

EMOTIONAL
RESONANCE
& TRANSFERENCE
IN ARCHITECTURE

YAMINAH LAMBERT

Emotional Resonance & Transference in Architecture

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the notion of unseen factors that a user leaves behind once departing from a space. When properly engaged, an inhabitant forms an emotional attachment to a space. This attachment can be felt by later occupants as an experiential, phenomenological quality that cannot be removed from the space.

This thesis asks questions such as: Which spaces lend themselves to what emotions? How does the architect compel a user to feel positive emotional attachment to a space? How does a building react to user changes over time? Can a building give off a “vibe” as an inanimate object?

This thesis aims to investigate the following thesis statement: “What happens to the emotions in a building after its users leave?”

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis examines if people leave behind emotions in the places they visit and inhabit. People have emotional attachments to places, and their emotion can transform a building in an unseen way.

This thesis asks questions such as: With which spaces do people bond? How does the architect play a role in someone liking a building? How do buildings change over time? Can buildings have a personality?

The thesis aims to investigate the following thesis statement: “What happens to the emotions in a building after people leave?”

Acknowledgements

This thesis is my portrayal of an unconventional love story.

In honor of that, I would like to acknowledge anyone who has shown me love, kindness, or sweetness throughout this process.

To my family for loving me regardless of how often I call;

To my friends for all the midnight snacks and laughs;

To my fellow WAACsters for giving me the energy;

To my committee for bearing with all my idiosyncracies;

To my muse who reminds me of the path I walk;

And to anyone who left a little piece of themselves tucked into a building
Not knowing that I would find it;

Thank you.



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the IDEA

"At the risk of sounding sentimental, I've always felt there are people who can leave an indelible mark on your soul, an imprint that can never be erased."

- Agent Broyles, Fringe, Episode 2, Season 4

For several years, I have been obsessed with the idea of sympathetic resonance. Sympathetic resonance in human beings entails a synchronicity of emotions without any verbal communication. The human mind discerns the mood of another person or a group and begins to harbor that same emotion. It is similar to the principle of sympathetic vibration in physics, which is defined by the Meriam-Webster Dictionary as "a vibration produced in one body by the vibrations of exactly the same period in a neighboring body." This principle has immense implications for science, especially in the studies of sound, light, and particles. While sympathetic resonance in human beings has no concrete scientific basis, the general layman belief is that one person's emotion can affect another's. I wondered if architecture could perform the same act.

Spaces exist that we enjoy and assign positive memories to them; simultaneously, other spaces evoke negative emotions. The experiential quality of a space constantly nags the architect's mind, and the architect always seeks to create a space that not only is harmonious with its users but also compels people to return. The architect has the power to transform a space's energy and ensure the happiness of its users through good design. However, "happy accidents" do occur, and undesigned spaces can become greater through the actions of those who use them.

The energy of a space can either be inherent or inherited. Although the words are similar (inherent and inherited), the distinction is clear. Some spaces force the user to feel specific emotions simply because of the will of the designer; this emotion or energy is inherent to the space. Oftentimes, a built space absorbs the emotion and energy of the users that inhabit or utilize the area; these properties are inherited.

Over time, inherited energies become layered. Iterations of past experiences can be exorcised from the space, similar to the action of palimpsest. One person's experience can be seen through the veil of others' experiences; consequently, the earliest users impact the lives of the next inhabitants. The built environment, a reflection and artifact of the human condition, undergoes "tweaking" as the users change. Whether these "tweaks" are known to the present user does not matter- the present inhabitant must acquiesce to their predecessors. They inherit both the space and the previous emotions and energies of the space.

[pause] the MUSINGS

[Musing ONE]

You constantly whisper in my ear: I have artifacts of you, things I can hold to know you existed, that you actually lived alongside me, if for a time. You existed; therefore, these things I hold exist. And in this way, I exist. Maybe existence is not definite. Maybe we find existence, and proof thereof, in others. Because here I stand, without you, and no one can believe your story without your artifact I hold. I am not your keeper, and yet I keep this object. Partially to remind me of you, but mostly to confirm that I existed with you.

[Musing TWO]

"Mal a batir;" I heard this once- that it was the sickness of building. I have not been able to find records of the phenomenon since. The madness that drives one to build and to make his mark upon the world. Man is driven to leave pieces of himself behind, to know that his strife will be acknowledged by others. Maybe this is the architect's true purpose. Not because people need places to be. But because people need places to be. To be more. To transcend into permanence because life is so fleeting, and humans yearn to be more. Is this why the Pyramids lead us to awe, and why some refuse to believe man has constructed something so massive, so permanent? In the quest to leave traces of ourselves, do we become more?

[Musing THREE]

Oral history; in many old families, mine included, there is a story-keeper. The story keeper remembers. They hold every single happenstance in their minds and relay it to the next generation. For years and years, humans have relied on historians recounting previous times in this manner. The oldest in the village retains the soul of the people. Soul is to have depth, to have history. And the soul of the people must survive. What happens when the story-keeper dies? I find this to be sorrowful. Thousands of stories dead in the ground, never to be known. Does the earth, the dirt know what secrets are decomposing in their soil? Does the earth know and remember, somehow performing a cellular transference between the story-keeper's mind and the soil? Does that trace remain, buried six feet under? I hope so. I hope the earth retains the aura of people past, knowing that the struggles of the lives lost in its dirt are valid. Because the stories deserve to remain, even if its characters are dead. The human condition deserves to be heard. It should be screamed over mountaintops and heard by all in the lowlands. Because each life matters. And for many, all they want is to matter.

[Musing FOUR]

Buildings can be secret-keepers. They can comfort us as we cry; they can screen us as we make love. They say: "Oh but to be a fly on that wall!" ... But would you want to be? Buildings absorb our pain and soak up our happiness. And when we revisit, our emotions we left are thrust back upon us. Or thrust upon whoever enters. A happy home is one that smiles. The windows look like teeth, winking and smiling from the street. A sad home is one whose paint looks tainted by ash, as if a fire has scorched it from within. How is it that buildings know us so well? Your walls keep your secrets. Buildings do not speak overtly, and try not to betray. Only through the scraping of the layers (ah, palimpsest), do we see truth revealed. And how hard it is to peel back the layers! (Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain... [oh, but you should- he has all the best stuff!]) The man behind the curtain controls all; he is but a simple man, but he is wise...) Renovations and restorations are so difficult: Time, money, effort... All to strip away secrets and stories that we do not connect with or understand. It is funny- does the person who undertakes such a daunting task see the original story? Do they see the bare, untouched animal hide and are willing to scrape the etchings and inkings only because they see the origins? And if so, is the original better than the current?



Image 1

begin here

My first foray into architecture and emotion came from an American remake of a Japanese horror film. The film, *The Grudge*, centers around a house where several murders took place. The victims' spirits inhabit the house, and anyone who enters (renters, real estate agents, etc.) falls prey to the previous tragedy that occurred. The emotion thrust itself upon others, thereby changing their lives forever.

I likened my thesis question to taking a "look behind the curtain." The word "apocalypse" has a similar meaning: a "lifting of the veil" that reveals some new knowledge. It could even be thematically related to the idea of palimpsest- "1. writing material (as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased; 2. something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface."

Could architecture have an apocalypse? Can we destroy architecture in search of something new? Can we peel back layers of something seemingly simple to reveal something diverse and colorful about architecture?



Image 2

A recurring theme in my research was destiny. Fate has many forms in many cultures. However, Fate as an inescapable being (almost like Death) became the catalyst for epic journeys, coming-of-age tales, and moving acts of love.

The stories of the people on the right all danced with Fate. From Tris (left) from *the Divergent Series* who by one action catapulted herself into becoming a martyr; to Jack and Rose (center) from *Titanic* sharing a love that would be cut short yet would impact Rose for the rest of her life; to Harry Potter from the Harry Potter Series whose prophesized birth brought forth the downfall and recurrence of a prolific villain- destiny played a part. However, the actions of each person directly played into Fate's design.



Image 3

In East Asian cultures, a metaphorical red string of fate ties two people together romantically from birth, regardless of time, place or circumstances. When designing what would become two separate buildings connected by a single bridge, I likened the bridge to this "red string" and the buildings to romantic soulmates.



Image 6

[Musing FIVE] Cycles. Everything that once was can come again. Like seasons. Time heals all wounds, but sometimes... Some things are so strong that the soul is disturbed. The soul can be forever transformed by the past. People are probably the only beings that do not have cycles. They begin. And they end. They progress. And they digress. But they are never static, never in the same evolutionary place twice. They are in constant flux, constant transience. There is redemption, salvation, and deliverance... But also failure, disgrace, and dishonor. But maybe this is beautiful. That man, in a sea of constant sameness (cycles), has found variety and revitalization of self. And mankind's environment changes to reflect its condition. Which is why architecture is important. Because like man, it is the only corporeal thing in a permanent state of evolution.

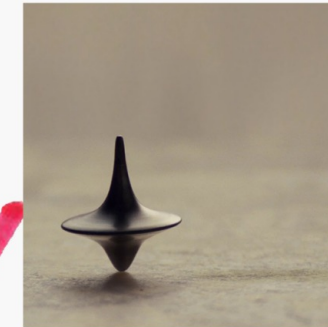


Image 4

end here

The theoretical research of the thesis topic uncovered a lot of negatively themed subject matter. The initial point of the Japanese horror film may have spurred that; however, most references to this phenomenon in popular culture were oriented around negative experiences. If I chose to go down the route of accepting negative experiences into my design, I might not have acquired the program I desired.

A piece of popular culture that counteracted the majority of my findings was the film *Inception*. The ensemble of characters create architectural experiences within dreams with such intensity that the dreamer absorbs the emotion and changes their memories of an event or their decisions in life. The main character, Dominick Cobb, expresses early on that "I think positive emotion trumps negative emotion every time. We all yearn for reconciliation, for catharsis. We need [him] to have a positive emotional reaction to all this." From here, I decided to give my thesis its own positive, cathartic end.

