

Archiving the Anaesthetised Landscape

Postcard from Singapore to Singapore

by

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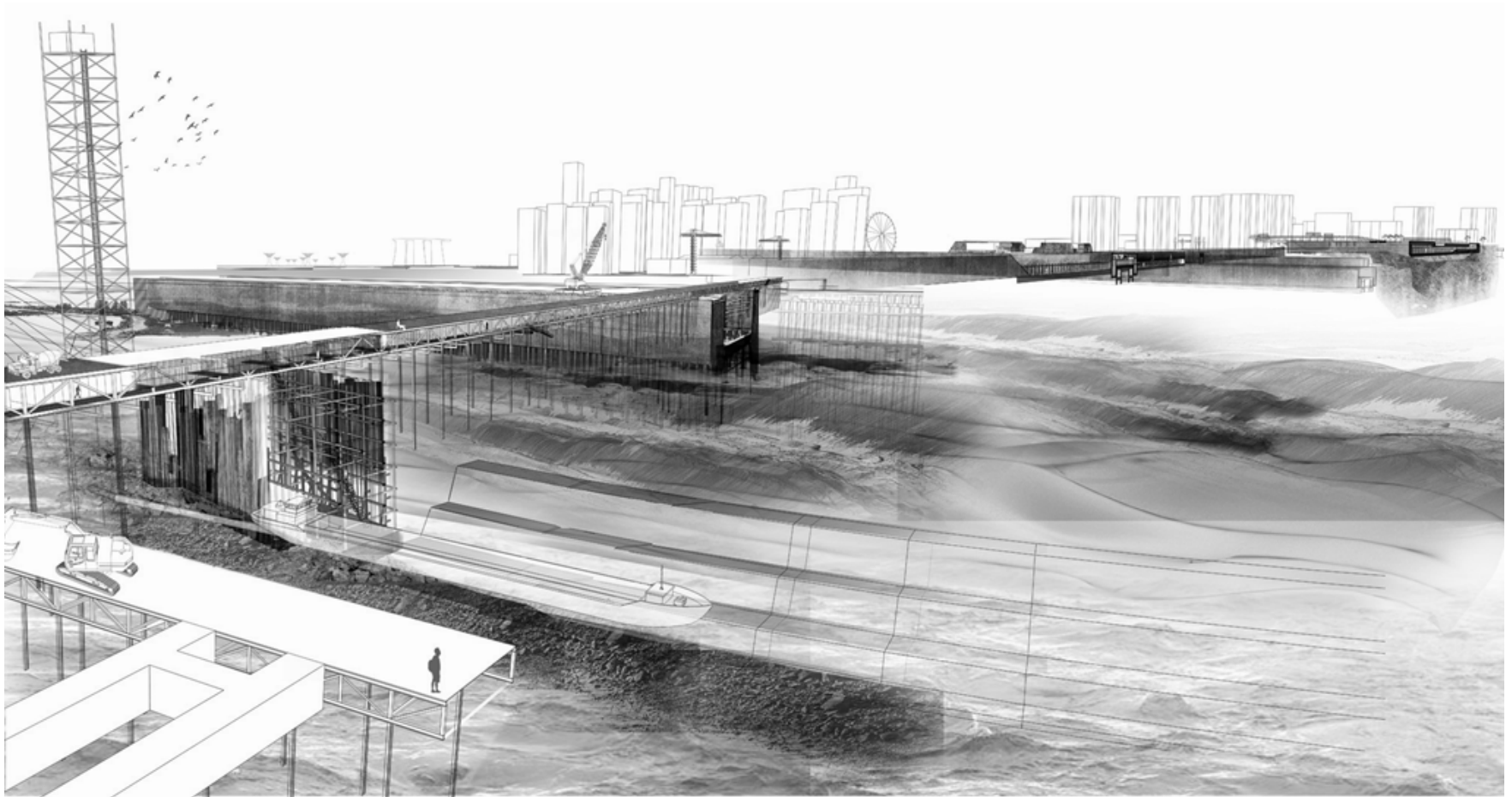
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Abstract

My thesis is a critique on the development of Singapore's urban development as an anaesthetised landscape. It questions the selective erasure of history and the meaning of land through looking at archiving from various perspectives.

Singapore, a city *and* a country, in its aim to be both marketable and idealised, projects a future that constantly displaces the past before the ripening of the present. This often results in a dramatisation and orchestration of the urban landscape – transplanted trees (and now Super Trees), crafted vistas of high-rise living next to beaches and parks by the sea (especially along the East Coast Parkway expressway from the airport to the city centre) and carefully outlined skyline at the central business district. The '*real*' is hence compromised; it has become an anaesthetised landscape where selective history, and memory, is kept.

Thus, the *archive* of Singapore has to be resuscitated, not merely in the form of an entity that documents and expands the autonomy of archiving, but also a physical body that archives the transformations in the Singapore landscape. It records the changes of the past (& the attempt to bury and negate this change), provides autonomy for the public to engage in the act of archiving, and lastly, allows archiving to take place in the in-progress development of the landscape (land reclamation). In essence, the project is manifested in three categories: archive as architecture, archive as document, and archive as mnemonic.

The site, Marina East, was chosen as it was the first *major* reclamation project in Singapore that altered the land and coastal profile in a series of phases. Katong Fort that marked the original coastline of Marina East, was as a result, buried, discovered and reburied in what became Katong Park that we see today. The artificial reclaimed land has since been seamlessly stitched into the original landscape, the past conveniently forgotten.

Thesis Supervisor: Tsuto Sakamoto
Title: Assistant Professor

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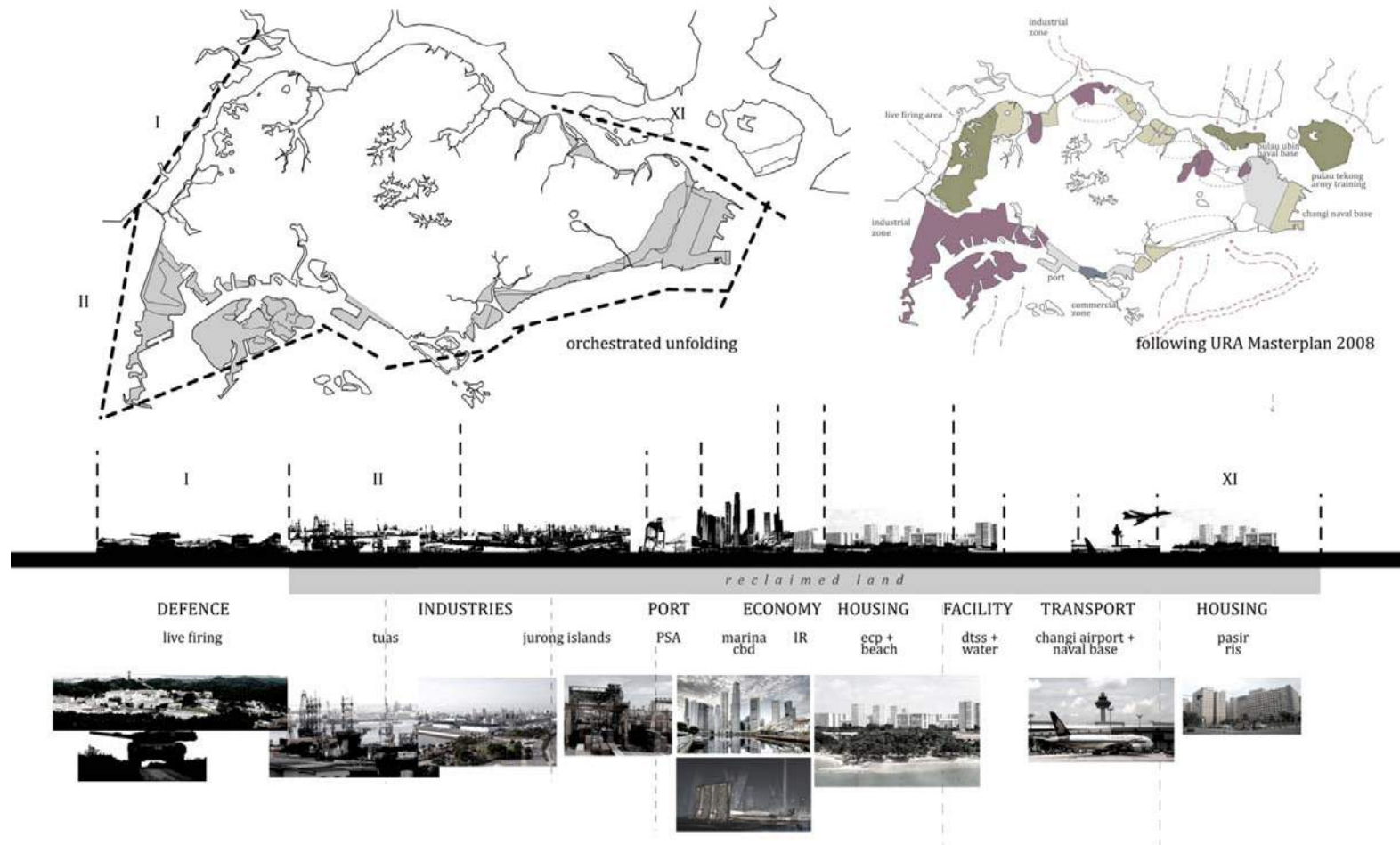
National Archives of Singapore, Heritage Conservation Centre

For the rare opportunities to visit your facilities and repositories

. the Anaesthetised Landscape .

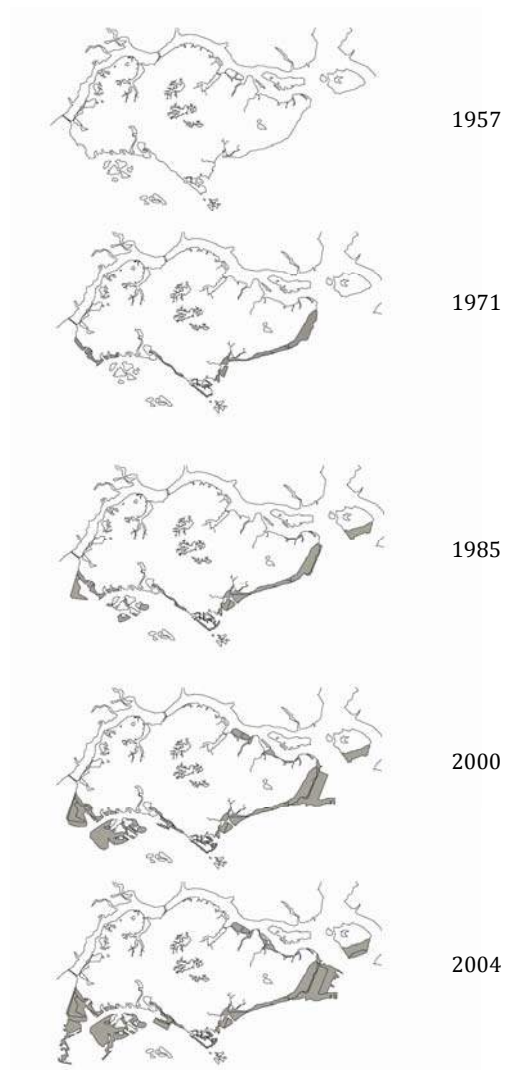


“Changi is a beautiful site at the easternmost corner of the island. The approach to the city from the east coast runs along a new 20 kilometer expressway built on land reclaimed from the sea, with no problems of congestion, beautiful glimpses of the sea on one side and vistas of HDB estates and private condominiums on the other. The airport and the pleasant 20-minute drive into the city made an excellent introduction to Singapore, the best S\$1.5 billion investment we ever made.” – ‘Conductor of an Orchestra’ in *The Singapore Story: memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*

