



ESTRANGEMENT

*ELIZABETH MATTHEWS*

AUBURN UNIVERSITY  
MAY 2015



This book is lovingly dedicated to my fiancé, Mark Lai,  
and my parents, John and Joy Matthews.

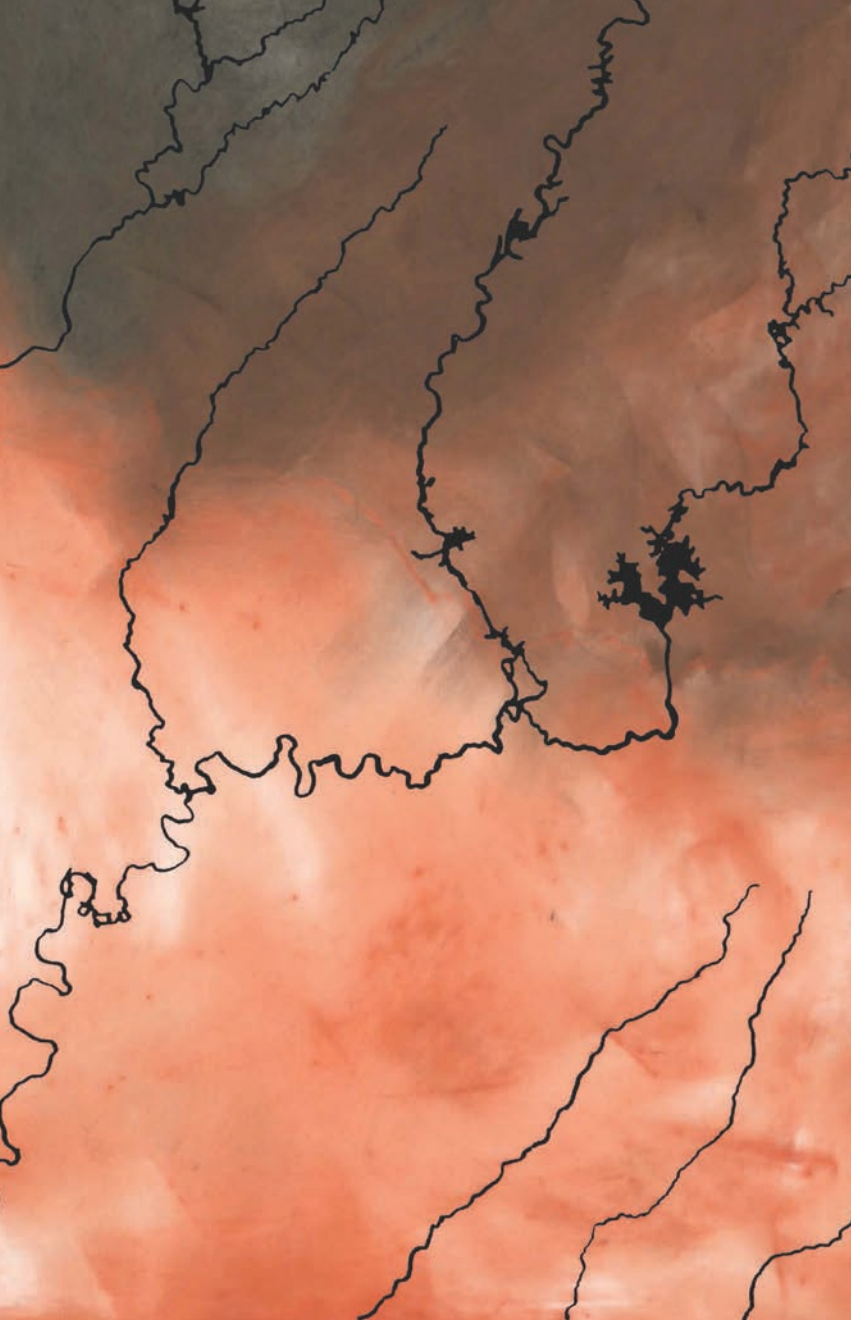
Many thanks to Professor David Hill for his guidance in this work  
and to Professor Charlene LeBleu for her kind support.

Much gratitude also to Laura Dickerson, Rebecca Goodman,  
Xiaoqing Zhao, Hanieh Ajdeh, Nga Bui, Devin Williamson,  
Will Nix, and Gabriela Arevola for their participation.









## INSIDE THIS BOOK

- [1] Estrangement Defined
  - [a] in pursuit of mystery
  - [b] estrangement in the aesthetic continuum
  - [c] conditions vs. objects
  - [d] learning from installation art
  - [e] landscapes of novelty and estrangement
  - [f] in the studio
  
- [2] Rural Explorations
  - Understanding rural Alabama through mappings and found examples of estrangement in rural places.
  
- [3] Moving Lightly in Tallassee
  - This test was a minimal activation with the goal of encouraging people to reconceive of and re-engage with the mill ruins at the heart of their town.
  
- [4] Estrangement Amplifications
  - [a] the station
  - [b] bloedel reserve
  - [c] the ramble
  - [d] the passage
  - [e] the ubiquitous wilderness
  - [f] west 8 swamp garden
  - [e] outcomes
  
- [5] Shifting Sites
  - How might these strategies be deployed when designing for estrangement at a timber plantation? A gravel pit? A fracking site?







*estrangement defined:  
in pursuit of mystery*

On a blustery March morning just over two years ago, my now-fiancé and I were driving through western Kentucky on an unconventional first date. After hearing me admire yet another old barn, Mark pulled the car over and said, “Let’s go look at it.” In all my trips through Kentucky, it had never occurred to me to get out of the car.

On the roof, a copula slumped to one side ready to give up the ghost in the next big storm. What boards were left were dog-eared and sun-bleached; some hung awry. Standing inside the skeleton, its hallowedness was palpable. We climbed a rickety staircase to a loft without floorboards, and as we picked our way across the remaining beams, looking down we could see the wild carpet weeds that had taken over the barn floor. Over our heads, loose sheets of tin banged loudly in the March wind.

Stepping on the clover-covered floor, touching the rough beams in the loft, hearing metal sheets slap in the wind – all of these sensorial qualities contributed powerfully to our experience of the barn. We experienced its sublime reality.

I am calling this particular kind of powerful experience *estrangement*. Estrangement can have negative connotations such as hostility or cold feelings between two

people, a broken relationship. But there is another meaning and that is the meaning I reference, that of distance.

One of the key texts referenced throughout this thesis is LOLA Landscape Architects’ *Lost Landscapes*. In it, the young Rotterdam firm writes, “An ecological perspective of protectionism or quantification does not address our need for wild experiences...”<sup>1</sup> These wild experiences are where my interest lies.

In the same book, landscape critic Paul Roncken states, “Lost landscapes [are] places where humans are deliberately estranged, teased into new performances in opposition to the unfamiliar conditions of unknown settings.”<sup>2</sup> These lost landscapes are the feral places that have escaped our attention culturally and as designers. Roncken goes on to say that design almost always tames wild landscapes either to make them accessible to us (e.g., national parks) or to force them to provide some service for us (e.g., recreation).

When we design in this conventional manner, we can extinguish a landscape’s inherent power. For example, if I had approached the afore-mentioned barn by a sidewalk and climbed a re-inforced set of stairs with a handrail to a viewing platform, my experience of the barn would



1. Pleijster, Eric-Jan, Cees van der Veen, and Peter Veenstra. “The Fat of the Land.” (pp. 196) In *Lost Landscapes: LOLA Landscape Architects*. nai010 Publishers, 2014.

2. Roncken, Paul. “Lost Landscapes.” (pp. 146-7) In *Lost Landscapes: LOLA Landscape Architects*. nai010 Publishers, 2014.

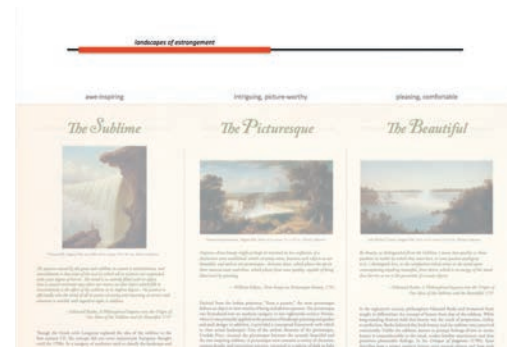


have been completely different (and typical). The power of that place would have been snuffed out.

My work suggests that in landscapes of estrangement, the designer's role is to make simple maneuvers that enable people to interact with the landscape on the landscape's terms. In other words,

**Wild the person; don't tame the landscape.**

## *estrangement in the aesthetic continuum of landscape architecture*



The brochure in the background of this diagram was published by the Blanton Museum of Art in 2012 for the exhibit "American Scenery: Different Views in Hudson River School Painting." It juxtaposes three paintings of Niagara Falls to illustrate the definitions of sublime, picturesque, and beautiful.

Aesthetic discussions of landscape borrow from philosophy the terms *beautiful*, *picturesque*, and *sublime*. Eighteenth-century philosophers Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant wrote about the beautiful and the sublime. Kant espoused that beauty was a projection of the viewer and had no deeper meaning, while he saw the sublime as related to a person's emotional reaction to overwhelming aspects of nature. According to Burke, both were understood emotionally but were distinguishable by the different emotional reactions they produced, pleasure and awe, respectively. A new genre, that of the picturesque, emerged in Britain in the late 1700s and had profound influence on landscape painting and design. Uvedale

Price positioned it between the beautiful and the sublime. Picturesque landscapes captivated the imagination of the person through their intriguing details, framing of views, and variety.<sup>3</sup>

These three genres define a spectrum on which landscapes fall. Beautiful landscapes are taken in at a glance; they are easily understood and consumed, pleasing and comfortable. Picturesque landscapes are intriguing, picture-worthy, and may inspire reflection and introspection. Both the beautiful and picturesque are concerned with framing a view, where the person is experiencing the landscape as image or images.

