





# A Third Thing

An exploration of Black Hair in Architectural Design

Christina B. Schaller, Masters of Architecture 2018





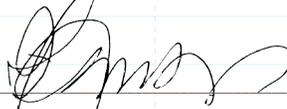


### **A Third Thing**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Architecture in the Department of Architecture of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island by

Christina B. Schaller  
Class of 2018

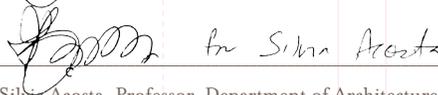
Approved by Master's Examination Committee:



Hansy Better Barraza, Professor, Department of Architecture, Thesis Chair



Hansy Better Barraza, Professor, Department of Architecture, Thesis Advisor



Silvia Acosta, Professor, Department of Architecture, Secondary Thesis Advisor



This thesis is dedicated to my family:  
Patricia, Marianna, Christopher and Maurice

And my RISD family:  
Danni Zhang, Jhanani Palasky and Shu Shang.

Special thanks to Hansy Better Barraza  
for her support, mentorship and guidance throughout this process.

*“The paradox of education is precisely this —  
that as one begins to become conscious one begins to  
examine the society in which he is being educated.”*





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## **Abstract**

“African-American architects have been unable to articulate our own truth or vision of the future except as a reflection of the very culture that marginalizes us. We are so spent by trying to get into the system that there is little time remaining to critique the historical condition that make our climb so difficult. Rather than develop a self-defined praxis of architecture that would make a real difference in the lives of our people, we mimic the values and goals that have created our oppression.”

Sharon Sutton

By looking at traditions, art and architecture in the African American community, my goal is to make a case for an African American aesthetic that embraces ambiguity and empowers the community. This thesis will manifest in a public space for activism, healing and uplift.

In the thesis, I look at the church as a site to question Black and White spaces. Does the church adequately accommodate this community that has been historically ignored in architectural design? I also use hair braiding as a muse for creative exploration in space making. The geographic site for the intervention is a suburban neighborhood in Deerfield Beach, Florida that is predominantly Black.



## I. Early Thesis Investigations

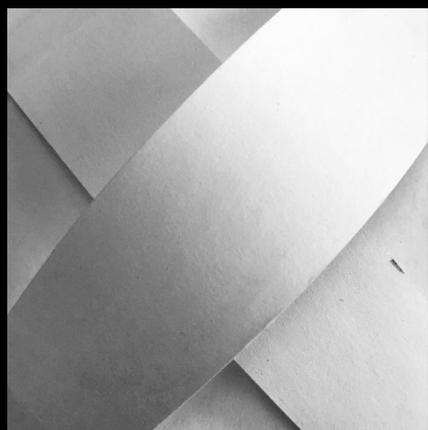


## Where do we look for cultural identity?

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“When praises go up, blessings come down.”  
Kurt Carr

Praise Dancing is a ritual unique to the African American community. Also referred to as liturgical dance, the practice merges the act of dancing as a form of worship (which is common amongst West African religions) and Christianity (which enslaved people embraced due to the preachings of freedom). Praise Dancing is an example of a cultural ritual which defines space.



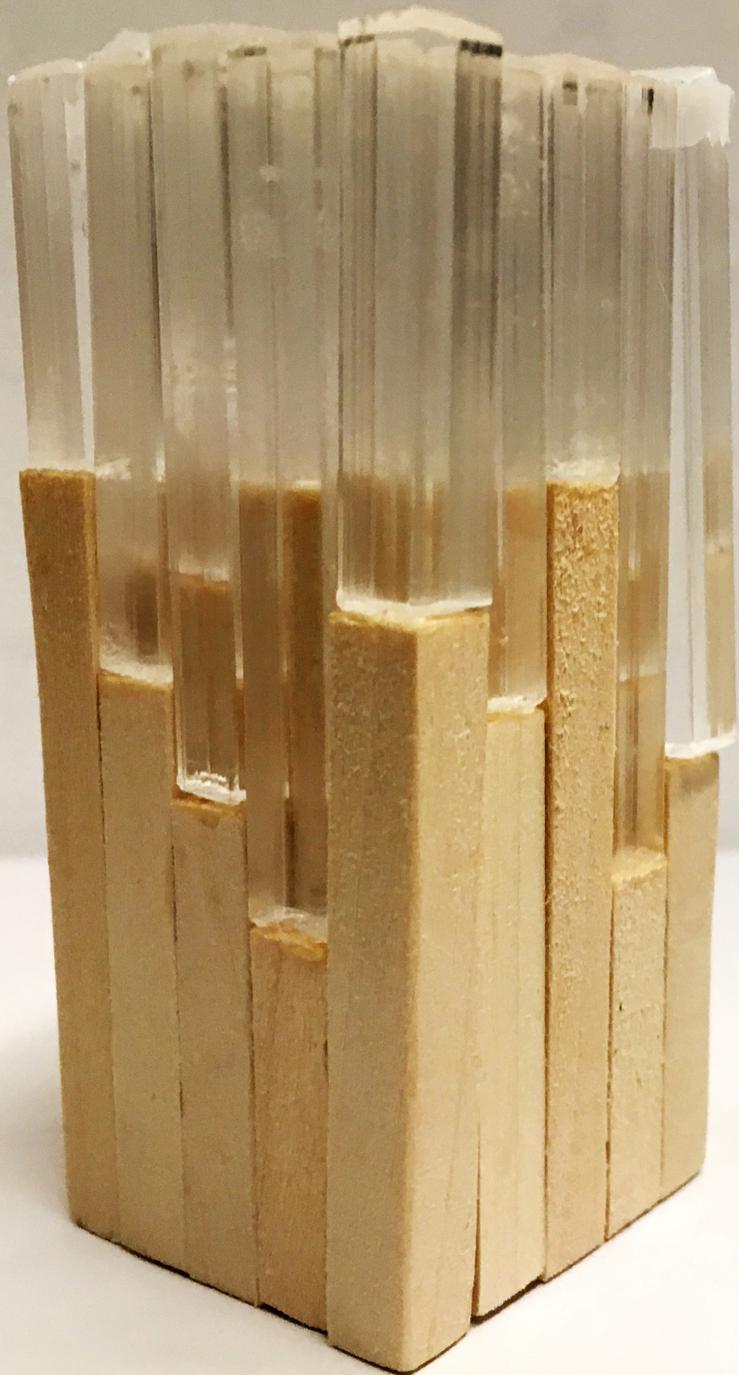
### **Are there tectonics in rituals?**

21

“But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her:  
for her hair is given her for a covering.”

1 Corinthians 11:15

A woman's hair is her crown and glory. Black women in America really embrace this theory through celebration and protection of their hair. Braids are a protective style that by overlapping and twisting three strands of hair together helps retain moisture and prevent tangling.



### Can materials reflect racial complexity?

23

“One ever feels his two-ness—An American, a Negro;  
two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings;  
two warring ideals in one dark body...”

W.E.B. DuBois

By joining hard and soft, translucent and opaque,  
I am seeking to reveal moments that appear  
when two different materials come together.

This exploration is a metaphor for the African  
American condition, making visible and tangible the  
double consciousness of being both African  
and American and trying to find the beauty of being  
in-between.



### **What are the architectural elements that are important to the Black community?**

25

“Often, exploited or oppressed groups of people who are compelled by economic circumstance to share small living quarters with many others view the world right outside their housing structure as liminal space where they can stretch the limits of desire and the imagination.”

bell hooks

In my thesis probe I was seeking to understand elements of place-making in the African American community and the global impact of style. The stoop and the porch overhang represent two kinds of place-making that are used for congregation. While the porch overhang is designed for shading in the southern states, families in Florida without porches use their carports for congregation. In the northern states stoops are a more prominent space for congregation. Although architecturally designed for egress, people often hangout, braid hair and interact with neighbors while sitting on their stoop.

## **“Humble Mumble” by OutKast**

Andre 3000 speaks about how hip hop can be transformed to deliver a political message. To bring empowerment and awareness to a larger audience than the traditional means of protest. I hope to do the same with architecture.

How can architecture deliver a political message and bring empowerment and awareness to a larger audience?

## **Paul R Williams Steyn Studio**

This mashup was created to understand the impact and reach of the black aesthetic in architecture. Paul R. Williams was the first African American architect to join the AIA and the first African American architect to win an AIA Gold Medal. Through studying his work I noticed a similarity between his La Concha Motel in Las Vegas (1961) and Steyn Studio's Bosjes Chapel in South Africa (2016). The overlap reveals a relationship between America and Africa. It leads me to believe that when architects are looking for a modern style to represent Africa they look to African American architecture.

If this is true, do other diasporic countries look to one another for influence? What is the global impact of this investigation?

*I met a critic, I made  
her shit her draws, She said  
she thought Hip Hop was only guns and  
alcohol, I said "Oh hell naw!", but yet it's that  
too, You can't discrima-hate cause you done read a  
book or two, What if I looked at you in a microscope saw  
all the dirty organisms, Living in your closet would I stop  
and would I pause it, To put that bitch in slower motion,  
got the potion and the antidote, And a quote for collision  
the decision, Do you want to live or wanna exist? The  
game changes everyday, so obsolete is the fist and  
marches, Speeches only reaches those who  
already know about it, This is how  
we go about it.*

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**“Ain’t Got No”  
by Nina Simone**

This song brings light to the complexity of the African American condition.

When black people were forcibly brought to this country they had no physical objects and were prohibited from speaking their native languages or practicing their religions. Very little of their African culture was preserved, but what they did have were their bodies.

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**Liberian Home,  
South Carolina Plantation Home**

This song was paired with a collage of a Liberian home and a Plantation home because the slaves also brought their physical skill to America. Slaves were responsible for building furniture, tools and architecture in the new world. The mashup examines the similarities between the style of colonialism and enslavement (the plantation home) and the style of free blacks that moved to Liberia in hopes to escape oppression.

How does architecture carry connotations? How can we begin to imagine an architecture of freedom? How do we create aesthetic that is not reliant on the European styles?

*I ain't got*

*no home, ain't got no shoes.*

*Ain't got no money, ain't got no class.*

*Ain't got no skirts, ain't got no sweater. Ain't got  
no perfume, ain't got no bed. Ain't got no man. Ain't  
got no mother, ain't got no culture. Ain't got no friends,  
ain't got no schoolin'. Ain't got no love, ain't got no name.  
Ain't got no ticket, ain't got no token. Ain't got no god. Got my  
hair, got my head. Got my brains, got my ears. Got my eyes, got  
my nose. Got my mouth, I got my smile. I got my tongue, got  
my chin. Got my neck, got my boobies. Got my heart, got  
my soul. Got my back, I got my sex. I got my arms, got  
my hands. Got my fingers, got my legs. Got my feet,  
got my toes. Got my liver, got my blood. I've  
got life, I've got my freedom.*

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**“Theme for English B”  
by Langston Hughes**

Does your race determine your production? Langston Hughes questions whether his poetry is black simply because he is black. I am questioning the same thing in terms of architecture. Does a building that was designed by a black architect inherently possess a black aesthetic? Or does it take a conscious effort to break the cannon?

