

The five obstructions to architecture

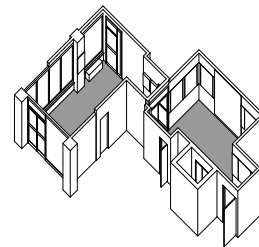
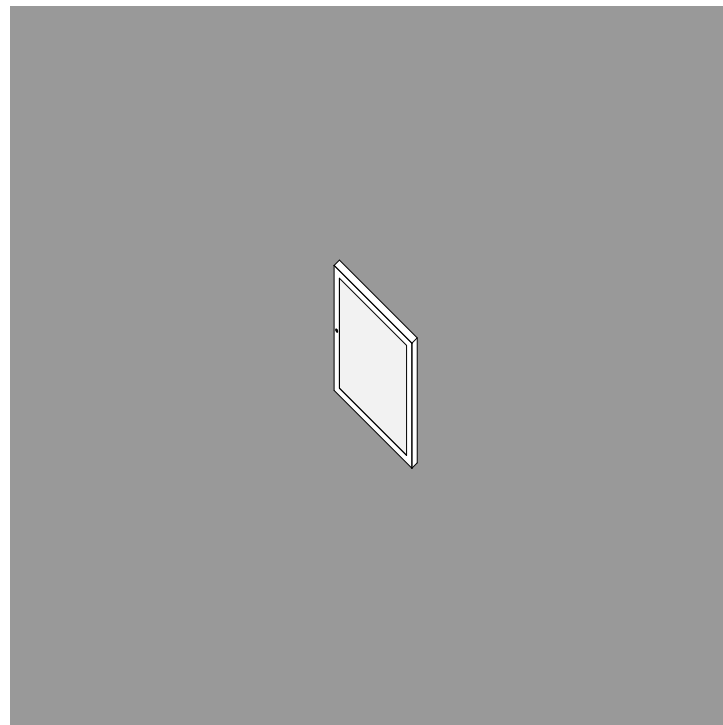
common room

Making and meaning in the current cultural environment requires responding to existing organizational structures, identifying differences and engaging architecture as an ongoing process.

