



# Tactics of Disappearance, Hiding in Plain Sight

## Citation

Martore, Celeste. 2023. Tactics of Disappearance, Hiding in Plain Sight. Master's thesis, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

## Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37378317>

## Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.  
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

**Tactics of Disappearance, Hiding in Plain Sight**

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture  
Harvard University Graduate School of Design, by

**Celeste Martore**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
[Master of Architecture]

**December 2023**

(Month and Year Thesis Submitted)

**“The author hereby grants Harvard University permission to reproduce and distribute copies of this thesis, in whole or in part, for educational purposes.”**

(signature)



[Student Name]

Celeste Martore

(signature)

  
Andrew Witt (Feb 10, 2024 11:48 EST)

[Thesis Advisor Name]

Andrew Witt, John May

# TACTICS OF DISAPPEARANCE, HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

CELESTE MARTORE

master of architecture I

harvard university graduate school of design

advised by john may and andrew wit

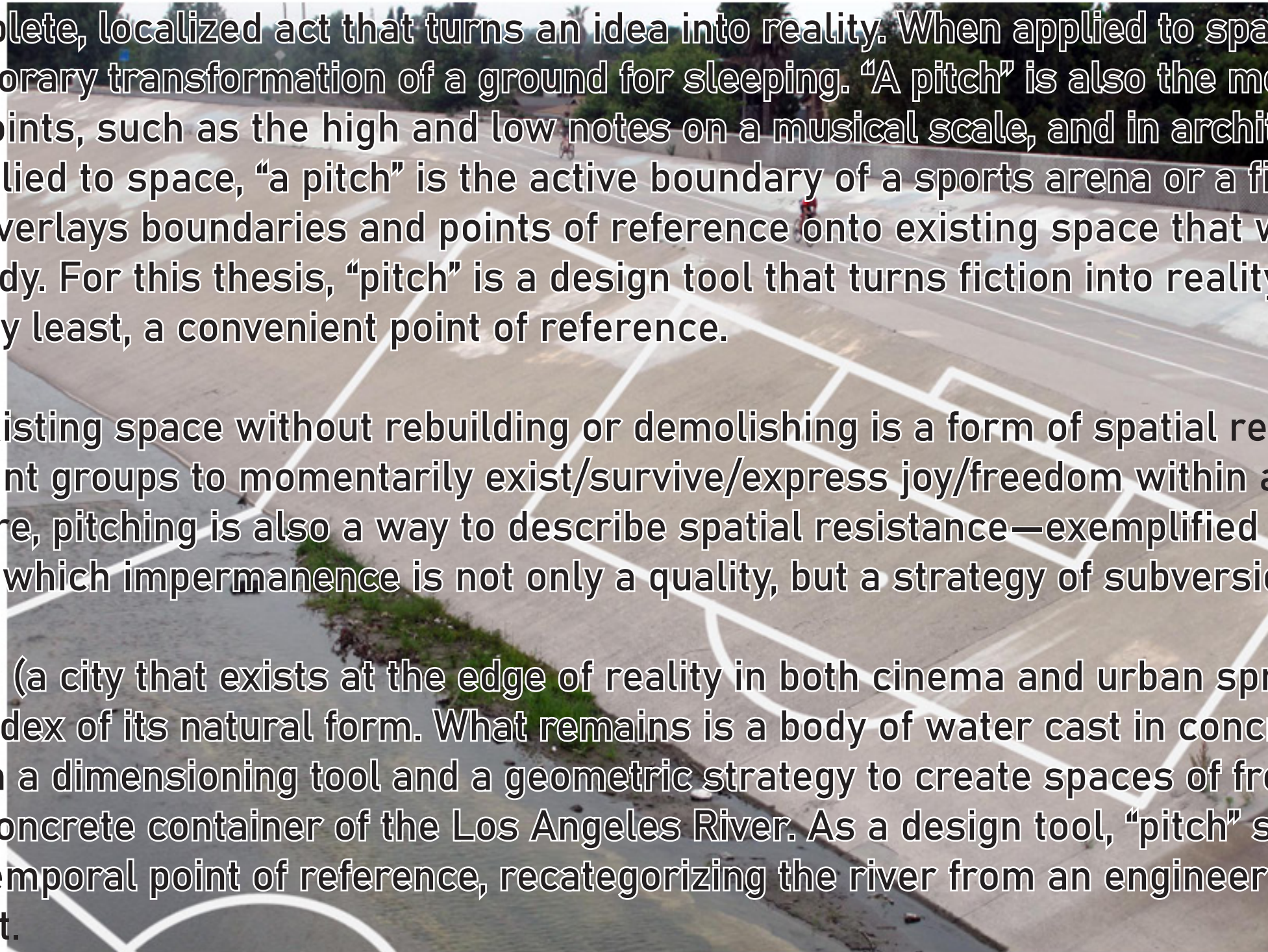
FALL 2023

# ABSTRACT

“Pitching” is a complete, localized act that turns an idea into reality. When applied to space, it describes the quick and temporary transformation of a ground for sleeping. “A pitch” is also the meaningful distance between various points, such as the high and low notes on a musical scale, and in architecture, the slope of a roof. When applied to space, “a pitch” is the active boundary of a sports arena or a field of play. In all its tenses, “pitch” overlays boundaries and points of reference onto existing space that would otherwise not relate to the body. For this thesis, “pitch” is a design tool that turns fiction into reality, providing an origin, or at the very least, a convenient point of reference.

Transforming an existing space without rebuilding or demolishing is a form of spatial resistance often used by nondominant groups to momentarily exist/survive/express joy/freedom within an adversarial landscape. Therefore, pitching is also a way to describe spatial resistance—exemplified by quilombos, and capoeira rodas—in which impermanence is not only a quality, but a strategy of subversion.

Within Los Angeles (a city that exists at the edge of reality in both cinema and urban sprawl), the LA River exists as a loose index of its natural form. What remains is a body of water cast in concrete. This thesis uses “pitch” as both a dimensioning tool and a geometric strategy to create spaces of freedom for water and people in the concrete container of the Los Angeles River. As a design tool, “pitch” suggests both an orientation and a temporal point of reference, recategorizing the river from an engineering project to an architecture project.



# PERMISSION TO MEANDER

Typical trapezoidal channels have a bottom width of 200-400 feet and a top width of 400-600 feet with a depth of 20-35 feet (Tetra Tech 2002). There is typically a low flow channel embedded within the larger channel (Figure 3). Low flow channel dimensions in upstream reaches vary between 12-20 feet in width and are usually 1 foot in depth (Tetra Tech 2002)<sup>4</sup>. Typical rectangular channel widths range from 60-120 feet and typical depths are 12-20 feet. Low flow channel dimensions range between a width of 12-20 feet and a depth of 1-3.2 feet.

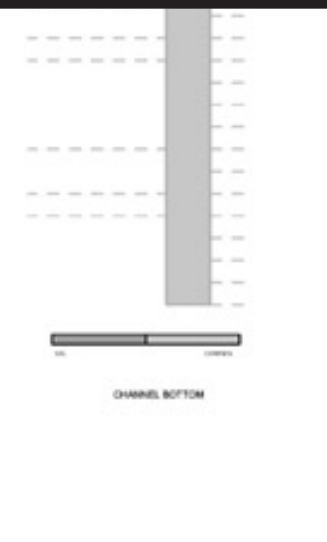
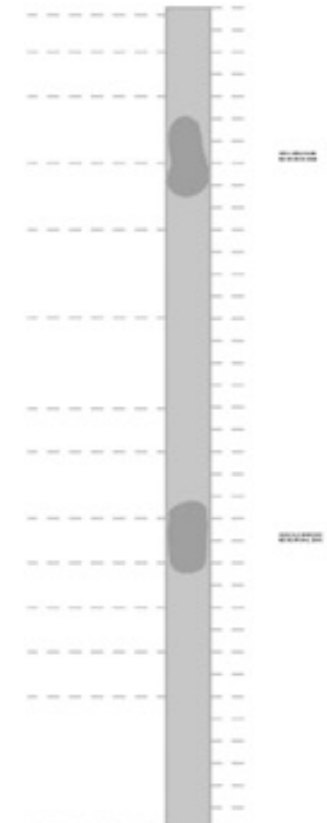


*Studio City, Los Angeles, 1937  
LA River before channelization*



*Studio City, Los Angeles, 2013  
LA River before channelization*

# HYDROLOGY



# ECOLOGY

(TOP) PHOTO FROM LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS, 2022, accessed November 2023  
(BOTTOM) PHOTO OF THE LA RIVER, COPYRIGHT SEPULVEDA BASIN WILDLIFE RESERVE above, the L.A. River looking north from the Burbank Bridge in the late 1970's before giant reed took over., sepulvedabasinwildlife.org, accessed November, 2023

# THE "RIVER"

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION IX

---

SPECIAL CASE EVALUATION REGARDING STATUS OF THE  
LOS ANGELES RIVER, CALIFORNIA,  
AS A TRADITIONAL NAVIGABLE WATER

---



(I) The 2.4-mile reach ( $34^{\circ}11'00.16''N$ ,  $118^{\circ}30'36.63''W$  downstream to  $34^{\circ}10'00.63''N$ ,  $118^{\circ}28'25.44''W$ ) within the Sepulveda Basin, a 2,150-acre flood control facility constructed in the upper watershed, that is designed to collect, retain, and release floodwaters during major storms. The Sepulveda Basin flood channel is unlined and soft-bottomed which allows the growth of dense riparian and wetland vegetation. Sloped channel banks consist of either grouted rip-rap or soil and vegetation;