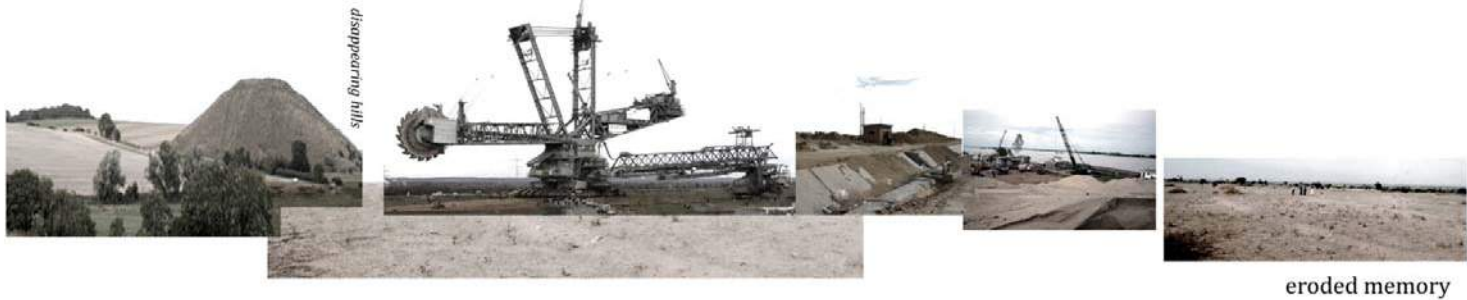


Museum of Singapore's Best | development along coastal profile – a display of a country's vision

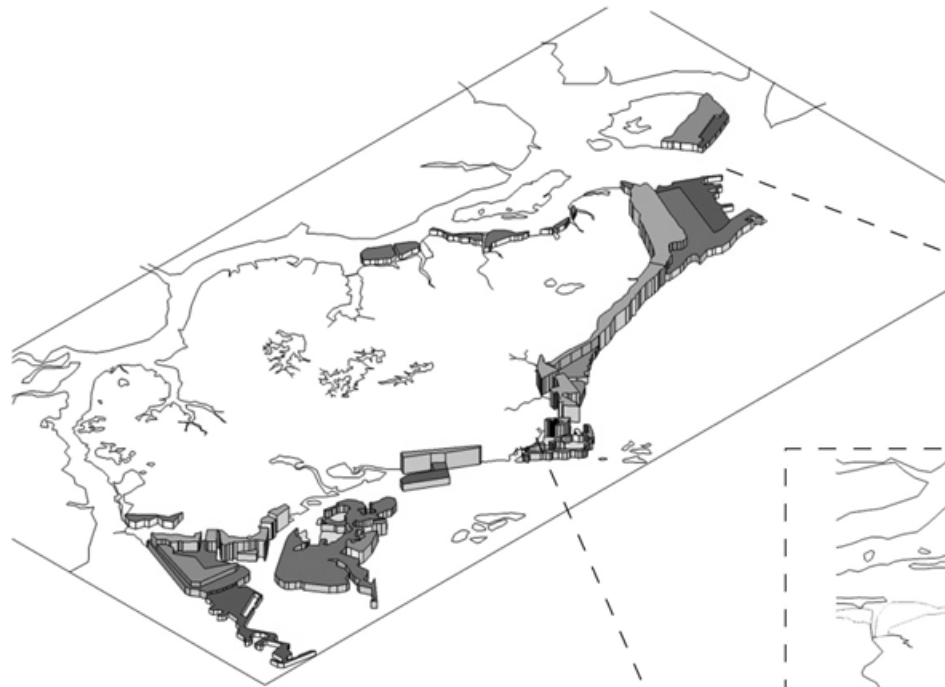




[Reference: Rodolphe de Koninck, Julie Drolet and Marc Girard, 'Stretching the Land', in *Singapore: an atlas of perpetual territorial transformation* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008).]



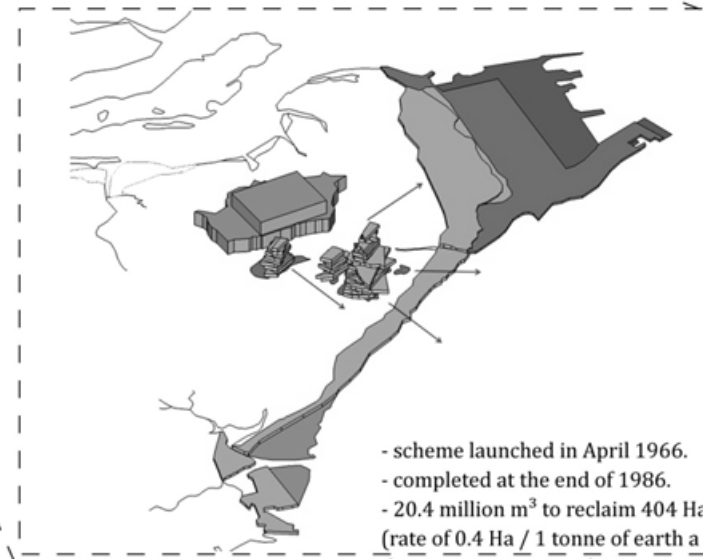
Displaced Land | Augmented Landscape



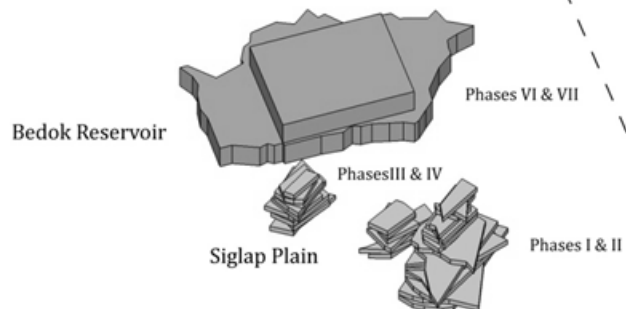
East Coast Reclamation

At the 343.4 Ha cut site of the East Coast Reclamation, only 5% of the land belonged to the state and the rest is private land.

Compulsory acquisition can also be seen in Changi, where the government acquired 103 lots, most of which are choice real estate. (4 charitable houses: the Cheshire Home, Red Cross Crippled Children's and Children Society Houses and a retreat home owned by the Catholic Redemptorist Fathers of Singapore.)

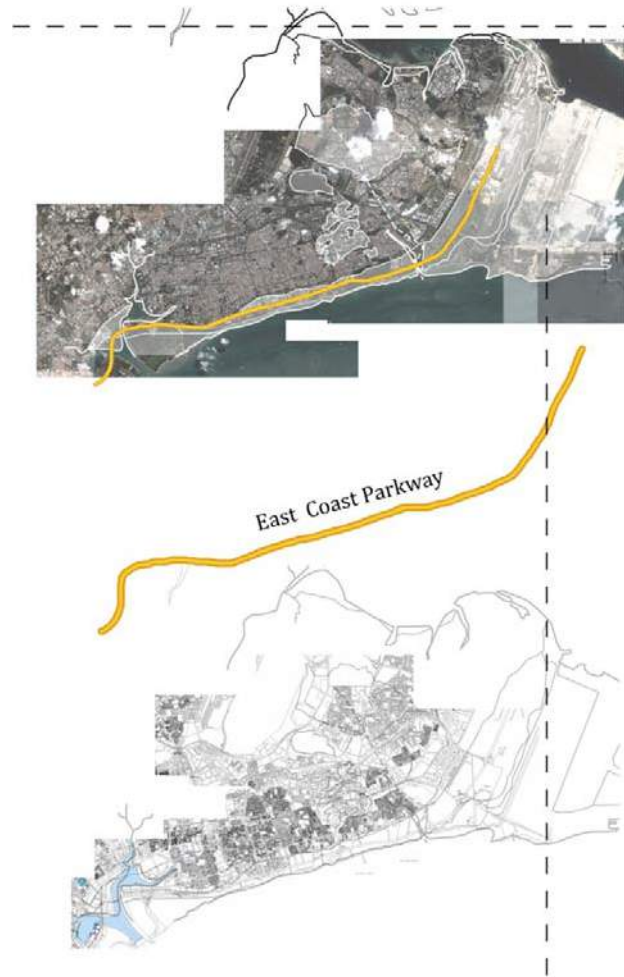


- scheme launched in April 1966.
- completed at the end of 1986.
- 20.4 million m³ to reclaim 404 Ha in Phase I 1966 (rate of 0.4 Ha / 1 tonne of earth a day to complete the contract in 4 years)
- rip-rap breakwaters





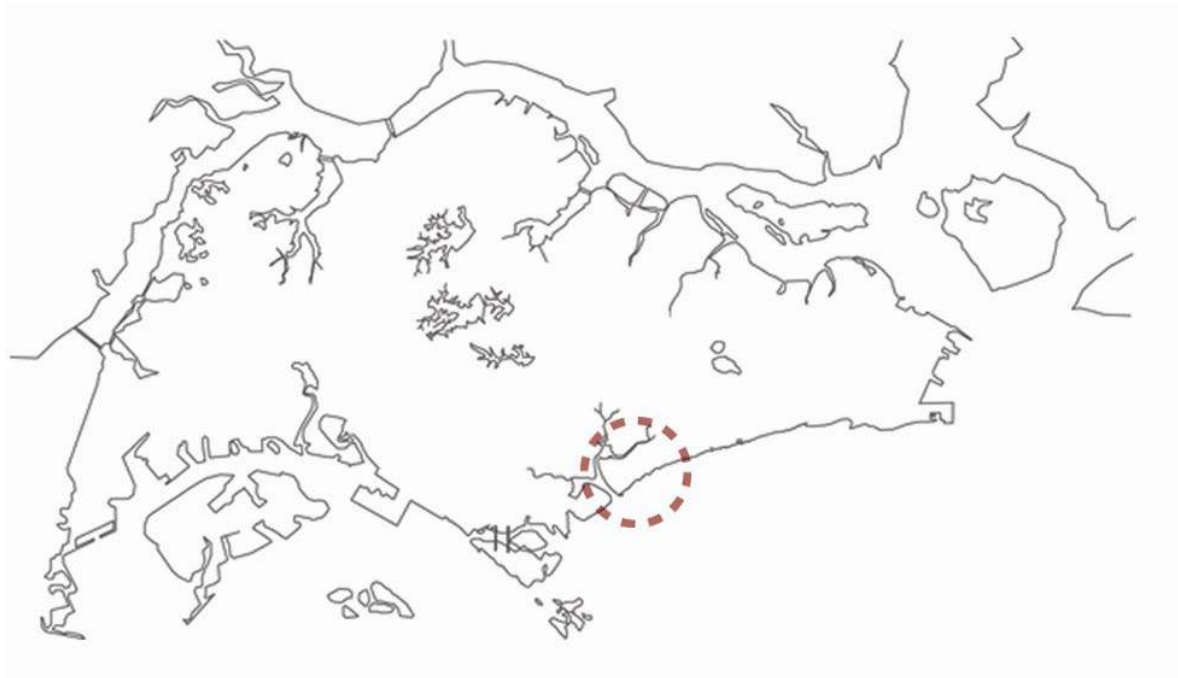
[Image source: <http://maps.google.com.sg/> , edited by author]



[Image source: <http://maps.google.com.sg>, <http://www.ura.gov.sg/MP2008/>, edited by author]



Series of views captured along the East Coast Parkway Expressway from Changi Airport to the Central Business District (CBD). (source: author)



SITE | Marina East

Part of 1966 East Coast Reclamation Project
Major land reclamation work that altered the coastal profile of Singapore



Site Plan | n.t.s.

SITE | Marina East

Marina East was conceived from two phases of major land reclamation – Phase II and Phase VI of the East Coast Reclamation Project of the 1960s. Following the vision of the Concept Plan 2001, the thesis hypothesises a further increase in land through future land reclamation southwards by displacing the sea. It is a tabula rasa site, a playground that contributes to the overall urban spectacle, striding between achieving the image of a vibrant city and a balanced home-play environment. Gardens by the Bay, the Marina Integrated Resorts, East Coast Park, Marina South Central Business District, Singapore Flyer – they have become an unfolding series of visual displays that hug the new coastline of Singapore, creating a sense of anticipation and instant delight to visitors. The new constantly replaces the old. It becomes virulent when the consumption of this orchestration becomes an inherent and natural part of the people; one forgets the real in this augmented, artificial landscape enabled especially by this obsession with land reclamation.

