the first paper published on the Cornell Box and an explanation of the first Cornell Box experiments, see Cindy M. Goral, Kenneth E. Torrance, Donald P. Greenberg, and Bennett Battaille, "Modeling the Interaction of Light Between Diffuse Surfaces," in *Computer Graphics* 18, no. 3 (July 1984): 213–222.

2

The idea of marginalia as a structure of text for a book was partially inspired by Nick Thurston, *Reading the Remove*

of Literature

(Information as Material, 2006). The book is a re-presentation of the English translation of Maurice Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire* (1955) through the erasure of Blanchot's main text and addition of Thurston's margin notes.

3

This description is similar to Adam Kotsko's concept of *everyday awkwardness*, which he defines by explaining that "there exists a certain norm that, though most often not explicitly stated, is regarded as both knowable and in fact known by all members of a given community. Awkwardness is then related to this stable norm as its opposite or violation." Adam Kotsko, *Awkwardness: An Essay* (Winchester

UK: Zero Books, 2010): 7. This same norm is responsible for the confusion that results when conventions break down. Where Kotsko defines awkwardness as a social situation that resides outside individual subjects and objects and surrounds the entirety of a situation, I position confusion as a more specific result that lies inside individual subjects (and objects).

4

Lewis, *Conventions*, 41–42.

5

The distinction between criticism as negative judgment (criticism-as-condemnation) and criticism as explanation was made by Pierre Machery, *A Theory of Literary*

Production, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978): 3–6.

6

This quote is often attributed to Donald Judd, who when talking about art in the world supposedly said, "the thing itself, not something imitating something else." Richard Dorment, "Simply Irresistible," *The Telegraph*, February 4, 2004.

7

As mentioned in a previous footnote in the Boring chapter I have loosely aligned three related terms (Norms/Normal, Conventions/Conventional, and the Everyday) with each of the chapter topics. This is not to say that these terms can't relate to multiple chapters, but they

each represent things that do not typically receive attention. In this chapter, *conventions* and *conventional* are aligned with confusing, as confusion often results when the arbitrary constructs that underlie most of our daily lives are agitated or frustrated. For more on conventions and their more specific relationship to architecture, see James Ackerman, "The Conventions and Rhetoric of Architectural Drawing," in *Origins, Imitation, Conventions: Representation in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001): 293–318. On the arbitrary nature of conventions as well as a hint on when they might break down he writes, "[A convention] is an arbitrary invention but

once established it works only when it means the same thing to an observer as it does to the maker." (294) See also: Stanford Anderson, "Types and Conventions in Time: Toward a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts," *Perspecta* 18 (1982): 108–117. Anderson also writes about the arbitrary nature of conventions, their origination, maintenance, and duration: "With 'convention' comes a self-consciousness... of a degree of arbitrariness or relativity in their beginnings and maintenance." (109) On conventions in art, see David Summers, "Conventions in the History of Art," *New Literary History* 13 no. 1 (Autumn, 1981): 103–125. About the formation

of conventions he writes, "'Convention' is a metaphor used for the characterization of cultural traits, the use and significance of which are as if agreed upon and the effective origins of which are only to be found in the culture itself." (104) Note his description of conventions as being about "culture itself," which we might juxtapose against Judd's "thing itself." Summers continues about the arbitrariness of conventions: "The idea of convention is consequently social and also historical, and in both of these respects it is opposed to the idea of nature, in relation to which conventions are arbitrary." (104) Lastly, about the social underpinnings of conventions, see David Lewis,

Convention (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002): 41–42. Lewis defines conventions through their relative stability and maintenance of our (arbitrary) expectations: *And so it goes—we're here because we're here because we're here. Once the process gets started, we have a metastable self-perpetuated system of preferences, expectations and actions capable of persisting indefinitely. As long as uniform conformity is coordination equilibrium, so that each wants to conform conditionally upon conformity by others, conforming actions produces expectation of conforming actions and expectation of conforming action*

produces conforming action. This is the phenomenon I call conventions.

9

With Anna Neimark, I have written previously about the Cornell Box. Parts of this section were previously published in Anna Neimark and Andrew Atwood, "Paranormal Panorama" in *Lineaments*, eds. Gail Borden and Michael Meredith (New York: Routledge, 2018): 196–209.

8

Ackerman, *Origins, Imitation, Conventions*, 204.

10

For more on this idea, see John May, "Field Notes from the Instruments Project" in *JAE* 61 no. 1 (March, 2016): 61.

11

Bob Colacello, *The Age of Ambiguity: Abstract Figuration/Figurative Abstraction* (St Moritz: Vito Schnabel Gallery, 2017).

12

I extrapolate this from Hal Foster's review of *Inventing Abstraction* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City December 23, 2012–April 15, 2013. He states, "And what about abstraction today? It does not pretend to the great ambitions—revolutionary, utopian, transcendental—of this early period; that is obviously not our mode. Many artists treat abstraction as a distant archive to cite more than as a continuous tradition to develop—but then nothing

can be world-historical twice." Hal Foster, "At Moma," *London Review of Books* 35, no. 3 (February 7, 2013): 15.

14

The term "rendering environment" refers to the combination of the model and the resulting image. An explanation of this term can be found in Ivan E. Sutherland, Robert F. Sproull, and Robert A. Schumacker, "A Characterization of Ten Hidden-Surface Algorithms," *Journal ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR)* 6 no. 1, (March 1974): 2–4.

13

Bruno Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past*

and Present, ed. H. Kuklick (JAI Press, 1986): 15.

15

I refer here to the following quote, which I also reference in the next chapter, "Even mechanical orders must be *fuzzy* around the edges and contain a random element; the experience of order pre-supposes tolerance." in E. H. Gombrich, "Order and Tolerance" in *Leonardo* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 147.

16

Claude Perrault, *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns After the Method of the Ancients*, 1683 (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993).

17

For a description of slit-scanning, its origins in analog photography,

and an explanation of its translation to digital formats, see Ted Kinsman, "The Role of the Slit-Scan Image in Science and Art," *PetaPixel*, Oct 18, 2017, <https://petapixel.com/2017/10/18/role-slit-scan-image-science-art/>.

18
"The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." Originally published in Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook* 4 (1961): 1.

19
Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" [1967] in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 149.

20
I refer here to a series of my own with Anna Neimark for First Office. The mountain and the rendering are discussed as part of this chapter. The dolmen work shows up in a few of our projects including our proposal for the MOMA PS1 YAP competition in 2015.

21
Using aesthetics to describe what is shared in different movements is not entirely accurate, but for better or worse it is what seems to bind works together

into movements and it's also the reason why it's not entirely inaccurate to draw equivalencies in movements and styles. However, this doesn't seem always to have been the case. Modernism might be described as a movement, and cubism might be described a style of the modern movement.

22
One could start with a seminal text on the subject: Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

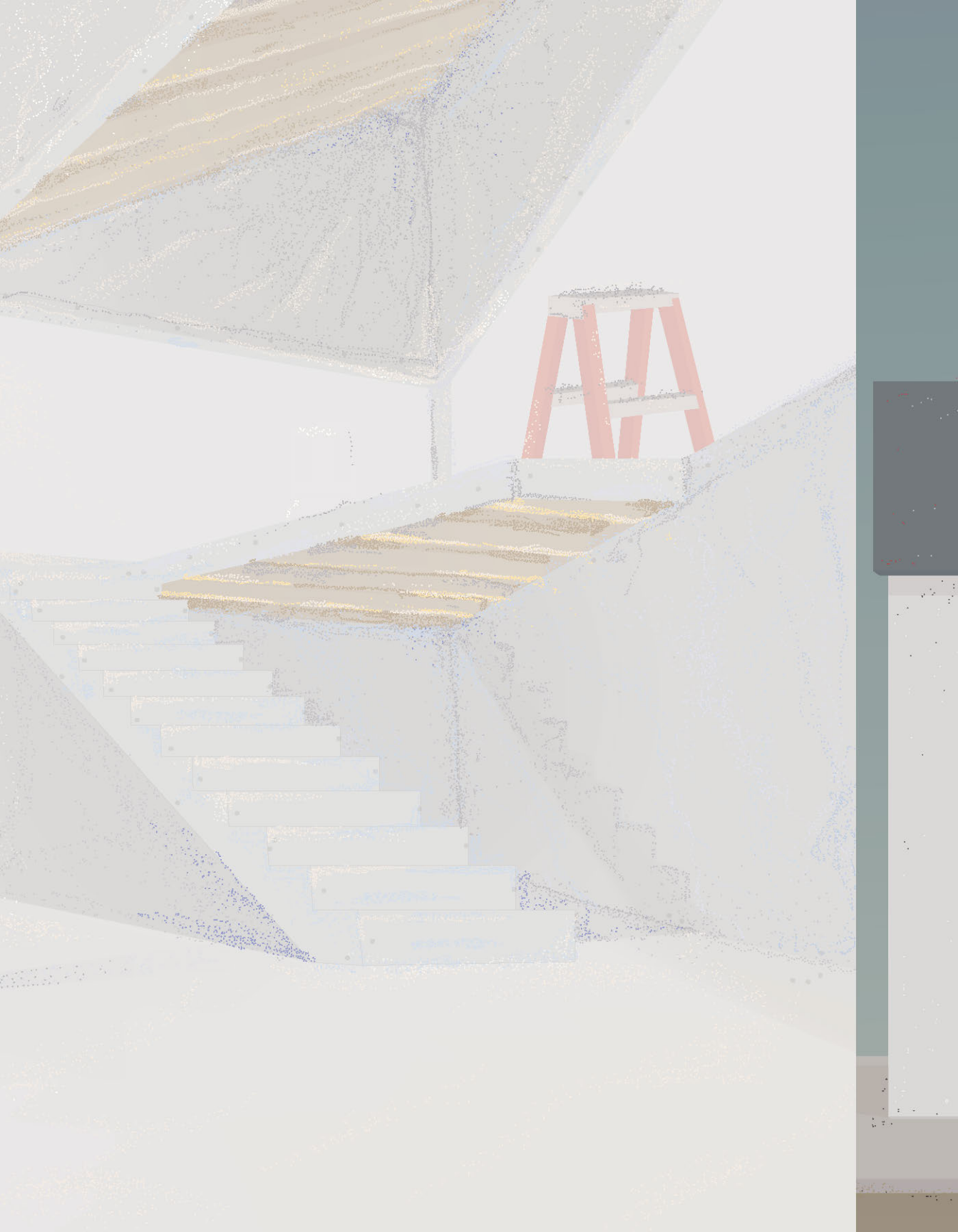
23
~_(\ツ)_/

24
Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," in *Partisan Review* VII, no. 4.: 296–310.



