

A Conversation Between Dance and Architecture

Benjamin Maestas III

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

University of Washington

2013

Committee:
Rob Corser
Rob Hutchison

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Architecture

©Copyright 2013
Benjamin Maestas

University of Washington

Abstract

A Conversation Between Dance and Architecture

Benjamin Maestas

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Associate Professor Rob Corser

Architecture

This thesis uses dance as a tool to investigate the alleys of Pioneer Square in Seattle, Washington. This path brings about an architecture that explores a shift of perspective in the attitude of homelessness, shelter and art.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends for their continued support and cheerleading.

I would like to thank Rob Corser and Rob Hutchison for pushing me towards the uncomfortable.

I would like to thank Ben Meersman for being by my side.

Table of Contents

1. My Beliefs

2. The Body | Happenings | Installations

3. An Experiment

4. A Test

5. A Shifted Perspective

Notes

References

I. My Beliefs

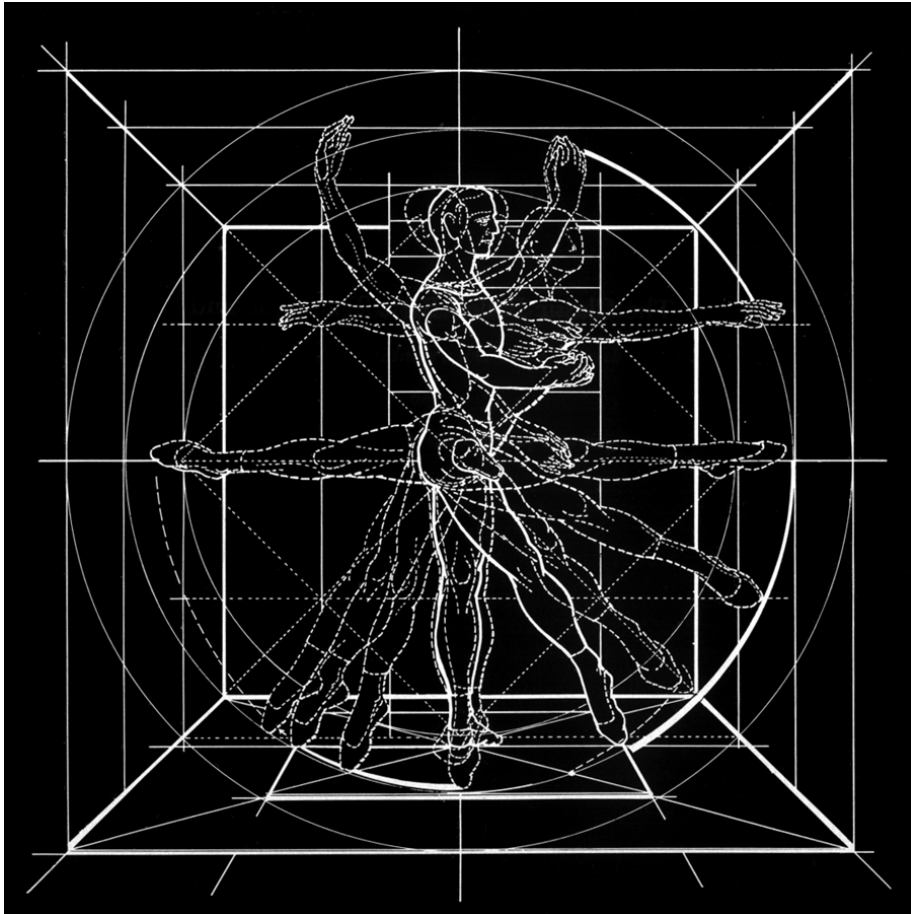


Figure 1.1 The Kinesphere

As a dancer I have always been interested in spatial manipulation and how the body moves through and shapes space. I view the invisible space around and use my body to embrace, compress, push and pull on this space to create forms. I see space as a liquid that can be formed using the body.

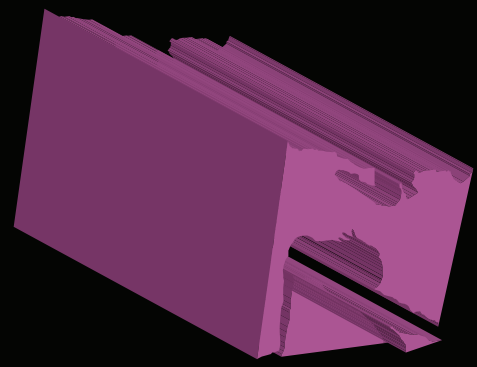
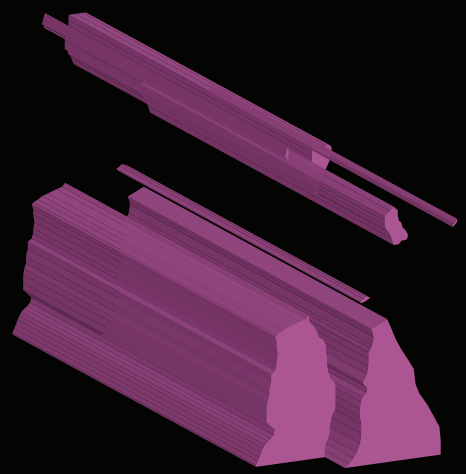
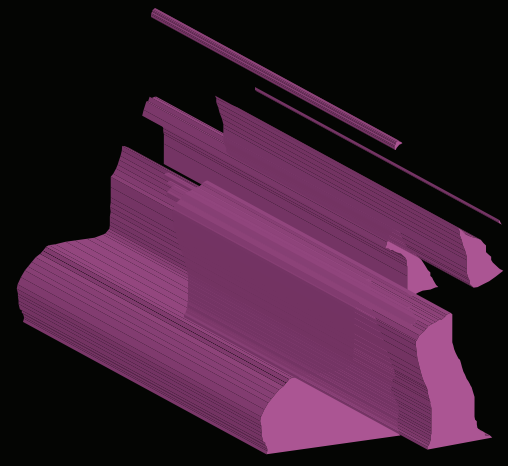
In dance school you are taught about this space as being called the kinesphere. This is the invisible space that a body inhabits and the physical extents of your reach and limbs (Figure 1.1). When a body begins to move you can see this space begin to flow. In Figure 1.2, you can see the physical space around Martha Graham as she twists and turns and begins to move space.

Another way to view this invisible space is looking at what dancers call negative space. This is the space between limbs inside your kinesphere that your body is not occupying. There are choreographic and compositional exercises that dancers and choreographers use to generate choreography. A dancer creates a shape and another dancer fills in that space using another body. These exercises are fundamental in helping shape a dancer's perspective of space. The drawing on the following page, Figure 1.3 was created to help visualize this negative space two dimensionally.



Figure 1.2 Martha Graham





As a dancer I am also interested in dance in the urban environment. Typically when one sees dance it is in a theater setting, often a proscenium stage. The theater frames the dance for the audience creating an environment that allows for the suspension of disbelief. However what I am interested in is when this frame is removed and dance is performed in the city. This allows for the urban spaces to become the backdrop for performances. When dance is viewed in this way it allows to those who dwell in the city to see their environment in new ways.



Figure 1.4 The Theater

Once this occurs the everyday become part of the performance from the cars honking on the streets, to the man waiting in the sunlight at the bus stop, to the pigeons bathing in the puddle in the alley. Your senses become very aware to these situations that would be mundane and ordinary otherwise. "By placing dances in city settings, choreographers and filmmakers open up possibilities for exploring the way in which cities and bodies can mutually define and construct each other" (Briginshaw 56).



Figure 1.5 The City as backdrop

2. The Body | Happenings | Installations

The Body

The body is our physical existence in the world and the vehicle through which we understand our environment, either natural or built. From our perspective the body becomes a central entity within space because it structures our engagement within the world. The human body was viewed as the centre of universal proportion in ancient architecture and used in the dimensioning of columns to rooms sized based on human figures.