Hence, the site is important as a starting point to resuscitate the real. It starts with an intervention into Katong Park where the original shoreline once stood, and where there once stood a fort that is conveniently disregarded in historic representation. On the tabula rasa site at the south of Katong Park, a system of archive is implemented such that the network will constantly react to the changes above ground, quietly observing and capturing the changes. The perpendicular cut in the North-South direction serves also as a barometer of this shifting shoreline and addition of land. Where new land is reclaimed (from the sea), the archiving takes place in the imprinted experience of the people observing the changes in land and seascape. A void is carved along the new land profile, a mnemonic device that would remind future generations of this augmentation.

. Archiving .

“at once a commandment & commencement”

“There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression.”

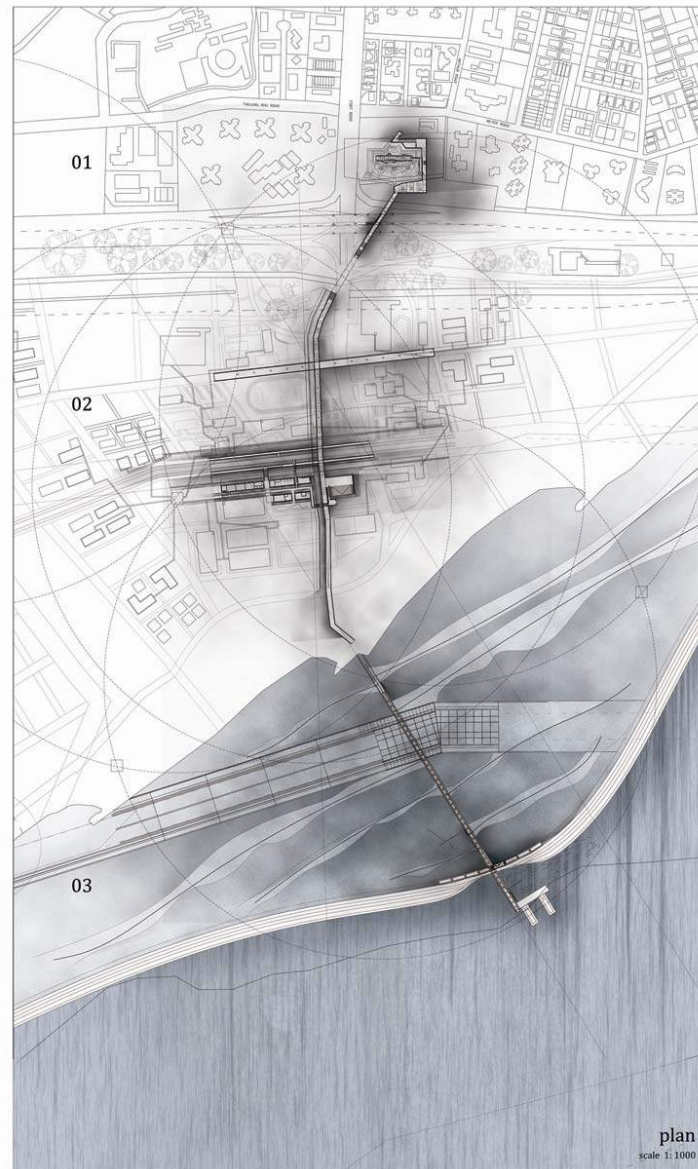
-- Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*

The archive deals with the mode and process of knowing. The physicality of an archive aims to connect to the real beyond the cosmetic patch up of urban planning. It also anticipates a forgetting of a land/seascape displacement. It is at the front end of a record keeping system, and the act of archiving becomes as important if not more crucial than the archived material itself. By revealing the mechanism and perpetual construction of this landscape and architecture, the process of creating history is hopefully surfaced. The past is made actual, the future anticipated. An archive then becomes an infinite activation of the record. The strategy of using large underground spaces serves to dichotomise the surface and subterranean development. The subterranean archive thus metaphorically attempts to capture the real.

01 Archive as Architecture

02 Archive as Document

03 Archive as Mnemonic



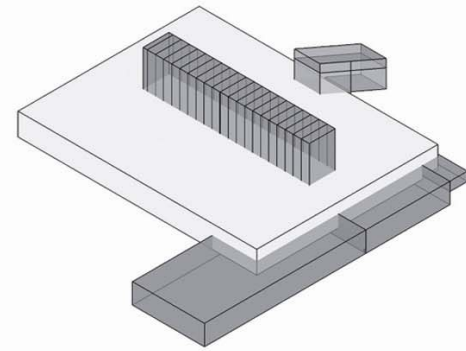
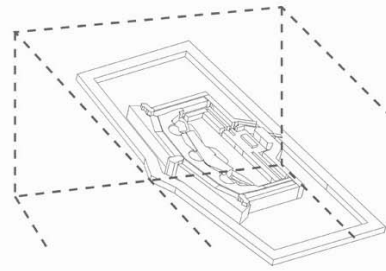
03

02

01



01 Archive as Architecture



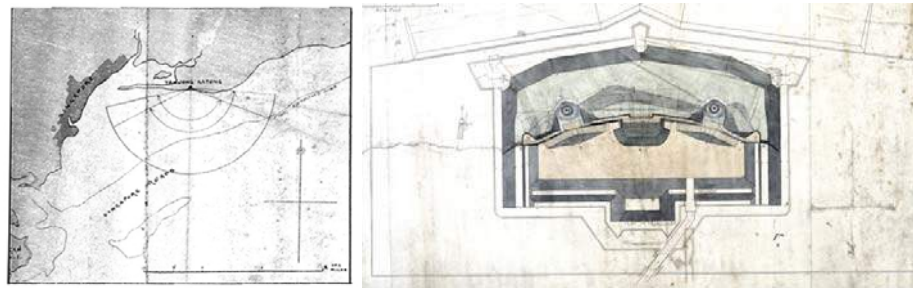
Uncovering the reburied fort

Uncovering the forgotten shoreline

The reburied fort

Katong Fort constructed in 1879 is among the earliest forts in Singapore. It was partially demolished sometime between 1906 and 1928 and later became a park that is more commonly known as Katong Park. It was further reburied during the 1960s land reclamation and was discovered in 2004 by volunteers who excavated part of the site, but was reburied again with the excuse of the lack of funds for excavation works.¹ This move delineates the selective representation of Singapore's history as its presence and history remains largely obscure and unknown to the general population of Singapore.

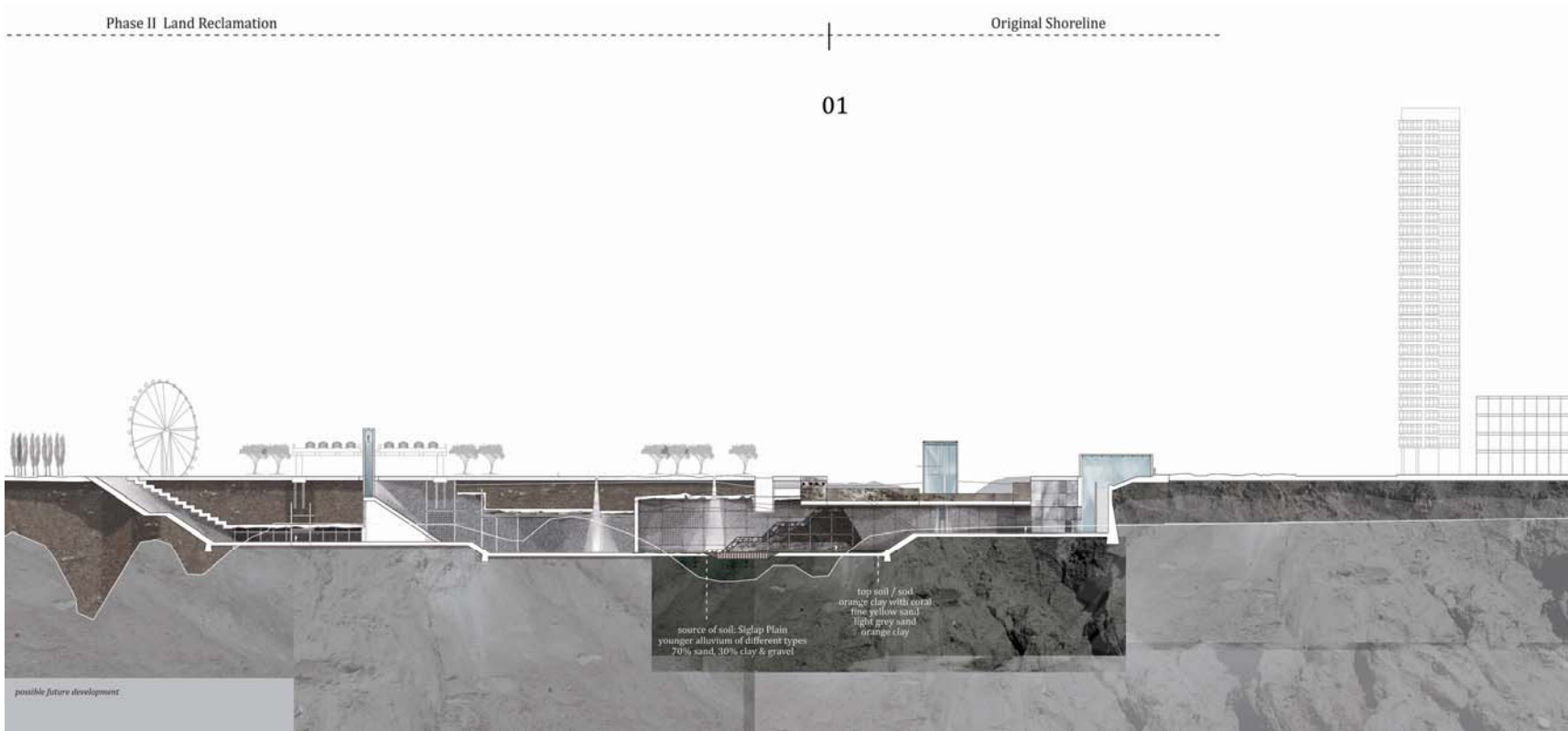
The design intervention aims to discover the fort through the periphery and underbelly, surfacing in the middle while observing the process of uncovering the fort. Unlike a typical archaeological site where ruins are firstly dug up and then displayed, the proposal here allows the public to observe the work in progress. The architecture becomes a living archive.



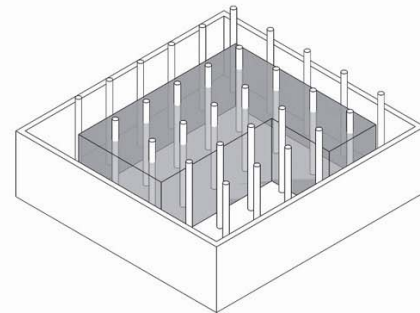
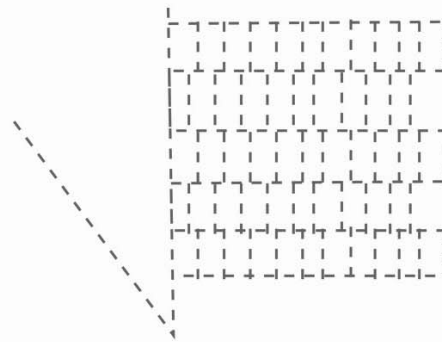
The forgotten shoreline

Katong Fort once fronted the original shoreline of Singapore. The new reclaimed land (Phase II and subsequently Phase VI of the East Coast Reclamation project) was seamlessly stitched into the original land, and many do not feel the addition of land on the surface. Thus, the design intervention underground aims to expose the strata of soil layers, revealing the addition of new soil onto the original land.

¹ Lim, Chen Sian, 'Fort Tanjong Katong Raising History Planting Roots Project' (unpublished report).