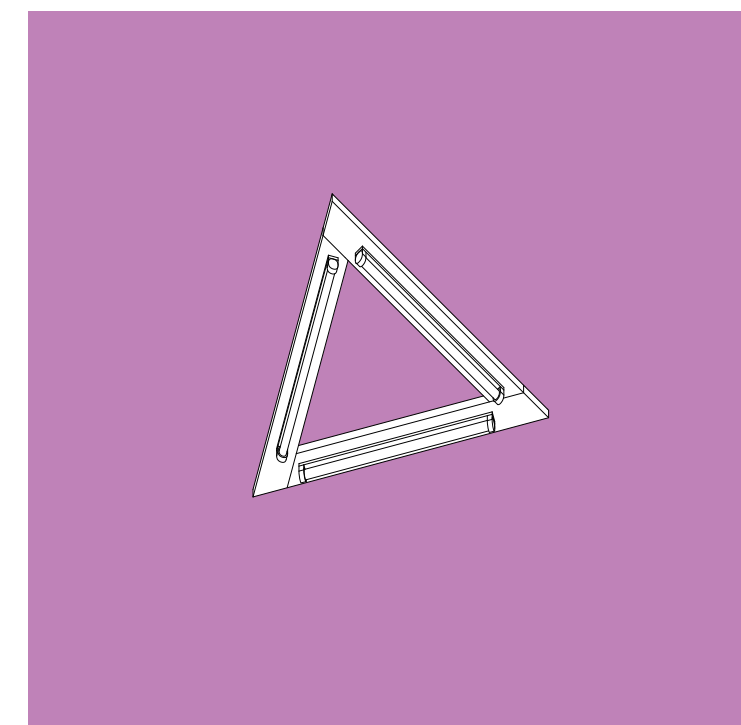
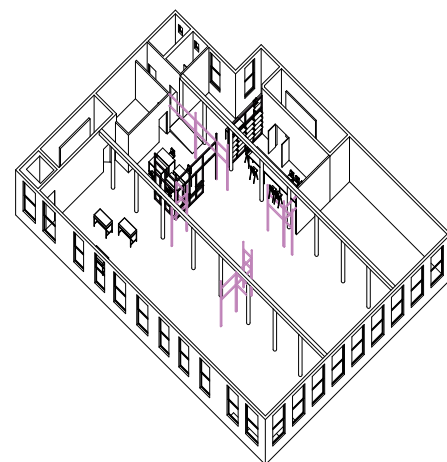
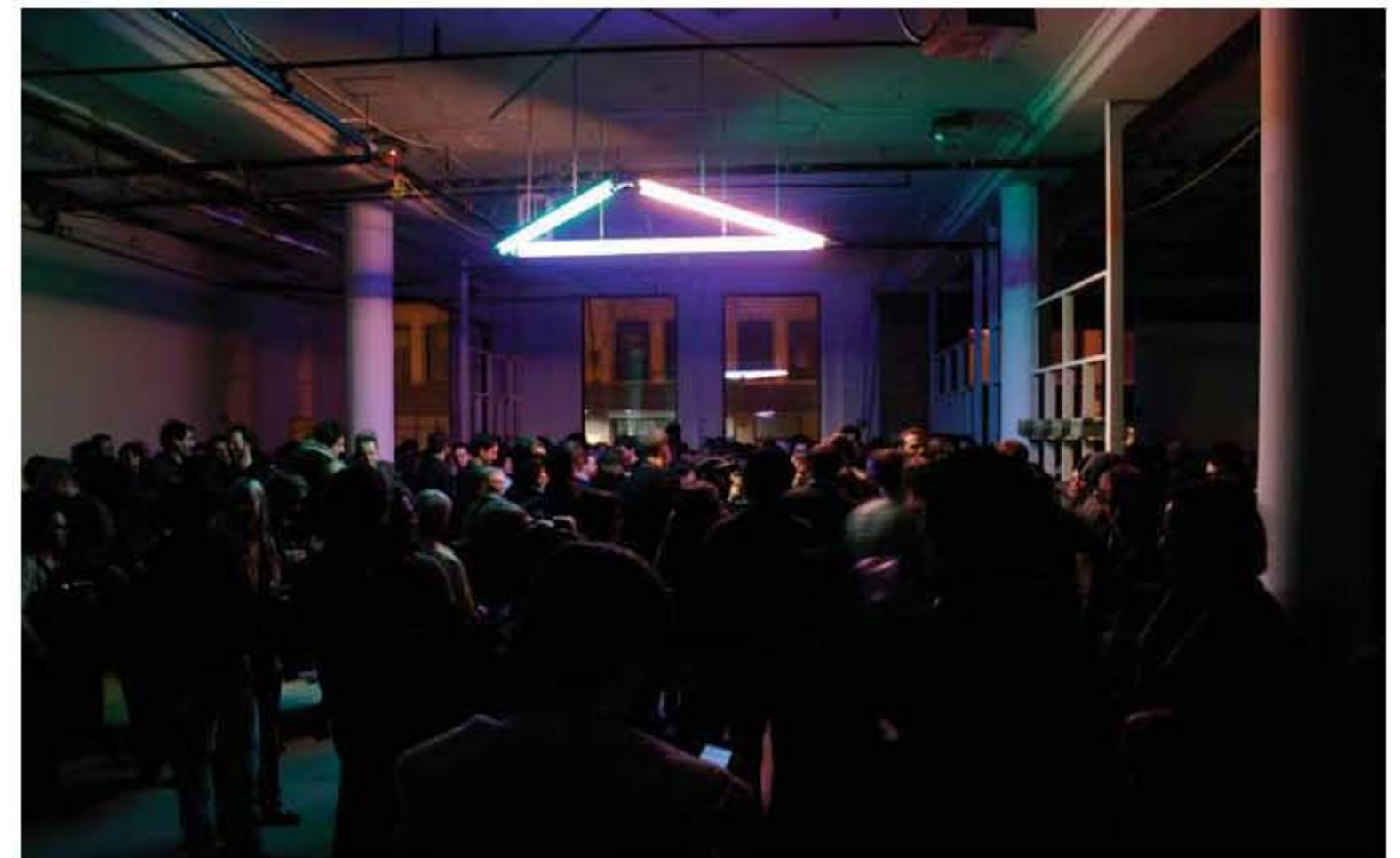
common room is an interdisciplinary design practice comprised of architects **Lars Fischer**, **Maria Ibañez** and **Todd Rouhe**, and sometimes graphic designer **Geoff Han**, working in collaboration with a network of individuals to develop new models of sociality for architecture. Their work extends architectural theory beyond a set of aesthetic proposals by acknowledging the political and economic valences of spatial practice. common room conceptualizes architecture as a series of relations between designers, institutions and user communities. If space has been identified as a critical medium for modern architecture, then common room has observed that the space their work defines, though its engagement with the built and social environment, is a space of negotiation. The 5 obstructions (for architecture) articulate a methodology. They are provocations for common room as an architectural practice and the discipline of architecture in general.

- 1 **Appropriate the Everyday**
To appropriate the everyday means paying attention, and using ordinary things in extraordinary ways.
- 2 **Never Finish**
To never finish is to acknowledge that conceiving and using architecture is an interconnected process.
- 3 **Share Space**
To share space is to negotiate, to work out how and when groups and events are sequenced or overlapped within a given space.
- 4 **Include Difference**
To include difference means an adjustment of conventional spatial and cultural boundaries.
- 5 **Don't Be New**
To not be new means that often times what a project needs already exists within its definition or context.



