

***modern urban ruins:  
landscapes of decay***

by Robert Fershau

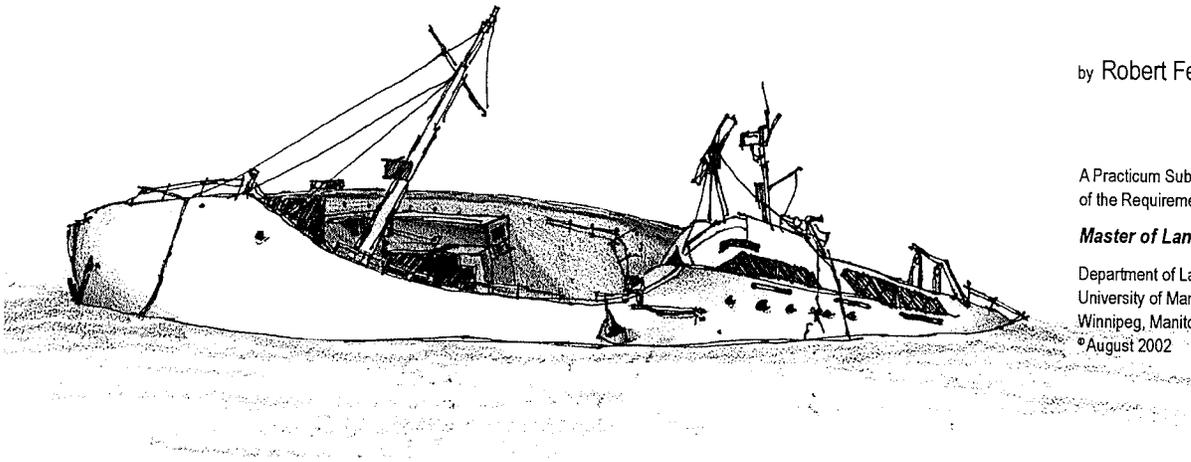
A Practicum Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

***Master of Landscape Architecture***

Department of Landscape Architecture  
University of Manitoba

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**MODERN URBAN RUINS: LANDSCAPES OF DECAY**

**BY**

**ROBERT FERSHAU**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of  
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree  
of**

**MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**

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*Talcahuano 57 1° 5°, Buenos Aires, Argentina*

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*The essay section is written as separate shorts, intended to introduce and state my position on the many levels of theory and investigation used to realize the practicum. These essays may be commentaries or expressive writings, incorporating the use of precedents and architectural examples, and may not appear cohesive until the design application is revealed.*

*A narrative in the first person will weave throughout the essay section, describing the experience of walking through the project site- a landscape of ruin.*

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**(preface) passion**



*photos by author*



**I have never brought anyone to this place. I am always alone. I come by it haphazardly, never in the same way and never in the same mood. Each time it is a new experience and a new landscape. Each time I find something special. Sometimes I venture as far as the doorframe, sometimes I walk in without hesitation and sometimes I just sit in the grass. Each time there is a different response.**



**I love the way that moss covers wooden shingles, how rusted nails bleed down greyed cedar planks, and how cobwebs replace broken window panes. I love the leaning picket fence and the rusted car that floats in a sea of grass and weed. I love the sapling trees that grow from it's trunk and decaying interior. I love the worn, earthtrodden paths of an unknown creature which cross the yard and dissappear on the doorstep.**



**I love decay.**

**It is a beautiful and honest process.**

**Not far from my family's cabin there is an abandoned farmstead hidden within the trees. There is no road to this place, no signs or markers. No names or stories that would revive any feelings of memory in me. No feelings of loss or grief. I do not feel sad. I do not feel happy.**

**But i love it here.**

**It is not cognitive or even conscious, nothing learned or remembered. It is more instinctual and volitional, drawing not on what I know, but what I don't know. It is informed by smell, sound, touch, light and so many other subconscious factors which make this experience real.**



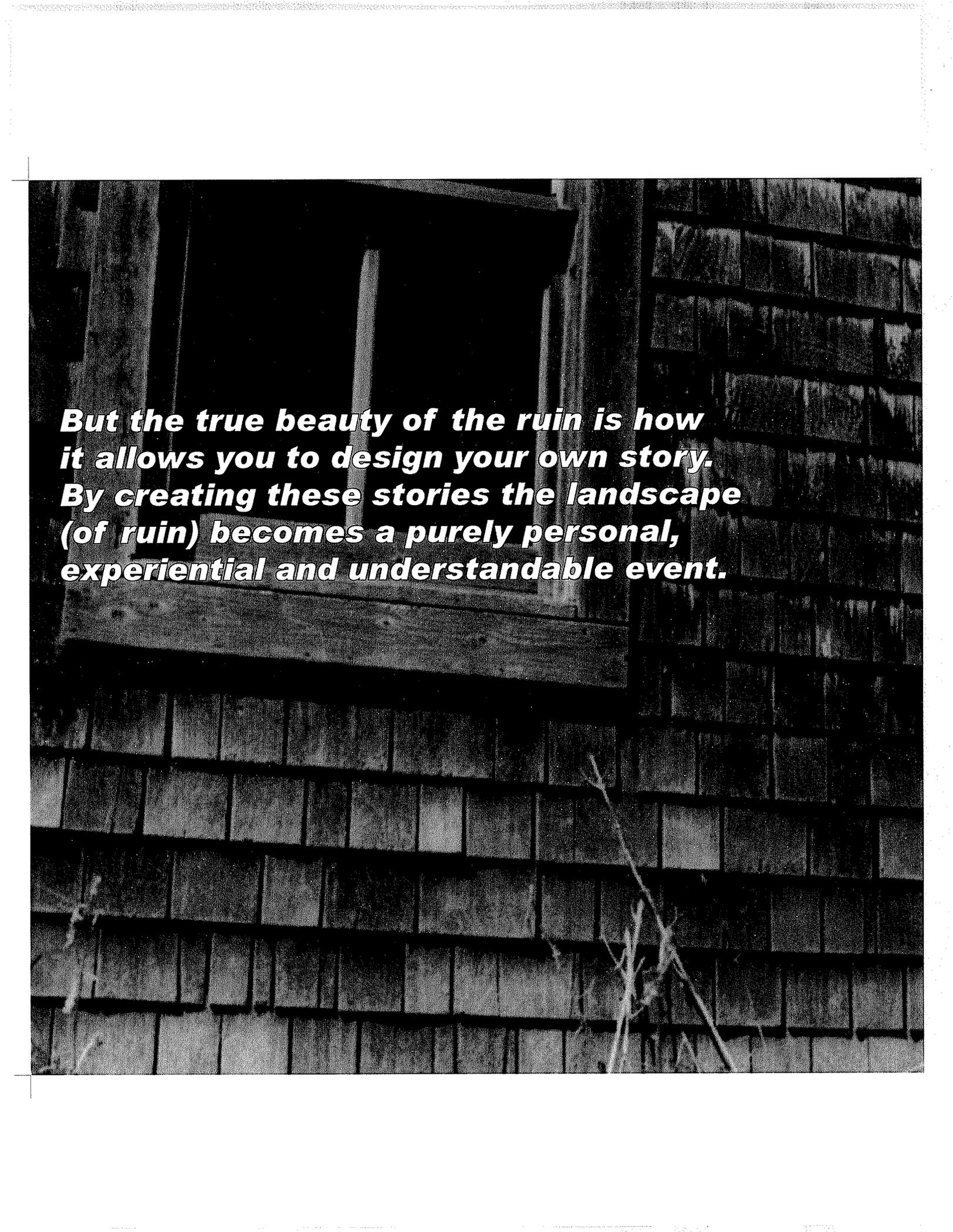
**It is extremely difficult for me to explain how I feel when I am in a place such as this. Retrospectively, I can always reflect on learned behaviours to translate my experience. Almost the way that one may analyze a dream. To pick it apart to its Freudian roots perhaps, or to abstractly construct a rational set of instances to justify my response. But I am not in a dream, I am in a dreamlike state. I am aware of everything around me but can not readily explain how I react.**



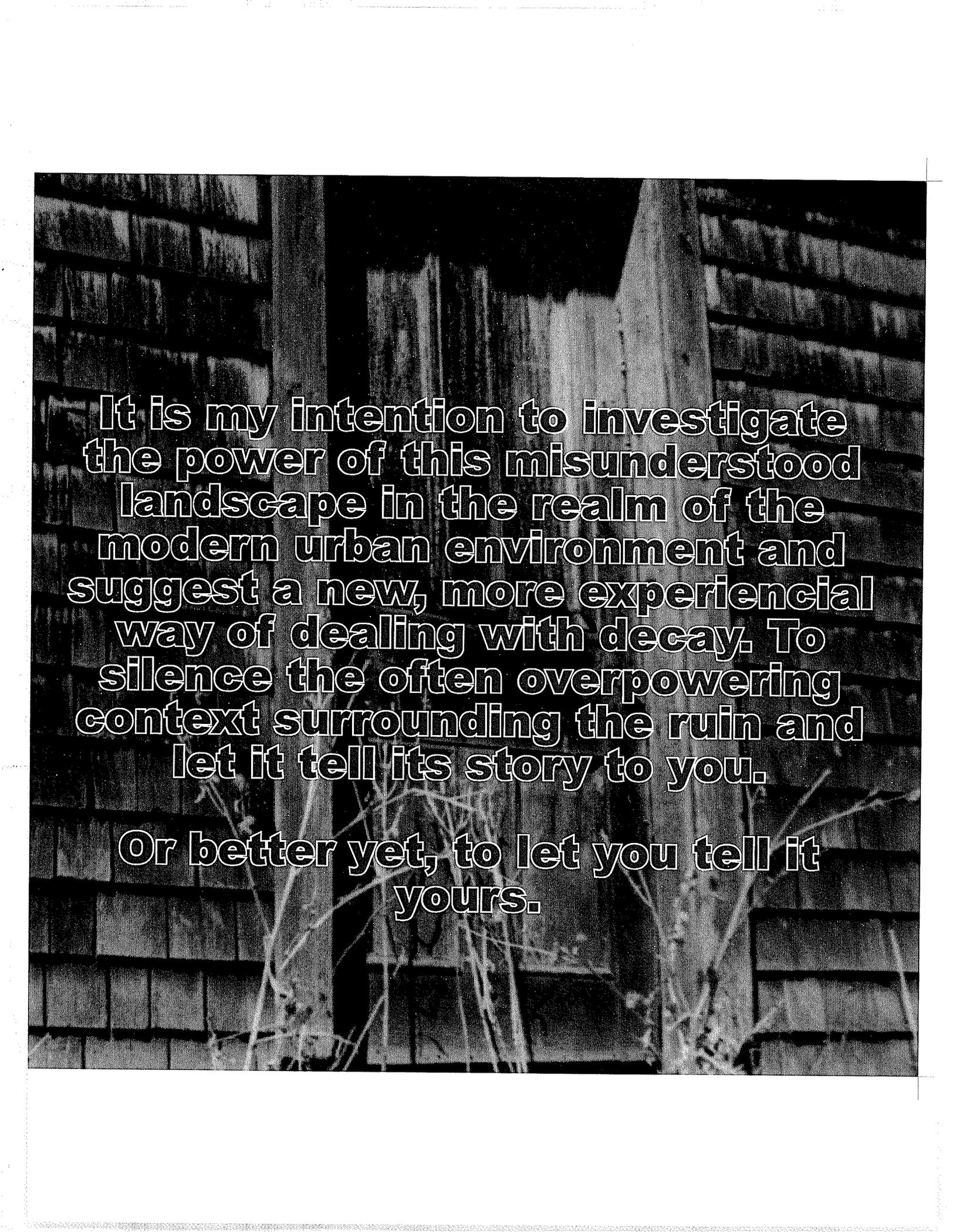


**It is in a place like this where I feel most human. The ruins offer me no answers, but allow me to question so many things about the physical and spiritual world in which I live. In a place like this I recognize just how insignificant I am.**

**The ruins' story allows me to grow as an individual, to ponder the minute to the immense, life and death. It is a story of being born, growing old and dying. It is a simple story. There lies an innate understanding of time and meaning within their silence.**

A black and white photograph of a dilapidated wooden building. The structure features a shingled roof and a window frame that is partially broken or missing. The wood shows signs of decay and weathering. The overall mood is one of decay and abandonment.

***But the true beauty of the ruin is how it allows you to design your own story. By creating these stories the landscape (of ruin) becomes a purely personal, experiential and understandable event.***

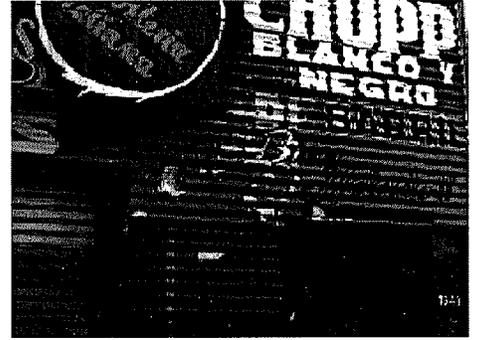


**It is my intention to investigate the power of this misunderstood landscape in the realm of the modern urban environment and suggest a new, more experiential way of dealing with decay. To silence the often overpowering context surrounding the ruin and let it tell its story to you.**

**Or better yet, to let you tell it yours.**



*La Boca, Buenos Aires -photos by author*



## **narrative..... a discovery of place.**

One of the amazing qualities of Buenos Aires is its streets. Never before have I been in a place where the desire to look up is forgotten.

"Buenos Aires is the faithful image of the great plain that, encircling her, has its straightness continued in the rectitude of the streets and houses. The horizontal lines overcome the vertical. The perspectives of one and two storey dwellings lined up and facing one another for miles and miles of asphalt and stone are too easy to be believed. Each crossroad intersected by four infinites." -Borges, Las Calles.

The brilliant blue sky is unlike that of any I've seen, and its ubiquitous presence seems to press the life of the city to within three meters of the earth. Traversing the streets you are constantly aware of this unseen density, and never do you feel the need to resist. But at one point that all changes.

The air became different. I don't know how, not at first. I find myself walking down streets at random, as if knowing that my destination will remain the same. There is something about the sky here. Its density has somehow changed and my eyes can no longer resist the urge to wander higher and higher. It is not that the life of the street has dissipated in any way but rather that it seems to drift. The air sounds different too...

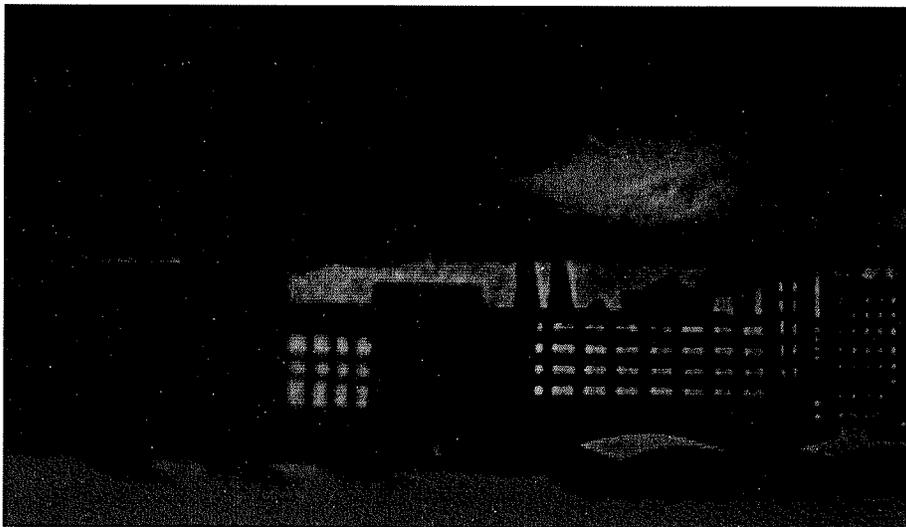
There is an old woman hanging laundry on a line of wire suspended across the street. When she sees me she smiles and shouts out a greeting. I find myself embarrassed to have caught her attention, after all I was looking up into this somewhat 'private' layer of air. I continue on, my eyes continuously drawn to pockets of shadow and color. The vast majority of the houses are clad with corrugated tin, rough squares cut out to fit shuttered windows. There is a continuous line of color for my eyes to follow. From brightly coloured squares of painted tin, reflecting the favorite colours of the residents, to blooming balcony flower pots, vintage Coke signs, hanging laundry and soccer flags.

# technophobia

*“The thought police would get him just the same. He had committed—would have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper—the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it. Thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed forever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you.” —p.19*

**George Orwell, 1984**

**Technophobia is the term used to describe any feelings of fear, discomfort, or anxiety towards one or more forms of technology. It is an acknowledged medical condition because it affects people mentally and physically. Technophobic individuals would like to avoid all technology if possible. When approached with technology, those who suffer with Technophobia experience mild to severe anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt. (Bollentin. April, 1998)**



*perceptions of the industrial landscape  
Spiderman animated series- photo by author*

A large percentage of modern urban ruins are things that have fallen into a state of obsolescence. That is to say that their usefulness has been eliminated, surpassed or replaced by new technologies. The modern ruin is no longer economically sensible or culturally significant enough to hold value in the urban landscape. Nor is its real estate value sufficient for it to have been adapted or for the site to have been redeveloped.

As Robert L. Thayer, Jr. states in his article Three Dimensions of Technology in the American Landscape, "*Most of the landscapes we experience in our daily lives are the piecemeal results of functional necessity rather than intentional design for human affect.*" Effectively, once the functional intentions of these landscapes are lost, so too is any level of meaning or connectivity to our everyday lives. Thayer also suggests that "*these technologically influenced landscapes seem to operate on three levels or dimensions, the perceptual, the functional and the symbolic.*" (Thayer, 1992)

The perceptual dimension is the landscape seen as patterns of light and dark. It is the perceivability and conspicuousness in the landscape as differentiated from the so-called natural background. The functional dimension is the landscape recognized as having a primary function. The symbolic dimension is referred to as landscapes representing abstract concepts or values not automatically expressed in their form. (Thayer, 1992)

It is the symbolic dimension that is of most interest when dealing with the urban ruin. This is not to say that the other levels are non-existent in the process of understanding the landscape; they do certainly play a role in that they set the stage for interpretation. They allow us to comprehend and negotiate the industrial landscape, but they lack the more personal interpretation that is inherent in the symbolic dimension. It is the symbolic dimension that allows us to detach ourselves from any consciously attained meaning or function of an object or landscape and insert our own abstractions and perceptions.

When and how these abstract feelings come about is largely dependent on our own feelings towards the technologies and the remnants left within the landscape. Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe proposed that, "It is possible that ugliness in the works of man, whether architectural or landscape, did not arise until there became a conflict between the user of the surface of the earth and the use of what lay beneath." (Jellicoe, 1985)

This would suggest that certain technologies evoke different levels of response, both consciously and subconsciously, depending on the nature and character of those technologies. Some of these factors may include the degree of impact upon the landscape or the activity's functional relationship to culture and tradition. From a 'prairie perspective', reactions to agriculture and farming may not be as strong as those towards open pit mining or offshore oil operations. The effects of the primary industry are overshadowed by their seemingly lower visual impact on the 'pastoral' landscape, when in fact the use of pesticides and the inhumane treatment of animals may hold negative connotations paralleling those of an oil spill.

But as previously mentioned this reaction is also dependent upon culture and tradition. Reaction to agricultural practices in Brazil for example would be somewhat different, where the disappearance of the Rain Forest is directly blamed on the agriculture industry. *“Consumptive technologies in the landscape frequently accrue negative symbolic meaning, since they represent a one way, entropy-producing “consumption” of actual, earthly resources.”* (Thayer, 1992)

Then there are the technologies that have become outdated or have been surpassed by the advancement of facilities, machinery and efficiency. Thayer proposes that these fall under a category referred to as nostalgic technologies. He goes on to state, “nostalgic technologies ease the unpleasant taste of *landscape guilt* by connecting us with a familiar past.”<sup>1</sup>

This holds true in situations where surpassed technologies have become small pockets within an urban industrial landscape which is still evolving. Old steam plants and towering brick smokestacks remain as testaments of change and are effective in part because they provide the much needed contrast in such a monotonous setting. In a sense they become the icons that justify ‘progress’, anchors around which change seems more tolerable.

But what happens when whole systems of industry are relocated? This is often the situation in historic port cities such as Buenos Aires, where population growth both instigates and depends on the development of entirely new industrial landscapes, capable of dealing with the increase of the import/export trade.

**The landscape that remains is not one of nostalgia. It is one of neglect.** Part of the reason for this neglect lies in the composition of these early industrial waterfronts. These waterfronts are landscapes of a human scale because the industry that developed was inherently tied to those who first inhabited the land. Residential and commercial activity threads its way through a seemingly impenetrable industrial landscape and has developed a symbiotic relationship with industry.

These neighbourhoods do not 'cope' with industry, they live with it. With the loss of industry, there is a void created in those neighbourhoods. Jobs are lost, streets become vacant and broken windows remain broken. To the residents, the industrial landscape becomes one of neglect and disdain, now only a constant reminder of how things were when the system still functioned. The historical and ephemeral value of the waterfront, which often dates back hundreds of years, has been more or less stripped of meaning by the 'advancement' of technology.

**The landscape becomes a non-place, negated space within the city, unappreciated by the outsider and slowly forgotten by the resident.**



*Calle Caminito, La Boca -photos by author*

After reading a nearby information marker and viewing the bridge from the footprints provided by 'kodak', my attention turns towards the inner harbour, la Vuelta de Rocha (Rocha's curve), where I can already see the ruins of the ships, two in particular which seem to lean on each other as if resting from a hard days labour. I'm about a kilometer away and can see the whole of Rocha's curve, an aged port lined with character buildings, mature trees and the sound of activity. It is a weekday in early February and not quite the high season for tourists, so the cafes, galleries, museums, street corners and new waterfront development are only scattered with people. I cross the street to hide in the shade of the street trees, which appear to pierce the asphalt and cobble. Although my eyes are drawn to the two ships, I continue to walk along the building edge, attempting a little banter here and there with local shopkeepers and artisans.

As I near Calle Caminito I am overwhelmed by the tourist trap. The area seems to brighten almost instantly, coats of fresh paint leave hardly a piece of tin uncoloured. The street is lined with artists, sculptors and musicians all trying to take advantage of a growing tourist industry. An Argentine couple dances the tango to the delight of a small group of German tourists, while a puppeteer works his magic on a nearby corner. The streets here are immaculate, unlike the ones I have just walked down with their forgotten potholes, lazing mutts and abandoned vehicles.

It's almost too much. There is already so much character in the neighbourhood that this exaggeration seems dishonest. The colours seem to have been carefully selected, to complement each other perfectly and contrast eerily with the blue sky. It most certainly characterizes the typical traditions and culture of the neighbourhood and without a doubt meets the expectations of the brochure abiding tourists. But it fails to do so in an intimate manner. Not to say that the area isn't beautiful. It is extremely beautiful. But after walking my meandering path I'm pretty sure I've gained a clearer understanding of this place. I feel sorry for the young foreign couple stepping out of their cab and right into this manicured landscape. They will never experience what I just did, only exploring up to the edges where the cafe umbrellas stop and the colours start to fade.

# **the tourist**

*"I dislike feeling at home when I am  
abroad."*

*George Bernard Shaw*

**Tourist.** *n. One who travels for pleasure.*

**Traveller.** *n. One who travels or has traveled, as to distant places.*

*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*

*The traveler sees what he sees, the **tourist** sees what he has come to see.*

*Gilbert K. Chesterton*

*Every perfect traveller always creates the country where he travels.*

*Nikos Kazantzakis*

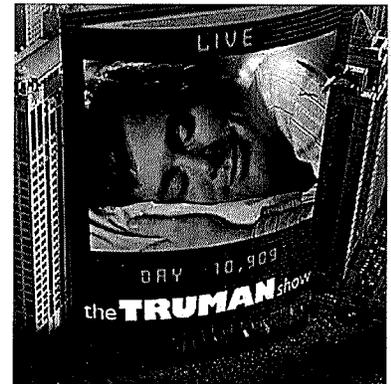
As J.B. Jackson states in *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics*, “Yet we are all of us strangers, tourists, at one time or another, and from our own experience we should recognize the individual impulse for self-improvement that is at back of so much tourist travel. At the risk of exaggerating, I would say that the inspiration of tourism is a desire to know more about the world in order to know more about ourselves. If we offend public taste, that is only incidental to our search; the Swiss cuckoo clock, the bumper-sticker from Carlsbad Caverns is a type of diploma-proof that we have at least tried to improve.” (Jackson, 1980)

This statement captures the true aspiration of tourism. But I would be wary to say that the inspiration of which Jackson speaks has maintained its vigour and influence. The desire to know more about the world has certainly survived but the quest for self improvement seems to have faded from the foreground and has been replaced by the bumper stickers and cuckoo clocks. These ‘diplomas’ are no longer proof of an attempt at improvement. They are simply proof of where we have been. In a way they have become bragging rights, a thin veil to claim superior knowledge of another place.

The problem may lie in the over commercialization of tourism. Of course that is stating the obvious. But it is a critical observation in understanding the relationship between the visitor and the visited. Especially in impoverished societies where the economic gap between the two groups is immense.

Commercialization has transformed tourism into a carefully planned and packaged 'adventure' guided not by the tourist themselves but by fine print guidebooks and a travel agent thousands of miles away. It has tried to suck the unknown out of the experience. It is fully catered, from the prebooking of hotels and cars to the carefully framed tours which reveal only the "touristy" parts of the city. Not to mention the portrait-style photos to send home to loved ones. Money equals a painless immersion into an unknown culture. You are constantly surrounded by other tourists, and the 'locals' encountered are those dependent on the tourist economy. We have become comfortable and are satisfied with only seeing that which we have been told is worthwhile.

In a sense it has transformed tourism into a highly deterministic event rather than the desire, as Jackson states, "to know more about ourselves". It has become consumptive rather than timeless. *"Knowing the world almost always means a kind of intellectual or social awareness, a tolerance of unfamiliar ideas and unfamiliar people."* (Jackson 1980) The prepackaged adventure does not necessitate the need to immerse oneself in a culture and most certainly does not promote a greater social awareness. It is like living in a bubble, not aware there is an outside and therefore having no desire to know. Commercialism has leached the process of self realization and personal growth out of tourism and subsequently has led to the resentment that the visited often feel towards the visitor. Not to say that the resentment by the visited is justified, for often it too is based on misunderstandings and preconceptions.

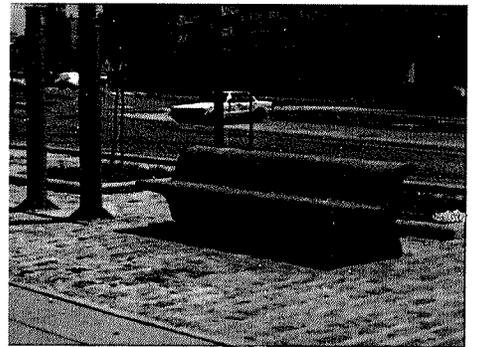
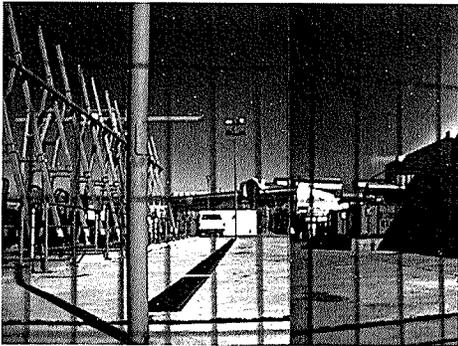


*The Truman Show (1998)*  
After years of idyllic living in a seaside island village, insurance salesman Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) begins to see signs that things aren't as perfect as they seem. He discovers that he's the "star" of a continuously broadcast TV show that's aired since his infancy, his friends and family are all actors, and his hometown is an elaborate set. Ed Harris, Laura Linney and Noah Emmerich also star in director Peter Weir's compelling satire on truth and freedom in the age of media manipulation. 103 min.

**So how do we bridge the gap? How do we instigate this new dialogue between the two groups?**

A dialogue void of the prejudices and tensions which allows for an exchange and an appreciation of cultures as well as a better understanding of ourselves and our environments?

I believe that one solution lies in the creation of an experience that focuses on creating the informal interaction between the two groups while still allowing for some level of personal exploration.



*La Boca, Buenos Aires -photos by author*

I can see from here that the redevelopment project along the waterfront stops or is at least interrupted by the imposition of a rather strange set of pipes and generators, surrounded by a rather imposing chain link fence. I walk back across the street to get a closer glimpse of the ships, moving as close as possible to the fence. The structures to my side are water pumps, used during the rainy seasons to extract the groundwaters of the port and to protect the surrounding buildings from flooding and shifting.

From here I have the best vantage point to view the ships. I can now see clearly the two that had previously caught my eye. I can see that they are indeed resting upon one another, and appear to have almost grown into one, years of rust, mold and rot blurring their edges. I am able to recognize the distinct naval markings and machinery on one of the sloping decks, but I am not close enough to experience anything other than an optic connection. Already my mind begins to wander, constructing ideas of how to design within, on and around them. A naval security guard walks curiously close to me, as I attempt to capture some of these ideas on paper. He pays me no further attention once he sees that I am sketching, but I can't help but feel a little intimidated by his response to my presence. Assuming that I may be standing too close to a secure area, I move back onto the decorative waterfront paving and take my place on a generic iron bench.

Focusing my attention back to the ships, I realize that I know nothing about them. How old they are, how they sunk, if they were placed there, if they will remain there. I don't even know when they came to this port or when this port came to the city. I have become that young couple now sipping their cappuccinos under the shade of an outdoor umbrella. I have become a tourist. Not to say that being a tourist is a bad thing. But thinking like a tourist often means hiding your money in a sweaty belt pocket and venturing only where you see people with cameras and funny hats.

Remembering the smile of the old lady, I start to look around, really look around. I try to forget about the pristine white railing in front of me, and the catalogue light standards, bollards and paving details. The red and white plastic patio furniture slowly sinks out of sight and I gradually become aware of the landscape.

# urban exploration

*When we were kids they called it  
breaking and entering or trespassing at  
the very least, but now it's called Urban  
Exploration and it's a proper action  
sport for adults, apparently.*

*[www.infiltration.org](http://www.infiltration.org)*

In the last few years, relatively unknown terms such as infiltration, spelunking and vading have been used to describe the increasing popularity of a movement referred to as urban exploration.

**infiltration** *n.*

1. *to pass (troops) singly or in small groups through gaps in the enemy line*
2. *to enter or become established in gradually or unobtrusively usually for subversive purposes <the intelligence staff had been infiltrated by spies>*

**spelunker** *n.*

1. *one who explores caves chiefly as a hobby, : a caver*

**invading** *v.tr.*

1. *To enter by force in order to conquer or pillage.*
2. *To enter and permeate, especially harmfully.*

*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition  
Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.*

**vading** *v.tr.*

1. *To enter and permeate*

*“When you make the finding yourself - even if you’re the last person on Earth to see the light - you’ll never forget it.”*

*Carl Sagan*

In the past few years there has been a fanatical increase in the amount of websites related to this activity. For the most part, they appear to be collections of images and historical facts relating to the specific “mission” or site to be “vaded”. These sites are often abandoned structures, but also include subway tunnels, bridges, boats, and even the odd five star hotel. They range in size from single individuals to full fledged membership groups, and are dispersed across the globe. In the Americas, sites exist for virtually every major city from Argentina to Greenland. Most of the sites offer legal advice and explicitly do not advocate vandalism or theft. It is interesting to note that many of the sites make specific reference to the intimacy of the activity, and do not wish for it to become mainstream.

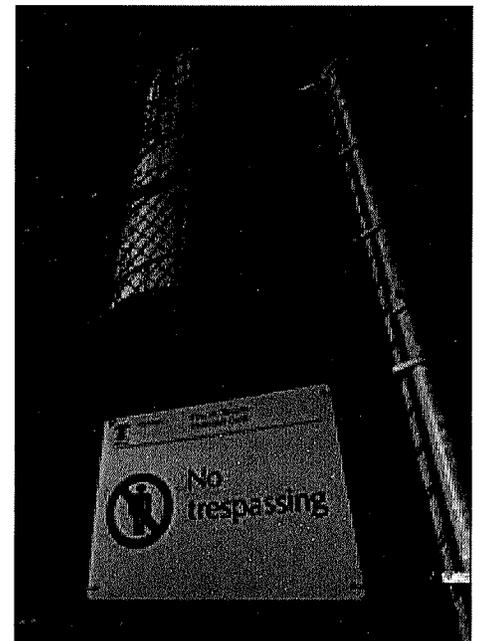
*The true intent of urban exploration is aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the places we inhabit. It offers an utterly new approach to “experiencing”, rather than “seeing” the city. I’ve always felt that the most exotic form of tourism is to be given the chance of revisiting the city in which one actually lives, really seeing it for the first time. You see, the problem of a big city is that the visitor is always seeing the official sites, the spectacles, observing it from points of view from which it was meant to be seen. And those of us who live here gradually grow indifferent to what it looks like, and it becomes more or less invisible. So what one needs is to look at the city in a way it was never meant to be looked at.*

*Jonathan Miller, Quoted in Cities*



The act of exploring is tactile and blatant by nature, involving all of the physical senses, yet it is one of the most powerfully engaging activities of the imagination and the subconscious. What is extremely important is how the act of exploring abandons or overcomes the limitations we associate with so much of our environments. It takes us past the "Do Not Enter" signs and the locked gates and allows us to see the entirety of the urban landscape. Not just the skin and bones, but the guts as well.

