

P P U B L I C
P R I V A T E



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A LIBRARY ON H STREET NE WASHINGTON DC

PRIVATE IN PUBLIC - PUBLIC IN PRIVATE
A LIBRARY ON H STREET NE WASHINGTON, DC

KATHLEEN ANNE RUTLEDGE

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates private versus public space and the natural tendency for an individual to seek out its own place within a group. More specifically, the project studies whether private and public could not only occupy the same geographic space independently, but also activate one another.

A library was chosen as the program for its opportunity to serve as a "third place" in the community. A "third place" is a neutral ground that is neither a home nor workplace. The benefit of such a place is to stimulate conversation and interaction, to provide a way to either hide or be seen, and to encourage social cohesion as people meet that may not have through normal daily life.

The site is on the corner of 12th and H Streets NE in Washington, DC. Its location in a rebounding streetscape demands that the library give the surrounding context a large role in its design. Public space is a priority, and the building is porous to extend the exterior into the interior and vice versa. The library's ever-changing role in a city inspires flexibility in the design and a life beyond normal library hours.



"I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library."

Jorge Luis Borges

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BEGINNINGS

The inspiration for the thesis came from varied sources and spurred beginnings that were spaced out over time and varied in intensity. Some concepts clicked right away, while others simmered in the background, in some cases not revealing themselves until the end. As patterns emerged, I identified three beginnings that influenced the final design: a “third place”, shelter with a periphery, and efficiency of space.

The concept of a “third place” is one that clicked immediately. A “third place” is a neutral ground with a flow of unplanned arrivals and departures, with the population changing at any given hour or day. The benefit of such a place is to stimulate conversation and interaction, to provide a way to either hide or be seen, and social cohesion as people meet that may not have through normal daily life. A place as an alternative to one’s home and workplace struck a chord and identified with the goals of the project that had not even been clarified yet.

Although it can take on many different physical forms, the concept of “third place” is familiar due to a universal desire. The thesis question became how can architecture encourage, facilitate, and inspire the generation of a “third place”? The missing ingredient in unsuccessful “third places” is people, while without their inhabitation of the architecture, the “third place” cannot exist.

To start, I studied where people instinctually congregated and used their own creative abilities to make a good place even with limited resources or professional planning. Two scales quickly appeared: 1) where one person would want to sit and 2) where large populations would want to gather and be. These two scales became the focus of my thesis work and I aimed to work at both simultaneously, alternating, working in one, while keeping the other in the periphery.



MFO Park Zurich, Switzerland
Burckhardt + Partner

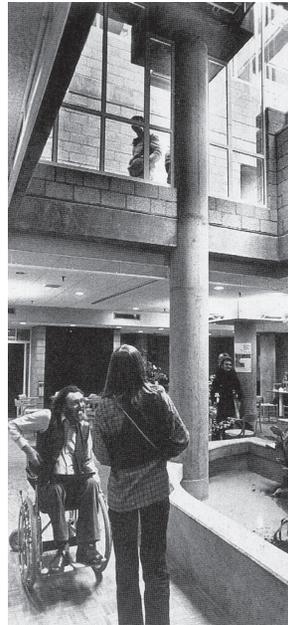


1 Oudegracht (Old Canal) Utrecht, Netherlands

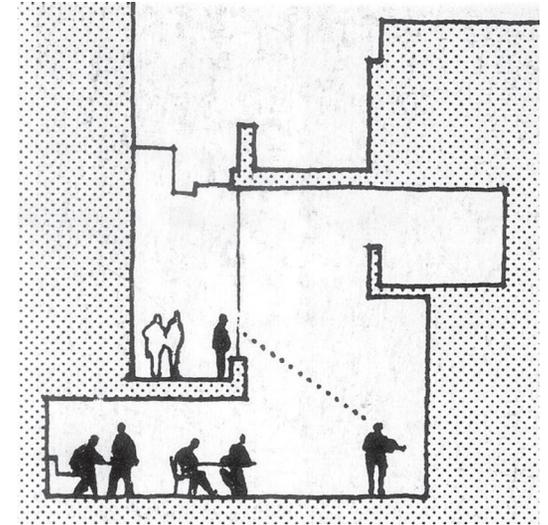
BEGINNINGS



Piazza San Marco Venice, Italy



2 Vredenburg Music Center Utrecht, Netherlands
Herman Hertzberger

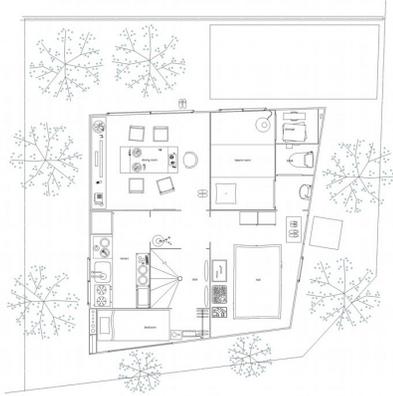


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The idea of designing shelter while maintaining contact with the context is one that pervaded even the earliest studies of the thesis. Peripheral vision facilitates awareness with one's surroundings and actually provides much more information than the field of vision on which one's conscious attention is focused. A mind can absorb information and orient oneself more easily if the periphery is available and uninterrupted.

Herman Hertzberger's Vredenburg Music Center in Utrecht makes casual interaction a priority that defines the movement through the building. Visual opportunities to connect to others in the building make the space richer and more complex. At the same time, it creates a transparency that allows ones to understand the layout of the building quickly. Public spaces such as the Piazza San Marco in Venice provide an place for an individual to interact with many yet still have an opportunity to seek shelter and observe from a distance.

BEGINNINGS



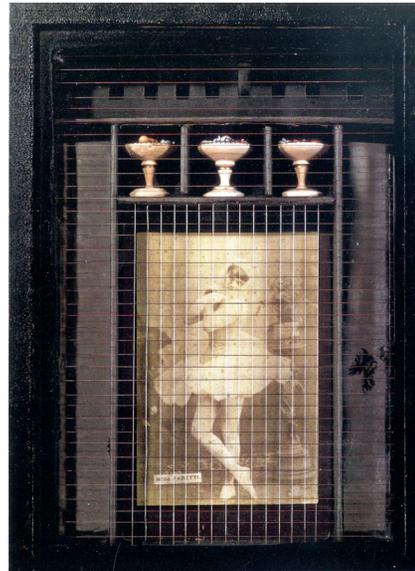
4 House in a Plum Grove Tokyo, Japan
Kazuyo Sejima



5

A third beginning to the design process is efficiency and scarcity of space. A goal of the thesis was to maximize the value and impact of even the smallest spaces. The work of architect Kazuyo Sejima, of the firm SANAA, includes diverse spaces that are connected through transparency, not only of material but also of sequence and flow. Her intention is described by Kristine Guzman in the book "Houses" as "to create a certain liberty, letting the users stroll or carry out an other activity at will, aside from the space's formal uses. In this way, through architecture, this space is produced in time."

Joseph Cornell's assemblages create a world within a clearly defined space, and his work sets the bar for individual enjoyment from small details. Cornell's work instigates the imagination to finish the story, based on the hints of the universe beyond the scene. In one way, space is created by movement and time. In another way, greater space is created through the richness and depth of a smaller space.



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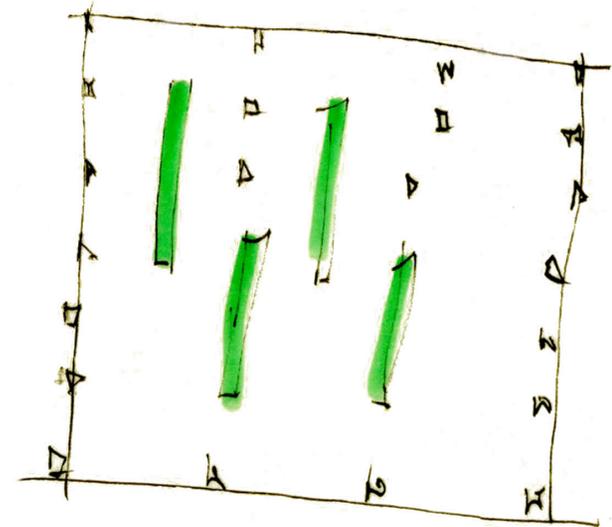
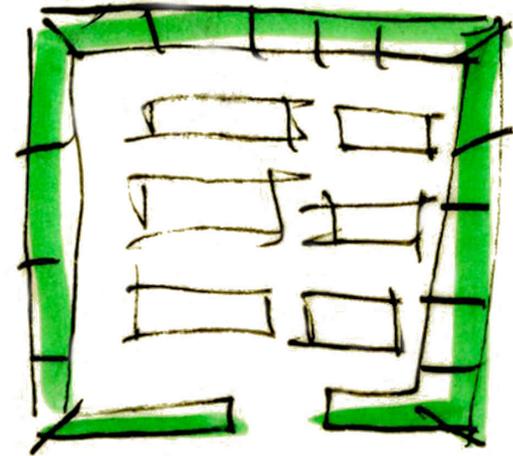
LIBRARY

A library is a democratic place that not only accommodates, but also welcomes all. Its equalizing nature makes a library an ideal contender to serve as a “third place”. The inherent functions of a library support a characteristic transition point between work or school or home, in any order or combination. The length and purpose of library visit can change by person, day, hour or mood.

Early in the project, I came across the following quotation by Sheila Bourbeau: “A library is books and somewhere to put them and some people who want them there.” Disguised as a solution that neatly summed up everything, the thought instead generated many questions such as: what kind of books? how many books? where do they belong? who will visit the library? what can they do there?

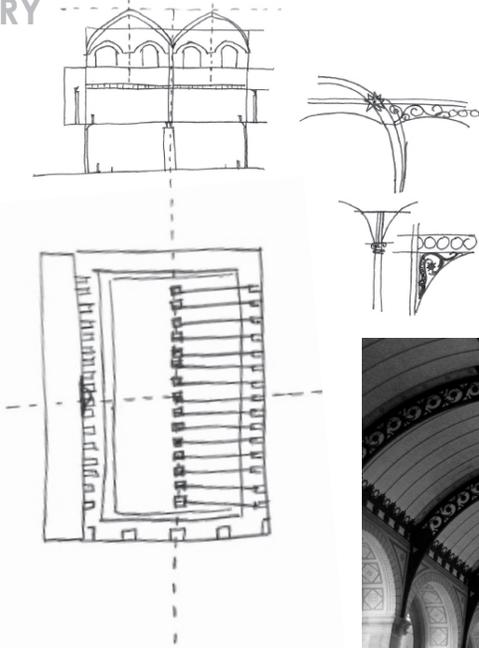
An investigation of library building precedents included floor plans of older, more traditional libraries, sections and diagrams of libraries constructed recently, and personal sketchbook notations from libraries I have visited. Research also revealed a plethora of articles with other's opinions about what a library should or should not be. Research for the program included efforts to learn about how libraries were constructed in past compared to how libraries are designed now and what has caused those changes. Ideally the thesis would predict what future changes could occur and design a library building to reflect the most innovative new uses.

Although trends can be identified, such as decentralization of information, the fact remains that information has always been unstable. Technology is therefore a continuation not a change. The design of a library can therefore attempt to accommodate the technology that inevitably approaches; however, the changes have often not even been imagined yet.

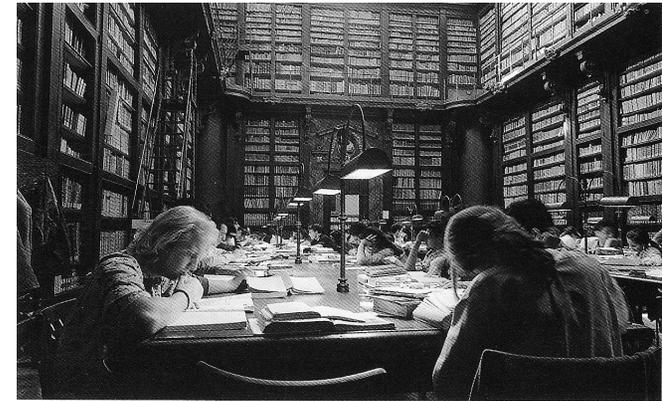


Diagrams of separation of structure and books

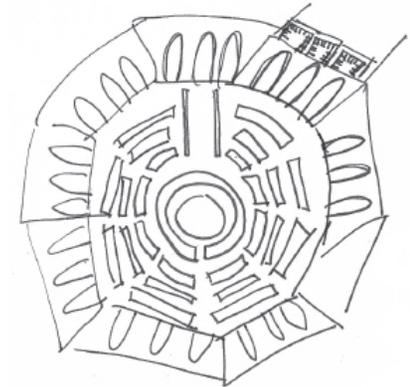
LIBRARY



Saint Genevieve Library Paris, France
Henri Labrouste 1851



9 Boston Public Library Boston, Massachusetts
Charles Follen McKim 1895

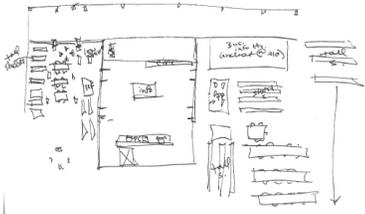


Library of Congress Washington, DC
John Smithmeyer 1897

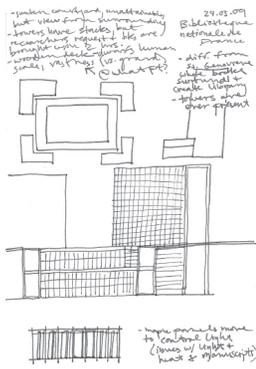
In the past, the books defined the structure of a library building. Bookshelves served as walls that surrounded the reading tables in the center. Historically, the pattern of density decreased as one ascended vertically. Group activities and interaction occurred in the ground level or in auditoriums below ground. Opportunities for individual study increased with each floor level with the most private, silent study places on the top floors. If a children's area existed, it was often a hidden black box, often isolated from the remainder of the building. For practical purposes of buffering noise and distraction, the children were kept separate from the adult population.

Entering a library used to mean entering a world where everything was known and accessible. Information was centralized in one location for the ease of the staff, documented in the card catalog. Upon their arrival, computers were also centralized, mostly near the librarians as a resource primarily to locate books.

LIBRARY



Martin Luther King Jr Memorial Library Washington, DC
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe 1972



National Library of France Paris France
Dominique Perrault 1996



Philological Library Berlin, Germany
Norman Foster 2005



Law Library Zurich, Switzerland
Santiago Calatrava 2004

More recently constructed library buildings include a structural system of parts with glazing or thin framing covered by exterior and interior veneers. The books are disengaged from the wall and their precedence or, in some cases, existence among the floor plan is up for debate. Technological improvements make it no longer necessary to congregate the staff in one place. It is more beneficial for information nodes to be dispersed among the floors and linked in wirelessly. With many library visitors bringing their own personal laptops, less computer hardware is required. Instead there is a need for more infrastructure to accommodate many visitors plugging into the network.

Knowledge is now online, endless, and not contained by the walls of a library. The patterns of scattering and isolation make the real life connection to others even more crucial. For example, the spontaneity of children exploring their environment may be a welcome and energizing addition to the adults who are focused on their individual computer screens. The future library is neither a warehouse nor a museum. It is an interactive, flexible building that must adapt and include functions that are not yet dreamed of, with technologies that have not yet been discovered.

PUBLIC

Public space serves as an integral part of the design as the boundary between public and private on the site. Casual yet vital interaction occurs in the shared spaces of a city that belong to every one. The architecture making up public space can be at an expansive or intimate scale. For example the Piazza del Campo affords a wide view of distant restaurants, merchants and residences, but also includes narrow moments to frame a personal conversation.

By reviewing photographs of precedents I had visited, I saw that I had captured moments that could be incorporated into the design of the library. I then photographed people in downtown Washington DC who had chosen places for themselves amidst a larger public space. Following their instincts, I then recognized the narratives I wanted to recreate and re-imagined the scene within the context of a library.

A library is visited mainly by choice not necessity. In order for people to choose the site as a third place, it must provide the opportunities for gathering and shelter. In a modern library, the visitor himself will carry out services him/herself, such as locating and checking out books or researching online databases. The librarian's role as gatekeeper is changing while the Internet is the first place that people turn to for information. It is important that people still engage with each other, therefore architectural elements to encourage face-to-face communication and balance out the isolation that staring at a computer screen could bring.



