

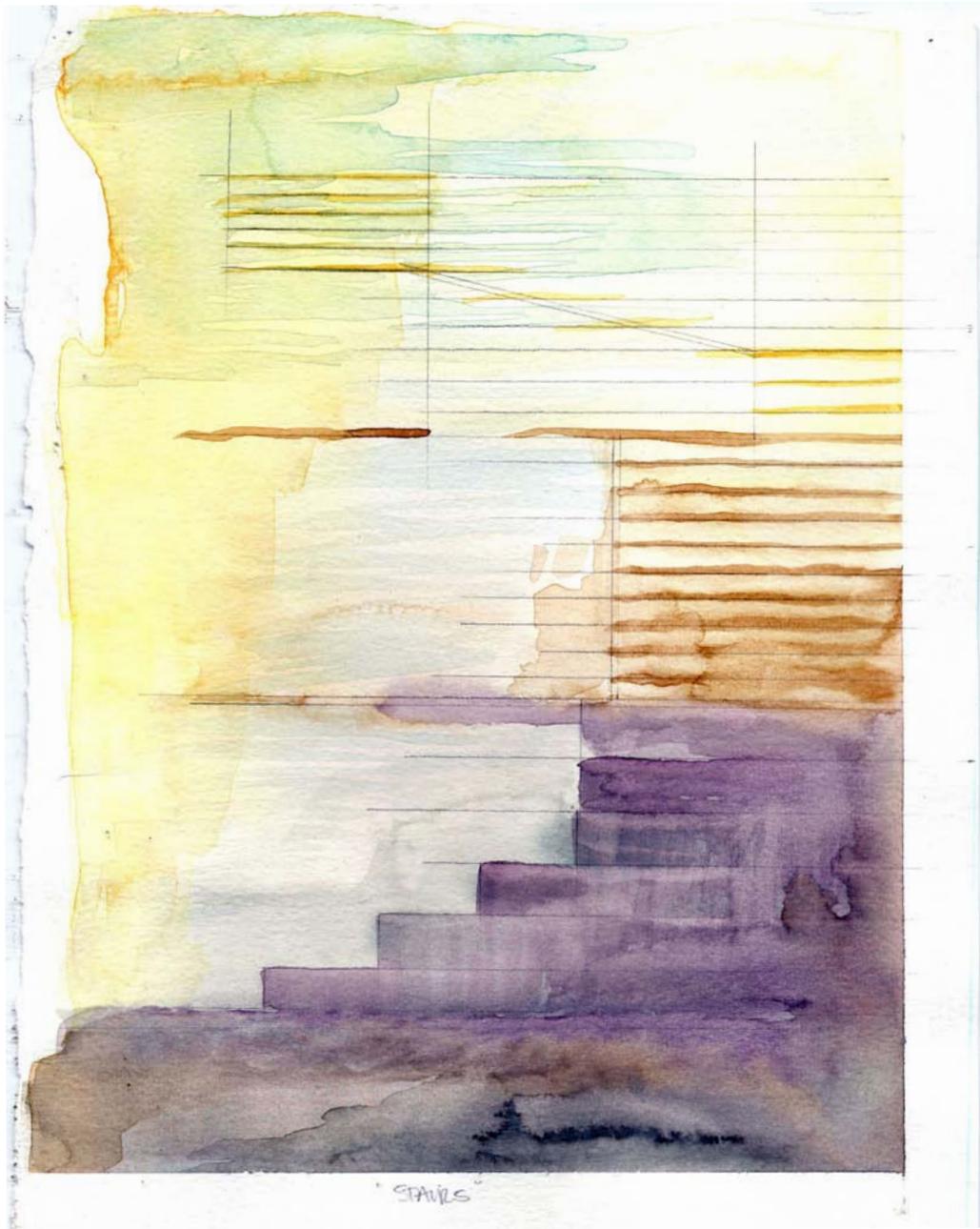
Architecture

**R E A D I N G**

**G R O U N D I N G**

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the L a n d s c a p e



STAIRS

# GROUNDING Architecture

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## READING the Landscape

A public library at Rock Creek  
P St. and 23rd St NW, Washington, DC

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of  
the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and  
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in partial fulfillment  
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# ABSTRACT

## GROUNDING Architecture READING the Landscape

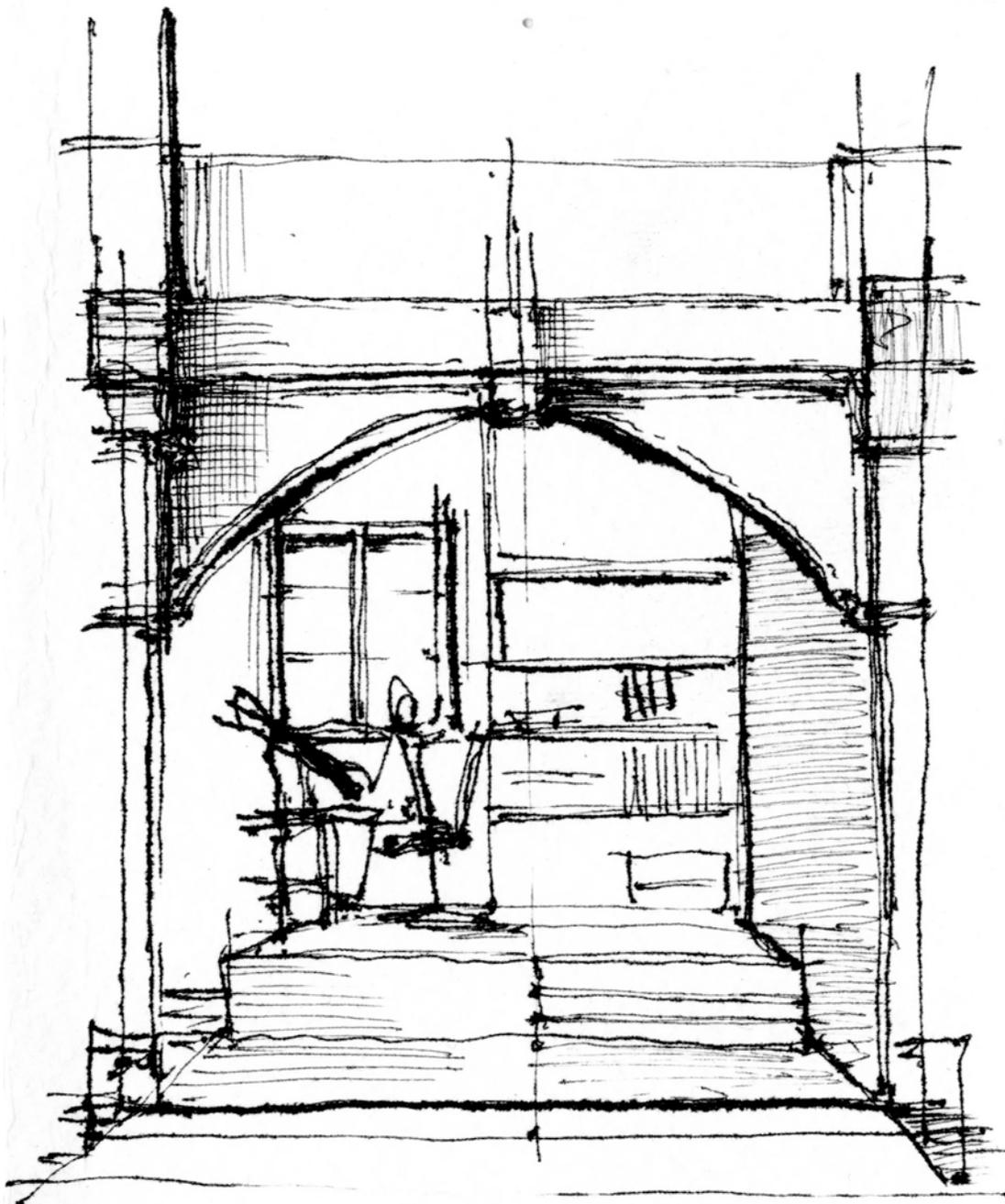
B Y S A R A H R I C H T E R

Ground, construction, light and weather: all of these elements when compounded create architecture. What is the built? What is the unbuilt? How can we merge the two? How can we architect a future where buildings are so contextually true to their site that the boundary of what was traditionally exterior and interior are one in the same? A building must be rooted in the site, it must be *of the ground*. It has to be grounded.

The roots of the building must dig deep into the meaning of what the site is, what it was, and what it wants to be. Through careful discernment of these varied layers of ground are, we can begin to understand the levels and layers that take place within a structure.

This thesis strives to ground architecture. The library at Rock Creek Park is nestled into the site, it is of the site, and honest to the site. A building that seems to grow out of Rock Creek Park as it exists in a city, a building that pulls the park into the city, and the city into the park. It is a glimpse of what potential the futures can hold if we, as designers, decide to collaborate, to treat each discipline as a layer of groundwork. A groundwork and foundation that must be laid first and then consciously called to mind to create a strong foundation for the design. This common thread must be kept taut throughout the design process.

The scene of this thesis is set at the corner of P St. and 23rd St. NW in Washington, DC at the berm of Rock Creek Park; at the brink of City and Nature.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am incredibly grateful for the time I have spent at the Washington Alexandria Architecture Center. Within those walls, while brushing shoulders and engaging in conversation with imaginative, and creative minds, I have flourished.

Over the past two years, I have realized that things are not mutually exclusive. We, are not mutually exclusive. You can be a designer, a writer, an artist, a builder, a thinker, and a creator. All of these qualities make you, you. My thesis embodies my desires, my hopes and my dreams for my career and calls for an architecture that transcends its walls, and grows roots both vertically and horizontally. A call for engagement, if you will.

I have grown roots in this place with the guidance of Paul Emmons, Susan Piedmont-Palladino, and Paul Kelsch. All three, who are not mutually exclusive, have taught me the importance of collaboration. All three are designers, writers, artists, builders, thinkers and creators. The WAAC is filled with Renaissance men and women. They create Renaissance men and women. I believe that as a designer, you must embrace what is at hand, and also look for opportunity where it may not have been before. I appreciate all three of you for your time, your encouragement and your patience. Thank you.

To Amber, my other person. My best friend, my supporter, my “late-night” pusher, my confidant, my believer. I couldn’t have gotten through the past two years without you. Thank you for your love, friendship, and steadfast spirit. You are special.

To my family, where my roots first began to grow. You have taught me the importance of nurturing things you believe in, reaching for the sky, trusting your own two hands, and never stop imagining. Thank you for supporting my dreams and hardships.

All of these experiences, not mutually exclusive, but collaborative, have helped me grow roots, and stay grounded while reaching for the treetops.



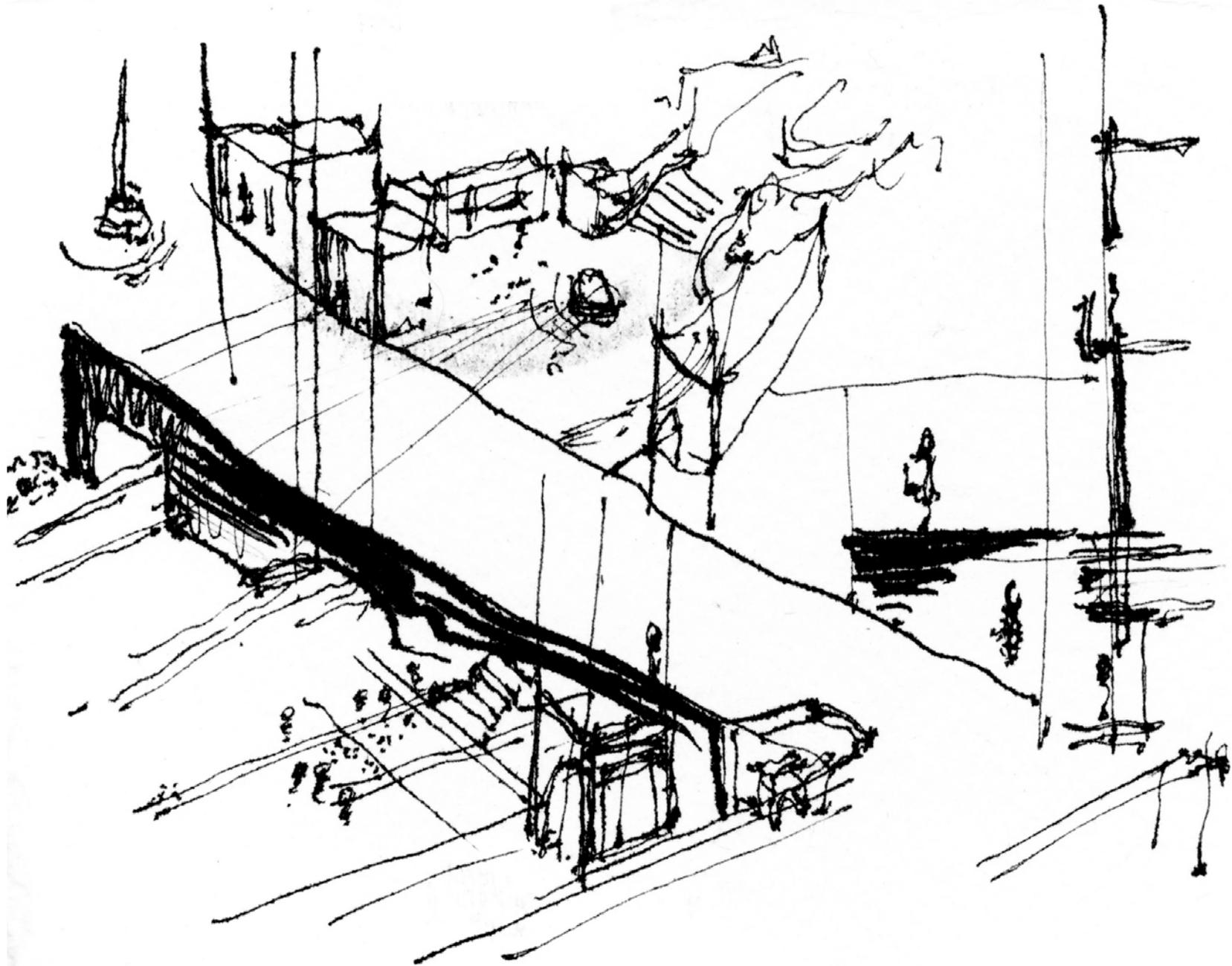
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“In their world-making,  
architects always start

with the worlds at hand;  
their making is thus always a remaking.”<sup>1</sup>

Marco Frascari



# INTRODUCTION

Envision a place where imagination can thrive--a place that cultivates a sense of self. Where the built and the unbuilt speak to one another. Where the bustle of the city is enriched by the rhythm of nature. Washington, DC embraces the topography and its geographical location, and as such, a relationship of shared values emerges.

As we build structures that rise up and out of the land we have the land to thank for providing us a solid foundation. The goal of this thesis is to create a space that is encouraged by this idea of sharing and learning.

At the seam between the built and unbuilt a library is situated. Through careful exploration of this seam a middle ground must be reached. A “ground” that is nestled between architecture and landscape that is not a static relation but that transforms what is at the “foreground” and what is “background.” The hope was that a building with these various elements could be collaged together to create a dwelling of wander and wonder. As the inhabitants walk through the spaces, the series begins to dictate where they are located. There are moments where you’re within architecture, but you feel as though you are within a landscape. There also spaces that are purely landscape but have been composed in a way that provides a sense of structure. Engaging both architecture and the landscape the goal is to create a building that complements it’s site.

Through encouraged activity and sharing, various age groups will find a forum to rediscover the world they inhabit. The world slows down while inside the library. By diving into the authenticity of what the “library” has traditionally been inhabitants can rediscover what the “library” can be.



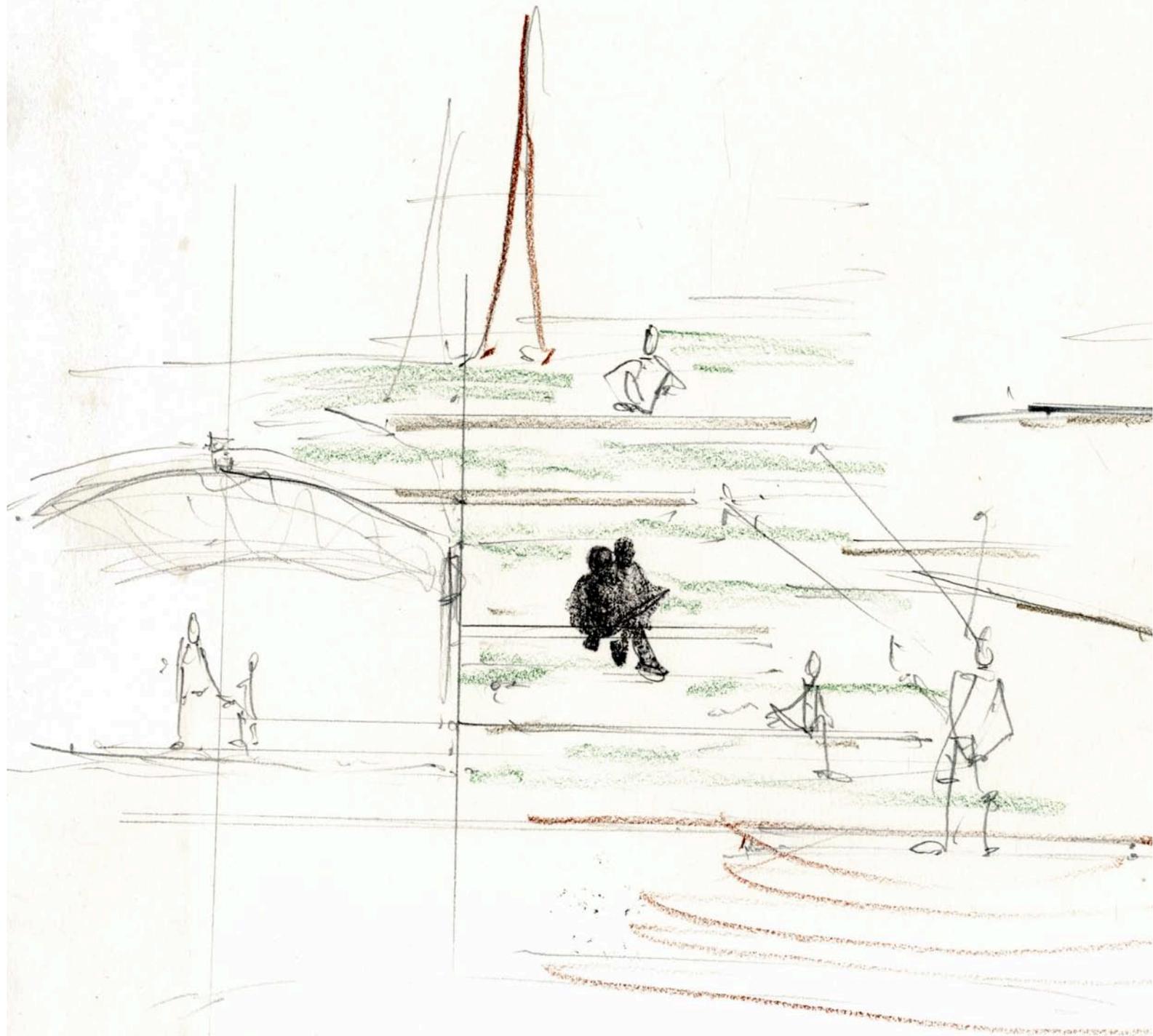
# A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN

B y B e t t y S m i t h

Betty Smith's book, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, tells the story of a young girl growing up in Brooklyn with very little money. The girl's childhood room allows her to look out her window and see a large tree that grows in the lot next door. As she watches the tree grow and change with the seasons, she makes certain metaphors with the tree and her own life. She notices how the tree grows, and weathers as time goes on. This novel was very important to the framework of this thesis: Firstly, because it exemplifies the impact that nature has on children, especially children who grow up in an urban environment. Secondly, this novel describes one of the most invaluable characteristics that children have, imagination.

“Because,” explained Mary Rommely simply, “the child must have a valuable thing which is called imagination. The child must have a secret world in which live things that never were. It is necessary that she believe. She must start out by believing in things not of this world. Then when the world becomes too ugly for living in, the child can reach back and live in her imagination.”<sup>2</sup>

“There's a tree that grows in Brooklyn. Some people call it the Tree of Heaven. No matter where it's seed falls, it makes a tree, which struggles to reach the sky. It grows in boarded-up lots and out of neglected rubbish heaps. It grows up out of cellar gratings. It is the only tree that grows out of cement. It grows lushly . . . survives without sun, water, and seemingly without earth. It would be considered beautiful except that there are too many of it.”<sup>3</sup>



# LEARNING

In thinking about *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, one begins wondering how that story might apply to today. Today there seems to be a lack of sensitivity. There is something sacred about youth, it is a time that is all too fleeting. People get wrapped up in their day to day routine, and forget how to enjoy the small things. In an age of technology and immediate satisfaction it is important to create places that slow the world down, cul-de-sacs that engage, draw in, and hold.

Juhani Pallasmaa wrote, “By and large, we live in a visual world. The tactile ingredient in vision has disappeared. There are many reasons behind that; one reason is that the visual world is instant, whereas the tactile world is very slow. The visual world is public, whereas the tactile world is always intimate...There are all kinds of sensory experiences that are essential material for compiling an understanding of yourself, of the world, and these do not have to be designed in a very meticulous manner. Tastes and smells can be landmarks of orientation and memory. We are better off and our learning skills are improved if we are strongly rooted in our settings.”<sup>4</sup>

It is a necessity that children have these places; locations where they can be rooted in life. To be rooted in life, they must have environments that are safe, yet challenging. A place where they can sit and imagine. In cities, it can often be hard to find a nook like this, and if they do exist, they are not readily available for the child and the child at heart.

It is possible for such a place to exist for both children and adults. Here, there is yet another seam, a seam where both age groups can flourish. “When adults are outdoors, they admire a healthy lawn, a nicely tended vegetable garden, and beds of beautiful flowers. When children are outdoors, they’re crawling under bushes, digging in the dirt, damming streams, and climbing anywhere their legs and sense of adventure will take them. Children want areas filled with nature, from plants, trees, flowers, and water, to animals and insects.”<sup>5</sup>



Where the Sidewalk Ends

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
And where the road begins,  
And where the shadows stretch and white,  
And where the sun burns crimson bright,  
And where the moon will cool the night,  
To cool in the yew-hemlock wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black  
and the dark street winds and bends.

Just the way we go,  
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and true,  
And walk with a walk that is measured and true,  
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes, we shall walk with a walk that is measured  
And we shall walk with a walk that is measured,  
For the way we go,  
The place where the sidewalk ends,  
The place where the sidewalk ends,  
The place where the sidewalk ends.

# WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS

B y S h e l S i l v e r s t e i n

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
And before the street begins,  
And there the grass grows soft and white,  
And there the sun burns crimson bright,  
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight  
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blocks black  
And the dark street winds and bends.  
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow  
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow  
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go  
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow  
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,  
For the children, they mark, and the children they know  
The place where the sidewalk ends. <sup>6</sup>



# LIBRARY AS PROGRAM

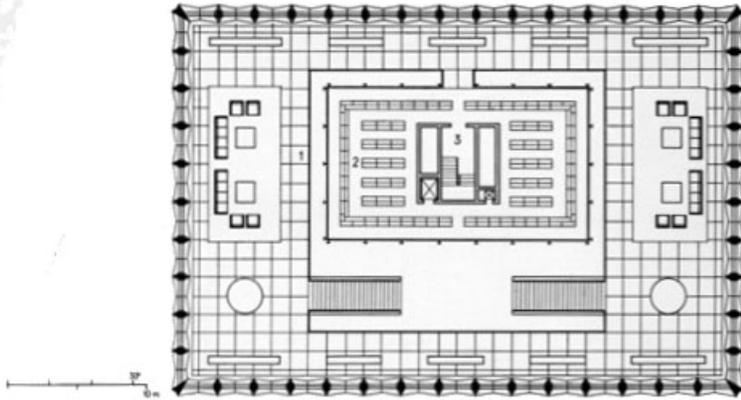
## A CHANGING TYPOLOGY

The “library” has had a changing landscape over the past 10 years, and it is only going to shift further. In an article, written by Mark Lamster, he quotes Jeffrey T. Schnapp, a professor at Harvard University, “There’s a shift of their core identity, away from places where documents are housed, to physical structures that can serve as nodes that add value to the act of consultation.”<sup>7</sup>

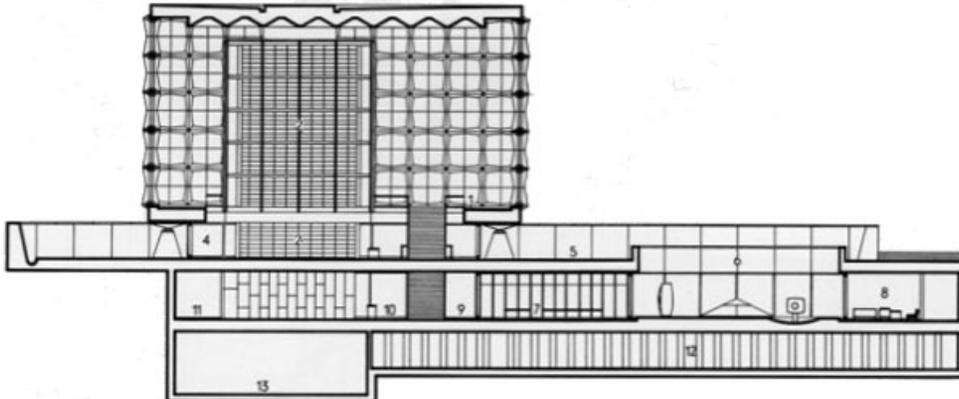
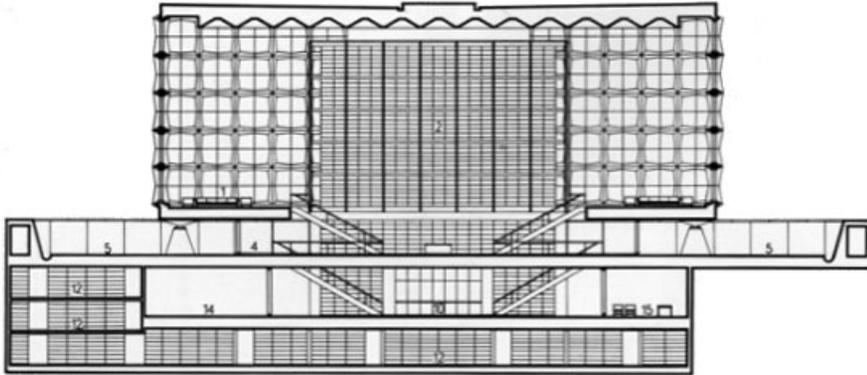
Libraries are the corner stone of our society, they are an institution that both young and old can use, and most of the time for free. They are a place of learning, and sharing knowledge. Many people have fond memories growing up, no matter what generation they are of, at the library. It is the place where people can dive into their books into other worlds, and live for hours.

Mark Lamster writes, “But for all their supposed obsolescence, libraries remain vital places, and many of them are more crowded than ever. Printed material, however is not always the primary draw. “Increasingly, people can use that material anywhere that they want to, which means they come to the library for other needs,” says Jim Neal, the VP for information services and university librarian at Columbia University. “They come to study. They come to work together. They come to use technology they can’t carry around. They come here to consult with experts, with librarians.”<sup>8</sup>

The library has always been defined by what is on the inside, what it houses, it seems that what the library “stands for” hasn’t changed much, it still is the foundation of our society. But what if the library was still defined by what was on the inside, we just housed a different set of things: experience, sharing, collaboration, resources.



- Plan, typical floor / Grundriß Normalgeschoß.  
 Transverse section / Querschnitt.  
 Longitudinal section / Längsschnitt.
- 1 Mezzanine floor, exhibition hall / Emporengeschoß der Ausstellungshalle
  - 2 Book tower / Bücherturm
  - 3 Service core / Servicekern
  - 4 Entrance lobby / Eingangshalle
  - 5 Plaza / Terrasse
  - 6 Sculpture court / Lichthof
  - 7 Reading room / Leseraum
  - 8 Office / Büro
  - 9 Stair hall / Treppenhalle
  - 10 Control desk / Kontrollpult
  - 11 Work area / Arbeitsraum
  - 12 Book storage / Büchermagazin
  - 13 Mechanical equipment / Technische Installation
  - 14 Cataloging room / Katalograum
  - 15 Lounge / Aufenthaltsraum





# CASE STUDY

## Y a l e B e i n e c k e L i b r a r y

Architect: SOM

Date: October 14, 1963

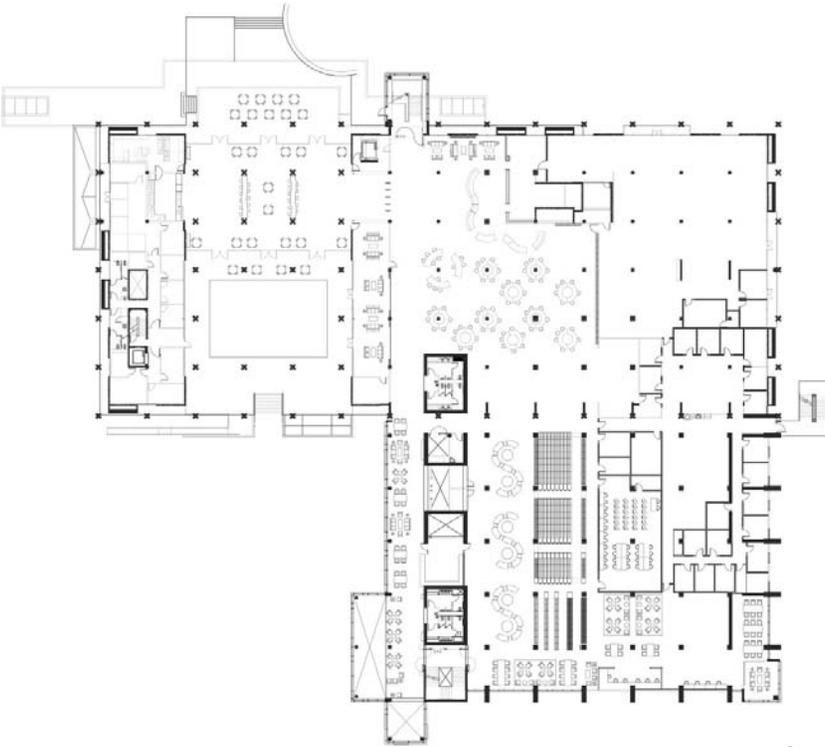
Location: New Haven, Connecticut

Points:

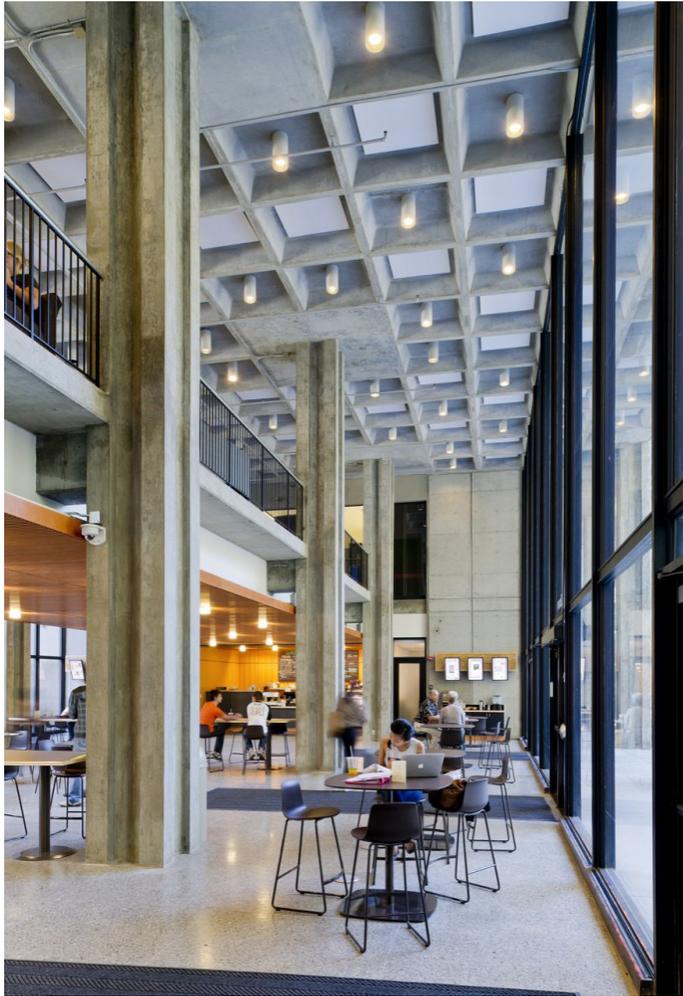
1. Natural lighting-how to preserve the documents that were inside, while still providing enough light for people to be able to read/study?
2. Contrast of building mass and open plaza.
3. Underground level are two stories of mechanical equipment, book stacks, reading room, and staff offices with a sunken court.
4. Entry/Circulation, upon entering at the ground level the visitor is met by a large marble stair, where to go next?
5. Variety of ceiling heights and expanses of space.



1.



2.



# CASE STUDY

## M c H e n r y L i b r a r y

Architect: Originally designed by John Carl Warnecke (1968),  
Addition designed by Boora Architects

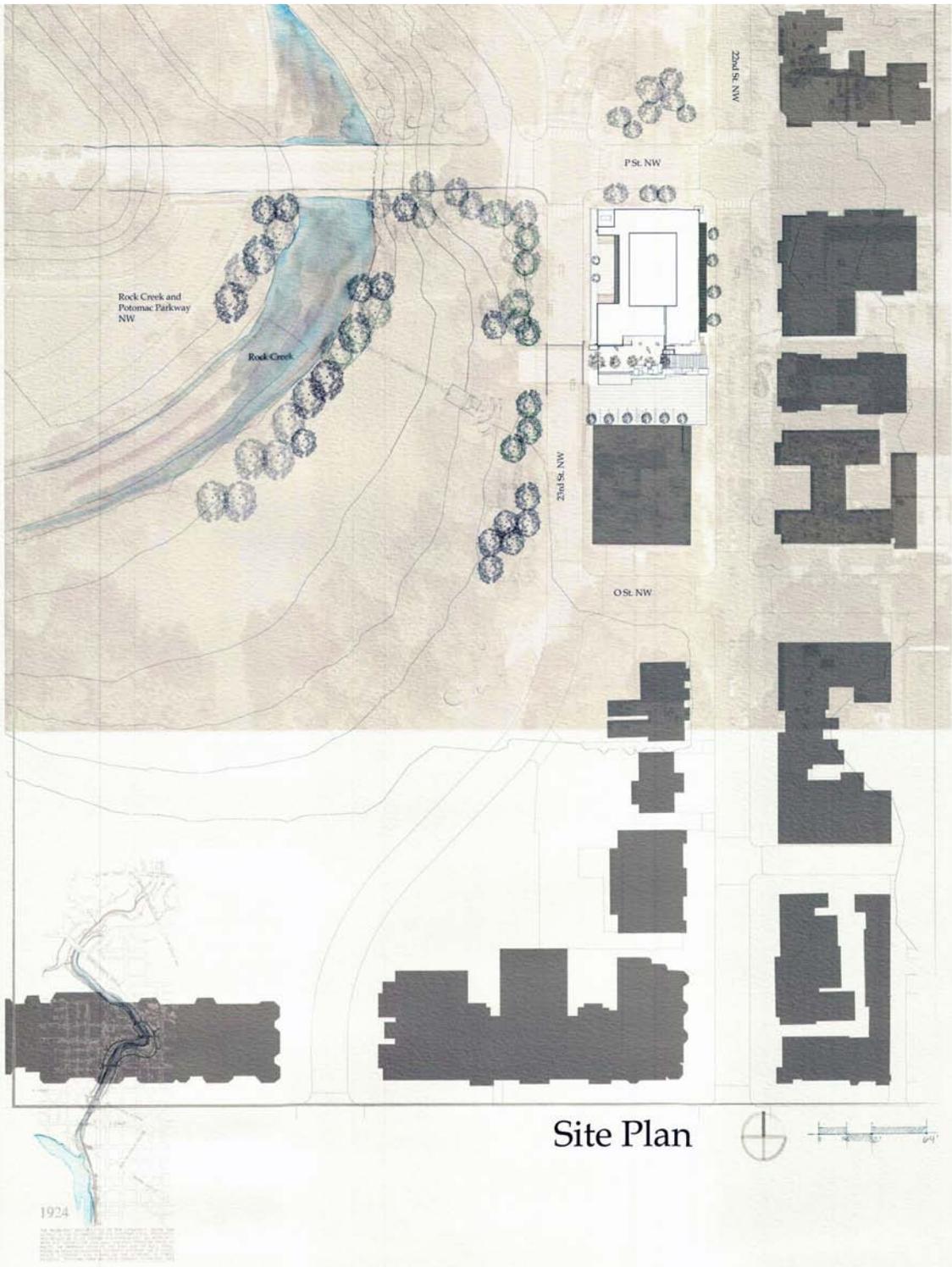
Built: 1968

Addition: 2008

Location: Santa Cruz, California

Points:

1. There are a variety of spaces for reading and studying. Cafe at the center for ease of access and social interaction.
2. Located in a large forested area of Redwood trees. Columns mimic redwood trees.
3. Materials: concrete + glass stay true to original building and provide a balance of site(unbuilt) and built.
4. Variety of volumetric spaces.



# SITE

## P R E S E N T D A Y

Washington, DC is known for its tree-lined streets, low building heights and framed views. The map of Washington is dotted with green, and its wide streets make for another type of playground. The iconic National Mall with buildings of knowledge and history set the precedent for what the District is all about. The open green spaces have remained grounded as the urban environment vibrantly grows. In a search for a site that was at the crease of landscape and architecture, Rock Creek Park made itself present.

The corner at P St. NW and 23rd St. is notched between two one-way streets. The city abuts this block on the East, and to the West the land drops off and slopes away down towards Rock Creek. Essentially, the sliver of urban lot is at the cross hairs of urbanity and land; making it the perfect place to confront the issues of land and city. The task was not to leave the landscape untouched, but to challenge the idea of how to “use the land” in order to appreciate it. Not to sequester and leave it “untouched” but to understand the implications of acting within it.

William Cronon warns about “idealizing a distant wilderness.” When people idealize the far away, they tend to neglect the land they inhabit. Cronon believes that the land that we inhabit every day is of utmost importance. A relationship with our environment must be based on an “ethic that will teach us as much about using nature as not using it.” When people fall victim to this way of thinking they are thinking in the extremes, and miss the “middle ground” altogether. Cronon writes, “My own belief is that only by exploring this middle ground will we learn ways of imagining a better world for all of us: humans and nonhumans, rich people and poor, women and men, First Worlders and Third Worlders, white folks and people of color, consumers and producers—a world better for humanity in all of its diversity and for all the rest of nature too. The middle ground is where we actually live. It is where we—all of us, in our different places and ways—make our homes.”<sup>9</sup> What can we learn from the middle ground?

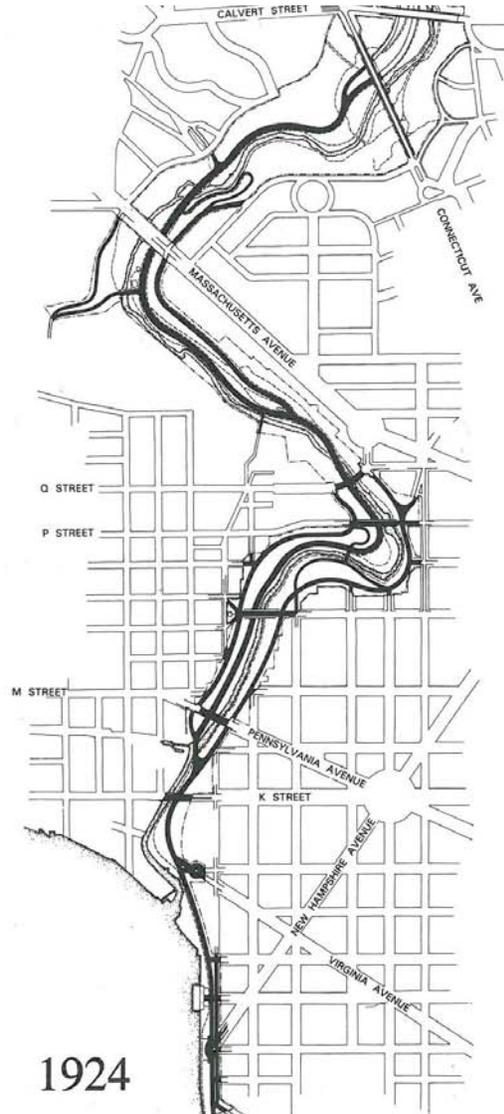






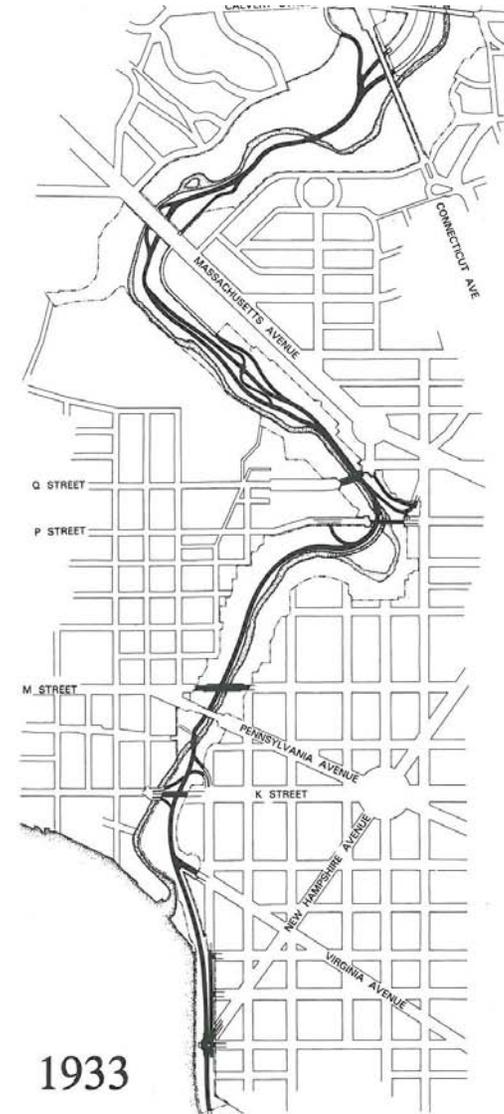
1916

THE 1916 PLAN ENCOMPASSED THE ENTIRE PARKWAY PATH FROM THE WATERFRONT TO THE ZOO. BORDER ROADS EXTENDED TO CONNECTICUT AVENUE. ADDITIONAL ENTRANCES PROVIDED ACCESS TO THE EXCLUSIVE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS. THE NEW PLAN REDUCED CONFLICTS WITH THE PARKWAY'S NEIGHBORS BY ELIMINATING THE ROUTES THROUGH OAK HILL CEMETERY AND PROPOSING TO SEPARATE THE MOUTH OF ROCK CREEK FROM THE ENTRANCE TO THE C & O CANAL. A NEW CROSSING BETWEEN N AND O STREETS WAS CALLED FOR TO REPLACE THE ANTIQUATED M STREET BRIDGE. THIS PRELIMINARY DESIGN OF ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY WAS PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF COL. WILLIAM W. HARTS, OFFICER IN CHARGE OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS, BY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT JAMES G. LANGDON.



1924

THE INCREASING SIMPLIFICATION OF THE PARKWAY'S DESIGN WAS EVIDENT IN THE ELIMINATION OF THE PROPOSED CANAL SEPARATION AND REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF ACCESS ROADS. AN AGREEMENT WITH THE WASHINGTON GAS LIGHT COMPANY PROVIDED ROOM TO ROUTE THE PARKWAY DRIVE ON THE EAST SIDE OF ROCK CREEK. PRESSURE FROM GEORGETOWN RESIDENTS RESTORED THE M STREET BRIDGE PLACEMENT AND ELIMINATED THE PROPOSED N STREET CROSSING. THE MAIN PARKWAY DRIVE CROSSED TO THE EAST SIDE OF THE CREEK JUST ABOVE Q STREET RATHER THAN FARTHER NORTH AT LYON'S MILL ROAD. THIS PLAN FOR THE PARKWAY WAS PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF LT. COL. C. O. SHERRILL, OFFICER IN CHARGE OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS, BY OFFICE OF ENGINEERS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS IRVING W. PAYNE AND THOMAS C. JEFFERS.



1933

DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE EDGES OF THE VALLEY, TOGETHER WITH THE WIDER, STRAIGHTER ROADS REQUIRED BY AUTOMOBILES, NECESSITATED MAJOR REVISIONS TO PRESERVE SCENERY AND SECLUDE MOTORISTS FROM THE SURROUNDING CITYSCAPE. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES WERE THE ELIMINATION OF BORDER ROADS AND THE CREATION OF SEPARATE NORTHBOUND AND SOUTHBOUND DRIVEWAYS BETWEEN O STREET AND MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE. LOCATION AND ALIGNMENT OF ACCESS ROADS WAS ALSO REVISED. THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO PREVENT THE DISTRICT HIGHWAY OFFICIALS FROM ROUTING PARKWAY-BOUND TRAFFIC ACROSS THE CEREMONIAL WATERGATE STEPS. THIS 1933 ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY VICINITY MAP WAS PREPARED BY THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND PUBLIC PARKS.

# SITE

## H I S T O R Y

The greater Rock Creek Park has been a site that has had a history of controversy. Beginning in the early 19th century, the question arose, “open-valley plan, or closed-valley plan?” What are the implications of filling it in? Or sectioning it off and not allowing people into it. Do we want this area to be a democratic space—a natural habitat for Washingtonians to use? Or do we close the valley and build. Thus came the decision to keep it an open-valley plan. Let’s keep this natural resource a National Park.<sup>10</sup>

Once this first decision was made, it led to a series of consecutive questions: How do we deal with infrastructure? How do we keep both sides of the park connected? How do we preserve and conserve? How do we create a landscape that all people can enjoy?

The combined efforts of multiple landscape architects and officials from the office of Public and grounds came up with solutions to keep noise pollution down, keep this habitat for animals safe, and to reduce/create effective routes across the park running East and West, in conjunction with secluded drives and vistas North and South.

The decision to keep Rock Creek Park an open-valley plan set the tone for how residents of Washington, DC would use the park for generations to come. This historical decision greatly influenced the making of this thesis: *Grounding Architecture-Reading the Landscape*. How can we utilize the landscape in order to make a great architecture? Through perspective, framing, and path we can invite Washingtonians into this area and when they leave the will take what they’ve experienced with them as they go back out into the world to do their every day work.





# GROUND

P S T A N D 2 3 R D S T N W ,  
W A S H I N G T O N , D C

Once Rock Creek Park was designated as the site for this thesis, questions began to formulate: Where does the city end and nature begin? Where do we see the ground revealing itself? The site at P St and 23rd St NW met these requirements. There was a definitive sense of above and below. The architecture and the landscape confronted one another.

