



Reading a Place
by Daniela Bueter

Thesis submitted to the faculty
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for the degree of

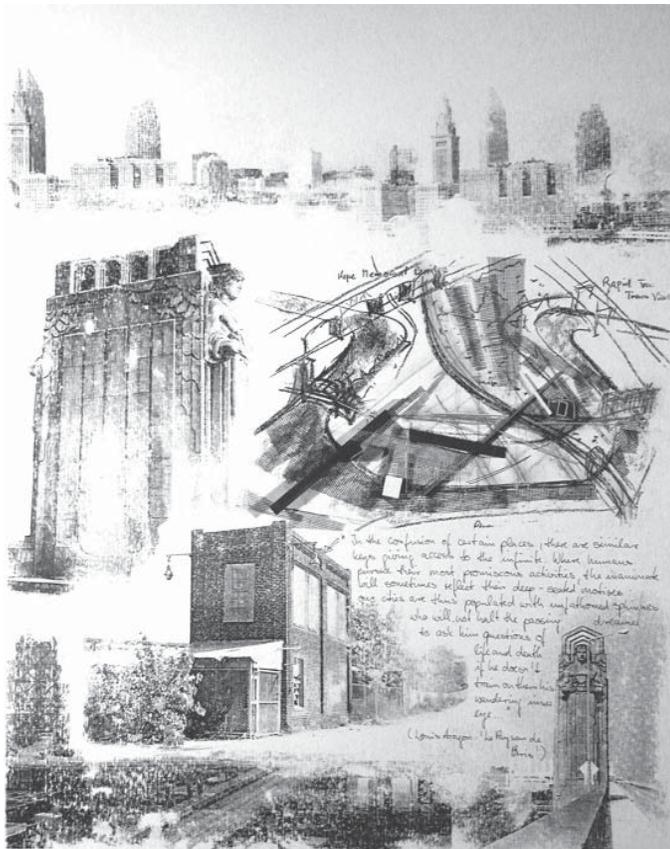
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

Professor Heinrich Schnoedt
Chairman

Professor William Galloway

Professor H. Scott Gartner

August 9, 2002
Blacksburg, Virginia



"The street, which I imagined might communicate to my life its surprises and detours, the street with its disturbances and its glances, was my one true element. There I partook, as nowhere else, of the wind of circumstance."

(Louis Aragon: "Le Paysan de Paris")

reading a place

A series of chance encounters with the city of Cleveland leads to a non-objective reading of this place . It is an intuitive approach, an attempt to understand the complexity of a city in fragments and to change the city's perception of itself.

This thesis is a reciprocal play between conceiving and creating, revealing their close interrelation. It is an inquiry into how our imagination transforms our built and not-built environment.

To be an architect is to dwell at the interface between the imaginary and the real, to draw from both worlds.

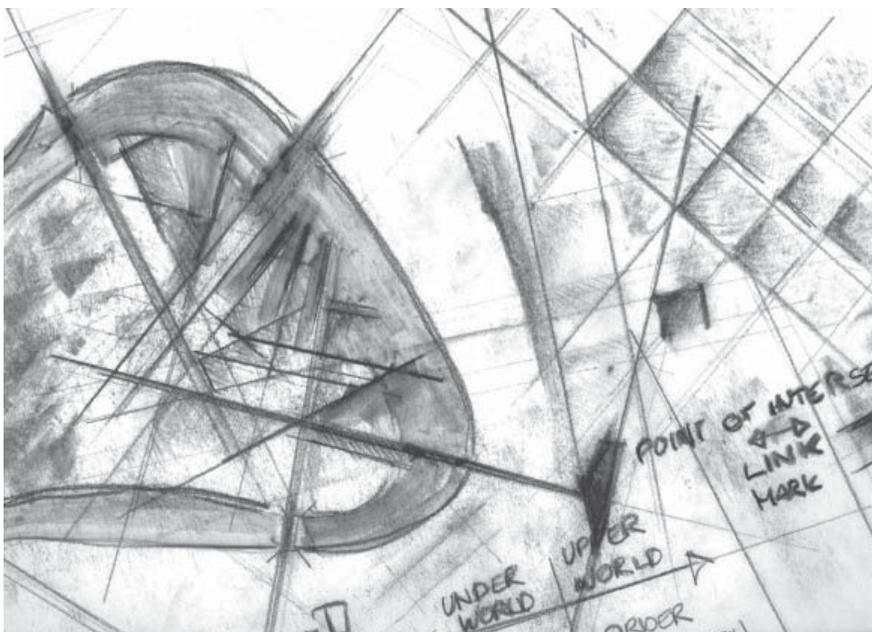
dedication

This book is dedicated

to my mother and father, who brought me up in a very
imaginative, supportive and loving way,
to my sister, with whom I shared my imaginary worlds from
early childhood on.

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crossing the boundaries



"Architecture is the visible expression of how a specific historical-cultural era shapes its space and boundaries between the inside and the outside."

(Robert D. Romanyshyn: "Technology as Symptom and Dream")

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I believe that architecture can as well be defined as an expression of how we shape the space inside of our heads and draw boundaries between the interior of our minds and the external world.

Architecture oscillates between the imaginary and the real.



The environment changes by association and interpretation.

The way we approach a place-how we perceive and understand it- is a central element of reflection.

Our understanding determines how we shape and constantly re-shape our environment.

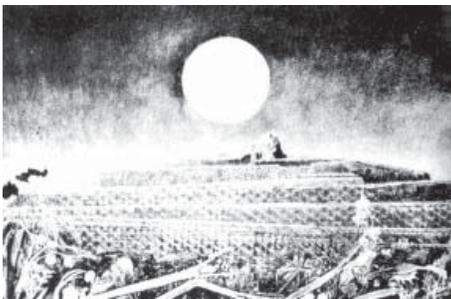
A city can be a magical space conducive to a non-objective vision of the world. Buildings are interlocked into the urban fabric and its complexity of meanings. Wandering through the streets without plan or purpose can result in a sequence of surprising encounters and unleash chains of association.

The Surrealists understood very well the crisis of modern culture from the inside and were able to challenge it on the territories beyond pure thought. They tried to reconstruct a qualitative universe as opposed to the positivistic world of quantities.

The Surrealists had an interest in extraordinary every-day phenomena and studied rituals, myths, dreams, hallucinations, objective chance and madness.

The primary goal of surrealism was to reach an absolute point of reconciliation of **dream and reality** in order to find authentic life. The Surrealists believed in the existence of a key that opens the **secret corridor** to the **mystery of life**.

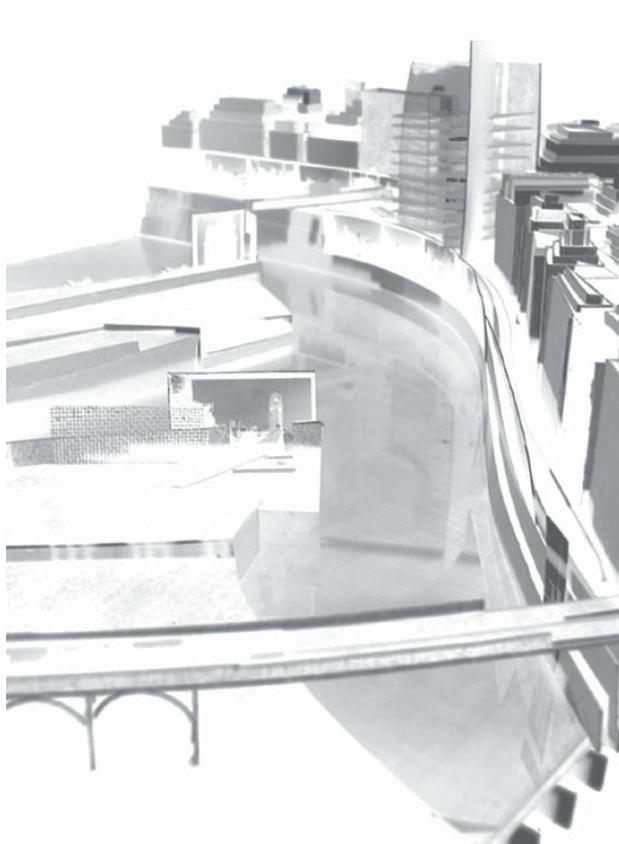
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Max Ernst: 'The Elastic City'



Max Ernst: 'The Forrest'



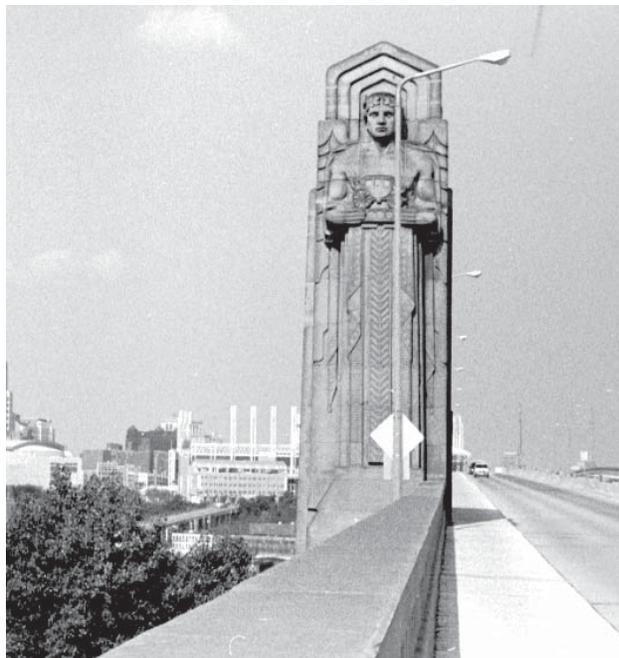
The Surrealists looked for imaginary ways of disrupting the given, conventional reality. However, Surrealism was much more than a mosaic of provocative revelations, more than merely a method of inquiry. The Surrealists believed that there is a profound meaning in the **absurdity of life** and that this absurdity could be transmitted into art. They were seeking to **create a new myth**.

The Surrealists' approach to a city as well as to architecture was entirely poetic. To them the city was a world that allowed a **maximum freedom of movement and possibilities**.

"Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?...I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of reality, a surreality..."

(Andre Breton: "First Manifesto of Surrealism")

In his book 'Le Paysan de Paris' Louis Aragon gives a collection of loosely drawn tales in which a character wanders through the streets of Paris. Locations change abruptly and are sometimes imaginary. It is a sequence of chance encounters and mysterious events.



*" I must make painful effort to **shake off this mental habit** so that my mind, as would seem natural, can credit what my body sees and touches...
Is the knowledge that is derived from reason entitled to oppose, even for an instant, the knowledge of our senses?..."*



*...In the confusion of certain places, there are similar keys giving access to the infinite. Where humans pursue their most promiscuous activities, the inanimate will sometimes reflect their deep-seated motives: our cities are thus populated with unfathomed **sphinxes** who will not halt the passing dreamer to ask him questions of life and death if he doesn't train on them his wandering inner eye...*

(Louis Aragon: "Le Paysan de Paris")



A collage to the Surrealists was a means of reaching two distant realities and showing a spark of their proximity.

To me the collage has been the exploitation of chance encounters and startling juxtapositions in my working process.

The existing is sometimes obvious and disclosed, sometimes hidden and encoded. It is always the basis for the new. Reading the existing in different ways has been an inexhaustible source of association for me.

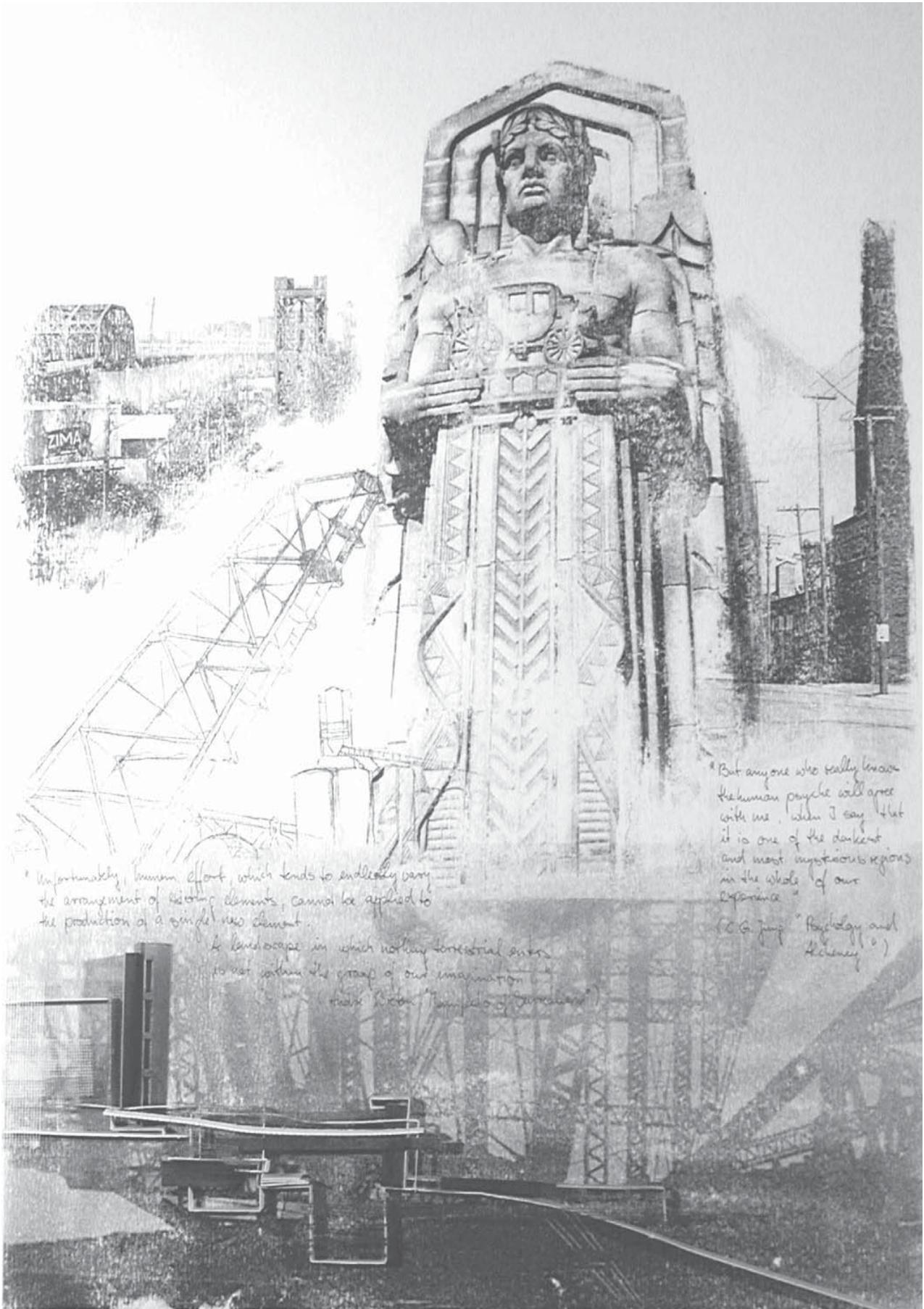
"Each day alters the modern feeling of existence. A mythology takes shape and comes undone. It is a science of life belonging to the innocent, a living science which engenders and kills itself. Am I too old at twenty six, to participate in this miracle? Will my feeling of wonder inherent in commonplace things endure much longer? I see it perishing in men, who advance in years as on a road that levels out, who bend ever more adroitly to the routine of this world, who progressively blunt their taste and flair of the fantastic. My fate, that is what to my despair, I shall never know."

(Louis Aragon: "Le Paysan de Paris")

"...he [the child] likes to link his imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things of the real world."

(Sigmund Freud: "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming")

Escaping the limits of logic and common sense we enter the region of childhood visions and dreams. To understand artistic creativity we might look at children at play. When children play they create imaginary worlds of their own, worlds in which they may become completely absorbed.

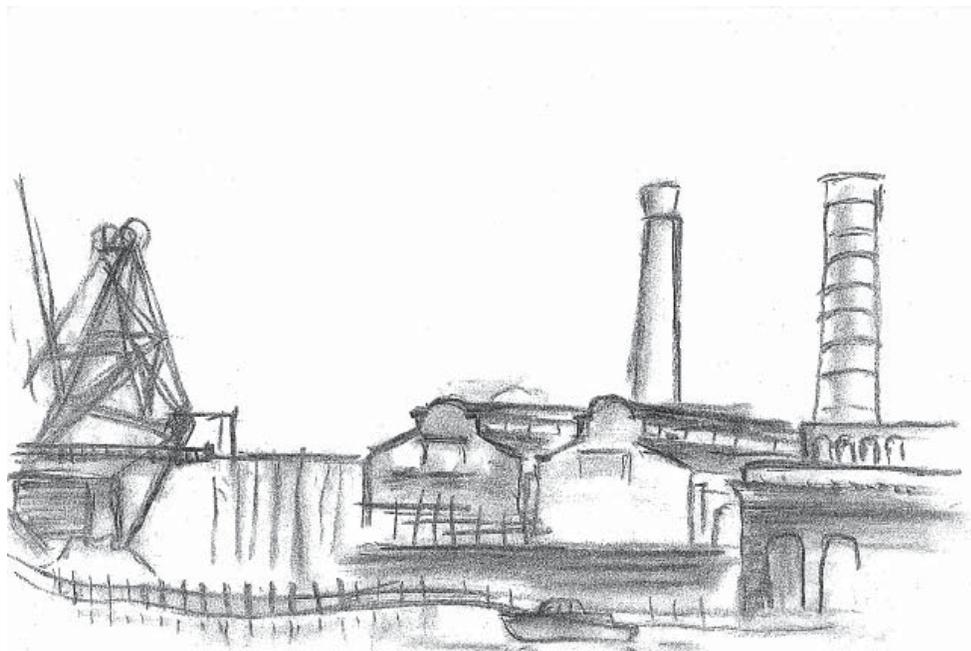


Unfortunately, human effort, which tends to endlessly vary the arrangement of existing elements, cannot be applied to the production of a single new element.

A landscape in which nothing terrestrial enters to act within the range of our imagination (think of the "Temple of Jerusalem")

"But anyone who really knows the human psyche will agree with me, when I say that it is one of the darkest and most mysterious regions in the whole of our experience."

(C.G. Jung "Psychology and Alchemy")



exploring a place

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“To have original, extraordinary, and perhaps even immortal ideas, one has but to isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most commonplace happenings appear to be new and unfamiliar, and in this way reveal their true essence.”

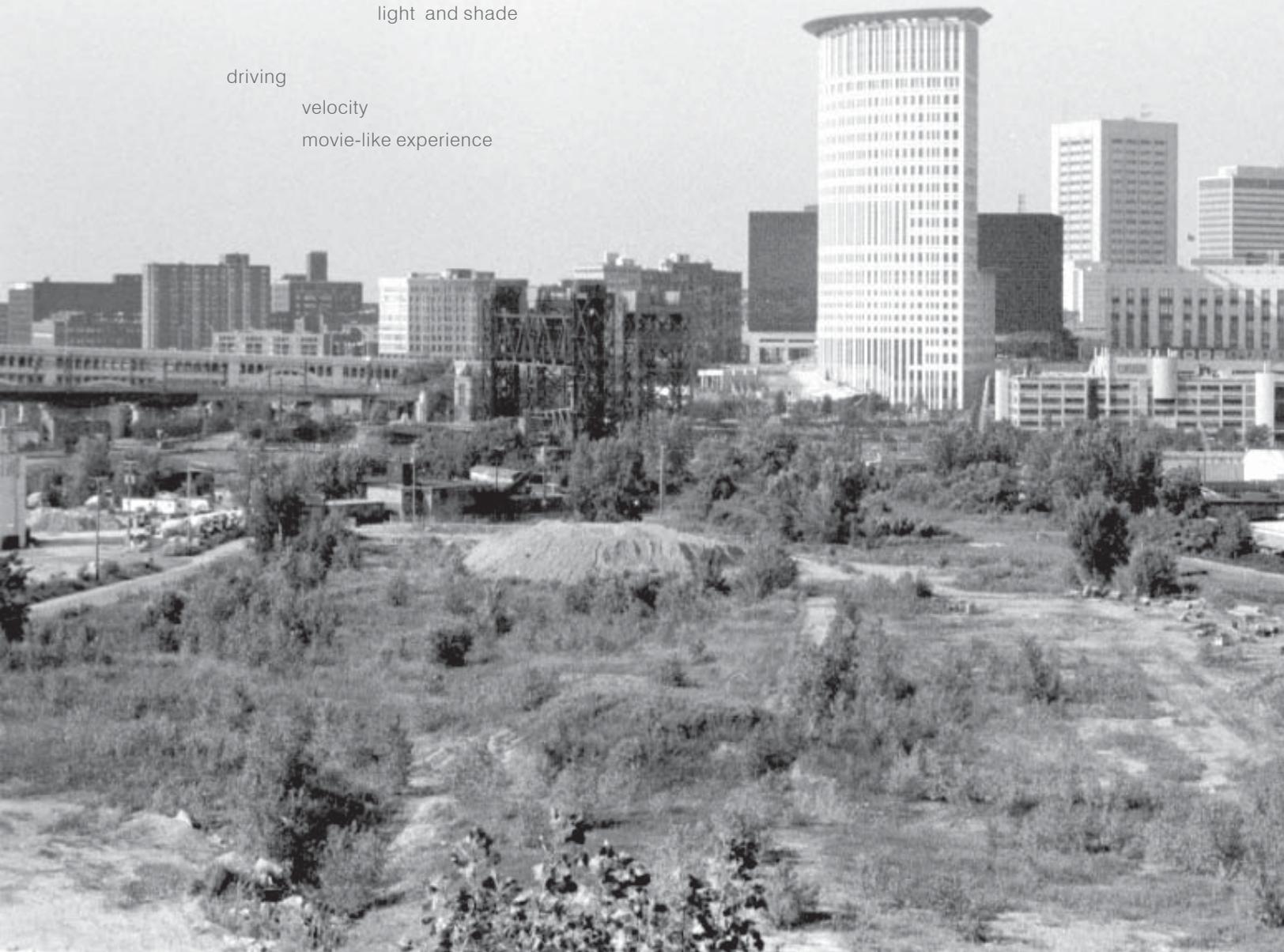
(Arthur Schopenhauer: ‘Parerga and Paralipomena’)



bird's eye's view
distance
detachment
control?

