

## **A MACHINE FOR IMAGINATION**

Tofan Rafati

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Architecture** in Architecture.

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Quintin Tarantino,  
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Stone.

## A MACHINE FOR IMAGINATION

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### **ABSTRACT**

It began with the question, "What if the Modern Man was successful in his dominion over nature?"

By means of Architecture this thesis became a speculation and commentary on the human condition. But, more than that, this is a story that tells the evolution and outcome of a series of questions and inquiries into the relationship between Architecture, art and the mythopoetic-narrative realm.

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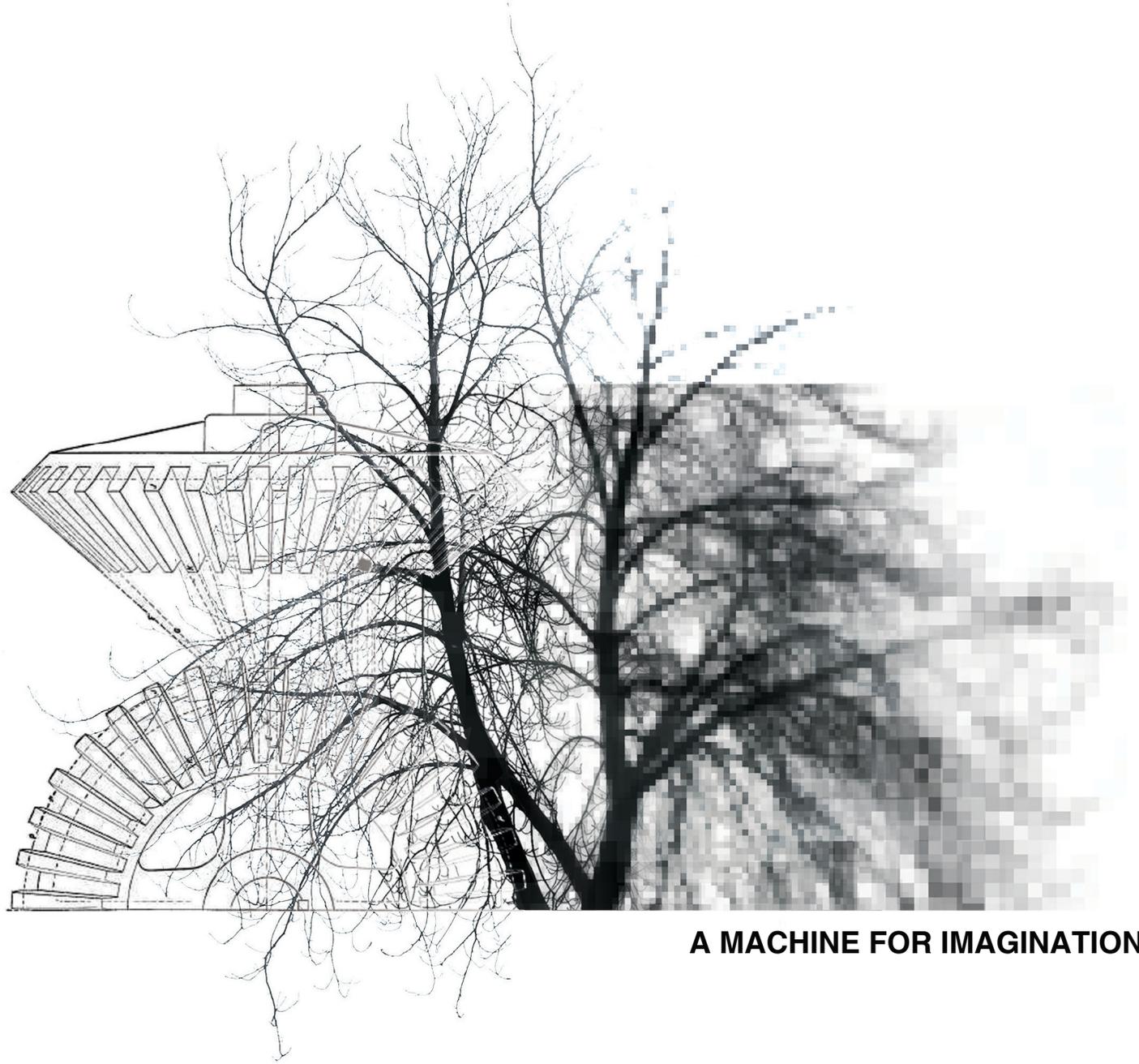
## A MACHINE FOR IMAGINATION

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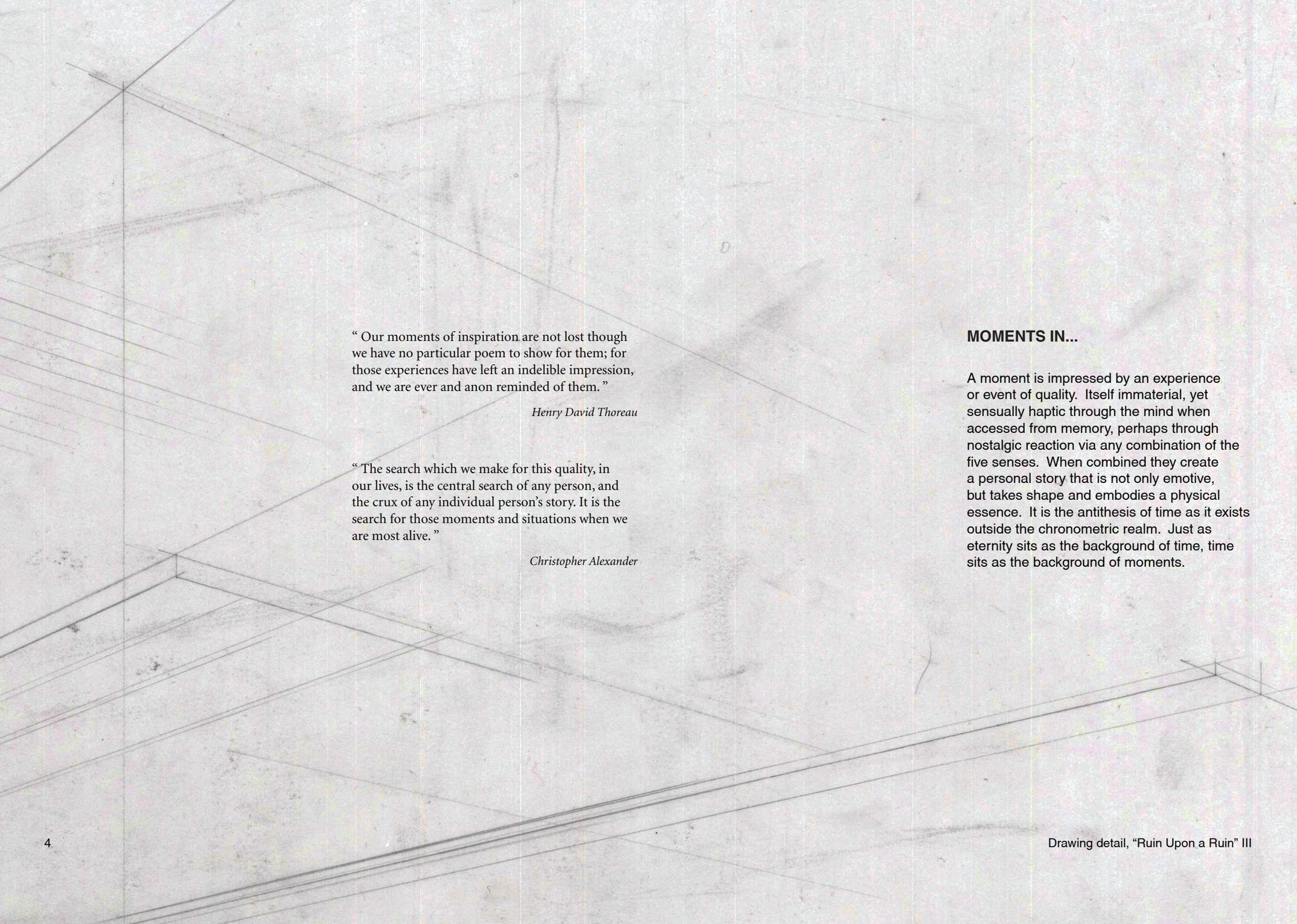


## INTRODUCTION

In the pursuit of progress, the Modern Man attempts to comprehend the otherworldly via the mundane with heedless mechanization of the cosmos not realizing its disruptive influence on the human condition and the anima mundi. In this Age of Information, man's sensibilities and reverence towards nature are losing ground to a newer, intangible form of mechanization, Digitization, which has attained a unique omnipresence in our lifestyles and lives. It now enters our psyche by default thus becoming the norm which, in turn, deceptively gives us a new set of tools and seemingly endless opportunities. Through this canon of binary units, there's an unimpeded ambition to document, understand, and predict the path and fate of the cosmos, with the ultimate goal of perfect replication – the sign of complete dominion.

But... what if the Modern Man was successful in this pursuit of dominion?

How would Architecture interpret, interject and react to this new space?



“ Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them; for those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever and anon reminded of them.”

*Henry David Thoreau*

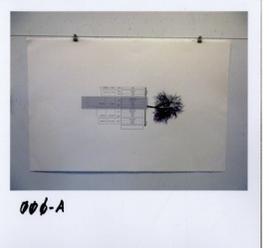
“ The search which we make for this quality, in our lives, is the central search of any person, and the crux of any individual person’s story. It is the search for those moments and situations when we are most alive.”

*Christopher Alexander*

### **MOMENTS IN...**

A moment is impressed by an experience or event of quality. Itself immaterial, yet sensually haptic through the mind when accessed from memory, perhaps through nostalgic reaction via any combination of the five senses. When combined they create a personal story that is not only emotive, but takes shape and embodies a physical essence. It is the antithesis of time as it exists outside the chronometric realm. Just as eternity sits as the background of time, time sits as the background of moments.

A MACHINE FOR IMAGINATION



000-A



001-A



002-B



003-C



004-D



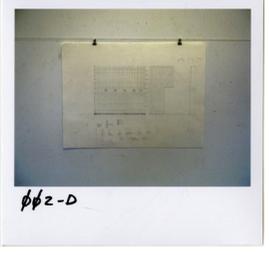
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006-D



007-A



008-B



008-C



008-D



009-A



009-B



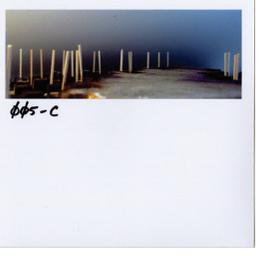
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010-A



010-B



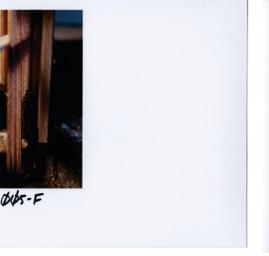
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010-D



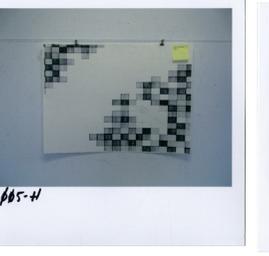
011-E



011-F



011-G



011-H



011-I



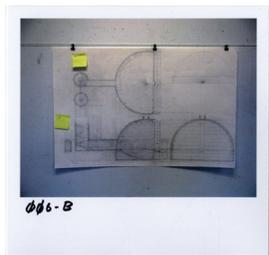
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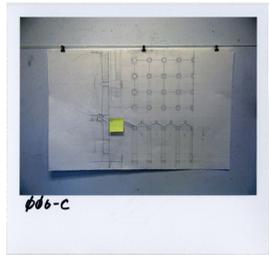
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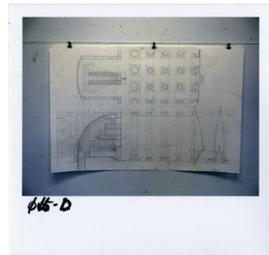
012-A



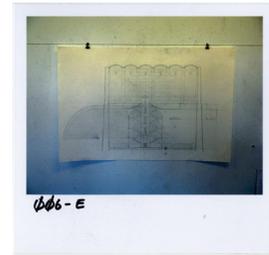
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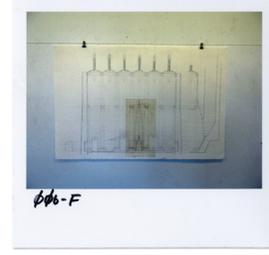
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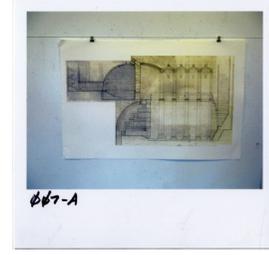
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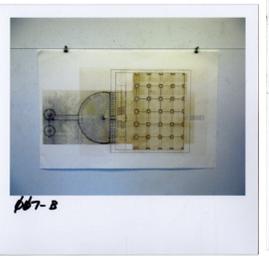
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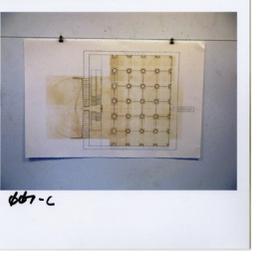
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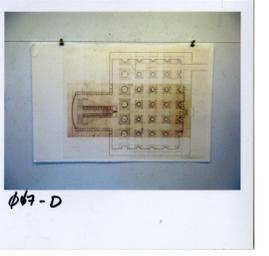
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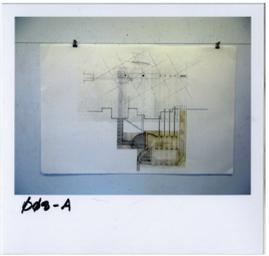
014-B



014-C



014-D



015-A



016-A

Moments in...