Part of the thrill of exploring the 'guts' is the sense of danger, of the unexpected and the unanticipated events which stitch together the experience. A certain degree of danger is ever present within the urban landscape but much of our environments have been designed in such a way that the feeling of fear is excluded or diluted. When fear does exist it is often a reaction to the designed environment, when the familiar conditions we feel safe in are challenged both physically and psychologically. This vague zone of apprehension in the landscape often sets the limits of where one will go, and has never been adequately addressed through the design of the urban environment.



Anything remotely dangerous is surrounded by a cinder block wall or a chain link fence, then, as if that was not enough, covered with “danger” and “do not enter” signs.



Gas Works Park, Seattle. Photos by author.



Gas Works Park was completed in 1978 with the large gas works left as something of an urban sculpture/ graffiti canvas. At one time the gas works were unfenced and anyone could explore them. Today they are fenced off, but people still manage to break in and scrawl on the rusting towers with spraycans and paint markers.

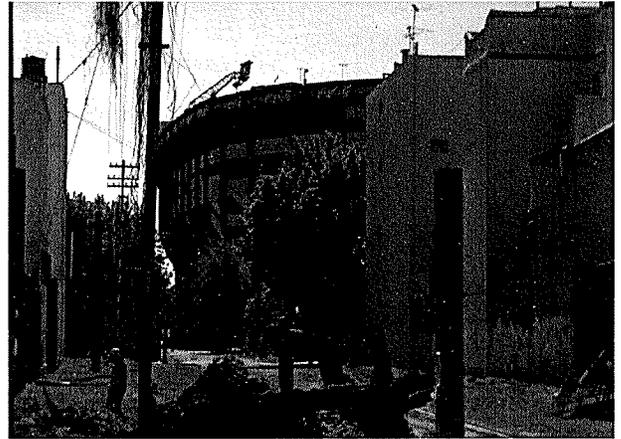
In *Architecture of Fear*, Dora Epstein describes how this preoccupation with fear shapes the contemporary landscape

*“There is a story to this fearing, this fearing that maps the cityscapes into places I will go and places I will not. As speaking subjects, sentient members of urban terrains, we can narrate our cartographies of avoidance, our fearing, far better than we can narrate how the fearing came to be. We know, can articulate, what we have deemed as “unsafe”- the strange, the unfamiliar, the supposedly violent “other” against which we have insulated and barricaded ourselves- and what we have deemed as “safe”- the lit, the populated, the orderly, or seemingly controlled to which we have clung. We felt justified when violence occurred in the realm of our “unsafe”; felt shock when it occurred in our “safe”. (Ellin, 1997)*

*A couple walks along the Vuelta de Rocha. My eyes follow their steps through a maze of umbrellas and cheap plastic chairs. They reach the end, stopping to look around, not certain if their journey is over. Hesitating, they turn back and take a photo of what they have already seen. Their backs now face the 'unknown' and a quick glance only emphasizes their longing; to explore beyond that last step and discover what this place is really all about.*

**So how do we promote the i**

**avigation of the entire urban landscape?**



*Street Performers, La Bononera -photos by author*

It seems to me that there is an invisible boundary, a rough edge of paving stones and tourist activity delineating the places I can and can not go. I am trapped by the visual quality of the redevelopment. It has effectively set the limitations of my experience, and no doubt is effective in keeping the tourist (spending power) within the desired area. But as I look past this barrier I begin to wonder what I am missing. Surely, my experience of walking to this place should be equally as profound as leaving it. I decide to make my way into the depths of this perceived confinement, in an attempt to rediscover the water's edge from a different perspective. As I move through the maze of shops and artisans I am surprised how easy it is to become engrossed by the optical nature of the atmosphere. There is so much information to be processed and so many things to see. I am walking down cobblestone streets, surrounded by puppeteers, dancers, magicians, painters, sculptors and singers, but yet can not seem to process the sounds, textures, and smells which accompany them. I feel overwhelmed by the intensity of this visual world and my sense of vision seems to have unknowingly taken control of my sensory exploration and nullified my experience.

As I come to the end of Calle Caminito, I am somewhat dissatisfied. The subtle curve of the street had maintained my curiosity until this point. My eyes were continuously invited to scan ahead, expecting to see an illuminating terminus of some sort. A terminus which gave meaning to the curve of the street and the activity along it. What I find is an abandoned rail line wild with vegetation which becomes yet another movement restricting barrier. My only reward is seeing 'La Bombonera' (Boca Juniors stadium) in the distance, aptly named for its chocolate box form. As I gaze at the stadium, beaten paths in the tall grasses emerge and I realize that this has become somewhat of a pedestrian street, linking the residents to their football club.

I am aware that the water's edge is the natural terminus of the street, but it seems to me that those who visit this place start boldly at the water's edge and move timidly to explore inwards. There is no real sense of discovery, wonder or mystery in the experience of this aging waterfront anymore. Its connection to La Boca is detached and fragmented, and like the fresh coats of paint and hypnotic activity, is understood singularly as a visual experience.

## **memory and the imagination**

*Like all great travellers, I have seen  
more than I remember, and remember  
more than I have seen.*

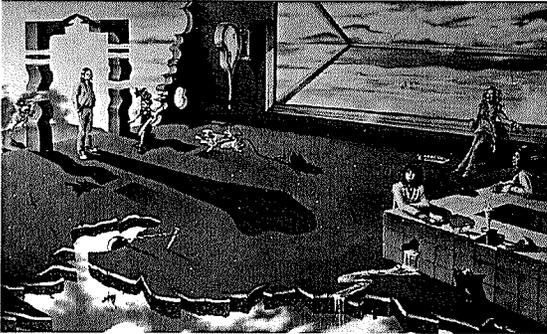
*Benjamin Disraeli*

**Cities and Memory 5** - from Italo Calvino's, *Invisible Cities*

*In Maurilia, the traveler is invited to visit the city and, at the same time, to examine some old post cards that show it as it used to be: the same identical square with a hen in the place of the bus station, a bandstand in the place of the overpass, two young ladies with white parasols in the place of the munitions factory. If the traveler does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one, though he must be careful to contain his regret at the changes within definite limits: admitting that the magnificence and prosperity of the metropolis Maurilia, when compared to the old, provincial Maurilia, can not compensate for a certain lost grace, which, however, can be appreciated only now in the old post cards, whereas before, when that provincial Maurilia was before one's eyes, one saw absolutely nothing graceful and would see it even less today, if Maurilia had remained unchanged; and in any case the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was.*

*Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves. At times even the names of the inhabitants remain the same, and their voices' accent, and also the features of the face; but the gods who live beneath names and above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place. It is pointless to ask whether the new ones are better or worse than the old, since there is no connection between them, just as the old post cards do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city which, by chance was called Maurilia, like this one.*

*"Hey, it's not really that surreal, in fact it's kind of stupid. But I like that." -Bob Somers*



*Forever 27 (modified with baguette boy), Scott LoBaido*

*"I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die." - Rutger Hauer as Roy Batty in Blade Runner*



*History exists as long as an object is in use; that is so long as form relates to its original function. However when form and function are severed, and only form remains vital, history shifts into the realm of memory. When history ends memory begins.... History comes to be known through the relationship between a collective memory of events, the singularity of place (locus solus), and the sign of the place as expressed in form.*

*Peter Eisenman*



*"It's like that scene from Planet of the Apes where Charlton Heston rides his horse past the submerged Statue of Liberty and realizes just how much the world has changed." -access seattle travel guide*



La Boca, Buenos Aires -photos by author

As I stand on the abandoned tracks, I start to get glimpses of life behind the façades of Camnito. There are worn paths within the tall grasses which form a detour of sorts around this tourist mecca, leading into the heart of La Boca. For the first time it is something I hear rather than see which draws my attention.

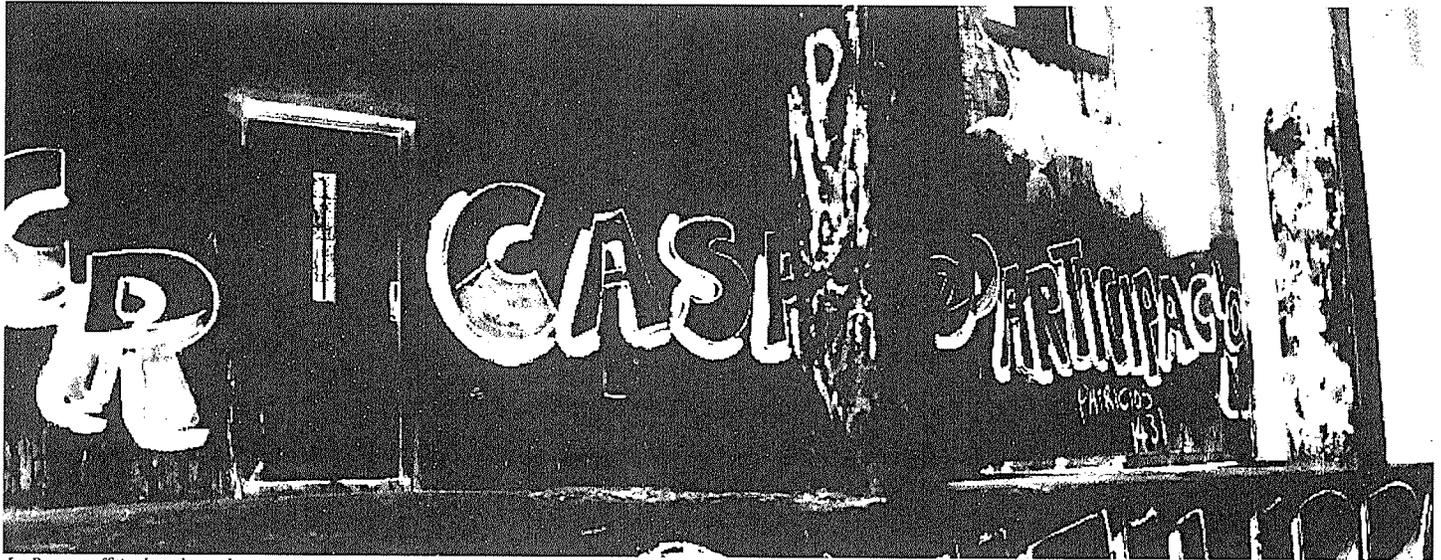
There are voices yelling in Spanish and instinctively I find myself nervous of what lies around the corner. I look back to see the reassurance of the colours and tourists, somehow thinking that as long as I am within sight I am safe. There is a solitary wheelbarrow resting in the entry of a building, above a ramp leading up the stairs. It is soon joined by a worker who seems to pay no attention to the sporadic yelling. I continue walking along the grass path until I see what lies around the corner. I find myself embarrassed to see a group of men playing a makeshift game of football, for just seconds earlier, instinctive feelings of danger pervaded my thoughts. I had begun to experience this place in such a singular manner, believing that I could comprehend the complexity of this place as simply as one would view a postcard.

I decide to make my way down the street and back towards the waterfront. I can sense the glances cast my way as I pass quietly on the sidewalk. Some are enhanced with a grin or a nod, while some demonstrate indifference, but all let me know that they are aware I am an outsider, not from their neighbourhood. I get the sense that they are equally as wary of me as I was of them, and can only imagine the degree of separation which divides the understanding between the tourist and local populations.

## **social landscapes: proxemic and distemic space**

*“Although fences of some sort remain important to neighbourhoods, it is only as urban life is able to flow beyond city walls that human culture is able to expand.”*

*(Greenbie, 1981)*



*La Boca graffiti, photo by author*

In his book, Spaces: Dimensions of the Social Landscape, Greenbie examines the relationship between the recognition of small group identity and the new respect for cultural pluralism. He characterizes small group identity as proxemic<sup>1</sup> spaces, having inherently strong loyalties and defensive territoriality. These are spaces such as the neighbourhood, where there is a sense of community that shares similar economic and social values.

Greenbie's investigation of territoriality has obvious links to that of Oscar Newman's theories on crime prevention and defensible space<sup>2</sup>, but diverges from Newman's conclusions. Although both suggest an informal order of social control, Newman recommended that barriers needed to be created between the private, public, and semipublic space. To do so would increase private space and in turn make it defensible space (Newman, 1972). Newman's theory fails to address notions of cultural pluralism, whereas Greenbie suggests that a 'defensible space' is only possible when those barriers are removed. It is his opinion that only when we are able to transcend the borders of proxemic space can there be the "full flowering of human personality."

Although Greenbie addresses the notion of territoriality between different cultures and classes within the city, and the transcendence of those borders, he does not examine the reality that 'distemic'<sup>3</sup> spaces are often inserted within the proxemic. His scope is somewhat limited to the idea of the distemic as 'cosmopolitan', the "large and important spaces in all real cities which are used by diverse people of many cultures and subcultures and cannot properly be called the turf of any group." (Greenbie, 1981) He acknowledges the fact that proxemic and distemic spaces can turn into each other over time, but does not seem to question the implications of such an insertion. His analogy of walls and fences could just as easily include moats and islands.

*1 Edward T. Hall has coined the term proxemics to refer to the culturally specific ways in which various groups use space. Hall defined it quite specifically to refer to "theories of man's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture."*

*2 Oscar Newman developed his theory of Defensible Space in the early 1970's. His theoretical construct consisted of the interaction between individuals and the environment as a means of making their living environment "defensible space."*

*3 Greenbie coined the word distemics from Hall's proxemics to refer to those parts of the city that are actively shared by people with diverse cultural values and codes of conduct which must be intelligible to all.*

Tourist zones within cities, especially those within historical neighbourhoods, often cause a tension within the neighbourhood in which they occur by effectively blurring an established sense of ownership and territoriality. "Obviously, if much spatial behaviour is unconscious and taken for granted, there is likely to be less conflict if people of the same culture primarily share and control a given area." (Greenbie, 1981) When this control is compromised the possibility to transcend spatial borders becomes even more challenging and often these borders become heightened. Rather than attempting to see as others see, we tend to return to what is familiar and perceived as safe, making amicable social diversity impossible.

In the proxemic neighbourhood, "both the social and physical environment can be extremely complex and yet understandable to its residents because they have learned to know it over a longer period of time...To insiders it will appear logical and proper, no matter how illogical it may be to outsiders; outsiders may, however, find it delightfully picturesque if they are not threatened by it."(Greenbie, 1981) Cultural anthropologists note that every culture takes its values and view of the world for granted, which further stresses the possibility of interaction. "We take for granted all the various ways we use space, position ourselves within it, and define boundaries between public and private domains." (Greenbie, 1981) It is the somewhat unconscious ignorance or learned behaviours on the part of both groups that must be addressed before any valuable flow of communication can occur.

Greenbie does make some links to communication and to the pluralistic nature of the tourist zone when he speaks of the marketplace, which he refers to as "the oldest and most effective in accommodating social diversity." It allowed neighbourhoods of an internally similar social structure to exchange goods and services in a socially equalized space. Maybe the use of the word marketplace would best be substituted with gallery today, which promotes the freedom of expression and the exchange of both cultural and individual ideas.

**But does this accommodation really occur in the tourist zone?**

**rarely.**

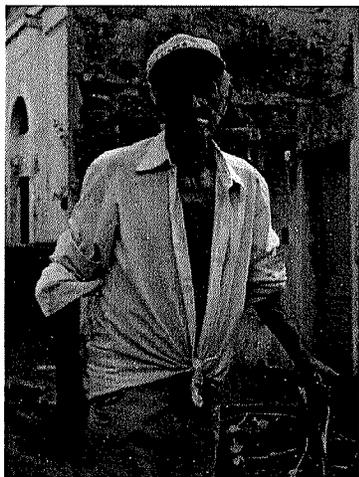
There is no necessitated exchange of ideas, only a consumption of one culture for the currency of another. And there is no longer a sense of equalized social space, for there is no communication outside the constraints of the island. It could be said that tourist zones in the city were initially distemic in nature in that they instigated diversity and social awareness, but once established they became proxemic spaces themselves, distinct and restricted to economic and social structure.

If that is the case, and I believe that it is, a new model of distemic space may be needed. *“Public places in which various people can interact, both as individuals and as groups, in order to develop those possibilities in human beings which transcend local differences.”* (Greenbie, 1981)

It is these spaces in the city that I will refer to as **negated spaces**. These are the places that have been somewhat abandoned or forgotten by the local population and remain undiscovered by the tourist. These spaces are not necessarily a result of newly emerging territorial boundaries, but are spaces that over time have faded in cultural significance and understanding.

Resulting from this are landscapes void of strong ownerships, which provide the needed platform to initiate cross-cultural dialogue. They allow for a shared sense of ownership to develop simultaneously between different user groups. The activities that begin to emerge do so in an unobtrusive manner, and there is no attempt to claim the space as 'turf'. It is a shared urban space where function is dependent on the user, be it group or individual.

**Void of tensions, the space becomes the stage where culture is recognized and understood for what it really is, not what we have perceived it to be.**



*La Boca, Buenos Aires -photos by author*

Without the predominance of colour and herds of tourists guiding my way through the streets, I find myself moving at a much slower pace. I have the chance to examine the hidden details and personifications of buildings, the trees which sprout from the narrowest of gaps, and the objects which lie forgotten along the street. My understanding of this place is finally starting to involve my sense of touch, smell and sound and for the first time I find myself really seeing. It is the banal, the "everyday" which draws my curiosity, not in the physical sense of these ordinary objects but in their familiarity. It allows me to attach some level of connection to the residents of the neighbourhood. This is a part of the culture that I can easily identify with and comprehend, much more so than the puppeteer or the couple dancing. This recognition of the banal is what initiates the process of becoming an 'aware tourist', able to put aside any preconceived notions of place/people/culture. It allows me to experience the neighbourhood of La Boca in a much more honest and intimate manner.

I find myself fascinated with the varying states of decay, from moss covered walls and missing sidewalk stones to roughly boarded windows and wheel-less cars. There is an old bicycle leaning against the wall up ahead and as I approach it I find an aging house tucked onto a narrow lot. I have never experienced a landscape like this before. I am not used to seeing such a dense composite of residential and industrial use. My idea of industry is the 'industrial park', that concrete world on the periphery meant to be viewed through a car windshield at a speed of 80km/hr. But here a metal fabrication shop shares the wall of a dilapidated house. I hear the steady droning of a diesel air compressor as welding sparks fly out of an open truckbay and children run carelessly across scraps of metal. An elderly man slowly emerges from the weed-infested garden within the yard holding two ripe tomatoes, and I am momentarily stunned to think that someone lives there, or even that something could grow there. That feeling immediately dissipates as he motions for me to take a tomato and I find myself in a conversation of hand motions and gestures. From his actions and his toothless grin it is obvious that he is incredibly proud of his garden, his house and his neighbourhood. The conversation ends as easily as it began, as he extends his hand to me. I feel the strength in his handshake and am deeply moved by his genuineness.

I have begun to realize that not all is what it seems. Dilapidated houses are not empty, boarded windows do not always hide barren shops and abandoned bicycles are not forgotten.

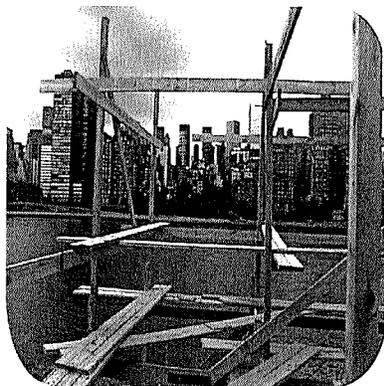
Neither are the ships.

**artspace:**  
**the ruin as alternative site**

*Installations and Site-Specific Works*

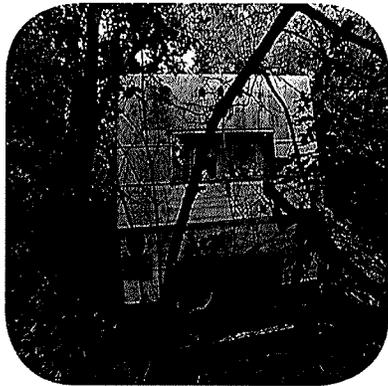
Installation artist Robert Irwin, in the video *"The Beauty of Questions"*, states that the subject of art is a non-thing. He views it as a personal awareness of the world that illustrates a new way of seeing.

***"The art doesn't reside in the object. The art in the set of circumstances is in a sense the opportunity for you to have this moment of awareness, of touching something special, which humans can touch. So that somehow, what you walk out of the room with somehow is what's of value... If the value is in the experience it won't die."(Feinstein,1997)***



images from left to right

1. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970*
2. Tadashi Kawamata, *Kawamata Project on Roosevelt Island, 1992*
3. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Valley Curtain, Grand Hogback, Rifle, Colorado, 1970-72*
- 4 and 5. Robert Wogan, *Starfyte, Route 25, Stamfordville, NY.*



It is the lost spaces within the urban fabric that become the medium for alternative artworks. And it is the rejection of the gallery and the traditional exhibition space by the artist that brings new life to these spaces.

Art historian Francesca Dal Lago characterizes it as an attempt to clarify meaning and, *“escape the ideological connotations inherently conveyed from the institution to the work.”* She describes “site specific” as a term that *“defines a type of art that uses the environment as an element in the production of the artwork. The environment is included both formally, as the space woven into the fabric of the work, and conceptually, as its content.”* (Dal Lago, 2000)

These artworks almost always use the environment as an element of design, either as a physical representation or abstraction, or as a psychological play on historical, social or political aspects of the site.

It is not the object in the landscape that is the art, it is how we perceive the object in the landscape which is the art. -Robert Irwin

Special  
in red

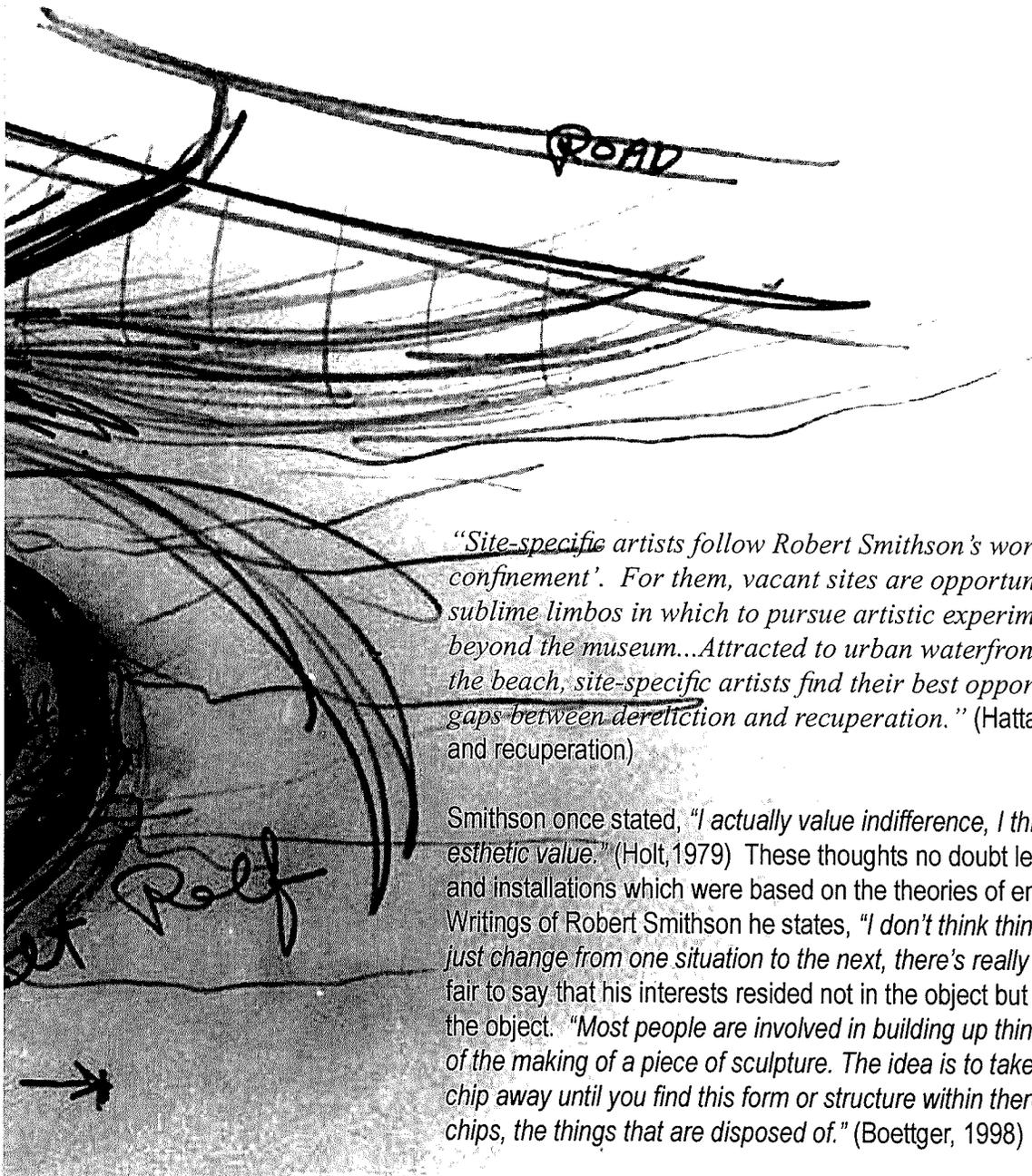


Red  
300 x 300

drawing by Robert Smithson  
www.robertsmithson.com

Salty  
Salt water

Black Rock



*"Site-specific artists follow Robert Smithson's work against 'cultural confinement'. For them, vacant sites are opportunities for intervention, sublime limbos in which to pursue artistic experiment on the wild side, beyond the museum...Attracted to urban waterfronts as surrealists were to the beach, site-specific artists find their best opportunities in the folds and gaps between dereliction and recuperation."* (Hattan 1995, Between dereliction and recuperation)

Smithson once stated, *"I actually value indifference, I think it's something that has aesthetic value."* (Holt, 1979) These thoughts no doubt led to his strong associations and installations which were based on the theories of entropy. In, From The Writings of Robert Smithson he states, *"I don't think things go in cycles. I think they just change from one situation to the next, there's really no return."* (Holt, 1979) It is fair to say that his interests resided not in the object but in the conditions created by the object. *"Most people are involved in building up things. Take the classical idea of the making of a piece of sculpture. The idea is to take a block of marble and then chip away until you find this form or structure within there. I'm more interested in the chips, the things that are disposed of."* (Boettger, 1998)

The increase of disorder or entropy with time is one example of what is called an arrow of time, something that distinguishes the past from the future, giving a direction of time. First, there is the thermodynamic of time, the

The beauty of the ruin lies in its ability to foster new memories, rather than attempting to cling to or revive those of the past. Therefore, the use of the metaphor becomes somewhat inappropriate, blurring the idea of the ruin as an evolving landscape. Its use is an attempt to appeal to popular sentiments of loss and identity and freeze a moment in time. It begins to disregard the processes of decay, which brought the ruin to its present state and continue to have effect. Perhaps the metaphor's greatest shortcoming is that it mitigates any chance to express our own stories.

That is not to say that the use of metaphor can not appear in site specific installations and constructions, but that it does not necessarily have to conform to a prior use of the site. It may look ahead to the future of the site or become an abstraction of the story which the artist has witnessed. The landscape transforms into a gallery of personal response, not just in the physical sense but also in the psychological sense. Its empty space starts to harbour these responses in a manner which gives the ruin a type of rebirth, in both physical manifestations and personal gestures. These personal gestures are the ones which create our deepest understandings of place.

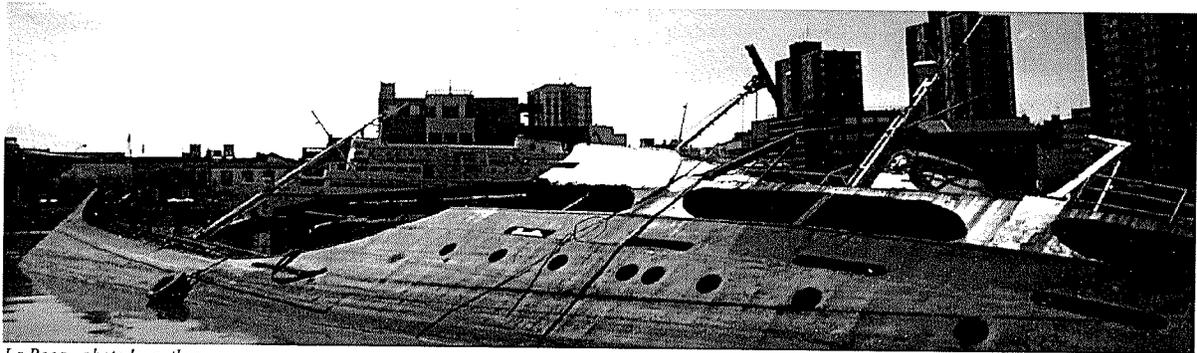
The ruin provides the artist with the perfect platform to associate and incorporate the element of time into their art works. It allows the piece to become a part of the immediate (recognizable) landscape, yet still adopt an anonymous timeframe of creation. Unknown velocities of entropy may transform it into an indistinguishable object within the landscape, or create an object of overwhelming contrast. It may appear as a relatively new art work or begin to take on features of aging in a way that connects it more to the lifeline of the ruin itself.

which the universe is expanding rather than contracting. (Hawking, 1988)

The artwork's primary intended effect may change or change relative to the ruin in ways which begin to give the work a completely new meaning. This is typically impossible in a controlled setting such as the traditional gallery space unless the work is intentionally weathered by artificial means. The ruin allows for the natural processes of decay to be superimposed upon the life of the artwork, which allows for the work to 'ripen'. This ripening of the piece is something that allows for a broad range of audience appreciation and understanding, as we all conceive of ruin and time in different ways. Whether or not it is the intention of the piece to be site-specific or singular in expression, the artist must realize the powerful nature of the ruin and respect that context and the processes of time cannot be ignored.

The artist must also begin to challenge the visual nature of art and the dominant power of the eye over the other senses. David Michael Levin; in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* states, "*I think it is appropriate to challenge the hegemony of vision in the ocularcentrism of our culture. And I think we need to examine very critically the character of vision that predominates today in our world. We urgently need a diagnosis of the psychosocial pathology of everyday seeing-- and a critical understanding of ourselves, as visionary beings*". (Levin, 1993)

**Artworks within the landscape of ruin can no longer be viewed as an instant visual image, for they must adapt and be read not as object but as landscape. And to be read as landscape they must engage the context of the ruin, which speaks in a multi-sensual language. Installation and site-specific pieces must awaken the sensuous side of our understanding.**



*La Boca, -photo by author*

Conclusion to the narrative....

I find the ships sitting silently, waiting to be discovered. I have entered the waterfront from the heart of this industrial neighbourhood, from a place where I had been warned not to venture into. There are no signs of tourism here- no people carousing artisan shops, no plastic patio furniture and certainly no simulation of La Boca's character. This is La Boca.

Once again the quality of the space has changed. The air seems to have aged, smells of rust and moisture seem to permeate through my skin. Even the most subtle of sounds seems to ressonate until hauntingly clear. As if I could close my eyes and navigate this place guided only by smells and sounds.

I cross Pedro de Mendoza and drift towards the line of ships. From here I can vaguely see the start of the tourist zone, but it appears only as a background image, consumed by the landcape of the decaying waterfront.

I find myself back at that abandoned farmstead, ten thousand kilometres away, in a place where time transcends reality. In a place that I can not describe in words. I realize now that it is not the ships I have been searching for. It has been the experience.

## **La Boca, Buenos Aires, Argentina**



# **buenos aires. republica argentina.**

## **34s36 , 58w27**

**location:** Rio de la Plata, Argentina.

**surface:** 200 km<sup>2</sup>

**population:** 2,965,403 (city); 12,594,974 (metropolitan area), 9.1% of total population

**ethnic mix:** 95% white, 5% other.

**population distribution by sex:** 55% women, 45% men

**life expectancy:** women 78.56 years, men 71.13years

**total number of homes:** 978 330

**average number of inhabitants:** 2.9

**religion:** Roman Catholic 90% (>20% practising), Protestant 2%, Jewish 2%, other 6%

**languages:** Spanish (official), English, Italian, German, French

**average January temp:** 29°C (84°F).

**average July temp:** 14°C (57°F).

**annual rainfall:** 950mm (37 inches).

**Barrio La Boca**









## condensed history

**1536** - Pedro de Mendoza arrives from Spain seeking riches of gold and silver and establishes the first fort - ***Puerto de Nuestra Senora de Santa Maria Del Buen Ayre*** on the west bank of the Riachuelo river.

Five years later, after the destruction of the city by the native peoples, the settlement is moved to Asuncion, Paraguay.

**1580** - Juan de Garay sails from Asuncion to establish a new settlement near the earlier fort. The first port of Buenos Aires named ***Santa Maria de los Buenos Aires*** is now permanent. The settlement receives little help from Spain and relies heavily on the trade of contrabands.

"Doors must be opened to the land and the land must flourish, its fruit must be useful to the nation and to other nations of the world."

