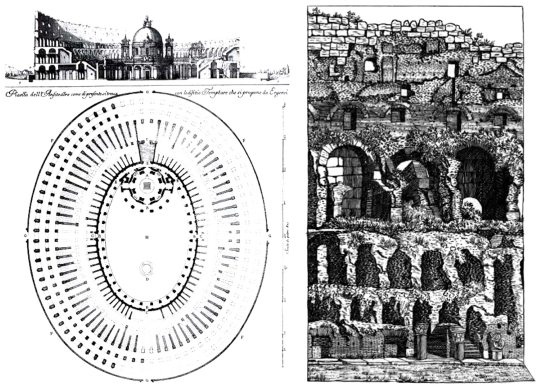
Neyran Turan

Long Span



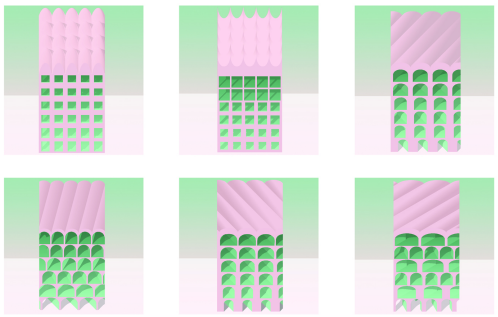
[Left] Ground plan and elevation drawing of Carlo Fontana's Colosseum church in the ruin of the amphitheater [1725]. [Right] Engraving of the Colosseum from Richard Deacon's Flora of the Colosseum [1855].

Consider two depictions of the Colosseum in Rome that were produced a little more than a century apart. First is the plan drawing of Carlo Fontana's 1725 project for the erection of a church on the arena of the Colosseum amphitheater, which turns the oval organization of the existing plan into a centralized building arranged around circular passages. Second is English botanist Richard Deacon's *Flora of the Colosseum* from 1855, which records 420 species of plants growing in the ruin state of the Colosseum, some of which were rare species whose seeds were primarily transported to the site by the animals and slaves brought from Asia and Africa for the city's numerous spectacles. When positioned next to one another, these two depictions of the Colosseum put forward an important coupling of two different dimensions of architectural longevity (Figure-1). First, as illustrated by the Fontana plan, is the expanded life-span of a particular building after its original use and its inherent capacity for flexibility despite programmatic obsolescence. Second is the idea of material long-span, which complicates the delicate relationship between natural and man-made systems within an elongated temporality as presented by Deacon's plant inventory.

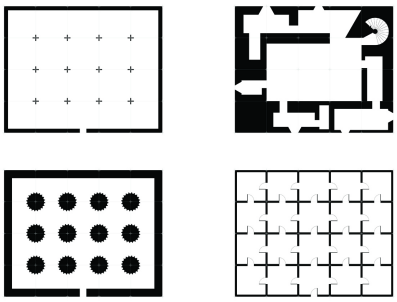
Given our contemporary environmental, political and economic instabilities, a discussion on the architectural long-span might seem to point towards already exhausted undertakings in our field: foregoing the architectural object altogether for the sake of ultimate flexibility and ephemerality, foregrounding the idea of performance for a "realist" mission, or declaring the sole permanence of the architectural object with a relative suspension from questions of temporality. If we have already come to realize the dead-end quality of these discussions and their derivatives, then another question follows: What if our objects, geographies, and geologies cannot be neatly categorized as flexible or ephemeral but instead are in dire need to be reimagined in their expanded temporal and spatial long-span, i.e. in their unfamiliar permanence?

"To call human beings geological agents," as historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, "is to scale up our imagination of the human." [1] As the "the distinction between human and natural histories—much of which had been preserved even in environmental histories that saw the two entities in interaction—has begun to collapse," Chakrabarty writes, "it is no longer a question of simply of man having an interactive relation with nature," but instead, as humans operating as a "force of nature in the

geological sense." [2] From Timothy Morton's "hyperobjects," which depict environment as a compilation of immense objects—such as the polystyrene cups that will still be around after 500 years—vastly distributed in time and space relative to humans, to historians Jo Guldi and David Armitage's critique of short-termism and call for a new conception of *longue-durée* in their book *History Manifesto*, an intellectual shift of elongation is evident in the fields of history and eco-criticism. One unifying thread within this shift is the return to and reinterpretation of *permanence*. [3]

