



Mnémé

A memorial site in Mati, Greece

Master Thesis

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Chrysa Gerakaki



Photograph taken by Bobonis, Tasos on 20.10.2018

Prologue

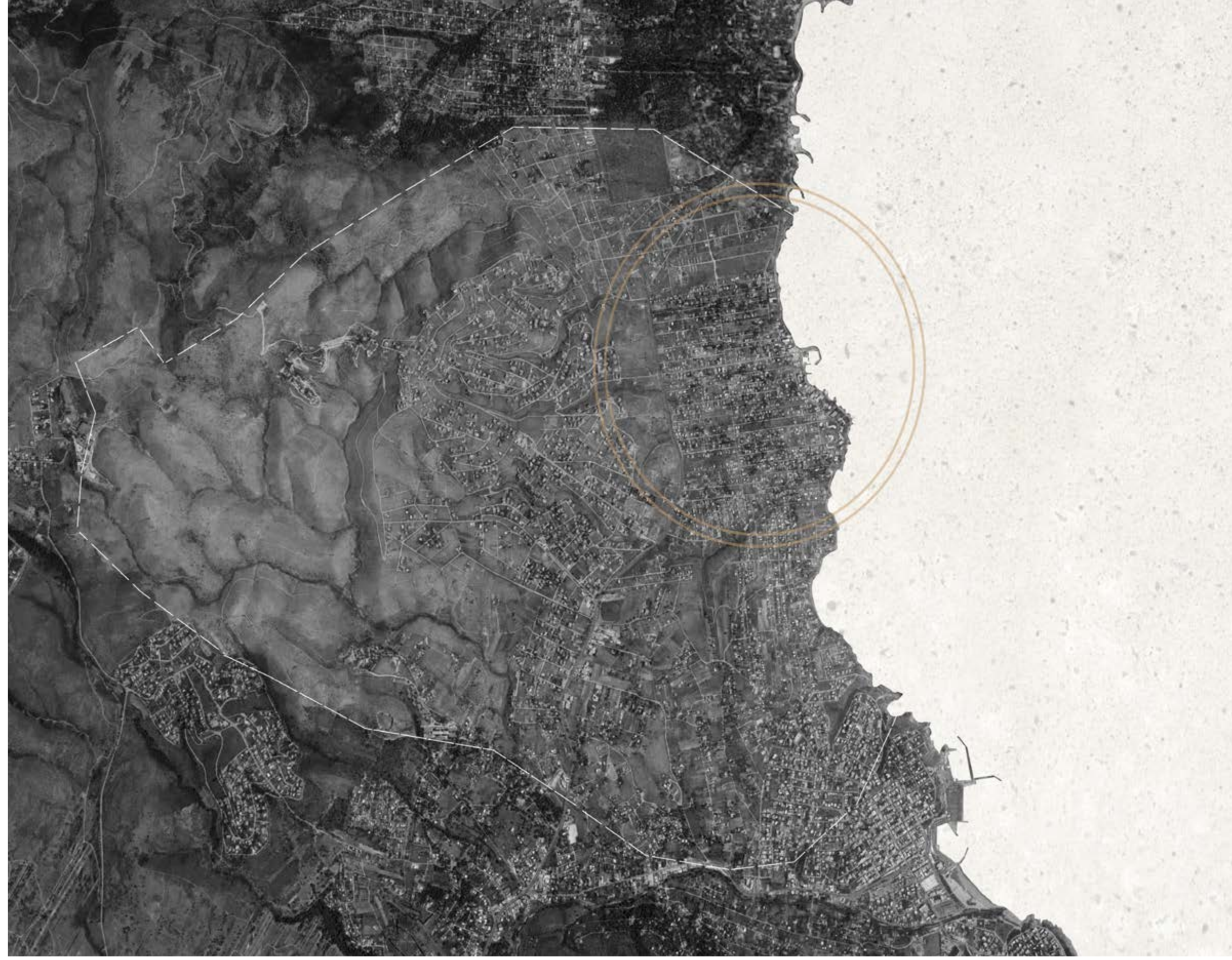
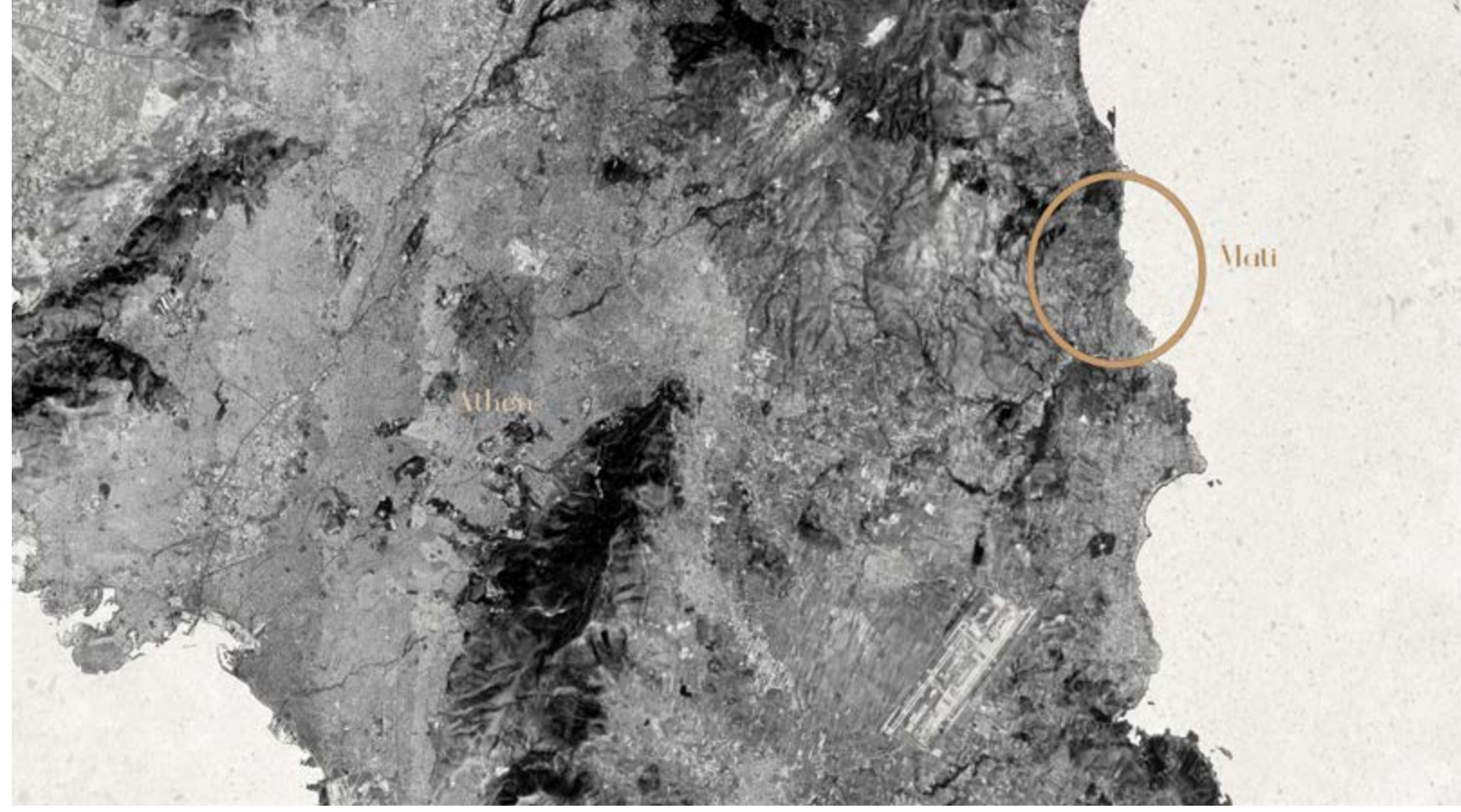
Two years ago a devastating event of a wildfire near Athens, Greece resulted in taking the life of 102 people, left many people homeless, severely injured and emotionally drained.

This was my neighborhood.

Through the prism of experiencing this traumatic event, escaping the fire, living the horror and then the aftermath of it, my thoughts these two years have never left Mati.

This thesis explores the aesthetics of remembrance and the relationship between memory and memorial architecture. Can history and loss be physically represented, while we honor individuals and commemorate many deaths? How can architecture address the events, honor the victims and survivors, contribute to acts of remembrance, heal, demand proactive engagement, and envision a better world?

It is a deeply personal project. I tried to explore my personal memories and emotions and translate them into space. The problems, the despair, the sadness and the hope. Translate them into something that embodies the responsibility of the memory.







"For the rest of the world the fire is history. For us, however, it's still burning, it still smells. It's hard to walk through some streets knowing that that is where your friends died. Months after the fire, an impenetrable wall went up. I would very much like to feel the liberation of reliving the incident, of crying and venting, but it has not happened yet. It's been two years and it's still not happened"

- Aphrodite Hatzianastasiadi



The importance of memory

Memory is vital not only to our knowledge of the world in general but also to our personal past in particular. It underwrites our identities as individuals and our ties to other people.

People, with the help of memory, associate the past with the present, to form the identity that will characterize their present and future.

In order to understand how to create commemorative architecture, it is mandatory to understand the relation between trauma and memory.

For a successful closure, a genuine recognition of what exactly happened, who was involved, how, when and why it took place, is required. Processing the trauma by sharing the memories and incorporating it into the identity of the victimized person or society, results in the much-needed catharsis and relief. Only after the process of reinterpreting the trauma, people recover the power to regulate and orient the emotions evoked by it and take responsibility for their future.

There exactly, where the work of mourning and dealing with trauma and the work of recollection overlap, memory, individual and collective, acquires its full meaning.



Photograph taken by Karmaniolas, Savvas on 24.07.2018

Memorial Architecture

Through the implementation of memorials, we prevent the process of forgetting, materialize the intangible and connect past with the present. As architecture is being used in the mechanism of healing, memorials become a construct of symbolic consolidation of memory in space and time.

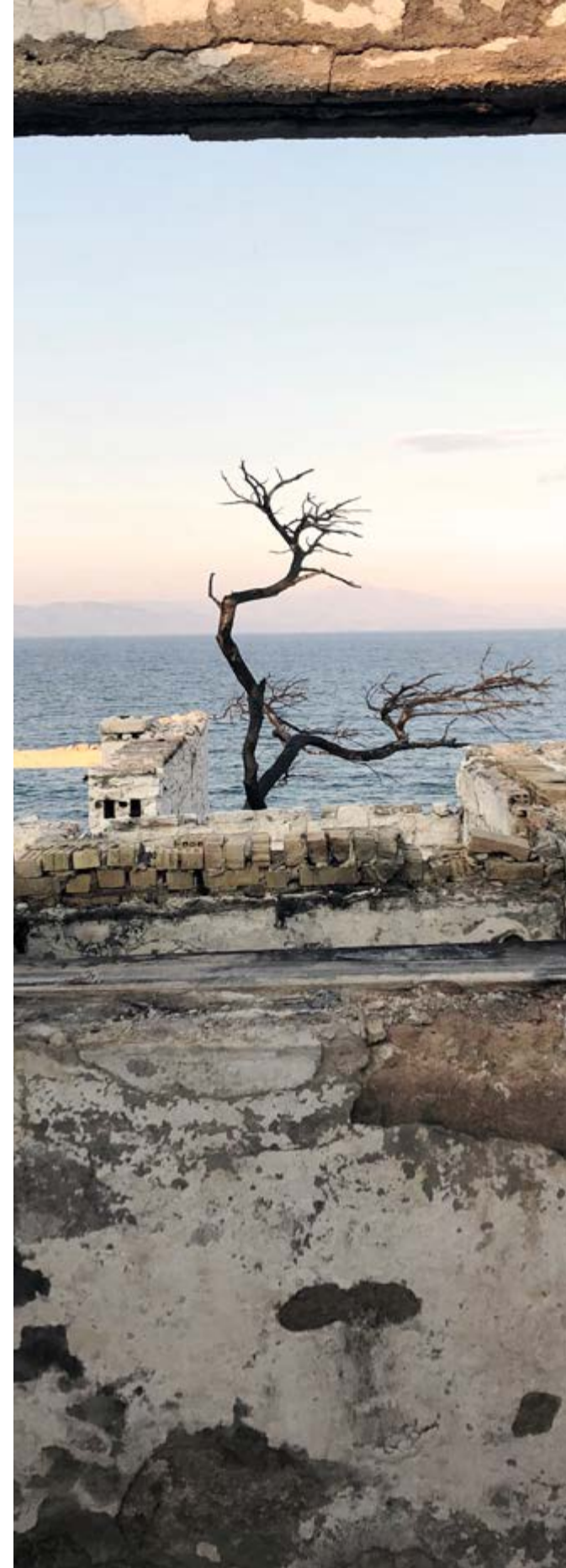
As such, they are expected to exist not as a place reminiscent of terror and despair, but one which actively engages the surrounding urban fabric and welcomes all to its space.

They not only create a material framework for mourners and survivors but also prolong the collective social memory of persons or events beyond mental recollections of individuals who knew or witnessed them first hand.

Peterson suggests that once the immediacy of expression of grief decreases in its power, the mourning continues, being transformed into a ritual similar to visiting a graveyard. The memorial becomes a transitional object and a holding space, providing a significant locus for processing the legacies of trauma and creating an environment for individuals who need to make sense of loss and deal with conflicting emotions.







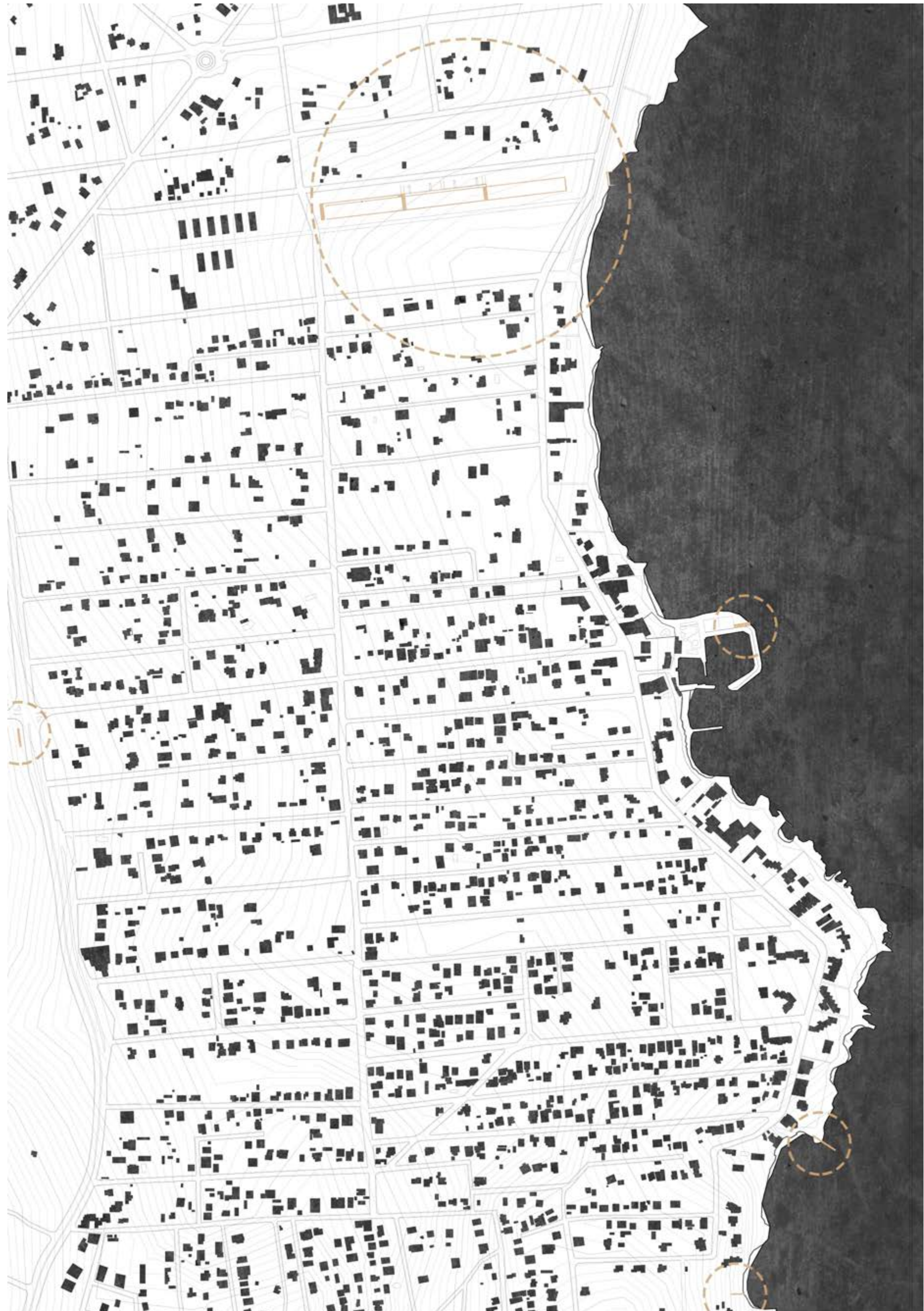
Project Proposal

The whole area and the landscape in Mati (natural or structured) with all its wounds from the fire, becomes a palimpsest of history and memory. The project is conceived as a memory and conscience site, that invites the visitor to explore the affected area and find the narratives himself.

This project becomes an anarchic other space where trauma is revealed, terror is showcased, identities are highlighted stories are unearthed and closure may be achieved. It encourages critical consciousness, committed memory work and the possibility of engaging with the world through transformative practices.

The project embeds both the idea of life and death, providing a network of symbolic interventions as representations of the handling of some of the most critical moments of the disaster. These act as constant reminders of the things that were missing when the fire took place. The concept exists in the ambivalence of being both soothing and emotionally challenging at the same time.

The ground in Mati is so incredibly charged that every intervention is carefully considered. Symbols are abstracted, providing meaning in the project while being open to individual interpretation. The memorial offers a place for timeless reflection. It demands that people do not forget, that they commit to never forgetting.