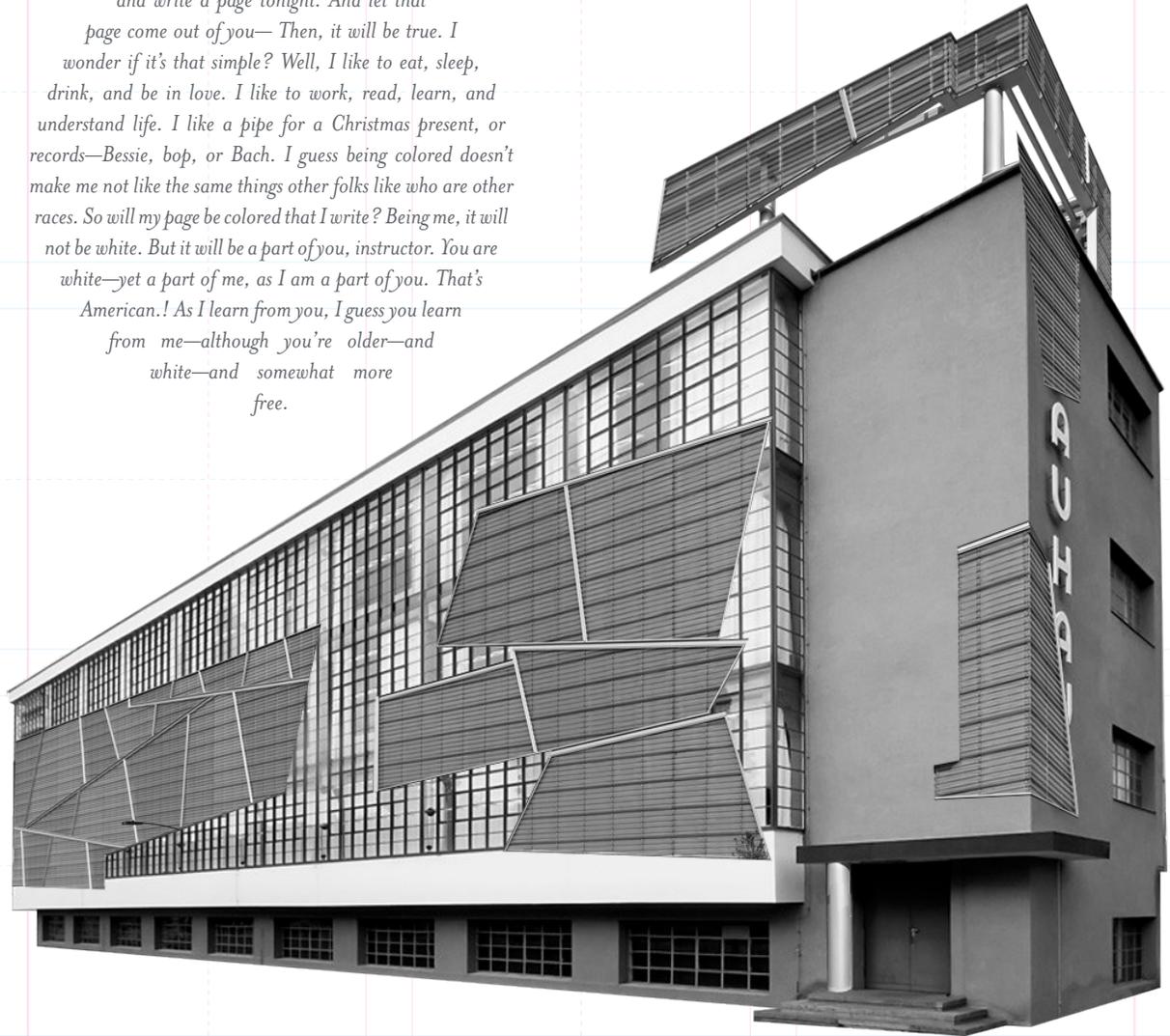
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**Phil Freelon,  
Walter Gropius**

By looking at Phil Freelon's Harvey Gantt Center for African American Arts (1975) and comparing it to Walter Gropius' Bauhaus (1925) I noticed similarities in form and facade articulation.

I wonder if Freelon's work is similar to the Bauhaus due to education, an unconscious mimicking of what he has been taught? Can you tell the race of the architect by looking at the architecture?

*T h e  
instructor said, Go home  
and write a page tonight. And let that  
page come out of you— Then, it will be true. I  
wonder if it's that simple? Well, I like to eat, sleep,  
drink, and be in love. I like to work, read, learn, and  
understand life. I like a pipe for a Christmas present, or  
records—Bessie, bop, or Bach. I guess being colored doesn't  
make me not like the same things other folks like who are other  
races. So will my page be colored that I write? Being me, it will  
not be white. But it will be a part of you, instructor. You are  
white—yet a part of me, as I am a part of you. That's  
American.! As I learn from you, I guess you learn  
from me—although you're older—and  
white—and somewhat more  
free.*





**Reflection**

The jury was very encouraging and supportive of my thesis exploration. The complexity of the problem raised excitement but understandably a desire for me to define more limitations. These questions arose:

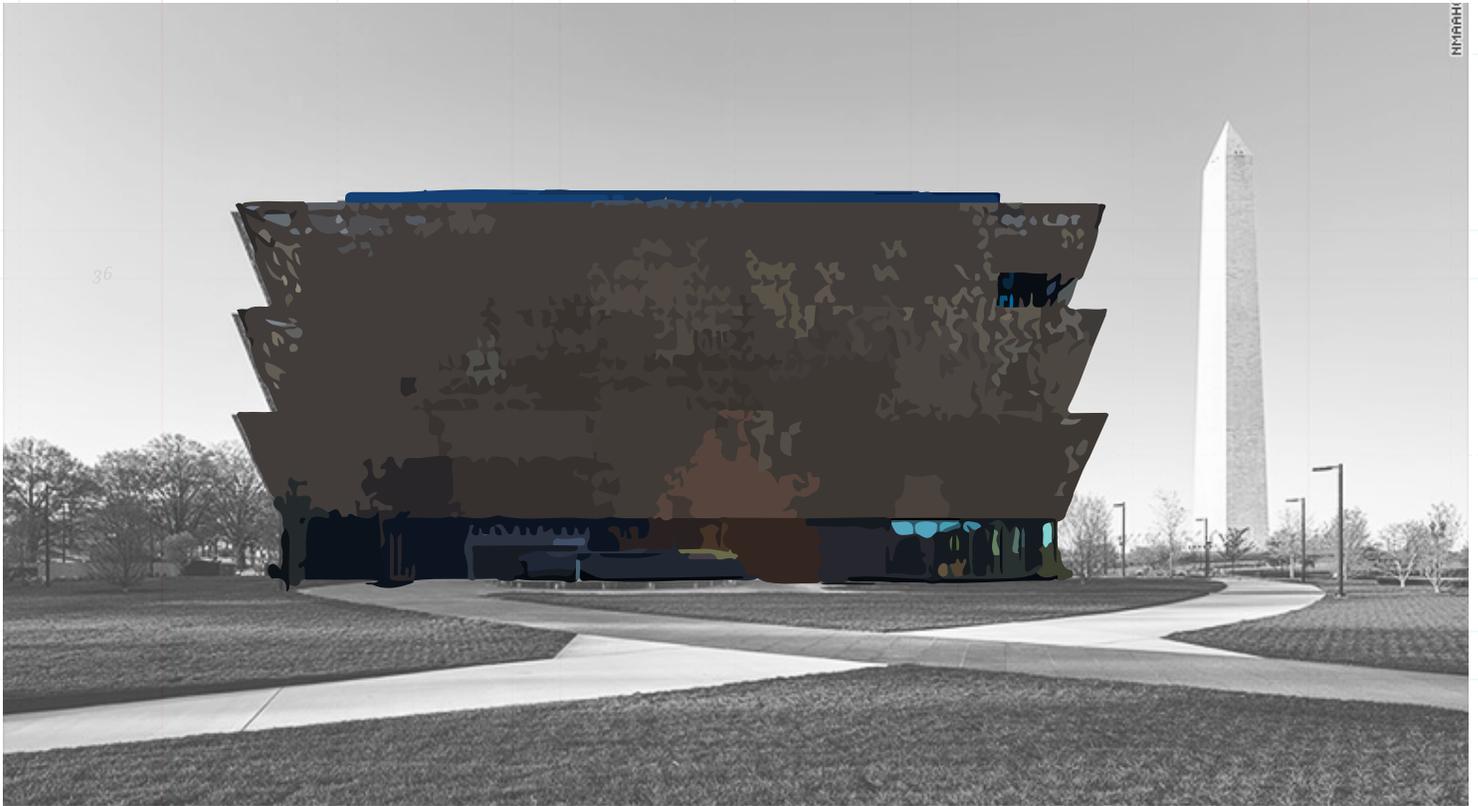
How much will I educate myself and others about the work and history of African Americans in architecture and how much will I design a project?

Do I define just a few people to model my work after as opposed to trying to understand the issues of representation in the black community as a whole?

Do I choose very specific issues that I can explore in depth instead of trying to define a wholistic style (which will be difficult considering the small number of African American architects that can freely explore issues of representation)?



## 2. Wintersession Investigation

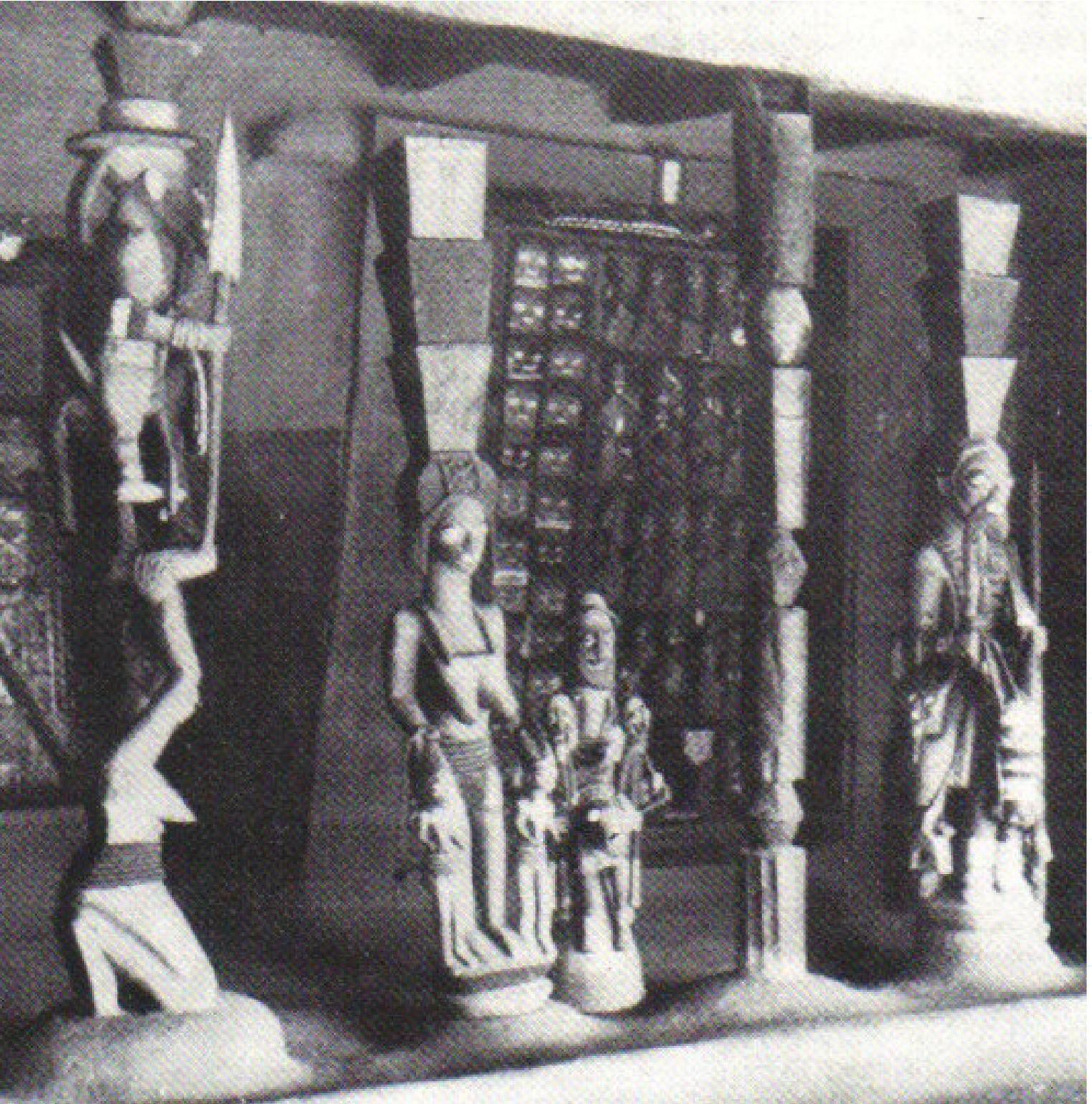


**The National Museum for African American History and Culture**  
**Architects: David Adjaye, Phil Freelon, Max Bond**  
**Inspired by the three-tiered crowns used in Yoruban art from West Africa**