---

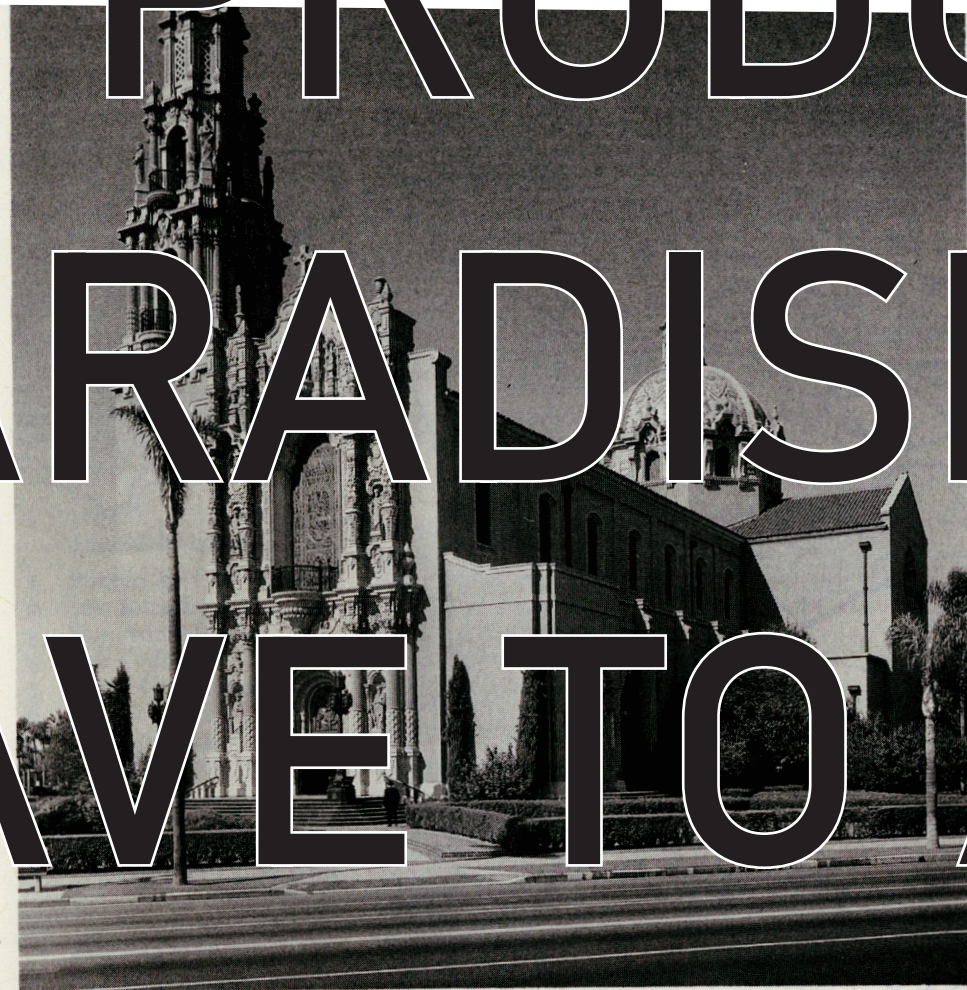
July 1, 2010

# THE "FLOOD CHANNEL"





# TO PRODUCE PARADISE, YOU HAVE TO ADD WATER



4. St Vincent's church, 1923, Albert C. Martin, architect

As this architecture shows, the mixture of Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon traditions could have provided the basis for an interesting culture, even if its economic basis had remained agrarian. But the Yankees were coming because they knew a better trick with land than

ery means the rule book and some outside it, was subdivided, here put to intensive cropping, and ultimately offered as residential plots in a landscape that must have appeared to anyone from east of the Rockies like an earthly Paradise.

Whatever man has done subsequently to the climate and environment of Southern California, it remains one of the ecological wonders of the habitable world. Given water to pour on its light and otherwise almost desert soil, it was made to produce a seasonal facsimile of Eden. Some of the world's most spectacular gardens are in Los Angeles, where the southern palm will literally grow next to northern conifers, and it was this promise of an ecological miracle that was the area's first really saleable product – the 'land of perpetual spring'.

But to produce instant Paradise you have to add water – and keep on adding it. Once the scant local sources had been tapped, wasted, and spoiled, the problem of hydrology became pressing concern, even deciding factors in fixing the political boundaries of Los Angeles. The City annexed the San Fernando Valley, and later the San Gabriel Valley in its first great raid on hinterland water under the leadership of its hydrological frontier, the Colorado River. Fertile watered soil is no use if it is inaccessible; transportation was to be the next great shaper of Los Angeles after land and water. From the laying of the first railway down to the port at Wilmington just over a century ago, transport has been an obsession that grew into a way of life [5].

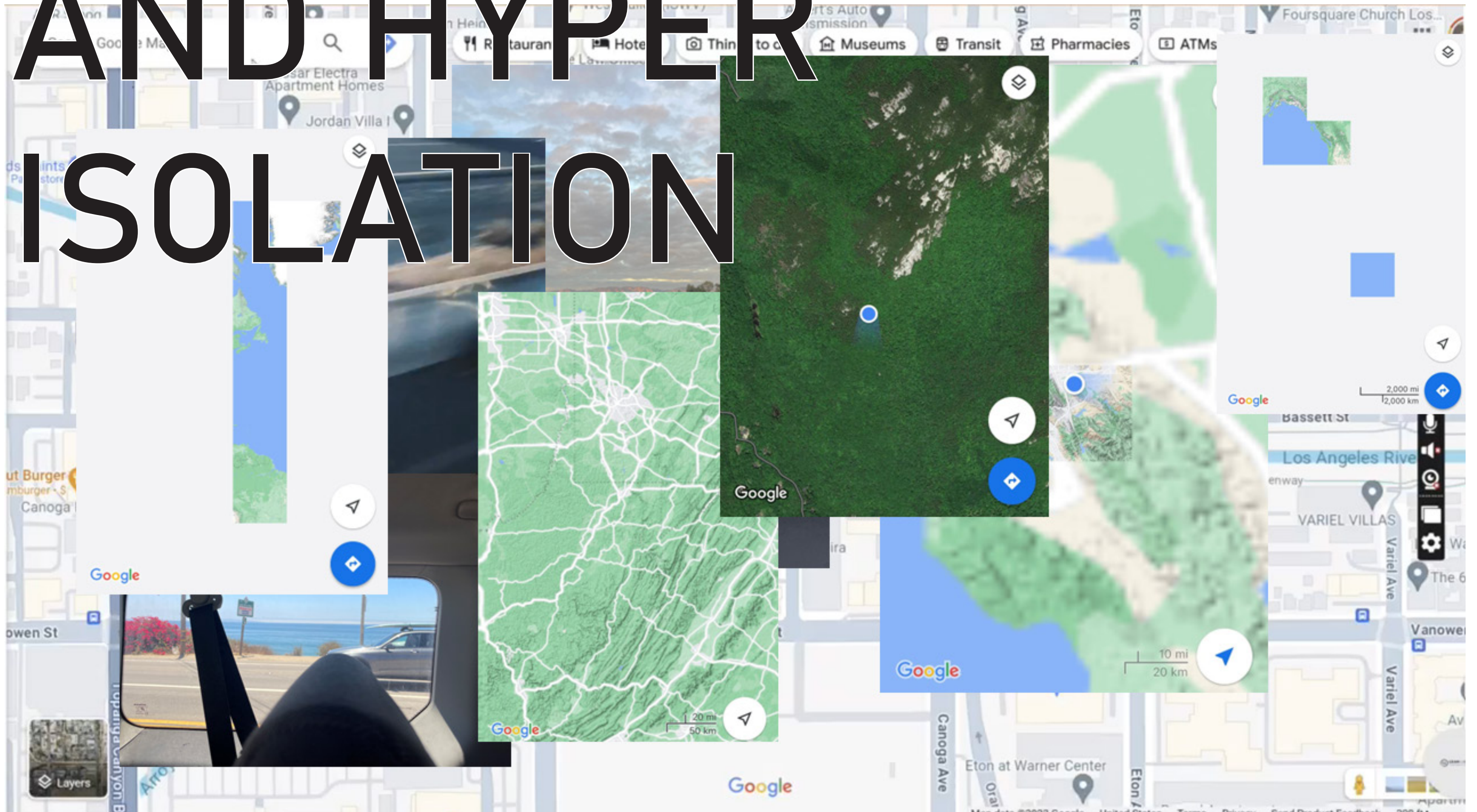
Lines were hardly laid before commuting began along them; scattered communities were joined in a diffuse and unprecedented super-community, whose empty interstices filled up with further townships, vineyards, orchards, health resorts, and the fine tracery of the second generation of railroads – the inter-urbans. By 1910 when amalgamations

# SO, LOS ANGELES BECAME A CITY OF PRIVATE POOLS



GOOGLE MAPS SCREENSHOT OF PRIVATE SWIMMING POOLS WITHIN ONE MILE OF THE LA RIVER (OVERLAY)  
MAP OF PRIVATE SWIMMING POOLS WITHIN ONE MILE OF THE LA RIVER

# AND HYPER ISOLATION



# AND NOW, EXTREME

# HEAT



Nearly one million people live within one mile of the LA River, and nearly half of Los Angeles County residents live within the river's watershed.<sup>1</sup> More impressively, more than a third of Californians live within a one-hour drive of the river.<sup>2</sup> Channelized to protect lives and property from flooding during the late-19th through mid-20th centuries and continuing to serve flood-risk-management purposes today, the LA River has largely been separated from our social, cultural, and ecological communities. While fragmented jurisdictions, land ownership, and funding present hurdles in rethinking the LA River, the LA River Master Plan seeks to build on prior and current planning efforts to continue to reimagine the LA River from a single-use corridor to a tangible, multi-benefit resource for the communities of LA County. The LA River right-of-way includes over 2,300 acres of primarily publicly owned land that can greatly benefit the communities near the river. The Plan recognizes the need for resilient

Los Angeles Times

CALIFORNIA

California is working on solutions to worsening climate change. Will they be enough?

## Extreme heat

Perhaps the most devastating impact of a warming planet can be seen in extreme heat events. California suffered its worst heat wave ever less than a year ago, and the state's [six warmest years](#) have all occurred since 2014.

A [2021 investigation](#) published by the Los Angeles Times found that California chronically undercounts heat-related deaths. In Los Angeles, extreme heat is the city's biggest climate threat and greatest cause of climate-related deaths and hospital visits.

By 2050, daily maximum average temperatures in California are expected to rise by 4.4 to 5.8 degrees, and heat waves in cities could cause two to three times more heat-related deaths.

# WHAT IS A NEW PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE?





**It's raining in England, yet all England** is outdoors. Why? There is a soccer match at Wembley. As in all great sport spectacles, the inaugurating ritual is observed with great formality. At certain periods, in certain societies, the theater has had a major social function: it collected the entire city within a shared experience: the knowledge of its own passions. Today it is sport that in its way performs this function. Except that the city has enlarged: it is no longer a town, it is a country, often

Remember in soccer,  
Or in capoeira,  
Or in any container of moving precision parts,  
When forced to tighten the boundary of play  
I would often think  
We all thought to ourselves  
How is this gonna work?  
Perhaps the truly fearless  
Relished in the constriction.  
Before long, so did I.  
With open fields you can run  
But in the tight circle,  
You have to weave.



This first law of the climate is entirely contained by the gesture that prepares the space of the combat: a little frozen water, and hockey is possible.

soil and climate. To play hockey is constantly to repeat that men have transformed motionless winter, the hard earth, and suspended life, and that precisely out of all this they have made a swift, vigorous, passionate sport.

The children seem to be fighting, but they are merely learning to inhabit their country, and what the mothers' eyes follow in their progeny's first adult gestures is not so much the outcome of a battle as the development of an initiation. This first law of the climate is entirely contained by the gesture that prepares the space of the combat: a little frozen water, and hockey is possible.

### Can we remove the concrete?

Many have asked if we can remove the concrete from the LA River to return it to a more naturalized river. Because a more naturalized river requires a much wider flow path than the existing channel allows, it is not feasible to remove the concrete from the LA River without causing significant negative impacts to communities and local culture. Without displacing hundreds of miles of transportation routes and utility corridors, thousands of businesses, and potentially hundreds of thousands of residents, removal of concrete is difficult to accomplish. Additionally, climate change poses future uncertainty, so we need to maintain the existing capacity of the channel while also finding ways to increase capacity where the channel is undersized. As such, the LA River Master Plan does not pursue a strategy of massive concrete removal and community displacement as other goals would be supplanted by this singular strategy. Instead, the Master Plan seeks to find areas where natural ecosystems can exist while maintaining flood risk management and retaining river adjacent communities, culture, infrastructure, and amenities.