Information and evacuation

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Marathonos Av., Mati



Weather conditions and shelter

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Marina of Mati, NAOMA



Rescue from the Sea

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Cavo Beach, Mati



Topography and escape routes

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Fragkos Property, K.Limanaki



Panic, organisation protection

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NAT Property, Mati

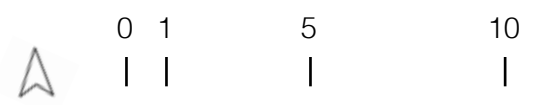
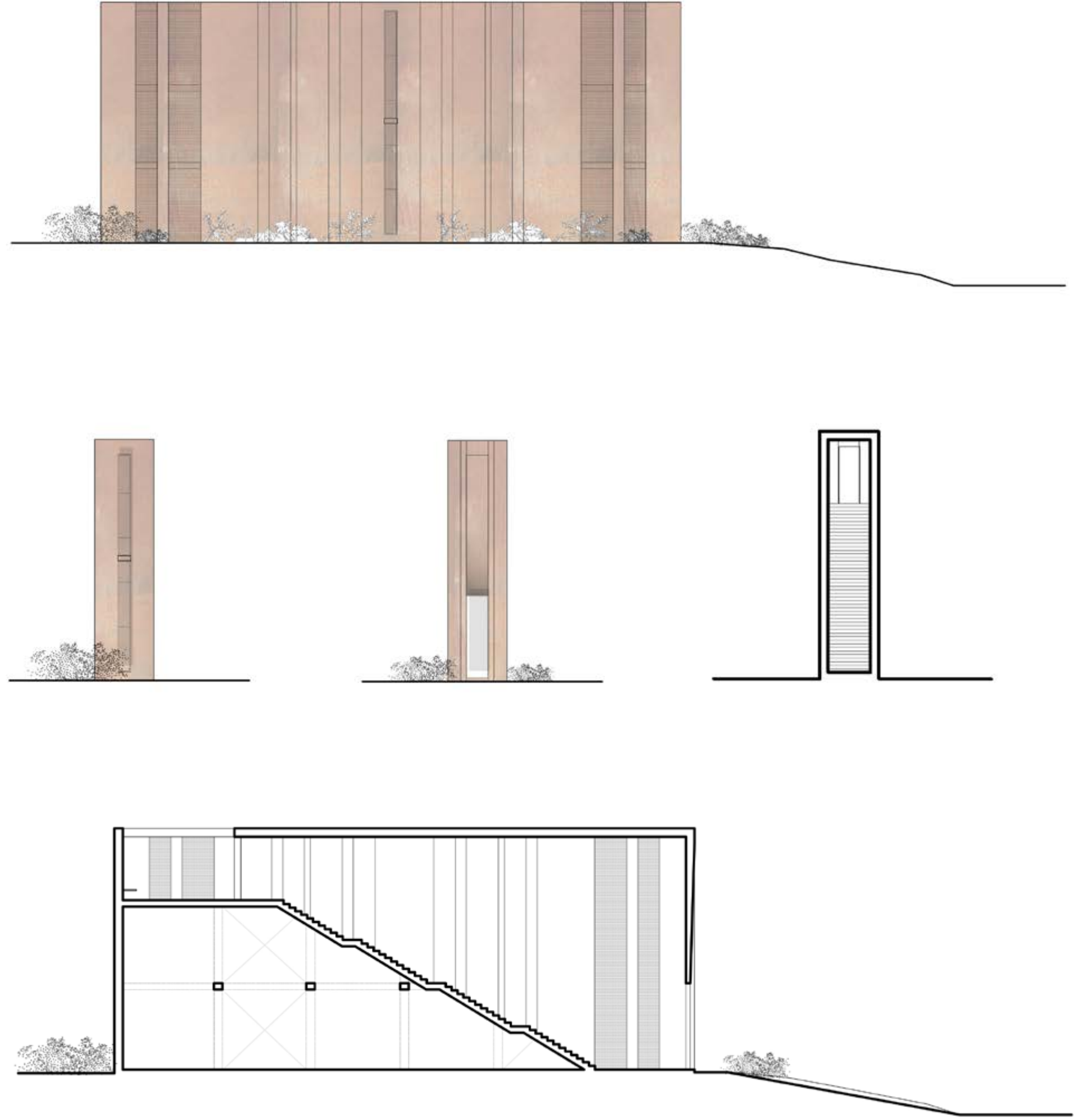
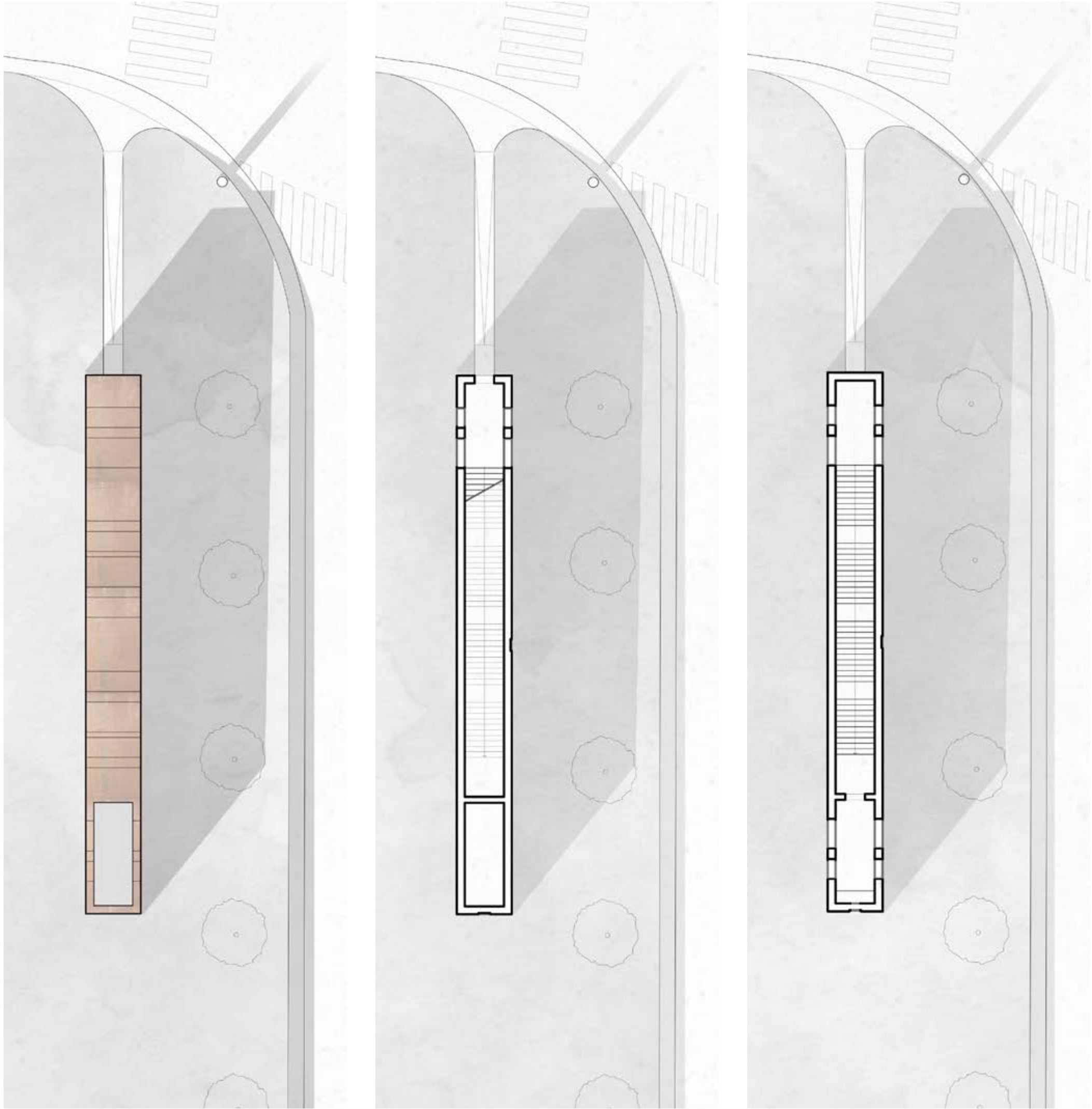




Information and
evacuation

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Marathonos Av.,
Mati



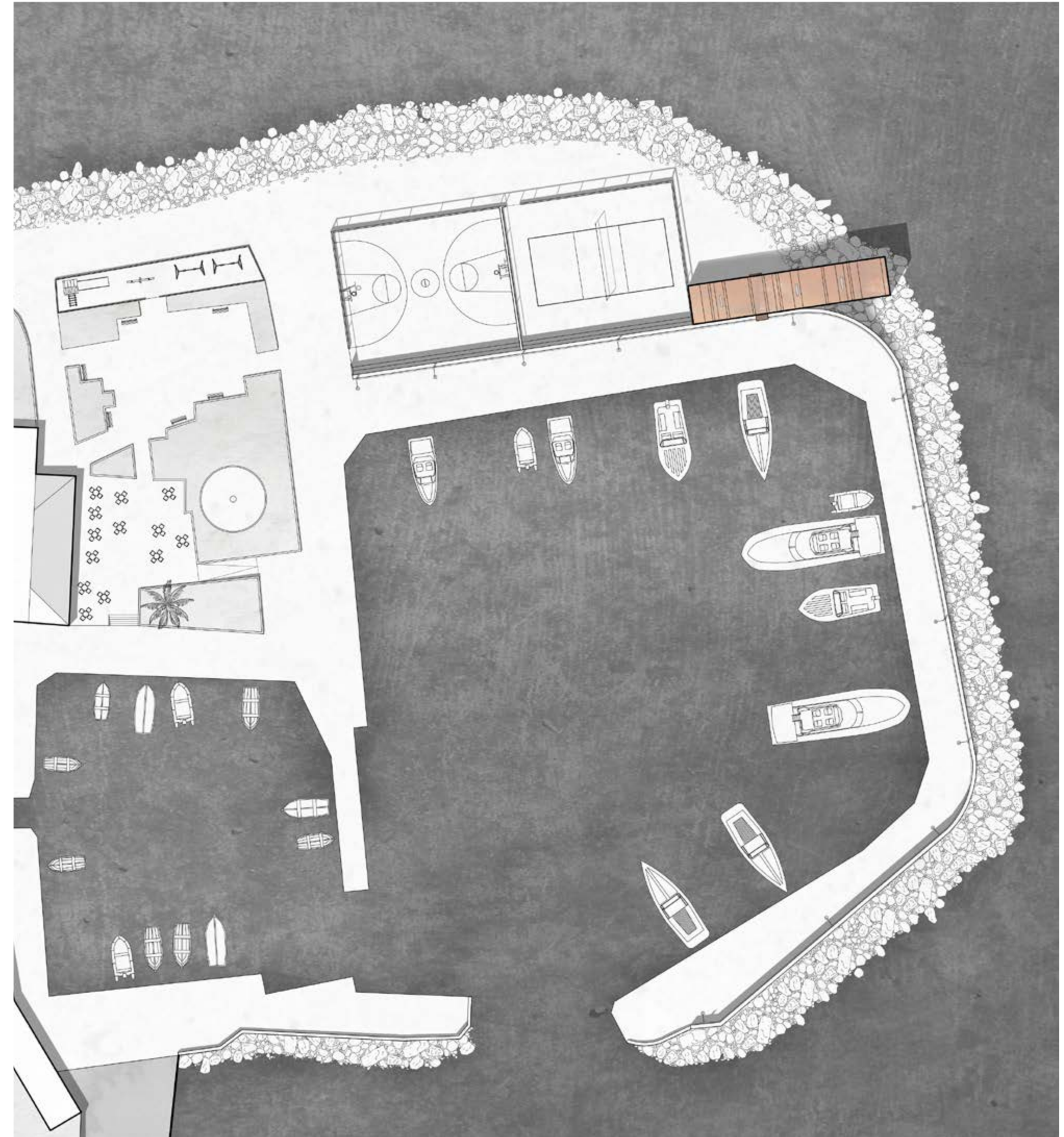


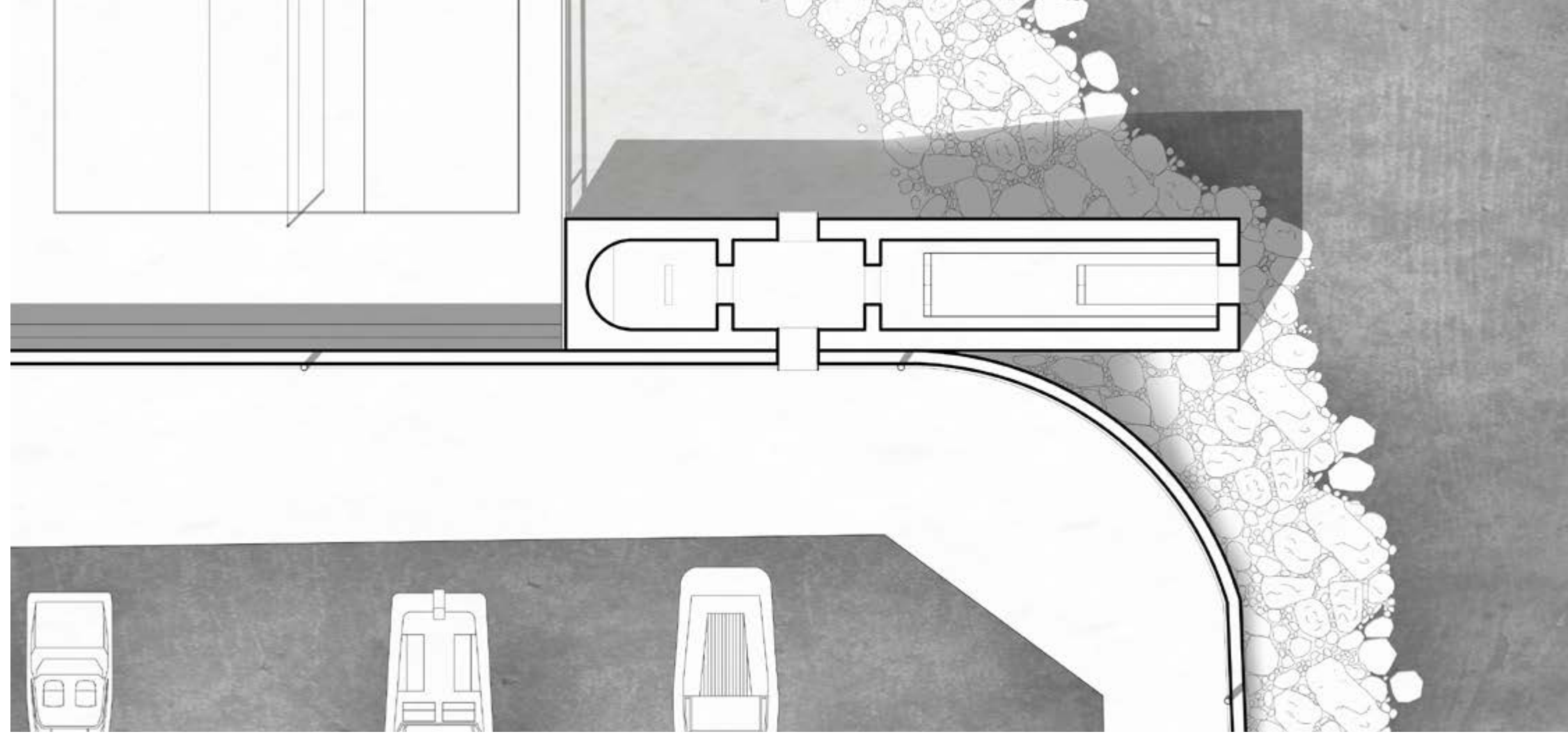




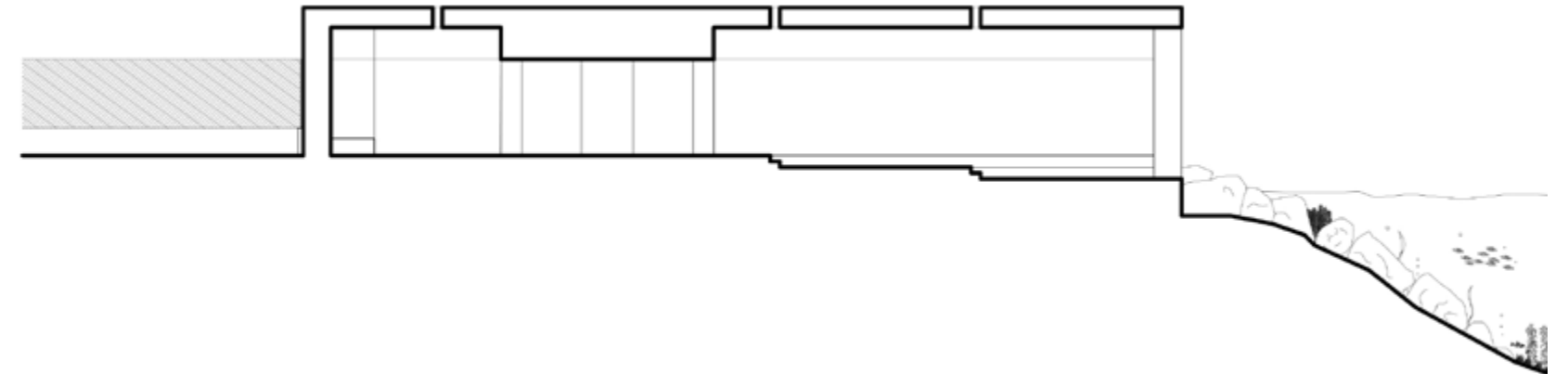
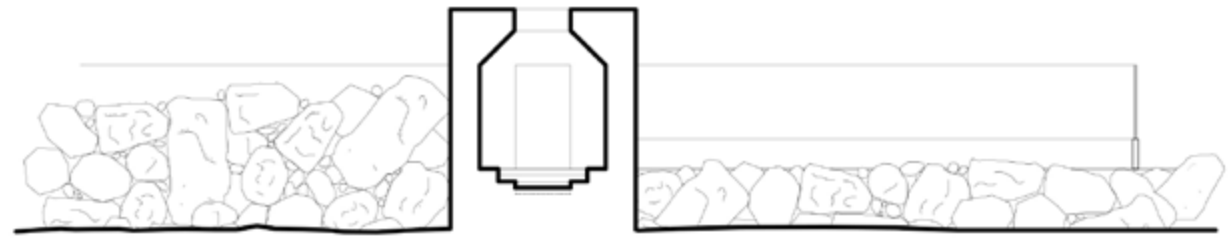
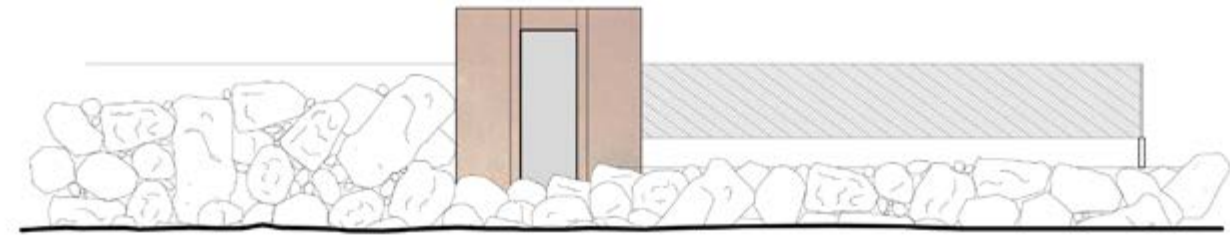
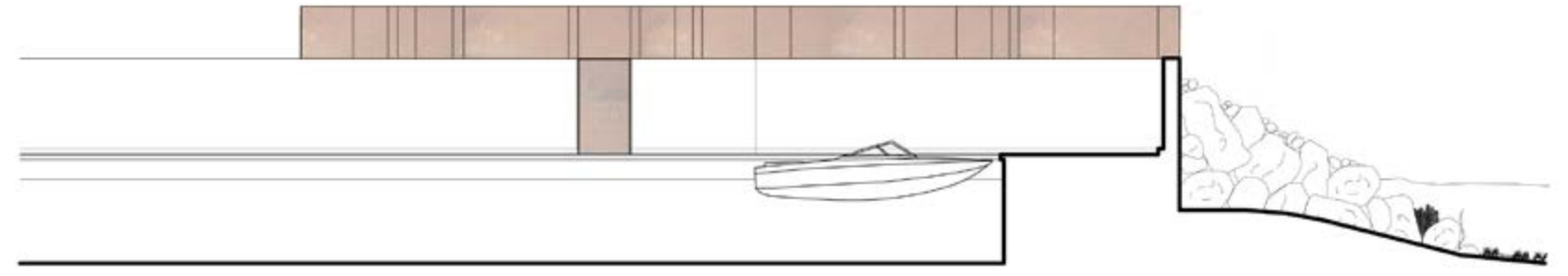
Weather
conditions
and shelter

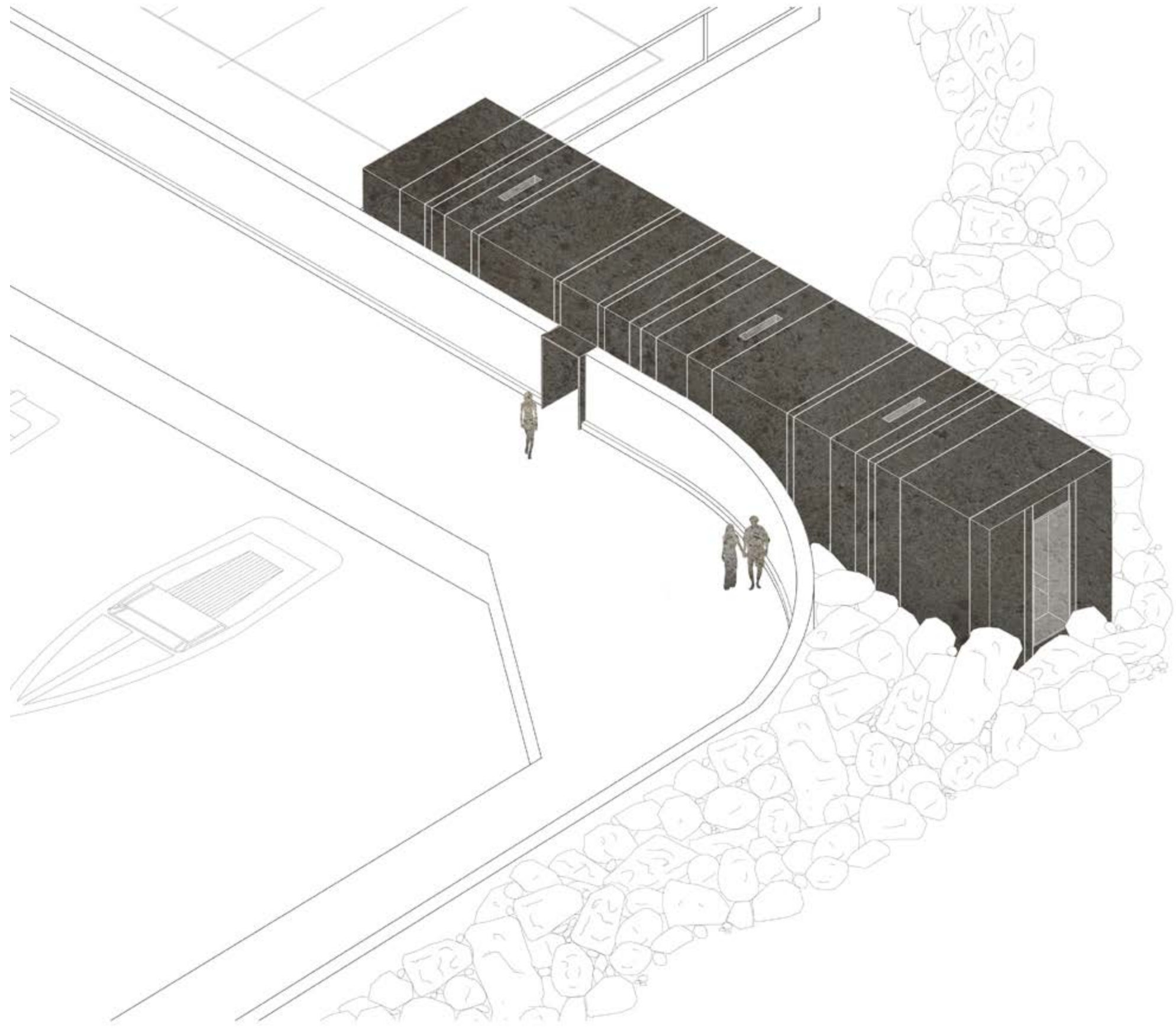
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Marina of Mati
NAOMA