walking
bodily experience
tired legs
exhaustion
being exposed to
 weather, sounds,
 scents,
 light and shade

driving
velocity
movie-like experience





immerse yourself into a place

descend / climb



place as

topography

landscape

everyday culture

place of

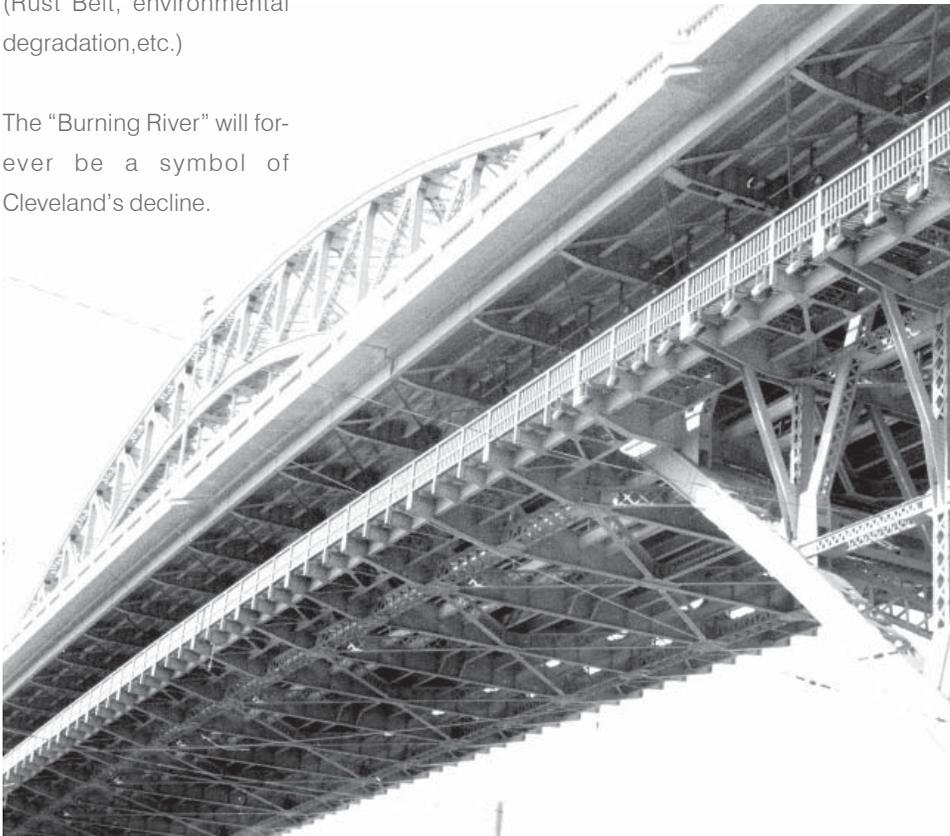
plays

encounters

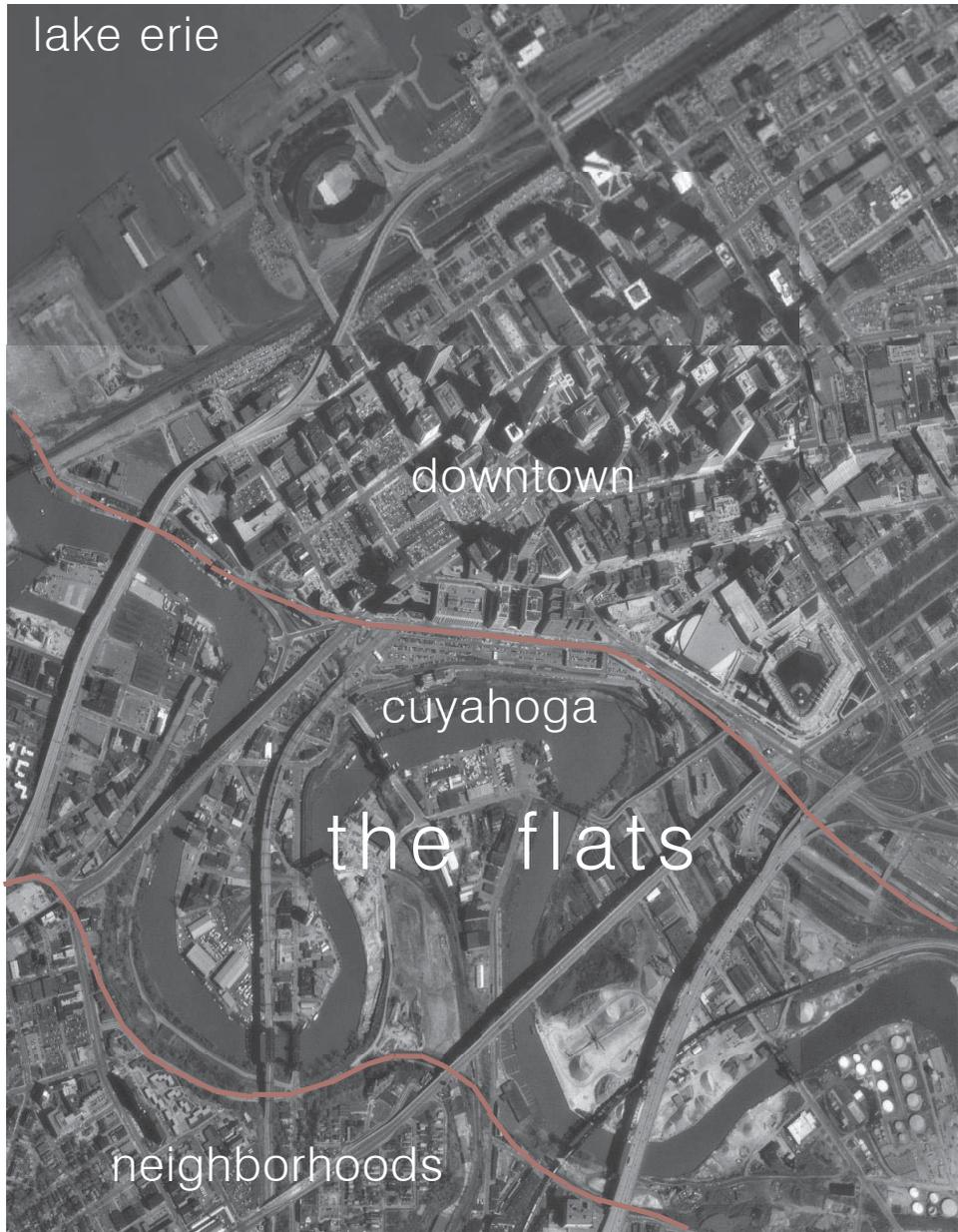
Historically the Flats of Cleveland, Ohio were the transportation and economic hub of the region because of their siting at the northern terminus of the Ohio and Erie Canals.

Decades later, the Industrial Revolution ushered in an era of heavy industry, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution. This activity led to dramatic growth and established Cleveland as a national center of industry and commerce - with all the unwanted consequences (Rust Belt, environmental degradation, etc.)

The "Burning River" will forever be a symbol of Cleveland's decline.



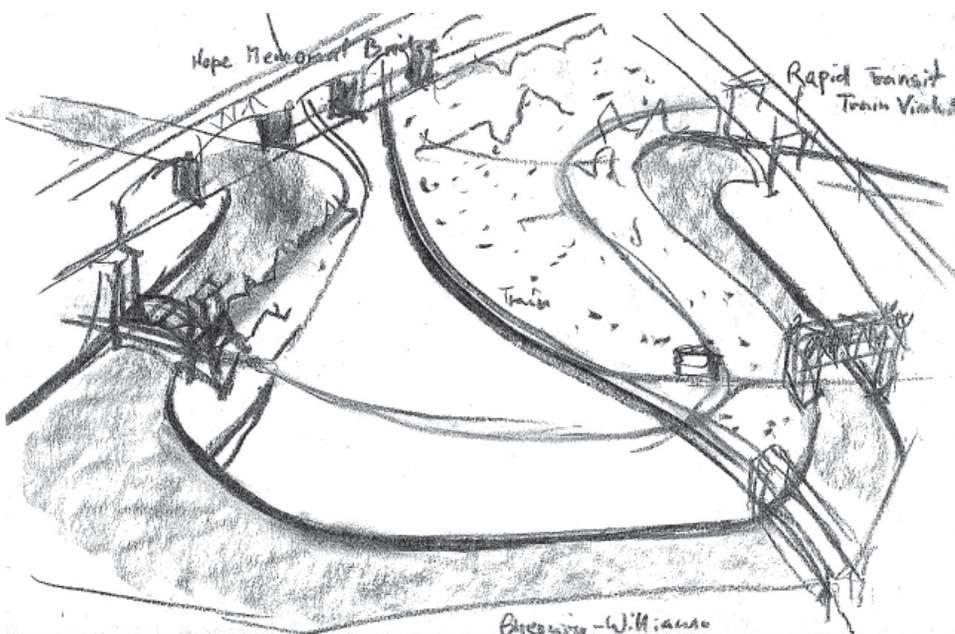
The bridges in the Flats are one of the area's most fascinating features. Nine distinct types of bridges traverse the Cuyahoga including several movable types.



The Flats, a post-industrial wasteland, divide city center and historic neighborhoods.

A spirit of openness and receptivity can be exercised very well in the Flats, being a wide area on the border between the inner city and the outer suburbs and giving an increased sense that 'anything could happen'.

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While wandering through the Flats I made an attempt to lay my consciousness open to a series of impressions:

What do we perceive if we read the city
as dream,
as layers of history,
as poem or play,
as psychic labyrinth,
as organism,
or as a system of signs?

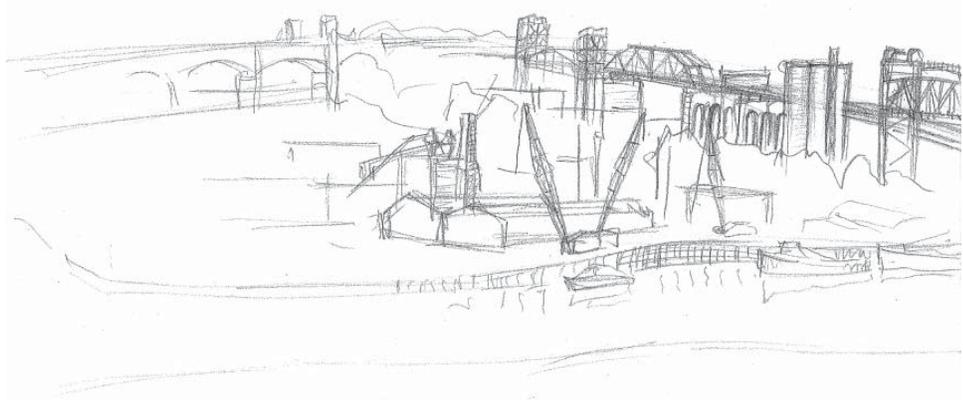


There is a connection between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. Walking down the street, trying to recall something, I automatically slow down.

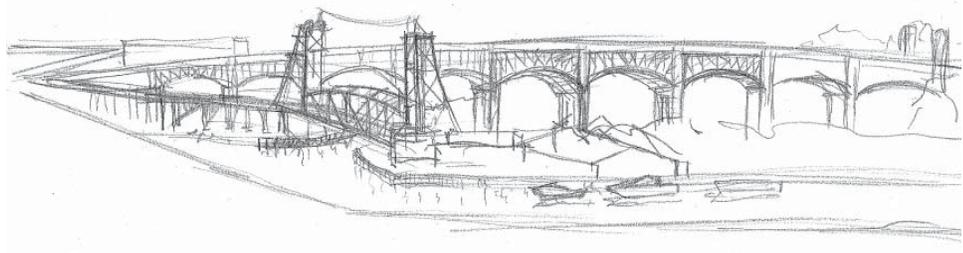
Another time, remembering an unpleasant moment and trying to shake it off, I unconsciously speed up, as if trying to distance myself from a thing still too close to me.

*"The remembrance is above all the site of the memory. Upon this base the memory can unfold itself and call up **fragments** of life, **moments** of happiness and **periods** of time."*

(Andre Breton: "First Manifesto of Surrealism")



collecting fragments



fragment 1

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The city is a vision of connectedness and correspondence, an expression of analogically linked discoveries. It is a space filled with signs I try to decipher on my journey.



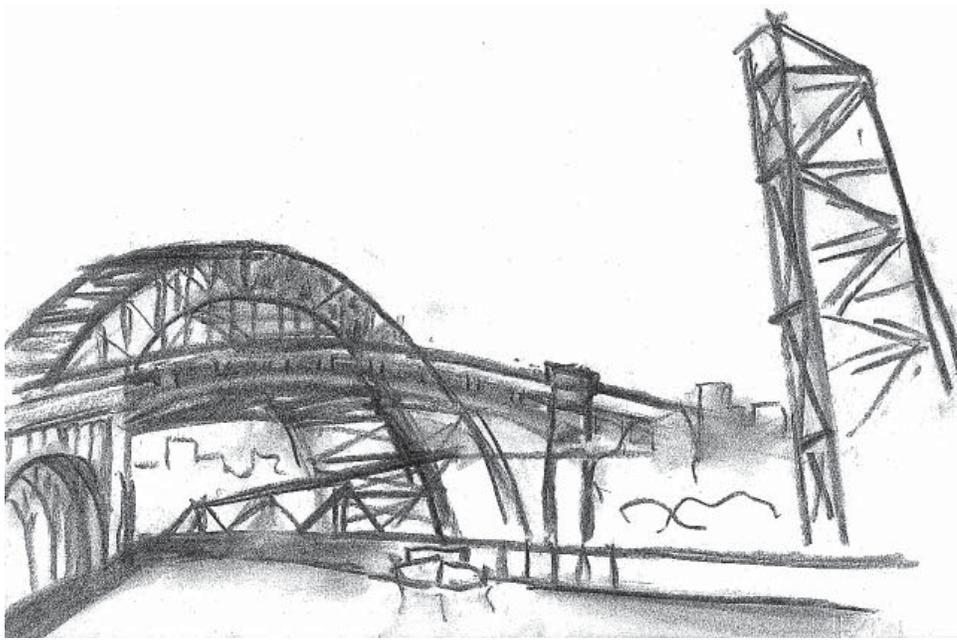
the order of a place

downtown cleveland
upperworld



city founded on a bluff above the cuyahoga river
protection
distance
overview

the grid
orientation
clarity of structure



fragment 2



An overlap and interchange of different experiences result in a labyrinth of connections. To walk down this labyrinth means to simultaneously explore circuits and networks of thoughts, recesses of emotions.

the chaos of a place

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the flats

underworld

the crooked river

labyrinth

secret corridors

brusque transitions

fragments of life

periods of time



fragment 3





The city is a space filled with metaphors of ongoing transformations - the principle of flux.

the potential of a place

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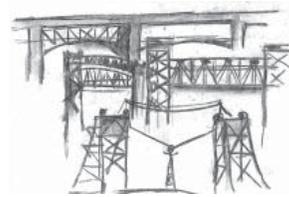
everything is possible
place in flux
constantly changing
unpredictable
forks
bends
perspectives
openess
endlessness

fragment 4





The isolation enforced by the Cuyahoga River gives the Flats a notion of mystery.



the enigma of a place

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a sense of ordinary things in a mysterious void





fragment 5

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The dream-thought is often a kind of thinking in opposites.

An unexpected juxtaposition of 'distant realities' is a source of inspiration.

Heat and blown dust give the place a spectral appearance.

the melancholy of a place

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light and haze

twilight zone

the suggestive
presence of
hidden things

fragment 6





The industrial remnants give an increased sense of the individual's loneliness in an indifferent world.

the silence of a place

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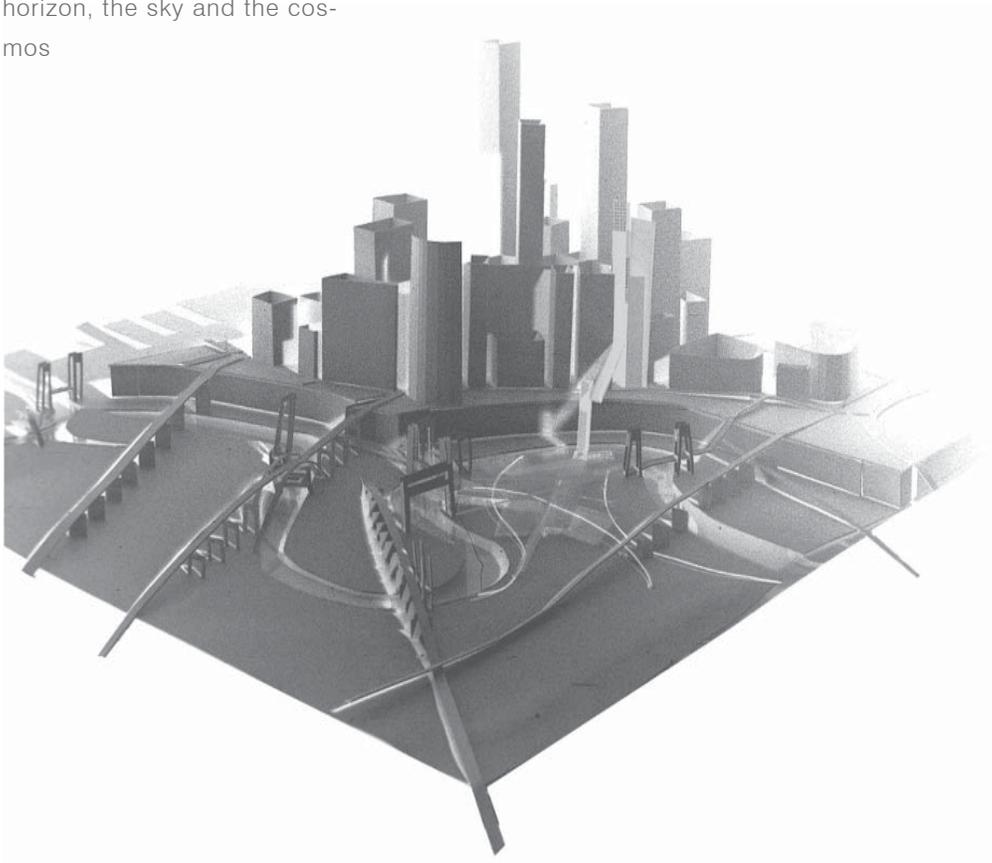
wasted and
left behind
collision
collapse
confusion

following the circum-
stance
reaching dead ends
chance encounters
surprising vistas and
perspectives

upperworld

the external world

the totality of things and events which exist outside the ego - the world with its landscapes, cities, houses, streets, squares and gardens, the things, the horizon, the sky and the cosmos



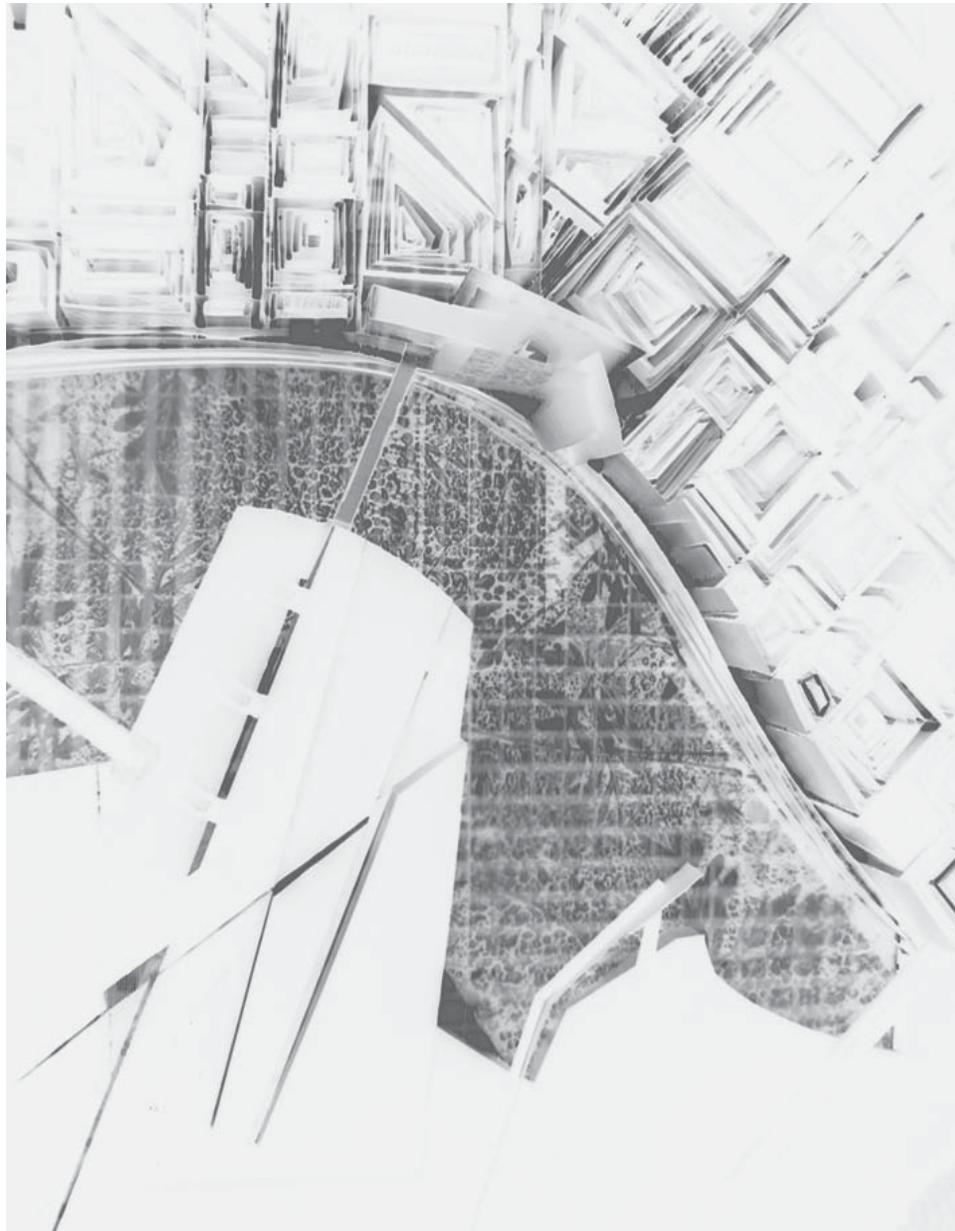
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underworld

the inner world

the space inside of the head of each ego is completely inside and invisible to other human beings

a dark, imaginary cave as large as the universe with floating islands of consciousness, with paths, corridors and labyrinths, with sequences of dark and light rooms interconnected, with thoughts, sentences and voices



threshold

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a place that is situated at the **interface** between the **inner world** of the ego and the **exterior space** of the world

a place at the **threshold** between **underworld** and **upperworld**

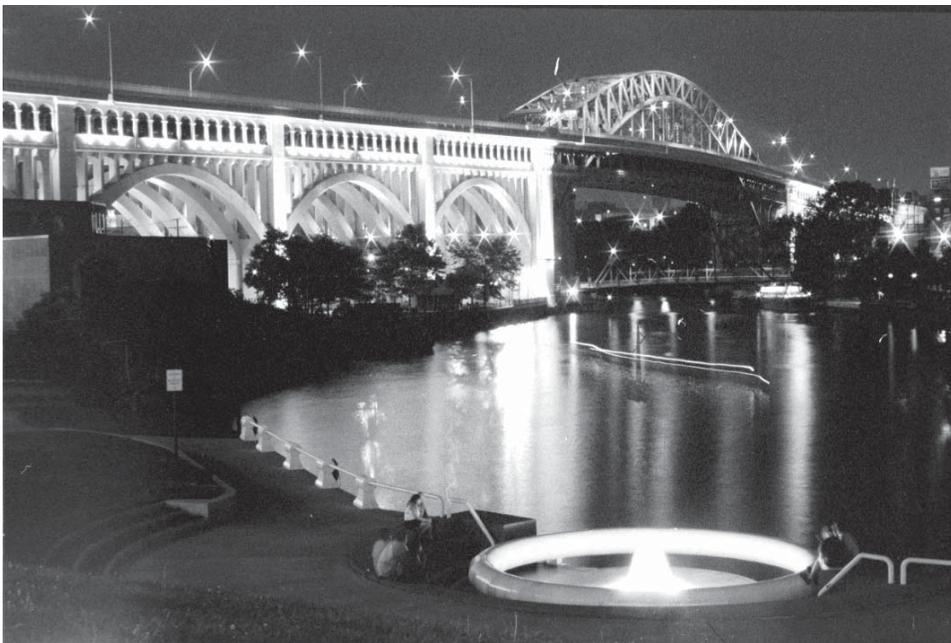
bridge - threshold - link

a place where glances of the **inner chaos** are rendered visible

outward glances, inward glances

a place of **insights** and **panoramas**

a transitional state between **conceiving** and **creating**

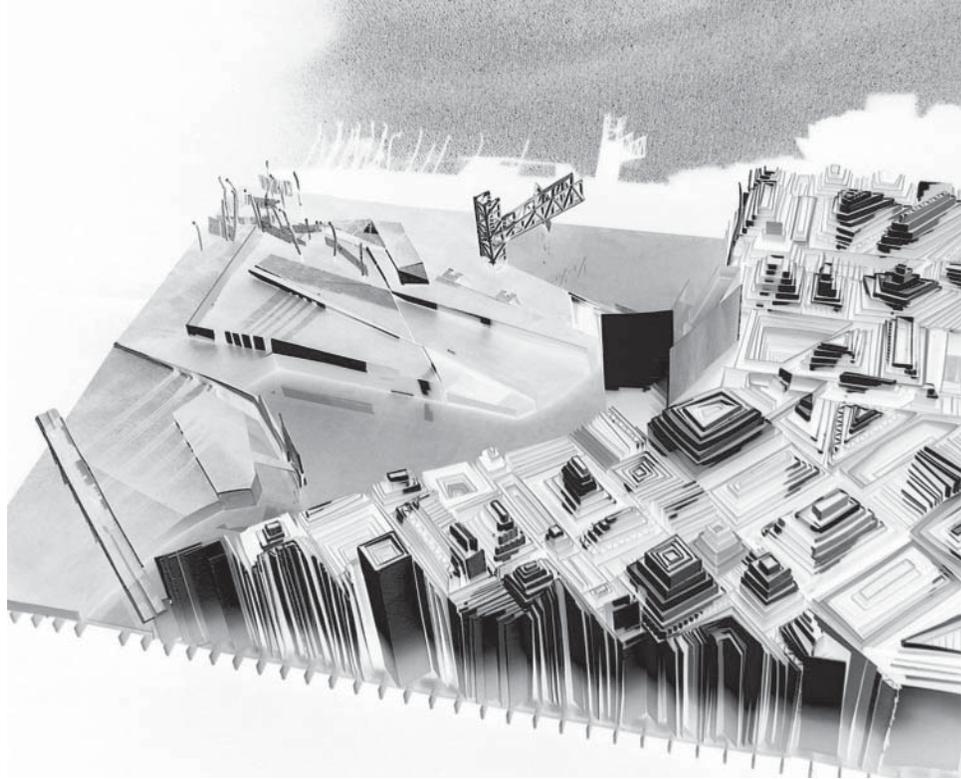


reading a city

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"Within the twilight zone of the memories one can find the emblems of a mythical theatre. It is a distant, eccentric theatre, whose stage is as estranged from life as an island full of spirits which materialise themselves under the cover of darkness. The night is the climate of theatre as mythology."

