

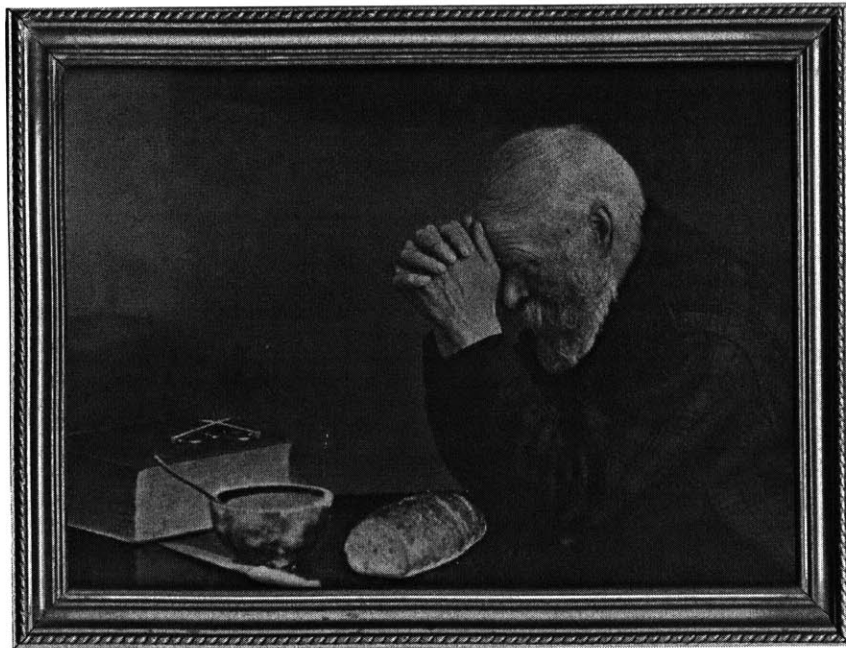
# Finding God in the Urban Landscape: A temple for gnosis in Upper Manhattan

Andrew Todd Marcus

Bachelor of Arts  
Biology & English Literature  
Oberlin College 1997

Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture at the  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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Author

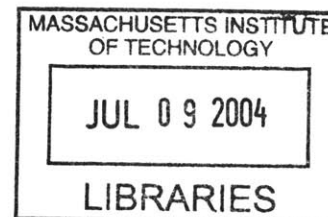
Andrew Todd Marcus  
19 May 2004

Certified by

Fernando Domeyko  
Senior Lecturer  
Department of Architecture

Accepted by

William Q. Hubbard, Jr.  
Adjunct Associate Professor of Architecture



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ROTCH

Thesis Advisor:

Fernando Domeyko  
Senior Lecturer  
MIT Department of Architecture

Thesis Readers:

Mark Goulthorpe  
Assistant Professor of Architecture  
MIT Department of Architecture

Axel Kilian  
PhD Scholar, Design & Computation  
MIT Department of Architecture

**Finding God in the Urban Landscape:  
A temple for gnosis in Upper Manhattan**

by Andrew Todd Marcus

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on 19 May 2004 in partial fulfillment  
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**Abstract**

Nature and Gnosticism are problematic terms. With the discovery of a library of so called heretical Gnostic texts in 1945, theologians, historians, and believers the world over have been exposed to Christian texts that call into question the liturgical lineage of the “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” and question the very biblical canon which informs almost all sects of Christianity. The texts in question span religious and cultural boundaries and give us a glimpse of a tradition, more mystical than political, that was lost to mainstream Western history and absorbed into the religions of the East. Understanding the term Nature require a form of extreme self-consciousness, what Peter Fritzell calls “a tolerance for ambiguity that is very difficult to sustain. It is, in essence, a dedication to paradox, and even an occasional delight in uncertainty, that can be extremely unsettling.”

This thesis proposes is a temple for gnosis in upper Manhattan that creates a space of meditation, reflection, and communion with the knowledge of God employing the theoretical ideas found in the “Gospel of Thomas”. The site, located in Inwood Hill Park on the extreme northern end of the island of Manhattan. The park contains true virgin forestland, a salt marsh, Native American cave shelters, and a clandestine and pastoral aspect unknown in the City of New York. An opportunity exists in the lack of ecclesiastical and traditional continuity in the individual relationship to god in the Gnostic gospels, and the ambiguity inherent in the displaced historiography of the texts in question is used as the foundation from which to reform the idea of “church.”

**This Advisor: Fernando Domeyko  
Title: Senior Lecturer**

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my family which has grown exponentially in my time at MIT. Their faith in me through eclectic career turns has sustained me in my endeavors. Many thanks, also, to T. Scott McMillin and H.D. Thoreau, two friends in philosophy and life.

Thank you Fernando Domeyko, my mentor and advisor, whose passion for deep truths gave me a rock on which to anchor my architectural education. Thanks, also, to Christine who has aided me immeasurably in this battle, and Matt and Esther for their uplifting presence each and every day.

Thank you, finally, to Nancy, my soul-mate and inspiration for a luminous life. gate gate para gate para sam gate bodhi swaha

This thesis is dedicated to the god without name:

*"Why God did you include me in your great scheme? Will you not make me a partner at last?"*

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*No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in Heaven or on Earth it is but a fraction of an all-pre-supposing fact with which our story sets out.*

George Elliot

**Introduction**

The insights spiritual intuition brings are neither complete nor certain; instead, epinoia conveys hints and glimpses, images and stories, that imperfectly point beyond themselves toward what we cannot fully understand.

Elaine Pagels  
*Beyond Belief: The secret Gospel of Thomas*

I am the light which is before all things. It is I who am all. From me all things came forth, and to me all things extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there; lift up the stone, and you will find me.

Gospel of Thomas 1:2  
from *The Nag Hamadi Library in English*

Nature and Gnosticism are problematic terms. As Karen King says in her recent book *What is Gnosticism*, “although scholars have expended considerable effort on determining the origin and development of Gnosticism, no consensus has been established.” With the discovery of a library of so called heretical Gnostic texts in 1945, theologians, historians, and believers the world over have been exposed to Christian texts that call into question the liturgical lineage of the “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” and question the very biblical canon which informs almost all sects of Christianity. The texts in question span religious and cultural boundaries and give us a glimpse of a tradition, more mystical than political, that was lost to mainstream Western history and absorbed into the religions of the East. Nature, perhaps the more ineffable of the two terms, seems to require a form of extreme self-consciousness, what Peter Fritzell calls “a tolerance for ambiguity that is very difficult to sustain. It is, in essence, a dedication to paradox, and even an occasional delight in uncertainty, that can be extremely unsettling.” If architecture is a means of positing our relationship to the larger world, historically, that relationship is one of a strong separation between culture and nature. Na-

ture is either separated from culture as “other” and assigned a place in “wilderness,” away from here, where we live and build, and subjected to nostalgia and romanticism; or it is detached from its metaphysical meaning and seen as scientific phenomena, essentially the weather. Nowhere is this more evident than understanding the urban landscape as pure manifestation of wildness and nature.

This thesis proposal is for a temple for gnosis in upper Manhattan that creates a space of meditation, reflection, and communion with the knowledge of God using the theoretical implications of so called “Gnostic Christianity. The site is located in Inwood Hill park and the surrounding neighborhood of Inwood on the extreme northern end of the island of Manhattan. Inwood, a predominantly Dominican and Irish area, is little known to New Yorkers and remains a cohesive and distinct neighborhood. Spanning five blocks from river to river, and at the confluence of two major highways, three rivers, and two subway lines, it is, in some ways, out of place in Manhattan. Inwood Hill Park, with the same physical area as Inwood, contains true virgin forestland, a salt marsh, Native American cave shelters, and a clandestine and pastoral aspect unknown in the City of New York. I propose that the temple act as a bridge between the well defined urban grid and the last remaining virgin forest in New York and, ultimately, between the urban landscape and God.

The thesis incorporates a modification of traditional Catalan tile construction I developed through my work at the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, research in parametric masonry systems in a workshop at MIT, and historical research on Rafael Guastavino. Catalan masonry, which informs the work of such architects as Antonio Gaudi, Rafael Guastavino, Eladio Dieste, and Felix Candela, can be found in Catalan Modernista architecture, many notable nineteenth and twentieth century buildings in the United States, and throughout South America. This building system proposes that a clear tectonic and the hand of the craftsperson are vital to understanding how a building exists in the landscape and attempts to ground new technologies in traditional sensibilities.

The research and design process included a survey of religious and meditation spaces in Christianity and other religions. The goal is to more clearly understand church typologies and understand their relationship to theology and mystical philosophy. The design process focuses on developing a new formal language that mirrors the ideas in the primary Gnostic texts, in particular, the Gospel of Thomas, though the program is by no means limited to a theoretical “Gnostic Religion.” An opportunity exists in the lack of ecclesiastical and traditional continuity in the individual relationship to god in the Gnostic gospels, and the ambiguity inherent in the displaced historiography of the texts in question, and I’ve used this as a starting point from which to re-form the idea of “church.”

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 ΤΑΝ ΕΠΡΟΧΑΥΤΑ  
 ΣΕ ΟΟΠΝ ΒΕ ΕΤΟΥ  
 ΑΥΘΕΤΑ ΜΕΙΟΝ ΕΝΚ

Title page of the original Coptic Gospel of Thomas

*The author of the Secret Book stresses that the insights spiritual intuition brings are neither complete nor certain; instead, epinoia conveys hints and glimpses, images and stories, that imperfectly point beyond themselves toward what we cannot fully understand.*

Elaine Pagels  
*Beyond Belief: The secret Gospel of Thomas*

**Theology & Precedent**

## History of the Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel According to Thomas is an ancient collection of sayings of Jesus said to have been recorded by Judas Thomas, the twin. Portions of Greek versions of the Gospel of Thomas were found in Oxyrhynchus Egypt about one hundred years ago and these can be dated to about 170 A.D. A complete version in Coptic (the native Egyptian language written in an alphabet derived from the Greek alphabet) was found in Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945. That version can be dated to about 340 A.D. The Coptic version is a translation of the Greek version. Thus most, if not all, of the Gospel of Thomas was written prior to the middle of the second century A. D. The Nag Hammadi find included other apocryphal gospels written contemporary to the four known canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The four canonical gospels and Thomas and other gospels such as the Gospel of Philip (found at Nag Hammadi) were given their names some time in the second century. Scholars of the New Testament generally agree that none of the gospels were written by people who had ever met Jesus of Nazareth during his lifetime. But at a later date names were assigned to them that were associated with famous individuals in the earliest church. The name of the person who supposedly wrote the Gospel of Thomas is given in the first lines of the text as “didymos Judas thomas.” The word “didymos” is Greek for twin and the word “thomas” is Aramaic for twin. The individual’s name was Judas, and his nickname “the twin” is given in two languages. The canonical gospels mention a man named Thomas and John calls him Didymos Thomas. There are also several individuals named Judas mentioned in the canonical gospels in addition to Judas called Iscariot. We do not know who wrote the Gospel of Thomas and we cannot be sure which Judas mentioned in the New Testament was also Thomas.

Amidst a flurry of speculation and claims of ownership, it became clear that the texts were, in fact, from the time of Jesus. Their authenticity confirmed, important theological and political questions arose, as did countless new-age interpretations of the meaning of the texts and the consequences of their loss and discovery.

The First Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, held in 325 on the occasion of the heresy of Arius. As early as 320 or 321 St. Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, convoked a council at Alexandria at which more than one hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya anathematized Arius. The latter continued to officiate in his church and to recruit followers. Being finally driven out, he went to Palestine and from there to Nicomedia. During this time St. Alexander published his “Epistola encyclica”, to which Arius replied; but henceforth it was evident that the quarrel had gone beyond the possibility of human control. Sozomen even speaks of a Council of Bithynia which addressed an encyclical to all the bishops asking them to receive the Arians into the communion of the Church. This discord, and the war which soon broke out between Constantine and Licinius, added to the disorder and partly explains the progress of the religious conflict during the years 322-3. Finally Constantine, having conquered Licinius and become sole emperor, concerned himself with the re-establishment of religious peace as well as of civil order. He addressed letters to St. Alexander and to Arius deprecating these heated controversies regarding questions of no practical importance, and advising the adversaries to agree without delay. It was evident that the emperor did not then grasp the significance of the Arian controversy. Hosius of Cordova, his counsellor in religious matters, bore the imperial letter to Alexandria, but failed in his conciliatory mission. Seeing this, the emperor, perhaps advised by Hosius, judged no remedy more apt to restore peace in the Church than the convocation of an ecumenical council.

The council, among other things, canonized the New and Old Testaments and produced a list of texts that we know of as the Catholic Bible. Moreover, the council named all other viewpoints heretical, particularly the beliefs of the Gnostic Christians, and condemned all texts and beliefs not agreed on. The theology agreed on by the council became the foundation of the One Catholic and Apostolic Church and dictated the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire. It can be expressed most succinctly in the literal translation of Nicene Creed, still a vital part of Catholicism:

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [ek tes ousias] of the Father, God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of the same substance with the Father [homoousion to patri], through whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and our salvation descended, was incarnate, and was made man, suffered and rose again the third day, ascended into heaven and cometh to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. Those who say: There was a time when He was not, and He was not before He was begotten; and that He was made out of nothing (ex ouk onton); or who maintain that He is of another hypostasis or another substance [than the Father], or that the Son of God is created, or mutable, or subject to change, [them] the Catholic Church anathematizes.

Christians who did not subscribe to these beliefs were excommunicated as heretics, which derive from the Greek word *hairetikos*, or “able to choose.” It is clear how this creed and the ideas promulgated by the Council came to be part of tradition. Constantine, the first Christian emperor, became convinced that making—and enforcing—such creeds helped unify and standardize rival groups and leaders during the turmoil of the fourth century. All heretics were forced into hiding, converted, or killed. Their texts were destroyed, and their religious beliefs eradicated. It is amazing, then, that any texts remain and that they should be found by accident almost 2000 years later. In retrospect, we can consider how political expediency effected religious belief and reexamine the heretical beliefs of those who were lost in history.

### Interpreting the Gospel

The Gospel of Thomas portrays Jesus as a wisdom-loving sage, his words more akin to Buddhist koans than to Christian parables. The aphoristic sayings emphasize the value of the present, teaching that the Kingdom of heaven is spread out upon the earth now, if people can only come to see it; and that there is divine light within all people, a light that can enable them to see the Kingdom of God upon the earth. Jesus teaches, in the Gospel of Thomas,

that people have the potential to be as he is, to be a child of god, and therefore from that perspective Jesus is not a uniquely divine person but a role model for all people.

The texts suggest an intensely personal relationship to a universal god akin to that found in yogic philosophy and Zen Buddhism, and later described more literarily in the Transcendentalist writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Seeing what is before you is the whole art of vision for Thomas’s Jesus, and many of the hidden saying are so self-contradictory that they can be interpreted only by seeing what they deny to confirm. As in a study of Gnosticism, no positive affirmation exists, but the negations are palpable and infinitely suggestive. It is in the constant ambiguity and slipperiness of an understanding that the divine is revealed. Nothing mediates the self in the Gospel of Thomas, and therein lays its power as well as its danger to the ancient church of the fourth century. Everything the reader seeks is already in their presence, and more over, in their self. Most remarkable in the text is the insistence that divinity and the Kingdom of God is already open to the seeker, they need only knock and enter. This shift of consciousness, of world view and self placement in space, is what makes the text so intriguing for architectural investigation. The deepest of these truths is never stated but always implied, and this implication leads to a possibility of experiential discovery.

Below are included the texts from which I drew for programmatic and theological inspiration. They are provided not for careful metaphorical evaluation, but as a lens through which to imagine a material and spatial experience in the world.

## The Gospel of Thomas (excerpts)

(This text is adapted by Elaine Pagels and Marvin Meyer from Professor Meyer's translation in *The Secret Teachings of Jesus* (Random House), in consultation with the Scholars Version published in *The Complete Gospels* (Polebridge Press).

These are the secret sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas the Twin wrote down.

5 Jesus said, "Recognize what is before your eyes and the mysteries will be revealed to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed."

13 Jesus said to his disciples "Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like."

Simon Peter said to him, "you are like a righteous messenger"

Matthew said to him, "you are like a wise philosopher"

Thomas said to him, "Master, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like."

Jesus said, "I am not your master Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended."

And he took him, and withdrew, and spoke three sayings to him.

When Thomas came back to his companions, they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?"

Thomas said to them, "If I tell you even one of the sayings he spoke to me, you will pick up rocks and stone me. Then fire will come forth from the rocks and devour you."

17 Jesus said, "I shall give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched, what has never arisen in a human heart."

18 The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us about the end."

Jesus said, "Have you already found the beginning, then, that seek for the end? For where the beginning is the end will be. Blessed is the one who stands at the beginning; that one will know the end and will not taste death."

24 His disciples said, "Show us the place where you are, for we must seek it."

He said to them, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear! There is light within a person of light, and it lights up the whole world. If it does not shine, it is dark

42 Jesus said, "Become passersby."

48 Jesus said, "If two make peace with each other in a single house, they will say to the mountain, 'Move from here!' and it will move."

