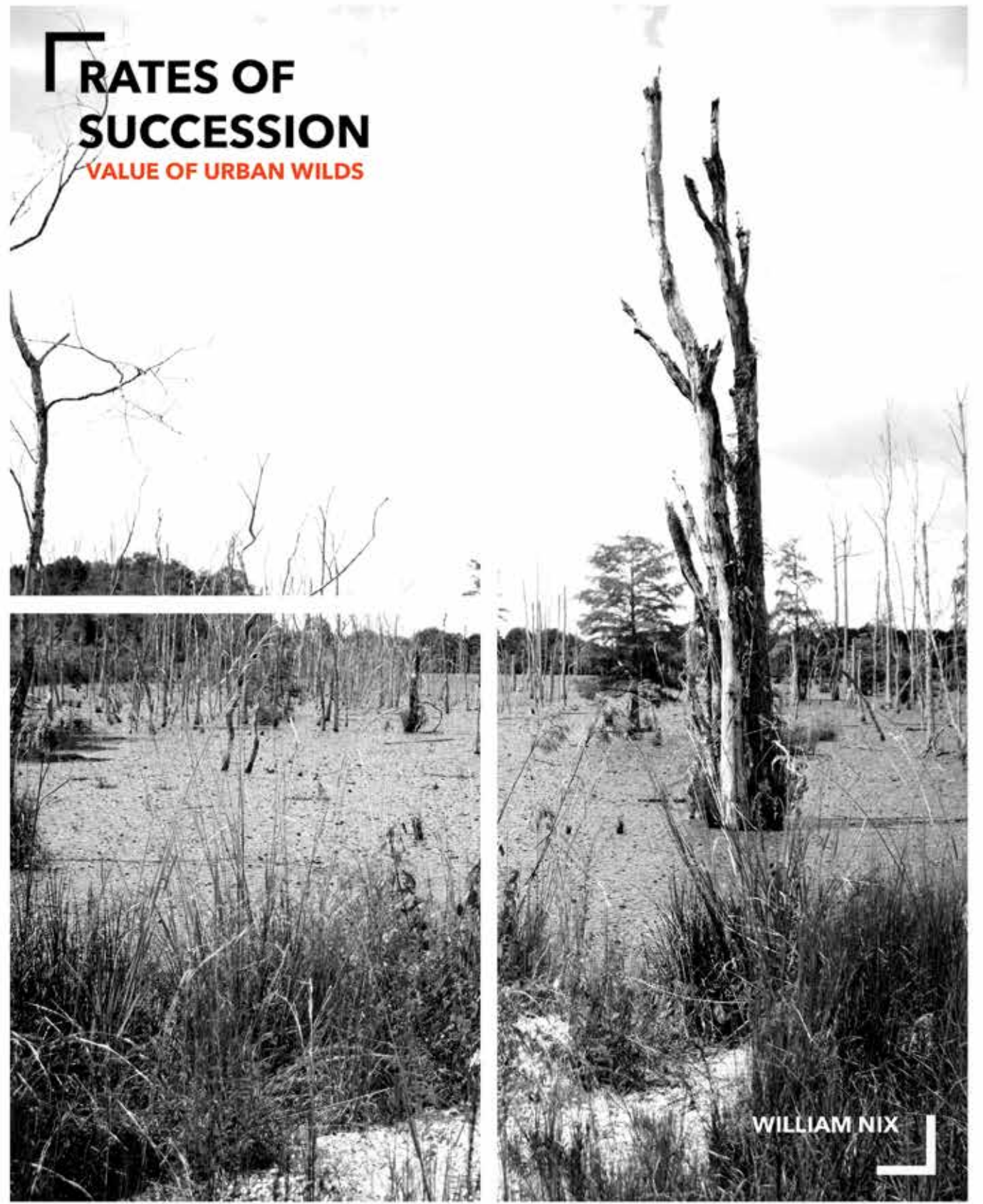


RATES OF SUCCESSION VALUE OF URBAN WILDS

WILLIAM NIX



WILLIAM NIX



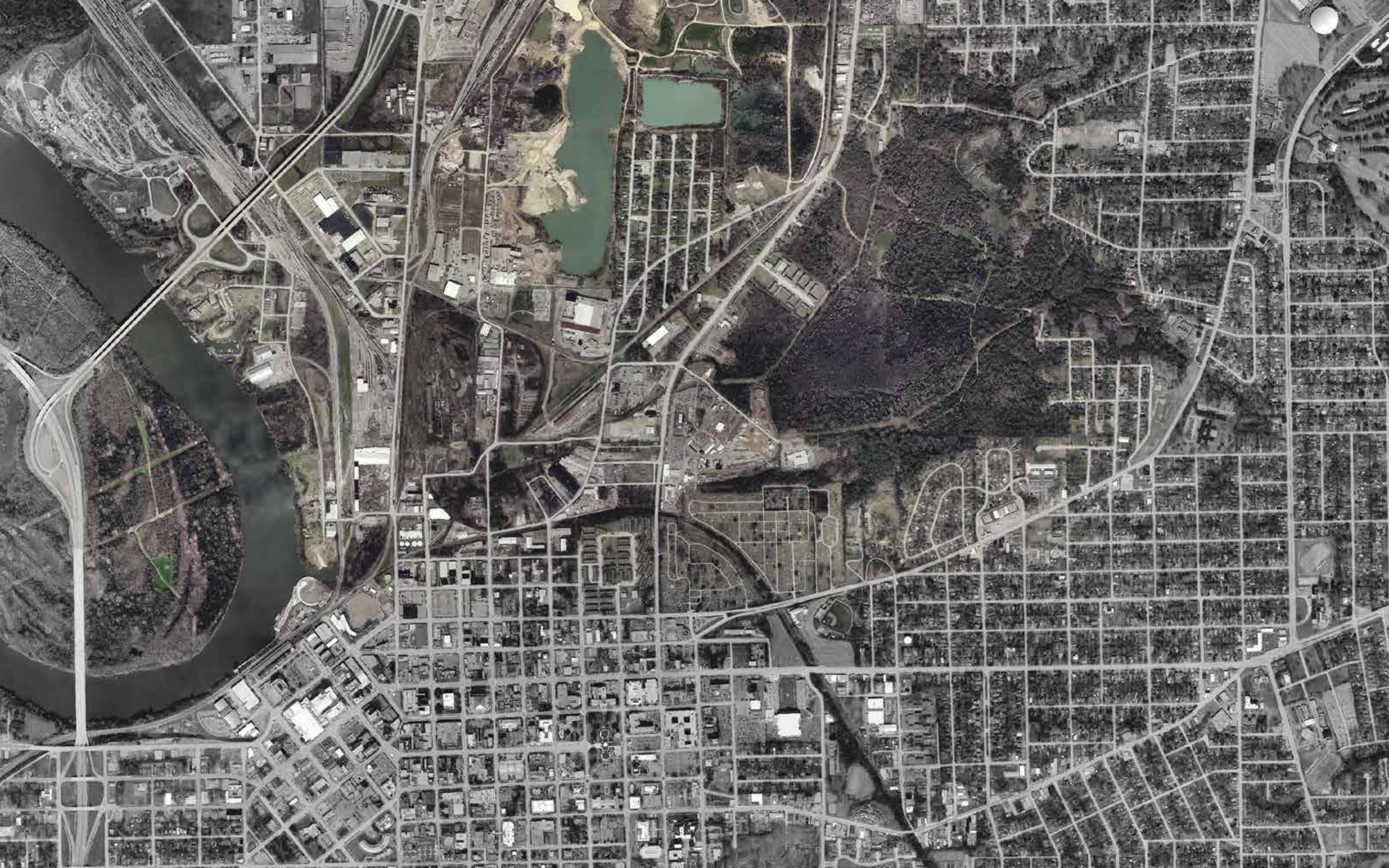
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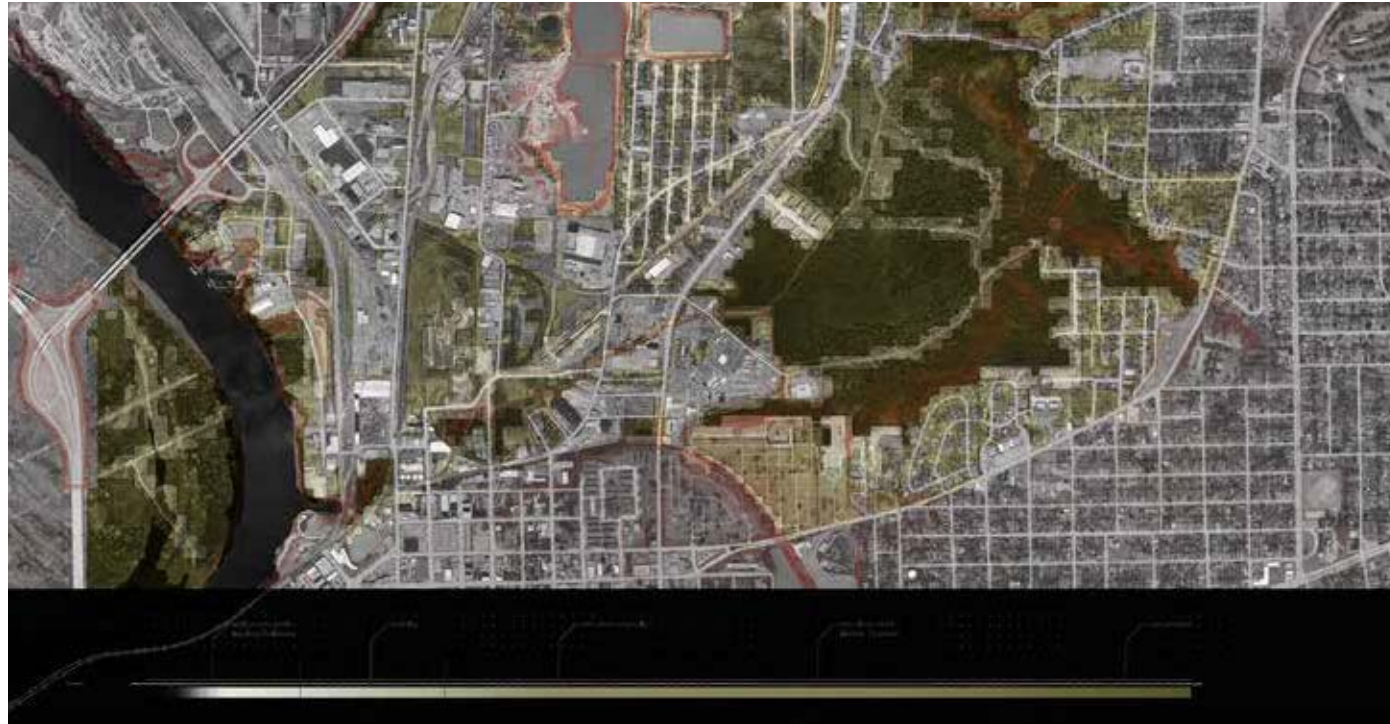
VALUE OF URBAN WILDS



WILLIAM NIX

Auburn University
Master of Landscape Architecture
Graduate Thesis 2015-2016





Natural process is fundamental to landscape architecture. Combining forces with these processes is a landscape architect's greatest challenge and opportunity. A dialogue with urban wilds' successional qualities is the core of this thesis. A landscape architect with the vision and tools to engage in dialogue with the urban wilderness is capable of detaching obstacles and rendering the "wasteland" perception. As public perception deviates from the abandoned "wastelands" to valuing the "friche" landscape, design intervention keeps in tact the spirit of wilderness. The balance of maintaining the wilderness spirit while curating habitable public space is the landscape architect's task. The design instigation relies on process. Succession is the foundation. Providing innovative public space for the people of Montgomery's north end is made possible through collaboration with succession. Succession establishes comprehension of site and network trajectories. The successional lens is vital for design intervention. It embodies the urban wilderness condition as a continuously moving force.



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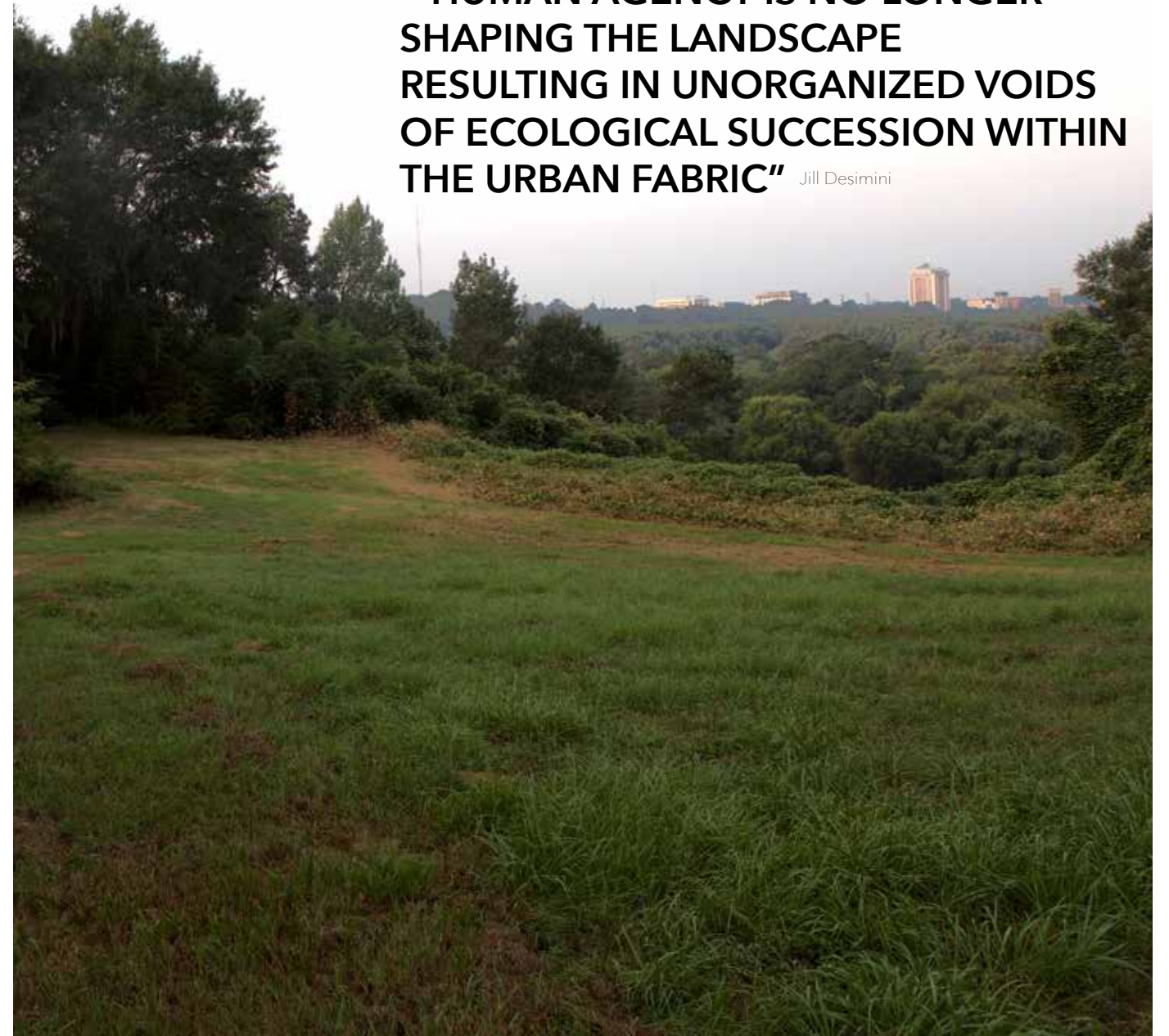
Common Ground

American cities are experiencing drastic fluxes in population and economic transfers; resulting in a curious patchwork of land use. Expansive industrial corridors are abandoned. Spontaneous vegetation growth is a didactic mark of vacancy. "Urban wildness" as Jill Desimini, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, explains in her article, "From Planned Shrinkage to Formerly Urban", "generally refers to places where human agency is no longer shaping the landscape resulting in unorganized voids of ecological succession within the urban fabric" (Desimini 23). This definition encompasses a list of terms with similar connotations: urban wildscape, new wilderness, alternative wilderness, terrain vague, terra incognita, third landscape, and so on. The result of these "urban wilds" is what Emma Marris, in her book "Rambunctious Gardens: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World", refers to as "novel ecosystems". What a majority of people may consider to be an overgrown hectic mess of weeds, landscape architects possess the tools to engage these landscapes.

