Our City, What Ruins

by

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# Bachelor of Science in Architecture University of Michigan, Taubman College School of Architecture and Urban Planning

# 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

# FEBRUARY 2018



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# Signature redacted

Department of Architecture January 18, 2018

# Signature redacted

Certified by: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Author: \_\_\_\_

Joel Lamere Assistant Professor of Architecture Thesis Supervisor

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Accepted by: \_\_\_\_

Professor of Architecture, Chair of the Department Committee of Graduate Students

### **Our City, What Ruins**

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#### Martin Joshua Holmblade Elliott

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on January 18, 2018 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture

### Master of Architecture

#### ABSTRACT:

Leaks, demolitions, vacancy and ruins. *Our City, What Ruins* is a double entendre we use to describe the conditions of urban life at the peak time of our practice. On the one hand, one third of the land lay vacant, transforming into blight, and targeted for demolition. The city was the world's flagship destination for wonders of the modern day ruin. We declared the largest federal bankruptcy in the nation's history, and our democratically elected officials were on their way to prison. It was clear the ruin landscape was an allegory for a failing system from the top down. On the other hand, Our City, What Ruins willfully drops the connotations associated with the ruins and the blight that surrounds them, and the bodies who still call the neighborhoods home.

Our practice was born out of a necessity we saw to fill a void in society; a collectively led spatial justice practice that was willing to work both nefariously and legally, on the psyche and on the land, on damaged histories and invented futures.

We advocate for an expanded agency of the architect; especially in landscapes of divestment and subtraction. This thesis explores spatial and socio economic tactics relating to rebranding of the body, community wealth building and emancipatory infrastructures in the form of drawings, models, slides, legal documents, literature, animation, collage and various other materials and documentation from the time of our practice. All of this presented in the very bureaus we discovered and rescued from a school tainted for demolition. Just as our practice worked to unravel the failed bureaucracy that helped produce Our City, we dive into our bureaus to question What Ruins?



**Thesis Supervisor:** Joel Lamere **Title:** Homer A. Burnell Career Development Professor, Assistant Professor of Architecture

#### Mentions:

#### Advisor:

Joel, I can't thank you enough for your ability to consistently meet my ideas from a place of authentic curiosity and allowing me to take risks and step into the darkness of the unknown. You have true talent in intellectual stewardship and curatorial feedback and have been among my favorite voices throughout my career studying in higher education.

Congratulations on becoming a father this year! I wish you happiness wherever life takes you next.

#### Readers:

Azra, Azra, Azra, you are such an amazing energy to be around that brings me true joy! It was an amazing opportunity to work together in so many ways throughout my time in this crazy, ridiculous place we know as MIT. Your incites and unique perspectives certainly rubbed off on me in many ways that I am grateful for. I'm looking forward to see what new amazing work you have in store in the future (heritage lab!)

Hashim, it was a privileged to attend this department under your deanship, as it was a privileged to borrow your intellect from time to time throughout the course of my thesis semester.

#### Helper:

Joey Swerdin, although spending 10 hours printing endless material on custom paper isn't the most glorious job you'll ever have, it was one of the most helpful I have ever had. Thank you so much for offering to help me when I needed it most and good luck with your future endeavors; I'm excited to continue following your work!

#### press:

To Daniel Glick-Utterman, Dwight Portocarrero, Ian Donaldson & last but certainly not least, Philip Marcantonio - you four are a dangerous breed when it comes to exchanging ideas, collaborating in thoughtful debate and following through on passionate projects. Each of you have my utmost respect as I look forward to growing further alongside yourselves.

#### Mom & Dad:

It's difficult to even know where to begin thanking the two of you. My entire life you have continuously supported and believed in my abilities while coaching my inabilities. Regardless if you agree or disagree with my ideas or beliefs, you support my passion which means so so much to me. You're truly amazing teachers in the category of life and love and I thank you for your being.

#### All Kinds of Support

Sam Arabbo, thank you for listening to the endless hours of rambling thoughts, insecure lows and excited highs. Sharing ideas, receiving feedback, criticism and overall support was overwhelmingly helpful throughout the process, and made the process that much more enjoyable.

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INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE P. O. BOX 2508 CINCINNATI, OH 45201

# Date: FEB 1 0 2015

ANATOPIA NONPROFIT CORPORATION 4423 HUMBOLT ST DETROIT, MI 48208 - 4824 DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Employer Identification Number: 27-2011211 DLN : 17053183307010 Contact Person: ID# 31360 Michelle Brown Contact Telephone Number: (313) 829-5500 Accounting Period Ending: May 31 Public Charity Status: 170(b)(1)(A)(vi) Form 990 Required: Yes Effective Date of Exemption: March 1, 2010 Contribution Deductibility: Yes Addendum Applies: No

Dear Applicant:

We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your application for tax exempt status we have determined that you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to you are deductible under section 170 of the Code. You are also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Code. Because this letter could help resolve any questions regarding your exempt status, you should keep it in your permanent records.

Organizations exempt under section 501(c)(4) of the Code are further classified as either public charities or private foundations. We determined that you are a public charity under the Code section(s) listed in the heading of this letter.

Please see enclosed Publication 4221-PC, Compliance Guide for 501(c)(4) Public Charities, for some helpful information about your responsibilities as an exempt organization.

Sincerely, Sis J. Hernen

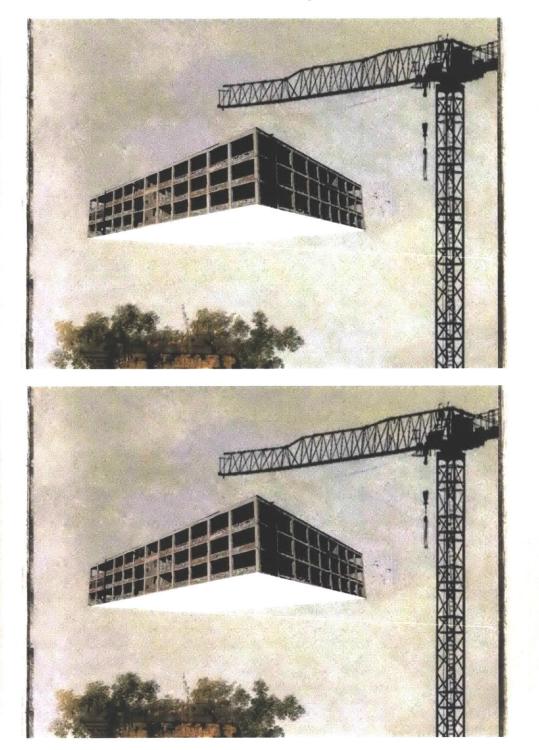
Lois G. Lerner Director, Exempt Organizations

Enclosure: Publication 4221-PC

Letter 947 (DO/CG)

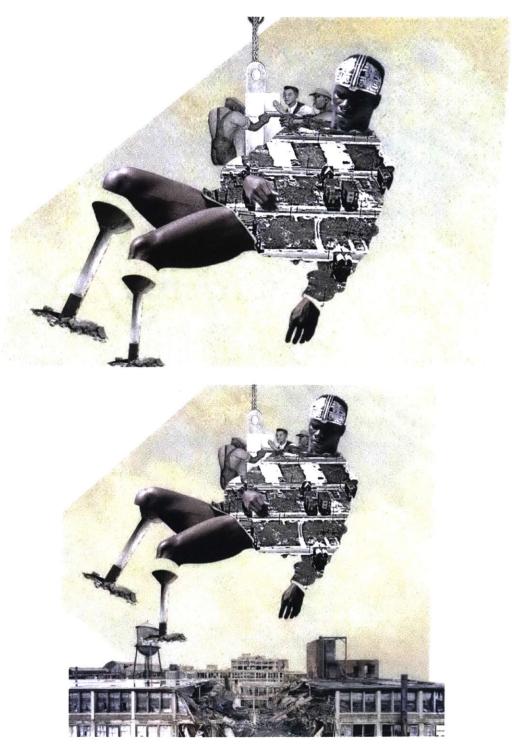
Animation Film Stills

Like many, we found ourselves in a landscape of subtraction.



For years, we witnessed the steady divestment, watched our city morph into ruin as the world progressed.

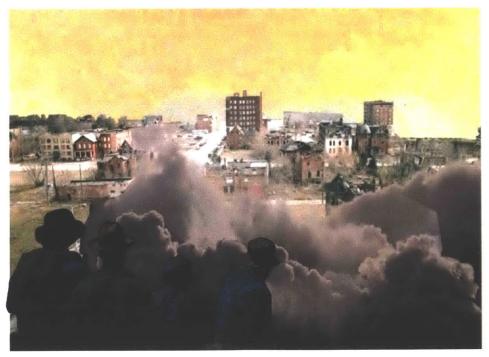
# We felt the urban fabric corrode away with time, we watched architecture animated,



performing a dance with nature and the body.

# On occasion, some would gather to watch and bid the

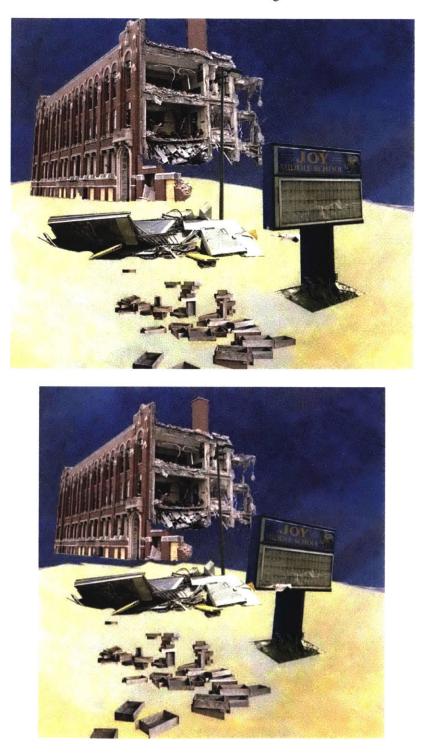




buildings farewell as they disappeared in a fiery spectacle of instantaneous reversal.

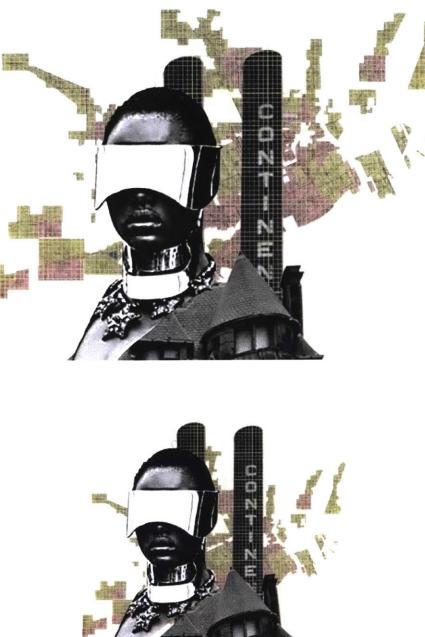
Scene 3

# Other occasions were less glorious



as our memory boxes were violently erased from the landscape.

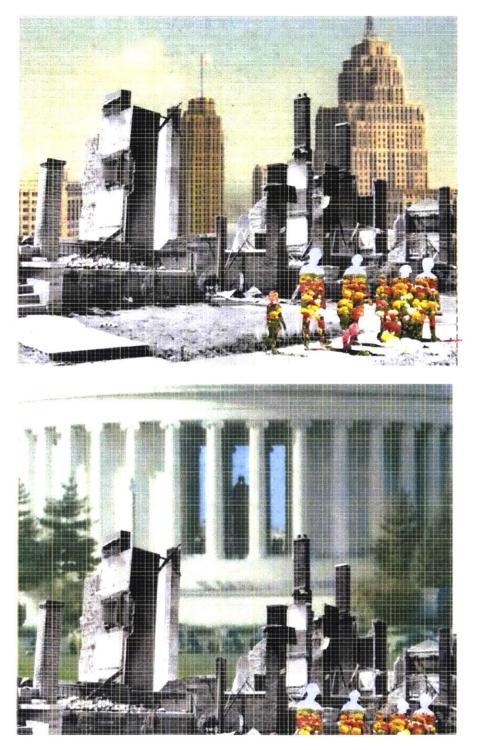
Scene 4



And even at times, it feels like the necessary mutilation.

After all, we've grown tough skin.

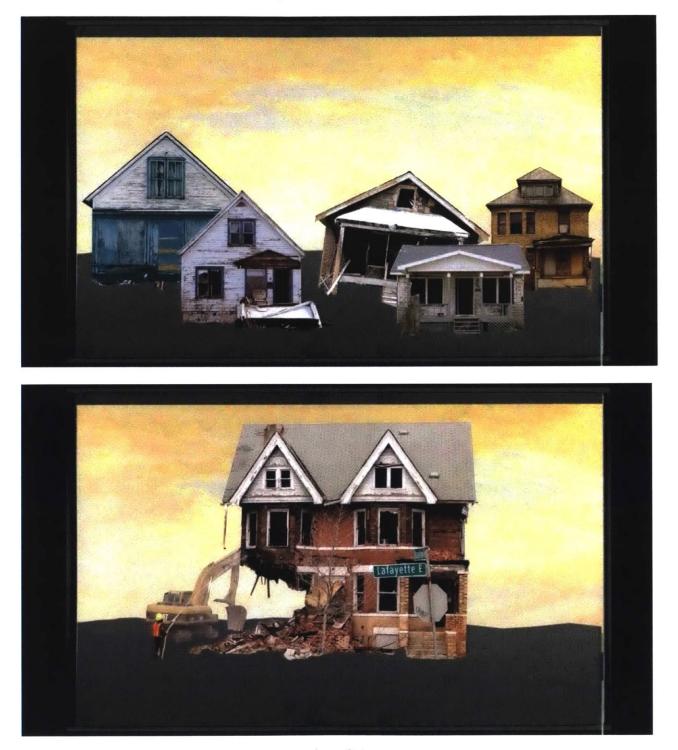
As the years progressed, it became clear we were not the only communities on the losing side of progress.



A pattern evolved, and we recognize ourselves across the region.

Animation Film Still

# Foreclosures led to vacancy Vacancy led to blight Blight led to subtraction,

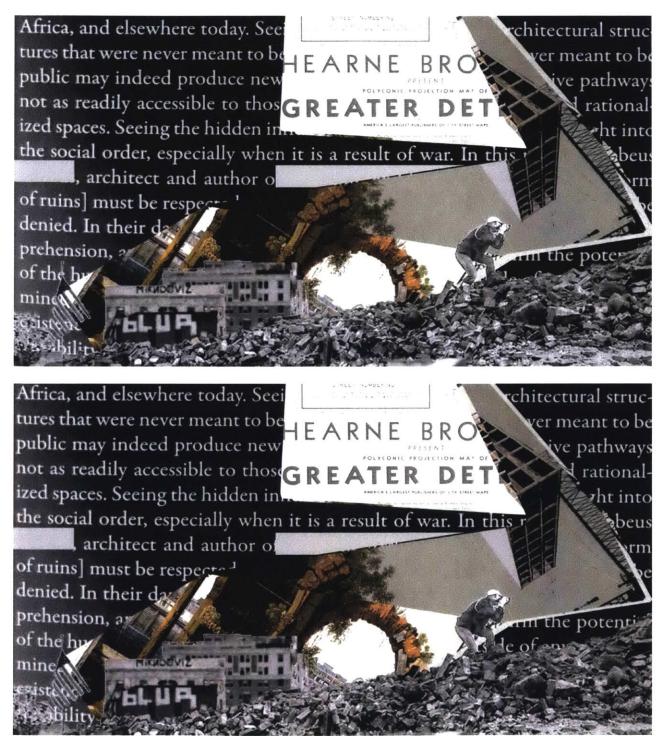


to demolition, to erasure lots and lots of erasure. Scene 7

Animation Film Still

Scene 8

Our city became a destination for so called "urban explorers" who found awe, romanticized, fetishized and for some,



found freedom in the ruin.



# Often, these passerbys rendered our city as a zombie wasteland

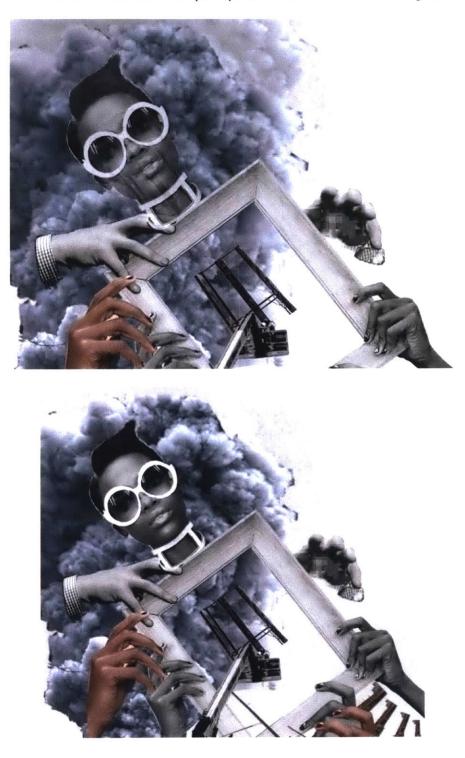
- absent of life of any kind beyond trees.

Scene 10

Narratives developed,



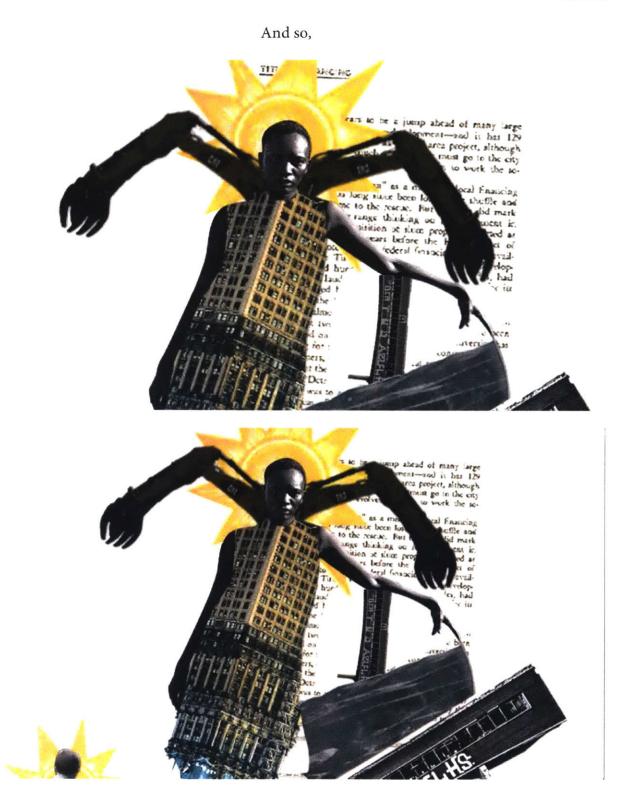
casting blame on the citizens of the city for the scenarios that surrounded them.



Our bodies were branded synonymous with failure, with danger,

with the ruin.

Scene 12



we wear our ruins like fashion

Scene 13

Animation Film Still

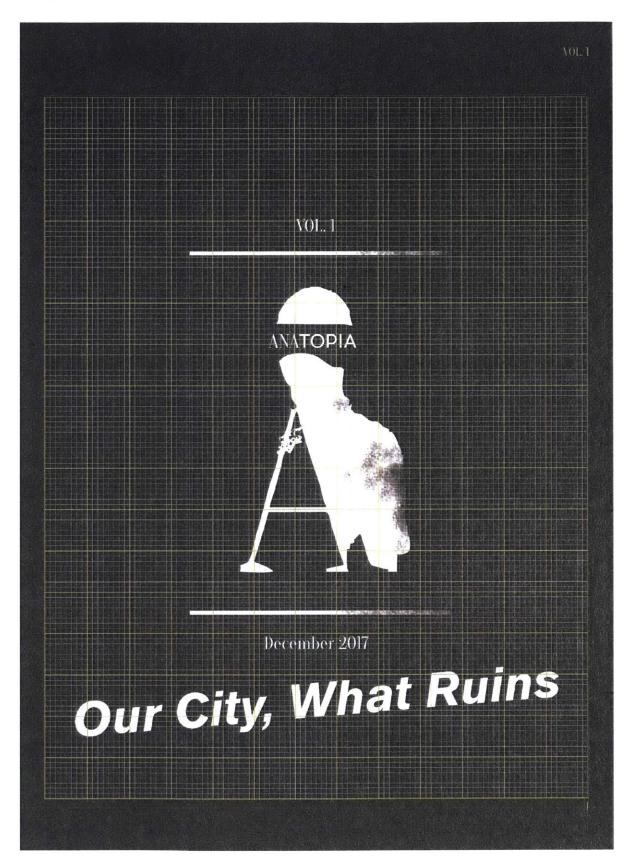
Our practice was born out a necessity and an urgency to fill a void in society; a collectively led spatial justice that was willing to work both nefariously and bureaucratically, on the psyche and the land, on damaged histories and uncanny futures.



