

Architecture under the influence of a topographic condition

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Architecture is response.

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I fell in love with a piece of land. Growing up, I filled it with my childhood days, and its slightly rolling fields of green still comfort me like a familiar blanket. I have not lived there for some years, but I visit often and each time I walk the land, I feel like I can fully breathe again. In summer, the surrounding trees are full of leaves that buffer you from the outside world, so much that you begin to feel completely removed from the fast-track ways of a modern society. This is a different kind of 'island effect' than the localized climate of a large metropolitan area. This is a localized climate of being, where nothing matters more than the wind blowing across the grasses and the warmth of the sun on your face. It is the kind of place where time seems not to exist, where the sun making its way across the sky is evidence of something other than simply the passing of minutes. In winter, the palette changes from lush green to the straw yellow of dormant grass, and the leafless trees are more transparent than enveloping, but somehow they still manage to contain you in this place.

The thought of building on this land is frightening to me. Construction is necessarily accompanied by a relative level of destruction, and I always have to question whether the positive outweighs the negative. It is rare that the act of building is approached with the level of gravity it deserves, considering the significance of what is taking place. It is the replacement and/or displacement of 'what is' with what we think 'should be'. And what 'should be'? Luigi Snozzi tells us to "Destroy with sensibility." So the question becomes, what is sensible, and conversely (and maybe more importantly), what is insensible. Architecture has the role of establishing the relationship that will exist between inhabitants and inhabited before the former even arrive. In a building that is designed with careful consideration of its surroundings, the inhabitants are themselves likely to extend a more careful consideration toward their environment. It is a fortunate relationship for both, as the inhabited is treated to at least a greater level of regard if not reverence, while the inhabitants benefit from the richness of experience that comes with a positive connection to place. In buildings where this role is neglected, the unfortunate relationship established by default is one of dominion with disregard.

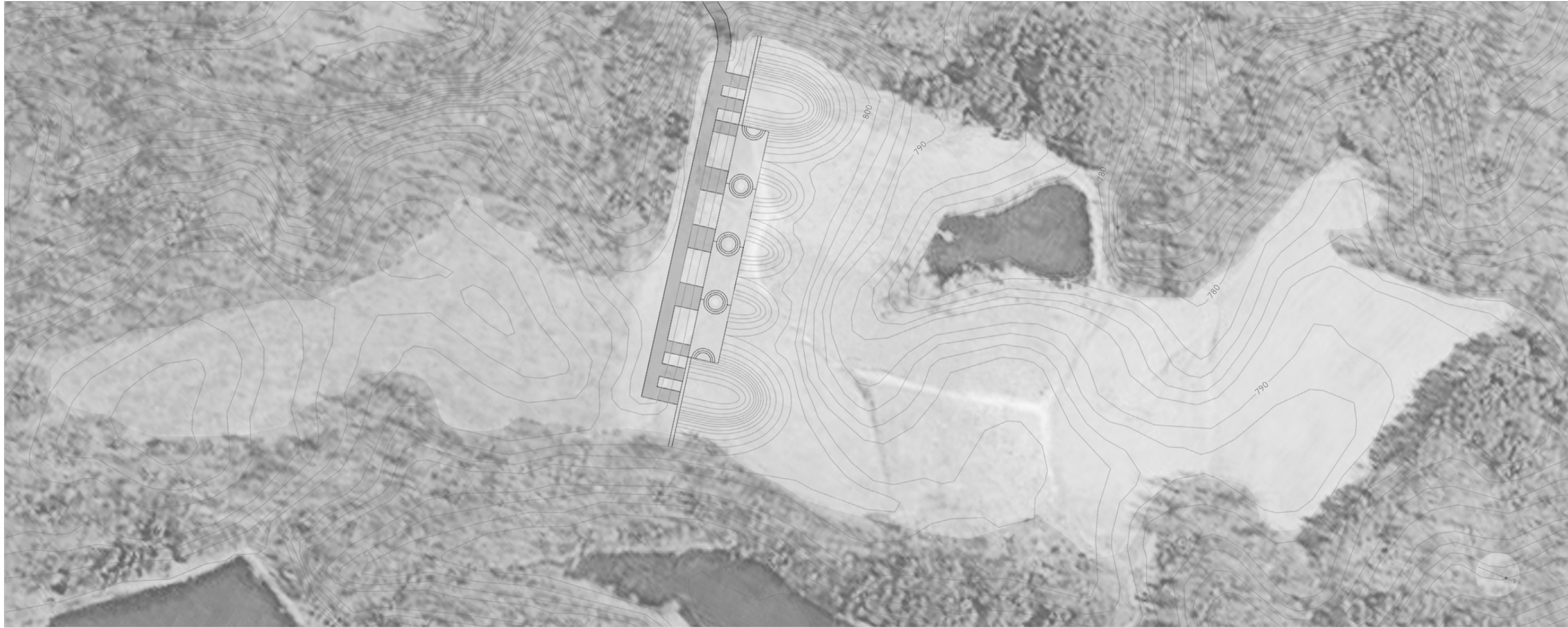
I set out to design multi-family housing for this piece of land that I love. I chose this site knowing that it, more than any other, would force me to grapple with these issues concerning the relationships between building, inhabitants, and the inhabited. If I could resolve them here, then I felt that I would be in a better position to resolve them anywhere.

