

The Serpentine Pavilion's Slow Slither Toward Staleness

When Zaha Hadid unveiled the first Serpentine Pavilion in 2000, she proclaimed, “There is no end to experimentation.” Yet, Marina Tabassum might disagree. The Serpentine Pavilion’s 25th designer expressed concern about inventing something new. As she told The Guardian’s Oliver Wainwright, “Every time you think of an idea for the project, you realise, oh, that’s already been done.” Year after year, Serpentine invites rising (st)architects for their London debut, to try to capture the public’s attention for the summer with a new temporary pavilion. Formerly known as the Serpentine Galleries, the organization comprises two contemporary art galleries on the North and South sides of Kensington Gardens. Hadid’s initial pavilion, intended to last for a one-night gala sponsored by Vanity Fair in honor of former patron Princess Diana, became so well-loved by the public that the pavilion became an annual tradition.

Every year since, the selected architect throws their hat into the ring, responding to the same unchanging brief to propose a temporary pavilion that redefines experimentation. But to what avail? What does the 25th anniversary tell us about the tradition of the Serpentine Pavilion?

Last year, Tabassum was given the chance to answer this question. Her work ranges from temporary housing for flood relief to light-filled embassies and expressive museums. Her designs’ range of scale and ingenuity of engineering earned her the opportunity to address the pavilion, and expectations were high. While visiting London for summer travel, we saw hints of the structure peeking over the construction fences in the month leading up to the opening. When the day came in June, Tabassum revealed the “Capsule in Time,” a pill-shaped segmented structure clad in folding panels. Filled with books and a singular ginkgo tree, Tabassum sought to create a library for people to gather and learn. While the pavilion might not look much from the image, something about the rare sunny day in London brought out the beauty inherent in the technicolor enclosure. Tabassum’s original inspiration for the pavilion was the shamiana, a ceremonial tent from South Asia, yet the ethereality of this reference was lost in translation. Rather than a lightweight wooden structure, the pavilion is composed of bulky metal beams that span a tessellated arch. Rather than dyed fabrics that billow in the wind, the pavilion becomes rigid with the hard plastic panels. Apparently, many design choices are “value engineered” during negotiations with the contractors, who are responsible for building the project in under six

Justin
McKenna

LeveIIe
Sabon

months. Previous architects have suffered the same struggle. The unchanging brief and strict construction constraints create stagnation, reducing the overall impact of the pavilion.

In the weeks following its opening, we saw a few people sitting to enjoy the space, but most seemed to be architects bringing their families to take pictures. Those who visited rarely stayed long as they were shoed away or enticed by the neighboring LEGO pavilion by Peter Cook. When we returned to the pavilion to grab a coffee, the security even scolded us for picking up the books. As a place intended for conversation and dialogue, the pavilion fostered little of either.

The importance of Tabassum’s appointment should not be understated. As the sixth individual woman awarded in the pavilion’s 25-year history, Tabassum deserves the recognition and international admiration. We enjoyed the pavilion and were honored to attend Tabassum’s opening talk. Still, we found it does not represent the same boundary-pushing, forward-looking commission it was intended to be 25 years ago. Perhaps the next 25 years might change our minds, but until the brief is reframed for our contemporary world and problems, we fear the tradition will disappoint. Perhaps the Serpentine Pavilion has become a tradition for crowning the next generation of Architects, rather than the radical presentation of experimentation Zaha Hadid intended it to be.

The 2026 Serpentine Pavilion, designed by Isabel Abascal and Alessandro Arienzo of LANZA atelier, will open in June.



Serpentine Pavilion 2025 - A Capsule in Time, designed by Marina Tabassum, Marina Tabassum Architects (MTA). Interior view. Photo by authors.