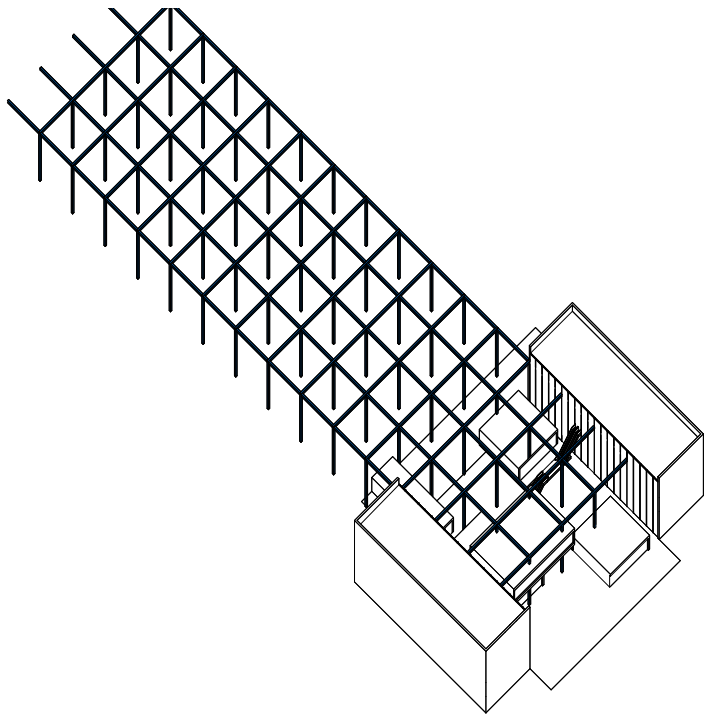


1 Appropriate the Everyday: common room 2
 common room 2 is an exhibition space in the public elevator lobby of a mid-century office building that houses several non-profit groups. This room is a shared space borrowed from the housing cooperative that owns the office building. The works and projects displayed at common room 2 engage the community in a dialogue about the social, economic, and political structures of the built environment. These dialogues are revised through a consideration of local contexts; as such, common room 2 is continually renovated in an open-ended process of installation and inhabitation. The simple occupation of institutional space can be a powerful architectural act.



2 Never Finish: Artists Space, New York, 2009 in collaboration with ifau & Jesko Fezer / Light Fixture: 177 Livingston, Brooklyn, 2010

The design process for this non-profit exhibition space was an ongoing exchange between the director, the staff and the collective design team. An open frame work of wood studs defines the negotiated boundary between staff workspaces and the public areas of the gallery. Bookshelves mounted between the wood studs create a bookstore and social bar on one side of the partition and a more private archive on the other side. The exhibition space is left open. The frame work is incomplete—a fragment of a more extensive system of elemental coordinates that break up the neutral space of the open loft typology. The triangular light fixture was part of a proposal for 177 Livingston—a shared space for three arts organizations—that also included a cubic storage volume and a circular platform for performing, meeting or reading. Each of these elements relates to the identity and shared use of the space and defines areas for specific activities while leaving the overall organization open-ended. Only the triangle was built.



3 Share Space: Natural History Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009

The proposal for the Natural History Museum in Copenhagen is based on "The States of Matter," a collection of ideas and observations about Nature, Science and Culture conceived as a network of public knowledge. Each state has the potential to form a cluster of associations that reflect an attitude about human experience within the natural environment. The proposed institutions of the Natural Sciences intend to physically and discursively expand the Museum. The entire site of the Botanical Garden is considered part of the Museum floor plan. The landscape is re-programmed in reference to the proposed garden monument, which becomes the locus of extended museum exhibitions, events and research.

STATENS NATURHISTORISKE MUSEUM

The States of Matter

STATE 1

Encounters with Natural History: Organization



Scillas-treatise, 1670



Modern open research lab

Classical versions of Natural History (Pliny to Darwin) have had very determined historical outcomes – i.e. the fittest will survive, systems always tend toward equilibrium. Many of the institutions devoted to archiving/displaying and studying the Natural Sciences were established on the basis of this classical model.

However, because classical versions of Natural History have a clearly determined outcome they are closed systems. The same could be said of the buildings that house these institutions – formally, organizationally – they are closed. The

intended to allow for cross-disciplinary work. Research, exhibition design and not least the information displayed in various public spaces is shared between disciplines and program types.

STATE 2

Versailles is overgrown: architecture

Architecture only survives where it negates the form that society expects of it. Where it negates itself by transgressing the limits that history has set for it.

– Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Transgression*



Bernard Tschumi: *Architecture and Disjunction*, 1975



Overgrown urban environment, manga

A view of Versailles overgrown shows the ideal landscape (manicured paths, garden archi-



Encounter child, exhibit

desire to enlarge a collection or resources however, should not simply be understood as an expansion to the closed system. It is an opportunity that opens the system up:

To the public
To an undetermined reading of history
To mutual interactions between departments
To interactions between departments and public
To the outside

"The public program of the Museum is expanded. They are not supposed to be a wall, to lock them in."

ecture and graded earth) covered by an unwanted proliferation of plant life. The territory of knowledge and power are transgressed by uncontrolled vegetation. Rational order exists simultaneously but is subsumed by that which was once dominated by the engineered landscape (use another term). The hierarchy of knowledge is dismantled; weeds have sprouted from fissures in paved surfaces and garden monuments.

In this state both the past and future of human enlightenment are seen simultaneously.

The image of nature as beautiful is nostalgic; the picturesque is static and the overgrown garden is unsettling.



High voltage pylons in ice storm

STATE 3

Swarm: the public

So the green field To oblivion freed Overgrown, flowering With insects and weeds And the wild noise Of a hundred dirty flies

– Arthur Rimbaud



Patterns of ant movement



Partisans crowd

The swarm emerges when spatial praxis meets the political. A social phenomenon. A large number of human voices stirred up in the urban environment. The swarm is an urban response and a political response to a public institution of knowledge.

The swarm, as a form of human response, is a form of human response that is possible in a dense, ordered, organization of program activities. The public space that man patterns, moves, favors, programs, designs, that gathering space is not there, but might exist without it, research, discipline. The response becomes part of the program. A new program begins. The public in that sense, human cannot be understood, society, territory in itself, building into the natural element.