Jill Desimini shares an optimistic view of vacant land in American cities, a view that has become necessary to embrace as landscape architects attempt to understand "novel ecosystems". Fallow lands within American cities are too often treated with a zoning or policy based ailment. The unavoidable occurrence of wild conditions arises with urban abandonment. "Novel ecosystems" emerge. With the landscape architects concepts of the city, "an interweaving of complex systems", adaptive and flexible approaches of design are at the core of the profession. Desimini states, "to the landscape architect, it goes without saying that all cities have the capacity to expand and contract" (Desimini 19). Certainly a landscape architect possesses the tools necessary for designing an adaptive space within the context of urban wastelands; however, the transferable understanding and perception to the public eye is still ambiguous.



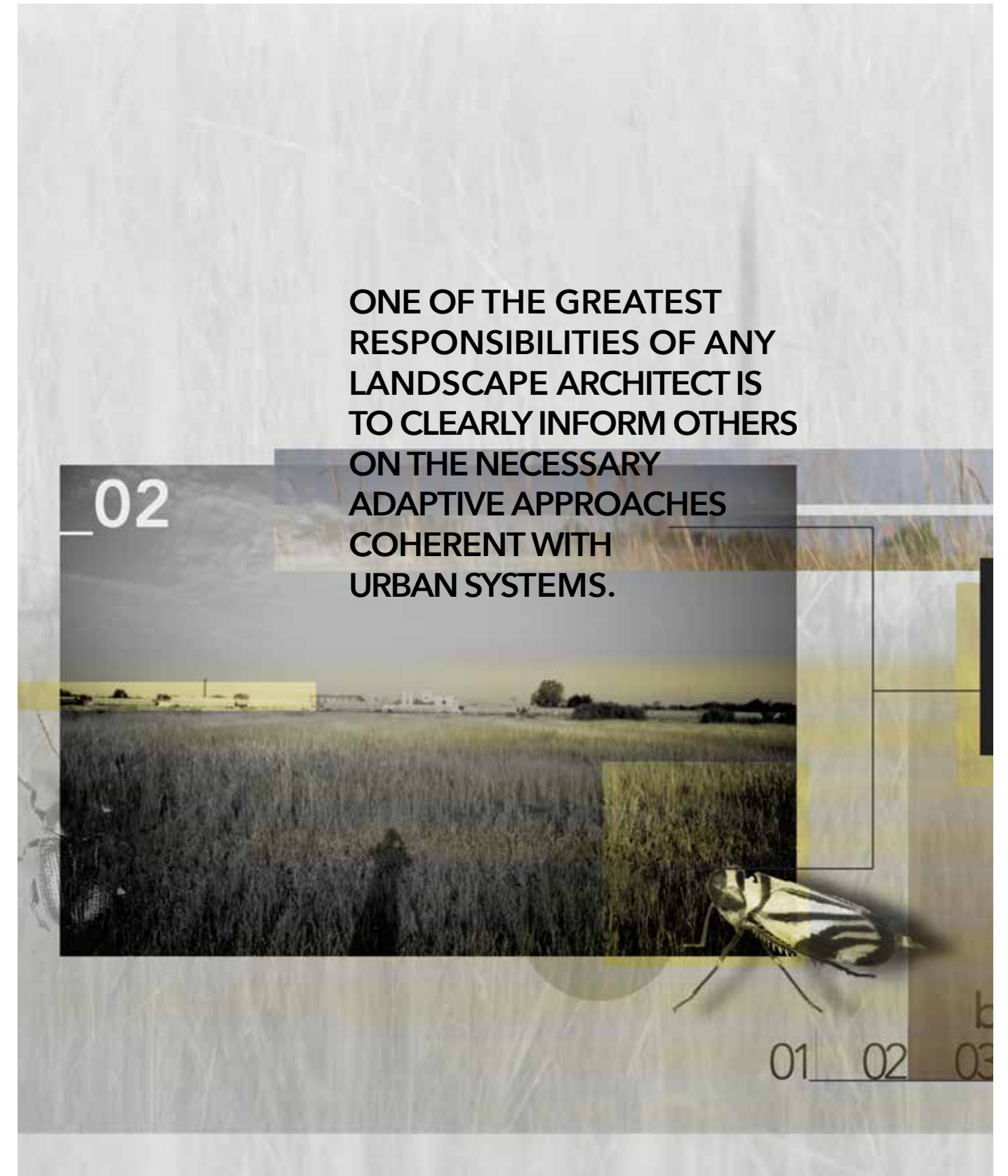
"HUMAN AGENCY IS NO LONGER SHAPING THE LANDSCAPE RESULTING IN UNORGANIZED VOIDS OF ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSION WITHIN THE URBAN FABRIC" Jill Desimini





Landscape Lens

Public perception of urban wastelands is a strong force of uncertainty, creating static notions of enterprise. As Dr. Rod Barnett explains in his book, "Emergence in Landscape Architecture", "Cities are seen as emergent systems rather than geographies of function" (Barnett 226). Through a process-based lens of the city, resilient systems of variation are depicted. Perhaps, one of the greatest responsibilities of any landscape architect is to clearly inform others on the necessary adaptive approaches coherent with urban systems. It is vital for landscape architects to possess a voice of keen willingness; embracing the novelty of cities fallow land. Perpetuating responsive tactics will furlong the expenditures needed to flexibly design within an assorted patchwork of history, culture, and ecology.





The balancing act required to successfully intervene with novel ecosystems is found in the adeptness of landscape architects. Desimini explains, "architecture acts as an instrument of organization, or rationalization, and of productive efficiency capable of transforming the uncivilized into the cultivated, the fallow into the productive, the void into the built" (Desimini 21). Time, maintenance, and scale rely heavily on the process-based design informed by the open, emergent systems within novel ecosystems. Landscape architects are the definitive advocates for this.





Legacy City

American cities perform incessant variability. Marking the transition from the 20th century into the 21st century, dense conditions of suburbanization, globalization, and deindustrialization have shaped the physical form and ideologies of urban cores. A direct effect within the last decade; the phenomenon of "shrinking cities" has become a certain challenge. With a considerable amount of further exploration, "shrinking cities" are experiencing consistent decline in population. More closely, a "shrinking city" defines American cities with peak populations above 100,000 that have declined by twenty percent or more. Notable cities include Cleveland, Detroit, and Pittsburg; which have all experienced over fifty percent of population decline since the 1950's. Furthermore, the recent research on "shrinking cities", even the word itself, is denoting an undesirable connotation. A new group has emerged to redirect our perceptions of a fluctuating city.

- Louisville, KY
- New Orleans, LA
- Birmingham, AL
- Detroit, MI
- Philadelphia, PA
- Milwaukee, WI
- Baltimore, MD
- Cincinnati, OH
- Cleveland, OH
- Akron, OH
- St. Louis, MO
- Washington, DC
- Richmond, VA
- Macon, GA
- Dayton, OH
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Norfolk, VA
- Minneapolis, MN
- Gary, IN
- Buffalo, NY
- Rochester, NY
- Warren, MI
- Youngstown, OH
- Flint, MI

Legacy City by geographic size



www.legacycitydesign.org

- Fall River, MA
- Charleston, WV
- Canton, OH
- Scranton, PA
- Springfield, OH
- Syracuse, NY
- Newark, NJ
- Hammon, IN
- Albany, NY
- New Bedford, MA
- Pontiac, MI
- Erie, PA
- New Haven, CT
- Providence, RI
- Hartford, CT
- Saginaw, MI
- Utica, NY
- Huntington, WV
- Niagara Falls, NY
- Wilmington, DE
- Schenectady, NY
- Reading, PA
- Camden, NJ
- Trenton, NJ



Montgomery, AL, Legacy District



The Legacy Cities Partnership has produced certain opportunity for cities with reduction in population. Redirecting attention to the assets presented in the cities, LCP believe opportunity abounds. LCP defines legacy cities as, "older, industrial urban areas that have experienced significant population and job loss, resulting in high residential vacancy and diminished service capacity and resources" (LCP). Advocating enriched perception of progression is crucial. Furthermore, as stakeholders and public city officials collaborate with planners, architects, landscape architects, and designers for solutions, a general outlook of progressive clarification will create valuable results. Direct effects of vacancy and uncultivated land are linked to "shrinking cities" or "legacy cities". How we interpret and communicate these conditions is presenting vital suppositions.



"Derborence Island"

Derborence Island, by French landscape architect Gilles Clement informs specific implications caused by intentionally intermingling with fallow lands. Using Clements term, "third landscape", clear reflection can occur on his deliberate actions in Lille, France. "Third landscape" is characterized by: "1. The abandoned space associated with past agricultural or industrial uses, 2. The reserve spaces that have been scarcely modified by human activity whether by chance or inaccessibility, and 3. Designated nature reserves - which enjoys some form of legal protection" (Gandy 265). Matthew Gandy, Professor of Geography at University College London, is direct and unafraid in his critique of Clements design. Gandy believes, at the core of Derborence Island, "Clément's project reveals tensions between the aesthetic and scientific significance of so-called 'waste space' in contemporary cities and the widening scope of utilitarian approaches to landscape design" (Gandy 259). Waste spaces, or as we have referred to, describes fallow lands or urban wilds. Gandy acknowledges the spreading emphasis of urban wildness in landscape design. Gandy also provides us with the term "friche" - referring to fallow land; however, "friche" implies productive use in the future.



<http://wasteland-twinning.net>

"Friche" correlates with perception. Creating implications of healthy performance, one may understand this fallow land as opportunistic. Supposing Clément's progressive intentions read these implications, Gandy suggests his design may have caused seclusion from the processes involved in cultivating this land. Two distinct elements make up Clément's design: "an expansive open area that is accessible to the public, and a raised island at its center that is inaccessible" (Gandy 261). Even though Clément is recognized as exceptional in landscape design, Gandy suggests the inaccessibility in Derborence Island "runs counter to the inspired emphasis on the 'right to urban nature' and wider connections between nature, landscape and urban environmental justice" (Gandy 267). The complex underpinnings involved are not clearly deciphered for all to understand. Gandy states, "There is an implicit didacticism and utilitarianism that runs through the discourse of landscape design, which presupposes the existence of a relationship between professional practice and public culture" (Gandy 269). Derborence Island is simply taken out of context, moreover, a strong statement from Clément, but not implicit to the site.

Recalling Clément's intentions, calling attention to the "tensions of aesthetic and scientific significance of so-called 'waste spaces'", the project intended to build an education center, informing the viewer on Clément's attempt. However, funds had diminished and the center was never built. This contributes greatly to any public misunderstanding. And, as Gandy suggests, "if we accept the legitimacy of making intellectual demands on the public for the appreciation of nature and landscape, this poses a particular challenge for Clément's park design, since its interpretation requires an understanding of multiple fields of knowledge. Gandy closes by describing Derborence Island as an "ecological simulacrum" (Gandy 275). Clément's project has become a floating sculpture resembling efforts to embrace urban wilds. What Clément implies, can be formed in actuality.



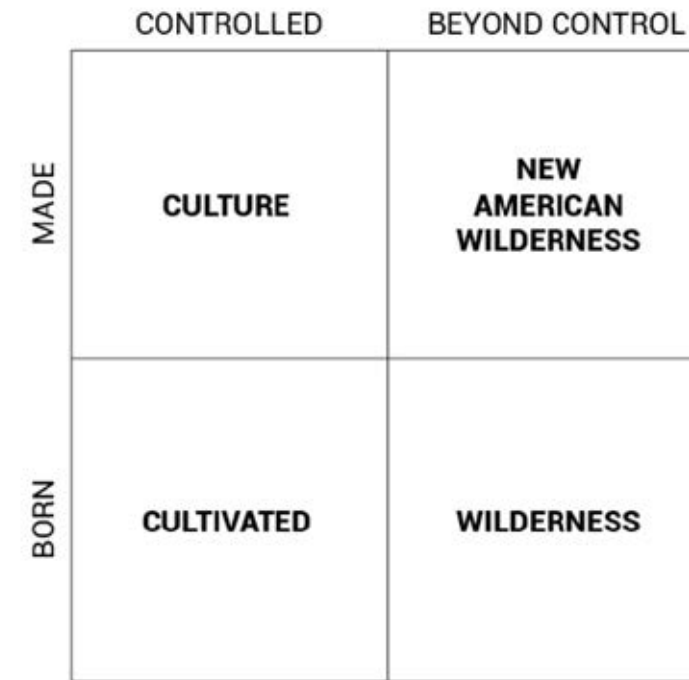
<http://wasteland-twinning.net>

DERBORENCE ISLAND

Wilderness Redefined

Wilderness is not nature. The notion of wild as untouched by man is false. Gradients of human presence fluctuate from densely urbanized to sparsely rural, and wilderness is encountered throughout the entire spectrum. The experience of wilderness is not only found remote in the Blue Ridge Mountains or deep within the Mississippi River Delta, but also in what is commonly described as cities "wastelands". To claim "wilderness" over "wasteland" is to shift the conversation. After all, "wasteland" suggests forlorn, hopeless land. To counter, wilderness claims cultural, ecological, and even social value. Culturally, when individuals encounter spaces shaped beyond human intention, where the modus of succession has exemplified dominion, the space is deemed wild.

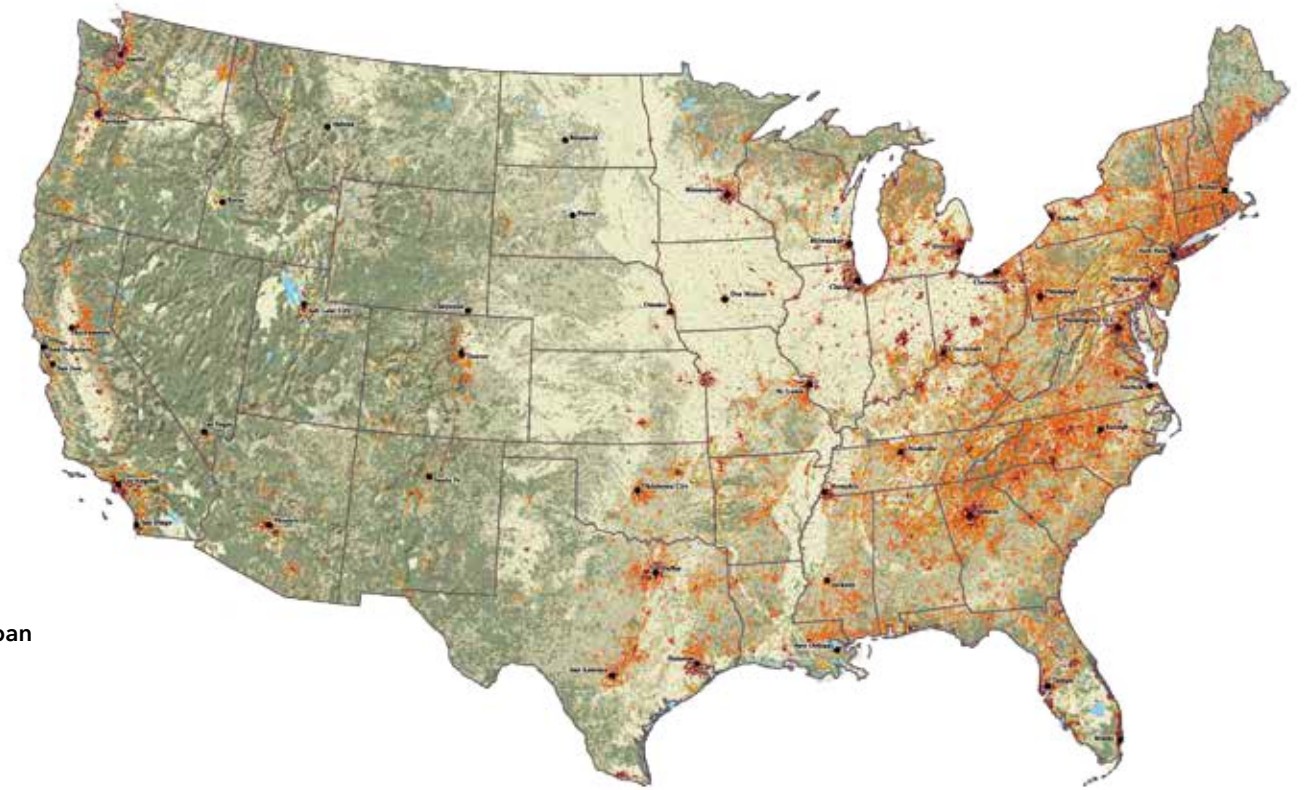
The United States is continually inaugurating land as preserved wilderness. The Wilderness Act defines wilderness as "rare, wild places where one can retreat from civilization, reconnect with the Earth, and find healing, meaning and significance". The misconception that our wilderness is gradually decreasing is a sensitive topic of land stewardship. This idea also threatens the millions of people without access to Wilderness Act areas of preservation from ever experiencing "retreats of healing". Just as individuals experience restorative qualities in the 10 million acres of protected wilderness, similar opportunities are available in urban wilderness.