Children, and Parents
Response to Nathaniel Kahn,
Yael Melamede, Anita Naughton,
Jim Venturi, and Denise Zmekhol:
“Biography and Building:
Film-Makers on Lives of Architects”

Zacharie Lauzière-Fitzgerald

In Rudolph Hall, five film-makers gathered to speak about their projects. Each was the child of an architect who made a documentary about their parent—Yael Melamede with *Ada: My Mother the Architect*, Denise Zmekhol with *Skin of Glass*, Anita Naughton and Jim Venturi with *Stardust*. Nathaniel Kahn moderated. Sheepish, the conversation revolved around tenuous similarities between documentary filmmaking and architecture: both involve time, both centre people, both have a form... They talked around the central relationship of their films: that of child and parent. Jim Venturi said about his parents’ work that, “each project had a secret to be found”—in effect, the same could be claimed for each documentary. They all began with a secret to uncover. Zmekhol emphasized this, saying that she used the film to better understand her father after he moved away from their family home when she was fourteen. Melamede countered. She, supposedly, didn’t yearn for clarity like the other filmmakers. In her movie, there is a striking exchange as she interviews her mother. Her mother asks her how she can love her so much. Yael laughs in response. Her mother continues: “What’s so funny? I wasn’t with you.” It conveys the clear distance that comes with the chosen career—the countless hours invested into projects, separating us from those we love. Yet, is recognizing the sacrifice enough to debunk the secret? In the most poignant moment of the night, Melamede recounted an anecdote from filming *My Architect* with Kahn. As Nathaniel skated through the plaza of the

Salk Institute, the wheels of his roller-skates left black traces of rubber behind him. Aren’t we all just trying to leave a trace on our parents, like they did on us?

Site Planning
Yanbo M.Arch I '26 Li

Advanced Studio travel locations become questions. Could you see yourself living in Seattle? Can you handle a Boston winter? Is your Spanish passable enough to join past YSoA alums in Mexico City? Could you get a visa to work in Thailand? Would you marry that cute Irish boy for a EU passport? Every semester, we attempt to understand a place as deeply as we can for one week. After New Haven, what place will understand us, for the next year, or five, or fifty?

Housing Crisis Over
Susan M.Arch I '27 Sontag

Core 4 cancelled after site visit. Students met developers who fixed housing in Bridgeport by building luxury condos. They hoped the waterfront views and beautiful fixtures might increase the median rent, thus making it a more enticing city to move to.

Frostbite Weather
Layna M E D Chen

With temperatures below freezing, group meetings have been on Zoom although resources are pooled together. Grant season looms for all.

BP26 Design Phase Comes to a Close

Maggie M.Arch I '28 HoIm

Building Project Hell Week is upon us! After five weeks of BP, first years feel enthused but disillusioned. Some (thankfully) feel it wasn’t as “spicy” or friendship-destroying as foretold

by years above. Others feel that the whole production is a rigged business stunt. The previously required but now cut “how to work on a team” workshop undoubtedly should have made a comeback. Nonetheless, the chance to provide beautiful and affordable housing to two families at the Howard St. site remains the principal driving force behind the twelve thoughtfully conceived proposals!

Rehearsal for Missing This All

Marusya Bakhrameeva
M.Arch II '26

I woke up with a clear thought: I will miss this. Somehow, my mind skipped over the deadlines waiting at school, and instead, I saw time before graduation counted in months and their halves. I will miss the room I woke up in, the people I message the moment I unlock my phone, and the plans we have. I will miss the paprika carpet, famous rusted walls, and the neo-Gothic decorations of the old campus. I will miss all of it. And this morning, I began to practice feeling more grateful for the fact that I am still here.

Shared Longing

Shreshtha Goyal
M.Arch II '27

Traveling to Thailand this week reminded me how architecture shapes community, even for someone whose social battery runs low. Temples, homes, and markets aren’t just walls and roofs but invitations to linger, bump elbows, and exchange smiles. Food culture imitates this design, meals are placed at the center of the table, meant to be shared. Shared resilience becomes part of daily life: neighbors gather, meals are shared, and public spaces invite lingering despite challenges. Architecture can be quiet, but it teaches belonging in the most deliberate ways.

Welcome to the architecture

Justin

Architecture there?

Where?

Here?

Everywhere?