Taking a moment to look at the macro scale that Washington holds we are able to survey the relationship between Rock Creek Park, Rock Creek Parkway, and the city. Circulation, is one way that the “city” must adjust to the landscape. Through the infrastructure of DC we see how the movement of the city changes once it is confronted with a natural landscape. Richard Sennett discusses how circulation was implemented in Washington, DC in his book, *Flesh and Stone, The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. He says, “Because of the interplay of various power interests in the young Republic, the designers of Washington had to transform a near-tropical swamp into a national capital, rather than locate power in an established city or building on a more hospitable open site. The plan for Washington, and its partial realization in the Washington we know today, is a vindication of Enlightenment beliefs in the power to create a healthy environment in a highly organized, comprehensive urban design. This urban design reveals as well a certain social and political vision contained in the image of a “healthy” city in which people can breathe freely.”<sup>11</sup>

The leaders and designers of our Nation’s Capital did not run away from the characteristics that the land possessed—they confronted it. Thomas Jefferson said, “By being out in the open air, a citizen, breathes free: Jefferson applied this metaphor to the countryside, which he loved; L’Enfant applied it to the city.”<sup>12</sup>

Let the citizens breathe free.



# GROUND

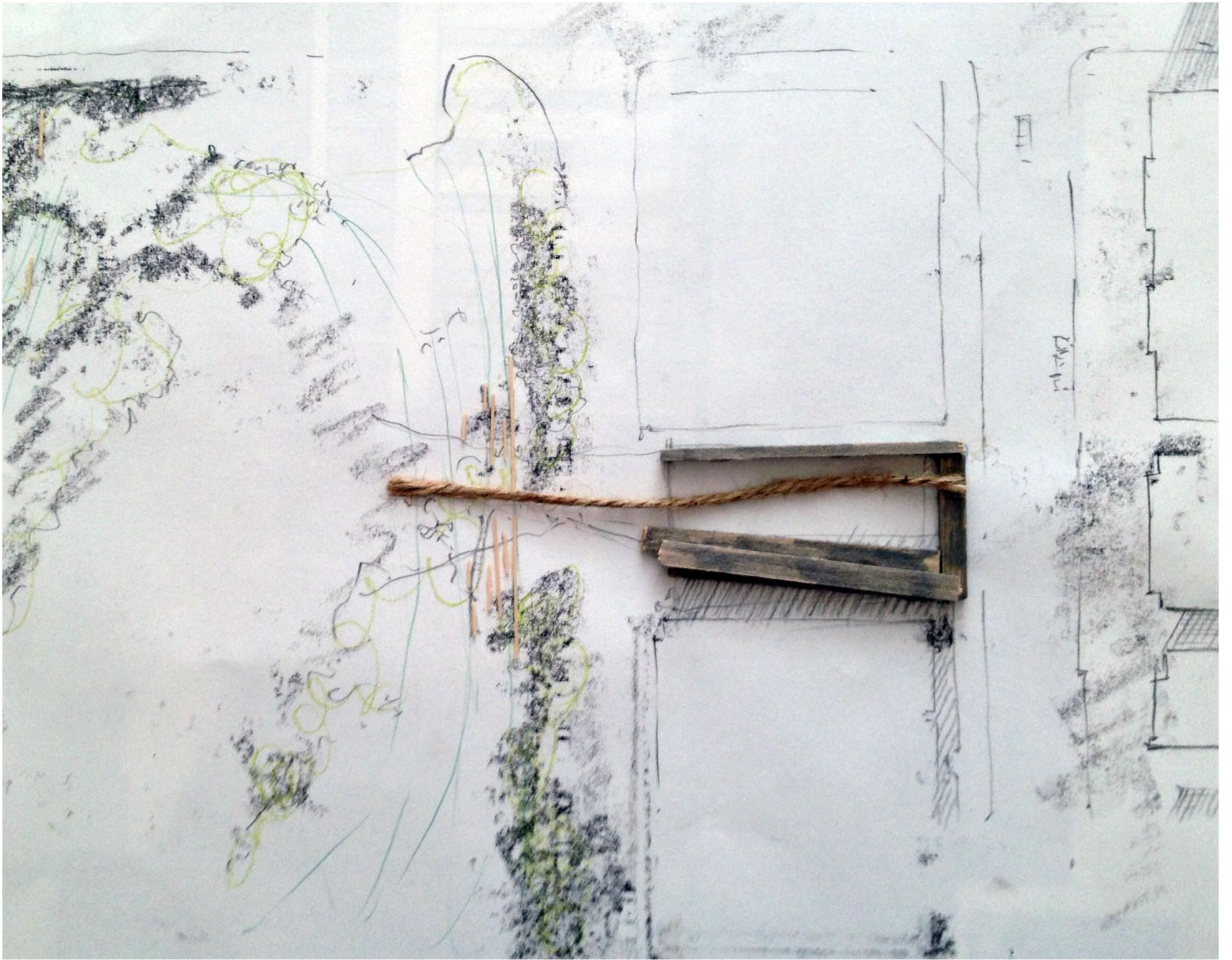
## F R A M I N G

In an effort to understand landscape and city, one must first comprehend through what lens city-dwellers are viewing their environment. An intriguing characteristic of Rock Creek Park is elevation. It is not just about the horizontal aspect of the ground but the vertical. In most contexts there are both characteristics of the “land” and of “architecture.” There is more to landscape than just nature, trees and some leaves. Conversely there is more to architecture than buildings, columns and bricks. Each discipline possesses form, rhythm and construction.

The photographs on the left were taken underneath the P Street bridge and they exemplify this phenomenon. This kind of lens essentially undoes the stitching of what was once *a landscape* woven with *an architecture*. It is a much deeper distinction that warrants a digging into rather than a mere skimming of the surface.

A site visit traditionally deals with surveying, collecting, and observing. Through the lens of a camera a realization was formed. The two photographs on page 34 were taken a mere 20 feet apart. In the bottom image, one sees “landscape” first, and it camouflages the bridge, commanding attention in the photograph. The image at the top, the strong arch of the bridge takes the stage in this frame. It draws the viewer’s gaze in, it’s strength and curvilinear shape encompasses the landscape just beyond it. These two images apart show different things, however, as a series one begins to understand how they work together as a sequence.

This series describes a sequence which now breathes movement. The movement of a human within an architecture and a landscape. How a human understands the spaces that they are in, and what they appreciate now depends on the lens they are looking through, and how that lens defines what they see. Therefore the interplay of framing, perspective and foreground verses background is the very essence of this thesis.



# GROUND

## D I R E C T I O N

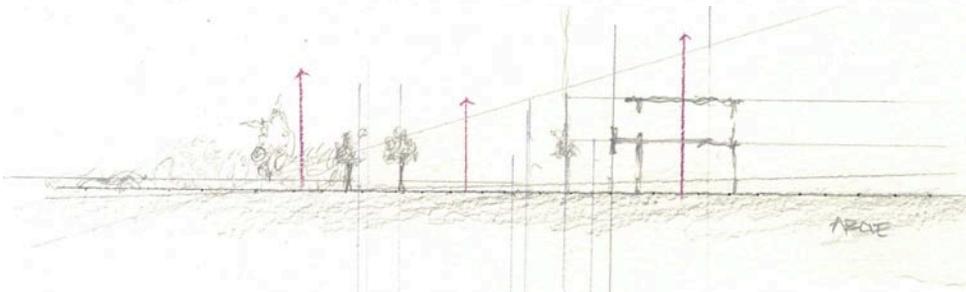
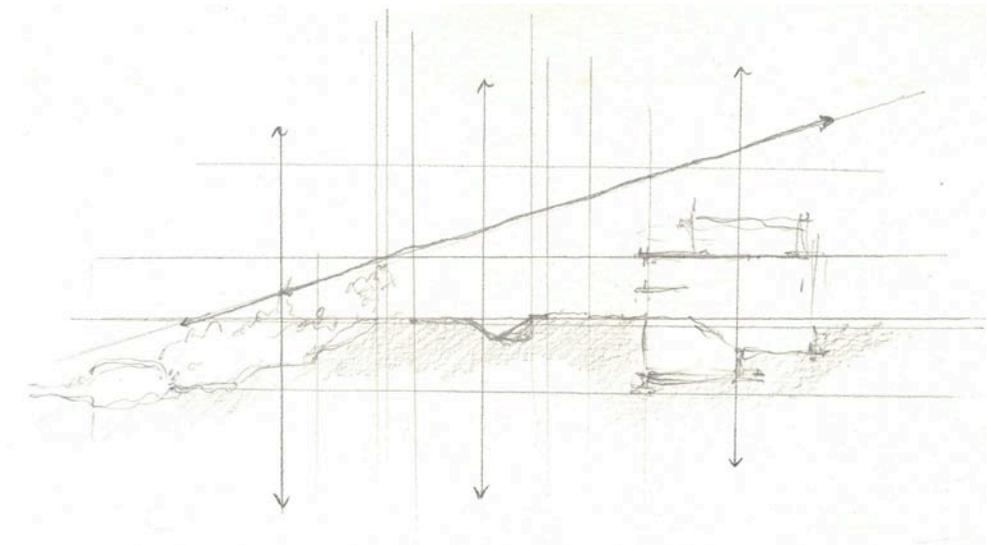
Movement, circulation, and sequence now describe this site. The next question spurred making the collage on the left. Is the effort to bring the city into the park? Or is the effort of this thesis to bring the park into the city?

The question sparks the conversation of this thesis, it is both. Only when both are implemented can we truly get Washingtonians to breathe. The scale and the methods used to bring the park into the city, and to bring the city into the park is crucial. It is not an exchange of worlds, but a meshing of the two in order to create an atmosphere that is successful and allows Washingtonians to enjoy, learn, explore, wander and wonder.

The broad stroke idea was to invite the city into the park: by way of exposure and ease of accessibility. The idea of bringing the park into the city was done through choreographing an architecture that was “within the city block” and therefore “of the city,” and making that architecture a series of spaces, frames and of varying perspective that pulled on the heart strings of inhabitants as a landscape’s majesty has the power to do.

The goal always in the forefront “allowing city-dwellers to breathe.” Creating a library that slowed the city down. Similar to a landscape the task was choreographing an architecture, a building that utilized natural elements to make profound spaces. A landscape is created through the use of a foundation and living things growing upward and outward from this foundation.

The library has to do the same. The question is, “How?”



# GROUND

## A B O V E   A N D   B E L O W

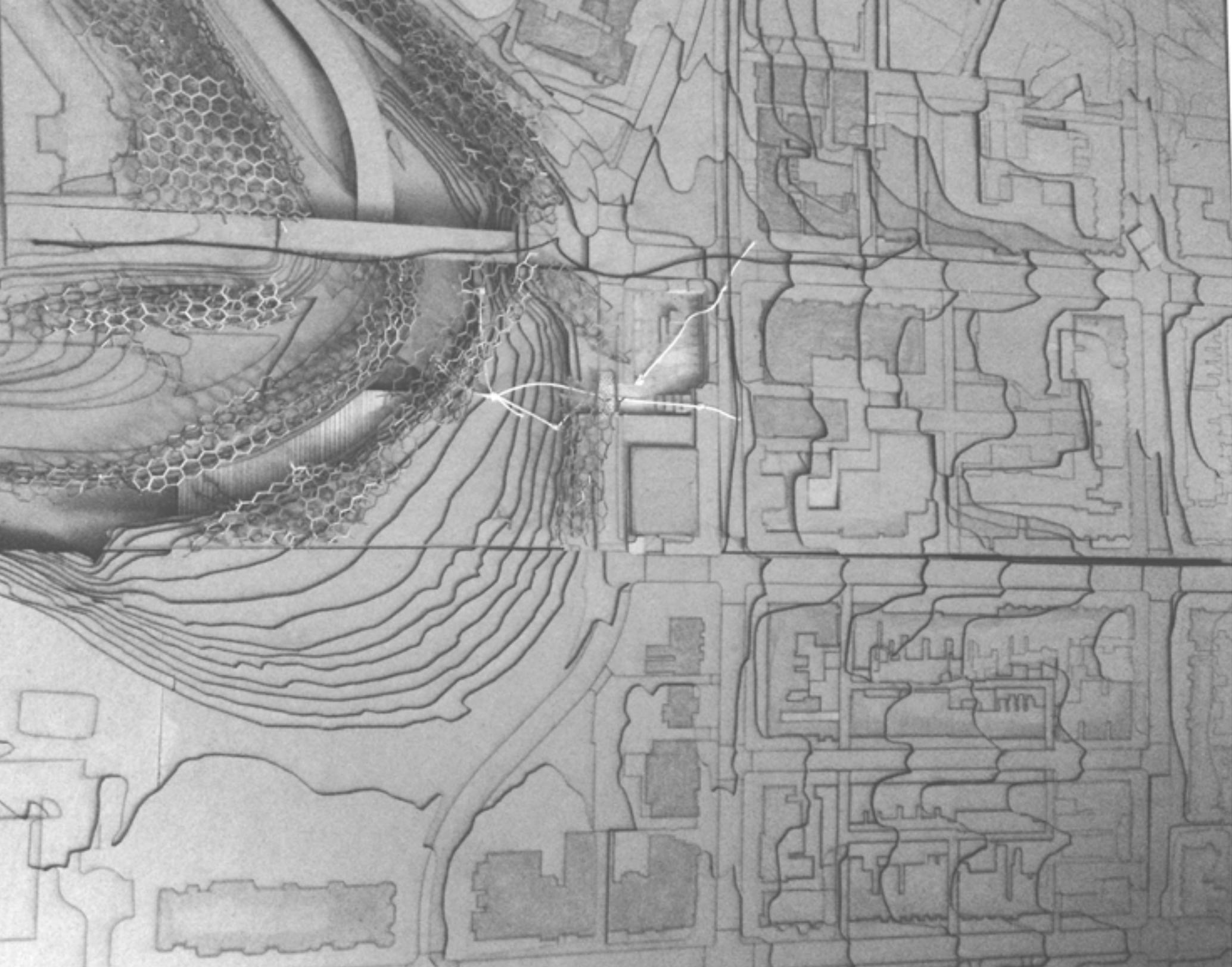
Robin Dripps essay, “Groundwork” began to shed light on what it truly means to build, to construct, to interpret and to comprehend.<sup>13</sup>

Lasting design, *good* design requires reasoning. In Architecture and Landscape Architecture there is always a process, and a cultivation of why. Why is this answer to the problem, not just satisfactory, but revolutionary?

Design is a reasoned purpose, an intention. All compositions have a pattern, and a meaningful order.

The ground is something that both nature and architecture have in common. It is a datum line that things below the ground and above the ground react to. To understand fully how the built environment was constructed the ground needs to be defined.

There is a whole world underneath buildings, similar to the living world that is below a rock or that lives amongst the roots of trees. There is a need for Humans to truly understand this relationship. The relationship between all living things exists, there is a dynamic dialogue that when it is engaged can open up a world of opportunity. Beginning to think about Architecture as a thing “of the ground” allowed for a sense of freedom. Once you appreciate this entity, and do not fear it, once you understand it so completely, so fully that you can no longer see a boundary, that is something to grasp onto, that is when the whole world opens up. The possibilities are endless because what you are building upon, the foundation, is solid and promising.



# GROWTH

## THE CITY FALLS AWAY

The fabric of Washington, DC begins to fall away as it leads into Rock Creek Park. The large model on the left was created to describe this elevation change. One can view it as the city caving in, or as the park growing outward. David Leatherbarrow writes, “The hermeneutics of site study is thus twofold: unmasking and revealing; the general assumptions about terrain that arise from glancing surveys of its surface geometry must be shown to be false so that previously unseen potentials can be discovered.”<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to confront the topographical change of the city in this area and view the city as a figure ground, this model was constructed. By stripping away the buildings from the site and purely looking at the footprints of the buildings, the roads, the blocks that are formed and the bridges that carry across the Rock Creek Park ravine, one notices what the character of the ground is. That is not to say that there are not deeper roots to this story, but it was a first attempt at looking at the site through a particular lens, or the removal of a lens.

Through revealing and uncovering, the site began to have a new meaning, that was there all along.





# GROWTH

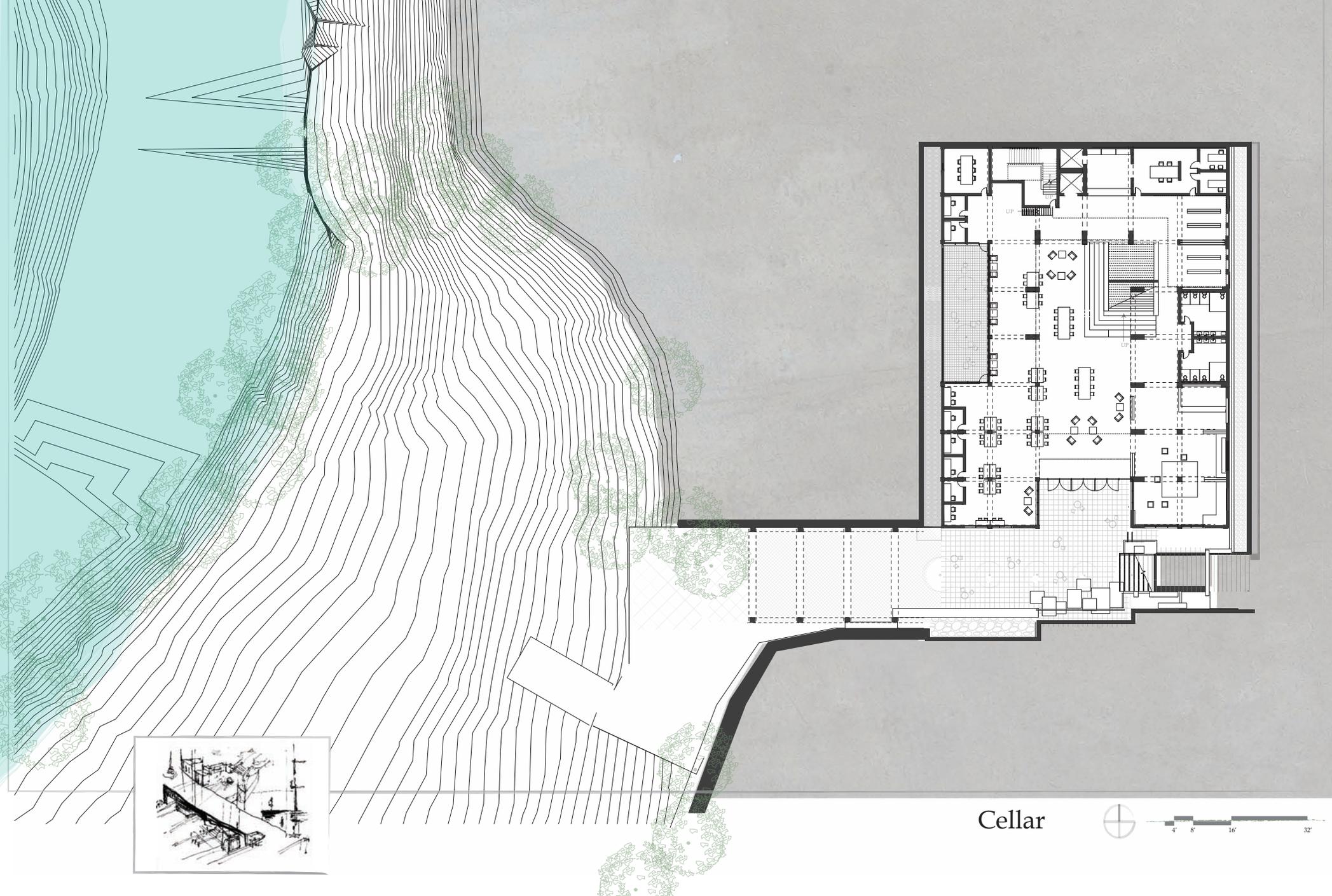
## THE LIBRARY AS A DWELLING

Gaston Bachelard's, "The Poetics of Space," discusses the characteristics of memory, childhood and home. Through the lens of library as a home for books and the people who use books, the meaning of the site and program is reengaged. This new idea: library as dwelling, captivates the city by inviting its inhabitants in, providing shelter while they imagine, and feeds the creation of memories with one another. This was the goal for a truly rooted building within its surroundings.

Bachelard writes, "To bring order into these images, I believe that we should consider two principal connecting themes: 1) A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. It differentiates itself in terms of its verticality. It is one of the appeals to our consciousness of verticality. 2) A house is imagined as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality. These themes are no doubt very abstractly stated. But with examples, it is not hard to recognize their psychologically concrete nature."<sup>15</sup>

*Verticality* and *concentrated being* are two themes that appear to be opposing thoughts. In creating a sense of place that is both grounded and allows the mind to imagine and dream, there are certain parameters that the dwelling must have. To architect a building that is truly grounded in its location, grounded into the earth-- the library had to be a place of shelter, first and foremost, once that was achieved the library could be a place that allowed your mind to wander and wonder.

The creation of the library was a process. It is a series of characteristics. A series of architectural elements implemented to create the *landscape* of the library. Grounding the library for its inhabitants meant that they were in a *concentrated being* that could allow them to reach the heights of their imagination, and to construct their dreams. That *verticality* could only be achieved if they were confirmedly grounded.



Cellar



4' 8' 16' 32'

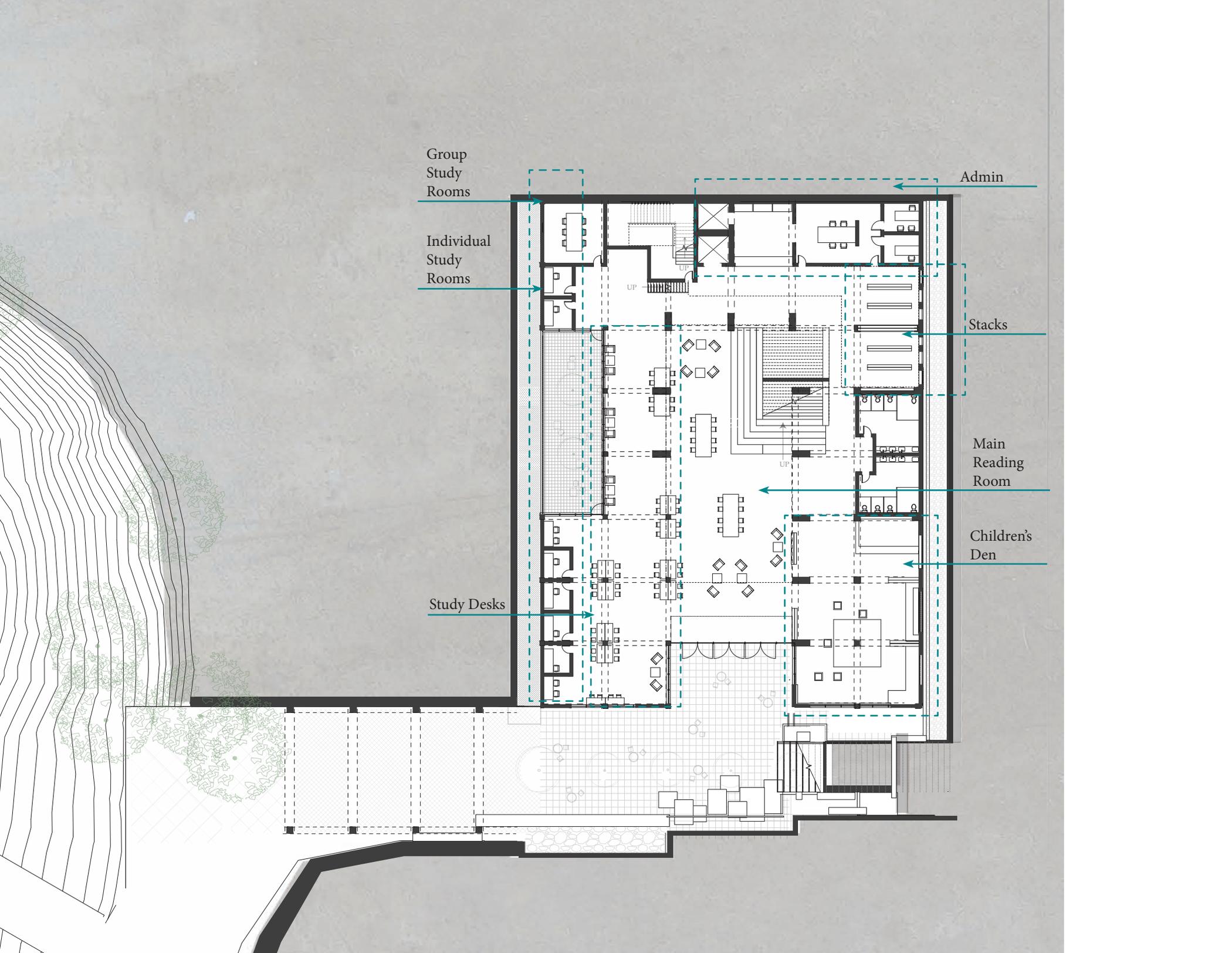
# GROWTH

## C E L L A R F L O O R

The Cellar is “of the ground,” it is here that it is cradled. Robin Dripps says it profoundly, “The special condition of the cellar, a place in and of the ground that humans can occupy, makes its structure and its unique qualities worth study. Properties of the cellar reveal much about the structure and potential of the ground itself. ..The cellar is only experienced from within. Without the light of day, its vague and shifting contours, its partial completion, and its many twisting passages contribute to its sense of being boundless, extending beyond easy comprehension. Without boundary, there can be no discernible form and consequently no figure. The cellar, with its actual and implied extensions into the ground, becomes the perfect counter to the figures placed upon it. Its single sided walls hold back the earth but also make us constantly aware of the ground’s immediacy.”<sup>16</sup>

This bottom-most floor is sunken 16 feet below the city surface and unveils a new floor of the earth to library users. Three sides meet the earth and one opens up to it. This creates a natural flow of the Northeast corner toward the south, toward the park. Opposite poles of darkness and depth, light and air. One enters down into the Cellar from the City Floor by way of a commanding concrete stair. The stair acts as a gesture from the City unveiling this underworld to it’s city dwellers.

