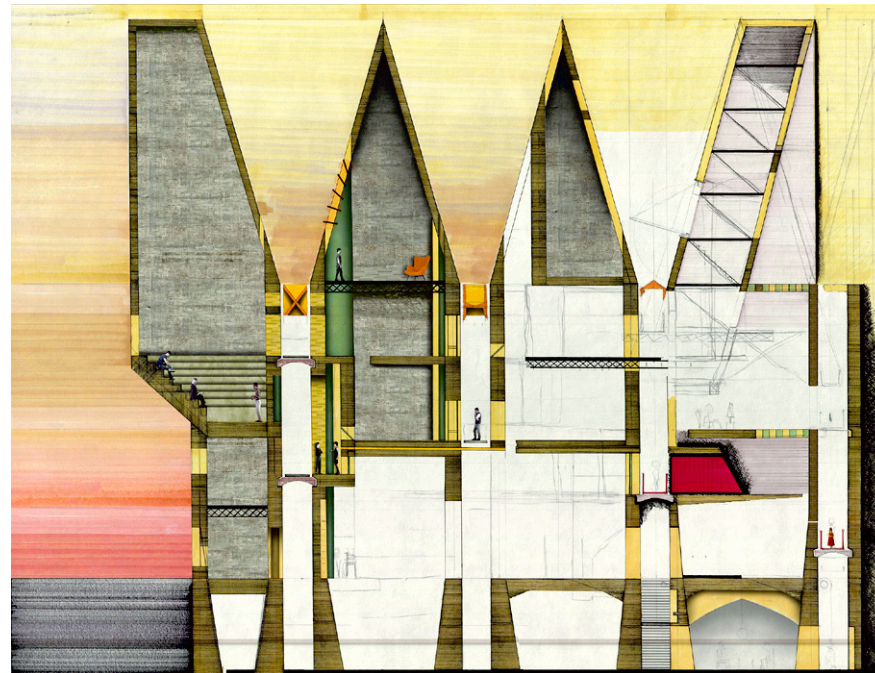


DIALOGUES IN TRANSLATION



A House For Languages On Fourteenth Street

NICOLAS BALACCO

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
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DIALOGUES IN TRANSLATION

A House For Languages On Fourteenth Street

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ABSTRACT

Why is it that architecture is so capable of triggering emotions in us? How come there are certain buildings, certain urban streetscapes or certain city corners that have the ability to make us feel intrigued, excited, happy, interested, thoughtful or curious? How is it that there are certain places, at the same time, that don't trigger any sorts of emotions in us? Urban places. They all have an immense capacity to influence the way we feel about life. Just like people, just like music.

In the months previous to my thesis, I started to pay attention to some past personal experiences when, confronted with the process

of discovery of a new urban place, I found myself experiencing strong emotions of happiness and excitement. This led me to start focusing on the elements of sensorial stimulation that I was encountering in those places, with the hope of being able to identify them, and ultimately being able to decode them and translate them into architecture.

It became clear to me, soon after I started my travel through this journey of thoughts, that there were two elements that were always present in these experiences, and were therefore possible suspects. One of these elements was the pass of time, and the other was the density

and diversity of materiality. Both where materialized in the form of overlapping layers of information that would add extreme complexity to the place. It was this complexity what was triggering all these emotions in me, making me feel like a curious child again.

As a consequence of this analysis, my main interrogation became whether it was possible to replicate the feelings that these large-scale urban spaces had produced in me into the realm of an architectural project. Regarding a possible program, A place for speaking different languages or A building for brainstorming and thinking were some of the thesis topics that came to my mind.

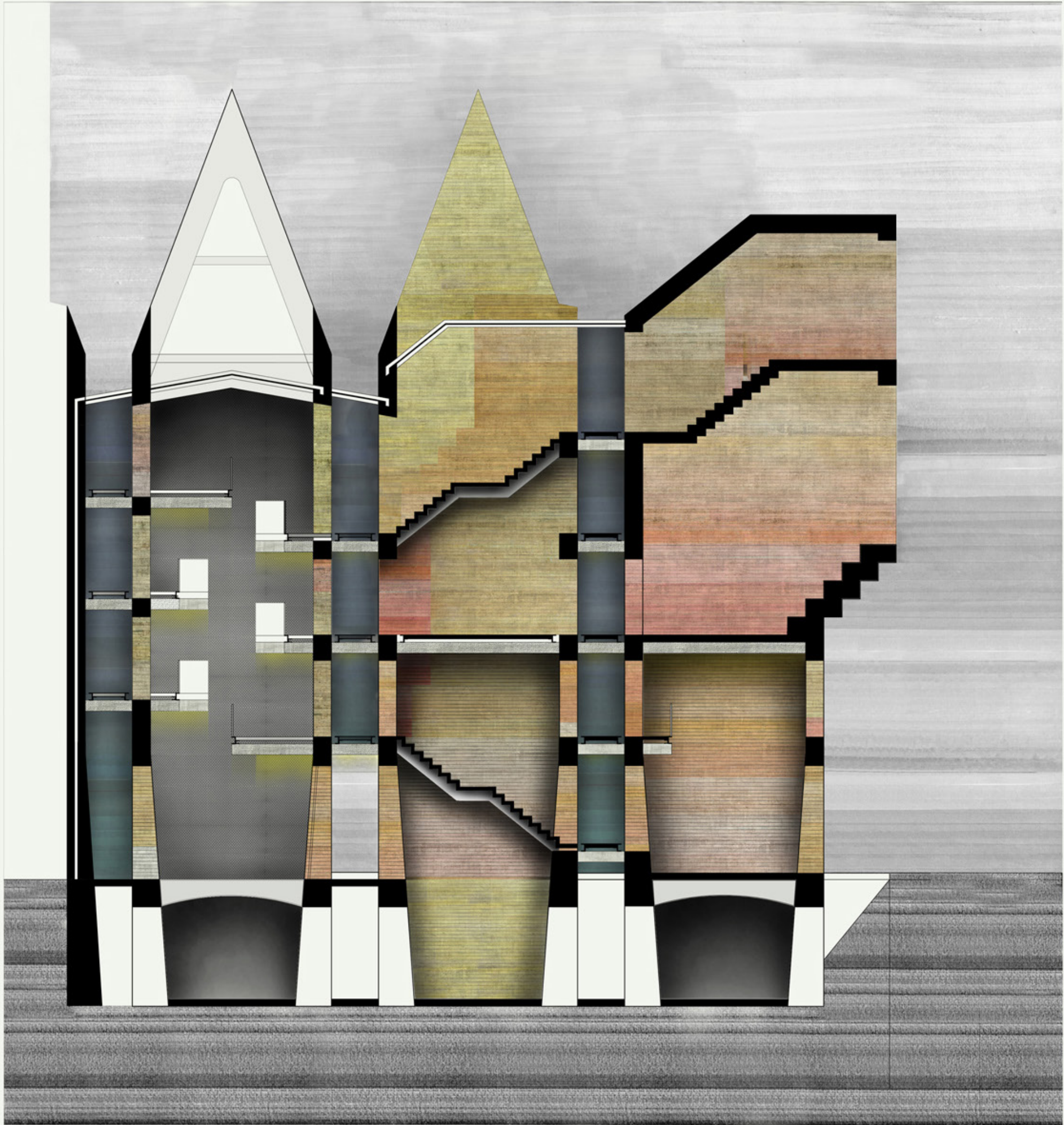


FIGURE 1 - Conceptual Section

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'Nobody returns
from a long journey
the way he left'

(Graham Greene)

INTRODUCTION

As my first semester at the WAAC unfolded, I was encountered with a big question: What to do for my thesis project? And even though I wasn't sure exactly what exactly the answer was, it was clear to me since the beginning of this process that I needed to work with something related to my passions. This is, in the end, the reason I came to the WAAC for in the first place.

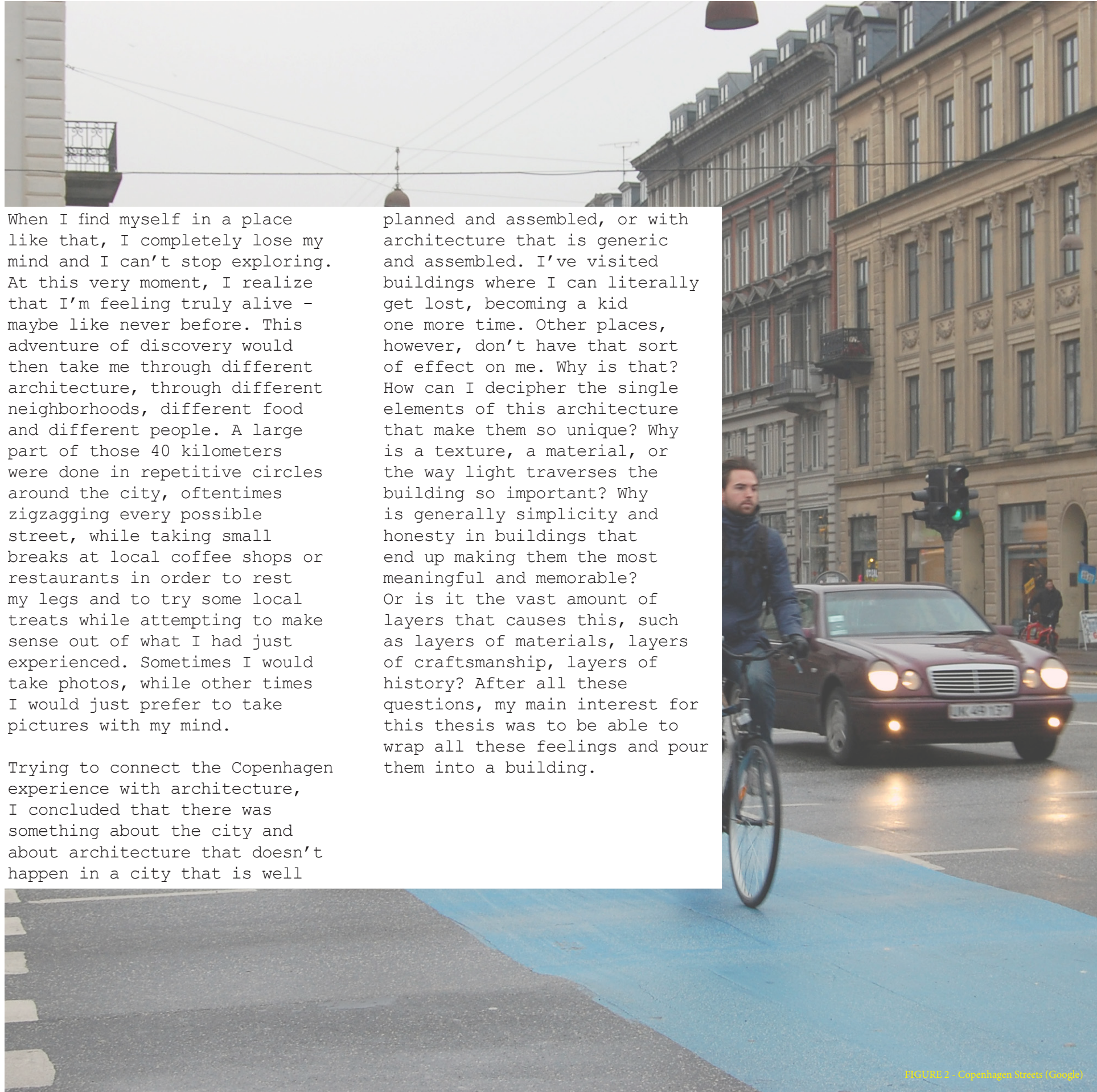
While pursuing my architecture degree back in Mendoza, I had the opportunity to design buildings that worked from a structural and functional standpoint, while achieving certain beauty and design formality. Following the school years, several projects in the professional field allowed me to "solve" a building as well. So, I had been there before. I had experienced that, and therefore that didn't represent a challenge for me any longer. The mission for this chapter of my life at the WAAC, therefore, was not merely to solve a program, but to be able to give birth to a building that had a soul.

Since the beginning of the research process I started thinking about what motivates me the most, and about when I do feel the most passionate and alive. After a long reflection, I decided that I wanted to work with my passion for travel and for learning languages.

I love to travel. I love to arrive in a new city and start discovering its soul right away. When I find myself at the beginning of this experience, an incredible feeling of excitement, translated as an immense inner energy, comes afloat inside of me, pushing me forward into this journey of exploration and discovery. The last times I've experienced this feeling - the last time I explored cities that had these qualities of amusement - I've ended up hurting my feet after days of intensive walking, not being able to make it any longer and having to spend the last part of my trip sitting down waiting for recovery. I haven't complained about this. I haven't gotten upset. I have

just understood that it all happened for a reason. When this happens, I become aware that I have pushed myself over my own limits, and I laugh.

This story is not unique in my travel experiences, but it can particularly relate to a trip that I did to Copenhagen three years ago that was a big inspiration for my research. I stayed in the city for 3 days during mid-August. I remember I was so motivated exploring, finding new coffee shops, navigating the different streets, the different architecture with all these different layers. I would walk, traverse a park, arrive to a diagonal avenue, and listen to all these people speaking in different languages. I would stare at a spot, observing the architecture but at the same time observing life just happening. The first day of my stay I walked almost 40 kilometers, and I was forced to take it easier the day after. I was not wearing the right shoes, I know, but that's not the point.



When I find myself in a place like that, I completely lose my mind and I can't stop exploring. At this very moment, I realize that I'm feeling truly alive - maybe like never before. This adventure of discovery would then take me through different architecture, through different neighborhoods, different food and different people. A large part of those 40 kilometers were done in repetitive circles around the city, oftentimes zigzagging every possible street, while taking small breaks at local coffee shops or restaurants in order to rest my legs and to try some local treats while attempting to make sense out of what I had just experienced. Sometimes I would take photos, while other times I would just prefer to take pictures with my mind.

Trying to connect the Copenhagen experience with architecture, I concluded that there was something about the city and about architecture that doesn't happen in a city that is well

planned and assembled, or with architecture that is generic and assembled. I've visited buildings where I can literally get lost, becoming a kid one more time. Other places, however, don't have that sort of effect on me. Why is that? How can I decipher the single elements of this architecture that make them so unique? Why is a texture, a material, or the way light traverses the building so important? Why is generally simplicity and honesty in buildings that end up making them the most meaningful and memorable? Or is it the vast amount of layers that causes this, such as layers of materials, layers of craftsmanship, layers of history? After all these questions, my main interest for this thesis was to be able to wrap all these feelings and pour them into a building.

FIGURE 1 - Copenhagen Streets (Google)

THREE SEMESTERS

I will be presenting the development of my thesis project in three chapters, which correlate to the three semesters that this journey took. These chapters are well defined, but they also overlaps.

FIRST SEMESTER will introduce the program and will explain the reasons behind this project. In here I will develop my initial ideas, introduce the site, and develop a series of schematic drawings. Towards the end of this chapter, the overall scheme for my building is already clear.

SECOND SEMESTER, which I call the puzzle-solving semester, was more dedicated towards solving the different, individual parts of the project. At this time, I already had a general idea of what my building was going to look like and what the general parts of the building were supposed to be. However, in this semester I worked more in depth with the different details that made this project work.

THIRD SEMESTER is when everything comes together. At this moment, my project was already clear. Therefore, this period of time was used to fix some discrepancies within the design, to make some minor adjustments, and ultimately to produce the final set of drawings.

FIRST SEMESTER

BRINGING IDEAS TOGETHER

FALL 2013

TANDEM & COFFEE PLACES

After my return to DC, I started looking for places to go “do tandem”, as the European call it. This practice is very common throughout Europe, and consists in having a conversation with a stranger in a different language. This activity normally happens in a coffee place, where both participants meet once, twice or three times a week to spend an hour or two talking in a different language. With coffee in between, one participant teaches the other their native language, or they divide the time in halves, where each mother language has the opportunity to become the protagonist.

Sometimes this dual learning experience comes in the shape of question in one language in answer in the other, where both participants are able to learn simultaneously.

In any case, doing tandem ends up becoming much more than just learning a new language. It becomes the opportunity to open the door to other people, other cultures, and to have a good time while making new friends.



FIGURE 3 - Tarifa Cafe, Hamburg (Google)



FIGURE 4 - Tide Cafe, Hamburg (Google)



FIGURE 5 - Cafe May, Hamburg (Google)



FIGURE 6 - Bar Knuth, Hamburg (Google)



FIGURE 7 - Cafe May, Hamburg (Google)



FIGURE 8 - Bar Knuth, Hamburg (Google)

LEARNING LANGUAGES IN DC

At the time of my return to DC, a big personal motivation was to find a place where I could keep speaking German; since I was too afraid I was going to start forgetting the language. I was also interested in the possibility of learning a new language, like French. It was during that first year back at WAAC when I realized that even though DC is a very cosmopolitan city, backed up by people from all over the world coming to the city, it didn't possess the same feeling of multiculturalism that I had found in other cities. Being DC such an important city from a geopolitical standpoint, you can find people from all over the world, you have all the embassies - you can go for example to the French embassy on Wednesday night to watch a French movie and drink wine - but out on the streets you wouldn't find events that would speak of an international city. In other words, that foreign presence was not so present.

So, in the attempt to find people that shared the same interests and places that could support these activities, I started researching online, and found some social networks - like

meetup.com or the German speakers community on Facebook - that would act as some sort of online platform for people to find and arrange these sorts of activities. People would meet around twice a week in a bar or café to speak a specific language. I decided to give it a try and I went there a couple of times. I did enjoy the time I spent with my new group of foreign friends, but then the problem was that there was lack of a physical place that supported the activity that we were looking for. For instance, the café would be a Starbucks, which would close too early or not have enough space to sit. Or, if we moved to a bar, we would have to keep ordering drinks or food in order to keep our right to use that table - otherwise we would be kicked out. There was not really a space that we could use the way we wanted. This made me realize of the need to have some sort of language place, where people could simply gather and communicate, learn and practice.



FIGURE 9 - 14th Street, NW

LOOKING FOR A NEIGHBORHOOD

At this point, I already had an idea for the type of project that I wanted to work on. The next step was then to go out and look for a site. "Where should I build this?" was my next question. I needed to find a site in a place that had enough people walking by on the streets, a place that would be approachable for people of all ages, a place that would bring different activities together instead of forcing you to go to different places far away, like is the case with the existing embassies.

After analyzing different areas of DC, I ended up focusing on the 14th Street corridor. Not long ago, maybe 4 or 5 years into the past, 14th Street and its surroundings was considered a dangerous area to visit. In the last years, however, the area started going through a

revitalization process. Old buildings were renovated, and new structures starting filling those empty gaps. Urban renewal and densification took place, and as a result, the corridor is today filled with stores and restaurants, and has become a good place to go to eat something or to go out afterwards. Architecturally speaking, this area used to possess a very interesting character, with a broad array of brick, colorful structures, with corner towers and row houses. However, through this revitalization process that we've been witnessing, this historic architecture has slowly been replaced with a larger scale of mix-use residential / commercial buildings. If one looks around 14th Street today, one will find new developments all over

the place. And this triggers of course the question of how will 14th Street look in five years from now.

After this thoughtful analysis, I arrived to the conclusion that this neighborhood and its people would benefit from the type of program that I was considering for my thesis.



FIGURE 11 - DC Houses (Google)



FIGURE 10 - DC Houses (Google)



FIGURE 12 - DC Houses (Google)

| 2007 |

intersection with T Street
looking east



FIGURE 13 - 14th Street looking east - 2007 (Google)



FIGURE 14 - 14th Street looking east - 2014 (Google)

| 2014 |

intersection with T Street
looking east

| 2007 |

between S & U Streets
looking west



FIGURE 15 - 14th Street looking west - 2007 (Google)



FIGURE 16 - 14th Street looking west - 2014 (Google)

| 2014 |

between S & U Streets
looking west

LOOKING FOR A SITE

Once I knew that I wanted my project to exist on 14th Street, I went on a neighborhood expedition to try to find a possible site. Since the majority of remaining sites were quickly disappearing, I didn't have too many options available. However, there was a small available site that I liked. It is located in the intersections of 14th Street and Swann. The site, which used to be a parking lot and later a car repair shop, has around 30m by 40m. This is one of the few remaining sites in the area that hasn't been rebuilt yet. Eventually, after comparing this site with 2 others along the corridor, I arrived to the conclusion that it's closeness with U Street, and with the metro station, made this place the best option for my project.



FIGURE 17 - Project Site



FIGURE 18 - Project Site (Google)

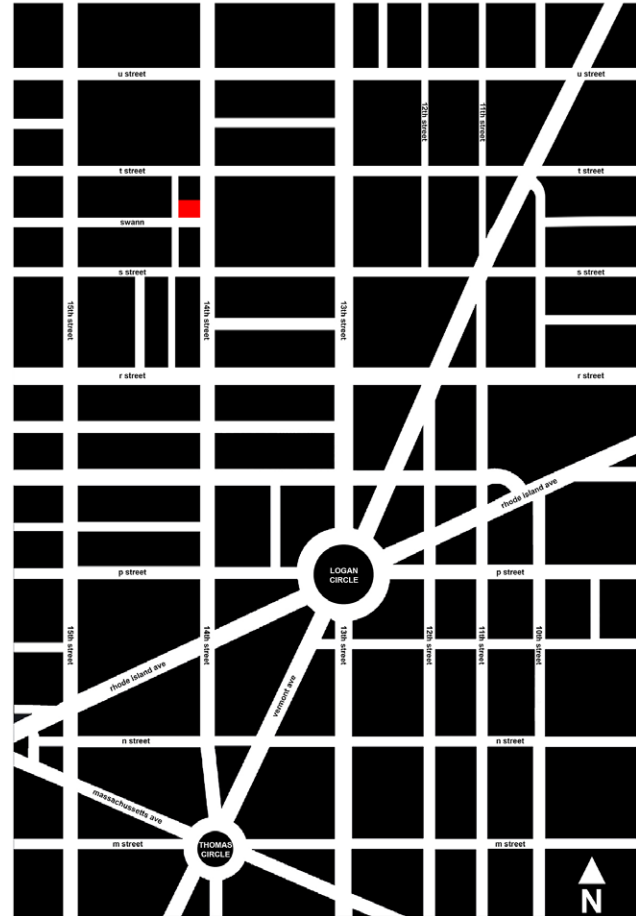


FIGURE 19 - Site Location Diagram



FIGURE 20 - Existing Site Elevation



FIGURE 21 - Existing Site Elevation

ARTISAN ARCHITECTURE VS. INDUSTRIALIZED ASSEMBLAGE

Once I confirmed that my site was going to be located on the intersections of 14th Street and Swann, I started series of visits in order to analyze the area and to decipher the language of the surrounding urban environment. For this purpose, I walked around the streets, explored the alleys, visited some buildings and took pictures of everything I saw.

During this process, my main concern was to be able to understand the qualities of the architecture that was present in the neighborhood, both old and new, and how these talked to one another. After a couple of visits, it became clear to me that I was witnessing 2 different languages. It also became clear which types of buildings, materials and proportions I enjoyed the most. I realized that I didn't want to develop a project that promoted the assemblage of generic, industrialized materials, and the lack of local character. On the contrary, I wanted to work with the proportions of a row house, because when I entered into one of those buildings, I really enjoyed the feeling that those 18 feet of width (5.5 or 6.5 meters) between thick walls created. Being there, I was able to see one wall on one side, the other wall on the other side, and I would feel somehow

protected. I could perceive the thickness of these walls, and even all these layers of history that were contained in such wall. These qualities - the thickness of the wall and the layers of paint, of scratches - makes you feel that you are just a little tiny part of something bigger.

Then there are the alleys. Most of these buildings had alleys in between. Some of them are used. Some of them aren't. These alleys allow you to go in between buildings in order to get somewhere else. Sometimes they are there to allow you to reach the back street, or for you to find a missing courtyard. Alleys create a magical experience. There's a coffee shop in Old Town called ESP. Most of the students at WAAC know it. You can reach ESP from their main entrance on King Street. But, if you decide to reach it from the back side and through the alley, not only is this experience of walking in between walls beautiful, but you will also find a

hidden little patio with benches. Sitting there at the patio, you can see the brick and all the layers of painting, and you start wondering how old should this building be. If you come from the Gallery, through the alley, you can get this experience as well.

An interesting thing, if we go back to the topic of languages, is that this concern that I'm having about architecture, is happening with languages as well. Let me provide some numbers in order to explain my point. As of 2009, there were between 6,000 and 7,000 languages alive, and it is believed that by 2050, 90% of them are going to be gone. So, we can see that globalization is really reshaping everything. And even though the project of Esperanto, as a global language that would be the spoken all over the world, didn't succeed as intended, we could say that English - or some other main languages of today - did succeed, in what to globalization and communication concerns. They have therefore, helped reshape the global scenario.

So, having said that, I could state that this building in the end is about recovering - or celebrating - the richness of architecture through craftsmanship, through detail and through a sense of surprise.

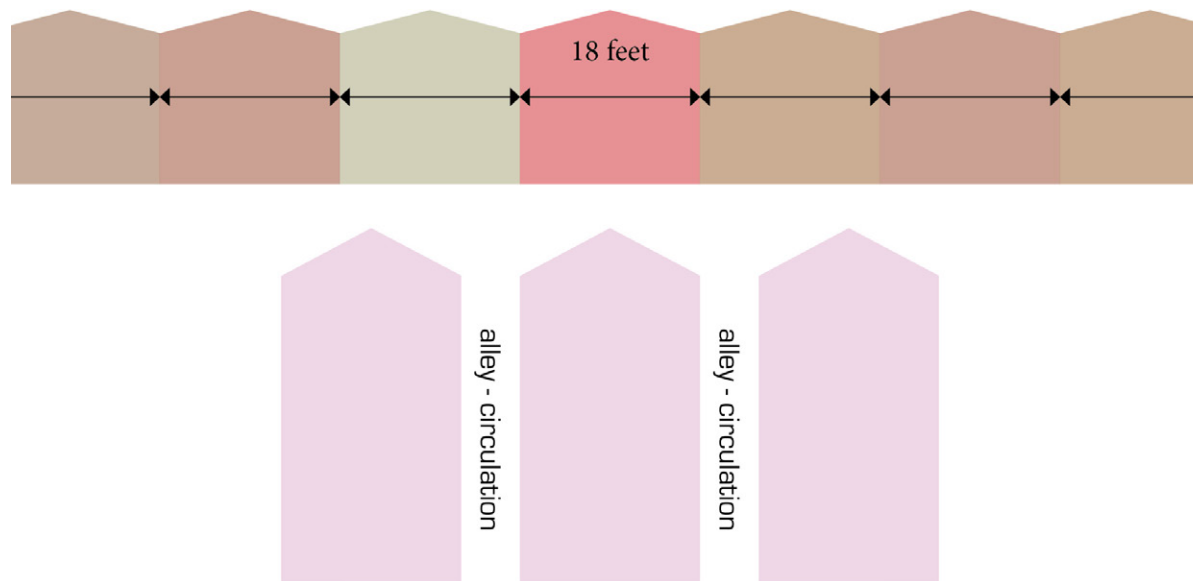


FIGURE 22 - Row House Proportion Diagram

THE PROGRAM

At this point, I already had a general idea of what type of program I wanted to have in my building. I wanted to have some specific uses, while also providing open plans for more general activities. I wanted to give people the freedom to visit the building and to use it without being given any official instructions. A building, just like a city, as an open lab for different things to happen.

The building, therefore, was thought to have an open plan for receptions and temporary exhibitions, an auditorium for lectures and movie nights, a coffee shop, a wine bar, a living room space with sofas and benches, a library of language books, and the rest would be composed of many spaces of different sizes for classes and language conversations.

So, I started doing some sketches and drawings of what my building could look like. This was a long process that took me several weeks, and went gradually from developing simple conceptual drawings that meant to explore the sense of uncertainty and surprise that I wanted my building to have, to more clear layouts where certain elements of my project would start to appear. I would also spend some time studying certain parts, such as the bathrooms or the walls.



FIGURE 23 - Concept Drawing

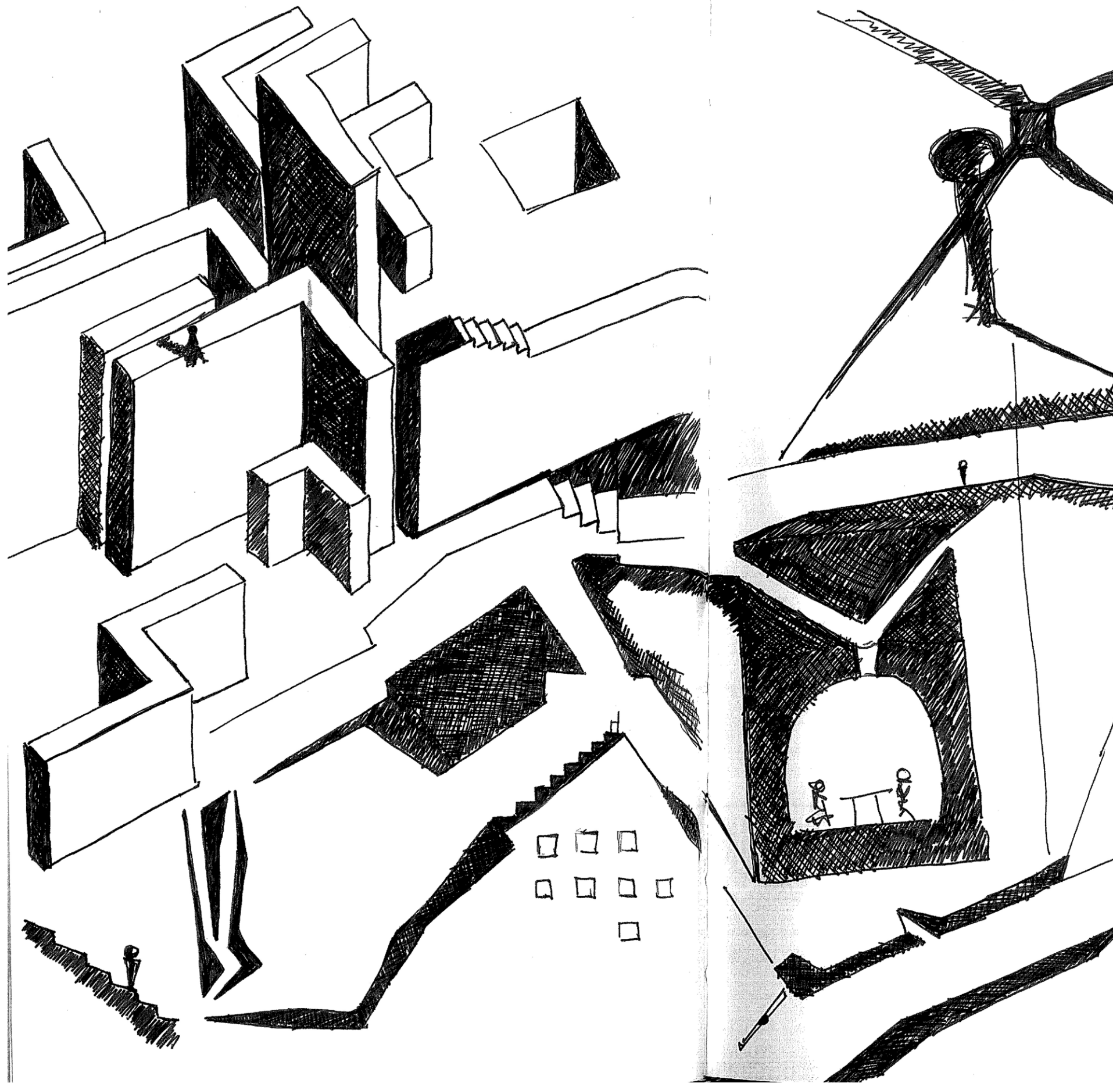


FIGURE 24 - Concept Drawing

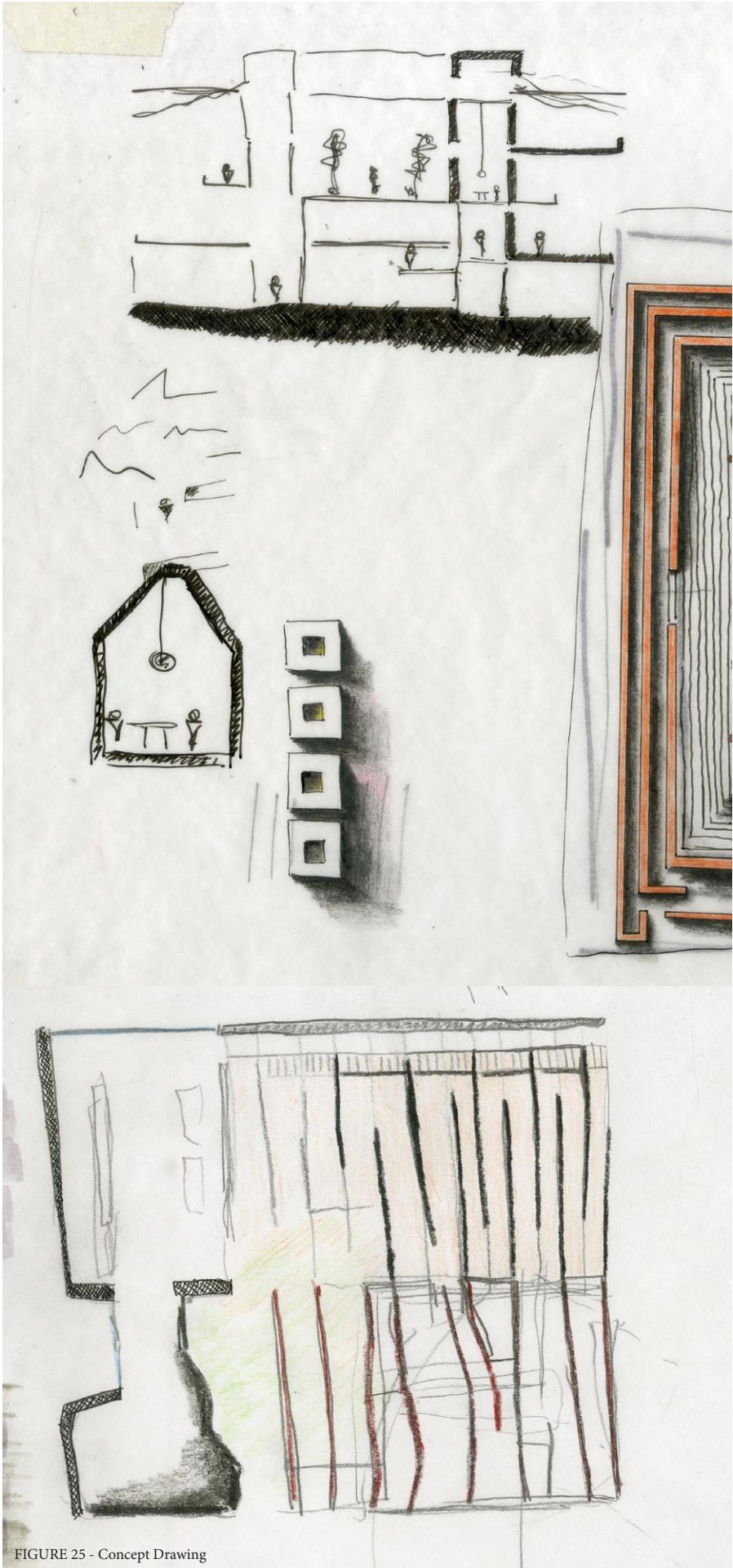
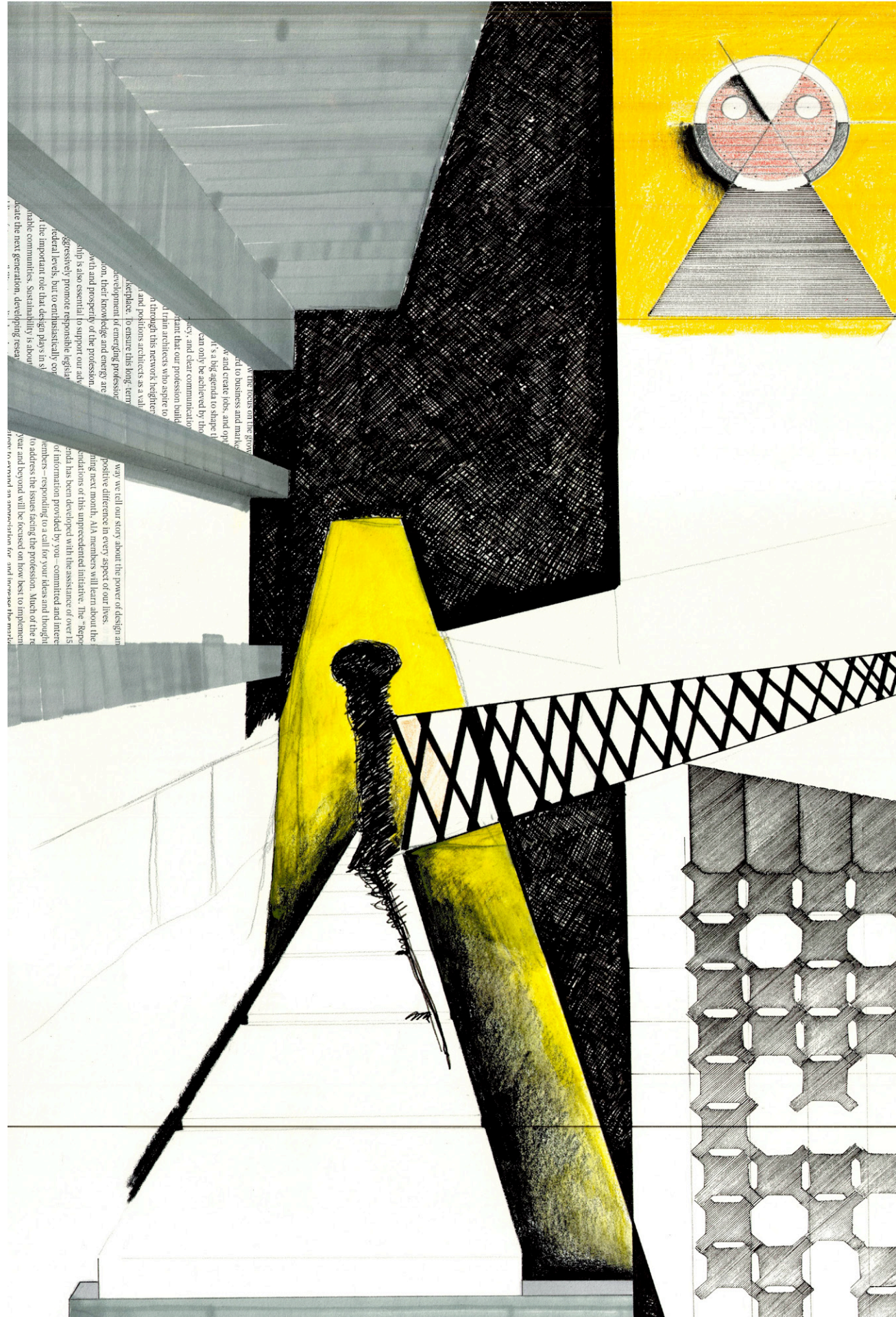


FIGURE 25 - Concept Drawing



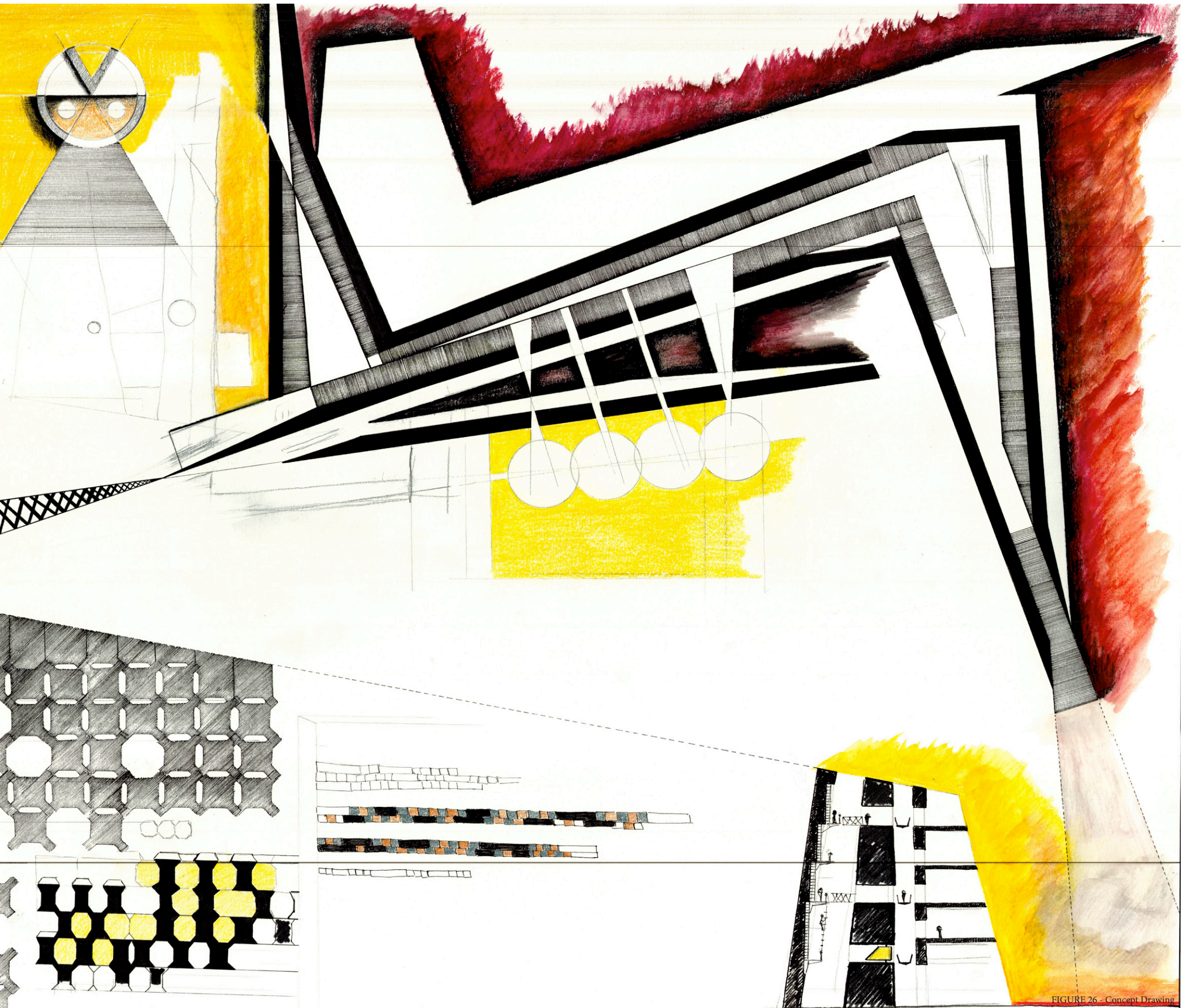
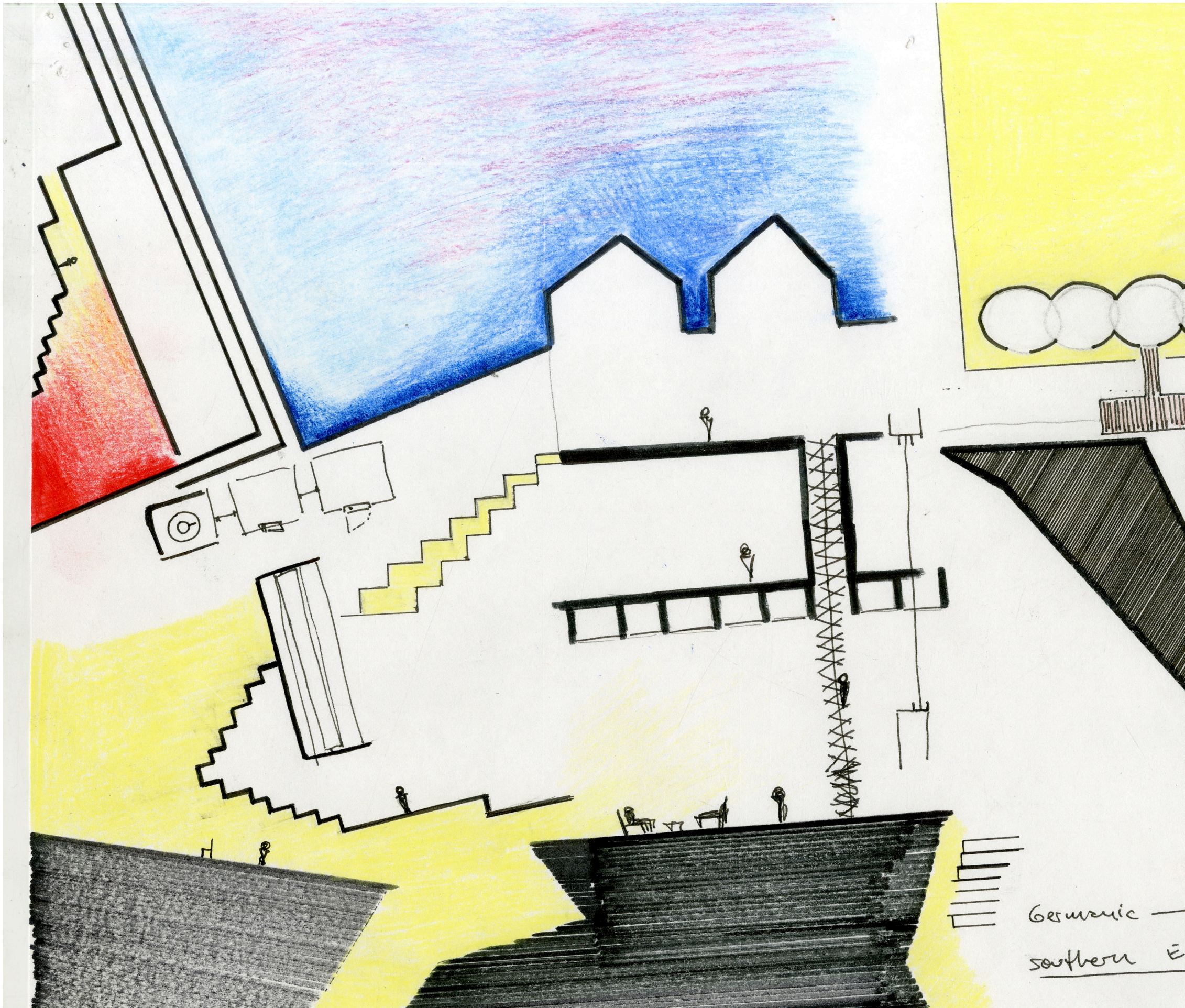