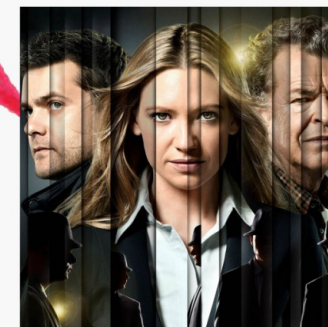
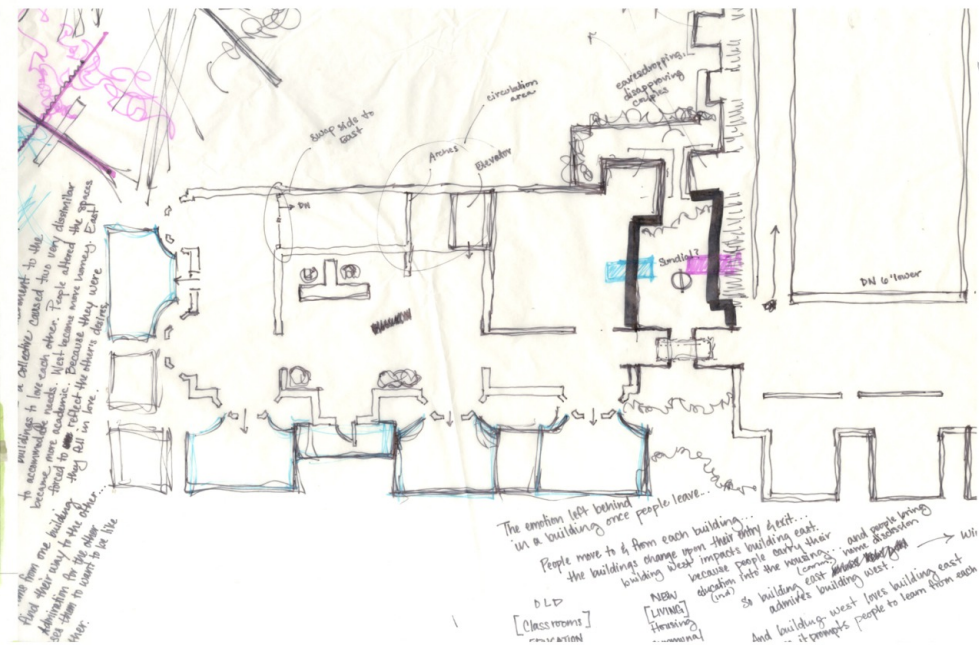
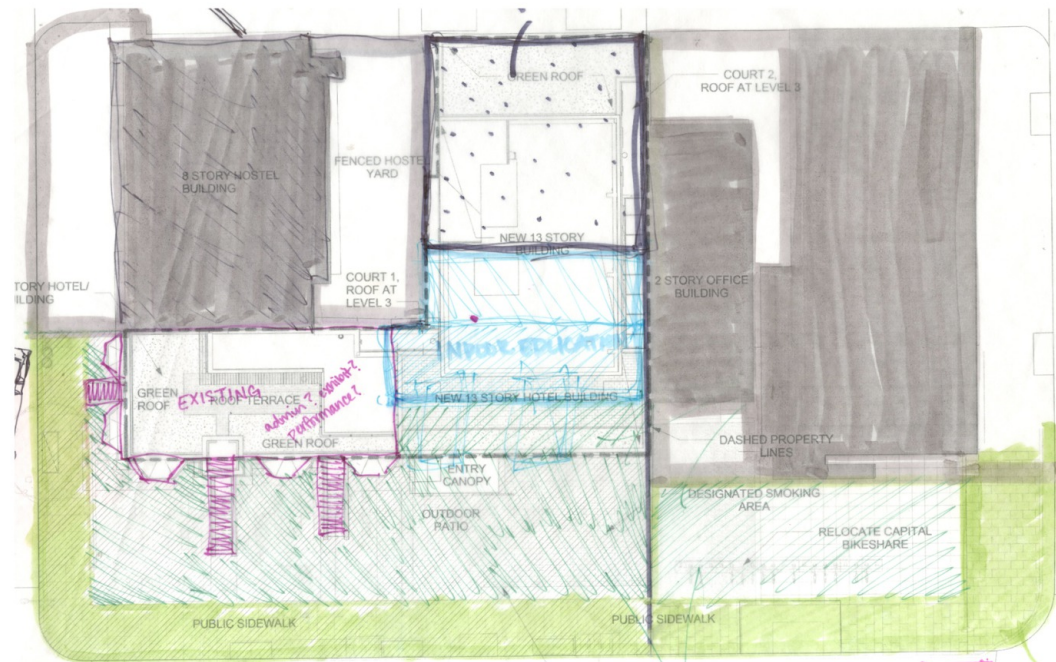


Image 5

The quote from page 1 is a line from the television sci-fi drama *Fringe*. Agent Broyles says, "At the risk of sounding sentimental, I've always felt there are people who can leave an indelible mark on your soul, an imprint that can never be erased." He refers to a recurring idea from the plot: a woman (pictured left, center) falls in love with a man (pictured left, far left) who becomes erased from our universe. His father (pictured left, right) trades his own life for the life of his son so that the woman and man may be together. During the period of time that the man is absent from our universe, the woman feels a sense of unrest in her spirit and searches for the missing piece of her life. She dreams of him and her need for him pulls him back into existence. The two were fated to be together.

I wondered if architecture revealed the same. Can people exist in a space and slip pieces of themselves into the building? What do we give up in order to let those pieces survive within architecture? Can we feel the emotions others have left behind?



SITE PROCESS



Outdoor corridor



Walls



Floor



Window

THEORY PROCESS

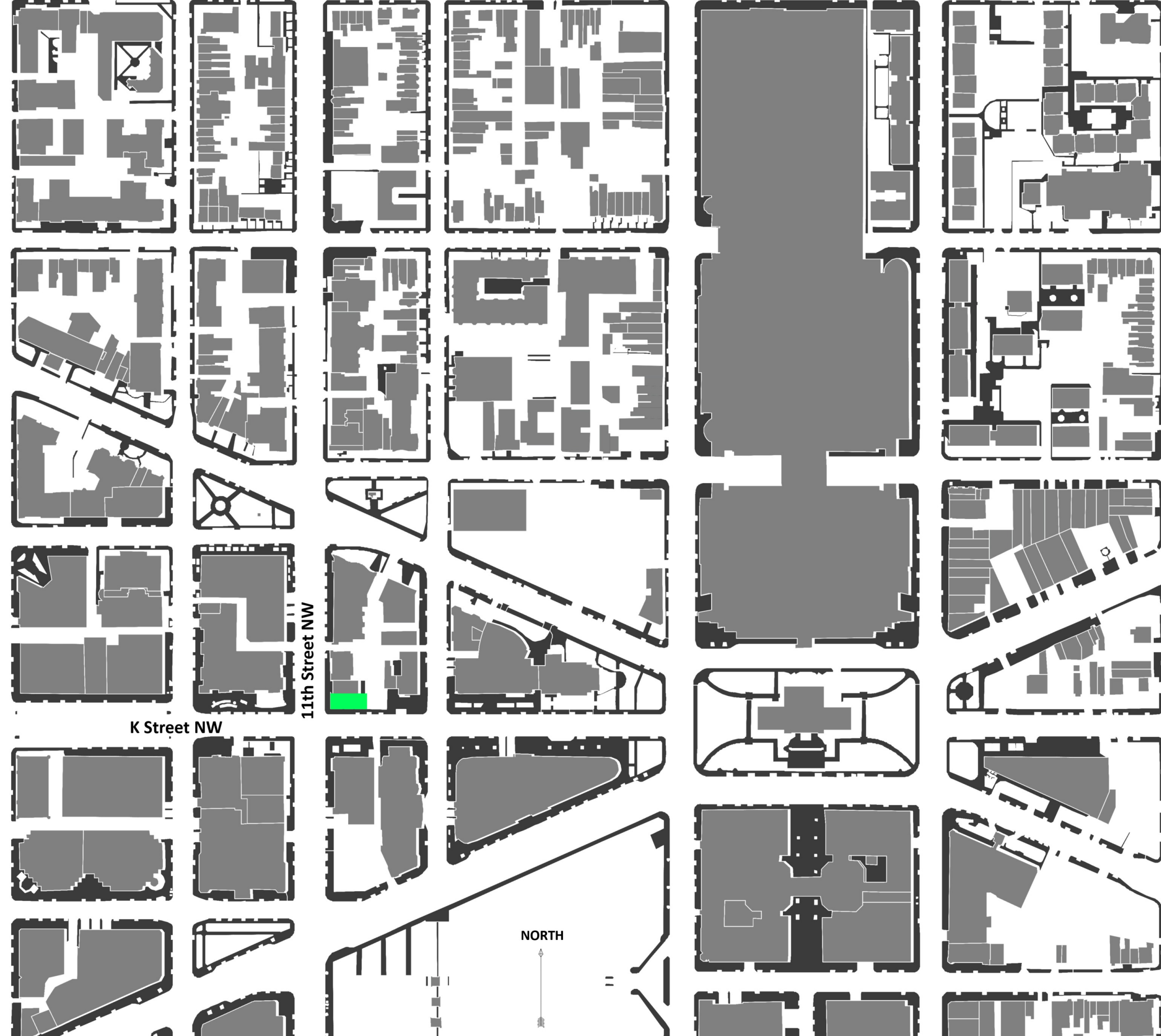
the TRIUMVIRATE

I decided to take a three-pronged approach to my thesis. Theory, Site, and Program all warranted individual investigations.

For the site, I realized I needed a place with emotion inherited from previous users. I needed an urban setting as well. I identified historical buildings and structures within the Washington, D.C. diamond that had extra space to build upon.

For the program, I pulled places from my research that were meaningful and contributed to my thesis statement. I identified probable programs from this.

For the theory, I continued my research into science, popular culture, mythology, and sociology to substantiate my design. I studied architectural elements and their relationship to the users.



K Street NW

11th Street NW

NORTH

the SITE

The chosen site (marked in green) is part of a downtown Washington, D.C., close to the Walter Reed Convention Center, CityCenter DC, and directly north of Chinatown. It is at the corner of K St NW and 11th St NW.



On the site are two existing rowhouses, historical mansions reminiscent of a time when the entire neighborhood was and upscale, residential part of D.C.

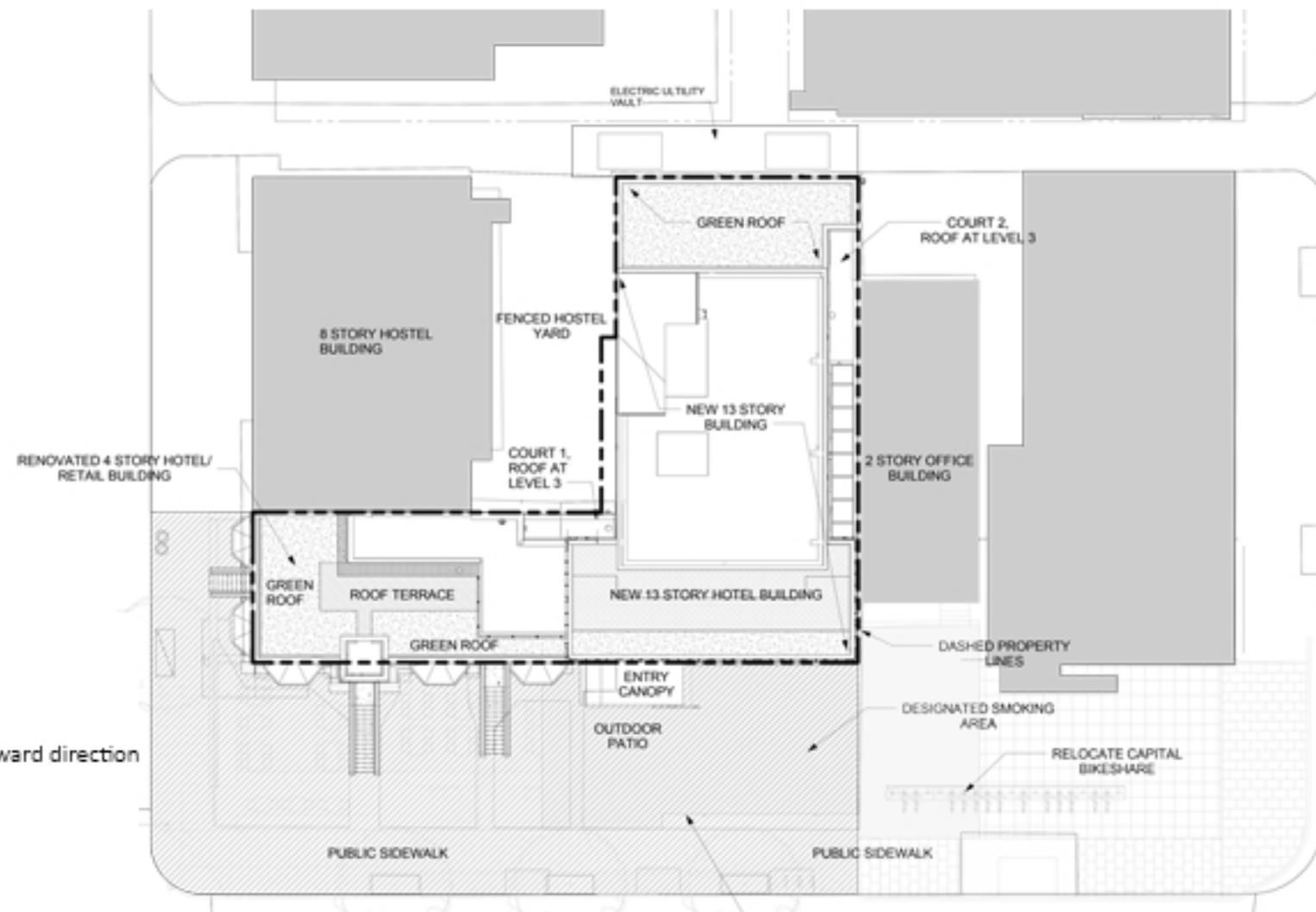
I chose the site knowing that I would keep this existing building after refurbishing and reconfiguring it. I refer to it as the West Building or Building West.