Piazza del Campo Siena, Italy



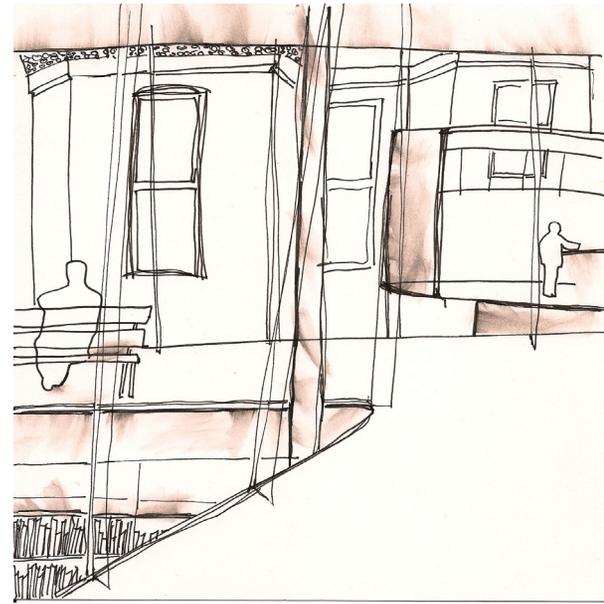
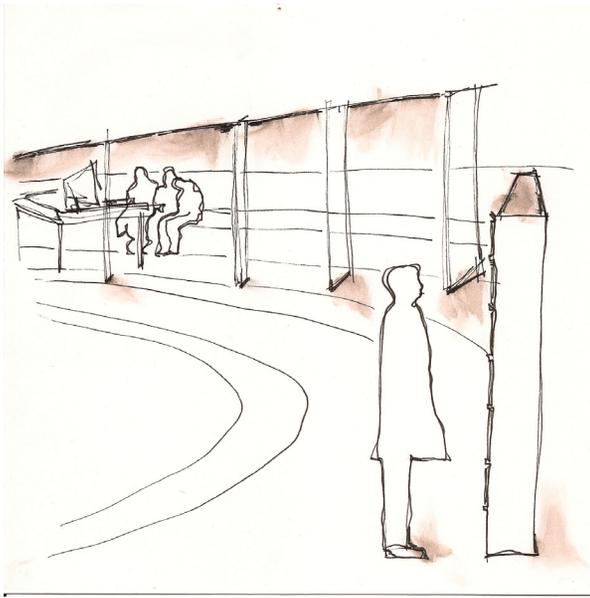
Park Guell Barcelona, Spain
Antoni Gaudi



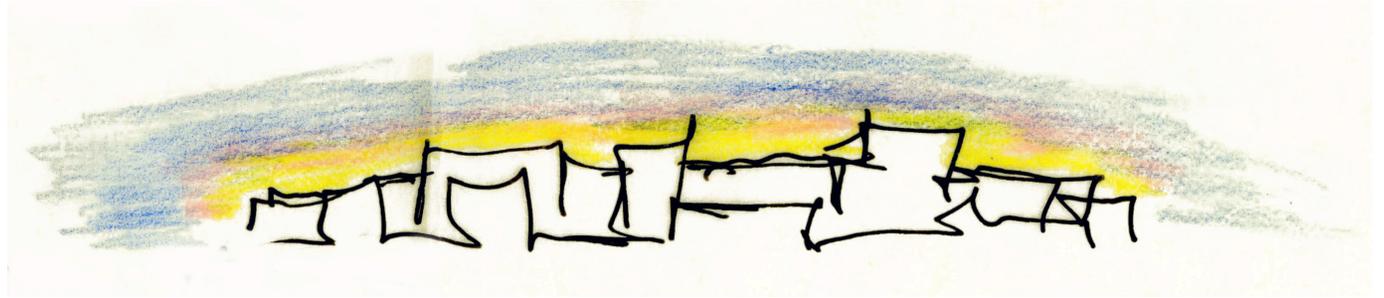
PUBLIC



PUBLIC



PUBLIC



Early Massing Model

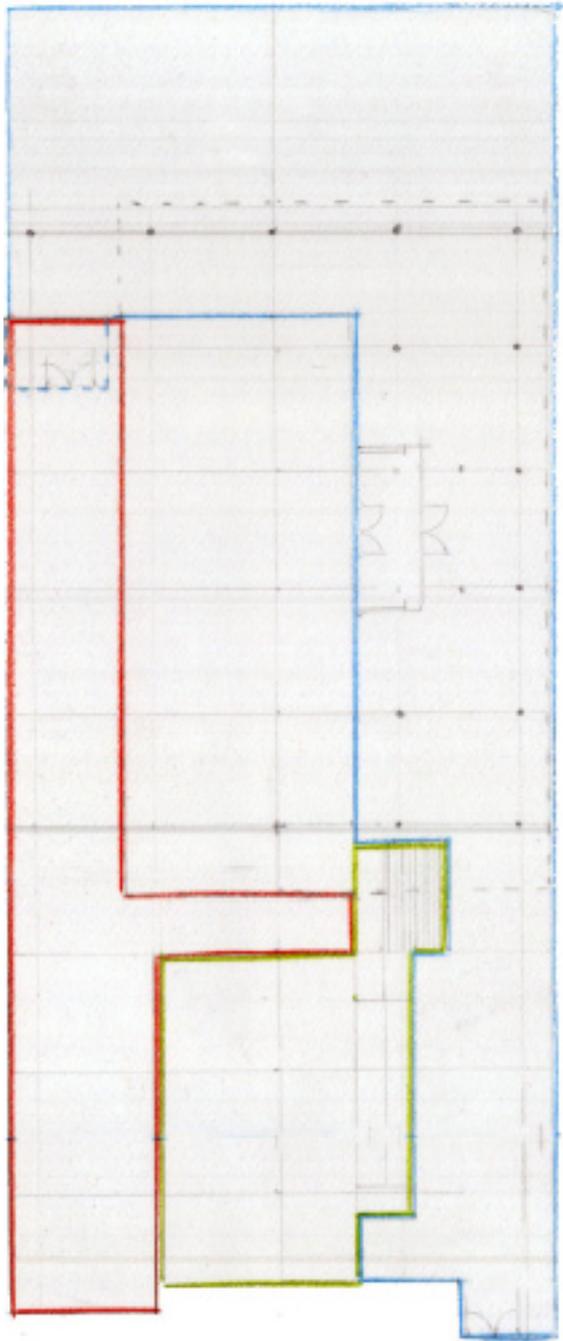
Early massing studies show the library mass elevated on columns, allowing for public space below. The community center portion of the program is mainly housed in the L-shaped two-story building plus the basement below, which covers the entire building footprint. In addition to the outdoor plaza created by pulling back the mass of the building, more outdoor space exists as part of the roof of the community center is accessible from a door leading to the library.

The two general masses of the library and community center overlap in the middle, where the core elements of circulation are contained. Consolidating the elevator and stairs here maximizes the wall space available for perforation and connection to the exterior. The horizon of the cityscape is emphasized, by keeping the exterior in the peripheral view even when an individual is standing in the center of the floor plate.

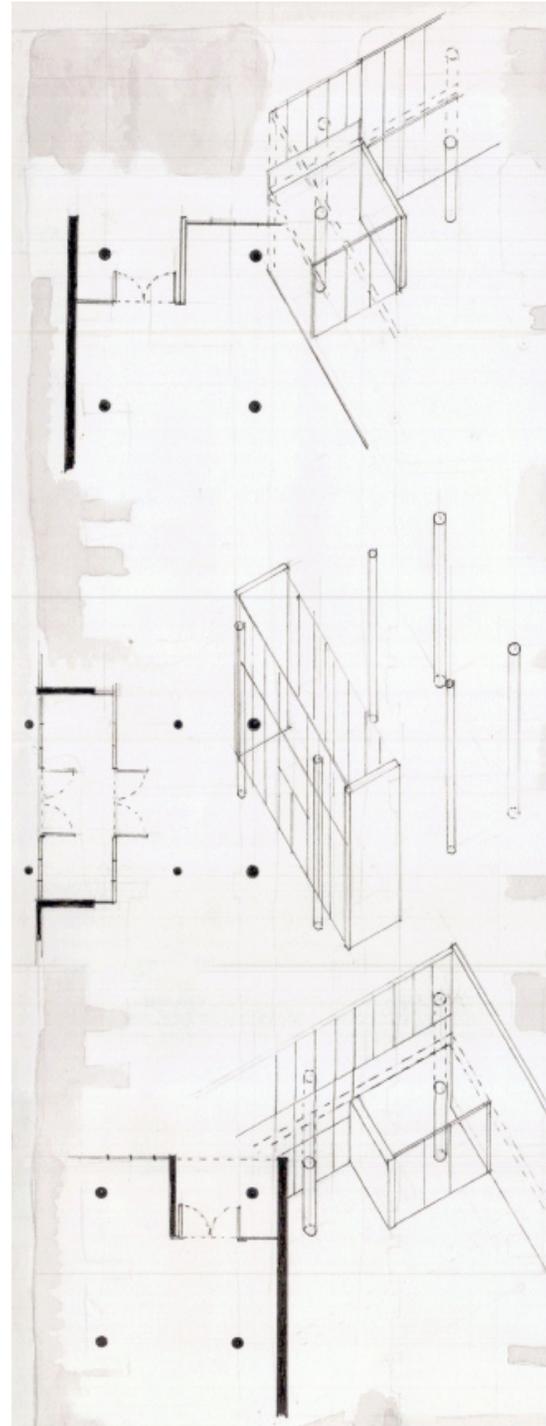
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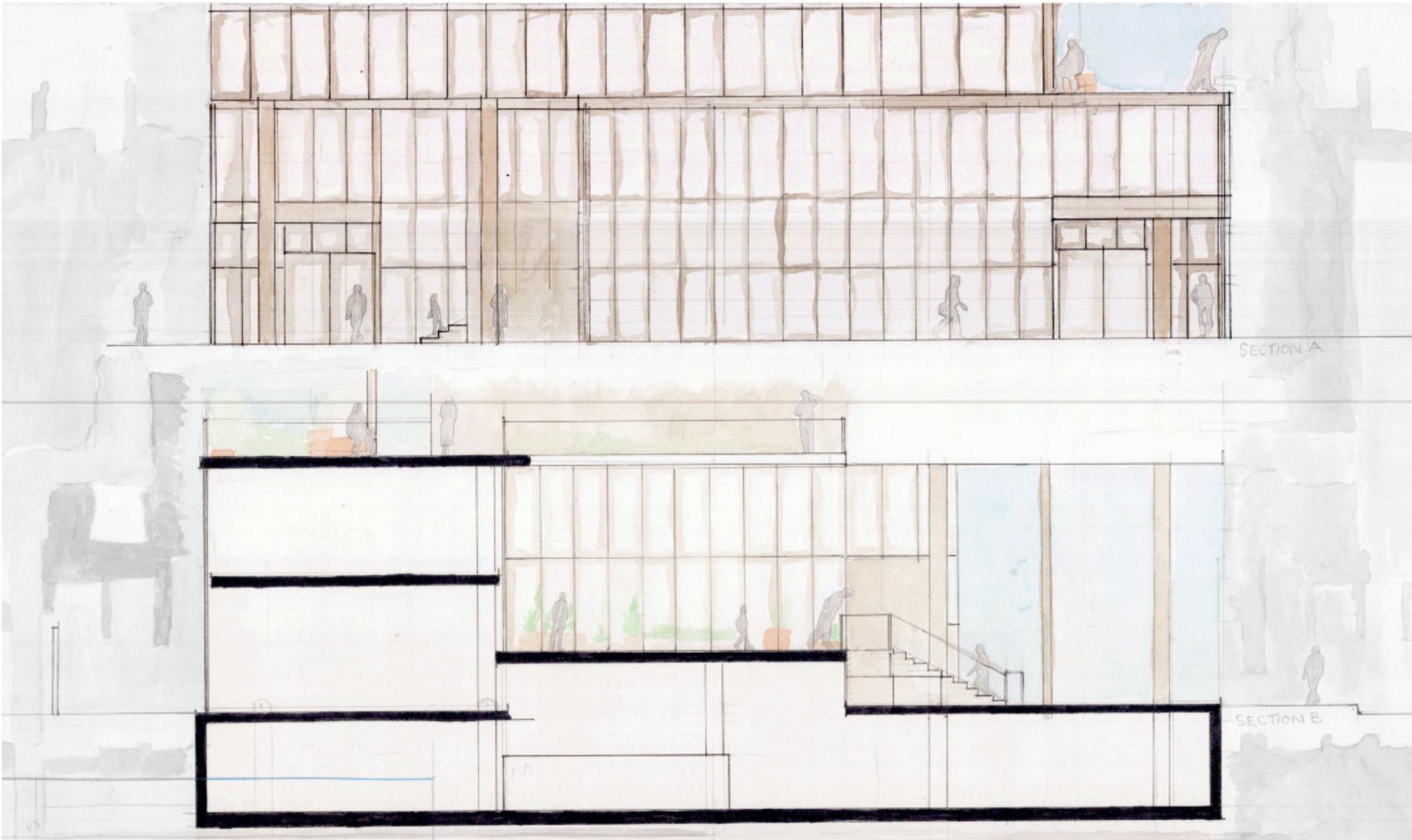


Public "zones"



Entrances

PUBLIC



Early elevation and section

SITE

The site is located in the northeast quadrant of Washington DC on H Street. The H Street corridor is a historically significant area that was once a center of commercial activity DC, was severely damaged in riots in 1968, and is currently at a point of recovery and transition. Such a short description gives little credit however to the many layers of life existing simultaneously in the neighborhood. Throughout the year of this project I saw improvement, tension and evolution as new stores opened, others remained boarded up, new neighbors moved in and old residents remained rooted.

Originally I chose the site, based on where a library is needed. But as time progressed, the site fit my thesis for reasons beyond the program. The pursuits of the public and private individual merged, ran parallel, diverged and overlapped.

Returning to my thesis question, I first analyzed the pattern of public to private space in the surrounding area. There was typically a gradual progression from the street front to backyard or alley depending on which building it was. There were smaller roads cutting through blocks for service vehicles, but they were not inviting to a casual passerby. The social norm would be to stay on the 8 to 10 feet of sidewalk along the front facades, which seemed like a lost opportunity since the intricate in-between spaces were the most interesting part of the area.

A study of the existing conditions informed later design decisions to include and celebrate the in between spaces. Brainstorming about where the "front" and "back" of the building should be brought up ideas for challenging the existing conditions on H Street. The orientation could welcome or push away those passing by. Another challenge was that the south side will be the most important in terms of sunlight, however it also is adjacent to the back of the townhouses and their individual backyards.





H Street

G Street

For panoramic views, see next page.

12th Street

13th Street

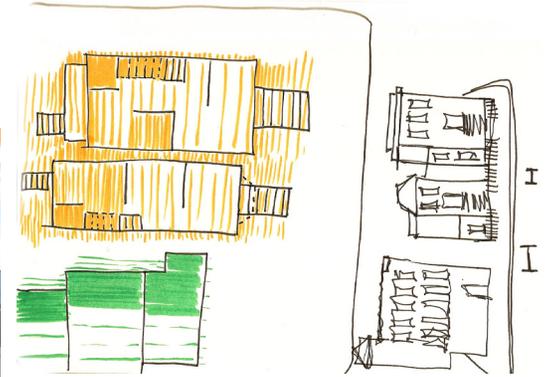


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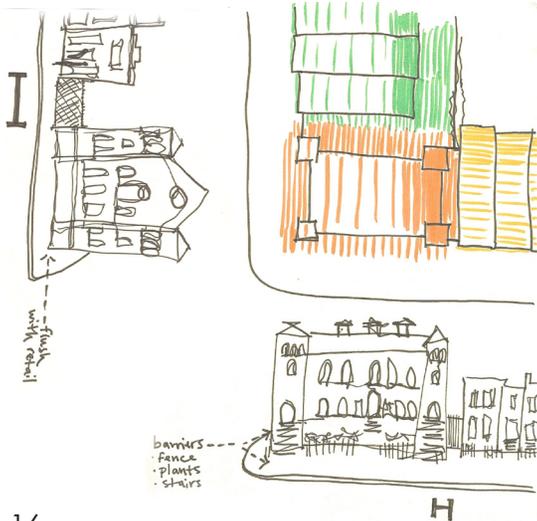
Located at the corner of H and 12th Streets NE, the site is a gap in the line of storefronts along H Street. It is currently used as a public parking lot whose boundary is a solid wooden fence. Beyond the fence are backyards of townhouses whose address is Linden Place NE, one of the in-between streets that bisect the main block. The site's corner position provides the potential for a landmark that signals its presence from both the commercial and residential paths. It is also close to several religious and civic buildings, such as schools, which could potentially use the library for overflow activities.

Looking at the makeup of the neighborhood in a circle with a half-mile radius revealed the nature of the neighborhood. By looking at walkability, perhaps anchoring the library within commercial district instead of hidden in the maze of residential. Currently walking, biking or driving is the easiest way to arrive. Many live there and commute elsewhere to work and therefore need a transition point from work or school back to home. Studies of site and massing models showed importance of maintaining streetscape along H St NE. In order to pull back and create a transition space, at least part of the building will remain along the property line.

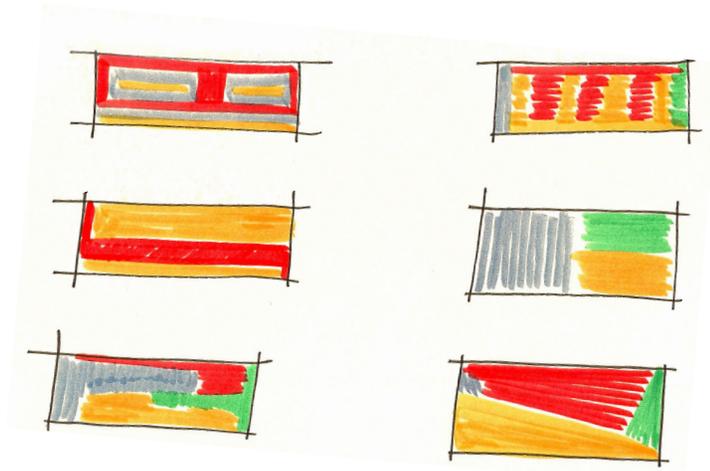
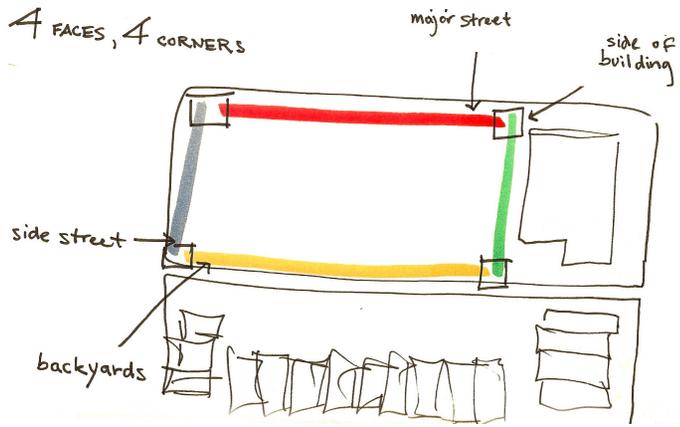
SITE



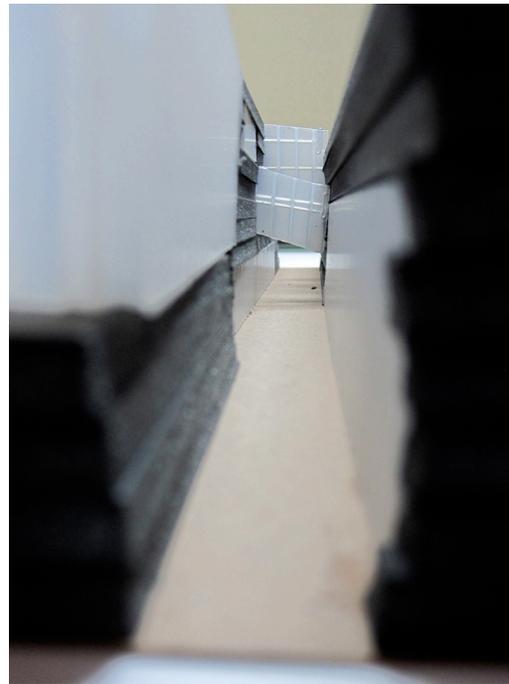
Panoramic views with site analysis sketches