STATE 4

Geography of use: program (or site strategy)



Group talk, Allen Ginsberg



Picnic



Yona Friedman

Conceptually, architecture as idealized space has been overrun by a new social and spatial praxis. In a more literal sense this results in an expanded territory of use. The museum extends into the Botanical Garden.

An area of contingent activity passing through the botanical garden between the street entrance and the new museum facilities.

The existing or historic, topographic given, and garden design become part of a new program of use that extends of more that one body. From the individual to the collective garden-landscape.

The reason for this is that the existing garden landscape is not a neutral ground but a framework for use over time.

STATE 5

Superstructure: urban strategy

"When structure defines the general form of legibility, nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid. Architecture under these conditions is the architecture, the system of systems."

– Denis Holler

Superimposed on the Botanical Garden the grid structure forms a single continuous environment, the context (the city, Copenhagen or the world) rendered uniform by technology, culture and all other forms of imperial knowledge. This allows for truly democratic human experience; every point on the grid is identical.



Superstudio



Biosphere, Buckminster Fuller

The ecological garden (with its own program) the legibility of the historical context and the habitat, but the museum (which was in the city, in the city, in the city) is not the same. Superimposed on the geography of use, the grid with its own program (the museum) is not the same. The ecological monument will not be the same.

STATE 6

Paradigms: Denmark's modernist tradition

World-wide exchanges help us to overcome national obstacles. This does not

mean that national and regional cultural particularities are going to be eliminated; quite the contrary. It will be up to us to collaborate to protect them.

– Arne Jacobsen



Arne Jacobsen, chairs



Annex to the Statens Museum for Kunst, Østre Anlæg

Rooted in the past, Danish Modern design sought to embrace modern life and to align itself with the principles of rationalism, humanism and democracy. The current design for the Statens Naturhistoriske Museum responds to the strong tradition modern Danish Design.



Clock, Arne Jacobsen

This is a matter of re-asserting the value of materiality and craft in the contemporary cultural environment. Looking within and beyond aesthetic criteria.

STATE 7

Density: Arealbehov (space required)

Miles of unimaginative glass cases crammed with an indigestible mass of small specimens (which) kept the public from many parts of the ... Museum of Natural History even while the famous wildlife zoological groups were educating droves of small boys and other citizens who were not

In search of scientific information – Bernard Rudofsky

The programming strategy calls for a heterogeneous mixing of program types and museum departments.



Central Park, New York

On the North side of the Botanisk Have, the existing Zoological and Geological buildings will be completely reprogrammed, leaving the buildings exterior and interior structure intact. Permanent and temporary exhibition halls, research laboratories and museum collections will be organized as layers of different densities, breaking the Solvgade threshold to the Garden.

STATE 8

Environmental Strategy: Monument as power plant

Humanity is acquiring all the right technology for all the wrong reasons.

Nature is trying very hard to make us succeed, but nature does not depend on us. We are not the only experiment.