Directly east of the existing rowhouses is an empty space, enough for a new building or addition.

I reached out to the developer for documentation on the site.



Site Plan,
with north as the upward direction



South Elevation



Ground Floor



Documentation for the site and its existing buildings were limited. The images to the left portray the vision the developer has for the space (construction can be seen in the pictures on the previous page) with a look at what the building was in its former glory.

After studying historical precedent in DC, my gut feeling was for my thesis to become two separate buildings (West and East), as the integrity of the existing buildings should be preserved. The idea echoed what the developer was constructing; however, I understood that in order for the building to be a true gem in a sea of modern corporate structures, the height and design of the East Building would be vastly different.

All images shown are construction documents and property of Douglas Development Corp. and Marriott International, Inc.

Emotion Left Behind by Users



Image 7



Image 8



Time Spent [or Frequency of Use]

Likelihood of Emotional Transference within a Space

How the space is used can affect the emotional impact the user retains; however, this does not mean the space will retain those emotions. Also, collective emotions over time can impact a space.

How much the space is altered



Time Spent

Correlation: Time Duration & Space Alterations

We change our spaces in order to connect emotionally, to make it more familiar/welcoming; the more we alter spaces, the more emotional attachment we have.

the PROGRAM

the PROGRAM

The search for a program that was fully informed by the theory of my thesis that would work well within the context of the site gave me pause.

The only words I had were "happy impermanence" for what I needed from the program. It suggested a place where the people were in constant flux (providing many emotions to seep into the architecture) and also engaging in positive actions (to enforce the cathartic aspect of the architecture).

I thought of the programmatic needs as questions. What spaces lend themselves to happy memories? If people tend to alter spaces that they connect to, what spaces allow for "user tweaking"?

The graph collages on the left show different programs and how they related to the themes I was exploring.

After studying space and program, I decided that the program should be a dormitory for those studying in the arts. A dormitory provided impermanence and community, while the creative people who inhabited it would spend significant



elevation collage
elemental bones



elevation collage
aura nouveau

the THEORY

The theory of these two buildings was simple. As the users traveled from one building to the next, they left pieces of their emotion within each building. The following users "picked up" that emotion and then thrust their new emotions back onto their environment. The result would be a three-way exchange among the West and East Buildings and the people who used them.

The hitch became this- if a person picked up emotion from one building and placed it into the next, how would the next building react? I delved into the relationship between the two buildings- were they friends or enemies?

As I collaged what the East Building would look like, I realized that a dialogue was taking place between the two buildings, and that I was the bridge between the two. I discerned what from the West Building would look harmonious on the East Building. Simultaneously, where I placed architectural elements informed my thoughts about the use of space in the West Building.

However, designing the bridge as a special moment within the composition proved difficult.



the DOVETAIL

Once I understood how the two should connect, a covered bridge masked by a screen, the rest of the design fell into place. The buildings began to react to one another. The West Building became the educational center of the art school, with a library and classrooms. The East Building became the residential heart of the art school, with workspaces and many communal spaces for the residents. The bridge between the two acted as a conduit for connecting programming.

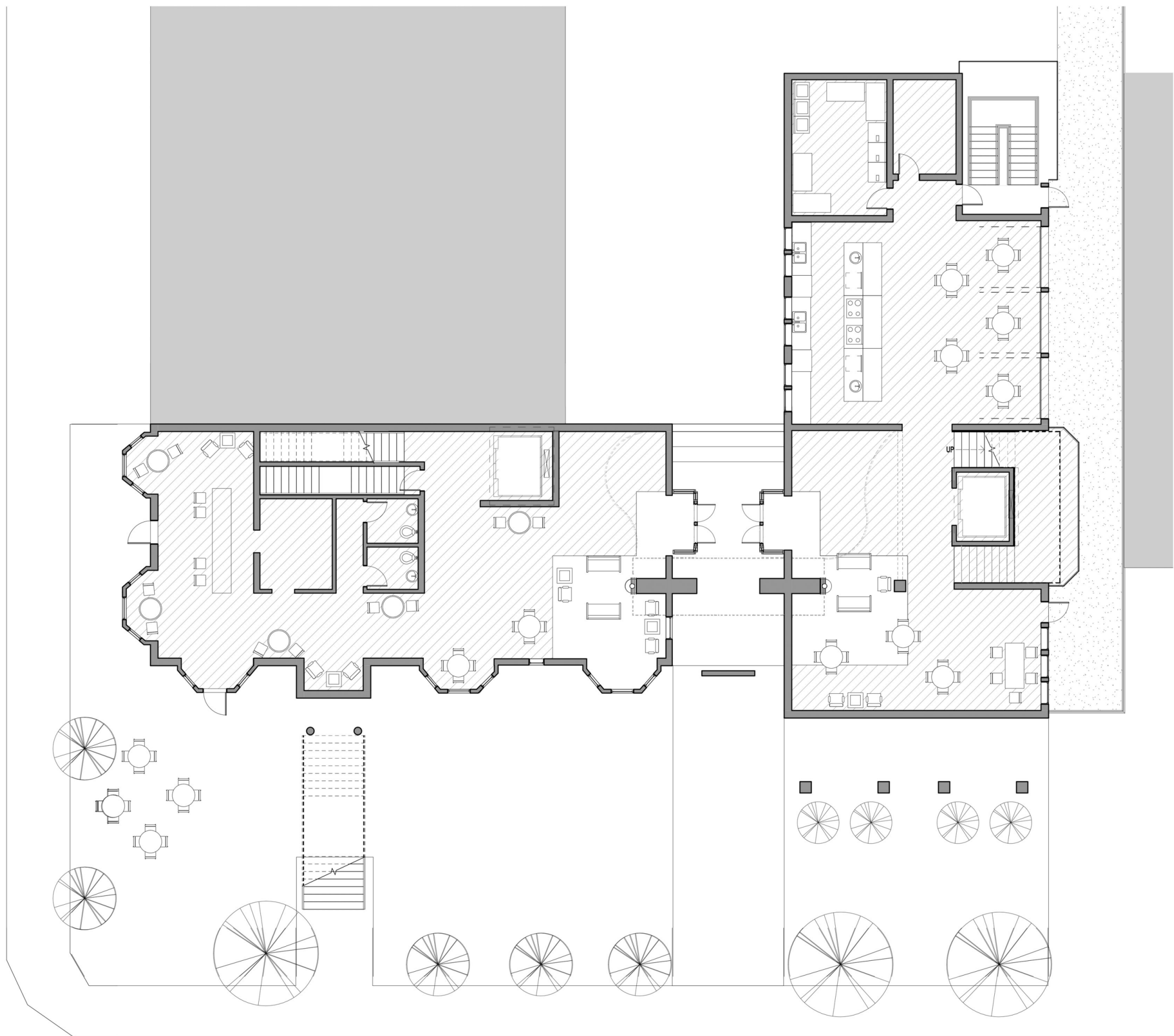
As Fate would have it, the cross-streets (K Street NW and 11th Street NW) where my thesis is located emphasize the duality of the design. K is the eleventh letter of the alphabet. So, in a way, both streets are different sides of the same coin, just as the two buildings retain many similarities yet have a distinct difference.

The informal name for the buildings became elevenELEVEN.

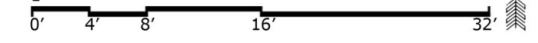
their STORY

They only connect through a bridge, where their materiality (corporeality) meets, and through people (emotion) walking across the bridge. Each building knows the other through the people (emotions and experiences) that they bring through the bridge. The bridge acts as a wormhole between universes. Each building has grown to accommodate the other (shortcomings, programmatic consequences, etc.) in order to show their love for the other.

The buildings can never be together as they cannot move. However, people move pieces of each building into the other.



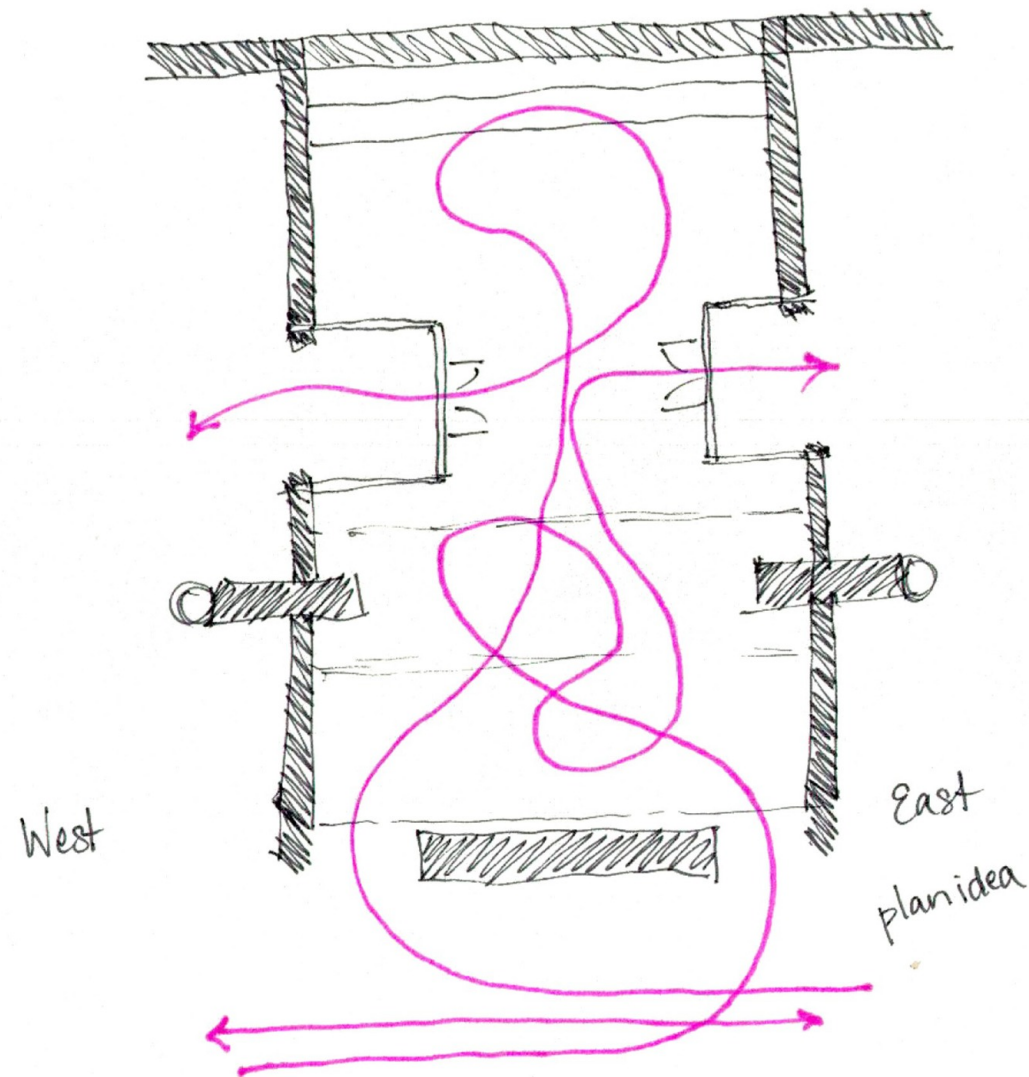
plan GROUND LEVEL



the ENTRY

The scheme for the entry (shown in plan, below) involves a large wall shielding the entryway and the bridge on the second floor. This navigation around the wall allows for a meandering approach.

