

FLUID FUTURES OF MULTI-LAYERED HISTORIES: MANY LIVES OF
NORTH BROTHER ISLAND, NEW YORK CITYMeriç Erdoğan*
Bilkent University**Abstract**

The transience of populations reflects itself as the life cycle of the buildings. Constantly changing dynamics in the entities of a building also constantly effects the fate of the structure. Even with the proper treatment, the loss of its compatibility in functions with the deterioration of a structure becomes inevitable with the forces of various humanitarian, natural and ecological crises.

The examined case that has experienced several phases of ephemerality in its lifetime is the North Brother Island in NYC that people abandoned more than half a century ago. In its many lives, the island has been a quarantine island, the site of one of the deadliest maritime accidents, a last resort housing solution for WWI veterans, and a forced rehabilitation center for young drug addicts. Today the island is occupied with a few abandoned public buildings, which are remnants of its troublesome past, and innumerable plants that have taken over the land after everyone left. And now it is facing its proclaimed sinking that is going to be happening in 100 years.

This project is for the treatment of a more than human community in the isolated jungle off the coast of the dense cosmopolitan NYC. In an era defined by the environmental and climatic crises, architecture's long-standing obsession with monumental and immortal buildings has to leave a way for a humbler approach intending to provide habitats for more than one entity in the cycle of life.

The design method to answer this problem is to consciously re-creating places on the island by using de-constructed materials from the former buildings of the island with the addition of biodegradable ones. By their dissolving in nature after the sinking, only the skeletons of the structure will remain as a ruin, but also as a new home for underwater life.

In conclusion, this approach envisions a safe environment for nature and humans through the different stages of the island until the inevitable yet not to be feared sinking of the island, which will further become the starting point of the new urban infrastructure of underwater life.

Keywords: ephemerality, life cycle, transience, sinking, New York.

This article originates from my architectural graduation thesis studio project, "Afterlives of North Brother Island,"¹ undertaken with the aim of comprehending the rapidly changing world characterized by developmental challenges. In pursuing "sustainable" design and planning solutions, it is crucial to consider a multitude of societal and urban concerns, going beyond the physical manifestation of architecture to encompass social, environmental, and economic dimensions. The studio format allowed students to explore individuality, with each student selecting their own site and building type, resulting in a comprehensive building program. The exploration and synthesis of alternative urban and site-specific architectural concepts focused on creating a sustainable and livable urban fabric, relevant to the architectural profession and aligned with our future aspirations.

Within this studio, my project emerged from the recognition of the transient nature of architecture within the Anthropocene context. The project is situated on an island within the dense urban fabric of New York City, which is projected to sink in the coming decades. This impending event challenges the fixation on immortal and monumental buildings, urging a shift in focus towards adaptability and addressing the impermanence inherent in our built environment. By confronting the island's sinking as an opportunity for reimagining the role of architecture, innovative approaches were explored to respond to the evolving needs of society amidst environmental changes. Embracing the transitory nature of the island and its architectural interventions, this project contributes to the ongoing discourse on the evolving role of architecture in the Anthropocene era.

The theoretical framework that emerged from my research process centers around the transience of architecture. It explores the implications of the Anthropocene and the imperative for sustainable design within the project. Adopting a comprehensive approach beyond human-centric perspectives acknowledges the interconnectedness and cohabitation of diverse entities within the built environment. By incorporating this broader perspective and acknowledging the transient nature of architecture within the Anthropocene context, this study aims to contribute to the academic discourse surrounding the evolving role of architecture in our dynamically changing world. It underscores the importance of designing for the well-being and harmonious coexistence of not only human inhabitants but also the broader ecological community within the built environment.

In light of architecture's association with permanence and stability, it is essential to critically reflect on the relationship between architecture, impermanence, and death. Buildings are subject to decay, destruction, and the passage of time, like all things in life. This impermanence reminds us of the transitory nature of all things, including ourselves, and prompts us to consider the value of architecture beyond its physical manifestation. Its true significance lies in the memories and experiences that architecture creates, and the ways in which it shapes and reflects our society. As architects and scholars of the built environment, it is vital to critically reflect on the relationship between architecture,

impermanence, and death and to explore how the built environment can facilitate meaningful connections between people, places, and time.