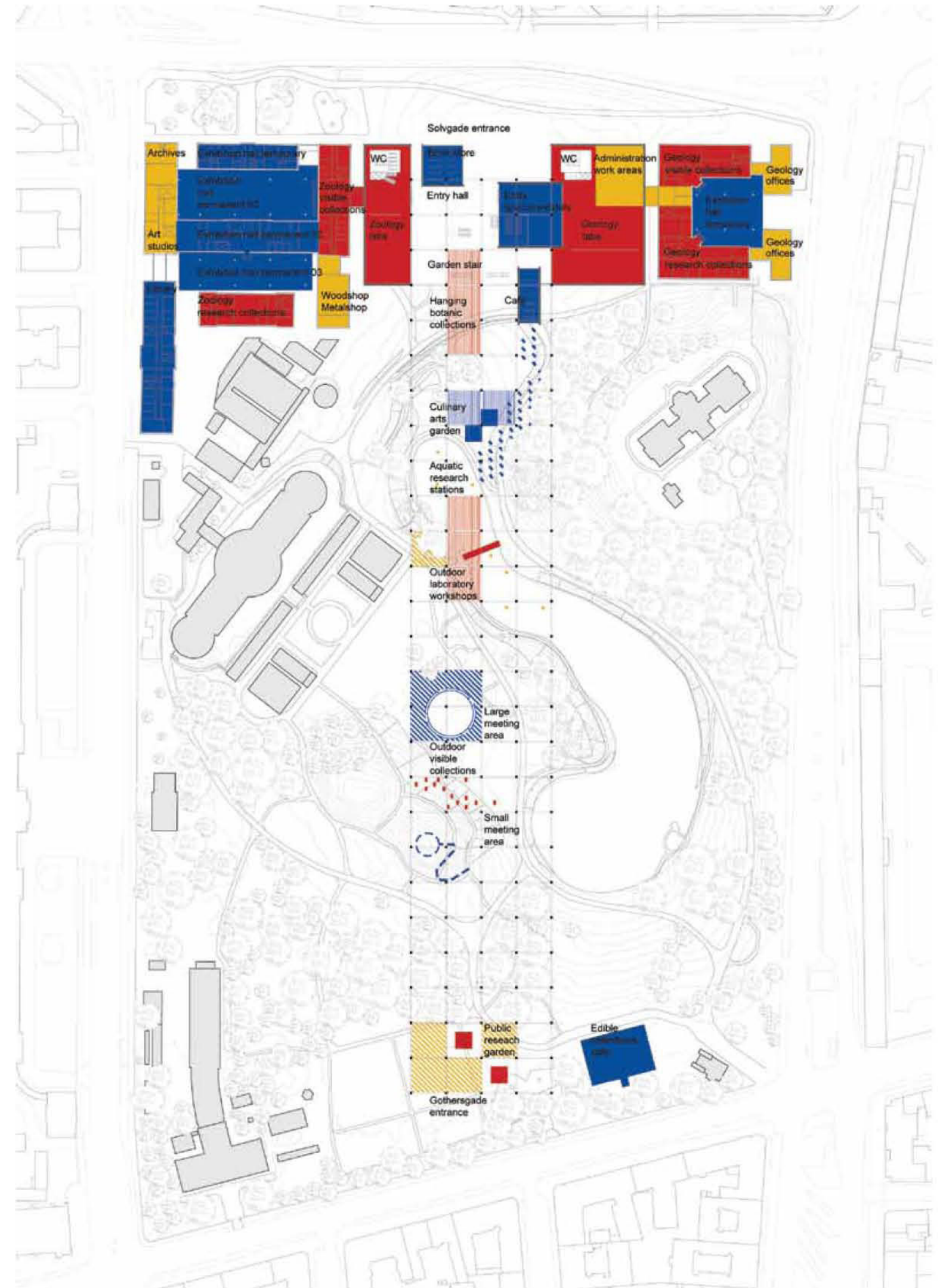
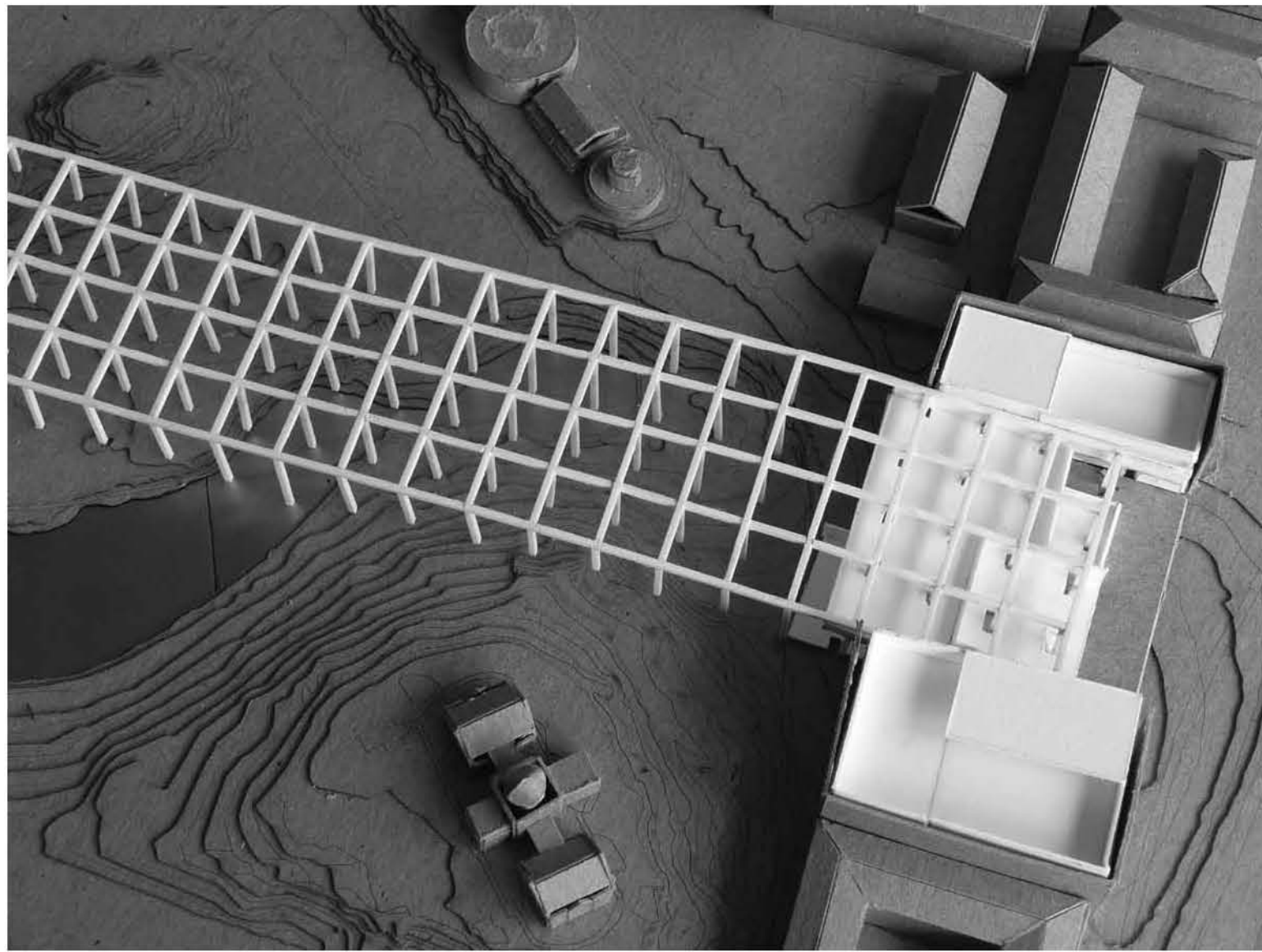
– Buckminster Fuller