Peter Zumthor believes that there are two types of space within architecture, “the closed architectural body which isolates space within itself, and the open body which embraces an area of space that is connected with the endless continuum” (21). This alongside Moore’s bodily view of space shows shared characteristics:

The most fundamental organizing principle in the formation of our body image is that we unconsciously locate our bodies inside a three-dimensional boundary. This boundary surrounds the entire body and demarcates our “inside” personal space from our “outside” extrapersonal space. It is an unstable boundary subject to events both inside and outside the boundary. It may be regarded as an extension of the body in the form of an imaginary envelope which modifies our perception of the forces affecting us by magnifying or suppressing the psychological effect of those forces. If there is a particular body zone which is physically weak or vulnerable (such as the back), the shape and texture of the boundary is modified in respect to that particular zone, often by establishing defensive psychological “barriers”. (37)

Both of these views of space are similar in that they include an external space and an internal space. What is enclosing space is either the body or architecture. The interface between our body and this external space is how we perceive the world and the interface between building and external space is architecture. According to Moore, “at the very beginning of our individual lives we measure and order the world out from our own bodies: the world opens up in front of us and closes behind” (1). The way we view and perceive the world is through our own bodies so why not use our bodies directly to explore architectural space.

What makes dance such a useful tool for architecture is it is an art that is based in spatial manipulation and movement. However very little study has tried to use dance as a theoretical framework for architecture. Why is this? It seems completely natural that these two fields work side by side since both use space as their creative medium and both have an essential link to the human body. Dance uses the body to shape space creating fluid volumes that are constantly manipulated while architecture uses built environment to shape space yet requires movement to explore it.

What makes these two fields have such an interesting relationship is “the conjunction of bodies and spaces...because it is through this interface, through our material bodies being in contact with space, that we perceive the world around us and relations to that world” (Briginshaw 1).



Figure 2.1 A Meeting in an Unlikely Place

Happenings

In the 1960's choreographers began creating works called "happenings". These happenings pushed the boundary of where dance is performed and encouraging the audience to become more aware of ones surroundings, where one lives, where one walks as well as ones own body. These happenings paved the way for later works that focused more on abstracting social stereotypes into the relationship of user to city. As stated by Allan Kaprow, "happenings are events that, put simply, happen. Though the best of them have a decided impact – that is, we feel, 'here is something important'" (Doherty 115).

These events like all dance are time based; they happen in the now. You can always watch them on video but they truly "exist for a single performance, or only a few, and are gone forever as new ones take their place" (Doherty 115). Even though these events happen outside of the theater they "are essentially theater pieces, however unconventional"(115). Artist of the sixties used these avant-garde performances to stretch "audience perception, on a particular urban sensibility and on blurring boundaries, such as outside/inside, private/public and arts/everyday life, paved the way for what was to follow" (Briginshaw 44).

Happenings are important because they possess qualities that set them apart from theater:

first there is the context, the place of conception and enactment. Happenings have been spawned in old lofts, basements, vacant stores, natural surroundings and the street, where very small audiences, or groups of visitors are commingling in some

way with the event, flowing in and among its parts. Thus there is no separation of audience and play(as there is even in round or pit theaters); the elevated picture-window view of most playhouses is gone, as are the expectations of certain openings and tableaux vivants and curtain closings..." (Doherty 115).



Figure 2.2. A happy ending

Installations

A way to converge these two theories of architecture and dance is through site-specific art. Site-specifics is defined by Nick Kaye as “the place or position occupied by some specified thing” (1). He further articulated that “if one accepts the proposition that the meanings of utterances, actions and events are affected by their ‘local position’ by the situation of which they are a part, then a work of art, too, will be defined in relation to its place and position” (1). So by situating art in a place it begins to be articulated and defined through properties and characteristics of its site. This makes site-specific art an important tool to architecture because they both share an intimate relationship with their site. This intimacy is significant because it “can speak to and about that specific space, to [enable one to] ponder its physical and theoretical being-its identity” (Rosenthal 27). By asking the viewer, audience member or client to view space in this way you are asking them “to investigate the work of art much as he or she might explore some phenomenon in life, making one’s way through actual space and time in order to gain knowledge” (Rosenthal 27). Just imagine the possibilities of investigation and expression:

First and foremost, [site-specific work] must be understood and recognized as a medium, however elastic in its material definition, offering the broadest possibilities for investigation and expression. Second, having achieved worldwide reach, this practice may enable art to actually achieve an ambition from universality. Third, because there is no frame separating this art from its viewing context, the work and the space having

melded together into an approximation of a life experience, the sphere of art has effectively been compromised, even democratized. Fourth, that late nineteenth-century German art shibboleth and chimera, the Gesamtkunstwerk, wherein the artist has total command of a space and might use any artistic means, including architecture, music, dance, and theater, along with the visual arts, to create a synthetic environment, has become an everyday occurrence. (Rosenthal 25)

“Choreographers and architects often say that dance and architecture share the same concern, and the shared concern is space; dancing bodies and the architectural built environment manipulate space” (Dance). With this shared view of space architecture can use dance to create new ways to approach spatial questions and use site-specific art to help others understand space. Our bodies enclose our personal space and act as the interface for us to receive the world so why not use our bodies directly to answer spatial questions. Maybe our current approach to practice reduces things too quickly to easily solvable problems. By investigating current architectural practice to see where changes can be made, different questions will start to be asked, or they will be asked in different ways that might produce much richer and more beneficial results.



Figure 2.3

3. An Experiment

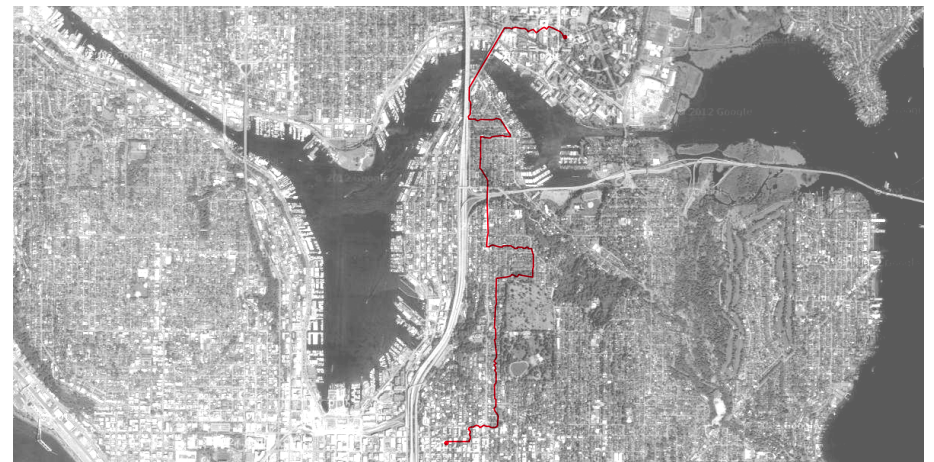
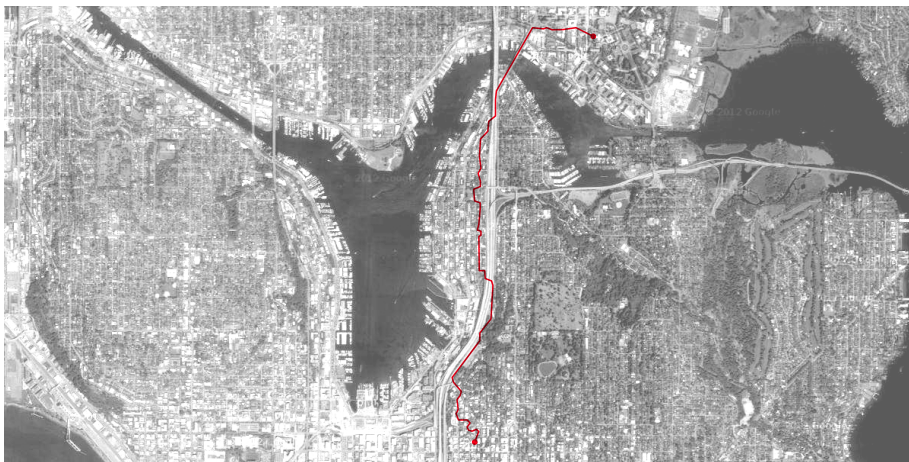
Walking

"In a derive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the derive point of view cities have a psycho-geographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortices which strongly which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones" (Costa 22).

