

[URBAN] MONASTERY

6 DuPont Circle NW
Washington DC

by
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degree of*

Master of Architecture

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Le Corbusier

LE CORBUSIER COUVANT DE LA TOURETTE



"Fundamental datum of human existence is the never resolved tension between desire and restraint."

- Less is Enough, Pierre Aureli.

Aureli's statement from Less is Enough acknowledges a key component: constraint that the contradiction lies in the representation of the two extremities; desire and restraint.

Prologue

There were two simultaneous thoughts to begin with. One that concluded on wanting to explore architecture within contradiction. That preceded with identifying the elements establishing the contradiction. Going back and forth within the two came a book - Less is Enough written by Pierre Aureli.

Aureli's statements in the book:

"..fundamental datum of human existence is the never resolved tension between desire and restraint."

The contradiction lies in the representation of the two extremities; desire and restraint.

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Abstract

Architecture that embodies contradiction has the opportunity to be a separation while creating new avenues. Separations help by distinguishing the two dualities.

This thesis is an exploration on Architecture's response within complexity and contradiction. Within my project, the driving parameter is the program: A monastery for the Dominican order within an urban context of Washington DC. The architecture has two primary responsibilities, one is to preserve the sanctity of a restricted way of living and the other to engage with its profane surrounding. The two most important questions are: how does a monastery represent itself to a city; and how does a city represent itself from within a monastery.

Statement

Architecture is a curation of thresholds transitioning between two complexities; those that have the ability to contradict each other. Through the program of an urban monastery the scales of curated inquiries vary. This allows an opportunity to study the varying degrees of separation while continuously questioning the strictness of the duality.



study model

PLACING THE SACRED

INQUIRY_01

Deals with studying the expression of architecture within the complexity of placing a sacred entity within a profane context.

The facade as the key element intends to represent the ideals of the Dominican order while preserving the urbanity of DuPont Circle, Washington DC.

In the following pages one utilizes the opportunity of massing and material abstraction to develop a conversation between the sacred and the profane.

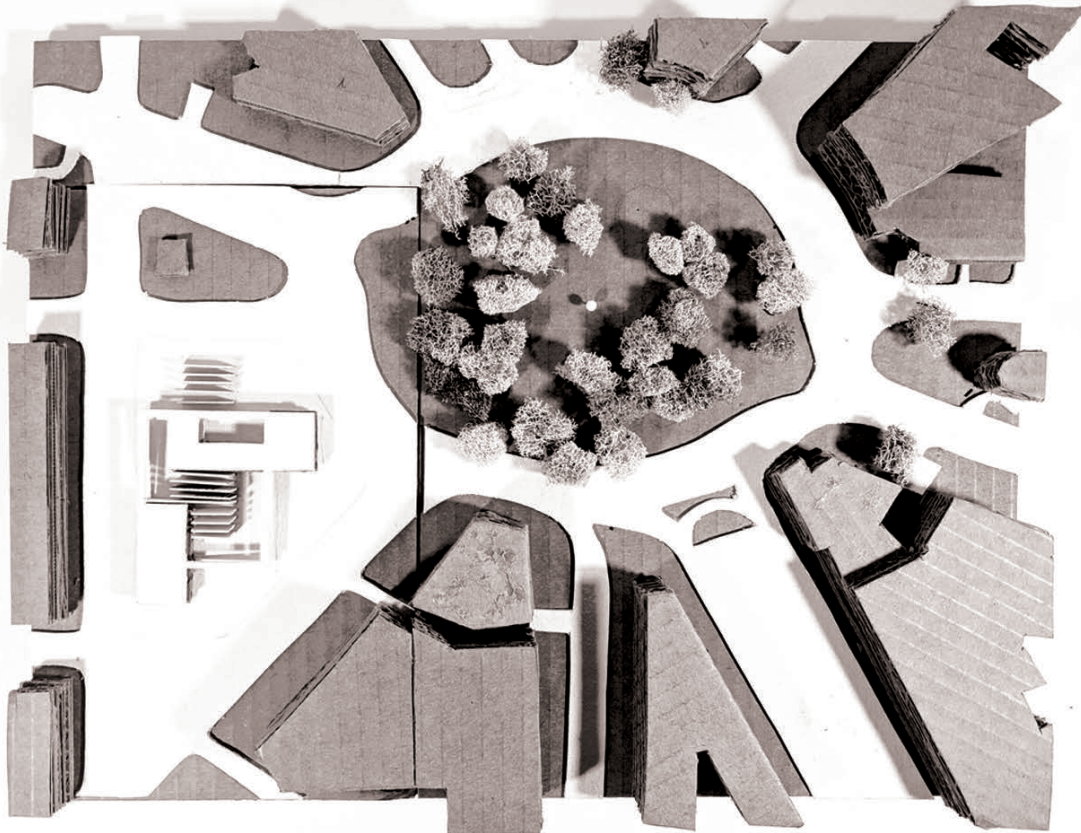
COURTYARD IN

version I

Intent // *To intersect the collective square over the individual with an intention of using the processional path to sew the two into one building.*

Observation // *There are two courtyards created that differ in volume and have the potential to be treated in the extremities of private and public. There is a potential of controlling the levels and degrees of interaction between different user groups of the monks and the public.*

Weakness // *The proposal does not reflect the boundaries of the site nor does it reflect on its immediate context. The processional path as an element requires to include more purpose than just a long rote of commute between the first and second floors.*



study model

COURTYARD IN

version II

Intent // Repeating the intent of version I, while keeping one of the two courtyards formed through the intersection, outside the perimeter of the processional path.

Observation // With one courtyard outside the periphery there is a clear distinction in the degree of inclusion. There is also an opportunity of continuing the geometry into the site potentially as landscape.

Weakness // The proposal does not reflect the boundaries of site nor does it reflect on its immediate context. The processional path as an element is required to engage other activities.



study model

LAYERING THE FORT

version III

Intent // To address the site boundaries and acknowledge their immediate context while increasing the purpose of the processional path.

Observation // There is an opportunity to articulate the elevation and create a reveal of the inner workings of a monastery. The orientation of the project along the site helps create an inner street that demarcates the pedestrian of DuPont Circle from that of the project.

Weakness // Though the proposal creates an interesting interface between the context and its program, it fails to interact with the circle proactively. Unfortunately, the illuminated processional path opens towards a high density structure. When it should be addressing the circle.



study model

INTO THE CIRCLE

version IVa

Intent // To acknowledge the circle while aligning the chapel to its cardinal direction.

Observation // The processional path has a prominent presence compared to previous versions. The courtyard begins to acquire dynamic qualities because of its diagonal boundaries.

Weakness // The prominence of the path begins to compete with the other programs of the proposal. There is a lack of clarity in the hierarchy of the proposal even though it may have an intention to address the circle.

version IVb

Intent // An iteration to the version above by introducing a secondary level, a new datum within the central courtyard for the monastery above.

Observation // While the observation of the first version remains. With the new datum there is a clear distinction in the open spaces for the monastery vs the area allocated for public.

Weakness // The prominence of the path increases with the introduction of a new level within the courtyard. With the pedestrian movement that is in close proximity to the building, the scale at which the structure meets the pedestrian path seems to be unsuitable.



version IVa



version IVb

study model

LAYERING THE FORT

version V

Intent // Keeping the true cardinal direction for the chapel, while orienting the reveal of the illuminated facade towards the center of DuPont Circle.

Observation // There is an opportunity for dynamic movements through the site, cutting it on cardinal and diagonal axis. There is a clear intent on the orientation of entrances for each of the specific programs.

Weakness // The proposal is a step towards a simple expression of the complexity of the project. The weaknesses for instance, lie within the areas where different geometries meet.



study model

TANGENT

version VI

Intent // Expressing the strictness of the duality of the program through purity in the organization. Introduction of a public wing that is oriented in tangent to DuPont Circle.

Observation // The change in geometry highlights the public wing and acknowledges the presence of the circle. It creates an opportunity to reveal the interior workings of the monastery which could be articulated for the public to participate with the profane context.