50 Jesus said, "If they say to you, 'Where have you come from?' say to them, 'We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established [itself] and appeared in their image.' If they say to you, 'Who are you?' say 'We are its children, and we are the chosen of the living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the sign of your Father in you?' say to them, 'It is movement and rest.'"

61 ...[Jesus said,] "For this reason I say whoever is [undivided] will be full of light, but whoever is divided will be full of darkness."

66 Jesus said, "Show me the stone that the builders rejected: that is the cornerstone."

70 Jesus said, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you. If you do not have that within you, what you do not have within you [will] destroy you."

77 Jesus said, "I am the light that is over all things. I am all. From me all came forth, and to me all extends. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."

83 Jesus said, "Images are visible to people, but the light within them is hidden in the image of the Father's light. The Father will be revealed, but his image is hidden by his light."

91 They said to him, "Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you."

He said to them, "You search the face of heaven and earth, but you have not come to know the one who stands before you, and you do not know how to understand the present moment."

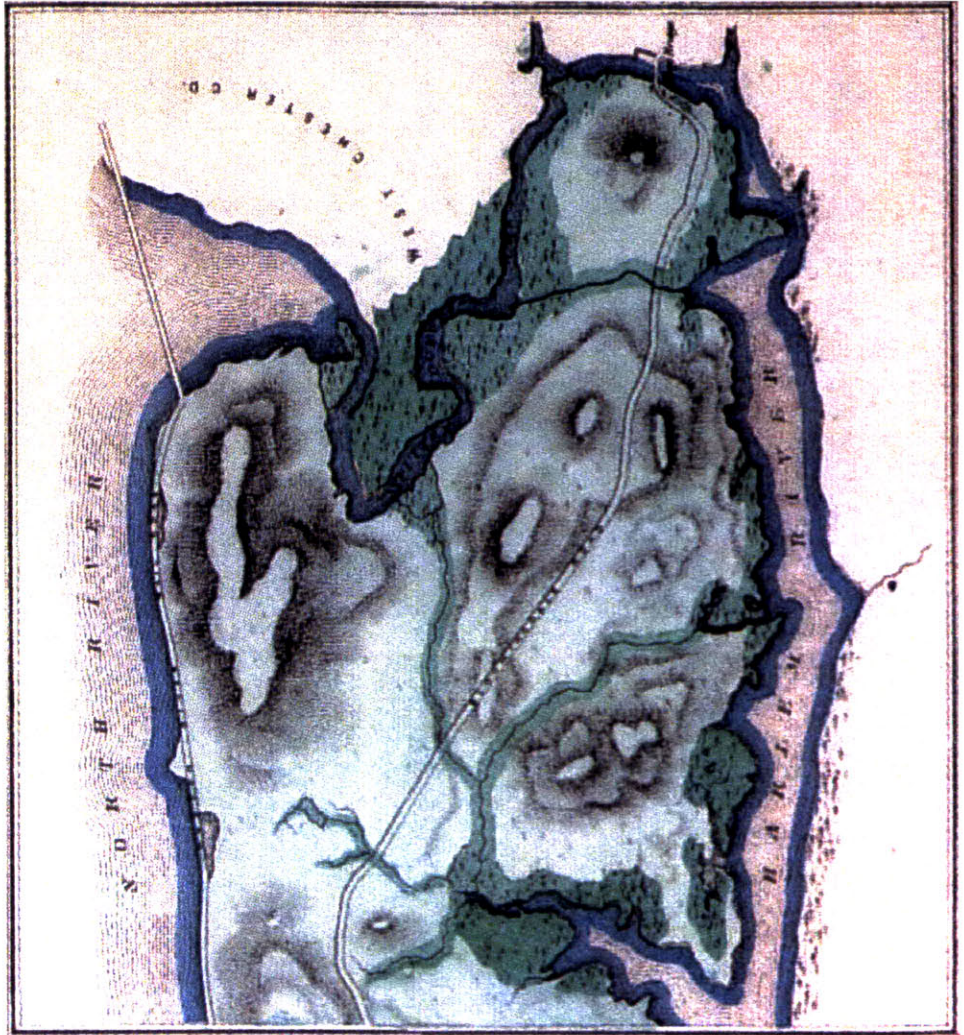
94 Jesus [said], "One who seeks will find, and for [one who knocks] it will be opened."

106 Jesus said, "When you make the two into one, you will become children of humanity, and when you say 'Mountain, move from here!' it will move."

113 His disciples said to him, "When will the Kingdom come?"

"It will not come by watching for it. They will not say, 'Look, it is here!' or 'Look, it is there!' Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, but people do not see it."





Viele's Water Map, 1865

*Solitude, in the sense of being alone, is essential to any depth of meditation or character... Solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without.*

John Stuart Mill

Site



Aerial view of site from the southeast. c.1937



Aerial view of site from the north. 6/25/1938



Aerial view of site from the south. 9/8/1937

Located on 196 acres in Upper Manhattan, Inwood Hill Park is the northern terminus of the island bounded by the Hudson River, Harlem River Ship Canal, Dyckman Street, and Payson and Seaman Avenues. Once a Wiechquaesgeck Indian settlement, Shora-Hap-Kok, meaning “in between hills” or, alternatively, “the sitting-down place,” the park contains the last remaining primeval forest in Manhattan and the largest in New York County. The Mohegan “showaukuppock” is translated as cove. The Delaware (or Lenape) term is “w’shakuppek,” which means smooth, still water when interpreted from their language. Another term is attributed to Reginald Pelham Bolton is “saperewack,” which meant the glistening place.

Indians occupied the park as late as the 1920s and 1930s. Princess Naomi, a member of the Algonquin-speaking peoples, operated a Native American store and museum in the park and her tribe maintained an Indian Life. The organization gave tours of the remaining cave shelters, demonstrated native arts and crafts, and ran a library containing books on American Indians.

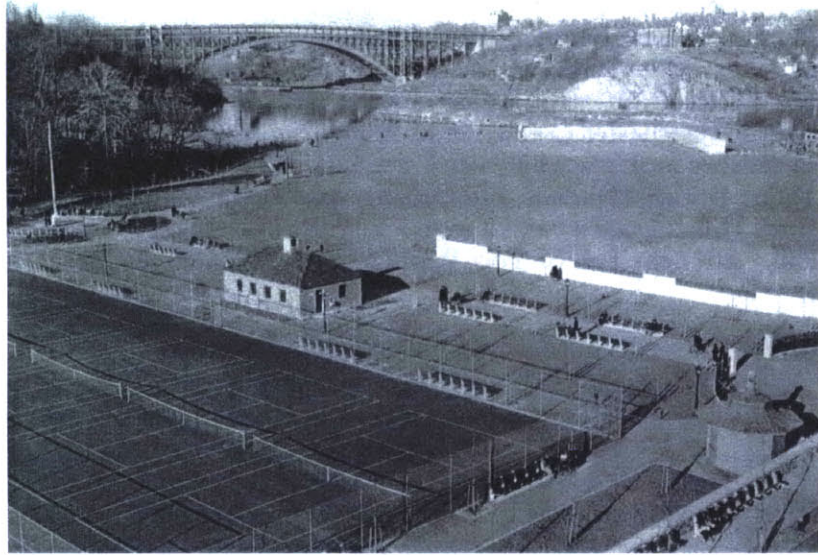
Within Inwood Hill Park there is an area called Cold Spring Hollow where the local tribal groups of the Lenape Confederacy lived in the nearby caves and fished in the local waters. Shells and other artifacts still surfacing had been used by these early inhabitants who made the park their home. Deer, raccoon, bear and other animals were hunted for food and skins were tanned for everyday use. In the early part of the 20th century, archaeological digs in the area uncovered two Native American burial sites. These skeletal remains were located near 203rd Street and Seaman Avenue. One site contained the remains of a squaw and an infant, and the other contains a chief and his squaw. According to local legend, the Dutch purchased Manhattan from the Indians for \$24 worth of trinkets on November 5, 1626, near the knoll on the shore of the Spuyten Duyvil Creek. To commemorate the occasion, the Indians planted a tulip tree, which had grown for 300 years. Its dimensions were 165 feet in height and 6 and 1/2 feet in diameter. The tree, now long dead, has been replaced with a plaque honoring the location and event. The cove in the Spuyten Duyvil Creek

was the reputed landing site of a long boat of Henry Hudson’s ship Half Moon.

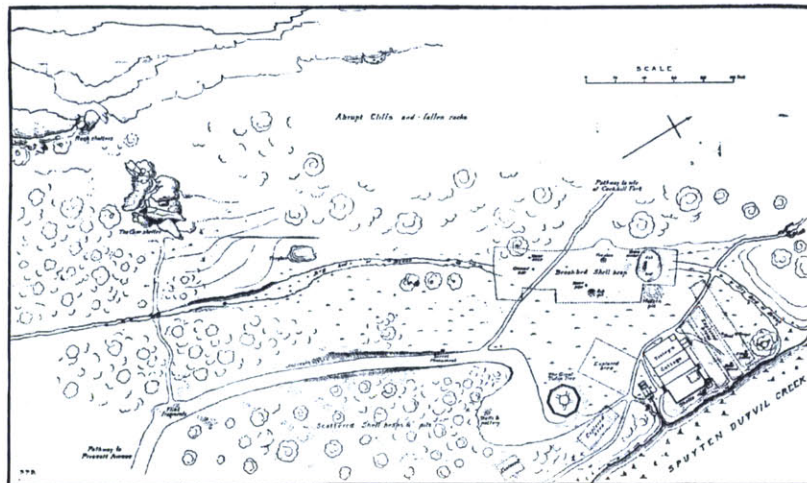
During the Revolutionary War, During the war for independence, batteries were erected in the vicinity of the Spytten Duyvel on promontories on each side of it, at its junction with the Hudson; and in Westchester County, in its immediate neighborhood, many skirmishes took place between Cow Boys and Skinners, Whigs and Tories, British, Hessians, and Indians. Inwood Hill, then known as Cox’s Hill, housed a two-cannon fortification known as Fort Cock Hill. After the Fall of Fort Washington on November 26, 1776,



Westside improvement, north of Dyckman St. 8/13/1936



View of newly constructed playing fields. 1/1/41



Map of the glen of Shora-Kap-Pok showing Indian sites. 1933

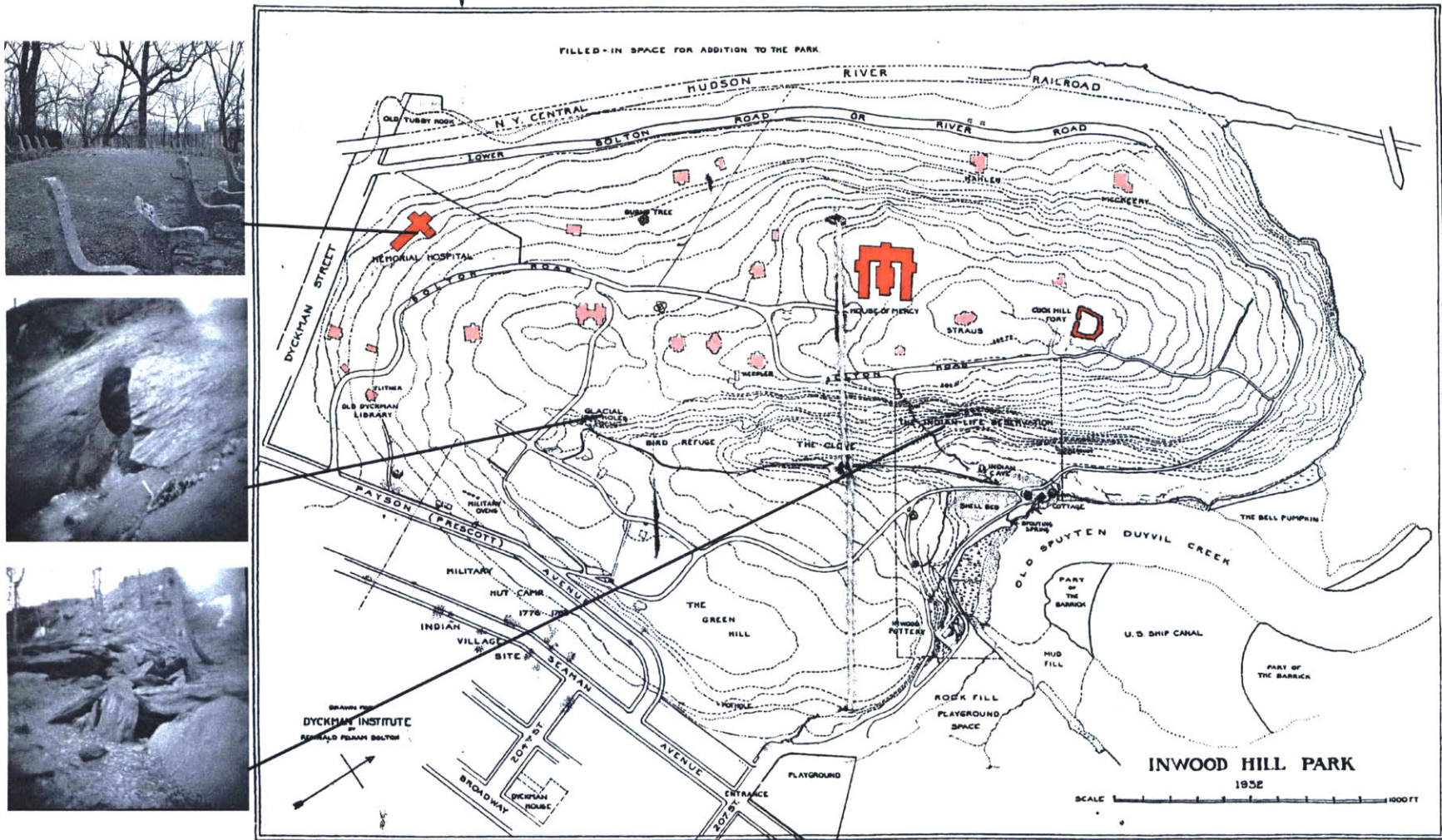
Hessians mercenaries occupied the area, and archeological remains of their camps still exist in the park.

The park was home to country retreats for some of the wealthier families of the community and the rest of New York's social elite in the 19th century. In 1847 the New York and Hudson River Railroad opened, and there was a station known as Tubby Hook, which was located at the foot of Dyckman Street on the Hudson River. Wealthy city dwellers built summer estates in the area. Some of their summer estates had farm animals that were threatened by wolves, foxes and bobcats and the groundskeepers eradicated these predators by the mid 1890s.

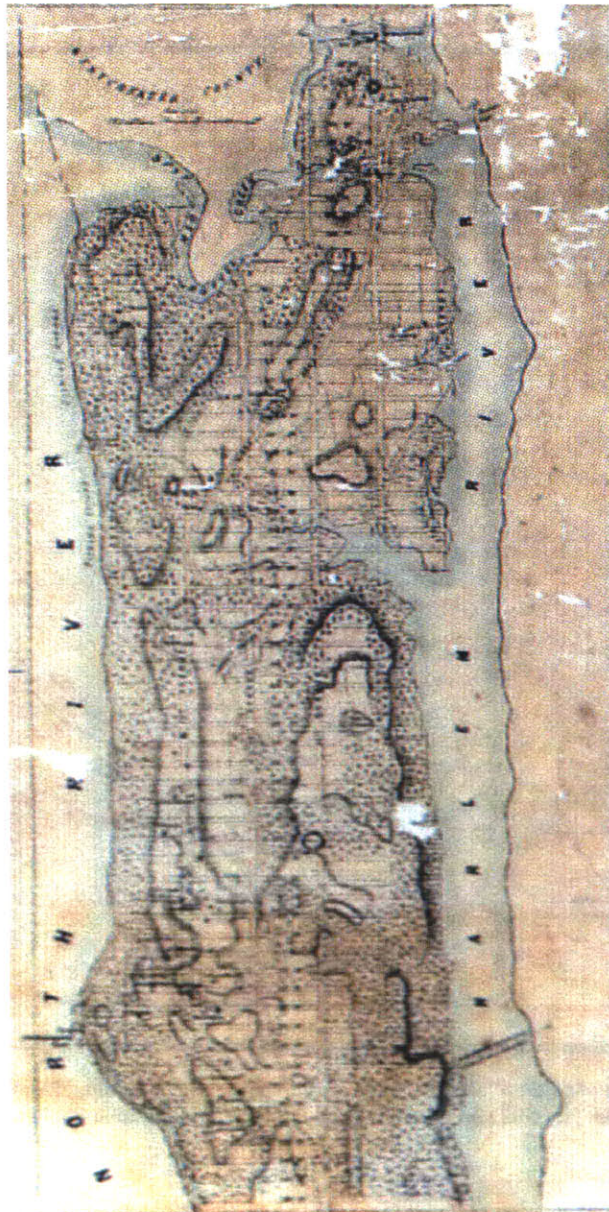
Land north of 110th Street became exceptionally cheap during the 19th century, and charitable institutions such as the House of Mercy and Jewish Memorial Hospital purchased estate land in the park, taking advantage of the woodland though to play an important role in the health and welfare of the. There was an orphanage, a home for unwed mothers and a rest home for tuberculosis patients. These institutions, which have moved to other locations, left traces of foundations, verandas, and pathways in the park

Founded by the Episcopal Church, The House of Refuge for Young Women and Girls, or House of Mercy was operated by the Sisters of Saint Mary. The land was bought in 1888 and opened its doors two years later. The building closed in the 1920s and was demolished. The site of associated convent and rectory on the western ridge remains as the Overlook Meadow which commands vistas of the Lower Hudson River and the Palisades Cliffs.