Dwellers are pulled downward as the stair widens to become part of the Cellar. The inhabitant begins to feel the City fall away as they too, become “of the ground.” This feeling of depth is met by the sun pouring down into the south facade of the building where a sunken park comes into view. Compartments line the perimeter of the Cellar adding strength to the soaring building above, and making inhabitants feel like they are within the crypts of the cellar. These compartments house book stacks to the east and both private and shared study rooms to the west. The concrete floor sprawled in front of the stair is strewn with tables for studying. At the Cellar there are spaces for group sharing, and individual privacy.



Group Study Rooms

Individual Study Rooms

Admin

Stacks

Main Reading Room

Children's Den

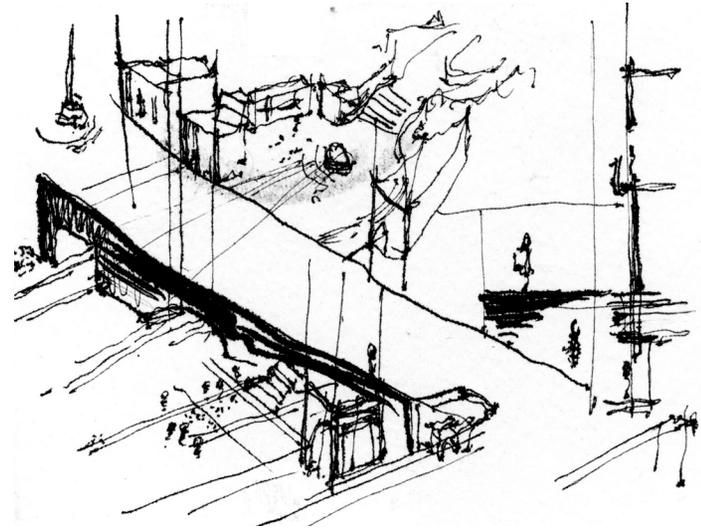
Study Desks

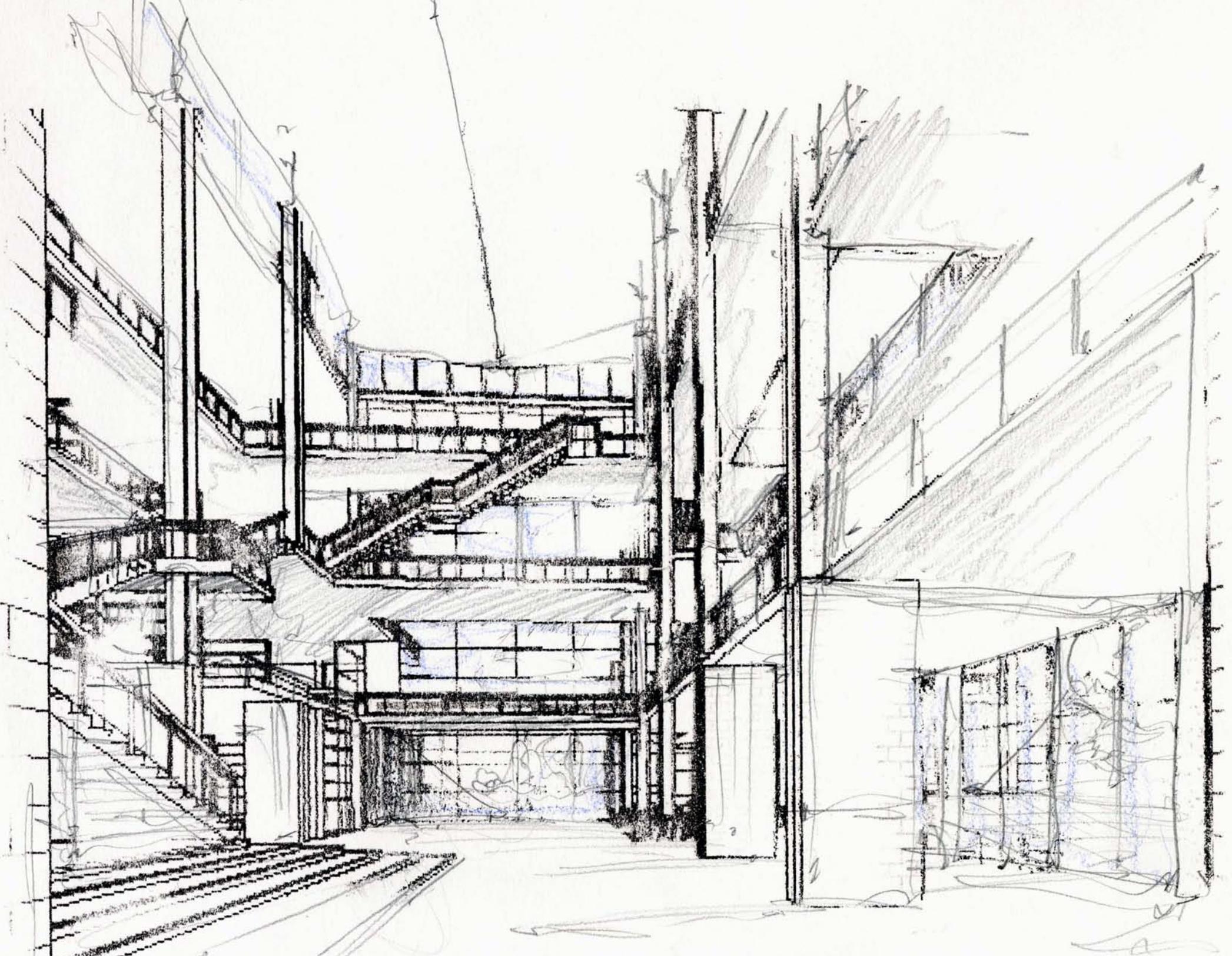
# GROWTH

## C E L L A R F L O O R

The Cellar Floor at the library is made up of two “bars.” The bar that is created on the north has a rhythm of walls that repeat every 20 ft. A similar “bar” of walls is found on the East side of the cellar. It is only at the ends of these “bars” that the walls start to break down. The east bar that runs north and south is made up of stacks, bathrooms, the children’s stacks and their den. The north bar holds a group study room, a secondary stairwell, elevators and administration office space. These bars create an L-shape that is quite different from the opposite two bars to the west and south.

The walls begin to breakdown in solidity and the remnants form the rectilinear concrete columns that soar to the top of the attic. These areas reinforce the perimeter as covered space on the three sides leaving the main reading floor of the atrium open to the rest of the building. This open space extends out into two parks: a sunken reading park enclosed on all 4 sides to the west and an extended outdoor sunken plaza to the south of the main reading room that connects underneath 23rd St. NW giving way to Rock Creek Park.





# GROWTH

## C E L L A R F L O O R

Diana Balmori, writes about the interface between landscape and architecture. Her thoughts on how to portray it is similar to the way that this thesis was approached. "I have often used a thick line to represent the interface between architecture and landscape: a tangible spatial unit between a building and its surroundings, a line that is wide and varied and that changes in thickness and intensity, vanishing at times, densifying at others. This thickened irregular juncture between landscape and architecture comes from erasing the clearly defined, continuous line of separation drawn by the modern movement. It entails considering the site and the building as a continuum, each modifying and being modified by the other to different degrees."<sup>17</sup>

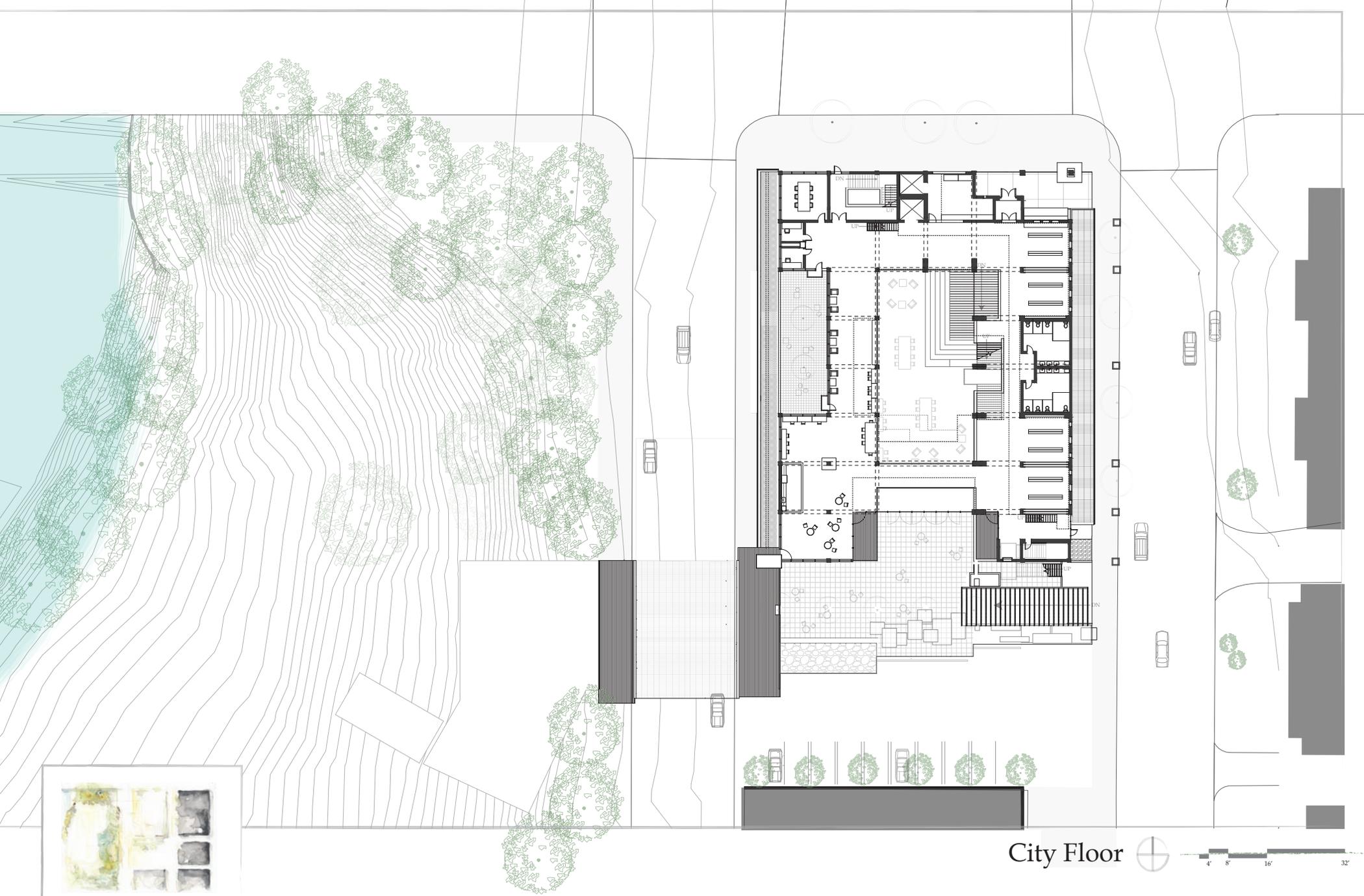
The view to the left is of the main reading room looking south towards the sunken public park. Here the columns become fragmented walls that mark the main reading room and act as concrete trunks providing strength for the roof.





Park Engages City  
S. Elevation





City Floor



# GROWTH

## C I T Y F L O O R

The entrance into the library is the first gesture of the library. The library engages the city through creating a piazza, or public square. In terms of dwelling, this might also be viewed as a covered front porch. This provides shelter for city dwellers waiting to cross the bustling streets. It also acts as an inviting front stoop ushering people inward to experience the space.

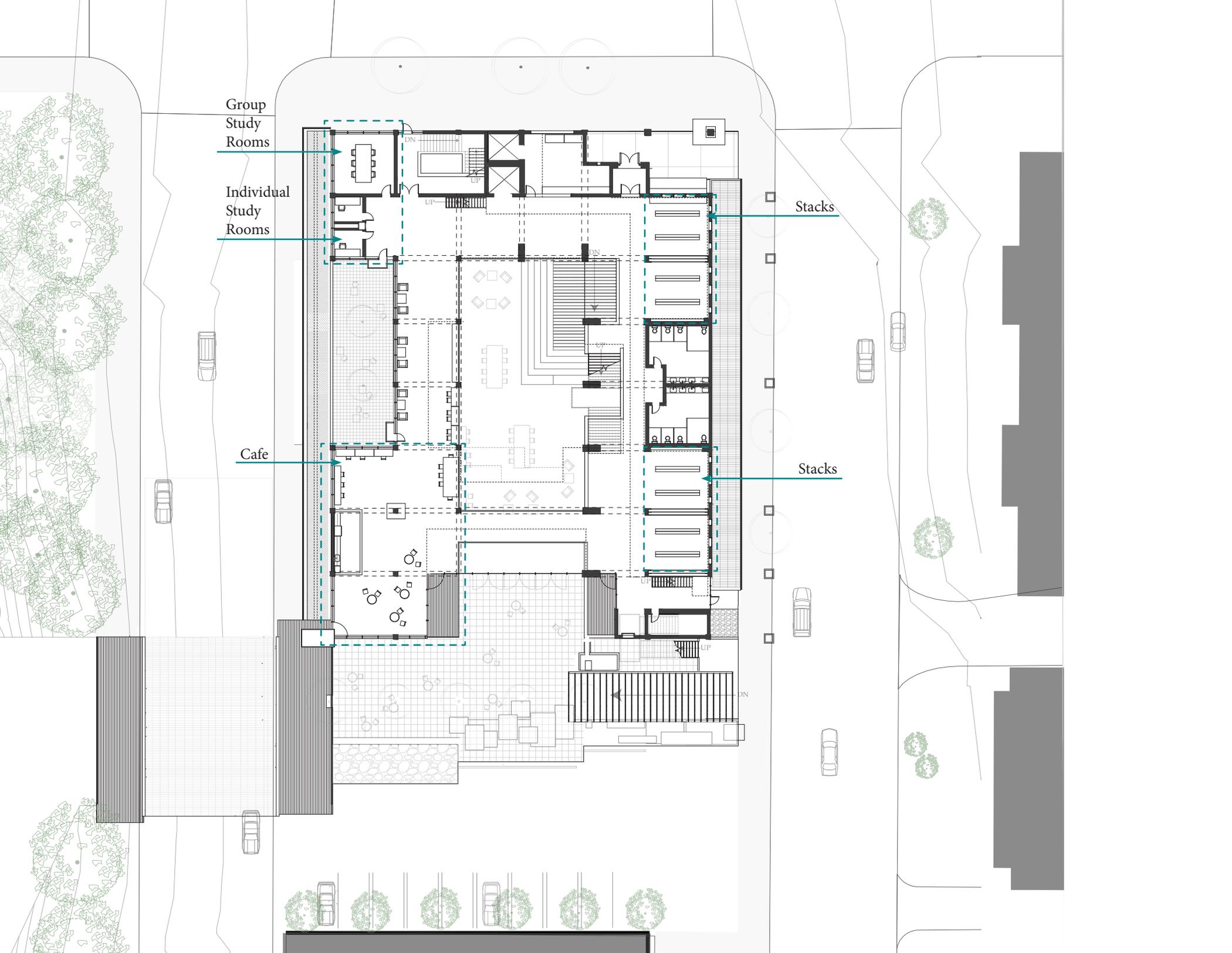
As the first place that people encounter upon visiting the library it sets the tone for how the building engages the city side and opens its arms to invite them in. This open corner is an outdoor room with a singular column at the corner that meets the attic floor.

Upon entrance through the heavy doors off P Street the inhabitant is met with the large concrete stair that descends down into the cellar or as they move south a more narrow concrete stair ascends upward to the piano nobile.

The diagram of this floor continues the “bar” diagram of the cellar. The north bar and east bar house the administration spaces and stacks. Essentially this L-shape is the extension of the city blocks that it parallels-this is where the information is housed. The spaces for studying and reading are along the west and south perimeter where large windows invite the tree lined Rock Creek Park into the library.

The City Floor also has two corners with very different characteristics. The northeast corner which houses the entry is an open piazza with heavy concrete walls and minimal windows. The southwest corner is a public space as well, the cafe. Here there are low walls panoramic views to rock creek park and passersby.

The central atrium is kept open and allows people on the city floor to look downward into the main reading room.



Group Study Rooms

Individual Study Rooms

Cafe

Stacks

Stacks

# GROWTH

## C I T Y F L O O R

The vertical edge (facade) of the city floor and the floor of the library act as a window for city dwellers on the exterior and hints at what the function of the interior spaces are. Robin Dripps writes, “Within this textural density edges, seams, junctures, and other gaps reveal moments of fertile discontinuity where new relationships might grow. Relationships among grounds are multiple, shifting and inclusive. They engage the particular and the concrete rather than the abstract and the general. The rich and even contradictory contest needed to enlarge our understanding of self and world resides in the elaborative potential of individual hypotheses about how to put all these pieces together. In other words, discoveries made within the ground are likely to offer profound and rewarding challenges to the human intellect.”<sup>18</sup>

The building meets the sidewalk cleanly on the north. The east edge is pulled back from the sidewalk and allows for a 4 ft. drop to the cellar floor. It is connected through a metal grate that captures and redirects water runoff. Opposite, on the west edge the building pulls back from the sidewalk and creates an open crevice where tall grass and plantings grow. The cellar’s enclosed reading garden lives. The south side is free and acts as a large window to the sunken park, as it tunnels city dwellers to Rock Creek Park.





# GROWTH

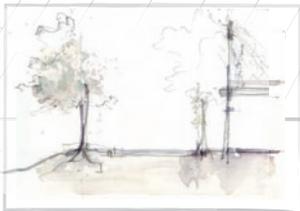
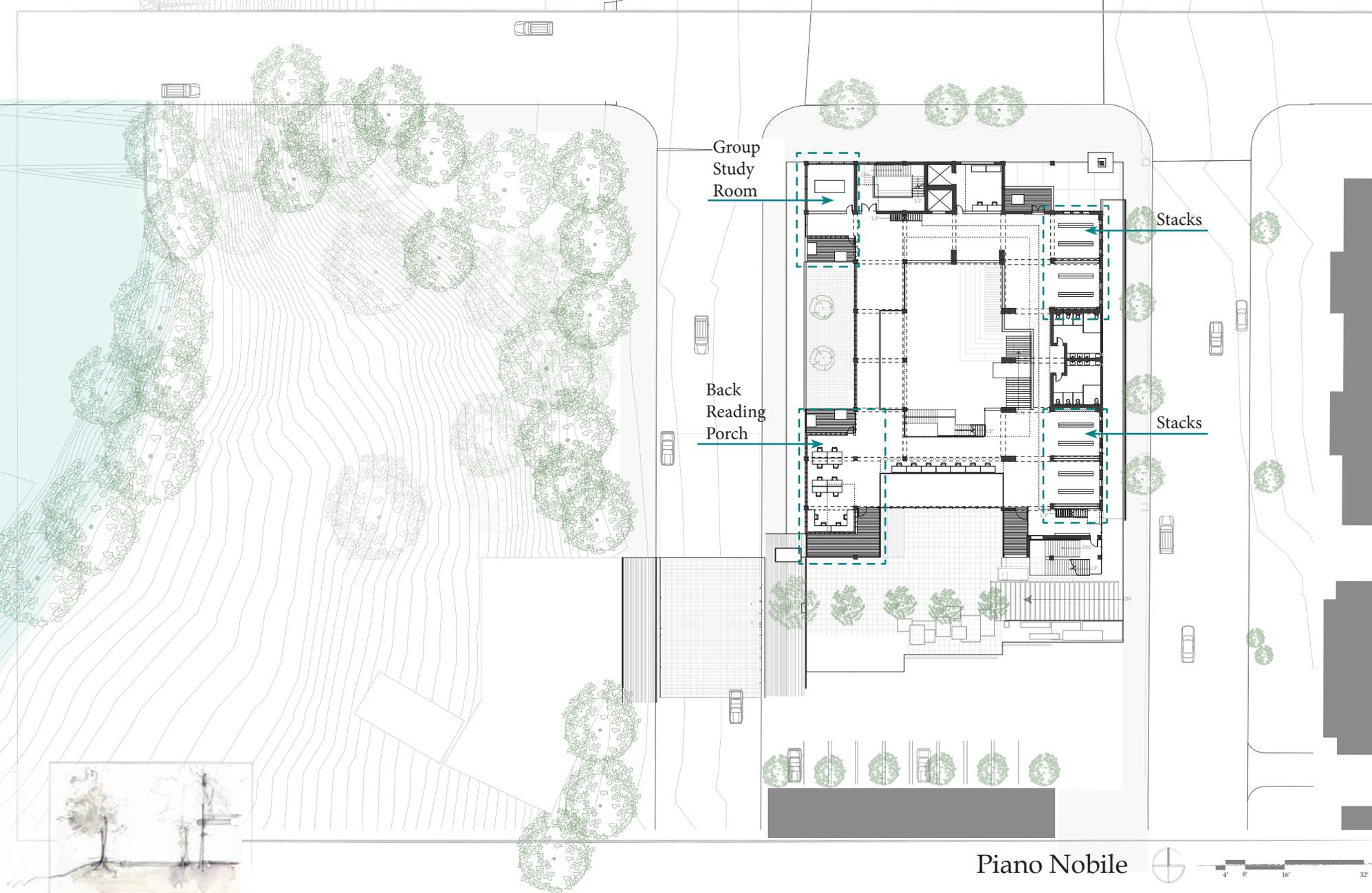
## A T R I U M   S P A C E

The Atrium is at the core of the building. It represents the light and air of the library. It is here that we see both horizontal and vertical properties converge. This space, architectural in definition possesses the quality of landscape.

