

The Poetics of Deconstruction
Unbuilding the Peterborough General Electric Plant

by
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I. ABSTRACT

The place of the General Electric Plant in the history of Peterborough, Ontario is almost in equal measures positive and negative. In the early part of the century, Peterborough, the “Electric City,” was a rapidly growing manufacturing powerhouse. However, the incremental dissolution of local manufacturing, largely due to trade agreements and automation, resulted in a dramatic shift for the worse in Peterborough’s economy. At the height of its production between World War II and the 1970s, the plant was the city’s biggest employer, with over 6000 employees on the 80-acre site. Forty years later, in 2018, after years of cutbacks and layoffs, GE Peterborough closed its doors, laying off the 358 people still employed at the plant. What remains are the empty buildings and abandoned rail lines; traces of the prosperity and of industry Peterborough’s past.

This thesis proposes a thoughtful, phased deconstruction of the former General Electric plant with levels of public appropriation at each interval. This slow demolition process is like scraping away layers of history; a poetic procedure that generates moments of striking beauty while avoiding the tendency that complete and immediate demolition has to reinforce the worst reputation of the plant. This process of deconstruction is treated as a complex theatre production which culminates in moments of dramatic spectacle. These theatrical processes and emergent spectacles are observed by the public from viewing platforms constructed of re-purposed debris from the demolition process. While this project clears the General Electric site, it also documents the act of demolition as it occurs preserving these moments through a series of artistic interpretations. This project explores the productive potential of demolition and its capacity for reinterpretation and rearticulation.

To my advisor Catherine Bonier, for your knowledge and expertise, guidance, and continued belief in this project,

To my family and friends, for your support, interest, and understanding,

To Erin, for your insights, patience, and for helping me stay sane,

Thank you

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01/ THE HISTORY



The city of Peterborough, Ontario has a firmly established history as an industrial powerhouse for Canada. Peterborough was an incubator for 19th and 20th-century industrial innovation in Canada, an origin point for the expansion of industry and home to companies like General Electric, which developed new technologies from electric streetcars to jet engines. The area was settled in 1818 by Adam Scott because of its bountiful supply of natural resources and the network of waterways connecting it to the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. Almost immediately upon its settlement, industry started to develop in the community that would in 1850 become known as Peterborough. In the early years, Peterborough was a budding mill-town with many lumber, grist, and woolen mills dotting the landscape. The town's reliance on industry and technology made Peterborough rather progressive in its approach to innovation, developing and testing technologies that the rest of Canada would later adopt as standard practice. In 1869, Peterborough was the first city in Canada to introduce a modern gas works system capable of distributing gas to streetlights throughout the downtown, illuminating the streets after dark - a symbol of the local innovation and industry.¹ The following year, Peterborough became the greatest lumber producer in the whole of Ontario, solidifying its place as an important manufacturing town.² In 1884, Peterborough became the first community in Canada to introduce electric streetlights and earned itself the moniker of 'the electric city,' an association the city carries to this day.³

1 Leif Einarson, 'The 8 Most Important Moments in Peterborough History,' *Peterborough This Week*, Feb. 14, 2015.

2 Diane Robnik. *The Mills of Peterborough County*. Peterborough: Trent Valley Archives, 2006.

3 Einarson, 'The 8 Most Important Moments'

INDUSTRY

It was this reputation for innovation and technology, coupled with the robust railway network that had been constructed to carry goods to and from the many mills and factories, that attracted Thomas Edison to survey the small town as a potential site for the first Canadian Edison Electric plant. In 1890, Edison signed a deal with the town ensuring him 30 acres of land on the boundary of the town limits to construct his new plant; a deal widely acknowledged to be profitable to both parties involved. As the newspaper *The Peterborough Examiner* noted in 1890, “with the Edison Company once established here, the town will become a recognized manufacturing centre, and that will attract other large establishment as well as small ones. There is nothing that succeeds like success and, if once we get a solid and firmly established nucleus of manufactories here, others will come of themselves.”⁴ The arrival of the Edison Electric Company in 1891 was seen as a culmination of Peterborough’s willingness to embrace industry and technology, and expectations were high that the town’s prosperity would continue. As industry began to grow at a quicker pace, Peterborough developed a streetcar network which by 1893 stretched from one end of the city to the other, passing in front of the newly named Canadian General Electric (not coincidentally, to be sure, as the CGE had actually won the contract with the city to produce the streetcars themselves).

4 Unknown. ‘An Editorial on The Proposed Edison company By-law.’ *Peterborough Examiner*, Sept. 18, 1890.



Downtown Peterborough circa early 1920s
Photo shows an active downtown and streetcar network

Fig. 3

As the 1890 article in the *Examiner* had predicted, the town's wealth and prosperity continued to grow into the new millennium. Factories opened for businesses like Quaker Oats, Westclox (clock/watch manufacturer), Outboard Marine (small engine manufacturers), and the Peterborough Canoe Company. The cumulative roster for these new businesses was over 8000 employees.⁵ In the 1930s, one quarter of Canada's boat making industry was located in Peterborough.

⁵ Douglas Goold, "The rise and fall of Outboard Marine Corporation, and my brief, sad career renting fishing boats," *The Globe and Mail*, Aug. 31, 2001.

RAILWAY

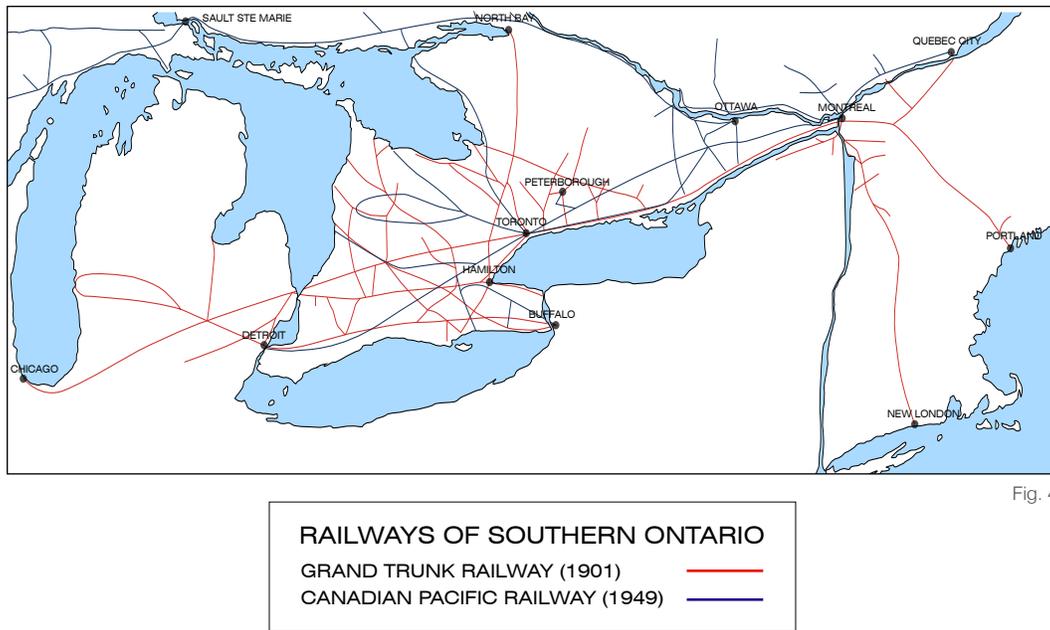


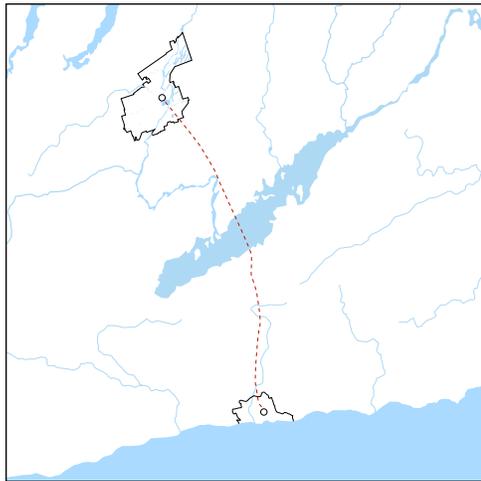
Fig. 4

The railway played a vital role in the success that Peterborough experienced as a manufacturing town. Early on, the city was well integrated into the rail network that ultimately connected the United States to Southern Ontario. In fact, the Cobourg to Peterborough line (built in 1854) was one of the first railway lines to be built in Central Ontario. Crossing directly over Rice Lake required incredible technological skill and necessitated the construction of what was the longest trestle bridge in the world at the time. This rail connection to Cobourg meant that Peterborough was able to

move its products to Lake Ontario and out to a wider market. As the town grew and attracted more mills and factories, it became more connected to a wider web of rail lines expanding the possible markets where it could sell goods. Significant effort went into connecting Peterborough to the broader rail network, illustrating the economic importance of Peterborough's industrial heritage to Ontario generally. During WWI and WWII, the railway was of specific importance in Peterborough. Many of the manufacturing plants (including General Electric) produced wartime goods that needed to be quickly moved to military bases to be flown to Europe to aid in the war effort.⁶

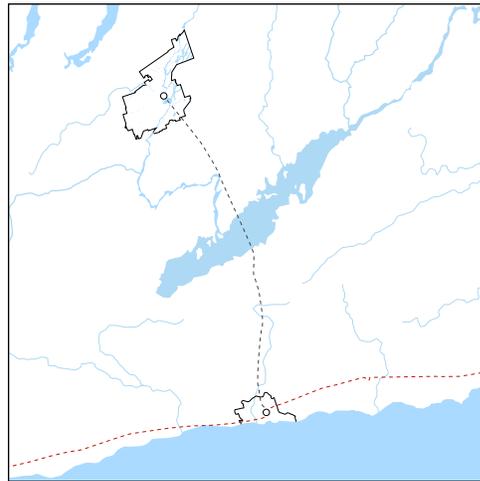
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Keith Hansen, *Last Trains from Lindsay, Roseneath*: Sandy Flats Publications, 1997.



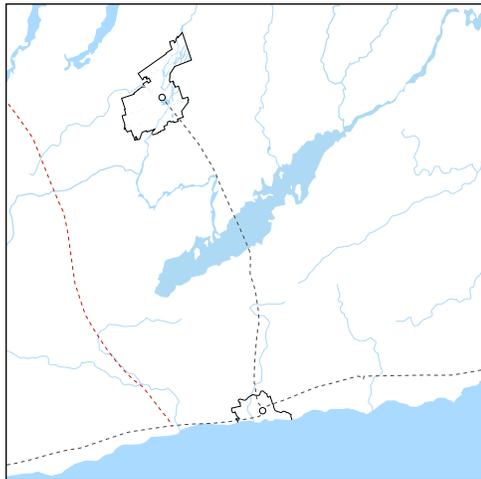
1854

Fig. 5



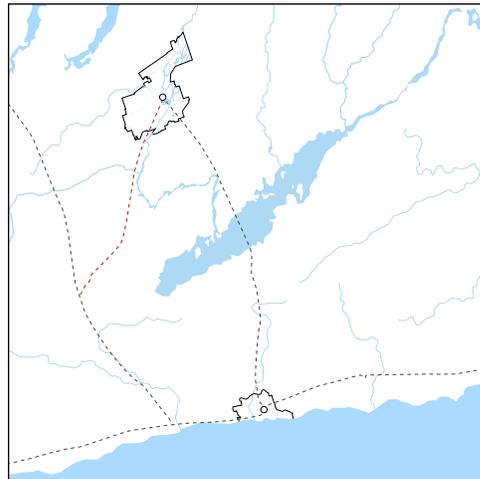
1855

Fig. 6



1856

Fig. 7



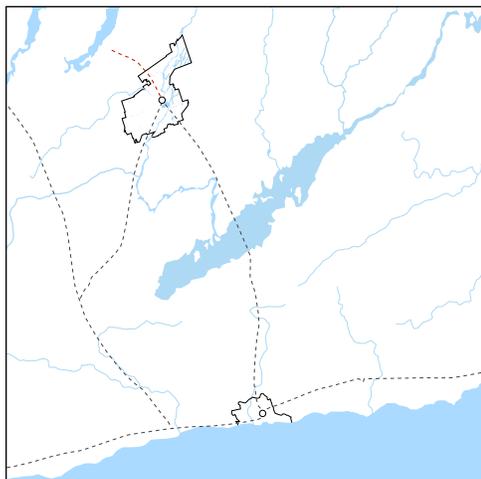
1857

Fig. 8

new line

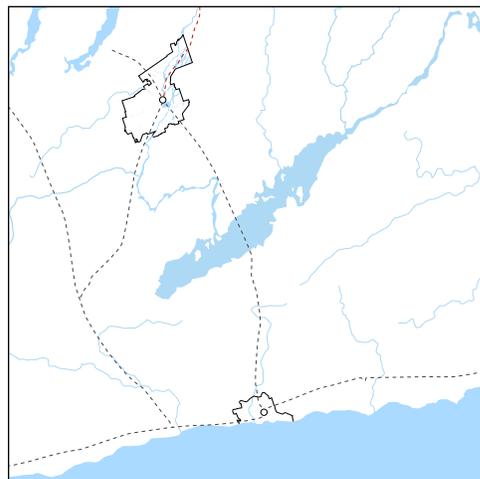
active line

abandoned line



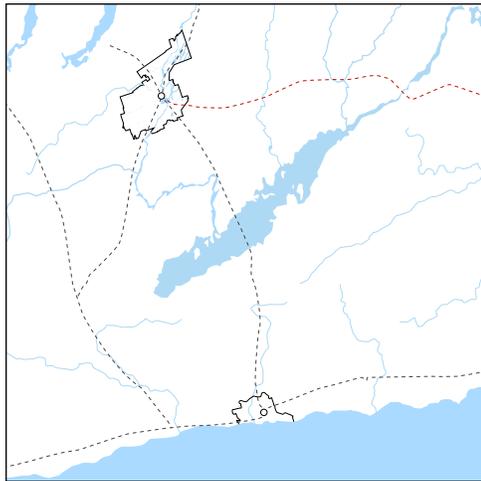
1857

Fig. 9

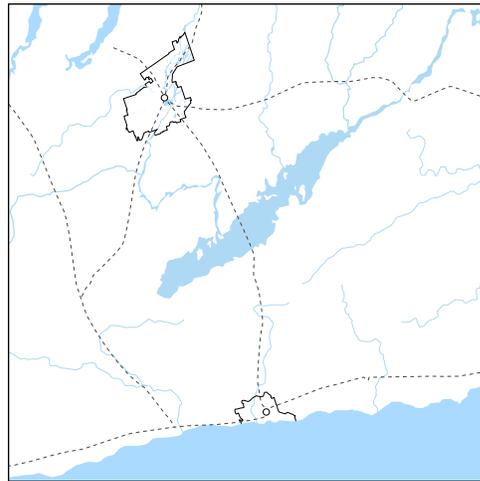


1858

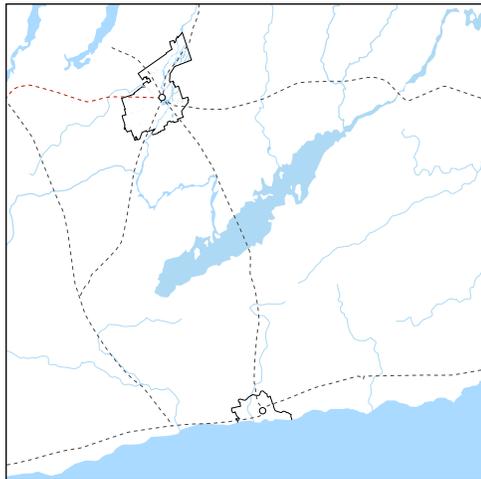
Fig. 10



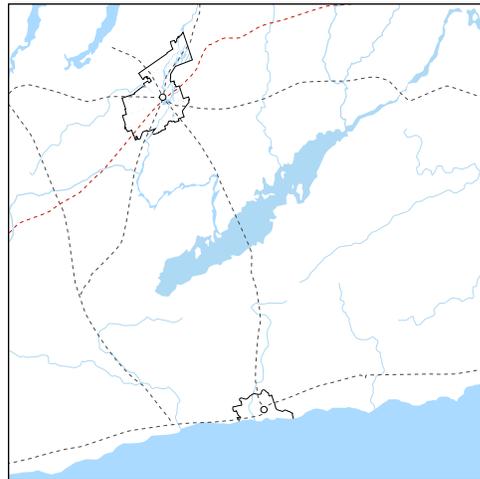
1870 Fig. 11



1876 Fig. 12



1878 Fig. 13

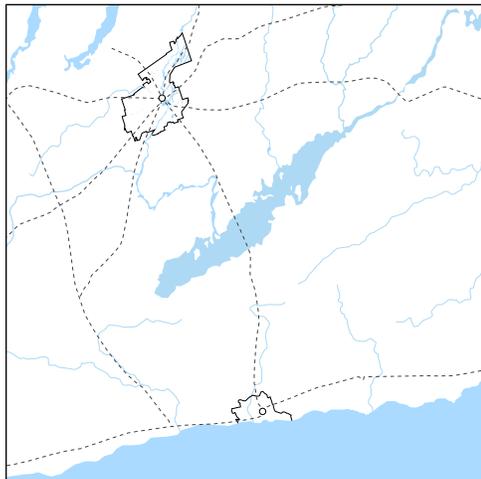


1882 Fig. 14

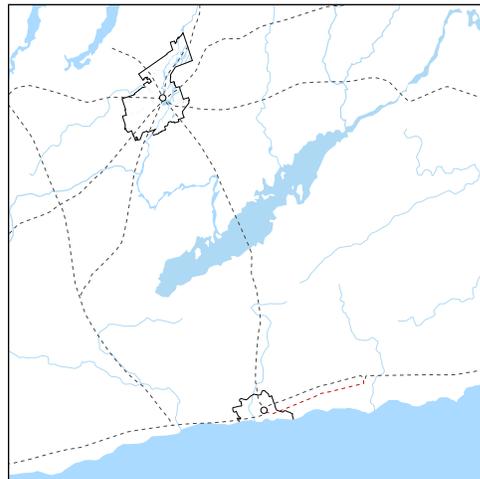
new line

active line

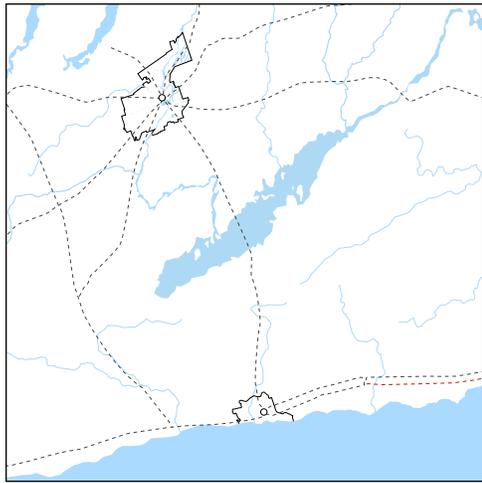
abandoned line



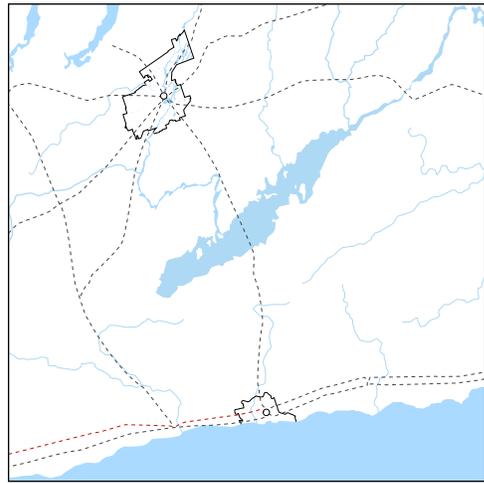
1883 Fig. 15



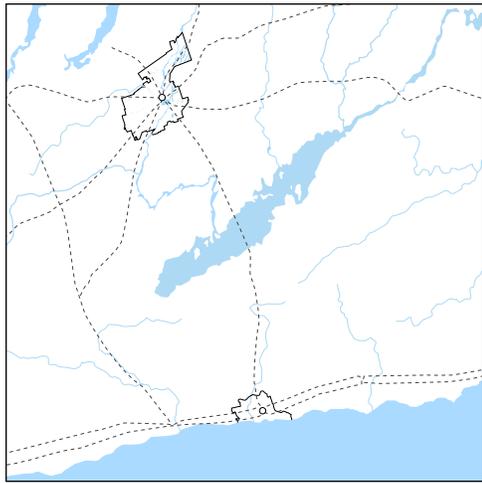
1884 Fig. 16



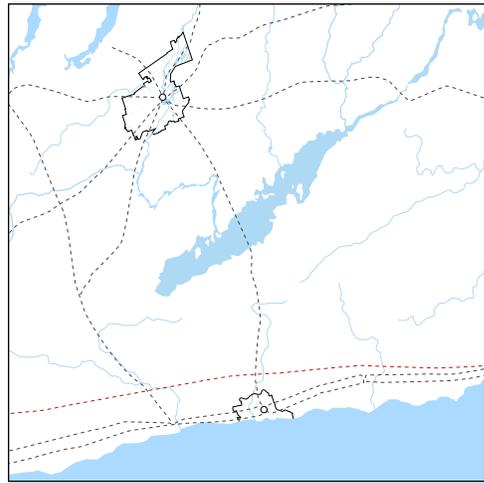
1890 Fig. 17



1891 Fig. 18



1903 Fig. 19

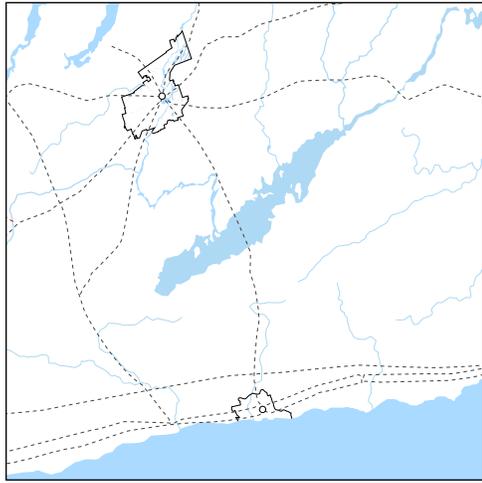


1911 Fig. 20

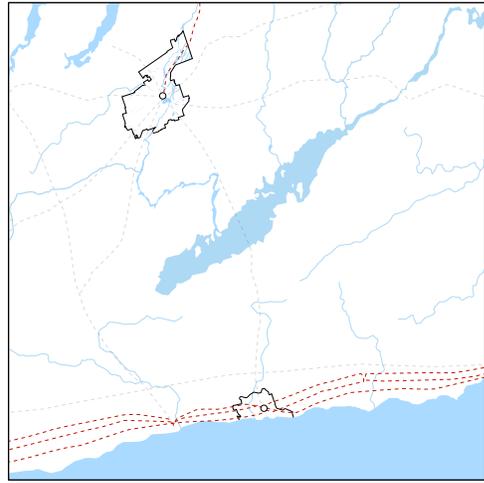
new line

active line

abandoned line



1913 Fig. 21

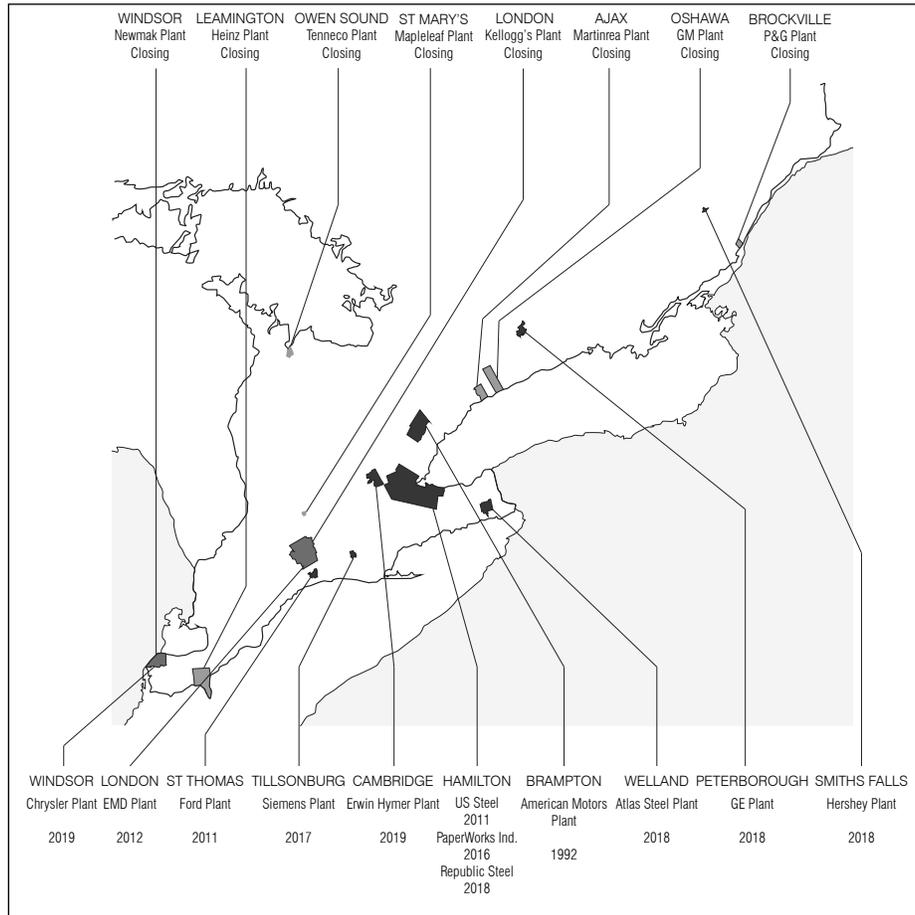


OPERATIONAL - 2019 Fig. 22

POST-INDUSTRY

The prosperity that the city had experienced for so long would begin to dissolve in the 1970s as manufacturers across the country began laying off employees as part of their cost-cutting measures. And while the impact of this shift was felt across the country, the Canadian region that was arguably the hardest hit by this wave of factory closures was southern Ontario and Quebec, from the Great lakes up the St. Lawrence River, an area that was historically the industrial manufacturing powerhouse for the rest of the nation. This loss was also echoed in the USA. The loss of heavy industry around the Great Lakes, completely devastated cities like Cleveland, Buffalo, and Detroit. This once powerful network of producers was hollowed out and disconnected from each other with the decline of industry. Despite the national boundary, these were once cities interconnected by industry and suffered the same fate. A trend towards increased automation in manufacturing plants meant that fewer workers were now needed to produce the same volume of goods. This compounded with a lower demand for many of the products being manufactured, resulting in more employees losing their jobs.⁷ The process of manufacturing in Canada also changed around this time, and instead of engineering and building goods from raw materials, factories like General Electric began assembling

⁷ Ian Austen, 'This City Once Made Much of What Canada Bought. But no More.' *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2018.



2019 Closures of Manufacturing Facilities
Southern Ontario

Fig. 23

products from parts produced elsewhere.⁸ This new form of production caused a decline in higher paying engineering jobs and less dependence on local engineers. The introduction of free trade agreements in the following decades further impacted the already damaged local manufacturing industry as many factories began closing for good to move their facilities to places where labour costs and taxes would be lower.⁹ Peterborough's economy

8 Stewart MacLaren, *Standards of the Highest: From Edison to GE Canada: Peterborough 1891-1991*. Centennial Committee of General Electric, Peterborough, 1991.

9 Austen, 'This City Once Made Much'

had always been dependent on manufacturing, meaning that these waves of successive closures had severe consequences on the socio-economic makeup of the city.

This decline is further exemplified by the closure of many rail lines in Peterborough. At the height of industrial production Peterborough relied on the railway to move goods in and out of the city. However, in the early 20th century rail expansion had dramatically slowed and transportation by automobile began to become the preferred method of shipping. Eventually, the railway networks that once connected Peterborough to major cities throughout Canada and the United States began to dissolve and were ultimately abandoned or destroyed, leaving Peterborough with only three (rarely used) remaining lines from the previously active eight lines.¹⁰ This slow decline of the railway was an omen of Peterborough's weakening manufacturing sector and its transition to a post-industrial city.

10 Hansen, *Last Trains from Lindsay*.

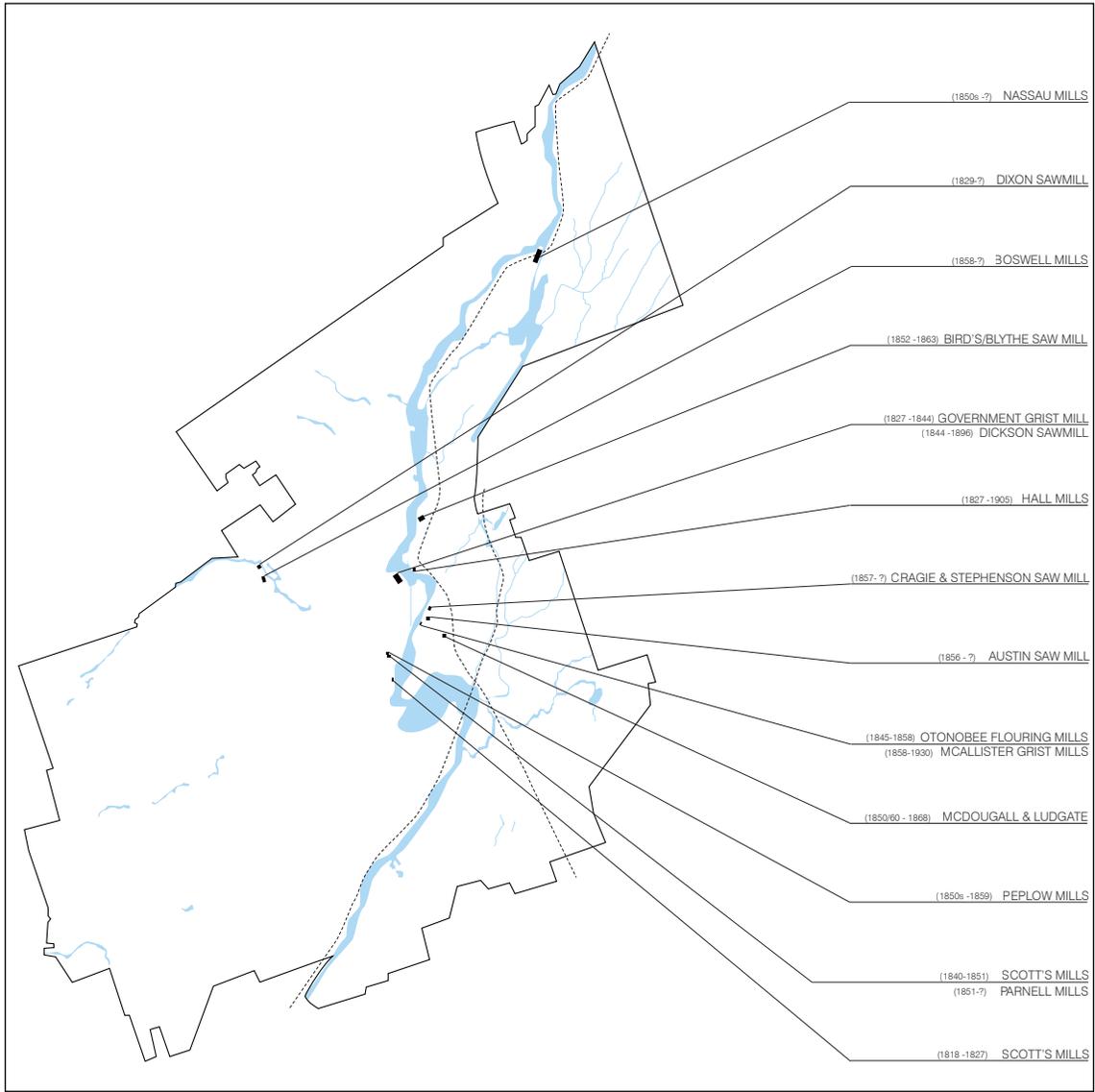
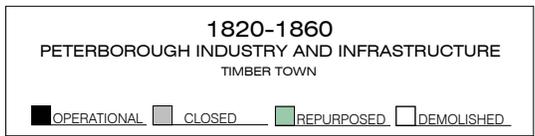


Fig. 24



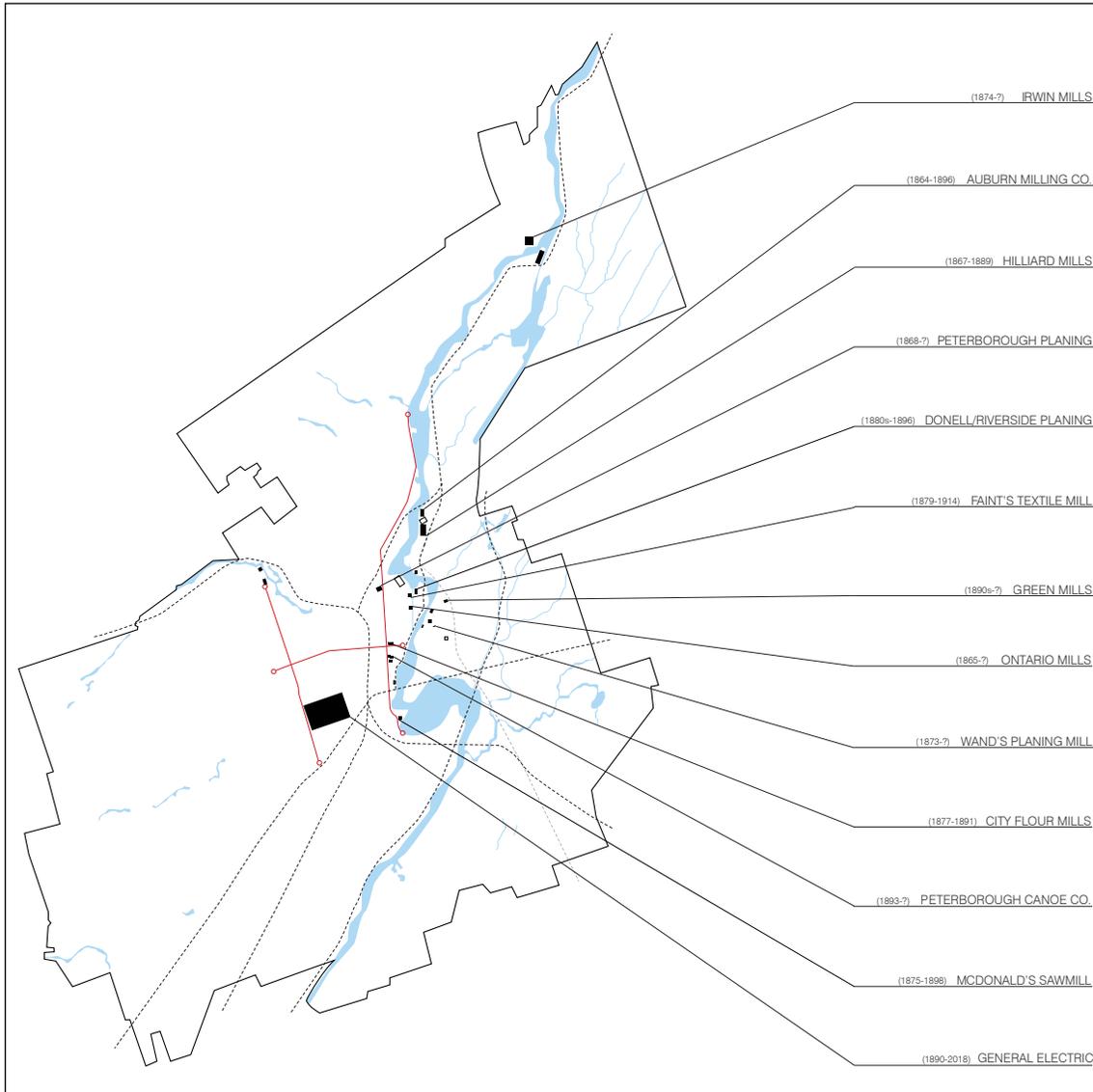


Fig. 25



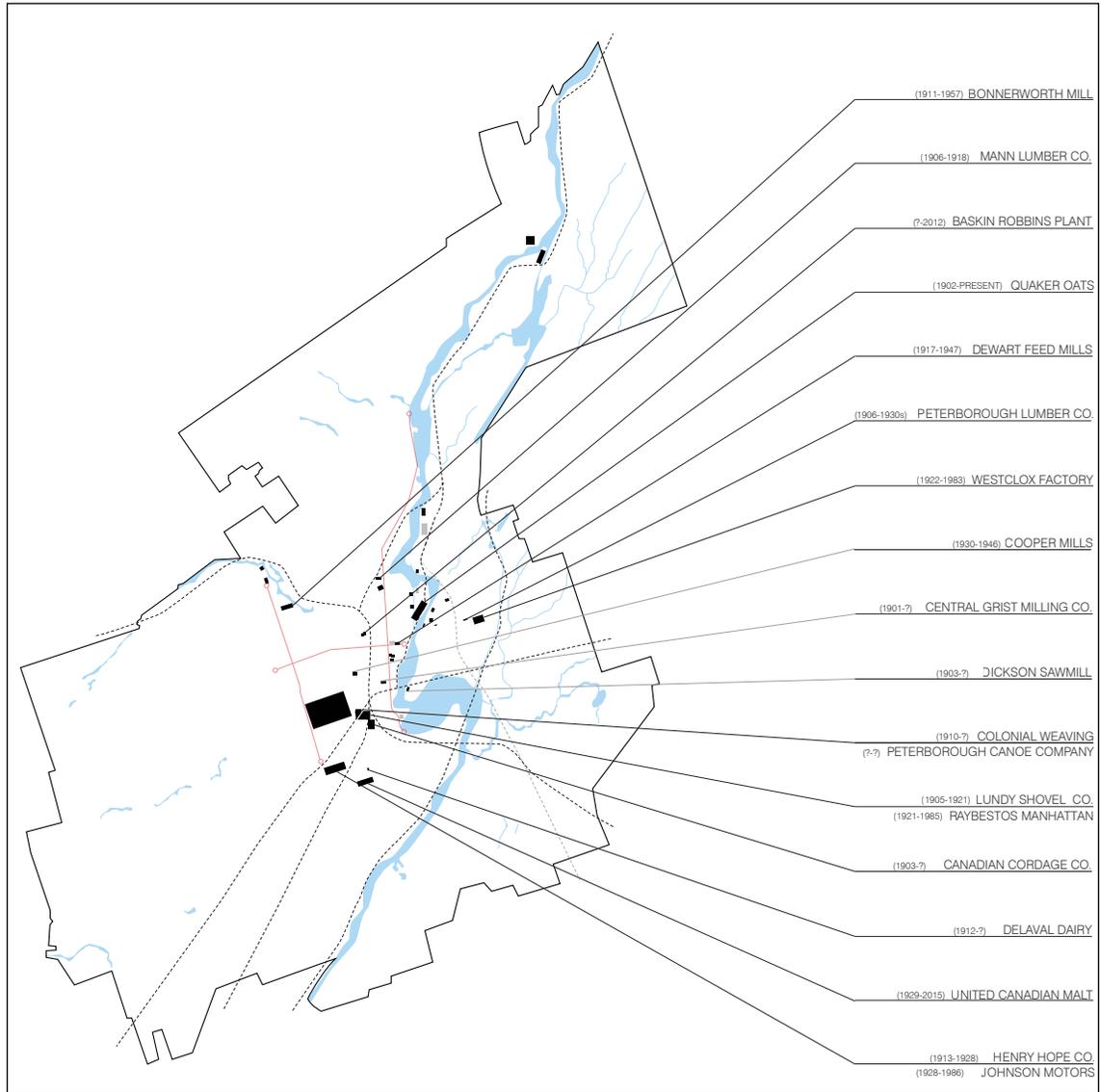
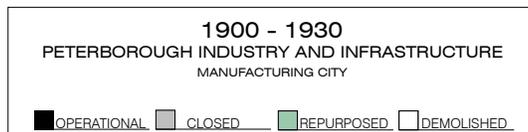


Fig. 26



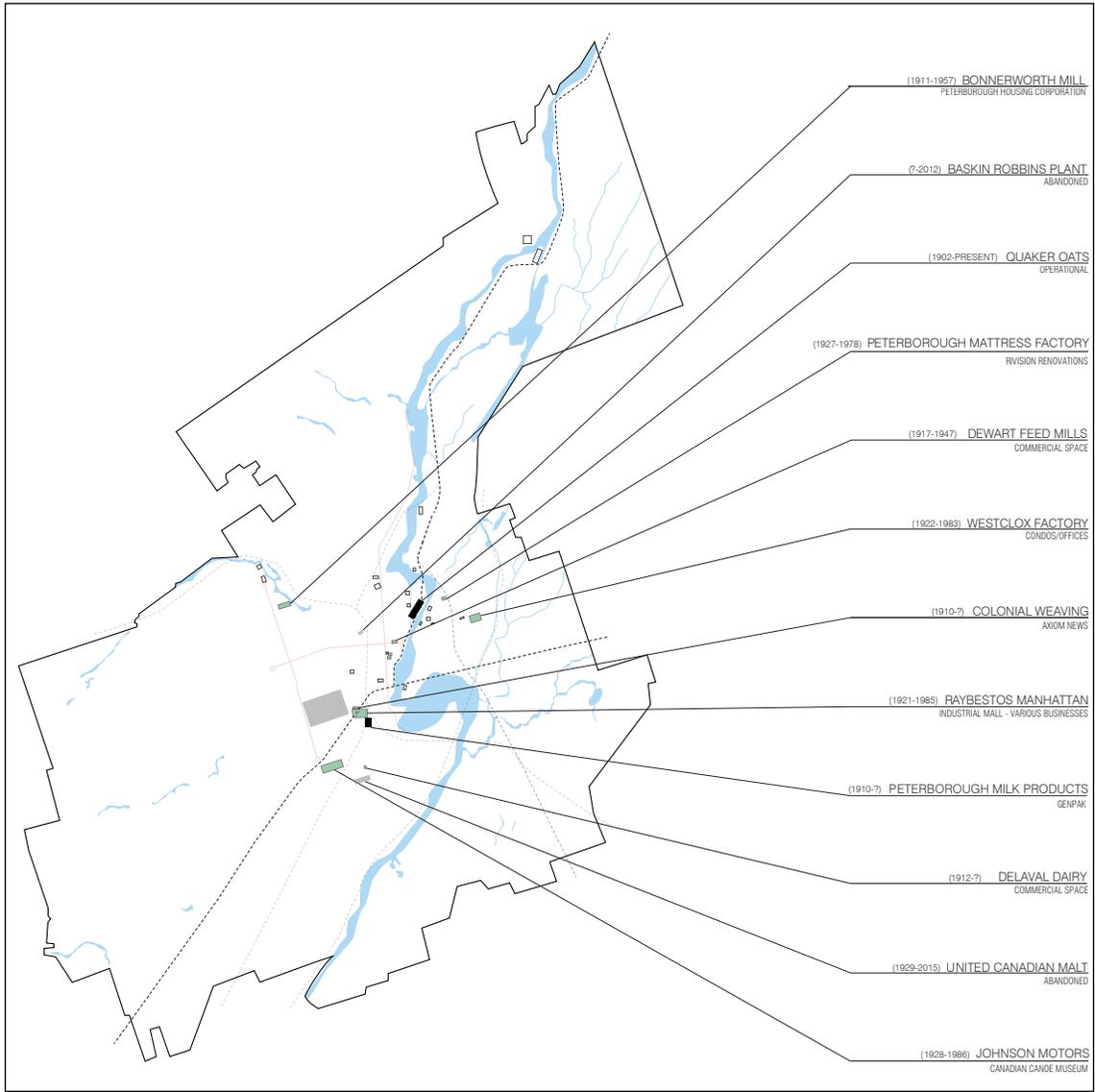


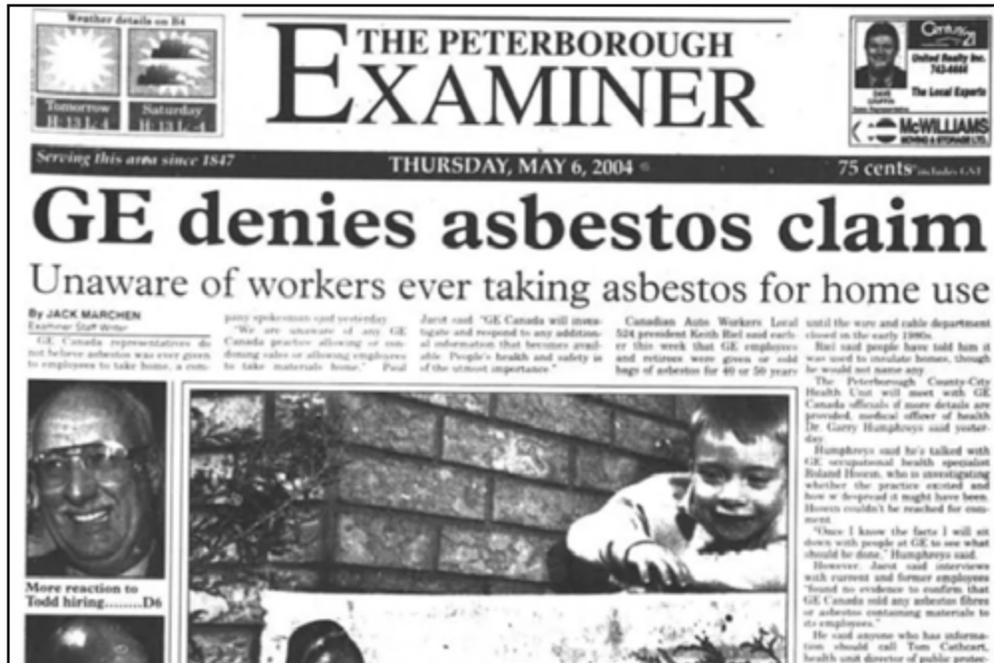
Fig. 27



To make matters worse, in addition to the unemployment that resulted from the departure of several significant manufacturers, evidence began to emerge that many of the materials being used at some of these plants were extremely hazardous to employees. One report, for example, indicated that the Peterborough General Electric employees had been exposed to over 3000 toxic chemicals at the facility, 40 of which are now known to be carcinogenic.¹¹ Peterborough's General Electric facility used asbestos and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) extensively for decades in many of its manufacturing processes before knowing the dangers of these chemicals. This chemical exposure has now been cited as being responsible for high rates of cancers and respiratory diseases amongst former employees, many of whom are still fighting (or their families are fighting) for compensation from the WSIB.¹² What had once been the largest employer in the city and a catalyst for growth is now also understood as another industry that poisoned its workers for the sake of profits.