FIGURE 26 - Concept Drawing



Germanic —
southern E

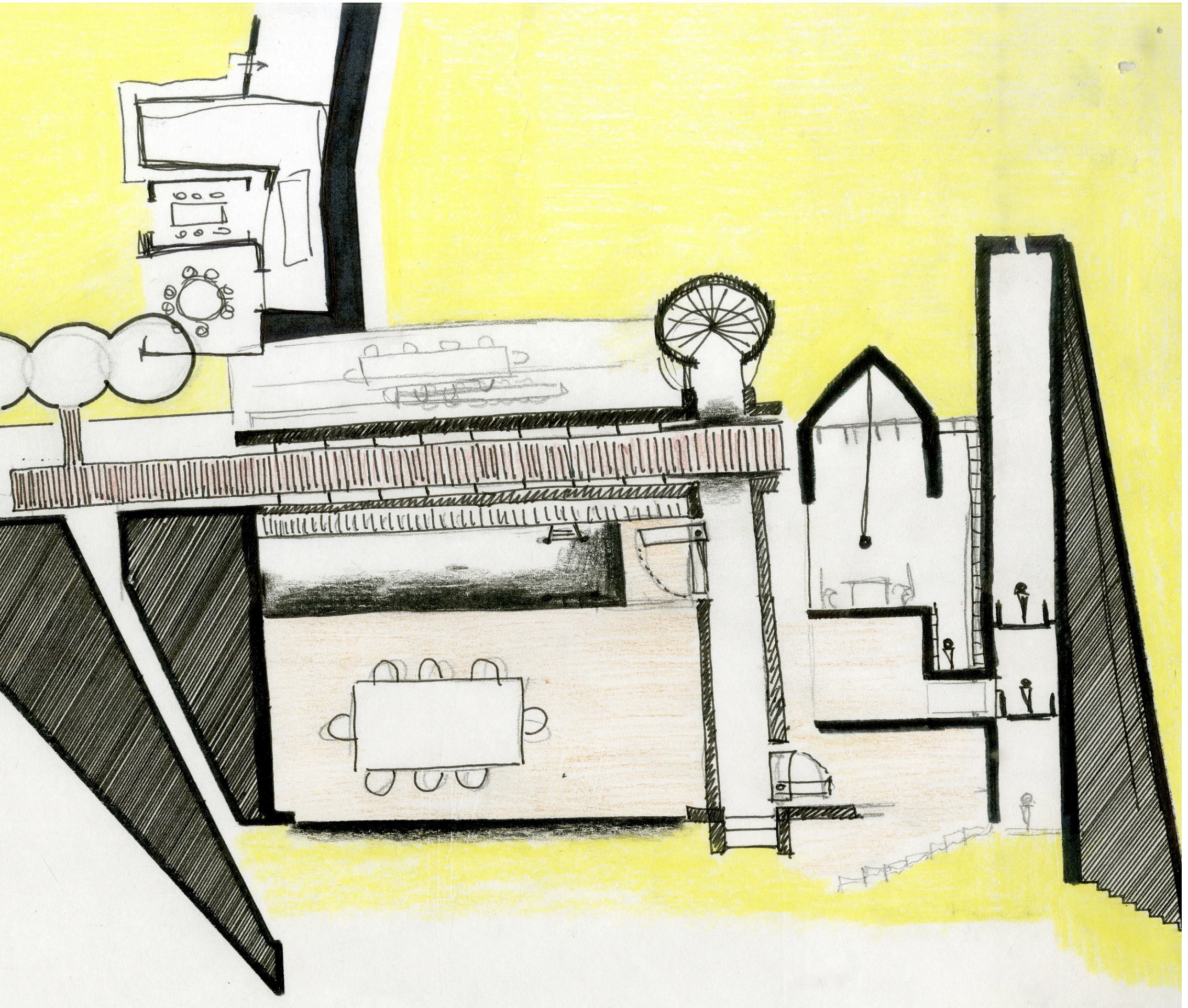
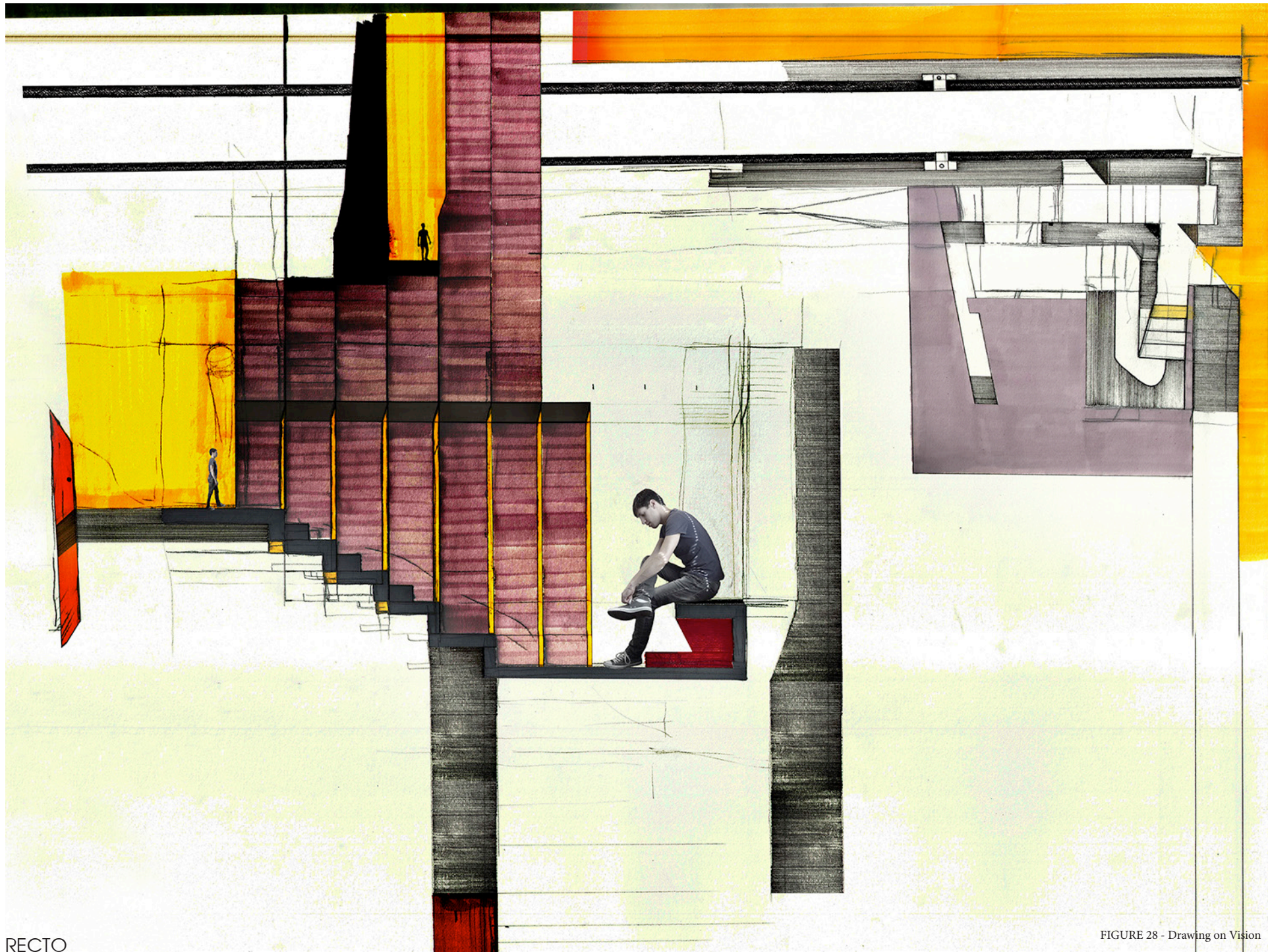


FIGURE 27 - Concept Drawing



RECTO

FIGURE 28 - Drawing on Vision

Traversing the building. Going up. Going down. Turning left or right. Zigzagging. Getting lost in the realm of possibilities. That's what my project is about. And, as in my project, the intention for this drawing is to try to imagine how these situations take place inside the building. The goal is therefore to try to imagine two different parts of my building, being both intrinsically related, since both

take advantage of the existence of the other in order to be complete.

The first element takes the role of a staircase, but is actually a labyrinth. This element is a journey into a different dimension inside the building. It contains thick walls, openings, steps, textures, and places to seat to take a break or to observe other places. This labyrinth is a shortcut inside the

building, a place that allows the person to quickly travel from one place to another. One can well make use of the labyrinth, or use the traditional threshold instead. It's up to the person. But one has to be aware that this labyrinth is full of turns, zigzags, and dead ends. Therefore, its use should only be recommended to those who are willing to assume the risk of embracing the unknown.

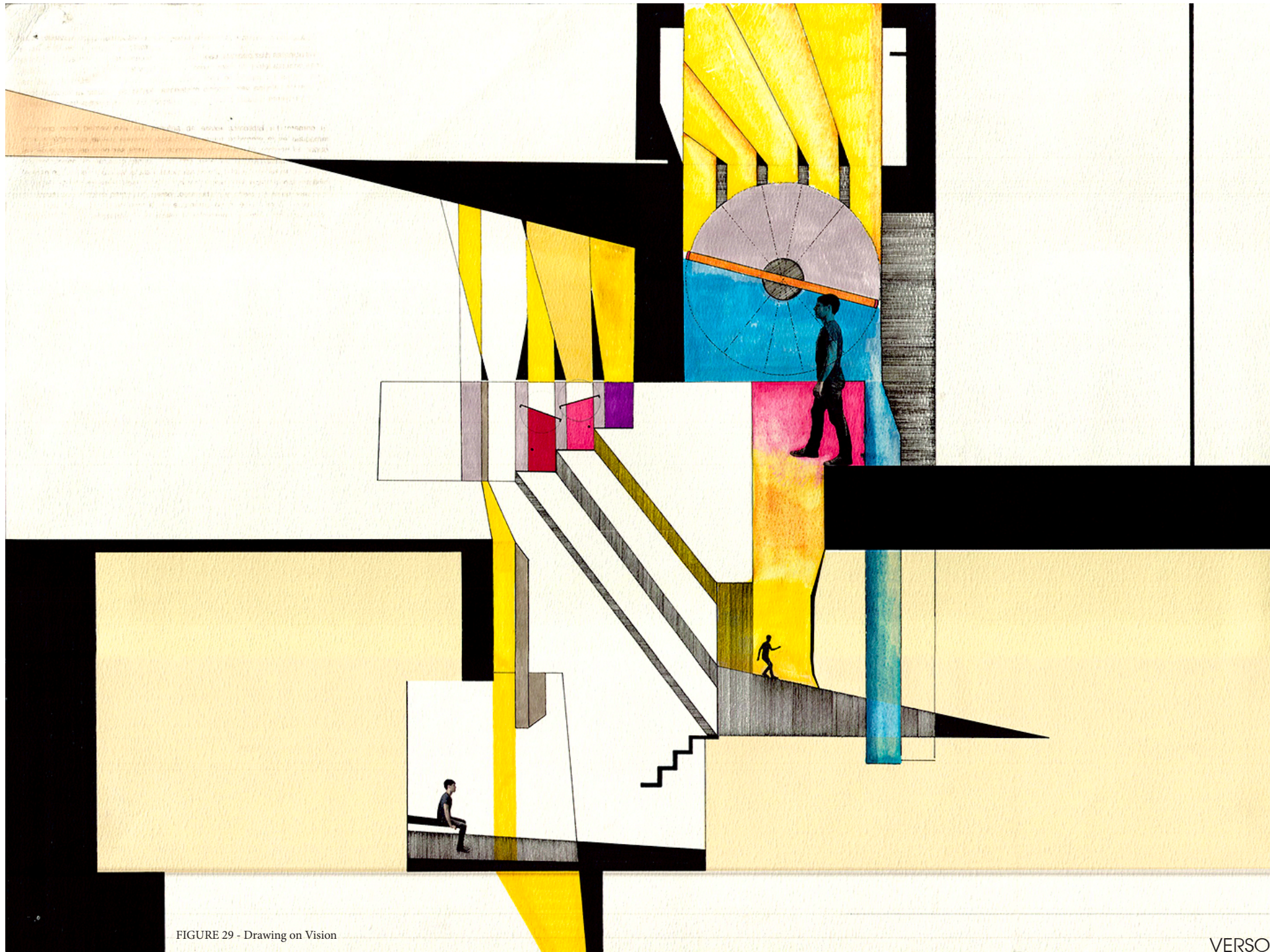


FIGURE 29 - Drawing on Vision

VERSO

Turning the page around - and upside down - there's a different situation. Containing similar architectural elements as the previous drawing, this one is a representation of the life inside the building. It was born on its own, but it fed from the previous drawing in order to achieve a richer architectural experience. Many of the previous elements have been turned upside down, becoming

openings in the ceilings, doors, and different types of windows that allow the outside world to merge with the inside. The experience of this other place is, after all, the one of being inside a labyrinth as well.

**THE LABYRINTH OF
MULTIPLE POSSIBILITIES**
DRAWING ON VISION
Ekphrasis nr1
Material Imagination in Architecture
Spring 2014

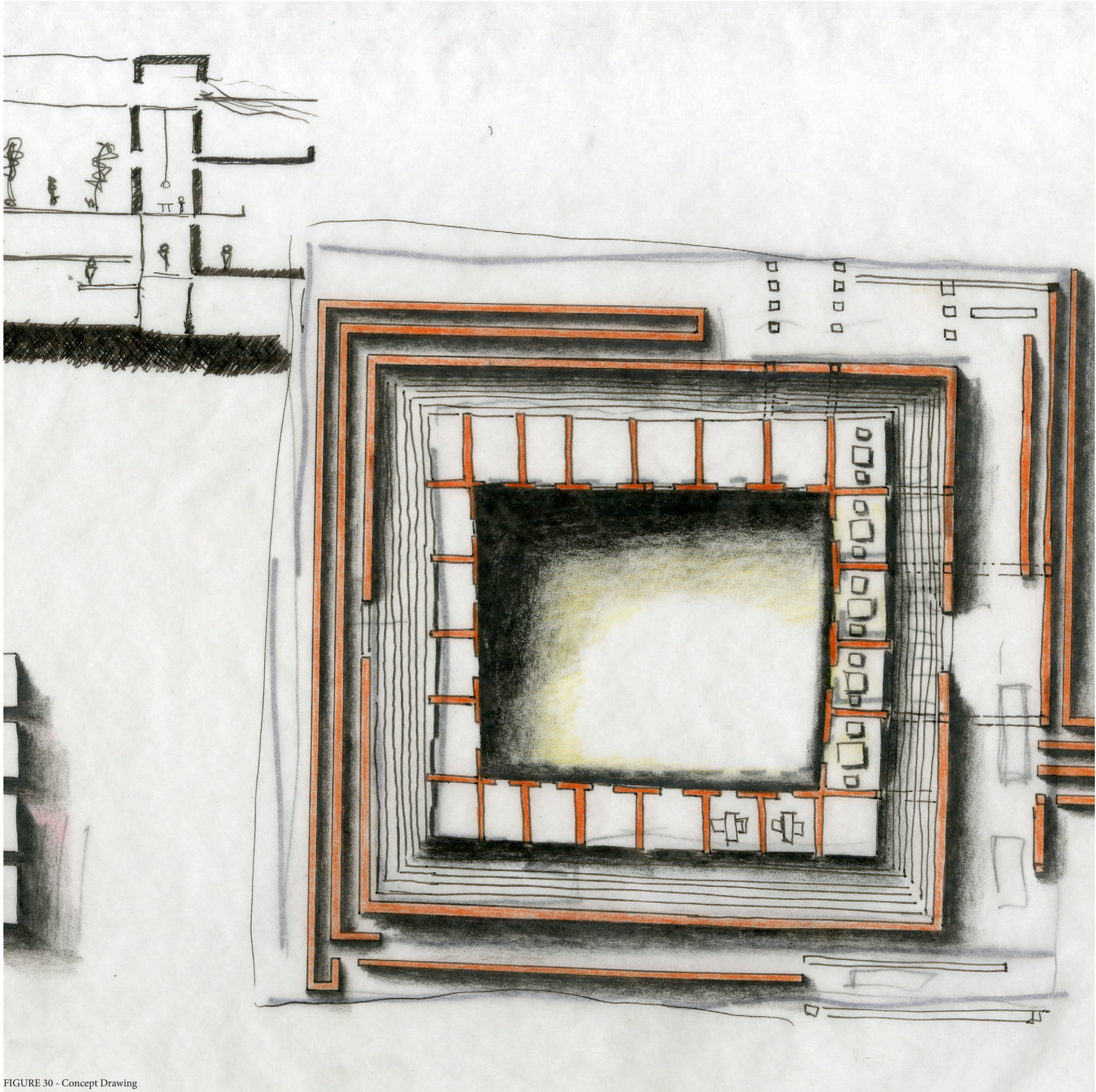


FIGURE 30 - Concept Drawing



FIGURE 31 - Concept Section

Since by this point I already knew that I wanted to work with the proportion of the raw-house, I decided to start drafting ideas for a building that would be composed of repetitive structures and alleys in between. Therefore, I started imagining a series of buildings laid next to one another, different buildings with different uses, and in between having a series of alleys that would allow me to circulate, to enter and to exit. These alleys, these in-between spaces, would eventually become my circulation, and in some cases ramps.

These conceptual drawings were developed for the first thesis midterms presentation. They intend to represent the current thoughts on the project. In

the upper drawing, we can already see the presence of three towers that are separated by alleys. There's also a coffee shop, areas for photo exhibitions, rooms for language classes, and an ascendant path that connects everything and takes the visitor throughout the whole building.

Meanwhile, I started doing some studies for the design of the walls containing my program. In a series of drawings, I tried to explore the relationship between the way of constructing a wall and the way languages are built, with the intention of finding some sort of relationship between the material of the wall and the characters of an alphabet. This led me to start imagining a wall that was made out of concrete blocks, treating

such blocks as characters. My ultimate intention here was to start writing - or typing - a wall. This was of course, the first of other iterations to come.

So, I started typing, pretending that I was writing in a specific language. The concrete blocks - my characters - would then form words; and the openings - those voids between blocks - would then be the spaces. I went further, and I started imagining that one building or one wall could be written in German and the other in English, for example, and because words in the German language tend to be longer, the overall result ended up being a wall with longer pieces of concrete and fewer openings, fewer spaces.

This early drawing also incorporated an idea of what would eventually become a strong element throughout the project: the in-between ramps. Departing from the previously conceived alleys between buildings, I decided to suggest a series of ramps that extend between these walls. These ramps are structurally attached to the walls, but in a way that keeps a gap between them, allowing for visual connections both with the space above and underneath. The ramp is, at the same time, to be built out of a semi transparent element, like perforated metal, which supports the sense of transparency and visual connection. Finally, the books stacked inside the concrete blocks suggest the possibility of a semi transparent wall, allowing it to be fully solid when all the books are in place.

These were all ideas that, although premature in this case, were able to move ahead with the project and were developed further.

So, with the goal of trying to merge all these ideas together, I kept refining the concept of the different towers, and I continued drawing sketches, plans and sections of my building. Departing from the previous schematic drawings, my intention this time was to work with the aforementioned proportion of 18 feet of width - the proportion of the raw

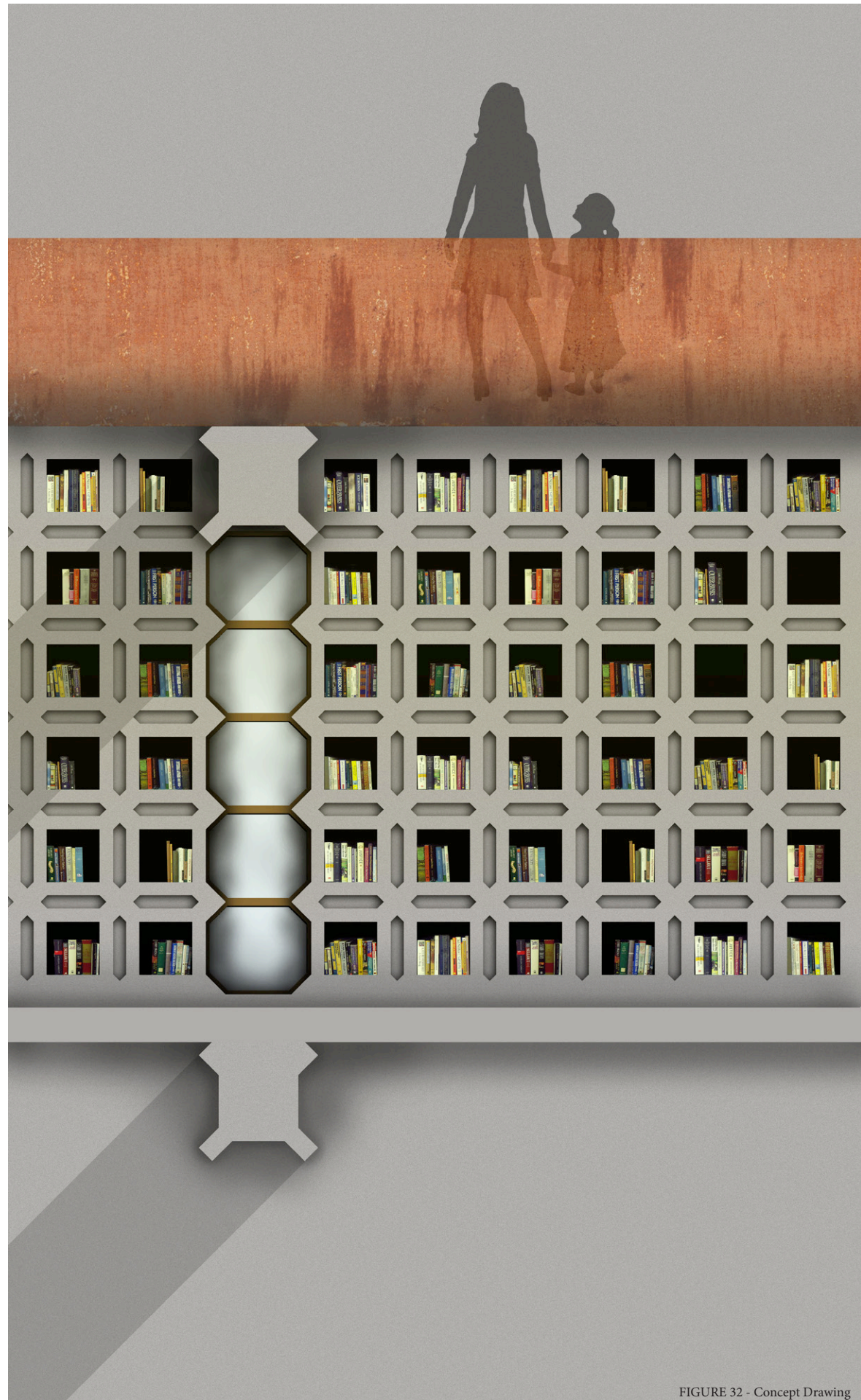


FIGURE 32 - Concept Drawing

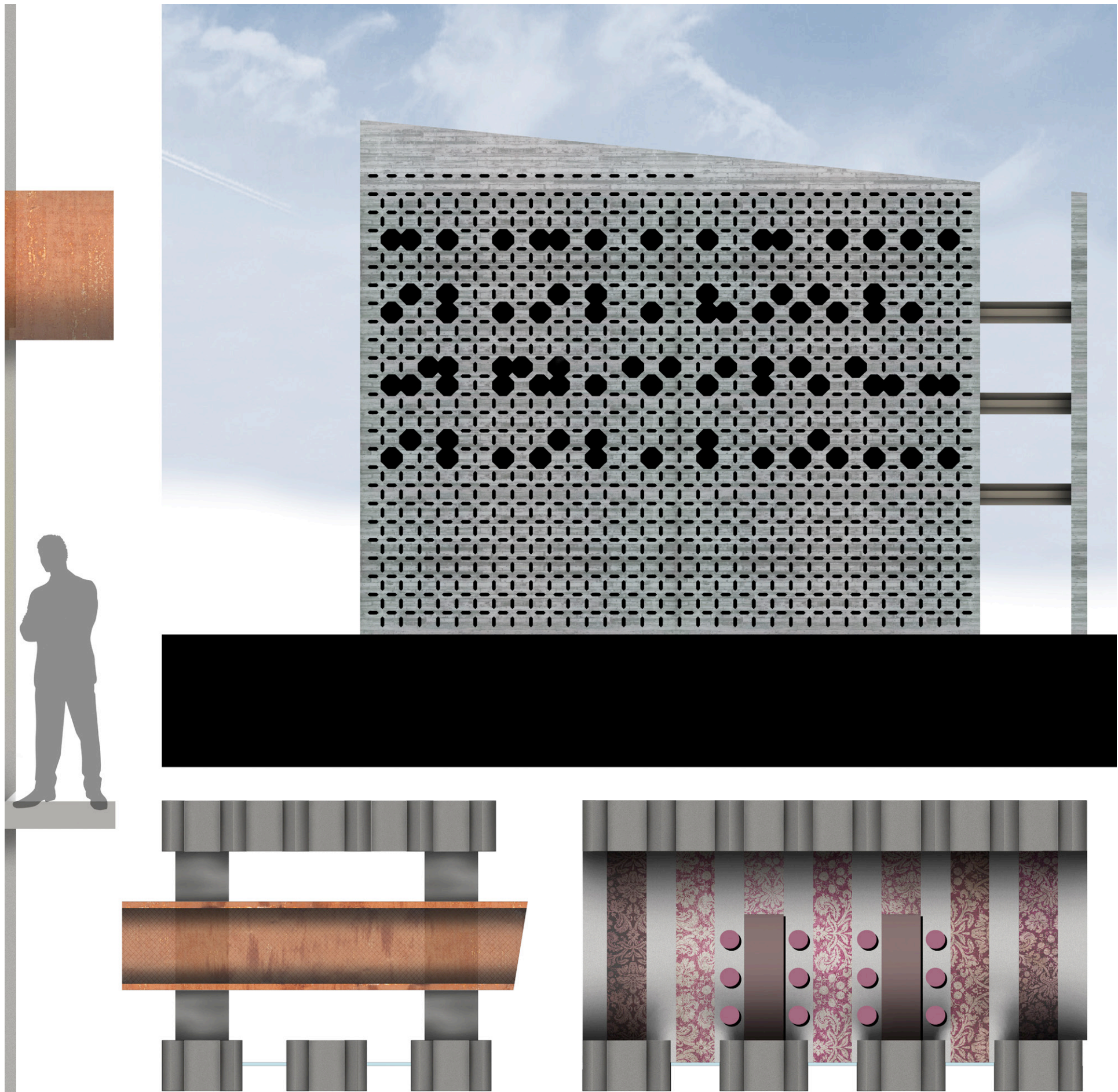


FIGURE 33 - Concept Drawing

house - to develop a section that was more accurate with the reality that I was trying to achieve.

So, I went through a process of thinking and imagining how the wall and its texture could look like, while trying to put together a section that somehow brought together all the ideas that I had up to that moment. The result was the drawing on page 37.

The current building brings together an auditorium in the corner, the ramps as some sort of bridges, smaller spaces within the interior voids of the buildings, reachable from the ramps and intended for people to stop by to engage in brief conversations, and eventually to keep moving. I also thought of a basement, that could be some sort of German Keller where people drink beer or wine and feel protected in winter time.