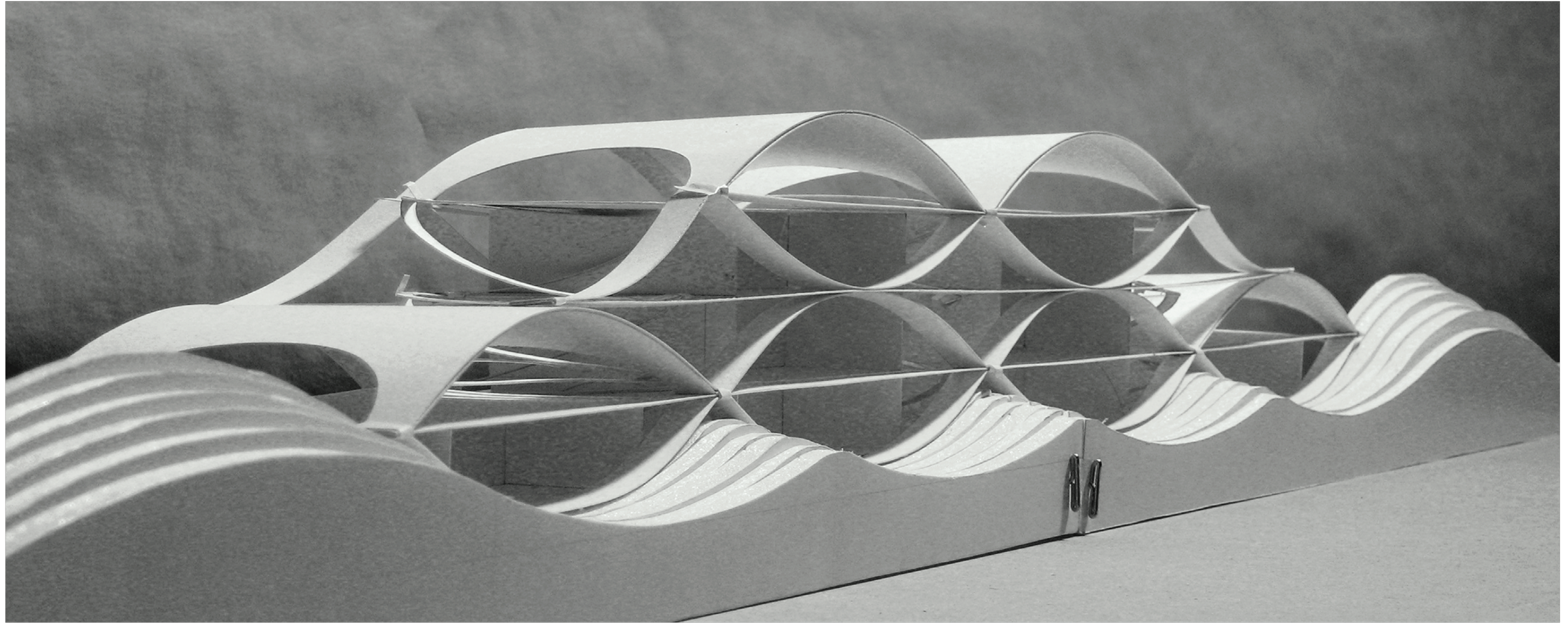


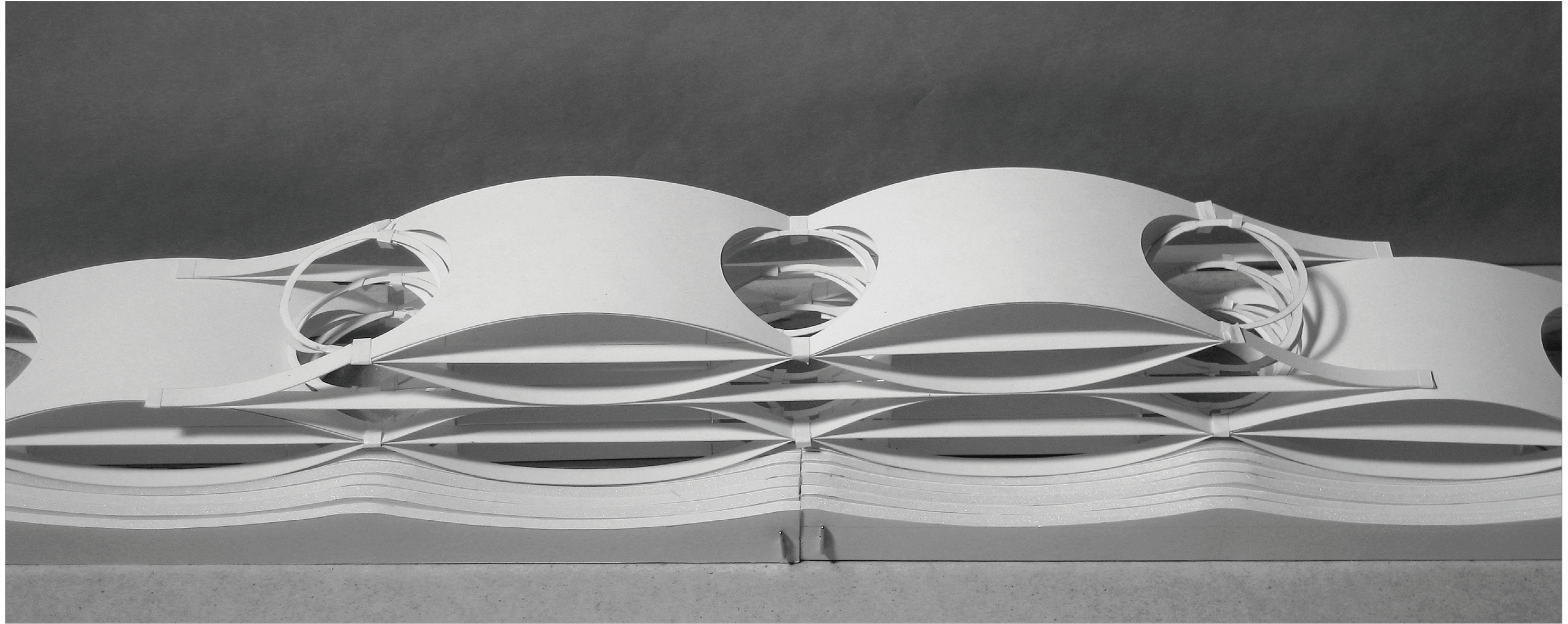


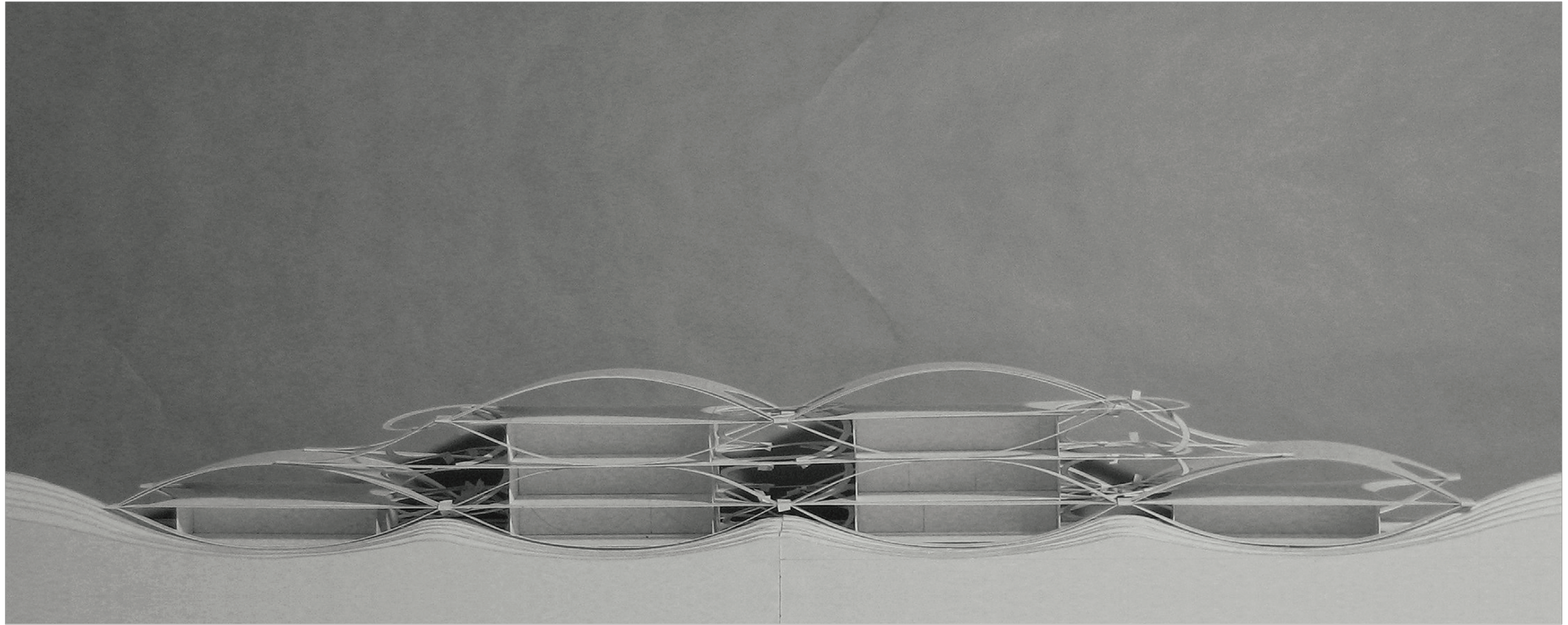


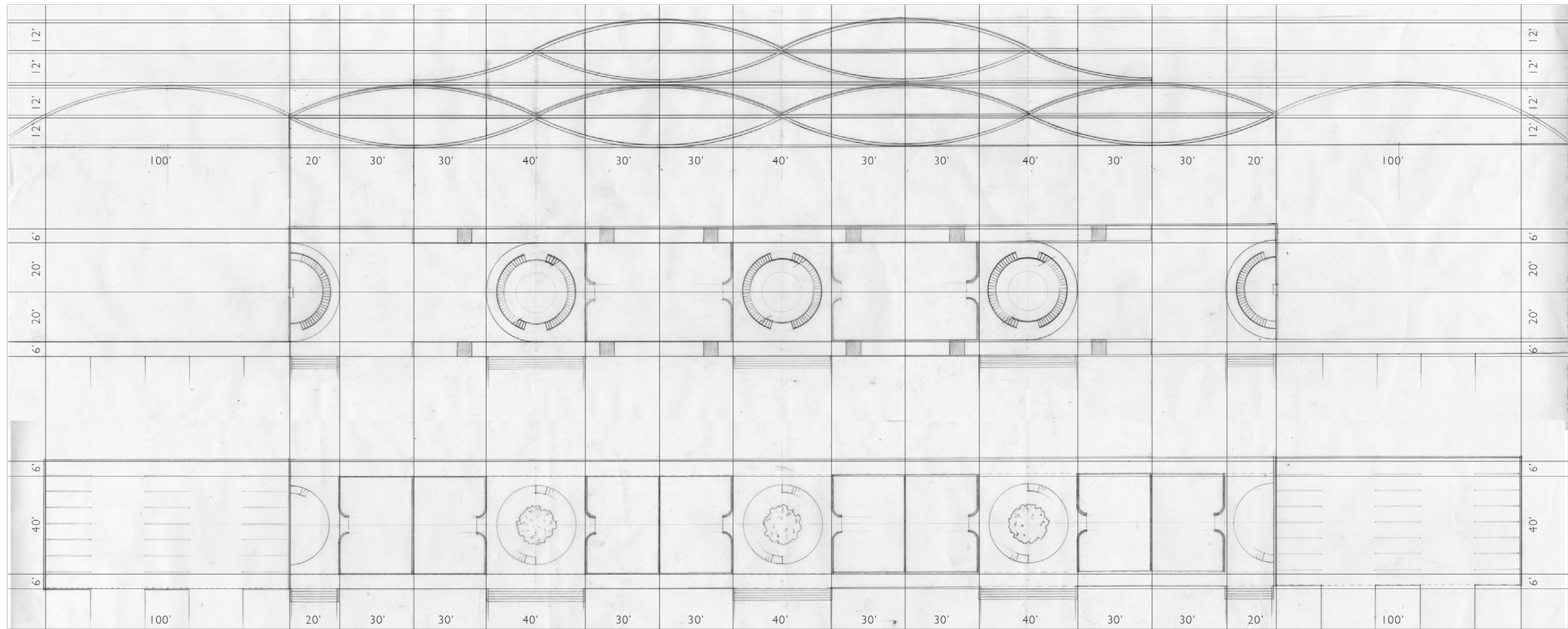


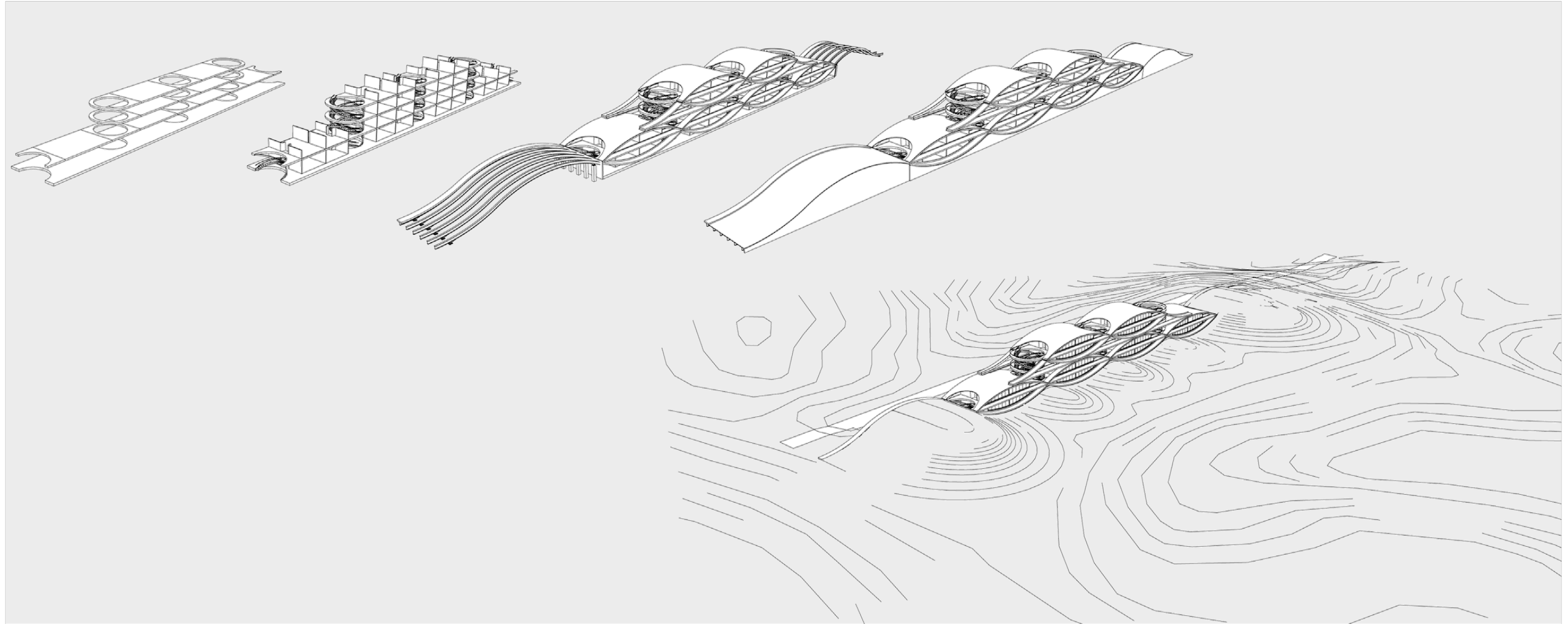