The varying scale of spaces, of compression and tension, and conversely expansion are rolled into this main space. The openness of the atrium is a vertical datum for the library. Circulation happens around it, views are cultivated within it. There is only one floor that can “occupy” the atrium (the main reading room) however it is constantly giving life to the library through its nooks and areas of perspective and framed views.

In *Eyes of the Skin*, Juhani Pallasmaa writes, “Images of one sensory realm feed further imagery in another modality. Images of presence give rise to images of memory, imagination and dream. ‘(T)he chief benefit of the house (is that) the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace,’ writes Bachelard. But even more, an architectural space frames, halts, strengthens and focuses our thoughts, and prevents them from getting lost. We can dream and sense our being outdoors, but we need the architectural geometry of a room to think clearly. The geometry of thought echoes the geometry of the room.”<sup>19</sup>

The atrium by purely “being” breeds wonder. The atrium is meant to be a space that people move about, and on few occasions can move within. The ratio of these moments are to be built upon one another and while experienced one at a time, the last impression that an inhabitant and a dreamer has, are all of the experiences of this vertical shaft.



Piano Nobile



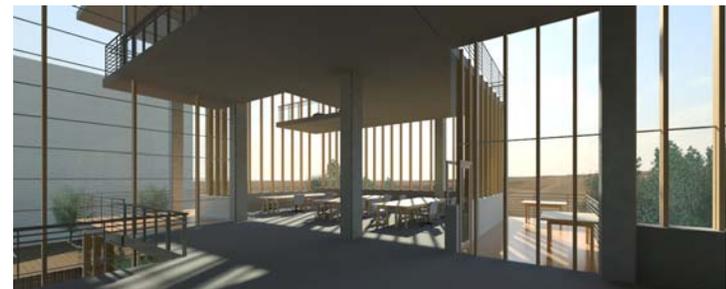
# PIANO NOBILE

## T H E N O B L E F L O O R

As the inhabitant begins to ascend the stairs they arrive at the Piano Nobile, which in Italian means “the Noble Floor.” Upon arrival they feel a departure from the ground. This floor is a floor all to its own. It is not quite the ground but it is not the attic either. It is neither here nor there.

The piano nobile is home to a reading porch at the southwest corner. There are also many more outdoor reading rooms and niches than on the floors below. Panoramic view command the attention of its inhabitants. The city continues to fall away. It is much quieter than the busy city floor, yet you can hear people talking quietly amongst themselves as they peer down into the atrium.

Gaston Bachelard writes, “And so, beyond all the positive values of protection, the house we were born in becomes imbued with dream values which remain after the house is gone. Centers of boredom, centers of solitude, centers of daydream group together to constitute the oneiric house which is more lasting than the scattered memories of our birthplace. Long phenomenological research would be needed to determine all these dream values, to plumb the depth of this dream ground in which our memories are rooted. And we should not forget that these dream values communicate poetically from soul to soul. To read poetry is essentially to daydream.”<sup>20</sup> This floor places you across from the trees, not at the trunk but not yet at the canopy.





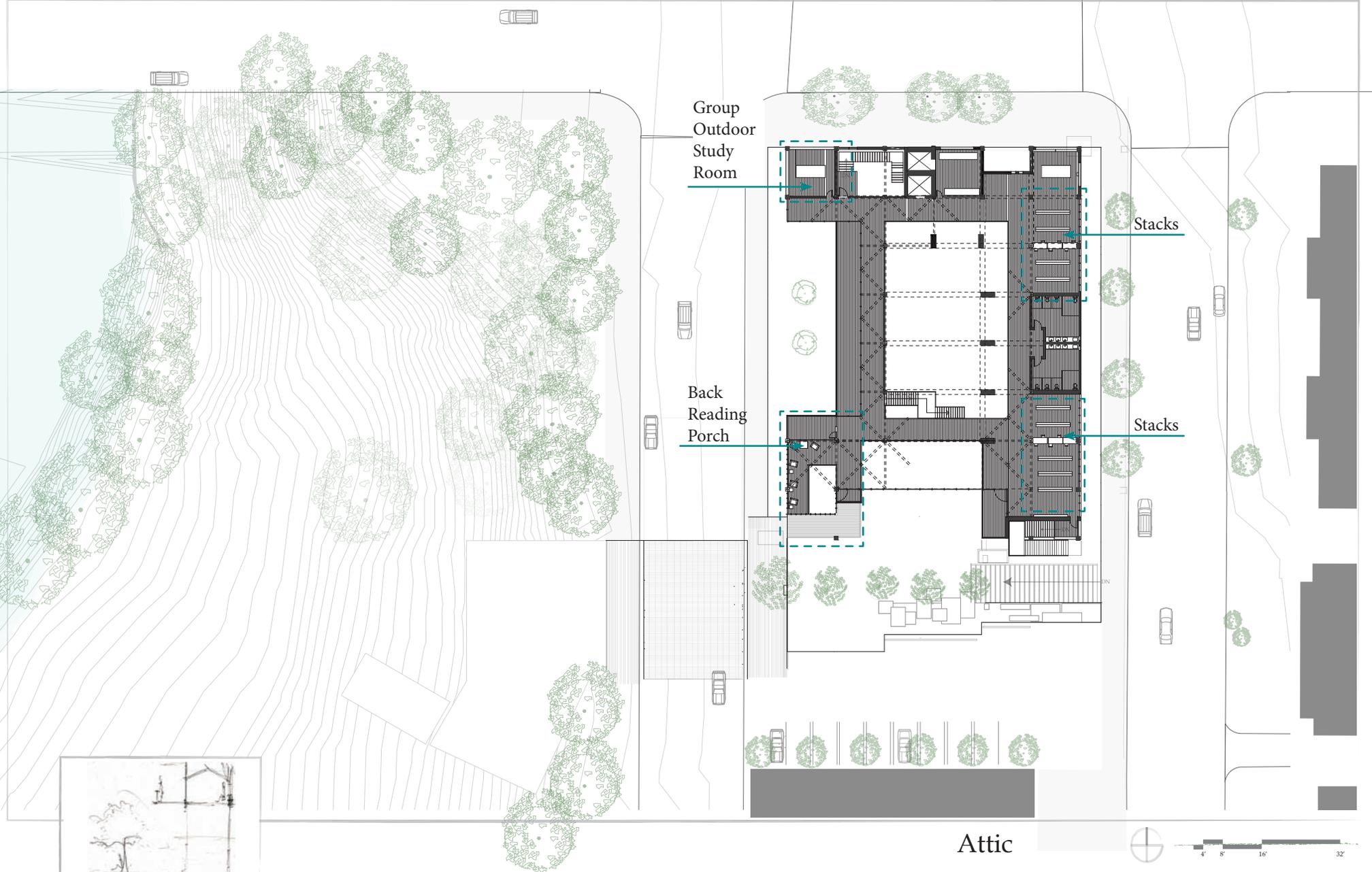
E. Elevation





W. Elevation





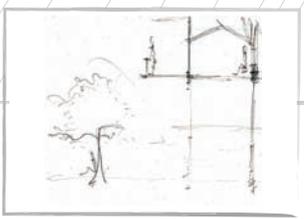
Group  
Outdoor  
Study  
Room

Stacks

Back  
Reading  
Porch

Stacks

Attic



# ATTIC

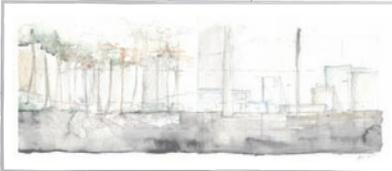
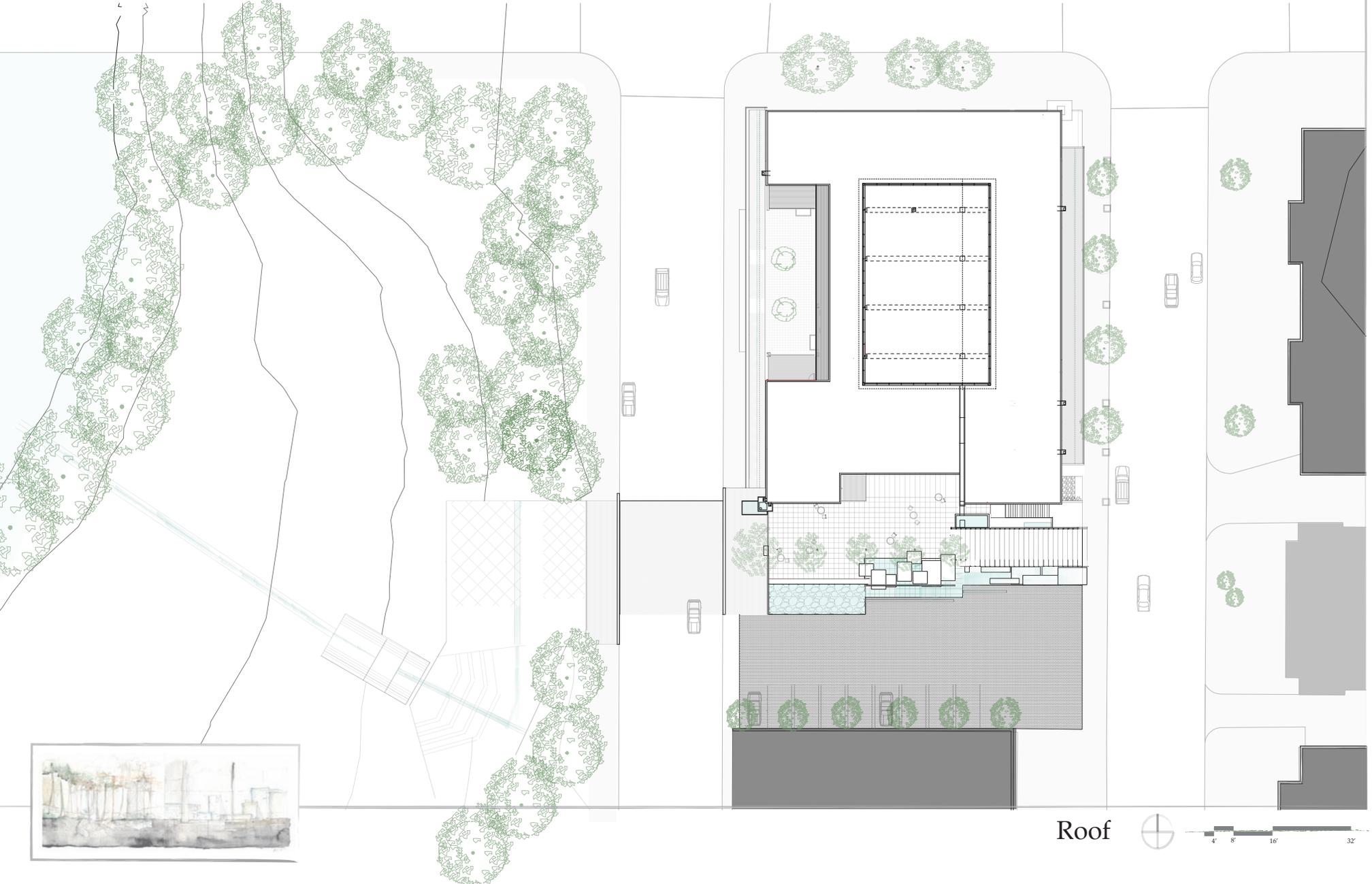
## P E R S P E C T I V E

The Attic is the canopy of the building. Amongst the beams and tree-like columns readers settle in. Tucked away in reading nooks both exterior and interior, they can dream.

The relationships of this part of the library dwelling to the whole is one of light. Here, shadows are cast on the wood creaking floors as they breathe out under the weight of it's users. The ground in this sense is far below yet it's presence is felt. The complete oppositeness of the bottom to the top. As Bachelard wrote, "(The ground) forms one pole in a spatial construct linking earth to sky that he considers one of the fundamental relationships guiding human thought and action. The attic, with its clearly articulated structure exposed to view, its removal from the particularity of the ground, which gives it its greater sense of perspective on things, and its mnemonic capacity coming from the contents typically stored within, is considered the rational part of the house. The cellar, with walls just barely holding back the vast and formless extent of the earth beyond, is both physically and poetically the dark entity of the house."<sup>21</sup>

At this level the stacks only come up 6 ft. and you come close enough to the roof that you think you might be able to reach it. This floor is yet a further departure from the rest of the dwelling. The attic floor plate is much smaller forcing inhabitants to be conscious of where they are stepping as they meander under the beams and columns.

The views to the north and east are rooftop, to the west are the tree tops and leaves. A sea of green in summer, and a kaleidoscope of changing colors in the fall.



Roof



4' 8' 16' 32'

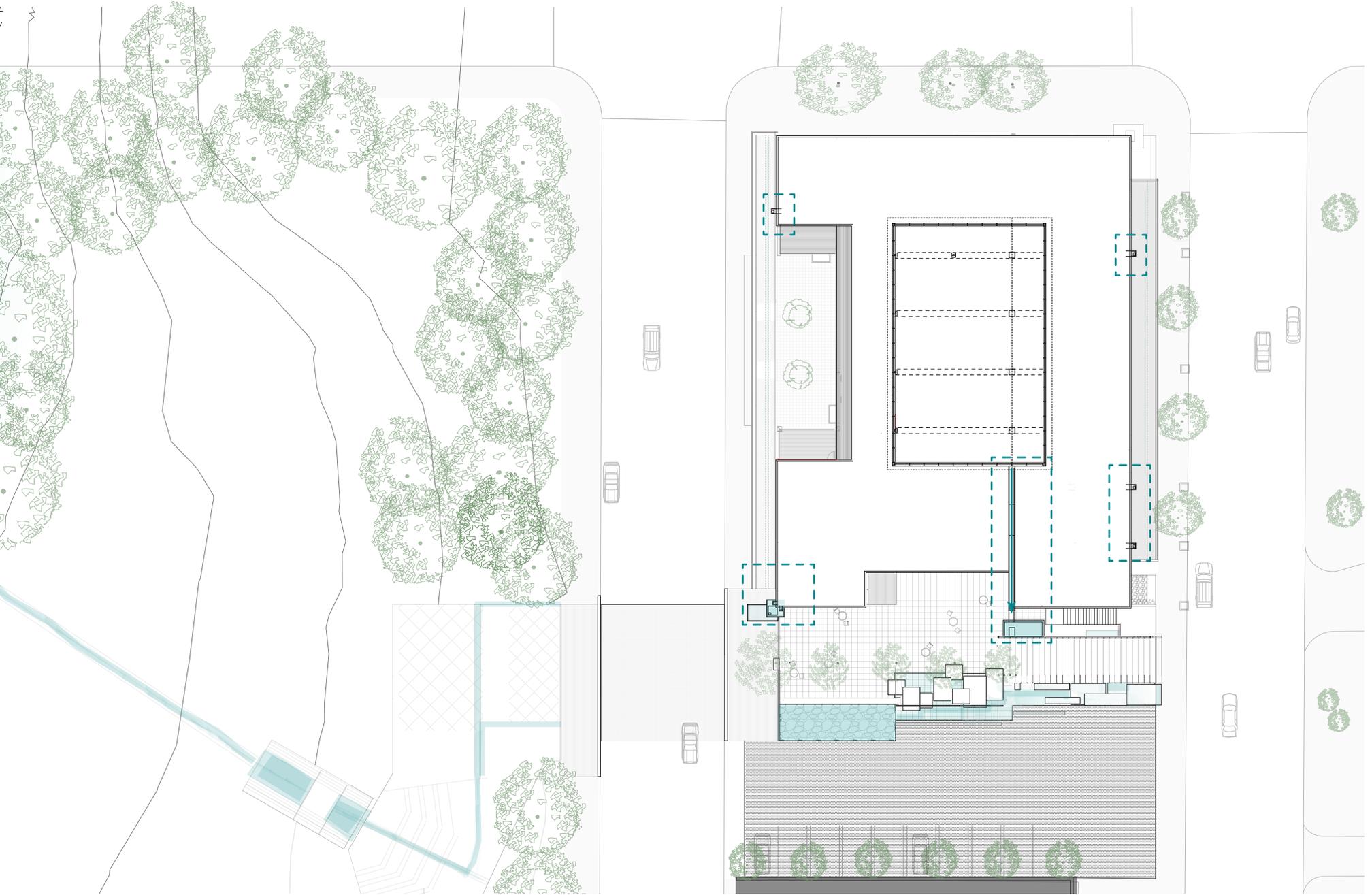
# THE ROOF

## S h e l t e r   a n d   P r o t e c t i o n

The Roof topographically shifts. It speaks to both the horizon and the verticality of the library. David Leatherbarrow writes, “Design is often described as creative. Yet when the materials of landscape and architectural practice are considered, the matter of creativity suggest another division. Work in the first seems less artificial than that in the second. This is because the latter, architecture, often involves working against, not with, the products and tendencies of the natural world: roofs resist rain, artificial lakes loves it; the first suffers the climate, the second engages its operations.”<sup>22</sup> The design of the roof engages the climate and also speaks to the functionality, architecturally, of the interior. The roof in this sense is two-fold, is shelters readers, and it’s true beauty comes as it collects the rain and diverts it at strategic points.

From the earth to the sky, the library is engaged.





# THE ROOF

## R A I N W A T E R E N G A G E D N O T O P P O S E D

From the ground to the roof water is present. The design of the library was to engage the landscape. Naturally speaking this did not only mean breaking ground and planting. The library is meant to encourage wonder, and dreaming. This includes all of the small parts, whether it be the type of flooring a reader is sitting on, or what view is framed. The library as dwelling was meant to be a shelter, where readers could root themselves in natural processes of the mind, and also of the world that they live in.

When it rains, water is seen, heard, and can be felt. Scuppers placed around the roof direct water to strategic areas on site that enhance the experience. Being able to sit under rafters and watch rain hitting the leaves at Rock Creek Park, or sitting in a rocking chair under a covered porch while the rain creates walls around you..that was the experience of the library at Rock Creek Park.

Bachelard writes, “Verticality is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic, the marks of which are so deep that, in a way, they open up two different perspectives for a phenomenology of the imaginations. Indeed, it is possible, almost without commentary, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar. A roof tells its *raison d'être* right away: it gives mankind shelter from the rain and the sun he fears. Geographers are constantly reminding us that, in every country, the slope of the roof is one of the surest indications of climate. We “understand” the slant of a roof. Even a dreamer dreams rationally; for him, a pointed roof averts rain clouds. Up near the roof all our thoughts are clear. In the attic it is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework. Here we participate in the carpenter’s solid geometry.”<sup>23</sup>

In the Attic, readers and dreamers can experience nature. They are so submersed in it that it’s hard to differentiate between what is inside and outside. They are engaged, because their dwelling is engaged.

“Sense-making has a double meaning;  
it addresses an emotional communion of the  
five senses, and is directed to a rational  
awareness of its use.

The construction of an architectural sense results from the tectonic play of materials, textures, structures, spatial sequences with which a building's image, mood and uses are crafted.”<sup>24</sup>

Marco Frascari







E-W Section  
Atrium



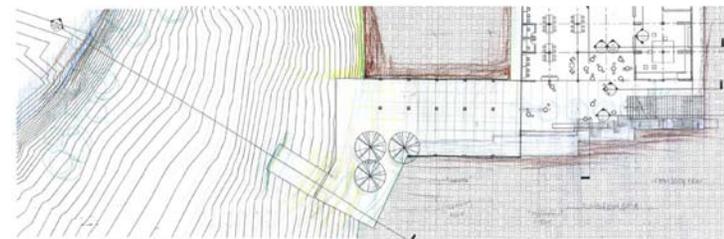
# PARKS

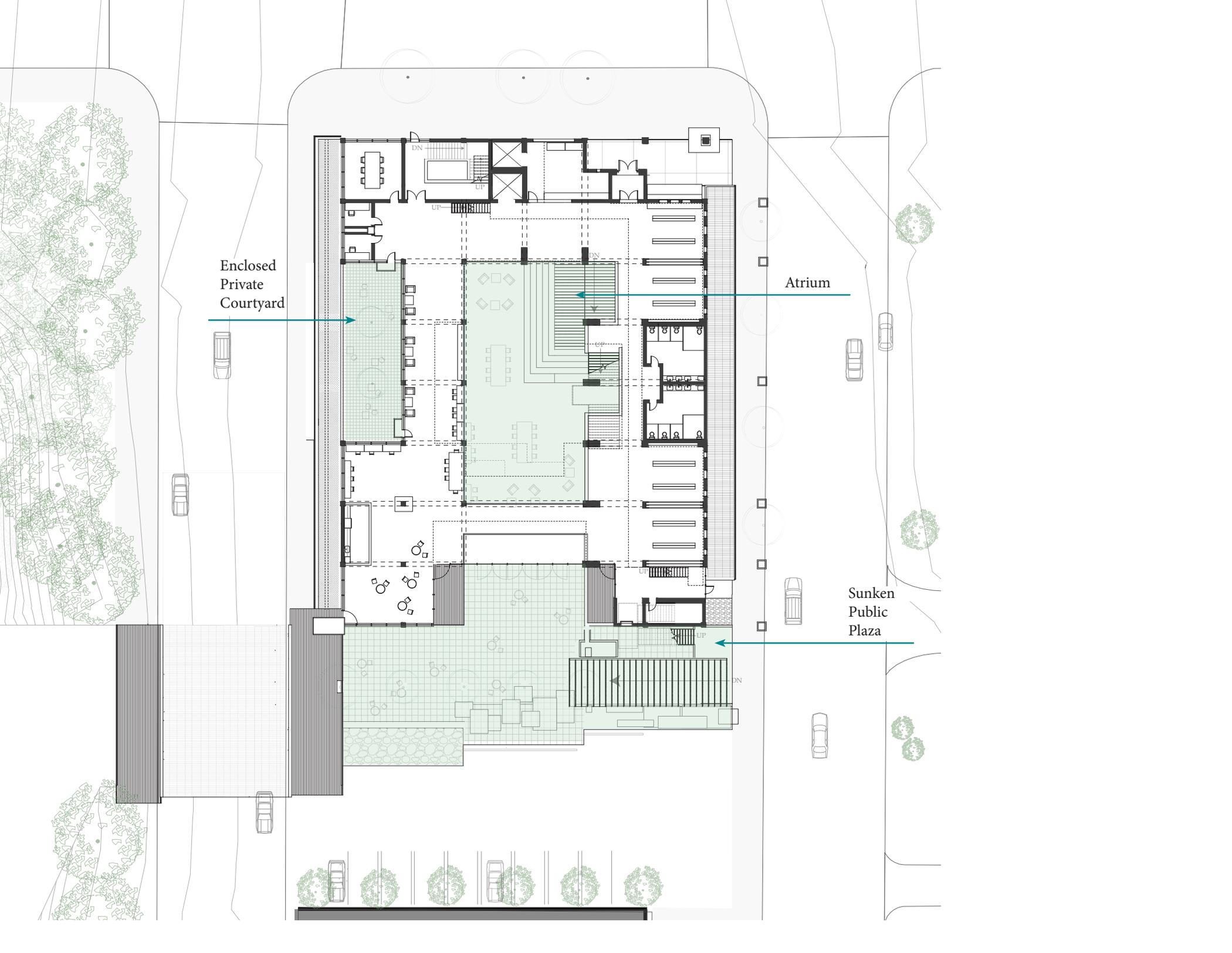
## THRESHOLDS VS. BOUNDARIES

The “Parks” of the library all share a common thread. They are hinged spaces off of the greater library. Viewing each edge as a threshold and not a boundary led to a conversation between the interior and its bordering exterior. Each side was carefully thought out, each edge constructed and each surface or floor designed. Every park space has inherent qualities of being a participatory space, and each space is engaged with the building *and* the ground. David Leatherbarrow writes, “Although both can be practiced creatively, construction and cultivation also differ as results of production and participation. The matter is not that simple, however, because these terms can be interchanged; construction can be seen as a participatory sort of practice and cultivation one that is productive.”<sup>25</sup>

The library embodies three parks: The sunken private courtyard on the ground floor west. The sunken plaza with connecting tunnel into Rock Creek Park. The third, the atrium space at the core of the library.