After doing the preceding research on the body, happenings and installations I decided to curate a performance installation. Knowing how important using the body in a site-specific performance could be. Before I could begin working on this I needed a site. So I began walking.



Walking became a movement tool used as initial site analysis. These walks or derives always had a planned beginning and end. Deriving is a technique borrowed from the Situationist International, "whose reflections on art, spontaneity, the city, and the spectacle have insured it a vital, if largely hidden role in art and politics in the last forty years" (Costa 7).

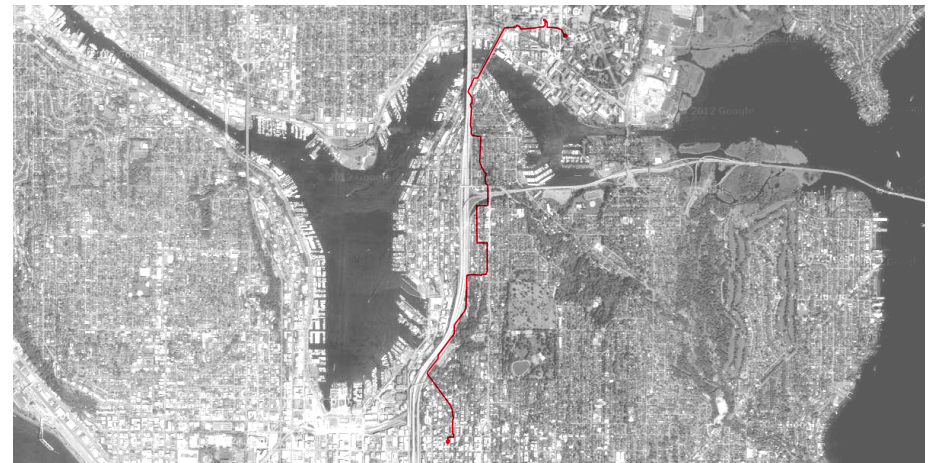
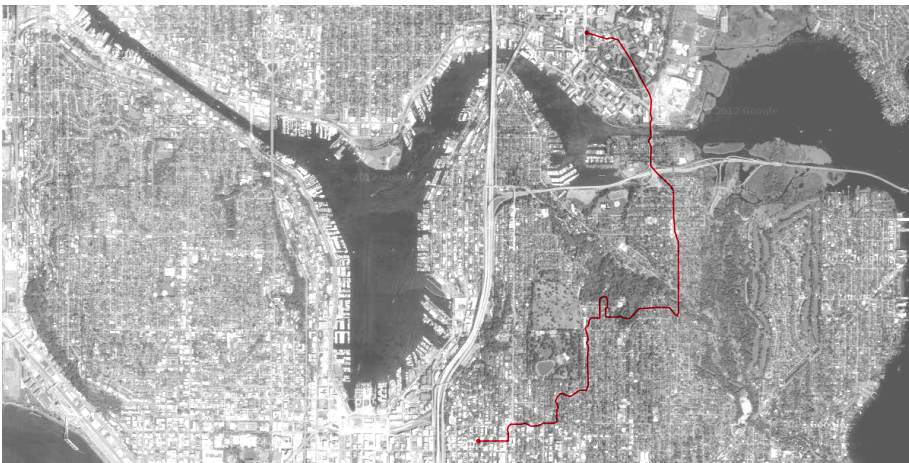




The origin for these walks was always my home. The destination for the walks you see below was the University of Washington. Once these parameters were set I allowed myself to meander off my path. I let points of interest pull me of course and took note of what these interest were.