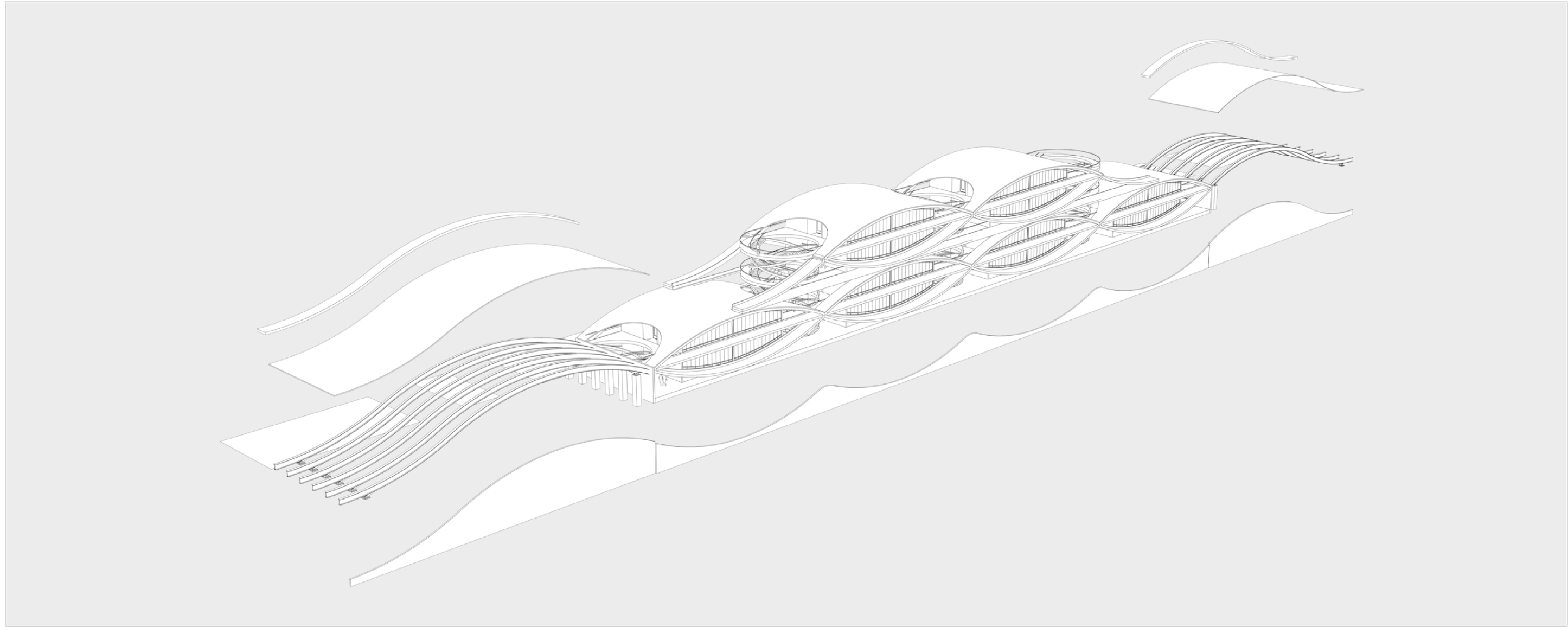


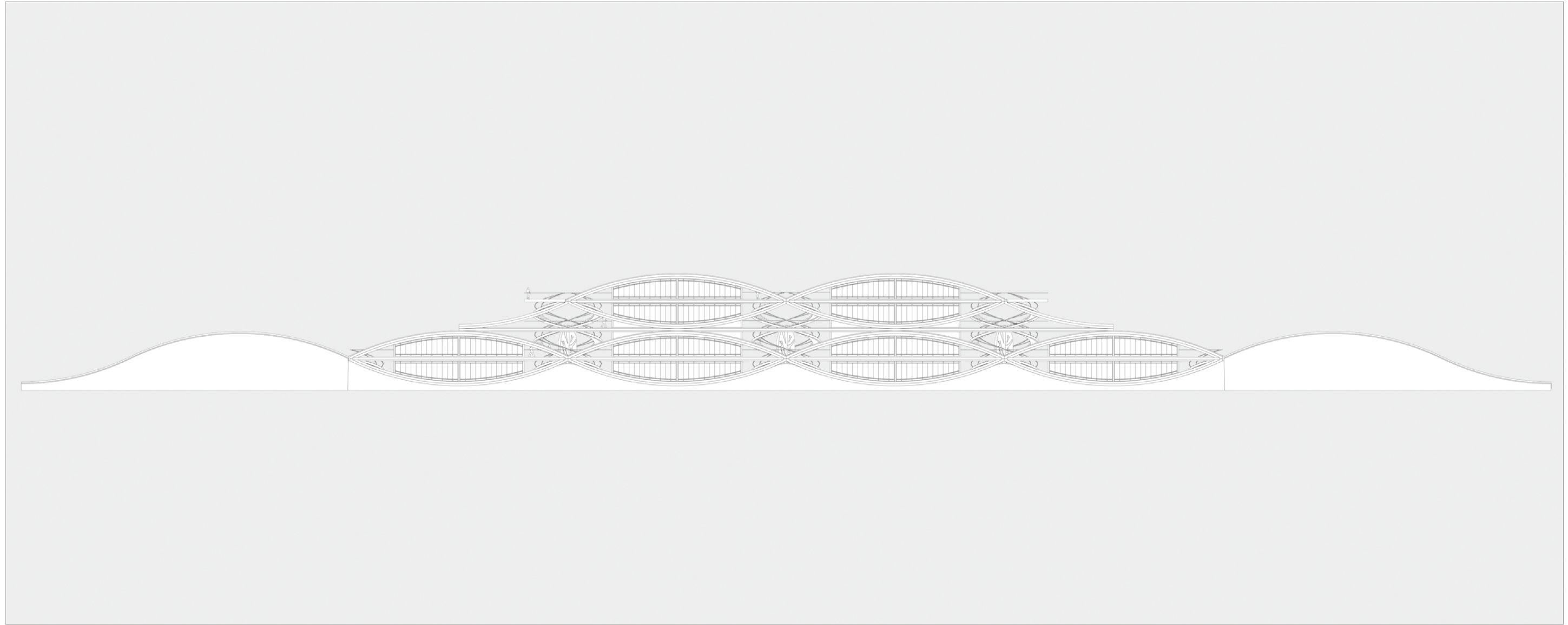


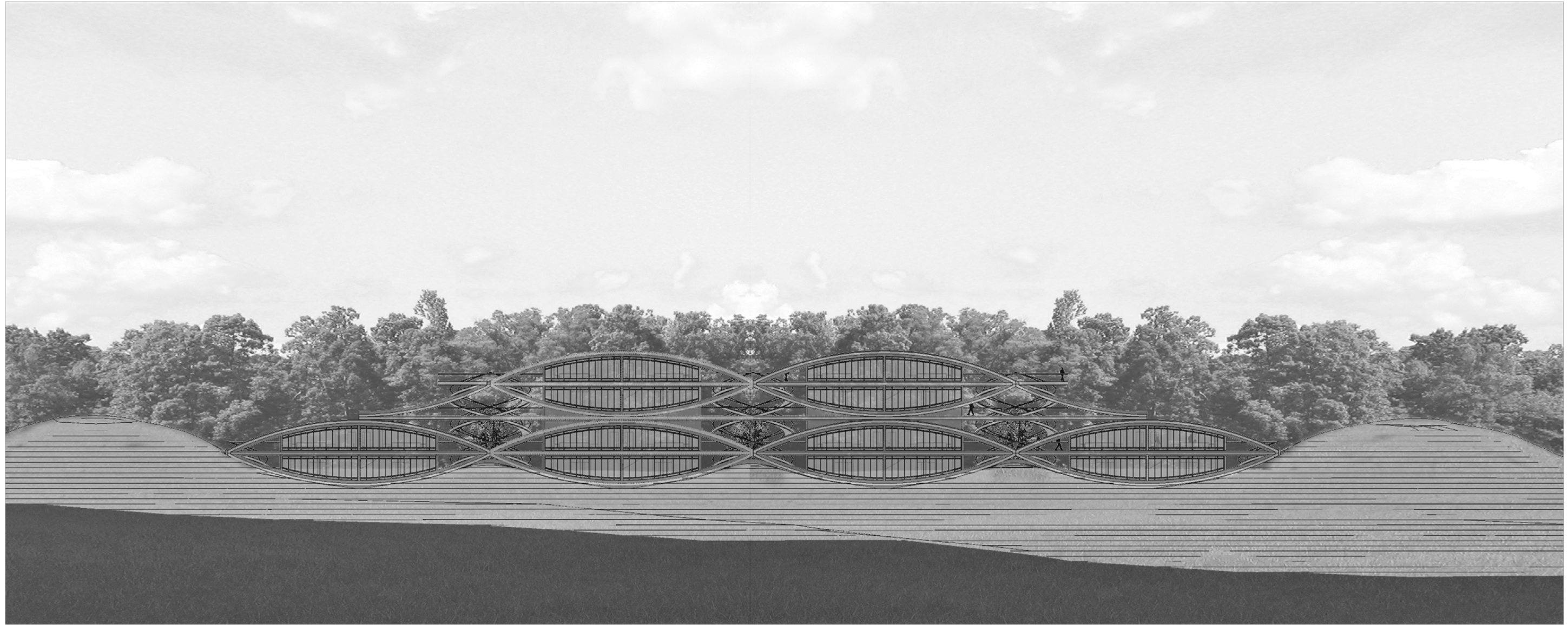


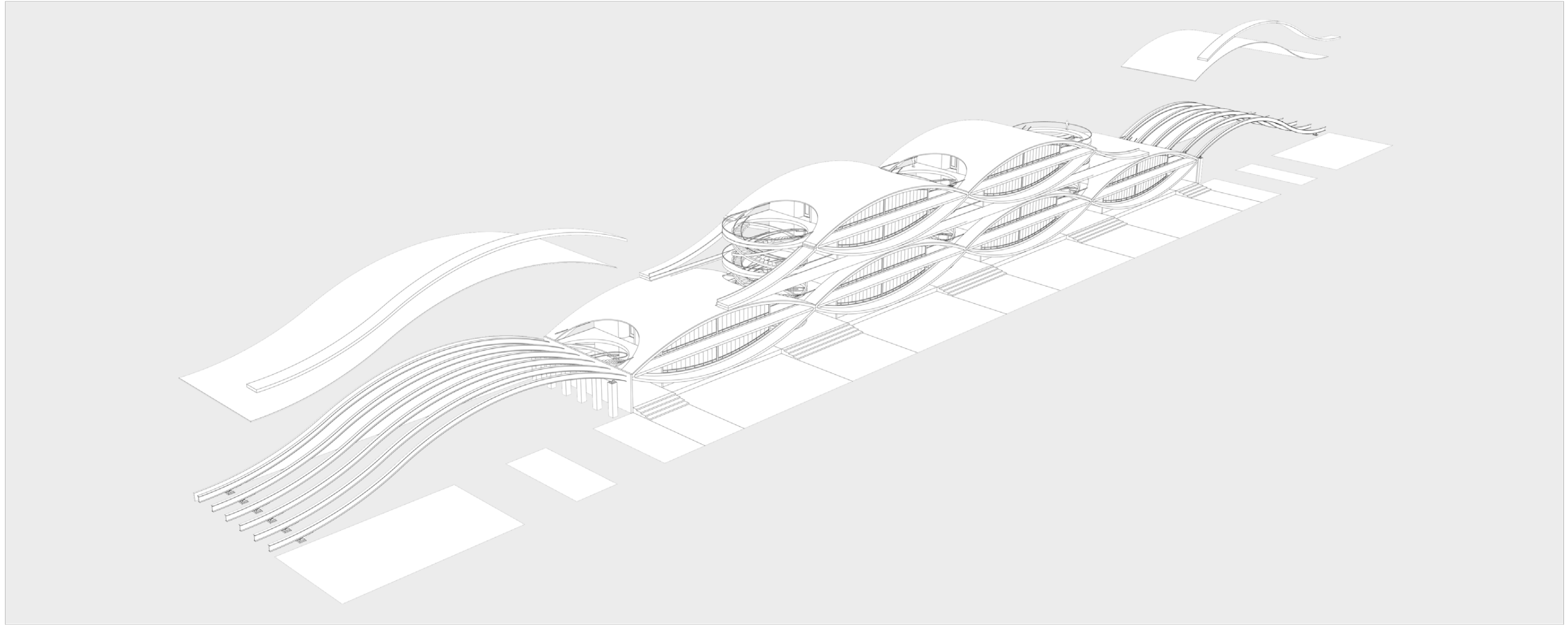