All three spaces vary in size both in footprint and volumetrically. The enclosed private courtyard can only be entered from the main atrium space, this allows readers to take books out into this outdoor space and read. The ground is porous with small pavers, and is an extension of the reading spaces on the interior. The library surrounds the space on three sides, and outdoor porches on the floors above allow for a connection visually with readers above and below.





Enclosed  
Private  
Courtyard

Atrium

Sunken  
Public  
Plaza

# PARKS

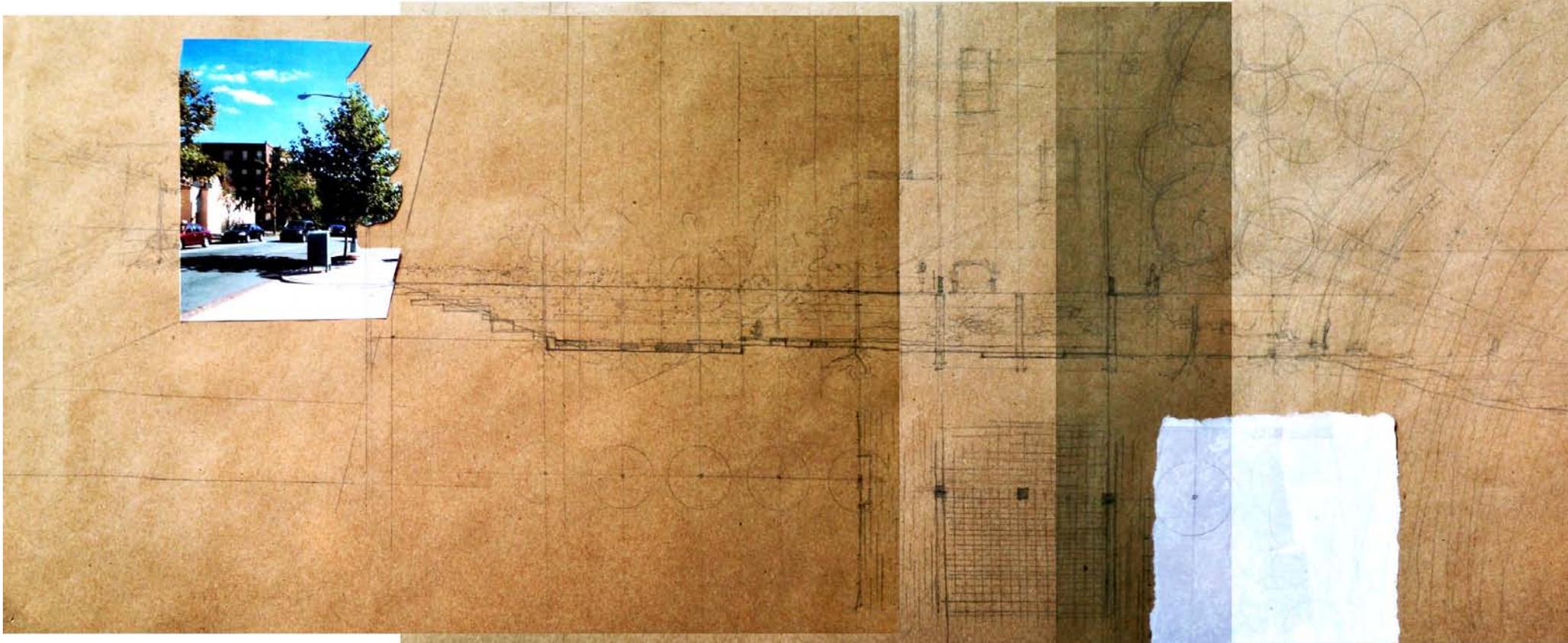
## THRESHOLDS VS. BOUNDARIES

The fourth side is a terraced bank that runs parallel to Rock Creek Park that has tall grass and two yellow Gingko trees. The trees shade the space in the summer and spring, and in the fall when the yellow leaves layer the outdoor floor a new ground layer is formed.

The Main Atrium is the public “courtyard” in the library. The main reading room is a main ventricle of the library and organizes the individual and public study spaces, stacks, circulation routes and the other parks.

The third park, the sunken public plaza. Is a communal place for gathering. It is the most lively and bustling park that the library has. It acts as another form of infrastructure for city dwellers. Pedestrians, runners, nature enthusiasts all are able to use this public space to get from the city safely under 23rd St NW and into the belly of Rock Creek Park. This park, carved out of the earth embodies the idea of *erosion*. Upon study of the site, erosion was found in various corners of Rock Creek Park. Erosion is caused often times by water. This sunken public plaza has multiple water systems. These systems are fed purely from the climate, when it rains inhabitants can experience the water’s movement. The plaza is meant to highlight the processes of nature that were already there. A revealing and an unveiling.

Garret Eckbo wrote, “Is Landscape *Architecture*? He began by describing the relationship between the building and its site as a problem that neither the architect nor landscape architect could avoid. Eckbo quoted from Neutra’s book, On Building: Mystery and Realities of the Site: “My experience, everything within me, is against an abstract approach to land and nature and for the profound assets rooted in each site and buried in it like a treasureable wonder.” A number of commonplaces are contained in this passage: that each site is unique, that design should engage the particularities of place and not satisfy itself with the invention or variation of abstractions, and that each site hides itself within itself.”<sup>26</sup>



# PARKS

## THRESHOLDS VS. BOUNDARIES

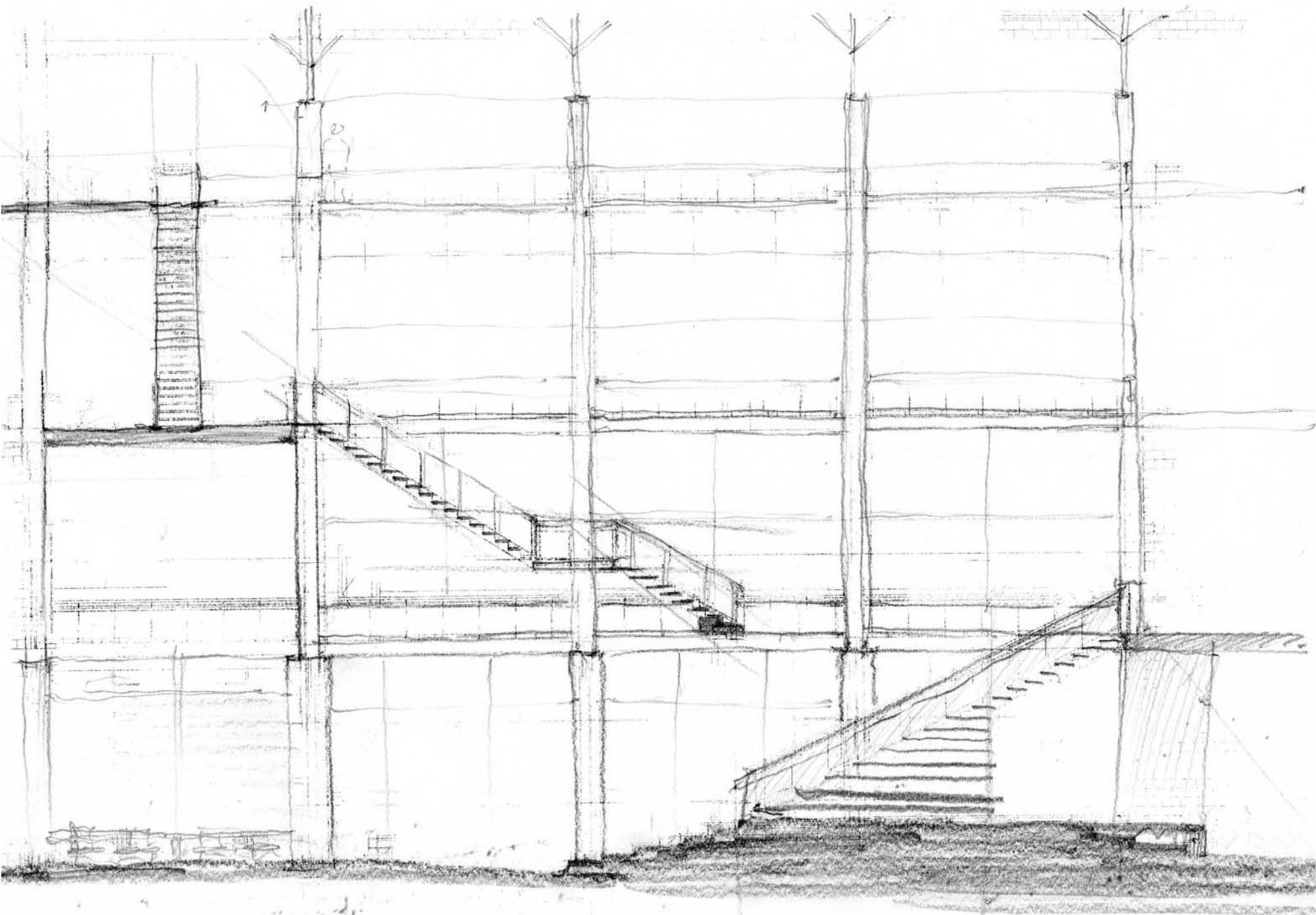


The unfolding of the site is magnified. Through increasing ease of access, and uncovering the process of grounding that has taken place over hundreds of years at Rock Creek Park we are able to not only bring the park into the city but also bring the city into the park. This is done in an experiential way. The library and its parks were designed to create a series of experiences that when coupled together led to a profound sense of knowledge about the ground, and thus an incredible comprehension of where we are in the world.

Robin Dripps writes, “Conventional distinctions between inside and out or nature and artifice fail to capture the complexity of this place. Equally challenging is trying to understand differences between public and private activity. With the domestic program no longer constrained to a singular structure, much of the domestic enterprise becomes porous and open to public engagement. The eight separate points of entry to the site allow individual pieces of the domestic program to form their own separate relationship with one another and the town beyond. These examples show the importance that edges play in mediating relationships with the ground. Whether made by adjacency, juxtaposition, overlap or by things brought together by seam, the edge registers and responds to similarity and difference. Once architecture or any other figure becomes open to the ground, attention shifts away from the center and toward an increasing number and variety of edges.”<sup>27</sup>

This sense of “finding” and encouraged wander promotes a sense of self-discovery and rebirth of how people view nature and the city. This changes the lens that city inhabitants look through which ultimately will change the way they live and engage with their surroundings.

*Threshold* is defined as the starting point of an experience, event, or venture. In a building, a threshold is a doorsill, it often acts as a frame. Thresholds exist in landscape too. Therefore, Landscape is *Architecture*.



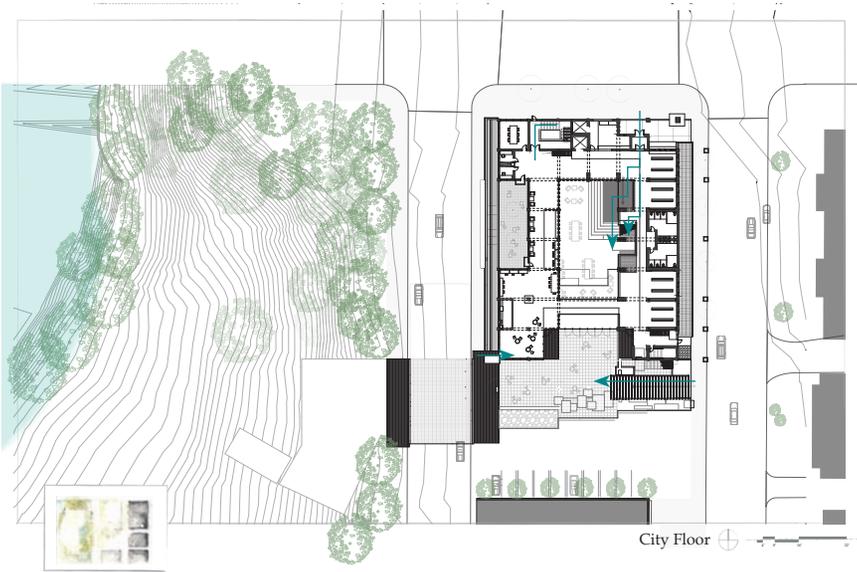
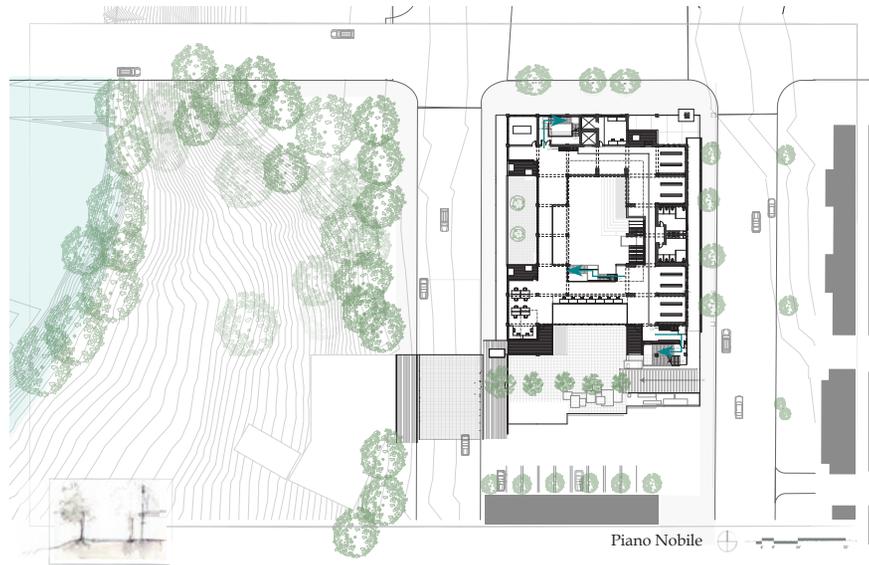
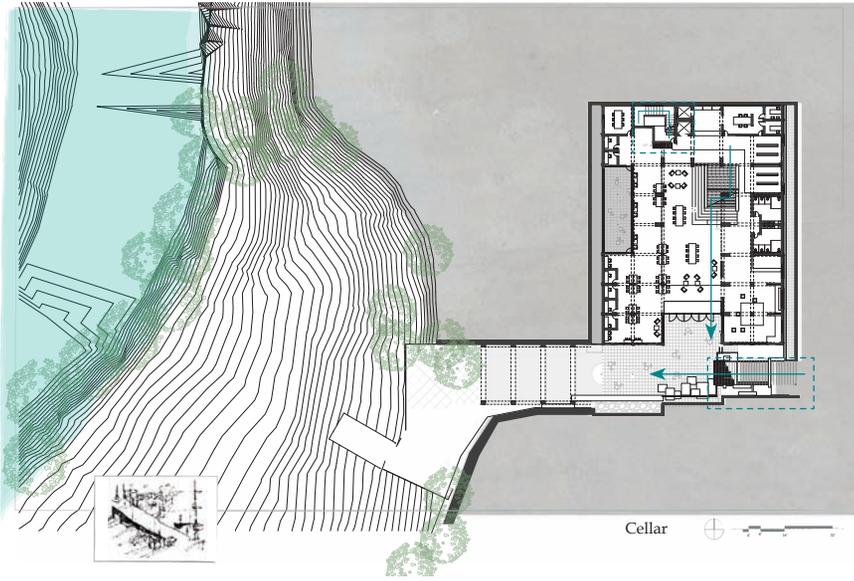
# CIRCULATION

## H O R I Z O N T A L

In both the landscape and architecture humans move laterally and longitudinally. The circulation methods throughout the building are crucial to framing perspective views. There is clearly defined movement, and then there is also an aspect of wandering that takes place. A reader wanders when they weave in and out of the stacks. They wander about to find a space to sit quietly and read. The library has both qualities of movement that happen in a city and in the landscape. In a city there are clearly defined routes of infrastructure, yet city-dwellers cut corners. In a landscape there might be pathways to walk on, but more often times people create their own paths.

Humans also move vertically, both ascending and descending. There are two elevators in the library, one for inhabitants and one for the librarians. These elevators can be found on the north side of the library and when the doors open they are always facing the atrium.





# CIRCULATION

## V E R T I C A L

Humans also move vertically, both ascending and descending. There are two elevators in the library, one for inhabitants and one for the librarians. These elevators can be found on the north side of the library and when the doors open they are always facing the atrium.

There are 3 main sets of stairs that are attached to the main atrium space: The large concrete stair that descends south from the city floor to the cellar. The second steel and concrete stair that ascends from the city floor facing south to the piano nobile. The third stair hangs in the atrium space with its first set of runs attached to the piano nobile and the second run free as it touches ends its ascent at the attic. This stair differs from its family by running east west. This final stair faces Rock Creek Park head on, and leaves the city to its back. It is only when you begin your descension from the attic back to the ground that you face the stacks, and the city, and continue winding down.

There are three other stairs. One, on the north, is completely interior. The Second to the south, is both interior and exterior. The third stair is fully exterior made of concrete that ushers city runners and pedestrians alongside the library into the sunken plaza underneath 23rd St NW and opens up into the heart of Rock Creek Park. Once in the park the axis changes as the city dweller faces the middle of the park they follow the path to the southwest where a small outdoor amphitheater gives way to a stone path that carries water from the sunken plaza to Rock Creek.

This is yet another example of the axis changing, but this time upwards and downwards.



"STAIRS"

# CIRCULATION

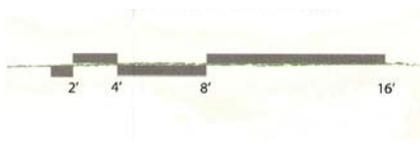
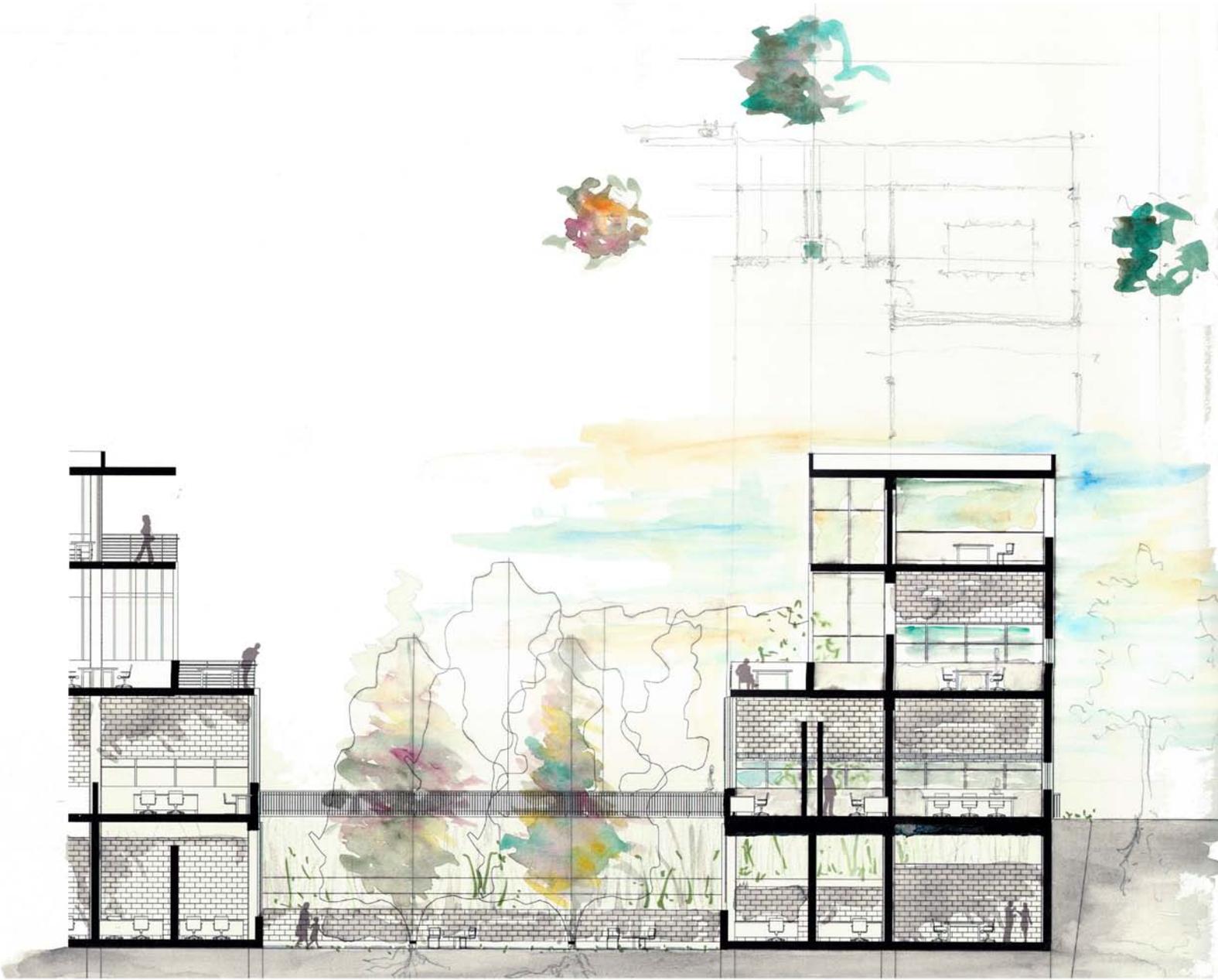
## HORIZONTAL & VERTICAL

To get from one corner to the next within the library the reader is led around the expansive main atrium and either slides between the compressed stacks on the east or along the panoramic facade of the south and west.

Martin Heidegger links space indivisibly with the human condition: “When we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them space..As we enter a space, the space enters us, and the experience is essentially an exchange and fusion of the object and the subject.”<sup>28</sup>

The movement of the inhabitant is at times, quick and knowing, similar to the city-dweller commuting home from work. There are also moments where that same city-dweller, notices the shadow that the setting sun creates on the city floor as it begins to set casting the shadow of the yellow ginkgo tree in the private courtyard. These moments are so crucial to the experience of the reader. The library, was designed to function as a dwelling for city readers. However it is also a place that is meant to slow the world down.

The material of the flooring and the stairs were defined by the floor they belonged to. What are the library users departing from and what are they ascending towards?



# STUDY ROOMS

## CHARACTER OF SPACES

The study rooms in the library belong to the ground from which they were constructed. To support readers there must be a variety of spaces for the many functions that library users now do in libraries. The hope was that the building would serve its inhabitants, therefore small spaces and large spaces with different characteristics were created.

