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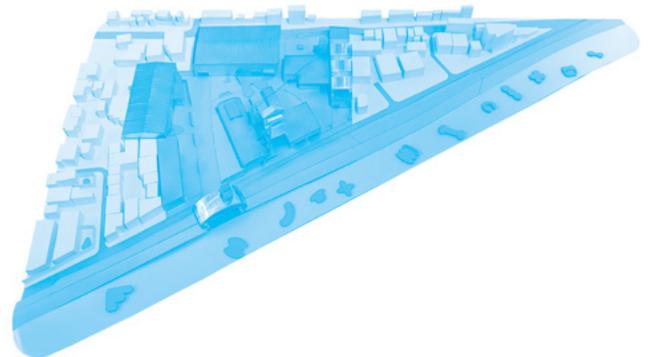


Parque Sonar Section Perspective by
Harsheen Kaur and Ishan Pal.

STUDIO PAPER

Studio Work

Karun Deepak
Chughasrani
Ismet Damgacioglu
Valeria De Jongh
Harsheen Kaur
Salvador Lindquist
Kunshi Liu
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Abirami Manivannan
Gregory Nathan
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Ishan Pal Singh
John Vieweg
Dongya Wang



Chinam-pow! Axonometric by Valeria de
Jongh, John Vieweg, and Dongya Wang.

Arch 562 / UD 722:
CDMX: Emergent Cultural Infrastructure
at the Margins of the Megalopolis

TAUBMAN COLLEGE



Title

ARCH 562/UD 772: CDMX: EMERGENT CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT THE MARGINS OF THE MEGALOPOLIS

Professors

ANYA SIROTA
GRACIELA KASEP

Can equity and inclusivity in marginalized urban environments be improved by leveraging the cultural activity and assets of place? Can the intersection of art, curatorial practice, urban activism and architecture push the methodological boundaries of design to produce unorthodox institutions and emancipatory socio-spatial scenarios? These questions were central to the studio, which aimed to explore Mexico City's **cultural infrastructure** through the lens of diverse and pioneering projects located along the megalopolis's economically vulnerable **urban periphery**.

Investigating the role of cultural centers in urban development, this advanced proposition studio was situated at the intersection of contemporary art, politics, and visual culture. Through a series of directed experiments, students were asked to broadly scrutinize how art and culture embody and influence transitional urban space, negotiate between informal appropriation and institutionally sanctioned environments, and advance new urban paradigms. Techniques developed through interdisciplinary research and fieldwork were applied toward the design of new and speculative social environments. More generally, the course sought to advance the necessary literacy for architects to critically engage complex urban scenarios – to understand and interrogate issues related to cultural enfranchisement, and to produce compelling formal responses to the realities of context.

Over the course of the past two decades, Mexico City has witnessed the emergence of a breadth of cultural projects; some can be understood as sites of informal allowance, others as spaces validated and governmentally-sustained for diverse constituents. Departing from an analysis of the organizational structures, programs, and spatial configurations of select projects, including los faros, centros comunitarios, and experimental museums, students produced conceptual and speculative designs for a cultural center in Mexico City's **East Iztapalapa**^[1] neighborhood. A site visit to the capital included a workshop, co-taught by art and design curator **Graciela Kasep**^[2], as well as encounters with an entourage of leaders involved in key cultural projects in Mexico City.

The exploration, soliciting an affinity for collaborative work and collective negotiation, extended to create an applied, contemporary definition of cultural infrastructure, an understanding of its intended and inadvertent impacts on urban conditions, and its social effects. The semester was split into five sections: Intervention Cultivators, On Site, Affordance, and Vibe. Through the five sections, students developed their critical thinking, visual communications, investigation, technical documentation, and fundamental design skills. The sections attempted to take very complex cultural, political, social, and economic environments and make them legible to an external gaze. Rather than asking students to make sense of it all, the series of the assignments tried to make sense of portions of the problem while helping students develop a humble understanding that the cultural production of place is very sophisticated and needs to be understood first as leading in the

1 Iztapalapa is one of Mexico City's 16 municipalities, located on the east side of the entity.

2 Graciela heads the Creative Economy Research Center (CIEC) at CENTRO. Her research explores 20th-century and contemporary art as a mode of social and civic expression. Kasep has curated a number of large-scale exhibitions in Mexico City. She has been developing research and curatorship on expanded cultural production and urban culture topics.

understanding of context. The studio started with the expertise of others, understanding that expertise often comes from disciplines that are parallel, adjacent, or partnered with architecture, but not necessarily from architecture itself.