Made and Beyond Control
Rob Holmes after Van Mensvoort and Grievink, Next Nature

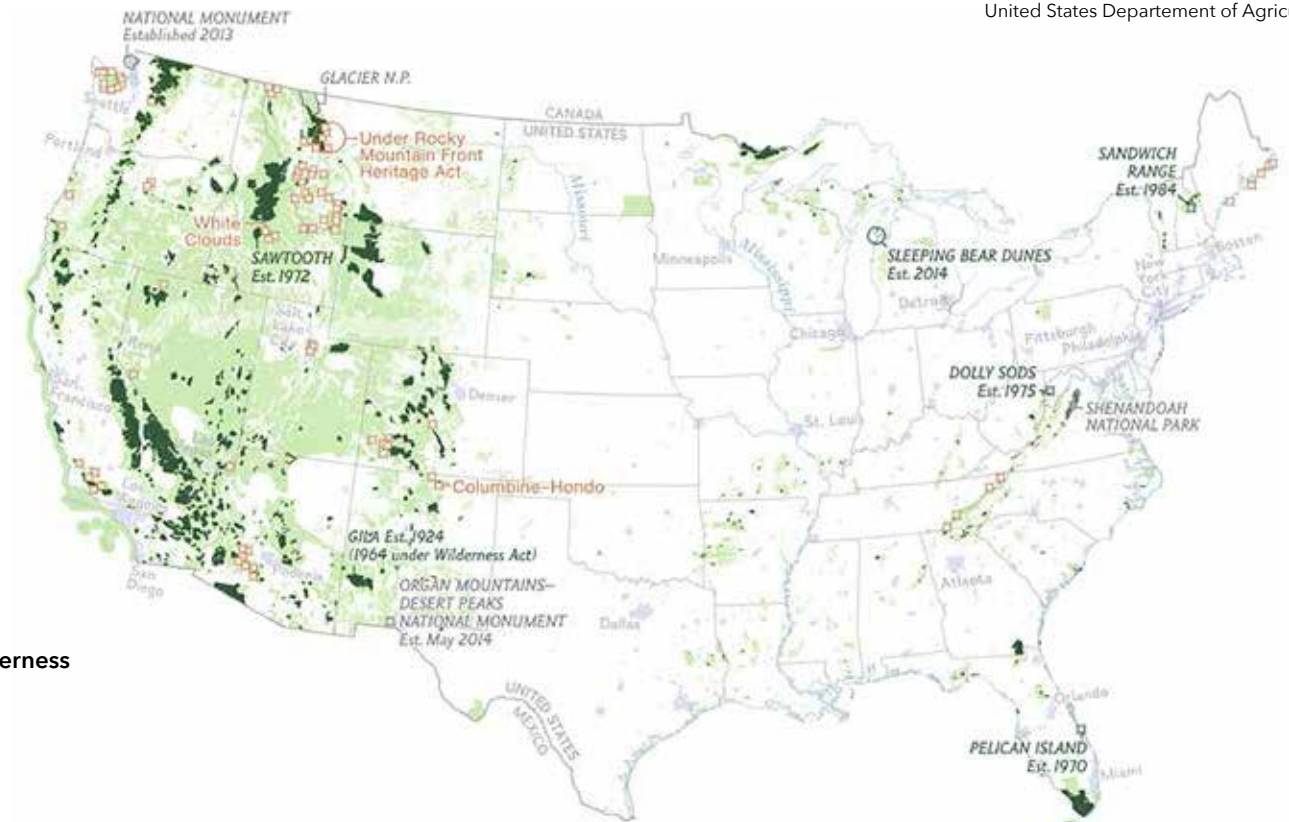
Novel social development and interaction are established within wilderness. The urban wilderness offers a range of social behaviors not possible in a cities "park system". The do-it-yourself mindset suggests creativity and ingenuity for all encountering wilderness. Furthermore, humans are not the only inhabitants of the wilderness. Aggregations of wildlife, from large mammals to small insects, call this home. All of these, ecological, cultural, and social opportunities are heightened by the traces of historic human intervention. The wild condition, within the urban realm, boasts persuasive imagery. A powerful scene of nature consuming a once heavily cultivated area actually amplifies the wilderness dynamic. As, often times, industrial corridors lay fallow; swaths of wilderness are establishing themselves in cities all around the world.

Urban



United States Department of Agriculture

Wilderness



<http://www.wilderness.net>

WILDERNESS REDEFINED

These “bewildered cities” have a surplus of techniques toward suppressing the urban wilds. The title of “wasteland” has cancelled out the chance for any existing opportunities. So, characterizing the site with barbwire fencing and no trespassing signs is no surprise. Rarely do residents possess the prospect of experiencing wilderness. Montgomery, Alabama embodies these suppressing characteristics. The features of obstruction privilege what is known and comfortable. An orderly, familiar site of “master planned green space” or additional parking are prioritized scenarios in Montgomery. The perception a city places on a site deceives one into believing there is no value. But certainly, as stated earlier, there is cultural, ecological, and social value here. Nonetheless, the urban wilds are tucked away and deemed empty until development demands the site. The wilderness will proceed emerging behind barricades.



02 CURATED WILDS



- 01 STOCKYARDS**
- 02 QUARRIES**
- 03 MARSHLANDS**
- 04 WOODLANDS**
- 05 HOUSING**

Theory of Impact

Understanding the fallow lands in Montgomery, Alabama is complex. Decades of industry, layers of disruption, and baggage of perception define miles of Montgomery's urban core. Establishing a foundation of understanding urban systems, population fluctuations, novel ecosystems, and public perception are fundamental for closely examining the implications of intentional intervention. Site-specific circumstances have presented themselves. Traces of previous land use are legible on many of the urban wilderness sites in Montgomery. Over time, impacts of human influence have established themselves. The rate of impact varies upon the physical implications. Soil make-up, topographic variances, and abiotic remnants shift and stabilize. The stockyard condition is clear over decades of time. As materials remain stagnant, soil compaction is increased. In time, the parcel of land is left unattended and an andropogon field emerges. The emergence is clearly influenced by the stockpiling rows. The impact of stockpiling is felt well after stockpiling actually occurs. The theory of impact suggests human influence can be legible over extended periods of time, without human control. This is vital for a landscape architect's ability to curate urban wilderness sites.





Embracing novelty suggests a much deeper level of human impact. We live in a society, which has misunderstood the actuality of pristine wilderness. Change is constant on our landscapes. Rather short or long term shifts, this understanding opens many opportunities for landscape architects to intervene within urban wilderness sites with short and long term impacts. Joshua Zeunert, in his article, "Challenging Assumptions in Urban Restoration Ecology", articulates approaches to restoring fallow lands in urban areas. Zeunert, at the core of his writing, is advocating for full acceptance of "novel ecosystems" found in cities. As "restoration" is an often times assumed approach toward fallow lands, Zeunert is troubled with the naivety associated with this. "Restoration" is an attempt to recreate past, indigenous landscapes. Zeunert has lists of problematic assumptions associated with "restoration ecology", in short, "the goal of returning to static, past points in time and restarting the ecological clock is unrealistic" (Zeunert 234). Novelty is embraced, designing for a resilient future is examined, and flexibility through a multitude of scales is Zeunert's suggested direction.

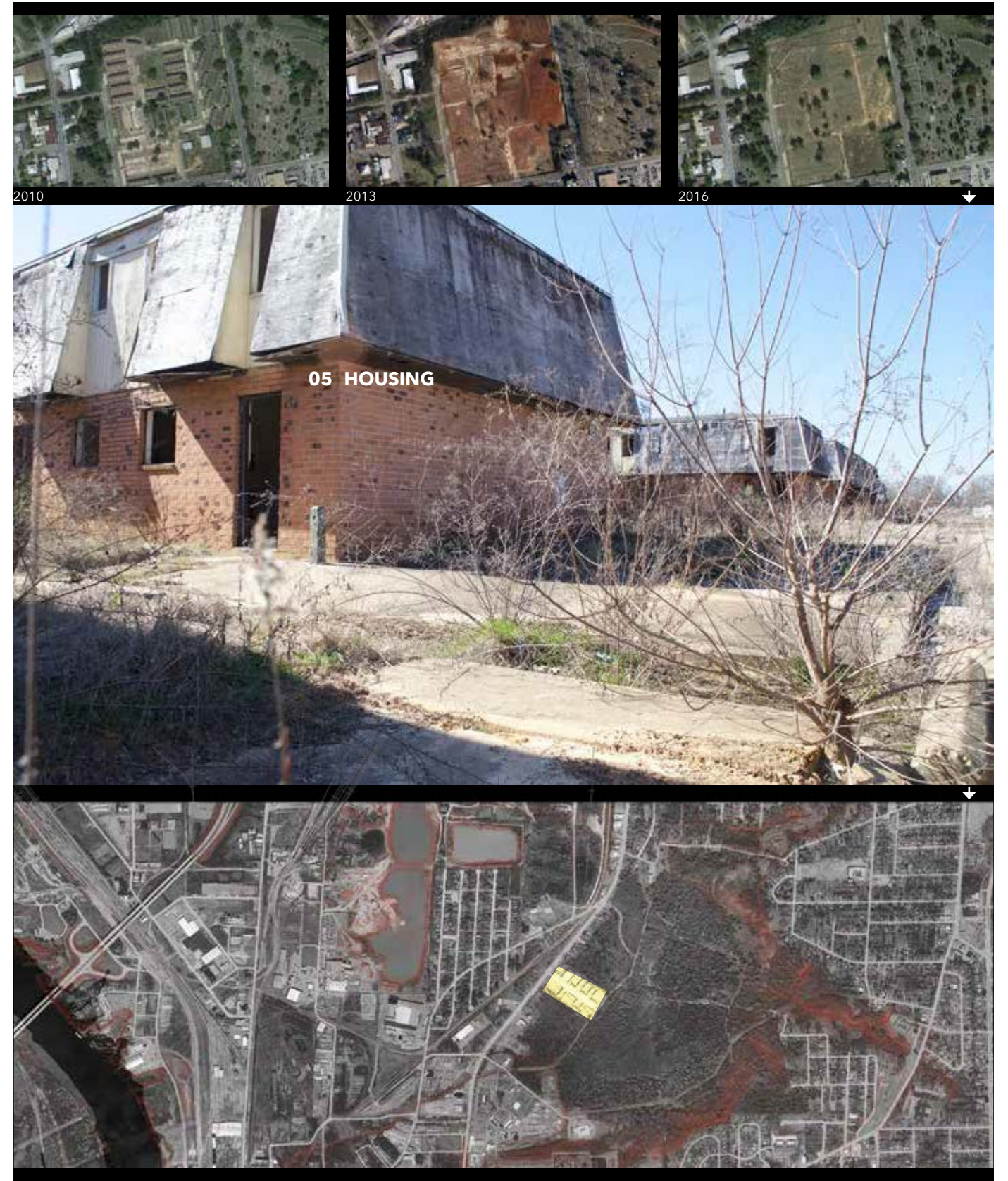
The woodlands of Montgomery, or formally known as, Cypress Nature Park, is a unique urban condition. Many Montgomery citizens recognize value in the vastness of this condition, but struggle to see their new urbanism vision take form. A majority of this comes from the overwhelming maintenance necessary to maintain its current condition. What the urban wild approach does so well is its proactive performance. There is no battle with succession, but urban wilds are fundamentally about embracing the shifts emerging. The woodlands are a vital piece to the urban wild network.

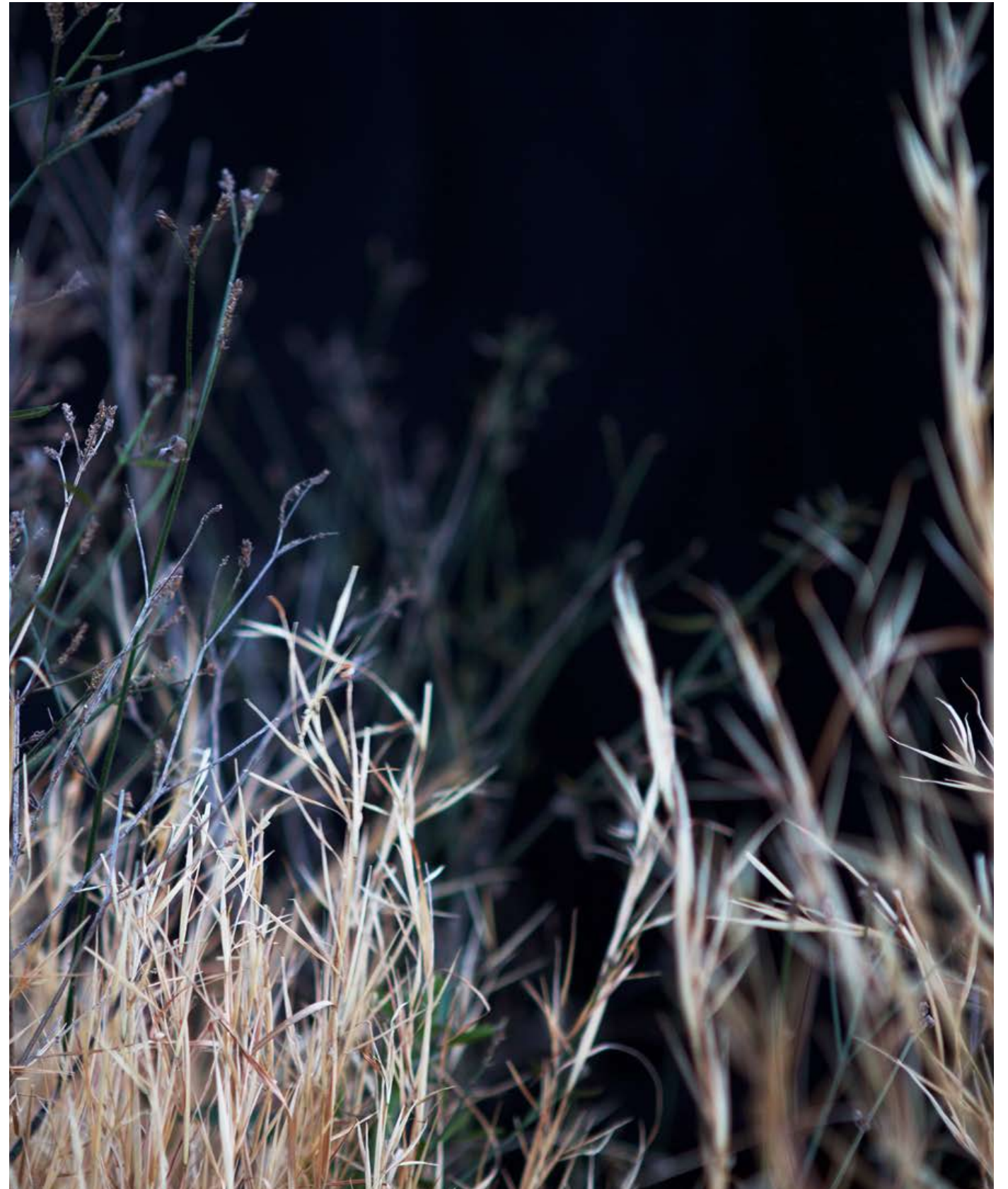


Rapid Succession

These wilderness sites are incredibly dynamic in their ability to perform as regenerative ecosystems, remnants of cities past, and glimpses into future cities. Urban wilderness is the threshold humanity is fascinated with, nature and its relationship to mankind. When the economic backbone of city is ravaged by natural process, the spirit of wilderness takes hold. The foundational characteristic of these transitional processes is succession. Once this is discovered, a landscape architect must initiate a dialogue with the messy, unruly, and undervalued character of the urban wilds.