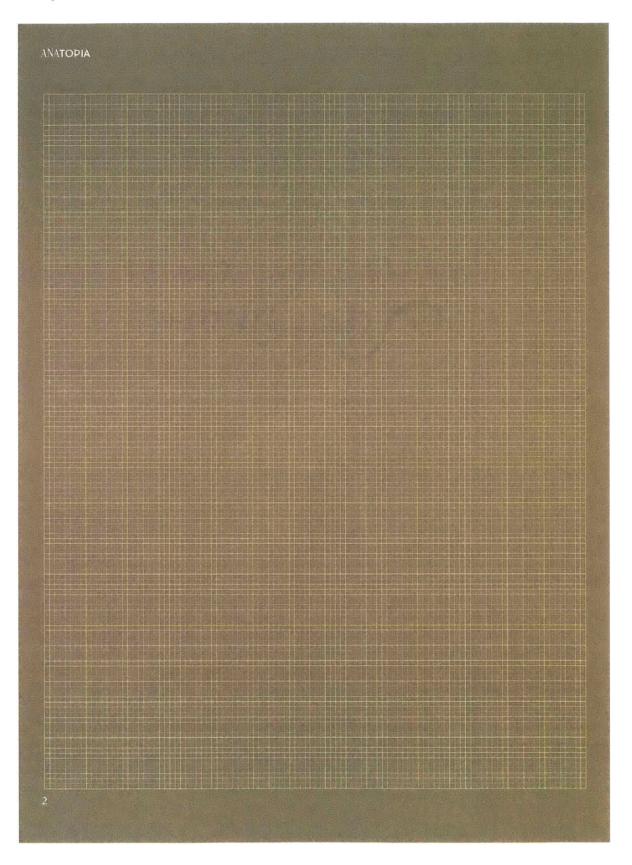


We are ANATOPIA

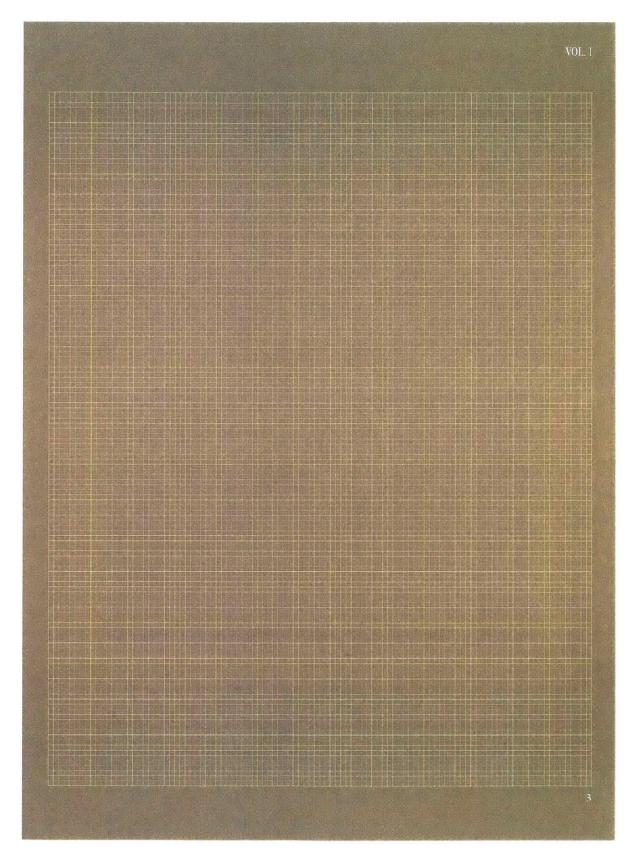
Front Cover



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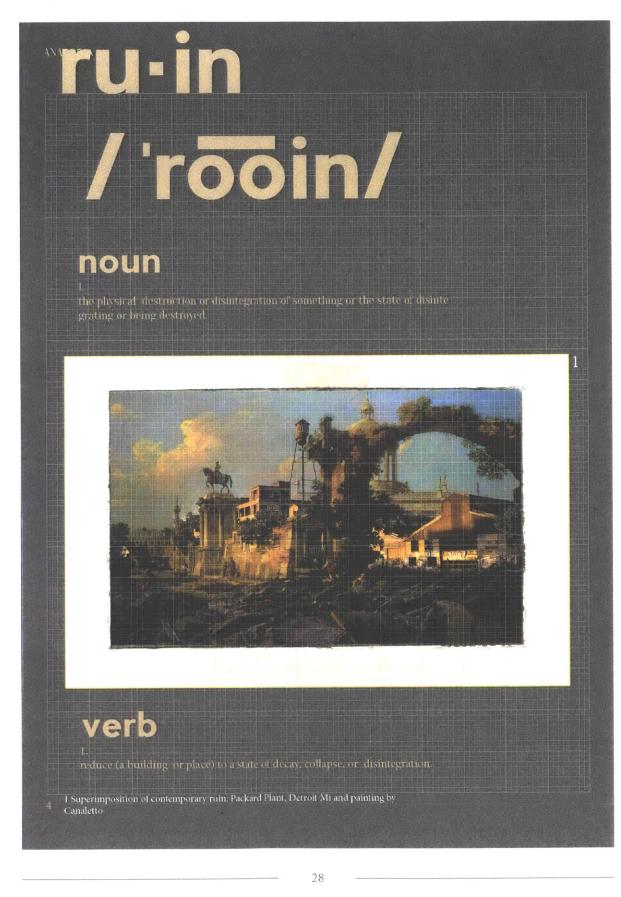


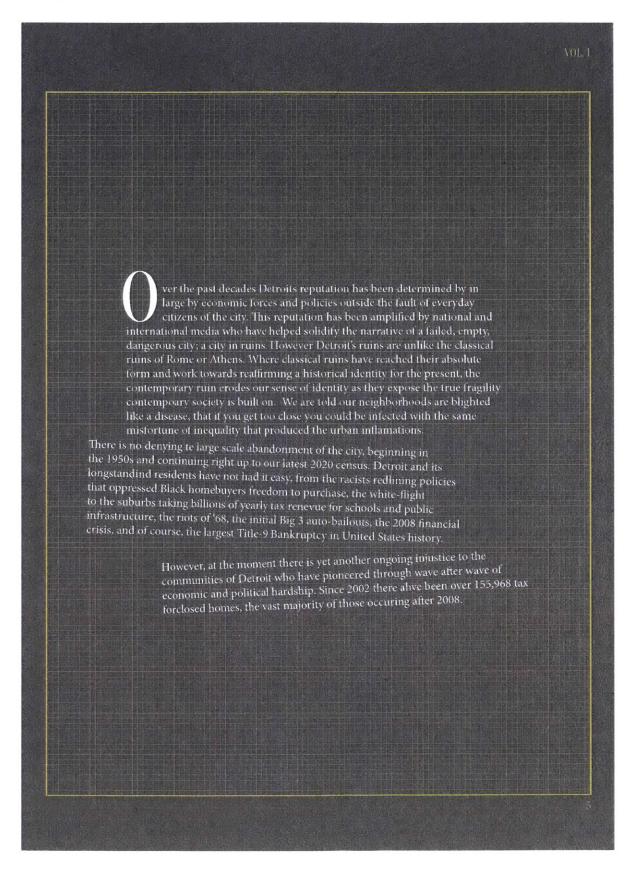
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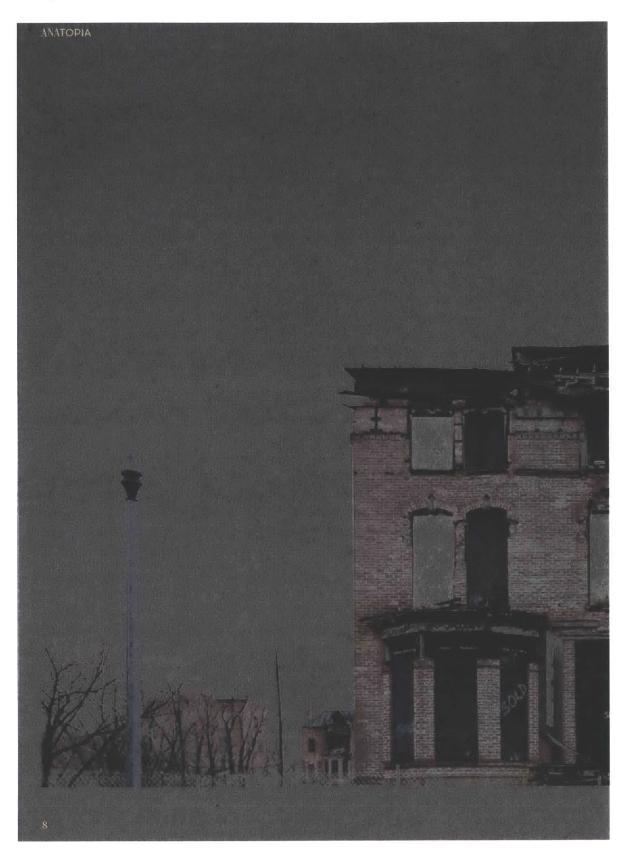


#### Research Spread

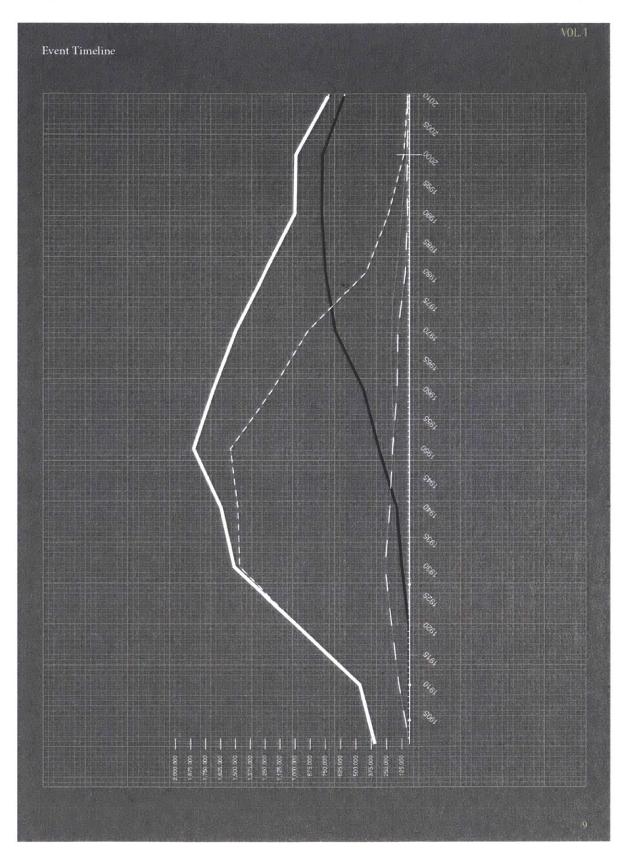
Anatopia Research Publication







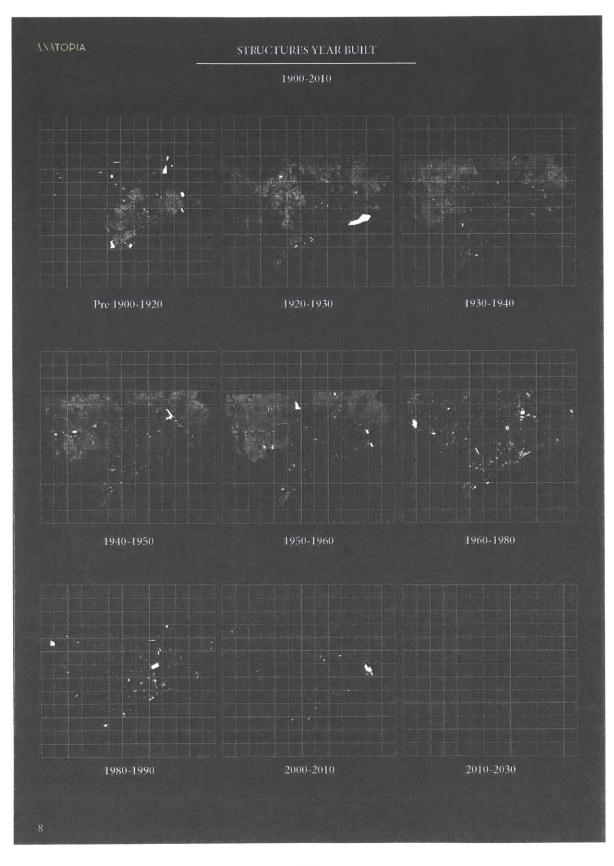
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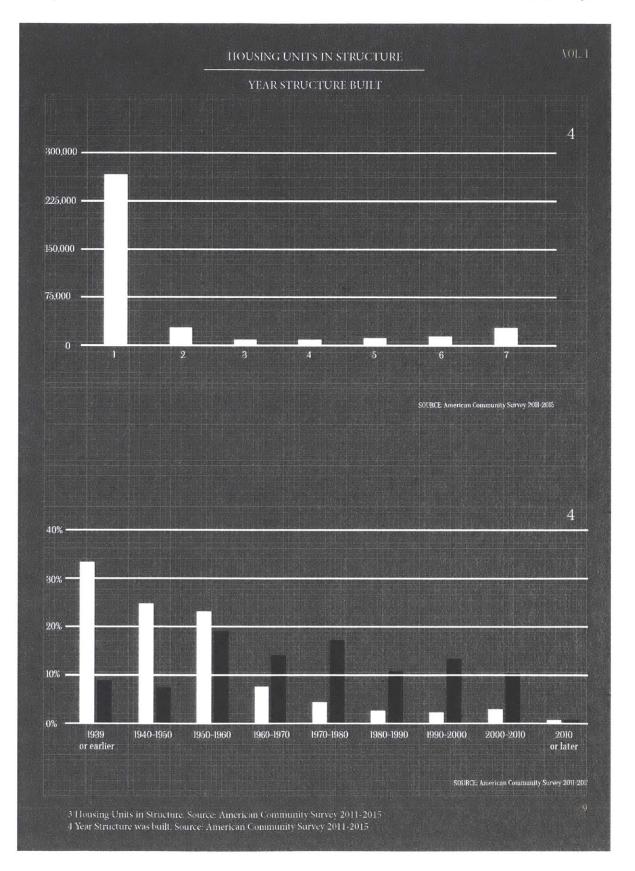


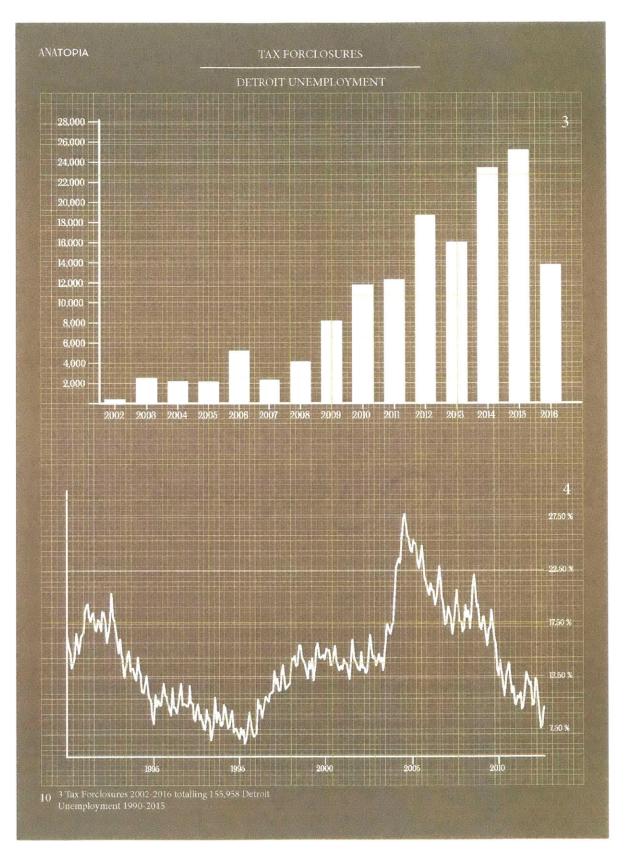
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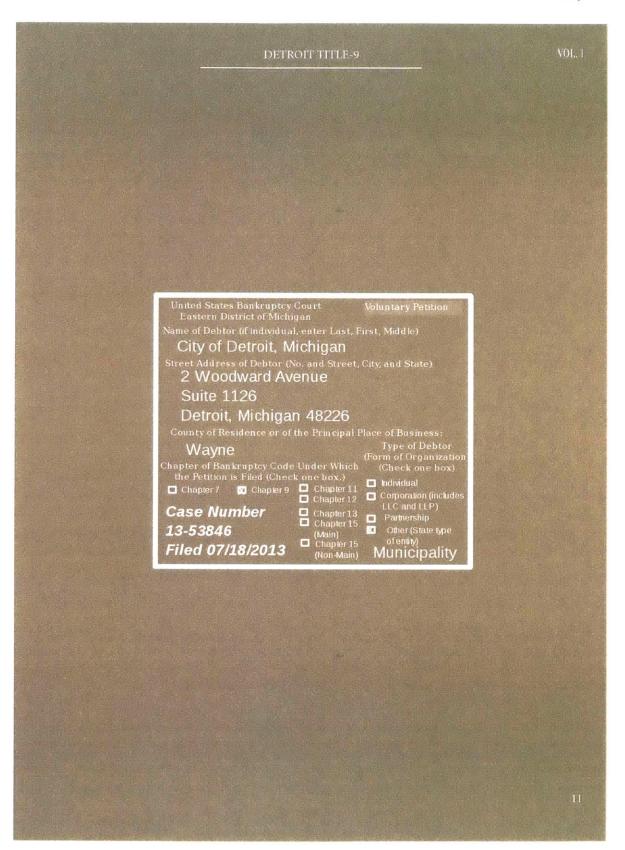
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# Anatopia Research Publication



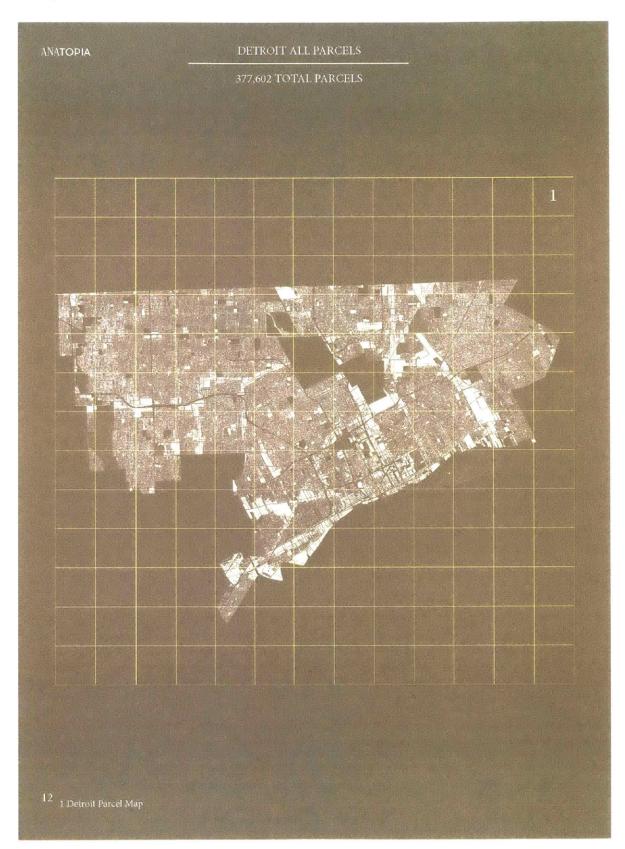


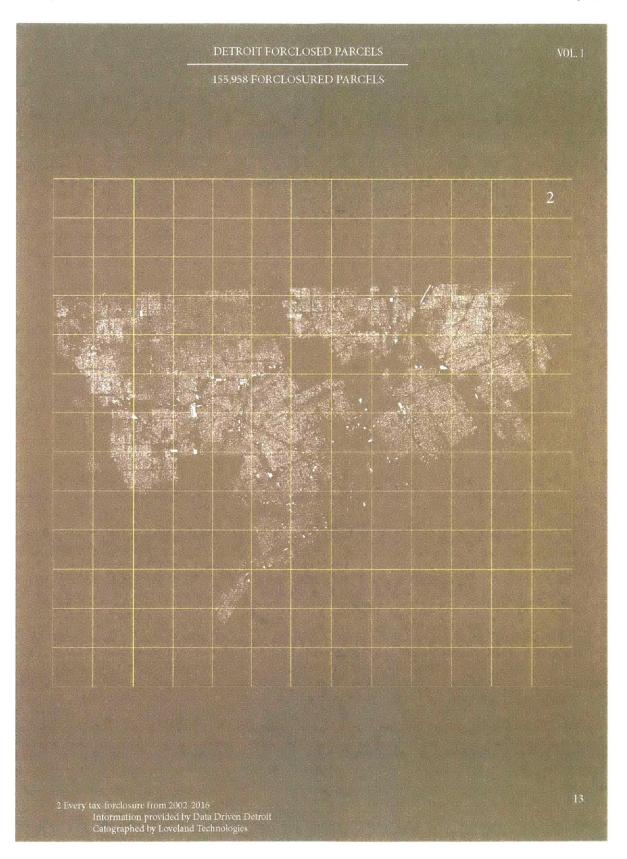


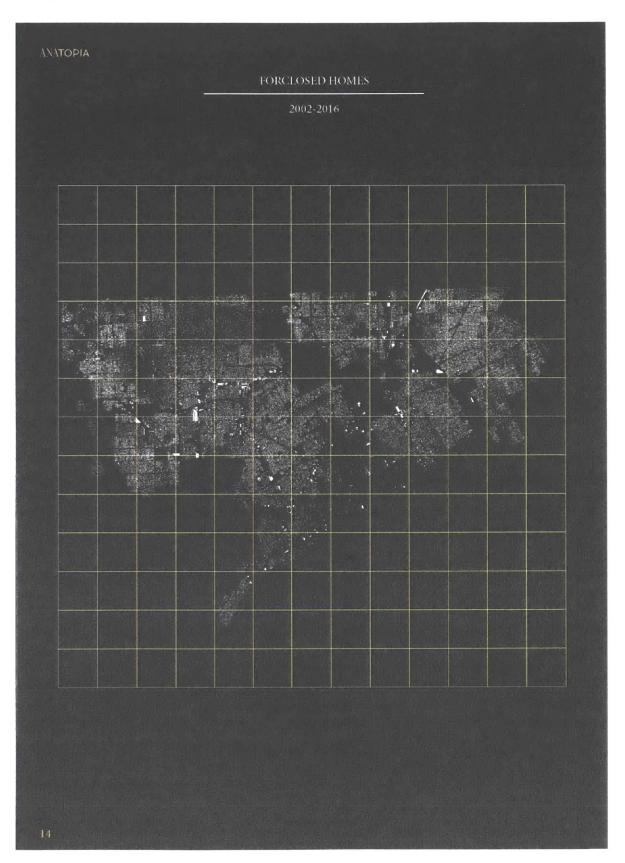


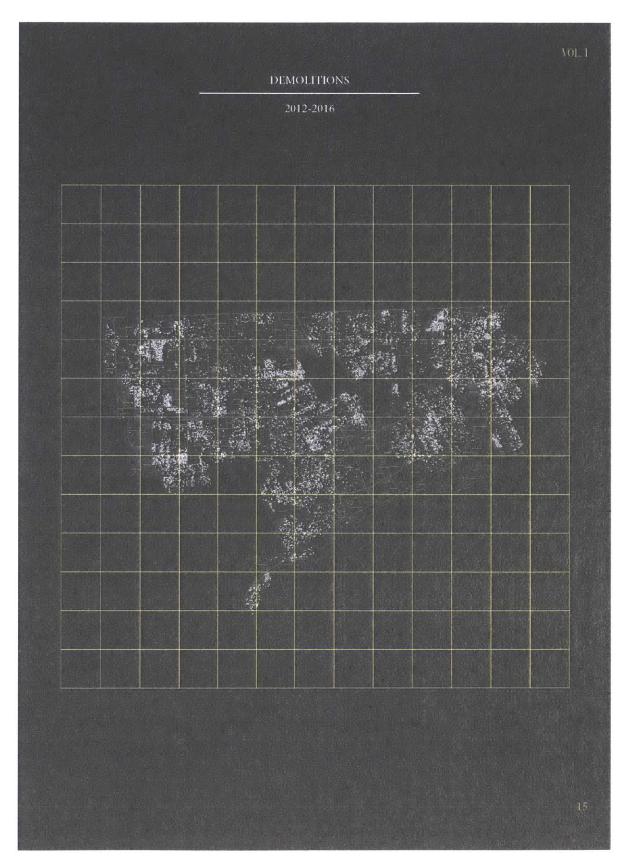
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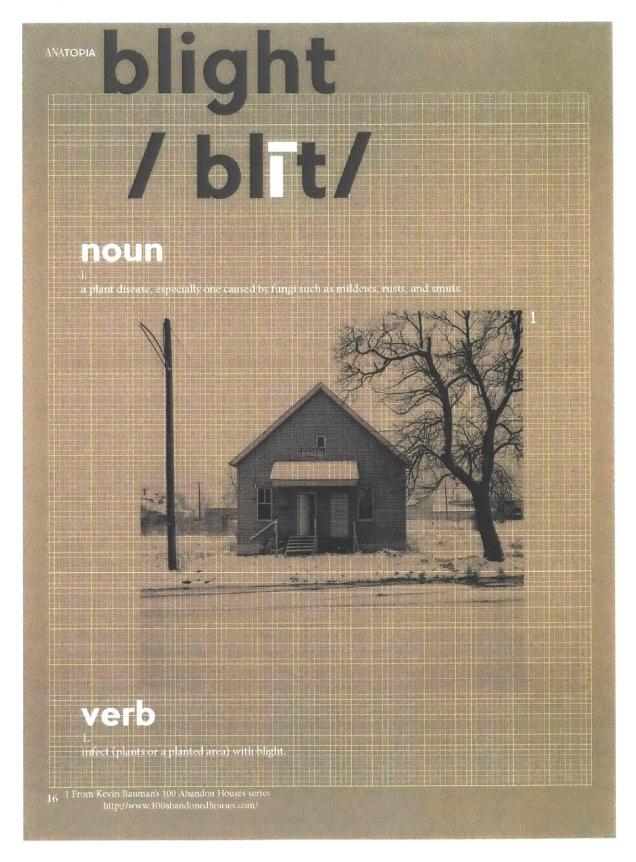