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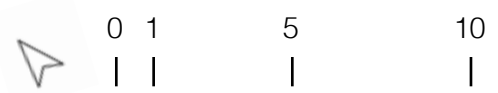
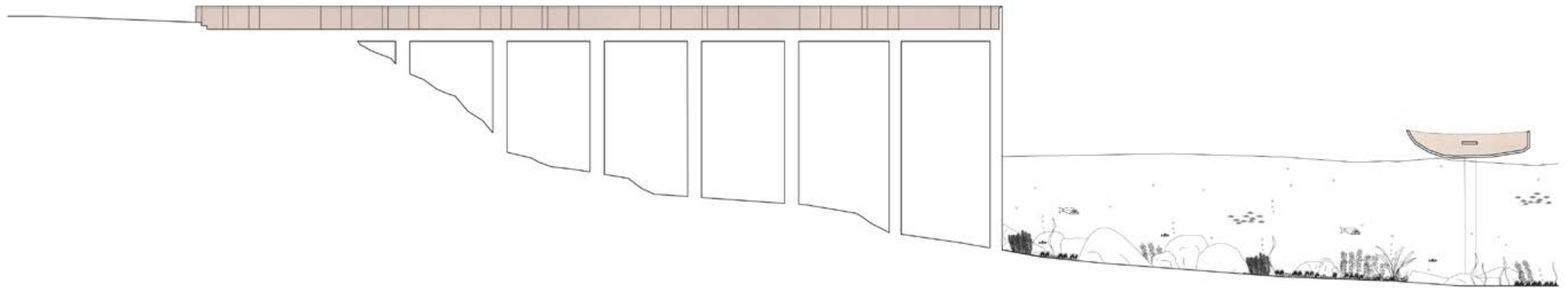
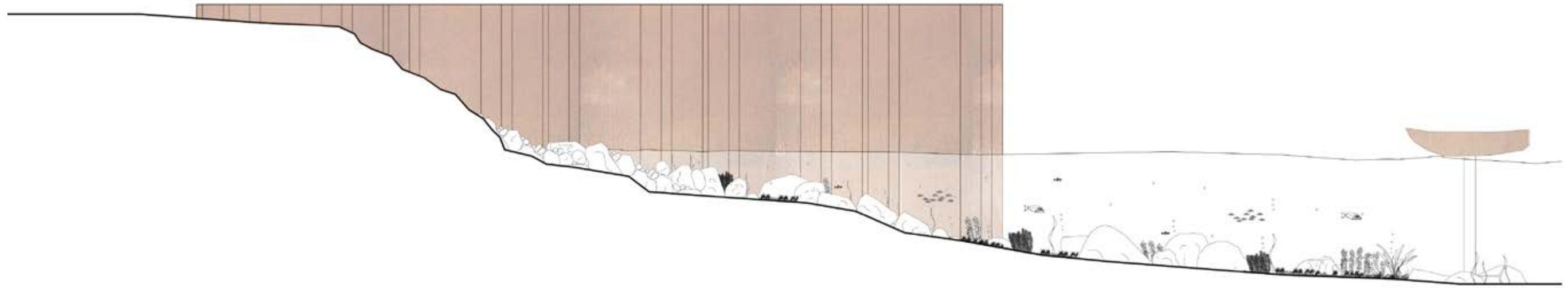
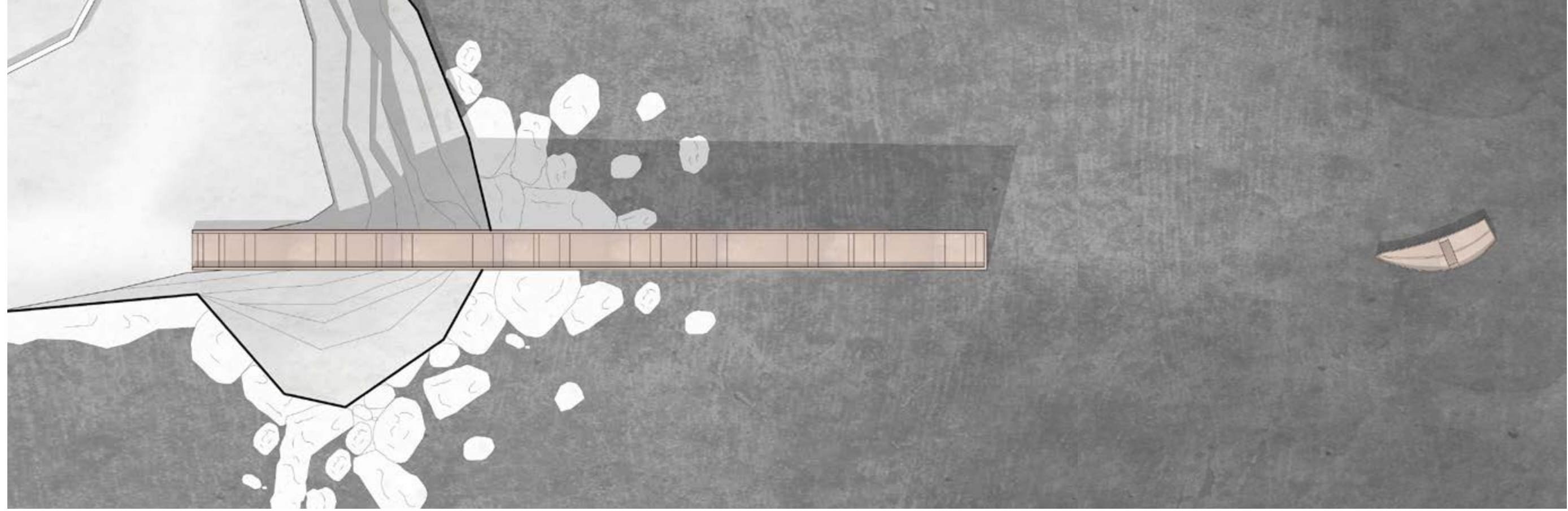


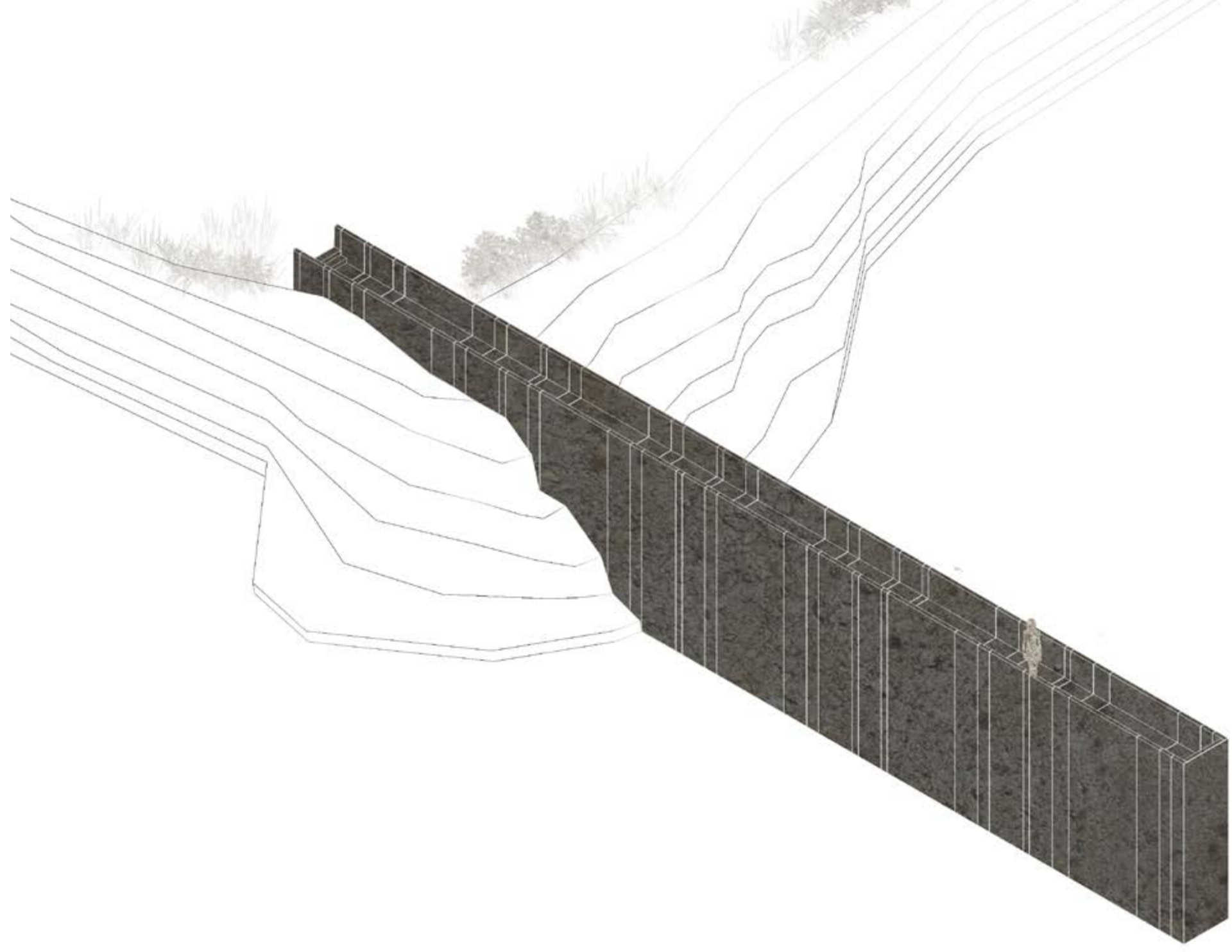


Rescue from
the Sea

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Cavo Beach,
Mati



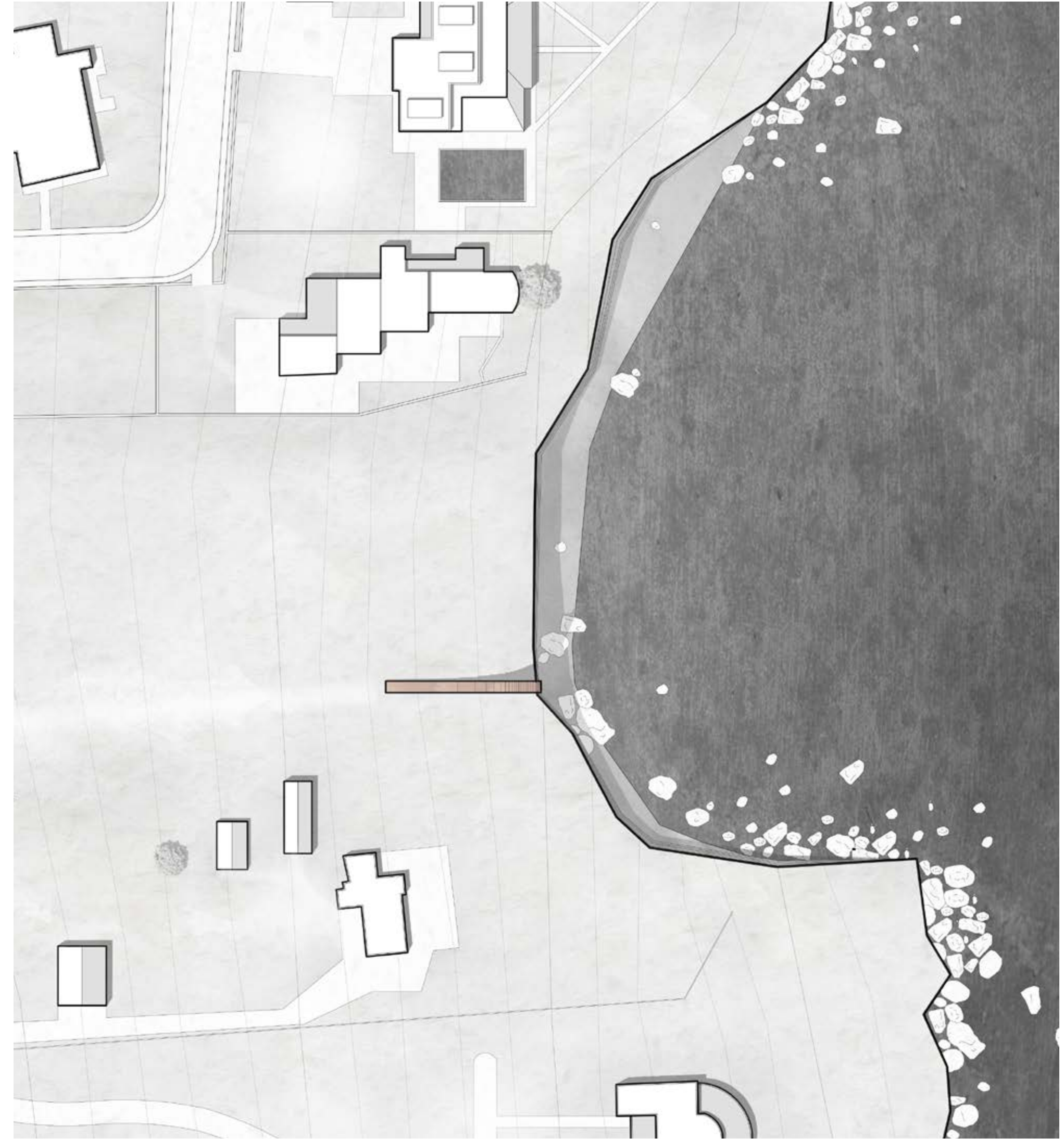


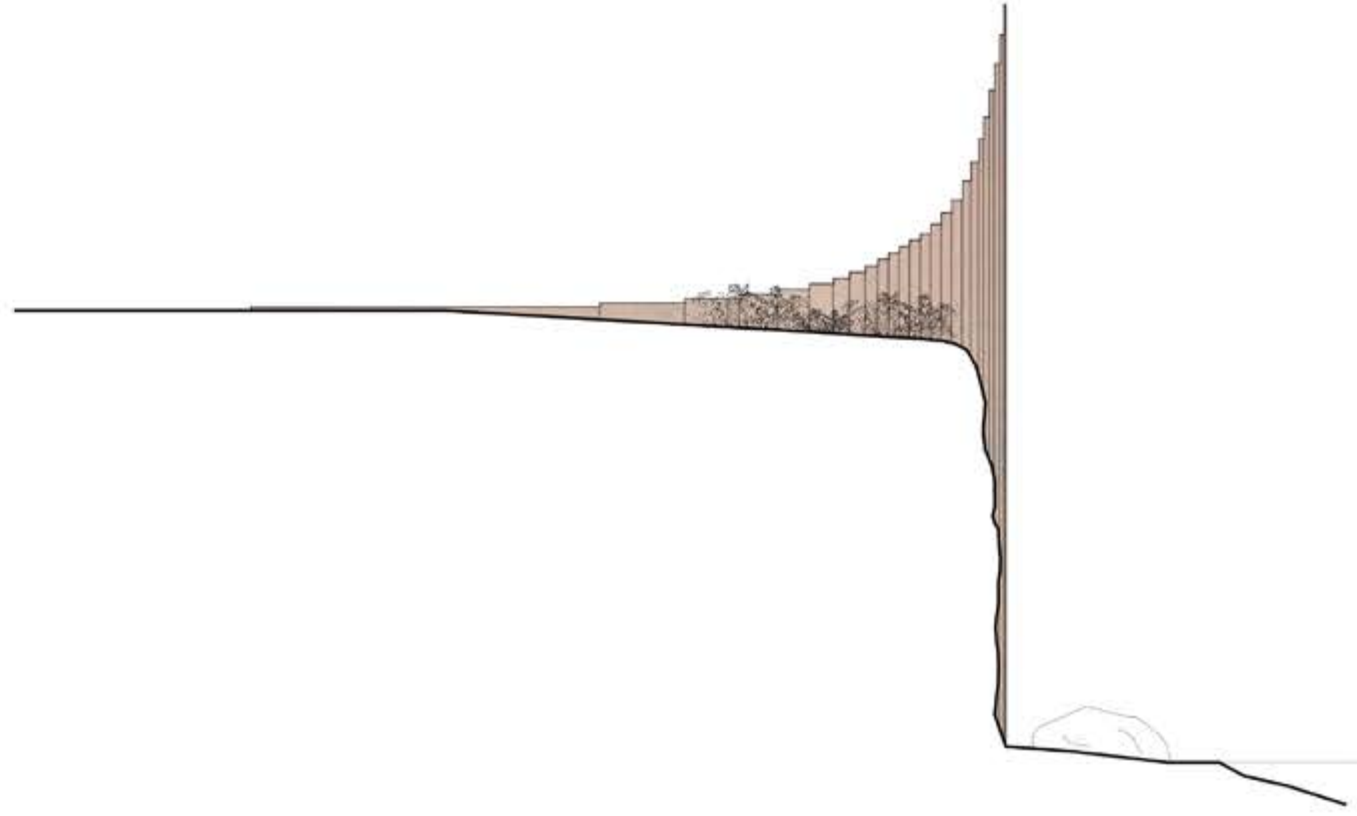
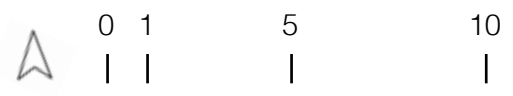
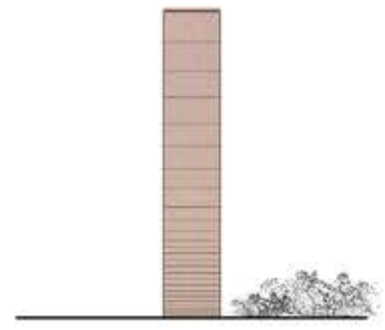
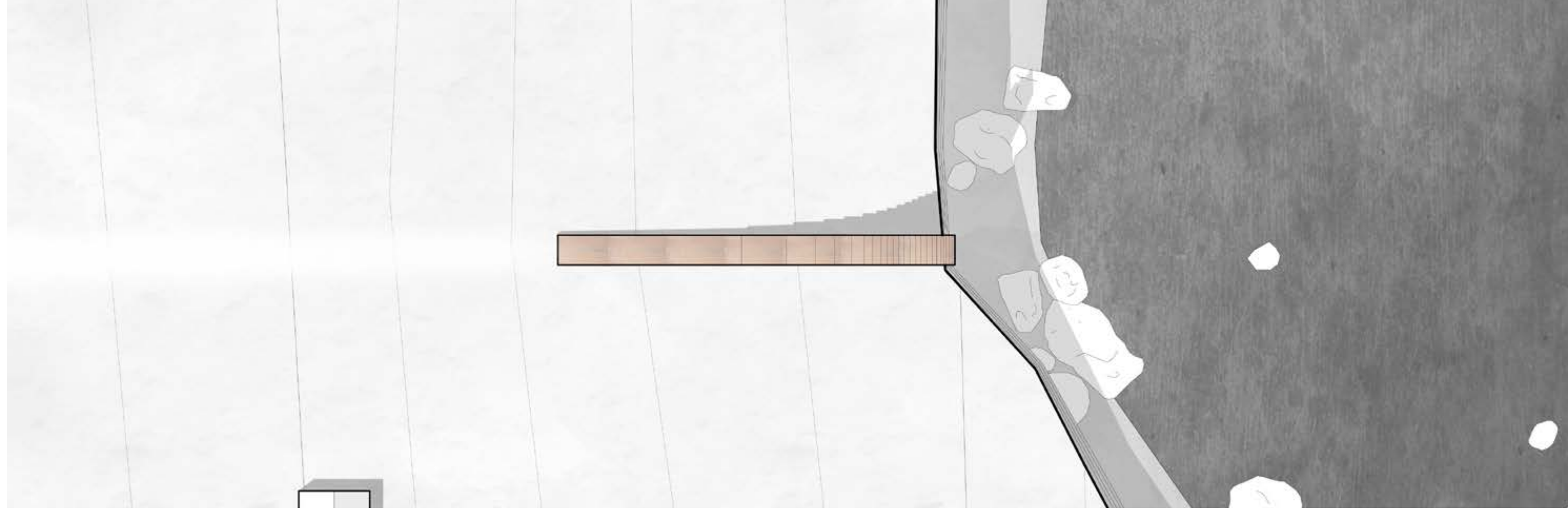