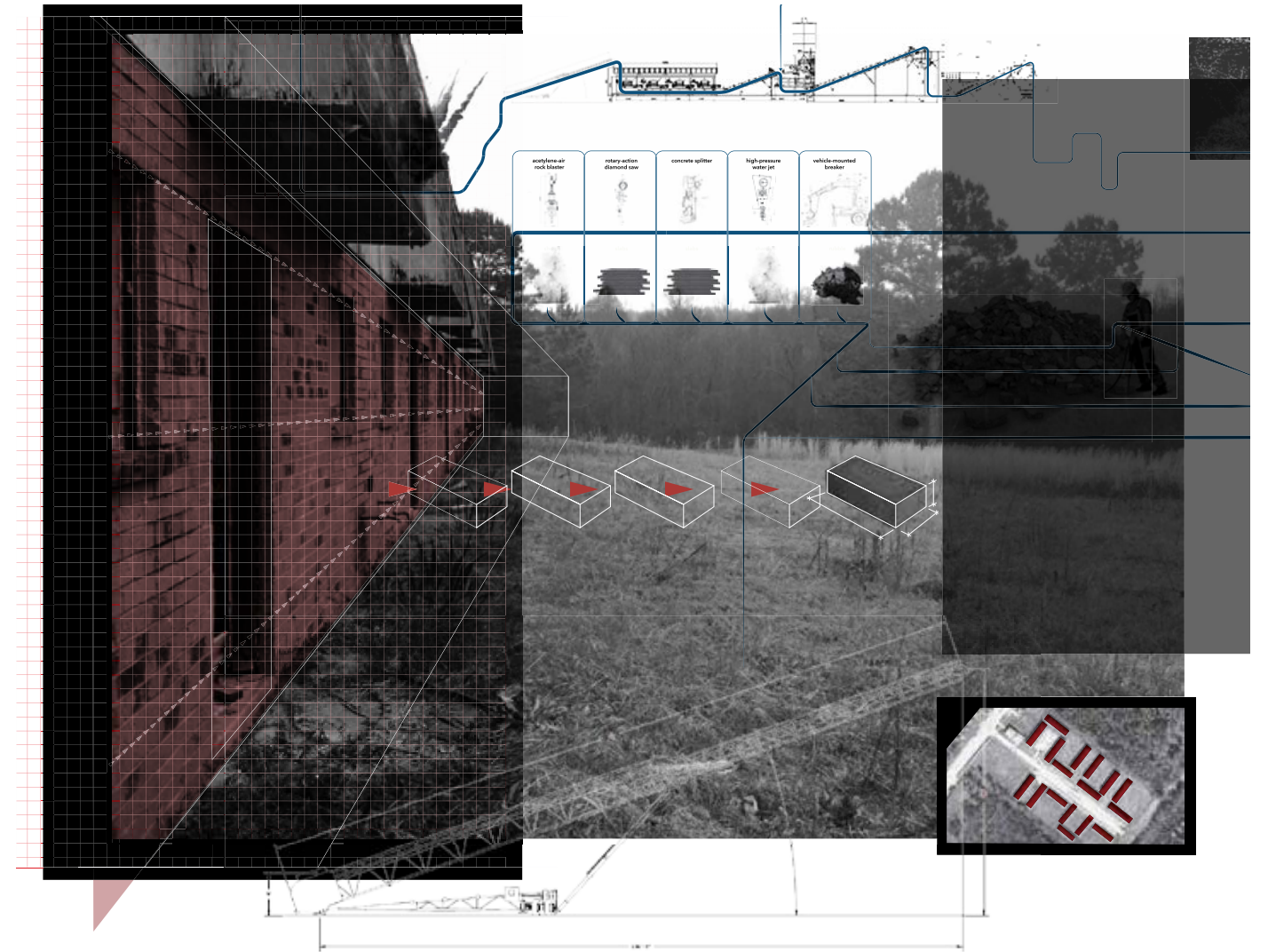
Succession is engaged in all aspects of a site. The abiotic elements of urban wild sites are much less flexible than the organic elements emerging. Landscape architects have the ability to craft strategies suitable from site to site to propel the successive qualities of, for example, the eighteen abandoned public housing buildings adjacent to the 260 acres of woodlands. The dramatic shift in site functionality is responsible for "wasteland" perception. Rapid succession of perception is altered through phasing of strategic demolition, stockpiling, soil preparation, and resourceful re-use of materials.

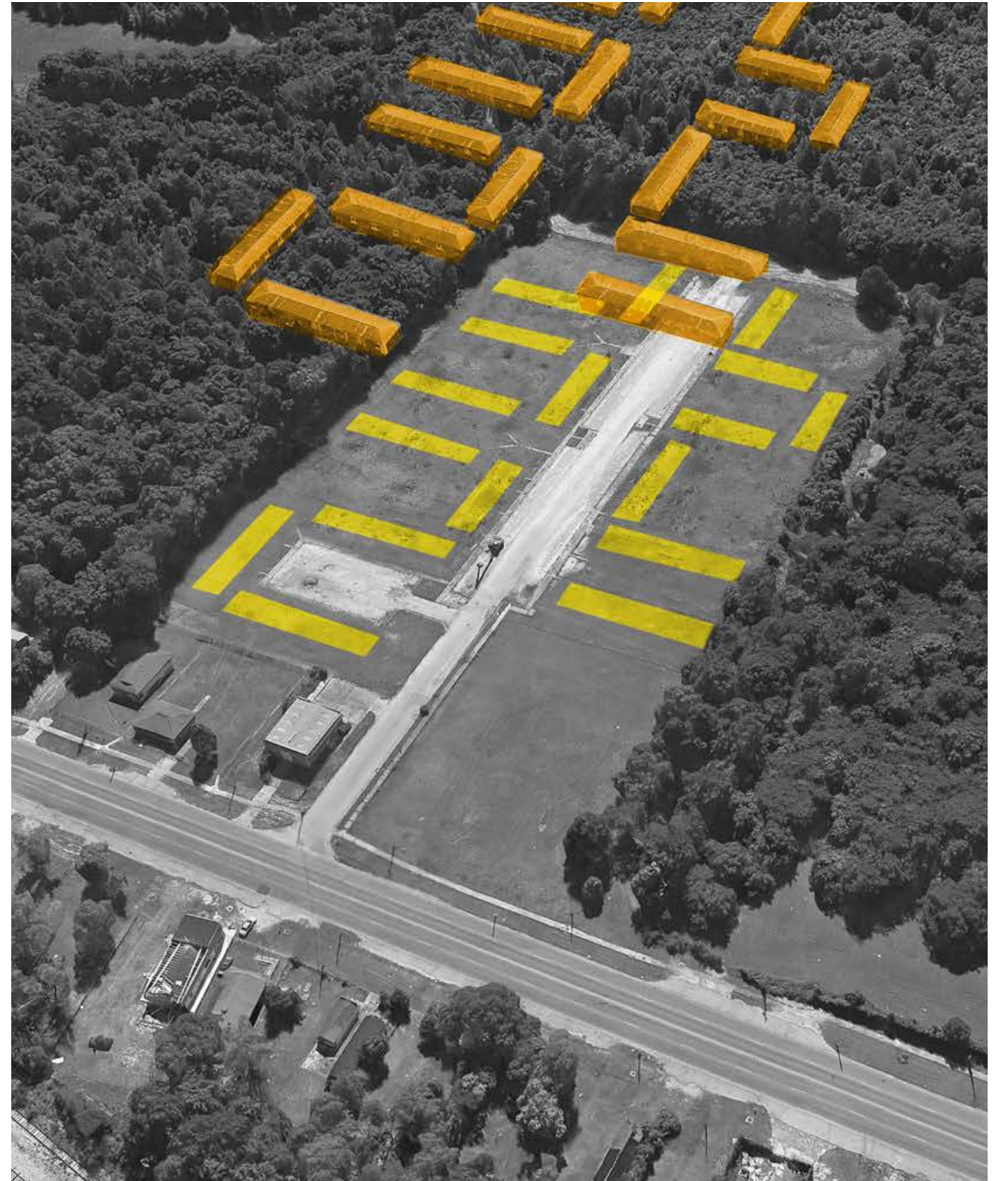
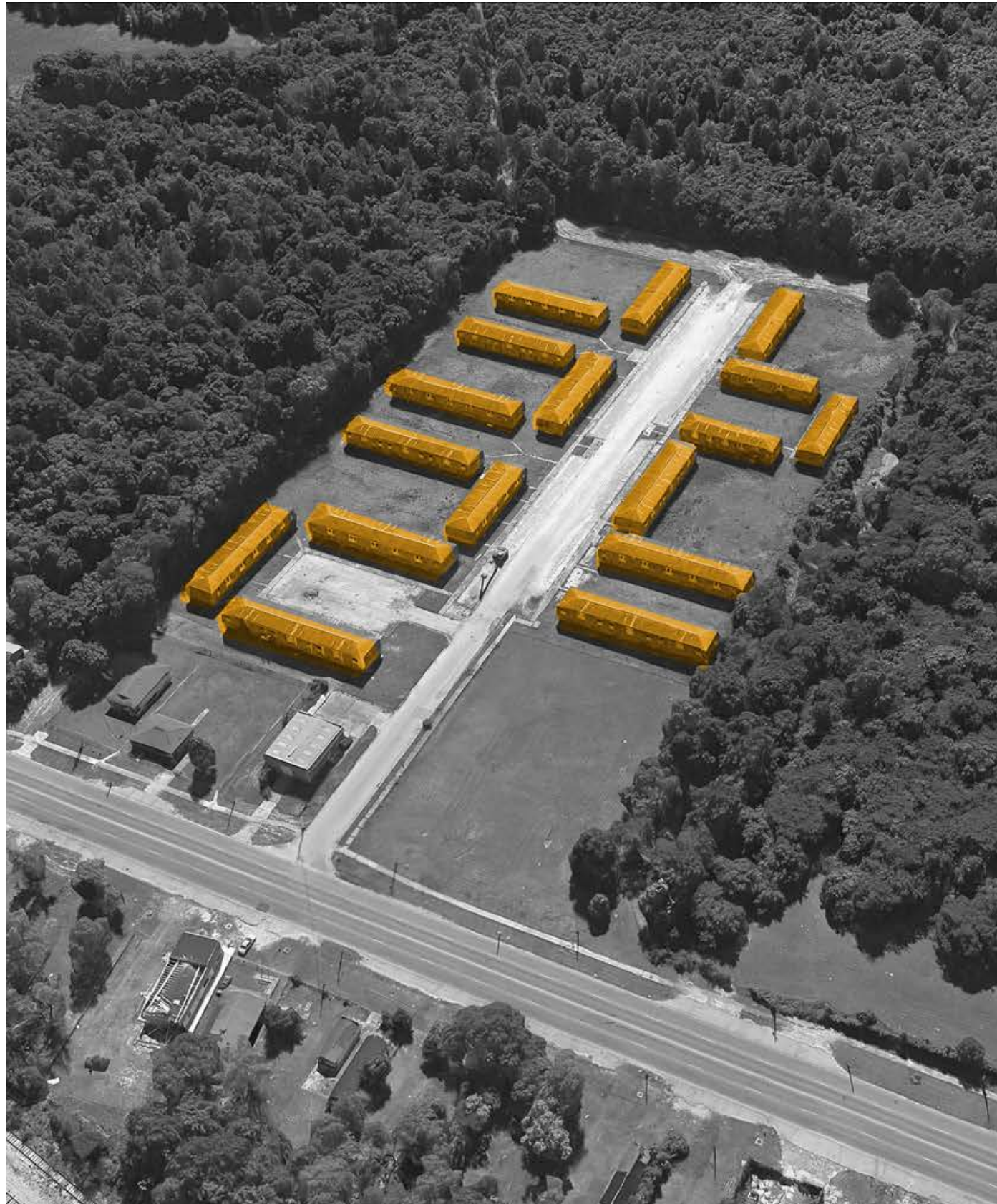