11 Joelle Kovach, 'General Electric Peterborough workers' fight for compensation 'an uphill battle.' *Peterborough Examiner*, Jan.04, 2019

12 *ibid.*



In recent decade, evidence has been made public claiming that many harmful chemicals were used in manufacturing at the General Electric plant in Peterborough.

Fig. 28

In recent years, the city of Peterborough hardly resembles the flourishing town of the late 19th and early 20th century. The consistent closure of manufacturing plants left Peterborough with the highest unemployment rate in Ontario in 2019 and a homelessness epidemic so severe that tent cities emerged in almost every public park in the summer of 2019. This economic dilemma has led to significant social problems - in 2016 violent crime rose 20% from the previous year and in 2019 Peterborough had the highest rate of opioid related deaths per capita.¹³

¹³ Todd Vandonk, 'Peterborough now has Ontario's highest rate of opioid deaths.' *Peterborough Examiner*, Sept. 06, 2019.

Shifts in industry, energy, communications, and transport have led to the rise and fall of Peterborough. This thesis proposes a way of opening the General Electric site to accept the next shift in Peterborough's history. Through a choreographed deconstruction of the plant, the public become spectators to the poetic unwrapping of a familiar landmark and witnesses to the layers of history that are revealed. A thoughtful unbuilding of the site can be an act that conserves some of the values many people identify with Peterborough (innovation, industry) while still opening the site up to future reinterpretations. This proposal looks to the future of the city while appreciating its history.

02/ THE SITE



The site that the city offered to Thomas Edison for his Edison Electric plant was on the western border of the town and adjacent to an already existing rail line. It sat on the boundary between the old town (oriented along the Otonabee River) and newer residential developments (oriented on a north/south axis) - an area that was largely undeveloped but did fall within the official town boundaries. This site was directly to the north of several parcels of land that had already been subdivided for a housing development,¹⁴ making it convenient for the housing of many GE workers who would be employed at the plant in the future (fig 30). The town continued to grow, however, and while in 1890 this site was on the edge of the city limits, today it is close to being directly in the middle of the city (fig 31). After the establishment of the General Electric plant, many new factories were built to the east along the rail line that serviced GE. In every other direction housing began to consume the vacant land. As Peterborough expanded around GE, it became the link between the core and the town limits. With the site's place on the western streetcar line (which operated from 1893-8 and 1902-16)¹⁵, workers from downtown could commute to the factory, and those living nearby had easy access to downtown. The General Electric parcel itself also continued to grow over time, as the company was given the meadow across the street to the west

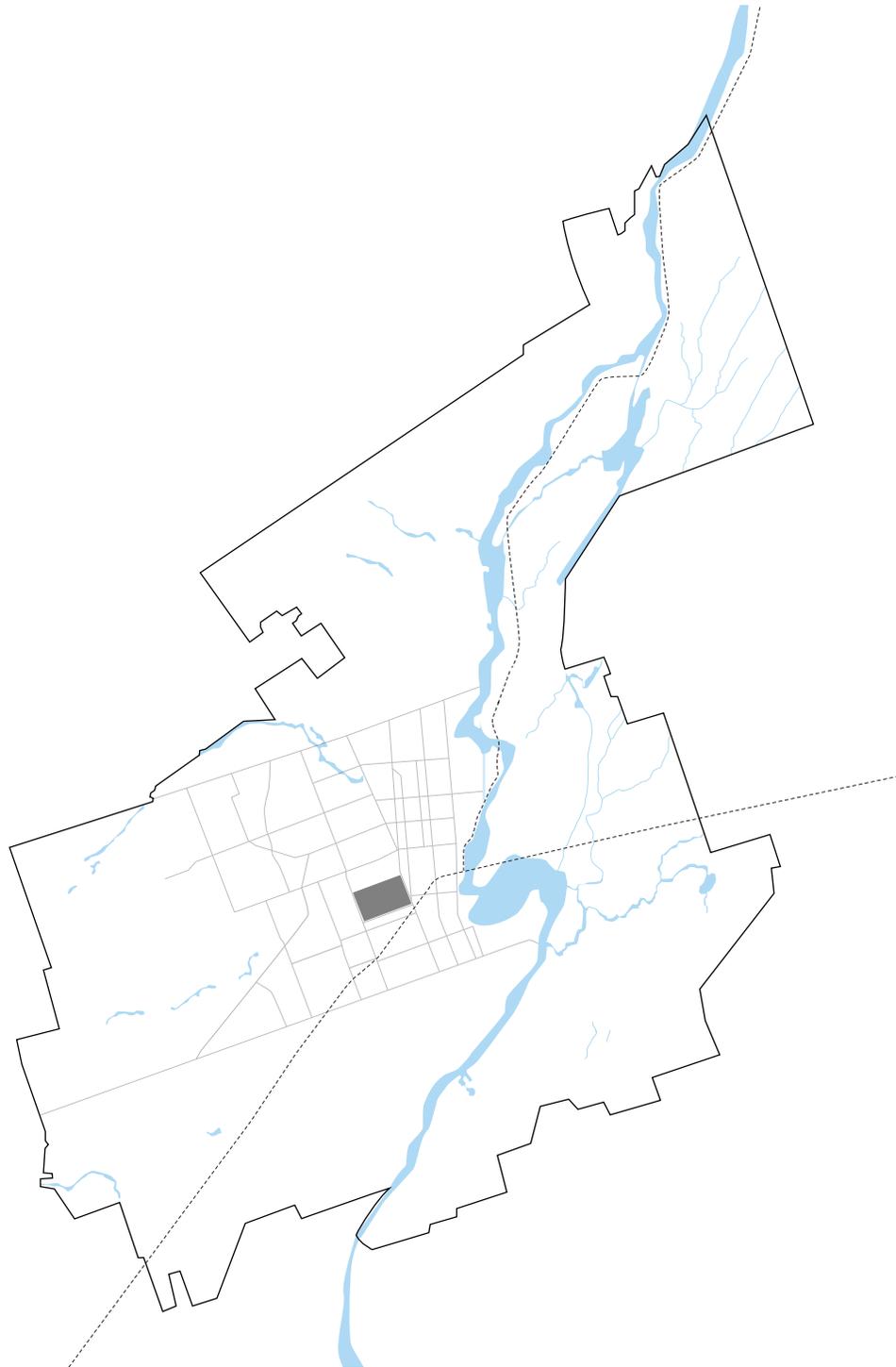
¹⁴ Robert Romaine, *Romaine's Map of the Town of Peterborough and the Village of Ashburnham*. Peterborough: Office of the Peterborough Review, 1875.

¹⁵ Elwood H. Jones, 'Part 1 of a series: The Street Railway in Peterborough' *Peterborough Examiner*, Nov. 05, 2016. Accessed October 18, 2019



A map of Peterborough from 1875. Black lines denote the town borders, red lines show the existing rail lines, and highlighted in red is the General Electric site.

Fig. 30



Map showing the location of the General Electric plant in present day Peterborough.

Fig. 31

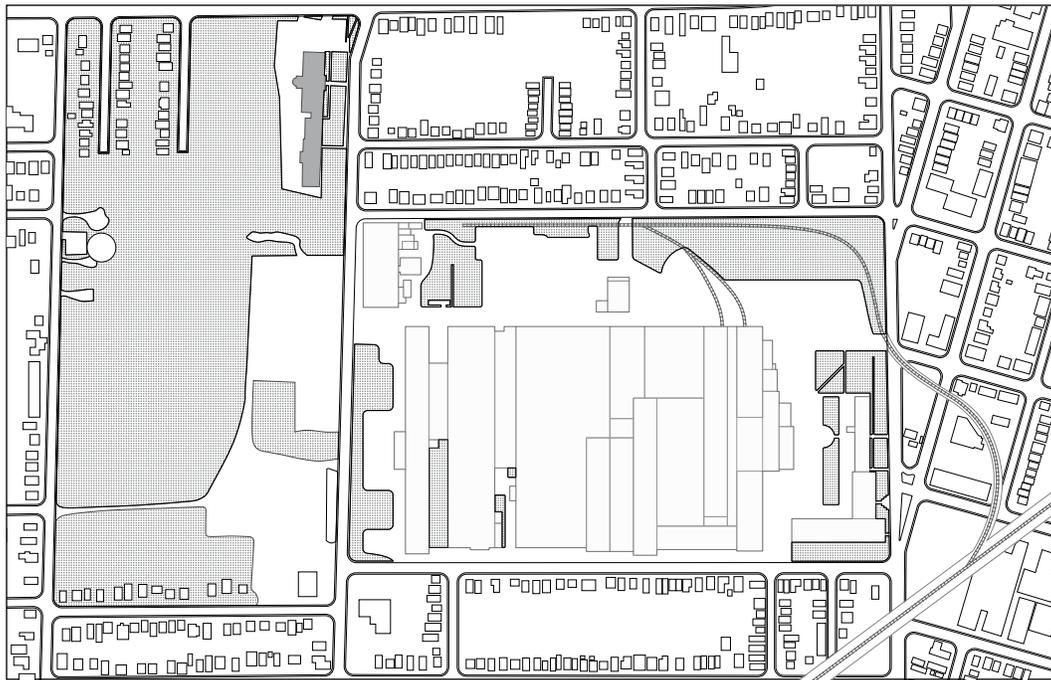


Fig. 32

2019 General Electric Site Map
 Showing Prince of Wales Public School
 (to the north-west, shaded in dark grey)

of the factory, a site which (although never completely developed) is still surrounded by a high fence to keep the public out. To keep up with the growing population around the GE plant, Prince of Wales Public School was built in 1919 directly to the North of this vacant meadow. The factory boomed during World War II and into the following decades. By the late 1960s, the plant had 6 000 employees and in a city of only 60 000, over 24 000 people were directly connected to the factory.¹⁶ During these boom years, the General Electric factory played a very active role in the community. The plant often opened its doors to factory tours and held annual Christmas dinners at the local hockey arena, often drawing crowds of 8 000 to 9 000

16

Taylor Clysdale, 'The History of General Electric in Peterborough,' *My Kawartha*, November 30, 2017.



A tour through the Peterborough
General Electric factory in the 1970s.

Fig. 33

people.¹⁷ However, as mentioned above, the production levels at General Electric began to decline and the factory began laying off many of its employees after the 1970s. By the summer of 2018 General Electric had closed for good, laying off the remaining 358 employees and leaving acres of land in the centre of the city unoccupied.

17 *ibid*

PRODUCTION

When Edison Electric opened in 1891, the plant designed and produced generators, transformers, electric lamps, and electric motors/equipment for streetcars. However, the factory quickly broadened its production to include a wide variety of electric accessories. At this time, General Electric also built most of the hydro-electric and waterworks infrastructure that would eventually become the nerve center of the Peterborough Utilities Commission.¹⁸ Because of its tremendous manufacturing capability and its integration into an extensive rail network, the General Electric plant was completely retooled to produce wartime supplies in 1914. It would now produce artillery, shells, and guns for the war effort and was an extremely important link in the supply chain.¹⁹ During the war years, the increase in labour requirements and shortage of men (who were of course fighting overseas) meant that the Peterborough General Electric plant, like many factories at the time, would have to hire women to work in its factory. After the war, General Electric went back to its pre-war production, but with new contracts for engines for cargo ships, boilers, and other marine goods that were needed in the repair of post-war Europe. WWI had ravaged parts of Europe, “but from that devastation arose the requirement for reconstruction. Sizeable contracts would be required to deliver many kinds of civilian products to be sold in Europe, and CGE was ready to fulfill

¹⁸ MacLaren, *Standards of the Highest*

¹⁹ *Ibid*

them.”²⁰ In 1941, during World War II, the plant was greatly expanded again, and buildings were constructed in order to facilitate the manufacturing of munitions and wartime supplies. However, in this case, these new additions to the factory were crown-owned but operated by General Electric. This new production facility was called Genelco and produced wartime materials at an even higher rate than what was achieved during WWI.²¹ Throughout all of these decades 19th and 20th-century production, General Electric had an affinity for technology and innovation; they were constantly creating new patents and handing out bonuses weekly to workers whose inventions or innovations improved efficiency at the plant.²² This thesis attempts to imagine a way that GE could continue to give something to the residents of Peterborough, even as its traces are gradually removed from the site.



The numbers 1 to 10 above refer to
WAR MUNITIONS

For the Navy.		Length.	For the Army.		Length.
1.	9.2" Shrapnel Shell	32.64"	7.	18 Pr. Shrapnel with Case	22.00"
2.	7.5" Shrapnel Shell	25.12"	8.	60 Pr. H. Ex. Shell	16.82"
3.	6" Shrapnel Shell	18.15"	9.	1.5" H. Ex. Shell	13.37"
4.	3" Shrapnel with Tracer	9.02"	10.	18 Pr. H. Ex. Shell	9.55"
5.	3" Shrapnel Shell	8.32"	Cartridge Cases.		
6.	13. Pr. H. Ex. Shell	7.79"	Percussion Primers.		

Fig. 34

Diagram of War munitions produced by GE during WWI

20 Brooklyn Furrow and Alex Murphy. 'Peterborough General Electric Plant.' *Trent University: Peterborough and First World War*

21 MacLaren, *Standards of the Highest*

22 Furrow, Brooklyn, 'Peterborough General Electric Plant.'

DEVELOPMENT

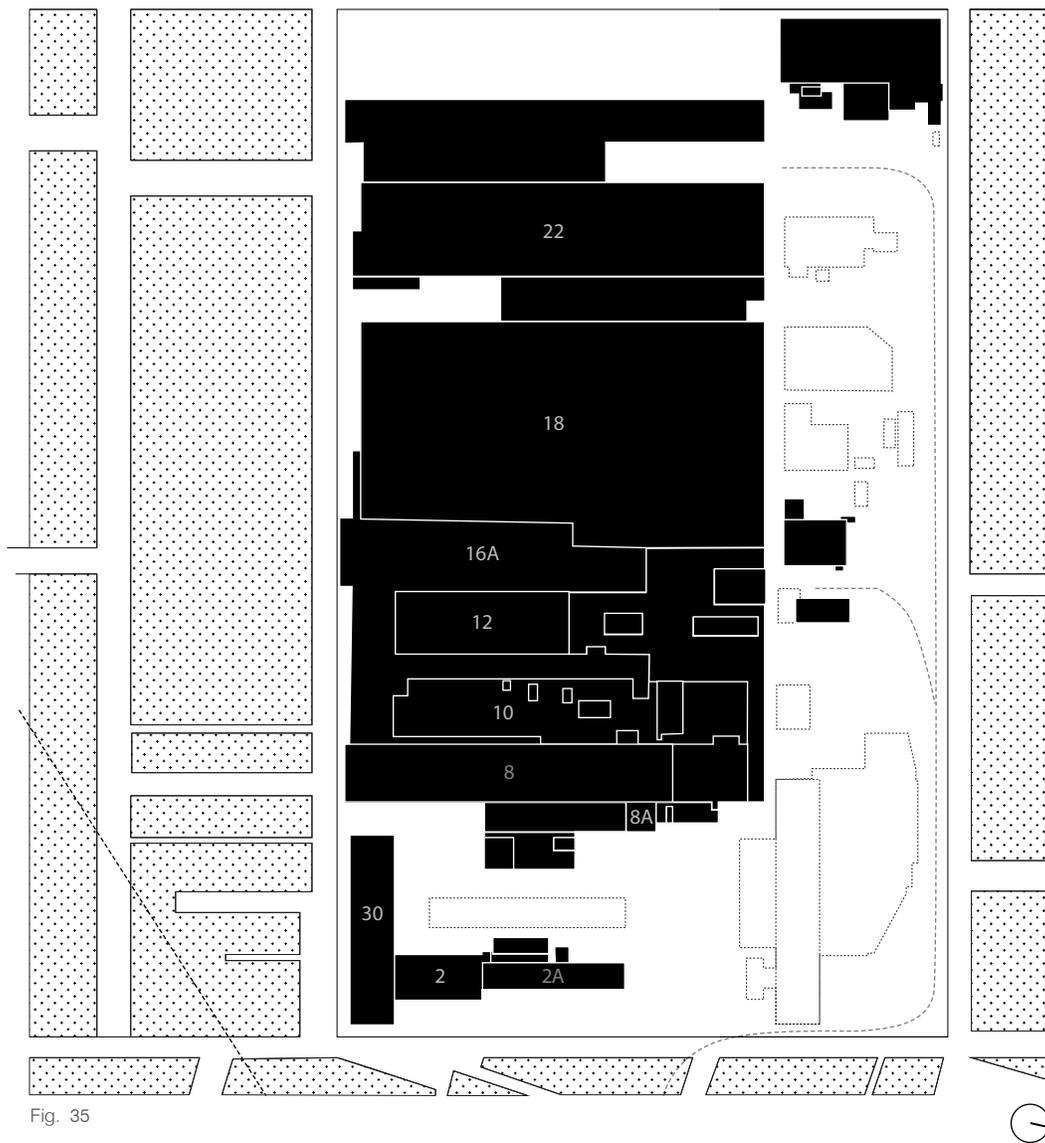


Fig. 35

General Electric Peterborough plant:
Current site plan with buildings numbered.

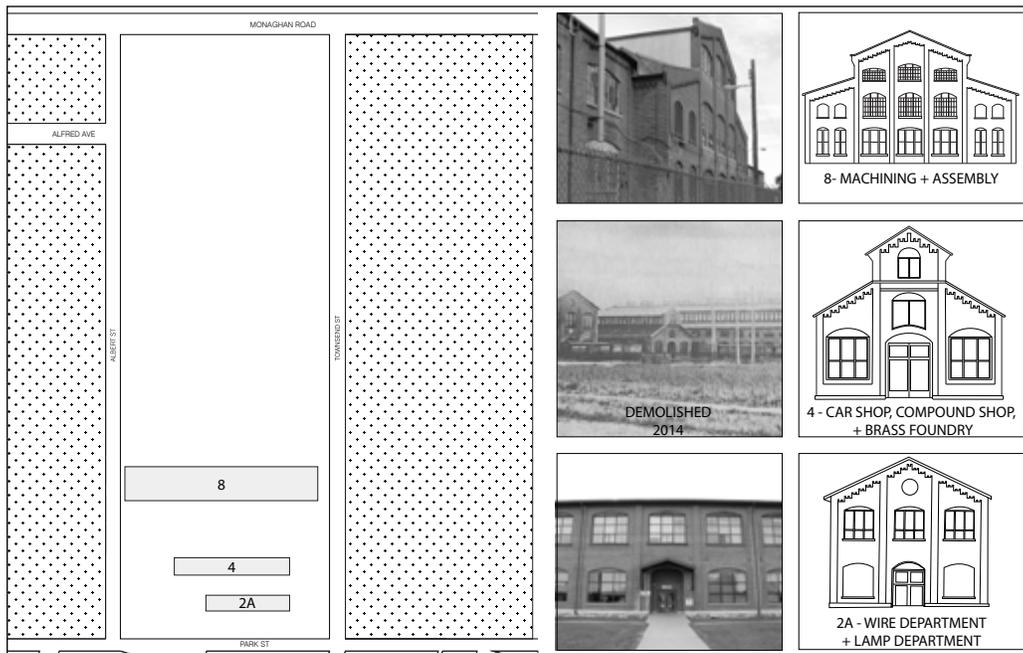


Fig. 36

1891

The first three buildings are constructed on the Edison Electric site

The first three buildings constructed on the General Electric site in 1891 were Buildings 2A, 4, and 8. These three buildings provided the workspaces necessary to build the early electric motors and equipment that GE produced (fig 36). Building 2A was the wire and lamp department, Building 4 was the car shop, compound shop, and brass foundry, and Building 8 was the machining and assembly building.²³ These initial buildings were all constructed in a very similar style from the same type of brick. Each have the same ornate brick cornice that runs along the eaves of the building and arched windows frames with leaded glass windows. These buildings have a series of pilasters that run the building facade, separating the facade into equal vertical bands. The monitor roofs on Building 4 and

²³ MacLaren, *Standards of the Highest*

8, perhaps the building feature most emblematic of the General Electric plant in Peterborough, allow for higher interior spaces and the integration of clerestory windows to provide more natural light into the buildings.



Fig. 37

1903

Building 7 and Building 30 are constructed on the site.

In 1903, the factory expanded to include two new buildings: Building 7, the armature shop, and Building 30, the new shipping wing (fig 37).²⁴ These buildings were constructed in the same style as the original three buildings; both had the ornamental cornice, pilasters, and the same red brick. However, instead of the arched window frames used in the 1891 buildings, the company opted for simpler square ones. The monitor roof profile was not used in either of these buildings, but instead they were single gable roofs like in Building 2A.

²⁴ *Ibid*

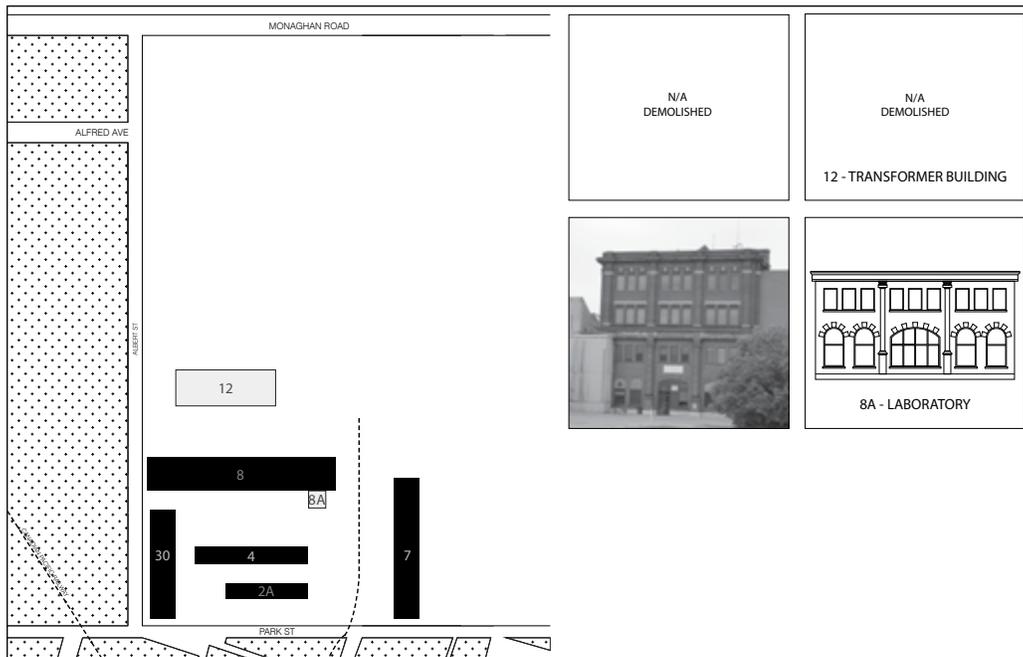


Fig. 38

1907

Building 8A and Building 12 are constructed on the site.

In 1907, several small additions were made to the plant: Building 8A (an addition onto the already existing Building 8) and Building 12, a freestanding building to the west of Building 8 (fig 38). The addition of Building 8A provided a new laboratory space for the factory while Building 12 was the workspace in which transformers were built.²⁵ Although there is no documentation of what Building 12 looked like before it was absorbed into another plant expansion, Building 8A is still standing and can be analyzed. The original Building 8A addition was only the bottom two floors of what currently exists and is quite different than the other GE buildings that existed at that time. Although Building 8A is made of a similar brick and has arched windows on the lower level, the pilasters are slightly more ornamental and the building has a flat roof, rather than the typical gabled or monitor roof.

²⁵ *ibid*

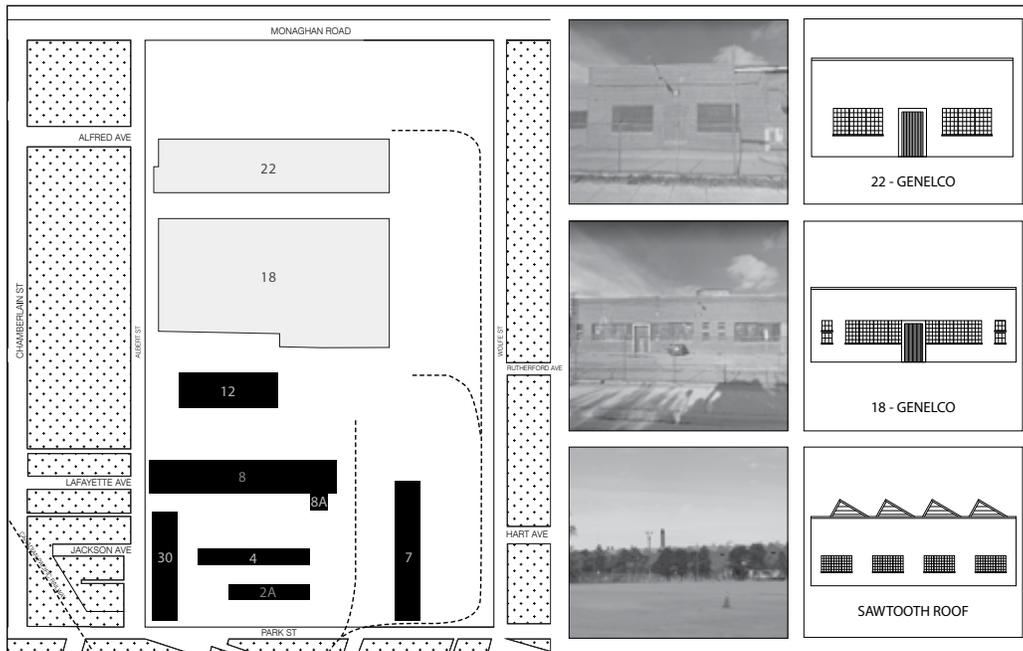


Fig. 39

1941

The Genelco buildings are constructed on the site.

The construction of the Genelco buildings in 1941 is the most significant example of deviance from the original building typologies. These buildings were constructed to manufacture munitions and wartime supplies for WWII and were much less ornamental than the previous buildings (fig 39). These new buildings were constructed from a lighter coloured brick and had no embellishment on the facades. The windows on these buildings were simple rectangular window frames with leaded glass windows similar to the previous typologies. Perhaps the most discernible change, beside the austere facades, was the sawtooth roof profile used on these new buildings. The sawtooth roof functioned in a very similar way to the monitor roof. Where the monitor roof incorporated clerestory windows into the roof

profile, the sawtooth roof allowed glazing on the vertical pitches of the ridge allowing sunlight into the building, while sheltering the workers from direct sunlight. The adoption of the sawtooth roofs roof profile would influence many of the building additions in the future.

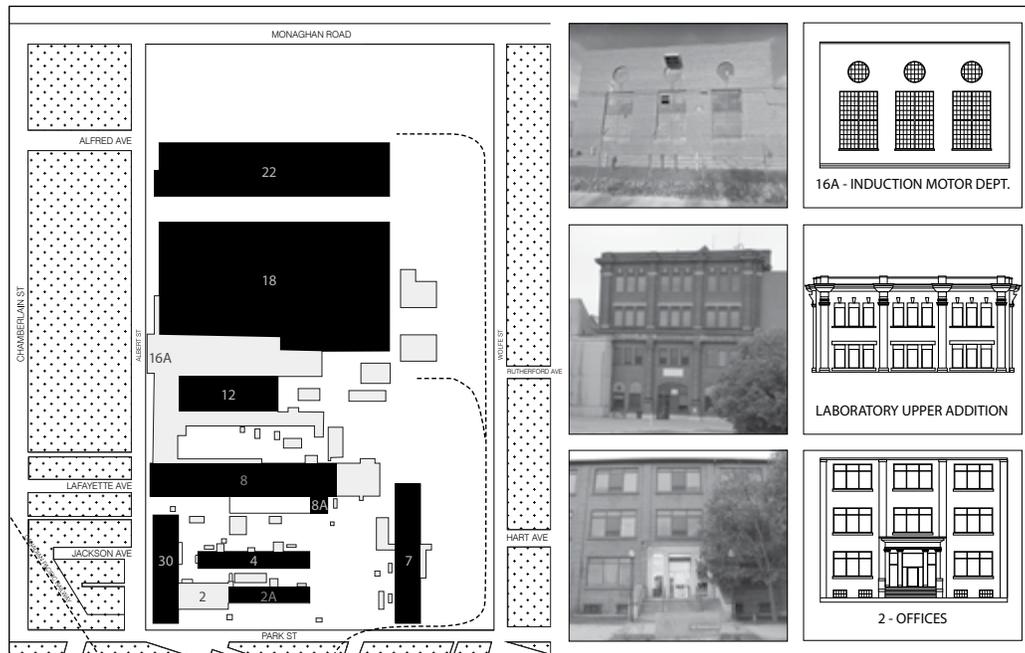


Fig. 40

1943

Building 16A and Building 2, among others, are constructed on the site.

In 1943, the plant was further expanded, joining many of the existing buildings together. These additions included Building 2, Building 16, and an upper addition to Building 8A (fig 40). Building 2 was a new office wing that connected Building 2A to Building 30 and Building 16 was a new induction motor department that bridged the gap between Building 12 and the Genelco addition.²⁶ Building 16 was constructed in a style very similar to the Genelco typology but with a higher ceiling level and the integration of large,

26

Ibid

round windows. The building facade is unadorned, and the building uses a sawtooth roof very similar to the Genelco buildings. Building 2, on the other hand, emulates the typology of the original 1891 buildings but in a more restrained way. The building has pilasters ordering the facade into equal bands and a single gabled roof like the original buildings but has windows with less leading between the panes of glass and a brick colour more similar to the Genelco buildings. Finally, the upper addition to Building 8A closely emulates the style of the existing 8A building. This new addition continues the pilasters to the new roof and keeps the rhythm and scale of windows between these columns. However, this addition is slightly more ornamental in its introduction of keystones above the upper windows, a more intricate column capital than the original building, and a large and ornate cornice running the length of the flat roof. Although each of these buildings was created in a different style, each was designed to fit into their contexts and match the existing adjacent buildings.



Fig. 41

1948

Building 10 is constructed on the site.

Building 10, built in 1948, served to encase the gap between Building 8 and Building 12 (fig 41). This structure was soon swallowed up by another addition to the factory, so not much documentation exists about the building's appearance or role in production. Based on the accounts of the building, it was one of the tallest additions made to the plant and included the sawtooth roof profile that was becoming common to the new building additions.²⁷ However, it is unknown if the building design was more like the pre or post-WWII typology.

27 *Ibid*

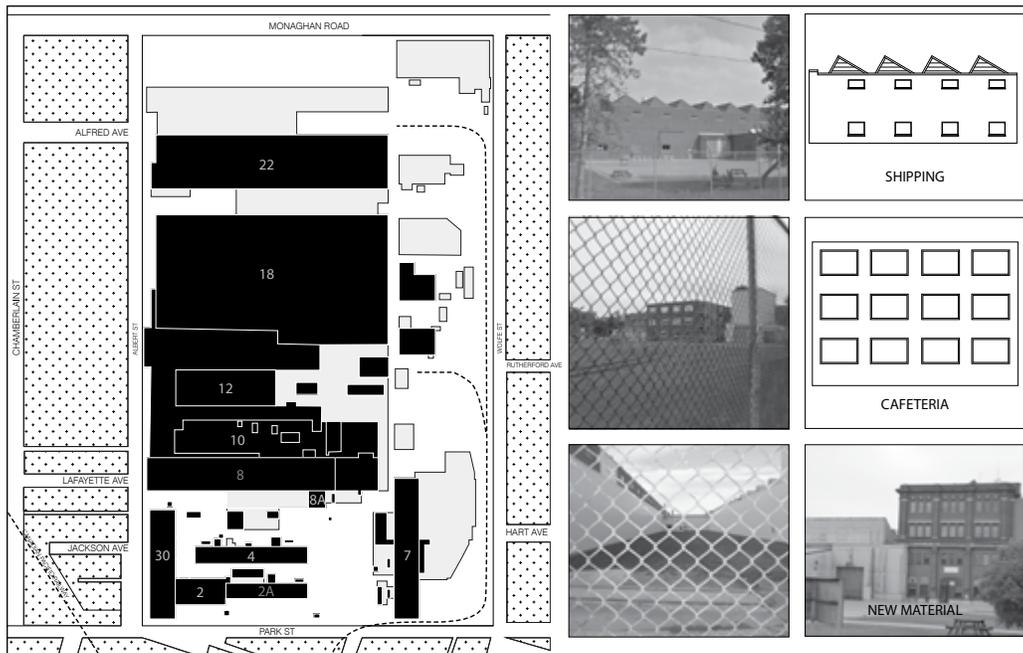


Fig. 42

1968

Several new buildings are constructed with new materials and typologies.

By 1968, a number of additions were completed, unifying many of the previous buildings into a large, single structure (fig 42). These additions included the new shipping bay to the west of the site, and a cafeteria directly north of that.²⁸ While many of these new additions incorporated typical building details (sawtooth roofs, unadorned red brick facades), several introduced new materials and forms. The cafeteria, although made of red brick, was a completely new typology on the site. This building was a simple, undecorated square structure with unlead square punch windows ordered regularly across the facade; this building is perhaps the simplest structure on the site. Many of the other additions were not discrete buildings, but rather a form of adding on to existing structures. Often, they were made of aluminum siding with very few windows, making it the first time that a cladding material other than brick was used on the site.

28

Ibid



Fig. 43

2014

Multiple buildings are demolished on the site.

2014 brought the demolition of many of the existing buildings and the discontinuation of the railway into the General Electric plant (fig 43). Building 7 and its additions were completely demolished and replaced by a parking lot in the same shape as the previous building footprint.²⁹ Many of the discrete buildings to the west of Building 7 were also demolished and, like Building 7, the concrete pad of their footprints still exist (as illustrated by an aerial view of the site). Building 4 was also demolished and replaced by a lawn that follows the exact footprint of the former building. These building footprints and abandoned rail lines serve as artifacts of the building's history; they are remnants of Peterborough's past, testaments to the prosperity and industry that existed on the site and in the city.

²⁹ Joelle Kovach, 'General Electric Peterborough workers' Underused GE buildings coming down.' *Peterborough Examiner*, Jun. 14, 2014

03/

THE POETICS OF DEMOLITION



THE POETIC FORM

When a structure is being demolished, there are unintentional moments of beauty that emerge as the building is pushed and distorted into unplanned, unusual, and transient positions and shapes (fig 45). However, it is difficult to rationalize exactly what makes these moments so beautiful and captivating. The familiarity of the materials of which they are composed and the understanding of what they should look like in regular circumstances adds to their allure. The novelty and uniqueness of each of these objects asks the viewer to explore every inch of it to fully appreciate the intricacy of the form. But, perhaps the most compelling reason for their appeal is their mortality - these forms appear only after a building has been wounded. Thus, they will inevitably cease to exist and so their brief life becomes even more valuable. What makes these poetic forms interesting is their dynamism – immediately after they are created, they may change forms, grow, or disappear entirely. Although there is something wonderful about the notion of freezing these fragments in time, without their fleeting quality they are not much more than an architectural folly. The association that many people have between destruction and age means that, to most, these forms are immediately historicized. From the moment that they are created they are past tense; objects from a time before now that have somehow seeped into the present. Although these are modern buildings, there seems to be “visible effects of history in terms of decay.”³⁰ They ask the viewer to contemplate their history and to somehow feel nostalgic for past that the viewer has never experienced. Often, these poetic forms are

30 John Piper, ‘Pleasing Decay’ (Architectural Review, Sept. 1947)

juxtaposed with an element of the building that, for whatever reason, is perfectly intact, emphasizing the strangeness and peculiarity of the demolished form – small hints to the history of the building. Flashes of paint on a torn piece of concrete or shattered ornamental corbels accentuate the disparity between what the building was and what it is presently.