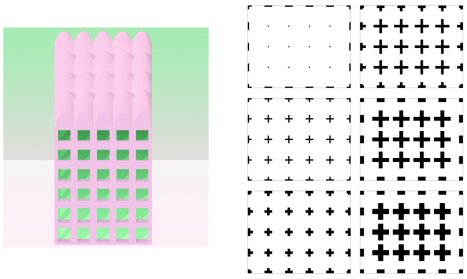


SOTSP: Six objects shown together. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

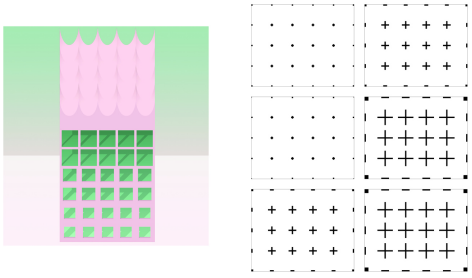


SOTSP: Diagrams of building plan typologies. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

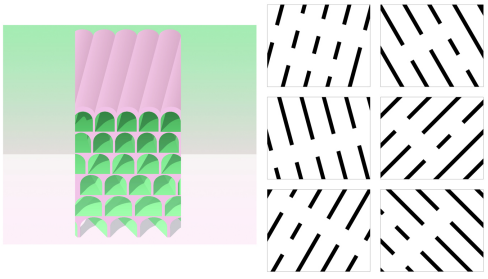
Two of our recent projects at NEMESTUDIO tackle the question of long-span through the frameworks illustrated in the two Colosseum examples described above. Our SOTSP (Six Objects with Thirty-Six Plans) project engages with the question of permanence with a particular focus on flexibility (Figure 2). It consists of six medium-scale building proposals, which investigate the idea of flexibility through the variation of certain plan typologies (such as the enfilade plan, the multiple corridor plan, the hypostyle plan, the open plan, and so on) (Figure 3). While each building is composed of deviations from a particular plan typology with 6 different iterations, each building offers a particular spectrum of flexibility despite perceived as a permanent structure. Rather than associating flexibility directly with ephemerality or with the dissolution of the object, SOTSP repositions architectural flexibility as a typological problem of elongated permanence.



SOTSP: Object-1. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

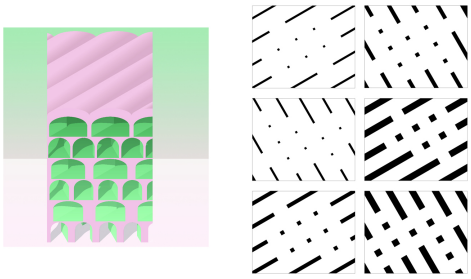


SOTSP: Object-2. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

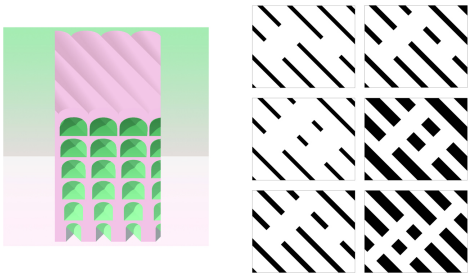


SOTSP: Object-3. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

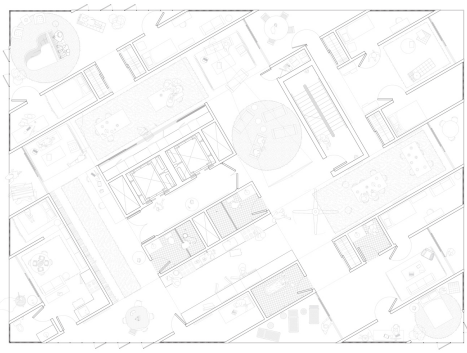
For instance, an enfilade plan on the ground level turns into an open plan on the top level with the Object-1 of SOTSP (Figure 4). With Object-2, the building has an open plan on the top but transitions into hypostyle columns on the ground level with poche space (Figure 5). And, with Object 4, thin elongated sheer walls on the top levels transition into habitable wider spaces on the ground level (Figure 6). In Object-4, the poche space gets wide enough to accommodate programs such as micro-units and necessary building infrastructures in the case of a shared living program on the lower levels and turns into elongated sheer walls on the upper levels while accommodating storage and utility spaces for a possible co-work space (Figures 7-11). In the end, through a focus on the most familiar architectural notion of the “typical plan,” the SOTSP project questions inherent flexibilities in various plan typologies.



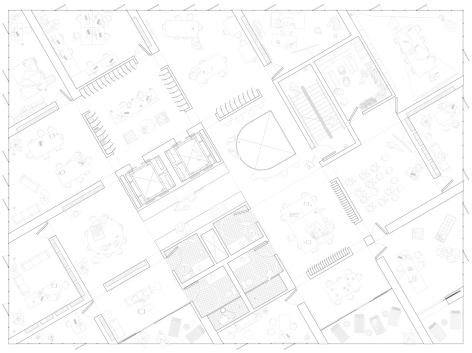
SOTSP: Object-4. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.