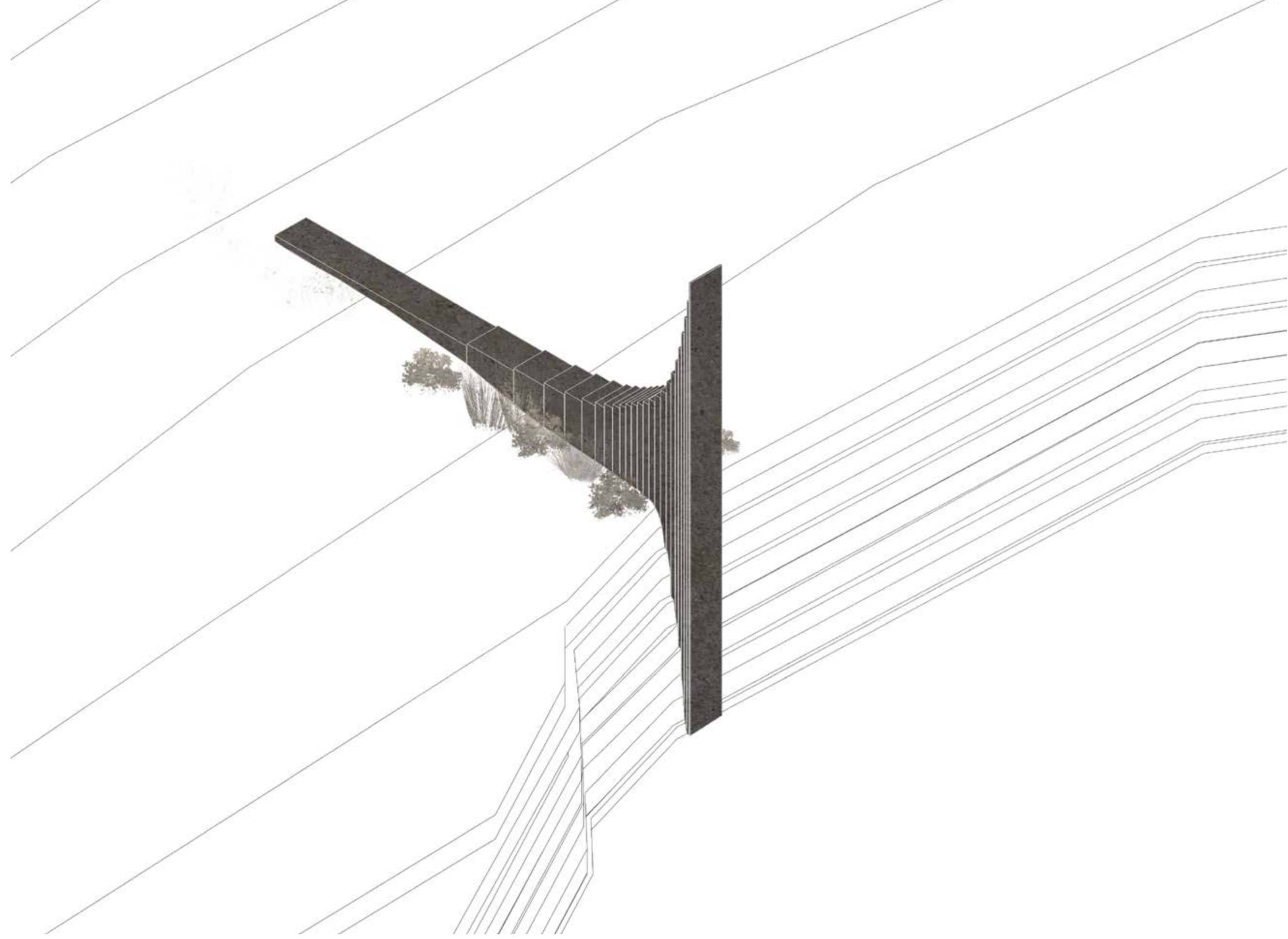


Topography and
escape routes

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Fragkos
Property,
K.Limanaki







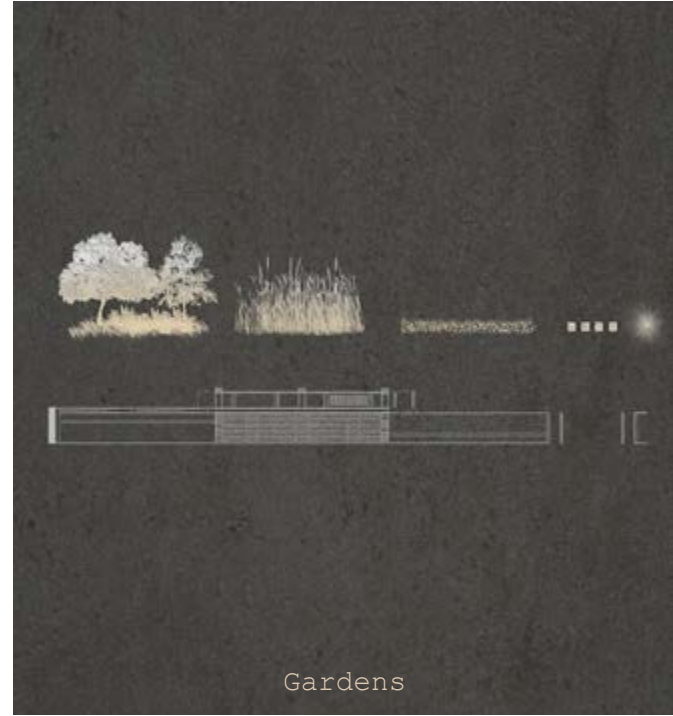


The memorial
(Panic, organisation,
protection)

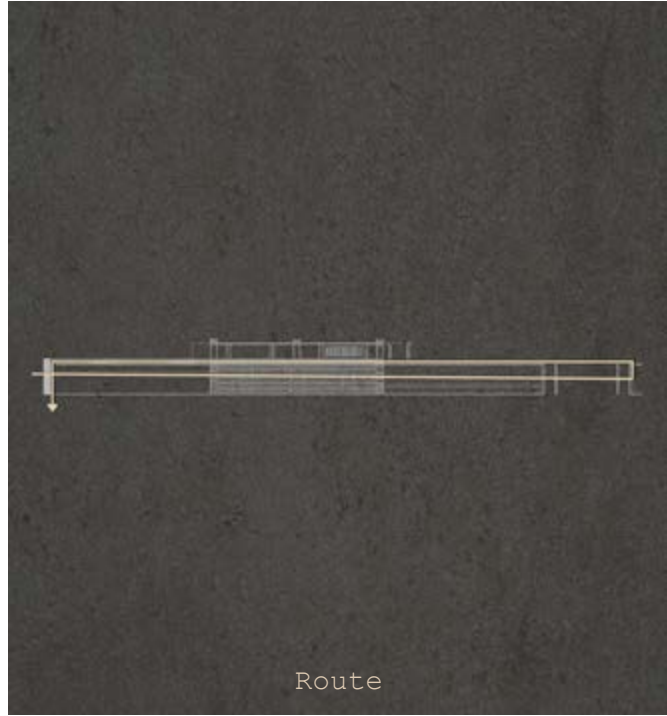
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NAT Property,
Mati





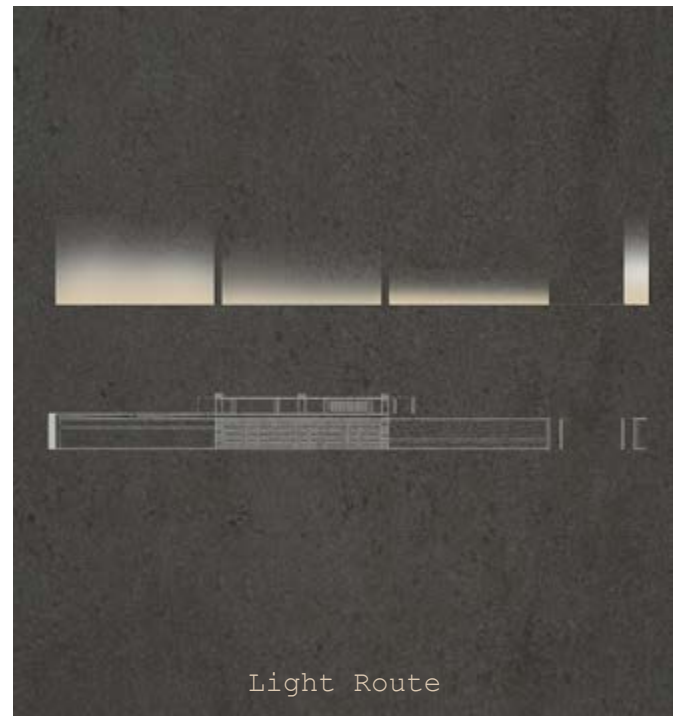
Gardens



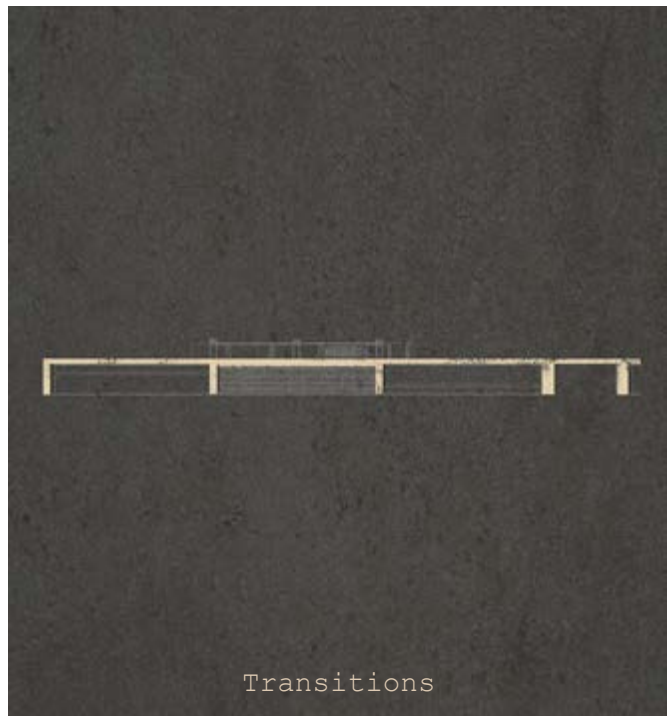
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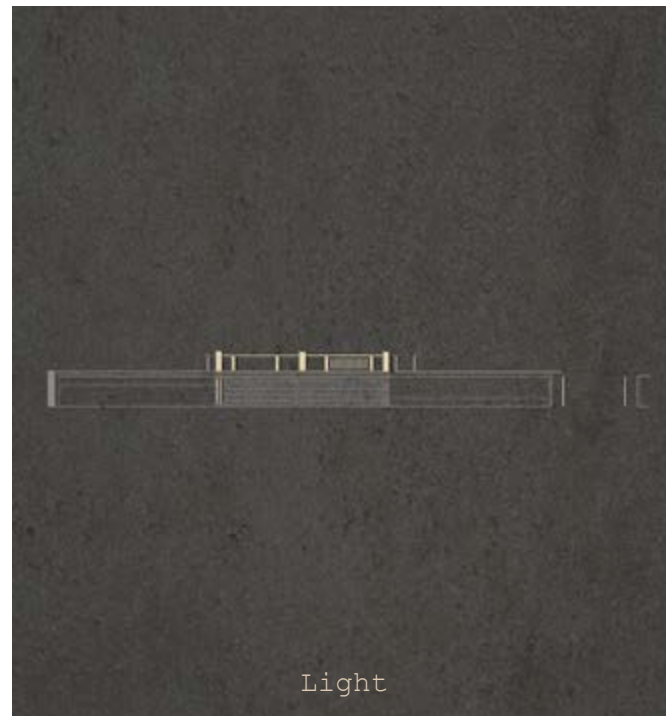
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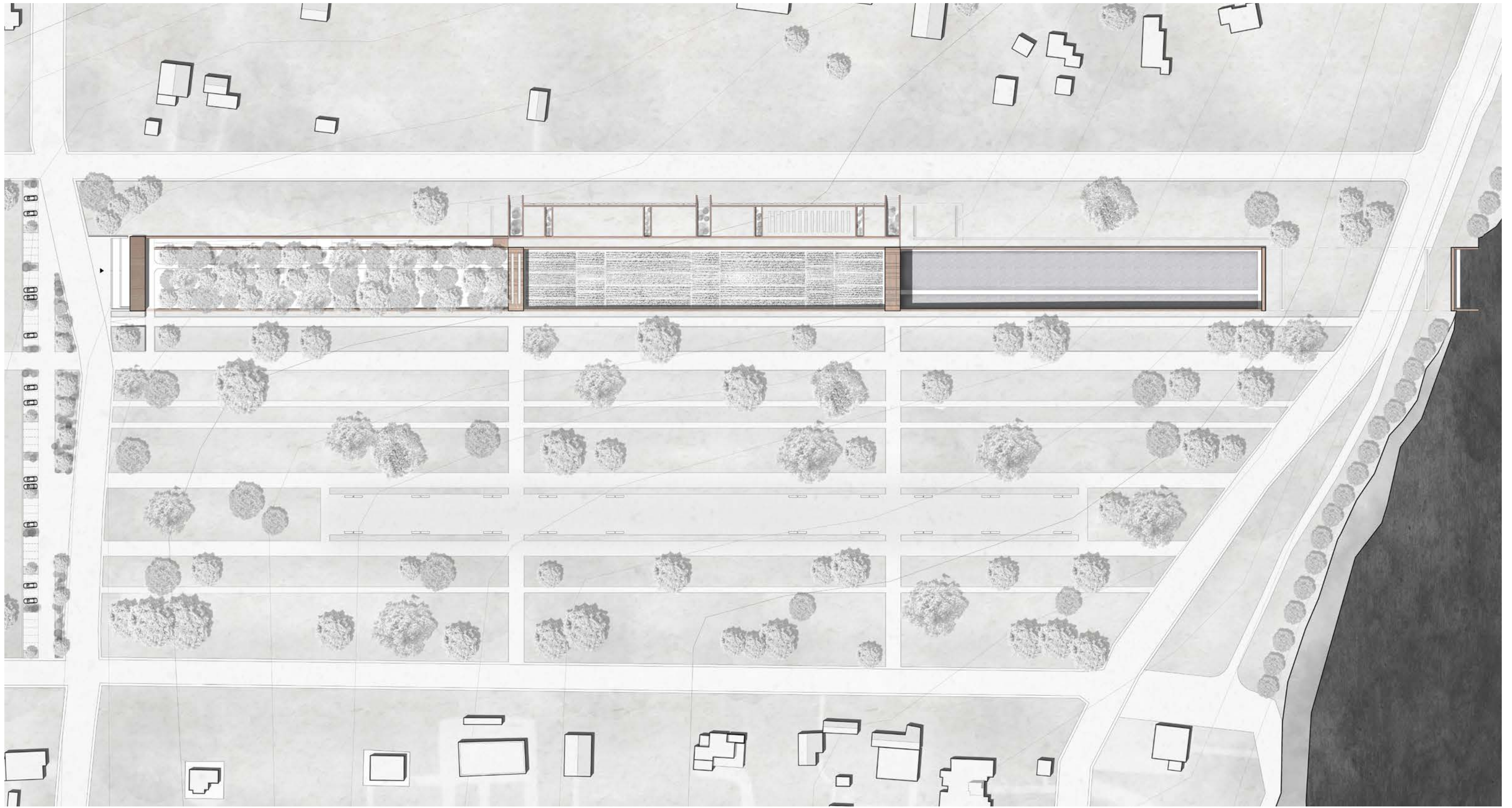
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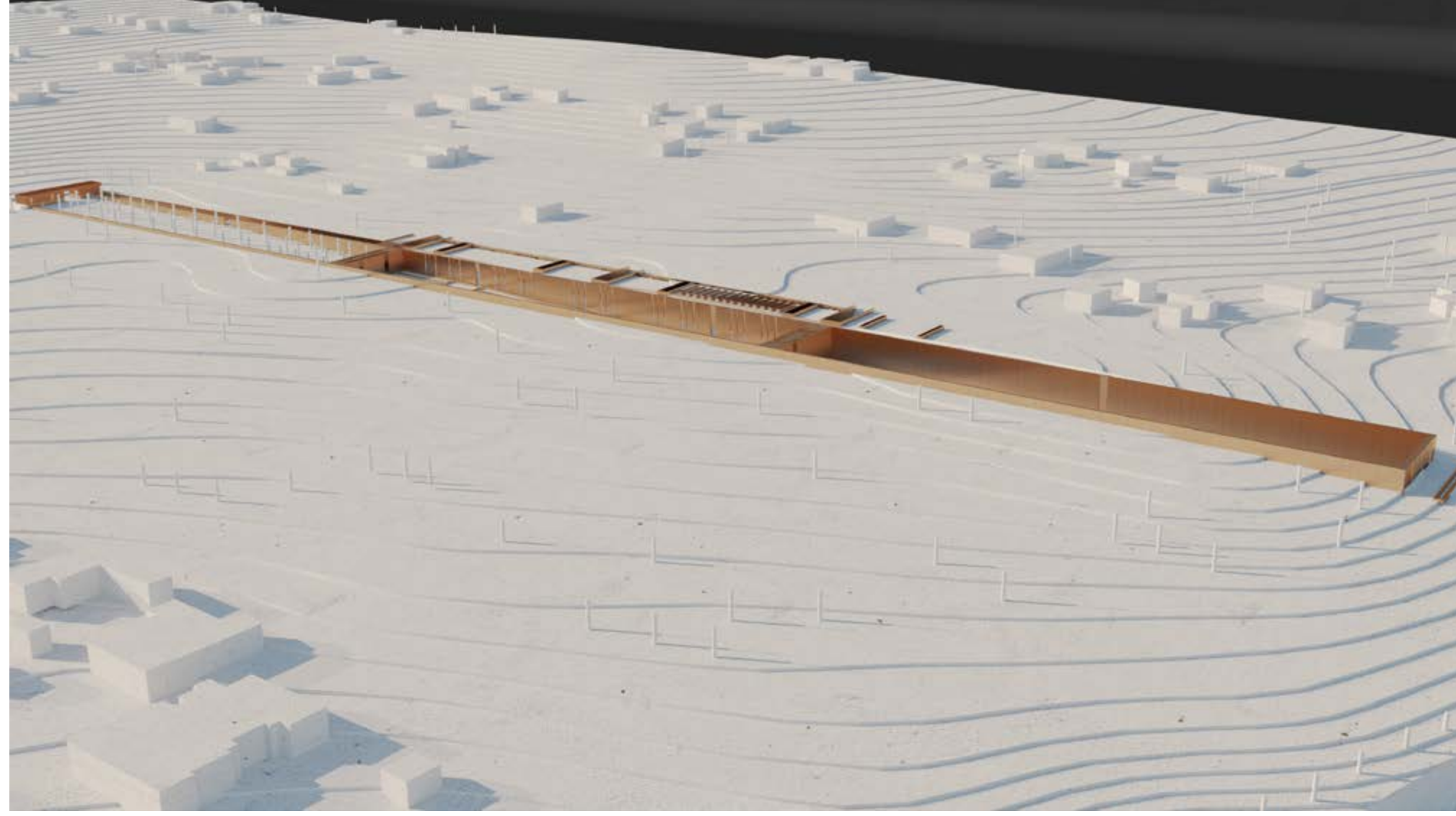