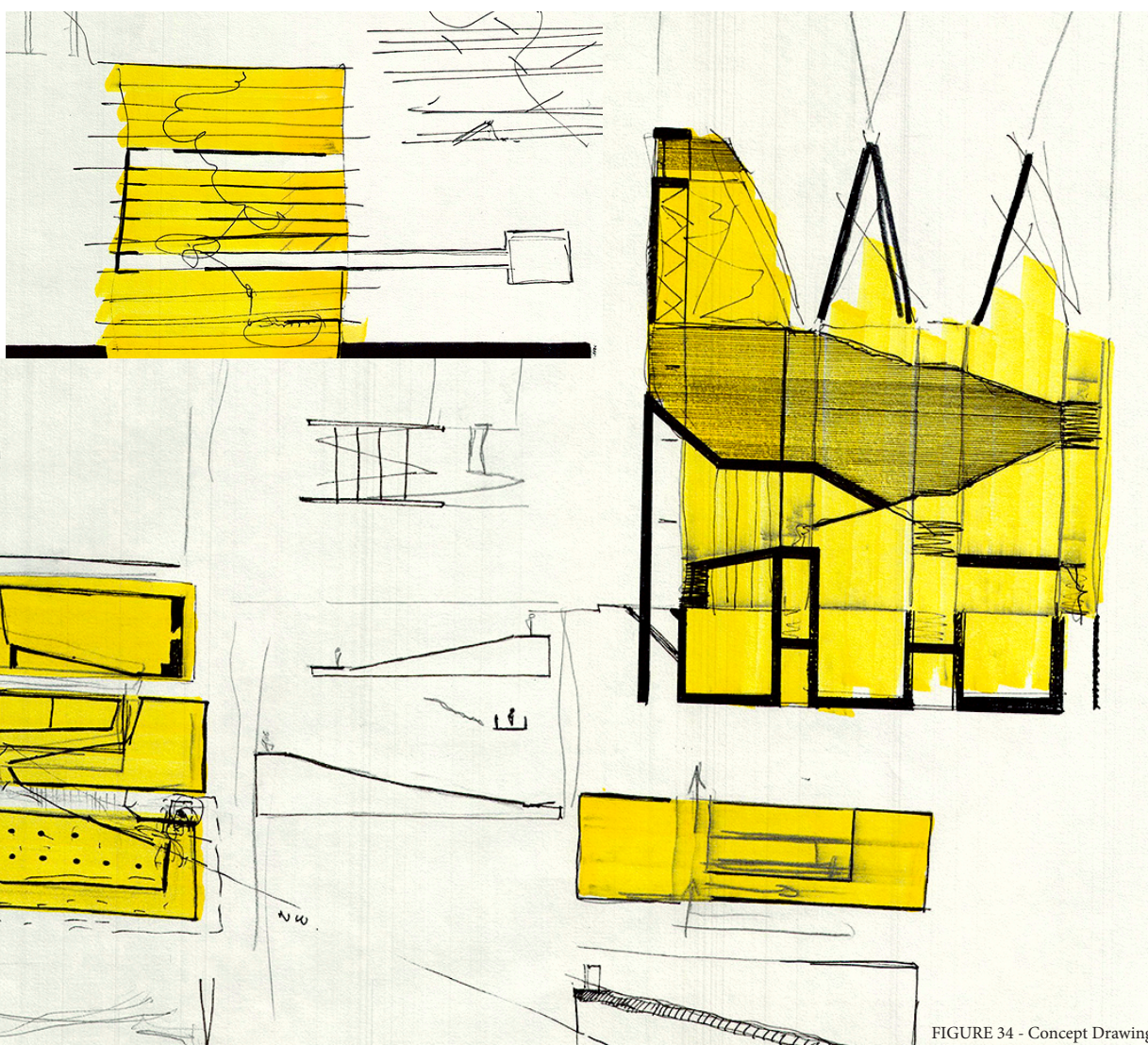


FIGURE 34 - Concept Drawing

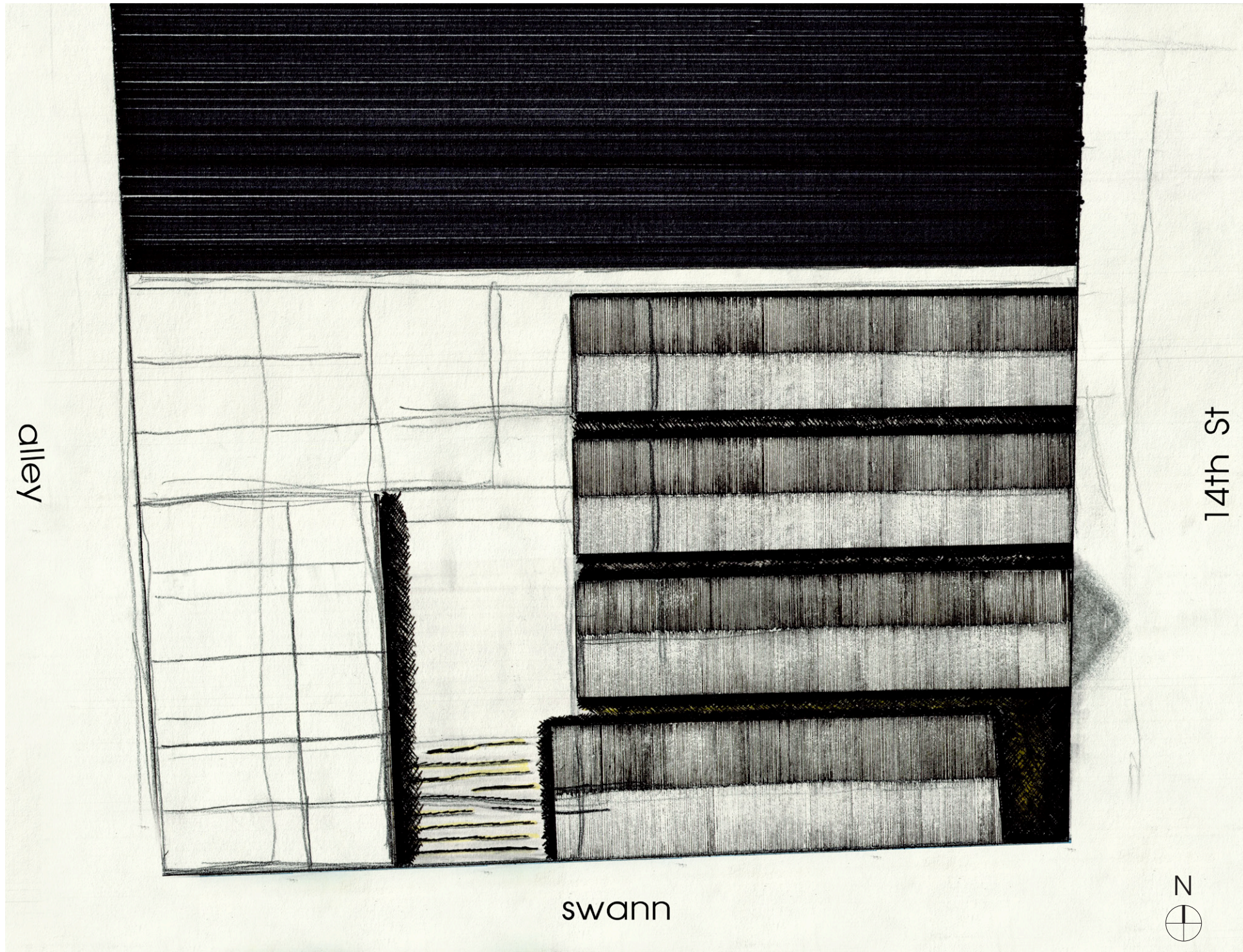


FIGURE 35 - Concept Siteplan



FIGURE 36 - Elevation Sketch

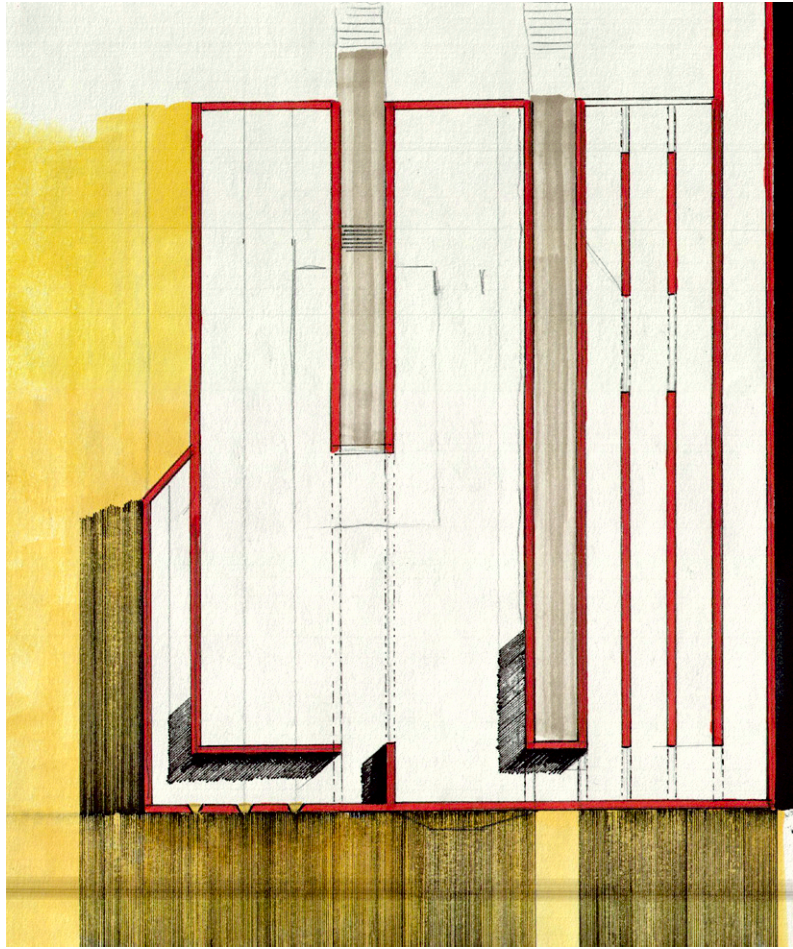


FIGURE 37 - Concept Plan

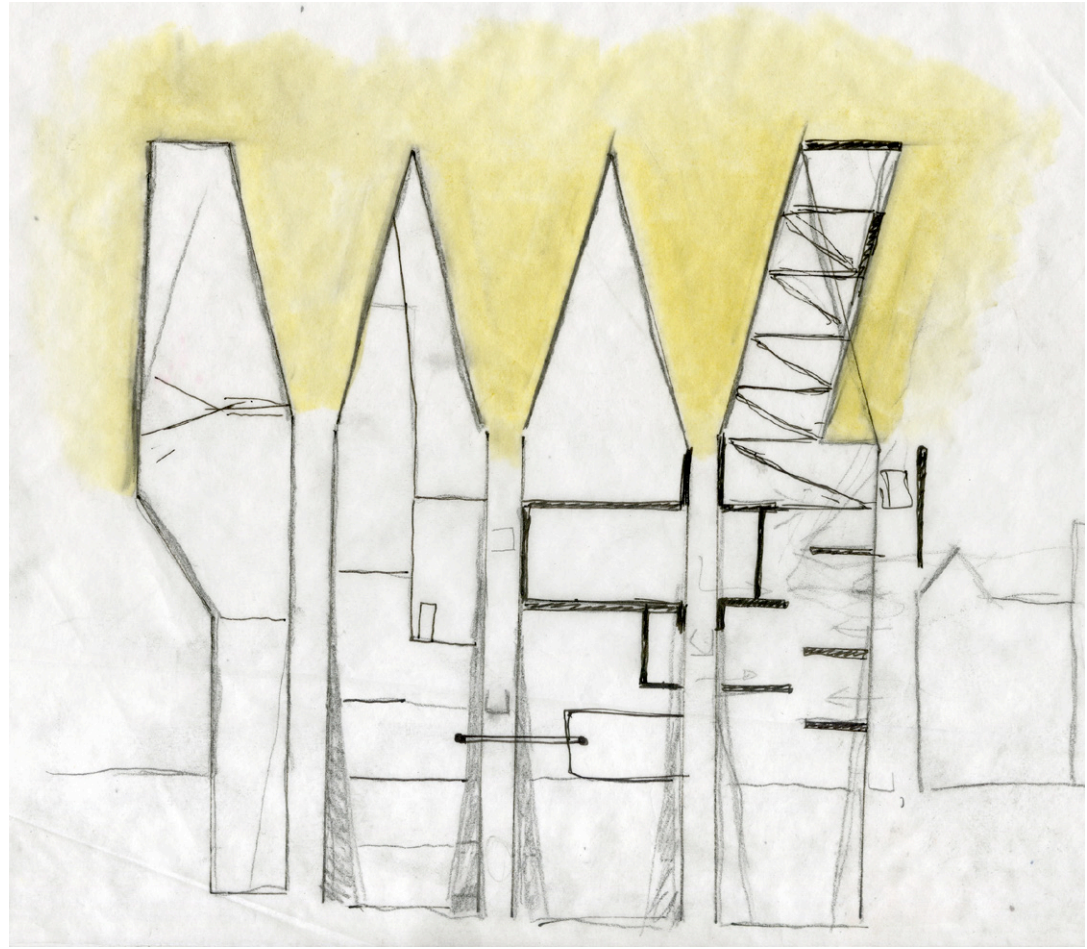


FIGURE 38 - Building Section Sketch

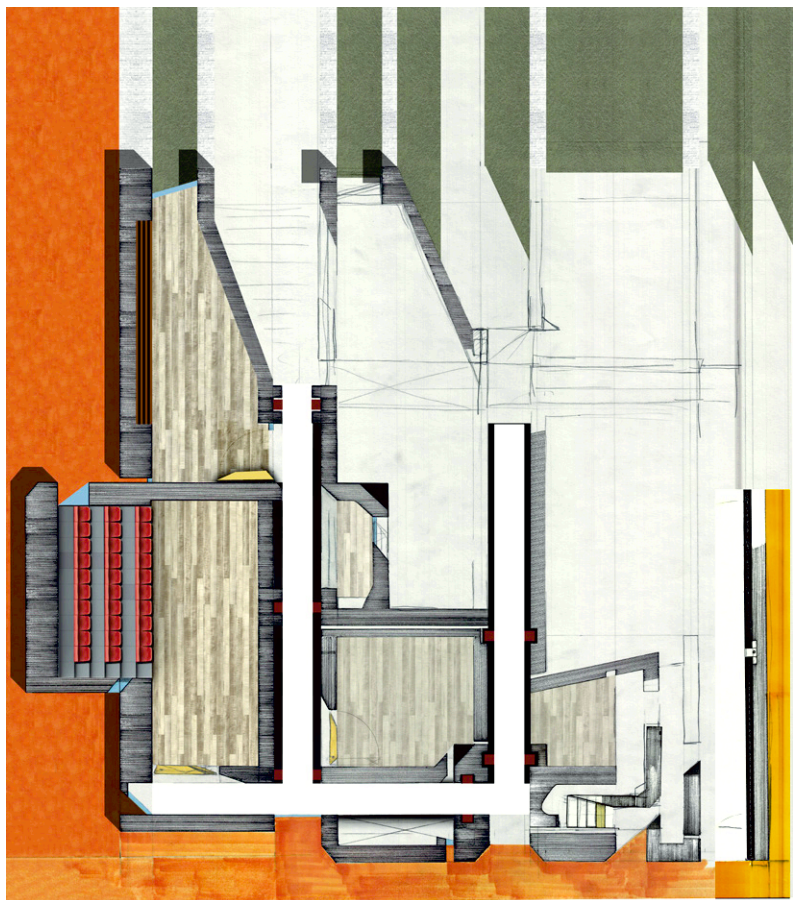


FIGURE 39 - Building Plan Sketch

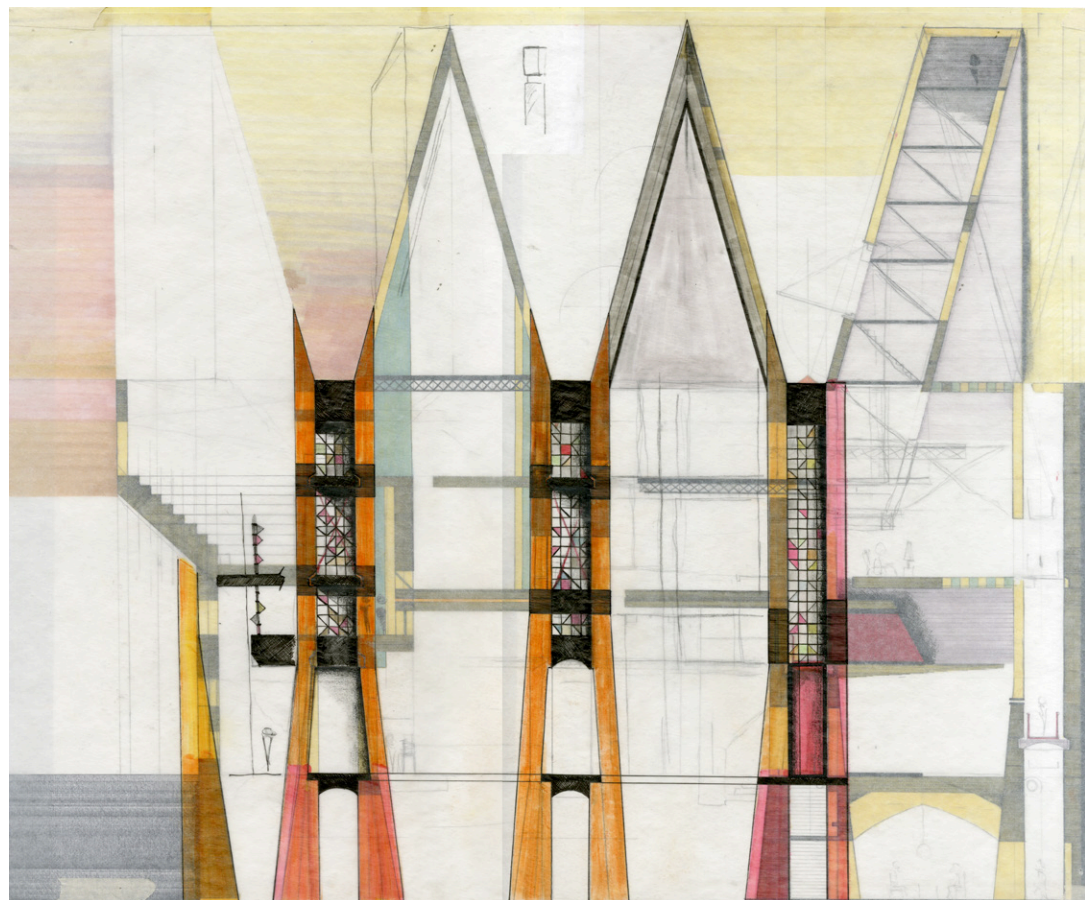


FIGURE 40 - Building Section Sketch

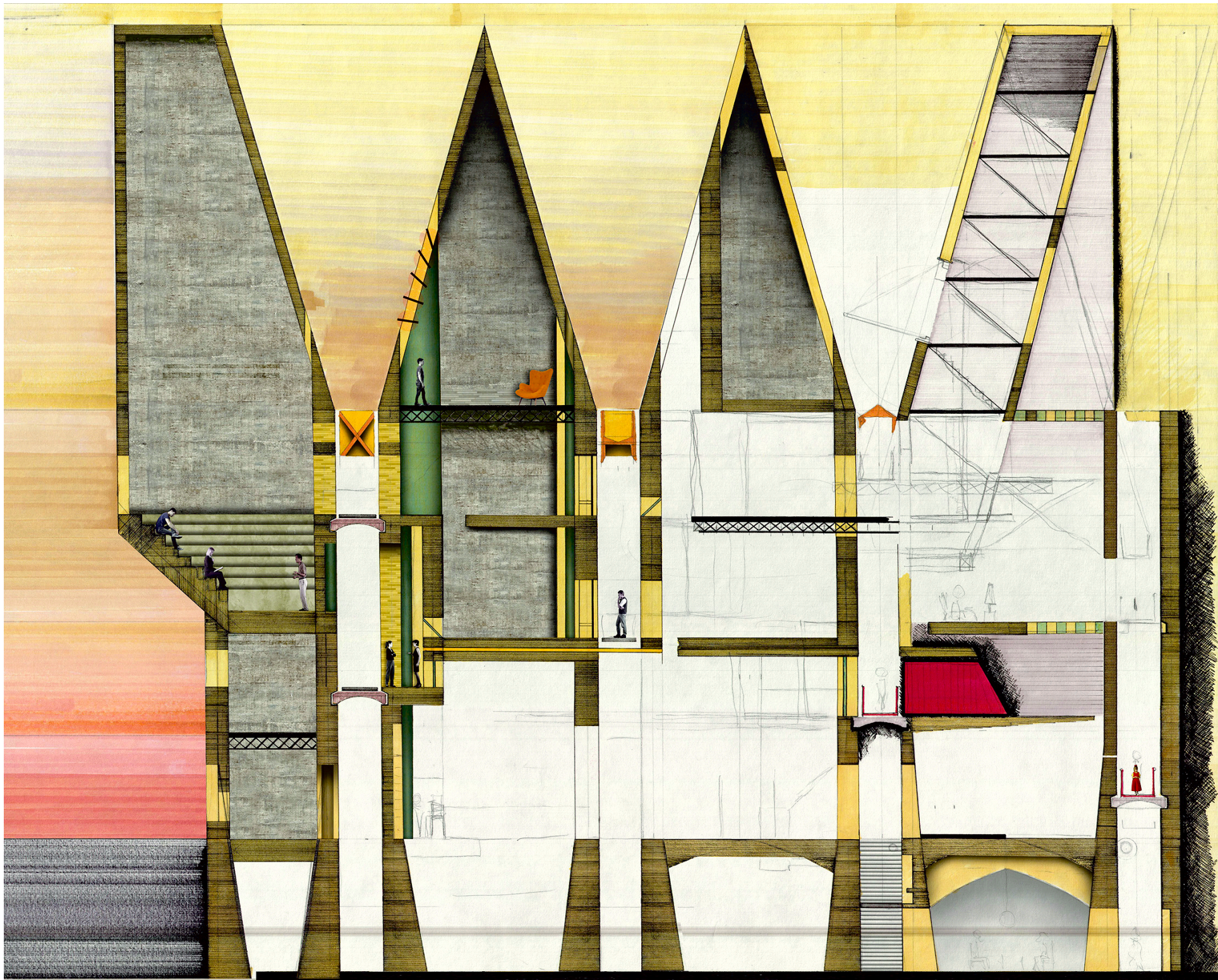
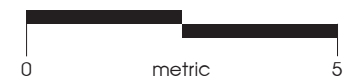


FIGURE 41 - Conceptual Section

The result was this section. The current building brings together an auditorium in the corner, the ramps as some sort of bridges, smaller spaces within the interior voids of the buildings, reachable from the ramps and intended for

people to stop by to engage in brief conversations, and eventually to keep moving. I also thought of a basement, that could be some sort of German Keller where people drink beer or wine and feel protected in winter time.



SECOND SEMESTER

SOLVING THE PUZZLE

SPRING 2014



FIGURE 42 - Concept Elevation



By the beginning of the second semester, I started putting all these ideas of the project together. At this point, I had all the pieces of a puzzle that was somehow flying in the air.

During this stage of the project I kept drawing, but in this case I stopped drawing in a general, schematic

way, as I had been doing until now; and I started instead focusing on different areas of the building and on specific parts, such as the walls, the slabs, the stair cores, the auditorium, the spaces for studying, for socializing, and for drinking wine. These were all part of different drawings that intended to imagine how

these different pieces of the project could come together and start to interact.

In the next pages I will try to explain the thinking process behind each of these parts, while introducing the drawings that were part of the process, and helped me imagine and build such parts.



FIGURE 43 - Concept Elevation



WEST ELEVATION

THE WALLS | THE STRUCTURE

One of the first elements of the building that I started studying in more detail were the walls. I started imagining these elements extending from east to west, very thick - of 50 centimeters - becoming the main structure of the building, supporting everything above, below and to the sides. These concrete walls would be interconnected by concrete beams, conforming some sort of skeleton or concrete web. Then, a series of platforms made out of metal or wood would sit on top of these beams, becoming a secondary, lighter element where people would stand. I will explain these platforms later.

The idea of an old, thick wall, that contains many layers of history and information in them, is to my understanding what makes a wall complex and beautiful, and I believe that it is such beauty what feeds our souls. The idea of having a wall that has been there for a very long time, and is capable of remaining there for the times to come, gives the current building a feeling of timelessness. Another aspect of this feeling of beauty comes with the complexity of having different layers. I'm talking here about a complexity that makes it necessary for us users to spend a moment observing such element before being able to get a sense of what

we are standing in front of. Moreover, the more we observe this element, the more things we are able to discover. It's a beautiful complexity. It's the same beautiful complexity that you find in old buildings, or in authentic, diverse cities. Many times we can perceive this beauty in an instant, but we don't fully understand it until we pay deeper attention to it.

So, in trying to bring this feeling into these walls, is that I thought of the idea of thickness, which talks about structure and about long-lastingness; and also about the concept of layers. Now, my walls are newly built, so I don't have the factor 'time' to generate these layers. I'm pretty sure that time will do something beautiful to these walls eventually, but for now, the complexity has to come from a different source. Maybe in the future these walls will get cracked, painted over, or re painted. Maybe this paint will eventually start fading away and the user will be able to see the different paintings that have been added time after time. But this will be the job of time and the experience of future users of this building.

So, I started exploring having these walls be made of reinforced concrete, poured in layers of different types

of concrete. These types of concrete are to be composed of different gravel (which could come, for example, from the different continents), together with different sand and different color resins. This would allow the wall to be made out of a material that literally belongs to the different parts of the world. These lines of concrete (vertical in early stages of the design process, then horizontal) would also have different thicknesses. Some would have 20 centimeters, some others 30, 40 or 50. These layers of different colors and textures would develop throughout the totality of the wall. It would look aleatory at first sight, but it would start making sense once the user understands its codification. This process is intended to be similar to the one experienced when learning a language.

THE DENSITY OF A LANGUAGE

Bringing back the initial idea of constructing a wall that mimics a language with characters and spaces - where such codification responds to a specific language - I decided to search for a more profound and less literal way of translating this concept into a wall. I just felt that the original idea wasn't complex enough or should be complemented with something



FIGURE 44 - Wall Detail Sketch



FIGURE 45 - Wall & Structure Detail



FIGURE 46 - Wall & Window Detail

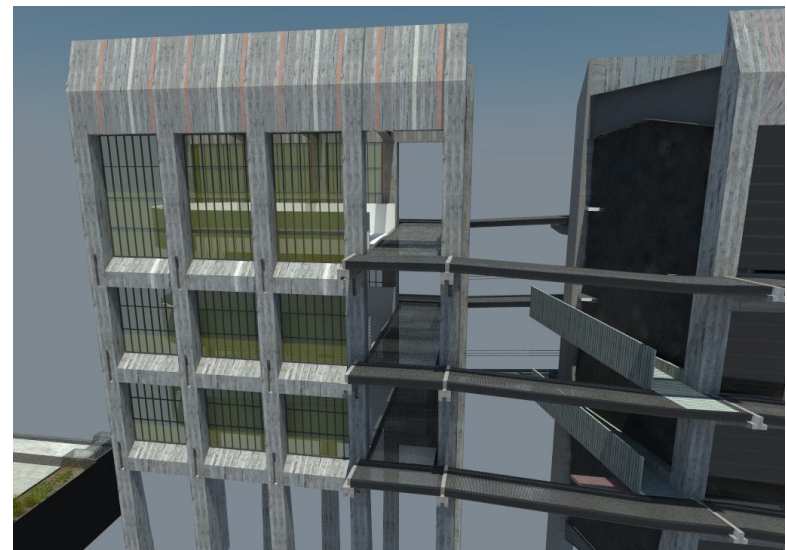


FIGURE 47 - Wall & Structure Detail

THE WALLS | THE STRUCTURE

else. So I continued reading about languages and going back to personal experiences, and I decided to take a different path, exploring a concept that I had created in the past when studying languages: the concept of the density of a language.

While studying German 6 years ago, I wondered why it was being so difficult for me to learn the language in comparison to other languages that I had learned in the past.

This time, it felt like my brain wasn't working at the speed it needed in order to process all the words and articles and prepositions. I already knew the grammar and a lot of vocabulary, so that wasn't the problem. The problem was not lack of knowledge, but lack of processing speed. And it is not that my brain had become slower or that I hadn't slept enough that day, although that would have an influence of course. But I realized that the problem resided in German being a very dense language. The problem was density.

So, for example, German is a language that has lots of articles, short words and prepositions that create phrasal verbs, most of them being formed with one-syllable words. This means that in a specific sentence in German, we will probably need more words

(or more one-syllable sounds) to produce such message than for the same sentence written in Italian, where such word would probably need more syllables to create the same message. Instead of explaining this concept through a sentence, maybe I should use some sort of measurement scale, something like words-per-five-seconds, syllables-per-five-seconds or even mouthsounds-per-five-seconds. In this case, what my ear hears in five seconds in German (and therefore what my brain needs to process and to decode) will contain more information than in the same message in Italian. My brain will need to process more information to decode into meaning because the language is more dense.

On a side note, I could also argue that such language is also difficult because these sounds come from a different part of the throat that I'm used to use, or that such words - in the case of German phrasal verbs - are used over and over in different locations for different words and meanings, forcing the user to really learn to identify and differentiate the different ways in which the same sound is used to acquire a different meaning. But this is another story. For the sake of my research, I think the concept of density of a language is rich enough for my translation

into architecture.

Going back to the built environment universe, I decided that comprising my wall of different textures and thicknesses could be a good way to translate this concept into architecture. This led me to think that I could eventually represent many different languages in many different walls, by generating different textures and thicknesses and thus creating walls with different densities. I could then start writing one same message in different languages that would repeat around the different walls, but with different densities, textures and colors. These sentences would propagate around the walls of the building, becoming some sort of secret language of the wall. I could even provide the builder with exact instructions on how to pour the concrete in order to achieve this. For the time being of this project, this will just remain as a concept, since further study should be needed in order to develop such codification system and to apply such readability to the walls. The timetable of this thesis is not enough to fully develop this system, so it will just remain as the conceptual idea behind the random-looking textures of my walls.

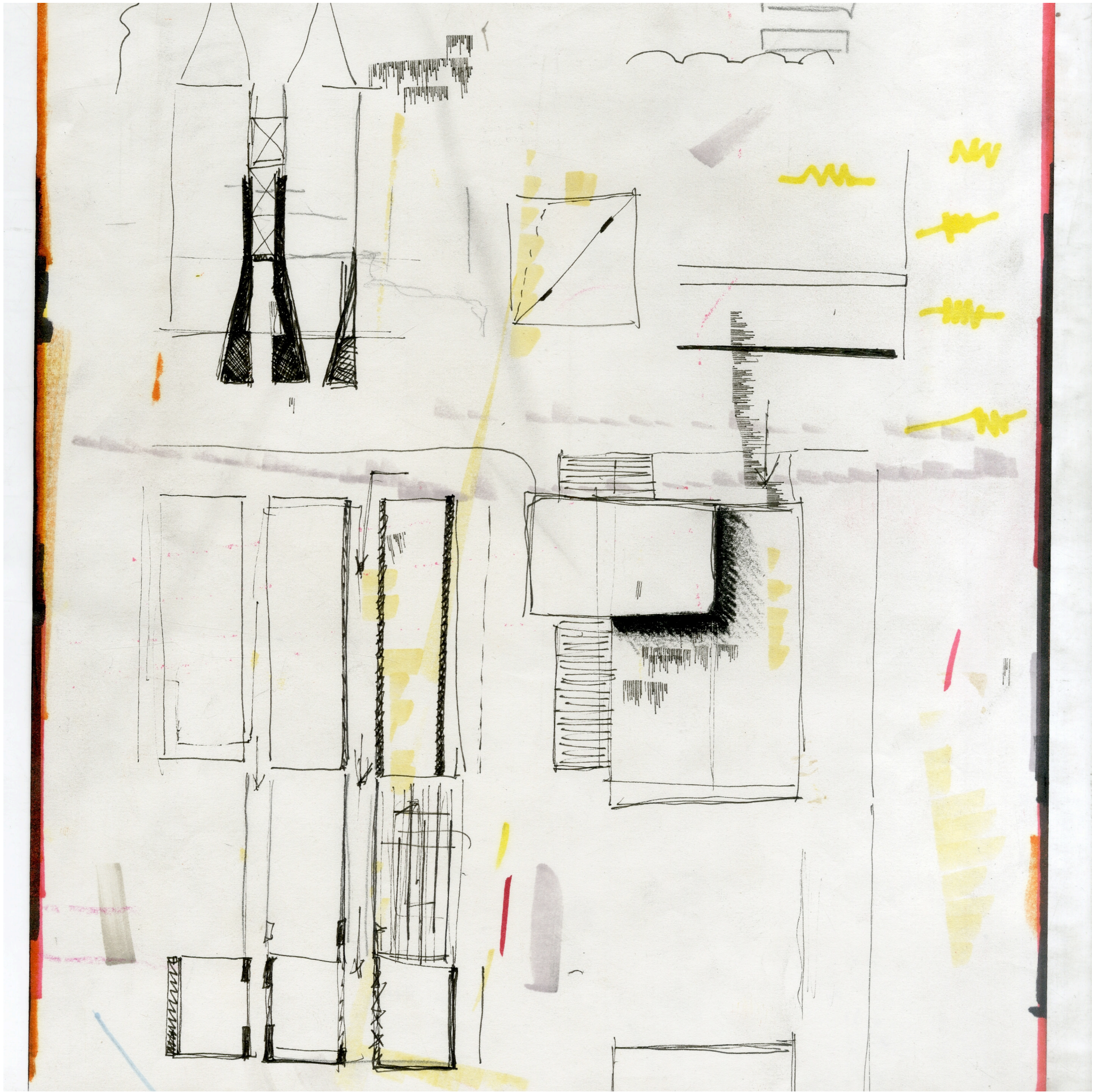


FIGURE 48 - Sketch

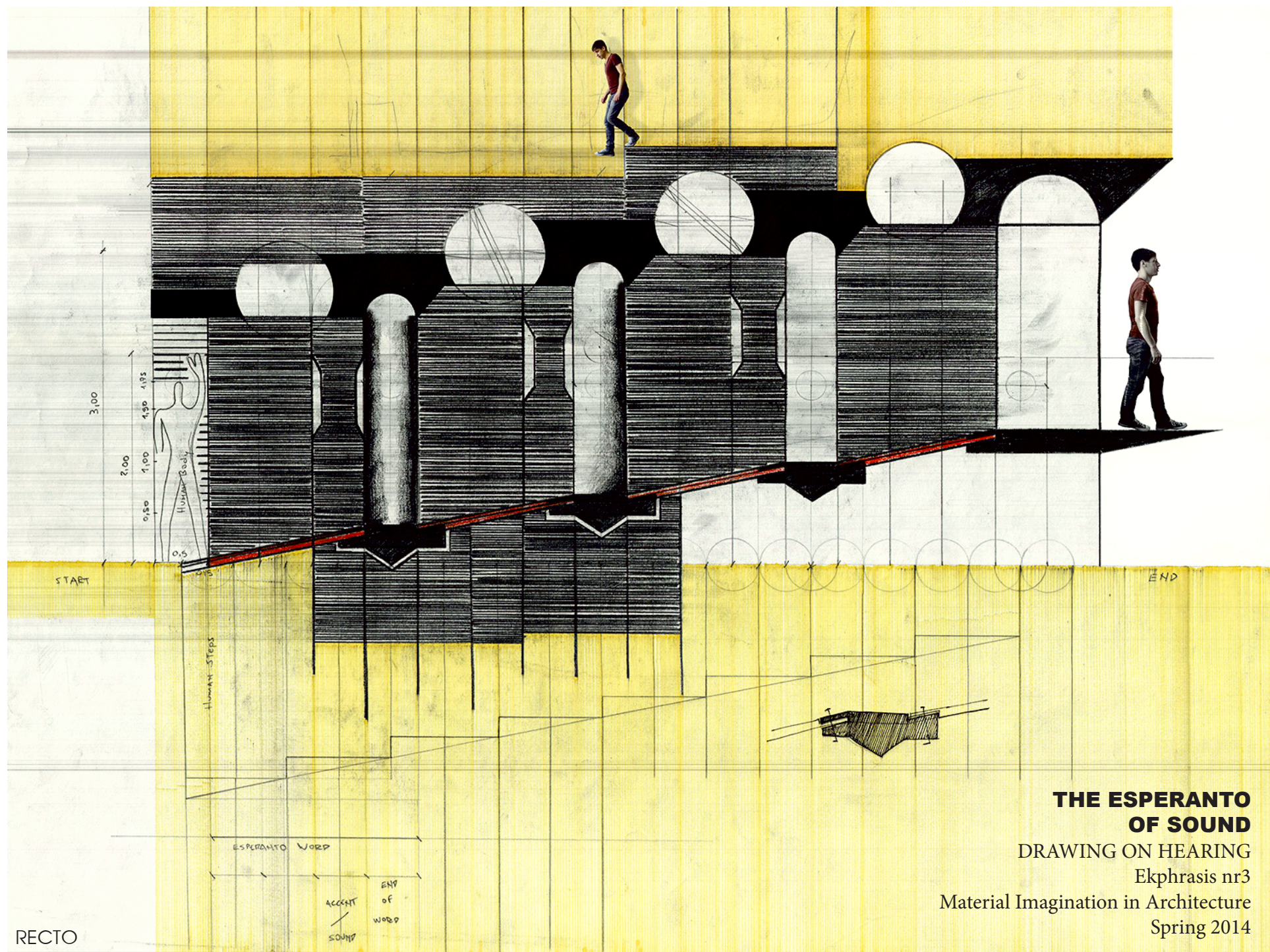


FIGURE 49 - Drawing on Hearing

This building is about sounds, about hearing, about communication. The idea in this drawing was to explore sounds that originate somewhere inside my building, to analyze how they travel across the building and how they come together, forming a new sound in the process. Whereas the original sound was legible and familiar to the human ear, the new composition - made out of many layers - is complex and unfamiliar. The place where this merging process happens is the threshold, a long hallway that extends along - and between - the different

buildings that conform my project.

Conversations that originate in a specific room - in French, in Dutch, or in Japanese - will be collected through special pipes, conducted and released in this hallway. This overlapping process will give birth to a new type of sound, a mélange of languages, of conversations; a new, undecipherable type of music.

Borrowing Le Corbusier's Modulor, I decided to start designing from the dimension of

the human scale. Assuming that the human body occupies 50 centimeters of space, and thinking that a human step might also use the same distance, I used a 2H graphite pencil to create a diagram for what would later become my ramp. Using Esperanto as a metaphor, I decided to develop this space as an architectural expression of this artificial language. Later on, using an 8B graphite pencil, I drew a ramp that is assembled in the same way a sentence in a spoken language is put together. That is, out of characters, words, spaces and

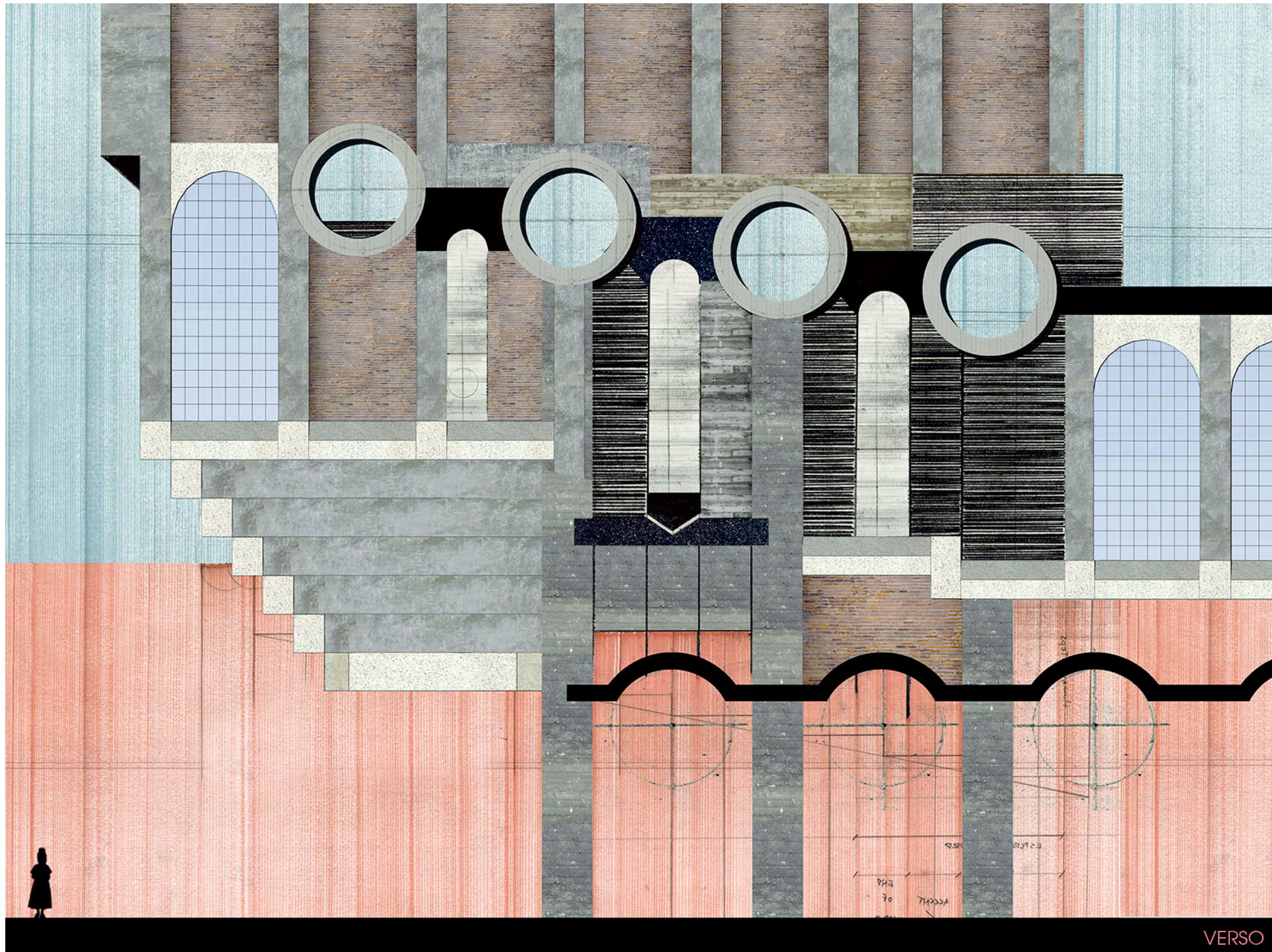


FIGURE 50 - Drawing on Hearing

punctuation marks. Each character in a word is later transformed into a metal platform of 50 centimeters wide. These platforms are then connected in a similar way syllables are, forming full words that are held both at the beginning and at the end by a steel beam. These steel beams are the spaces connecting such words.

I decided to work with a steady rhythm of three-syllables per word, something common in Esperanto. I also applied the same rhythmic treatment to the surrounding walls, and I generated openings in these walls to

allow different things to happen. At the end of each word, the space on the floor indicating a change of word is accompanied by an opening in the wall. My intention here was to reinforce the idea that after each word, human beings always face the possibility of taking different paths and going somewhere different. We can always change the meaning of what we are saying if we really change our mind. Every end of a word is an opportunity to do so, by choosing another set of future words instead of the originally picked ones. Finally, another

type of opening in the wall, this time a pinhole, brings sounds from a particular room located somewhere else in the building.

The last step was to incorporate the realm of digital media in order to put myself in the space. Walking up the ramp and along the hallway at a steady speed, I was then able to experience a new rhythmic type of music, where some of the words were familiar but would suddenly change into something new. By doing this, I felt as had I created a new form of communication.

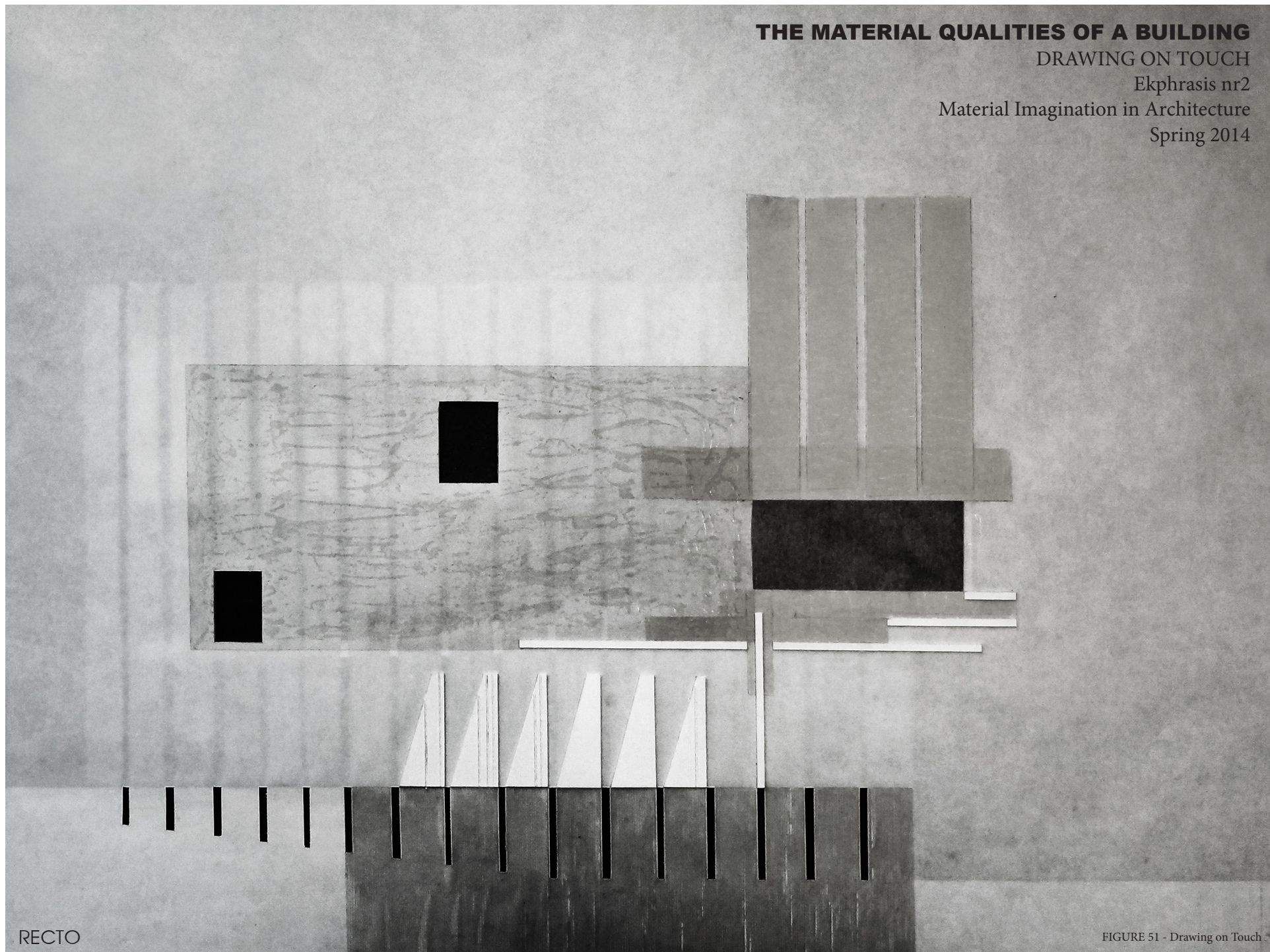
THE MATERIAL QUALITIES OF A BUILDING

DRAWING ON TOUCH

Ekphrasis nr2

Material Imagination in Architecture

Spring 2014



In this drawing I intend to explore the materiality of the elements that I will use in the construction of my building. Concrete, stone, gravel, bricks, metal, wood, glass; they all have strong and particular characteristics. Apart from the way they look to our eyes, they all have different textures; they all feel different in our hands or under our feet. They have different shapes that will influence the way we interact with them. The idea in

this exercise is therefore to try to develop tactile qualities that will contribute to a richer building experience.

The first side of the drawing is focused on the intervention of an alley that traverses my building from east to west, allowing pedestrians to get into the structure without really entering it, in order to access an inner courtyard. The materiality of this

space is really important, since it relates to the overall experience of this passage. The ground of this alley could well be constructed out of gravel stone, leaving the upper half part of the gravel outside of the concrete, and allowing one person's shoes to turn sideways as the person walks on top of them. The experience of traversing the oldest streets in Old Town - close to the Potomac - inspires this idea. The walls, similarly, will have

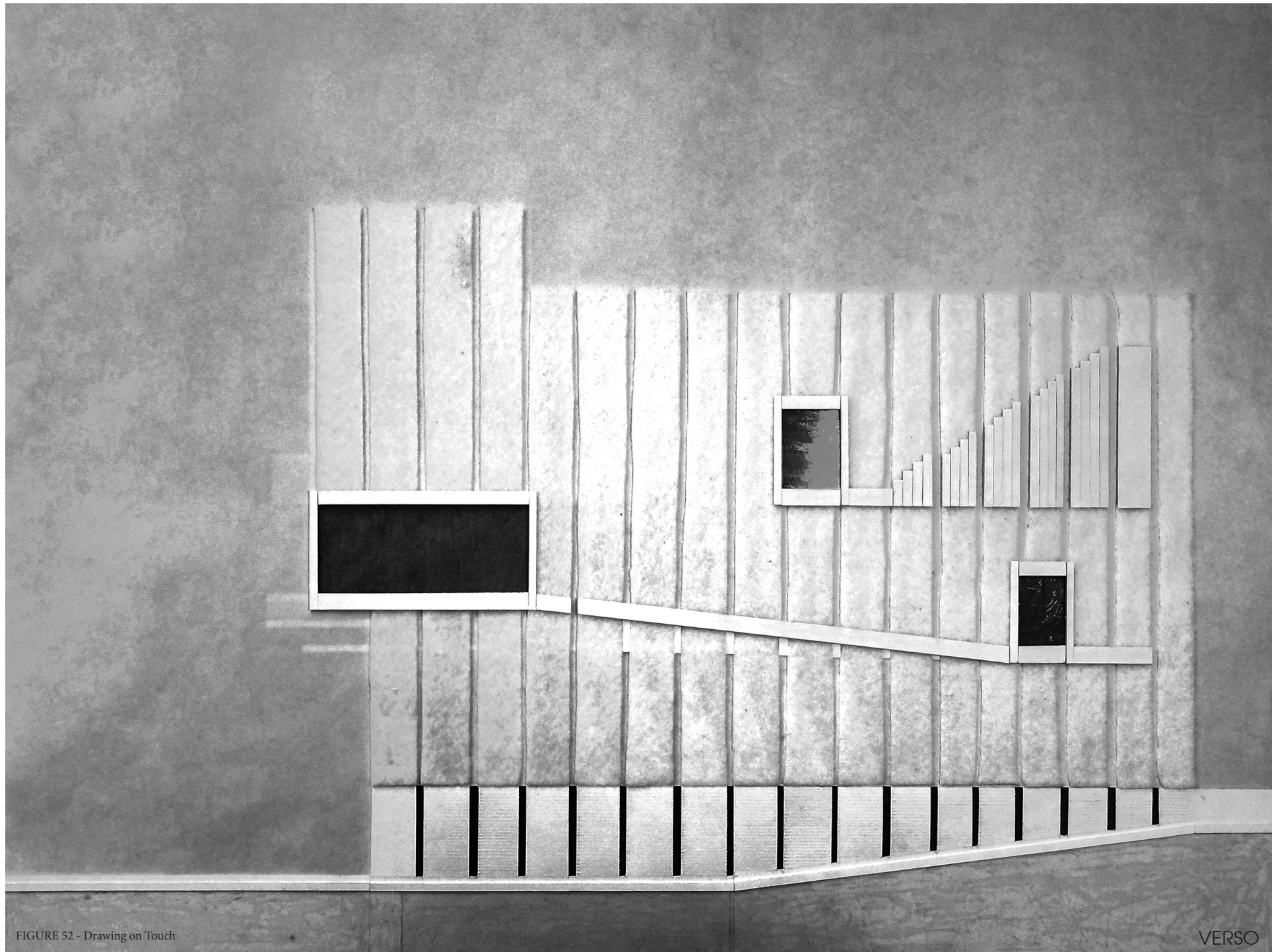


FIGURE 52 - Drawing on Touch

their own textures. A combination of Roman Brick and concrete composed of horizontal layers will add richness to these walls. Horizontal metal bars separating the different layers of the concrete will become noticeable when in contact with the human hand. The texture of the metal is much softer and feels much colder to the fingers than the surrounding concrete. The other side of the paper explores a horizontal section of the space. Here we can explore the treatment

that the sidewalk receives when being covered with long, thin, rough concrete panels. And in between, we can find wood panels of similar dimensions and transparent panels made out of thick, polished glass that will allow natural light to get down into the basement. As we access the courtyard, triangular-shaped ergonomic benches welcome the visitors to the building.

Whereas this is just an experimental

exercise, it is intended to be a reminder of the importance of detail, shape and texture in the elements that we use to create architecture. Oftentimes we forget about the importance of these qualities, and we fall into a mere visual formalism. Whereas this exercise is just one little step in the development of my project, it intends to show the process of exploration that I'm carrying, in hopes of achieving a memorable type of architecture.

THE RAMPS

Since the beginning of the project I was interested in developing a building that was fully accessible and that developed as some sort of trail, allowing its inner circulation to be experienced as some sort of journey all along. In order to develop this concept, I decided incorporate all sorts of vertical circulation means, such as stairs, elevators and ramps.

Being all of them equally important, I want to talk more about the idea of the ramp, which became a strong element due to its capacity to take the user on a journey around the building instead of being a direct destination.

During the initial iterations for the ramp, I studied the use of wood, with the intention to use its lightness and warmth to communicate an idea of ephemerality in contraposition to the more permanent quality of the concrete structure. At this point, I wasn't sure if the beams supporting the ramps were to be of concrete or steel. Therefore I explored different types of woods that somehow could incorporate some sort of texture similar to the one that I was studying for the concrete walls.

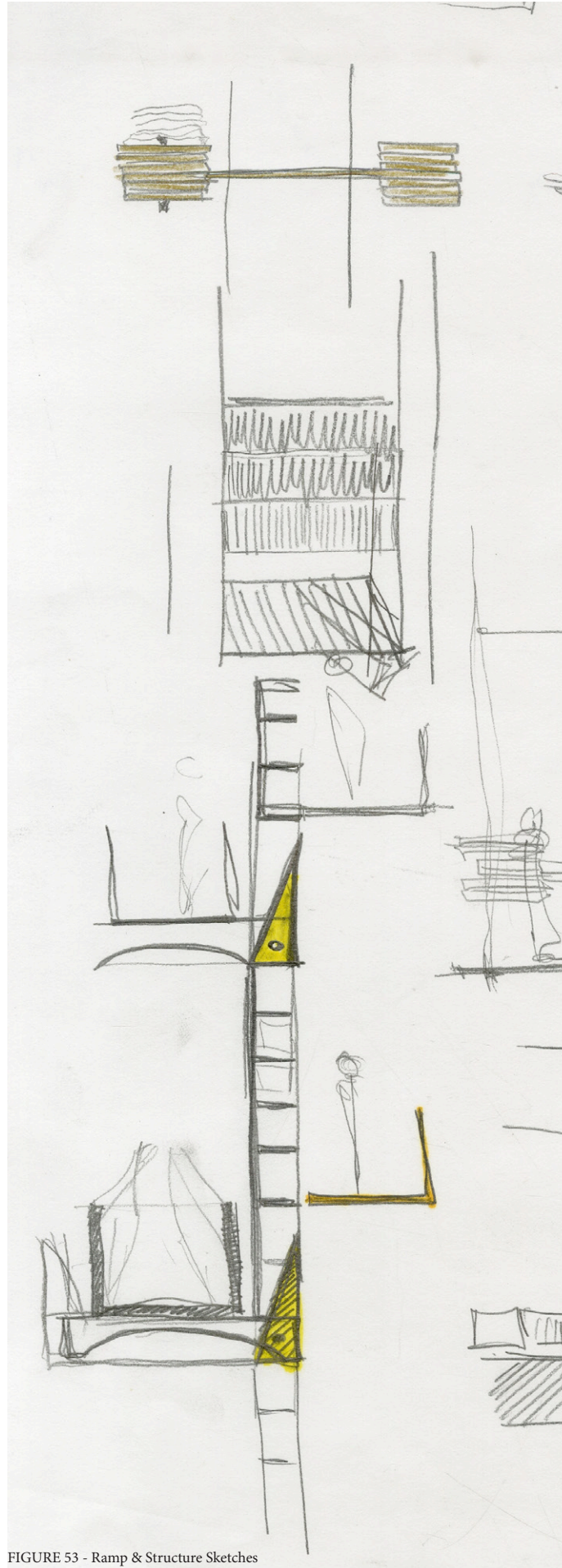


FIGURE 53 - Ramp & Structure Sketches

Later in the process, I will eventually decide to opt for a steel beams and perforated metal ramp, that reinforces the sense of vertical transparency that the wood ramp wouldn't allow. But I will talk more about that later.