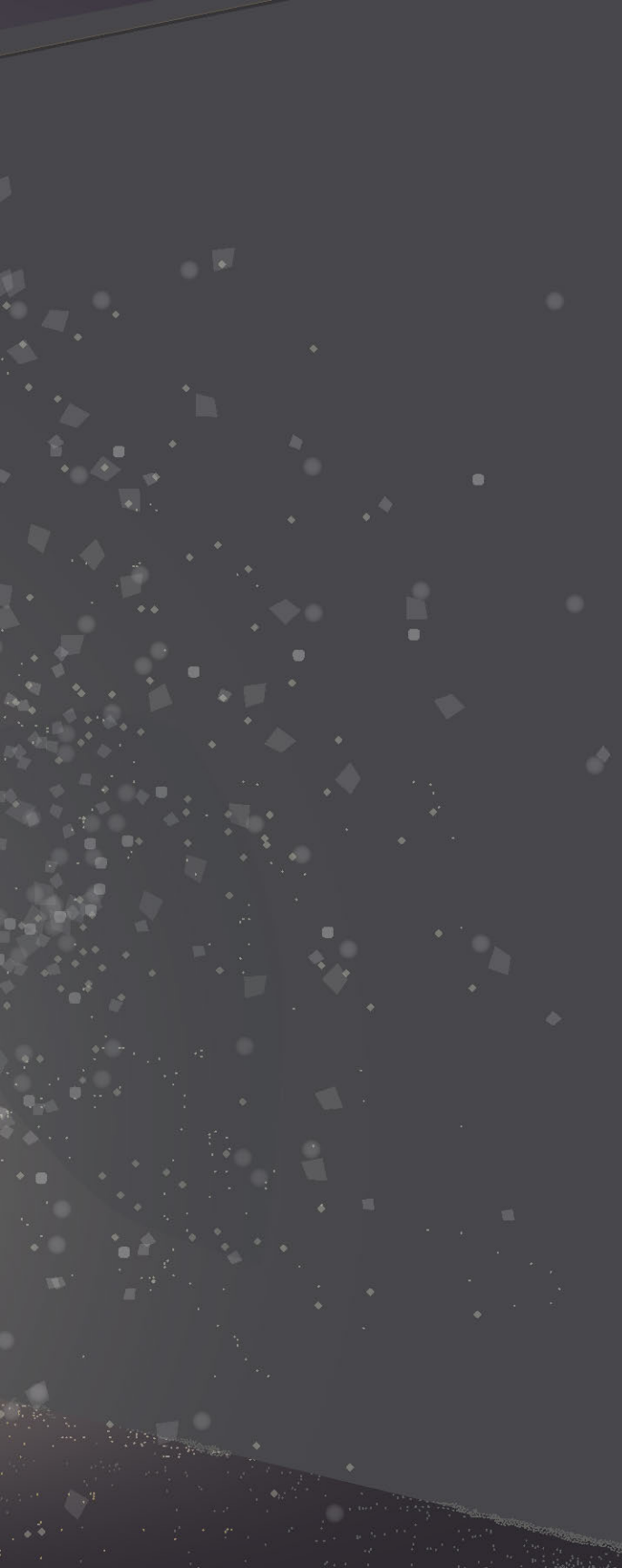


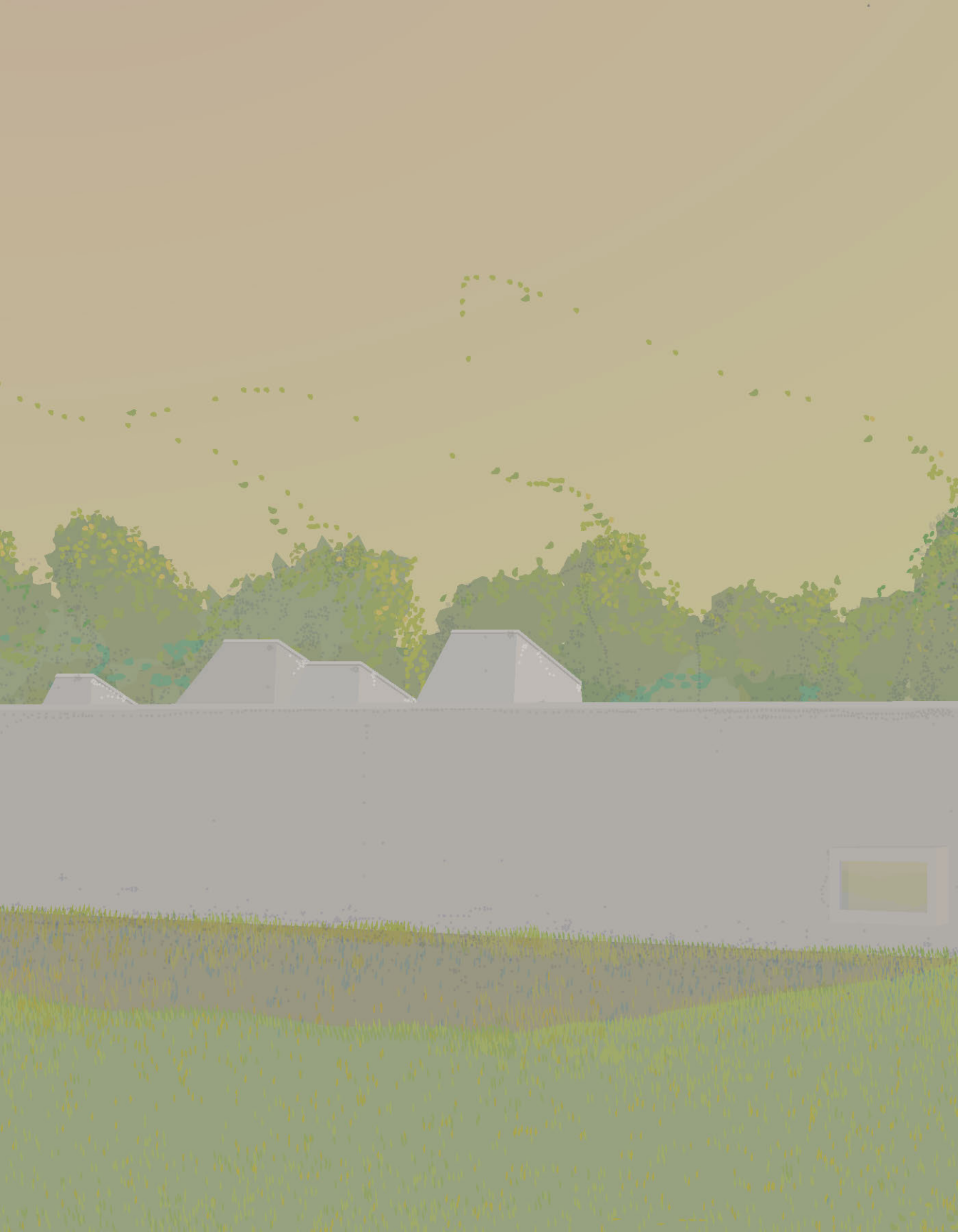


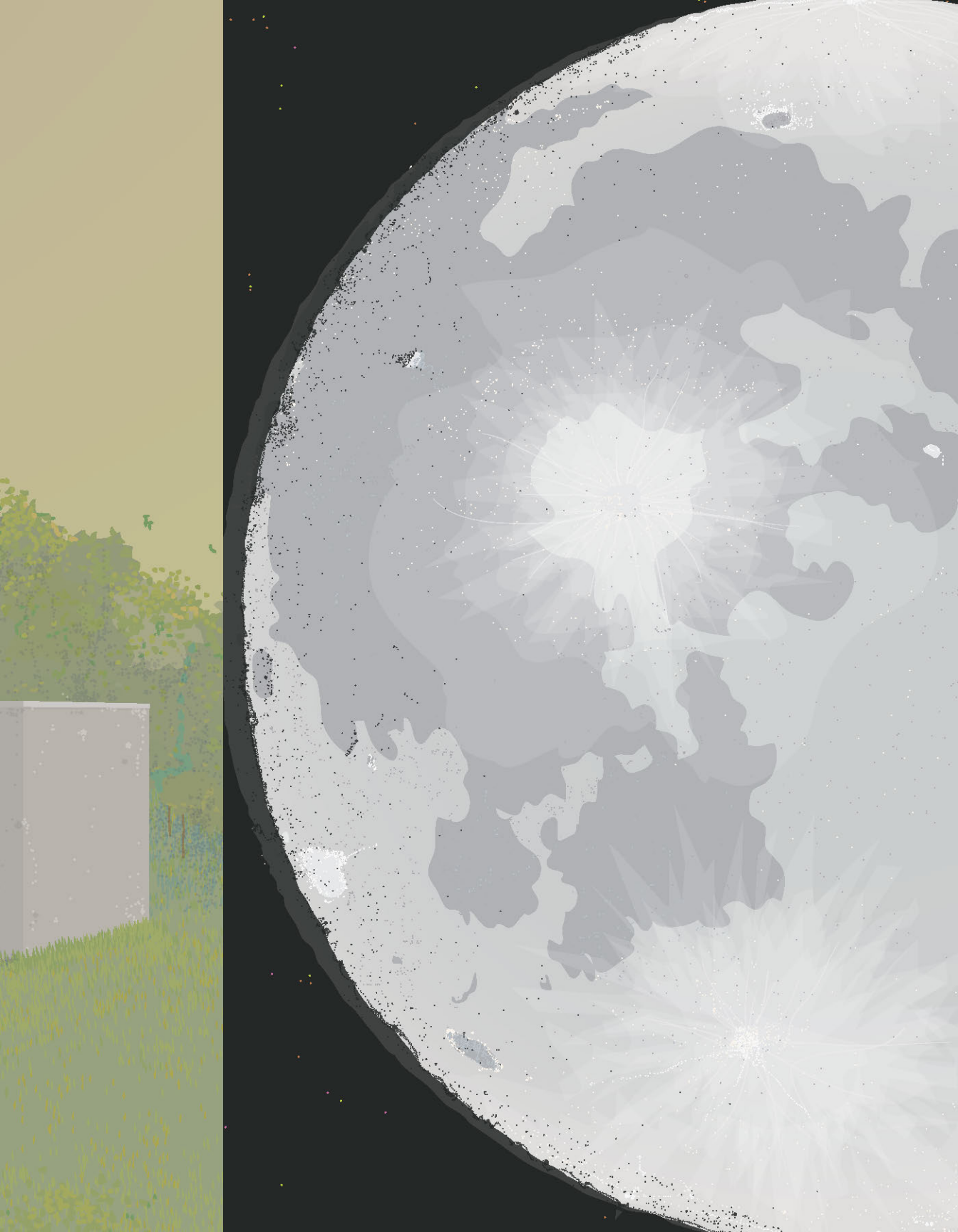




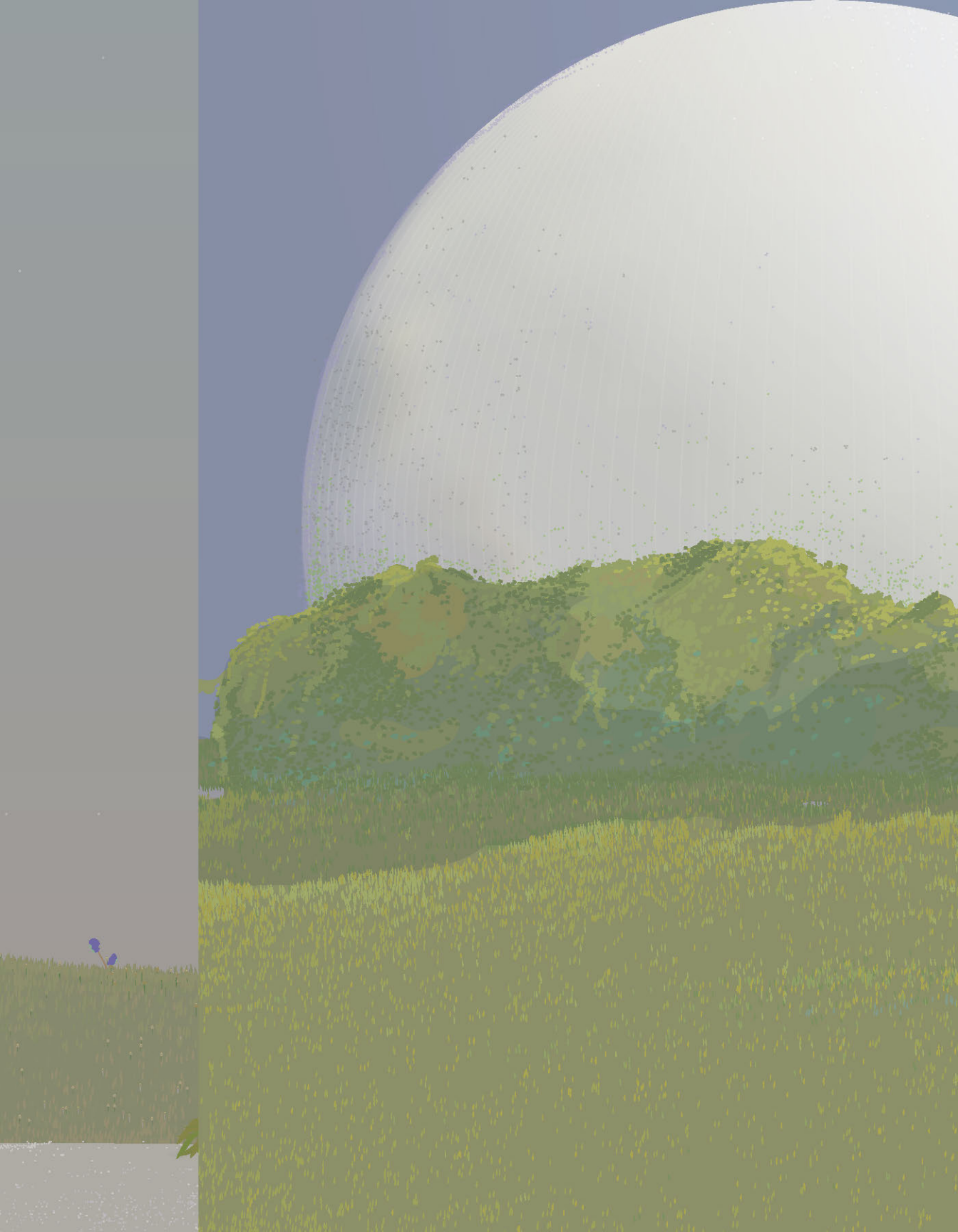


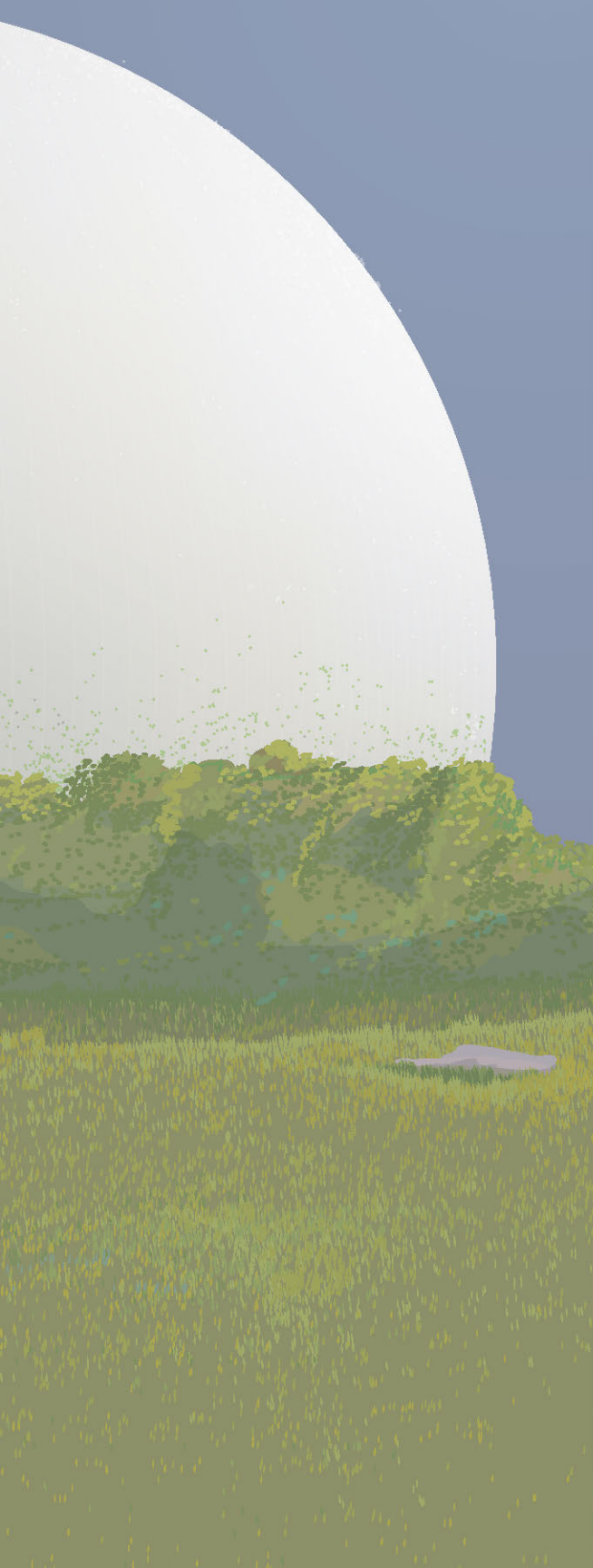


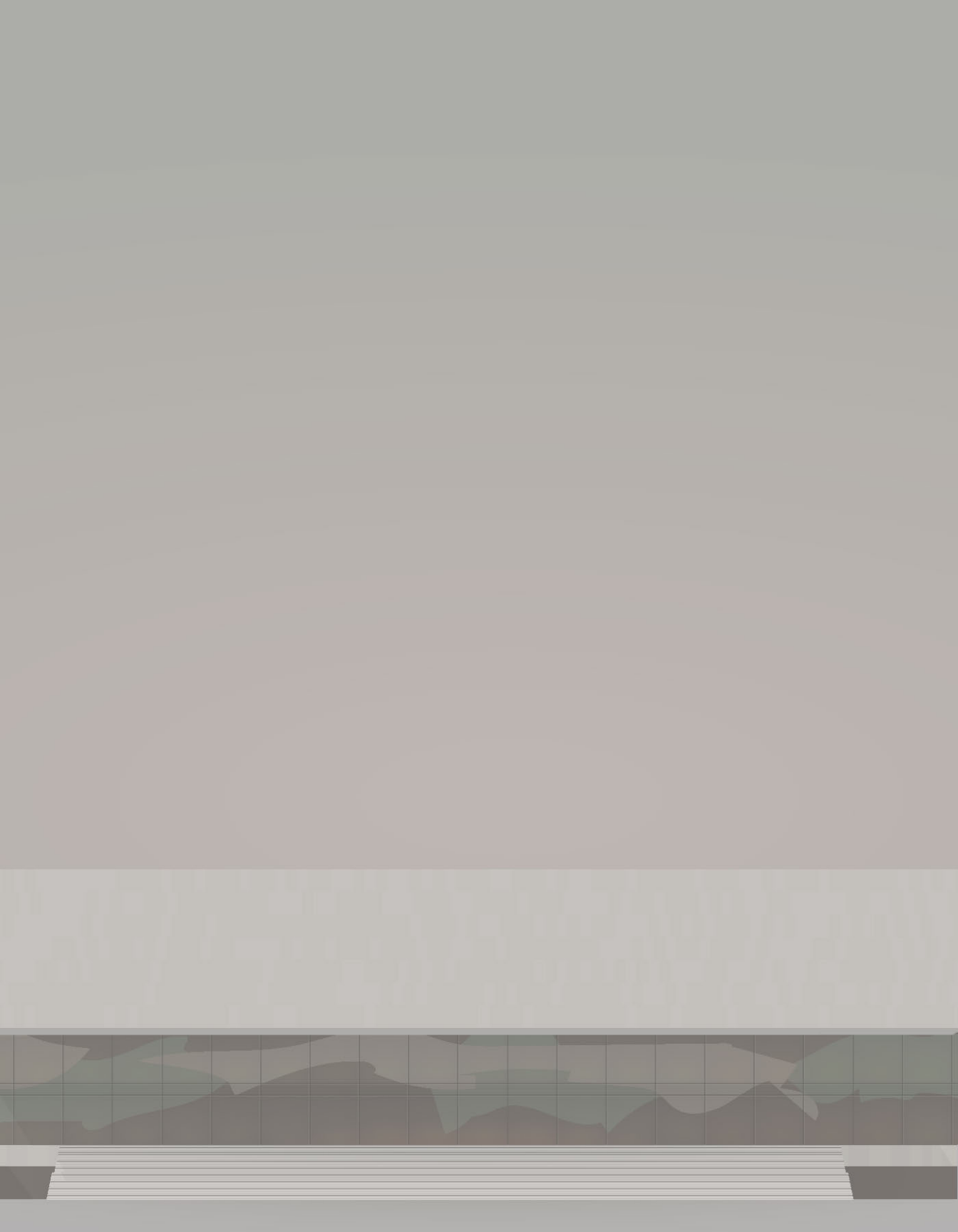




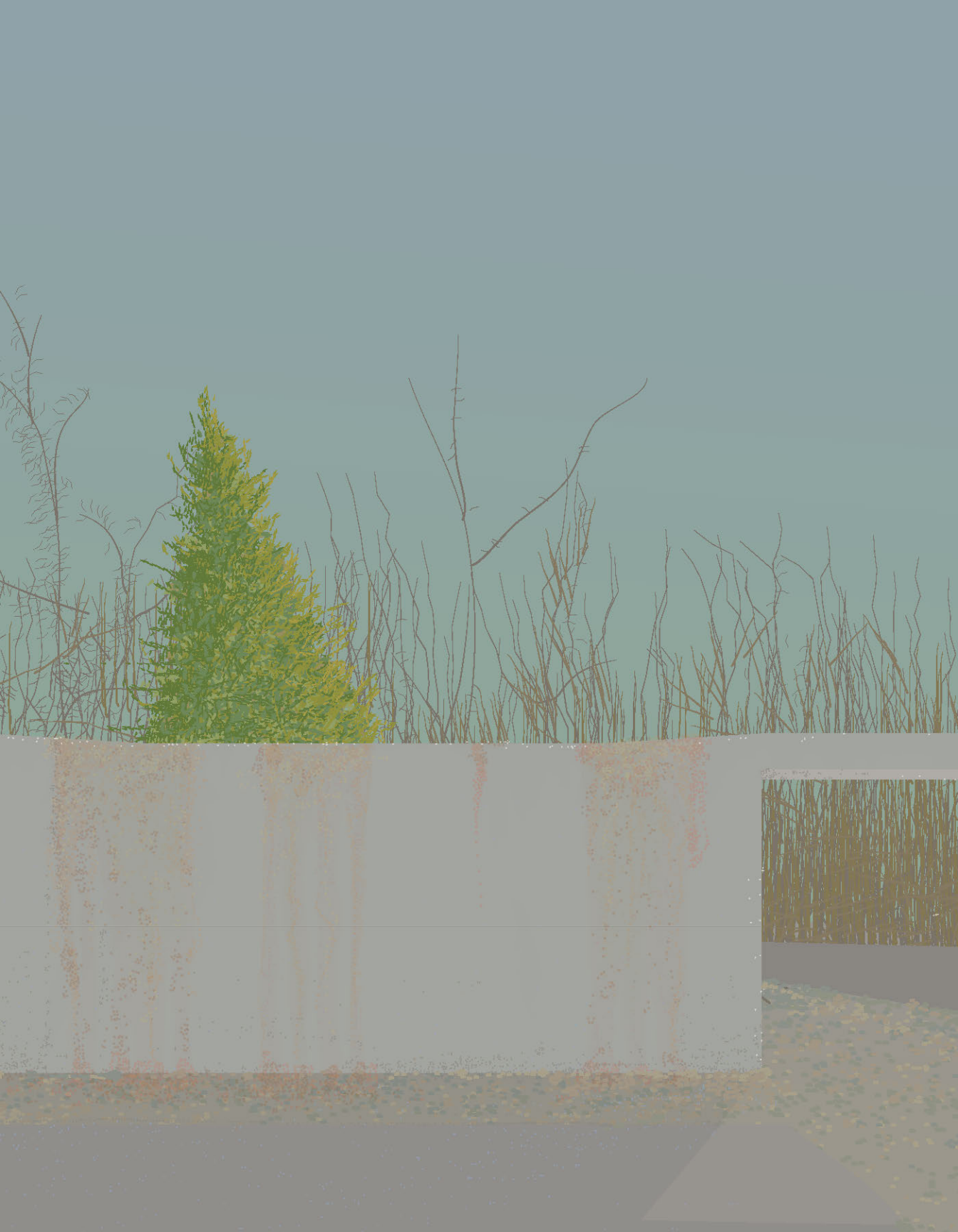




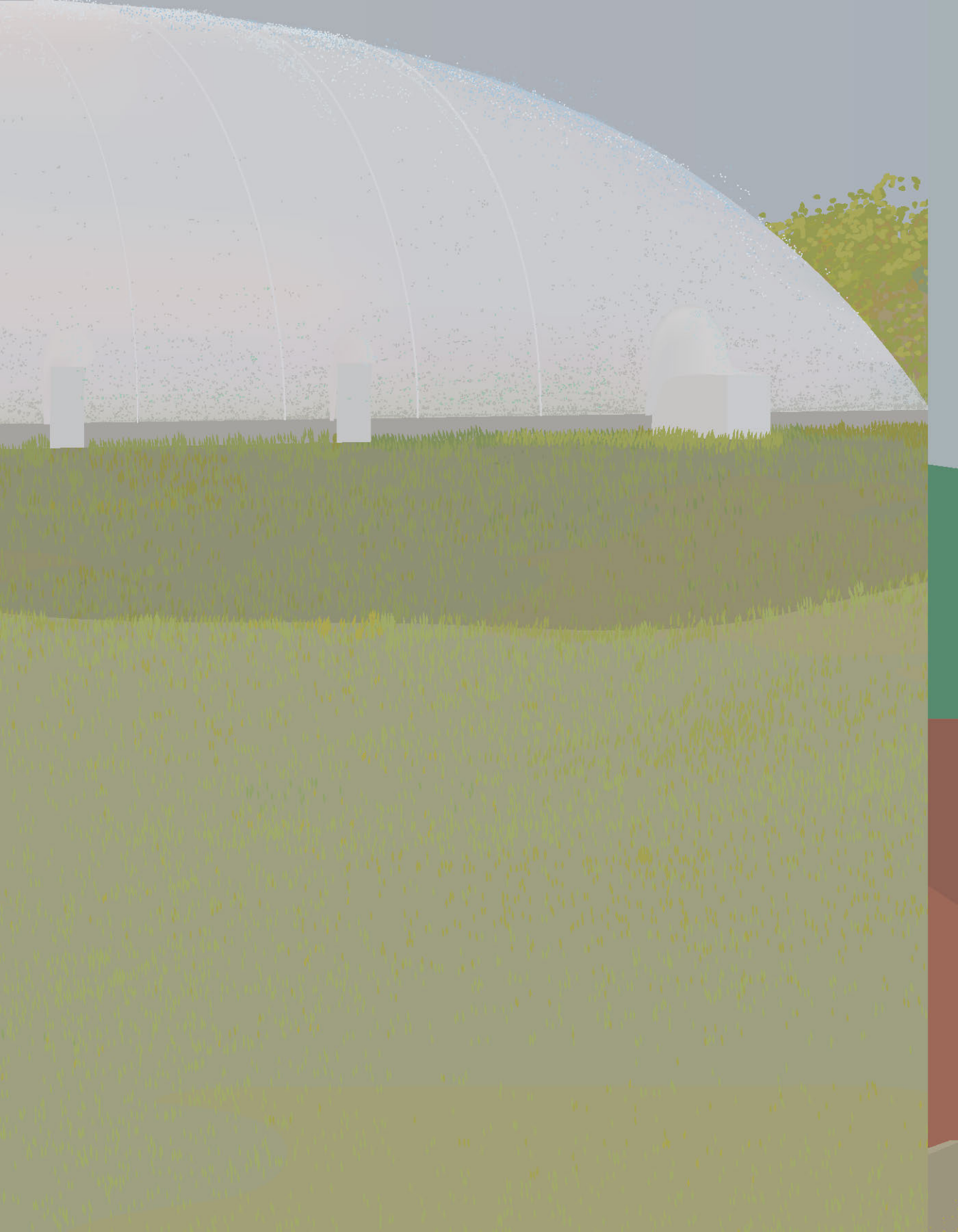








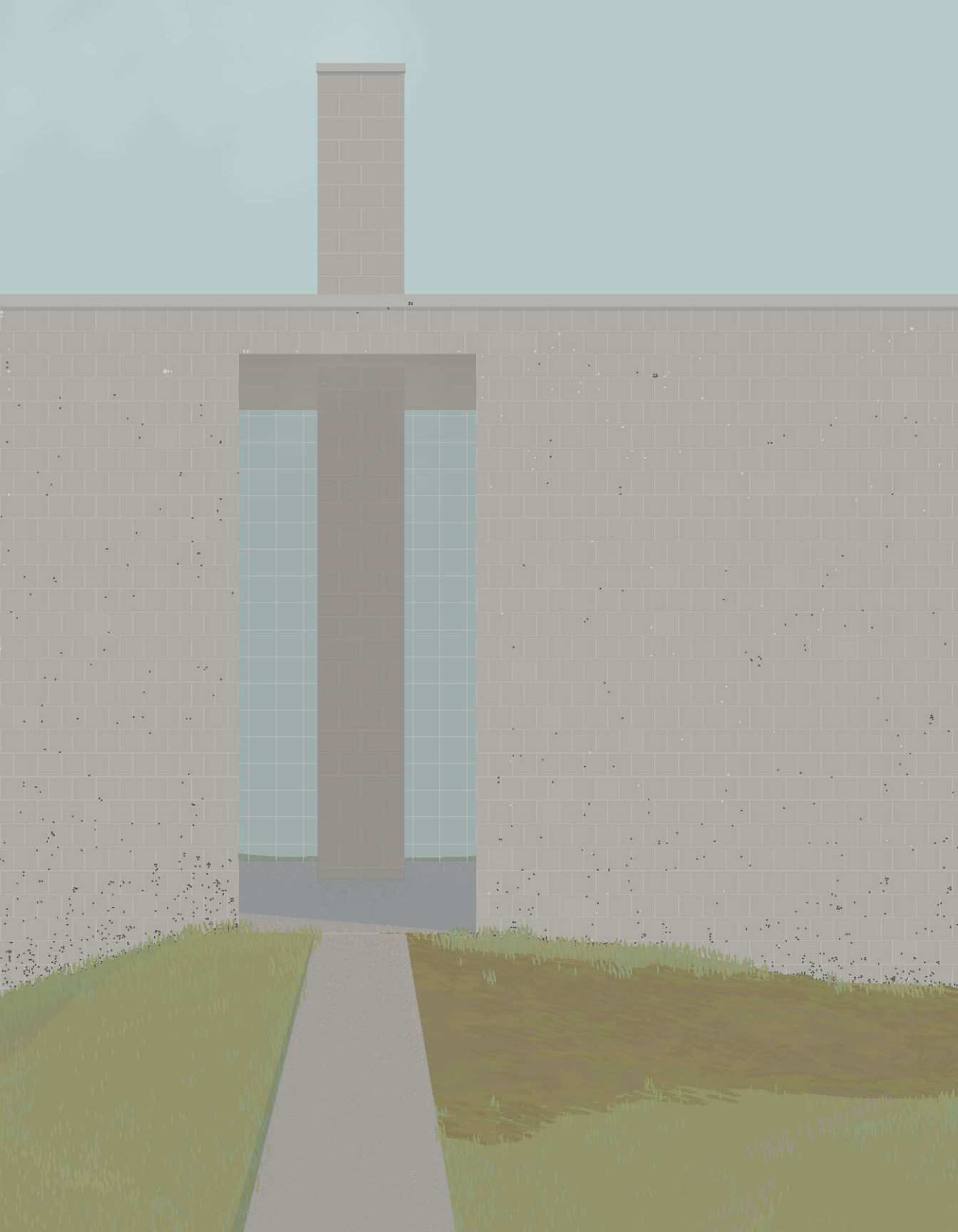




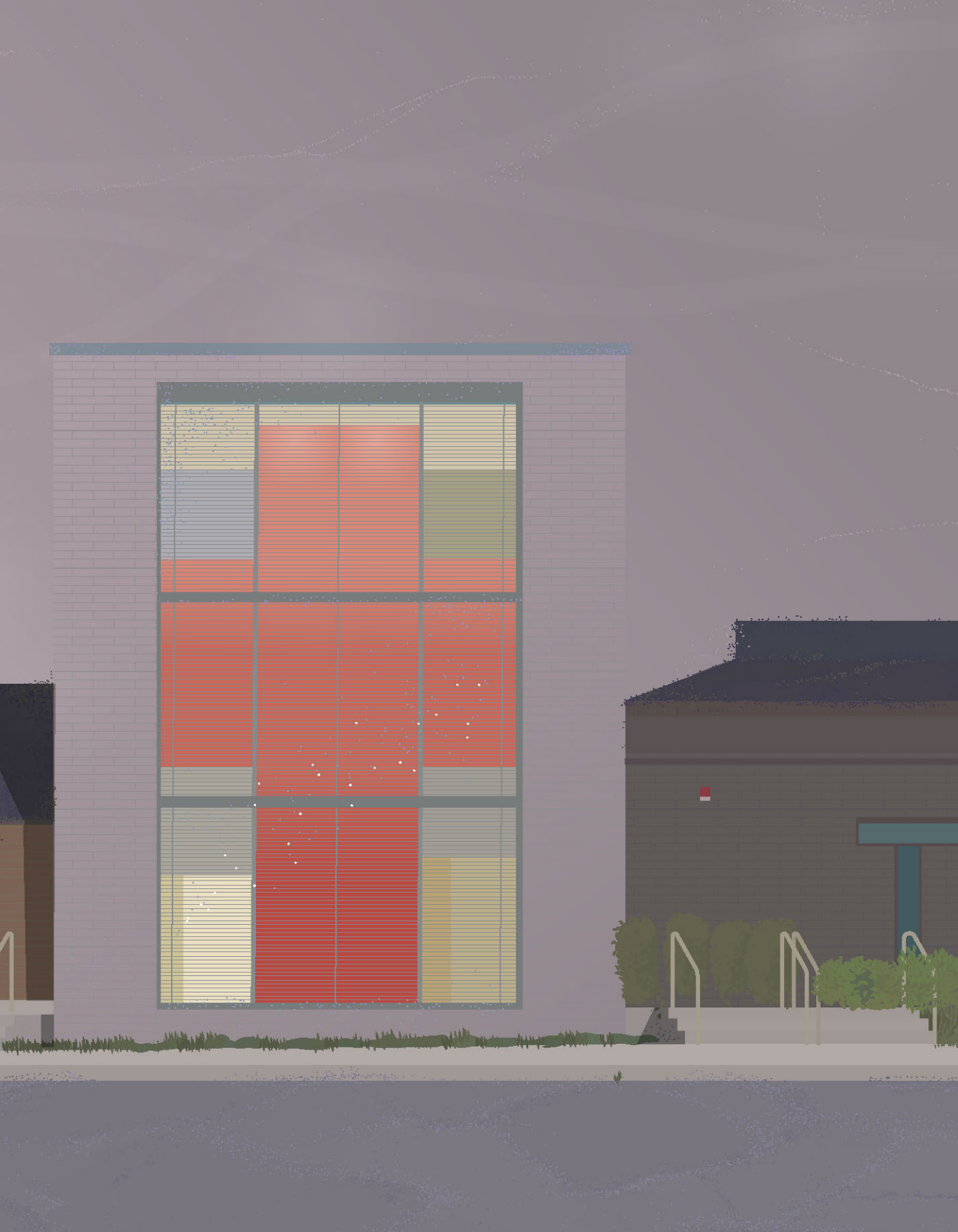






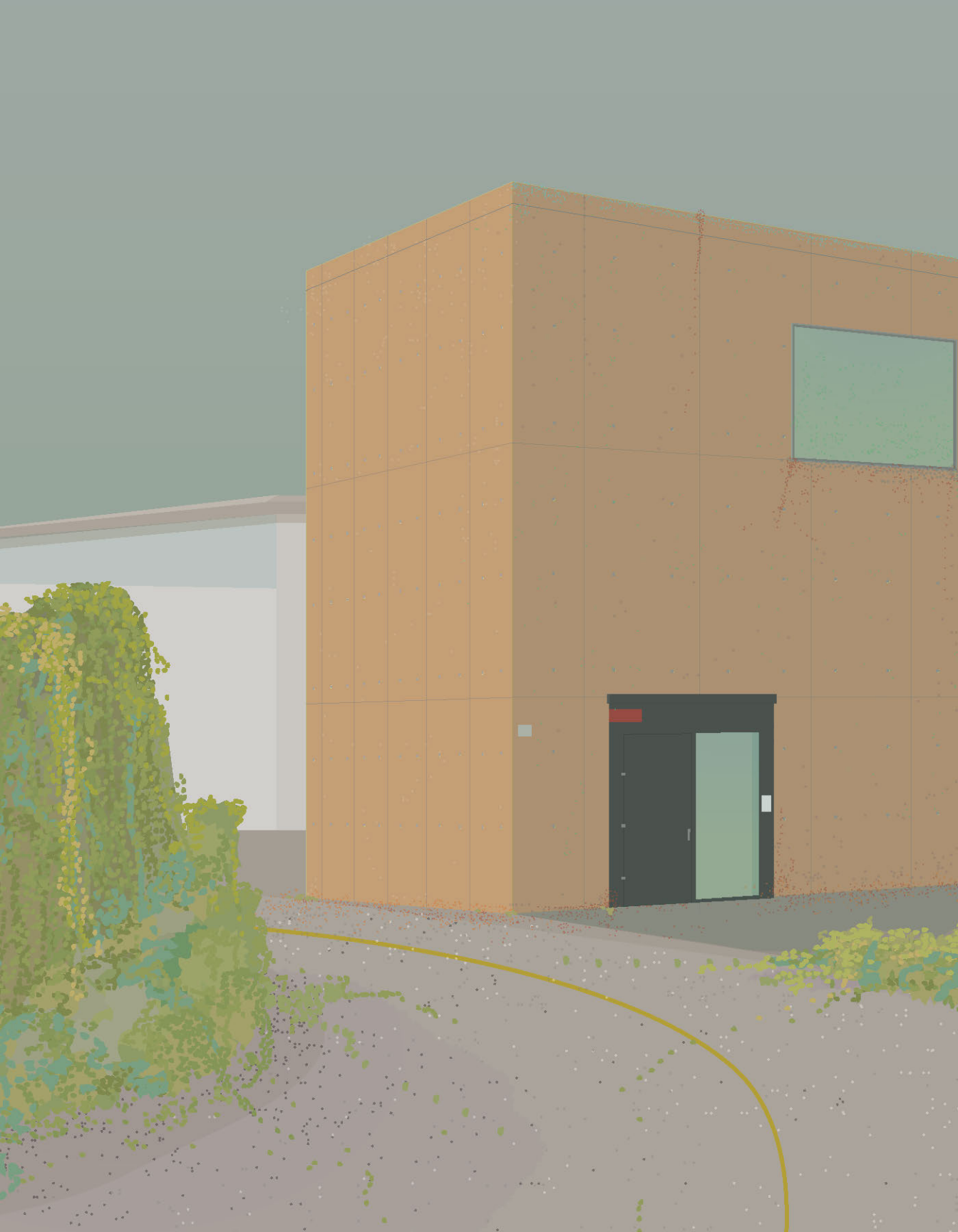


















COMFORTING

Throughout the 1810s the English painter J. M. W. Turner gave an annual lecture series as the Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. By many accounts, these lectures were remarkable mostly for how terrible they were, with one critic calling the lecture series “distinguished for its usual inanity, want of connection, bad delivery and beautiful drawings.”[1] Perhaps it was the coupling of the phrases “bad delivery” and “beautiful drawings” that initially drew me to these lectures, but once I looked into them, one particular lecture in the series caught my attention. The sixth and final lecture was titled “Backgrounds: An Introduction of Architecture and Landscape.”[2]

Given my limited expertise in art and art history—and recognizing the sometimes-sensitive boundaries between the disciplines of history, art, architecture, and landscape—I will not belabor the historical significance of a painter and professor of perspective introducing architecture and landscape through the topic of “backgrounds.” Instead, borrowing from Turner and using one of his precedents as my own, I will use “backgrounds” as the starting point for an examination on *the comforting*.



Titian, 1485/90?–1576,
Venus and the Lute Player,
c. 1565–1570, Oil on canvas,
65" x 82.5".
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York.

Venus and the Lute Player

Somewhere in the middle of his final lecture at the Royal Academy, Turner discusses a landscape in the background of Titian’s painting *Venus and the Lute Player*:

The part, tho’ small compared with many of his pictures of landscape... is replete with all his love and true regard for the value he held of landscape. Brilliant, clear and with deep-toned shadows, it makes up the equilibrium of the whole by contrasting its variety with the pulpy softness of the female figure, glowing with all the charms of colour, bright, gleaming, mellow, full of all the voluptuous luxury of female charms rich and swelling.

The sight must return and rest there, altho' the landscape insensibly draws the eye away to contemplate how valuable is its introduction.[3]

Turner's agenda here is clear: with the word "equilibrium," he claims for the background landscape a status equal to that of the foregrounded human figure of Venus. No doubt there are many things one might analyze in this quote and its implications for the future trajectory of Turner's work. But for my purposes, I would like to call attention to the word Turner uses to defend the importance of the landscape in this painting's composition. Turner, like so many after him, ascribes value to things in the painting based on their ability to hold "interest." He continues, "To keep up that union of interest and support its assistance in attracting the eye from the right hand of the picture can be no small honour." [4] Simply put, Turner finds this painting's landscape background important because he finds it interesting.

Rather than reiterate the limits of interest, I will focus on the dynamic in *Venus and the Lute Player* between the things Turner finds interesting and the things he does not, as well as the specific terms he uses to describe them. The qualities and effects of the different interesting and non-interesting parts of the painting, and the relationships between them, provide the framework for beginning to describe comfort in architecture.

Looking at the painting, we see that Turner was correct: the landscape is in balance with Venus. But what holds those two things in place? To borrow a word Turner couples with *interest*, what provides their *support*? The answer is architecture. I mean architecture in its most literal sense: elements of the built environment as they are represented—in this case, by Titian.[5] In the painting, the architecture performs various functions: the window frames the landscape, the angle of the lounge provides a support for Venus's repose, and the lounge's shape reinforces the lower right corner of the window frame. In the middle of the window, the drapery parts, framing a tree and revealing the sky. On the right, the drapery drops to a point, reinforcing the figure of Venus's upper body. On the left, the drapery rises, uncovering a blue mountain ridge. In short, in this painting the architecture *does a lot*. However, what it does not do is attract and sustain interest. Instead, unlike the landscape, the architecture stays firmly in the background of the painting, supporting its more interesting neighbors.