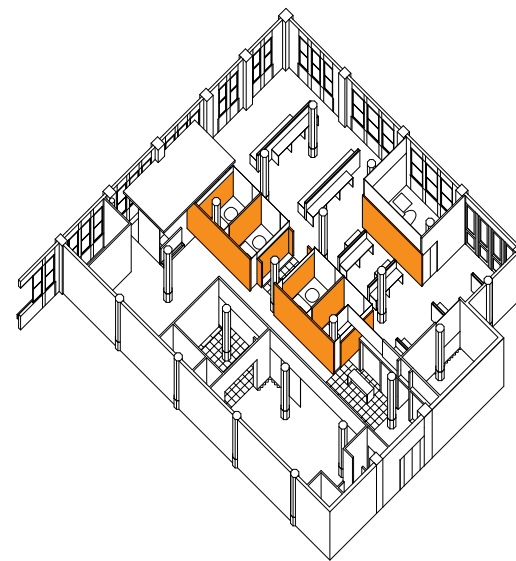


Photovoltaic panel farm

Buckminster Fuller's reservation is that the Universe

consists of non-simultaneously apprehended events. As a gateway and as an extension to the territory of the Museum, the Garden Monument serves as a reference point for an undetermined range of encounters with the social and natural sciences. The Garden Monument operates at the scale of an environmental event; of communications systems and infrastructures for alternative energy assumes.

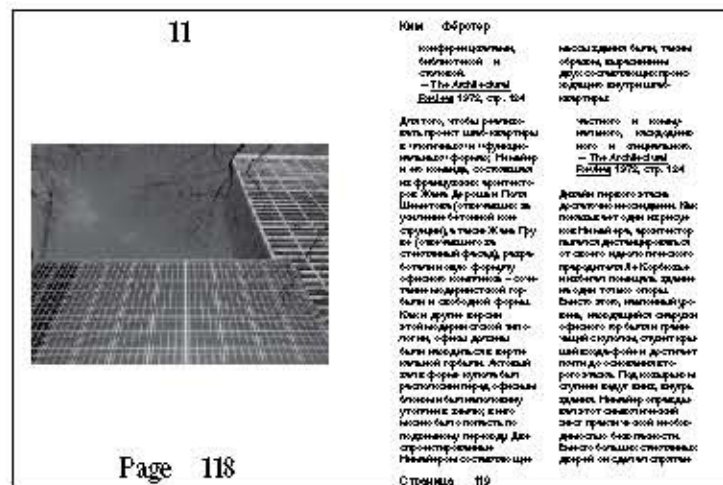
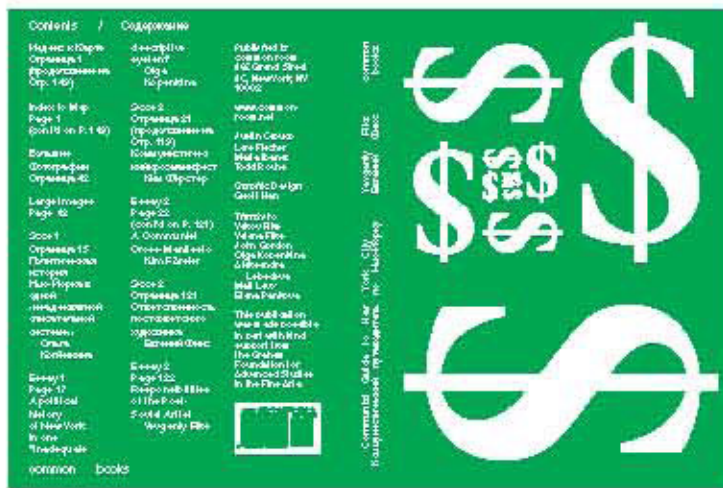
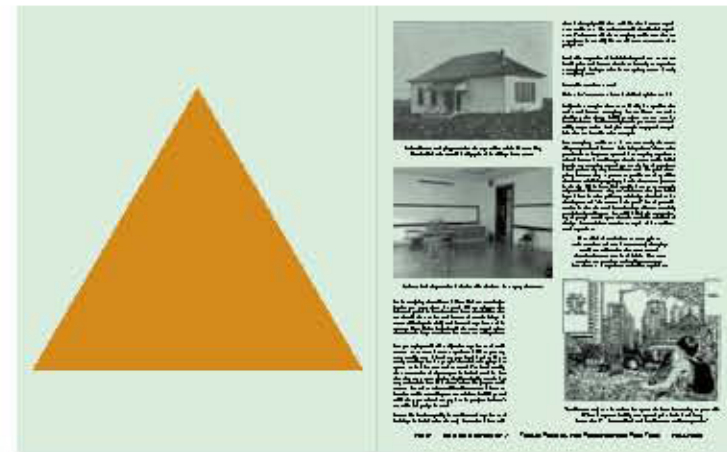
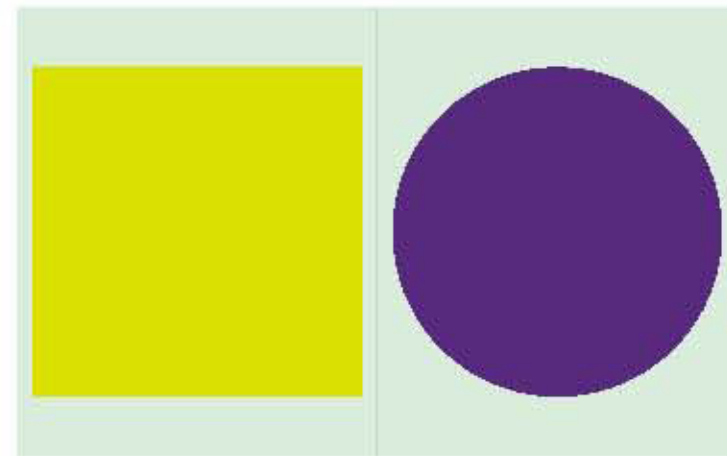
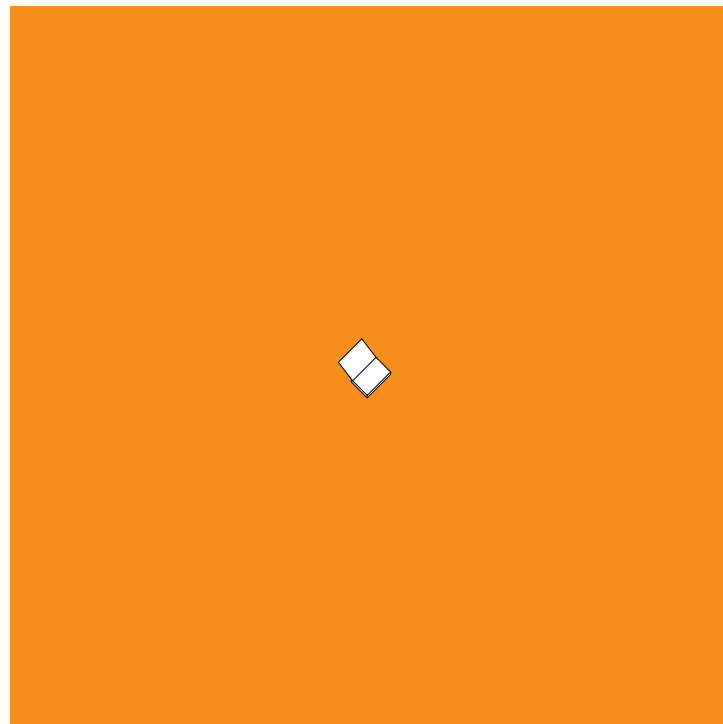