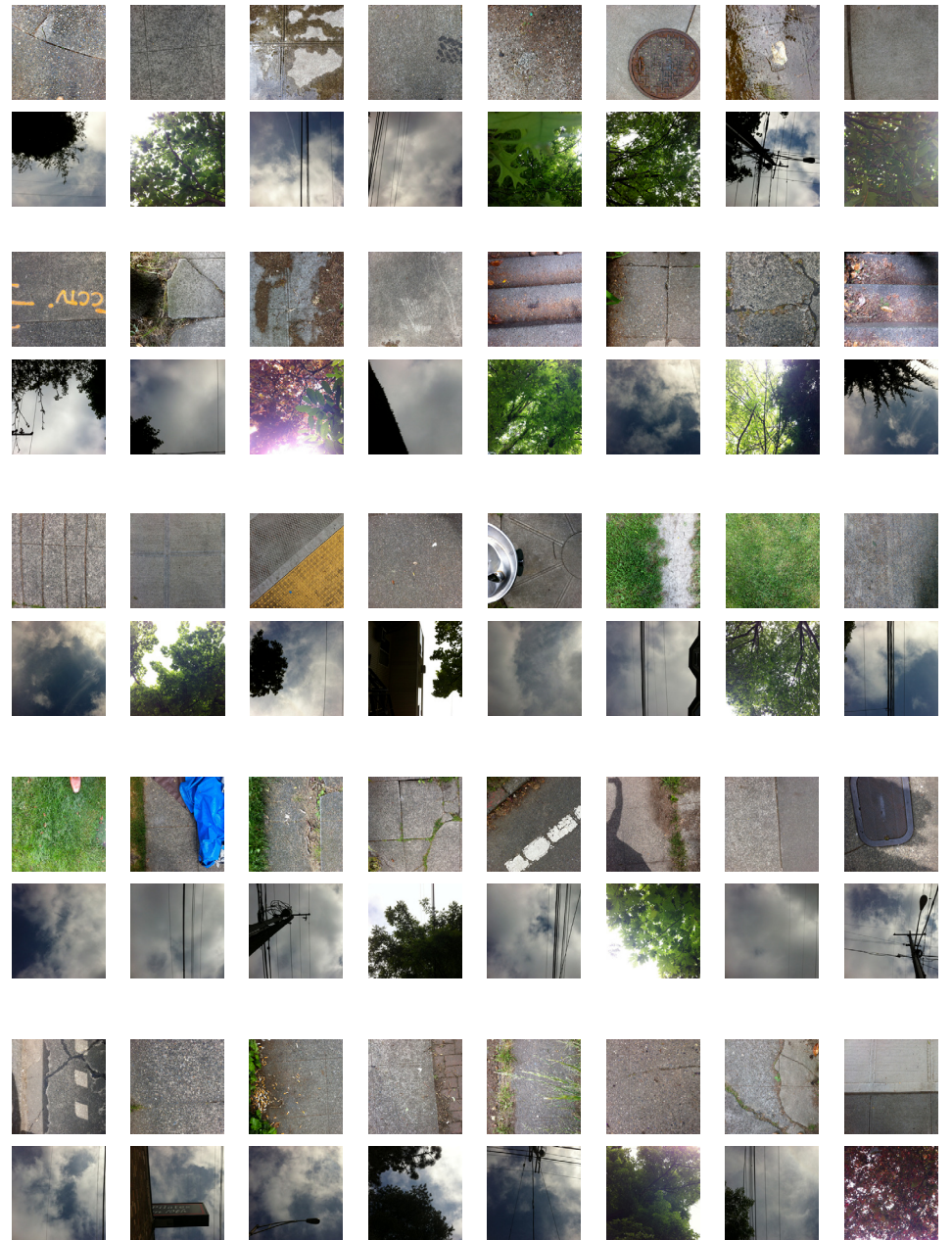


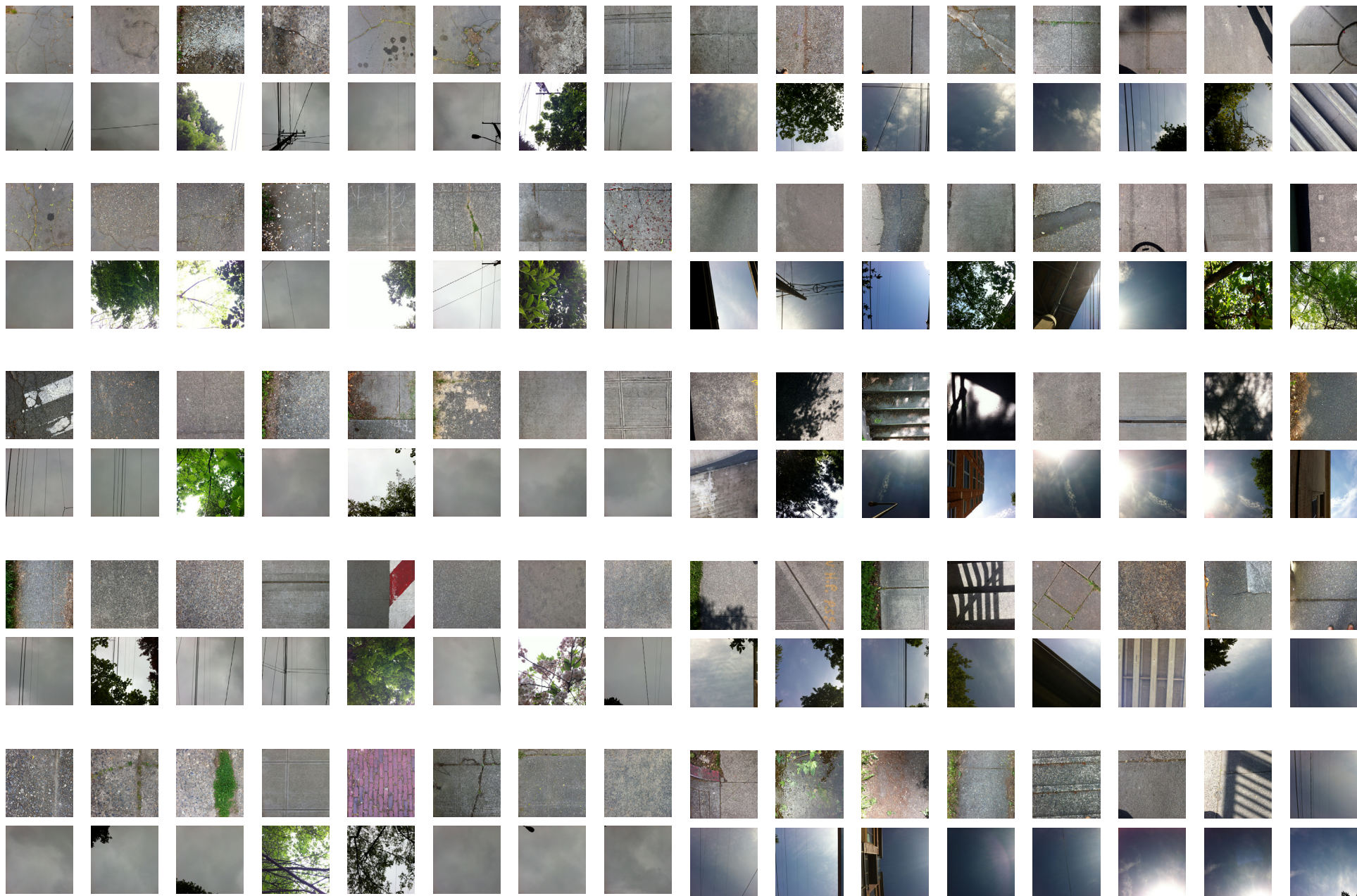
I noticed a pattern of walking through alleys. So I made these walks follow the alleys of Seattle.

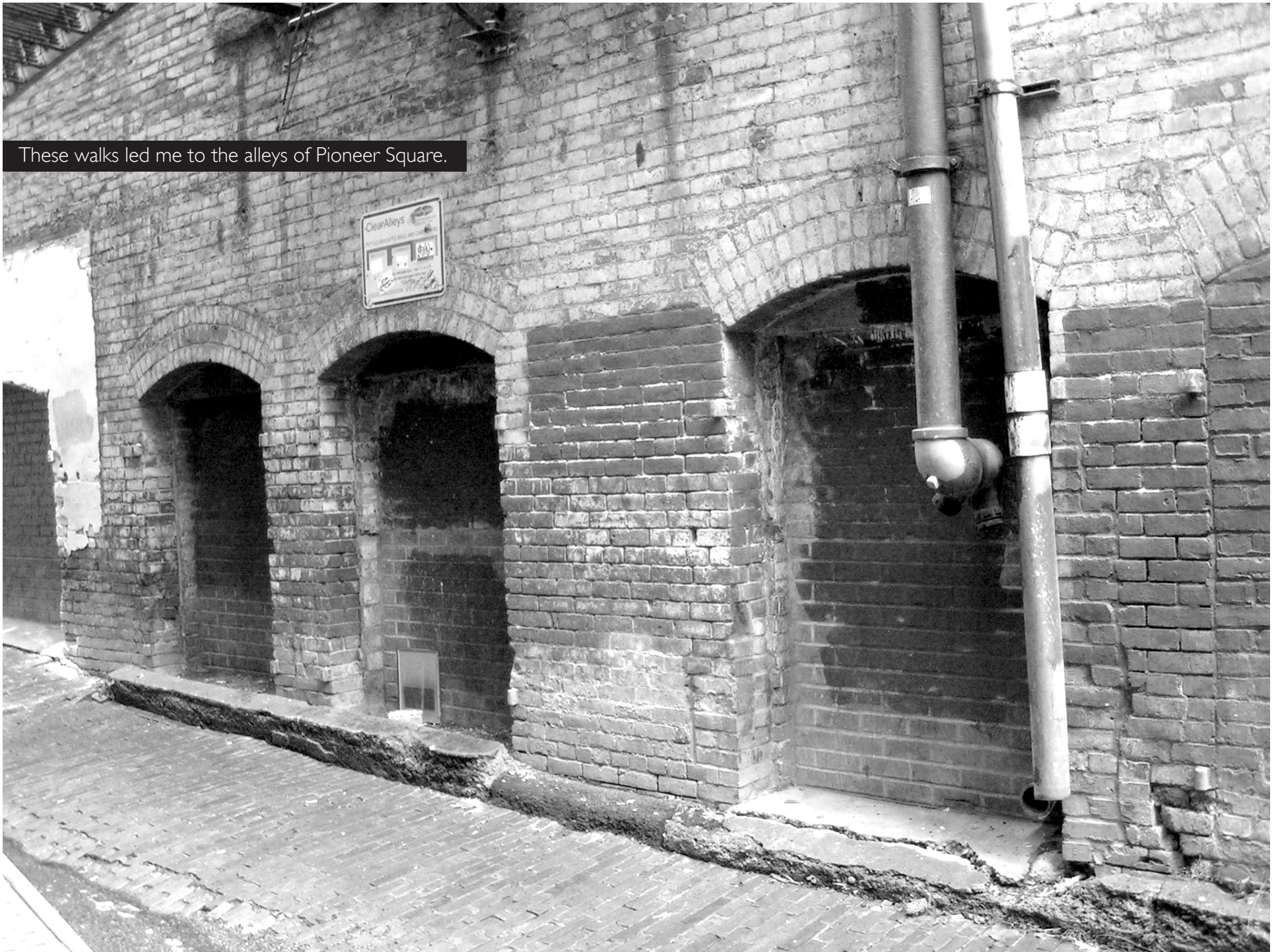


Data

Images from my walks.
Ground and Sky.