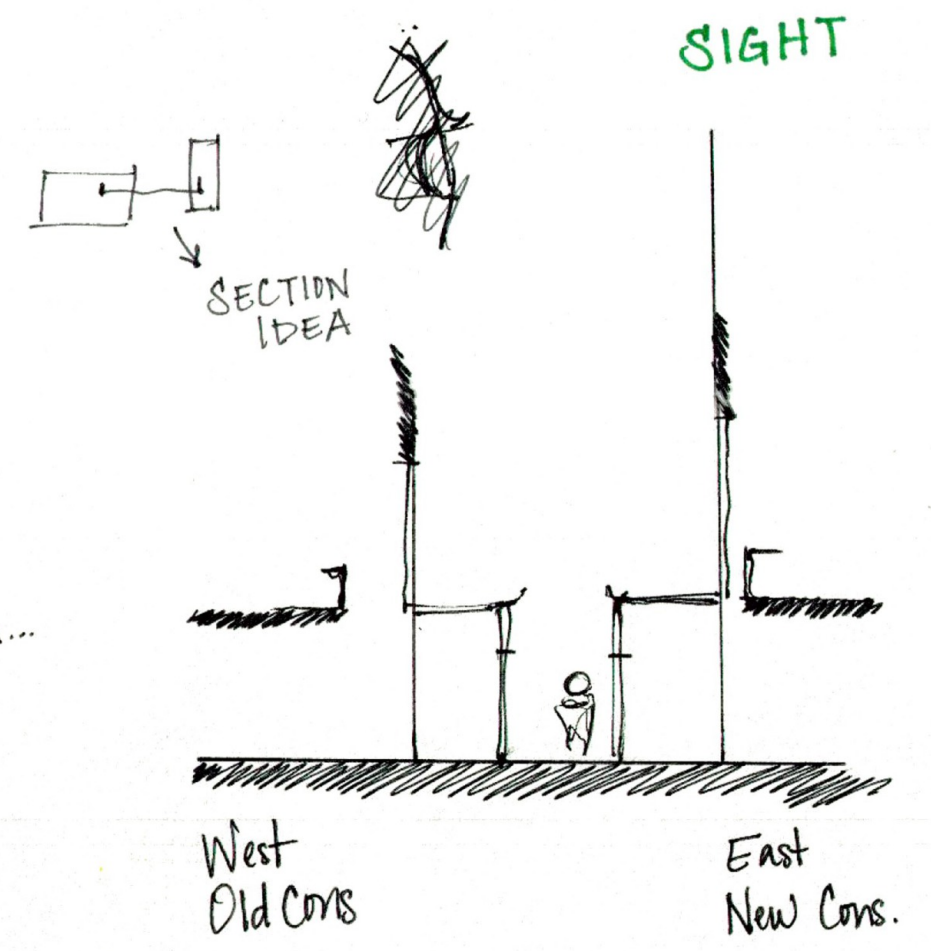
The entries of the East and West Buildings stare at one another. The section diagram (shown right) demonstrates how the two buildings jut out to view one another, almost like the pause before a kiss. However, these two buildings are forever paused.



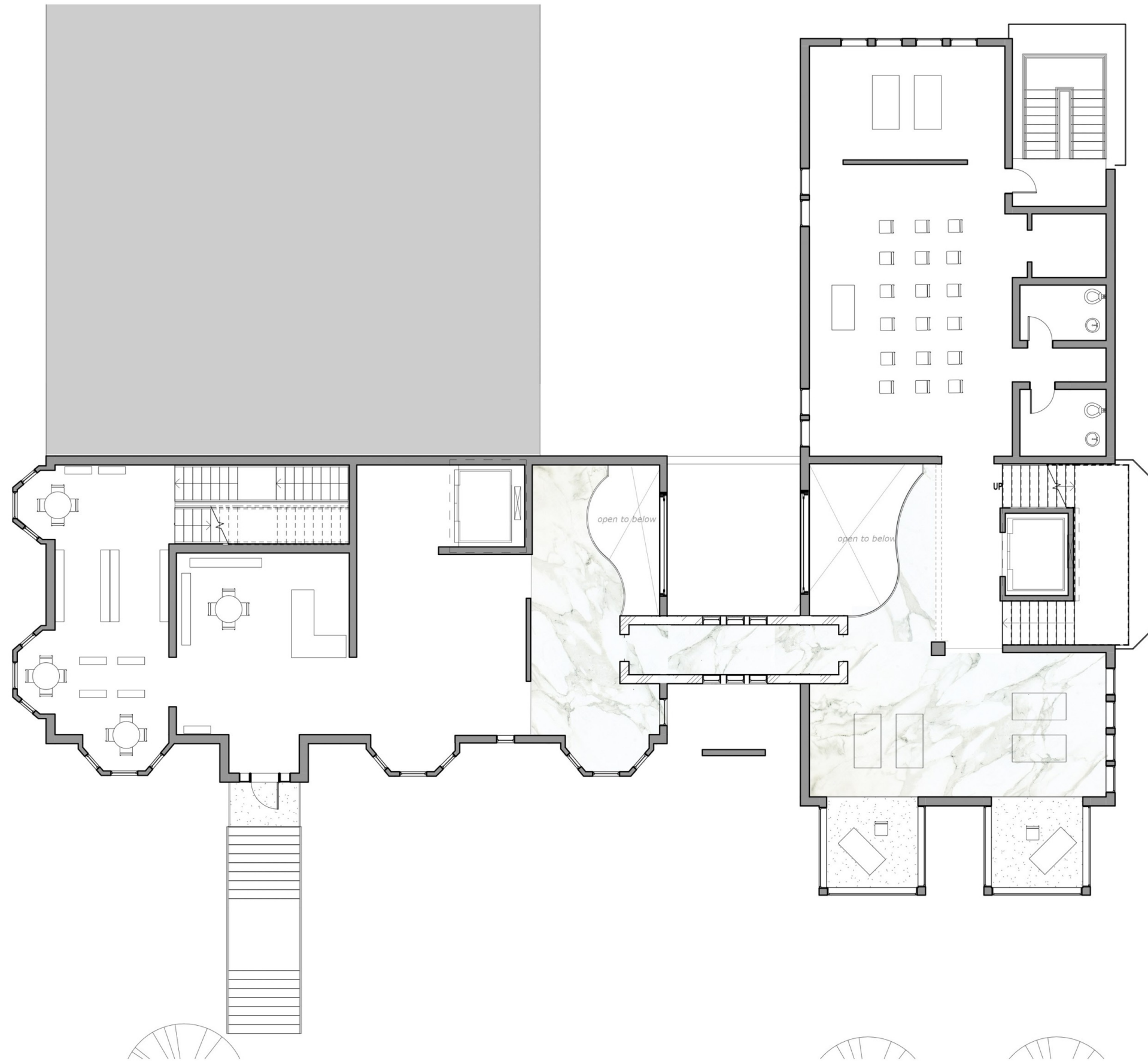
Imaginary friends, stay with me til the end...

Mystery & Concealment —
no one understands
no one can see it
lets keep it secret.

"dear whoever you might be —
I'm still waiting patiently"
Tension — Waiting — Patience —



Love at Recognition...
Intimacy with sight
Caresses with eyes..

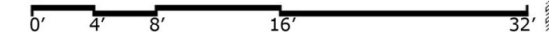


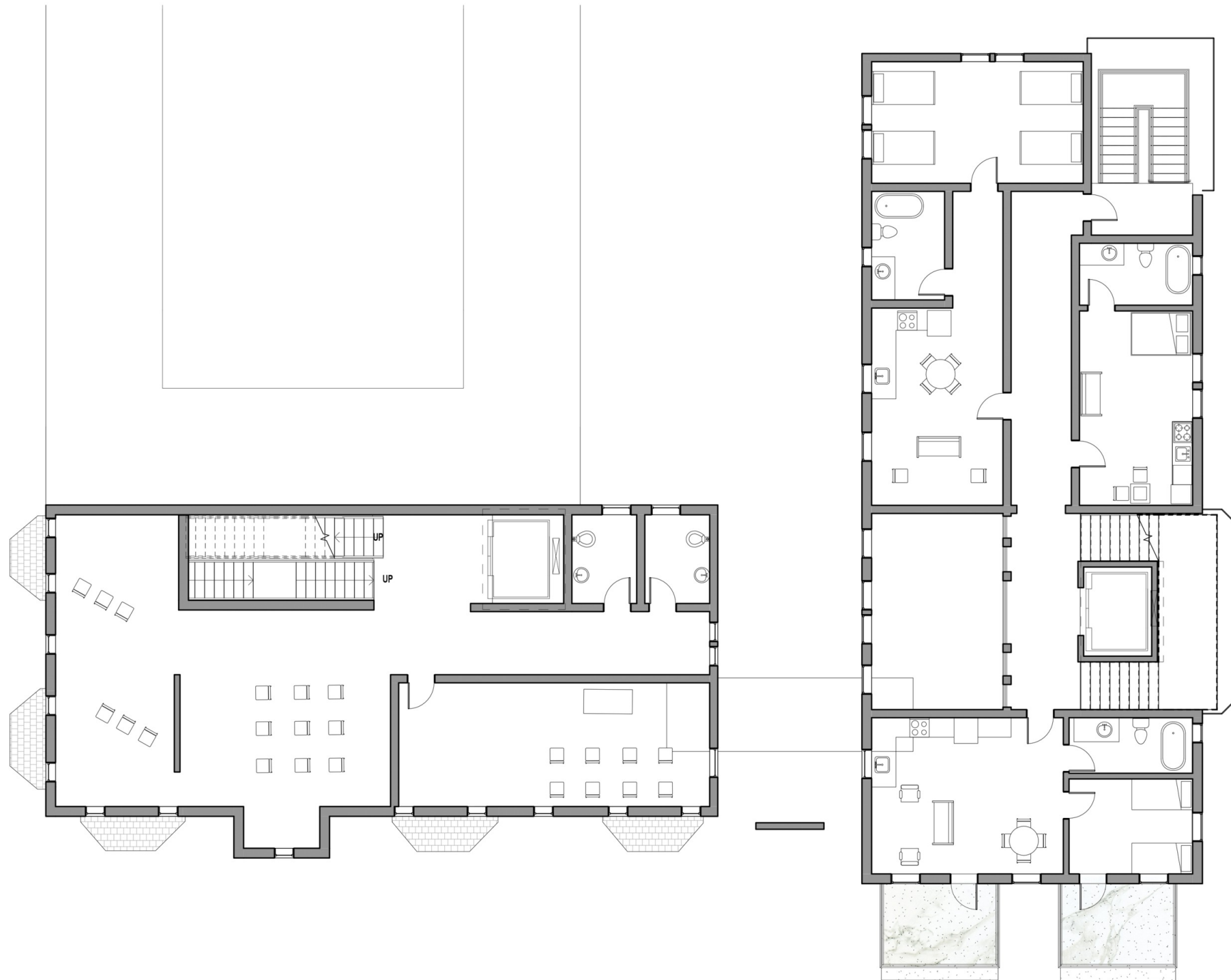
the BRIDGE

The bridge on the second floor is a covered passageway between the two buildings. It is a symbol of their metaphorical love; however, it should not be mistaken for a joining. It is simply a point where they are allowed to exist within the same space.

