



s a d s c a p e

materializing the poetic image of loss

a master's thesis by natalie blom



Master 's Thesis in Architecture

by Natalie Blom

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Chalmers University of Technology
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

MPARC Matter Space Structure Studio

Examiner: Morten Lund

Supervisor : Naima Callenberg

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natalie.a.blom@gmail.com

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Student background:

Natalie Blom

Master's programme:

Architecture and Urban Design
Chalmers University of Technology
2018-2020

Department of Architecture & Architectural
Engineering
Seoul National University (exchange year 4)
2018-2019

Bachelor's programme:

The School of Architecture
Chalmers University of Technology
2013-2017

Employment:

Project:Architecture, Seoul
2019

White Arkitekter, Gothenburg
2017-2018

Contact:

www.natalieblomportfolio.com

natalie.a.blom@gmail.com

Abstract — This Master's Thesis Project is a search for an architecture derived from emotions of loss through the exploration of poetry. Believing that by using poetry to inform design, a space of high emotional resonance and beauty can be discovered.

The poem I have selected to explore is Sand, by Han Kang (2016). It is a poem about fragility, temporality, and loss, where Kang use the material sand to embody her emotions. I chose Sand because of its' rich poetic image, believing that the cognitive sensorial experience of the poem has high architectural potential.

The poetic image can be described as the mental sensorial experience of a poem. This concept is widely discussed within Cognitive Poetics, a discipline combining poetic linguistics and cognitive science. In the first part of this project, called the Poetic Materialization Methods, I have used theories of Cognitive Poetics to analyse and materialize different facets of the poetic image of Sand. In the second part, called the Architectural Potential, I

explore the architectural potential of the materializations made in part one. This is done through an iterative process, contextualizing the materiality and narrative of the poetic image into an urban landscape. The proposals are meant to direct our attention, to function as gateways, encouraging people to connect and express emotions of sadness and loss.

The wider discourse of this project is in the societal disconnection to loss. In our secular urbanity, the church is no longer a place where people go to express and work through sadness. Public display of negative emotion is rare, and to openly grieve is almost exclusively done at funerals. A grieving process never really ends, but it can progress - this is where I believe architecture can fill an emotional function. It can make us feel, and make us reflect.

Sadscape is what I am searching for in this thesis: a universal architectural language of sadness, a representation of loss in the material realm.



Background — This Master's Thesis project is a search for an architecture derived from emotions of loss through the exploration of poetry. Believing that by using poetry to inform design, a space of high emotional expression and beauty can be discovered.

I want to radicalise the poetic methodology, to see how fully poetry can lend itself to architecture. This is where the discourse of cognitive poetics comes in. Cognitive poetics is a discipline combining poetic linguistics and cognitive science. It uses the concept of the Poetic Image to describe the mental sensorial experience - or what we see and feel - when reading a poem. This poetic image possess materiality, dimensionality, form, composition, lightness, darkness, which I believe can be used to influence architecture. To do this, I have widely used theories or models for analysis, from Cognitive Poetics presented by Peter Stockwell (2005), combined with artistic design research.

The poem I have selected to explore is Sand, by Han Kang (2016). It is

a poem about fragility, temporality, and loss, where Kang use the material sand to embody her emotions. I chose Sand because of its' rich poetic image, believing that the cognitive sensorial experience of the poem has high architectural potential.

The research presented in this booklet is divided into two parts. In the first part, called The Poetic Materialization Methods, I have designed eight methods to materialize different facets of the poetic image. The methods are widely influenced by theories of Cognitive Poetics as well as my personal desire to materialize a specific experience. The materialization methodology uses an exploratory and artistic approach, where the physical model, live installations, and sculptures have been essential representation techniques. In the second part, called the Architectural Potential, I explore the architectural potential of the materializations made in part one. This is done through an iterative process, contextualizing the materiality and narrative of the poetic image into an urban landscape. The proposals are meant to direct our attention, to function

as gateways, encouraging people to connect and express emotions of sadness and loss.

The wider discourse of this project is in the societal disconnection to loss. In our secular urbanity, the church is no longer a place where people go to express and work through sadness. Public display of negative emotion is rare, and to openly grieve is almost exclusively done at funerals. A grieving process never really ends, but it can progress - this is where I believe architecture can fill an emotional function. It can make us feel, and make us reflect. A built reference that exists in the periphery of this discourse is "An Occupation of Loss" by OMA, an installation in New York 2016. The performance piece focused on the anatomy of grief, showing 11 hollow concrete structures occupied by mourners. It is an alternative, essentially emotional, way to understand grief spatially.

Sadscape is what I am searching for in this thesis: a universal architectural language of sadness, a representation of loss in the material realm.

Purpose/Exploration _ This thesis explores the human experience of loss in relation to architecture. Claiming that there is a need for an alternative urban space for people to express and connect to emotions of loss. It is a search for an architecture derived from emotions of loss through the exploration of poetry. Believing that by using poetry to inform design, a space of high emotional resonance and beauty can be discovered. The translation from poem to architecture will be made through an artistic exploration and theories of Cognitive Poetics.

Thesis Questions _ The main question of this thesis is if poetry can be used to design emotionally expressive architecture. Sub-questions include: "How can poetry of loss be expressed in a material culture?", "How can theory of Cognitive Poetics be used in a design methodology", "How do I materialize the poetic image of the poem Sand", and "How can architecture function as an arena for emotional work?".

Method _ This project aims to translate the poem Sand, by Han Kang (2016), into architecture. This process is divided into two parts, one where I use theories of Cognitive Poetics to materialize the poetic image of Sand, and the second where I explore the architectural potential of the materialization. The methodology I have developed is not limited to the poem Sand, it is open for any type of poetic design project.

Part I - The Poetic Materialization Methods is an artistic exploration, where I have developed eight methods to materialize different facets of the poetic image. The methods are widely influenced by theories of Cognitive Poetics as well as my personal desire to materialize a specific experience. I have used the term materialize because of the broad meaning "to bring something to life". The physical model, sculpture, and live installation was the best medium of representation because of the high degree of presence and "life" which can only be experienced in the physical material realm.