Too few care to ask this much
 Too few long for fresh air
 Some do leap from their screens
 Some do inhale what's outside
 Some see, at last.
 This stuffy atmosphere,
 filled to the brim with held breaths
 From people they always claimed to serve.

Such begins the quest to define a new kind of "drawing".

A kind made for scheduling carpools to and fro

A kind made for taking care of an elder

A kind made for celebrating a child's first steps

A kind made for guiding a warehouse party from 120 to 130bpm

A kind meant to reveal
 that perhaps

tending could be > producing
 sensing could be > stating
 returning could be > reaching.

Not a race to the edge of discipline
 But a recentering
 to the quiet choreography
 we ignore.

To moments like these in multitudes.

To a race for a new life equation.

The year was 2044

One passerby smiled at this newfound quantumland

As they read the fresh-faced billboard.

"14AA41: Welcome to The Everyday"

everyday office

McEliderry

Brathwaite has previously questioned normative vocabulary by forming one of his own called 'nation language'. His words are sonic, rhythmic and spatial. He has a way of writing that captures the histories of dispersal and migration across the Black Atlantic. This starts to seed an architecture of a different register: one which creates structure out of memory and gestures rather than through forms. Encountering Brathwaite through these acts of sketching makes the prior clear, something that Edouard Glissant described once as a type of poetics that "gives form to the memory of the Middle Passage," and so, rhythms and relations are spatial acts rather than literary devices.

Three
 Sometimes these sketches gain consciousness. Opening my copy of Kamau Brathwaite's trilogy *The Arrivants*, I follow his writings of the diasporic journey with my Pilot Gel Microtip Rollerball 0.4 mm. These pen lines attempt to spatialise the smallest forms of literature, such as the "city of gold" or "ivory altars" [Fig. 01]. Though these marks are shy, not fully sure of themselves, they begin to form a visual vocabulary.

Two
 A translation begins almost accidentally. Quick unconscious marks in the margins of books, the backs of receipts, in the creases of napkins and between the words of poets. This is the first sign of figuring: trying to work something out, to translate something, to hold a sense of architecture outside the architect and their education.

One
 When a practitioner starts their architecture, the common first step is to seek an act of mimicry. They try to find an architectural language through pre-existing building fabric, resulting in an ossified relationship between form and discipline.

For those who cannot find a language so easily, their search becomes an act of translation, one that often begins in literature. To guide such seekers, I have written a step-by-step approach to formulating a kind of architecture from literature.

A translation of the words of
 The Arrivants; a New World Trilogy
 By Kamau Brathwaite

Four
 I return to these sketches, redrawing. Again. This time, the sketches take on more than single sentences, and begin to visuals entire sections. Each stanza of *II Kumasi* becomes a separate drawing. Reading time becomes drawing time. "the morning sun of seven hills greets you best, knows you blessed." Fig (02)

Five
 At some point, a form appears, it becomes something that is neither figurative nor architectural but hovers between the two, an in-between shape that feels translated rather than designed. This is usually the moment when the sketches accumulate into a drawing with direction. A comfort, or perhaps a confidence settles into the line. Enough to start imagining their context, materiality or lighting conditions. These forms, still provisional, still unresolved, carry the sense of the architect.

Reverse
 In reverse, architecture in this poetry is measured as a practice of ritual, migration, and bodily negotiation rather than the production of buildings. In this process, sketching functions as the translator. Poetry becomes the (mis) translated; architecture, the misinterpreted. Yet it is precisely within this slippage that another mode of architectural practice emerges. Through a subsequent series of drawings, it asks how diasporic subjects construct "home" under conditions where permanence is impossible, territory is unstable, and shelter must be carried rather than occupied. The drawings - and I - learnt that a 'home' is approached not as a site, but as a cyclical condition, framing architecture as a state of becoming rather than a finished object.

Architecture within the Poet Issi Nanabeyin

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All drawing imagery by the author, Issi Nanabeyin.

¹ Biremon Tutu is coming.