Demolition of United Canadian Malt
Factory - Peterborough, Ontario.

Fig. 45

THE RUIN

Humans have been fascinated with the poetics of ruins for most of documented history. There are accounts of romanticized descriptions of ruins in literature dating back to ancient Hebraic poems describing the fall of Babylon and representation of ruins in Chinese garden decoration dating back equally long.³¹ This fetishization of the ruin enthralled Europe during the 18th century and rekindled an interest in the classical ruins of Rome.³² Piranesi was one of the many artists who became enamoured within the poetics of these ruins and etched many of Rome's ruinous landmarks in his *Views* series (fig 46). However, this fascination with ruins culminated in the Romantic period when painters and architects began depicting buildings from their era left in ruinous states by catastrophes yet to come. In 1798, Joseph Gandy depicted the recently completed Bank of England as a picturesque ruin (fig 47) just as Hubert Robert had done earlier following the completion of the Louvre (fig 48).³³ When reflecting on Robert's work, philosopher Denis Diderot noted what he felt made the notion of ruins so poetic and compelling was that "everything dissolves, everything perishes, everything passes, only time goes on...How old the world is. I walk between two eternities... What is my existence in comparison with this crumbling stone?"³⁴ This fascination with ruins and modernity continued into the Victorian period with authors like Richard Jefferies writing about the destruction of the city of London and its return to nature in his novel *After London*.³⁵

31 Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1954), 3.

32 Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*

33 Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*

34 Denis Diderot and John Goodman, *Diderot on Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 197.

35 Brian Dillon, "Ruin lust: our love affair with decaying buildings," *The Guardian*, February 17, 2012.



Remains of a Covered Portico in a villa of Domitian (1748-1778)
Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Fig. 46



A Vision of the Bank of England in Ruins (1798)
J.M Gandy

Fig. 47



View of the Grande-Galerie in Ruins (1796)
Hubert Robert

Fig. 48



Demolition site, Rue de la Parcheminerie (1913)
Eugène Atget

Fig. 49

Even into the early 20th century artists were still captivated by the notions of progress and ruins and how these played out in the modern city. French photographer Eugène Atget documented the city of Paris as it was being modernized in the early 1900s. His work focuses on the poetics of the demolished form and shows an interest in dichotomy between the built and the destroyed (fig 49). Today, this fascination with the juxtaposition of destruction and construction, and nostalgia for an imagined past continues. Artists continue to travel to areas of urban devastation to document abandoned and derelict spaces. In recent decades, cities like St. Louis or Detroit have attracted spectators to marvel at the decaying ruins of formerly impressive structures (fig 50) and have attained cult status as purveyors of ‘ruin porn’ – a recently coined term to describe the current fixation with the decaying and dilapidated. Author Siobhan Lyons draws a connection between the current obsession with modern ruins and mortality; she states that,

“modern ruins signal this global decay to which we all will invariably succumb, one way or another. In this manner, modern ruins arouse both despair and fascination, a fascination with our own death and a tangible image of the precise form it will take. They remind us, in a very sublime way, of the inevitability of human extinction, refocusing the terrain of ‘ruin’ away from the ancient world and towards the imminent future.”³⁶

Although the notion of clinging to beautiful ruins is tempting, this type of response can become dangerous if it creates areas valued purely for their aesthetic and emotional value rather than for any productive or novel occupation or use. The

36 Siobhan Lyons, *Ruin Porn and the Obsession with Decay*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2.

danger of freezing a ruin simply for its aesthetic appeal is amplified in a struggling city desperate for change. Aestheticization, nostalgia, and sentimentality can turn these former buildings into something meaningless. In the case of the GE plant, the careful choreography of unbuilding emphasizes the aesthetic beauty of the temporary ruin but embeds active moments of theatre and poetic beauty into the act of deconstruction.



The ruined Spanish-Gothic interior of the United Artists Theater in Detroit (2005)
Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre

Fig. 50

04/

THE SPECTACLE OF DEMOLITION



The term spectacle is deeply entwined with visual perception. As a derivative of the Latin term *spectāre*, meaning ‘to look,’³⁷ the concept is predicated on a connection between the eye of the spectator and the event. The power of the spectacle is contingent on the spectacle’s ability to elicit a response in the viewer and maintain their gaze. The spectator may view the spectacle with “curiosity or contempt” or “marvel or admiration”³⁸. However, regardless of how the spectator feels about the event that they are witnessing, the spectacle can be judged on its ability to control the attention and view of the observer. Generally, one might consider a spectacle to be something unusual, exciting, entertaining, or interesting that is presented publicly. The act of demolition, then, is inherently spectacular. Whether a building is being imploded or disassembled piece by piece, a crowd of interested onlookers is sure to gather. But what is it about a structure being demolished that is so appealing to the public? Demolition is a revelatory act that displays all of a building’s secrets; spaces that are usually hidden from the public are on full display even structural components and wall and floor assemblies generally shielded by cladding are exposed to viewers. Demolition forcibly cuts through the skin of the building to reveal the building’s inner workings, often giving pause to passersby to wonder what exactly they are seeing. It is the “transparency of demolition [that] is responsible for such piqued interest.”³⁹ Demolition also has the effect of turning the spectator into an archaeologist, looking for peculiarities or

37 “Spectacle.” In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

38 “Spectacle.” In *Oxford English Dictionary*.

39 Chris Muskopf, “Constructing Demolition: A New Design for Detroit,” *Thresholds* No. 29 (2005): 92.

artifacts inside of the wreckage. They are shocked when they realize, 'that room in that factory is painted pink' or 'there was a third floor to that building?' It is this process of seeing something familiar in such a new way that contributes to the allure of the demolition site.

Yet scale and novelty also play a role in the efficacy of the spectacle. Witnessing someone knock down a store-bought shed would not likely be considered spectacular but seeing a high-rise building imploded would unquestionably be a spectacle. In this comparison, the scale of the demolition taking place and the novelty of the object being demolished contribute to what makes the spectacle. On the one hand, we have an object (shed) common enough that most people can reasonably guess at the interior qualities, structure, and amount of effort required to destroy it. On the other, in a high-rise building these elements are not so familiar; the interior may be surprisingly ornamental, it may be made of reinforced concrete instead of steel, and perhaps it is so rooted to the ground that the initial act of implosion was ineffective at felling the structure and it is not until minutes later that it eventually surrenders and collapses. It is these unknowns that make the latter's demolition attractive to a spectator.

Unlike spectacle, where the viewer passively looks-on in awe, theatre proposes something that engages with a range of thoughts, scales, and emotions. Theatre is largely contingent on context; the way that it is interpreted by the viewer is dependant on backdrop, lighting, and sound. The distance that an audience is from a 'performance' what they are able to see and hear changes the way the act is understood. Theatre is the observation of an action whether choreographed

or unchoreographed. As Peter Brook explains in his study of theatre, *The Empty Space*, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.”⁴⁰ However, what makes theatre compelling is much more than simply witnessing an action. The immediacy and immersiveness of the theatre are what give it depth and meaning. The audience bears witness to an event that happens live before them without the distance of an intermediary. The action in front of the viewers may be banal or stimulating, comfortable or challenging the fact that it unfolds in front of an audience turns the action into theatre. In the case of demolition, the drama of the act of destruction is affective because it is a genuine action occurring in real time and space before the eyes of the spectator. The viewer is a spectator to the immediate act of destruction without the filter of any media. This thesis proposes an intricate theatre production, which will have certain moments of dramatic spectacle, at which point views will be framed and platforms for viewing offered or created.

Many artists and architects have played with the notion spectacle and theatre in their works. Perhaps the best-known example of this is *Conical Intersect* by Gordon Matta-Clark. This piece was a deliberate ‘unbuilding’ of two 17th century buildings in the downtown area of Paris to make room for the new Centre Georges Pompidou, which was already under construction.⁴¹ Matta-Clark made a series of cuts to the building, removing a cone shaped volume from the building’s interior, from its façade up through the roof. This intervention allowed passers-by

⁴⁰ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 7.

⁴¹ Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, 1975. Silver Dye Bleach Print, New York, Guggenheim. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5211>, accessed 6 December 2019.

at ground-level to view through the entirety of the building, through the floors and past the structure. The process of deconstructing this historic building became a sort of theatre – workers carefully cut through specific layers of the building while a confused public watched, trying to figure out what the purpose of this selective unbuilding was. The result was a large aperture through the building, visible to the public at ground level. This moment of selective deconstruction, frozen in time, creates a moment of spectacle for the on-looking public. The impressive void cut through the building is equally large as it is strange to the spectator at street-level. Nonetheless, the novelty of such an act of deconstruction captures the gaze of the viewer and maintains it as they try to work out exactly what they are seeing (fig 52).



Fig. 52

Conical Intersect by
Gordon Matta-Clark, 1975.

With respect to the deconstruction of the General electric plant, by deconstructing the plant in a slow and considered way, this thesis proposes a choreographed act of demolition, which becomes intentionally theatrical. If the plant were imploded in a single act of violence, it would confirm and reinforce its worst reputations and memories, wiping away any of the good intentions in its original construction. There is also a poetry to unwinding the factory; revealing layers of its history and allowing the public to participate in the clearing of a post-industrial site for future reinterpretations. As the facades dissolve and views expand, the public is able to see into areas of the plant previously invisible, revealing enormous manufacturing spaces and any residual machinery left inside the buildings: Spaces and machinery used in the production of massive-scale motors used around the world; spotlights for bomber planes or munitions from WWII; machinery used to create the local infrastructure that would launch Peterborough onto the national stage as a city for technology and industry. Not only does the deconstruction of the factory create a form of spectacle, but the revelation of these interior spaces and their associated history creates a secondary layer of spectacle. People seem to be fascinated by both watching things being made as well as watching things be destroyed. Therefore, exposing General Electric's historically significant manufacturing facilities through a process of deconstruction will be an experience that engages the imagination of visitors and residents of Peterborough in a variety of ways.

THE FRAMEWORKS FOR EXPERIENCE

This thesis will provide the frameworks through which the public can be intentionally engaged in the deconstruction of the General Electric plant. Chapter 5 will describe this time-based process, through which the body of the building becomes a framework for spectacle, theatre, and appropriation. In this designed demolition, the walls of the building will be surgically reworked. Views through the windows of the southern façade and from the constructed viewing platforms yield two different (though complimentary) experiences. From the façade at the south of the site, the spectator witnesses the demolition by looking through a window to the north side of the plant where the deconstruction is actively occurring (fig 53). Looking through the plant this way frames the spectator's field of vision and restricts what they are able to see by limiting their view to the space between the floor and ceiling. From here, the viewer will see machinery abruptly enter and exit their field of view and will see bits of rubble and building fragments suddenly fall from above without warning. Witnessing the deconstruction occur from the other side of the factory also means that the sounds of machinery buzzing, or concrete smashing resonate and echo through the plant before reaching the spectator, making these noises fuller but muddier- changing the experience. Although the façade offers a barrier between the spectator and the machinery, as demolition progresses and moves closer, the sounds become much louder and the machinery (operating at the same level as the viewer) becomes much more imposing.

On the other hand, from the viewing platforms the spectator is elevated above grade and, although closer to machinery and to the area of deconstruction, will feel a sense of separation and security. From this vantage point, the viewer can likely smell the machinery and hear the workers shouting above the din of the equipment. The spectator can see the entire length of the demolition site and can witness columns and roofs come crashing down and see the broken fragments of building material jutting out from a crumpled wall or hanging precariously from a truss (fig 54). Being on the viewing platform means being surrounded by the debris from demolition; the piles of structural steel or smashed bricks and being overwhelmed by the volume of material being pulled from the factory and spread across the site. The plan for unbuilding is designed to be seen from these two very different perspectives, offering onlookers an immersive vantage-points from which to experience the spectacle of deconstruction.

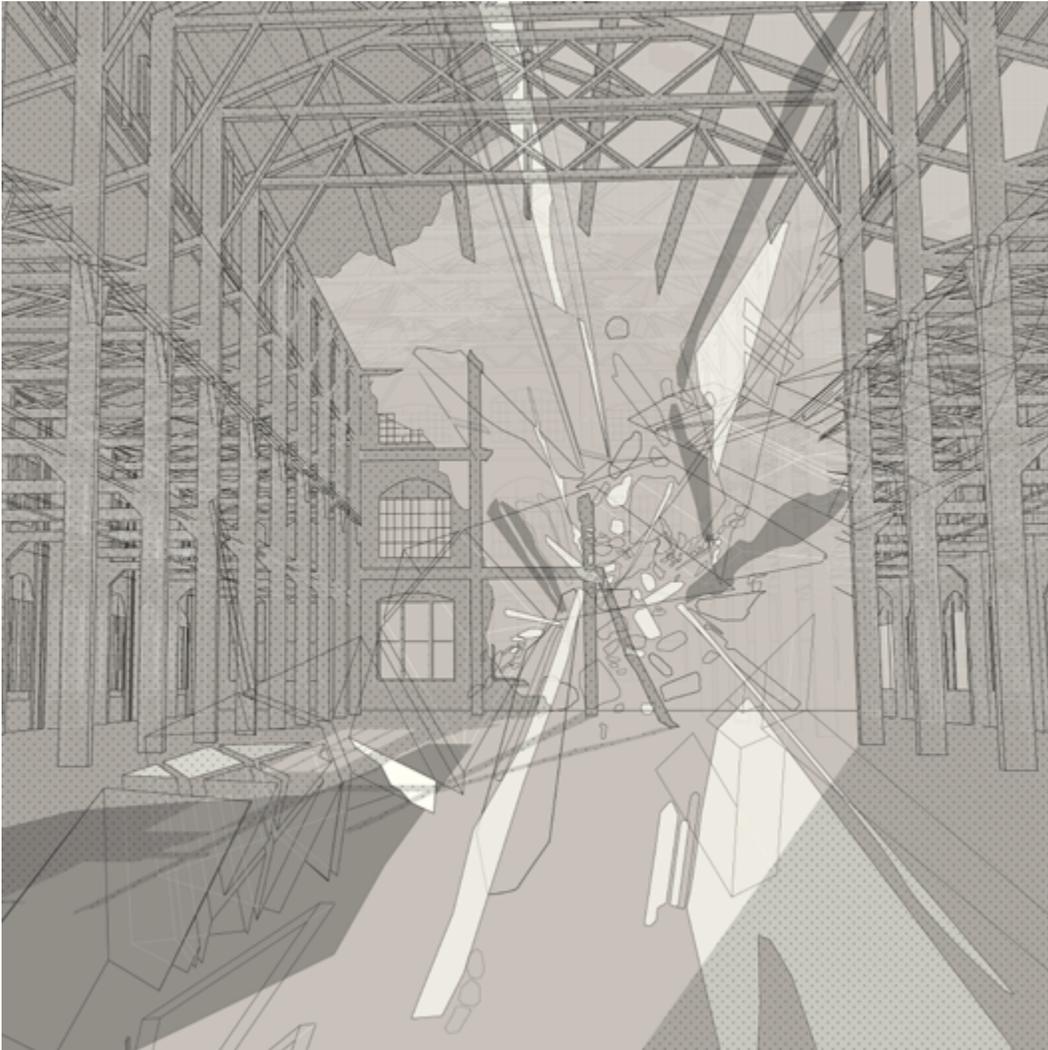


Fig. 53

A view from the southern facade of
the plant as demolition occurs.



Fig. 54

A view from the viewing platform towards
the plant as demolition occurs.

FIELD RESEARCH

In order to better understand the spectacle of deconstruction, I documented the process of demolition and the forms that emerged at a number of sites in the City of Peterborough, between the months of December and April in 2019 and 2020. With a shift from industrial to residential occupation, demolition is occurring throughout the city.. The largest-scale demolition underway was the recently vacated wing of the city's Lansdowne Place mall. This demolition included a relatively sensitive severing one portion of the building from the rest of the still active mall. This process involved cutting a straight path through the building (fig 55) and then a systematic destruction of the remaining building. Excavators were used to first punch holes through the building façade between the structure, pull down the roof and floor slabs, before finally toppling the remaining structure (fig 56). The volume of material pulled from the building and piled together was staggering (fig 57) and onlookers were dwarfed by the mountains of steel and brick. The process of demolishing the reinforced concrete led to some very beautiful forms emerging before being fully dismantled (fig 58). In many places, the concrete hanging from rebar seemed to float above the demolition as if it were frozen the moment before it came crashing to the ground. A tension developed between the demolished forms and remaining identifiable building components. The front doors (doors I had passed though countless times) endured relatively undamaged by demolition while the building crumbled around it (fig 59). This collision between

destruction and a familiar object seems to place the viewer into the wreckage and, to a degree, consider their own mortality. While documenting the demolition of the mall, I observed many other people interested in witnessing or chronicling this destruction. This was the largest active demolition site in the city and had the most pedestrian traffic around it. People were often walking around the perimeter of the site, pointing things out to their companions and taking photos of the ruins as they developed. Others parked their cars in the parking lot just outside of the demolition site and watched the spectacle unfold, as if they were at a drive-in theatre.



Fig. 55

Early stages of demolition of the
Lansdowne Place Mall in Peterborough, ON.



Fig. 56

Final stages of demolition of the mall building.



Fig. 57

Mountains of debris pulled from the mall building.



Fig. 58

Concrete suspended overhead during demolition at the mall building.



Fig. 59

The original entrance door to the mall building, now buried by rubble.

The second demolition project that I encountered was the removal of the historic United Canadian Malt Plant. This building was built in 1929 in an industrial art deco style. Although many concerned citizens argued for the architectural significance of the building, the demolition proceeded. The destruction of this beautiful building captivated me more than the other demolitions that I witnessed. As layers of the building were shaved off it revealed pastel painted interiors and layers of red brick infill. These spaces were set against the smashed reinforced concrete floor slabs and the ornamental golden bricks of the exterior (fig 60). Something about the care given to the powdery painted interior spaces and the ornate brickwork in contrast to the violence of the destruction seemed to capture demolition at its most poetic. During the demolition, some exceptionally beautiful forms emerged at material junctions on the building (fig 61). Destruction turned these junction points into impermanent sculptural ruins that provided both a sense of novelty and of impermanence. The punctures made through the front of the building allowed for never-before-seen views into the factory (fig 62), intriguing passers-by and encouraging them to visually explore the interior. Although this building is inconvenient for pedestrians, during my times at the site I witnessed several interested walkers slow down to glimpse at or photograph the destruction. Many drivers would also slow down to investigate before being honked at and quickly pulling away. The demolition of the United Canadian Malt building also generated multiple artifacts that were informally displayed to the public. Traces of the site's industrial past were strewn across the perimeter of the site, adding to the intrigue of the building and its history (fig 63).



Interior spaces revealed as layers of the building are shaved away.
United Canadian Malt building, Peterborough, ON.

Fig. 60



Beautiful forms emerge at material junctions
during the demolition of the United Canadian Malt building.

Fig. 61



Views into the (lime green) interior spaces through the front facade of the United Canadian Malt building.

Fig. 62



Artifacts removed from the United Canadian Malt building during the process of demolition.

Fig. 63

Perhaps the most interesting case that I discovered during my documentation was a church that had been cut perfectly in half and left. St Paul's Presbyterian church is the clearest case of demolition acknowledging its performative nature and operating as spectacle. This church was demolished from the front entry all the way to the apse but then abruptly ends, creating a perfect section through the building (fig 64). It remains unclear why the church continues to be left in this state months after initial demolition,⁴² though based on local news reports, confusion around the church's heritage status or the developer's multi-phased demolition plan may be the reason.⁴³ Whatever the case may be, the current state of the church has a spectacular impact on the viewer passing by. When demolition was initially halted on this building, the apse at the rear of the church was left intact along with the front door and portal; a wreath was hung on the front door (fig 65). The novelty of seeing the front door of a church standing on its own in situ separate from a remarkably cleanly cut section through the church was mesmerizing. Eventually, the door was removed from the site, leaving just the section through the church – which makes the building remnant seem more like a theatre backdrop. The effort to sensitively deconstruct while leaving identifiable traces of the original church behind unintentionally turns the demolition site into a type of art installation. Whether or not intentional, ossifying the demolition process in this way has piqued the public's interest and has been an effective way of integrating them into the deconstruction process. Each time I go to visit the site, there are people inspecting the strangeness of this half-building and taking photos of this moment of demolition frozen in time.

⁴² Taylor Clysdale, 'St. Paul's Quietly Stripped of Protections Prior to Demo,' *Peterborough This Week*, March 5, 2020.

⁴³ Steve Guthrie, 'Demolition of St. Paul's Presbyterian church in Peterborough begins,' *Global News*, January 17, 2019.



Fig. 64

A perfect section through
St. Paul's church, in Peterborough, ON.



Fig. 65

The front door remained standing
as construction stopped at St. Paul's.

05/

THE DECONSTRUCTION



The deconstruction of the former General Electric plant is a productive activity in the life of the site. By operating pragmatically between the philosophies of indiscriminate demolition and extravagant preservation, this proposal carefully and selectively deconstructs the former General Electric plant allowing for public appropriation at each phase. The total deconstruction of the site is conducted over five phases of varying length, ultimately leading to a complete clearing of the ground and preparation for the next phase of the site's life - whatever it may be. This proposal emphasizes the act of demolition as a public theatre and encourages the public to witness the factory's unbuilding and appreciate the beauty and the gravity of such an act. By creating visual connections into and through the former factory, this proposal not only allows the public to view into spaces previously unavailable to them but also creates spectacular moments of deconstruction which are framed and viewed from newly created public spaces.

The process of deconstructing the General Electric plant is a choreographed theatrical production in which certain spectacular moments emerge and are witnessed from public viewing platforms. In this project, the movement of machinery and workers on the site and the destruction that is committed against the plant are all acts of theatre that are observed by the public audience. The immediacy and intimacy of these choreographed movements on the site are what make the act of theatre compelling to the audience – the viewers feel a part of the demolition that they are witnessing. As this destructive 'performance' makes its

way across the site, moments of dramatic spectacle are generated. These are impressive moments of large-scale deconstruction that offer views into closed off areas of the factory or expose hidden components of the building. However, these moments are more passive for the viewer – they absorb the spectacle in awe but without being immersed in an action. Unlike theatre, these spectacles do not rely on activity to be affective; it is the static view that is so compelling that it holds the gaze of the audience.

During the deconstruction, the site is slowly reappropriated by the public through the construction of viewing platforms that grow in relation to the plant's active line of deconstruction – as the footprint of the plant recedes, the platforms develop into this newly cleared space. This public appropriation gives new life to the site; activating it with a renewed purpose for the community.

Demolition of the site continues as a coordinated process from north to south on the site, however, just before the site is completely deconstructed, the process of unbuilding is paused and the remaining structures on the site are secured and stabilized. At this point, the site is fully open to the public and is able to facilitate a range of public events. The final stage of deconstruction involves the complete clearing of the site including the viewing platforms and any remaining infrastructure on the site. Through a time-based deconstruction and public appropriation, the site's future is liberated from its past and a new situation can be imagined for the site.

However, there is a fourth aspect that takes place during the phased deconstruction and reoccupation of this post-industrial site. This demolition process is part of a self-reflective act that captures industrial artifacts and documents ephemeral moments of deconstruction, presenting these traces as an active visual public record both of the history of the plant and of the process of its removal. This thesis begins to attempt to capture the ephemeral forms that exist only through an act of destruction and preserving these fragments as mnemonic objects. Through a series of castings, rubbings, and drawings, both the process of demolition and the beauty of the associated forms will be translated into museum objects and displayed to the public. More than just demolishing a building, this project operates with a level of reverence and sensitivity that traditional demolition does not offer. The act of documenting while demolition is a process that simultaneously looks to the future and the past and pays homage to the history of the plant.

The proposed deconstruction of the General Electric plant operates between the philosophies of indiscriminate demolition and extravagant preservation. By creating a time-based approach to deconstruction while simultaneously preserving and documenting moments in the process, this proposal clears the site for public appropriation in a sensitive and considered way. This project acknowledges the important history of the General Electric plant in Peterborough and preserves 'artifacts' uncovered during deconstruction and documents ephemeral moments of the site's deconstruction before they disappear – an action which acknowledges the significance of the act of deconstruction. This procedure is a form of selective surgery; exposing the insides of a body to

views, acknowledging the almost voyeuristic curiosity of the public while gradually removing layers of the buildings. The proposed procedure is closely aligned with the historical Latin term *radere* (the etymological root of the term *raze*). *Radere* denotes a considered scraping or shaving of a building rather than its merciless implosion⁴⁴, allowing for both the collection and documentation of fragments as well as appreciation that a building's life is ending, and the site is transitioning to a new phase. Although this procedure is both expensive and difficult, and may create some strong emotions, it seems more therapeutic than simply flattening everything.

A complete and indiscriminate demolition of the General Electric plant ignores the architectural and socio-historical importance of the GE plant. Peterborough's industrial heritage is a key contributor to the identity of the city and this industrial heritage culminated in the construction of the GE plant. To demolish the plant with the swing of a wrecking ball or the crush of an excavator does not do justice to either the negative or positive significance of this site. Although the outcome for the site is ultimately the same, this form of demolition is not sensitive to the history of the building and does not encourage the public to engage with the demolition in the same way. Traditional demolition does not provide a dynamic space for the public that grows in relation to the degree of demolition, nor does it pause the act of deconstruction in order to provide the public with an interval during which they can occupy and interact with the site.

44 "Raze." In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

If an instantaneous demolition would fail to acknowledge the weight and history of this site, its complete preservation would be even more unreasonable. The General Electric plant has been so deeply contaminated by manufacturing processes that in order to be redeveloped in any significant way the site would need to undergo an extremely expensive and time-consuming decontamination process. Due to the types of chemicals used in manufacturing and the extent to which they were used, the buildings on the site would likely need to be demolished if the site were slated for future development. The cost alone of remediating the buildings is enough of a deterrent to make an adaptive reuse of the entire plant an unreasonable proposition. Further, if sentimentality were to win and the factory was preserved without being remediated, the site runs the risk of being ossified in the least useful state – where the shells of these buildings are more valuable than the potential for anything productive occurring on the site, and the plant sits vacant in the name of conservation. This project operates between these conventional approaches and proposes a procedure that documents while deconstructing; turning a typical demolition into a spectacle encouraging the public to witness and appreciate the act of deconstruction.

THE PROCESS

This proposal prescribes a specific series of manipulations of the GE buildings and site, but does not determine the future uses of the site and does not advocate for a specific type of redevelopment. Although the process of deconstruction does offer the potential to redevelop the site, it is more than that: it represents what Chris Muskopf calls a “changing mentality and the passage of an old order and the revelation of a new situation,”⁴⁵ liberating the site’s future from its past.

This process can be understood as the building’s “Grand Closing.” A certain level of reverence is afforded the plant in its deconstruction; the entire process is documented as the plant is slowly and carefully unbuilt over 41-54 weeks (see Appendix A). The memory of the plant is rearticulated in the artifacts displayed in the retrofitted Building 8 and the public is invited to participate in the process by interacting with the fragments left behind from the demolition process. The mass spectacle of the process is a call to the public to bear witness to the deconstruction and to fully appreciate that the life of these buildings is ending, and the site is entering its next phase.

45 Muskopf, “Constructing Demolition”

PHASE I

OPERATIONS - Shaving

ENGAGEMENT - Appropriation (public invited onto site)

- Spectacle (northern facade removed)

- Theatre (crane loading debris into train car, train moving debris)

DECONSTRUCTION (2 weeks) -- PAUSED (2 weeks)

In the first phase of deconstruction (fig 71), the southern boundary of the site which was previously fenced off to the public is opened allowing the public to walk up to the southern façade of the building and view into the factory. Any windows on this side of the plant that were boarded up or otherwise sealed are uncovered revealing more views into the plant from multiple vantage points. Benches will be installed in front of these windows, inviting the public onto the site to view into the interior of the plant and witness the theatre of demolition as it occurs. At the same time, the discrete structures to the north of the main plant are dismantled and the salvageable debris is moved to the northwest extent of the train line. While this is happening, the northern façade of the main plant is gradually shaved away (*radere*) revealing a spectacular view into the inner working of the factory. The debris created from this operation is moved by crane to a staging area beside where the existing train lines enter the plant. As this debris accumulates, the train is used to move it to the collection area where it is stored with the rubble from the previous dismantling. The dissolution of the northern façade provides views through the monolithic plant for the first time since the late 1960s and allows spectators on the southern side to view the process of deconstruction through the factory as it works its way from the north of the site southwards.

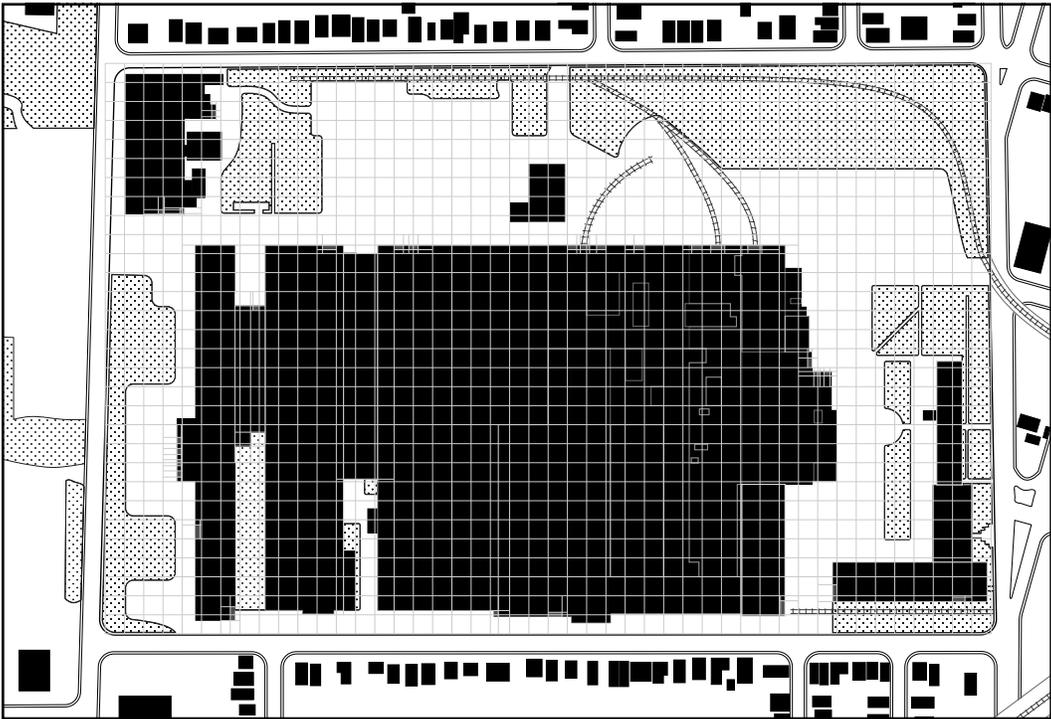


Fig. 67

Phase 1
Step 1

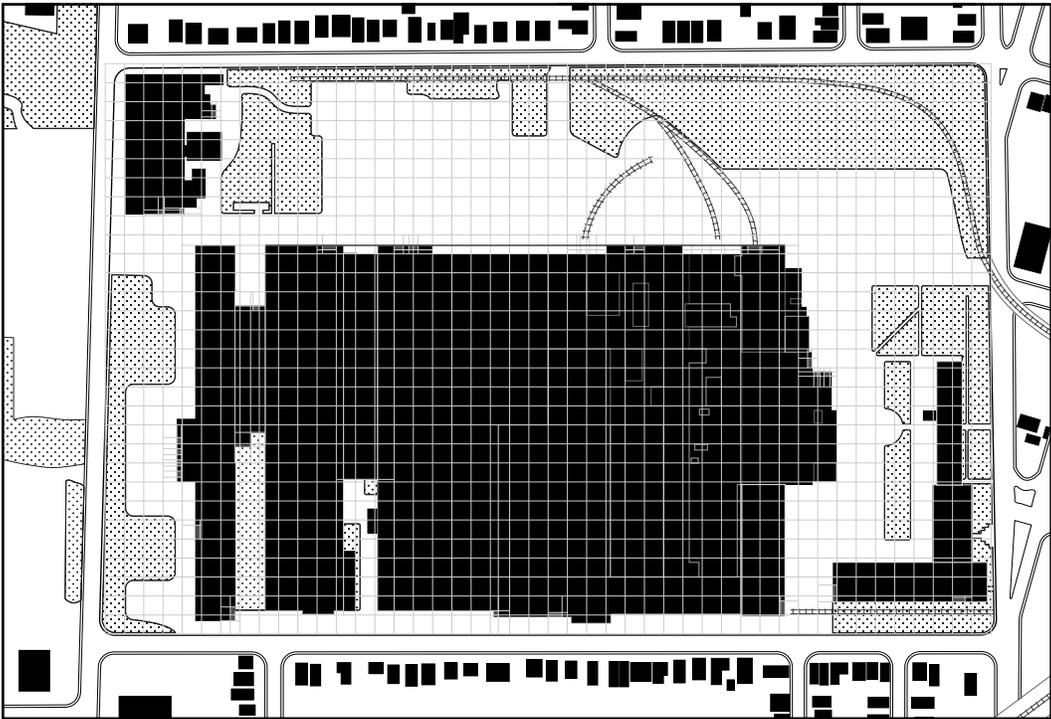


Fig. 68

Phase 1
Step 2

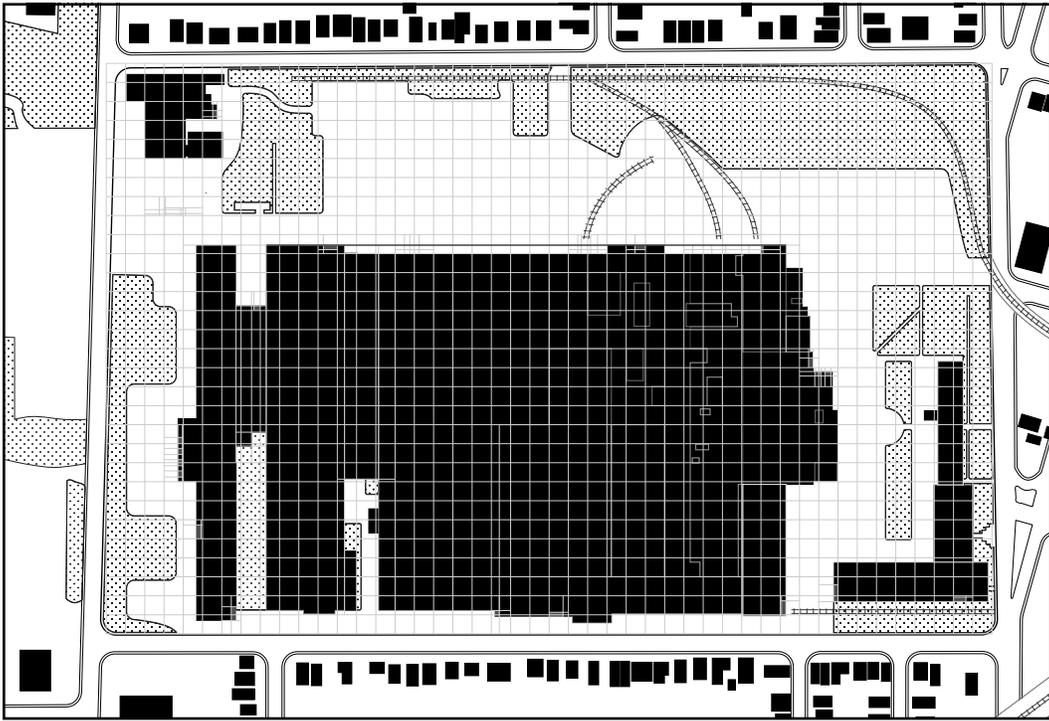


Fig. 69

Phase 1
Step 3

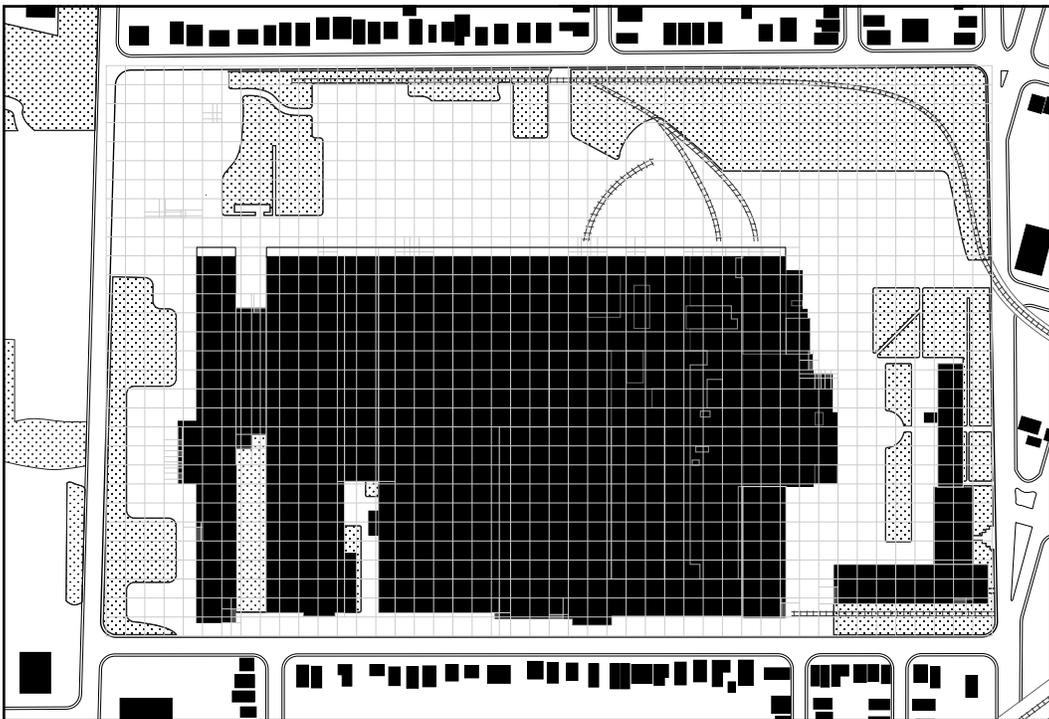
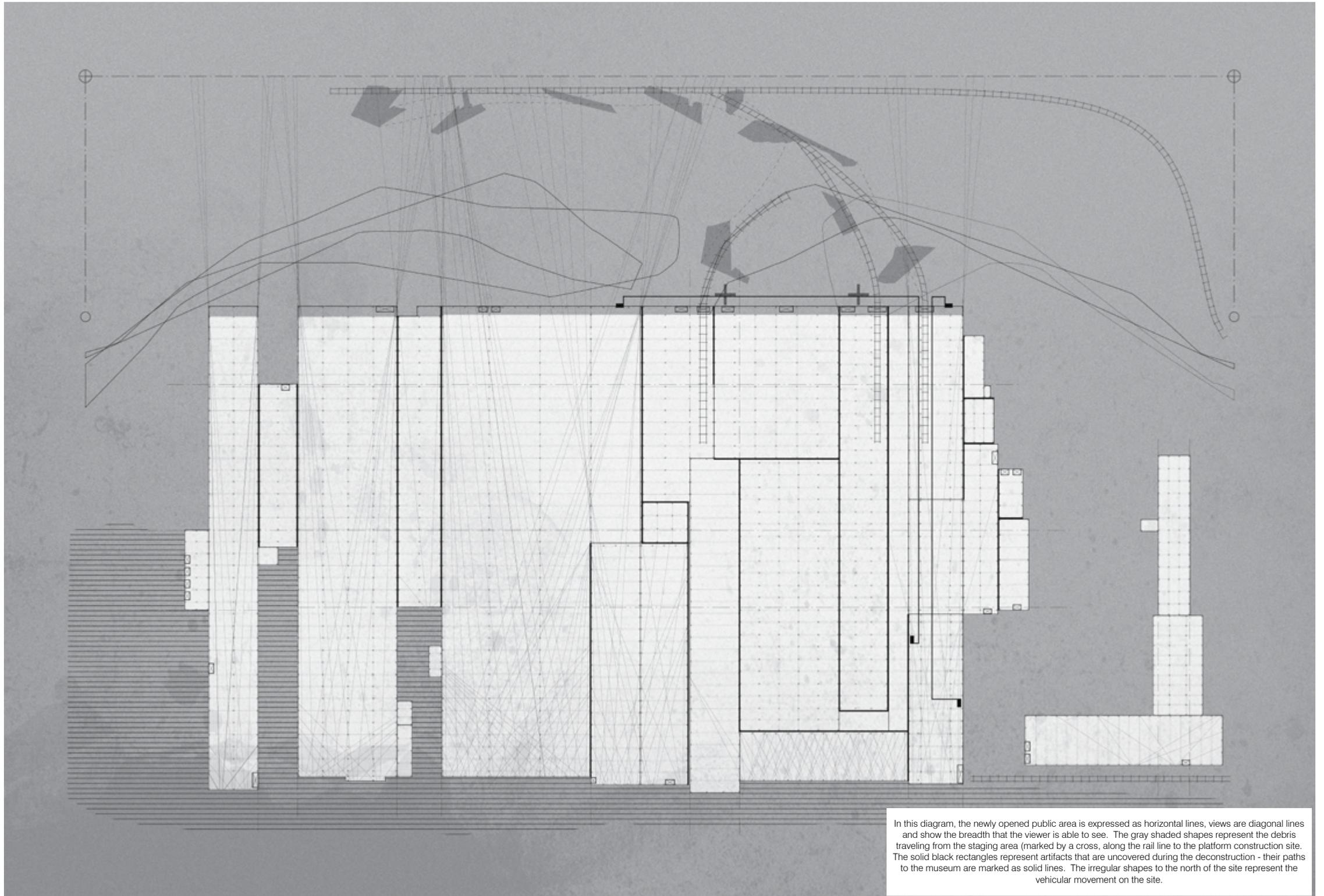


Fig. 70

Phase 1
Step 4



Phase 1

Fig. 71

PHASE II

OPERATIONS - Cellular Deconstruction/Building

ENGAGEMENT - Appropriation (public viewing platform constructed)
 - Spectacle (massive temporary ruin)
 - Theatre (act of demolition)

DECONSTRUCTION (3 weeks) -- PAUSED (2 - 3 weeks)

During the second phase of deconstruction (fig 76), the plant is dismantled as cellular volumes originating at several points on the northern side of the site. These points include the debris staging area, the crane, and the two sections of the western plant where there are nearly gaps through the plant. These four origins of deconstruction are important because they create visual connections through the factory and allow for the public on the southern side of the site to witness the demolition occurring at the northern side of the site. This demolition involves removing quadrants of the building, piece by piece; pulling apart the skin and bones of the actual structure. This process creates a gradual dissolution that completely erodes the building cell by cell as if it is being shaved away. This phase also includes the completion of the first public viewing platform to the north of the active demolition. This viewing platform is constructed from the salvageable debris from the deconstruction process that was moved along the rail line to the northwest section of the site. The platform is primarily an earthworks structure created by piling and packing earth into an elevated berm and stabilizing it with a cladding composed of bricks generated from the shaving of the factory's cladding

in the previous phase. Likely, there are large pieces of bricks still held together by mortar as well as small individual bricks that are fractured or smashed. These large wall fragments can act as retaining wall components on their own while the smaller rubble will be packed into gabions in order to function as retaining walls. This cellular array of stacked bricks and wall fragments takes on a heavy, eroded form that looks as if it has stood in its location for decades but is actually made up of the masonry units that were the cells of the old building's skin. This structure forms a platform elevated above grade large enough for spectators to watch the theatre of deconstruction while staying a safe distance from the active demolition site. At this point, spectators are able to view the of deconstruction through the southern façade as well as from a more intimate perspective just to the north of the deconstruction.