#### Research Spread

#### Anatopia Research Publication



#### Research Spread

n february of 2010 during the wake of the financial crisis fallout, the Obama Administration established the Hardest Hit Fund (HHF.) The program trageted aid to families in states where the effects of the economic downturn were greatly felt. States were selected if the steep home prices declined greater than 20 percent or if the state's unemployment rate was higher than that of the national average.

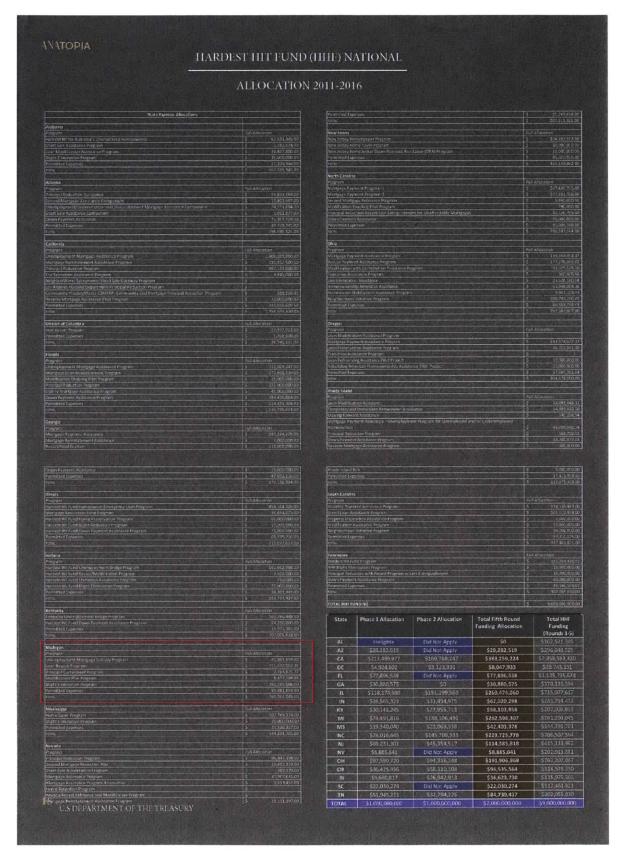
decined greater ational average. The program funds were distributed to primarily provide: mortgage payment assistance for unemployed or inderemployed homeowners, principal reductions to help homeowners who are transitioning out of their homes and into more affordable housing, and for blight elimination and downpayment efforts.

> "We need to remove every single structure and building in this city that is no longer viable. Once you remove all of that, and I mean all of it, you start renewing hope." Dan Gilbert

Michigan received a total of \$761 million, the fourth highest allocation to a state behind Ohio. Florida and California. Of the \$761 million over \$500 million has gone towards demolitions across the state. In 2013 the mayor of Detroit Mike Duggan, with the help of the federal funding, partnered with capitalist Daniel Gilbert to create the Detroit Blight Removal Task Force (DBRTF.) The trio

between the federal government, the mayor of Detroit and one of Detroit's most influential and invested business people has ignited an urban erasure on the scale not before seen in the United States. Demolition industries became the new construction contract, except it was deconstruction and material flows that became the new interest of the city.

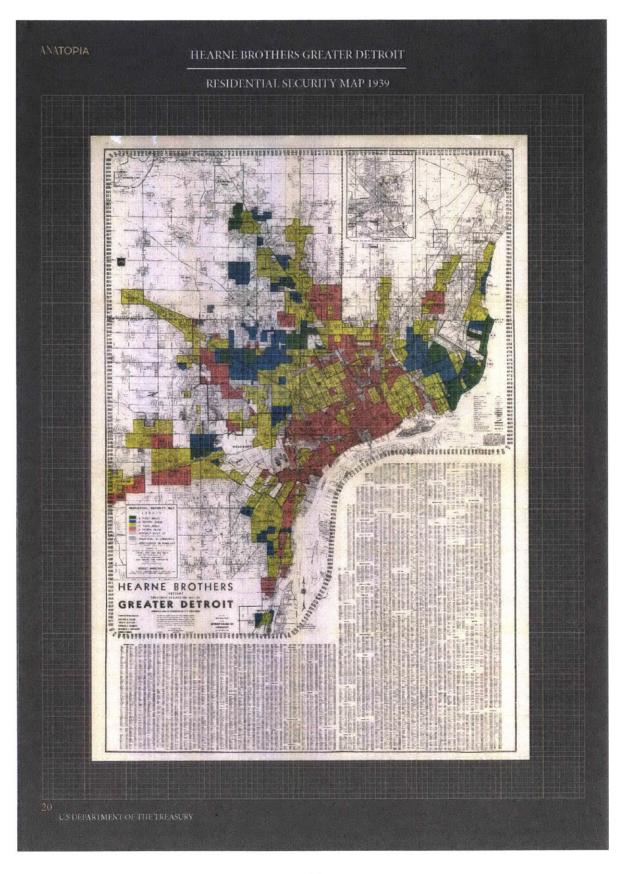
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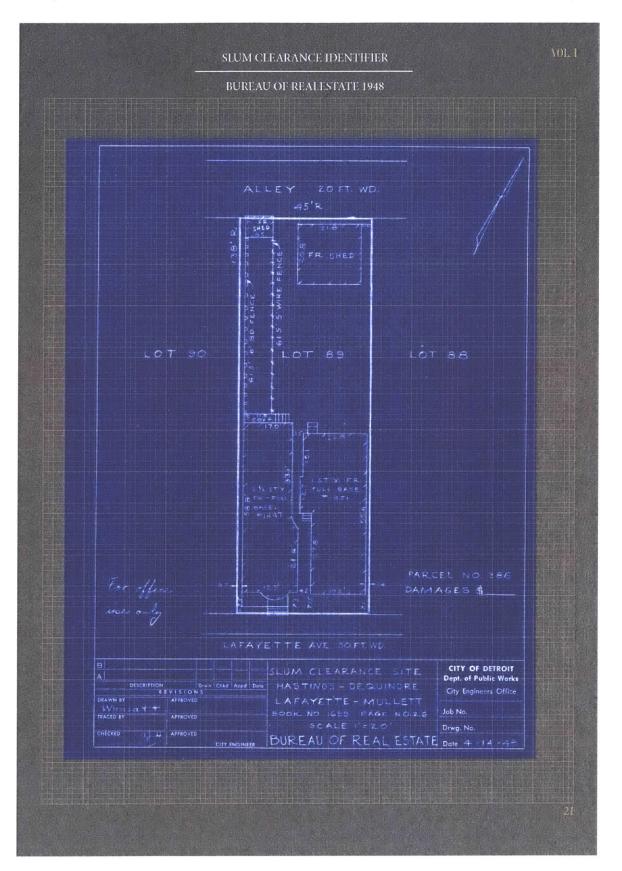


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| ALLOCATION 2011-2016   |              |  |                  |   |  |
| Michigan   |              |  |                  |   |  |
| Program<br>Unemployment Mortgage Sub:<br>Loan Rescue Program<br>Principal Curtailment Program<br>Modification Plan Program<br>Blight Elimination Program<br>Permitted Expenses | sidy Program |  |                  | Full Alloca<br>\$<br>\$<br>\$<br>\$<br>\$<br>\$<br>\$<br>\$ | tion<br>81,861,559.00<br>216,572,902.35<br>2,764,875.77<br>8,837,288.88<br>381,185,566.00<br>69,981,853.00 |
| TOTAL  |              |  |                  | \$  | 761,204,045.00   |
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|  |              | Hardest Hit Fund<br>Program Purpose and Overview |                  |   |  |
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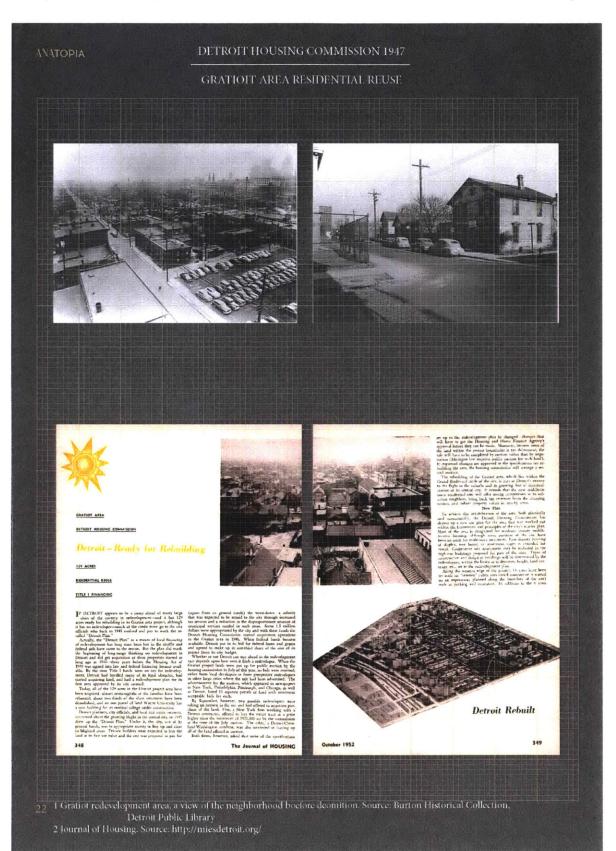
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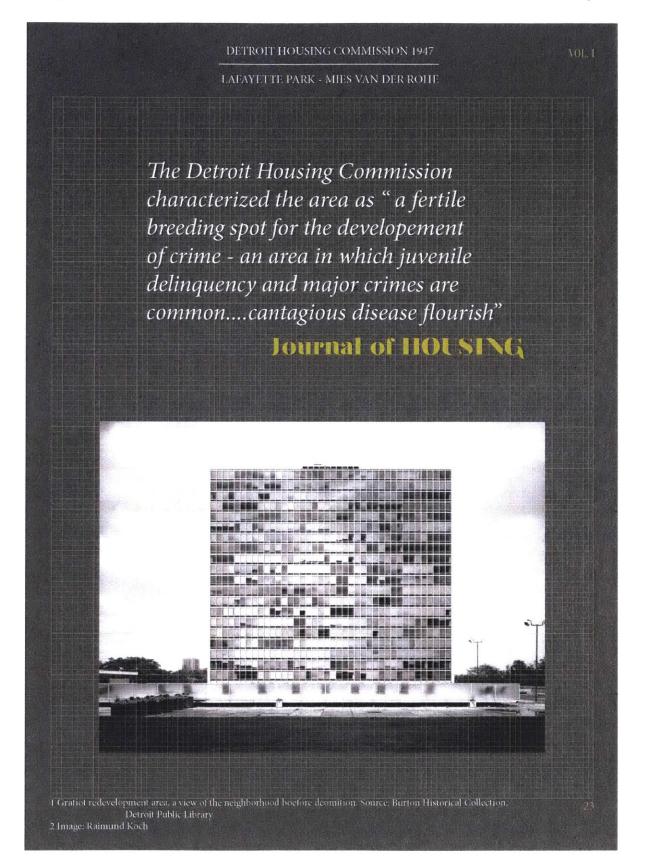