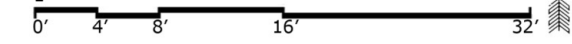
The bridge also connects programs. The studio space of the East Building flows into the exhibition space of the West Building. The translucent floor highlights this, and people on the ground floor are able to understand the importance of the flow happening overhead.

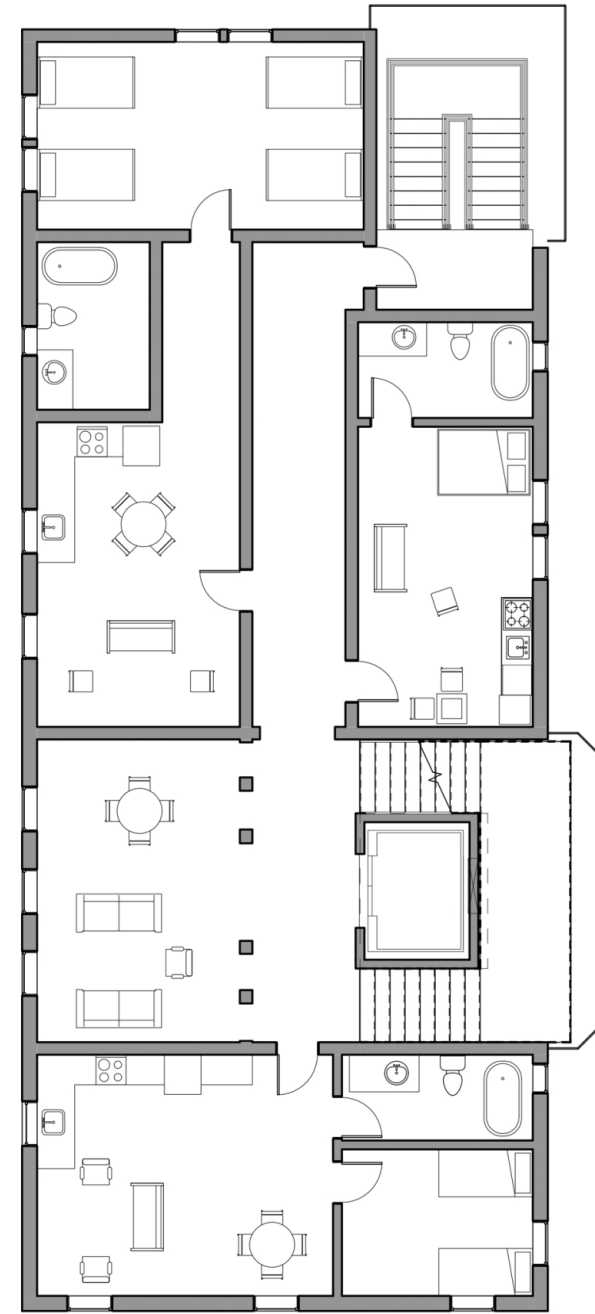
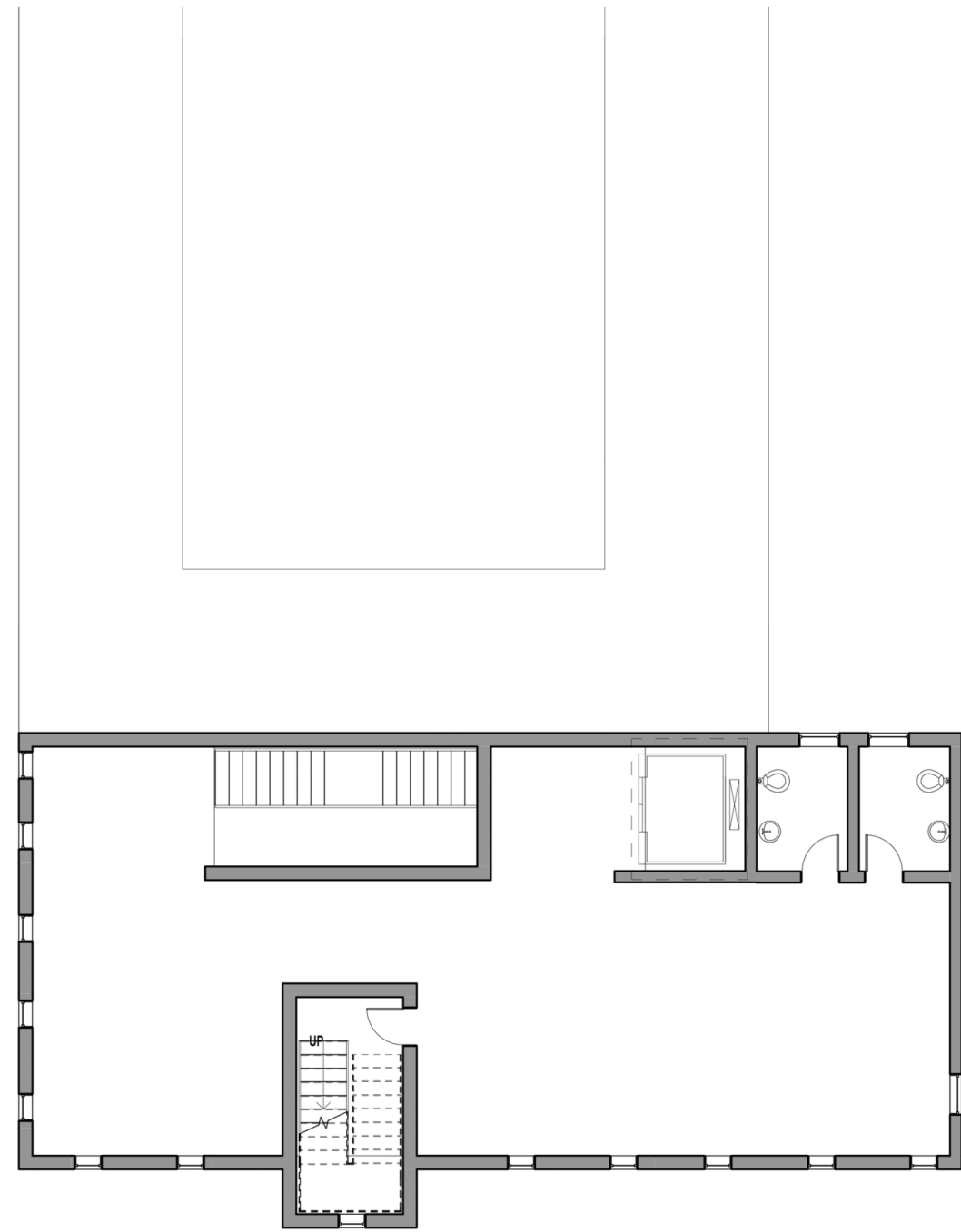
plan SECOND LEVEL



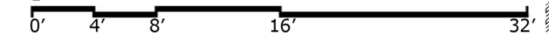


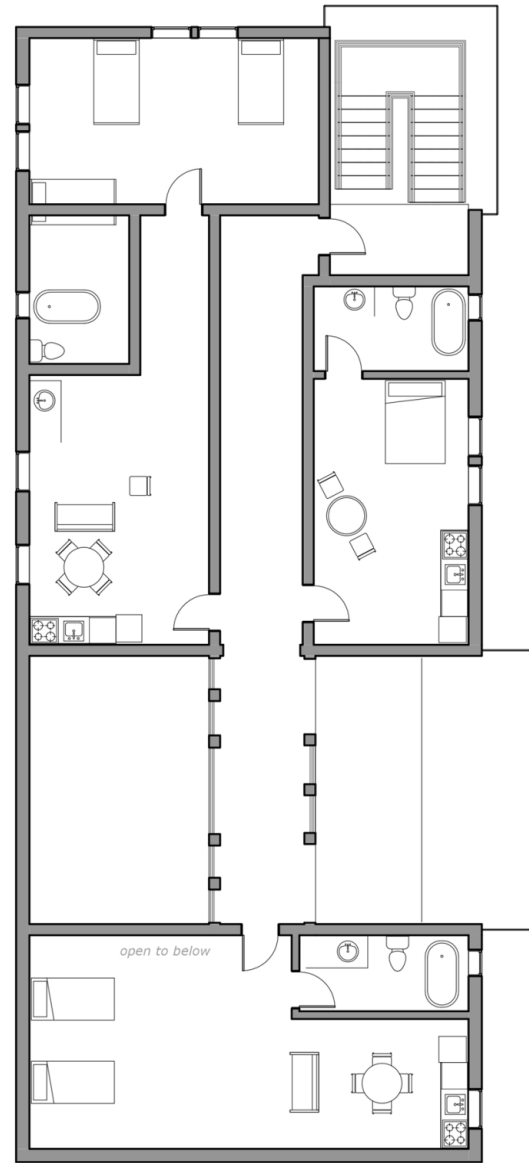
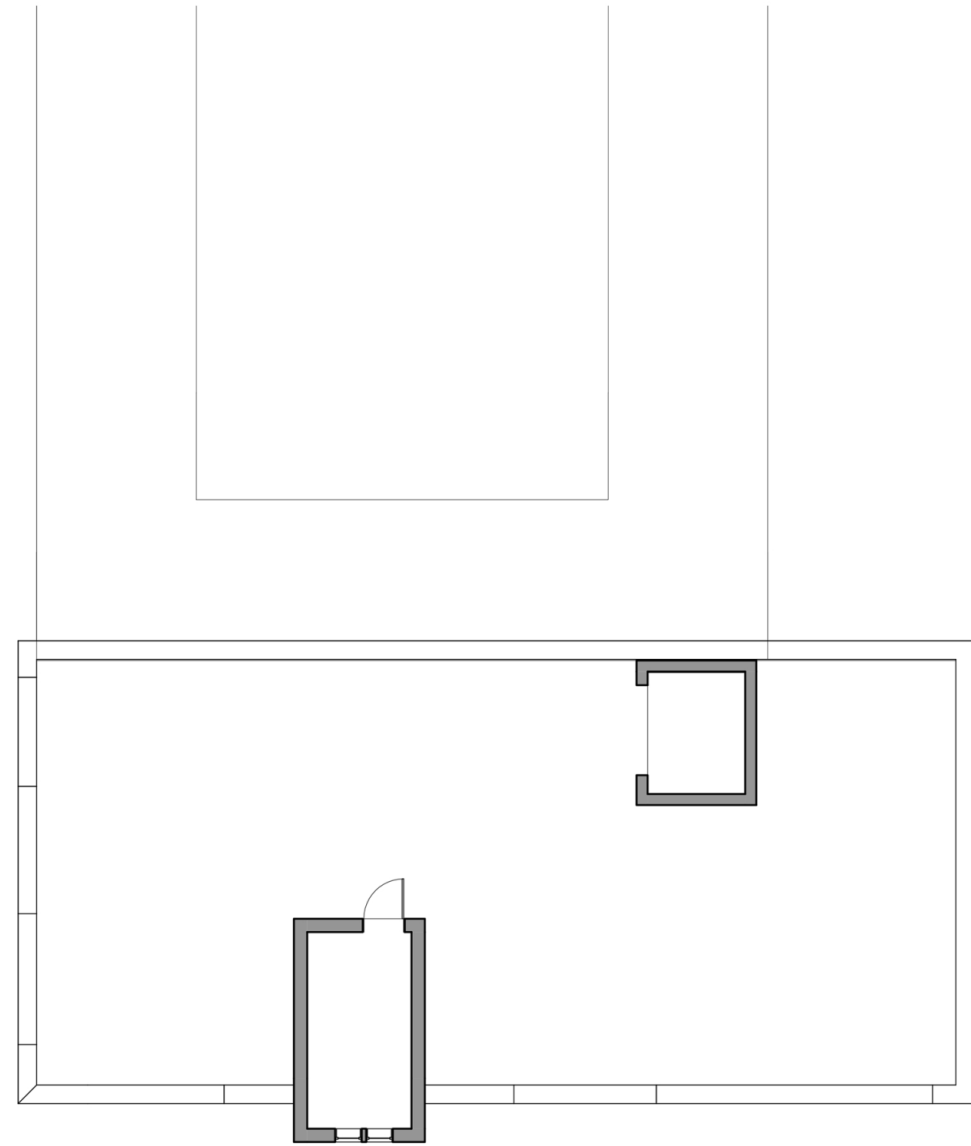
plan THIRD LEVEL