“ [The] new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit  
Can well direct him where to look for it ”

*John Donne*

“ ...the renaissance enabled a scientific revolution  
which let scholars look at the world in a different  
light. Religion, superstition, and fear were replaced  
by reason and knowledge.”

*John Desmond Bernal*

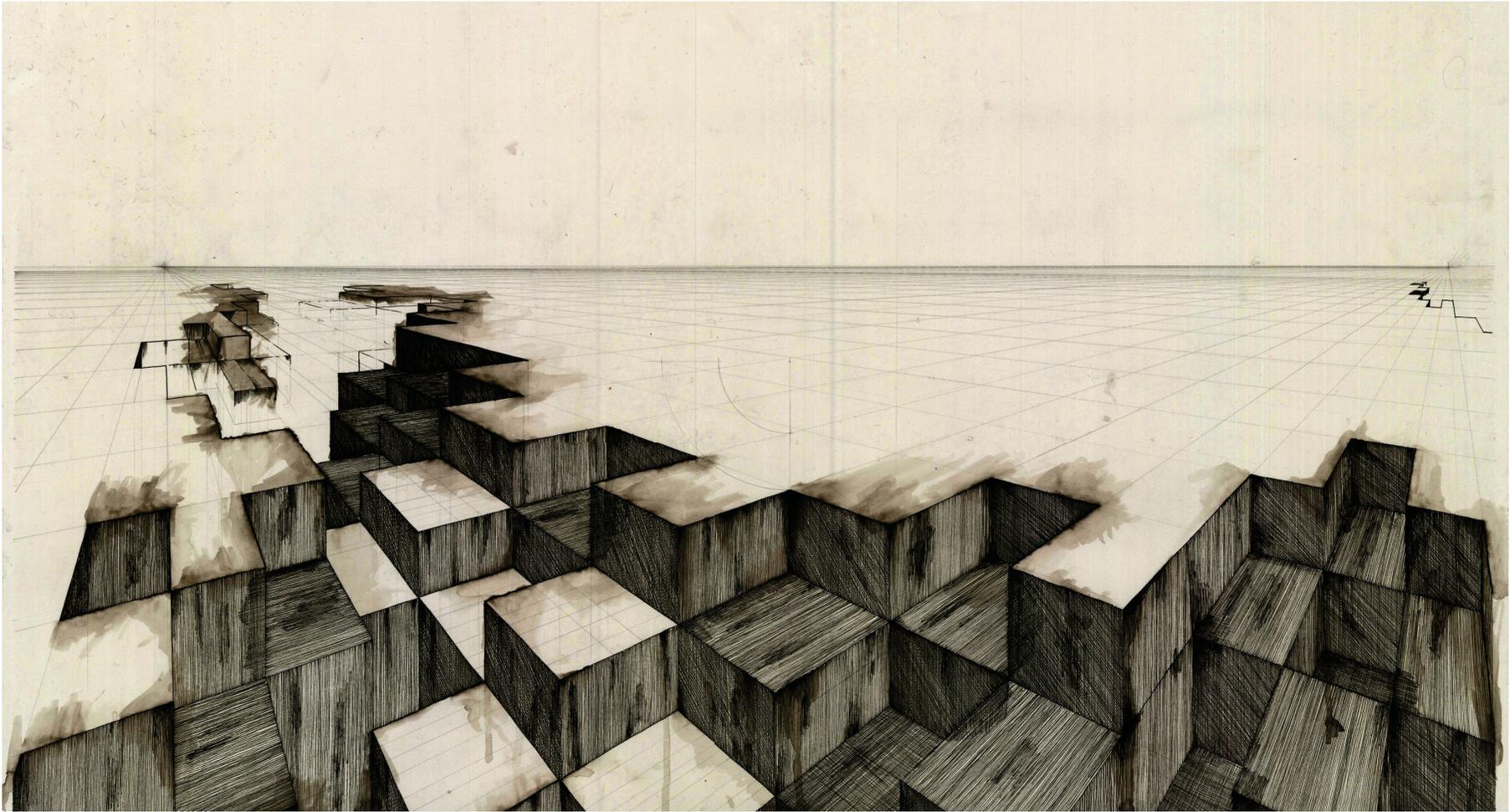
“ The base of society is mythical and narrative and  
not ideological and dialectical.”