47

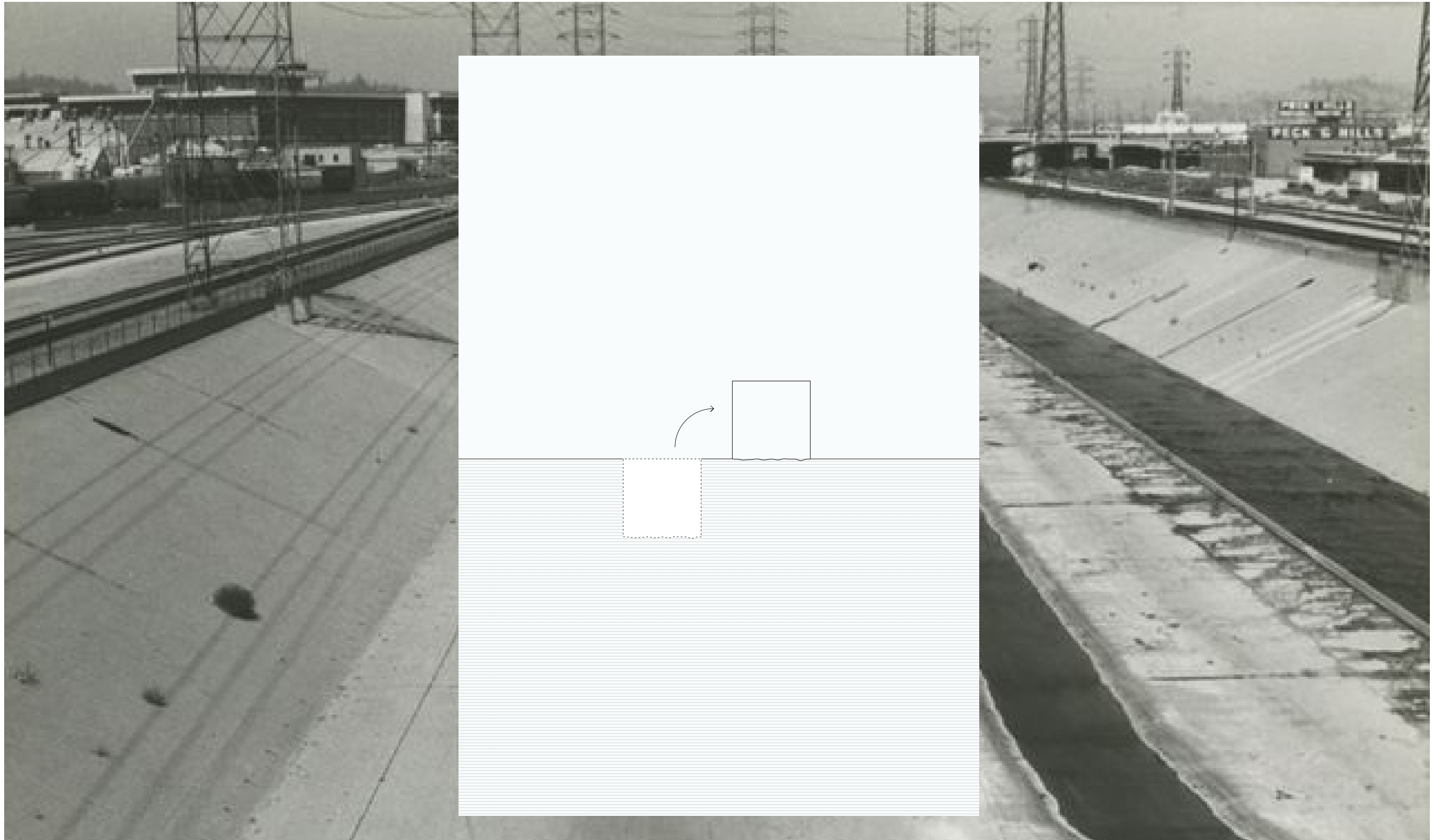


(L) ROLAND BARTHES, WHAT IS SPORT? pg. 47, 2007

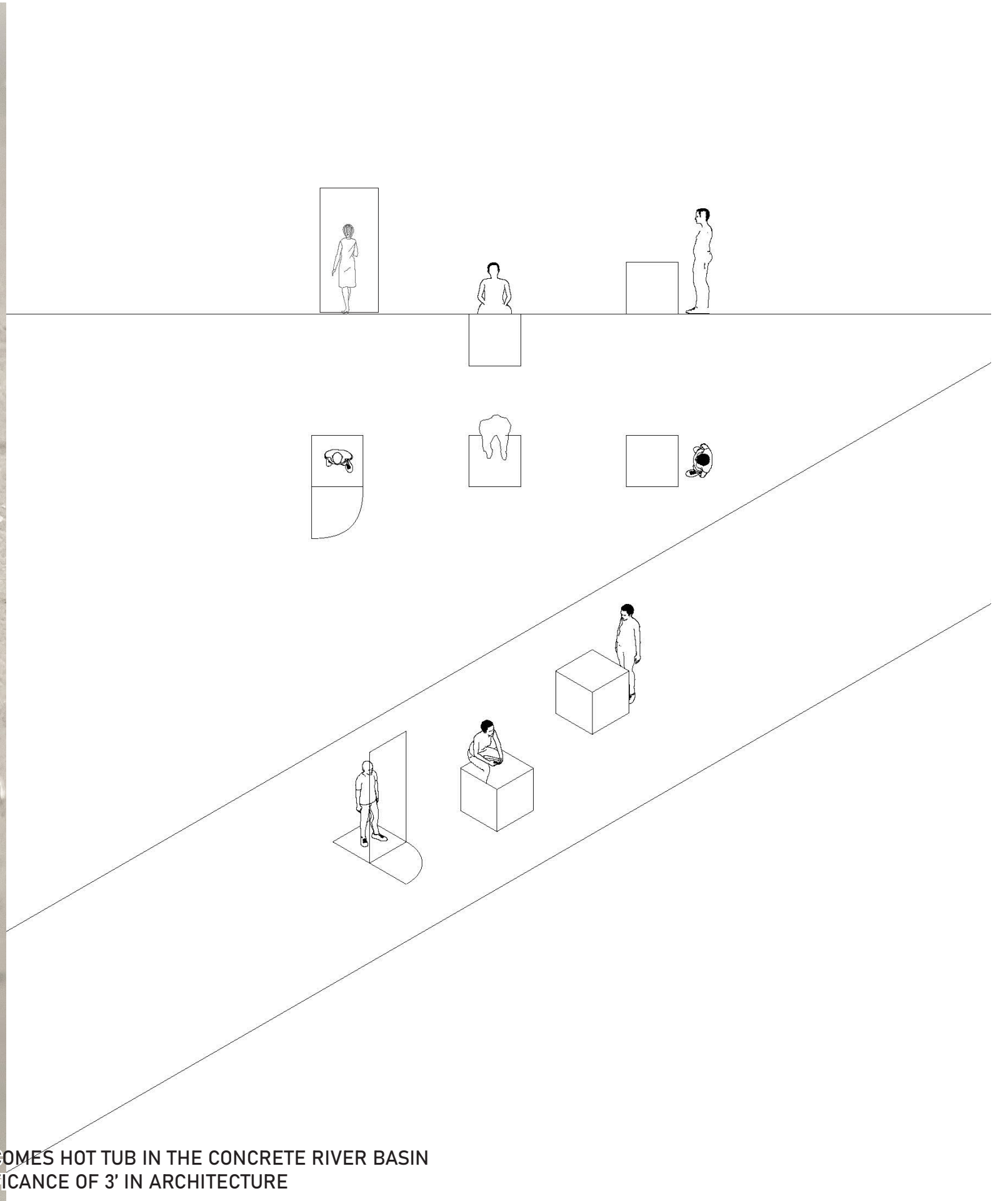
(L) SCREENSHOT FROM THE LOS ANGELES RIVER MASTER PLAN, 2022 (LARIVERMASTERPLAN.ORG)