At this point, as I was solving technical aspects of the ramp, I started exploring different ways to incorporate a bar or a handle for people to grab while using the ramp, especially since the 20 cm gap between the ramp and the adjacent wall made it necessary to incorporate some sort of fencing. While working on the construction aspects of the wall, which until this point was to be composed of vertical slices of different types of precast concrete, I decided to use these slices in the wall to generate such fence. This, aside from technical reasons, was a good way to create a stronger dialogue between the permanent wall and the ephemeral ramp. As a result of several sketches and iterations, the final design consisted in creating some sorts of waves in the concrete wall that would come out to surround steel cables, and then come into the wall to incorporate a lighting system that would be

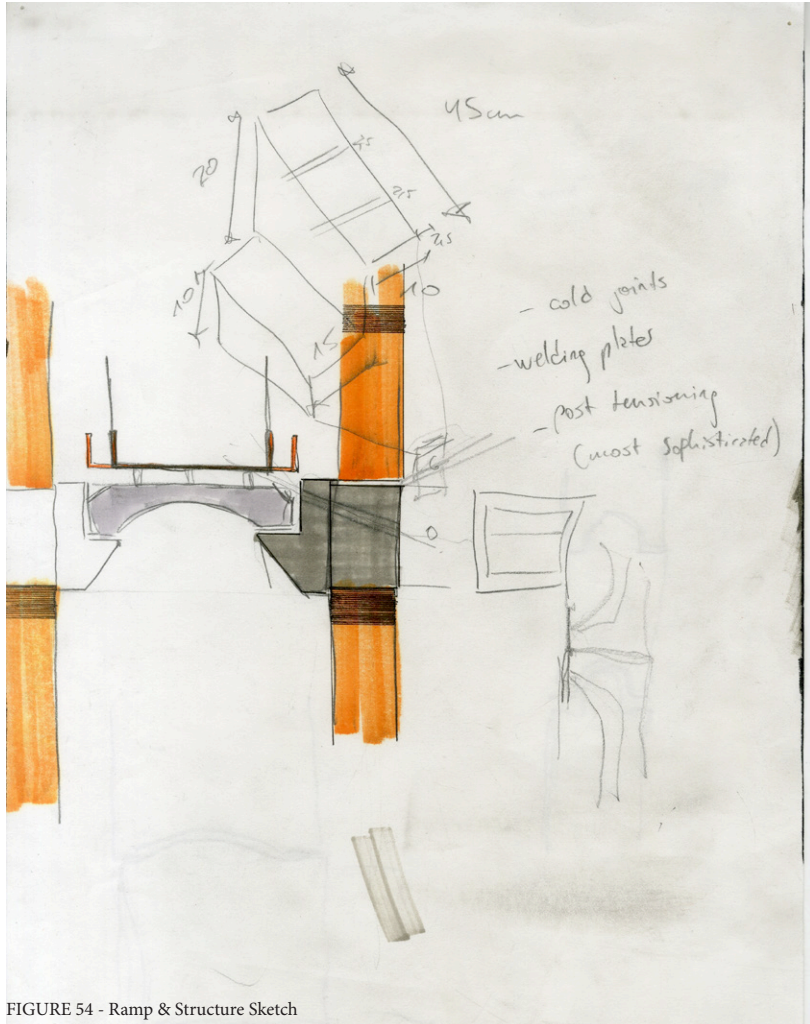


FIGURE 54 - Ramp & Structure Sketch

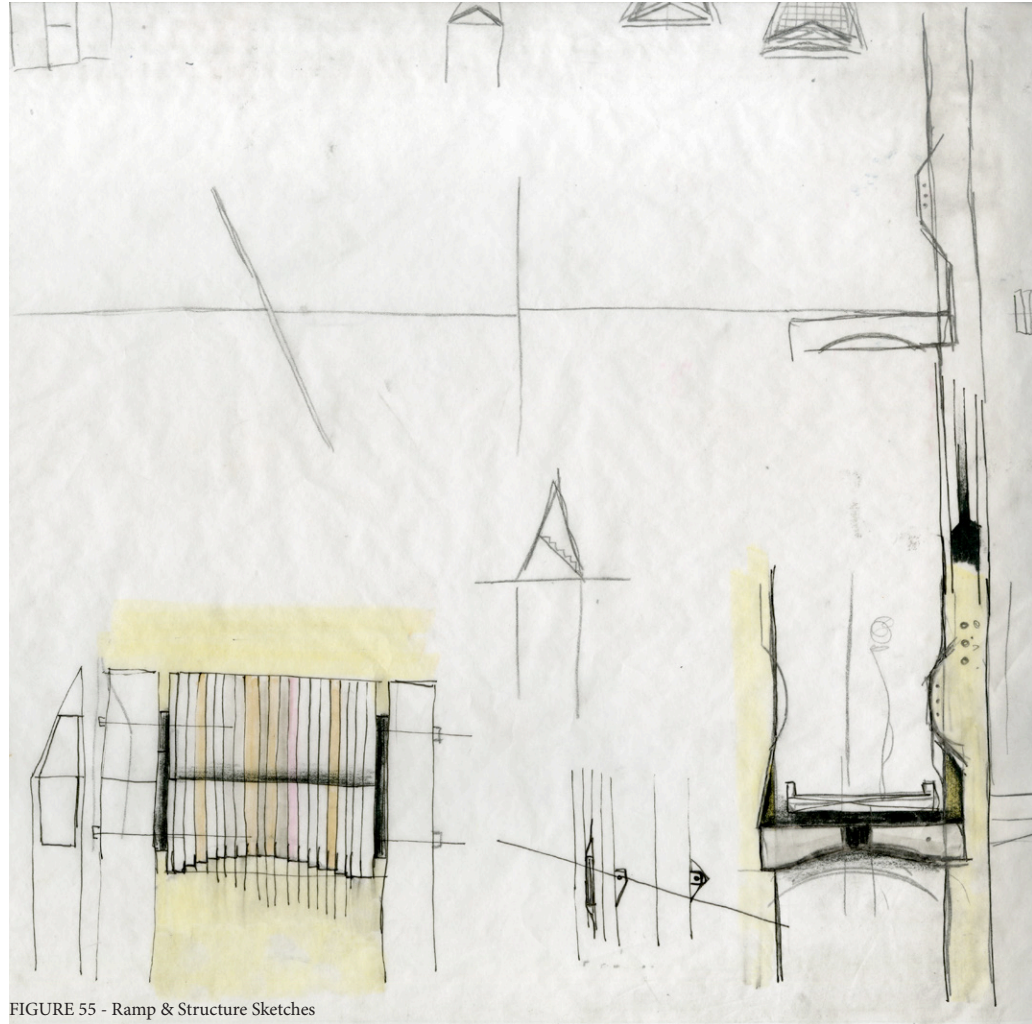


FIGURE 55 - Ramp & Structure Sketches

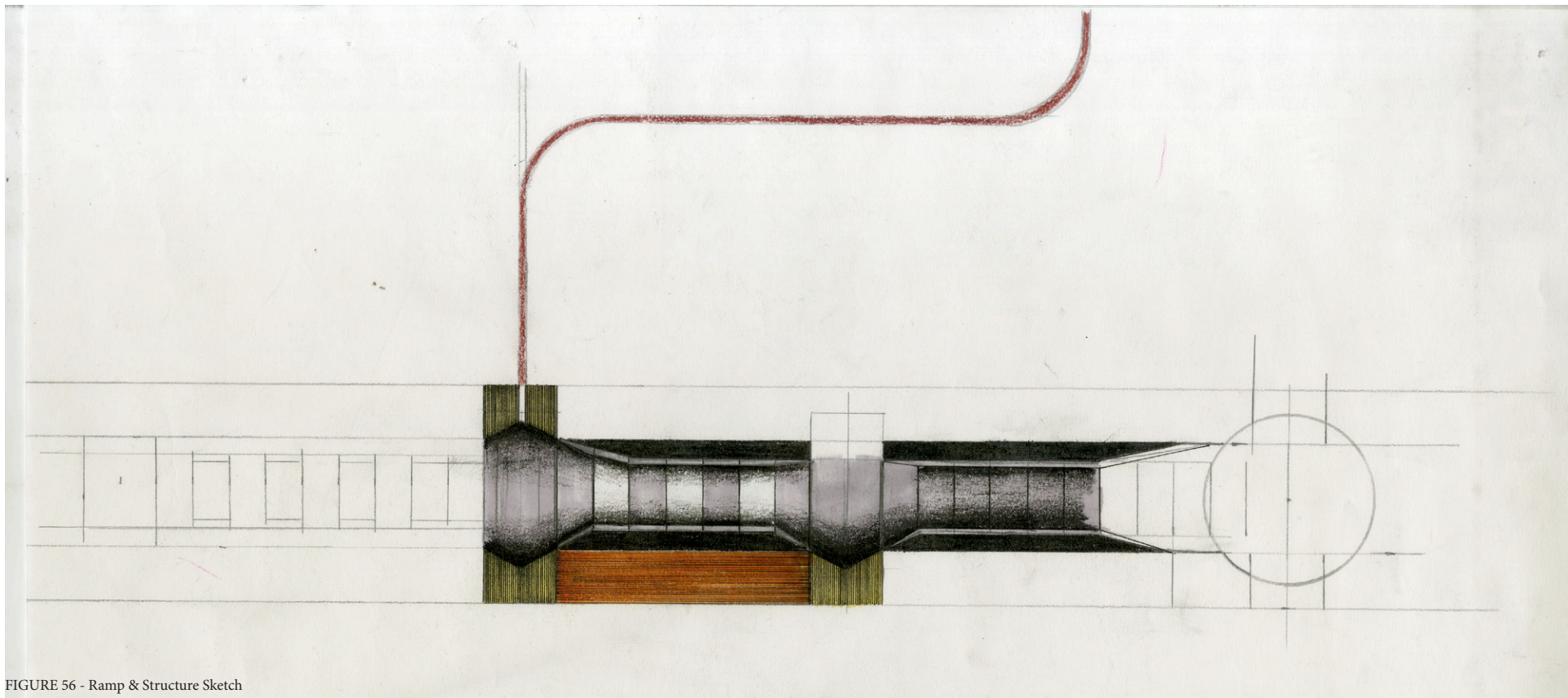


FIGURE 56 - Ramp & Structure Sketch



FIGURE 57 - Ramp & Structure Render

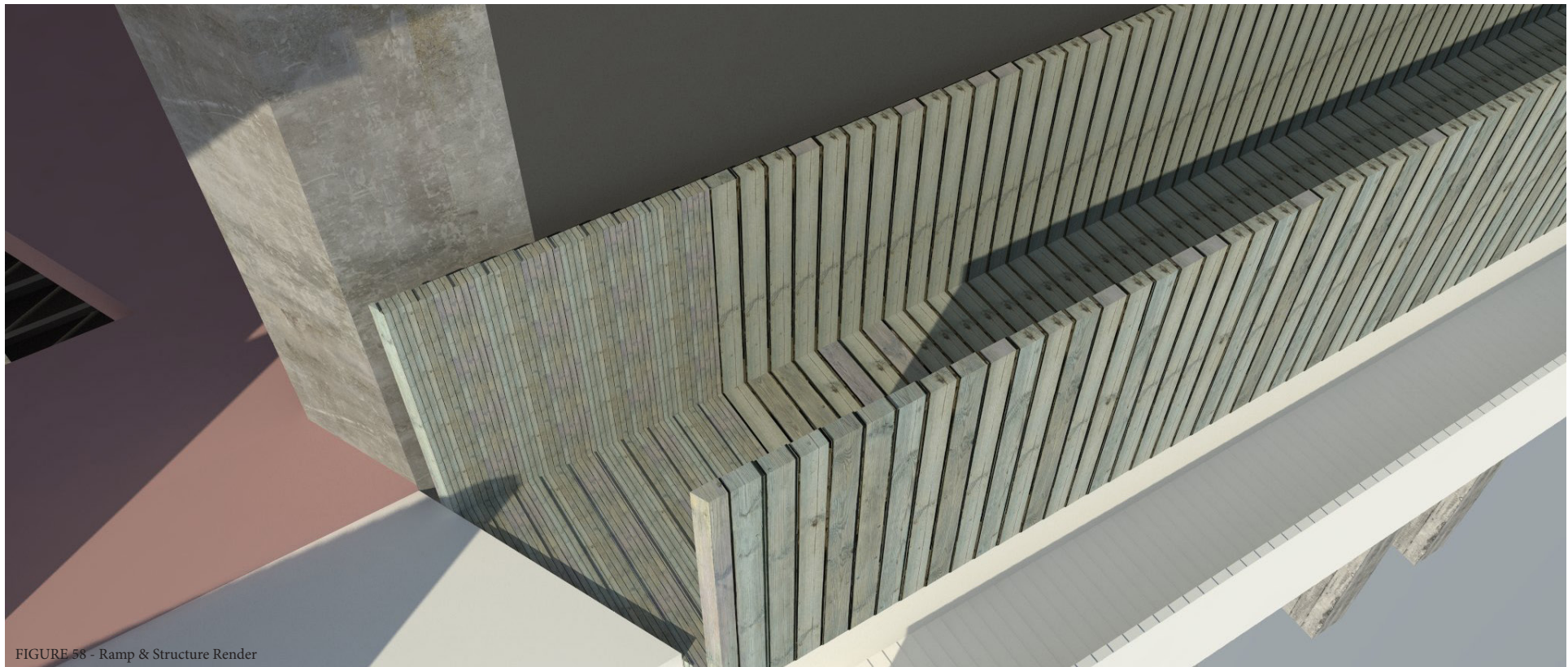


FIGURE 58 - Ramp & Structure Render

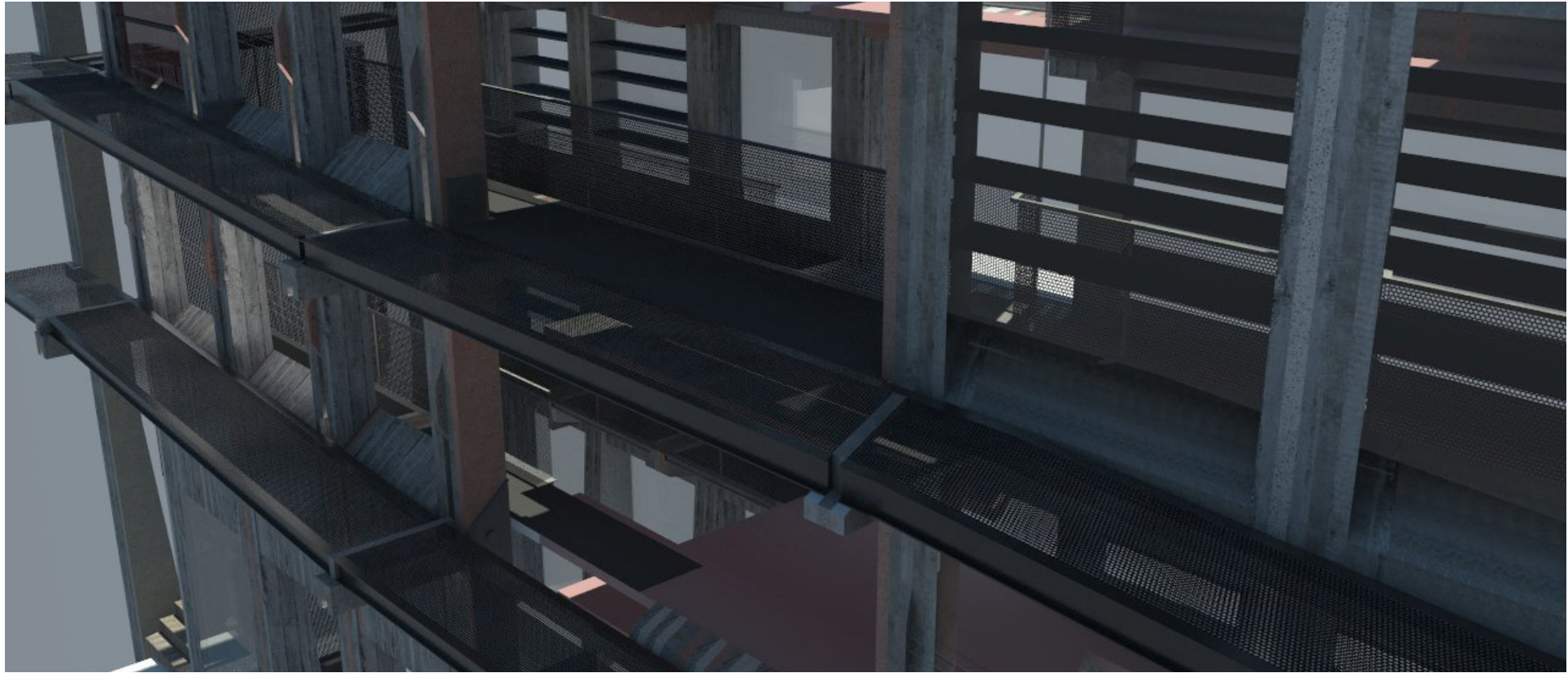


FIGURE 59 - Ramp & Structure Render

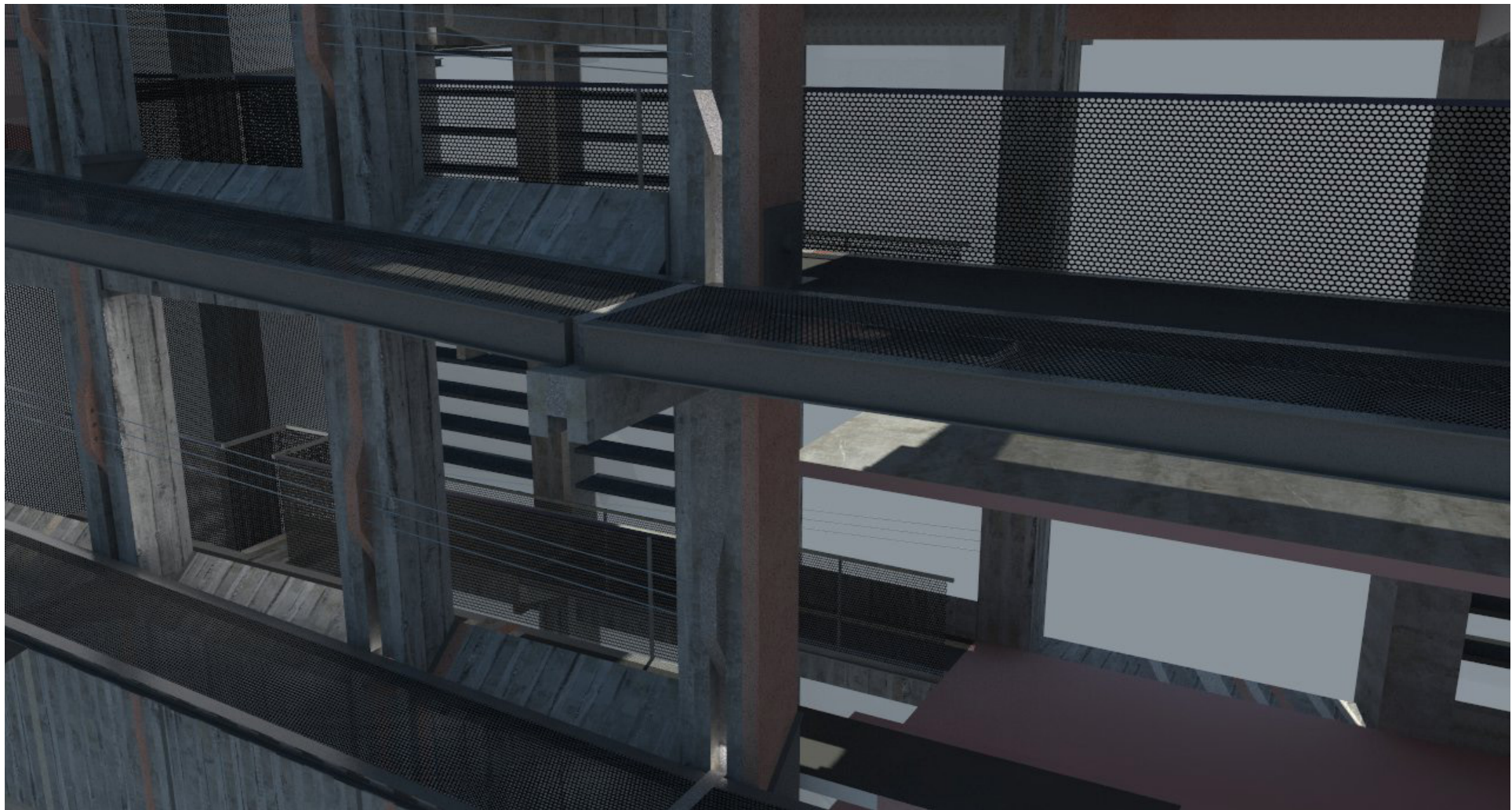


FIGURE 60 - Ramp & Structure Render

THE AUDITORIUM

The corner tower is meant to be the most social of the three, and the one that houses the largest amount of people. This is where people access the building, where the information and reception desk will be located, and where an open, multipurpose room is supposed to host happy hours and photography exhibitions. Going down into the basement, this is where the large living room with sofas develops.

The auditorium is located on the third floor of the corner tower, expanding outwards towards Swann. It is meant to house different activities during the day and evenings. For example, a lecture about Chinese art or a show about Czech architecture could happen here. A foreign movie night could take place on Wednesday evenings. The rest of the time, the place could house some summer language courses or act as an informal place for people to gather. It can be accessed from two different bridges, with direct access to the stair core, the elevator and to the access lobby through an opening in the wall.

Continuing with the idea of having perforated walls that allow a visual connection and acoustics to connect the different rooms, the auditorium will be connected to a main multipurpose space underneath.

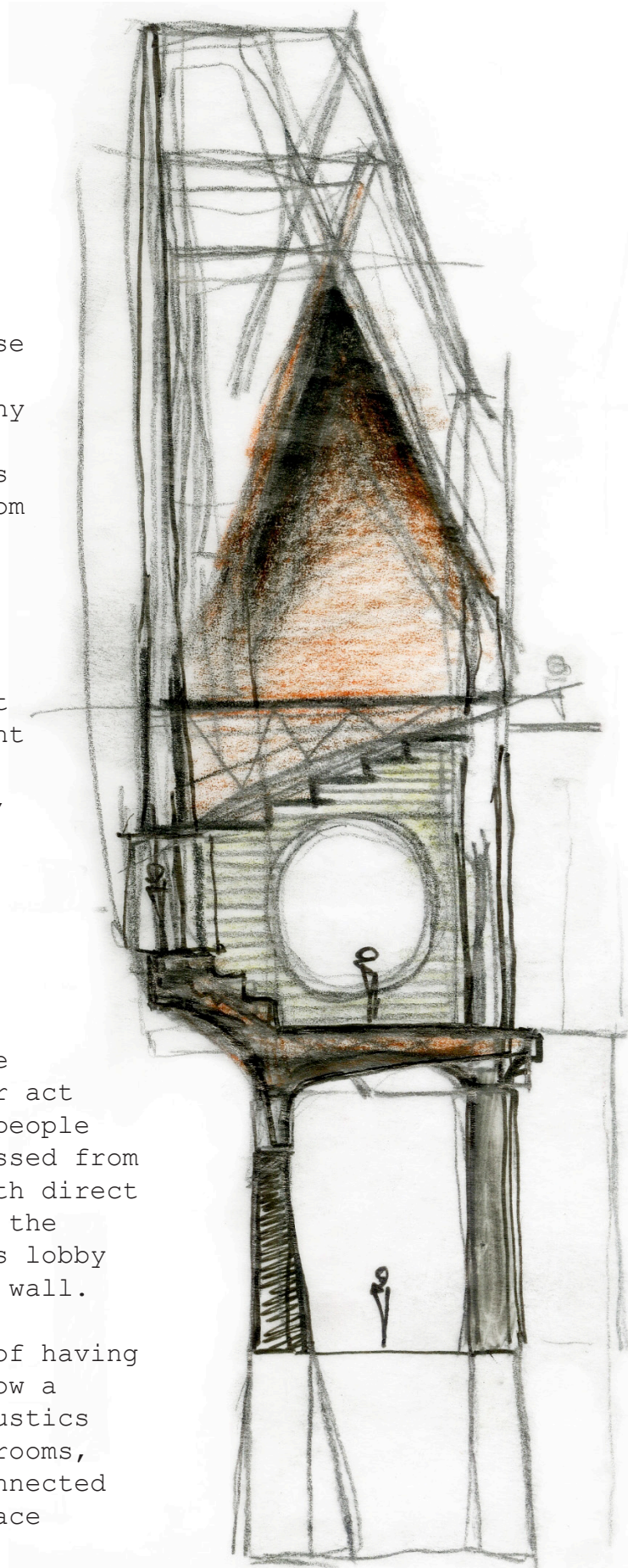


FIGURE 61 - Auditorium Section Sketch

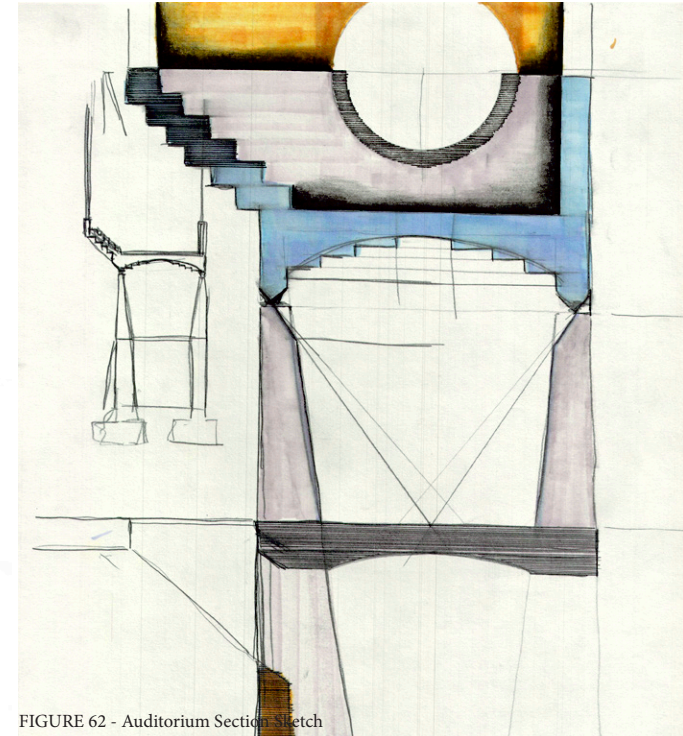


FIGURE 62 - Auditorium Section Sketch

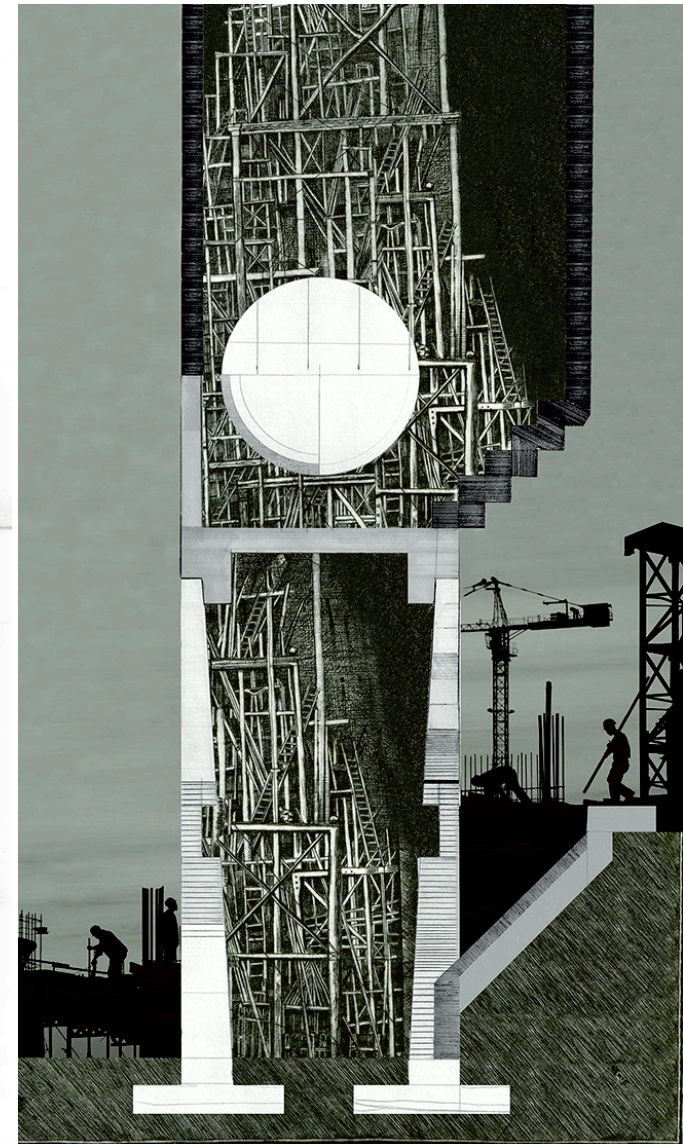
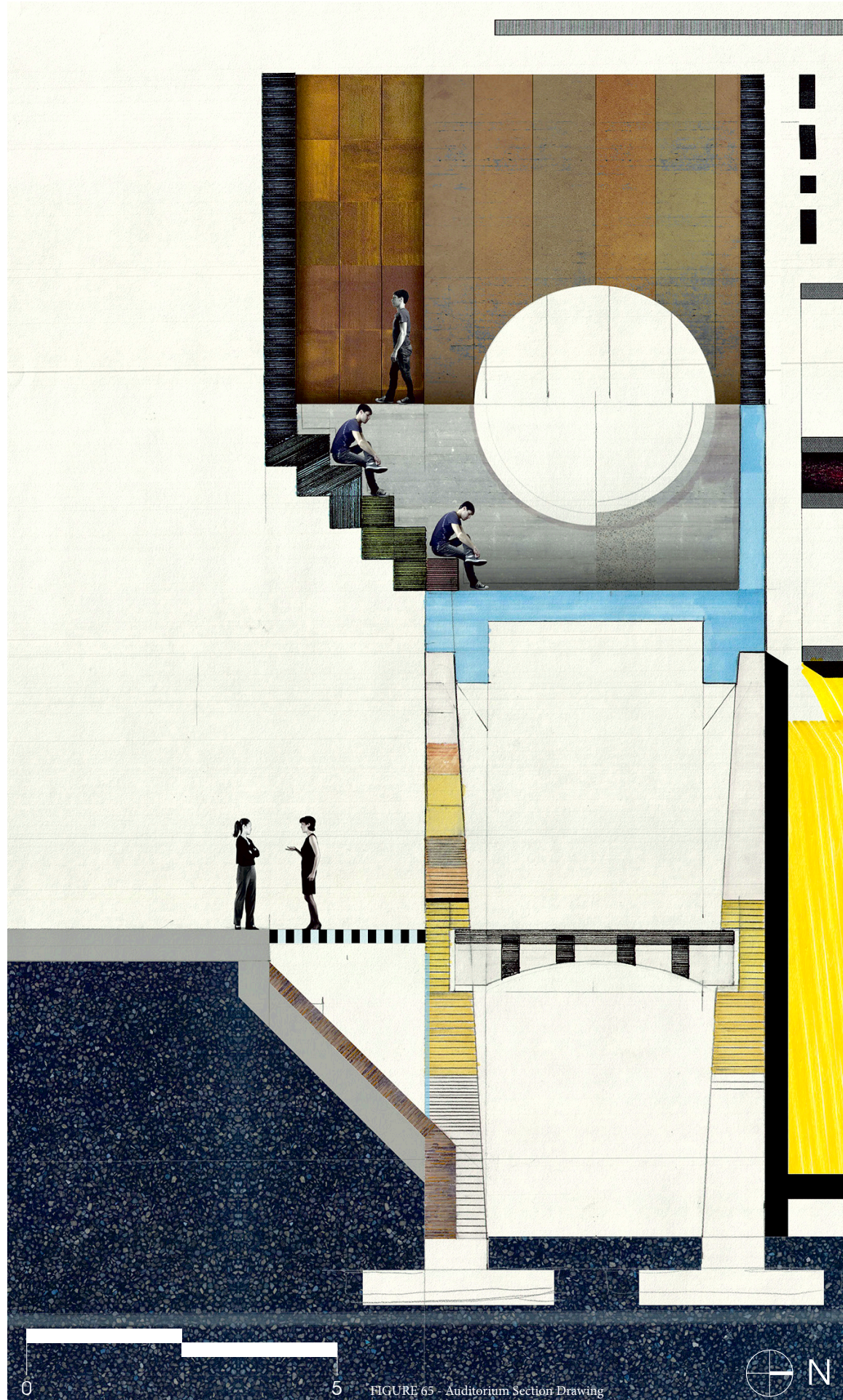
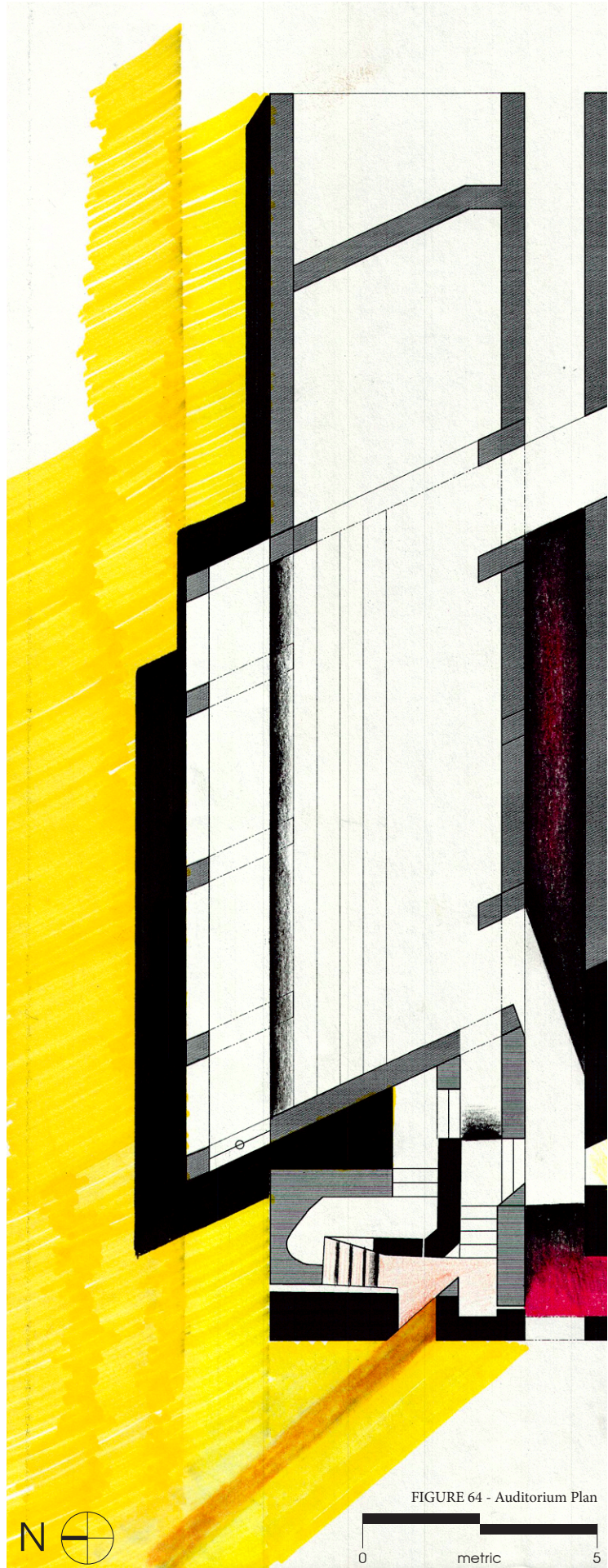


FIGURE 63 - Auditorium Section Drawing



THE OUTDOOR AUDITORIUM

The idea for having some sort of open, outdoor space that wasn't necessarily as public as the exterior plaza, interested me since the beginning. My intention here was to incorporate an area that was inside of the building, within its perimeter, and that provided an outdoor experience as well as views of the neighborhood from the top of the building. This space could be multipurpose as well, being used for the most part when the weather allowed it. It became clear to me at some point during the second semester, that this area, due to the social nature of the space, should be located in the corner tower, which is the most social of the three. Moreover, this location could also benefit the views.

For a long time the thought moved around the idea of having a simple terrace with benches, tables and chairs. Inspired in the Arthouse project in Austin by LTL architects, I wanted to provide an outdoor place for people to sit and gather under the sun, or eventually to watch movies outside when the weather allowed for it.

After a series of studies and iterations, and while trying to me this space work with the auditorium underneath, I decided to replicate the indoor auditorium experience, this time having the cityscape as the scenery, but also providing an adjacent outdoor movie theater.