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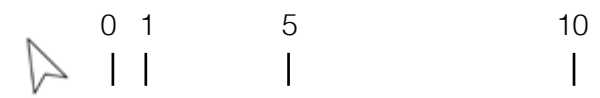
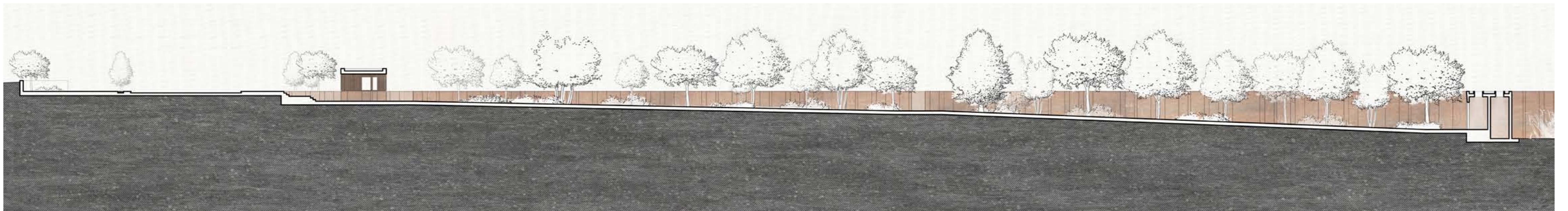
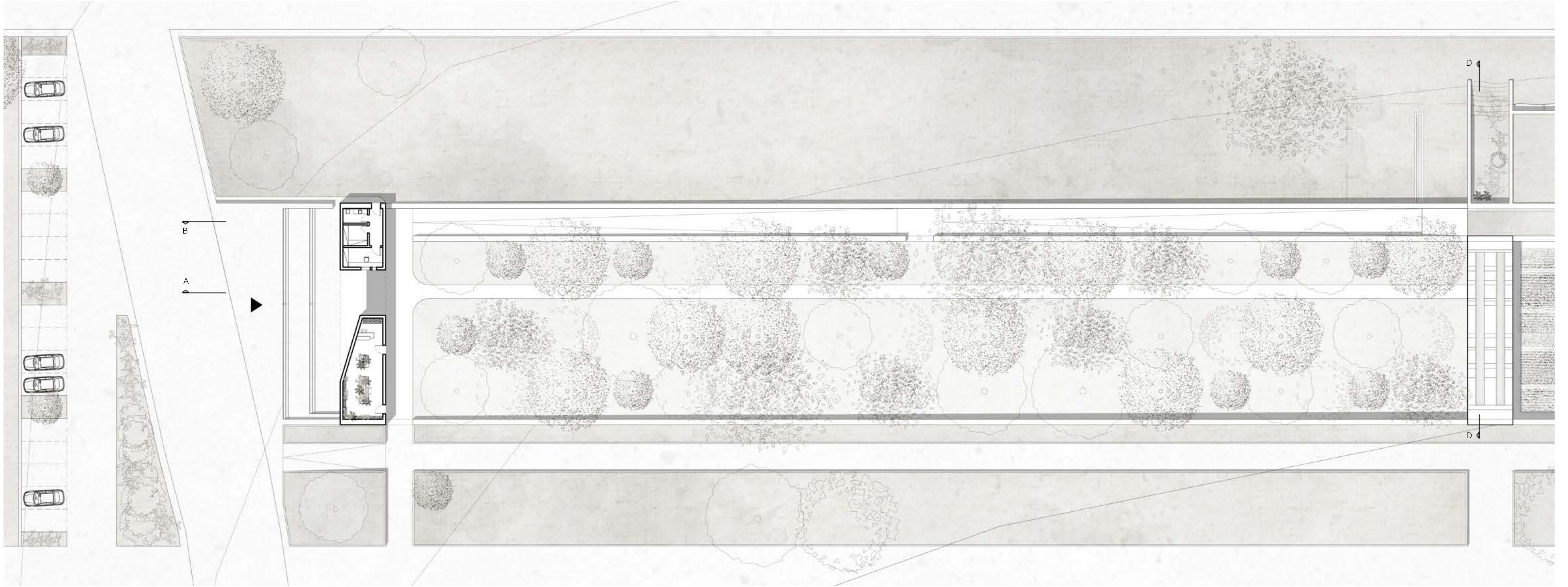


Light

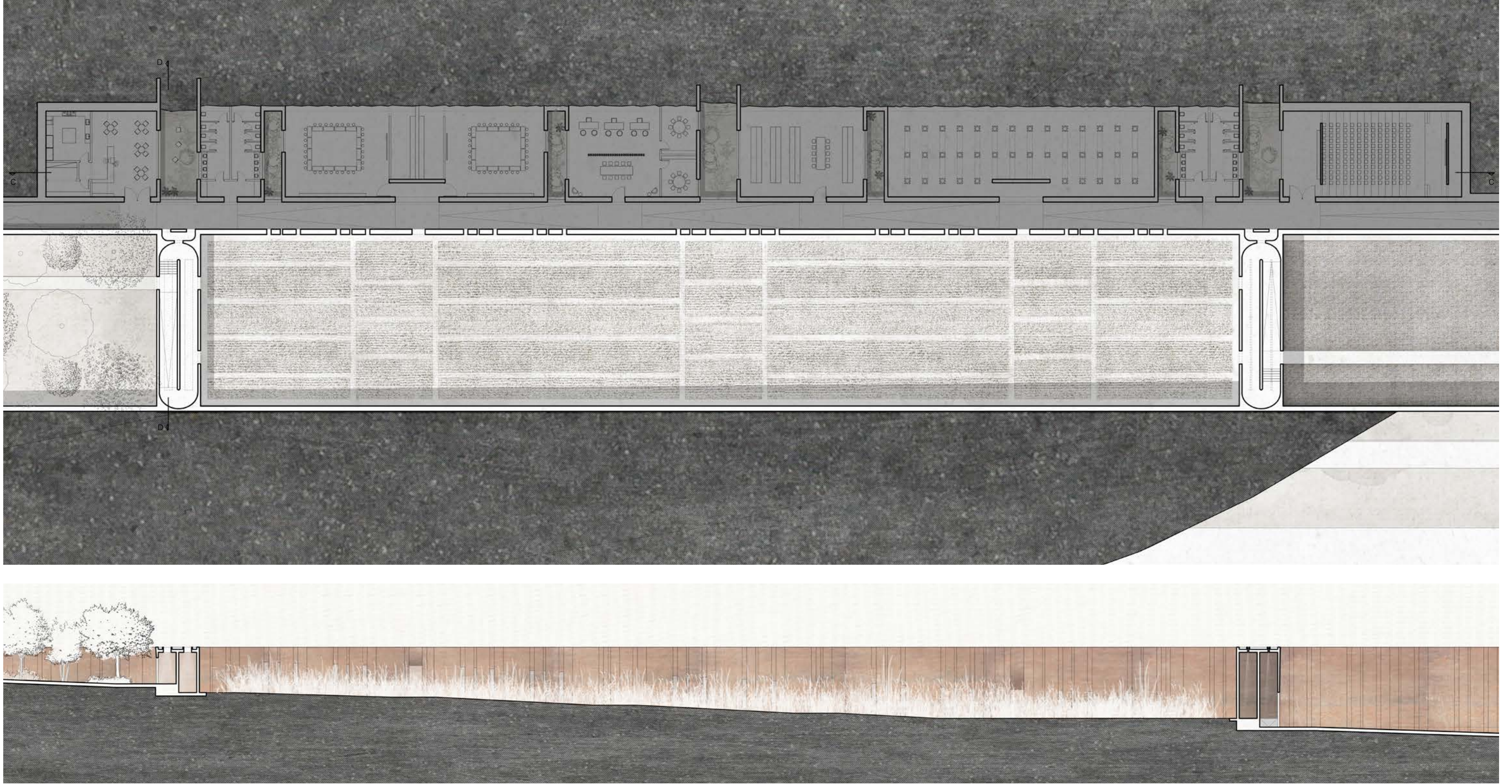






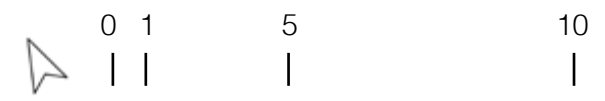
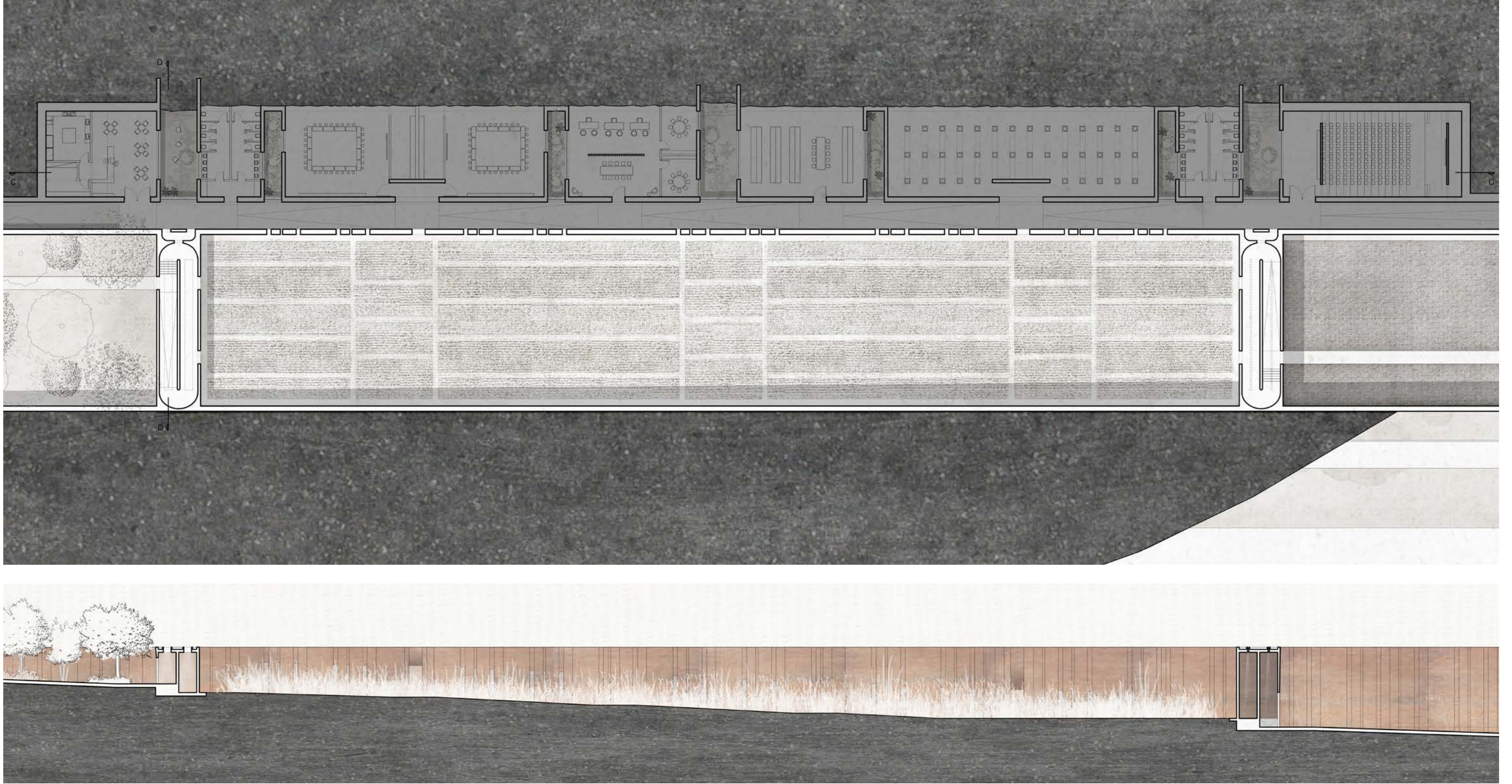


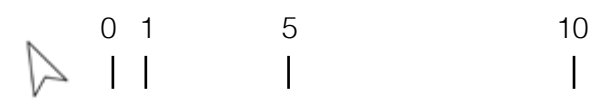
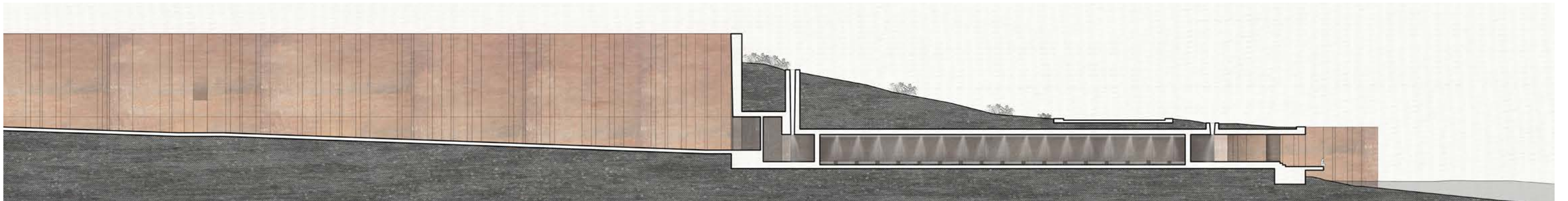
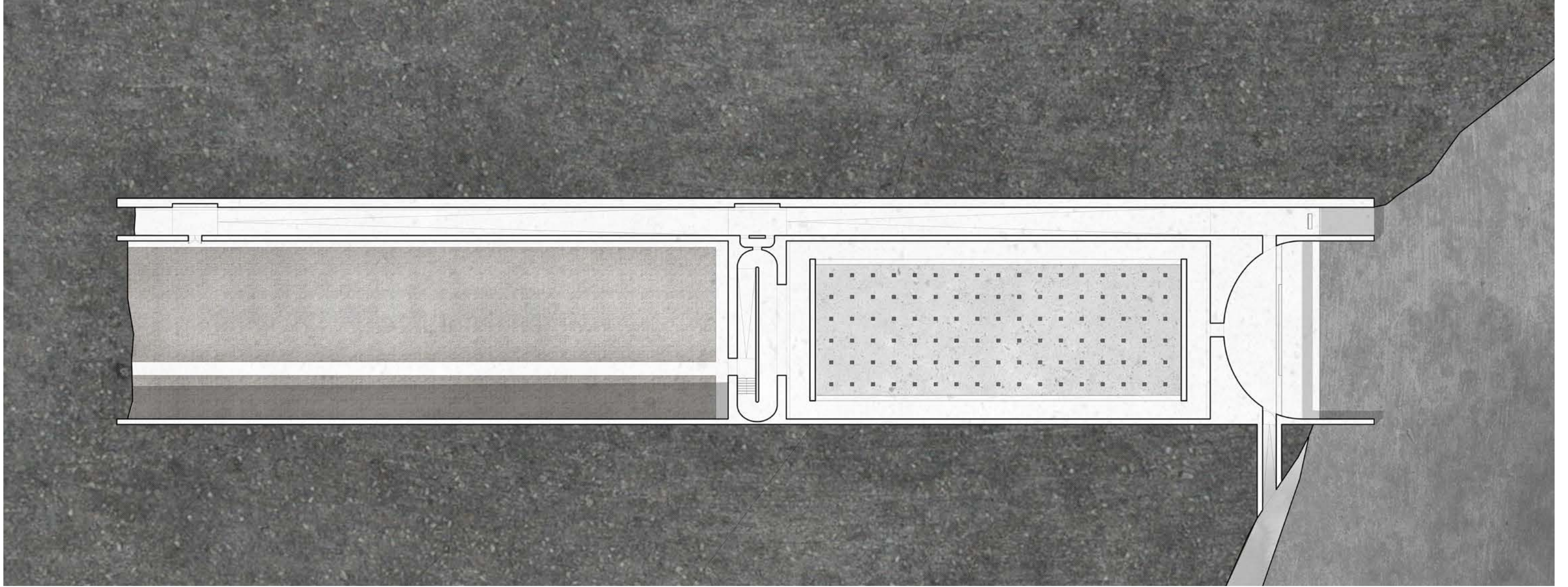