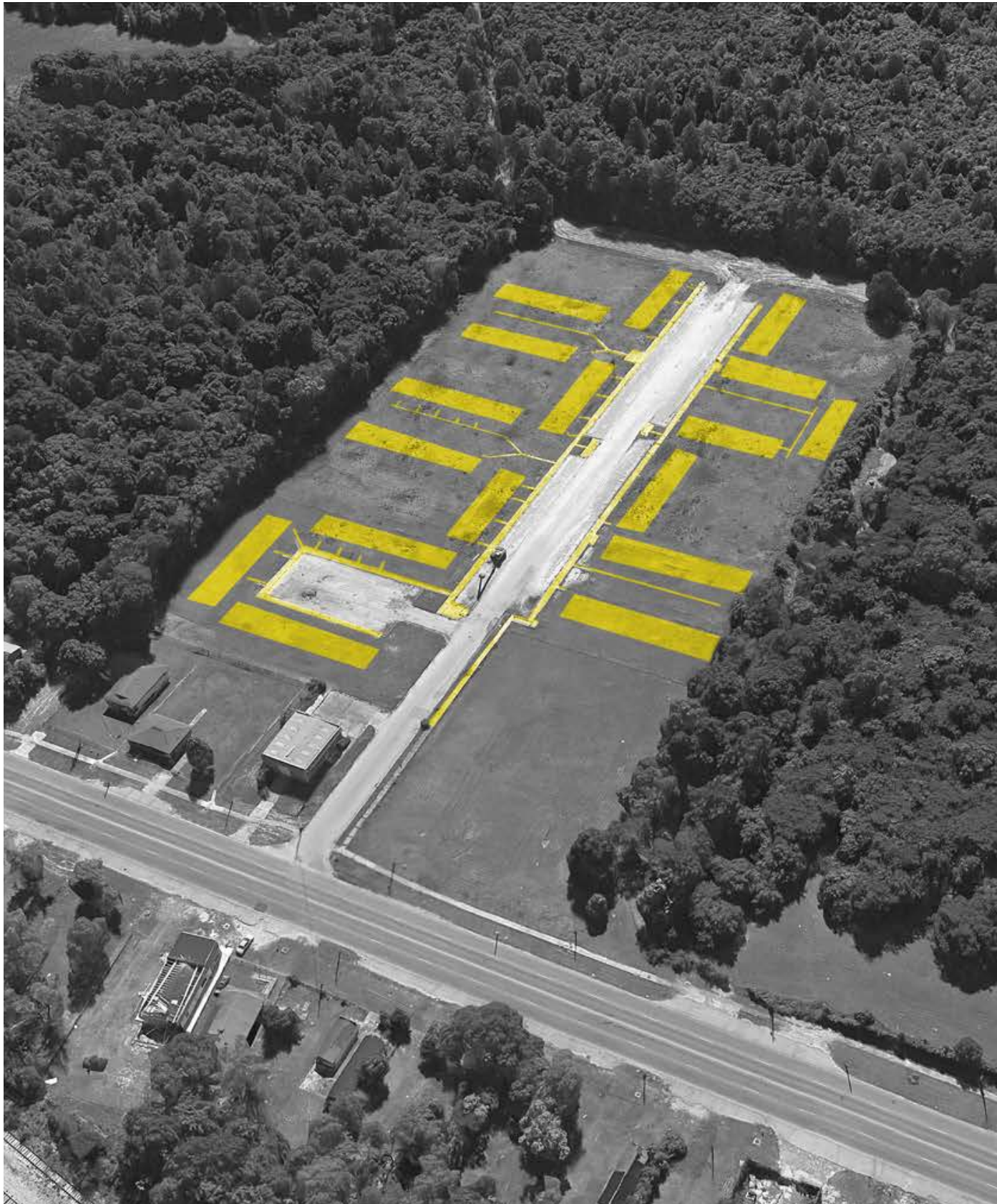


Strategic Demolition

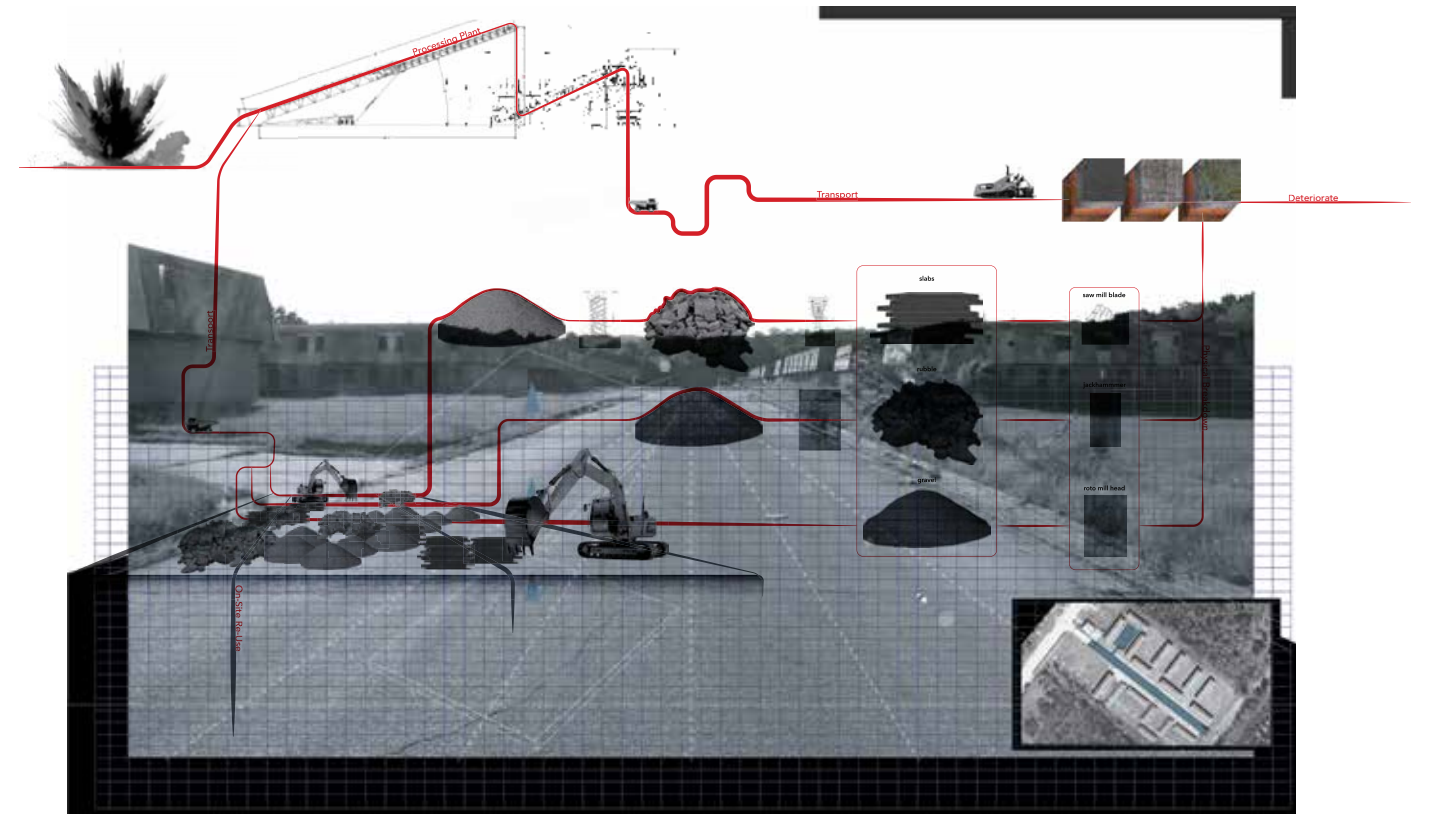
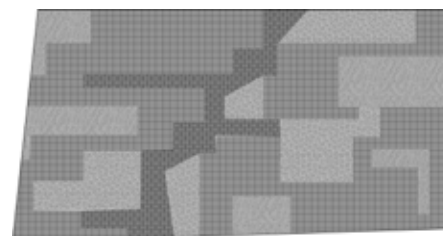
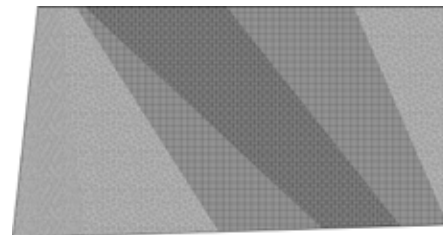
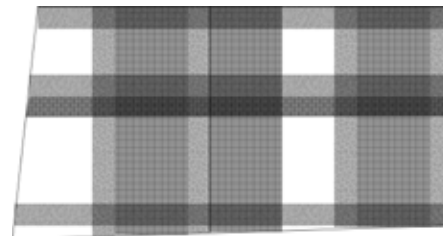
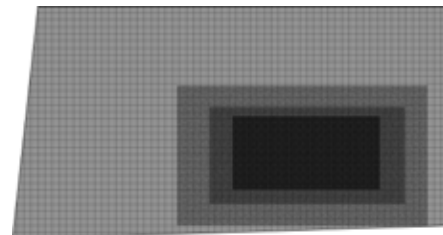
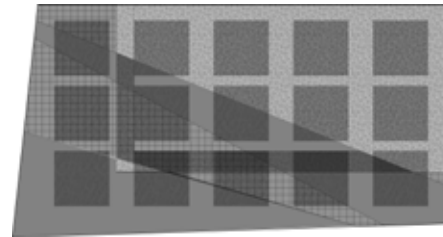
The sublime aesthetic of deteriorating buildings amongst vast fields of swaying diversity can be frightening and inspiring. Many urban wild sites with abandonment in the foreground are overwhelmingly frightening. In order to achieve welcoming wild space, rapid succession of abandonment is the first phase. Too often do landscape architects take for granted the demolition process. However, the urban wild spirit of resourcefulness embraces re-use of all materials. The abiotic and biotic relationships in urban wilds are incredibly rich. The rate of impact a slab of asphalt or rubble of bricks has on plant succession are our tools of legibility. So, we demolish with a careful hand, using a range of tools to cut, hammer, rip, blast, split, jet, break, and scrape our materials into new uses. In return, we have a full range fine grain sized gravel to dense slabs.

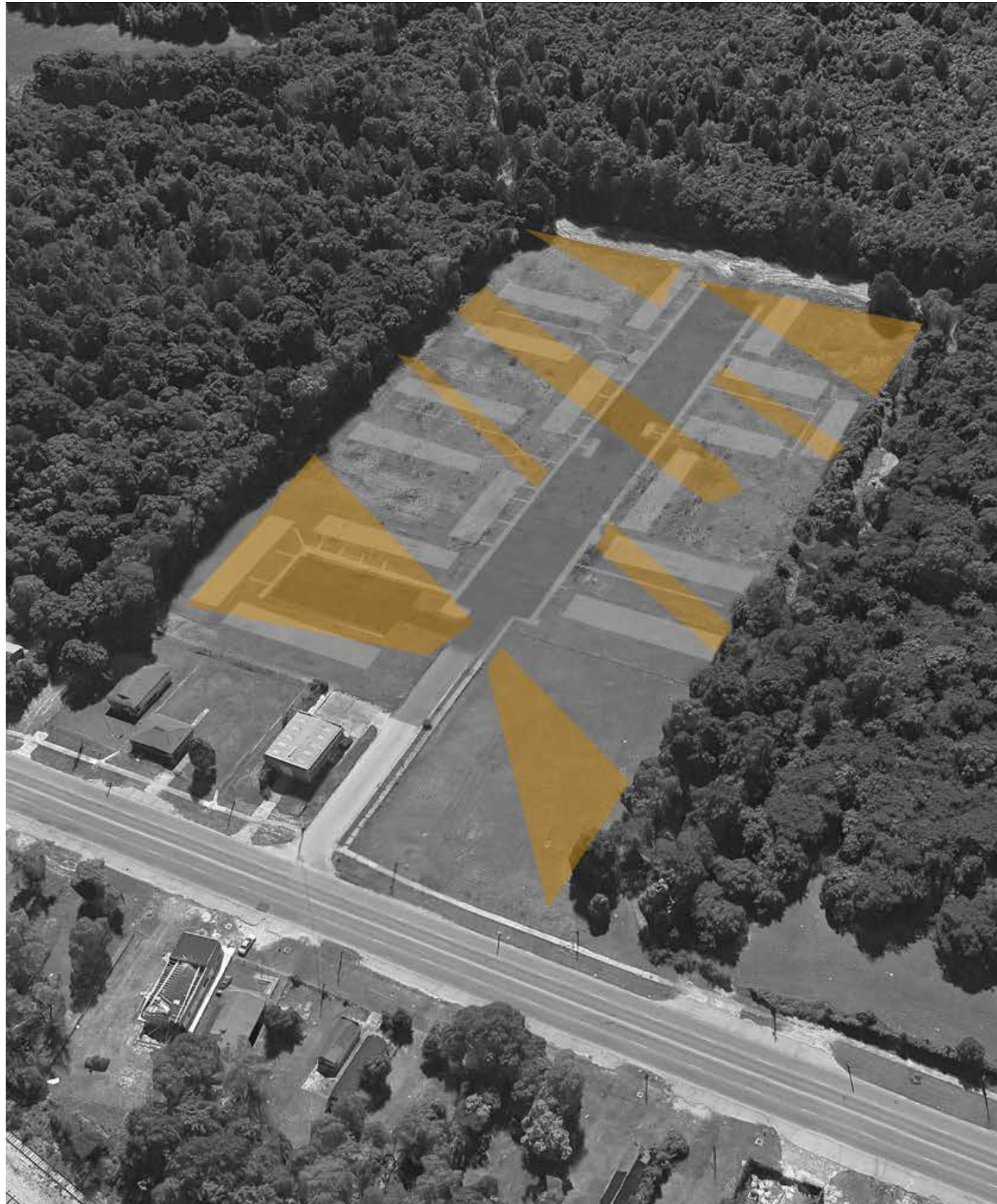






As a variety of materiality accumulates on site, strategic stockpiling, as we have seen earlier, establishes the first rates of impact. The techniques used for demolition, truck routes, toolkits, and material placement are elegantly designed to directly impact plant succession. Placing materials in varying strips and densities begins soil preparation for desired plant communities emerging. The most weighted areas are established for our pioneer plant species. Testing different layouts allows for an understanding of how the site will start forming. Grids, strips, overlays, fragmentations are all tested with the desire of clear design intent of long periods of time. The demolition process establishes many short-term impacts that mark the first decade of an urban wilds experience.

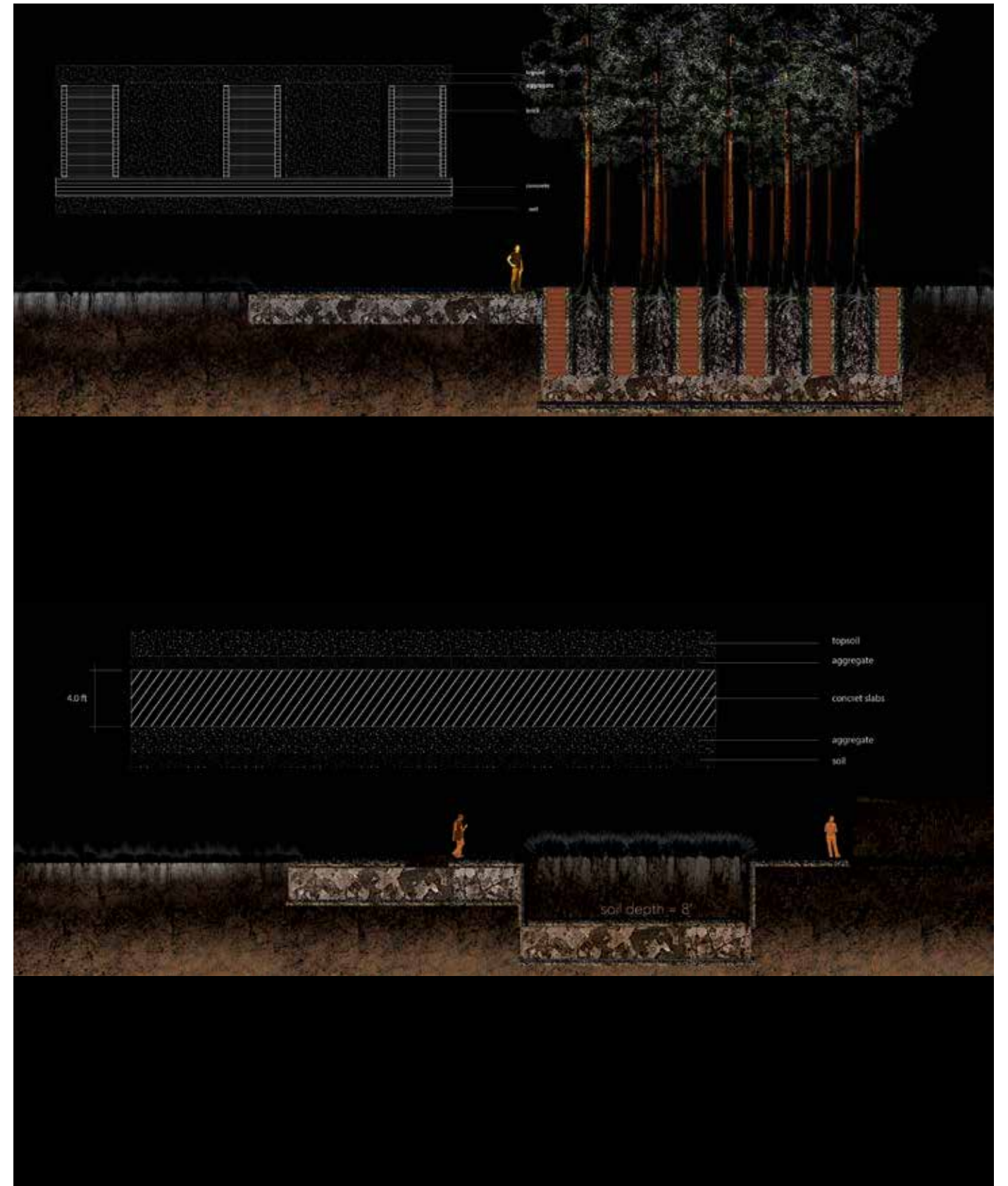
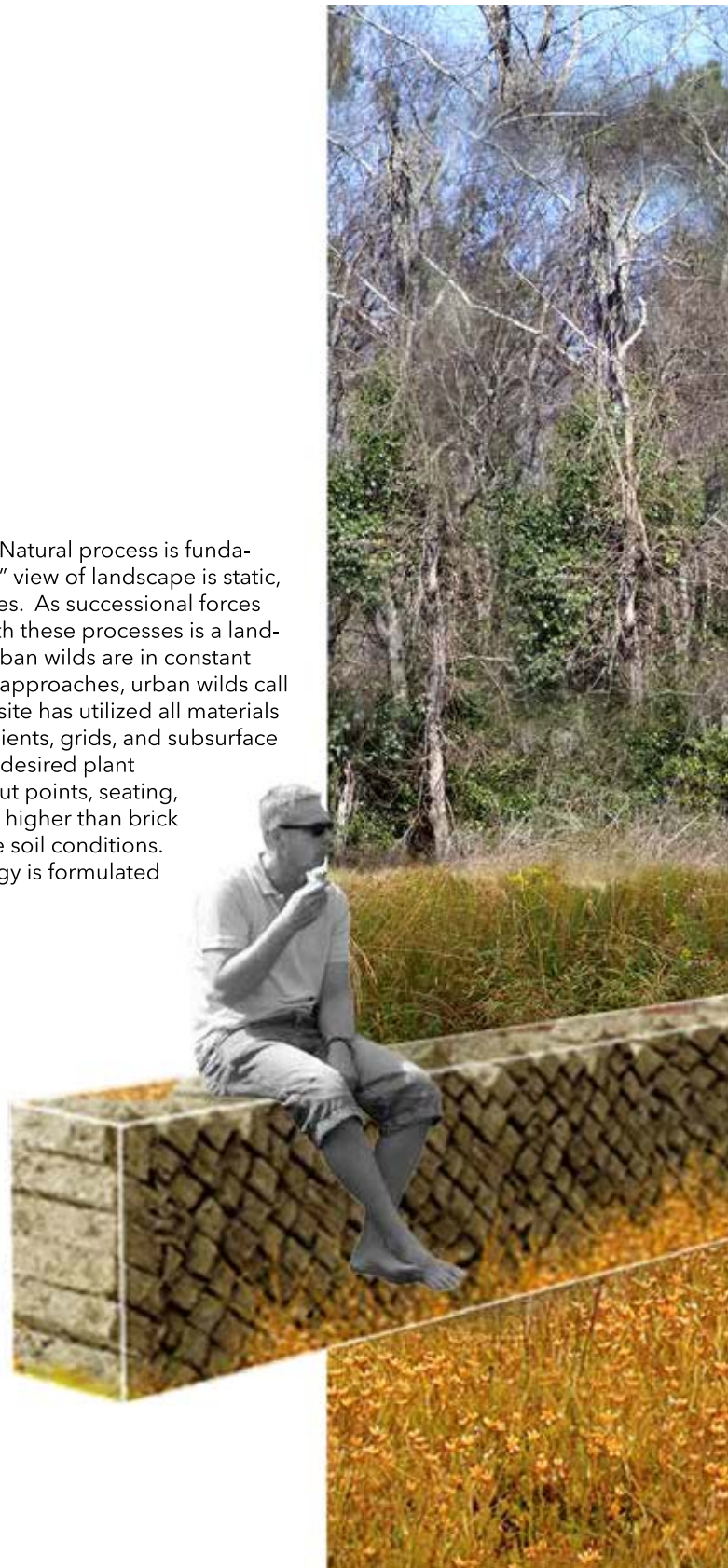