Part II - The Architectural Potential is the part where I explore the architectural potential of the previously made materializations. The structures presented are iterations of the materiality and narrative of the materializations, as well as a contextualization into the urban landscape. This process was also conducted in physical models, sculptures, and live installations, with the purpose to fully translate the phenomenological experience of the materializations poetic image into architecture.

part.1 poetic materialization methods

Poetry emits emotion and creates an atmosphere - it paints a textured picture of sensorial qualities - the poetic image. In this part, I will explore the possibilities of materializing the poetic image of the poem Sand, by Han Kang, through an artistic and speculative methodology.

I have used the term materialize because of the broad meaning "to bring something to life". The choice of representation technique was an iterative process that started with a range of drawings and models, but it became clear that the physical model or installation was the best medium, because of the high degree of presence and "life" which can only be experienced in the material realm.

The poem I explore, Sand, can be described as a meditation on the phenomena of sand, as well as a reflection on the temporality and fragility of life itself. Kang mourns the loss of her sister and transforms her emotions into poetry where sand gives it sensorial and figurative qualities. This generates a very vivid poetic image, which is what I, in this chapter, aim to materialize.

The methodology uses theories of Cognitive Poetics presented by Peter Stockwell to understand the poetic image. Cognitive Poetics is a discipline combining poetic linguistics and cognitive science, concerning the mental sensorial experience of a poem. Stockwell describes it as a discipline of holistic principles, drawing from natural human experiences.

The methodology consists of a collection of eight methods, delving into different facets of the poem Sand. The methodology is meant to be seen as an example of what this type of design research can enable and is not limited to the specific poem of Sand. The methodology is however not limited to Sand, but can be seen as an example of the possibilities of poetic design research.

1:1 Material Texture

Aim _ To materialize the experienced material texture of the poetic image.

Theory _ Texture is generally defined as a quality which can be determined by touch. It can be rough, smooth, soft, hard, and so on. However, within cognitive poetics, Stockwell (2005) says that texture goes beyond just touch, it is all that can be phenomenologically felt, cognitively experienced, and aesthetically seen.

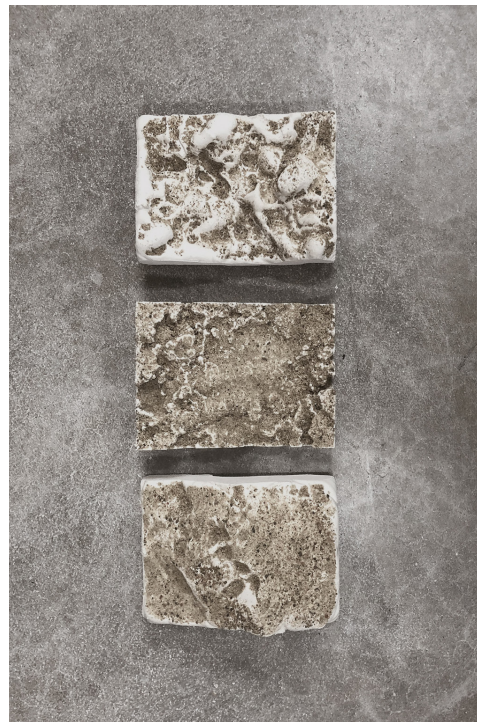
Analysis _ Sand being the title of the poem, the reader is from the start given a strong textural experience. One can easily imagine the feeling of running a hand through the soft but coarse, granular material. As the poem continues, new elements are influenced by this first strong mental experience. As Kang introduces the body, the house, the shattering, and the slipping; the material texture is solidified, eroded, and at last loose again.

Materialization _ Analogue models and drawings were made to conduct an exploratory research on the material texture of Sand. The sandbox was built as a framework, where one can experience the sensorial qualities of loose sand. Gypsum was cast against sand to explore the texture "solidified" and "eroded". Thinking of it as the bodies of the poem, which potentially could be shattered.





The moulding was done by pouring gypsum into frames placed in different types of sand texture. The sand is easily absorbed into the plaster and the surface becomes very similar to the sand landscape, only that it's solidified. By adding water to the sand and creating a more broken up texture the surface of the gypsum instead becomes more eroded.





1:2 Image Schema

Aim _ To materialize the textural schematics of the poetic image.

Theory _ Image Schema is a model used in a multitude of disciplines. It builds on pattern making for understanding and reasoning. It is a model on how we make abstractions to form our comprehension of physical and conceptual relationships. This is how we perceive our inhabited space as well as how we build up an imaginary space when reading a poem. An image schema is made up by figural objects (front), ground objects (back) and background space (fond). (Stockwell, 2005)

Analysis _ When reading Sand, a background space is generated from the title - sand. Perhaps you imagine a vast landscape of sand. Continuing the poem the reader learns about a body, then a shattered body/house, which is placed as a ground object in the image schema. The poem ends with sand slipping through fingers, and as is it is told in present tense, as well as the most recent information, it becomes the figural object.

Materialization _ This is a materialization of the order of the mental perception of elements. What is presented here is an exploration on the textural image schema of Sand. It can be described as a diagrammatic model, showing sand as background space, the solid sand piece and the eroded (shattered) piece as ground objects, and the slipping sand as the figural object.







1:3 Symbolism

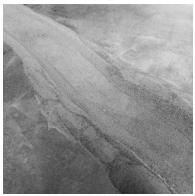
Aim _ To materialize the symbolic representations of the elements.

Theory _ The Symbolism movement in the late 19th century, was a reaction against naturalism and realism, in favour of spirituality, imagination, and dreams. Brodskaya (2010) writes that symbolic representation is visualizing by association or convention, which is abstract, like an emotion.

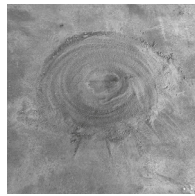
Analysis _ Sand is often used as a symbol for the passing of time and the eventual destruction. It exists because of thousands of years of weathering and erosion. There is also a connotation of elusiveness. A body of sand can change shape so quickly ; wind can change the entire landscape of a desert, and water can wash away all traces on a beach. Finally, there is an abrasive intrusiveness of sand, causing discomfort and friction against the skin.

Materialization _ Starting off, I made a lot of pictorial drawings, illustrating the poem quite figuratively. Then as a second iteration, I used sand itself to interpret the elements. This was done under a short period of time, using intuition, striving to approach the representations through the angle of the Symbolism movement.





Sand



And she frequently forgot,



That her body



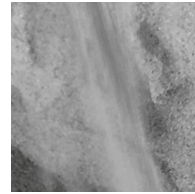
(all of our bodies)



is a house of sand.