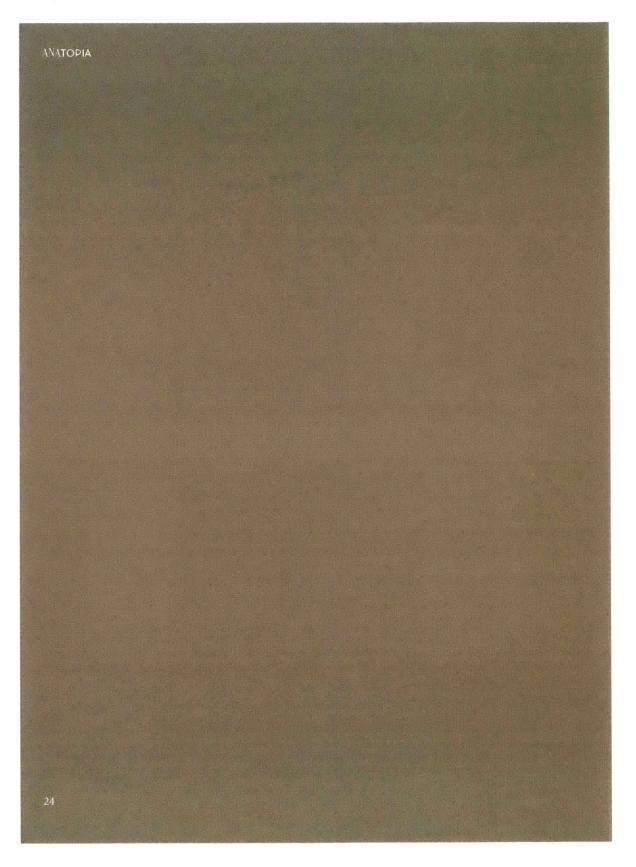


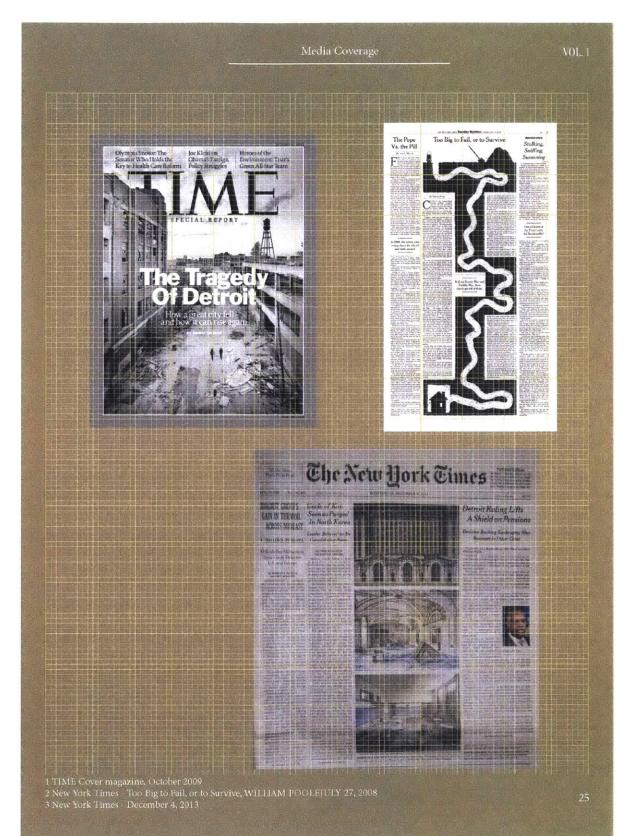
### Research Spread

#### Anatopia Research Publication

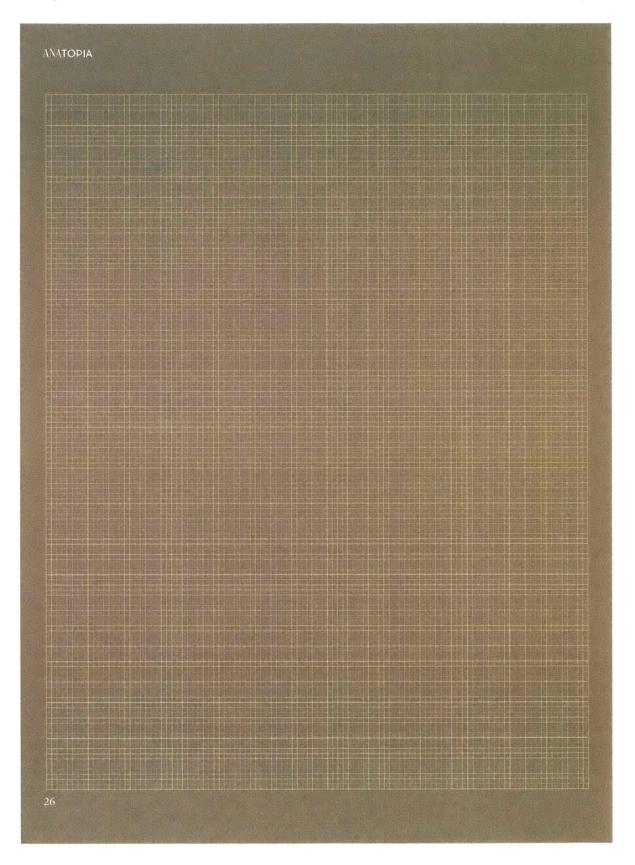




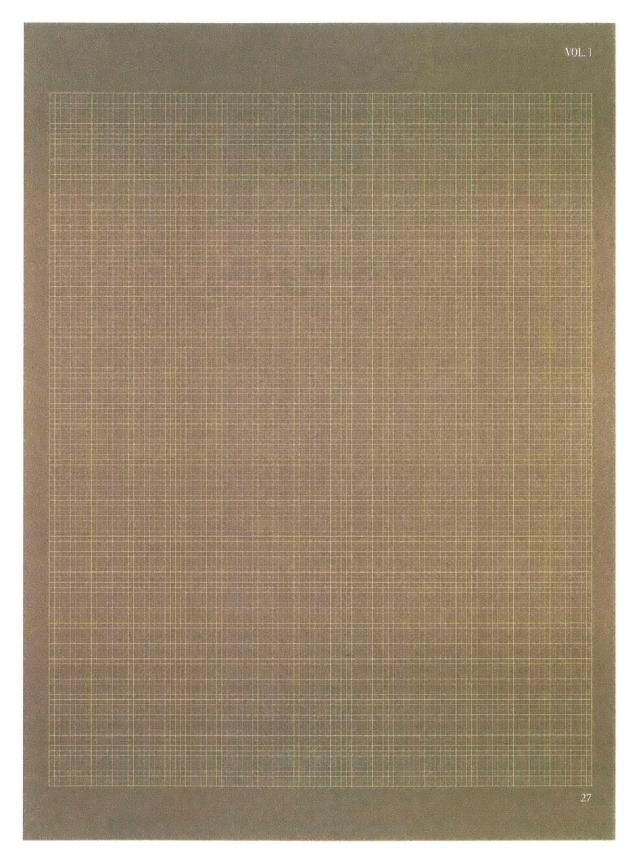




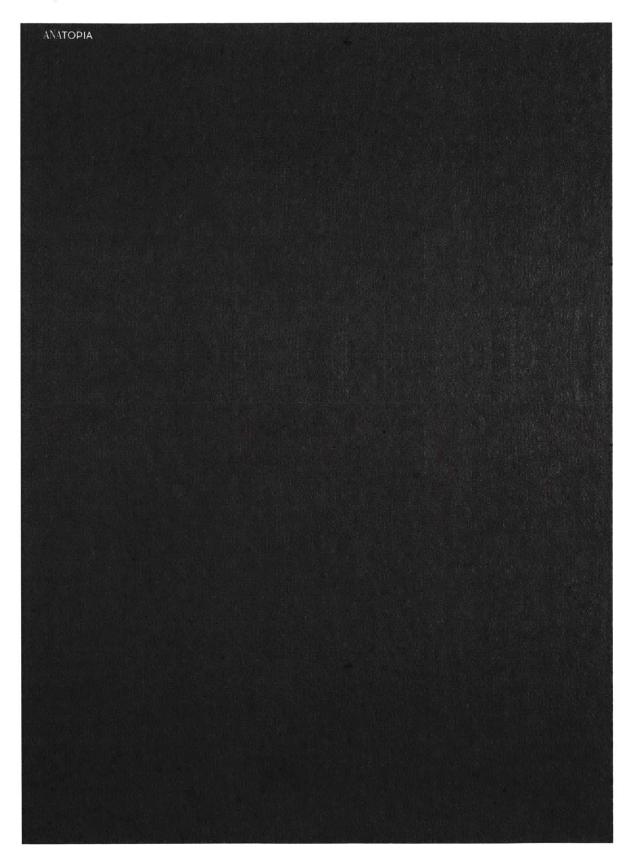
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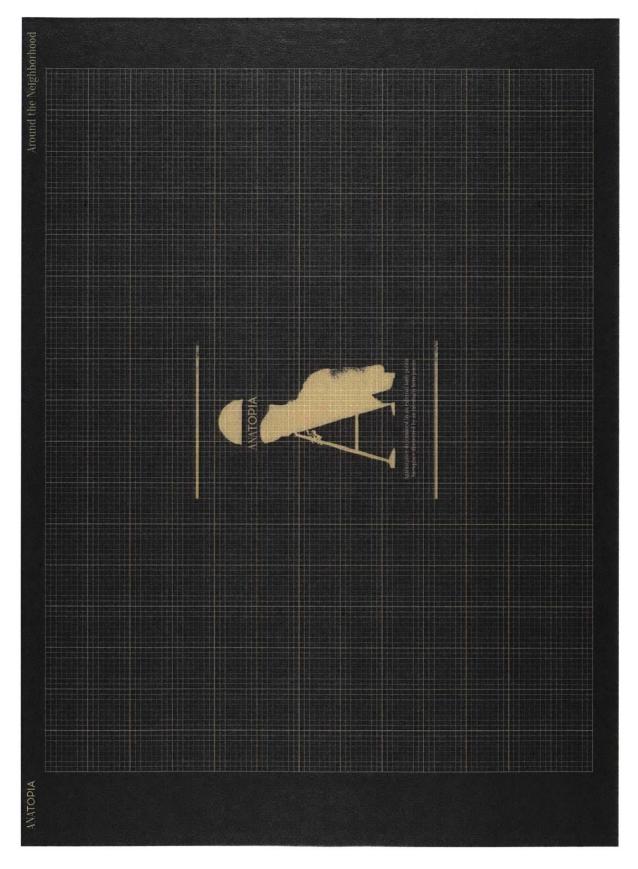
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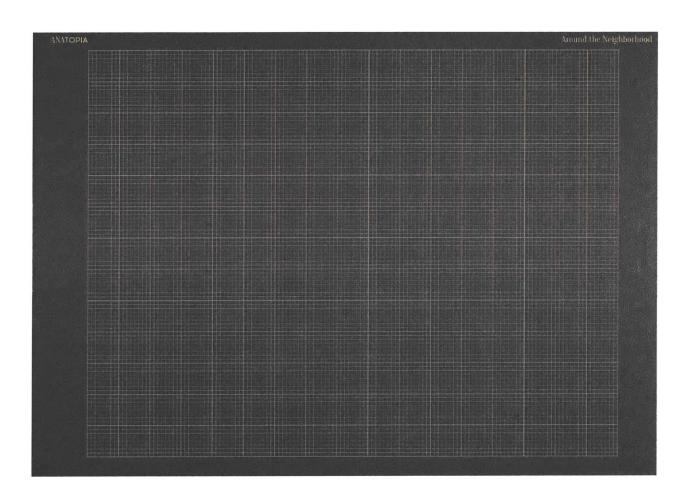


Around the Hood

## Around the Neighborhood

Site Visit







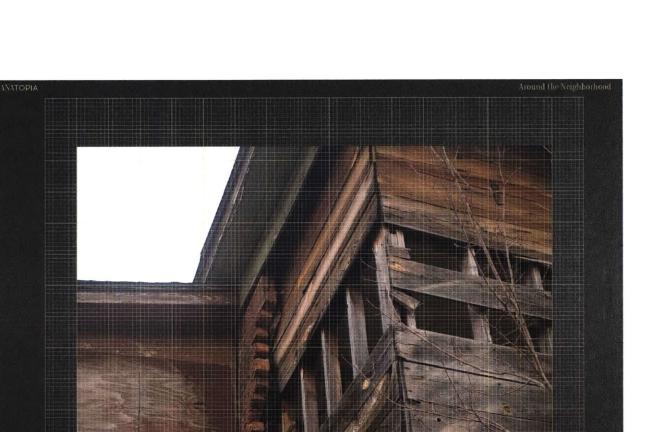
















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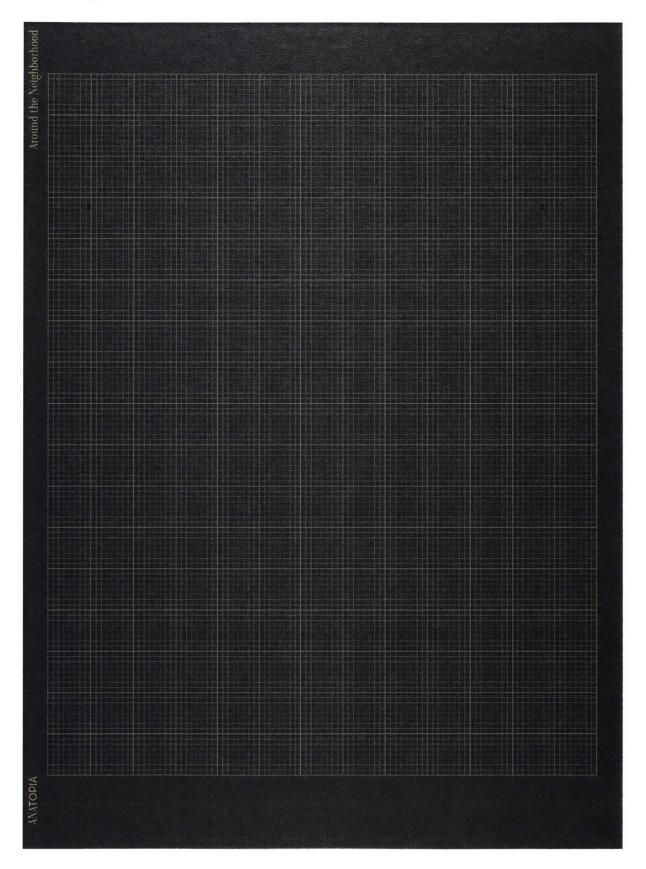
"Around the Hood" Site Visit 11/26/2017 Digital Photograph







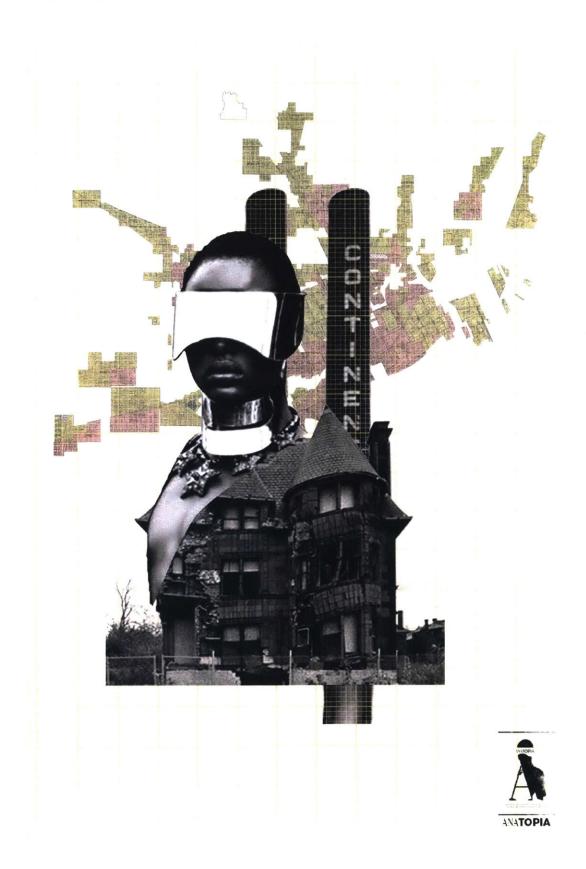
# Around the Neighborhood



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Anatopia Collage Series

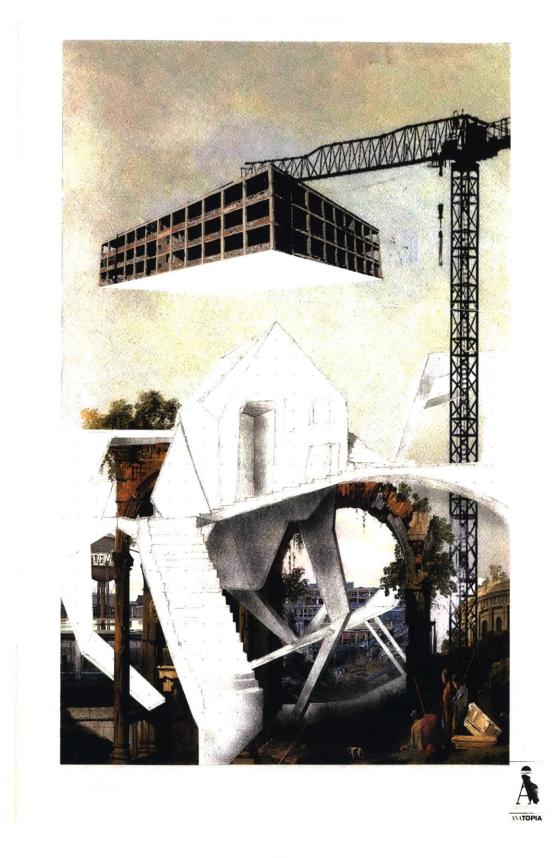


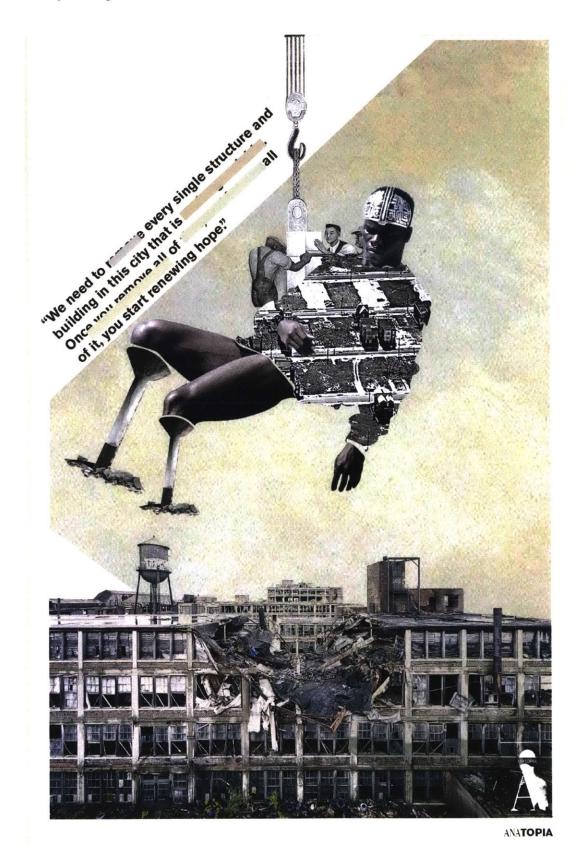


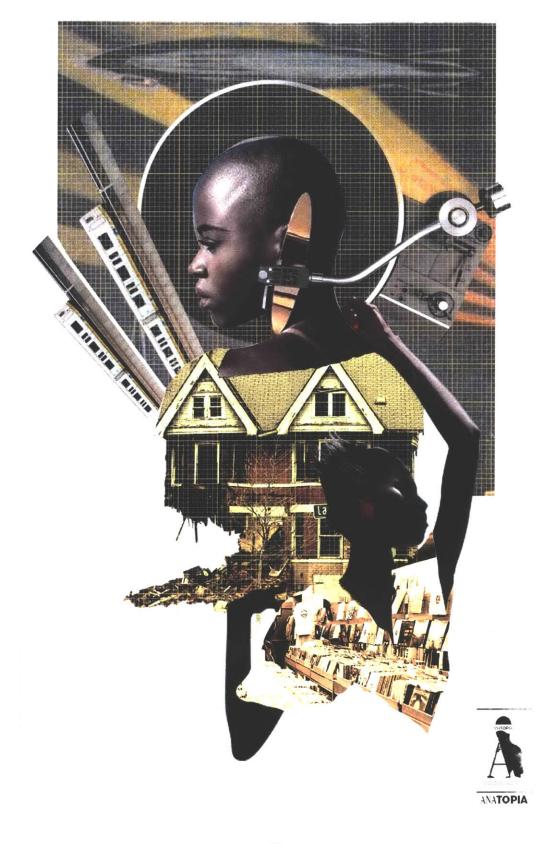


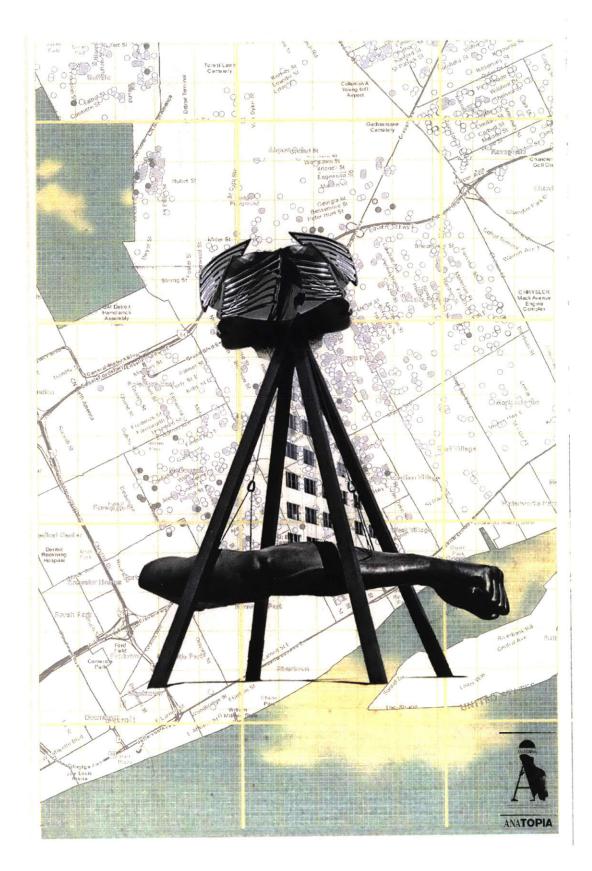
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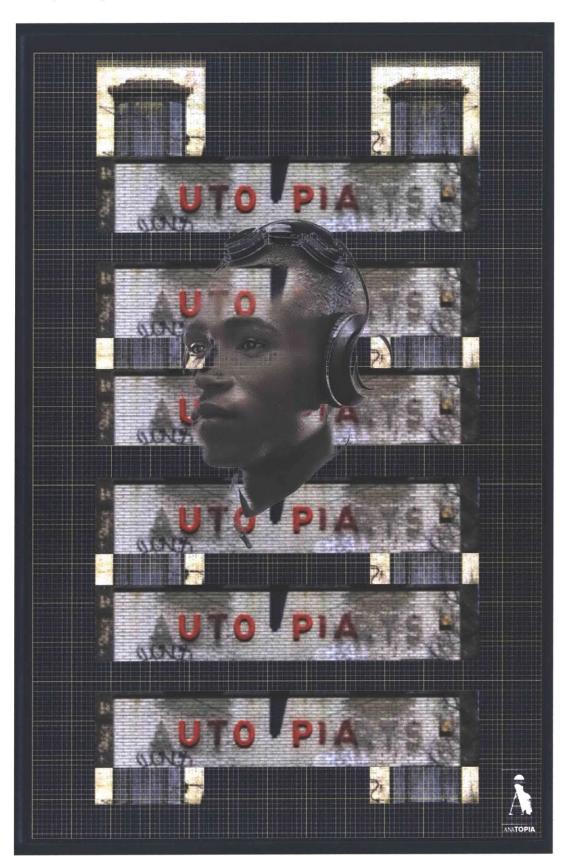