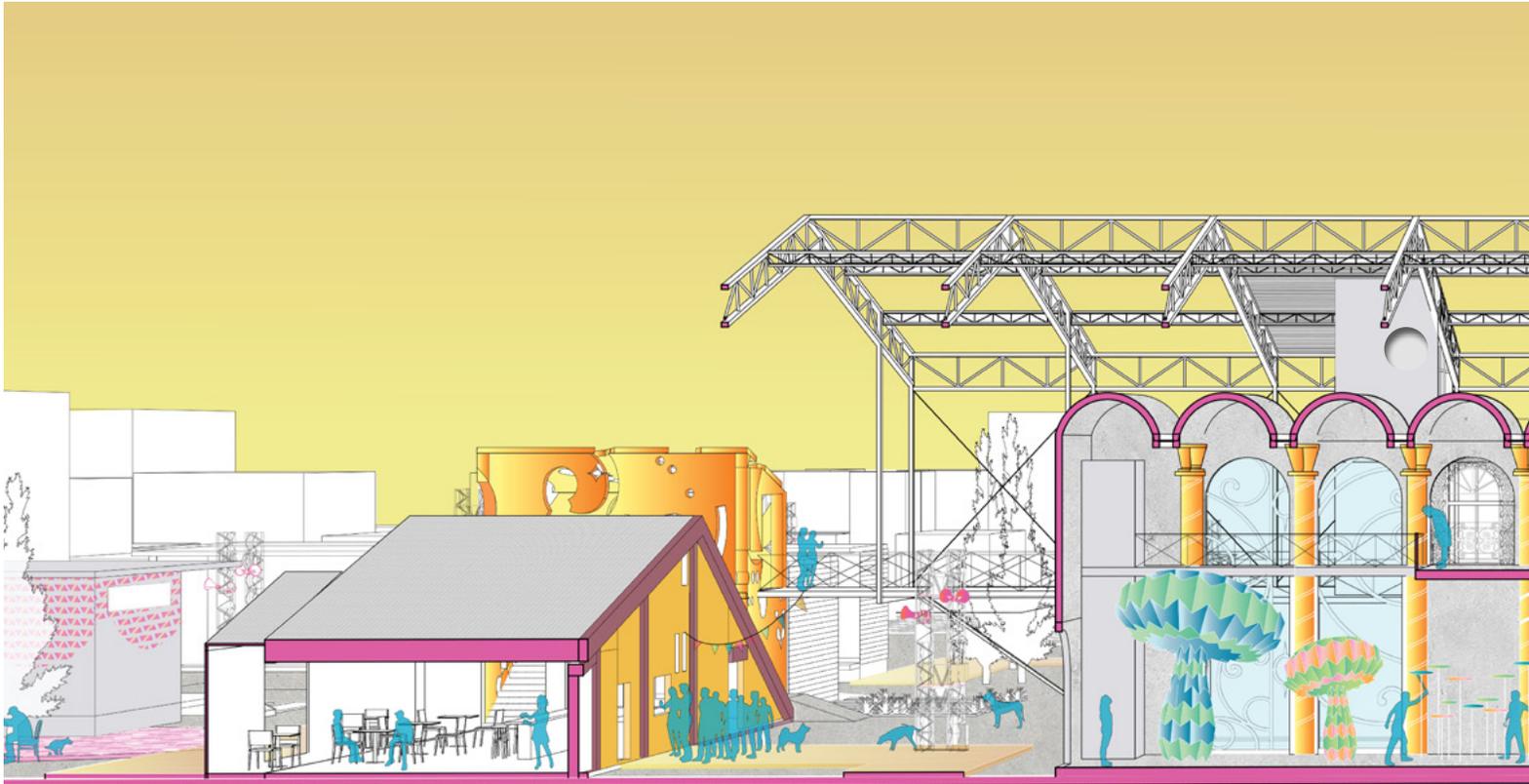
OX1: INTERVENTION

Intervention looked from the artist's and cultural practitioner's perspectives to read context. This section relied on [local actors](#)^[3] who have already identified and laid bare pressing cultural issues through their own work. In all of her studios, Sirota often starts by studying critical, political art practices so to understand what the main issues are through a culturally sensitive lens. In this way, students turn to others to tell us what was at stake in a particular environment.

Working in teams of two, students were asked to select one of the artists to analyse through their work. In their analysis, students determined how the work operates and the invisible contextual narratives that it renders explicit, whether it relies on pop actions in public space, performance, disruption, installation. Does the artist integrate elements from the surroundings into the creative process? Are the projects situational? Do they integrate social considerations into their conception and expression?

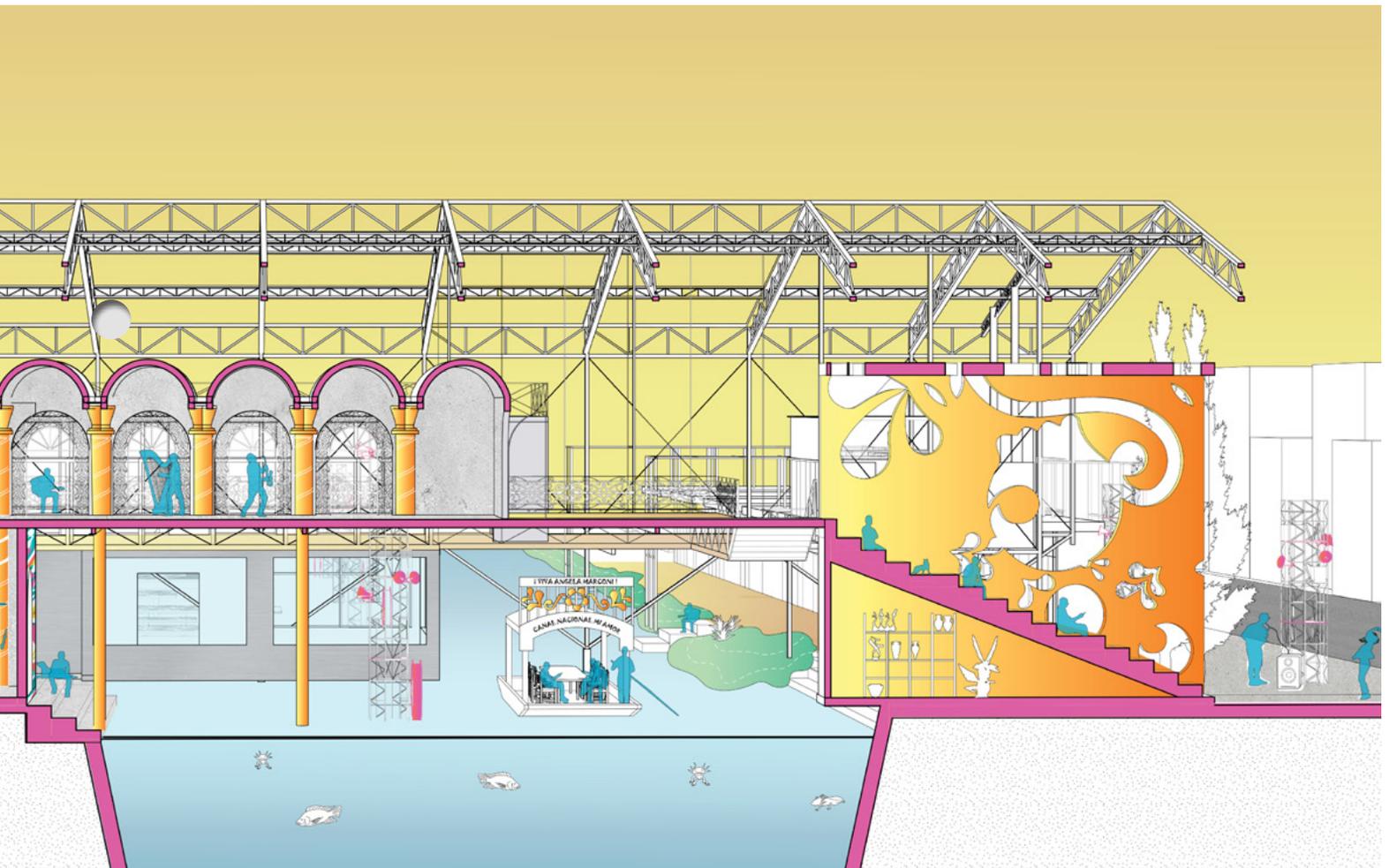
Learning from the artist's methods, students selected one site in Mexico City to design an intervention that responds to, channels, builds on, or critically transformed the artists techniques. The deliverable was to create one animated axonometric representation (drawn, collaged, rendered or built) to communicate the idea of their intervention as it related to time, space, and social activity.