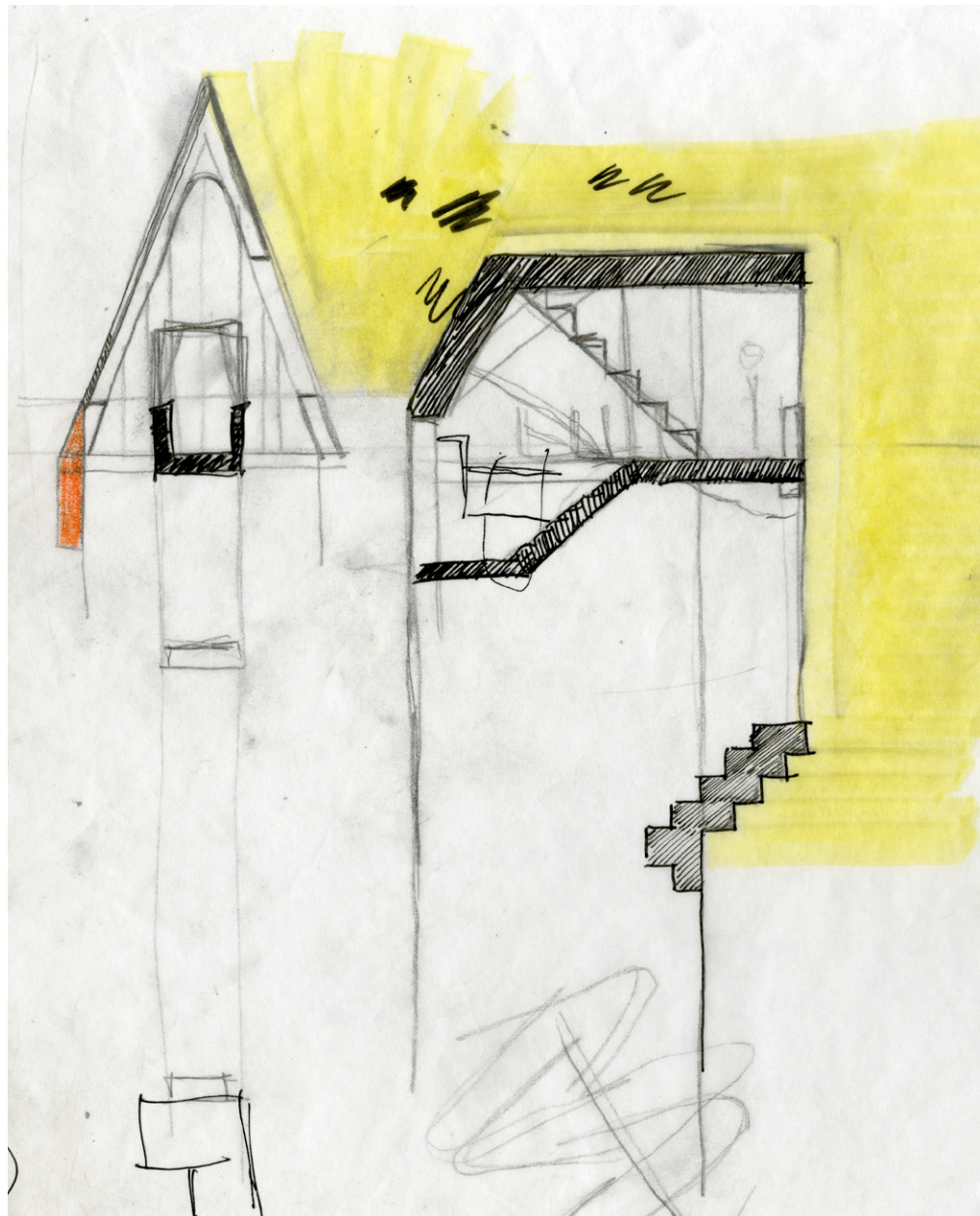


FIGURE 66 - Access to terrace Sketch



FIGURE 67 - Studies of Volumetry

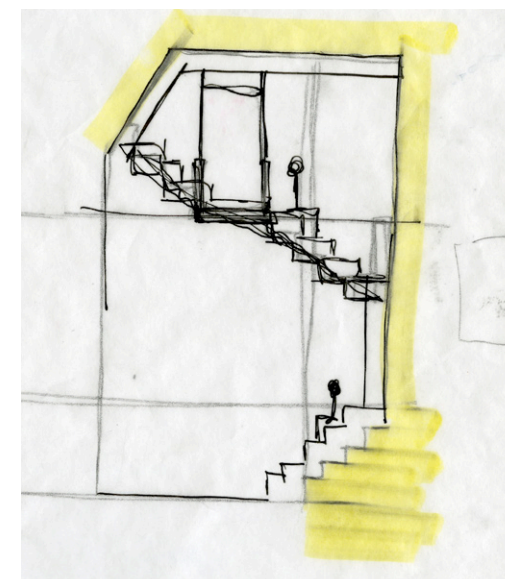


FIGURE 68 - Terrace & Auditorium Sketch

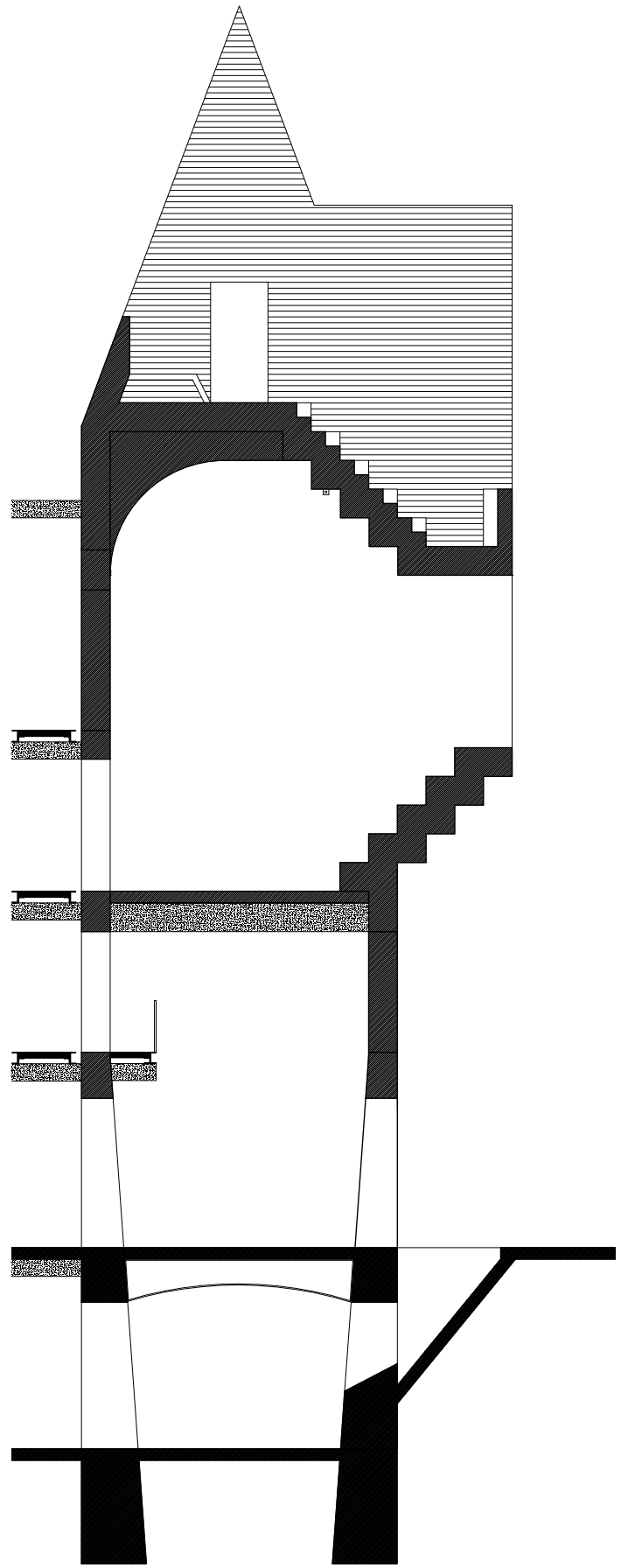


FIGURE 69 - Preliminary Auditorium Section

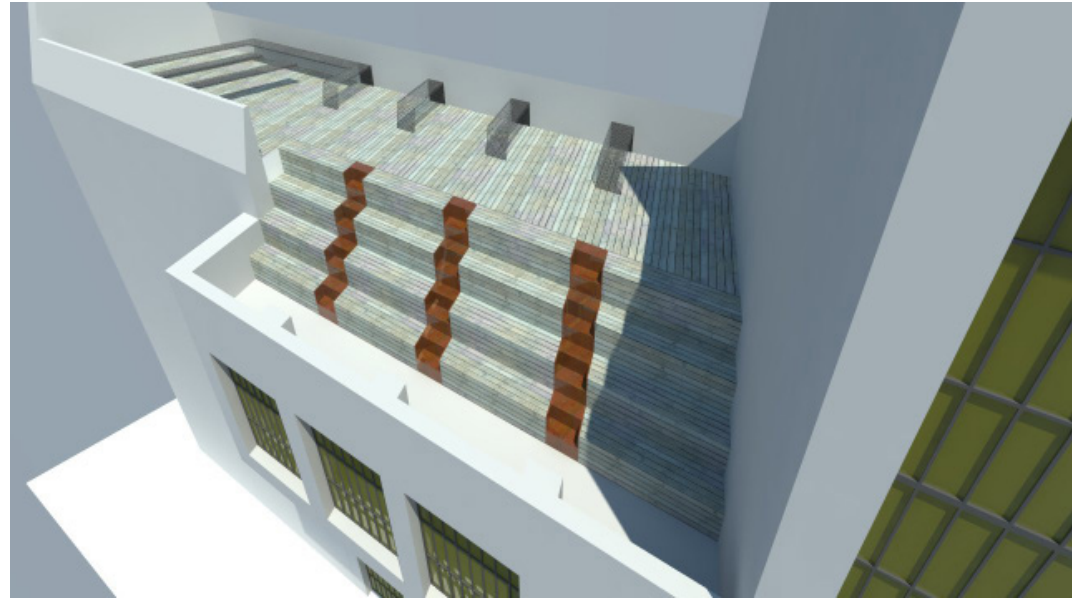


FIGURE 70 - Outdoor Auditorium Render

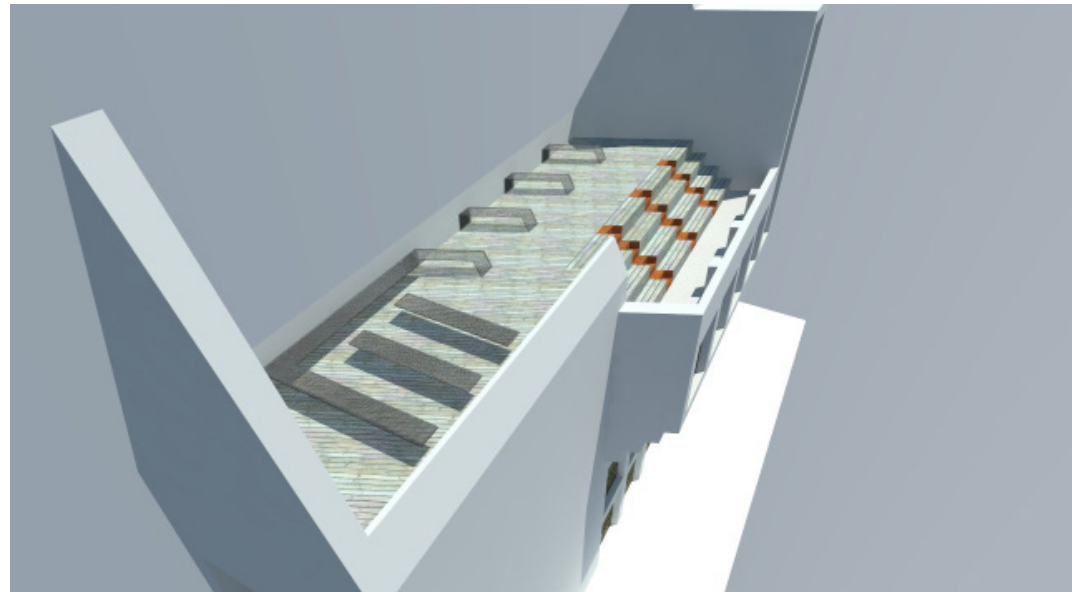


FIGURE 71 - Outdoor Auditorium Render

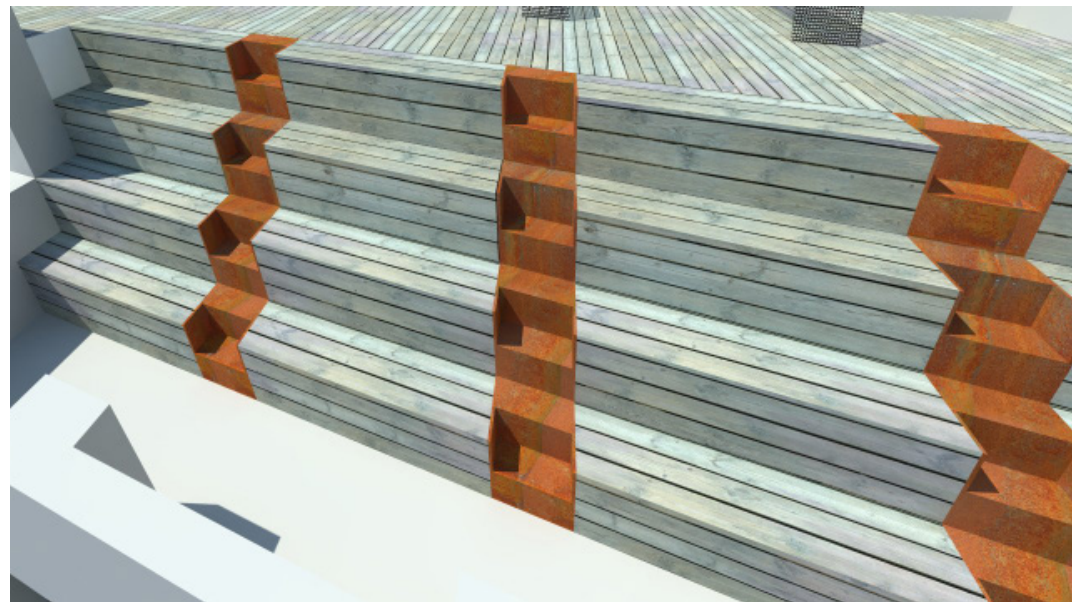


FIGURE 72 - Outdoor Auditorium Render

THE MAIN READING SPACE

At this point I already have my bathrooms, my auditorium and some stair cores in place. I then decide to focus on the northernmost building, the one that would contain my library.

I wanted to have a library. A library of books of as many languages as possible. At this point I started thinking how to make it happen. My main challenge here was how to design a library that would be comprised inside a narrow space, yet be grandiose. At the same time, this place needed to allow me to concentrate, but at the same time allows me to observe everything. How to design a space that could feel magical or infinite, that could reflect the infinite universe of languages and books and words and symbols.

The design of the library had many stages of development. At the very beginning my library had several stories, and the user could access the library from the different levels. But after studying this idea I realized that it wasn't what I wanted. It had to be more of a grandiose



FIGURE 73 - Reading Space Concept Section



space because the building is thin enough already, so I started thinking of allowing the building to be open, and using these lighter platforms to be in the middle containing the bookshelves. These platforms would be placed in a similar way as the other ones in the classrooms, but would have thicker gaps between them and the concrete walls, as you can see in the drawing. But still, I wasn't convinced. There was something missing and I wasn't happy with it. So, eventually what I would do.. as you can see in this diagram, I started think of having a series of horizontal platforms attached to the walls. So maybe my walls could contain the books, and I would have these series of platforms from which a series of balconies would appear.

So, the main space becomes a void, an empty space that allows you to appreciate the totality of the building, from one end to the other. And allows people to go there, grab a book, and be able to see everything. In order to do that, I created some sort of balconies that are supported by the beams of the main structure. These balconies contain only a stool and an individual table, becoming just a personal space for lecture and contemplation.

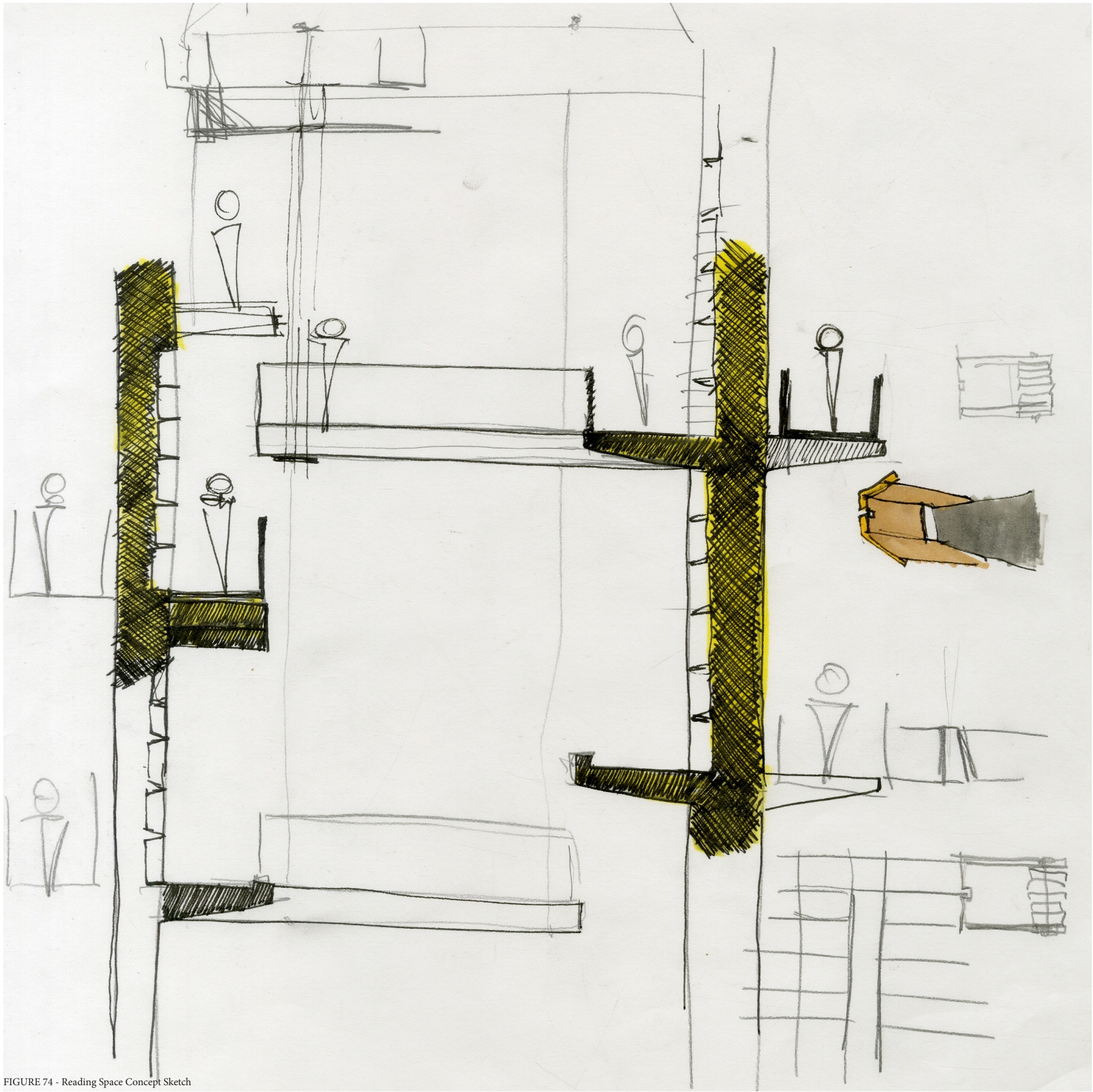


FIGURE 74 - Reading Space Concept Sketch

THE INDOOR LIGHTING

During the first phases of the design process, I started debating on how to distribute artificial light throughout the different spaces of the building. This topic brought me the question of what type of light fixture I wanted to use (if it should be something visible and contrasting or if it should otherwise go unnoticed) as well as what type of light did I want to generate.

After some thinking, I realized that I didn't want any external devices such as light fixtures to add noise to the purity of materials of the building. I thought instead, that it would be interesting to be able to achieve a light source that, in the first place, could originate in the walls - as if one of the layers of that wall became fluorescent and acquired the capacity to tint the space. Secondly, I thought it would be interesting if this light could act as the visual connection and acoustical waves inside my building. That is, to give this light the capacity to expand across the ramp, the perforated panels and the openings in the wall, becoming an element that traverses the perimeter of such space.

During this iteration of the wall design - whose layers of concrete are laid vertically - I decided to hide fluorescent lights inside the horizontal beams that extrude from the walls. That way, the generated light will expand from the beams itself.

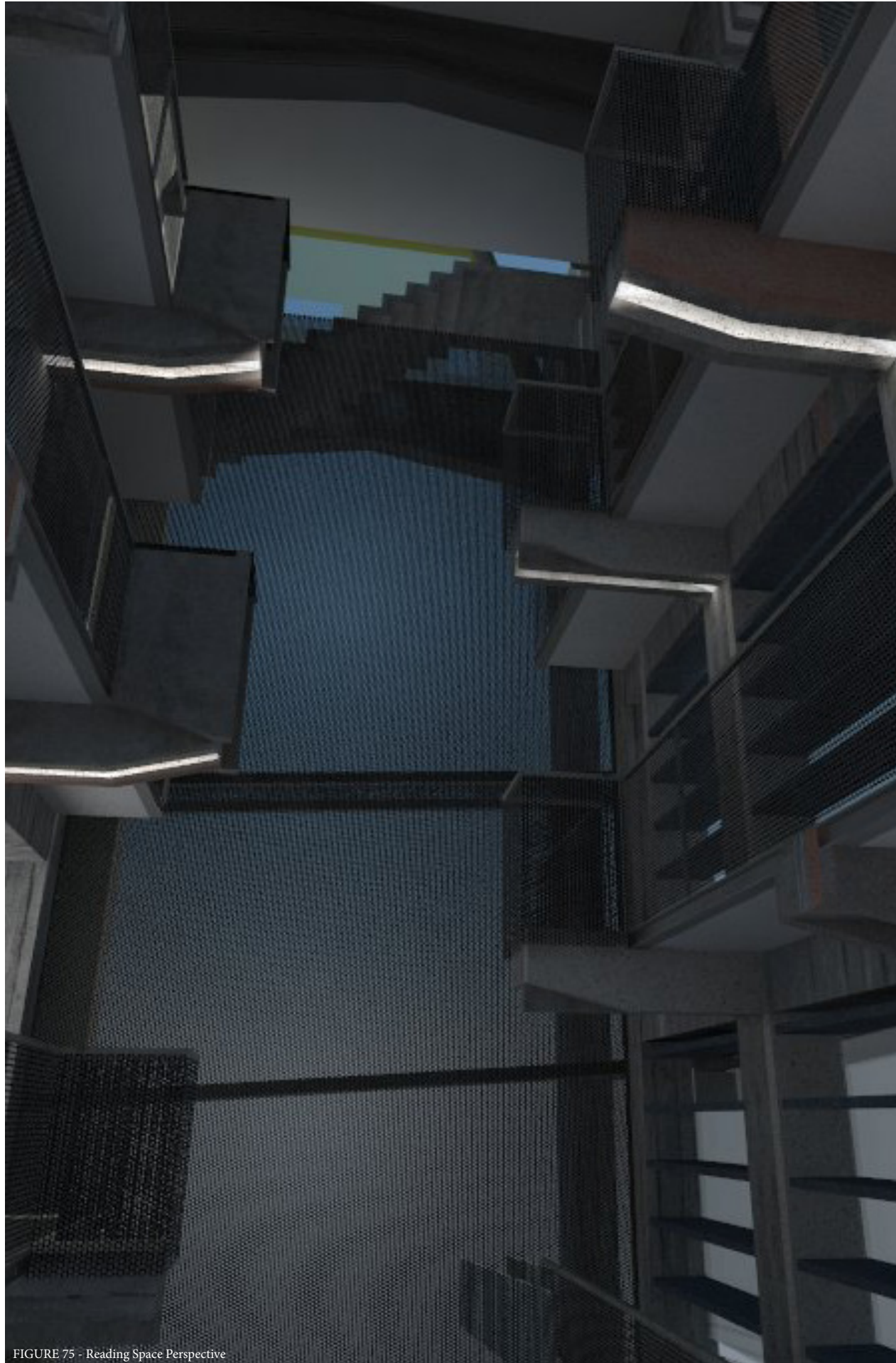


FIGURE 75 - Reading Space Perspective

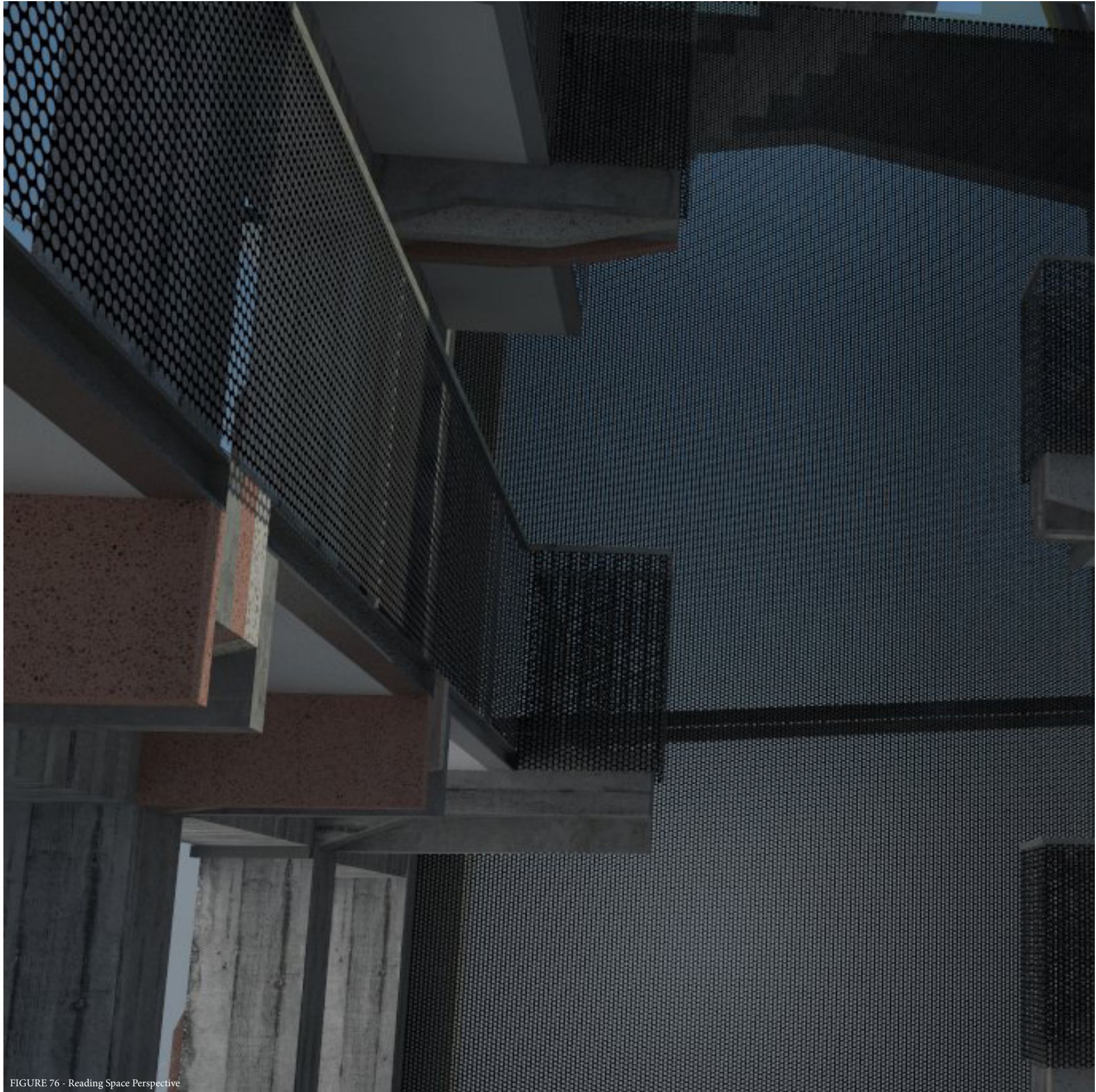


FIGURE 76 - Reading Space Perspective

THE ATTIC SPACE

Another element that I wanted to incorporate into my building was the attic space, being thought as some sort of uppermost area that, aside from being not obviously accessible, would possess certain qualities to make people want to go there. Great views, lots of natural light and quietness for people to be able to concentrate, were supposed to make of this space something unique.

Despite the fact that my building is a very social place, where all sorts of sounds are supposed to intermingle, thus creating an acoustical 'esperantization', I wanted this room to be different. The feeling that I wanted to recreate could well resemble when a person, sitting on the seat of a plane that is gaining altitude, is finally able to get over the tumultuous clouds. Being able to look down at the clouds, and at the miniature sights or urban development that appear in between those clouds, and far away at the blue sky, I've always found this experience to be very peaceful, thus creating the perfect atmosphere for reading and concentrating.

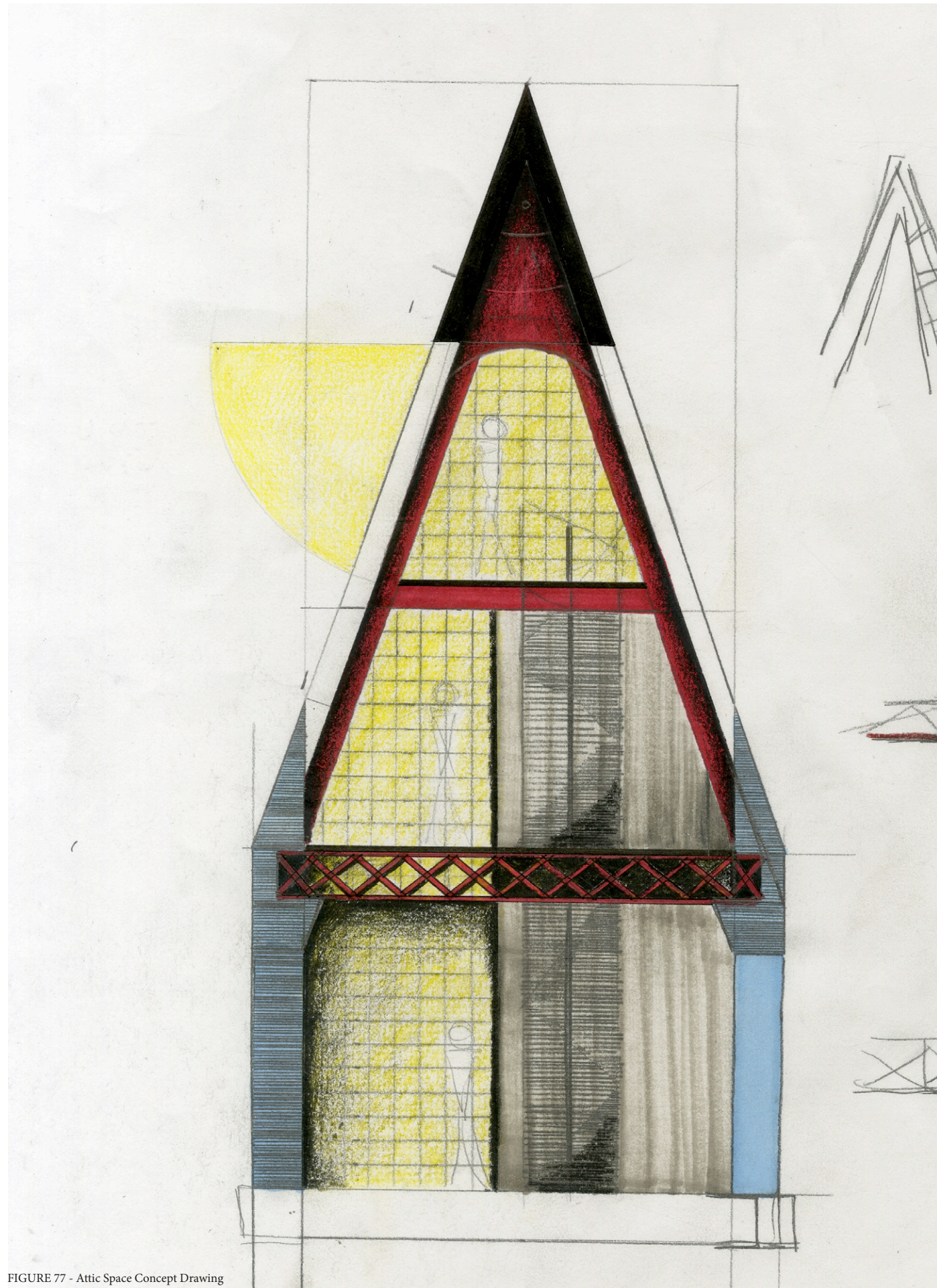


FIGURE 77 - Attic Space Concept Drawing

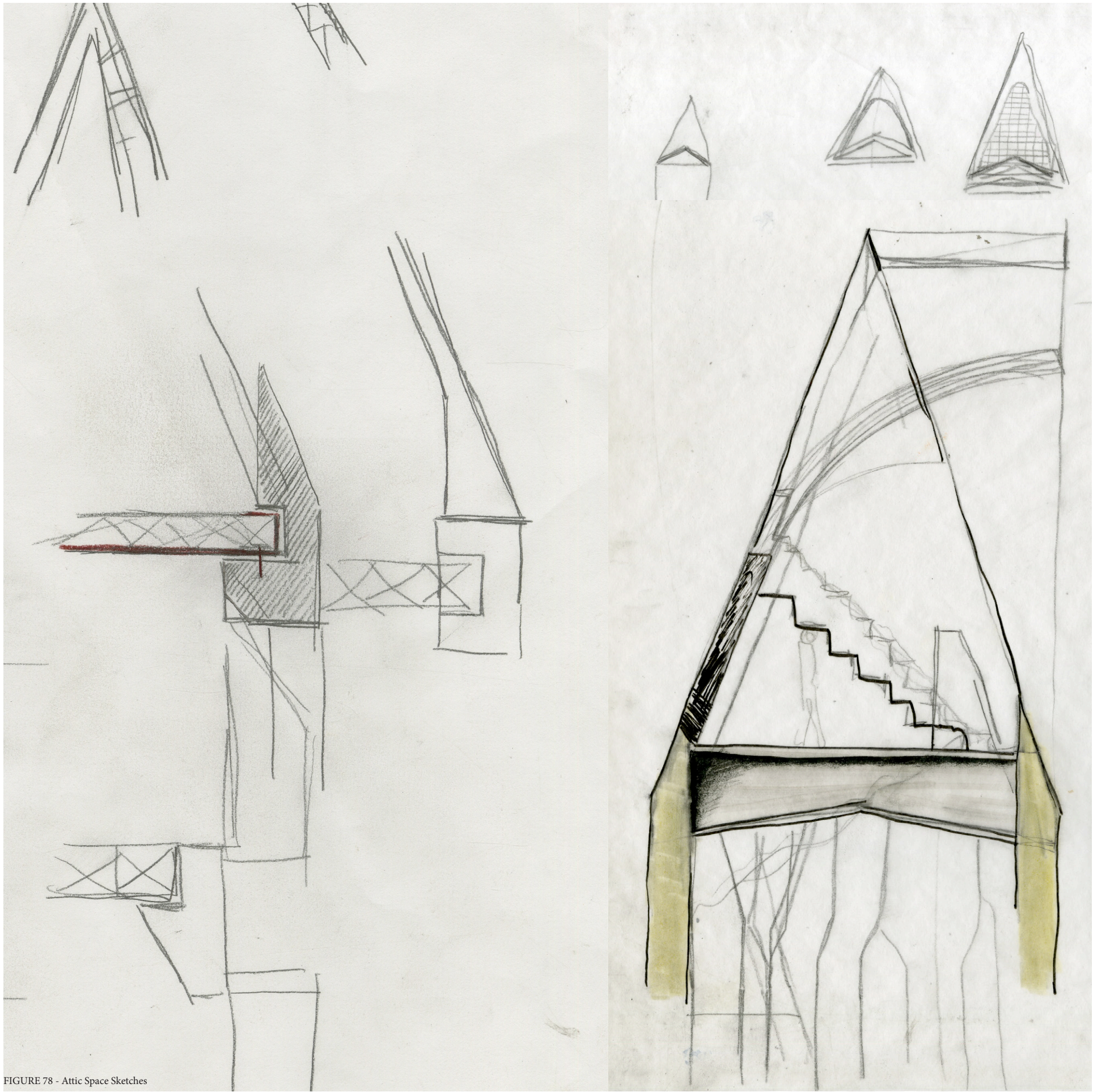


FIGURE 78 - Attic Space Sketches

THE BATHROOMS

During the second semester, I started analyzing possible locations for the bathrooms, and well as different design approaches to consider.

Since the beginning of the design process, I wanted these spaces to speak a similar language as the rest of the project. I wanted these bathrooms, therefore, to become a place for exploration and surprise, and not merely a utilitarian space.

This is how I decided to develop some inspirational drawings with the goal of bringing together all of these ideas into paper.

The following drawings are some concepts that I explored, and that led me to a final design during the third semester.

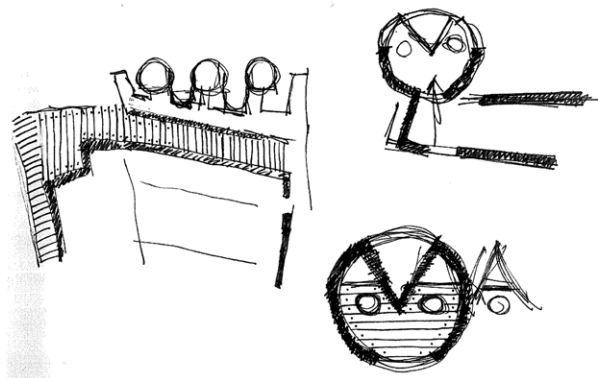


FIGURE 79 - Bathroom Studies

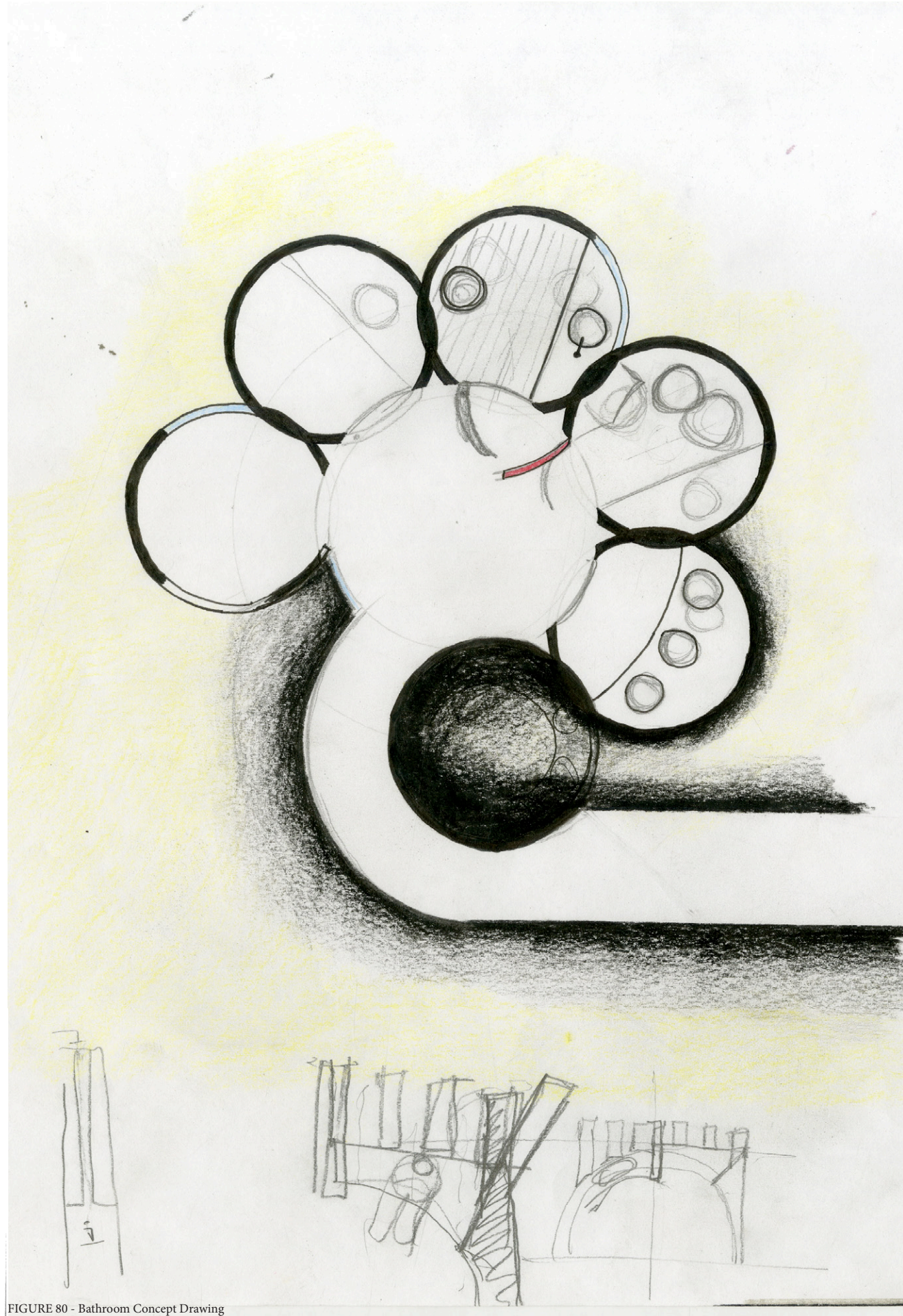
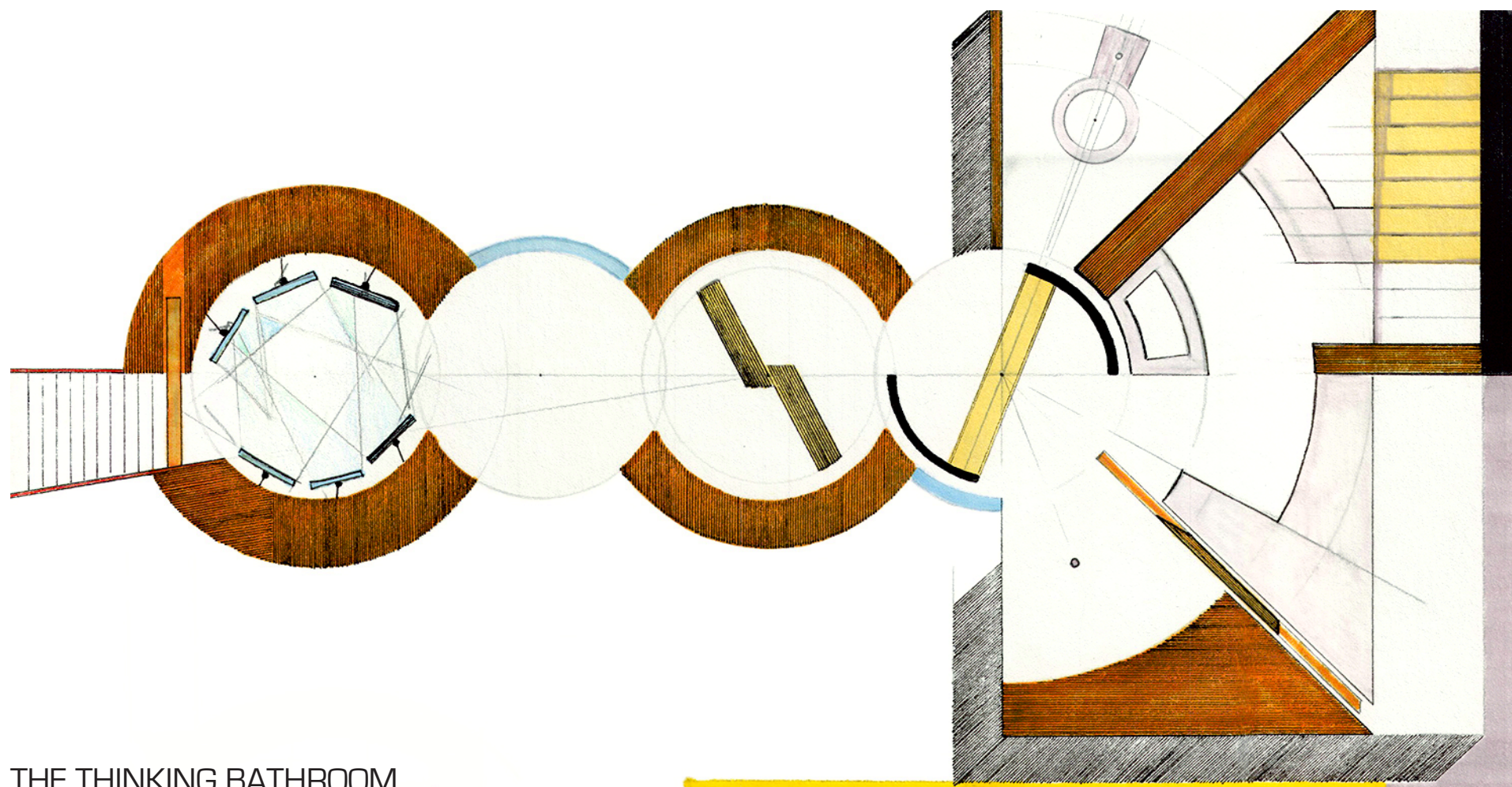


FIGURE 80 - Bathroom Concept Drawing



THE THINKING BATHROOM VERSION 1.0

FIGURE 81 - The Thinking Bathroom 1.0

The Thinking Bathroom is not merely a utilitarian space. It is much more. It's a place for getting lost, away from the mundane and from the entirety of the world. It is a place for meditation, a retreat into the sacred.

The Thinking Bathroom is composed of two parts. The first one is "the room of chambers", which allows the person to move away from the everyday life and into sacredness. This, as the name suggests, develops through a series of chambers. The journey starts by traversing a bridge that separates the person from the rest of the

building, followed by a thick sliding gate. Then, there's a series of circular-shaped chambers that contain rotating doors. A person has to traverse these doors in order to reach the bathroom, and there's no turning back. Each step forward will take the person further away. In each chamber, the person gradually loses awareness of the outside world. The first chamber is called "the infinite loop", where a series of mirrors placed against each other allows the infinite aspect of the universe to be contemplated. This is a place for meditation.

The second part of the bathroom is the bathroom itself. It is laid as a circular concentric space contained within a rectangle, with the services around the perimeter of the room. A last rotating door, located in the middle of the room, divides the space in equal concentric parts. People using this bathroom will have to go back into the middle space and push the rotating door in order to access the following room. The space has very high ceilings to foster concentration and big windows to allow the person to see the outer world. There is also access to an outdoor terrace.

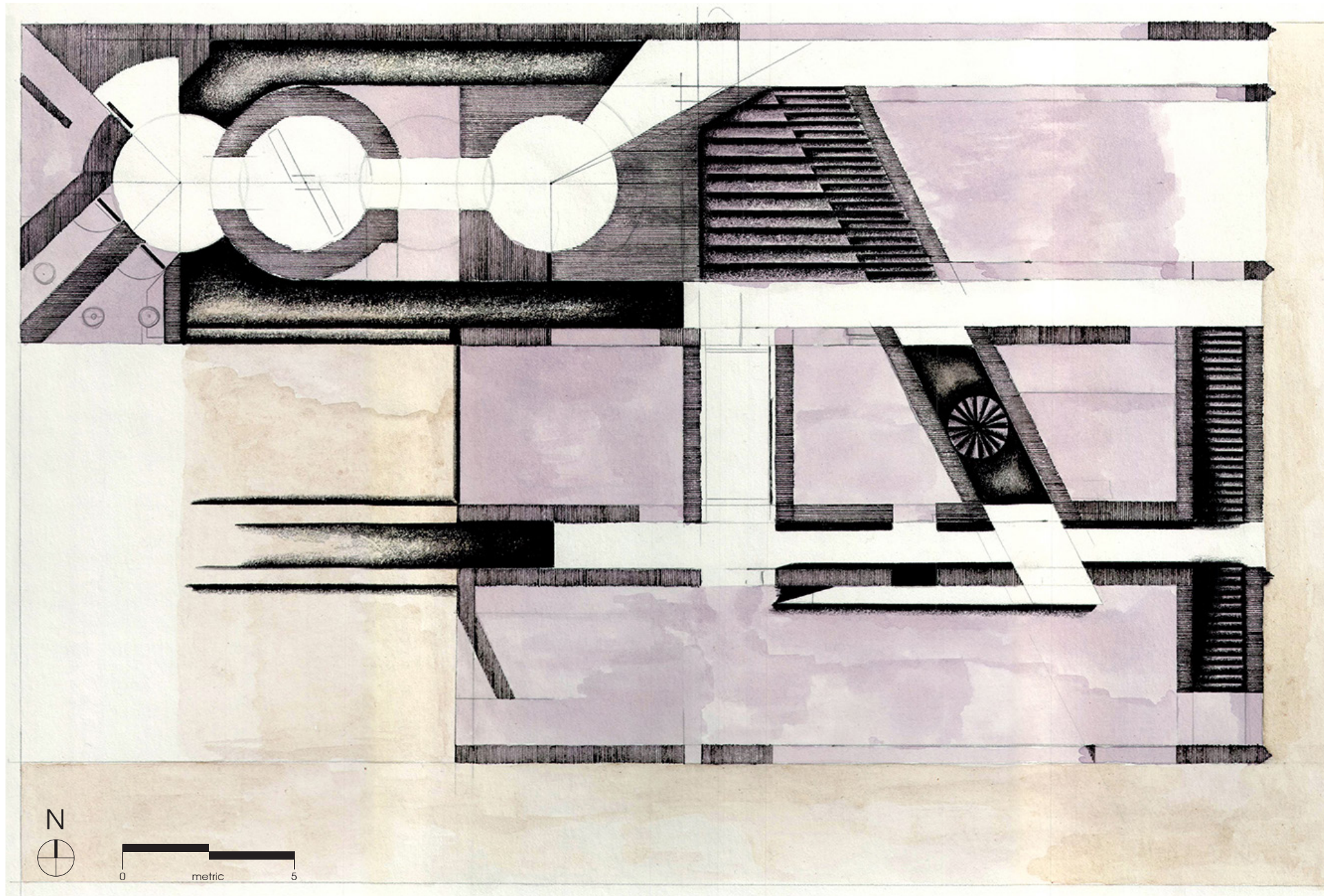


FIGURE 82 - The Thinking Bathroom 2.0

THE THINKING BATHROOM - VERSION 2.0 & 2.1 Beta

These drawings explore different versions of The Thinking Bathroom, where different layouts were explored in order incorporate it to the project. This exercise therefore represented an evolution of the previous space. It was done with black ink, and the help of a soft 8B graphite was used to add shadows. Later on, two different liquids were used. These liquids

are both equally important, since they are always present in the project. Red wine and coffee are both consumed in this building. Whereas coffee wakes you up and helps you concentrate; wine is consumed in the quest of relaxation and in the search for a meditating state of mind.

The first drawing represents the first attempt to accommodate the bathroom inside the perimeter of the north tower, facing the plaza. Some weeks later, as I was more advanced in the project, I decided to comprise all the services in the middle tower, locating the restrooms in adjacency to the street.