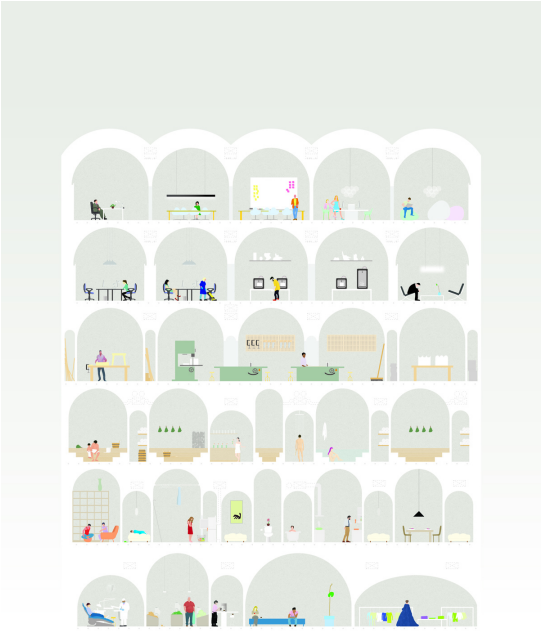
SOTSP: Object-1. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.



SOTSP: Object-4, Floor-2 detailed plan showing a shared living space with micro-units. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

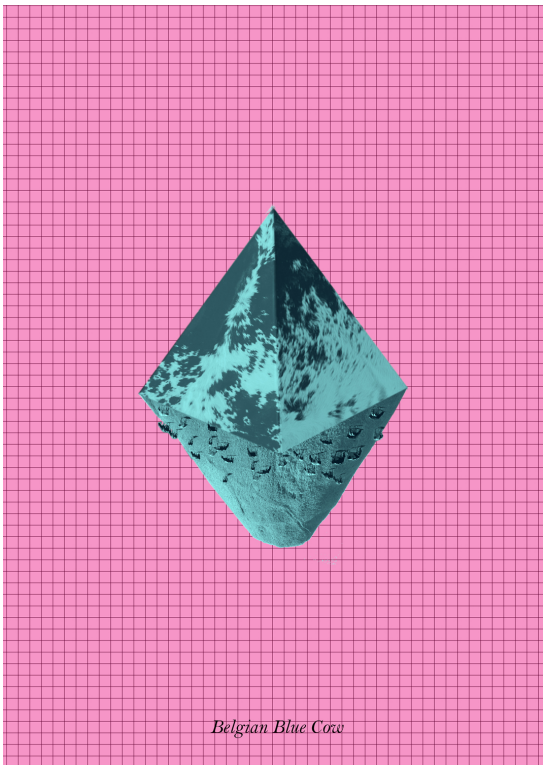


SOTSP: Object-4, Floor-5 detailed plan showing a shared working space. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