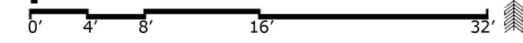


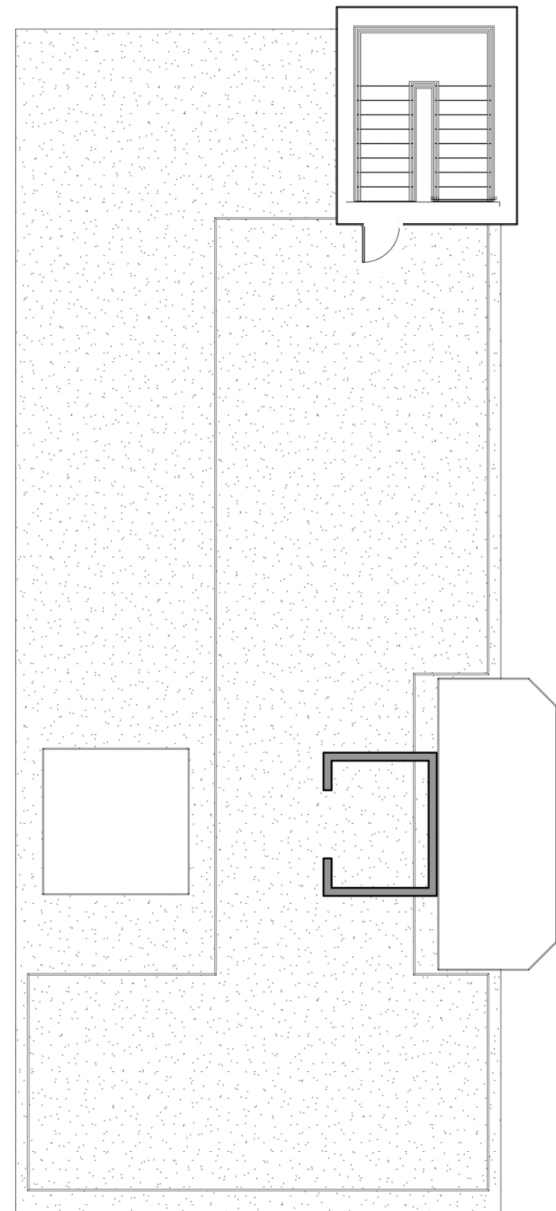
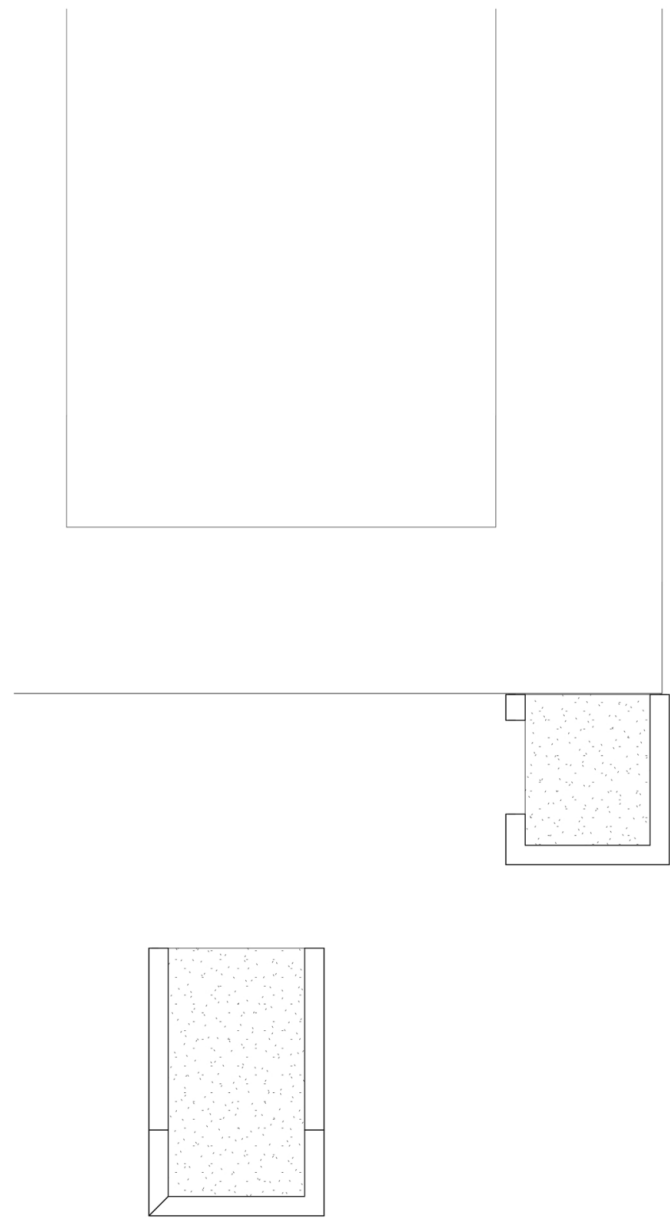
plan FOURTH LEVEL