Weakness // The geometry of the public wing is not well integrated with the geometry of the proposal. The transitions in volume need to be studied in reference to meeting of the site edge and the streets.



study model

THE KINK

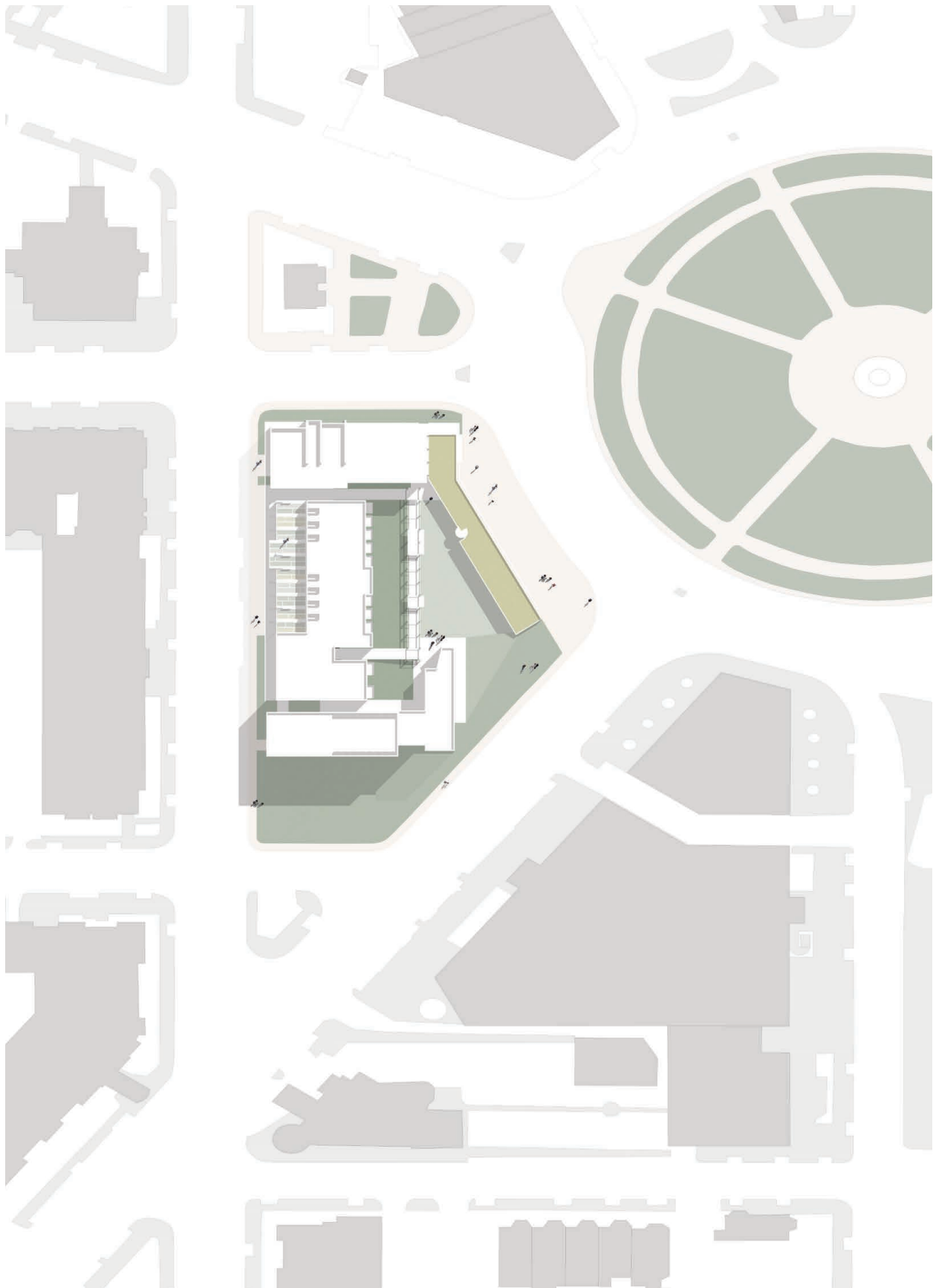
version VII

Intent // *Continuing to express the strictness of the duality of the program through purity in the organization achieved by the introduction of the public wing in the tangent.*

Observation // *There is harmony achieved in the abrupt change in geometry, an open wound inviting a pedestrian to gaze in curiosity towards the heart of the monastery. The very act of this organization begins to establish the very nature of the project and strengthens its intent.*

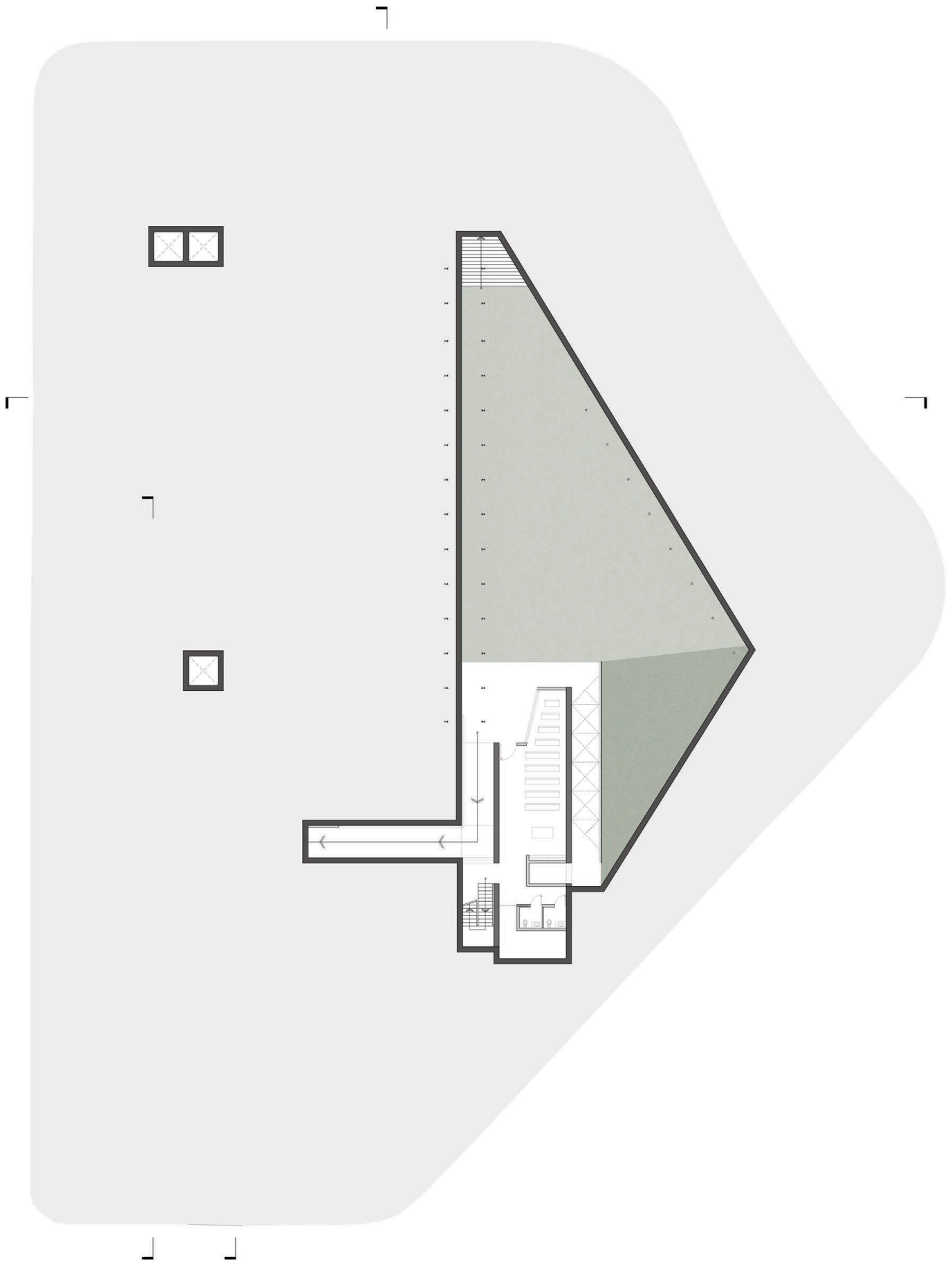
Weakness // *The weakness observed is that it has multiple sets of entries, which is used further as a design opportunity. It helps sets the nature of entrance as per its purpose and the user. One is left to wonder, if the project is by itself a threshold or a set of thresholds curated.*