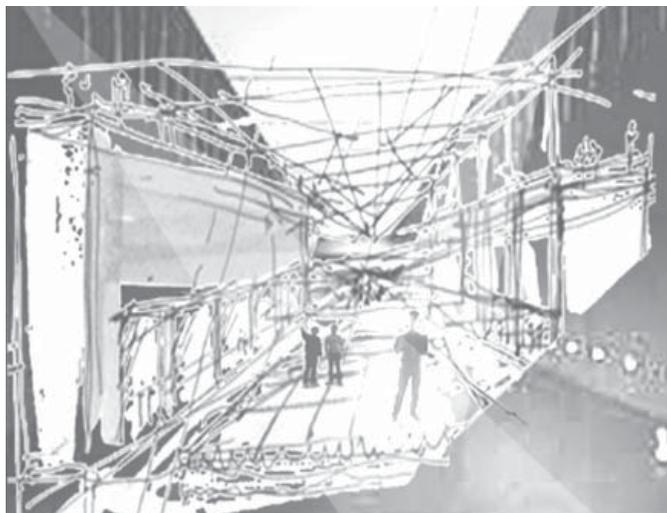
(Andre Breton: 'First Manifesto of Surrealism')



moving - remaining still
performing - registering
presenting - grasping
interpreting - understanding

city as theatrical space

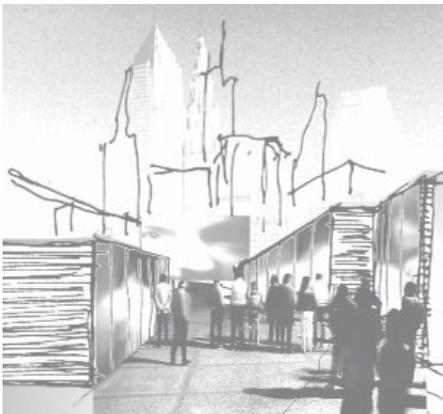
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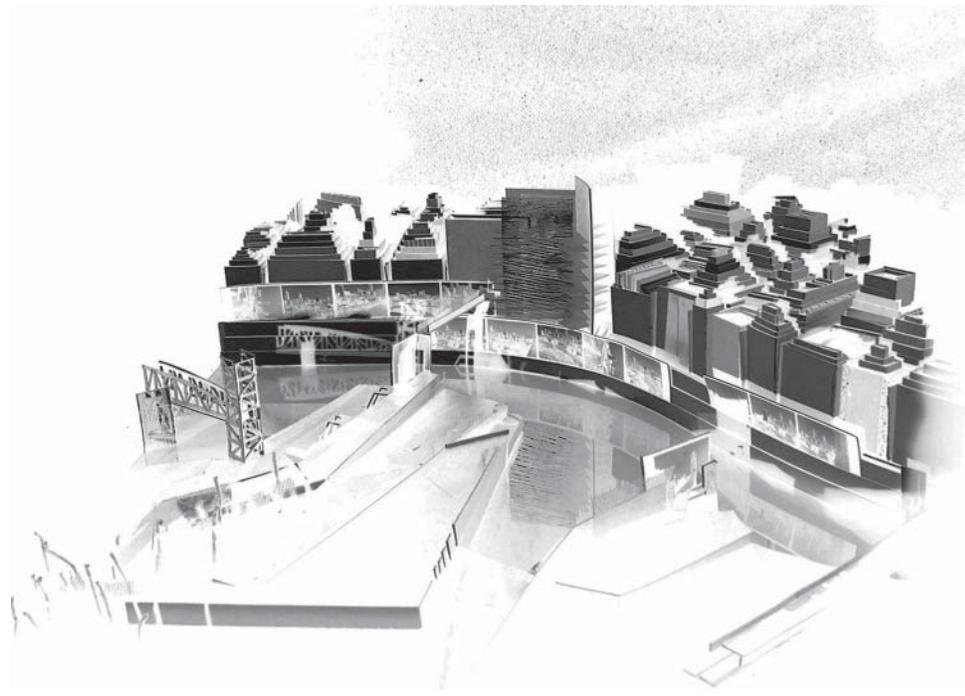


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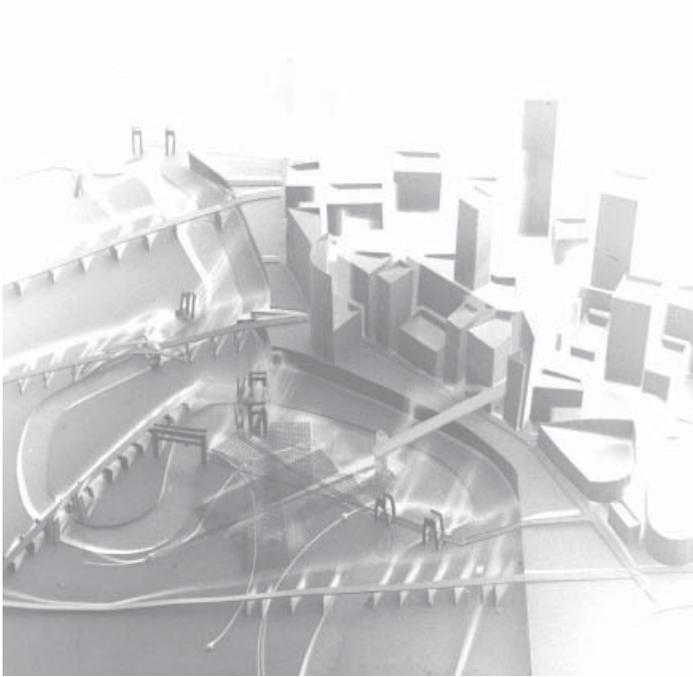
"The street [is a] rectangular stage set where encounters, gossip, games, fights, jealousies, courtship, and displays of pride occur."



(Aldo Rossi: "The Architecture of the City")



city as theatrical space



transforming a place

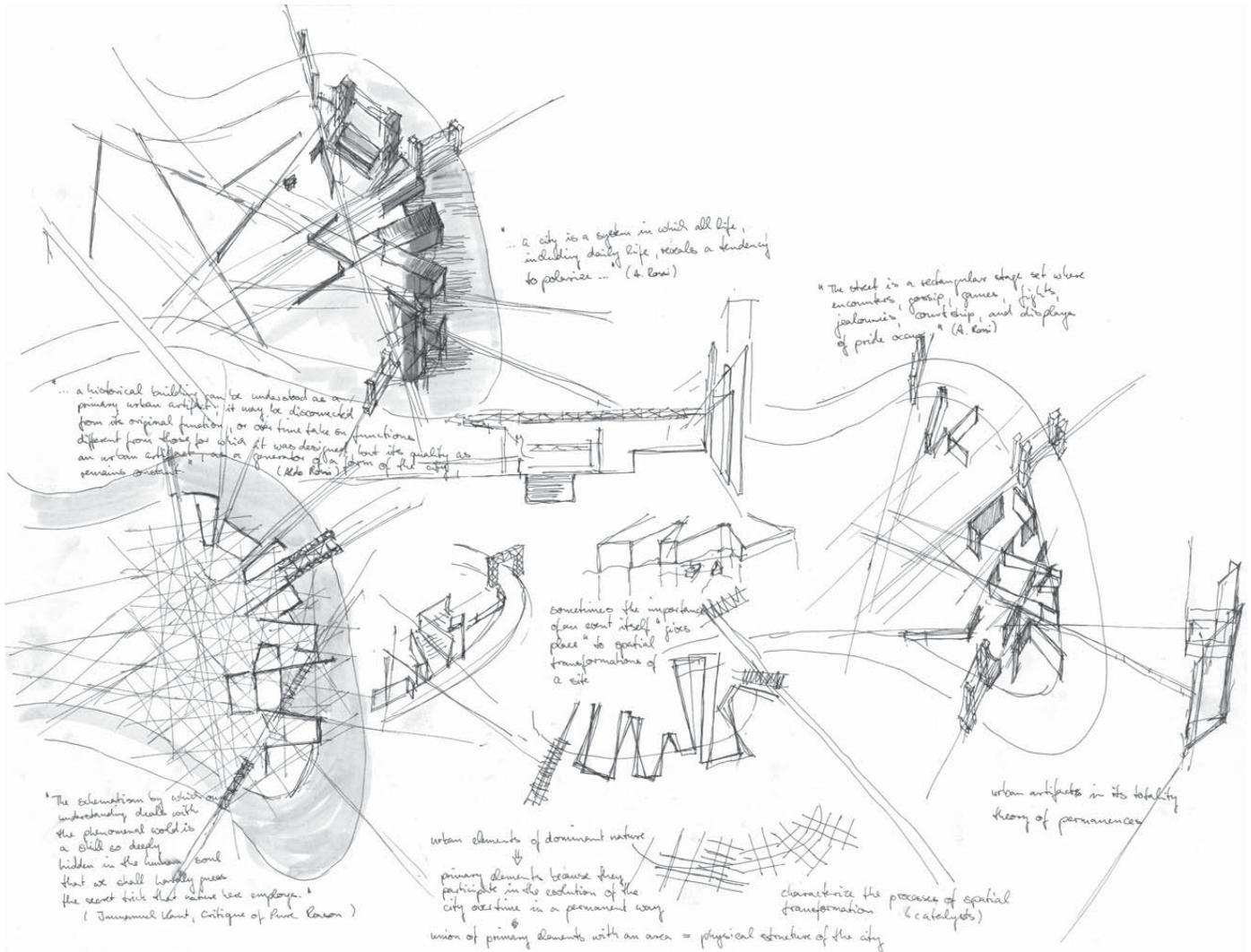
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"New myths are born beneath each of our steps. The legend originates where man has lived, where he is living. I want to reflect on nothing but these spurned transformations."

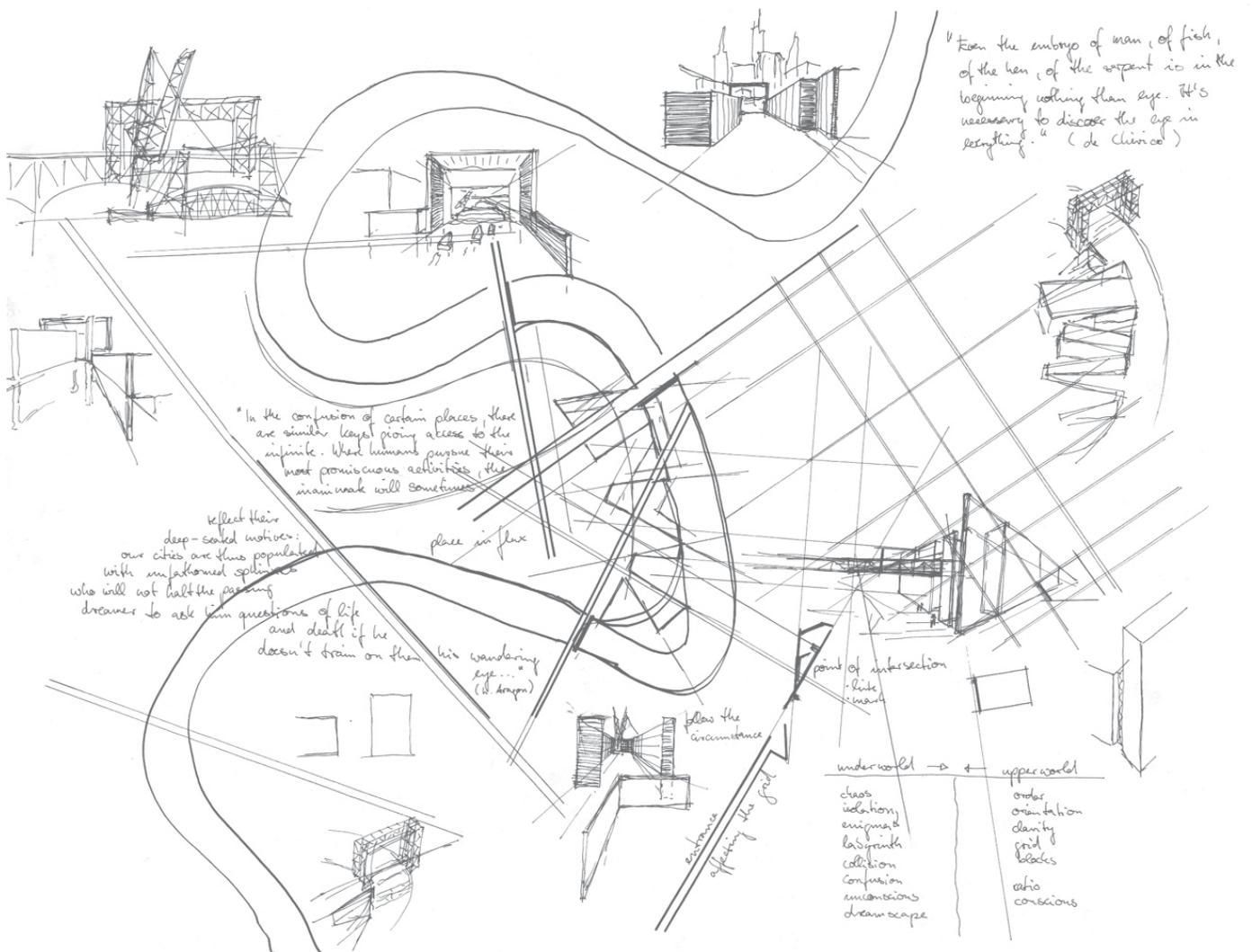
(Louis Aragon: "Le Paysan de Paris")

The discovery of a new beginning in an existing space acts like a **VACUUM** permitting stories to flow into it.

Emptiness is one of the essential spaces of theatre.



The beginning of the design process is an unexplicable act. Some ideas spring from my reading of the place.



A close interconnection of water and land (indentations and piers) characterizes the new landscape. Industrial remnants and moving bridges (partly still active) become an integral part of it. The goal is to enhance rather than take away the unique features of the Flats by juxtaposing the existing and the new.

The Inner world - Underworld

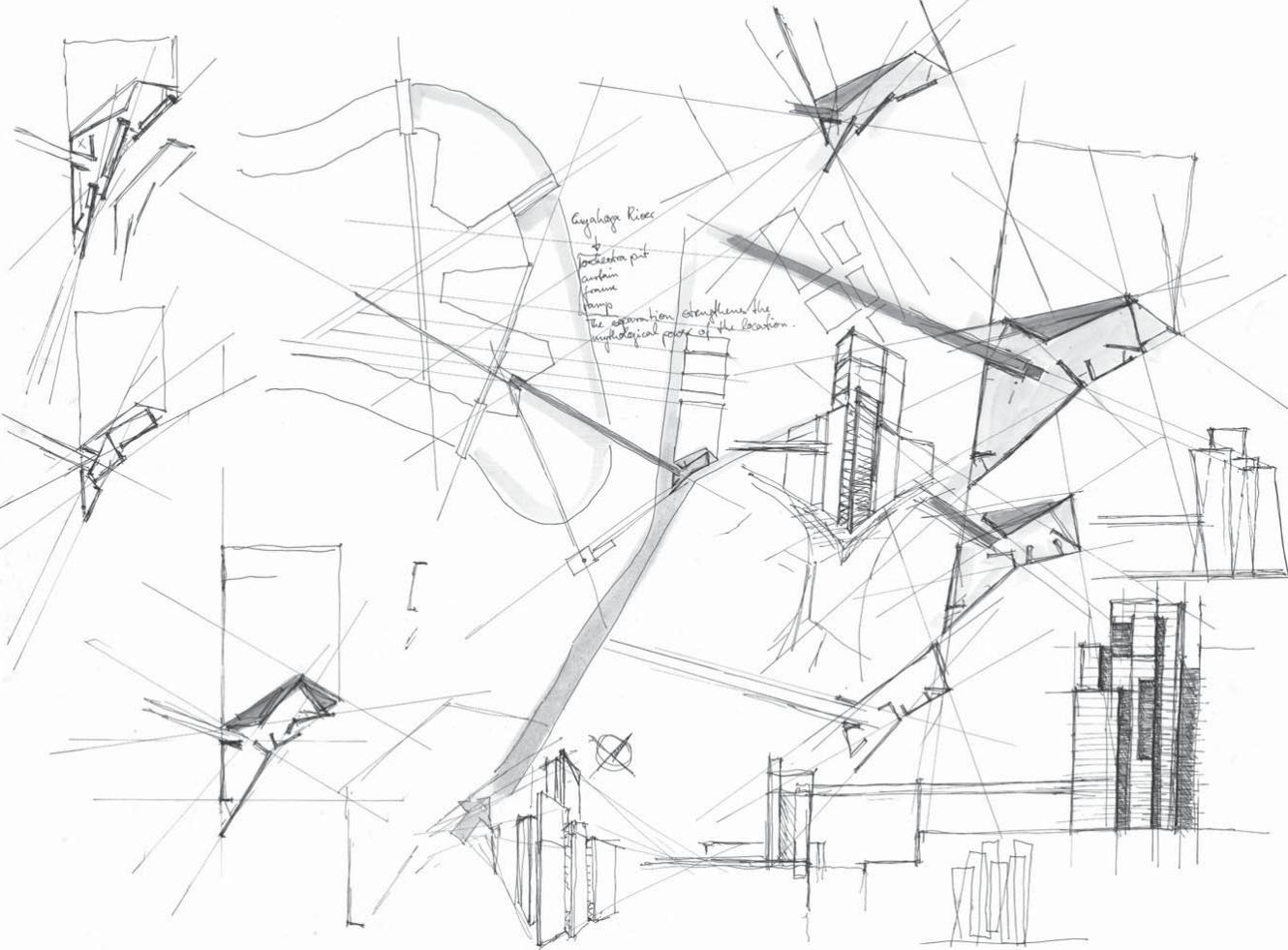
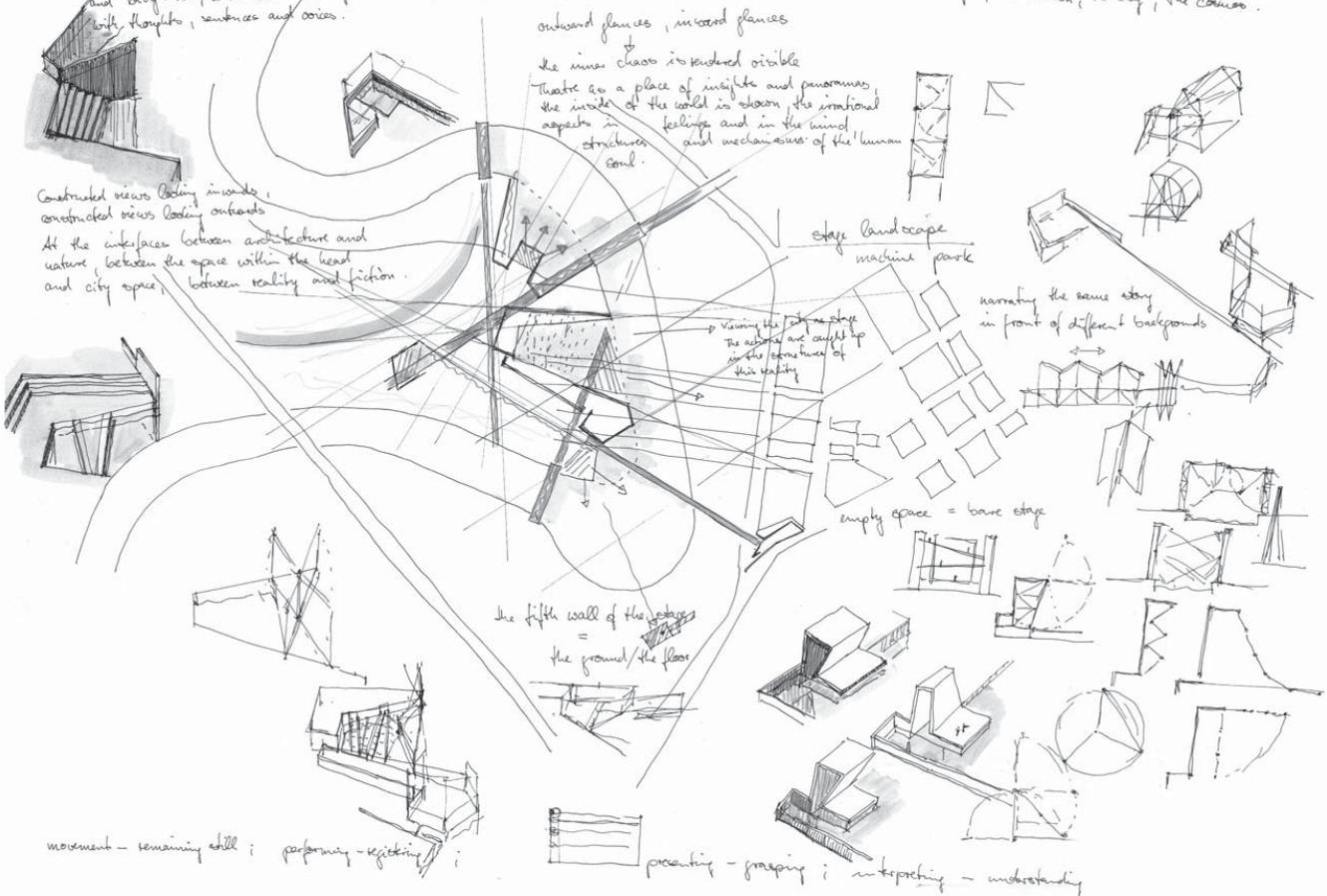
The space inside the head of each ego is completely inside and invisible to other human beings. A dark imaginary cave as large as the universe with floating islands of consciousness, with paths, corridors and obstructions, with dark and light suites of rooms, with thoughts, sentences and voices.