That it had shattered,



and is shattering still.

Slipping stubbornly



through fingers

1:4 World Switch Element

Aim _ to materialize the disjunctive element of the poetic image.

Theory _ World Switch Elements are a part of Text World Theory, a model of language processing based on mental representation found in Cognitive Psychology (Stockwell, 2005). A Text World is built up by, and changes along with, introduced world-builders, function-advancers, and world-switches (spatial alternations, metaphors, speculation, imagined alternatives). World-switches are used to create a disjunction between the world-builders and the discourse world. (Gavins, 2007)

Analysis _ The poem Sand starts off with a woman who "frequently forgot" that her body (all of our bodies) is a house of sand. The world switch element is therefore a "house of sand". It is what disjunct us from the "discourse world" - the woman. The author's use of world-switch takes the reader into an alternate (internal) world, where a body is a house of sand is the new given truth.

Materialization _ The process of materializing the World Switch Element started with mapping out all elements of the poem according to Text World Theory and defining the house of sand as the world switch element. The house, as I imagine it, is a home, which is why I chose the typical gable-roofed style. I made two plaster models. One represents the house as un-shattered, the state which the person in the poem first believes it to be. The second house is shattered, a large part is missing.





"We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost."

- Gaston Bachelard,
The Poetics of Space



1:5 Attractor

Aim __ To materialize the element of attraction and literary focus.

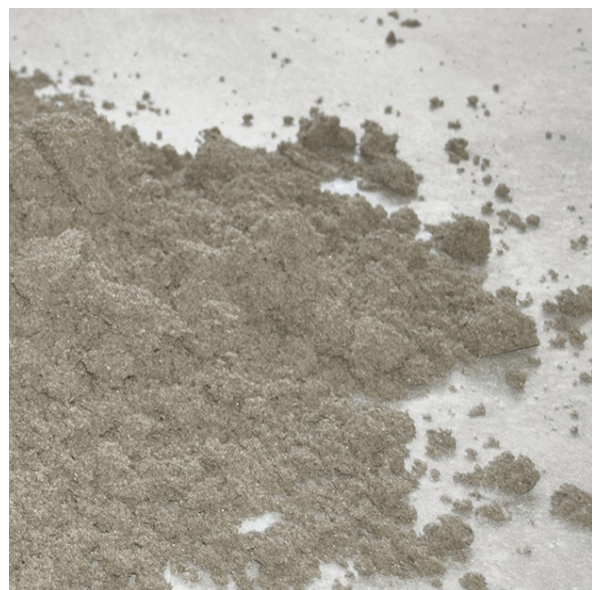
Theory __ Stockwell (2005) describes an attractor in cognitive poetics as an element which brings attention, it can be something newly introduced, or it can be something pre-existing which is given new focus and energy. There are several features which can create an attractor: newness, agency, activeness, definitiveness, fullness, largeness, and noisiness are some examples.

Analysis __ In the poem Sand, "shattering" (of the house of sand) is the main attractor. The shattering has features of newness (present tense, happening now), activeness (dramatic movement), fullness (richness of the house of sand image), largeness (a house), and noisiness (shattering is voluminous).

Materialization __ The first materialization I made was of sand and plaster that I destroyed with a hammer. I found this to be an unsuccessful representation because of it being overly dramatic and too manipulated, not mirroring the poem. The second iteration is what can be seen here. I took wet sand and formed it to a simple cube, then I let it shatter as it dried. This installation is more in tune with the poem, showing the shattering and erosion in an organic manner.







1:6 Resonance

Aim _ To materialize the poetic reverberation, meaning - what echoes after reading a poem.

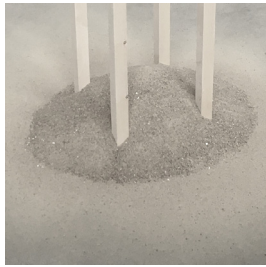
Theory _ Resonance in sound is the prolonged response of vibration. Literary resonance is similar, it describes the prolonged response of an aura of significance. Stockwell (2005) describes it as a "psychic reverberation between two times, places, states, or spheres" one common and the other extraordinary." (p.18). Spelke (1990) says that the reader's attention is like a spotlight, what remains in our field of view after reading a poem can be defined as the poetic resonance.

Analysis _ Poetic resonance is subjective. What I experience as the reverberating elements of the poem Sand can be perceived differently by others. But, for me, the poetic resonance of Sand is the body, whole and defined, slowly slipping away through fingers.

Materialization _ The materialization I made is an installation of the body (glass box of sand) and it slipping away (the falling of sand). As the sand is falling to the floor, the body decrease in size and changes in shape. The sand which hits the floor spreads out, and the dust fills the air. The sound of the slipping sand enhances the experience and helps to create a meditative state for the observer. This process of decrease and falling is irreversible. A feeling of loss becomes prominent.









"Sand, which didn't even have a form of its own. Yet, not a single thing could stand against this shapeless, destructive power. The very fact that it had no form was doubtless the highest manifestation of its strength, was it not?"

Kobo Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*



1:7 Vocalization

Aim _ to materialize the vocalized poem.

Theory _ Poetry possesses a certain dynamics which can be experienced to a higher degree when vocalized. This can be analysed through an audio spectrogram or "voiceprint". A voiceprint is a graph of the spectrum of frequencies over time. It shows the intonation, rhythm, composition, melody, and intensity in a way printed text cannot.

Analysis _ Sand is a poem about life and loss, when reading it out loud it is natural to read carefully, making longer pauses. There is also a certain degree of vivid intensity that appears when reading the more dramatic parts of "shattering" and "slipping through fingers".