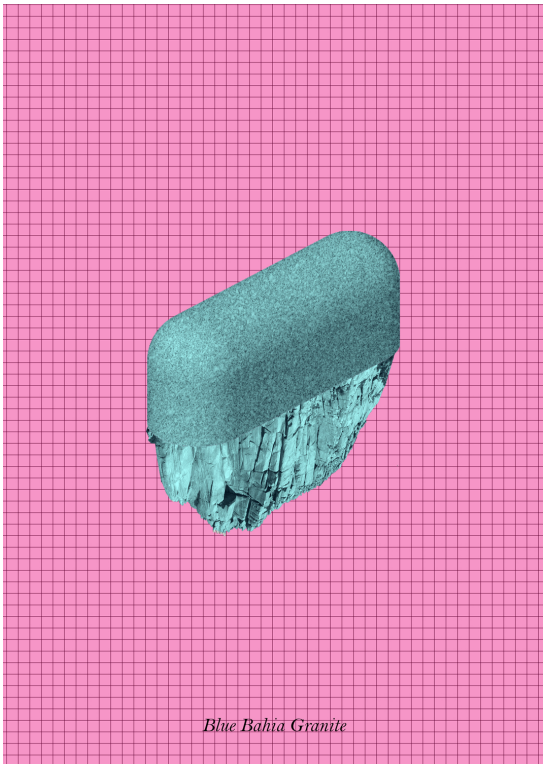


SOTSP: Object-4, section. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

Our NINE ISLANDS project, on the other hand, addresses the question of long-span from a material standpoint. [4] From the formation of various raw materials and their extraction from a specific geographic location, to their processing, transportation, and construction into a desired finished effect in the building, and finally to their demolition, waste, and decomposition, the project argues that the spatial and temporal span of architecture is wide (geographic space) and deep (geological time). The project proposes an archipelago of nine islands, represented through a series of axonometric drawings. Each island explores a particular lavish building material (certain types of leather, marble, wood, glass, travertine, gold, aluminum, limestone, or granite, etc.) with the upper part consisting of an archetypical building form. As an opposition to the upper part, the lower part of each island consists of a formless landmass from which the raw matter is extracted (quarry for the marble, tree for the wood, cows for the leather, and so on). (Figures 12-14).

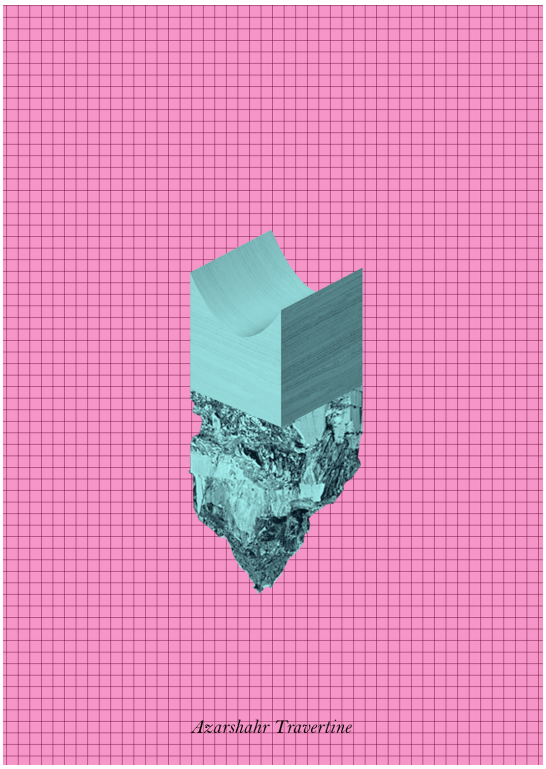


NINE ISLANDS: Island of the Belgian Cow. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.



NINE ISLANDS: Island of the Blue Bahia Granite. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

The juxtaposition of the finished surfaces of typologically simplified monuments at the top with the vulgar formlessness of the naked landmasses below works through two registers. First, the collapse of the finished and the raw aims to call attention to the under-conceptualized space in between. Second, by suspending the archetypical time of architecture and the slow time of geology in the objective space of the axonometric, the project presents the “reverse obsolescence” of each island as a resource ruin.



NINE ISLANDS: Island of Travertine. Courtesy of NEMESTUDIO.

Aiming to couple inquiries on matter and flexibility in architecture with their seemingly opposing counterpart of permanence, these projects point to alternative long-spans and their derivative architectural specificities.

The author would like to acknowledge and thank Ekin Arar, Soo Han, and Alex Spatzier (SOTSP), and to David Richmond and Patrick Daurio (Nine Islands) for all their help with the two projects.

1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry 35* (2009), 206. ↩
2. Ibid, 207. ↩
3. Timothy Morton, *Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 130–31. Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *History Manifesto* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). ↩
4. For more on this project, see Neyran Turan, "Nine Islands: Matters Around Architecture," *New Geographies 08: Islands*, ed. by Daniel Daou and Pablo Pérez-Ramos (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Graduate School of Design), forthcoming. ↩

Neyran Turan is an architect and a partner at NEMESTUDIO. She is currently an assistant professor at the Department of Architecture at the University of California-Berkeley. Before UC Berkeley, Neyran was an assistant professor at Rice University's School of Architecture. Her work draws on the relationship between geography and design to highlight their interaction for new aesthetic and political trajectories within architecture and urbanism. She holds a Doctor of Design from Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD), a Master of Environmental Design from Yale University School of Architecture, and a Bachelor of Architecture from Istanbul Technical University. Neyran is founding chief-editor of the Harvard GSD journal *New Geographies*, which focuses on contemporary issues of urbanism and architecture, and is the editor-in-chief of the first two volumes of the journal: *New Geographies* 0 (2008) and *New Geographies: After Zero* (2009). Some of her recent writings have been published in *Climates: Architecture and the Planetary Imaginary, ARPA Journal, SAN ROCCO, Scenario Journal, MAS Context, Conditions, MONU, ThinkSpace, Arqa, Bidoun, Thresholds,* and *20/20: Editorial Takes on Architectural Discourse.*