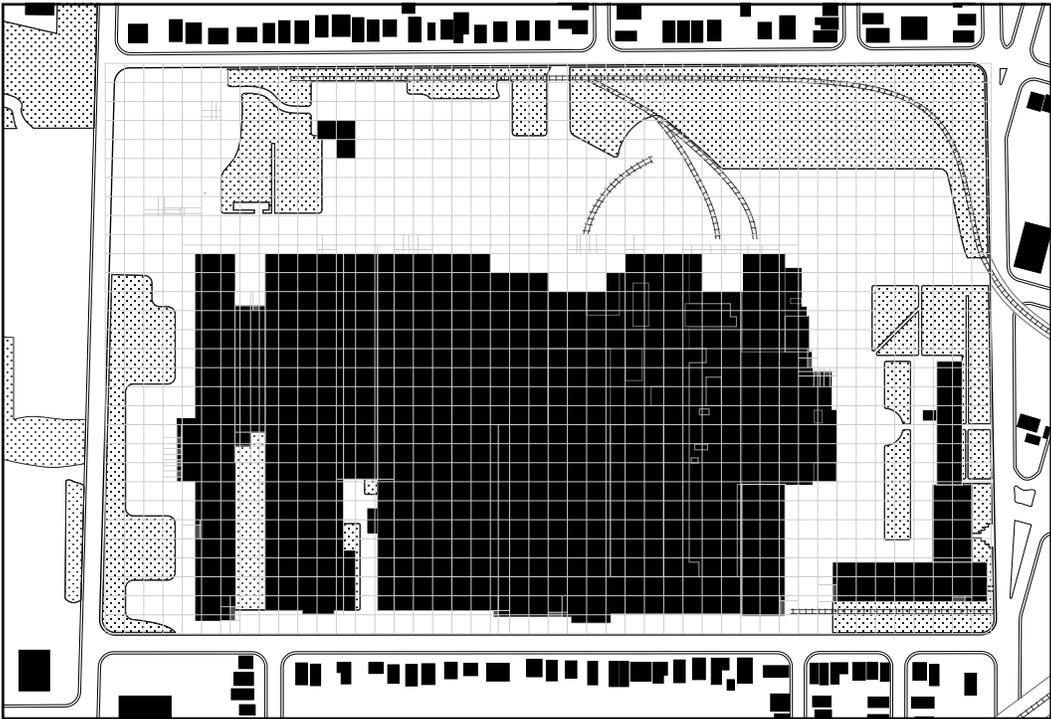


Fig. 72

Phase 2
Step 1

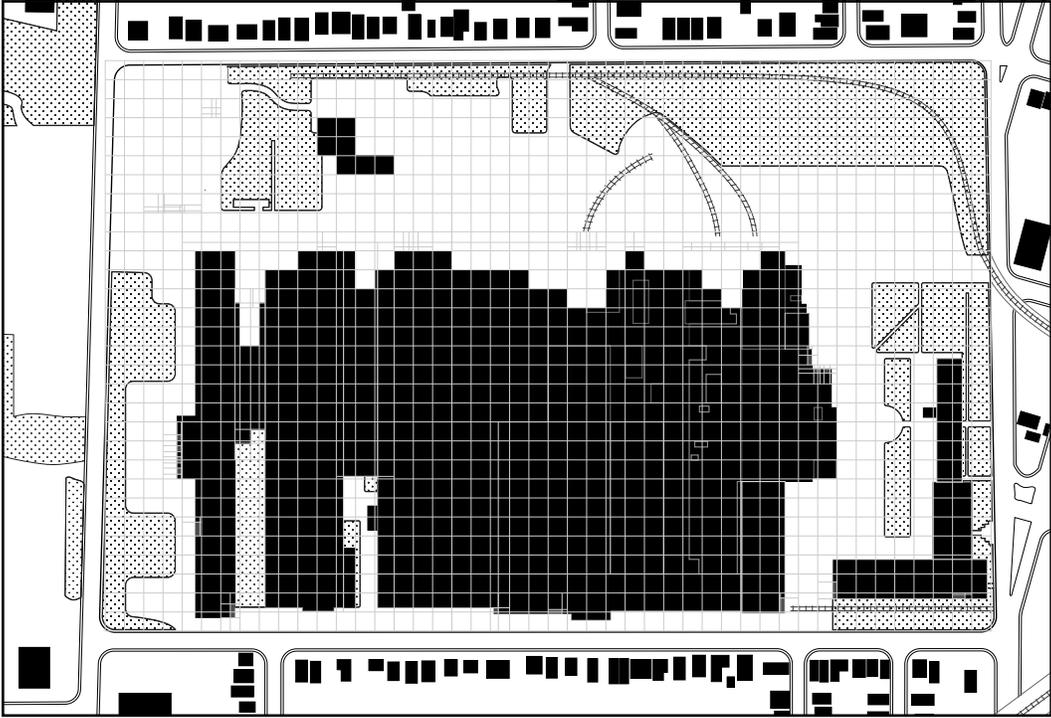


Fig. 73

Phase 2
Step 2

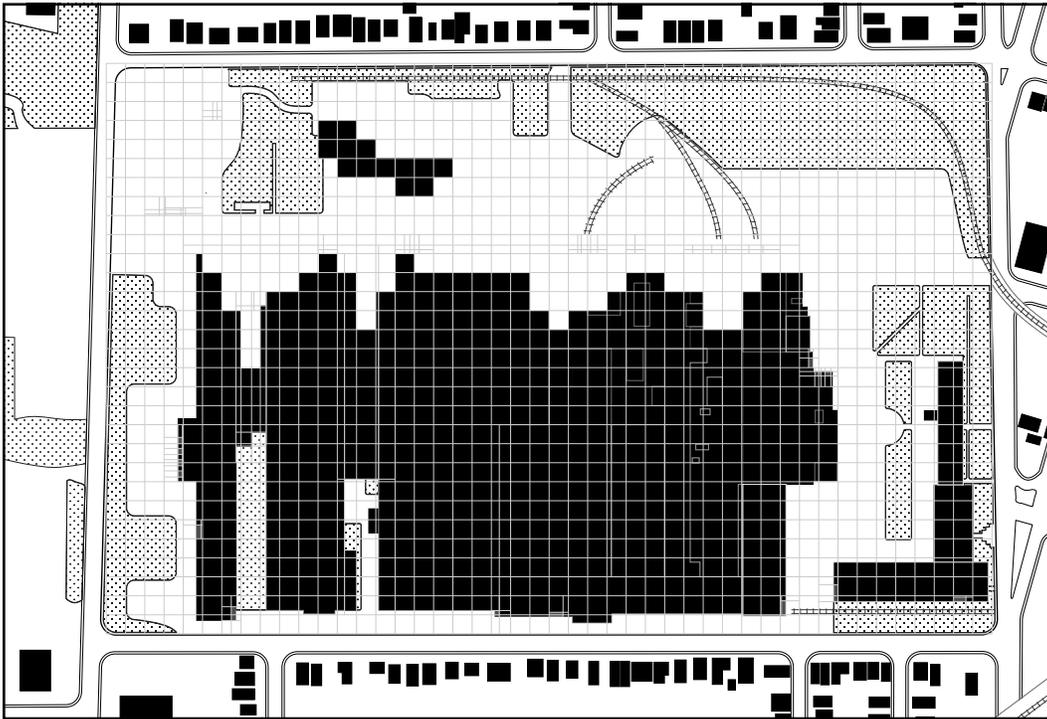


Fig. 74

Phase 2
Step 3

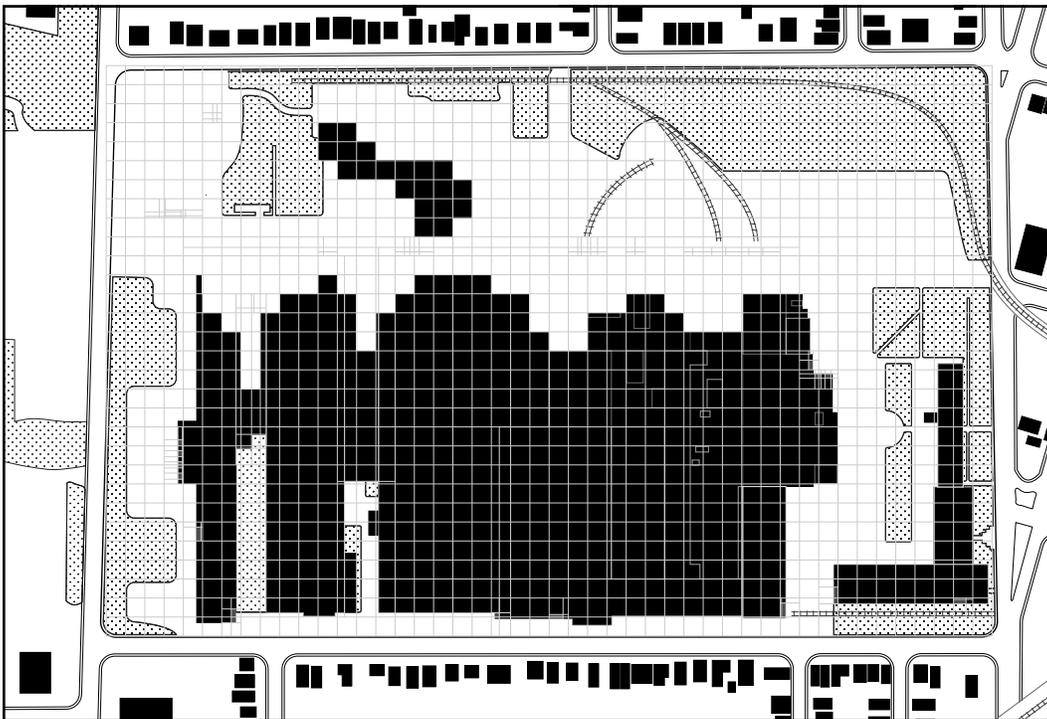
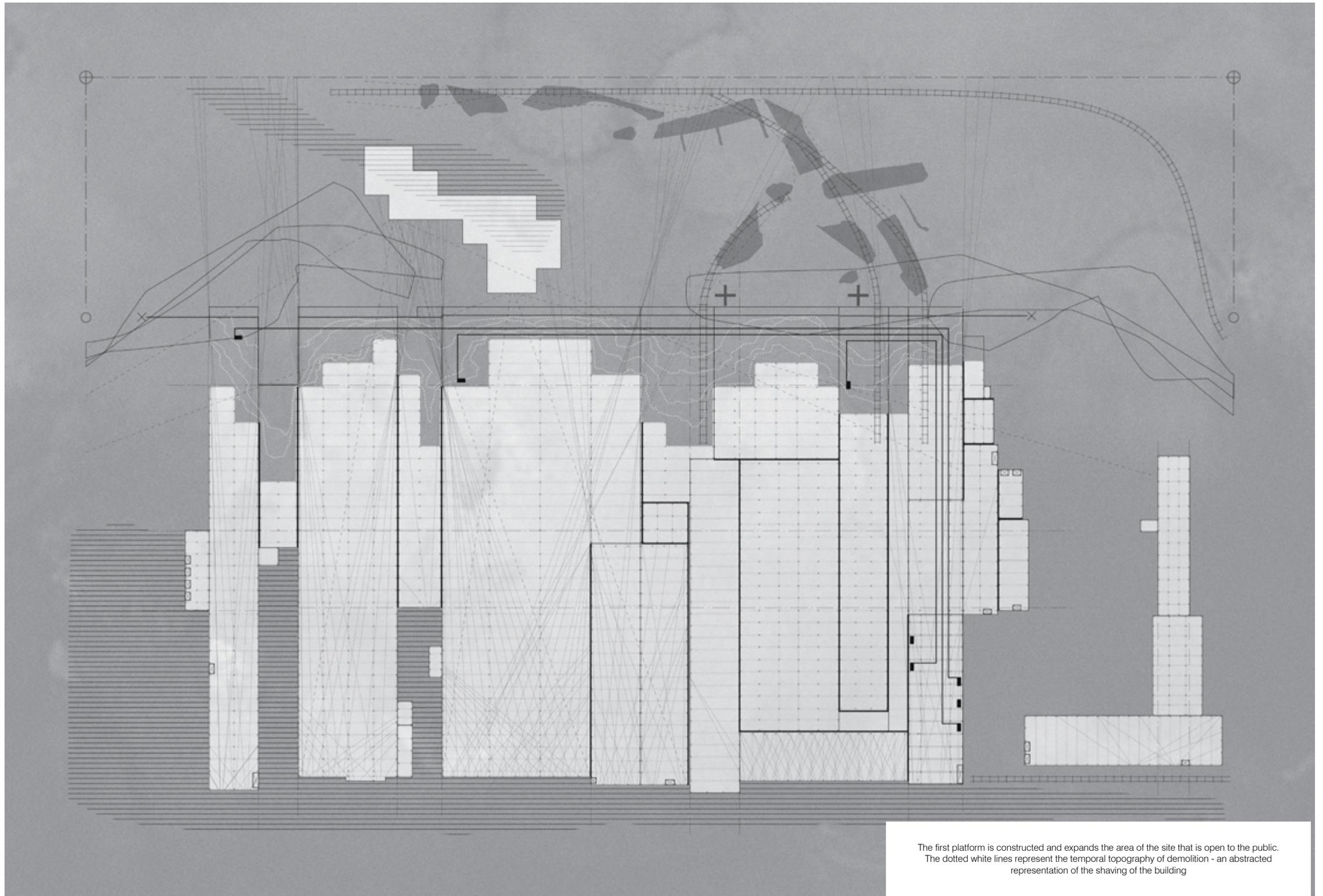


Fig. 75

Phase 2
Step 4



The first platform is constructed and expands the area of the site that is open to the public.
The dotted white lines represent the temporal topography of demolition - an abstracted representation of the shaving of the building

PHASE III

OPERATIONS - Cellular Deconstruction/Building

ENGAGEMENT - Appropriation (additional public viewing platform constructed)
 - Spectacle (massive temporary ruin, voids created through plant)
 - Theatre (act of demolition, watching through void to other side)

DECONSTRUCTION (4 weeks) -- PAUSED (4 - 6 weeks)

The cellular deconstruction continues to erode the northern boundary of the plant until, in the third phase (fig 81), two perforations through the factory emerge in the western section of the factory. These large voids completely open the plant from the north to the south allowing for uninterrupted views through the factory as well as from the southern façade to the first viewing platform. These massive cuts through the building represent the first visual connections through the monolithic factory in over 50 years. They are spectacular temporary moments that reveal huge cross-sections through the wartime additions of the plant. The recently deconstructed structures to the north also allow for expanded views from the southern façade. While there are still portions of the northern half of the site that cannot be viewed through the southern façade, most of the site is now visible to the spectators looking from the southern edge of the plant. In addition to the continued deconstruction, a new viewing platform is constructed to the southeast of the original platform. This platform brings onlookers closer to the deconstruction than the previous viewing platform and significantly enlarges the space reappropriated to the public at the north of the site. The new viewing platform is constructed from the debris generated during the previous phase of deconstruction which includes structural steel beams and trusses, corrugated steel roofing, and structural timber. Aside from providing a public space to witness the deconstruction of the plant, the platforms are a chronology of the demolition of the plant; they express fragments of the old building in the same sequence that they were removed.

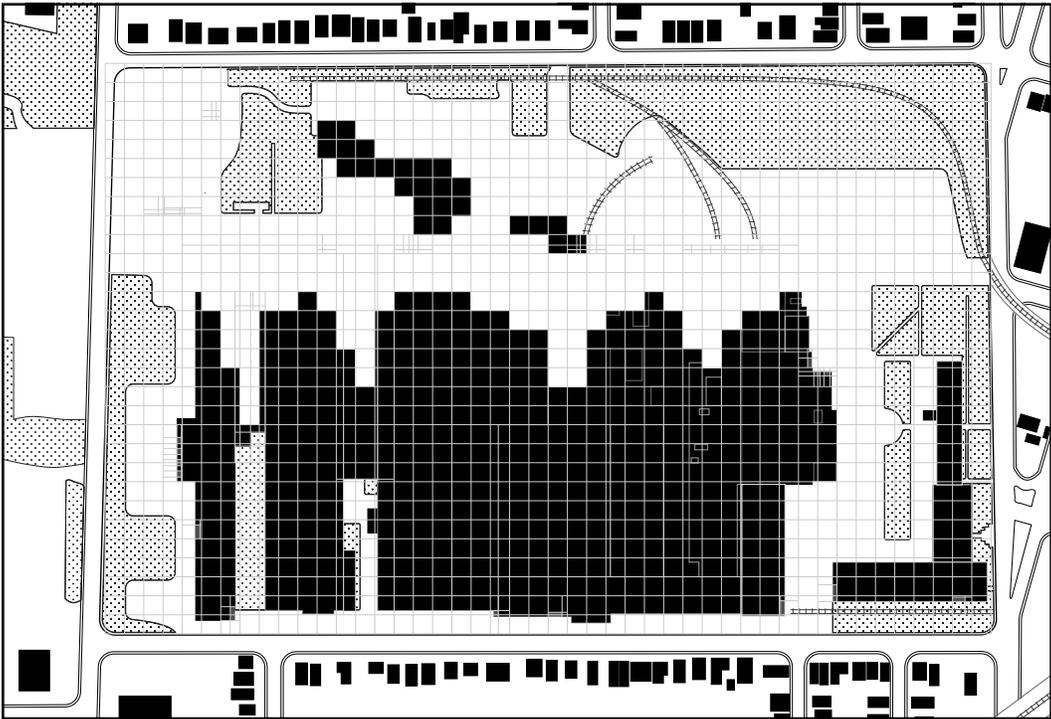


Fig. 77

Phase 3
Step 1

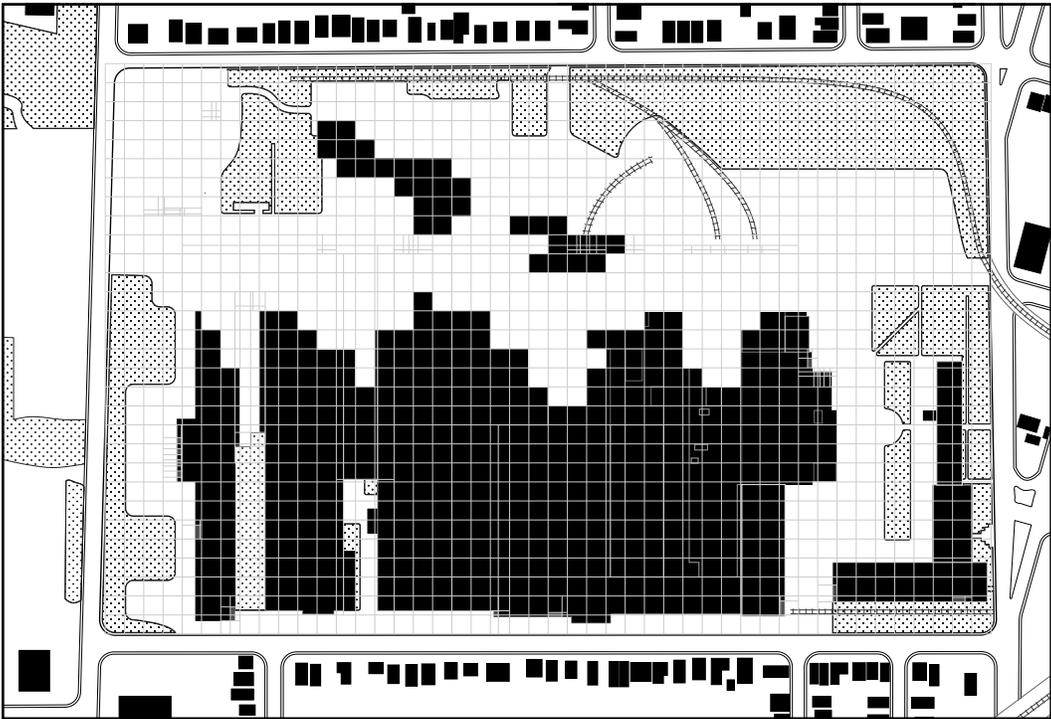


Fig. 78

Phase 3
Step 2

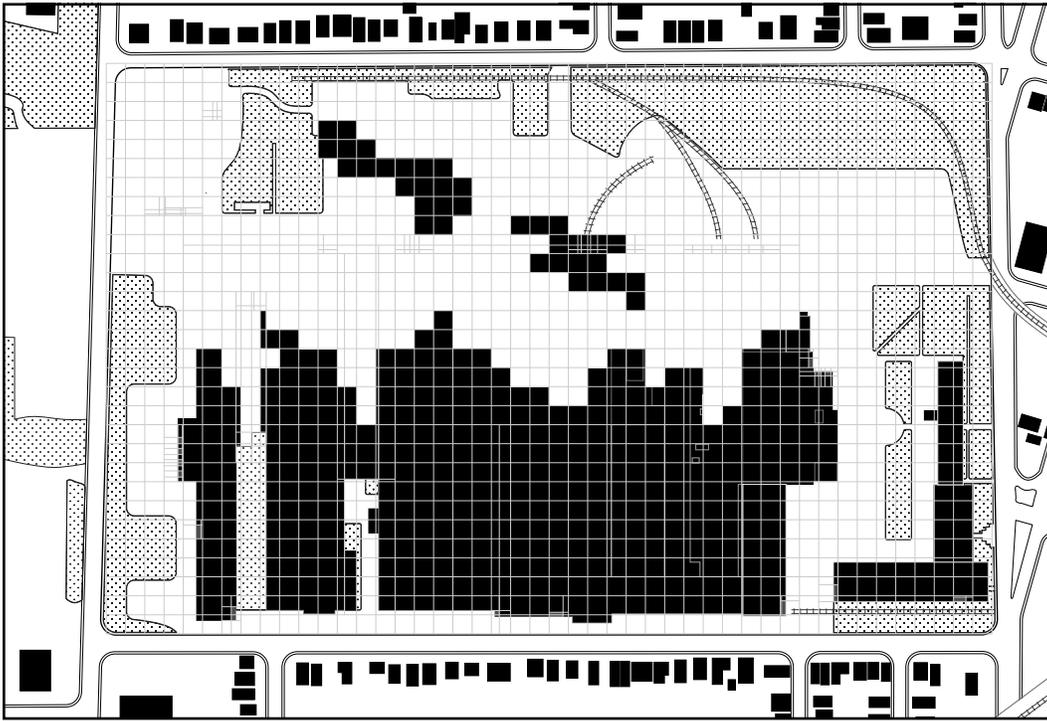


Fig. 79

Phase 3
Step 3

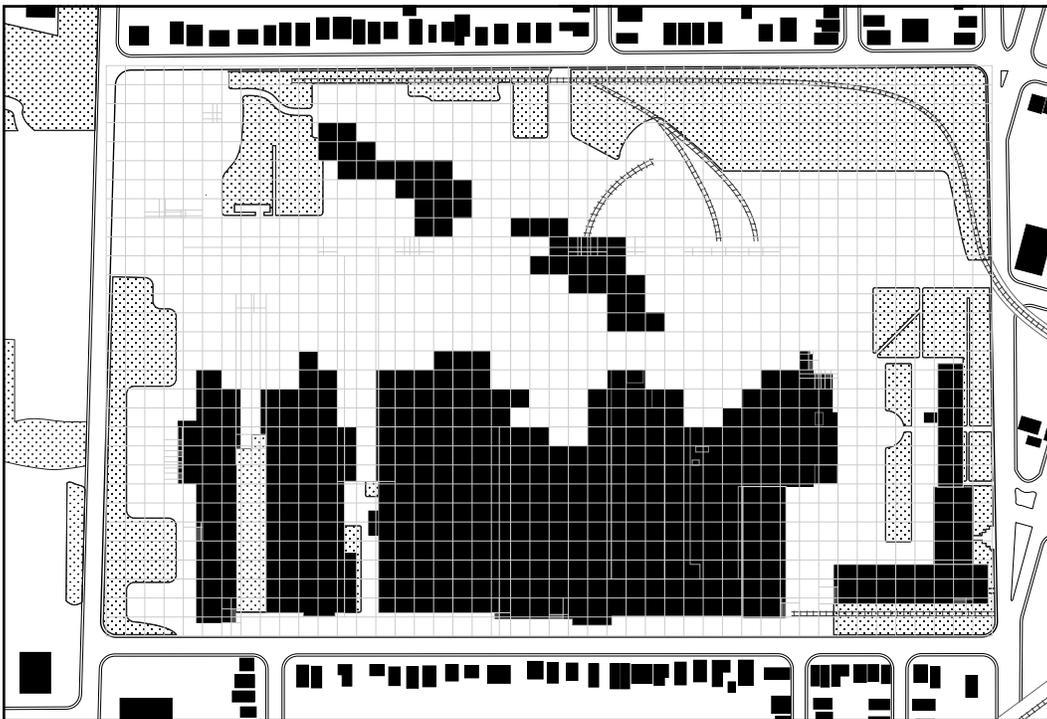
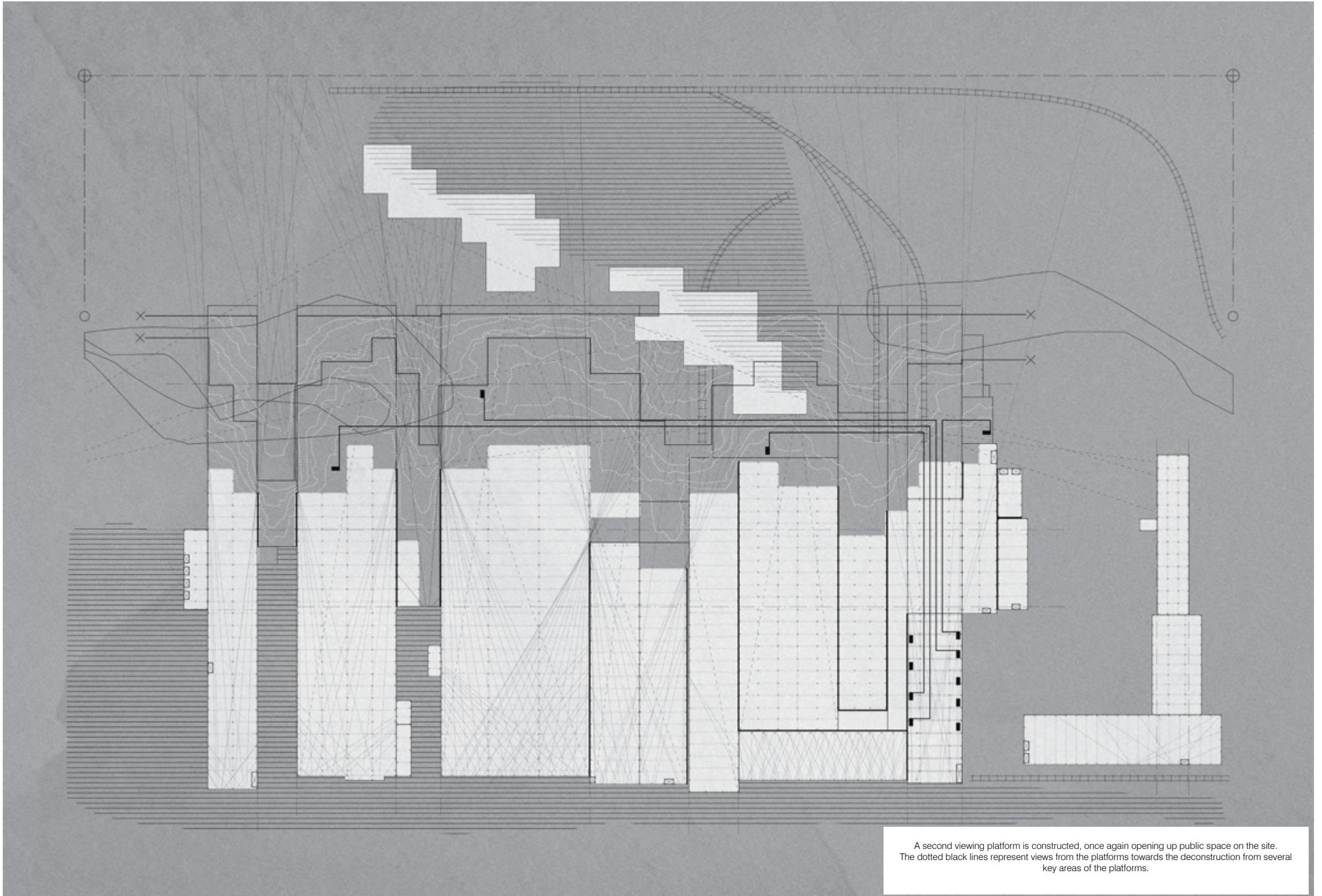


Fig. 80

Phase 3
Step 4



Phase 3

PHASE IV

OPERATIONS - Cellular Deconstruction/Building

ENGAGEMENT - Appropriation (total public appropriation)
 - Spectacle (museum objects, building remnants)
 - Theatre (public interaction with site)

DECONSTRUCTION (4-6 weeks) -- PAUSED (16 -24 weeks)

For the fourth phase (fig 88), the site is deconstructed except for the southern façade, the entirety of Building 8, and several small areas where the existing roof structures and columns are left intact. At this point, the entire site is open to reappropriation to the public and is capable of facilitating a number of public programs. Although the site has an uncomfortable history with contamination, toxicity is likely not a concern on the site at this state. Since the majority of buildings have been deconstructed, the remaining heavy metals and other contaminants (like PCBs) have probably leached deep into the soil, which, although it does pose a danger to the water table and may possibly bio-accumulate in small animals, does not present a significant hazard to the public.

A third viewing platform is also constructed during this phase providing a further elevated space for public occupation. Although the public function of these viewing platforms is to provide a safe elevated space to witness the deconstruction of the General Electric plant, they also function as buffers between the neighbourhood to the north and the newly open public space on the footprint of the former factory. To the south, the remaining façade of the plant offers a barrier and threshold space between the site's residential neighbours and the activity of the public space. During this phase, views from the southern façade are only interrupted by the viewing platforms, and the still standing Building 8. The remaining infrastructure provides some covered spaces for the public as well as a

tall building facade that defines the extent of the space and may also be used as an industrial backdrop for public events or performances. These platforms offer rich possibilities for public appropriation. Although no deconstruction occurs during this phase, the viewing platforms provide sight-lines to potential events on the site and the opportunity for a programmable space that is elevated from grade. On a more fundamental level, these platforms can fulfill a number of informal roles for the adjacent communities. They can become spaces for barbeques, picnics, creating community gardens, or shelter for homeless populations.

Throughout the process of deconstruction, Building 8 is abated of any contaminants and is opened to the public in varying capacities. At each phase of deconstruction, physical objects that have been uncovered were moved into Building 8 in order to create a museum-like collection of artifacts to tell the story of the General Electric plant in Peterborough. The museum houses fragments of deconstruction; both physical artifacts discovered during the demolition process as well as representations of the physical and temporal act of deconstruction. This series of representations (castings, rubbings, and drawings) captures the beautiful and ephemeral forms created through the acts of violence and destruction committed against the former factory and presents it to the public as a mnemonic device to understand the story of the factory and its deconstruction more deeply or simply to appreciate the art that grew out of the demolition.

In the early phases, Building 8 was simply a repository for any artifacts that were uncovered. However, as artists begin documenting the deconstruction, they move into Building 8 to produce their castings, rubbings, and drawings. At this point, the public is also welcome into the space to view the growing inventory of artifacts and witness the artistic production occurring in the former machining and assembly building. Ultimately, in the fourth phase, the space becomes fully open to the public and provides a museum space to showcase the art and artifacts of deconstruction as well as potential studio/workshop/classroom space for further creative activities.