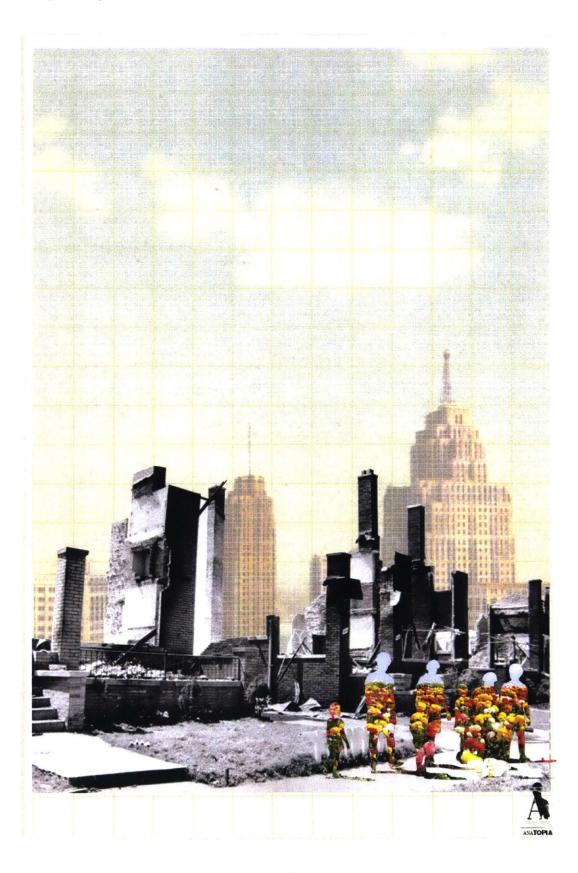


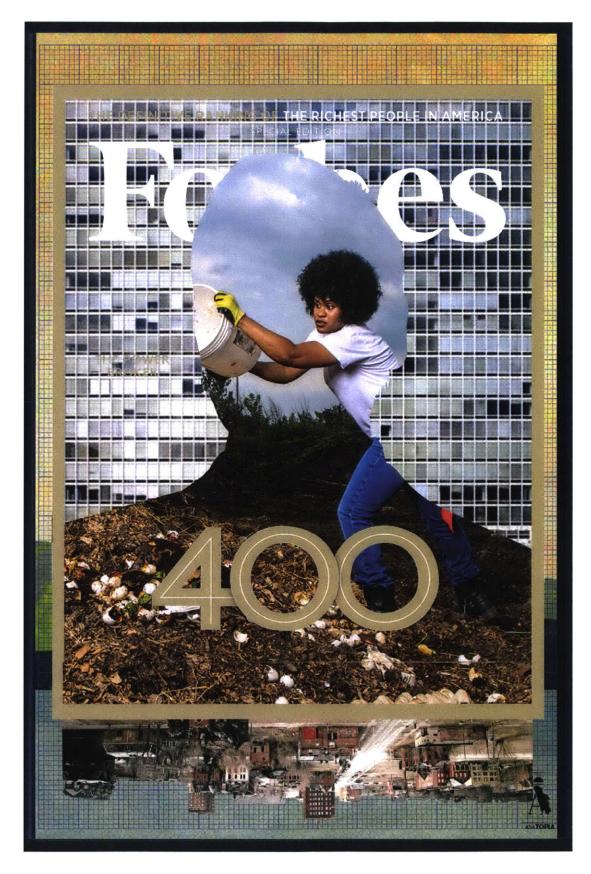


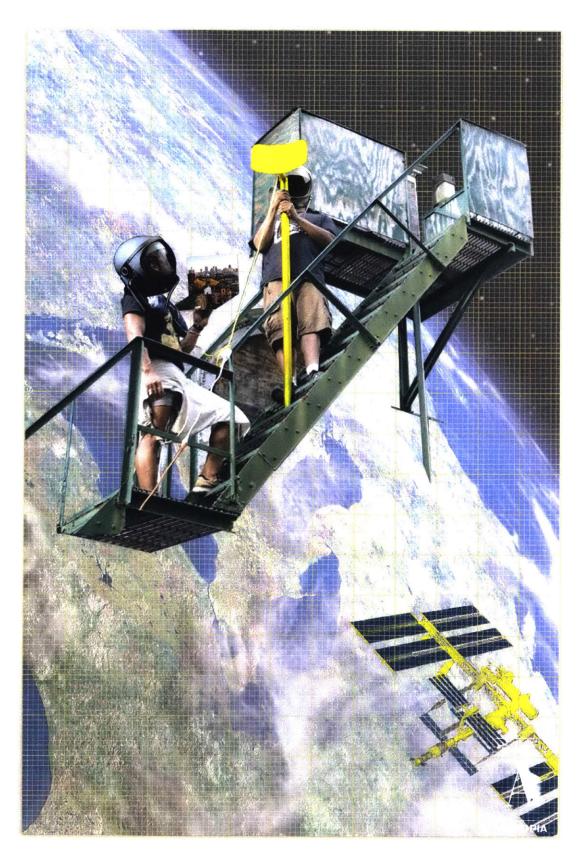


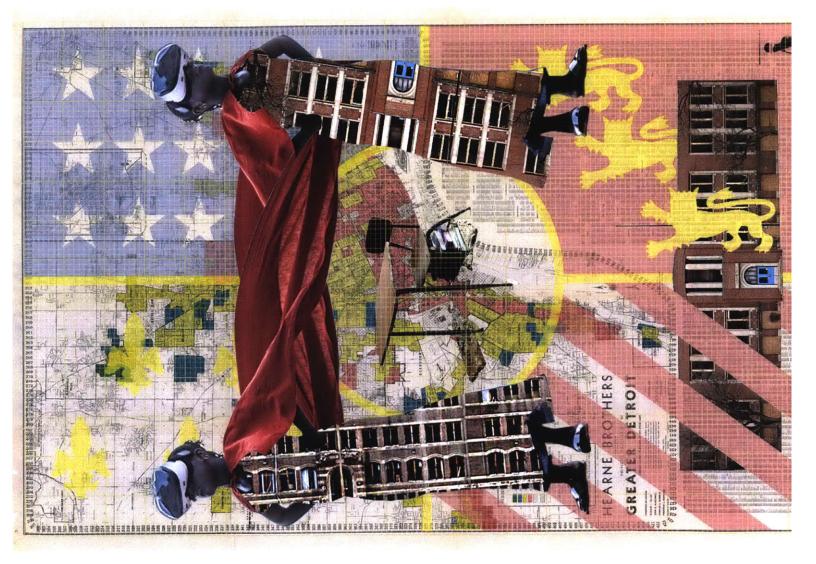


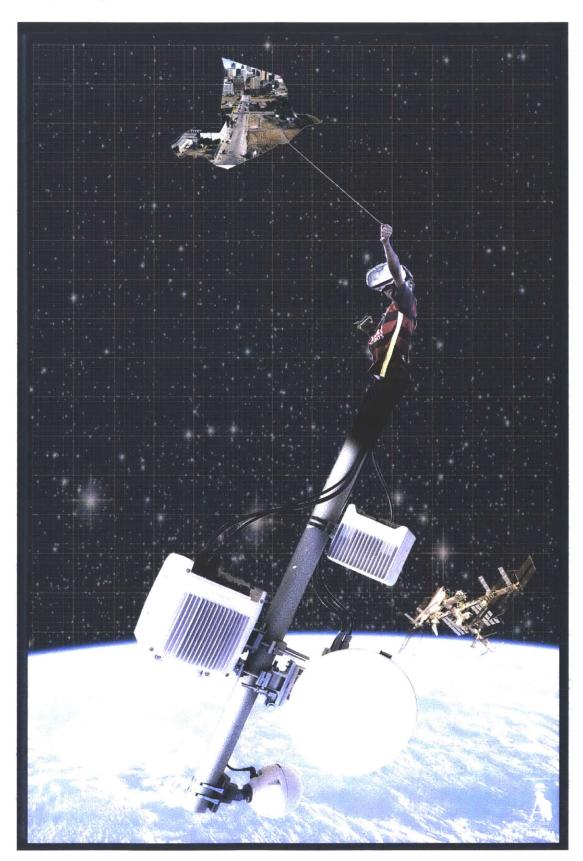


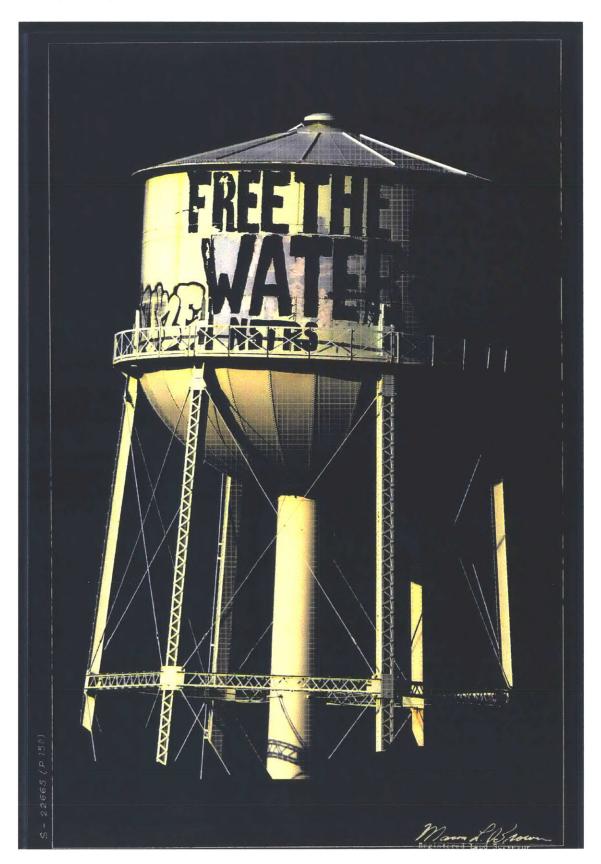




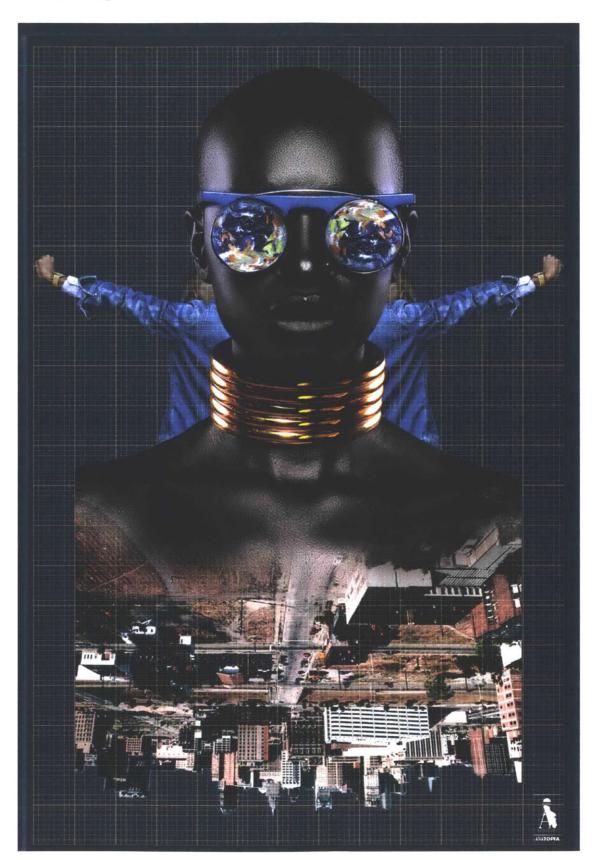








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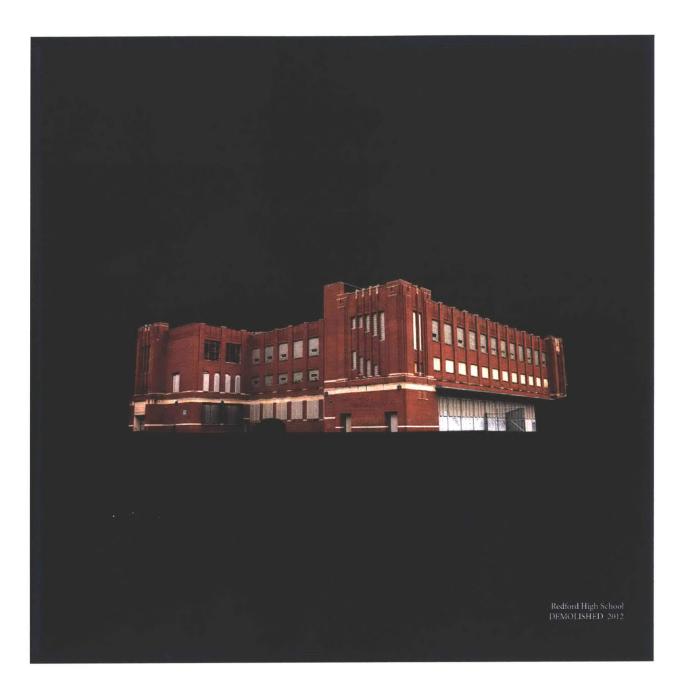
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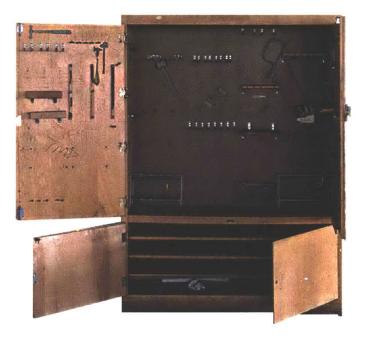
Object Interior



DAVIDE MACKENZIE HIGH SCHOOL DEMOLISHED 2013



Object Interior



Redford High School DEMOLISHED 2012



Object Interior



Paul Robeson / Malcolm X Academy / St. Francis Home for Boys DEMOLISHED 2012



Object Interior



St. Anthony / East Catholic High School DEMOLISHED 2012



Object Interior



Willard School / Highland Park Adult Education / Bright Center DEMOLISHED 2013



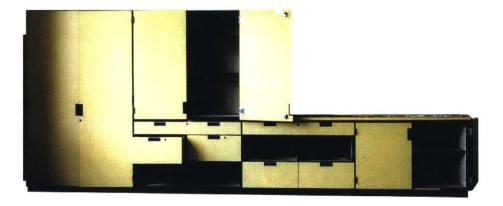
Object Interior



Thomas Houghten Elementary DEMOLISHED 2016



Object Interior



Henry Gary Sherrard Elementary DEMOLISHED 2010



Object Interior



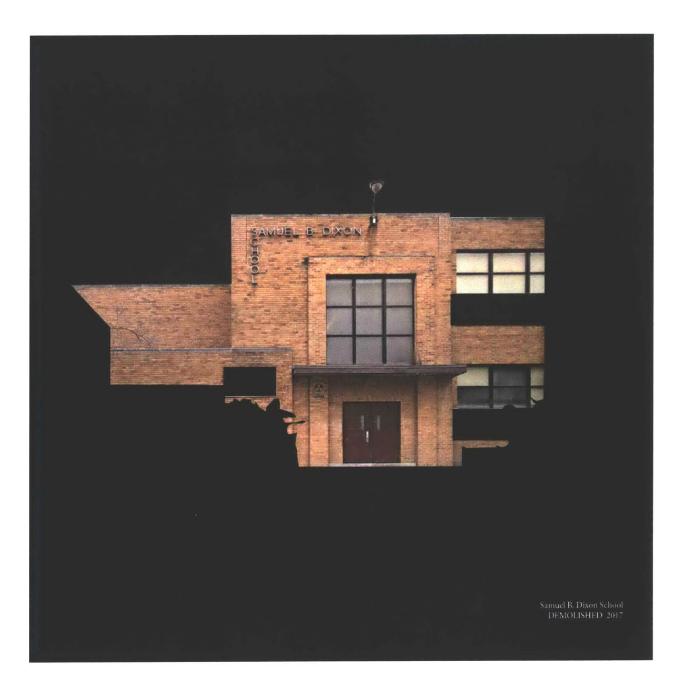
Breitmeyer Intermediate School DEMOLISHED 2010



Object Interior



Guardian Angels Catholic / Brewer Elementary School DEMOLISHED 2013



Demolition Diptych

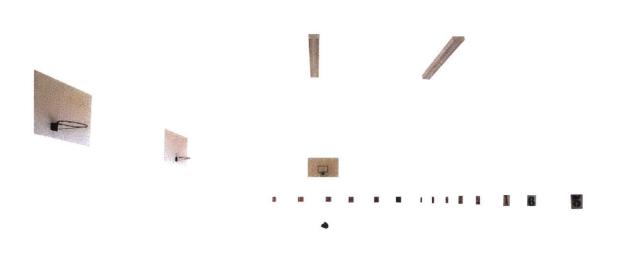
Object Interior



Samuel B. Dixon School DEMOLISHED 2017



Object Interior



Greenfield Park Elementary DEMOLISHED 2016

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Demolition Diptych

Object Interior



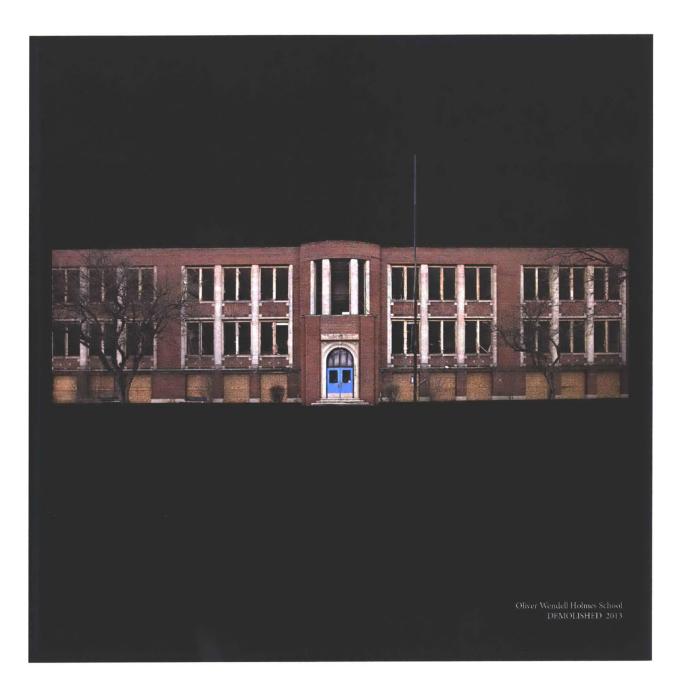
Dexter Ferry Elementar DEMOLISHED 2010



Object Interior



Grayling Elementary School DEMOLISHED 2013



Demolition Diptych

Object Interior



Oliver Wendell Holmes School DEMOLISHED 2013



Demolition Diptych

Object Interior



Jane Cooper Elementary DEMOLISHED 2010



Object Interior



Helen Newberry Joy Middle School DEMOLISHED 2009



Object Interior



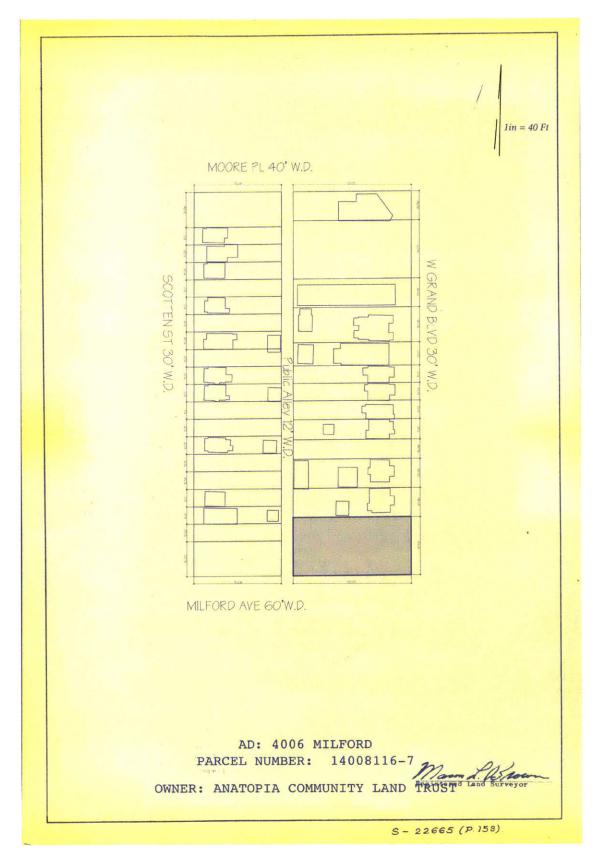
Lillibridge School / McKinney Day Treatment Center DEMOLISHED 2015

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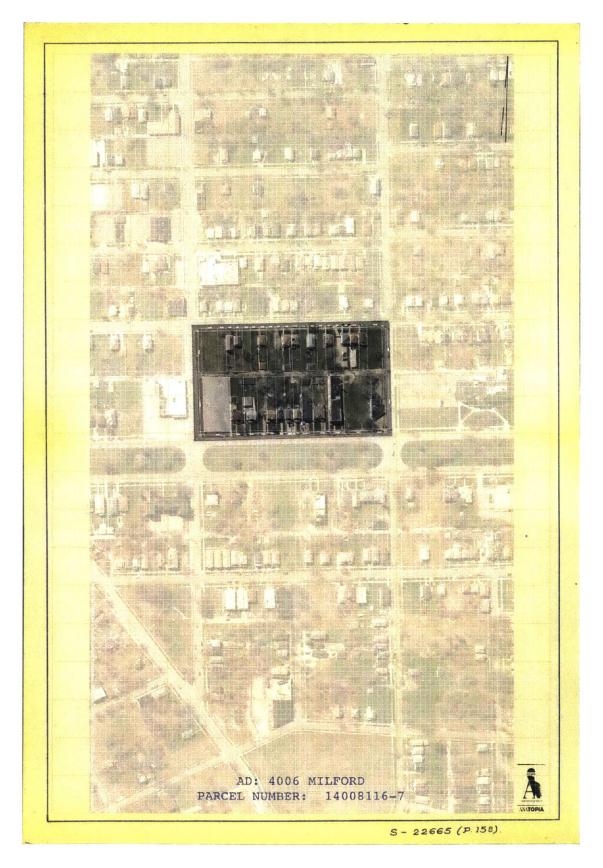
Original photographs in "Demolition Dyptichs" are pulled from anonymous photographers from the website: detroiturbex.com/ 17 Plots

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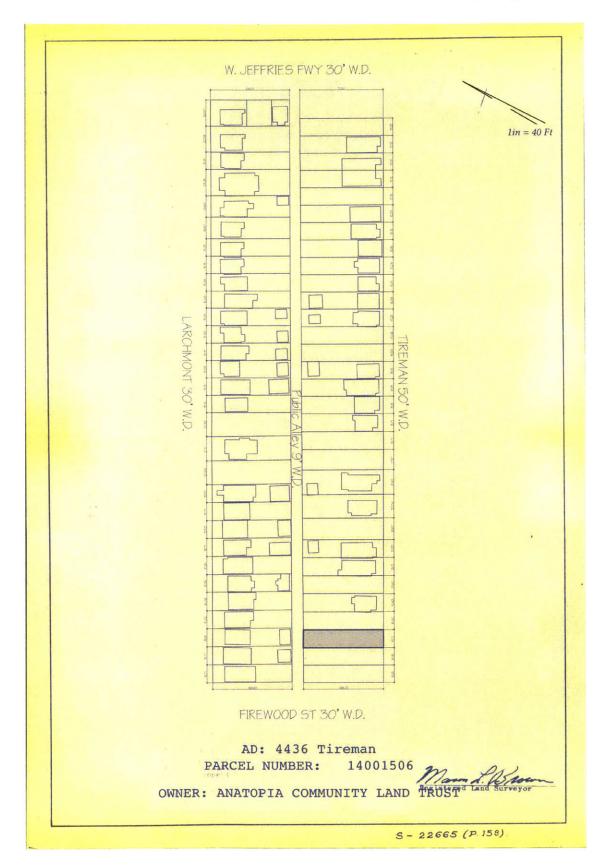
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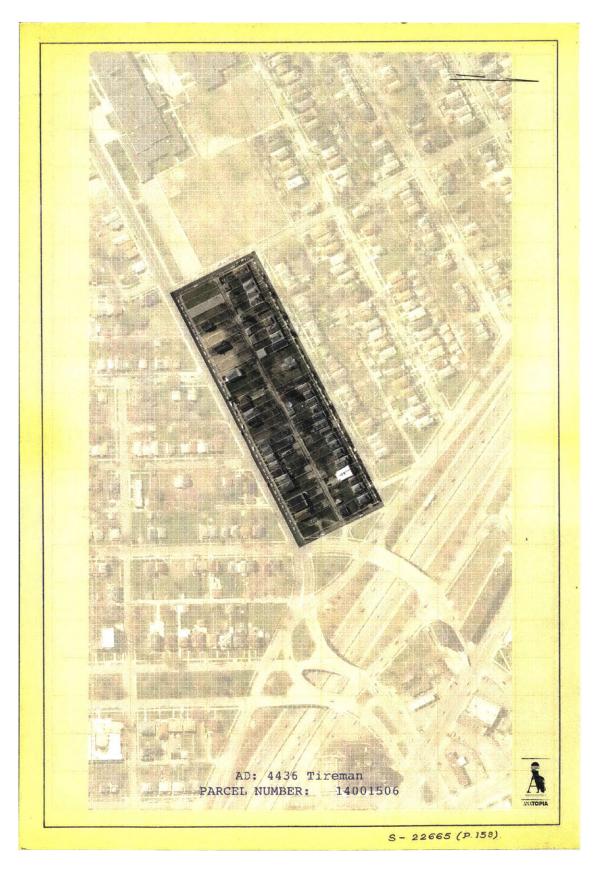


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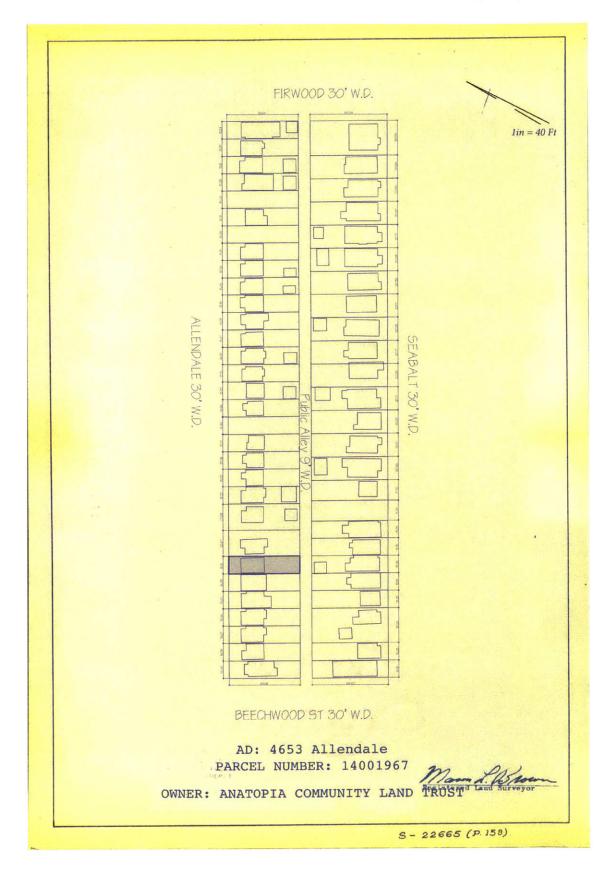