Inwood Hill Park clearly demonstrates the glacial and geological activity found throughout the Hudson Valley. Marble, schist and limestone are prevalent in the area and the park is seismologically located between several earthquake faults: the Hudson River, Dyckman Street, Spuyten Duyvil and the Harlem River. Millennia ago, glaciers covered the New York metropolitan area and left glacial striations and potholes in the park. A glacier, about one quarter mile high, created potholes formed by swirling water streams with the help of gravel and rocks that drilled holes over thousands of years. Between the 1890s and the 1930s, the Spuyten Duyvil



"The Park and Its Places of Interest". 1933. Sites in red shown as seen today. From top to bottom: Memorial Hospital sun porch, Glacial Pot Hole, Indian Cave Shelter.

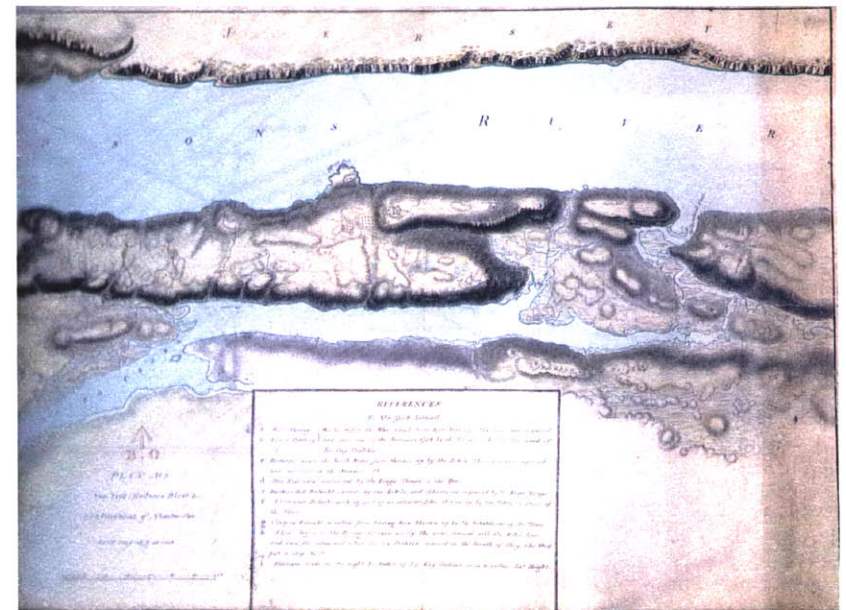


Dripps II Map. 1850

Creek was transformed into the Harlem River Ship Canal with the help of funds raised by the federal government and now marks the beginning of the East River of Manhattan.

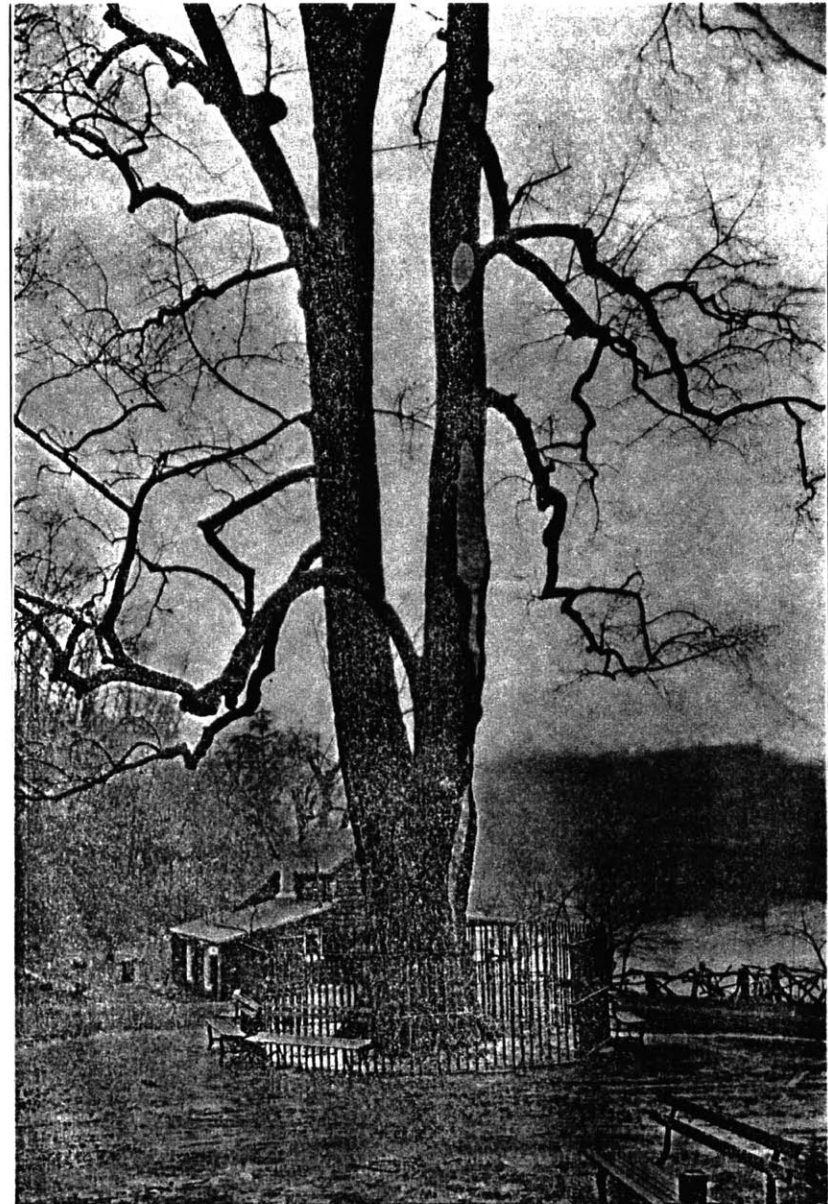
Between 1915 and the early 1940s, the City purchased the parcels of land that form the contemporary park site. The park was officially opened on May 8, 1926. The New York Times reported that day: “The majority of the one thousand spectators were children attracted by the announcement that real Indians were going to take part in the ceremony.” The Henry Hudson Parkway construction project, overseen by Robert Moses, was completed in 1938 and the two lane highway runs on tiers through the western length of the park. The cut stone and earth from the project was used as fill for a playing field complex which extends, at water level, into the Hudson and forms roughly a third of the acreage of the park.

While numerous obscure books and reports exist detailing the history of the park, there is little easily gathered information regarding the cultural and architectural history of the site. This includes,



British Headquarter Map. 1782

for example, information on water drainage. In this case, sources cite the association of unmarked and maintained cisterns found in the park to nineteenth century estates. Geological information suggests they were employed because of the high water table and good storage in the surrounding bedrock, but current park rangers and resource management officials are unaware of their current functionality. Through observation and cooperation with a local planning professor, I found that the bulk of the storm water runoff is collected and channeled through these cisterns and underground drainage tiles. In addition, remains from the hospital sun porch, though disused, mark the apex of the southern end of the park. The semi-ellipse of the sun porch is lined with south-facing benches that look downtown towards the Cloisters of Fort Tyron Park and the George Washington Bridge. The stone porch, set into the hill, is directly above the junction of a number of paths and the main tile network leading to the southern park drainages. On the western ridge, the soil depression from the removal of the convent and rectory remains in the form of the Overlook Meadow. It is the lone clearing in the dense forest and leads directly to a small overlook on a shear cliff with vistas of the Hudson and the Palisades.



Commemorative tulip tree, circumference 23'7", age 245 years. 1930



Composite map derived from maps and survey information from 1643-2004

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As part of a comprehensive site study, I examined nine historical maps and a number of ecological and geological studies in order to produce a comprehensive base map accurate both culturally and geographically. It is from this map, to the right, that I began to understand the shifting relationships between the internal site, the city grid, and the Hudson River.







It is difficult to describe the quality of Inwood Hill Park. There is responsiveness inherent in the site – a mental exchange and release that approaches the outcome of the communal consciousness. That is, the site is a reflection on the visitors' emotions and spiritual state precisely because it is defined and precisely because its definitions are indeterminate. The centers of indeterminacy on the site, historical and fictional in current form, act as a mirror to the visitors' emotion and imagination. The site is at once post-apocalyptic, or timeless in its subtle remembrances of things past, undone, and forgotten while at the same time pre-historical in its geological formations and surprising clandestine relationship with the teeming city. These photographs attempt to relate the experience of visiting the park.













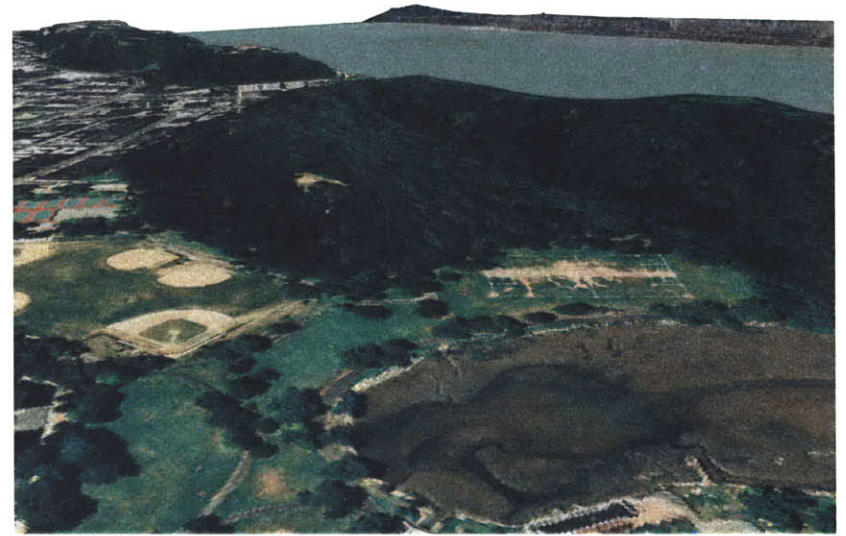


Composite map depicting 19th century site conditions

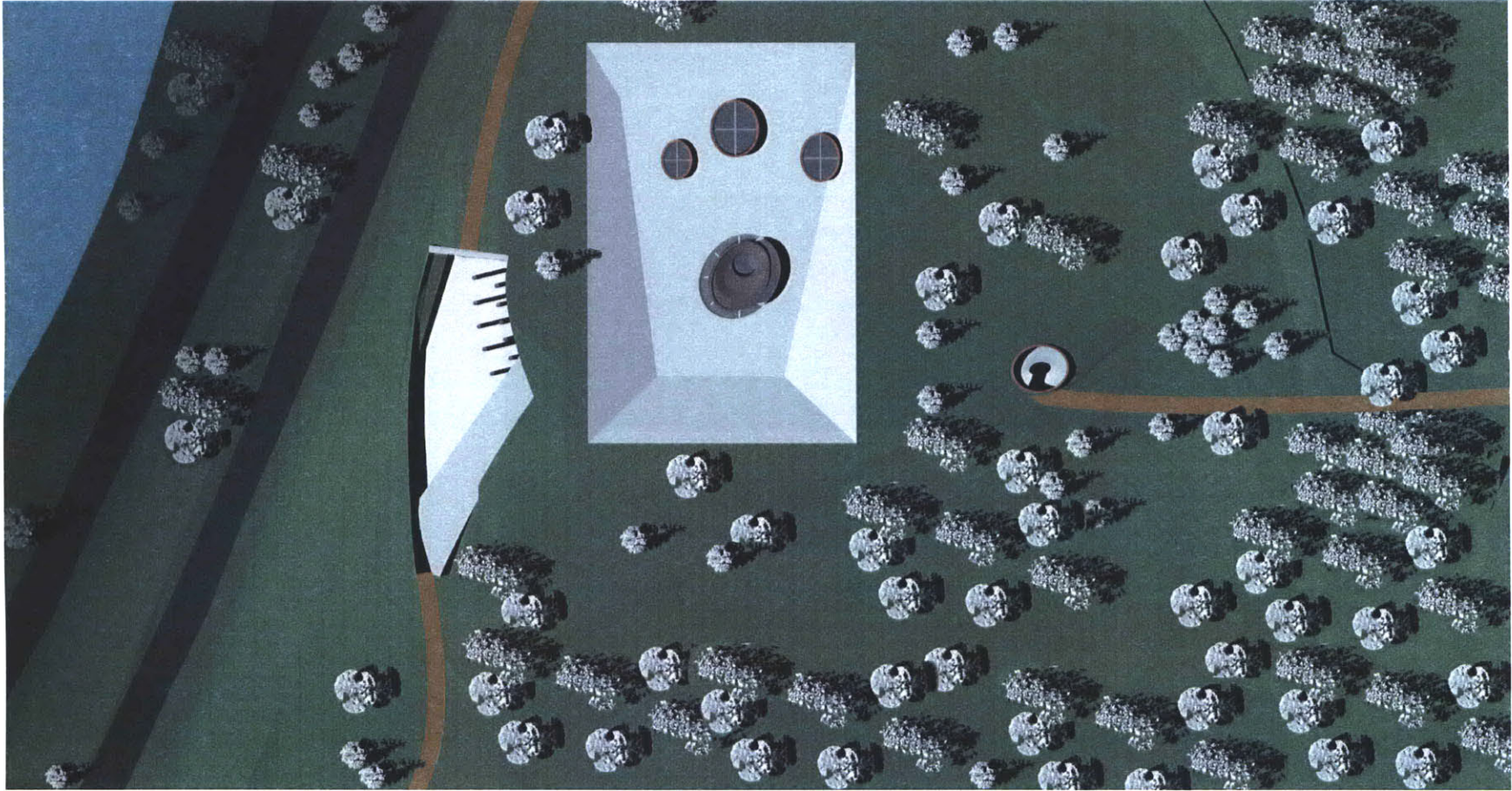
*I am the light which is before all things. It is I who am all. From me all things came forth, and to me all things extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there; lift up the stone, and you will find me.*

Gospel of Thomas 1:2  
from *The Nag Hamadi Library in English*

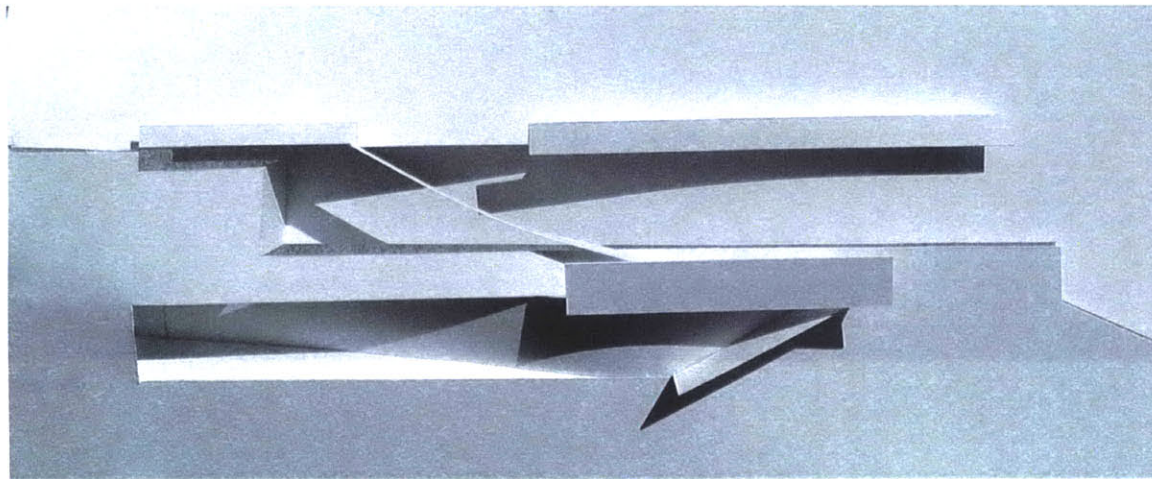
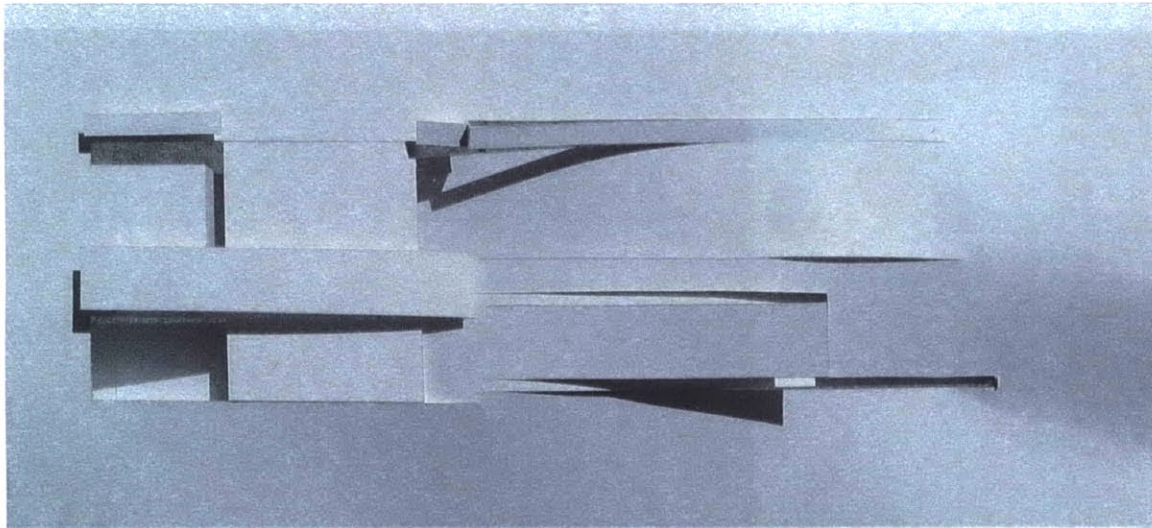
**Design: A Temple for gnosis**



