

**TWO STRIP MALL PLAZAS
EDISON, NJ**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Landscape Architecture,
Harvard University Graduate School of Design
*by***

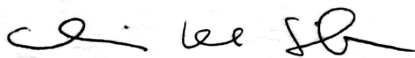
CAROLINE KOH SMITH

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

May 2024

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Student



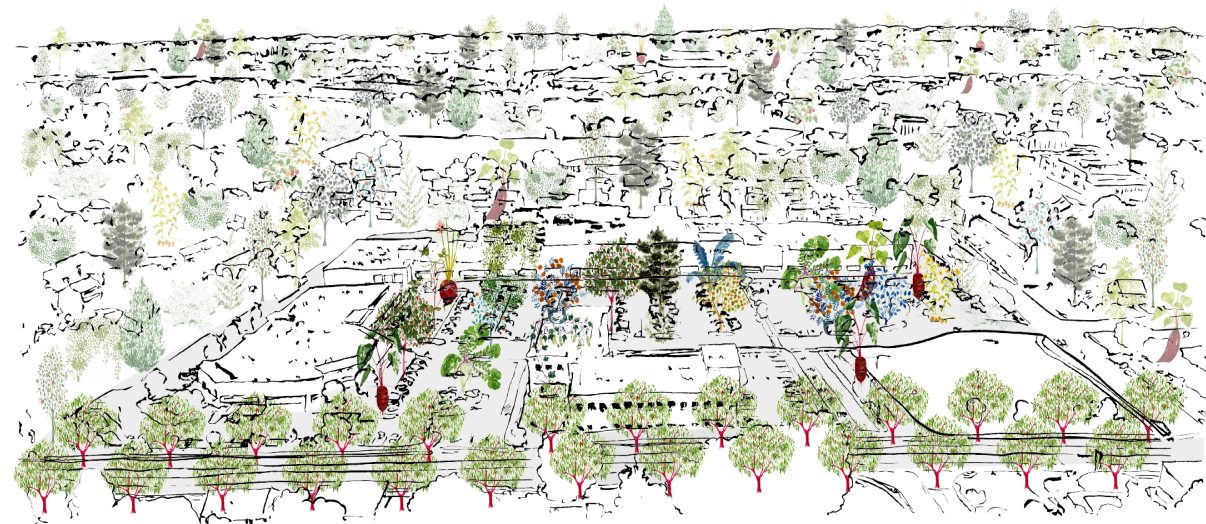
Thesis Advisor

David LaChapelle
Springtime
From the *Earth Laughs in Flowers* series,
2008–2011

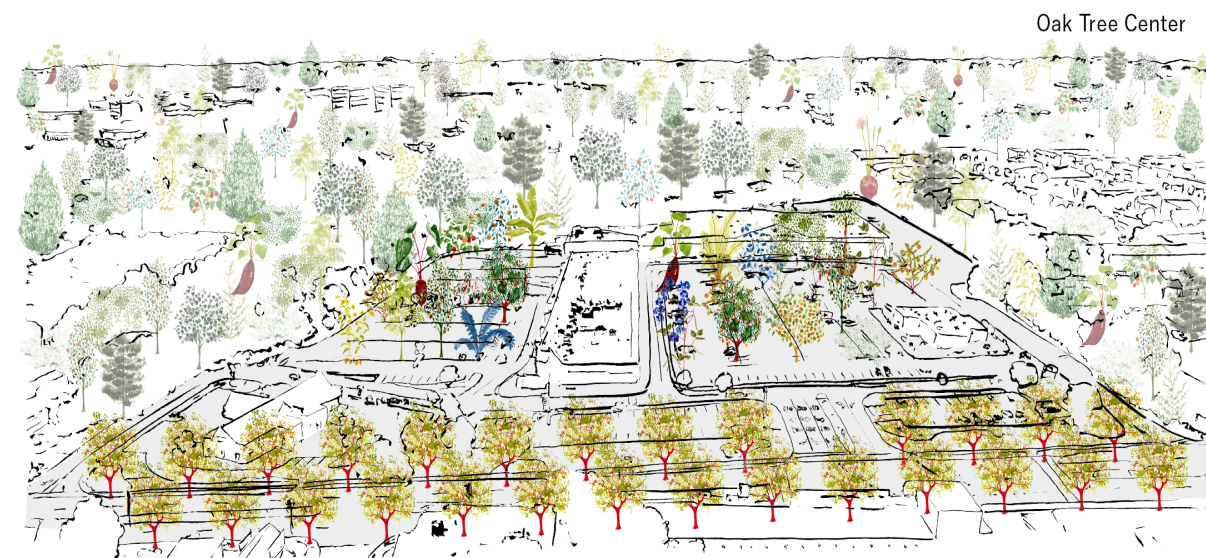
Two strip mall plazas
Edison, New Jersey



Caroline Koh Smith
Advised by Francesca Benedetto



Festival Plaza



Oak Tree Center

Abstract

Through a suburban counter-ethnobotany, this project examines how plant and human migrations land in two strip mall plazas in Edison, New Jersey. Edison became home to large communities of immigrants from East and South Asia after the 1965 Immigration Act; these communities had culturally specific needs which they fulfilled through the appropriation of the strip mall plaza. Plants also inhabit this peripheral asphalt world, both within the mall and around. Brought by historically complicated global mechanics, their presence, like that of the people around, is politicized. As local plant migrations increase due to changes in climate and the built environment, this project responds by proposing a choreography of stripping asphalt from the road and parking lot, facilitating planting. After de-paving, the material and program inside is brought outside and the spontaneous growth of the back end brought to the front, and the plaza becomes a garden in migration.



In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act formally abolished quotas placed on immigrants based on ethnicity or national origin. This falls into a lineage of immigration control legislation dating to the 1790s, including formalized discriminating against particular demographics that begins with the 1875 Chinese Exclusion Act. While the passing of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality act created new complex system of immigration restrictions, it also reversed a series of legislations favoring Western European immigrants passed to maintain a particular racio/ethno-economic hegemony within the US. The act opened the door to immigrants (albeit not uncomplicatedly) from other parts of the world that resulted in a demographic shift from a country that used to be 80% white.

The 60s were also a boom in decentralization of the city, with the construction of suburban developments that often had their own Racio-ethnic and economic quotas.

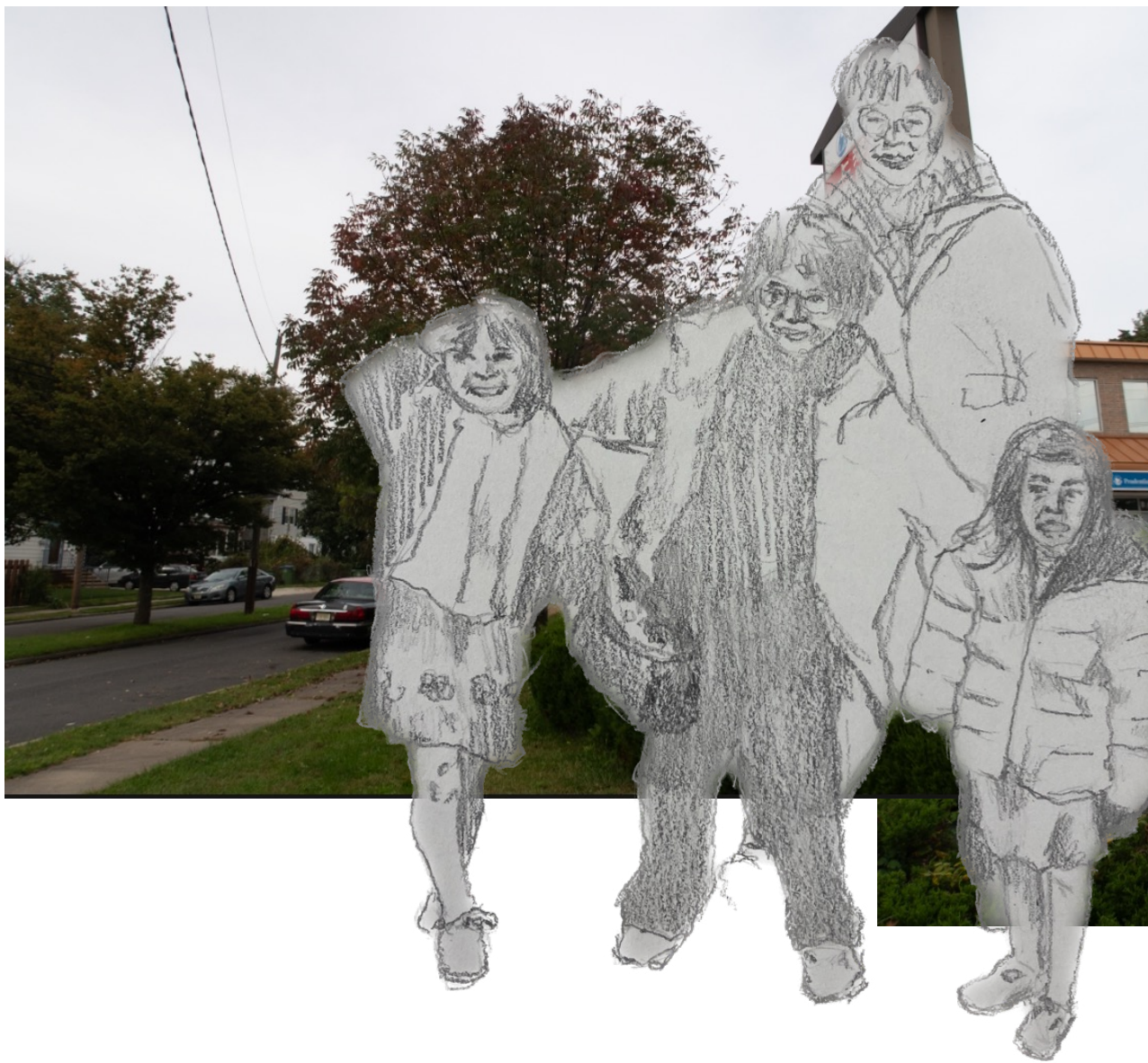
Starting in the 80s and 90s, immigrant groups had a generation to establish communities. Simultaneously, there was a suburban population shift and a desire to return to the city-as-commercial center. Cities became more populous and expensive and immigrant groups began to move to the suburbs (often, but not always, those with more capital).

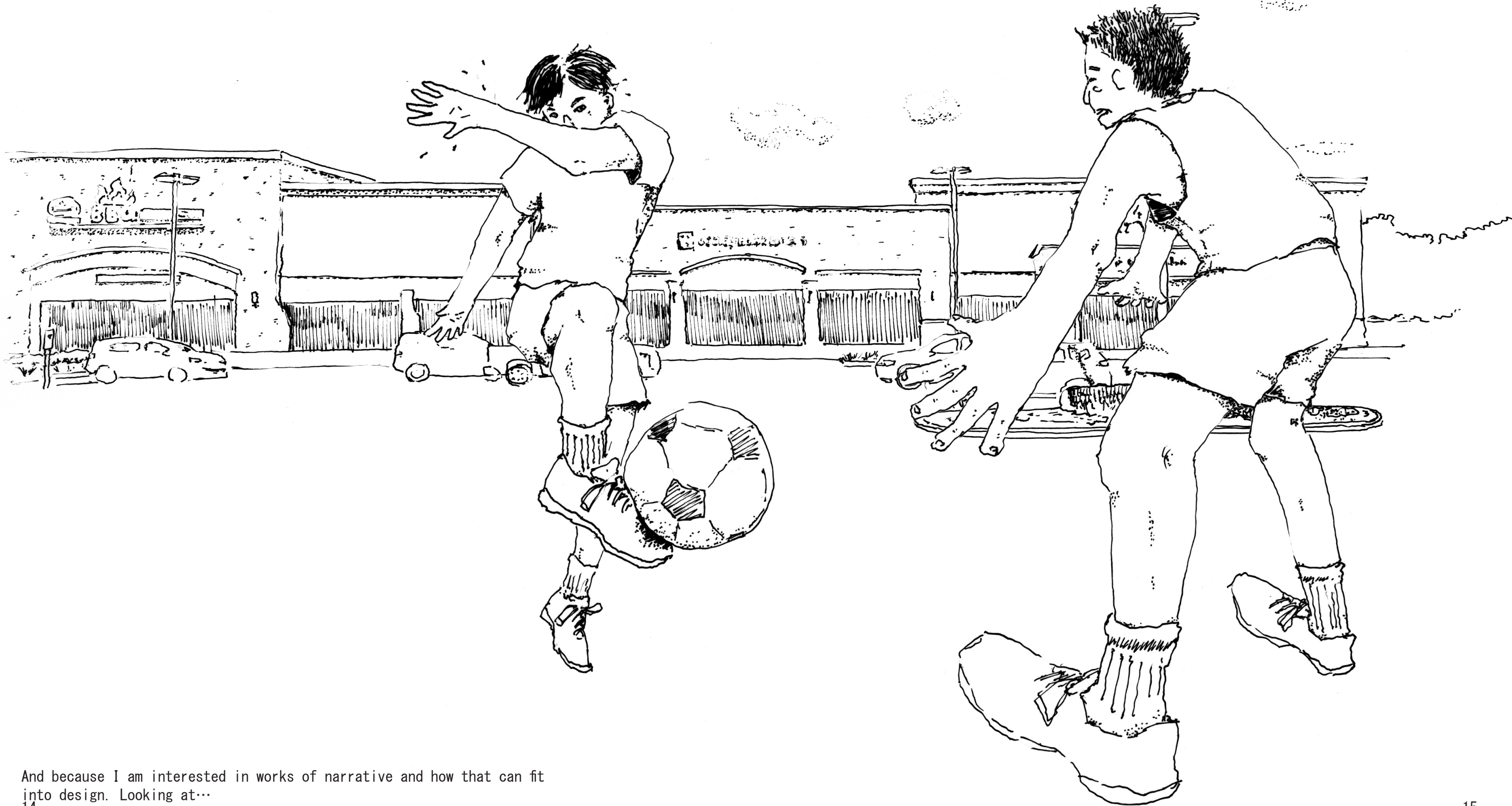
This resulted in the creation of suburban ethnic enclaves with culturally specific needs that required venues. For such, they appropriated the strip mall plaza as a cultural and economic public space.

A map of the two corridors in relation to nearby open space.

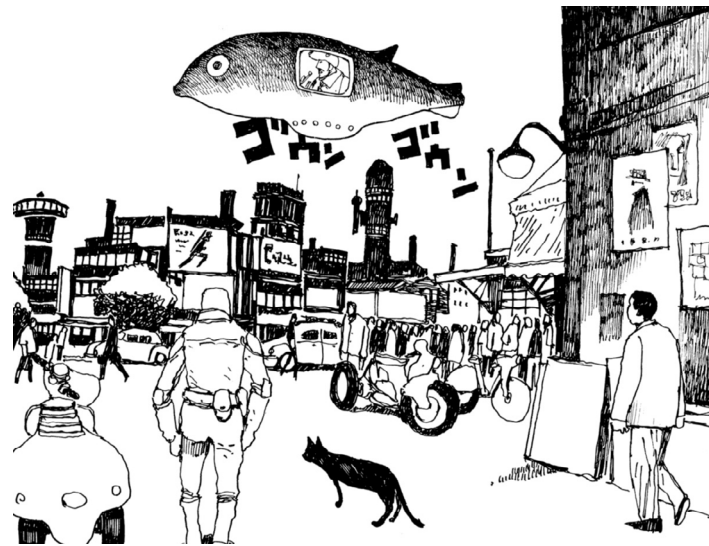


My site is two corridors with many of these stirp mall plazas in Edison, New Jersey





And because I am interested in works of narrative and how that can fit into design. Looking at...



Taiyo Matsumoto



Richard McGuire

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HUA HSU: WOKKING THE SUBURBS



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Illustrations by [Yina Kim](#)

Four articles from *Lucky Peach* were nominated for James Beard awards this year. We are posting all of them this week for your reading pleasure. First was [Fuchsia Dunlop](#) on *London's Chinatown*, then [Richard Parks](#) on the *Cambodian-California doughnut connection*. Today: [Hua Hsu](#) on the rise of suburban Chinatowns.

I was also interested in looking at the interesting cultural imaginary of New Jersey, from the Sopranos to the New Jersey turnpike. There is a rich history of examining New Jersey as such, famously by Robert Smithson in the Monuments of Passaic and Tony Smith's drive down the turnpike.

Has Passaic replaced Rome as the eternal city?

ROBERT SMITHSON

He laughed softly. 'I know. There's no way out. Not through the Barrier. Maybe that isn't what I want, after all. But this — this —' He stared at the Monument. 'It seems all wrong sometimes. I just can't explain it. It's the whole city. It makes me feel haywire. Then I get these flashes —'

—Henry Kuttner, *Jesting Pilot*
 . . . today our unsophisticated cameras record in their own way our hastily assembled and painted world.

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*

On Saturday, September 30, 1967, I went to the Port Authority Building on 41st Street and 8th Avenue. I bought a copy of the *New York Times* and a Signet paperback called *Earthworks* by Brain W. Aldiss. Next I went to ticket booth 21 and purchased a one-way ticket to Passaic. After that I went up to the upper bus level (platform 173) and boarded the number 30 bus of the Inter-City Transportation Co.

I sat down and opened the *Times*. I glanced over the art section: a "Collectors, Critics, Curators' Choice" at A.M. Sachs Gallery (a letter I got in the mail that morning invited me "to play the game before the show closes October 4th"), Walter Schatzki was selling "Prints, Drawings, Watercolors" at "33 1/2% off," Elinor Jenkins, the "Romantic Realist," was showing at Barzansky Galleries, XVIII — XIX Century English Furniture on sale at Parke-Bernet, "New Directions in German Graphics" at Goethe House, and on page 29 was John Canaday's column. He was writing on *Themes and the Usual Variations*. I looked at a blurry reproduction of Samuel F. B. Morse's *Allegorical Landscape* at the top of Canaday's column; the sky was a subtle newsprint grey, and the clouds resembled sensitive stains of sweat reminiscent of

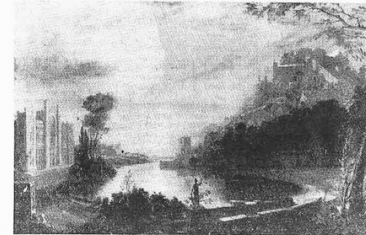
a famous Yugoslav watercolorist whose name I have forgotten. A little statue with right arm held high faced a pond (or was it the sea?). "Gothic" buildings in the allegory had a faded look, while an unnecessary tree (or was it a cloud of smoke?) seemed to puff up on the left side of the landscape. Canaday referred to the picture as "standing confidently along with other allegorical representatives of the arts, sciences, and high ideals that universities foster." My eyes stumbled over the newsprint, over such headlines as "Seasonal Upswing," "A Shuffle Service," and "Moving a 1,000 Pound Sculpture Can Be a Fine Work of Art, Too." Other gems of Canaday's dazzled my mind as I passed through Secaucus. "Realistic wax-works of raw meat beset by vermin," (Paul Theki), "Mr. Bush and his colleagues are wasting their time," (Jack Bush), "a book, an apple on a saucer, a rumpled cloth," (Thyra Davidson). Outside the bus window a Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge flew by — a symphony in orange and blue. On page 31 in Big Letters: THE EMERGING POLICE STATE IN AMERICA SPY GOVERNMENT. "In this book you will learn . . . what an Infinity Transmitter is."

The bus turned off Highway 3, down Orient Way in Rutherford.

I read the blurbs and skimmed through *Earthworks*. The first sentence read, "The dead man drifted along in the breeze." It seemed the book was about a soil shortage, and the *Earthworks* referred to the manufacture of artificial soil. The sky over Rutherford was a clear cobalt blue, a perfect Indian summer day, but the sky in *Earthworks* was a "great black and brown shield on which moisture gleamed."

The bus passed over the first monument. I pulled the buzzer-cord and got off at the corner of Union Avenue and River Drive. The monument was a bridge over the Passaic River that con-

Art: *Themes and the Usual Variations*



"Allegorical Landscape" by Samuel F. B. Morse, displayed at Marlborough-Gerson Gallery

48 i

"After that I returned to Passaic, or was it *thereafter*—for all I know that unimaginative suburb could have been a clumsy eternity, a cheap copy of The City of the Immortals. But who am I to entertain such a thought? I walked down a parking lot that covered the old railroad tracks which at one time ran through the middle of Passaic. That monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection—but the mirror kept changing places with the reflection. One never knew what side of the mirror one was on. There was nothing *interesting* or even strange about that flat monument, yet it echoed a kind of cliché idea of infinity; perhaps the "secrets of the universe" are just as pedestrian—not to say dreary. Everything about the site remained wrapped in blandness and littered with shiny cars—one after another they extended into a sunny nebulosity. The indifferent backs of the cars flashed and reflected the stale afternoon sun. I took a few listless, entropic snapshots of that lustrous monument. If the future is "out of date" and "old fashioned," then I had been in the future. I had been on a planet that had a map of Passaic drawn over it, and a rather imperfect map at that. A sidereal map marked up with "lines" the size of streets, and "squares" and "blocks" the size of buildings. At any moment my feet were apt to fall through the cardboard ground. I am convinced that the future is lost somewhere in the dumps of the non-historical past; it is in yesterday's newspapers, in the *jejune* advertisements of science-fiction movies, in the false mirror of our rejected dreams. Time turns metaphors into *things*, and stacks them up in cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs."

Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey: 1967"



Studying the Strip

The project was defined from a series of drawings studying each strip. First, I calculated the amount of asphalt along each artery from satellite-sourced GIS data. Then, during a site visit and through Google Streetview imagery, I recorded and categorized the program of every building along each artery to examine the cultural specificity of each strip. Finally, I looked at the regional vegetation and open space to understand the site in relation to present ecologies and functions.

The project also developed from studies of the site. This began with a collage in which a photograph was taken along each face of the building with a relatively consistent distance and frequency. Then, the existing parking patterns were documented, as was program, access, and vegetation.

The scheme was created by using the site and strip studies and pitting them against a potential for site change and how that would affect parking lot and building use.

Rte. 27
873,752 m² of asphalt

Serving primarily Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean communities



Each strip has a predominant material of asphalt because of the suburban infrastructure rooted in car transit.

Oak Tree Rd

490,673 m² of asphalt

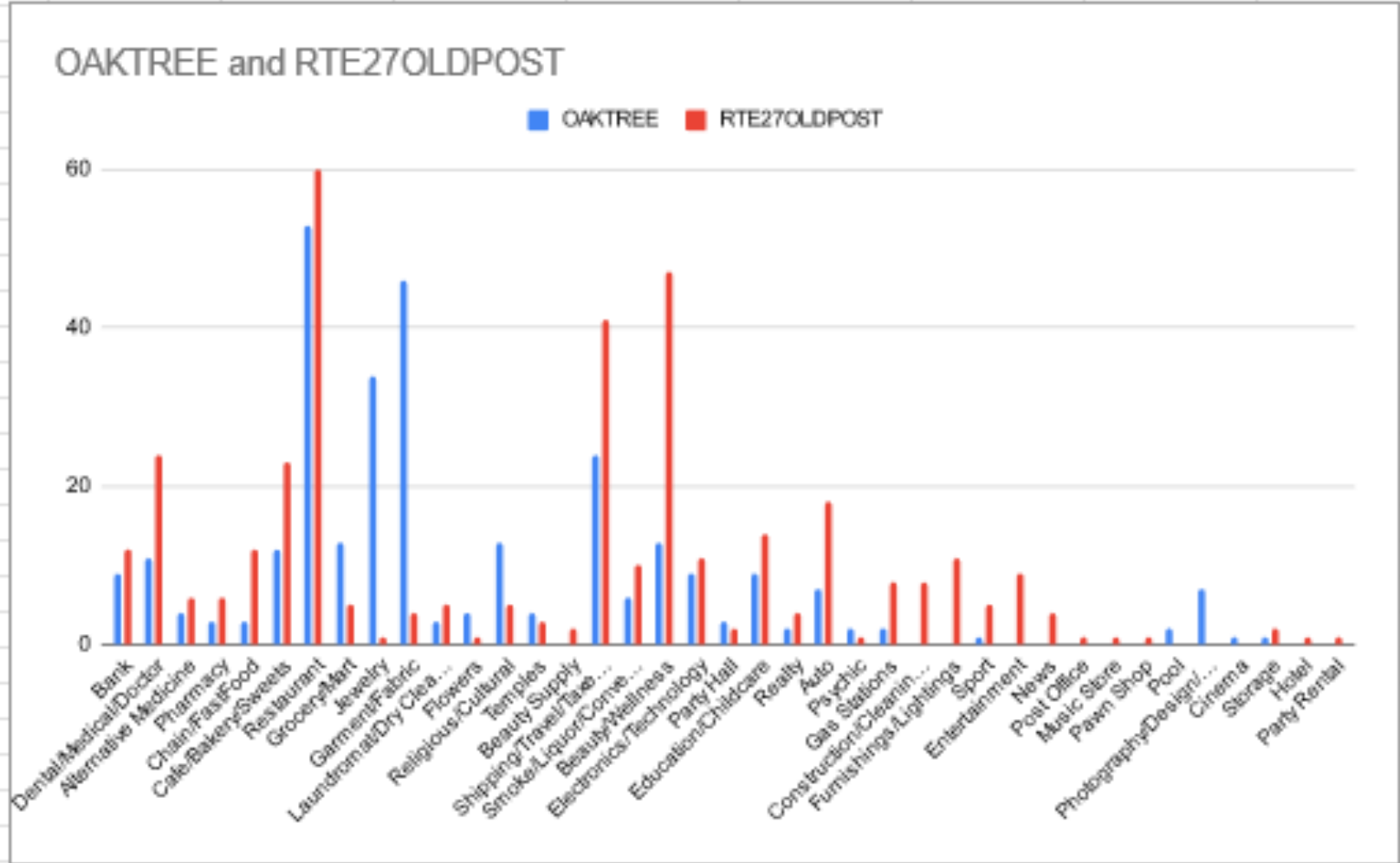
Serving primarily Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan communities



And each serves different communities of immigrants.

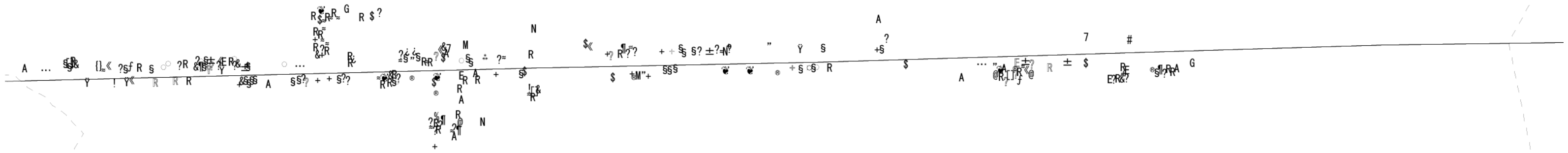
A Study of the Strip

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
1		OAKTREE	RTE27OLDPOST	Rte 27	Old Post											
2	Bank	9	12	10	2	\$										
3	Dental/Medical/D	11	24	19	5	+										
4	Alternative Medic	4	6	5	1	±										
5	Pharmacy	3	6	5	1	¶										
6	Chain/FastFood	3	12	7	5	⊗										
7	Cafe/Bakery/Swe	12	23	17	6	=										
8	Restaurant	53	60	45	15	R										
9	Grocery/Mart	13	5	3	2	G										
10	Jewelry	34	1	1	0	^										
11	Garment/Fabric	46	4	2	2	f										
12	Laundromat/Dry	3	5	4	1	@										
13	Flowers	4	1	1	0	Δ										
14	Religious/Cultura	13	5	3	2	[]										
15	Temples	4	3	1	2	{}										
16	Beauty Supply	0	2	2	0	∟										
17	Shipping/Travel/T	24	41	33	8	§										
18	Smoke/Liquor/Cc	6	10	7	3	¶										
19	Beauty/Wellness	13	47	35	12	?										
20	Electronics/Tech	9	11	6	5	*										
21	Party Hall	3	2	2	0		7									
22	Education/Childc	9	14	11	3	&										
23	Realty	2	4	3	1	!										
24	Auto	7	18	11	7	A										
25	Psychic	2	1	1	0	≡										
26	Gas Stations	2	8	4	4	...										
27	Construction/Cle	0	8	4	4	Y										
28	Furnishings/Light	0	11	9	2	◊										
29	Sport	1	5	4	1	*										
30	Entertainment	0	9	5	4	E										
31	News	0	4	4	0	N										
32	Post Office	0	1	1	0	#										
33	Music Store	0	1	1	0	M										
34	Pawn Shop	0	1	1	0	%										
35	Pool	2	0	0	0		0									
36	Photography/Des	7	0	0	0	V										
37	Cinema	1	0	0	0	*										
38	Storage	1	2	0	2	◊										
39	Hotel	0	1	0	1	H										
40	Party Rental	0	1	0	1		7									
41																
42				301	369											
43						670										
44																
45						0.03880597015										



The process began from studying the strip itself, walking along each site, taking picture inside and outside for program and plant material.

Programatic Diagrams



- \$ Bank
- + Dental/Medical/Doctor
- ± Alternative Medicine
- ¶ Pharmacy
- ⊙ Chain/FastFood
- = Cafe/Bakery/Sweets
- R Restaurant
- G Grocery/Mart
- ^ Jewelry
- f Garment/Fabric
- @ Laundromat/Dry Cleaners
- ∗ Flowers
- [] Religious/Cultural
- { } Temples
- ∩ Beauty Supply
- § Shipping/Travel/Taxes/Insurance/Law
- ☞ Smoke/Liquor/Convenience
- ? Beauty/Wellness
- ⏪ Electronics/Technology

Cultural specificity emerges:
 Commonalities like grocery stores have different materials, but there are also different venues along each strip. Route 27 has more bakeries, spas, pharmacies...



- 7 Party Hall
- & Education/Childcare
- ! Realty
- A Auto
- Psychic
- ... Gas Stations
- Y Construction/CleaningService
- Furnishings/Lightings
- " Sport
- E Entertainment
- N News
- # Post Office
- M Music Store
- % Pawn Shop
- O Pool
- V Photography/Design/Video/Events
- * Cinema
- ◇ Storage
- H Hotel
- 7 Party Rental

Whereas Oak Tree Road has more garment and jewelry stores, temples, and party halls.

Two strip mall plazas Edison, NJ:
Oak Tree Center on Oak Tree Rd.



This study along the strip was done to understand how global movement of people take form hyperlocally in Edison.

Two strip mall plazas Edison, NJ:
Festival Plaza on Rte. 27



From there, I selected one plaza along each corridor, comparable in size. Festival Plaza on Route 27, and Oak Tree Center on Oak Tree Road.

