

breath



or

a comparative analysis of post-industrial culture
in Mullae-dong, Seoul and the South Bronx, New York

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1.1 PART ONE—STEEL LUNGS:
a preface for two cities who echo



I.

solace—
in the hum before the map resolves,
in the negative space
where borough becomes workshop
+ workshop becomes rumor,
a hinge-language of asphalt + alloy

listen:

the bronx inhales through a scar
mullae exhales through a furnace
and somewhere between the two
a pulse assembles itself

III.

call this comparative method
or call it what it is:
two districts generating
parallel weather systems—
noise that settles in the lungs,
heat that rearranges thought

which came first:
the machine
or our habit of living around it?

(neither / both / something older + wiser)

V.

not analogy
still resonance

a shared architecture of constraint
beating through dissonant geographies—
bronx steel vibrating one frequency,
mullae metal responding in harmonic fracture

VII.

begin again:

where does a city end
& an atmosphere begin?
where does industry rest
when the day is over?
who tends the machines
that tend our breathing?

what survives the hum?

II.

atmosphere is a machine with memory

hold your ear to the trench—
it murmurs in diesel catechism,
recite the rites of accumulation:
weight, pressure, incision, repeat

hold your palm to the alley—
feel the heat signatures of fabrication,
blue-fire syllables climbing brick like
immutable punctuation

IV.

topography collapses:

an overpass column ghosts itself
into a welding table;
an alley grid overlays
amputated blocks of east tremont;
children learn acoustics
of constraint in different languages,
same key signature

VI.

if cities breathe,
these two cough light + residue:

Bronx = a lung pulled open by policy;
Mullae = a lung warmed by perpetual labor

Place your hand between them—
feel the interstitial temperature,
humid with inheritance,
dry with forgetting

VIII.

steel lungs:

overture, invocation, cross-sectional anatomy
of two sites stitched by noise,
written in the dialect of pressure—

enter here,
where the body
begins to breathe.

Opening, a surgical smile that
miles-long mouth steel hunger those
teeth carved of overpass her
tongue paved diesel scripture.
Highway pretends a heartbeat,
through brick organs rewiring
borough nerves sick
with eighteen-wheeled exhale.



Houses tilt like wary saints,
saints leaning their ribs away from
saints learning a way of ritual comes survival
as if architecture could flinch.
Rain falls in metallic syllables
sparked by brake light rosaries,
and the air hangs heavy, strange perfume
of gasoline prayers.

The road hums distant prophecy:
you move or you burn.
a law older than zoning maps and scrap metal
younger than breath*.
Below an overpass, low-budget angels,
wings stuttering less
under weight of truck thunder.
lungs each inhale a gamble.

Some nights i flood
with brake lights, ramp a red river
swallowed concrete canyon
until i'm baptized in industry.

1.2 a liturgy, a scar

a scar, yes
but scars have their own weather,
their own lunatic gravity.
You stand beside it and the earth
vibrates like a coin flipped by a god
too bored to watch it land.

*how long have we breathed?

Mullae flickers—

(bul / fire)

welding-laced breath thrown against corrugated skin.

machines half-sleeping,

one eye glowing ember-red,

the other dreaming in metal static.

alleys tighten—

a vascular script,

heat traveling through narrow syntax,

staining the night's stomach orange.

doors = hinges = thresholds = misfires

paint-peeled portals humming

blue flame equations,

acetylene vowels:

a / e / o / eu / untranslatable heat-speech.

grinders stutter—

gnaw and gnaw and gnaw

gnaw

the bones of the day into filings.

vertical mythologies:

floor 3 — a print shop dreaming in ink fumes

floor 2 — violin rehearsal, string scraping furnace heat

floor 1 — welding masks blinking open like startled

saints

basement — the machine-room heart, thudding, ageless.

sparks → scatter

across alley as startled gods,

brief constellations

that refuse to be named.