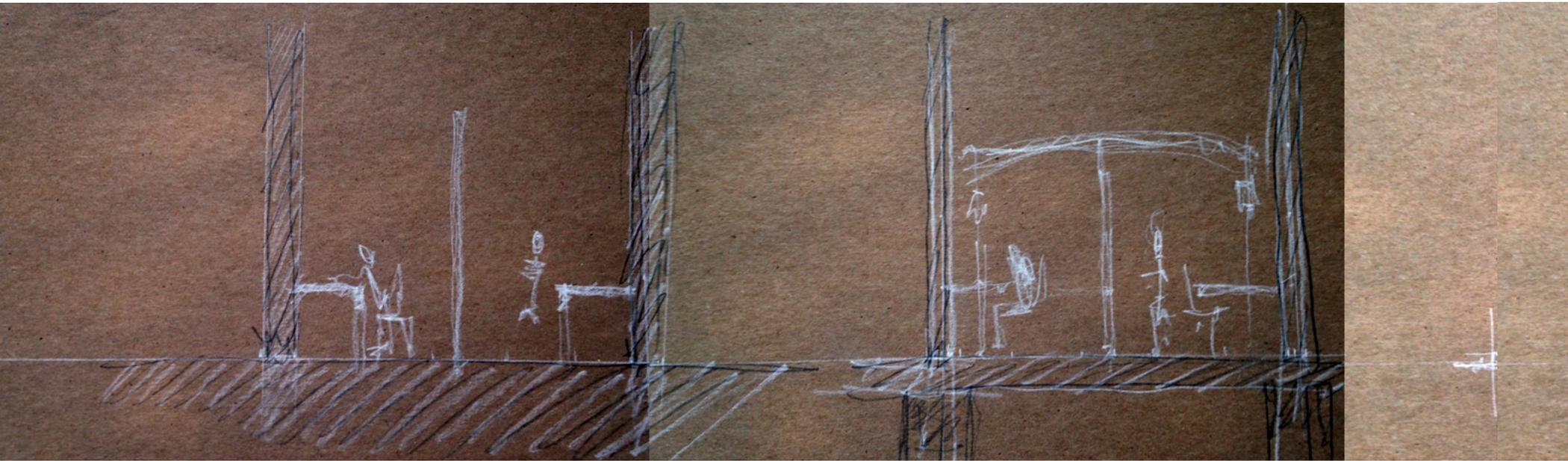
The study rooms, work tables, and seating areas are organized on the West and South sides of the building. This allows natural sunlight and views out to Rock Creek Park. On each floor, there are both enclosed group work spaces and enclosed individual spaces. Each study space has windows that frame exterior views pulling them into the interior space, or, pulling you out into them.

Frasconi mused, "A place for thinking generates motions of thought and delineates a privileged area where these motions are amplified and inflected by novel configurations of ideas, things and bodies. A place for thinking generates an intensive co-sensing, in emotionally dynamic terms, and it inaugurates the creative process because something in the surrounding built environment is compelling us to think; a development that is a coming across rather than being based on recognition."<sup>29</sup>

Defining spaces for study was developed through the thoughtful implementation of scale, variety and materiality.

What brought thought and introspection into these spaces was the desire, the yearning of the reader, the dreamer, the philosopher to spend time there.

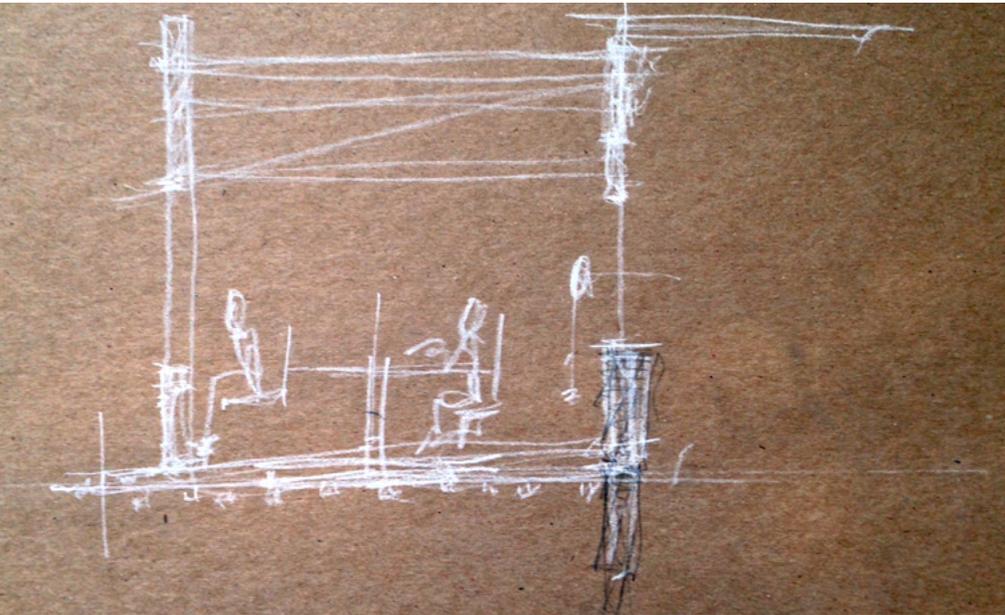
The success of these spaces was dependent on nature. The nature of the built environment and the construction of the spaces, but it was also dependent on the nature of the inhabitant.



# STUDY ROOMS

## CHARACTER OF SPACES

The series of drawings on the left were influenced by Antonella Messina's painting of St. Jerome in His Study, 1475. The concept behind these compartmental spaces was grounding. How do you make a space both "of the building" and "of the inhabitant?"



Robin Dripps writes, "A remarkable representation of the human figure evocatively incised in a room that is also fully engaged in urban life and natural process is Messina's painting of St. Jerome in His Study. Here is a room so responsive to its inhabitant's particular physical and intellectual needs that it seems more like a protective garment. Each surface registers the physical presence of the saint, and even without him indicates the special character of its intended task. The room is elevated above the ground and focused inward. Jerome's most explicit contact with his world would seem to be the book that is both part of the room and extension of his body."<sup>30</sup>

The character of the study spaces relied heavily on the floor they belonged to. The rooms were meant to be an extension of the nature of the building, the nature of nature, and the nature of its user.

Library dwellers need the library to be a place of shelter, a place for collaboration, for quiet, for talking. The library is an ever-changing place, based on the season (summer readers, studious fall students), the library has to be a place that meets all of these requirements. The inhabitant's needs are the most influential design tool.

Some of the study rooms are exterior, some interior, a few are made of concrete, while others are wood boxes set within. A few study spaces allow you to experience the sound of rain, and the setting sun. Subtle variety in climate, material and scale can make all the difference.



# READING PORCH

## CHARACTER OF SPACES

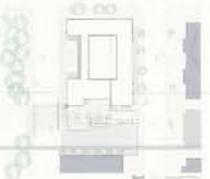
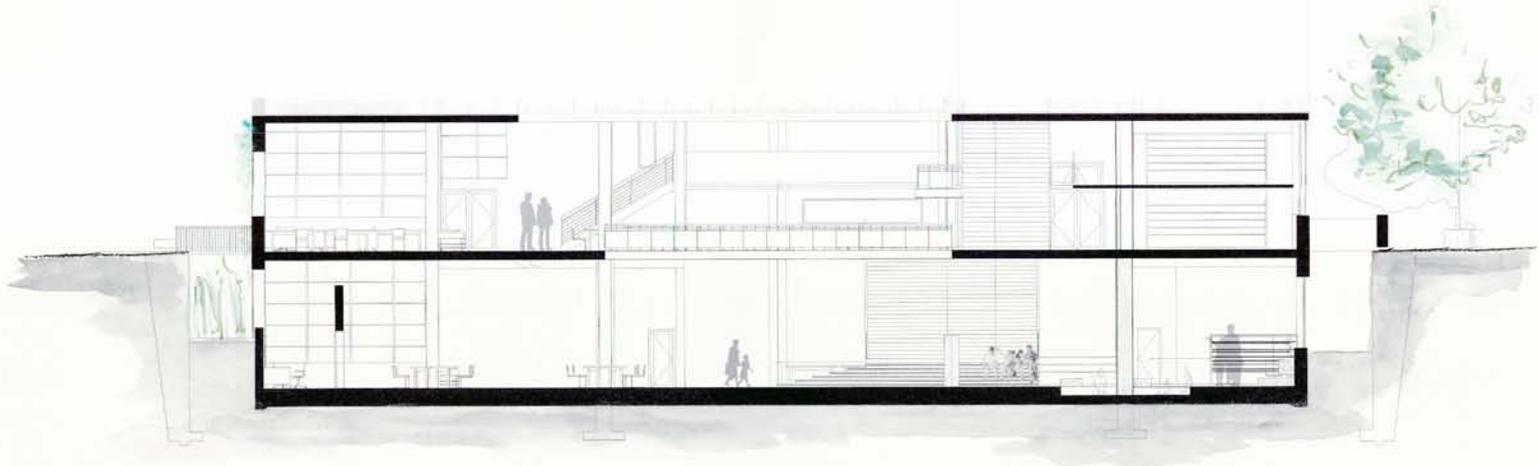
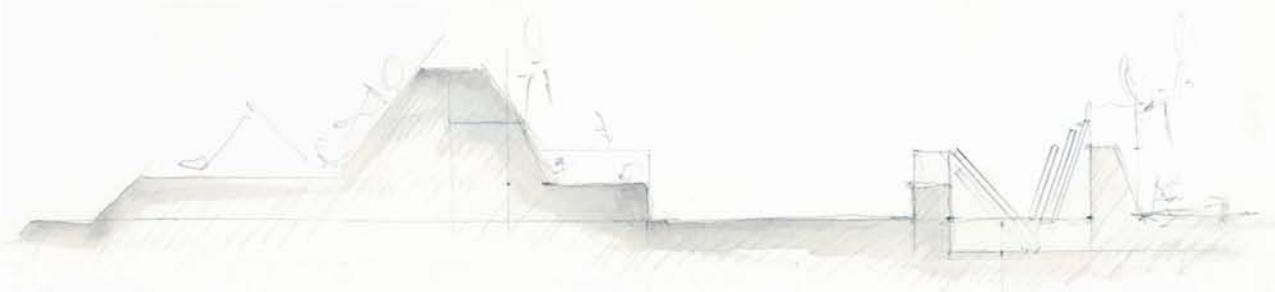
The Back Reading Porch is found in the southwest quadrant of the building. The cellar floor houses reading spaces and two enclosed study rooms. It has short concrete walls holding back the terraced earth in front and sit at eye level to the tall grass and plantings outside their windows.

Directly above is one of the main social gathering spaces, the cafe. People can meet friends and colleagues and talk over coffee as they people watch on the sidewalk outside or sit by the window and peer down at those who are taking the sunken path from 22nd St. into Rock Creek Park.

The Piano Nobile holds the first floor of the two-story reading porch. There are two outdoor reading porches, both double height spaces, one open to the elements and the other sheltered by the roof. The library dweller is able to choose their preference as to whether they want to be on the bustling sunken plaza side or if they want a quieter setting and would like to sit just above the enclosed reading garden below. This space has concrete floors below and a wooden floor above, creating a sensory realm that is beginning a departure of sorts.

In the attic we see the very top of the back reading porch, the wood planks provide just enough room for a small reading chair. Here, readers are able to peek down below onto the piano nobile reading space below and can lift their gaze from their books outward towards out the park.

The top two floors have uninterrupted view of Rock Creek Park as wood mullions enhance the verticality of the space, linking them together as they appear to detach from the ground and enhance their relationship with the sky.



# CHILDREN'S DEN

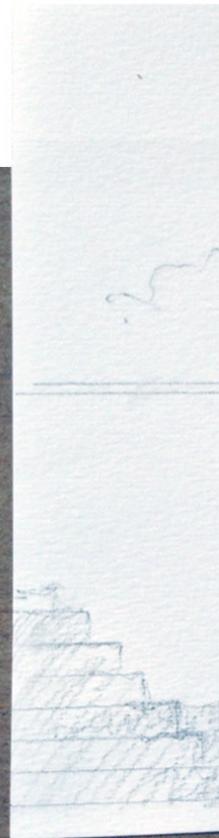
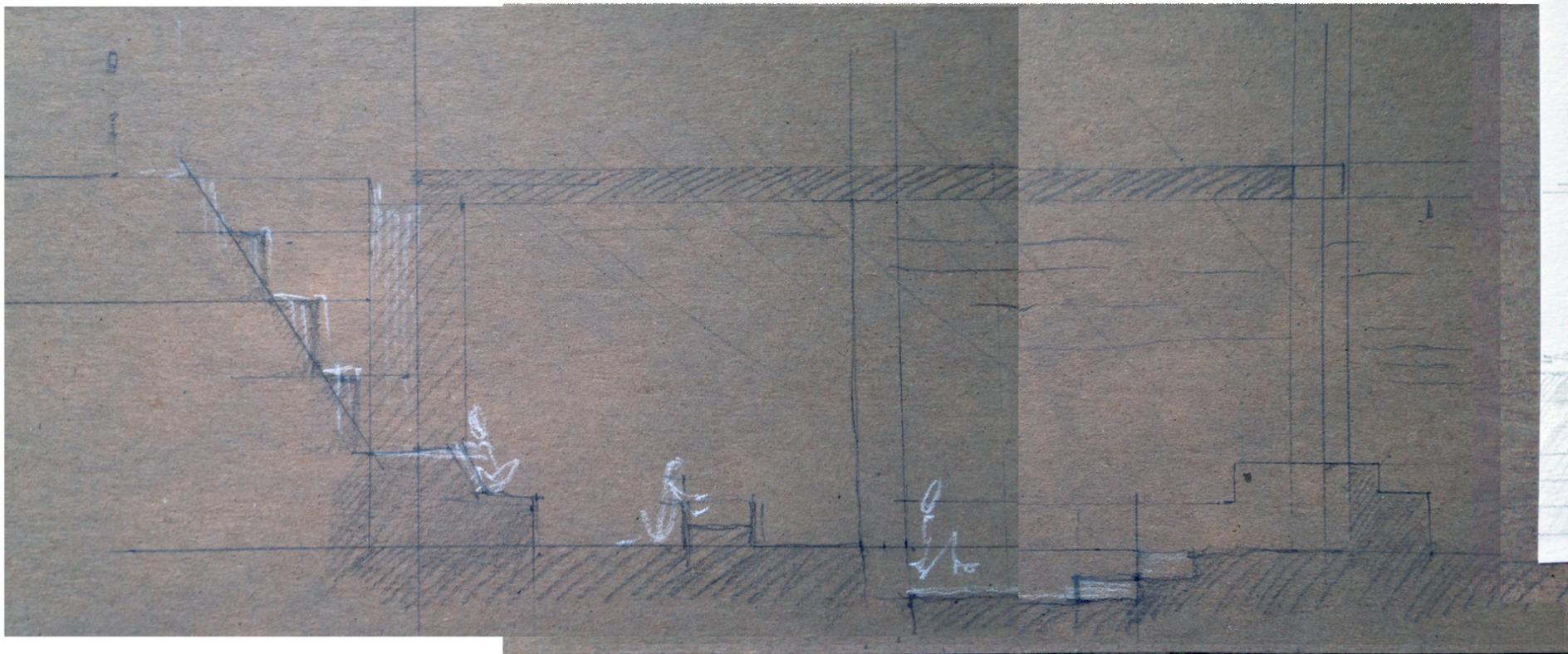
## CHARACTER OF SPACES

Children are at the core of our society. The new generation is going to architecture the future. Throughout the cultivation of the library at Rock Creek Park the need for embracing children and urging them to explore and wonder was at the heart of the mission. Also important was the challenge to ground older generations. Memory, imagination and creativity are all influenced by one's surroundings.

The children of DC deserved a space that was created for them. A space where they could crawl, and lay. A place where they can imagine, and wonder about how and where they are.

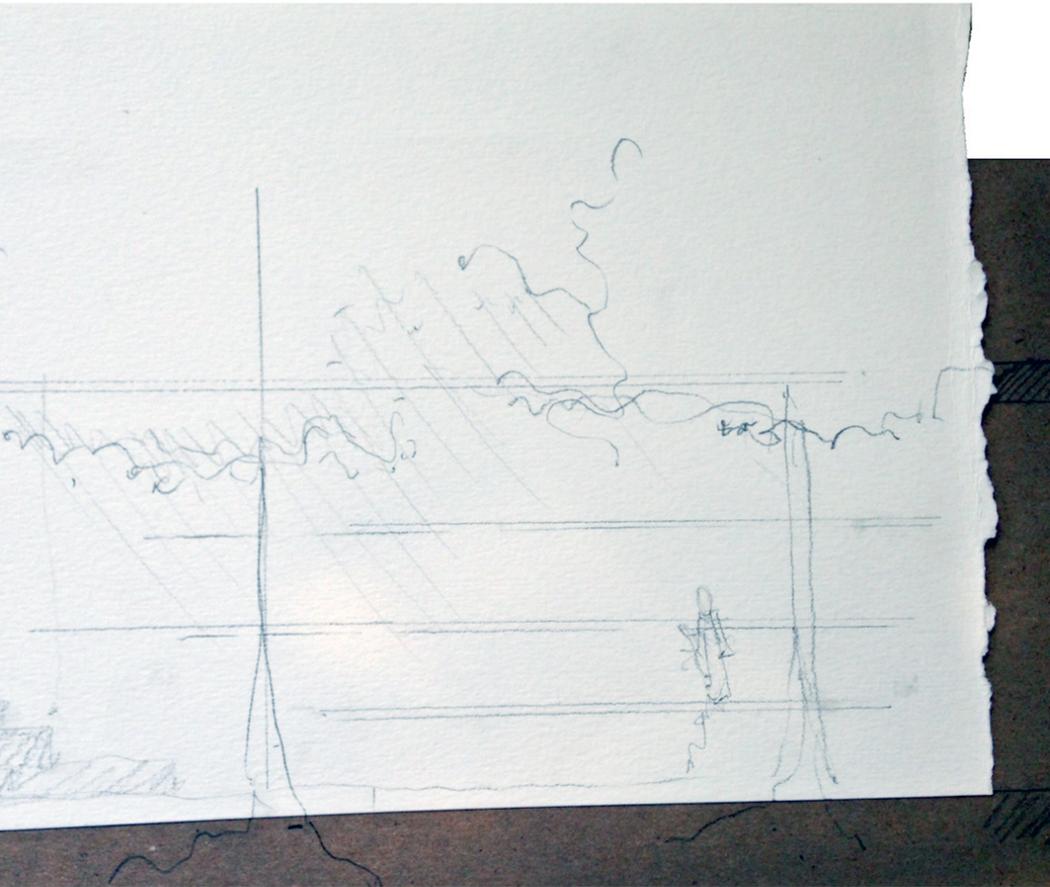
The children's den is located in the cellar. It is concrete and heavy. There is a large window that lets light filter down from the sidewalk and it is adjacent to the main reading room and atrium, as well as the large sunken plaza that acts as a thoroughfare from city to park. Here, children are able to lay "in the ground." There are small cavities in the ground where children must reach into the ground to pull a book out. All of these design moves were implemented to elicit from the children thoughts and wonderment about their surroundings.

One of the columns acts as a reading column where the librarian reads daily to the children. Similar to a tree in the woods, this column is a landmark acting as a beacon for children to gather, share and learn.



# CHILDREN'S DEN

## CHARACTER OF SPACES



The collage on the left portrays first ideas about a series of indents and cut and fill spaces to create an indoor playground for reading. Daydreaming and using your imagination ultimately strengthens a child's ability to work things out on their own. Sharing and sitting with other children teaches them about caring for one another and the differences that we all possess.

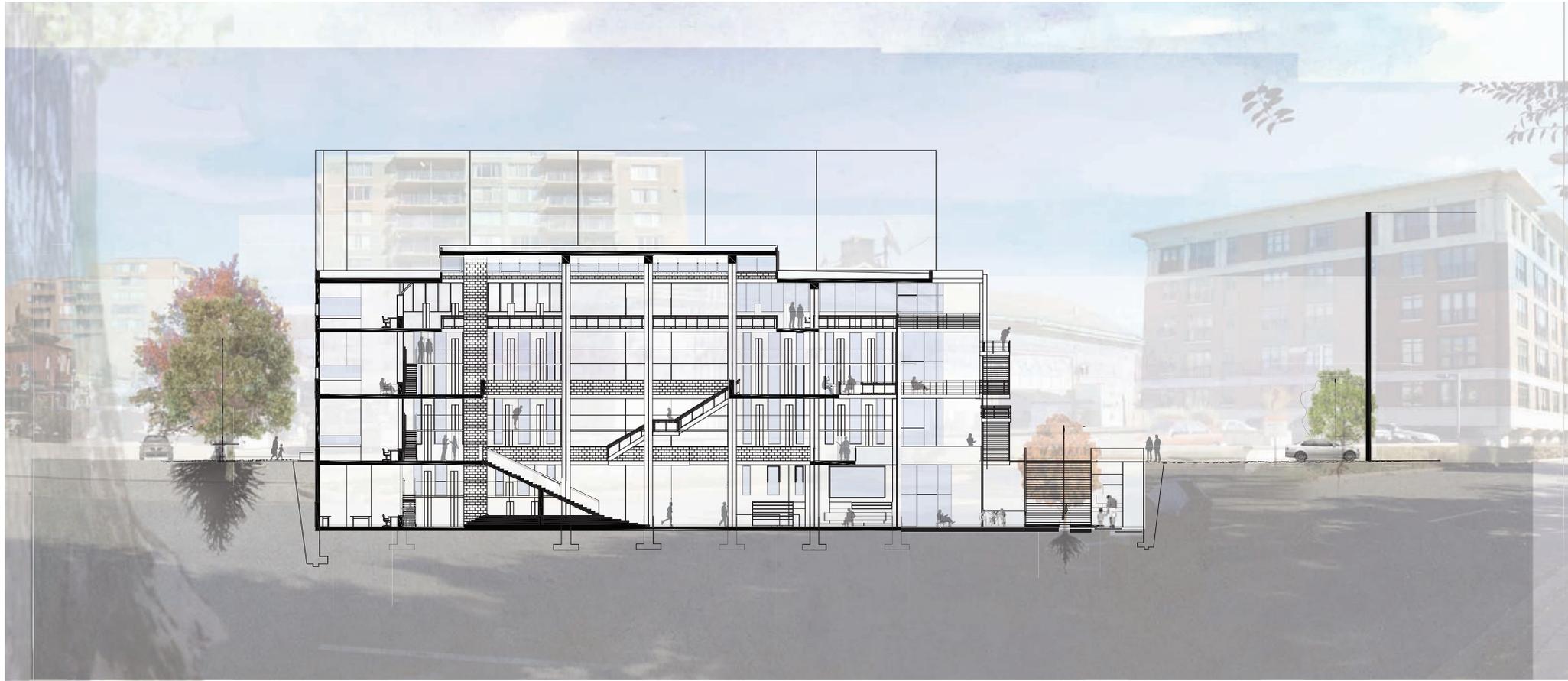
In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard shares an anecdote about childhood, "What special depth there is in a child's daydream! And how happy the child who really possesses his moments of solitude! It is a good thing, it is even salutary, for a child to have periods of boredom, for him to learn to know the dialectics of exaggerated play and causeless, pure boredom. Alexander Dumas tells in his Memoires that, as a child, he was bored, bored to tears. When his mother found him like that weeping from sheer boredom, she said: "And what is Dumas crying about?" "Dumas is crying because Dumas has tears," replied the six-year-old child. This is the anecdote people tell in their memoirs. But how well it exemplifies absolute boredom, the boredom that is not the equivalent of the absence of playmates. There are children who will leave a game to go and be bored in a corner of the garret. How often have I wished for the attic of my boredom when the complications of life made me lose the very germ of all freedom!"<sup>31</sup>

Within the Children's Den there are spaces for individual play, group play and outdoor play.