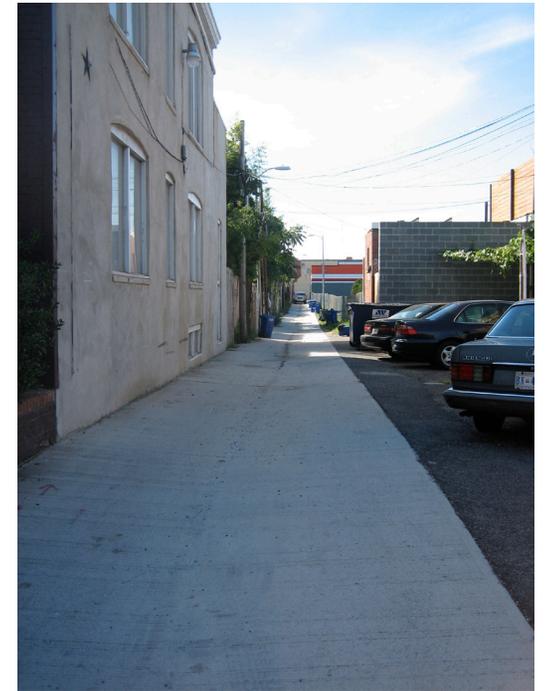
SITE



Context: study of existing and brainstorming variations



Early massing model

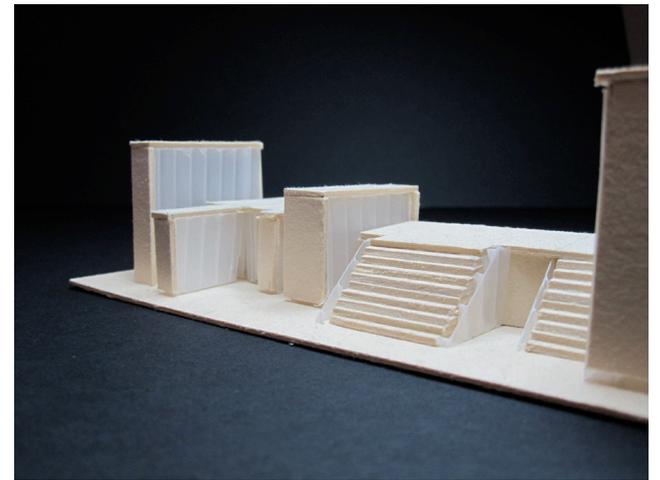
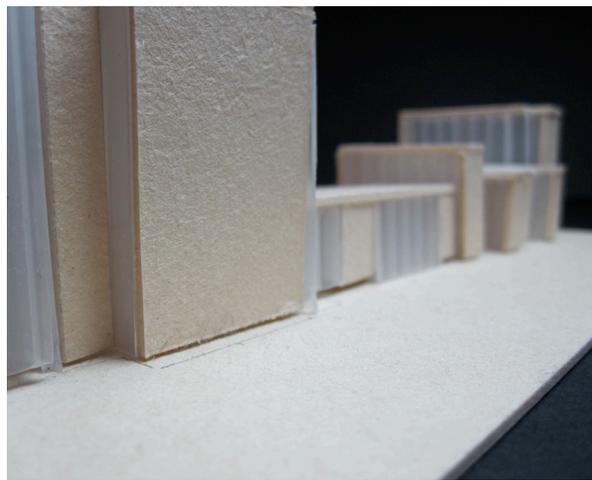
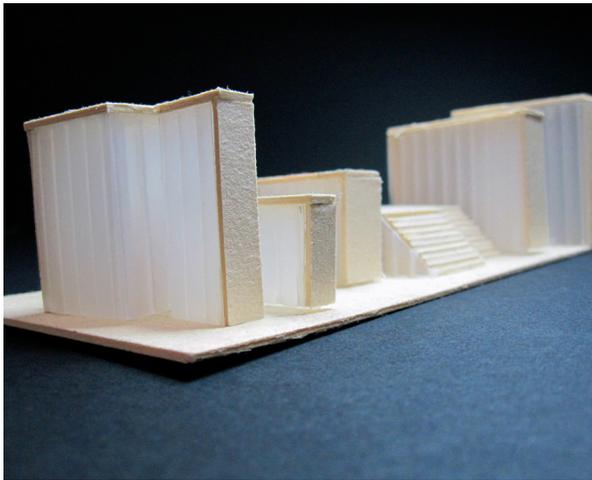


View of existing alley adjacent to site

SITE



Streetscape on H Street NE



Early massing model

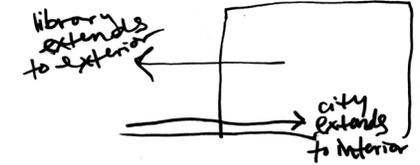
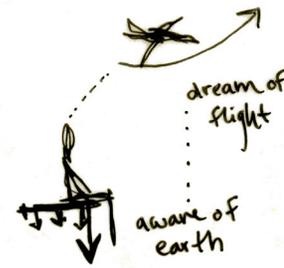
POROSITY

Porosity involves the spontaneous interaction between interior and exterior spaces, or between interior spaces. Openings can vary in depth and purpose, but the connection between two worlds is most important. It can be explicit as in the case of Herman Hertzberger's Montessori School with glazed corners and thresholds, or suggested with deeper perforations in the walls as in the case of Steven Holl's work.

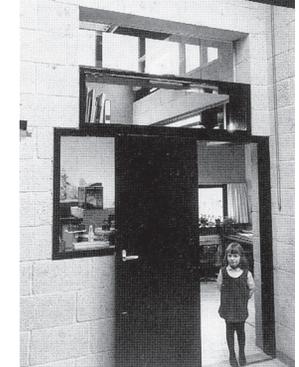
Porosity was a goal even in the earliest models and sketches of the thesis project. The idea was to extend the public access throughout the depth of the building from H Street to the fences of the homes behind it, and from 12th Street to halfway down the block where commercial buildings continue. Later this porosity manifested itself vertically as well. For example openings in the floor plates can connect the main lobby to the skylights four floors above and individual architectural elements can span multiple levels, even while serving different functions on each.

Porosity can be facilitated by the use of transparent materials, in this case glazing along the H and 12th Streets. The transparency would draw people to the building and encourage them to integrate the library into their usual schedules or commutes.

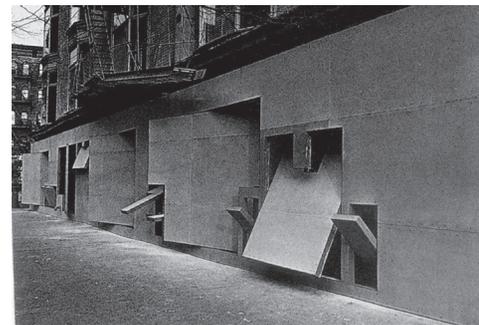
On the other hand, the transparency would remind visitors to the library of life that is continuing outside of the buildings walls. The bookshelves are positioned to maintain site lines through the curtain walls and are even transparent themselves. One should be able to see the books from the street. One should also be able to maintain visual connection with the city. Even in the stacks, the context of the surrounding city is visible across the floor. In older libraries, the image of getting lost among dark and tall stacks is prevalent, but even in a porous building there are opportunities to retreat with a book. The inhabitant uses creativity to construct the building's use.



12 Montessori School Delft, Netherlands
Herman Hertzberger



13

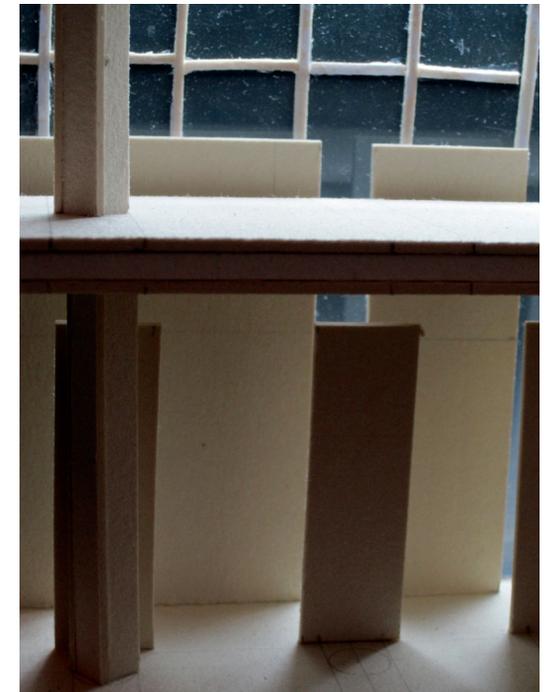
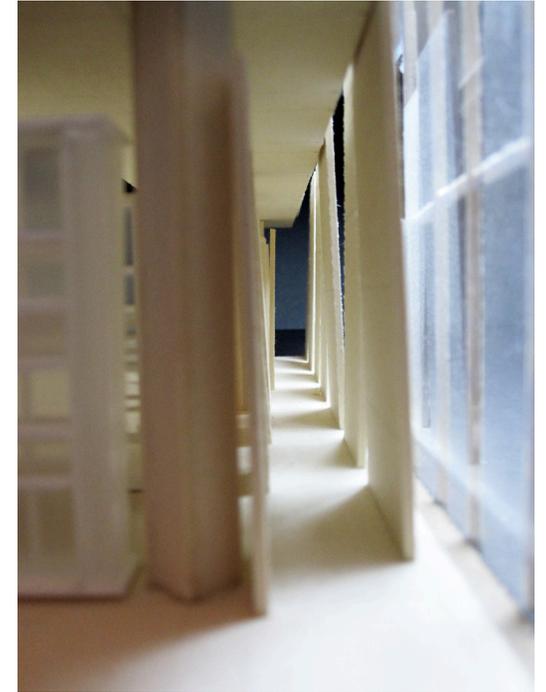


14 D.E. Shaw Office New York, New York
Steven Holl



15

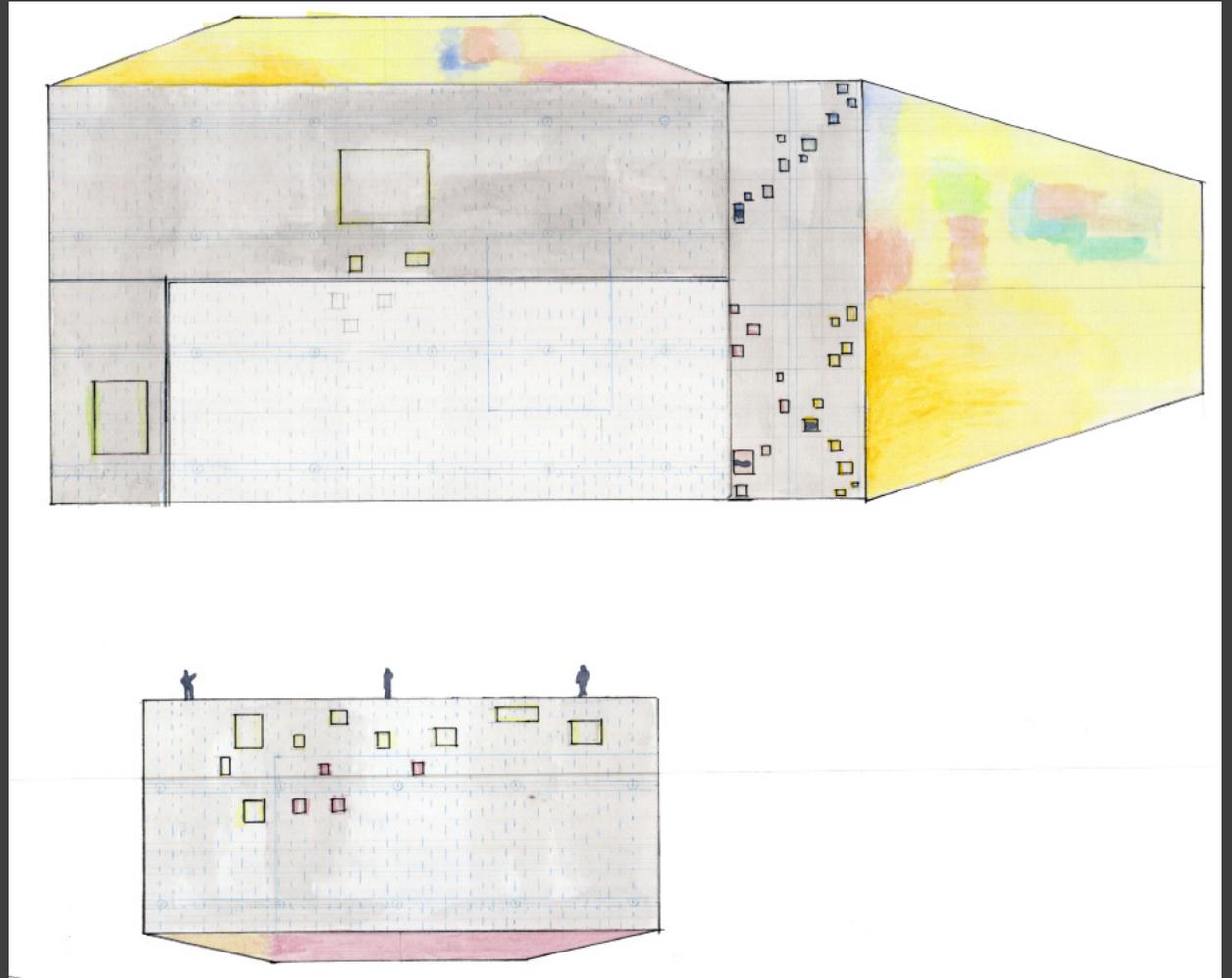
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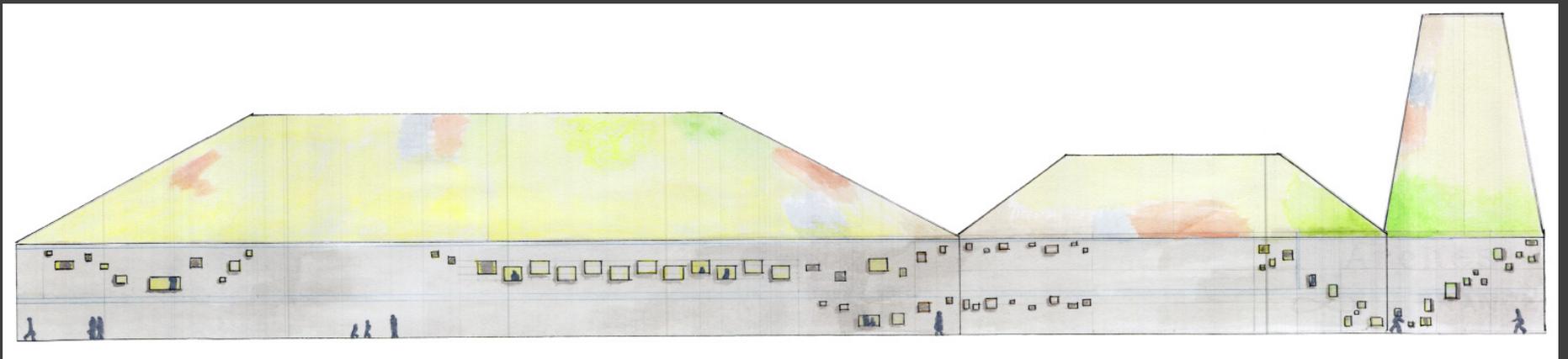
"Transparency is a compass/tool to help the user in the process of exploring flexibility. The transparency is a suggestion of relationship and the implication of solid boundaries."