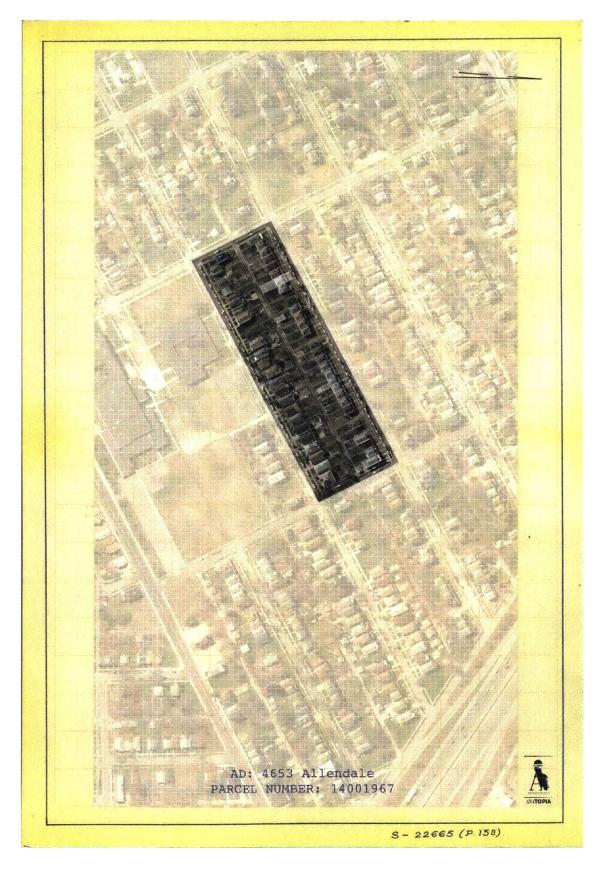
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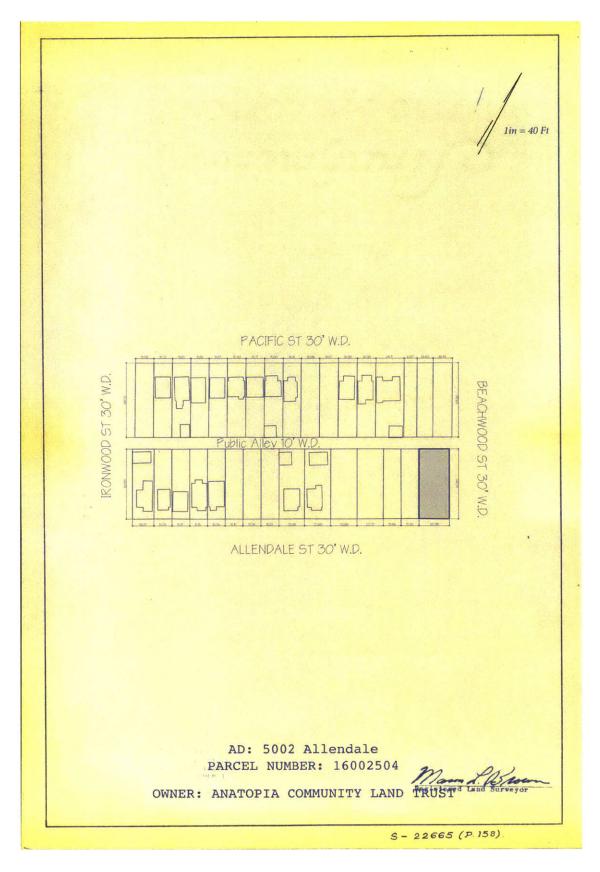


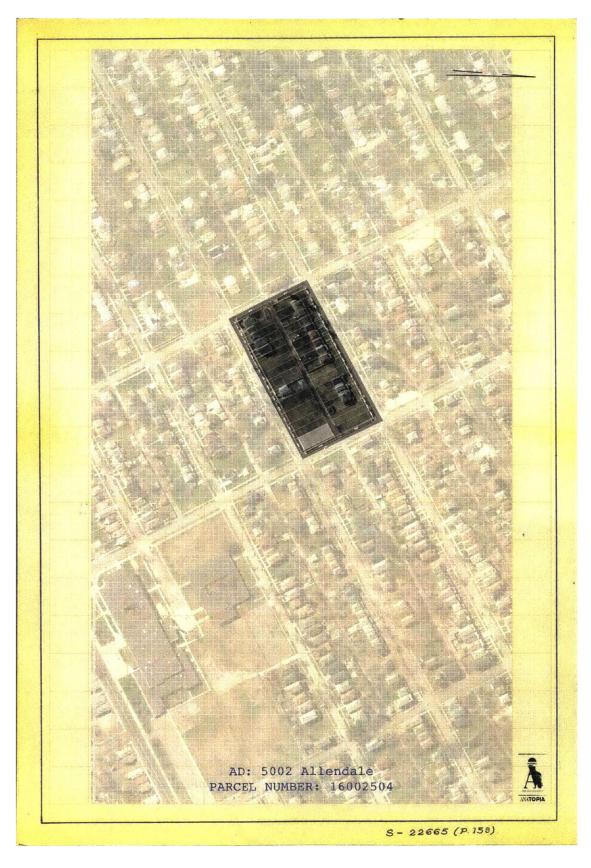
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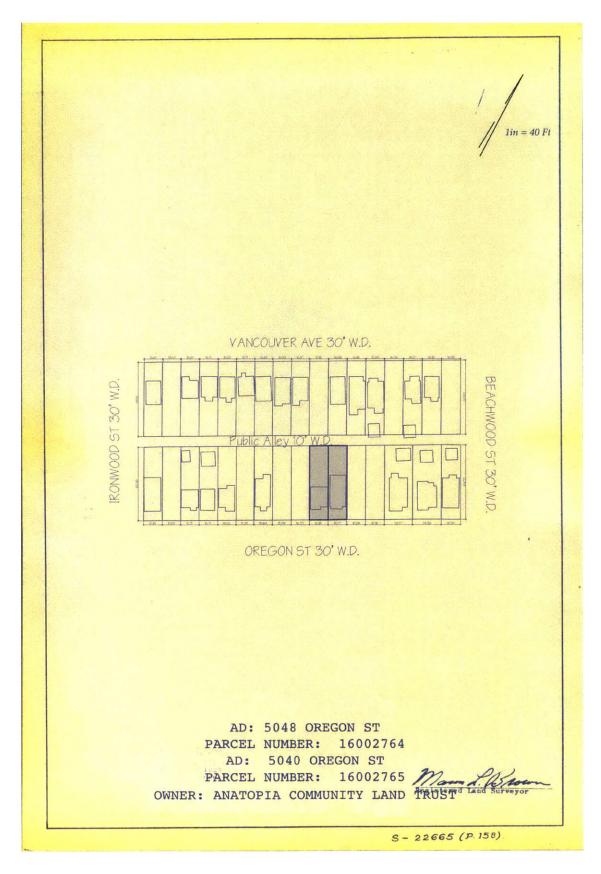


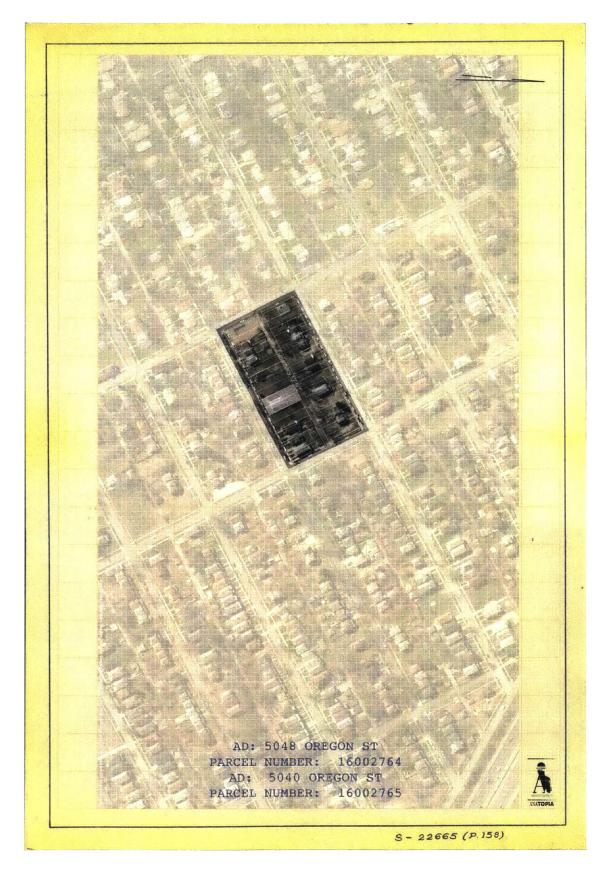
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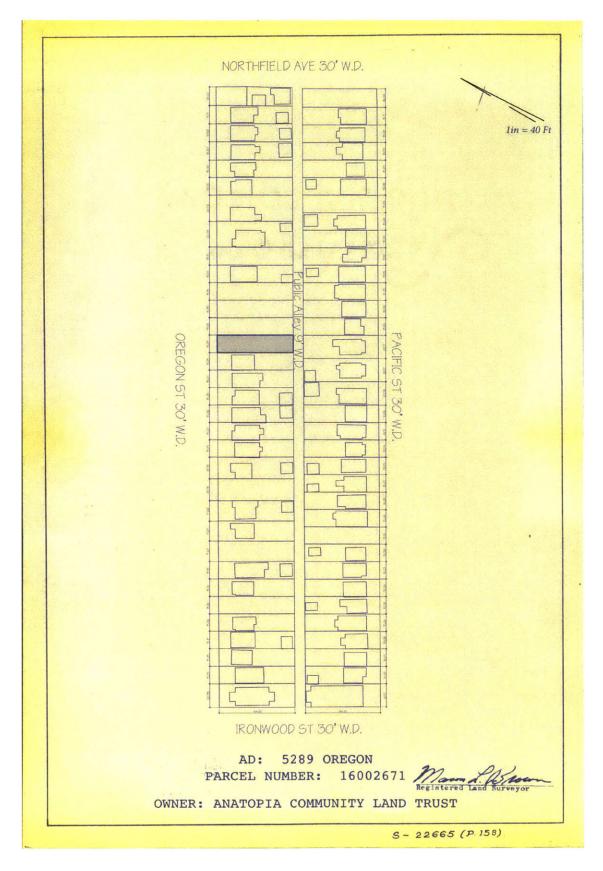


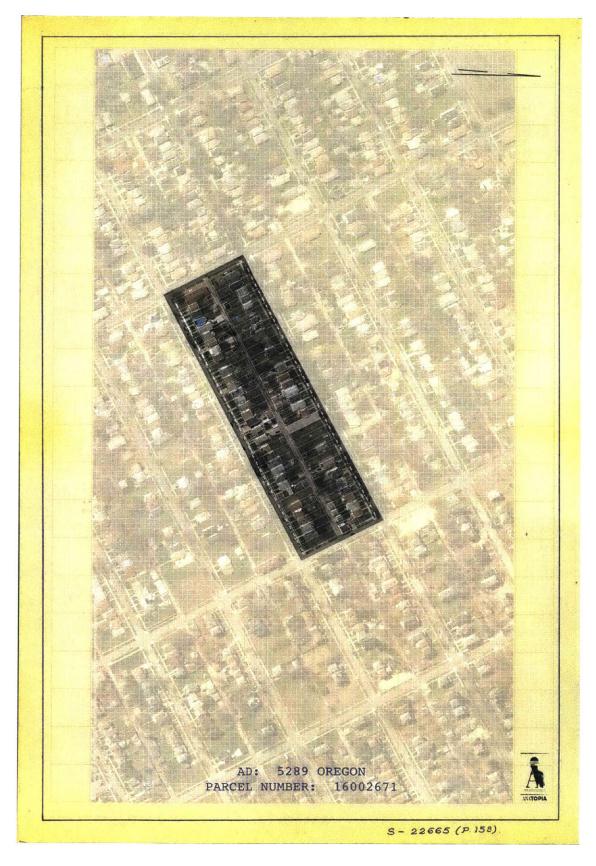
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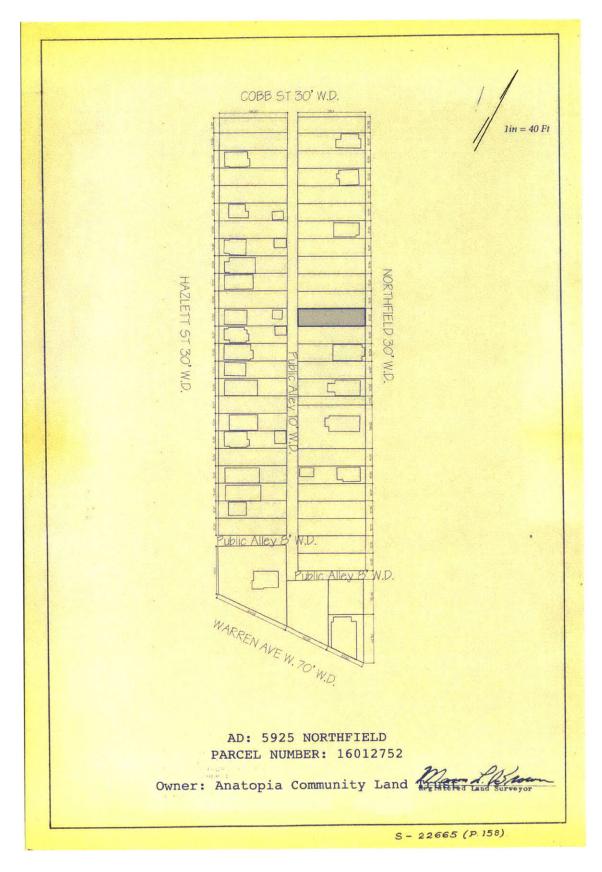


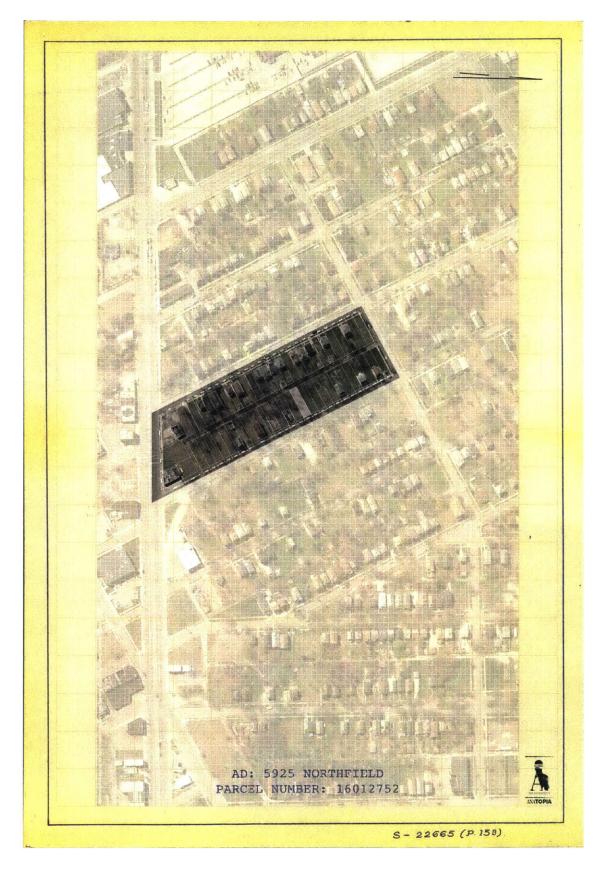
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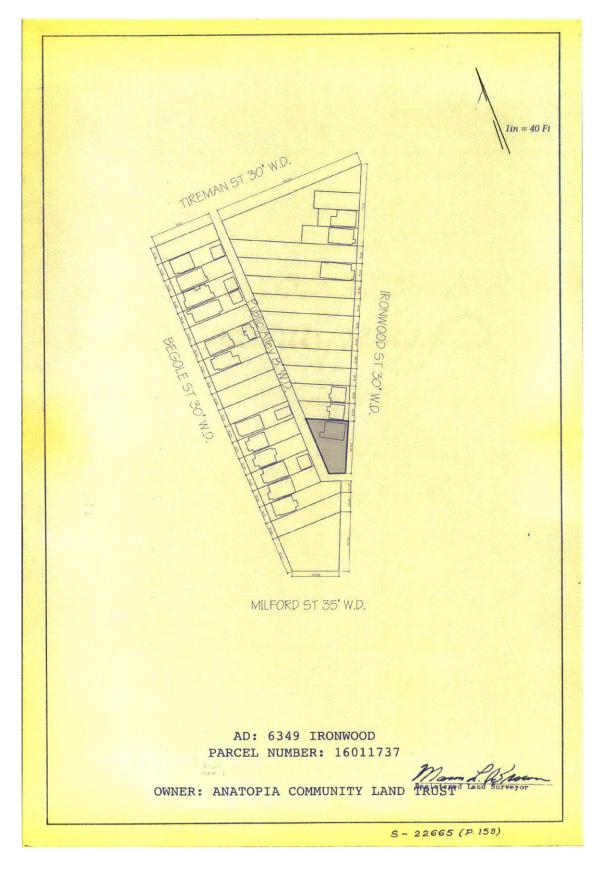


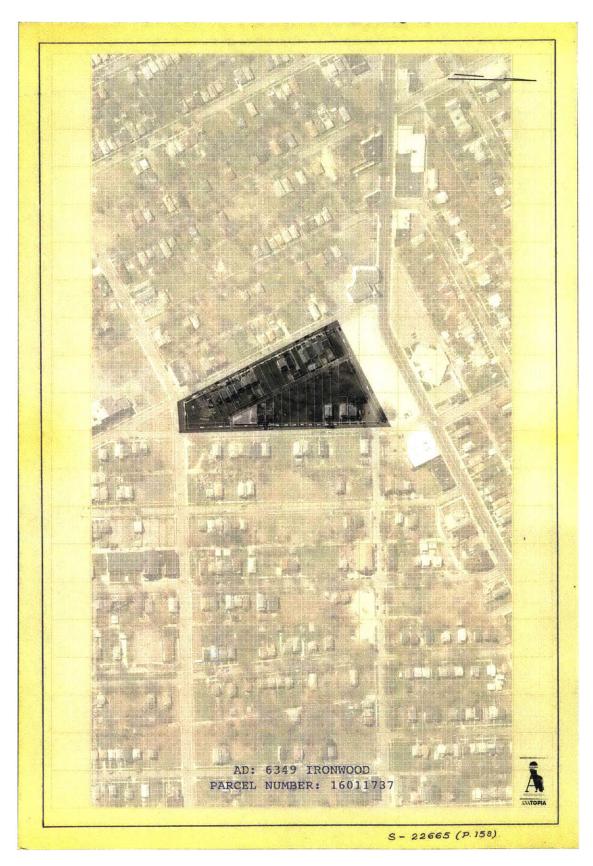


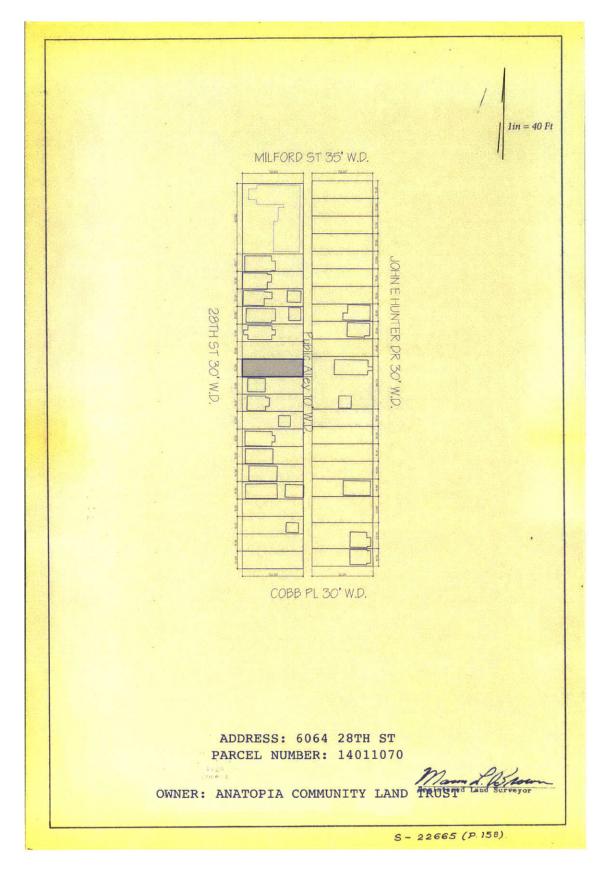
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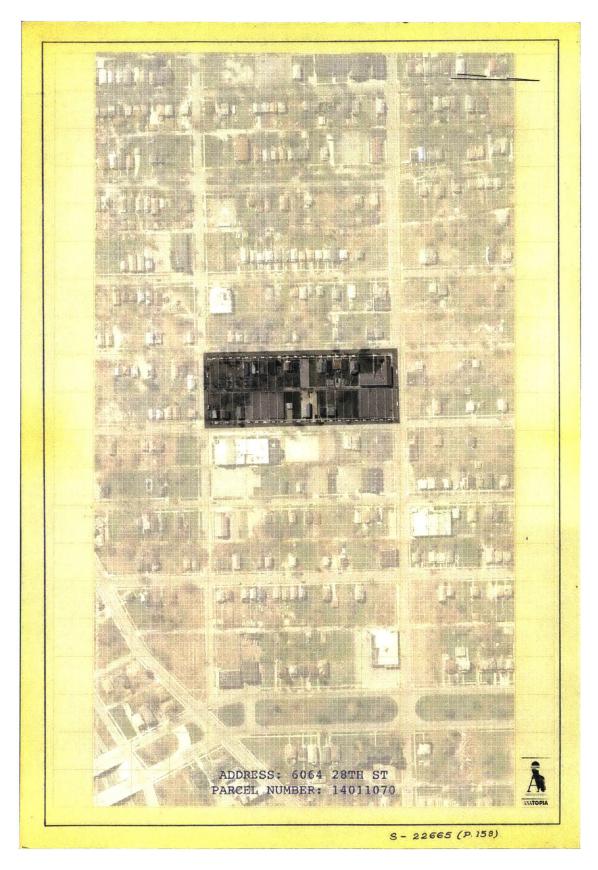