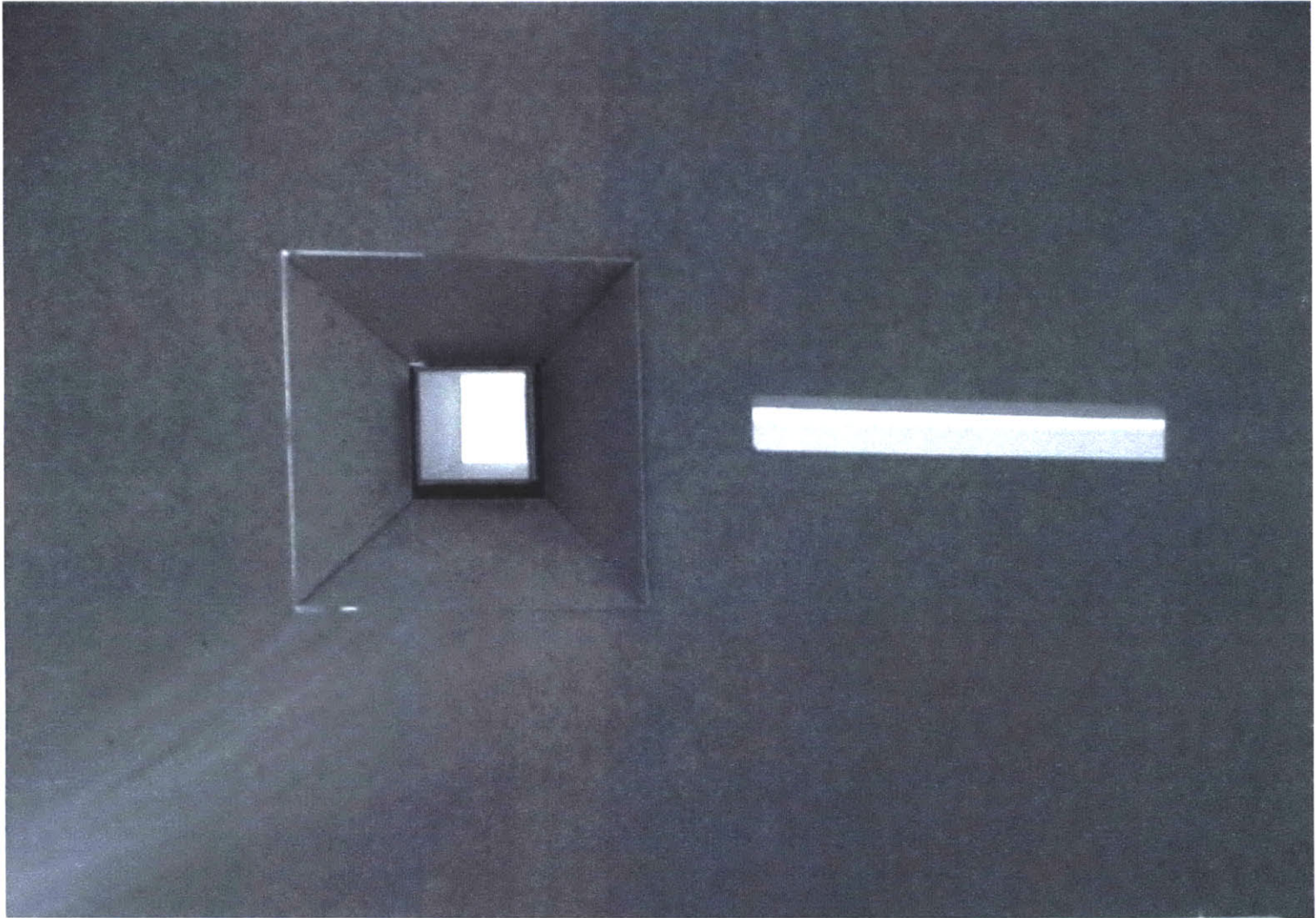
Site axonometrics from GIS datasets



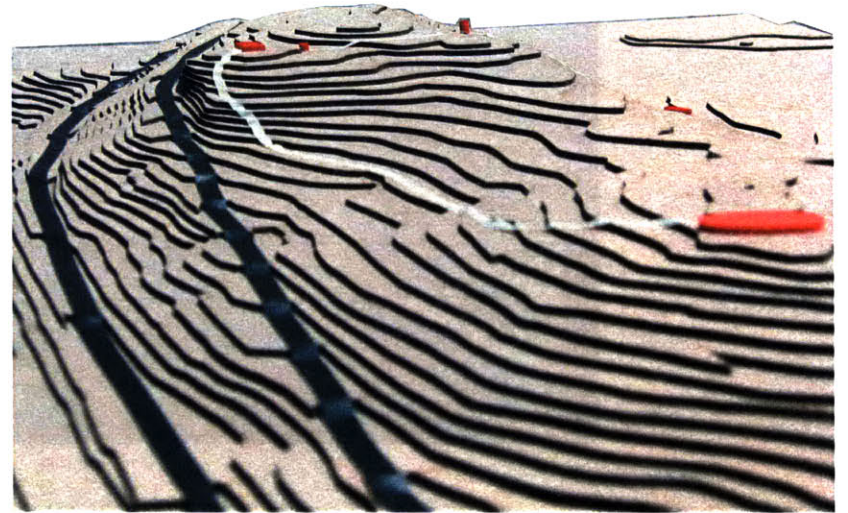
Site plan



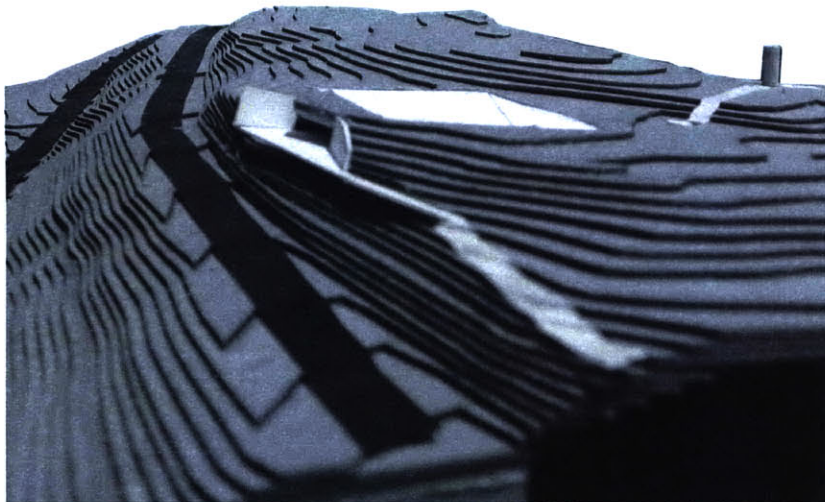
Sectional study models



Plan study model

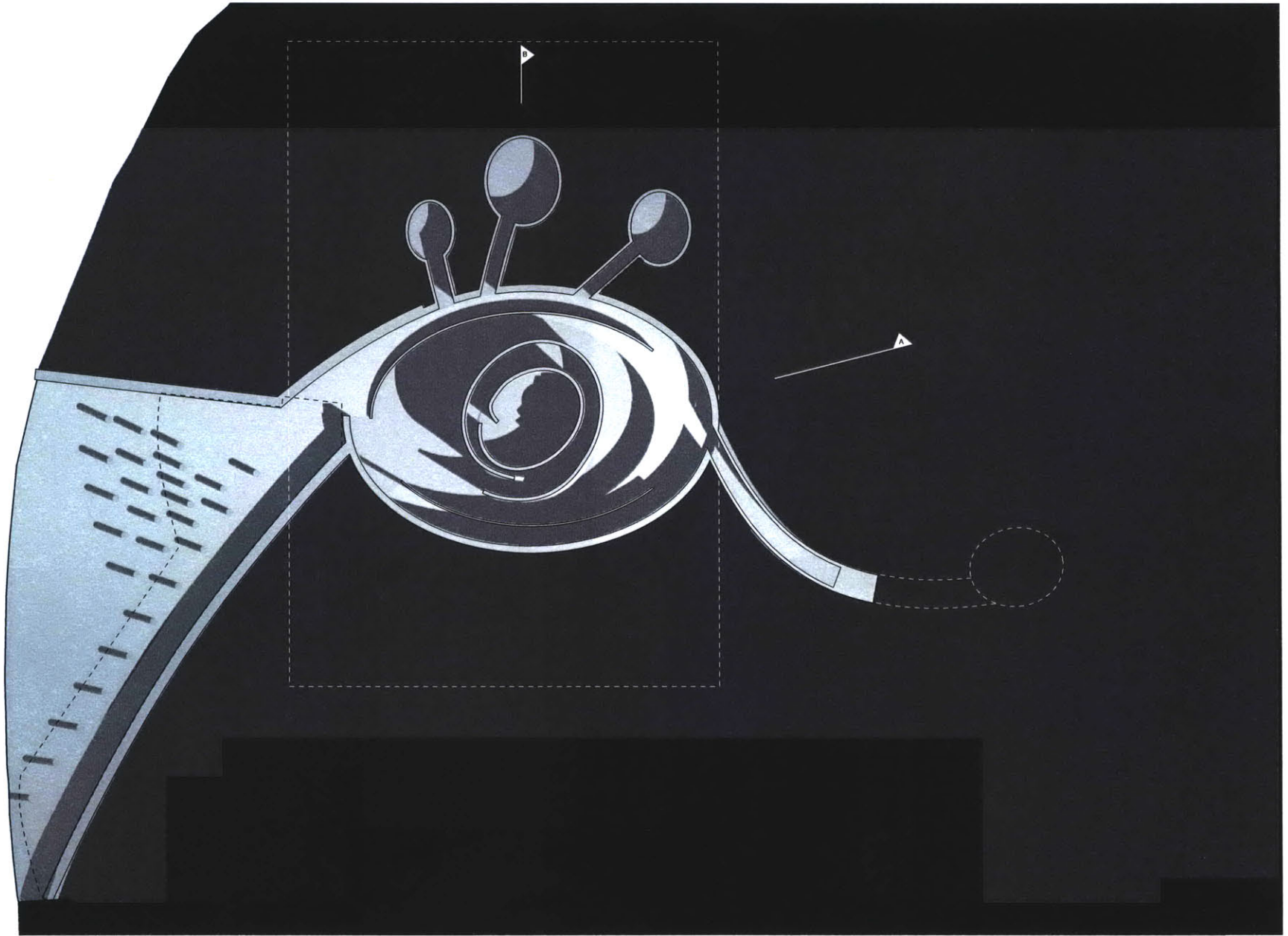


Full site model showing design focal points



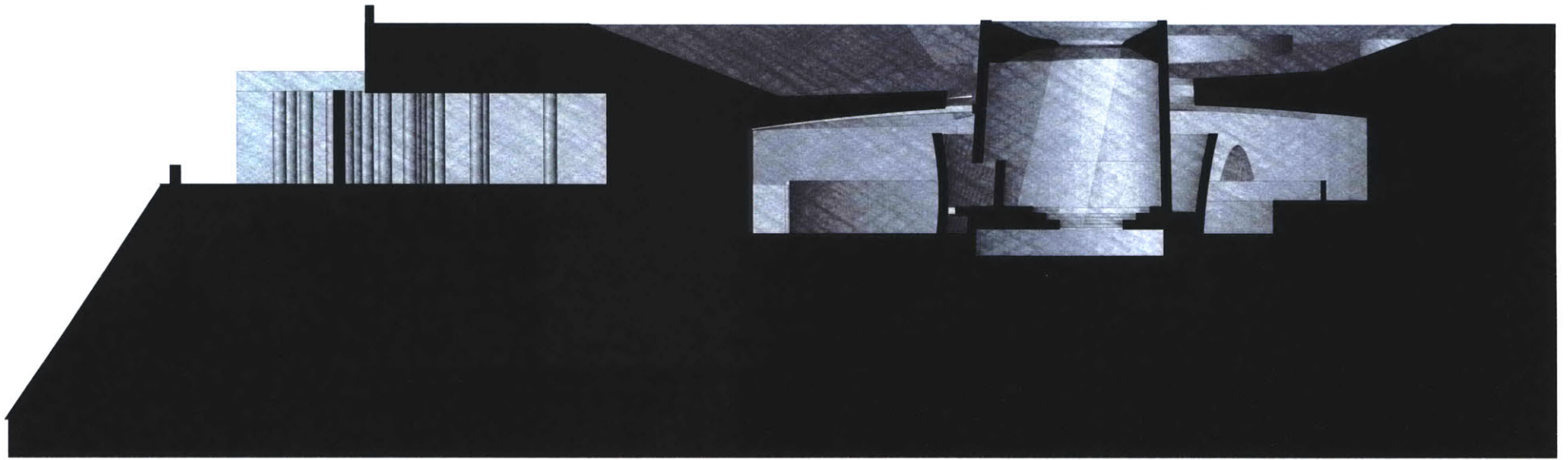
Detail site model showing temple site



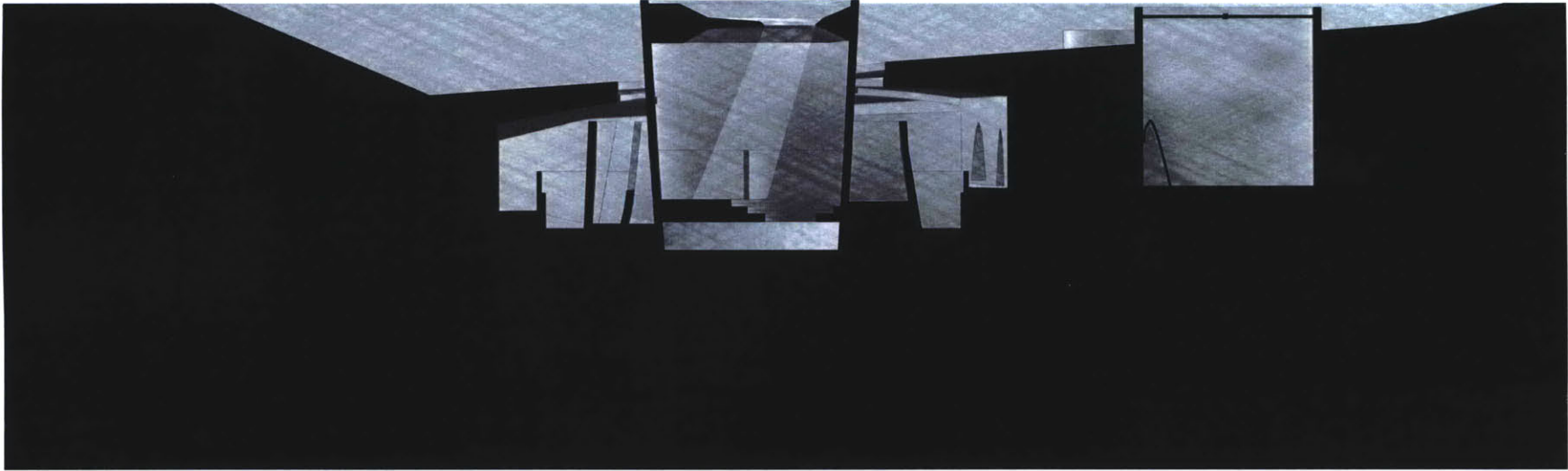