The sublime moves the person into the frame, pushing them past the image into the experience. The sublime is the only genre that elicits a direct response to landscape and beckons feedback from the person. Moving along the aesthetic continuum, experiential potential increases in intensity from the low point of removed appreciation to the middle ground of reflection to the zenith of terror and awe.

Landscapes of estrangement fall on the picturesque-to-sublime range of the aesthetic spectrum because these genres have the most to do with *experience* and *engagement*, whereas the beautiful is concerned merely with view. The picturesque is also concerned with view, so es-

3. "The Sublime, the Picturesque, and the Beautiful." Blanton Museum. Accessed February 18, 2015. [https://blantonmuseum.org/files/american\\_scenery/sublime\\_guide.pdf](https://blantonmuseum.org/files/american_scenery/sublime_guide.pdf)

trangement increases as a landscape moves toward the sublime.

A characteristic of the sublime that is critical to this thesis is that it is an experience of reality, even of the mundane. Considering this relationship, it should not be surprising that this thesis is concerned with the existing.



Images courtesy of [http://www.edwardburtynsky.com/site\\_contents/Photographs](http://www.edwardburtynsky.com/site_contents/Photographs)

Edward Burtynsky has made a life's work of photographing vast "industrial incursions in the landscape." The landscapes of process which he chooses to photograph - mines, quarries, oil fields, rail cuts, factories of mass production, and the like - are inseparable from our everyday lives,

4. Burtynsky, Edward. My Wish: Manufactured Landscapes and Green Education. TEDTalks, 2005. [http://www.ted.com/talks/edward\\_burtynsky\\_on\\_manufactured\\_landscapes?language=en#t-279476](http://www.ted.com/talks/edward_burtynsky_on_manufactured_landscapes?language=en#t-279476)

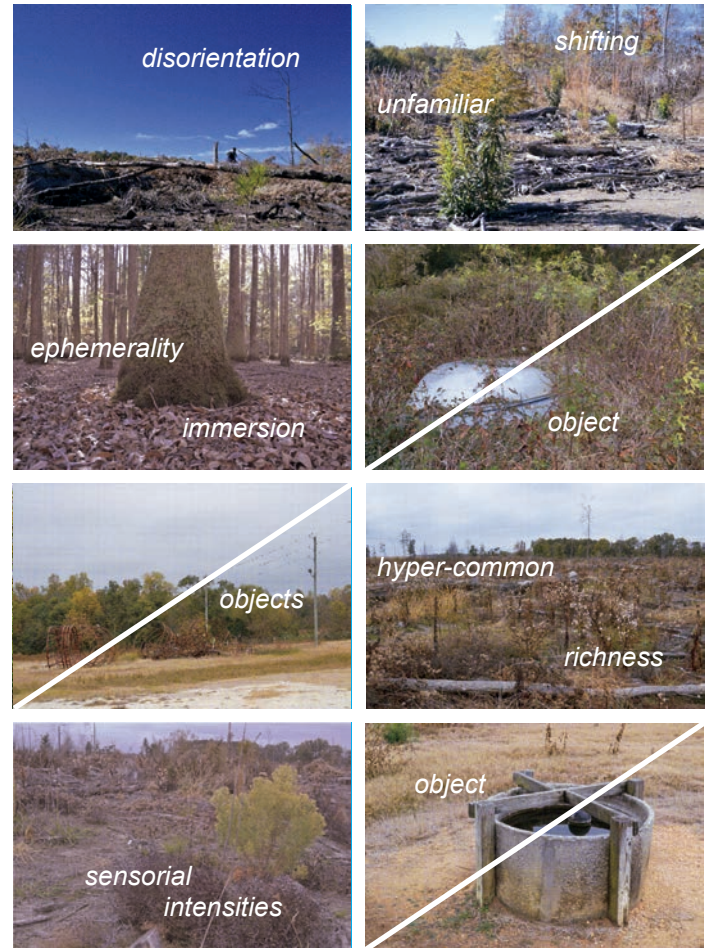


but we are estranged from them because they are hidden from us. By presenting images of these unseen places that simultaneously attract and repulse us, Burtynsky attempts to engage us in a dialogue on sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

While estrangement requires immersion and not merely viewing an image or landscape, Burtynsky's work is influential to my own for the reflective way in which he presents sublime landscapes - the familiar unfamiliar. We are shocked by these images and yet we have long known (or should have known) that these places exist. They are presented to us without judgment but impel us to respond.

### *conditions vs. objects*

The photographs on the opposite page capture some of the intensities at the E.V. Smith testing site and are intermingled with images of found objects. While objects may have an aura of strangeness, they do not make a landscape and are thus struck through. When evaluating estrangement in a landscape it is important to distinguish between conditions and objects. Without conditions, estrangement does not exist.





70 feet away

30 feet away

10 feet away

2 feet away

## *learning from installation art*

For several months in 2003, Tara Donovan's *Haze* (above) was installed at the Rice Gallery in Houston, Texas. Donovan massed hyper-common objects by the thousands, creating an installation that stretched 44 feet in length and more than 10 feet in height against the gallery's back wall. Far from being merely a great object created from smaller objects, the work was powerfully spatial and produced an ambiance that permeated the entire gallery, even seeping into the atrium outside.

While an undergraduate at Rice, I had the opportunity to experience this installation in person. Looking into the gallery from the atrium, it appeared a cloud had settled against the gallery's back wall.

Upon entering the gallery and walking a few steps forward, the cloud only became nearer. Ambiguity prevailed as I moved closer, even when I was a mere two feet from the wall. Then, as if discovering the floating object in a 90s stereogram, I suddenly recognized the component objects - clear, plastic drinking straws. Thousands of them. The simplicity was frustratingly simple and yet simultaneously delightful.

Above images courtesy of <http://www.ricegallery.org/tara-donovan/>

Below images courtesy of <http://www.ricegallery.org/yasuaki-onishi>

It may be useful to consider *Haze* in tandem with a later exhibit at the same gallery. In 2012, Yasuaki Onishi installed *reverse of volume RG* (below) in which he suspended clear, plastic sheeting by thousands of delicate strands of black hot glue. The result resembled an ancient Japanese landscape painting of rain falling on a mountain.



View from the atrium

Onishi working with hot glue

The object

Under the mountain



This installation shared characteristics with *Haze* such as the use of hyper-common objects and the encouragement to immerse oneself in a spatial condition. The installation's surely intentional relationship to Japanese painting carries the nuance that it was more concerned with itself as something to be viewed than something to be experienced. This is a great opportunity to reiterate the distinction between object and condition. Donovan initiated a condition. Onishi hovered somewhere in between.

Onishi's work was intriguing but straight-forward. It invited further engagement because of its novelty. Donovan's project invited further engagement because of its ambiguous presentation of reality.

### *landscapes of novelty and estrangement*

There are many landscape projects that are object-centric. One well-known contemporary example is Claude Cormier's *Les Boules Roses* (or *Pink Balls*), where strands of bright pink plastic balls are strung across Sainte-Catherine Street East in Montreal for an entire kilometer, enlivening a seasonal pedestrian mall. Cormier is interested in novelty - bringing new energy to a space.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, RO&AD Architecten designed

5. While Donovan's *Haze* also brings its own energy to a space, now that we are talking on the landscape scale, we are talking about a place with its own existing conditions rather than a white-walled room.



Image courtesy of <http://www.claudecormier.com/en/projet/pink-balls/>



Image courtesy of <http://www.ro-ad.org/projects/moses-bridge/>

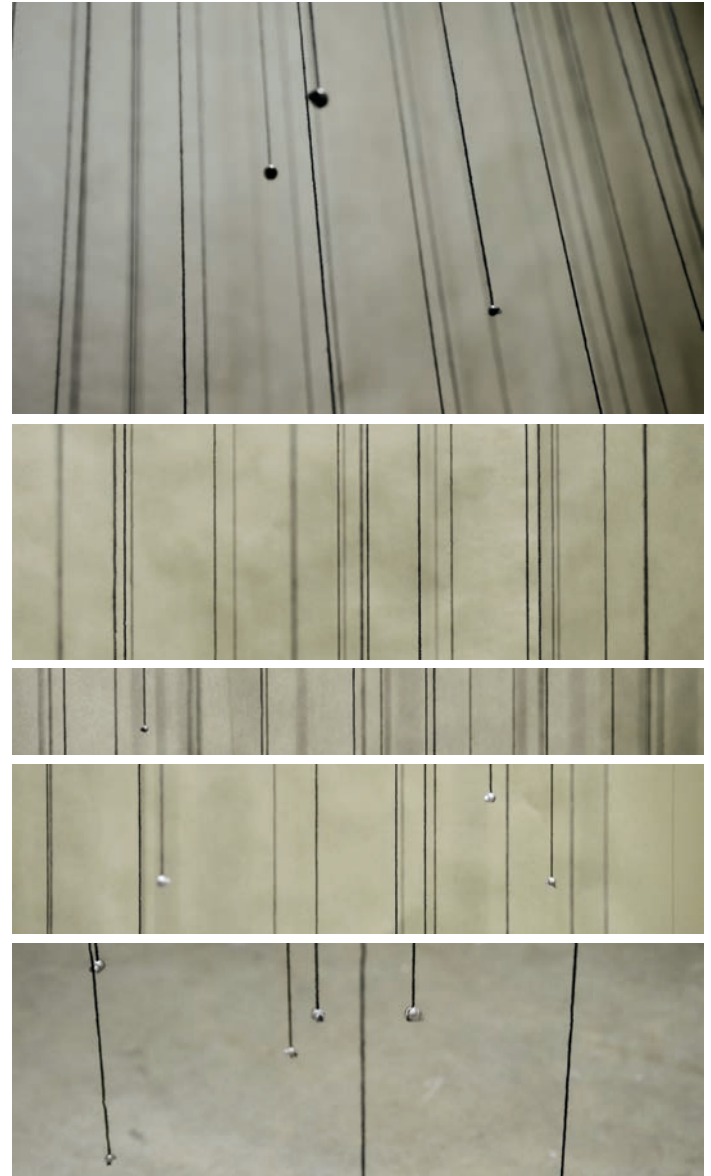
the Moses Bridge to enable visitors to cross a moat to an historic Dutch fort in the Netherlands. The bridge is unique because it is partially submerged, enabling people to literally pass through the water and even dip their fingers in it. They do not have to swim or wade across the moat, but they are able to cross the water in a way that brings them into contact with the reality of the landscape.