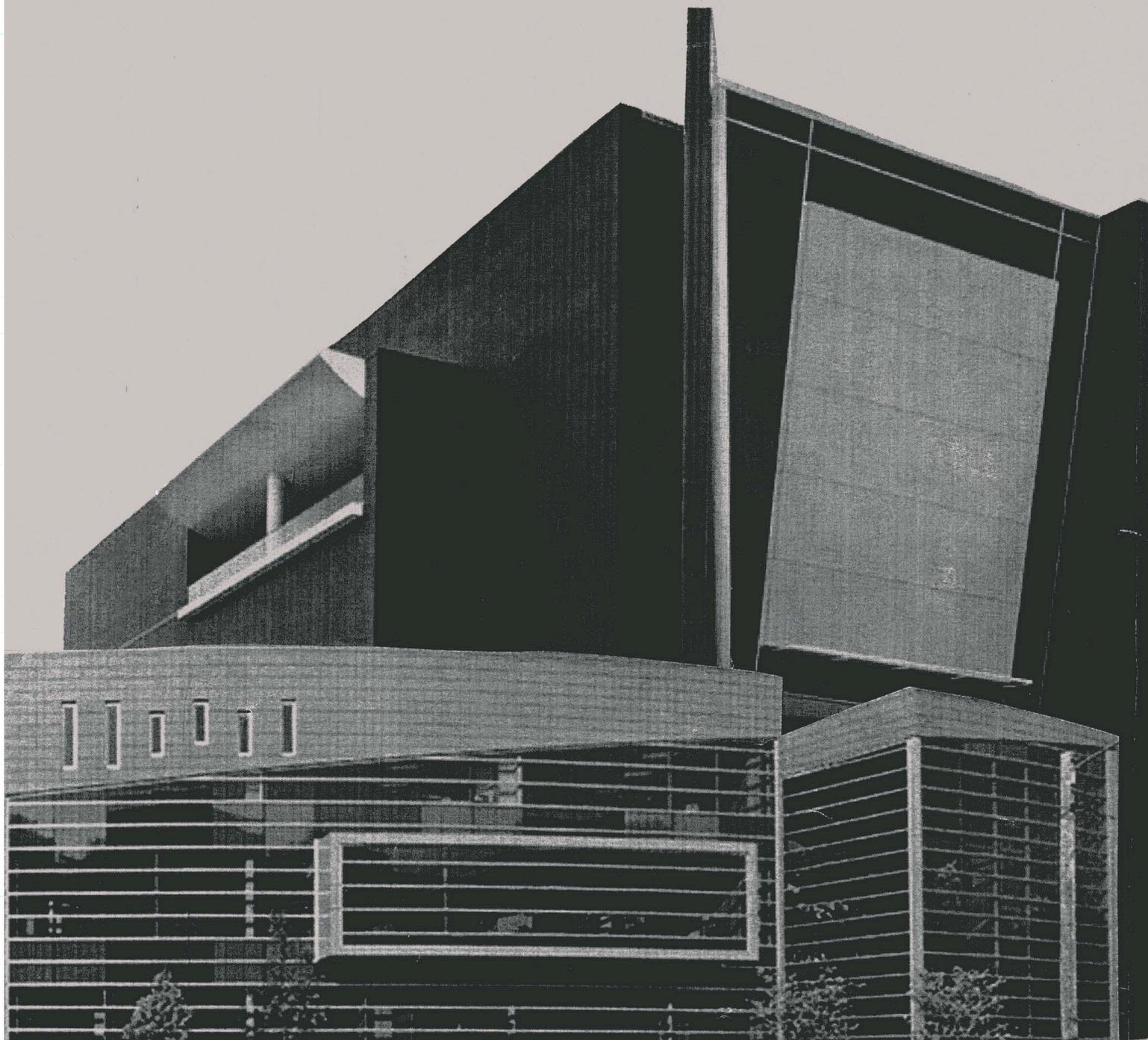
**The Deerfield Beach Museum for African American History and Culture**  
**Designer: Christina Schaller**  
**Inspired by Kodak Black's hair, a Broward County native and rapper.**

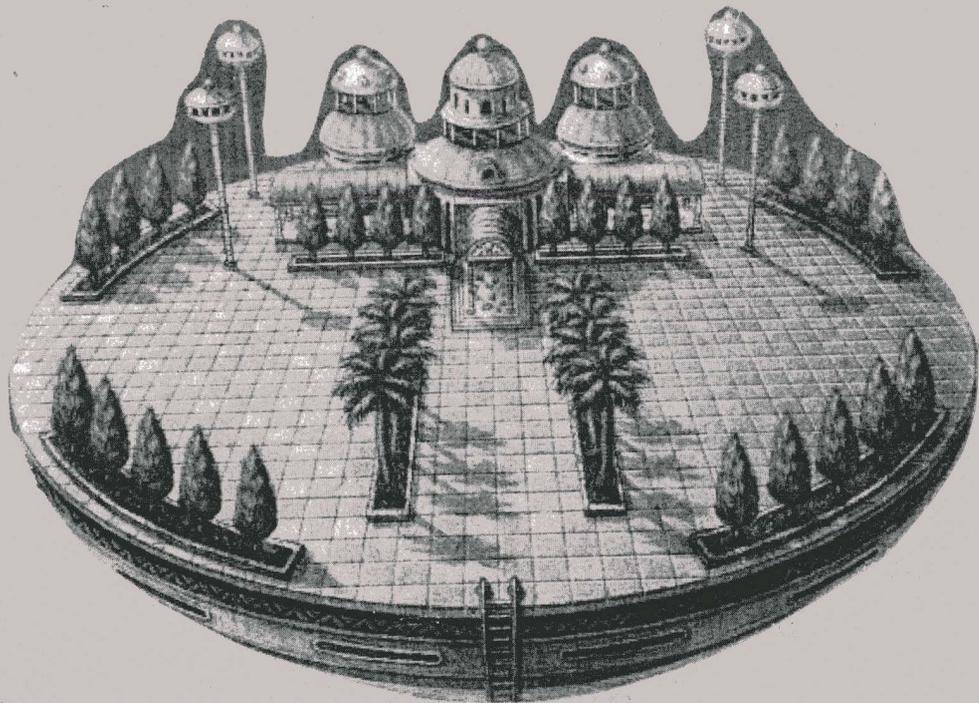
Christina B. Schaller



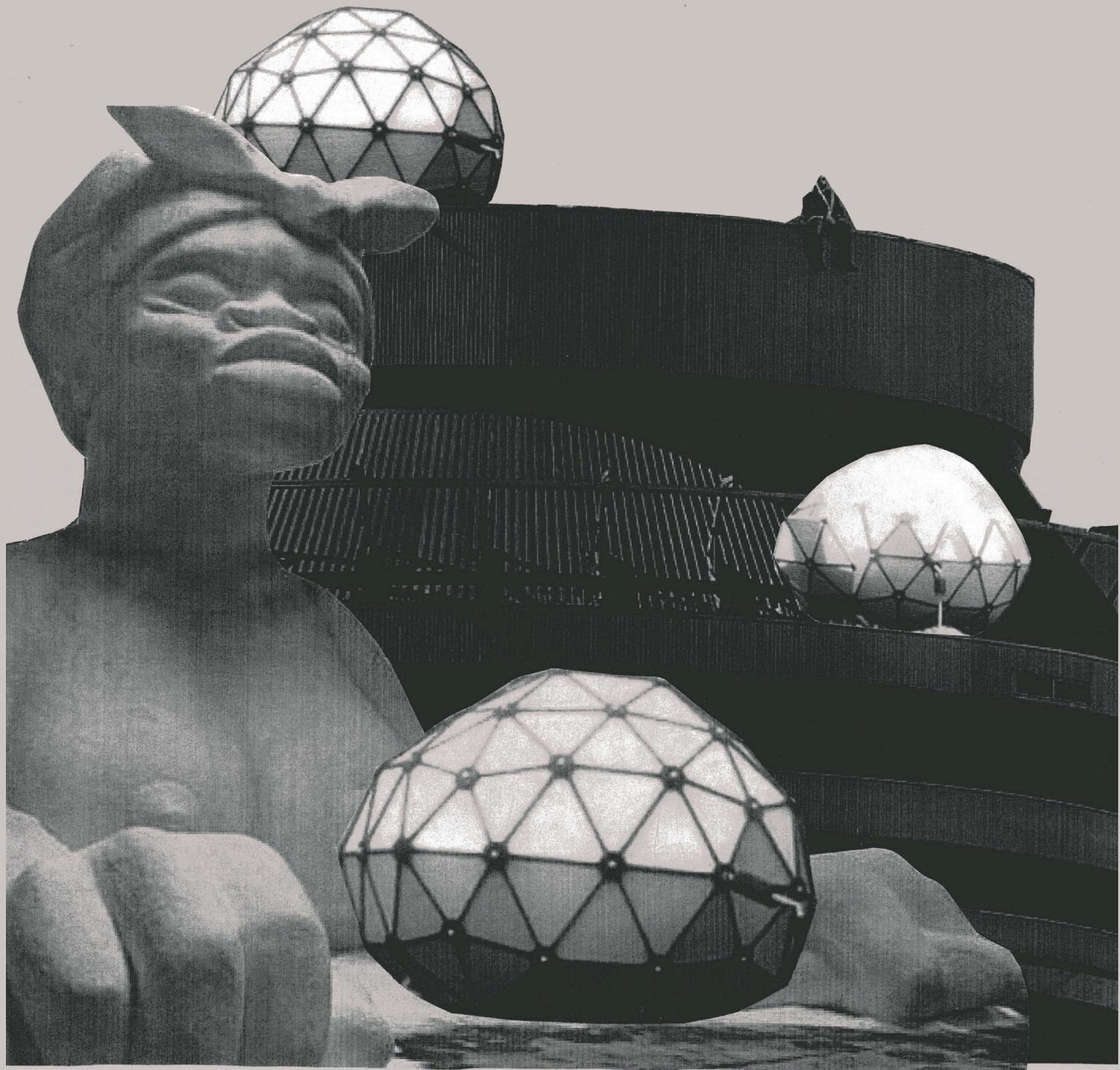












### **Collage Series**

The first collage of rapper Kodak Black's hair as a building was designed to critique where we get our architectural forms from. For the National Museum for African American History and Culture, the architects chose to look to Africa for a form embedded with cultural identity and meaning. The issue with this is that Black Americans whose ancestors were forcibly brought to this country through the process of slavery have no connection to this West African form. We need to look deeper and search for modes cultural expression that are shared throughout the diaspora and not just one specific place in Africa.

Hair is something that every person of African descent has a close relationship to. Our hair texture allows us to make unique forms and styles and we take special care of our hair, spending hours upon hours on maintenance and styling. Our hair has spiritual significance as well as the ability to communicate our martial and social status and general mood. How can this shared practice be used to create architecture?

## Jack Travis' 10 Principles of Black Cultural Design

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Economy  
Simplicity  
Advocacy in  
Construction  
Preservation  
Spirituality  
Heritage  
Duality  
Earth Centered  
Indoor/Outdoor  
Relationships  
Intense use of Color,  
Pattern, Texture

*“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.*”

*One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”*

W.E.B. Du Bois



### **Wintersession Probe**

The probe for wintersession was designed to materialize the feeling of double consciousness. Beads were strung and hung from the porch structure to create an ambiguous feeling of being inside and outside at the same time. Similar to being Black and American. The beads were used as a tool to create this type of space because they are often found in Black homes as curtains to create semi-privacy as opposed to doors that are always open or shut. The probe also attempts to create the feeling of spirituality and duality that

### **Advice From the Winter Critic**

Don't give over to the language of the discipline.  
Experiment in different ways.

Create a palette for the work.

Use the ritual of hair braiding to understand issues of identity, natural vs artificial, form, etc.