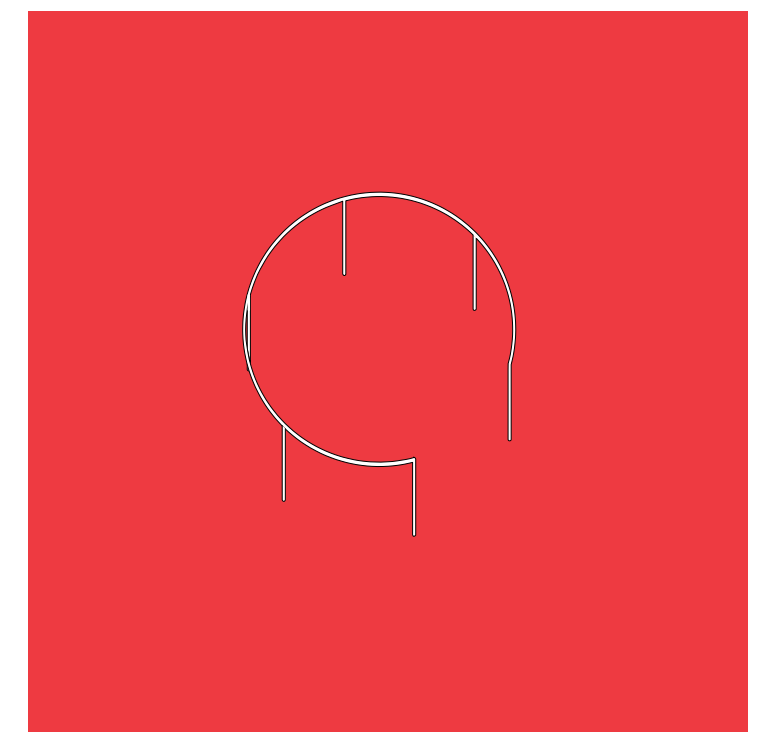
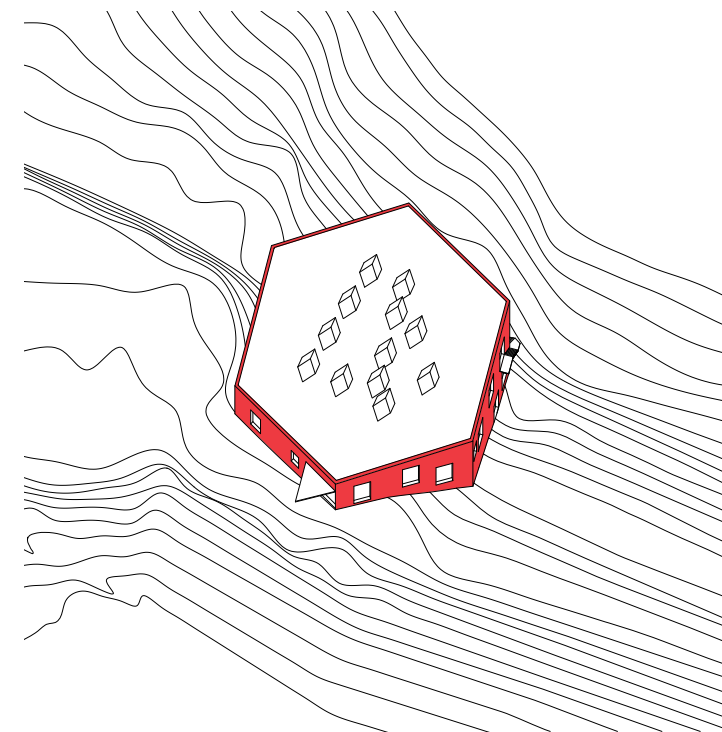
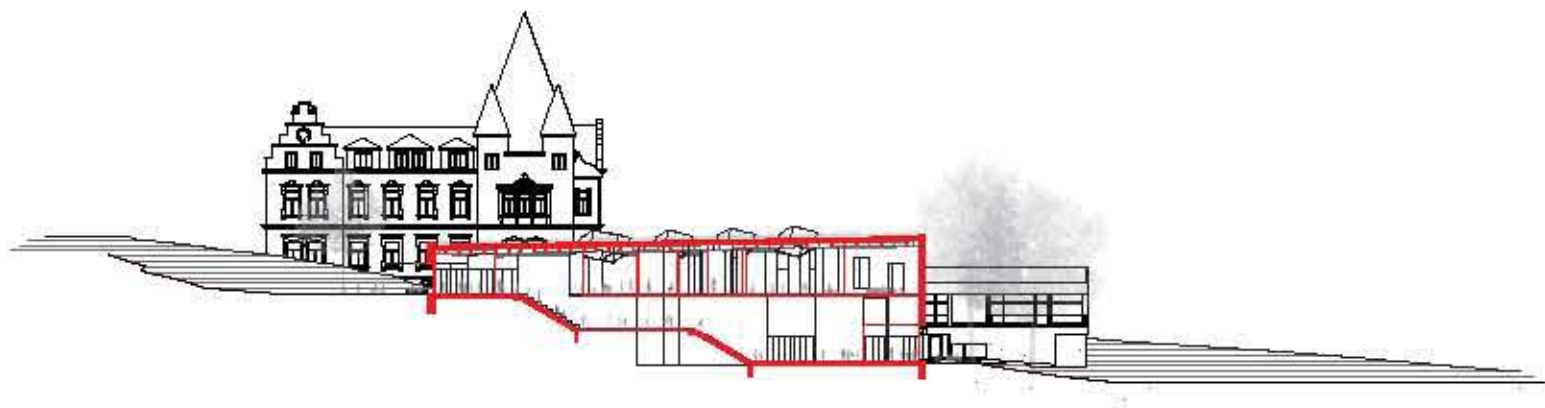
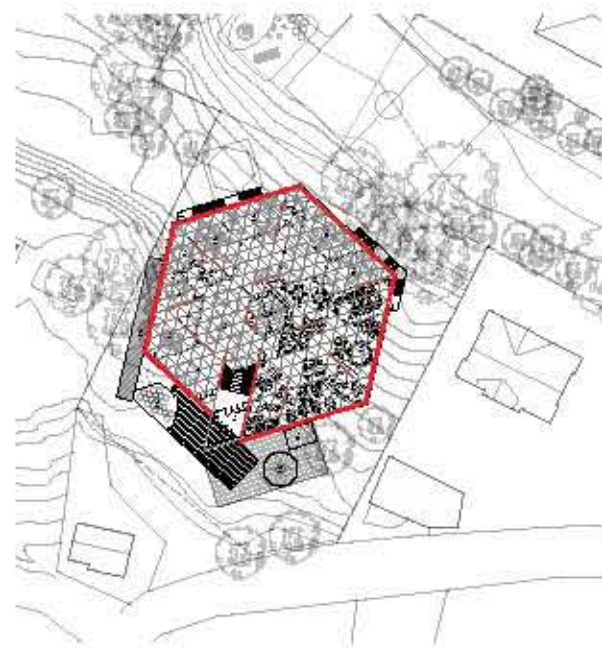