Whispers of dark *sasaboniam* of darkness will forever fear his black rings of iron, the rings spiked with thorn.

² So slowly slowly ever so slowly prepare for his coming;

bota beads, *bodon* beads proclaim

his prosperity; red, I am wealthy, my wealth

safe from termites; and the feather, red

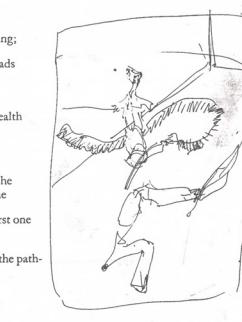
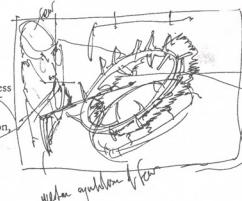
rooster, reminds us he watches; the first one

who rises and the first one who sings.

Spread the cloth in the pathway.

Oze yei
Oze yei

Oze yei.



IV

The Golden Stool

¹ Chiefs and people of the Asantehene let all be well

All is well

Chiefs and people of the Asantehene let all be well

We are listening

When the worm's knife cuts the throat of a tree, what will happen?

It will die

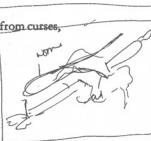
When a cancer has eaten the guts of a man, what will surely happen?

He will die

My people, that is the condition of our country today: it is sick at heart, to its bitter clay.

We cannot heal it or hold it together from curses, because we do not believe in it. Like fighting cocks hungry for corn,

the highest crowded perches, we are destroying our great nation. Mampong says his shrines sit heavier upon the snake,



Festivalization of Architecture

Rosita Palladino

In the Baroque feasts, ephemeral architecture, art, literature, and ritual transformed the city into scenographies of celebration—liturgical, civic, and profane. Whether commissioned by the establishment for the people, by the establishment for itself, from the people to the people, or as a moment when “the people” address the establishment through homage, inversion, or protest

— these celebrations used temporary structures to script spaces, make narratives visible and enable communities to rehearse shared values and forms of assembly¹. In this way, ephemeral architecture did not simply animate the city—it proposed versions of it, sometimes later built in permanent form².

Today, ephemeral architecture is shifting from representation toward architecture in action. Festivalization—introduced by the urban sociologists Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel (1993)³—describes cities’ growing reliance on events as a mode of governance: urban change is packaged into concentrated, time-limited episodes, easier to narrate, publicize, and convert into funding and investment. The term is often critical as it can privilege visibility over durability. Yet in contexts of rapid growth, mobility, and increasingly diverse publics, the event can also function as a tool of public-making: a repeatable format where co-presence is produced, differences are negotiated, and shared space is learned in practice⁴.

As urban policy becomes festivalized, architecture is increasingly festivalized too — reformatted for time-bound delivery, mixed audiences, and high-visibility use.

Against this background, ephemeral architecture reads less as a generational taste for impermanence than as a consequence of how cities increasingly produce civic life. This shift is visible in commissioning:

festival architecture has moved from an entry point for emerging practitioners to work that increasingly attracts established offices, not as a detour from “buildings,” but as a concentrated act of public address, operational clarity, and cultural consequence⁵. Accordingly, the field advances not only through its canonical “field-configuring events” (biennales, exhibitions, conferences) but across a widening circuit—music festivals, civic celebrations, and cultural programming—where ephemeral architecture