3 The list included artists Francis Alys, Hector Zamora, Melquiades Herrera, Pedro Reyes, Marcela Armas.



Parque Sonar Section by Harsheen Kaur and Ishan Pal.

“We didn’t simply ask students to exert their expertise, we asked students to adjust their understanding of architectural process to include collaboration with people who might know context better.”

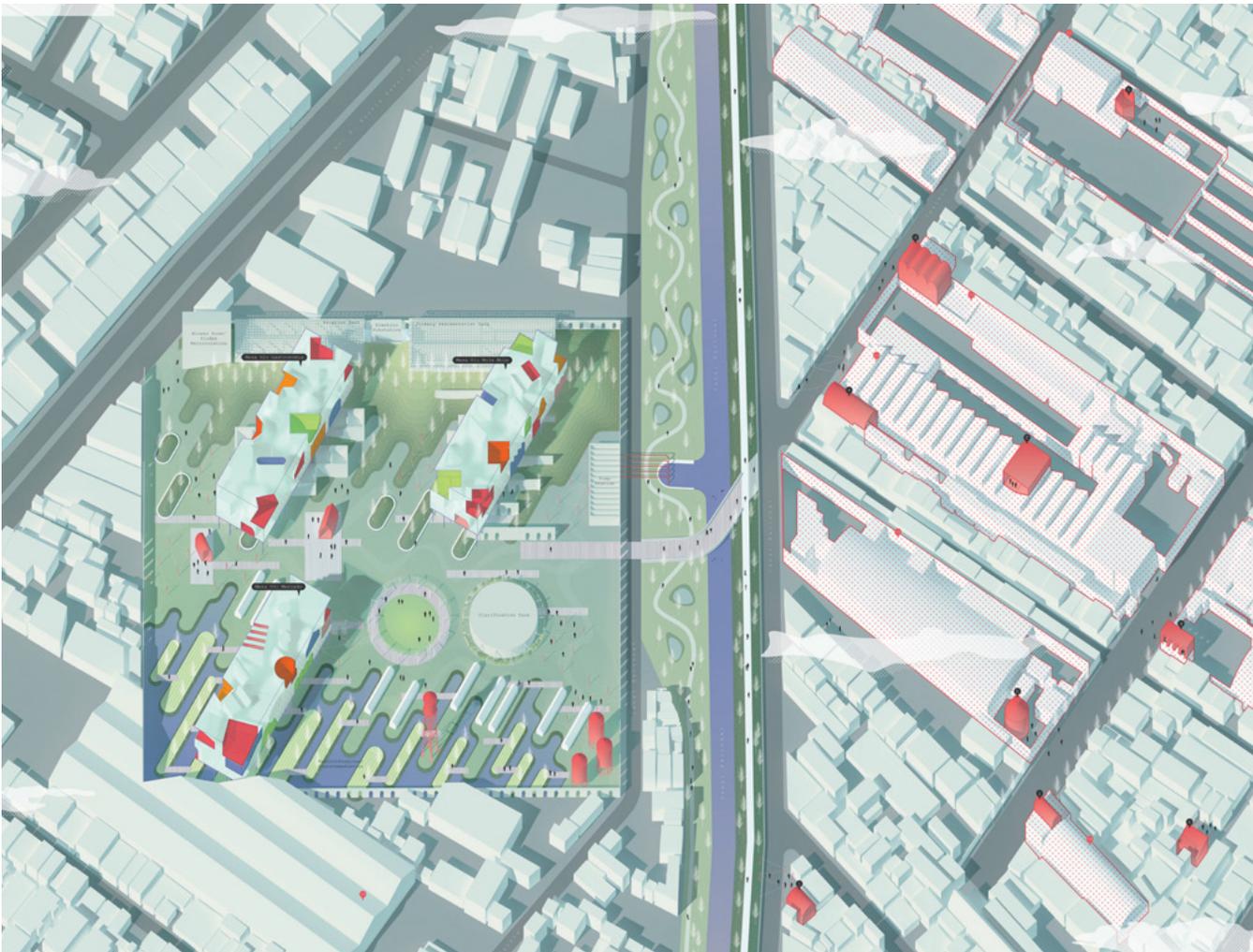


X02: CULTIVATORS

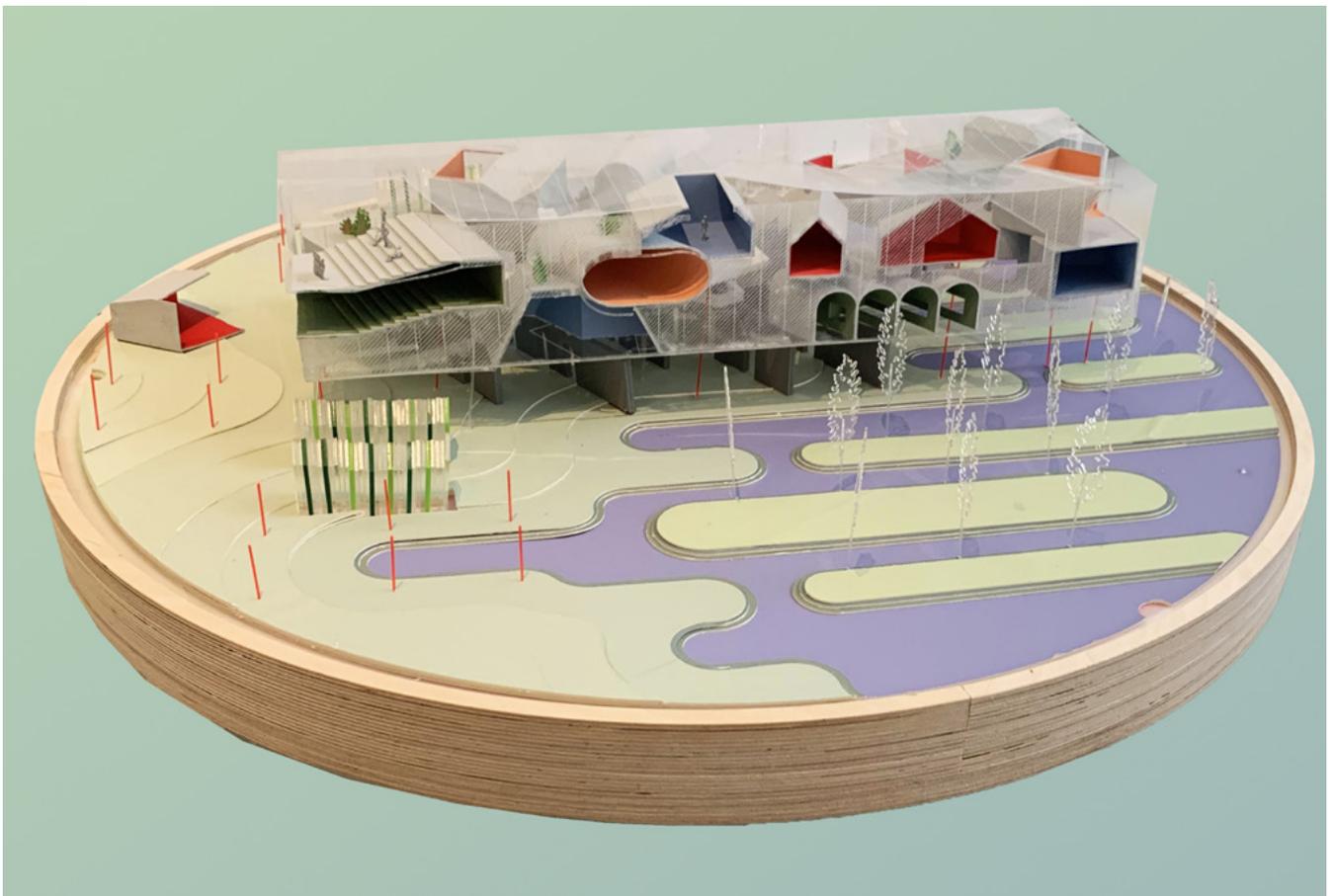
Cultivators looked to emergent cultural institutions, local structure of an emergent programs to see how new modalities of organization might inflect urban typologies. What can architecture and urban design do to further the goals and aspiration of stakeholders? What are the cultural institutions that are already in place that have dealt with the value propositions of local actors?

Since the rise of Modernity, significant credence has been ascribed to cultural infrastructure as a paradigmatic self-help tool capable of economic regeneration, urban renewal and community building. But as the current economic environment has grown progressively more turbulent, policy makers, planners and cultural critics have nurtured an evolving skepticism of the top down transformative strategies, Bilbao-effect architectural catalysts, and their implicit promise of tangible prosperity.

This exercise asked students to: (1) investigate the material and symbolic place of cultural infrastructure in modern and contemporary urban scenarios, (2) assess art's catalytic potential as a strategy for urban reactivation and social inclusivity, and (3) consider both the instrumental and less entrepreneurial manifestations of arts and culture within strategies of urban regeneration. Students chose from a list of key precedents to understand cultural infrastructure as a typology, determining program, scale, organizational structure and strategy, funding sources and budgets, sustainability aspects, architectural order, exterior to interior space proportions, emergent program, and urban impact of each case study.



Parque Sonar Aerial View by Harsheen Kaur and Ishan Pal.