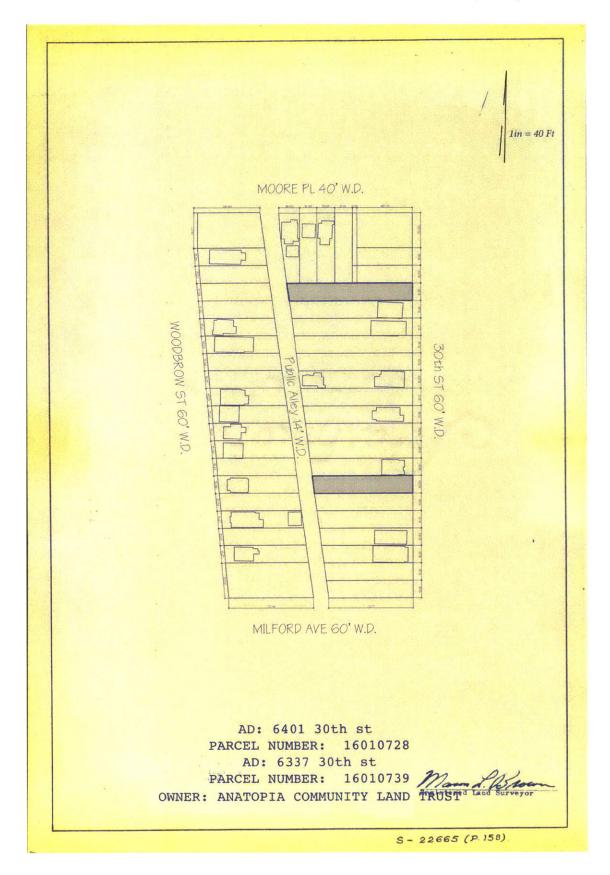




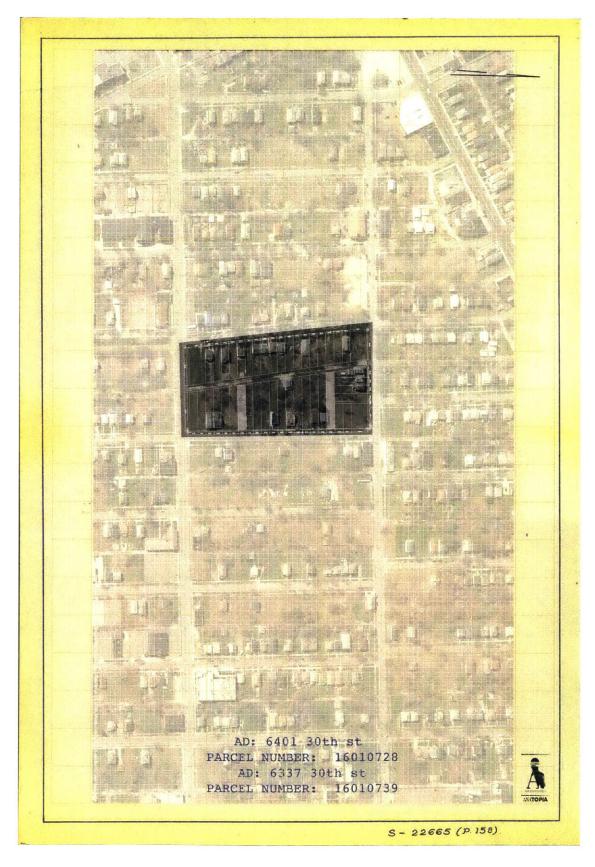
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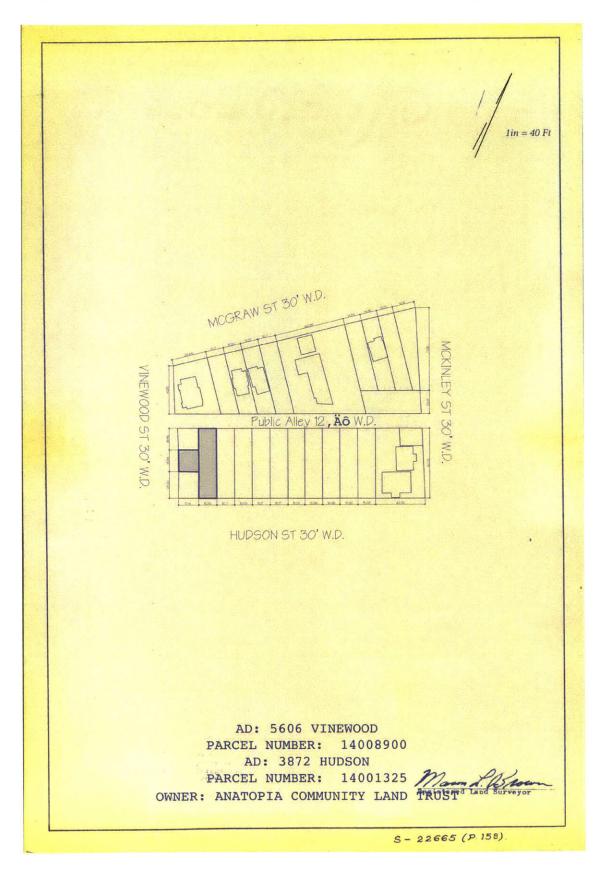
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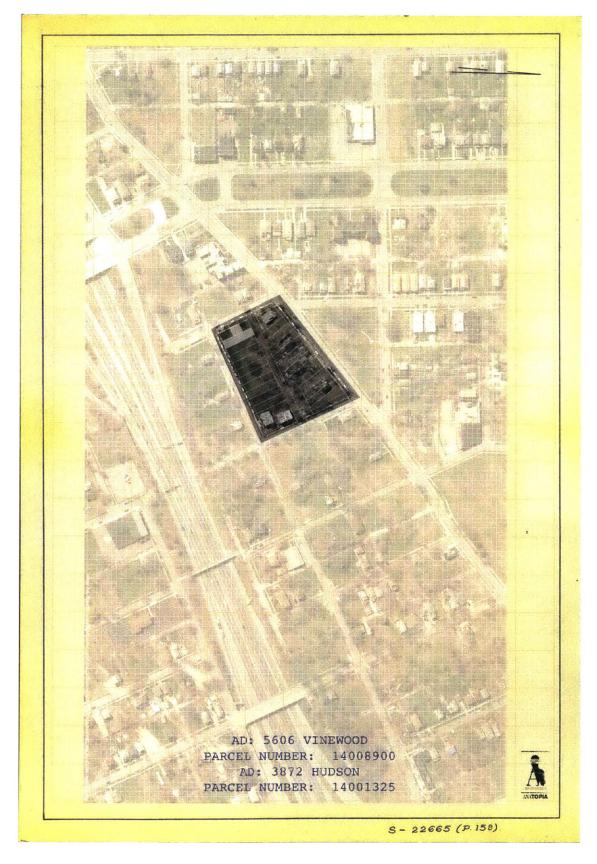
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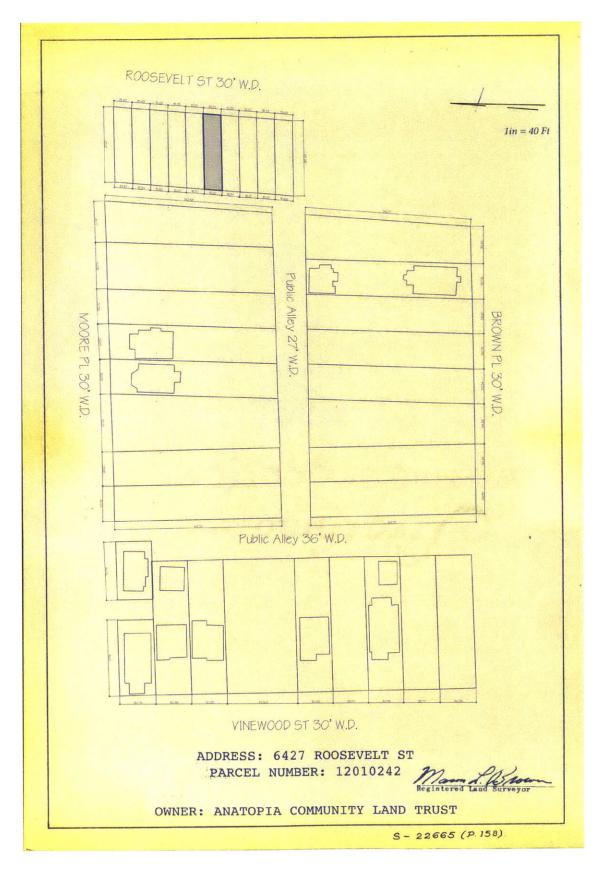


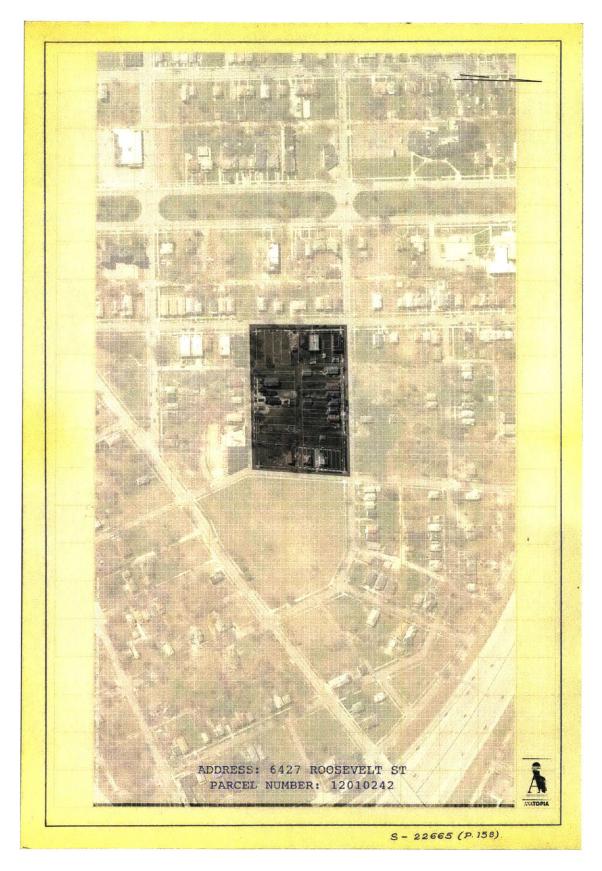
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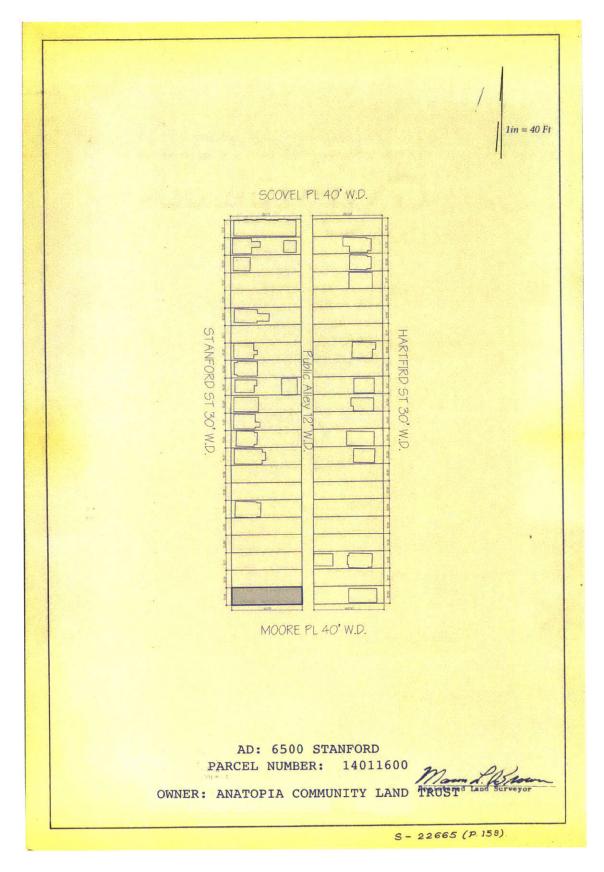
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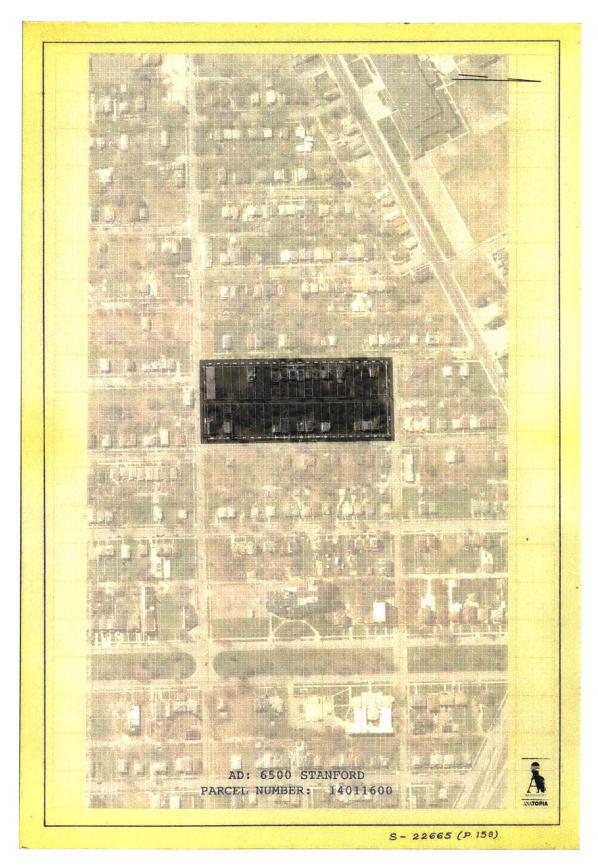


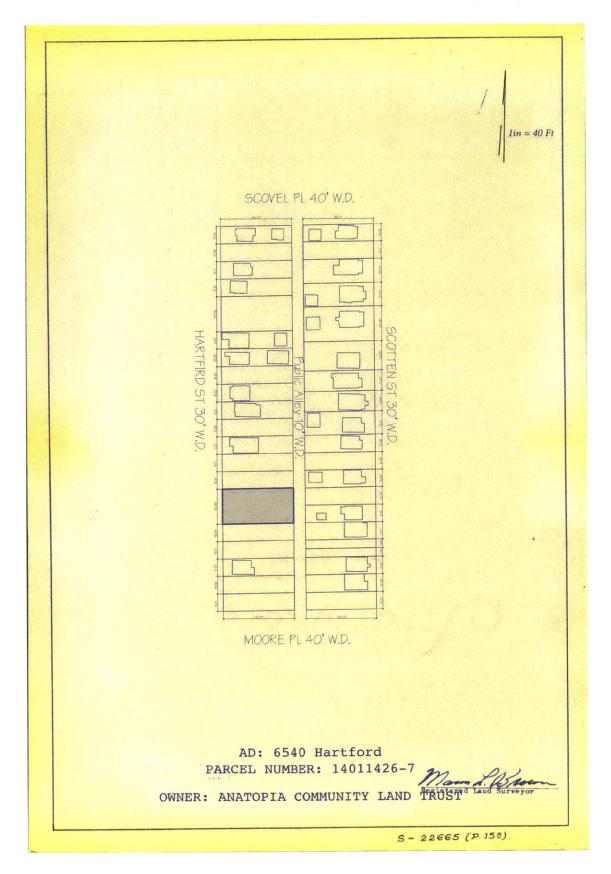
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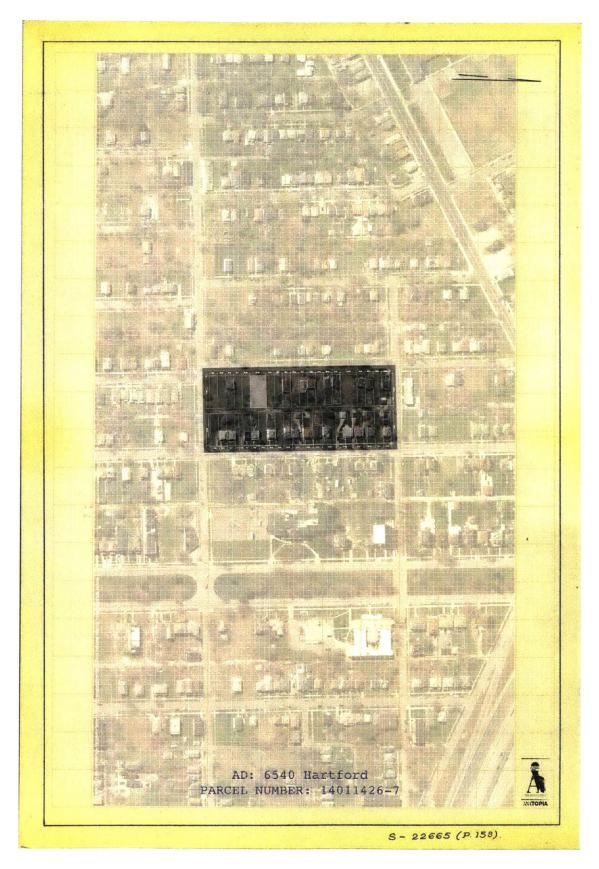




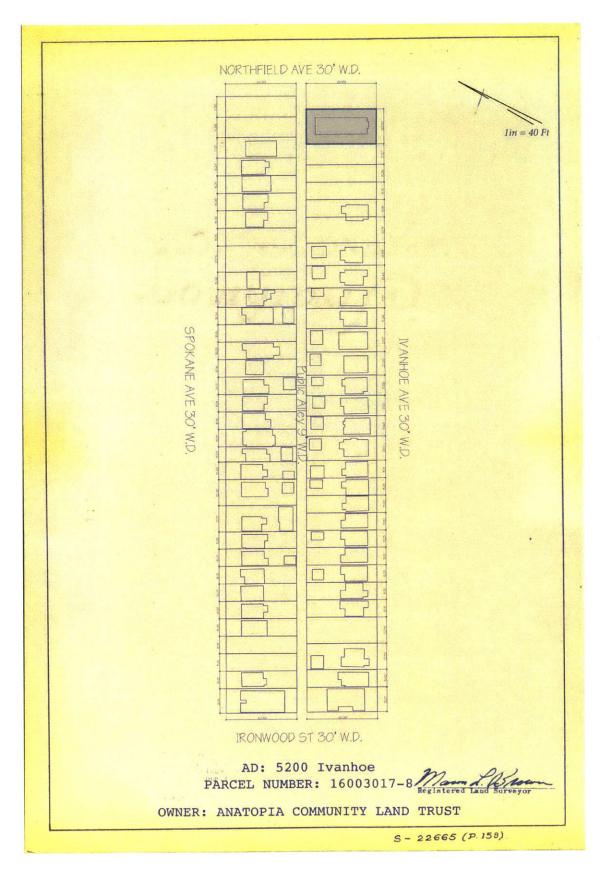




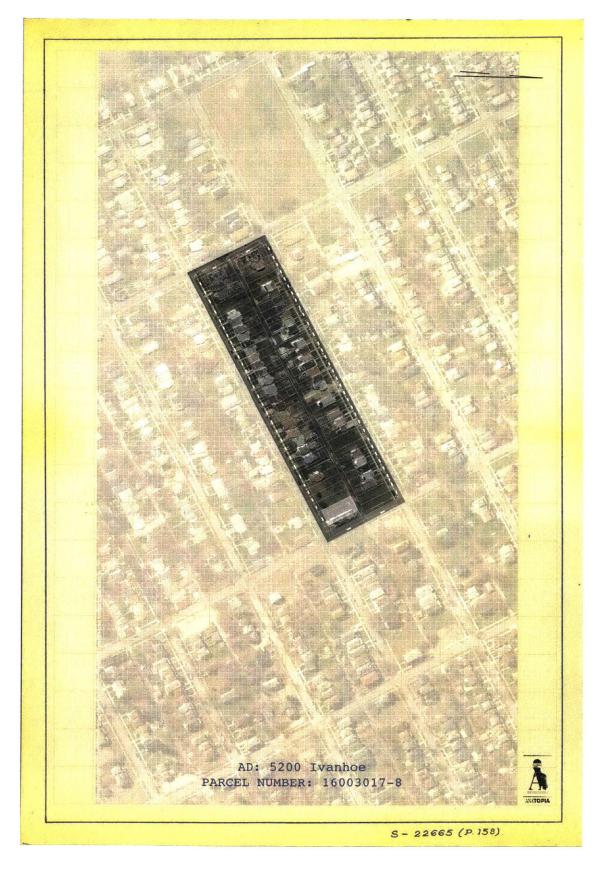




"17 Plots"



"17 Plots"

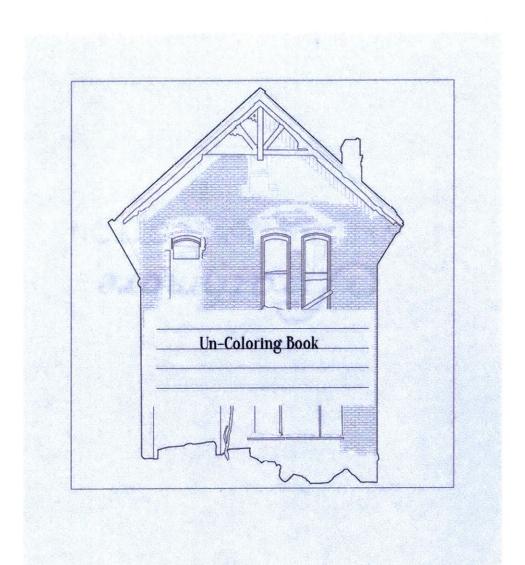


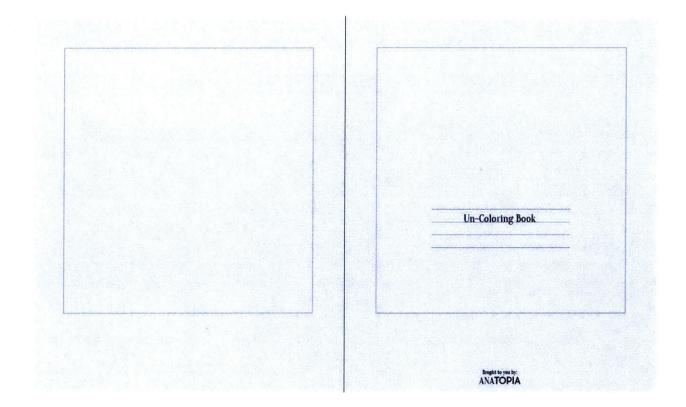
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Un-Coloring Book

Front Cover





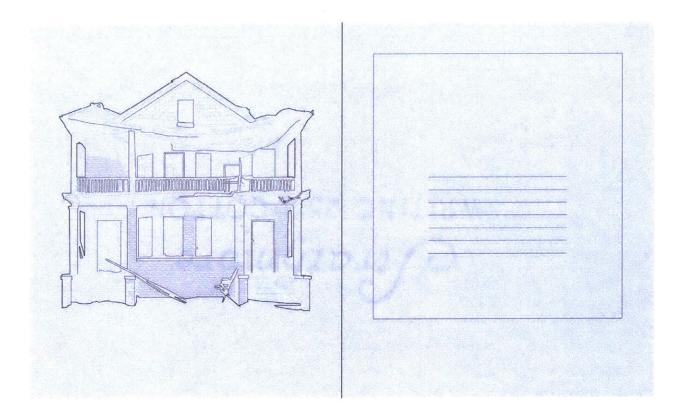
In this space....