SITE
plan



GROUND -1
floor plan

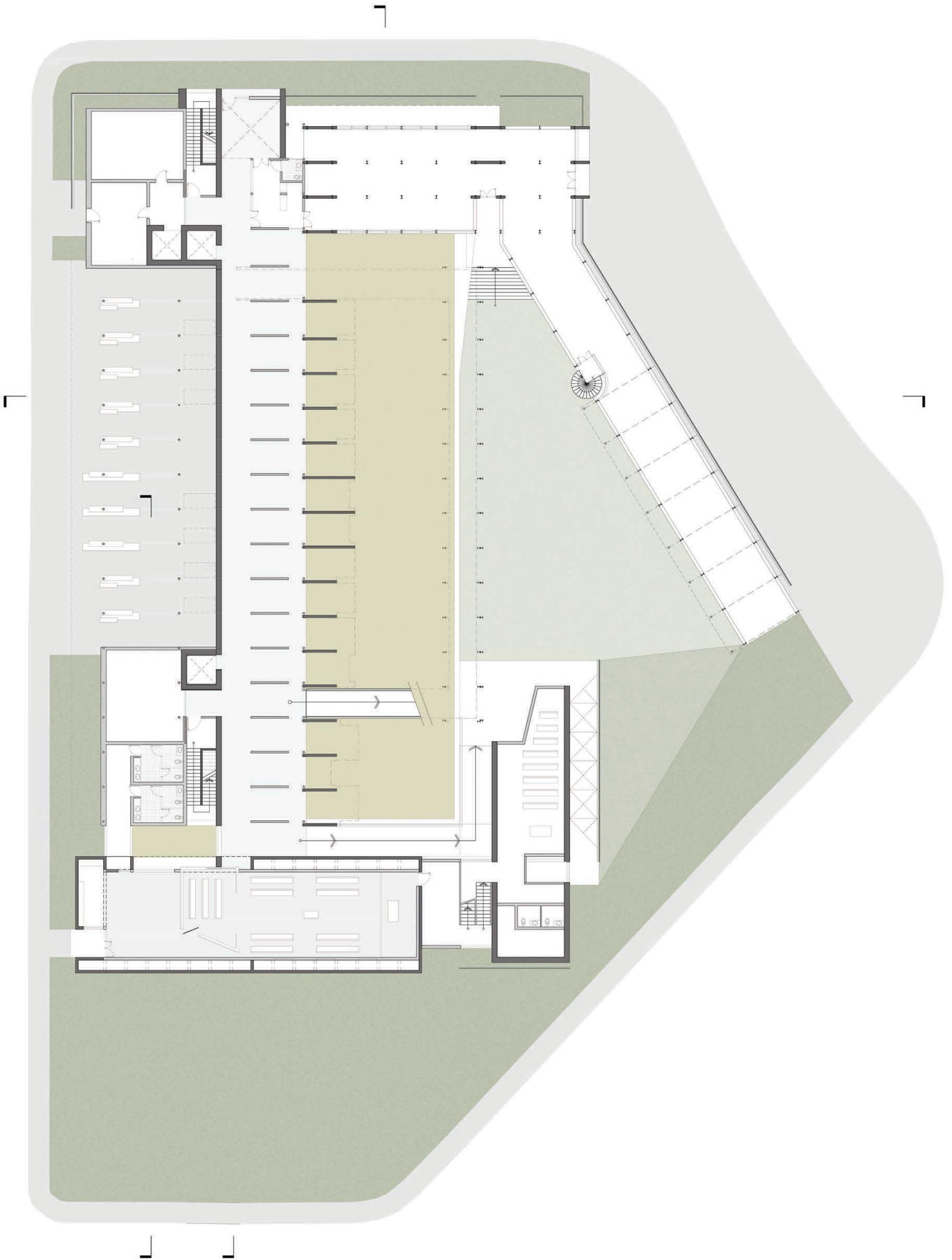
chapel
sunken court



GROUND

floor plan

Main Chapel
Library
Administration
Outdoor Church
Co-working space



SECOND

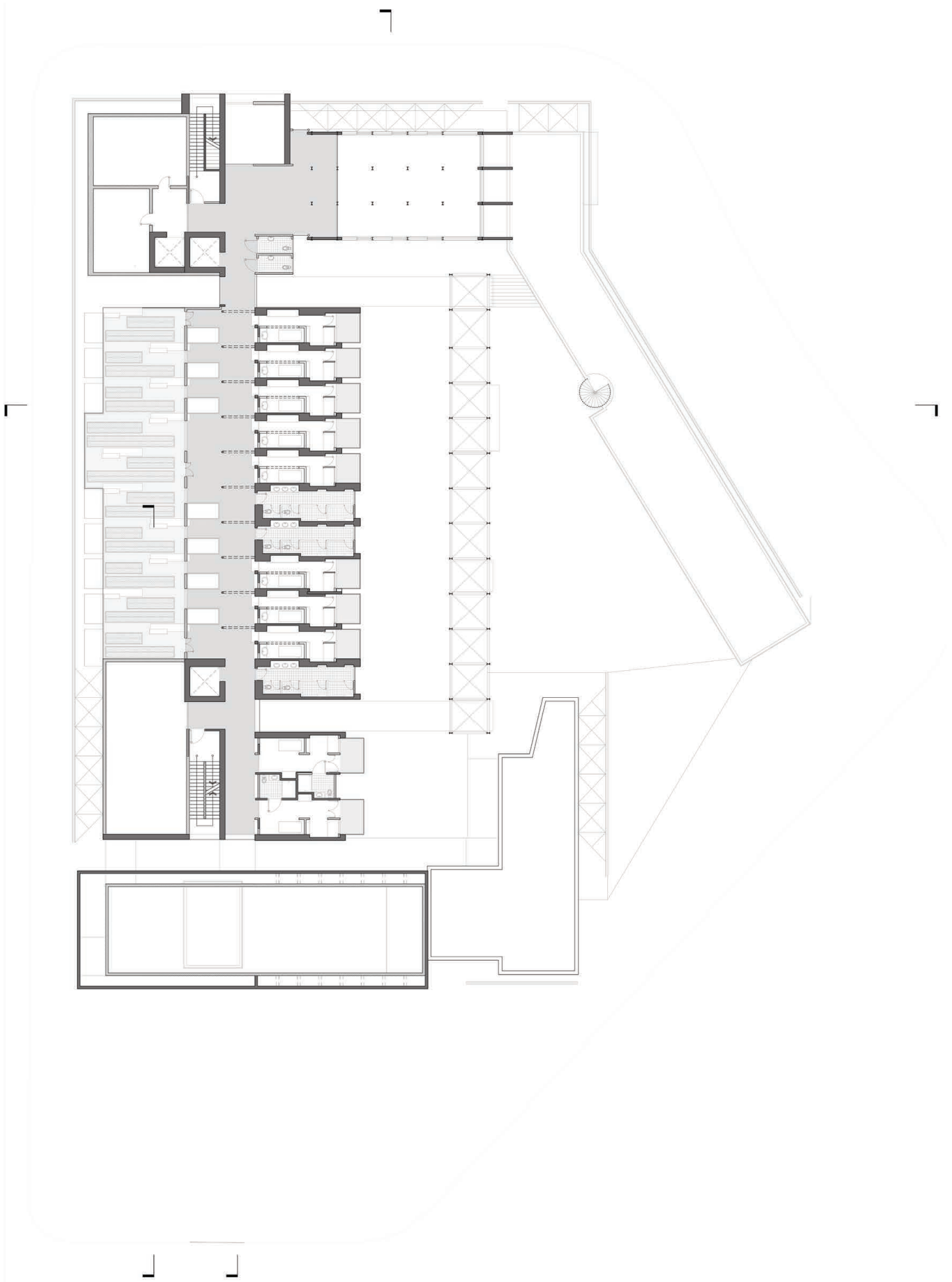
floor plan

Dining
Kitchen
Monk Cells
Visitor Cells
Privy Chambers
Storage
Outdoor Terrace



THIRD
floor plan

Dining Mezzanine
Kitchen
Monk Cells
Storage
Terrace Gardens

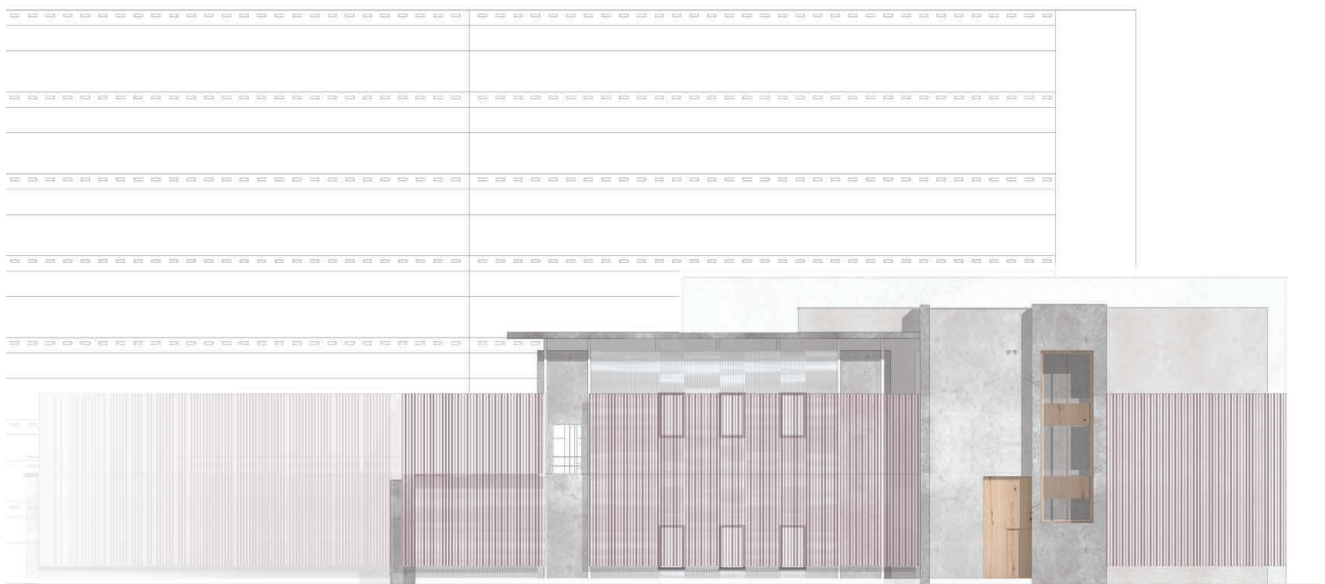
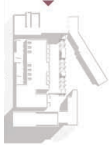


MAKING OF AN URBAN MONASTERY

INQUIRY_02

The inquiry highlights the skin of the project, its layered elevations. The activities it nestles within the project shape its internal structure like the bones that carve to make way for customised use. Whereas the skin envelopes it to deliver a wholesome building, that which is bound by contrasting situation on either sides of the threshold.