This article furnishes a crucial foundation for understanding the significance of architecture and design within a society fixated on permanence, particularly in the Anthropocene epoch. It outlines a trajectory for the future development of architecture, bridging the theoretical domain with the practical application through the "Afterlives of North Brother Island" project. The preceding section of this article provides a comprehensive exploration of the underlying theoretical framework, delving into the concepts and principles that inform the project. In contrast, the subsequent section focuses on the practical application of these ideas, demonstrating how they are translated into tangible architectural interventions.

The transience of populations reflects itself as the life cycle of the buildings. Constantly changing dynamics in the entities of a building also constantly affects the structure's fate. Architectural objects always accompany an individual throughout the different stages of life in many different forms, like private houses, urban environments, and places of leisure. This interaction between the living and built environment resembles the relations between other entities. These interactions between humans and objects of architecture go through the phases of 'reduction of tensions'², just like the interactions between other people. They result in the shift in perception of the structure being 'averaged.' In this way, there emerges a constant replacing power of adaptation to the existing conditions that predominate over the extreme feelings and assessments.

According to Tarczewski, ephemerality in architecture can be associated with being the subject of time passing in two different senses. One of them is the physical outcome of the systems and components of the structures that reads itself as the wear out of the materials, whereas the other corresponds to the always-changing perceptions of values and needs.³ Buildings age because the needs that constructed the reasons behind a structure disappear while providing room for a different approach. After an initial period during which the structure properly fulfills its designed functions, its progressive deterioration starts. As a result, steadily fewer buildings maintain their properties at a reasonable level throughout time. According to these different actors of change from the viewpoint of material properties to the aesthetic and functional paradigms in society, they all lead the way to the nobleness of aging conclusion in architectural entities. The analysis of these wear-outs in the built environment generates a map containing various information about the speed of changes in social, technical, and moral fields in society through different eras.

Architectural tectonics and the sense of form also age because the shift in aesthetic paradigms wears out the visual aspect and perception of the building. Design parameters, like materials and technical solutions of buildings depend on the constantly changing dynamics of diverse needs. In short, the built environment ages and wears out in time because the very resources, demands, and technologies that make them needed in the first place are continually developing.

In addition to these more predictable changes in the general flow of time, some forces that result in different adaptability needs in architecture are much more significant. While the climate and ecological crisis continue to signal that society needs to change profoundly in the coming era, sudden events that force the

functioning of society to change radically, such as the pandemic, once again prove the power of ephemerality in architecture.

In this high-speed and sometimes unpredicted and inevitable change in environmental, social, moral, and technical influencers of the built environment, the erstwhile dominant and divergent structures of an era become one of the many other buildings in the urban tissue.⁴ Even with the proper treatment, the loss of a building's compatibility in functions along with the deterioration of its structure becomes inevitable by the forces of various humanitarian, natural and ecological crisis. The word 'timelessness' for these powerhouse structures transforms into empty shells with no significant meaning. Despite this notion, the obsession of humans and architects to leave a permanent mark on the environment they affect has been going on for centuries.

This ongoing obsession may raise the question, in an era defined by environmental and climatic crises, where we see the results of the crises more than ever, the age of Anthropocene is what brought people to this point. 'Full mastery of the planet' is the term chosen by some elites and experts, meaning this age is the answer to stepping forward into a time of controlling Nature.⁵ This is an invasive way of showing that a living form is attacking the life cycle of other species in a way that will upset the balance of Nature. Some inconsiderate proposals from entrepreneurs, engineers, and their allies are made to solve environmental problems. What makes them inconsiderate is that these proposals are not adapting to a more cautious lifestyle. Instead, vastly new technologies are being developed, typically on scales that end up making them the most extensive infrastructure experiments ever conducted.⁶ They contend that the Anthropocene is an era to await industrial wonders and consideration for ecological interdependencies is obsolete and so pitiful.⁷ This shortsighted perspective offers solutions that emerge from a society that is already exhibiting an invasive social movement, which, under the pretense of having solved some problems in the short run, will sow the seeds of worsened results in the long run.