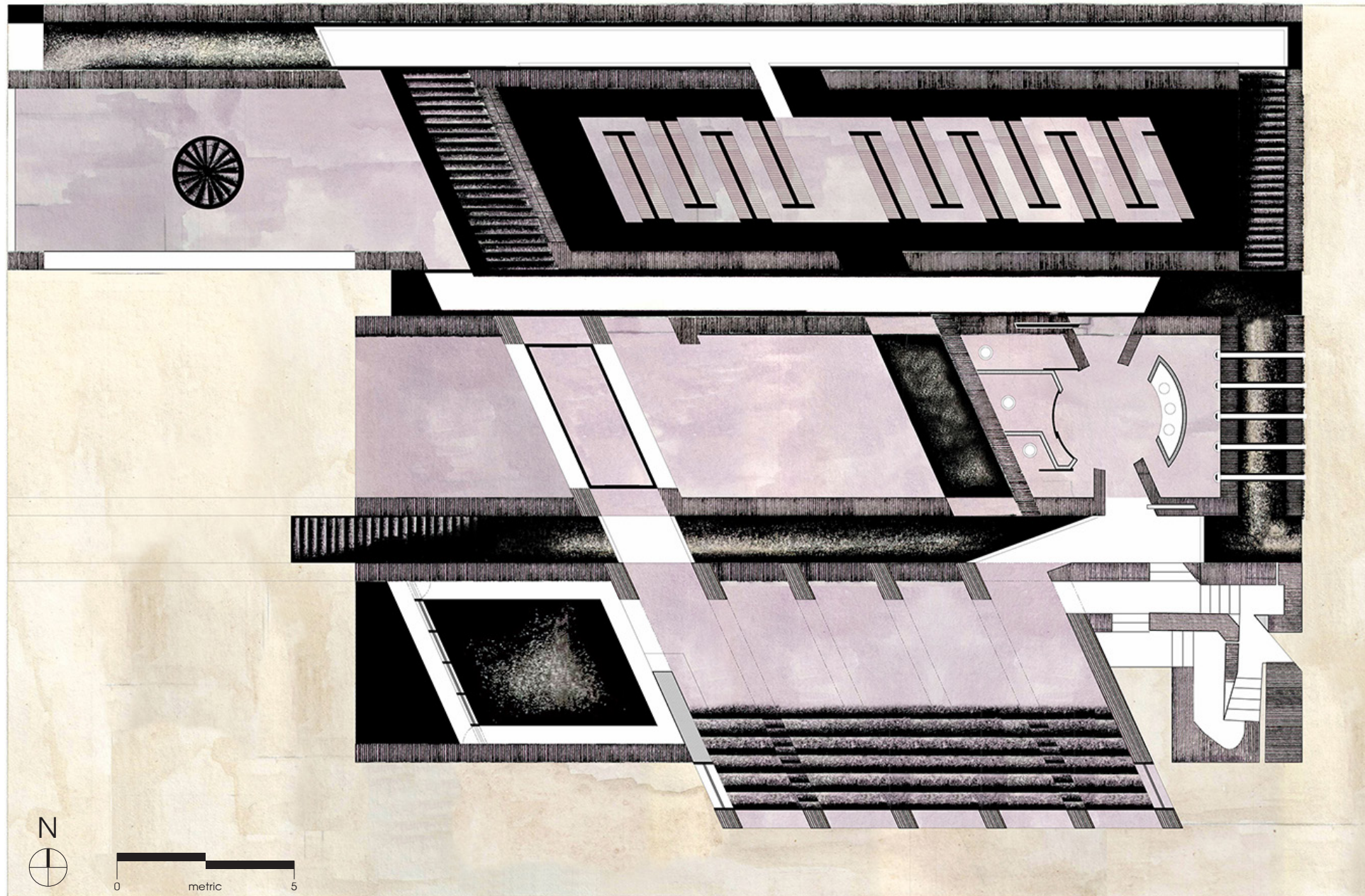


FIGURE 83 - The Thinking Bathroom 2.1

Since my building is all about hearing and seeing, I didn't want these bathrooms to become a boring utilitarian place. So, I started thinking of ways to bring the aspects of sound and vision in to these rooms. Further studies led me to develop a series of peep holes in the bathroom, allowing people using it to be able to observe 14th street. Being able

to see outside, they would witness life surrounding the building.

The creation of the second drawing incorporated the digital realm to the previous drawing. Departing from the first drawing made with graphite, Espresso and Malbec, I decided to digitalize it and to treat it like a puzzle in order to create something new.

Scanning the original drawing, I used Photoshop to copy and paste the different parts of walls and the different colors, rearranging everything until the first drawing became the second.

THE STAIR CORES

While imagining the bathrooms, I was also thinking on how to develop a similar language for the stairs around my building. Having such a presence of vertical circulation, I started thinking of these spaces as vertical versions of the horizontal experience I was intending to achieve in other parts of the project.

I started therefore imagining a stairway that would not only be a way to connect a point A with a point B, but instead I wanted to create a path that would incorporate detours, places to seat, spots that allowed the observer to look at other places, narrow parts or hidden passages.

This led me to a lot of sketching, exploring orthogonal and curved shapes, playing with thicker and thinner walls, and imagining different textures. My ultimate goal was to create a journey of exploration and discovery that would make the visitor want to stay within these walls.

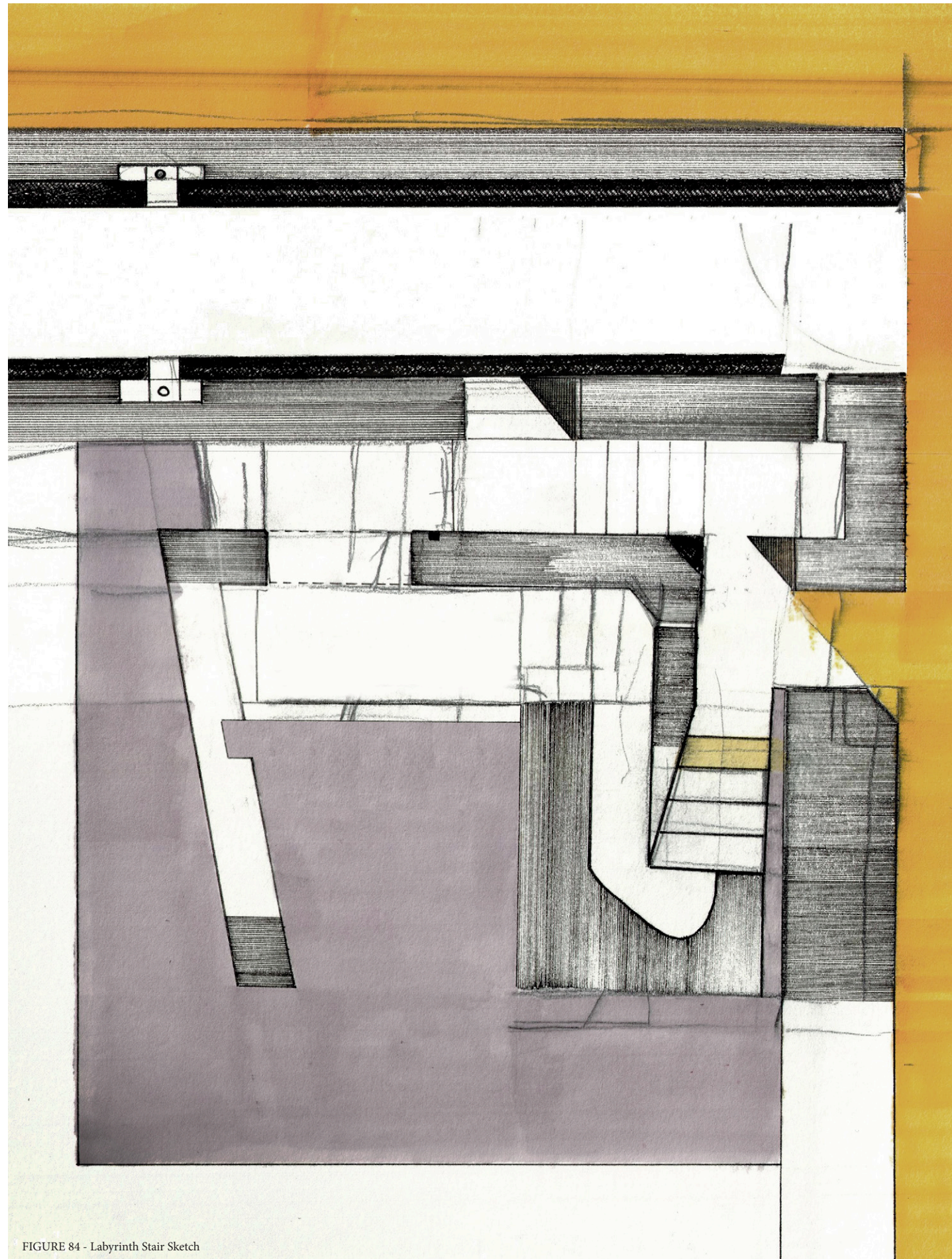


FIGURE 84 - Labyrinth Stair Sketch

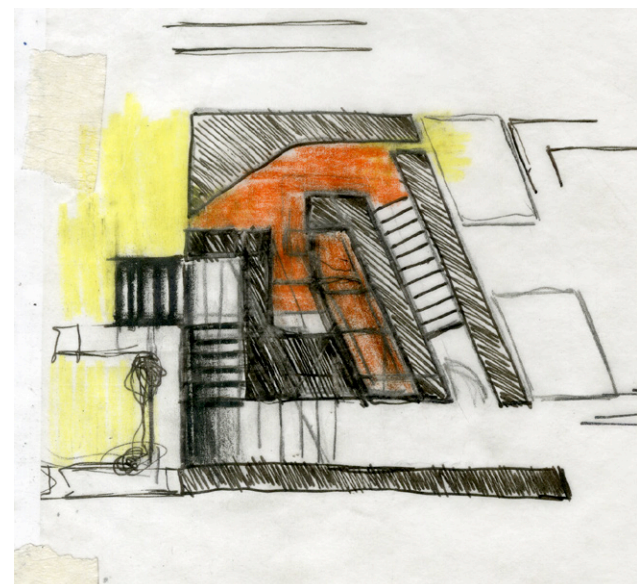
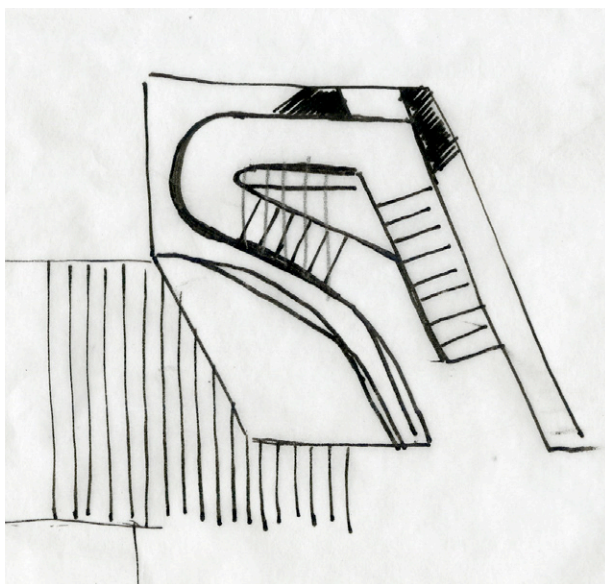
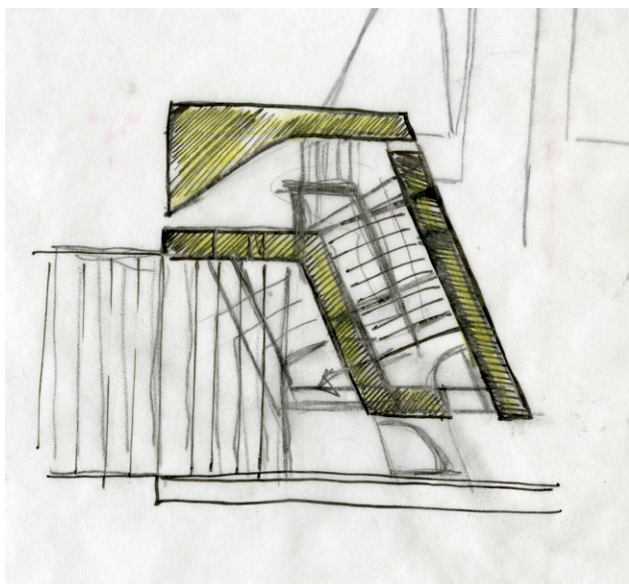
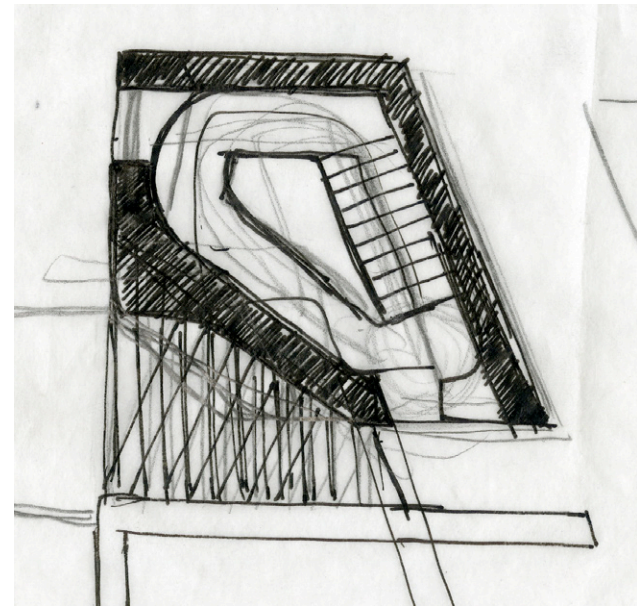
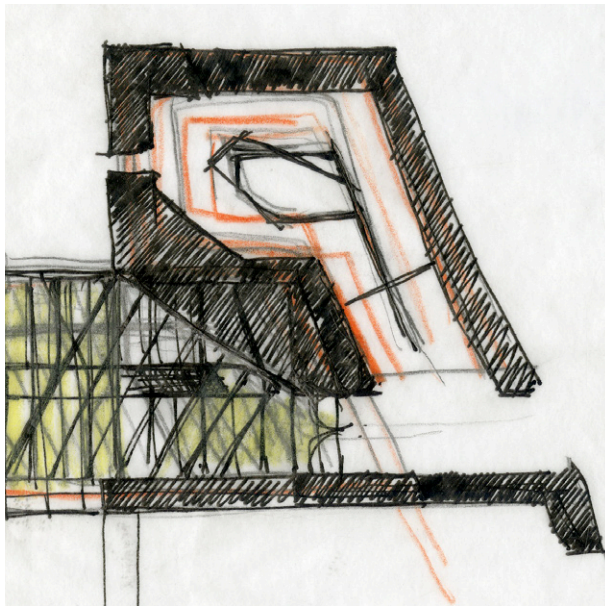
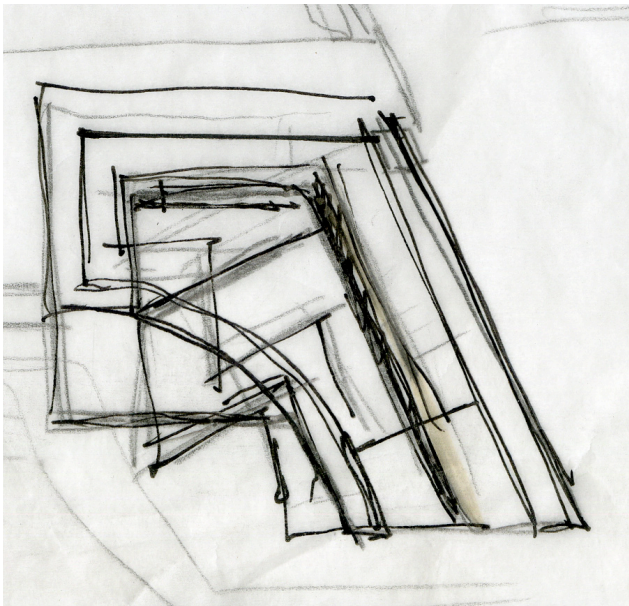
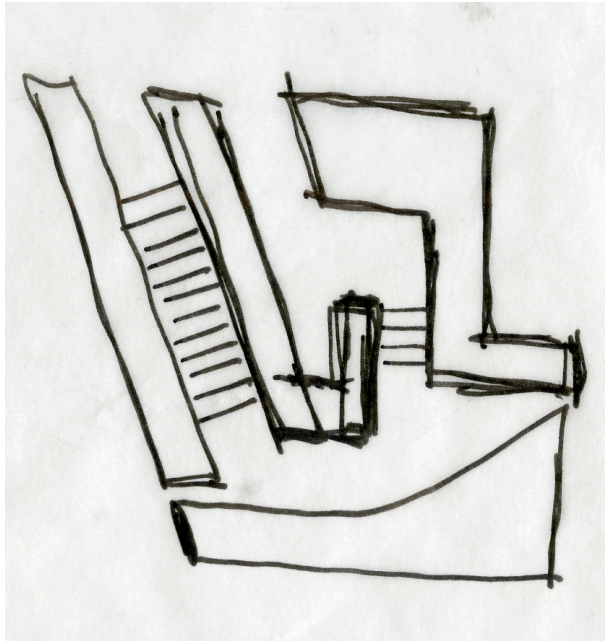
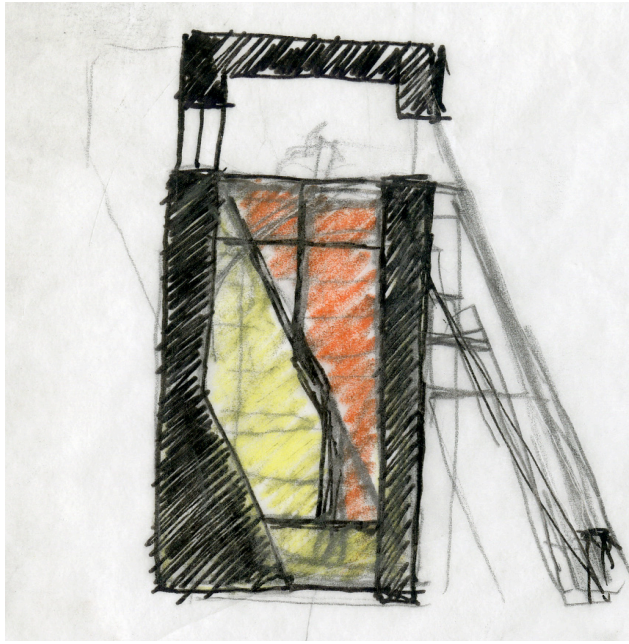


FIGURE 85 - Cores & Stairs Sketches

THIRD SEMESTER

A HOUSE FOR LANGUAGES

FALL 2014

SITE & ELEVATIONS

At this point I already have a building.

From 14th Street you can clearly see the proportions of the row house. On Swann I also tried eventually to make it work in order to keep with the proportions of the surrounding neighbors. I kept analyzing the houses aside. My main concern with this façade is that, since the building is long in the east-west orientation, I didn't want it to be too long in comparison with the surrounding houses. So, even though the rhythm would not be as apparent as on the other elevations, I tried to use the plaza, and the different parts of the south building to generate diverse openings, changes of texture, of shape, etc. to generate this sort of rhythm that the surrounding row houses would have.

From 14th Street you can see the three buildings. The first one is the library, then you can see the tunnel that will take you to the plaza, then you have the second building containing the peepholes, and then you have the third building with its stair core in the corner and the auditorium behind.

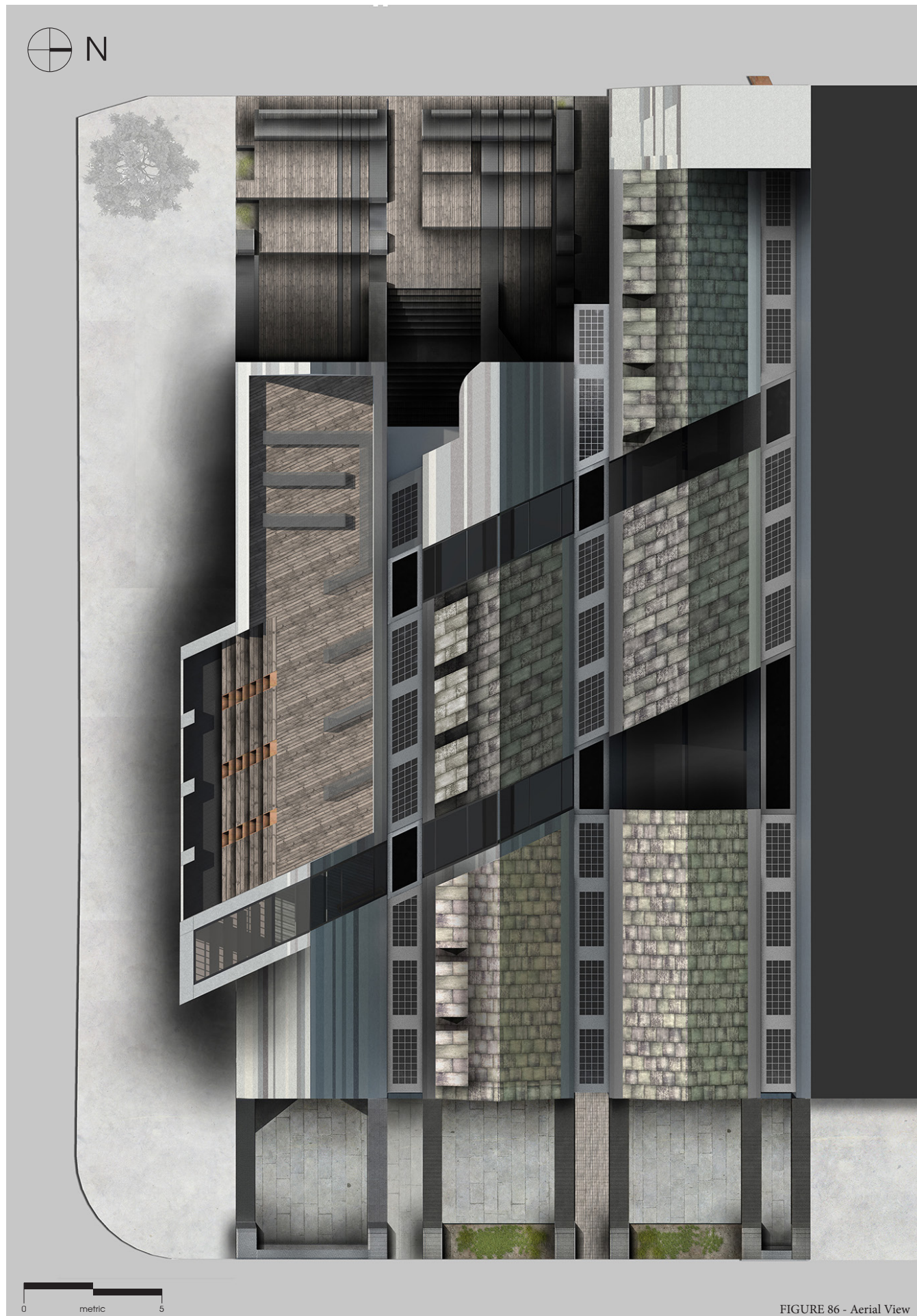


FIGURE 86 - Aerial View



FIGURE 87 - West Elevation

WEST ELEVATION

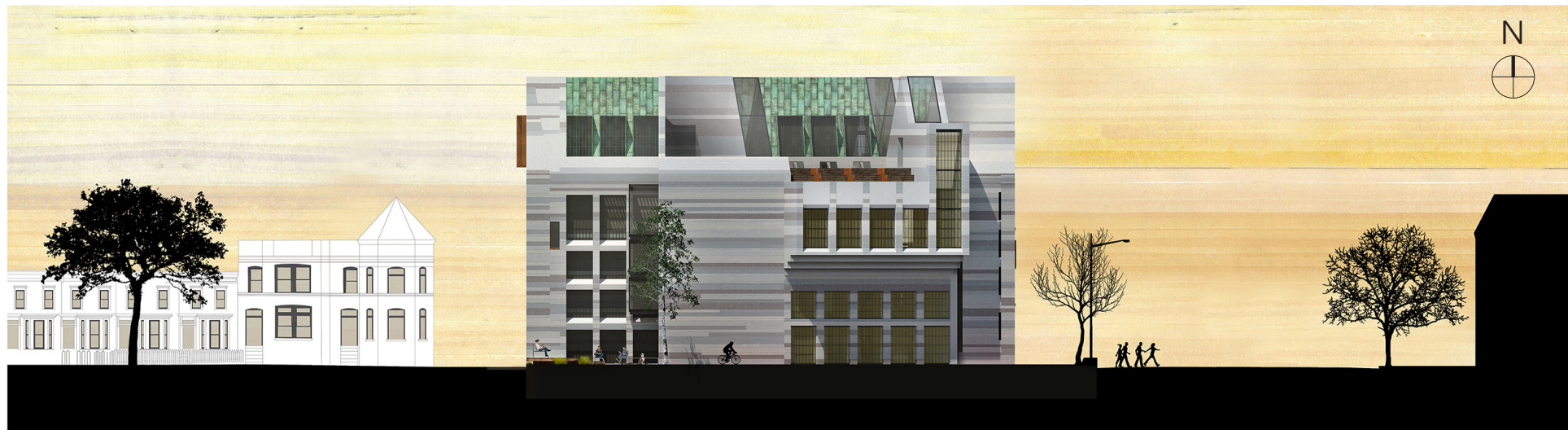


FIGURE 88 - North Elevation

NORTH ELEVATION

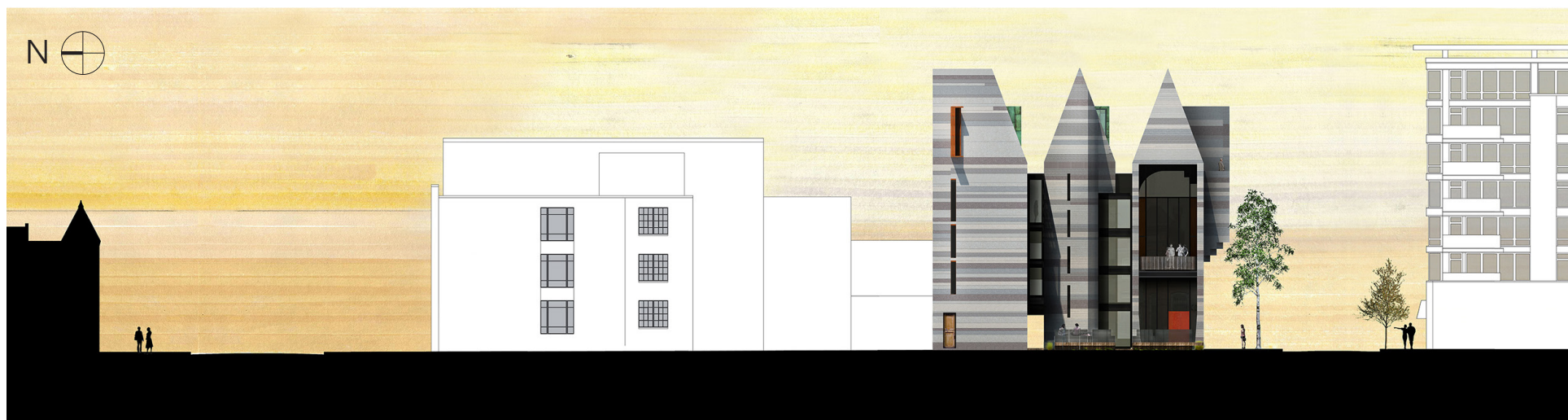


FIGURE 89 - East Elevation

EAST ELEVATION



THE SIDEWALK & THE PLAZA

Since the beginning of the project, I was concerned about the importance of including an outdoor space in the project, one that could be considered a part of the building but also a part of the neighborhood. This outdoor area could well become a gathering space during the warm months of the year, having people sitting outside of the building while drinking a cup of coffee or engaging in a conversation. It was also thought as a good way to invite the passerby to discover the building. Since the neighborhood and its current revitalization hasn't really provided its citizens with an open green space, this plaza could well become that place where people working in the area go to eat their lunches and take some sun before returning to work. The semi-hidden location of the plaza, close to 14th street but not directly on it, is supposed to act as a noise buffer to make this place more quiet and enjoyable.

People standing in this plaza can access the building through the main entrance, or alternatively walking down the stairs into an underground space. In order to reach the plaza, one can arrive from Swann street, or from 14th street using a tunnel-looking pathway that traverses the building from east to west.

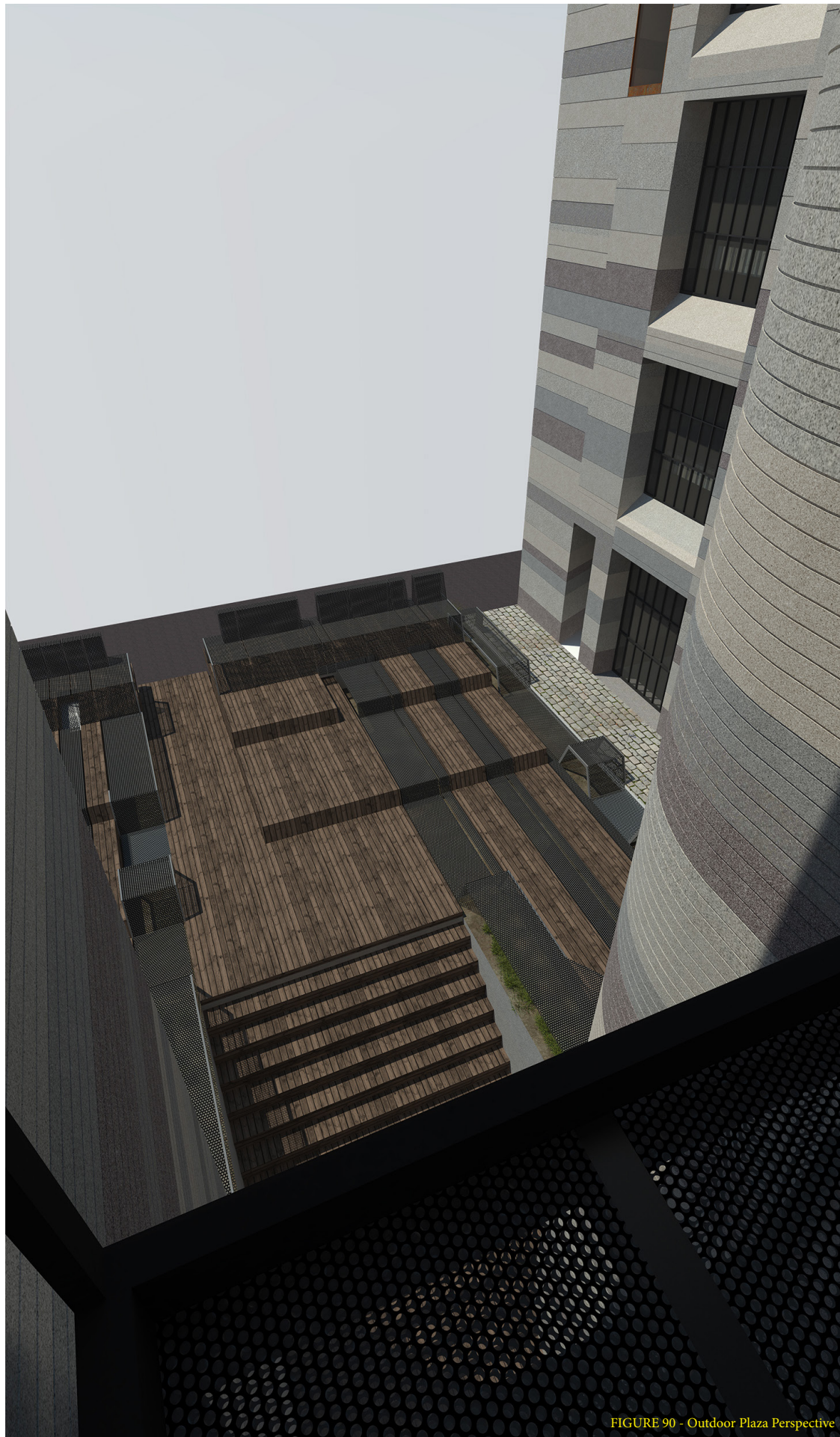


FIGURE 90 - Outdoor Plaza Perspective

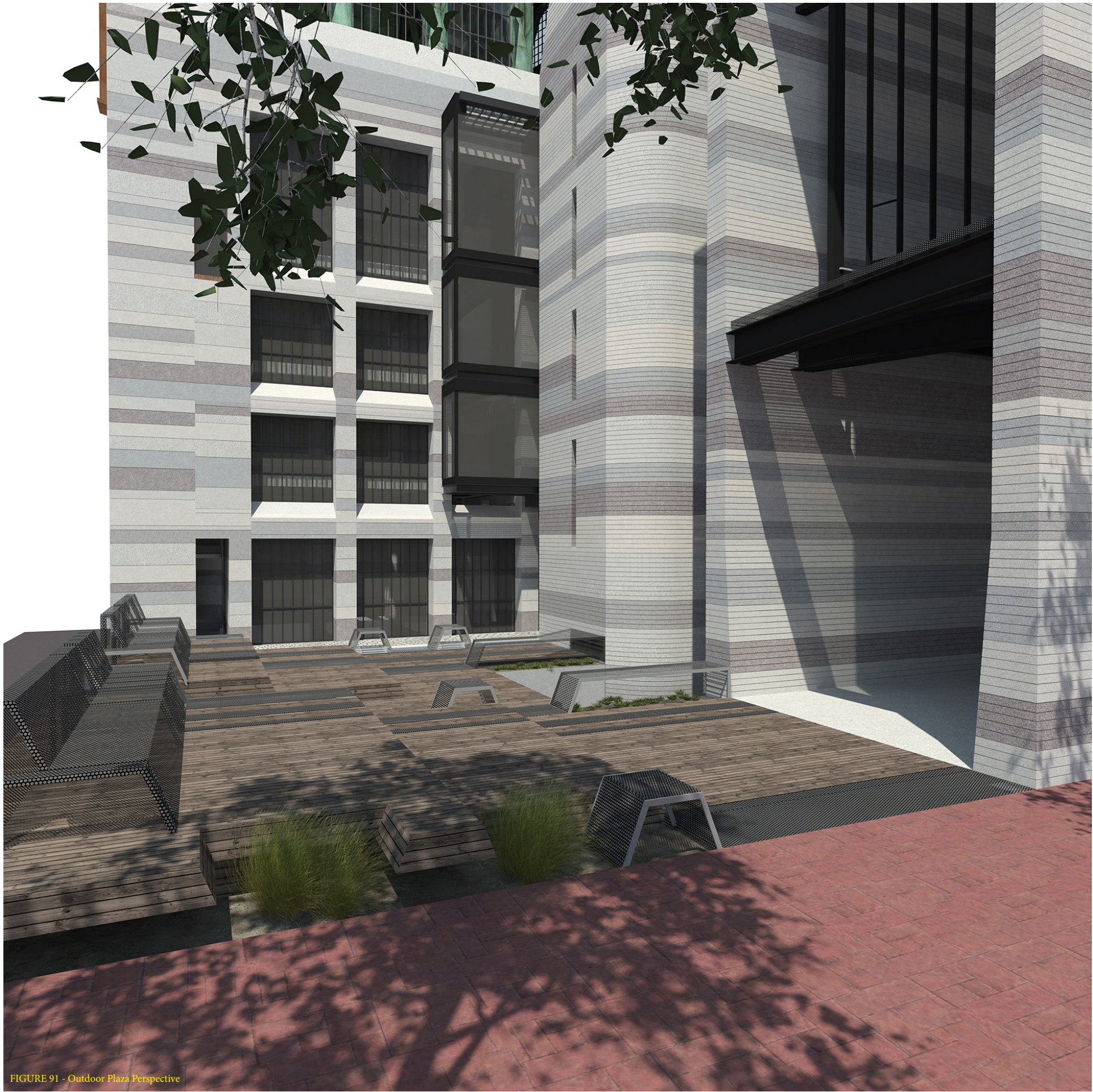


FIGURE 91 - Outdoor Plaza Perspective

With regards to aesthetics, both the plaza and the sidewalk on 14th street share a similar language, providing benches of different types and sizes to invite the passerby to use them. Finding inspiration on the east - west thick walls that provide the structure for the building, the sidewalk and plaza continue playing with these lines, generating a series of virtual horizontal lines on the floor that structure the space. Different light materials also found inside the building, such as perforated metal and wood, play with each other, zigzagging up and down, while creating different floor heights, transforming themselves into benches, and then transforming themselves into floor back again. Some shrubs and trees add a green touch to the space.

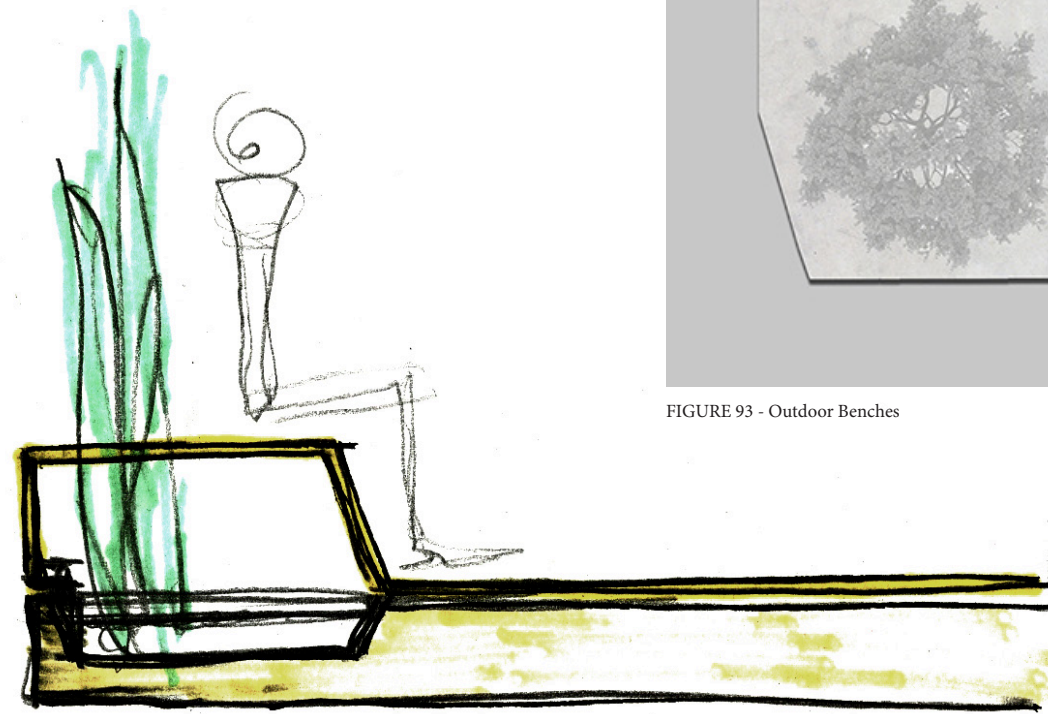


FIGURE 92 - Outdoor Bench Sketch



FIGURE 93 - Outdoor Benches



FIGURE 94 - Outdoor Benches



FIGURE 95 - Sidewalk Perspective

THE RAMPS

During the final semester, I revisited the ramps in order to develop a third iteration that contemplated a change of materials, as well as a different design for the handrail system.

I continued developing the previous idea of using a steel frame that supports a perforated metal floor. I saw this as a better solution than using wood, since it allows the ramp to become a quasi-transparent element, letting light fully permeate it.

Since the construction process of the concrete walls had changed in the previous months, I was forced to make some design changes. Until then, I had been working with vertical layers of concrete, and I had come up with the idea to extrude some of these layers to make them act as a support for the steel cables that would become the railing system. As I was studying how to generate light that came out from inside the walls, these extruded concrete layers also became generators of light.

This concept had to be rethought when I realized that, due to practical construction reasons, the layers of the walls needed to be poured horizontally. This forced me to rethink the dialogue between wall and ramp. The new design is a similar, lighter version of the previous. It incorporates a series of corten steel bookshelves that, through the addition of little fins in the lower part facing the circulation space, it's able to grab the metal cables and keep the railing system in place.