Yuko Hasegawa

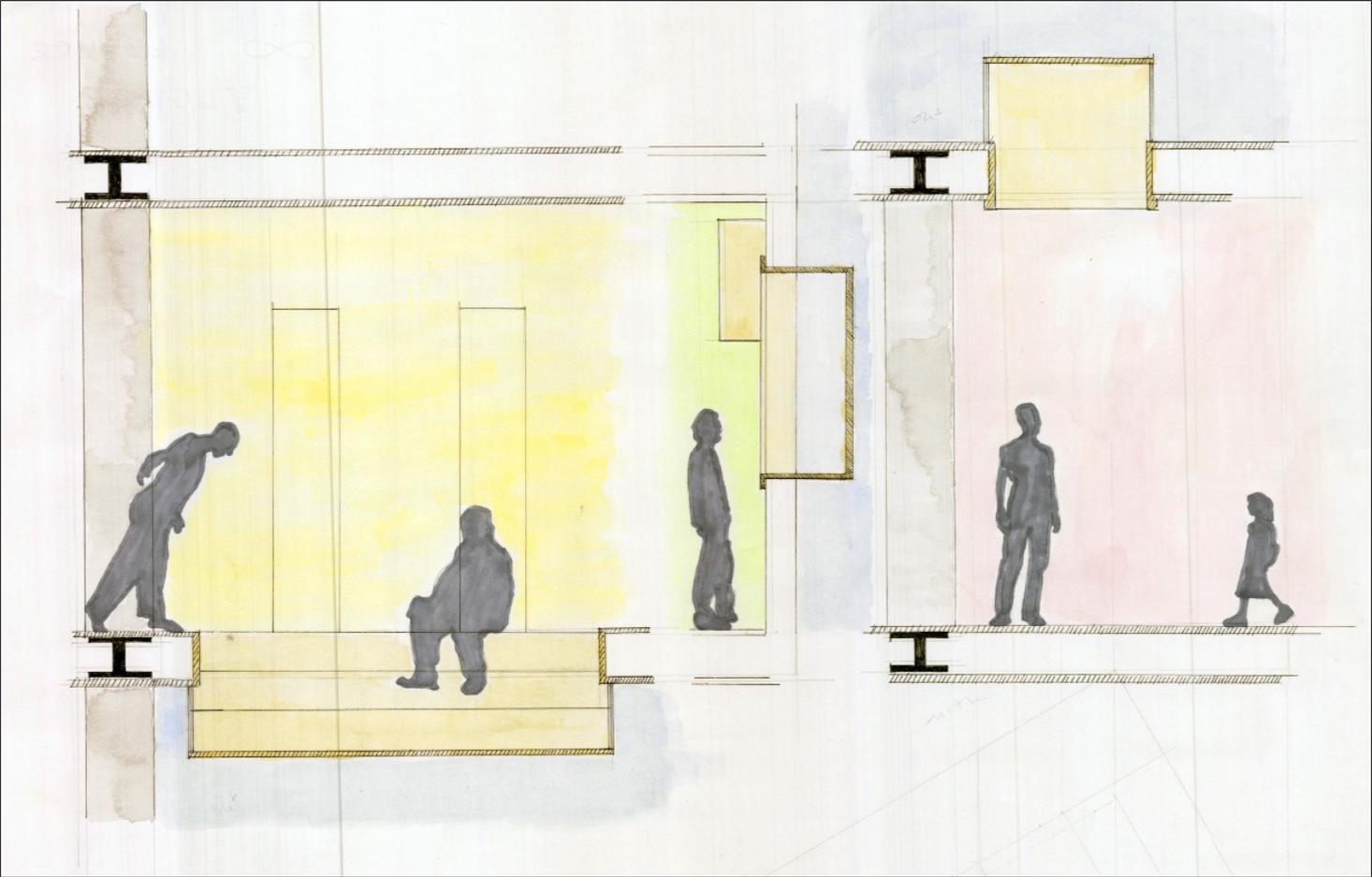
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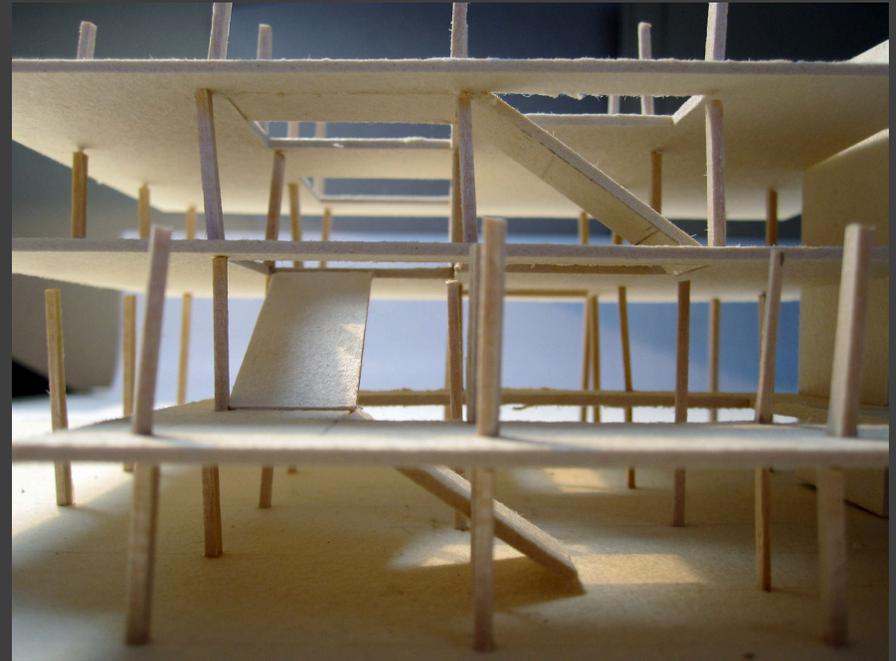
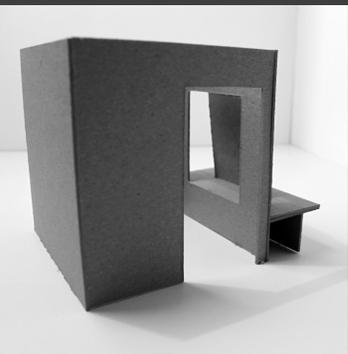
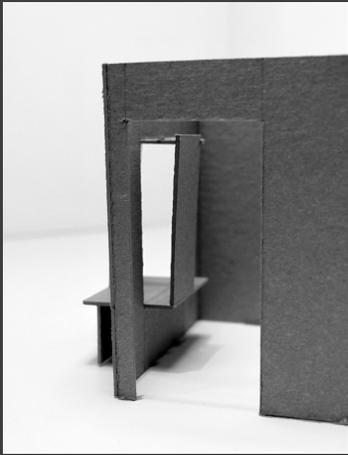
Early study of facade openings



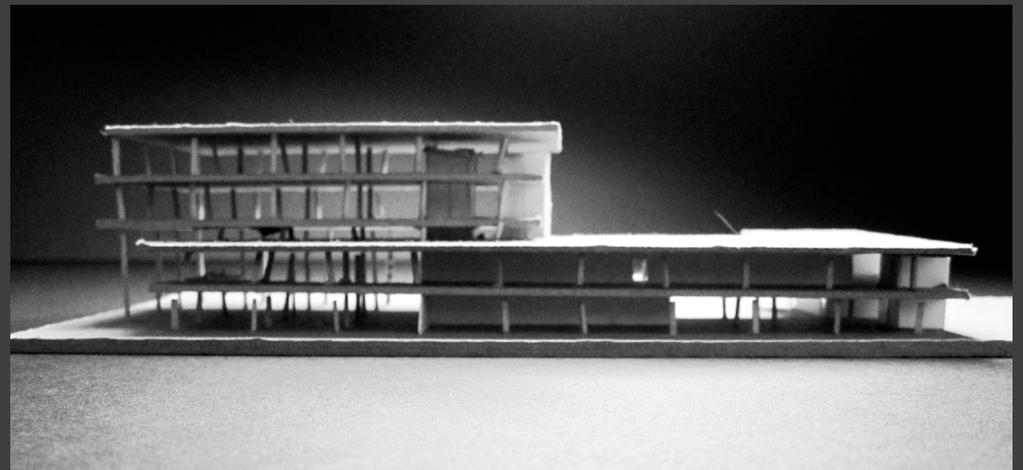
POROSITY



POROSITY



Early studies of structural layout



“Little spaces where you can adjourn with a book are tremendously important. So you might say that the world is put before you through the books.”

Louis Kahn

TIME

While the future needs of a library are not exactly known, it is important that the building serve several functions at different times and be able to adapt. The design should have a life that extends beyond library hours and should participate with the streetscape at every moment, even as a passive participant. For example, the community may have a need for meeting places in the evenings and can reuse the space that children's groups may have used earlier in the day. Or if only half or part of the building is needed at one time, the remaining part can be gracefully secured. Access to the Internet has become a necessity in daily life, and it has become the library's role to provide free Internet stations as a vehicle for learning, job searching and communicating. These needs may not necessarily follow a traditional schedule; therefore part of the building could be open 24 hours.

There are two extremes of time: the experiential time of an individual being compared to the abstract and anonymous measured time of science. Observation of activity in a public space over the course of the day will reveal patterns of information, while following one individual through the paces of their daily activity will reveal a unique set of information.

In addition, an individual can register time by remaining in one place and observing environmental changes or by returning to the same place at different times and noting what has changed in one's absence. An individual can also move throughout a building as time progresses, keeping pace or creating a unique rhythm.

Diagramming and models of interior space helped explore the Intermediate spaces that can act as stimuli for activity. The overlapping of masses and programming reveal the points along a path where an individual's perception of the building can change and the collective public can either return to as a touchstone or remember as a navigational tool.



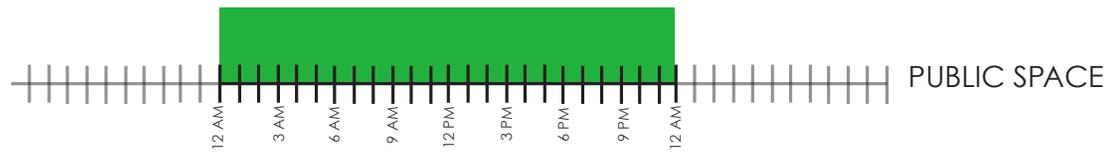
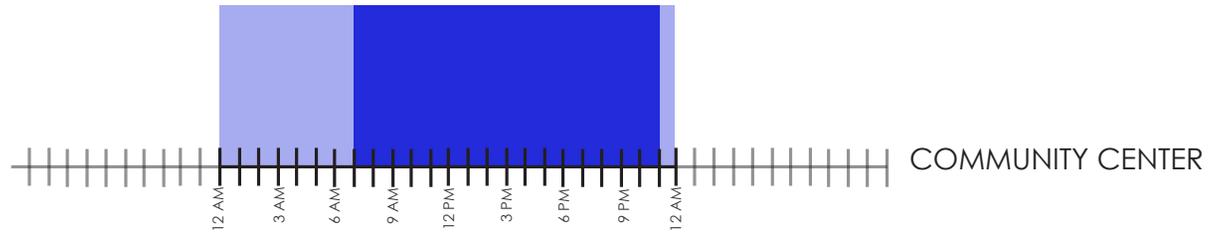
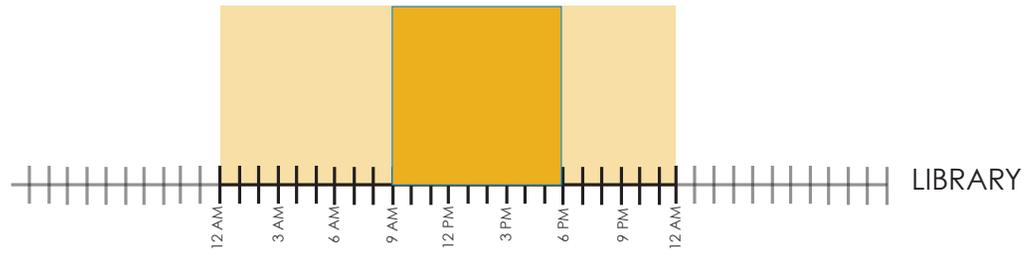
Assemblage

TIME

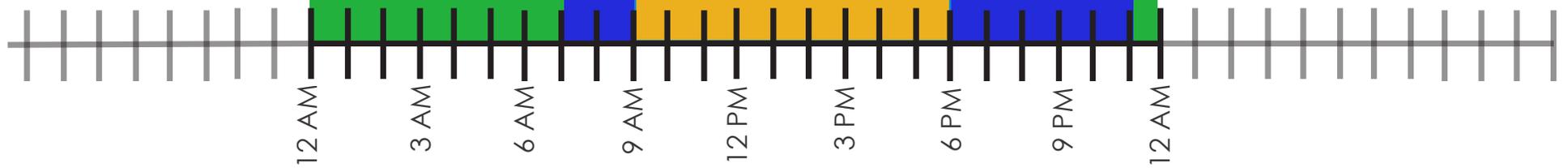


Sunlight study

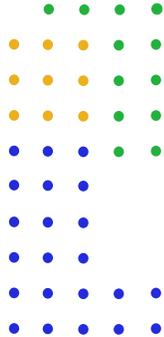
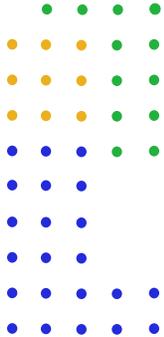
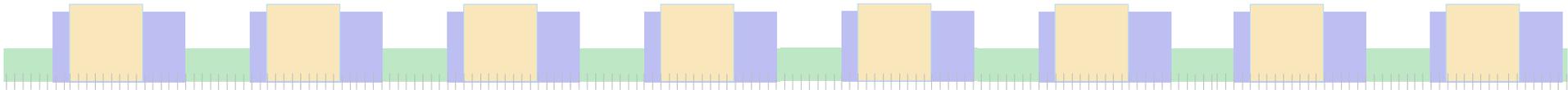
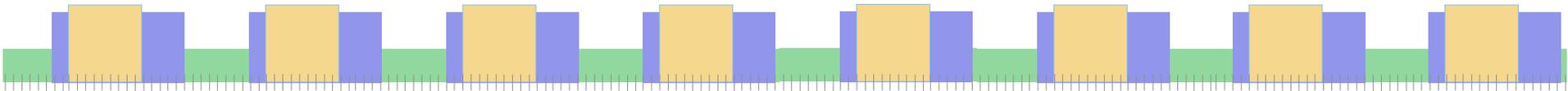
TIME



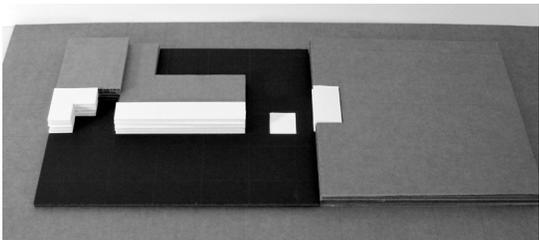
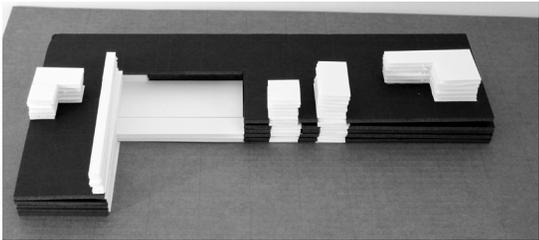
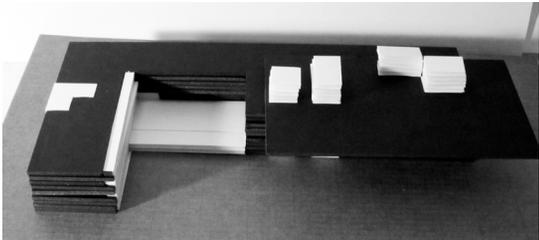
Diagrams of accessibility to building and surrounding site



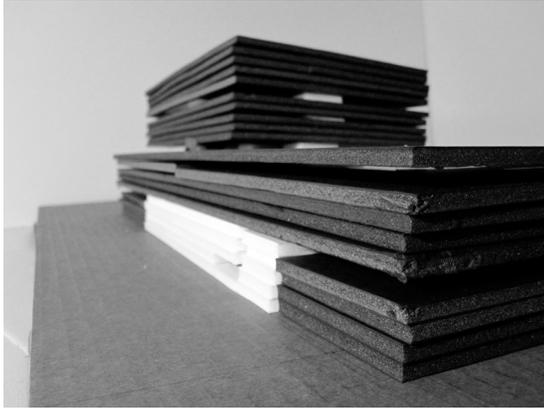
TIME



TIME



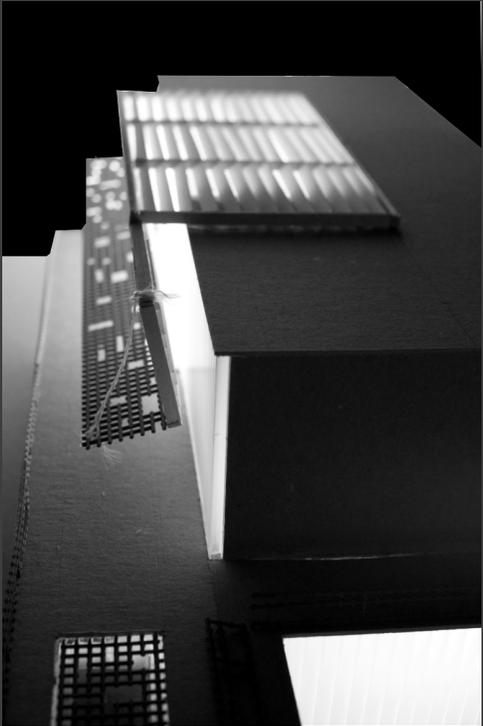
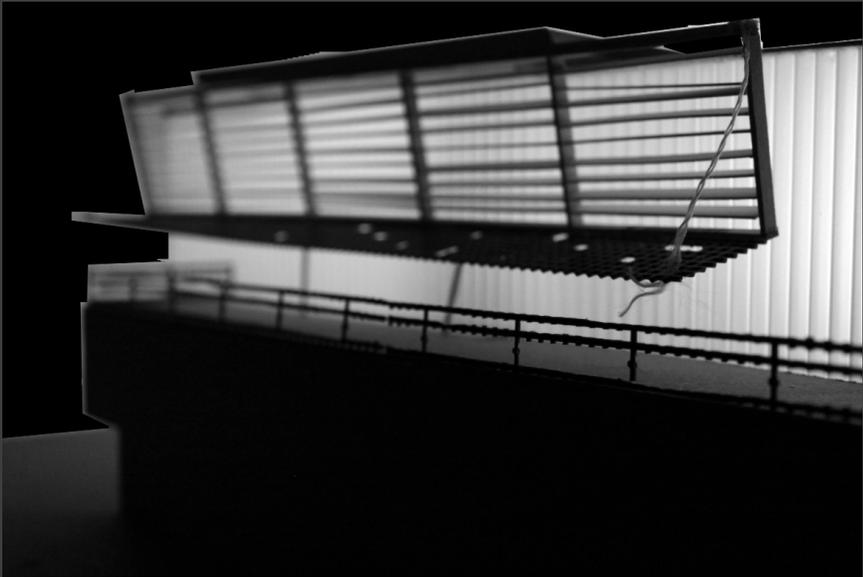
TIME



“For a building to be motionless is the exception: our pleasure comes from moving about so as to make the building move in turn, while we enjoy all these combination of its parts. As they vary, the column turns, depths recede, galleries glide: a thousand visions escape.”