These walks led me to the alleys of Pioneer Square.







Nord Alley, Seattle Washington

The site chosen for the dance performance.



Figure 3.1 Nord Alley Porosity at Ground Level



Figure 3.2 Nord Alley Residence



Figure 3.3 Nord Alley Bike Shop



Figure 3.4 Nord Alley Lighting

A Meeting in an Unlikely Place

<https://vimeo.com/75028152>

The performance, which can be viewed at the link above, was performed in Nord Alley as part of Pioneer Square's First Thursday Art Walk. The performers included myself, Ezra Dickenson and musician Zeke Keeble. This performance explored the alleys of Pioneer Square using dance, music and a sculpture which I designed and built. This work began to take on characteristics of homelessness. I believe this was natural evolution. We rehearsed weekly in the alley to develop concept and choreography. This time intensive site-research allowed the process to become permeable to the influences of the site. Often we rehearsed amidst homeless individuals asking what we were doing and at times showing us their dance moves. We performed 4 separate performances on August 1, 2013.

Most importantly, what I took from this performance were the reactions from the audience. I took note of words that individuals used to describe the performance: dignity, beauty, power, resilience, strength, pride, survival, and support. This was so surprising to me because clearly these are not words that are typically associated with homelessness. I saw this work as clearly changing the perspective that individuals had on the homeless. This raised the question: if a dance can change peoples perception on the homeless, how can architecture?

This dance gave me a site within Pioneer Square, it showed me a demographic-the homeless population, and a program of shelter. How can architecture give a fresh perspective towards the notions of shelter and homelessness through the lens of art?



Figure 3.5 Homeless through the lens of art.

A MEETING IN AN UNLIKELY PLACE

AN INSTALLATION BY BENJAMIN MAESTAS

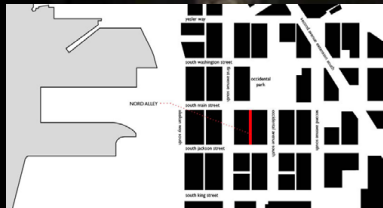
EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF
DANCE AND ARCHITECTURE

NORD ALLEY

FIRST THURSDAY ART WALK

AUGUST 1, 2013

5:30-8:30



HOSTED BY
THE ALLEY NETWORK PROJECT
THE INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE

PARTIALLY FUNDED BY
Seattle Office of
ARTS &
CULTURAL AFFAIRS

IMAGE TAKEN BY DOUG ARNEY

Figure 3.6 A Meeting in an Unlikely Place Promo

DIGNITY | BEAUTY | POWER | RESILIENCE | STRENGTH | PRIDE | SURVIVAL | SUPPORT



Figure 3.7 A Meeting in an Unlikely Place

DIGNITY | BEAUTY | POWER | RESILIENCE | STRENGTH | PRIDE | SURVIVAL | SUPPORT



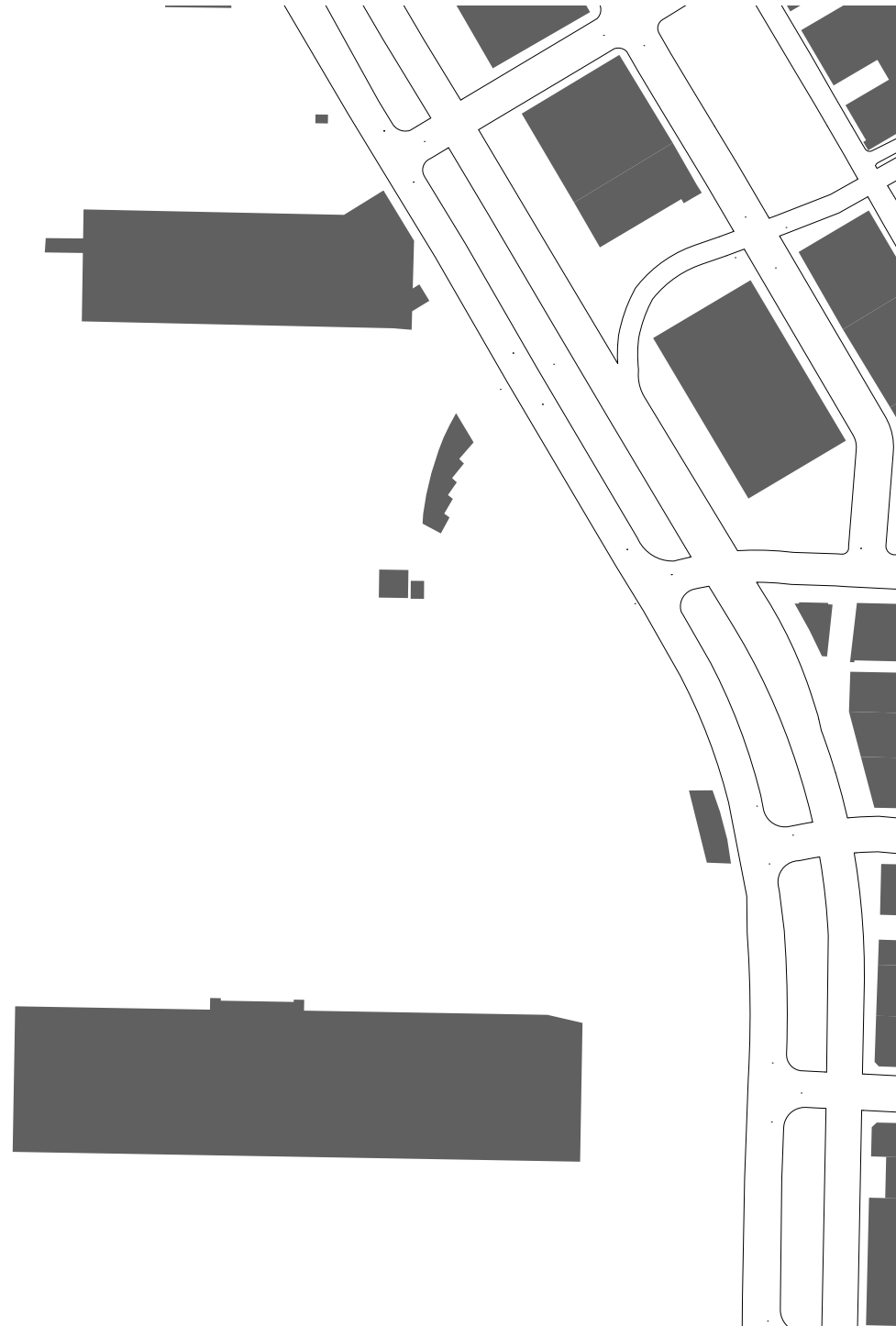
Figure 3.8 A Meeting in an Unlikely Place

DIGNITY | BEAUTY | POWER | RESILIENCE | STRENGTH | PRIDE | SURVIVAL | SUPPORT



Figure 3.9 A Meeting in an Unlikely Place

4. A Test





Pioneer Passage



Pioneer Passage is an alley just two blocks north of Nord Alley with similar parameters, that I chose to test the experiment. It had a node in the center of the alley that could become a point to bring people in, and it had residence that face the alley. What it needed was place that brought people down the alley. I choose the site that Med Mix Restaurant inhabits because it is located on this node in the center of Pioneer Passage.

Using this lot to create a space that gives shelter for those who are in need of it yet unlike a typical homeless shelter allowing for this space to feel very public. This was a challenge to develop a space where one can feel secluded and private at the same time being public.