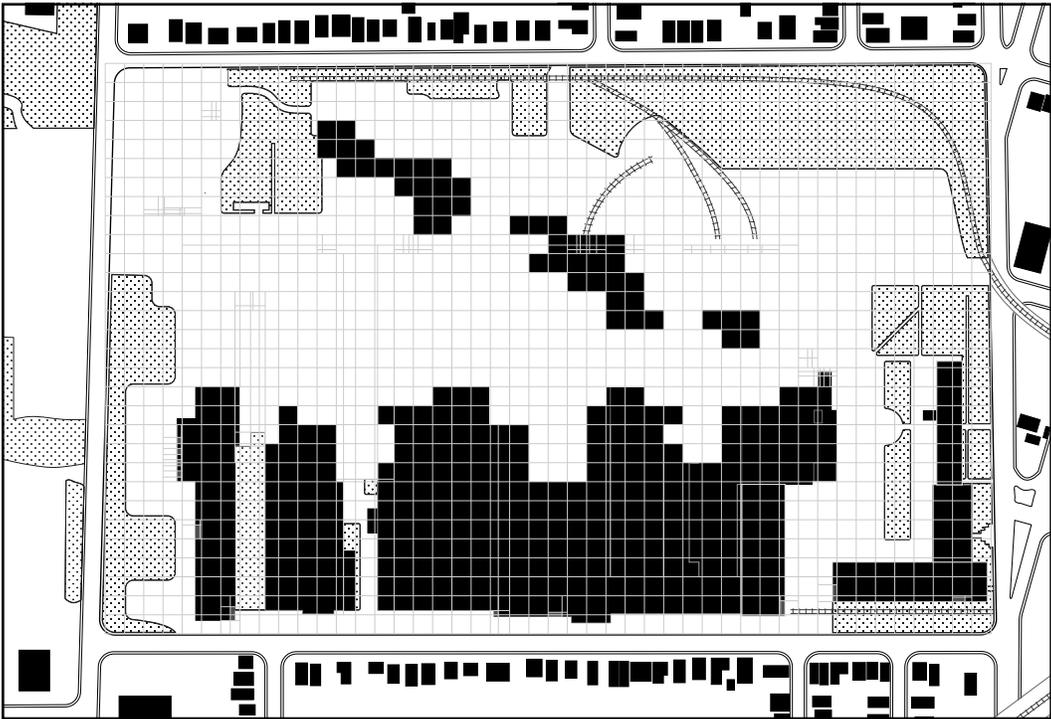


Fig. 82

Phase 4
Step 1

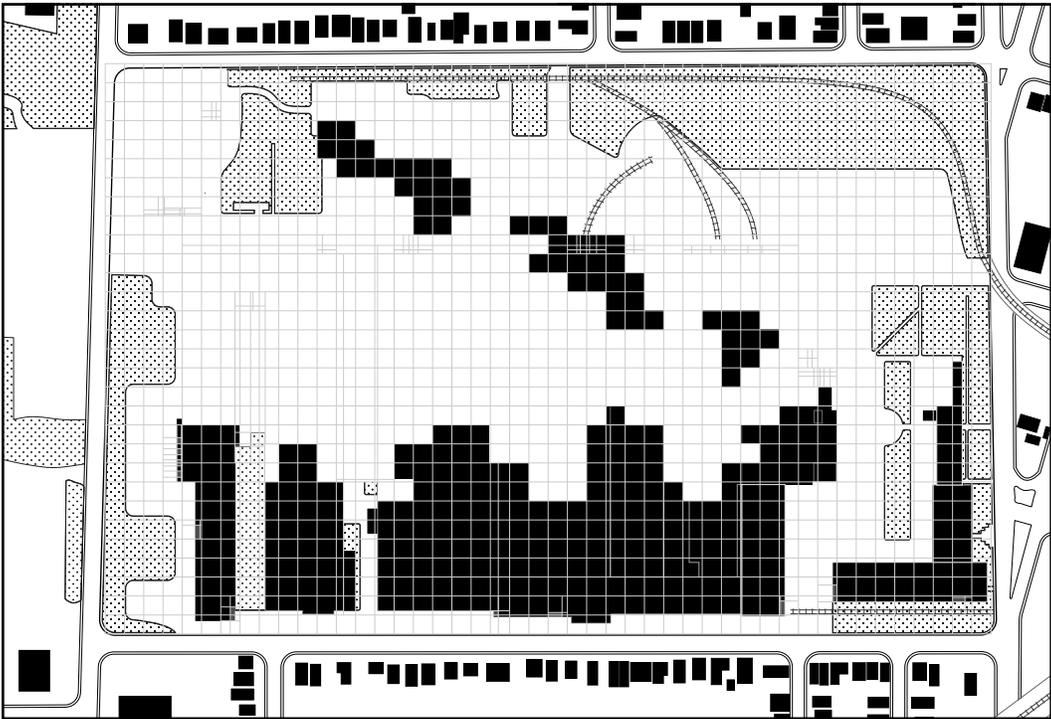


Fig. 83

Phase 4
Step 2

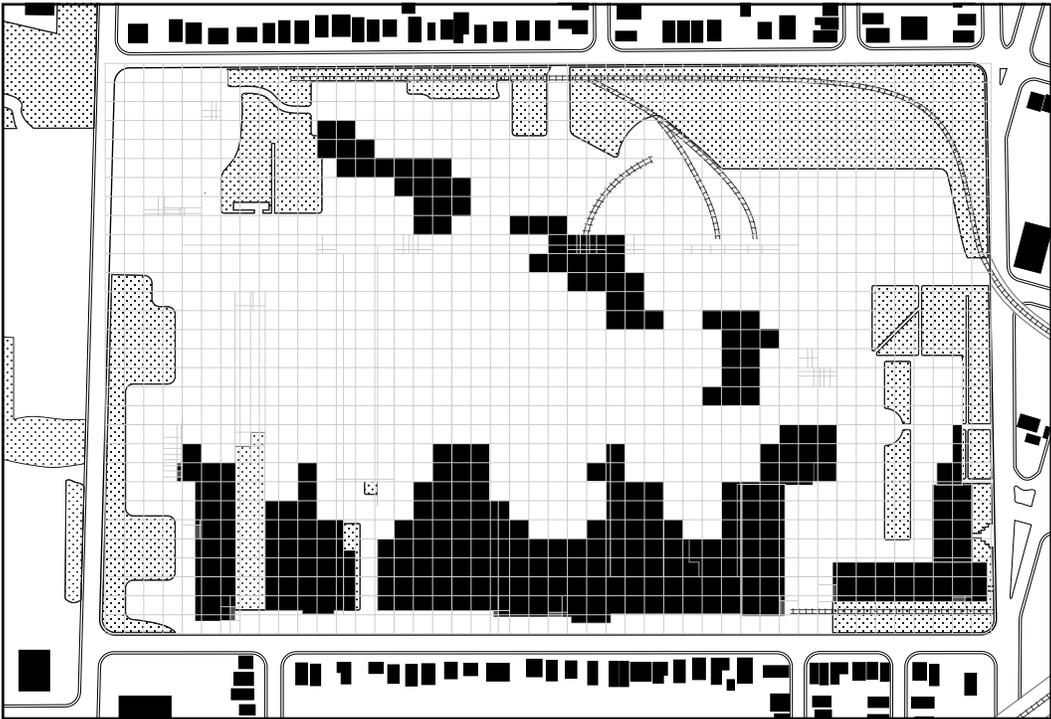


Fig. 84

Phase 4
Step 3

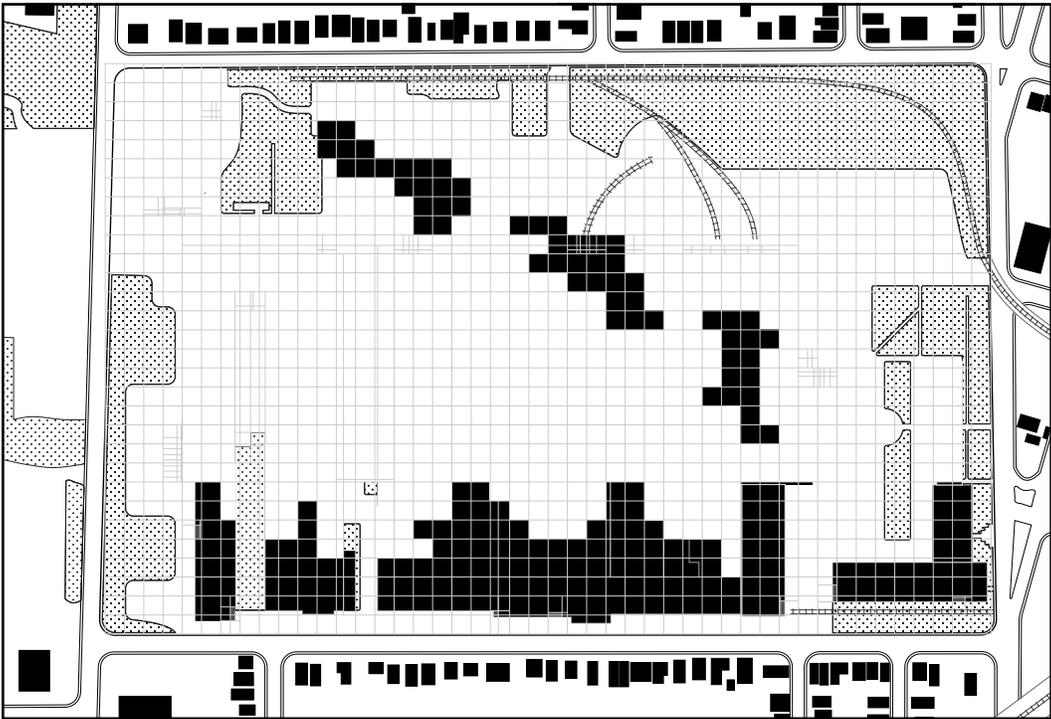


Fig. 85

Phase 4
Step 4

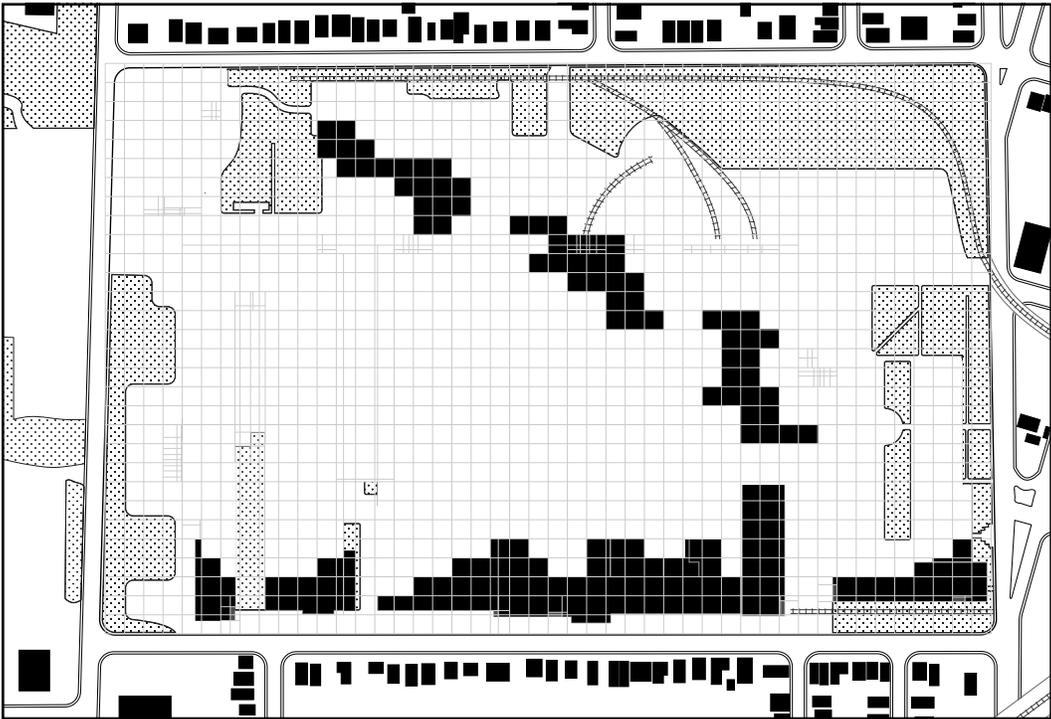


Fig. 86

Phase 4
Step 5

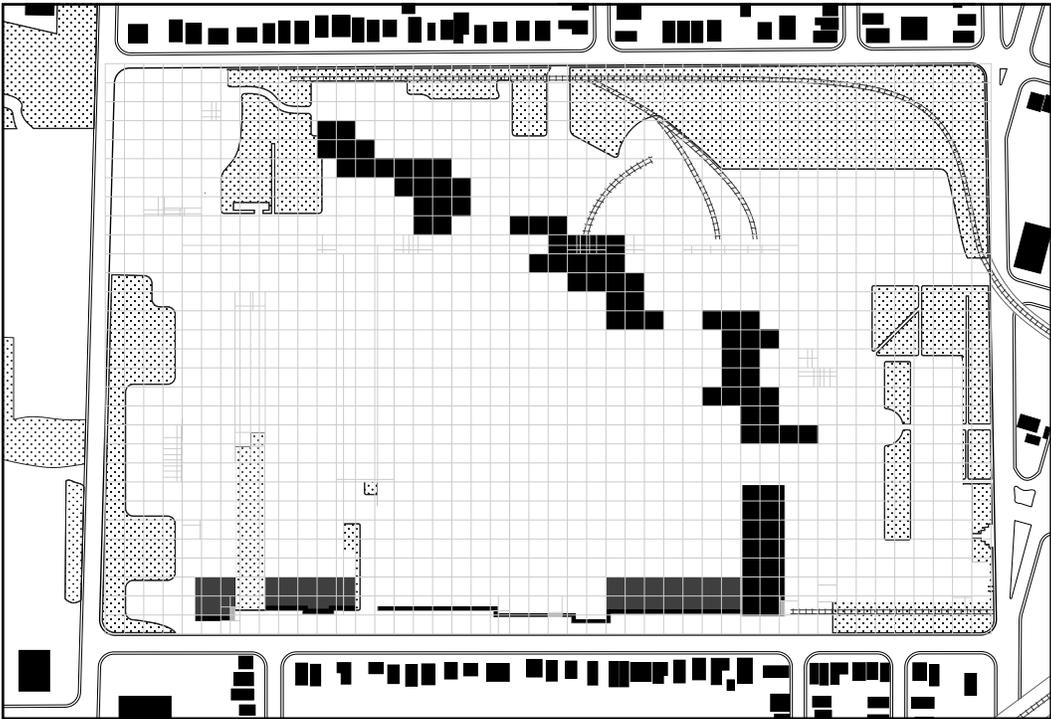
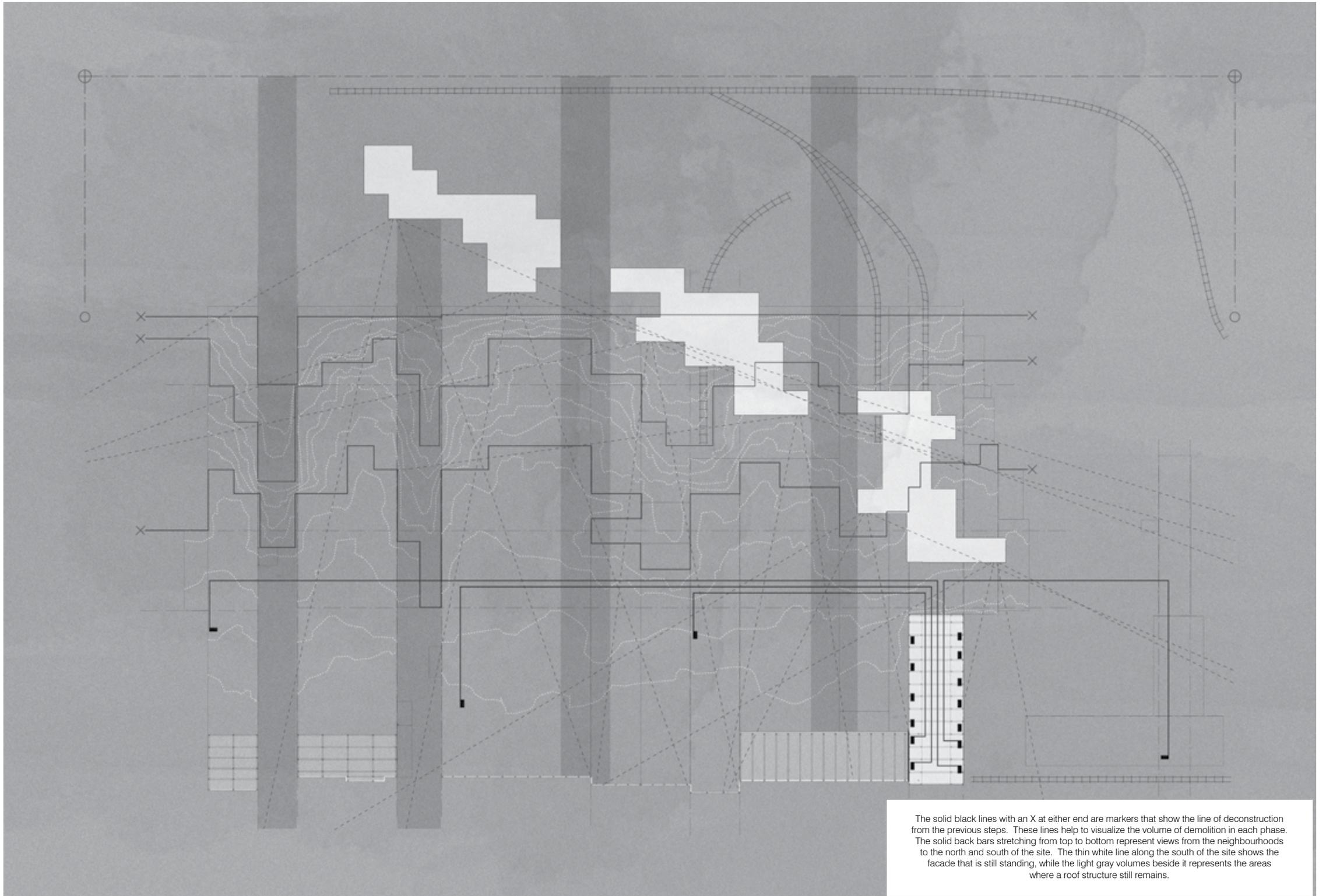


Fig. 87

Phase 4
Step 6



Phase 4

PHASE V

OPERATIONS - Clearing

ENGAGEMENT - Appropriation (public viewing platform constructed)
 - Spectacle (massive vacant lot in downtown Peterborough)
 - Theatre (the final act of demolition)

DECONSTRUCTION (4 weeks) -- PAUSED (-)

By the end of the fifth phase (fig 93), the site is entirely cleared of any structures leaving only traces of the former factory. In this phase the viewing platforms are once again available to the public to view the deconstruction of the remaining structures. The first elements to be deconstructed are the roof structures and supporting columns. Once these elements are removed, all that remains on the site is the southern building façade, the museum (Building 8), and the viewing platforms. Next, the museum is deconstructed followed by the façade, leaving only the viewing platforms on the site. Finally, when these viewing platforms are demolished, the site is left completely vacant and can be reinterpreted and redeveloped for future uses. The debris from the deconstruction is roughly sorted from being repurposed as material for the viewing platforms. As the site is cleared, any debris that can be recycled or reused is removed and the remaining rubble is disposed of. Inevitably, there will be traces left from the site's deconstruction and reappropriation that are left behind after the final clearing. These may include concrete pad remnants, changes in grade, or overlooked pieces of debris. These fragments are physical reminders of the life of the site – symbols of the site's reinterpretation and rearticulation.



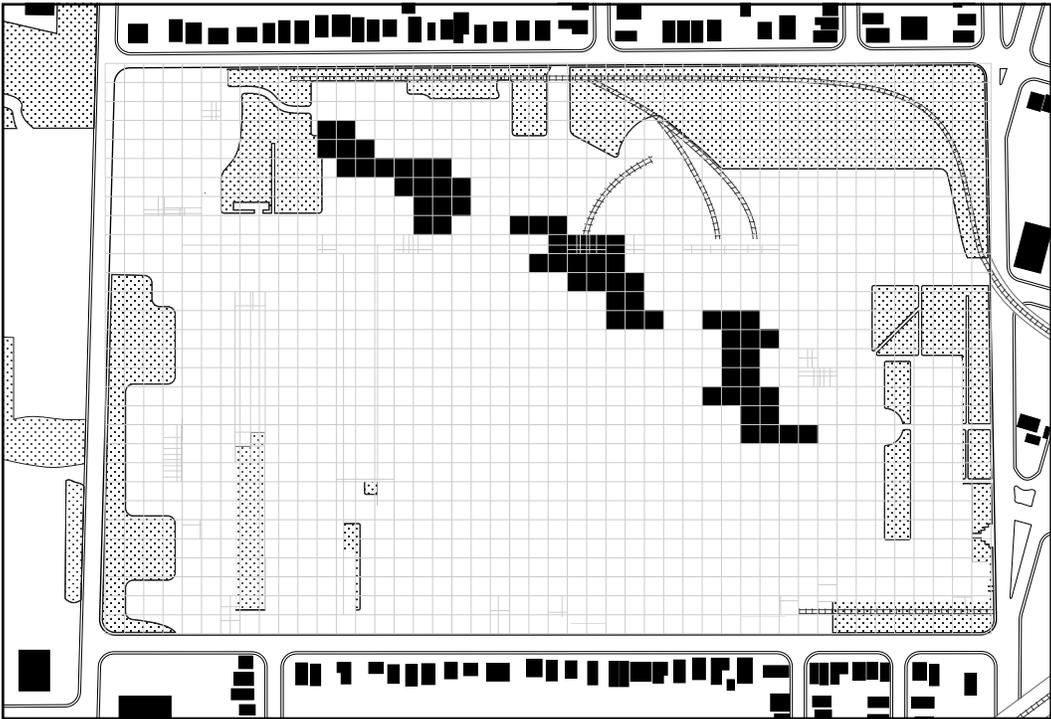
Fig. 89

Phase 5
Step 1



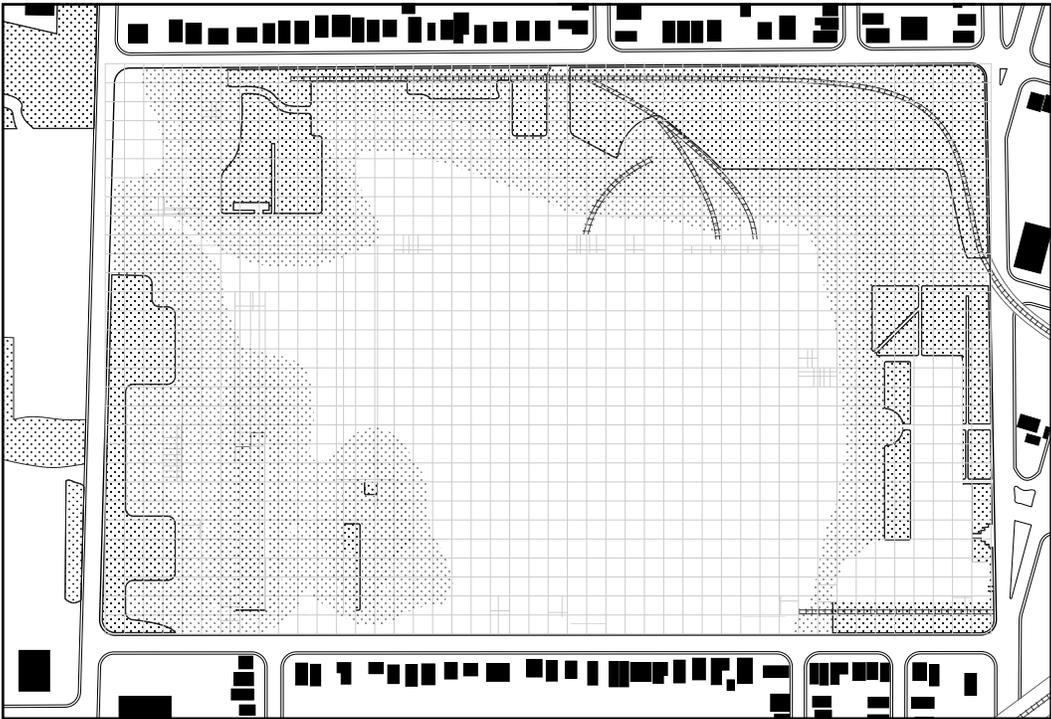
Fig. 90

Phase 5
Step 2



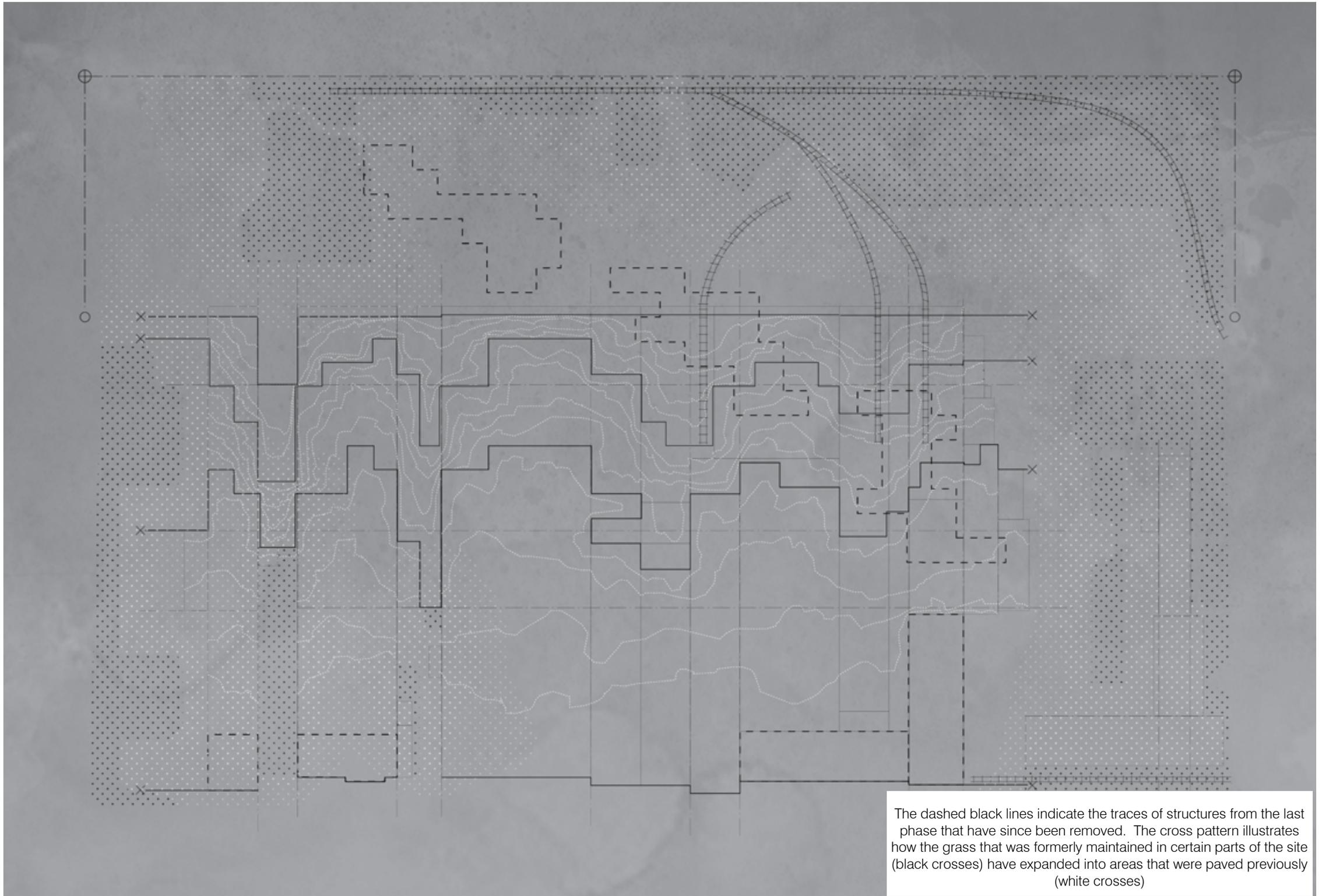
Phase 5
Step 3

Fig. 91



Phase 5
Step 4

Fig. 92



Phase 5

Fig. 93

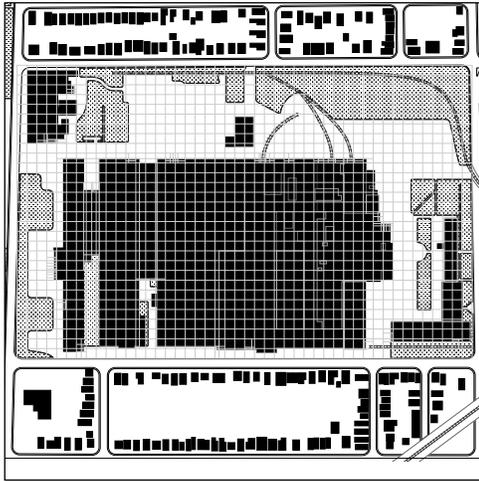


Fig. 94

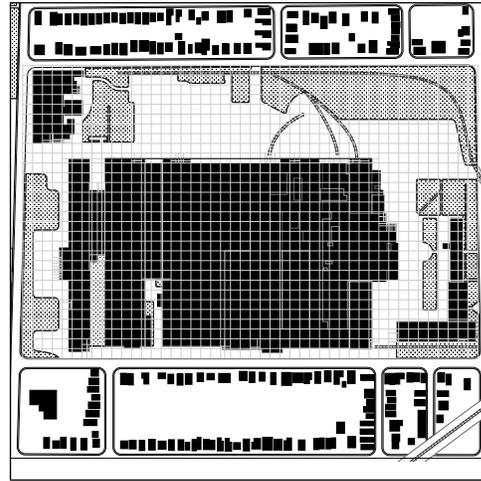


Fig. 95

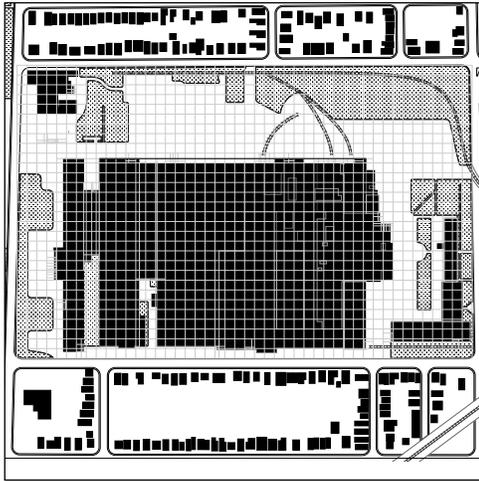


Fig. 96

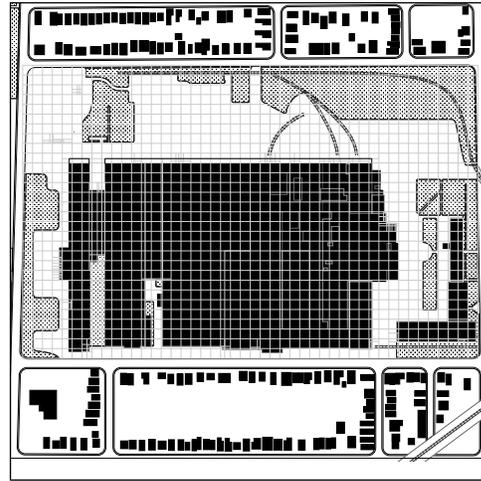


Fig. 97

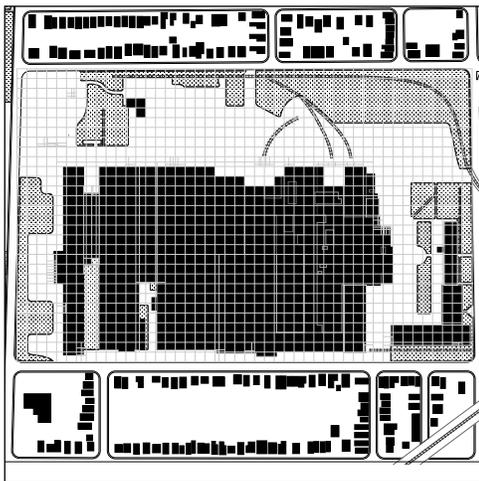


Fig. 98

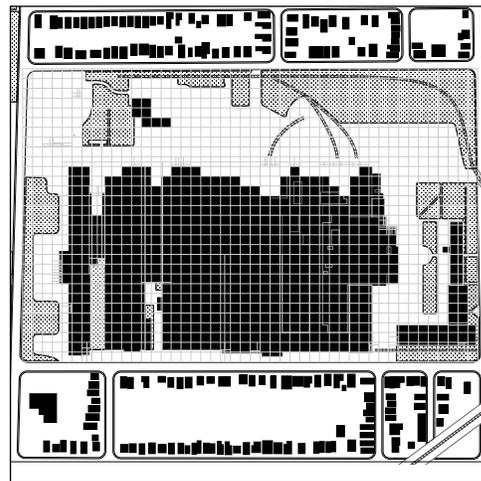


Fig. 99

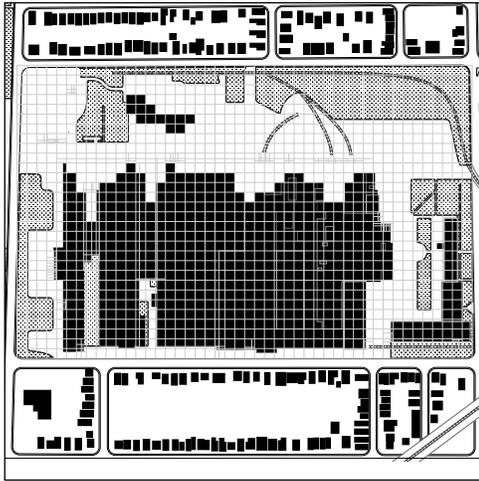


Fig. 100

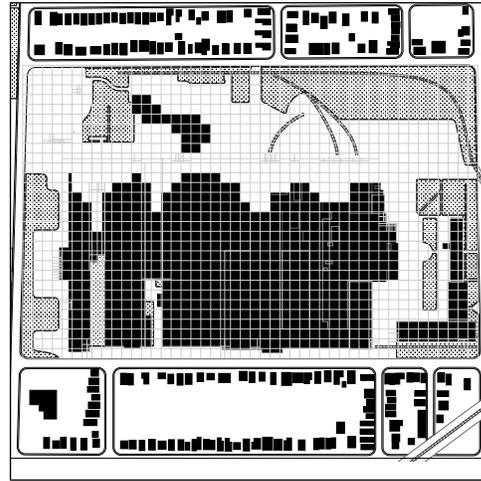


Fig.101

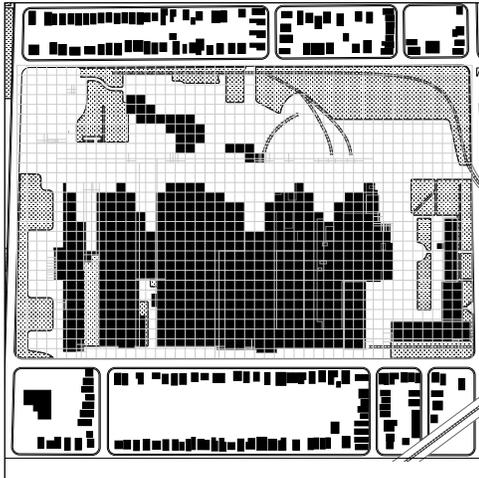


Fig. 102



Fig. 103

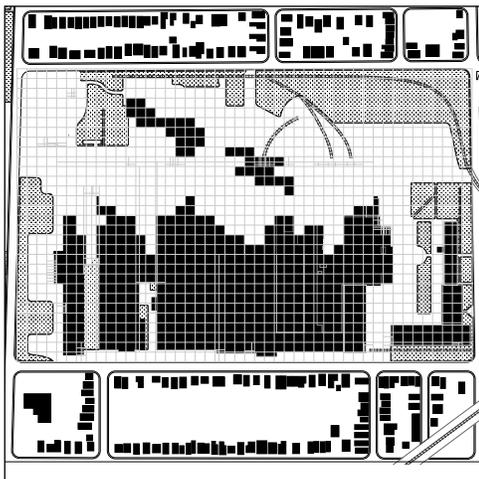


Fig. 104

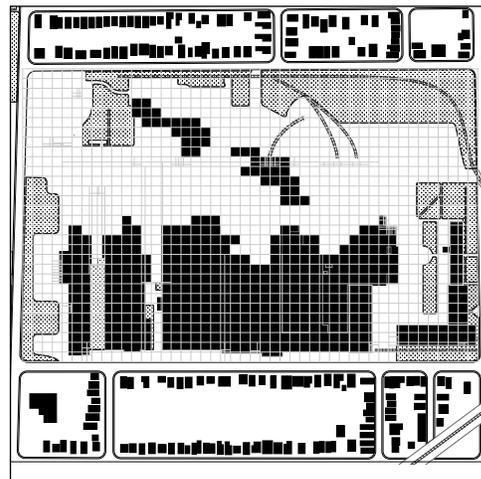


Fig. 105

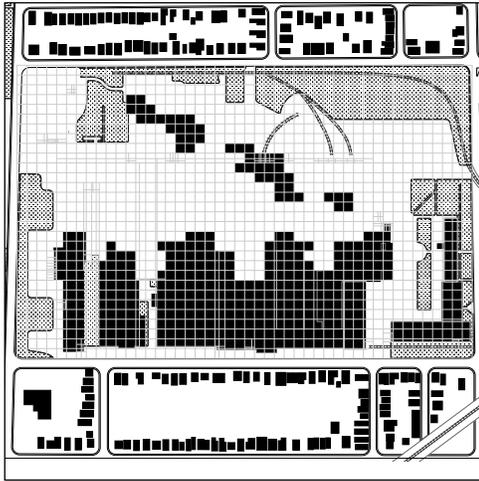


Fig. 106

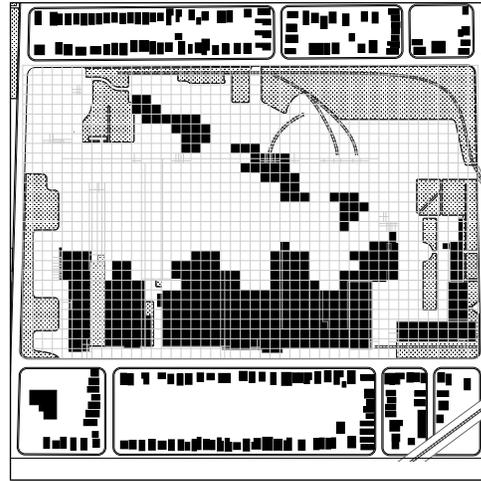


Fig. 107

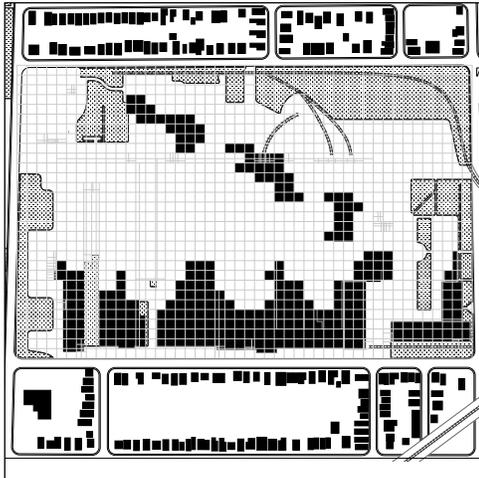


Fig. 108

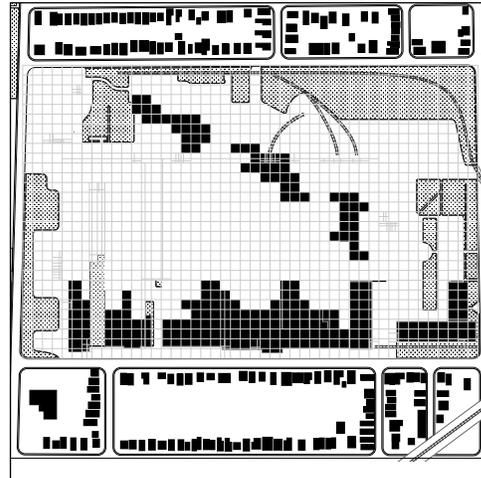


Fig. 109

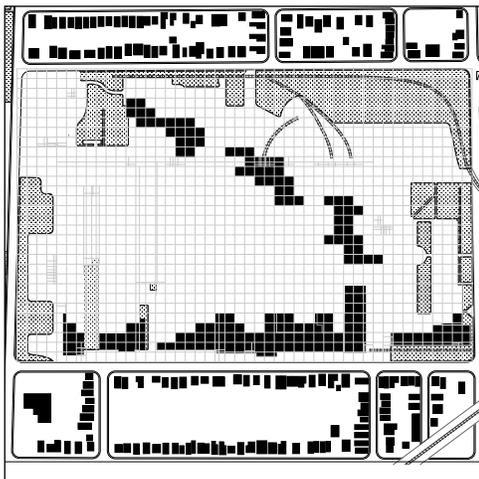


Fig. 110

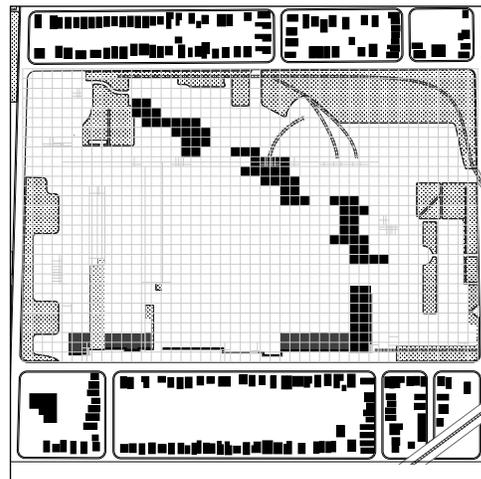


Fig. 111

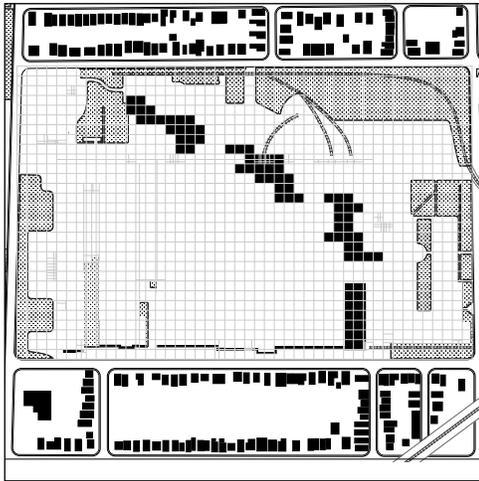


Fig. 112

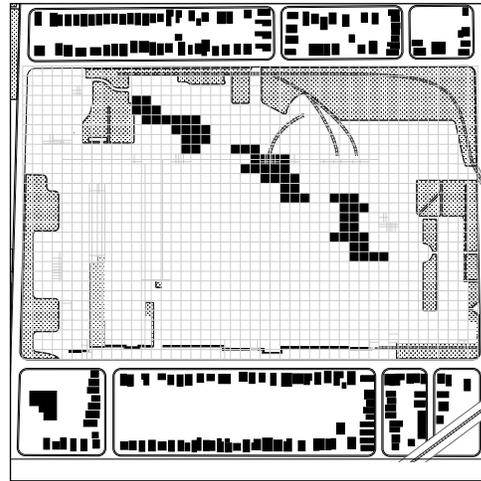


Fig.113

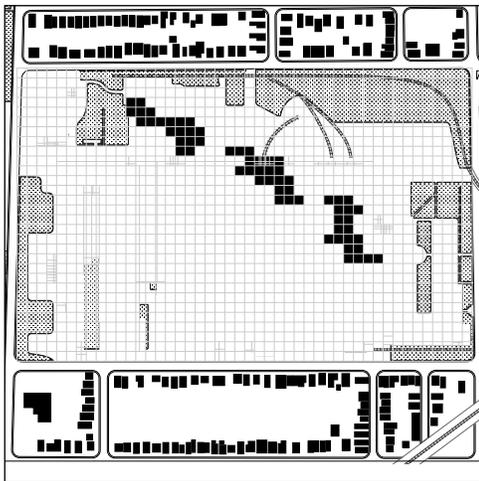


Fig. 114

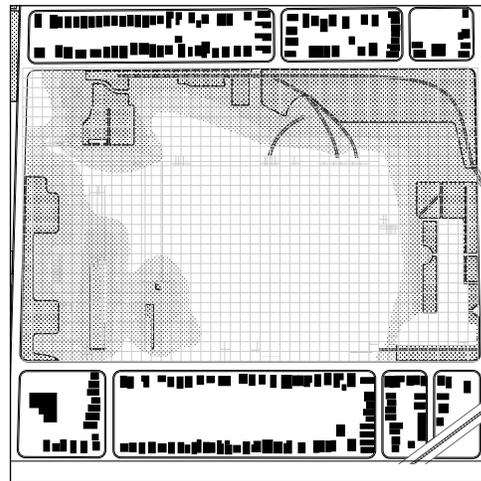


Fig. 115

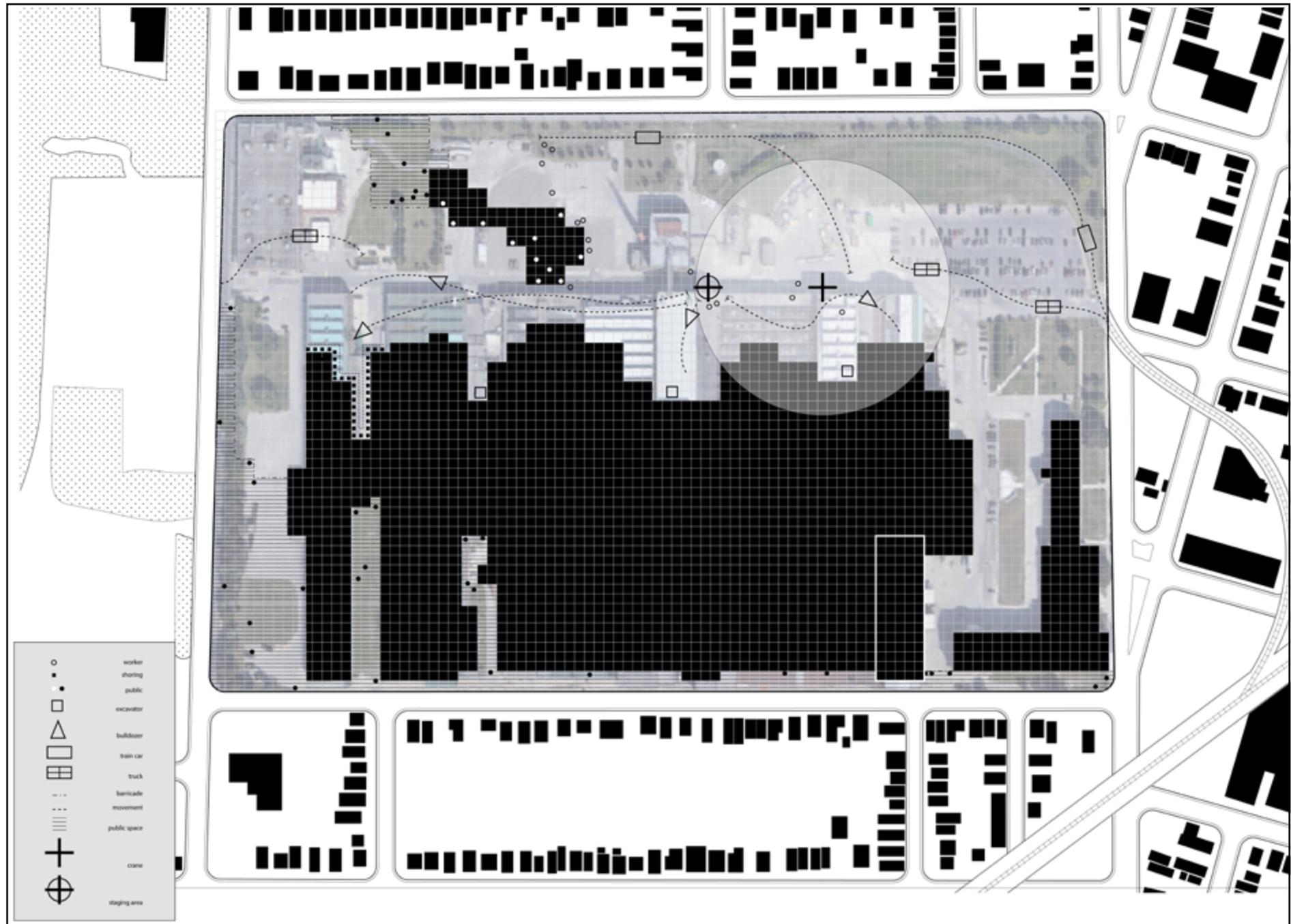


Fig. 116

The choreography of Demolition
Early Stages



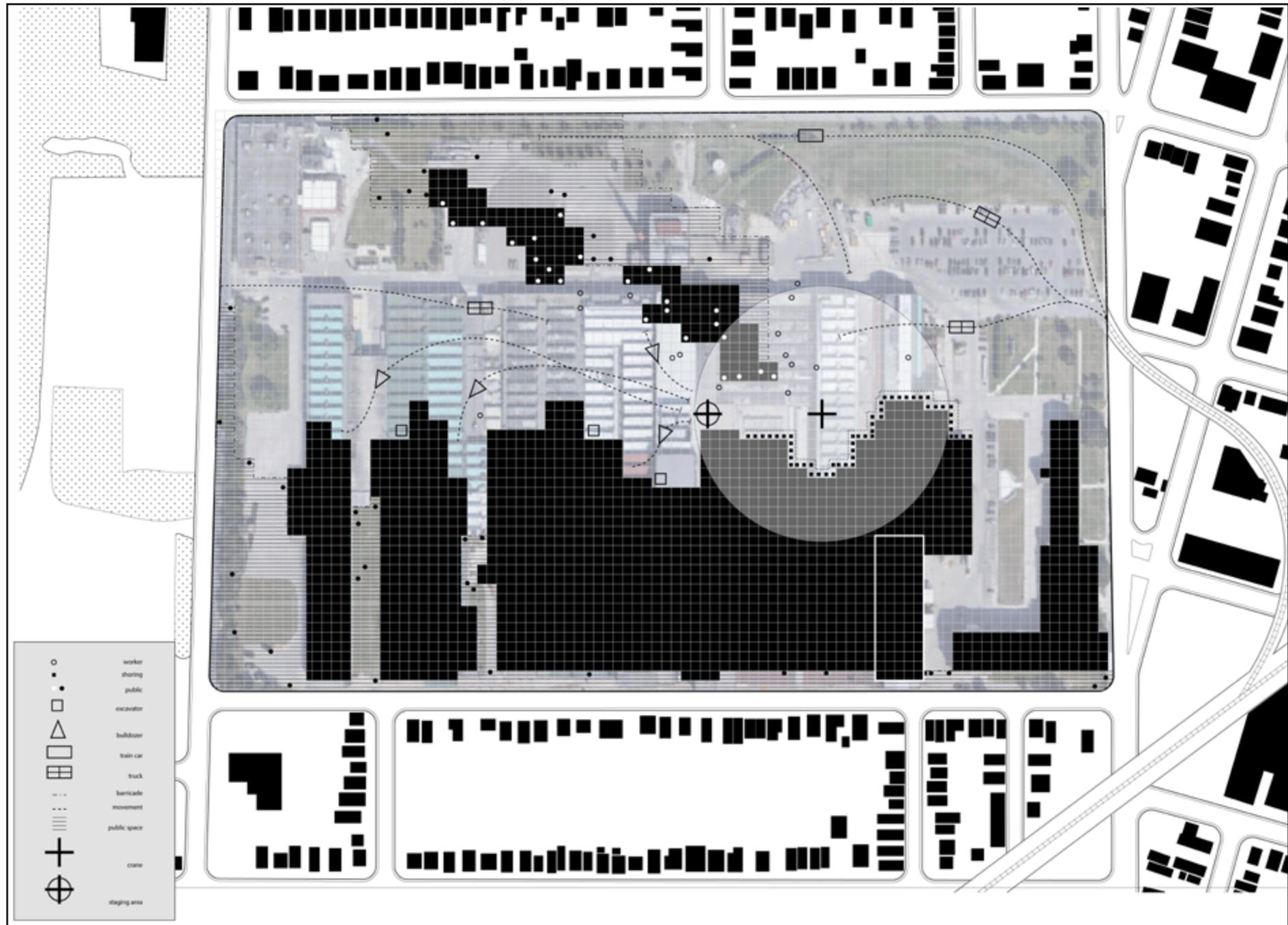
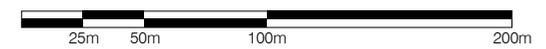