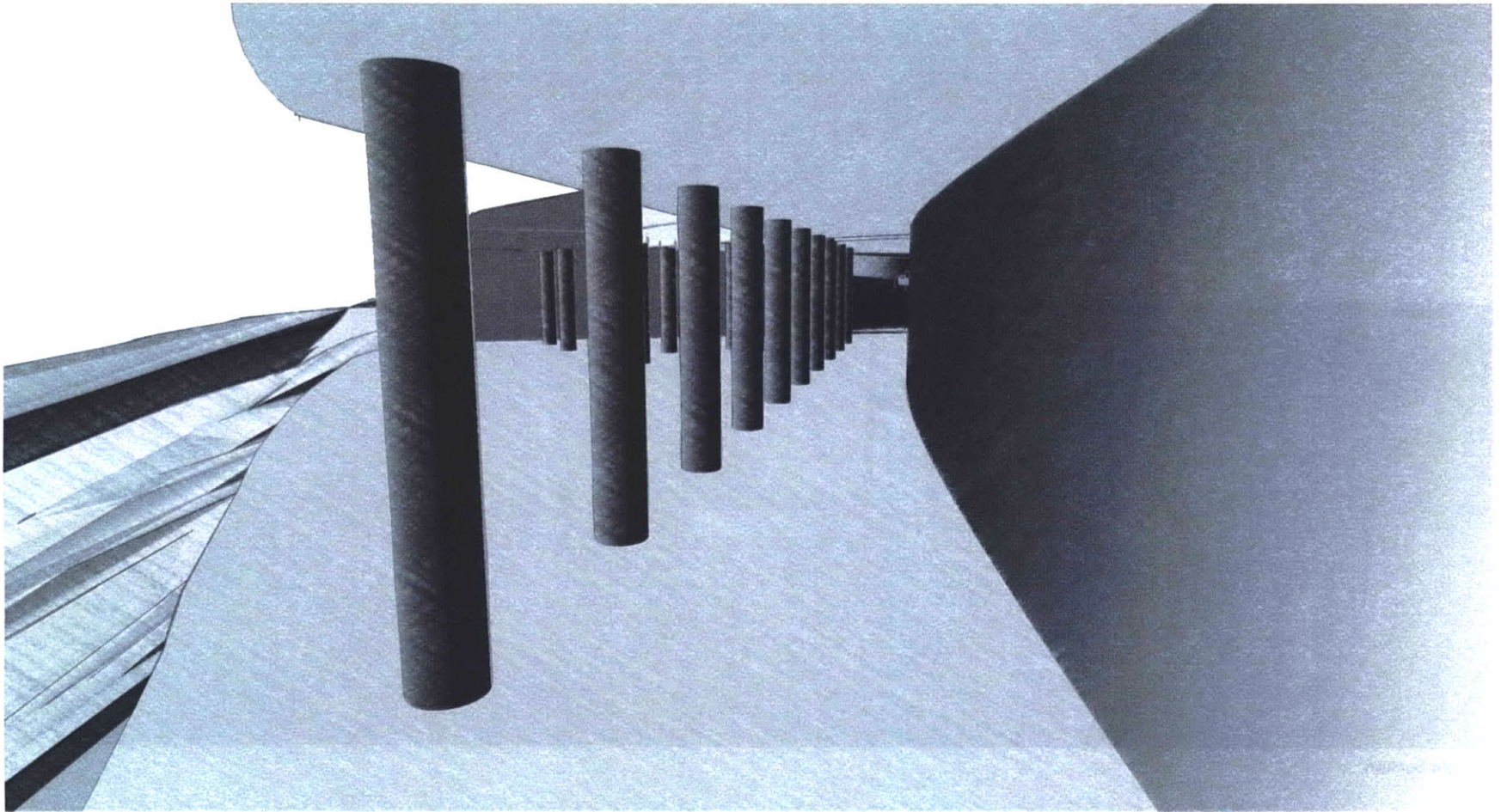
Temple Plan



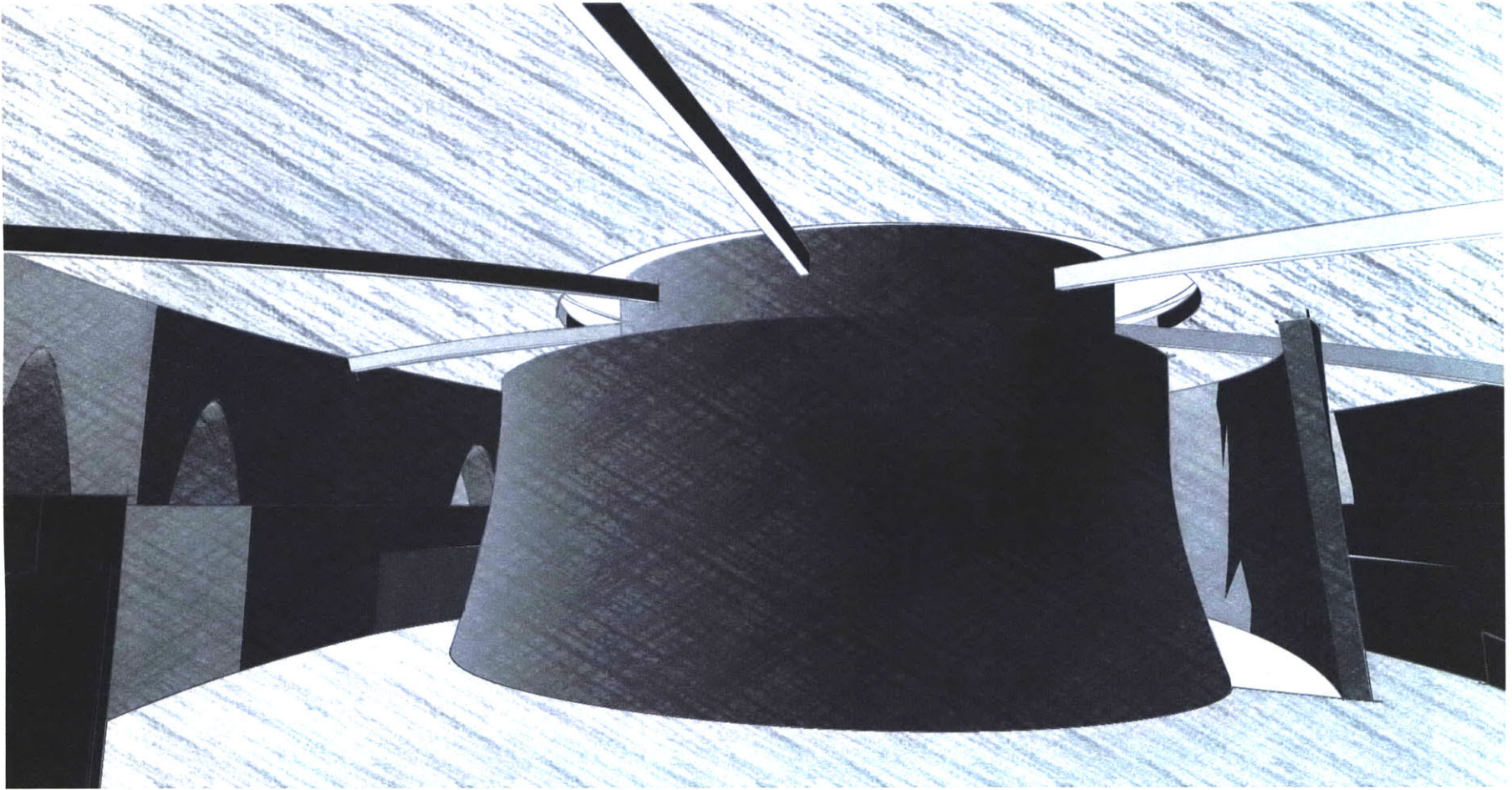
Temple Section



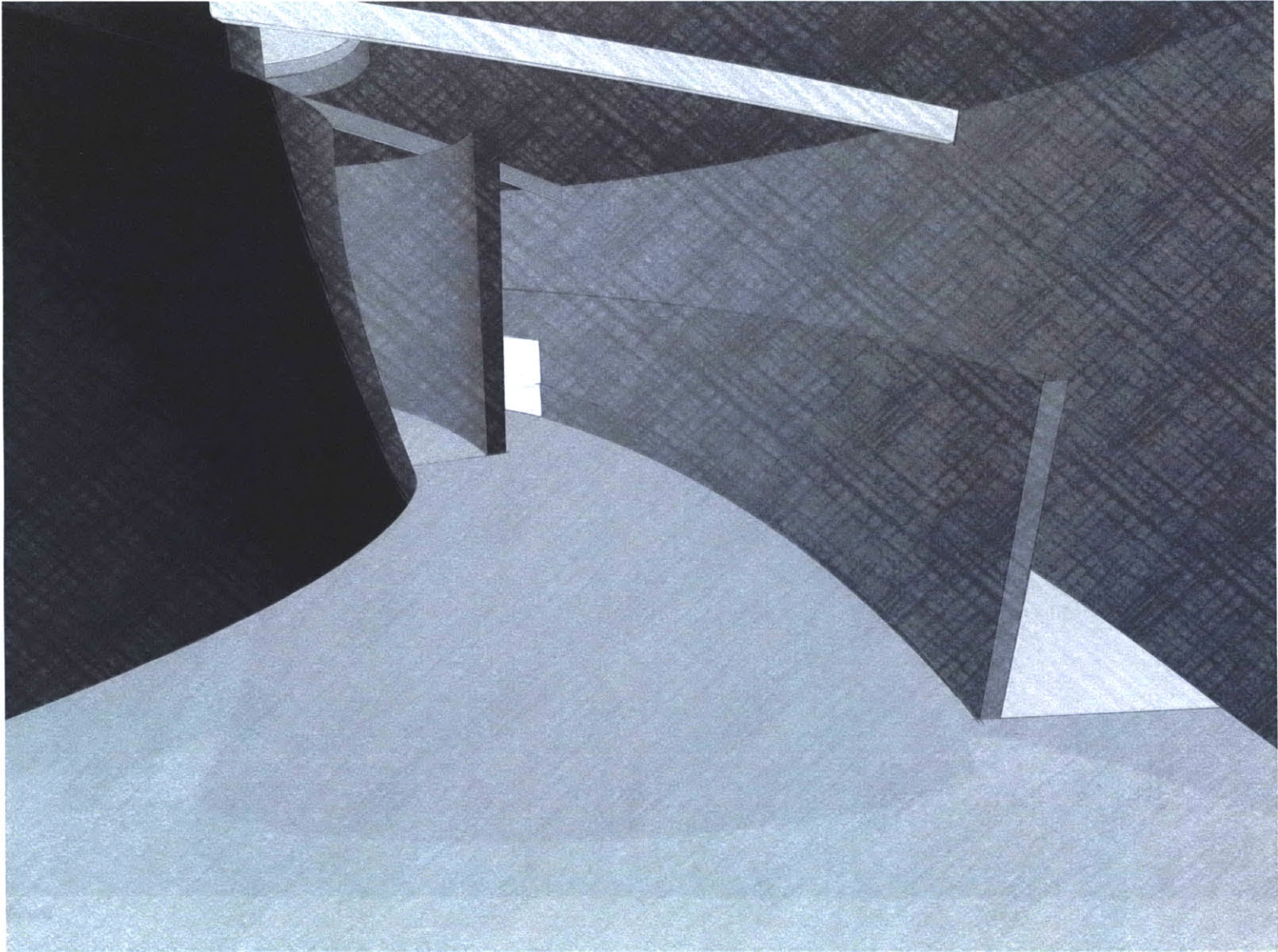
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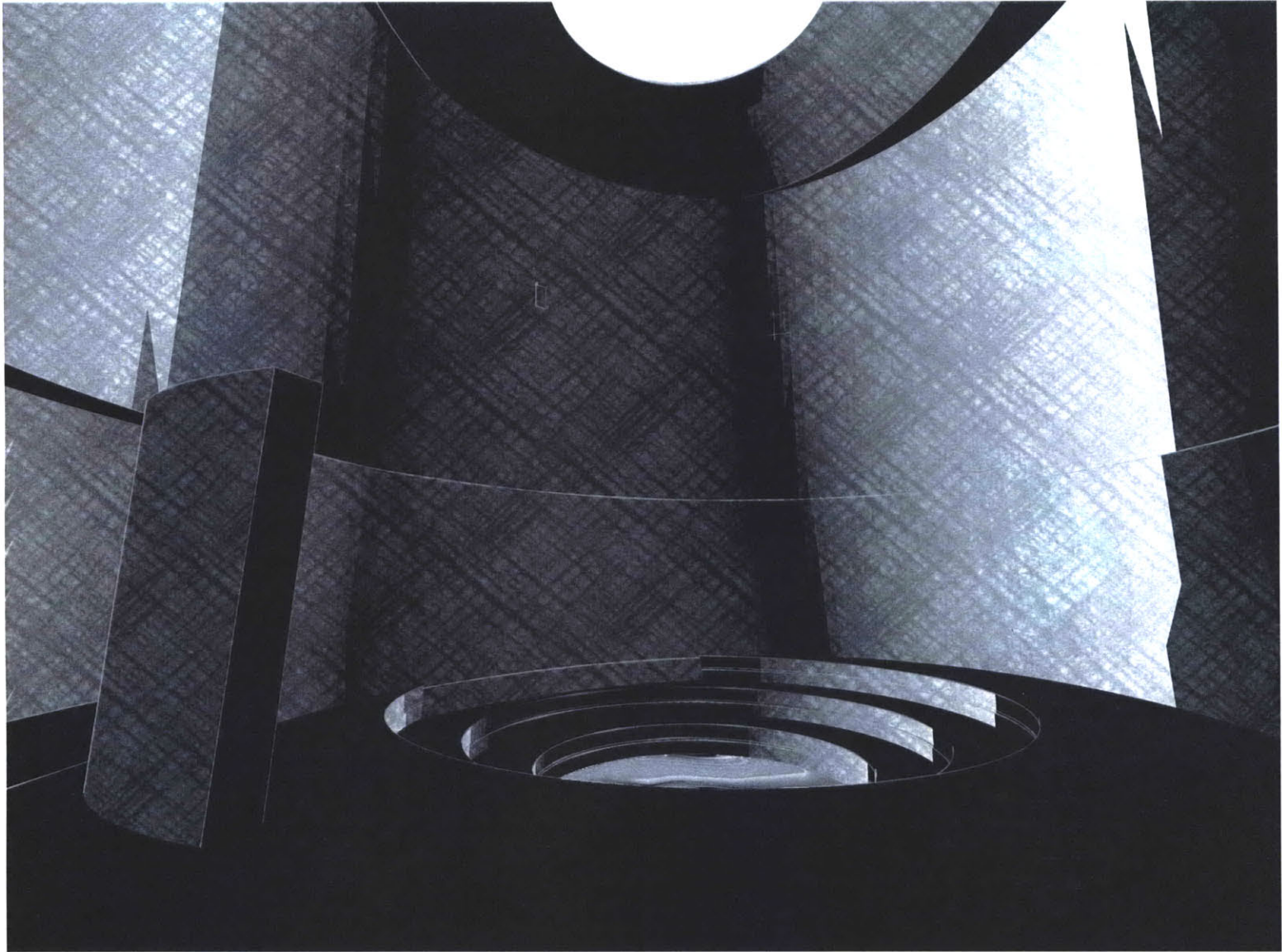
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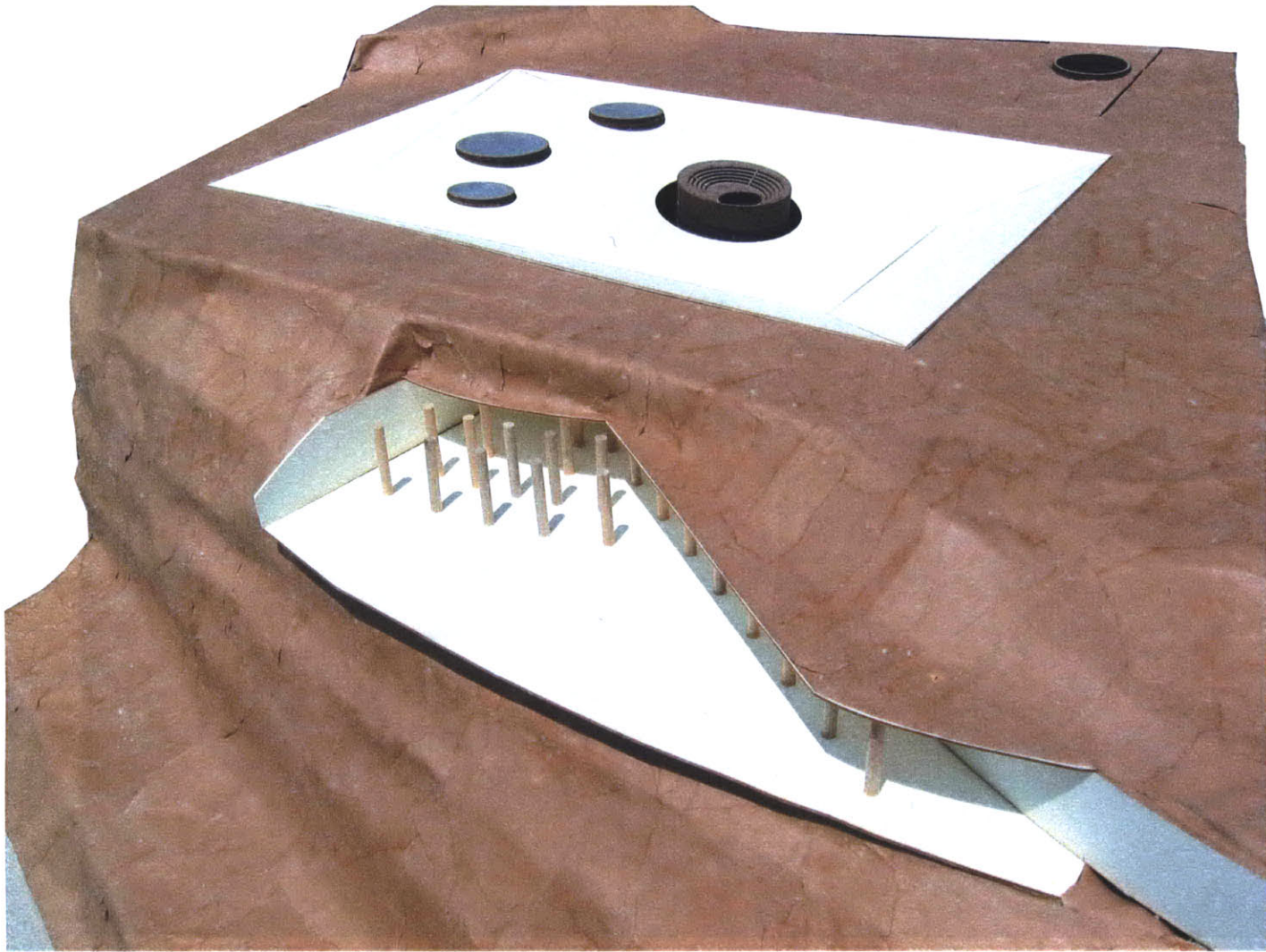
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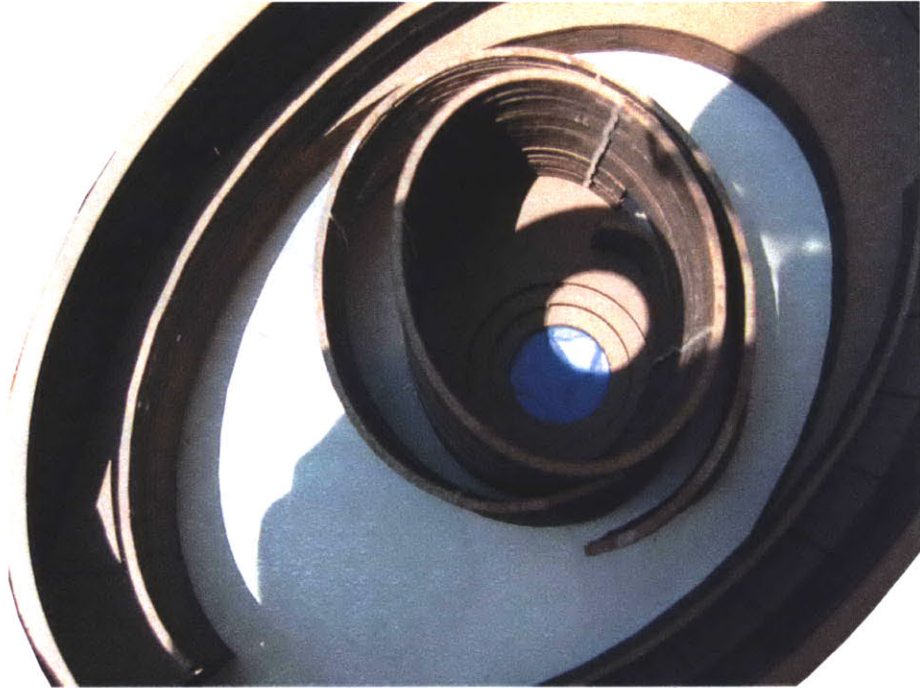
Temple Interior