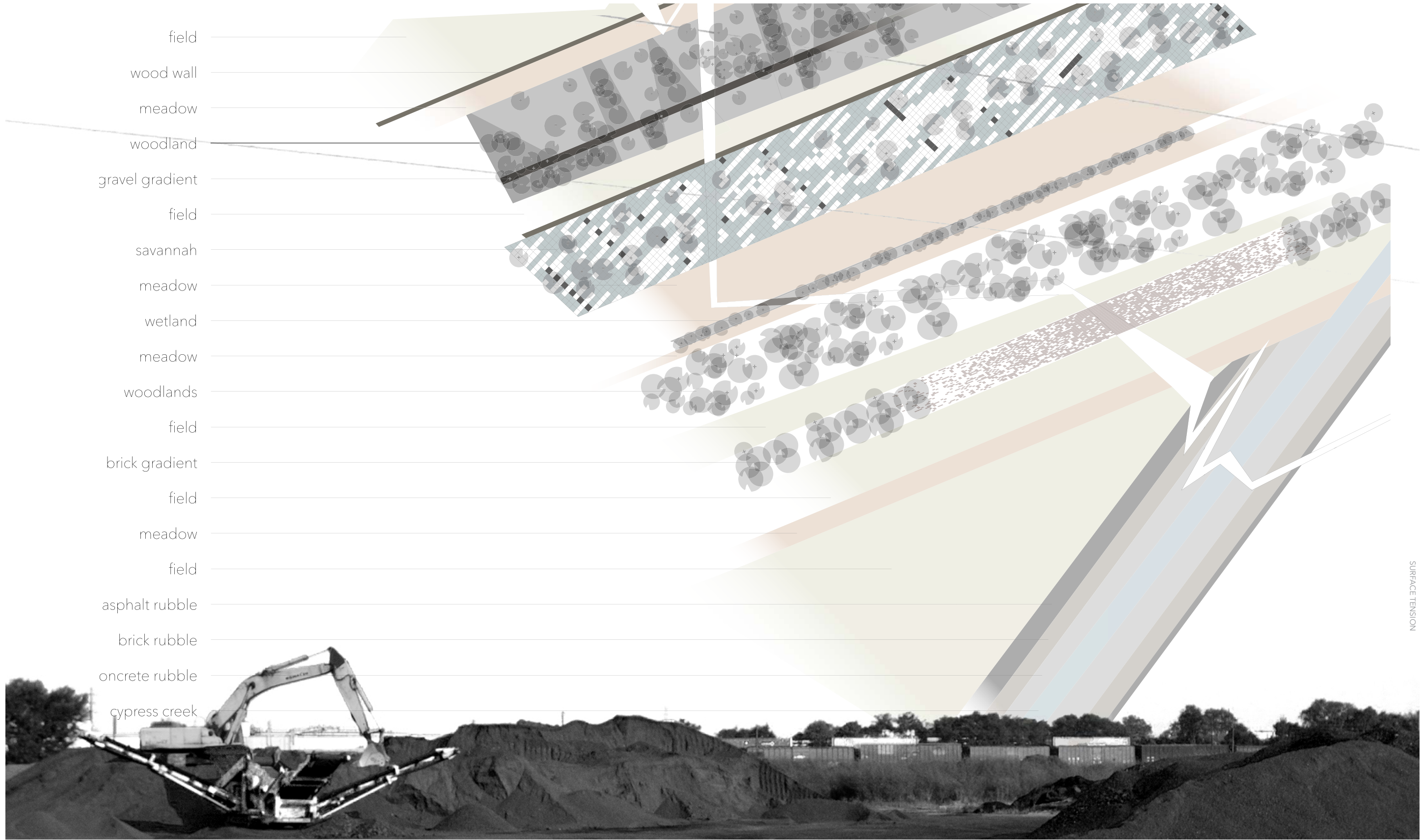


Surface Tension

Design legibility is the crux of urban wild approaches. Natural process is fundamental to landscape architecture. The “master planned” view of landscape is static, is an unrealistic approach to a network of urban wild sites. As successional forces easily consume any design intent. Combining forces with these processes is a landscape architects greatest challenge and opportunity. Urban wilds are in constant flux. Questioning our heavy-handed landscape design approaches, urban wilds call for a dialogue of process. The ten-acre public housing site has utilized all materials on site to initiate a range of successional impacts. Gradients, grids, and subsurface installations of materials directly influence and stabilize desired plant communities. Walls, varying in height function as lookout points, seating, microclimates, and fire breaks. Ph levels of concrete are higher than brick and asphalt creating a range of soil mixes to manipulate soil conditions. Once plant succession progresses, a disturbance strategy is formulated to ensure legibility and healthy environments.

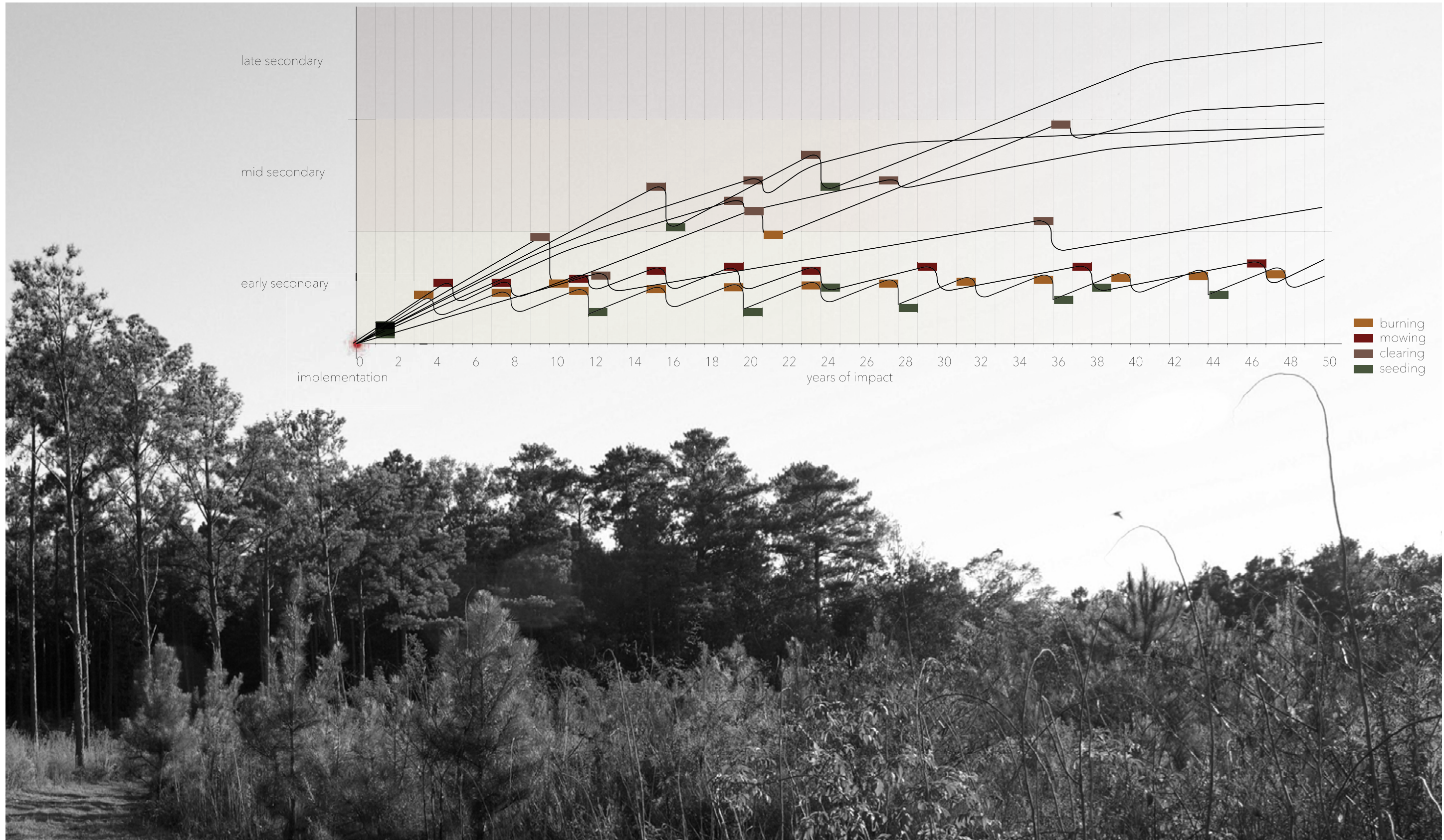




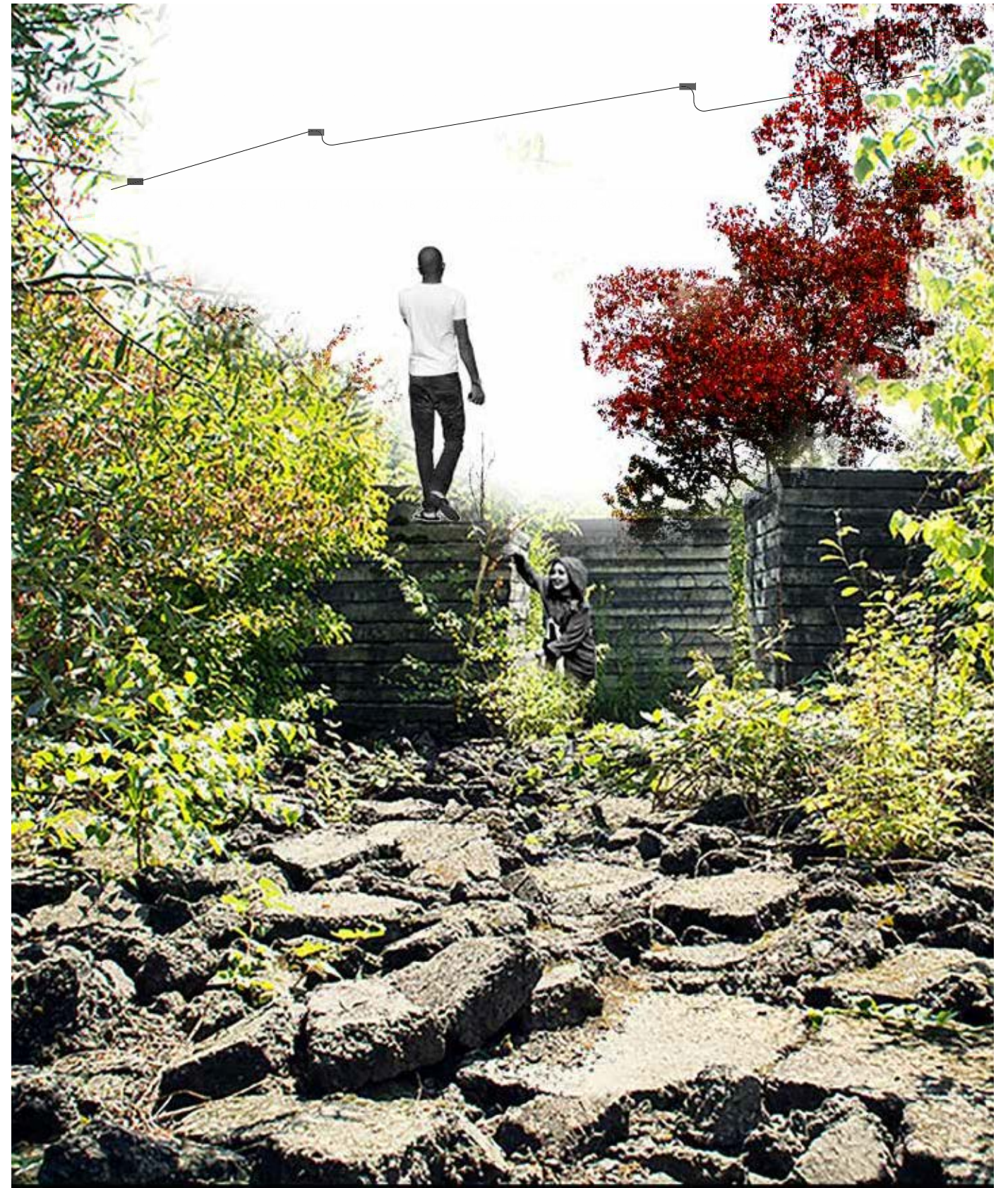


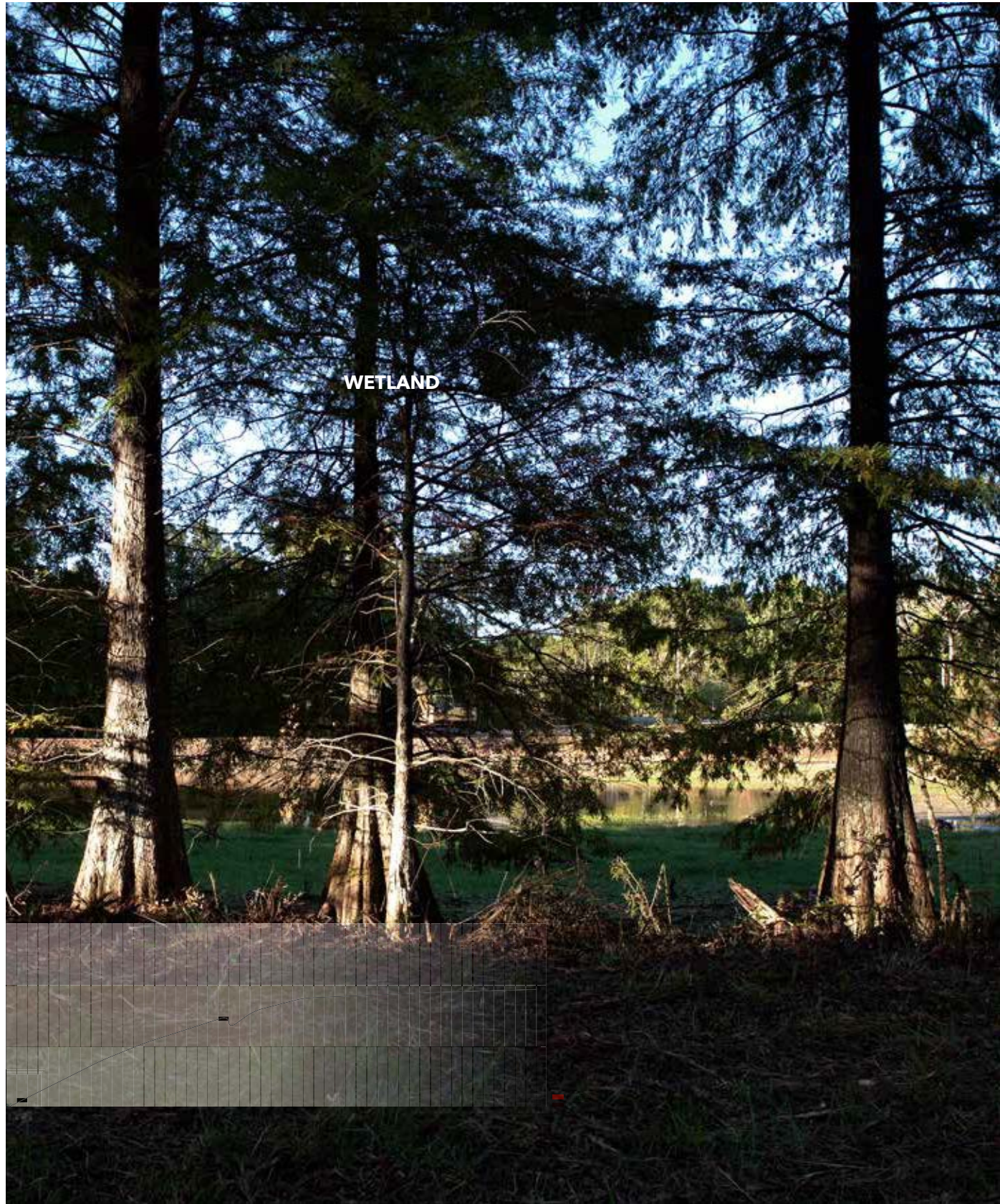
field
 wood wall
 meadow
 woodland
 gravel gradient
 field
 savannah
 meadow
 wetland
 meadow
 woodlands
 field
 brick gradient
 field
 meadow
 field
 asphalt rubble
 brick rubble
 oncrete rubble
 cypress creek