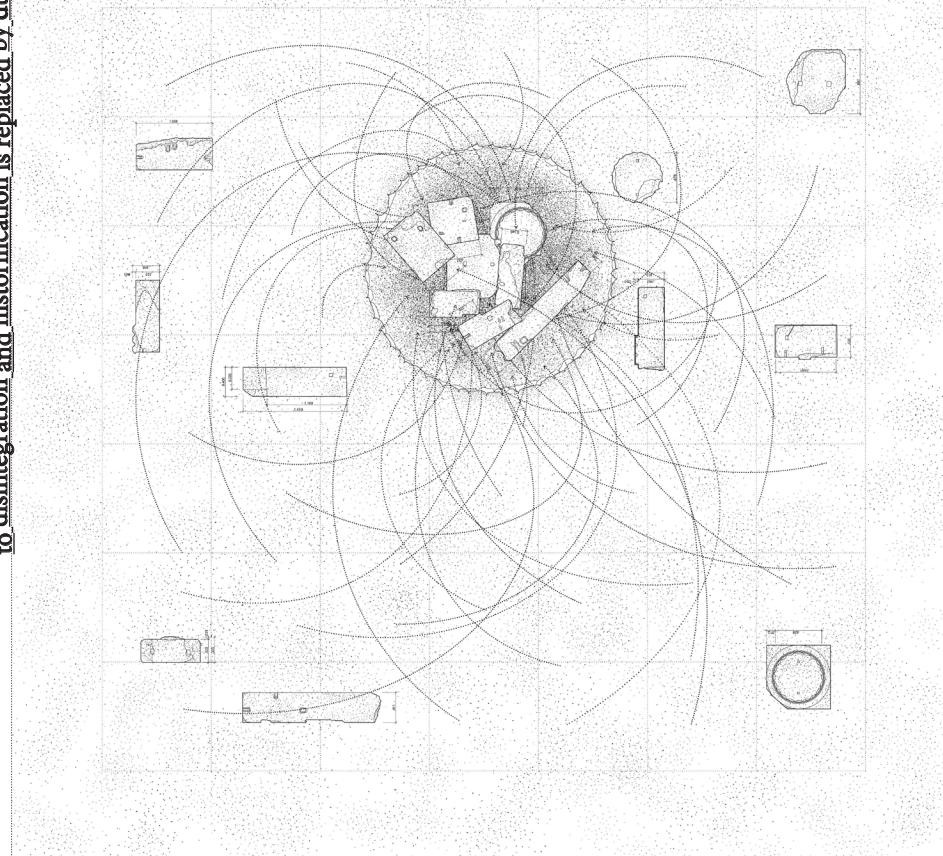
L I M E K I L N

Lightfoot

CaLeb On the North Aegean island of Samothrace, the burning of

limestone and marble monument blocks to produce quicklime has persisted from antiquity into the modern period. Processed in hillside limekilns built beside ruined monuments, this practice reveals an alternative material ecology in which architecture is not preserved but dissolved for domestic

use including mortar, disinfectants, fertilizers, and decorative applications. These drawings document surveyed blocks as instruments of calcination, where monumentality yields to disintegration and historicization is replaced by dust.



is often commissioned to confront the city’s challenges, for example by adapting public space to climate, and making plural heritage visible⁶.

The open question is whether the discipline is willing to treat this as architectural practice in full.

If festivalization is a driving force of the contemporary city, then its architectures increasingly carry a political and spatial weight, even when they are temporary. Practicing well in this project-form requires funding and procurement literacy, governance fluency, and an ability to read the “one hand” of delivery: who controls planning, finance, construction, marketing, and management—and to what ends. It also demands a temporal design logic (setup, peak, decay, disassembly, afterlife) and the ecological accounting it entails (materials, transport, waste, reuse). From there follows the audience choreography: how publics are gathered, routed, and positioned; what access regimes it installs (ticketed or open, affordable or exclusive); and a clear reckoning with who benefits, and who bears the costs, when public space is edited into celebration sites.

If festivalization has become a durable urban logic, it is also—quietly or explicitly—one of the principal sites where architectural agency now persists and where the field advances. The task is not to romanticize ephemerality, but to describe its conditions accurately and to build the competencies to practice it deliberately.

1. FaLassi, Alessandro, ed. Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

2. Tozzi, Simonetta, ed. Feste barocche “per inciso”. Immagini della festa a Roma nelle stampe del 600. Rome: Edizioni Artemide, 2015.

3. Häußermann, Hartmut, and Walter Siebel. “Die Politik der Festivalisierung und die Festivalisierung der Politik: Große Ereignisse in der Stadtpolitik.” In Festivalisierung der Stadtpolitik: Stadtentwicklung durch große Projekte (Leviathan Sonderheft 13), 7–31. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993.