As background, the non-interesting architecture in the painting provides support in specific and consistent ways. The angle of the lounge is soft, not abrupt or harsh. As the drapery drops to a point, it does so slowly, and the point is dull, not sharp. The architecture in the painting—the lounge, the window frame, the drapes—works to relax the

forms of its more interesting counterparts. The lounge's plush upholstery reinforces the more casual form of Venus's reposed position. Her "mellow" expression and posture suggest someone at ease in the informality of her immediate surroundings. She is clearly at home in what might be called a parlor.[6]

Within the window, the landscape is loosely framed by the sagging drapes. Instead of an abrupt transition between a controlled interior that orders and domesticates a wild exterior beyond, here we see a more empathetic type of support, one that attempts to accommodate the landscape rather than control it. In places, the forms of the drapes echo the landscape by taking the shape of the soft rolling hills. More than softly supporting and framing the landscape, they become *like* the landscape through impression and mimicry. As background, the window and the drapes are highly responsive to the particularities of both the landscape and the parlor, easily molded to the objects placed within and around their frame. This permissiveness is not a low-tolerance, high-precision architecture, but a highly tolerant, more casual, more contingent arrangement of parts which coaxes the landscape in the image forward, foregrounding it, even if it sits behind the window in the scene.

The architecture's softness and dullness are reinforced by Titian's color choices and painting techniques. According to Turner, interesting things are "brilliant"

and "clear" in the case of the landscape and "bright" and "full" in the case of Venus. The opposite is true of Titian's background architecture. Instead of the bright tones and high-contrast shadows of Venus and the landscape, the architecture is rendered with low contrast, dark tones and similarly dark shadows. The color of Venus's lounge is barely distinguishable from the shadows that surround it, allowing it to disappear slightly and reappear in the soft form of the drapes. The drapes themselves are not so different in tone from the lute player's cape, which tucks softly under Venus's feet and blends back into the form of the lounge. The brown, apparently wooden window frame moves in and out of focus as its image oscillates between sill, wall, and drapes. This is not the confused blur found in the Cornell Box: Titian paints his parts such that they are still identifiable. We know we are looking at drapes, a window, a lounge, and a cape, but identifying where precisely one becomes another is sometimes difficult as the lines between them and the affective qualities of each become increasingly blurred, as qualities of objects (and subjects) seep back and forth between each other.

The non-interesting parts are qualitatively different from the interesting figures, and they have drastically different effects on the viewer. The light is focused on Venus's high-contrast fullness and the landscape's deep brilliance, drawing the viewer's attention

immediately and spontaneously toward them. The viewer knows where to look and can quickly identify the things viewed. When compared to Venus and the landscape, the architectural background is painted with less bias as to how one should focus attention on its components. Its low contrast suppresses the hierarchy between the non-interesting parts of the architecture and ensures that our experience of these parts is unremarkable and insensible. However, unlike when we're bored and don't know what to look at, or when we're confused and don't know how to look, here we know where and how to look. Consequently, we find comfort in the relief between the soft, dull blur of the uninteresting architecture and the cool, mellow brightness of the more interesting figures and landscape.