While the architectural understanding that strives for immortality, despite the inherent transience of architecture, initially provided a conceptual foundation for my design project, the expansive nature of the subject matter necessitated a more refined approach beyond a singular architectural concept. Consequently, this realization compelled a rigorous exploration of relevant literature, with a specific focus on refining and narrowing the scope of the research. This refining process involved an in-depth investigation of concepts such as the posthuman paradigm and the more-than-human approach, which offer profound insights into addressing the intricate complexities of our contemporary built environment. The engagement with these theoretical frameworks was aimed at uncovering novel perspectives and potential solutions that account for the multifaceted interactions among diverse human and non-human agents within the design process and the broader socio-ecological context.

Invasive species as a terminology is something that biologists worry about because of the precision and inclusivity of its meanings.^{8, 9} It is relationships between species and specific disturbance settings on the planet that cause species to become invasive. Only when non-native species damage local ecosystems and prevent earlier inhabitants from thriving are they considered "intrusive". However, many non-native organisms get along well with their neighbors;

therefore, it makes sense to value them. This is one of the main reasons for emphasizing the importance of humans changing their lifestyles in the Anthropocene era, where humans are the invasive actors on the planet. However, despite these considerations, changes are made to investment ideas that rely on big capital-based technologies offered by today's authorities.

One of the main statements of the Third Istanbul Design Biennial (2016), which was curated with the theme 'Are We Human,' and exhibited the works of many architects, designers, artists, and scientists, was that 'talking about design is talking about the state of our species.'¹⁰ If architecture and design cannot be discussed without mentioning the dominant circumstance of the era to which it belongs, it is impossible to discuss the principles of the design, the Anthropocene, without taking into account the impacts of both climate change and the disruption of the ecological balance on the planet.

The act of designing shapes human behavior and identity, but it also reinforces inequality, leading to a need for redesigning the concept of design. In her article, Keller Easterling explains that design can extend beyond the rationality of human beings and their environment, including underutilized faculties such as voice, skin, skeleton, and muscles.¹¹ The human-centered design prioritizes human needs above business and technological needs, but this ignores essential components such as sustainability, ethics, and egalitarianism. This emphasis on the individual over the collective perpetuates anthropocentric views, making it challenging to consider aspects of ecological sustainability, social justice, care for us, and economic equality in design. Therefore, a reconsideration of design is necessary to address these issues.

As a result of living in the era of rapid urbanization, people started to lose the ability to learn from and grow with non-human entities. The population growth in cities caused sudden changes in the built environment and deterioration of the balance in our relations with other non-human stakeholders. Thus, this notion affected the way we design and formed an only-human/user-centered criterion starting in the mid-80s.¹² The point of view of this modernist thinking ends up in humans preferring to transcend and dominate nature instead of creating multi-kind worlds together.

The Anthropocene epoch necessitates reevaluating our actions' impact on non-human entities and how our past and present are interrelated, as every significant human occurrence has also affected non-human entities. The Anthropocene has led to the destruction of sanctuaries for both humans and other creatures, creating severe disruptions in the ecosystem, as pointed out by Haraway.¹³ By adopting a non-anthropocentric approach, perspectives such as environmental ethics can be realigned. An approach that doesn't prioritize humans can shift how we think about environmental ethics.¹⁴ This means considering nonhuman beings as important clients or stakeholders when designing solutions.

Being committed humanists, designers have frequently promoted the interests of people when confronted with a technologically focused justification for innovation and progress.¹⁵ With their natural skepticism, designers can push back against the often-revolutionary claims about new technology emanating from Silicon Valley. As socio-technical and environmental changes become more complex, designers must consider new design practices that consider a range of

questions, stakeholders, perspectives, and subjectivities. This will undoubtedly affect the methods designers use to plan research, collect data, and test prototypes.