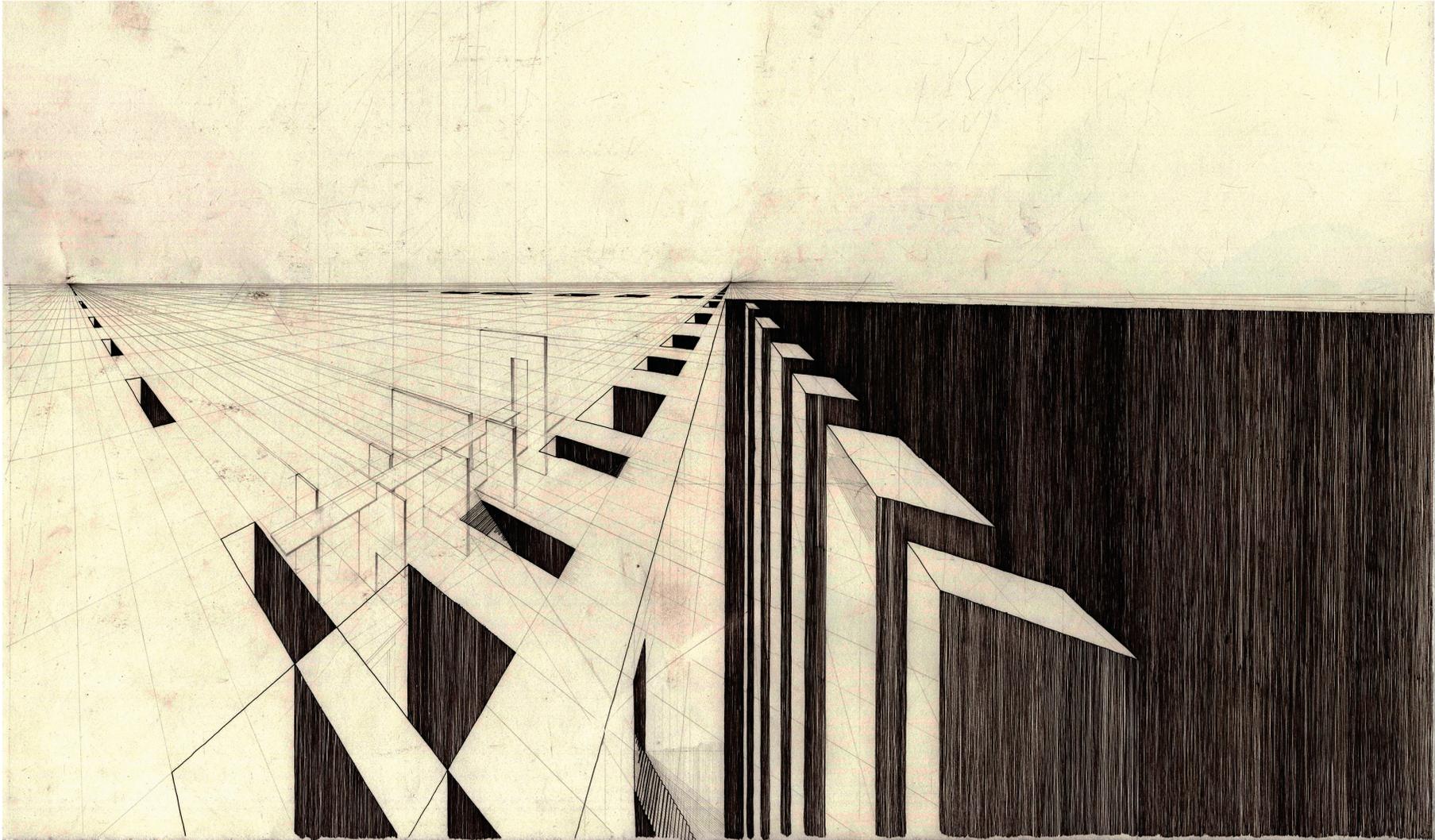
*Northrop Frye*

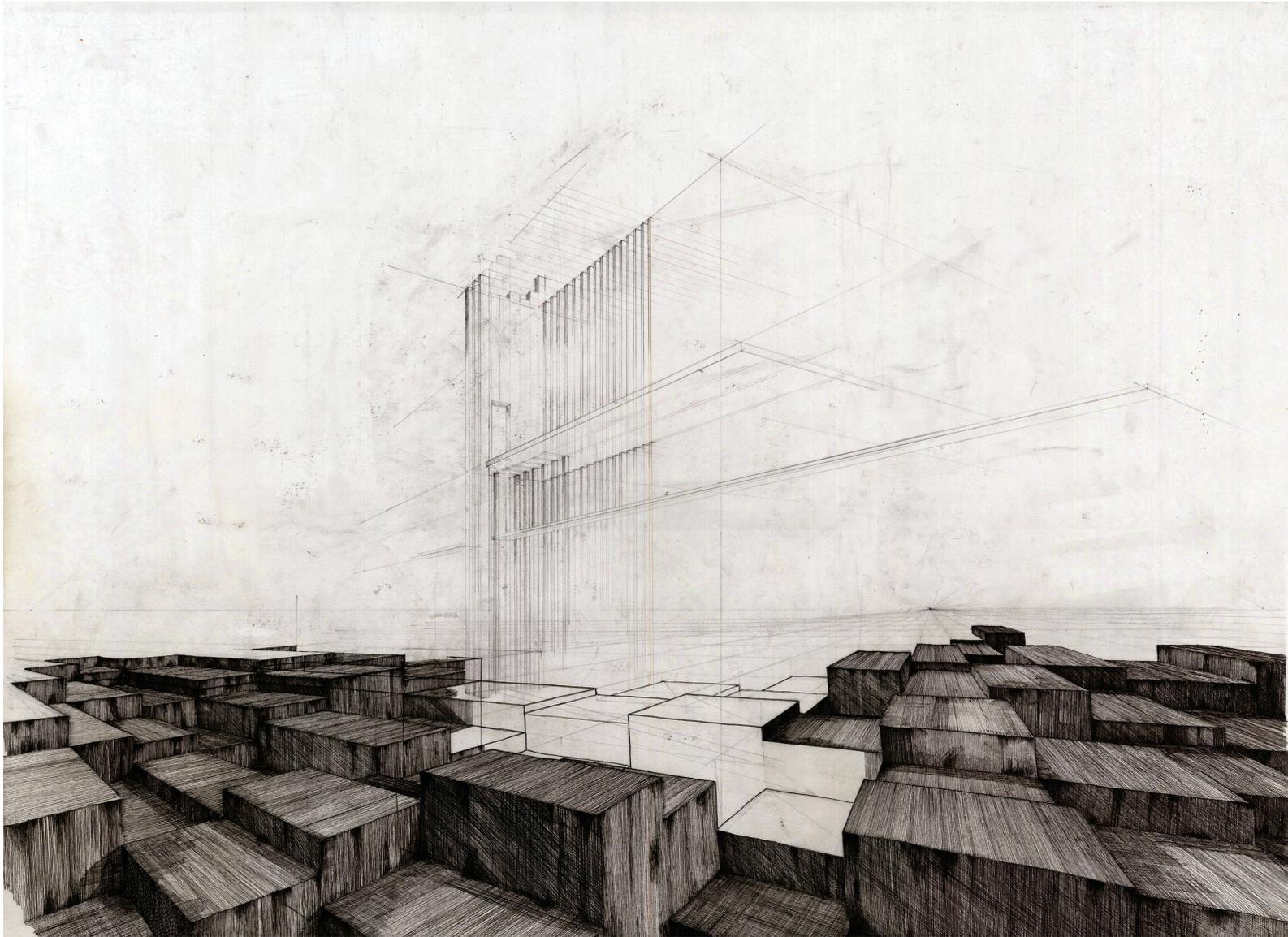
## **RUIN UPON A RUIN**

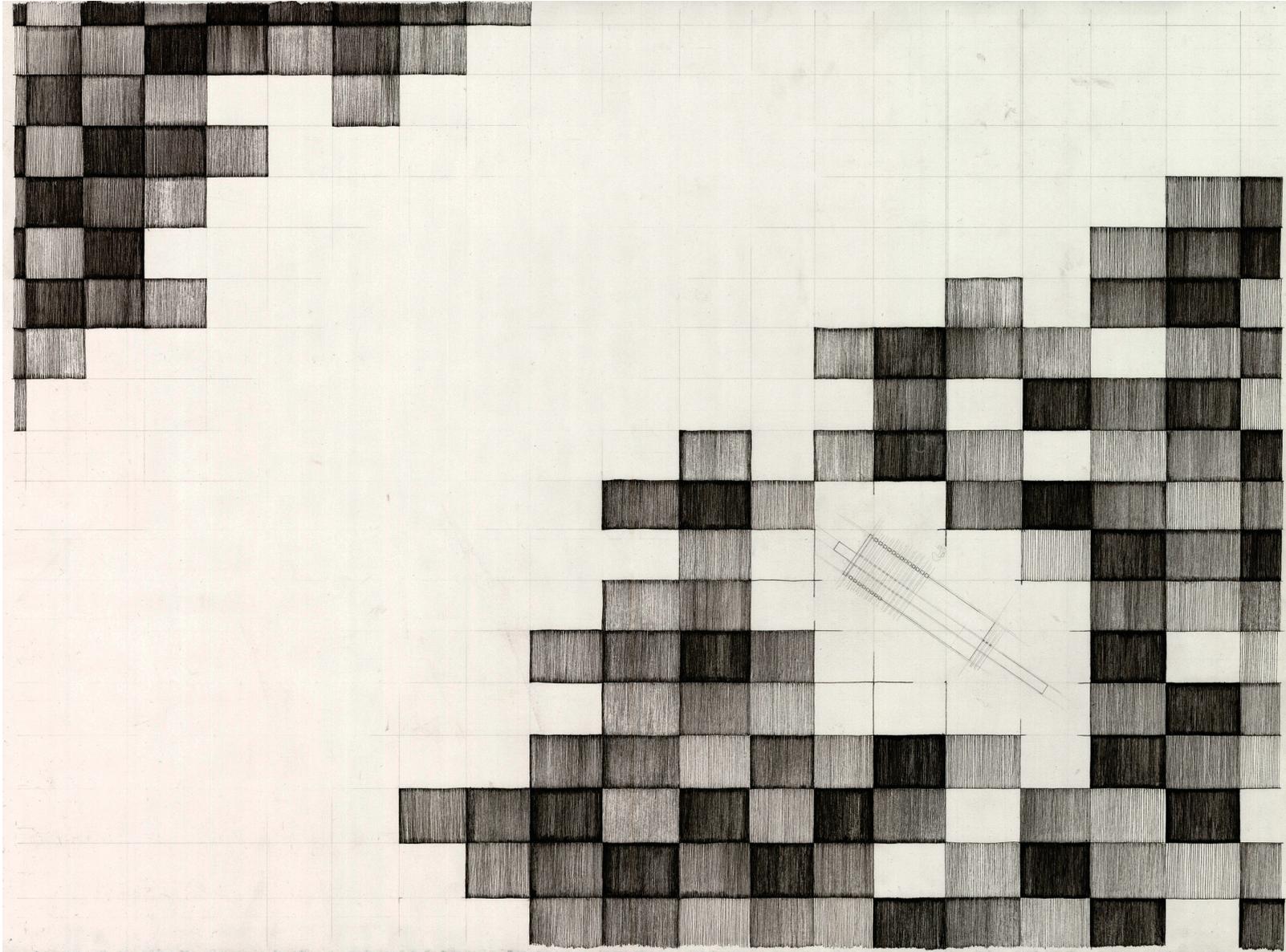
What if the Modern Man's dominion over  
nature was complete?

What if myth is eradicated and truth is  
absolute only through empirical evidence?

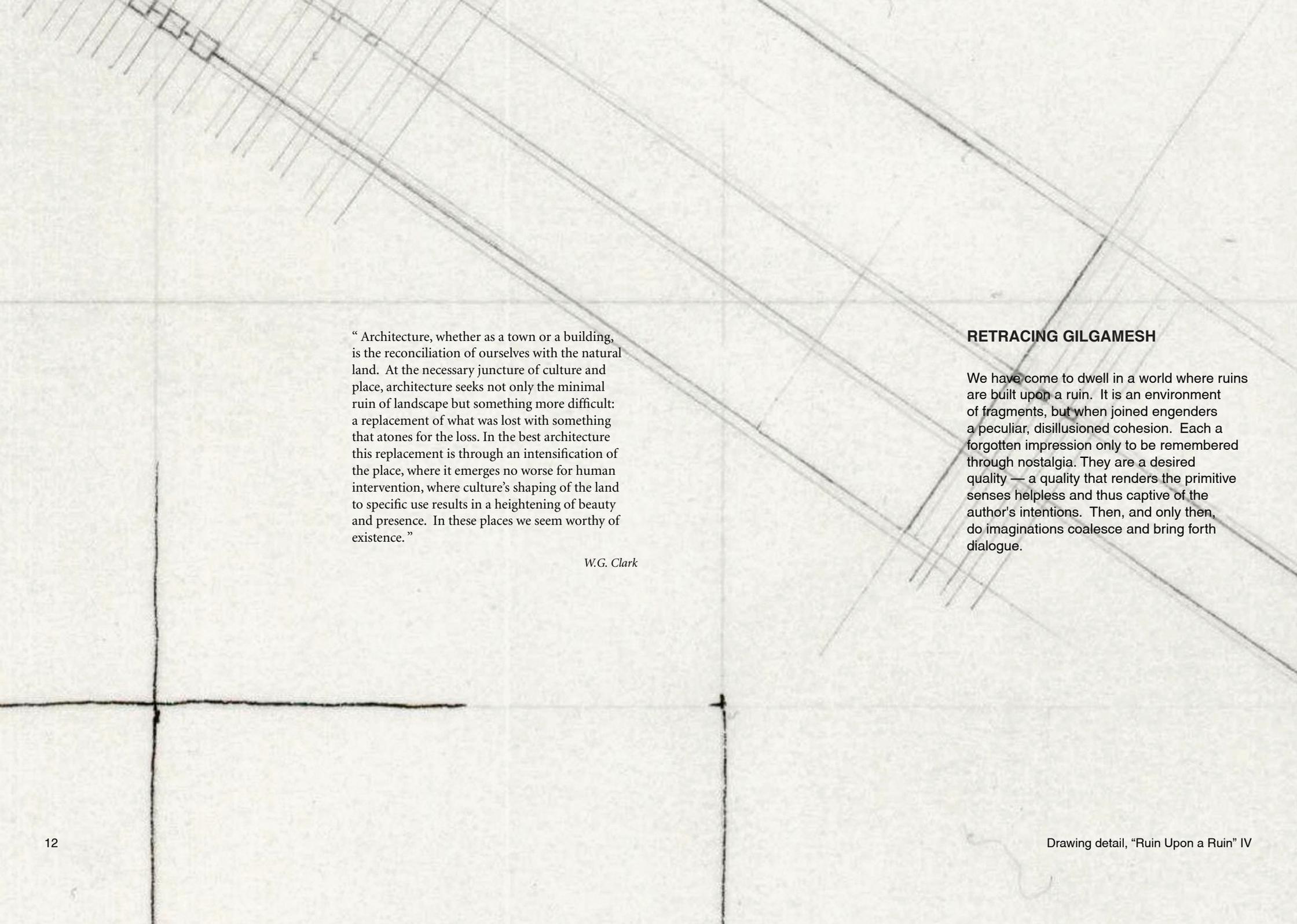










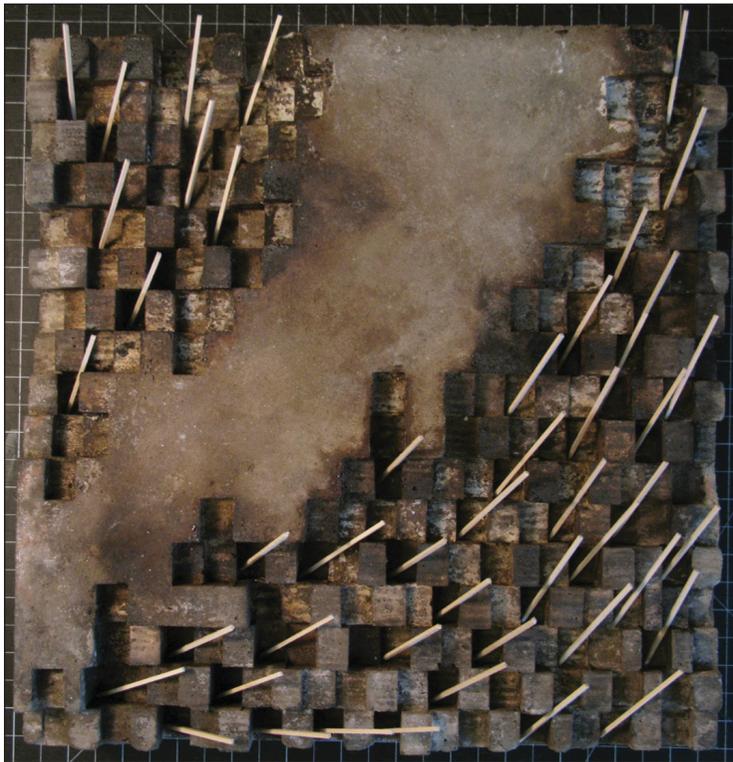
The background of the page is a detailed architectural drawing. It features a grid of thin, light-colored lines. A prominent diagonal line runs from the top left towards the bottom right. In the upper left corner, there are several small, rectangular shapes arranged in a row, possibly representing a row of buildings or a specific structural element. The overall style is that of a technical or conceptual architectural sketch.

“ Architecture, whether as a town or a building, is the reconciliation of ourselves with the natural land. At the necessary juncture of culture and place, architecture seeks not only the minimal ruin of landscape but something more difficult: a replacement of what was lost with something that atones for the loss. In the best architecture this replacement is through an intensification of the place, where it emerges no worse for human intervention, where culture’s shaping of the land to specific use results in a heightening of beauty and presence. In these places we seem worthy of existence.”

*W.G. Clark*

### **RETRACING GILGAMESH**

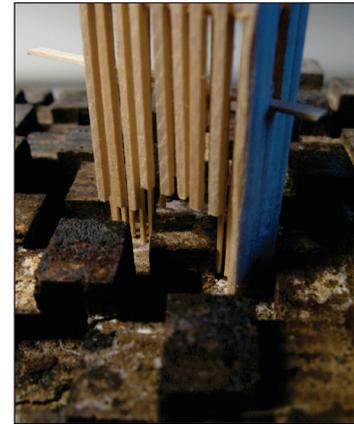
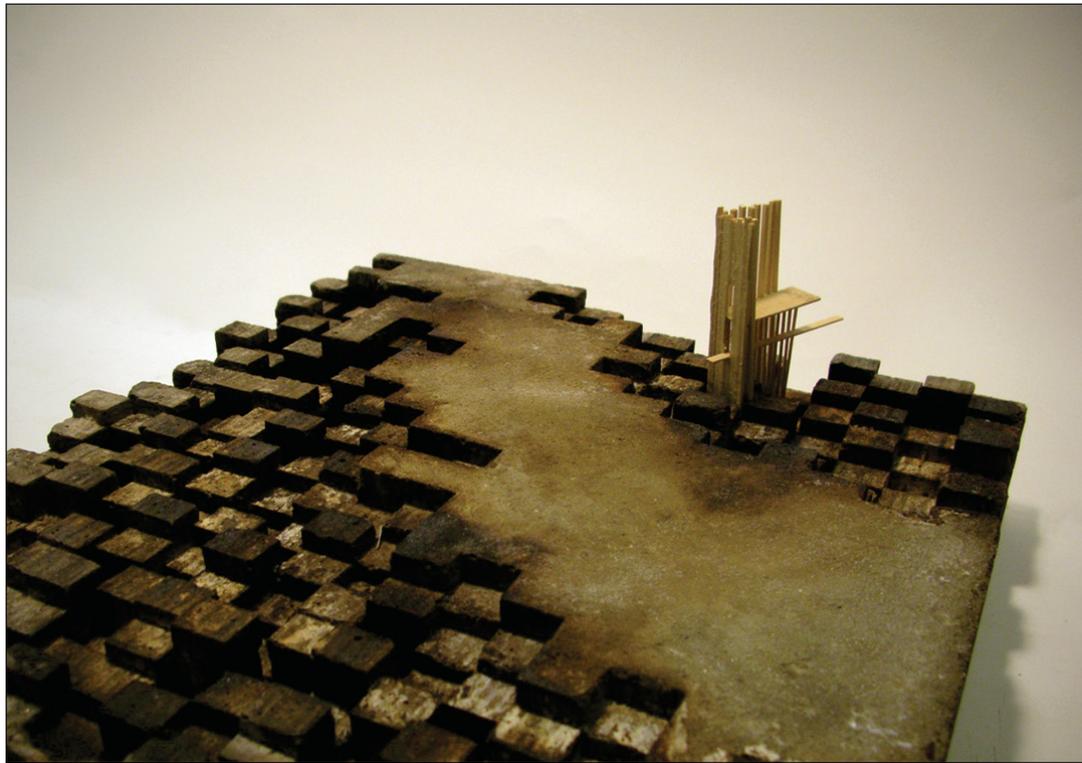
We have come to dwell in a world where ruins are built upon a ruin. It is an environment of fragments, but when joined engenders a peculiar, disillusioned cohesion. Each a forgotten impression only to be remembered through nostalgia. They are a desired quality — a quality that renders the primitive senses helpless and thus captive of the author’s intentions. Then, and only then, do imaginations coalesce and bring forth dialogue.