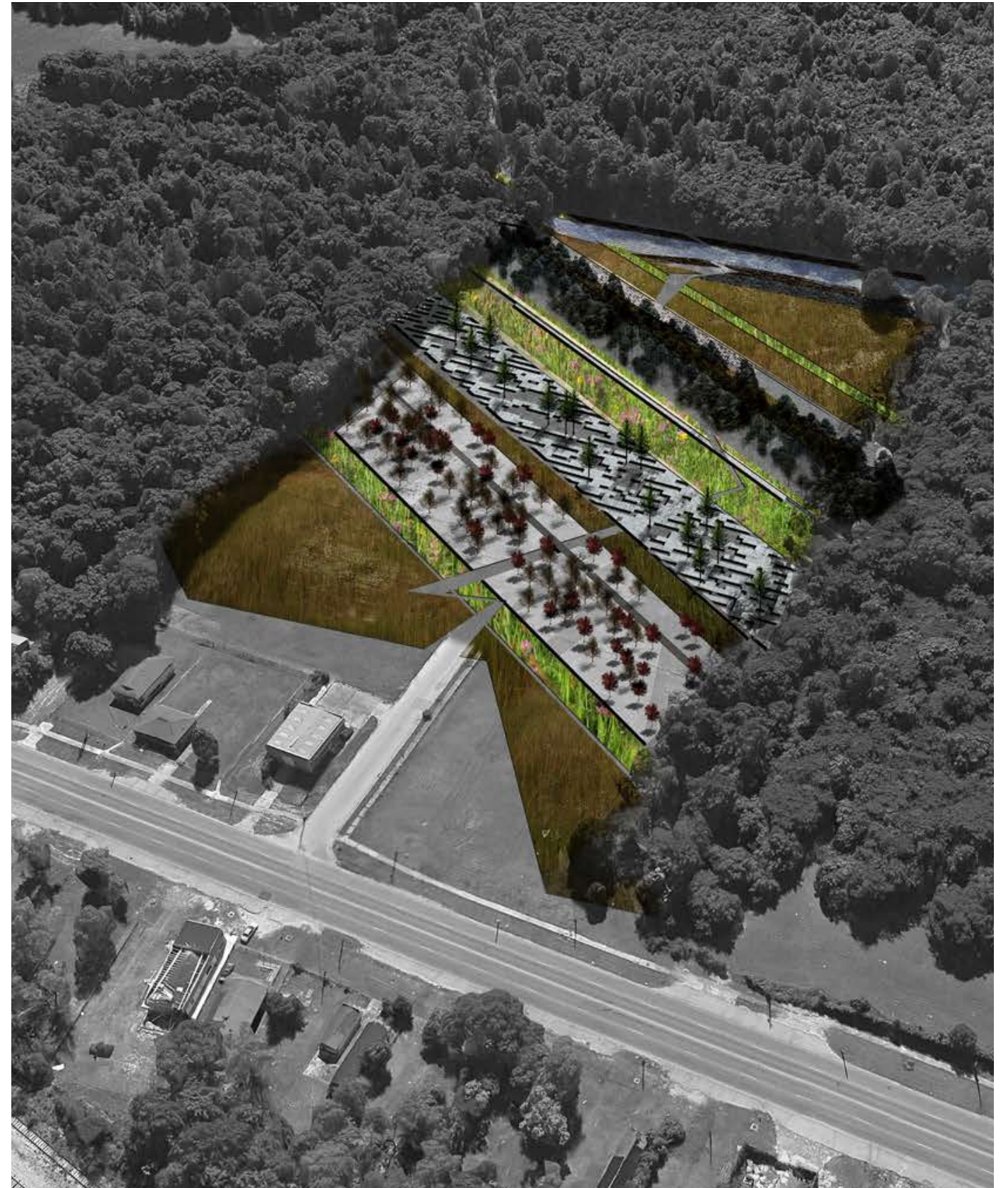
SURFACE TENSION



Disturbance methods are necessary to produce design legibility. As the site emerges within the choreographed strips, each condition requires different management techniques. The tension between legibility and succession is impacted with clearing, burning, and seeding. The field, for instance, requires the most tedious disturbance plan. However, the conditions emerging toward a later successional stage require fewer disturbances.





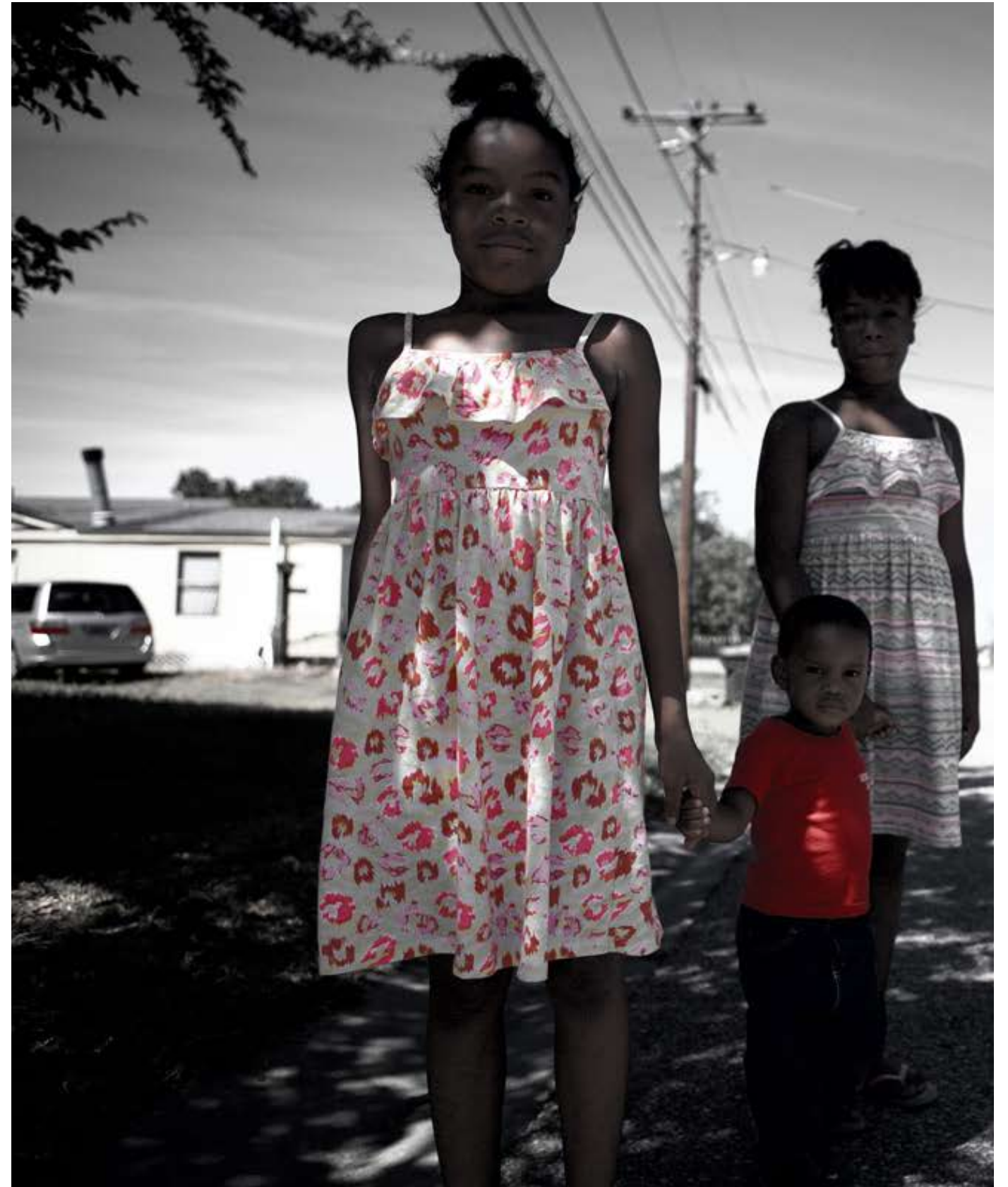


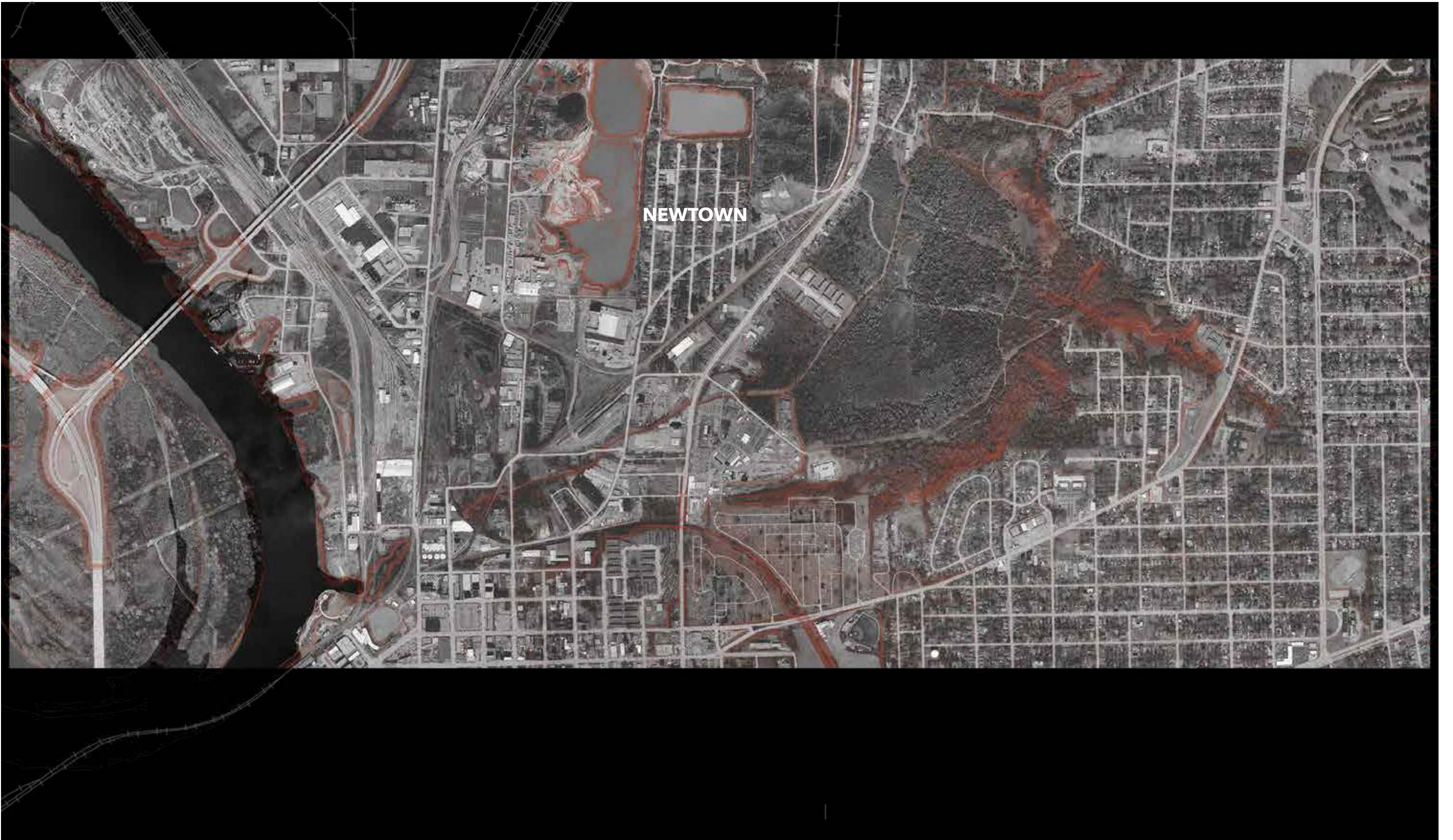
Newtown

The Newtown community embodies characteristics unique in today's American culture. Enduring and devoted, 500 residents are engulfed by the emerging urban wilds. They are the inspiration for taking a pro-active approach to these sites. The quarries, stockyards, woodlands, and marshlands are not the only sites available to merge into a network of urban wilds. Many vacant lots intermingle within the Newtown neighborhood. Using similar impact and management techniques, the vacancy in Newtown will start to emerge as valuable as well. Understanding the street culture, these sites have the highest impact along neighborhood roads. The fields and meadows emerge as seasonally stimulating throughout the year. Succession progresses on the boundaries of where people gather most, creating dense borders of shade. This community lives in an industrial and commercial network of rail lines, stockyards, and quarries. As the landscape dissolves methods of extraction and stockpiling, the Newtown community has the opportunity to experience a wilderness landscape emerge.