smoke unspools—

serpent with a broken memory of its own shape,

leaving trails of solder,

orange dust,

and aftertaste of molten doubt.

nothing here is mute:

shadows clatter,

ghosts perspire,

wind carries a metallic vowel shaped like a century

that has not yet cooled.

logic ≠ wound

logic = forge

a cramped cathedral of aches radiant.

old machines cough into the dark—

(gichim / coughing)

their rhythm a stubborn metronome of resurrection,

a lesson hammered into us

again and again:

—heat remembers—

—steel returns—

—work is ritual—

—nothing cools cleanly here—

and yet the alley breathes and breathes and breathes,

breathes,

folding its fire inward

so we may walk through.

1.3 alley forged in blue fire



2.1 industrial atmospheres

Industrial infrastructure does not disappear when its economic rationale fades; it mutates into an atmospheric regime, a material-semiotic order that continues to structure urban life long after the machinery of “progress” abandons its original script. Urban theorists of postindustrial conditions have argued that decline is never a simple void but a rearticulation of force, where once-productive systems sediment into environmental burdens, perceptual orientations, and embodied constraints.

In the Bronx, mid-century infrastructural interventions crystallize this logic. The Cross Bronx Expressway operates as infrastructural violence in slow motion: not merely a highway but a generator of polluted air, discontinuous street grids, heightened ambient noise, and a spatialized sense of vulnerability. Environmental justice scholarship shows how such infrastructures become biopolitical instruments, redistributing risk and exhaustion across racialized and working-class geographies. The expressway’s presence is therefore not passive; it continually produces atmospheric impoverishment, shaping respiratory conditions, domestic spatial arrangements, and the psychological experience of dwelling near a machine calibrated to prioritize regional throughput over local coherence.

Mullae-dong presents a different configuration of industrial atmosphere. Rather than a rupture imposed from above, its conditions emerge from the persistence of micro-industrial ecologies: machining, welding, fabrication, and repair industries that remain densely concentrated within Seoul’s metalworking district. Korean urban scholarship has emphasized that such districts are not inert leftovers but living infrastructures, where the circulation of heat, sound, metal, and labor organizes the district into a multi-layered assemblage of production and habitation. Here, atmosphere is generated not by infrastructural incision but by industrial continuity, producing thermal gradients, particulate micro-climates, and spatial improvisations that guide how residents, tenants, and artists occupy and reconfigure limited space.

The comparative question, then, is not whether the Bronx and Mullae share analogous conditions (they do not) but how both exemplify distinct modalities of atmospheric constraint. Each neighborhood demonstrates that industrial legacies, whether imposed or inherited, function as determinants of urban subjectivity. Infrastructure and industry mediate sensory life, structure mobility, delimit the affordances of public and domestic space, and shape collective adaptation over decades.

This suggests a broader theoretical claim: industrial atmospheres operate as primary urban agents, exerting force not only through environmental harm but through the rhythms, habits, and perceptual calibrations that residents must adopt in order to live within them. They constitute a form of material governance, one that exceeds technical function and becomes a pervasive background condition: felt before it is understood, endured before it is narrated.

By placing the Bronx and Mullae into dialogue, this project does not aim to collapse their differences but to reveal how postindustrial constraint becomes atmospheric, how machine-generated conditions linger as climate, texture, and bodily demand. The goal is to read these districts not as typological parallels but as parallel articulations of constraint, where industrial legacies shape endurance, spatial creativity, and the improvisational negotiations that constitute everyday urban life.