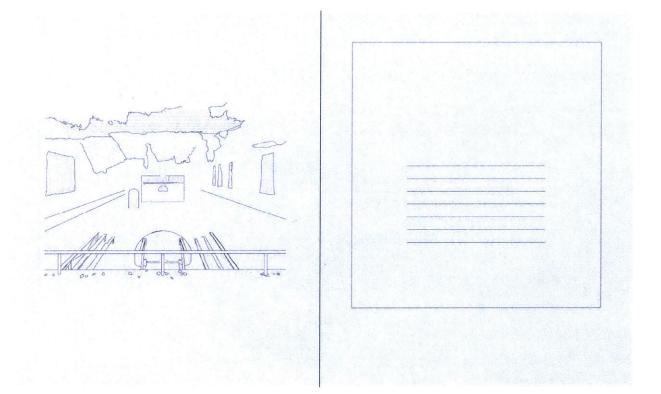
Draw what you see Draw what you don't see Draw what you'd like to see Draw what you think about Draw your reaction Draw your invention And in this space....

Write what we need to be doing, thinking, feeling about the illustrated spaces.

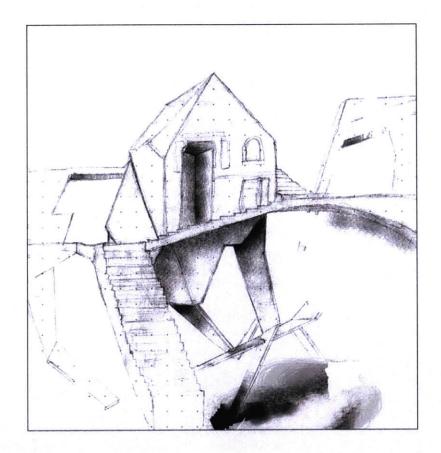
Tell us about your vision.







Back Cover

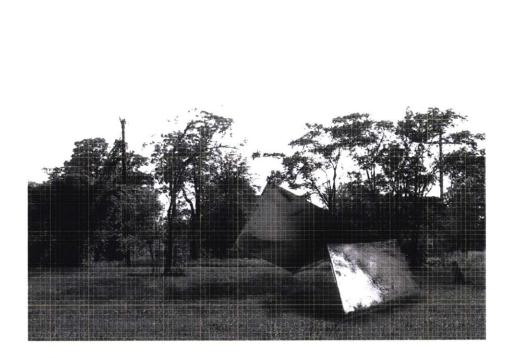


Broght to you by: ANATOPIA



ISBN 978-1-941332-13-9

Pamphlet Page



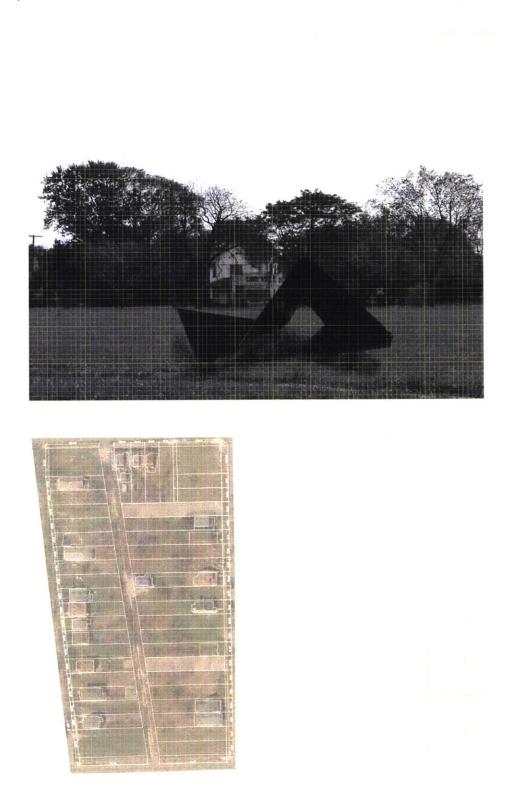




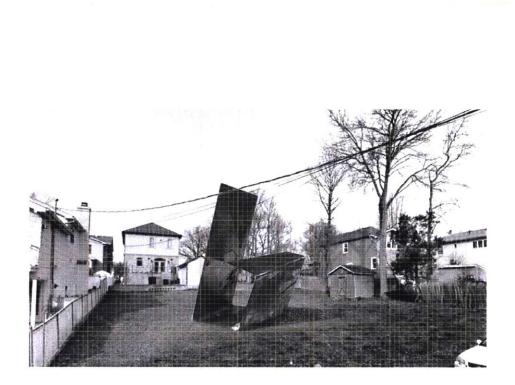


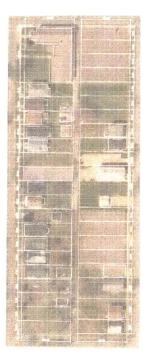
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Pamphlet Page



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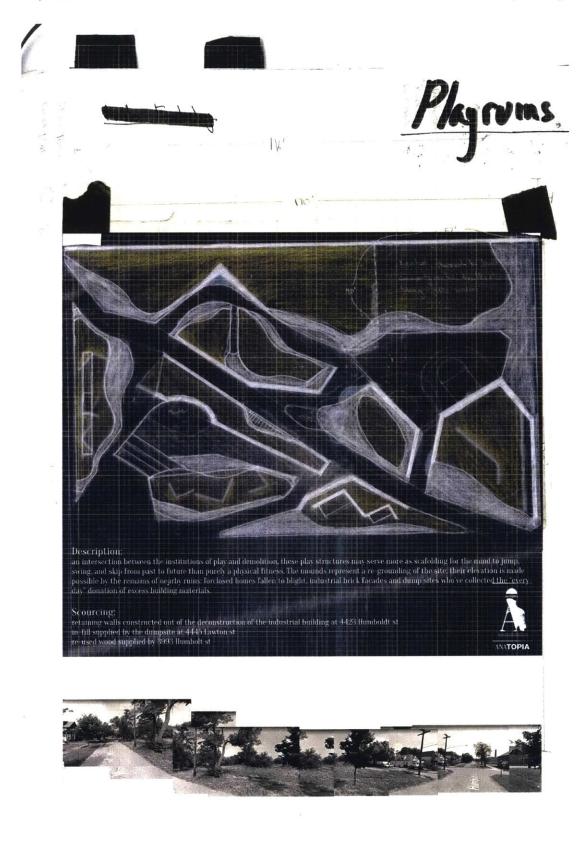
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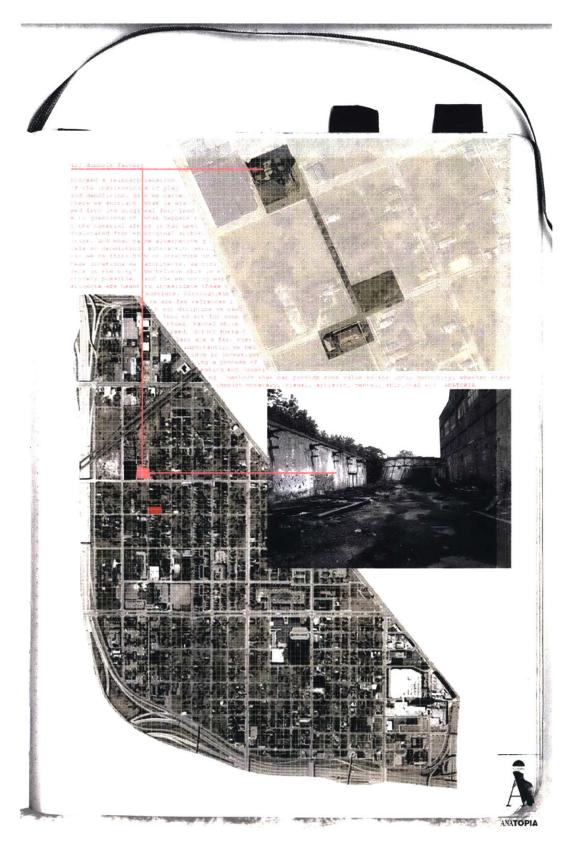
Playruins

Playruins

Pamphlet Page



Playruins

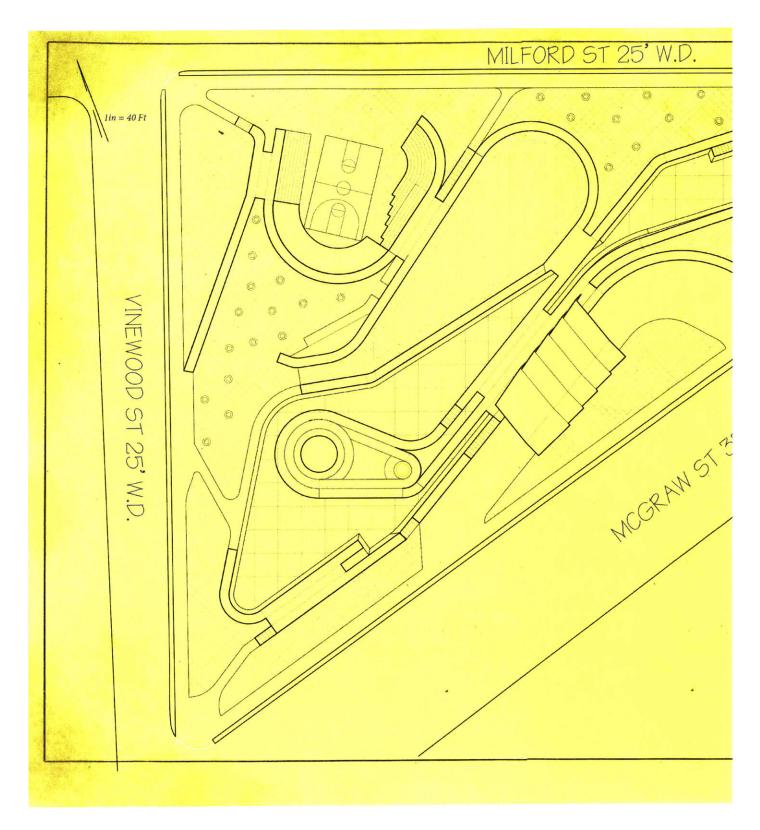


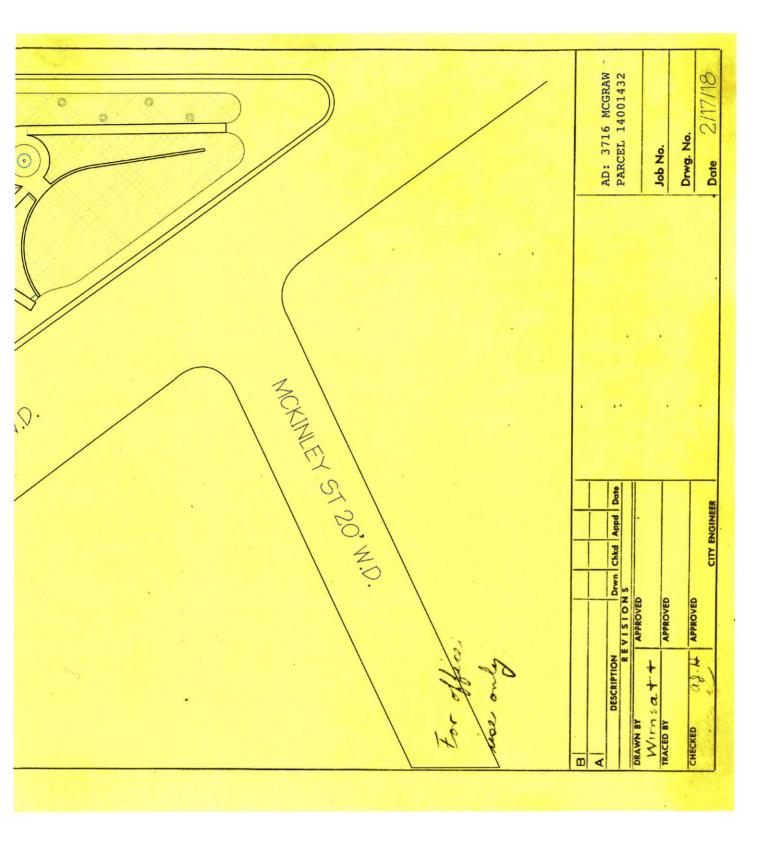
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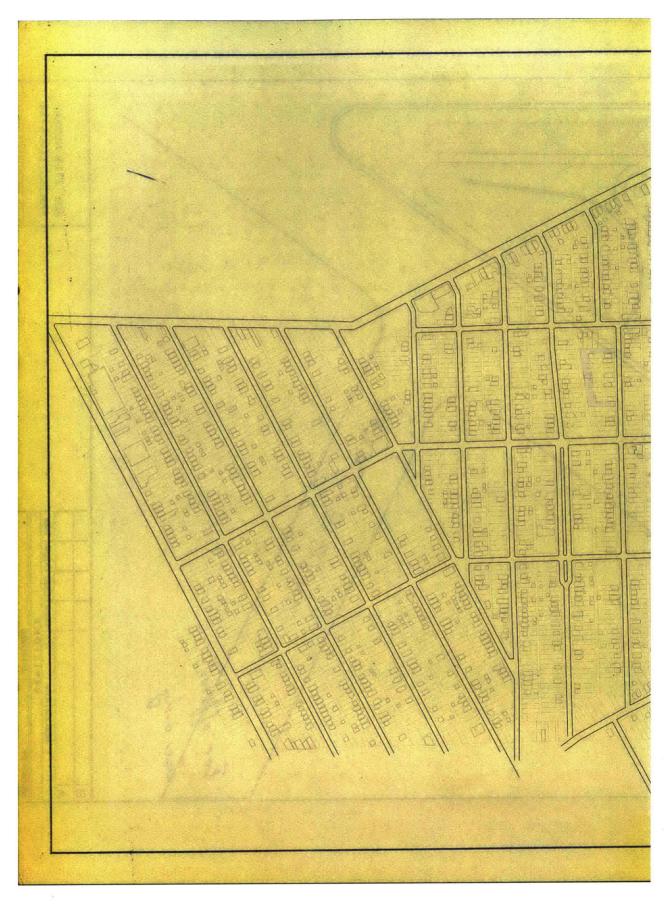
Ana-park

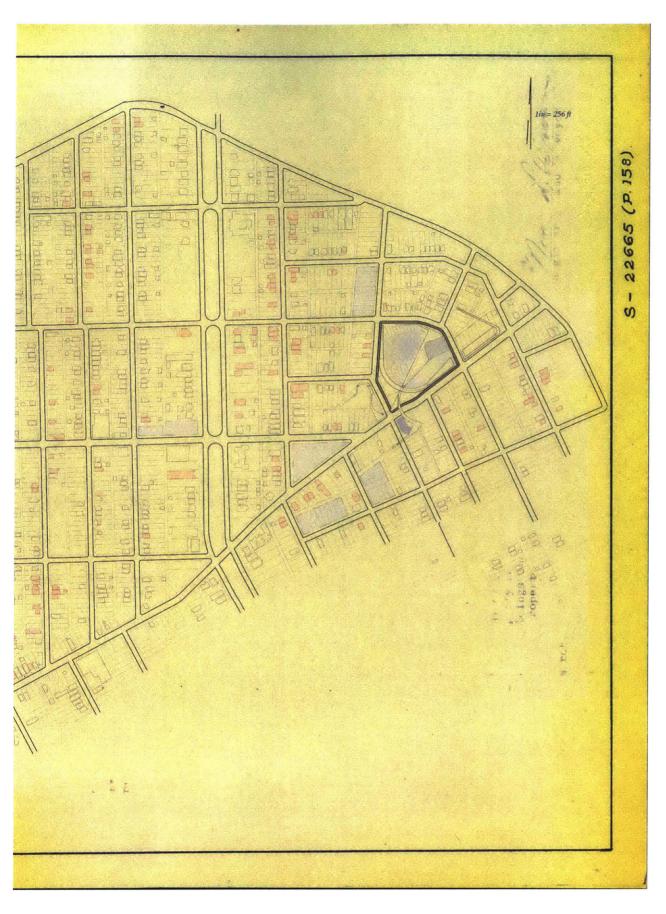












Plan

Thesis Discusssion

Moments after the review

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Moments after the review



The discussion (photo by Sarah Wagner)



The discussion (photo by Sarah Wagner)





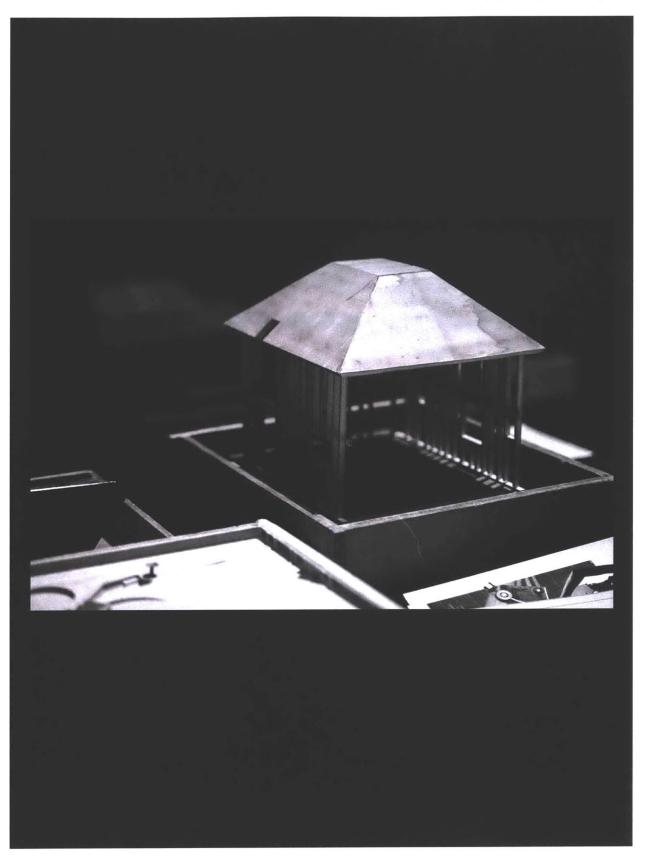
Piano close-up (photo by Sarah Wagner)

Thesis Presentation

Contents on table



C lose-up(photo by Sarah Wagner)



C lose-up(photo by Sarah Wagner)



C lose-up(photo by Sarah Wagner)



Close-up(photo by Sarah Wagner)





Close-up (photo by Sarah Wagner)

Thesis Presentation

Montents after the discussion

Thesis Presentation



Thesis Documentation

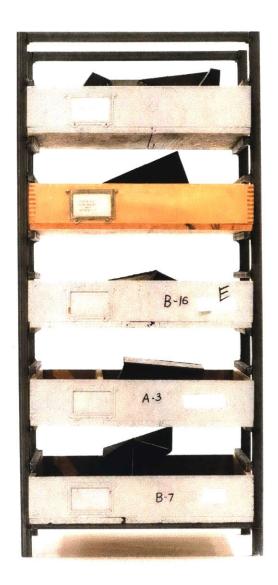
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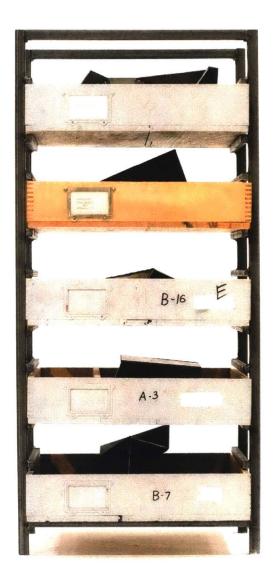














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Bureau Front Elevation



Bureau Side Elevation



Sculpture Garden Bureau



Thesis Documentation

Sculpture Garden Bureau











Sculpture Garden Bureau



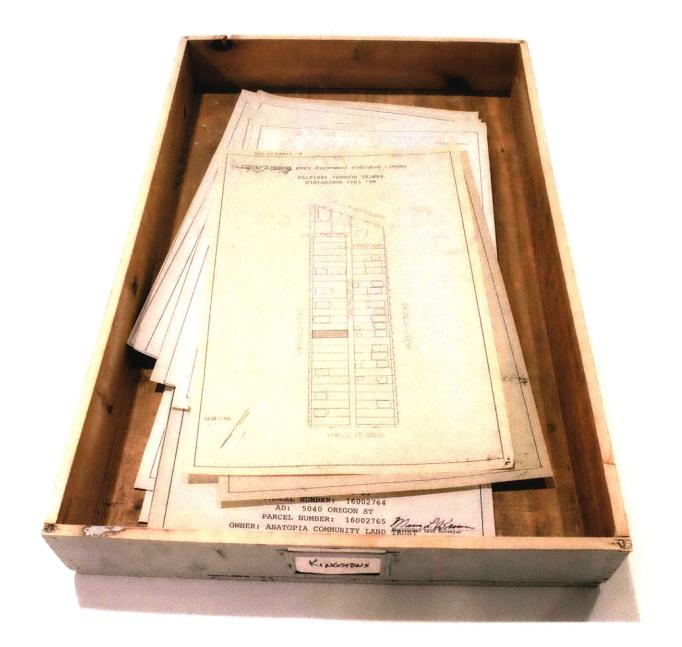












Early Anatopia Collages









Early Anatopia Collages







Our City, What Ruins