4. Finkel, Rebecca, and Louise Platt. “Cultural Festivals and the City.” Geography Compass 14, no. 9 (2020).
5. A key example is Leopold Bianchini Architects, which in recent years has participated in Concéntrico, Horst Arts & Music, and SIRACUSA-PANTALICA. Other established offices have also appeared in these circuits—for example, MVRDV at Concéntrico, and FaLa Atelier, SaLotobuono, and Bruther at Horst.

6. It also suggests that festival agendas are responding to broader shifts in the field (and may, at times, help accelerate them), particularly toward city-scale approaches that prioritize adapting and redistributing existing space over adding new construction; see, for instance, Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, A Moratorium on New Construction (Sternberg Press, 2025).

Silvery Gray Heavy Clouds

Bryan Honting Wong and Namhi Kwun
Zeifman's latest Flash Art article frames the zeitgeist

of contemporary architecture through a silvery-gray ambiguity—less a stylistic drift than a broader upheaval. The chromatic condition no longer operates as aesthetic choices but techno-consumptive apparatus that is, at a stretch, biopolitical. What initially reads as an aesthetic criticism begins to register, more uneasily, as a material concern. Architecture's formal production shifts away from legibility and authority toward something more mercurial and homogeneous, optimized for (post-)digital extraction, logistics, and control.

Such precarity becomes most visible in the proliferation of what we called heavy clouds: clusters of windowless, gray envelopes camouflaged across suburbia, calibrated exclusively for uninhabitable occupations. They take multiple forms—data centers, fulfillment warehouses, energy plants, processing systems—yet increasingly resist typological distinction. These structures dissolve into neutrality while actively terraforming their surroundings, mutating through manipulation of form into an environment of formlessness. In some instances, their standardized configurations subverts entropy of unlimited expansion, asserting authority as absolute architecture. In others, it is their edge condition—the shell wrapped around intensely optimized interior systems—that sustains their authority. Their refusal to perform as architecture is precisely what grants them power: an architecture without buildings.

But how did we arrive at a moment speculating about the radiance of gray boxes? When Meta announced its largest data center projects, a rudimentary collage, rendered as a massive blue superblock atop Manhattan's skyline was accounting for its absurd square footages. The names alone—Prometheus, Hyperion, a 5GW facility in rural Louisiana—gesture toward a synthetic mythology. What late-twentieth-century theorists once imagined as speculative megastructural totalities now reappear as logistical regimes, operationalized, haunted, and obsolete. Utopian projects like The Continuous Monument and The Voluntary Prisoners no longer read as provocation; but administrative fact.

If decorative sheds once ought to stage the pinnacle of capitalism, post-capitalist urbanism requires no facade. Its cyber-social condensers operate as closed-loop systems, where attention and data continuously feed into us and back into algorithms—driven by dopamine and calibrated delay—that is, a production of interfaces rather than buildings. Signifiers are consumed within seconds, whether we are streaming from an HBO episode or forwarding a reel to a friend, E2EE infrastructures displace invisibly across the planet—geographical abstractions define modern lifestyles. What defines the spatial quality of life is no longer physical enclosures but chemical modulation. Our center of gravity has shifted from urban cores to rural gray-landscapes—urbanized in function, if not in name.

This produces a new spatial dyad. Cities become sites of inference, interface, and immediacy, while the countryside absorbs the material costs of computation: land consumption, water depletion, thermal discharge. Rural territories are terraformed into battery packs for digital consumption, sustaining the illusion of immateriality elsewhere.

Meanwhile, architectural pedagogy continues to measure relevance through buildings as authored objects, even as architecture's most consequential work now unfolds through zoning envelopes, energy protocols, thermal management, and the strategic reduction of architecture to enable ecological operations. This shift exposes a profound misalignment between academia and practice. If form once followed function, function has now been followed, as Gordon Matta-Clark suggested, operating without representation or disciplinary acknowledgment.