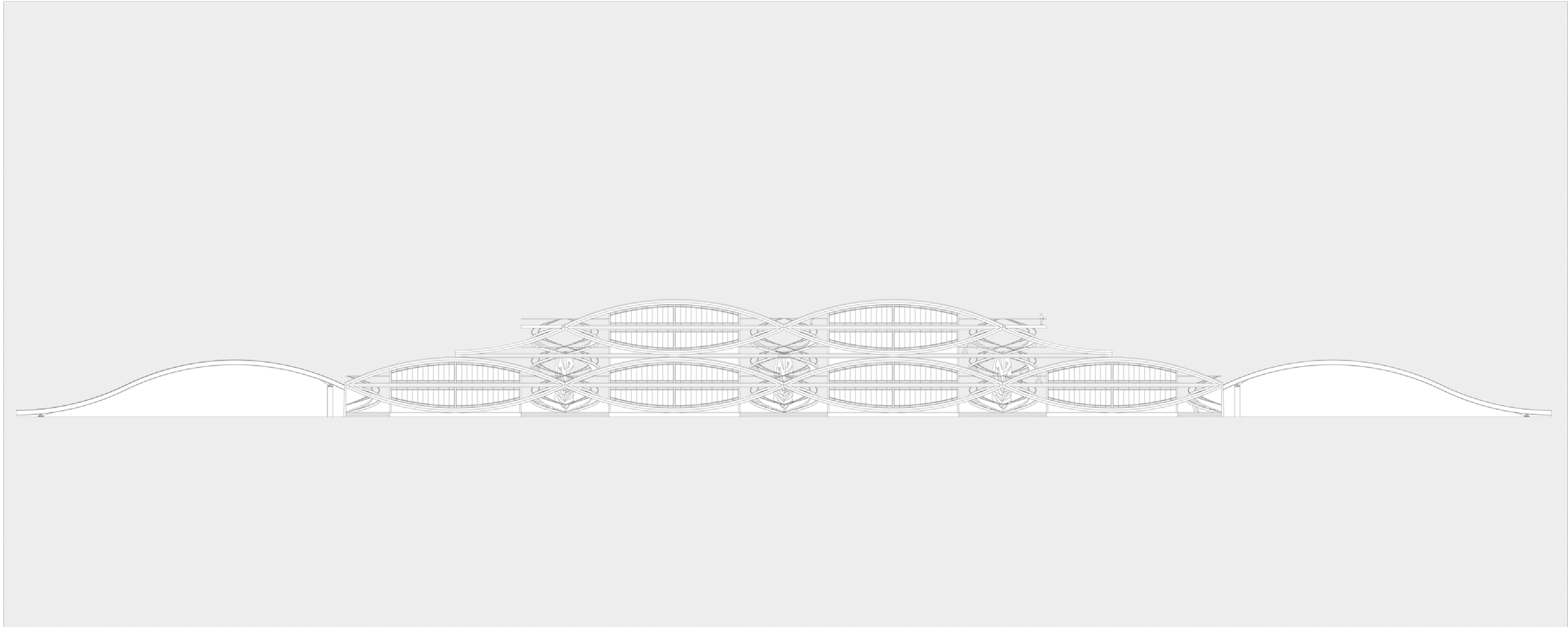


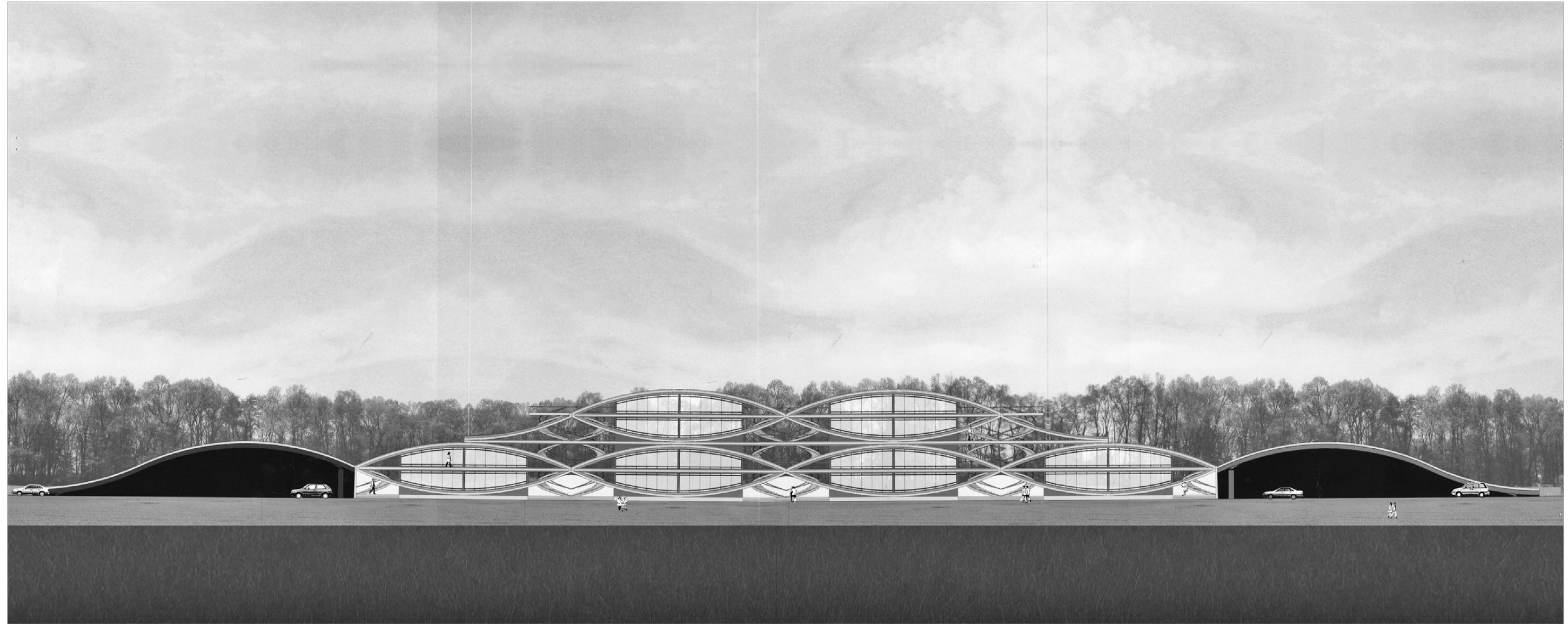


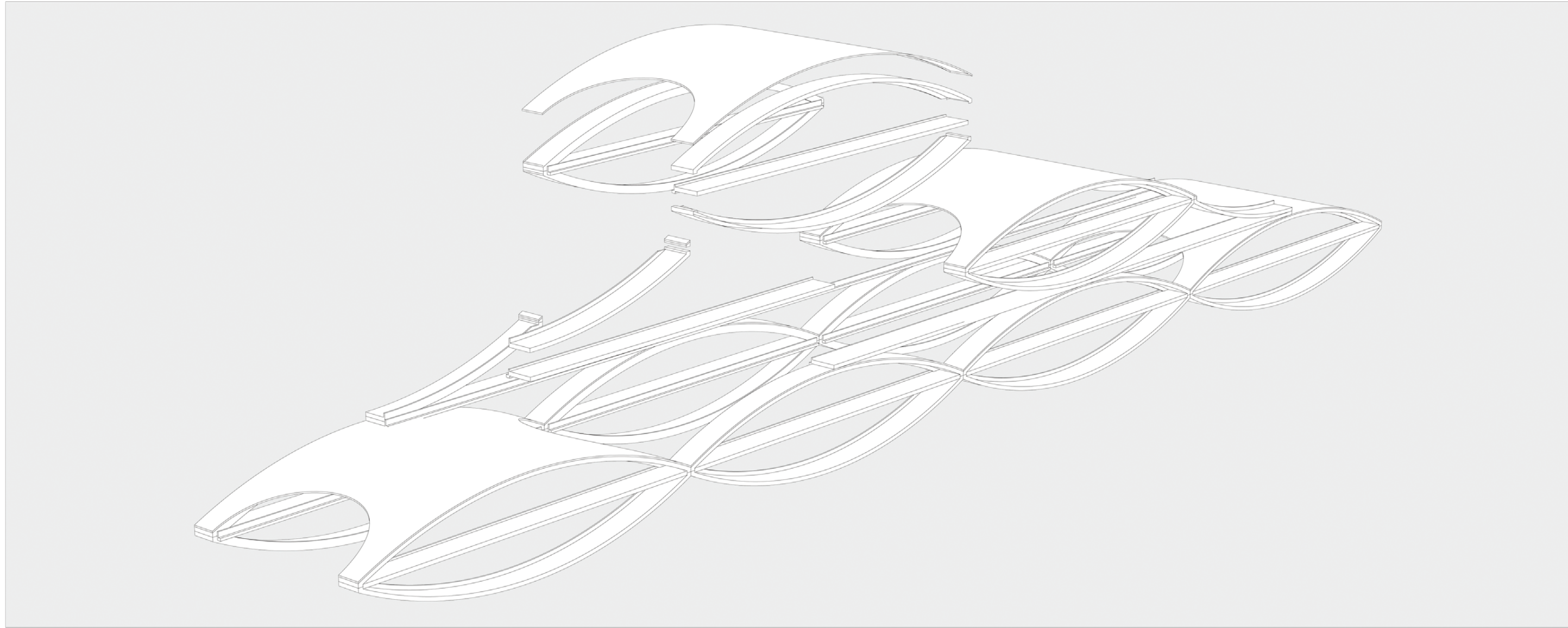


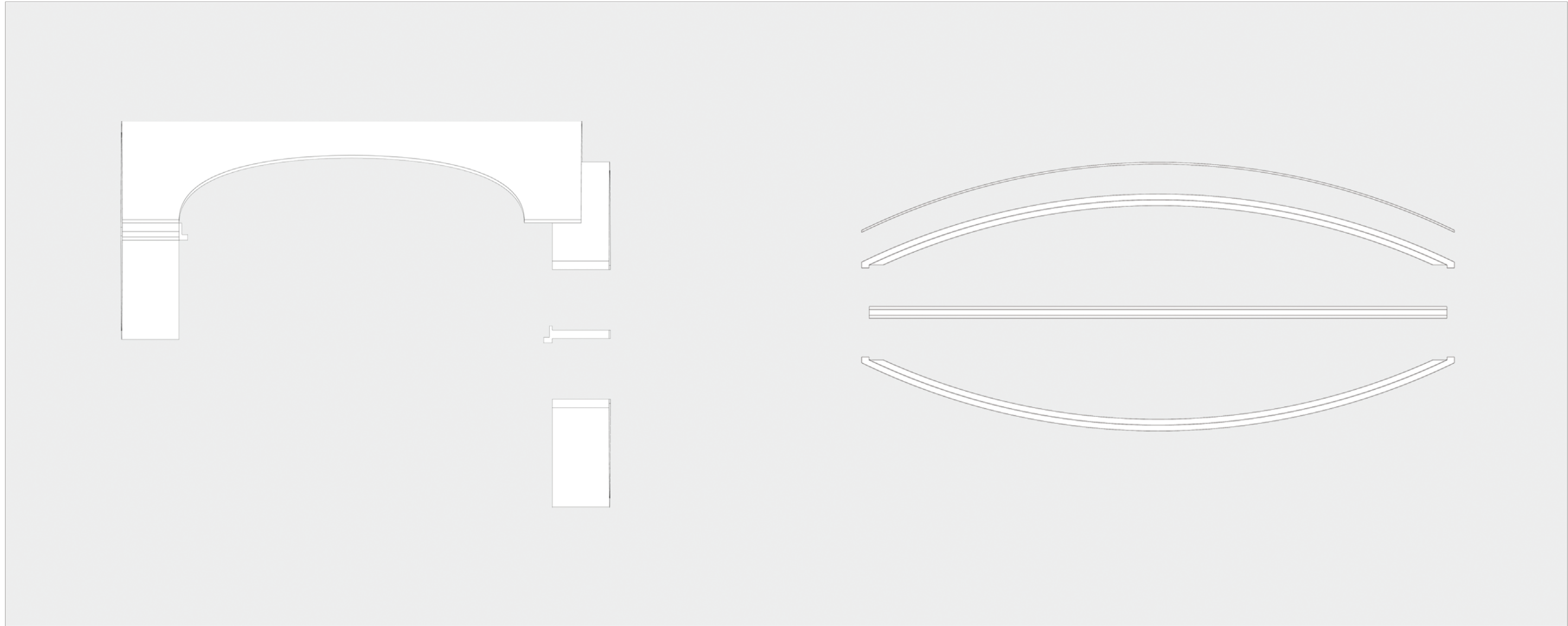


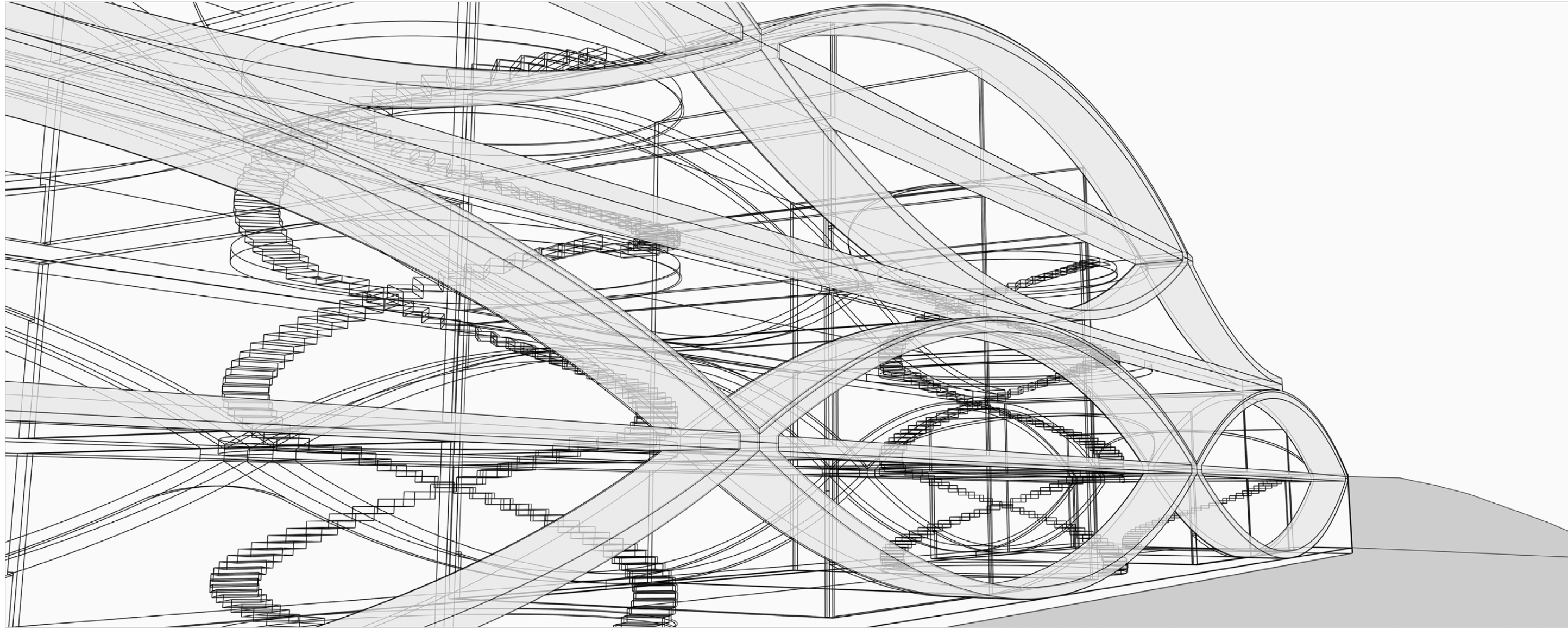