Self-Storage Buildings

The self-storage facility is a building type ubiquitous across the United States.[7] These buildings are usually empty of people but full of their stuff. They operate as convenient extensions of domestic lives, a kind of relief for overstuffed homes. For the more transient, self-storage facilities provide a stable location for belongings as people move from one house to the next, permitting a flexibility that would not be possible if they had to live with, and move with, all of their stuff. In some cases, a self-storage unit will outlast several different living situations over the course of its use by a single occupant.[8]



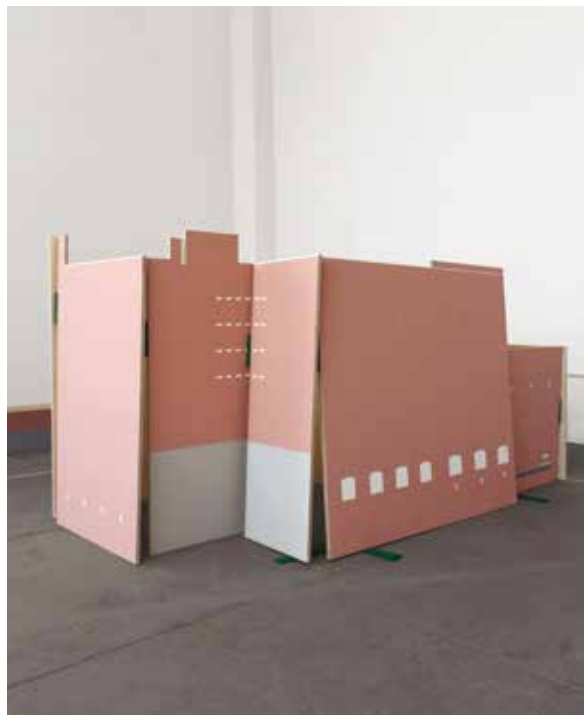
The Storage Post self-storage building. Google Street View, 2016, "30 Star Ave., New York, NY." Accessed November 18, 2017.

There are two kinds of self-storage buildings: purpose-built facilities, which are typically one- to three-story concrete tilt-up structures found in suburban and rural areas; and repurposed buildings, which are more typical in high-density urban areas. Buildings like vacant factories, warehouses, car dealerships, and banks, with their large boxy exteriors and unobstructed clutter-free interiors, are highly adaptable and provide easy foundations for repurposing into self-storage facilities.[9] These adaptive reuse projects take great liberties with the existing structures, gutting the interiors, adding circulations cores with large freight elevators, and arranging densely packed cells to maximize efficiency and provide an optimal mix of storage units of different sizes.

On the exterior, these buildings often undergo an equally dramatic transition. This is not the highly regulated world of historic preservation or conservation. These buildings are not special; signs are removed, excess ornamentation is stripped, windows are bricked in or otherwise covered up, and the whole thing is usually finished off with a couple layers of paint. Together, these acts combine to fill the interior with a grid of repetitive cells and pathways while blunting the building's exterior, re-presenting it as a series of blank faces.

Most of the self-storage facilities in New York City are extreme examples of the repurposed type. Bigger than those found in other cities, many of them sit silently within the high-contrast, full-saturation complexity of their immediate surroundings. Their increased size adds to the scale of their exterior blankness, and when combined with the intensity of New York City, these big, blank buildings seem to recede even further into the background. More than just a release valve for our cluttered homes, these background buildings provide relief in others ways too. Like Titian's background architecture, they provide relief for our senses, allowing moments of respite, functioning as a buffer between their more iconic, more eclectic, more interesting neighbors. The exterior paint creates yet another kind of relief: all the building's exterior details are turned into a single expansive bas-relief. Paint is used to

project a simpler figuration onto the façades, laying down smooth layers of latex that ignore the formal articulations of the building's exterior and flatten expressions of detail. The lack of coordination between paint and form undermines any singular reading of the building, creating a subtle flicker between two aspects of each building's façades. The size of the buildings and the simplicity of the paint job make the difference between the paint and form easy to see; it's not confusing. Instead, it creates a blur in the shallow spaces between the two—never enough to frustrate a viewer completely, but just enough to soften the view.[10]



Blocks of blabla, Los Angeles.
Photo by First Office.

For the Oslo Architecture Triennale, Anna Neimark and I sought to represent some of the qualities we found in these buildings. We called the project *Blocks of blabla* in reference to the Tower of Babel. If the Tower of Babel was meant to contain everything in a single building, then the *Blocks of blabla* could contain anything in a network of storage buildings. We built a clustered set of three models, each representing a single self-storage building found in New York City. To start, we reduced each building to a set of discrete façades. Once isolated to a single sheet of plywood, each façade was built up using dozens of layers of paint. First, primer was masked and layered to represent the formal articulations on the façade, creating a shallow bas-relief of the original façade's form. Next, we added colored paint. As in the original buildings, the painted figuration was rarely coordinated with the formal relief of the primer. Instead it spanned the subtle details of the primed relief, replicating the soft blur in the self-storage buildings.

To construct the model, we tilted the façades up and leaned them against each other, in an arrangement of mutual support similar to a house of cards.[11] This technique, inspired by both Richard Serra and the tilt-up construction of our buildings' suburban counterparts, produced an informal arrangement of façades, resulting in models with loosely butted joints, crudely opened corners, and a relaxed building posture. Each panel contacted two other

panels sitting at approximately 90 degrees to it, so that every piece supported another on one side and was supported on its opposite side. For the installation, the museum could not guarantee a perfectly flat floor surface, so we provided a set of shims to adjust the panels to the floor. The shims helped level the panels, but, more importantly, we painted them green and used them to the point of excess, to underscore the high tolerance of this type of architecture. Here, the contingency plan—buffering between the blank models and the refined beauty of the museum site[12]—was expressed as a series of details in the project.

Some described these models and the buildings they represent as “deadpan,” and to some extent they may be correct.[13] The models share a quality of blank permissiveness characteristic of a deadpan aesthetic.[14] The buildings, which are empty before they are repurposed, adapt with ease. The loosely composed models suggest flexibility in the arrangement of parts. In their painted finish, the buildings and the models share a blank unaffected expression. In the models, the casualness of the panels' collective posture suggests indifference, akin to the shrug mentioned in the previous chapter.

However, the self-storage models do not share all of the qualities associated with a “deadpan aesthetic.” Their affect is not meant as an attempt at humor through irony. Despite what some people might have read into them, these models are not intended

as ironic in any way; there is no attempt to obscure a hidden or paradoxical meaning. The blankness of self-storage facilities is not an exterior expression masking a more tumultuous interior, as one might expect from the “deadpan.” The indifference of their exterior extends throughout their architectural contents; their unaffected exteriors obscure only the monotonous repetition of more and more and more storage units. In fact, as images, models, or buildings, self-storage buildings seem unconcerned with any specific set of senses or affects. Instead, self-storage buildings settle into the background and resist our attempts to elevate them above their everyday status.

An Informal Outline of Terms Loosely Synonymous with Comfort

Unlike the Cornell Box, which makes us consider the differences between two nearly identical things, New York’s self-storage buildings and Titian’s *Venus and the Lute Player* ask us to consider the similarities between two very different things. However, if we step back, we can see that the two models of the Cornell Box were initially very different; they were made similar to each other only in the images produced of them. Here, we are confronted once again with images: photographs of Titian’s painting, photographs of self-storage buildings, and photographs of the *blabla* models. But in this chapter, the images alone do not make

the case for similarity. No amount of collaging, cropping, scaling, color correcting, or other visual post-processing is enough to make these three things look alike. Instead, I have used a set of shared terms—*loose*, *soft*, *blurry*, and so on—to make the case that they convey similar features of comfort. Photography abstracts objects to two-dimensional images, ekphrasis abstracts them to textual descriptions of interpretation, and modern publishing technology ensures that these will be consumed by the reader side by side from the same two-dimensional surface, whether a screen or a printed page. Photographs are usually considered to be more effective than written descriptions in conveying formal features: they are authoritative about what something looks like. Writing is considered to be less precise about physical characteristics but more precise about qualitative effects: it is authoritative about what something means and how it makes us feel. However, images, including photographs, are of course highly selective and subjective, not only about effects but also about physical reality.[15] And the same is true of words.

Words have the benefit of being discrete entities: we can clearly identify when the same word is used in two places, we can count and keep a precise tally of how many times they are used and note the different things they reference, but—fortunately for us—they can also be slippery. For instance, the terms I associate with comfort, enumerated in the

notes below, are often only loosely related to comfort and to each other. Sometimes they refer to subjective qualities, sometimes to objective features, and sometimes to both. In most cases, this is deliberate, as it creates a tolerant structure for understanding fuzzy things.[16] In their looseness these shared terms are more easily applied to different things and allow us to create congruities between seemingly unrelated things. To be clear, this set of terms does not represent a complete set of requirements. I do not claim that a work of architecture needs all these things to achieve an ideal version of comfort, nor do I pretend to provide an exhaustive account or history of comfort.[17] Instead, like all comforting things in architecture, my list of terms is intended here as a support. That is, the terms remain contingent upon the things around them, tolerant towards new ideas that might be applied to them, and indifferent to the various effects and sensibilities they might be used to produce.

As in previous chapters, these terms are laid out as a set of notes. In this case, the notes include quotes by others as evidence in support of each term and the flexibility with which it is used. At times these quotes are buttressed by my own commentary, but mostly they are left alone to hang independently and to relate to each other only loosely through the fuzzy structure of an *informal outline*.

I remember learning in school how to develop a formal outline, with the “main topics” listed with

upper-case Roman numerals, the main “supporting points” for each of them listed below them with upper-case letters, and so on. I have my doubts about how common that type of outline is after grade school. To be honest, even then, I never made it that far. My outlines were never finished before I started writing. They always remained incomplete and inconsistent in their numeration and indentation and permissive and flexible as a way to start an essay. Over the course of writing an essay, the informal outline remained productively open-ended, allowing for improvisation as the text evolved and drifted into areas not considered when writing the outline. Formal outlines are the opposite. By the time you write them out, there are no new associations to make. At the stage of the informal outline, however, seemingly infinite associations are still possible—a comforting thought! As an indicator of this fluidity, symbols often change over the course of an informal outline, switching from numbers to letters to arrows and asterisks and other symbols, as needed. Font size and text style might change as well, with italics, underlining, and bold text used at will. Sometimes fonts switch altogether; sometimes indentations are unmarked by numerals or letter symbols. All of these notational marks suggest hierarchies, but do not fix a single hierarchy. In an informal outline, some things seem to belong adjacent to each other, and one may seem to be more dominant, but it’s not certain yet.

Like the lack of coordination between form and paint in self-storage facilities, this type of outline is a little bit fuzzy in its arrangement, layering different formal strategies that only occasionally align. I have kept my outline about comfort in this form to preserve the oscillation of the terms, without imagining that they have a single fixed configuration with respect to each other. The hierarchies within the outline are situational, arising at different times but allowing change and improvisation when needed and as different agendas and ideas unfold. This looseness is not just a lack of arrangement within a set of related ideas. Instead, the indeterminate format produces looseness in how the terms and ideas might be interpreted, evoking the wellspring of potential associations and meanings that opens up in the early stages of a research project.

A final note: The word “comfort” is not always used in the outline, and it should not necessarily be considered dominant, as this early-stage outline has no fixed hierarchy. Parts of the outline can stand alone, focusing on relationships between other terms. These may point to a hitherto unconsidered definition of comfort, or to another word or project entirely—at least, this is my hope. Unlike the relentless flatness of a list or the forced juxtaposition and disjuncture of marginalia, this outline is full of possibilities for affinities but comfortably open-ended, promising as much depth—and only as much depth—as anyone might hope to find.

COMFORT

A BACKGROUND

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein

"Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the **background** against which whatever I could express has its meaning." [18]

Cannot express,
cannot see,
cannot feel.
Anaesthesia

*How do we
know its
real? exists?

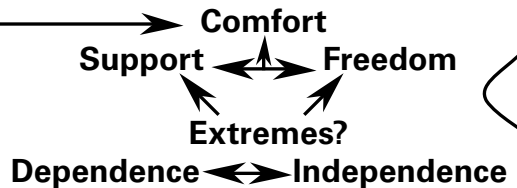
(need to tie back to Daston quote and Turner lecture title)

Galen Cranz

"*Comfort* and its synonyms, like *ease*, are problematic because its two components, support and freedom, could be in conflict." [19]

YES!

continuum?
spectrum?



1 SUPPORT

Mark Cousins

"The term **support** is itself not very well defined. There seems to be a lack of appropriate vocabulary to describe it and its effects. But, indeed, support will always be in some sense *minimal*, not because of some elementary meanness, but because the very gesture of support is linked to a certain functionality." [20]

"invisible"/"seamless" → "minimal"

fundamental link
between
what
we can
describe /
have words
for (INTER-
ESTING?)
and that
which
we cannot
describe
(boring?
confusing?
comfort-
ing? also
implies we
don't have
(or want)
adequate
words.

Later, in the same text, Cousins explains that support is "whatever is not given as autonomy, in its relationships to other networks." [21]

Jacques Derrida

"when it supports an edifice, the column was, for example if not by chance, a parergon: a supplement to the operation, neither work nor outside the work." [22]

Richard Serra, *One Ton Prop*, 1969 (image rights?)

—An example of mutual dependence and support.

Comfortable architecture is the stuff that could never be autonomous. It relies on a set of relationships and those things subsequently rely on it.

A FRAME

Comfort as an "invisible frame" —Lupton

Jacques Derrida

"*Framing* always *supports* and contains that which, by itself, collapses forthwith." [23]

Colin Rowe

"It is the universality of the *frame* and the *ease* with which it has apparently directed our plastic judgment which has led to the focusing of so much **attention** ~~upon the Chicago commercial architecture of the eighties and early nineties.~~" [24]

→ *imperative to include!*

Barbara E. Savedoff

"The most obvious functions that *frames* serve are practical and decorative. *Frames* are indeed decorative; they can be used to coordinate a painting with the architecture and furnishings of a room, or they can be used to provide an elaborate casing to show off an expensive work of art, or an impressive setting to glorify a sacred image. And *frames* are indeed practical; by protecting the vulnerable edges and corners and the delicate surfaces of paintings, they provide a practical means for holding and hanging the canvas and they thereby enhance its portability." [25]

→ *not sure how this quote is related?*

B SOFT

Alexander Theroux

"*Softness*, above all, is obliging. As a concept it allows for malleability, suppleness, yielding, and the transformable. *Comfort*, certainly in terms of handling, applies to the very

support
does not
have
autonomy
but the
supported
doesn't
have
autonomy?
bc it
needs
support

Frame
as
support
from within
vs
Frame
as
boundary/
container

directs
attention
inwards
(containing)

mediates
between
viewer
and
contents

word in terms of its positive connotations. It denotes moving in a leisurely manner, rising gradually, having curved or rounded outlines. Compliance is its first beauty... It is also about compassion, empathy, and the commiseration in situations of crisis or tragedy.”[26]

“Consider softness on the other side of its face: weakness: flaccidity, unathletic pusillanimity, an aspect—literally of being out of shape. There is the negative idea in softness of having or producing *little contrast* or a relatively short range of tones. There are the attendant connotations of cushioned, squishy, faint, stupid, and out of condition or having a *bland or mellow* rather than sharp or acidic taste. Softness is subdued, too compliant, unduly susceptible to influence, emotionally suggestible or *responsive*.”[27]

————→ *try to tie this to Somol/Shape.*

————→ *“little contrast,” “bland,” “mellow” ... are those bad things?*

Claes Oldernberg, *Soft Toilet*, 1966.

C EMPATHY

Robert Vischer

“empathy (einfühlung) traces the object from the inside (the object's center) to the outside (the object's form)”[28]

————→ *sinks (drifts), extends, stitches, seamless, invisible, etc.*

frame/
relationship
between
inside and
outside

D TOLERANCE

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/tolerati/#H4>
(tolerance and indifference)

i E. H. Gombrich

“Even mechanical orders must be fuzzy around the edges and contain a random element; the experience of order presupposes **tolerance**.”[29]

ii Genevieve Baudoin

“In the translation from drawing to building, there exists

an area of contingency inside the space of every line drawn. This space leaves room for the **interface** of trades and the unforgiving (and occasionally mischievous) nature of building materials. Concrete slumps, wood bows, and steel expands and contracts in the changing temperatures of the day. Humans very rarely draw in straight lines, and 'apparent' straightness is more an optical illusion than a reality built from geometry. We also very rarely build in single materials (caves are perhaps the exception). Because of this, the design of buildings must confront the ways in which the materials of construction join together, how they age, and how they move independently of one another. This is also the moment where architecture ceases to maintain its disciplinary autonomy—**tolerance** forces the architect to contend with the contingencies of the builders and materials. It is where the designer controls the uncontrollable, and why it is so significant to the discipline of architecture. **Tolerance** is the deviation we allow for human (and machine) error in installation and in the creation of the parts that create a building. As with statistics, **tolerance** is an allowable deviation from the precision of a drawing that will allow a building to 'fit' together." [30]

Connect to practice?
drawings/
contracts
provide
boundaries
for tolerance
and allow
for contingencies/
looseness?
—work/
outcome
falls within
boundaries,
"scope"

Full
autonomy
≠
comfort

Fit / Fitting — connect to Ahmed? "apparent straightness" versus otherness. the appearance of being straight?

iii Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter

"**pluralism** (another abstract entity which is usually honoured in the absence of any specific **tolerance**)" [31]

→ *need stronger connection between tolerance and pluralism*

Denise Scott Brown

"Architectural Taste in a **Pluralistic** Society" [32]

iv Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi

"Learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect. Not the obvious way, which is to tear down Paris and begin again, as Le Corbusier suggested in the 1920s, but another way which is more **tolerant**: that is to question how we look at things."

Look w/out
seeing?

E PERMISSIVE

i Denise Scott Brown

"Perhaps Freud in our time initiated facing the unfaceable. The words 'non judgmental,' '*permissive*,' and 'nondirective' relate first to psychiatry." [33]

→ *DSB said it first!*

ii Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi

"Architects are out of the habit of looking non judgmentally at the environment, because orthodox Modern architecture is progressive, if not revolutionary, utopian, and puristic; it is dissatisfied with existing conditions. Modern architecture has been anything but '*permissive*': Architects have preferred to change the existing environment rather than enhance what is there." [34]

→ *self storage? as an "enhancement"?
too much of a stretch?*

2 FREEDOM

A RELIEF

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury

"in the same way the natural '*free*' mental spirits of clever men, if they are imprisoned and controlled, will discover other ways of acting so as to '*relieve*' themselves in their constraint." [35]

John Dewey

"This sudden relaxation of strain, so far as occurring through the medium of the breathing and vocal apparatus, is laughter. ... The laugh is thus a phenomenon of the same general kind as the sigh of '*relief*'. The difference is that the latter occurs when the interest is in the process, and when the idea of labor, slow and continuous, is at its height; while the laugh occurs when the interest is all in the outcome, the result—the sudden, abrupt appearance of the 'point.' " [36]

→ *Lots going on here. Relaxation, Relief, Interest ... but not sure of the connection to "comic relief" works?*

pressure
stress
strain
force

VS

relief
release
freedom
catharsis

↓
transformation
through
relief

humor
as
release

Adolf von Hildebrand [37]

"[The] conception of **relief** defines the relation of two-dimensional impressions to three-dimensional. ... It is the mold in which the artists casts the form of Nature."

—————→ *Relief as an impression ...*

Low Relief
VS
High Relief

which is
more com-
fortable?
Low Relief
is more
ambiguous
(re: 2D vs
3D)
—fuzzier

B HOUSE AND HOME [DOMESTIC]

i Adolf Loos [38]

"art is to make us feel *uncomfortable*, a building is there for our *comfort*."

"A room must look cozy, a **house** *comfortable* to live in."

ii John E. Crowley [39]

"In the 1790s the picturesque was used to explain how **free-dom** from formal architectural imperatives gave the cottage an inherent potential for *comfortable* design. By the end of the century the cottage was the archetypically comfortable house."