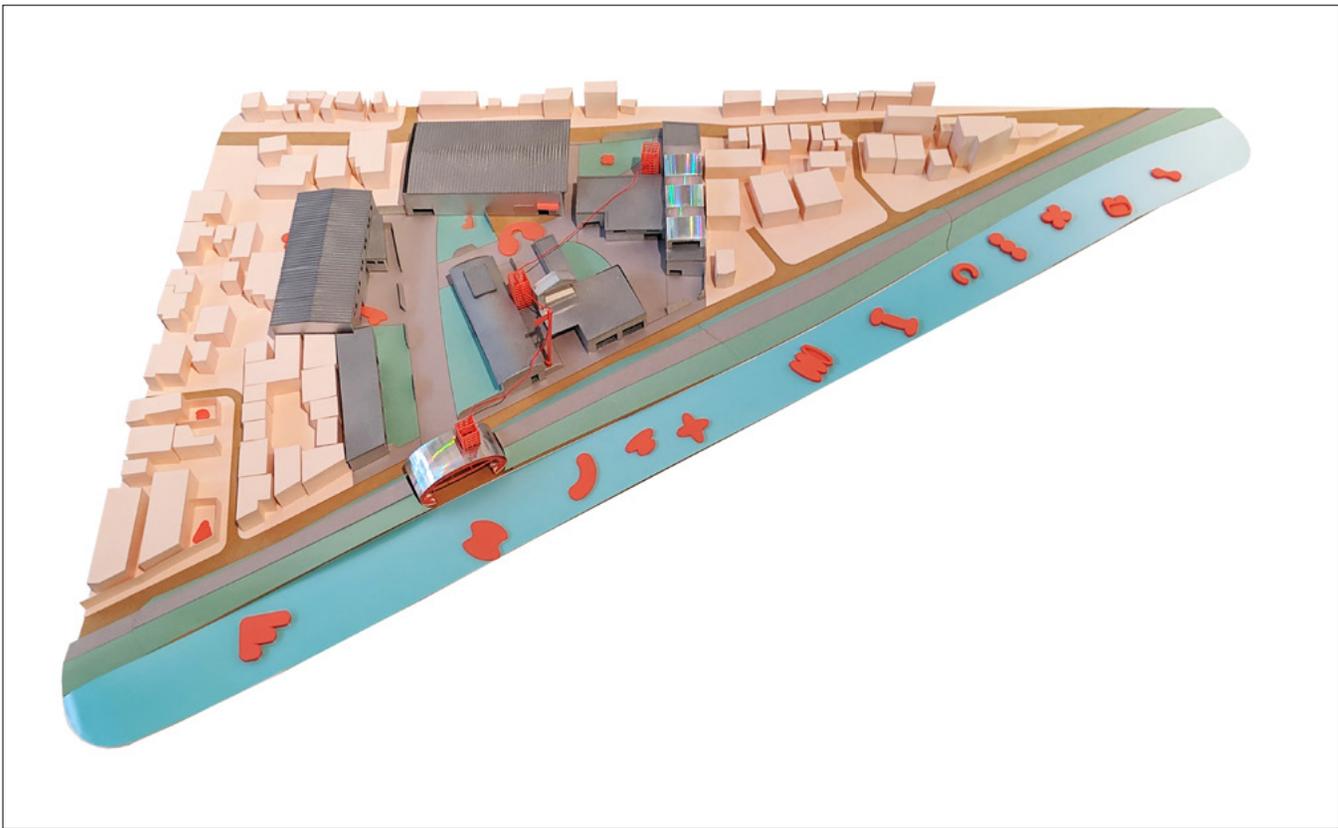
Tu Mesa by Abirami Manivannan and Salvador Lindquist.

X03: ON SITE

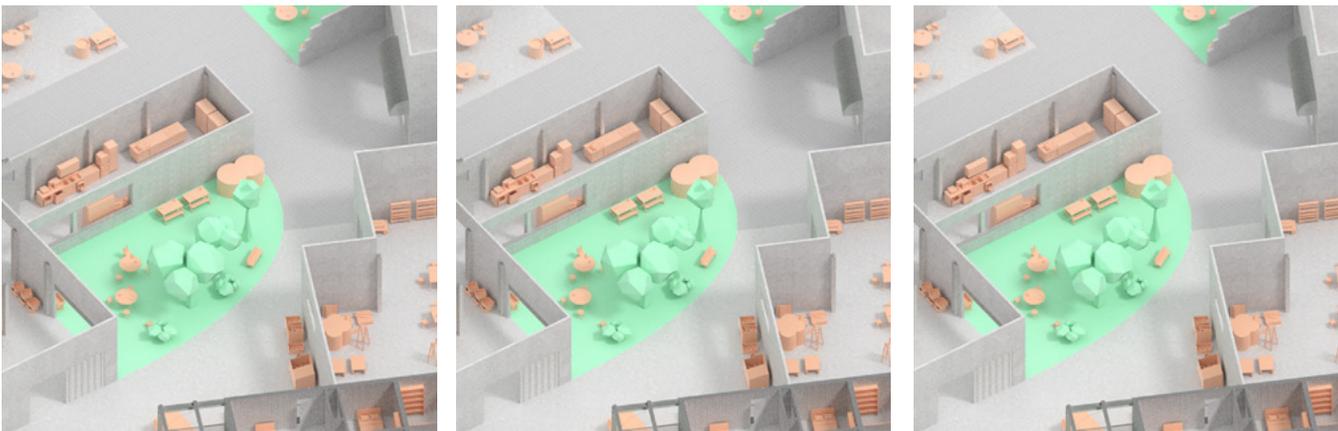
On Site considered how to connect with a network of people from a breadth of disciplines to offer a more nuanced understanding of context, beyond demographic mapping practices and data analysis. The class split into research teams to produce a preliminary context guide for the site visit. Part of the class looked at the context of the local neighborhood scale, specifically at Canal Nacional, Valle del Sur, Paseos de Taxqueña, and San Francisco Culhuacán de la Magdalena. Some students looked at the context at the large neighborhood scale of Iztapalapa and Coyoacán. Other sections took on emergent program, historical context, and the design of a travel guide.

By assignment three the studio slowly began to zoom into the particular urban context in which we're invited to work. Students began to look at the material realities of place and attempted to connect them to their understanding of what was at stake and what were the issues, which they developed from the first and second assignments.