(R) A SMALL SQUARE OF CONCRETE REMOVED FROM THE LA RIVER, EXPOSING THE SOIL UNDERNEATH photo by the author, 2019

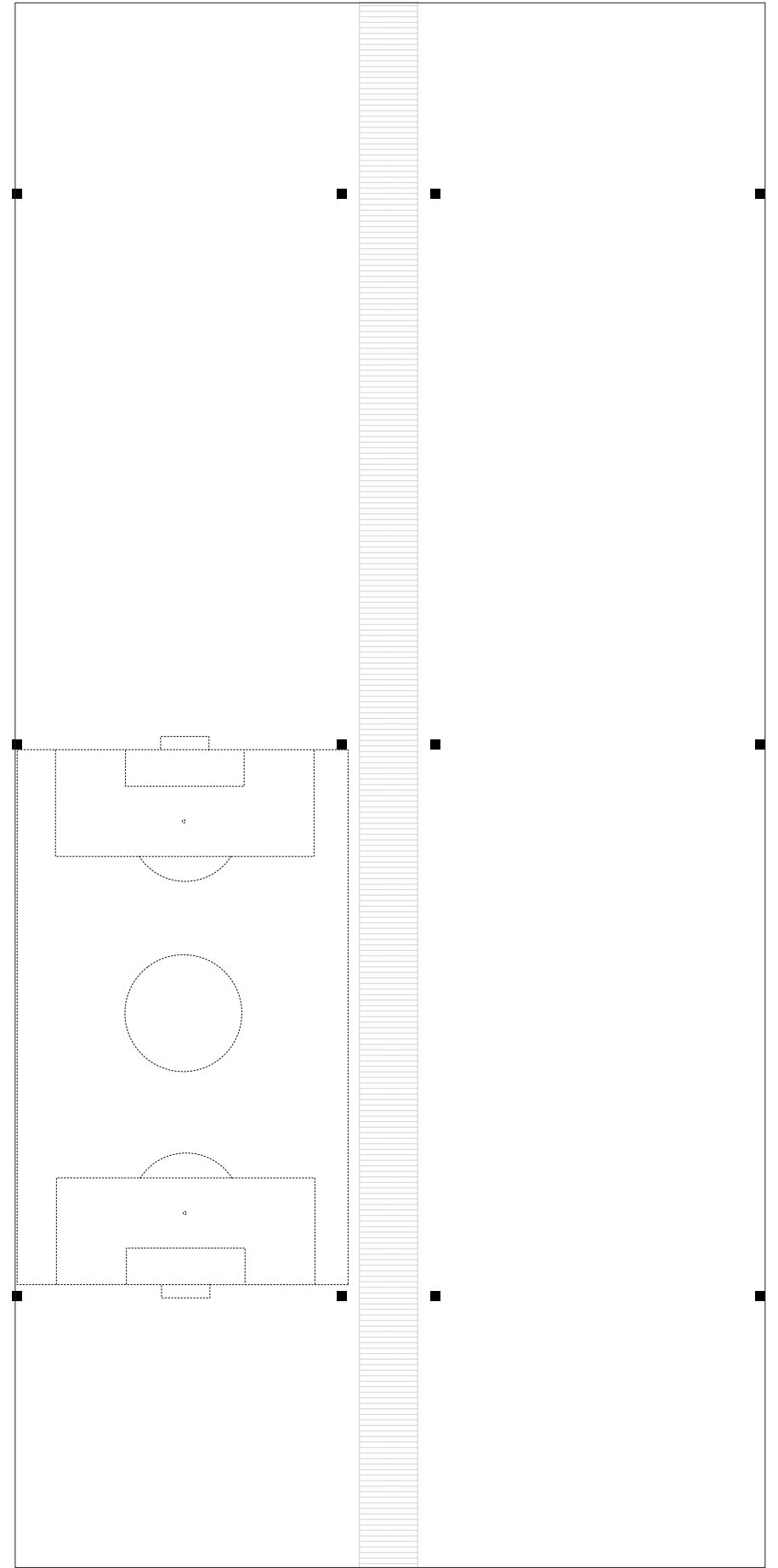
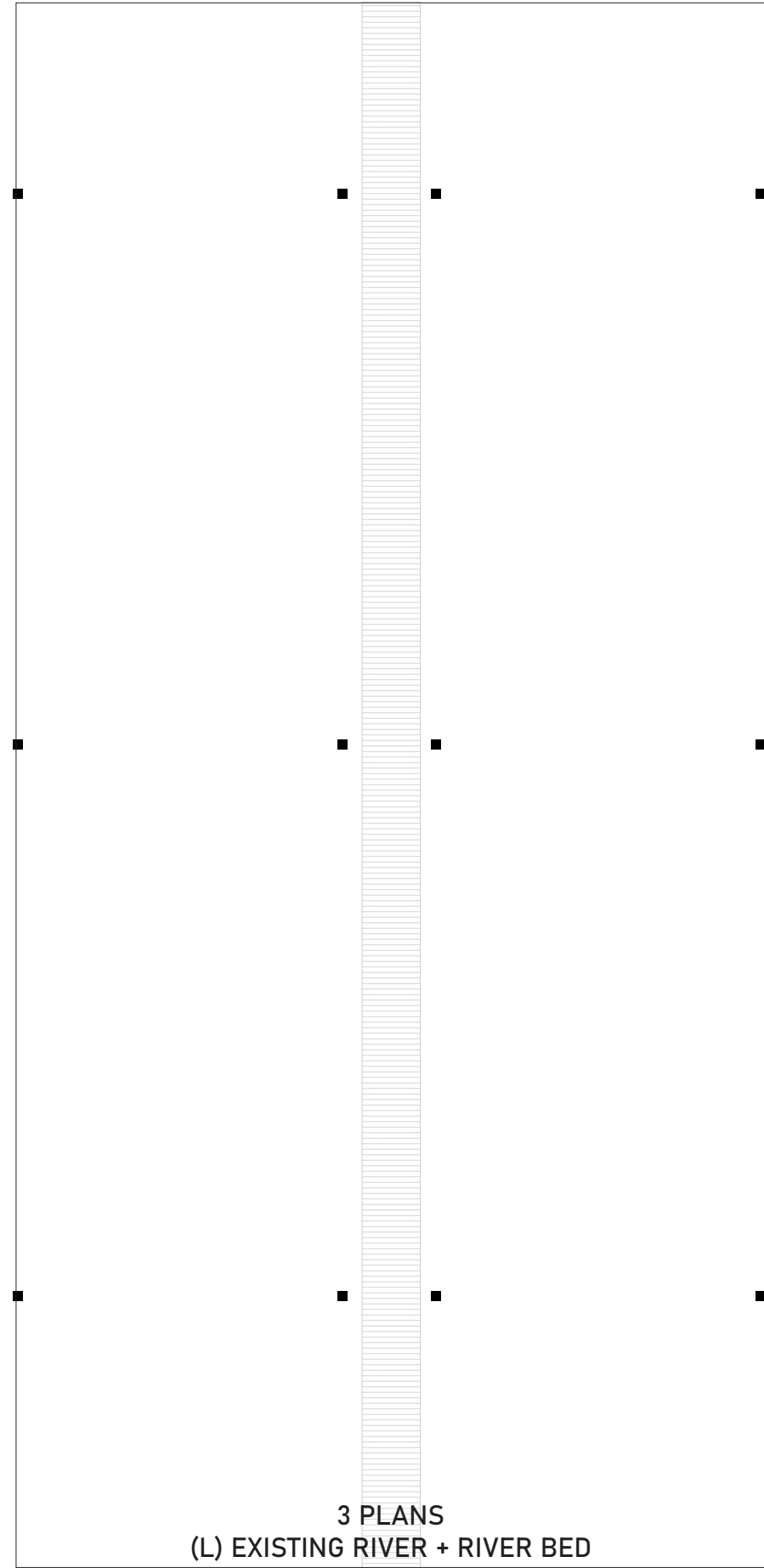
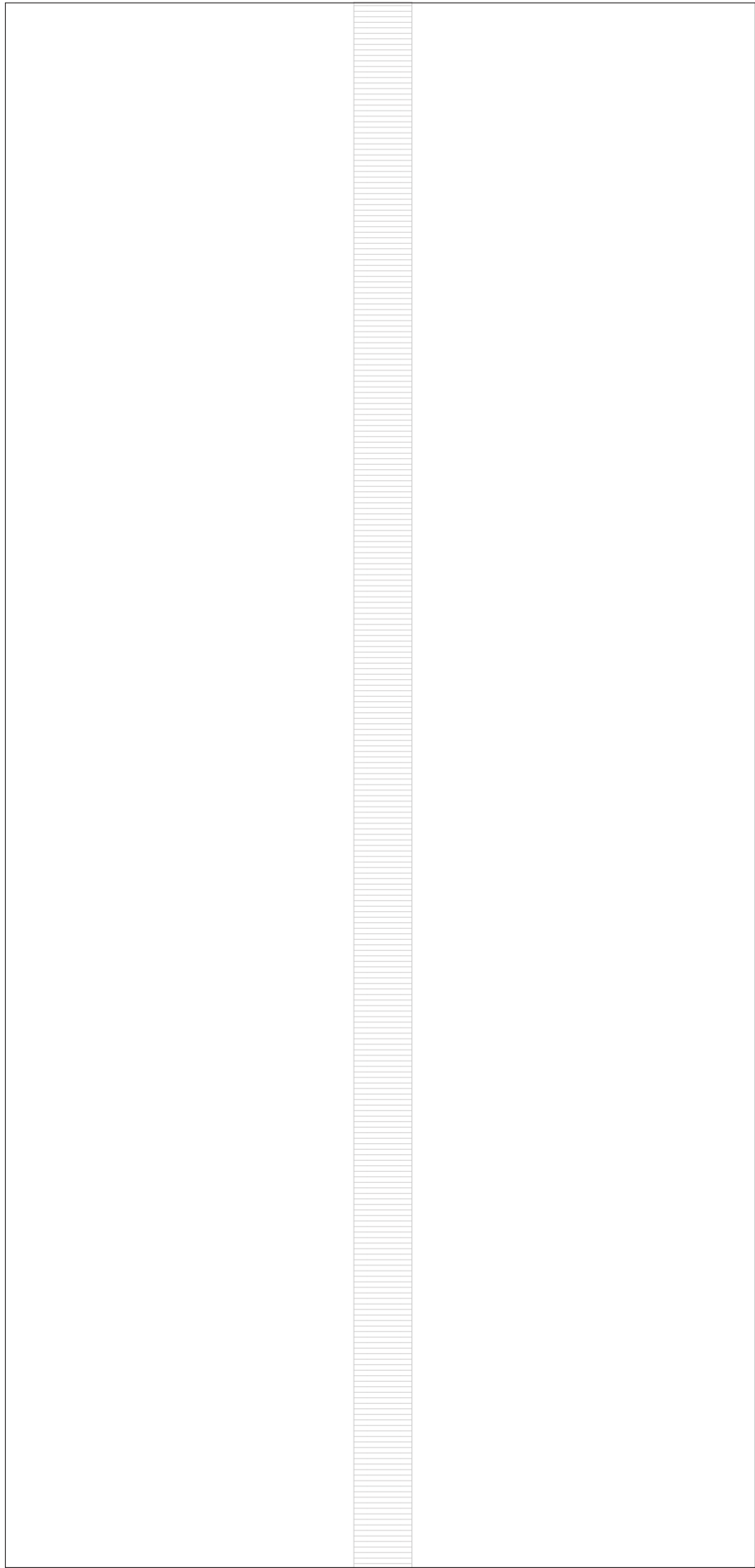




SECTION DIAGRAM, CONCRETE MONOLITH REMOVAL (OVERLAY)  
PHOTOGRAPH: FRIENDS OF THE LA RIVER LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



(L) CONCRETE MONOLITH NEGATIVE BECOMES HOT TUB IN THE CONCRETE RIVER BASIN  
(R) DIMENSIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF 3' IN ARCHITECTURE



3 PLANS

(L) EXISTING RIVER + RIVER BED

(C) RIVER, RIVER BED + 3'X3' CONCRETE MONOLITHS REMOVED

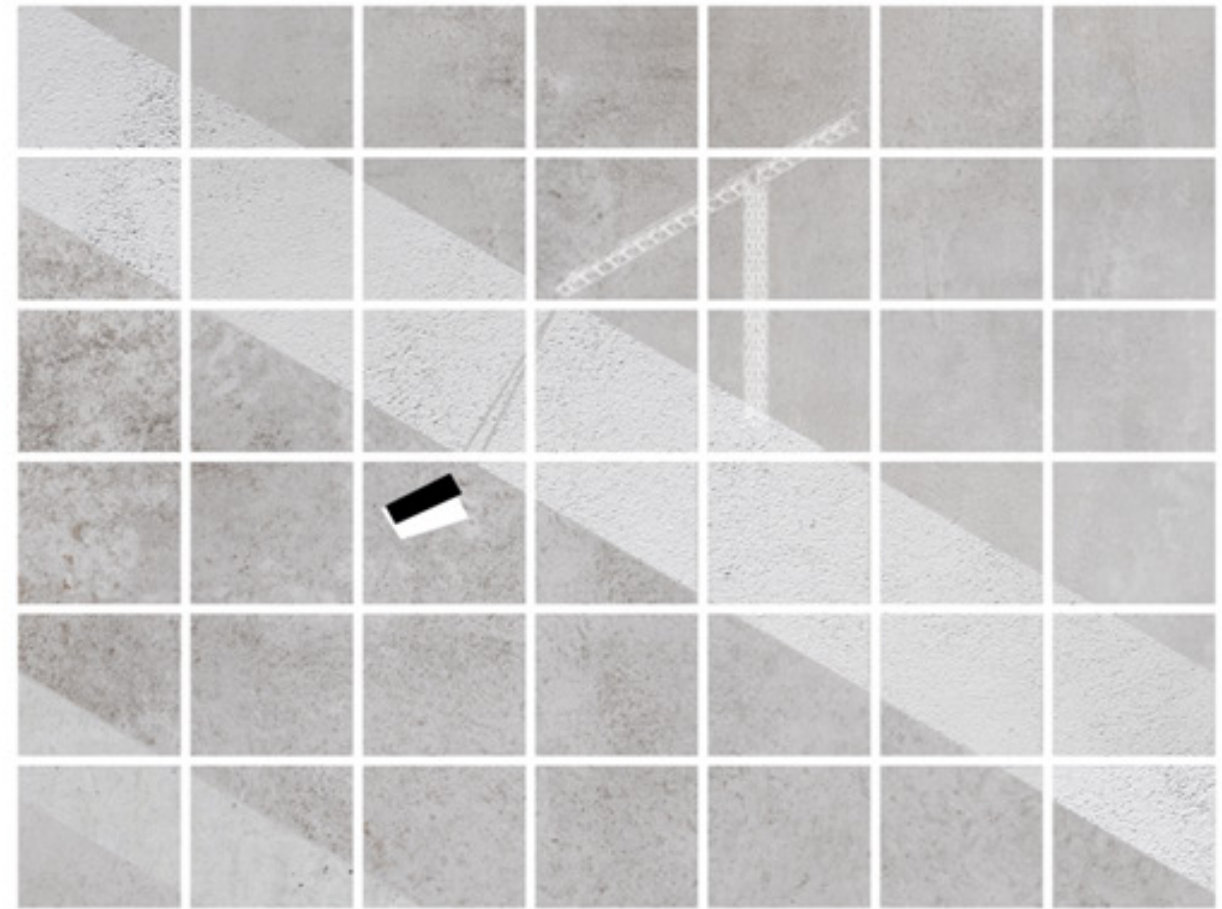
(R) SOCCER FIELD BETWEEN CONCRETE REMOVAL