The Theatre

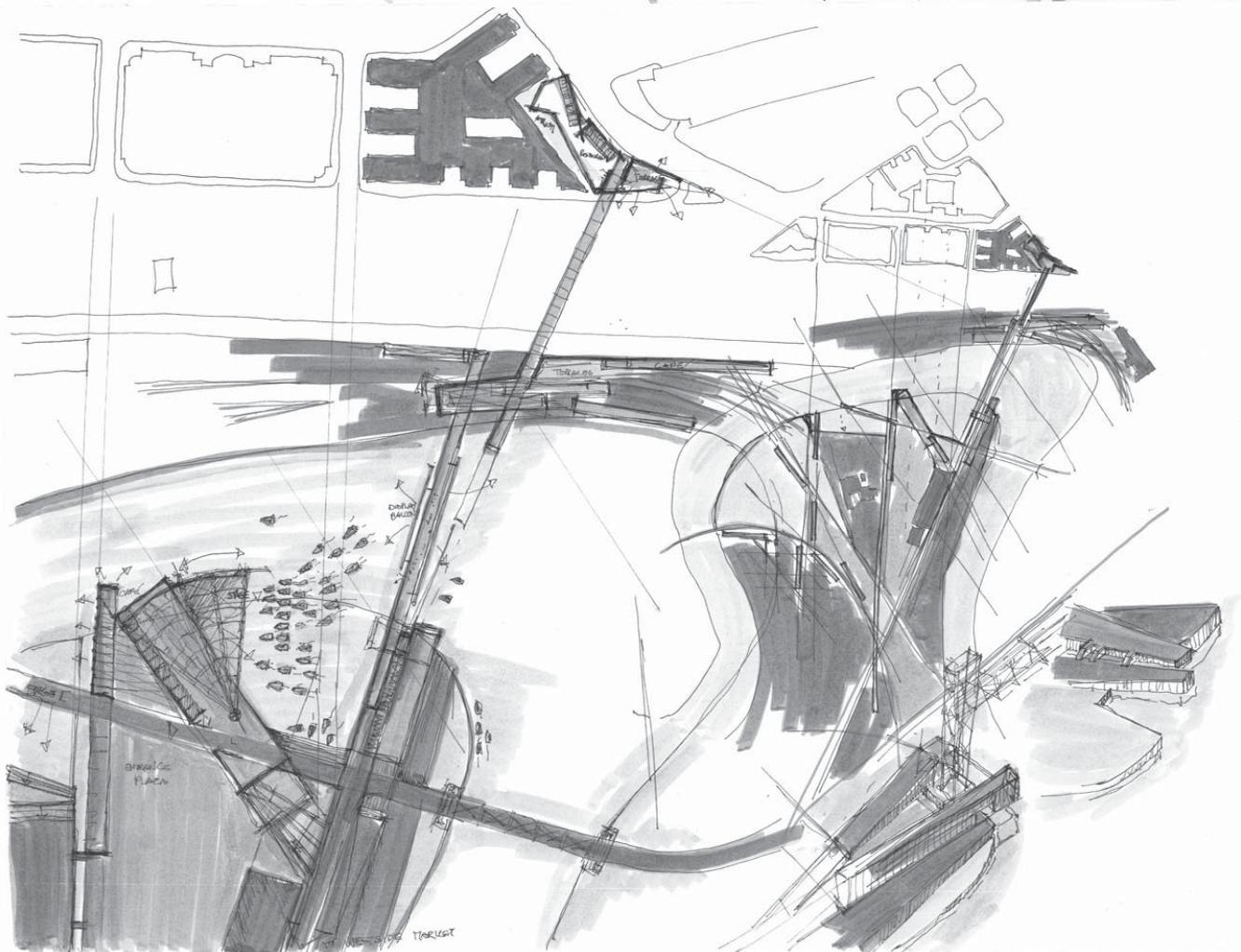
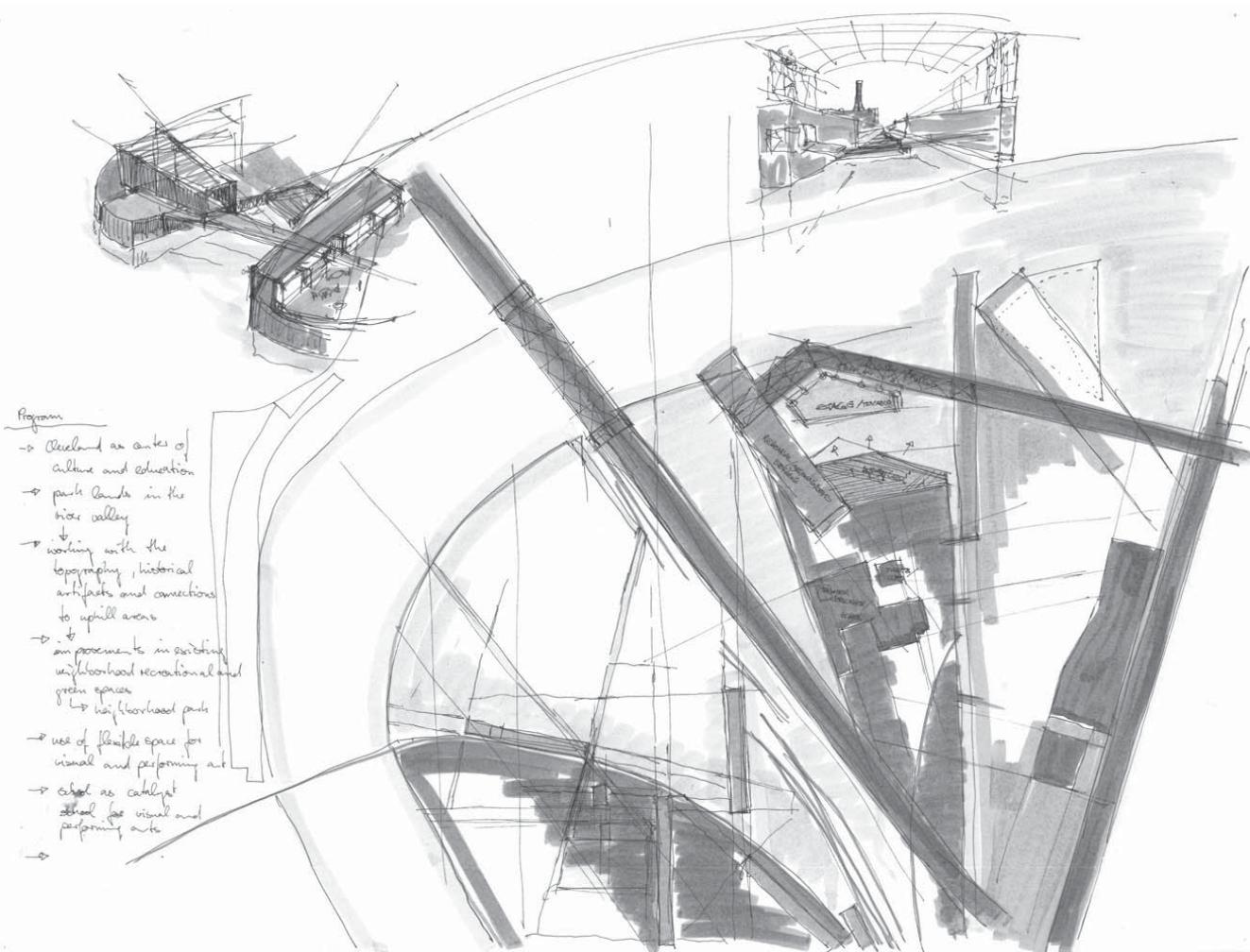
The theatre is situated at the interface between the inner world of the ego and the exterior space of the world, the interconnection between the two worlds.

The External World - Upper world

The totality of things and events, which exist outside the ego. The world with its landscapes, cities, houses, streets, squares and gardens, the things, the horizon, the sky, the cosmos.



The movable bridges of the Flats remind me of a theatre's stage-machinery . Industrial settings have inspired performing artists before. The Cuyahoga River seems to be the orchestra pit between the Flats and the City.



The separation and isolation of the Flats through the Cuyahoga is enforced by the topography of the place. Downtown Cleveland, sitting on a bluff, rules over the area almost ignoring the industrial wasteland at its feet. A connection is necessary to revitalize the Flats.



city as theatrical space



1

theatre landscape (vertical)
school for performing arts
school as catalyst

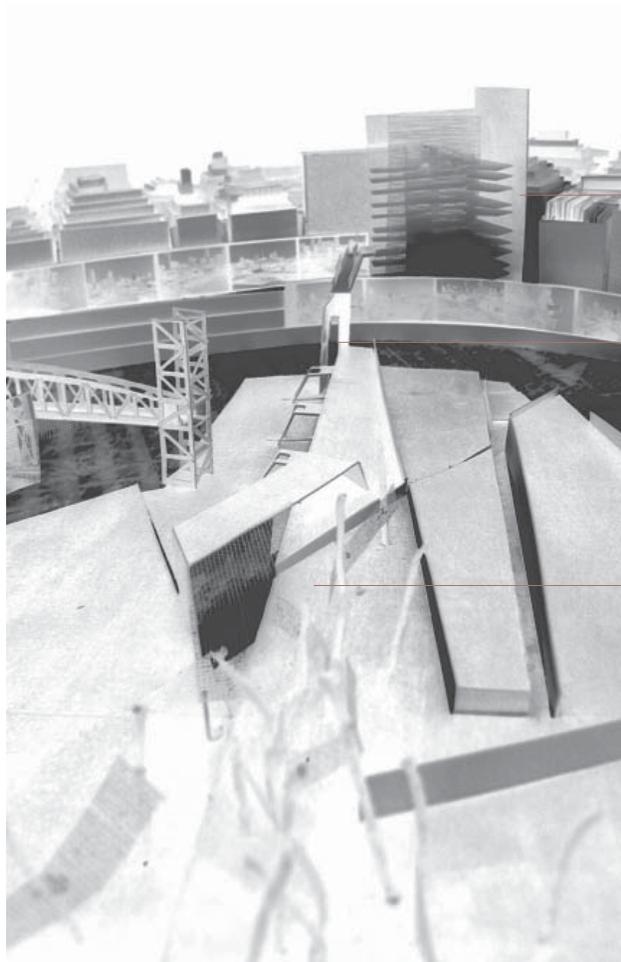
2

threshold

activate the in-between
bridges connecting downtown/school for performing arts with theatre park in the flats

3

theatre landscape (horizontal)
theatre park
recreational and cultural living spaces



1



2



3



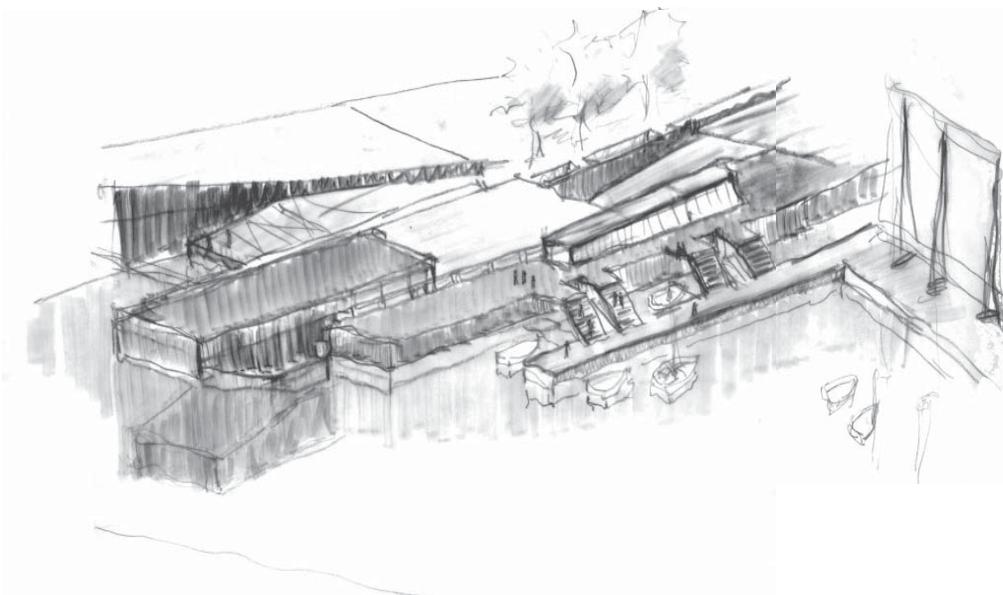
In the glacial epoch the drifting earth crust created folds and plateaus . The moving ice-masses of this period carried gravel, sand, clay and boulders. Cleveland's bluff is a result of this movement.

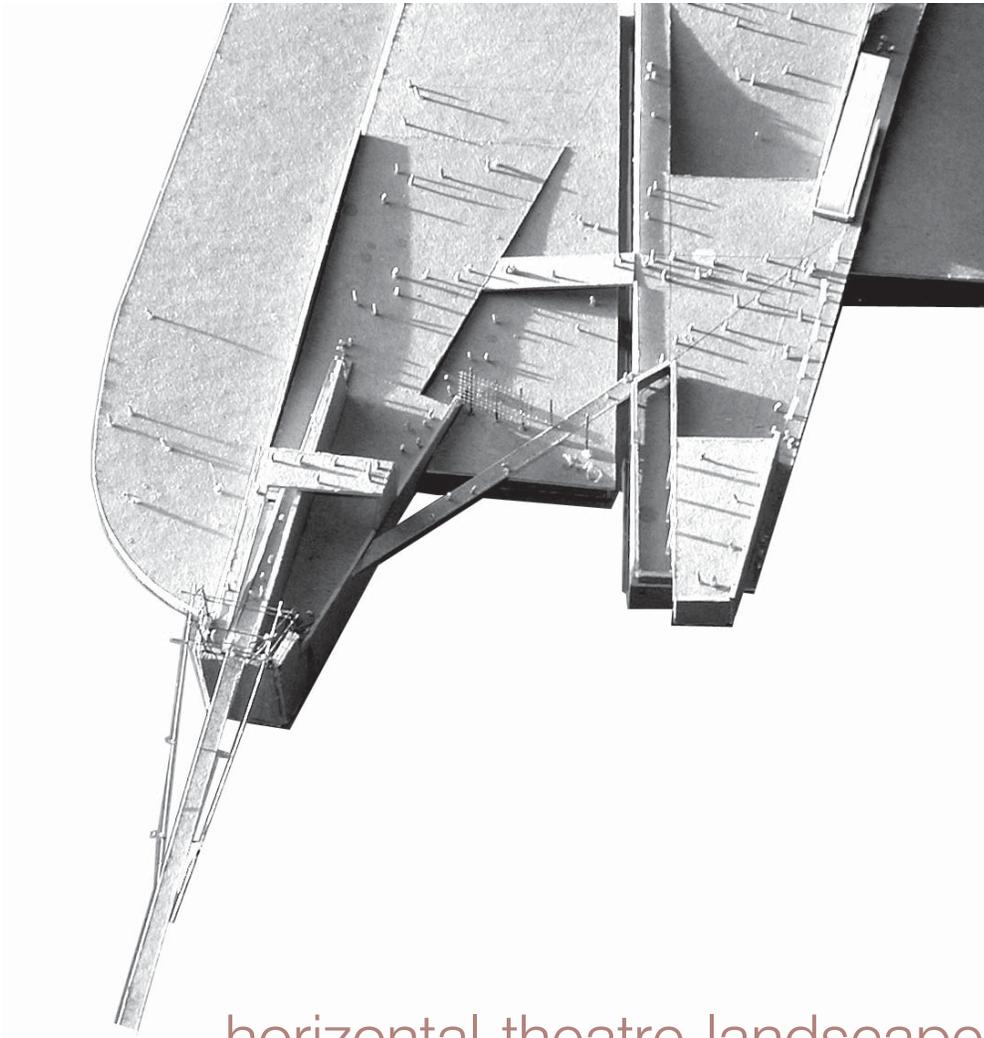
Over a period of ten-thousand years, the valley was cut by running water, forming the Cuyahoga River.

The **shifting earth masses** generated plateaus on different levels. As the **cutting water**, plateaus are features that determine the new architectural landscape. A close **interconnection** between land and water results in a **landscape-relief**.



moving earth masses





horizontal theatre landscape

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stage - auditorium

a single undivided place
without partition of any kind
direct contact

between audience
and the show

between audience
and actors

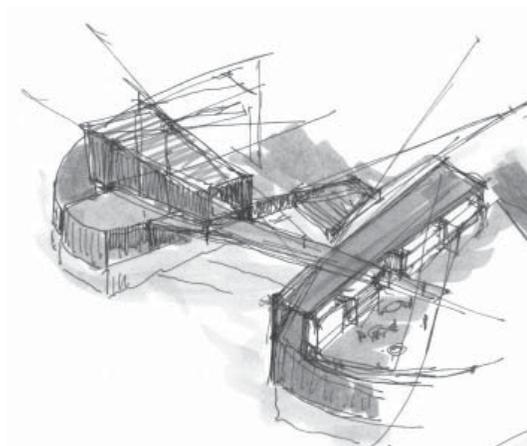
city as backdrop

city as stage

performance encircling the
audience

performance on water

audience on water





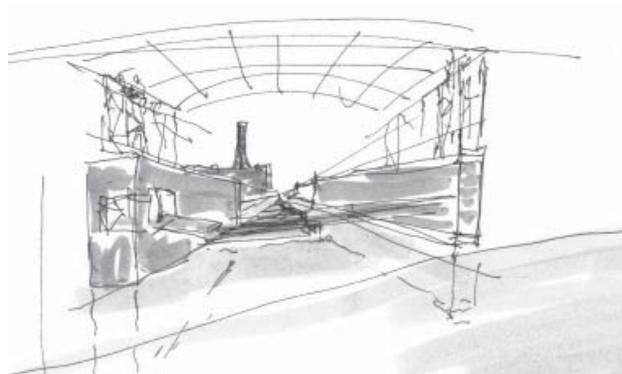
city as backdrop

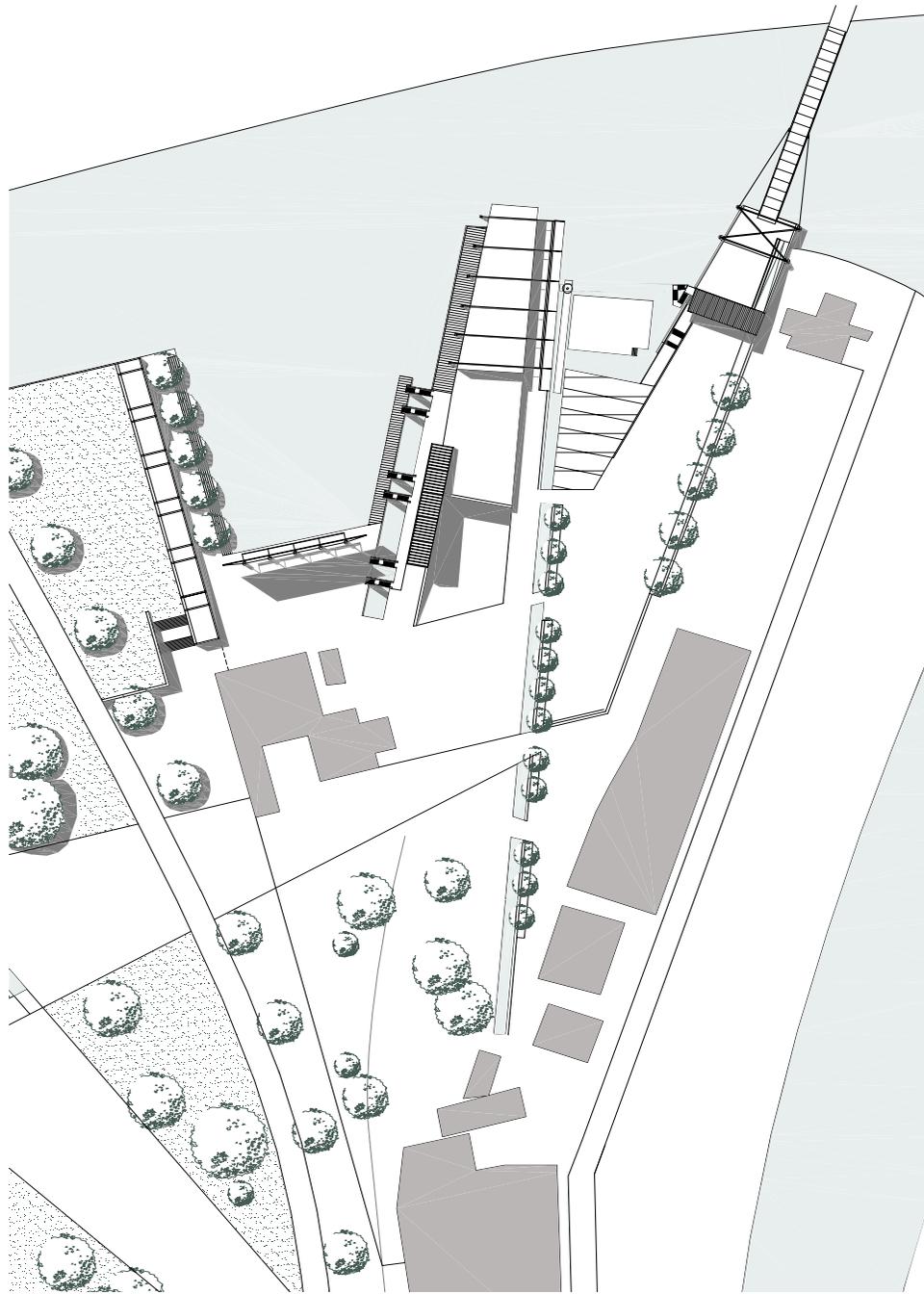
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Theatre is a blend of the outside world with the imagination.

Architecture is the meeting of space and life.

The theatre park is a **sequence of settings** which punctuate spacious **intersections** and prompt a sense of **dramatic focus**.

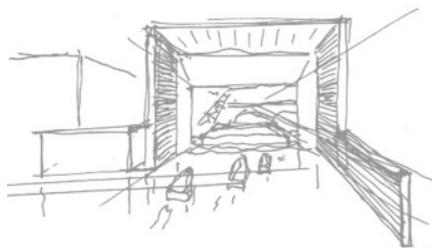




city as stage

57

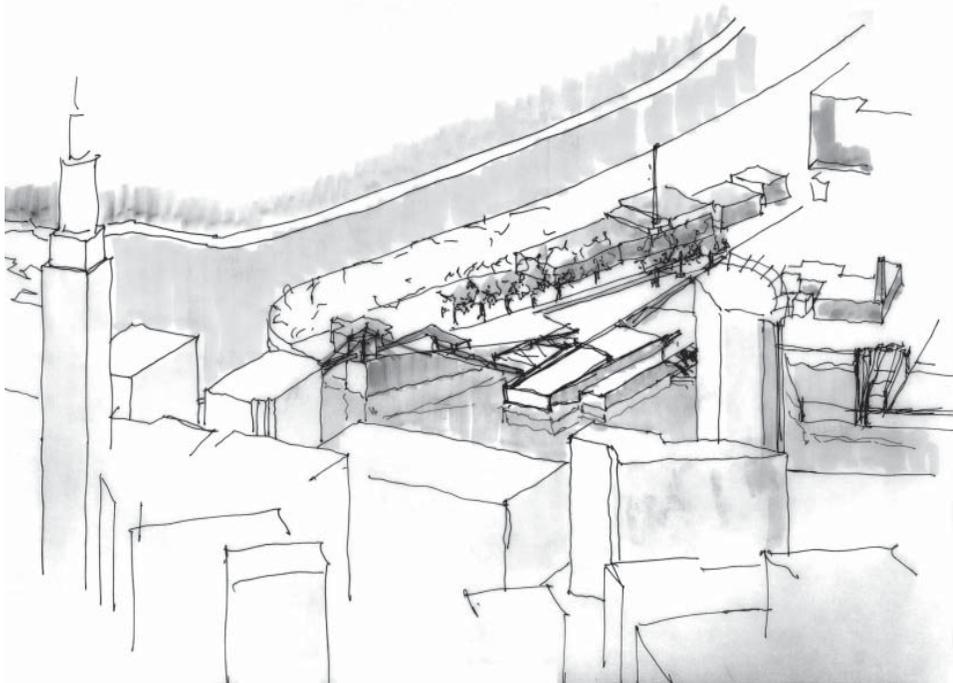
"...sometimes the importance of an event itself 'gives place' the spatial transformations of a site."



(Aldo Rossi: "The Architecture of the City")

Plateaus at different levels, display-screens, ramps, bridges and underground spaces serve as stage settings in this park. The architecture of the park also provides multiple opportunities for access to and from the water. Some of the existing industrial buildings are re-used by the performing arts school (workshops etc.).