02 Archive as Document



Redefining the National Archives building
Systematic development of archive storage spaces

Redefining the National Archives of Singapore(NAS) & Heritage Conservation Centre



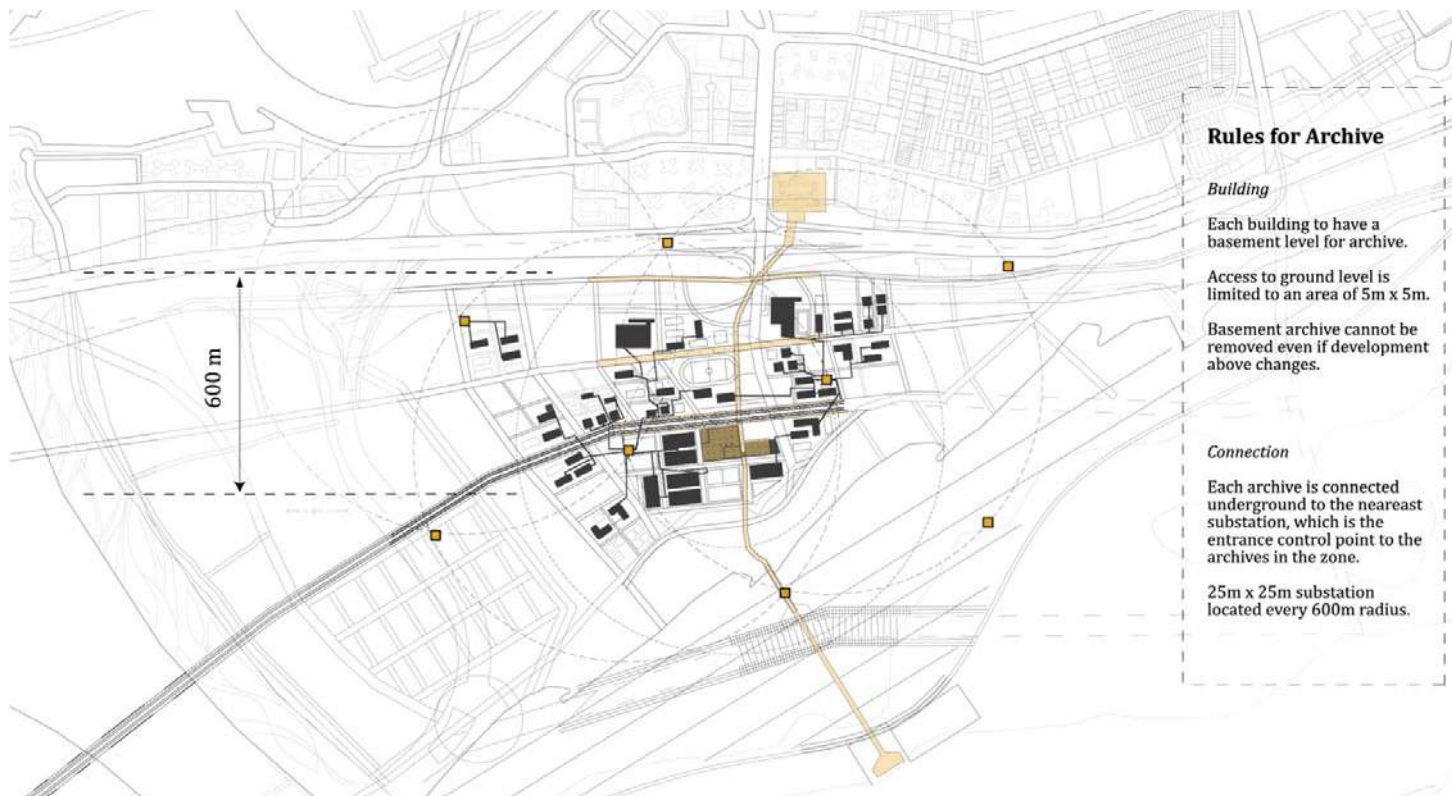
Left: repository @ NAS, Memories of Old Ford Factory Right: conservation lab @ NAS, Canning Rise (source: author)

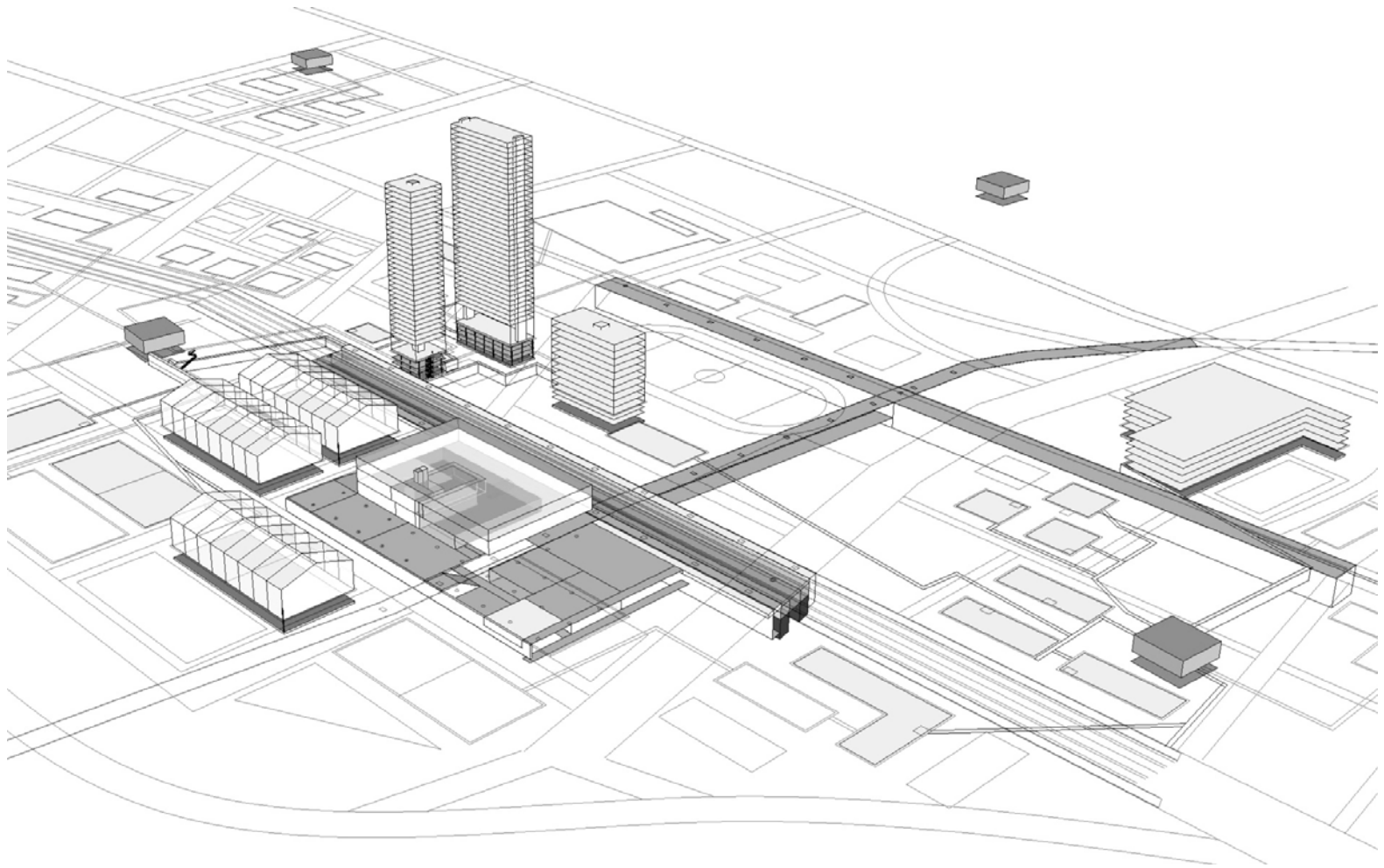
The current NAS houses approximately 80% government records and 20% private records, categories of which include documents, photographs, tapes, audiotapes, films & microfilms. The capacity of current archive storage is estimated to last another 20 years (currently approximately 60% of the space is used). Researchers or the public accessing materials from the NAS are not exposed to the immensity of the collection behind concealed spaces, and conservation processes are not revealed.

Leaching on the infrastructural development of the site, the new archives building will be in constant state of construction, relying on the soil dug out on site as support structures for the building. The engagement of the public & archival spaces is increased – the preservation and conservation processes are revealed to the public. Likewise, the immensity of the collection is made known to the public, who, through the systematic development of archive spaces, are given the opportunity to partake in the process of archivisation.

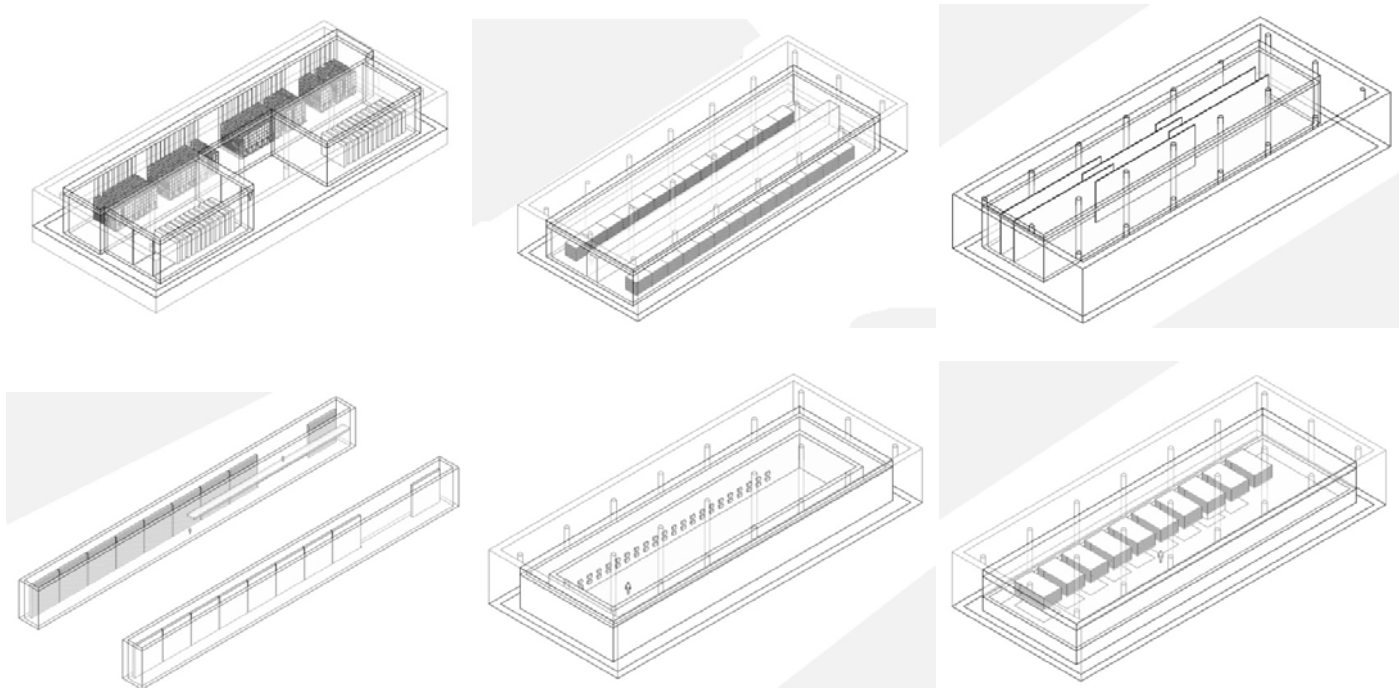
Systematic development of archive spaces

With each real estate development, there is a dedicated basement space for future archive storage. This provides the autonomy for the public to decide what is deemed important to be archived instead of a highly controlled collection determined by an institution. These sporadic developments of archival spaces will ultimately connect to the main archival spine. There is however, a need to monitor and control this proliferation of spaces. Thus, following the functional need for a substation within every radii of 600m to 1km, the access points within each radii of site area will be via these substations.