** Everyday*

iii Margaret Crawford

"**Everyday** Urbanism tries to refamiliarize urban environments. ... It **domesticates** urban space, making it more familiar, more like **home**. ... more like the interior; it becomes a softer place that is more inhabitable." [40]

—————→ *Freedom and Softness ... possible link between Freedom and Support in the softness of the Everyday?*

attracts
(demands?)
interest/
attention

bounded,
framed,
supported?

Crawford then draws a parallel between Everyday Urbanism with New Urbanism, writing:

"What they are also trying to do is create an environment that is more rather than less familiar, to replace alienation with a kind of **comfort**." [41]

Then immediately distinguishes the two by stating that New Urbanism is "scenographic and image-driven" while Everyday Urbanism is concerned with experience. [42]

picturesque?

iv Yuriko Saito

"I do agree that a part of the goal of everyday aesthetics is to illuminate the ordinarily neglected, but gem-like, aesthetic potentials hidden behind the trivial, mundane, and commonplace façade. ... However, by making the ordinary extraordinary and rendering the familiar strange, while we gain aesthetic experiences thus made possible, we also pay the price by compromising the very everydayness of the everyday. Haapala acknowledges this paradox by observing that 'ordinary' everyday objects lack the surprise element or freshness of the strange, nevertheless they give us pleasure through a kind of *comforting* stability." [43]

° Haapala, Arto, "On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place," in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 50–51.

→ *not trying to make the everyday interesting?
(comfortable?)*

we need
(most)
things to
remain
unremark-
able and/
or easy to
digest.

v Katherine Grier

***comfort* signals ideas and beliefs not simply associated with a physical state. It also designates the presence of the more family centered, even religious associated with '*home*.'" [44]

vi Witold Rybczynski

"During the six years of my architectural education the subject of *comfort* was mentioned only once. It was by a mechanical engineer whose job it was to initiate my classmates and me into the mysteries of air conditioning and heating. He described something called the '*comfort zone*' which, as far as I can remember, was a kidney-shaped, crosshatched area on a graph that showed the relationship between temperature and humidity. *Comfort* was inside the kidney, *discomfort* was everywhere else. This, apparently, was all that we needed to know about the subject." [45]

(often cited quote about how comfort is not taught in architecture schools.)

BOUNDARY
— soft shape,
soft boundary

LINES — fuzzy!
vague?

vii Lara Apponyi quote about comfort and interiors

viii Michael Osman (still needs citation)

"The conceptual association of comfort with room temperature is the historical consequence of the mass-marketing strategies of companies that sought to promote their regulatory systems to potential customers. The persistence of this naturalized concept of room temperature, one that was equated with a universal sense of comfort, is indicative of the influence that their advertisements had in positioning the thermostatic system as essential to any healthy modern household."

→ + try to work this in? temperature (*cool*), household (home), comfort? "regulating comfort" or "governing comfort" or "designing comfort"

ix Helen Mallinson

"Does air-conditioned *comfort* render us more civilized or more primitive?"[46]

"The question here is not whether it is natural to desire comfort, the conventional argument, but why we so readily suppose that modern western 'cool' comfort represents civilization?"[47]

→ AMAZING!

x Marsha Ackermann

"*Cool Comfort*: America's Romance with Air-Conditioning"[48]

→ (good title. Need to read)

D COOL

i Dave Hickey

"~~Irony~~ and *cool* are incompatible means to the same end. They are both modes of deniable disclosure. Each enables us to speak our minds while maintaining a small margin for disclaimer. When we use irony, we suppress the sense of what we mean. When we resort to *cool*, we suppress the urgency we attach to that meaning. Those who fear "death from above," who dwell in bureaucratic, clerical, or academic cultures where speech is regulated, relationships are permanent, and there is no *free* expression must resort to irony. Cool, on the other hand, is a modality of expression for those who live in a world where there are no hierarchies, no permanent enfranchisements, and, perhaps, a surfeit of *free* expression. Irony is a

Irony linked to fear of authority

cool – not strict/definitive "easy-going"?

way of eluding the wrath of your superiors; cool is a way of not imposing on your peers.”[49]

—————→ *Cool and Freedom ... and possibility connected to tolerance???*

ii Robert Farris Thompson

“The Lexicon of the Cool Language in Europe and in tropical Africa equally reveals, in the term, cool, a basic reference to moderation in coldness extended metaphorically to include composure under fire. Thus, in English: 2

‘Cool, composed, collected, unruffled, nonchalant, imperturbable, detached [are] adjectives [which] apply to persons to indicate calmness, especially in time of stress. Cool has the widest application. Usually it implies merely a high degree of self-control, though it may also indicate aloofness.’

free to have independent/ autonomous thoughts not mediated by ones context or environment

“Now compare a West African definition, from the Gola of Liberia: 3

‘Ability to be nonchalant at the right moment ... to reveal no emotion in situations where excitement and sentimentality are acceptable-in other words, to act as though one's mind were in another world. It is particularly admirable to do difficult tasks with an air of ease and silent disdain. Women are admired for a surly detached expression, and somnambulistic movement and attitude during the dance or other performance is considered very attractive. ...”[50]

is shape itself vague or the word “shape” is vague in meaning? is Somol being intentionally vague about shape’s (or “shapes”’s) vagueness

iii Wes Jones

“cool stands for ... well, ‘cool’ and *cool*.” [51] (emphasis his)

—————→ *uses change in font ... don’t highlight*

iv Bob Somol

“Shape is *Cool*.” and “Shape (*Vagueness*)” [52]

- 1 symbols (parenthesis) equates to words (“is”)
- 2 if shape = cool and shape = *vagueness* then cool ≈ vagueness?

Michelle Chang

"The fringe surrounding **vague** terms can be a productive space to create new definitions for the general and indeterminate qualities in architecture." [53] Vague vs Ambiguous?

≈ "Fringe" ≈ "Peripheral Fuzz"? ≈ Vague Frame

v Sarah Whiting and Bob Somol

"Critical architecture is hot in the sense that it is preoccupied with separating itself from *normative*, background or *anonymous* conditions of production, and with articulating difference." [54]

They follow this by stating, "Cool is relaxed, easy." [55]

They go on to articulate hot versus cool, but the distinction is never fully satisfying. We never get the pure inverse of the above statement, clearly stated. I'm sure this was the point. To distinguish so clearly would not be a very cool thing to do. It's too obvious, too clear, too *hot*. But for my purposes, the inverse of the above statement bears repeating or editing, as it were.

The opposite of critical architecture is cool in the sense that it is not interested in separating itself from normative, background, or anonymous conditions of production but with an inarticulate sameness.

vi Marshall McLuhan

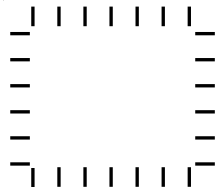
"A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.' High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, 'high definition.' A cartoon is 'low definition,' simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a **cool** medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a **cool** medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience." [56]

h s sen-
tence is
Vague

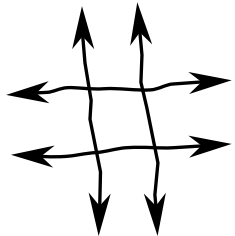
vs

~~This state-~~
~~ment is~~
~~Disiguide.~~

or



vs



[[[High definition = High Precision. Low Definition = High Tolerance. Possible connections to vagueness? Or ambiguity? "Willful Blur?"]]]

vii Gillian Welch

"Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? She's a **cool** girl. Being the **Cool** Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because **Cool** Girls are above all hot. **Hot** and understanding." [57]

Cool = Hot (and understanding) ... Related to Comfort's conflict between freedom and support? The impossibility of being simultaneously Hot and Cool (Cold).

viii Dick Pountain and David Robins [58]

"Levi's blue jeans are no longer **Cool**."

→ *(could transition to jean fit?)*

COLD
COOLD
CHOOLTD
C H O O L T D

E RELAXED

i Maggie Eliot [59]

"Relaxed fit is looser than 'normal fit', but it is not as loose as 'loose fit.' Relaxed fit jeans tend to be a little more 'relaxed' through the thigh area. Relaxed fit jeans are also very **comfortable** tend to fit the average build very easily. Relaxed fit jeans will be a good fit for you if you are not extremely large or extremely small and the most important thing to you when buying jeans is **comfort**."

Relax Fit | Normal Fit | Loose Fit connect to "fitting" and comfort (see Ahmed)

ii ?

fit

-Besler
fitting
(fit in)

-Ahmed
fitness
(get into
shape)

-Somol

F LOOSE

allows for
user
participation,
change,
improvisation.
COOL

i Stan Allen [60]

"By forming the institution within a directed field condition, connected to the city or the landscape, a space is left for the tactical improvisation of future users. A '*loose fit*' is proposed between activity and enclosing envelope."

→ *Fuzzy Periphery? Invisible Envelope? Vague Frame?*
A space for improvisation? Drift? Michelle Chang
"space to create new definitions."

ii Demi Moore

"There's this idea that if you take your clothes off, somehow you must have *loose* morals." [61]

→ [Hollywood. and the looseness of *Los Angeles*]

→ sign and loosely arranged letters

iii Sylvia Lavin

"When Frank Lloyd Wright apocryphally said, 'tip the world on its side and everything *loose* will land in *Los Angeles*', he intended to capture the city's abjection as a centerless deposit of buildings and billboards, each assembled of detritus and strewn about only to land in indifferent disorder." [62]

→ *could be related to DSB's quotes about Los Angeles as "even" and "open-ended" in the Boring chapter.*

→ *also equates looseness to indifference.*

HOLLYWOOD

"Sometimes the yellows shine the brightest, sometimes the blues."

a Indifference

* Jeff Wall (see Boring Chapter)

** Moira Roth

"The *indifferent* aesthetic emerged in the early 1950s, and had three fairly distinct phases: its cool and ironic beginnings in Cage, Raushenberg and Cunningham (with Duchamp as a major role model); its more poignant expression in the muted anxiety of early Johns; and its weakened final phase in the bland indifference of Pop and Minimal art." [63]

Cool
Irony



Mute
Anxiety



Bland In-
diffe-
rence

****5 Marcel Duchamp**

"You have to approach something with **indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on visual **indifference** and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste."** [64]

***** Michael Meredith**

"when done well, *architecture's* calculated ambiguity—*its indifference* is a social engine to produce discussion, reflection, thought, and even action, while allowing for the coexistence of an irresolvable diversity of ideas and identities."[65]

iii Sylvia Lavin (cont.)

"As is fitting of the concept, **looseness was often happened upon by accident and yielded unpredictable results, but there were nonetheless recognizable triggers that caused architecture to productively coincide with other art forms."**[66]

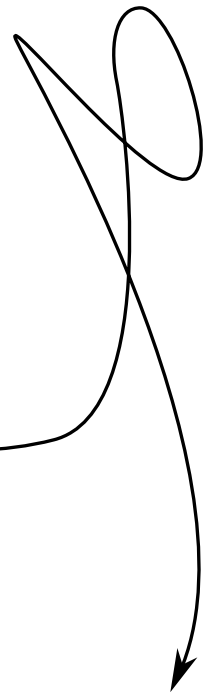
→ *links open-endedness of looseness not just to the city but to disciplinary boundaries.*

About a different Frank she writes:

"But in all this **calculated informality, a different form of **looseness** appeared: embedded within early drawings for both the commercial and the museum schemes are the first markings in what would become Gehry's famously wobbly graphic idiom. For Gehry, the path through unartful and anonymous means of production had yielded a highly identifiable signature, and he found a **loose architecture** while collaborating with artists known for precision and while he was working hard to avoid architecture altogether."**[67]

1 Unartful and anonymous (architecture without architects) or "avoiding architecture altogether"

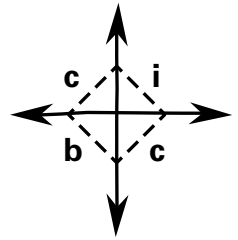
2 "Calculated informality" related to Michael Meredith's "calculated ambiguity"? (see below above)



**can
one design
comfort?
looseness?
can one
stage
things that
allow for
"unpredict-
able
results"?**

G INFORMAL

Reminder:



i John E. Crowley [68]

"Picturesque referred generally to the visually informal."

→ (circle back to the picturesque? Andrew Holder?
Rendering Air, Log 31)

ii Lucia Allais

*"Whereas the formless ridicules form, the *informal* attacks formality" [69]*

→ *which she addresses after labeling a specific work as "too *comfortable*" to be formless.[70] And revealing MOS's affinity for Rudofsky, "they too would like their architecture to appear "without architects." [71]*

a Bernard Rudofsky [72]

"For want of a better label, we shall call [Architecture Without Architects] vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous and rural."

→ *Lavin quote above? Re: Gehry*

→ *spontaneous? Connection to *Interesting*?*

b Stanford Anderson [73]

"I use the term 'vernacular architecture' to refer to works by builders who, whether their names are known or not, are not recognized as architects."

ii Lucia Allais (cont.)

"the 'informal' implies an architectural order that has to be tracked rather than generated from rules" [74]

→ *"tracked" Like something wild? Something furry?*

All of this is preceded by the statement:

*"MOS concentrates on form precisely so it can be more casual and *free* about other decisions." [75]*

iii Cecil Balmond

"informal" [76]

→ *(Maybe Related? Need to read ...)*

is comfort
ambiguous?
bc it can
be all these
contradictory
things
(spontaneous|will-
ful, free|
supportive,
discern-
ible|ambig-
uous, etc...)
simultane-
ously?

The Anaesthetics of Comfort

Because the relationships between the terms in this outline are not yet fixed, sometimes the terms may seem to conflict with each other. In most cases this is not particularly noteworthy—contradictions and non-sequiturs suggest the forms of ambiguity I advocate. However, the apparent contradiction between freedom and support, pointed out by Galen Cranz, reveals an important trend in the relationships between the different symptoms of comfort and recalls some of the themes addressed in the first chapter of this book.

On the one hand, we find words like *soft*, *tolerant*, and *empathetic* as suggesting connection, stasis, and dependability. We see these qualities in the plushy form of Venus's lounge, the suppleness of the drapes that frame the landscape, the function of self-storage buildings, and the open corners of the *Blocks of blabla* models. These terms describe architecture's provision of various systems of support. As these terms suggest, comforting architecture is architecture that *feels* "good" and provides a frame or basis for other things.

On the other hand, we see comfort described by words like *cool*, *relaxed*, *indifferent*, and *free*—suggesting the ability for detachment, movement, and independence. We see this in Venus's "mellow" expression and posture, the shallow layers of paint on self-storage buildings, and the slumping forms of the *Blocks of blabla* models. These terms describe comfort as a form of relief from strictures or rules. This

partial indeterminacy allows ample space for the viewer to insert her own interpretation or context, so that comforting architecture *looks* "good" (i.e. cool) to a relatively large audience.

At first glance, the associations of empathy (in the case of comfort as support) and indifference (in the case of comfort as relief) appear to stand in weak opposition to each other. And perhaps they do, if we think of them as occurring simultaneously. One quick way to resolve this is to place them into a linear formulation of cause and effect: feelings of support result in looks of relief. This could explain the relationship between the support of the lounge and the look of Venus; her casual posture and cool look are made possible by the soft support of the upholstered lounge, suggesting that "good" (soft) objects produce "good" (cool) subjects.

However, if we refer back to the initial ideas in this book about *interesting* and the terms that title each chapter—terms that simultaneously describe an object's qualities and a subject's feelings upon encountering an object—the cause-and-effect relationship described above does not apply. Not only does it fail to satisfy some of the book's initial parameters, but it also oversimplifies a messy network of things and reduces the number of things comfort might describe. Can't the lounge be seen as indifferent or cool? Can't Venus be seen as supportive or tolerant? Can't they be both and do both at the same time? In what way can each of these things be described as comforting? Why does there have to be a distinction? In fact, the blurred

distinction between subject and object is an opportunity, an opening, created by comfort's deliberate ambiguity.

To describe this ambiguity, architectural historian John Harwood paraphrases Lewis Mumford's writing about 20th-century mechanization for the human being to be at home in this brave new world, the human being would have to become more machinelike, a "new man" possessed of objective qualities. Conversely, the machine would need to be humanized, given qualities of subjectivity that would allow it to interact meaningfully with people. At the site of the interaction between human being and machine we would experience not pain but comfort.[77]

Here Harwood describes a region of overlap—what he calls the "interface"—where subjects are "possessed of objective qualities" and objects are "given qualities of subjectivity." In this nebulous territory, the distinction between things and the qualities used to describe those things is supposed to be blurry. Conveniently for me, he locates this territory inside the ambiguous boundaries of the word "comfort."

Comfort has been described as a blurry space by others as well. Writing a few years before Harwood, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed talks about a "seamless space" and, like Cranz, equates comfort with "ease":

To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, by fitting, the surfaces disappear from view. The disappearance of the surface

is instructive: in feelings of comfort, bodies extend into spaces, and spaces extend into bodies. The sinking feeling involves a seamless space, or a space where you can't see the "stitches" between bodies.[78]

Both Ahmed's and Harwood's descriptions of comfort evoke German philosopher Robert Vischer's concept of *Einfühlen*, a subject's feeling into an object such that the subject experiences something indistinguishable from the experience of the object.[79]

As a collection, Harwood's, Mumford's, Ahmed's, and Vischer's ideas are perhaps a loose fit. But if we relax our eyes, just enough to see these ideas overlap, together they provide a precedent for refusing to speak of comfort in oppositional terms of objects and subjects but rather, as this book has proposed, as a hazy blur between both. Instead of being defined by legible transitions and tangible boundaries, forms of comfort are more easily described by our inability to sense them. According to Ahmed, comfort is something "you cannot see." [80] Or, as Jane Murphy and Ellen Lipton have said, "comfort disappears: it is the invisible, enveloping framework." [81] Meanwhile, according to Harwood, comfort is the absence of a feeling: "it is the erasure of an experience, pain, which is not tied to any sense organ." [82] In all three cases, comfort is a negative: it is the absence of pain or the absence of discernibility. Either way, the collective numbness of comfort can be described simultaneously through two slightly different understandings of something we might call the anaesthetics of comfort.[83]

As an “invisible framework,” the anaesthetics of comfort-as-support is found in the minimalism required by its “functionality.”[84] An *an-aesthetics* describes that which we cannot see as it recedes, hides, or embeds itself in the service of other things. The tolerance of supportive things means that they take a back seat, at least when it comes to appearance; what they look like is largely contingent on the things they support or frame. Supportive things have no specific look of their own, no identifiable aesthetic, because they are connected to and defined by their support of other, more aesthetically dominant things. You might look at anesthetic things, but never see them.

As a space of “no pain,” the anaesthetics of comfort-as-indifference is found in the reduction of sensation. An *anesthesia* is that which cannot

be felt as its dullness seeps into the things that it surrounds. The result is a coolness that some may attribute to a blank expression. It lacks specific emotive qualities and is often given such names as *insensible* or *numb*. You might be touched by anaesthetic things, but never feel them.