The concept of the posthuman is a critical entry point into thinking about socio-technical systems as both ‘socially constructed and society shaping’.¹⁶ The boundaries between the familiar binaries of human and non-human, culture and nature, and human and animal have been blurred by emerging technologies that have begun to play a more significant role in socio-cultural, political, and economic transformations. The posthuman, along with related concepts such as the non-human, the multispecies, the Anthropocene, the more-than-human, the transhuman, and the decentering of the human, expand our understandings of the multiple agencies, dependencies, entanglements, and relations that make up our world. These hybridized notions challenge our fundamental understandings of human and non-human knowledge and ways of being in the world. They also make it possible for us to reflect on the implications of these hybridized notions for epistemology, ontology, and ethics. As we adjust our understandings, it is likely that we will develop corresponding design methods, frameworks, and practices that better address the challenges we face as a planet.

However, the dangers posed by the Anthropocene are structural and bigger than most communities can address alone. We must build alliances at every scale that include but do not stop local solutions. The push for new technologies to solve environmental and social problems can have unintended consequences, or ‘feral effects,’¹⁷ that are often swept under the rug to emphasize benefits. This could lead to planetary-scale catastrophe if a single intervention goes wrong. Therefore, it is crucial to consider potential non-designed effects at every scale of production and to resist the urge to fix everything at once. Humans must recognize the importance of ethical obligations in their interactions with nonhuman species and beings. To ensure our survival, we must understand that we are just one part of a delicate and interdependent ecosystem of beings on Earth. Instead of seeing ourselves as exceptional, we should describe ourselves by our connections with other beings.

Even though we are facing an existential crisis, we should adapt to our damaged world and begin to appreciate both its positive and negative aspects. According to Haraway, it is vital to see ourselves as part of a larger entanglement with other beings rather than as exceptional.¹⁸ In the Anthropocene era, during which we find ourselves amidst a crucial environmental crisis, it becomes exceptionally imperative to view ourselves as an intrinsic part of a larger interconnected system rather than mere external observers. Especially in the age of Anthropocene, we are currently in the middle of an existential crisis.¹⁹ However, to survive, we need to start appreciating the strange and fantastic aspects of our world, as well as the horrible and horrifying.

In recent years, there has been growing awareness of the importance of ethical considerations in our interactions with non-human species and beings. This viewpoint holds that we must recognize our place as part of a complex and interconnected ecosystem of beings on Earth and that we have a responsibility to ensure the survival and well-being of all species.

Whanganui River, located in New Zealand, was granted legal rights as a human being, marking a significant victory for the local Māori tribe, who have been fighting for its recognition as an ancestor for more than a century. The tribe argues that the river should be considered a living entity rather than a resource that can

be exploited and managed. This landmark decision means that crimes against the river will be treated as crimes against the tribe, thereby giving the river a voice in legal proceedings.²⁰ This development has implications beyond the legal sphere and has the potential to shape the field of sustainable design. While sustainable design has been around for a while, new ways of understanding and valuing the environment, such as recognizing the river as a living entity, may allow the field to gain greater traction. While not explicitly labeled as posthuman design, such examples demonstrate the need for new forms of expertise to consider the non-human aspects of design, whether it be animals and the natural environment or things and the artificial world. This transformation opens up new opportunities, questions, problems, and solutions that the design field may not yet be equipped to handle. To achieve this, we need to shift our perspective from one of exceptionalism to one of interconnectedness. We should view ourselves not as separate from the natural world but as part of it, entangled with other beings and reliant on them for survival. This perspective requires us to pay attention to how our actions impact other species and take steps to minimize harm and promote positive interactions. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that we are facing an existential crisis. Climate change, habitat loss, and other environmental factors threaten the survival of countless species, including ours. To adapt to this damaged world, we must learn to appreciate its positive and negative aspects. We need to recognize that even in the face of adversity, there is beauty and wonder to be found in the natural world, and by embracing these aspects, we can find new sources of inspiration and motivation.

Design can play a crucial role in helping us to navigate this complex and challenging landscape. By challenging our self-centeredness and encouraging us to pay attention to things that make us uncomfortable, design can help us to develop a greater awareness of the needs and perspectives of other beings. We can design for gratitude, encouraging people to appreciate the gifts that surround us and to take only what we need. We can also design to unseat humans from the center of the universe, creating more equitable and inclusive perspectives that recognize the value and importance of all species.