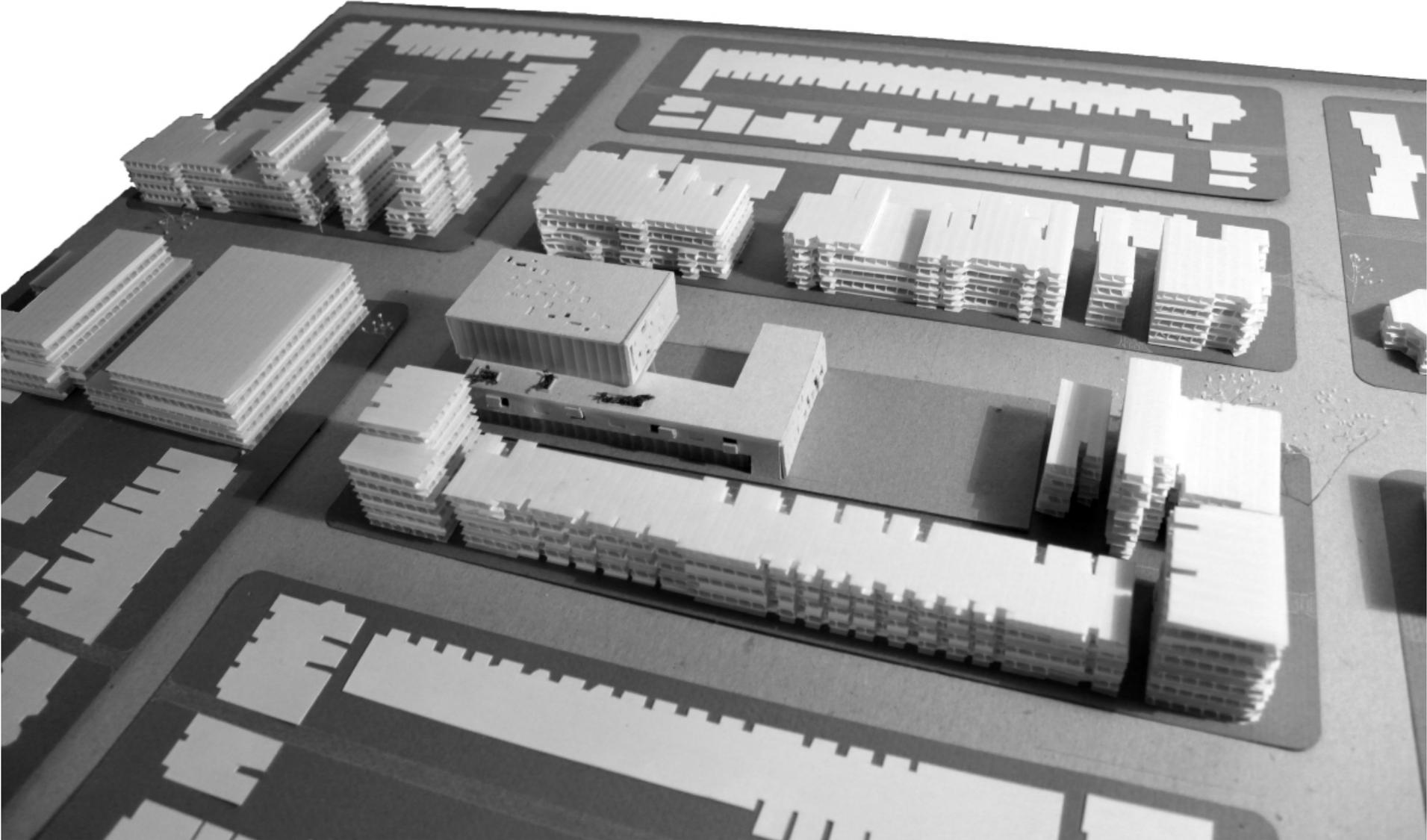
Paul Valery





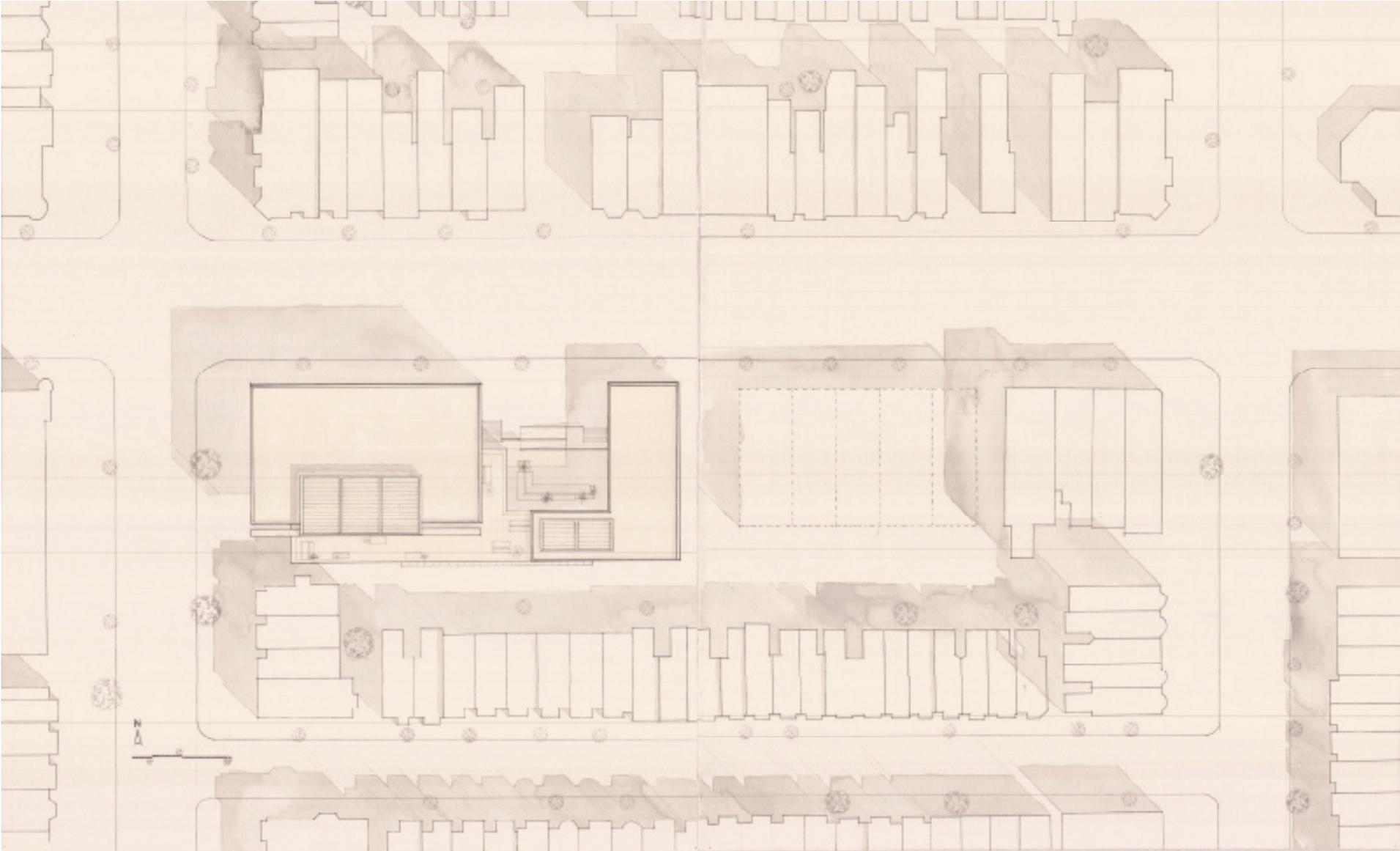
Study models for night time

BUILDING



Early site model

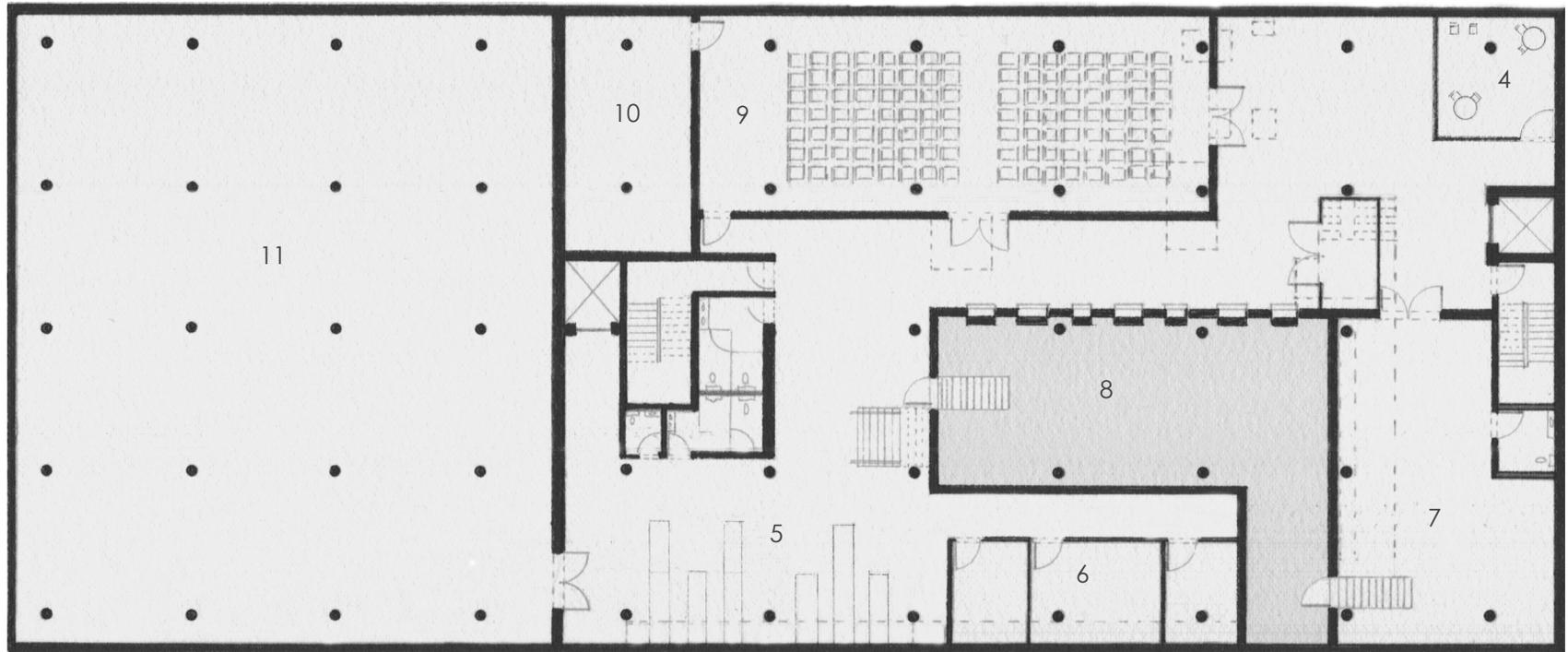
BUILDING



SITE PLAN

BUILDING

- 1 - Entrance
- 2 - News & Periodicals Area
- 3 - Information Desk
- 4 - Meeting Room
- 5 - Computer Area
- 6 - Study Room
- 7 - Staff Workroom
- 8 - Network Room
- 9 - Auditorium
- 10 - Auditorium Storage
- 11 - Mechanical Storage
- 12 - Outdoor Plaza
- 13 - Roof Garden
- 14 - Adult Stacks
- 15 - Children Stacks

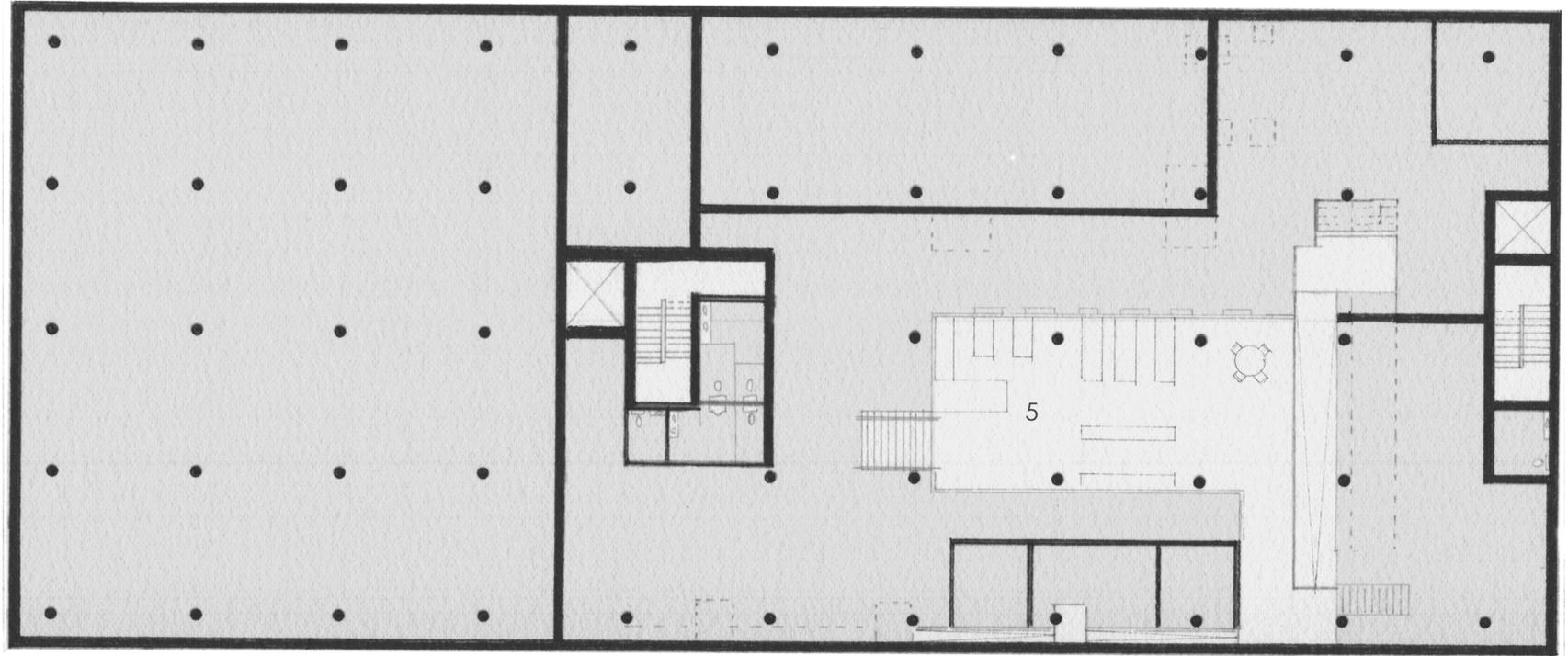


BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

BUILDING

- 1 - Entrance
- 2 - News & Periodicals Area
- 3 - Information Desk
- 4 - Meeting Room
- 5 - Computer Area
- 6 - Study Room
- 7 - Staff Workroom
- 8 - Network Room

- 9 - Auditorium
- 10 - Auditorium Storage
- 11 - Mechanical Storage
- 12 - Outdoor Plaza
- 13 - Roof Garden
- 14 - Adult Stacks
- 15 - Children Stacks

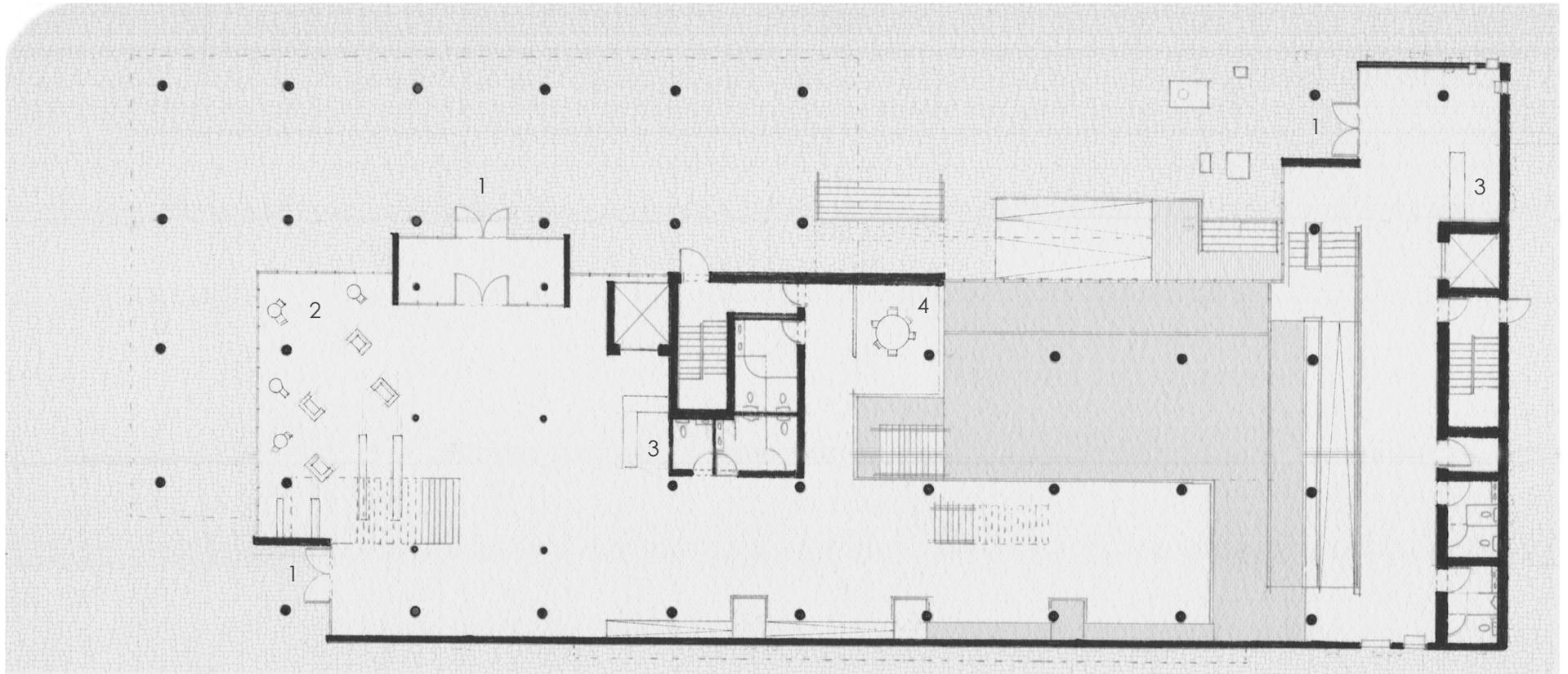


MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN

BUILDING

- 1 - Entrance
- 2 - News & Periodicals Area
- 3 - Information Desk
- 4 - Meeting Room
- 5 - Computer Area
- 6 - Study Room
- 7 - Staff Workroom
- 8 - Network Room

- 9 - Auditorium
- 10 - Auditorium Storage
- 11 - Mechanical Storage
- 12 - Outdoor Plaza
- 13 - Roof Garden
- 14 - Adult Stacks
- 15 - Children Stacks