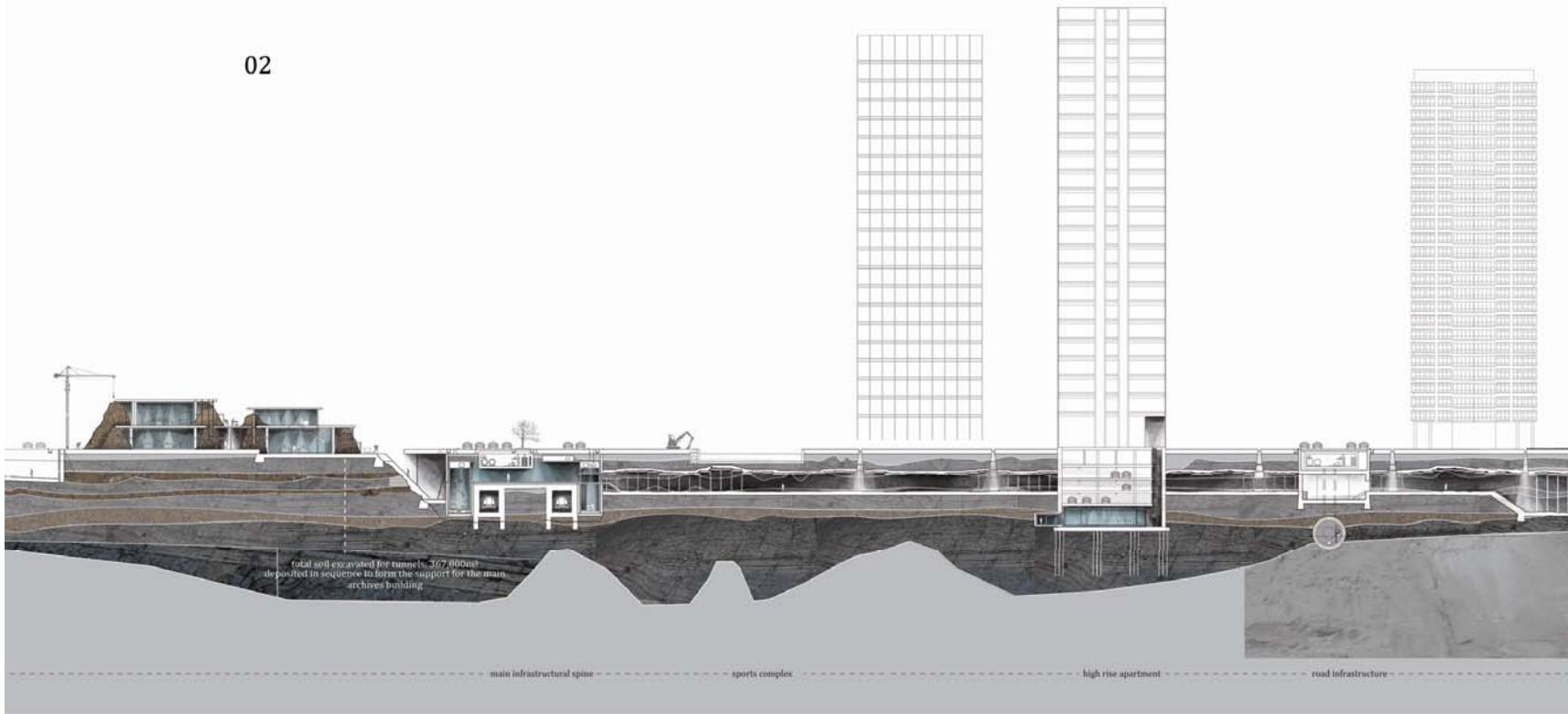
With every above ground development, there is a dedicated basement archive.



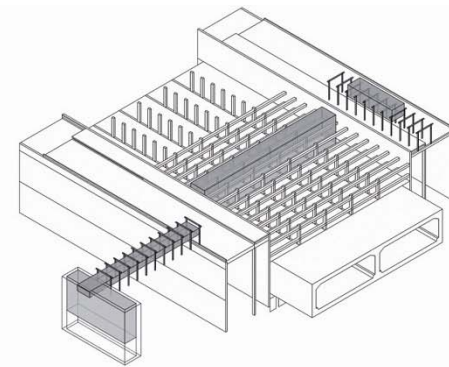
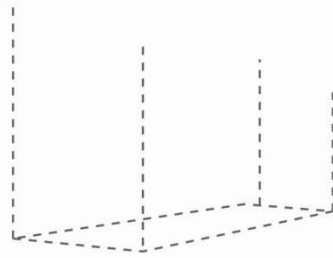
Possible permutations of pristine & controlled archive spaces inserted within the given basement floor.

Phase VI Land Reclamation

02



03 Archive as Mnemonic



Archived experience of augmenting landscape
Physical trace of displaced sea-land relationship

Archived experience of Augmenting Landscape

Beneath a bridge where construction trucks use to transport material from sea onto the mainland construction site, my proposed intervention allows one to partake in this massive operation of land reclamation. Estimated to take 5 to 6 years to complete, the land reclamation process becomes an archived experience that one goes through within this period. The undulating terrain of sand deposits revealed through the change in sea bed colour and shadow is part of knowing about this augmentation.

Leaving a Scar as a physical trace of a displaced sea-land relationship

Conventionally, new land profiles on sea are determined by the construction of stone bunds. (see Fig 1). Upon construction of the stone bunds, sand is slowly dumped onto the site and ultimately, new land emerges.

The proposed intervention replaces stone bunds with a functional caisson that on one hand, acts as a barrier for the land profile, on the other, provides a space which allows one to descend and experience the amount of sea that was displaced to reclaim the new land. This space, thus, anticipates the forgetting of the sea – land relationship.

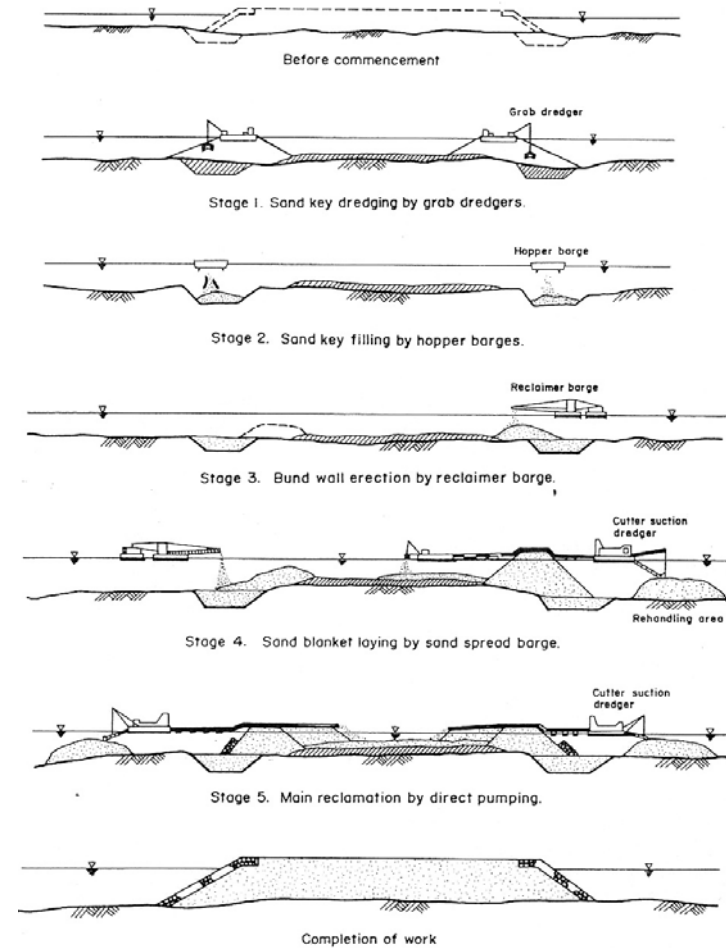
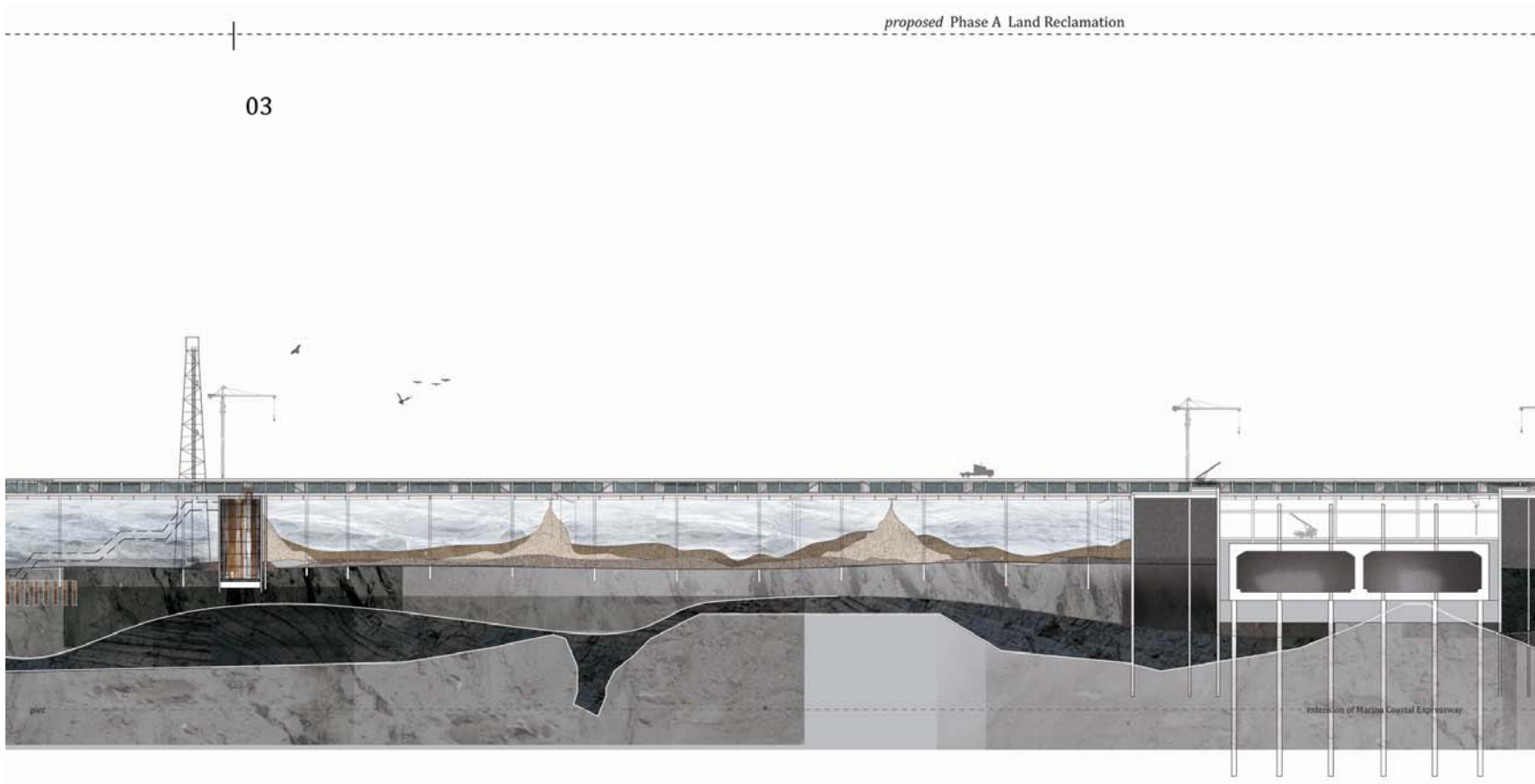


Fig. 1 Sequence of the reclamation work for the Tuas Reclamation Project (source: Chia Lin Sien, Habibullah Khan, Chou Loke Ming, *The Coastal Environmental Profile of Singapore*)