Owners
 1964 Plainfield Drive-in
 1984 Smutko/OTR
 2018 Edison 9 LLC



Oak Tree Rd

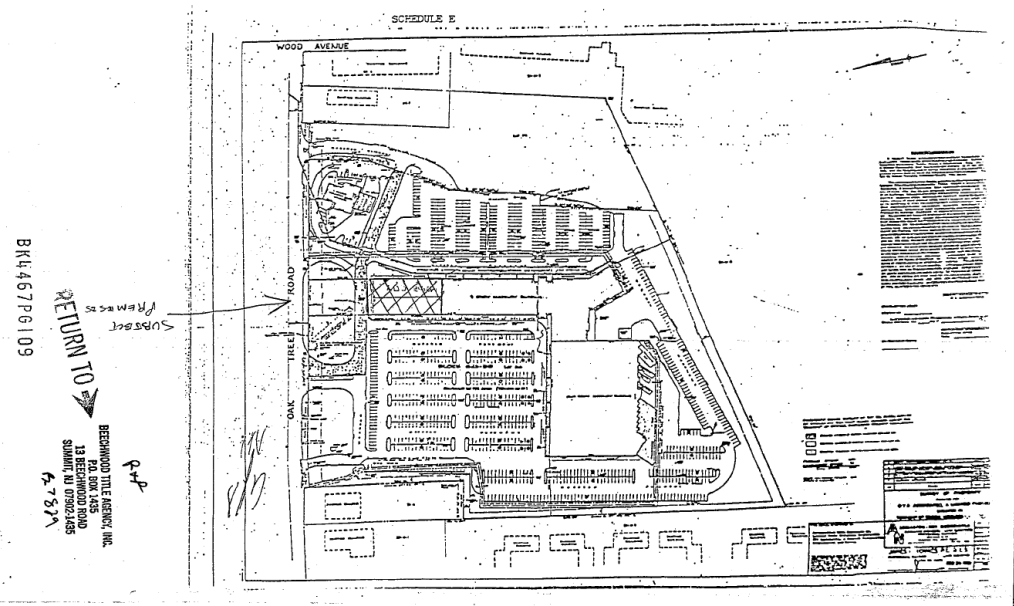
Prepared By: Howard J. Snowiss, Esq.

MEMORANDUM OF LEASE

O.T.R. ASSOCIATES, LANDLORD

FOODARAMA SUPERMARKETS, INC., TENANT, as successor in interest to Oak Tree Shop-Rite, Inc.

Date of Lease: January 24, 1984
 Expiration Date: 11-30-05
 Demised Premises: Supermarket located at Oak Tree Road Shopping Center, Edison, New Jersey and as more particularly set forth on Exhibit A attached hereto and made a part hereof
 Options to Renew: four 5-year renewal options

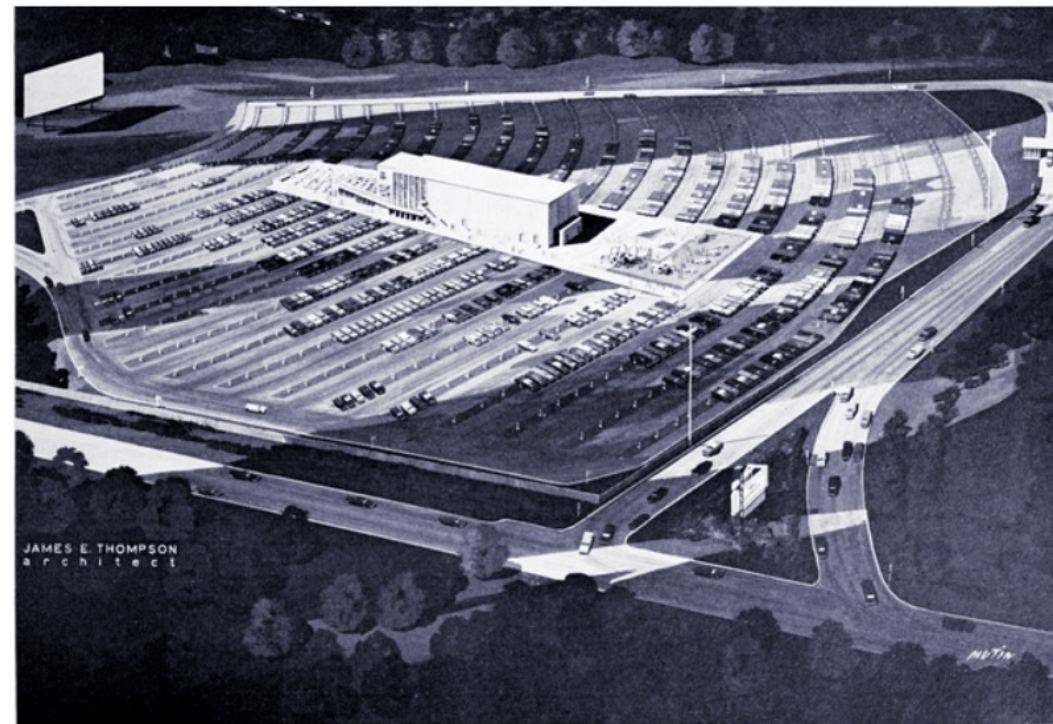


Plainfield Edison Drive-In
 1659 Oak Tree Road, Edison, NJ 08820

Closed Demolished 3 screens 1325 cars

Overview Photos Comments

2 people favored this theater



James E. Thompson architectural drawings in 1964.

Uploaded By

dallasmovietheaters

More Photos of This Theater



Photo Info

Uploaded on: May 4, 2019

Size: 3.9 MB

Views: 1,383

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In looking at the history of each specific site through the Middlesex County archives, we can see the demographic shift through transfer of properties and leases and how that affected what business were there.

Owners

1958 Levin
 1979 Turchin/Todsco
 2003 AMC Delancey
 2008 Edison I LLC
 2018 Edison 8 LLC

<u>Tenant</u>	<u>Lease</u>	<u>Deposit</u>
Acme Markets, Inc.	Aug. 22, 1957	
Cold Cut Center	June 14, 1962	\$ 900.
Shoe Town	Dec. 31, 1958	
SuperX Drugs	Nov. 20, 1958	
Zia Lisa Pizzeria	Mar. 1, 1966	1,125.
Mobil Oil Corp.	Mar. 31, 1953	
Roma Beauty & Barber Supplies	Feb. 12, 1974	1,150.
Kaepernik, Wm. B. & Jana	Apr. 14, 1977	1,800.
Beacon Photo	Mar. 9, 1977	
Miller & Zafarana (The Show Case)	Feb. 22, 1973	730.

SHOP CENTER SITE BOUGHT IN JERSEY

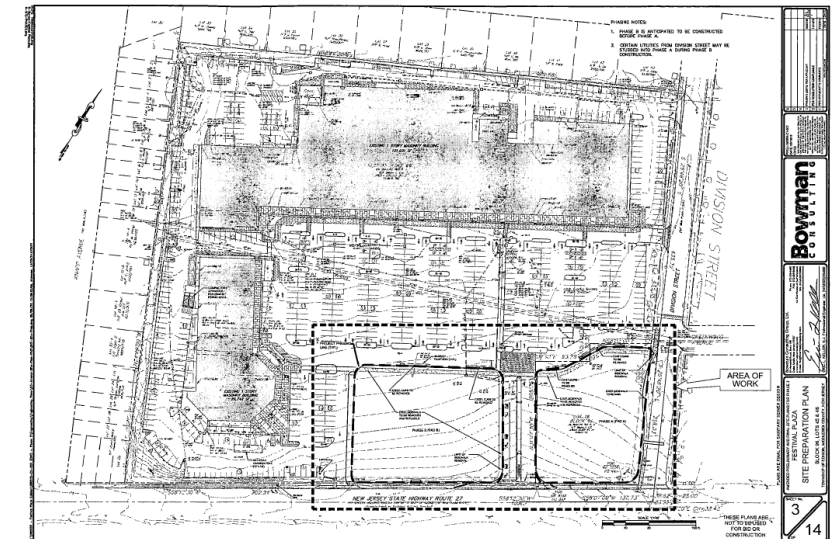
15 Acres in Edison Township Go to Builder — New Cranford House Sold

Fifteen acres on Linden Highway at Route 27 in Edison Township, N. J., have been purchased by Philip J. Levin, builder, for improvement with a shopping center. The property was sold by Sommer Bros. The center will contain 125,000 square feet of first-floor space and parking for 1,500 cars. Leases have been made with the American Stores Company and W. T. Grant.

*

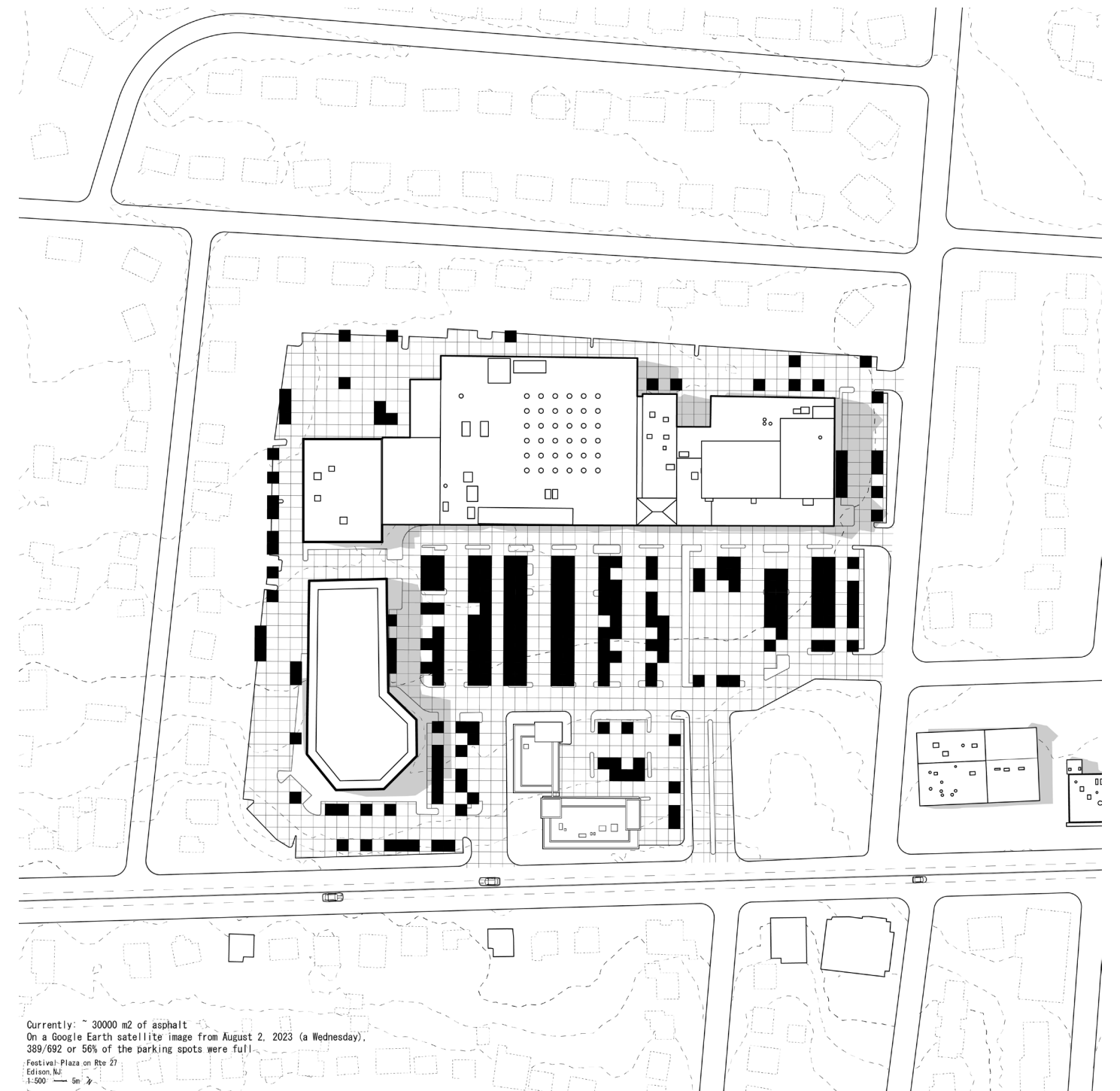
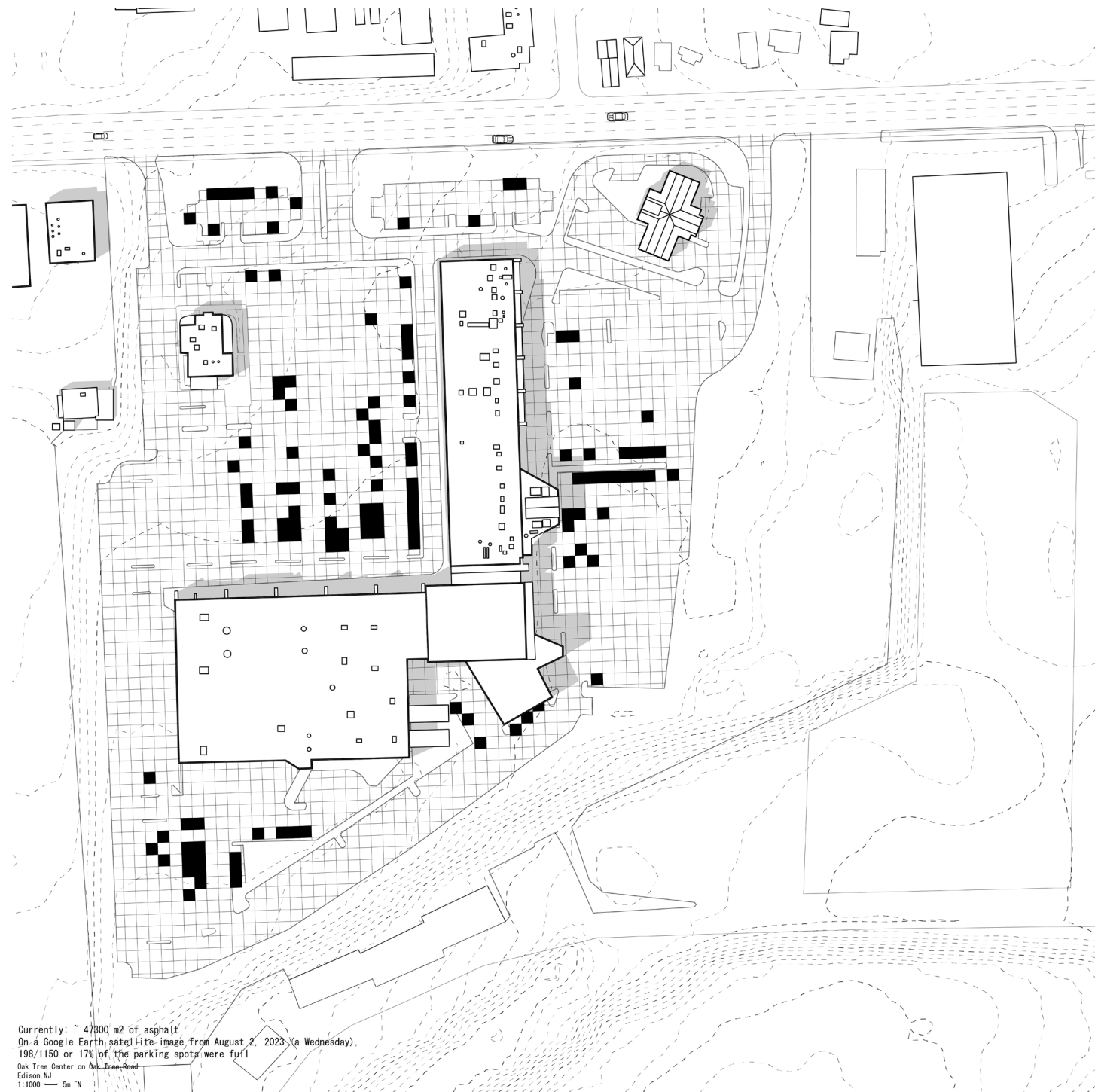


Rte. 27



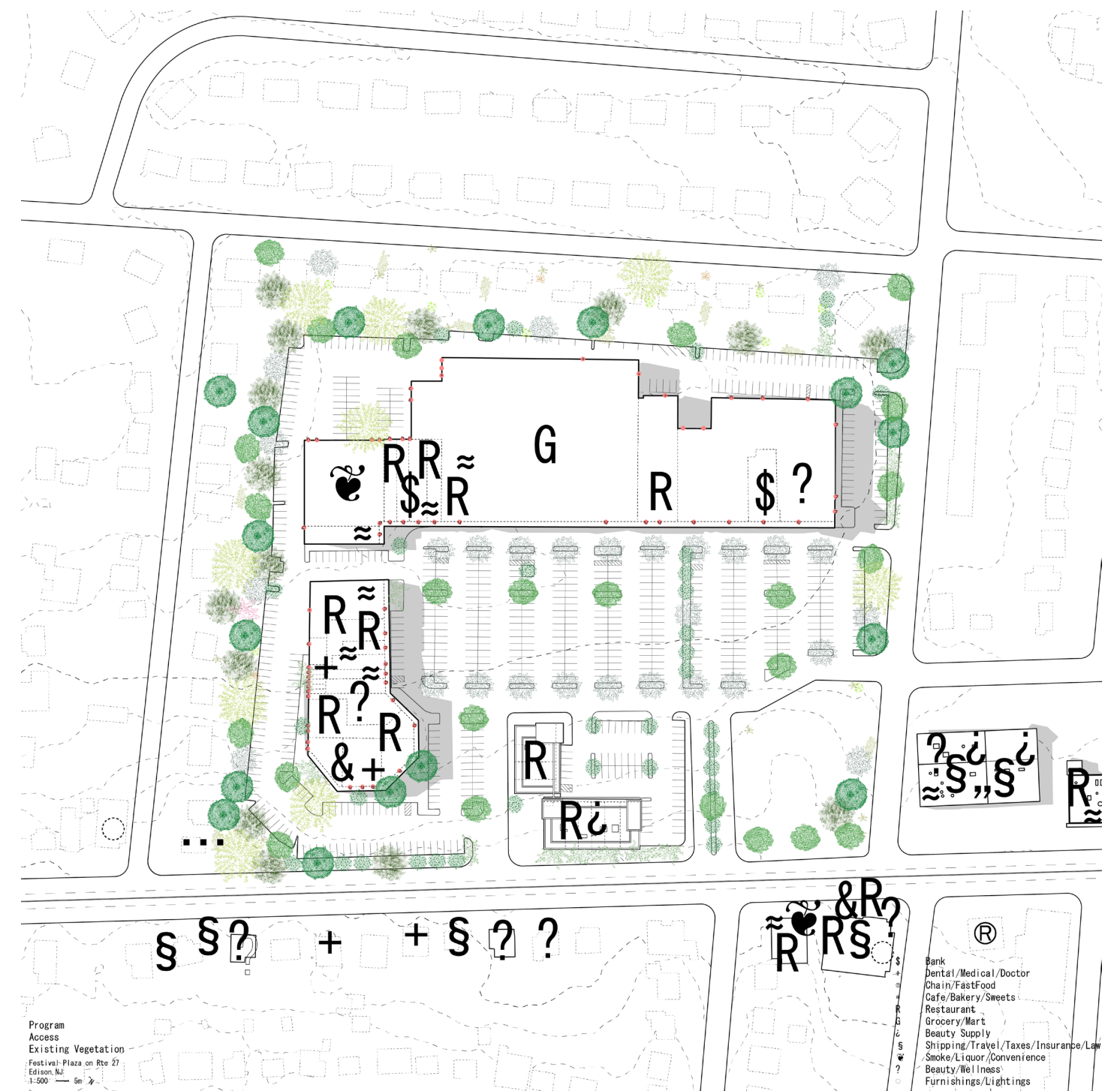
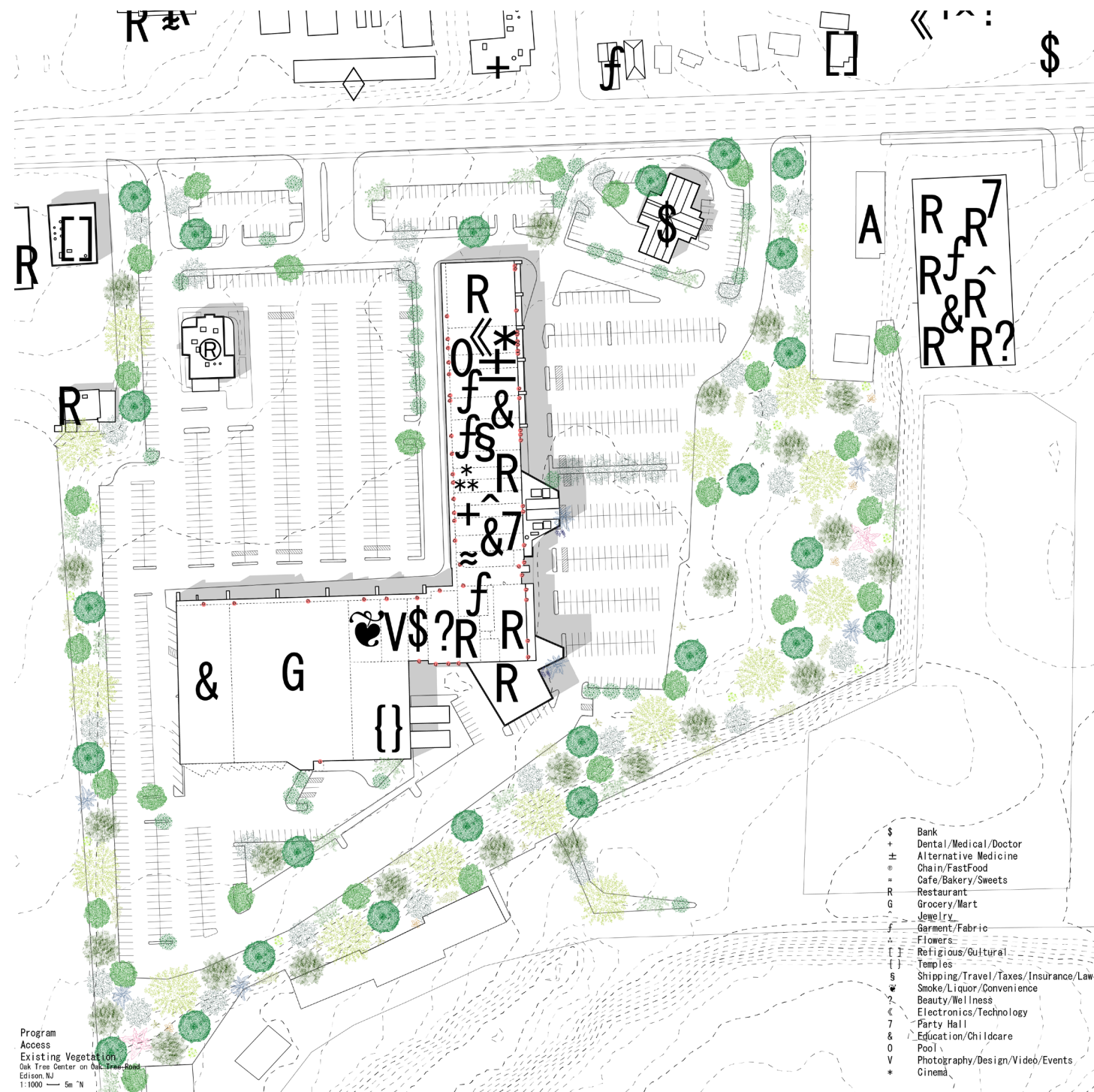
Drive-in movies became strip malls, shop-rites became India Grocers, Aldi became H-Mart. Through these archives, we can also begin to see the identity of strip malls as products of capital flows into the decentralization of the city, within which strip malls were constructed to house essential commercial functions. They were designed, constructed, and maintained cheaply, again with asphalt as the predominant material.

A study of the sites: Parking



Looking at the site physically, we can see patterns in the use, particularly of parking. In Festival Plaza, there is a continuous use of the parking lot with a relatively even distribution of cars. However, at Oak Tree Center, there are waves of use in different zones. Areas around the cinema, temple, and party hall are all activated and swell at different times.

A study of the sites:
Access, program, and vegetation



I also examined the access points in each site, as well as the program to understand physically and programmatically how each building is used.

Finally, I took a record of some of the existing vegetation of each site.

Plant migrations, human migrations

Through making these drawings, I was able to engage with an interest in global plant and human migrations by looking at how such a macro scale of movement manifests in a relatively micro site of Edison, New Jersey. This part of the project is also about understanding how people have related to plants, how they relate to them now, and how that has resulted in these 35 species living together in New Jersey.

Working through issues of narrative and memory throughout my representation, this project explores how narrative and memory can both drive global plant movements as well as a responsive design.

These drawings also serve to make evident the parallel politicizations of human and plant movements, as the rhetoric of anti-immigration is often deployed in that of ecological control, and the non-human has often been deployed as a metaphor for the ethnic Other.

This design inverts these tropes, instead envisioning a space that embraces the spontaneity of activity, human and non-human, already present in the site.

A Study of the Plants of the Strip

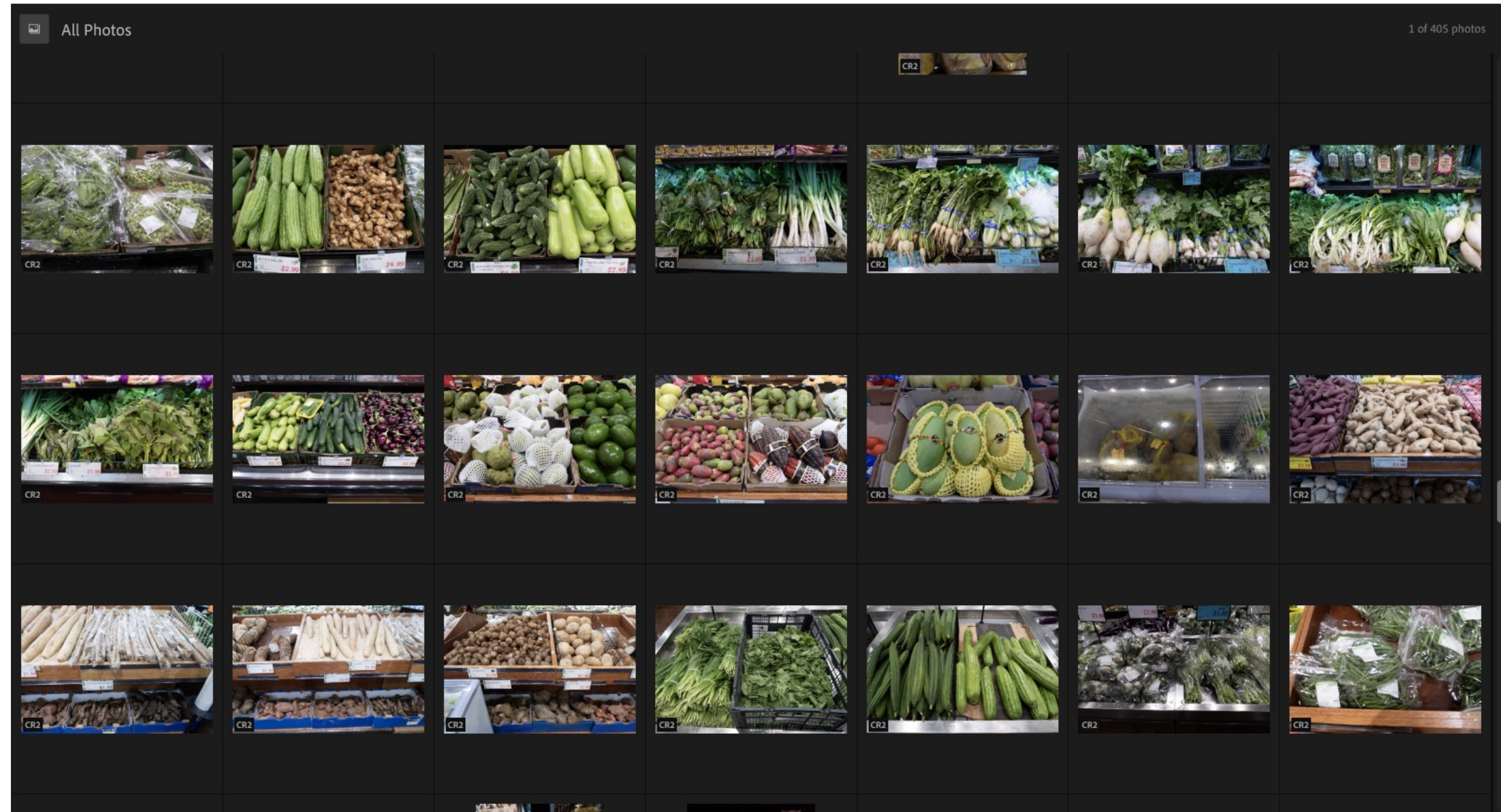
E15

fx Artemesia Vulgaris

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
1	India Grocers		H-Mart		Spontaneous	Planted		Pozed (Outside)	Plastic	Supermarket Staples				
2	Toover		Scallion		Tree of Heaven	Boxwood		Dypsis luteascens	Mala: Marigold	garlic				
3	Valor bean		Leek		Asiatic Dayflower	Eastern Redbud		Monstera	Oranges	red onion				
4	Fansi		Chinese broccoli		Juniper	Prunus Semulata		Begonia cucullata	Phalaenopsis C	yellow onion				
5	Pakora chili		Lemon grass		White Clover	Norway Spruce		Ficus Benjamin	Hedera Helix	sweet onion				
6	Serrano		Banana flower		English Ivy???	Juniperus Horizontalis		Rosemary	Monstera	vidalia onion				
7	Jalapeno		Perilla		Dandelion	Euonymus Fortunei		Kalanchoe	Nephrolepis ex	dinosaur kale				
8	Katra tamarind		Big green onion		Indian strawberry	Miscanthus sinensis		Catharantus rose	Dypsis lutescens	collard greens				
9	Desi red carrot		Mallow		Meadow Foxtail	Barbery		Rhododendron	Phoenix roebeler	butter lettuce				
10	Banana Stem		Crown daisy		Black walnut	Honey locust		Common petunia	Ochna integerrima	iceberg lettuce				
11	Jackfruit		Napa cabbage		Fall panicum	Norway Maple		Rosa Rubiginosa	Pink cherry	broccoli				
12	Kirbi		Dropwort		hemp dogbane??	Rose		Tagetes erecta	Roses	celery				
13	Cucumber		Radish tops		Euphorbia macul	Grass??		Pozed (inside)	Sunflower	carrots				
14	Mukhwaa		Daiikon		Dysphania pumil	Daylilies		Narcissus Bulbs	Cranberry	yellow potatoes				
15	Curry leaves		Korean mustard leaf		Artemesia Vulg	Rhododendron		Mala: Marigolds	Spruce	red potatoes				
16	Patra leaves (colocasia)		Young radish		Japanese Hone	Blue spruce		Rose	Peonies	russett potatoes				
17	Bliva patra (Baet)		Baby napa		Pin Oak	Korusa Dogwood		Dracanea fragran	Jasmine (SAME)	sweet potatoes				
18	Coconut puja		Perlimmon/fuyu		Pinus Strobus	Black locust		Epipremnum aur	Apricot	corn				
19	Dudhi (calabash)		Thai eggplant		Swamp White os	American Holly		Catharantus roseus		beets				
20	Fenugreek		Indian eggplant		Celastrus orbicul	Callery Pear		Espada de Joao		spinach				
21	Guava		Long hot green pepper		Calystegia sepiu	Gingko		Dracaena sanderlana		portabello mushrooms				
22	Matar - PEA		Asian pear		Chicorium intyph	Leyland Cypress		Orange		tomatoes				
23	Okra		Cacao fruit		Norway maple	Crape Myrtle		Lime		cauliflower				
24	Parvol		Sapote		Buddleja davidii	Liriope		Tomato		zucchini				
25	Fiat valora		Soursop		Callery Pear	Arborvitae		Camellia		cucumber				
26	Lavingya patra - colocasia		Avocado florida		Acer negundo	Camellia Japonica				squash				
27	Desi papdi		D'anjour		Humulus lupulus	Azaleas				pepper				
28	Mooli - white radish		Purple yam		Plantago major	Pinus Strobus				green pea				
29	Boniato		Durian		Plantago lanceol	Yucca filamentosa				green beans				
30	Tandalja bhaji		Taro		Panicum	Japanese Maple				radish				
31	Yuca		Jicama		Glechoma heder	Photinia serratifolia				eggplant				
32	Ani - colocasia		Malnga		Lamium amplexi	Hydranglea				Kiwi				
33	Chiku		Yellow yam		Polygonum	Black eyed susans				strawberry				
34	Suran		White yam		Securigera varia	Phytolacca americana				banana				
35	Ratalu		Battata		Koelreuteria pani	Chamaecyparis pisifera				blueberry				
36	Banana flower		Yamper		Ipomoea hederac	Trumpet vine				blackberry				
37	Chayote		Nagaimo		Jerusalem artio	Hibiscus				wheat				
38	Hawai'i Mamaki		Purple sweet potato		Solidago alitissin	Wisteria Cinensis				rice				
39	Dosakaya		Coconut		Digitarium ischae	Acer saccharinum				lemon				
40	Plantain		White coconut			Sunflower				lime				
41	Papaya		Yautma malanga blanca							coconut				
42	Pineapple		Burdock							avocado				
43	Ladu		Sunchoke							asparagus				
44	Handvo		Oyster mushroom							oranges				
45	Millet		Korean hot pepper							watermelon				

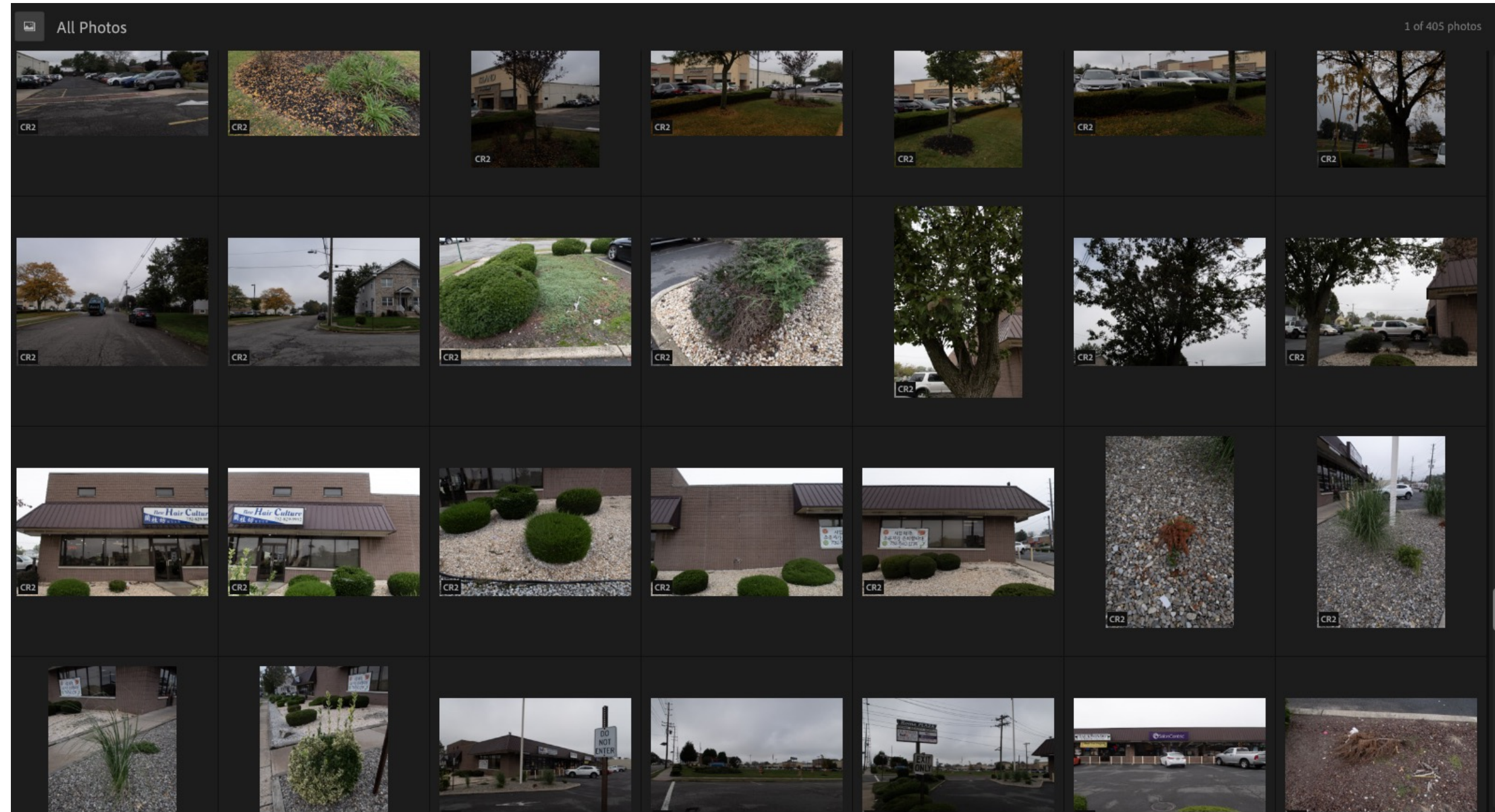
While this focused on each site, I also used photos taken along each strip to record the arterial plant communities, and different plantings at different plazas.