One of the crucial challenges facing designers in this context is how to design for differences. Our current mainstream design practices often focus on creating products and environments optimized for a narrow range of human experiences and preferences. However, as we become more aware of the diversity of living experiences and needs, we need to broaden our focus and design for a broader range of possibilities. This requires a shift from the idea of an "us" that is somehow separate and safe and towards a more inclusive approach that encompasses all members of our shared ecosystem. We need to be mindful of the complexities and inconsistencies of human experience and design in a way that accommodates and challenges these factors. As architects, we cannot expect future versions of ourselves to be inherently more virtuous or responsible. However, we can design with the goal of pursuing these values and creating a better world for all beings.

Ultimately, the challenge of designing for a more ethical and sustainable world requires us to think beyond our immediate needs and desires. It requires us to develop a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings and to work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive world for all.²¹ By embracing these principles and incorporating them into our design practices, we can help to ensure

a brighter future for ourselves and for all the beings with whom we share our planet.

The Project

Upon conducting the extensive literature review, I was resolute in my desire to propose an architectural project that would adopt a critical stance toward the design paradigms influenced by the Anthropocene era. This approach aimed to challenge the prevailing perceptions of architects and human-oriented thinking, emancipating the discipline from the fixation on transcendence and permanence. With this objective in mind, my initial exploration of potential contexts led me to center my attention on New York City, a consequential setting where architects strive to establish “an enduring imprint” upon its iconic skyline. During my research, I encountered North Brother Island, which emerged as an optimal foundation to anchor my architectural project and articulate these ideas.



Fig. 1. Project site location in New York City, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

The following section of the article expounds upon the concepts introduced in the initial portion, along with their corresponding analytical perspectives. Specifically, this segment is undergirded by the theoretical background of the architectural project, which serves as the impetus for this approach. This project

endeavors to manifest all notions in a tangible architectural form, thereby presenting an unconventional alternative that departs from the traditional pursuit of architectural permanence.