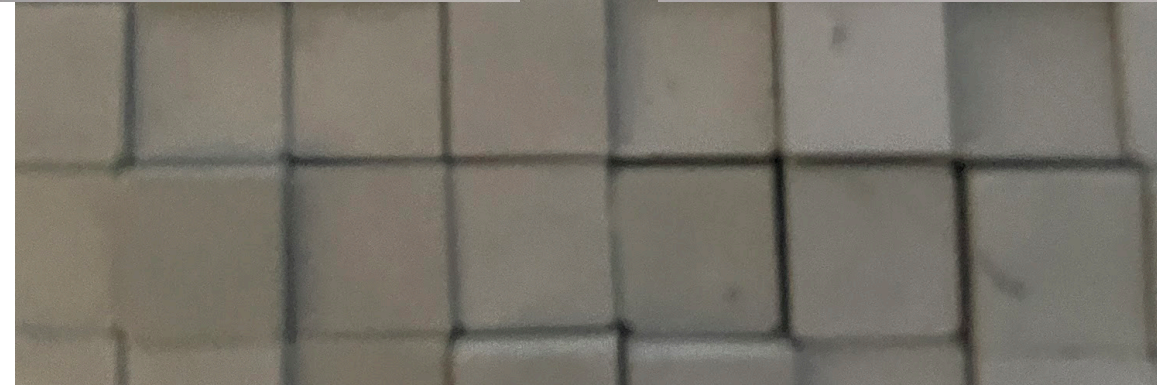
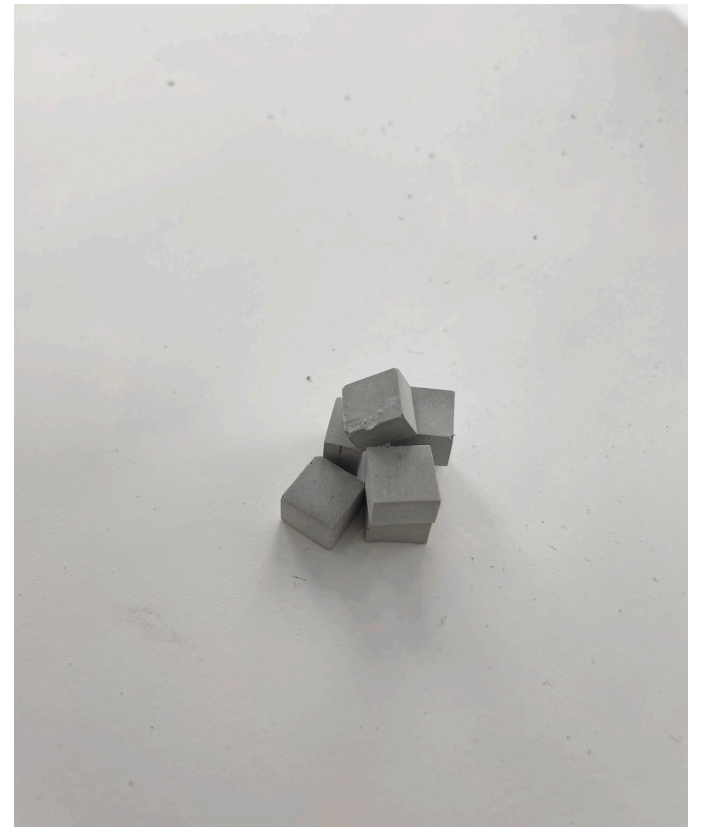
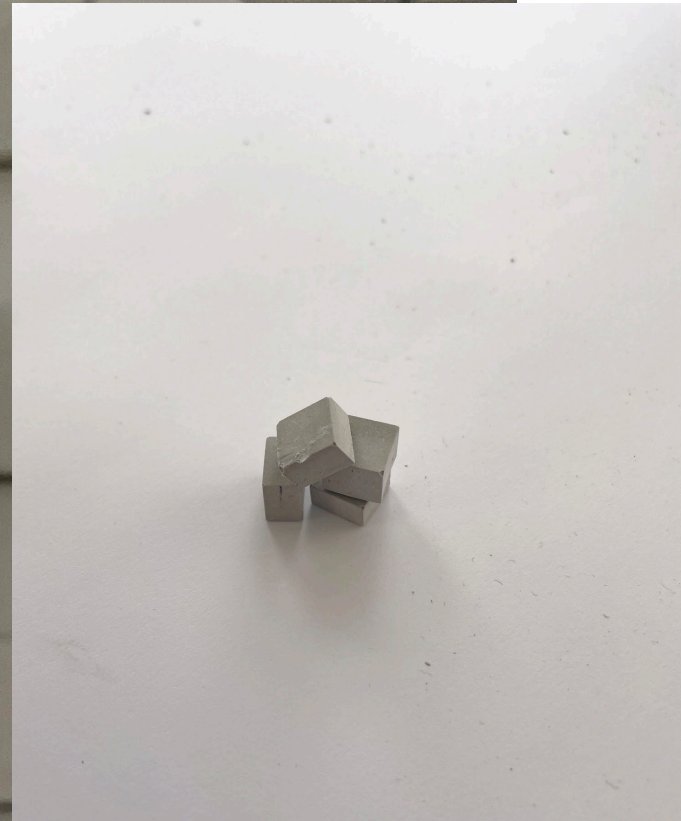
SECTION OF THE CONCRETE RIVER BED WITH 3X3' CONCRETE MONOLITHS REMOVED



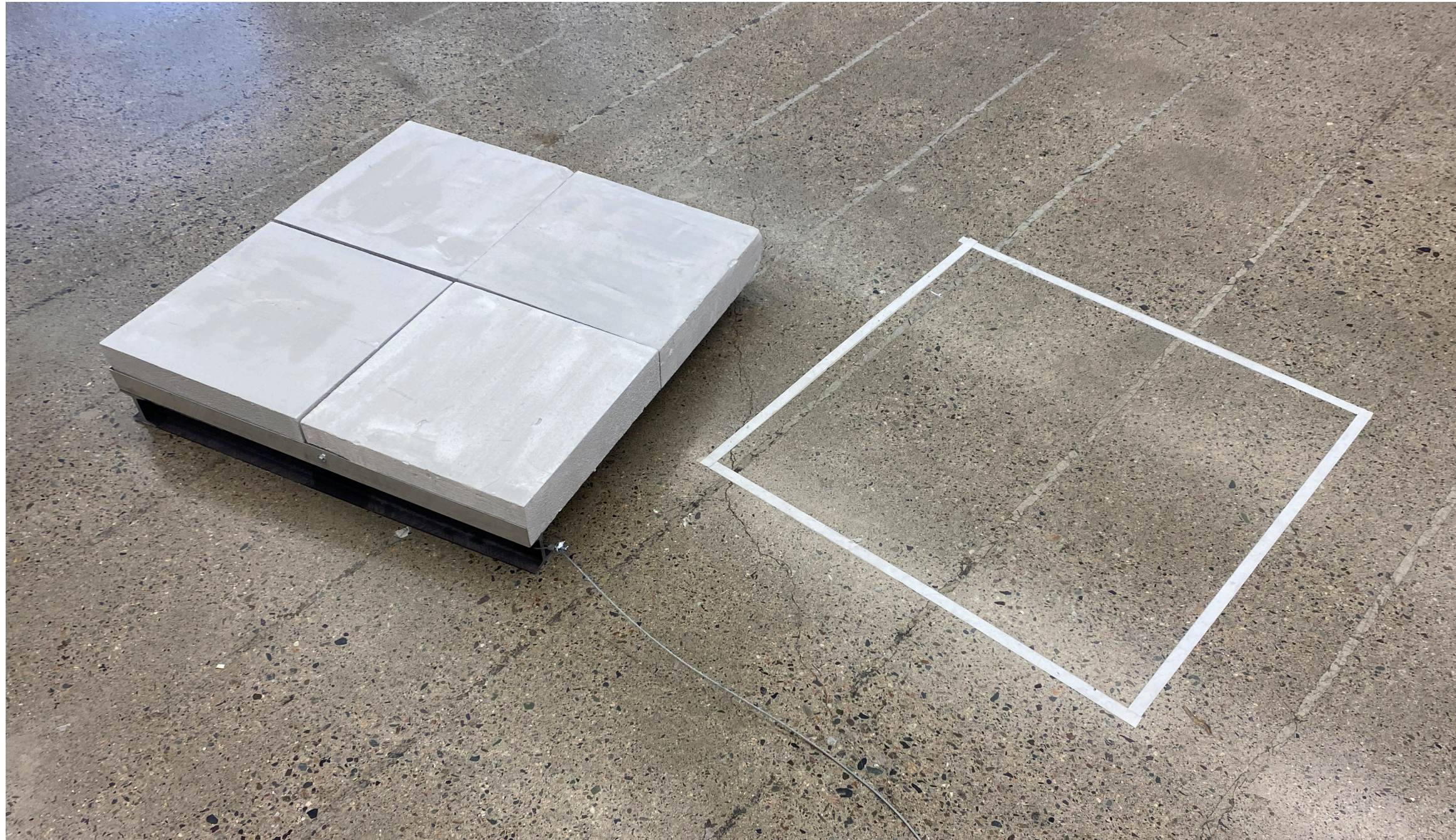
SHADOW AS SHELTER



DIPTYCH, AXONOMETRIC OF THE LA RIVER (L) WITH CONCRETE REMOVED AND FORMED INTO ROOF (R)