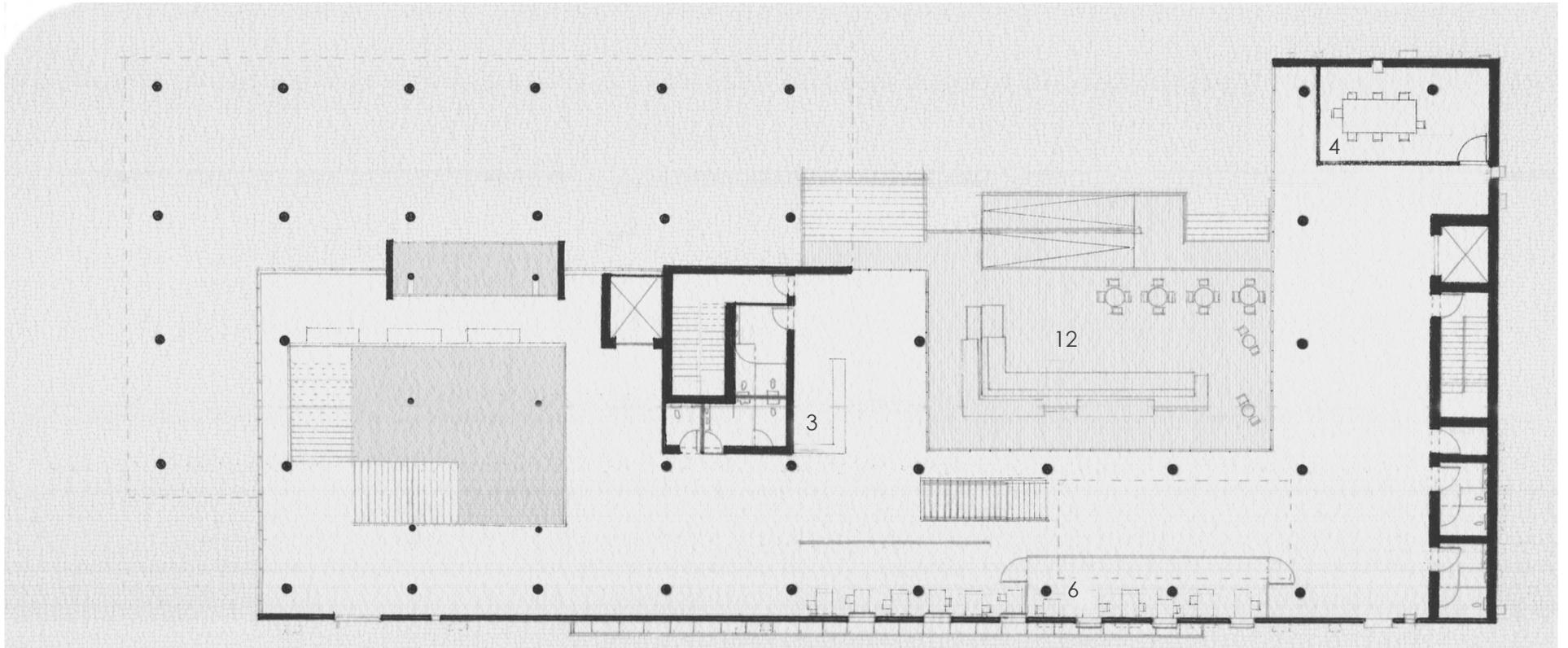


FIRST FLOOR PLAN

BUILDING

- 1 - Entrance
- 2 - News & Periodicals Area
- 3 - Information Desk
- 4 - Meeting Room
- 5 - Computer Area
- 6 - Study Room
- 7 - Staff Workroom
- 8 - Network Room

- 9 - Auditorium
- 10 - Auditorium Storage
- 11 - Mechanical Storage
- 12 - Outdoor Plaza
- 13 - Roof Garden
- 14 - Adult Stacks
- 15 - Children Stacks

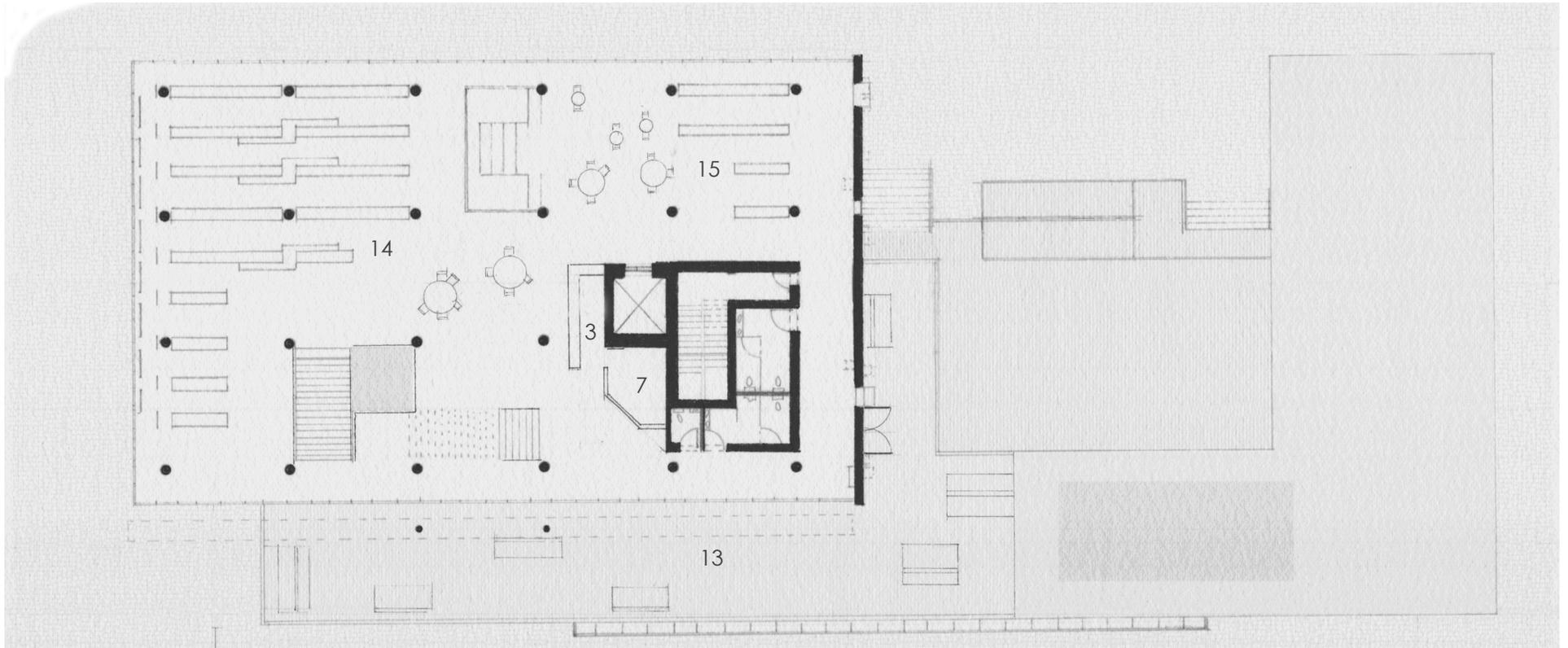


SECOND FLOOR PLAN

BUILDING

- 1 - Entrance
- 2 - News & Periodicals Area
- 3 - Information Desk
- 4 - Meeting Room
- 5 - Computer Area
- 6 - Study Room
- 7 - Staff Workroom
- 8 - Network Room

- 9 - Auditorium
- 10 - Auditorium Storage
- 11 - Mechanical Storage
- 12 - Outdoor Plaza
- 13 - Roof Garden
- 14 - Adult Stacks
- 15 - Children Stacks

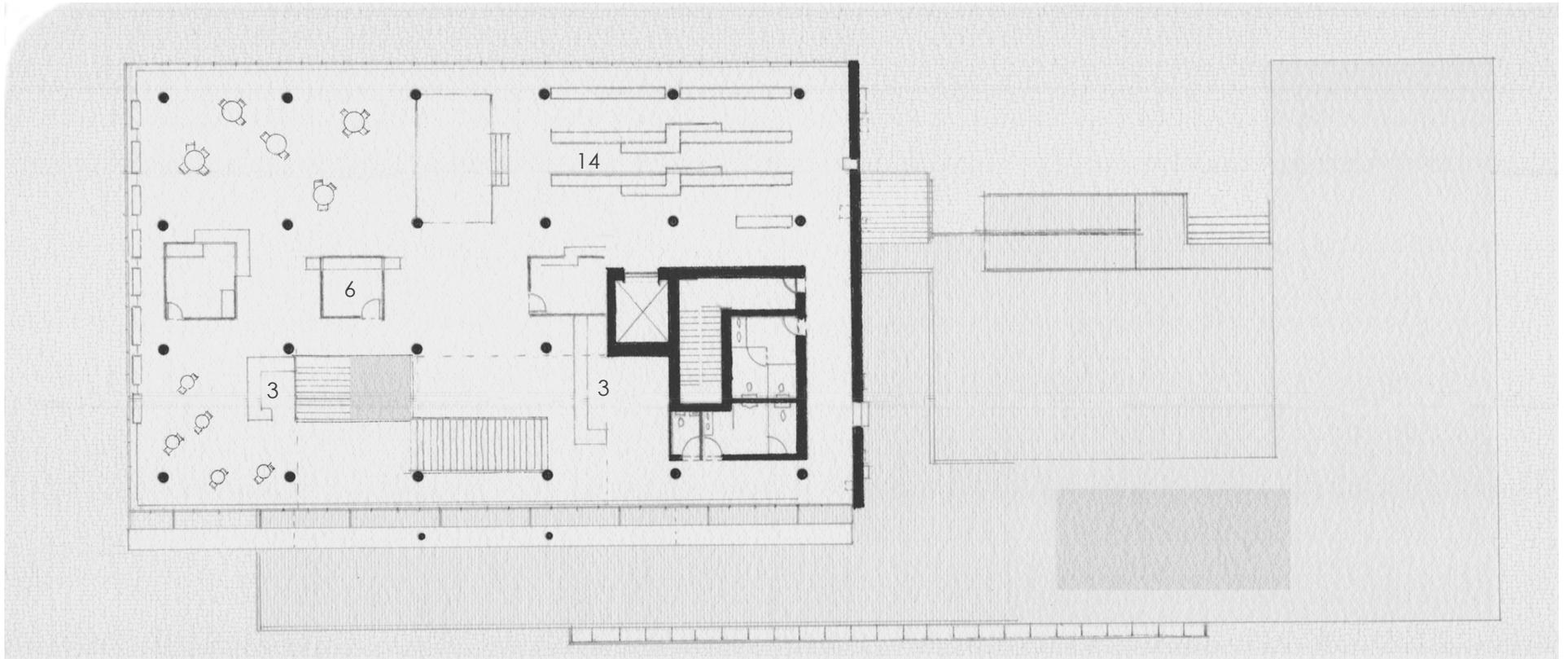


THIRD FLOOR PLAN

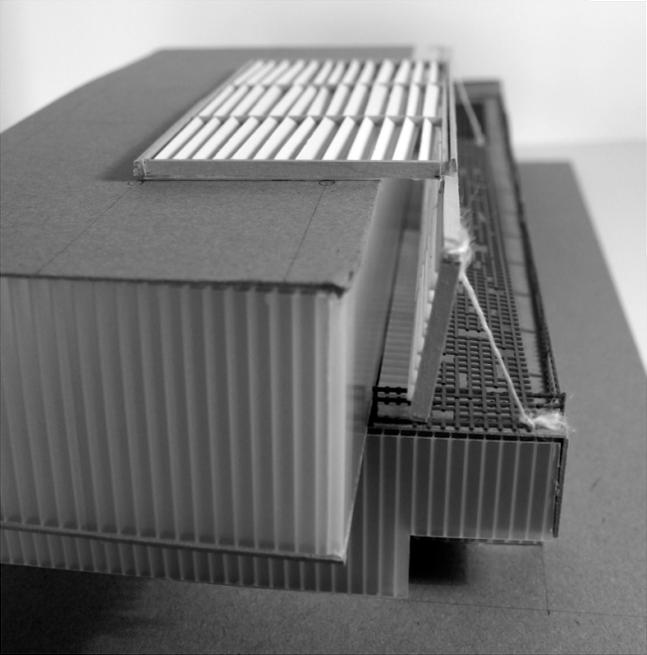
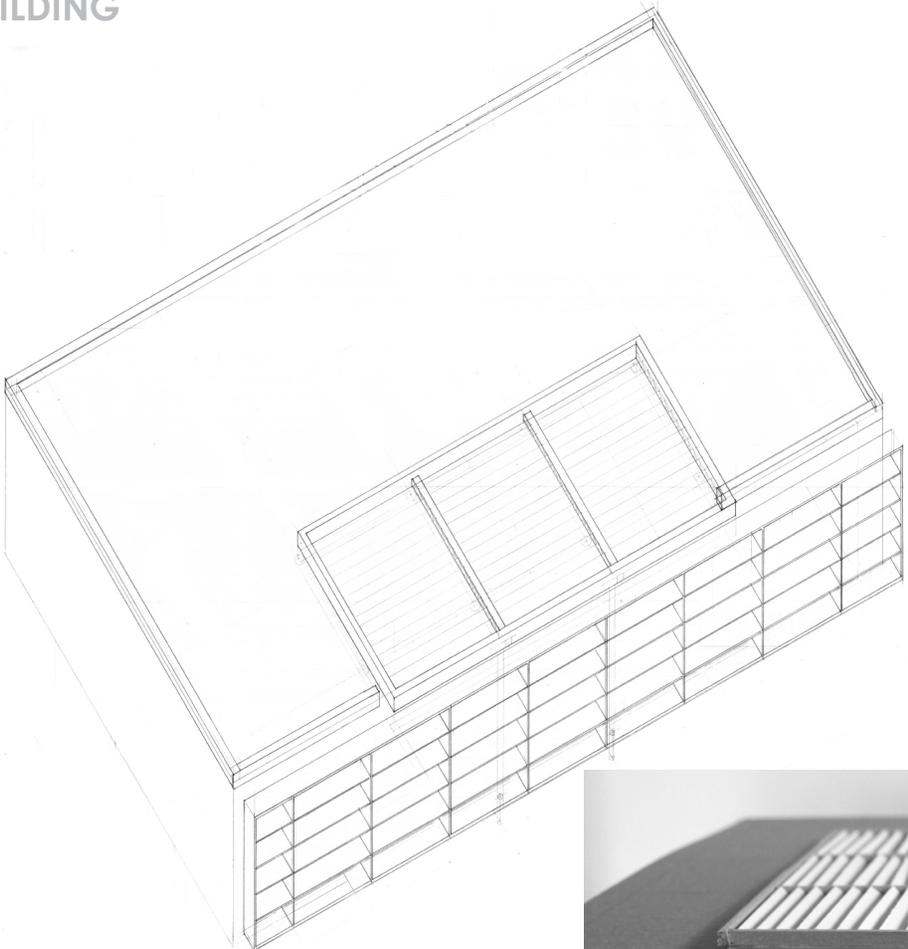
BUILDING

- 1 - Entrance
- 2 - News & Periodicals Area
- 3 - Information Desk
- 4 - Meeting Room
- 5 - Computer Area
- 6 - Study Room
- 7 - Staff Workroom
- 8 - Network Room

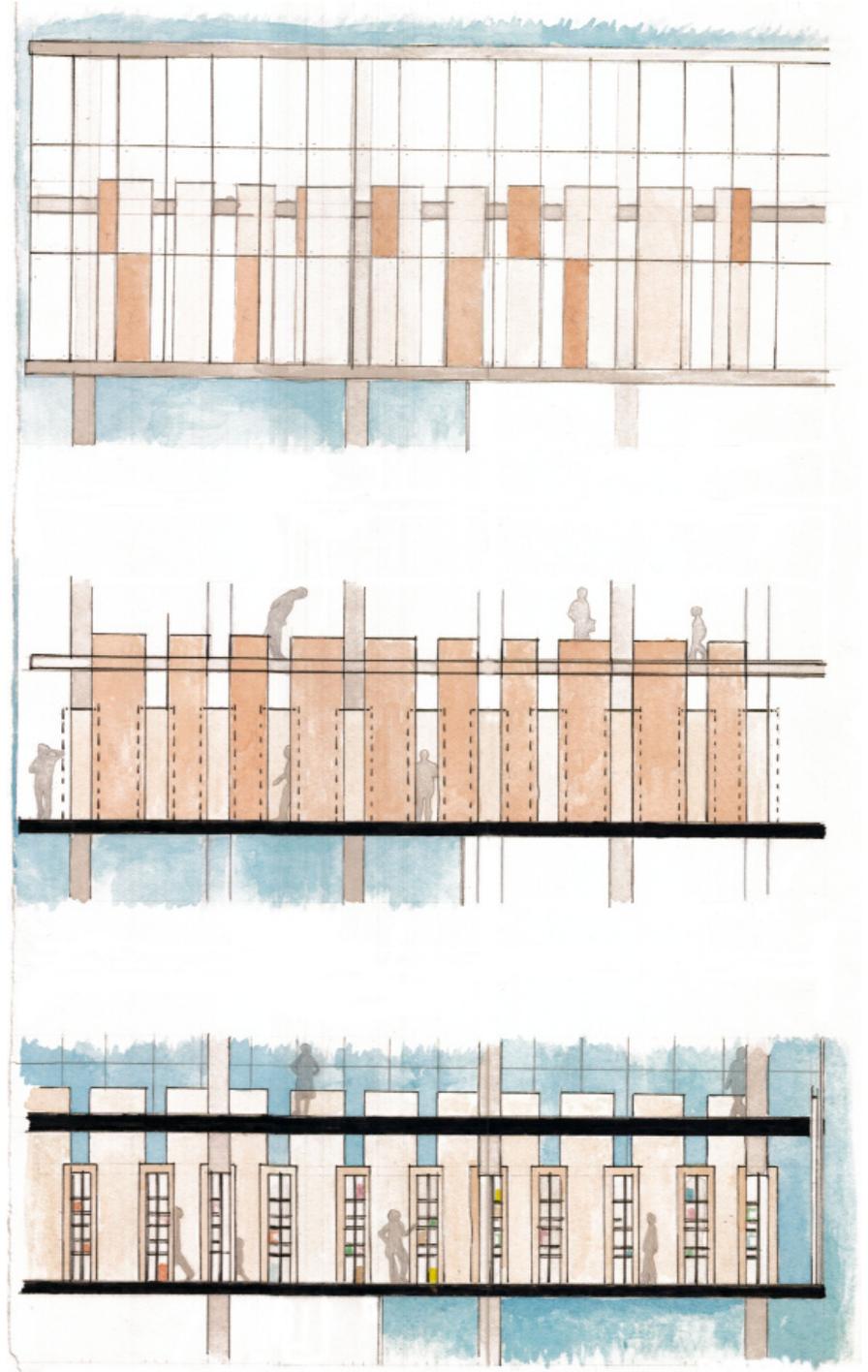
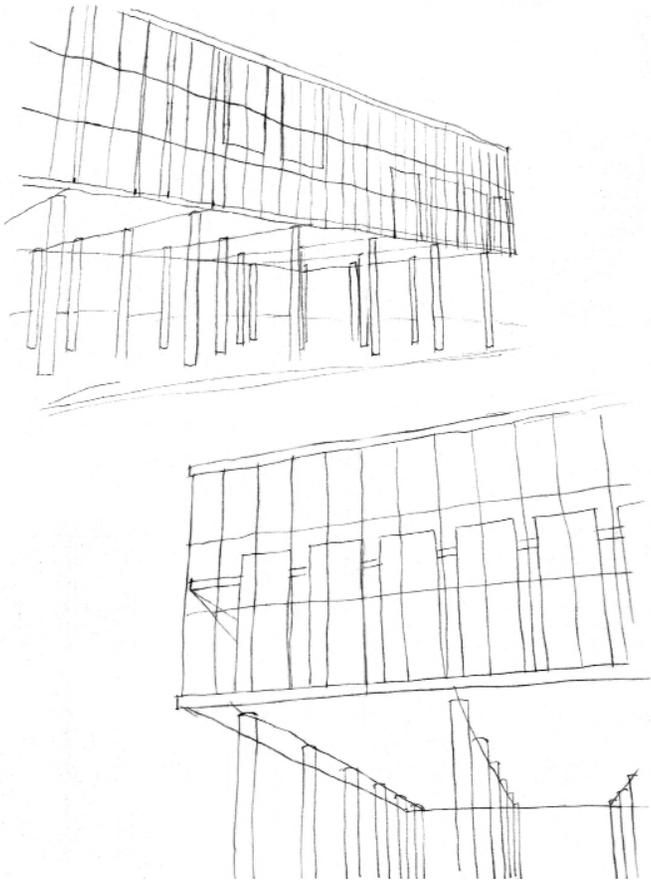
- 9 - Auditorium
- 10 - Auditorium Storage
- 11 - Mechanical Storage
- 12 - Outdoor Plaza
- 13 - Roof Garden
- 14 - Adult Stacks
- 15 - Children Stacks