Fig. 117

The choreography of Demolition
Mid Stages



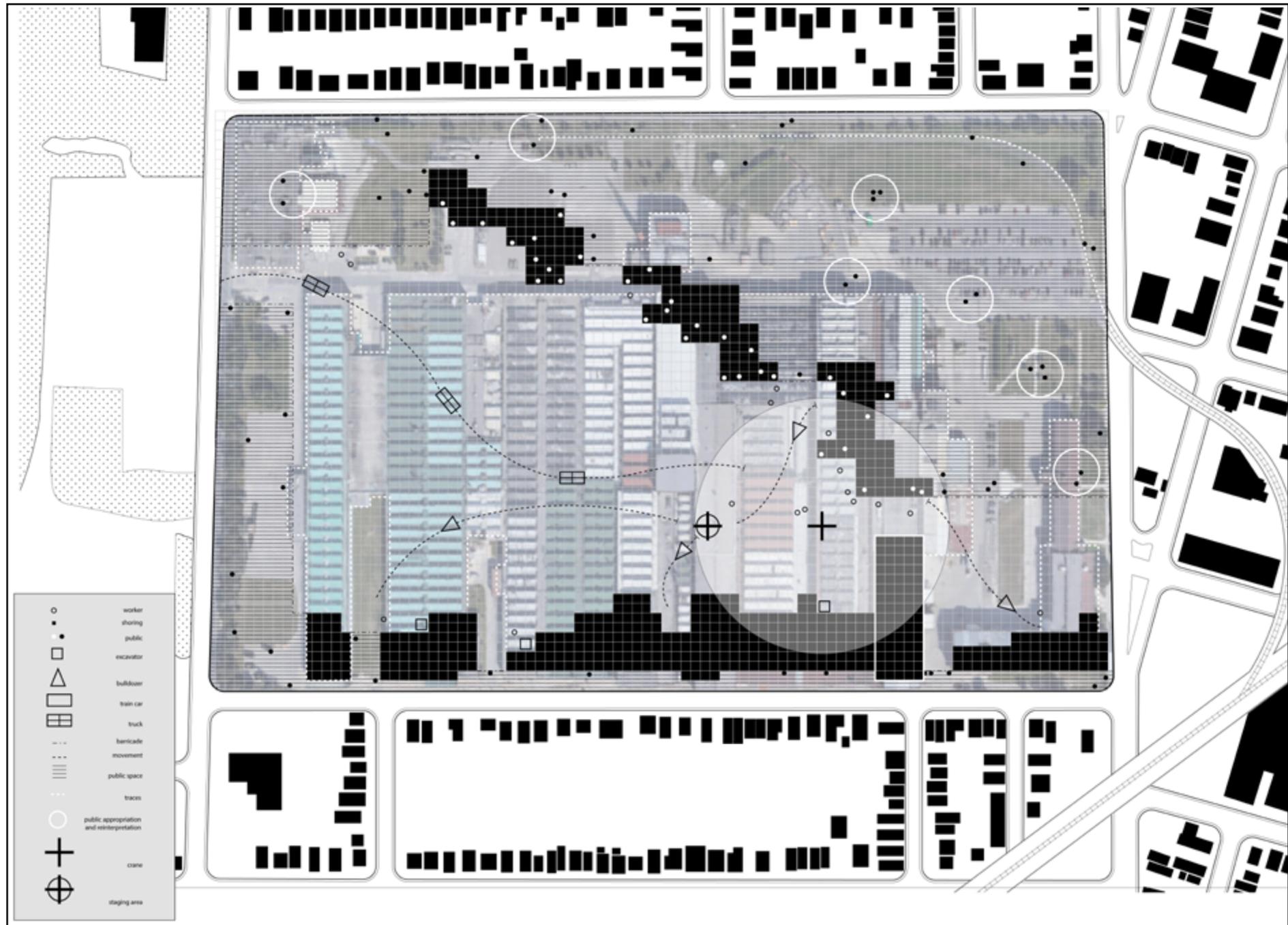
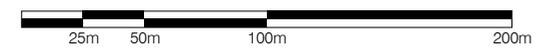
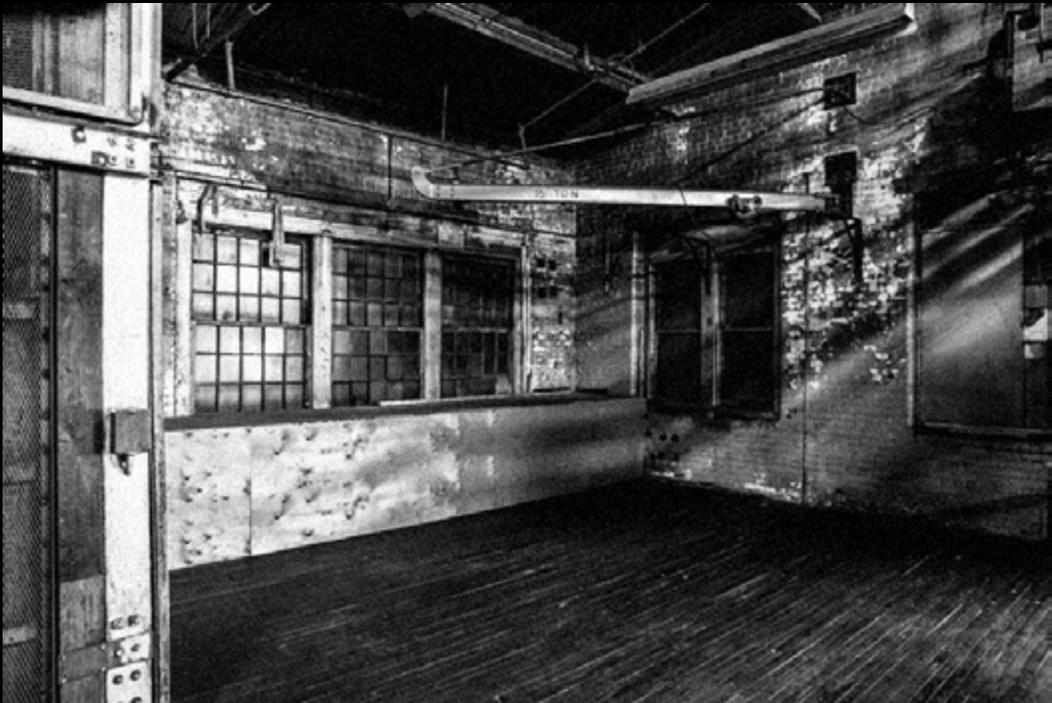


Fig. 118

The choreography of Demolition
Late Stages



06/ THE MUSEUM



As mentioned above, part of Phase IV of deconstruction includes the creation of a museum in Building 8. This building was built in 1891 and is one of the earliest General Electric buildings on site. When it opened it was the machining and assembly building and, as the largest building, provided the space for many large-scale manufacturing operations. The conversion of Building 8 into a museum is an acknowledgment of its historical importance not only as one of the most productive spaces, but also as one of the most iconic buildings on the site. The original red brickwork and arched windows as well as the monitor roof profile make it, perhaps, the building most emblematic of the General Electric plant. It also faces directly onto Albert St, giving it an easy connection to the neighbourhood.



The exterior of Building 8 from Albert Street.

Fig. 120

The creation of this on-site museum is a method of preserving for the public both the memory of the General Electric plant as well as the act of deconstruction. As buildings are unbuilt and debris is removed, artifacts that are uncovered are moved here and displayed to the public as museum objects speaking to the history of the factory. However, this building houses more than artifacts – it is a vessel that also holds the fragments of the deconstruction. These fragments take the form of drawings, castings, and rubbings that capture the ephemerality of the act of demolition. These pieces document the temporal forms that emerge during demolition and crystalize them into permanent objects. This museum is about making, transforming, and destroying. The main purpose of displaying the fragments of demolition is to include the public in the process of remembrance; to remember the spectacle of deconstruction and the site's transition from one phase of its life to the next. The objects act as both witness testimonies and journalistic accounts of the deconstruction of the General Electric plant. The public is able to engage intimately and immediately with these objects. By encouraging the viewer to physically touch the castings of fragments removed from the factory and see the artistic abstractions of the plant, they come in close contact with the texture and materiality of the plant's physical body. This process removes any positive or negative notions of the factory's history and leaves the viewer with an immediate connection with the haptic qualities of the fragment.

THE ARTIFACT

As demolition is conducted on an industrial building site, remnants of a former industrial history will gradually be uncovered. These artifacts may include hand tools, machinery, antique employee lockers and desks, or forgotten goods previously produced on-site (fig 121-122). Not only do these artifacts speak to the history of technological development and manufacturing that took place at this plant, but they consider this history through a very human lens. These artifacts will be displayed to the public at the new museum building allowing the public a glimpse at the complexity of the machines of production as well as the intimacy of the employee locker or the engineer's antiquated tool set. Seeing these two

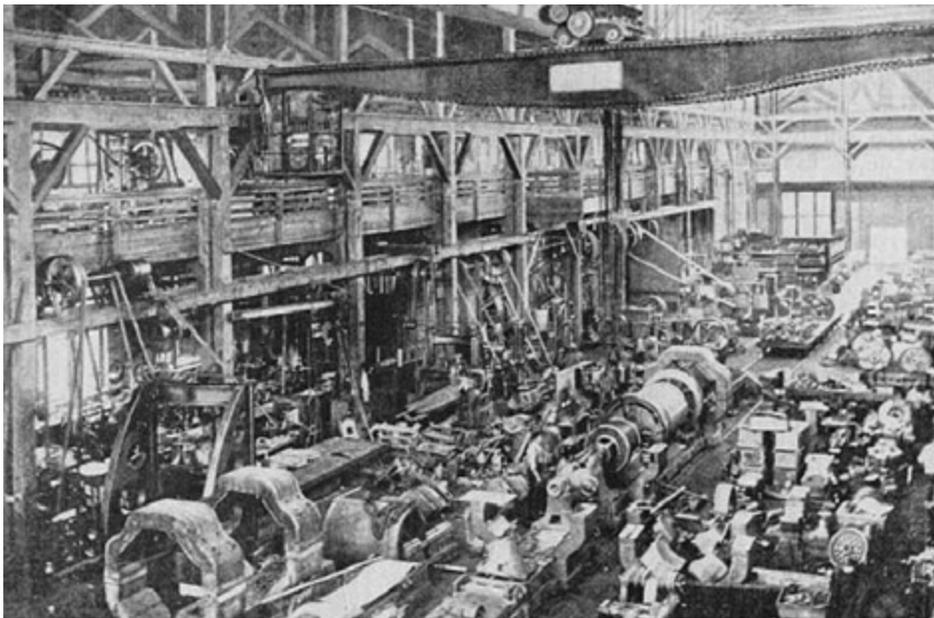
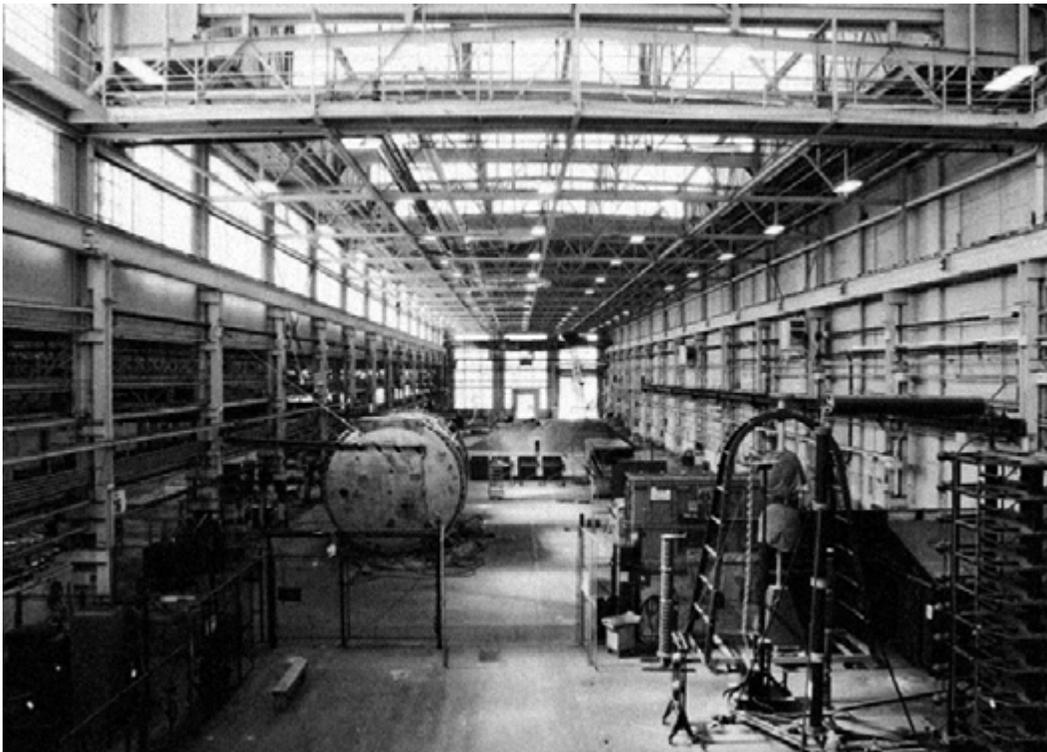


Fig. 121

An early photograph from the interior of what appears to be Building 8. This photo shows potential artifacts still in the space.

extremely different types of production can recalibrate the public's notion of the GE factory. Seeing wrenches displayed alongside motors may reinforce the depth of the factory's history – from hand tools to hi-tech, the plant has been a production hub for longer than most of the public realize. Further, displaying these artifacts demonstrates two scales (factory and human) of this plant. The factory built incredibly complex and important mechanical equipment, but this monolithic factory was comprised of individual worker who too often are overlooked when discussing the achievements of General Electric.



A photograph of the interior of Building 16A (2014) showing the industrial equipment that may yet remain.

Fig. 122



Fig. 123

An example of the artifacts removed from the United Canadian Malt building during demolition.



Fig. 124

An example of the artifacts removed from the Baskin Robbins factory during demolition.

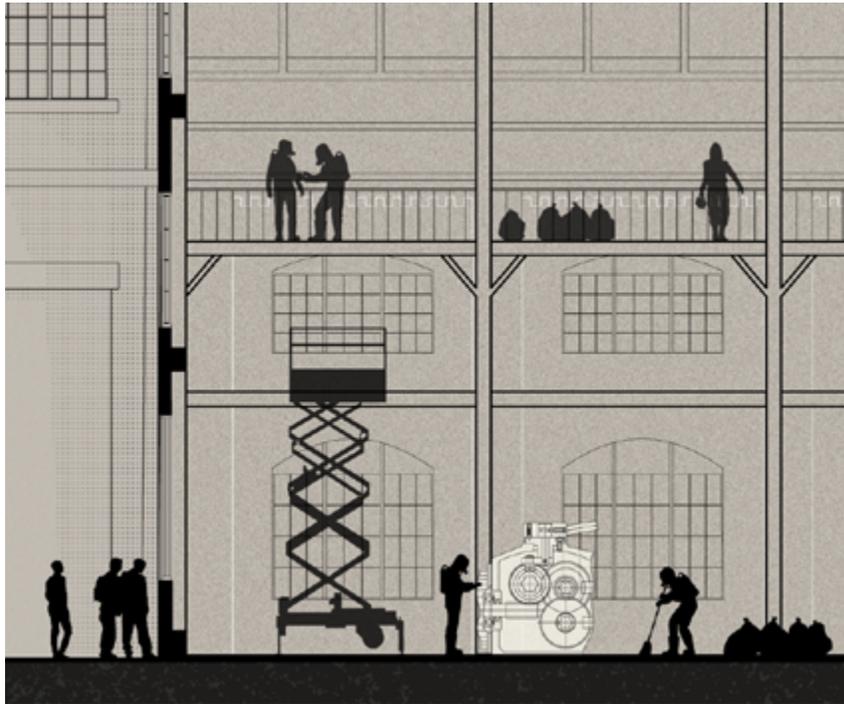


Fig. 125

An abatement team decontaminates the interior of Building 8 as spectators watch.

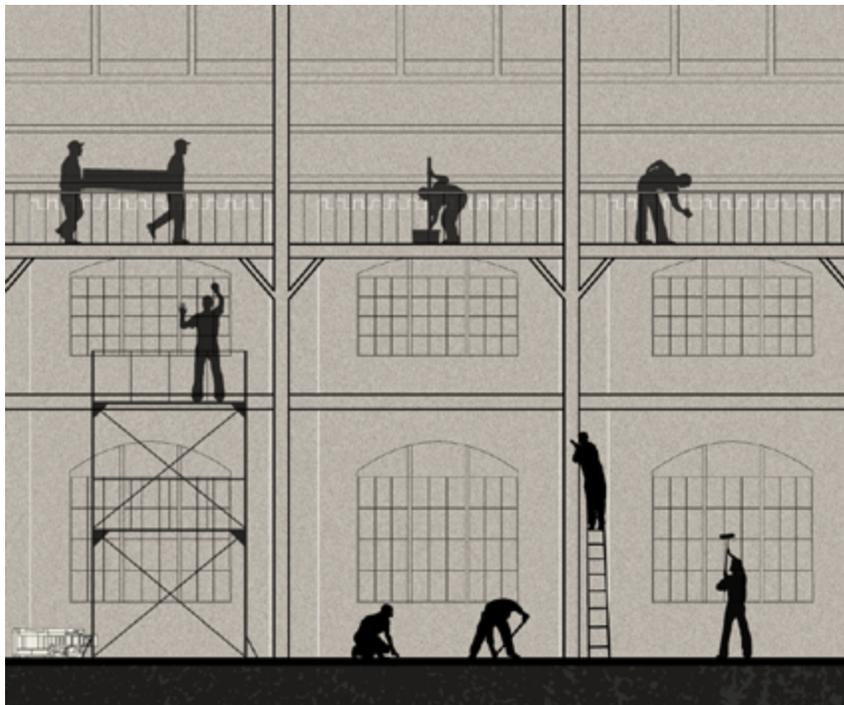


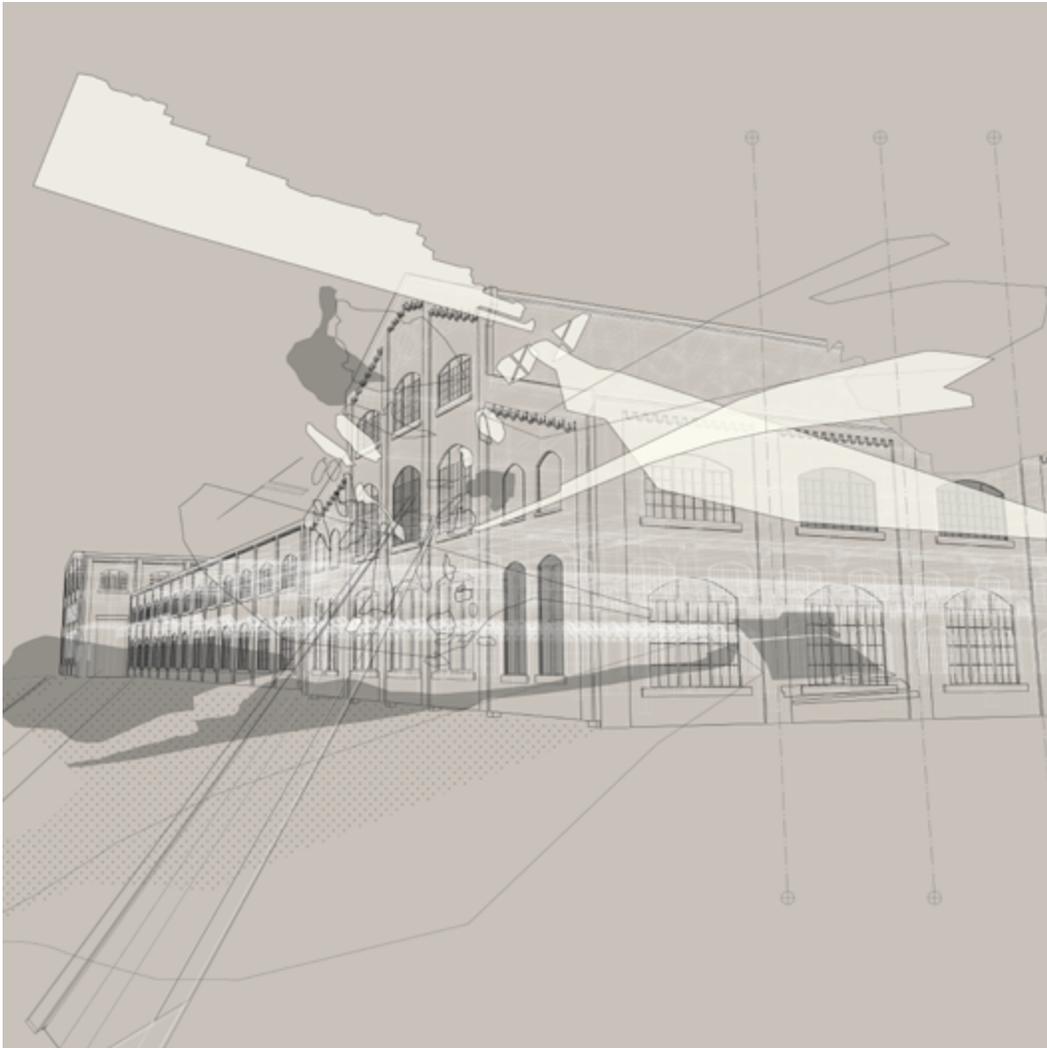
Fig. 126

A cleaning crew prepares Building 8 to become a gallery/workshop.

THE WANDERER'S EYE VIEW (DRAWING)

One form of representation that will be housed in the museum are drawings that record the act of deconstruction. These drawings operate as more than simple representations. Along with documenting the physical forms of demolition, they capture the temporal nature of the process. Within a single drawing are multiple vantage points and different time scales, which differs from typical drawings which depict one perspective at a singular point in time (fig 127-129). These works may focus on how a specific physical form that is generated through the act of demolition transitions from its conception to its destruction – bending, cracking, and fragmenting, through space and time until it falls to the ground or is reduced to rubble. Or, these drawings may concentrate on compiling multiple perspectives together to evoke a general sense of the beauty of the poetic forms that emerge through demolition. In both cases, the drawing is an evocative tool of documentation that holds the memory of the demolition.

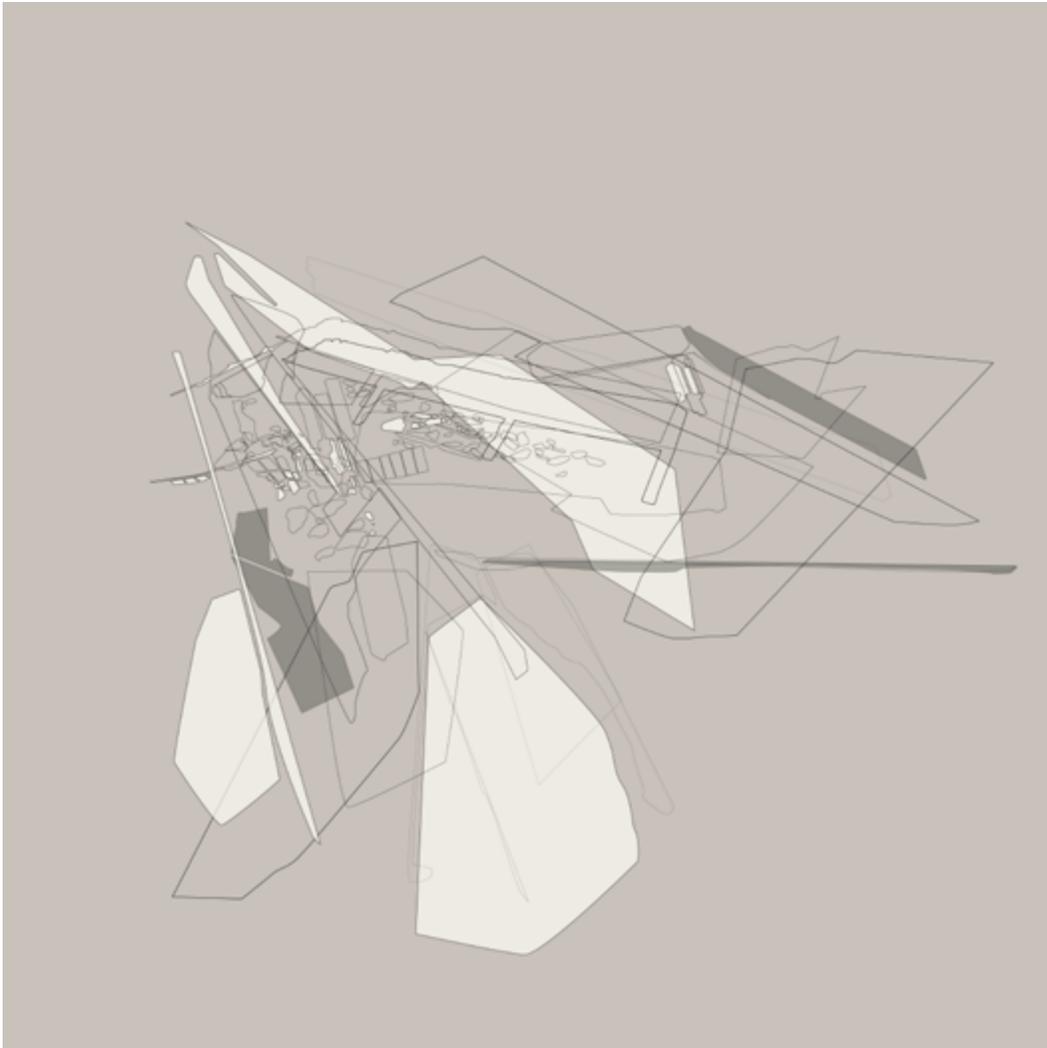
Creating these documents necessitates several tools and techniques. First, documentation of the building and demolition process are used as generative guides. These documents include rubbings that take a physical impression of the former building facades or photos that illustrate the way building components are dismantled over time. Next, tracings of objects of particular interest are created and layered in a way to create the drawing's temporal framework. These tracings layer multiple perspectives and timeframes to produce a document that shows the transformation of the poetic objects of demolition over time and evoke a sense of the act of deconstruction to the viewer.



This drawing shows the demolition process occurring from multiple vantage points against the facade of the plant. Fig. 127



This drawing tracks the process of demolition from multiple perspectives across time. Fig. 128



This drawing combines the qualities of demolition from multiple vantage points into a layered object.

Fig. 129

THE (IM)PERMANENT FRAGMENT (CASTING)

The castings that are created for the museum operate in a similar way to the drawings – they capture specific moments in time, converting temporary fragments into permanent objects. However, unlike the two-dimensional medium of drawing, casting represents the building fragments at a one-to-one scale with the surface quality of the original object. A casting in a simple monolithic material (like plaster) emphasizes the surface and the form of the object by eliminating distractions like material colour or patina – it distinguishes the “dirt, as it were, from the shadows”.⁴⁶ The public is invited to touch the castings and feel the surface of the building components in a way that the original objects did not allow. As a process, casting (particularly in plaster) tends to historicize the objects that have been cast. It implies that the original object is a historical artifact reproduced due to its significance, forcing the casting into the role of arbiter of cultural value. This monolithic casting can easily be a romanticized version of the original object, as Marcel Proust’s character discovers in *In search of Lost Time*. In the novel, the character is enamoured by a plaster casting of a church’s portal but when he travels to see the original, is disappointed. For him, the plaster cast is “perfect, universal, and timeless”⁴⁷ while the original is simply “reduced to its own apparent form in stone”.⁴⁸ The casting is preserved in an unalterable state, the original is the victim of time and reality. The notion of freezing a moment in time gets to the heart of the purpose of this operation.

⁴⁶ Mari Lending, *Plaster Monuments: Architecture and the Power of Reproduction*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 7.

⁴⁷ Mari Lending, “Proust and Plaster,” *AA Files* No. 67 (2013): 47

⁴⁸ Marcel Proust, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower: In Search of Lost Time, Volume 2*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 350.



Fig. 130

A brick wall fragment used as
prototype for casting

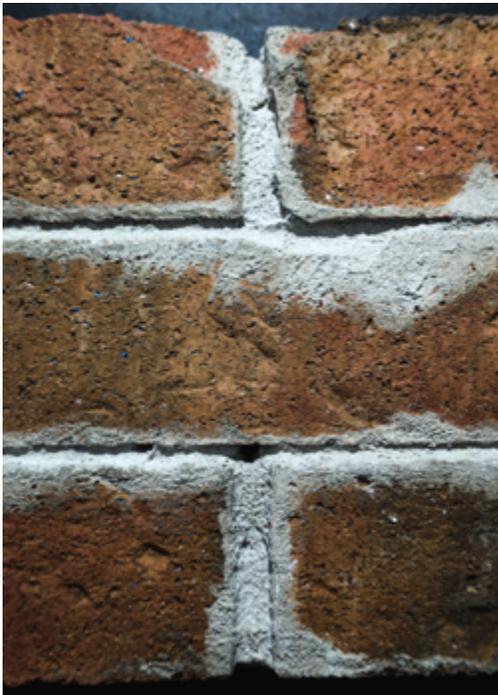


Fig. 131

Brick wall
details



Fig. 132



Fig. 133

Brick wall cast in plaster:
The texture of the brick is emphasized by the monochromatic quality of the cast.



Fig. 134



Fig. 135

Brick wall cast in plaster:
Details of the texture of the casting.

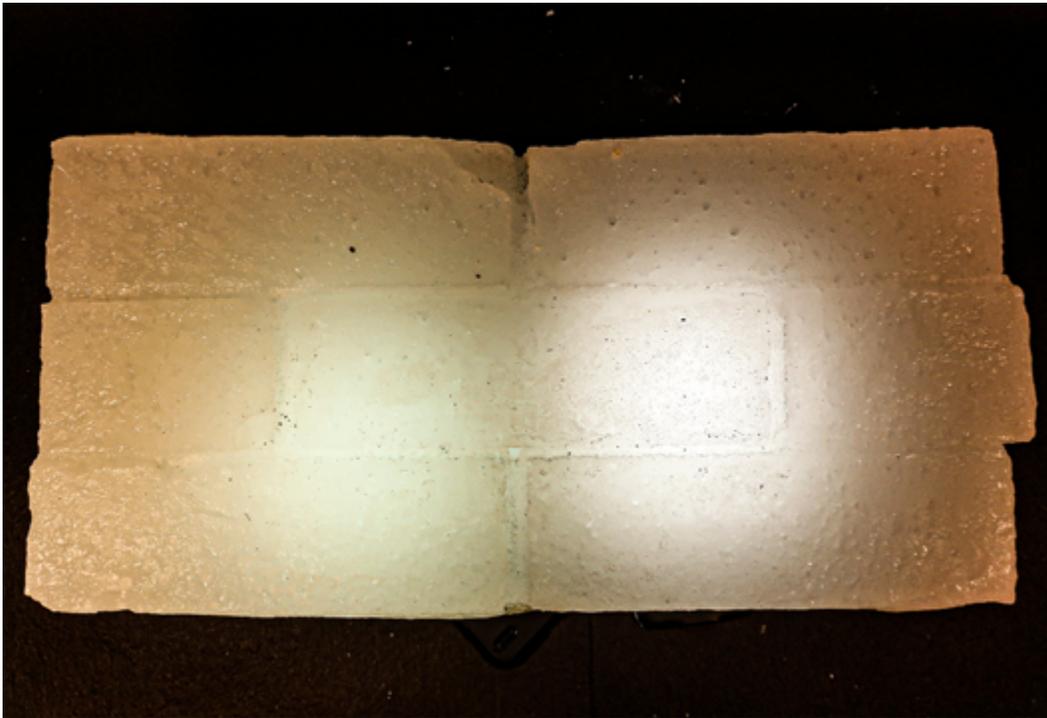


Fig. 136

Brick wall cast in wax:
The wax is illuminated from the bottom, creating a diffused glowing object.



Fig. 137



Fig. 138

Brick wall cast in wax:
Details of the texture of the casting.

These castings are created from the fragments of demolition. Some of these poetic fragments from the demolition are collected as they manifest and are cast in plaster or wax. As a form of representation, casting can document elements of permanence and impermanence simultaneously. The building components that are used in the castings are permanent objects, but they are preserved in a state which describes the impermanence of the poetic form. In other words, while the physical fragments continue to exist after the demolition process, their formal qualities and relationship to other fragments changes during the process of deconstruction, and it is these temporary moments that are captured through casting. The process captures these fleeting formal qualities and spatial relationships, making the impermanent into a permanent object and making the mundane into the celebrated.

Lighting is an important consideration for the display of the castings. The factory's history of manufacturing electrical components and Peterborough's reputation as the 'Electric city' inspire a particular sense of sensitivity in how the objects are lit. The wax castings will be displayed lit from below, illuminating the object from the interior (fig 136-138). Without lighting, these wax castings do not appear to have a pronounced surface texture, however, once lit from below the texture of the castings is dramatically emphasized. These castings have a beautiful diffused glow when they are lit and are an interesting study in the connection between material and surface quality.



Fragment from the demolition of the
United Canadian Malt Plant.

Fig. 139

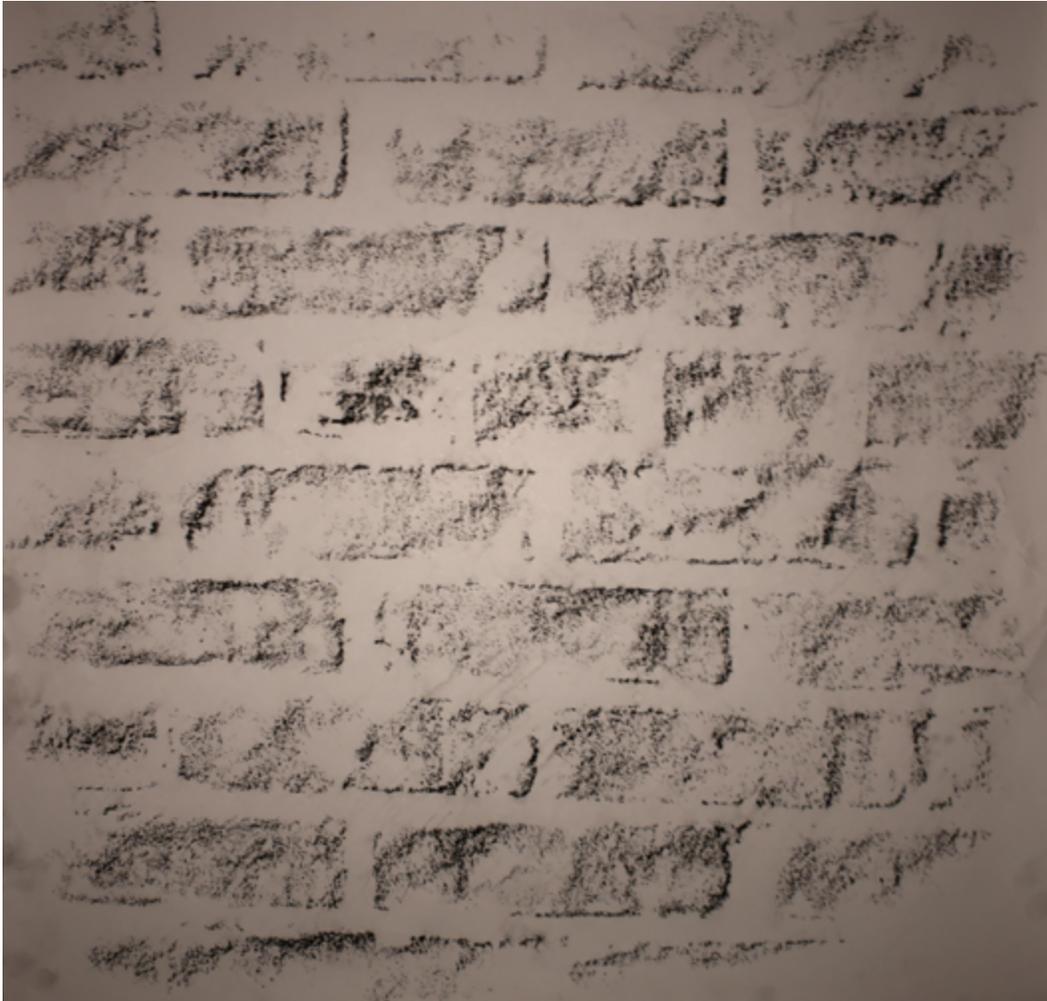


Fragment from the demolition of the United Canadian Malt Plant cast in plaster.