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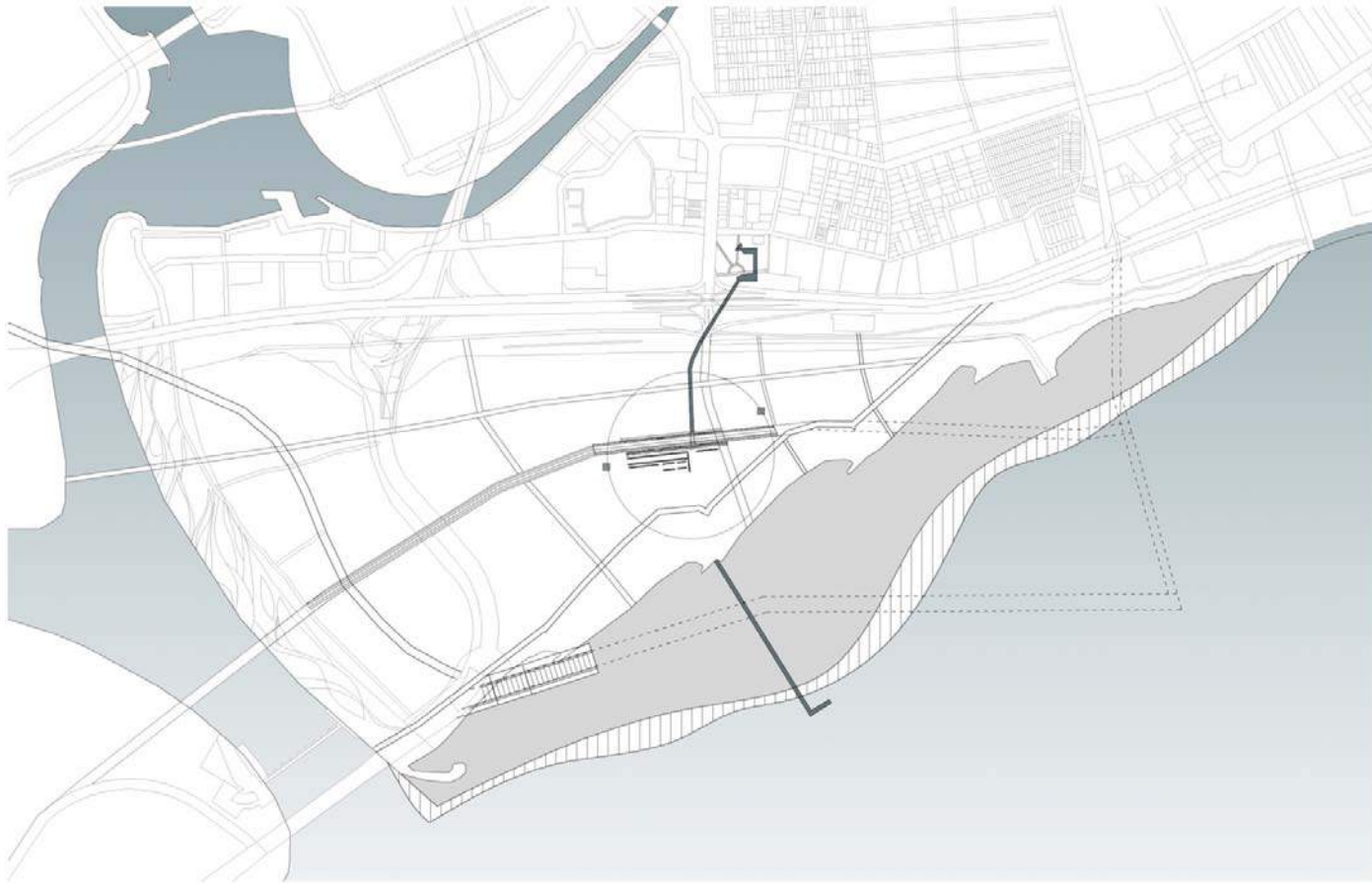


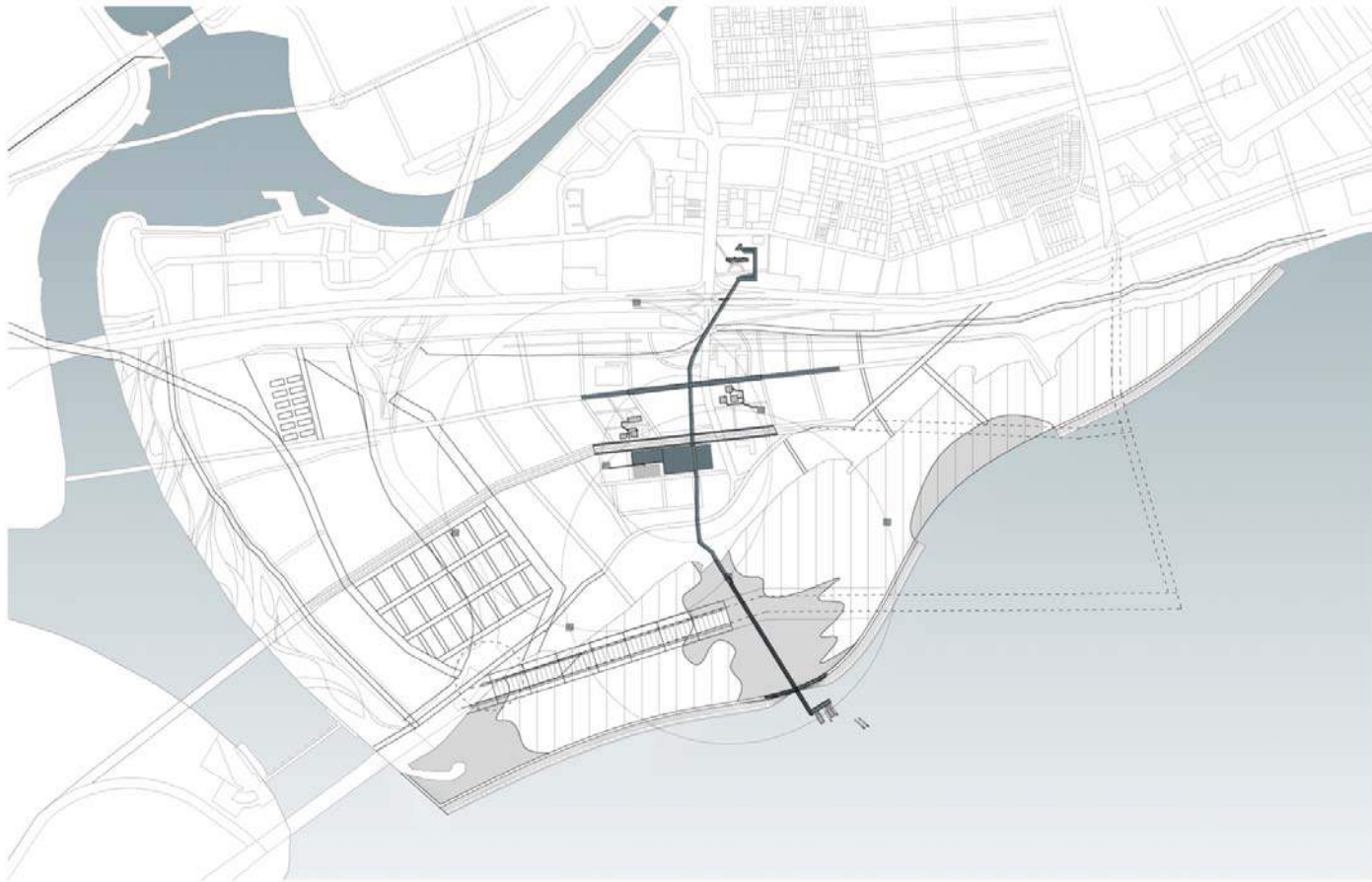
. Transformation of Archive & Landscape .

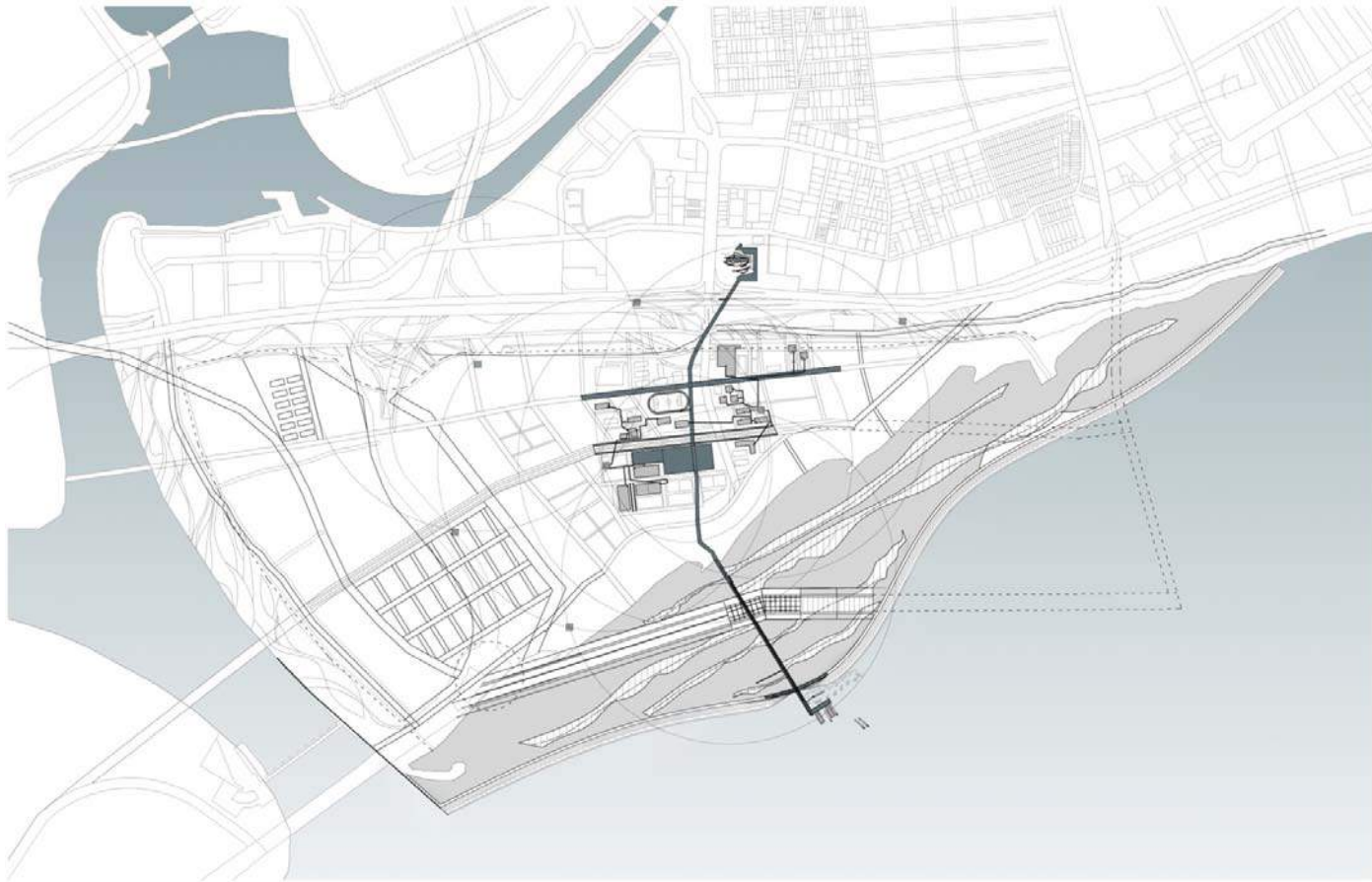
The archive continuously expands or destructs, reacting to the changes in landscape and the urbanscape.