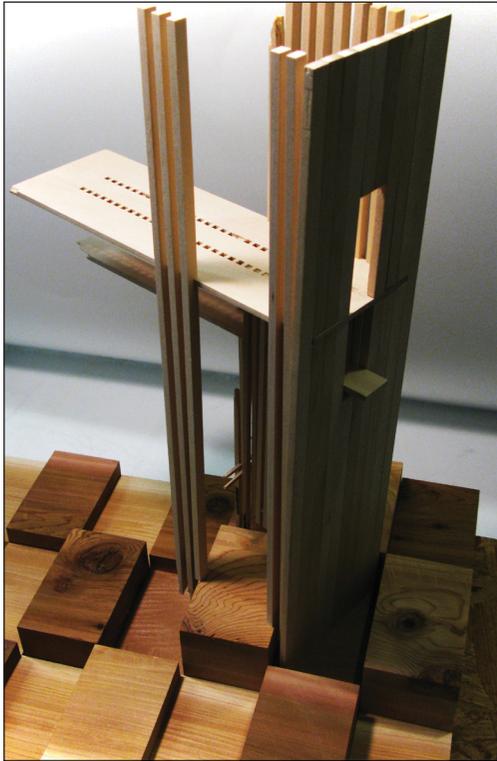


Pixelscape A1



Pixelscape study A2  
Pixelscape study B





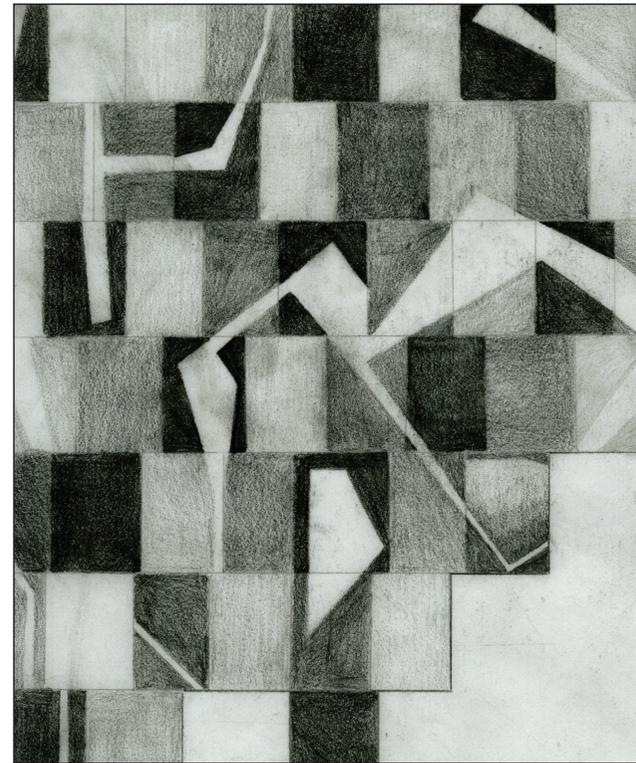
Ruin model B

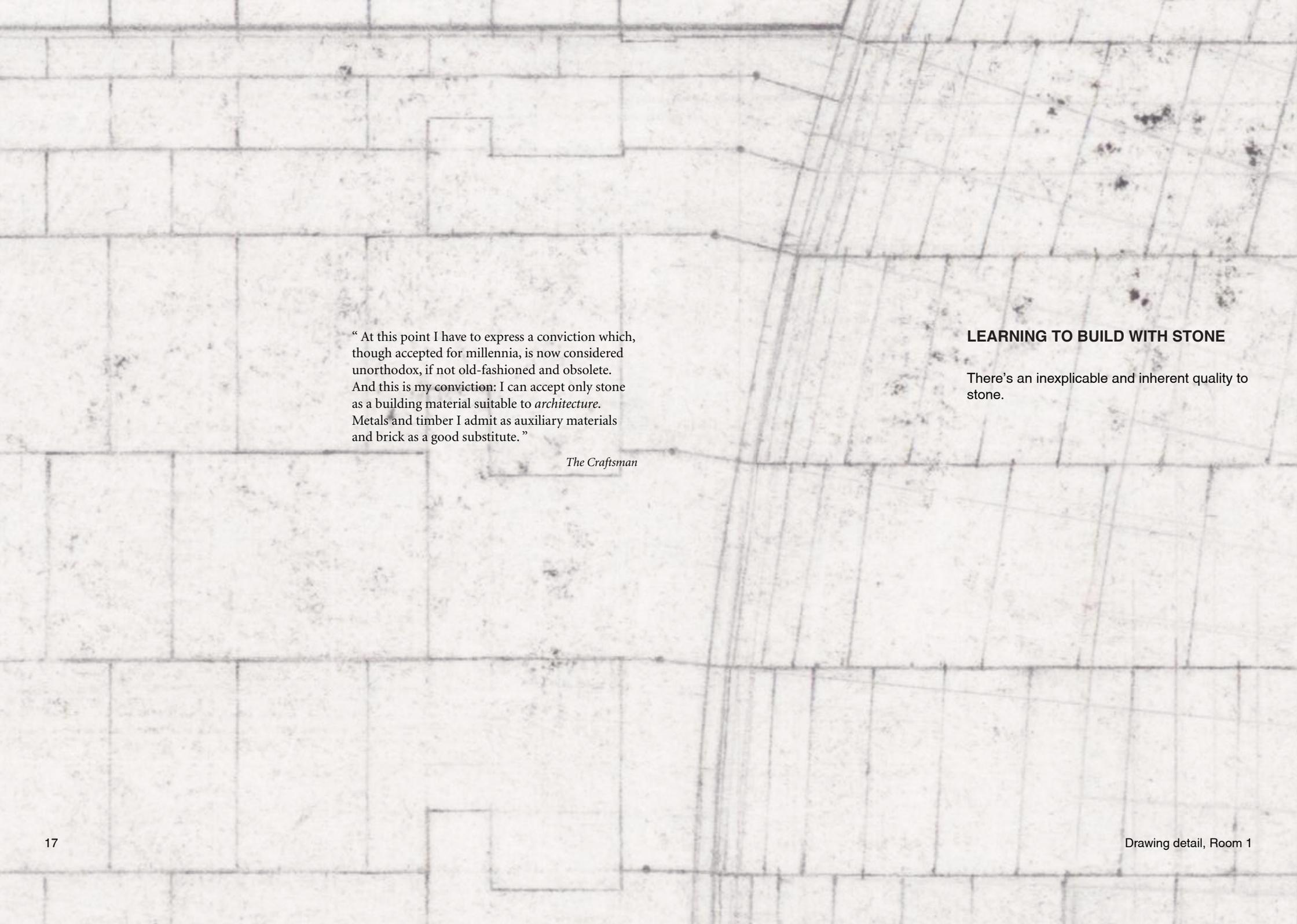


Detail



Detail



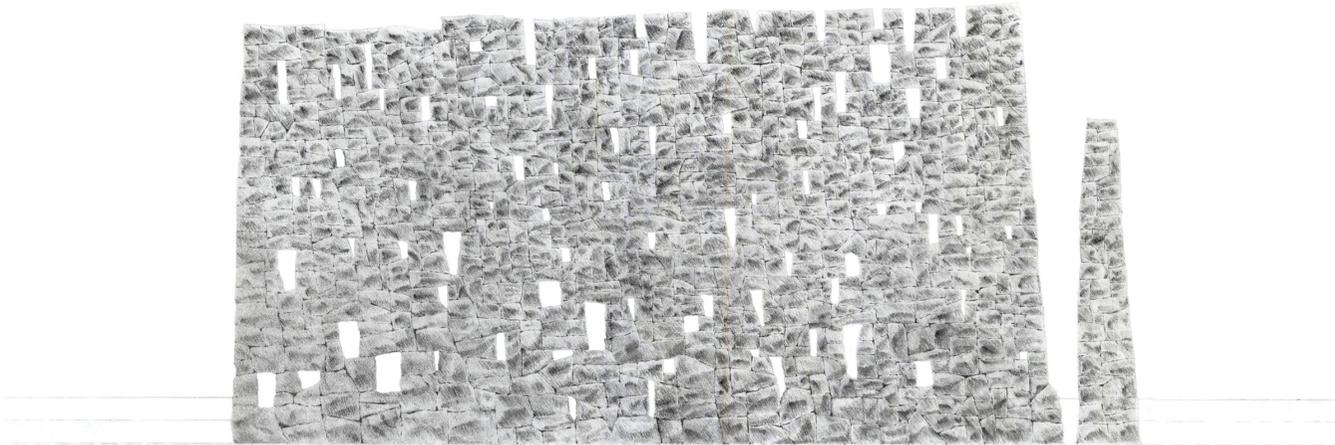
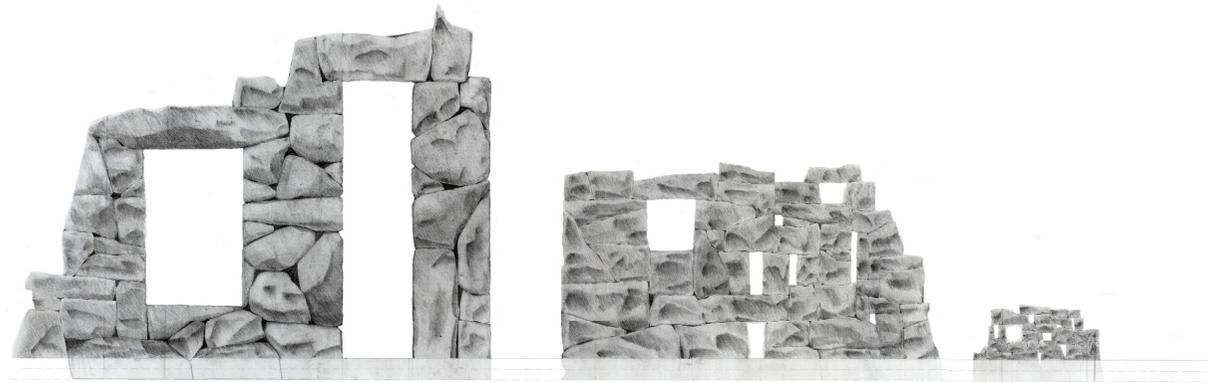


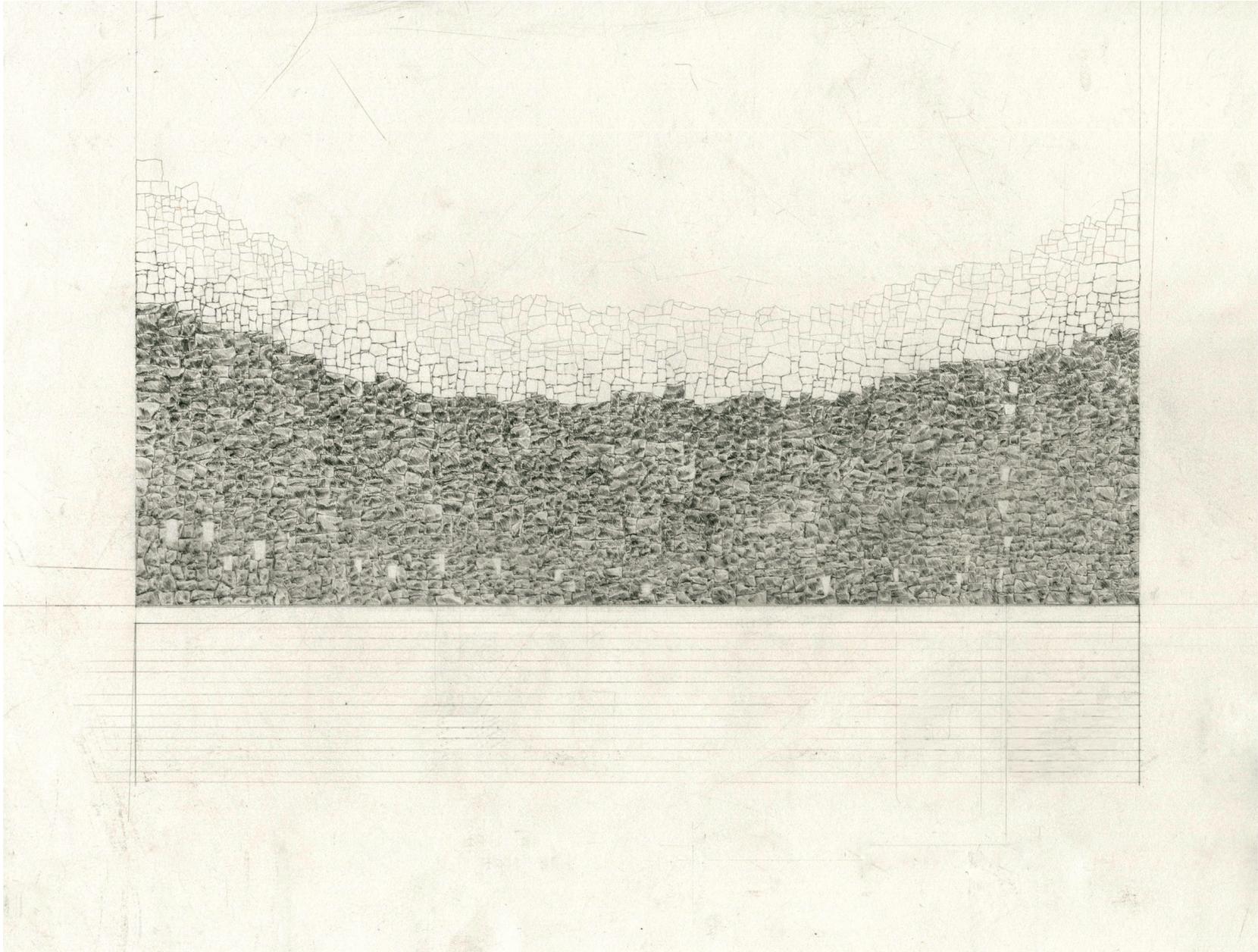
“ At this point I have to express a conviction which, though accepted for millennia, is now considered unorthodox, if not old-fashioned and obsolete. And this is my conviction: I can accept only stone as a building material suitable to *architecture*. Metals and timber I admit as auxiliary materials and brick as a good substitute.”