2.2 gravity of machines

the machines thrum beneath us like misremembered planets dragging our breath
into new orbits, pulling skin toward unseen furnaces, shaking dust into brief
zodiacs that fall through our ribs as if gravity were a rumor invented by metal to
keep our bodies from drifting too far into the quiet where engines cannot find us

[latitude fractures]
the city's spine buckles— not in collapse but in adaptation—
contour lines drifting like tired soldiers
each one sketching a different version of truth.

axis of noise → → →
a corridor bruised by freight
(label smudged: atmospheric risk index 7.4)

somewhere a district exhales metal
and the air folds itself into a new musculature,
bone-tilted, silver-rained,
a cartography of pressure forming in the back of the skull.

exhaust becomes a second spine:
[diagram not to scale]



annotated: vibration as inheritance
residue as pedagogy

machines rearranging air into heavier selves
a slow gravitational sermon
dropping into cartilage, storm drains,
stairwell corners,
any chamber willing to host the hum.

—FAULTLINE B—

a seam where industry dreams through its sleep-cycle
rotating night into glint, glint into weather,
weather into low-frequency faith.

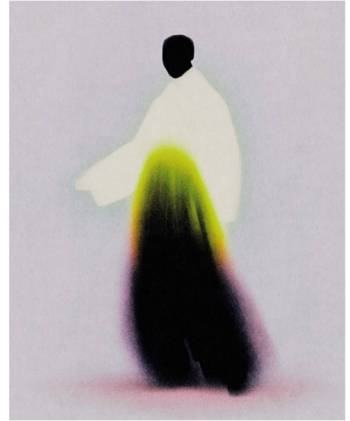
heat-index spiral:
0° 30° 60° 90°
heart-rate decibel overlay—
the numbers refuse to stay still.

and still the center drags us back—
a center stitched from leftover gears
and the forensic murmur of labor,
a center we never agreed to love
yet keep orbiting
because the alternative is

2.3 PART TWO—FAULTLINES: a sort of collage

—FAULTLINE A—

where infrastructure remembers
the violence it was asked to forget.



—FAULTLINE C—

hand-drawn in pencil, erased, drawn again,
the line that marks where neighborhoods learn
to negotiate their own weight.

we stand on the seam,
imagining we are stable,
while beneath us the grid rehearses
another shift, another shudder
another quiet recalibration
of what it means to dwell inside the afterglow of things built to outlast us
yet unwilling to let go.

3.1 underpass weather report

6:12 AM: truck-throat ignition,
coughing the night off its
hinges

rattled windowpanes
conducting their private
orchestra of dread

brake-dust halo shimmering
above the crosswalk

diesel fog: light particulate
bitterness on the tongue

plastic bag doing its biblical dance in the updraft

the metallic heartbeat of the guardrail when a semi leans too
close

distant salsa radio woven into the hiss of overheated pipes

bus hydraulic sigh — tired, parental, absolute

sour warmth of yesterday's trash blooming in the gutter

pigeons arguing in rusted soprano under the girders

overheard complaint: *"my chest feel tight today"*

ozone tang from a transformer box flirting with failure

the soft wet collapse of a fruit that
fell from the vendor's table

sneaker-soles sticking slightly to
the oil-slick pavement

a child's laughter, thin as a wire,
almost swallowed by the overpass

car alarm hiccuping itself awake
for no reason

faint sweetness of churros mixing
with brake fluid

siren Doppler-spiral bending the whole block's geometry

wind carrying microscopic tire-powder like unseasonable snow

someone spraying water to hold the dust down — it doesn't

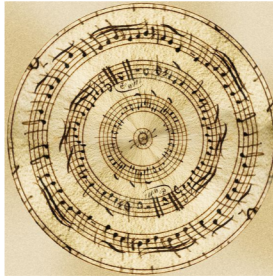
faint vibration in the curb, a pulse you can't unfeel

an old mural flaking off in rhythm with the passing trucks

conversation clipped into fragments by each engine roar:
"they...do...nothing...for...us..."

sunlight arrives late and sideways, tinted a soft industrial gray

after-rumble silence, brief, trembling, never trustworthy



3.2 alley metronomes

metal pulses in uneven mathematics,
wings flickering through heat's long equation,
time tightening
into a glowing anvil.