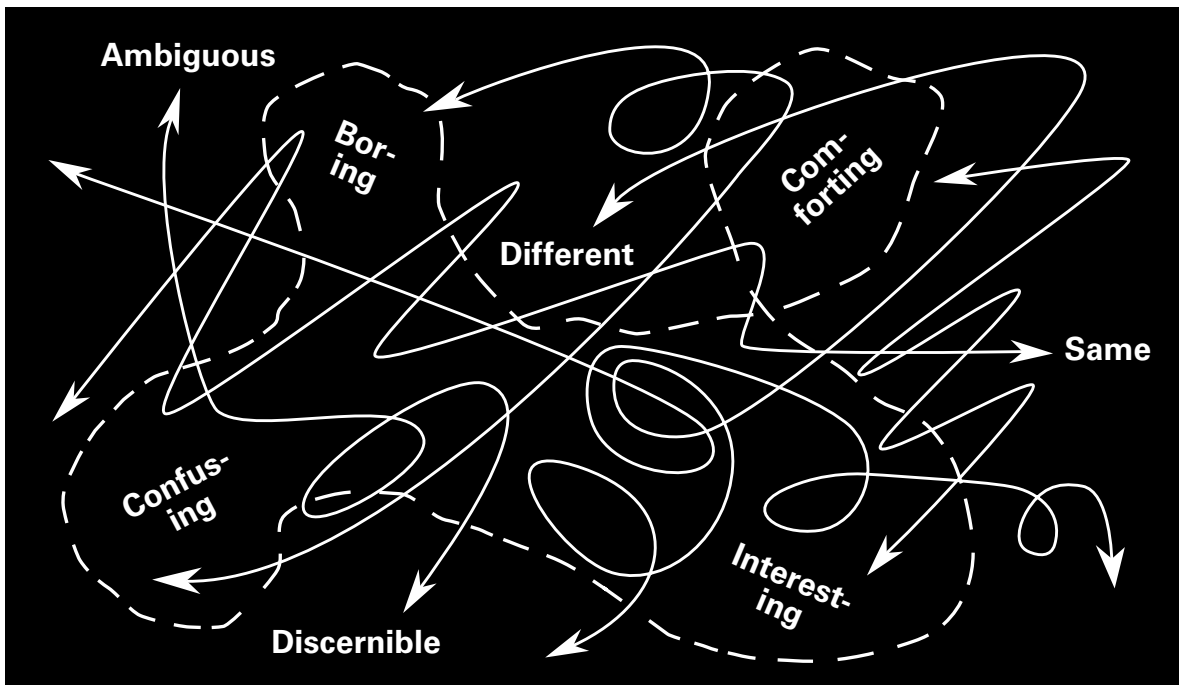
In 1979 David Gilmour and Roger Waters wrote, “Your lips move but I can’t hear what you’re saying.” The song, *Comfortably Numb*, was written in reference to an experience two years prior when Waters, experiencing stomach problems before a concert in Philadelphia, requested a doctor who provided him with an anesthetic for his pain. As the song goes:

Just a little pinprick

There’ll be no more, ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

But you may feel a little sick

It turns out Waters was suffering from hepatitis.[85]



1
This anonymous critic's account of the lecture can be found in Jerrold Ziff's "'Backgrounds, Introduction of Architecture and Landscape': A Lecture by J. M. W. Turner," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26, no. 1/2 (1963): 126. He credits it to *Annals of Fine of Fine Arts VI* (1820): 98.

2
This historical account, as well as Turner's lecture, can be found in Ziff, op. cit., 124–147.

3
Ziff, op. cit., 136.

4
Ziff, op. cit., 136.

5
I refer to architecture as a representation of the built environment, as

opposed to "the architecture of the painting" in the sense of the painting's design or composition.

6
For an exhaustive history of comfort's relationship to the parlor, see Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850–1930* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010). Among other things, comfort is linked to the design of these rooms with specific sections of the book focusing on upholstery, lounges, windows, and drapery.

7
"Self Storage," Wikipedia, last modified December 12, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self_storage#cite_note-self-storage-1

8
I'm sure there are many examples, but this one is anecdotal. I have had one storage locker for twelve years (as I write this book); during that same period I have lived in over ten different residences.

9
"An Introduction to Self Storage, from Self Storage Association," *Self Storage Association*, accessed on December 23, 2017, <http://www.selfstorage.org/Products-Services/Library/Public-Library>.

10
Anna Neimark and I first wrote about self-storage and "relief" for the Oslo Triennale. Anna Neimark and Andrew Atwood, *Blocks of blabla in After Belonging: The Object, Spaces and*

Territories of the Ways We Stay in Transit, eds. Lluís Alexandre Casanovas Blanco, Ignacio G. Galan, Carlos Minguez Carrasco, Alejandra Navarrete Llopis, Marina Otero Vezier (Baden: Lars Muller Publishers, 2017): 154–160.

11
There are many precedents for a house of cards, but these models most directly reference Richard Serra's *One Ton Prop* (House of Cards), 1969.

12
The site for the exhibition was the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo, Norway.

13
These comments do not refer to visitors to the Triennale. Sadly,

there was nothing left in the budget, so we were not able to make the trip to Oslo. Instead we held a small event at our studio to show the models before we shipped them to Oslo. At that event, a few people remarked that the models were “deadpan.” I’ve worked hard to recall the specific people who used that word, but no one would own up to it. Instead, here is an incomplete list of people (recalled from memory) that attended that event: Michael Osman, Sasha Osman, Andrew Zago, Laura Bowman, Brendan Shea, Gabriel Friess Briggs, Margaret Honda, Morgan Fisher, David Eskenazi, Erin Besler, Ian Besler, Matthew Au, Jason Payne, Molly Munson, Jon Gregurick,

Aubrey Bauer, Brooke Hair, Stephanie Atlan.

14
For more on “deadpan” see: Aron Vinegar, “Ed Ruscha, Heidegger, and Deadpan Photography” in *Art History* 32 (2009): 852–873.

15
For example, Alberti wouldn’t include drawings in *De Re Aedificatoria* because he didn’t trust reproduction and thought verbal description left less room for interpretation/error.

16
The idea of a “fuzzy” order and tolerance is explained briefly in E.H. Gombrich, “Order and Tolerance” in *Leonardo* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 147.

17
Some good accounts of comfort in architecture can be found in John E. Crowley’s *The Invention of Comfort* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). A shorter history of the term can be found in David Ellison and Andrew Leach’s “Thinking through Discomfort,” in *On Discomfort: Moments in a Modern History of Architectural Culture*, eds. David Ellison and Andrew Leach (London: Routledge, 2017): 1–7.

18
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* [1970] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 16e.

19
Galen Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1998): 112.

20
Mark Cousins, “On Support” in *Support Structures*, ed. Celine Condorelli (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009): 69.

21
Cousins, “On Support,” 69.

22
Jacques Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 121.

23
Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, 79.

24
Colin Rowe, “The Chicago Frame,” in *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*

and Other Essays (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976): 90.

25

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Helen Mallinson, "Heart of Darkness," 254.
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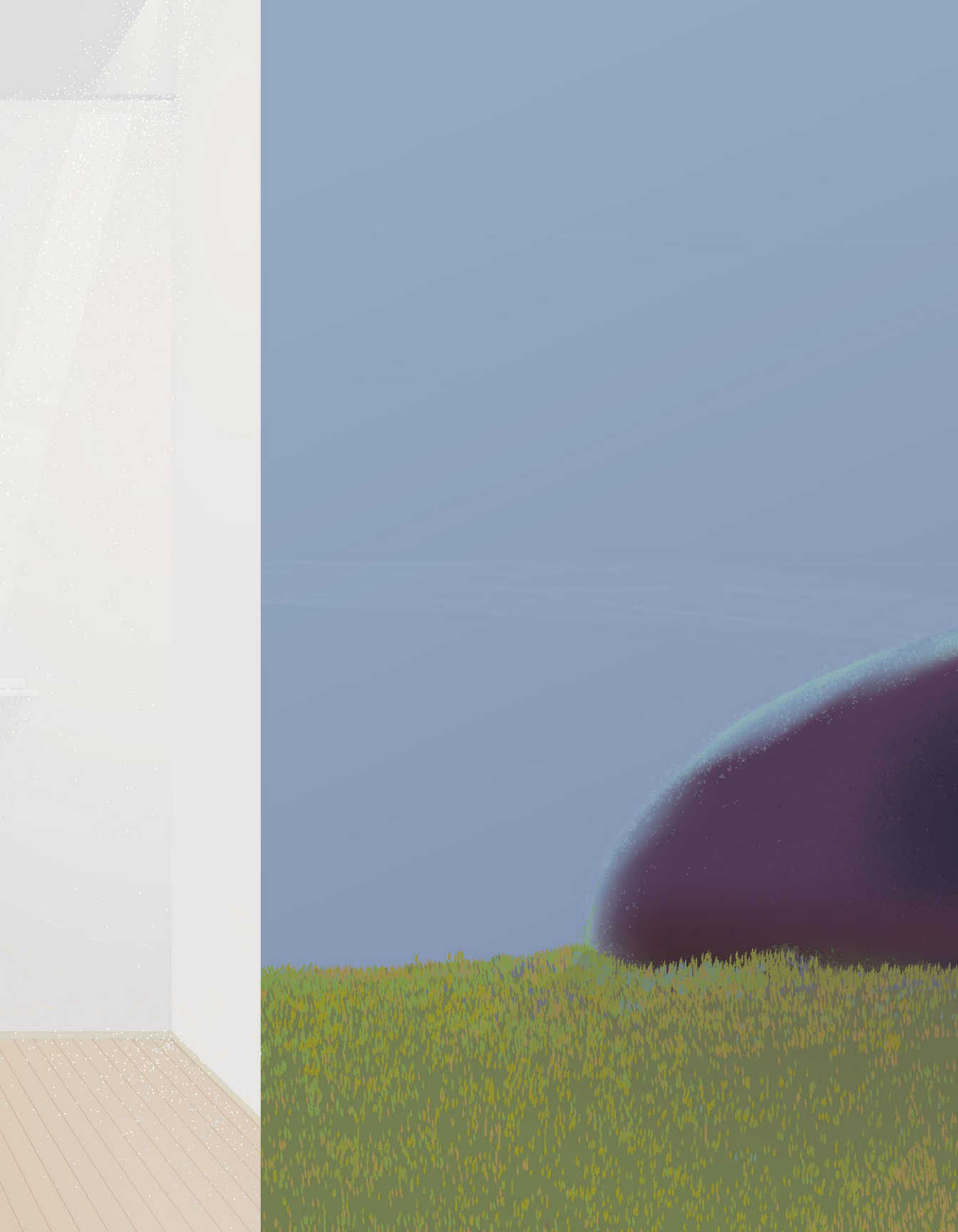
84

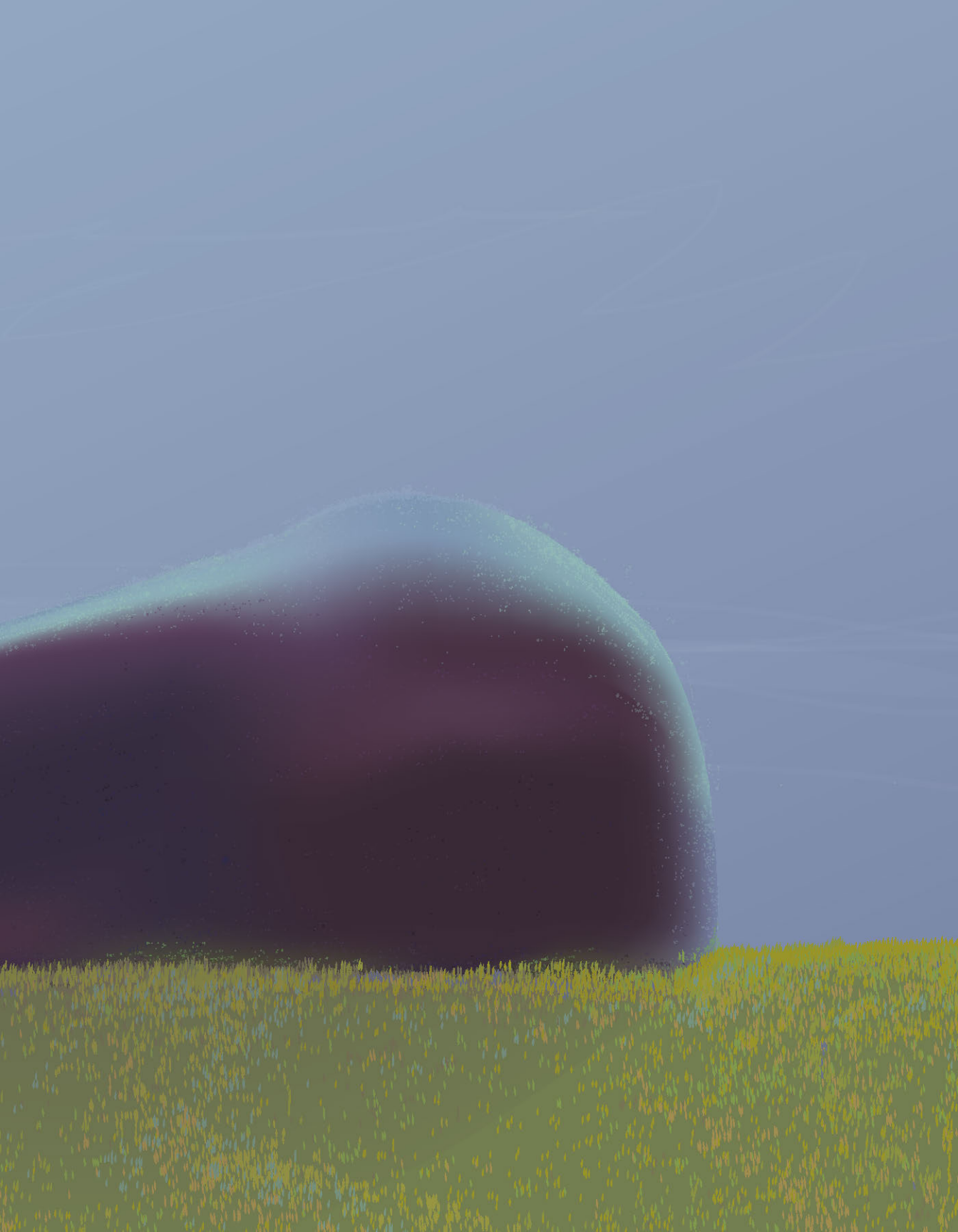
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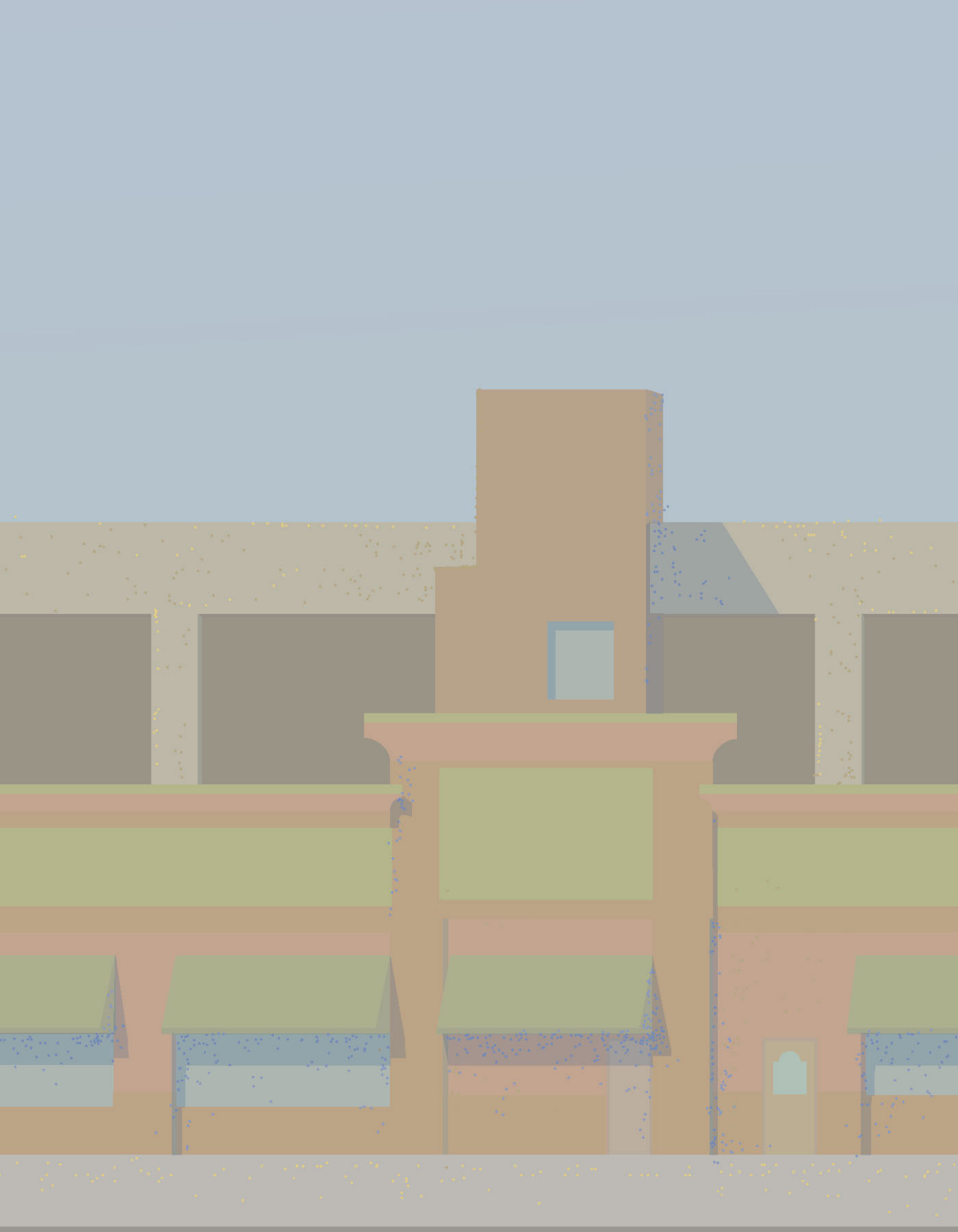