NORTH
elevation



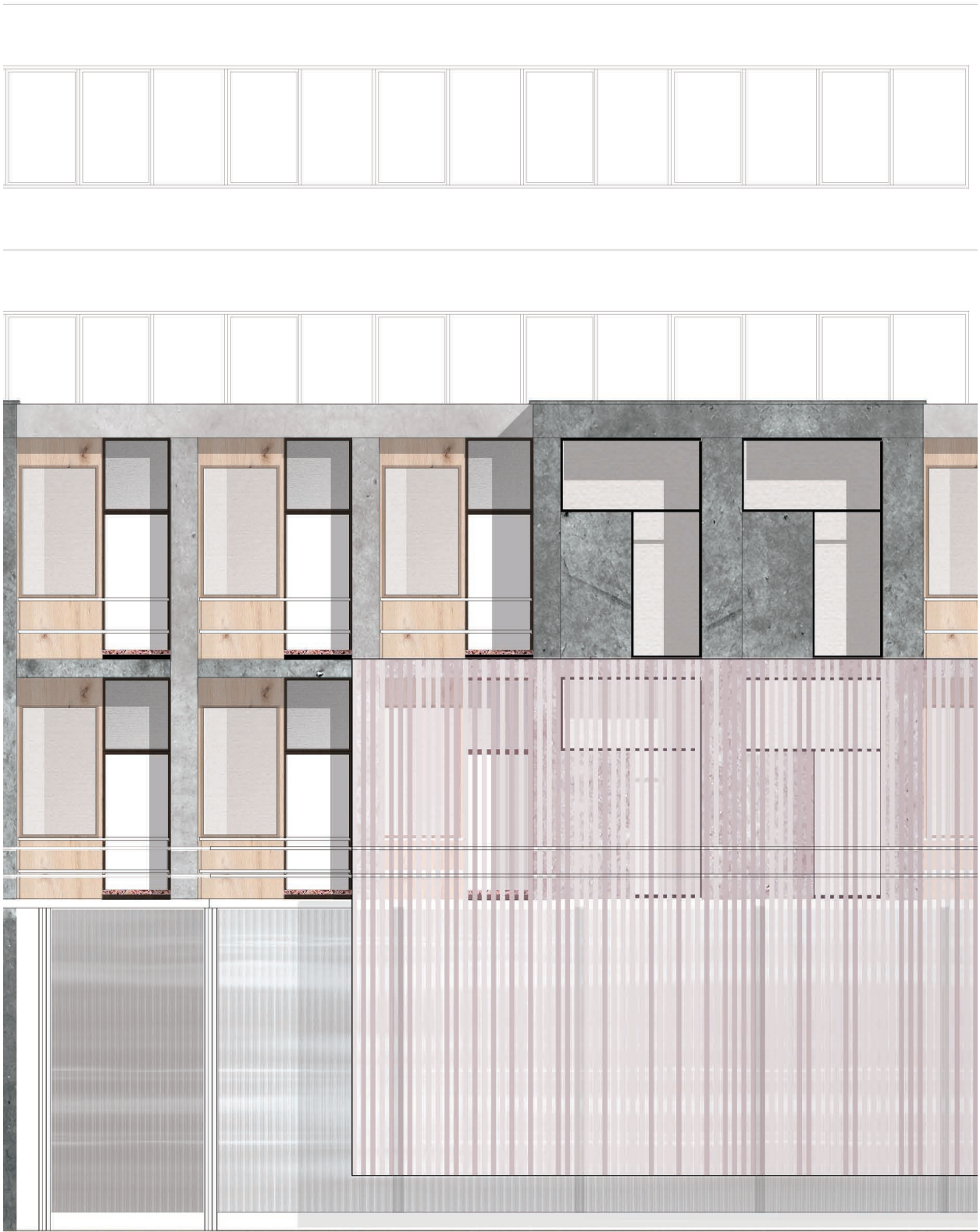
NORTH
part elevation



EAST
elevation



EAST
part elevation

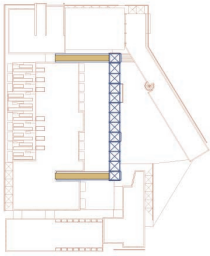


WEST
elevation

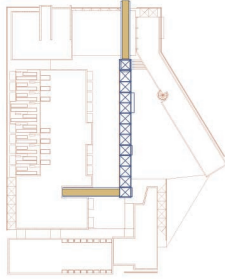


WEST
part elevation

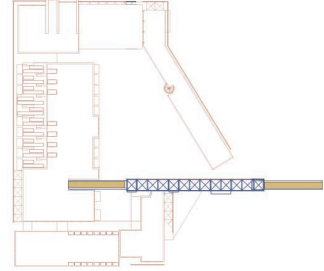




UNWINDING THE PROCESSIONAL PATH



UNWINDING THE PROCESSIONAL PATH



UNWINDING THE PROCESSIONAL PATH

THE INCLUSIVE CIRCLE

INQUIRY_03

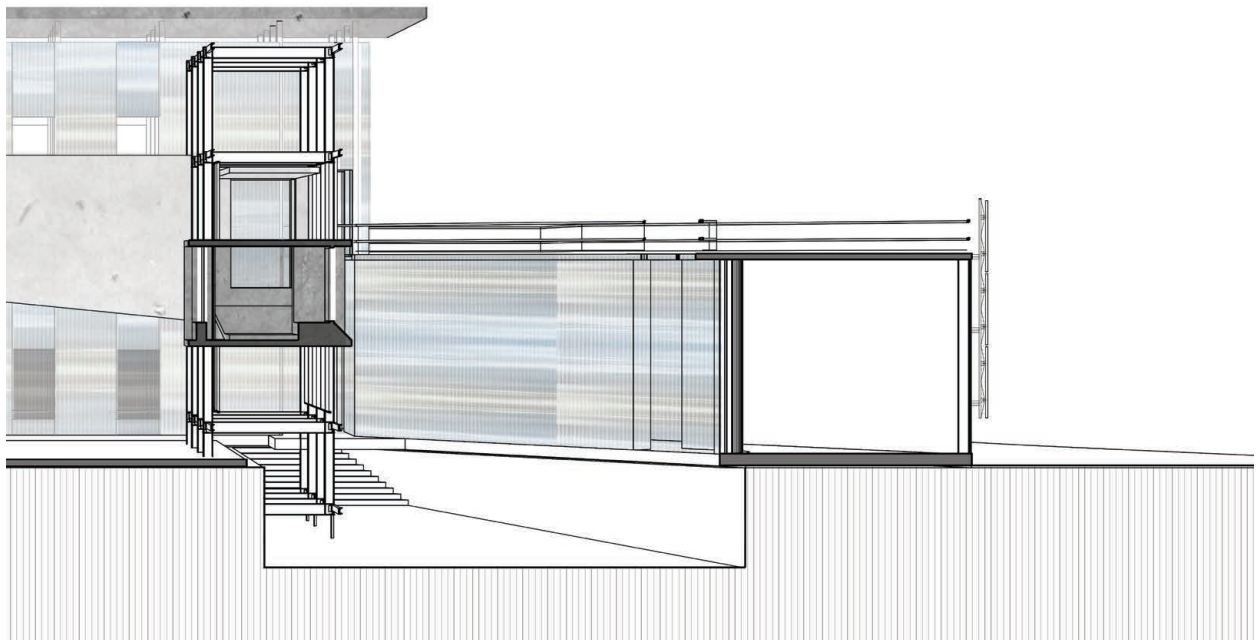
This particular inquiry was brought as a reaction to the opening of the facade the kink introduces. Adopting a very detailed architecture of steel and glass, with the structure enveloping the reflective glass facade - the processional ramp begins at the church lifting the processional service above the ground leading them to their personal chambers. It is now that a private activity of the order becomes a public celebration, a mark on their identity.

The idea that the very profane nature of DuPont Circle is dominated by the sacred of this religious activity. It is achieved not with an intention of dominance on the circle, but to display a contribution of the order towards it. Hence, an allinclusive circle within the building, as well with its context too.