“The course did not simulate community engagement or speculate on possible outcomes, had a longer, more more embedded undertaking been possible. Instead, cognizant of the limitations of intrinsic to studio learning, we were invited to work and learn from local designers with a deeper rooted and long-term parternships in the barrio.”



Chinam-pow! Axonometric by Valeria de Jongh, John Vieweg, and Dongya Wang.



Chinam-pow! Views by Valeria de Jongh, John Vieweg, and Dongya Wang.

X04: AFFORDANCE

Once the students understood who were some of the people and what issues they face that begin to surface through an understanding of context, that context was connected with an intensive site visit. The studio traveled to Mexico and spent ten days meeting the activists, political advocates, lawyers, architects, and designers who are already embedded and engaged in reimagining a particular scenario

The students are then asked to think about how each of their interventions might sponsor a breadth of activity. What happens if you create such an inflection or transformation? How can architecture and urban design create space and sponsor a sense of agency for local actors to transform and adapt public assets? How can architecture begin to image those activities and affordances?

This exercise is about abdicating some of the control architects typically have in describing the relationship between form and outcome and trying to figure out how particular inflections, be they economic, spatial, programmatic, cultural, or social can create a variety of opportunities for others to then begin to occupy and inflect space. How does an architect tell that story? With these questions in mind, the students were asked to choose between axonometric, 90-90 plan, or urban scaled section to critically describe the role of affordance in their projects.



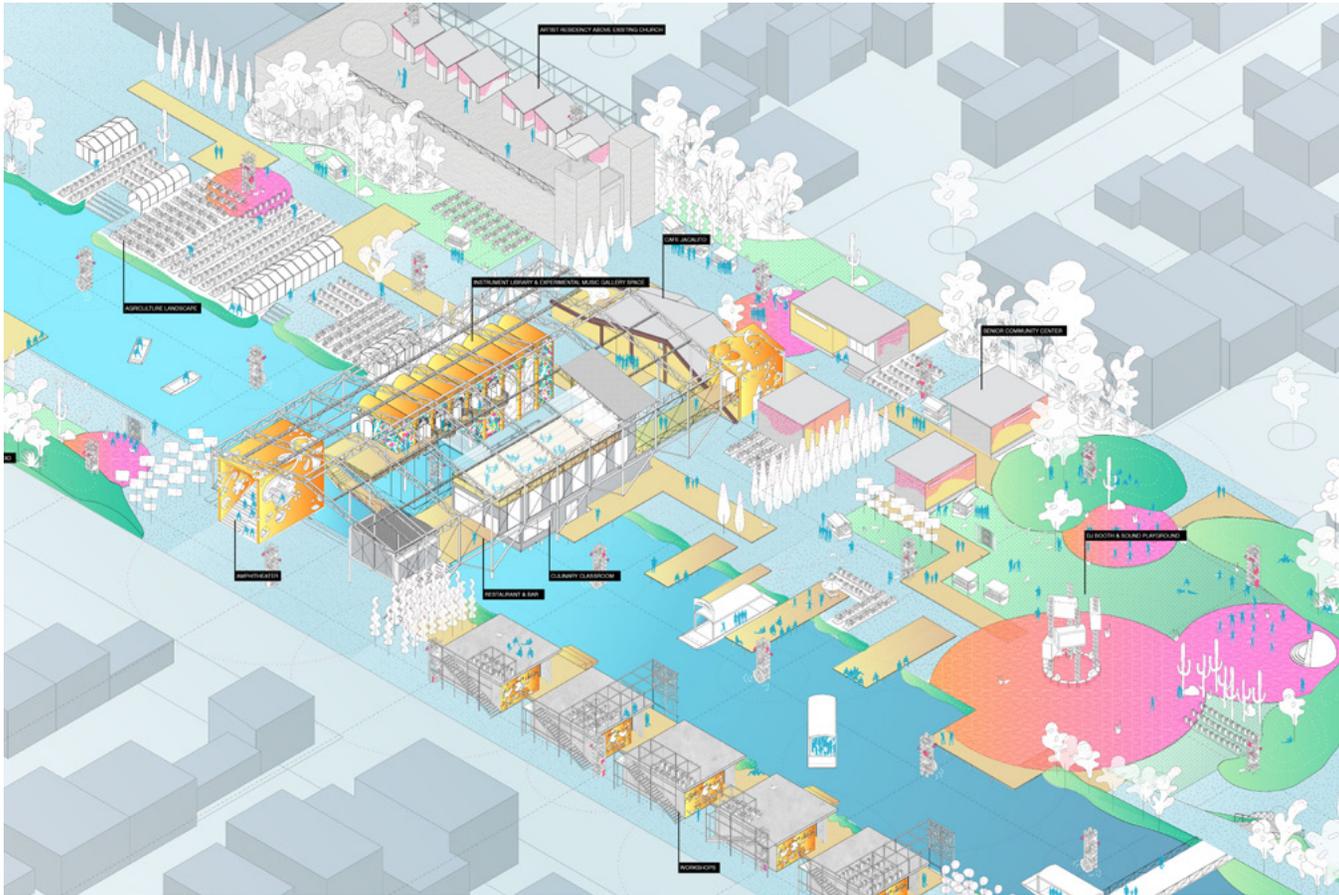
Chinam-pow! Perspective by Valeria de Jongh, John Vieweg, and Dongya Wang.

X05: VIBE

The meaning of an architectural project lies at least partially in an aesthetic 'vibe' or 'style' that we can sense when we consider all the myriad of objects and phenomena that make up the imaginative landscape of a work as a curated set. *Vibe*, an abbreviated form of 'vibration' coopted in the 60's as a stand in for 'instinctive feeling', has over the course of the past chaotic decade emerged as a disciplinary nexus for historic, geographic and cultural forces that offer architecture tools for instigating and calibrating ambient phenomena. *Vibe*, in this sense, offers the possibility of an intuitive, emotional reaction to the quality of a place or thing.