Fig. 140

THE COMPOUND TRACES (FROTTAGE)

Impressions taken from the walls of the plant through a series of rubbings of different media on vellum will also be included in the museum in Building 8. These works capture physical imprints of the building facades through the hand of an intermediary. These rubbings rely on strokes made by an author's hand and, though they translate the surface of the wall almost perfectly, they have a layer of artistic discretion. In this sense, they operate between the interpretative drawings and the direct castings as a 'near-truth'. These pieces are used as the foundation for some of the drawings but are also museum objects in their own right. They are composed of sheets of vellum (each with a rubbing) layered together on an armature and back-lit, to give clarity to the layers of images and provide depth to the drawings. Like the display of the castings, lighting is also an important consideration for the presentation of these rubbings.



An illuminated rubbing from the exterior wall
of Building 2A.

Fig. 141

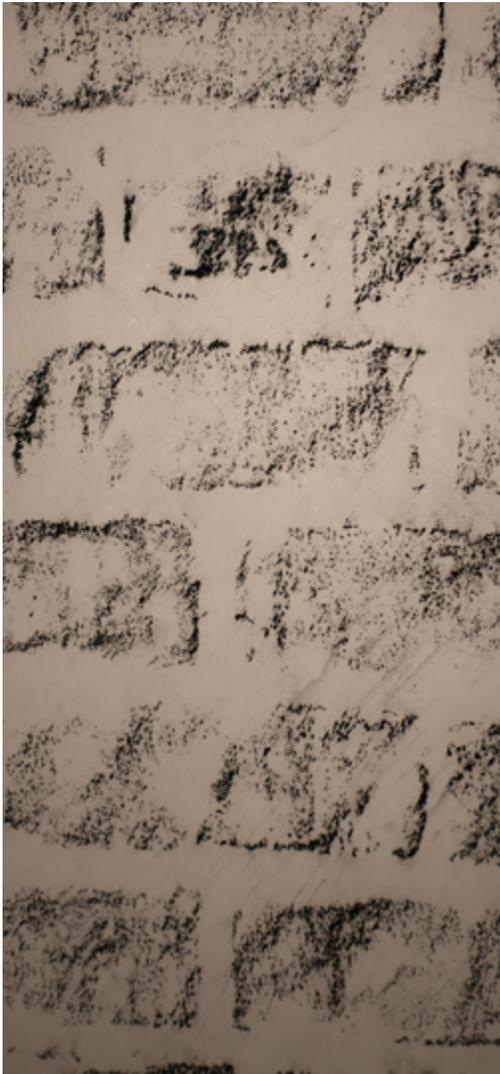


Fig. 142

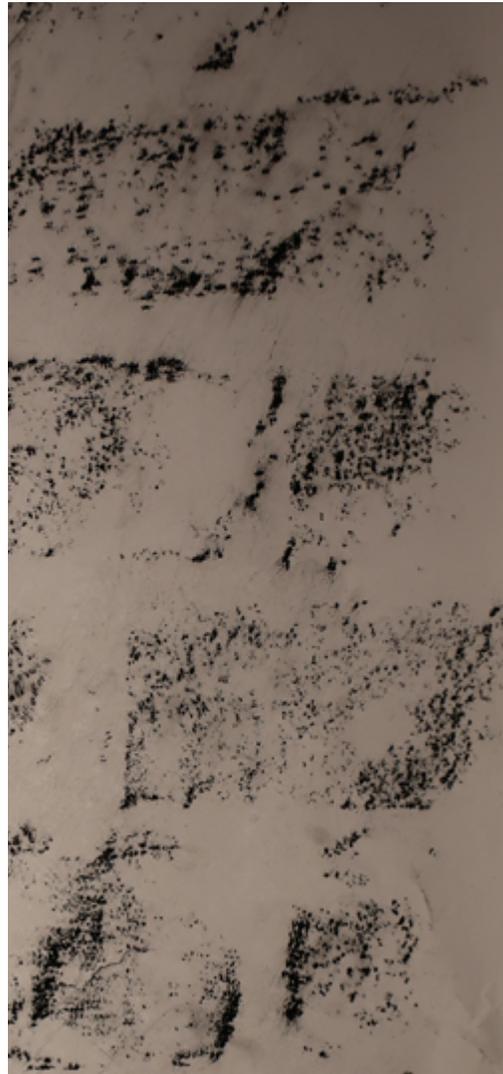
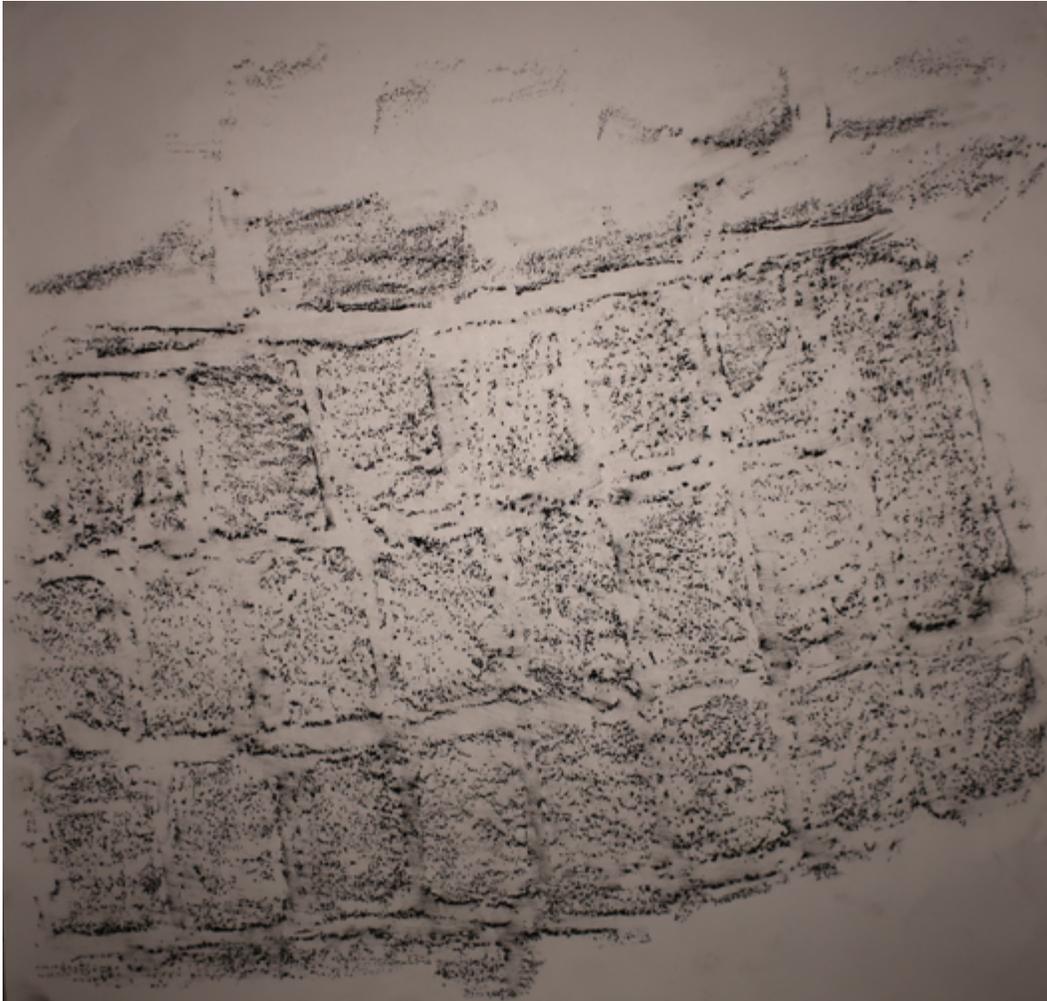


Fig. 143

Details the illuminated rubbing of Building 2A:
showing the texture of the bricks.



An illuminated rubbing from the exterior wall
of Building 30.

Fig. 144

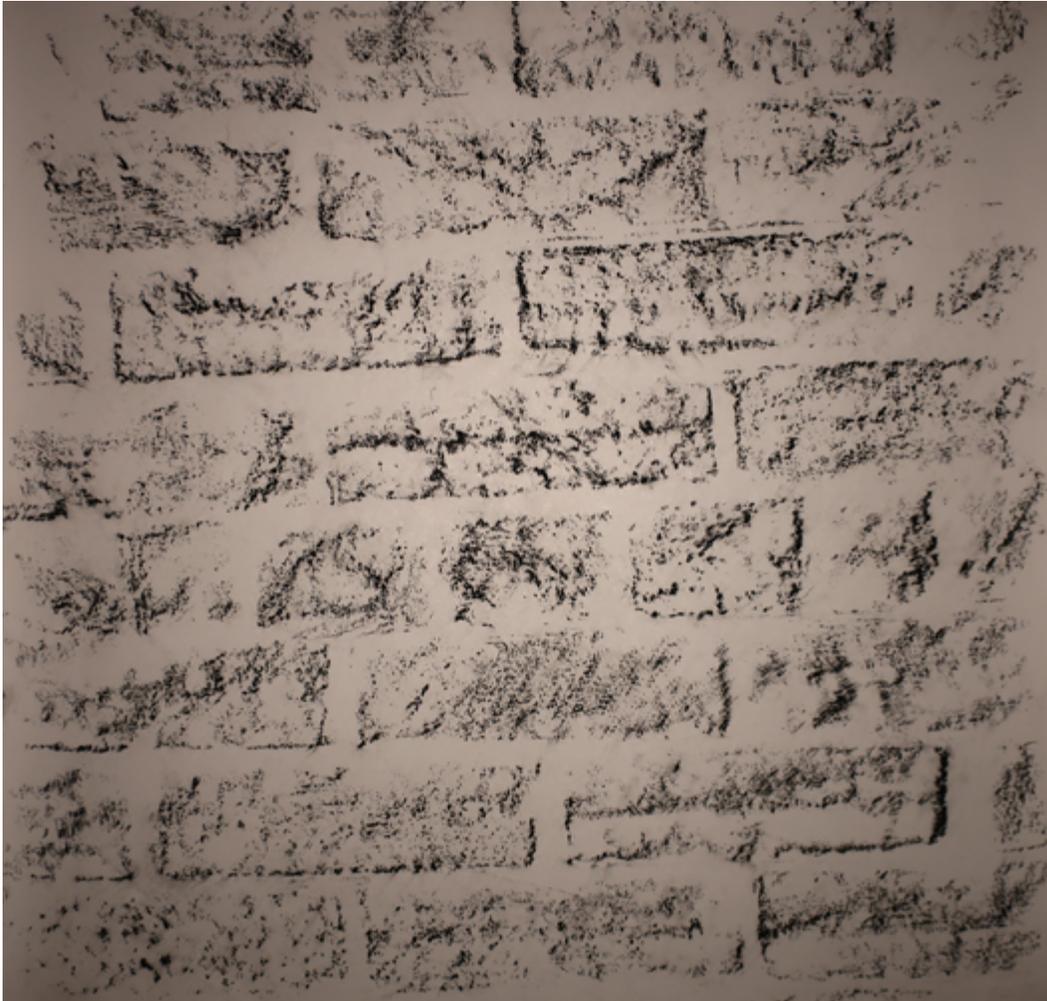


Fig. 145



Fig. 146

Details the illuminated rubbing of Building 30:
showing the texture and arched arrangement of the bricks.



An illuminated rubbing from the exterior wall
of Building 2.

Fig. 147

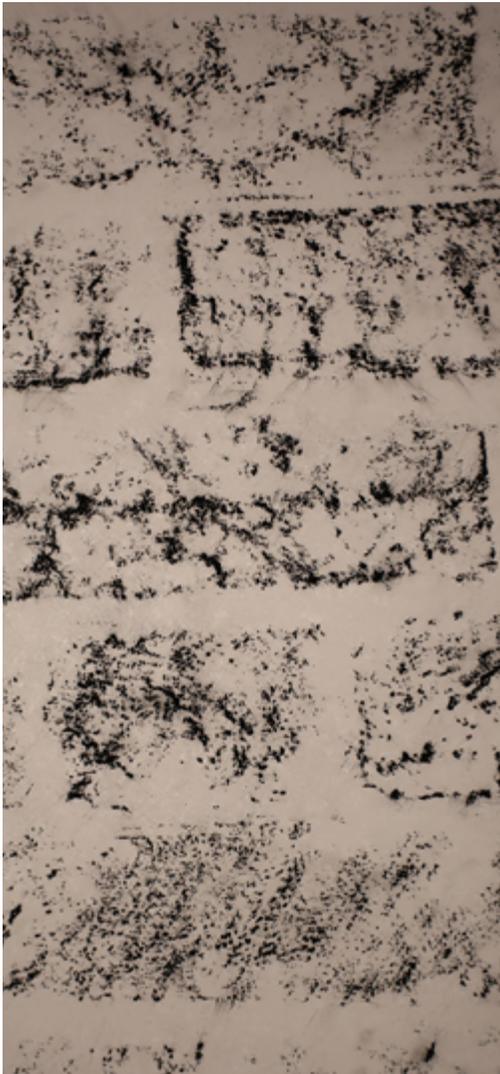


Fig. 148

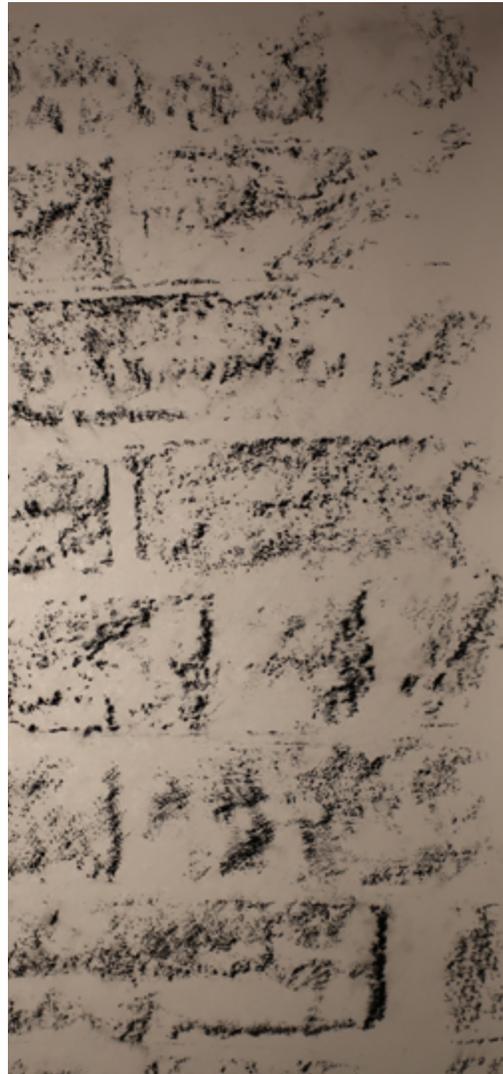


Fig. 149

Details the illuminated rubbing of Building 2:
showing the texture of the bricks.



An illuminated rubbing from multiple points of
the exterior wall of Building 2.

Fig. 150



Fig. 151



Fig. 152

Details the illuminated rubbing of Building 2:
showing the different textures of the bricks as a result of spalling and cracking.

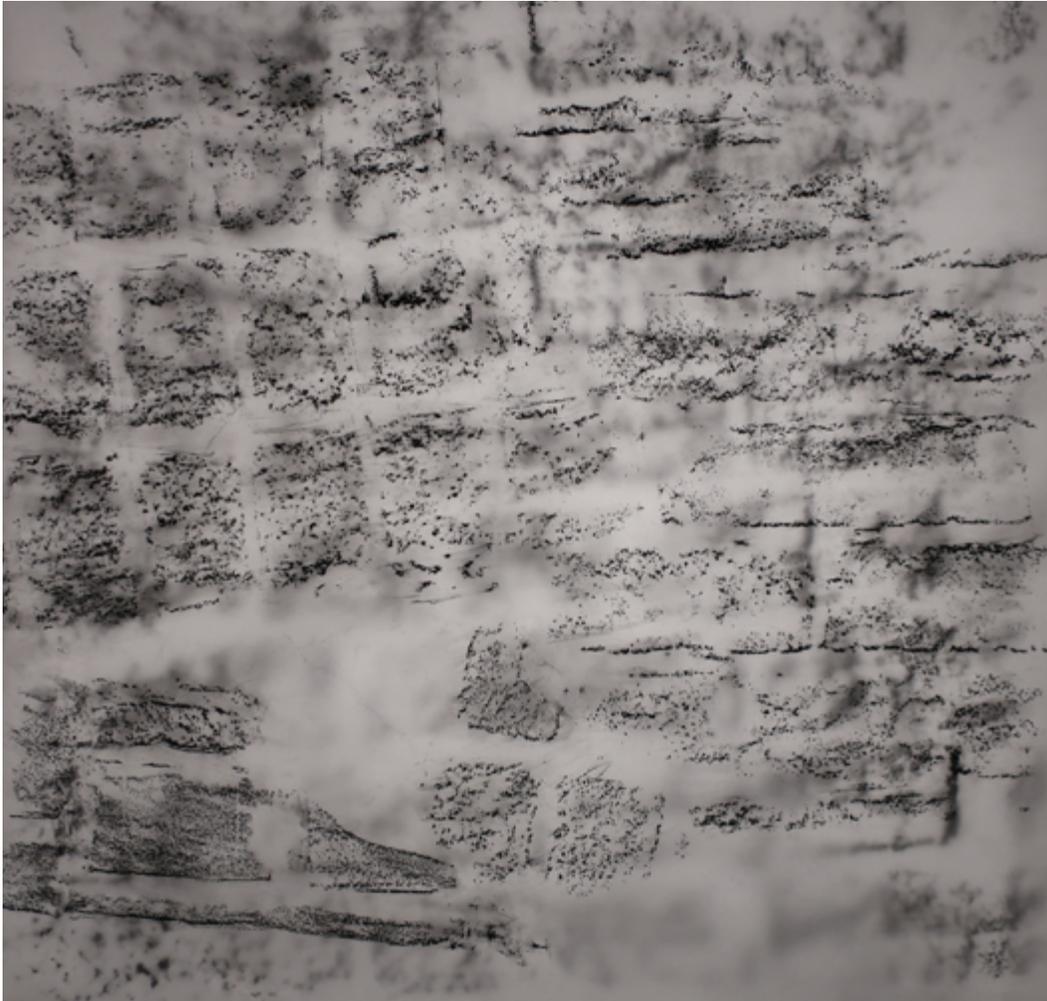


Fig. 153

Both of the rubbings from Building 2, layered and illuminated to created depth and abstract the image.



Fig. 154



Fig. 155

Details from the compound rubbing.

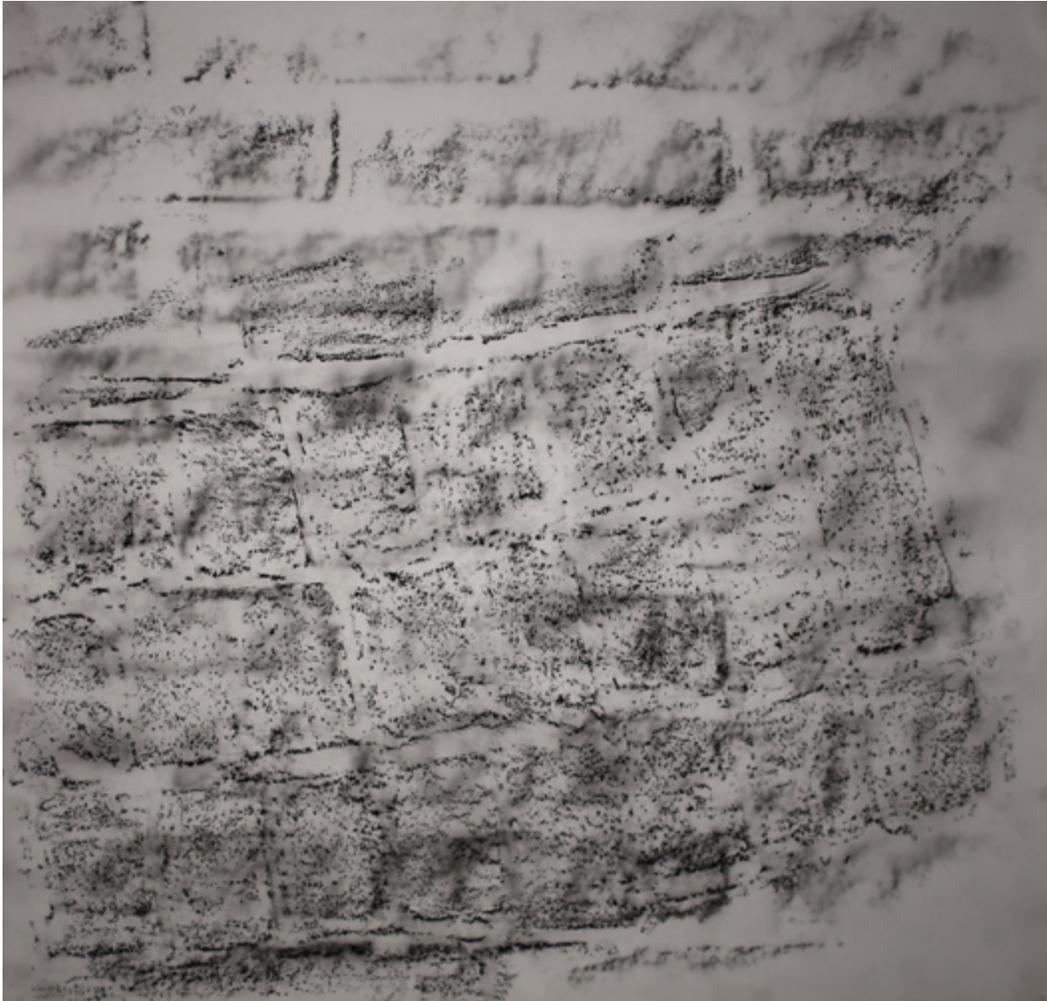


Fig. 156

The rubbings from Building 2A and Building 30, layered and illuminated to create depth and abstract the image.

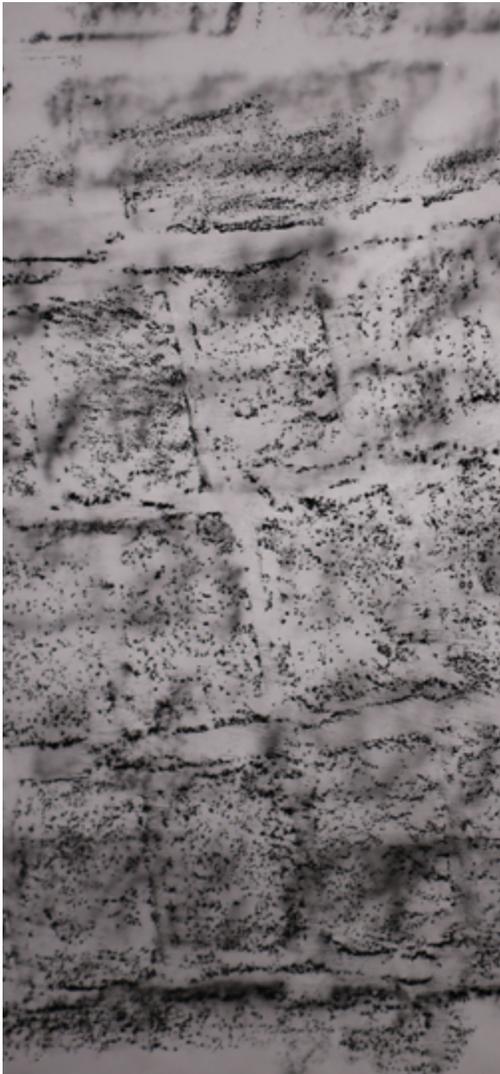
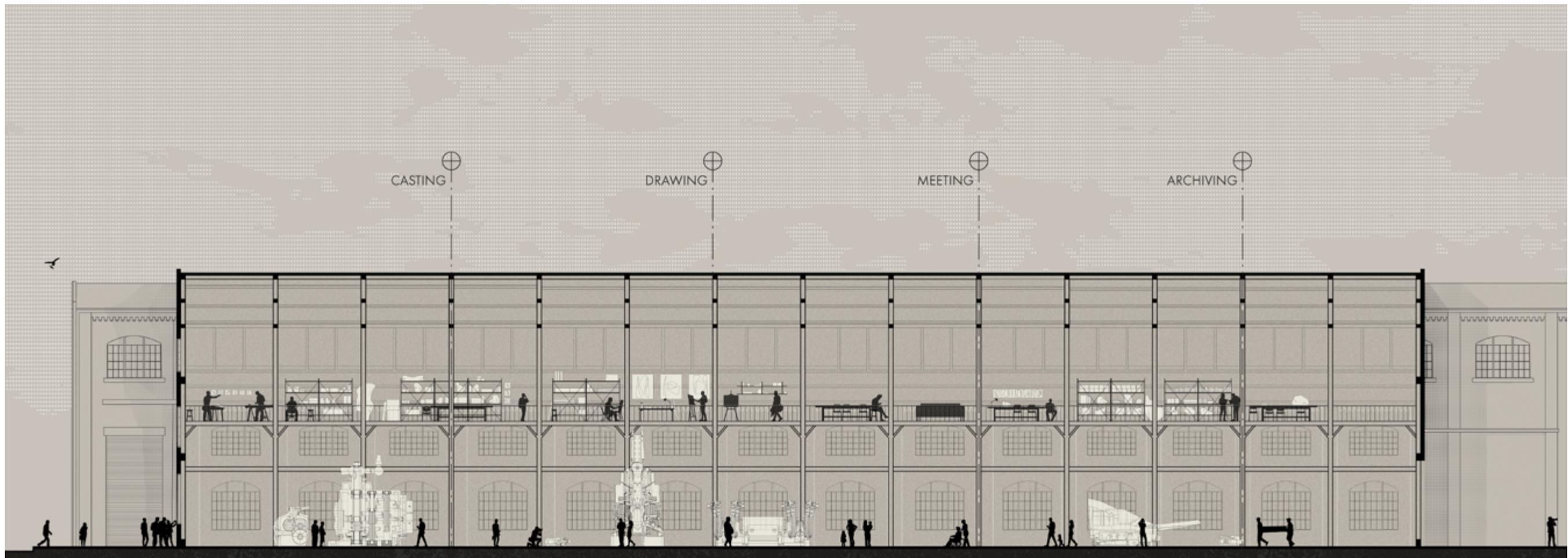


Fig. 157

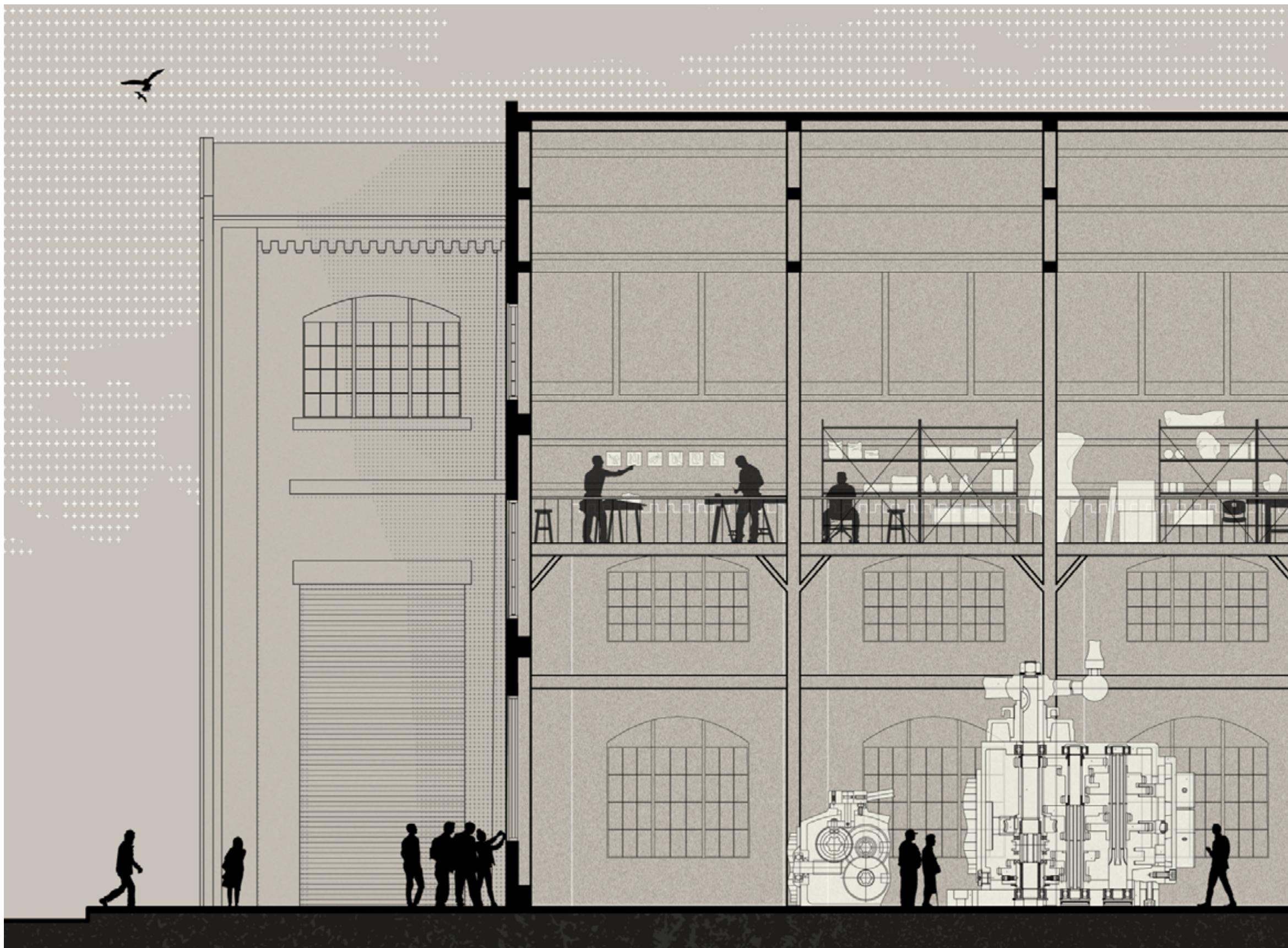


Fig. 158

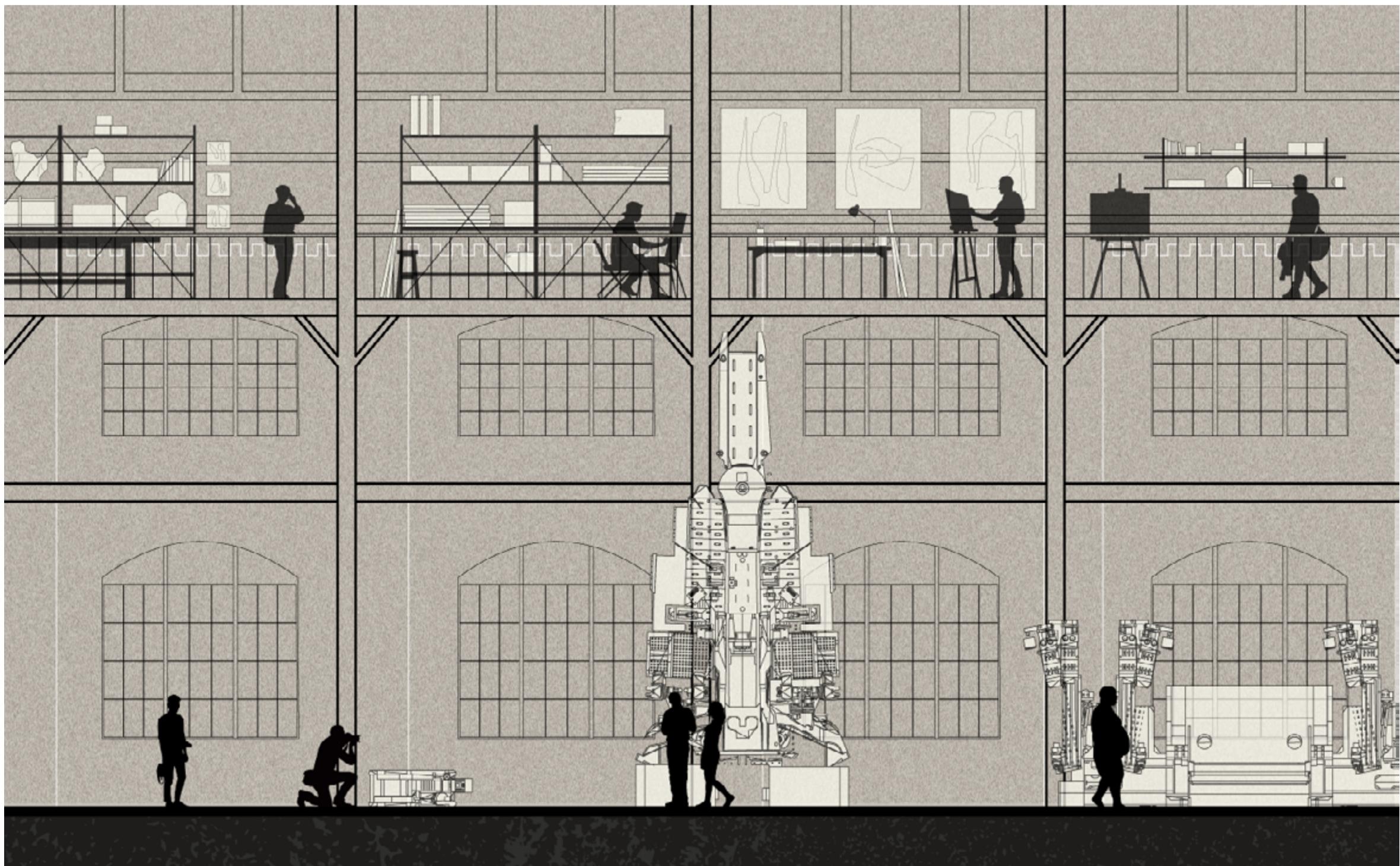
Details from the compound rubbing.



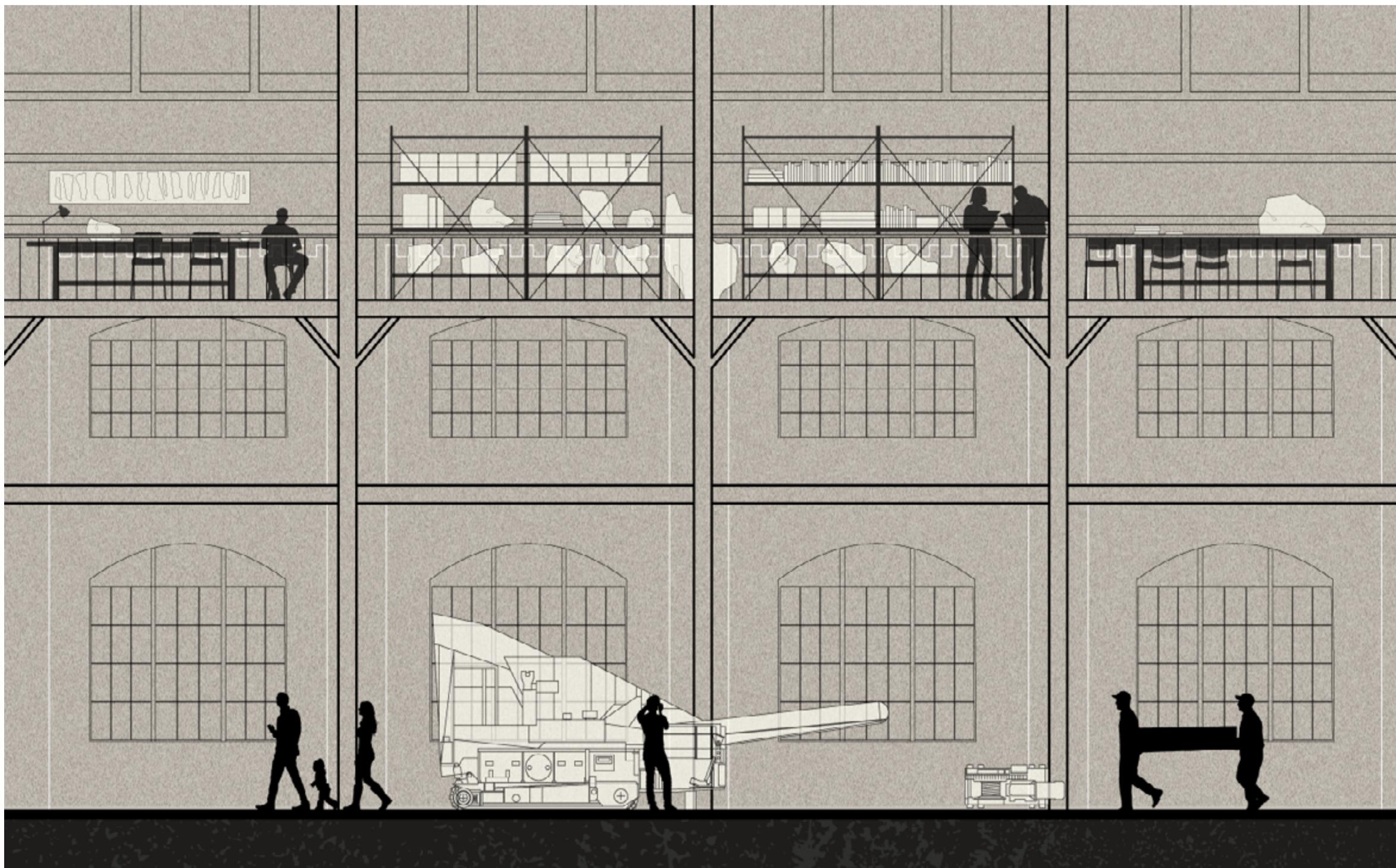
North-South Section of Building 8 during Phase III.
The gallery in Building 8 is open to the public to view the artifacts
uncovered during deconstruction.



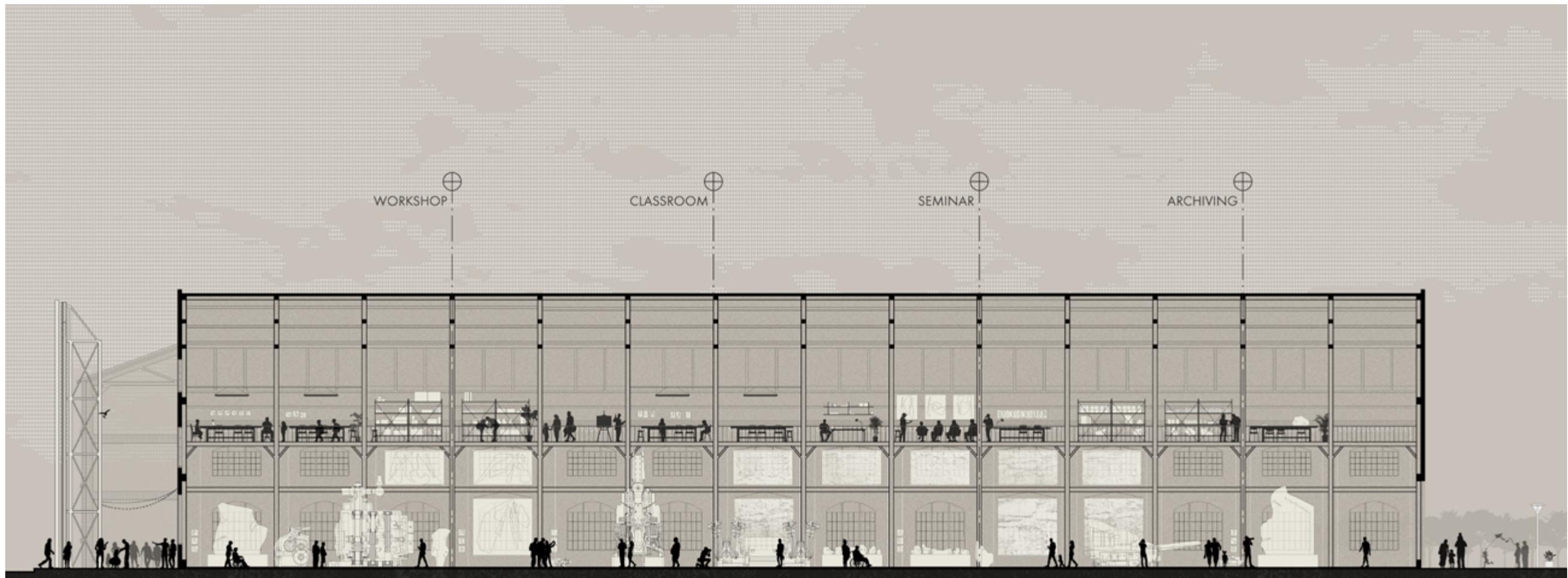
North-South Section of Building 8 during Phase III, Detail 1. ^{re}construction
Spectators look through the windows of Building 8 to the gallery of artifacts on the lower level. The mezzanine level is a casting space for artists.