This second project is designing with and heightening a found condition whereas the former is attempting to imbue a landscape with a new sense of place.

## *in the studio*

The installation shown on the opposite page and on the next spread is a small gallery created by hanging kraft paper in an eight by four foot rectangle with a ceiling light fixture centered in the overhead plane. Inside, approximately 150 black strings were affixed to the ceiling and weighted with split shot of various sizes. The result was an immersive field of strings in which a person could stand. Because the strings hung in close proximity to one another, it was difficult to focus clearly on any particular one. As soon as the eye began to bring one string into focus, it would inevitably shift to another also in the field of view.

This installation illustrated the importance of embeddedness or immersion to the experience of estrangement as well as the effectiveness with which an intentional disorienting ambiguity can have on engaging a person in a spatial condition. That this condition was produced through simple objects supports the fact that estrangement does not require outlandish or weird conditions but is readily found among the hyper-common.



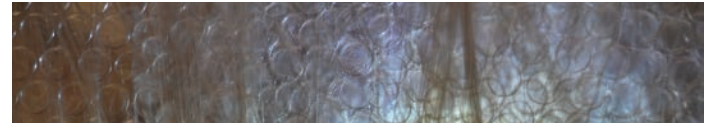




This next studio installation used plastic wrap and bubble wrap to create an immersive viewing screen. These familiar materials were wrapped around an upturned desk frame, and a simple chair was placed inside. Images or films were projected onto the back of the screen.

When a person sat inside the screen, his or her proximity to the screen combined with the distortions produced by the plastic folds and bubbles made the experience much more about immersion in the space than about any particular image.

Like the string gallery test, this installation also illustrated the disorienting power of immersion in the hyper-common. Together these tests produce a vocabulary for understanding landscapes of estrangement. Places of estrangement are *hyper-common*, meaning they are so ubiquitous to have become *white noise*. As such, they are *unfamiliar* to us. They possess *richnesses and intensities* making them highly *sensorial* or *experiential*. They are often characterized by *ephemerality, temporality, or shifting* on various scales such as the length of a day, the progression of seasons, or the span of some other process at work in the landscape, such as the cycle of growth and harvest in a managed timber forest. We find these places *disorienting*. Finally, they are *immersive*, meaning we must be in the landscape, not merely looking at it, and these landscapes call forth a *personal response*. To reuse the example of the timber forest, a forest manager may not experience the sublimity of a clear cut in the same way that someone else might. Landscapes of estrangement possess all of some of these qualities.







**hyper-common / white noise**

**(and therefore) unfamiliar**

**richness of intensities**

**sensorial / experiential**

**ephemeral, temporal, shifting**

**disorientating**

**immersive**

**evokes personal responses  
with variable outcomes**







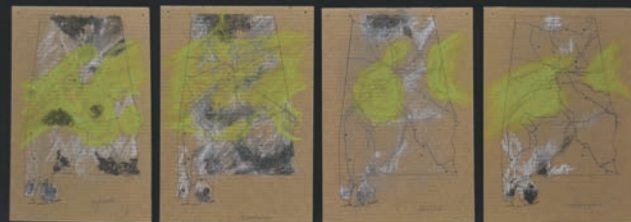
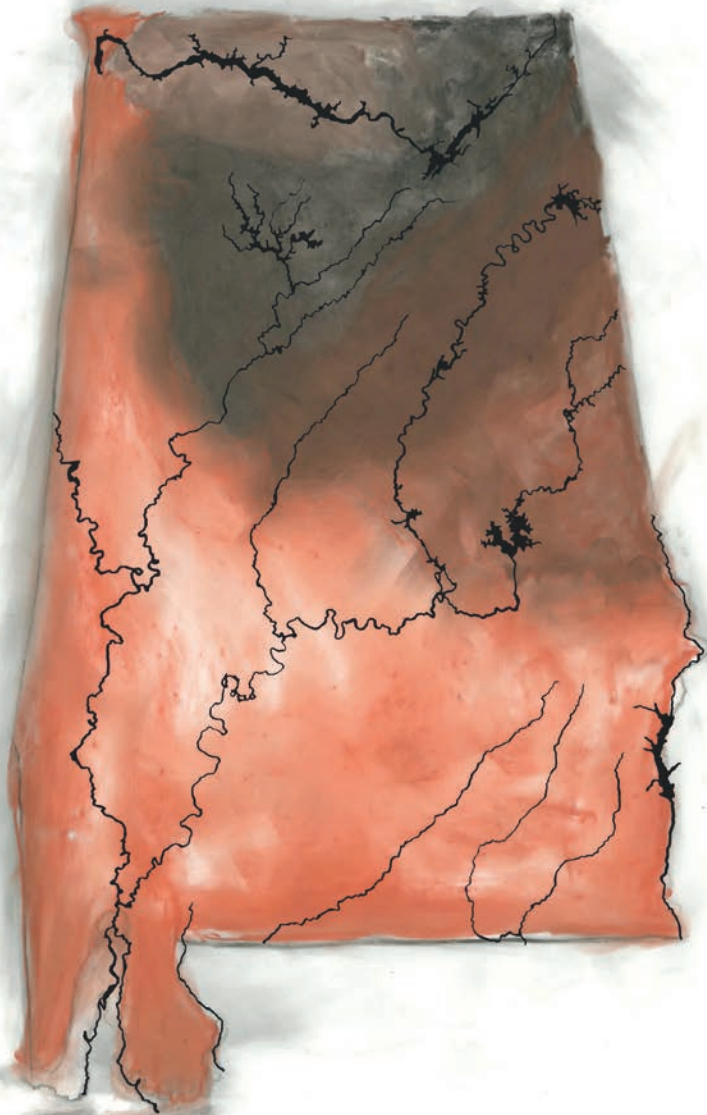
## *rural explorations*

While estrangement as a theory is not limited to a particular typology, this thesis tests it in two rural conditions - the mill ruins at Tallassee, and about six miles south at the E.V. Smith Research Center.

The following mappings explore rural Alabama. The first looks at bioregions and ecotones. Both testing areas are located in the blur between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain bioregions.

The four mappings on page 36 examine the invisible qualities of landscape, specifically air pollution. Each looks at the concentrations of a particular agricultural pesticide, movement of air pollution at four different times of day, active rail lines, and landfills.

The final two mappings explore Alabama's early history, from the arrival of white settlers and United States encroachment on the Creek Nation, to the discovery of the fertile Black Belt soils and subsequent Alabama Fever, in which slave labor fueled the South's cotton economy and textiles became an important Alabama industry.