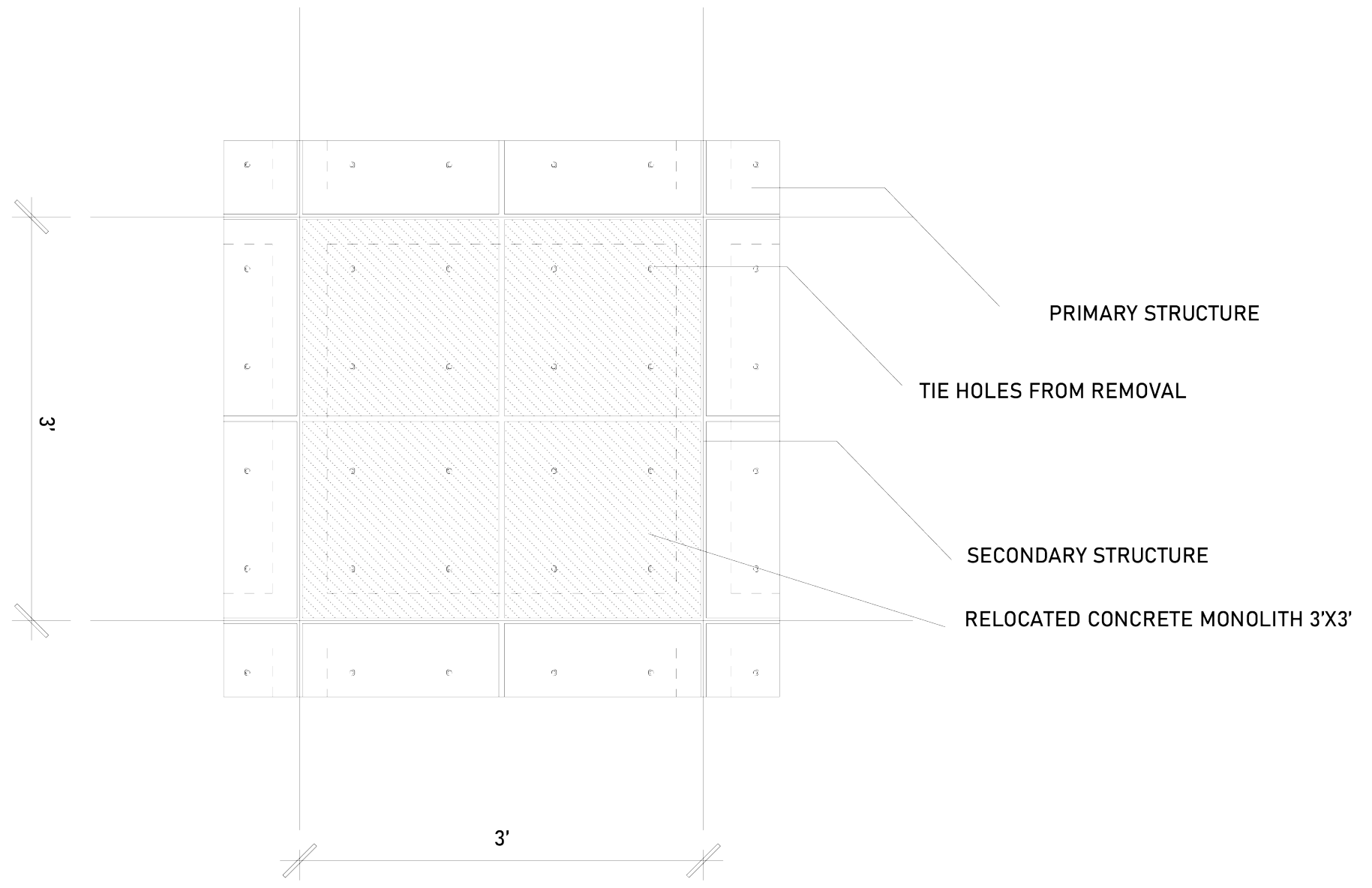


ACCUMULATION OF 3'X3' CONCRETE MONOLITHS



(L) 1/2-SCALE MOCK-UP OF ROOF ASSEMBLY  
(R) FULL-SCALE MOCK UP OF 3'X3' SQUARE





RIVER ROOF CONCRETE MONOLITH ASSEMBLY

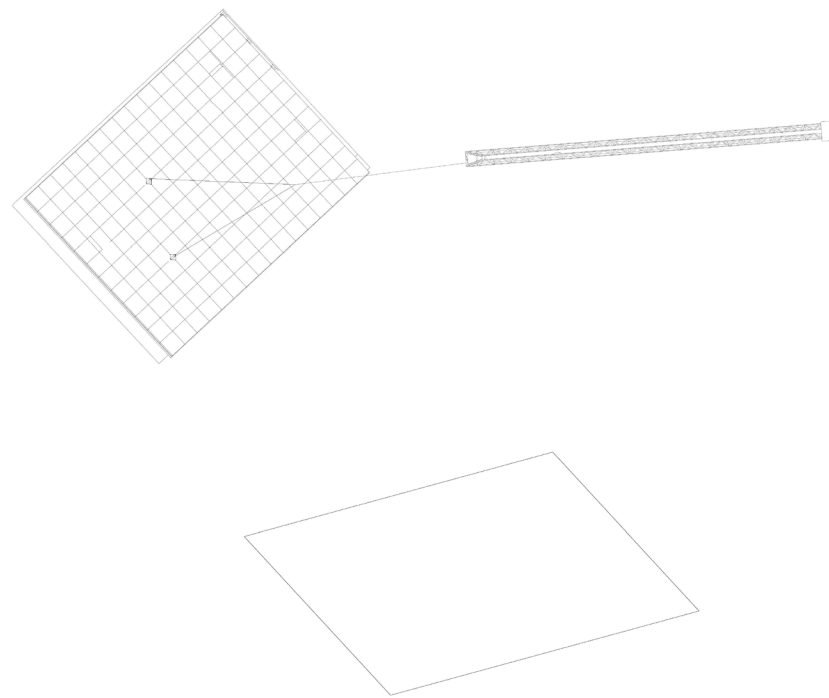


DIAGRAM OF RIVER ROOF



RIVER ROOF SKETCH MODEL

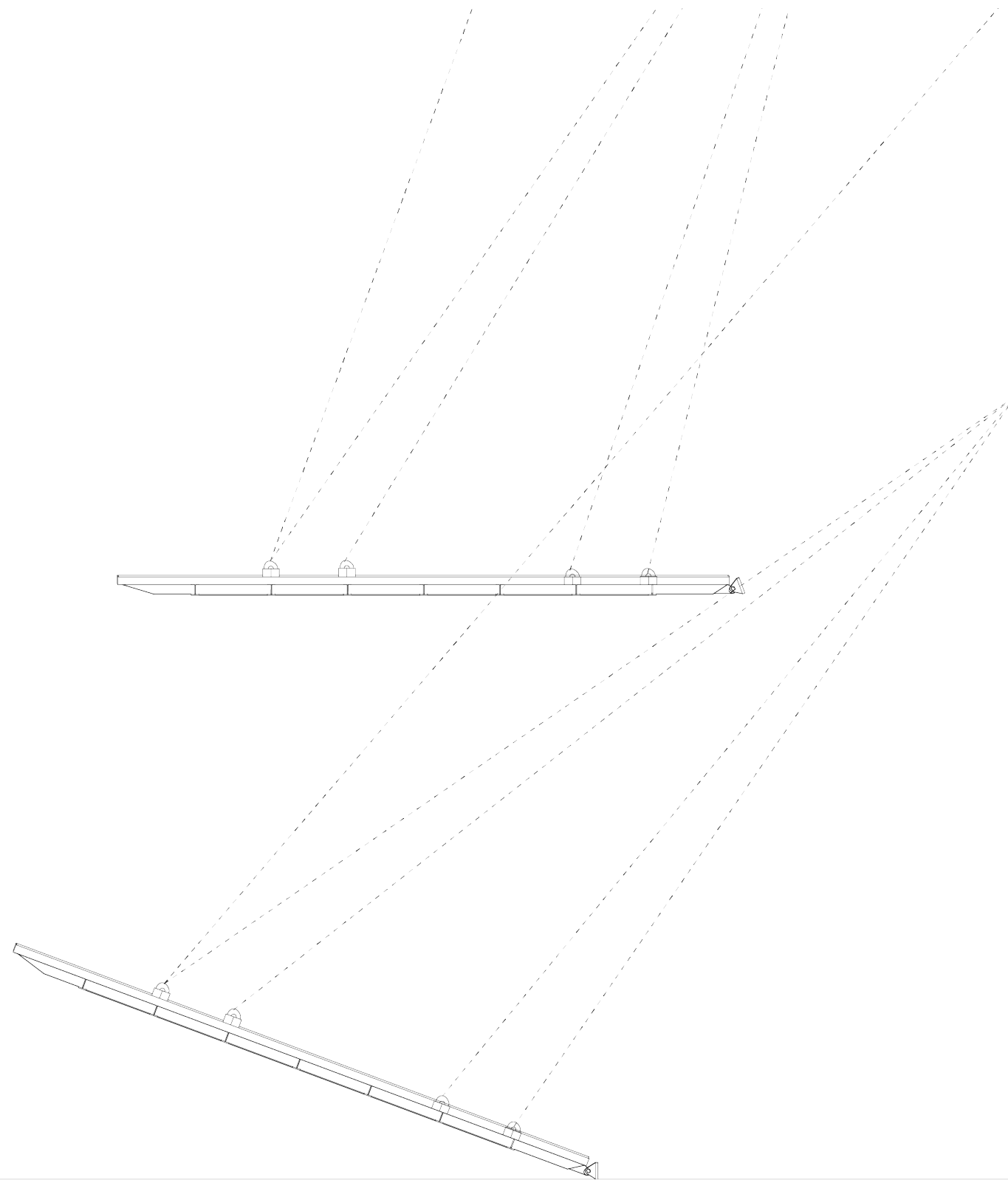
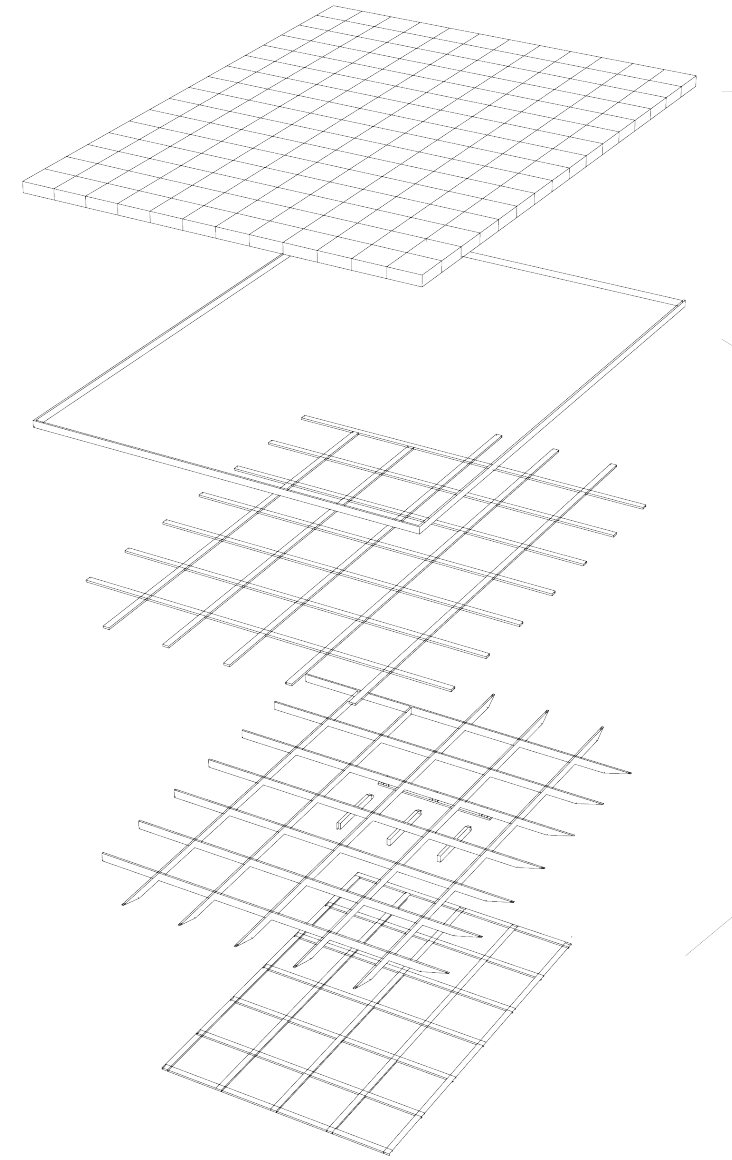