4 Include Difference: New York Foundation for the Arts, Brooklyn, 2009 / Common Books: 2007

The design for the New York Foundation for the Arts establishes a non-hierarchical office plan. Enclosed offices are set back from the windows to create filters and thresholds between the open work spaces and the more public areas of the Foundation. By locating the director's office off center and away from the corner, the central open work space is interrupted, resulting in heterogeneous scales of space ranging from intimate clusters to areas for group activity. Common books is a collaborative editorial project involving artists, graphic designers, architects and other cultural producers who share an interest in thinking critically about the built environment. The project serves as a forum that facilitates an open dialog between authors and readers, text and context, users and producers. Each publication manages difference by looking for a format that gives representation to a wide range of concerns and addresses diverse publics.







5 Don't Be New: Volksschule Mariagrün: Graz, Austria, 2010 in collaboration with Jörg Thöne / Ring; Dexter Sinister, New York, 2009; Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada, 2010; Casco, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2010

A proposed elementary school based on a singular hexagonal form that serves to intensify internal social activity while providing inertia against exterior conditions. The inherent geometry of the shape guides the programmatic organization, the approach to the site, the structural logic and the thermal concept. Program areas overlap and flow together to create diverse scales of learning within the unified building form. The Ring is a series of spatial interventions that offer variations on a theme.