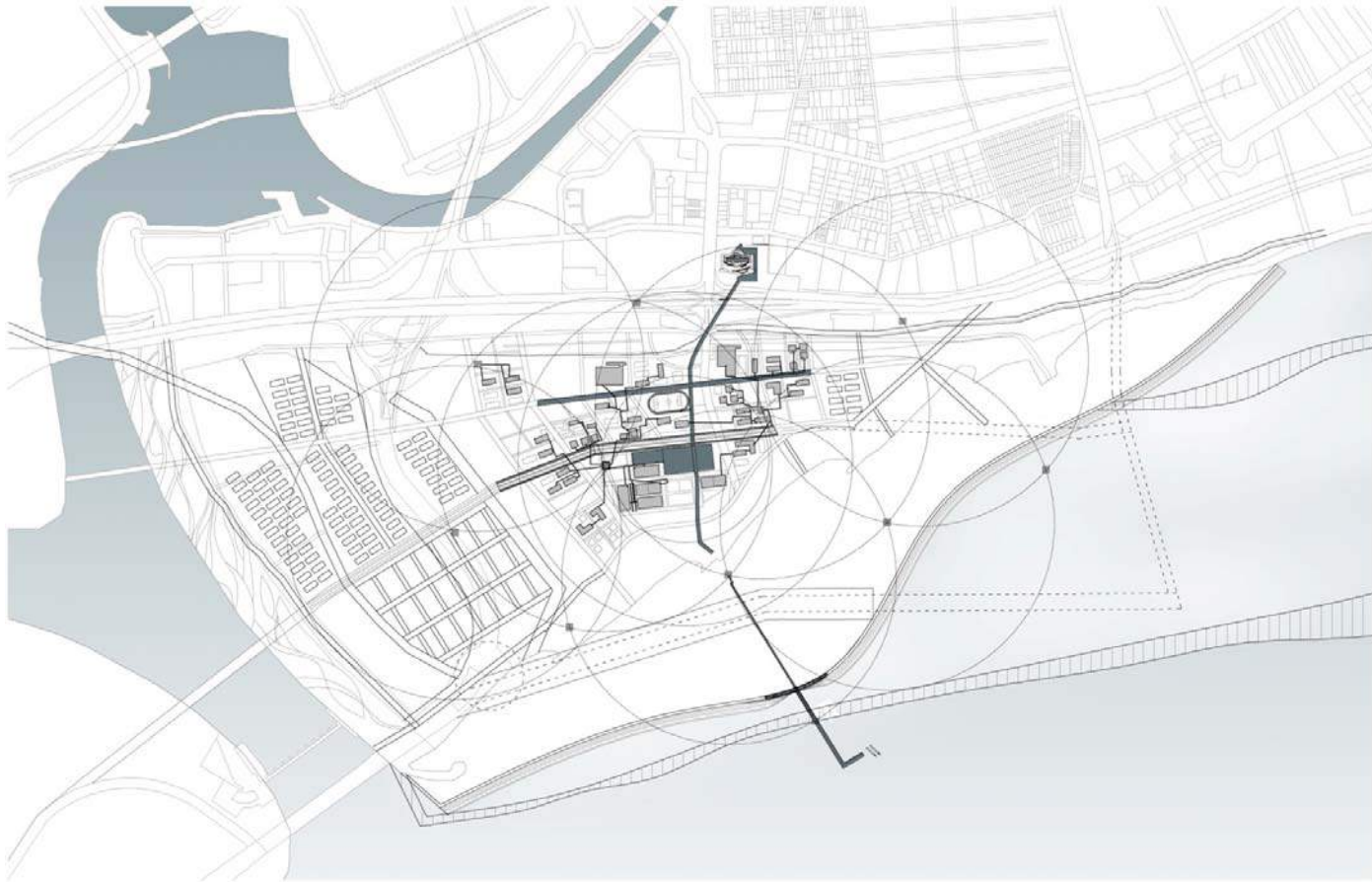
It will never be complete. It grows, corrodes, extends and destructs.

It is a barometer of the history of land, the history of the Singapore shoreline.











. Visions .

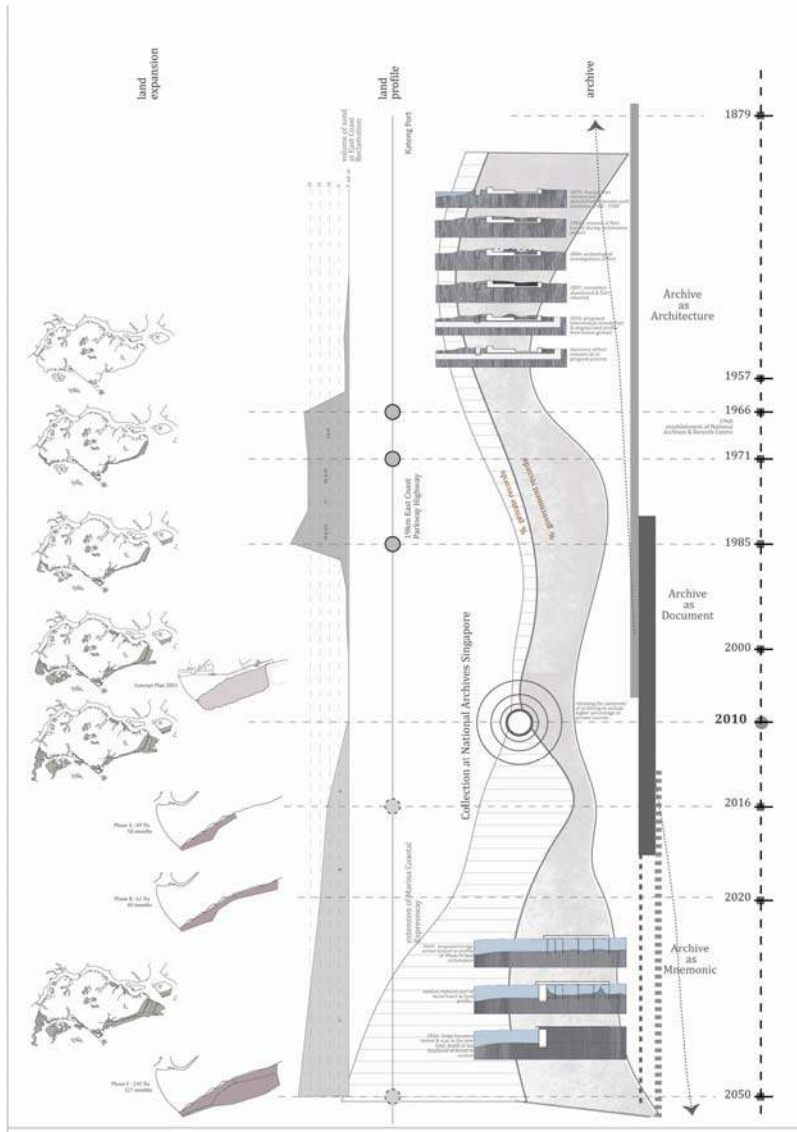
Those who arrive at Thekla can see little of the city, beyond the plank fences, the sackcloth screens, the scaffoldings, the metal armatures, the wooden catwalks hanging from ropes or supported by sawhorses, the ladders, the trestles. If you ask, "Why is Thekla's construction taking such a long time?" the inhabitants continue hoisting sacks, lowering leaded strings, moving long brushes up and down, as they answer, "So that its destruction cannot begin." And if asked whether they fear that, once the scaffoldings are removed, the city may begin to crumble and fall to pieces, they added hastily, in a whisper, "Not only the city."

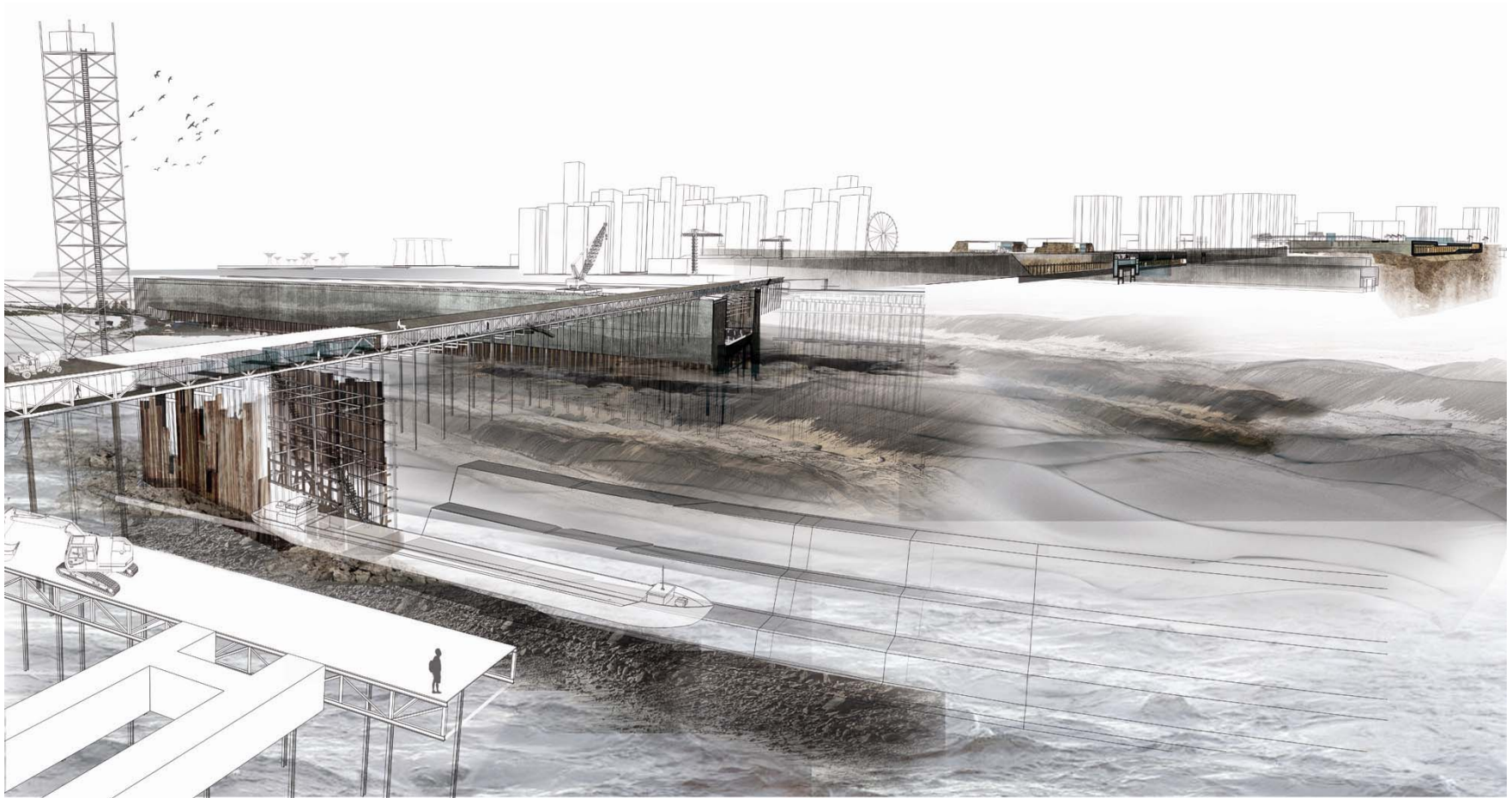
If, dissatisfied with the answer, someone puts his eye to a crack in a fence, he sees cranes pulling up other cranes, scaffoldings that embrace other scaffoldings, beams that prop up other beams. "What meaning does your construction have?" he asks. "What is the aim of a city under construction unless it is a city? Where is the plan you are following, the blueprint?"

"We will show it to you as soon as the working day is over; we cannot interrupt our work now," they answer.