North-South Section of Building 8 during Phase III, Detail 2.
Visitors investigate the artifacts in the gallery space while artist work in the mezzanine level producing drawings and rubbings.

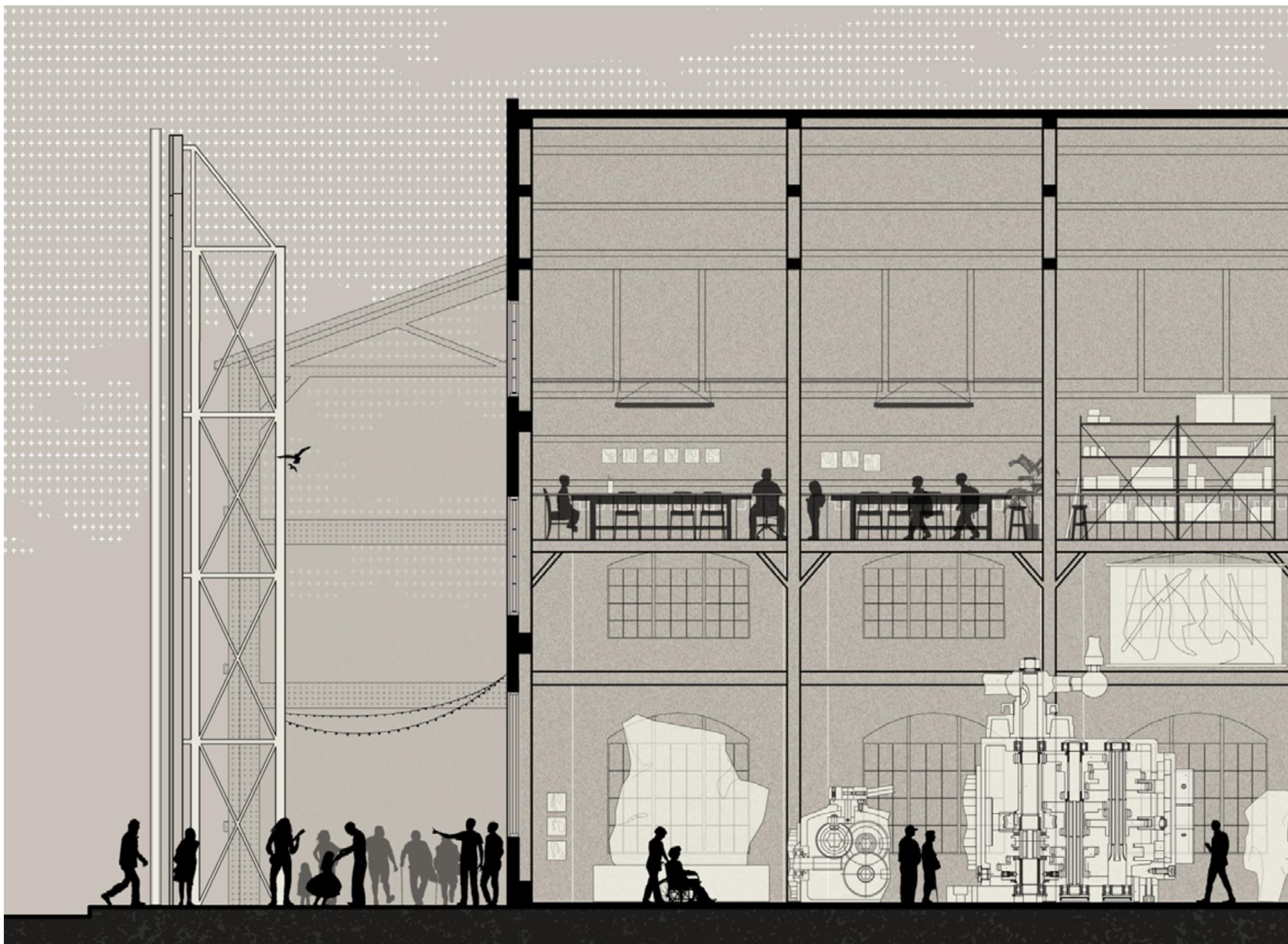


North-South Section of Building 8 during Phase III, Detail 3.
The mezzanine level of Building 8 also houses an archive of materials discovered during demolition and information about the history of the site.

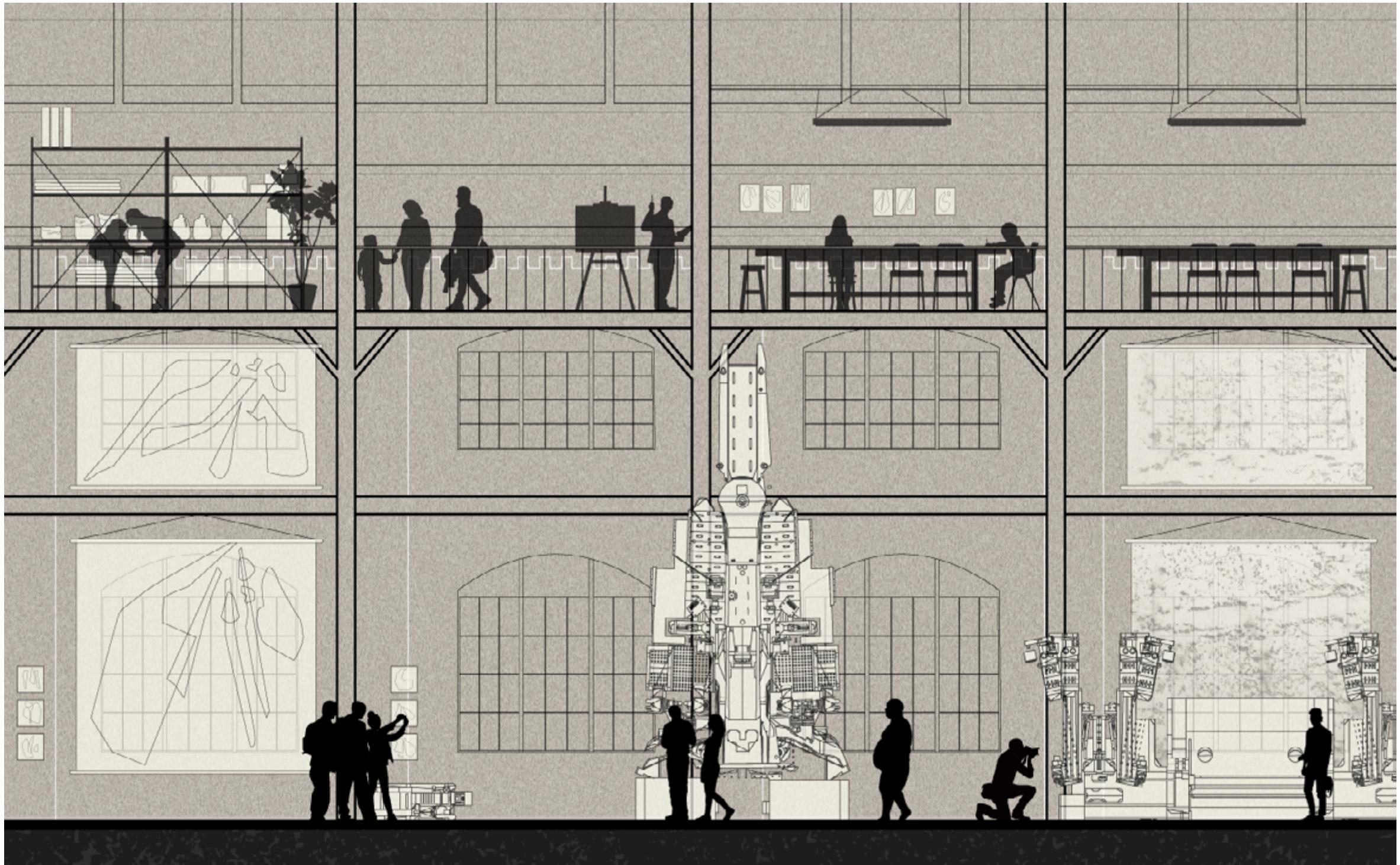


North-South Section of Building 8 at the end of Phase IV.

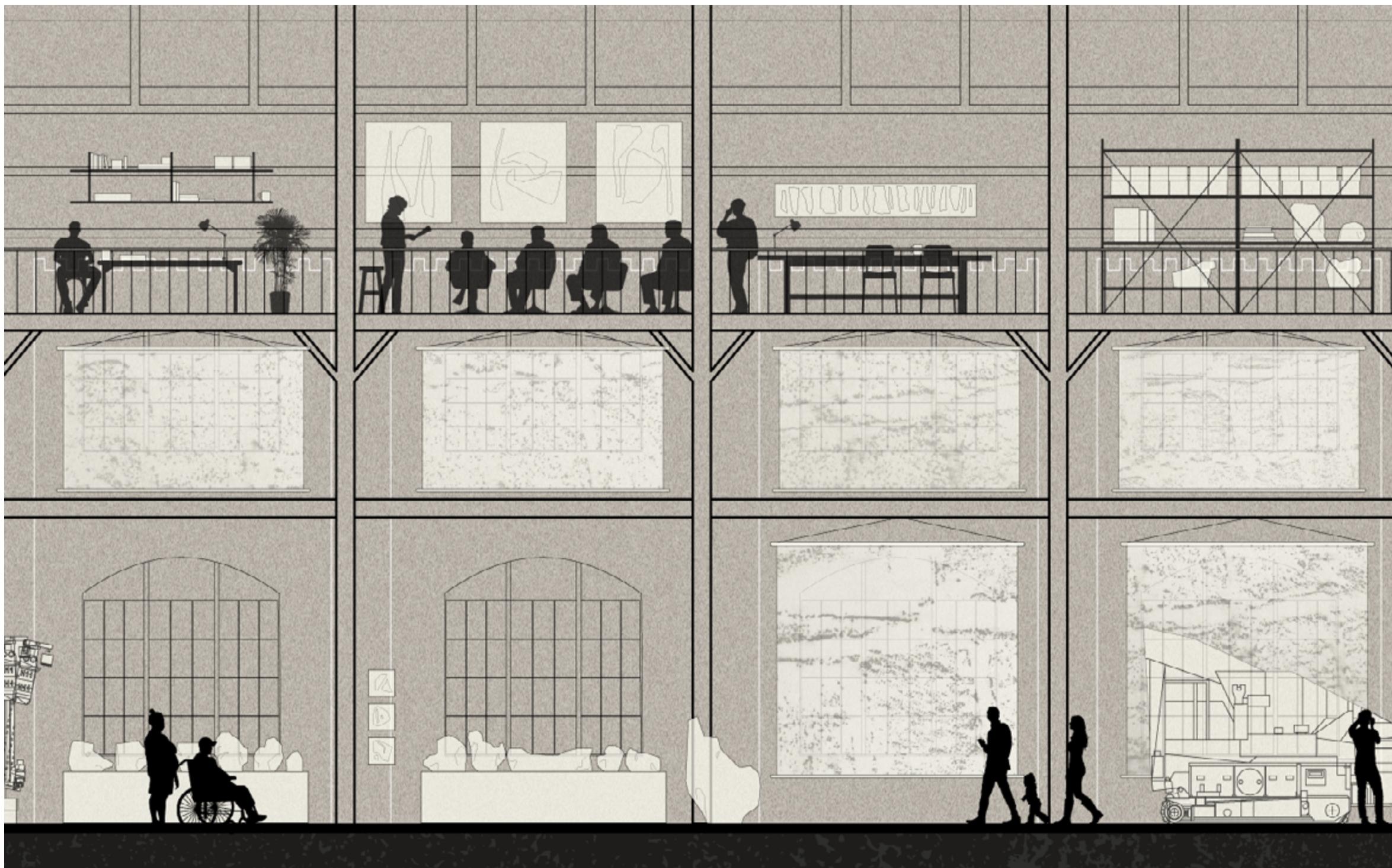
Building 8 is fully open to the public and houses a gallery complete with artifacts and artistic creations as well as classrooms, workshops, and meeting spaces on the mezzanine level.



North-South Section of Building 8 at the end of Phase IV, Detail P. reconstruction
 This section shows the remaining facade of the adjacent building secured by shoring and the exposed structure of the building behind. The lower level is a gallery space and the mezzanine level hosts a children's art workshop.



North-South Section of Building 8 at the end of Phase IV, Detail 2.
The rubbings in the gallery space are displayed over the building's windows in order to illuminate the rubbing and create a caustic effect on the interior.



North-South Section of Building 8 at the end of Phase IV, Detail 3.
 Like the rubbings, the wax castings are displayed in front of the window to illuminate them
 and reveal the texture of the surface.

07/

POSSIBLE FUTURES



The proposal for deconstruction outlined in this thesis is intended to occur over five phases, each of which draws attention to the spectacle and theatre of demolition and allows for varying degrees of public occupation. However, it cannot be known whether the public might engage with the site the way I have speculated were the project to be undertaken. The first few phases (large-scale demolition, removal of equipment, and public construction) I imagine to be fairly straightforward and see the gradual clearing and reconstructing of the site into a useable space. During the first phase, the public is encouraged to witness the spectacle of demolition, which might have a duration of 2 months. The second phase includes the further deconstruction of the plant and the creation of a viewing platform, and could last for 3 to 4 months. The third phase brings more extensive demolition and the addition of a second viewing platform. This phase may last for 4 months. In the fourth phase, the site is almost completely cleared except for Building 8, several covered spaces, and the southern building façade. Upon completion of the fourth phase, the site is now clear of toxins and hazards and a large area is now open for the public to use. My proposal would see one final phase of deconstruction, wherein all remaining structures from the original factory are removed. However, it is plausible that before this final phase, residents might seek to pause the demolition from proceeding further and maintain the site in its semi-deconstructed state.

Pausing at a near complete stage of deconstruction would provide a number of programmable spaces capable of facilitating a number of seasonal uses. These remaining spaces include Building 8, multiple covered outdoor spaces, and a large park bordered by industrial building facades at one end and elevated platforms at the other. In this scenario, the public reimagines and readapts the site to host a variety of public functions. The upper level of Building 8 houses public classes and workshops while the lower level is a gallery/archival space. The covered spaces adjacent to Building 8 become a space for farmers' markets and outdoor galleries for local artists (fig 170). In the evenings, these areas become venues for film screenings, theatrical/musical performances and art events. The huge open areas of the site can be used by the public for leisure and recreation – for children to play sports and ride bikes while adults picnic in the grassy areas or lounge and read books in the shade. Food stalls and pop-up cafes and vendors can share this space with members of the public and sell coffee, ice cream, hotdogs, and sodas to anyone looking for a snack. The interconnected platforms provide a raised pathway for joggers and dog walkers to meander through the site. This network of paths is punctuated by plateaus and secluded courtyards occupied by people practicing yoga, having family cookouts, or playing frisbee-golf (fig 169). In the evenings, these platforms provide elevated seating for audiences attending concerts or film screenings while vendors below sell popcorn and candies.

In the winter, Building 8 houses an indoor farmers' market allowing local producers to sell their goods year-round. The adjacent skating rink is the largest publicly maintained outdoor skating surface in the city and is utilized by all ages. When the cold becomes too much, skaters can warm up with a hot chocolate or coffee in the winter market, which is set up under the roof of the covered outdoor structures. Here, vendors sell seasonal goods from small wooden stalls under strings of lights. People stroll through the market with their families looking for gifts and enjoying the ambiance. Across the skating rink, people wander along the elevated platforms to admire the light displays and performances and are able to sit by large public bonfires to sip coffee and warm up while children slide down toboggan runs that they built from the top of the platforms into the snow below.

At night, this site changes. The families that occupy this site during the day are gone, and in their place are small groups of unhoused residents and drug users seeking shelter under the covered spaces or in the secluded courtyards of the elevated platforms. Hidden by the building facades to the south and the elevated platforms to the north, the most vulnerable members of the city turn the site into their own temporary residence. Beneath the covered spaces, the ground is dotted with tents - some commercial, some made from tarps and shopping carts (fig 171). People chat in front of small bonfires enjoying each others company. By dawn, this micro-town is slowly dismantled until there is almost no sign left behind of the night's activities.

It is fair to suggest that many forces might change the trajectory of this thesis were it to be attempted on the actual site. The “public” referred to throughout my proposal are made up of a diverse group of people, each with their own understanding of the significance of the site both historically and contemporarily. In this possible future, the “poetic” deconstruction of the GE site is left incomplete. All reminders of what GE has meant to the city (both positive and negative) have not been cleared. For many, this may mean that the memory of the plant lives on. For others, however, the history of the site is not important. What matters is what the site offers in its present state – an opportunity for picnics, performances, and play. Yet even if the ultimate outcome of the proposal was not achieved and the site was not fully cleared, the project would still create an interesting dynamic between conservation, demolition and public occupation. Regardless of how the public reinterprets the site, this thesis nonetheless raises questions around the public role and engagement how the public might be brought into the process of demolition and reappropriation in a way that is meaningful and allows for a historically significant site to take on new life.



During phase II, spectators watch the deconstruction process from elevated viewing platforms



At the end of phase IV, the viewing platforms are appropriated and reinterpreted by the public.

Fig. 169



At the end of phase IV, the remaining covered structures are appropriated and reinterpreted by the public.



At the end of phase IV, at night, these public spaces become home to many of the city's most vulnerable groups.

08/ CONCLUSION



The goal of this thesis is to reinterpret a former industrial site through a carefully choreographed deconstruction process that engages with public in an intimate and immediate way. The former plant is poetically unravelled as layers are slowly shaved from it; unwinding its history and revealing secrets it has long kept. The theatre that is latent in any act of demolition is emphasized in this project as the curious public become engaged audiences watching as the former factory slowly dissolves cell by cell. Within this theatrical demolition, beautifully spectacular moments emerge and captivate the viewer; cuts through the building, views of hidden interior spaces, or the poetic form of the ruin. Although this process is a form of physical erasure, it documents the demolition through artistic production. The works produced by these artists are, in themselves, a form of preservation, but more than that they are tools that allow visitors to re-see the site and interact with fragments in an intimate way. By touching a casting of the wall, the visitor develops an intimate connection to the site in a way that eliminates any positive or negative associations with the plant – at that moment, the visitor's consciousness is consumed by this haptic experience.

Through the gradual reappropriation of the General Electric plant, this project also questions what it means to give control of a site completely to the public. This project does not prescribe any program or function for the site once

it is cleared, rather it leaves specific building remnants in place as potential programmatic spaces and allows the public to determine their function. This likely means that as the public become accustomed to the site, there will be a fairly bizarre yet productive coexistence between the many members of the public. This cross-section might include dog-walkers, urban gardeners, unhoused residents, children playing, etc.

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The proposal for a poetic deconstruction of the General Electric site in Peterborough, Ontario, arose initially out of my interest in the beauty of demolition; both aesthetically and philosophically. The idea that the physical forms of demolition only existed for brief moments in time and the notion that once the act was complete, it was a sort of re-set for the site were both compelling concepts to me. When GE Peterborough closed its doors in 2018, question arose as to what to do with the 50-acre plant that had once been the driving economic force for the city. In addressing this question, I became interested in bridging the gap between the way conservation respects and values a building's historical significance and the way demolition offers total liberation of a site in an attempt to develop a methodology that could carefully and thoughtfully use demolition as a beautiful and productive act in the life of a site.

This thesis proposes a new method of engaging and reinterpreting abandoned buildings, which is neither indiscriminate demolition nor ruin porn. Rather, this project creates processes that makes deconstruction a productive act in the lifecycle of the building - a poetic interpretation of conventional demolition that acknowledges that the buildings' gradual destruction is just a short sequence of moments in the life of the site

Reflecting now on the implications of this proposal, I believe that the fundamental value of imagining a poetic deconstruction is that it supports us in questioning our relationship with buildings and their demolition. By considering the poetics of demolition, we might be able to conceive of ways that historically significant buildings may be thoughtfully demolished to make way for possible futures while still 'conserving' the building through education and artistic production. This poetic form of demolition encourages us to rethink the way that we typically deal with old buildings – it proposes another option that is neither indiscriminate demolition nor lavish preservation. Developing a new methodology for demolishing or conserving culturally significant buildings invites communities to appreciate the history and significance of what the building represents while also allowing these communities the freedom to explore new futures that are not determined by their past. I feel that the proposed methodology prevents abandoned or decommissioned buildings from becoming mausoleums for a romanticized history and, instead, direct the public's eyes away from the past, toward the future.

If this proposal were realized, it would encourage creates grounds for the public to engage with the deconstruction of one of Peterborough's most prominent historical landmarks. By encouraging the public to bear witness to the demolition of the General Electric plant, the process of unbuilding is a sort of eulogy for the building. The public becomes aware of the history and significance of GE in Peterborough on a deeper level by slowly and deliberately deconstructing the factory, pausing at specific moments, and revealing layers of the building's history. Through the gradual scraping away of the building and the revealing of views into the historically insular structure, the public is invited into the factory and allowed to interact with the plant's history of production and troubling recent legacy as a hazardous post-industrial site. I believe that this process is not only important because it gives a deeper reading of Peterborough's industrial heritage, but also because it proposes an optimistic view of Peterborough's future. Considering the prosperity that manufacturing industries (most notably General Electric) created for the city, onlookers may be able to imagine a future where Peterborough is, once again, an economic force within Canada.

I feel that there also is value in allowing people to occupy the long-barricaded site at different moments of demolition. Public occupation during demolition fosters a sense of community and ownership over the site throughout every phase of deconstruction and appropriation. By making the demolition of the factory into a spectacular event designed to be witnessed by members of the

community, I believe that there will be a growing sense of interest and concern over what becomes of the site. If people feel that they have a stake in the site's future, then it will ultimately be rearticulated in a way that reflects the needs and desires of the public who will use it.

Further, this rearticulating of the site by the public encourages a rethinking of public parks – both in terms of physical form and public program. This proposal questions what parks look like, what their functions are, and who they are for. By allowing members of the community to appropriate and reinterpret the site, it grows slowly and organically as a dynamic and reactive entity. The public is given the physical framework for the site and is free to rearticulate the spaces. This is a significantly different approach to the planning of public parks than what typically occurs today, where city planners might consult the public but make all of the final decisions. In my proposal, the public is given a framework over which they have total control and thus the park becomes a true extension of the community.

Ultimately, this proposal has theoretical and, if it were implemented, practical implications. On a more philosophical scale, a poetic deconstruction of GE creates a framework to question our relationship with buildings and their demolition. Why are some buildings significant? Why do we tend towards either preserving a building in its entirety or razing it to the ground? The methodology proposed here finds a way to include the act of deconstruction itself as a means of both honouring and liberating a site. In a practical sense, this phased process

of deconstruction would encourage greater interest from the community and better understanding of the site's history, which in turn, I argue, would inspire the public to become invested in the future of the site. This future, now uncoupled from the former building through the poetic process of deconstruction, could be entirely responsive to the desires and interests of the community.



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10/ APPENDIX A

SITE MODEL

The site model was built as a representational tool to visualize the process by which the site developed over time, and allows the user to peel back the layers of history by removing certain building additions and leaving others. The model was constructed at a scale of 1:1000 which gives a detailed impression of the layout of the city (where the old town and the new town meet), the buildings adjacent to the General Electric site, as well as topographical information about the neighbourhood. The buildings that were constructed for the model have proportionally correct facade details, which even account for how these facades changed over time to serve new purposes. The entire GE site is a wooden plug that is removable from the larger model allowing it to be replaced with variations of the site over the different phases of deconstruction. This removable plug accounts for any excavation that may be conducted on the site by allowing for ¼" of depth (6.5 meters at 1:1 scale) to be removed from the plug while still fitting into the larger model. This plug uses a white matte board layer to delineate grass from pavement on the General Electric site, which also highlights the footprints of the buildings that were demolished in 2014. It also shows how the railway line entered and travelled through the site. Although this model does not show how an individual building could be deconstructed, it operates well as a representational tool capable of illustrating what each phase of deconstruction might look like and how it interacts with its adjacencies.

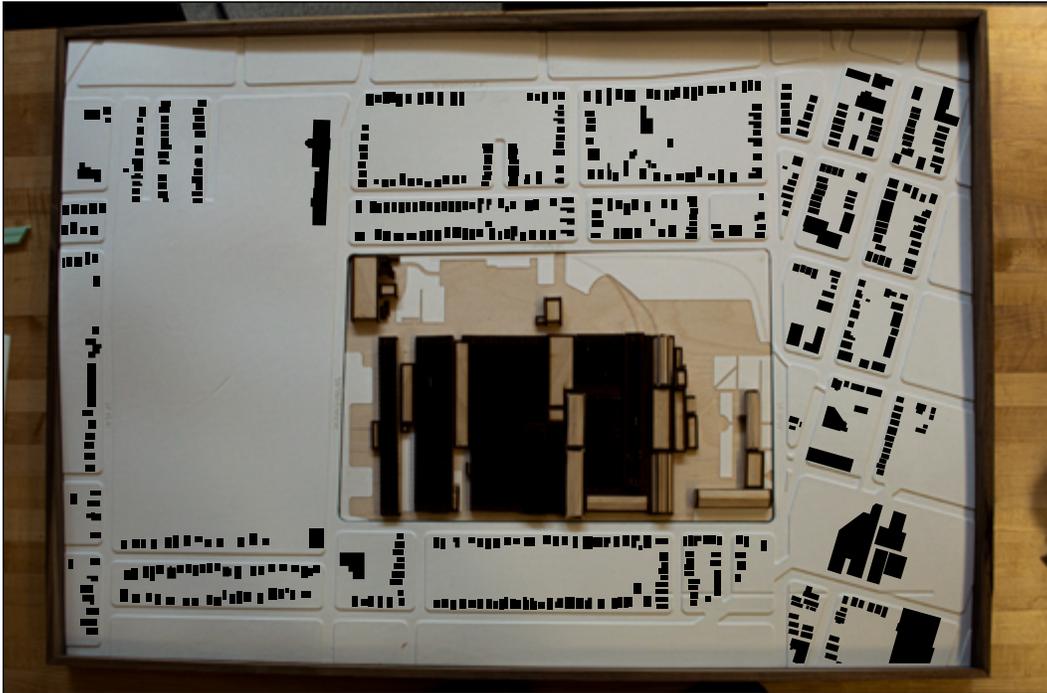


Fig. 174

The site model from above.

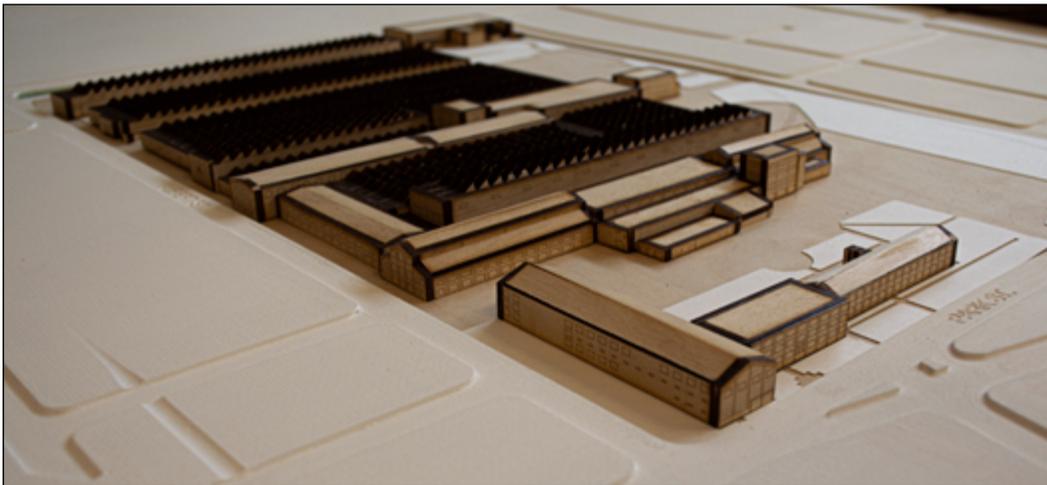


Fig. 175

Recreating the building facades as closely as possible was a primary concern in the design of this model. The site has developed and changed so dramatically over the years that capturing any peculiarities in the facades and exposed traces of history on the site was necessary to represent the site accurately.

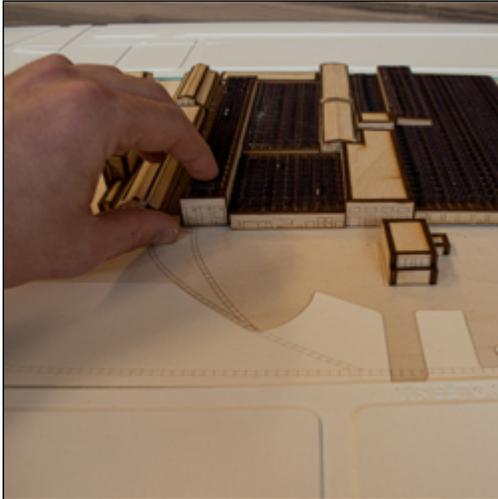


Fig. 176



Fig. 177

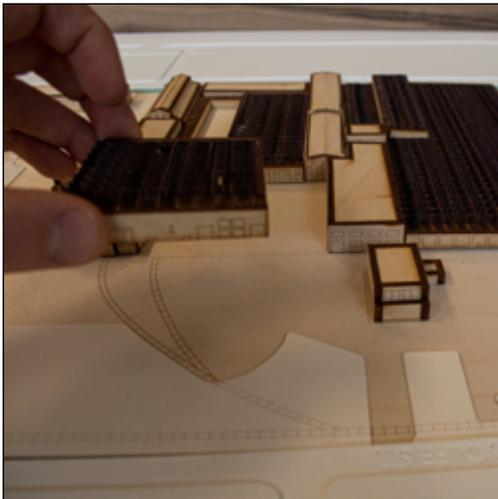


Fig. 178

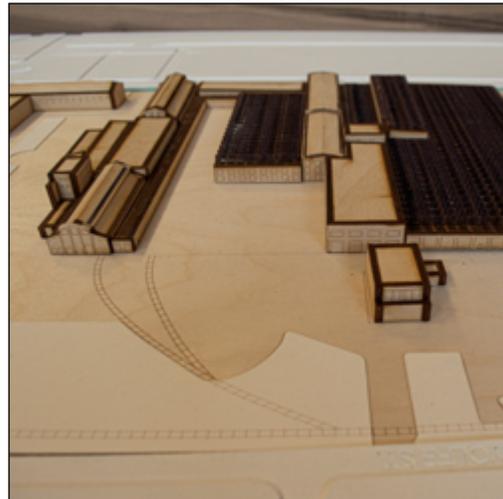


Fig. 179

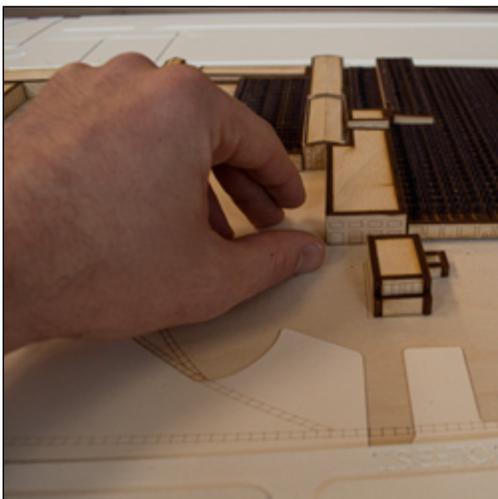


Fig. 180

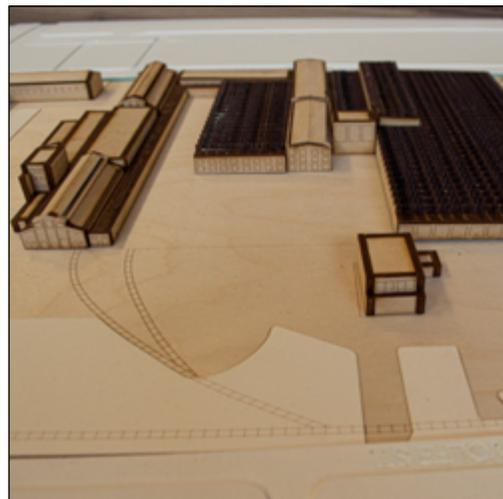


Fig. 181

BAY MODEL

The bay model was built at a 1:50 scale as a representational tool to express structural and spatial qualities of Building 8. The model is based off historic photographs of the interior of the building as it was being constructed (fig 182). The façade of the model is designed to be deconstructed according to its constituent parts; windows, cladding, pilasters/cornice, and ornamental fragments. This model is a useful tool in visualizing how views through the factory change as façade elements are removed as well as determining what the impact is from the



Fig. 182

A very early photograph of the interior of Building 8.
This photo was used as the basis for the design of the bay model.

front of the building when these façade elements are removed. The design of the model allows for selective removal of specific elements while retaining others. This means that the cladding of certain bays is able to be disconnected and only the pilaster/cornice remains, or that everything but the ornamental fragments could be removed from the model. This flexibility allows me to test potential sequences for the deconstruction of the facade to reveal certain views into or through the building. These tests begin to give a sense of the dramatic spectacle that is created through the act of deconstruction and the spectator views this spectacle.



Fig. 183

The bay model with removable facade details. This model explores potential facade deconstruction techniques - illustrating the process of demolition from the interior and exterior



A view from the interior with the windows removed from the facade.

Fig. 184



Fig. 185

A detail showing potential disassembly.



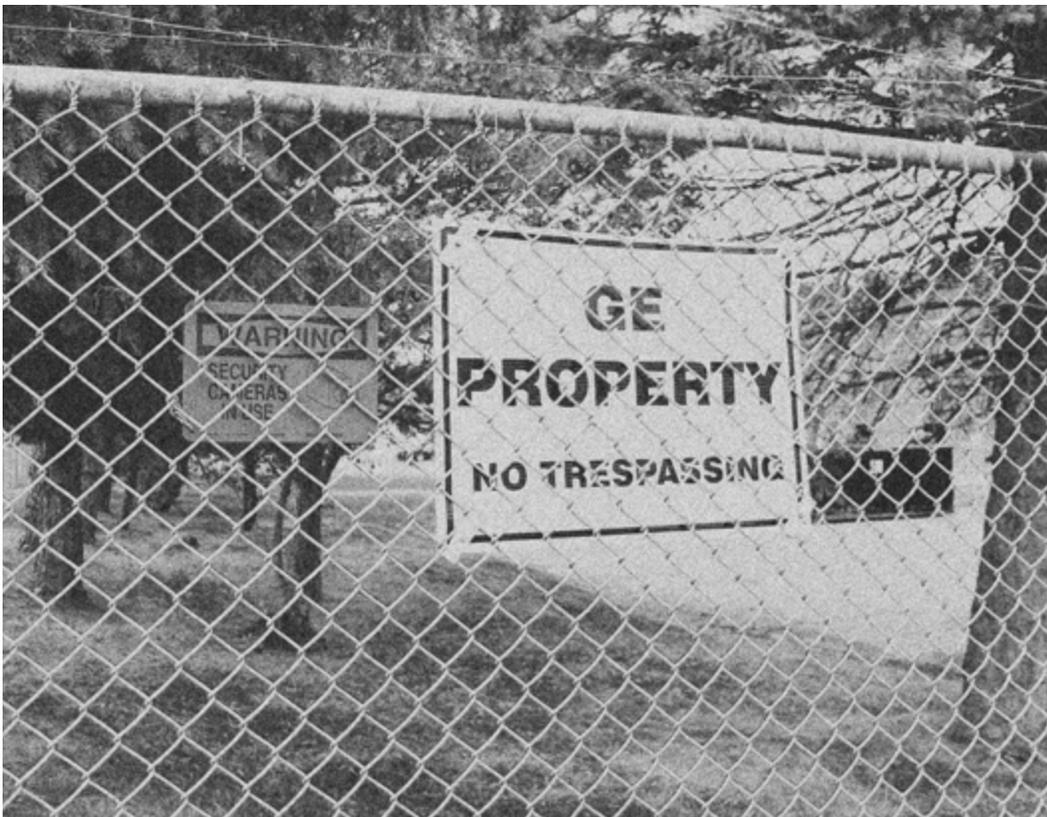
Fig. 186

A detail showing potential disassembly.

10/ APPENDIX B

GENERAL ELECTRIC PHOTOS

These photos provide context to better understand the physical attributes of the General Electric plant in Peterborough, Ontario. The photos were taken between September 2019 and April 2020.

















10/ APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL FIELD RESEARCH PHOTOS

LANSDOWNNE PLACE MALL

These photos were taken as research into the process of demolition and a study of how the public reacts to the spectacle created through the destruction of a well-known landmark in Peterborough, Ontario.

The photos were taken between December 2019 and April 2020.











UNITED CANADIAN MALT BUILDING

These photos were taken as research into the process of demolition and to document the beautiful and strange forms that emerged through the process of destruction.

The photos were taken between January 2020 and April 2020.















SAINT PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

These photos were taken as research into spectacular qualities of the demolition process and the effects created by pausing demolition at specifically intriguing moments.

The photos were taken between January 2020 and February 2020.







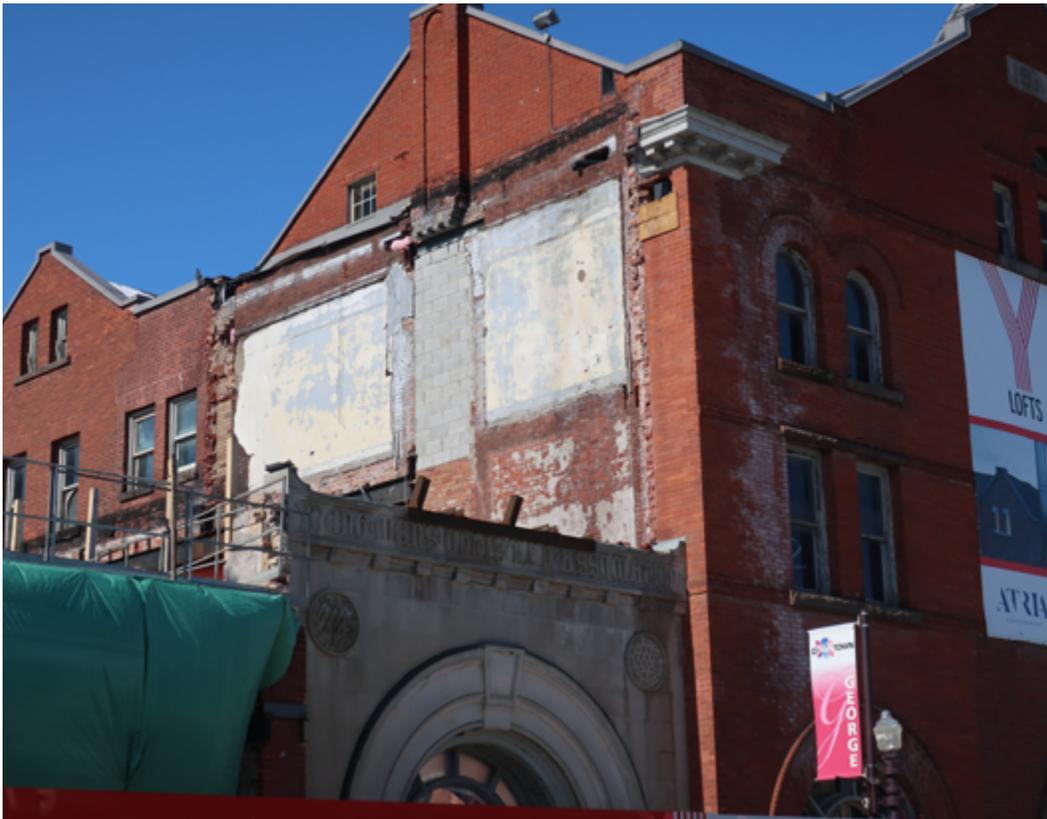
11/ APPENDIX D

FURTHER FIELD RESEARCH

PETERBOROUGH YMCA BUILDING

These photos were taken to illustrate that Peterborough is a city in flux. It is simultaneously tearing down old buildings and constructing new ones. In this project, the old YMCA building is being partially demolished and reused as a luxury condominium.

The photos were taken in February 2020.





PETERBOROUGH YMCA BUILDING

These photos were taken to illustrate that Peterborough is a city in flux. It is simultaneously tearing down old buildings and constructing new ones. In this project, the recently abandoned Baskin Robbins is being demolished to make way for unspecified future developments.

The photos were taken from March to April 2020.