BB'
section

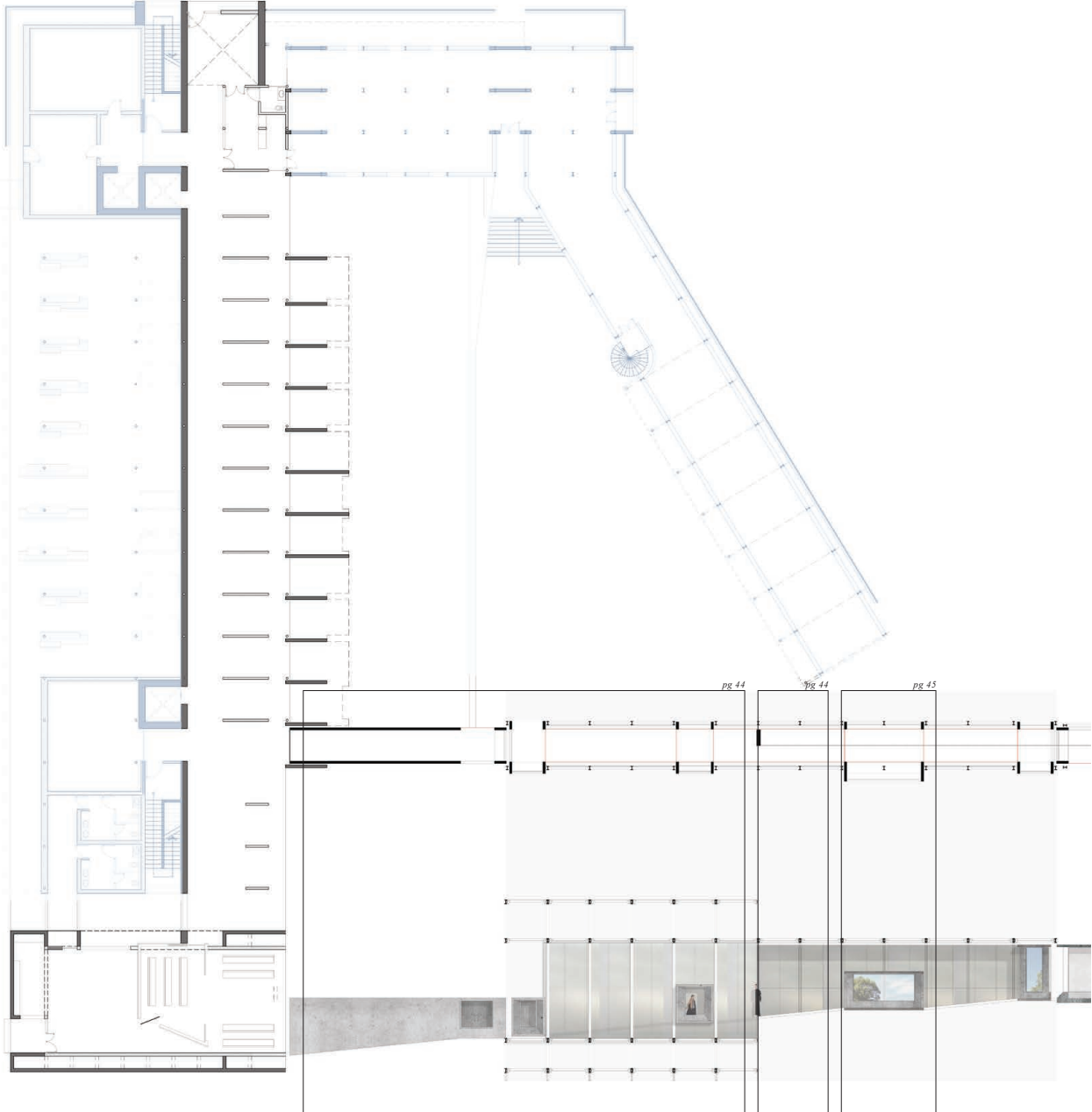
section

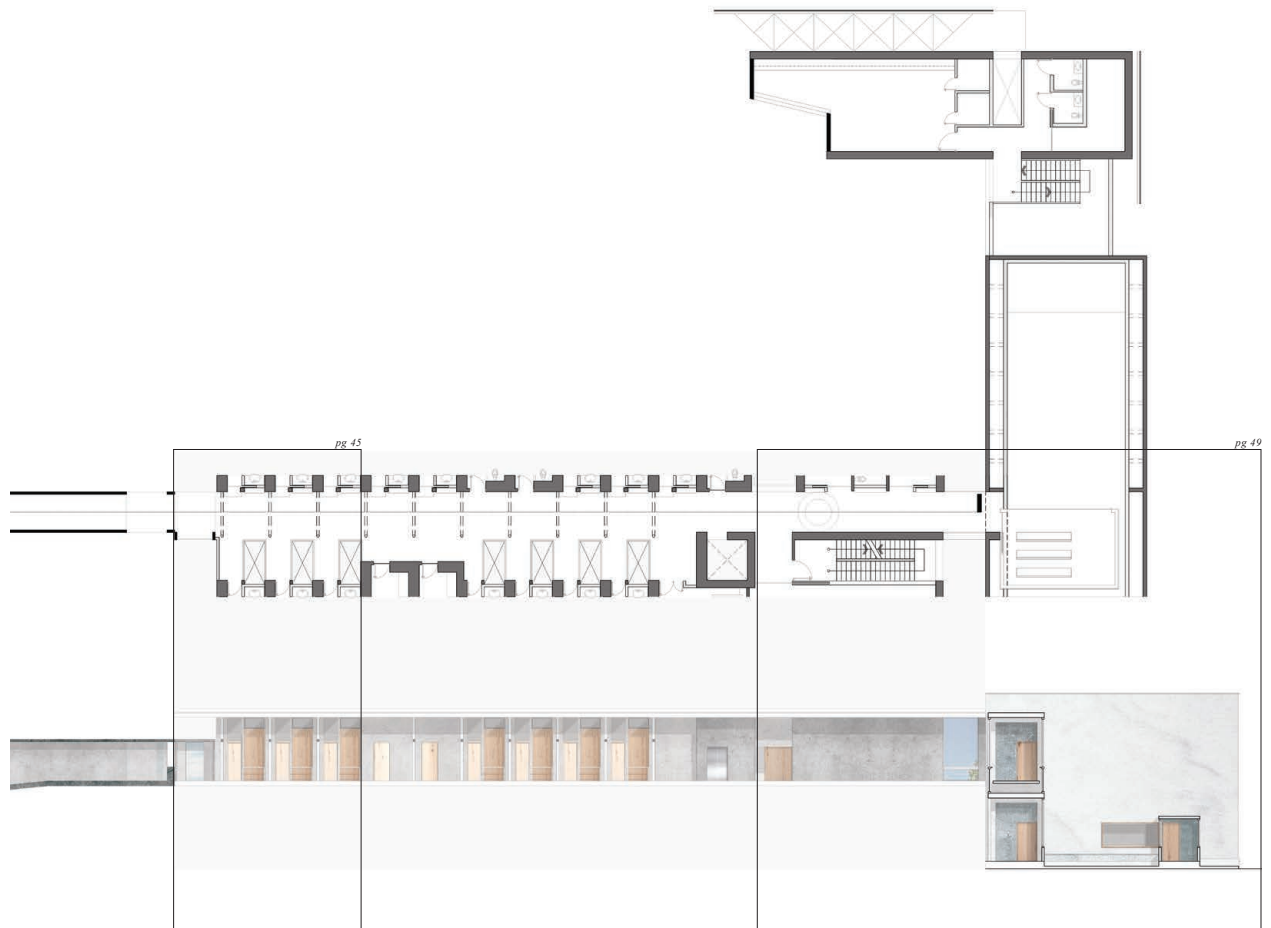




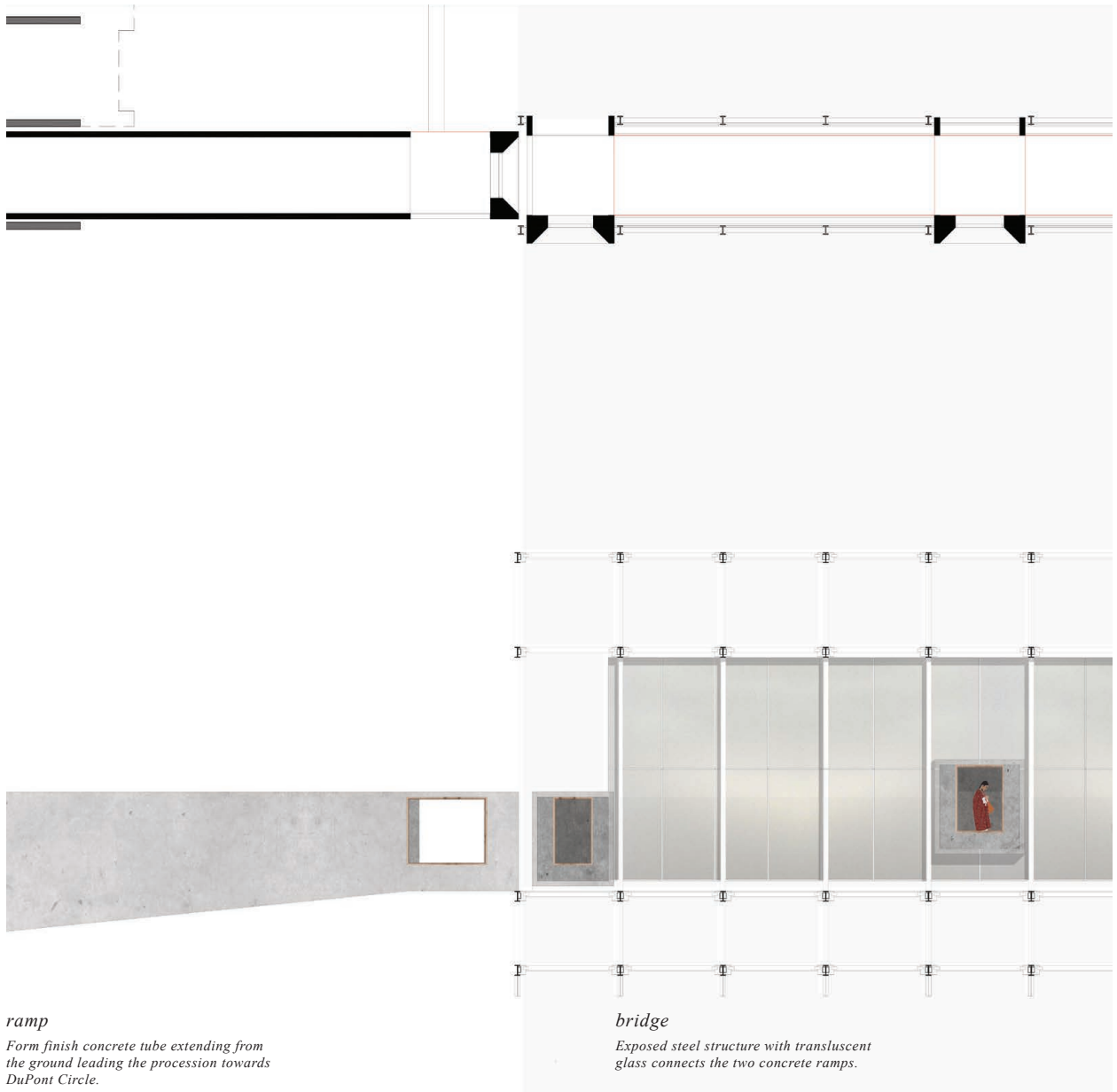
FRACTIONAL FRAME I *processional path*

elevation





MATERIAL TRANSITIONS | processional path
part elevation



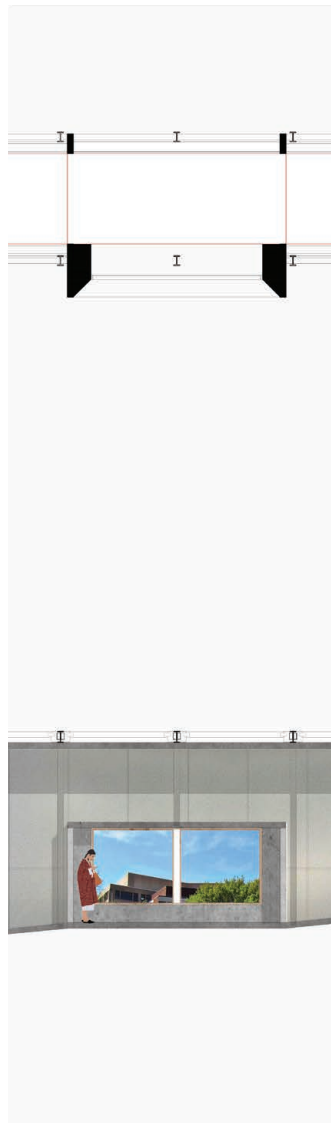
ramp
Form finish concrete tube extending from the ground leading the procession towards DuPont Circle.