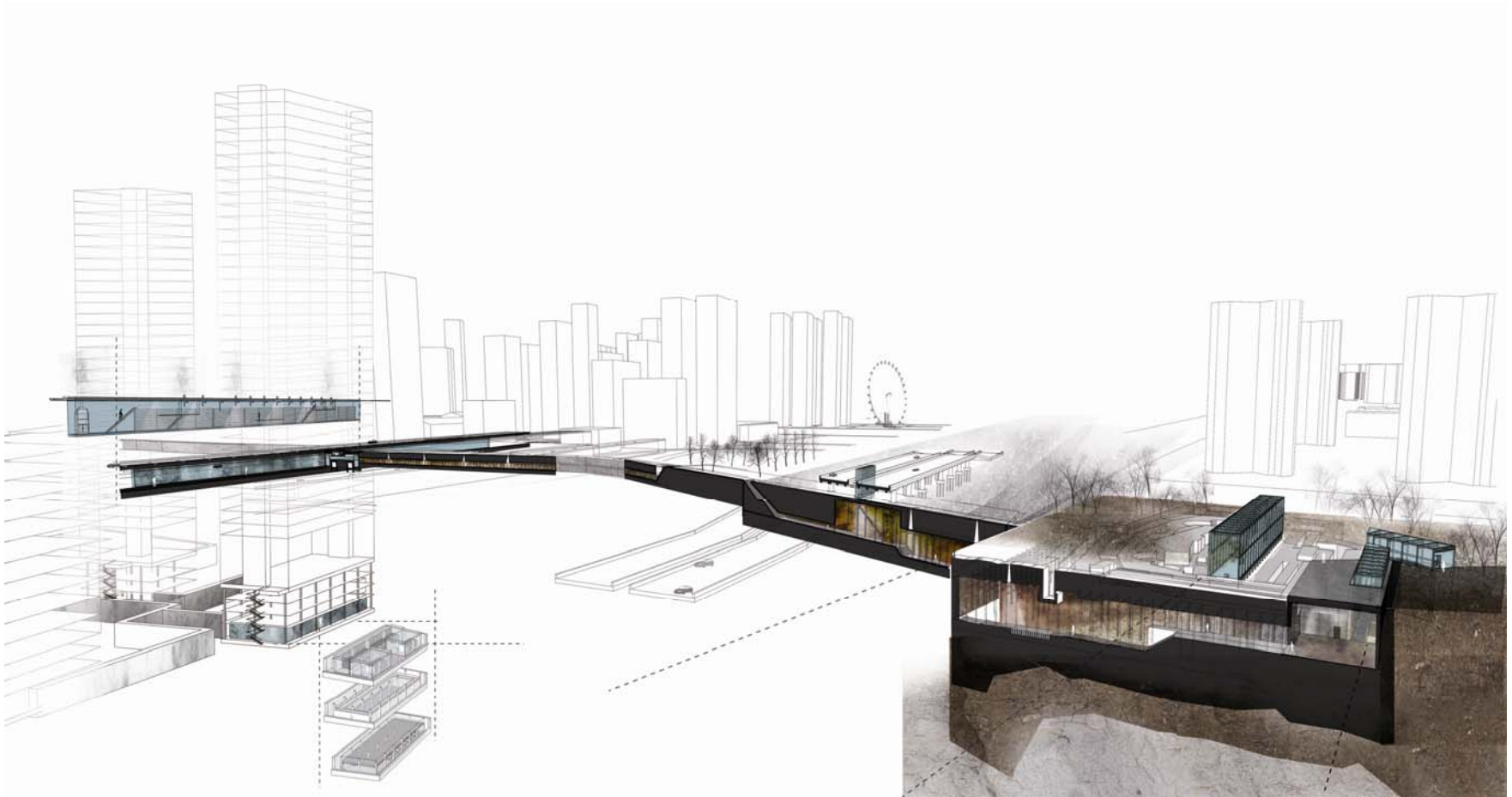
Work stops at sunset. Darkness falls over the building site. The sky is filled with stars. "There is the blueprint," they say.

- Italo Calvino, "Cities & The Sky 3" in *Invisible Cities*

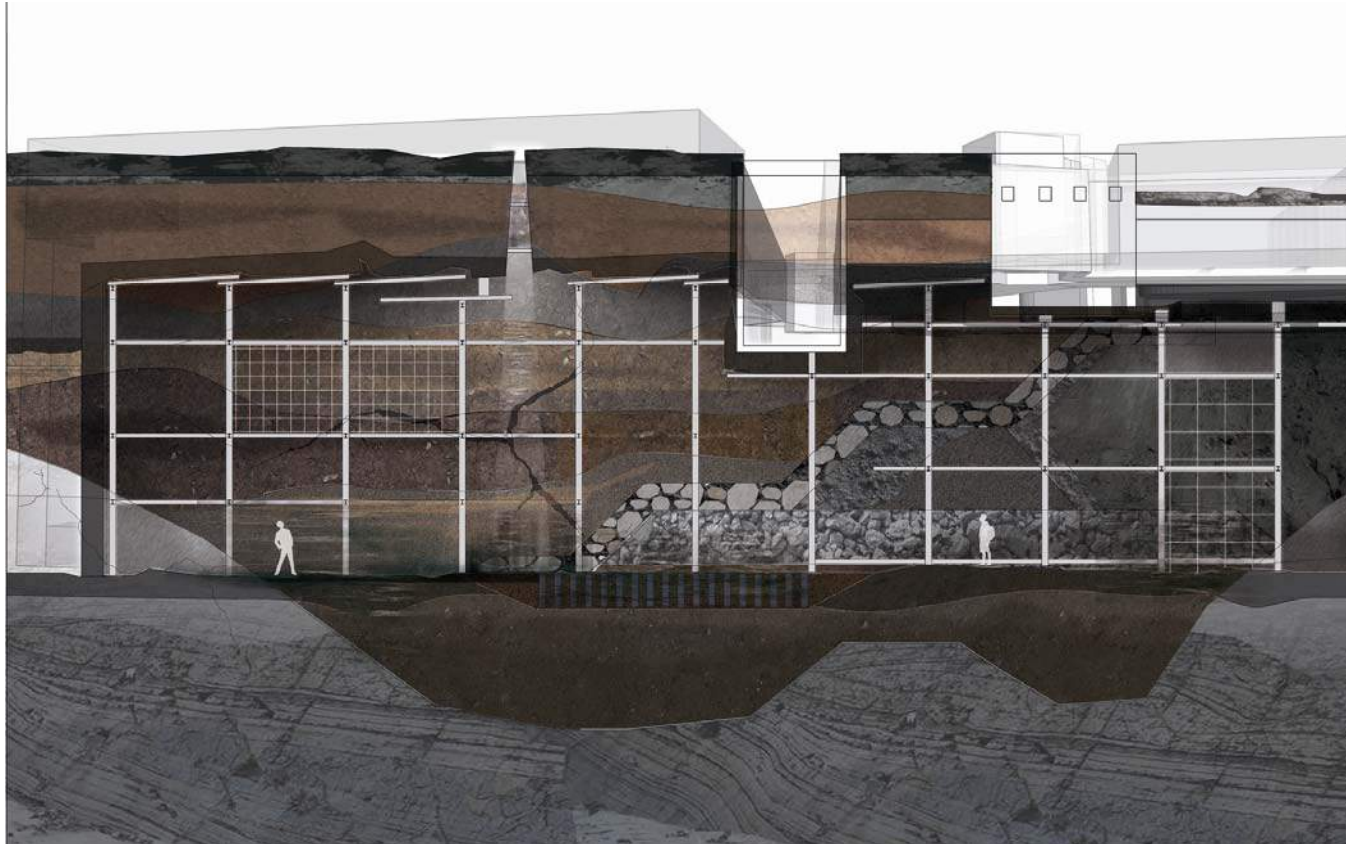




View of the 3 arches from sea

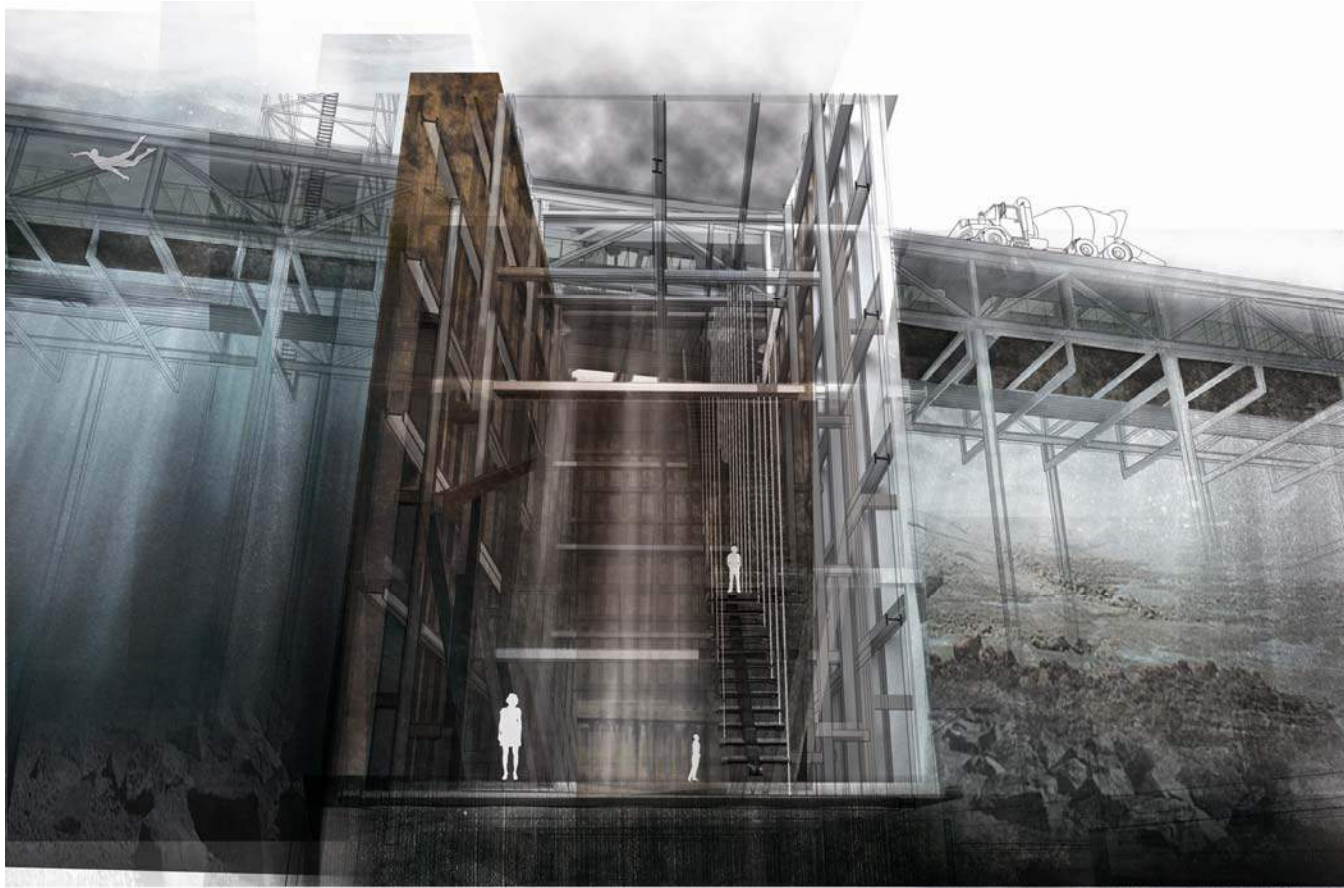


Sectional view of 2 archives from Katong Fort.



Archive as Architecture

View of change in soil layers & original shoreline erased by land reclamation. Appreciation of Fort made through a discovery of its profile from beneath. The architecture archives the change in physical land-scape & re-reveals the historical fort.



Archive as Mnemonic

A descent down the caisson along the new land profile allows one to experience the depth of sea water that was displaced due to land reclamation. It anticipates this forgotten change in sea & landscape. It is a mnemonic space of the future augmented landscape.

. the Apriori Knowledge .



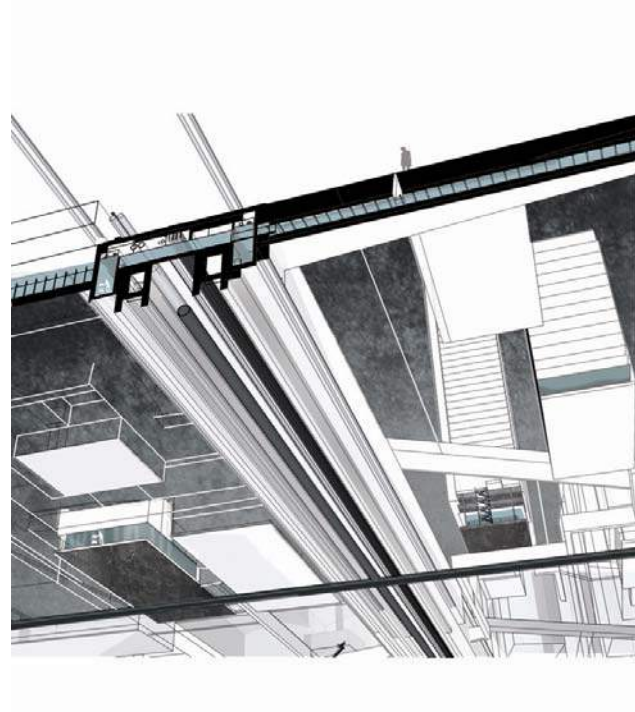
Ascending between the highway after experiencing the strata of new and oil soil, one can slowly observe the view of a highly orchestrated urban landscape from a standstill point.



The archive tunnels quietly observe the changes in the above ground development.



As the seawater is slowly displaced by the undulating terrain of reclaimed soil, so is one memory of the seascape. The bridge eventually becomes a tunnel scarred in the augmented land.



Worm's eye view of systematic underground archive development.

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