BUILDING



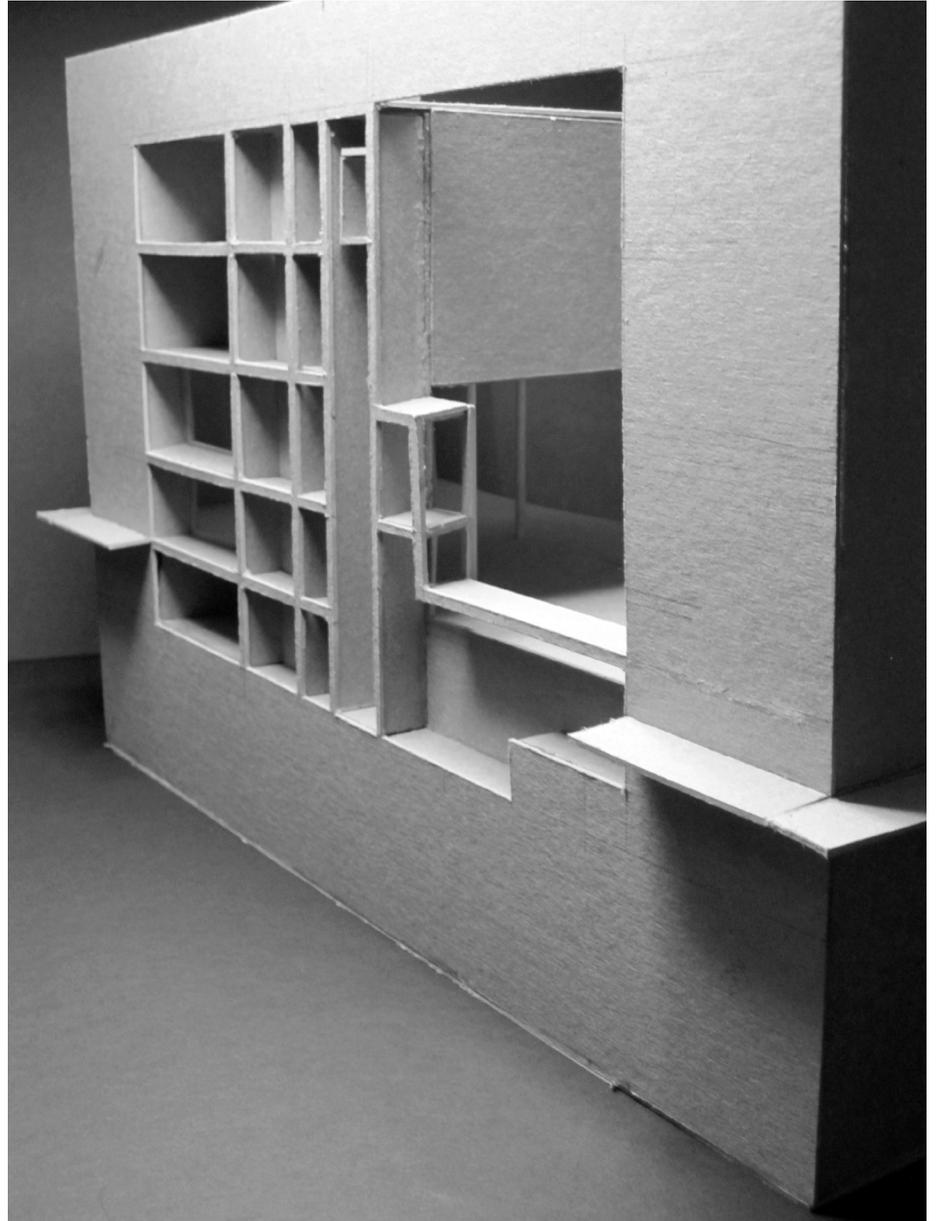
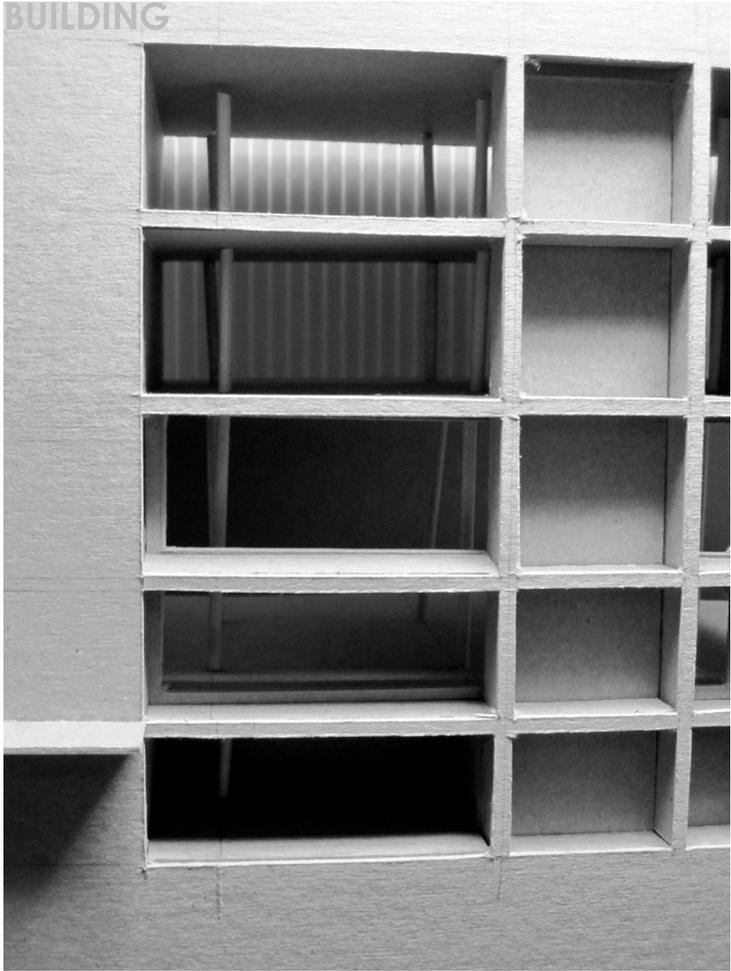
BUILDING



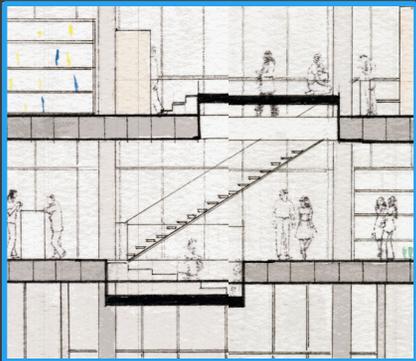
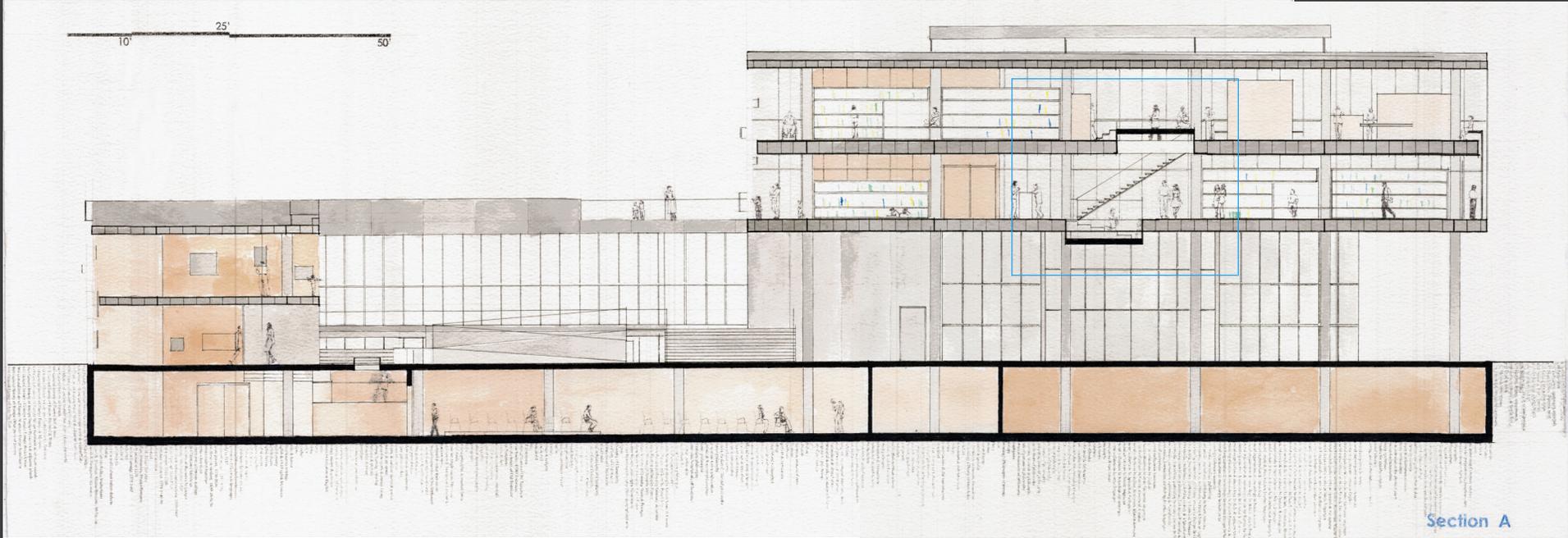