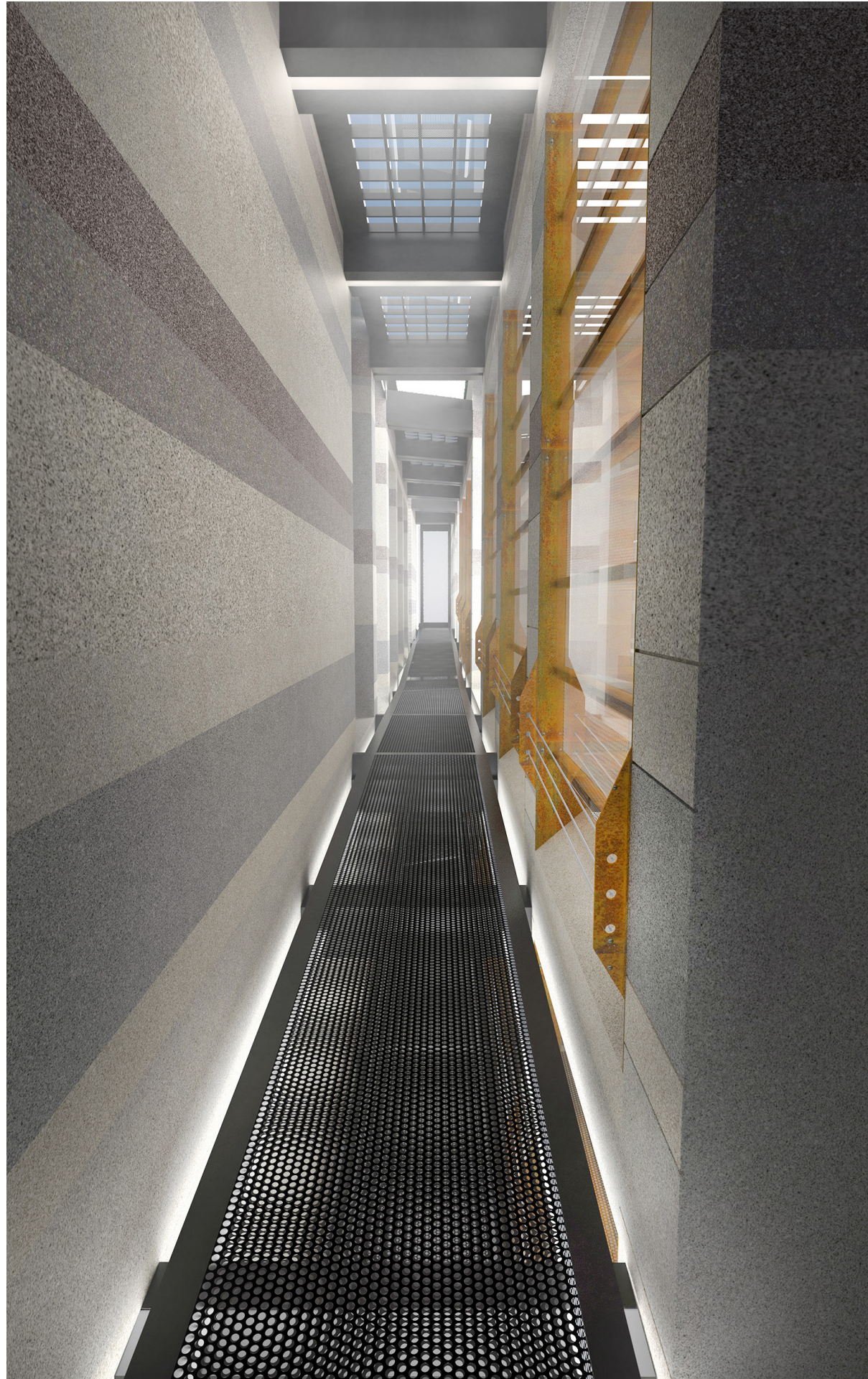


FIGURE 96 - Ramp Perspective

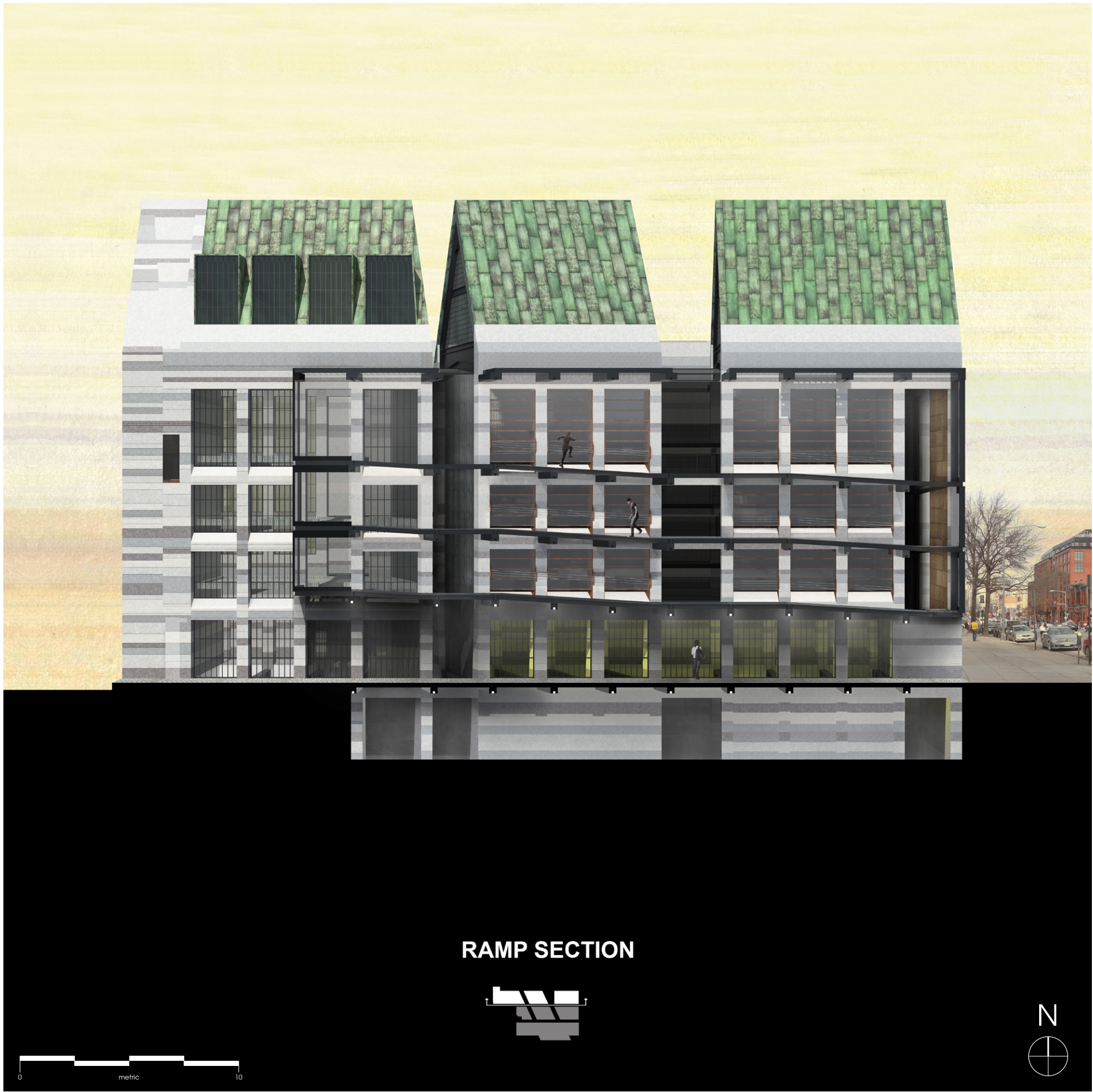


FIGURE 97 - Ramp Section

THE STAIRCORES

There are three main stair cores inside the building: the labyrinth stair, the middle stair and the oval stair. Each building has its stair core. They were inspired by the old gothic - or even renaissance - churches, where you find yourself inside these narrow stairways that go up and down, turn to the right and then to the left; with windows that are contained inside thick walls, in the form of just a tiny little opening that only allows you to perceive the outside. People using these stair cores will find benches to seat down and take a break, to have a conversation with another passer-by or just to tie their shoelaces. They will also find observation areas to look outside. Going to the upper level they will have access to the attics or to the open-air auditorium.

Alternatively, we can use the basket elevators, which are composed of a 1 m high basket-like structure that doesn't have a top part like regular elevators. They are meant to transport people up and down, without blocking the view. These elevators are enclosed by a large panel of semi-perforated metal, that allow people in the rooms next door be able to see the elevators going up and down. When the elevators are not blocking the view, people from one end of the building can have an open visual of the other end.

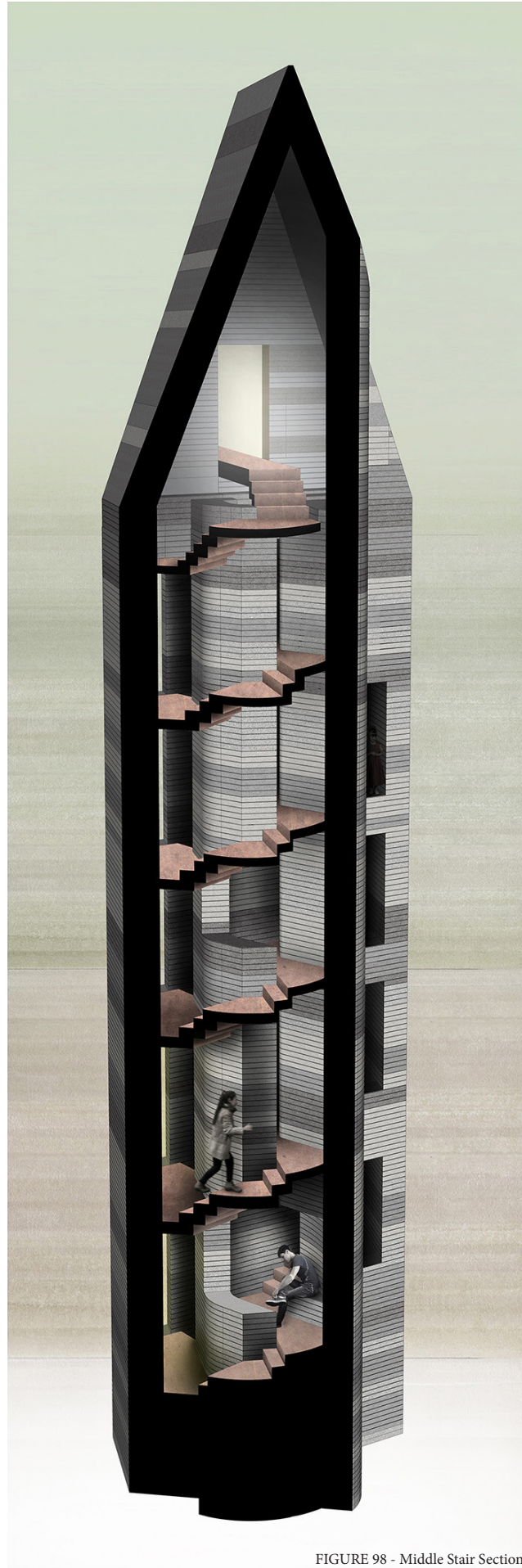
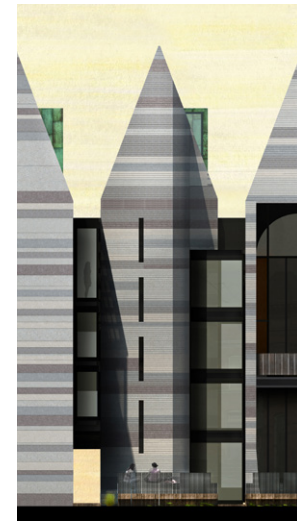


FIGURE 98 - Middle Stair Section



MIDDLE STAIR

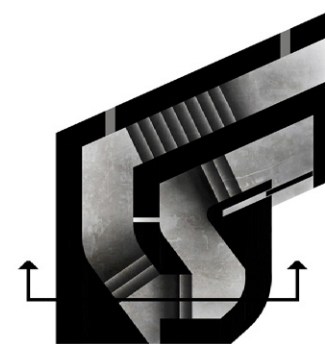


FIGURE 99 - Oval Stair Section



OVAL STAIR

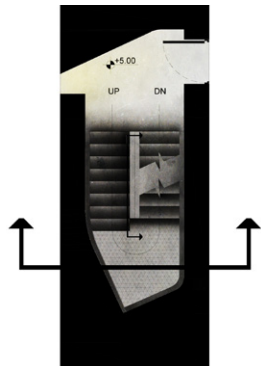


FIGURE 100 - Labyrinth Stair Section



LABYRINTH STAIR

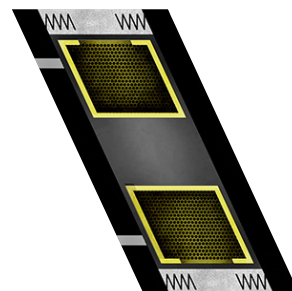


FIGURE 101 - Basket Elevators

THE
MAIN
READING
SPACE

I wanted to have a library. A library of books of as many languages as possible. How to make it happen? How to design a space that would allow me to concentrate, but at the same time allow me to observe everything? How to design a space that could feel magical or infinite, that could reflect the infinite universe of languages and books and words and symbols?

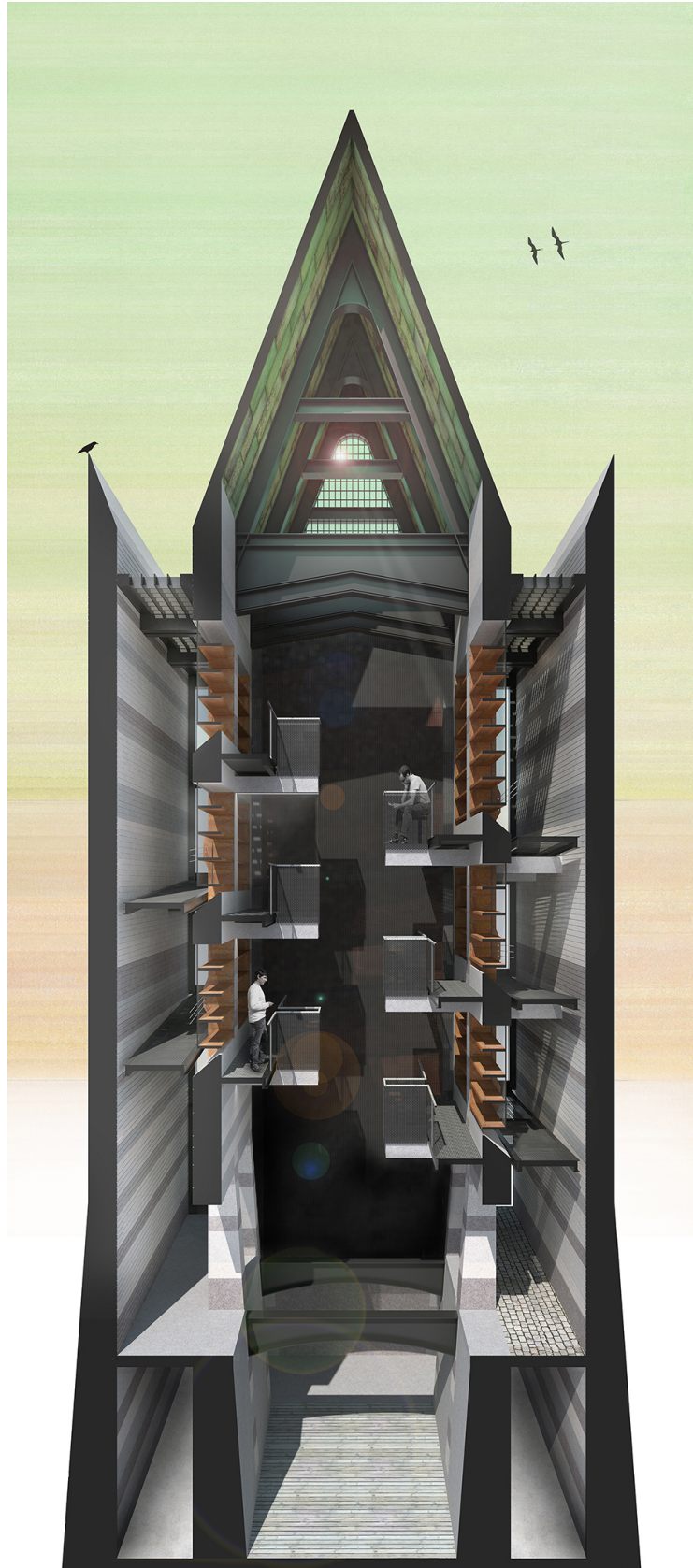
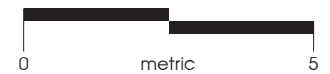
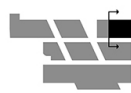


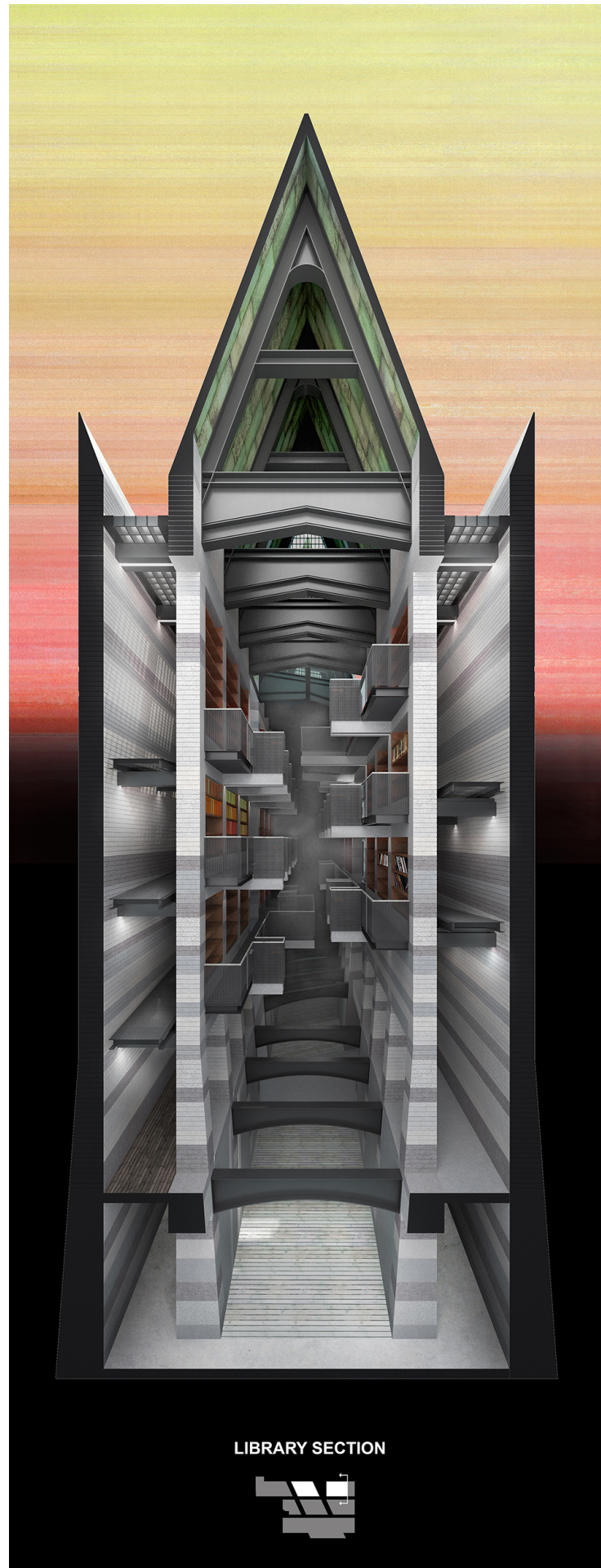
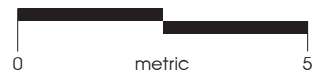
FIGURE 102 - Library Section - Looking East

The design of the library had many stages of development. At the very beginning, it had several stories, and the user could access the library from the different levels. But after studying this idea I realized that it had to be more of a grandiose space because the building is thin enough already, so I started thinking of allowing the building to be open, and using these lighter platforms to be in the middle containing the bookshelves.

LIBRARY SECTION



These platforms would be placed in a similar way as the other ones in the classrooms, but would have thicker gaps between them and the concrete walls, as you can see in the drawing. But still, I wasn't convinced. There was something missing and I wasn't happy with it. So, eventually what I would do.. as you can see in this diagram, I started think of having a series of horizontal platforms attached to the walls. So maybe my walls could contain the books, and I would have these series of platforms from which a series of balconies would appear.



LIBRARY SECTION



THE MAIN READING SPACE

So, the main space becomes a void, an empty space that allows the user to appreciate the totality of the building, from one end to the other. And allows people to go there, grab a book, and be able to see everything. In order to do that, I started creating some sort of balconies supported by the beams of the main structure. These balconies would contain only a stool and an individual table, becoming just a personal space for lecture and contemplation.



FIGURE 103 - Library Section - Looking West

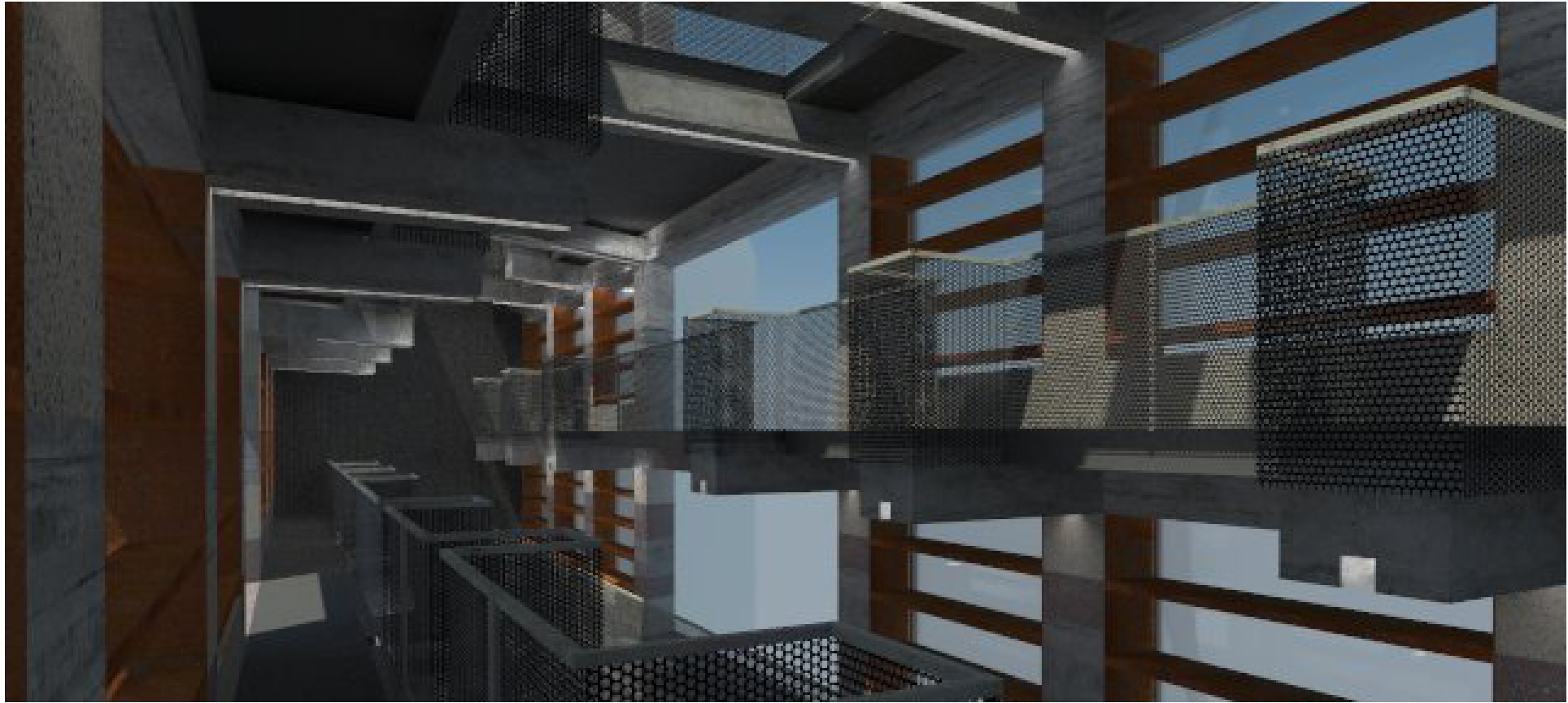


FIGURE 104 - Library Perspective

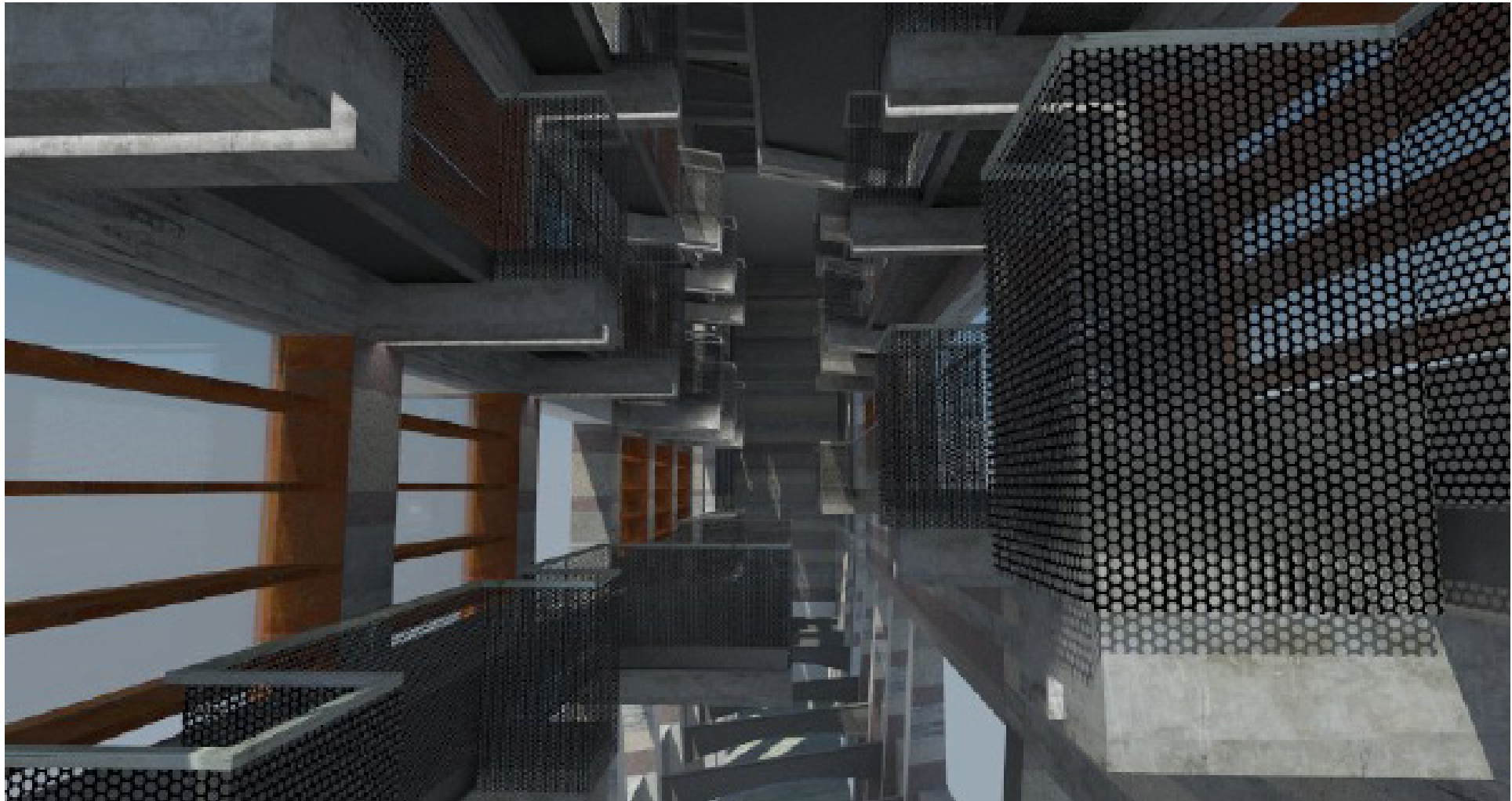


FIGURE 105 - Library Perspective



LIBRARY SECTION

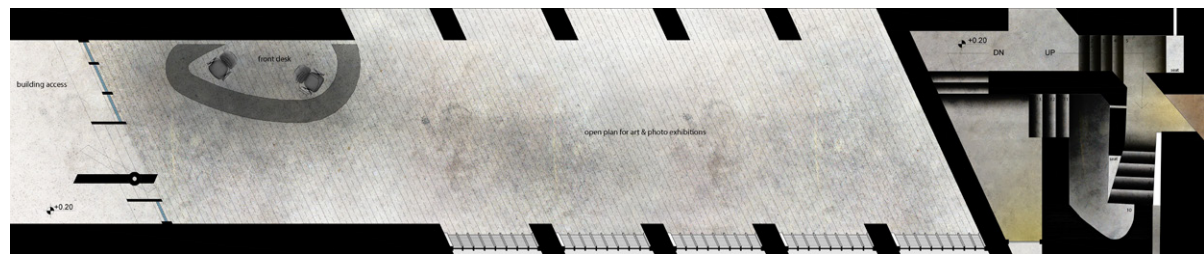
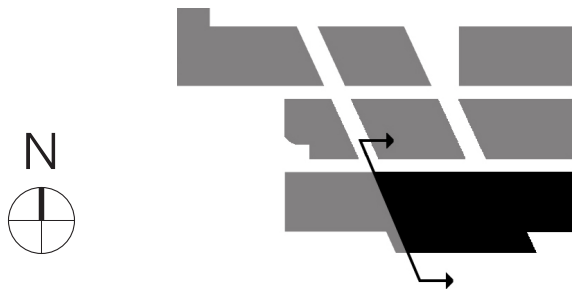
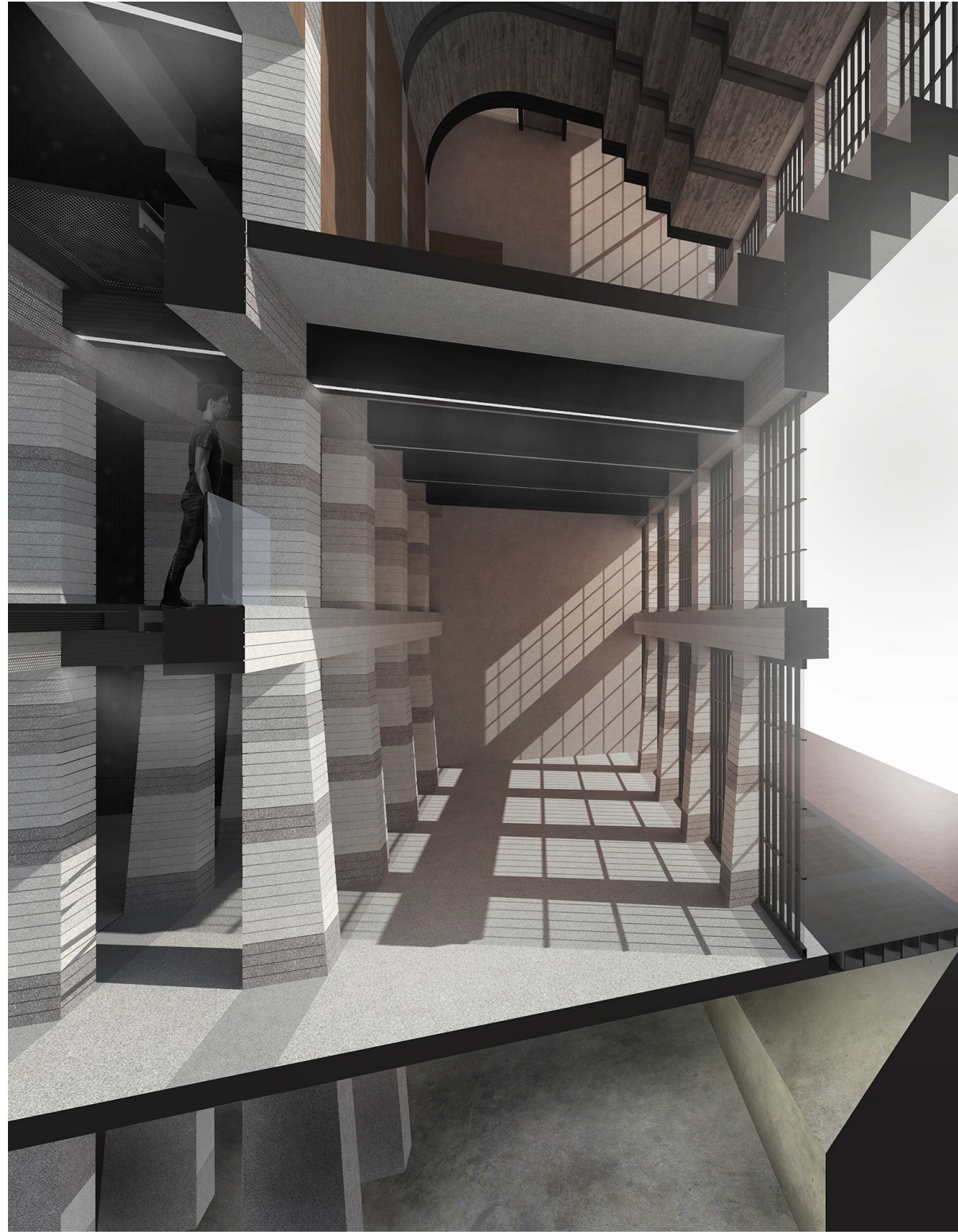
FIGURE 106 - Library Section - Looking North

THE MULTIPURPOSE SPACE

Being the first space that one encounters when accessing the building, the multipurpose space is meant to be a welcoming, flexible room, that is able to absorb large amounts of people. From happy hours to temporary photo exhibitions, this space is meant to have the capacity to change personalities to adapt to the different types of situations that this social building might encounter.

The open space has double heights and large windows that face the south, to allow natural light to enter, while inviting the outdoor passerby to come in. Following with the overall language of the building, fluorescent lights appear from inside the long beams above, illuminating the space from the ceiling.

From the second floor, the metal platform turns into some sort of mezzanine level balcony, allowing people to get a perspective of the room from above. Through this opening, people standing at the multipurpose space will be able to see across the buildings and all the way into the main reading space located at the other end.



0 metric 5

FIGURE 107 - Multipurpose Space Section - Looking East

THE AUDITORIUM

The final version of the auditorium is composed of three spaces, each one with a distinct function and personality.

The first one, the auditorium itself, is just a final refinement of previous iterations. When the main doors of the auditorium are open, people seating at both ends of the stepped platform can get a view of the library and the elevators going up and down.

To the far left of the building, there's an outdoor terrace that faces the plaza. This is meant for people to get some fresh air, smoke a cigarette, or just to observe the plaza from above. In order to access this terrace, people coming from the auditorium must traverse an open space that contains a narrow metal platform, attached to the walls in a perimetrical way. Speaking a similar language to that of the main reading space, this room is meant to be an in-between space, for people to use before, after, or during breaks; allowing them to gather and circulate while getting a sense of the multi-purpose room underneath. Temporary exhibitions of photos or paintings could be showcased in these walls.

The auditorium is separated from this space through a series of sliding wood doors, that can open completely to merge both spaces, yet close in its totality in order to provide the auditorium with complete privacy.

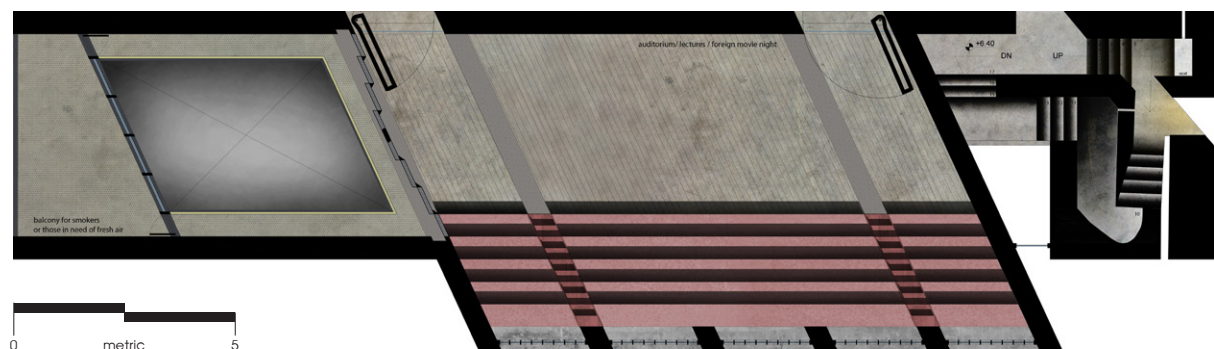
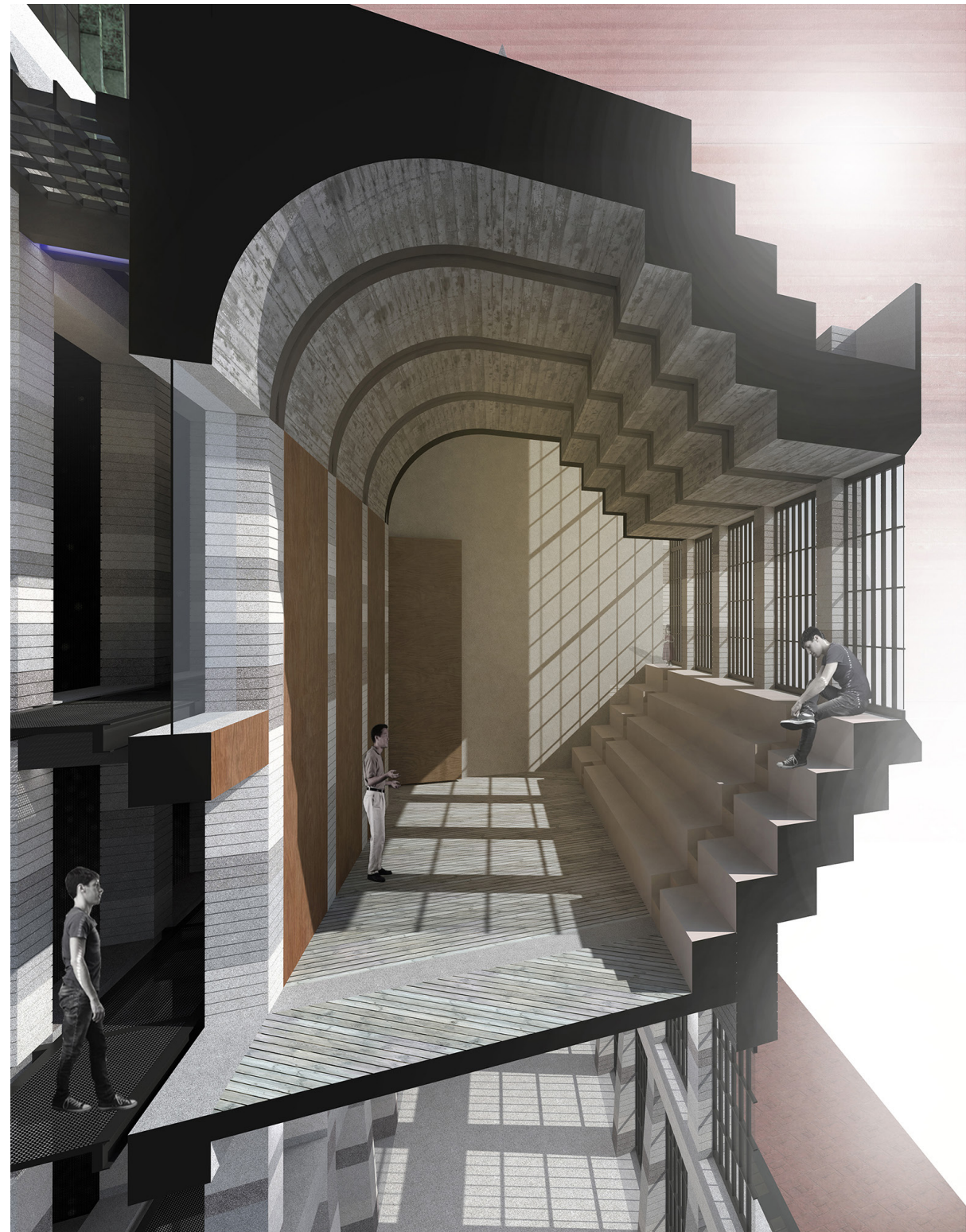


FIGURE 108 - Auditorium Section - Looking East

THE OUTDOOR AUDITORIUM

The idea of having some sort of open, outdoor space that wasn't necessarily as public as the exterior plaza, interested me since the beginning. My intention here was to incorporate an area that was located within the building's perimeter, and that provided an outdoor experience as well as views of the neighborhood. This space could be multipurpose as well, as it could serve for people to sit and gather under the sun, or eventually to watch movies outside when the weather allowed for it.

It became clear at some point during the second semester that this area, due to its social nature, should be located in the corner tower, the most social of the three, and in a location that would also benefit the views. For a long time the thought moved around the idea of having a simple terrace with benches, tables and chairs. After a series of studies and iterations, and while trying to make this space work with the auditorium underneath, I decided to replicate the indoor auditorium experience, this time having the cityscape as the scenery, but also providing an adjacent outdoor movie theater.

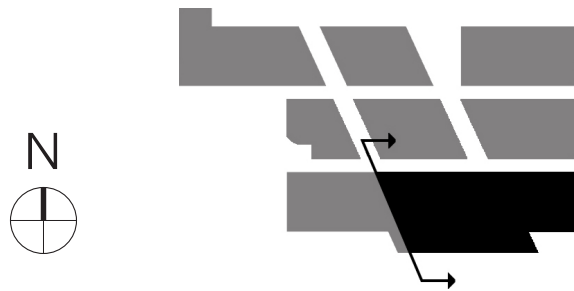


FIGURE 109 - Outdoor Auditorium Section - Looking East

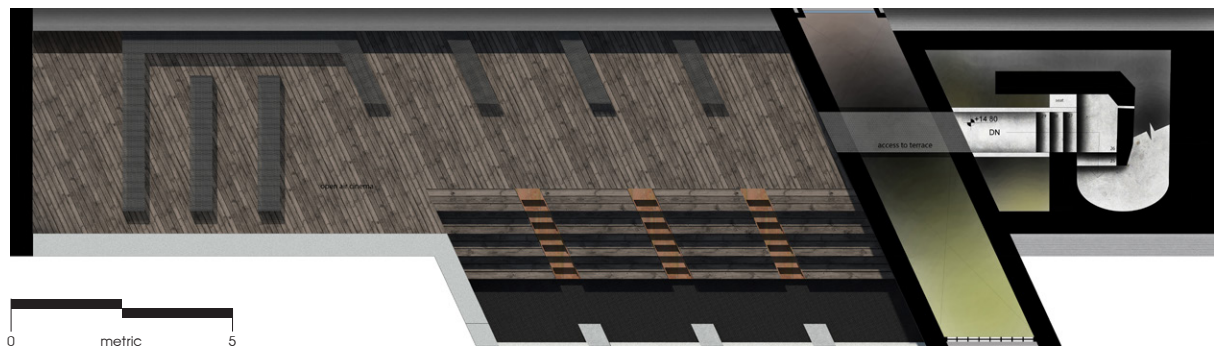




FIGURE 110 - Outdoor Auditorium Perspective

ARCHITECTURAL PLANS

THE BASEMENT

We access the building directly from the plaza. We can do so by using the main entrance, which is located in the corner building, and will bring us into a reception desk and a large multipurpose space. Alternatively, we can choose not to enter the building this way, but instead to go down the large set of stairs that extend from the plaza into the basement. This alternate set of stairs is meant to allow an independent use of the basement at night when the rest of the building is closed.

The basement plan covers the three buildings. Here we can find the three different stair cores (the Labyrinth Stair, the Middle Stair and the Oval Stair) and the elevators. Once inside the basement, we

can find a wine bar - which also serves coffee and snacks. Under the silhouette of the first building, there's a large livingroom-like space, that is furnished with sofas, benches and reading lamps. This space is meant to allow people to go there to work, to socialize or to drink wine. It is intended to be a large social space where people can be either in their own world or together socializing and practicing a new language. The inspiration for this space comes from those casual coffee places that look like giant living rooms, but also from a German Keller - that underground space where people drink beer surrounded by thick walls - that provides a feeling of shelter and protection during winter time. In order to provide some natural light

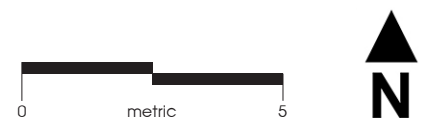
into the space, there's a series of openings in the floor, where glass bricks allow the light from the upper floor to get through. Such openings appear in three different parts of this level, allowing as much light in as possible.

The basement level also has restrooms, vertical circulation, and a direct access into the main reading space. Accessing the library from here, one is able to discover and contemplate the large space that develops above their heads. This lower part of the space has walls that are filled with books; and in the center, a long table - some sort of "last supper" communal table - allows people to sit next to one another, while witnessing a giant universe on top of them.



FIGURE 111 - Basement Plan

BASEMENT
 reading room / living room / wine and coffee



THE GROUND FLOOR

Instead of approaching the plaza from Swann, people walking on 14th street can also access a tunnel located between the north and middle tower. As they traverse this passage, they will find a series of large windows to their right, allowing them to observe the interior of the library, with the communal table underneath and the upper platforms above them. Walking all the way through this path will lead them to the plaza. Here, they will find a green outdoor space filled with different types of benches. A coffee shop to their right marks the culmination of the north tower. Turning this in-between-walls space into an

exterior alley was meant to reinforce the dialogue between the building and the exterior world, furthering the sense of openness and invitation.

Once in the plaza, we can use the stair that goes down into the basement, or we can access the building through its main entrance, which is located in the tower that faces Swann. This southernmost tower is also the most social of the three, as it's meant to allow the gathering of the largest crowds inside the building.

We enter the building through a big red door, and we access into a large, empty room with high ceilings.

We then find a reception desk that is followed by a large multipurpose space. This space is thought to be unfurnished, as it's a place for gathering. It might house photo exhibitions sometimes - from some eastern European artist - or a wine degustation from some French varietal some other times. Such events will be ephemeral.

The middle tower in this level houses an extension of this open plan, as well as men bathrooms and different means of vertical circulation into the other levels of the building.