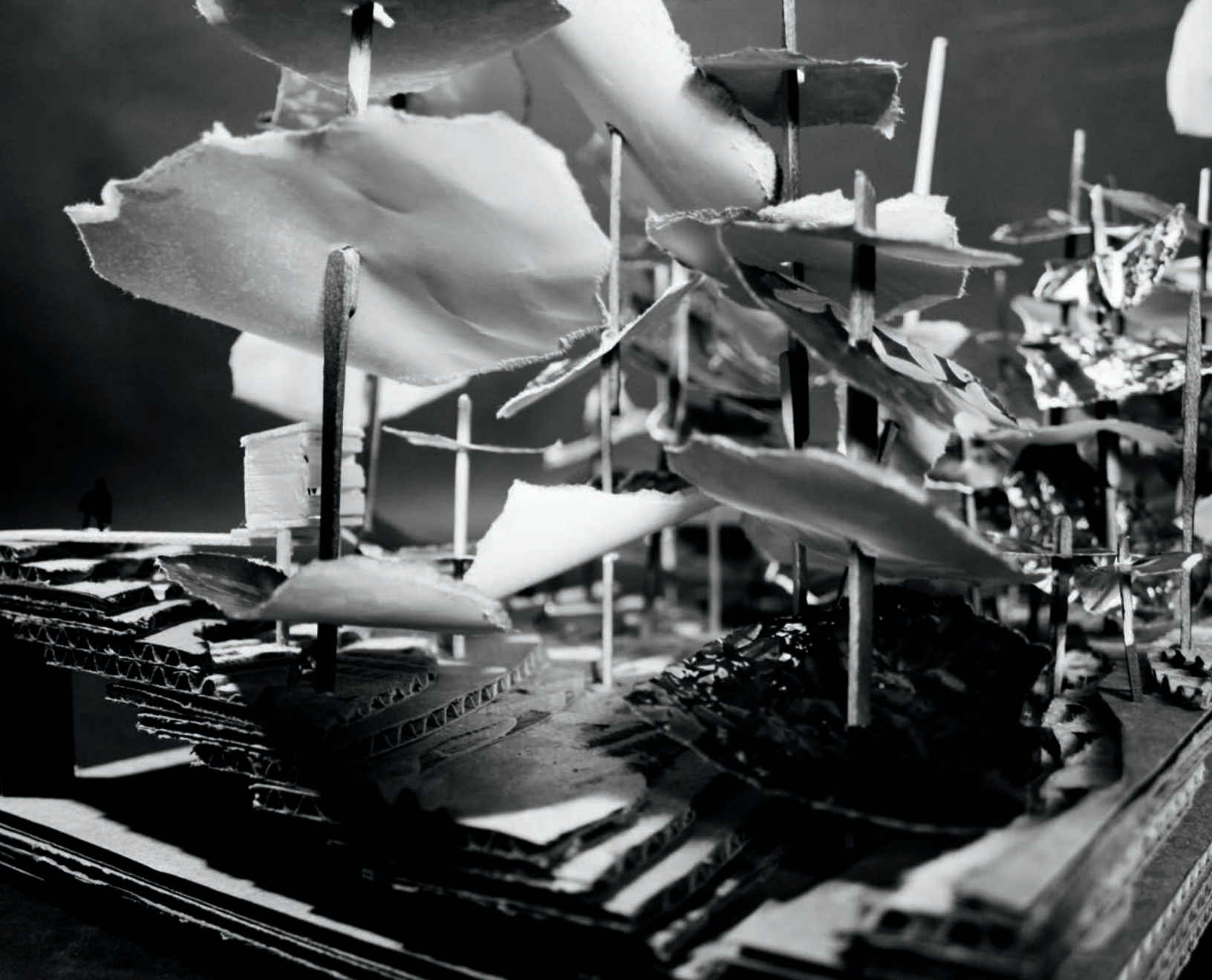




The drawing on the previous spread interprets an 1818 map of the Alabama territory drawn by John Melish. Red squares indicate the locations of Creek towns and outposts. At the date of the Melish map, Andrew Jackson and his troops had destroyed four of these settlements. Yellow areas highlight the presence of the Jeffersonian grid, indicating the intentions of the United States government. The Black Belt appears as a ghosted white arc, hinting the Alabama Fever that would strike in less than 20 years.

The drawing to the left takes as its base the 1856 map of the State of Alabama drawn and engraved by J. Bartholomew. A photograph of Africans working a cotton field is laid over the highest cotton-producing counties. Pink dots indicate some of the state's textile mills.









### *moving lightly in tallassee*

For more than 100 years, Tallassee was a mill town - a distinction it held longer than any other town in Alabama. The falls at Tallassee, which U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins had noted in 1798, produced a generous power supply. In 1841, less than 50 years later, the State Legislature chartered the Tallassee Falls Manufacturing Company. The first mill building was completed in 1844 and was constructed of native stone by enslaved Africans. Ultimately four mills built at the falls.

The original mill became part of the Confederate supply chain and served as the Confederate Armory during the Civil War. From 1861-1963, the mill produced uniform cloth, and later it began manufacturing carbines. Union forces made attempts to reach the armory at least twice but were unsuccessful.<sup>6</sup>

While the South suffered severe eco-

6. Golden, Virginia Noble. *A History of Tallassee for Tallasseeans*, 14–15. Tallassee Mills of Mount Vernon-Woodberry Mills, 1949.

nomie depression in the period after the Civil War, Tallassee's mills remained in operation and even did fairly well during the post-war period of reconstruction. The national depression of 1872 eventually led to a change in hands, and the new ownership made significant improvements. An additional mill had already been built before the war in 1854.<sup>7</sup> This building was referred to as "Mill Number One," while the actual first mill was called the "Old Mill." The new ownership added a fifth floor to Mill Number One and built a four-story duck mill, a weave shed, a three-story machine shop, and a new gin. This investment in and expansion of operations demonstrates that the late 1800s was a prosperous time for Tallassee's textile industry, but more was soon to come.

The new mill on the east side of the river was called "Mill Number Two." At

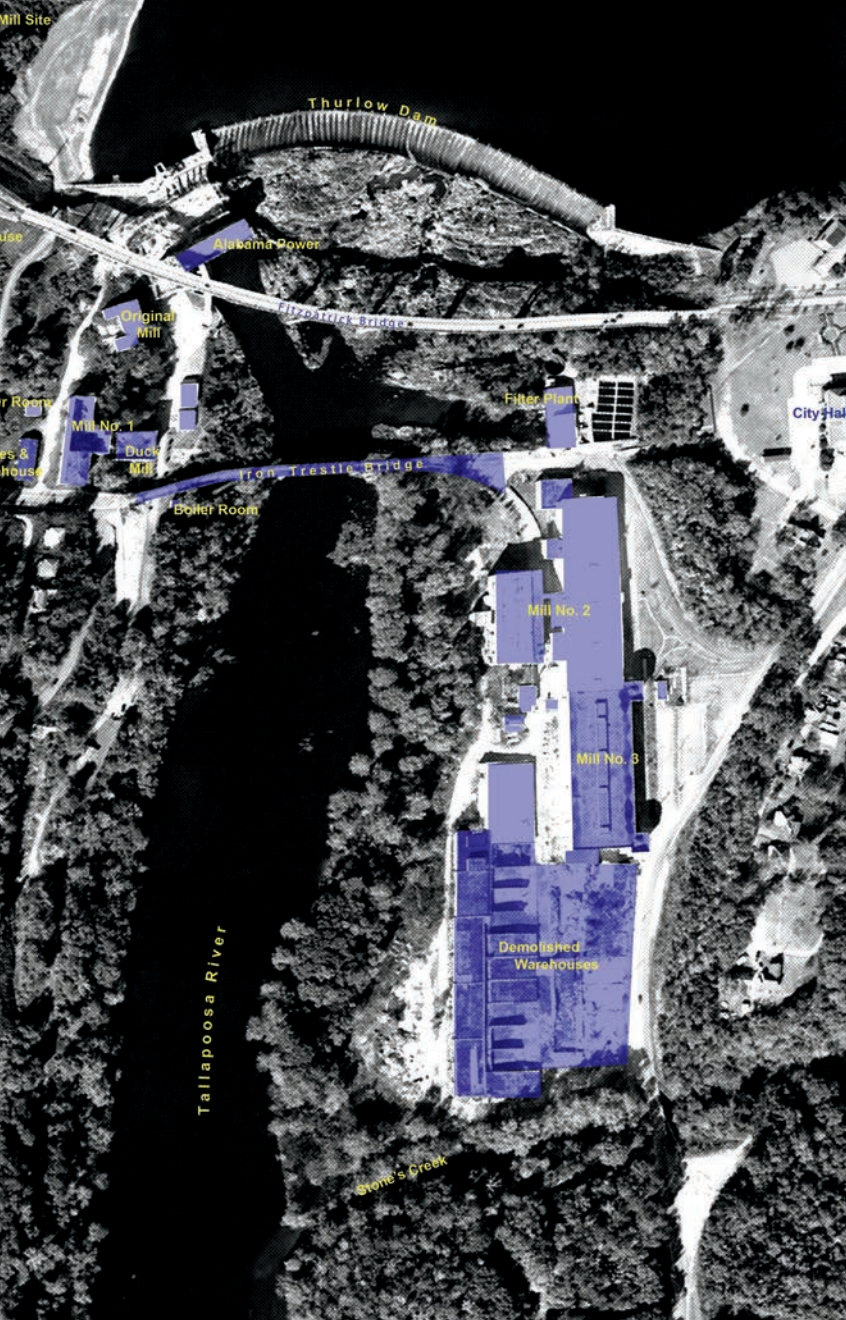


This reconstructed Sanborn map from 1941 illustrates the development of Tallassee with its sweeping arc of falls across the Tallapoosa (now replaced by Thurlow Dam) and the textile mill complex at the heart of the community.

7. Wadsworth, "Tallassee: Some Aspects of Southern Textile and Hydro-Electric Development," 39. Auburn, AL, n.d.

8. In a personal interview with Tallassee resident and historian Bill Goss, I learned that an Alabama recycling company plans to harvest the stone from this building.

9. Golden, *A History of Tallassee for Tallasseeans*, 42; "THPS & Tallassee Falls Museum."



450 long, 125 feet wide, and four stories tall, it was said to be the largest textile mill in the world built of stone.<sup>8</sup> Italian stone masons completed this and other buildings under the supervision of Isaac Pienezza, who came to Tallassee to oversee the projects and ended up making it his home until his death four decades later. It should be said here that Tallassee's mill operations were not only extensive but also quite lovely. All of the mill buildings had been masterfully constructed of stone and were beautifully situated below the dam.<sup>9</sup> Eventually a fourth building, known as "Mill Number Three," as well as extensive warehouses would also be added, and the complex on the Tallapoosa's eastern side would be far larger than its beginnings on the west bank.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the mills were the heart of Tallassee. Records show that they were financially successful at least through the late 1940s. Toward the end of the twentieth century, it was becoming cheaper to export labor and mill operations dwindled until only the facilities on the east side of the river remained in operation. The last mill closed in 2005, and the structures remain abandoned on the banks of the Tallapoosa.