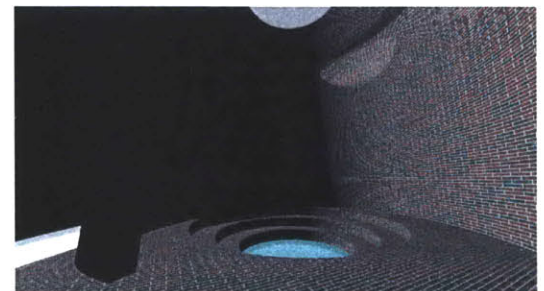
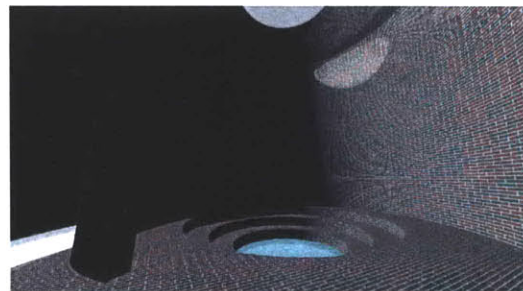
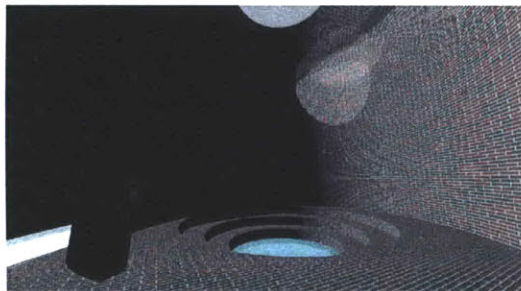
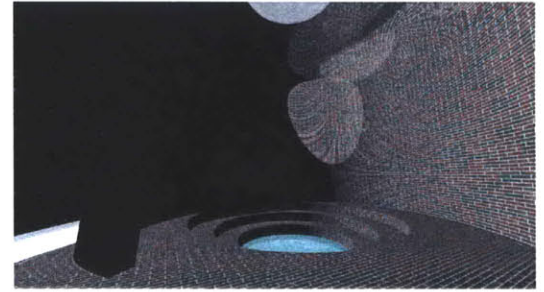
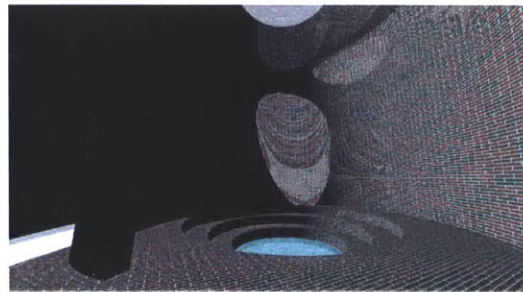
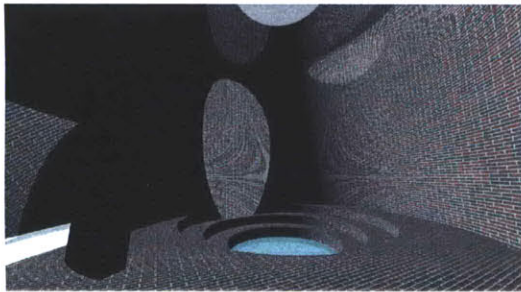
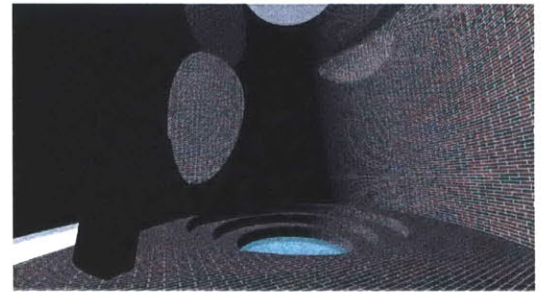
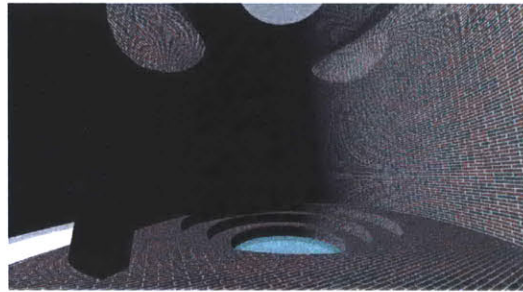
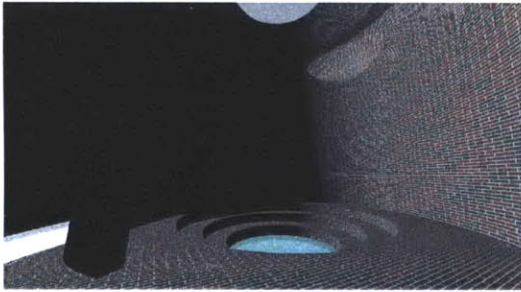
Inner Ellipse











Inner ellipse sun study





*The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us about the end."  
Jesus said, "Have you already found the beginning, then, that seek  
for the end? For where the beginning is the end will be. Blessed is the  
one who stands at the beginning; that one will know the and will not  
taste death."*

*Gospel of Thomas 18:1-2  
from The Nag Hamadi Library in English*

**Conclusion**



This thesis has raised innumerable questions about the nature of the divine and about how we, as humans, exist in the world. This, then, begs a consideration in design for buildings and environments that foster a deeper understanding of our I propose that an continuous reevaluation of our metaphysical and epistemological understanding of our place in the world through our direct experience with that world. In considering these questions, I think back to H.D. Thoreau's essay "Walking."

In "Walking," Thoreau concerns himself primarily with internal direction, and relies on nature to provide the ethics of the walk. We are, in fact, "part and parcel to nature"; that is, on the fractal boundary of the ever-changing with the whole of our options understood instantaneously within the moment of advancement. Nature itself provides all the information a walker needs and allows the walker to transcend the path behind and enter into the very order of things. The responsibility, then, is not in the surveying out of space and laying of lines (or the organization of knowledge,) but rather in the attentiveness to subtle changes and the acquisition of new, indeterminate knowledge.

Genius is a light which makes the darkness visible, like a lightning's flash, which perchance shatters the temple of knowledge itself,—and not a taper lighted at the hearth-stone of the race, which pales before the light of common day.

Genius, a sort of communion with nature, shatters knowledge and tells us that we know nothing. More truly, it informs us that what we thought we knew is but a scion of that which there is to know. Onwards and ever expanding, linearity collapses and nature moves in all directions simultaneously. This also denies the need for a predictable and traceable direction of knowledge within history. The practical upshot of such knowledge of nature is not to get lost in possibility and deny purpose, but to spread purpose outward in infinite directions. So, one may walk many places at once and inhabit many landscapes, some folding in on themselves and reintroducing knowledge to the feedback loop, and some moving steadily outward. Thoreau, then, "demands something that no culture can give," for no store of knowledge can keep up with one who walks as part and parcel to nature.

The question, then, is how to design or write as Thoreau walks — at the tip of the rhizome, or on the edge of the myriad shards of an exploded ideology, and moreover, how to let the nature of our built form continue to evolve. Design education and contemporary theoretical debate deny this. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, psychoanalytic theory and the expanding sphere of a global western culture abhor it. This thesis has been an attempt to deal with some of these issues. After ample criticism and reconsideration, I can see that many avenues were left unexplored. Through a deeper understanding of geometry and materiality, I hope to continue to develop an architecture that relates to a divinity suggested by the Gospel of Thomas.

In the words of John Rajchman, "we no longer have use for a principle of pre-established harmony; we have passed from the notion of the best possible world to the possibility of a 'chaosmotic' one, in which our 'manners' ever diverge into new complications." It is to be hoped that such an unfolding complexity and its concurrent motion brings assurance as well as spiritual tribulation, unleashing the possibility that we can, as Thoreau suggests, "saunter towards the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than it ever has done...and light up our lives with a great awakening light."

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## Illustration Credits

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Page 1 - Artist unknown

Page 10 - The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus

Pages 16, 22 - From Manhattan in Maps, 1527-1995

Pages 18, 19, 20 - Photos provided by the City of New York

Pages 20, 21, 23 - Maps from Inwood Hill Park (Bolton)

Pages 62, 67 - Photos from Richard Serra Sculpture 1985-1998

Pages 64, 65 - Photos from Park Guell: Gaudi's Utopia

Pages 65, 66 - Photos from Gaudi: Exploring Form

Pages 68, 69 - Photos from The Art and Light of Space

Pages 70-75 - All images from Las Bovedas de Guastavino

All other images created by the author.



Richard Serra, Carnegie. 1984-85

Jesus said, "Let one who seeks not stop seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will be troubled. When he is troubled, he will be astonished and will rule over all."

*Gospel of Thomas 2:1*  
from *The Nag Hamadi Library in English*

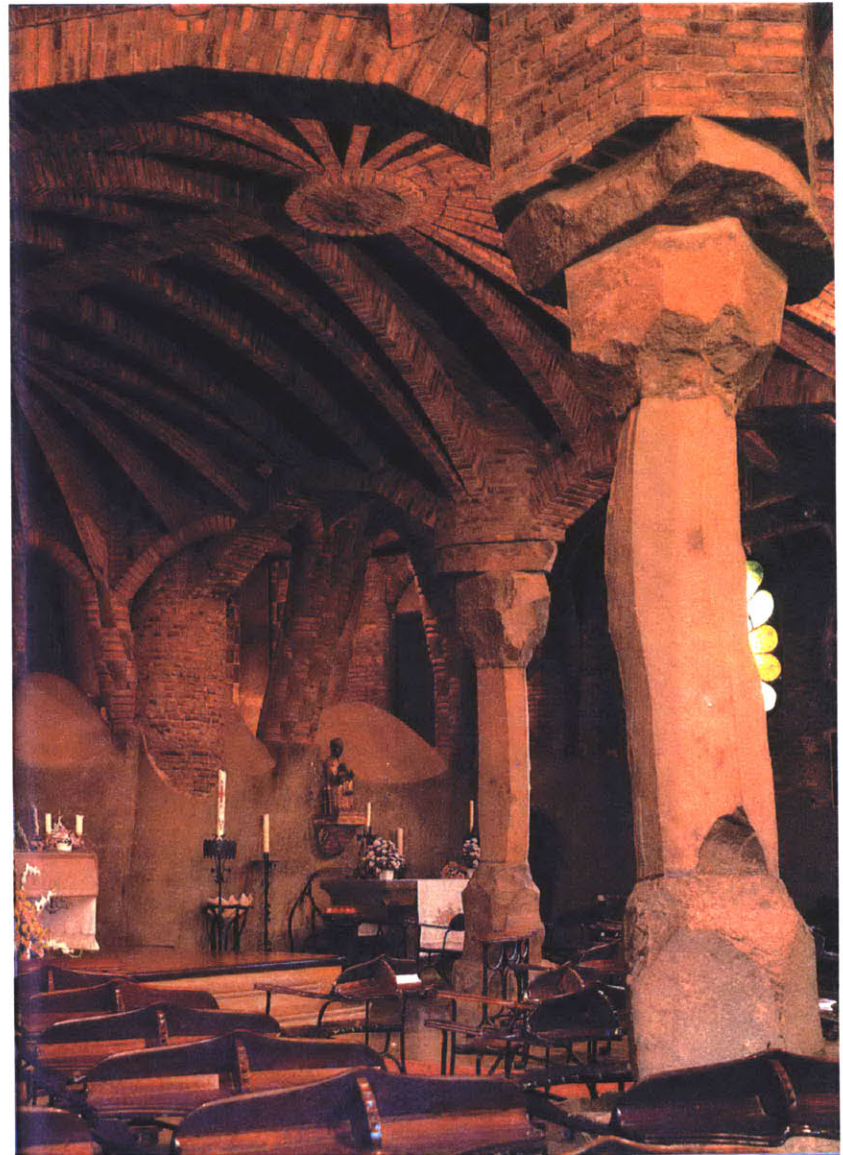
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**Precedence**



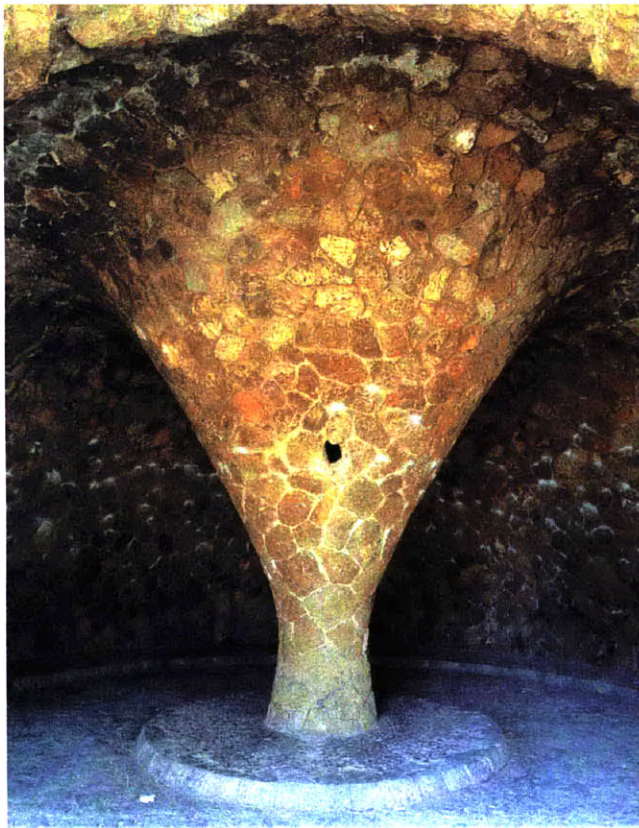
Antonio Gaudi, Serpentine Paths, Park Guell