**1607** - The port is given its first improvements to provide a mooring area to unload goods.

**1806** - British troops invade but are stopped by the colonial militia. Spain does not send help.

**1810** - May 25. Armed members of the town council demand the resignation of the Spanish viceroy.

**1818** - July 9. Official independence.

**Puerto Santa María de los Buenos Aires**  
**1580**

**Puerto Madero**  
**1887-1897**

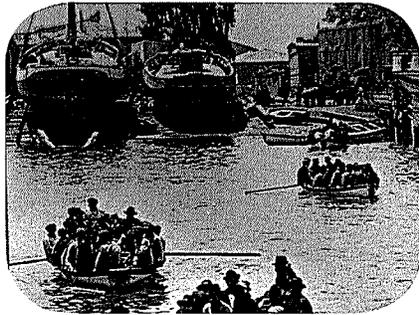
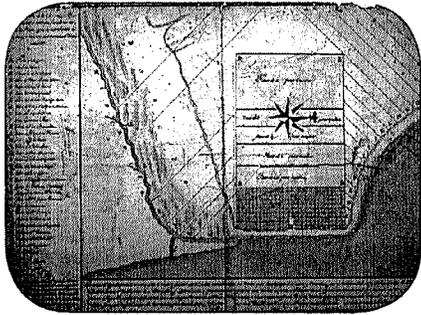
**Puerto Nuevo**  
**1911-1925 (present)**



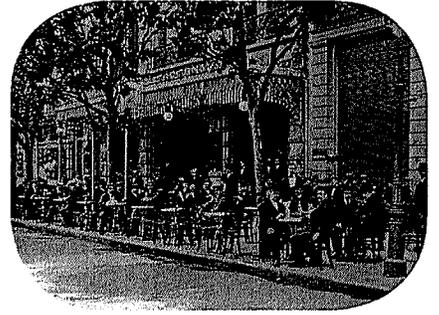
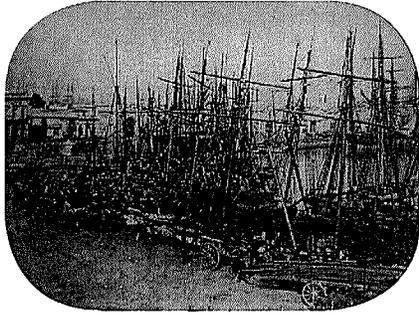
*Puerto Madero - photo by author*

A total of 170 hectares of Puerto Madero has now been redeveloped. Fifty-five hectares has been developed as commercial uses such as restaurants and hotels, and the rest as public greenspace, recreational boat docks, pedestrian streets, avenues and boulevards.

## **port development**



*historic La Boca,  
photos courtesy of Eduardo Maestriperi*



## **La Boca, Buenos Aires (the Mouth)**

When Garay founded the city of Buenos Aires in 1580, the only shelter that was available for the vessels that came near the Pampas coast was the Riachuelo, a stream that flowed into the Rio de la Plata.

For many years there were only masts to be seen along these coasts. The land was low lying and easily flooded when struck by the South-easterly wind typical of this region. For two centuries La Boca was a settlement with some huts and a few general stores where drinks were sold to the patrons. In the middle of the last century the vessel movement began to increase and a marine neighbourhood emerged next to the Vuelta de Rocha. From 1830-1850 immigrants began to arrive, many from Genoa, Italy. By 1887, 25 000 people lived in the neighbourhood, 70% having work related to the activity of the port.

They built their houses with wood and metal sheets on piles. This was an important form of spontaneous architecture, which is still used today. As was the origin of their colourfulness which was derived from the paint they retrieved from the ships. Tenement housing sprung up to house the workforce of the district. Unfamiliar dialects were spoken and the then repudiated tango was played. At the beginning of this century the railway and tramway arrived and the neighbourhood filled with cranes, shipyards and chimneys as evidenced by the abandoned buildings, vacant lots, and decaying ships that compose much of the landscape. With the construction of Puerto Madero and later Puerto Nuevo the marine Boca disappeared, leaving behind only traces of its story.

It has always been a neighbourhood rich in culture and pride. The neighbourhood is home to the Boca Juniors football club, the working class team, and there is a fierce pride and love for the game and the club. The blue and yellow colours of the official jersey were derived from the flag of a Swedish ship.

Prior to the economic crisis of 2002, the neighbourhood was undergoing a process of urban renewal, due to fact that La Boca's economic structure once relied solely on the industry of the port and related activities. The main attempt of renewal now seems to be focused on tourism and is concentrated in the existing tourist zone.

*I see ghosts which live. Rusted hulls once reflecting sunlight. Chipped concrete and fraying rope. A silent beacon. I see a cabin door on failing hinges and envision a world of navigational maps and tin coffee cups. Not the homeless man who emerges from his late sleep, fending off hunger by picking through the remains left by comfortable tourists.*

The ruins of La Boca are accepted as a natural part of its history. But this acceptance does not equal understanding. Understanding comes when one is able to form a reaction. True reaction comes through experience. This is where the process of ruination becomes landscape. The modern urban ruin ceases to exist as an object in the landscape and becomes a moment in the experience. It is this experience which is missing or misinterpreted in the barrio La Boca.

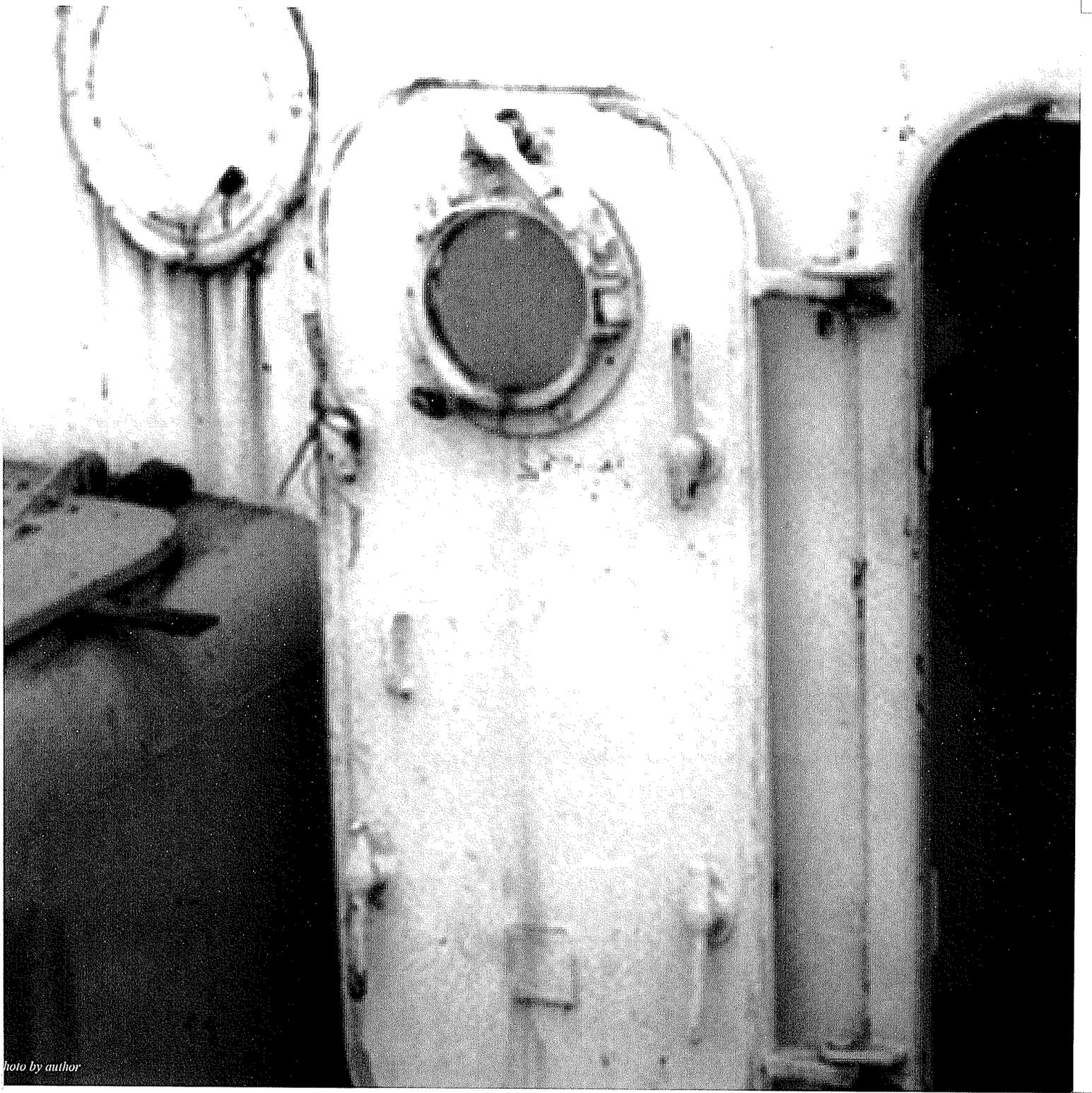
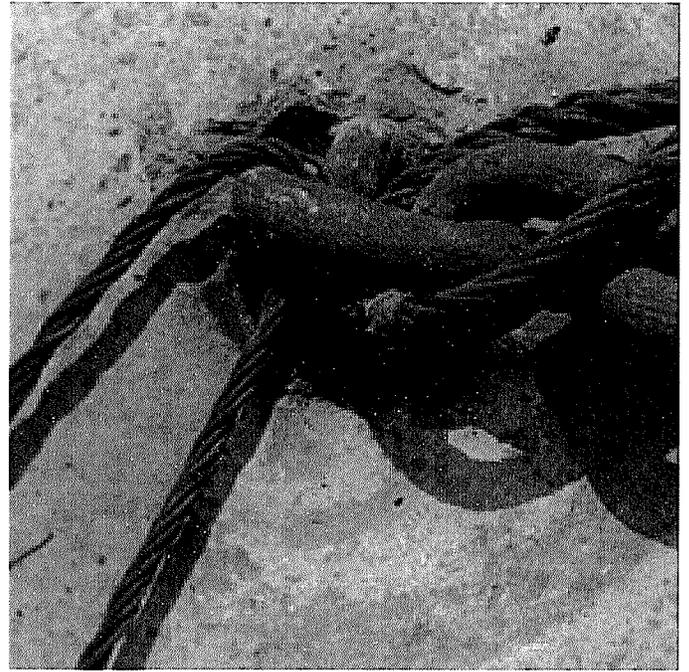


photo by author

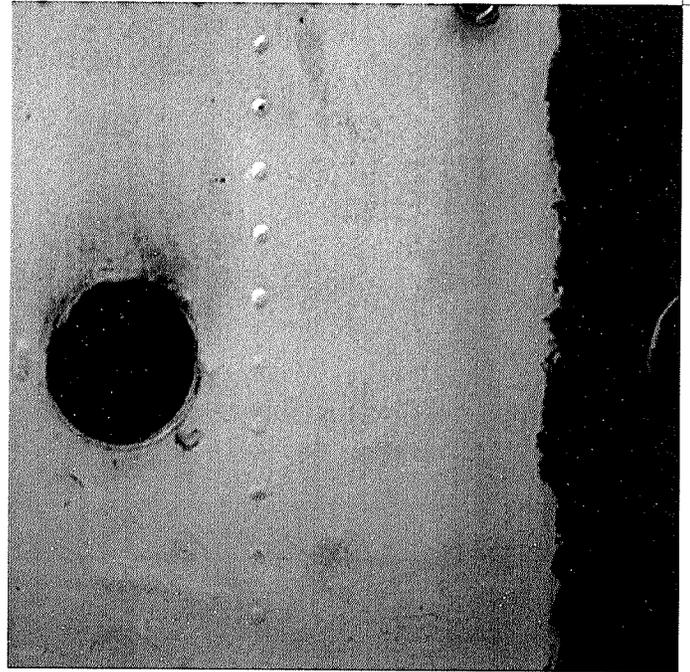
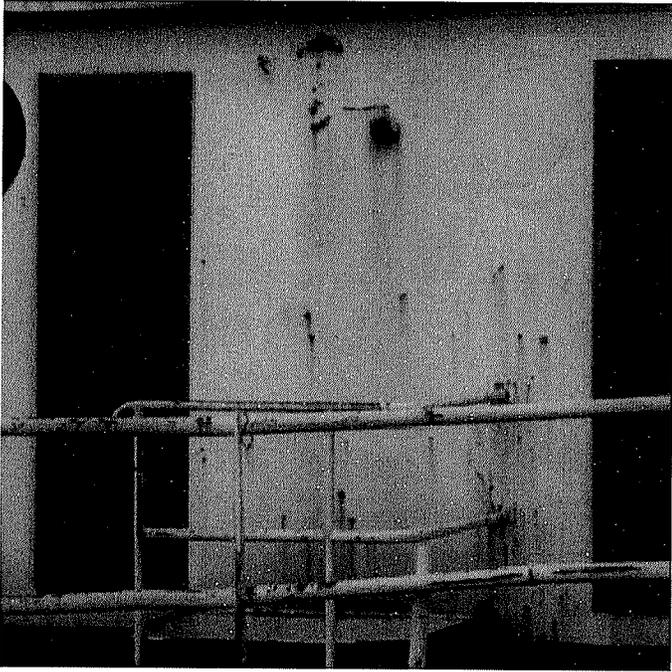


*“Quinquela Martin painted a neighbourhood: this one. slowly started painting a boat on a canvas, moving his La Boca was the picture he was painting or whether it*



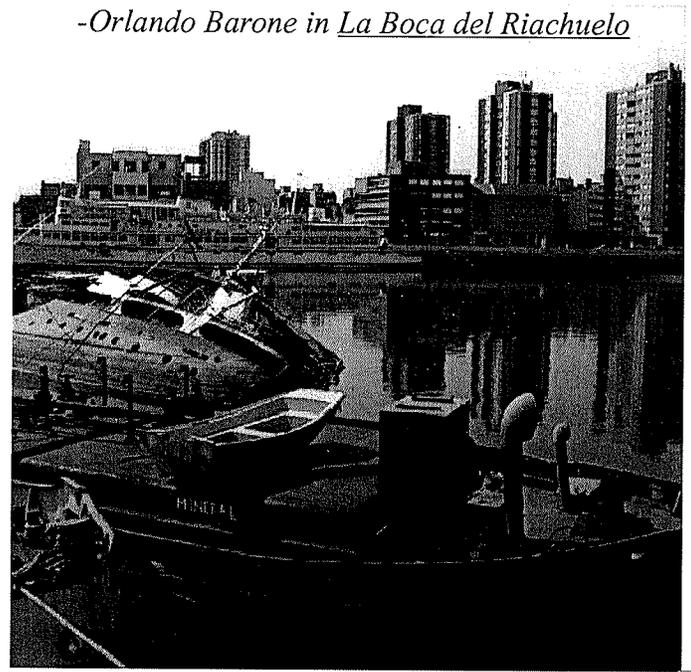
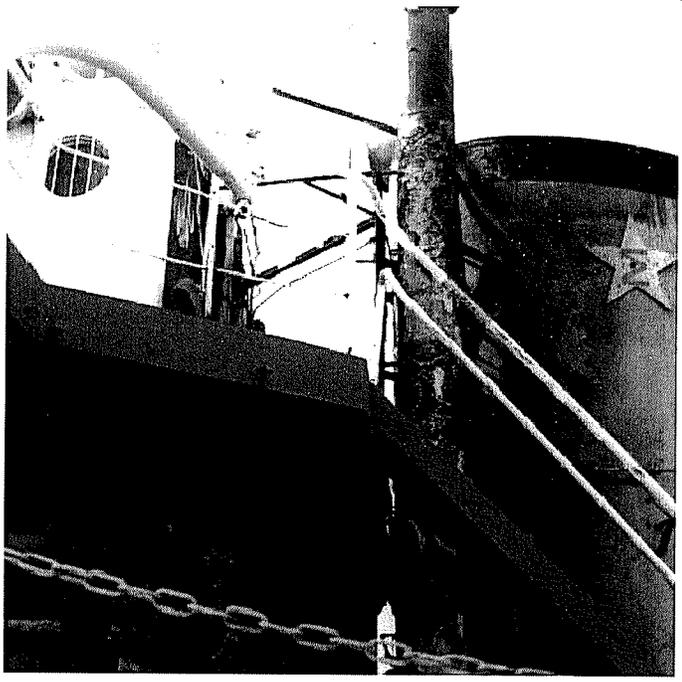
*photos by author*

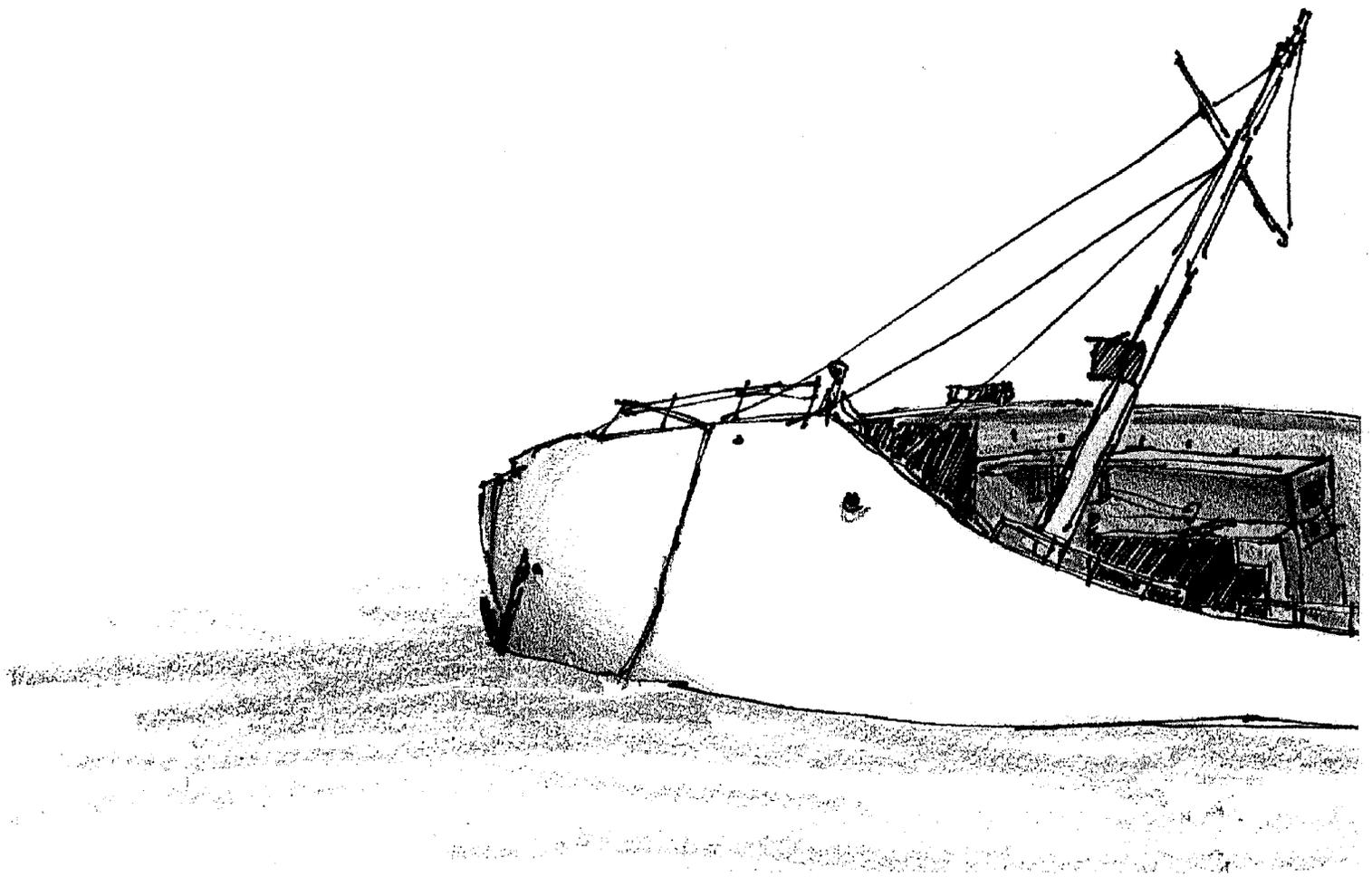




*He must be the only painter who, without noticing, brush so that in the end he did not know whether was the "barrio" that had got into his painting,"*

*-Orlando Barone in La Boca del Riachuelo*



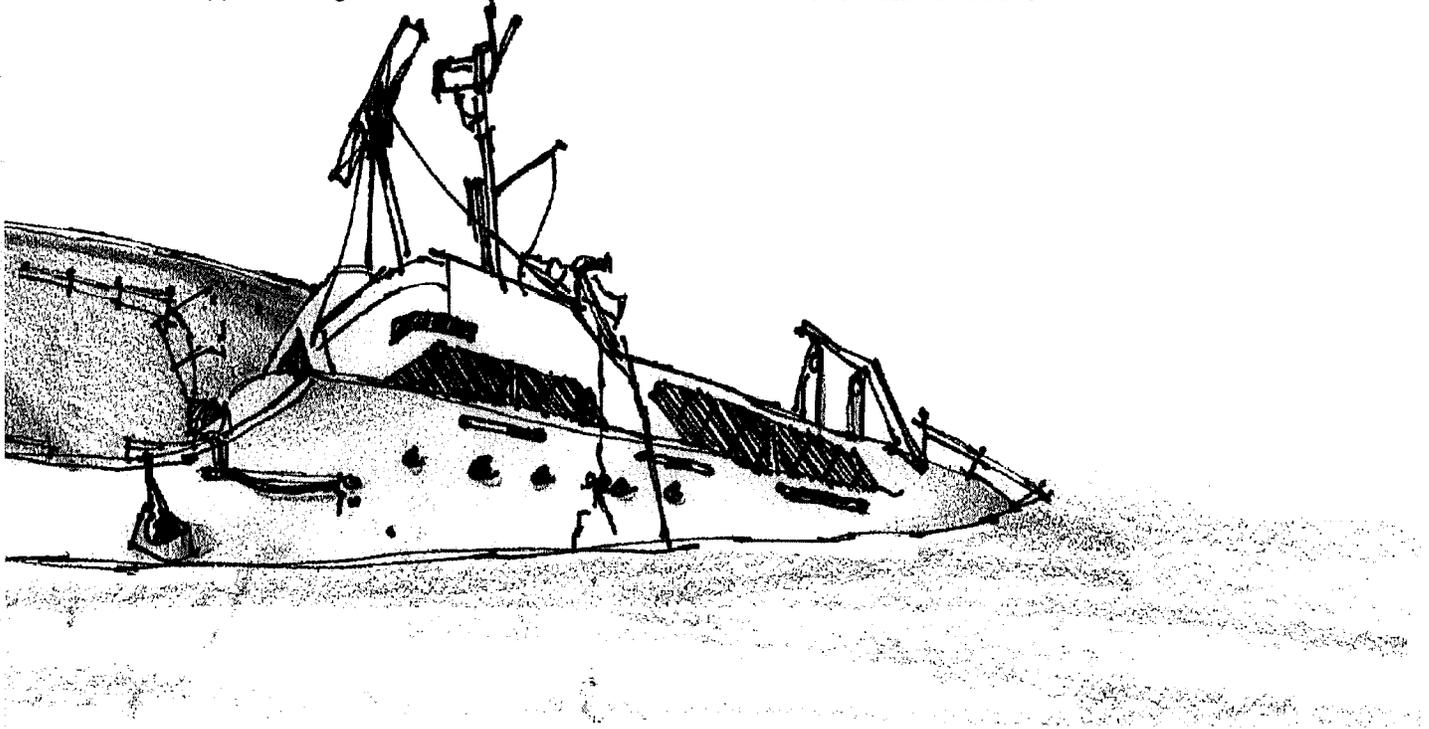


The final project proposed is one that suggests an alternate strategy for dealing with ruins, and redefines or questions the notion of public social space.

At the site-specific level, there is an attempt to form a new understanding and appreciation of cultural interaction and the industrial waterfront. To understand not only why this neighbourhood grew in the manner that it did, but also why parts of it now die.

It is the intention to provide the participant with the opportunity to explore and experience the essence of ruin and form an intimate response. **The nature of that response is not important**, only that there has been one and that a clearer understanding of context has been achieved.

I envision the proposed project acting as a catalyst for future re-enhancement of this particular landscape of ruin- a strategy that could be applied along a four-kilometre stretch of waterfront with similar conditions.



# **site analysis**

## site map landmarks

señales de la correspondencia del sitio

1. **Riachuelo River** El Río de Riachuelo
2. **Rocha's Turn** Vuelta de Rocha
3. **Nicolas Avellaneda Bridge** Puente Nicolas Avellaneda
4. **Museum of Beautiful Arts** Museo de Bellas Artes de La Boca
5. **Boca Juniors Stadium** Estadio del Club Boca Juniors
6. **Caminito Street** Calle Caminito
7. **Proa Foundation** Fundación Proa
8. **water pumping station** la estación del bombeo agua
9. **vacant industrial building** el edificio industrial vacío
10. **vacant lot** el sitio vacío
11. **port** puerto
12. **ship graveyard** cementerio del barco



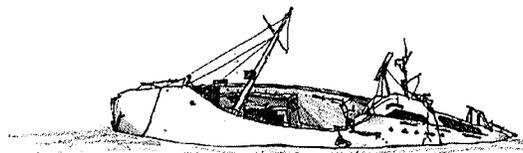
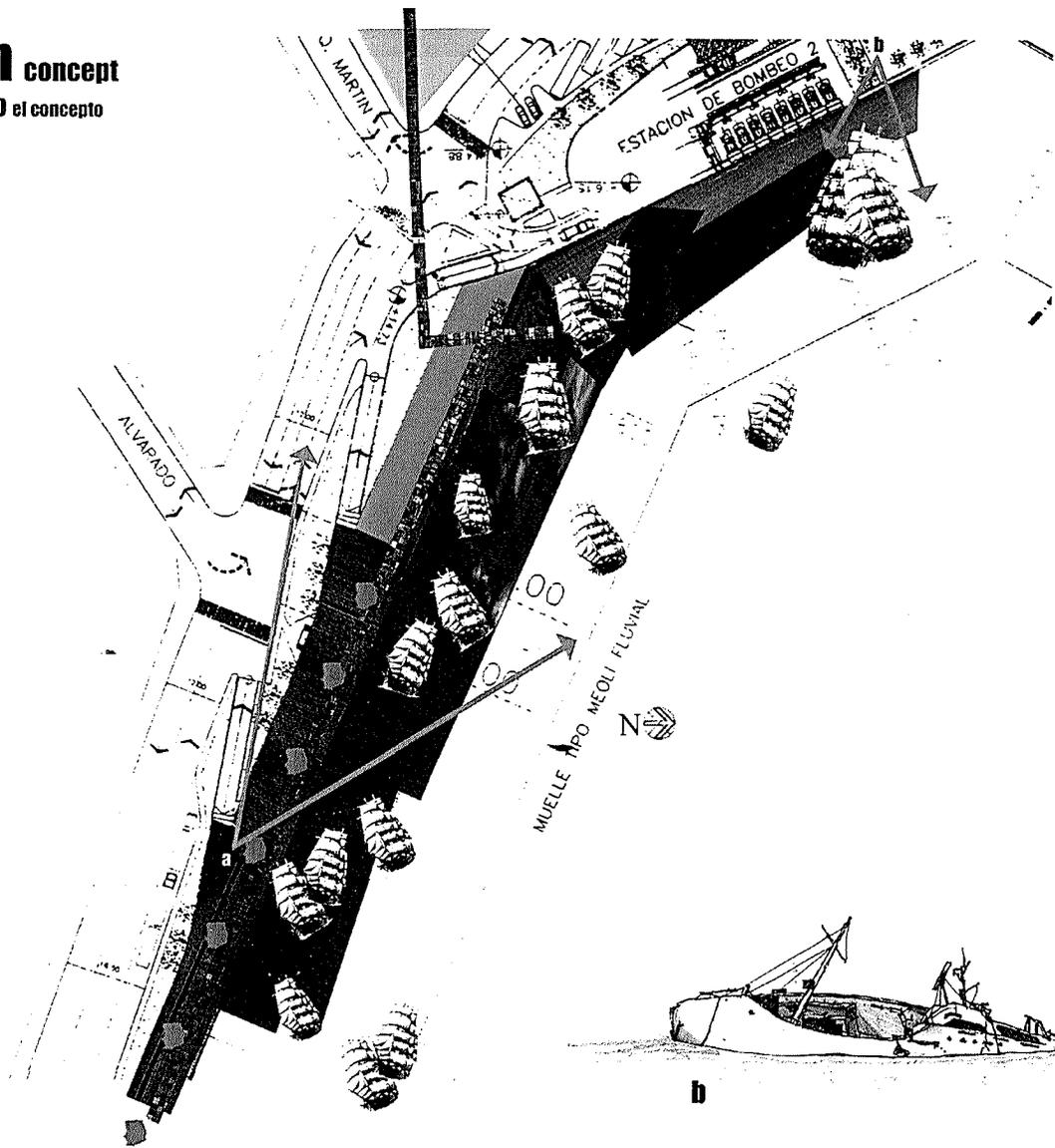
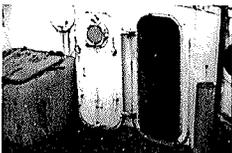
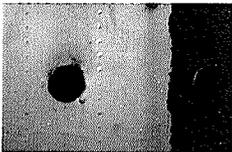
### **elements within this landscape of ruin.**

A polluted river, a derelict port and an abandoned industrial building  
A solemn concrete wharf with a line of floating/sinking/sunk ships. A vacant city lot with traces of structures and a silenced metallurgy shop. The residents of La Boca.

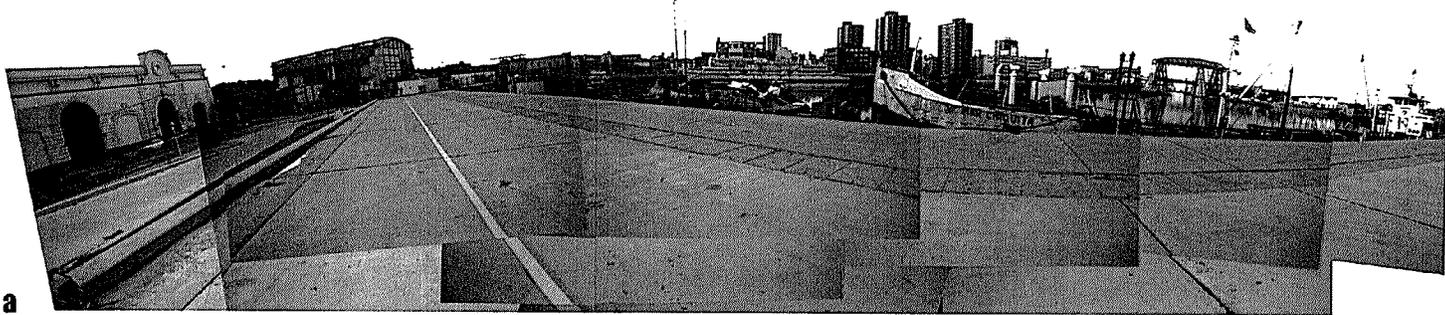
These pieces form the landscape of ruin. They are the parts which, in one way or another, form the whole setting for the experience. Each piece provides a glimpse of the story yet it is not until one moves throughout all, that the experience is complete.

# port site plan concept

el plan del sitio del puerto el concepto



b



a

### **the river**

The Riachuelo River marks the southern limit of the city of Buenos Aires. It has been partially rectified and channeled and its outlet location has been modified. The Riachuelo is sixty-four kilometres long, but not more than one hundred metres wide and three metres deep. Its behavior is similar to that of all the rivers of the pampean plain: slow, of irregular flow, with an almost nonexistent slope down to the outlet, and is influenced by the tides of the Río de la Plata. This explains its difficulty to absorb and to purify the high levels of pollutants. Because of industrial contamination, caused by tanneries, cold storage plants, etc., it has become a pestilent stream, littered with the remains of sunken ships. At the moment, it is undergoing a process of recovery.

### **the ships**

The ships are by far the most powerful iconic element in this landscape of ruin. Alone, they dominate the visual identity of La Boca and offer the greatest clues as to the origin of this place. There would have been nothing without this port. Buenos Aires itself would not exist. Yet they are the icons which seem the most undefined amid the dying port. The only connection one has with the ships is visual, seen only from the redeveloped sections of the waterfront, which cater to the tourist trade. The view does not provide any sense of intimacy, and indeed the ships just look like ruins.