bridge
Exposed steel structure with translucent glass connects the two concrete ramps.

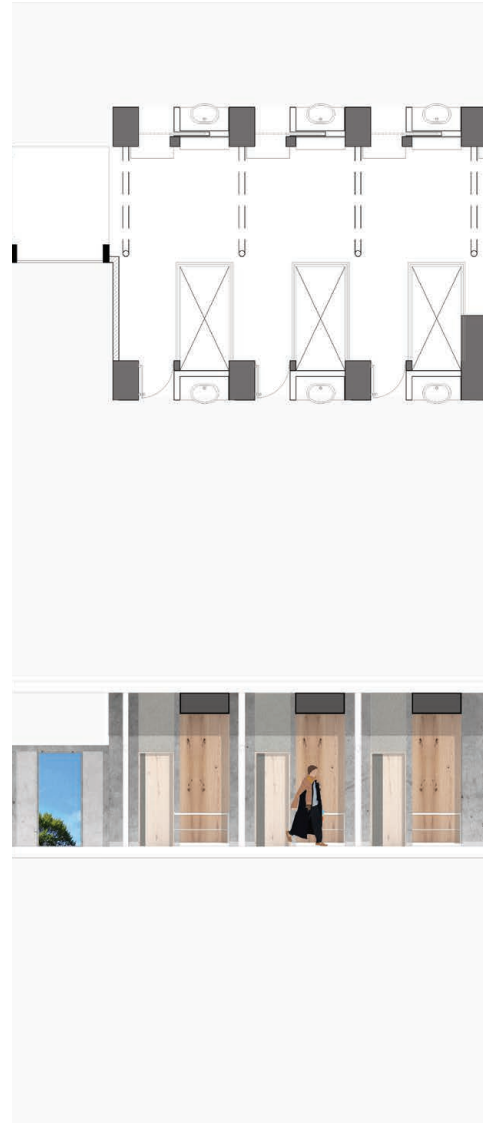
MATERIAL TRANSITIONS | the inclusive circle
part section



bridge
 Exposed steel structure with translucent glass connecting the two concrete ramps.



bridge
 Concrete window inserts frame DuPont Circle.