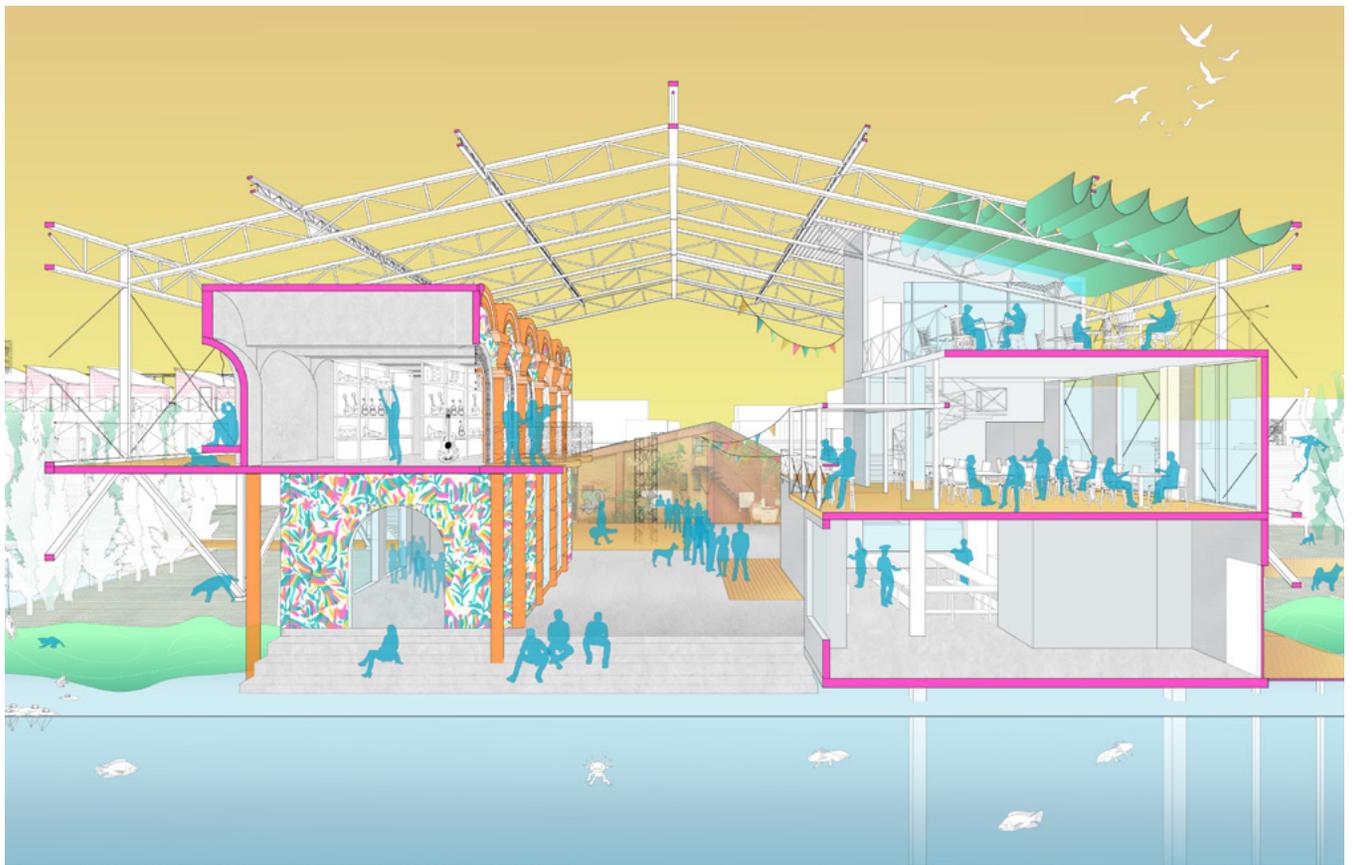
Consider vibe as a composition of parts that together transcend the mere attributes of 'local color'. What role does vibe have in evoking authenticity, artificiality, self-consciousness, play, critic, or otherness? What is the mood or atmosphere that your project is attempting to convey? Students were asked to use a small number of carefully curated elements, disparate or relational, to determine how their architectural or urban proposals communicate aspirations through vibe.

The students are asked to think about the role of the architect and designer in producing aesthetic practices and images that are political and can be disseminated to change perception and value of a particular context. Rather than following trend, the representations were intended to follow the specificities and particularities of place so that people feel included and imaged in the articulation of possible futures. In this final exercise, students design three fragments of their proposal at any scale.