# site plan

## el plan de sitio

REFERENCIAS  
 1. REGULACIONES MUNICIPALES DE ZONIFICACION  
 2. PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA

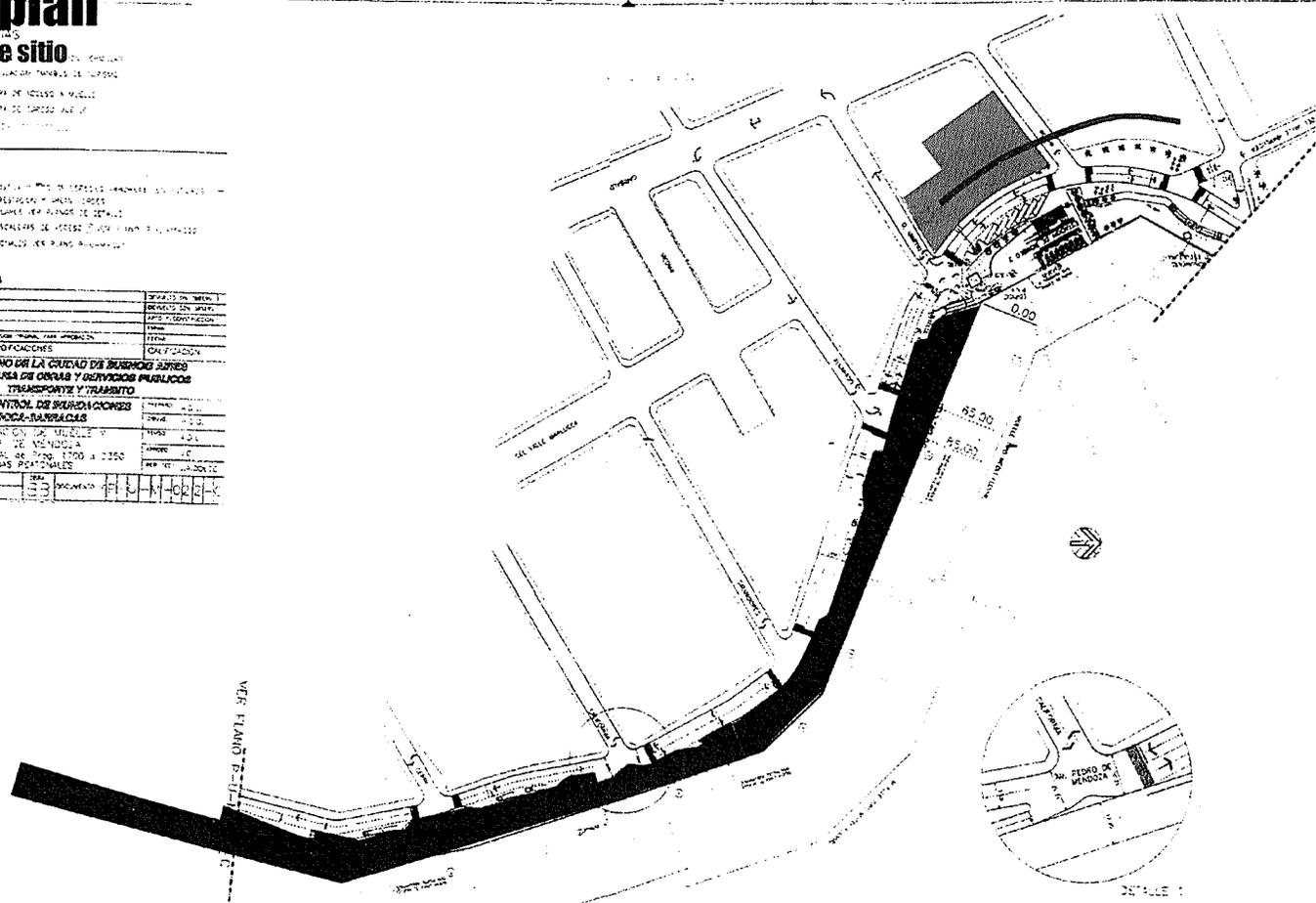
- NOTAS
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  2. PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
  3. PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
  4. PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
  5. PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
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CONFORME A CUBA

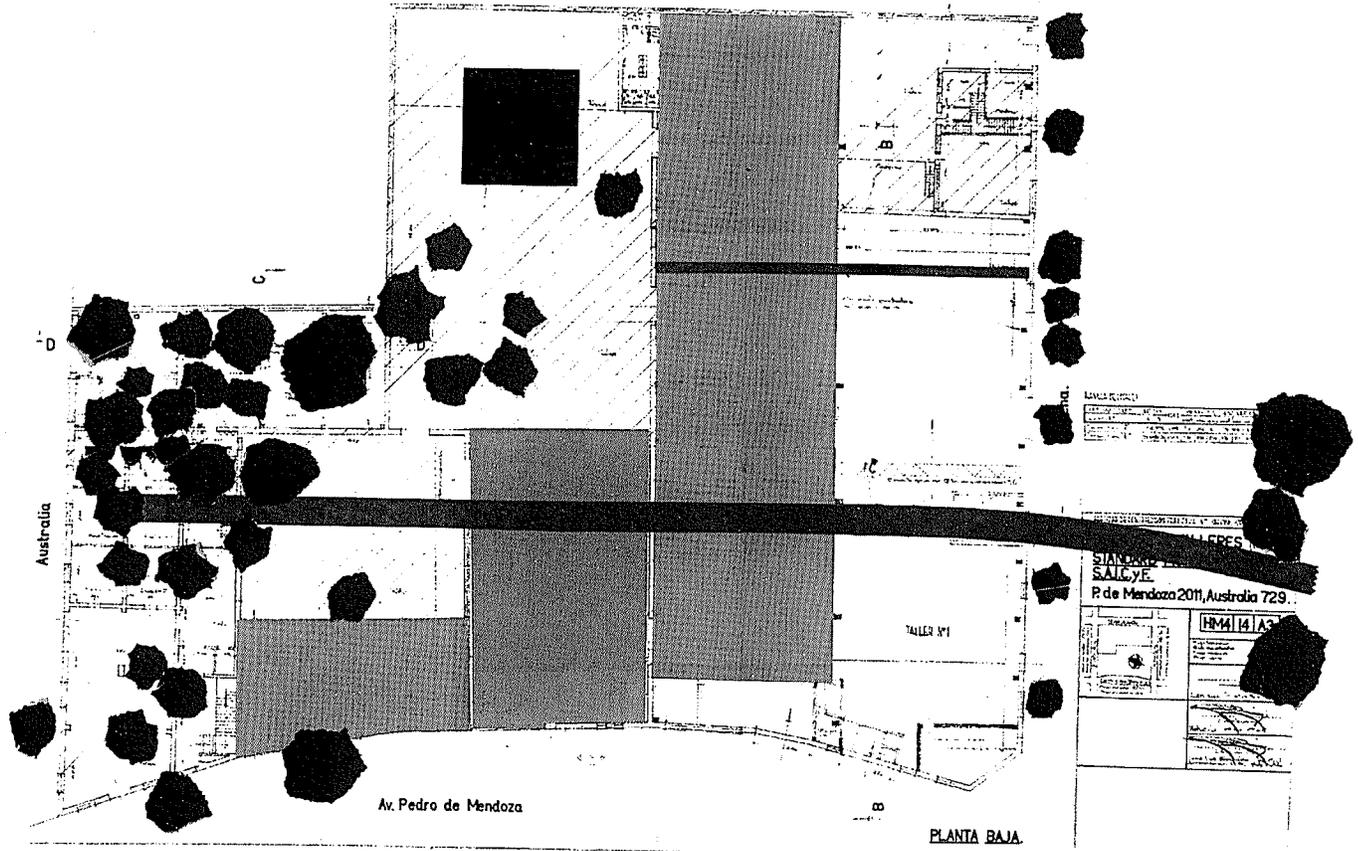
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02	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
03	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
04	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
05	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
06	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
07	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
08	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
09	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA
10	PROYECTO DE PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL DE LA CIUDAD DE MENDOZA

SECRETARIA DE LA CIUDAD DE BUENOS AIRES  
 SECRETARIA DE OBRAS Y SERVICIOS PUBLICOS  
 TRANSPORTES Y TRANSITO  
 DISEÑO Y CONTROL DE SERVICIOS URBANOS  
 DE LA SOCIEDAD ARGENTINA  
 PLANTA GENERAL DE PISO 1100 A 1150  
 SERVICIOS PERSONALES

ESCALA 1:2000



**lot site plan** concept  
 el plan del sitio del terreno el concepto

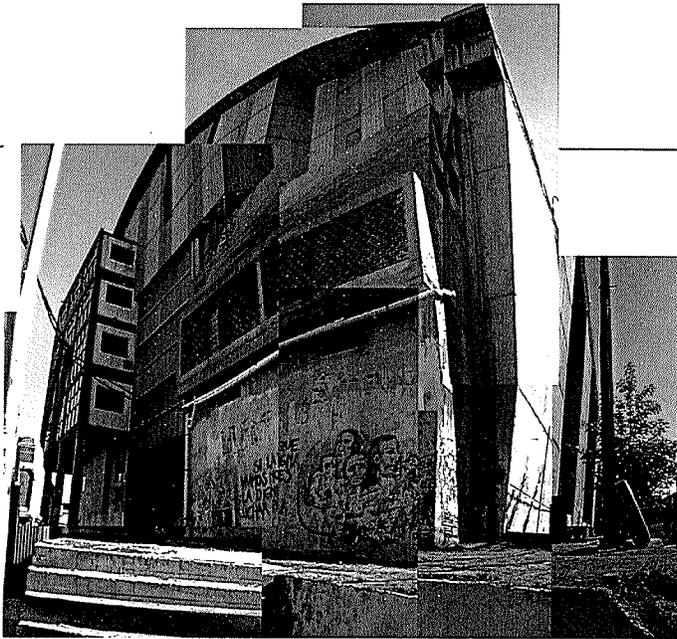


facade  
 order



# building facade

fachada del edificio



PARTIDA DE CONTRIBUCION TERRITORIAL N° 98305

PLANO DE OBRA

Proyectado por: *[Signature]*

**STANDARD MOTOR ARGENTINA S.A**

Calle: Don Pedro de Mendoza N° 2501-II

CORRUBO DE LOCALIZACION

ZONIFICACION: **II (R4) A3**

Superficie del Terreno: m<sup>2</sup> 043 83  
Superficie Cubierta: m<sup>2</sup> 043 83  
Superficie Libre: m<sup>2</sup> 043 83

CONFORME A LA LEY N° 17.319  
DE CONSTRUCCION DE EDIFICIOS Y OBRAS  
DE CONSTRUCCION EN EL TERRITORIO URBANO  
DE LA CIUDAD DE BUENOS AIRES

CONSTRUIDO POR: *[Signature]*

CONSTRUIDO POR: *[Signature]*

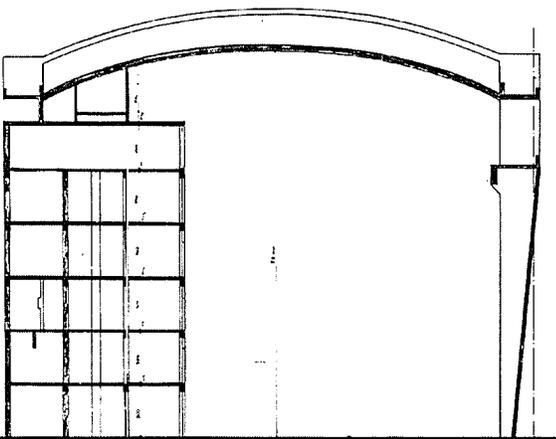
CONFORME (Ej. 1.º)

USO: *[Blank]*

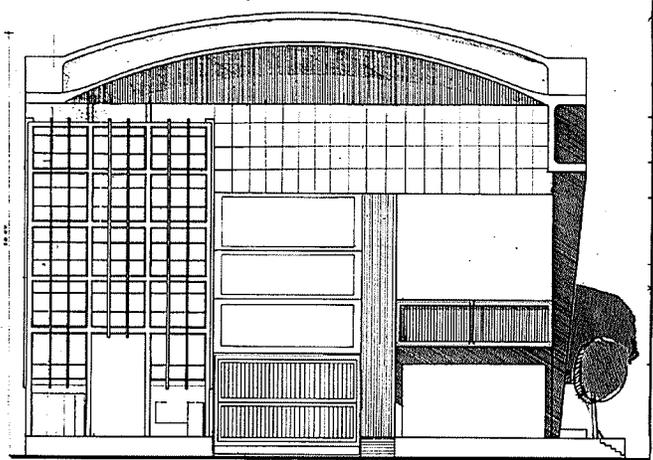
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FECHA: 19/04/2011

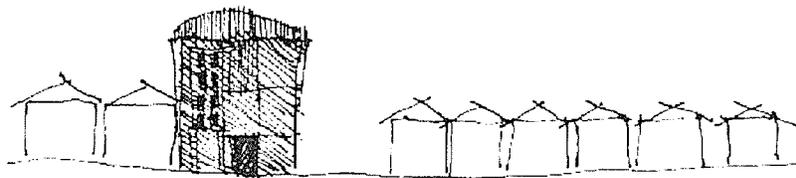
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CORTE A-A



FRENTA



### **structure**

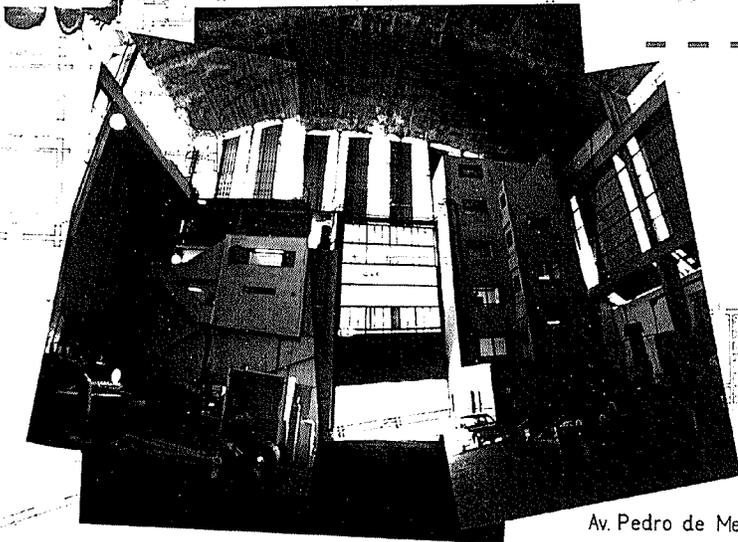
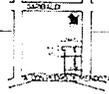
The abandoned metallurgy shop is in a constant state of flux, its use changing in response to the nature of decay on the structure. Changes in lighting, acoustics and spatial volumes will force function to adapt or transform.

In the past 50 years, the building has undergone many facelifts and repairs. Most recently in 1979, when a new annex of offices was built onto the front elevation of the building. These office spaces are currently in use, but the shop area itself is vacant.

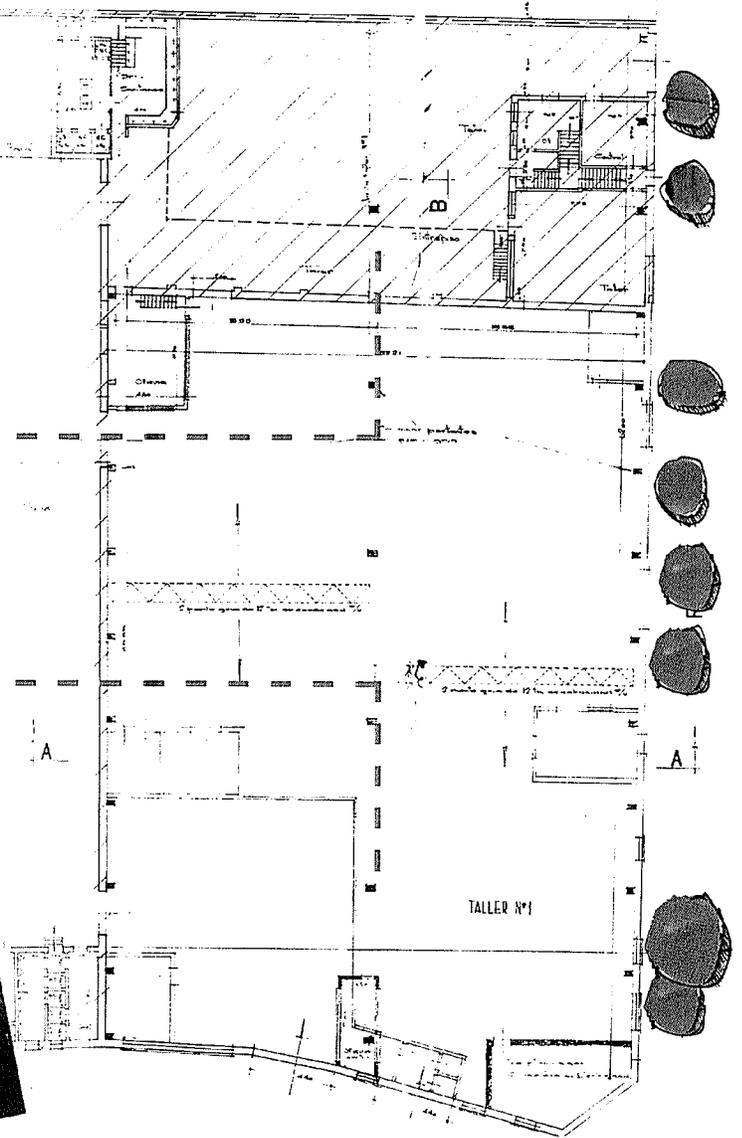


# building interior

interior del edificio



Av. Pedro de Mendoza

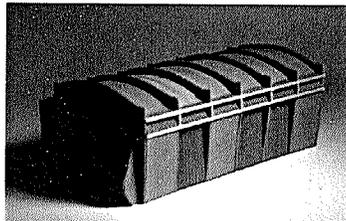


PLANTA BAJA

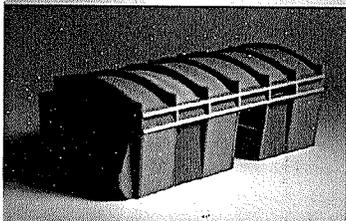
# light study stages of decay

el estudio ligero las etapas del decaimiento

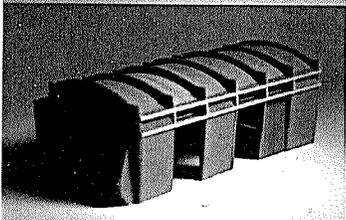
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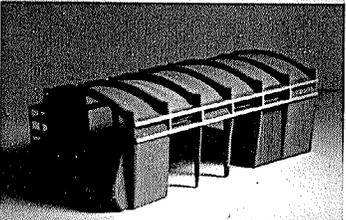
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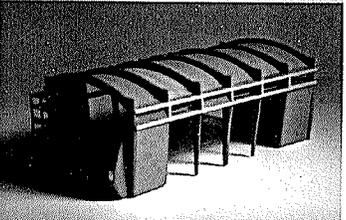
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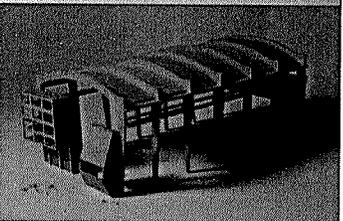
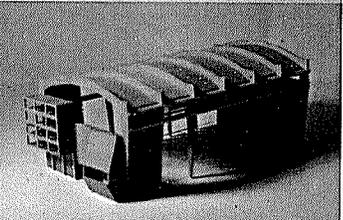
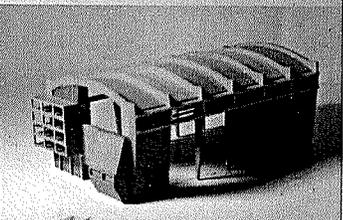
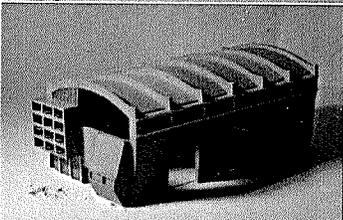
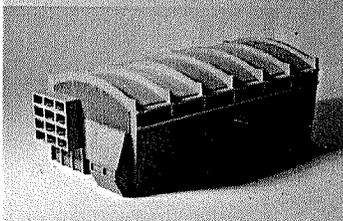
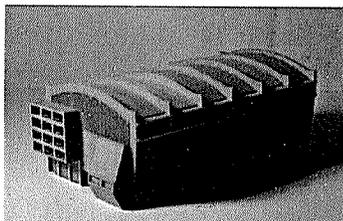
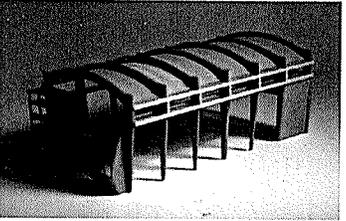
four



five

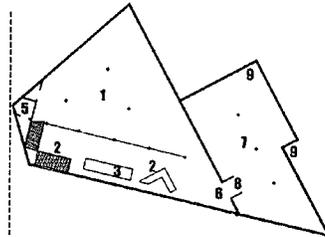
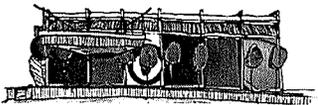
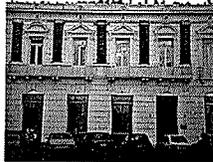
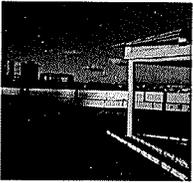


six



# PROA Foundation **bridge walkway**

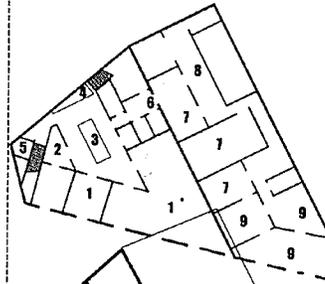
Fundación Proa el sendero de puente



## Planta Baja . Ground Floor

- 1 Sala de Exhibiciones . Exhibition Space
- 2 Recepción . Reception
- 3 Librería . Bookstore
- 4 Acceso 1er. piso . Access 1st floor
- 5 Ascensor . Elevator
- 6 Acceso Sala 2 . Access Room 2
- 7 Sala de Exhibiciones . Exhibition Space
- 8 Acceso desde Sala 1 . Access from Room 1
- 9 Acceso a área de depósito . Access to storage area

altura . ceiling height . 3,7m.  
la elevación . elevation . 0m.



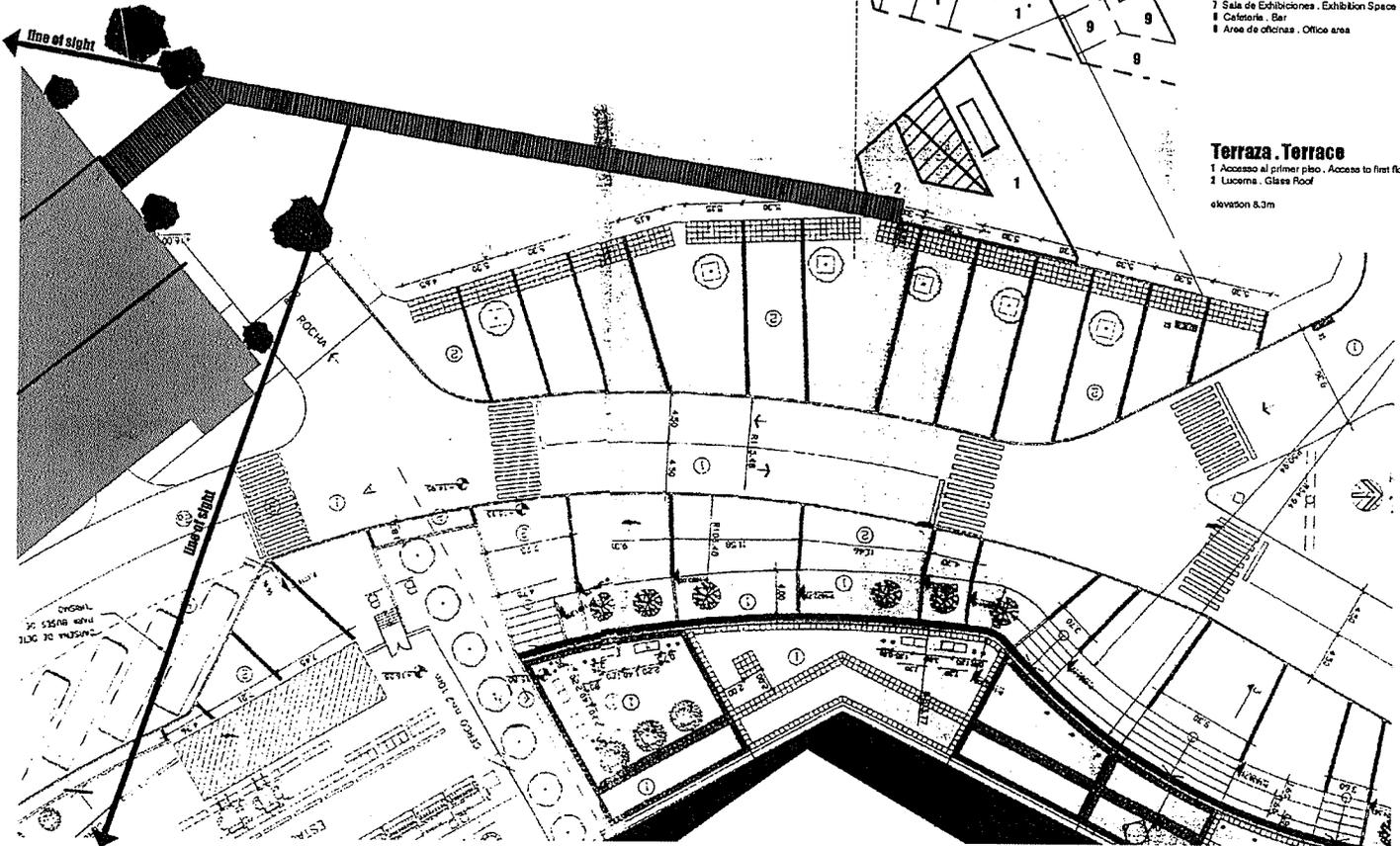
## Primo Piso . First Floor

- 1 Sala de Exhibiciones . Exhibition Space
- 2 Recepción . Reception
- 3 Mesa de lectura . Reading Table
- 4 Acceso a terraza . Access to terrace
- 5 Ascensor . Elevator
- 6 Acceso a cafetería y salas de exhibiciones . Access to bar and exhibition rooms
- 7 Sala de Exhibiciones . Exhibition Space
- 8 Cafetería . Bar
- 9 Área de oficinas . Office area

## Terraza . Terrace

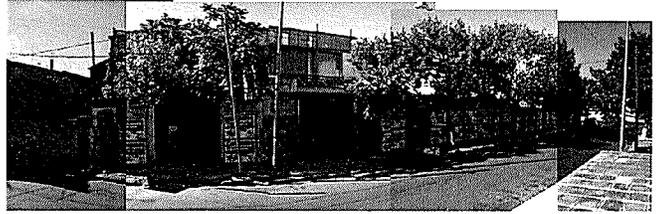
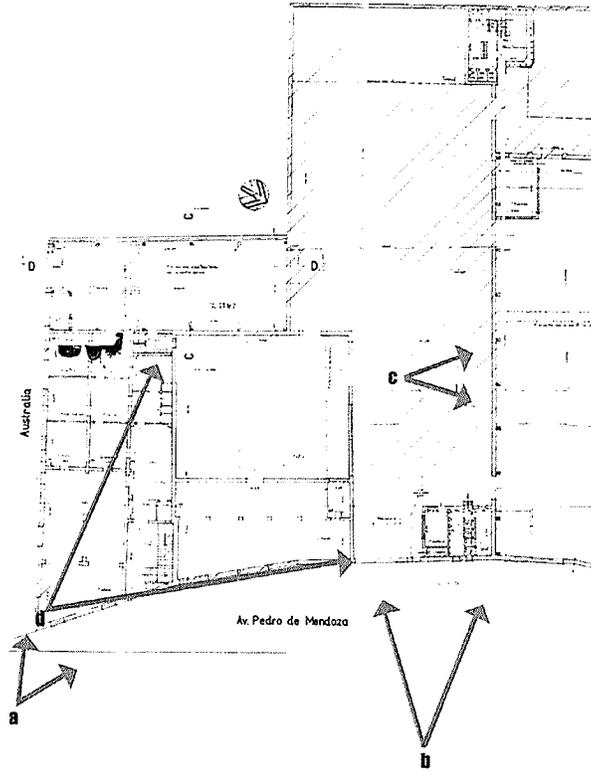
- 1 Acceso al primer piso . Access to first floor
- 2 Lucerna . Glass Roof

elevation 5,3m



# vacant lot and parking

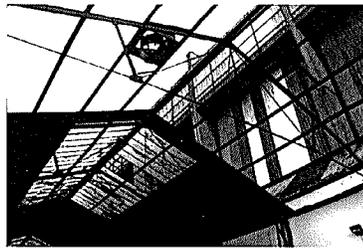
porción vacante y estacionamiento



a



b



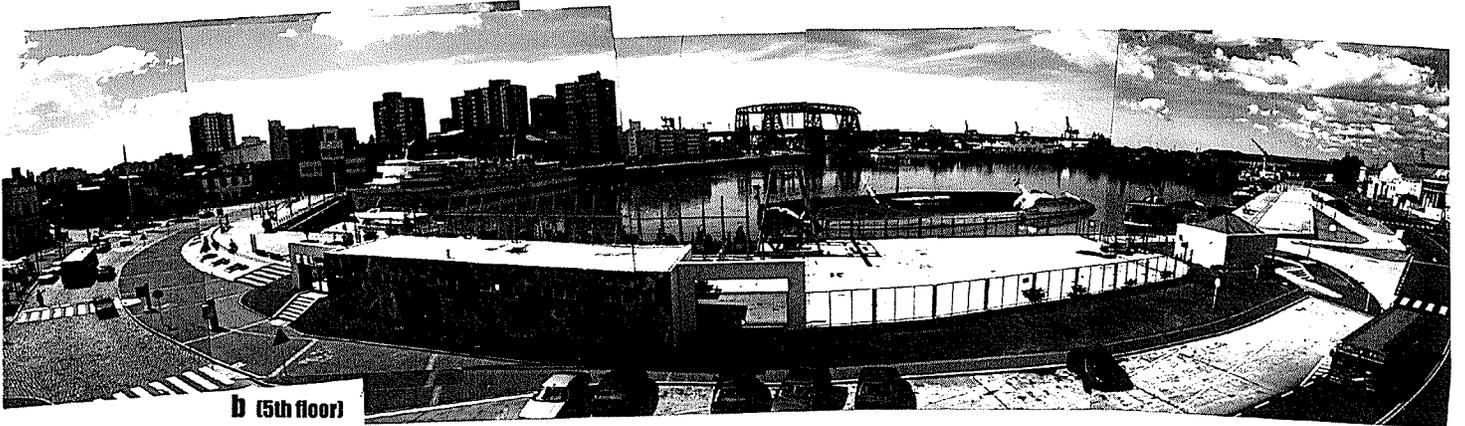
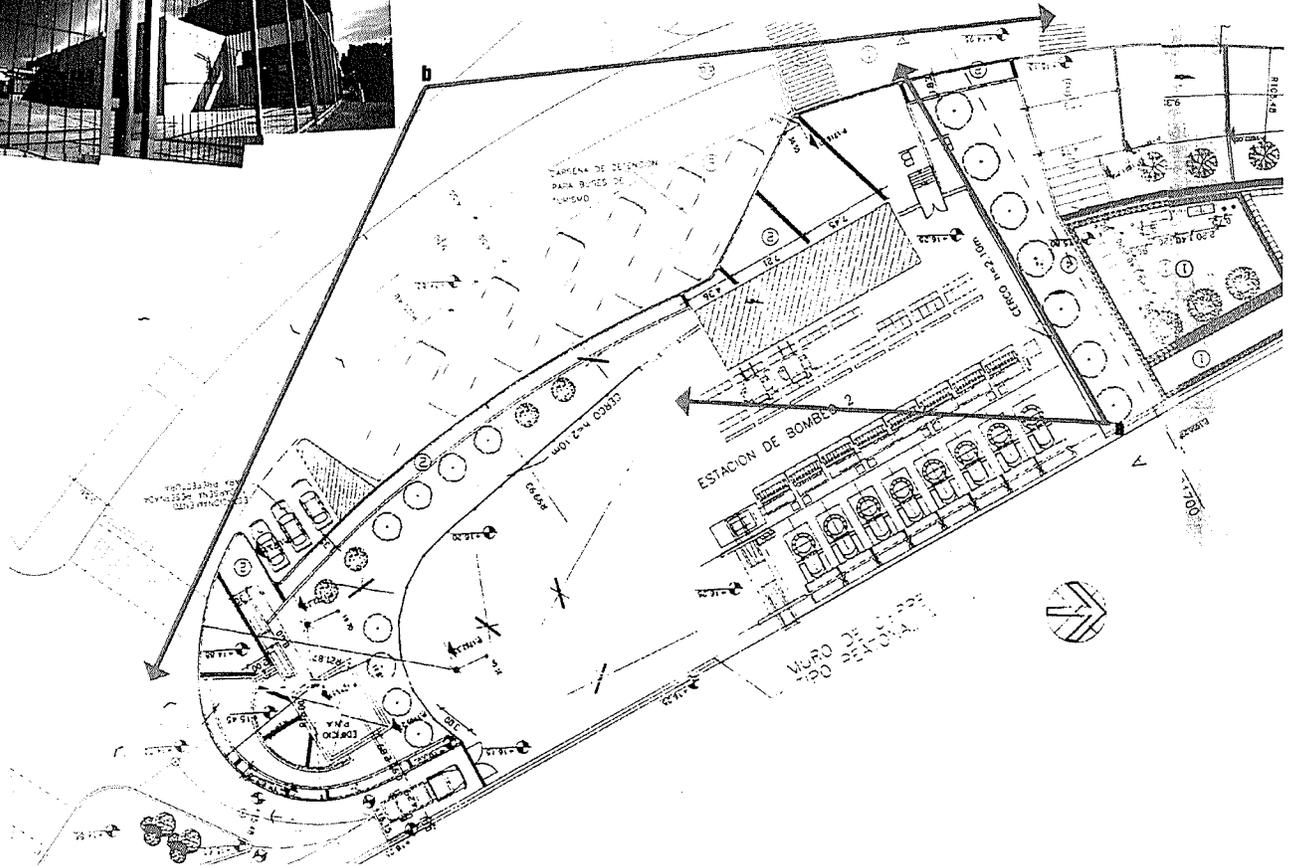
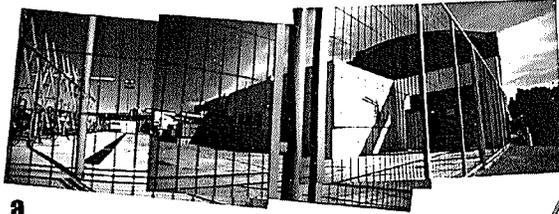
c