Plants Inside



























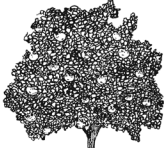




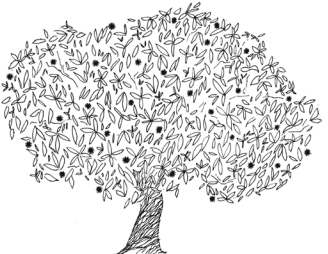
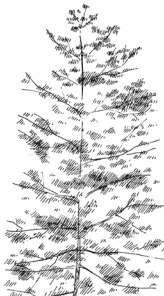



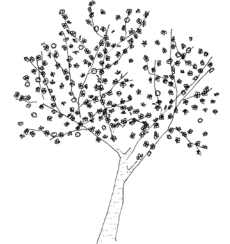
I cataloged the produce and dried goods in India Grocers at Oak Tree Center, then at H-Mart, comparing those with a supermarket that's not catering to culturally specific wants (Whole Foods). I looked at potted plants used decoratively, both inside and outside, as well as plastic plants in many forms.

Plants Outside

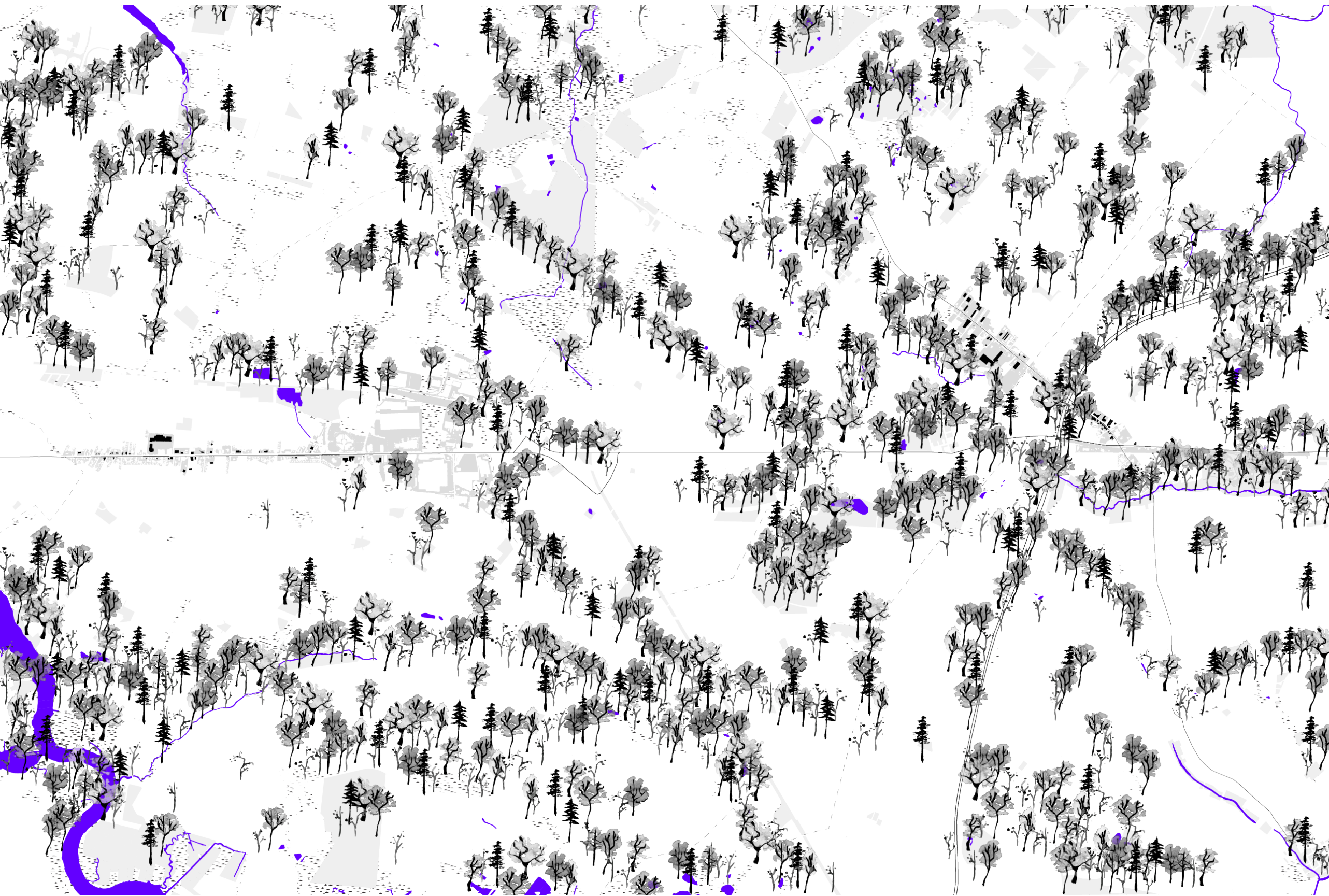


Then also catalogued some of the plants found walking around outside, including more potted and more plastic ones. I recorded spontaneous plants, those found growing in the back of house, alongside the arteries. I also recorded those planted intentionally by people, often used decoratively in the strip mall plazas.

Plants of the New Jersey Strip

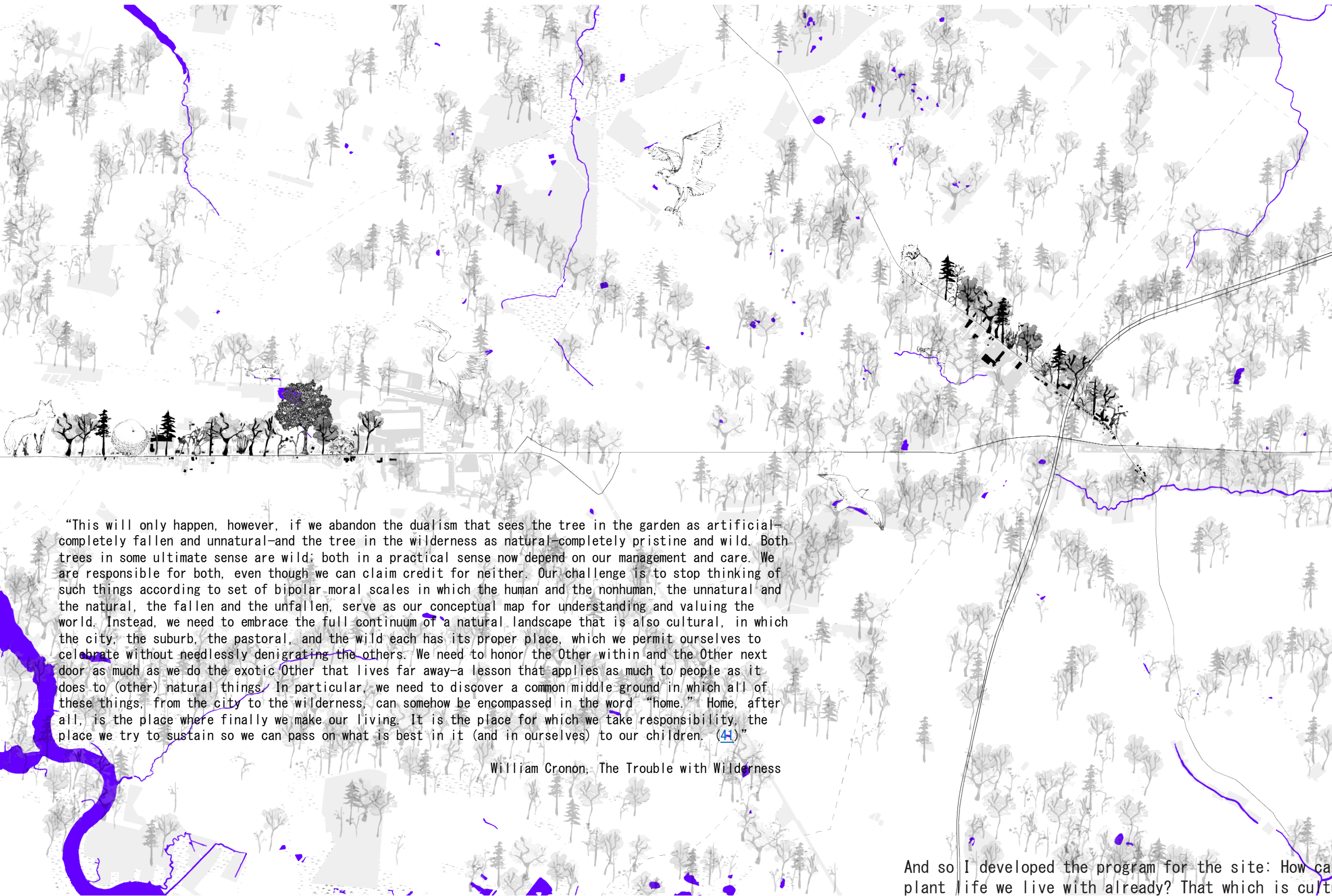
India Grocers, Oak Tree Center	H-Mart, Festival Plaza	Spontaneous	Planted	Potted	Plastic	Generic American Supermarket Staples
 <i>capiscum anuum</i>	 <i>raphanus sativus</i>	 <i>artemesia vulgaris</i>	 <i>buxus sempervirens</i>	 <i>dracaena sanderiana</i>	 <i>citrus reticulata</i>	 <i>allium cepa</i>
 <i>vigna radiata</i>	 <i>momordica charantia</i>	 <i>lonicera japonica</i>	 <i>juniperis horizontalis</i>	 <i>camellia japonica</i>	 <i>tagetes erecta</i>	 <i>solanum lycopersicum</i>
 <i>lagenaria siceraria</i>	 <i>colocasia esculata</i>	 <i>helianthus tuberosus</i>	 <i>cercis canadensis</i>	 <i>ficus benjamina</i>	 <i>jasminum sambac</i>	 <i>ipomea batatas</i>
 <i>mangifera indica</i>	 <i>diospyros kaki</i>	 <i>ailanthus altissima</i>	 <i>pyrus calleryana</i>	 <i>rhododendron spp.</i>	 <i>phalaenopsis amabilis</i>	 <i>musa x paradisiaca</i>
 <i>aegle marmelos</i>	 <i>castanea crenata</i>	 <i>pinus strobus</i>	 <i>cupressus x leylandii</i>	 <i>dypsis lutescens</i>	 <i>nephrolepis exaltata</i>	 <i>prunus armeniaca</i>

I used this to make a catalogue of 35 plants of interest to understand the plant life already existing on the site, and importantly, how each species is being used by the community that lives there.



Current environments
Water, wetlands, forest

I also wanted to look at the strips in a different way, for different migrations. How did the species I found get where they are? I mapped the road ways to show the movement of grocery store stock and people/cars as agents in dispersal with the found environmental conditions. The latter part is especially important in considering yet another migration, those necessitated by climate change as species viable ranges change with shifting temperatures, wetness, and other environmental conditions.



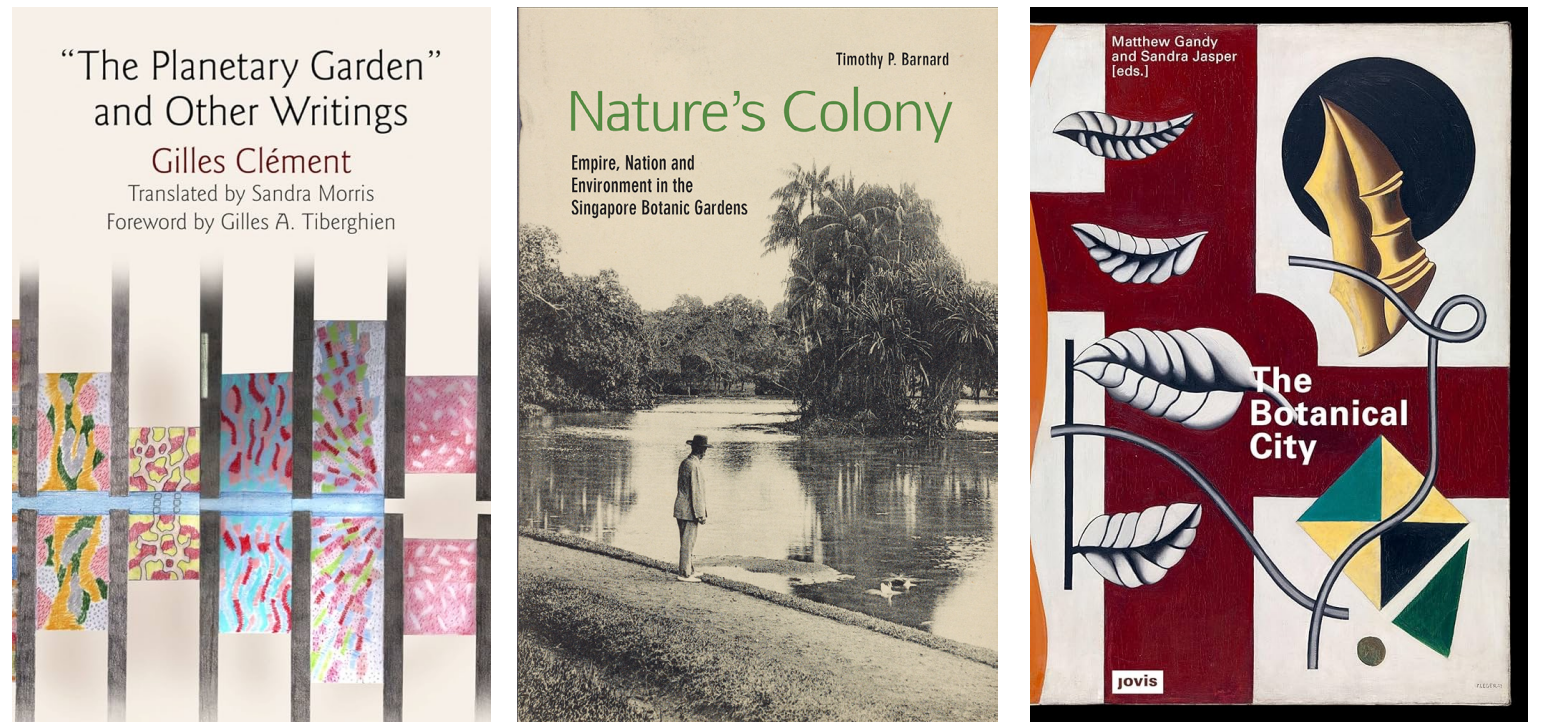
“This will only happen, however, if we abandon the dualism that sees the tree in the garden as artificial—completely fallen and unnatural—and the tree in the wilderness as natural—completely pristine and wild. Both trees in some ultimate sense are wild; both in a practical sense now depend on our management and care. We are responsible for both, even though we can claim credit for neither. Our challenge is to stop thinking of such things according to set of bipolar moral scales in which the human and the nonhuman, the unnatural and the natural, the fallen and the unfallen, serve as our conceptual map for understanding and valuing the world. Instead, we need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper place, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others. We need to honor the Other within and the Other next door as much as we do the exotic Other that lives far away—a lesson that applies as much to people as it does to (other) natural things. In particular, we need to discover a common middle ground in which all of these things, from the city to the wilderness, can somehow be encompassed in the word “home.” Home, after all, is the place where finally we make our living. It is the place for which we take responsibility, the place we try to sustain so we can pass on what is best in it (and in ourselves) to our children. (4)”

William Cronon, *The Trouble with Wilderness*

And then?

And so I developed the program for the site: How can we use the parking lot to reveal the plant life we live with already? That which is cultural, cultivated, the accidentally introduced, etc... So that we can pay closer attention to the environment around us? Can the plants inside, often grown in warmer, wetter climates, help maintain the biodiversity of New Jersey? Can we use the strip mall plaza, because of its artificialness, asphalt-ness, and car pollution from the artery as test sites to see how new species interact with the New Jersey environment? And how can we do that while maintain the social value of the parking lot as a site for spontaneous activity and culture?

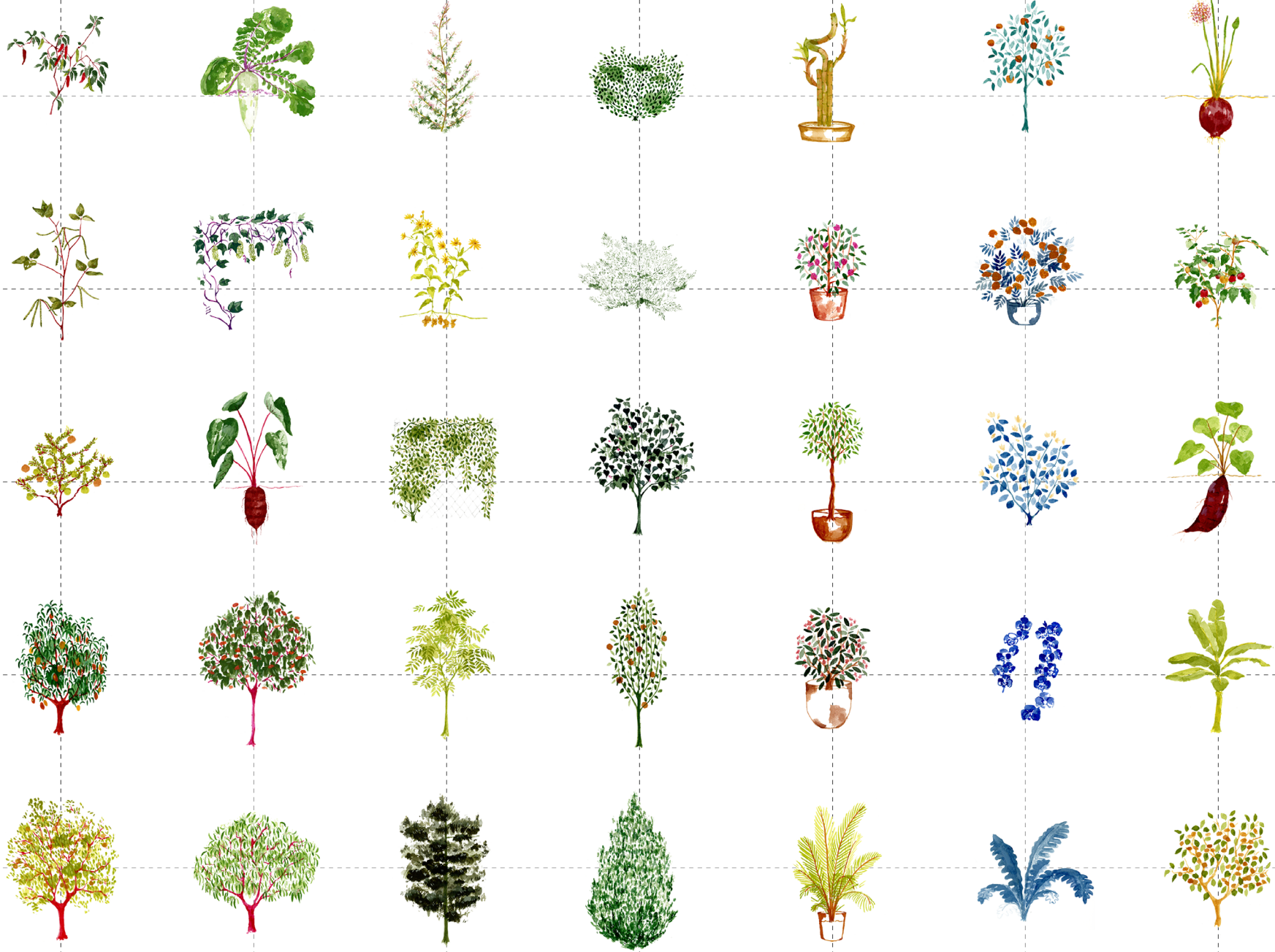
The Plant as Metaphor



Left: Paperwork and the Will of Capital by Taryn Simon

The introduction of plants of course falls into a complex lineage of botanical transplantation, with acclimatization used historically for colonial propagation to construct plantations. For example, rubber was brought from South America to the Singapore Botanic Gardens to be propagated for plantations in what was then British Malaya.

Plants of the Strip:
Global Movement



However, plants are being introduced here for different reasons. First, as a response to climate change, to use these plots to test interactions with other species and the New Jersey climate, where the asphalt strip can be set up as piecemeal. It is also a way of securing, communing, and localizing foodways, by introducing plants that are already there and used by the community within the grocery store. This process instead introduces culture as a part of environmental management, gives agency to the community to plant their own food, and reveals the migrations that happens at different scales for us and the plants we live with.

Plants of the Strip: Global Movement



The plants in the catalogue were chosen to all have complicated global histories. There are plants that have been growing wild in New Jersey for millennia, those introduced either intentionally or accidentally, those grown thousands of miles away and only in New Jersey through an exceedingly complex global shipping network.

There are plants endemic to the environments of regions these immigrants come from, those that grew wild in different regions (including the Americas) and became naturalized in others like Asia and culturally important, plants exported to be grown in other countries oftentimes through colonization and plantation, plants that may have floated the Pacific Ocean themselves and naturalized in the American continent in pre-Columbian times.

There are hybrids, cultivars, grafts, plants with different cultural, religious, medicinal, culinary significances, all which complicate the common language of Linnean nomenclature and the lenses through which we see plants.

ESSAY

The Aliens Have Landed! Reflections on the Rhetoric of Biological Invasions

BANU SUBRAMANIAM

Two years ago in a special issue on *Biological Invaders* in the prestigious journal *Science*, an article begins as follows:

One spring morning in 1995, ecologist Jayne Belnap walked into a dry grassland in Canyonlands National Park, Utah, an area that she has been studying for more than 15 years. “I literally stopped and went, ‘Oh my God!’ she recalls. The natural grassland—with needle grass, Indian rice grass, saltbush, and the occasional pinyon-juniper tree—that Belnap had seen the year before no longer existed; it had become overgrown with 2-foot-high Eurasian cheatgrass. “I was stunned,” says Belnap, “It was like the aliens had landed.” (Enserink 1999)

“As Nancy Tomes argues, our anxieties about social incorporation (associated with expanding markets, increasingly permeable borders and boundaries, growing affordability of travel, and mass immigration) have historically spilled into our conceptions of nature.”

Banu Subramanian, “The Aliens have landed!” (2001)

Swarms, floods and marauders: the toxic metaphors of the migration debate

David Shariatmadari



We're not being 'overwhelmed' by a 'tidal wave' of migrants. How can anyone justify this callous, misleading language?



Floods and waves are among the metaphors of inundation used to describe migrants. Waves hit Aberystwyth, Wales. Photograph: Keith Morris/Barcroft Media



And these lenses are complicated. These global histories find themselves in language, with the control of nature often linked with a rhetoric of anti-immigration. What gets labeled an invasive species, versus what gets naturalized? Many of the species I found outside, like the omnipresent boxwood, are already non-native. And many of the species found inside every grocery store are only there through the extremely destructive land use but still not considered invasive. Often, the reason is economic. For example, the Russian wheat aphid is considered such because it is a risk to wheat crops, which aren't even native to the US. Natural disasters are also invoked with mass immigration, with the all-too-often heard phrase, a “flood of migrants,” that demonstrates an invocation of mutual fears of parallel threats to the dominant lifeway: A fear of nature and a fear of the ethnic other.

Non-human and the ethnic “other”

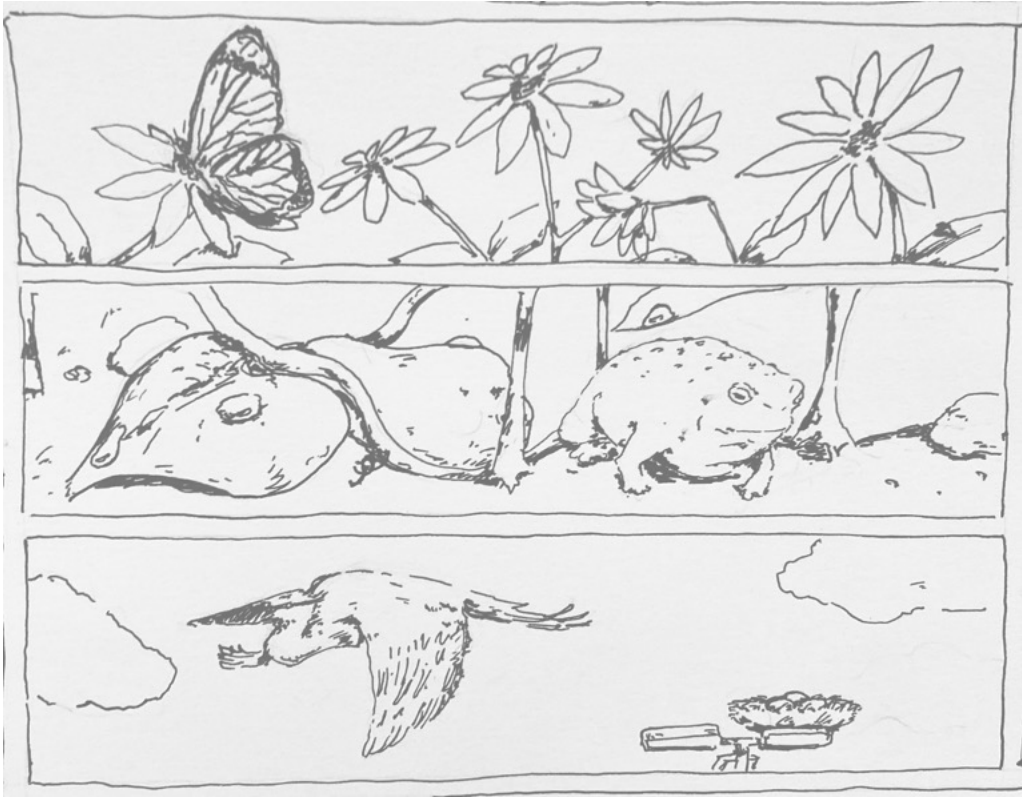
“Myrmecological texts are no exception; they do not only tell us about ants. Colonial-era myrmecological literature, I find, did in fact reflect and thus perpetuate some of the dominant, racist stereotypes of its day. In implicit ways, these texts reproduce the Orientalist dichotomy of civilization and savagery. Many of the key myrmecological texts written in this era were travel accounts that were just as concerned with the portrayal of the places and people of Latin America, Africa and Asia as they were with the study of tropical ants. At a time when notions of nature, bestiality and primitiveness were integral to the Orientalist construction of the non-white Other, the image of the tropical ant came to be intimately tied up with derogatory representations of non-European landscapes, inhabitants and animals. In this way, we might view the representation of ants in myrmecological literature as a product too of Orientalism. . .

Any analysis of the cultural history of natural history requires an understanding that the definition of what is “natural” and what is “human” has shifted over time.”

Carissa Chew, *The ant as metaphor: Orientalism, imperialism, and myrmecology* (2018)

Furthermore, the non-human has often been deployed or invoked as a way of dehumanizing ethnic “Others”. This has manifested in public and private space, and famously suburbs, where ethnic “Others” are often treated as weeds to be kept out.