N-S Section  
Framing Rock Creek





N-S Section  
Framing City





# BOOK STACKS

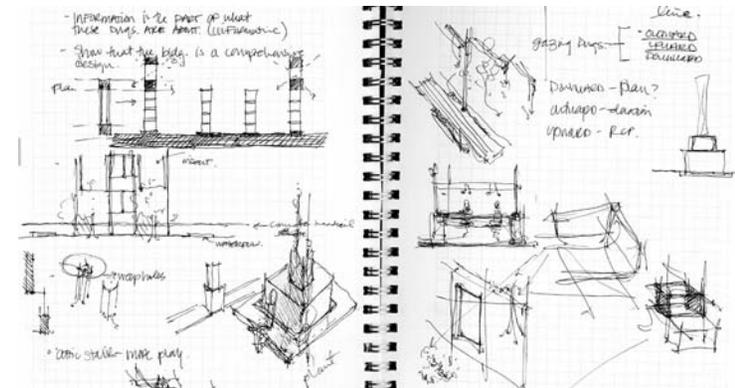
## WITHIN, UNDER, ABOVE & BETWEEN

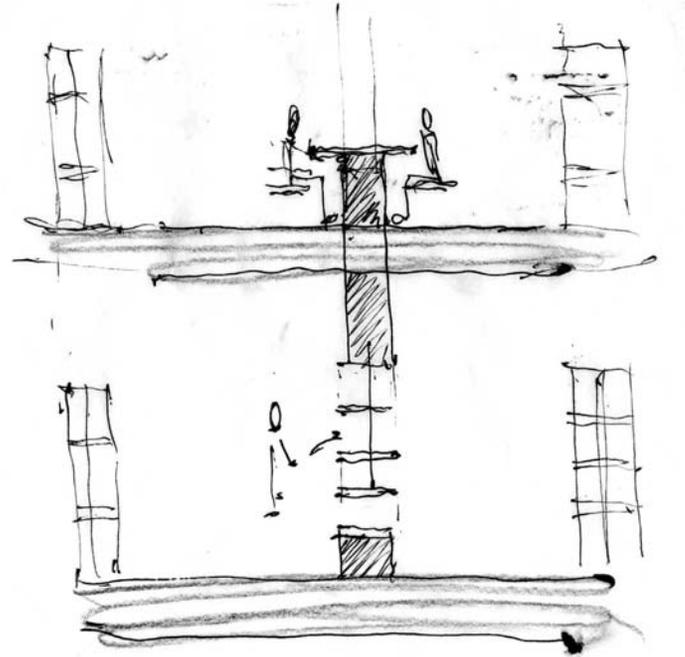
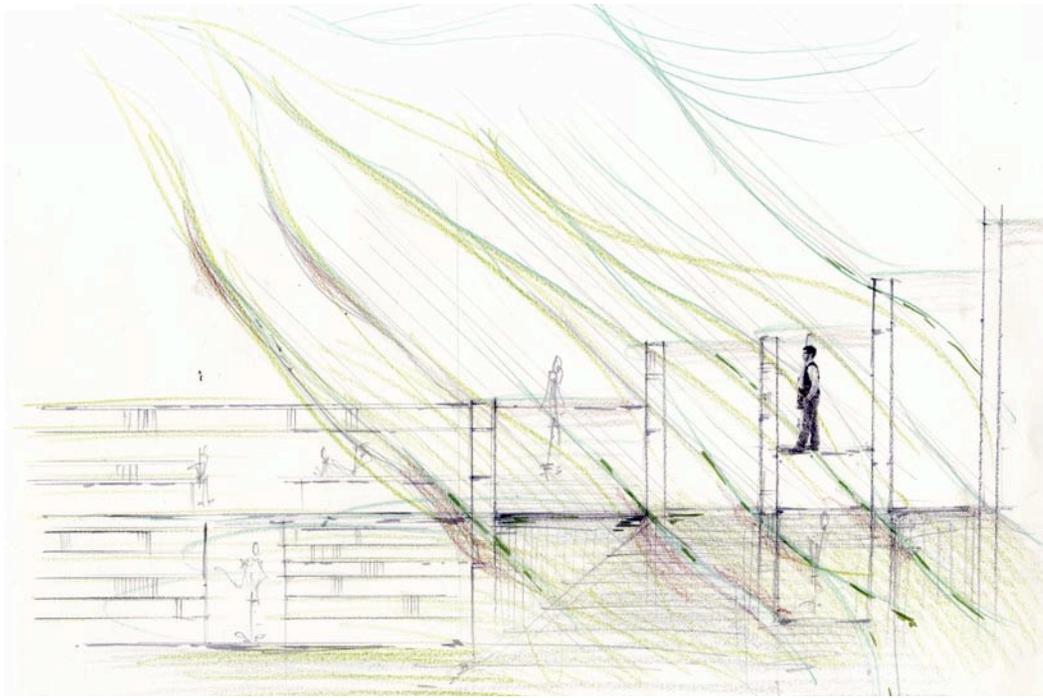
The stacks on each floor are double stacked. There is a half-floor on the cellar floor, city floor, and piano nobile. This compression creates an area that is both functional and experiential. The stacks are closely packed, you brush elbows with other eager readers as you both look for your books. The stacks located on the east side of the building act as an extension of the city block. The floor to floor height is 16 ft. making each floor of the stacks roughly 7.5 ft.

Windows are narrow and tall to allow glimpses of the outside world into this cavernous space.

The shelves of the stacks are held between concrete columns reinforcing the strength and grounding of the urban side of the library.

One of the main design strategies used throughout the library was the rule of opposites. It is only through contrast that each aspect of the design is magnified. Shadow and light. Concrete and wood. Tension and ease.





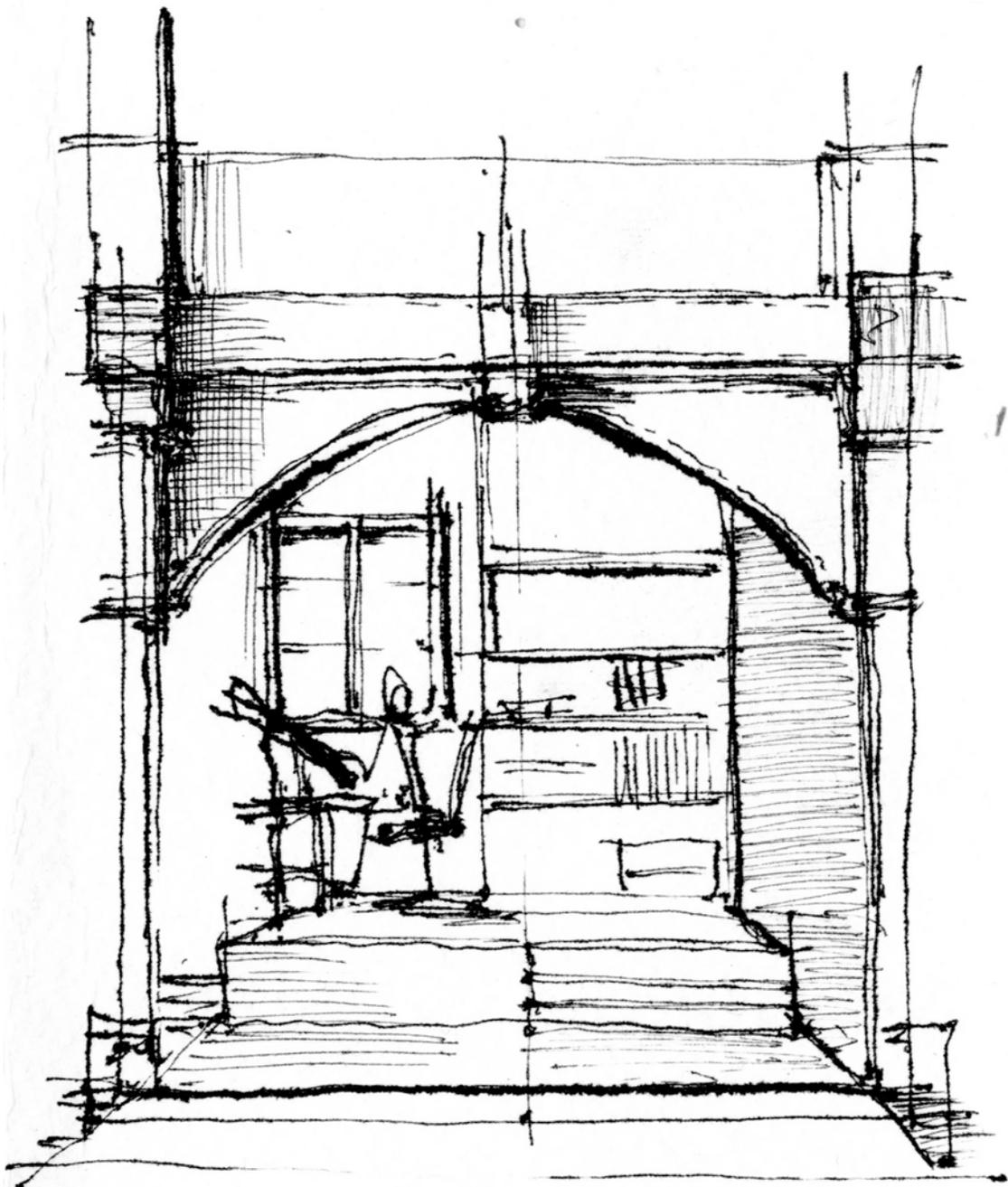
# BOOK STACKS

## WITHIN, UNDER, ABOVE & BETWEEN

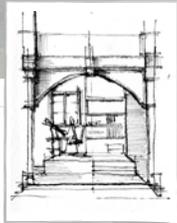
The number of book stacks decreases as the building grows. The cellar, city floor, and piano nobile are double loaded. The attic houses a shift in book stack topography. The stacks which were once stagnant, rigid, and concrete are now tables with spaces for quiet reading.

The attic allows more natural light into the space and the book stacks only reach 5 ft. in height. A library dweller is now able to see over the stacks which creates a different experience and perspective than searching for a particular book on the floors below.

The transformation of the books stacks as the ownership of location shifts from ground to sky reinforces the idea of attic and ground.







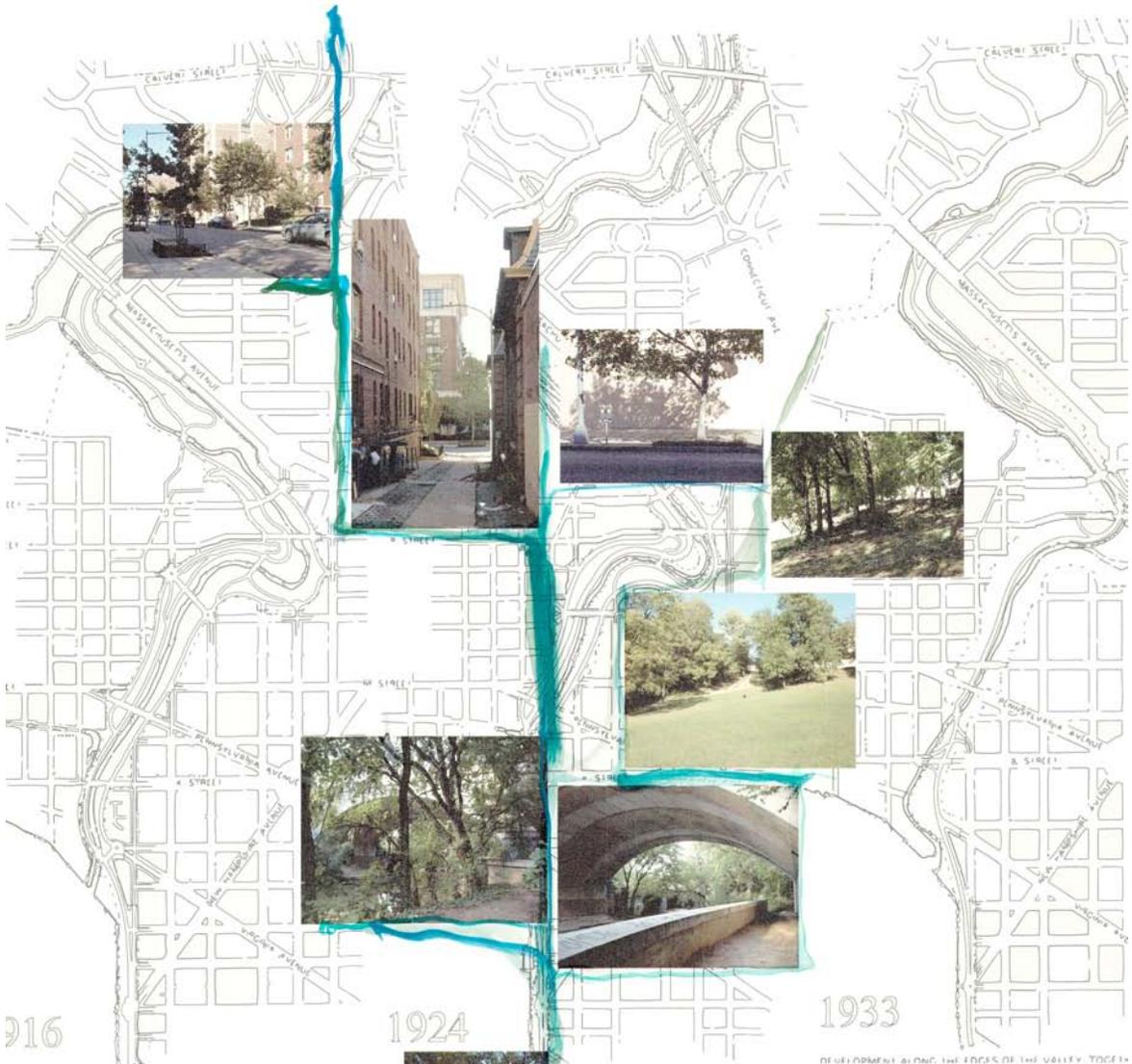
N. Elevation





E-W Section  
Atrium



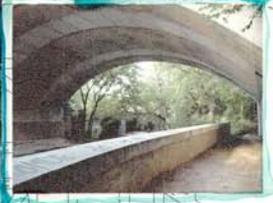


1916

1924

1933

DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE EDGES OF THE VALLEY TOGETHER



# IN CONTINUUM

## D E N D R I T I C

A “Dendritic Pattern” is an ecological term that refers to viewing something in plan that resembles the branches of a tree. It usually pertains to water drainage and is made up of a series of rivers, creeks, and streams. The character of these bodies of water is affected by many factors such as slope, climate, and season. These crevices of water are reliant on one another, they each feed into another and so on until they widen and create new depths in the ground as they meander and carve their way through the earth.

The Library at Rock Creek Park has inserted itself, and contributes into a dendritic plan that was already in place. Multiple cases of erosion were found on the site during early studies and the design of the library strove to embrace this idea of numerous systems coming together to improve the site.

Robin Dripps states, “Within architecture, once the ground is revealed and its structure made visible, it is possible to give the ground a voice equal to that of the products of human artifice. At this point architecture can open to and take into its domain a rich world that can augment what architecture is capable of. In being open to the ground, architecture will also discover a wealth of means to deal with intractable problems of its own. The consequence of this intense engagement is the effective reattachment of humans to the many worlds that support them.”<sup>32</sup>

The Roof in addition to the Lawrence Halpern-like erosive water walls, the paving patterns, and the vegetation all work together to embrace the elements of weather.

There are also qualities of the Dendritic plan seen within the library. The series of spaces that library dwellers live in during their time at the dwelling build upon each other. Through scale, materiality, and cultivated views the idea of similar things creating something much more rich, much more experiential was created.



# IN CONTINUUM

## D E N D R I T I C

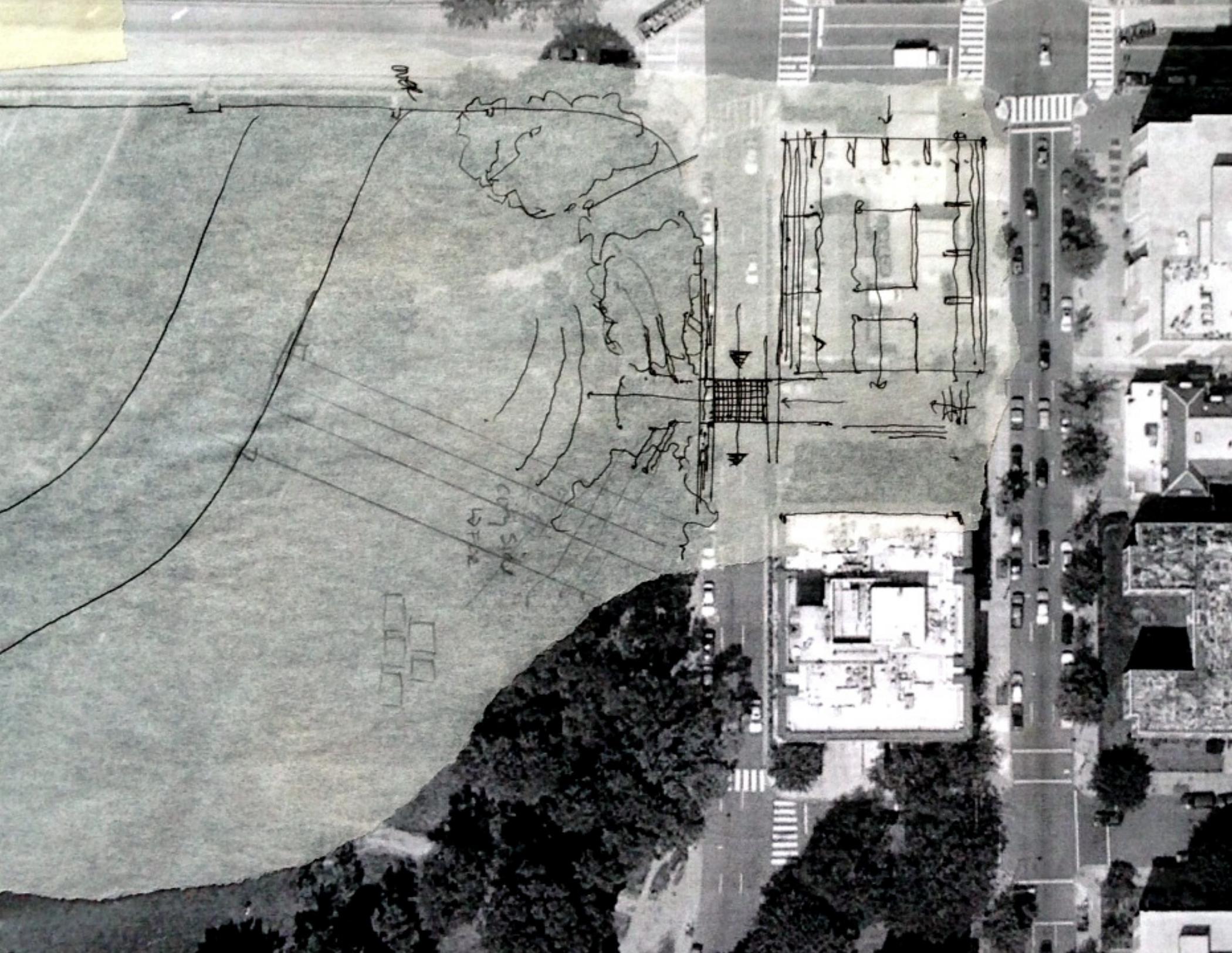
The library both internalizes the qualities of landscape and keeps it at a distance. There is a continuous shift of architecture as foreground, framing the landscape in background, and utilizing the architecture to pull the landscape into the foreground. This patterning of variations creates a rhythm that allows the dweller to move through each space building upon the space that they were just in, and the space that they are heading towards.

This library is a series of spaces, a complete dwelling. It is a communal center that inspires sharing, learning and imagining through a safe environment with a variety of naturally driven spaces.

Humans will always be searching for ways to improve, to progress. To successfully do that, two of the most important actions are: one, to step back and two, to engage. At the surface, these seem like conflicting concepts however, in order to engage, we must assess the site, assess the problem, and engage in conversation to develop viable solutions.

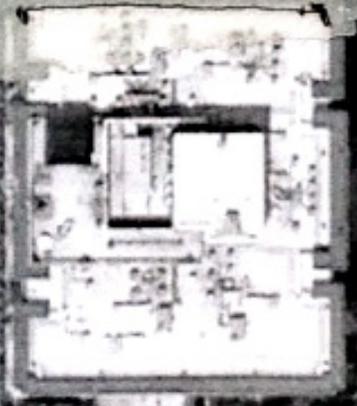
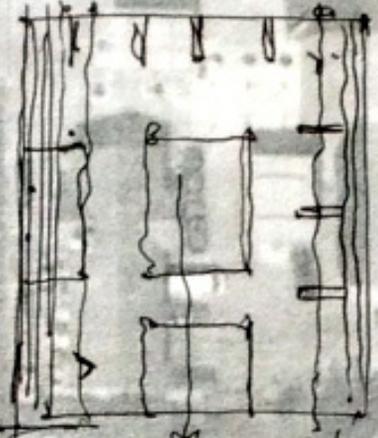
The library as a program and a typology is one that fosters collaboration and knowledge but a crucial component of this is time. The world that many city-dwellers live in today must have places where they can slow down. A place where imagination can roam, a place that they can be alone with their thoughts, but still feel the presence of a greater vitality.

There is much to be learned and gained from the surroundings. Architecturally speaking, it is up to humans to become engaged with the spaces that they dwell in. Naturally speaking, in order for humans to engage with their spaces, they must engage with their location. Architecture and Landscape are two natural necessities for humans. Both can be used to root inhabitants and to re-sensitize.



OUT

CITY SIDE  
HOTEL





# AFTERWORD

## C O L L A B O R A T I O N

The question: What is ground? And thinking about how Architecture and Landscape can interface not just vertically, what is inside and what is outside, but horizontally, above and below led to a compelling journey of process. Rethinking site studies, rethinking the traditional approach to creating an architecture on a site, allowed me to dig into the real conversations about the built environment.

Creating buildings in the city has seen a change away from building a green space in the urban fabric, it is no longer about building a park within the city, but about ingraining the city within nature. I am confident that there is a way to create an architecture that is of the ground. In fact, there are multiple methods. Architecture can be truly rooted in its site. It can embrace and invite, rather than reject and deflect, the elements. It is important that Architecture and the Landscape work together, it is then that a truly wholesome building, with all of its working parts through relation are able to coexist. The library as a program, was the perfect typology for studying the relationship between architecture and landscape architecture. The library is a place where multiple generations can inhabit. It is a dwelling with inherent qualities and a strong habit of inciting memory of its inhabitants.

Through the use of experience and memory a building was created that embraces young, old, built and unbuilt. In a library there needs to be function, but also a function that elicits imagination and wonder. Doors are opened in the minds of library dwellers. My hope is that doors are also opened in the minds of city dwellers in a architecture landscaped environ.

Diana Balmori writes, “The interface between landscape and urban design is thus forged by putting the city in nature. Landscape has become the discipline best prepared to transform the city into a life-giving environment. And landscape combined with architecture can help people develop a new compact with nature. A vital component of this new blend is education: people must learn to be actively engaged with their transformed space.”<sup>33</sup>



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10. Beinecke Library Photo, [http://www.archdaily.com/65987/ad-classics-beinecke-rare-book-and-manuscript-library-skidmore-owings-merrill/som\\_beinecke\\_pg206/](http://www.archdaily.com/65987/ad-classics-beinecke-rare-book-and-manuscript-library-skidmore-owings-merrill/som_beinecke_pg206/) (February 2013)
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12. Image 1. [http://www.archdaily.com/306098/mchenry-library-boora-architects/50c7d2e3b3fc4b2b100000b7\\_mchenry-library-marcel-breuer\\_ucscmchenry19-w-jpg/](http://www.archdaily.com/306098/mchenry-library-boora-architects/50c7d2e3b3fc4b2b100000b7_mchenry-library-marcel-breuer_ucscmchenry19-w-jpg/) (February 2013)  
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