DIAGRAM OF VARIABLE ROOF SUSPENSION



MODEL PHOTO



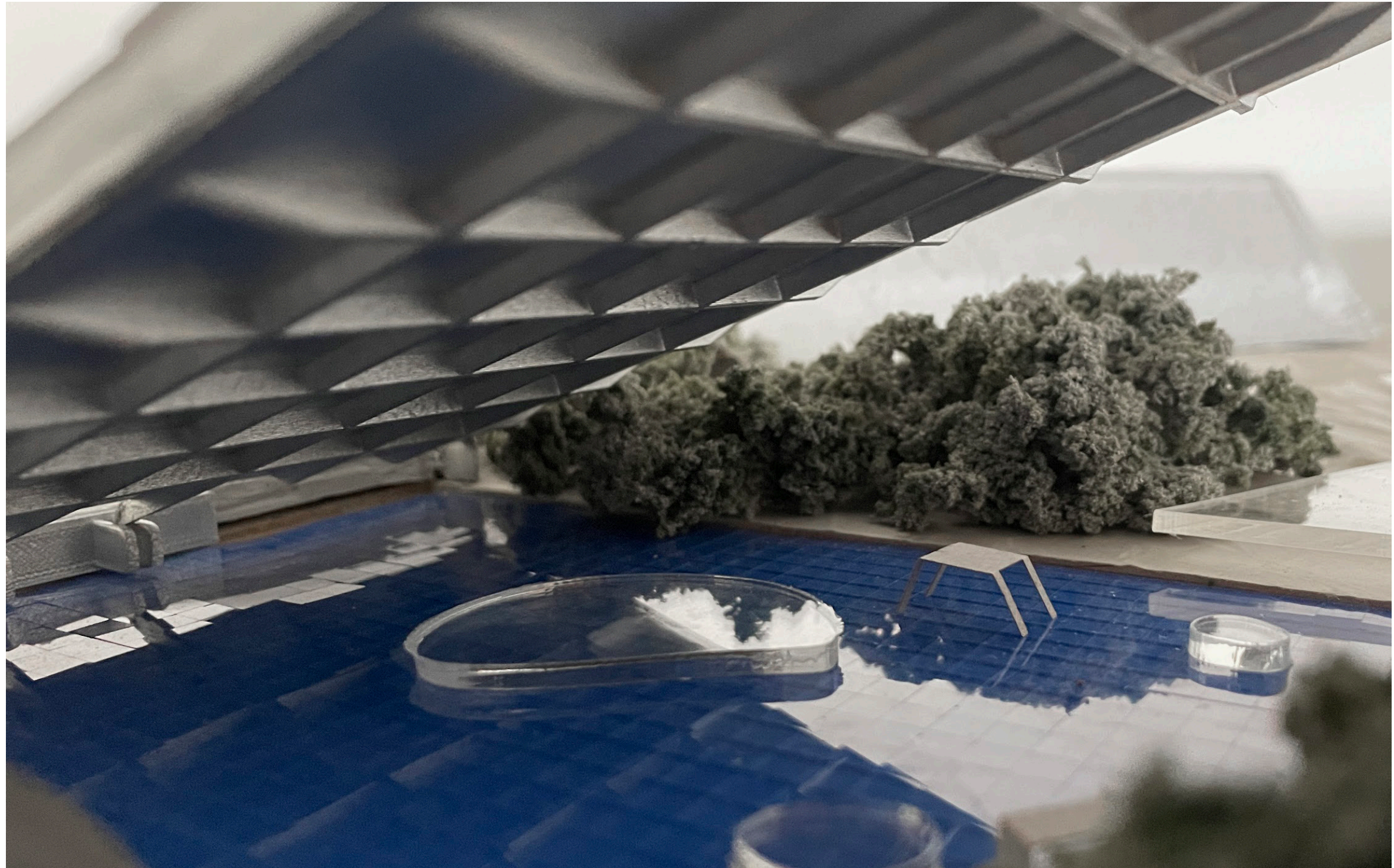
168 RELOCATED CONCRETE  
MONOLITHS 3X3'

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY  
STRUCTURE

MODEL PHOTO (L)  
RIVER ROOF ASSEMBLY STRUCTURE (R)