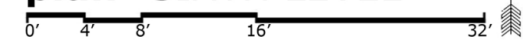


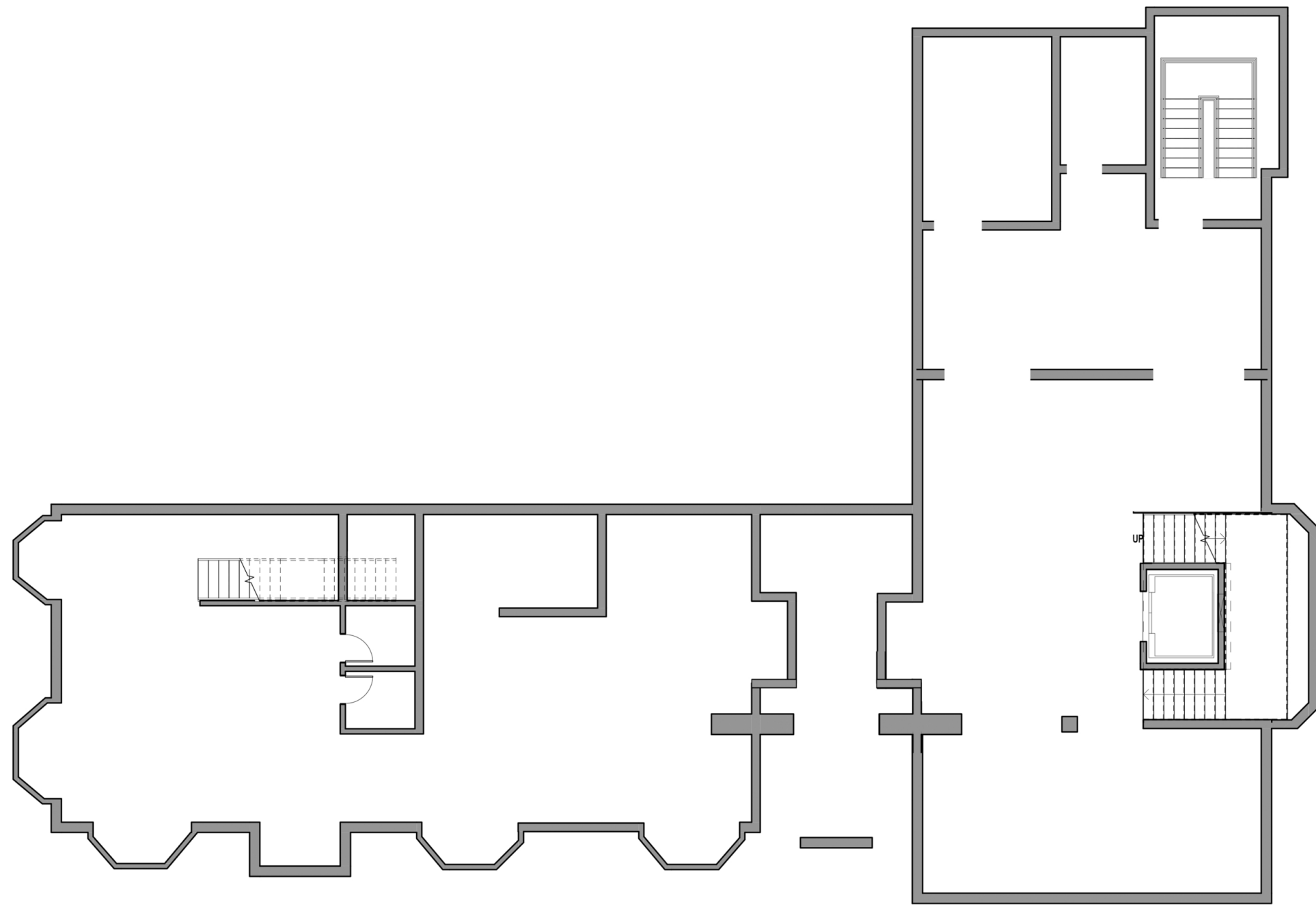
plan FIFTH LEVEL



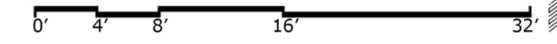


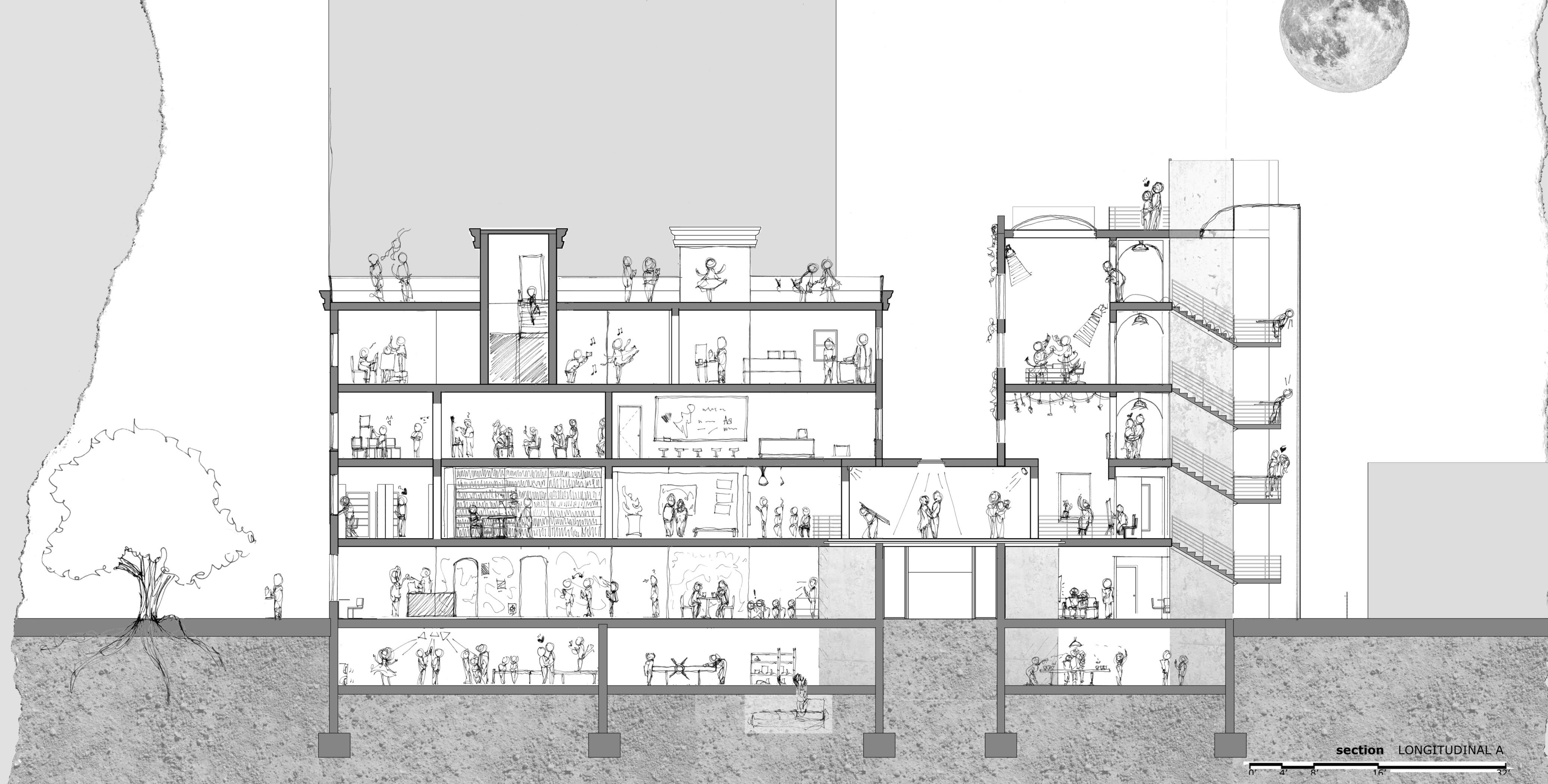
plan SIXTH LEVEL





view BASEMENT PLAN





SECTION
Whole Building, Longitudinal Cut

From this vantage point, a straightforward east to west slice through the entire building, one understands the connection point of the bridge and what that bridge offers to both buildings. It is a point of resolution for each building, where the purposes and emotions of each bleed into one another.

The versatility of the West Building can be seen, from the makeshift nightclub in the basement to the impromptu oratory performance in the east part of the coffee shop to the many different creative disciplines on the upper floors. The nature of the architecture informs the actions that will take place; each action, especially when performed repeatedly, seeps into the architecture until the emotion derived from the actions blends into the architecture.

The basement offers a sound-isolated space with room to dance; the nightclub naturally follows. The heavy walls holding up the bridge act as feature walls in both the coffee shop and the lounge area; respectively, the oratory space and the movie area are a direct result of those architectural elements.

One also can see vertical relationships clearer, especially in the East Building. The main staircase offers pauses which stack, allowing for people to talk to one another on different floors or for a space for lingering in the glass column on the easternmost side.

[pause] the Balconies

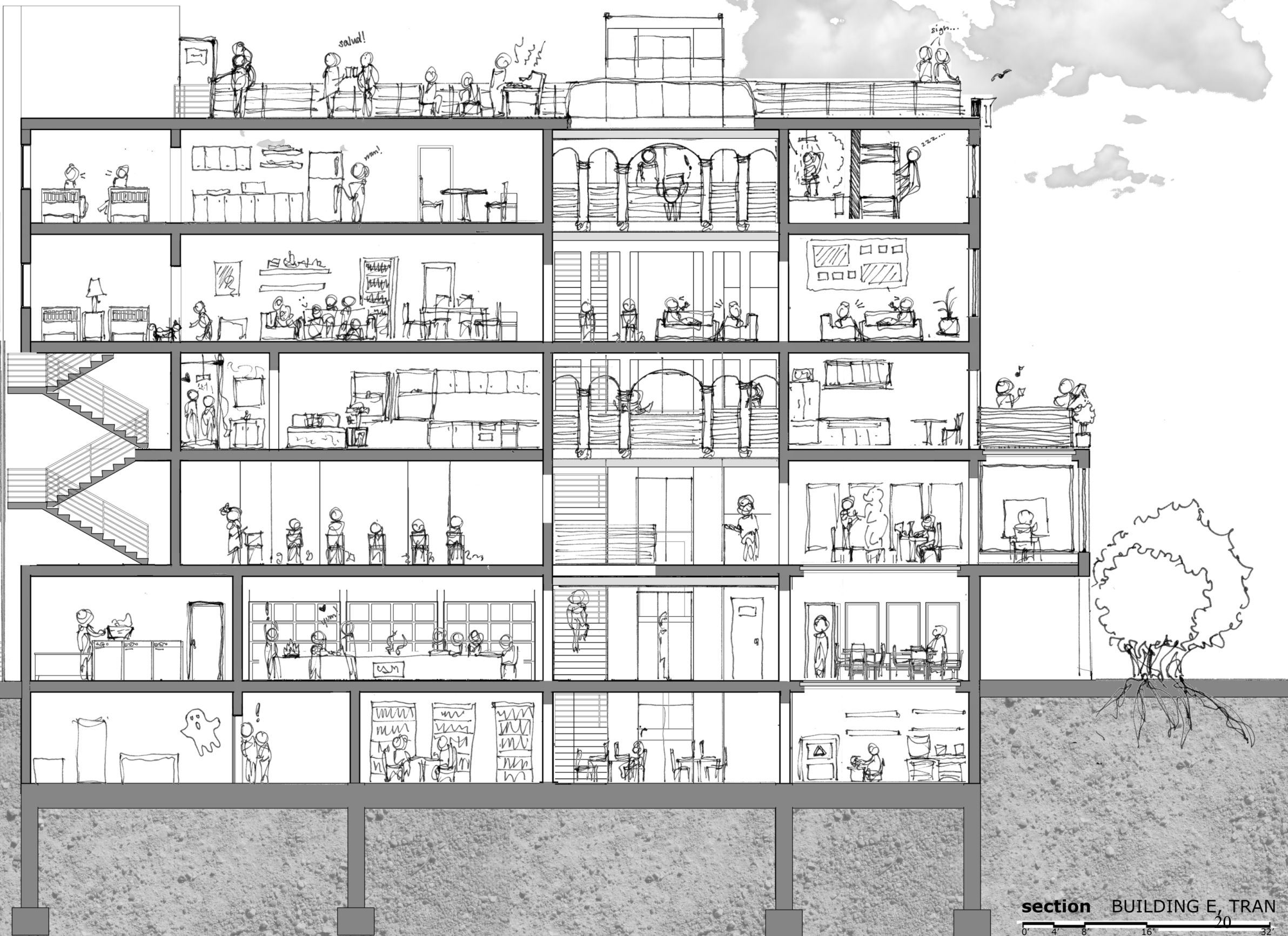
The balconies of the residential space incites the creation interesting relationships. For example, two friends dance on the fourth floor with daylighting from the skylight and windows to the west or spotlights during the night. However, on the fifth floor, a watcher stands by, possibly amused at their antics, enthralled in their dancing, or taking a rest after a cardio session before returning to their dorm. However, this "cascading effect" of the balconies allows living to take place vertically, not just horizontally. The emotion cultivated by the dancers and the watcher can last for a lifetime, depending on the context, because it is entirely about architecture instigating specific actions from its users.

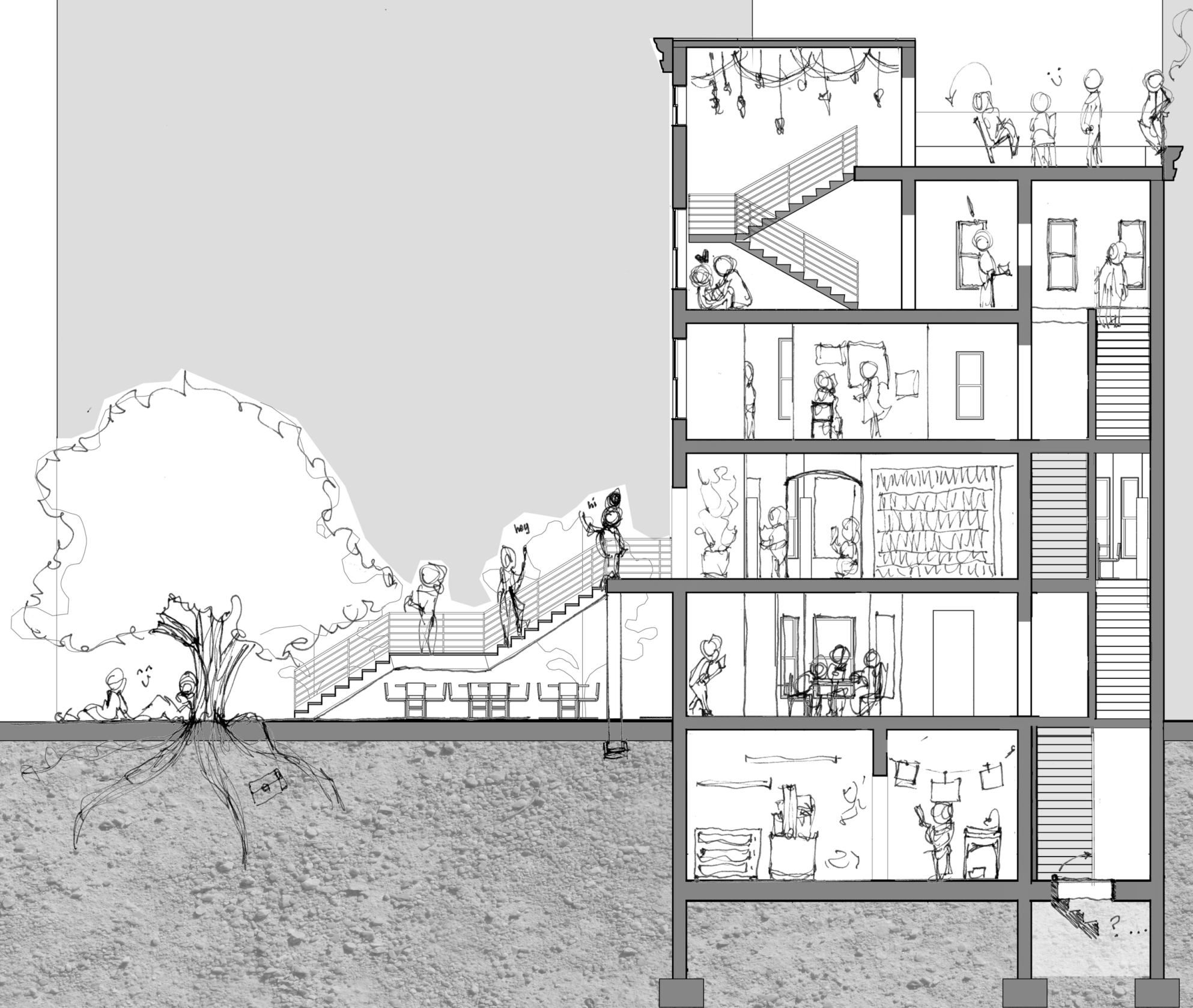
SECTION
East Building, Transverse Cut

The East Building serves as the dormitory for the creative students with various communal spaces and studio spaces.