The parking lot as a multi-species site of spontaneity



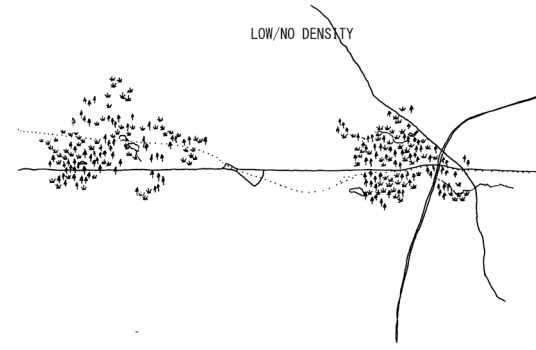
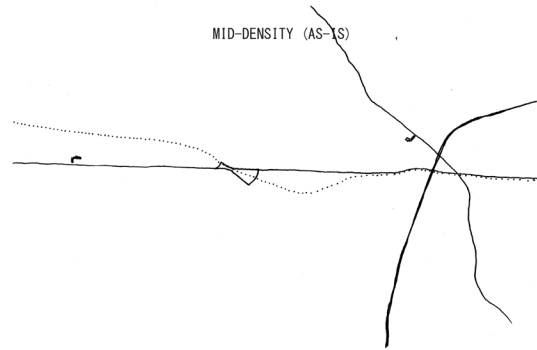
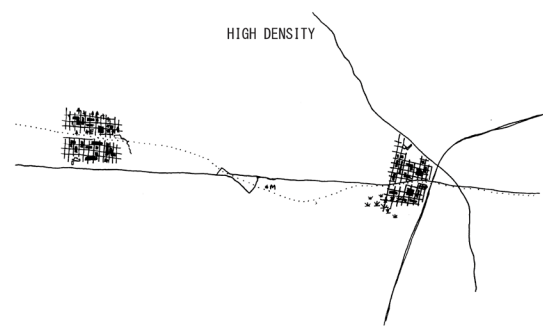
Can we build a solidarity of the “Other” in the parking lot, inviting human and non-human agents to craft the site?

Edison(s) of the Future

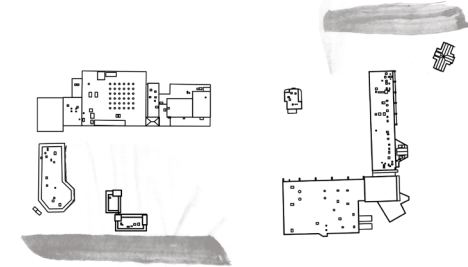
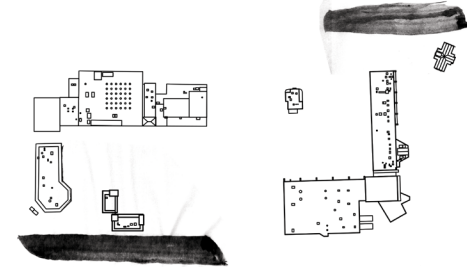
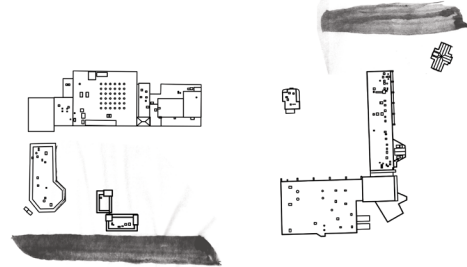
HIGH DENSITY

MID-DENSITY (AS-IS)

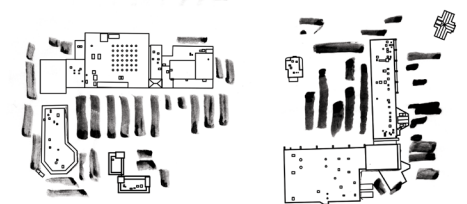
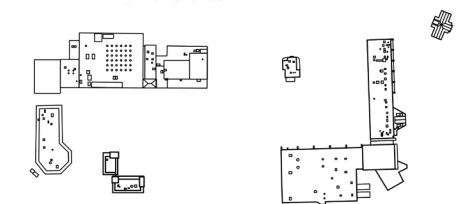
LOW/NO DENSITY



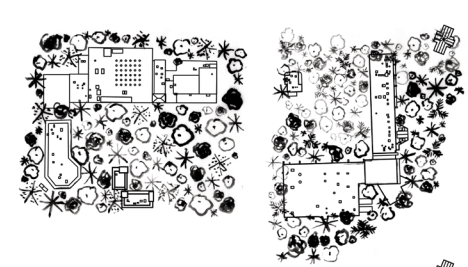
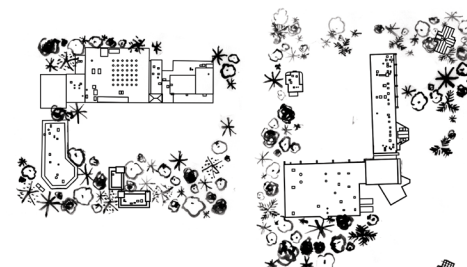
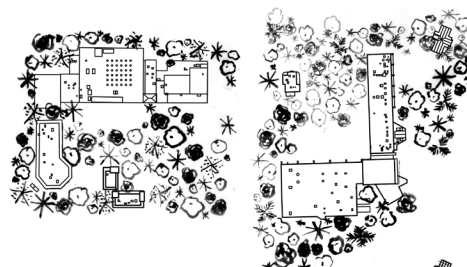
Road use



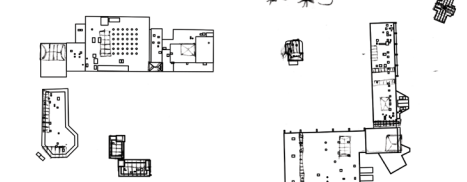
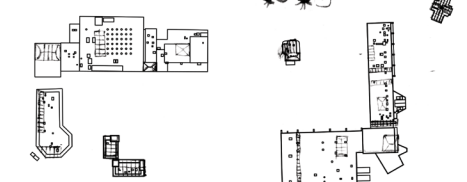
Parking lot use



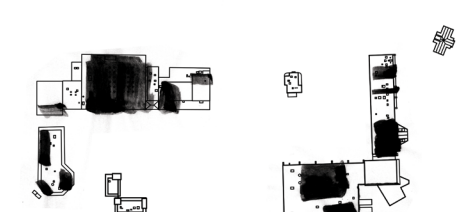
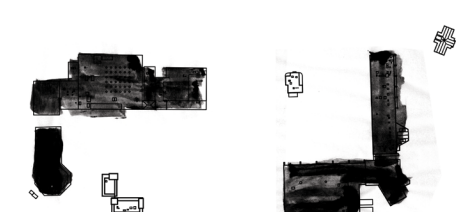
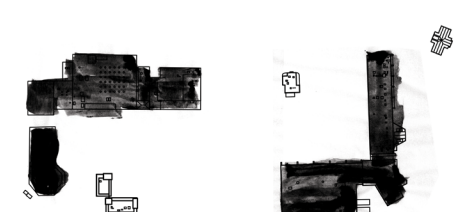
Stripping the parking lot



Greenhouses



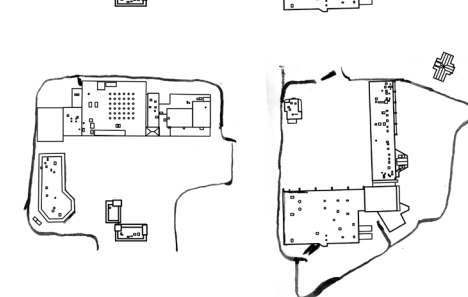
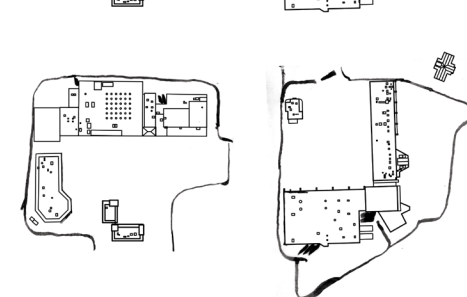
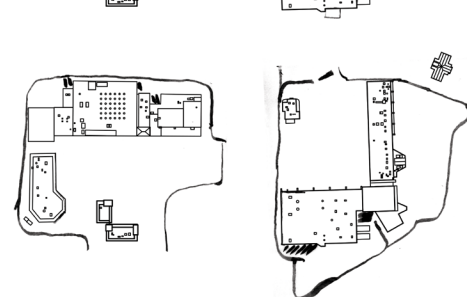
Indoor program



Outdoor program



Truck access

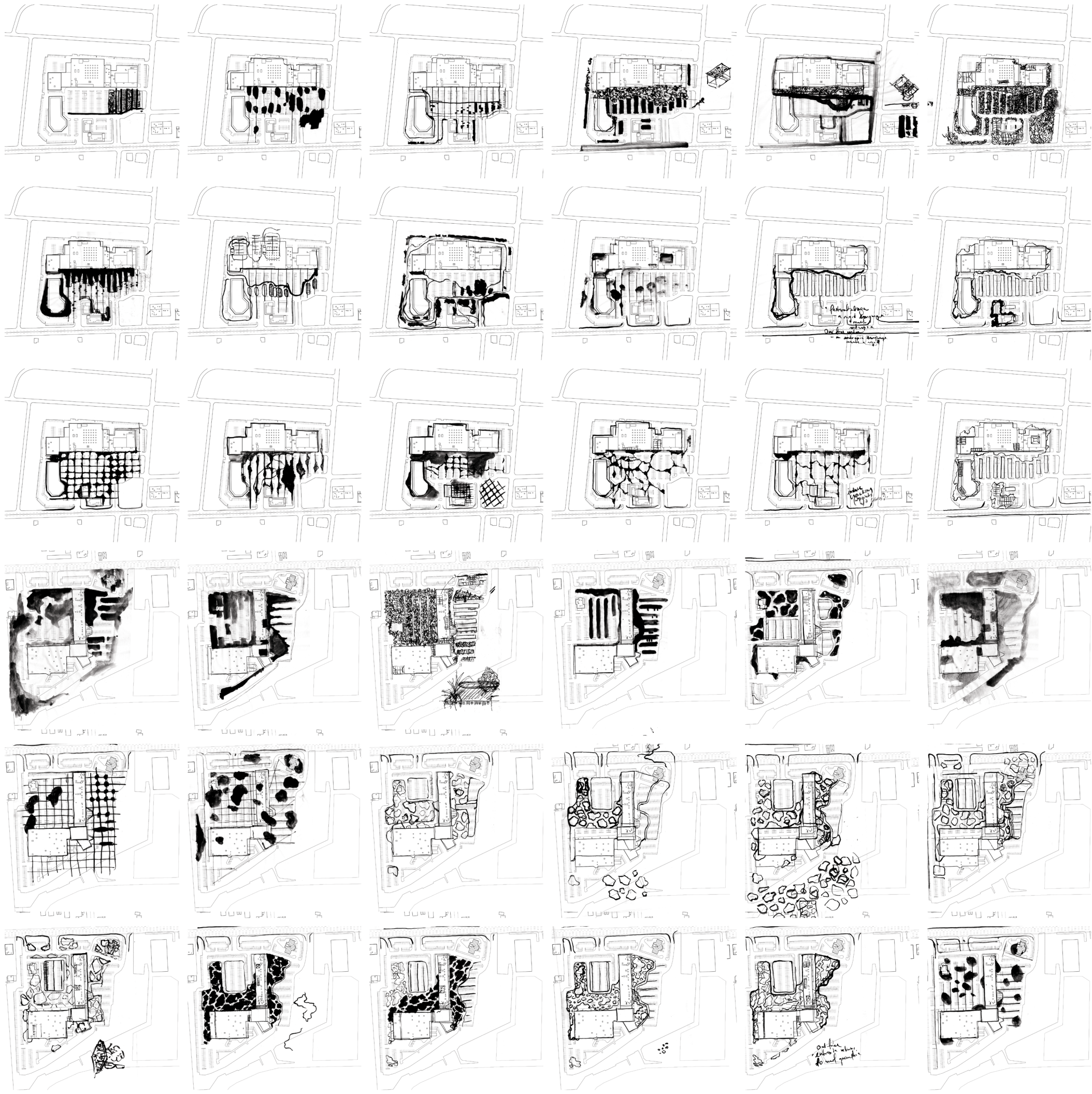


I also wanted to consider different scenarios for the future of the suburb. Edison is well served by public transportation, with three Northeast Corridor stops (Edison Metuchen, and Metropark) as well as a robust bus network that could result in the area densifying. But further trends of moving to the city with younger generations could also result in a population decline.

Either way, there will hopefully be fewer people in cars in the future. I used three scenarios (low/no, mid/as-is, and high density) to see how the parking lot could transform programmatically and spatially, and how much asphalt could be removed from the site.



Also, many stores are closing along both strips, so there is a potential to develop interior spaces as well for new economies and ways of living.



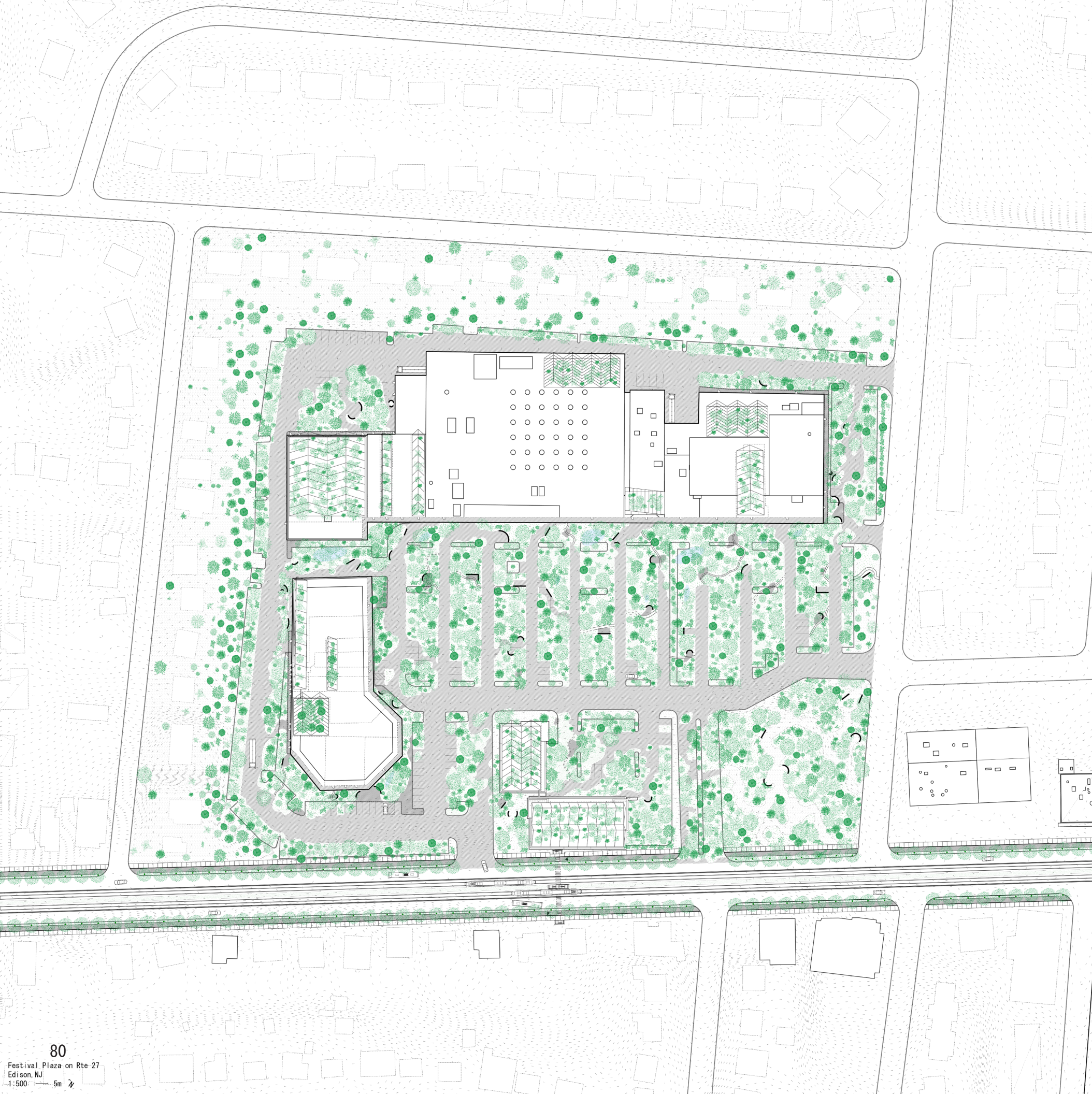
Considering these different programmatic and material needs, I developed 18 schema for each site that could be responsive to a changing suburb through different patterns of asphalt stripping.

Site Proposals

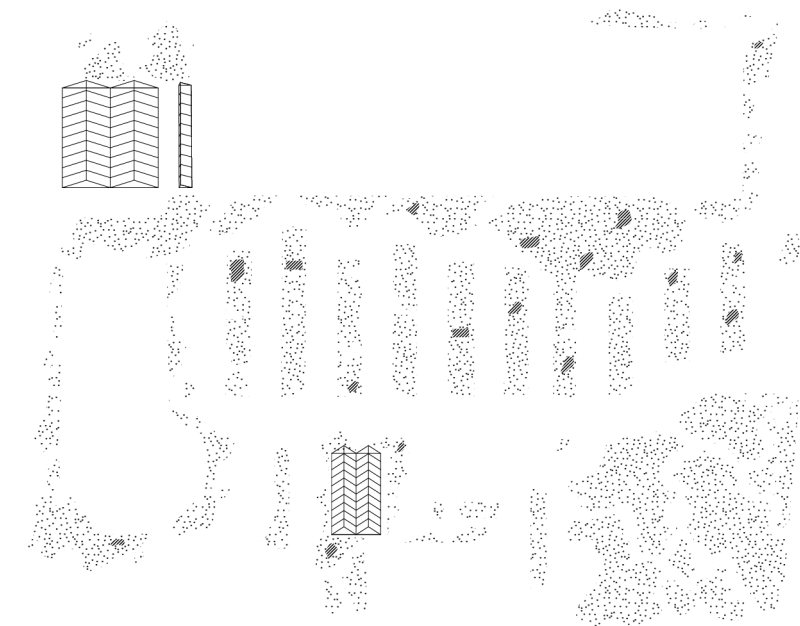
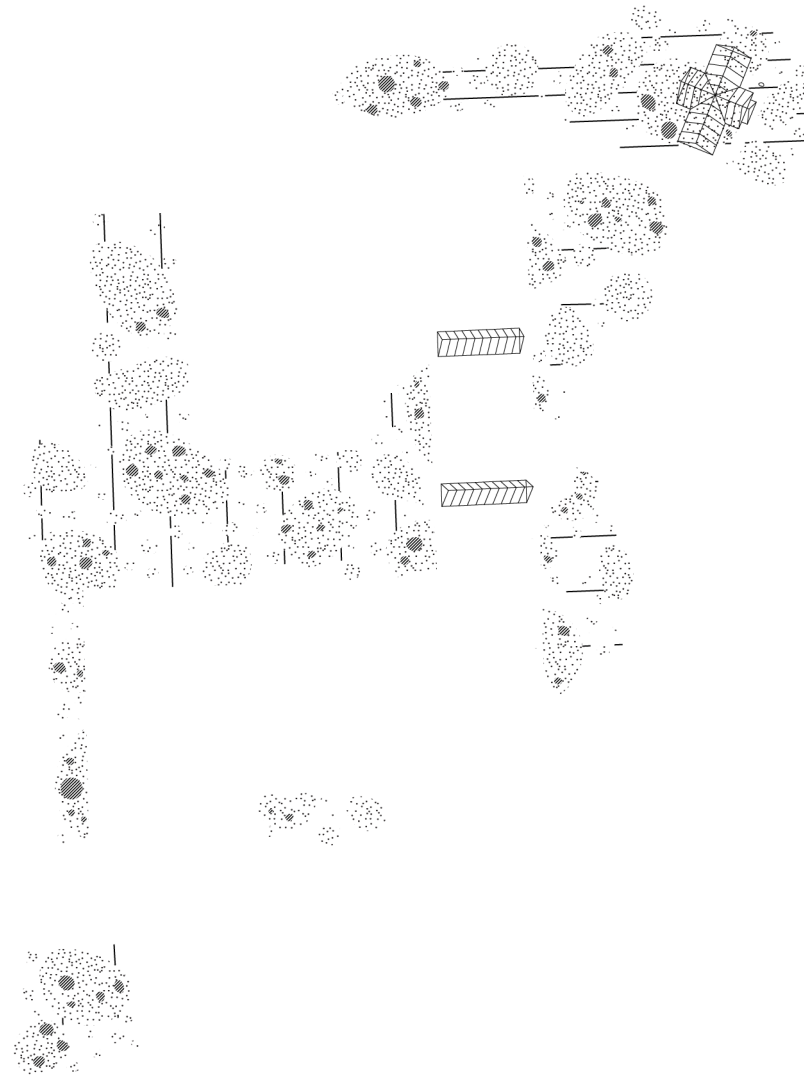
This project proposes a choreography of stripping asphalt that can respond to the changing built environment of suburban New Jersey: Each step proposes a stripping of asphalt depending on how the suburbs densify, depopulate, or stay as-is. The forms in either project respond to parking use patterns related to program inside the strip mall as well as building access and existing vegetation and topography. Each strip mall plaza parking lot consists of a de-paved surround that will host the introduction of species from within the strip mall outside, and through the progression will create new spaces to stimulate spontaneous growth. This will allow both for the study of how these plants interact, but also to test potential plant resiliencies as New Jersey warms with climate change.



I developed one of these on each plaza, planning a choreography of asphalt removal to respond to suburban change and as a vehicle for interfacing migrations of people and plants and how that lands in these two strip mall plazas in Edison, NJ. These two schemes create two mirroring sites shaped both by the people and other species that live there.



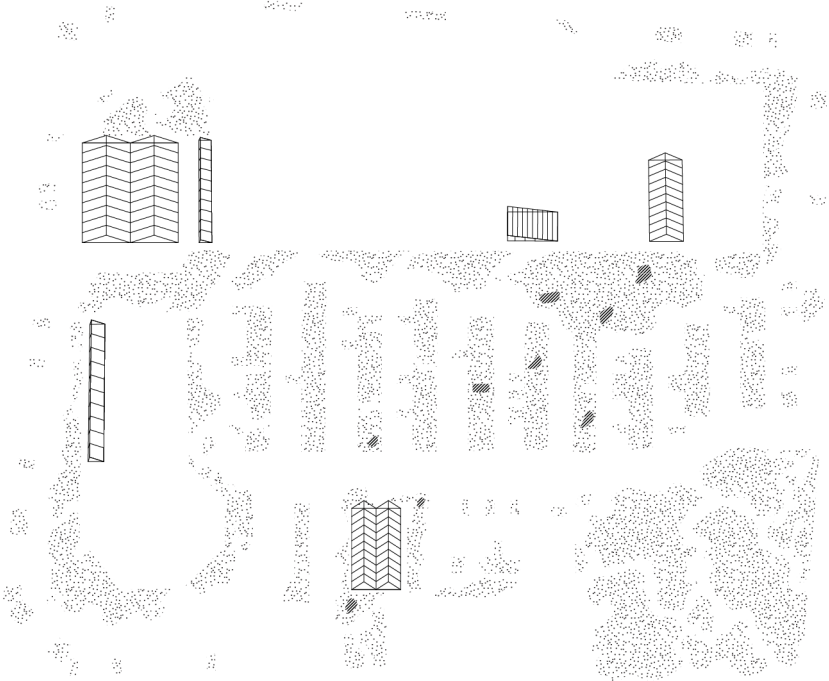
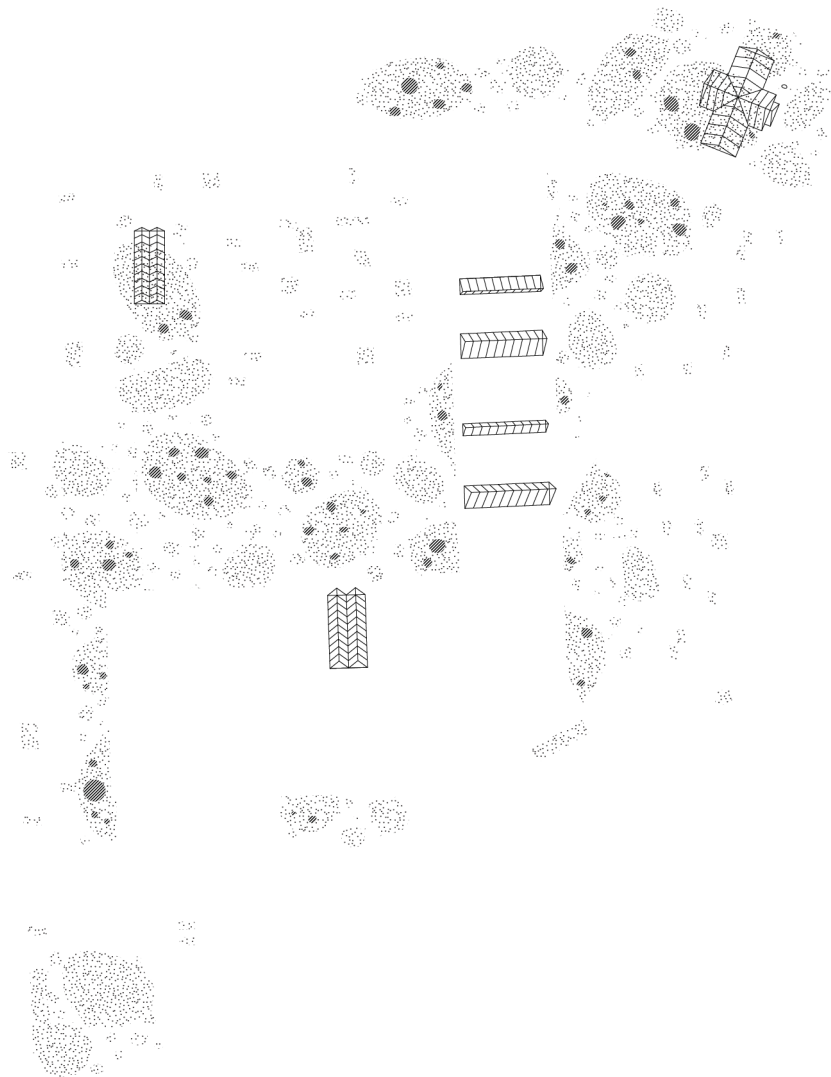
A choreography of asphalt stripping Step 1: Taking half the parking spaces



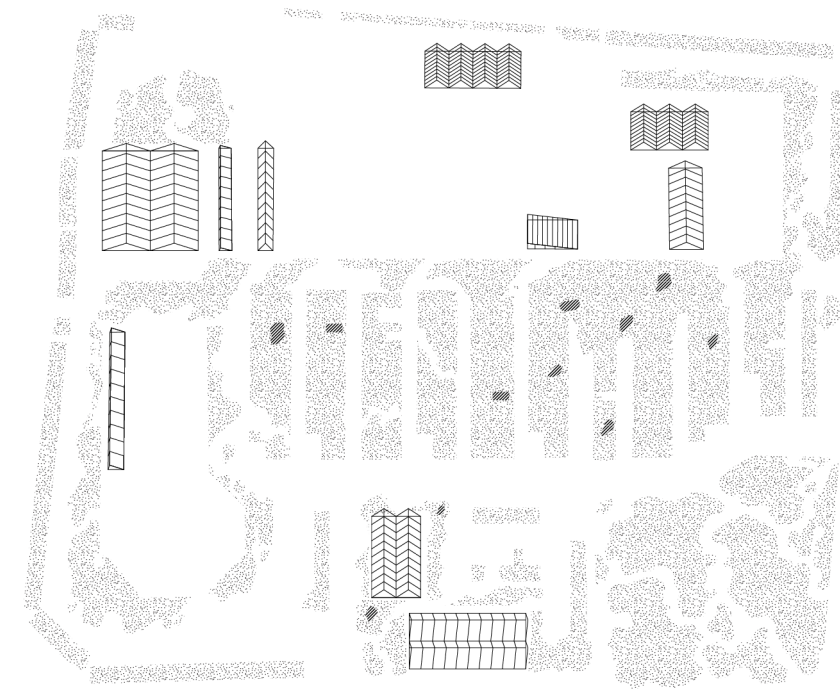
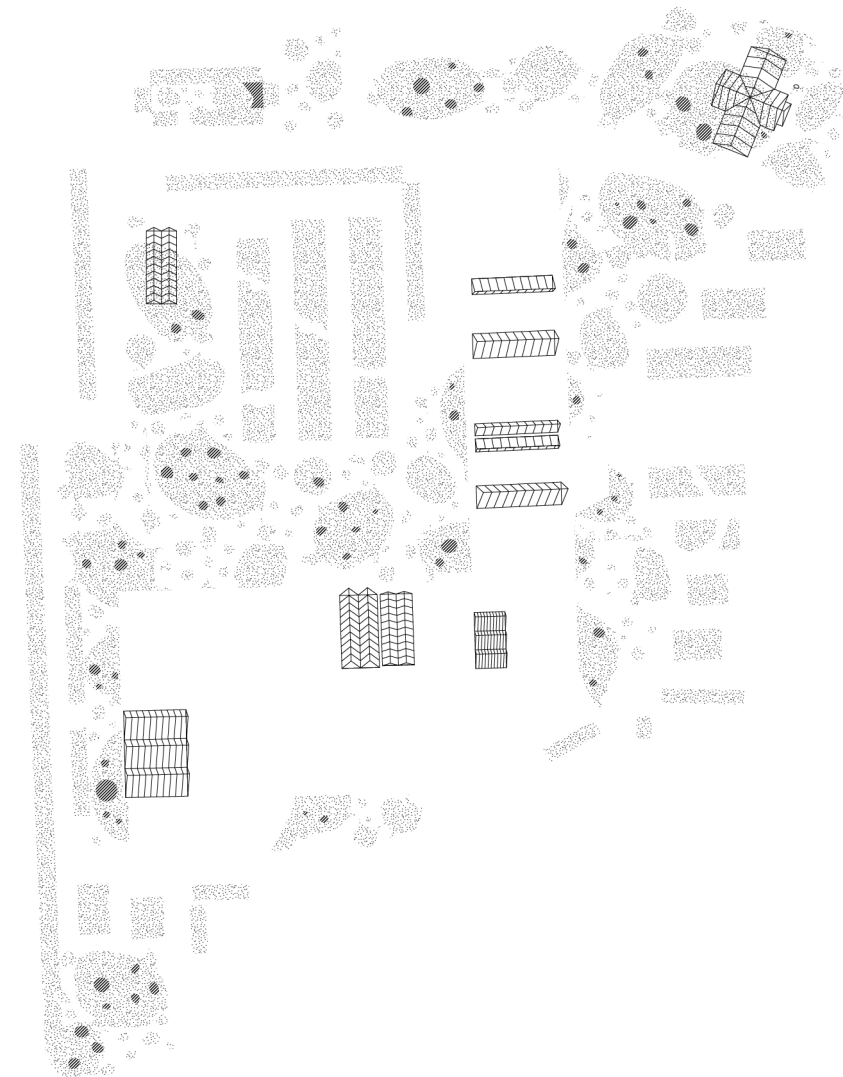
Since even at a high only around half of the parking spots are used, each scheme starts with taking over around half of the parking spaces. At Festival Plaza, the proposal starts by stripping half of each parking row of its asphalt and creating a surround to force an encounter of plants and people between the parking and the building. At Oak Tree Center, however, the design starts with a creation of zones near the areas that don't surge in parking use, where the surround becomes the initial stripping as a series of cut-outs to retain the heterogeneity of different zones present in different parking rows. Then, cuts are made through the asphalt that can be colonized with plants and grow with the freeze/thaw cycle.

If the density and form of Edison remain the same, the project can remain at this step, because half the parking spaces are retained and accessible.