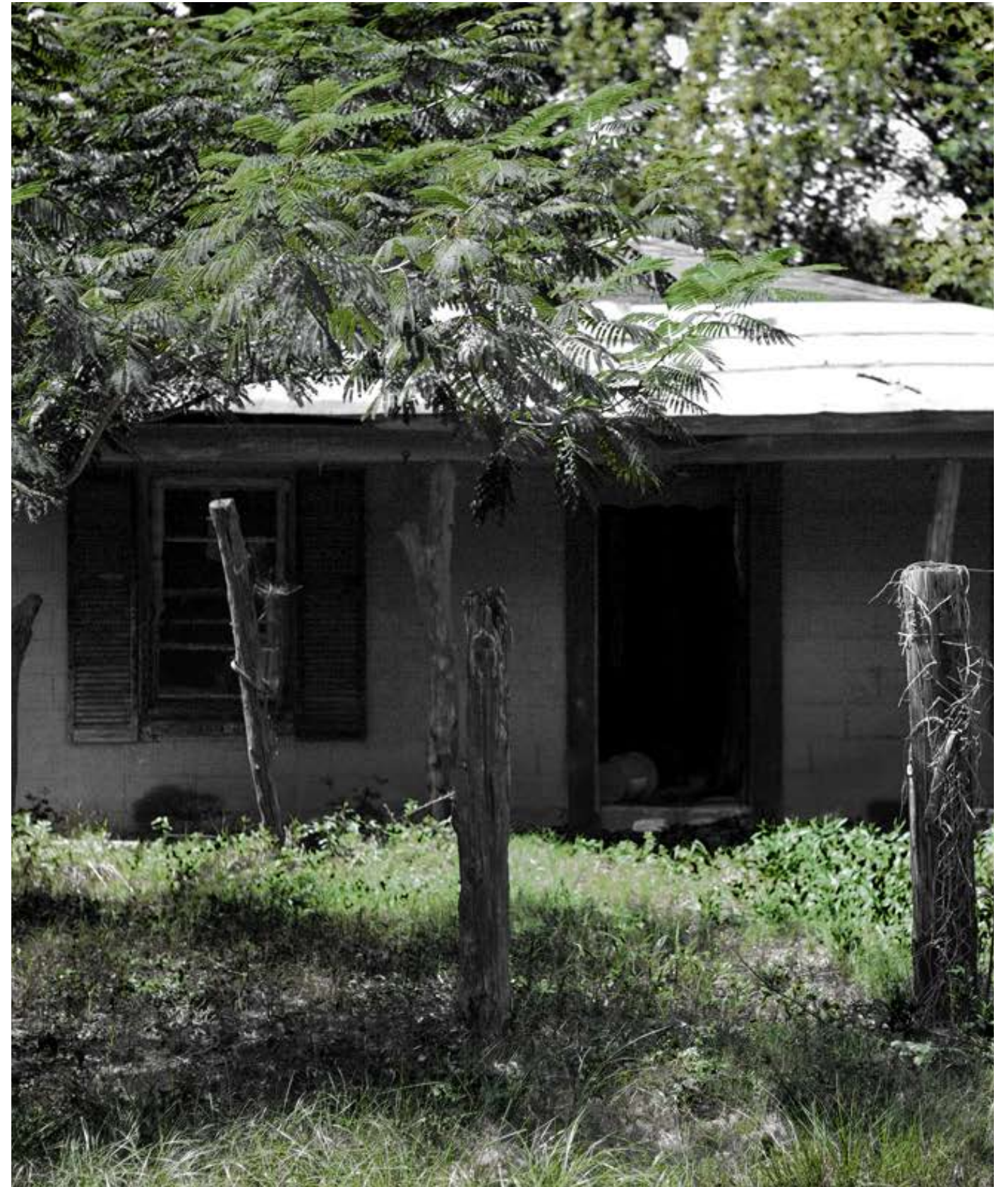
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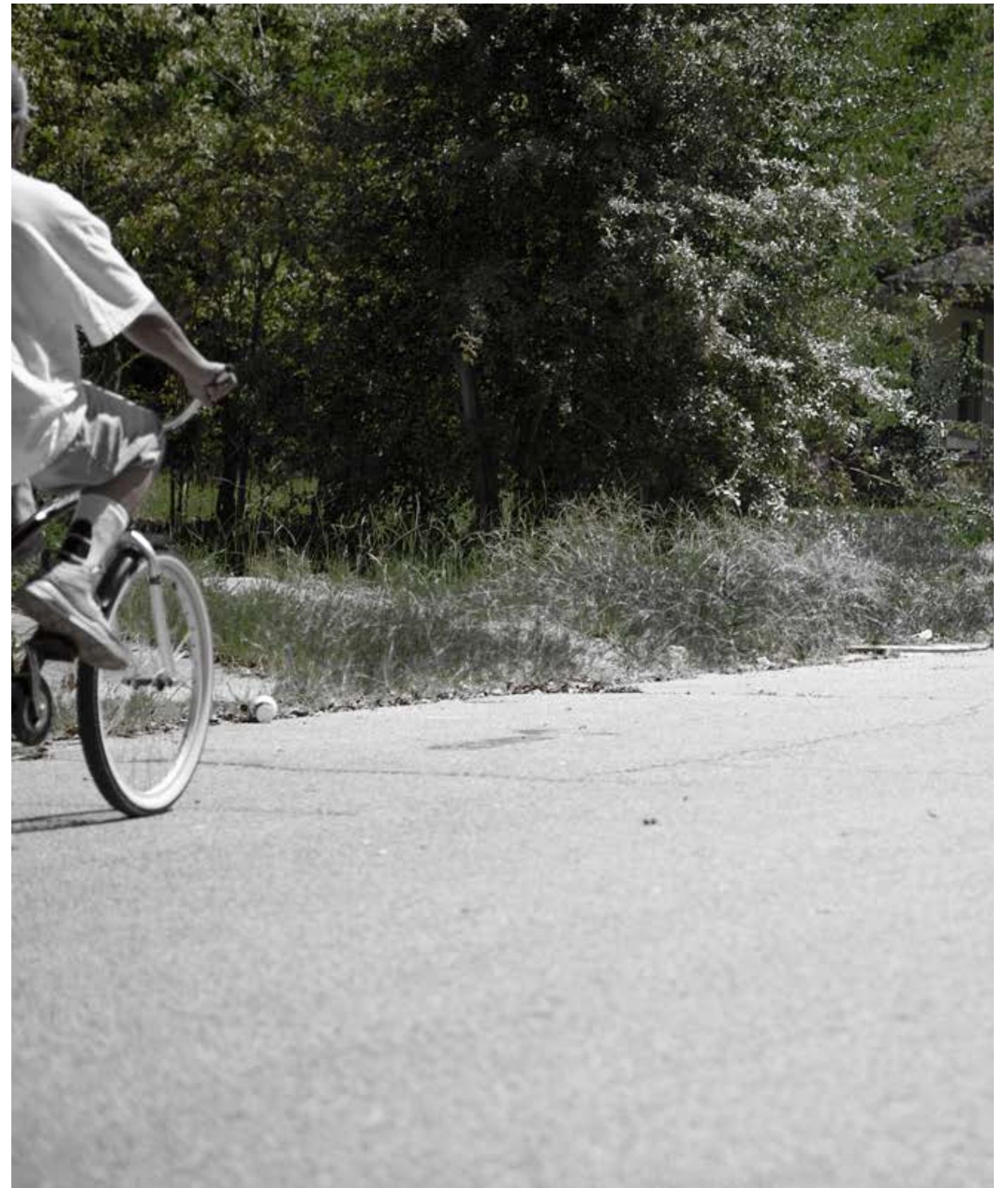


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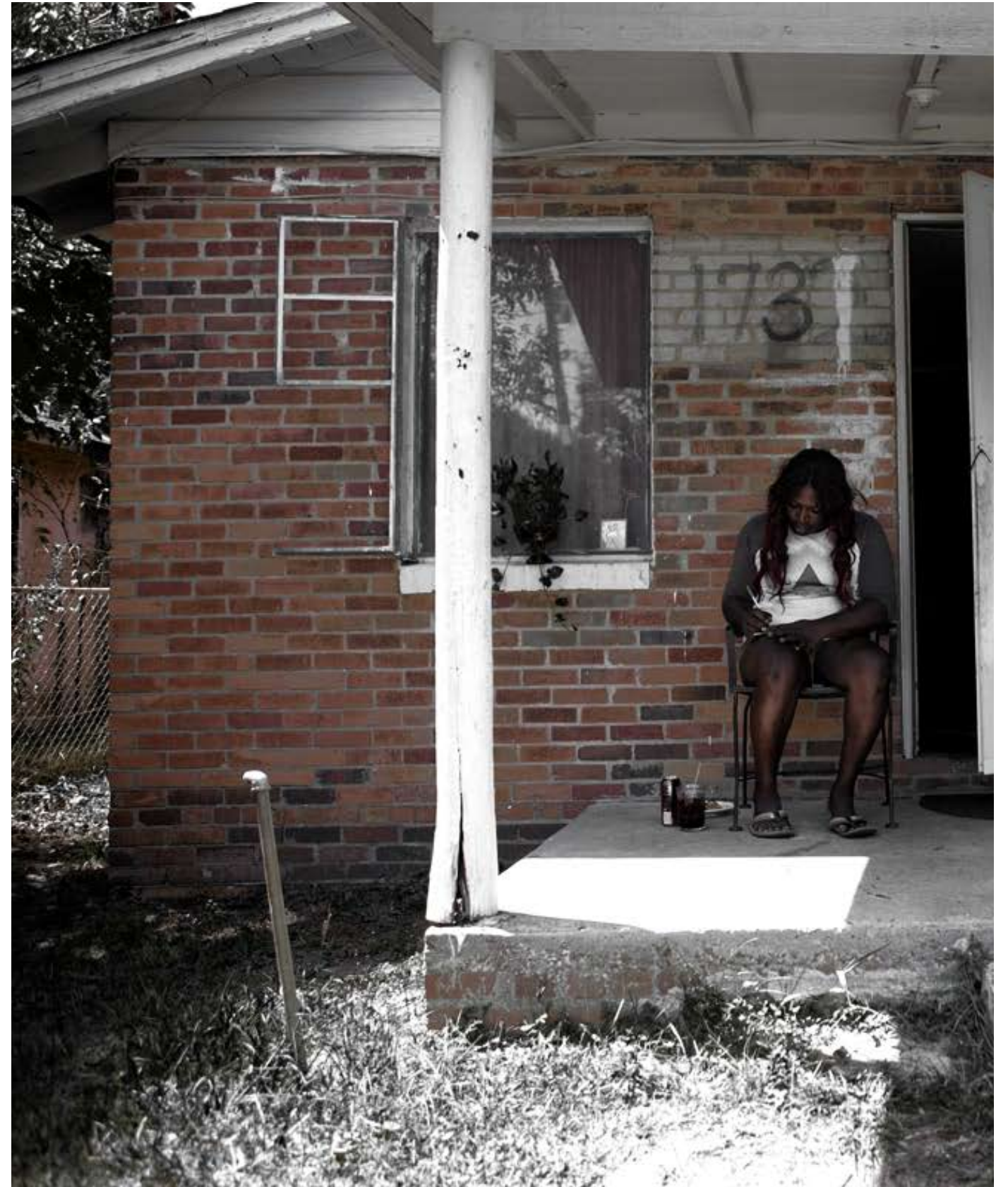


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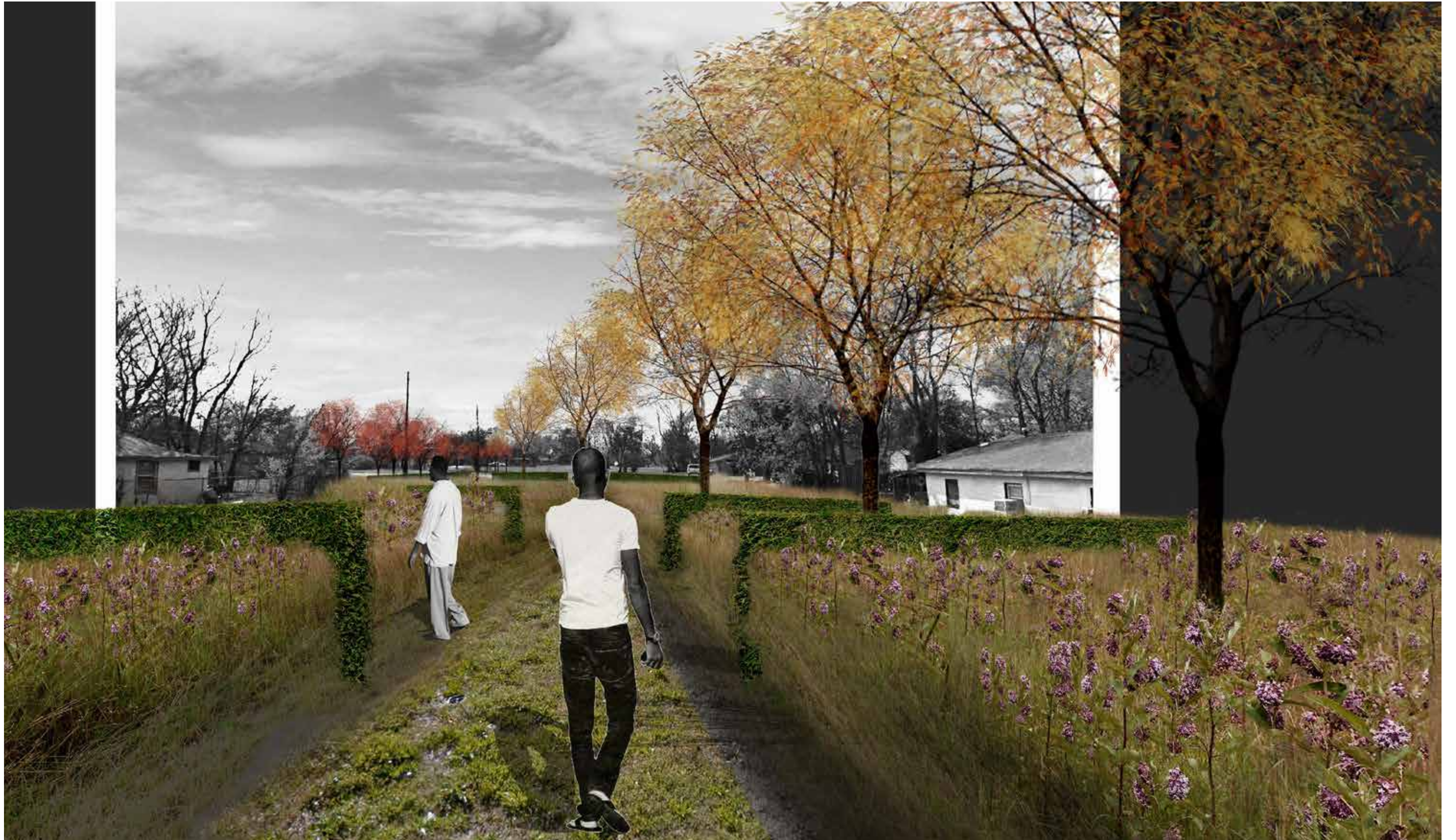


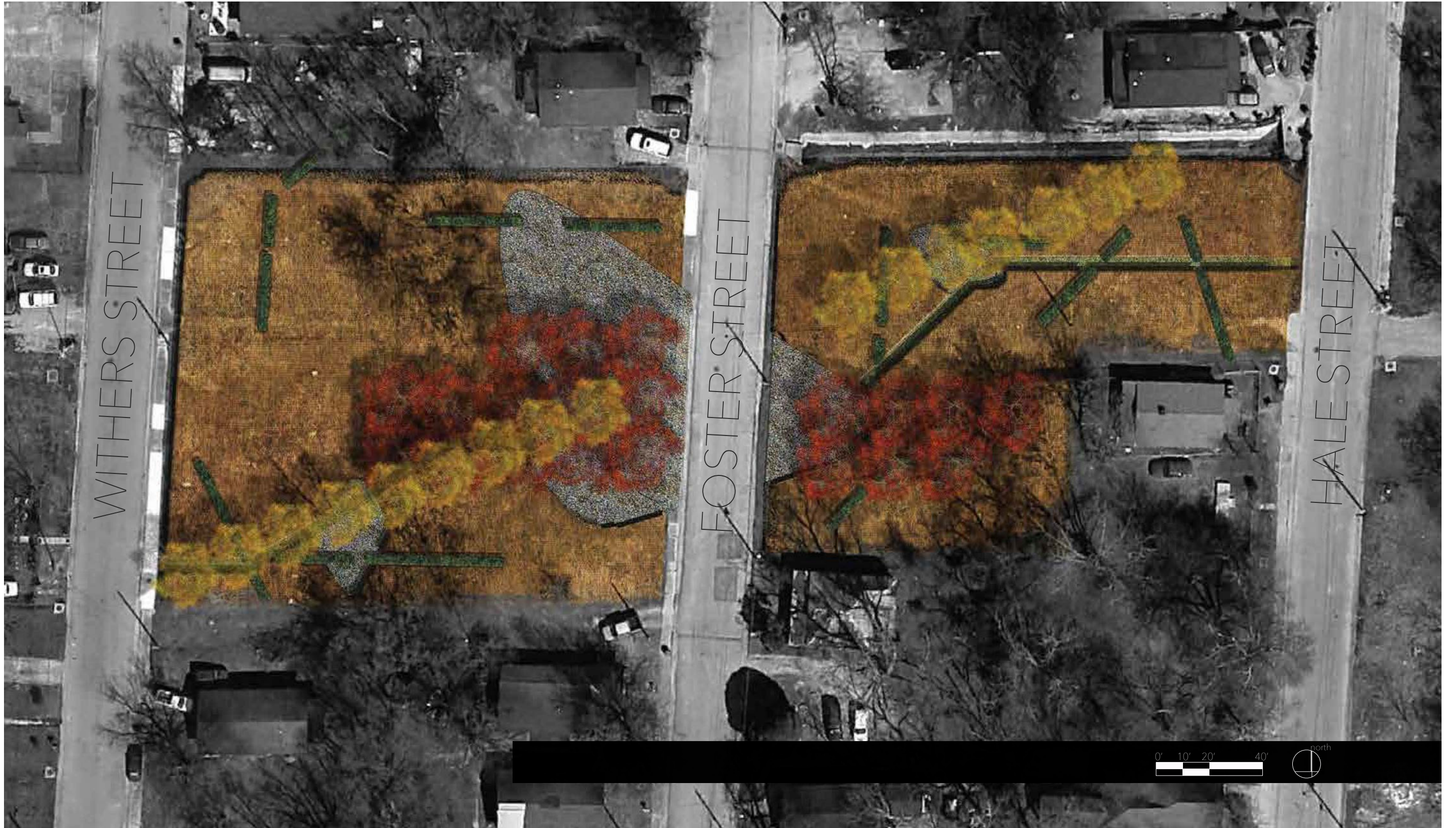


Jim Pepler, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/landingpage/collection/pepler>



NEWTOWN





WITHERS STREET

FOSTER STREET

HALE STREET

0' 10' 20' 40'



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