Since the 15th century, Albertian methods of notation have positioned media, or more precisely, ways of mediating between graphical representation and construction at the center of the architecture discipline. In the face of evolving digital processes, media continues to be the primary means for directing labor and for planning the organization of physical matter. Media production is the traditional means through which complex geometries can be constructed without explicit direction or methods of mediating matter. In other words, complex - double curvature - forms can be built without construction drawings. If so, what is the role of media in forming physical matter into geometries that can resist gravity through form?

The vehicle for exploring this question is the double-curvature work and catenary practices of the late Uruguayan engineer Eladio Dieste. This work questions the relationship between digital craft and automated production of images. The images in this project are made using digital techniques, like Grasshopper definition for Rhino and other 2D line-based outputs in 3D-modelling software. Images are not used to generate irrational forms, but rather expand the familiarity and scope of ways of thinking and seeing catenary shapes. To this end, media is used as a speculative framework through which to imagine and construct complex forms without explicitly directing the labor that connects them to people and tools. Pushing media away from mediating matter, or rather, designing ways of fostering unmediated matter, is borrowed from Dieste’s thinking about the role of graphical representation:

“All of the great structures of the past were built with extremely simple plans. I am aware that the organization of work was very different. I also know by experience the difficulties involved in envisioning things that cannot be expressed well in drawing, but many times the results are worth the effort.”

The idea of drawing not being a universal method for architectural representation is evident in Dieste’s thinking. “Everything is Already an Image.” May describes the technical aspects of the three categories of media, or visual depiction, which allow us to express and communicate ideas through drawings, photographs, and images. “Drawings are static hand-mechanical depictions that deposit geometric, rule-bound marks onto a stable surface. Images, unlike photographs, are the process of coordinating energetic outputs. Photographs manage chemical exposure processes; images manage data and energy. The effects of automated representations highlight the emerging, contemporary situation of seeing technology as almost as absolute as the different analog forms of media that existed before digital technology. Unmediated Matter and Catenary Practices explore the relationship between images and forms, as a means to question their instrumentality. According to May, “Drawings and images are both representations in that they deposit information, but drawings generally, comprised more of a stable visual tradition as a foundation for technological development and its representation.” Each form exposes the role of media in forming physical matter.