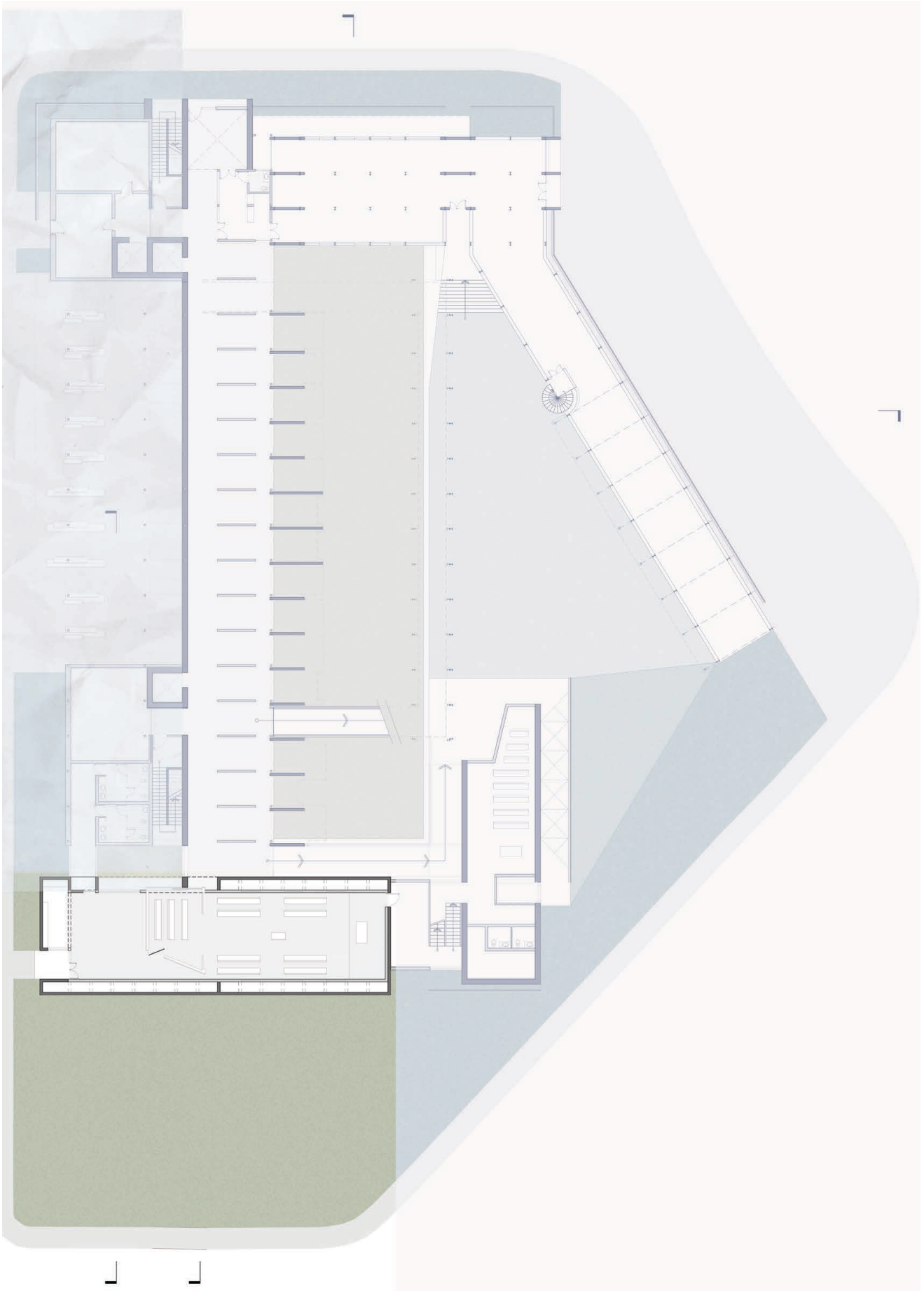


corridor
 Corridor continues the rhythm of the steel structure manifesting the entry into individual cells.

SHARED WALLS

INQUIRY_04

Walls as elements morph into identities that begin to shape themselves in relevance to what they enclose within themselves. Walls are partitions or more importantly the hosts to carry thresholds. The flexibility in their physicality permits us to push boundaries in its role of serving as a planar element. The following pages shall demonstrate two distinct areas where walls evidently took drastic forms in its physicality to serve as enclosures.