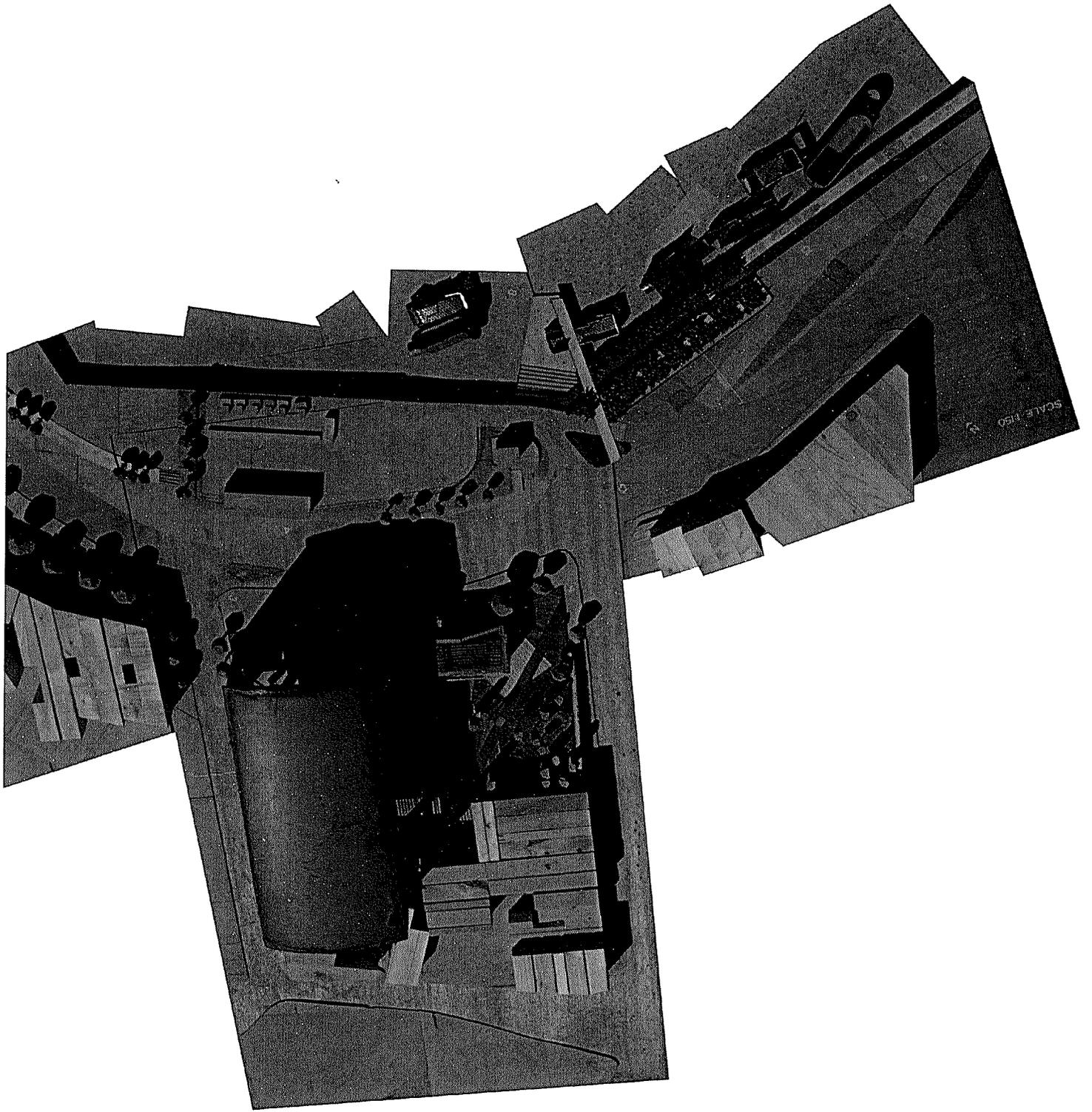


d

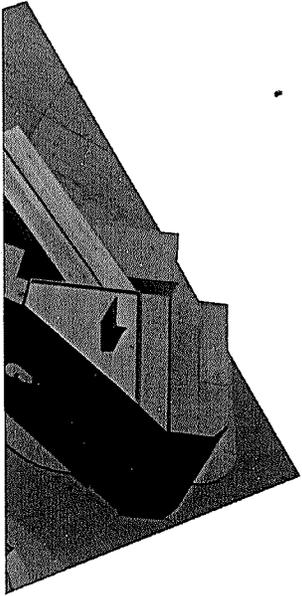
# water pumping station

la estación del bombeo agua





# **the design**



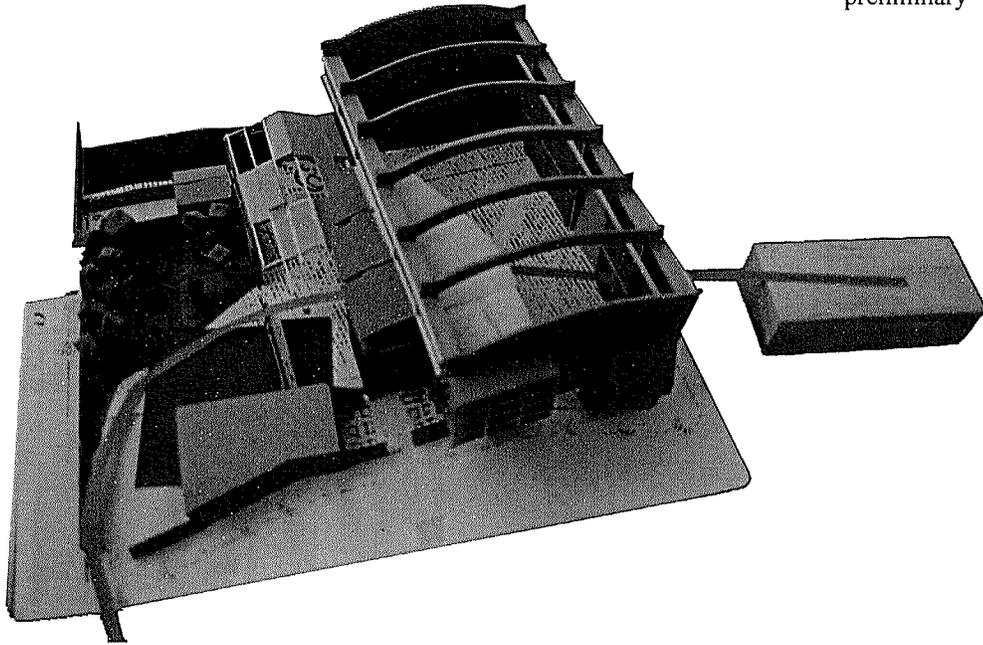
## **the physical model**

The model remained a valuable design tool throughout the project, becoming the medium with which to explore and articulate the various notions and ideas researched. It allowed for a stronger understanding of the physical manifestation of these ideas, and the direct implications of these ideas in a site specific context.

The selection of materials was critical to represent and express the richness of the site, and all the model parts were salvaged or recycled. The model itself was built and rebuilt, then torn apart and built again.

Constructed at a scale of 1:150, the model allowed for the landscape of ruin to be understood at a more intimate level, informing a strategy for design- revealing what was to be touched and what was to be left unchanged .

preliminary



## development and material selection



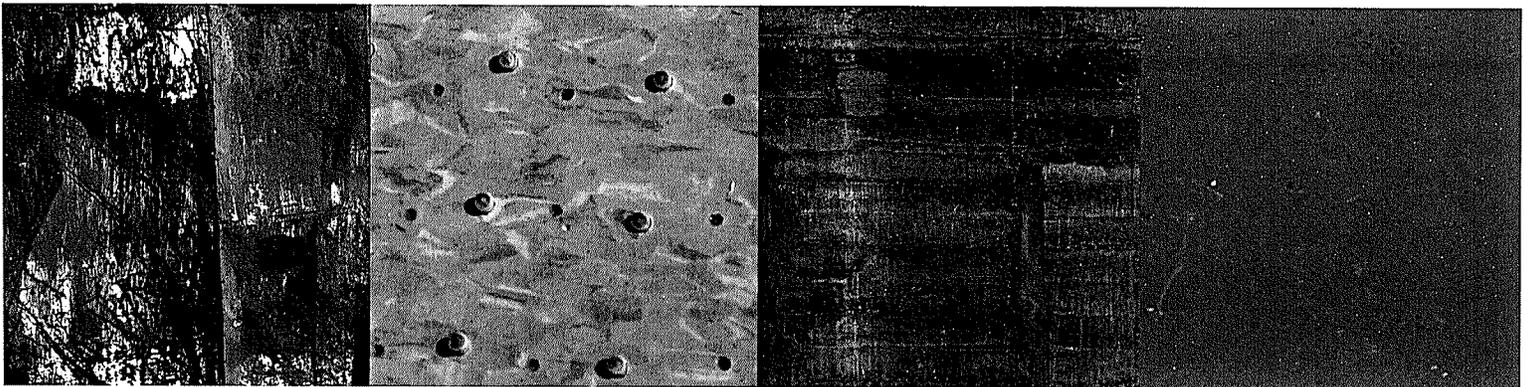
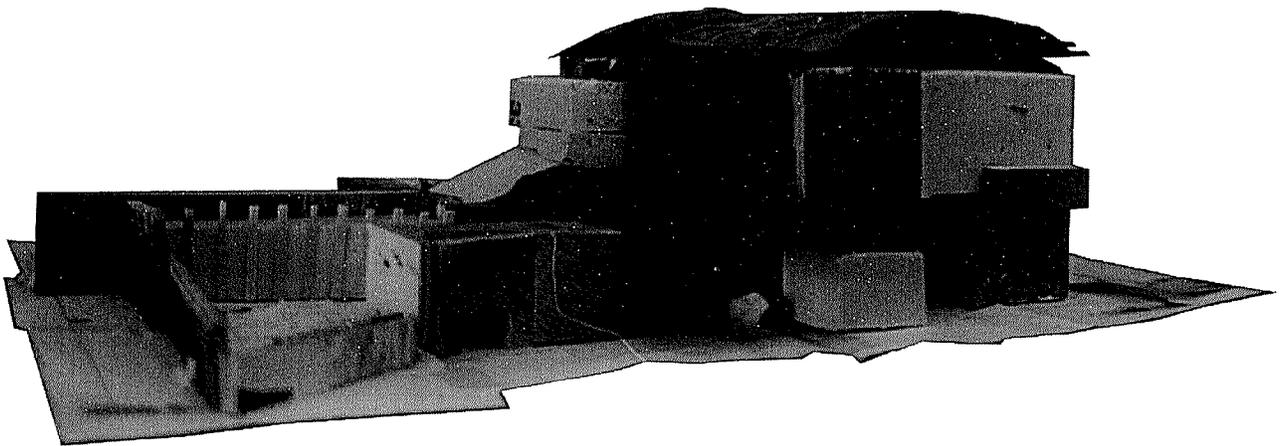
building mass

pampas

revegetation

plaza

intermediate



ship

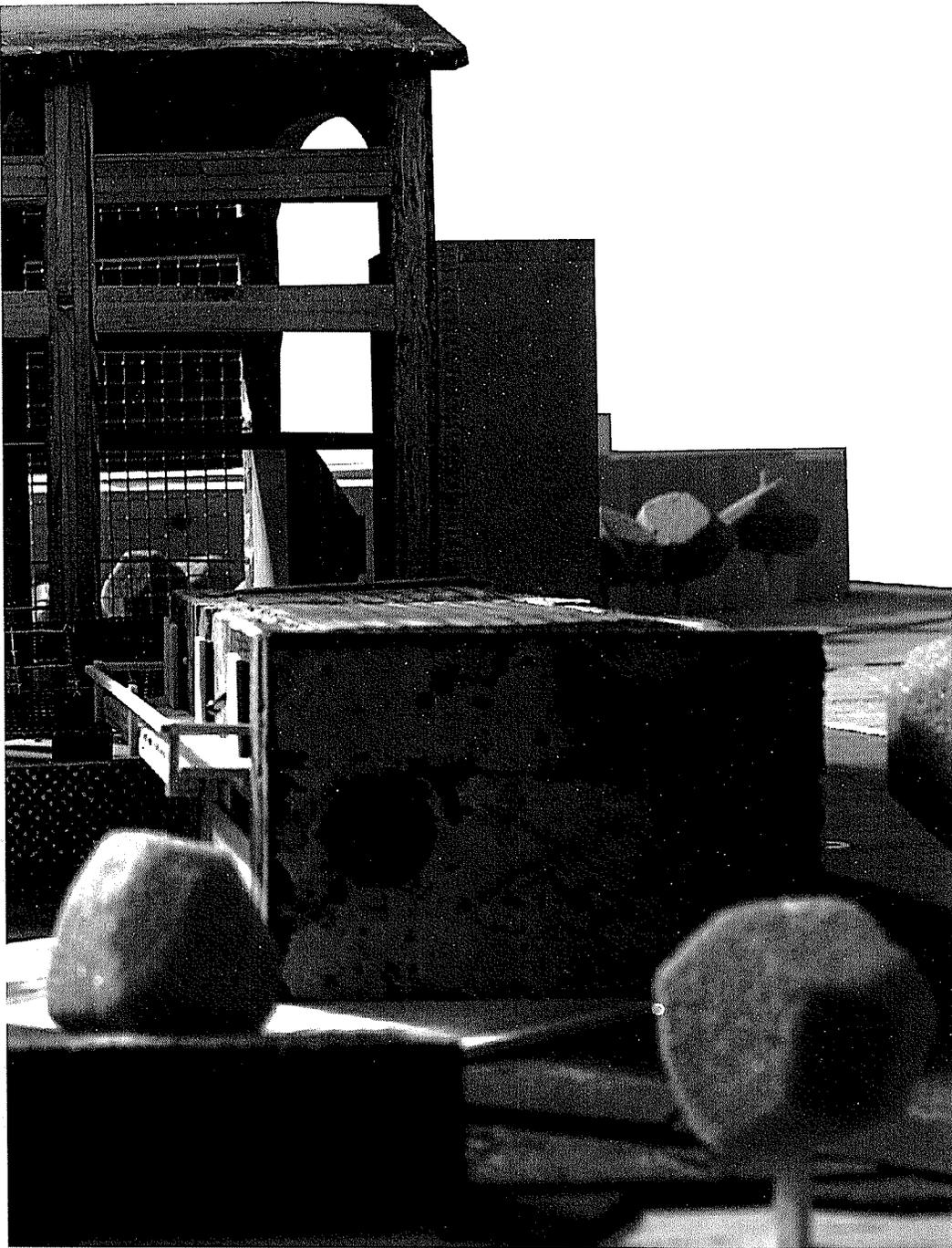
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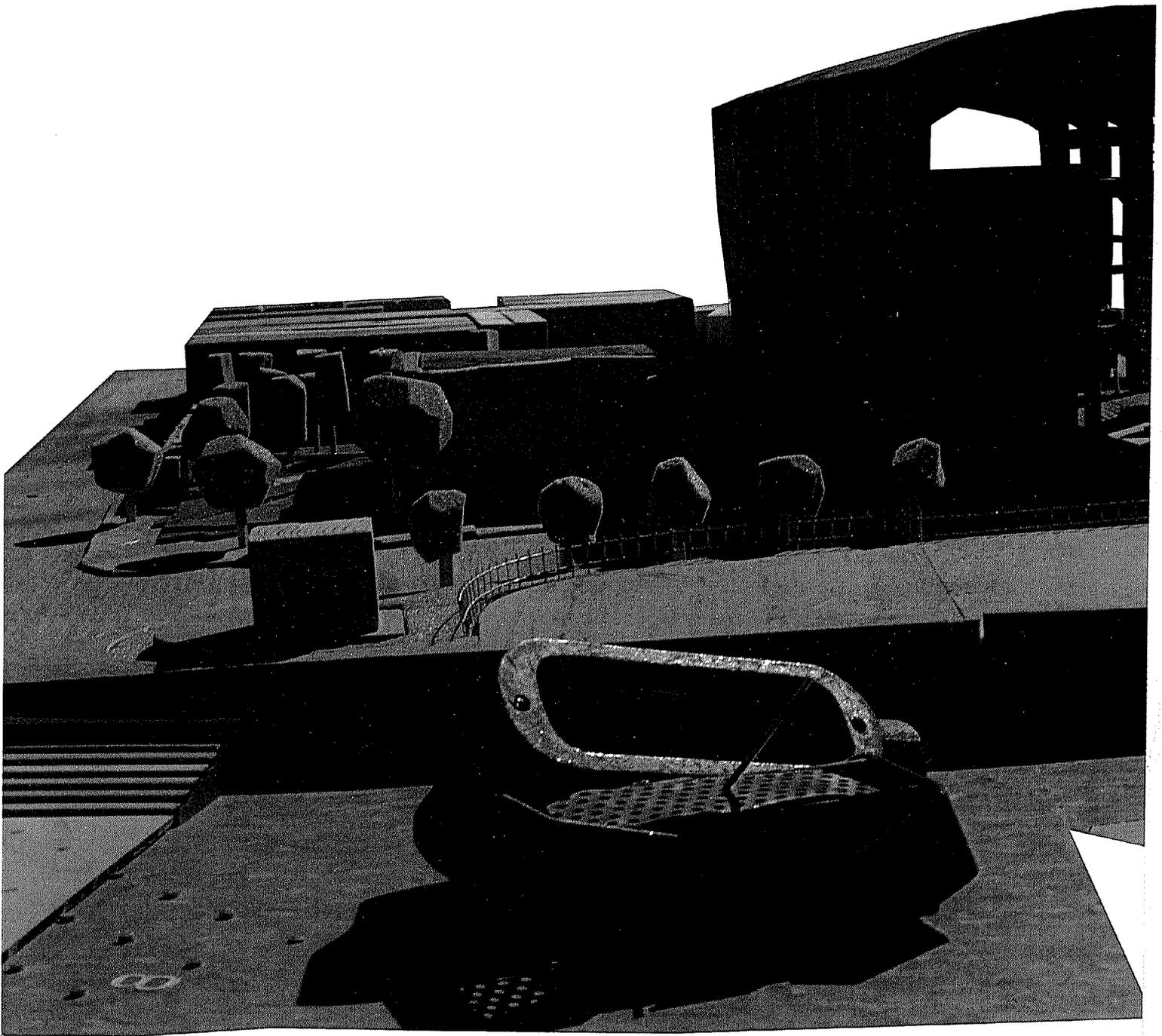
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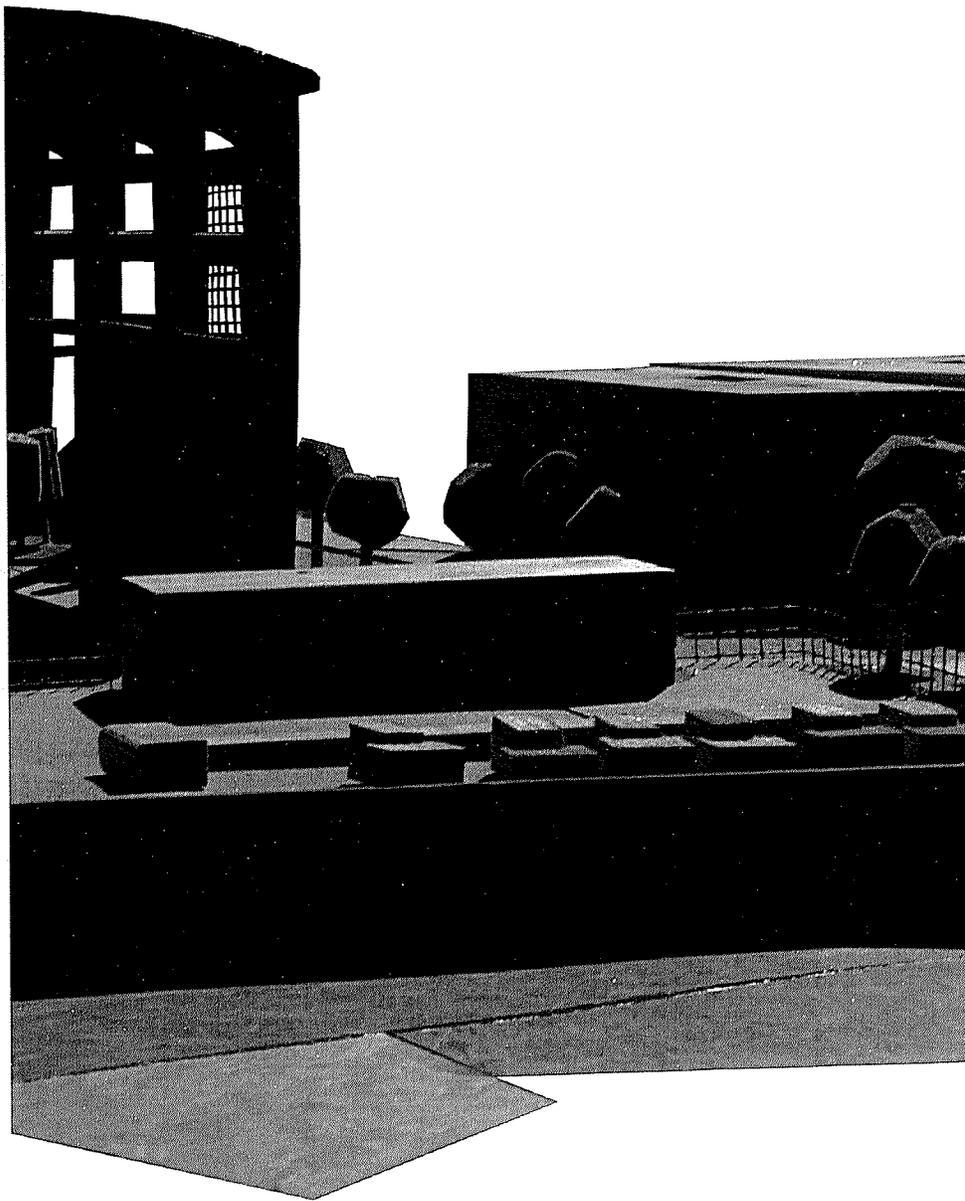
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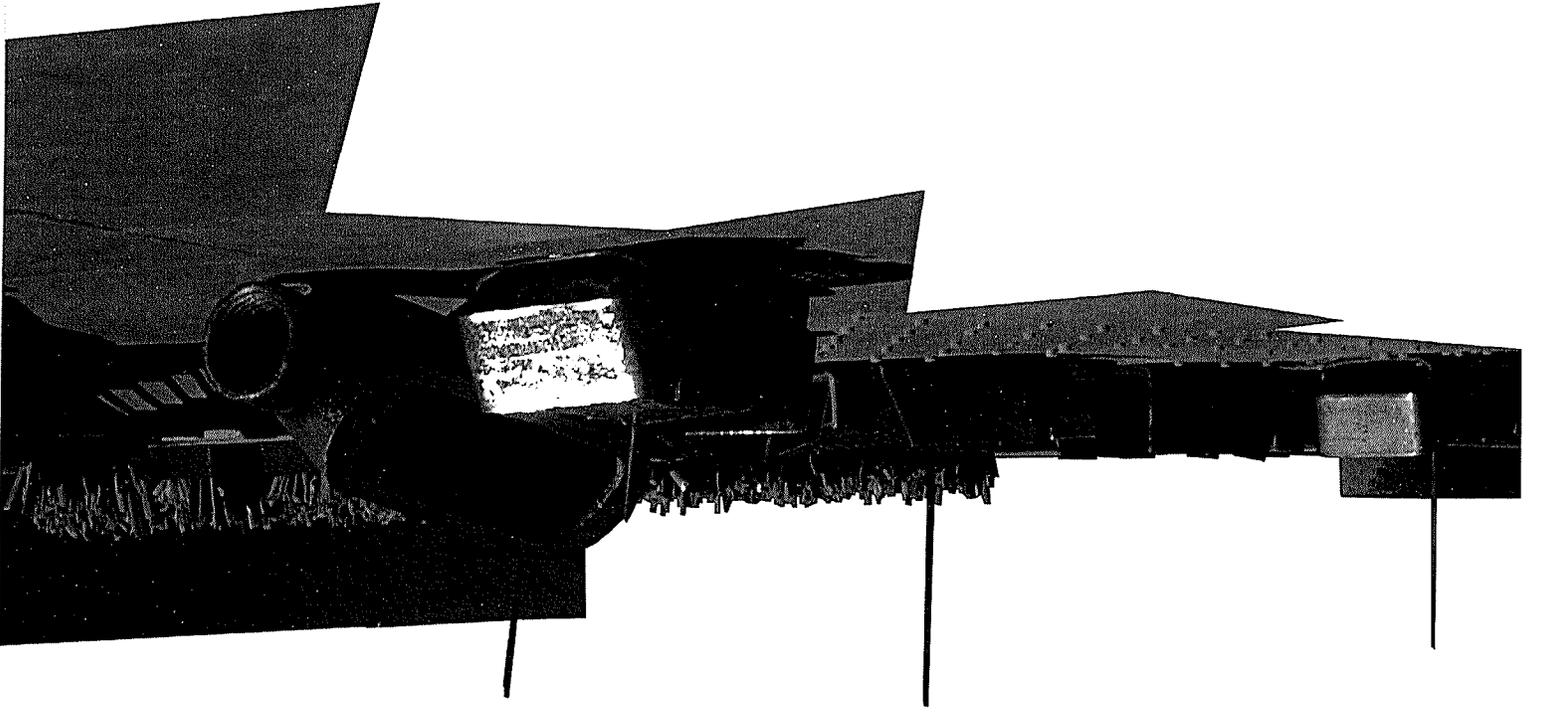


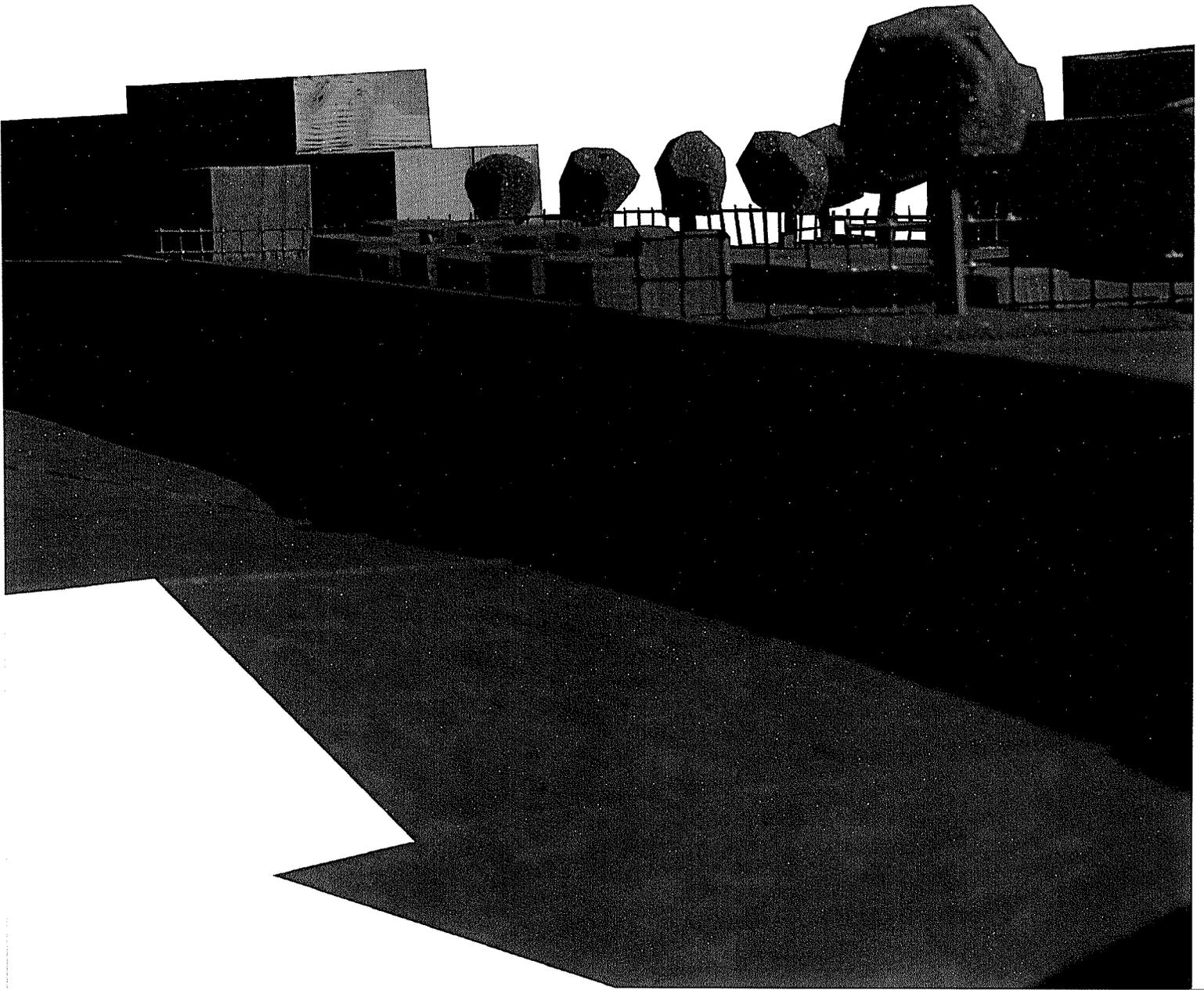
final



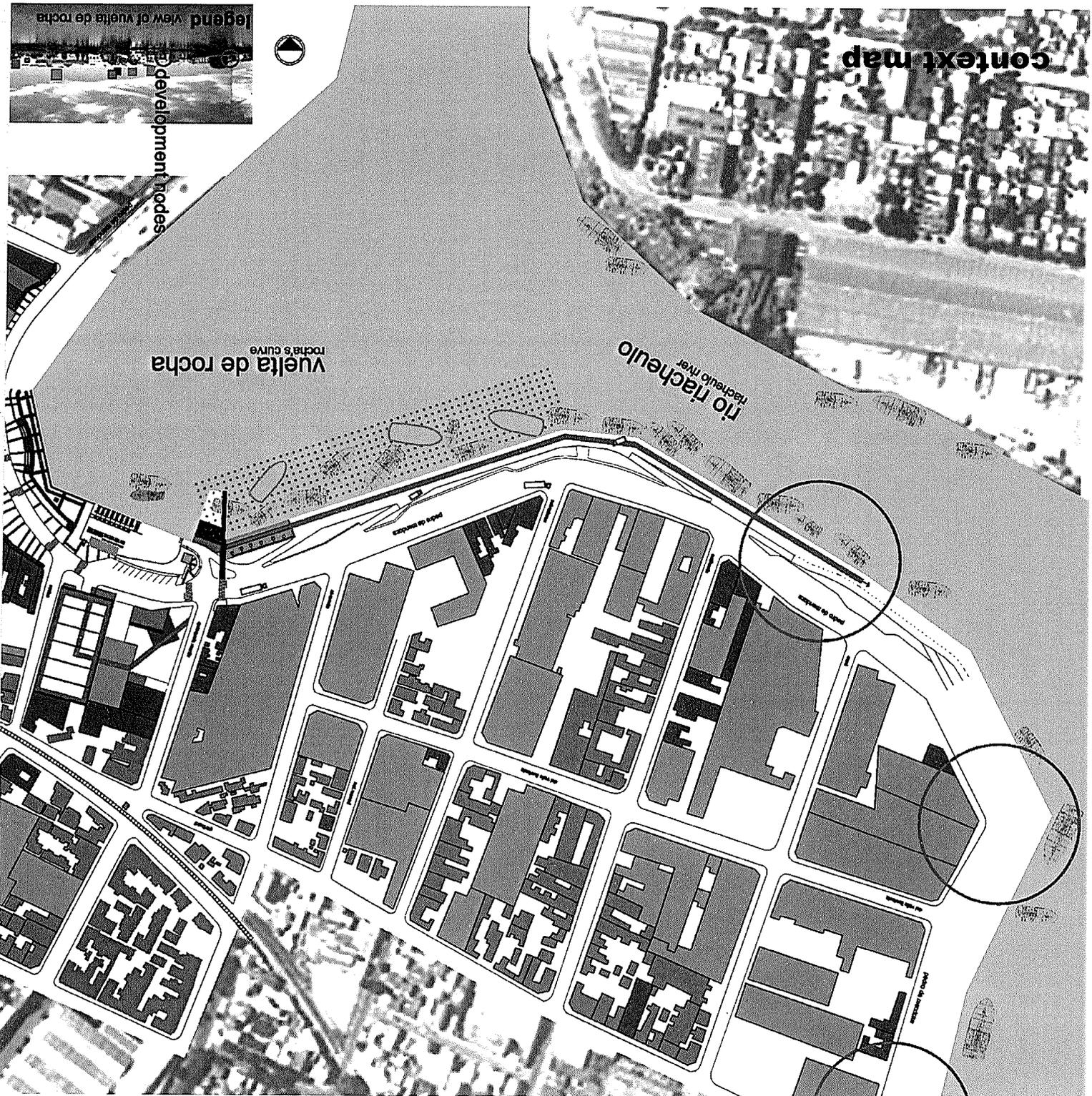








context map



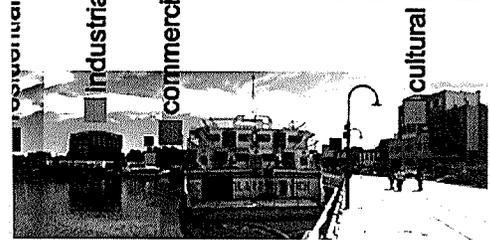
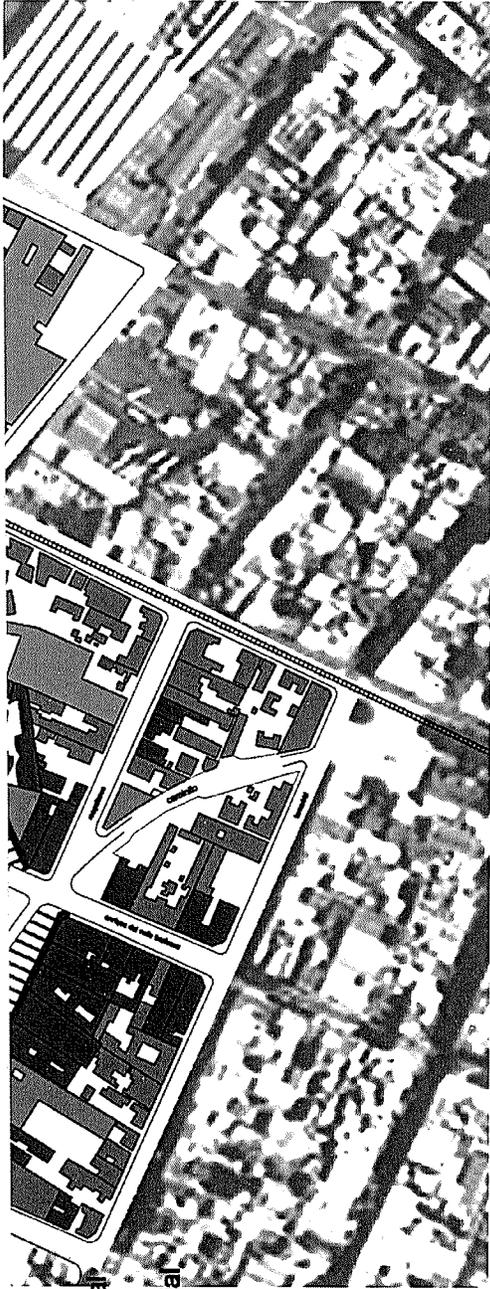
view of vuelta de rocha