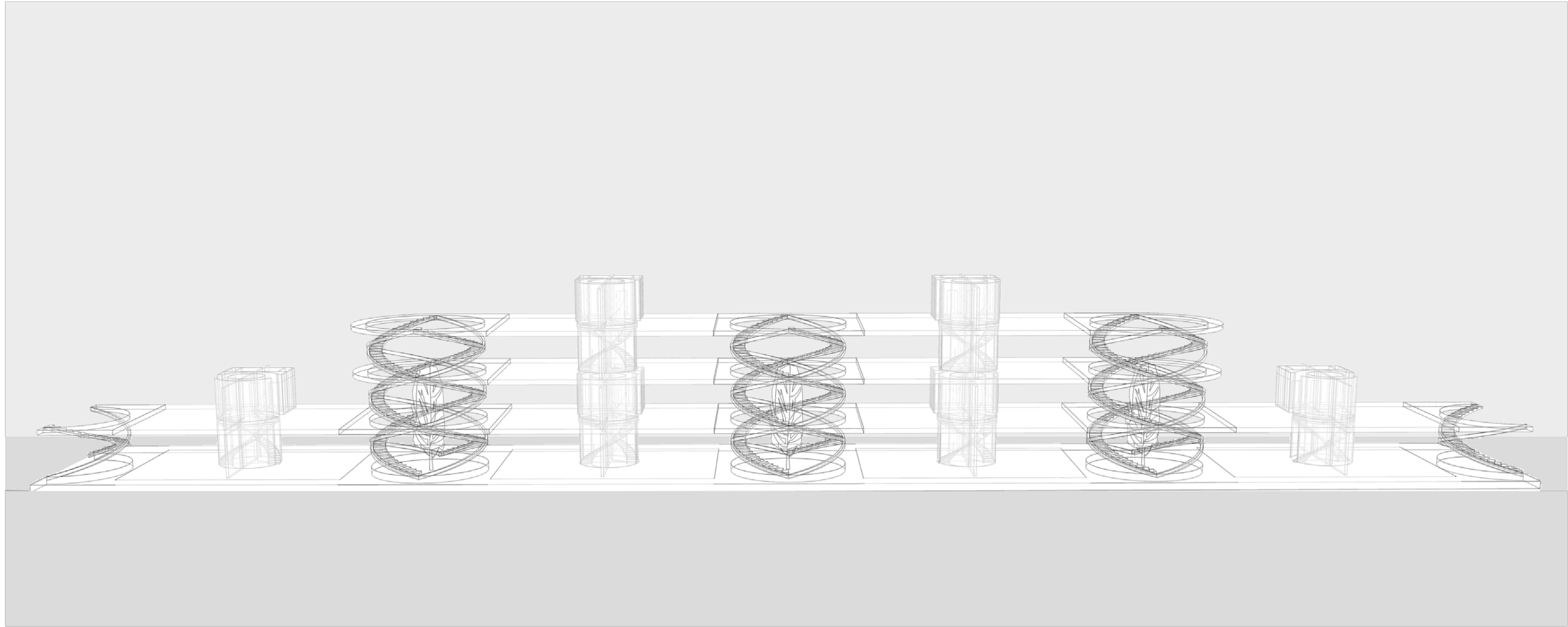


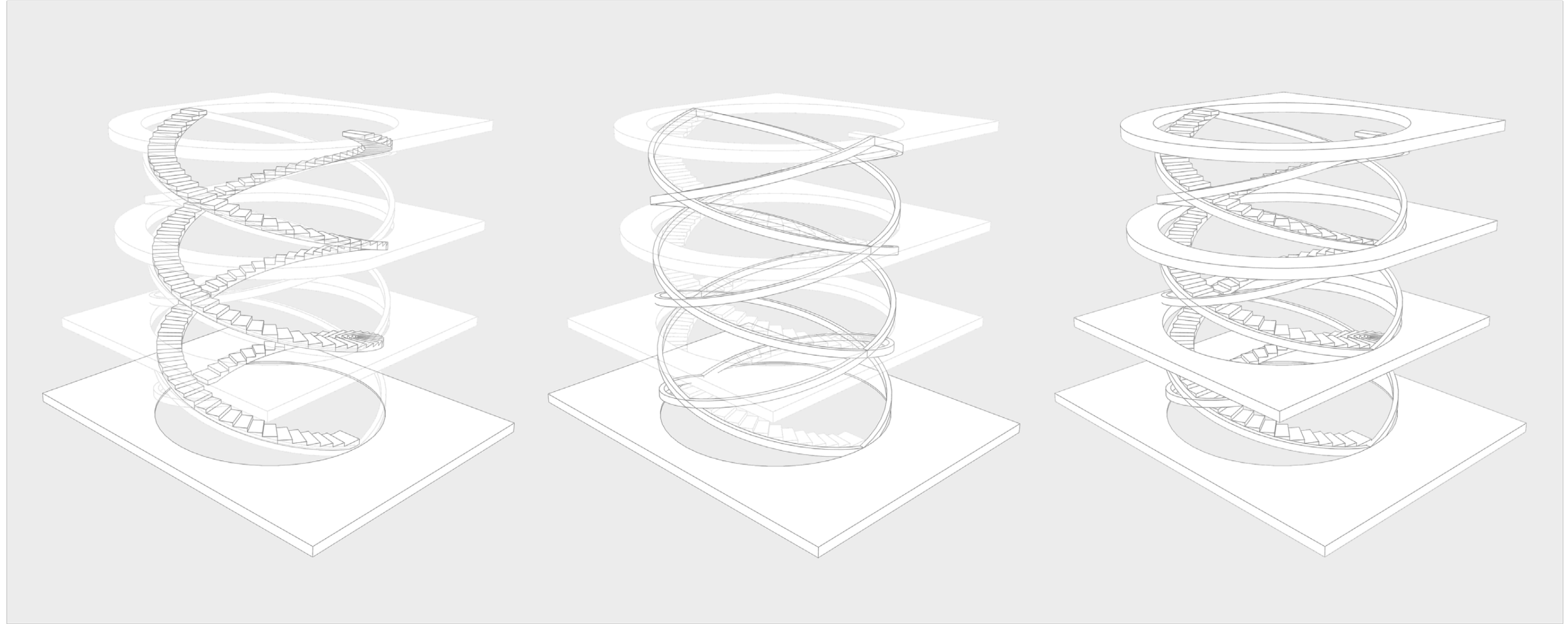


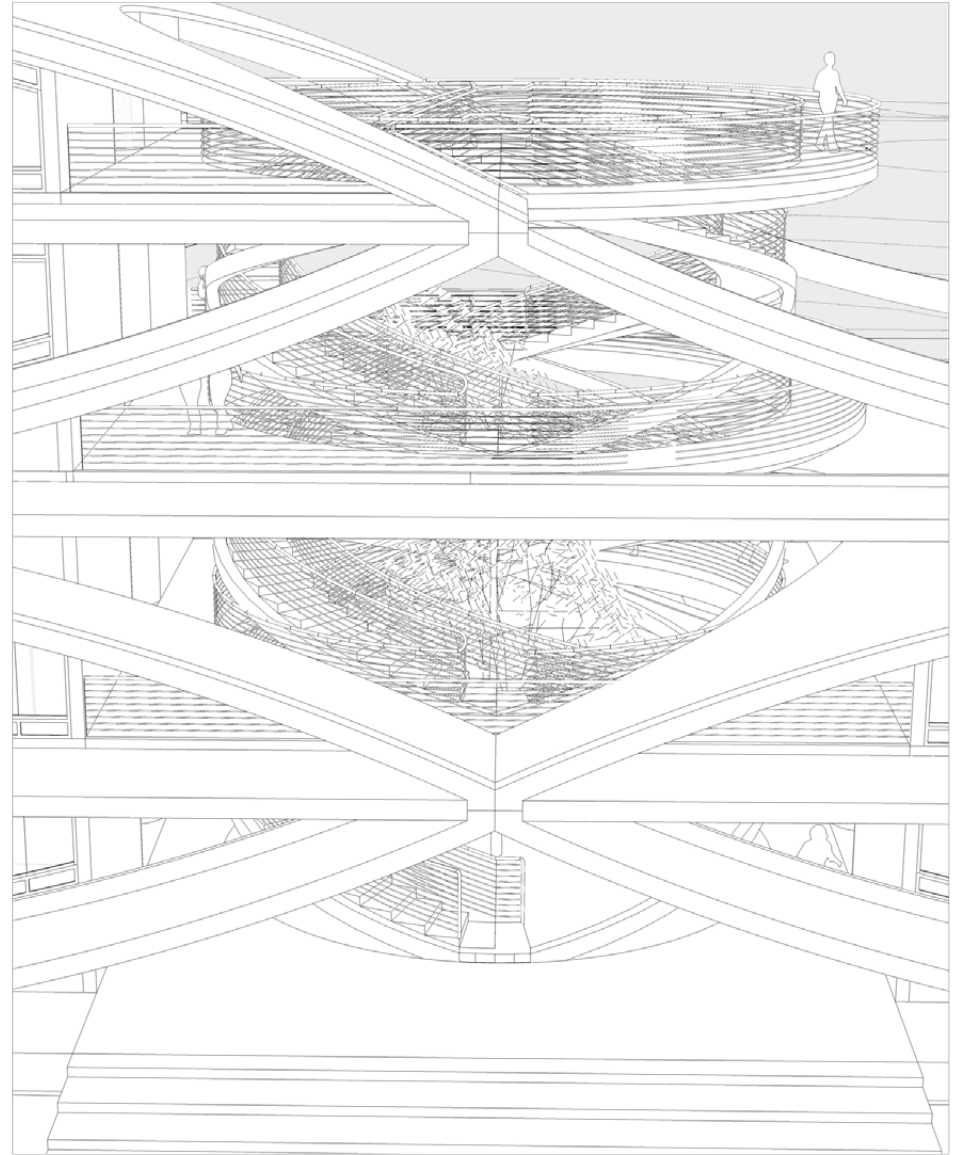
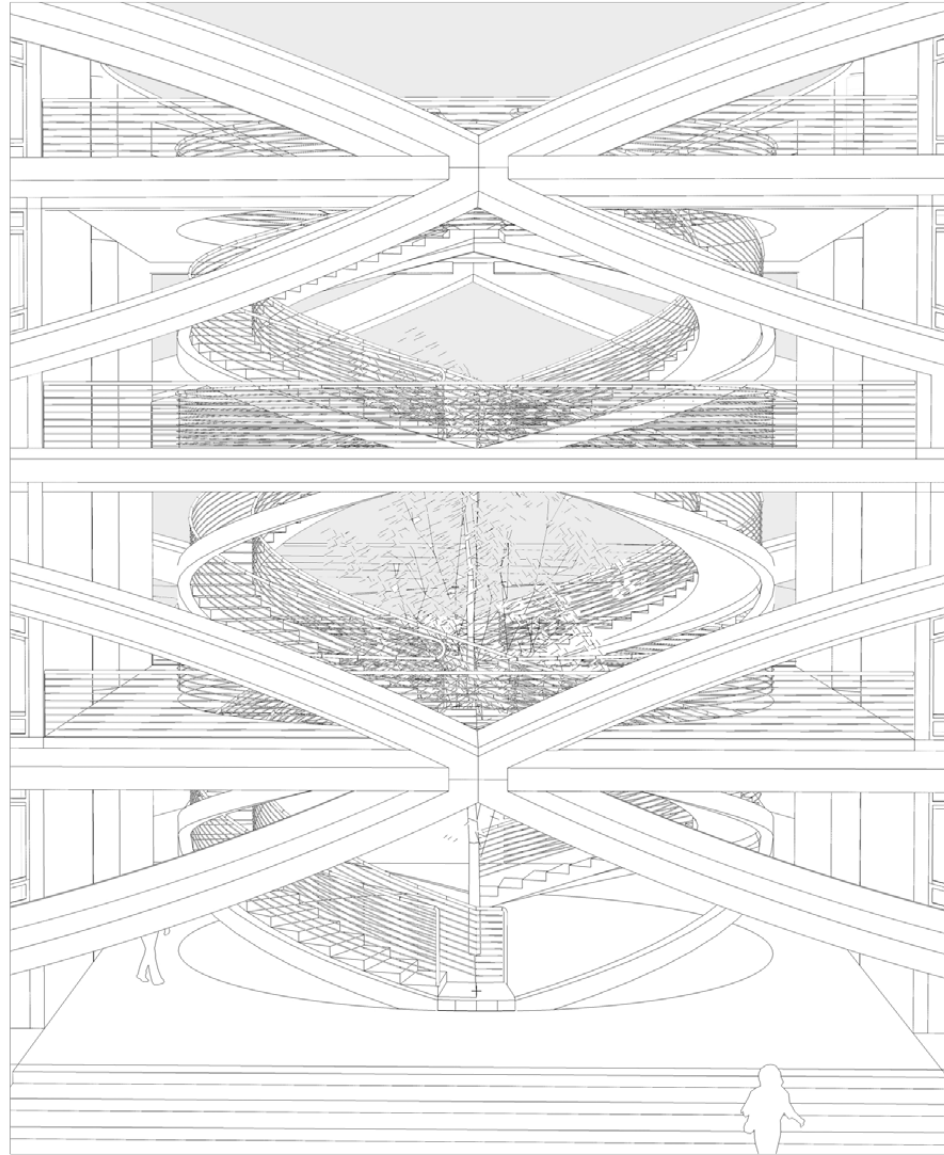
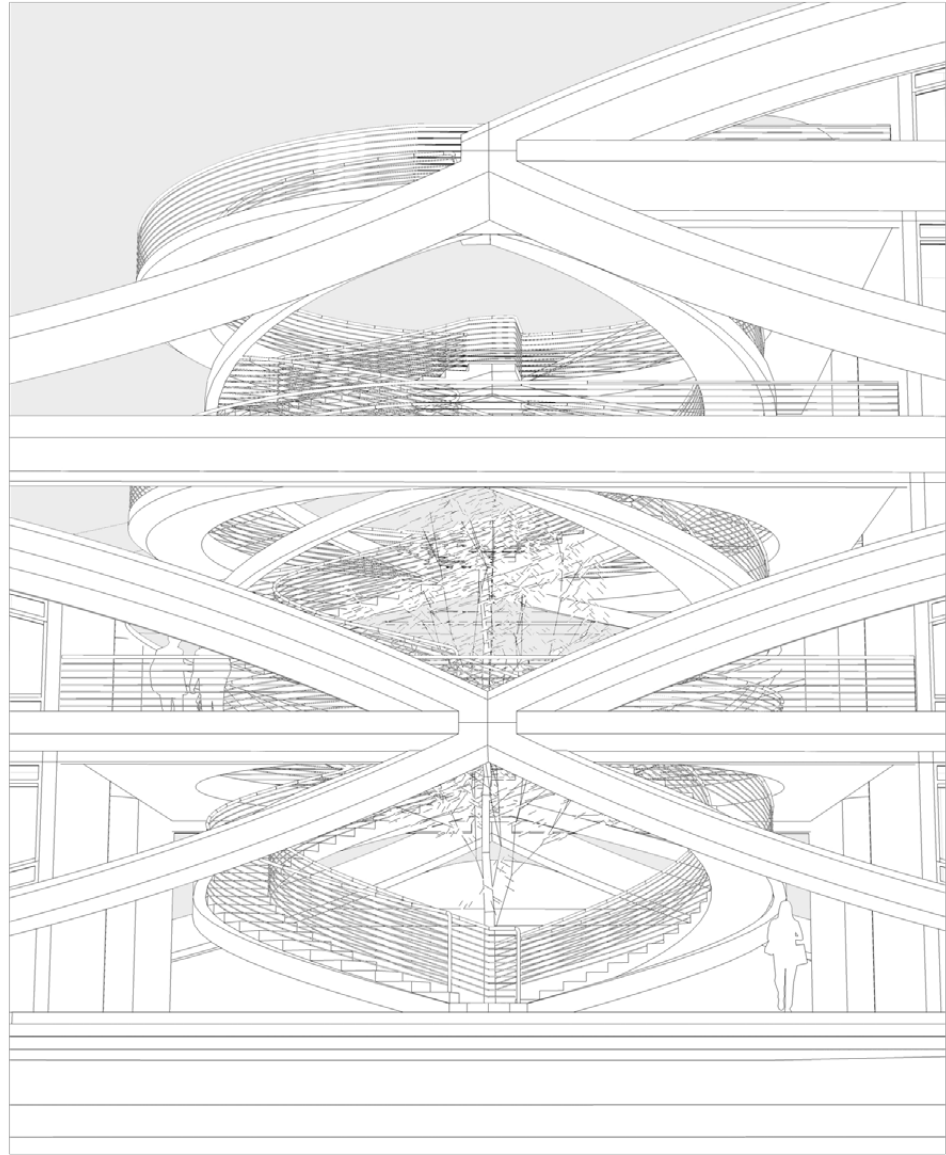