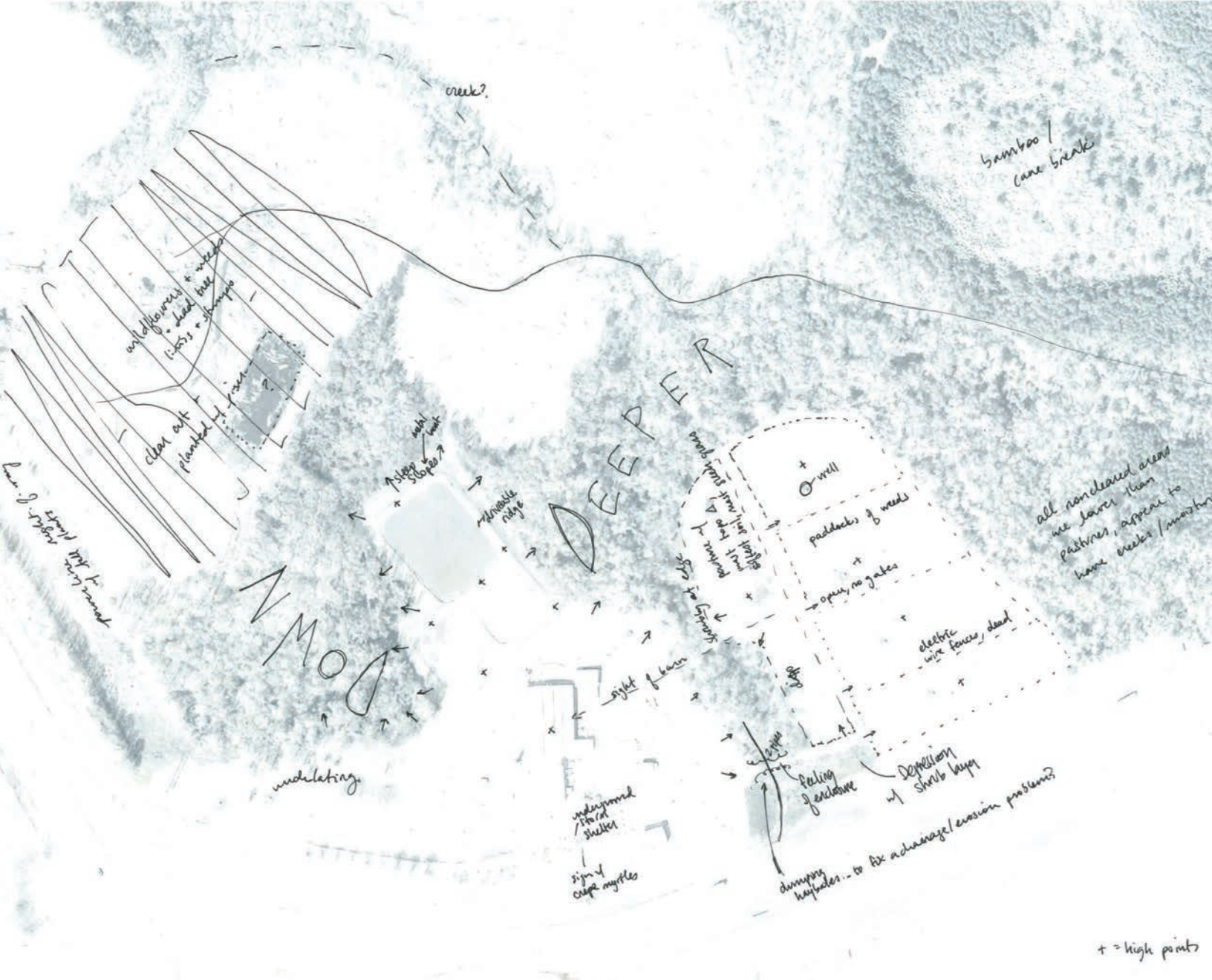


The mill ruins are nothing less than sublime. They are massive, crumbling beauties covered in blankets of kudzu. When I asked Bill Goss how Tallasseans felt about the mills, he said they couldn't see their value. But he thought they were marvelous and compared them to ruins he'd seen as a soldier during World War II as he floated along some European river. This was his vision for Tallassee.

My design explorations in Tallassee were brief because of restrictions on site access. I wanted to offer Tallasseeans a new perspective on the remnants of their mill heritage, white noise which they pass daily driving back and forth over Thurlow Dam. For an initial intervention, I decided

to light the old trestle bridge with bright, neon pink light which would be highly visible from the bridge over the dam. The goal would be to build interest in increasing accessibility to these rich areas and that that would be done in a way that protected their sublimity.









***the station: ev smith research center***

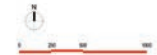
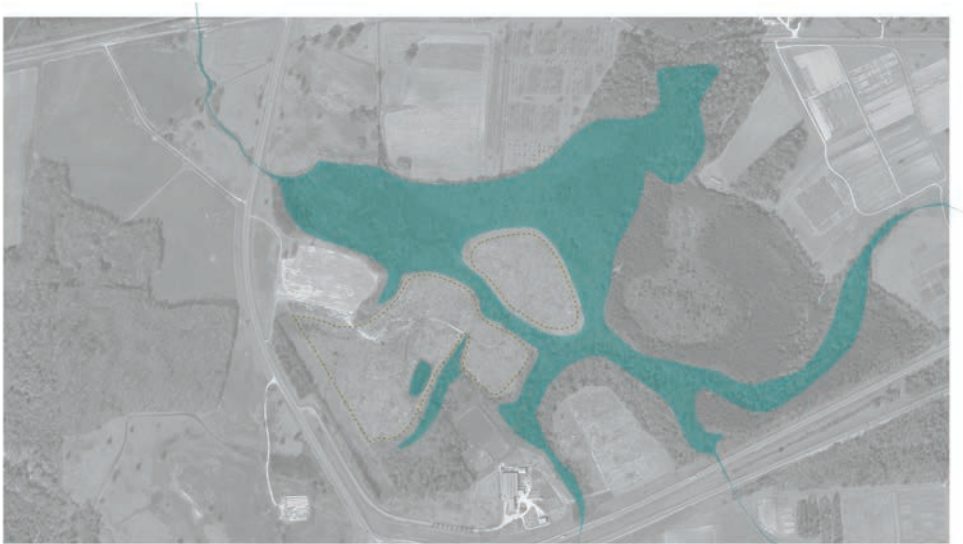
The E.V. Smith Research Center is “the largest and most comprehensive” of Alabama’s sixteen Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station (AAES) locations with “with research units in dairy cattle [closed in the summer of 2013], beef cattle, horticulture, plant breeding, field crops and biosystems engineering.”<sup>10</sup> Approximately 25 miles west of Auburn on Interstate 85, the station occupies 3,200 acres in Macon

10. “ACES Publications : Timber And The Economy Of Alabama : ANR-0602.” Accessed February 6, 2015. <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0602/>.

County. It is bordered to the north by the Tallapoosa River and is roughly six miles south of Tallassee’s Thurlow Dam.

Basemap courtesy of Greg Pate, Director of E.V. Smith Research Center

E. V. Smith represents an array of Alabama landscape typologies - cropland, timber land, abandoned agricultural infrastructure, powerline cuts, acres lost to invasives, interstitial swamps, active and phantom rail lines, and even a old gravel extraction pit. Because of its plethora of intensities, it is a great place to experiment with estrangement.



This map shows the bounds of the clear cut areas as well as the streams, ponds, and swampy areas around it.



My testing focuses on approximately 50 acres at the northeast pocket of I-85 and Highway 229 (Tuckabatchee Road). This land is very swampy and moist. Where agriculture gives way to woods, it does so because of slight elevation changes that result in ephemeral or perennial wetlands and swamps, making farming impractical or impossible in these areas. Thus, when looking at an aerial image, the presence of water can be guessed at by examining tree cover, particularly when a stream is seen passing into and out of a canopied area.

In 2013, approximately 47 acres of native mixed hardwood forest was clear cut





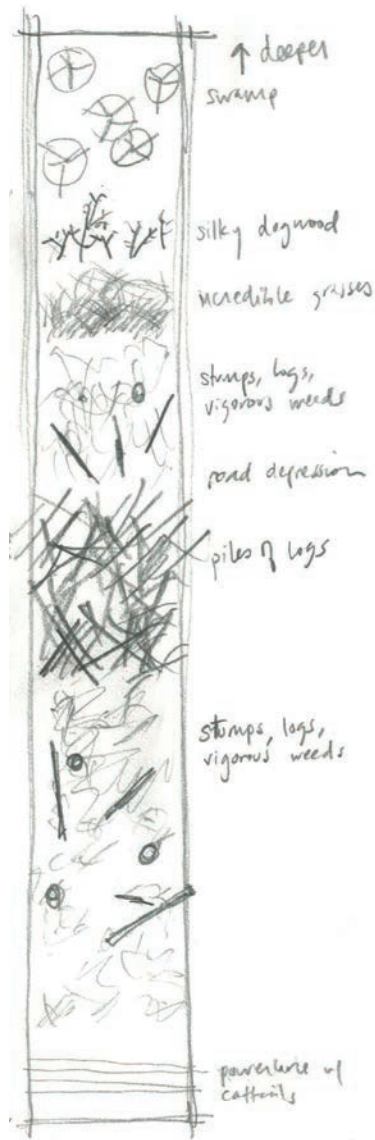


From top left to bottom right: (1) dairy, (2) coral-like weeds amid strewn tree limbs, (3) golden band of grasses between the clear cut and swamp, (4) pile of tree parts, (5) swamp vegetation during low water level, (6) deep in the swamp, moss growth registers the usual water levels.





Diagrammatic drawing (right) and model (above and opposite) documenting progression through existing site intensities.





immediately to the north of the defunct dairy unit. Tree butt ends and other pieces unsuitable for timber were dragged into massive piles, which have a combined footprint of almost two acres and heights that often surpass six feet.

The area was sprayed with herbicide to control the growth of volunteer trees and then replanted with loblolly pine seedlings. With the pines still in their nascent stage, the landscape is rife with weeds, which appear in their full glory during the fall with bright colors and distinct textures that make them reminiscent of ocean corals. This creates a poignant moment of estrangement in the landscape as ephemerality operates on both seasonal (weed flowering and seed head dessication) and process scales (clearing, decay, planting, and timber maturation).

Just to the north of the clear cut is a large swamp whose dominant vegetation is a combination of swamp tupelo trees and delicate groundplane plants, whose verdant hues intensify when submerged. Precipitation levels determine the swamp's bounds and depths, and light plays freely off of water in an understory unobstructed by shrub layer plants.

The interfacing between these two conditions is a golden band of grasses interjected occasionally by bright red silky dogwoods.