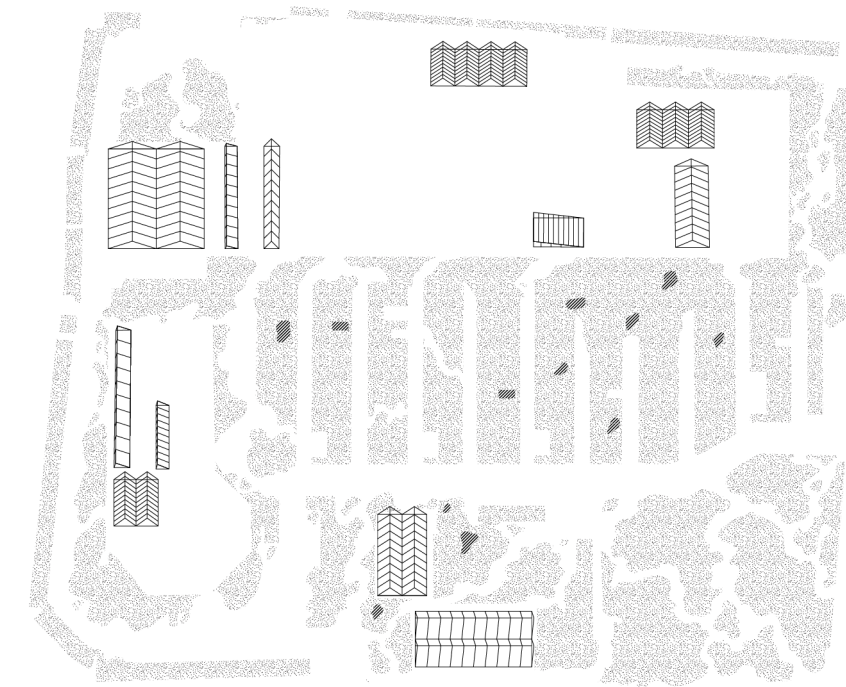
Step 2: Expanding, parking spot by parking spot



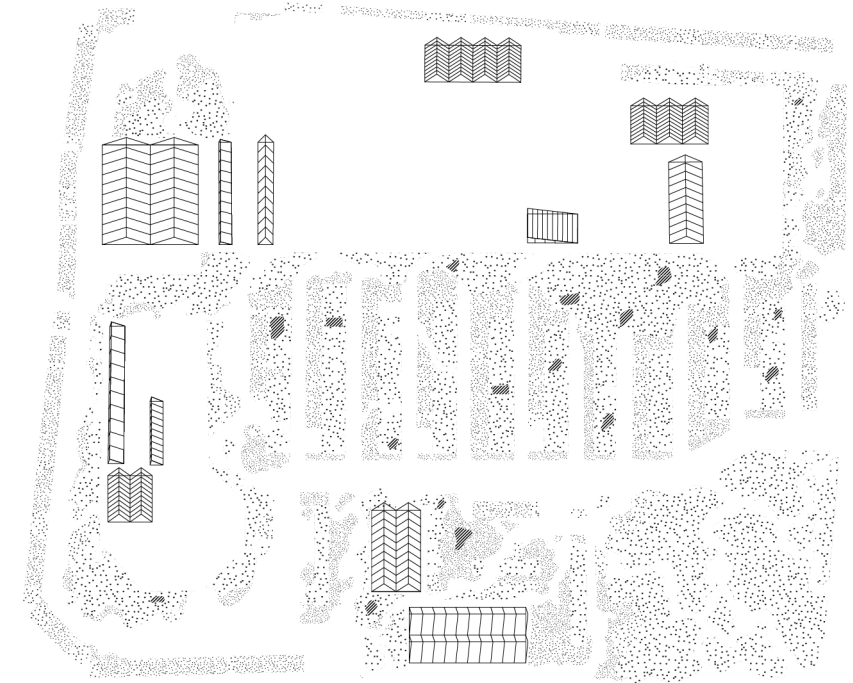
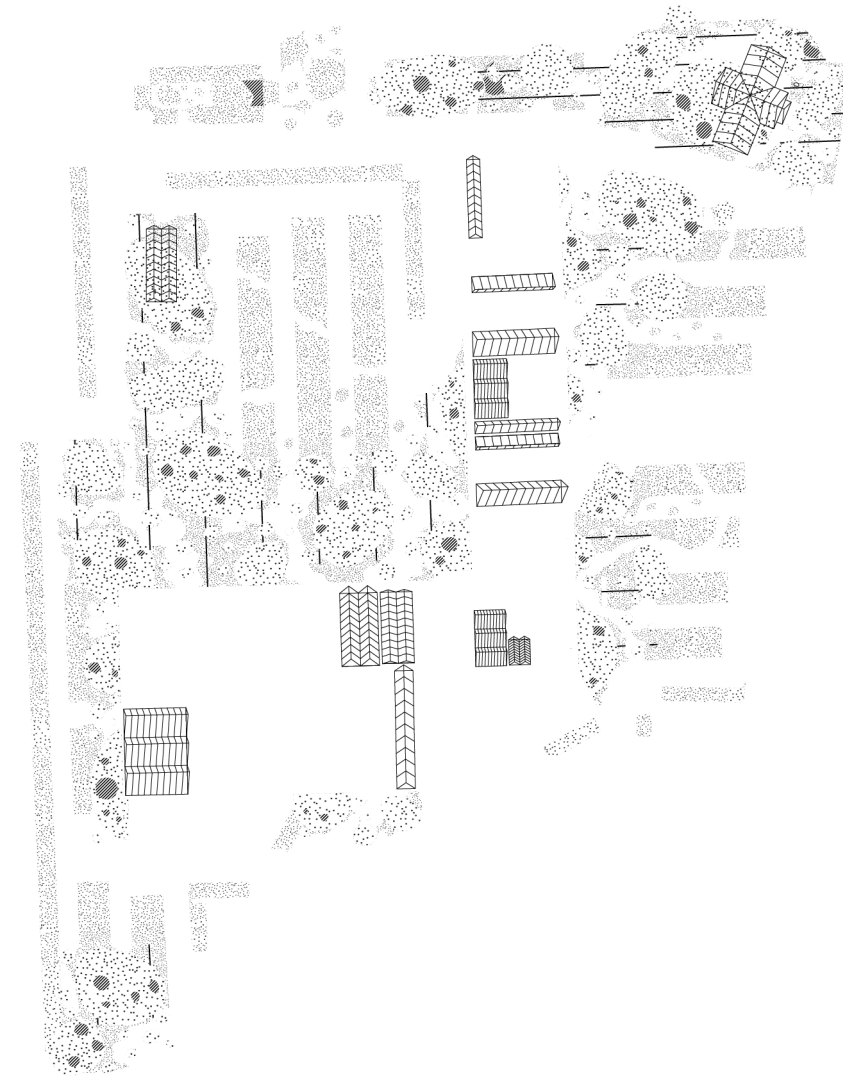
If Edison either densifies or empties, there will be fewer cars. So individual parking spaces can be stripped as car use decreases.



Eventually, the whole parking row will become exposed soil. As stores close or parts of stores want to change their models, areas of the strip mall itself can be converted into greenhouses.



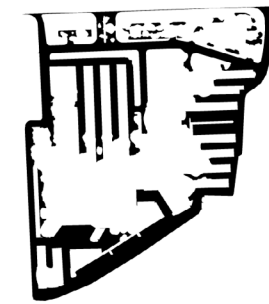
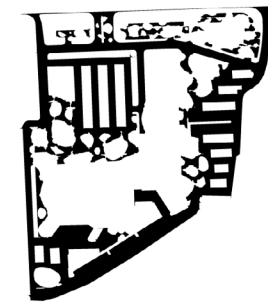
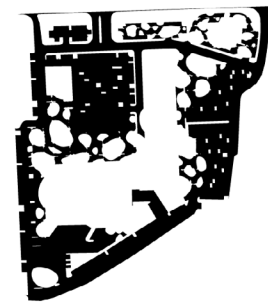
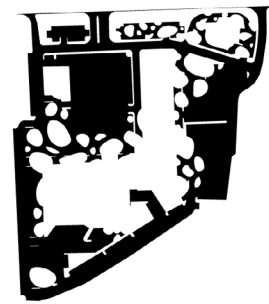
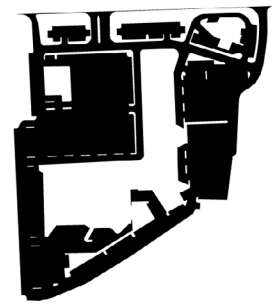
The exposed soil surround will be brought out to meet the parking rows, and all that will remain is enough asphalt to retain the asphalt identity, have some hardscape for activity, and have a circulation route and a few parking spots left for visitors and truckers/workers to retain building operations.



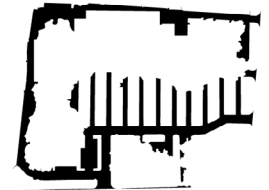
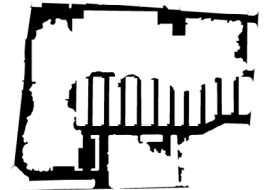
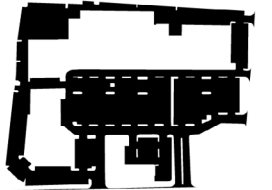
The form of each site was inspired by a different part of the asphalt cycle. The Festival plaza scheme was inspired by the pouring of wet asphalt, whereas Oak Tree Center was inspired by the cracking and erosion of dry asphalt. In the removal of asphalt, the variation of the remaining asphalt will be made more obvious through the jagged forms broken asphalt has and the shadows the plants will cast upon the asphalt surface.

Stripping the Asphalt

Step 0: 47308 m2
Step 1: 38687 m2
Step 2: 37087 m2
Step 3: 28013 m2
Step 4: 24432 m2

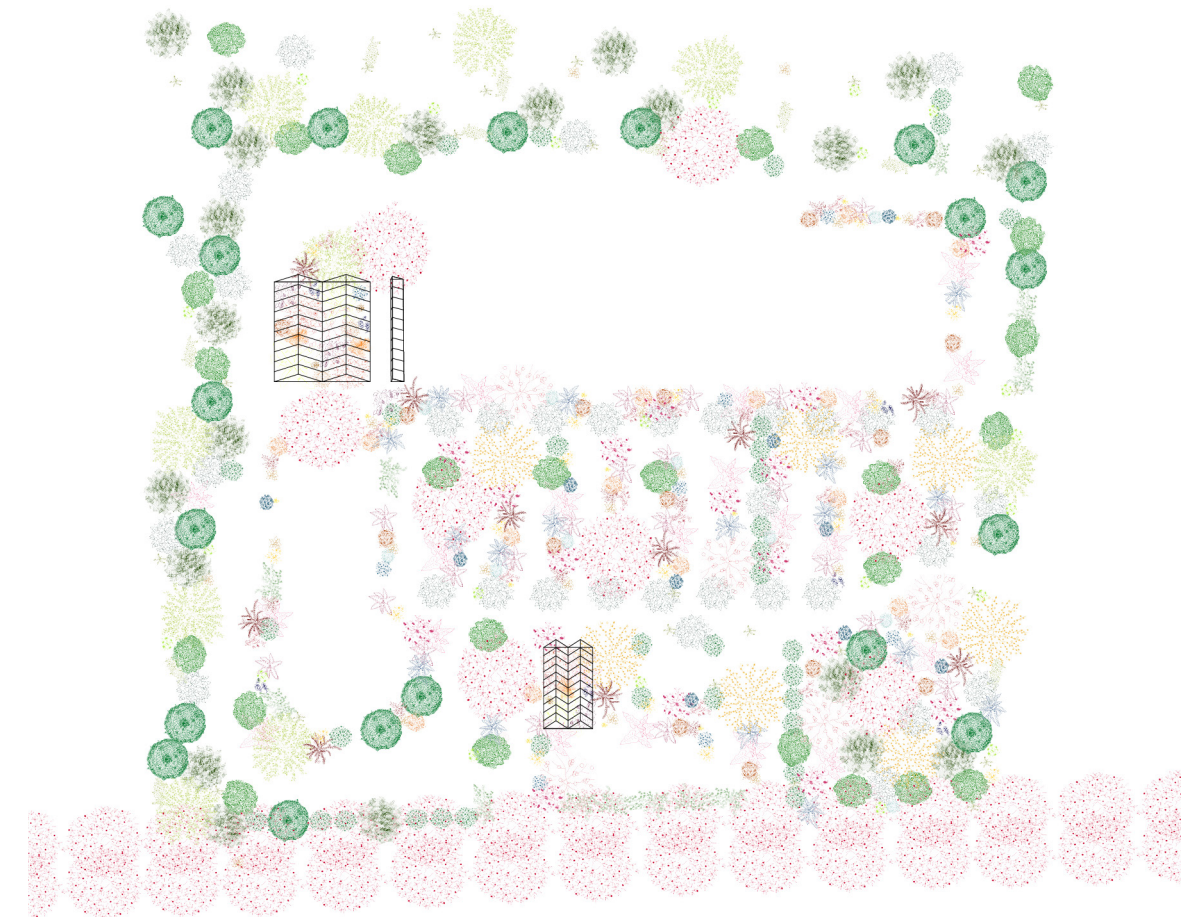
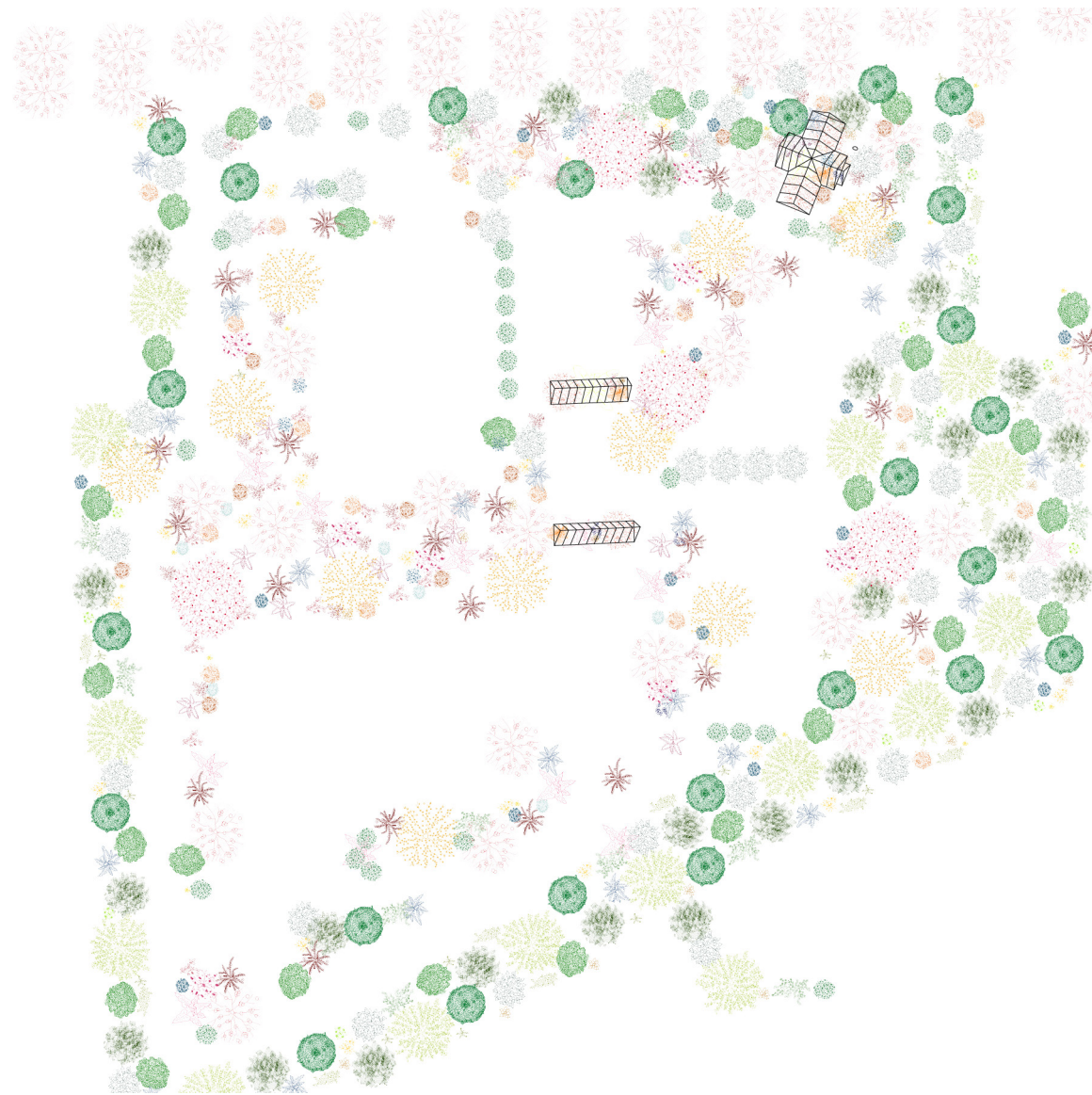


Step 0: 30363 m2
Step 1: 22118 m2
Step 2: 20087 m2
Step 3: 17330 m2
Step 4: 13341 m2



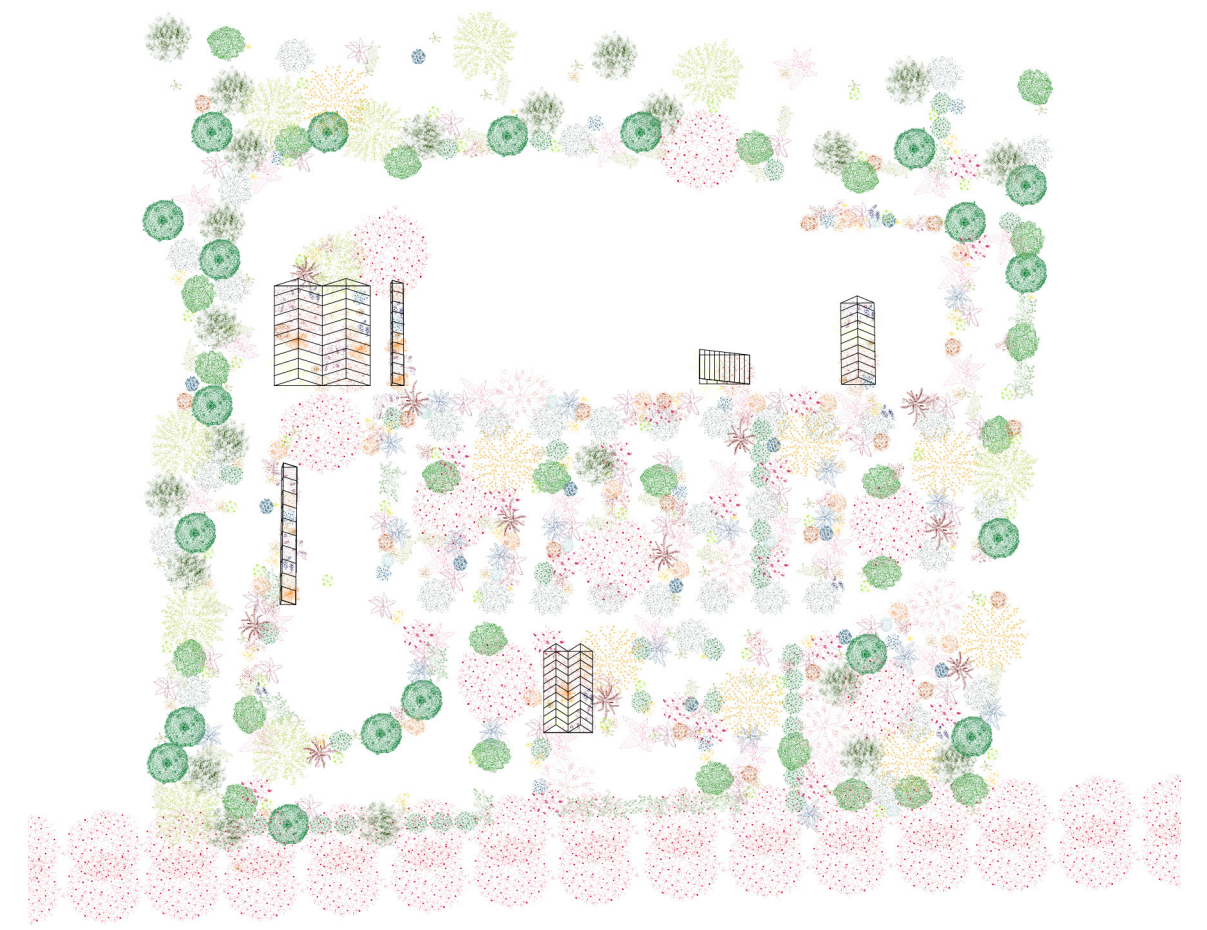
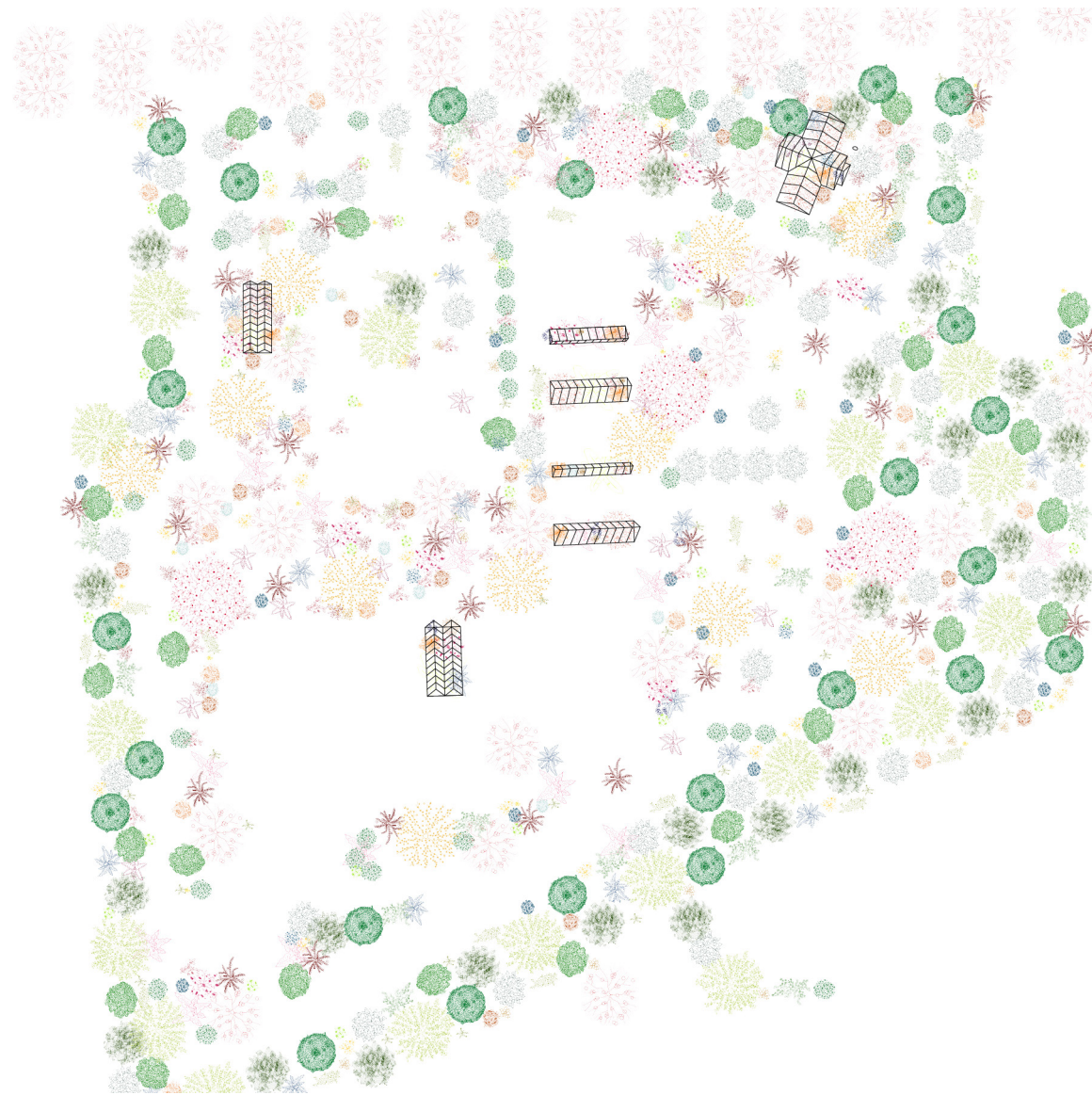
Both schemes if taken to completion will reduce the amount of asphalt by around 50%. This way of phasing allows for flexibility, responding to how Edison changes.

A choreography between planted and spontaneous
Step 1: Bringing the inside out

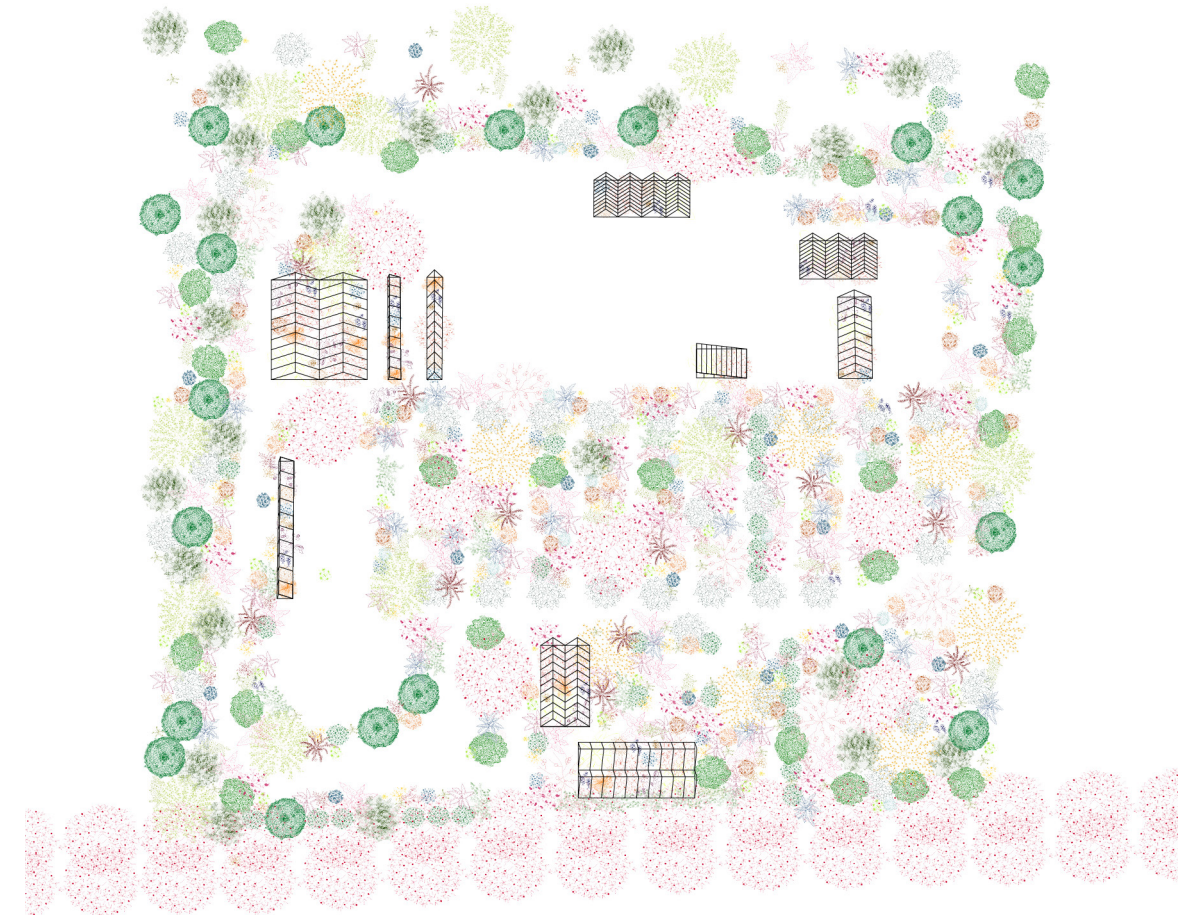
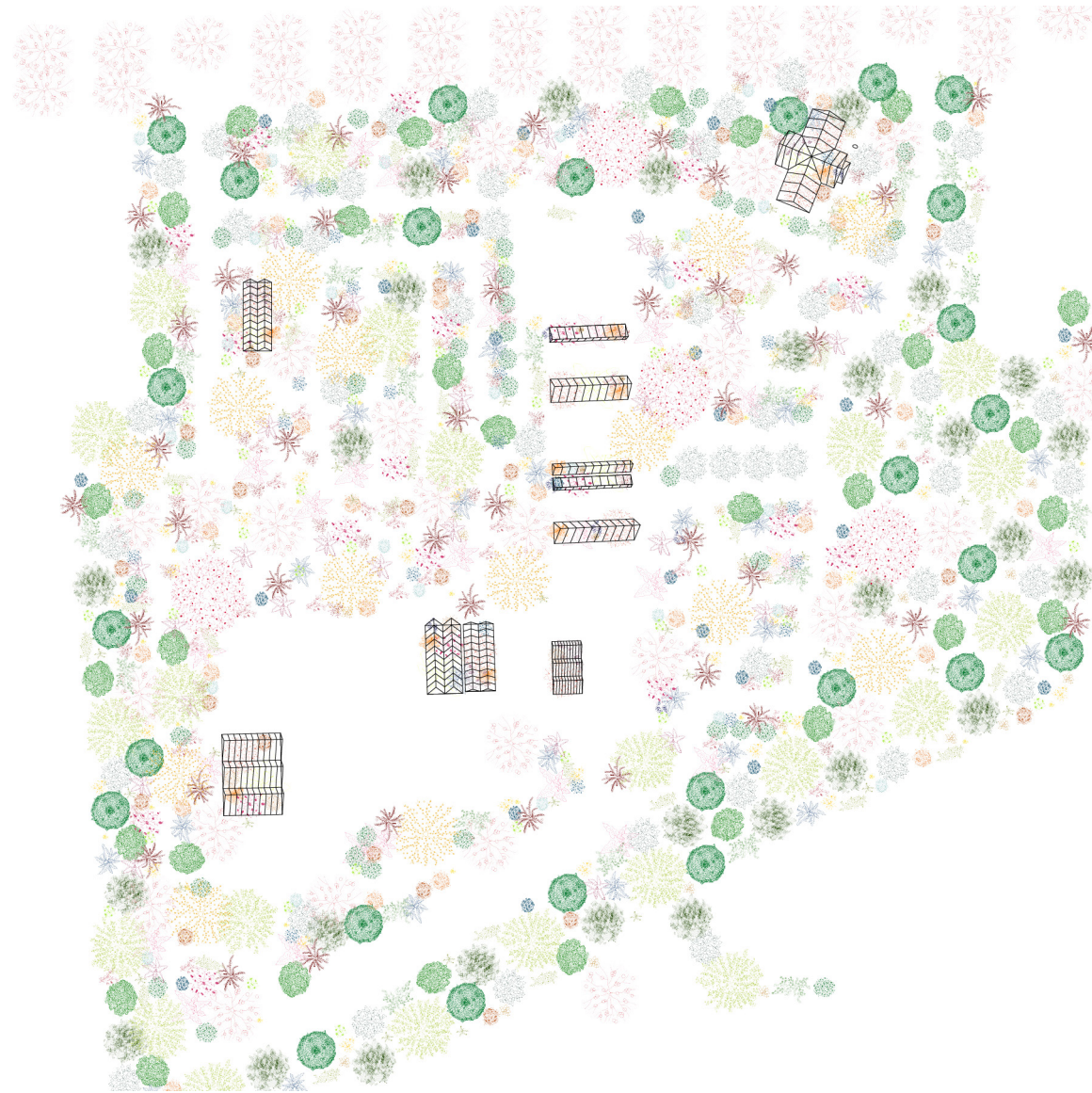


The planting is done through a parallel choreography. The first step brings the plants found within each strip mall outside into the original striping. The striped zones serve as test sites to see how they interact with other plants and the environment. Again, some of the shops that close can be converted into greenhouses and nurseries for propagation.