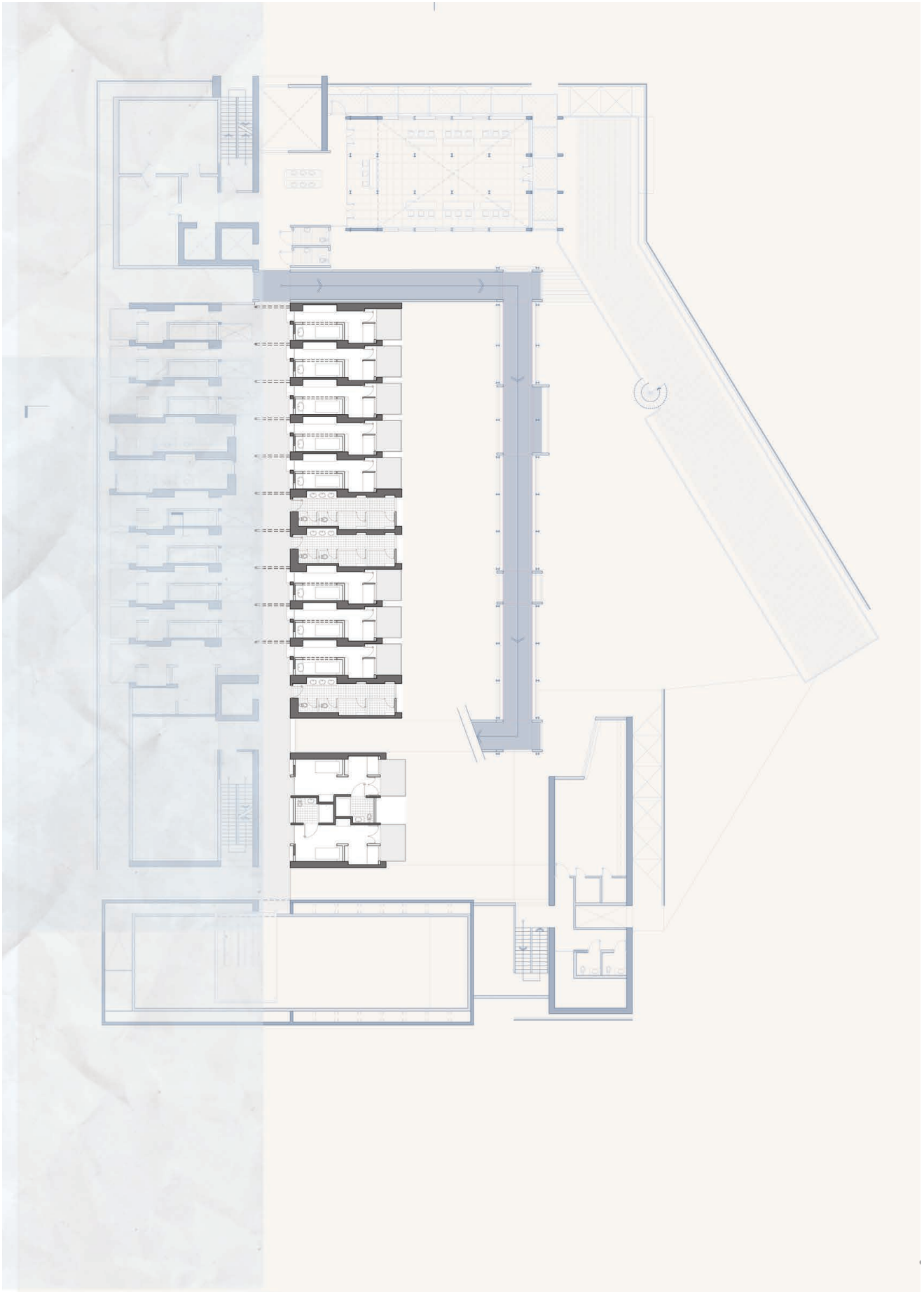


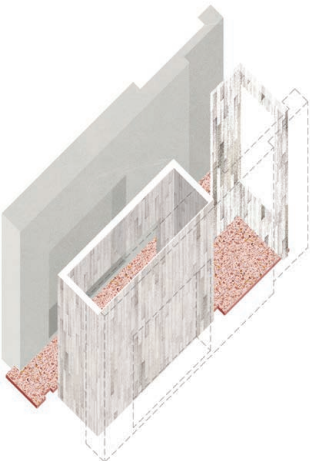
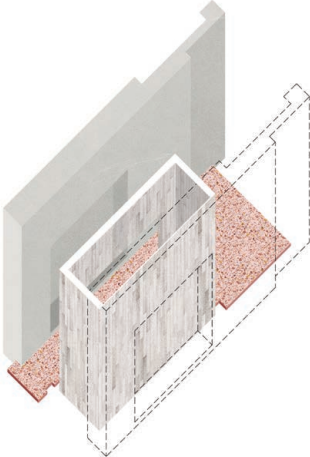
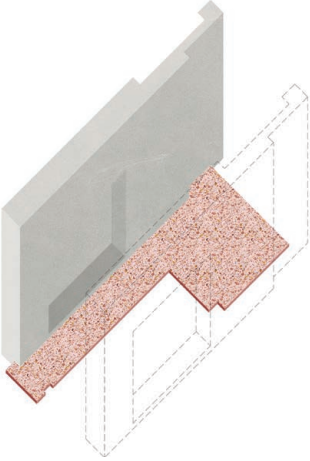
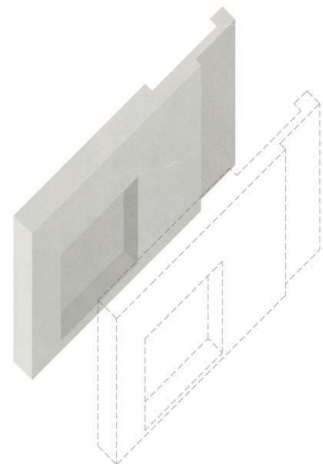
The Sacred wall for the masses

The walls enclosing the chapel, is a double walled system. Where one is able to recognise the outer wall shielding the inner sacred walls of the chapel from its profane surrounding. This elaborates the idea that in order to preserve a sacred entity, it begins to fortify itself more as the profanity of the context increases. This project does not negate the urban context in its entirety but instead chooses to emphasize on areas where the introvert nature of the activity be preserved. The monolithic nature of the chapel places this project on its site. With its large closed elevation, the simplicity of the structure in contrast to the rest of the project establishes its importance.

The skin on the facade respects its heirarchal order and stops short of the chapel's elevation. When approaching the chapel from the interiors, one can see the elevatio peel to showing portions of the inner sacred walls.







Domestic Walls

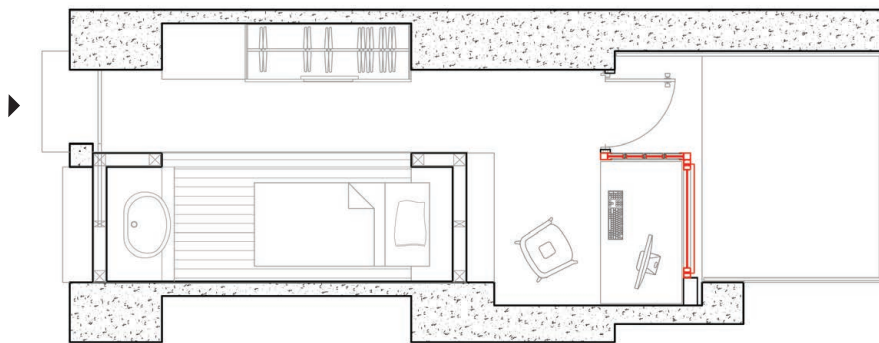
In contrast to the walls of the sacred chamber that would have the tendency of the user to stand far from its dominating presence. The walls dividing the cells to individual units promote otherwise. Structurally as shear walls carved to inhabit various space of individual use, this fosters direct and intimate contact with the surface of the walls.

The walls are smooth form finished concrete structures that facilitate a soft edge through its on site construction.

EXPRESSING THE ENTRANCE

INQUIRY_04

The project has various opportunities in enhancing the experience through arrival, whether it be a permanent user as the monk who follows his rituals, or the temporary user of a visitor who is not governed by rigid conditions of everyday nuptials. However, the corridor that holds both the monk and visitor cells on either its side is used as an example to show how the opportunity could be articulated.



Entrance to the Monk Cells

To understand the articulation of the cell, it was important to first understand the nature of the cell itself. A cell for the monk defines the space where he has the liberties to confine to his independence. Where he recognizes himself as the individual than as a member of the order that the monastery otherwise entails.

The cell really is the start and end destination of his personal space. It was important that though it looked out into the country's capital, it did so via the central court. Thus, establishing the sequence of their relation to the world - I, us and all.

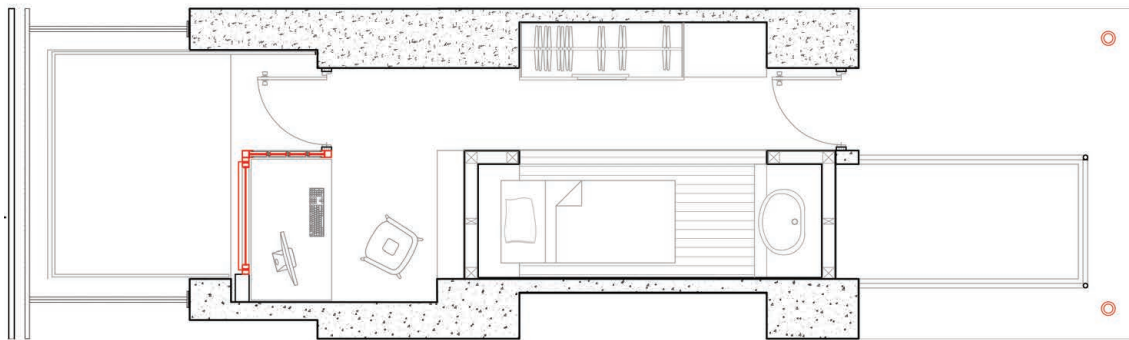
The walls, as shown in the illustration above, begins to morph itself to accommodate the activities it encloses. Opening onto a a personal balcony for open air contemplation.

The entrance is an step elevated from the corridor, where monks open directly onto it. This establishes them as the governing members of the environment of the corridor. A playful floor awaits the opening, leading to the window opening on to the balconies. The spaces do not interrupt this linear view, but lie tucked in.



corridor

Corridor continues the rhythm of the steel structure manifesting the entry into individual cells.



Entrance to the Visitor Cells

In contrast to the monk cells, the visitor cells have an opposing ideology. Here it is clear that one using it belongs to the outside world. Where each cell opens to a direct view of Washington DC. This is to emphasize on its connection, an awareness of the profanity within which the project is located within.

However, the contradiction comes when you experience getting to it. Following the corridors dominated by the cells of the monks, one is reminded of the silence and the presence of the religious order. On approaching its elongated entrance, an extended threshold, awaits the view of the urban context.

The long thresholds leading to its doors, allows it to maintain a tertiary state, giving the user time and space to gather composure before entering the corridors.



corridor

Corridor continues the rhythm of the steel structure manifesting the entry into individual cells.

Conclusion

To conclude, one is able to say that architecture within contradiction is an array of curated thresholds, the idea is to balance it at the level of a large project. In allowing a complexity to dominate the other within specific instances, to deliver a balance within the project.

There is a resolved result where the project is a sequence of tension between desire and restraint. The luxury obtained within the space is that every space faces duality in the order of how it is used and interacted with. The processional ramp from within is a celebrated ritual, whereas to its urban context it is the jewel that glitters in the after hours of the day, for a passing moment. Ritual's contribution to profanity. Unlike performing arts that leaves a product, monasticism is a performance itself. Where its medium is time and space.

All its individual spaces maintain their personal identities, compromising at points of transition. Fortifying walls make way for corridors peeling into the sacred entities.

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