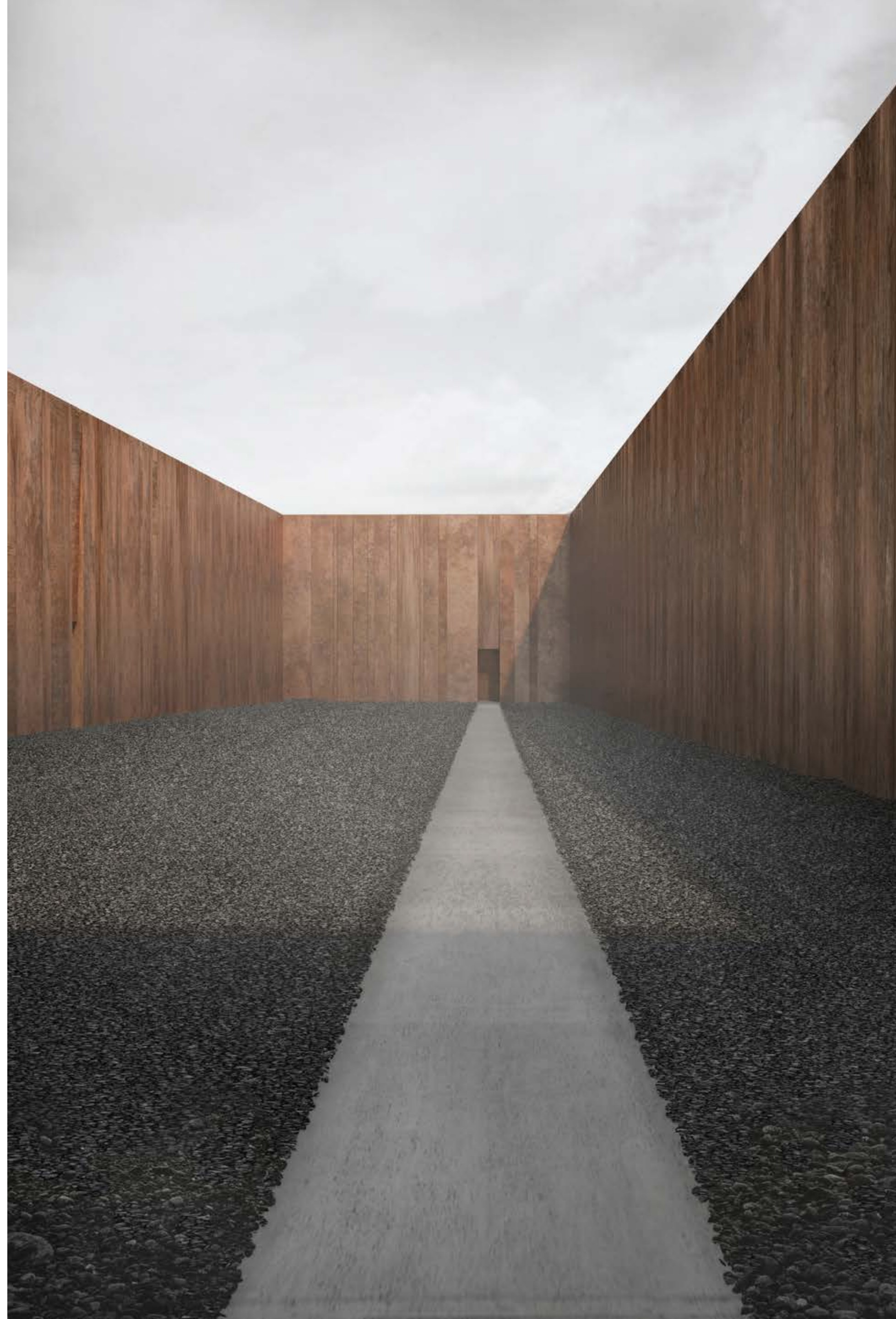


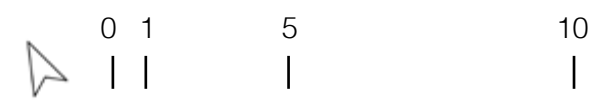
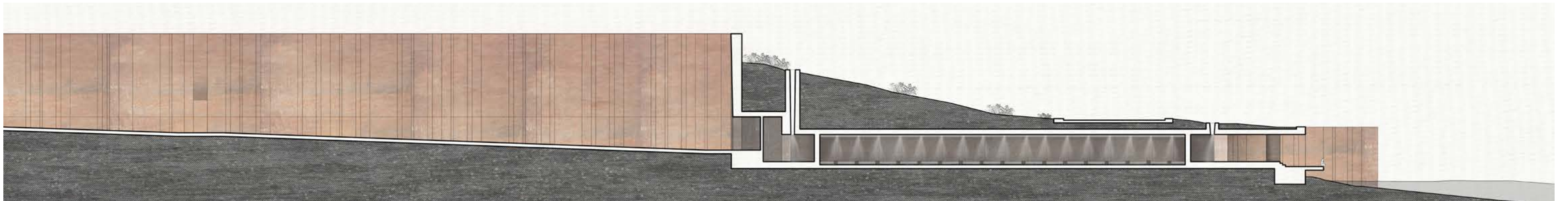
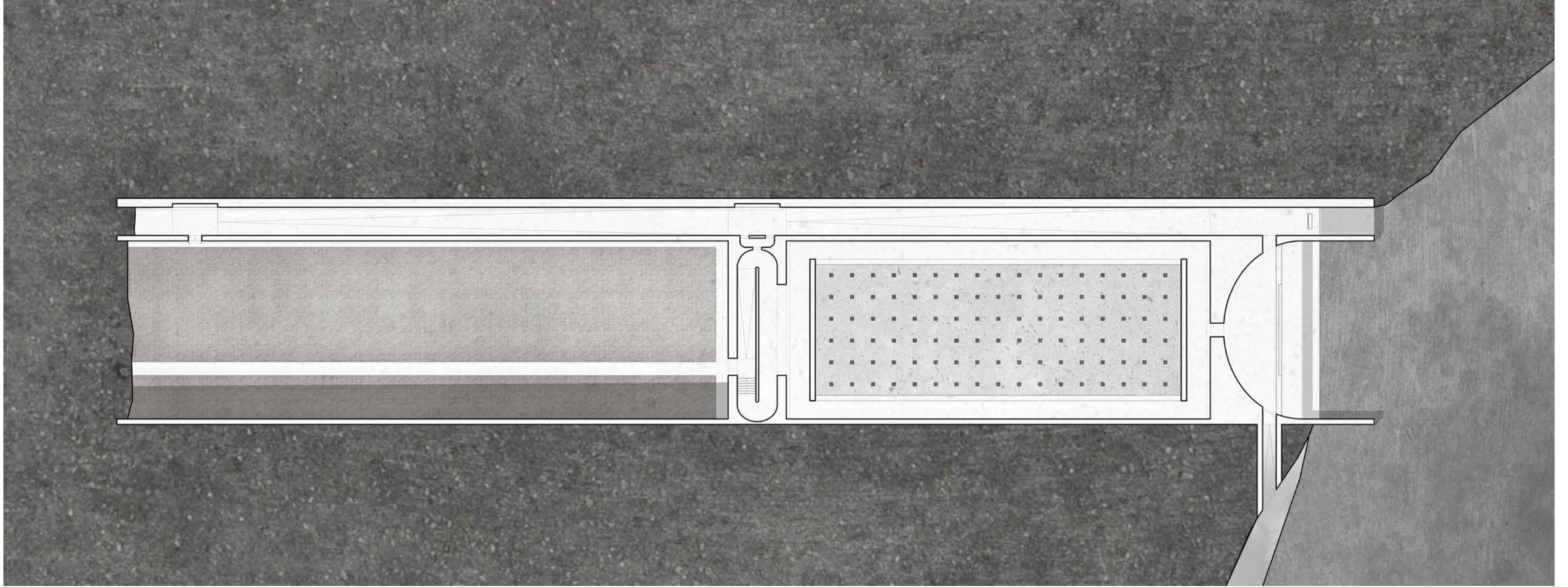
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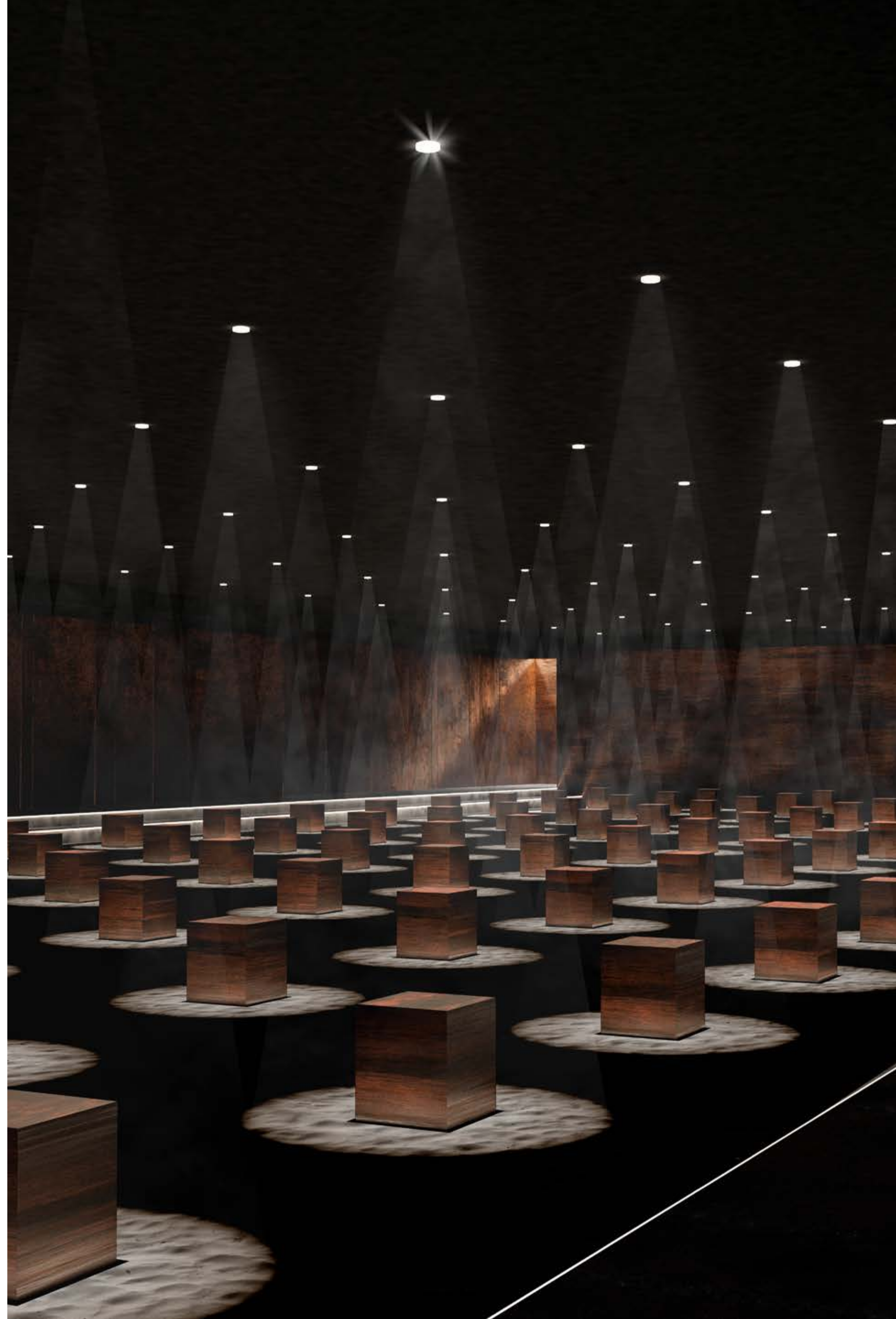


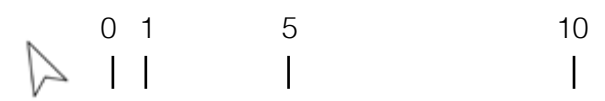
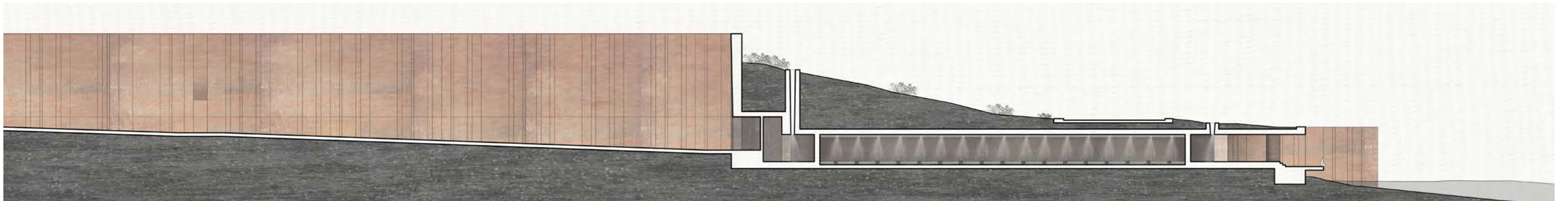
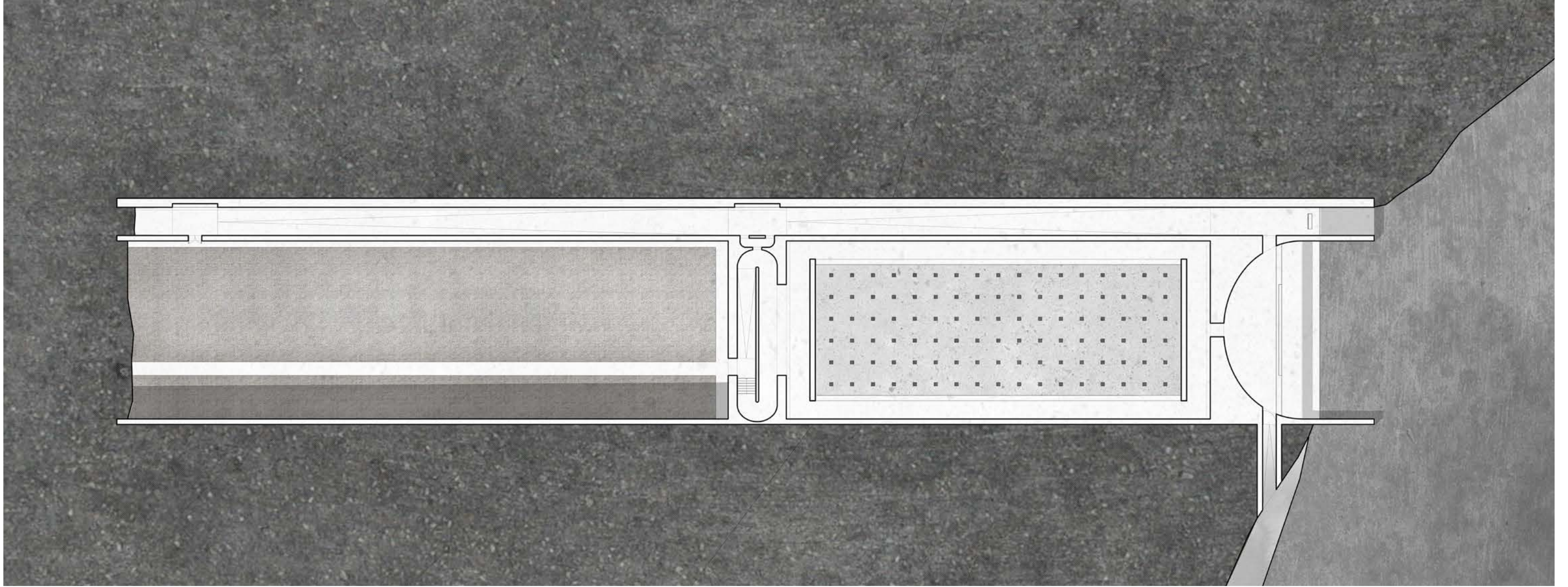






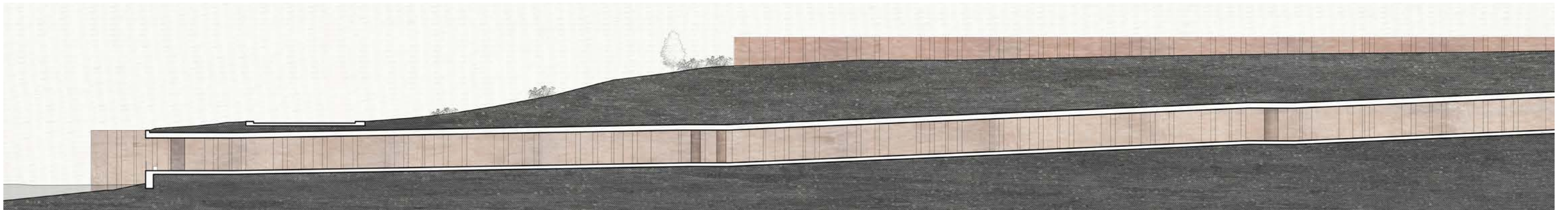
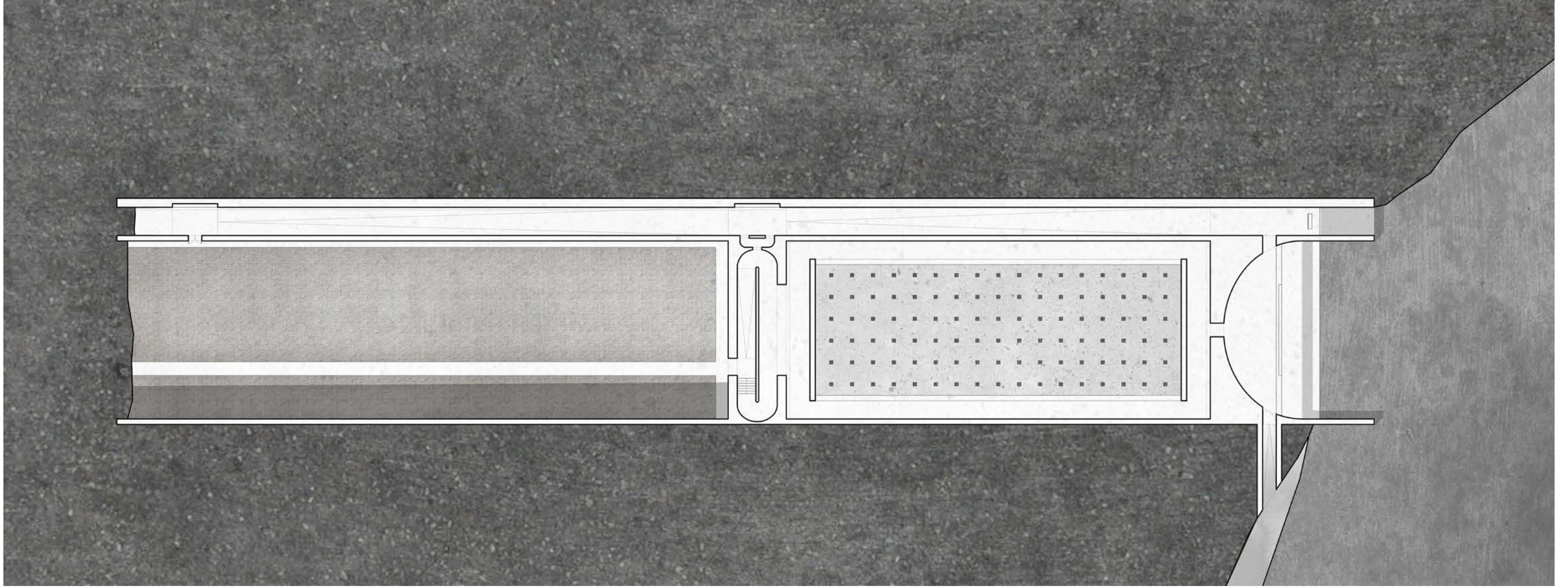


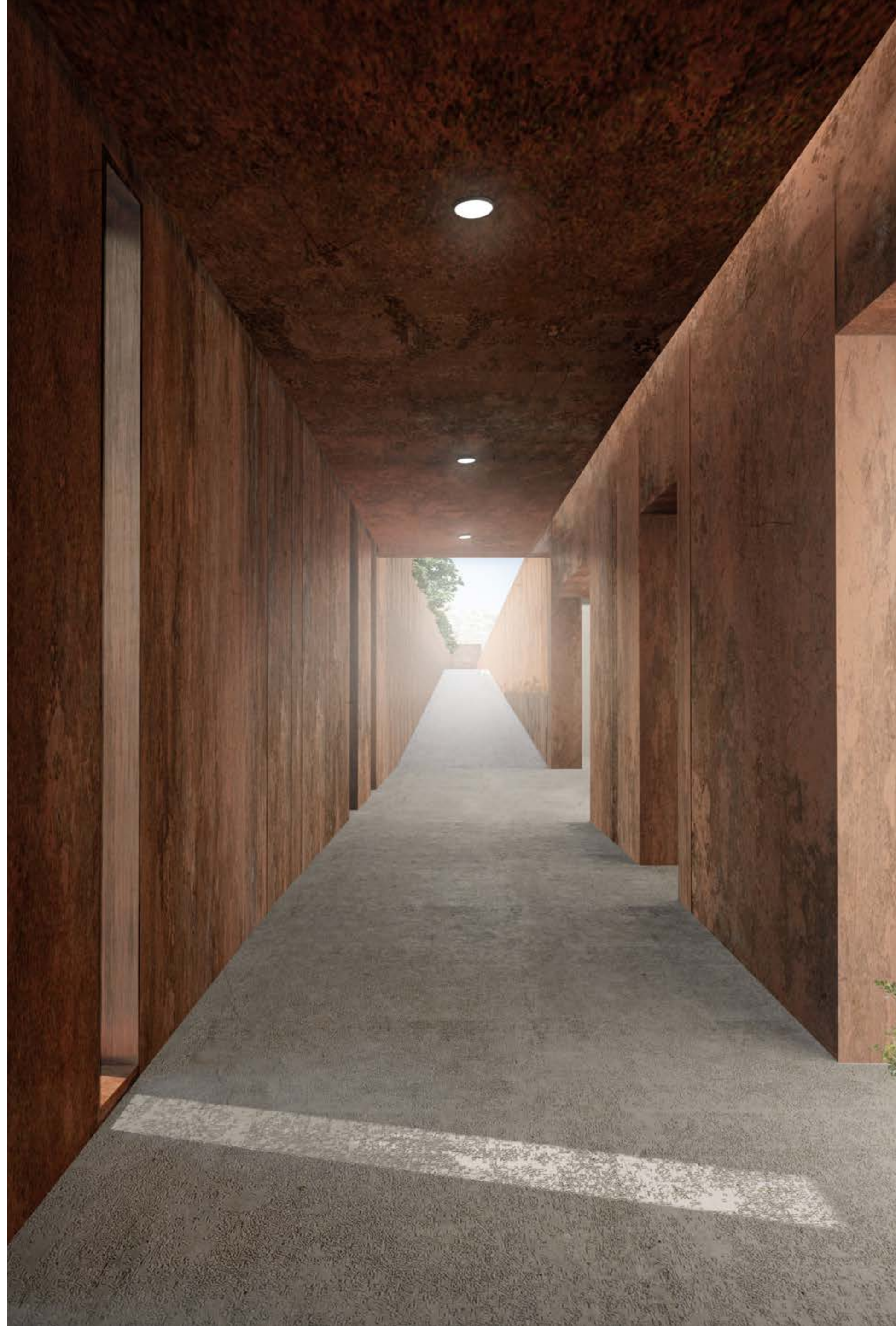


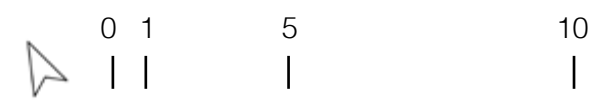
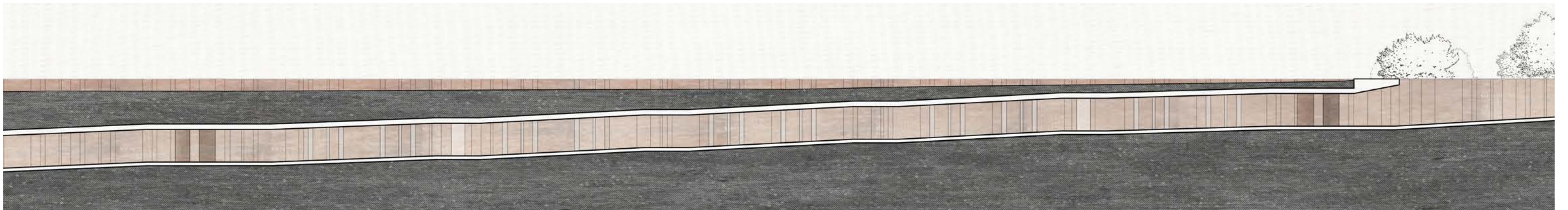
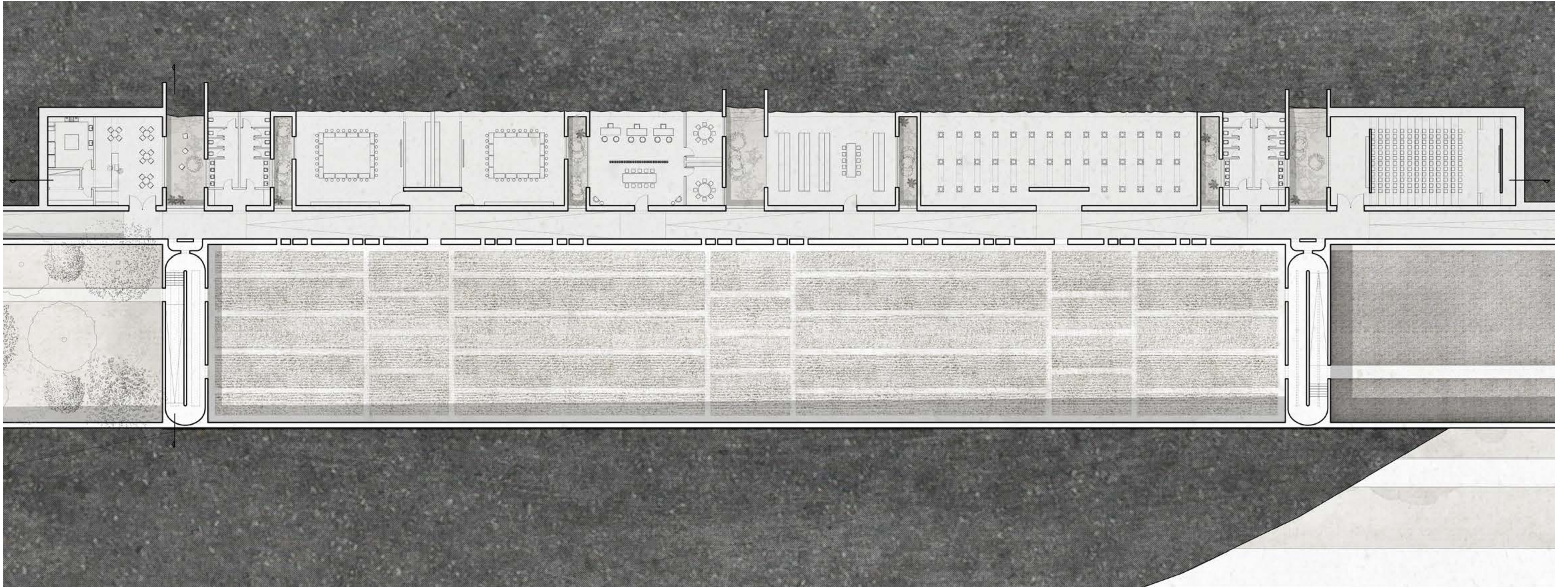