development nodes

vuelta de rocha  
rocha's curve

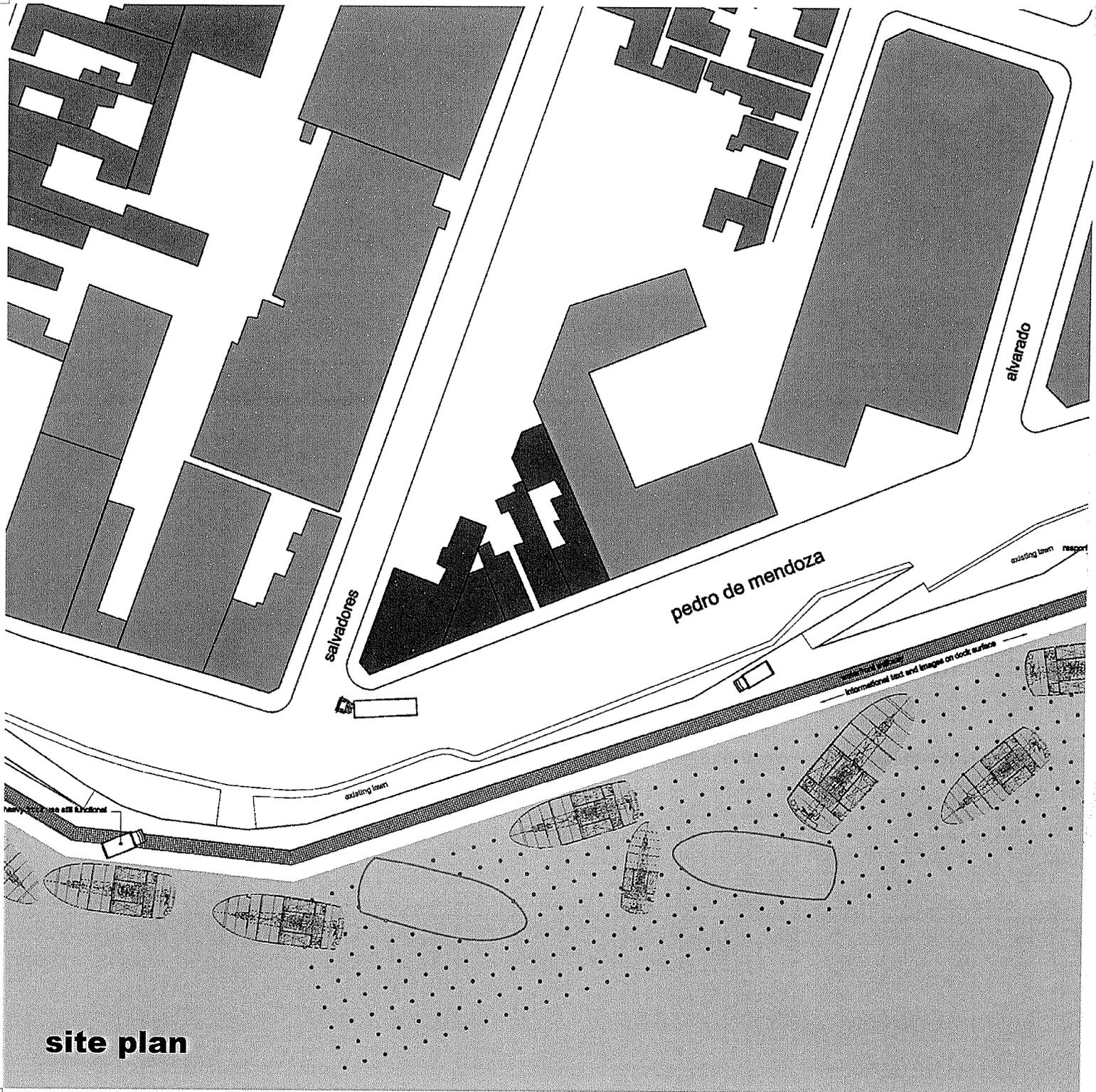
rio racheulo  
racheulo river





## hard line drawings

Eventually, the design-build exercises engaged on the physical model were input into the larger context of the neighbourhood. This allowed me to see the implications of the design (design site) within a highly diverse pattern of residential, industrial, commercial and cultural activity. Emerging patterns of movement, density and function also helped to indicate possible nodes for future development.



**site plan**



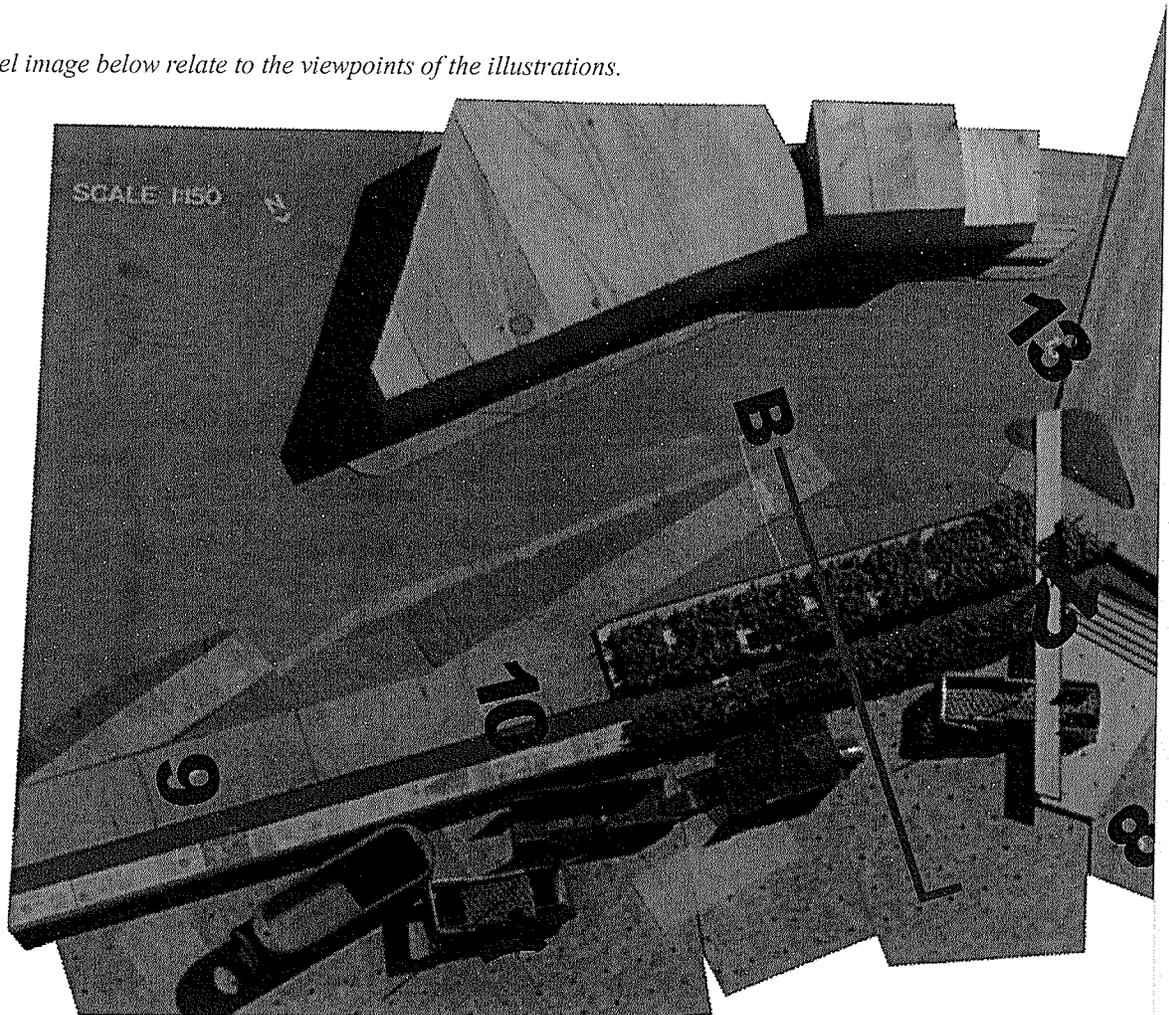
# experiential walkthrough

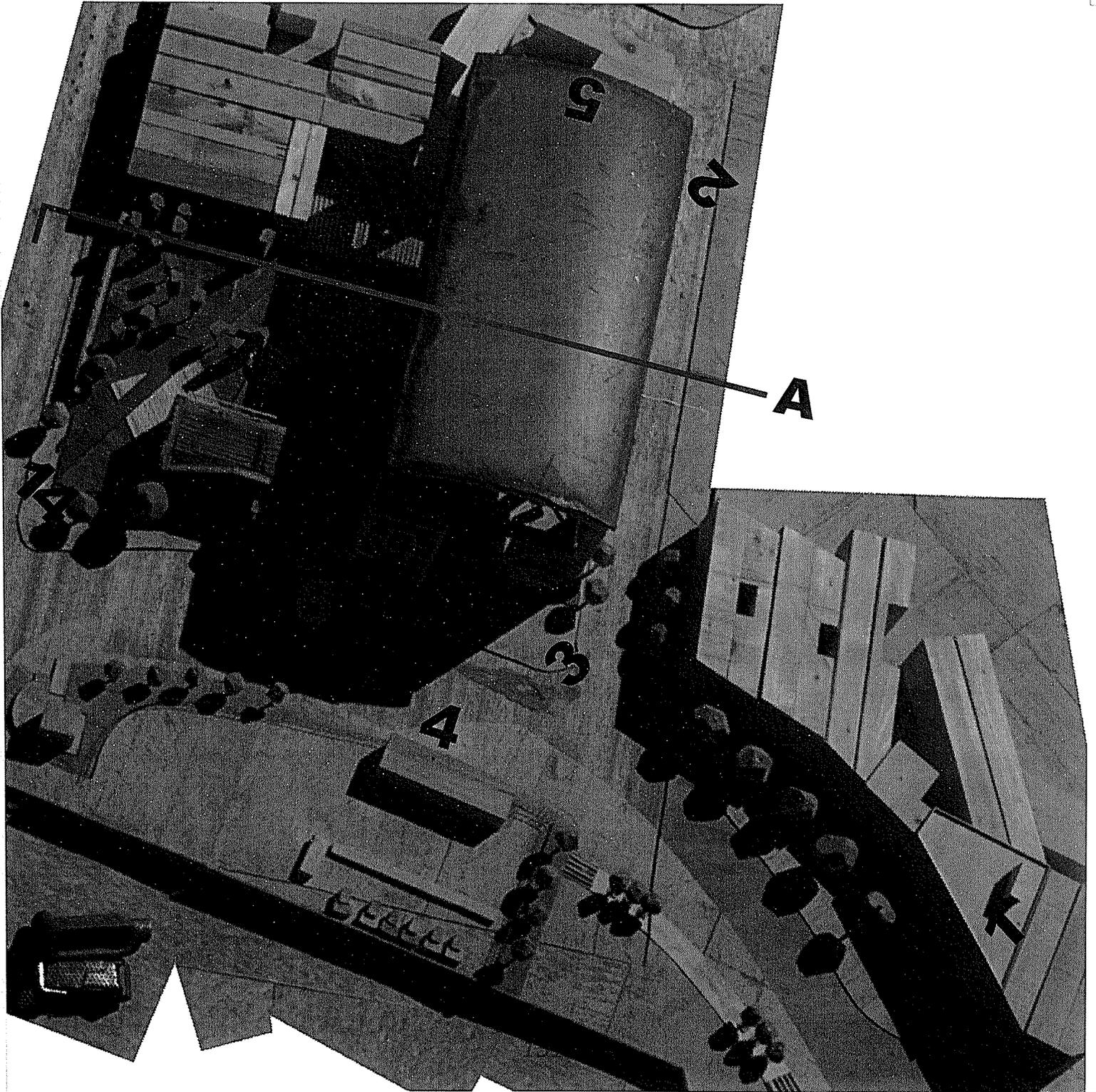
It is the intention of the walkthrough not only to introduce the design application, but also to reveal that which I have not designed. That which has a beauty of its own and expresses the honesty and value of this landscape.

These two approaches form a symbiotic relationship and should/do not necessarily read as separate elements in the final scheme. When appropriate, additional text is included to articulate the design intention.

The collages are meant to explore scenarios and suggest a story, but not necessarily depict one.

*The red numbers on the model image below relate to the viewpoints of the illustrations.  
(seen on the following pages)*





S

B

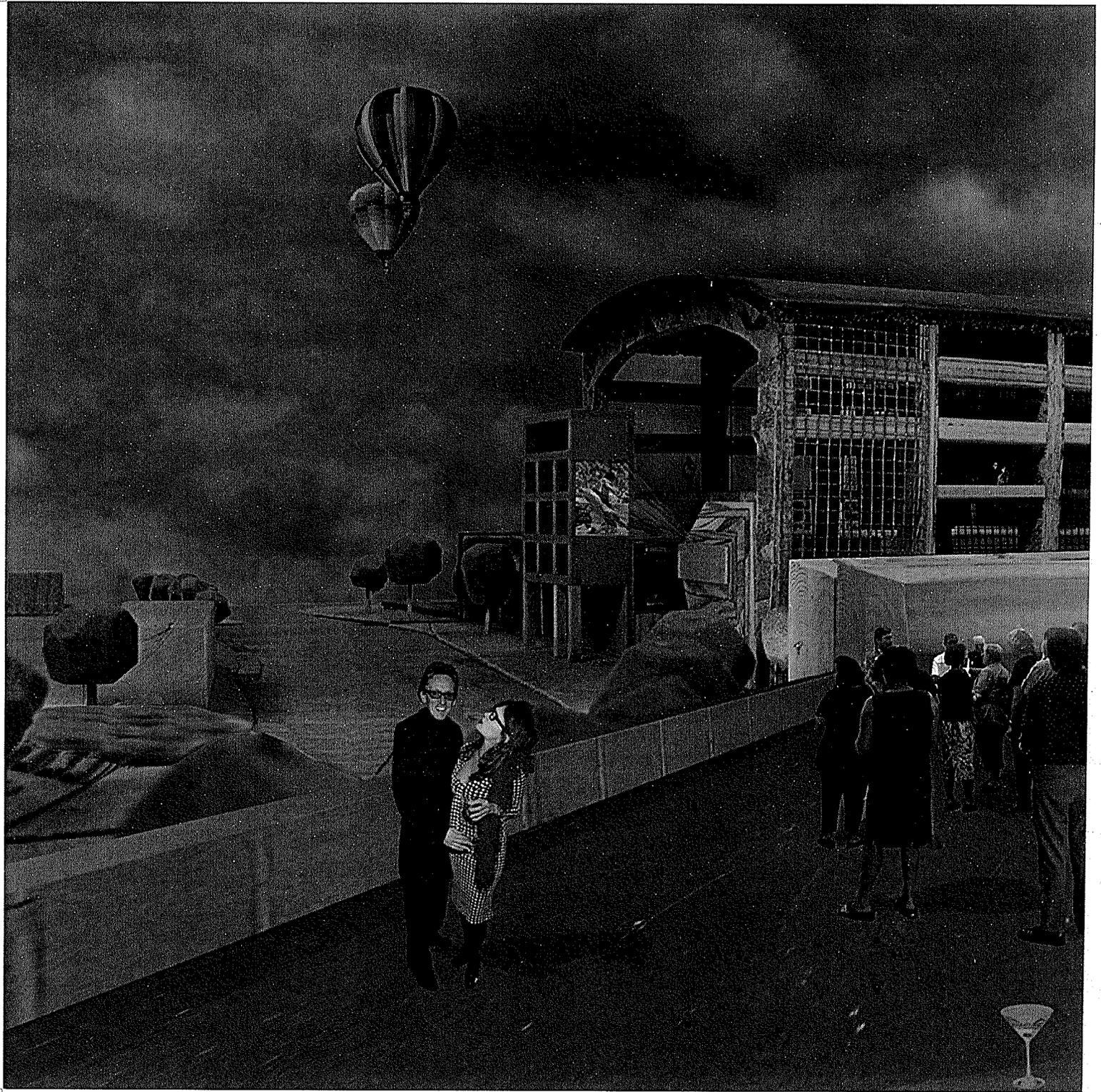
A

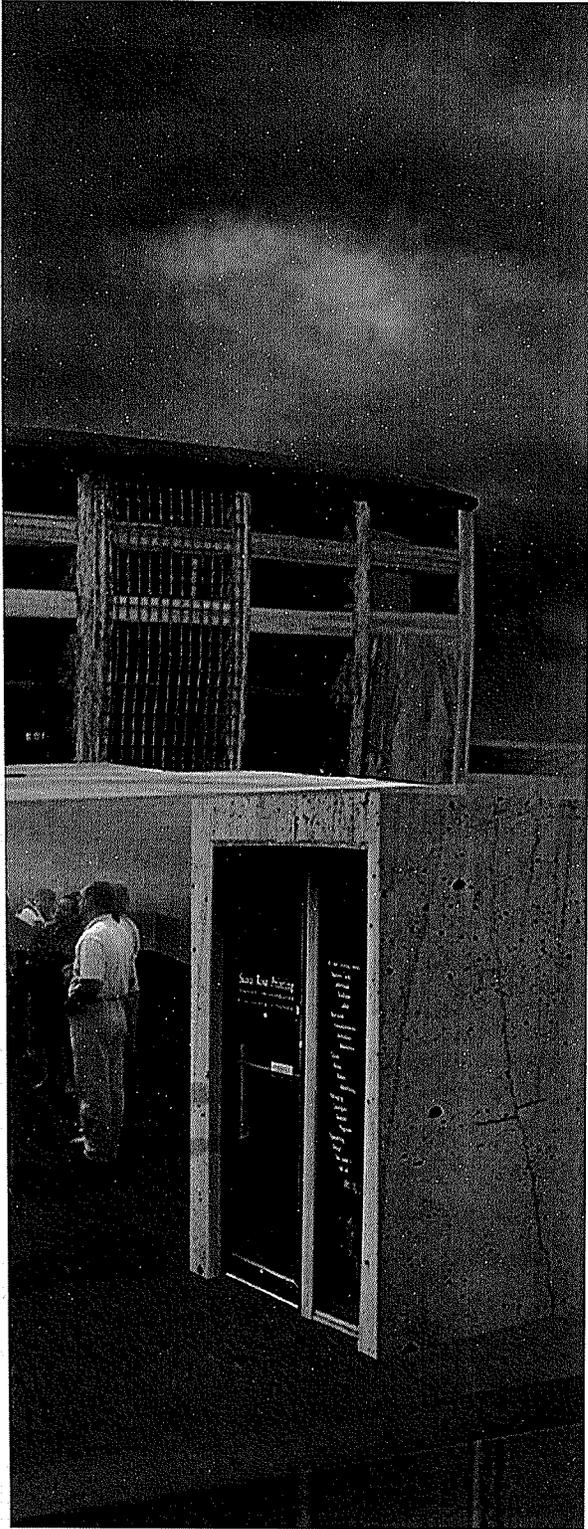
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## 1 rooftop patio

The PROA Foundation is an existing contemporary art gallery located in proximity to the site. From its existing rooftop patio one can see the decaying building where artists are encouraged to create and display their works.

The building acts as a medium to display the works and as an integral part of site-specific sculpture and installations. Projections and multi-media installations are seen dancing across the tin panels of the building, and lights filter through vegetation which may climb up the protective metal screening. As the building changes, so must the interpretation of the art which uses it as canvas. It is a gallery that constantly reanimates itself.



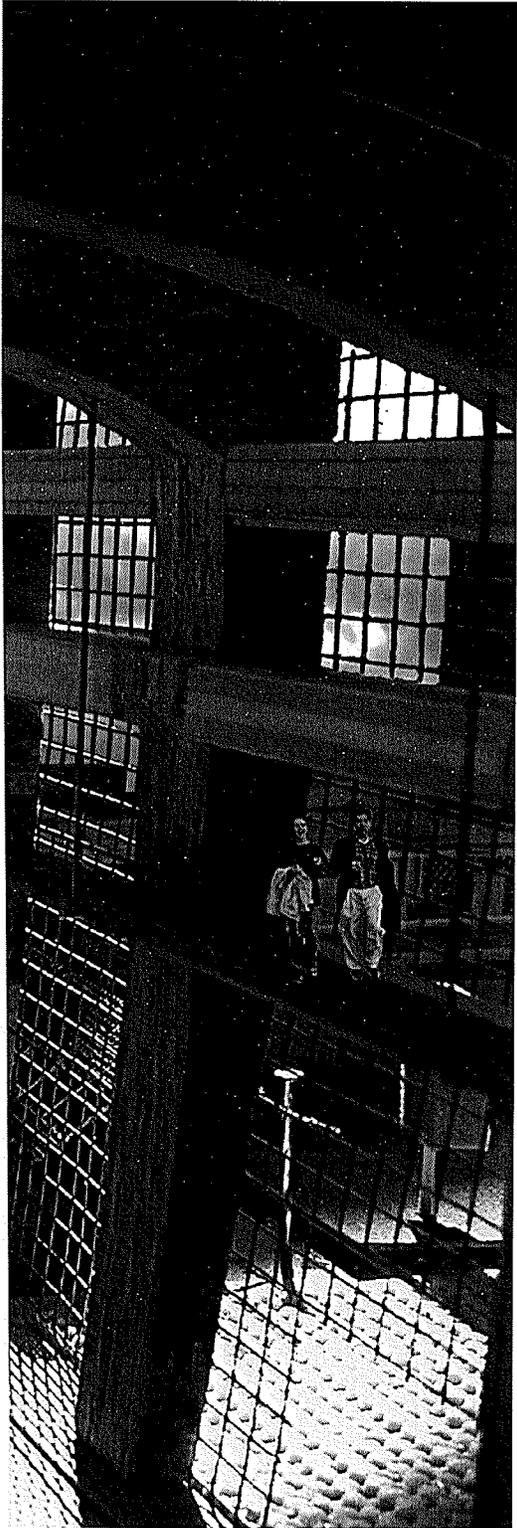


### **3 building facade**

Moving towards the building at street level, participants are drawn by the activity of local artisans and the elevated walkway. This pathway strengthens the connection back to the PROA, creating a dialogue through adjacency and function. It also offers unique views to the adjacent lots as well as to the docklands.

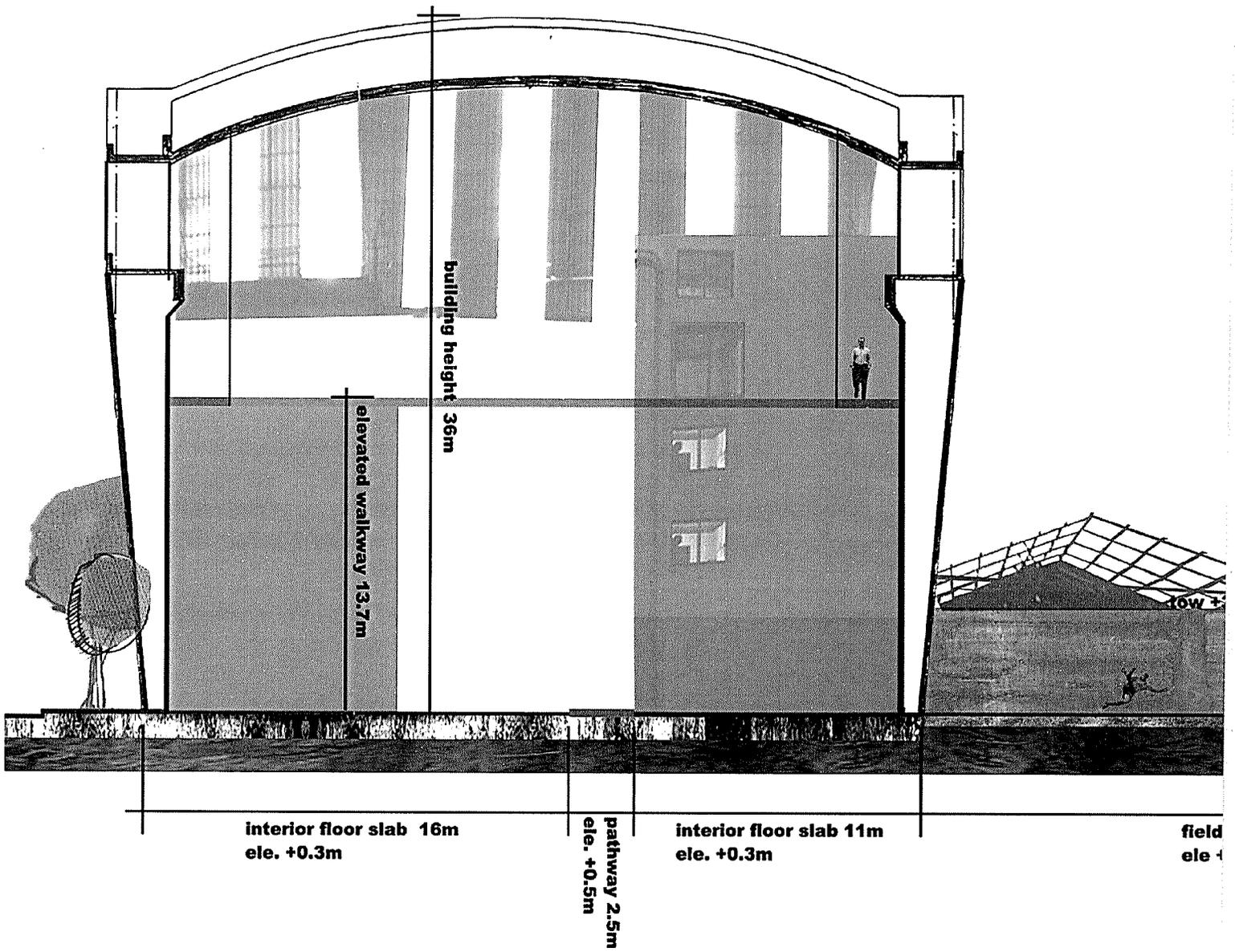
The existing office space at the front of the building remains, its future use determined by the growth of the site.





## **5 elevated walkway**

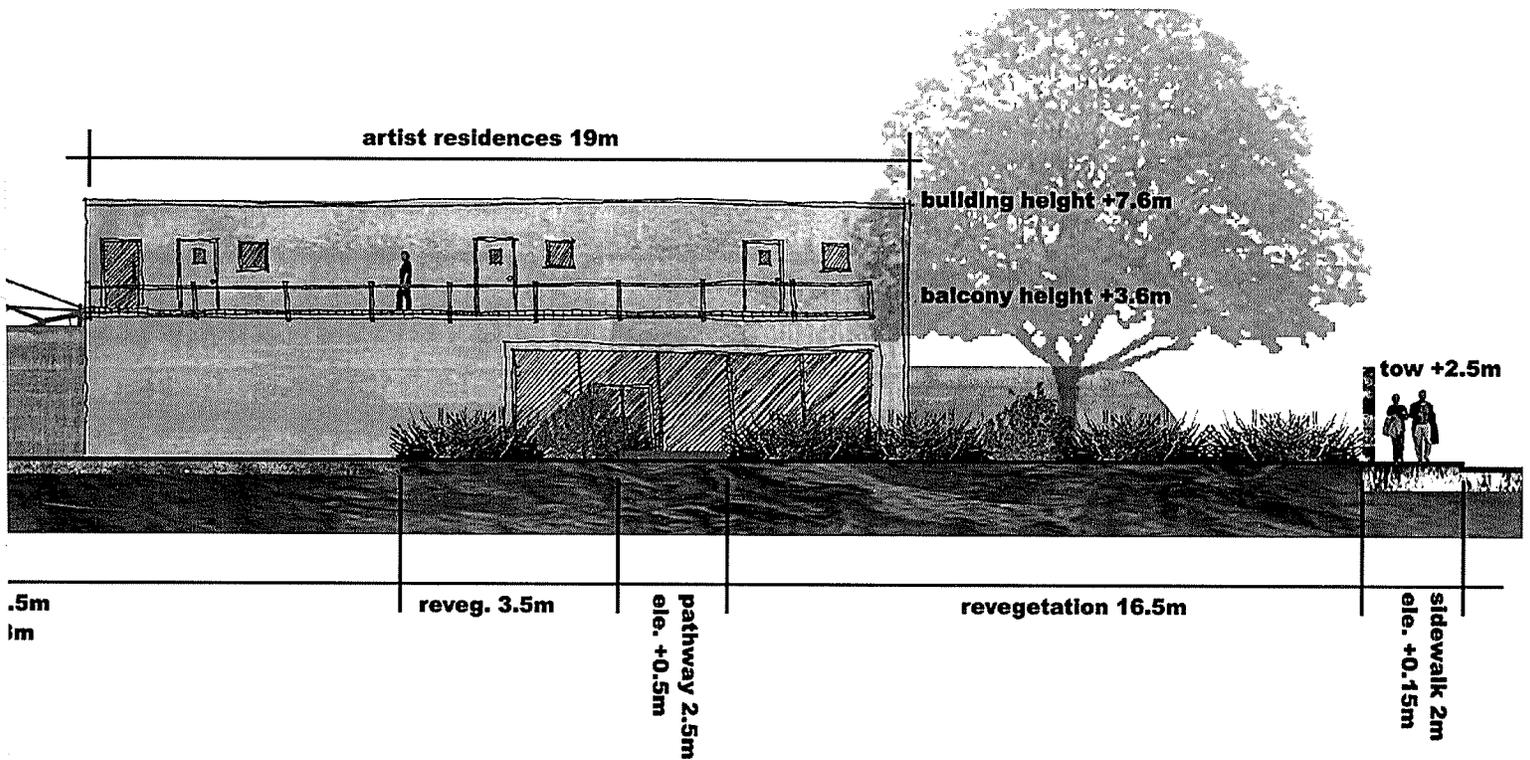
From the elevated walkway it is possible to appreciate the prior function of the building as a metallurgy shop and its sheer scale and volume. It offers a unique view of the ships and activities occurring within or adjacent to the site, as well as the details and connections of the building construction which are slowly undergoing the process of ruination.



# A building/lot section

This section (looking toward the docks) illustrates the spatial relationships that will only strengthen as the walls within and around the vacant lot decay. Tourist and local spaces overlap, and the adjacent spaces of building volume, field, lot, residential, and commercial become more fluid, setting the stage for a new social space where diverse activity occurs.

Resident and visiting artists from the PROA gallery will occupy the second floor of the renovated building, and are seen as key participants in the dialogue between art and ruin. The PROA gallery, in collaboration with artists and the Historical Society of La Boca, would oversee the funding and operation of the site.