Materialization _ By recording my friend Mikaela as she read the poem Sand I could place the text along the curve of the voiceprint. When reading this, one can experience the way Mikaela vocalized it. This was used to make a model of spatial properties. By giving the voiceprint three-dimensionality and an outwards offset, the model contains not only the relational dynamics but also movement and vibrato. This was iterated into a collection of gypsum pieces, where each flow between pauses is one piece. By changing the composition, one can play with the experience of the poem. Through arranging the pieces differently, the dramatics of the poem is played with.

s -

a -
nd

And
she

frequently

forgot

That
her

body

(that

of all
our
bodies)

is

a

house
of

sand

That
it
had

shattered

and

is

shattering

still

slip-

ping

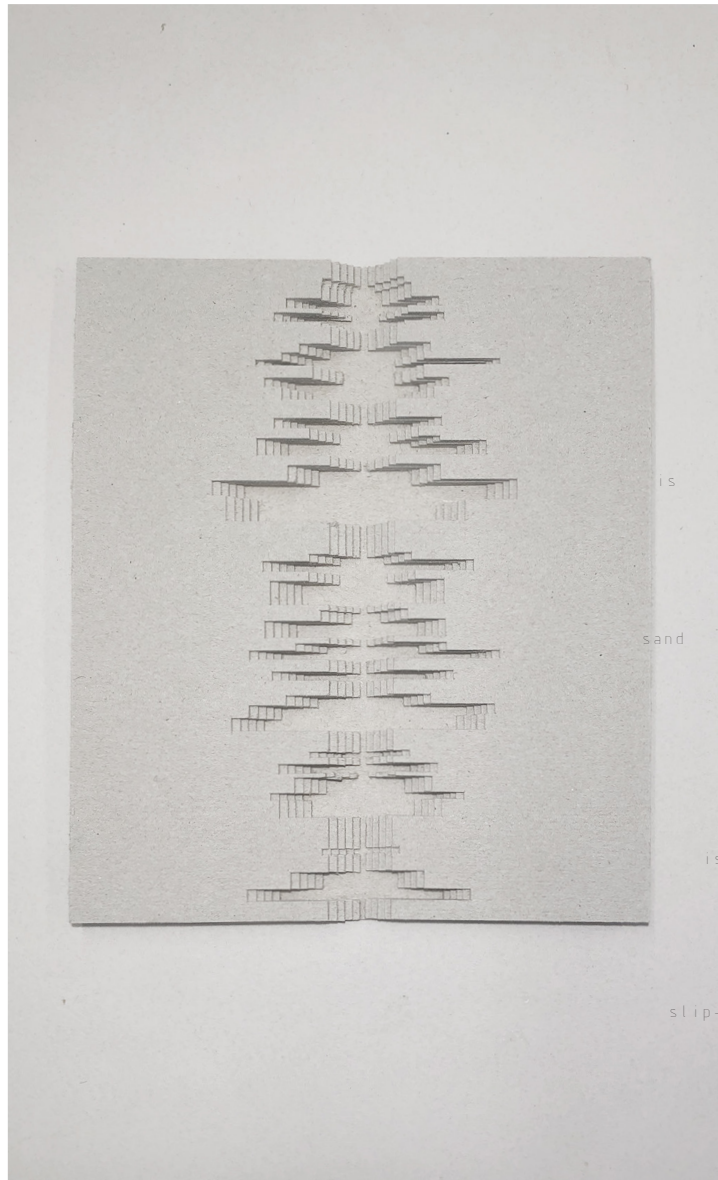
stubbornly

through

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s

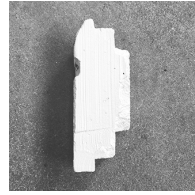




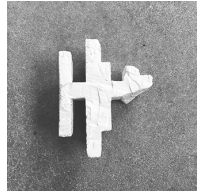
Sand



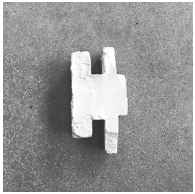
And she frequently forgot,



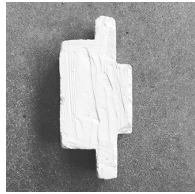
That her body



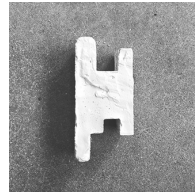
(all of our bodies)



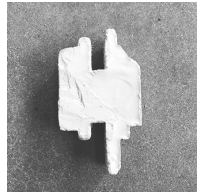
is a house of sand.



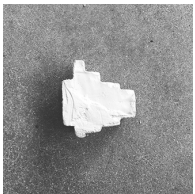
That it had shattered,



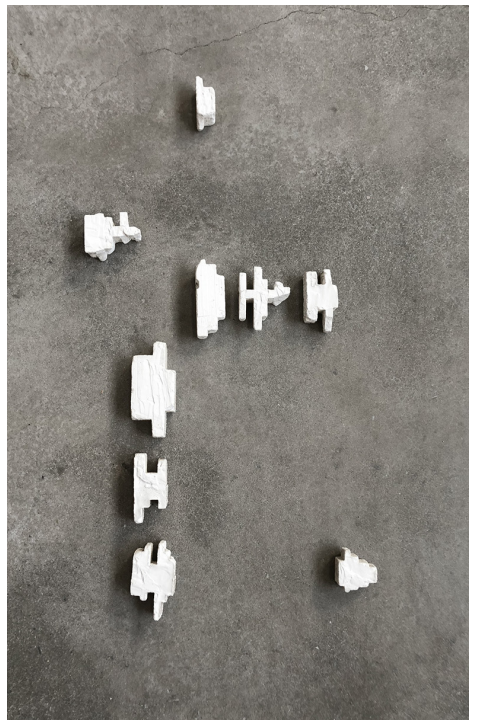
and is shattering still.



Slipping stubbornly



through fingers



1:8 Dynamics

Aim _ To materialize the dynamics or “movement” of the poem.

Theory _ Stockwell (2005) says that a vocalized poem possesses dynamic relationships in a three dimensional imagined space. When the poem is performed with empathic expression the dynamics and movement can be strongly experienced mentally and physically. This does not necessarily require you to understand the meaning of the words, the sound itself is enough to create an atmosphere and emotion. Just like when listening to music.

Analysis _ The dynamics of the poem Sand will be experienced differently depending on who reads it. My intuition is to read slowly, carefully, with a degree of intensity for the more dramatic parts of the poem. This slowness, carefulness, and intensity can be experienced physically, creating a bodily reaction.

Materialization _ To materialize the dynamics of the poem Sand, I have used my own body to interpret it. In the format of a performance, I have tried to represent the emotion, force, and flow through the material sand, as my friend Mikaela recites the poem. Each motion creating a trace erasing the one before.





Sand



And she frequently forgot,



That her body



(all of our bodies)



is a house of sand.



That it had shattered,



and is shattering



still.



Slipping stubbornly



through fingers



2:5 The Shattering Structure

The Shattering Structure is an exploration of the architectural potential of the Attractor Materialization Method (1:5)(p.32-35).