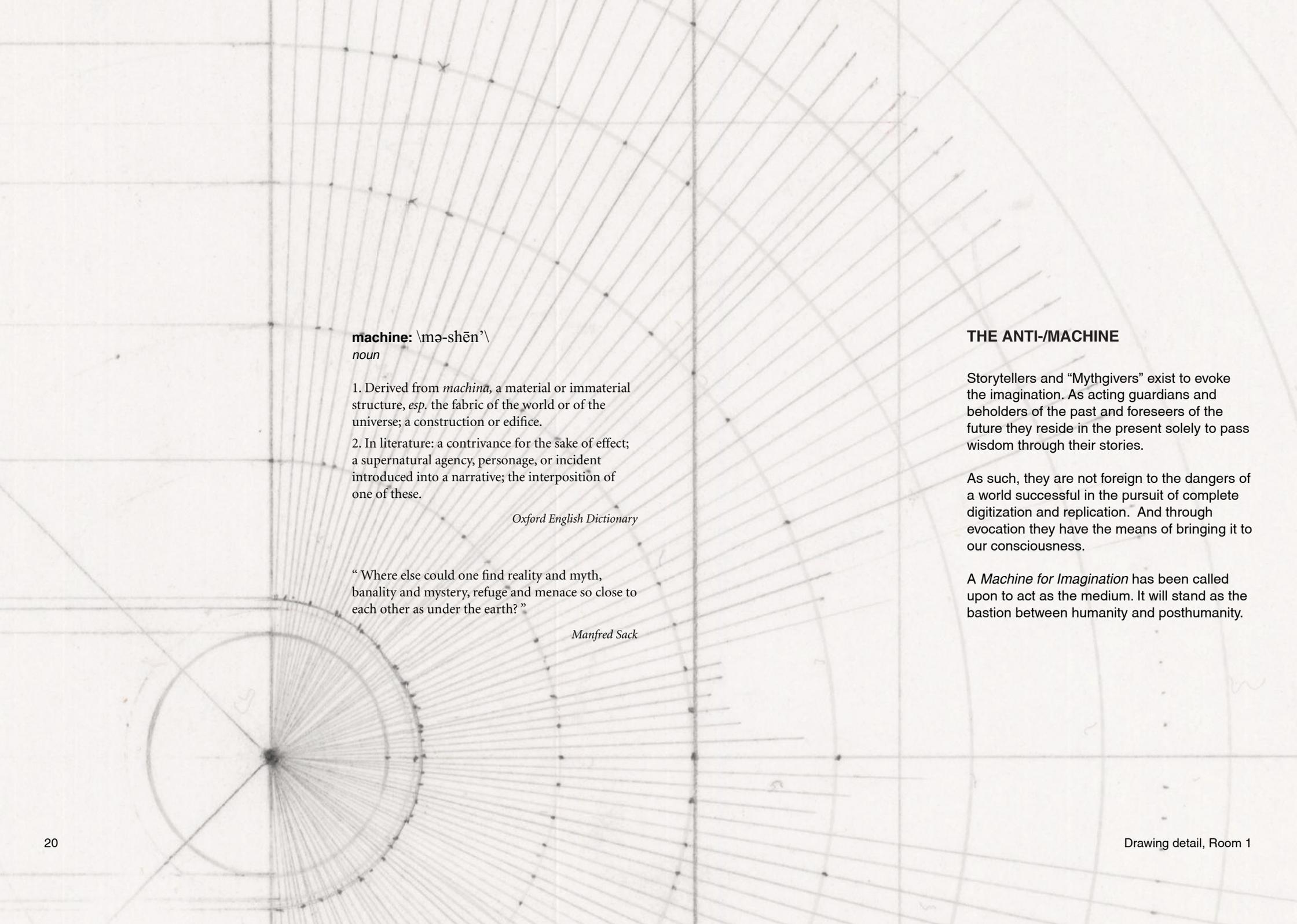
*The Craftsman*

## LEARNING TO BUILD WITH STONE

There's an inexplicable and inherent quality to stone.







**machine:** \mə-shēn'\  
*noun*

1. Derived from *machina*, a material or immaterial structure, *esp.* the fabric of the world or of the universe; a construction or edifice.
2. In literature: a contrivance for the sake of effect; a supernatural agency, personage, or incident introduced into a narrative; the interposition of one of these.

*Oxford English Dictionary*

“Where else could one find reality and myth, banality and mystery, refuge and menace so close to each other as under the earth?”