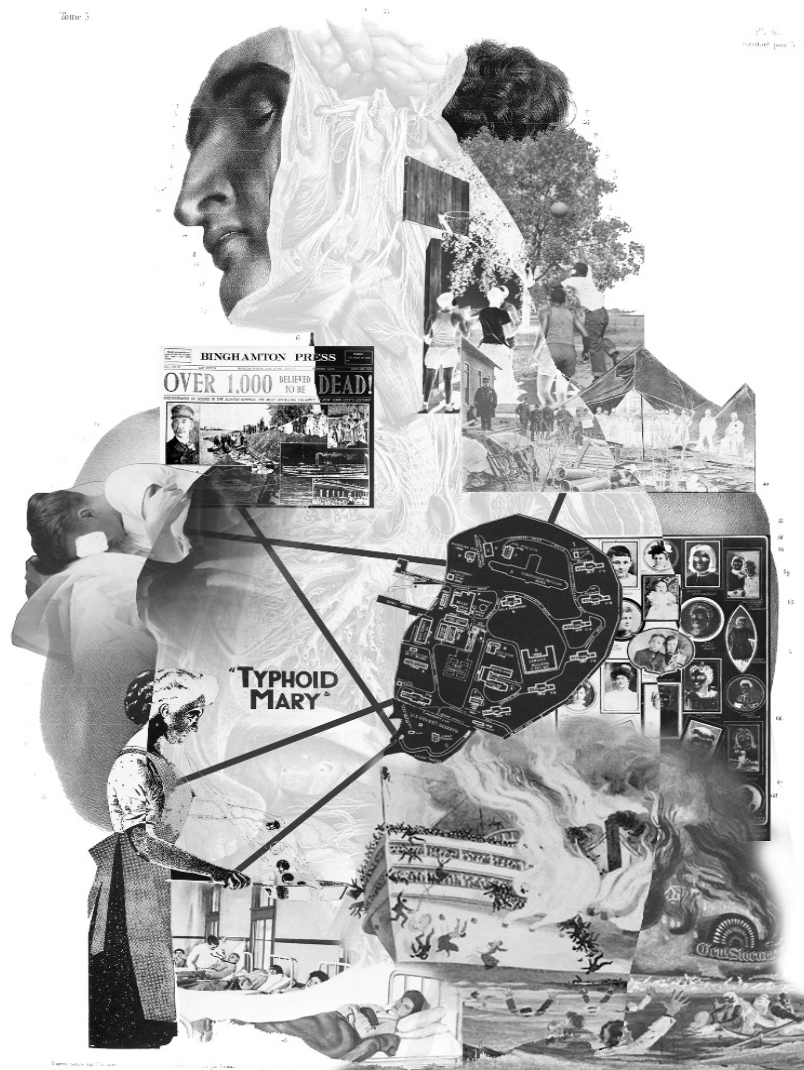


Fig. 2. North Brother Island's history collage, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

The site, North Brother Island, is an enigmatic island situated in the East River and located less than a mile from Manhattan. It stands as a testament to the multifarious heritage and natural wonders of New York City. Despite its proximity to one of the world's most densely populated areas, this island remains shrouded in obscurity, abandoned for over fifty years. As a result, it has emerged as one of the city's most exceptional and obscure locales, imbued with a rich history and ecological significance that are often overlooked. It is located on the East River, corresponding to the south of the Bronx (fig,1). It is uninhabited and owned by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Preserving the island presents a unique challenge. The site contains significant remnants from one hundred and fifty years of human occupation and a distinctive environment that has become a significant nesting area for wading birds. It has been home to various institutional uses, beginning with a contagious disease hospital in the 1880s

because of its perfect location for the sick because it was isolated from, but still near, the city. During this period, it became the site of a great tragedy: the sinking of the steamship General Slocum. Taking over a thousand lives, the tragedy was the largest loss of life in New York City until '9/11'. The island kept going on with its institutional function while still developing in each new diseases like tuberculosis and polio.

"Typhoid Mary" Mallon, the notorious cook and asymptomatic carrier of typhoid, was the most notable and longest-tenured resident of the island. She had a reputation for infecting fifty-three people during her lifetime. After World War 2, the island became the home for veterans due to the lack of housing issues in New York with all the returning soldiers. So, it became a lively campus. Those who lived there remember it fondly. However, the community was short-lived as the state's lease expired in 1951. Afterward, it hosted a rehabilitation facility for juvenile drug addicts that was soon to be closed due to the high cost of treatments and corruption in the hospital staff. Now the island is serving as a sanctuary for herons and other wading shorebirds and is off-limits to the public (fig.2).²²



Fig. 3. North Brother Island's estimated sea level change diagram through years, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

Although this island, which is another victim of the environmental crisis, is in the flood zone by nature, the global warming that started with the effects of the

Anthropocene has taken the possibility of the island being submerged one step further.²³ It is expected to be underwater in approximately a hundred years due to the drastic sea level change (fig.3). The river's tidal patterns also wash garbage and debris onto the shores, further damaging its environment.

Working in such a context, one of the first moves that might come to an architect's mind would be to look for how to solve this situation and how this island can somehow be reintegrated into the urban fabric of New York City. But the project took a different route that was informed by the understanding that the solution in architecture does not always lie in big moves that rely on architectural “natalism” concerning only creativity and permanence.²⁴

In their thought-provoking book, *Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture*, Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs challenge the conventional notion that buildings are static and unchanging.²⁵ Rather, they argue that buildings are alive in the sense that they exist according to a recognizable lifespan and that the language we use to describe them should reflect this reality. The authors examine how metaphoric language has been used to describe buildings in terms of their lifecycles, but they also explore how this language has neglected to extend toward critical approaches to death and dying. Cairns and Jacobs' book encourages readers to think differently about the role of architecture and to consider how buildings are constantly changing and evolving over time.²⁶



Fig. 4. Designed experience path of Afterlives of North Brother Island Project, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