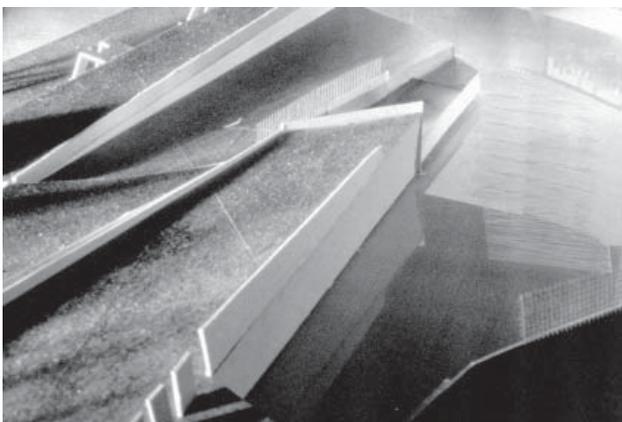
The park could be the catalyst for future development in the Flats.



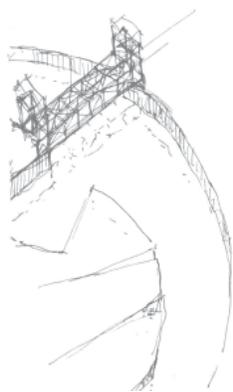
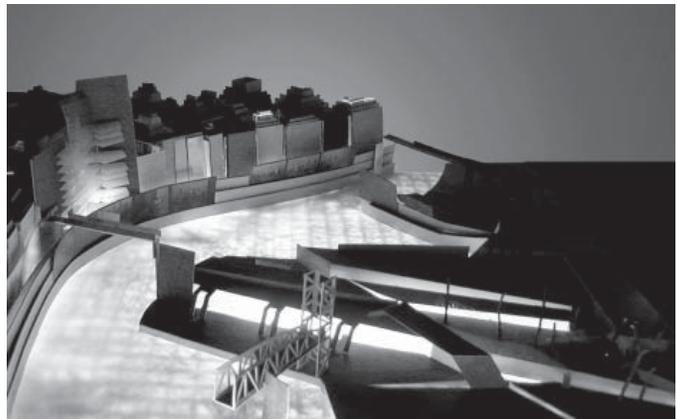
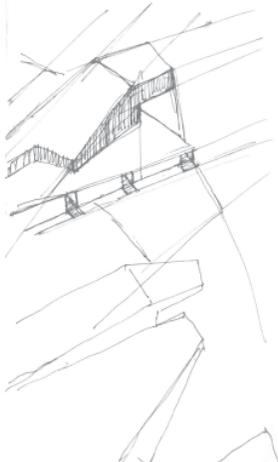
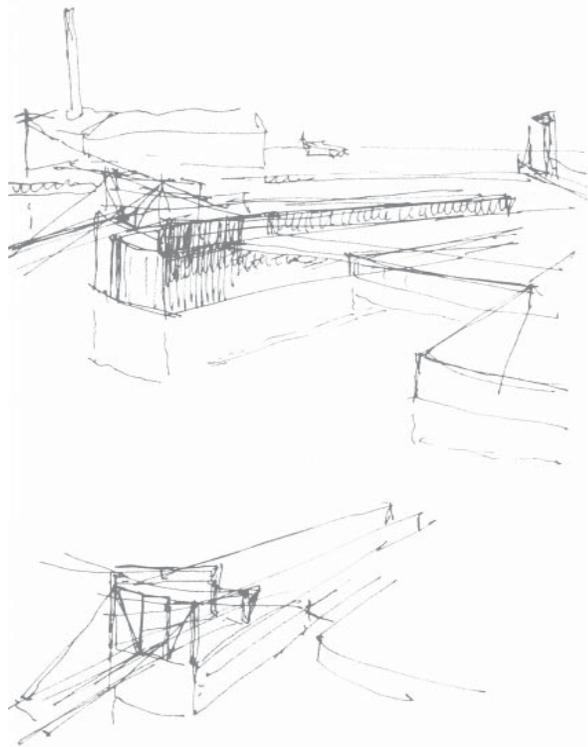
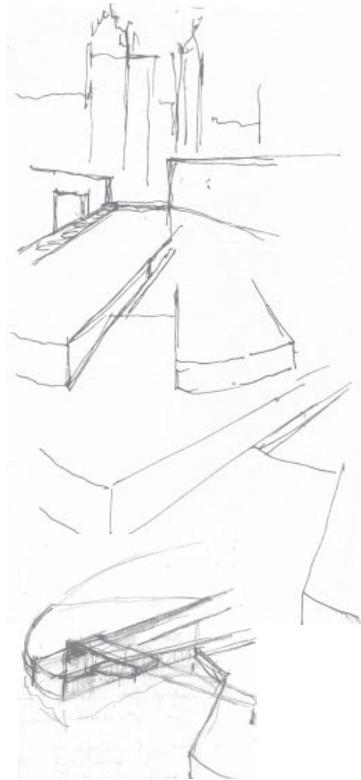
"Whether they admit it or not, whether a conscious or unconscious act, at heart audiences are searching for a poetic state of mind, a transcendent condition by means of love, crime, war or insurrection."

(Antonin Artaud: "The Theatre and the Double")

58



Water is the ideal medium for the de-realisation of the existing reality.



*I am falling.
I am falling.
I express my fear with the sound
of fury, in a solemn bellowing.*

...

*I cry out in dreams,
but I know I am dreaming:
my will-power prevails
on BOTH SIDES OF DREAMS.*

....

*But I must fall in order to scream
this struck -down cry.
I fall into caves from which I
cannot emerge, from which I will
never emerge.*

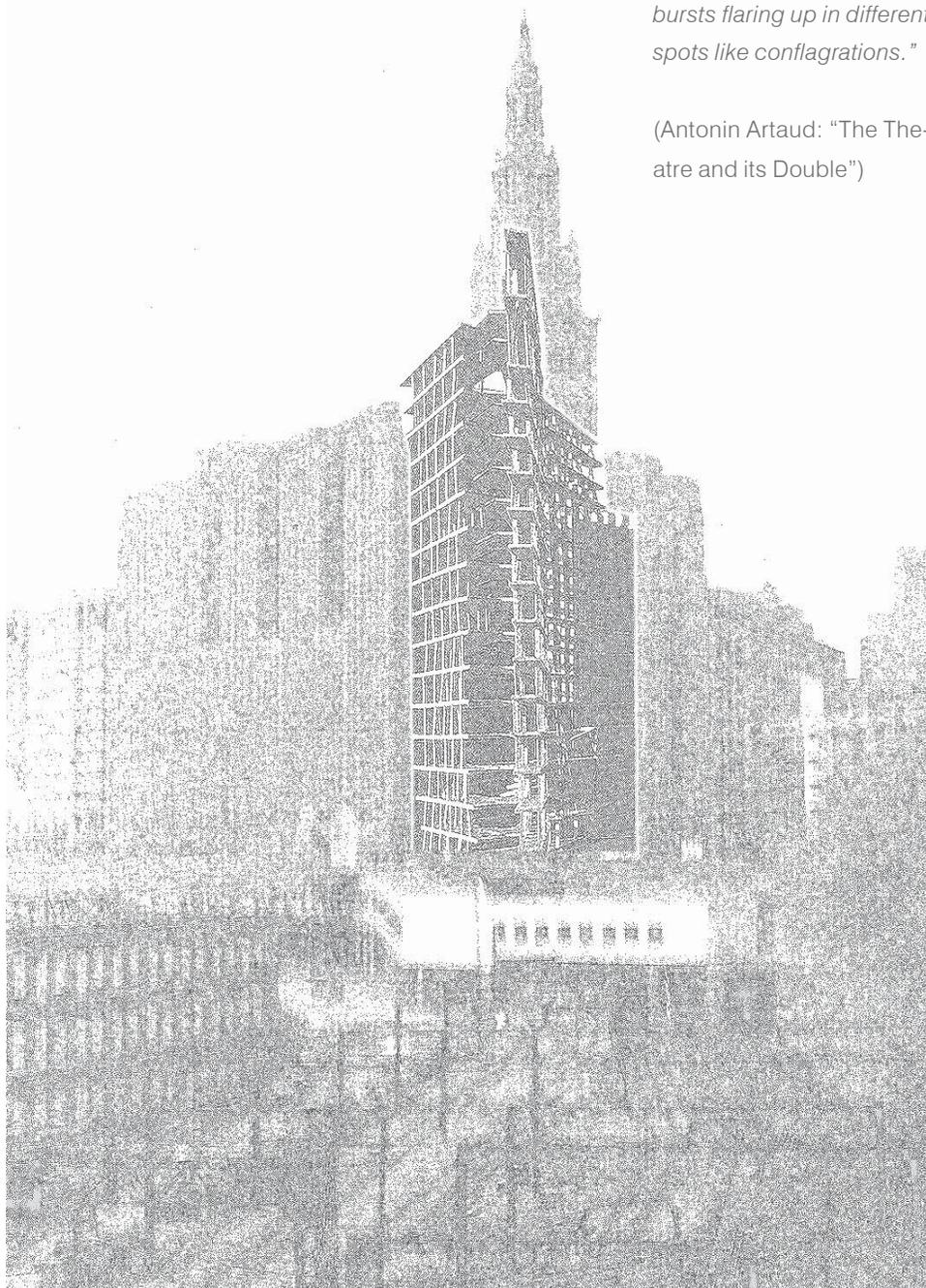
...

(Antonin Artaud: "Seraphim's Theatre")

vertical theatre landscape

"The action will unfold, extending its trajectory from floor to floor, from place to place, with sudden outbursts flaring up in different spots like conflagrations."

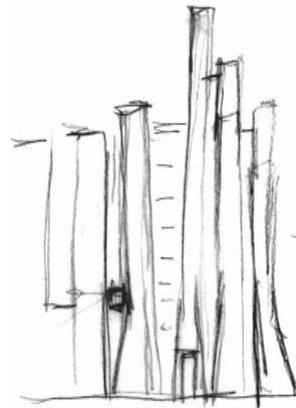
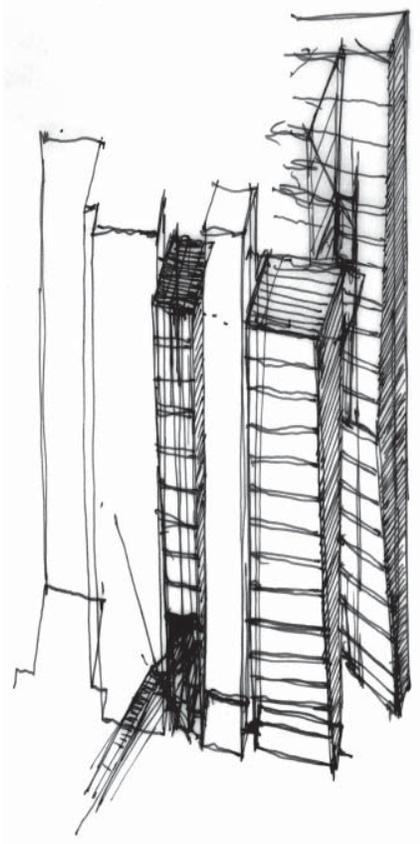
(Antonin Artaud: "The Theatre and its Double")





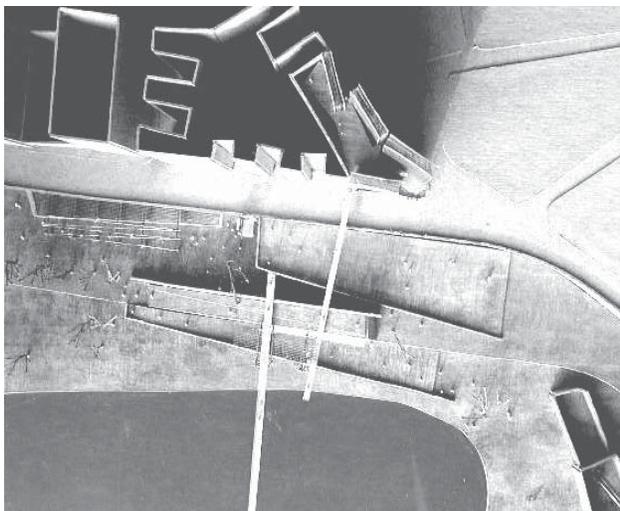
62





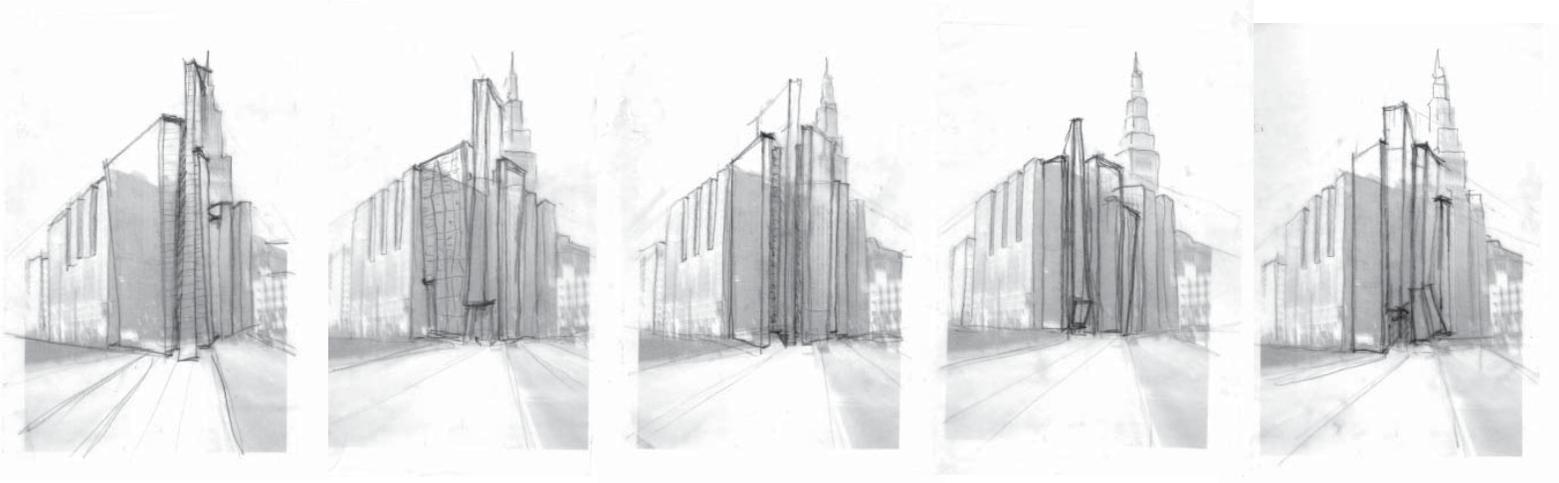
transplanting a place

63



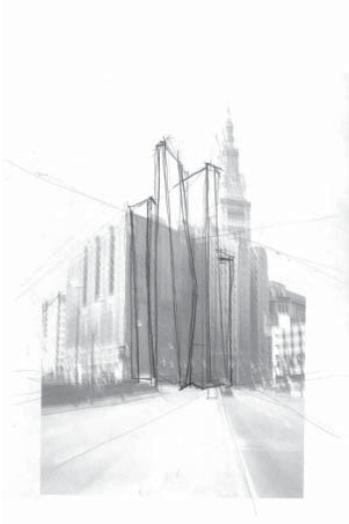
In order to establish a connection between the two worlds on either side of the Cuyahoga River, a 'satellite' of the Flats is 'transplanted' to downtown Cleveland.

Programmatically as well as architecturally the two sides are related. They correspond: one in a horizontal direction, the other in a vertical plane.

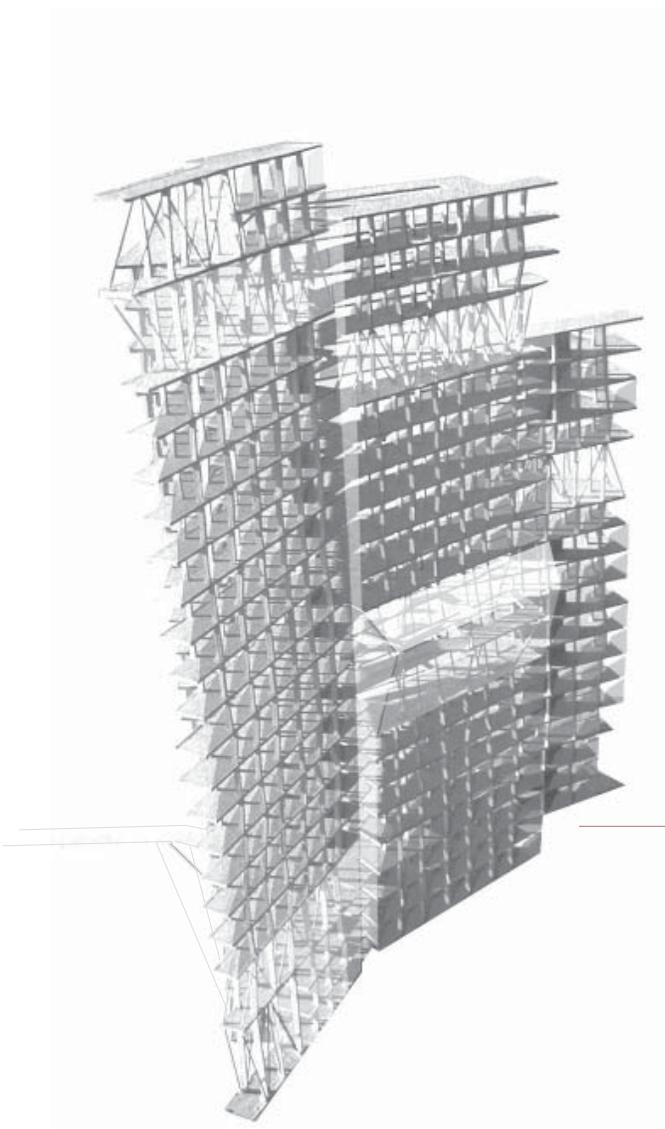




transplanting a place

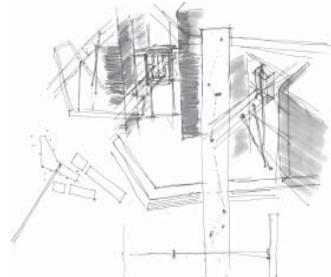




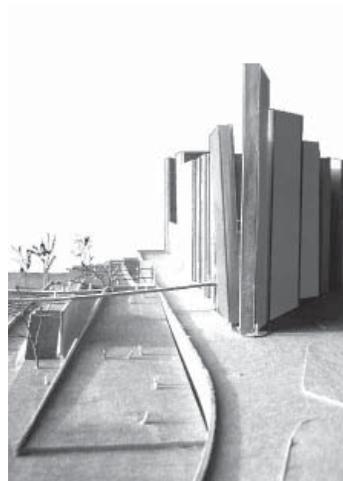


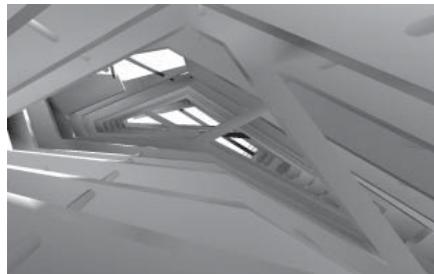
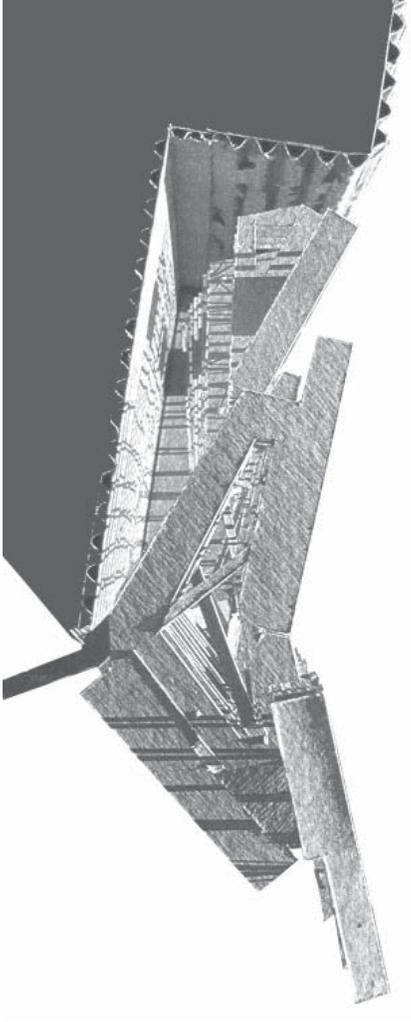
The performance tower marks the entrance to the city center of Cleveland.

At the same time it points to and gives a hint of the new performance park in the Flats. The connecting bridge is a visible link.



hinting the new





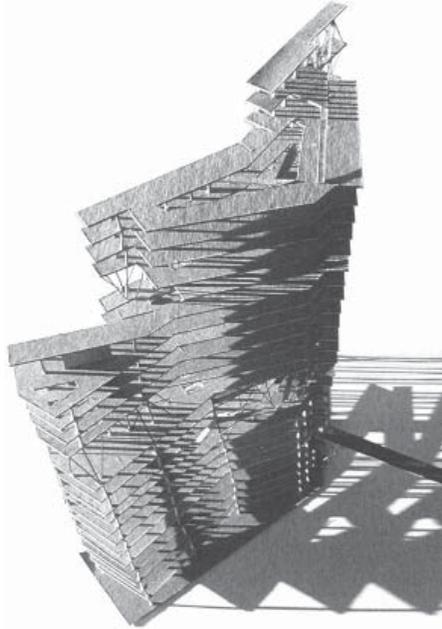
It is through defining borders that space becomes visible.

The same principle applies to the psychic realm inside our heads. We have to construct vessels, housing and traps, entrances and exits in order to render it visible.

The reality of the external world reflects the reality of our minds.

"I personally feel that a box, is an entrance to another world. I don't know to where, some other world. I say this, but the opening to that other world is not very different from a dead-end alley if I stifle my nausea as I examine the world outside my little observation window... I am a box man, which is the same as not existing... A box man can't very well take off his box and simply return to the ordinary world. When he takes it off it is to emerge into another world just as an insect metamorphosis."

(Kobo Abe: "The Box Man")

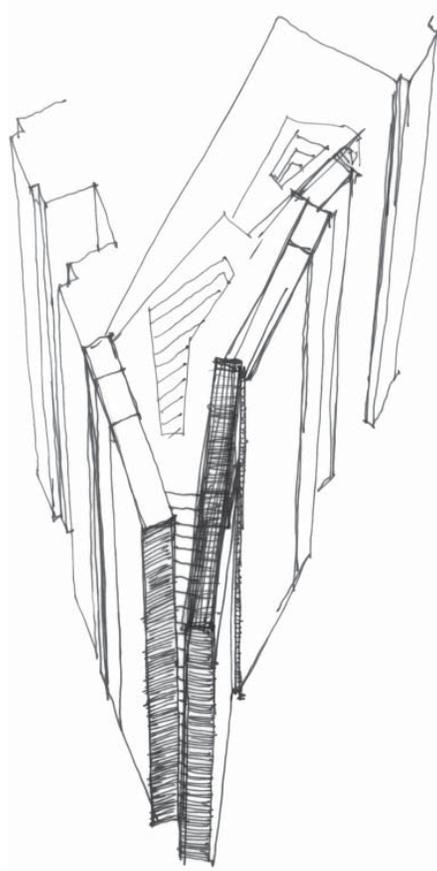


The performance tower consists of two structurally and thematically different parts that embrace each other.

Four volumes define and protect the inside space like a **shell**.