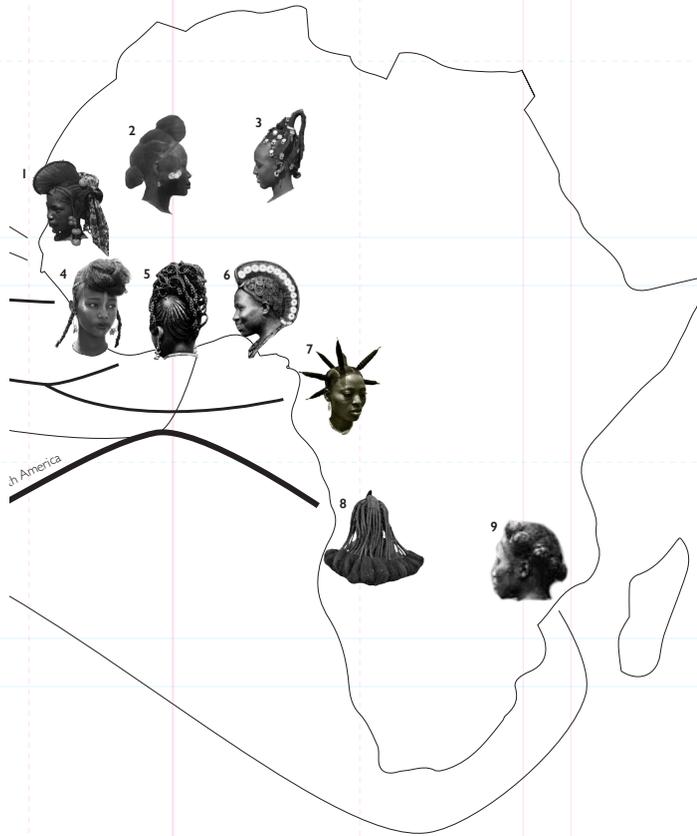




### 3. Hair Analysis



- Current Events
- 10 Natural Hair Movement
  - 11 Bonnor Brothers Hair Show
  - 12 Smithsonian Folklife Festival



Tribes

- 1 Fulani
- 2 Soninka
- 3 Songhai
- 4 Wodaabe
- 5 Yoruba
- 6 Igbo
- 7 Fang
- 8 Himba
- 9 Zulu

A Third Thing: Hair Analysis

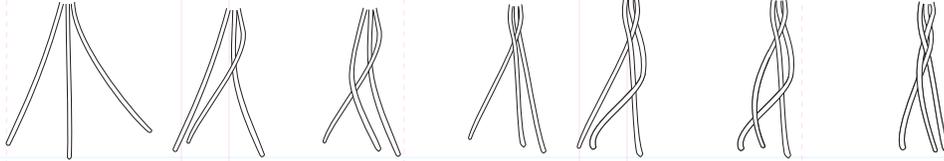
Meanings

Variety of meanings. The hair style and texture communicate one's tribe, social status, material status, age, wealth, health and sometimes current feelings. A commonality among tribes is that if a women's hair is unkept, it means that she is in mourning or immoral.

Erasing culture and destroying knowledge

Dehumanizing

Process



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Masters wives shave slave womens hair because it "confused" their husbands.

Events

Europeans arrive in West Africa and document many diverse Sculptural Hairstyles

First Slaves brought to Jamestown - Shaved heads

Description of Afro-textured hair as Wool

1400

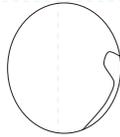
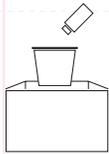
1444

1600

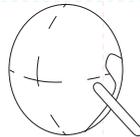
1619

1700

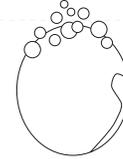
Improvising, white hair products do not work on black hair



Free time to do hair!



Hair as a "political statement"



Song criticizing notions of Good and Bad Hair

Black Hair Documentary

Getting off of the "creamy crack" maybe because of the documentary?

Hair as liberation and accepting of oneself

"Tignon Laws" in Louisiana required black women to cover their hair in public.

Headwraps for field slaves to protect from bugs, braids for house slaves.



Slavery ends, straighter hair = good hair = well adjusted = socioeconomic mobility



Madame C. J. Walker is the 1st female self-made millionaire in the US from selling African American hair products

Marcus Garvey: "back to Africa" aesthetic



"Good Hair" Chris Rock

Natural Hair Movement  
Big Chop: Baptism  
YouTube: Community Building: Education Sharing

Bacon grease, butter and kerosene used to condition hair. Internalized colorism linked to hair.

Ships stop importing slaves. Slave lives are valued more and they get Sundays off.

Hot Comb's become popular in America

Garret A. Morgan invents the relaxer

Black Power Movement

Civil Rights Act

"I Am Not My Hair" India Arie

Chemical relaxer sales decrease 67% from previous year.

1789

1808

1865

1880

1910

1913

1920

1960

1965

2006

2009

2011

2018

1800

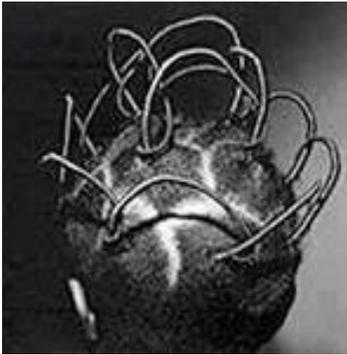
1900

2000

A Third Thing: Hair Analysis

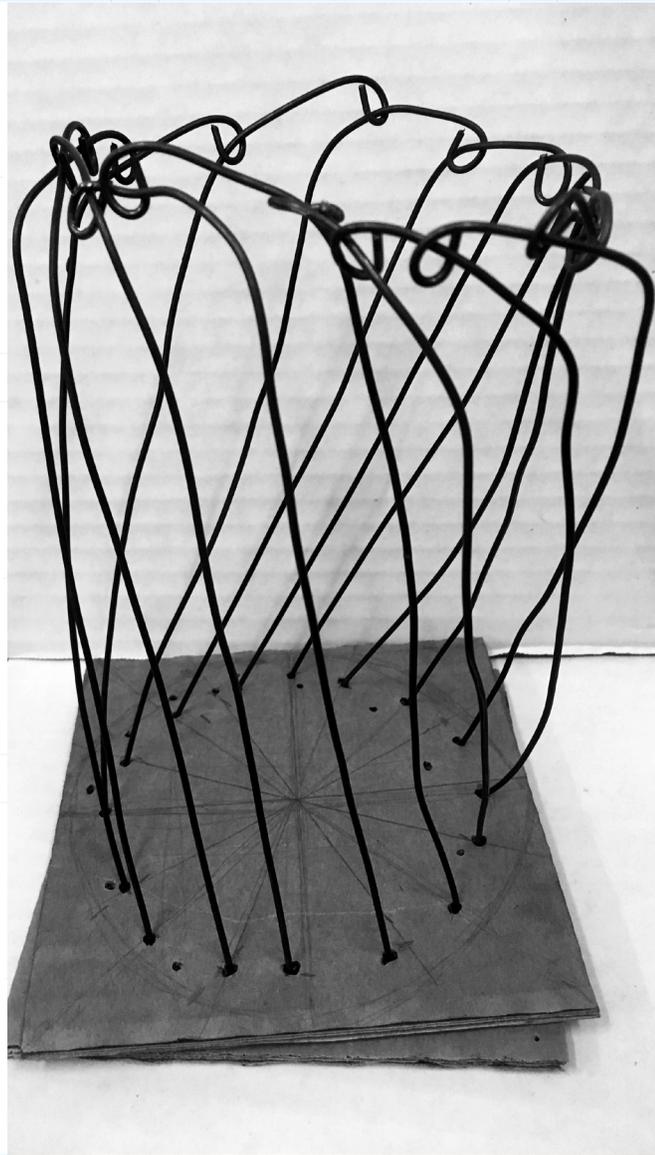


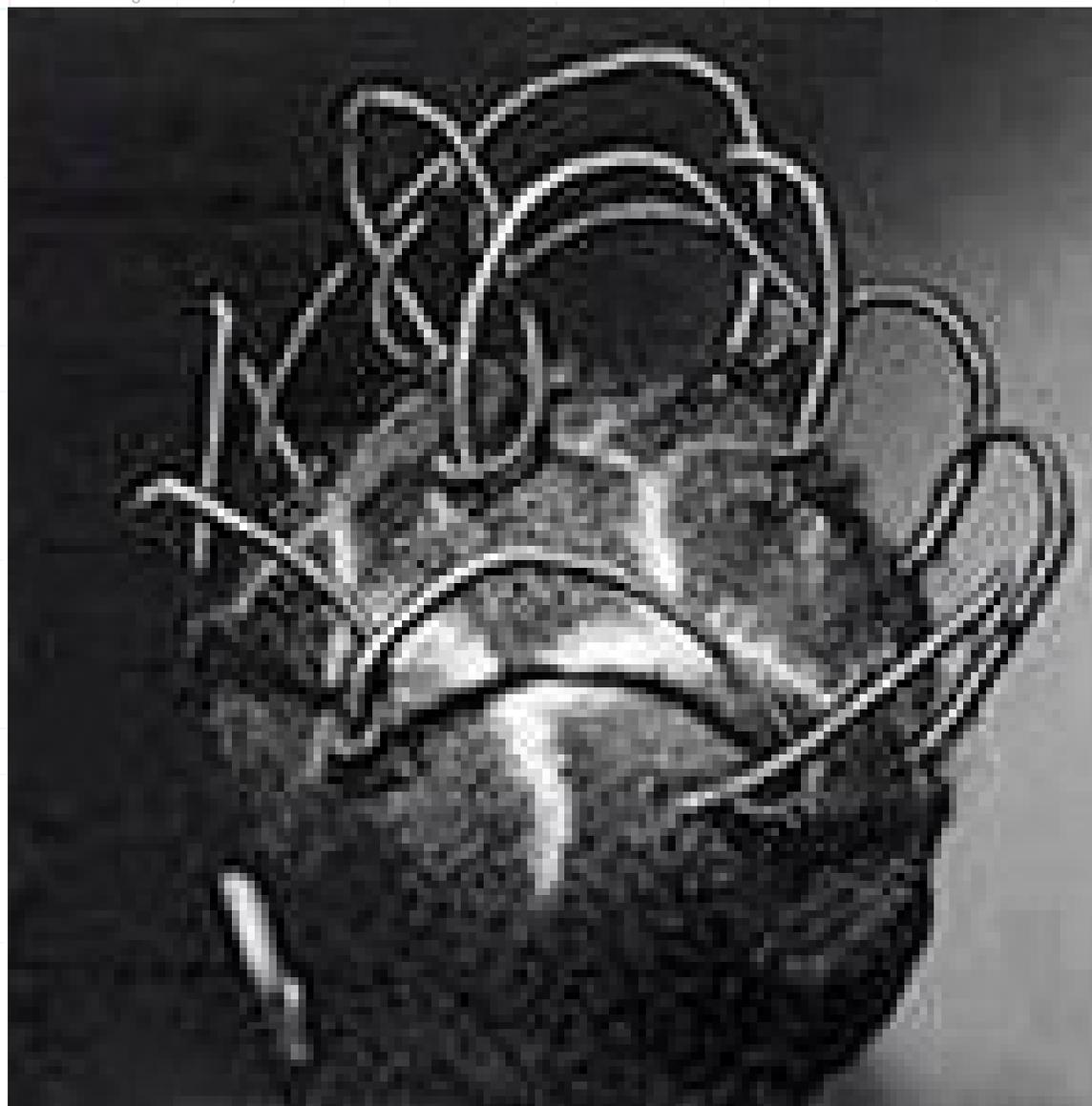
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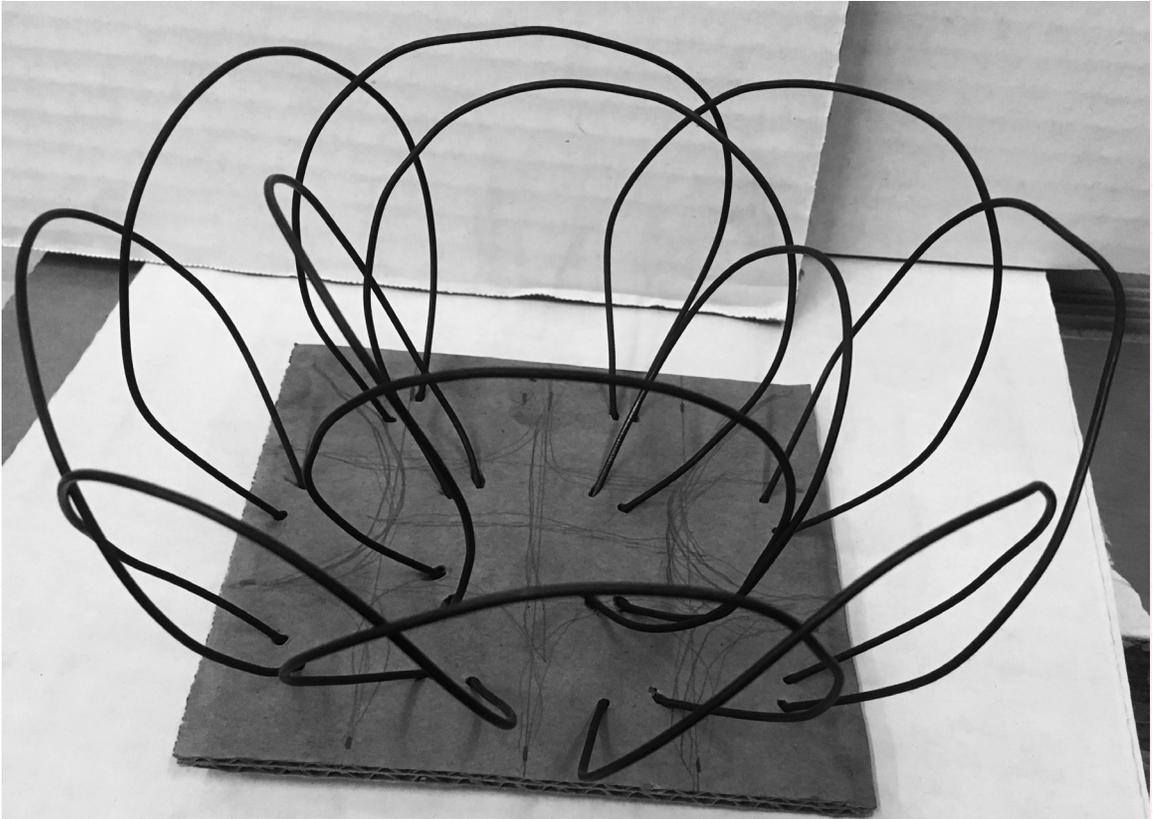