The primary programmatic functions here are a transitional shelter and gallery space. The two work in tandem as a type of Fare Start Program for the Arts. This allows for those staying in the shelter to work in the arts either artistically or administratively. The shelter allows for the basic uses of sleeping, sitting, cooking, and socializing, while the gallery space provides public viewing of art created by those taking part in the program and their instructors.

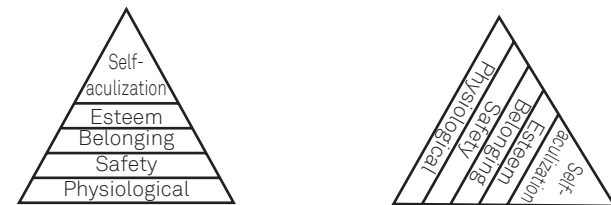


Figure 4.1 What if Mazlow's heirarchy of needs was flipped on it's side?



Figure 4.2 Pioneer Passage

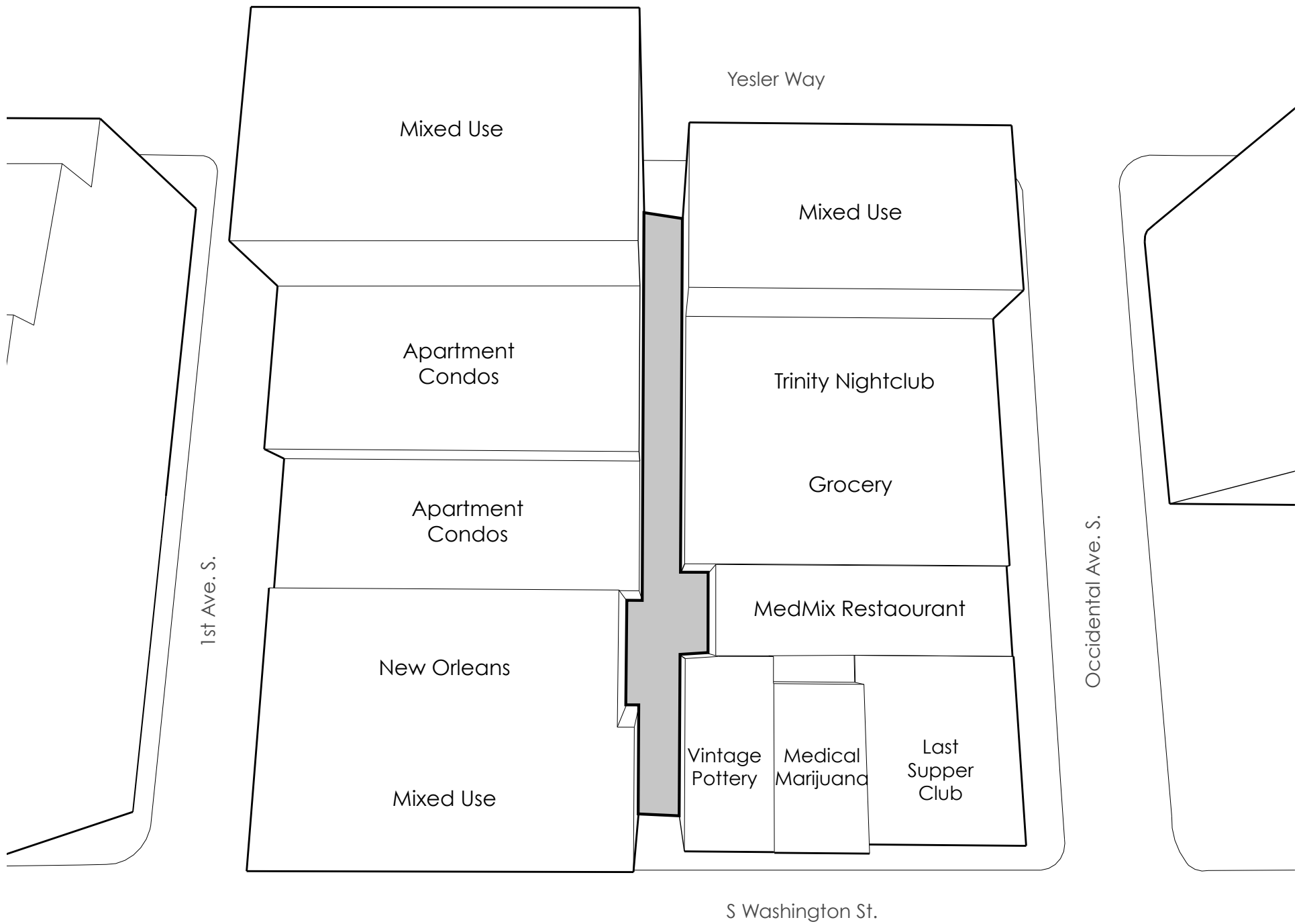
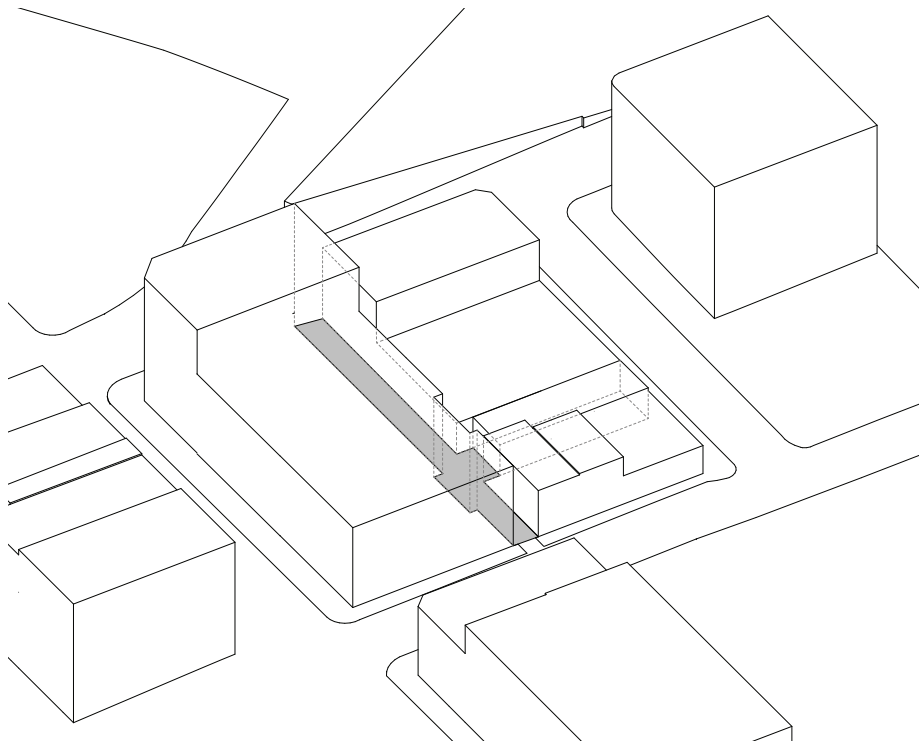