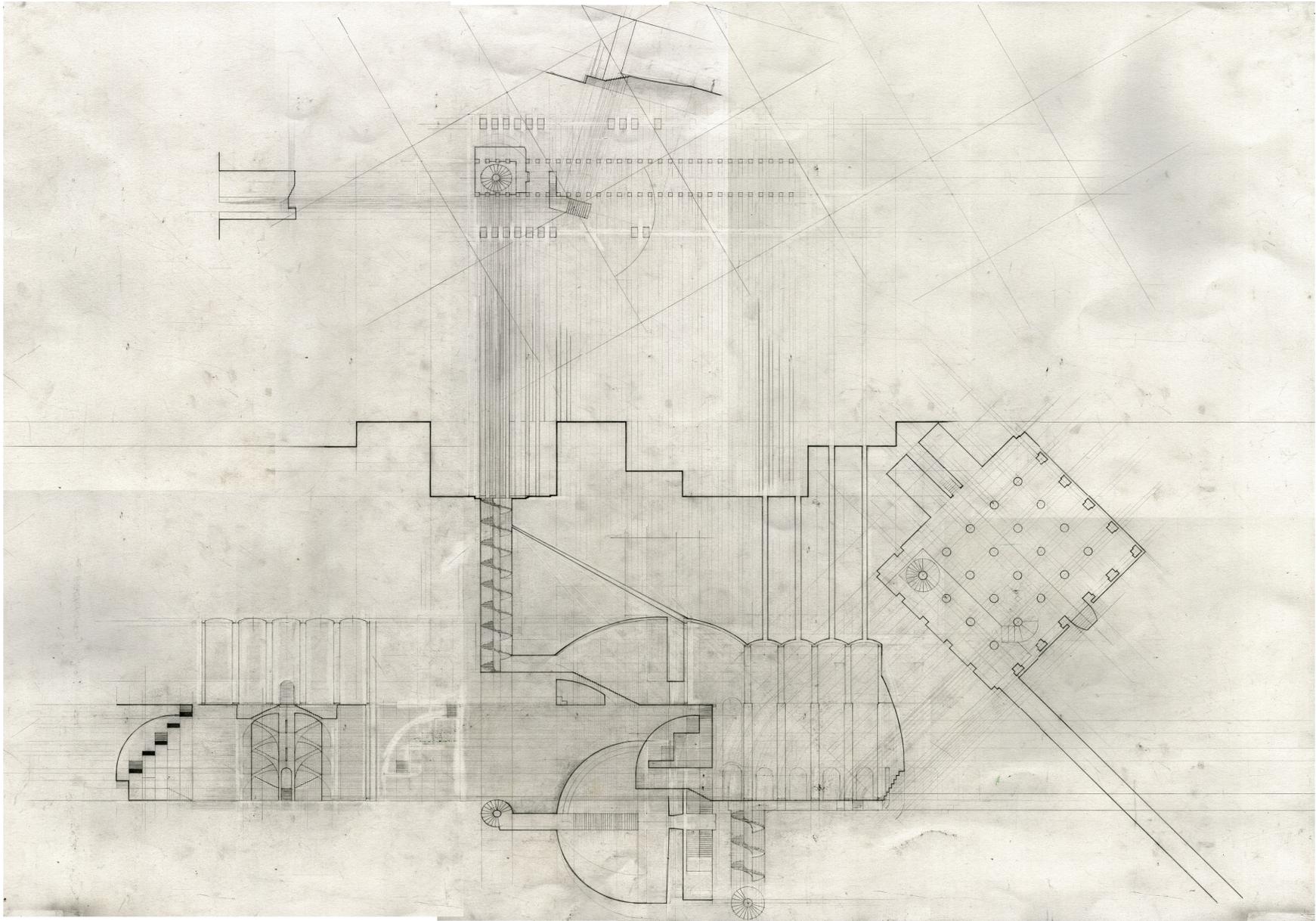
*Manfred Sack*

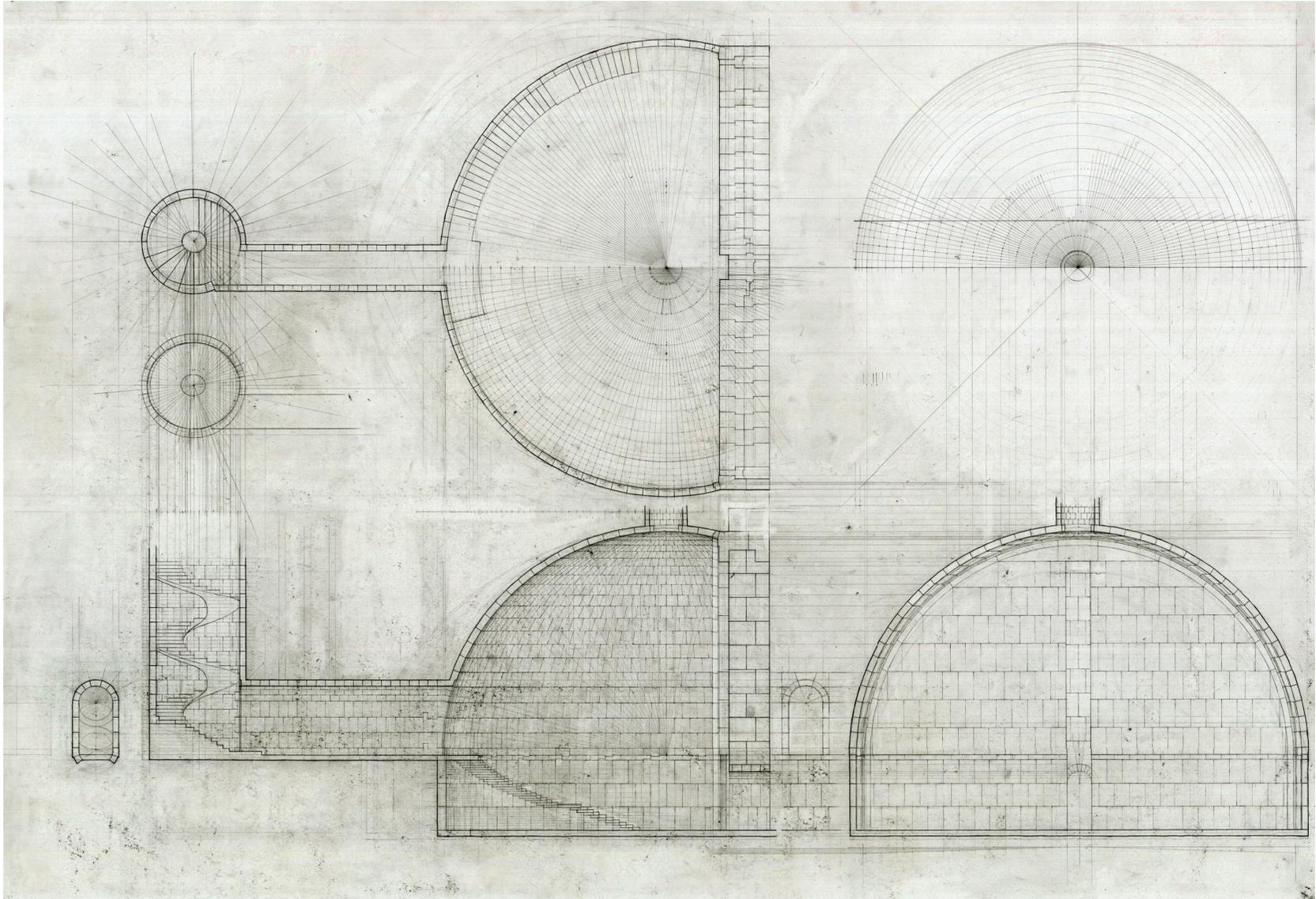
## THE ANTI-MACHINE

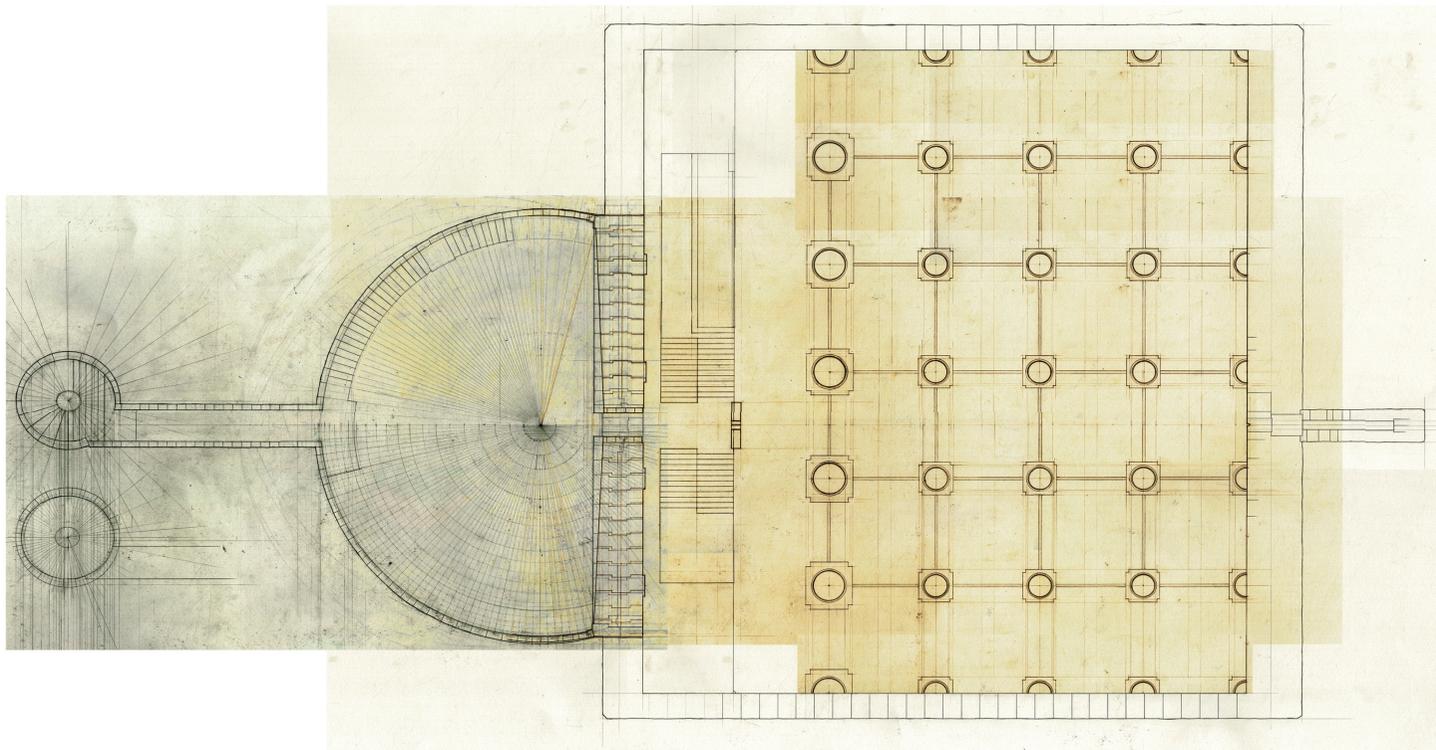
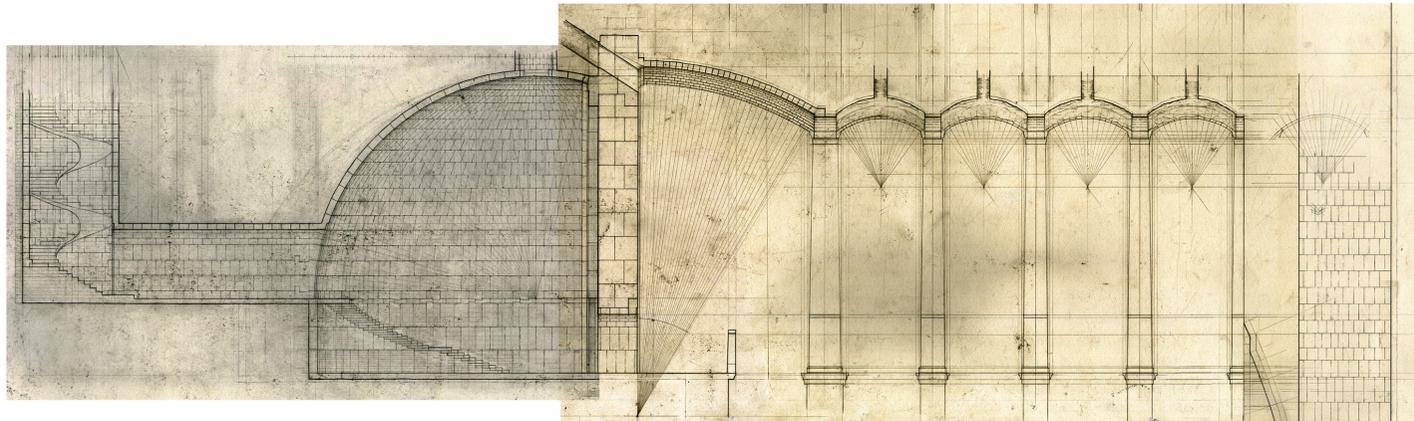
Storytellers and “Mythgivers” exist to evoke the imagination. As acting guardians and beholders of the past and foreseers of the future they reside in the present solely to pass wisdom through their stories.

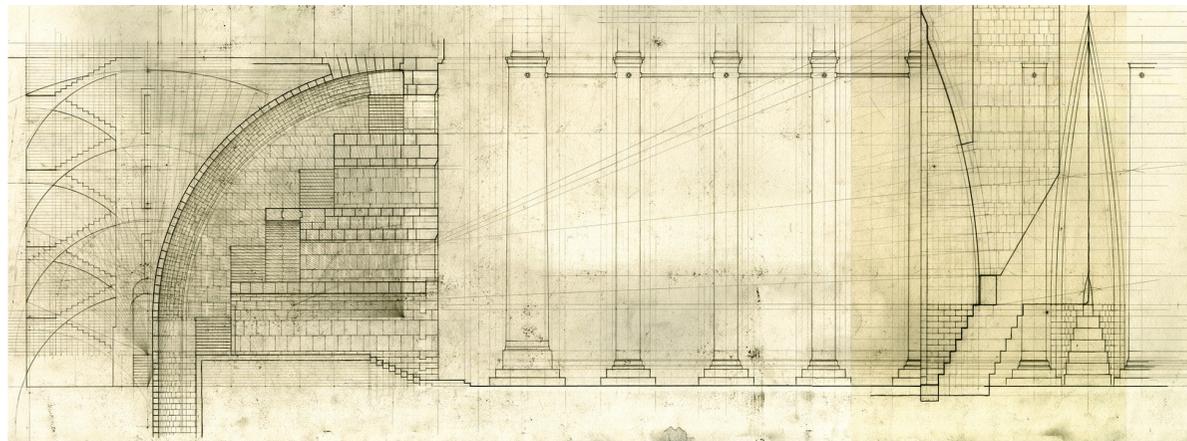
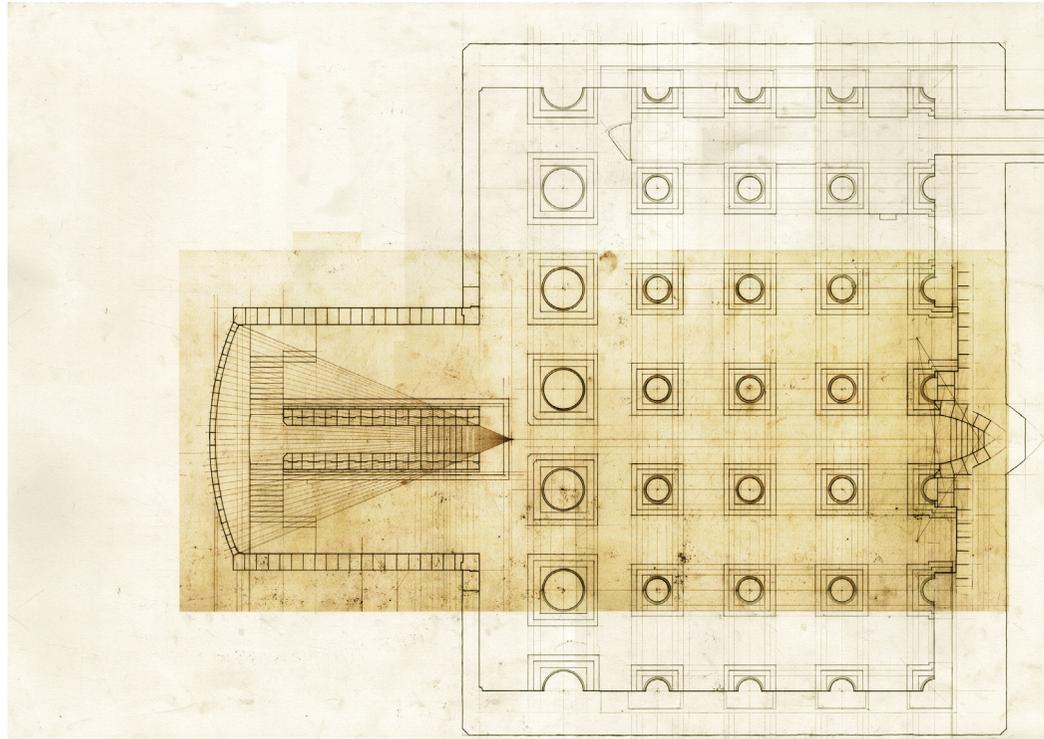
As such, they are not foreign to the dangers of a world successful in the pursuit of complete digitization and replication. And through evocation they have the means of bringing it to our consciousness.

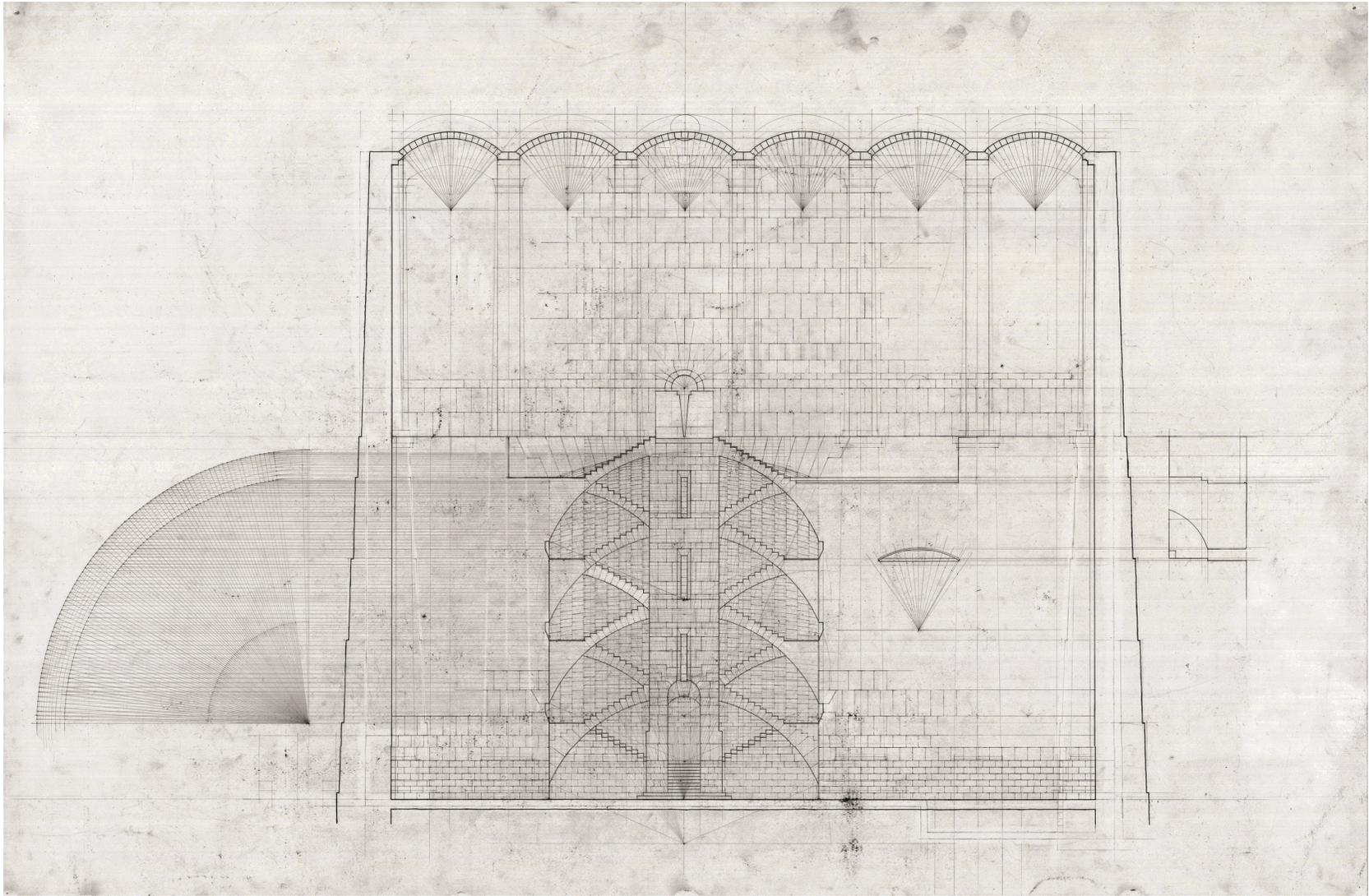
A *Machine for Imagination* has been called upon to act as the medium. It will stand as the bastion between humanity and posthumanity.