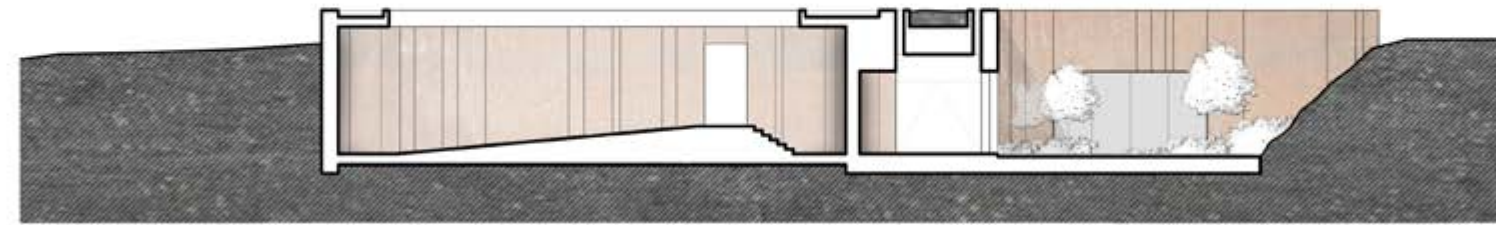
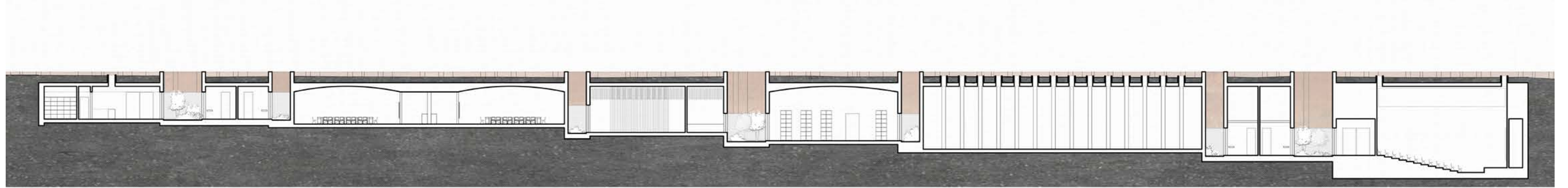








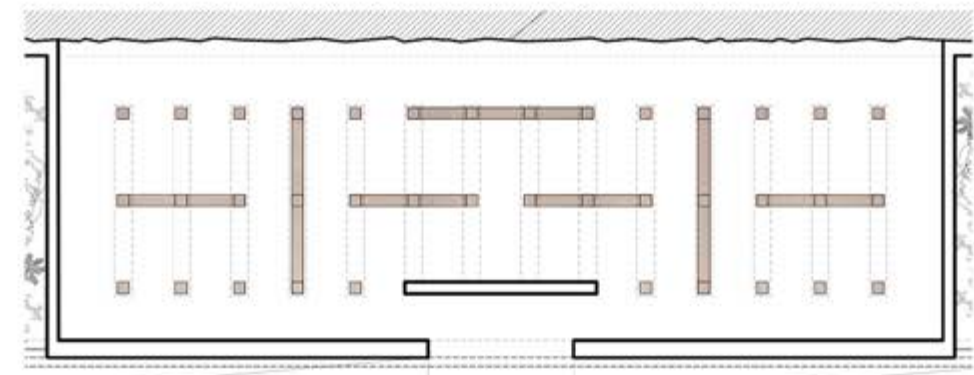
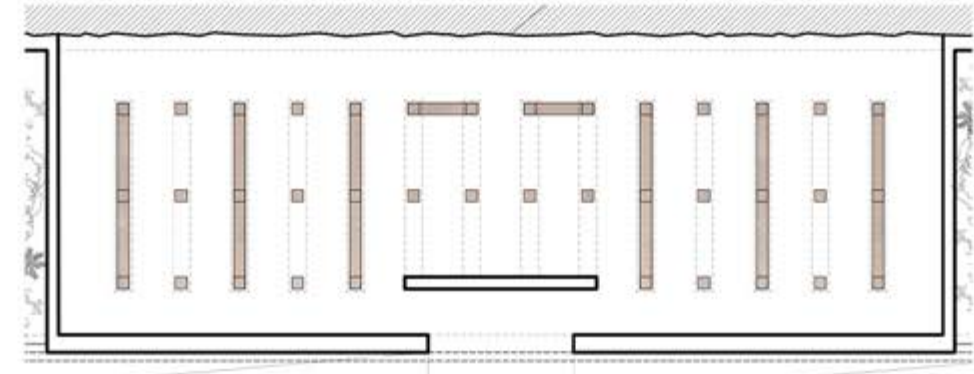
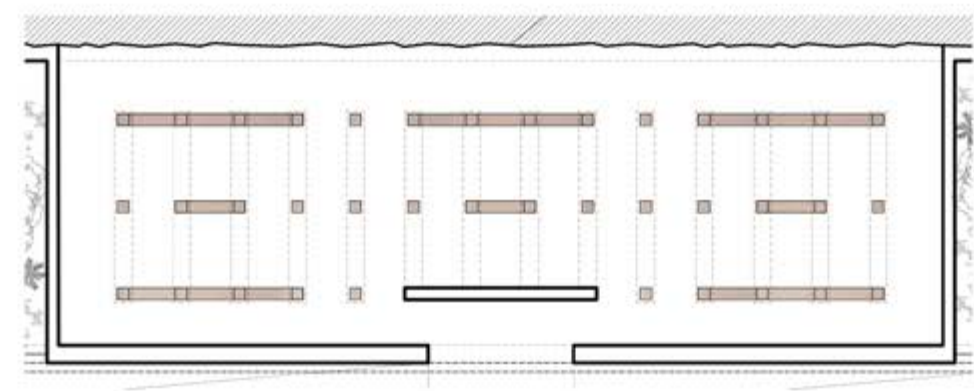


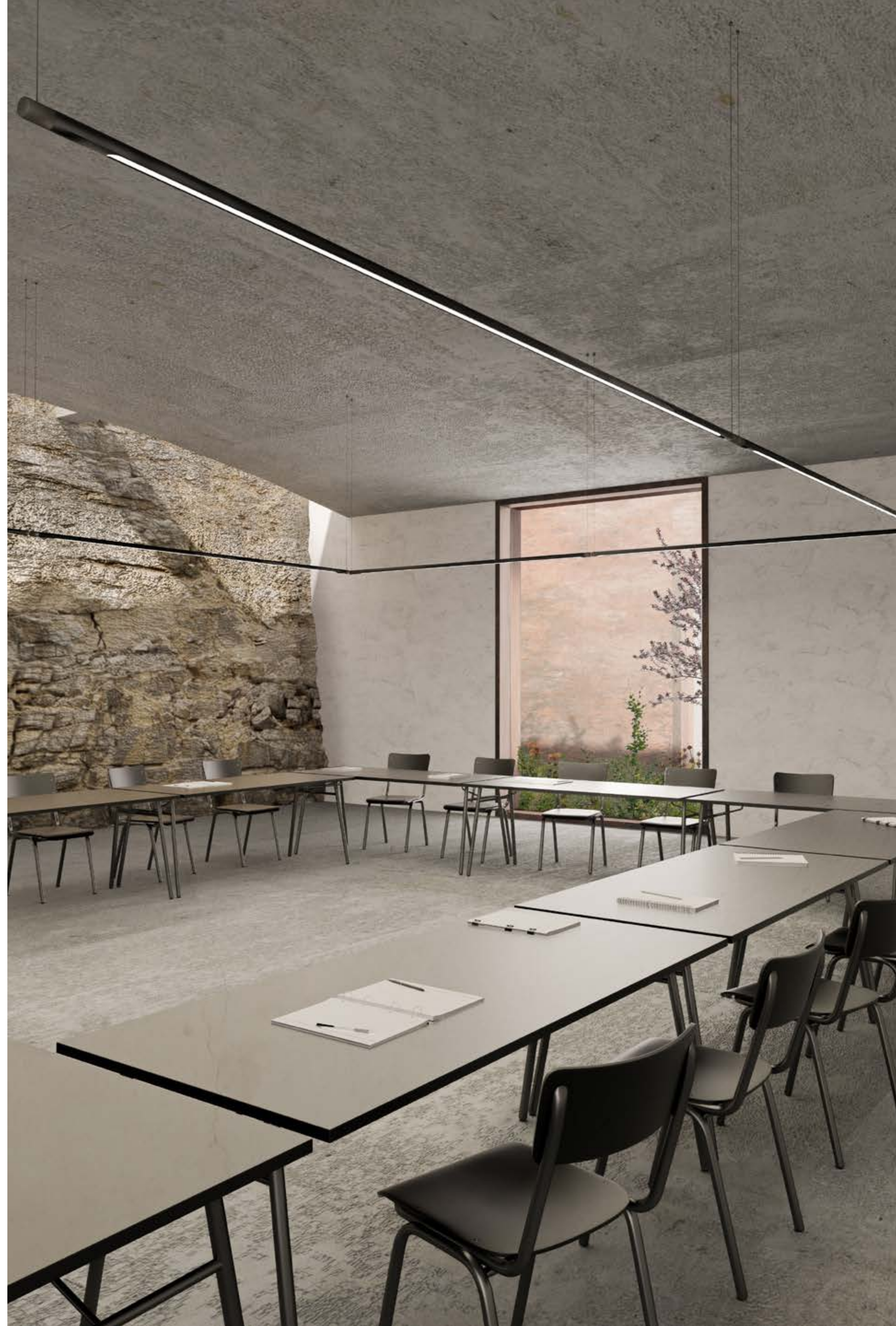


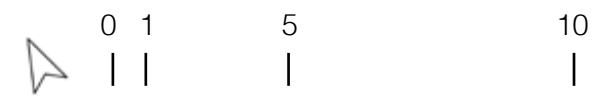
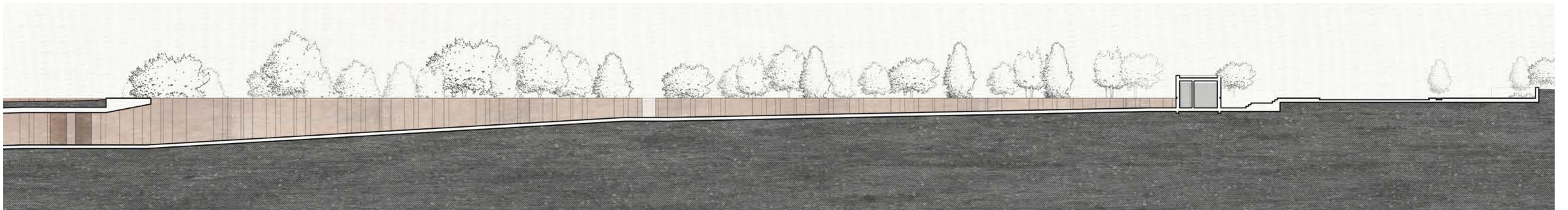
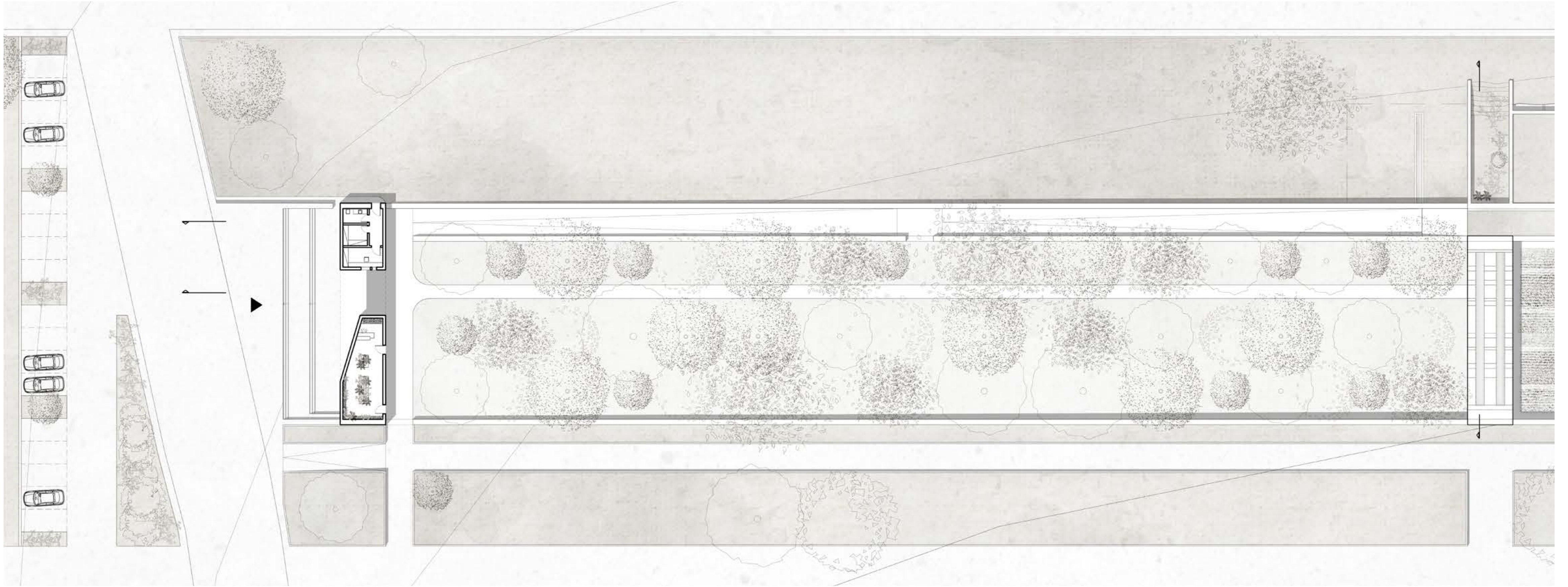
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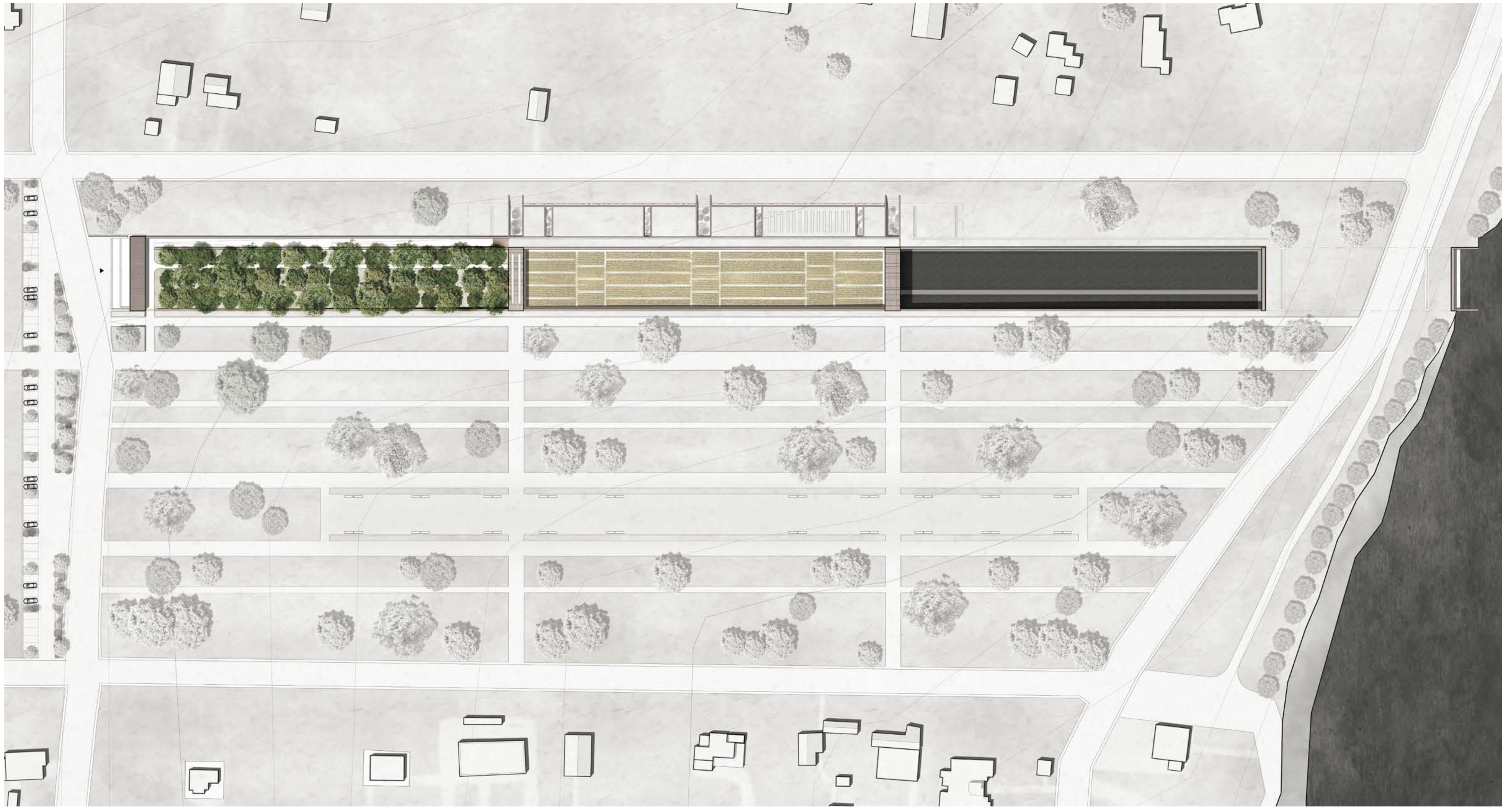


Memory |
And with only a head
at my hands,
The night was deserted, I
wasn't unblest of the
red sun.
I whispered: memory hurts
whenever you touch it.
There's only a little bit
there's no more than
what they'll be by day they
carry away in carts and
dumps behind the ridge.
My fingers were nursing
my face this time
that an old abandoned path
to the biscuits I had
good reason to run.
The others have abandoned
every kind of greeting
they walk, speak and start
the day's work of slaughter
as one grows or grieves,
methodically, without
pity: you're dead like
Pantoula, and no one
makes a mistake.
I thought of playing a tune
and then I left unwept at
front of the other world
the one that walks the
from beyond the night here
within my light world of
king beds, raised hearts
and love that belongs to
the future as feelings to
rain and to stone and to
water and to grass
and to the animal that looks
straight into the eye of its
approaching death.
So I continued along the
dark path and turned into
my garden and dug and
buried the seed.
I whispered: some morning
the resurrection will come
Down's light will grow red
as trees bloom in spring
the sea will be born again
and the waves will again
sing for Anaktoria.
We see the seed that dies
And I entered my empty
house.
George Seferis











The passage of time

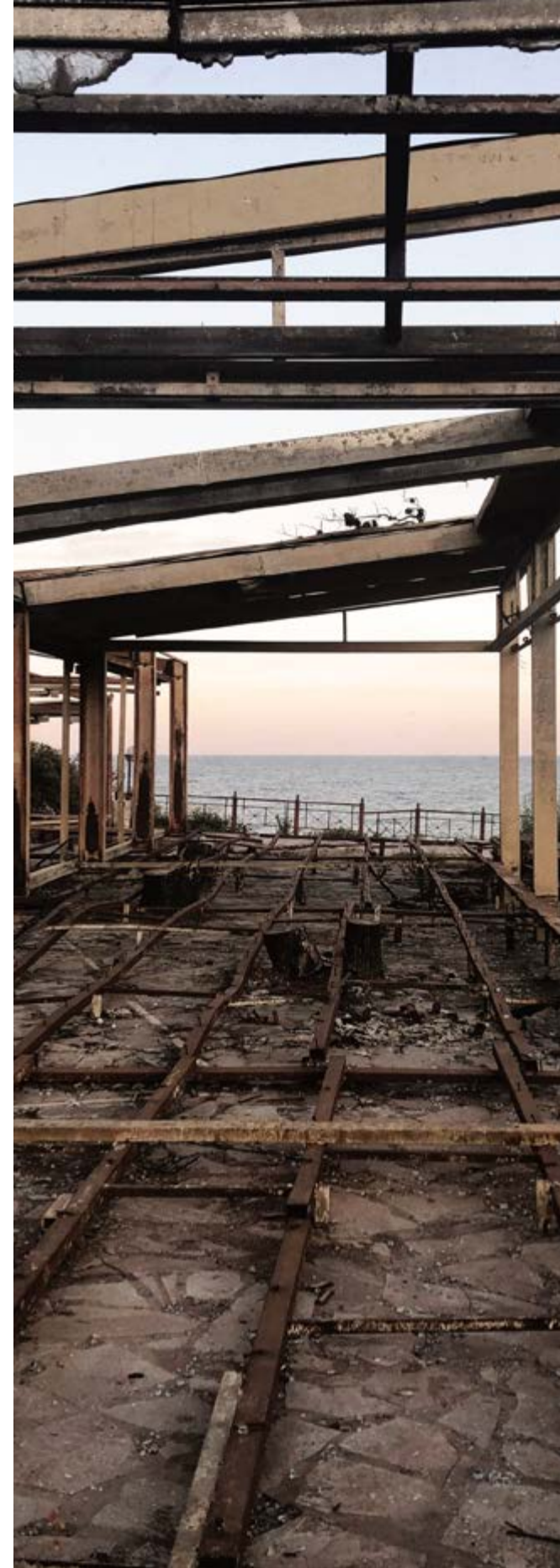
It has been said that time heals all wounds.