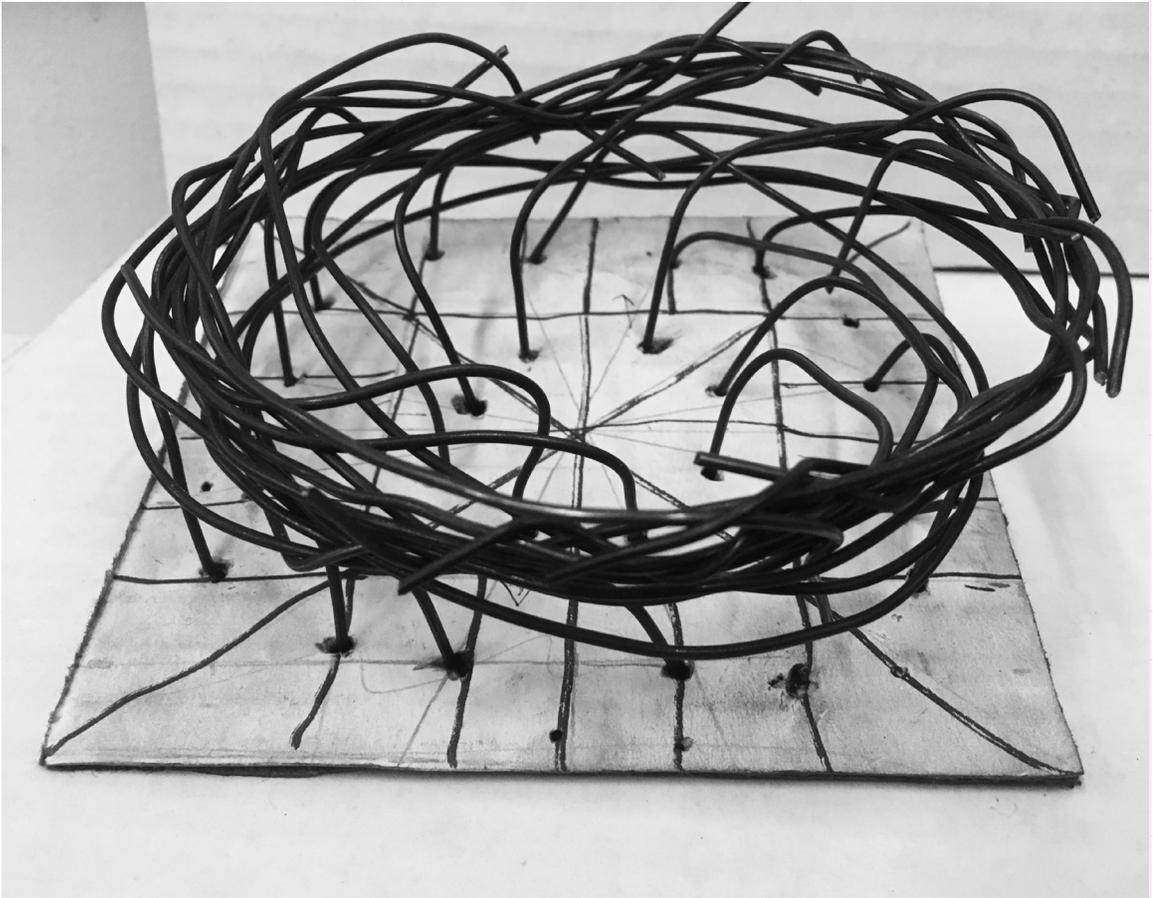
























A Third Thing: Program and Site

## 4. Program and Site

**Events/Programs**

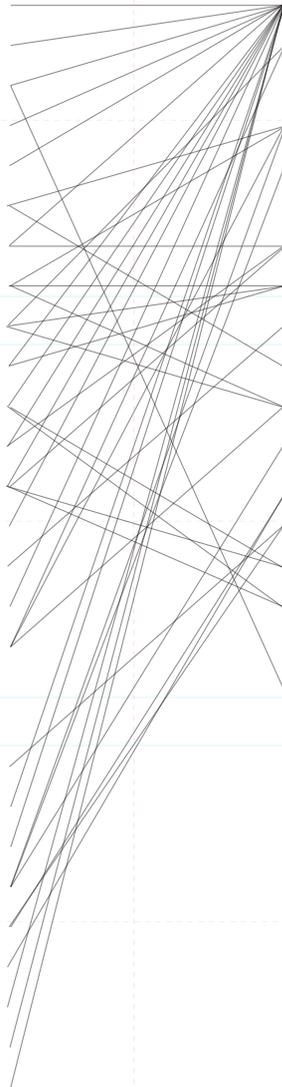
Weddings  
Home-going  
Baptism of Water  
Revival  
NYE  
Fish Frys  
Plays  
Vacation Bible School  
Children's Church  
Bible Study  
Sunday Morning Service  
Praise Dancing  
Praise & Worship  
Preaching  
Alter Call  
Tithes & Offerings  
Daycare

**Rituals/Actions**

Counseling  
Call & Response  
Shouting  
Fellowship  
Praying  
Meditating  
Singing  
Dancing  
Baptism of the Holy Spirit

**Places**

Sanctuary  
Nursery  
Study/Prayer  
Kitchen  
Reception Space  
Storage  
Rehearsal Rooms  
Classrooms  
Alter  
Back Porch  
Play Ground  
Community Garden  
Meditation Garden  
Private Meeting Rooms  
Choir Space  
Band Space  
Offices  
Bath  
Lobby  
Restrooms



### **Program**

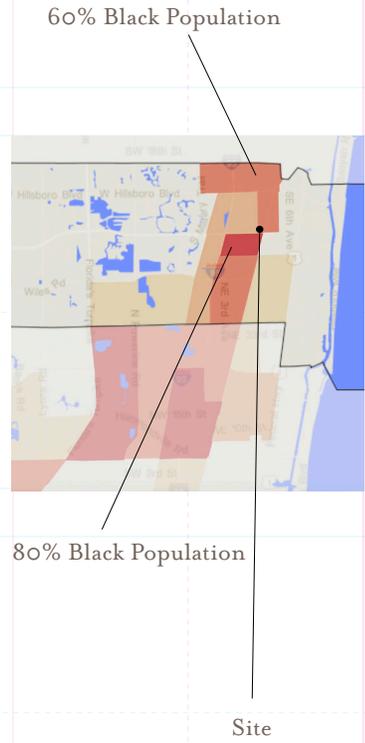
Program is an interdependent relationship between activity and space.

In the event of Praise Dancing, the activity and space both participate in the manifestation of a program. While the altar and the seating for the congregation define the space for the dance, that space would be unprogrammed if not for the dancers which provide the activity. In the same respect, the dancers would not be able to perform their activity if there was no space available.

*“For African slaves in the American colonies in the eighteenth century, the possibilities of resistance and liberation were, ironically, often to be found in the religious theology of the white dominate society; this embrace of an evangelist theology resulted in their own liberative space-making as they constructed spaces for religious worship and refuge... the promise of space to practice liberation and cultural identity.”*

Dark Space, Mario Gooden

A Third Thing: Program and Site



**Site**

A site is a place to make ideas manifest. The site should be strategically picked in order to explore an idea and make evident a research agenda. The site should make a claim.

My site will combat the “inner city” stereotype of black people. By choosing a suburban area not only will I be bringing black representation to a place that it does not currently exist but I will be making the claim that black people cannot be generalized by cities or public housing projects. That we live in other places.

Deerfield Beach is a suburban city in Broward County, Florida, north of Miami. The site chosen is in a prominently black neighborhood in the city that is defined by I-95, an industrial railroad track, and a river. I-95 and the railroad run North-South throughout the county and have prominently black communities living within these boundaries.

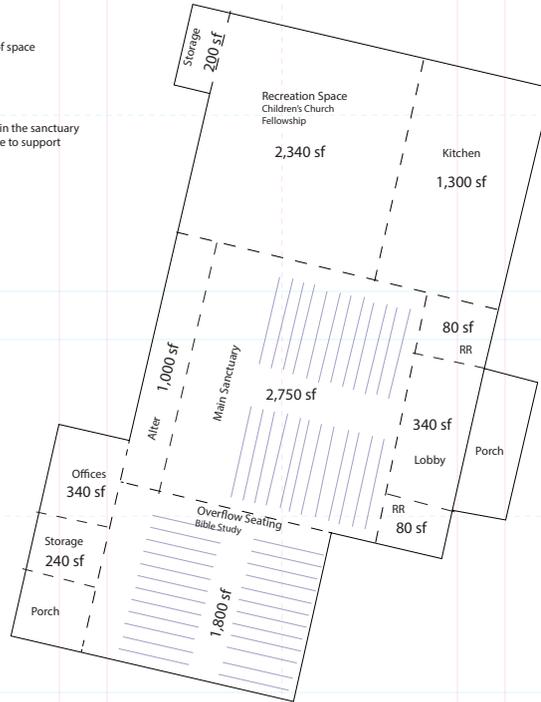
Bible Way Temple Diagram

Pros

Efficient use of space

Cons

Fixed seating in the sanctuary  
Could do more to support community



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1"=16'

Places	Bible Way SF	Proposed SF
Sanctuary	4,550 sf	6,500 sf
Nursery		900 sf
Kitchen	1,300 sf	1,300 sf
Reception Space	2,340 sf	2,500 sf
Storage	440 sf	240 sf
Music Rehearsal Rooms		1,000 sf
Private Rehearsal Rooms		(2) 80 sf
Dance Rehearsal Rooms		1,000 sf
Classrooms		(2) 800 sf
Alter	1,000 sf	1,000 sf
Choir Space		
Band Space		
Back Porch		50% of building footprint
Play Ground		
Community Garden		
Meditation Garden		
Private Meeting Rooms		(2) 80 sf
Offices	340 sf	340 sf
Bath	100 sf	100 sf
Lobby	340 sf	340 sf
Restrooms	160 sf	160 sf
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>
	10,570 sf	17,300 sf