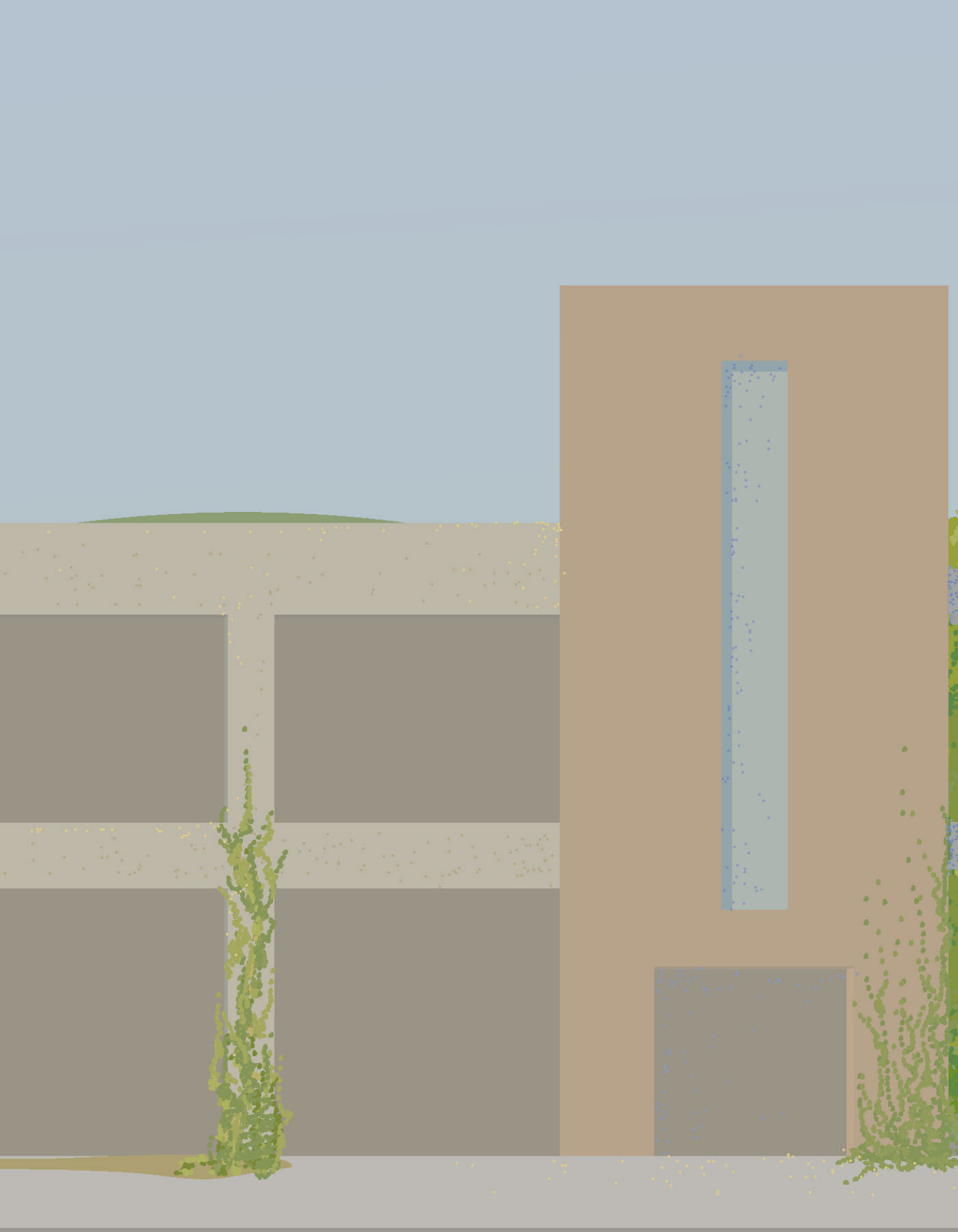




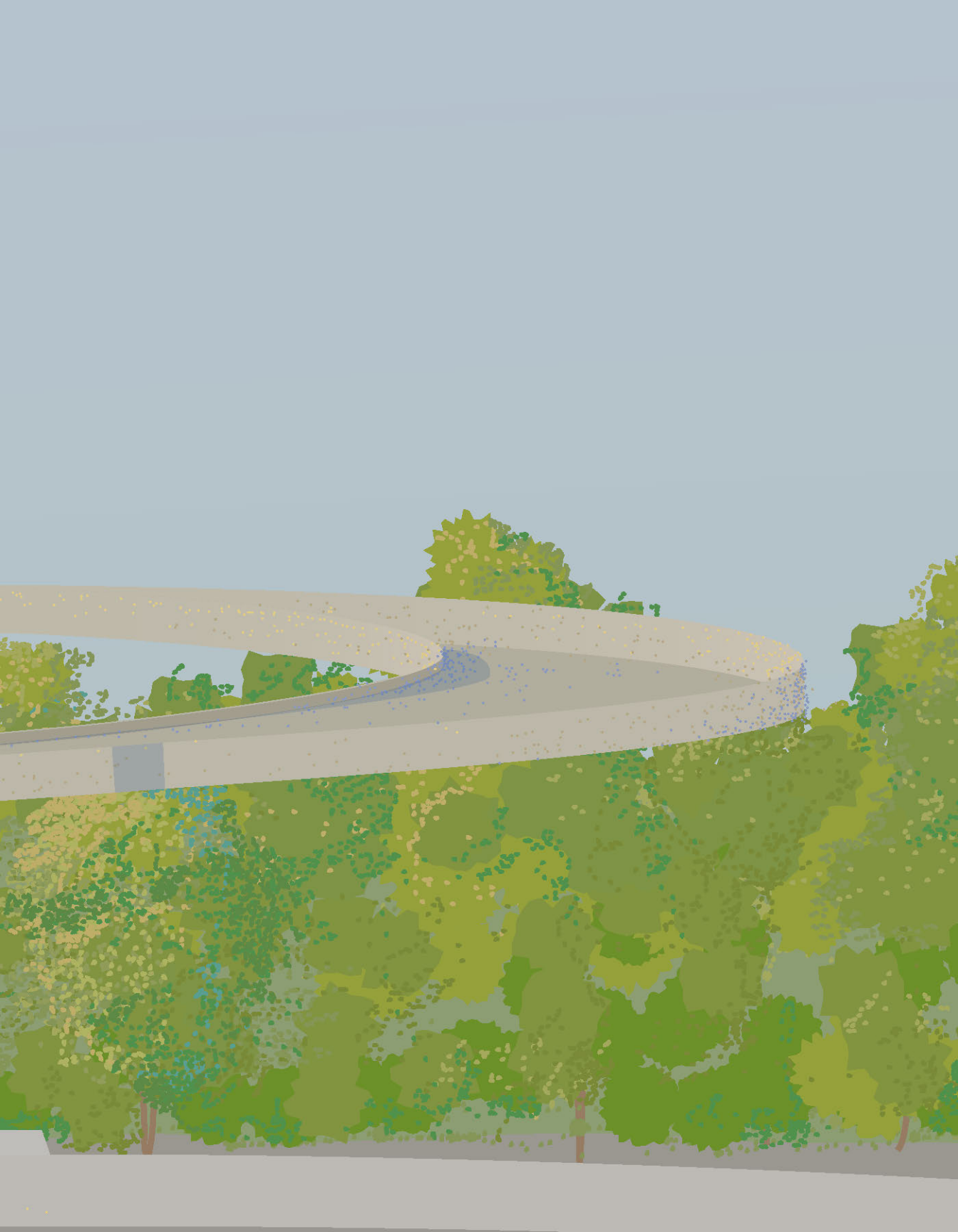


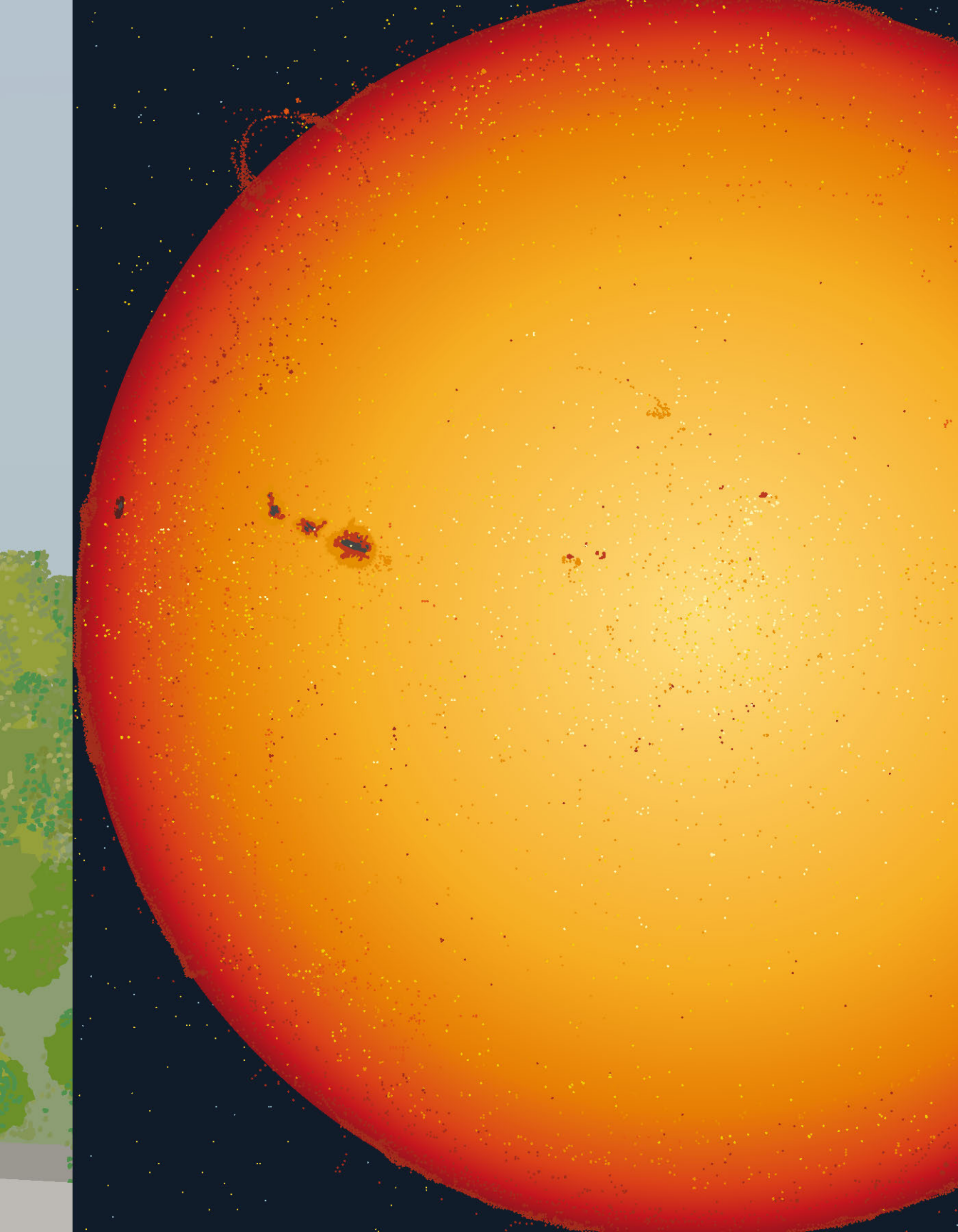


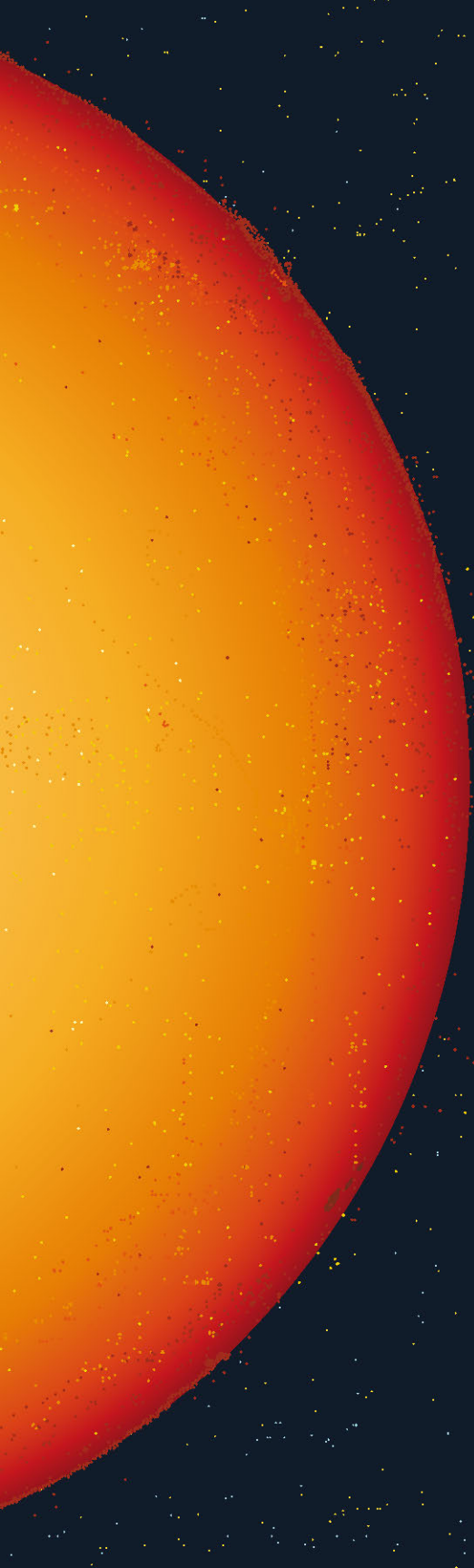


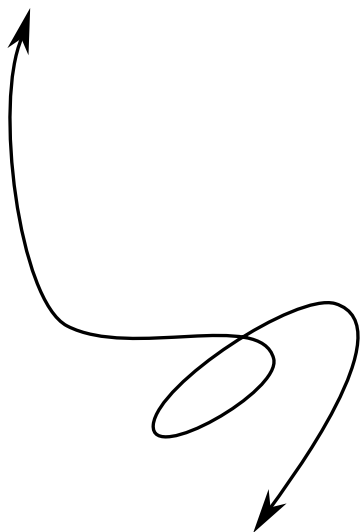


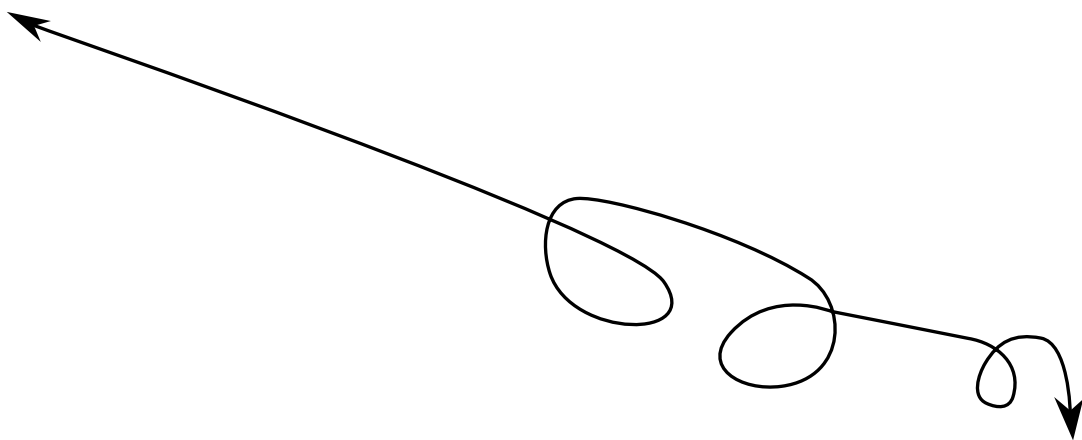












INDEX

P. 31

**Blur Building,
Diller + Scofidio,
Yverdon-les-Bains,
Switzerland, 2002**



P. 32–33

**Upper Lawn Pavilion,
Alison and Peter
Smithson, Wiltshire,
England, 1962**

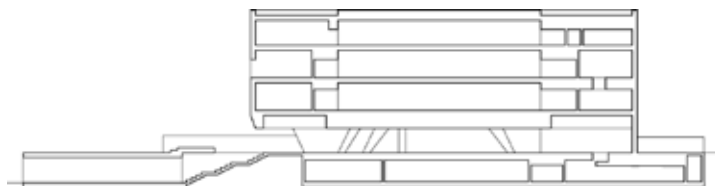


P. 33–35

**Château de Montailou
[Ruin], Unknown,
Montailou, France,
12th century AD**

P. 35–37

**Fontaine Avenue
Gas Station,
Atwood Architects,
Charlottesville, VA, 1988**

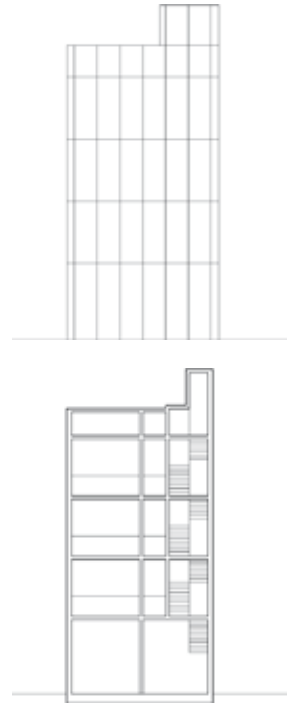


P. 37–39

**Villa Snellman,
Erik Gunnar Asplund,
Djursholm, Sweden, 1917**

P. 43–45

**Bluemoon Hotel,
Foreign Office
Architects, Groningen,
The Netherlands, 2001**

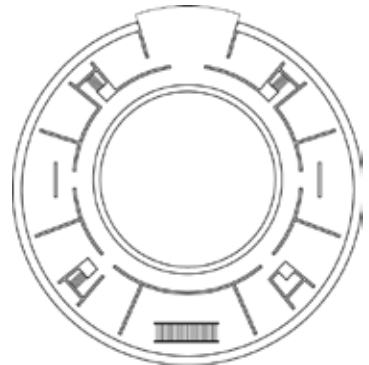


P. 39–43

**Iceberg, N/A,
Macquarie Island,
Australia,
November 12, 2009**

P. 44–46 (bottom)

**Hirshhorn Museum
and Sculpture Garden,
Gordon Bunshaft,
Washington, DC, 1974**

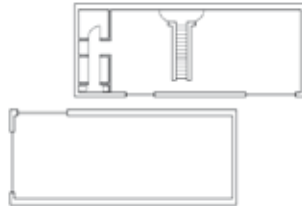
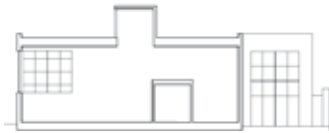
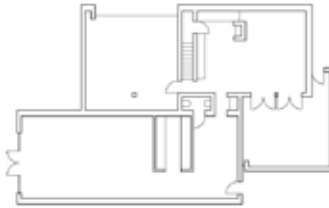


P. 46–47
2206 Echo Park Ave,
N/A, Los Angeles, CA,
1964

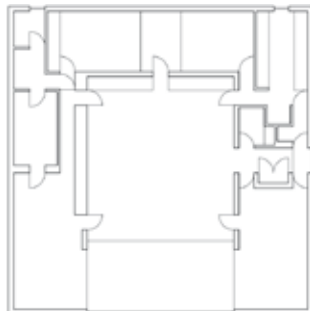
P. 47–49
Sale House,
Johnston Marklee,
Venice, CA, 2004



P. 49–50
Danziger Studio,
Frank Gehry,
Los Angeles, CA, 1964



P. 50–53
Library House,
Shinichi Ogawa,
Tochigi, Japan, 2012



P. 54–55
Sagarmatha,
Chomolungma,
Mount Everest, N/A,
Mahalangur Himal,
on the border of Nepal
and Tibet, 29,029 feet
above Earth's surface,
60 million years BC

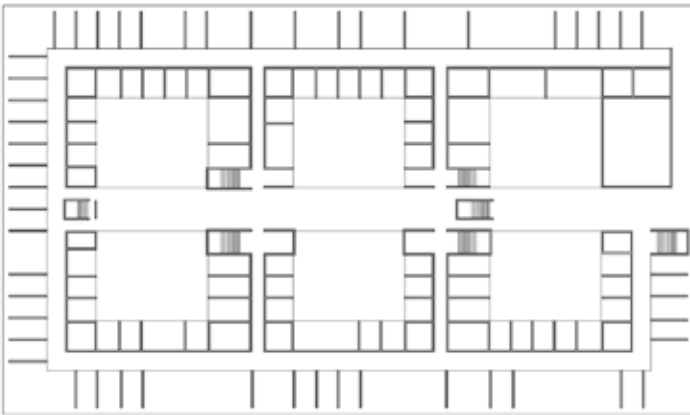
P. 55–57
Shoji Ueda Museum
of Photography,
Shin Takamatsu,
Tottori, Japan, 1995