These three areas of intensity (shown below) are all highly experiential. The questions are, how can a landscape architect design in such a way that their inherent energies are protected and possibly even enhanced? And, how do these experiences intersect one another?



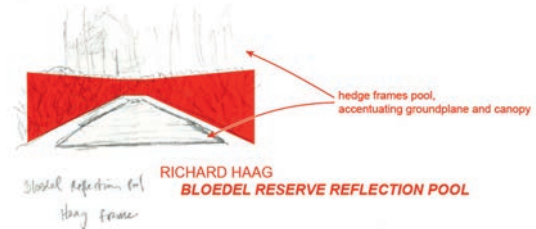
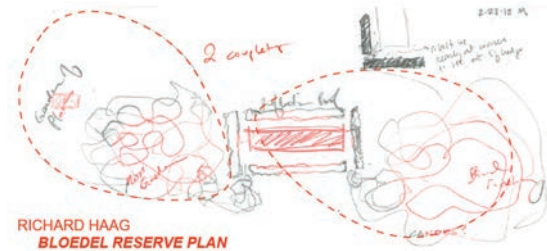
## *bloedel reserve*

Richard Haag connected four experiences at the Bloedel Reserve by coupling them into pairs - the Garden of Planes with the Moss Garden, and the Reflection Pool with the Bird Sanctuary. He created a linear progression from the disorienting, geometric Garden of Planes to the verdant Moss Garden celebrating the full life cycle of trees; upon turning a corner, one begins the second couplet passing along the long edge of the rectangular Reflection Pool and then on into the wild, organic Bird Sanctuary (designed by Fujitaro Kubota).<sup>11</sup>

Upon returning from Europe where they had visited several estates, the Bloedels decided they would like to have a reflection pool at their home and hired Thomas Church for the project. The pool is remarkable for its being in the forest and fed directly by groundwater. Unlined, it essentially reveals the forest's damp provenance.<sup>11</sup>

As a landscape, the Reflection Pool had never felt complete, so in the late 1960s, Prentice Bloedel hired Richard Haag to do something about it. This was the beginning of a long relationship in which Haag would spend every Thursday coming to Bloedels' home for lunch and then working with them to design their property in the afternoons.

Haag's solution for the Reflection Pool was to frame it with a border Irish taxus. This distinguished it from the surrounding



forest, accentuating both the view to the sky above and its reflection in the water below.

The passage into, through, and out of the Reflection Pool room is notable because of its contrived subtlety. Rather than entering on axis with the pool, visitors enter at a corner, as shown in the sketch diagram above, and must choose whether to continue straight across the short edge or turn and walk along the long edge. The positioning of the apertures within the hedge prevents the pool from being taken in at once. This imbues the space with a sense of ambiguity, compelling the visitor to meander in order to find the way out, which is not immediately visible from the entry point.

11. "Richard Haag Oral History Project | The Cultural Landscape Foundation," June 28, 2012. <http://tclf.org/pioneer/oral-history/richard-haag>.

Following spread: Bloedel Reserve Moss Garden. Image courtesy of <http://richhaagas-soc.com/>









## *the ramble*

The site is entered by parking along the road to the old dairy, which is parallel to Highway 229, and walking under powerlines into the clear cut, or nascent timber forest. This crossing of the powerline right-of-way is an ideal entry opportunity because it is a mundane sight with an immediately-understood connection to modern life and yet we don't often step into these landscapes.

The clear cut is a large, currently-open area of approximately 29 acres. This hyper-common landscape typology has been little explored yet makes up 68 percent of the land of Alabama. The territory's earliest residents called themselves "Alabamas" meaning "thicket clearers," and today timber is "the backbone of the state economy."<sup>12</sup>

12. "ACES Publications : Timber And The Economy Of Alabama : ANR-0602." Accessed February 6, 2015. <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/ANR-0602/>.



Having been replanted with pine seedlings, the clear cut land will transform over the next decade from a field dominated by weeds to a young pine forest. It may be thinned at intervals and the removed trees used for pulp and chips. As the pines mature, the weeds will be shaded out and lose their prominence. Ultimately, another clear cut will occur like the one in 2013.

The path is the primary design device for moving people through landscape, and Haag used it extensively at Bloedel. However, the design for this thesis takes





a different tack. To make this 29-acre condition explorable, meridians are placed in two arcs, extending from the northern and southern intersections of the clear cut with the powerline right-of-way toward a point just beyond the center of the field.

Opposite: Through research, it was determined that this is an "on-foot" landscape. Unless infrequent, a much larger territory than 50 acres would be required for equestrian exploration.

Meridians are marked by posts placed at regular intervals of 25 feet. They are brightly-colored and very difficult to miss, even in dense vegetation, a summer storm, or the waning of light at dusk. They function as navigational device, alerting ramblers who may not have brought a map or GPS-enabled device that they are moving out the accommodated range. They are free to continue on if they wish but should be aware that they will be unaided.

The intent of the meridians is to enable each person's meander through the clear cut (and later, the forest) to be self-determined, thus encouraging adventure and facilitating relationships between individuals and the landscape.

Suggesting without force, the meridians curve toward a point just beyond the center of the clear cut where the next phase of designed experience begins.

deeper  
deeper, w/obien  
Stamp!

margin  
padding  
padding  
padding

inflowing + outflowing  
dead line  
padding + margin

clear left  
padding + margin

to S. 500px  
500px left to browser

DOWN

DEEPER

margin from padding  
padding from margin  
padding from margin

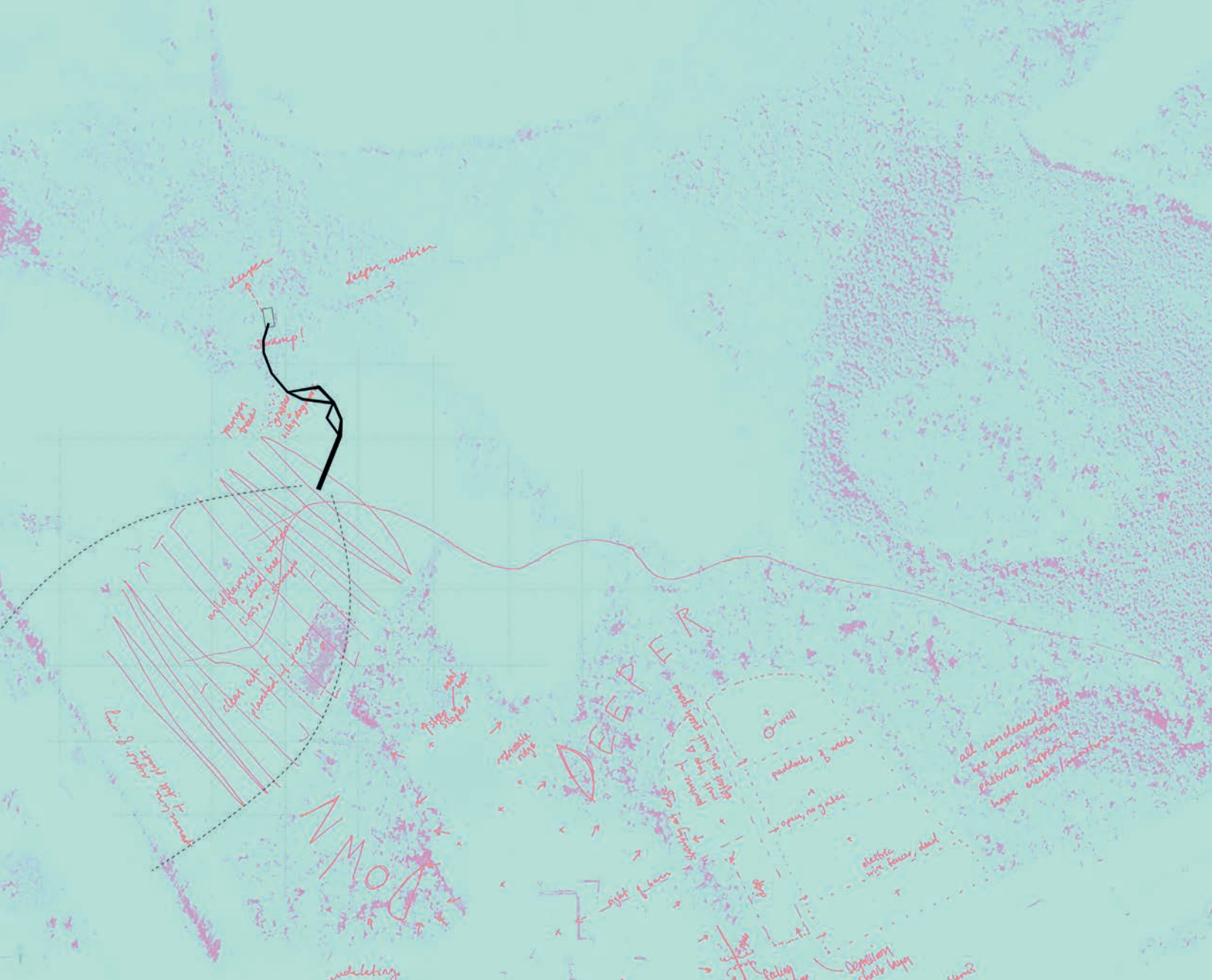
padding of width  
padding of width  
padding of width

all condensed space  
is taken from  
padding + margin  
have width padding

delete  
with force, dead

padding  
padding  
padding

padding







### *the passage*

The volume of tree chunks left haphazardly piled in the field is staggering. As the ramble approaches the swamp, the meridians narrow to a passage in which they are reorganized into monstrous walls through which the explorer passes. Undulating the heights of the walls throughout the passage disturbs symmetry and opens views, simultaneously generating disorientation and relief.<sup>13</sup>

Laying the logs in this fashion amplifies the estrangement inherent to the clear cut forest by orchestrating a direct encounter with its remnants.