## 5. The New Bibleway Temple







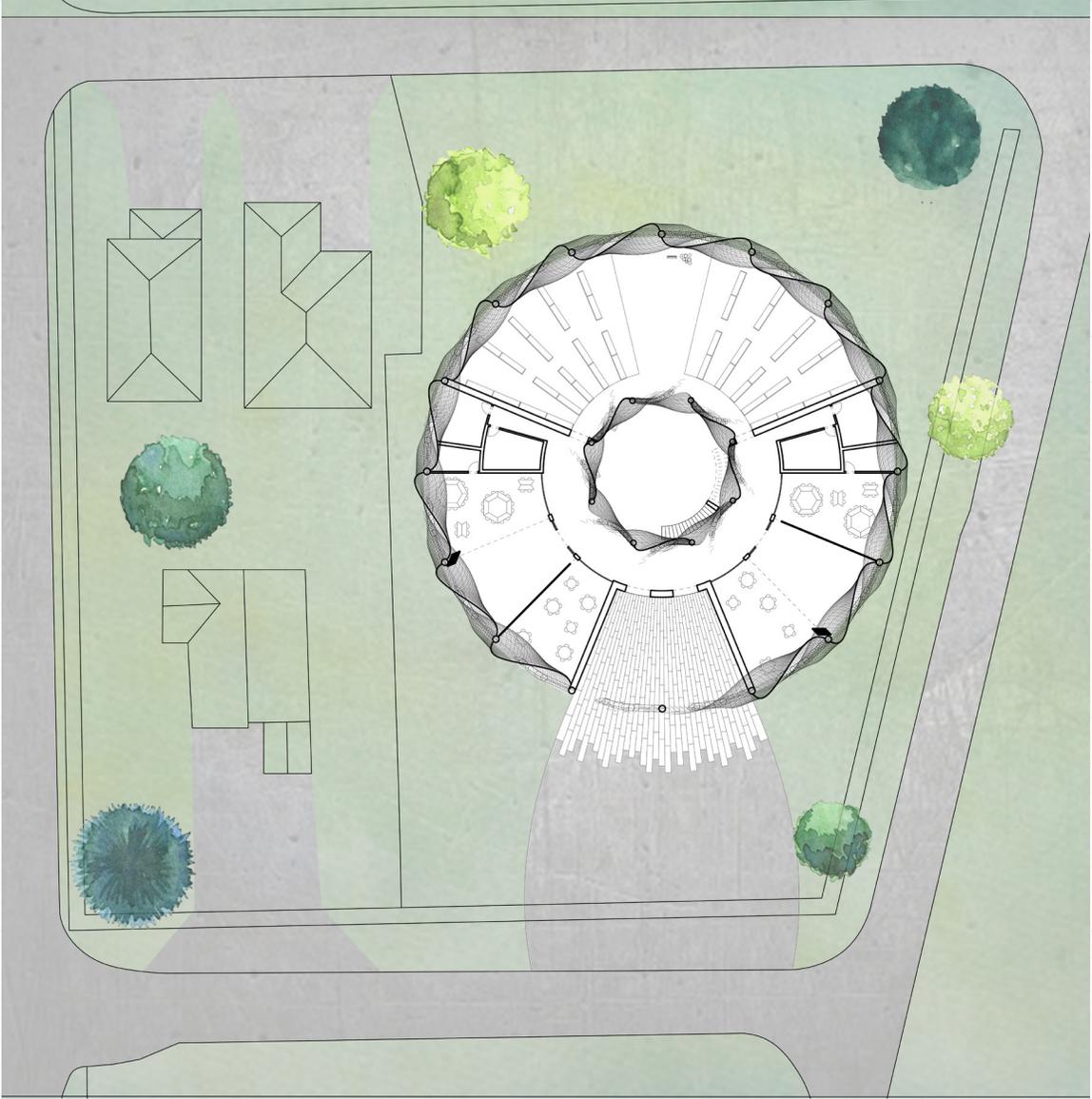
### **About the Project**

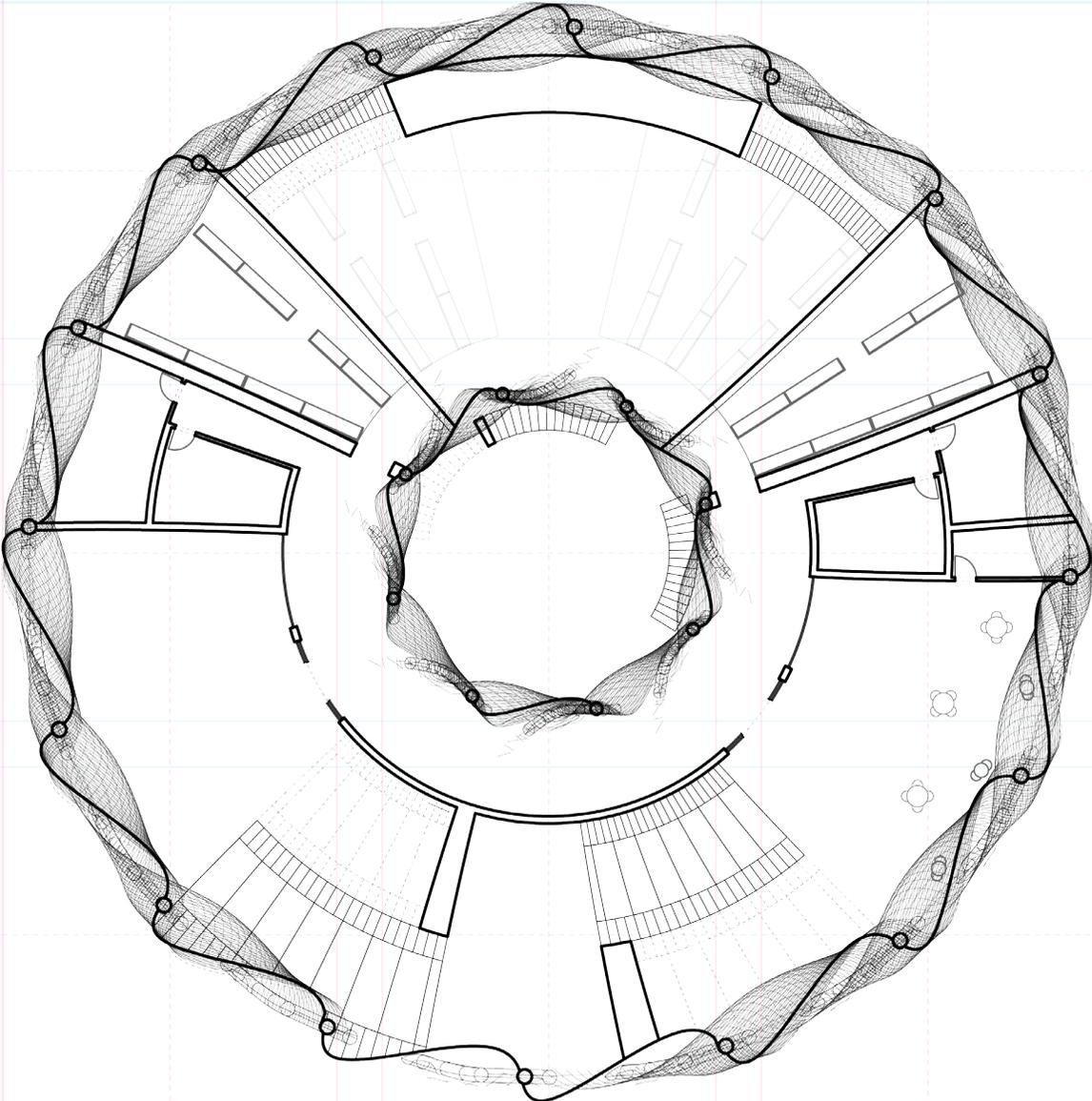
The New Bibleway Temple puts a focus on the needs of Black people through architecture. As Black people have a very unique way of praising and worshiping, space was given throughout the main sanctuary to accommodate dancing, jumping and shouting.

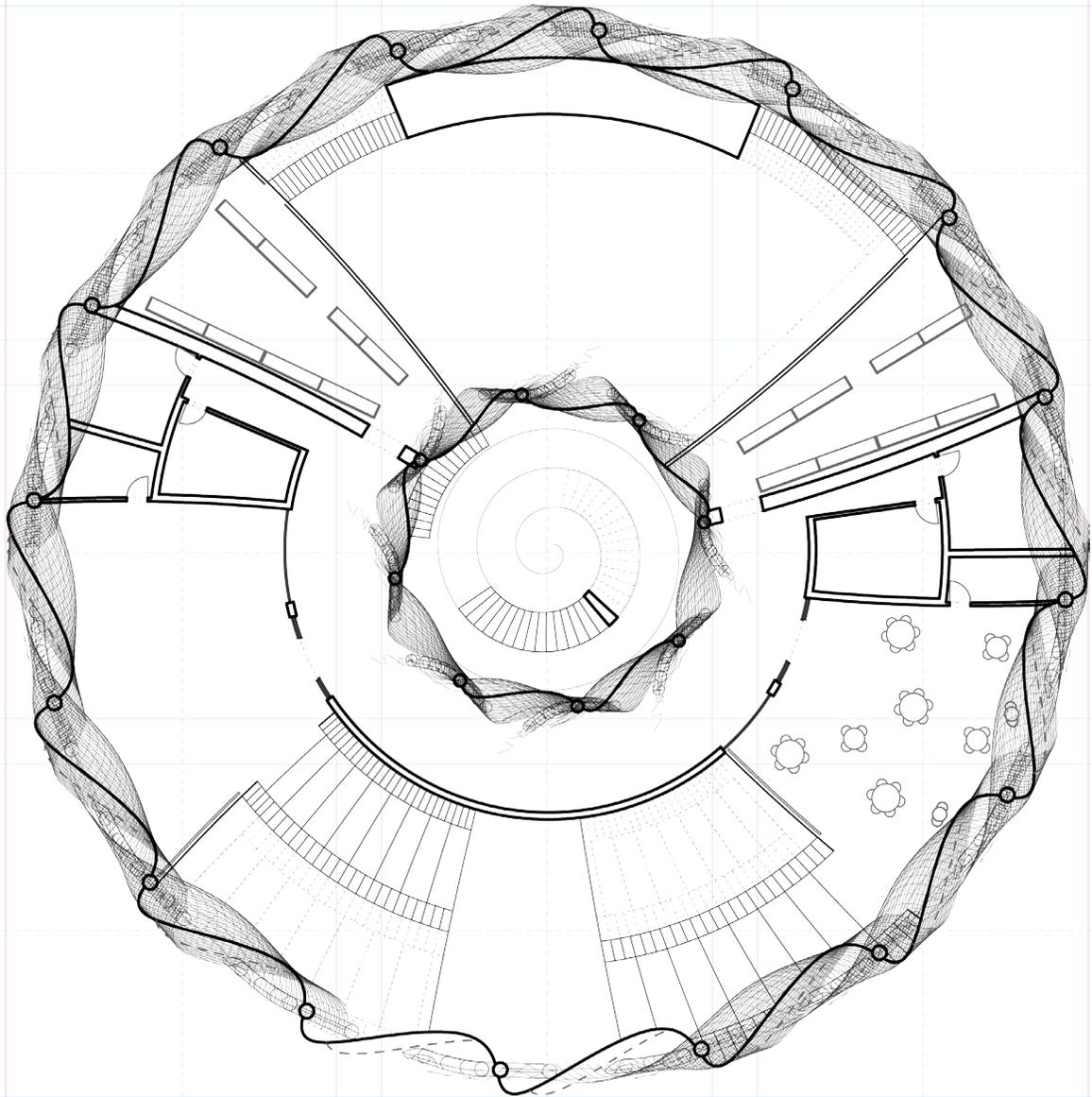
The driveway is extended into the main entrance of the church to mimic the car port condition. As opposed to stoops and porches, Black people in South Florida use their car port as an outdoor gathering space. The church tends to the needs of the community providing several spaces for semi-private congregation, a library, rehearsal rooms for music and dance, and art studios to encourage creative expression. The kitchen has been centralized in the space as a way to “bless the hands that made the food” and celebrate the cooks, as opposed to hide them in the background as “servants”. The top floor is dedicated to prayer and mediation, an essential part of the Pentecostal denomination.