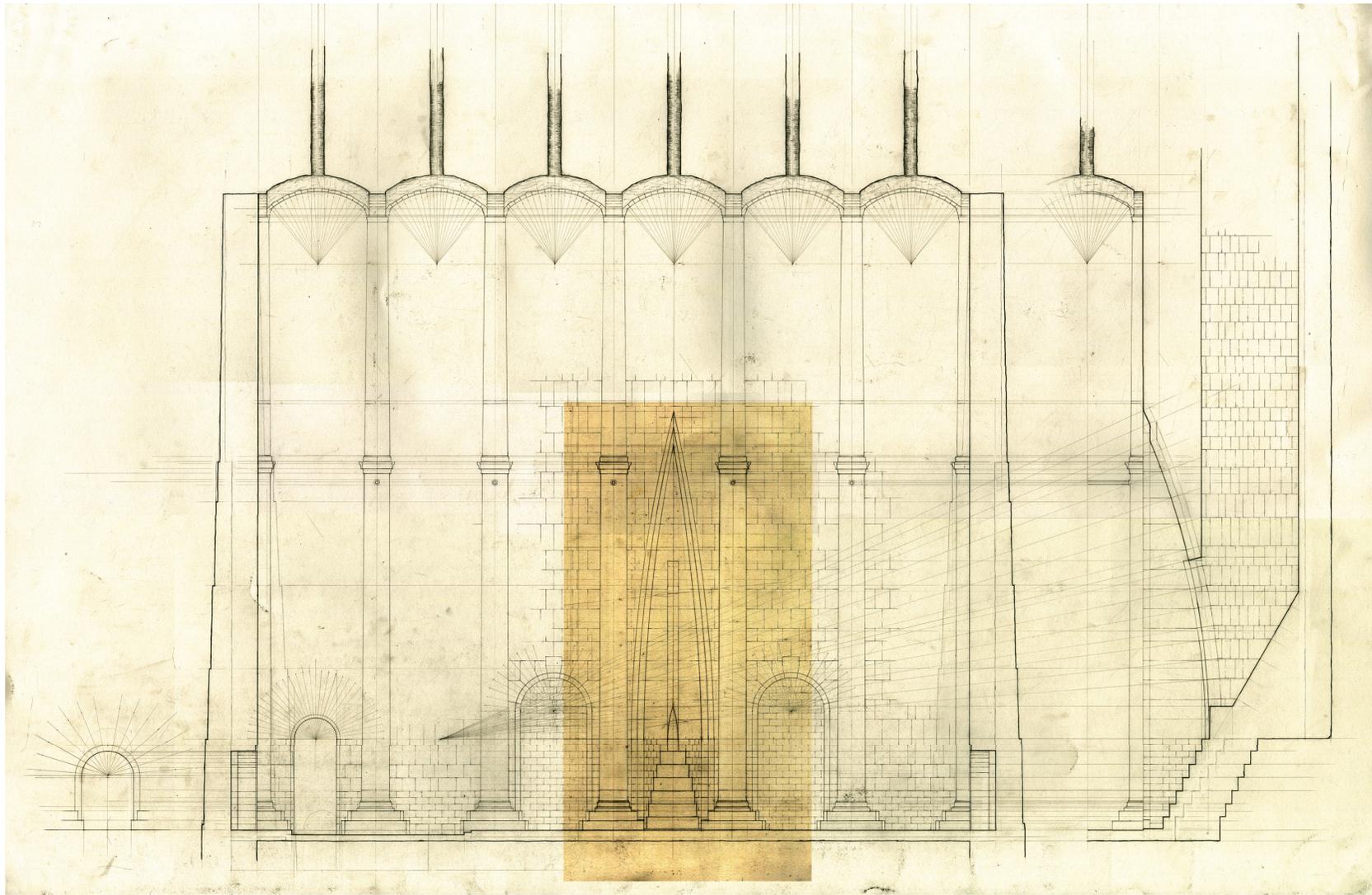


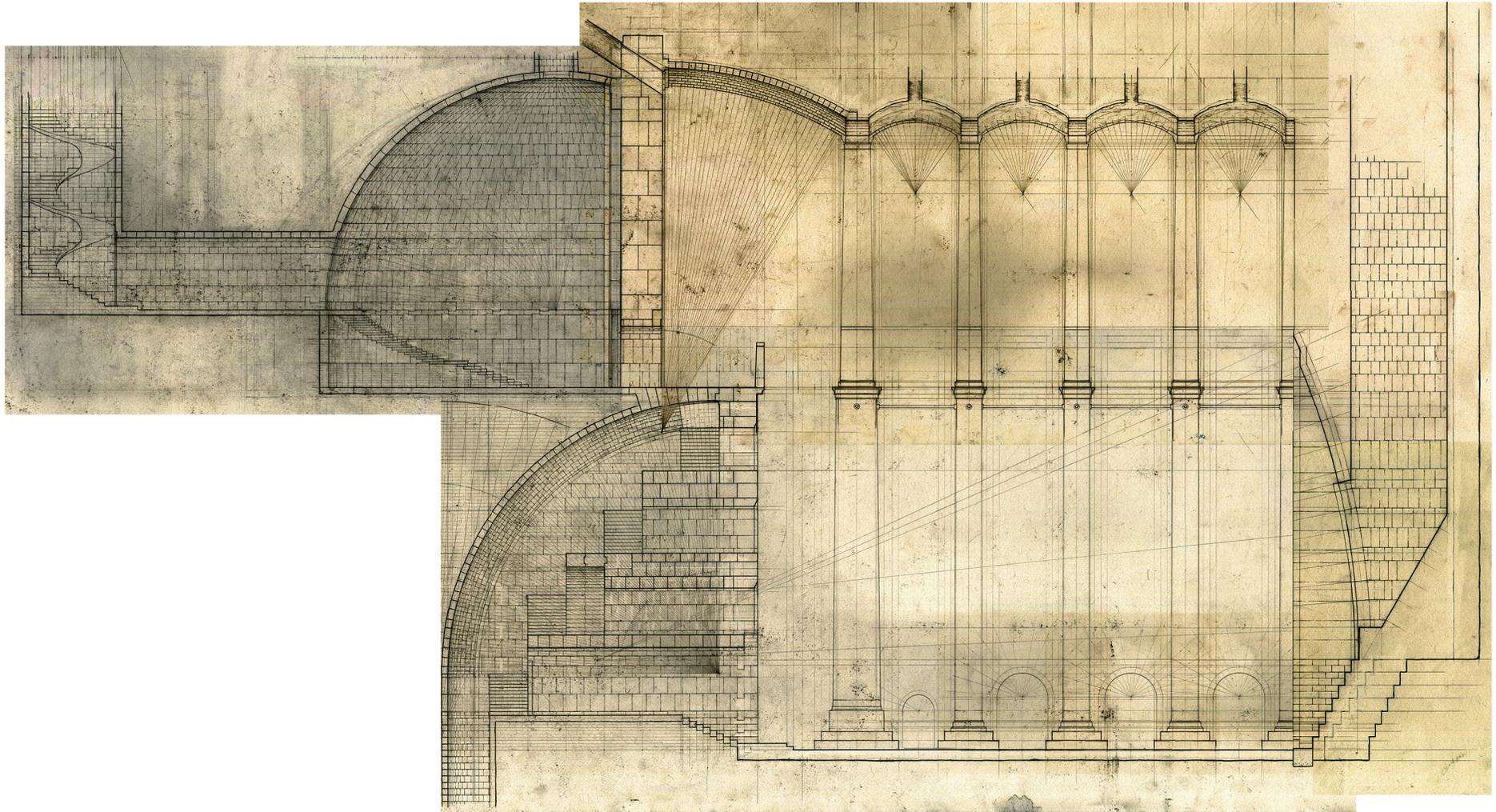


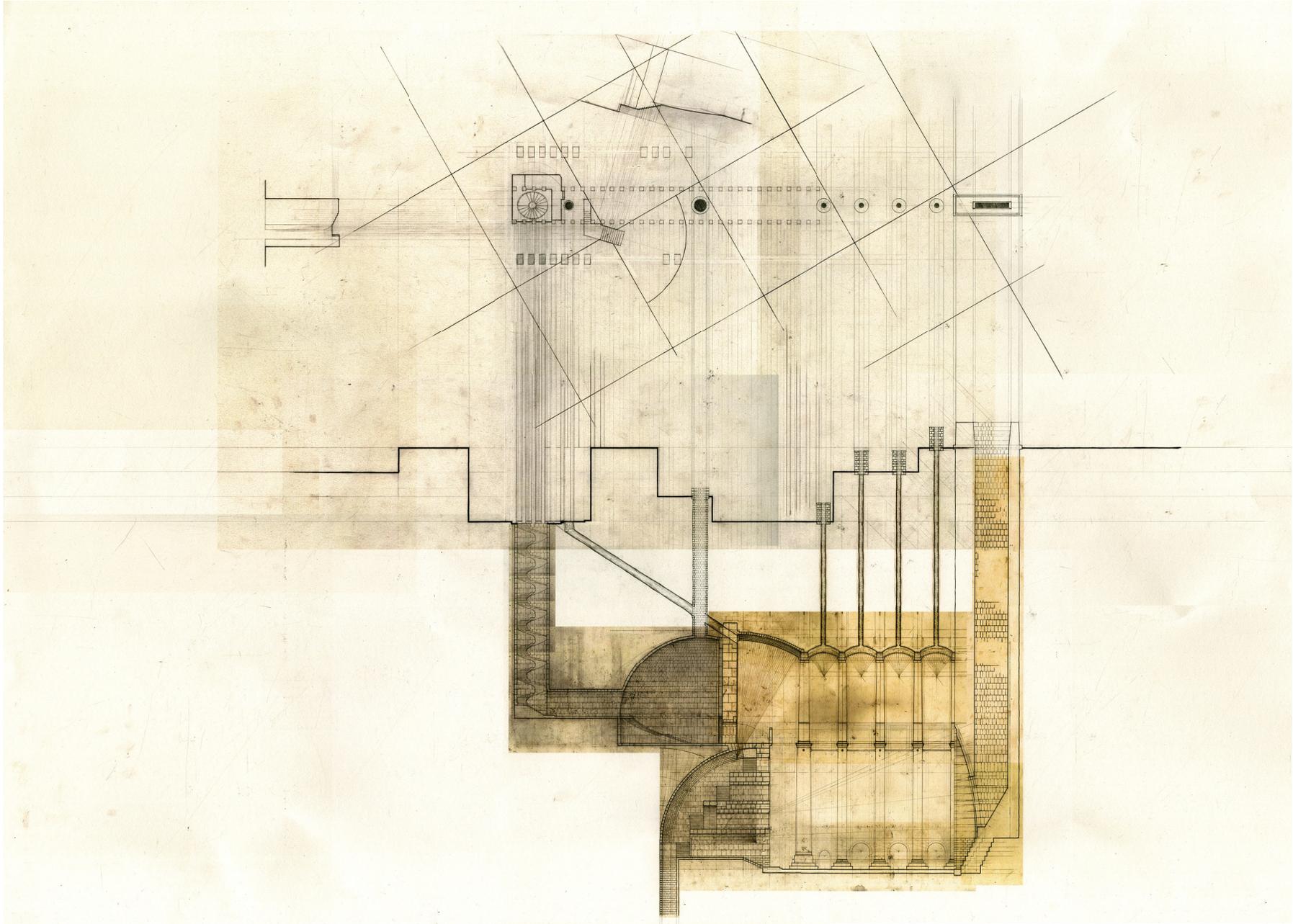




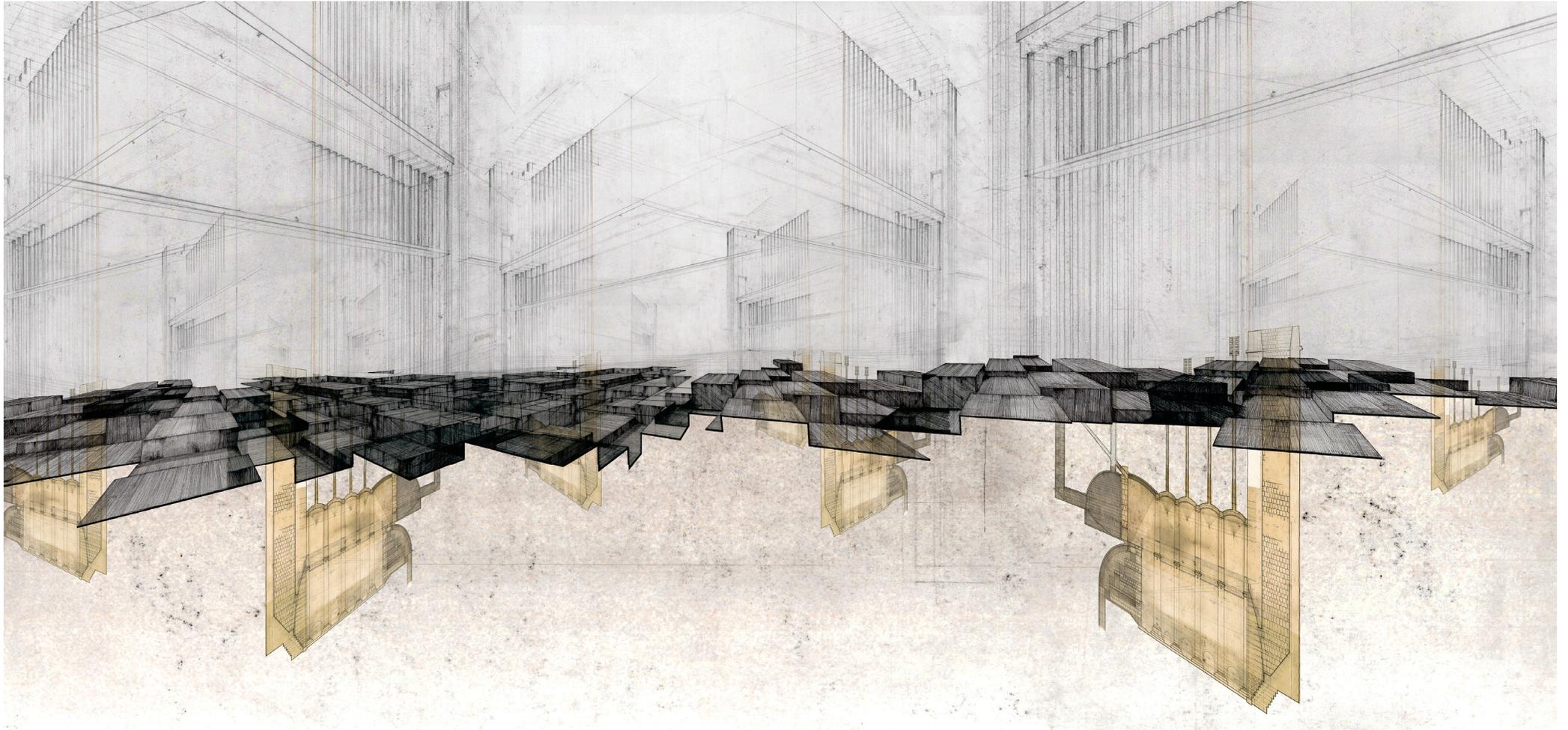












**END CREDITS**

## A MACHINE FOR IMAGINATION

Tofan Rafati

### I AM CONTEMPLATIVE

What is, was, and ought to be?