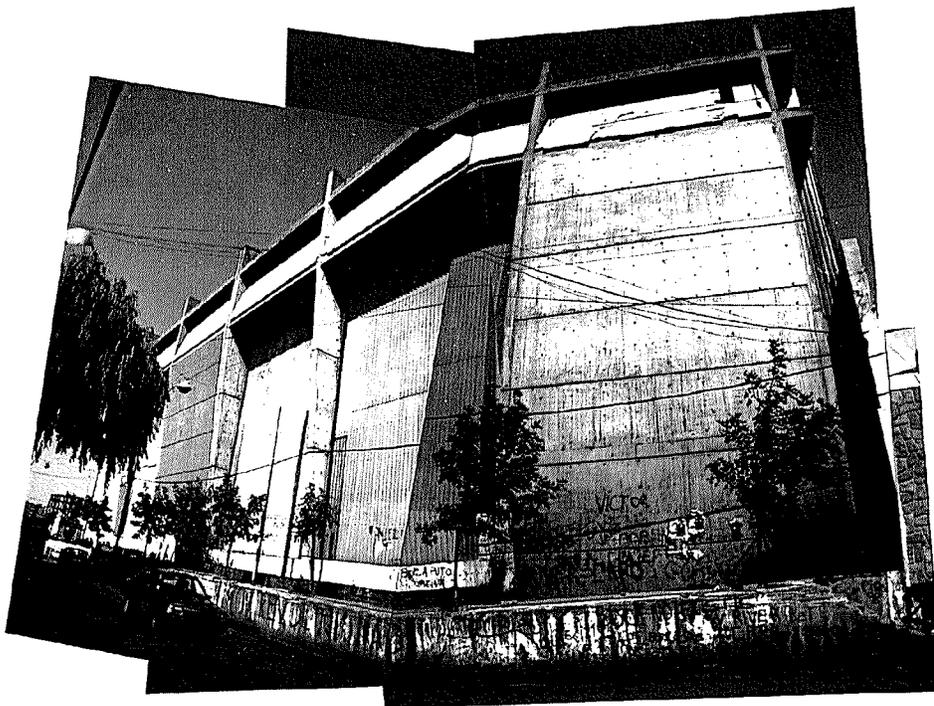
## 2 building elevation

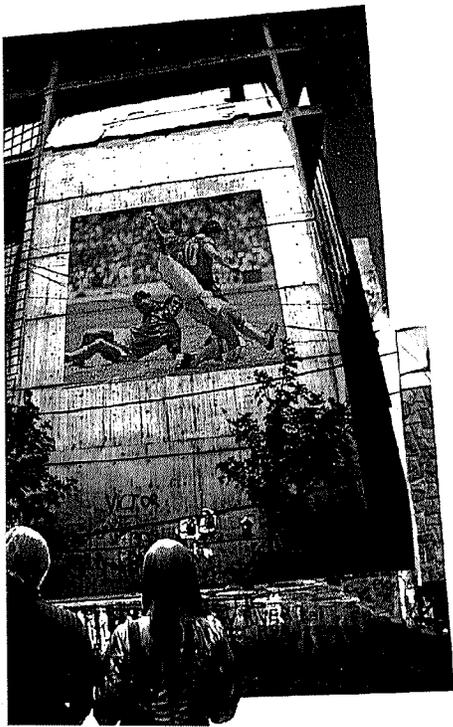
This series suggests the gradual transformation of the building.

Protective screening is installed on the building frame to allow for decay of the corrugated panels, while protecting the participants moving through the landscape. As panels disappear, the distinction between interior and exterior becomes ambiguous.

The outer skin of the building is envisioned as a canvas for artists. It will be encouraged that pieces of the building are disassembled in order to create their works. This type of transformation is seen as one which positively reinforces the idea of urban decay and, although encouraged, is viewed as a **naturally** occurring **urban** condition.

Another key participant in this process are the local residents of La Boca. The scavenging of the corrugated siding is a naturally occurring event in the neighbourhood and is not seen as detrimental to the process of decay but rather one of the most honest processes within this urban condition.





## 4 building interior

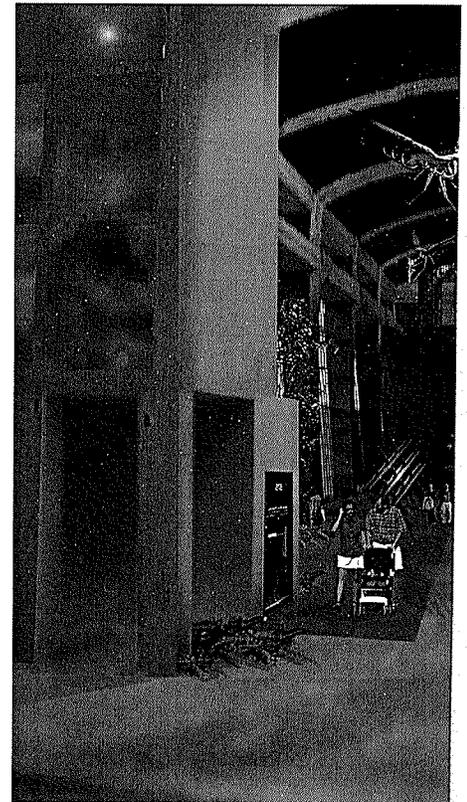
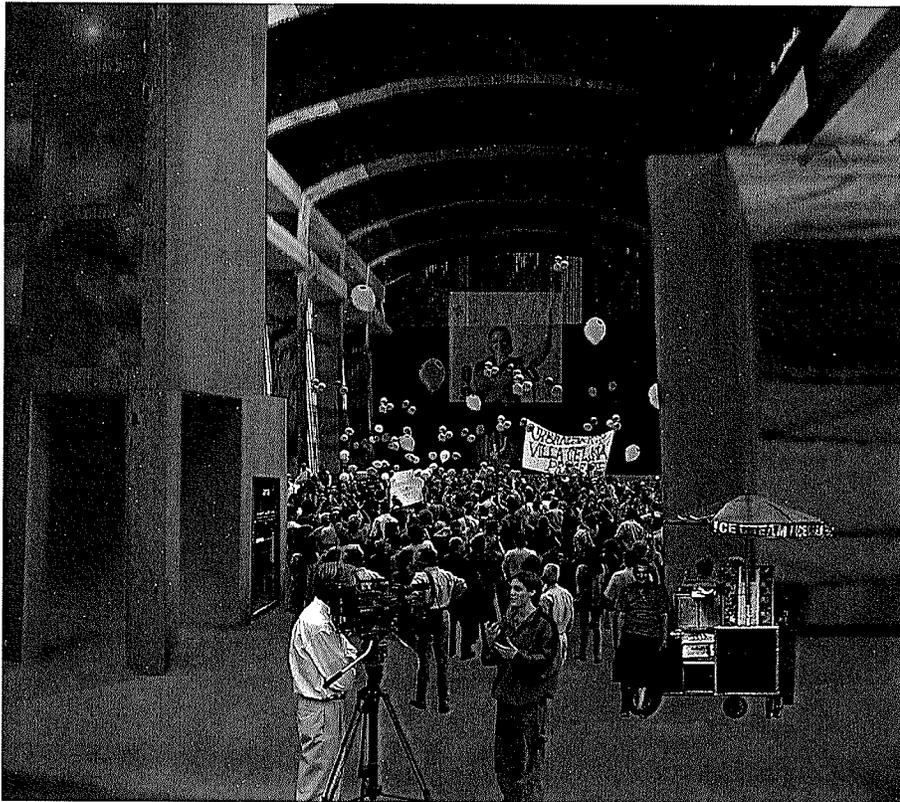
Time and decay begin to indicate how the space is used. The space could accommodate large-scale activities such as celebrations and rallies,

4b

or transform into an installation space

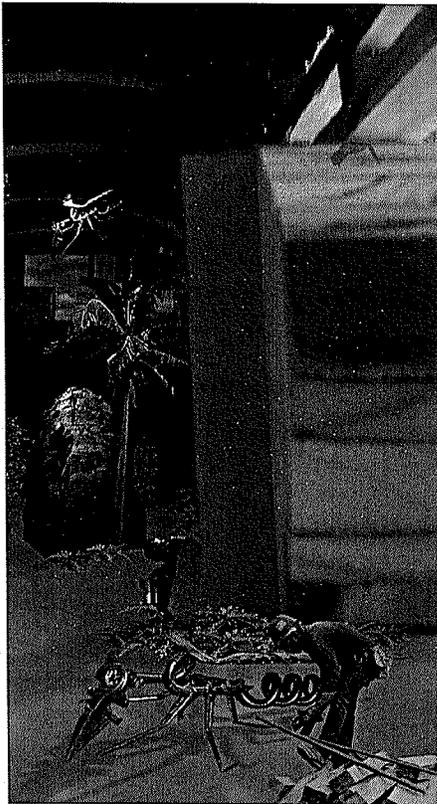
4c

Increased penetration of light into the building may encourage vegetative growth



An existing, still functional crane and winch system in the building will remain, to aid in the creation of large scale artworks. The elevated walkway will allow for views into the working space of the artists, while keeping people a safe distance from any hazards of the decaying outer skin.

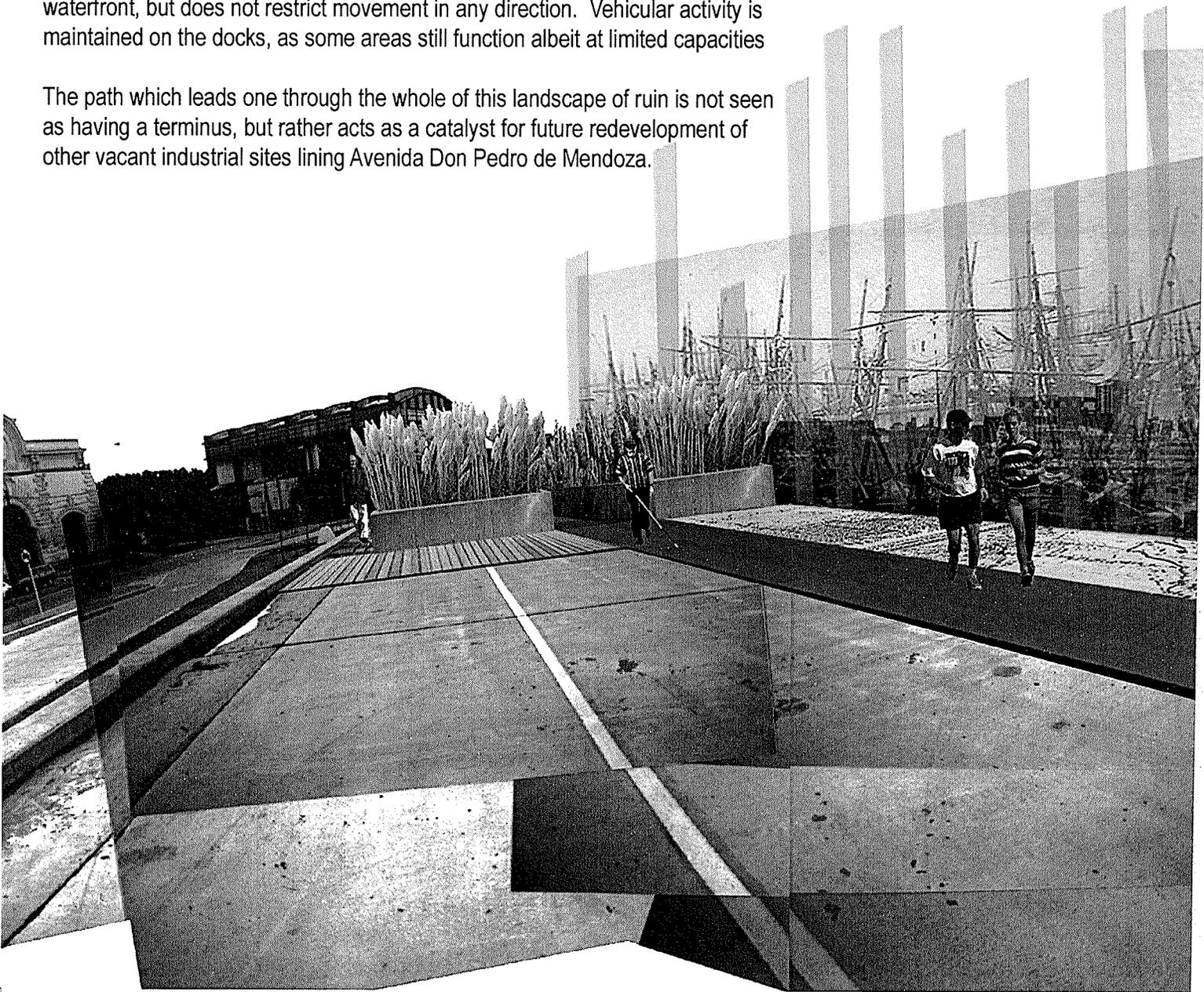
Gradually, interior will become exterior. Installations and artworks will melt into vegetation, blurring their exact timeframe of creation and allowing them to become landscape rather than object.



## 9 dock pathway

At the east periphery of the site, the landscape is dominated by the ruins of the ships. The linear path suggests a direct movement along the length of the waterfront, but does not restrict movement in any direction. Vehicular activity is maintained on the docks, as some areas still function albeit at limited capacities

The path which leads one through the whole of this landscape of ruin is not seen as having a terminus, but rather acts as a catalyst for future redevelopment of other vacant industrial sites lining Avenida Don Pedro de Mendoza.





***Cortaderia jubata*** pampas grass

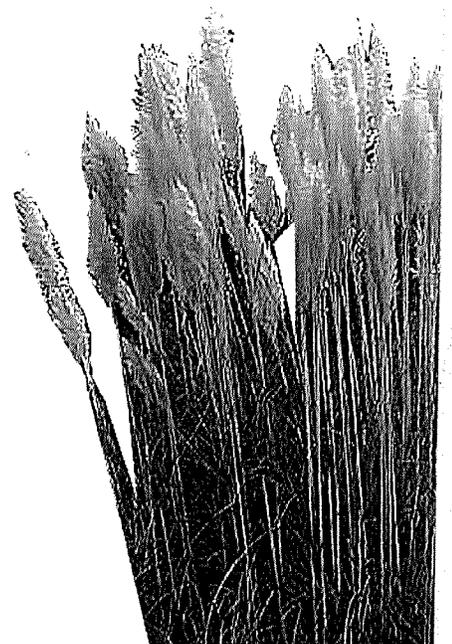
Robust, tussock grass up to 3M in diameter, flowering stalks up to 2.5M high.

Leaves: Bright green, blade flat to only slightly v-shaped in cross section, margins rough, cutting; leaves mostly basal to half the height of the flowering stalks.

Inflorescence: Yellowish or purple, loosely branching, feathery, 600-800mm long.

Fruits: Seeds, falling from old inflorescence which remains a dark or yellowish color.

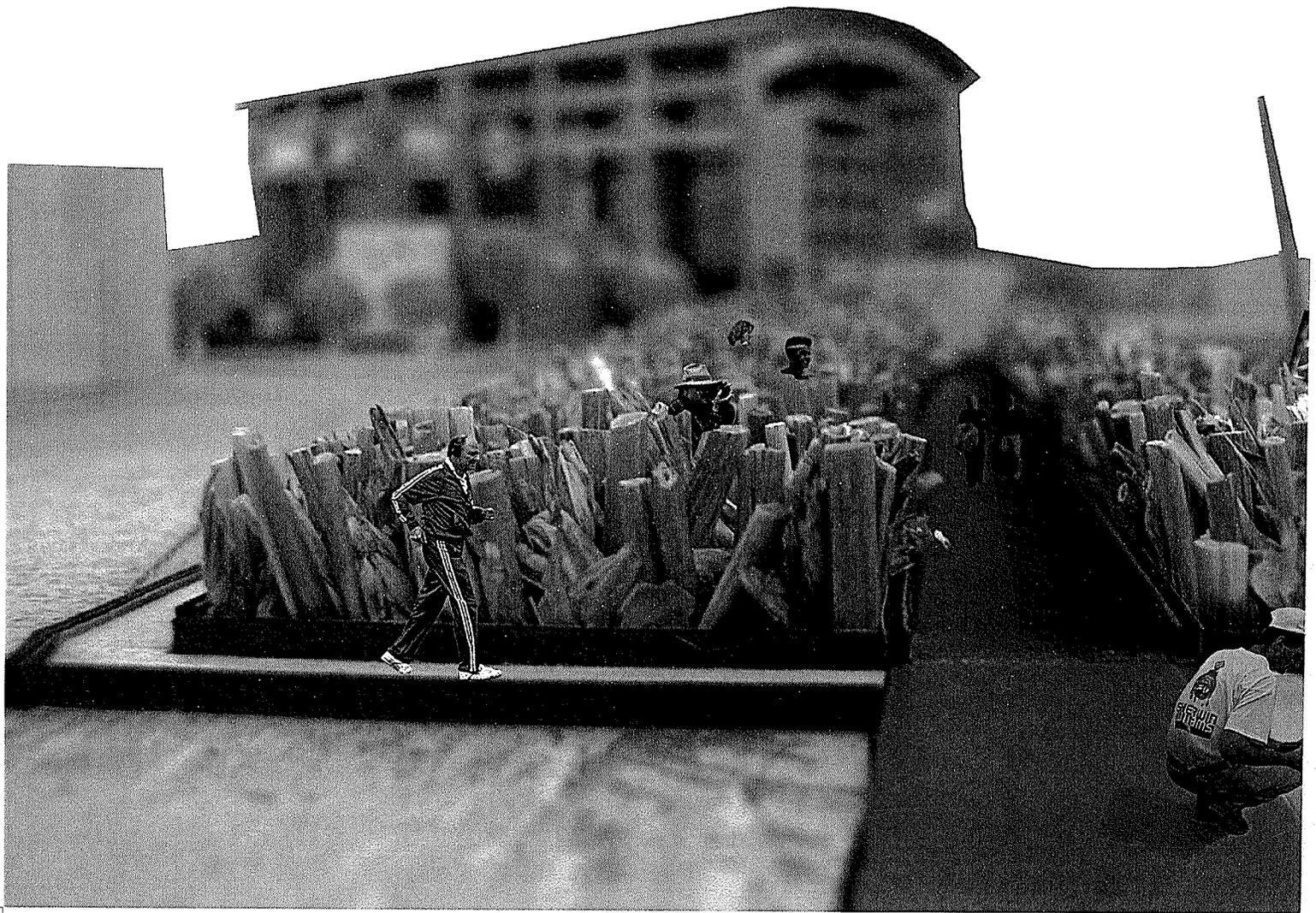
(Henderson, 1995)

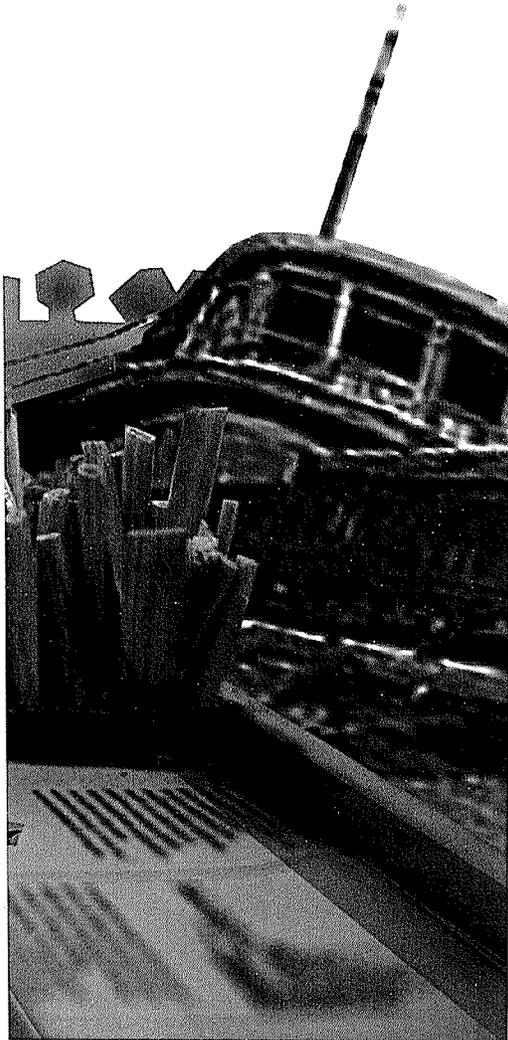




***Anteriormente del asentamiento de los inmigrantes europeos, la grama de las pampas domino las praderas del campo.***

(Prior to the settlement of European immigrants pampas grass dominated the prairie landscape)



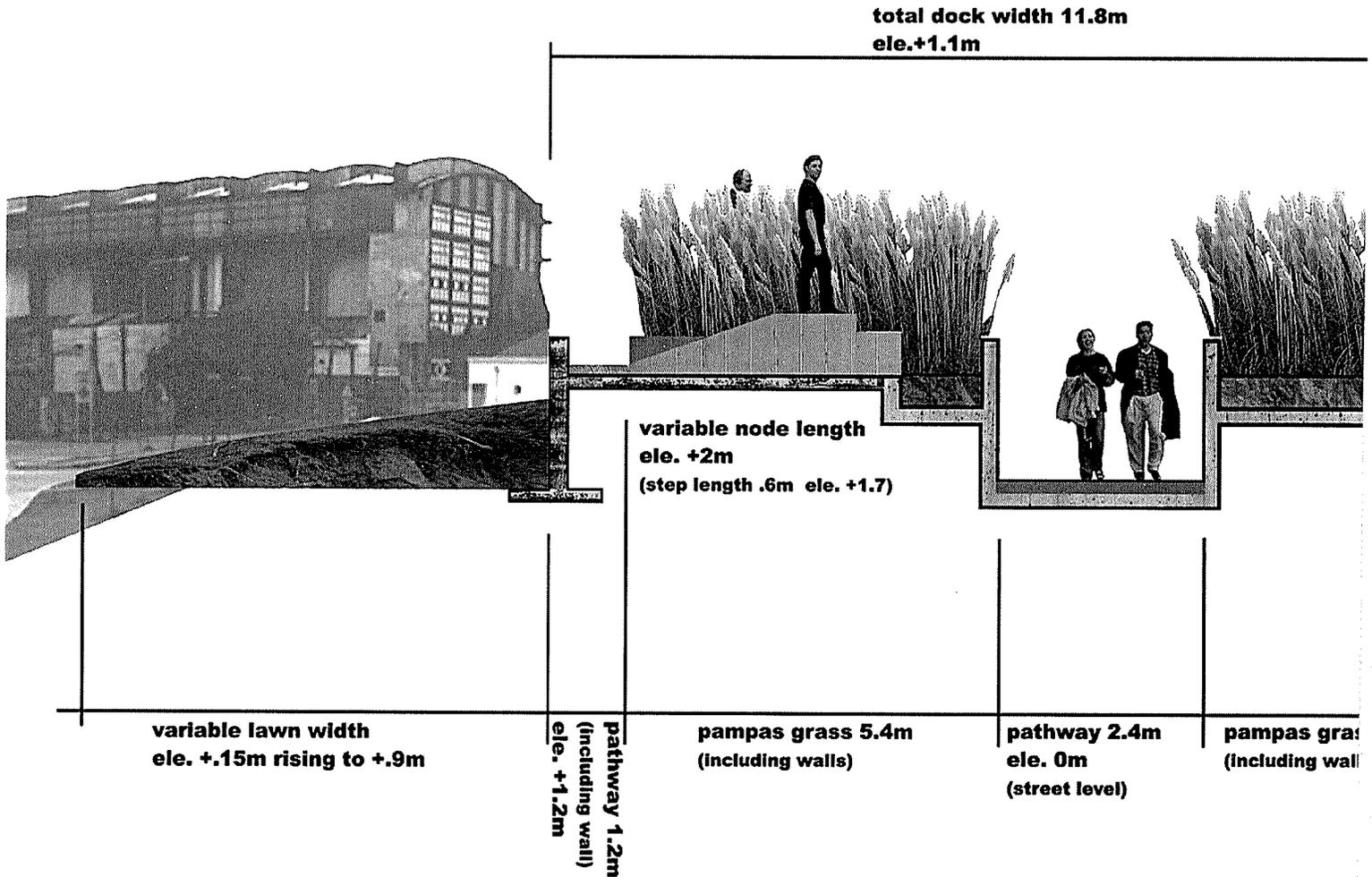


## **10 walkway/pampas nodes**

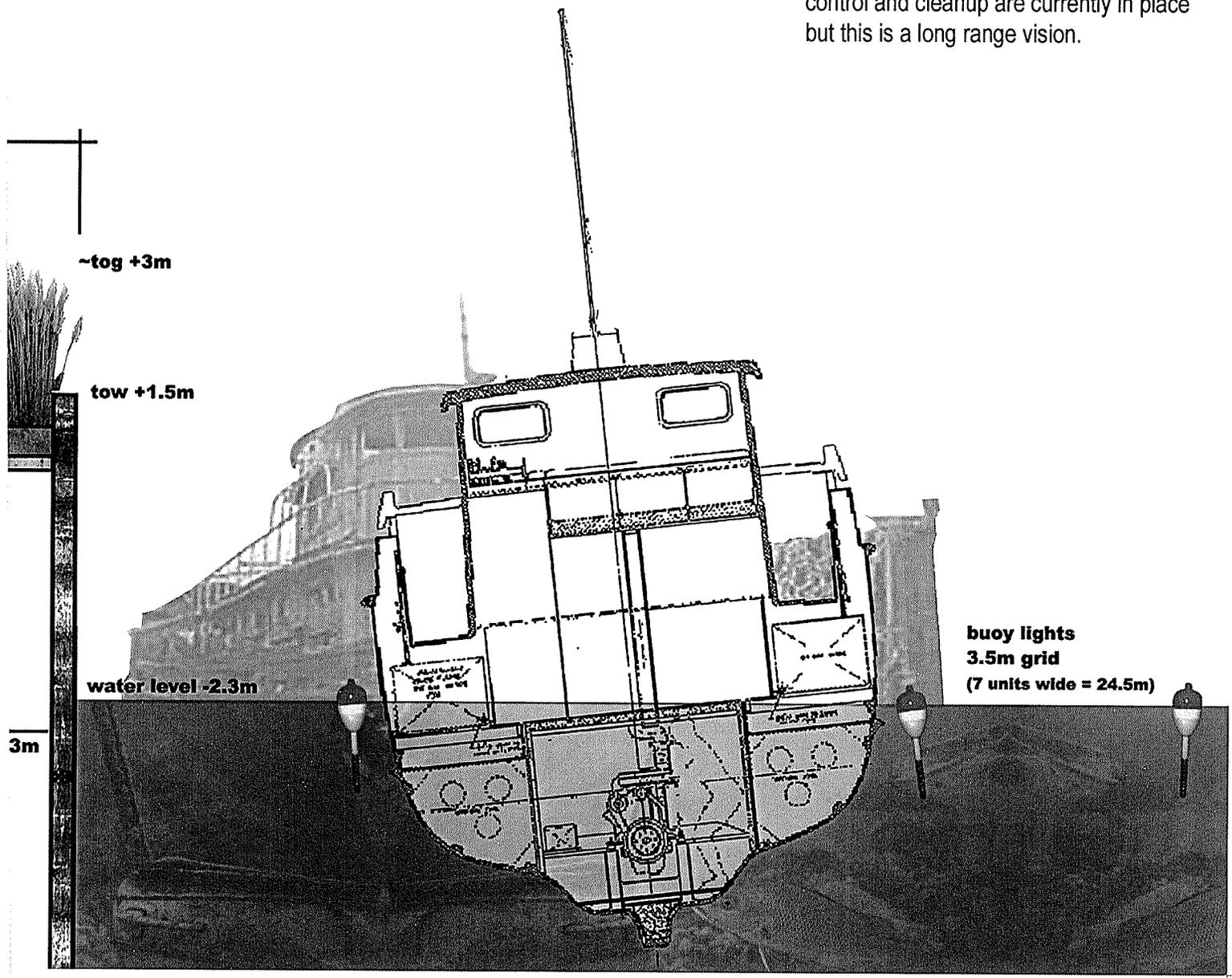
It is at this point where one may begin to hear or see activity within the pampas nodes.

# B dock section

This section demonstrates the various experiences within the pampas nodes. Those on the main path are immersed in a sea of grass, with limited awareness of the ships. The only connections are the sound/smell of water or the play of light in the sky. While those who discover the nodes find themselves in a very personal space, able to see the ships through the pampas, as the first inhabitants did. These spaces are intended to be the most contemplative moments of the experience, allowing one to form a more critical response.



Over time, it is envisioned that the water quality of the Riachuelo will return to life-supporting levels. Programs for pollution control and cleanup are currently in place but this is a long range vision.



~tog +3m

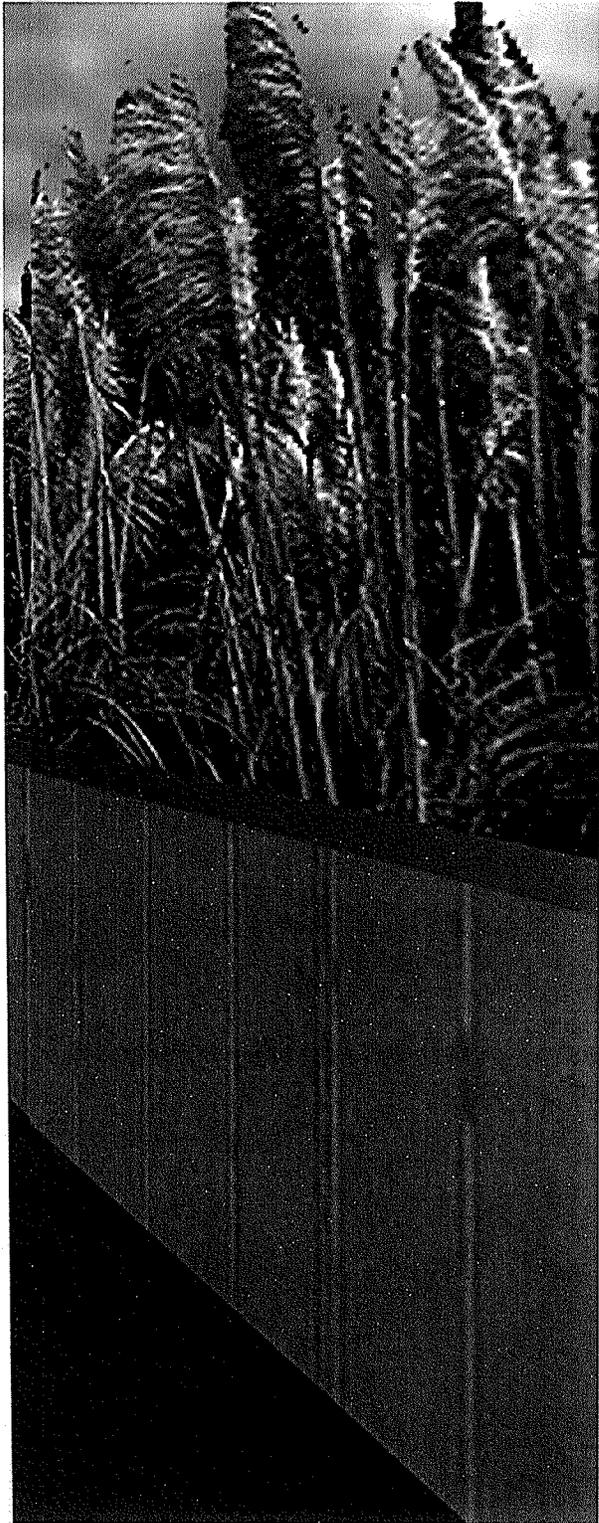
tow +1.5m

water level -2.3m

buoy lights  
3.5m grid  
(7 units wide = 24.5m)

3m

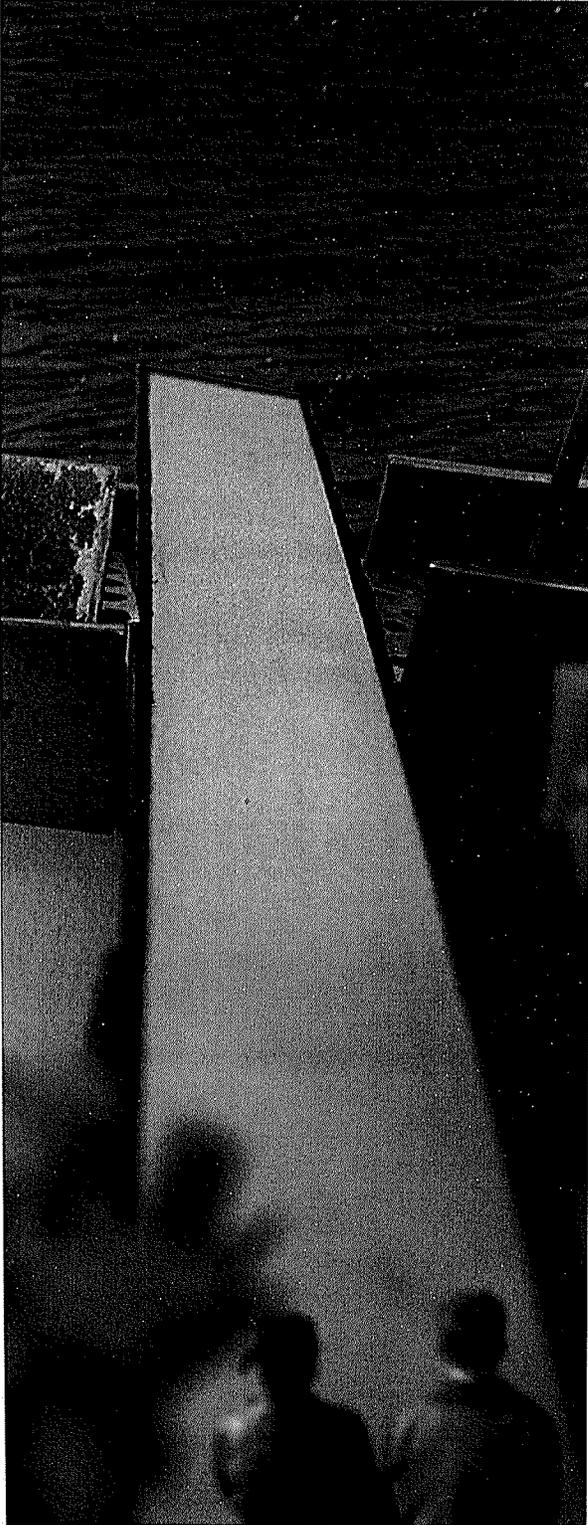




## **11 sunken walkway**

The sunken walkway channels the participant away from the stage area, and one immersed in grass and sky. It effectively cuts off any visual connection to the ships, but as the path rises it offers a unique and strange landscape. The ships are finally revealed in their most honest and vulnerable condition. A stretch of silent ships lines the port, only the pathway suggests further exploration of this solemn landscape.