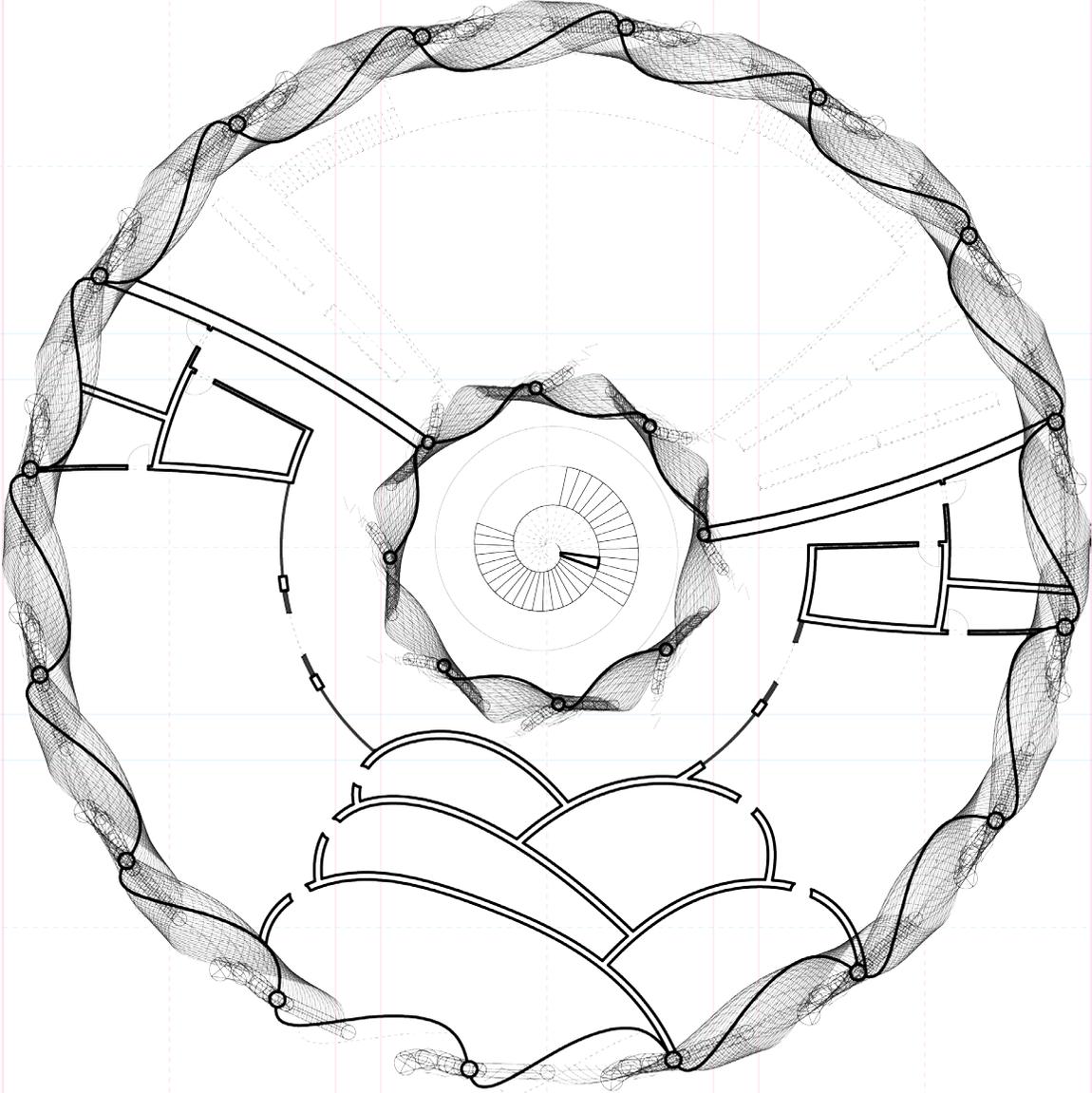
A Third Thing: The New Bibleway Temple

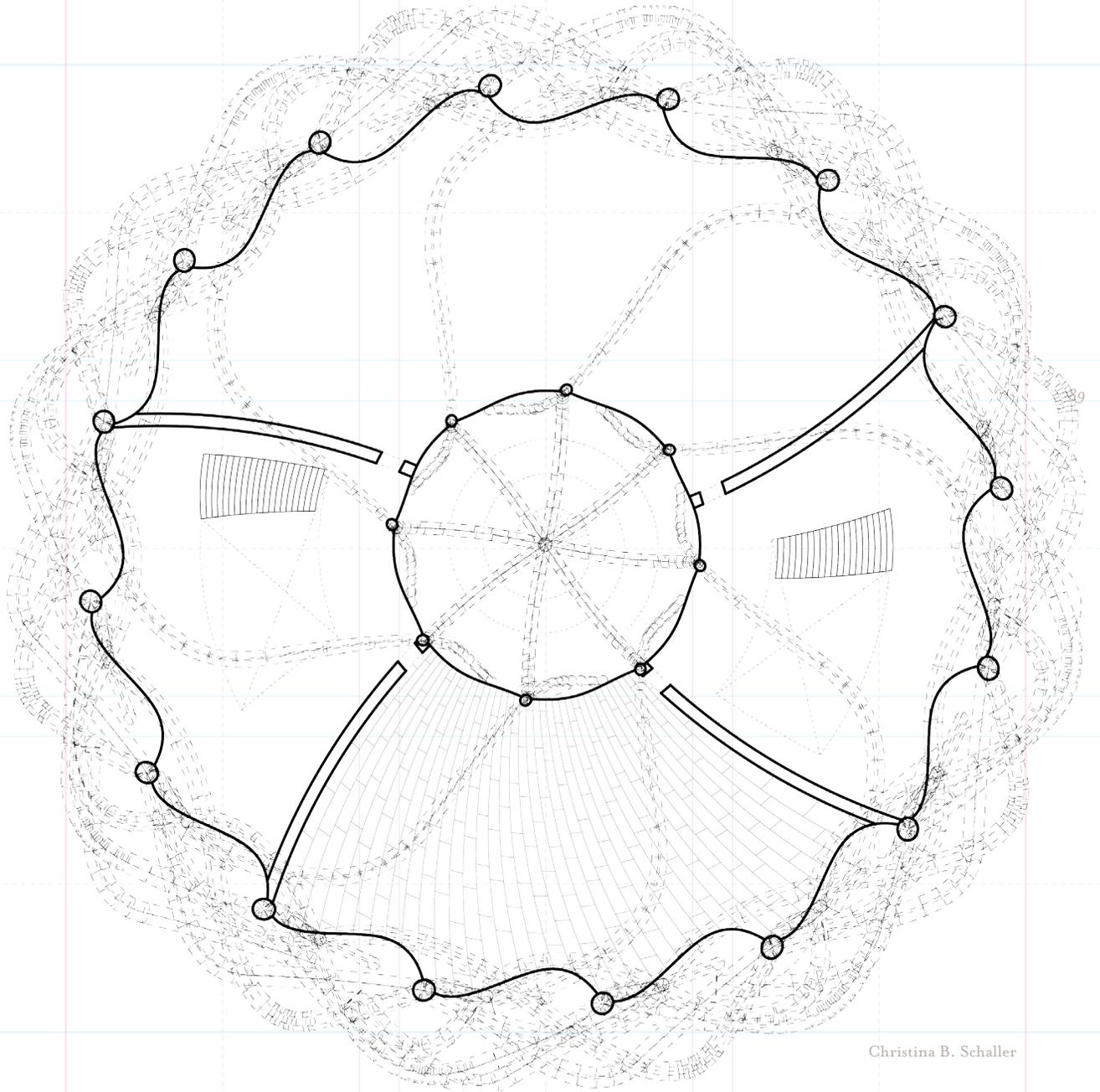






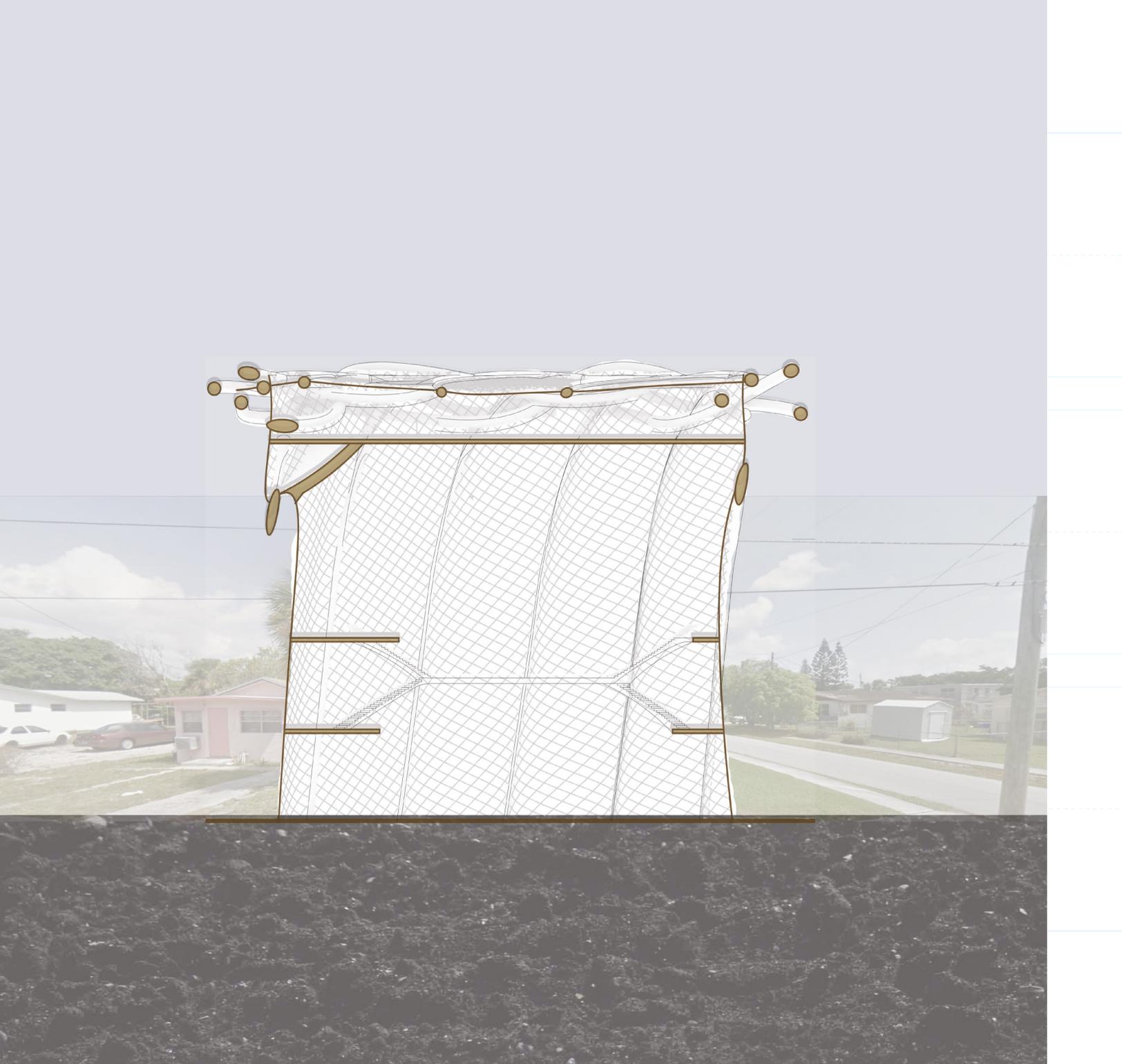


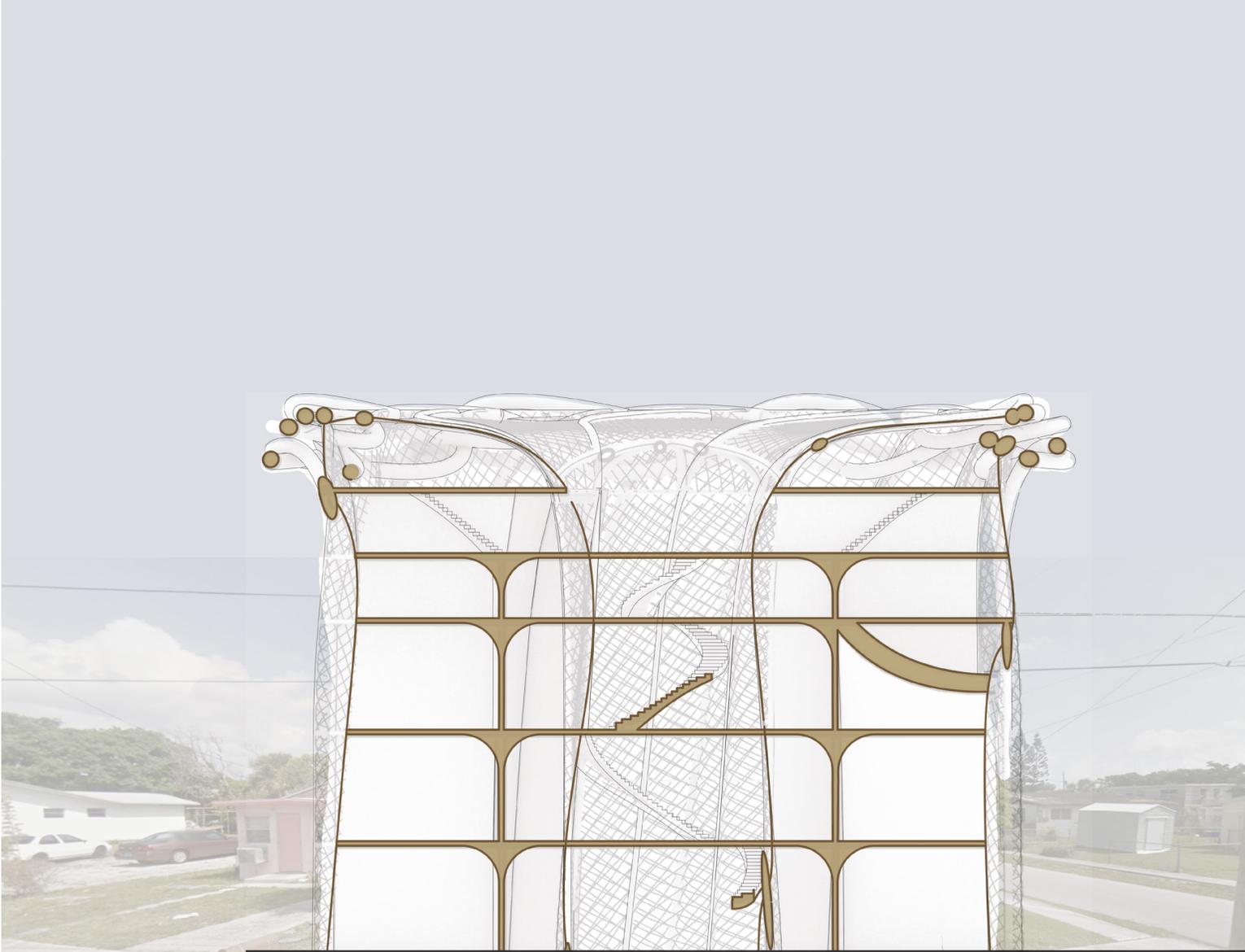












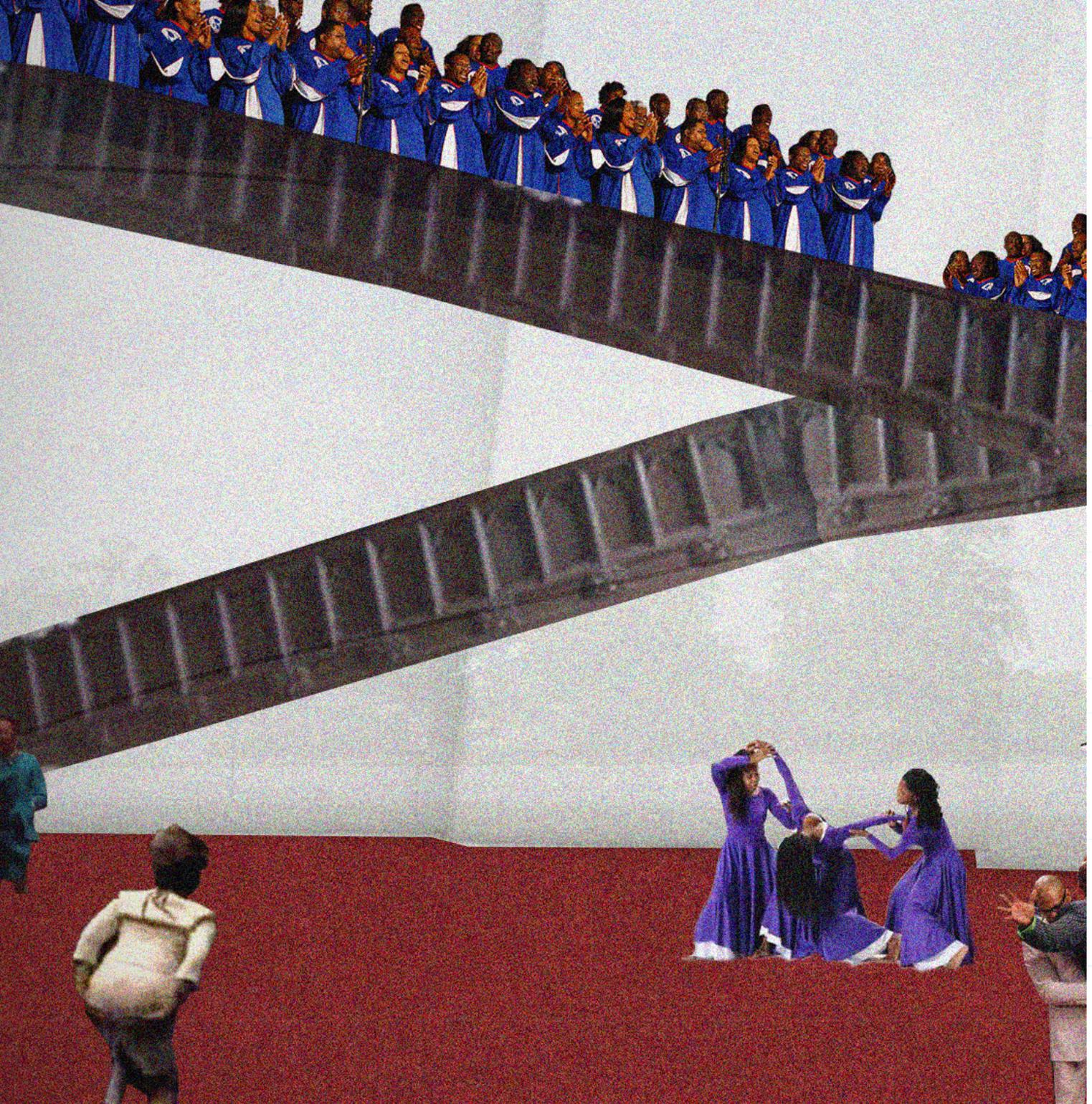


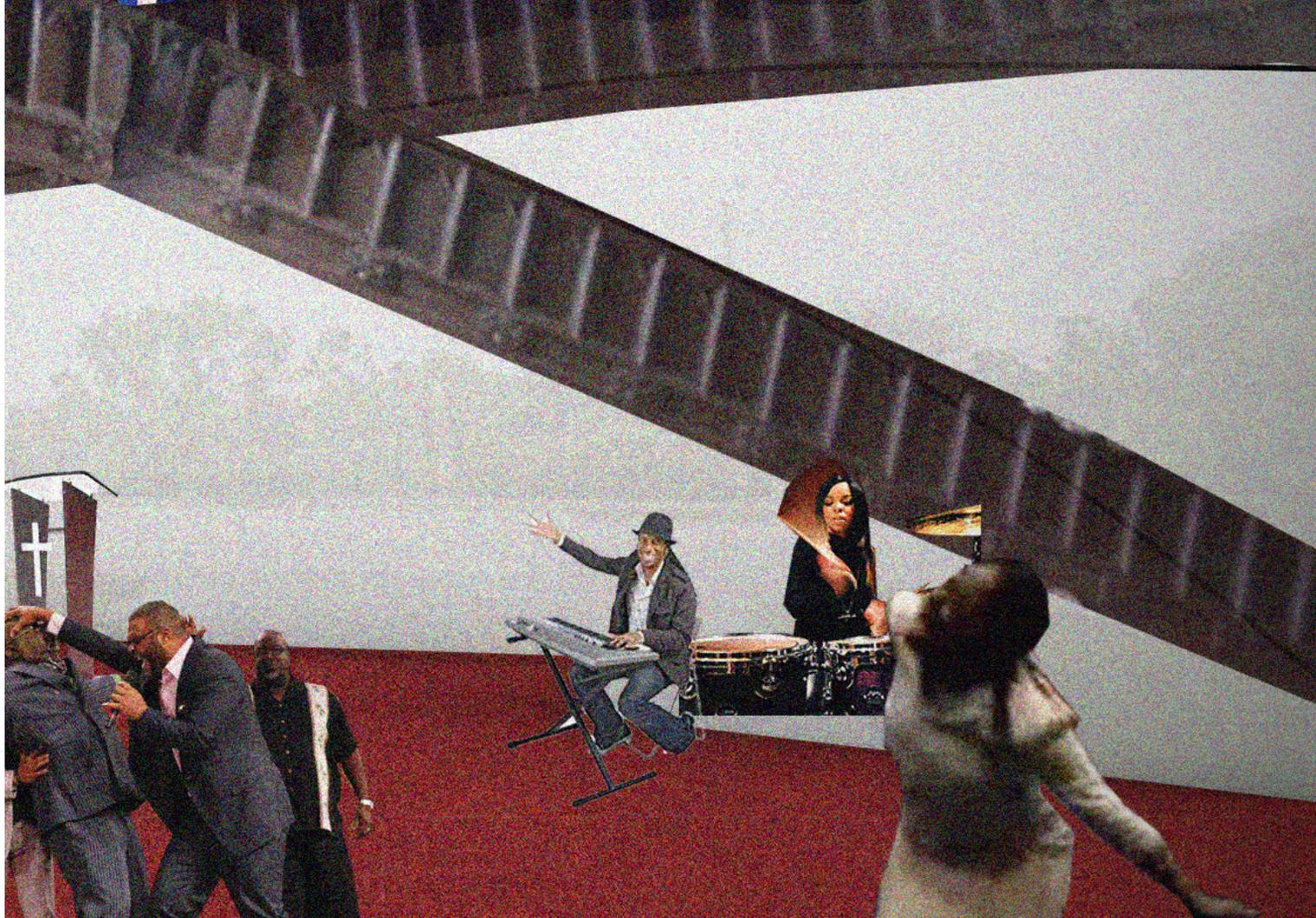




### **About the Model**

The model was constructed almost entirely out of hair products and using hair styling techniques such as braiding and sewing. The tools used were needle and thread, a hair net, rubberbands, hair glue and Kanekalon (plastic braiding hair). These tools were used to perform architectural tasks, the rubberbands were used to provide a tension element to support the floor slabs (strands of braids). The hair glue was used to act as a concrete footer, being poured into the holes that the in the ground around the metal wire to keep the wire and place. The thread was the connected element, connecting slab to slab as well as the metal wire and the rubberbands.





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