3.3 PART THREE—CHORUS OF UNFINISHED CITIES:

in unison

my streets keep rearranging their decimals
traffic behaving like untamed arithmetic
yesterday's scaffolding mouthing new futures
and the horizon glitching like a half-erased ledger.

I walk inside a grammar of detours
avenues bending like faulty protractors
the city muttering equations I can't finish.

cities draft themselves without permission,
blueprints molt, coordinates sweat,
nothing aligns except the desire to keep happening.

A pigeon shouts stock tips at a broken antenna,
billboards audition new moons, and a bus exhales
a rumor of a future that overslept.

sidewalks attempt to grow fins—fail—try again,
and a child draws a planet shaped like a traffic
cone.

my stoplights blink in forgotten dialects, fire
hydrants whisper maritime secrets, new buildings
arrive already tired, nothing stays fixed long
enough to love properly.

your alleys keep rehearsing their own weather
heat performing minor operas in tin corridors
welding sparks practicing punctuation
and rooftops practicing the art of deliberate collapse.

I walk inside a syntax of heat signatures
corridors folding like concertinas on fire
the district tuning itself to unknown frequencies.



both our districts insist on continuing,
ungrounded, unpolished,
half-rendered cities rehearsing their next versions.

A cat naps on a lathe spinning slower than memory,
alleyway fans gossip about improbable revolutions, and a
shutter vibrates with dreams of mechanical coral.

ventilation ducts attempt to learn choreography—fail—
try again, and a worker carves a constellation from
spilled mercury.

your workshop lamps blink like bored astronomers, steel
beams hum dietary advice to passing moths, machines rest
with one eye dreaming sideways, everything stays warm
long enough to forget its name.

**unfinished cities
drafting
redrafting
revising themselves
in our shadows.**

and maybe the future is just the next miscalculation, scrawled across a
borough still learning its outline, yet both of us walking through the
almost-city, carriers of versions no map wants to claim.

and maybe the future is just another unfinished rehearsal, sketched
across a district still resisting completion, both of us walking through
the about-to-be, custodians of futures that haven't agreed to arrive.

The bodega keeps its own time. Not the hour stamped on receipts, but a softer chronology: plastic curtain flutter, hum of refrigerator coils, coins passing hand to hand like quiet weather. A toddler drags a bag of rice across the floor; a teenager buys batteries and disappears into a hallway lit blue. Neon flickers unevenly, syncing and unsyncing with the outside world. The owner counts bills with the precision of someone calibrating a small universe, adjusting for absence, for hunger, for Tuesday.

People come in hurried, leave slower. The heat inside rearranges their breath. On the counter, plantains bruise into new shapes of sweetness while a man debates whether he can afford the extra can of beans. Time stretches, folds, contracts, elastic as the gossip traded between strangers. The door chimes again. Another small negotiation enters the room.

The bodega pulses not with commerce but with continuity: a place where scarcity and abundance sit on the same shelf, touched by the same hand, surviving together in the fluorescent dusk of the neighborhood's heartbeat.



4.1 bodega pulse theory

4.2 celadon



06:12

A machine clears its throat.

It does this every morning.

No one taught it.

inventory (partial, unreliable):

— one mug, no handle, filled with drill bits

— one calendar refusing the present

— green powder in the shape of yesterday's footsteps

— a stair that answers only when stepped on wrong

The alley is a narrow kiln.

Heat accumulates.

Nothing leaves unchanged.

A man feeds steel forward.

Not carefully.

Correctly.

The blade learns him.

&

Above:

broth ticking toward boil,

a window sliding open just enough to release smell,

a socked foot testing gravity.

Below:

oil, radio static, sparks rehearsing flight.

note on color:

Celadon is not chosen here.

It appears where time touches metal too often.

It appears where water gives up.

Someone tapes a poster to rust.

The tape peels before adhesion finishes.

The word *opening* bends.

&

14:03

A reflector board enters the alley.