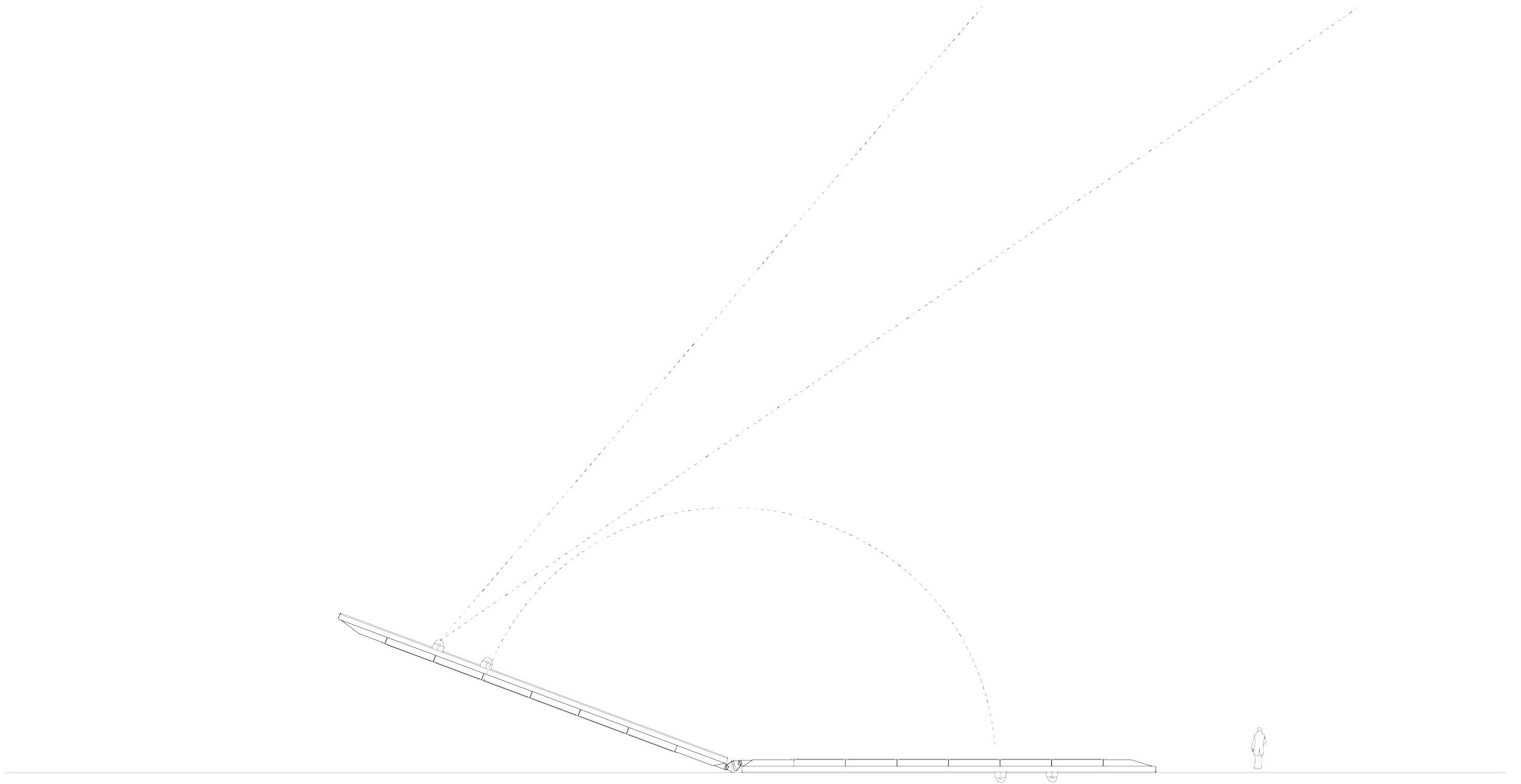


MODEL PHOTO

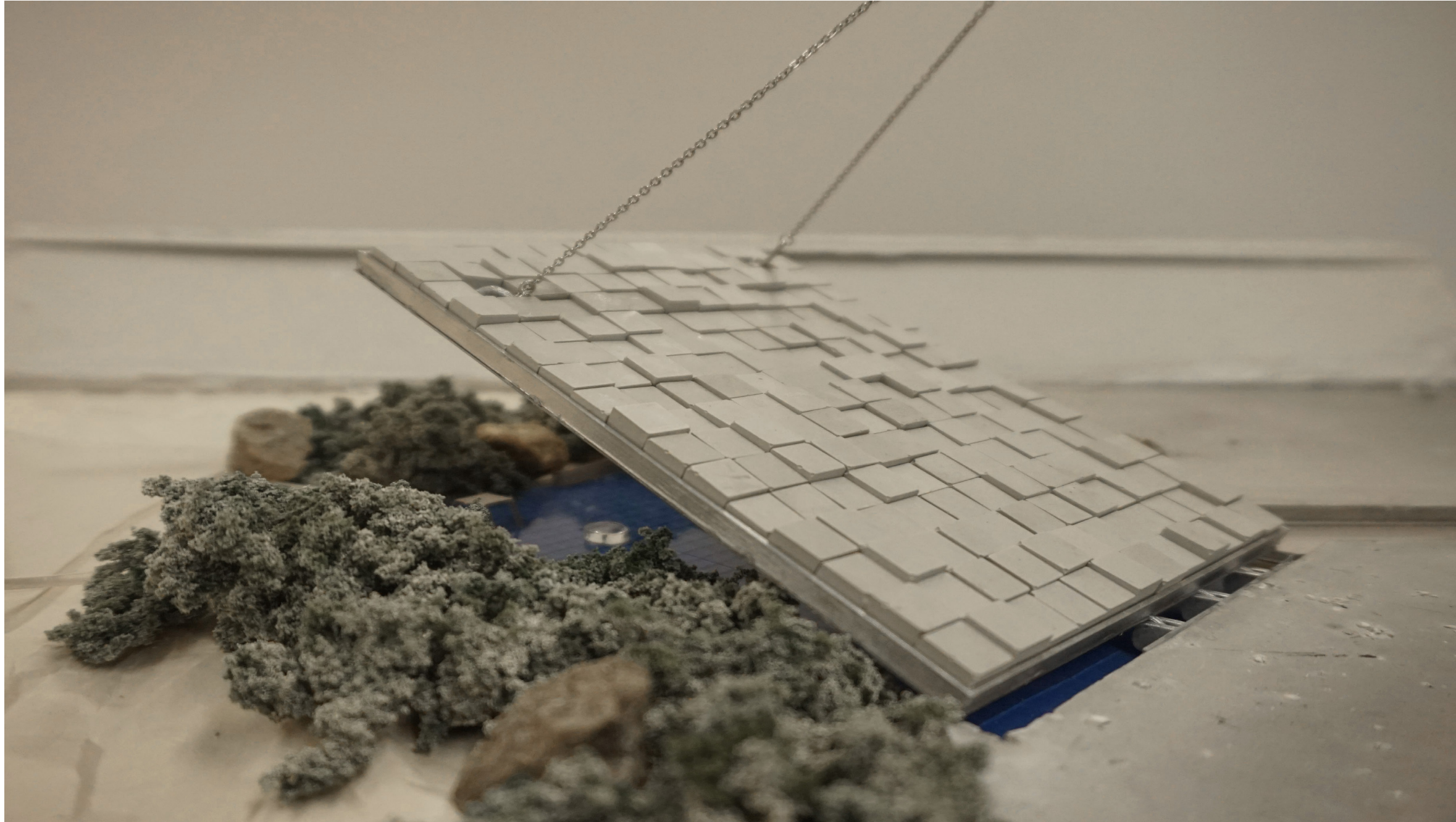


MODEL PHOTO

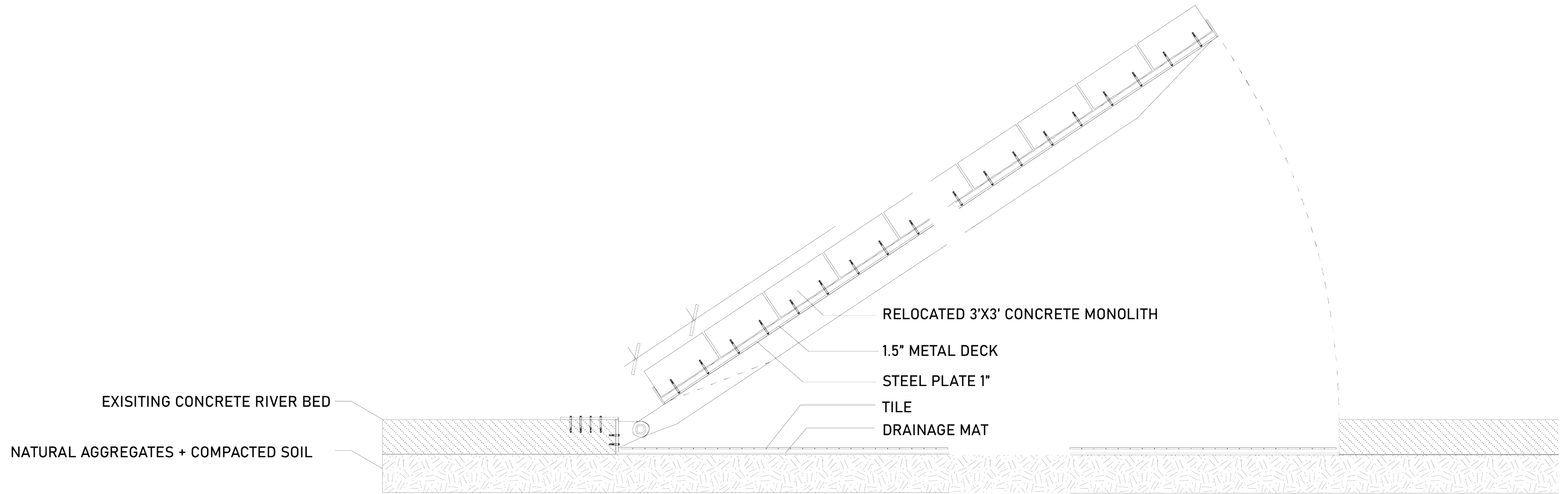




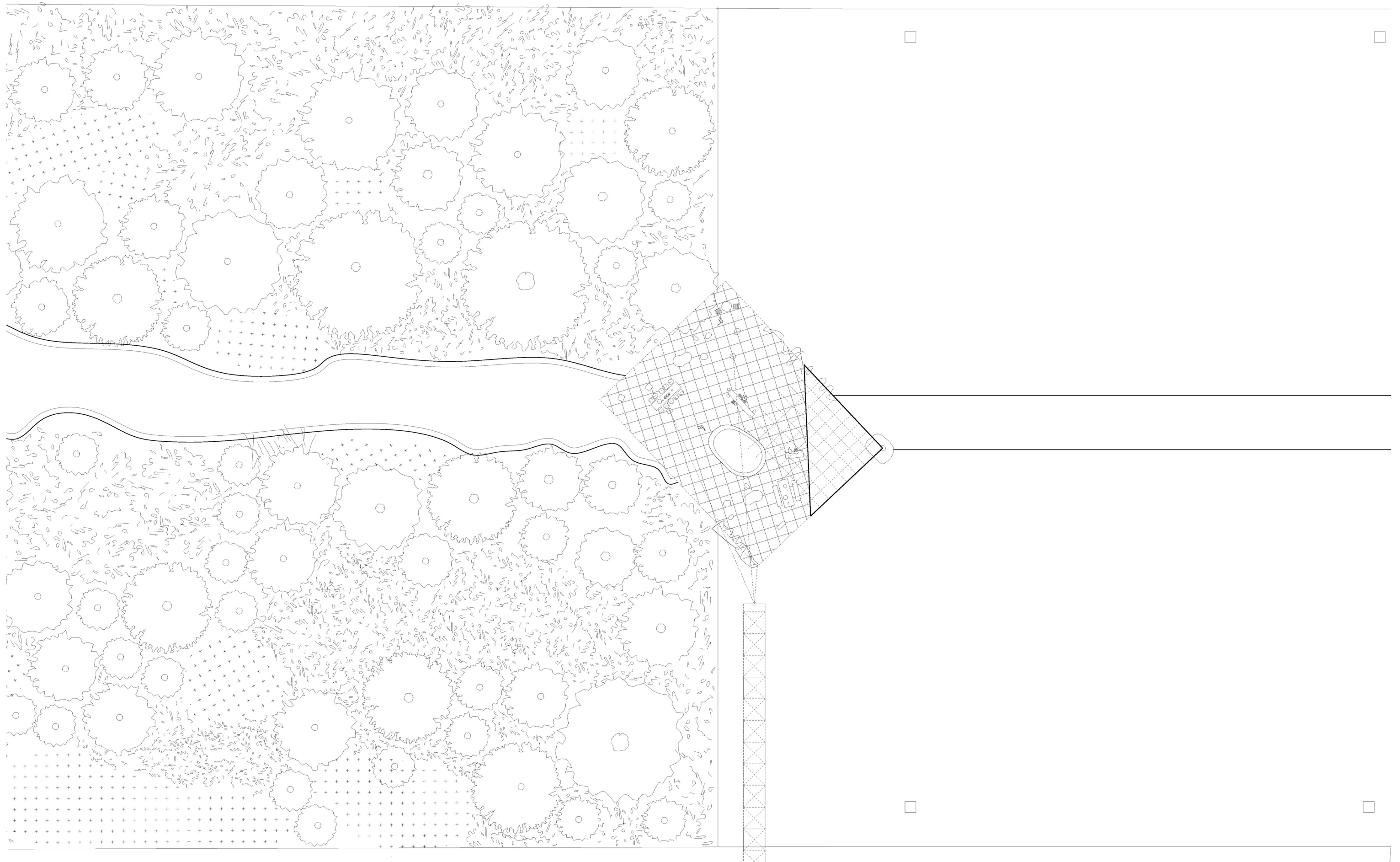
PIN JOINT + AXIS ROTATION



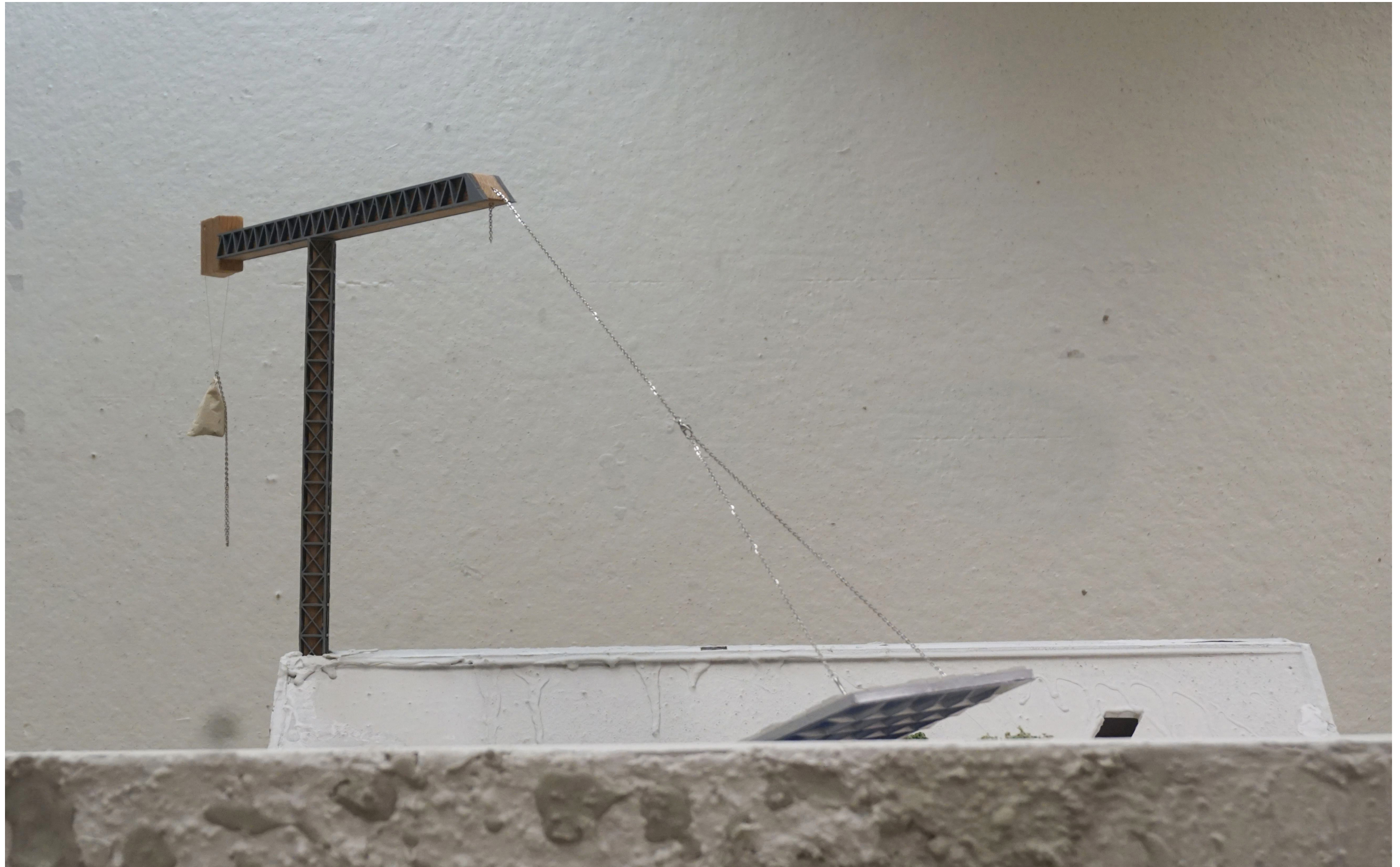
MODEL PHOTO



SECTION DETAIL OF RIVER ROOF



PLAN OF RIVER ROOF



MODEL PHOTO