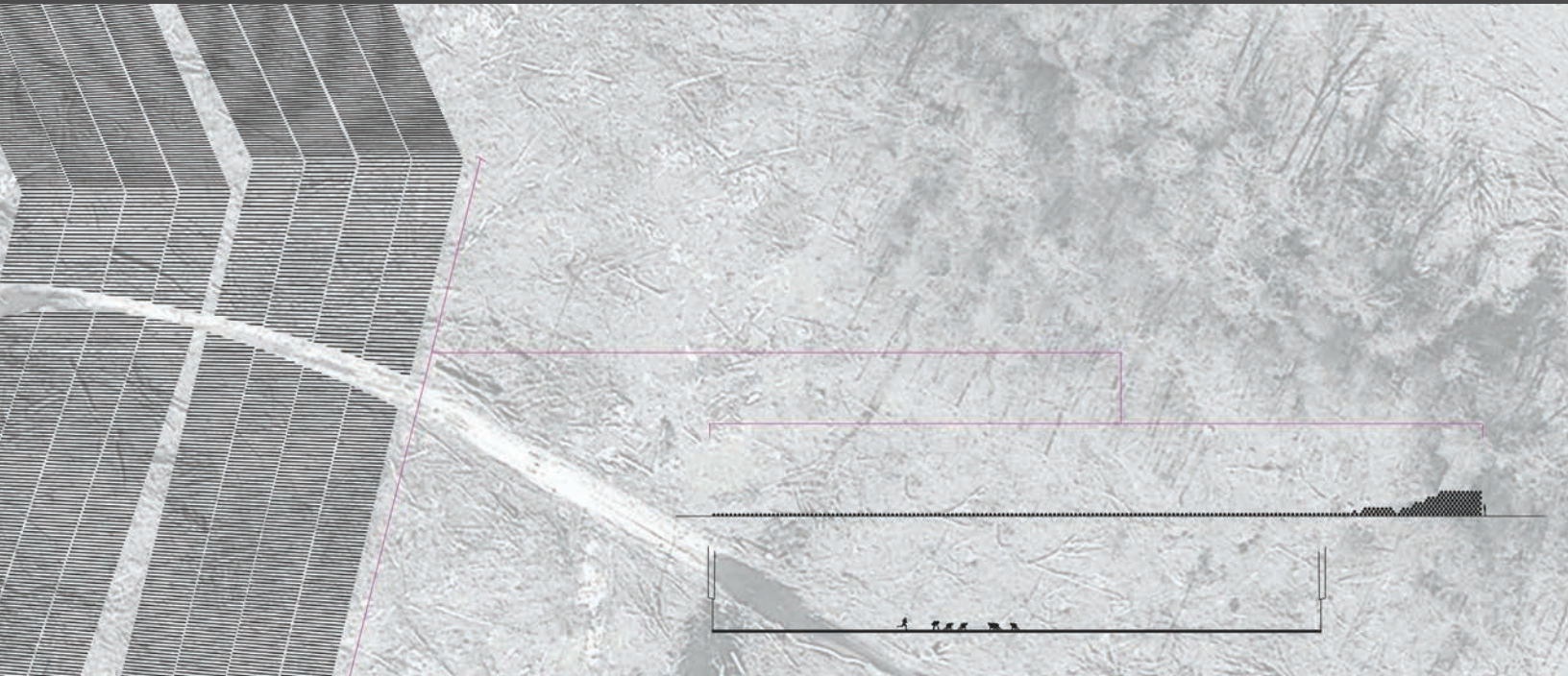
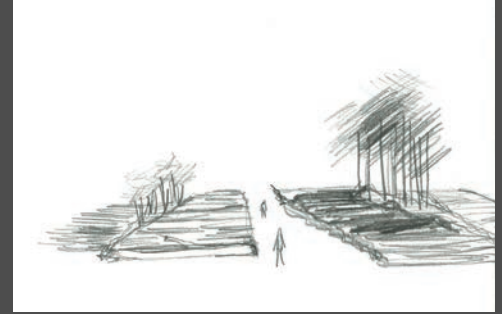
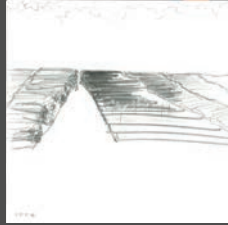
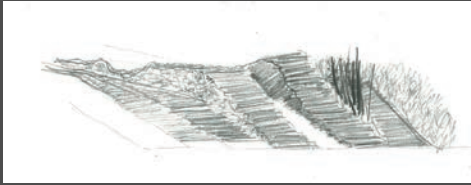
The sketches on the following spread illustrate how stacking patterns and a variety of depths could create opportunities for seedbed plants to emerge. Where logs are stacked thinly and close to the soil, plants will sprout up immediately, whereas

in areas that are stacked deeply, years of decay may be needed in order for plants to take hold. This variance sets up interesting successional relationships and new intensities.

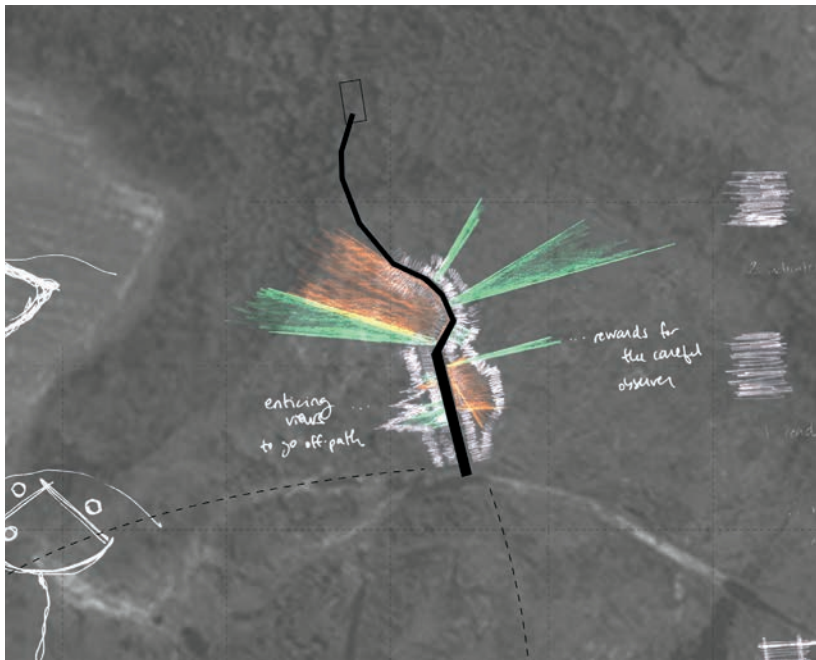
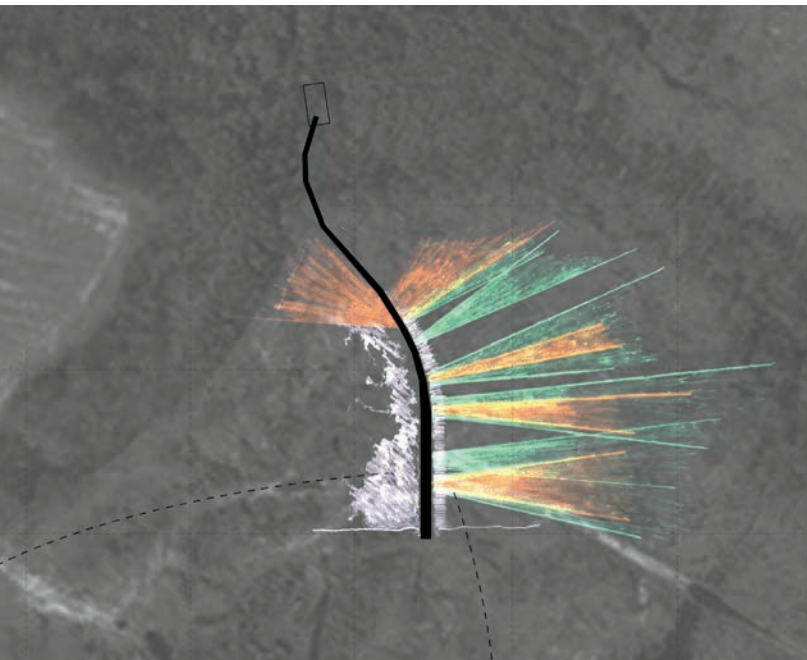
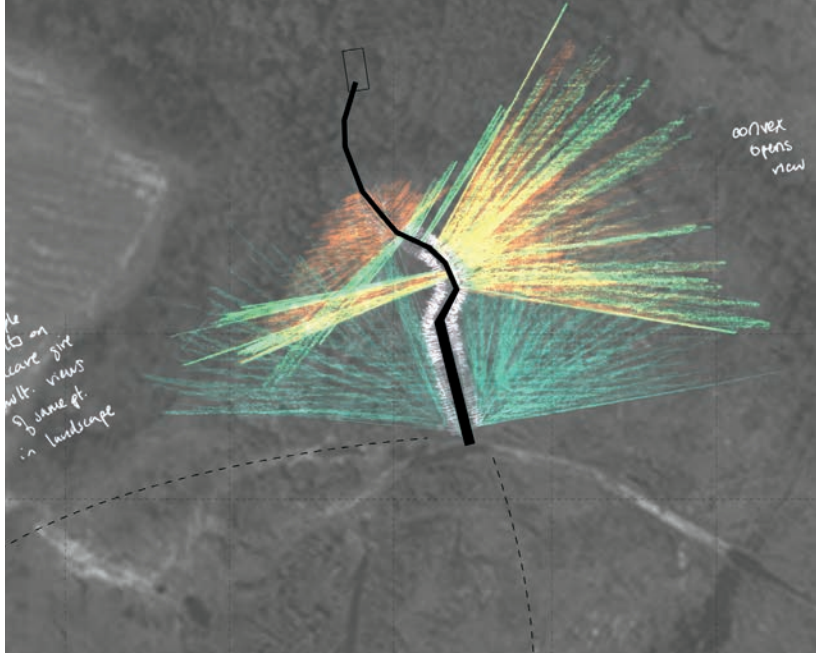
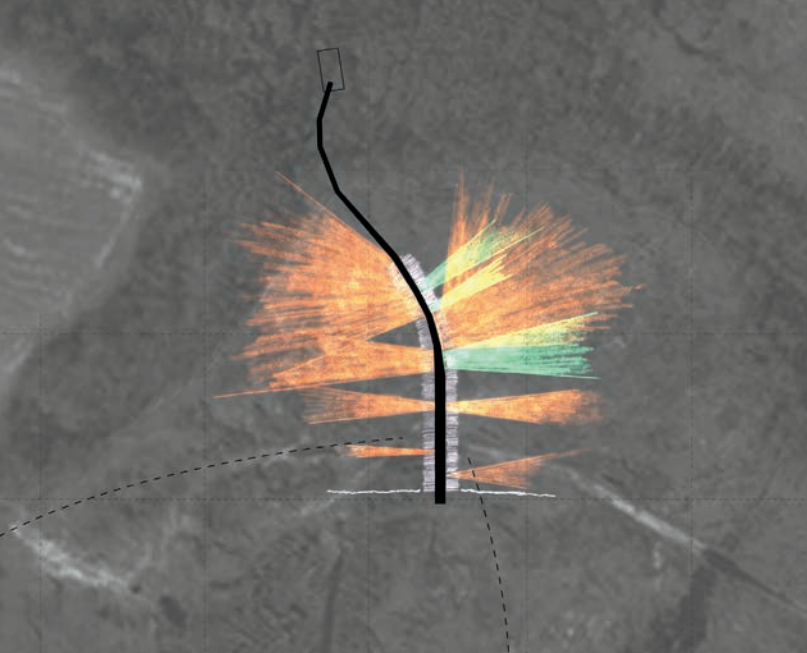
Ultimately, this path leads through the forest to the spectacular grasses growing at the swamp's edge. The grasses are given a much broader territory than they naturally have to draw out the experience of passing through them and later on, to keep enough of an unforested edge that they can continue to persist once the pines begin to mature and shade out other plants.