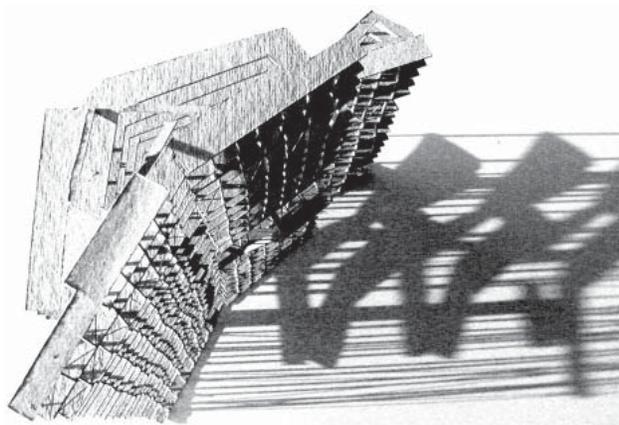
The volumes are oriented at different angles: The shell breaks open.

The resulting gaps direct daylight inside the tower and permit views to the outside.



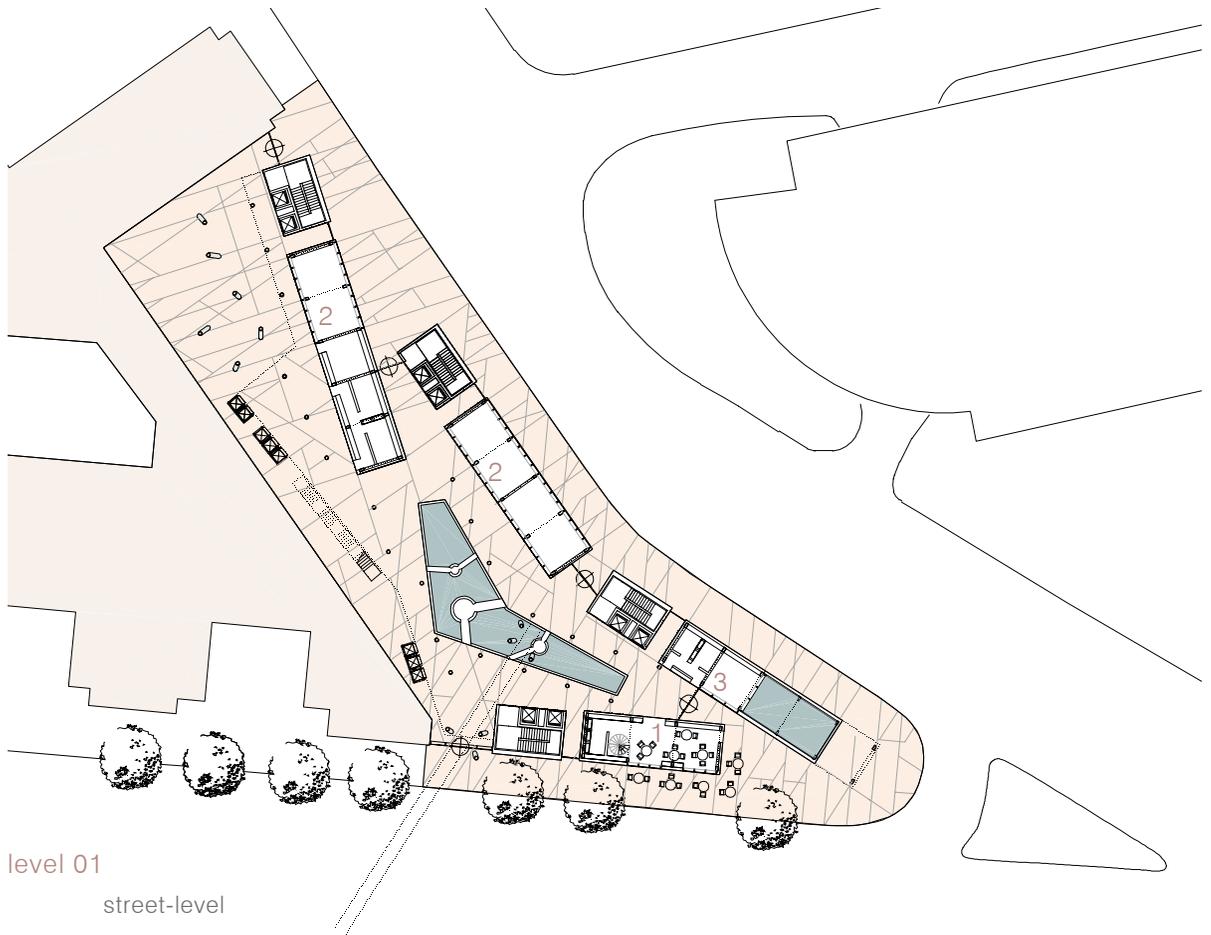
(trans-)forming space

69



The inner life of the tower is characterized by an open space: platforms, bridges and ramps are supported by concrete columns.

The heart of the open space is a **void**, a vertical shaft, offering a setting for performances in a vertical direction. The firewalls of the existing building collect the inner space from the other side.



level 01

street-level

- 1 cafe
- 2 retail
- 3 exhibition



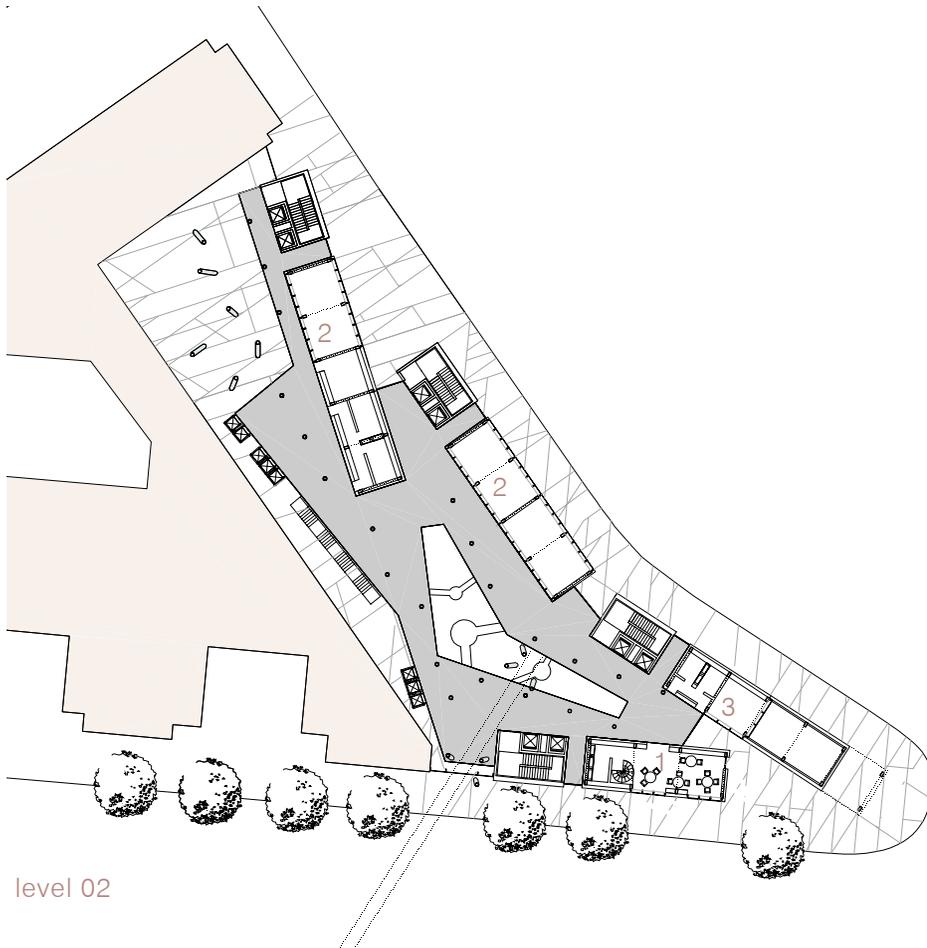
level 04

bridge-level - entrance to the school for performing arts

- 1 restaurant
- 2 school for performing arts
- 3 exhibition

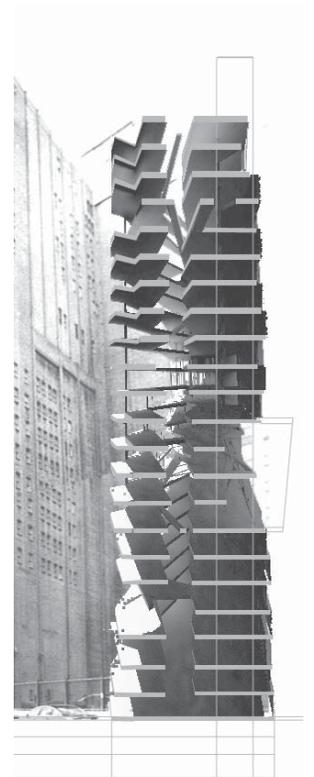
level 03

retail
exhibition



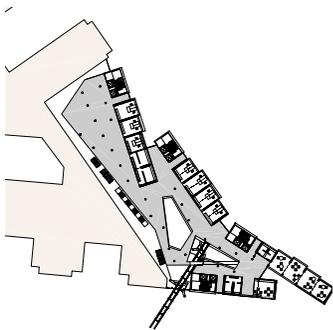
level 02

- 1 cafe
- 2 retail
- 3 exhibition



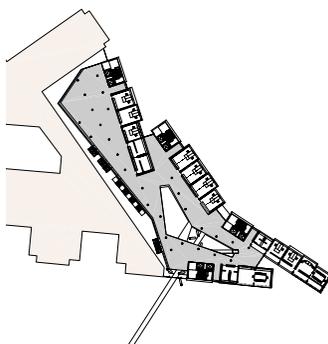
(trans-)forming space

The floors change continuously from bottom to top, forming a space that expresses movement in verticality.



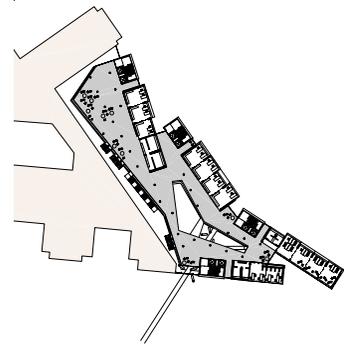
level 05

- school for performing arts:
- administration
 - faculty



level 06

- school for performing arts:
- faculty



level 07

- school for performing arts:
- library
 - study



level 09

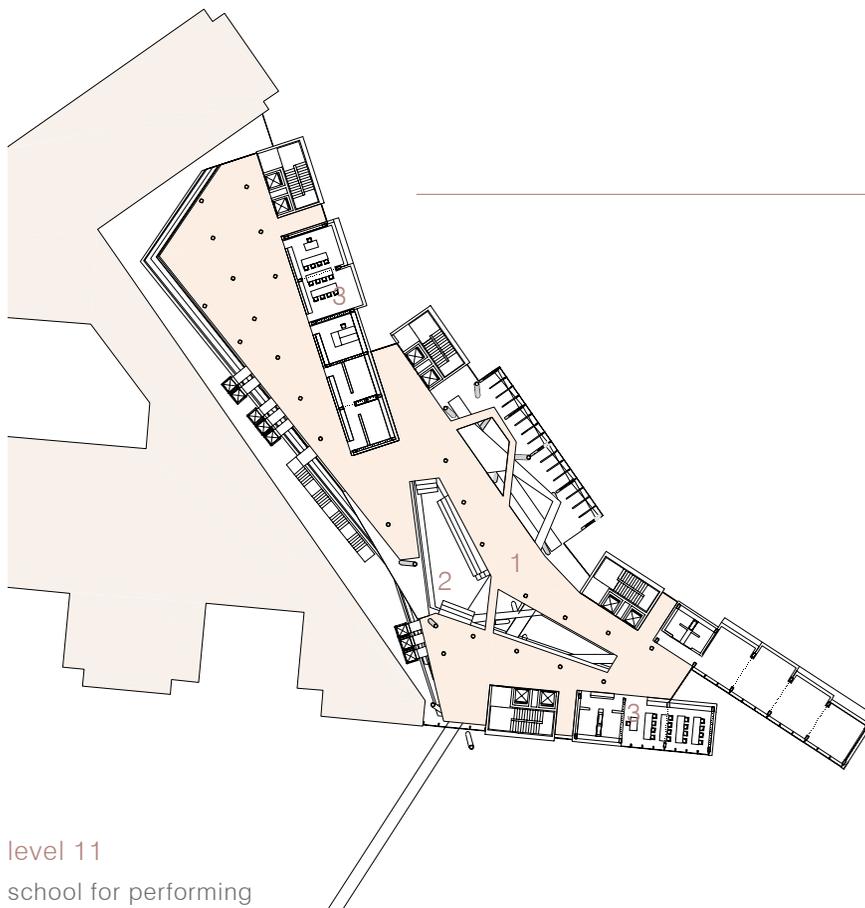
school for performing
arts

1 lobby

2 performance space

3 classroom

72



level 11

school for performing
arts

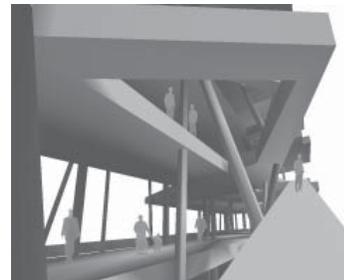
1 lobby

2 performance space

3 classroom

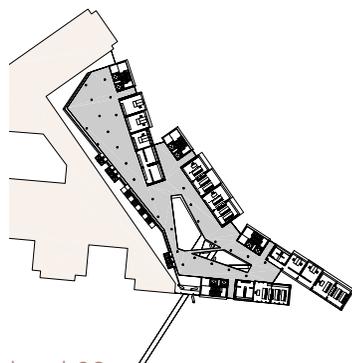


level 10
 school for performing
 arts
 1 lobby
 2 performance space
 3 classroom

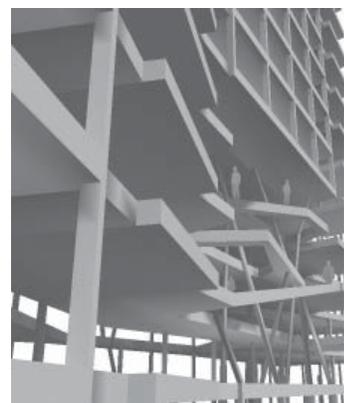


(trans-)forming space

73



level 08
 school for performing
 arts
 classrooms



The lobby space projects out of the building, breaking through the rigid structure of the protecting shell.

Performances could extend into this lobby space revealing the activity inside of the performing arts school. It is a contribution to the street and to the city.



level 18

hotel

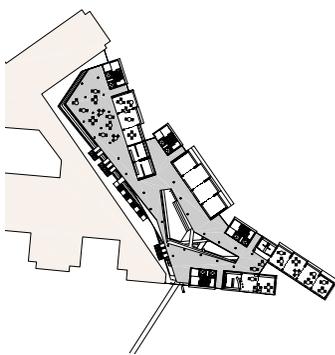
1 reception

2 lounge

3 bar

4 breakfast room / cafe

5 roof garden

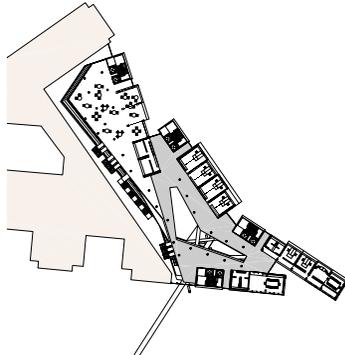


level 12

school for performing
arts:

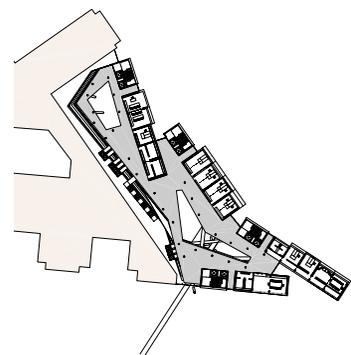
dining hall

kitchen



level 13

office space



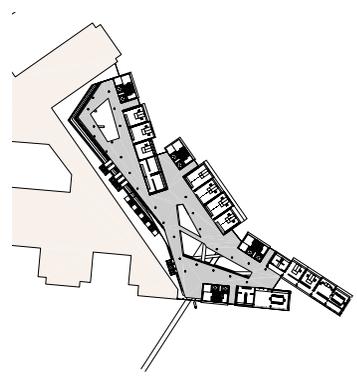
level 14

office space

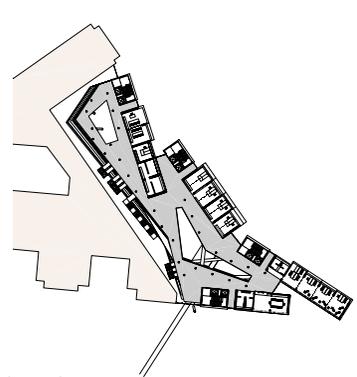


level 19
hotel (wellness area)
1 swimming pool
2 hot tub
3 massage
4 fitness

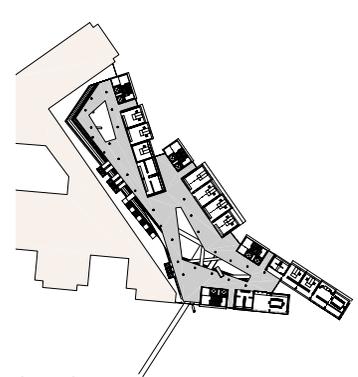
(trans-)forming space



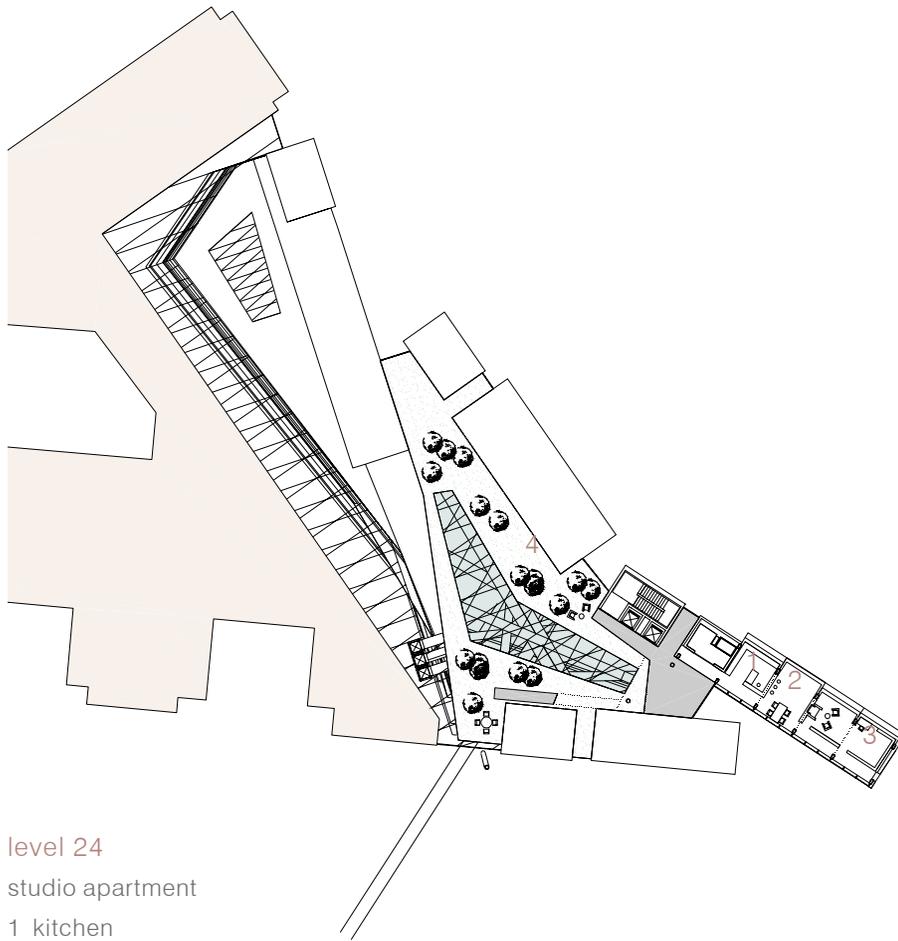
level 15
office space



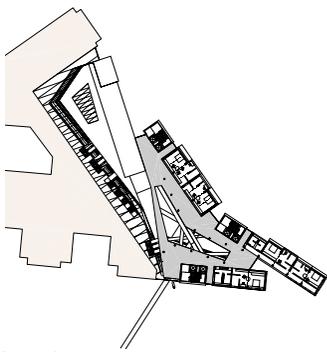
level 16
office space



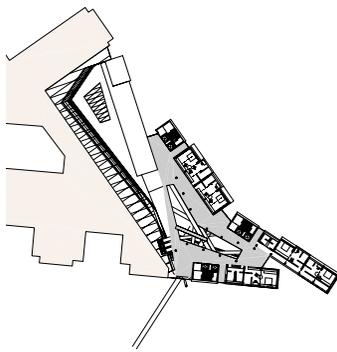
level 17
office space



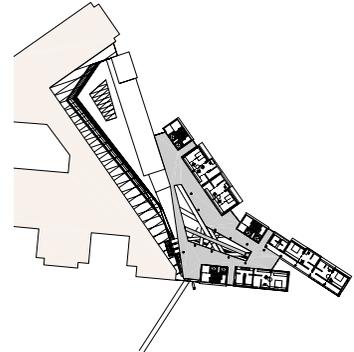
level 24
studio apartment
1 kitchen
2 dining room
3 living room
4 roof garden



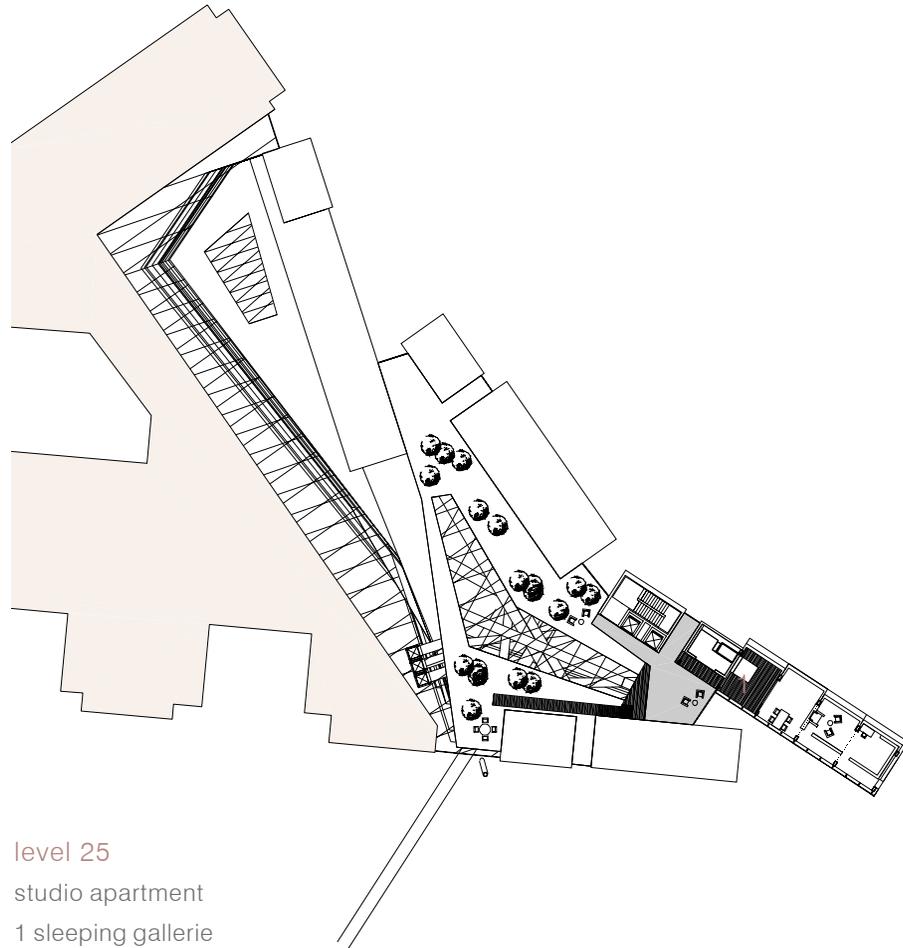
level 20
hotel



level 21
hotel



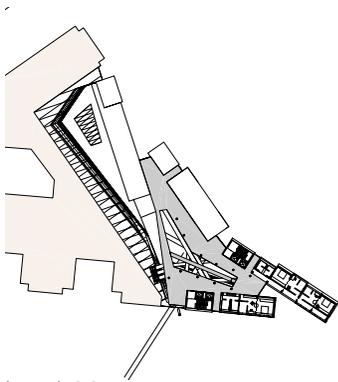
level 22
hotel



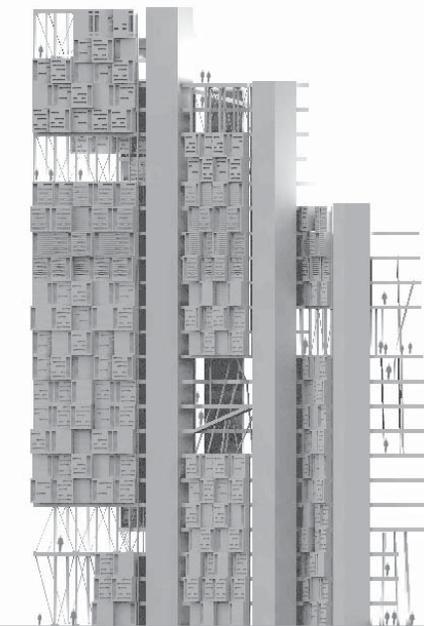
level 25
studio apartment
1 sleeping gallerie