Antonio Gaudi, Cistern, Park Guell



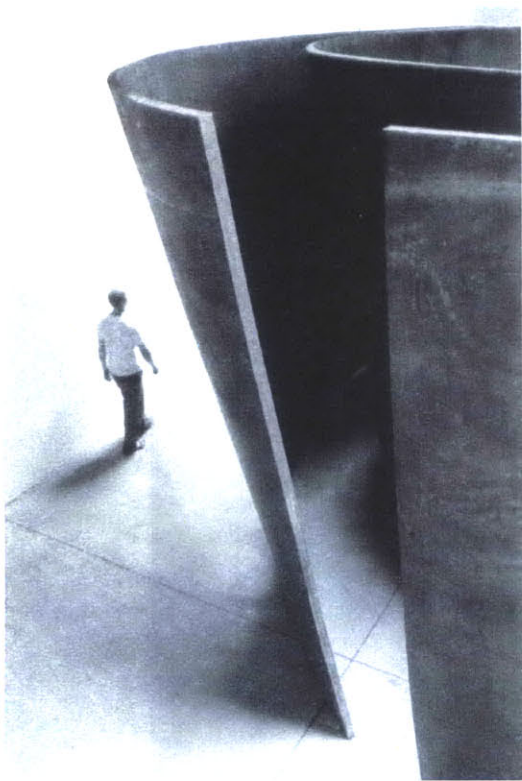
Antonio Gaudi, Crypt, Colonia Guell



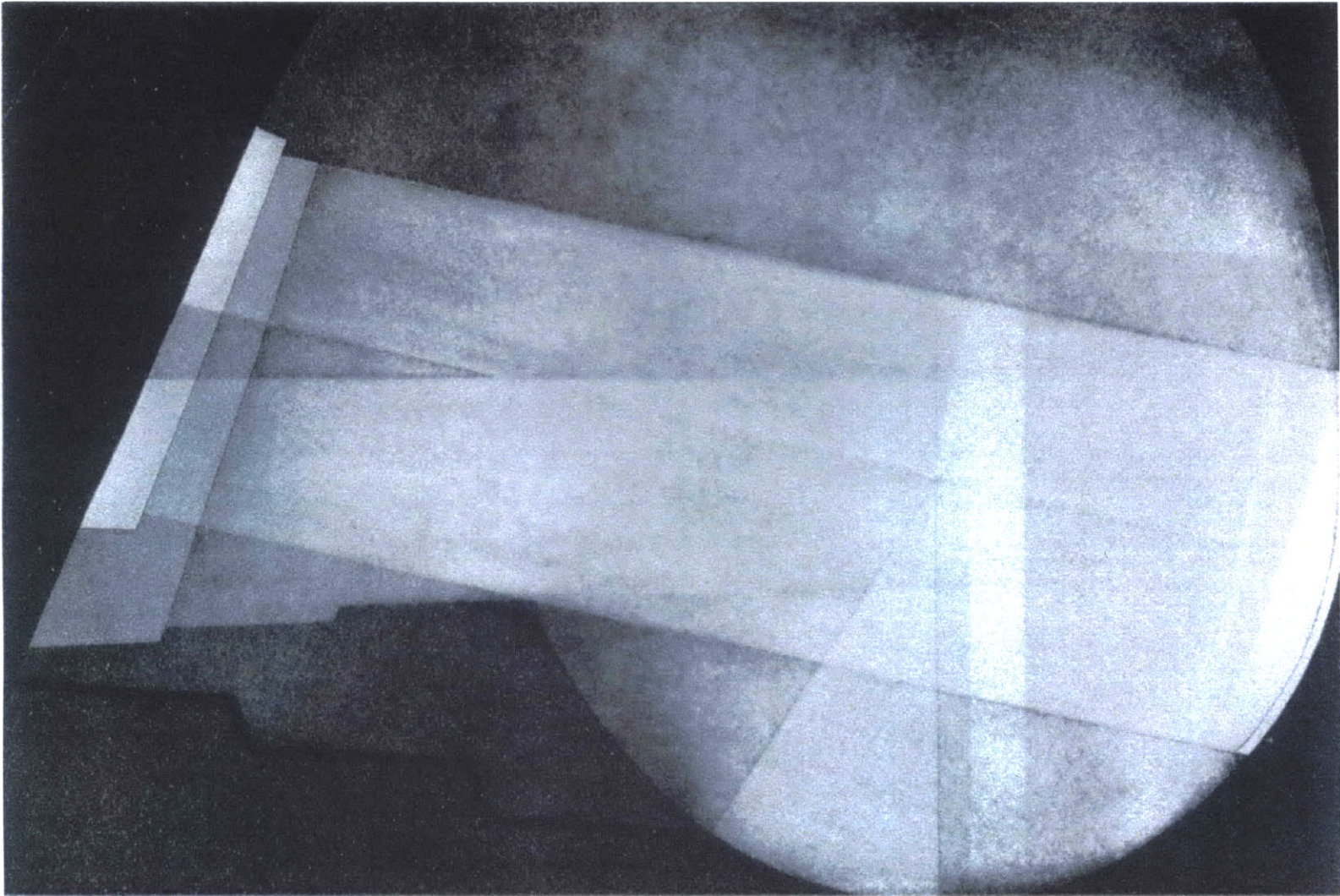
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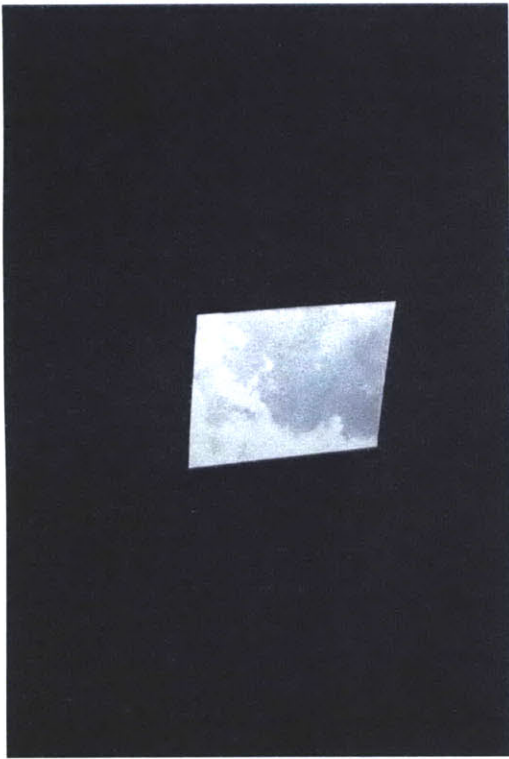
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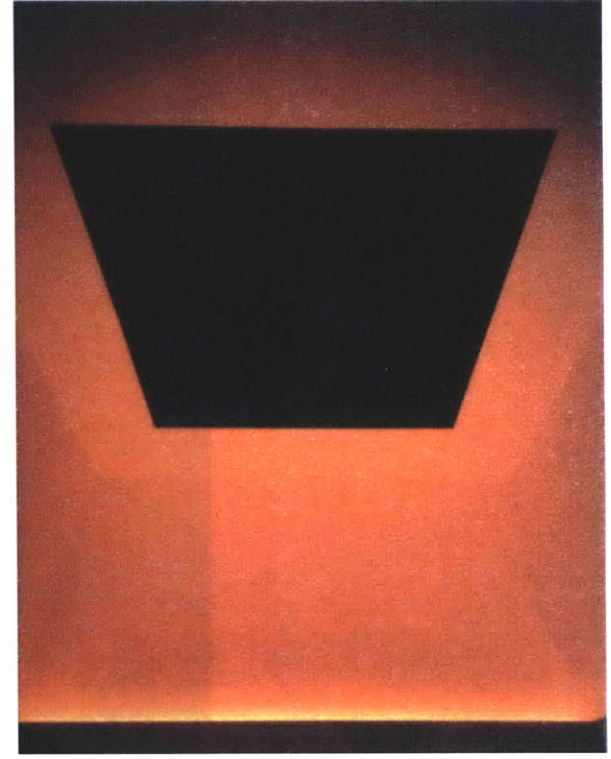
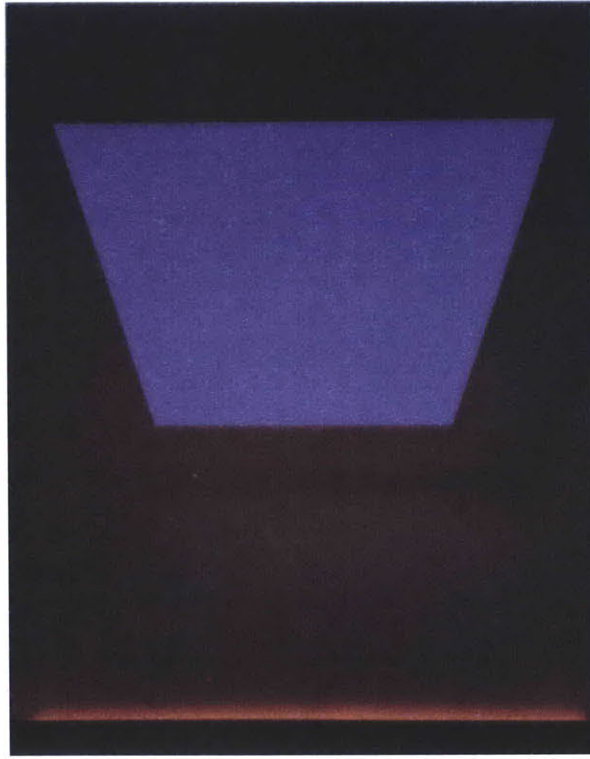
Richard Serra, Double Torqued Ellipse. 1997



James Turrell, Deep Sky. 1984



James Turrell, Skyscape. 1970-72



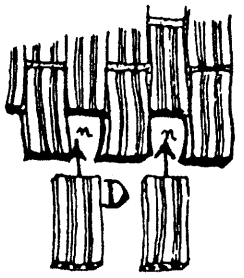
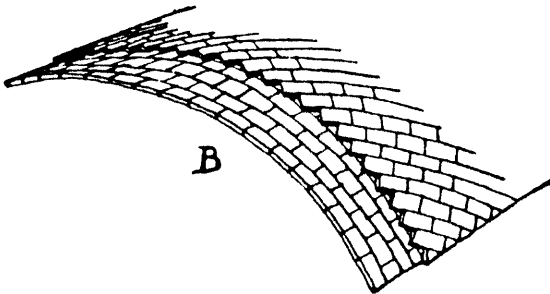
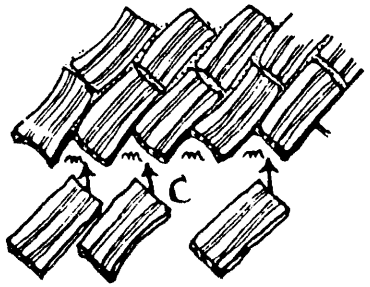
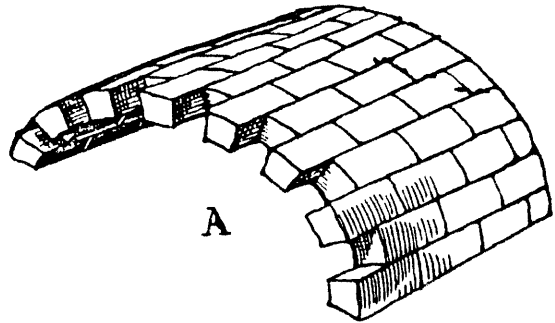
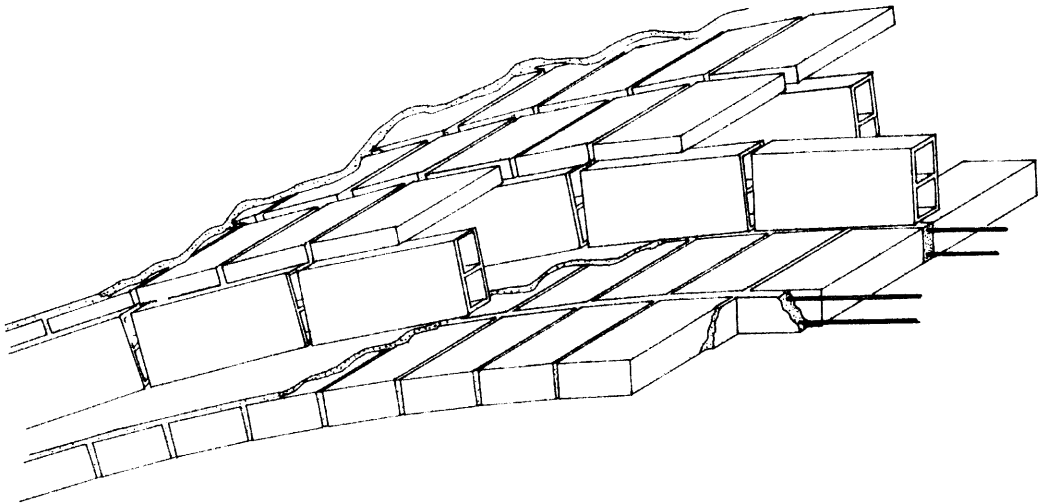
James Turrell, Meeting. 1980-86

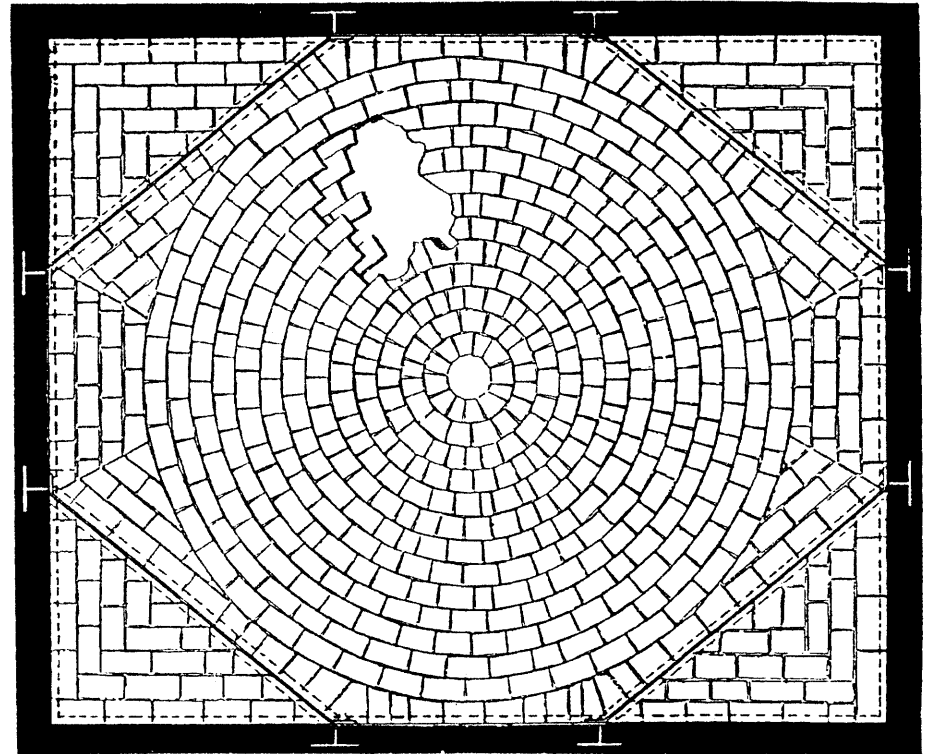
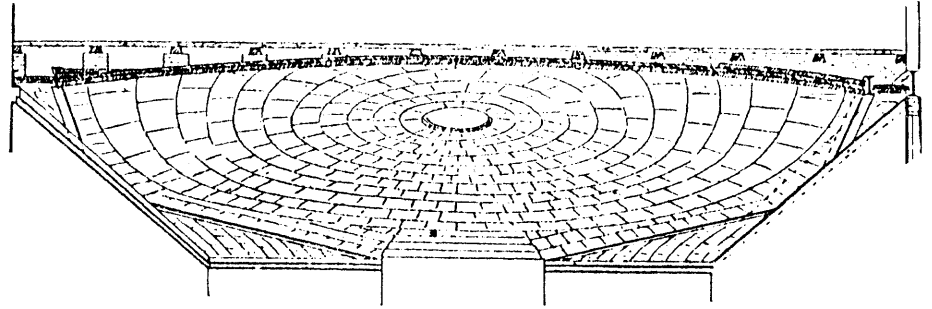


*Jesus said, "Show me the stone that the builders rejected: that is the cornerstone."*