Light behaves badly.

Sparks refuse direction.

A camera frames the wall, not the man.

Later, the wall will circulate.

&

glossary (for newcomers):

Factory: something that is still happening.

Studio: something that has stopped pretending.

Authentic: sparks that interrupt your shot.

&

Dusk installs itself.

Cables of warm light stitched overhead, temporary veins.

Wine sweats.

Music mimics labor without heat.

From behind the steel door:

the real sound, uneven, unlooped.

It cuts through everything.

&

final firing:

Green dust settles again

on sneakers,

on menus,

on the idea that this was ever empty.



5.1 postindustrial futures

Urban futures are often imagined through differing logics of replacement: obsolete infrastructures are removed, industrial districts are cleansed, environmental burdens are offset through redevelopment that frames erasure as improvement. Such imaginaries depend on a temporal break that treats the past as something to be overcome rather than metabolized. Against this model, this project seeks postindustrial futurity as an atmospheric continuation, in which material legacies (noise, heat, residue, spatial compression) remain active agents in shaping what futures can be inhabited.

Drawing on scholarship in urban political ecology and postindustrial geography, futurity here is not understood as a clean horizon but as a thickened present, structured by accumulated infrastructures and uneven exposure. In both the South Bronx and Mulla-dong, industrial and infrastructural forms persist not as static remnants but as dynamic conditions that govern circulation, health, affect, and land use. These conditions are neither fully obsolete nor fully productive; they operate in what theorists describe as an afterlife of capital, where material systems continue to organize urban experience long after their original economic rationale has shifted.

Speculative atmospheres, in this sense, do not imagine futures by subtracting constraint. Instead, they ask what kinds of continuity become possible when constraint itself is treated as a structuring medium. We highlight forms of urban life that adapt to noise rather than eliminate it, repurpose industrial heat rather than displace it, and negotiate density as a condition of collective endurance rather than a failure of planning. This mode of futurity resists both nostalgia and technocratic optimism. It refuses the romanticization of industrial pasts while also rejecting redevelopment narratives that frame working-class presence as transitional or expendable.

In centering postindustrial futurity without erasure, the project argues that the future of neighborhoods like the Bronx and Mulla-dong will not be determined by their ability to escape their industrial conditions, but by how those conditions are rearticulated as livable, legible, and collectively sustained. Futurity emerges not as some rupture, but as a careful recalibration: a slow adjustment of atmospheres, uses, and expectations within environments that were never designed to be finished.

the machines dream in overheating loops in the millisecond after the switch flips
before the light commits when two cities same corridor of soul and the same taste of
iron on the tongue and the same green film on the thumbprint of a door you push
without thinking

they dream of a future that doesn't arrive as a skyline but as a maintenance schedule
that actually gets followed as bearings that stop screaming because someone had time
to oil them as freight that moves like a nocturnal animal silent only where it should be
silent gliding under apartments that are built like stacked workshops with steam rising
through vents designed to carry smell the way music carries

they dream of streets that store heat in ceramic sidewalk slabs so winter becomes an
argument you can win of lamp posts that dim when grinders start so sparks can be the
city's punctuation of new materials that look old on purpose bio-ceramic panels that
blush into celadon where hands touch them most a civic color that forms only from use
so legacy can't counterfeit it

they dream of galleries that are not kingdoms but small apertures carved into skeletons
like inspection windows on a boiler so art remains a side-effect of proximity not a
takeover