(trans-)forming space

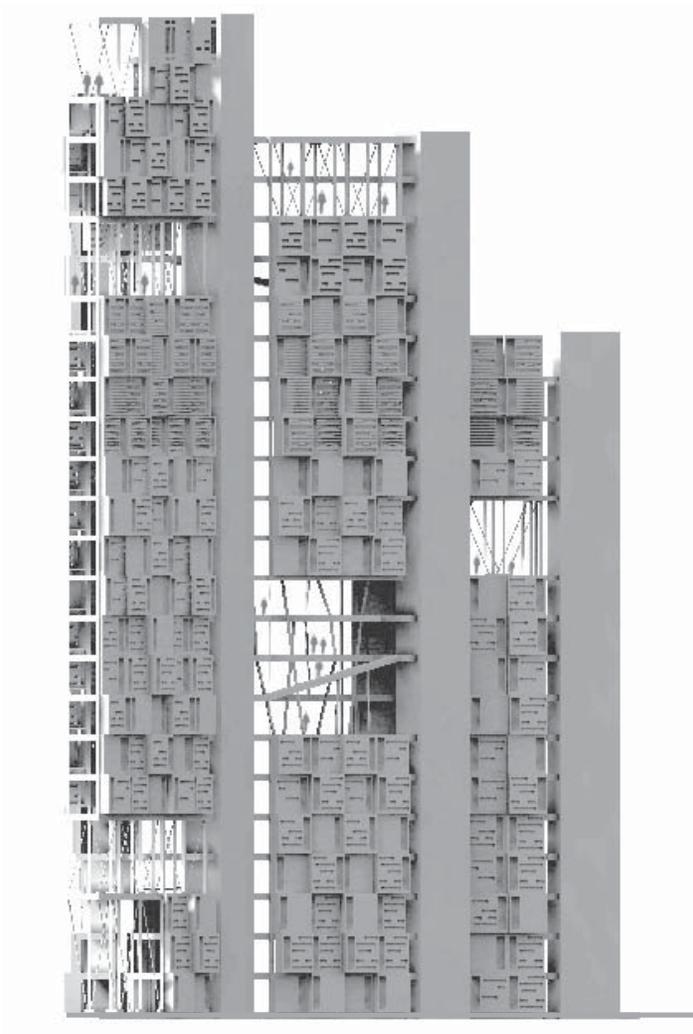
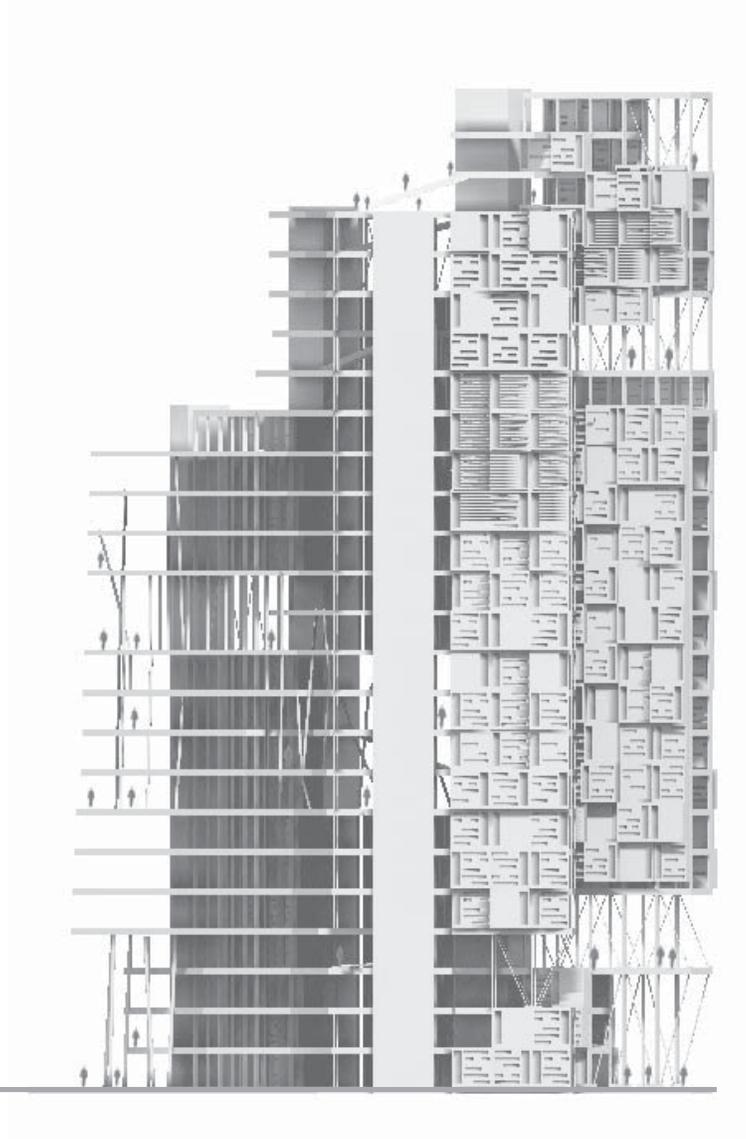
77



level 23
hotel



east elevation



level 12- 13

school for performing arts:
dining hall

level 08-11

school for performing arts:
vertical performance space
lobby

level 07

school for performing arts: library

level 04-06

school for performing arts:
administration
faculty
exhibition

level 01 - 03

retail
exhibition
cafe
restaurant

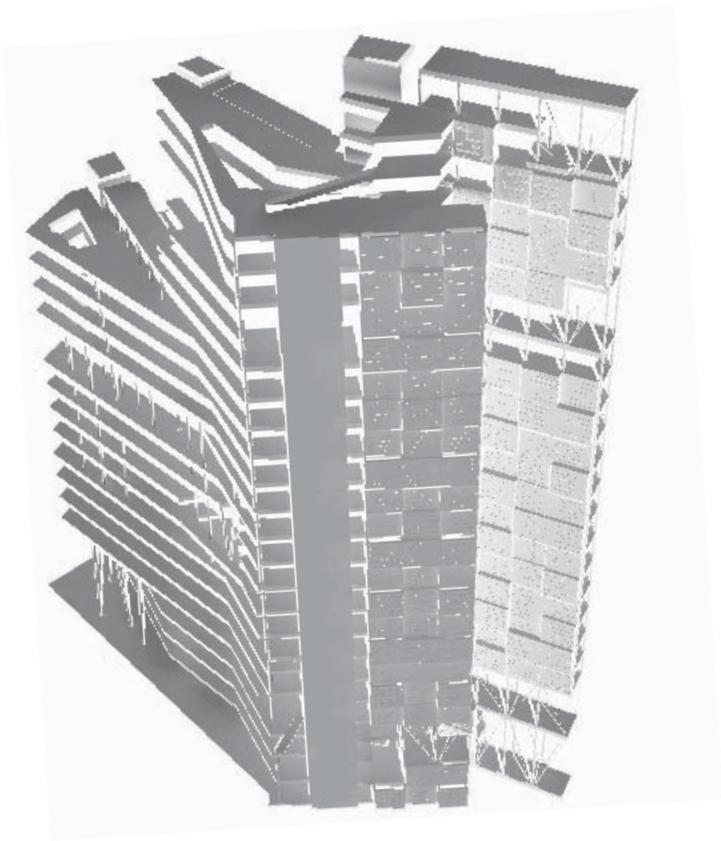
level 24-25
studio apartment

level 20-23
hotel

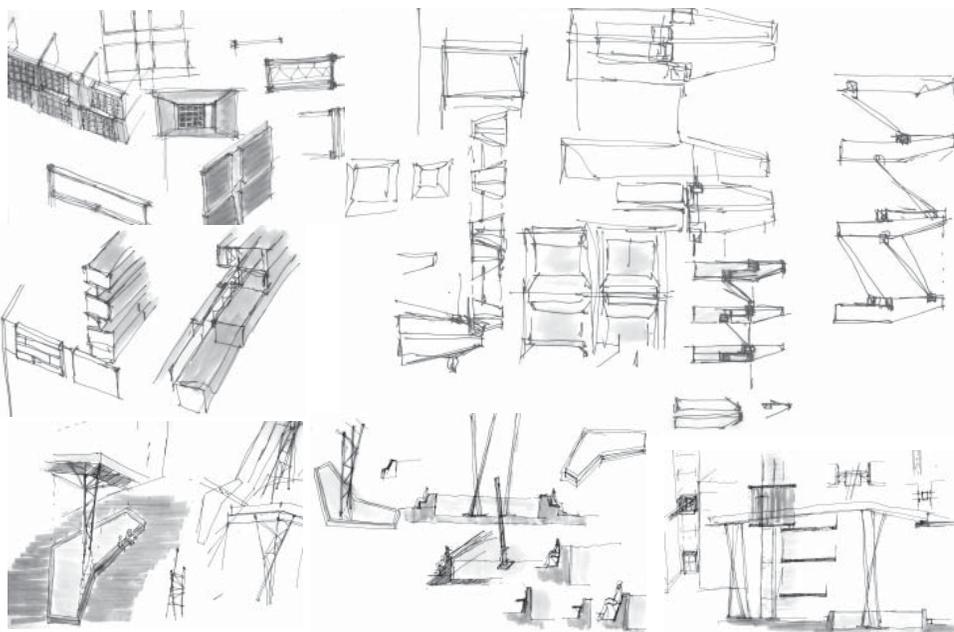
level 18-19
hotel: roofgarden
wellness
restaurant/bar

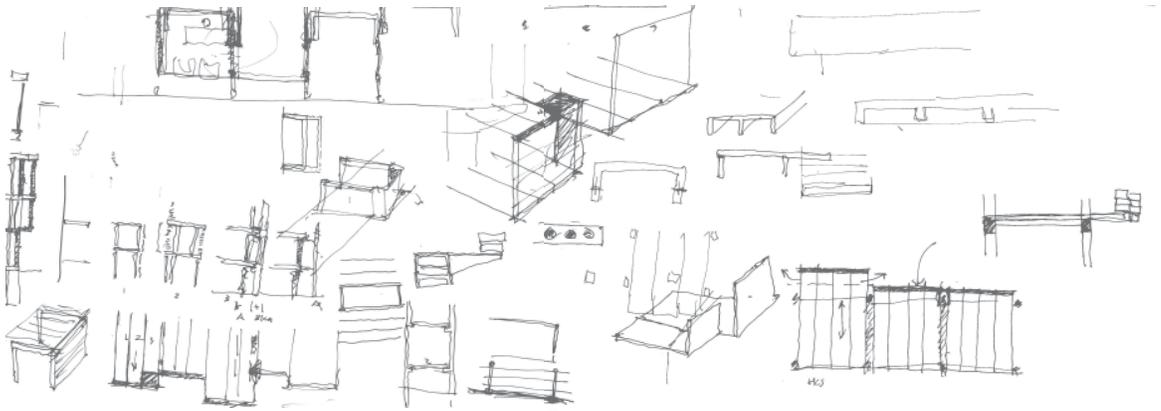
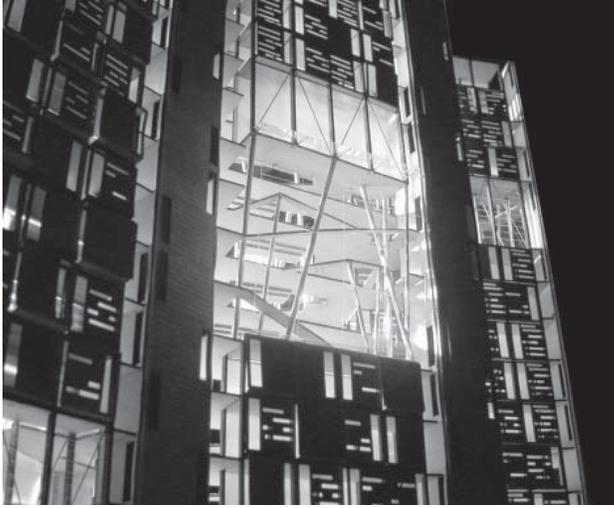
level 13-17
office space



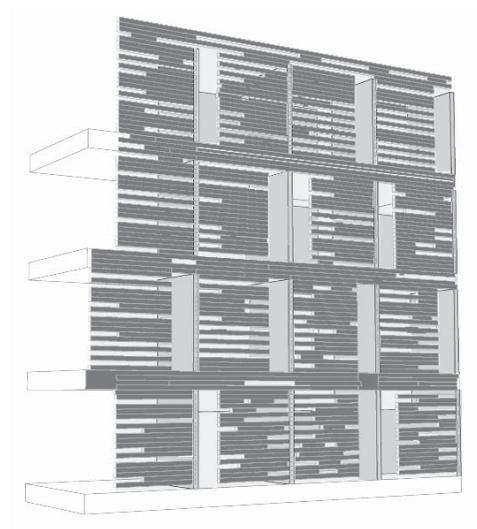
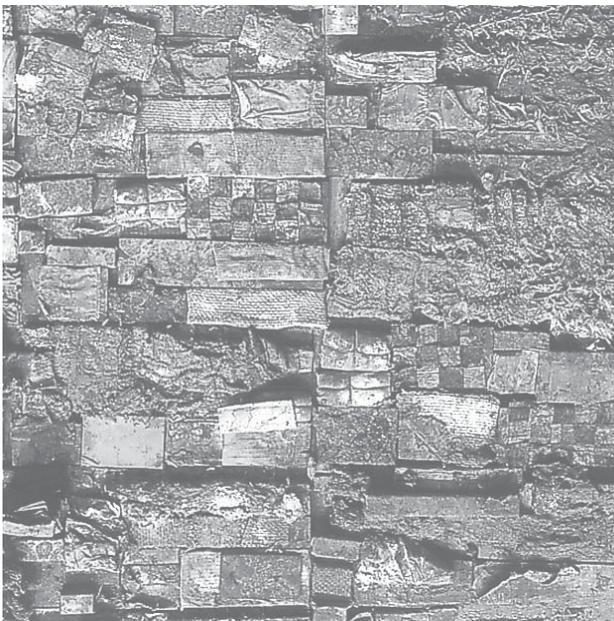


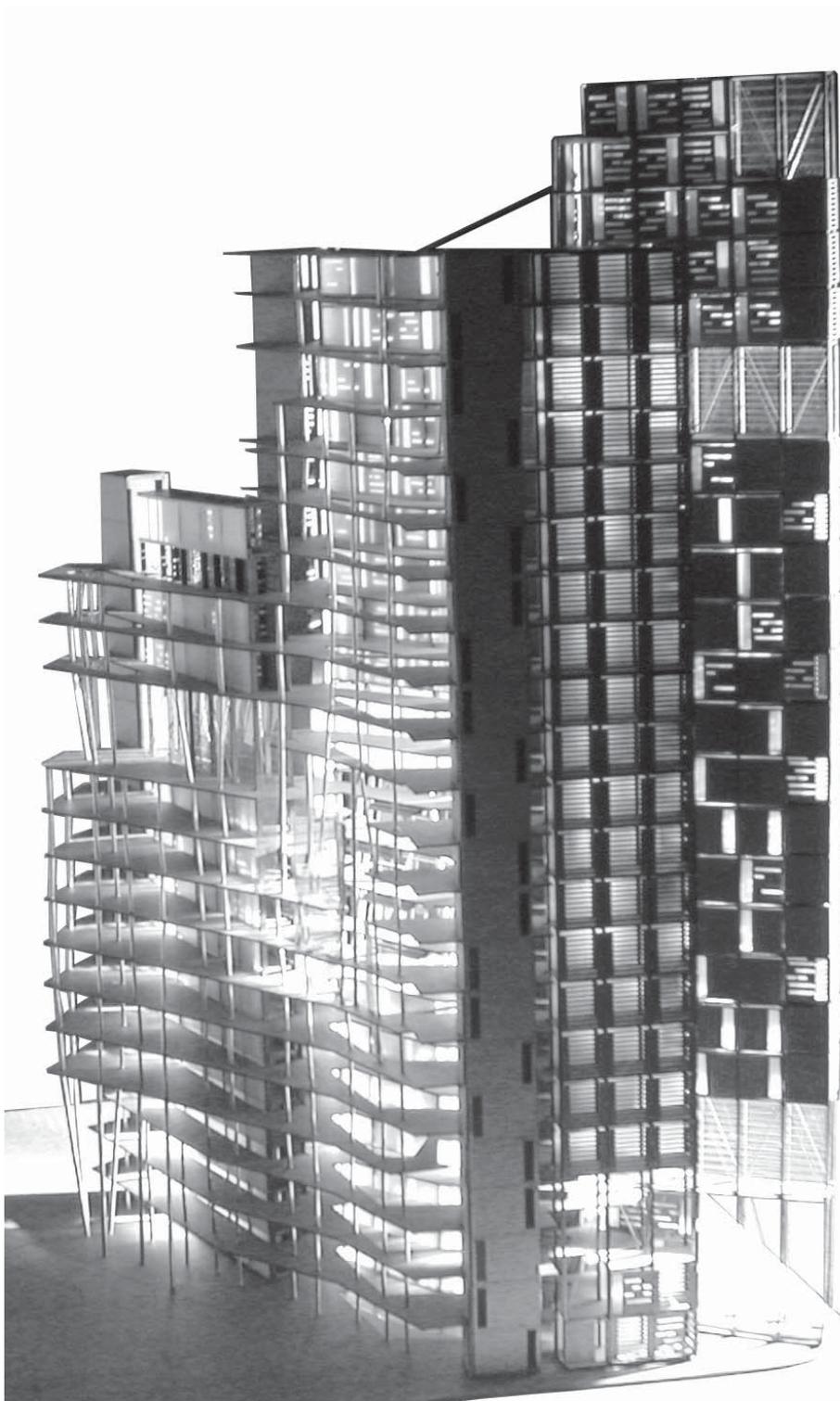
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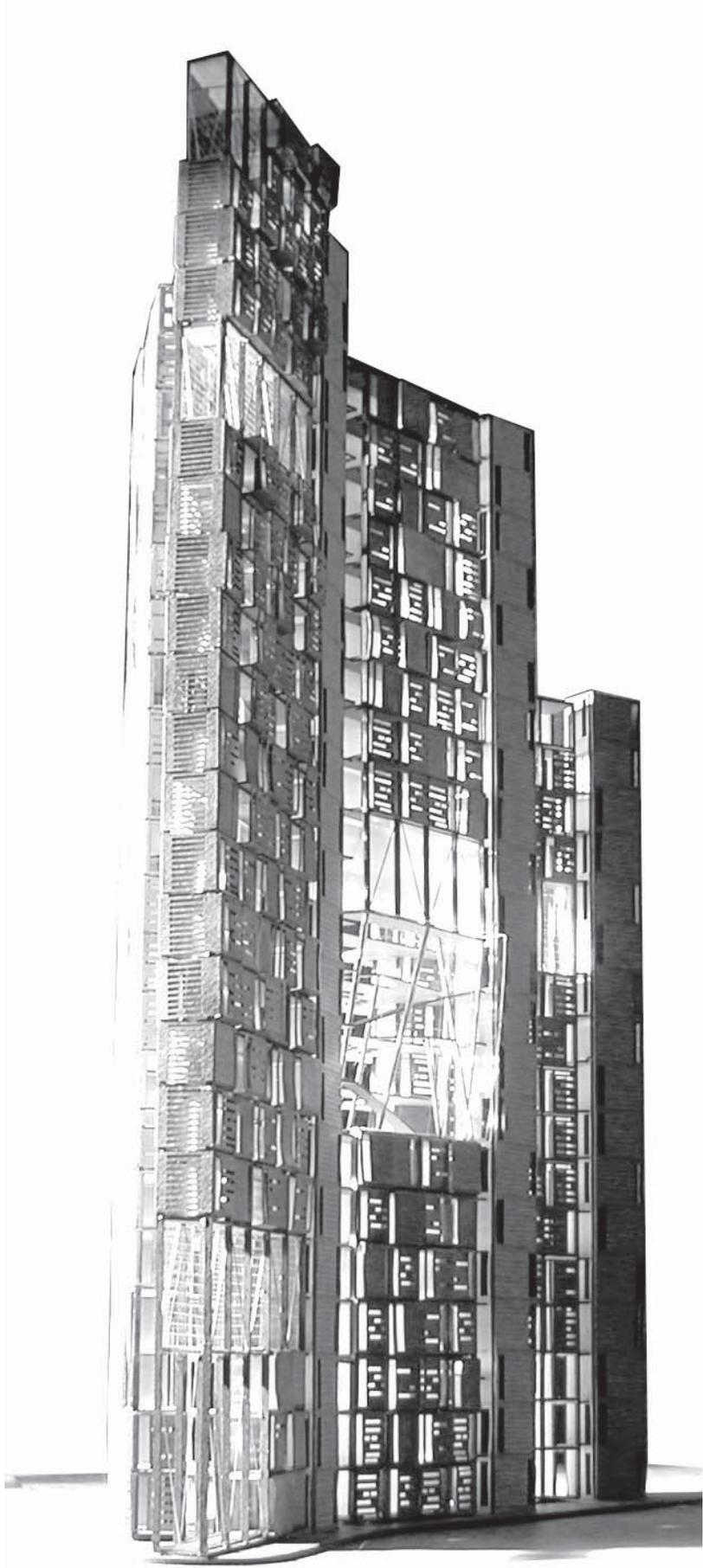