13. See pages 76-77 for viewshed studies examining the implications of path and wall undulation.













This drawing explores experiences in the landscape during different seasons and weather conditions. Imagine being the person on the right on a rainy November afternoon. The logs are soggy and aromatic from the rain. Then imagine being the person who reaches down to touch the grasses while sauntering through on a warm morning in the spring.



## the ubiquitous wilderness



According to Michael Godfrey, swamp forests are extremely common throughout the Piedmont bioregion.<sup>14</sup> Often these are the last holdouts of so-called “untouched” wilderness when surrounding areas have been appropriated for development, agriculture, timber, or other human uses. Godfrey writes,

The swamp forests of the Piedmont constitute our closest approximations of true wilderness. Because the soils are too wet to farm, and often too wet for profitable timbering, some of the swampy tracts are largely intact. Here may be found the wildest, richest, and most diverse habitats available to the Piedmont naturalist. Most are inaccessible by foot during the wetter seasons - winter and spring - but they may be explored by canoe at any time of the year. The chances are good that each of us lives within striking range of one of these wet forests.<sup>15</sup>

These swamp forests are the hyper-common unfamiliar, and they possess extraordinary experiential potential. When we do visit wetlands and swamps, we typically

14. The Piedmont bioregion stretches from New York City to Montgomery, Alabama.

15. Godfrey, Michael A. *Field Guide to the Piedmont: The Natural Habitats of America's Most Lived-in Region, From New York City to Montgomery, Alabama*, 260. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

16. “Swamp Garden.” West 8. Accessed February 9, 2015. [http://www.west8.com/projects/swamp\\_garden\\_](http://www.west8.com/projects/swamp_garden_).

17. “Adriaan Geuze’s Inspirations.” The Dirt. Accessed May 4, 2015. <http://dirt.asia.org/2012/10/19/adriaan-geuzes-inspirations/>.



boardwalk



stepping stones



ropes



canoes

have our experience from a boardwalk or a deck. We are kept above and safely separate from the swamp.

The images on page 81 identify the boardwalk as well as three other tools for bringing people into these wet landscapes. Stepping stones are essentially a broken up boardwalk and keep the person elevated and out of the water. Ropes tied between trees create a trail that a person can grasp while trekking through water; this brings the person *into* rather than *above* the swamp, moving from a picturesque to sublime perspective and greatly intensifying the territory's experiential qualities. In the final strategy, brightly colored canoes signify that in order to be reached, one must get in the water. They beckon explorers to wade in and avail themselves of the canoes to explore deeper water.

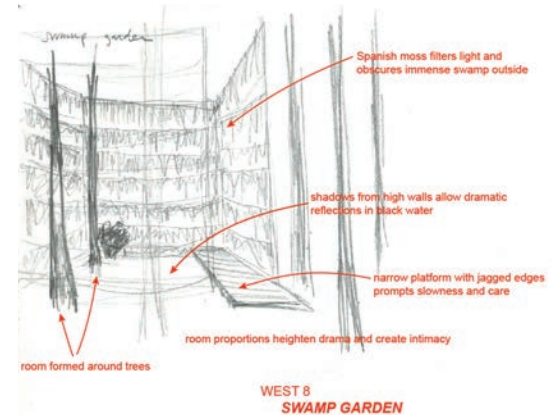
This final approach is the ideal because it allows for direct encounter with the landscape. The absence of paths allows and even forces individuals to familiarize with their surroundings sufficiently to direct their own explorations. But how does this tie into the progression from the clear cut forest to the passage through the logs and grasses?

If people come to the edge of the swamp, they are likely to turn around. We humans tend to stay away from places that get our feet wet. The design accommodates this



## west 8 swamp garden

In 1997, West 8 created the Swamp Garden for the Spoleto Art Festival in Charleston, South Carolina. With a cypress swamp as the setting, the firm designed an airy room in which Spanish moss was draped over wires supported by steel poles. The room was sited so that it encompassed several cypress trees and other swamp vegetation; it could be entered by landing a canoe or approaching via boardwalk.<sup>16</sup> According to team member Adriaan Geuze, the design resulted in an “intense atmosphere that [was] stronger than the swamp.”<sup>17</sup>









by providing a boardwalk to benignly take people into the swamp. The boardwalk curves so as to provide views of the landscape rather than the destination, which is rectangular room, a concentration of the swamp enclosed by four Corten walls. The boardwalk juts inside one wall near a corner and at an angle, appropriately disorienting and off-axis.

This unexpected destination arouses the visitor's curiosity, encouraging careful observation and ultimately active response. Doors opening to the swamp, steps

leading down to the water, and waders hanging on the walls suggest that this does not have to be an endpoint, but the decision is left up to the individual.

All of these design moves are intended to bring people as close as possible to these landscapes of estrangement without extinguishing their inherent power. Sometimes that involves an open terrain and self-navigation, while at other times experience occurs within the confines of a path or room. The clear cut forest gets the lightest touch, followed by a high-handed

Previous spread:  
Images courtesy of  
[http://www.west8.com/projects/swamp\\_garden/](http://www.west8.com/projects/swamp_garden/)

Following spread:  
This model was used to test a variety of strategies for moving through the three intensities.



reorganization of debris into a disorienting passageway. This opens to a beautiful zone of grasses marking the edge of the swamp. Finally, engagement with this wildest landscape is fostered through the initial provision of accommodations and then their gradual removal.

Each part of the design employs a different level of artifice and intervention. Each demands a different level of response, or wilding, from the person.











## *shifting sites*

This thesis pushes into new territory as far as what we consider landscape – what places are worth investment – and how we approach them as designers.

Estrangement as a theory is not limited to rural conditions, although it is frequently found there. To more firmly establish estrangement as a theory independent of any specific landscape typology, an appropriate next test setting would be a highly urban context that meets estrangement criteria.

It would also be worthwhile to push the concept of meridians and expand the range of navigational devices. How we move through landscape is an enormous influence on our experience of it.

The design proposed in this thesis assumes a maximum number of people at the site at a given time (perhaps 40 in groups of about 5) so that each person is able to have an individual encounter with the landscape. The effect of human density on an individual encounter with a landscape of estrangement would be worth testing in a variety of conditions to determine exactly how that influences experience.

As mentioned in the vocabulary, estrangement is subjective, so the effect of repeated exposure to a landscape should be



tested. While some landscapes may lose their enchantment with familiarity, I have a hunch that estrangement might actually expand beyond surface encounters.

This thesis works with existing conditions of estrangement, but it would be worthwhile to test whether estrangement could be worked into a landscape, such as a suburb cul de sac or an active big box store parking lot. However, manufacturing a condition might be at odds with the theory since estrangement pushes into reality.

I am personally devoted to the rural condition and would be interested in cataloguing and developing a unifying program for these typologies. This might take the form of a geospatial smartphone application or a state or regional program, with the goal of introducing more Alabamians to their own landscapes.



plowed field

clearcut  
tall dominant vegetation

lots of deer  
paths  
through woods

SWAMP  
Kupala  
stand

wildflowers - various  
dead trees - stumps

lots of old stumps

DOWN

DEEPER

incubating

chicks

background  
stump clearing

appearance  
of short logs  
will  
lots of stuff in woods

predators of meads

absent here  
(clear)

depression  
with short logs