The Shattering Structure is an example of the Attractor Method elongated into architecture. The Structure is placed in a hypothetical gap between buildings on a street in an urban environment. The Structure is placed in an imaginary urban context, in a gap between buildings on a public street. When passing the structure it is unassuming, there is only a small passage on the sides that hints of something else. Walking behind it, there is a cavity. The cavity creates seclusion, it is a space for being alone, a space for meditation.

When installed, it is a perfectly shaped cube consisting of gypsum and sand. However, as time passes, weather and human interaction will slowly make it erode and shatter.

The ability to scrape the surface and change the structure yourself makes the decay visible in real-time. After a couple of weeks, there might be nothing left but a pile of dust.





illustration : street view

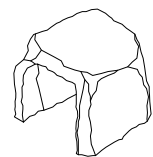
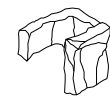
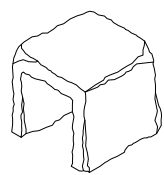
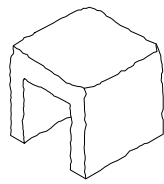
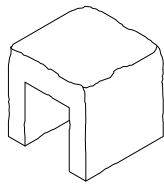
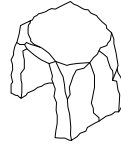
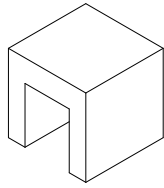


illustration : shattering over time



illustration : interactive decay



photo : physical model





photos : physical model

2:6 The Suspension Pavilion

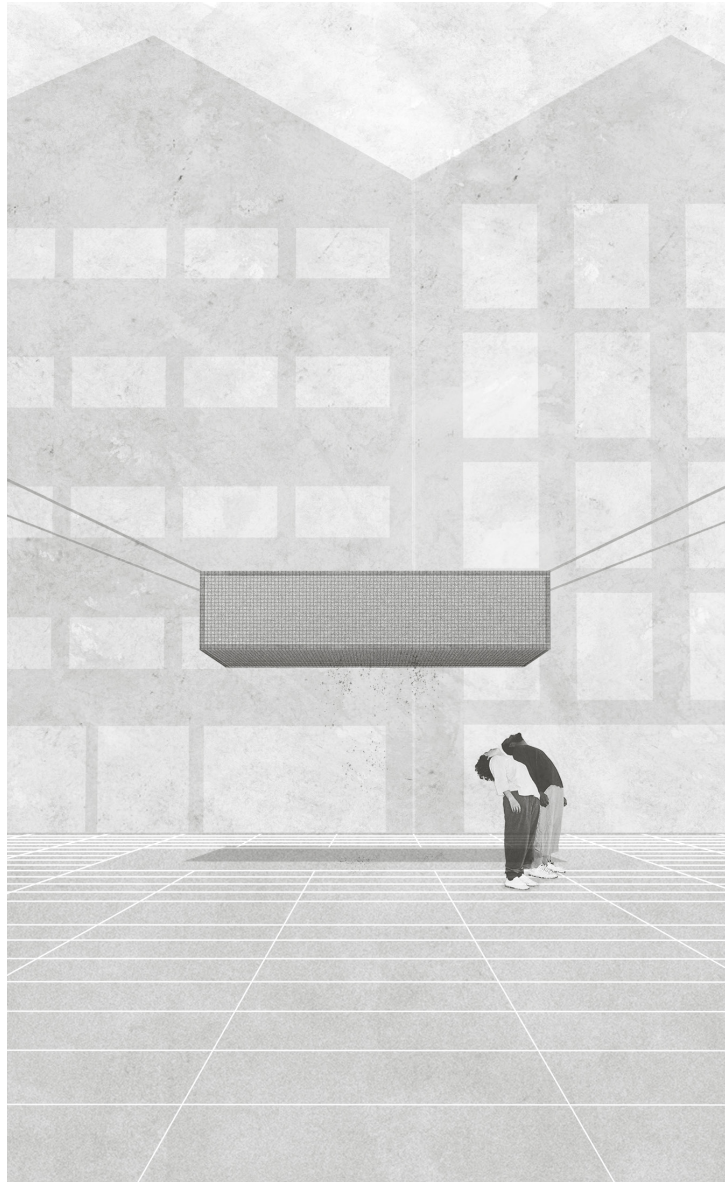
The Suspension Pavilion is an exploration of the architectural potential of the Resonance Method (1:6) (p.36-41).

The architectural potential I found in the materialization of the poetic resonance of Sand, was in the suspension of time. Before the sand falls, there is already an understanding of what is about to happen. There is a tension, a waiting game.

In this proposal I iterated the glass box of sand and its' sand fall into a suspended framework covered in a fine metal mesh. I imagine this to be hanged between building façades in a public setting. The frame is filled with wet sand, where the water holds the sand together and prevents it from slipping through the mesh. However, as it dries, it will start to shift and fall towards the ground.

This is a one-way process, exhibiting the inevitability of time. The ability to come close to the phenomena and feel the falling sand as it slips through your fingers enhances the experience and creates a physical connection to loss.

The prototype model took about 48h to completely dry and empty out, which means that the full scale installation, which is about 20 times larger, would take much longer, perhaps a couple of weeks, depending on the weather.