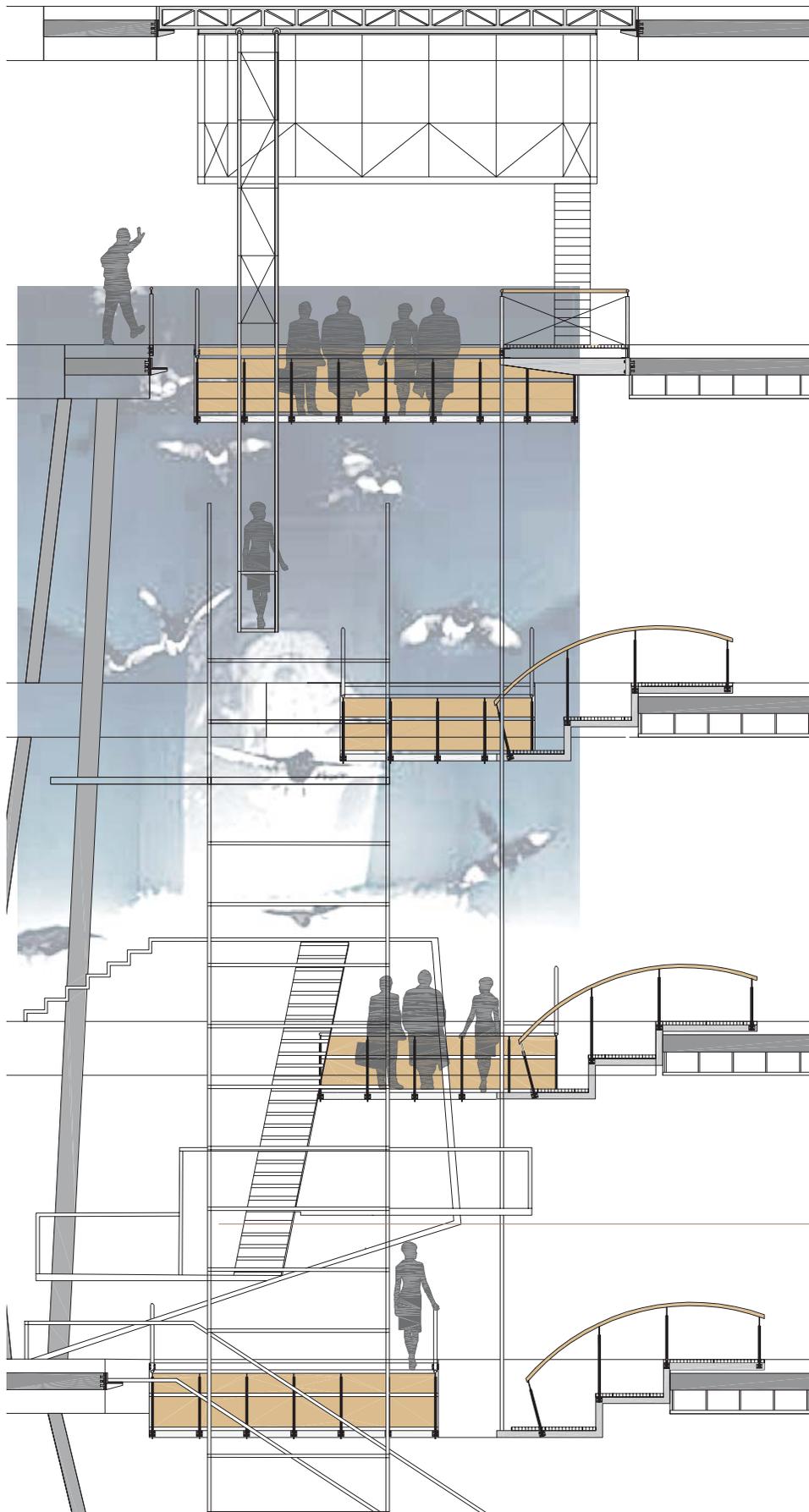


the shell





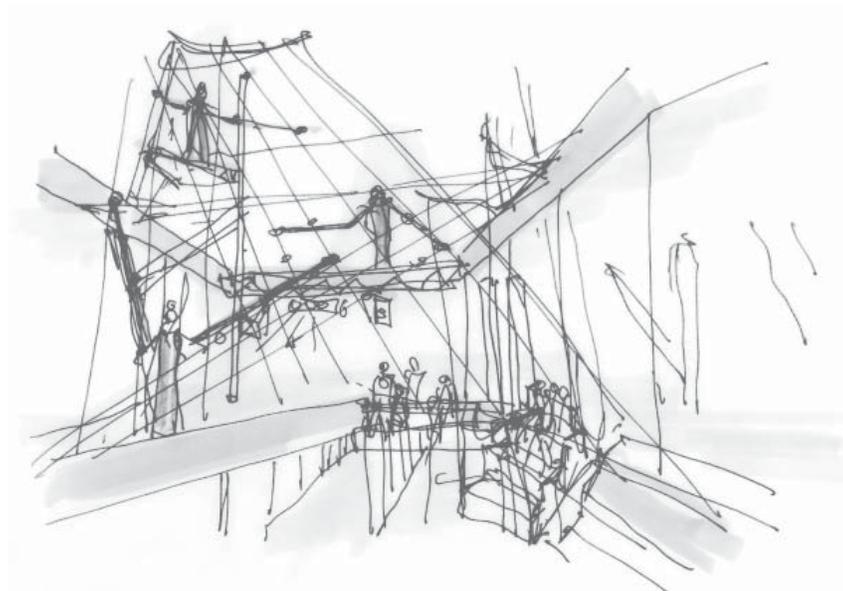




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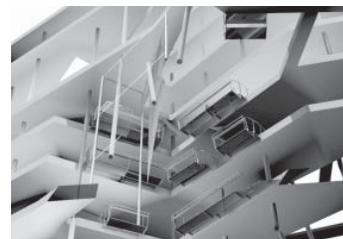
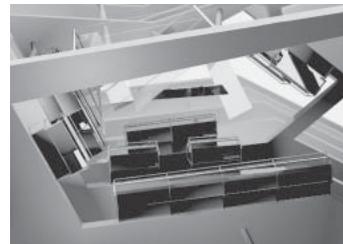
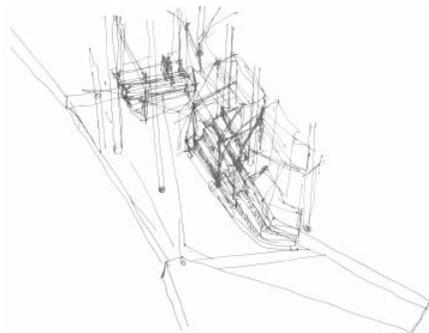
"And the show's true nature will not be empty words any more than the action's direct, immediate hold on the spectators. For the action, diffused over a vast area, will require the lighting for a performance to hold the audience as well as the characters."

(Antonin Artaud: "The Theatre and its Double")



the void - vertical performance space

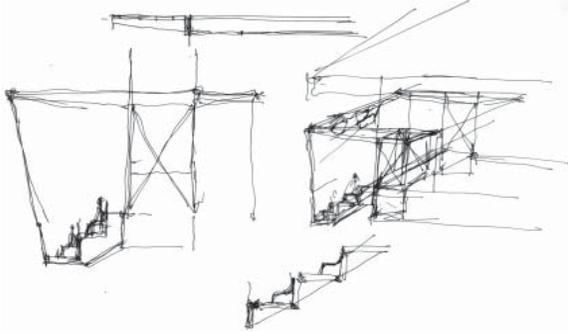
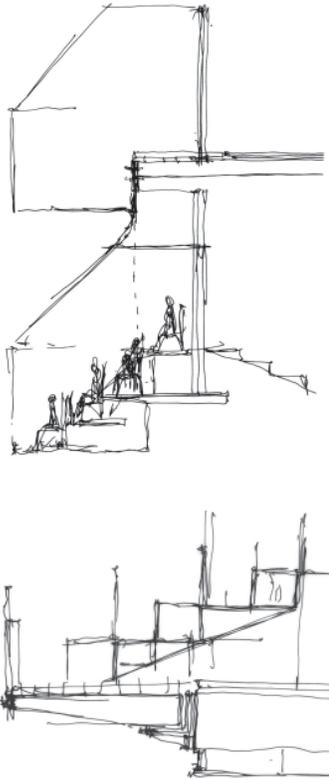
85



The vertical performance space provides opportunities for experimental theatre. It is a space of possibilities as well as a space of challenge and restraints.

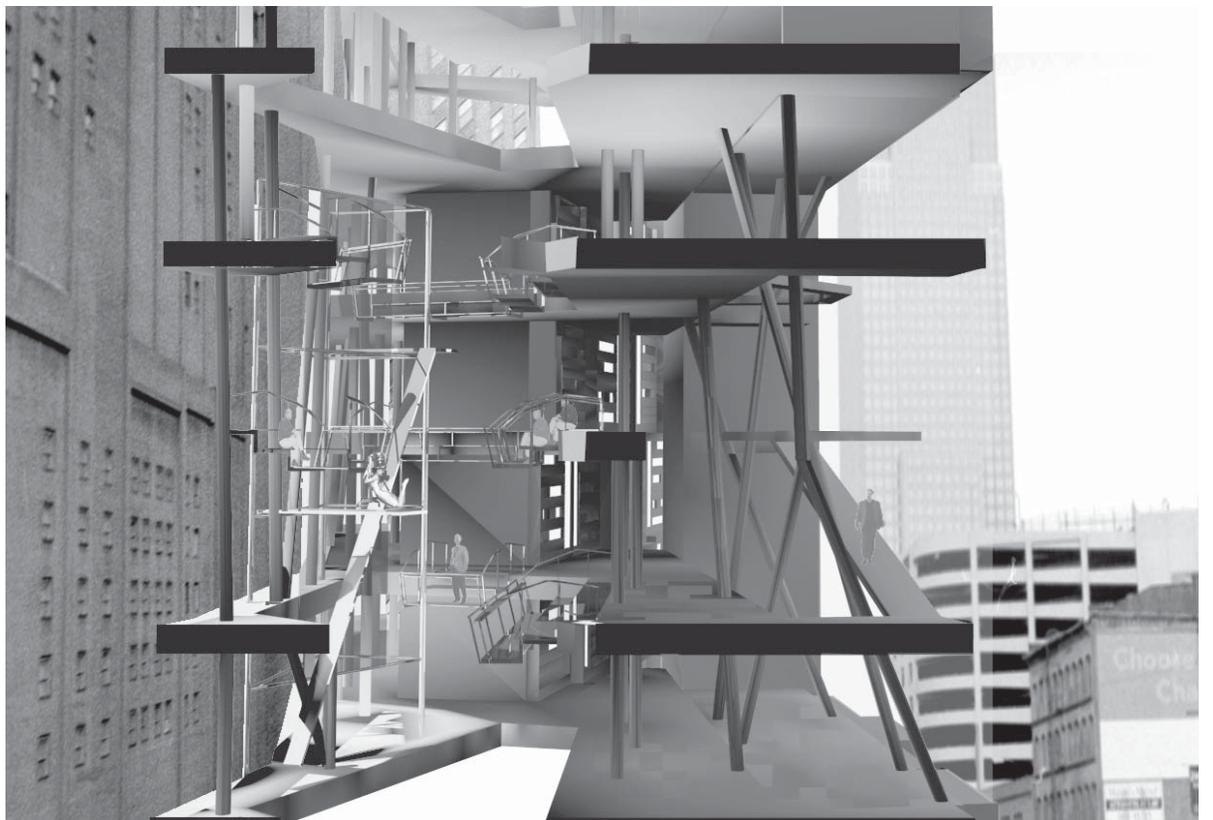


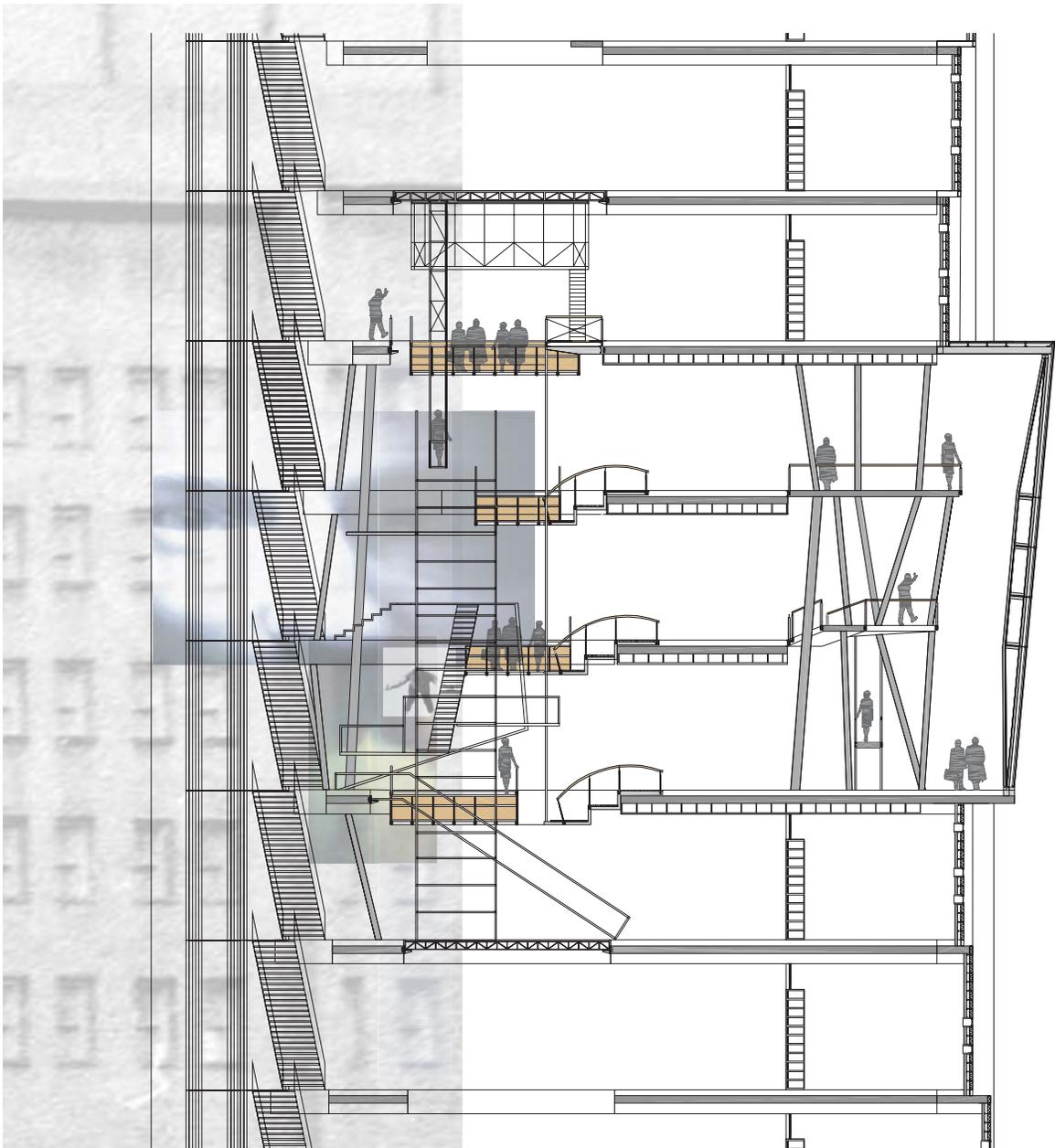
86





the void - vertical performance space







"We want to make theatre a believable reality inflicting this kind of tangible laceration, contained in all true feeling, on the heart and senses. In the same way as our dreams react on us and reality reacts on our dreams, so we believe ourselves able to associate mental pictures with dreams, effective in so far as they are projected with the required violence. And the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, not for a servile imitation of reality."

(Antonin Artaud: 'The Theatre and its Double')



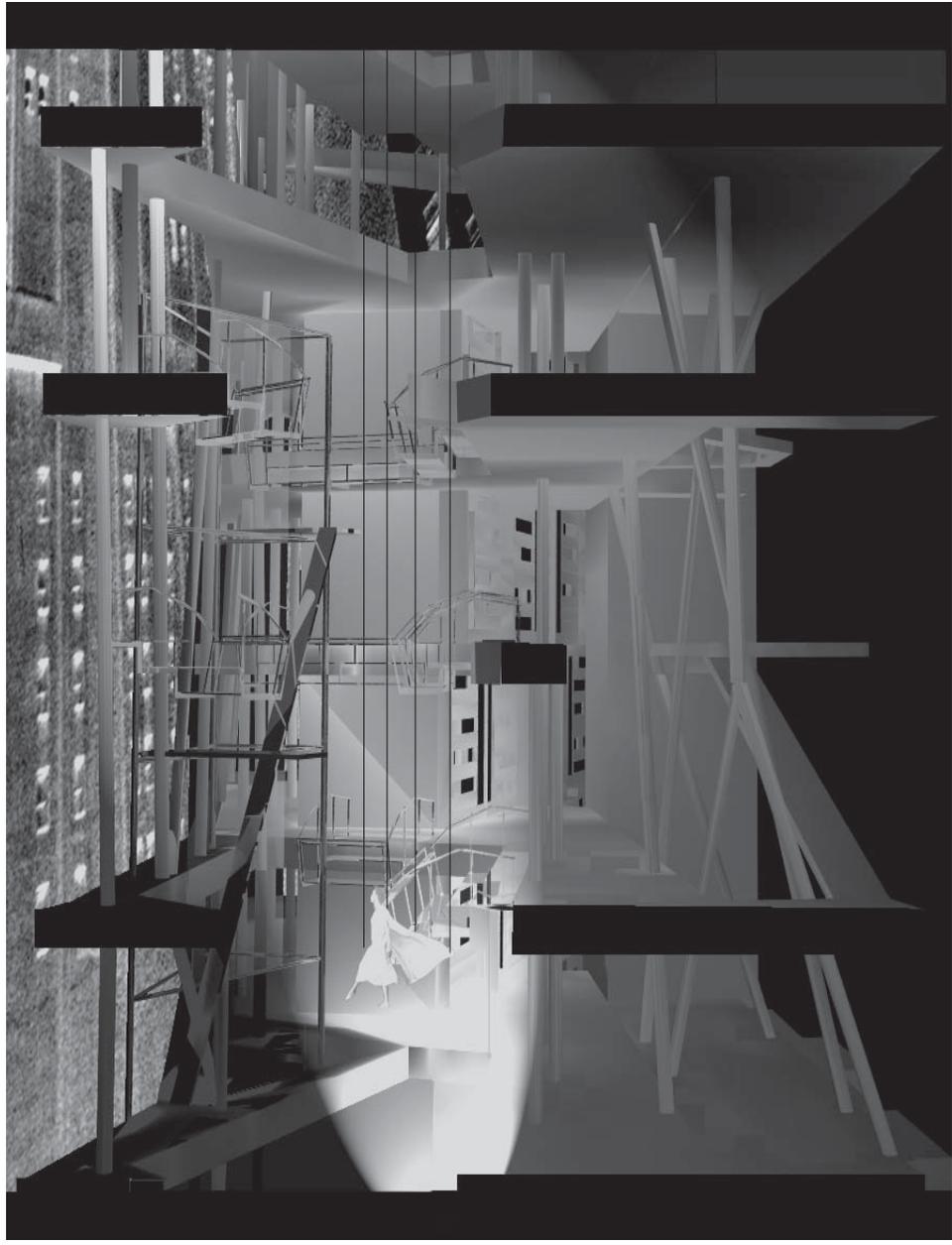
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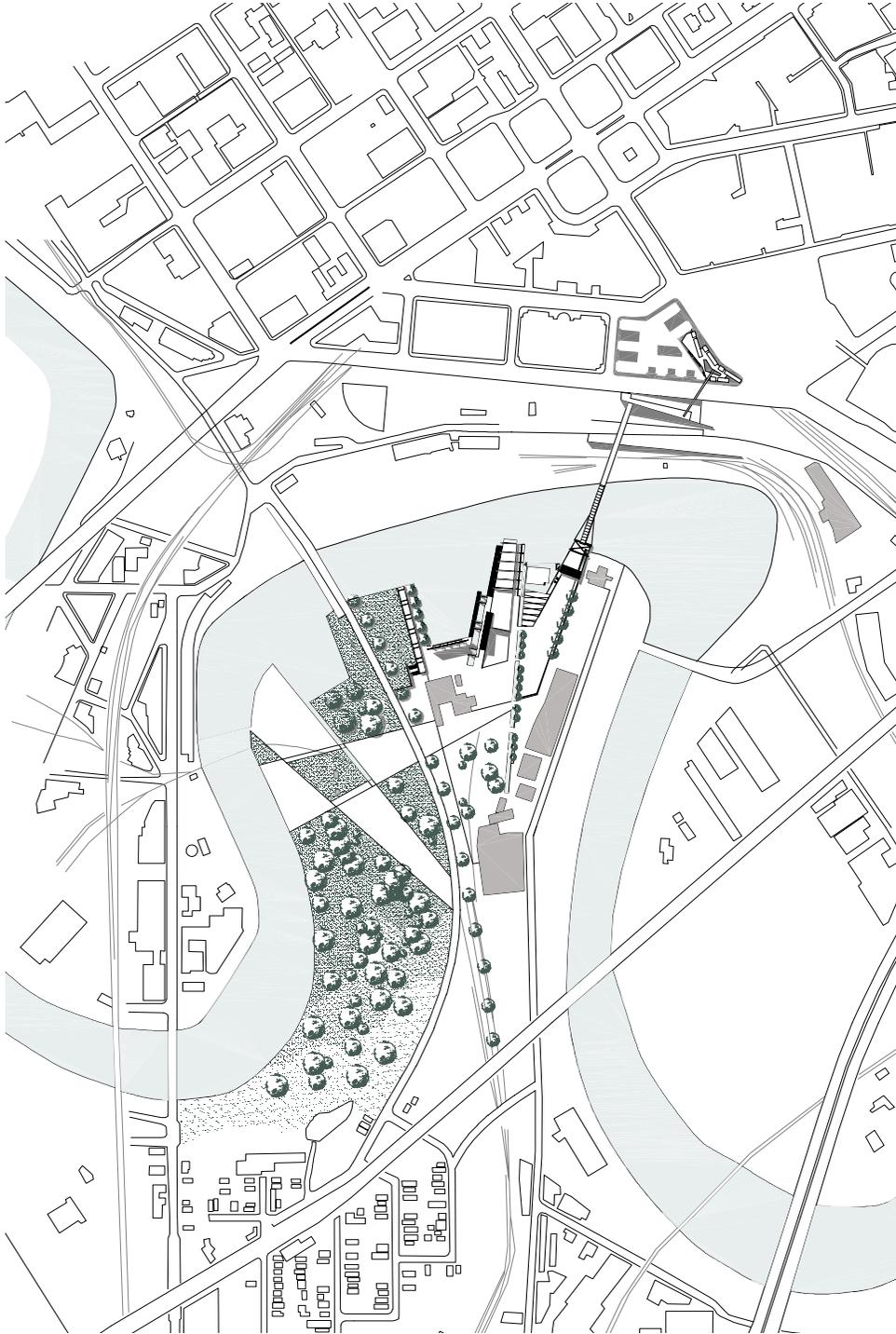




the void







*"I believe that as from a certain point of view the sight of someone in a dream is a proof of his metaphysical reality, so, from the same point of view, the revelation of a work of art is the proof of the metaphysical manner that something appears to us and provokes in us the image of a work of art, an image, which in our souls awakens surprise - sometimes, meditation often, and always, **the joy of creation.**"*

(Giorgio de Chirico: 'Meditations of a Painter')

As a mode of making, architecture can reveal qualitative differences between contiguous elements. Further it can transform these differences into habitable settings, constructed thresholds.

A threshold, a physical transition, is a metaphor as well. It gives place to the tensions and conflicts between an individual's conscious and unconscious . It is a place for a possible reconciliation of the imaginary and the real. From this point of view, architecture can activate its own highly-charged psychological attributes.

Further the threshold describes the transition from conception to creation, an in-between space rather than a clear line. To be an architect means to dwell in this transitional space, between conceiving and creating, between the imaginary and the real.

Architecture is analogous to the human mind: as the mind, architecture suggests rather than determines or imposes.

conclusion





acknowledgements

97

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you have challenged and influenced my way of thinking in a profound way, far exceeding the study of architecture;

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for being my friend and companion. It has been a pleasure to share my thoughts and time with you;

Dawn Bushnaq:
for sharing moments of insanity. I so much enjoyed your intellect and your sense of humor;

all my friends in Blacksburg:
for sharing times of hard work and fun.

bibliography

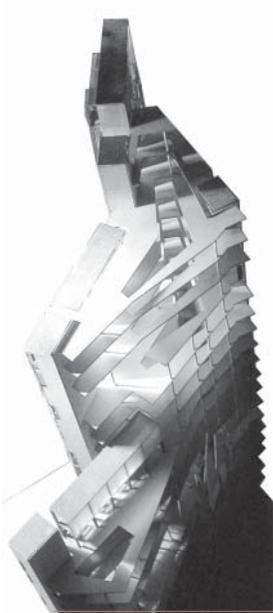


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Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001

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All images created by the author

except for
Max Ernst: 'The Elastic City'
Max Ernst: 'The Forrest'
taken from Warlick: 'Max Ernst and Alchemy'





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