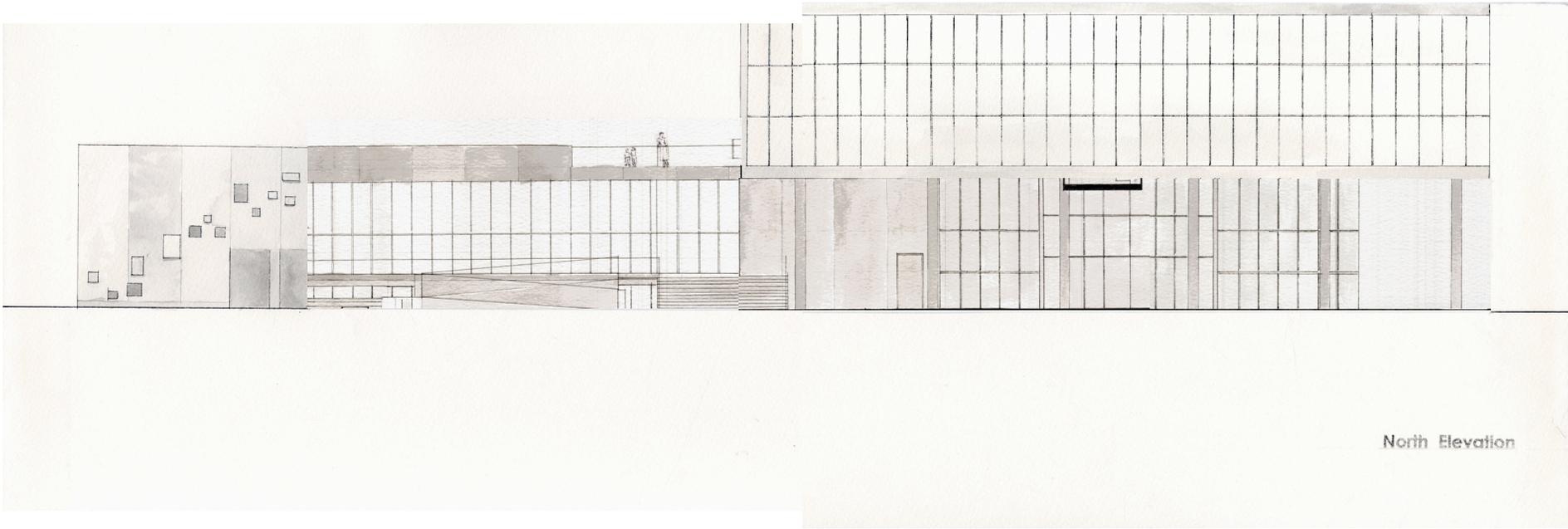
Mirrored section models

BUILDING

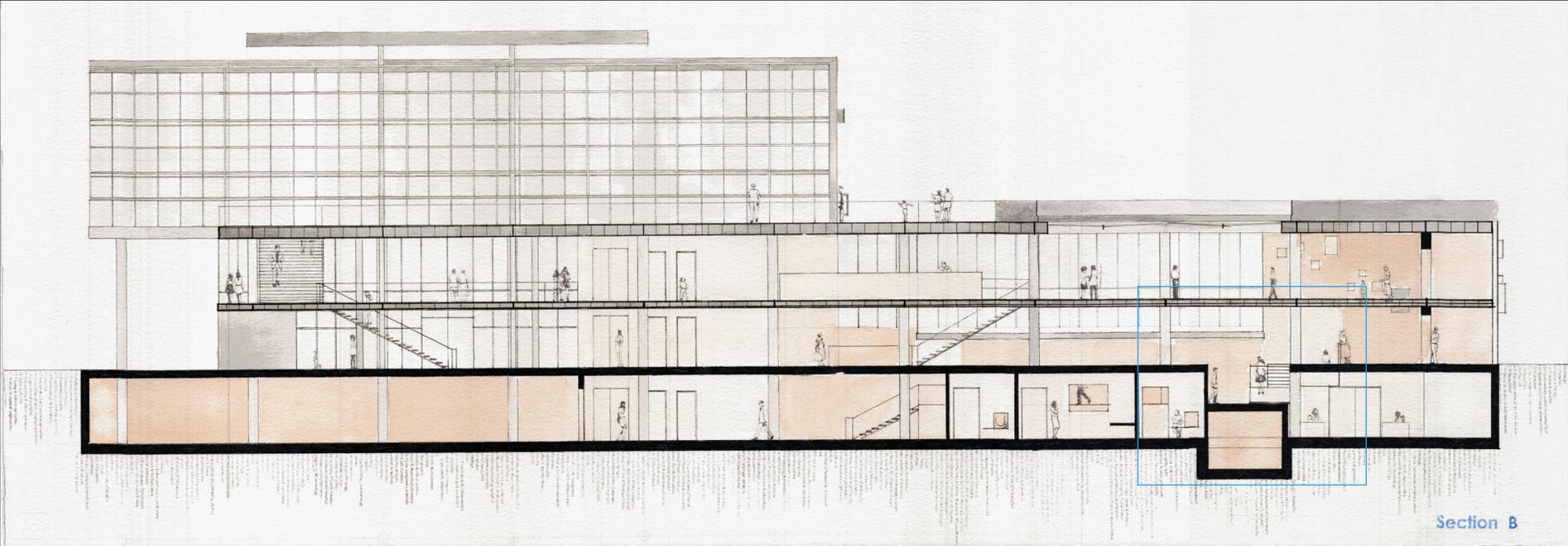


BUILDING

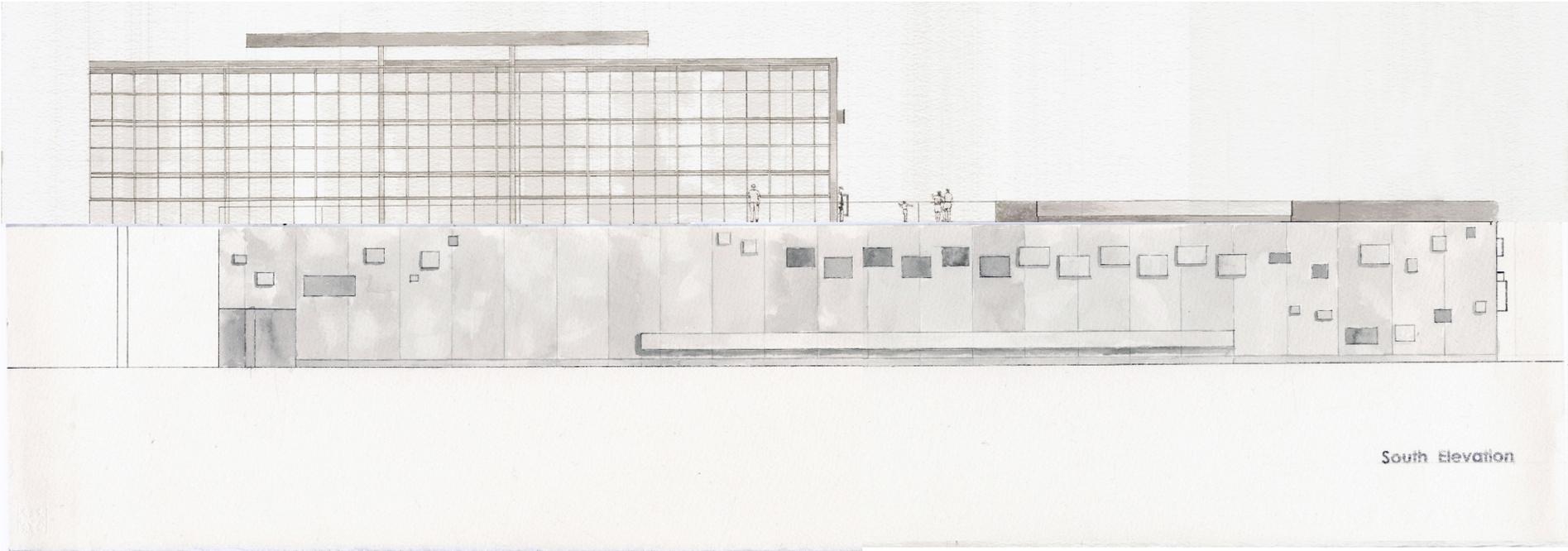




BUILDING

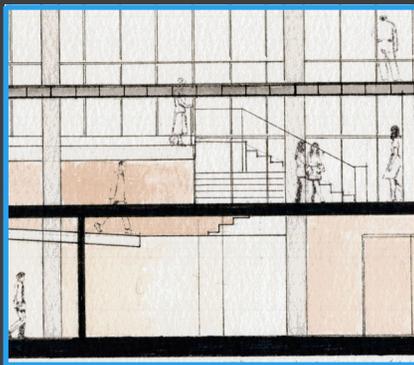
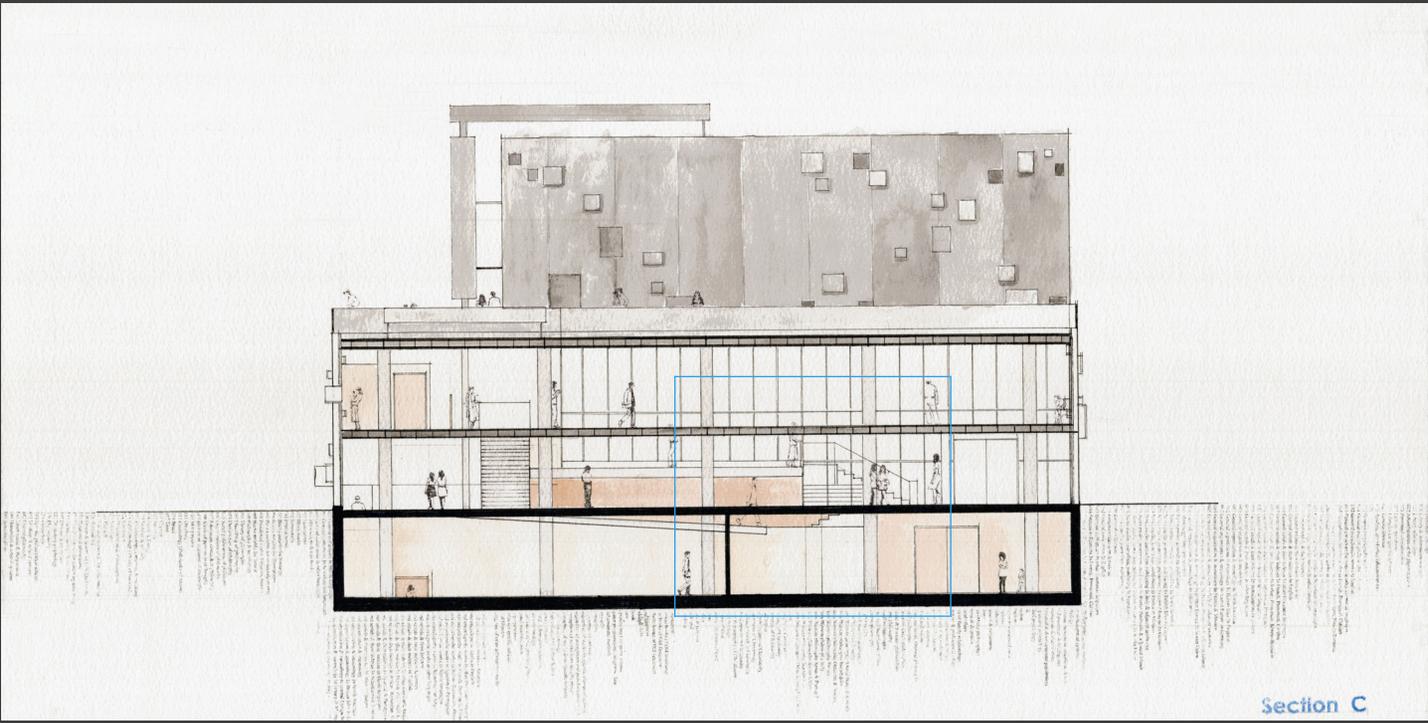


BUILDING

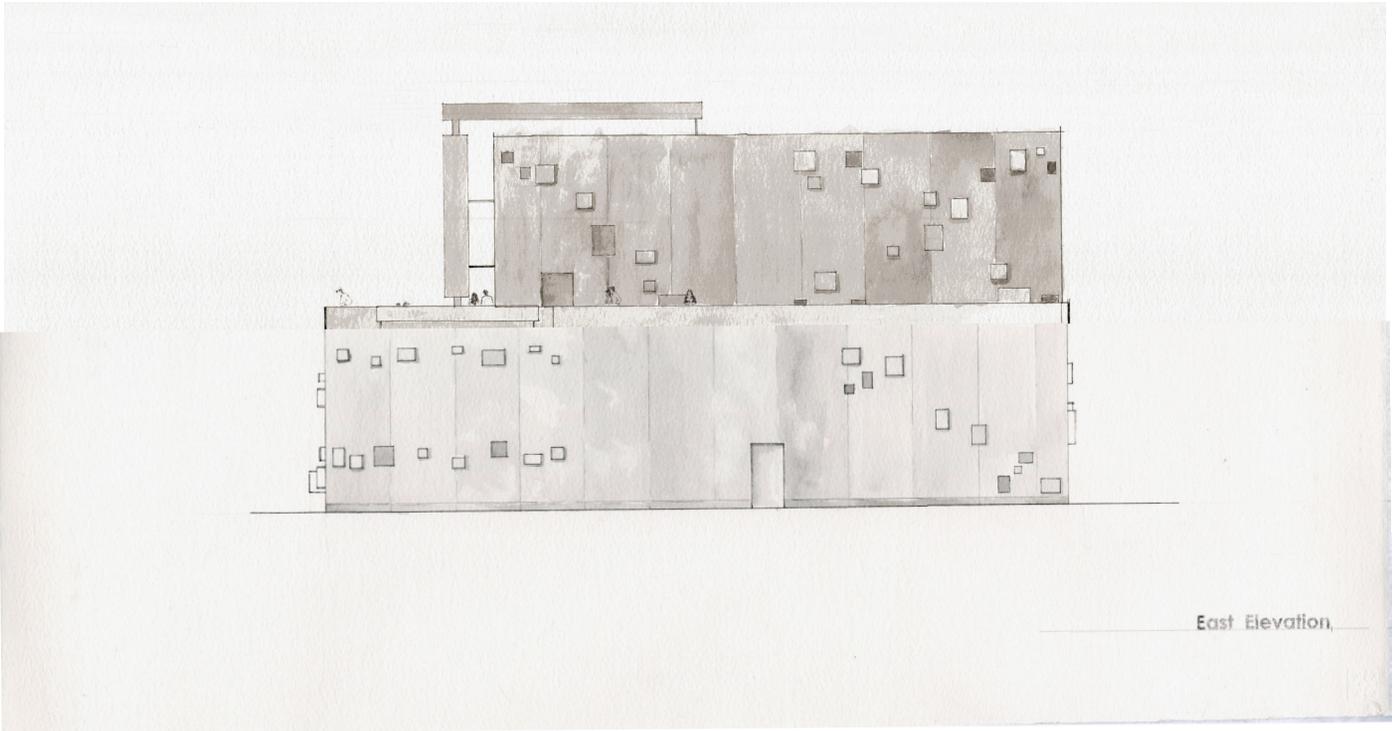


South Elevation

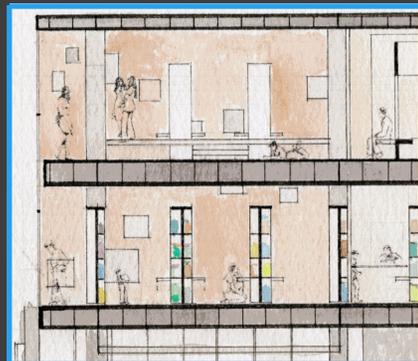
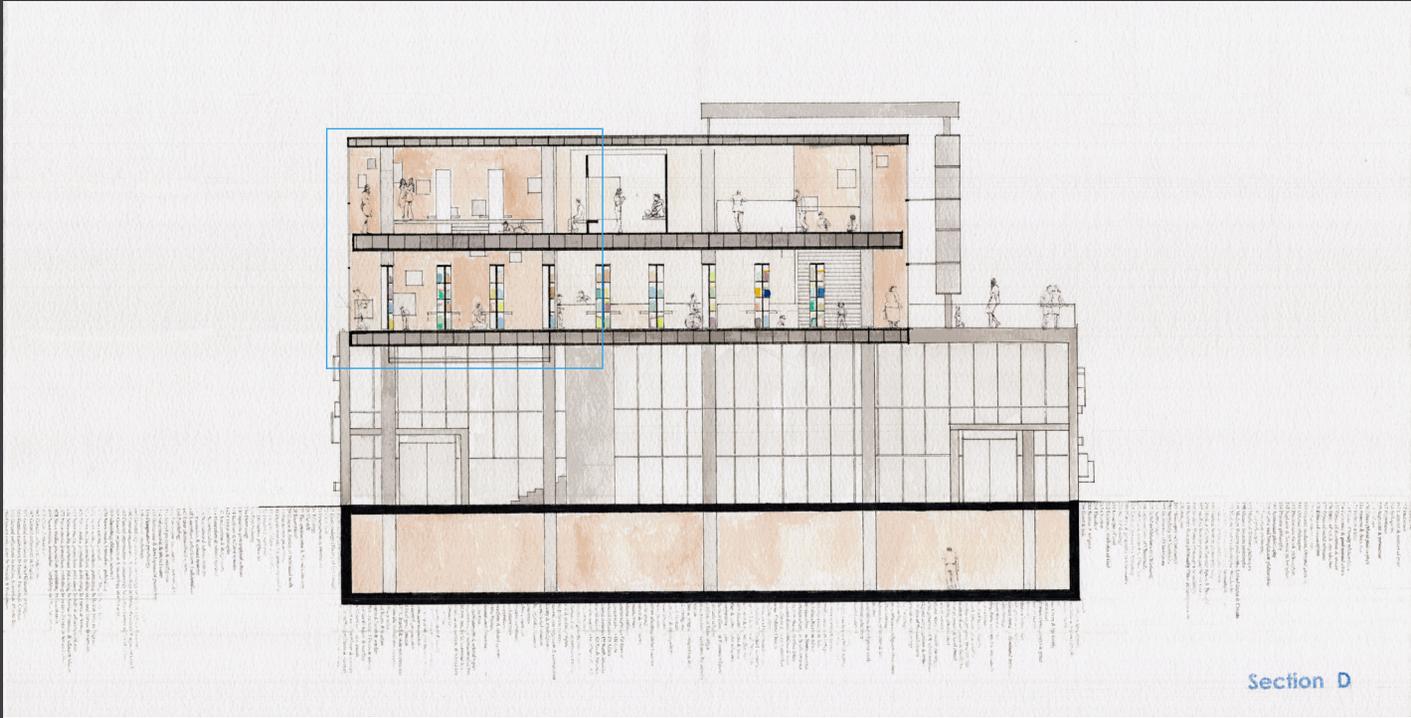
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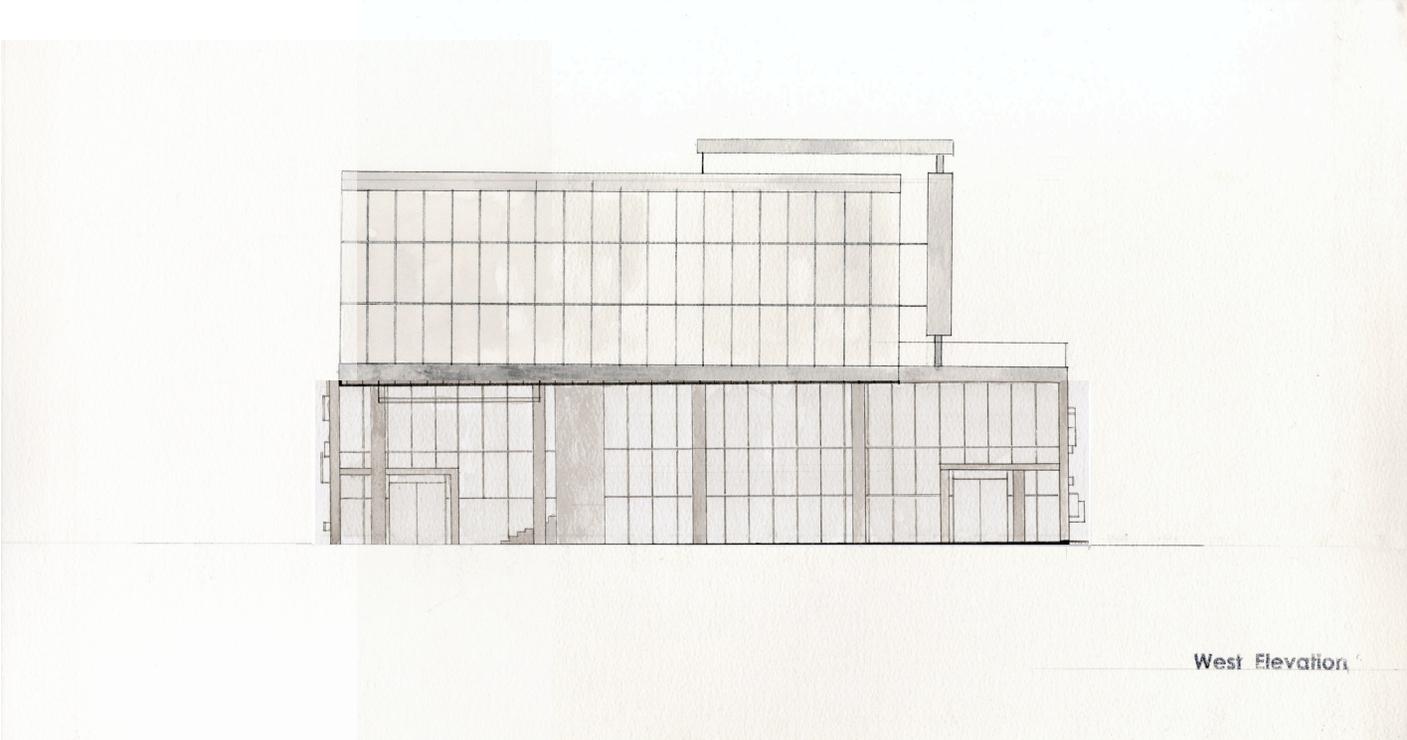


BUILDING



BUILDING

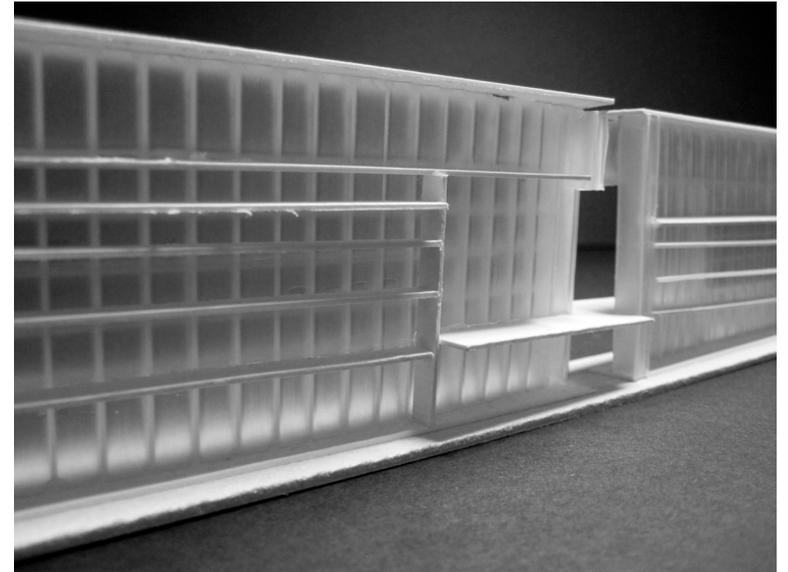




MORE BEGINNINGS

The beginnings from the early part of the thesis project seemed dissonant at the time, but each were crucial to the development of the design. They remained a touchstone to return to and explore during moments of inertia. The conclusion to the questions they posed comes in the form of a building, but the real result was the generation of more questions or more beginnings.

The evolution of technology and its increased impact on daily life became a larger factor in the thesis project as time progressed. The opportunity to design a library for a world where information is becoming decentralized could result in a model where other building types or programs could benefit. Ultimately adaptability became a priority while designing a library brought about the question of "do we really need all of this space for books?" Which is a parallel question to one that may come in the future "do we really need all this space for people?" In both cases, the answer is yes, but it may require a new and creative approach that differs from designs of the past.



"We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time".

T.S. Eliot

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- 2 p.2 Vredenburg Music Center, photograph. *Lessons for Students in Architecture* p. 201
- 3 p.2 Vredenburg Music Center, section. *Lessons for Students in Architecture* p. 202
- 4 p.3 House in a Plum Grove, plan. *Houses: Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa* p. 40
- 5 p.3 House in a Plum Grove, photograph. <http://www.japan-architect.co.jp/english/2maga/ja/ja0065/works/103.html>
- 6 p.3 Untitled (Dancer), assemblage. *Joseph Cornell: Master of Dreams* p. 111
- 7 p.3 Untitled (Paul and Virginia), assemblage. *Joseph Cornell: Master of Dreams* p.56
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- 9 p.5 Boston Public Library, photograph. *For the Love of Libraries* p.8
- 10 p.14 Existing Land Use, map. <http://dpw.dc.gov/DC/Planning/DC+Data+and+Maps>
- 11 p.15 H Street NE between 12th and 13th Streets, aerial photograph. <http://maps.google.com>
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