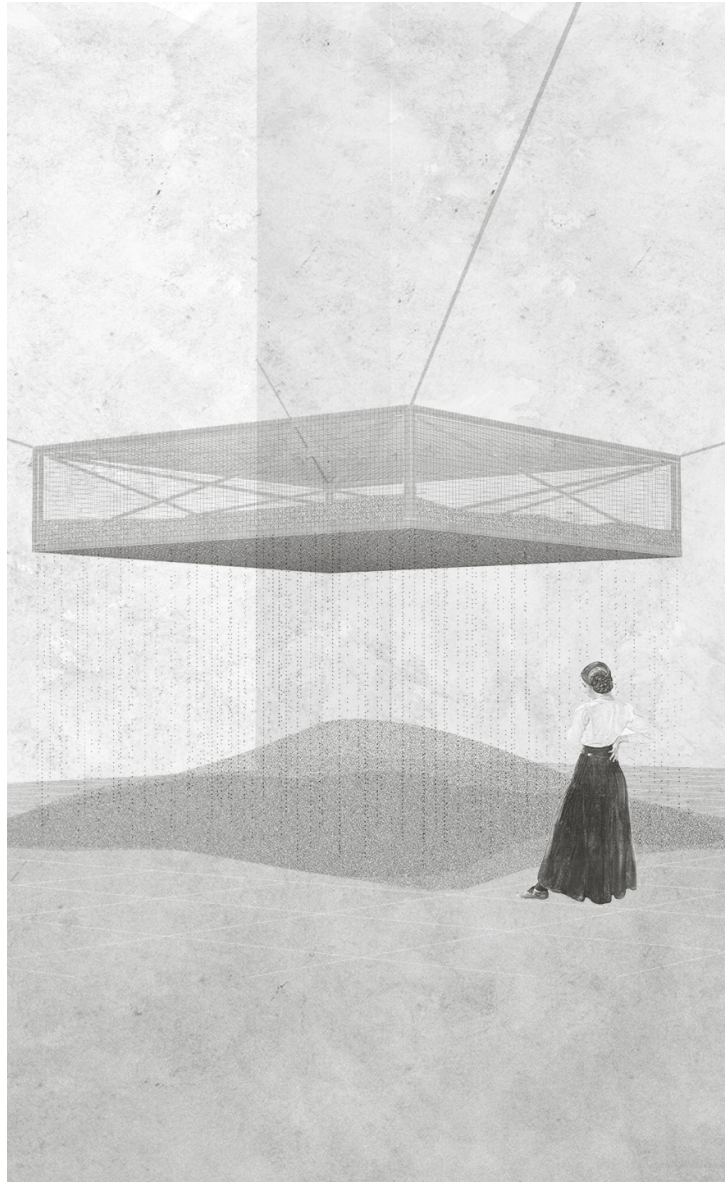


illustration : slipping of sand

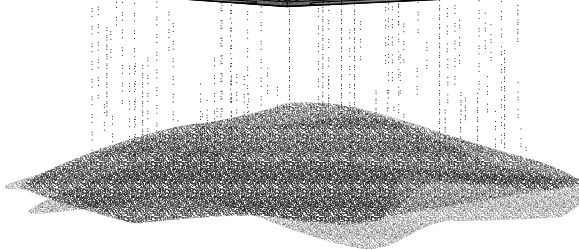
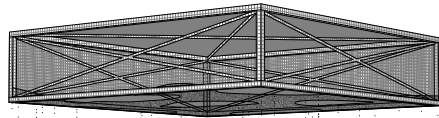
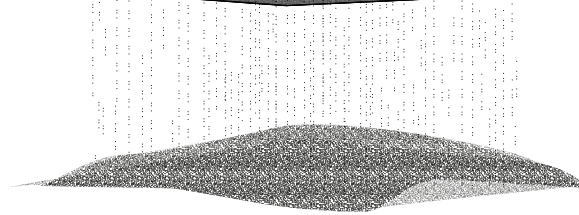
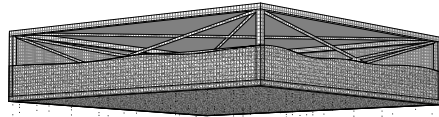
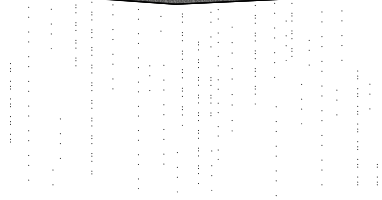
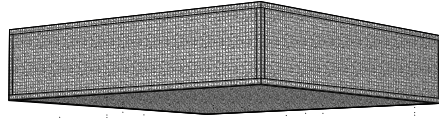