P. 57–59
Jackson Meadow,
David Salmela, Marine
on St Croix, MN, 1990s

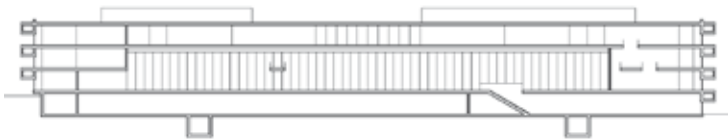
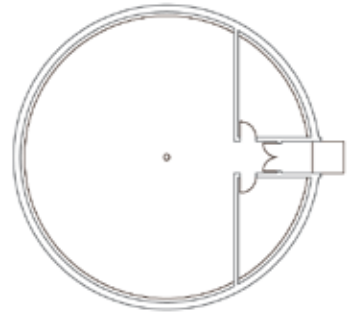
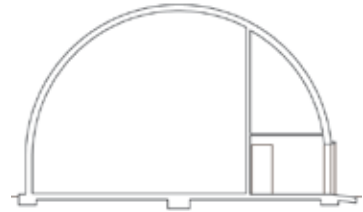
P. 59–60
Lanyon Quoit,
N/A, Cornwall,
England, Collapsed 1815,
Re-erected 1824

P. 60–62, 87
Multipurpose Pavilion,
Eduardo Souto de
Moura, Viana do
Castelo, Portugal, 2012

P. 87–89
Am Römerholz,
Gigon Guyer, Winterthur,
Zurich Canton,
Switzerland, 1998

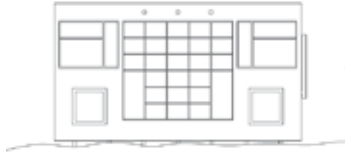


P. 95–97
RAF Dome, N/A,
Norwich, Norfolk,
England, 1940's

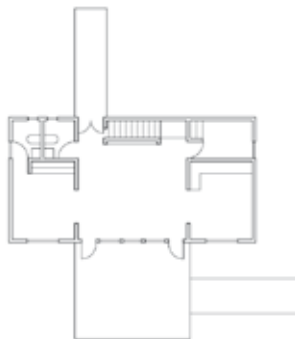


P. 89–90 (top)
Netherlands
Forensic Institute,
KAAN Architecten,
The Hague, South
Holland, The
Netherlands, 2005

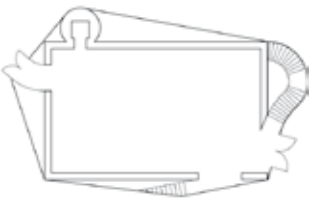
P. 92–94
Casa Klotz, Mathias
Klotz, Tongoy, Chile, 1991



P. 97–99
Medical Faculty
Housing, Lucien Kroll,
Leuven, Belgium,
1970–1976



P. 91–92
Kukje Gallery, SO–IL,
Seoul, South Korea, 2012

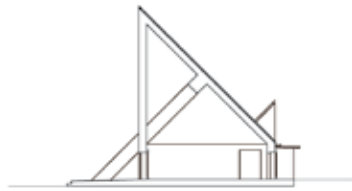


P. 99–100
General Sherman, N/A,
Giant Forest of Sequoia
National Park, CA,
700–300 BC

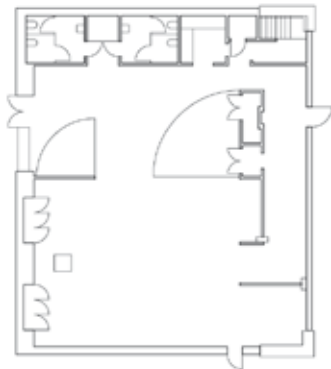


P. 94–95
Villa Schwob,
Le Corbusier,
La Chaux-de-Fonds,
Switzerland, 1912

P. 100–102
Planhof Auditorium,
Valerio Olgiati,
Landquart,
Switzerland, 2010

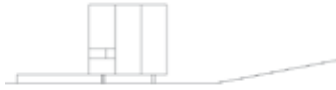


P. 102–104
St Nicholas Church,
Marlon Blackwell
Architect Springdale,
AR, 2010



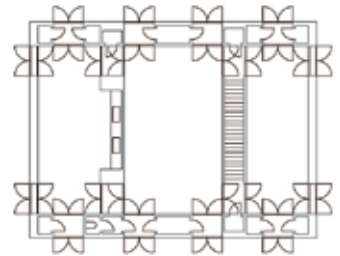
P. 104–105
Jones Hall, William
Wayne Caudill, Houston,
TX, 1966

P. 106–107
Casa Invisible, Delugan
Meissl Associated
Architects, Austria, 2013



P. 107–109
Church of Saint George,
Unknown, Lalibela,
Ethiopia, Late 12th/
early 13th century AD

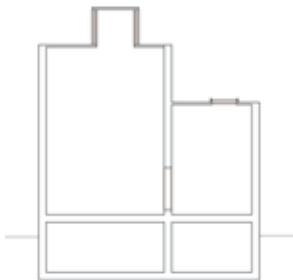
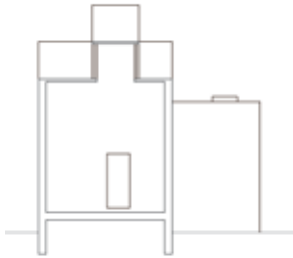
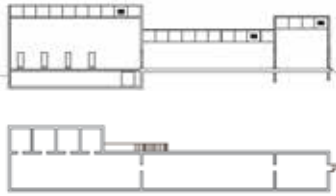
P. 109–111
House Without
Qualities, O.M. Ungers,
Cologne, Germany, 1995



P. 111–113
5800 Colby Street, N/A,
Oakland, CA, 1961

P. 113–115
OCMW Nevele, 51N4E,
Nevele, Belgium, 2012

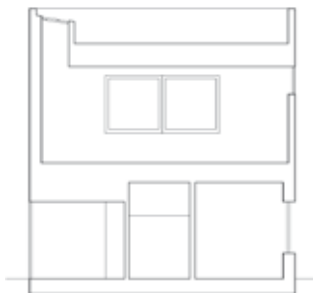
P. 115–117
La Congiunta,
Peter Markli, Giornico,
Switzerland, 1992



P. 117–118
Seaside Pavilion,
Tod Williams Billie
Tsien Architects,
Highlands, NJ, 2015



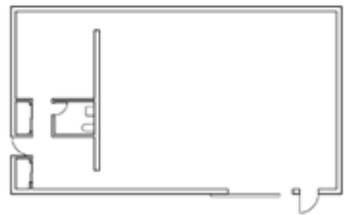
P. 118, 143–144
Page House,
Ajay Manthripragada,
Berkeley, CA, 2017



P. 144–145
Mesh Temporary Bar,
Fala Atelier, Porto,
Portugal, 2014

P. 145–146
A, B 1:2, Michelle Jaja
Chang, Houston, TX,
2016

P. 146–147
Matthew Marks Gallery,
ZELLNERPLUS, West
Hollywood, CA, 2012



P. 147–149
San Cataldo Cemetery,
Aldo Rossi, Modena,
Province of Modena,
Italy, 1971

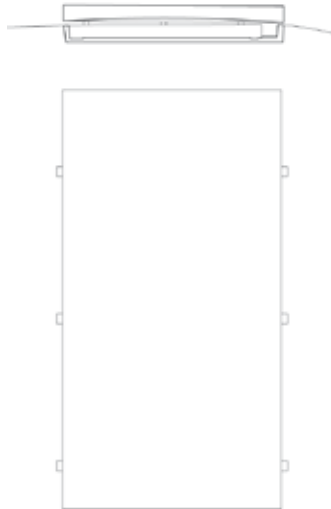
P. 149–151
Variations on the
Disco Ball, Jason Payne,
Outer Space, 2012

P. 151–153
Cemetery Service
Building, Petra Gipp,
Stockholm, Sweden,
2011



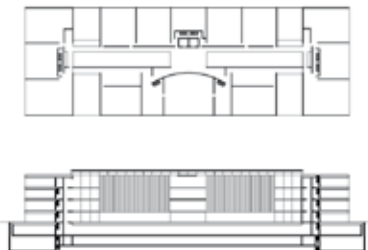
P. 153–154
The Moon, N/A,
Earth's Orbit,
~239,000 miles
from Earth's center,
4.51 billion years BC

P. 154–156
Monument of Fosse
Ardeatine, M. Fiorentino,
G. Perugini with N.
Aprile, C. Calcaprina,
A. Cardelli, Rome, Italy,
1952

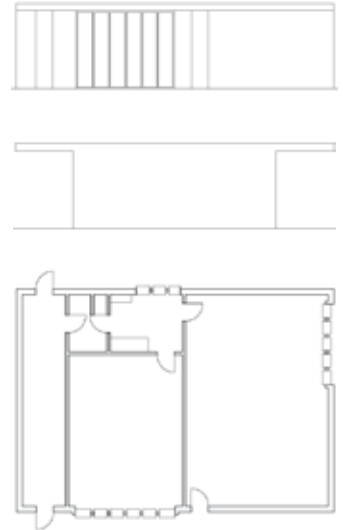


P. 156–157
Radome of Pleumeur,
Milton B. Punnett,
Pleumeur-Bodou,
France, 1960–1962

P. 157–159
United States Tax Court
Building, Victor Lundy,
Washington, DC, 1972



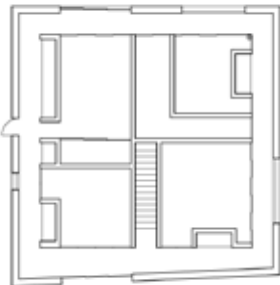
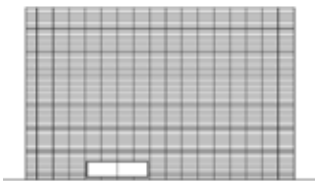
P. 159–161
Studio Rémy Zaugg,
Herzog and de Meuron,
Mulhouse, France, 1996



P. 161–162
Hornet's Nest
Superdome, N/A,
Ottawa, ON, Canada,
2007

P. 162–163
Seoul Iron Works,
Unknown, Seoul, South
Korea, Unknown

P. 163–165
S House, SANAA,
Okayama, Japan, 1996

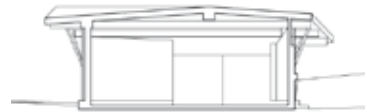


P. 167–169
Korean Presbyterian
Church of Metropolitan
Detroit, Zago
Architecture,
Detroit, MI, 2001

P. 169–170
House No. 7, MOS,
Columbia County, NY,
2015



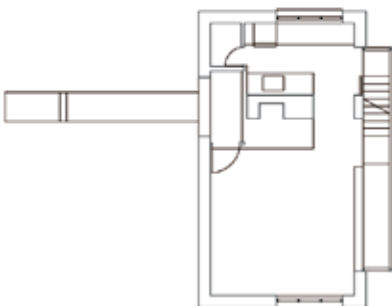
P. 172–174
Armstrong House, The
LADG, Los Angeles, CA,
Date: The Future



P. 171–172
Signal Box, Gigon Guyer,
Zurich, Switzerland,
1999

P. 174, 207–208
Santa Maria dos Anjos
Chapel, Lina Bo Bardi,
Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1978

P. 165–167
Clark House, WG Clark,
Charlottesville, VA, 1994



P. 208–209

**Garcia Marcos House,
Alberto Campo Baeza,
Madrid, Spain, 1991**



P. 211–212

**Southlight Pavilion,
Ultramoderne with RISD
Architecture students
and James Barnes, AIA,
Providence, RI, 2016**

P. 212–218

**1 Arsenal Marketplace,
N/A, Watertown,
MA, Varies**

P. 218–219

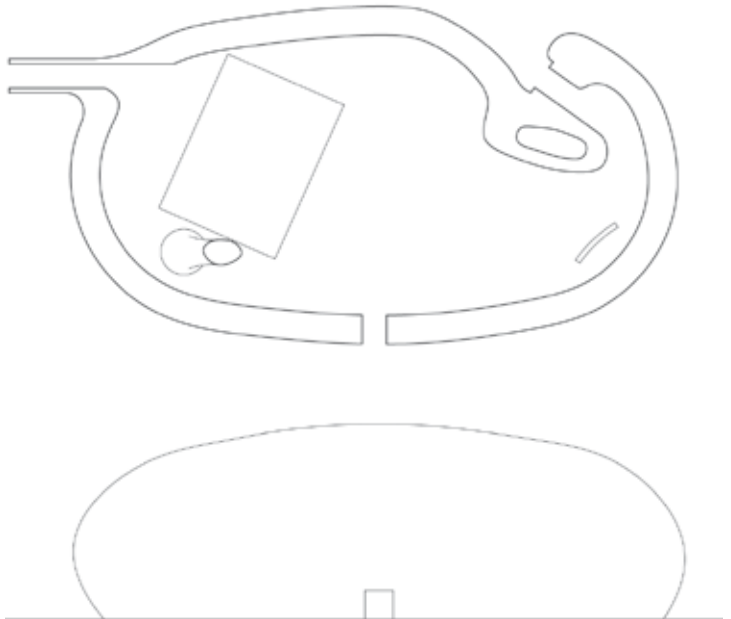
**The Sun, N/A, Center
of the Solar System,
Milky Way Galaxy,
4.6 billion years BC**

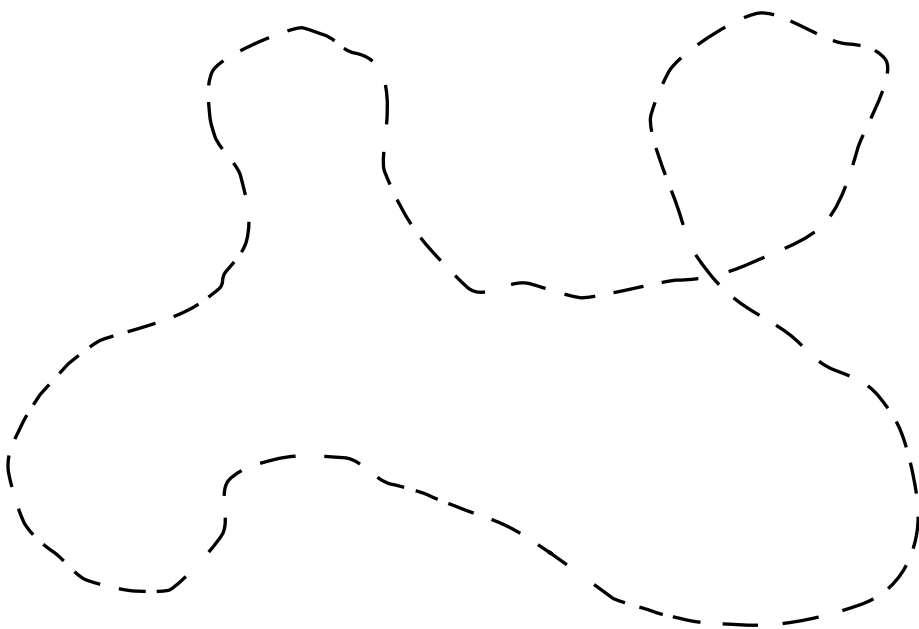
P. 219, 31

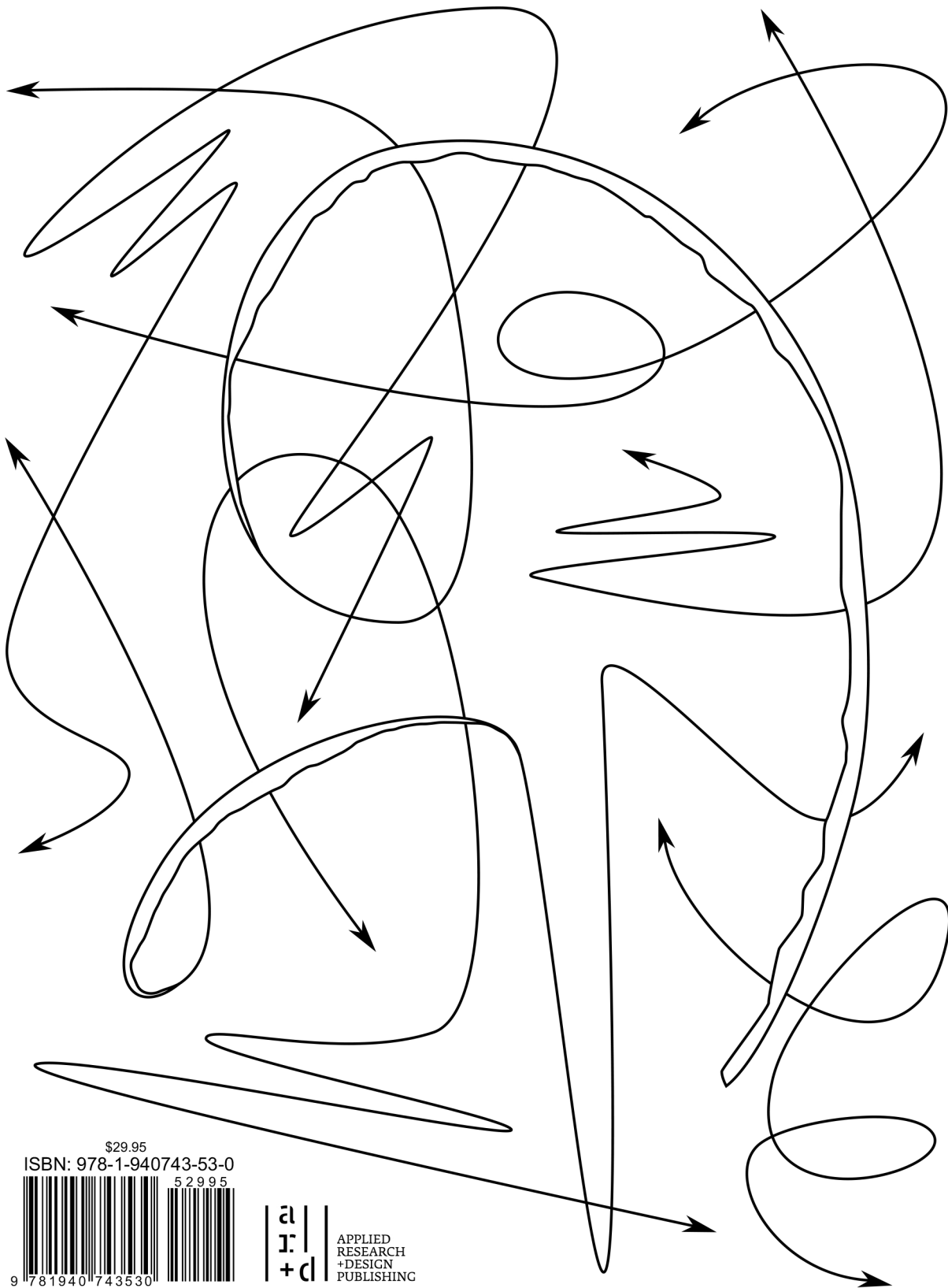
**Blur Building,
Diller + Scofidio,
Yverdon-les-Bains,
Switzerland, 2002**

P. 209–210 (right)

**Ark Nova, Arata Isozaki
and Anish Kapoor,
Matsushima, 2013**







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