But time is an abstract concept that does not actually possess the ability to do anything. The passage of time may take the edge off of acute pain and over time things may seem to get easier, but it does not heal pain. Though not a healer, time is still a valuable tool in the healing process.

A time for hurting, a time for remembering and a time for healing.

This passage of time, metaphorically and physically is embraced in the spatial project. From the materiality to the way that the gardens evolve, traces of time and the effects of it are visible throughout the project proposal.

Weathering steel hardens and gets stronger with time. Likewise, the vegetation changes though the seasons and the years. The trees will become bigger and more lush. The vegetation of the field in the Garden of fire will constantly change. Last, the Garden of Grief contains black stones. It is possible that after some time small shrubs or little seasonal flowers may appear underneath the rocks. Just as it happens with the actual grief, time will continue its course, introducing new life. Here, the community can decide whether they want to pull the plants out, bringing the garden back at its initial empty form, or leave them there as a reminder that grief and sorrow will someday be replaced with hope.



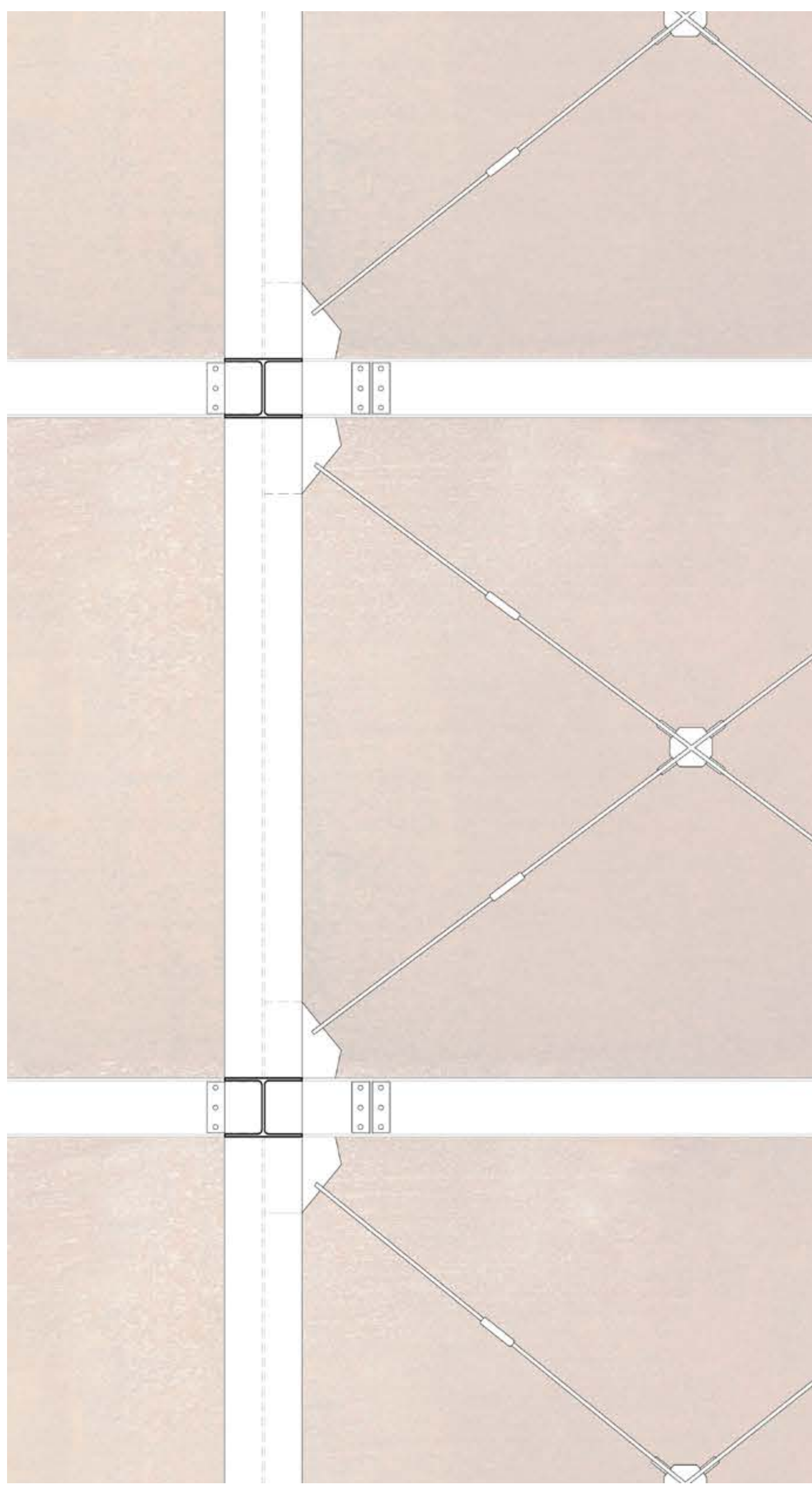
Materiality and Construction

The proposed material being used throughout the project is weathering steel (corten steel). It is a modern industrial material which nonetheless suggests the archaic. Also referred to as Atmospheric Corrosion Resistant Steel, this material is a highly effective material to be used in structural applications which are exposed to the atmospheric elements. Weathering steel hardens and gets stronger with time, a concept that is congruent with a vulnerable person having experienced a traumatic event who likewise, through the memorial experience will get stronger with time and heal his wounds. The material sacrifices its outer layer to protect the main body of it. This can be seen as having parallels with dealing with the trauma. The outer layer, just as memory itself, is constantly evolving and transforming. The dark brown/orange patina that is being formed in the exterior looks like burnt, which resembles and directly corresponds with the incident that is being commemorated.

Apart from corten steel, concrete is also being incorporated in the project as the ground material. Sleek and simple it is used to provide a clear background and underline the concept.

The structural armature of the main memorial intervention and the information and education center is principally reinforced concrete. Steel is used for wall cladding inside and out.

The rest of the interventions consist of lighter steel frame constructions, as they are more sculptural than functional in their sense



Wandaufbau

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Cortenstahlblech | 6mm |
| Unterkonstruktion Edelstahl | |
| Wärmedämmung | 80mm |
| Stahlbeton | 200mm |
| Cortenstahl | 6mm |

Dachaufbau

| | |
|--|-------|
| Attikablech Cortenstahl | 6mm |
| Cortenstahl Gitter auf höhenverstellbaren Abtasthaften | |
| Wärmedämmung | 120mm |
| Dampfsperre | |
| Stahlbetondecke | 200mm |
| Installationsraum | 10mm |
| Cortenstahl | 6mm |

Bodenaufbau

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Unterzug aus Ortbeton | 16mm |
| Estrich auf Trennlage | 50mm |
| Trittschalldämmung | 70mm |
| PE Folie- Trennlage | 7mm |
| Betondecke | 250mm |

Wall construction

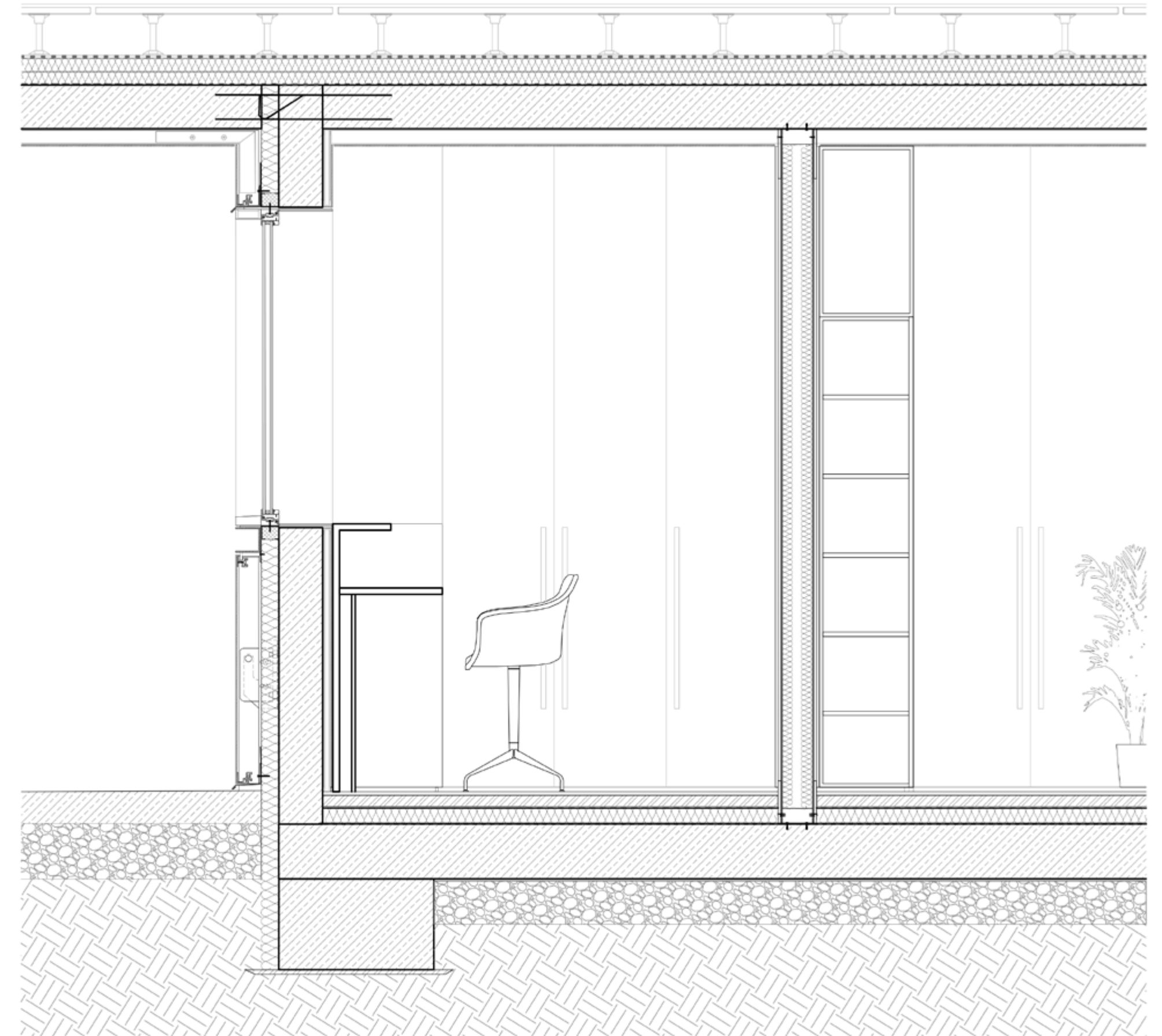
| | |
|---|-------|
| Corten Steel | 6mm |
| Stainless steel supporting construction | |
| Thermal Insulation | 80mm |
| Reinforced concrete | 200mm |
| Corten Steel | 6mm |

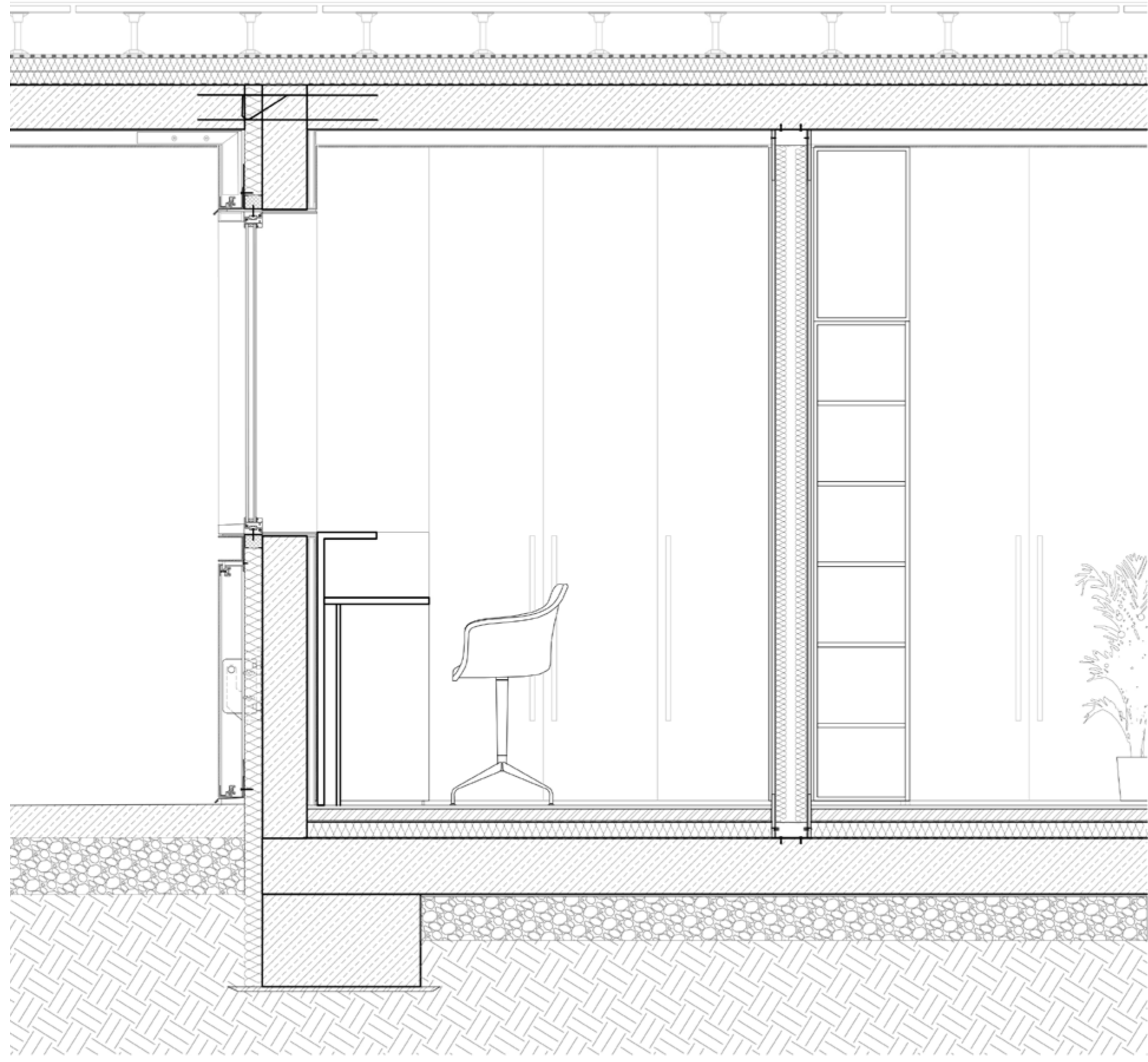
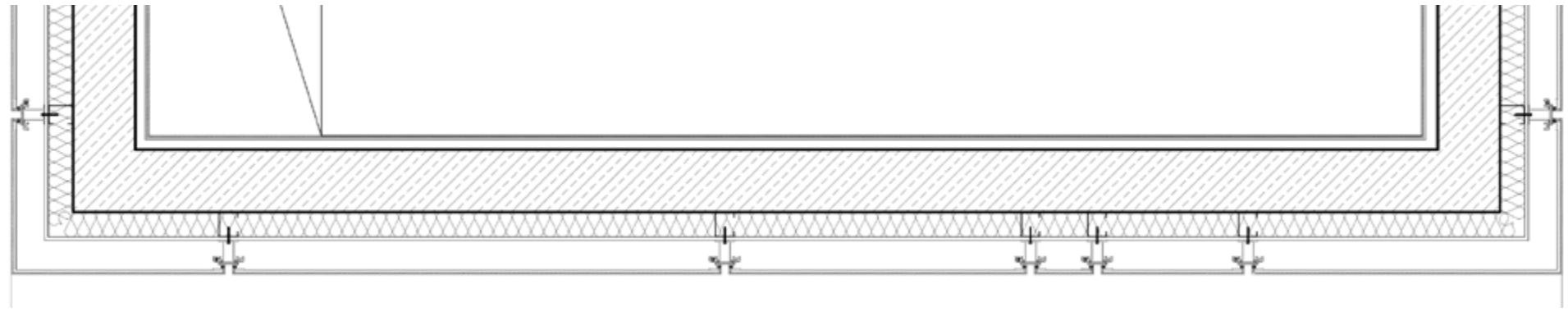
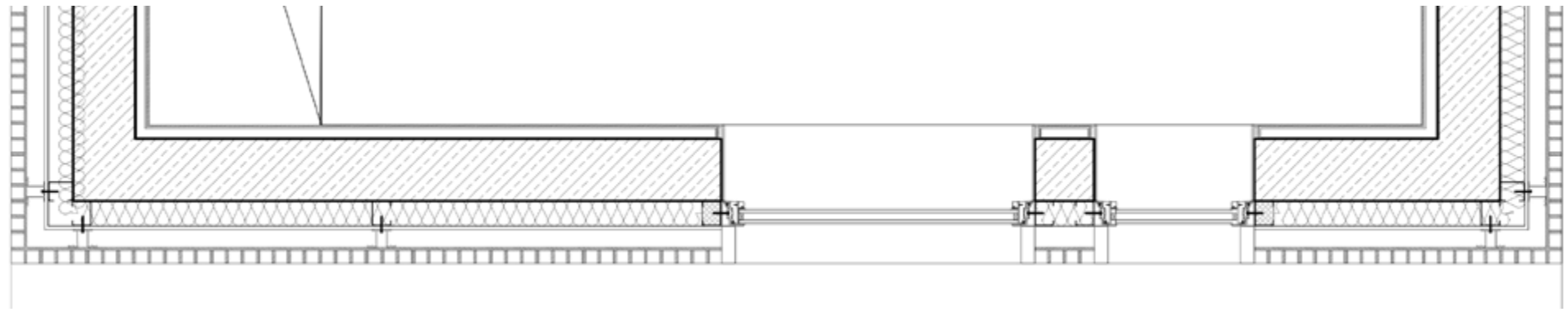
Roof Construction

| | |
|--|-------|
| Corten Steel parapet cover | 6mm |
| Corten Steel grating on raising pieces | |
| Sealing layer | |
| Thermal Insulation | 120mm |
| Vapour barrier | |
| Reinforced concrete slab | 200mm |
| Services space | 10mm |
| Corten Steel | 6mm |

Floor Construction

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| In-situ concrete floor | 16mm |
| Screed on separating layer | 50mm |
| Insulation | 70mm |
| PE foil- separating layer | 7mm |
| Reinforced concrete | 250mm |







Conclusion

A network of emblems, symbols of the handling of some of the most critical moments of the disaster. Same in materiality and form but different in the function and experience that they present. They incorporate all the individual and collective stories of the fire and encourage a discourse with the reasons that led to this catastrophe. The simple, blunt, orthogonal form is consistent in all of them. Votive inscriptions do not need to be pompous. They deal with trauma, death and grief. They become modern cenotaphs, simple containers of a difficult memory that needs to be addressed.

The project compressed between earth and sky, between hope and despair, between past and memory, is located exactly in the present and the life itself. A sobering reminder of an unpleasant event. Of everything that went wrong. Of the people who were lost. It becomes an anarchic other space where trauma is revealed, critical consciousness is encouraged and the loss is being commemorated.

In order to move on and actually forget, *Léthé*, is not the solution. Acceptance and forgiveness are. Thus, this memorial site in Mati while it commemorates and mourns the past, it also cultivates and envisions a better future.