illustration : slipping over time

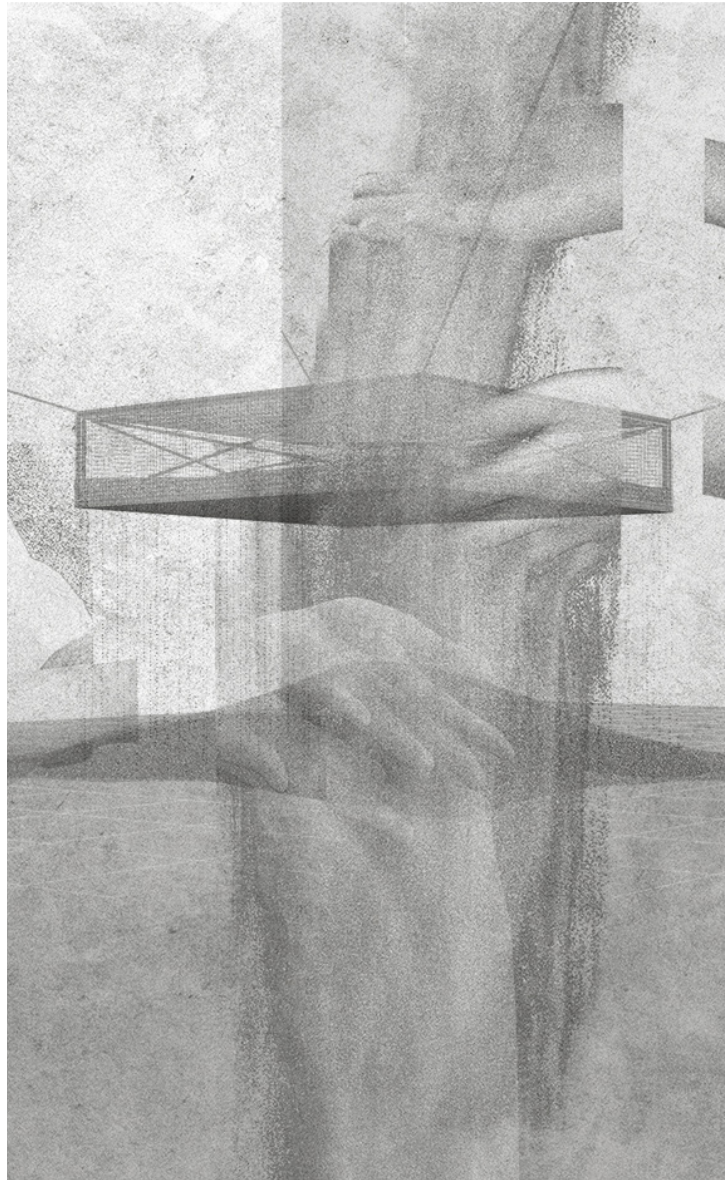


illustration : interactive slipping

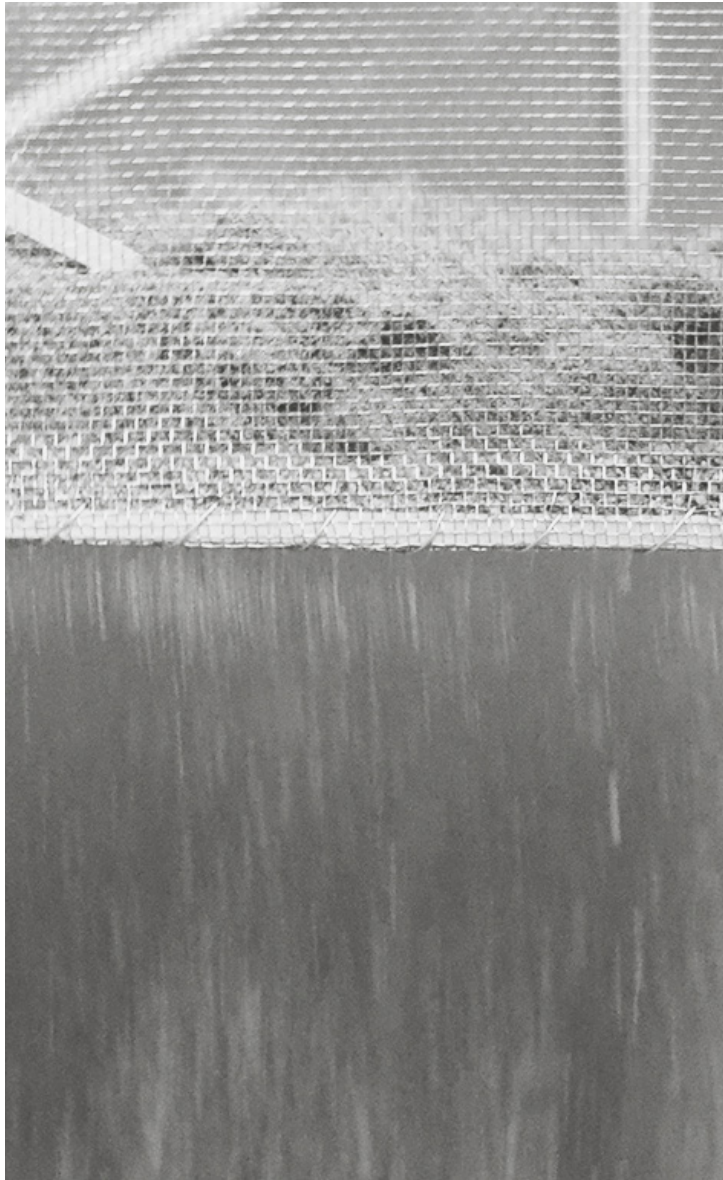


photo : physical model





photos : physical model

2:8 The Paving Installation

The Paving Installation is an exploration of the architectural potential of the Dynamics Materialization Method (1:8)(p.46-49).

The Paving Installation is about dynamics, movement, flows, and traces replacing traces. It is placed on an hypothetical street, stretching from facade to facade, forcing people to walk over it. The structure consists of 40 cm deep sand on top of thick glass blocks, which relatively easily, will be abraded and polished by the sand when people put pressure and movement on it.

People might stop there to make a conscious trace in the sand. Or if they are in a rush, they might just walk straight over it. Traces quickly being replaced with the next. This ties back to the elusiveness and inability to control life described in the poem. The grinding of the glass cubes manifests memory. It shows an aspect of beauty in loss. Even though you have lost someone or something, the memory will live on. Sadness is in contrast to the memory of happiness.

People's movement will create a collective memory imprinted in the glass blocks. This can be given a new life as a sculpture. Showing how flows might be momentary, but the beauty of memory can live on.