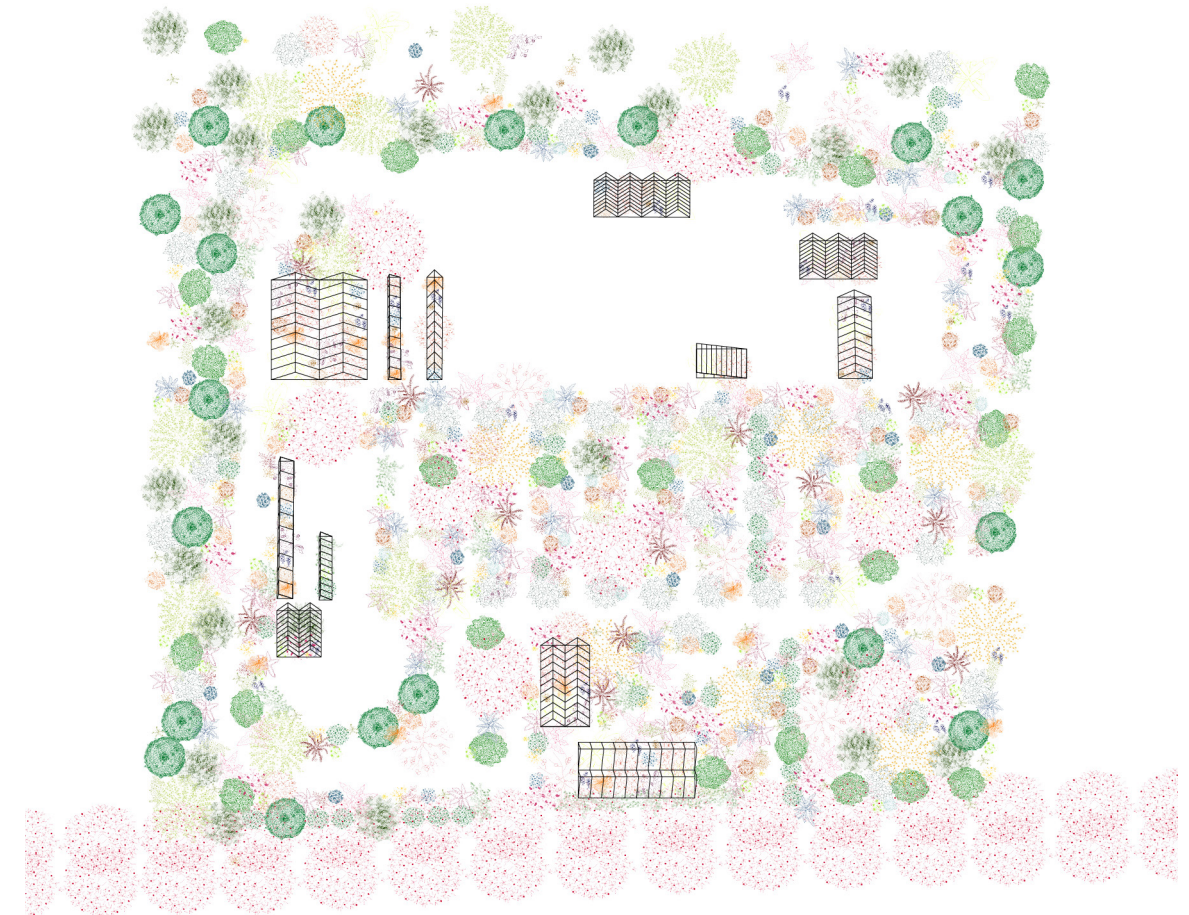
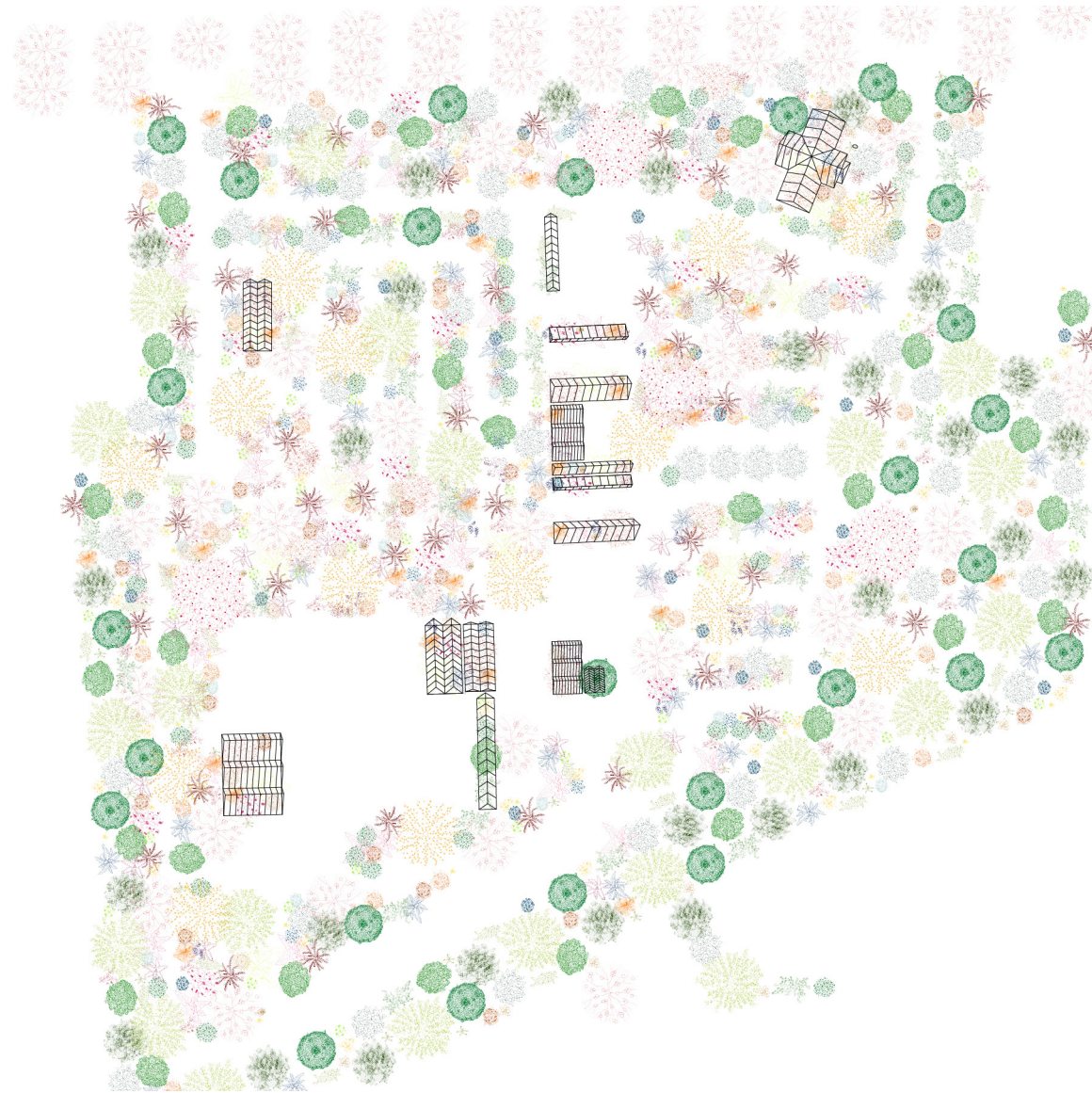
Simultaneously, the strip itself becomes a site of intervention with the creation of a boulevard with one plant from inside each grocery store planted outside to give each strip a cohesive identity.



As individual parking spots are stripped, they can be opened to spontaneous growth as a way of understanding how the “back of lot” gets populated with plant life. It manifests the global and ecological systems that create ruderal plant life.



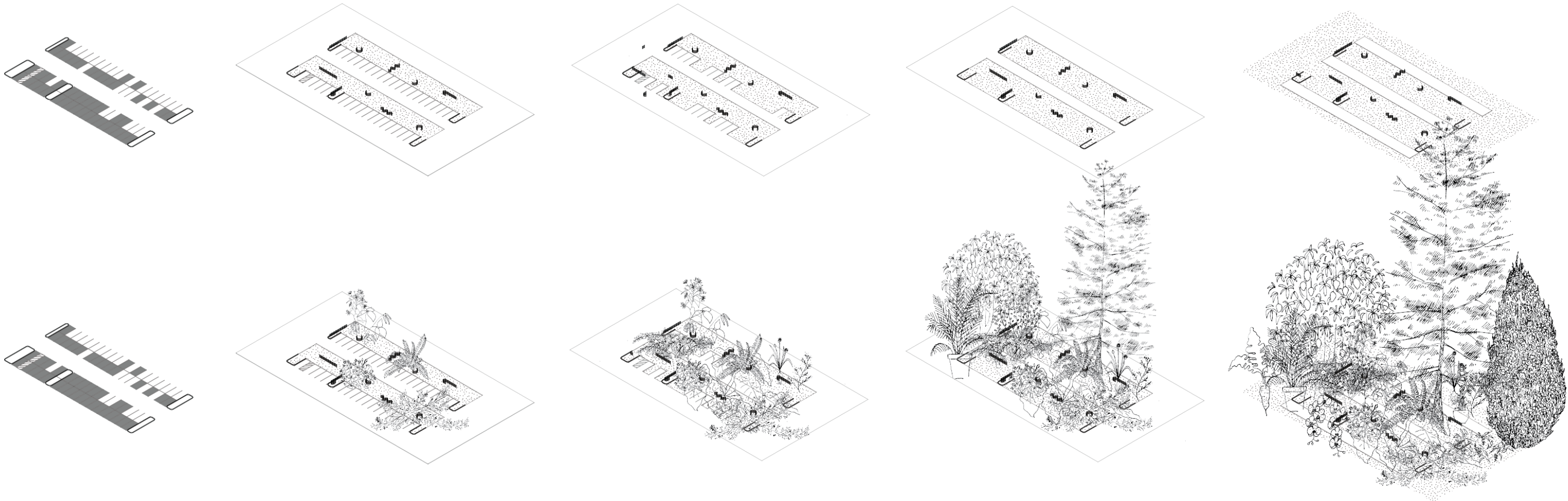
As the row gets taken over, planting of the plants found inside merges with spontaneous growth, as ruderal plants populate the garden and community members begin shaping the space by planting garden plants in the open lots.



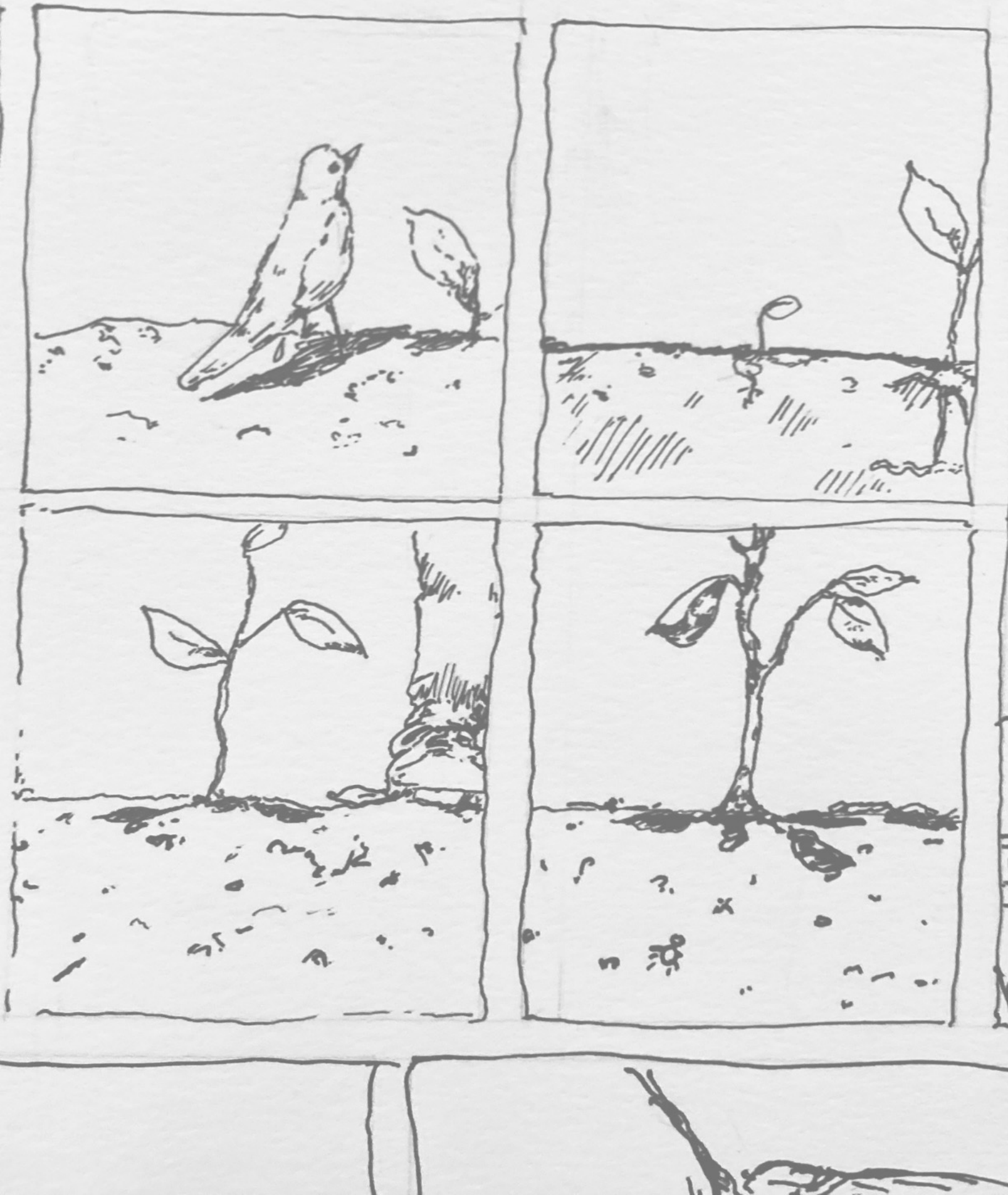
These lots will serve to see how plants can be introduced to maintain biodiversity in a warming climate. Greenhouses can also be converted into cooling areas to maintain plants that can no longer survive in the New New Jersey Climate.

This choreography represents a way the existing interior plant life can merge with the exterior in a site.

Bringing the back to the front



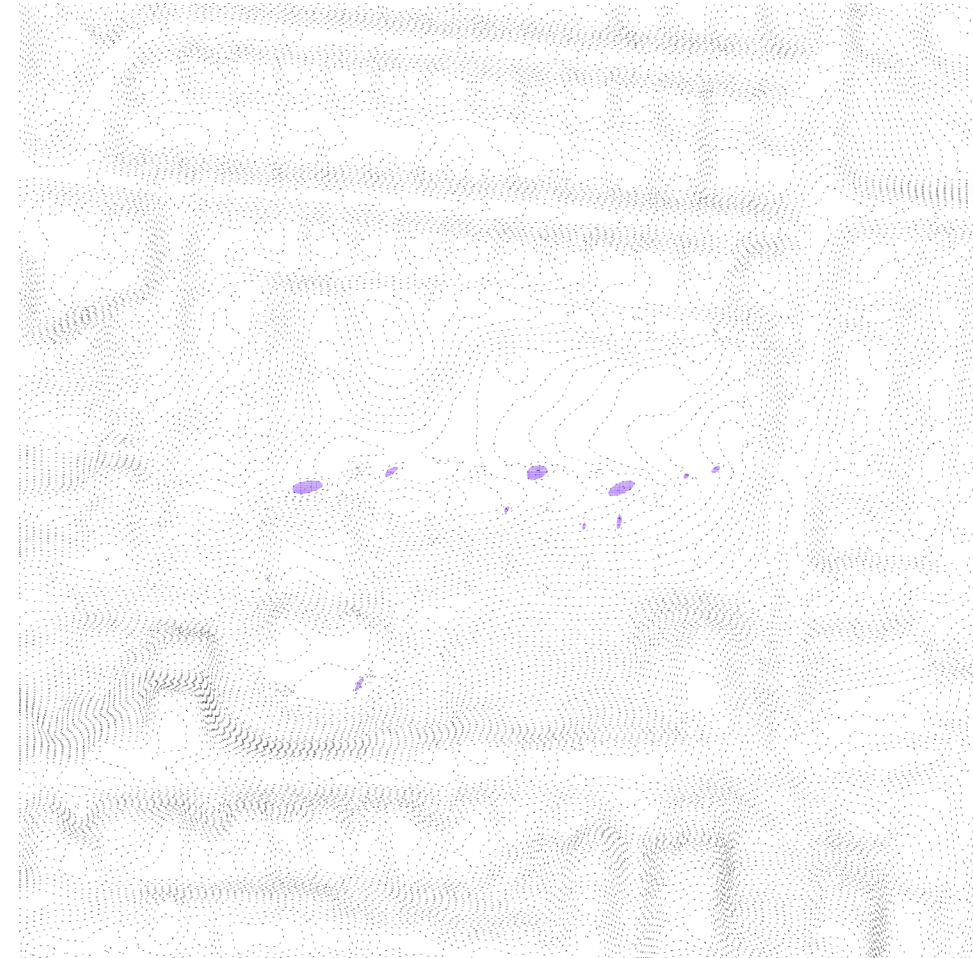
The process of spontaneous growth can be stimulated by creating spaces designed for dispersal agents, both human and non-human (eg. birds, bats, chipmunks, squirrels, rats), to stay and rest. It also relies on how the wind flows, the sun shines, and the water moves on the site.



One way to go about this is to introduce structures made of leftover chain-link fence for birds and other animals to access plants and poop seeds.

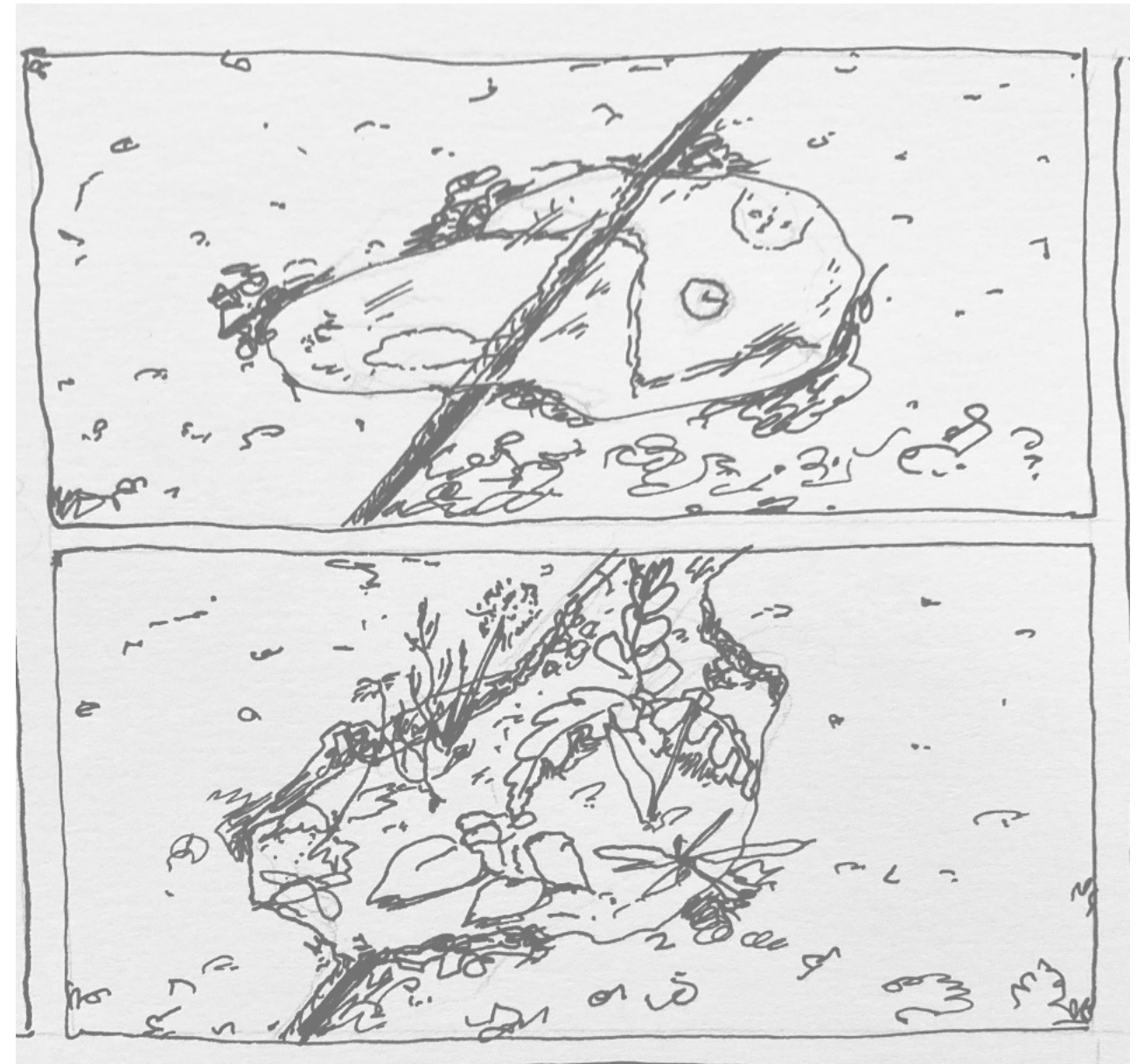
Most of the species that will begin to grow will be weeds, neophytes, invasives, often from the "Orient" that grow well in the arterial damaged soil. Yet these species, able to grow in these conditions, can start help remediate the polluted soil and then be foraged and used by the community.

Grading for microclimates



A new grading plan was developed to create different conditions of wind, sun, and shade...

How to catch and direct the rain



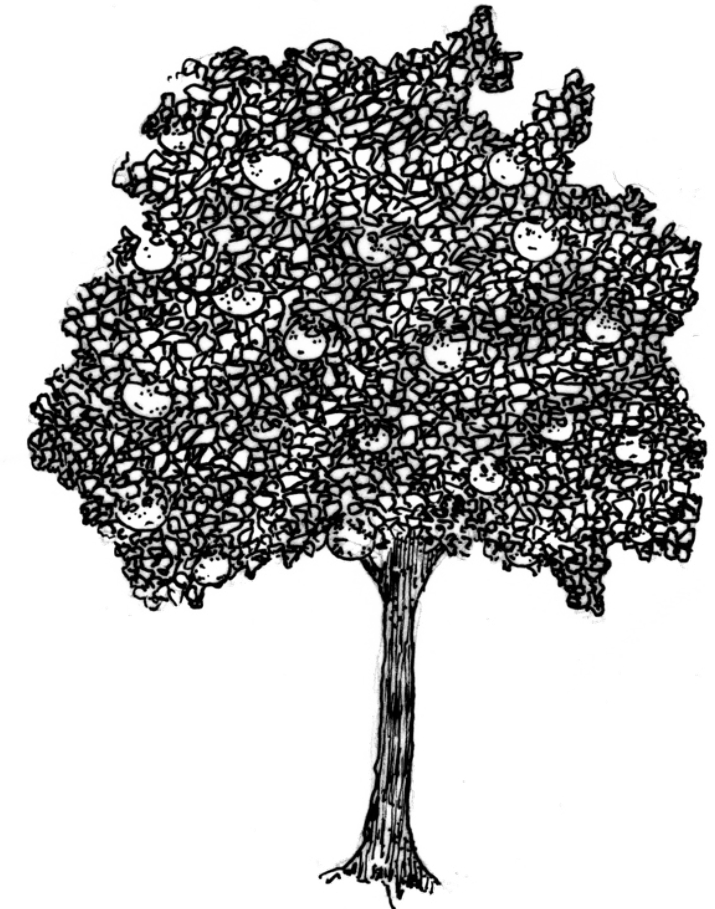
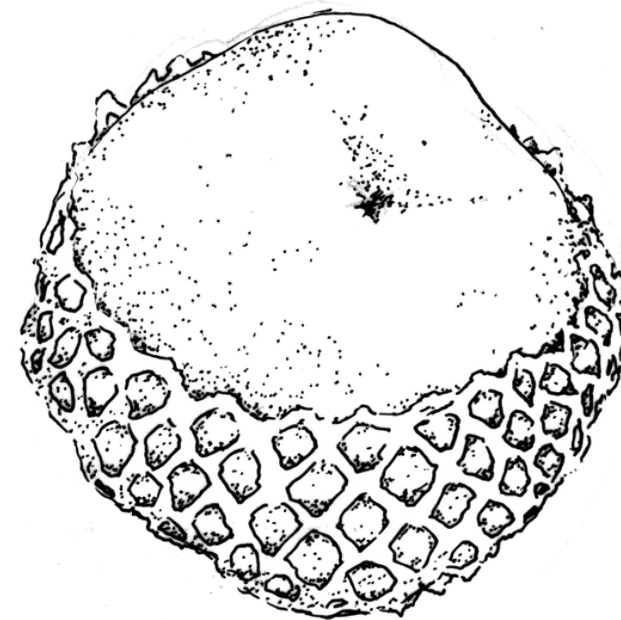
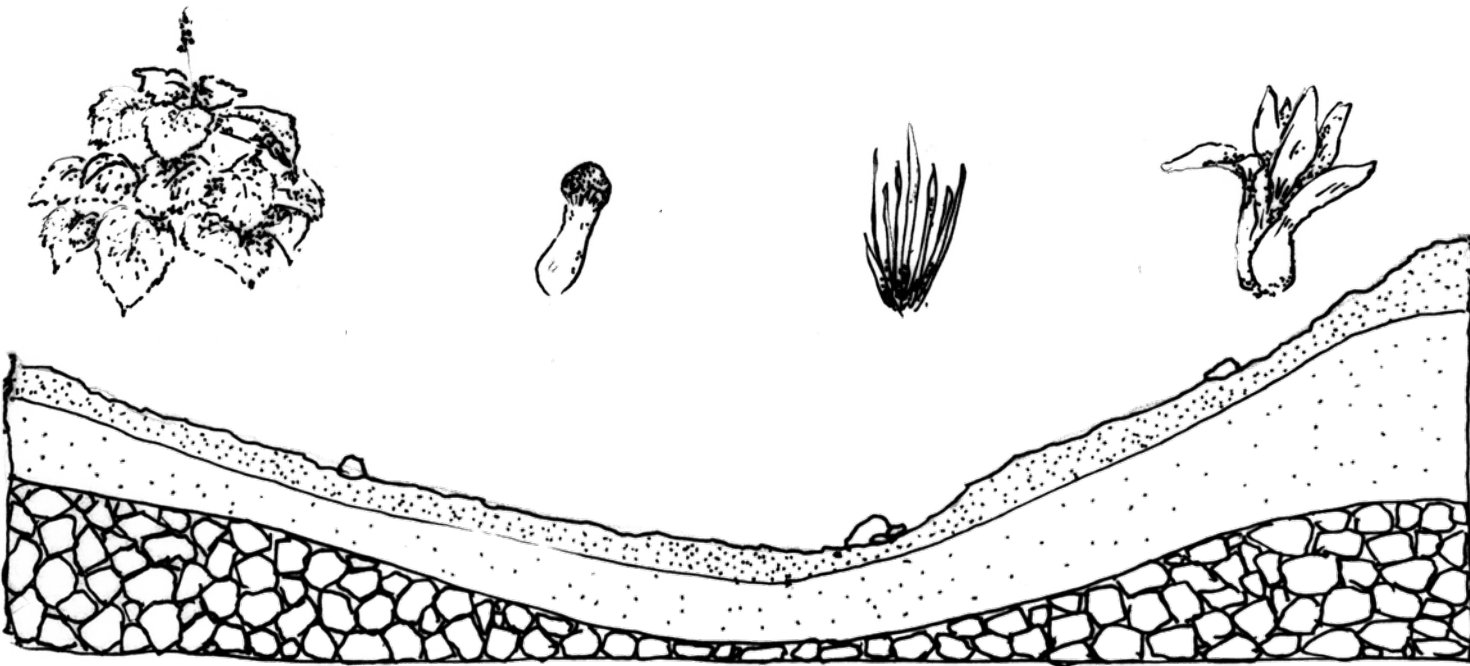
But most importantly for moisture collection to create different moisture environments. Also, the new grading plan guides water to the edges of the planted zones, stimulating the erosion of the asphalt.

Bringing the outside in and the inside out

“If knotweed is considered an invasive plant in Europe, it’s not because it is an intrinsically invasive plant, but rather because it was introduced without any of the other organisms that limit its growth in Asia, nor the practices that make use of it. Indeed, in Japan, China, and Korea, knotweed grows smaller and is less dominant. Its leaves are smaller and its stems are shorter. Can we postulate that there is no such thing as an “exotic” species? There are simply living beings that move with forces that lift them. Taken in isolation, without “its world,” knotweed was bought to “another world.”

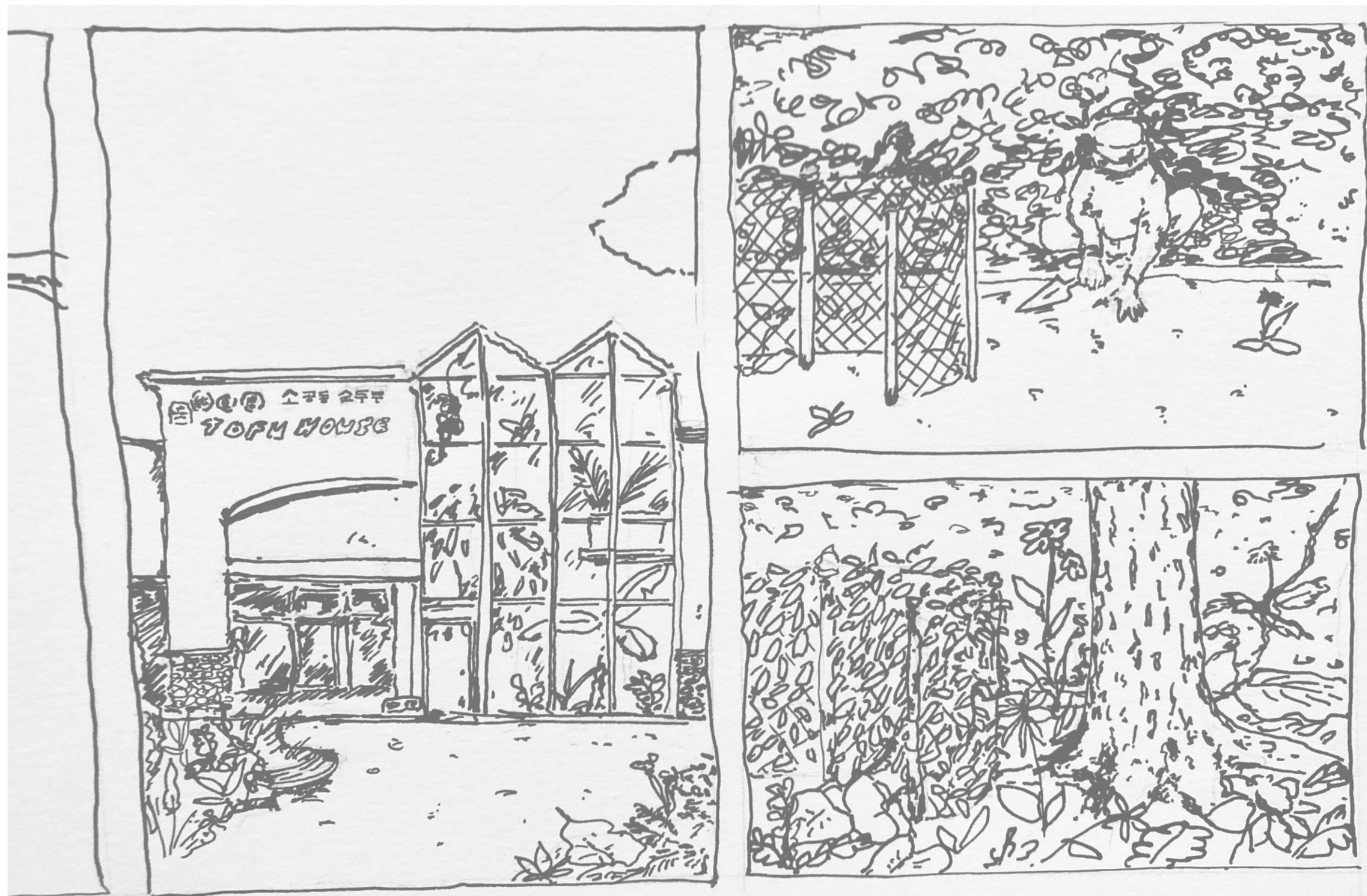
Cultural practices around plants can be seen as ecological processes.