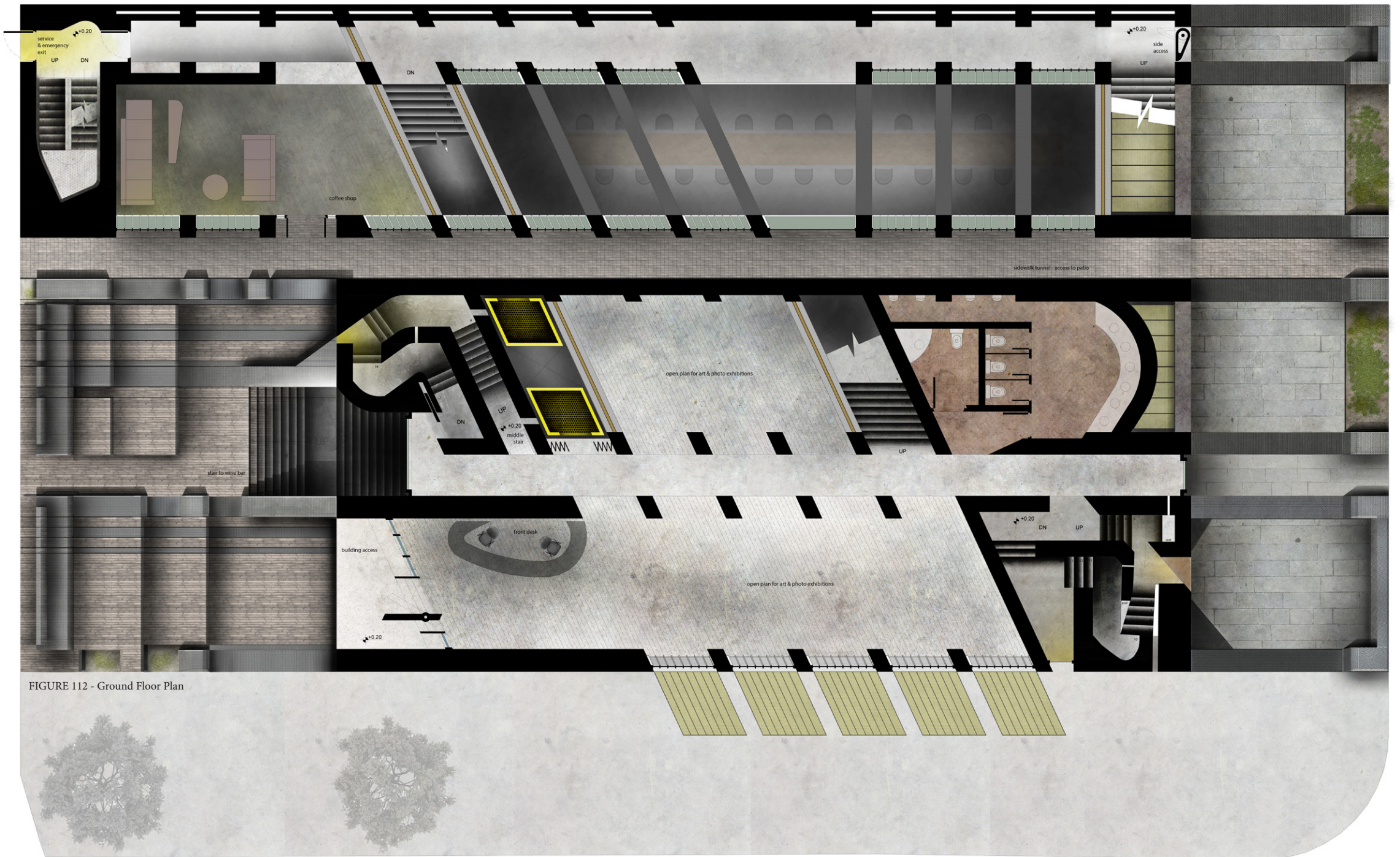
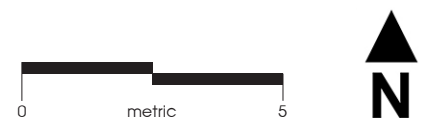


FIGURE 112 - Ground Floor Plan

GROUND FLOOR
 patio / main lobby / art and photo exhibition space



If we continue our journey up the ramp, surrounding the north tower, we will eventually be able to access the library from the other side of the tower, half a floor above. As we enter the library, we leave the ramp and we are now standing in a horizontal metal platform. To our backs, books are stacked inside shelves that are made out of corten steel and are contained inside the walls. In front of us, a new rhythm of individual balconies - which have a stool and a small desk - invites us to sit down with our book in hand, and read,

while we contemplate the world underneath, above, and in front of us.

From this standpoint, and due to the skeleton-like nature of the concrete structure, the perforated metal screens that separate the spaces in the opposite direction, and the books - which become part of the wall but otherwise create a visual connection to the other side when are not on the shelves - we can practically get to see any corner of the building. For instance, we can have a sense of what's happening in the middle

building and even in the south building, we can see people using the administration office in the middle building, but we can also see the classroom on the third floor, we can see the basket elevators going up and down, sense the people traversing the ramps, sense the auditorium on the other end of the building. This experience is what the building is all about. It goes back to the Copenhagen experience, to the city experience of the different paths coming together.

SECOND FLOOR

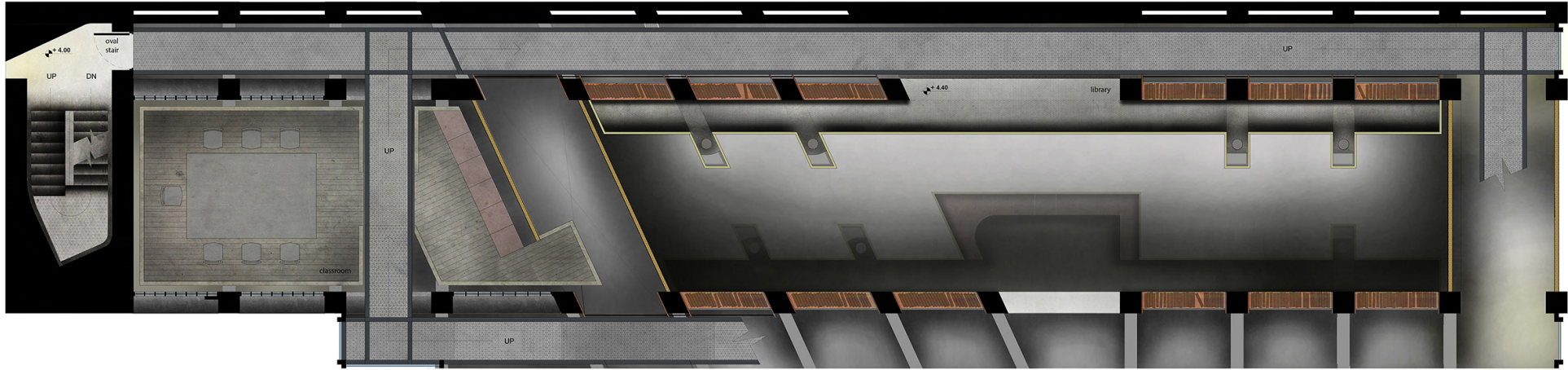
We can reach the second floor in many ways. We can use the labyrinth stair located in the corner of the south tower, or we can use the middle stair, the basket elevators or the stair located next to the restrooms - that will take you to the ramp and to the library. Put in other words, there are many ways to circulate this building. Each of these means of vertical circulation will take you on an unknown journey and will drop you in a different part of the building. With the exception of the three main staircases, the other sets of stairs don't exist in every level.

The south tower is just a void that serves to provide height to the multipurpose space below. The bridge suspended between towers allows people to observe this space from above, while providing access to the restrooms, the stairs, the elevators and the administration office; all located in the middle tower.

Finally, the north tower is surrounded by a perforated metal ramp, which initiates at this level and goes all the way up, wrapping the north tower up to the fourth floor. The main protagonist of the north tower is the library, which welcomes its

users - and celebrate the beginning of the ramp - with a large observation deck. This observation platform also appears on the fourth floor, marking the end of the ramp. To the side of this deck, a series of smaller, individual balconies invite the users to sit down and read. Books fill the thick walls behind.

Finally, if we take the ramp and start walking upwards, we will reach a classroom and another observation deck.

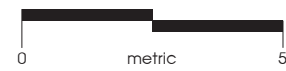


SECOND & 1/2



FIGURE 113 - Second Floor Plan

SECOND FLOOR
administration / library / open classroom

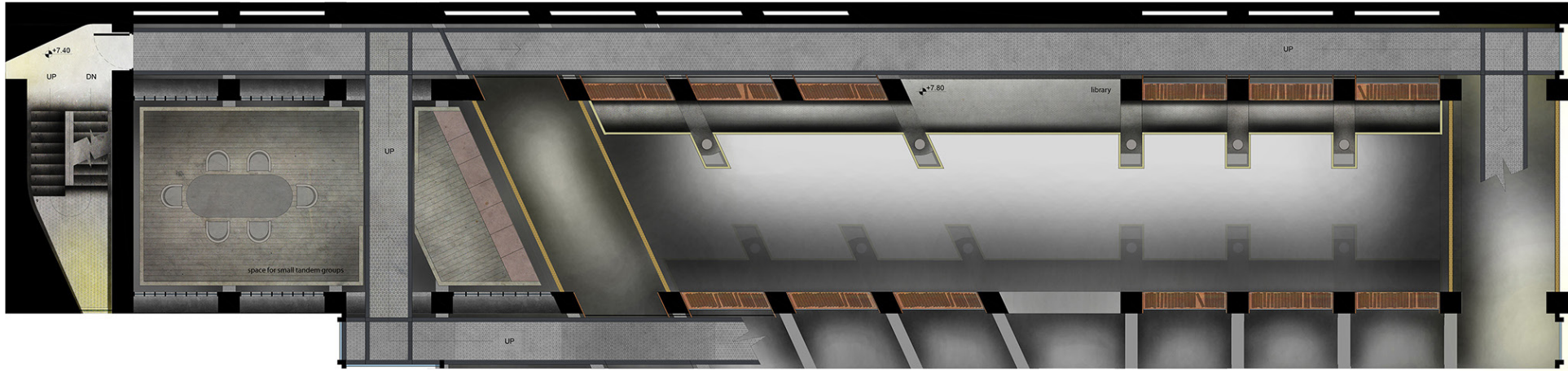


THIRD FLOOR

If we keep climbing the ramp up to the third floor, we can access the library again on this level. But if reading is not what we are there for, we can use the metal bridge that traverses the middle building in order to reach the auditorium, located on the south tower.

Across the street from the auditorium, in the middle tower, we can find vertical circulation, a conversation space, and men restrooms. All of the restrooms are located in this vertical core of the building. Intercalating men and women restrooms per floor, they are located facing 14th Street, and a series of

peepholes allow their users to get a glimpse of the street and the outside world. Since the building is all about visual connections, and about being here but wanting to be there, these bathrooms are meant to become an observation deck into the outside world.



THIRD & 1/2

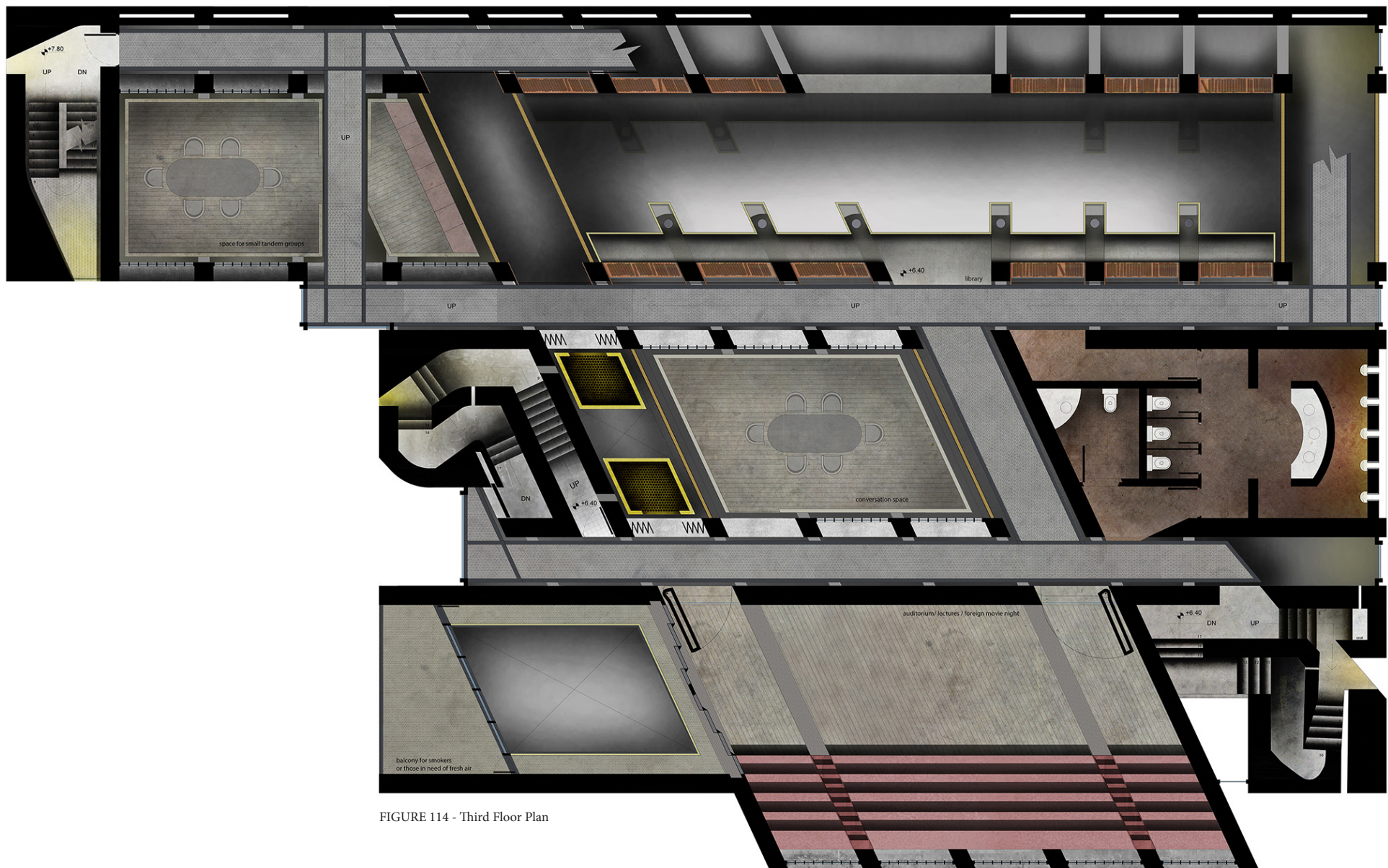
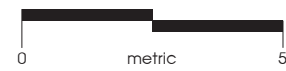


FIGURE 114 - Third Floor Plan

THIRD FLOOR
auditorium / library / social spaces

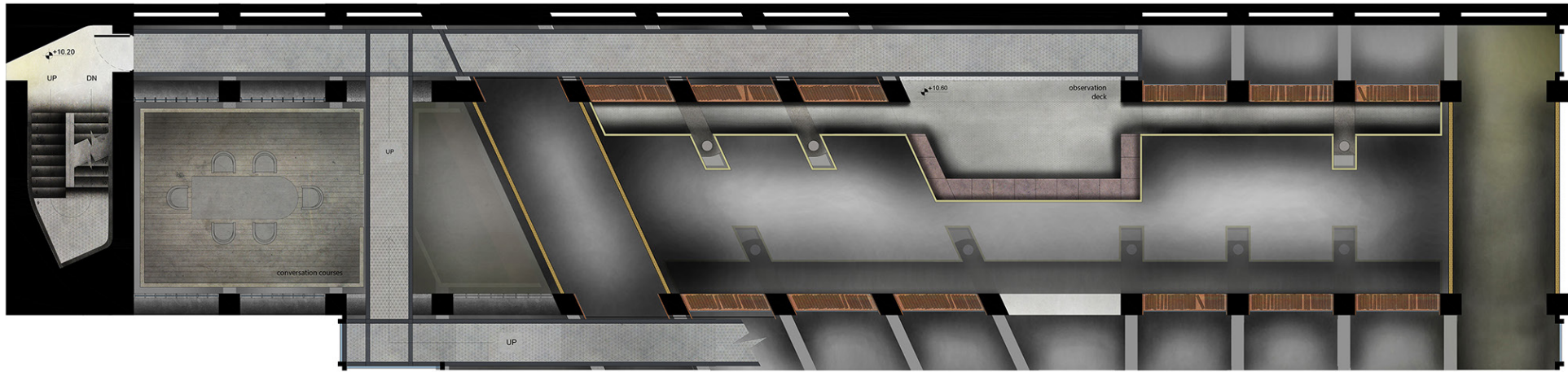


FOURTH FLOOR

Using the ramp, we can access the reading space on the fourth floor as well. We can also keep climbing all the way up, where a large metal platform celebrates the end of this journey half a level above.

As we walk up the ramp and traverse the north tower, we can find a wood platform to the left, which contains a group conversation space; and an open void to the right, connecting such space to the seating area in the level below.

While walking along the ramp between walls, we can discover an open space with sofas and puffs that is located in the middle tower behind glass panels, but the access to this part of the building is not that obvious and requires some exploration. Women will discover that they can actually exit the bathroom using a secondary door that will lead them into this hidden part of the building. Men will have to arrive from the level below, using the labyrinth stair, the middle stair or the elevator. From this metal platform we can also observe the auditorium from above.



FOURTH & 1/2

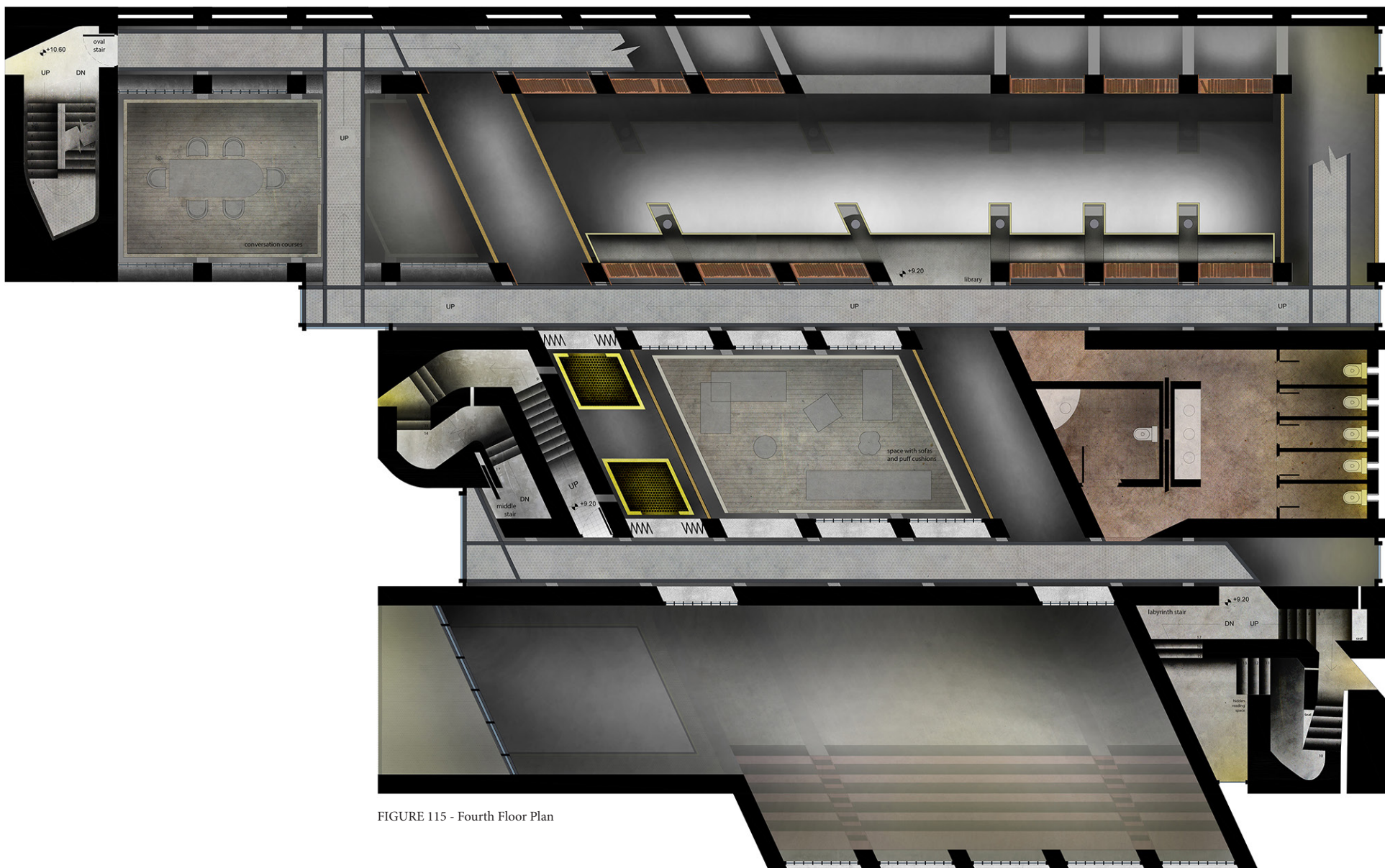
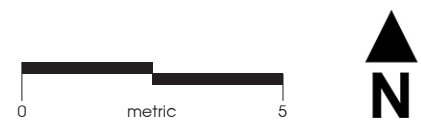


FIGURE 115 - Fourth Floor Plan

FOURTH FLOOR
library / social spaces



UPPER FLOOR

We can use any of the enclosed staircases to access the upper floor, but since these floors are not connected between each other, we will have to use a specific stair to get to each space. For instance, if we are in the north tower, and we want to access the private reading room that is located in the attic, the oval stair at the very end of the tower will give us access to this quiet room. From there, large windows provide natural light, as well as a view of the plaza, the neighborhood and the rest of the building. This attic only exists at the west end of this tower, since the rest of the space to the eastern part is just open space for the library.

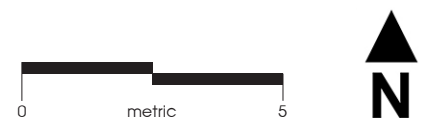
The middle tower uses the middle stair to access the attic, and we can also use the elevators. Divided in two different spaces that are connected through bridges, these attic spaces provide tables and chairs for summer conversation courses. Due to the more private nature of these spaces, formal classes could happen in here. For example, the Alliance Francaise could rent this room for the entirety of the summer to offer different levels of conversation courses in a more urban location.

Finally, the labyrinth stair brings us to the upper floor of the south tower. Because this tower is about housing larger groups of people and about socializing, there is no attic space in here. Instead, there's a large terrace space with an open-air auditorium and movie theater. Replicating the stepped seating configuration of the auditorium, this secondary auditorium is not about lectures or movies like the one below, but about the city, about observing the neighborhood and people passing by, and about looking at the sky. The open-air movie theater intends to be a secondary choice for summer nights when the enclosed movie theater is not the best option.



FIGURE 116 - Upper Floor Plan

UPPER FLOOR
attic & terrace



STUDY MODELS

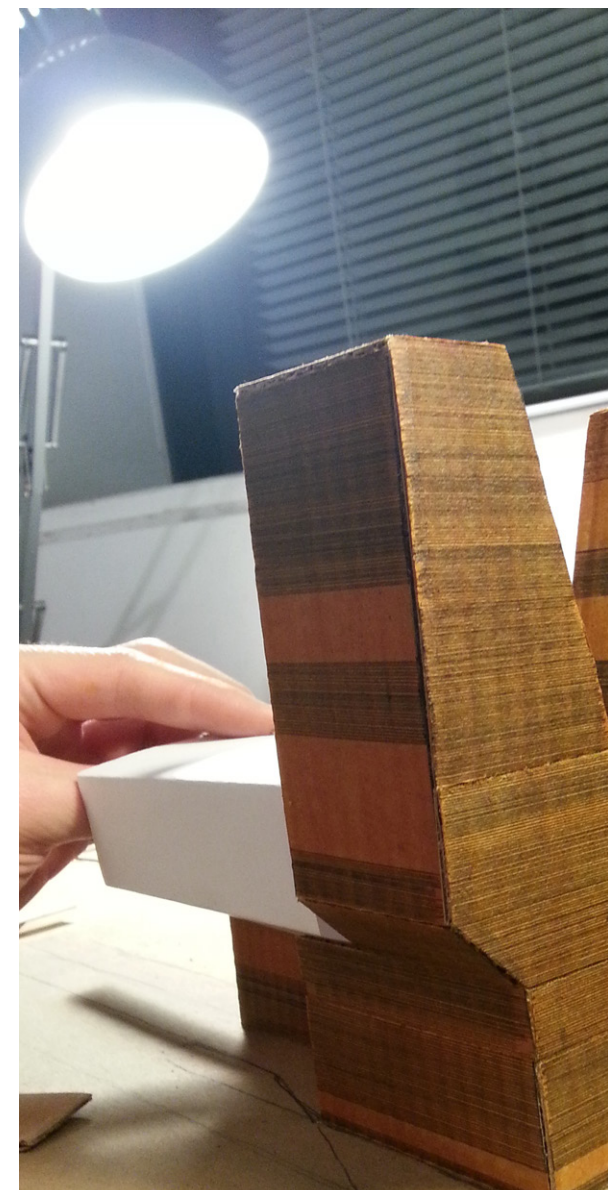
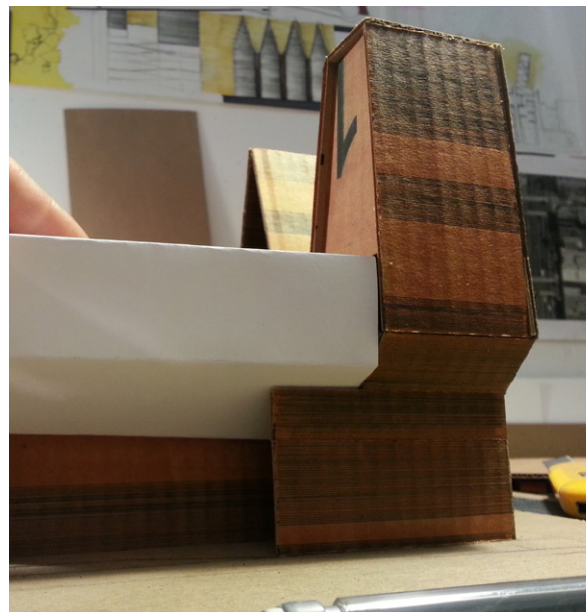
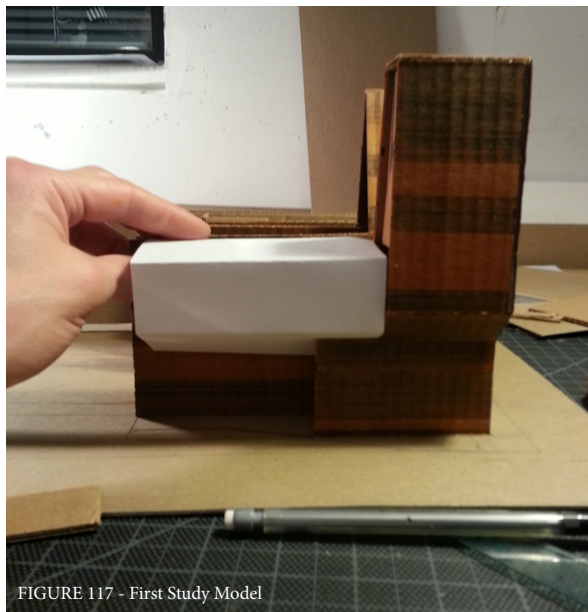
Throughout the design process, I used sketches and drawings as the main way to imagine the building and its different parts. This was the main tool I used in order to make design decisions. However, there were some moments in which a sketch was not enough, as I had the need to touch a texture, to put myself in between the walls, or to see the volume's projected shadow on the surrounding buildings. For this reason, I found it necessary to build study models throughout the development of the project.

The first model was born after the three-tower concept was conceived. At this stage I wanted to explore the relationship between the different buildings: their height, width and length, their curvy roofs mimicking the immediate environment, their narrow passages in

between, their interior spaces, their projected shadows, and the way the walls were constructed and how they looked and felt like.

Out of regular chipboard, I put together a simple model that I modified several times throughout its construction, while trying different volumetric relationships. The particular process of this assemblage was to paint (or build) each wall before its assembly into the rest of the project. Trying to be consequent with my drawings, I wanted to imagine these walls as conceived by horizontal stripes of different types of concrete, containing a slightly different color and texture in it. This is a process that I generally enjoy when building a model, which consists in building its pieces as if they were built in real life, trying to

develop a process of cutting, marking and painting the different elements, imitating the real construction method. Building a model this way, I intend to carry on a similar sort of "slow-food" thinking process, like the one experienced when making a drawing. The slowness of this process produces all sorts of thoughts and triggers the imagination in many different ways.

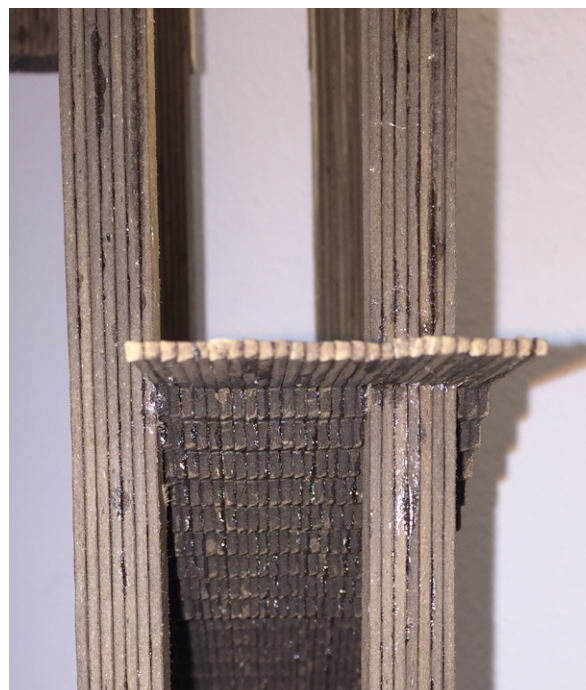




STUDY MODELS

During the second semester, as the project found itself in a more advanced state and I found myself solving the different spaces, I went on to create a second study model, this time putting more attention to detail, shape and material. After having worked with a digital 3D model as the main tool to solve technical aspects of the project, I realized that it was time to explore the physicality of the model one more time. So, I decided to create a physical version of the 3D. Like I did before, I approached this construction like if I was constructing the building in real life. I created the "ribs" that formed my walls using CAD - which at this moment were vertical - and cut them on cardboard using the lasercutter. Then, I pasted these pieces together,

one by one, until they started looking like the walls of my building. This exercise turned into a detailed 1:50 (metric) version model of the tower containing the library. It allowed me to study the openings between the inner void that would become the main reading space and the side passages containing the ramps. This also allowed me to investigate and develop a system to attach the ramps to the walls. Even though I envisioned an ongoing effort to see this model grow into the totality of the project, due to the low construction process and to the fact that I was still making a lot of design decisions, I decided to go back to the digital realm to continue designing and making changes. This model ended up looking as some sort of skull.



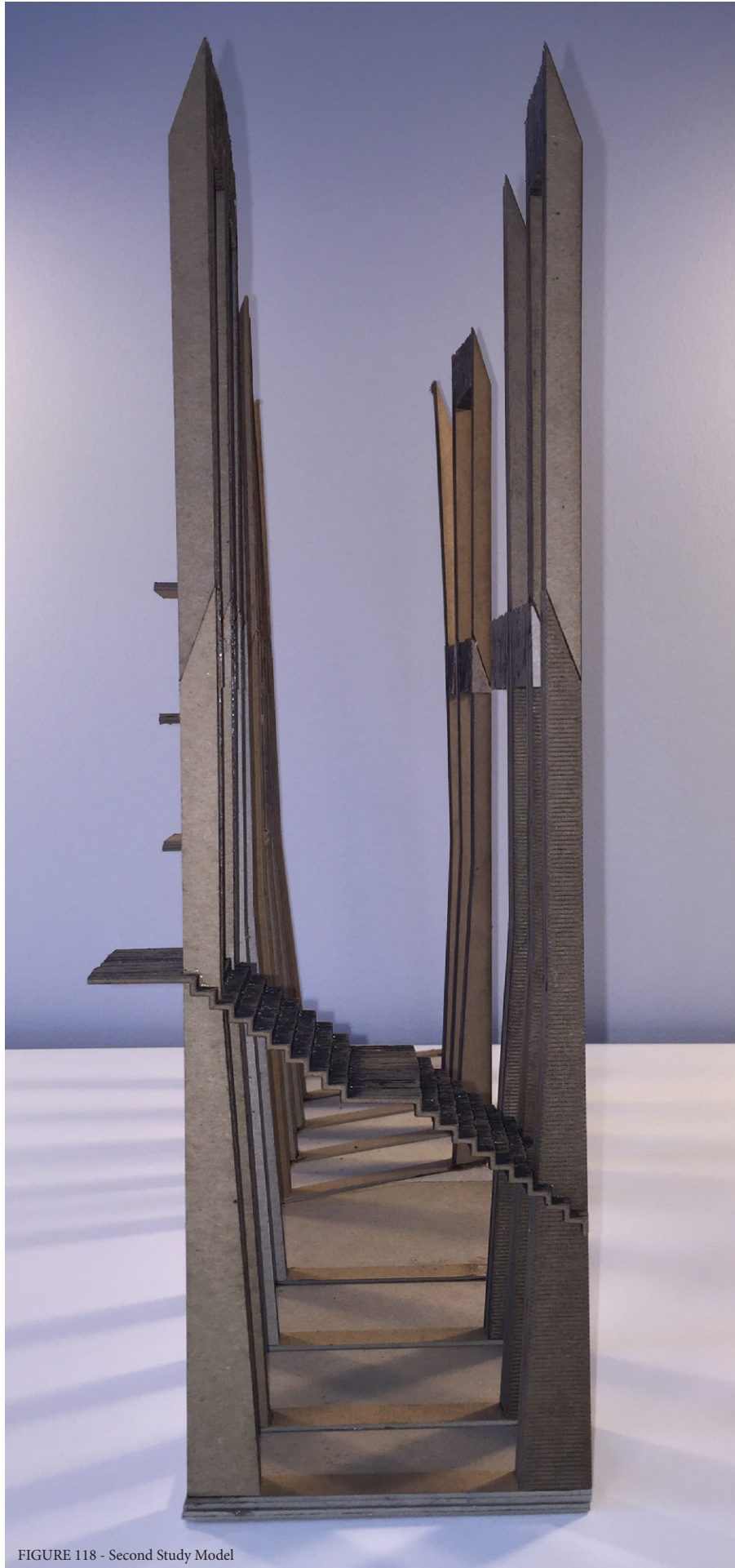
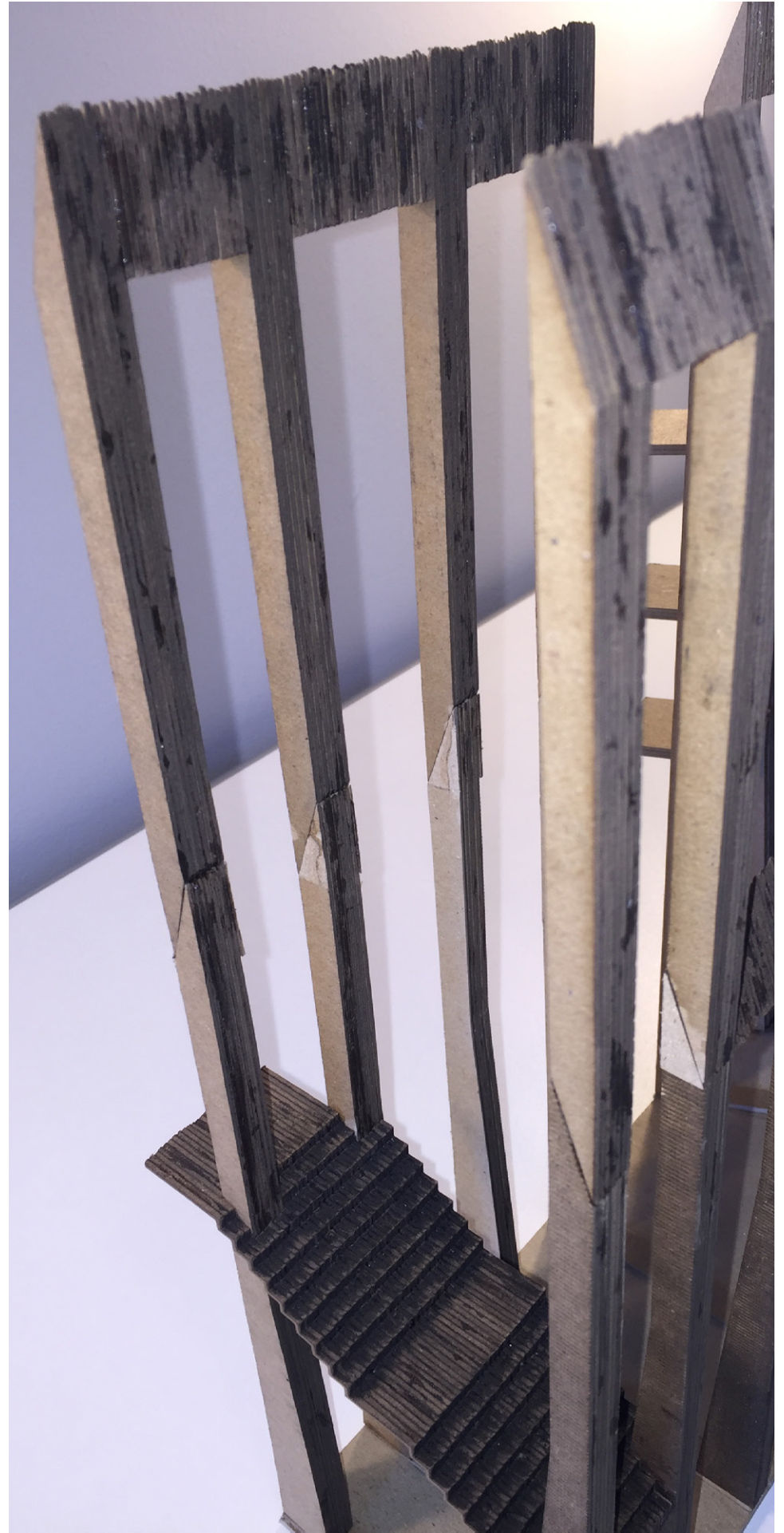


FIGURE 118 - Second Study Model



STUDY MODELS

The final physical model became a 1:200 (metric) version of the project and its surroundings. Showing the relationship between the House for Languages and the neighborhood, this monochromatic model was just meant to locate the project within the broader urban scope and to provide a sense of scale. In trying to add a final ingredient of 'esperantization' to it, I decided to add labels in different languages. The project is now located in the intersections of 'la strada di Swann' and 'veertiende straat'. This last name for 14th street is written in Dutch, and I had to incorporate it into the story of this project. Amsterdam Falafel Shop, which had recently opened its doors next to my site, had just added a street label on the wall of its shop. 'Veertiende Straat, NW' can now be read, when walking by next to my site. I try to think of it as a magical coincidence.



FIGURE 120 - Amsterdam Falafel Shop

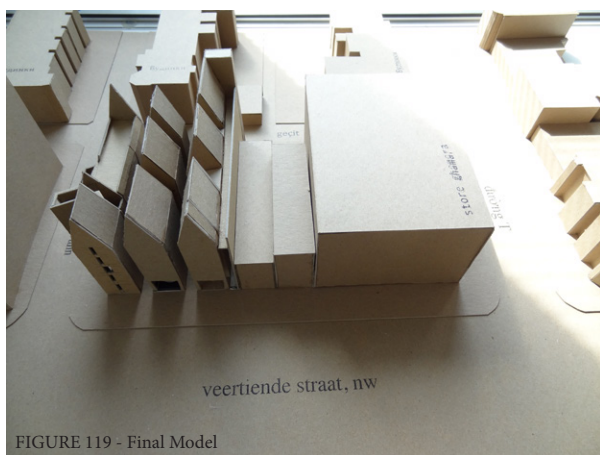
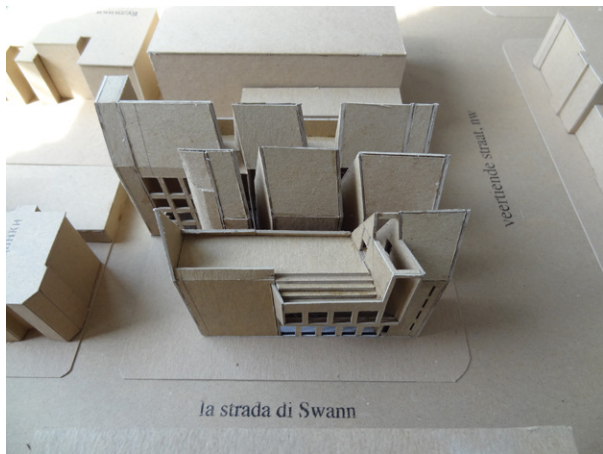
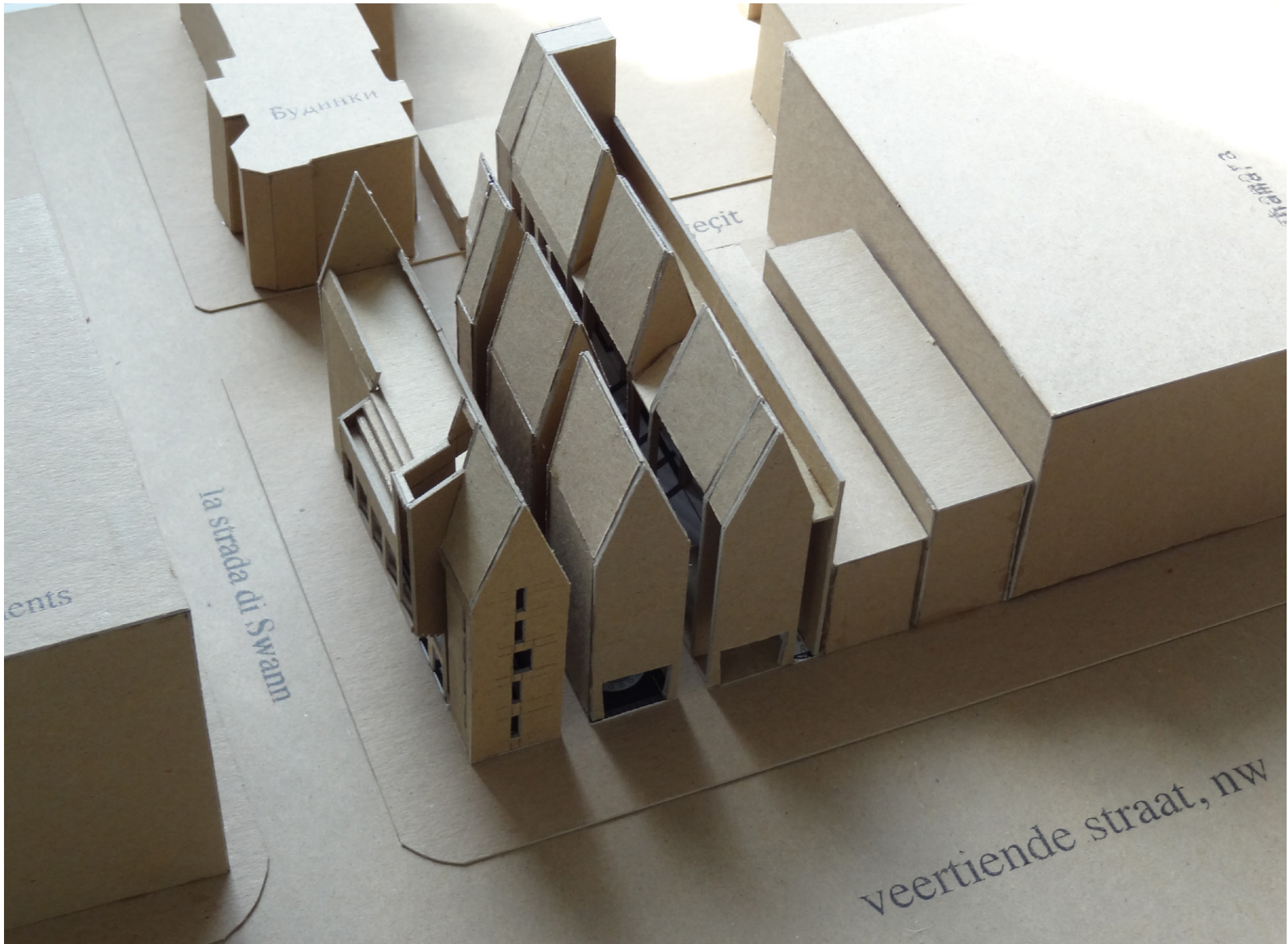


FIGURE 119 - Final Model





THE DAY OF THE DEFENSE



FIGURE 121 - Red Room (Photos by Geraldine Sheppard)



THE DAY AFTER



FIGURE 122 - The Day After

FIGURE INDEX

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