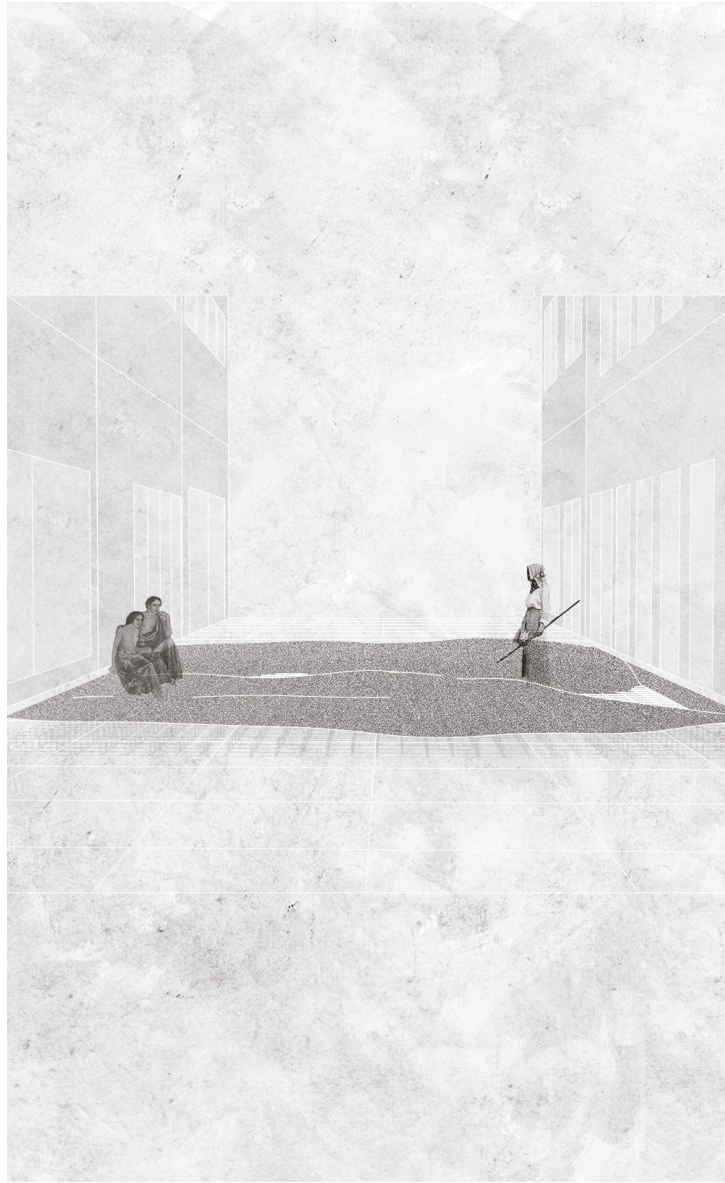




illustration : street view

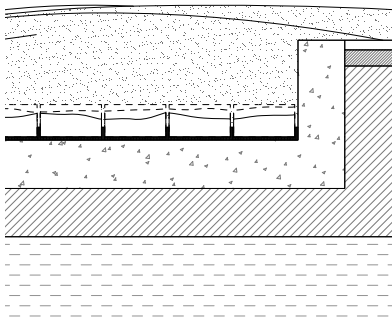
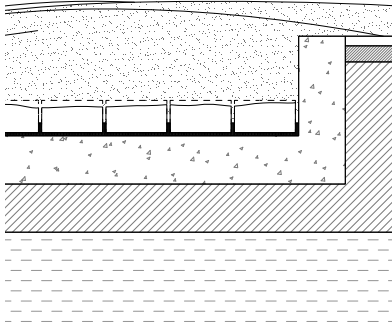
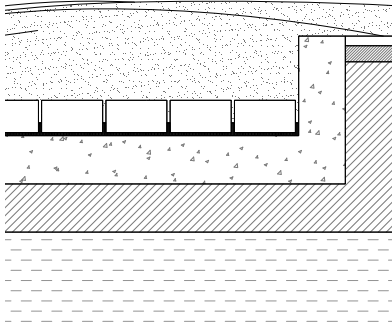
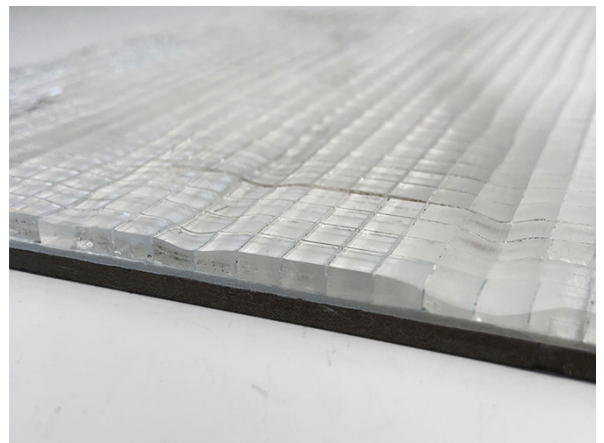
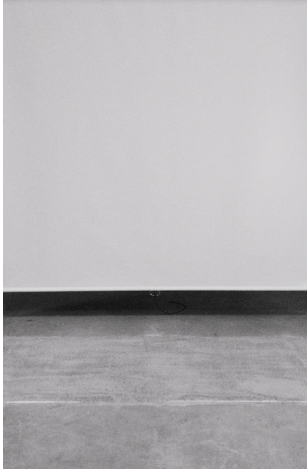


illustration : grinding over time



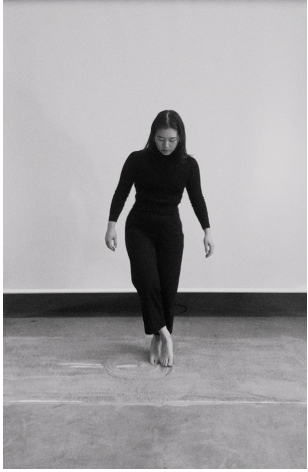


photos : physical model

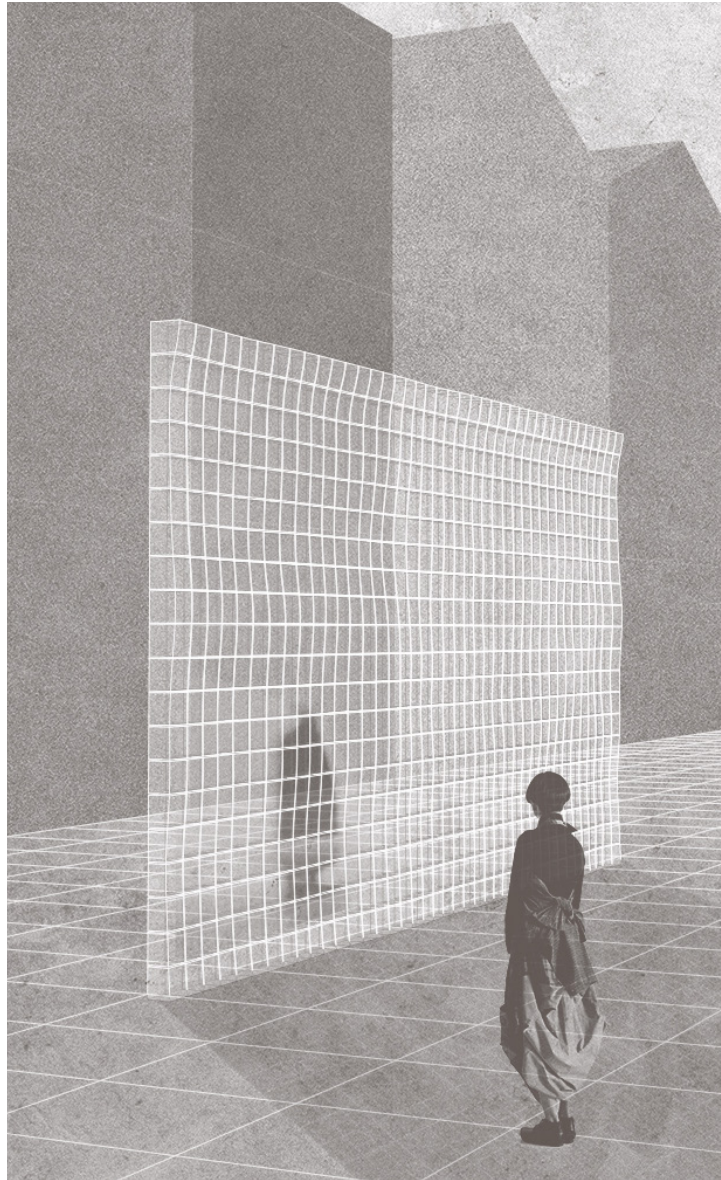


To further explore
the Paving
Installation I once
again used movement
to interpret the
poem. I created
a choreographed
sequence, where
the steps I took
created a pattern.









People's movement will create a collective memory. This can be given a new life as a sculpture. Showing how flows might be momentary, but the beauty of memory can live on.

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