Architecture no longer holds account for building buildings; the economy proceeds through these silvery grey boxes regardless of architectural authorship or agency. The cloud is heavy and extractive, stripping architecture of its aesthetic container and redistributing it across territories through material and environmental violence. The question is no longer how to design these structures better, but how to remain present—intellectually and politically—within an unconsented future produced by conditions we have thus far refused to name.

1. Emmett Zeifman, "ANY: Silvery-Grayish Boxes," *Flash Art*, June 30, 2025, <https://flash-art.com/article/any-ny/>
2. Kriston Capps, "Why Is Manhattan Being Crushed by This Giant Meta Data Center?," *Bloomberg (Design Edition newsletter)*, August 24, 2025, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2025-08-24/why-is-manhattan-being-crushed-by-this-giant-meta-data-center>
3. Prometheus and Hyperion are both Titans in Greek mythology associated with primordial knowledge and overreaching power.

Garden in Progress

Simona

Ferrari

**"... A lifetime
Was too little to think all this up in. But
As the garden grew with the plan
So does the plan with the garden."**

—Bertolt Brecht,
"Garden in Progress,"
from *the American Poems*

Thinking an architecture without buildings could mean shifting attention from the objects to the space in between them. In a city like Tokyo, that space might be called a gap; in a city like Los Angeles, it might be called the garden. Ubiquitous space across the metropolis, the garden embeds LA's entire population, without distinction of class or ethnicity.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the garden became a space of labour for thousands of Japanese American inhabitants-turned-gardeners, unable to own land because of the California Alien Land Law (1913). It was a predilect retreat for Bertolt Brecht while in Los Angeles as a political refugee in the 1940s, whose Santa Monica garden provided metaphorical ground for his intellectual labour. The garden fulfilled the promise of collectivism in the experimental architecture of the Schindler House (1922) in West Hollywood. Woven into the plan, the garden functioned as an outdoor room equipped with fireplaces where Pauline and Rudolph Schindler gathered with friends of the avant-garde: salons, conversations, readings, performances, and Thanksgiving feasts. Through the spatial interlocking of interior and garden, the entire lot functioned as a living space. The garden also operated as a living unit at the site of Tokio Florist in Silver Lake, where Yuki Sakai and her family ran their flower business from the 1960s directly from their two-story house and garden: clients were received in the front Japanese-style garden, selling took place in the driveway, and flower growing occurred in the field to the rear. The land surrounding the house allowed Tokio Florist to function for decades as a self-sufficient unit for living and working, just like a traditional machiya (Japanese townhouse).

1. I owe the discovery of Brecht's garden poems to the writings of Erhard Bahr—see "Bertolt Brecht's California Poetry" in *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and of Quinn Latimer—see "Kalifornienräume: Bertolt Brecht's Los Angeles Poems and Other Sunstruck Germanic Specters" in *Like a Woman* (London: Stenberg Press, 2017).

Today, the garden lives on in flourishing community gardens created by Latino and African American communities in the food deserts south of Los Angeles, and in the carefully tended residential front yards of Chinese American households in the East. In the neighbourhood of Lincoln Heights, the front lawn—plastic or real—is nowhere to be seen. Instead, chain-link fences support makeshift structures where vegetable gardens grow, supported by wooden sticks or planted in buckets. The garden also continues to be a site for cultural production—see artist David Horvitz's garden with Terremoto, started on a residential plot next to his studio in Arlington Heights, where a house disappeared after a fire. Exhibitions, readings, and performances constantly take place—and where one afternoon, together with friends, we read Brecht's garden poems aloud ⁽¹⁾.

This is a personal and partial account of my six-month path across Los Angeles as an architect-in-residence at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in 2023. Moving across Los Angeles through the garden opened up a different way of looking at the city—one that highlights the life of its inhabitants as they find their ground, making and transforming its urban landscape. The garden is an architecture constantly in progress—a living plan continuously edited and adapted, unfolding beside, beyond, and in place of buildings.