Buildings are not immune to the effects of time. As they age, they can become increasingly susceptible to deterioration. However, it is important to recognize that decay is not always a negative thing. In fact, buildings may go through a metamorphosis and reclaim their time for more than just the human world. As structures deteriorate and functions lose their purpose, new opportunities arise for adaptive reuse, where buildings can be transformed into something new and different. Such transformations can breathe new life into old

buildings and revitalize communities, creating a sense of history and continuity. Adaptive reuse can also be a more sustainable option than tearing down old buildings and constructing new ones from scratch, as it reduces the amount of waste and energy required for new construction. Therefore, while buildings may have a finite lifespan, their potential for transformation and rebirth is endless.

Maybe North Brother Island shouldn't be explored to be saved and kept alive for a few more centuries. This island has a life span that has gone through many stages in its life and was infected with a deadly disease by the Anthropocene virus. Even if the Anthropocene hastened its demise, what architecture should do for it is to make sure that it spends its last years as best as possible and to follow a path that will not cause more permanent damage to the ecosystem. Instead, we can accept its natural lifespan and let it be a newly metamorphosed entity of underwater life.

The critical approach towards death and dying that is extending towards lifetime of architectural structures can also direct the perception of what architectural program is needed on this island that hosted many lives and deaths in its own organism. This project proposes to claim the needed memory value to this island, which has been the site of multiple historic events and various tragedies, with site-specific multi-sensory memorials. An experience path (fig.4) running across the specific locations of the places of tragedies.



Fig. 5. Palliative Care Center render of Afterlives of North Brother Island Project, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

A proposed a way of making a connection for humans needing a tangible medium 'to make sense of loss, to create a physical connection of stone and mortar

between memory and the present.’ The spatial quality of these series of memorials can be an opportunity to mourn and connect with the intangible emotions of the events. It is intended to provide a collective memory created by commemorating the losses in a series of pavilions that are representative of the post-traumatic disease of tuberculosis corresponding to the quarantine state of the island and its relation to the tuberculosis of our time, cancer. The design method while creating new structures in this delicate ecology is to consciously use the decay of the buildings by deconstructing and using the materials as spolia and adaptive reuse of the former buildings of the island, which are suitable to accommodate inhabitants with minor stabilizations. The proposed design strategy for North Brother Island integrates symbolic and functional elements to offer a unique approach to death. The light-imprint memorial structures will guide visitors on the island, while the main architectural program draws from the island's history of health institutions. This critical approach to death is reflected in the inclusion of a palliative cancer care center as the central element of the program. It offers a space where individuals and their families can find solace and comfort in the face of terminal illness. The memorial structures and the palliative cancer care center represent a critical approach to death, offering a space for contemplation and comfort in the face of mortality. The reintroduction of healthcare services to the island transforms it into an entity that journeys with its fellow inhabitants into the afterlife over a century-long period (fig.5).