Livia Cahn, “Rhizome city: tracing knotweed through the soils of Brussels” (2020)



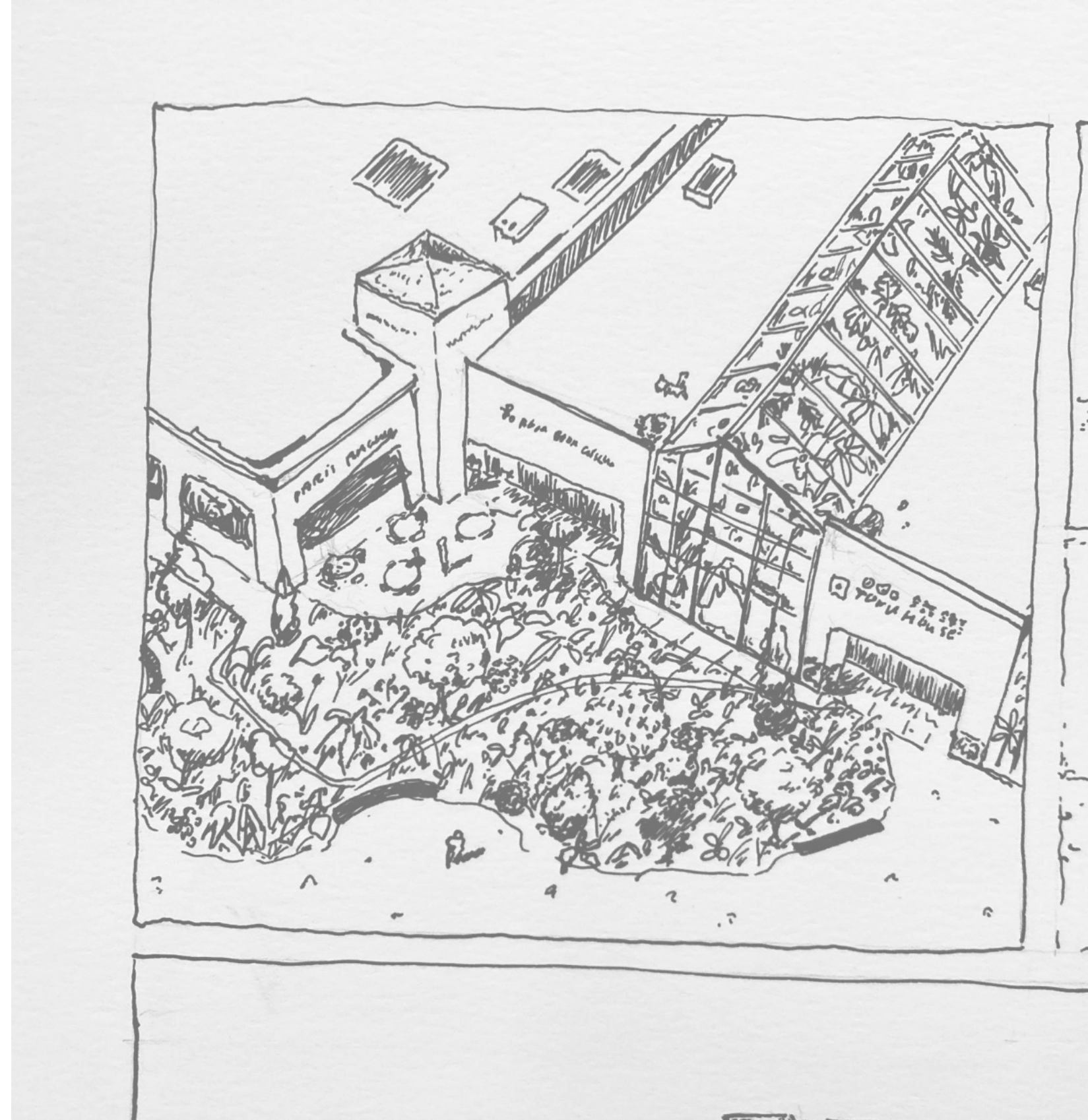
As species grow, methods of cultivation brought from the homelands of these communities can be introduced, as many of the people living in Edison are often from the same places as many of the ruderal plants. Culture would exist as an ecological process - as humans exist as a growth limit in any species’ home environment.

Bringing the outside in and the inside out



This could result in a wider teaching of the use of these plants that could maintain generational cultural knowledge after the spatial dislocation of immigration. This knowledge could spread beyond the community.

In parallel, the planting of new plants found within the strip could begin to form agency of community members in growing what they already eat inside the grocery store. The construction of greenhouses and the parking lot garden has the potential for a commons of people growing their own food.



Through these schemes, I wanted to maintain the spontaneity of each site so present in my memories, but also show intentionality in form so that the sites do not read as disinvested or abandoned. I also wanted to keep certain hard surfaces from eroding as much to maintain social space.



1:100- understanding planting
Oak Tree Center



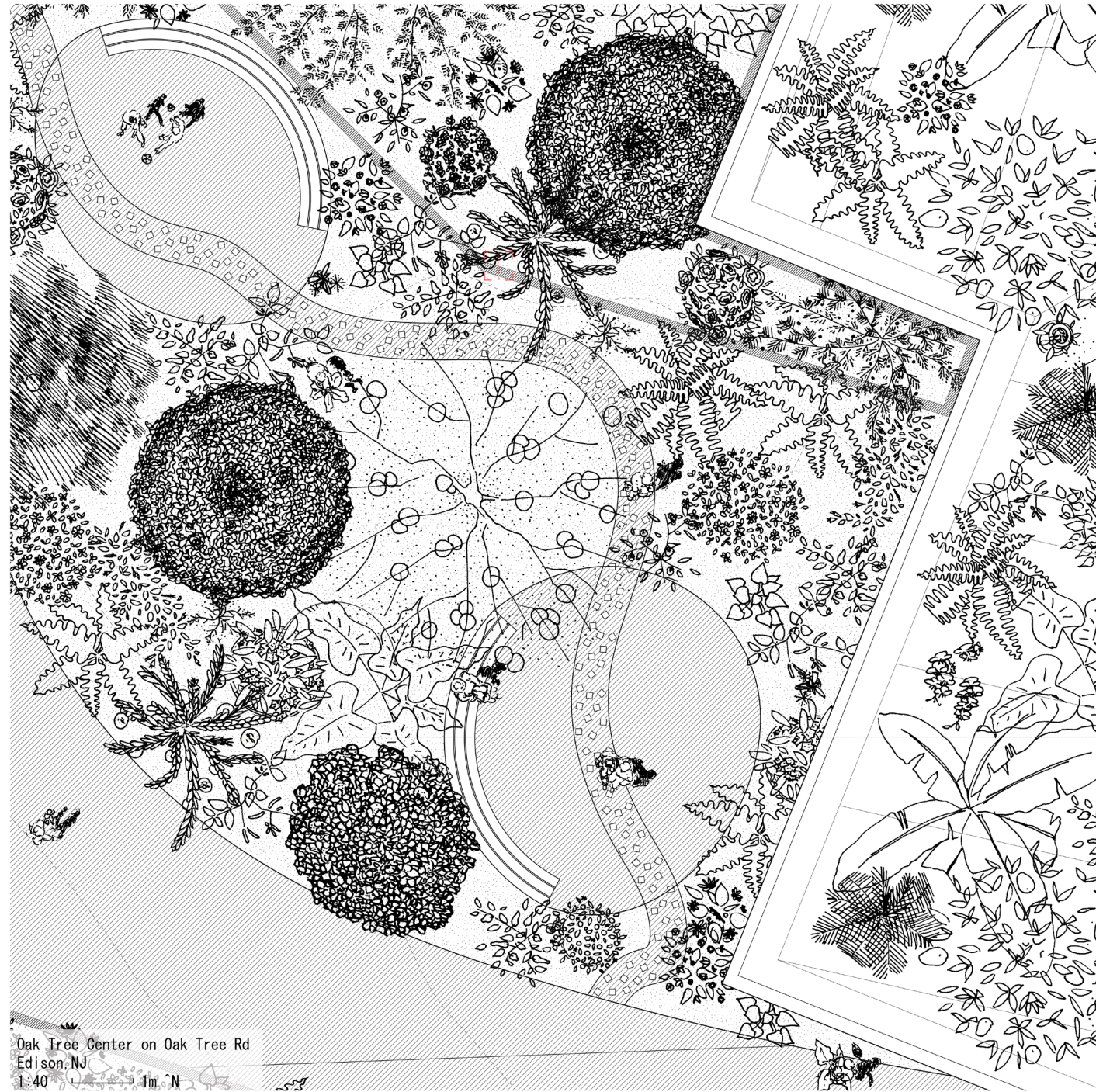
At the 1:100 scale, I wanted to ensure each site had enough large patches of de-paved surface for plants to amass and each plot to have a different community and conditions for new plants to grow.



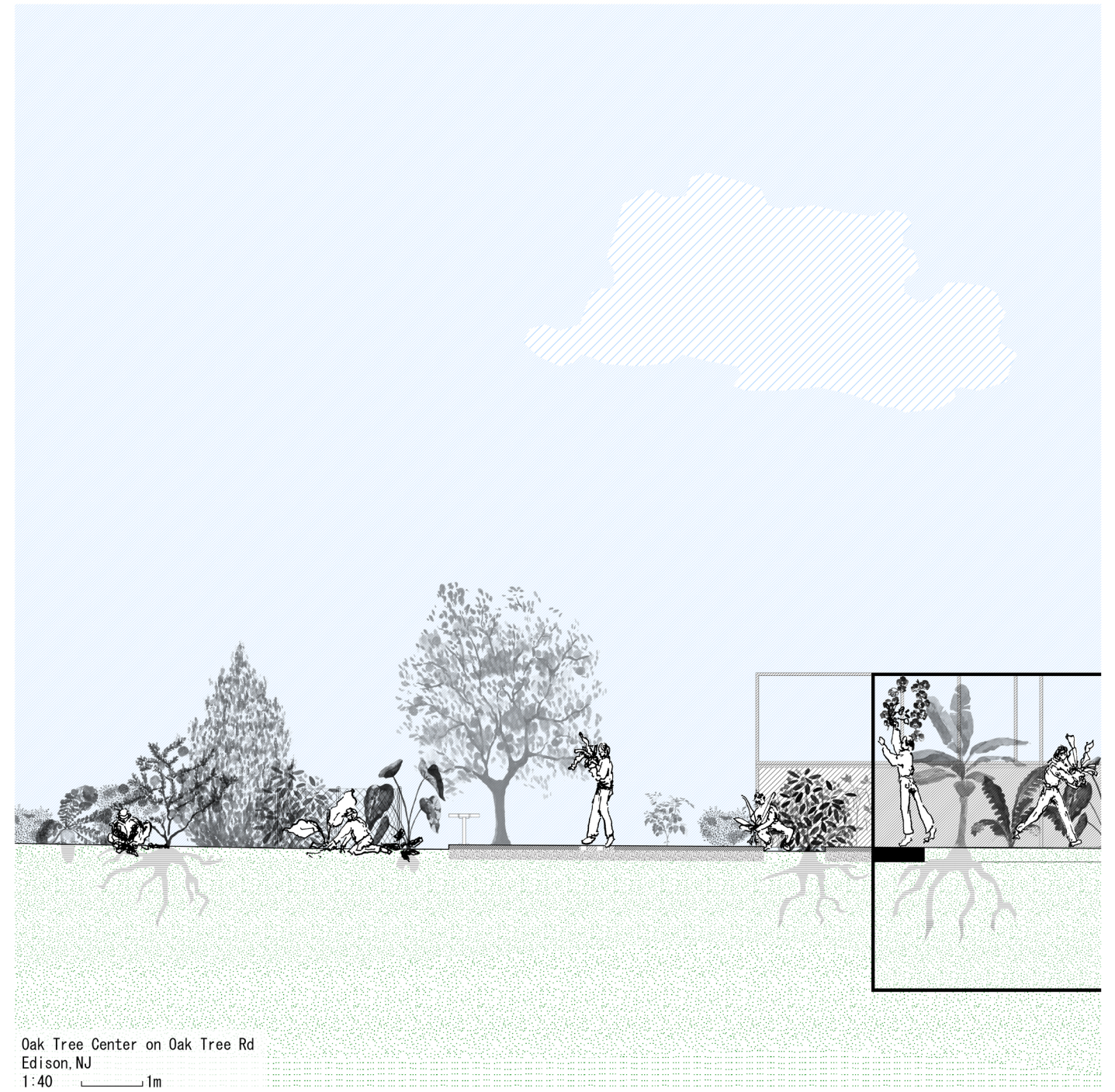
1:100- understanding planting
Festival Plaza



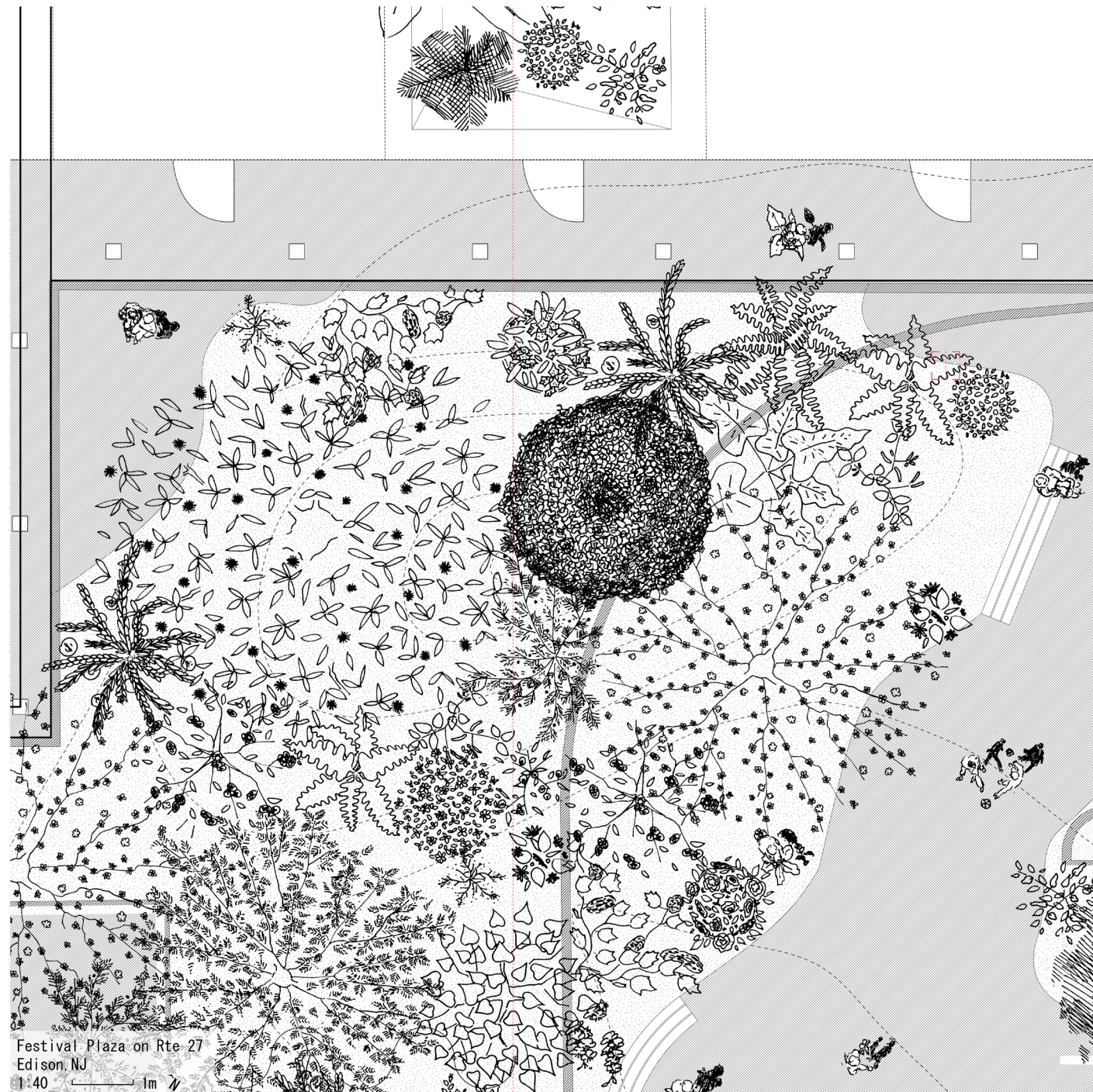
This scale also was able to demonstrate how existing vegetation would interface with new vegetation, and how these plantings would shape the space physically.



1:40- understanding inhabitation
Oak Tree Center



At the 1:40 scale, I wanted to understand how humans could use and occupy the space. This developed into the creation of a series of surface and structures that create unusual social spaces. For example, benches define edges between the asphalt and the unpaved, bringing people in direct contemplation of the plant life around them.



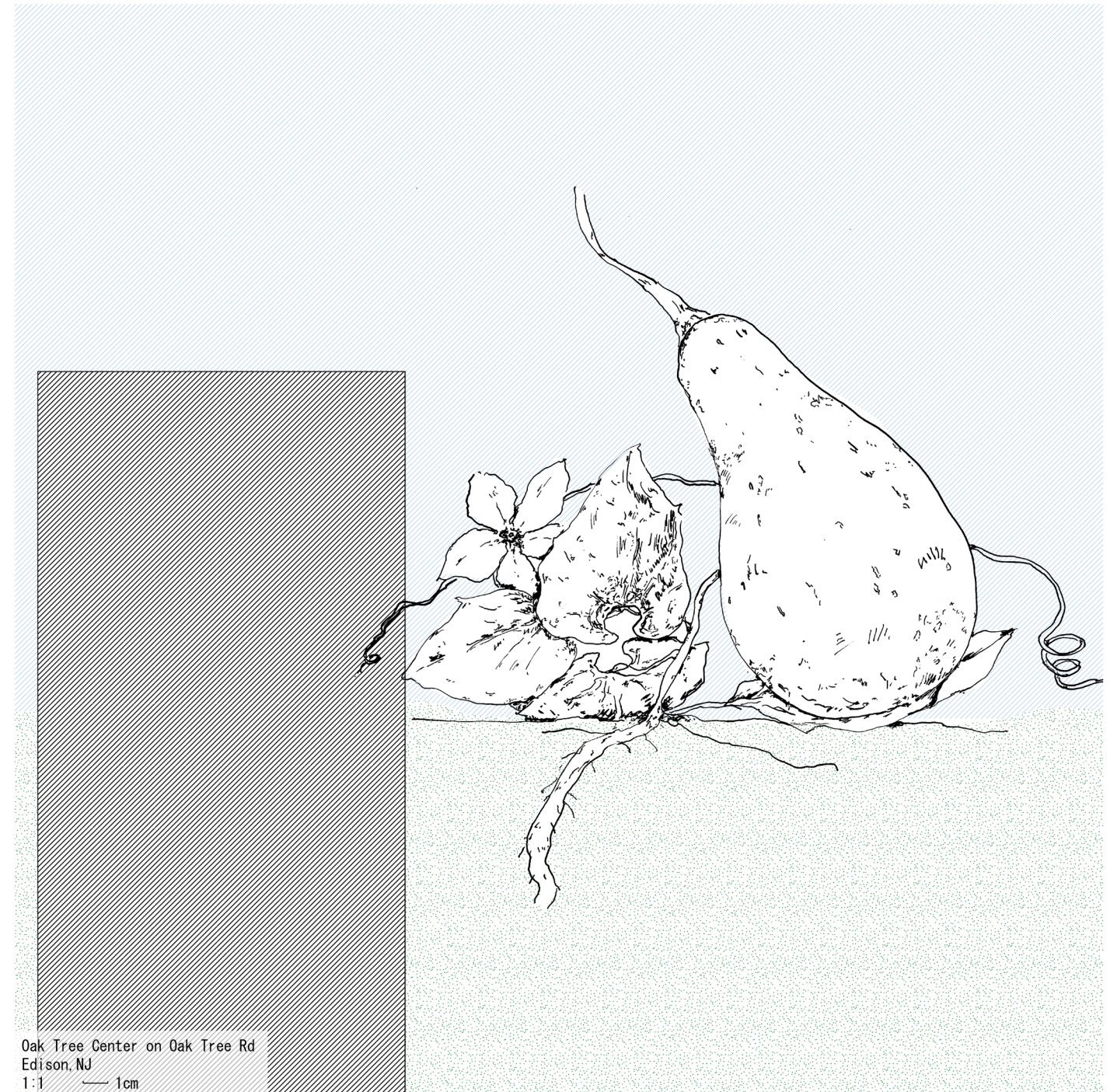
1:40- understanding inhabitation
Festival Plaza



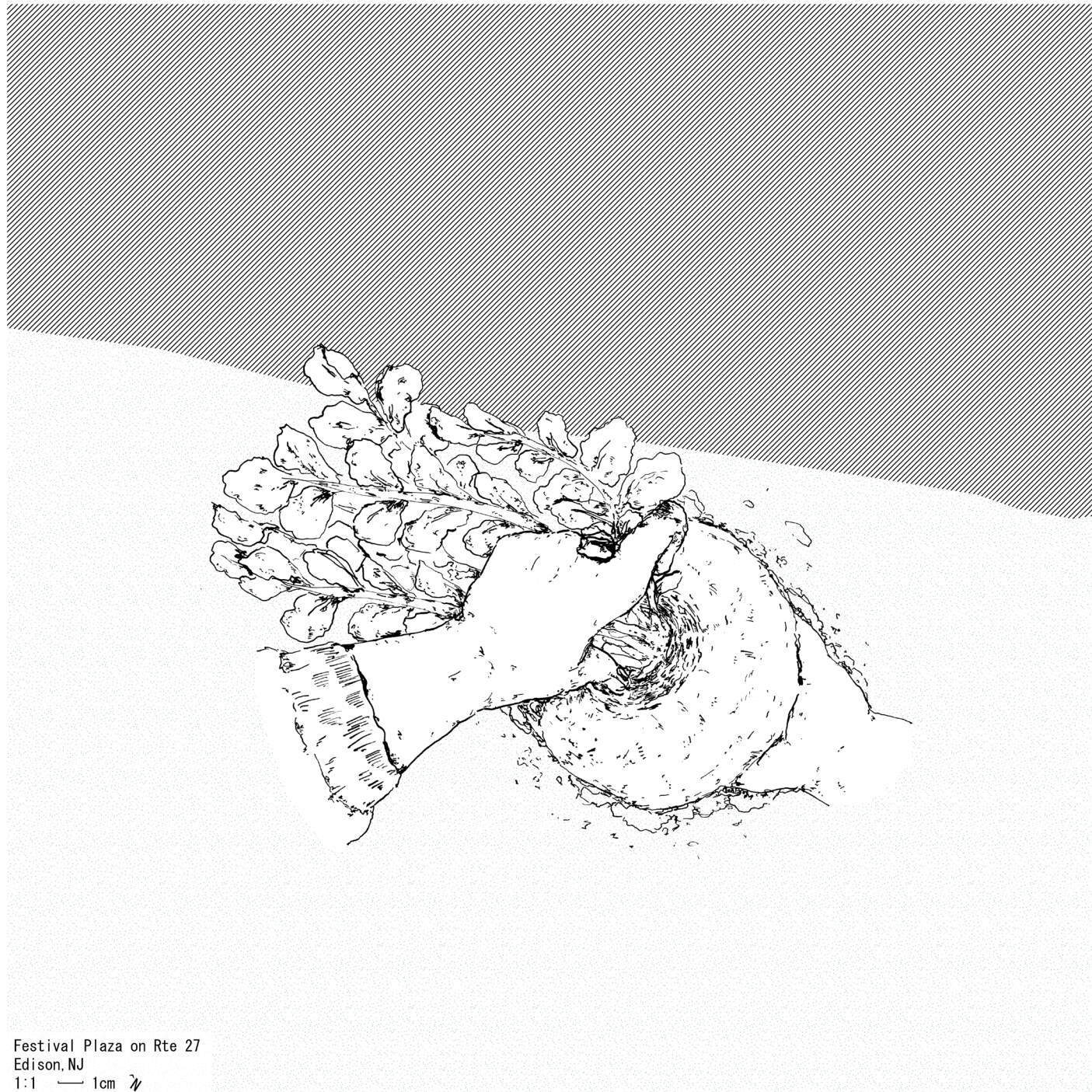
The 1:40 scale allowed for the development of a variety of conditions, from paths, plots, open hard surfaces, closed hard surfaces, building access, and building function and greenhouse modification. This was the scale in which the interior and exterior relationship was better defined.



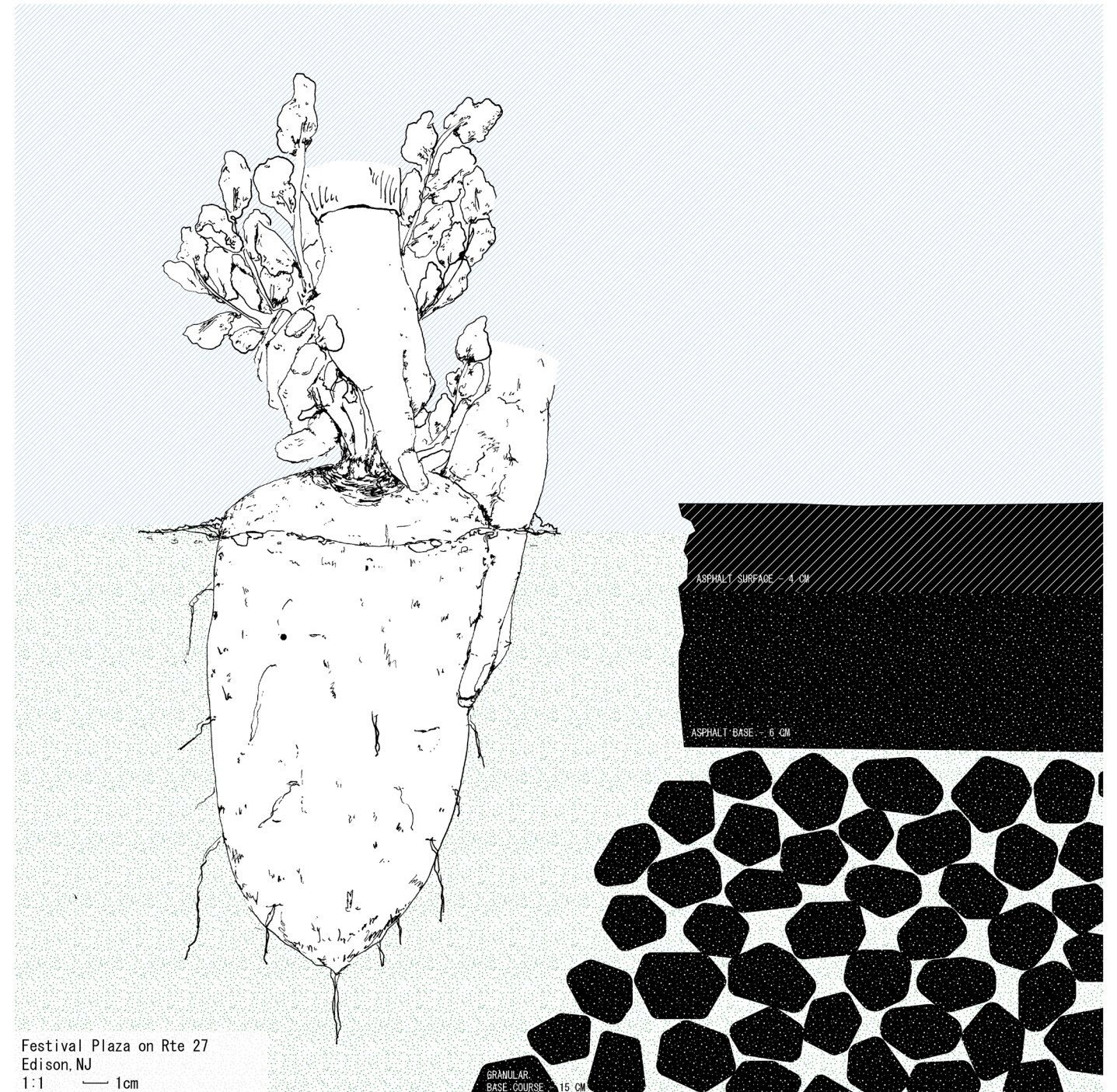
1:1 - people, plant, material
Oak Tree Center



At the 1:1 scale, I wanted to develop the interactions between people, plant, and material. How do culture and ecology intersect? And how does that intersect with the built world in detail?