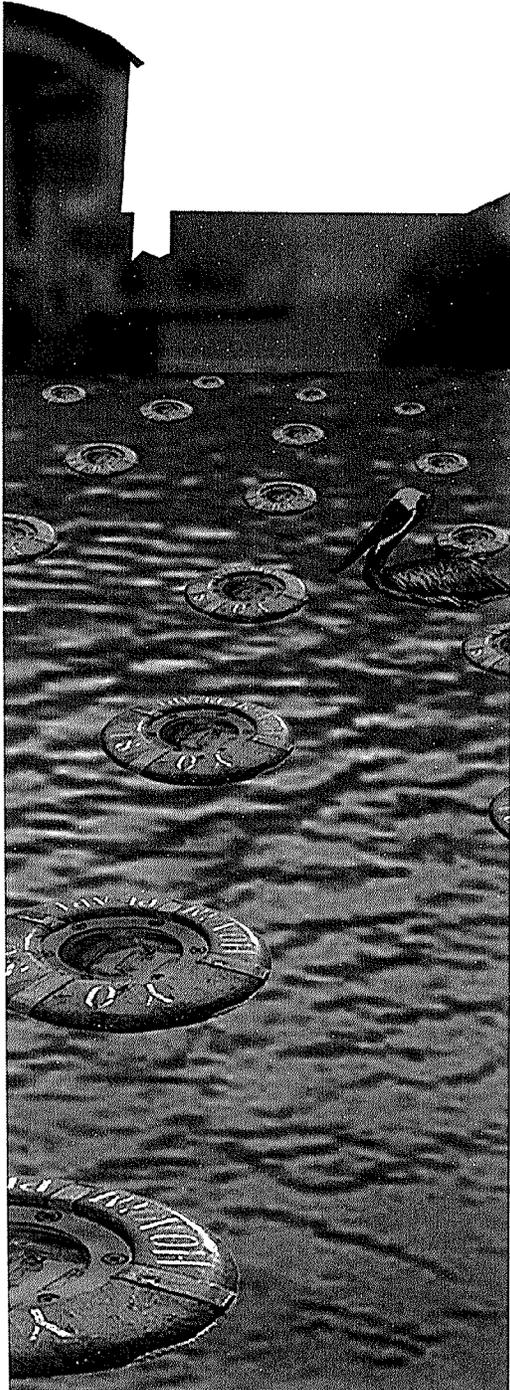




## **12 floating stage**

The floating stage area invites the participant to engage directly with the water and ruins.

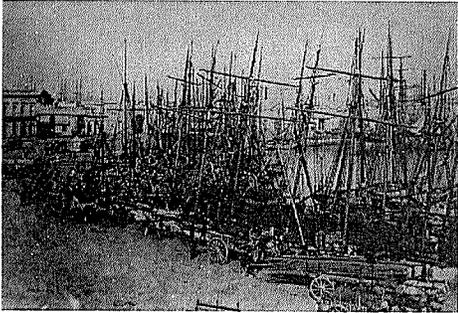




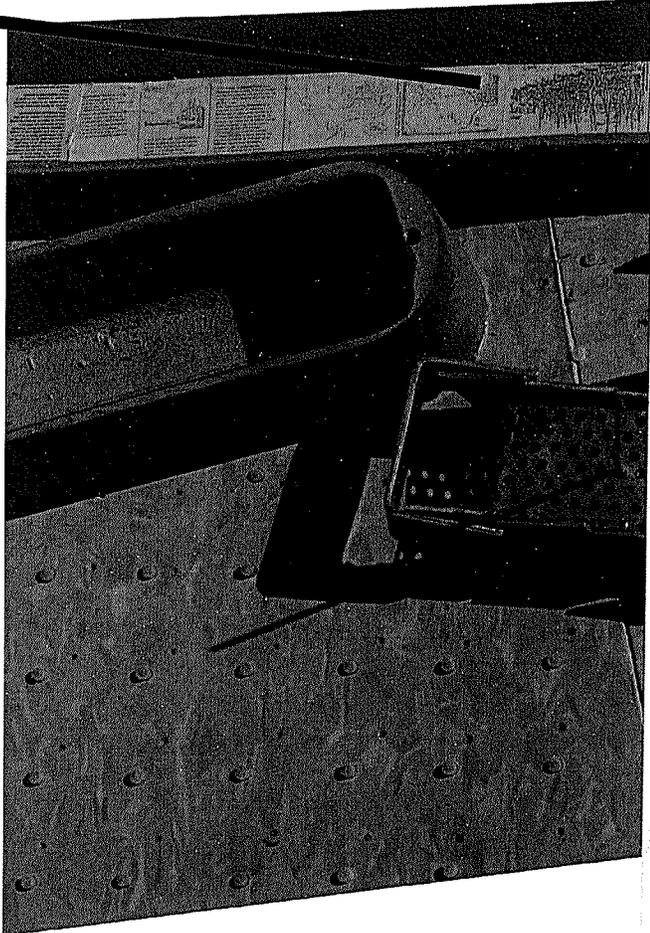
*Orange buoys mark the places where people have gone after her. They are inflated cryptograms, pumpkin heads hollowed out into angry signs that point to the gravity of their own warning. Only the unsinkable can show up a wrecked visibility. She looks up at the muscular underside of the story as it sails by loaded with its unlikely ending. Beneath the commotion she is as calm as the water, so there is no need to come up for air. - (Miles, 2000)*

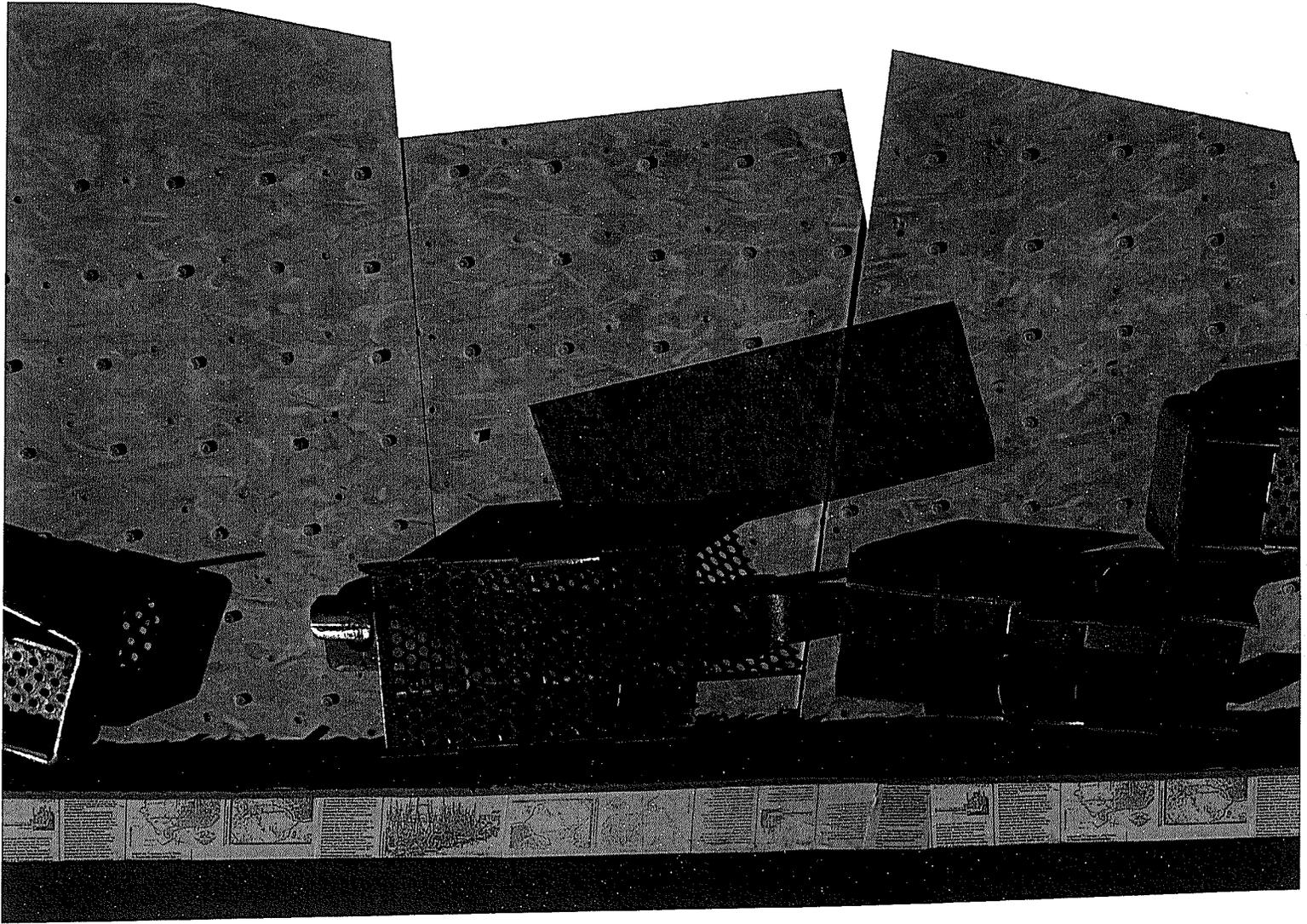
## **7 grid of lights**

A 3.5m grid of lights floats amid the ruins of the ships. At night, beams of light would cut through the polluted waters of the Vuelta de Rocha, and soak into the rusted hulls of the ships. During the day, the floatation devices maintain the visual presence of the grid. As the ships decay and perhaps submerge, void traces remain in the grid, which start to engage memory and act as a record of decay.



Information plates edge the walkway, reinforcing the link between the neighbourhood and the ships. The plates depict the history of the port, as well as the the historical record of the ships now there; information of crews, log entries, cargos, etc.

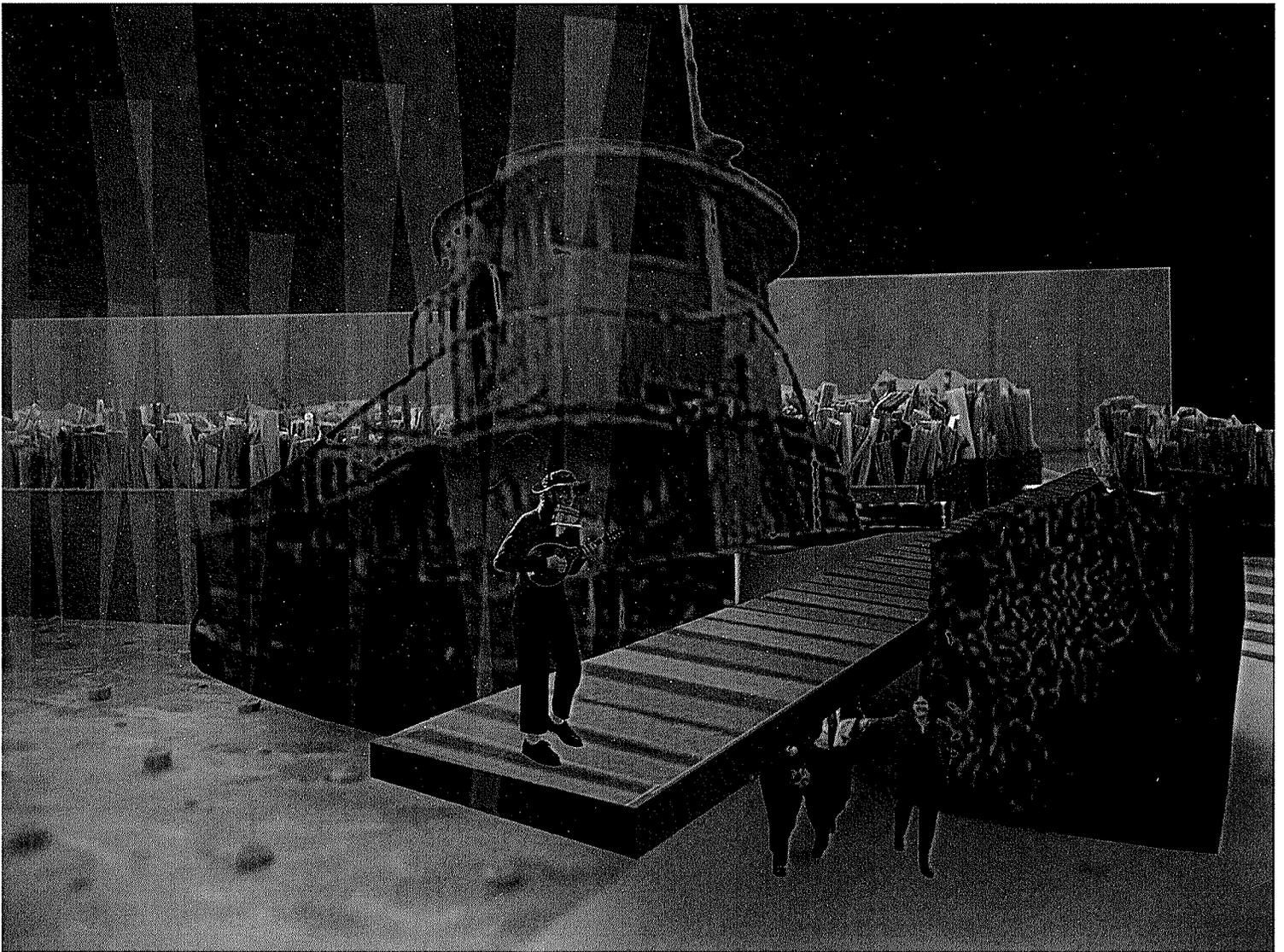




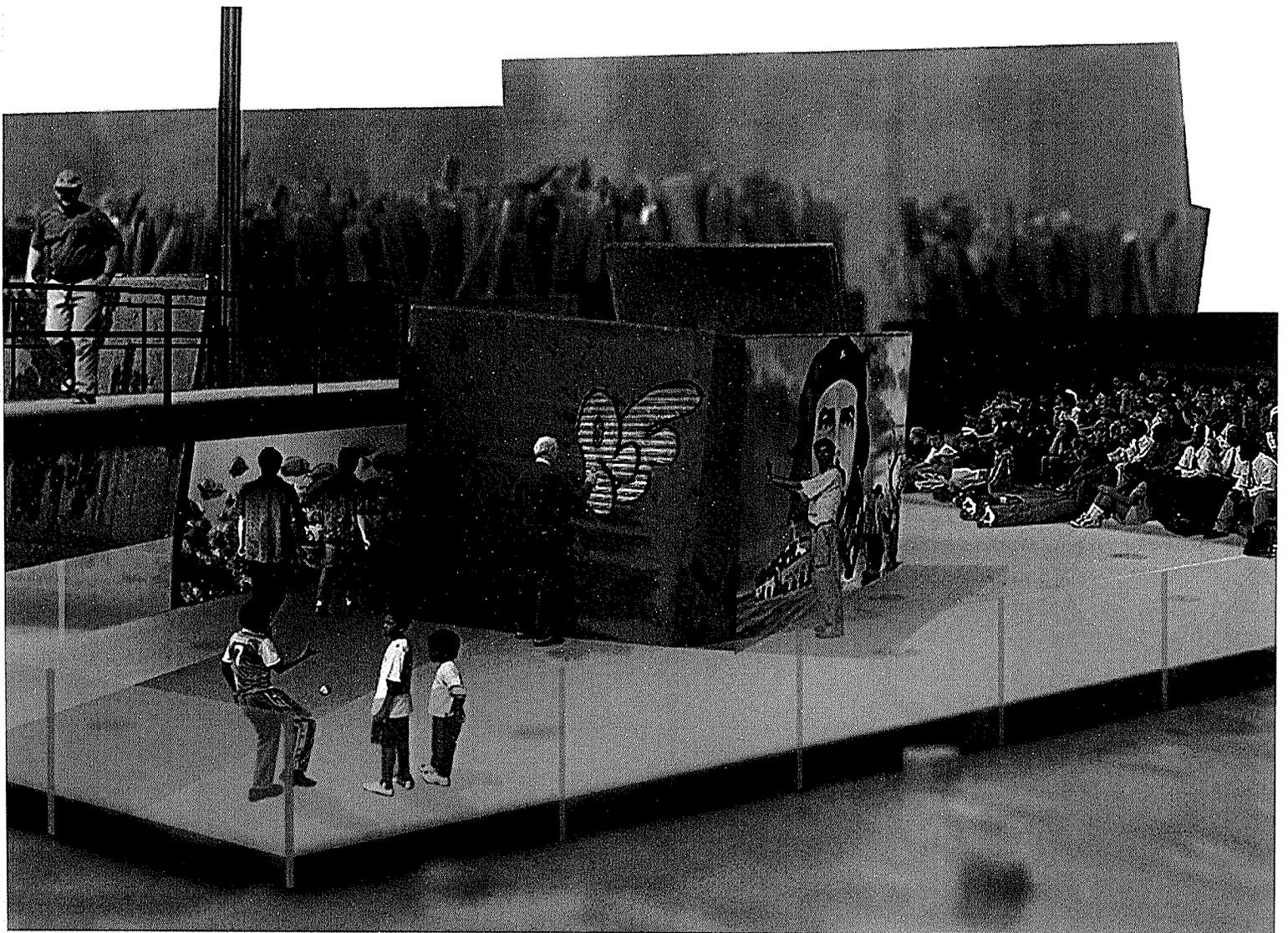
## 8 floating stage/cantelevered walkway

These images show the interaction between the participants and the ships. The hull and the deck of the ship become accessible to explore. It is here that the experience of the ships is no longer strictly visual. It engages all of the senses, and allows for varying degrees of exploration and experience to occur. The landscape of ruin can only be understood through touch, smell, detail, texture and light.

It is imagined that other ships within the scope of the future development nodes would be utilized. This is the only ship in the design that is stabilized.



The user is presented not only with the beauty inherent in the weathering of the ships, but also is confronted with extremely disturbing levels of water pollution. It acts as a reminder that this is an extremely polluted landscape and that the water is essentially lifeless. The process of decay acts as a natural part of the healing process of this landscape, as nature slowly resumes its dominance over the human-made.





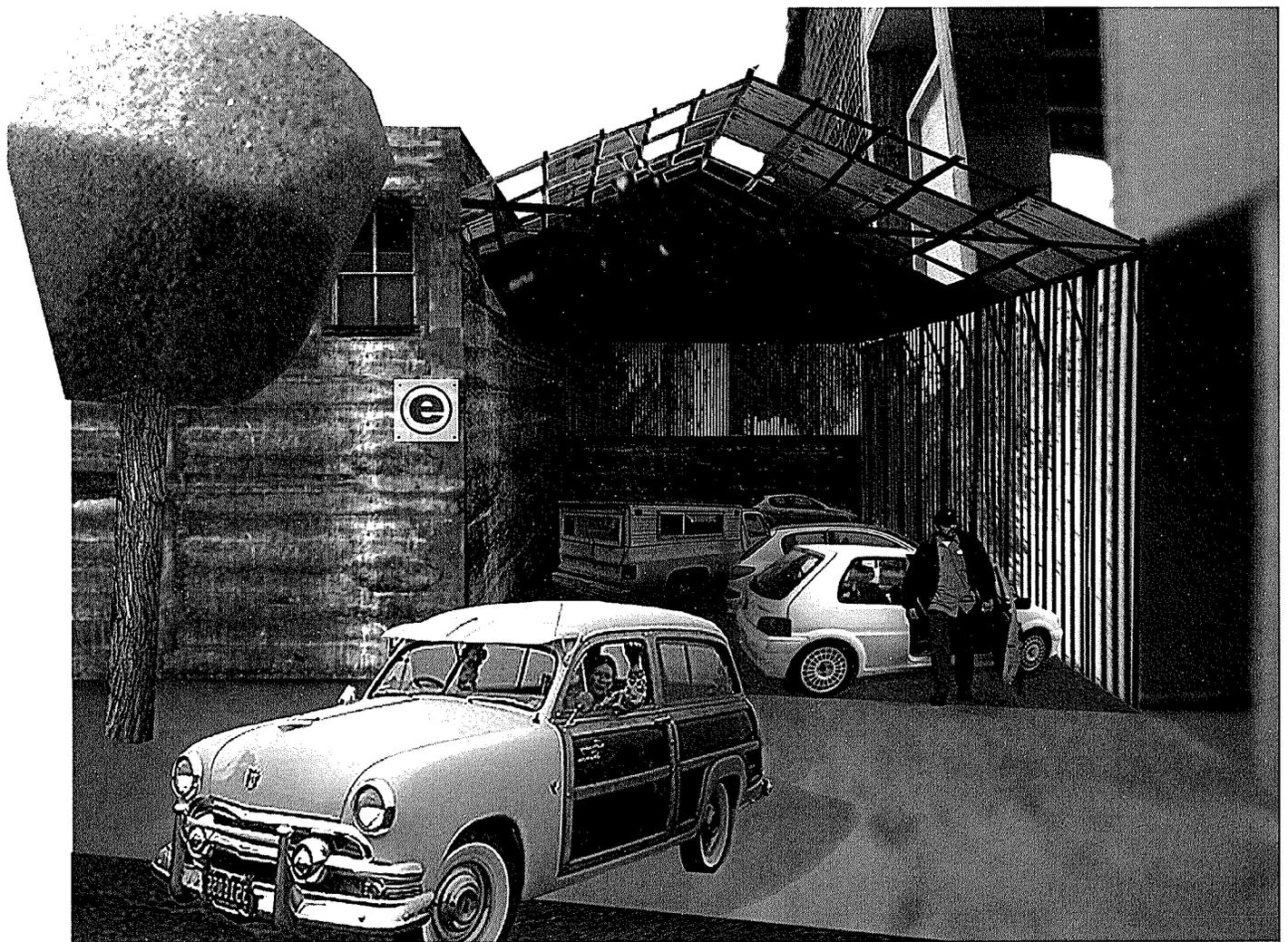


## **13** **pedro de menzoda**

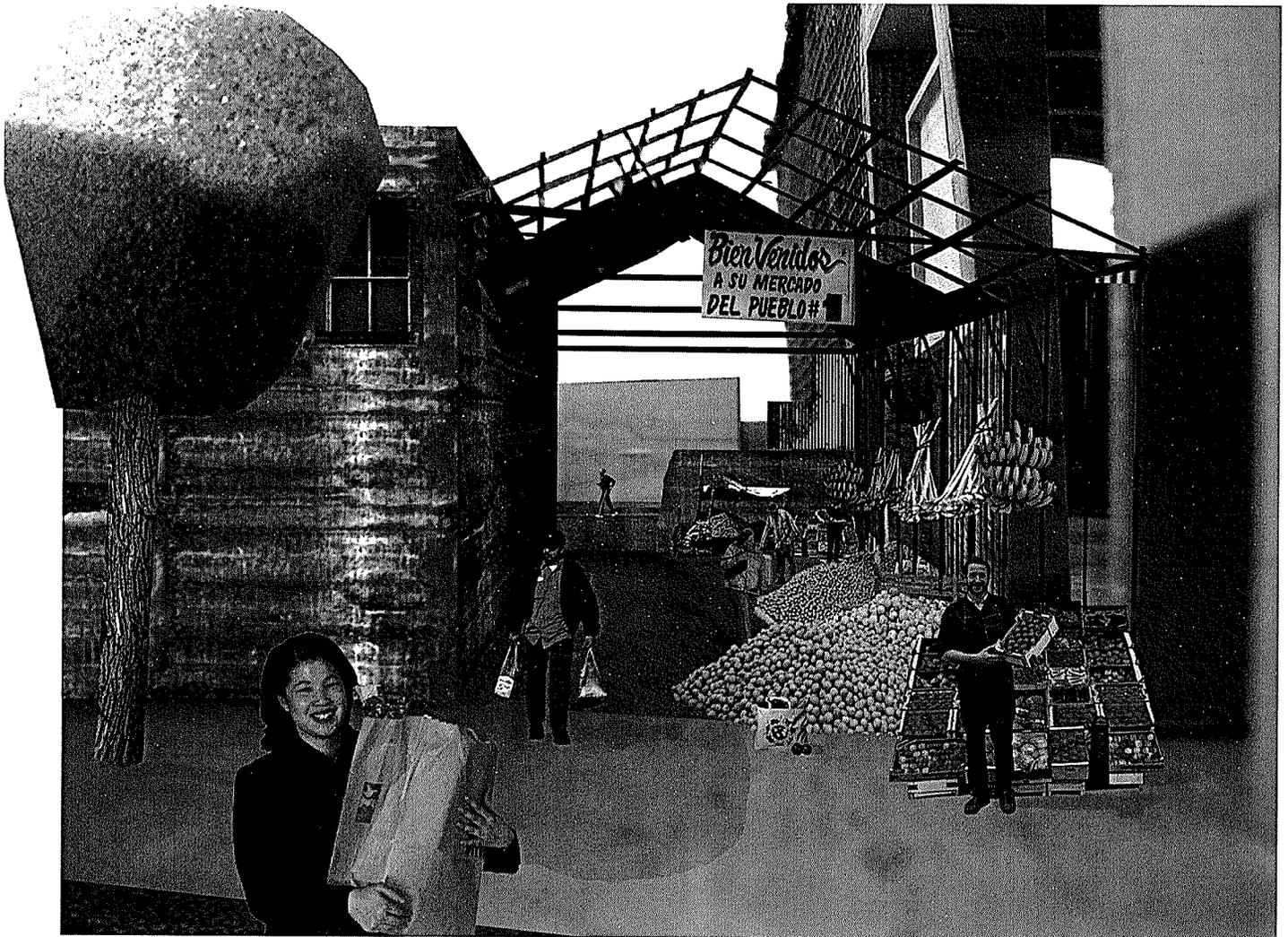
At this point on the street, participants are drawn to activity both within the site and further along the waterfront.

## 6 parking lot

A possible transition from parking to market. (Parking is the current use at this time)  
As the qualities of the space change, so might the function.



Usable places emerge from derelict spaces, instigating commerce and movement along the waterfront by both local and tourist populations. The impact of the tourist is no longer a threat as the space is equally used, and the waterfront once again becomes a place of vitality and celebration.





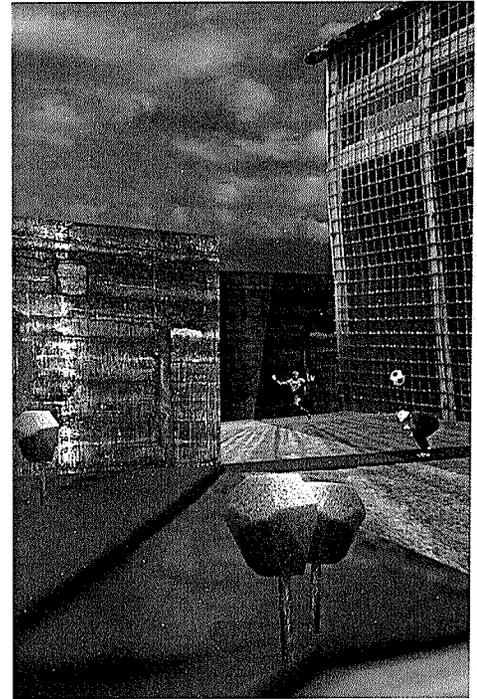
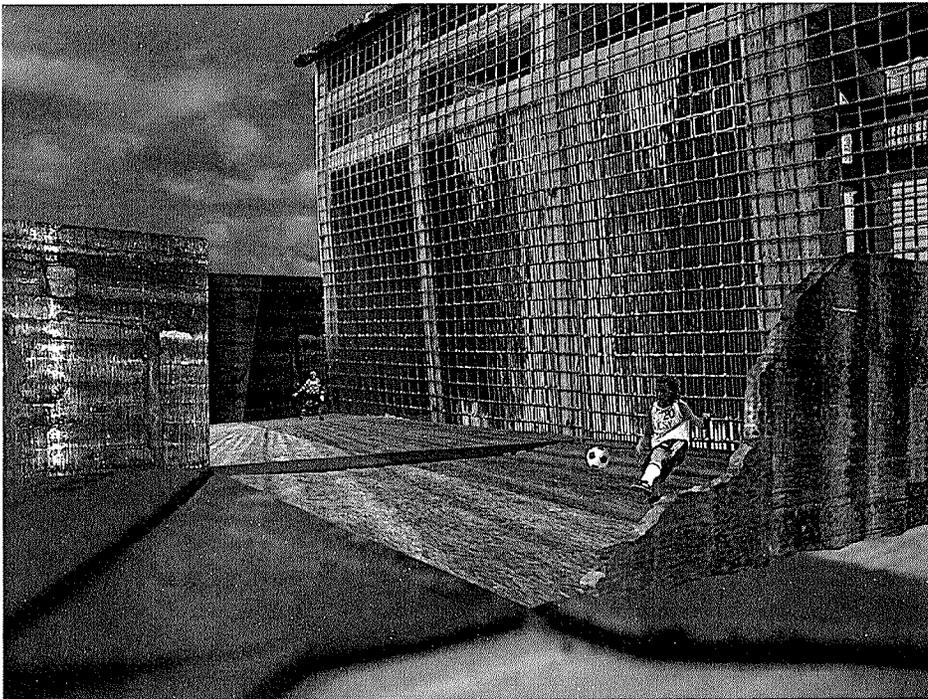


## 14 vacant lot

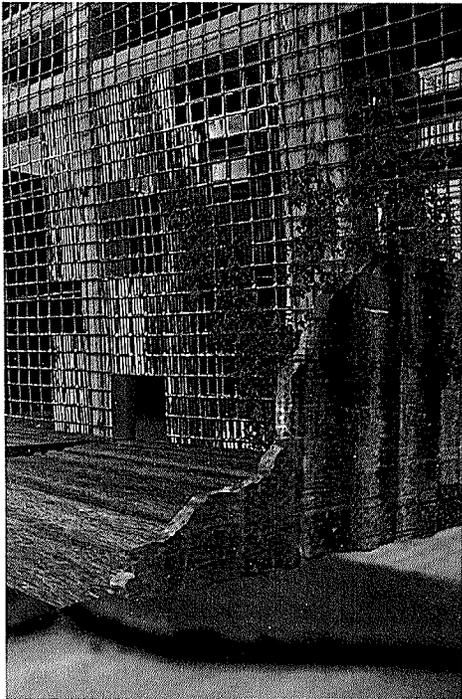
The lot is left to revegetate through wind-born seeds and the active participation of local residents. The smaller abandoned building has been renovated and has become commercial space with a plaza on the ground floor and three artist residences above.

# 15 playing field

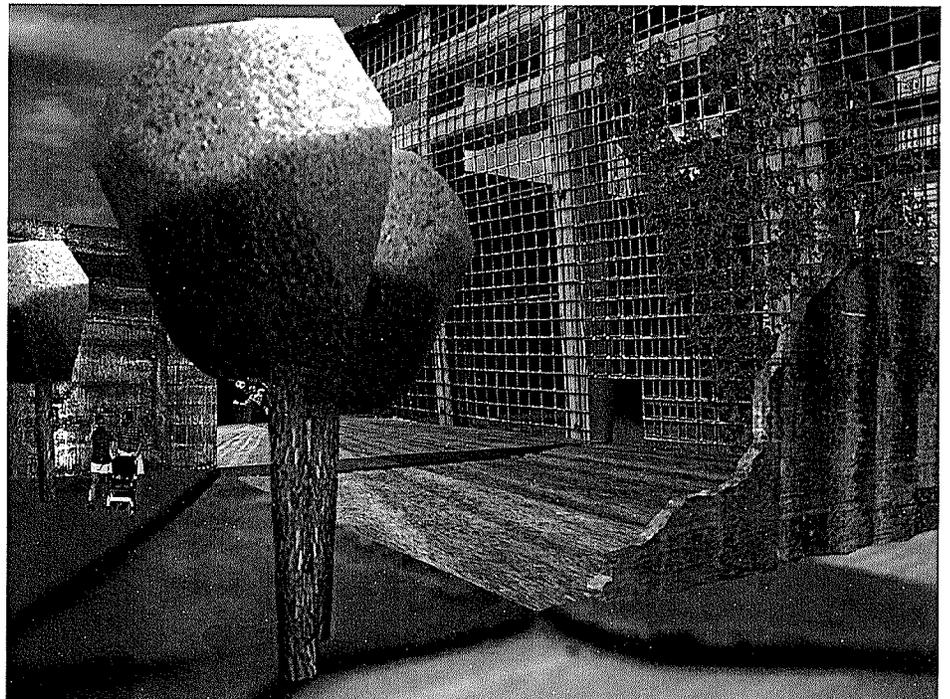
This final series shows the grassed playing field that instigates a dialogue between different parts of the site. It is imagined that the passion that exists for football in this neighbourhood is strong enough for it to become a central activity.



As barriers within the site decay, the interaction of commercial, residential, sport, art and market merges.



Interior and exterior become ambiguous, strengthening the processes that created the experience of this landscape.



**I came to the conclusion early in the project that response is the essence of ruin.**

**It was this realization that allowed me to continue forward and attempt to tell a story of this landscape. It could be argued that the story I have told is my own, and I would have to agree. I realize that I have developed very personal biases, but I believe that these are only a result of my response to my experience.**

**The design that I have shown you was not constructed to predict a response. It was constructed to set up the conditions for an experience and accept the response that follows.**

**As stated earlier, the nature of that response is not important, only that there has been one and that a story has been told.**

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