What is the relationship between Architecture and Nature?

What is the relationship between Man and Nature?

What is the relationship between me and Nature?

What ought to be the relationship between Man and Nature?

What ought be the relationship between Architecture and Nature?

Should we destroy nature or should we destroy ourselves?

Is Architecture an alchemy of dualities?

Is Architecture a resistance?

What are the desires of my Architecture?

What is common sense?

Does common sense exist? Does it act as a limitation?

What are the limits of this world?

How do we start over?

What hasn't been scorched?

If a body is not instrumental, then what would it be?

What has happened to us as disembodied beings?

Does myth equal truth?

What if myth is eradicated and truth is found and becomes absolute through empirical evidence?

What does it mean to wander?

What does Architecture represent?

Are there limits to our desires?

What are the limits of imagination?

"Is it theoretically possible for a finite state digital computer, provided with a large but finite table of instructions, or program, to provide responses to questions that would fool an unknowing interrogator into thinking it is a human being?" - *A.M. Turing*

Can machine have a destiny? If so, are a machines' destiny created by man?

If man and nature are one and the same is what's created by man part of the same thing?

Is the subterranean world the absolute manufactured world?  
Can man really *make* anything?  
What if one cannot depict his or her desires?  
Which modern or contemporary buildings would withstand time and become revered?  
Can man be truly autonomous?

Is theory still relevant?  
What is Cybernetics? What is the history of Cybernetics and Architecture? How can architecture respond to Prosthetics?  
What the hell is a thesis?  
Can I use literature devices as a method to conceive architecture?  
What am I interested in? What am I looking for? Why do I like ruins so much? Why do I like stone so much?  
What is Architecture? What is the difference between Architecture and Building?  
How has technology affected the quality of our relationships?  
How has technology affected or influenced the relationship with reality?  
How has technology affected or influenced the relationship between Man and Nature?  
What is a hacker? What does a hacker do? What is the character of the hacker? What does he need and desire? In what world does he live in and how does he perceive the world?  
Who can I use as my mentor? Who are my Architect allies?  
What is Irony? What is Absurdism?  
What are some of the dualities?  
What is my desire? When do I start with the How? What is the How?  
What is mytho-poetics?  
How do I define nature?  
What is meaning and is it created through abstract or direct relationships?  
Can Architecture be used as a Critique (of the current state of humanity)?  
What is a moment in Architecture?  
What is the difference between Architecture and Building?  
Am I ever going to finish my thesis? What is my thesis?  
What is absurdism?  
What are the limits of Architecture?  
What are the limits of Architectural drawing?  
What's the relationship between common sense and absurdism?  
Where does Architecture end and art/illustration/phansm begin?  
How far can I push it?  
Can successful alchemy exist between the two worlds and still retain a plausible architecture?  
How do you make a "good" space?  
How do I define humanity? The human condition? The human spirit?  
Why does my Architecture come out to be monumental?  
How does my Architecture respond to the speculative world?  
What is "speculation"? What is "speculative architecture"?  
How is it speculative?  
Who are the characters in my world?  
What does it mean to be an active participant vs. observer of the moment?  
What is the relationship between storytelling and architecture?  
Where does the character come from?  
Are there monsters in Architecture?  
Can I imagine myself in this space?  
How does the space frame my body?  
Is this related to narrative?  
What does it mean to be instrumental versus technological?  
What is the definition of imagination?

What is a machine?  
What does Le Corbusier think about machines?  
What does Kant think about imagination?  
What does Islamic Philosophy think about imagination and reality?  
What does Husserl think about imagination?  
Can Architecture exist only with artificial light?  
What's the relationship between imagination, storytelling, ritual, folk-tales, fiction, and mythology?  
What am I deliberating?  
Is there a relationship between mysticism and Architecture?  
What is plausible Architecture?  
What is narrative and its relationship with Architecture?  
Do I have any intellectual allies?  
Is Digitization a form of or an evolution of Mechanization or neither?  
Is a *visceral* space conceivable?  
Can it be a place for storytelling or just benign?  
Should this first space have a program, a function or utilization?  
How do you construct "good" space?  
What flavor hookah do I want to smoke tonight?  
What is it doing?  
How is it doing it?  
What is it about?  
What Matters? How do you Evaluate?  
Is it a space For Imagination? Of Imagination? About Imagination? (J. Bassett)  
How am I going to write about this?  
What does my Architecture represent?  
Is there such thing as a ritual of space(s)?  
Is harmony always associated with sacred and/or ritual and vice versa?  
Could the created spaces be for busts of past storytellers?  
What do I do next?  
How do I draw it to make it instrumental?  
What is my condition?  
What is the condition of my thesis?  
Is my thesis a criticism of the current and future human condition?  
How is this damn ruin constructed?  
Is there a metric?  
Could I benefit from using a Cartesian frame?  
What's an Architecture in "Motion"? What's "Still" Architecture?  
Should it be inhabitable?  
What Was, Is, and Ought to be? Which part of my project Was? Which part of my project Is? Which part of my project Ought to be?  
Why can't the square peg fit into the hole?  
Should the worlds be related (like a clock) or discreet?  
How do I create subtlety?  
When was stone used to its full potential and splendor?  
What's the material of the ground I'm digging into?  
Am I using means used in the past, available today, or imagined future means?  
How can I remove myself from this aversion of pure shape?  
Is this still a thesis?  
Should I simplify the geometry of the space by starting with a dome on top of a cylinder?  
Do I want to reflect the artificiality of building underground?  
Should the thickness of the walls reflect the requirements as if building above ground or below ground?  
If I reflect the subterranean conditions does the stone lose its formal/structural value or is it irrelevant?  
How many worlds am I working in?

How many worlds am I creating?  
2 or 3?  
What are the affects of constructing?  
Can or should this be an automated construction?  
Can I really think of all the instrumental requirements in the construction of this thing?  
Would it have been better if I did this drawing with the computer?  
Why are these steps not meeting the wall as they should be?  
With these constructed drawings should I be showing the exact stonework I desire or can I convey my desires through drawn renderings?  
Why can't I stop distracting myself?  
Am I still doing Architecture?

How is it held up?  
Does it stay above ground?  
Is it formally a solid thing? (Steve Thompson)  
Does the landscape become the plinth?  
Does it go below ground?  
Is there an anchoring?  
How does it become accessible?  
Where is the entry point?  
How do we descend?  
What's the chora?  
Rectilinear, circular, elliptical or oval?  
How deep?  
What's the rise and run of the steps?  
Should it stand alone like a column?  
How should the descent be in main room with columns?  
How should the stairs wrap around the column?  
Should the walls of the steps leading into the room protrude into the room?  
Should I differentiate the walls with stone patterning?  
How is the roof going to be at this section cut?  
Is there an order, dynamics order?  
How should the ceiling be?  
Is there an order to my space(s)?  
How do I want the outer most columns to engage the wall?  
Should there be skylights? Should they be circular, square or rectangular in cross section?  
Should there be a hole to let in light to the stairwell entry?  
Should I line up the stone joints with the stairs?  
Can this vaulted ceiling be supported with stone?  
What should be the quality of the stone here?  
Should I have subtle or overt differences in qualities of the finish?  
By what means am I digging into the ground?  
Can I create a sense of stillness and motion with the weaving of the stone?  
How does the wall meet the floor?  
What size(s) are the stones of this portion of the room?  
What's the condition of this corner of the room?  
How does the cylinder meet the dome?  
How should one tread these steps into the first room?  
Should one feel the need to hug the wall?  
Should the steps only allow for one person to pass at a time like the side of a canyon?  
Should the steps line up with the stone lines, in effect, making them, subtly, one with the cylinder portion of the room?  
How do the stones of the first passage connect with the first room?

Is this how I want the stone pattern to be?  
Should these steps have a pause?  
How long should the pause be?  
How should these stones line up as to convey the (seamless) connection between the staircase room and the first hallway?

## I AM IMPRESSIONABLE AND UNORIGINAL

A Theory of Architecture: The Second Chapter From A Platonic Dialog by *Victor Hammer*  
Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory by *Andrea Lauterwein*  
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Underground by *David Macaulay*  
Underworld: Sites of Concealment by *Manfred Sach, Klaus Kemp and Peter Seidel*  
Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers by *Leonard Koren*  
et alia...

“ Architecture and war are not incompatible. Architecture is war. War is architecture. I am at war with my time, with history, with all authority that resides in fixed and frightened forms. I am one of millions who do not fit in, who have no home, no family, no doctrine, no firm place to call my own, no known beginning or end, no “sacred and primordial site.” I declare war on all icons and finalities, on all histories that would chain me with my own falseness, my own pitiful fears. I know only moments, and lifetimes that are as moments, and forms that appear with infinite strength, then ‘melt into air.’ I am an architect, a constructor of worlds, a sensualist who worships the flesh, the melody, a silhouette against the darkening sky. I cannot know your name. Nor you can know mine. ”

*Lebbeus Woods*

“ ...lend your ears to music, open your eyes to painting, and... stop thinking! Just ask yourself whether the work has enabled you to “walk about” into a hitherto unknown world. If the answer is yes, what more do you want? ”

*Wassily Kandinsky*

“ If you want to build a ship, don’t herd people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

*Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

“ [imagination] is reason in her most exalted mood.”

*William Wordsworth*

“ We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know it for the first time. “

*Thomas Stearns Elliot*

“ ...are we going to be better off trying to understand the neurophysiology of how we perceive things, or are better off seeing that we're the magicians? ”

*Jeff Kipnis*

“ The role of the architect is to make visible that which is invisible. ”

*Marco Frascari*

“ The Comedy of the serious incorporates the most extreme horror. ”

*Anselm Kiefer*

“ We see emotion as the essential, tangible content of architecture: the telluric worlds we envision and investigate belong to a state prior to the existence of architecture to a time when architecture was created by nature. ”

*Fernando Menis*

“ Rise out of the ashes of the old one while honoring the old. ”

*Steve Thompson*

“ A building is as tectonic and tactile in character as it is scenographic and visual, although none of these attributes deny its spatiality. ”

*Kenneth Frampton*

“ To purge ourselves of these illusions, to become free of all the artificial images of order which distort the nature that is in us, we must first learn a discipline which teaches us the true relationship between ourselves and our surroundings... Then, once their discipline has done its work... we will be ready to give up the discipline, and act as nature does...This is the timeless way of building: learning the discipline – and shedding it. ”

*Christopher Alexander*

“ I only wish that the first really worthwhile discovery of science would be that it recognized that the unmeasurable is what they're really fighting to understand, and that the measurable is only the servant of the unmeasurable; that everything that man makes must be fundamentally unmeasurable. ”

*Louis Isadore Kahn*

“...it is not surprising that a culture such as ours, preoccupied with the notion of a Heaven hereafter, would abuse its landscape. How can Eden be properly cared for if it has already been abandoned for a deferred Paradise for which the Earth is a mere staging area? When a land is removed from worship it is no wonder that conscience regarding the use of that land is profoundly deficient. We have no sacred places. We have no Delphi. Where there was once spirit, in the Serpent Mound, in the kiva, there is now only curiosity, the haunting relics of an Earthbound reverence.”

*W.G. Clark*

“ Architects don't invent anything, they transform reality.”

*Alvaro Siza*



Architecture is not the result of alchemy. It *is* alchemy.  
Architecture is the denouement of contradictions.

Architecture is not a threshold. It is *the* threshold.  
Architecture is the collision between the instrument and medium.

Architecture is not a noun or a verb. It is an action.  
Architecture is the instance when myth turns into truth and truth into reality.

Architecture is neither desire, will or resistance. It is the tension between the three.  
Architecture is the force that keeps a top spinning.

Architecture is not perfection. It is the pursuit of perfection knowing that it can never be achieved.