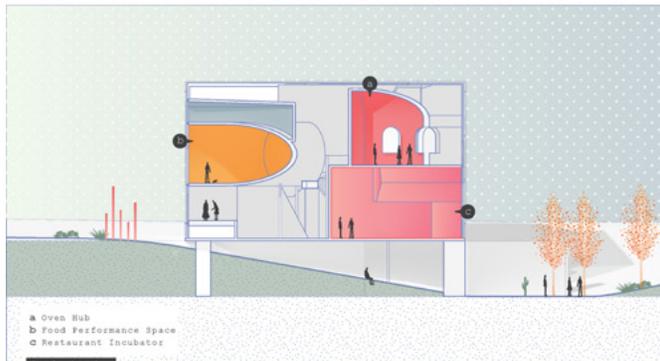
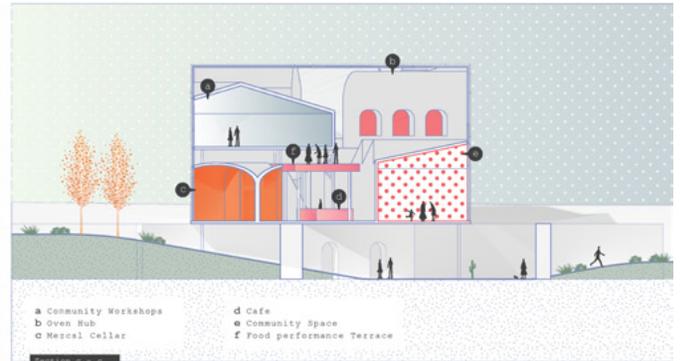
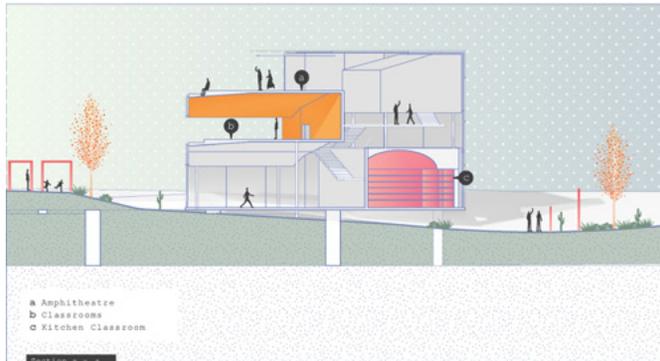


Parque Sonar Axonometric by Harsheen Kaur and Ishan Pal.

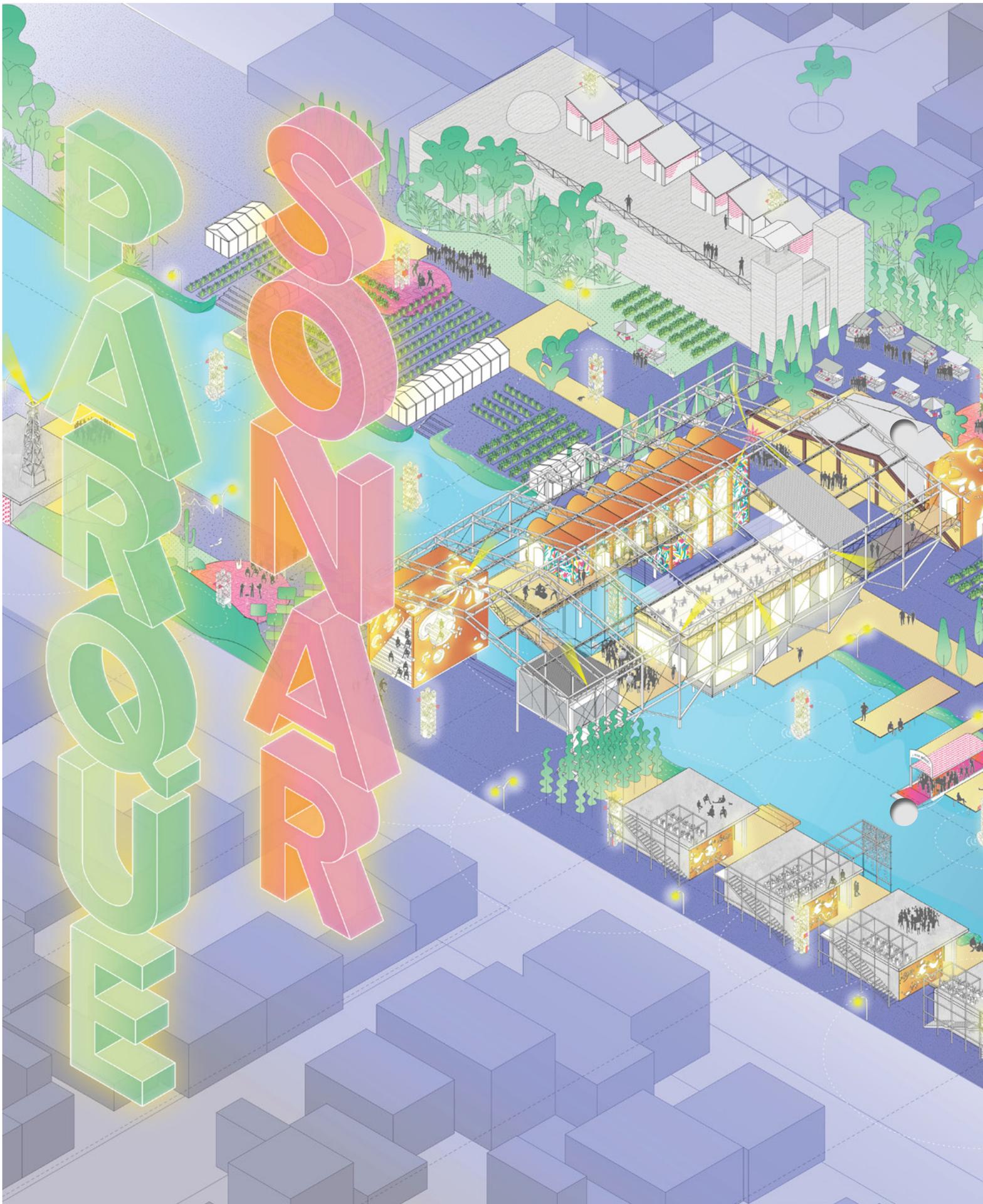
“Transdisciplinary practice was central to this studio. By first distancing students from normative tools of analysis, we looked to generate fresh thinking about ways designers observe context and respond to the perceived issues at hand.”



Parque Sonar Section Perspective by Harsheen Kaur and Ishan Pal.



Tu Mesa Sections by Abirami Manivannan and Salvador Lindquist.



Tu Mesa Axonometric by Abirami Manivannan and Salvador Lindquist.
Studio Paper



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