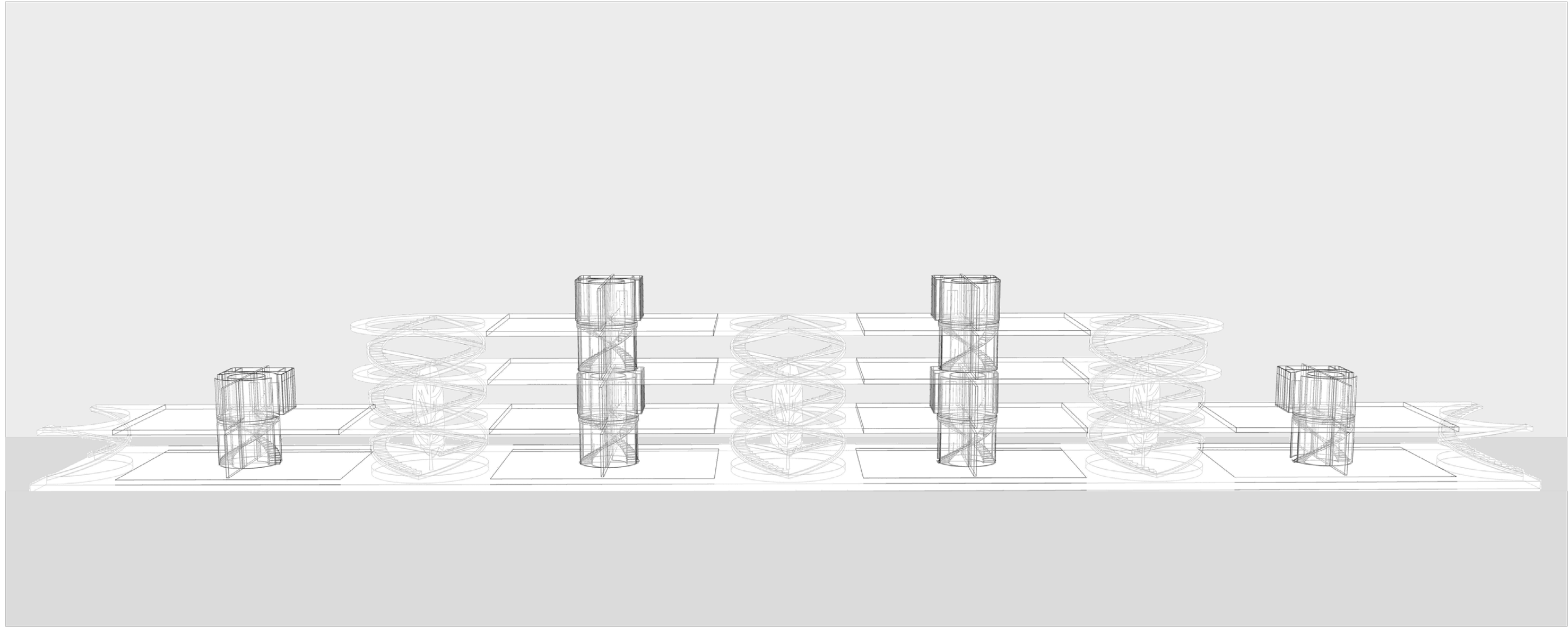


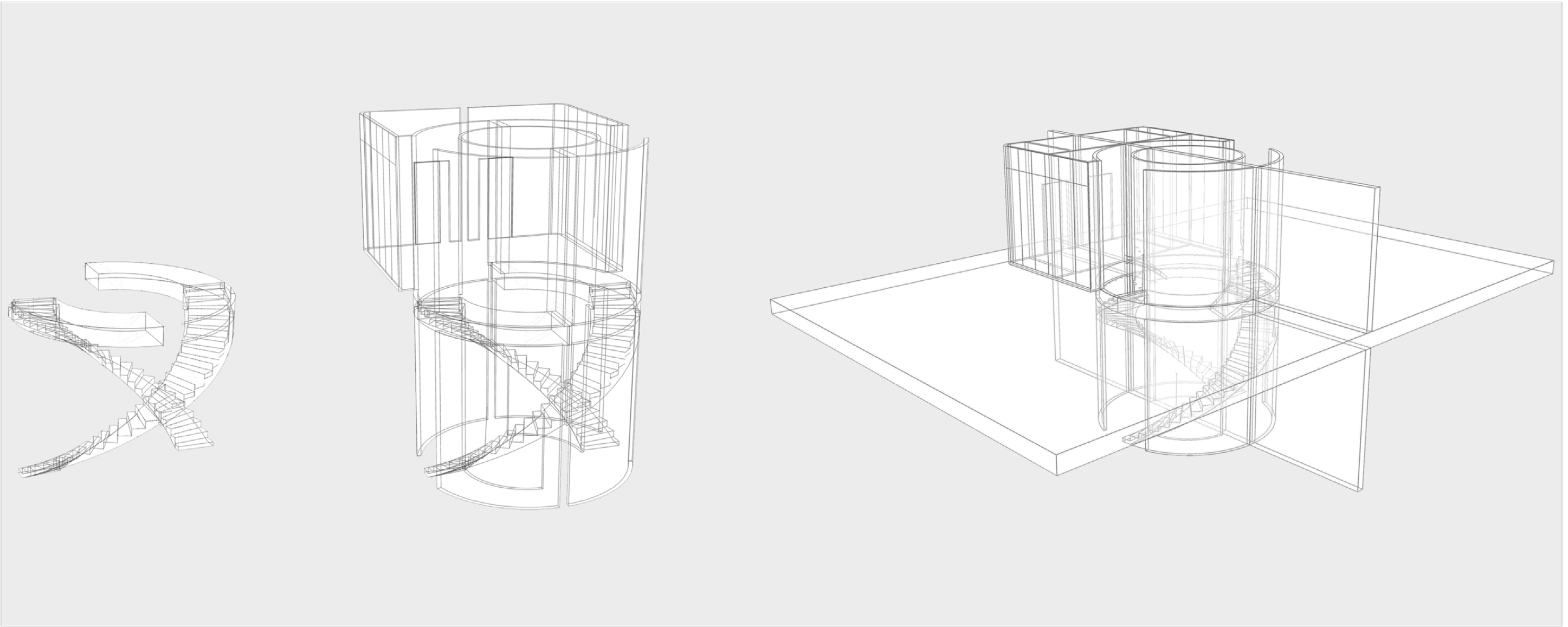


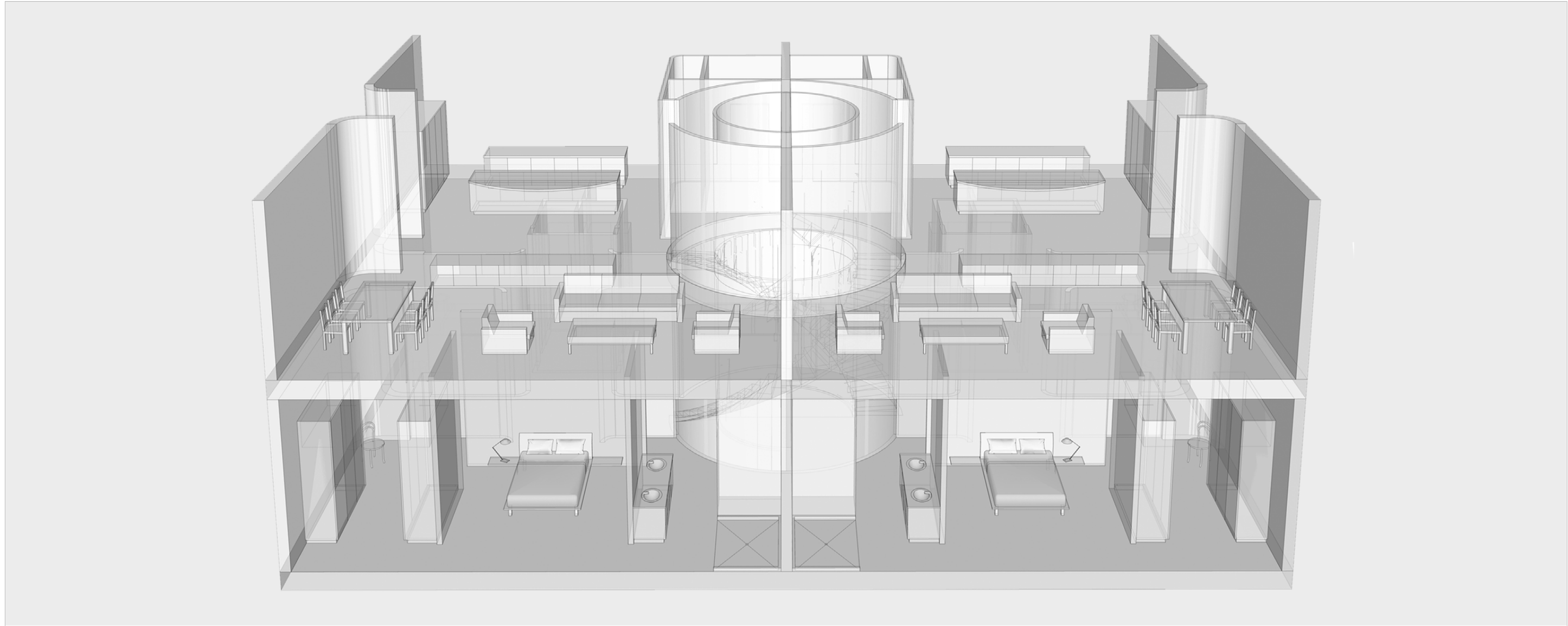


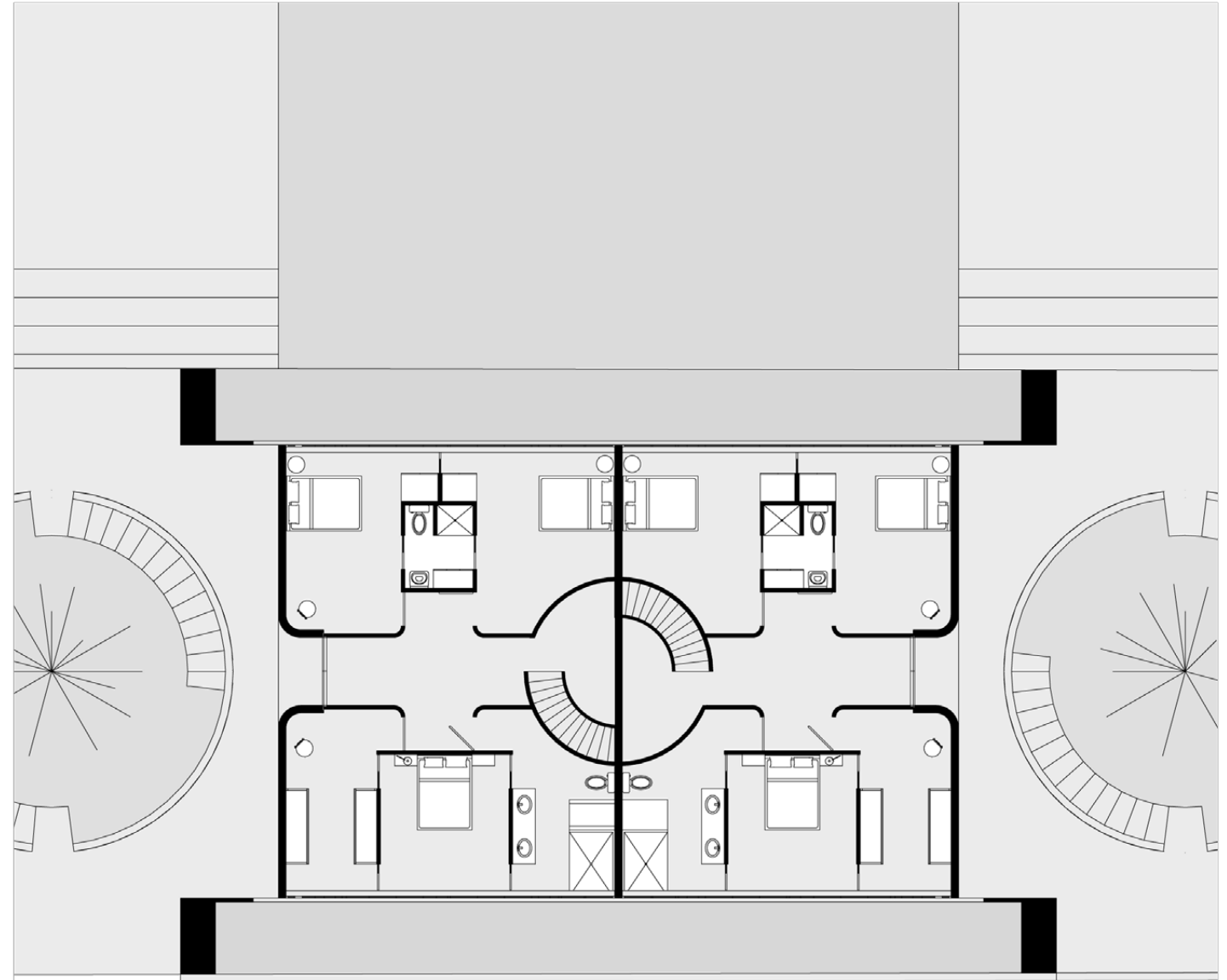
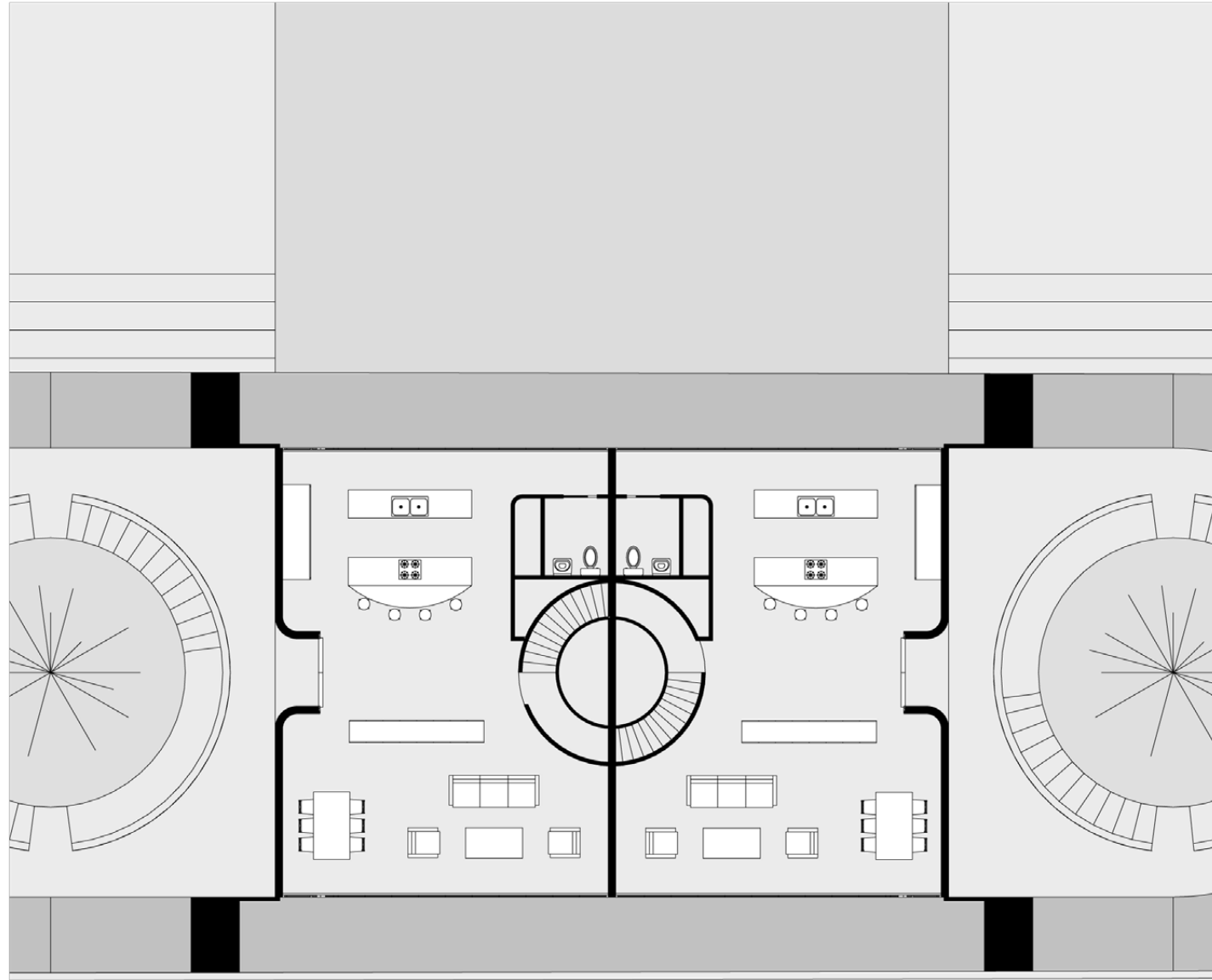