Figure 4.3 Adjacent Building Uses

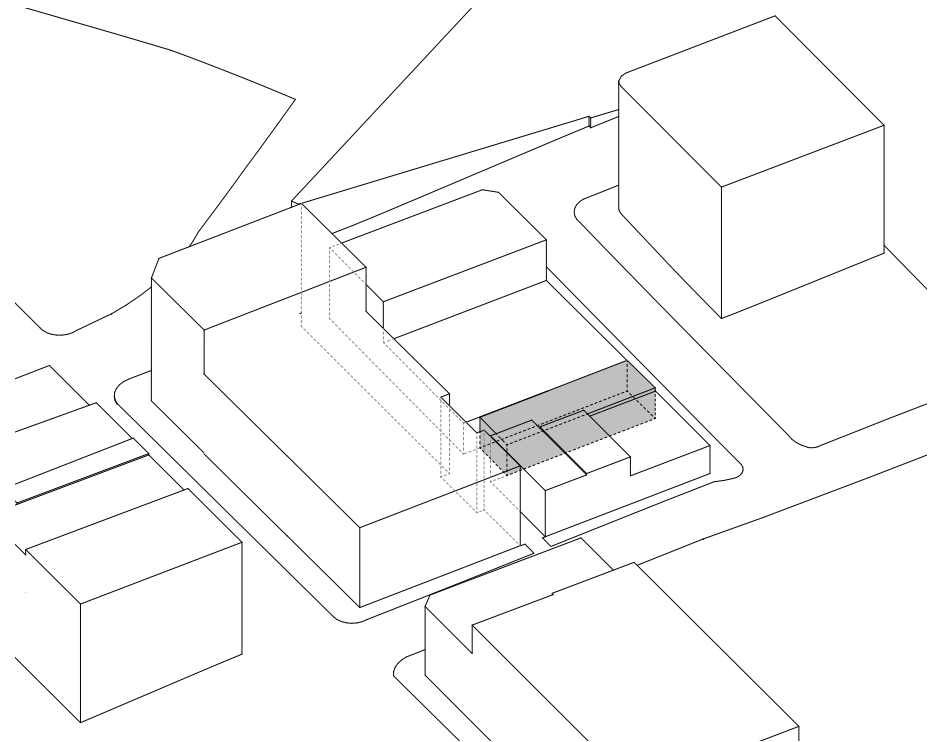


Figure 4.4 Med Mix Elevation

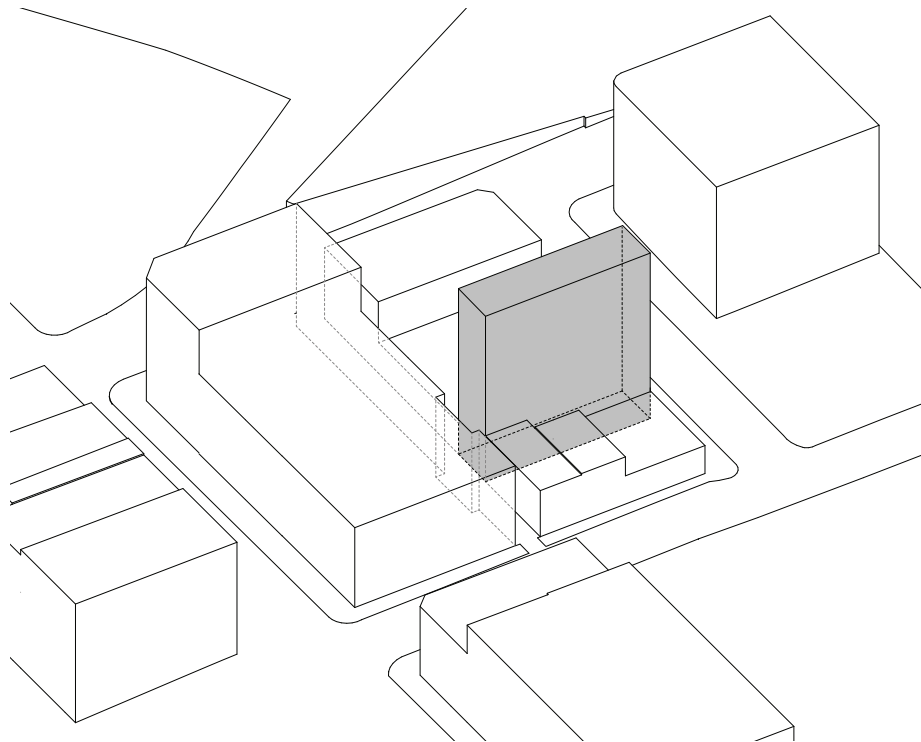
Starting with Pioneer Passage as initial site.



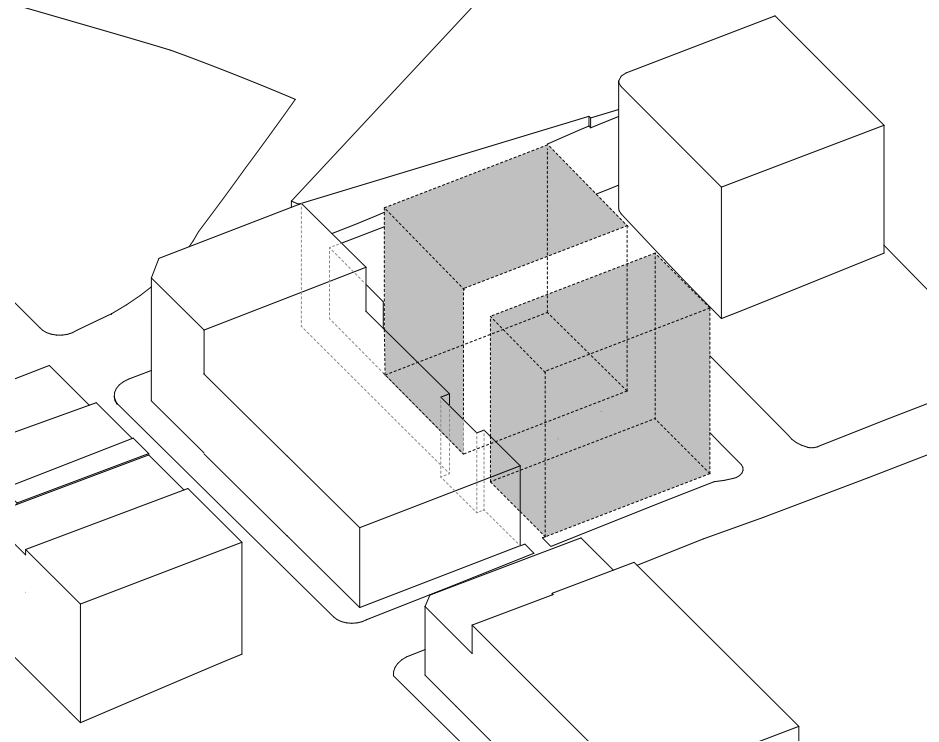
Looking at the lot that Med Mix inhabits. 30' x 110'.