1:1 - people, plant, material
Festival Plaza




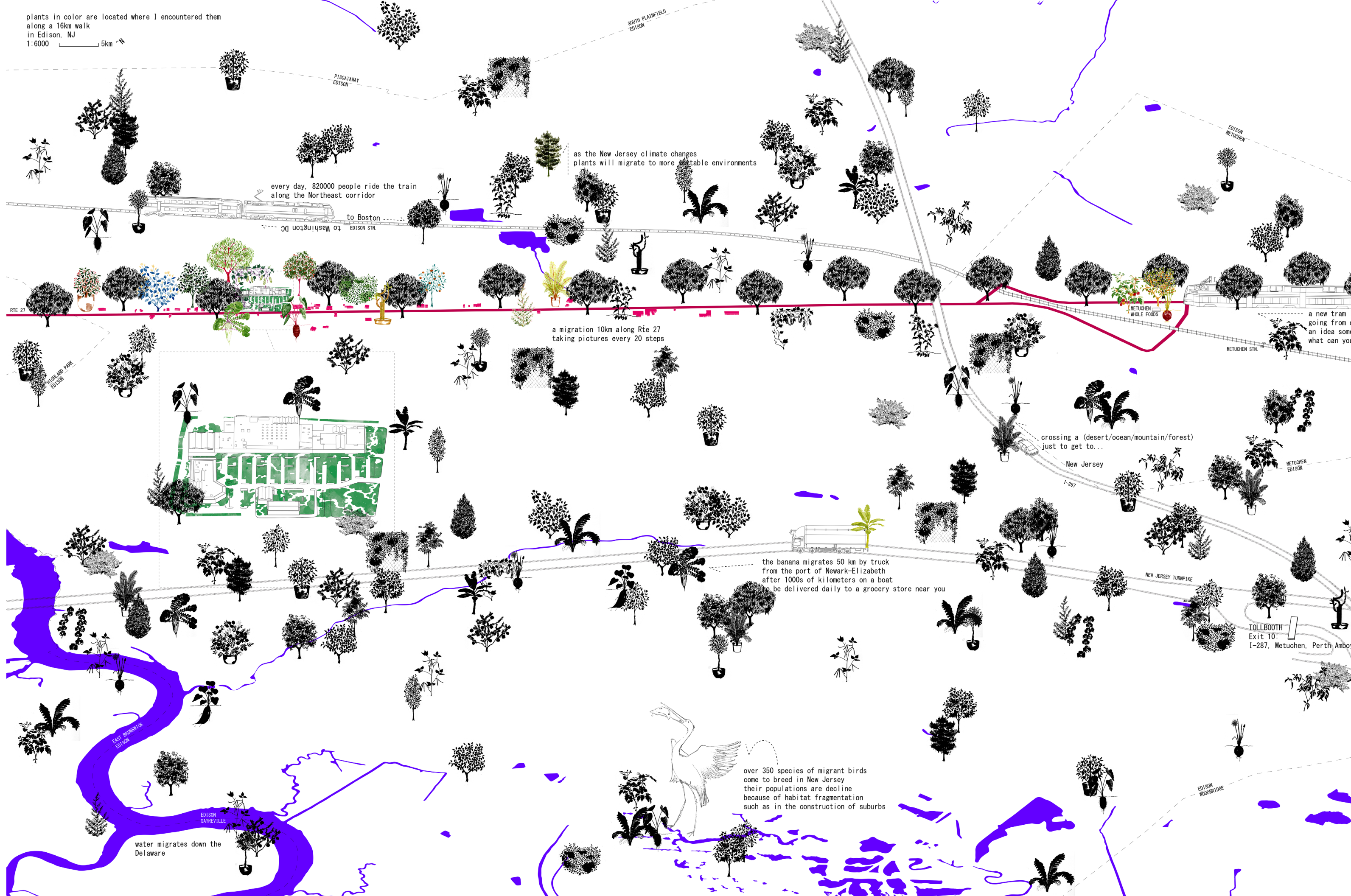
In understanding this interaction, we can see how the parking lot can be transformed into a commons. The world around us can be understood as sustenance, with humans as ecological beings that cultivate, use, and contribute food for ourselves, each other, and non-humans.

Migrations across scales of time and space

Each site reveals the migrations that happen around us.

There are the tiny daily migrations along the NJ transit or the NJ turnpike. There are migrations across oceans or continents to get to New Jersey over generations, lifetimes, eons, by humans and non-humans, together and apart. There are the migrations done by the food we eat, from the port of Newark-Elizabeth every day.

plants in color are located where I encountered them
along a 16km walk
in Edison, NJ
1:6000 



every day, 820000 people ride the train along the Northeast corridor

to Boston
to Washington DC

as the New Jersey climate changes plants will migrate to more suitable environments

a migration 10km along Rte 27 taking pictures every 20 steps

crossing a (desert/ocean/mountain/forest) just to get to...

New Jersey

the banana migrates 50 km by truck from the port of Newark-Elizabeth after 1000s of kilometers on a boat to be delivered daily to a grocery store near you

over 350 species of migrant birds come to breed in New Jersey their populations are decline because of habitat fragmentation such as in the construction of suburbs

water migrates down the Delaware

a new tram going from an idea some what can you

TOLLBOOTH Exit 10: I-287, Metuchen, Perth Amboy

the callery pear migrates through bird poop

a migration from one end of Oak Tree Rd to another documenting the plants along the walk

the life cycle of the strip migrations of property

generational migrations city suburb enclave enclave not

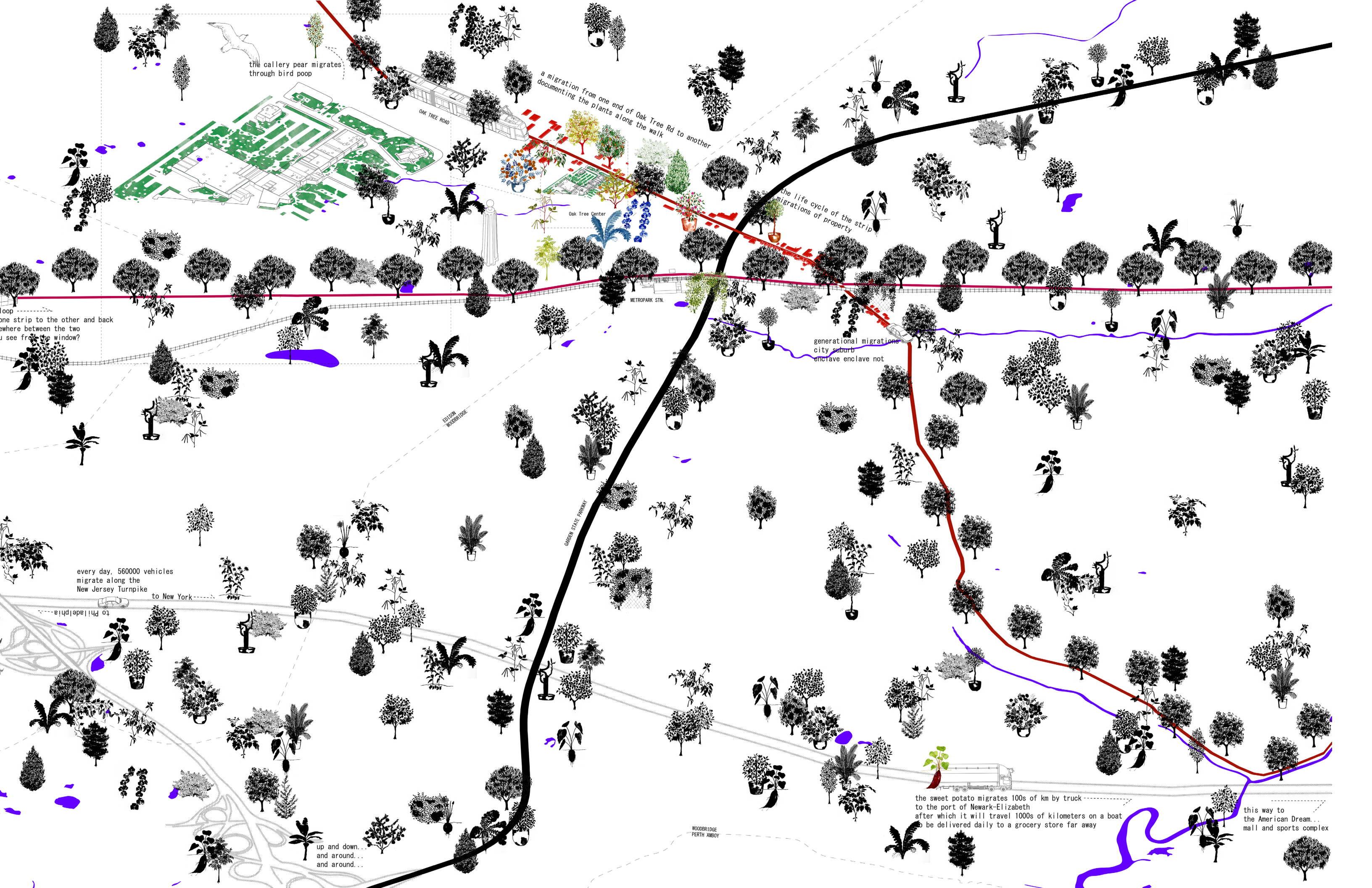
every day, 560000 vehicles migrate along the New Jersey Turnpike

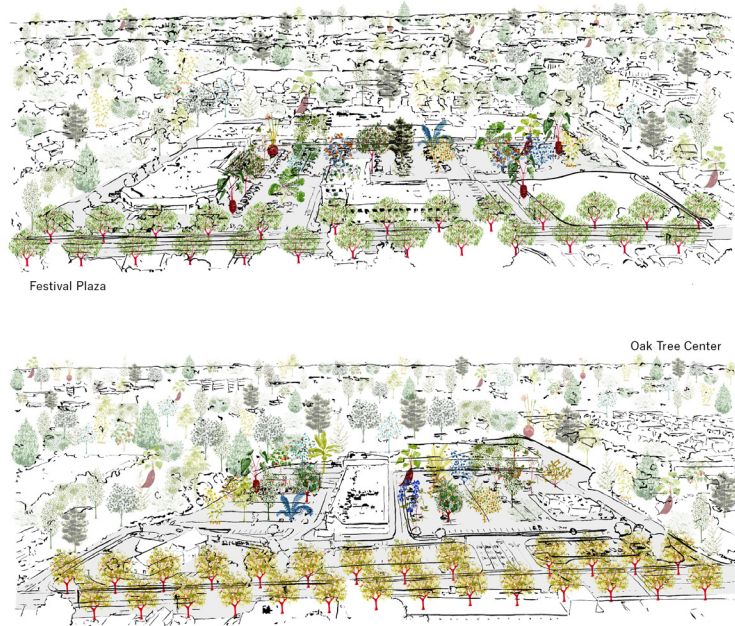
the sweet potato migrates 100s of km by truck to the port of Newark-Elizabeth after which it will travel 1000s of kilometers on a boat to be delivered daily to a grocery store far away

this way to the American Dream... mall and sports complex

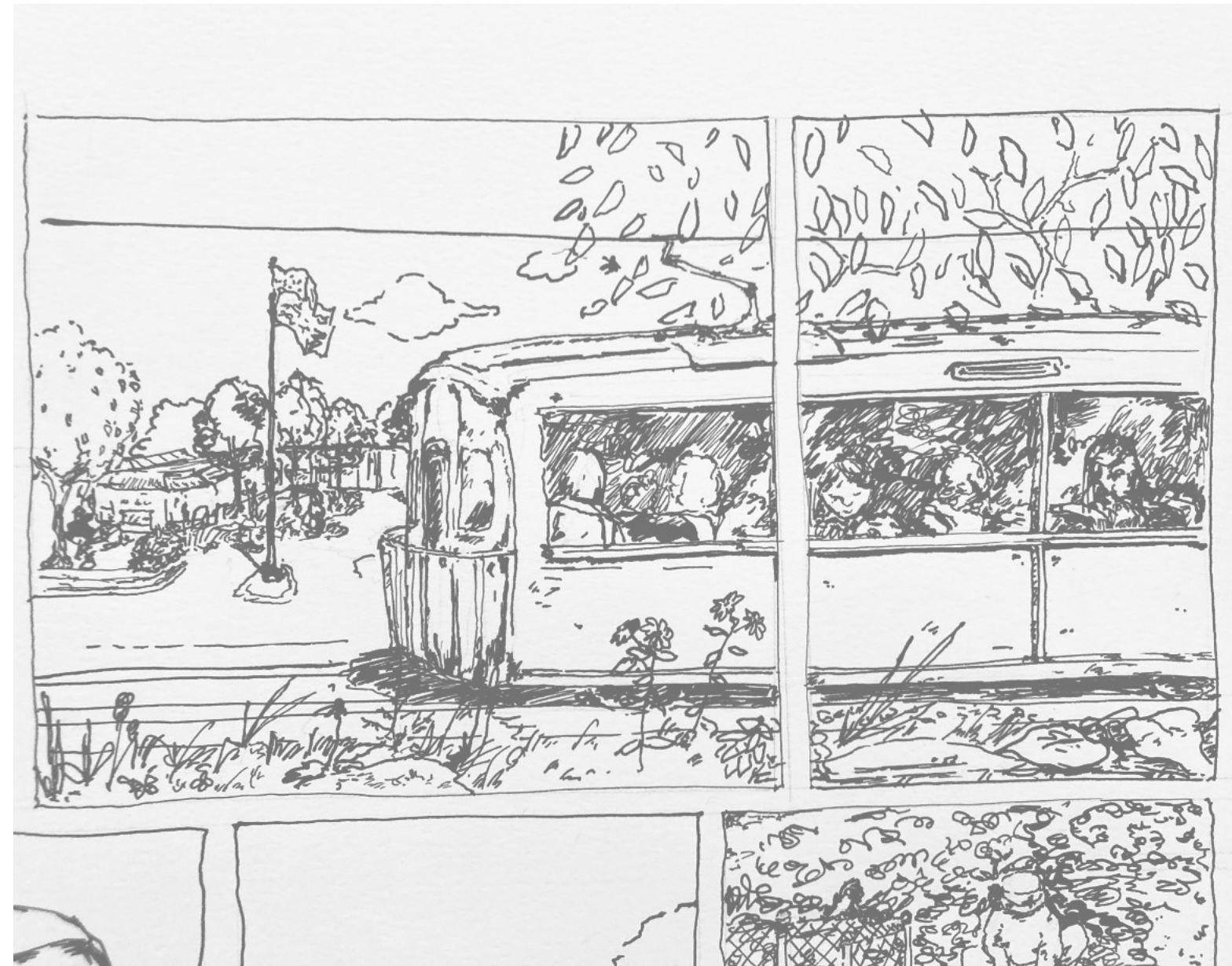
up and down... and around... and around...

loop one strip to the other and back wherever between the two you see from the window?





A vehicle for a changing strip



Not only will each strip now be planted, there will also be the introduction of a tram line. It serves explicitly to bring people from one strip mall plaza to the other to witness how each one changes over time. The tram is an agent for bringing change from one strip mall to the other: The sites will always influence each other and exist in relation to the other.

The Strip as the Post-Botanical Garden

And so this project proposes a post-botanical garden, showing how the hyper global sits in a hyper local site to reveal the plants that are already there, inside and outside, spontaneous and planted, real and plastic. The site shows how they are used already by the people in a specific local community, and is for and about and made by the people living in a place and the plants they live with.

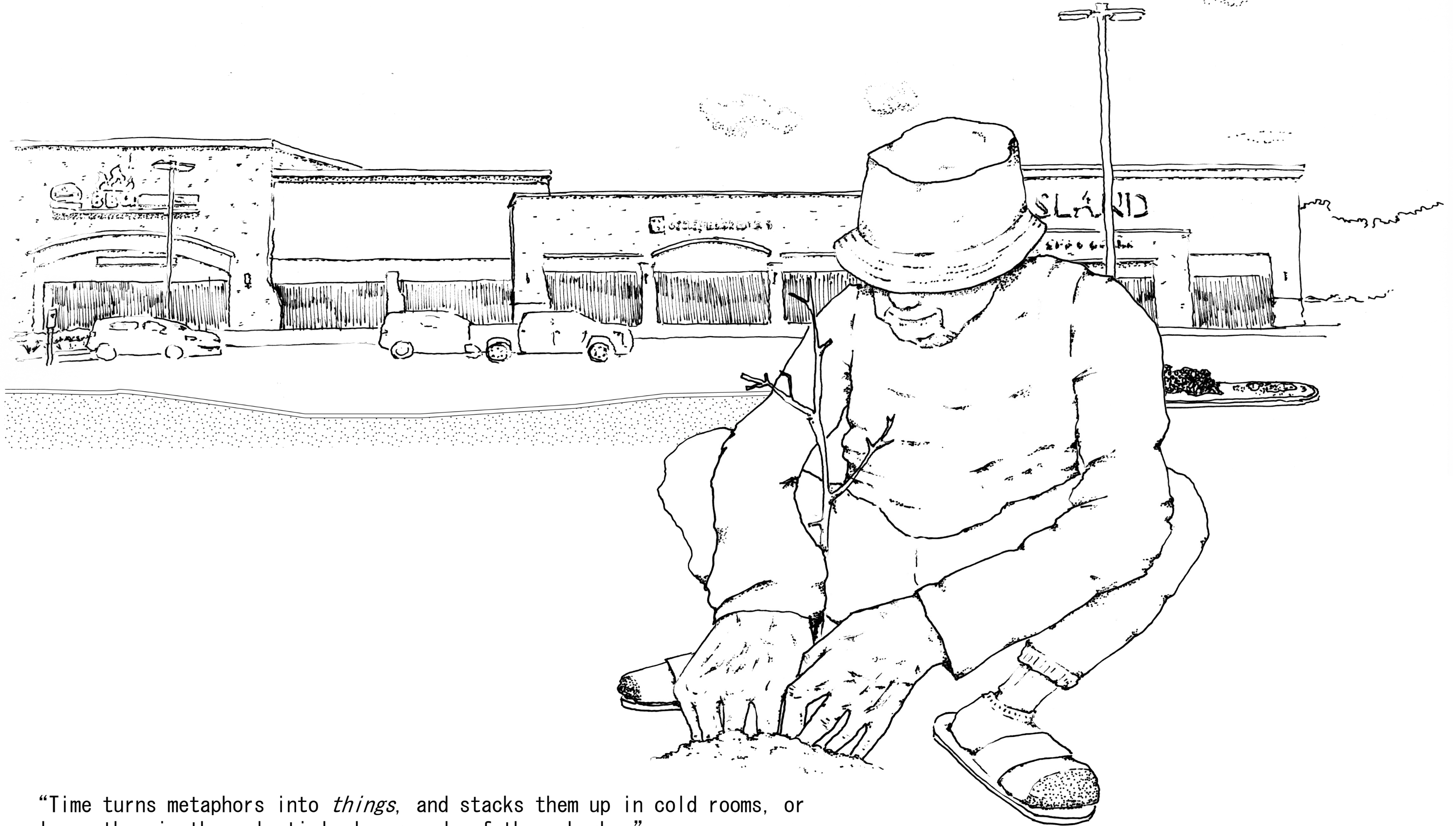


Embracing spontaneous growth, getting lost in the



Living things need places to live. If excluded from others, they will create their own spontaneous ones, often through the appropriation of undesirable sites. I.e. the nest on the electric lines... Or the strip mall plaza.

I want to use these sites to invert the tropes and re-deploy the plant as a metaphor to create a solidarity of those excluded from public space to become agents in crafting it.



“Time turns metaphors into *things*, and stacks them up in cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs.”

Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, NJ” 1967

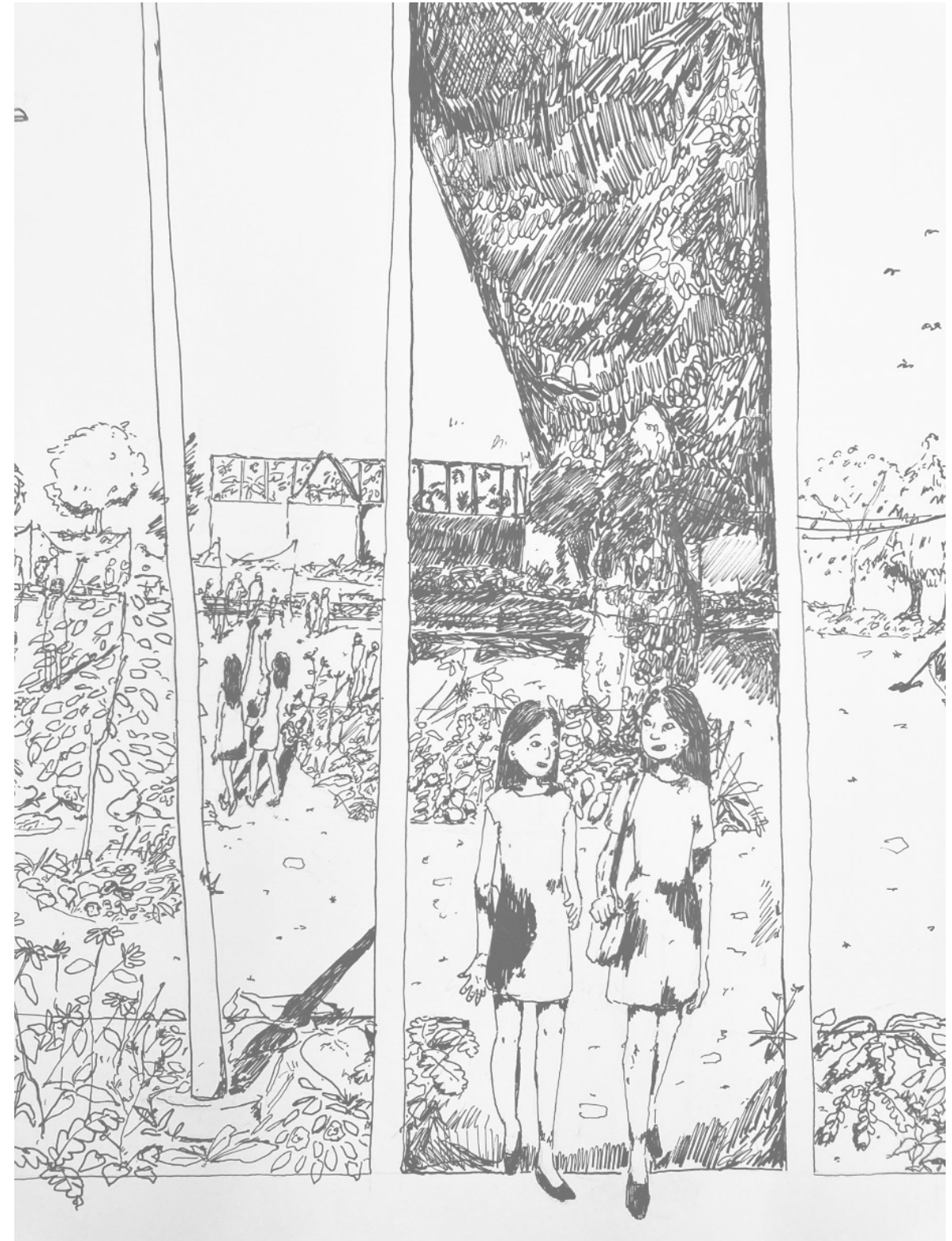
To embrace and show the spontaneity and cultivation already there...



“Time turns metaphors into *things*, and stacks them up in cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs.”

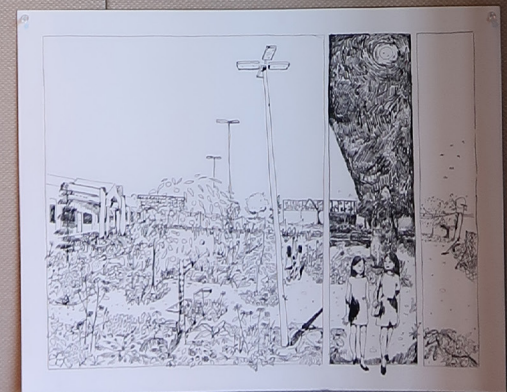
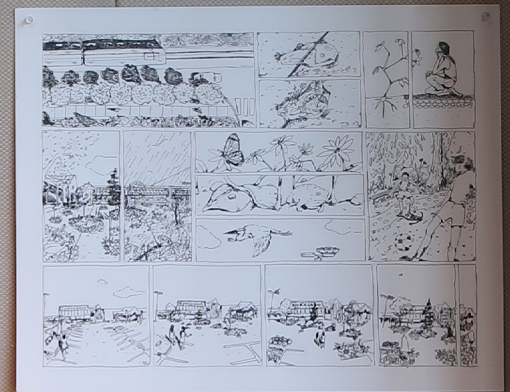
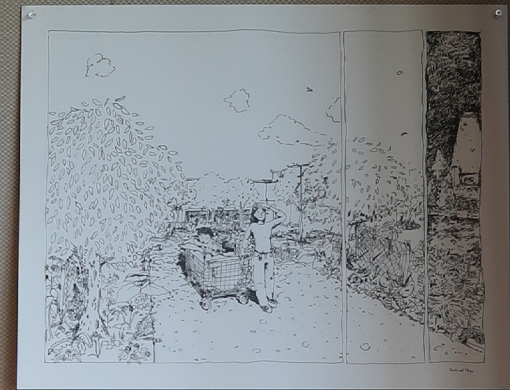
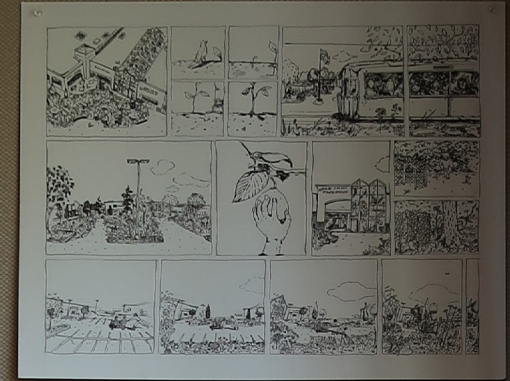
Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, NJ” 1967

So that we continue to pay closer attention to the nature we live with every day.



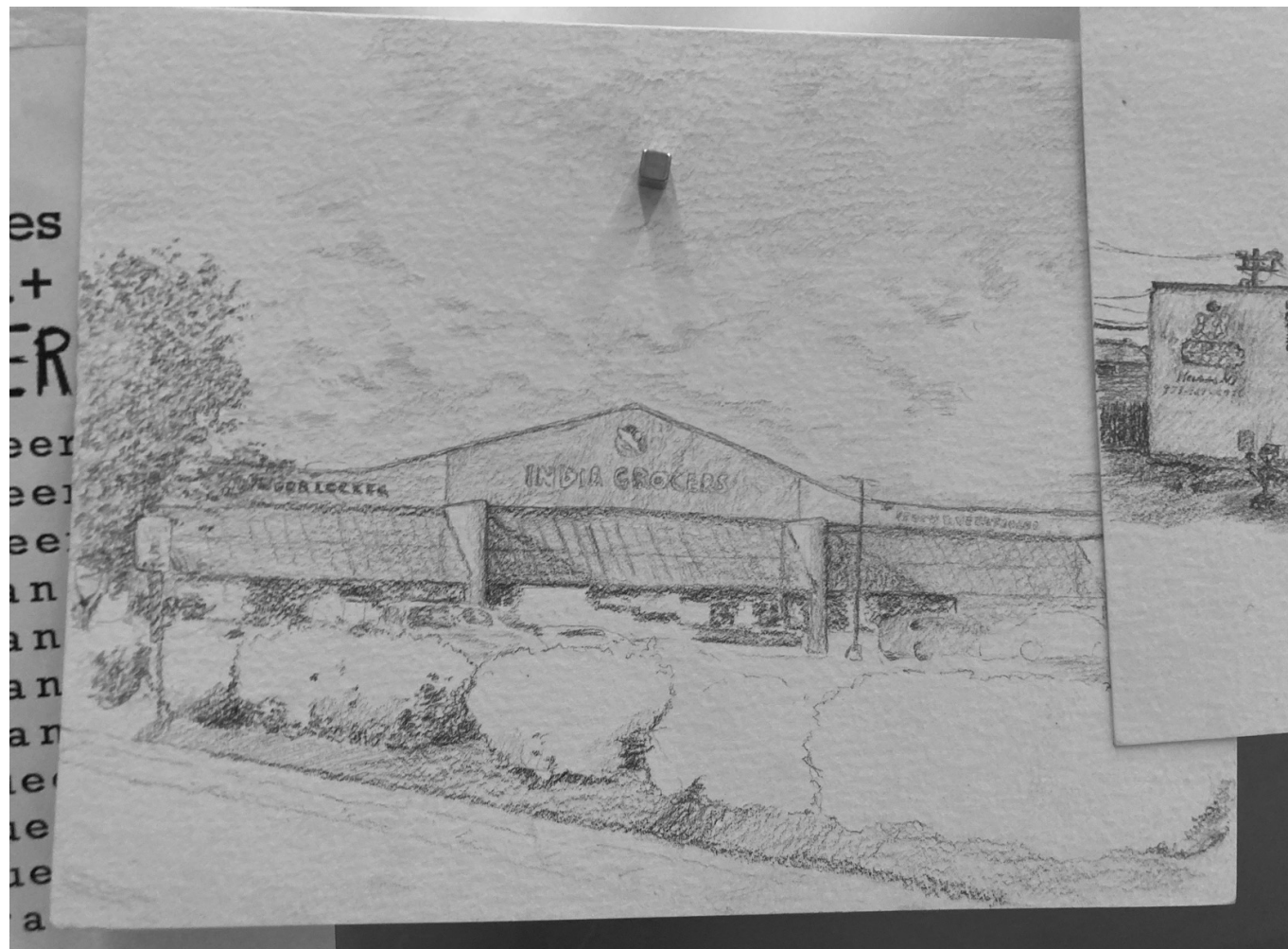
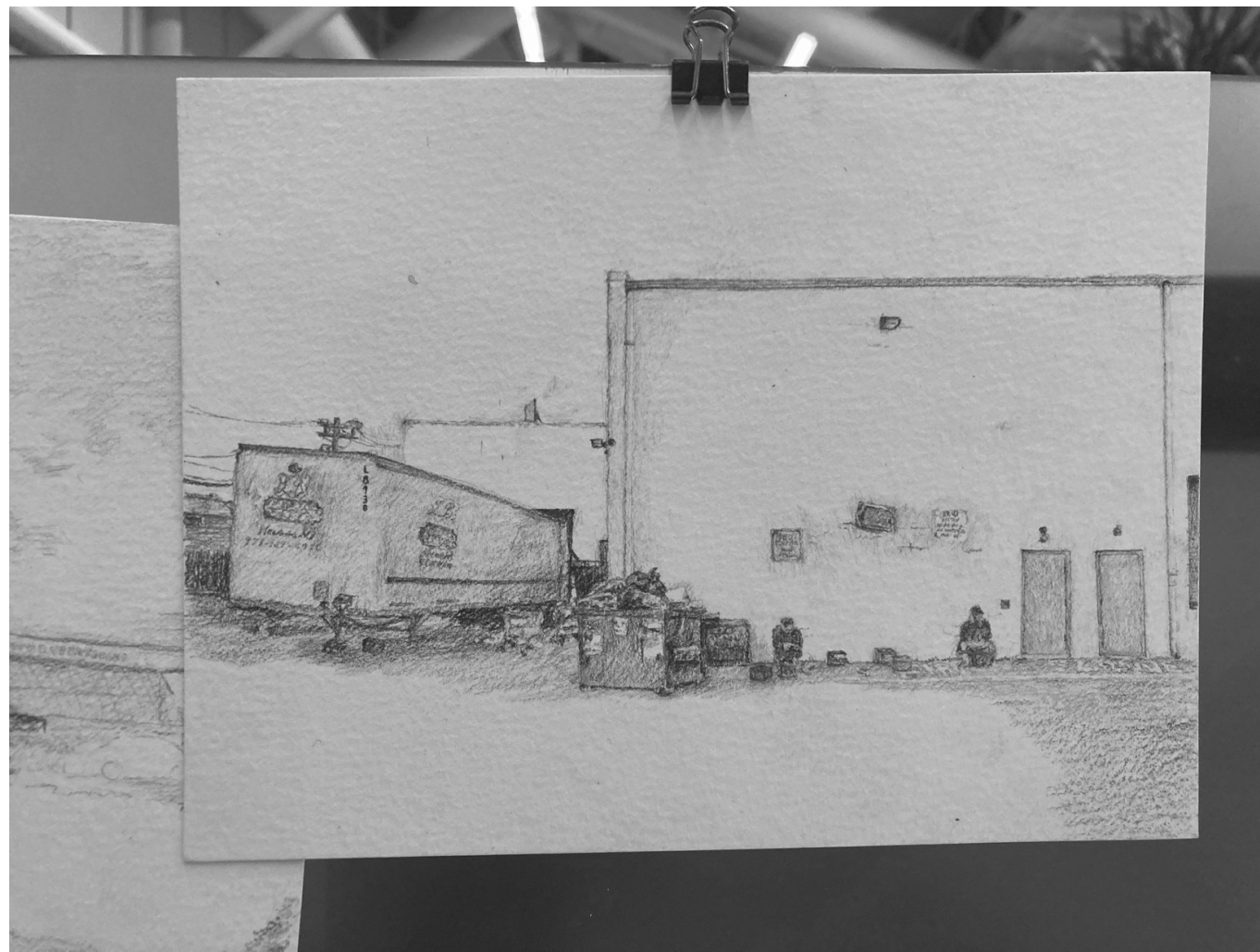
“Time turns metaphors into *things*, and stacks them up in cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs.”
Robert Smithson, “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, NJ” 1967

Review photographs



Review photographs





Citations

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