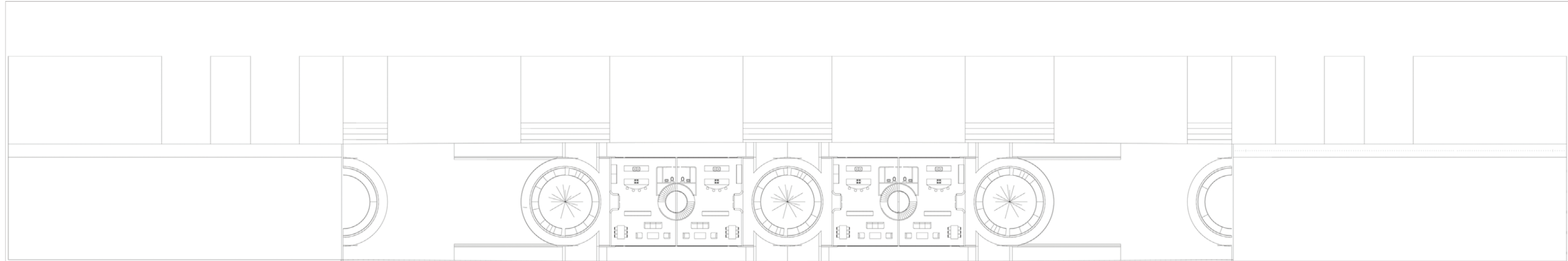




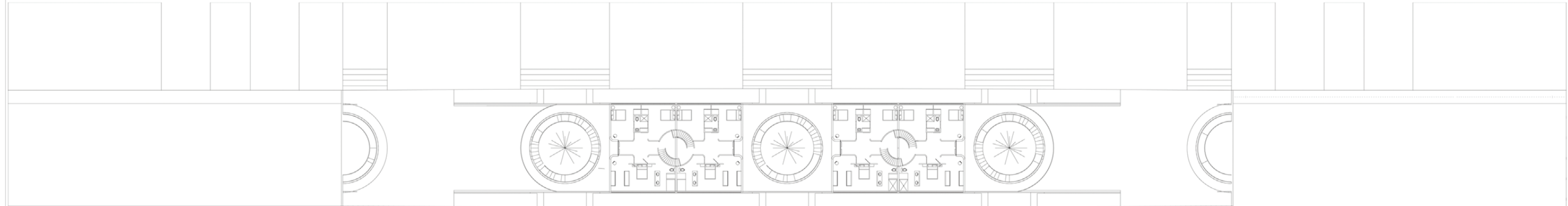




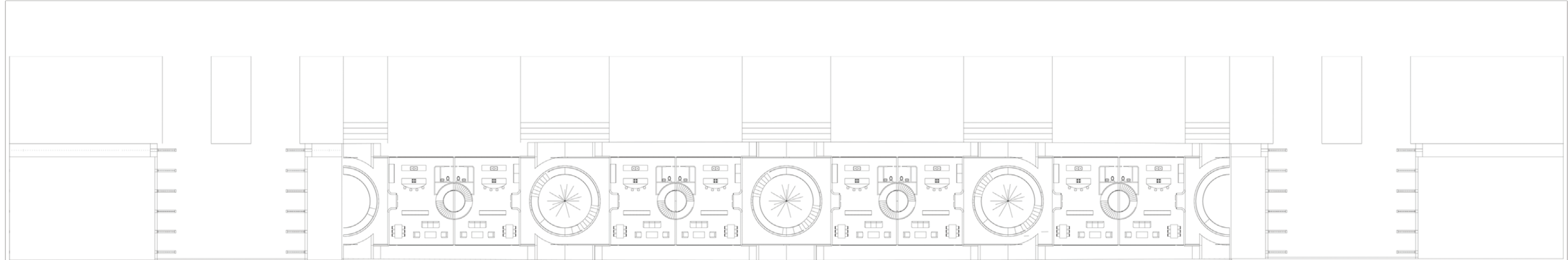




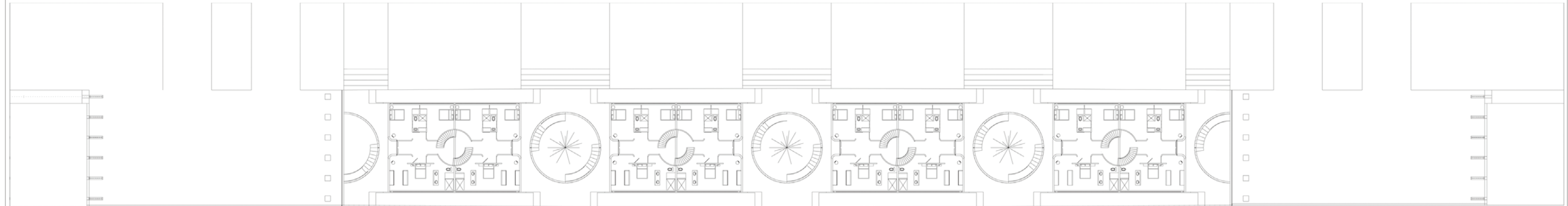
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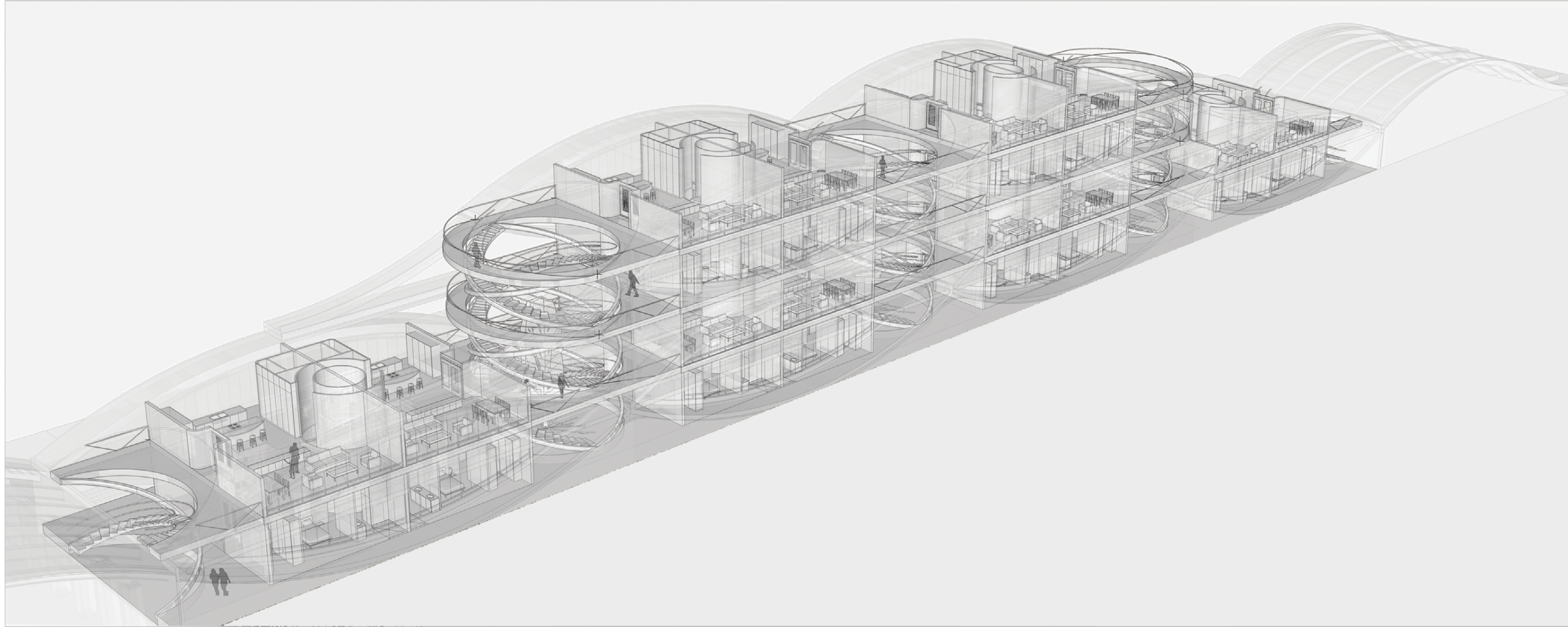
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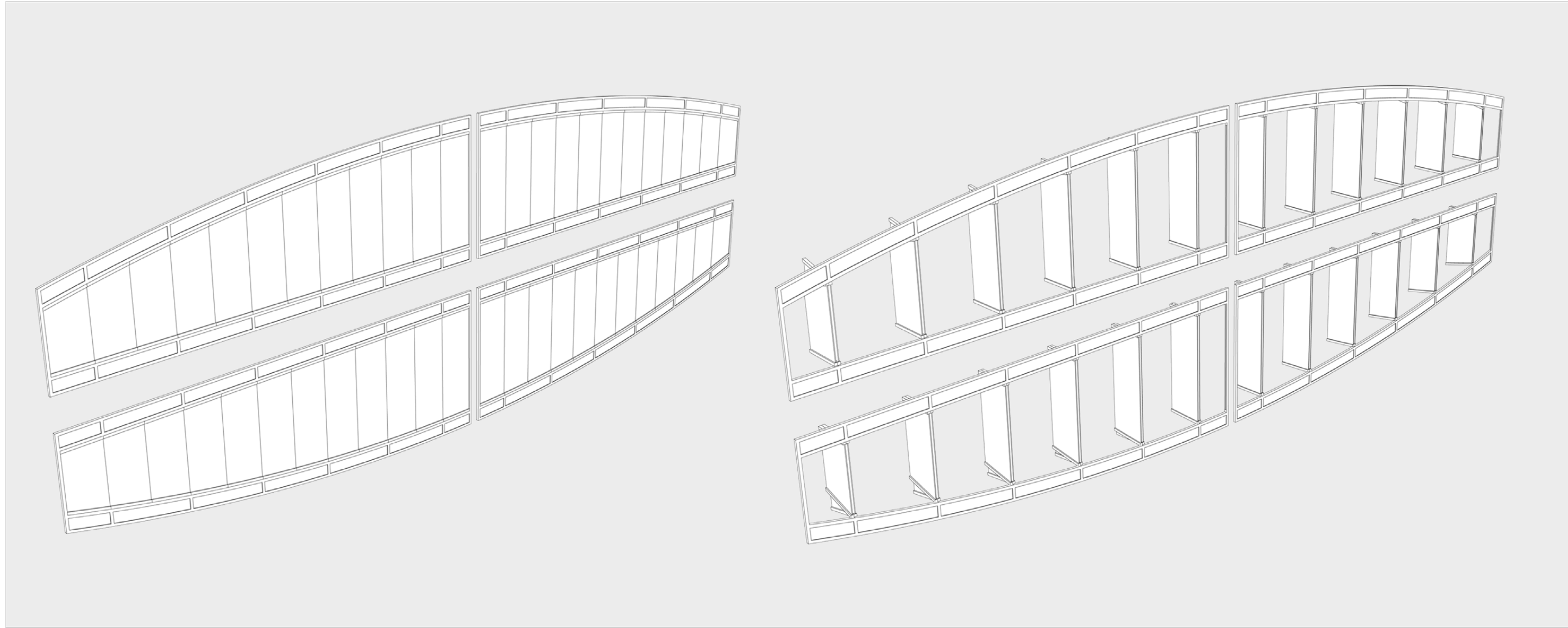


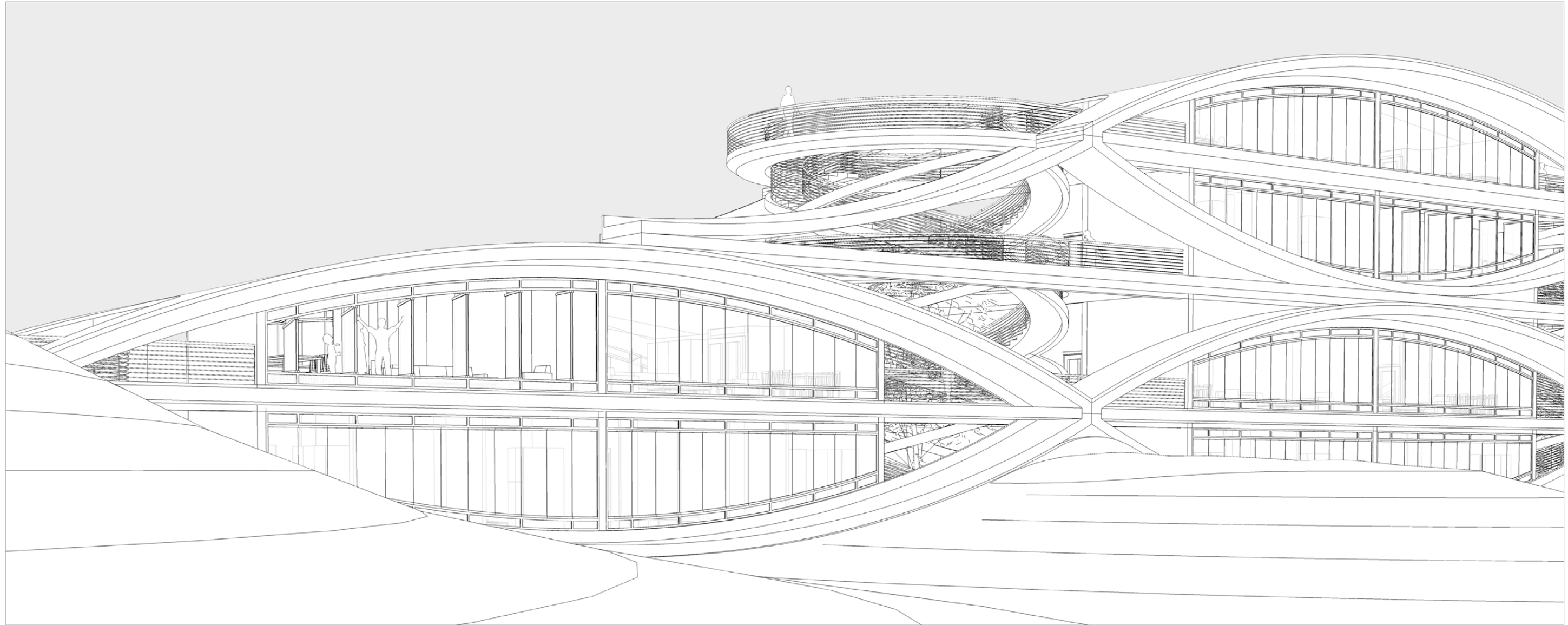
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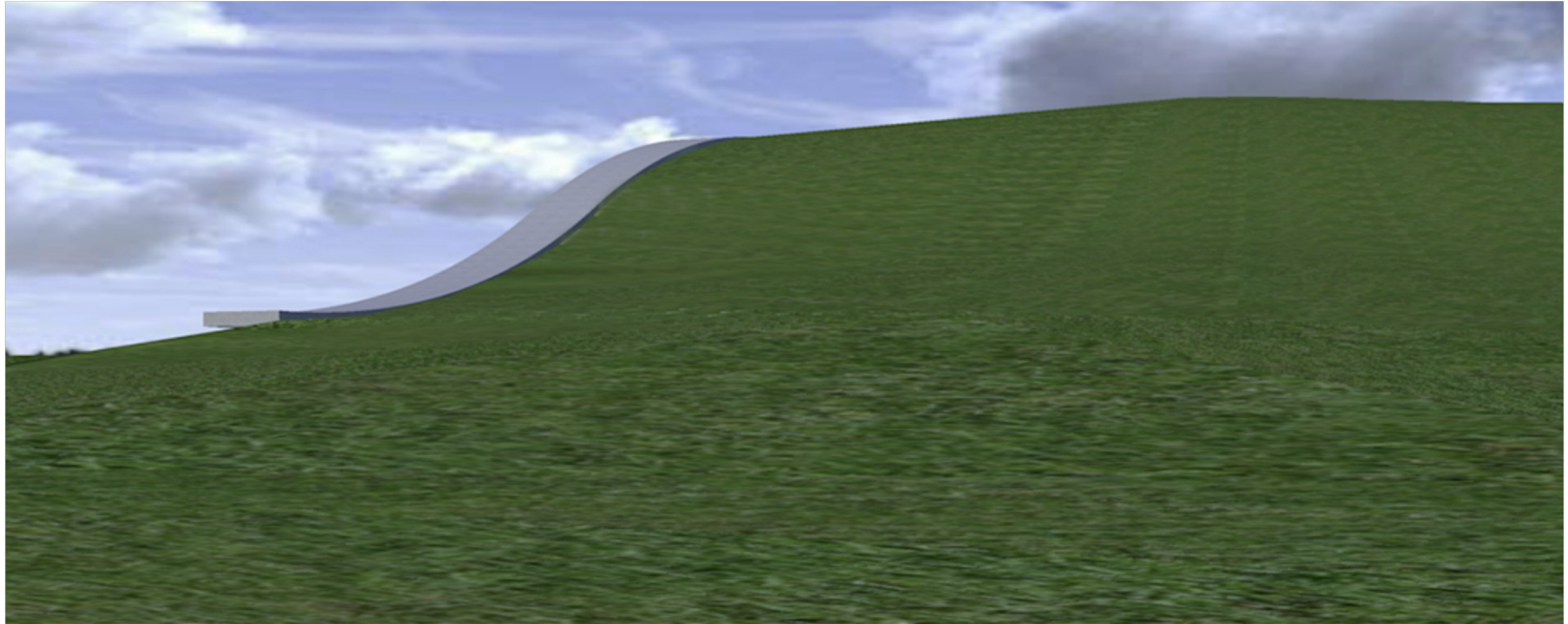