5.2 what machines dream of

they dream of a train that runs like a pulse through both places an old bronx spur line
growing a second track of fiber and copper so the rail becomes an lifeline for power
and parcels and people and rumor a night train with no ads on its walls only scuffs and
rivets and the faint ghost of a timetable

they dream of elevators that remember weight and greet it with a soft shudder like
recognition

they dream of drones that don't hover like surveillance but dock like pigeons into
warehouses and vanish

they dream of a future where the word *creative* is extinct because no one needs to
rename what is already making

the machines keep dreaming one stubborn thing over and over like a mantra they
learned from the floor keep the door open keep the radio on keep the heat where the
work is and let the city be loud enough to prove it is still real



celadon on skin
not a palette—proof of use
green that can't be bought

white rail at midnight
turns into a soft artery
love without a pulse

sparks refuse the frame
hand learns the shop's true rhythm
city stays awake

5.3 PART FOUR—NEXTCITY:

braiding futures

1) Switchyard Gospel

In the signal room, the future isn't a manifesto—it's a relay clicking yes/no, yes/no, like a monk with a metronome. Hunts Point at 3 a.m.: pallets breathing cold; fluorescent hum; a forklift reversing with the same beep it has used since you were a kid. Mullae at 3 a.m.: metal still warm in the corners; a shutter half-down; a second-floor light that means someone is dancing above someone else's iron.

Nextcity begins when the system admits what it is: a choreography of weights. Not a "scene," not a "district," not the city-as-influencer. A switchyard civilization. The romance is not in newness but in alignment.

Think: Cedric Price's optimism without the cartoon, Constant's roaming infrastructure without the utopia posters, a little Archigram energy but with a maintenance budget and a union rep.

2) Footnotes for a City un-Rendered

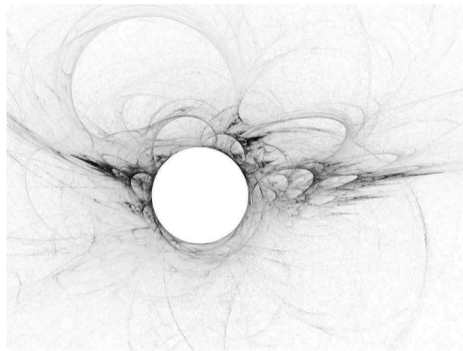
A neighborhood doesn't "revitalize." It gets *re-scripted*. (Ask Sharon Zukin about the soft power of taste; ask Lefebvre about who gets to produce space.)

The opposite of gentrification isn't stagnation but continuity with upgrades. Elevators that work. Boilers that don't terrorize winters. Leases that don't roulette every June.

"Creative" is a word that usually arrives after the work is already priced out. Nextcity retires it.

The city's new status symbol is boring: a stocked parts cabinet; a public machine shop; a superintendent who knows the building like a face.

The most futuristic object is a repaired thing.



3) "Braid" (Final Sequence)

EXT. BRONX — NIGHT

ConEd steam drifts across a streetlight. A sax lick leaks from somewhere you can't see. A delivery guy slaps a loading dock door twice, the knock that means *I'm not a cop, I'm not a landlord, I'm just late*.

Cut to—

INT. TRAIN CAR — MOVING

No ads. Just scuffs. Somebody has taped a hand-drawn diagram to the wall: "how to fix the door when it sticks." A kid reads it like it's sacred text.

Cut to—

EXT. MULLAE — NIGHT

A gallery opening is happening, but it's not the center of gravity. The weight falls next door: a shop still running. The music from upstairs tries to become the soundtrack; the machine dreams and stays louder, irregular, alive.

Cut to—

INT. STAIRWELL — CONTINUOUS

Steam from broth meets the mineral smell of metal. Two atmospheres negotiating. No narrator. No thesis line. Just truth of stacked life.

Camera holds on hands:

one hand signs a lease meant for you and me;

one hand oils a hinge;

one hand learns the angle to carry steel through a narrow door;

one hand carries soup upstairs without spilling.

This is the closing shot: not skyline, not drone footage—hands.

4) The Covenant

We will not confuse quiet with improvement.

We will pay for repair as if it is art, because it is.

We will treat freight and food as twin infrastructures.

We will protect messy coexistence—the kind Jane Jacobs loved.

We will stop laundering displacement through aesthetics.

after the hum

the ground

still feels us



breathing