The basement houses storage and work space for light-sensitive tasks. The ground floor has a laundry room, atrium space, and a study area. Most importantly, the large demonstration kitchen with garage doors opening to the side yard transforms cooking and eating into a three-season, communal event. The second floor looks down into the atrium space while providing a large pin-up area, studio space, and two semi-private "war rooms" where the artists can work in large light boxes overlooking trees.

The top three floors are purely residential with dormitories of varying size.





SECTION
West Building, Transverse Cut

The West Building is primarily educational in function with a public space on the ground floor (coffee shop). The coffee shop walls also act as a showroom for artists' work that can possibly be purchased.

The basement houses storage and light-sensitive disciplines. The second floor is split between a library and exhibition space, while the higher floors cater to creative disciplines where light is desirable.

section BUILDING W, TRAN



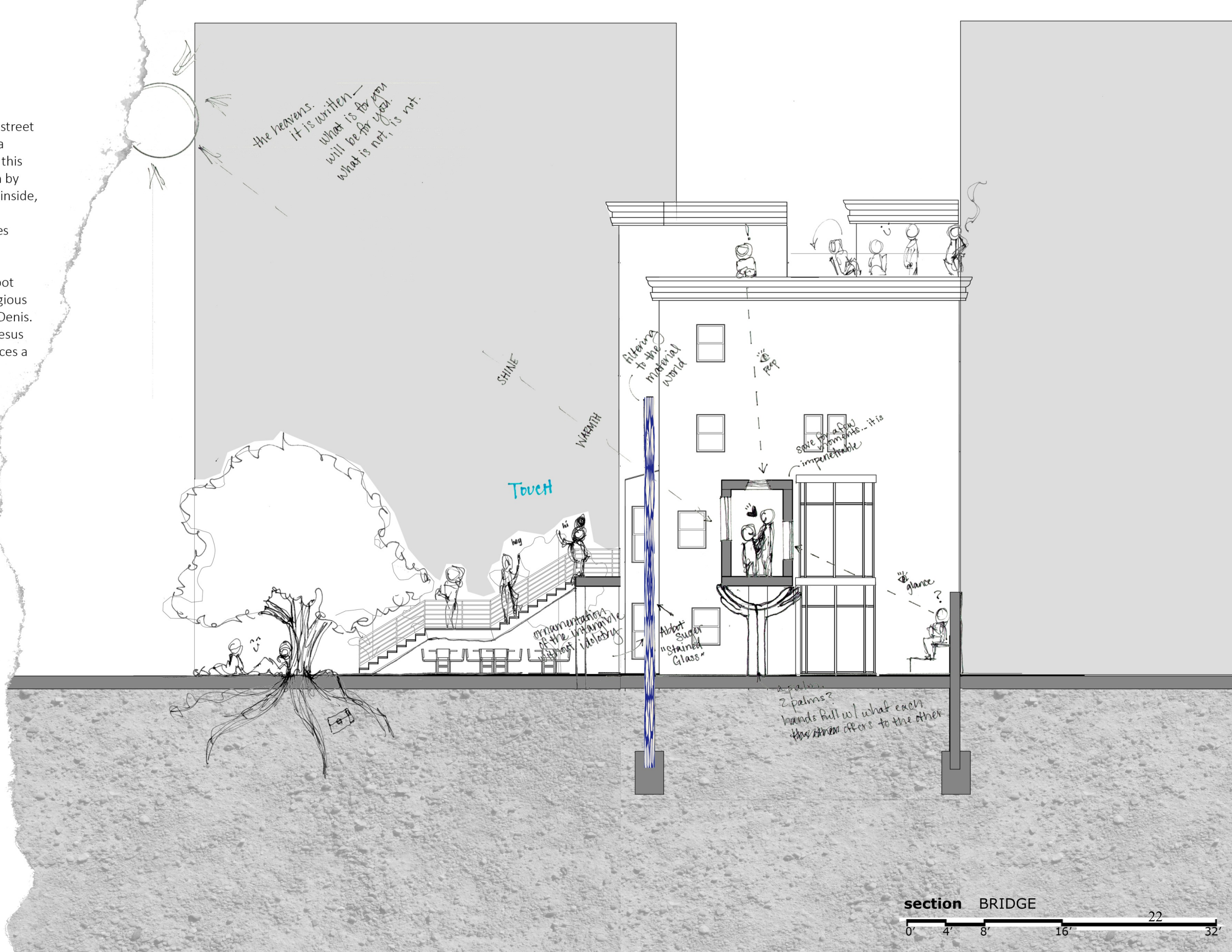
SECTION
Bridge, Transverse Cut

[pause] THE WALL

The wall that shields the bridge from street view is truly a screen. It is, in theory, a privacy screen. It lets outsiders know this bridge, this moment is not to be seen by others. The only people who can see inside, however, are those who are actively engaged in the building (see sight lines labeled "peep" and "glance").

Moreover, the screen also recalls Abbot Suger's stained glass designs and religious theory at the rebuilt Church at Saint-Denis. Just as God impregnated Mary with Jesus without a physical body, sunlight pierces a window and fills a space with light without physical form.

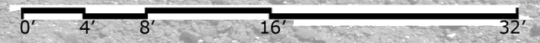
The notes near the sun in the top left corner of the drawing harken back to an Arabic proverb relating to Fate and God: "It is written." I literally drew a reference of Fate being filtered through something in order to shed light on an event within the bridge. The heavenly is translated through a filter before gaining materiality within the bridge. The material of the screen wall provides ornamentation of the intangible, heavenly world without idolatry, also a reference to the Islamic world and its architecture.



ELEVATION
Southern Facade



elevation SOUTH

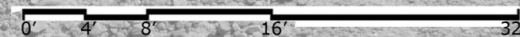




ELEVATION
West Façade

The west façade is purely a revitalization of the old rowhouse mansion; it also shows how the public arena interacts with the private art school at the corner of K St NW and 11th St NW.

elevation WEST



Below: Perspective from the Bridge

"It's called ma. Emptiness. It's there intentionally. [...] The time in between my clapping is ma. If you just have non-stop action with no breathing space at all, it's just busyness, But if you take a moment, then the tension building in the film can grow into a wider dimension. If you just have constant tension at 80 degrees all the time you just get numb."

- Hayao Miyazaki speaking to Roger Ebert



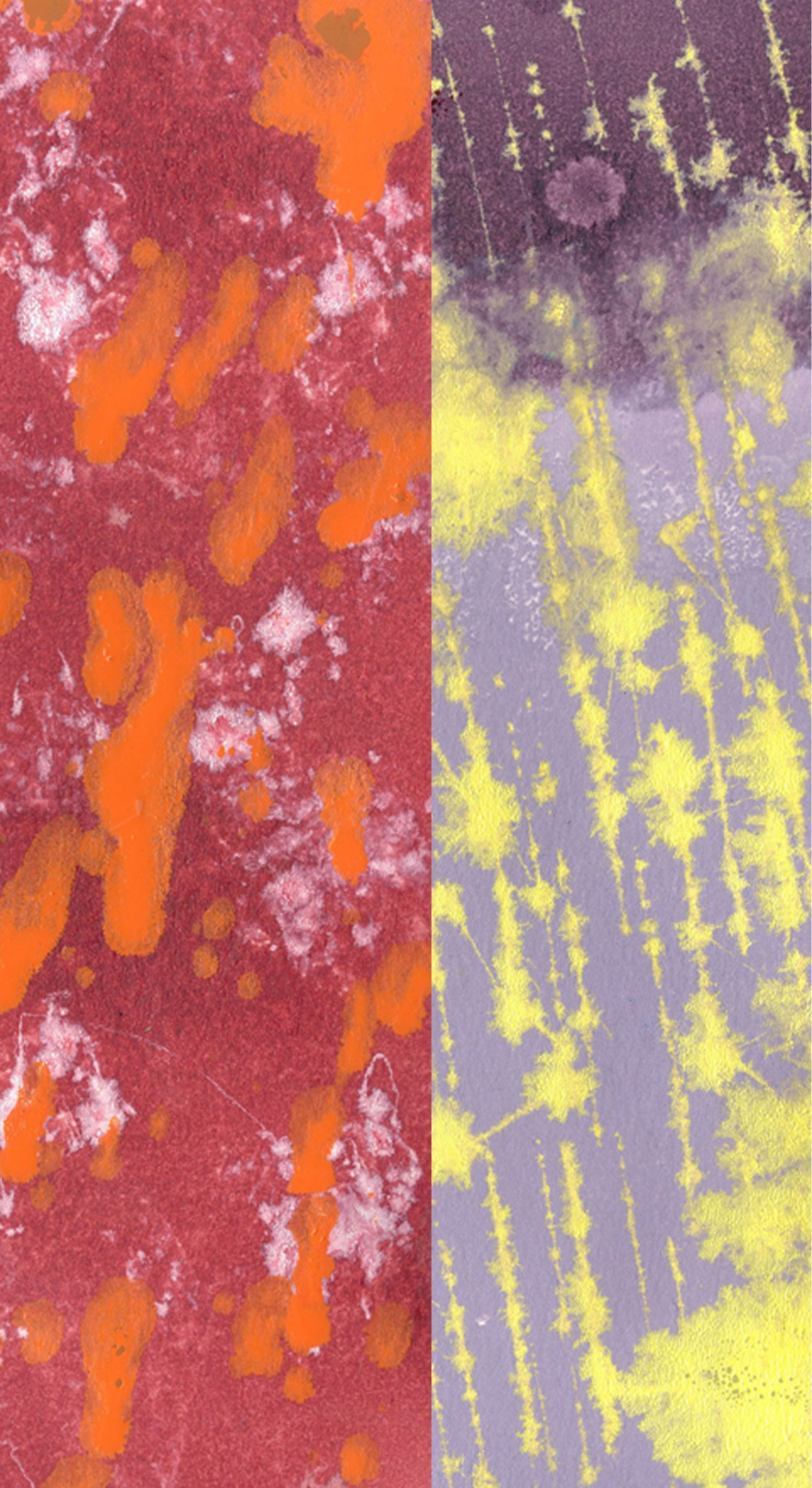
Above: Perspective from Southeastern Sidewalk

"Sometimes when you meet someone, there's a click. I don't believe in love at first sight but I believe in that click. Recognition."

- Ann Aguirre, *Blue Diablo*

"Maybe it's not about the length of time you've known someone; maybe it's about instant recognition on an unconscious level. Our souls know each other."

- S.E. Hall; *Emerge*



“For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts- serious, sad thoughts- and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality.”
- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

The journey of this thesis was mostly experimental and experiential. People live in a space and leave an immaterial quality within architecture. New occupants can sense this immaterial quality, almost as if the building or space were alive and sharing what it knows.

The two monoprints on the left have entirely different colors and moods. Separately, they may not seem related. However, when placed next to each other, they speak to one another, and similarities can be extracted. The East and West Buildings act in the same way- two sides of the same coin, two buildings bound by the same fate. Although they cannot touch, the space between them is honored by the bridge that connects the two.

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Image 5: *Fringe* [Advertisement]. (2001).

Image 6: Allan, D. (n.d.). *Hurricane Storm Clouds over Ocean* [Digital image]. Retrieved from gettyimages.com.

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