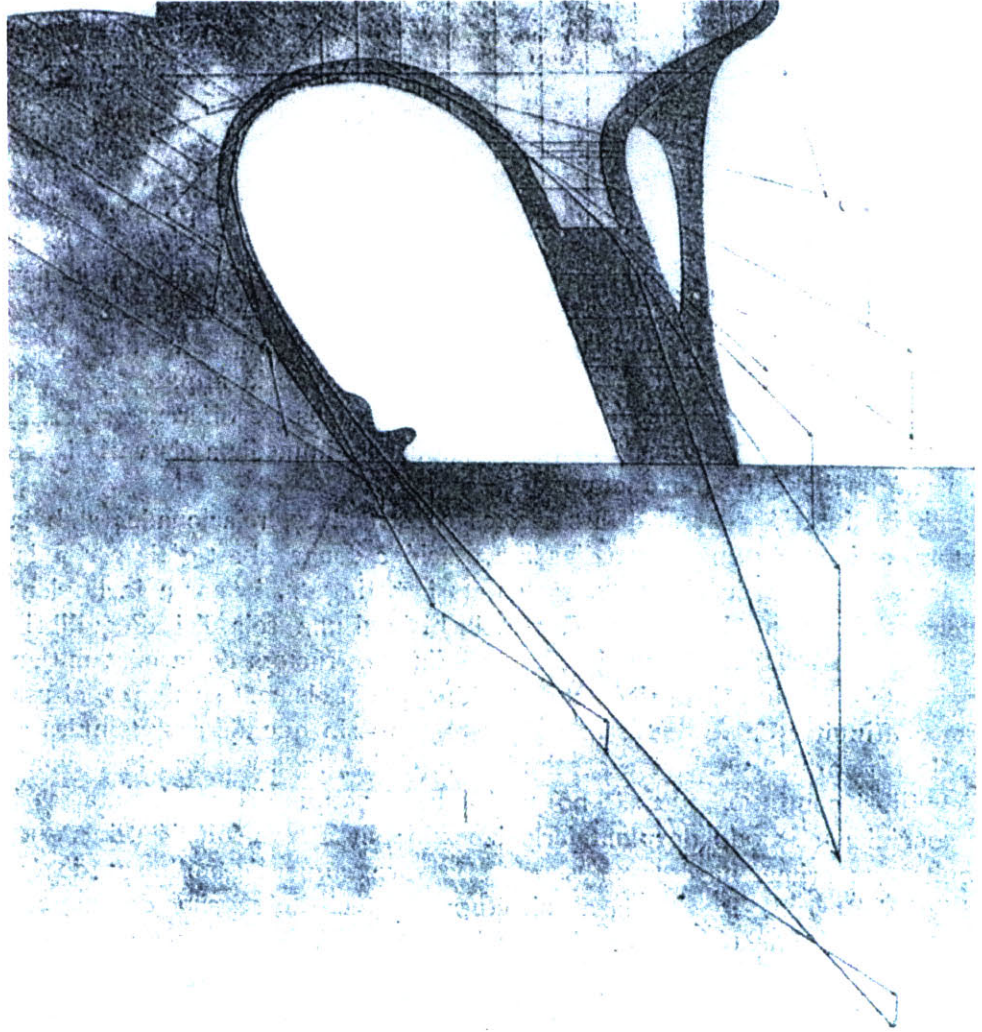
*Gospel of Thomas 66:1  
from The Nag Hamadi Library in English*

**Appendix B:  
Construction Methodology**











*Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, "These nursing babies are like those who enter the Kingdom."*

*They said to him, "Then shall we enter the Kingdom as babies?"*

*Jesus said to them, "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the Kingdom]."*

*Gospel of Thomas 22:1-3  
from The Nag Hamadi Library in Englishs  
Beyond Belief: The secret Gospel of Thomas*

**Appendix C:  
Thresholds: Denatured**

I've included this introduction for *Thresholds 26: Denatured* as an appendix because it sets the philosophical groundwork for my investigation into Gnosticism. More accurately, it is a continuation of my undergraduate thesis work on Transcendentalism and the philosophy of literature and marks the point at which I began to think about how divinity and theology can and ought to have a place in architectural design. While the subject matter does not deal explicitly with Gnosticism or religion, the issues raised led directly to this thesis investigation.

## Introduction

### On Thoreau, Walking, & Nature

Environmentalists across the gamut of movements widely quote Henry David Thoreau's writings in the service of a call to ecological action. "In Wildness is the preservation of the world" – a clipped quote from the short essay "Walking" – has become a rallying call to ethical stewardship, management, and preservation of some ill-defined nature. This reading of Thoreau fundamentally misappropriates his definition of "wildness" and the spirit in which he uses the word. It confuses wildness with wilderness and assumes an allegiance to an objective environmentalist end. In fact, Thoreau's ideas are more in concordance with the concept of the rhizome, smooth space, and nomadism as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Thoreau's writing deserves a place in modern discourse in the hope that his wildness may reveal a method for reading, writing, and understanding nature and the cultural landscape. This wildness, a form of extreme self-consciousness, requires what Peter Fritzell calls "a tolerance for ambiguity that is very difficult to sustain. It is, in essence, a dedication to paradox, and even an occasional delight in uncertainty, that can be extremely unsettling."<sup>1</sup> It is this ambiguity that *Denatured* hopes to investigate.

#### Thoreau, Walking, and the Instantaneous Redefinition of nature

In some sense, the act of walking as described by Thoreau embodies a worldview oddly placed in intellectual history. In the midst of the Enlightenment and at the dawn of the industrial Revolution, Thoreau called for a dynamic understanding of nature that transcended the contemporary emerging discussion on environmental issues. Modern environmentalism, a product of the sensibilities of Pinchot and the romanticism of Muir, embraces Enlightenment conceptions of objectivity and rationality and finds itself mired in the twentieth century discourse of social and power relations. Fritzell suggests that the dominant rhetorical stance of applied science, environmental discourse, and writing

about nature is fundamentally positivistic and representational.<sup>2</sup> While Thoreau's conception of nature found its stylistic roots in both eastern philosophy (especially Hinduism) and European romanticism, his description of walking is fundamentally outside of the positivistic dialectics that enforce and entail a view of relations between language and experience in which words are devices of representation. Thoreau's text is, in its constant self-examination, more akin to Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida and their denial of the objective nature of discourse. Unfortunately, the legacy of post-modern discourse is a malaise of sorts, unable to assign value to ideas, and devoid of ethics. Thoreau's walking begins to provide some ground for ethics, and more than ethics – an inner experience of spirituality more akin to Bataille – which has been seemingly lost in modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Thoreau begins his treatise on walking by diminishing the importance of civil freedoms. He seeks to “speak a word for nature, for the absolute freedom and wildness” therein.<sup>4</sup> He presents the walker as *saunterer*, and locates him outside of Church and State and People. It is here, alone, that the walker must face Fritzell's ambiguity, *sans terre*, without a land or home, but equally at home everywhere. To even begin a walk, one must be prepared to cast off one's entire history, both civil and personal:

The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is – I am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods if I am thinking of something out of the woods?<sup>5</sup>

In every sense, Thoreau demands an absolute commitment to walking, so much so that he implicates the entire self in the act and can accept no alternative.

Much has been made of Thoreau's understanding of locality, but as he discusses the walks within a ten mile radius of his home his interest is not in viewing linked points and setting destinations but in an evolving relationship to the land. For Thoreau, the space through which walking transpires constantly folds. Points may remain, but trajectories redefine themselves on each walk, and while the same raw material remains, the state of the walker is in flux. So then, a walk unfolds not in allocation of space, but in

internal re-experience. This unfolding takes place, largely, outside of the village (or, as Thoreau's etymological study suggests, the place where many walks converge.) The space occupied in a walk defies linearity and striation, and though it may turn in on itself or down a previously abandoned road (such as the case with the poem “Old Marlborough Road”), new meaning is constantly discovered.

### Ethics, Responsibility, and the Genius of Knowledge

The responsibility involved in walking is found not so much in where to walk, but how to walk:

What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will walk?...There is a right way; but we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world, which is perfectly symbolical of the path which we love to travel in the interior and ideal world; and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea.<sup>6</sup>

Thoreau concerns himself primarily with internal direction, and relies on nature to provide the ethics of the walk. We are, in fact, “part and parcel to nature”; that is, on the fractal boundary of the ever-changing with the whole of our options understood instantaneously within the moment of advancement.<sup>7</sup> Nature itself provides all the information a walker needs and allows the walker to transcend the path behind and enter into the very order of things. The responsibility, then, is not in the surveying out of space and laying of lines (or the organization of knowledge,) but rather in the attentiveness to subtle changes and the acquisition of new, indeterminate knowledge.

Genius is a light which makes the darkness visible, like a lightning's flash, which perchance shatters the temple of knowledge itself,—and not a taper lighted at the hearth-stone of the race, which pales before the light of common day.<sup>8</sup>

Genius, a sort of communion with nature, shatters knowledge and tells us that we know nothing. More truly, it informs us that what we thought we knew is but a scion of that which there is to know. Onwards and ever expanding, linearity collapses and nature moves

in all directions simultaneously. This also denies the need for a predictable and traceable direction of knowledge within history. The practical upshot of such knowledge of nature is not to get lost in possibility and deny purpose, but to spread purpose outward in infinite directions. So, one may walk many places at once and inhabit many landscapes, some folding in on themselves and reintroducing knowledge to the feedback loop, and some moving steadily outward. Thoreau, then, “demands something that no culture can give,” for no store of knowledge can keep up with one who walks as part and parcel to nature.<sup>9</sup>

This expansion is essentially reflected in the rhizomatic idea of Deleuze and Guattari. The rhizomatic principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, and asignifying rupture all hold true in Thoreau’s walking, meaning that any point of a rhizome can and must be connected to the whole. This is the embodiment of the part and parcel of nature that Thoreau expounds. Nature, described for the single walker, is described for all. The multiplicity, in its substantive sense, loses a subjective/objective relationship to nature, for the individual walks (of myriad walkers) retain independence only insofar as they are discrete directions of growth. The asignifying rupture and consequent regrowth is found in Thoreau’s understanding of progress.

Such motion is outward, and transcends an enlightenment science that moves only forward. The scientific method, hampered by its own boundaries, then becomes merely useful, and can offer no definition of nature. It is concerned, by definition, with what is already conceivable and can only move outside of itself through the wild actions of those who are both genius and scientist, those prepared to shatter knowledge, or more likely, unconcerned with knowledge at all. These scientists become, as it were, walkers. Thoreau is calling for an expanded contact with nature – a continuous evolution in the place of strict linearity of purpose:

[A] Knowledge useful in a higher sense: for what is most of our boasted so-called knowledge but a conceit that we know something, which robs us of the advantage of our actual ignorance?...My desire for knowledge is intermittent, but my desire to bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant. The

highest that we can attain is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence.<sup>10</sup>

Thoreau, then, places the walker on a sort of border life. He intimates an ethics of walking, and, consequently, an ethics of the search for and use of knowledge. T.S. McMillin, in *Our Preposterous Use of Literature*, suggests that Thoreau’s approach towards reading smoothly makes the transition to walking, and, if “reading is nothing other than a method of thinking [and] of gathering the world;” it is essentially a form of walking.<sup>11</sup>

#### Walking in the Space Between

Thoreau’s call for a constant redefinition of nature is as Fritzell promised, ambiguous and difficult. Deleuze and Guattari, while making similar observations, demand less and elucidate more. It is in the juxtaposition of the three writers’ conception of nature that a true ethic may be revealed.

Jaques Derrida, in his essay “Différance”, offers a crucial link between Thoreau and Deleuze and Guattari:

Finally, a strategy without finality, what might be called blind tactics, or empirical wandering if the value of empiricism did not itself acquire its entire meaning in its opposition to philosophical responsibility. If there is a certain wandering in the tracing of différance, it no more follows the lines of philosophical-logical discourse than that of its symmetrical and integral inverse, empirical discourse. The concept of play keeps itself beyond this opposition, announcing, on the eve of philosophy and beyond it, the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of différance situates itself in the space between, in the smooth space of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomad and in the scope of Thoreau’s walk. Play allows a movement in the space between and moving through Thoreau’s literal sunset to Derrida’s eve to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic nose, and here we find that “unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end” that allows Thoreau endless walks and the nomad limitless speed. Thoreau, in fact, explicitly leaves room for play – for the uncertainty of the space between:

I would not have every man nor every part of man cultivated any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest...<sup>13</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari discuss this same middle in “A Thousand Plateaus”:

It’s not easy to see things in the middle rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below, or from left to right it right to left: try it, you’ll see that everything changes. It’s not easy to see grass in things and in words.<sup>14</sup>

Smooth space takes advantage of this middle and leaves us with room for play in which to encounter nature. We set our lines of sight and so have intermittent, personal cataclysms. At these times, the technological or enlightened state (or, alternatively, the ever-expanding opportunistic global consumerism) appropriates the walking nomad into its war machine in a desperate attempt at self-preservation. It is through constant wildness, or refusal to be bound by the civilized apparatus, that Thoreau calls each individual to shorten the time between cataclysms and constantly redefine our participation in landscape – a sort of instantaneous evolution. The cultural denial of Deleuze and Guattari’s war machine is exactly what Thoreau means by “a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure.” Civilization (and the clear path through the village) is the striated space that denies wildness.

### Wildness in Design

Through Thoreau’s conception of walking, I have explored how one may begin to read and experience knowledge and landscape rhizomatically. It is more difficult to conceive of how one may design and build architecture or landscape that embodies the smooth space of the rhizome. Architecture and landscape design does not seem to achieve true smooth space in that the viewer/inhabitant/walker’s mind cannot be manipulated. The experience of a place, in plan and section, cannot necessarily draw a visitor or inhabitant into a pre-defined smooth space, and such a space is a self-denying paradox. Texture, light, and situation may begin to set the conditions for what Bernard Tschumi calls an “event-space”, but ultimately the true experience of the smooth space is left to the observer.

If production and representation work to move the event-space closer to the moment of design and observation, a true smooth space of built form may be reached. That is, the process of design may become more important than the representation and the realization. While it is difficult to find examples of a building or landscape conceived to be in a constant state of design, we can look to the integrity of modes of representation as an indication, and the concept of a tracing and a map may be invoked.

The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing...What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented towards an experiment in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce the unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious.<sup>15</sup>

The map can begin to mark smooth space by redefining space itself and examining dynamic events within space. A map must be redrawn as the landscape of the mind changes, and as the needs of the walker evolves. Christine Cequiera Gaspar’s map of the greenhouses of Wellesley College in Massachusetts (the image on the title page) records a condition of chaos in the site’s vegetation and juxtaposed with foliage density. It is, however, more than a data representation. It allows and demands dynamism in its reading and its production, and refuses static interpretation. As the architect’s conceptions of the intentions for the site change, the data is pliable and the map adjusts. But Deleuze and Guattari, in a constant dialectic, question their dualism and privileging of a map over a trace. In a true feedback loop, a map produces a trace produces a map, and so the image is never at rest, only caught in a moment in time.

### Denatured

In design studios students are asked to investigate ideas and come forth with a complete representation of their project. In the professional world, we construct buildings and landscapes, but little room exists to re-evaluate and redesign a completed project. We hope for sustainability through low energy consumption and low maintenance, but the investigation ends with construction and, if we are fashionable enough, the consideration of the design moves on to the critics.

The question, then, is how to design or write as Thoreau walks – at the tip of the rhizome, or on the edge of the myriad shards of an exploded ideology, and moreover, how to let the nature of our built form continue to evolve. Design education and contemporary theoretical debate deny this. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, psychoanalytic theory and the expanding sphere of a global western culture abhor it. The articles in *Denatured* act, then as a discourse only, and welcome the infinite new directions for the reader to walk, herein. *Denatured* proposes that, through an active dialectic, the work presented here can begin to illuminate the edges and folds of the space between.

Perhaps it is through the non-theoretical and non-intuitive that is the same time non-utilitarian that we may access the ambiguity of an ill-defined nature. For example, projects such as the library by Matthew Pierce and the works of Studio Granda as described by Petur Armannsson deal with nature on an ethical and spiritual level. Through their non-prescription and rugged refusal to align themselves with a theory other than an extreme and personal sensitivity to their physical place in the world, they are involved in constant observation, interrogation, and absolute receptivity. Alternatively, through Nataly Gattegno's *Desert Oasis*, we begin to understand how the process of making architecture is as vital to understanding nature as the act of building. Mark Goulthorpe and The Fab Hab Tree House examine different ways in which technology can aid us in understanding nature while Christine Cerquiera Gaspar and Stanford Kwinter question the very need for it to do so. Finally, Sanjit Sethi's artwork questions the impetus to examine the ambiguous in all of its impossible complexity.

For it is to be hoped that such an unfolding complexity and its concurrent motion brings assurance as well as spiritual tribulation, unleashing the possibility that we can “saunter towards the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than it ever has done...and light up our lives with a great awakening light.”<sup>16</sup> Though Thoreau's lofty language has found its way into pop psychology and the self-help lexicon, it is well to remember that genius, even at its most pedantic and formalistic, is but a product of a mad enthusiasm for understanding nature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Peter A. Fritzell, *Nature Writing and America: Essays Upon a Cultural Type*. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> “By inner experience I understand that which one usually calls mystical experience: the state of ecstasy, or rapture, at least of mediated emotion. But I am thinking less of confessional experience, to which one has had to adhere up to now, than of experience, laid bare, free of ties, even of origin, of any confession whatever.” Georges Bataille, “Critique of dogmatic servitude (and of mysticism)” in *Inner Experience*, tr. Leslie A. Boldt. (New York: S.U.N.Y Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Henry David Thoreau, “Walking” in *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Brooks Atkinson. (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 627.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 632

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 637.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 645.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 649.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 650.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 657.

<sup>11</sup> “Reading itself becomes the objective and starting point, the end and beginning of seeing one's way more clearly...Reading, therefore, does not simply mean running one's eyes over pages of writing, but seeing 'more clearly' the relationship between one's reading of books and one's reading of landscape. Reading is not something we do all the time but something we could (and should) do more often, if we would learn to see differently.” T.S. McMillin, *Our Preposterous Use of Literature: Emerson and the Nature of Reading*. (Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2000), 127-128.

<sup>12</sup> Jaques Derrida. “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Thoreau, 656.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, “Introduction: Rhizome” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Thoreau, 663.

**Jesus said, "Become passersby."**

5/20/15