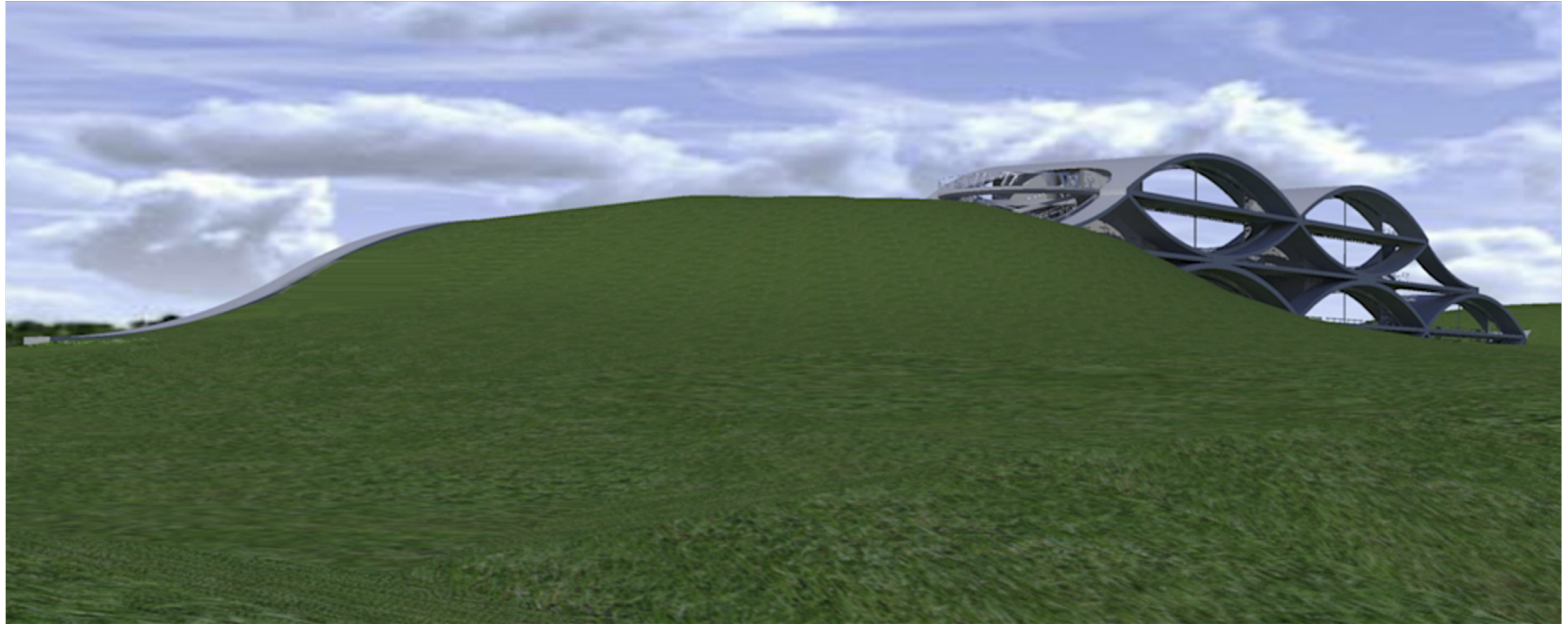
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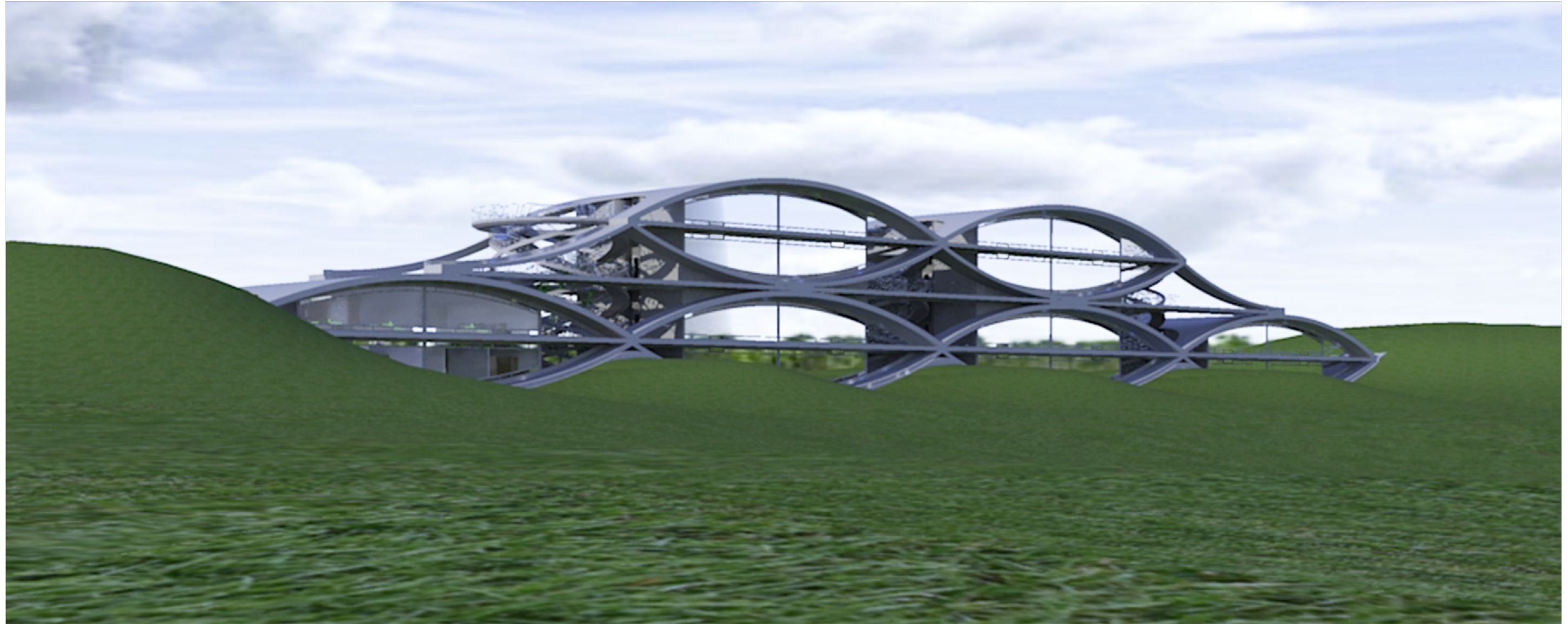






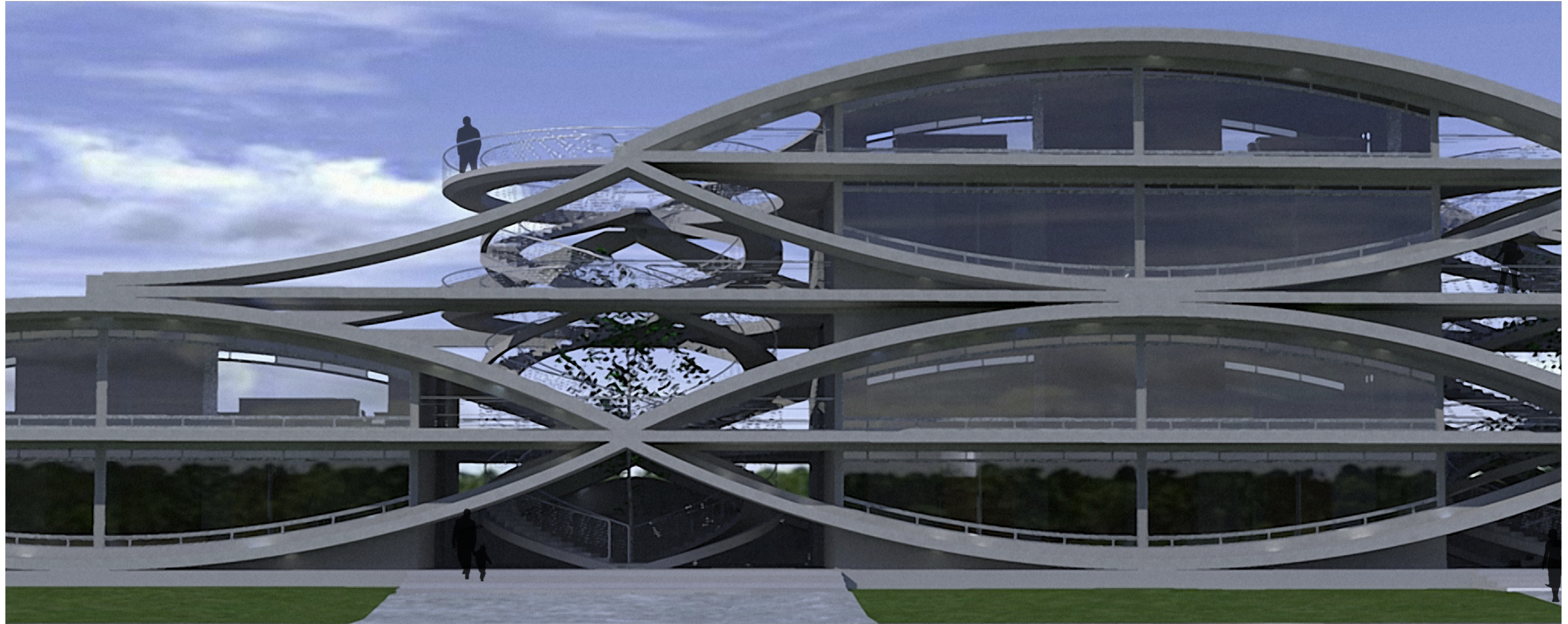


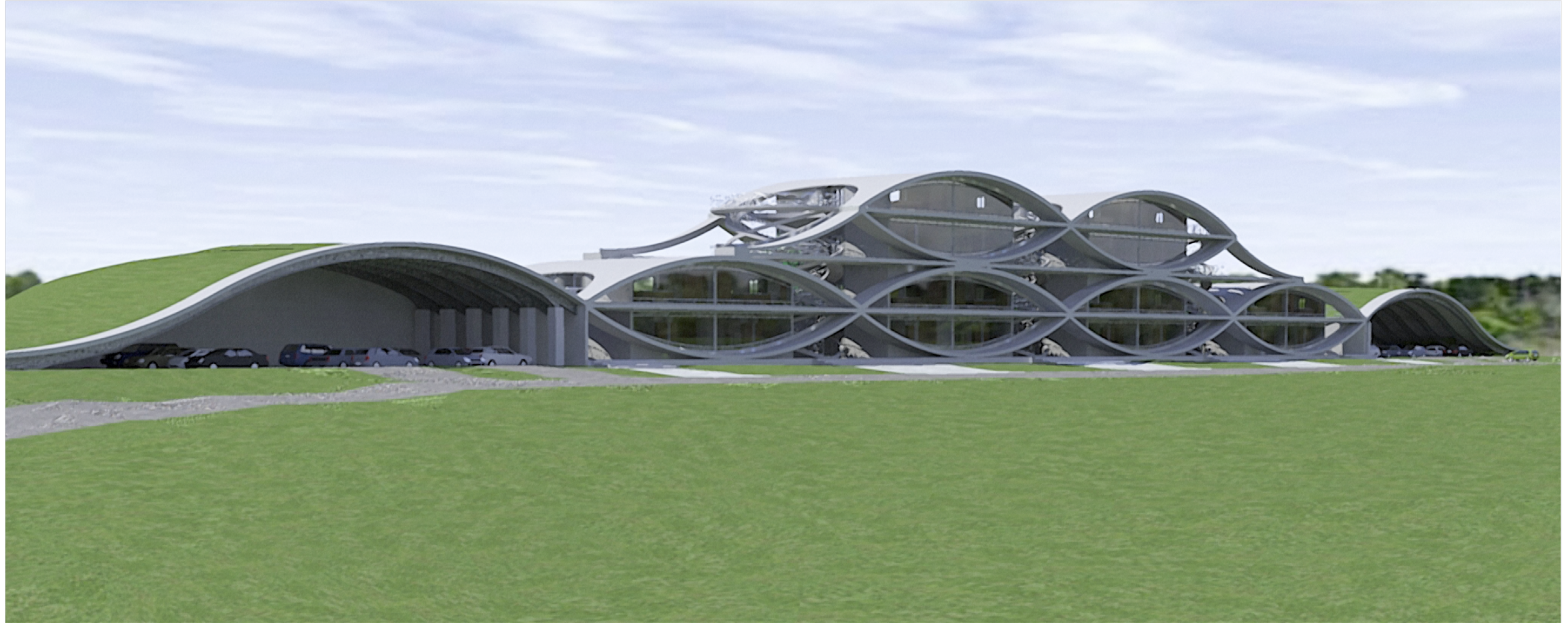


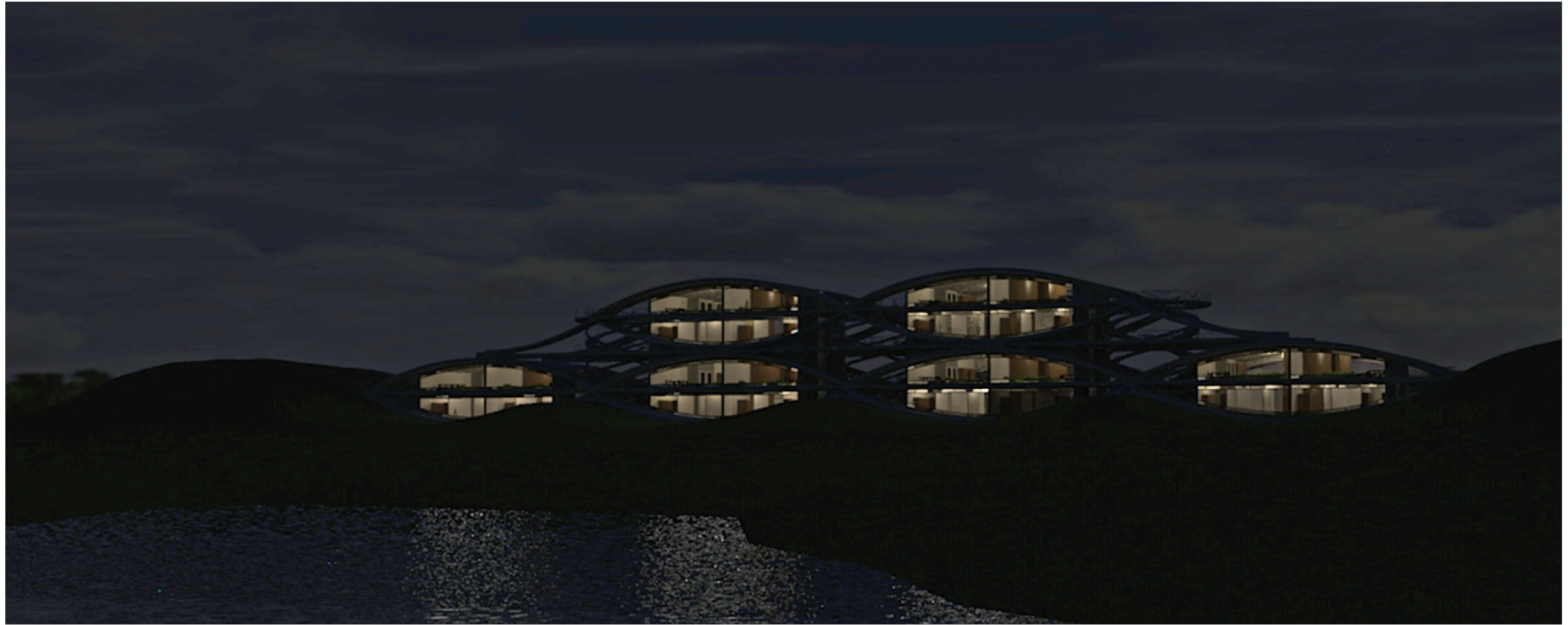












Credits:

Original source material for satellite images from NASA World Wind. Satellite images are altered by the author.

All other images are by the author.

Luigi Snozzi as quoted by Frank Weiner in a lecture, June 2007.