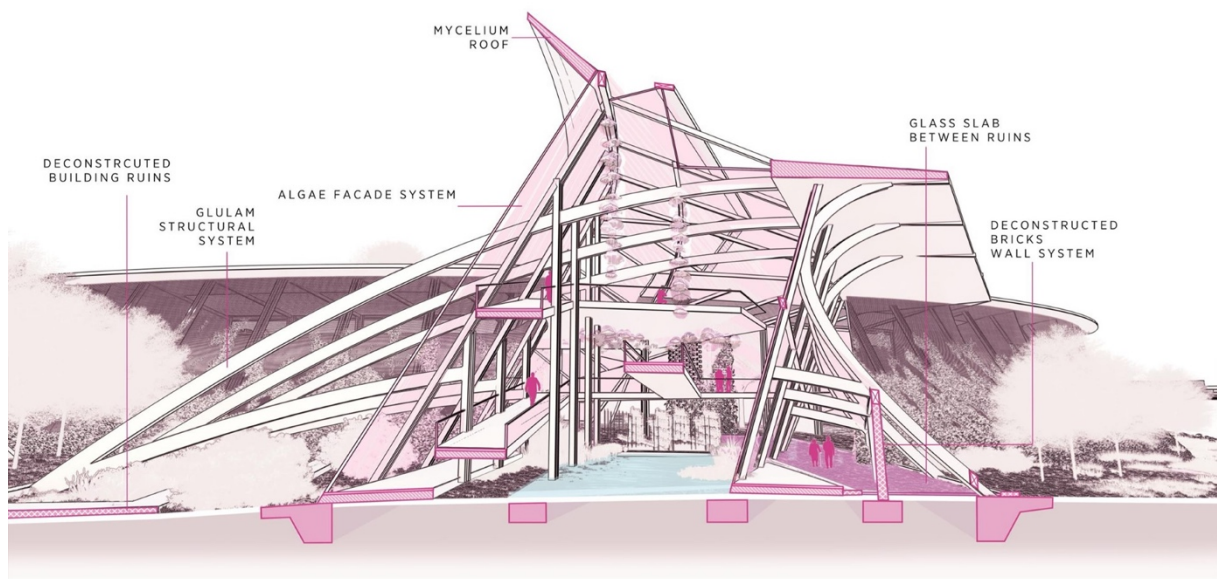


Fig. 6. Material selection and building systems perspective section of Afterlives of North Brother Island Project, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

The design method contains transforming the notion of decay, transcendent nature in the built environment that develops over time utilizing nature's forces into an architectural quality. While creating new structures on this delicate

ecology, instead of reversing or eliminating decay from its life story, the decay is consciously integrated to the process by deconstructing and using their materials as spolia for the new architectural programs. The spolia supports and completes the new structures both materially and symbolically. They reference the historic and cultural meanings behind the deconstructed buildings and reinterpret them in a re-bornist manner for the new compatible building programs. Other than the deconstructed materials, such as brick masonry and wood framing that are used in the new structures as spolia, the new structures feature carbon fiber mesh, biodegradable materials resolved by nature over time like mycelium in a gradient of material selection alongside clean conventional materials like titanium dioxide, ceramics, compatible to the hygiene-based designs (fig.6).

In his influential work, Viktor Frankl argued that the will for meaning is essential for human survival.²⁷ For humanity to endure, there must be a shared sense of purpose and meaning, which can only be achieved through an awareness of common tasks. As designers, researchers, and makers, we have a unique opportunity to facilitate the discovery and pursuit of collective and personal purpose through the creation of tools that promote this search. While there are existing frameworks for designing for peace, social justice, and value sensitivity, our call to action emphasizes the importance of an ongoing, adaptable, and reflexive design process that remains conscious of evolving societal needs. In uncertain times, effective leadership requires this same flexibility and awareness. As technology design and development increasingly take place in the Global North, we must also consider the implications of our actions on other regions and future generations. This requires a



Fig. 7. Diagram showing the sinking phases of North Brother Island, Meriç Erdoğan, 2022.

shift in our mindset from ‘What more can we take from the Earth?’ to ‘What does the Earth ask of us?’ As we continue to develop and evolve, we must remain mindful of our collective impact and work towards a shared sense of purpose that promotes sustainable futures for all.²⁸

In conclusion, this project is for treating a more-than-human community in the isolated jungle off the coast of dense cosmopolitan New York City. In an era where environmental and climatic crises are becoming the dominant factors in our way of living, architecture’s long-standing obsession with monumental and immortal buildings must leave a way for a humbler approach intending to provide habitats for more than one entity in the cycle of life. Developed with these concerns, the project acknowledges the traumatic history of the island with a memorial landscape that extends the recreation areas available to residents of New York City. It embraces the mortality of human life and proposes a rehabilitation center and end-of-life care institute while envisioning a safe environment for nature and humans until the inevitable yet not to be feared sinking of the island (fig.7), which will further become the starting point of the new urban infrastructure of underwater life.

NOTES

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³ Tarczewski, *Transience of Architecture*, 761.

⁴ Tarczewski, *Transience of Architecture*, 758.

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¹⁶ Wiebe E. Bijker et al., “The Evolution of Large Technological Systems,” in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 51.

¹⁷ Tsing et al., *Feral Atlas*.

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