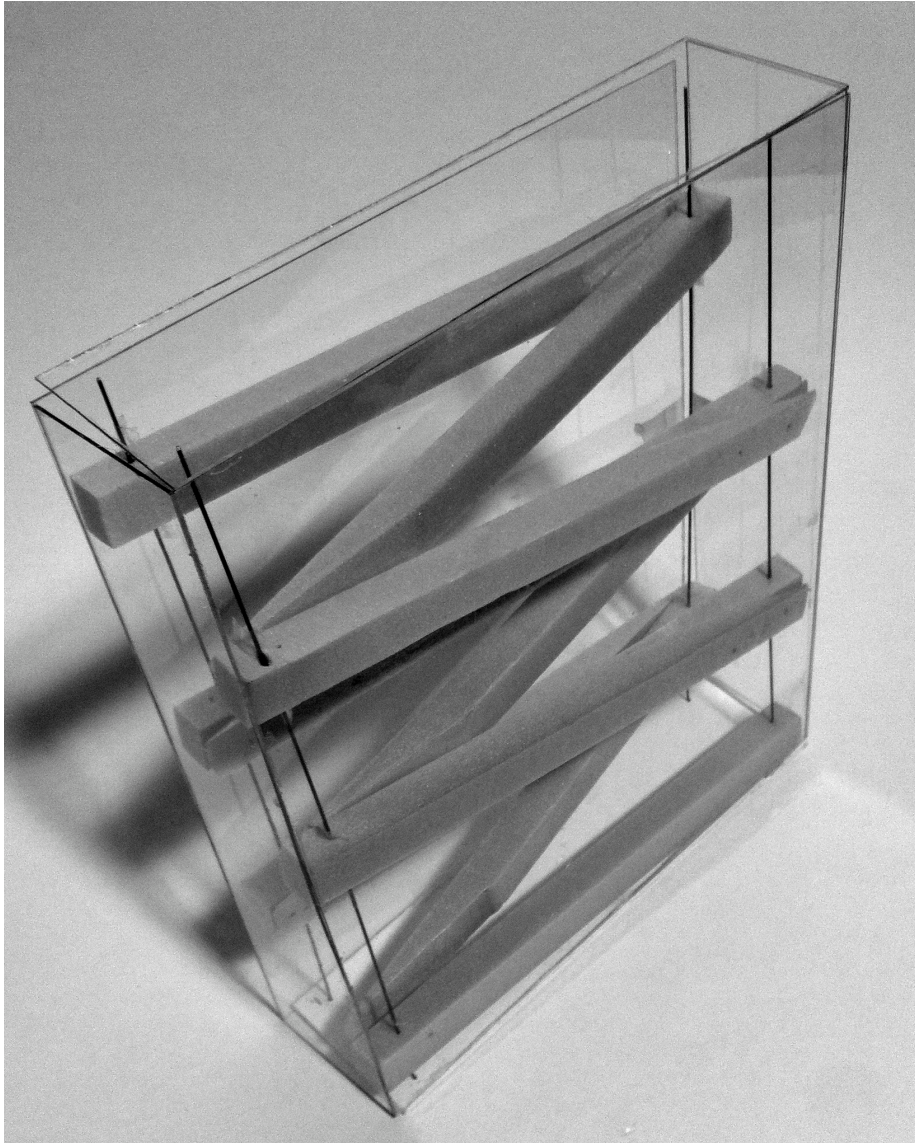


This lot is zoned for a maximum height of 120'.



Designing for the inevitable, when the adjacencies build to their maximum heights.



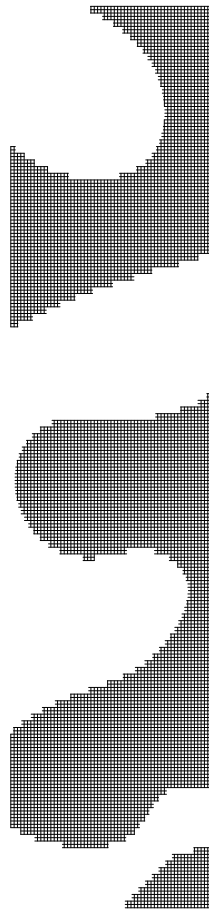


Diagrams

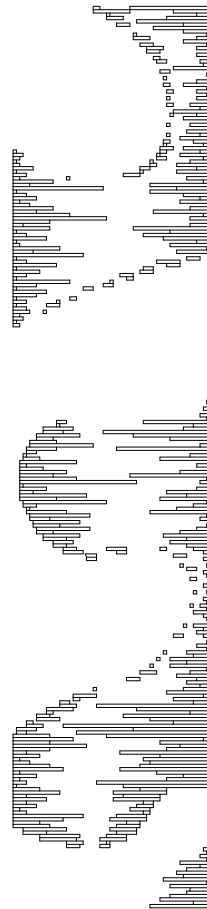
Starting with a solid.



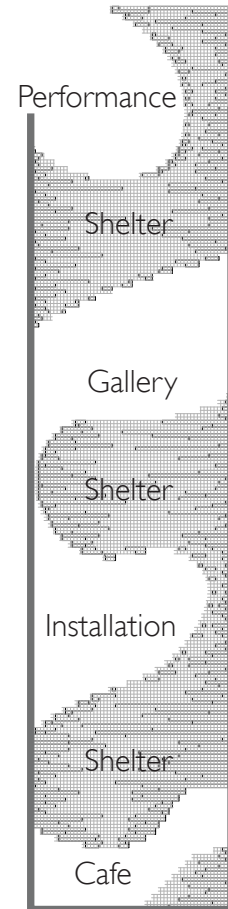
Solid | Void



Carving at void to create habitable space.



Space for shelter and art.



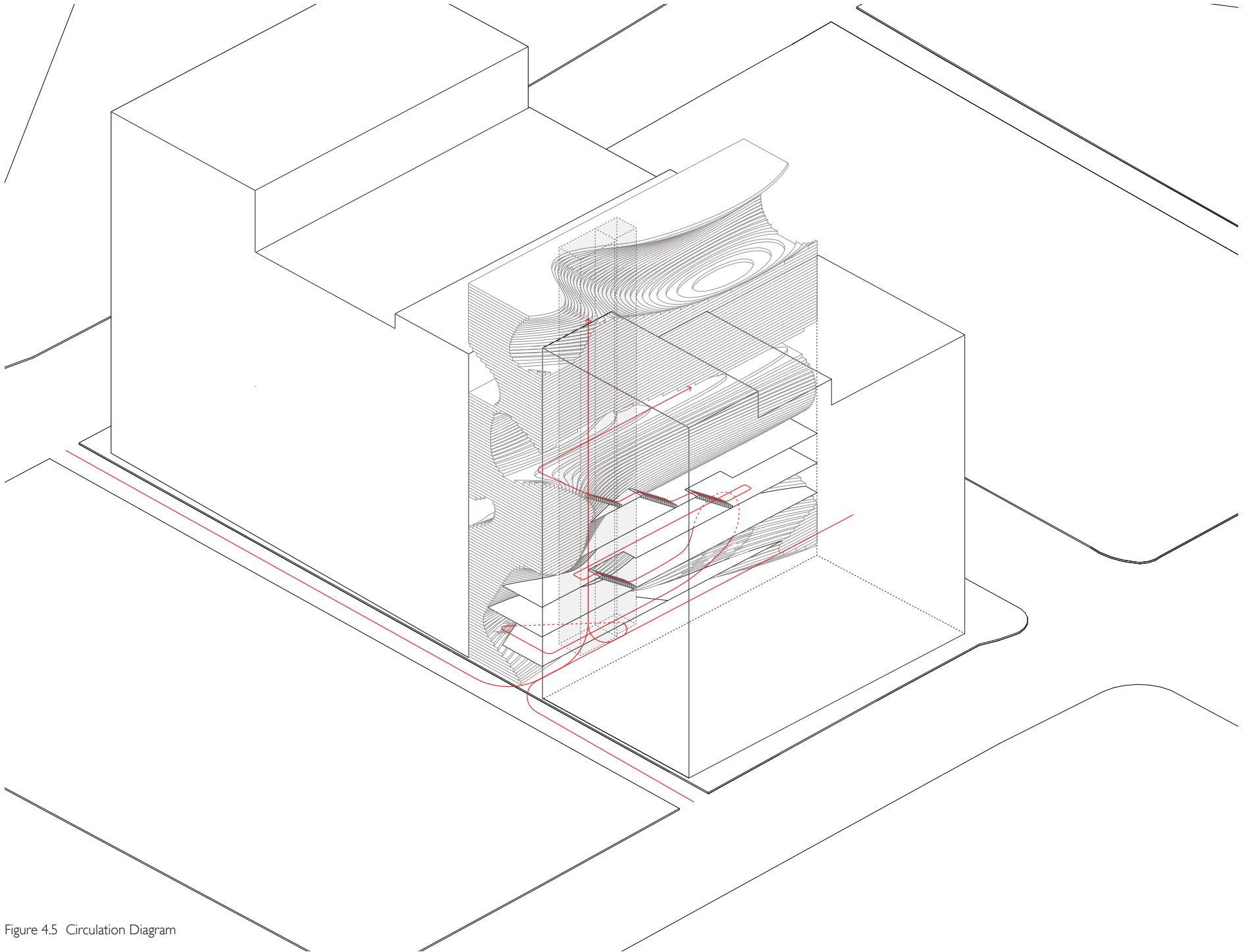


Figure 4.5 Circulation Diagram

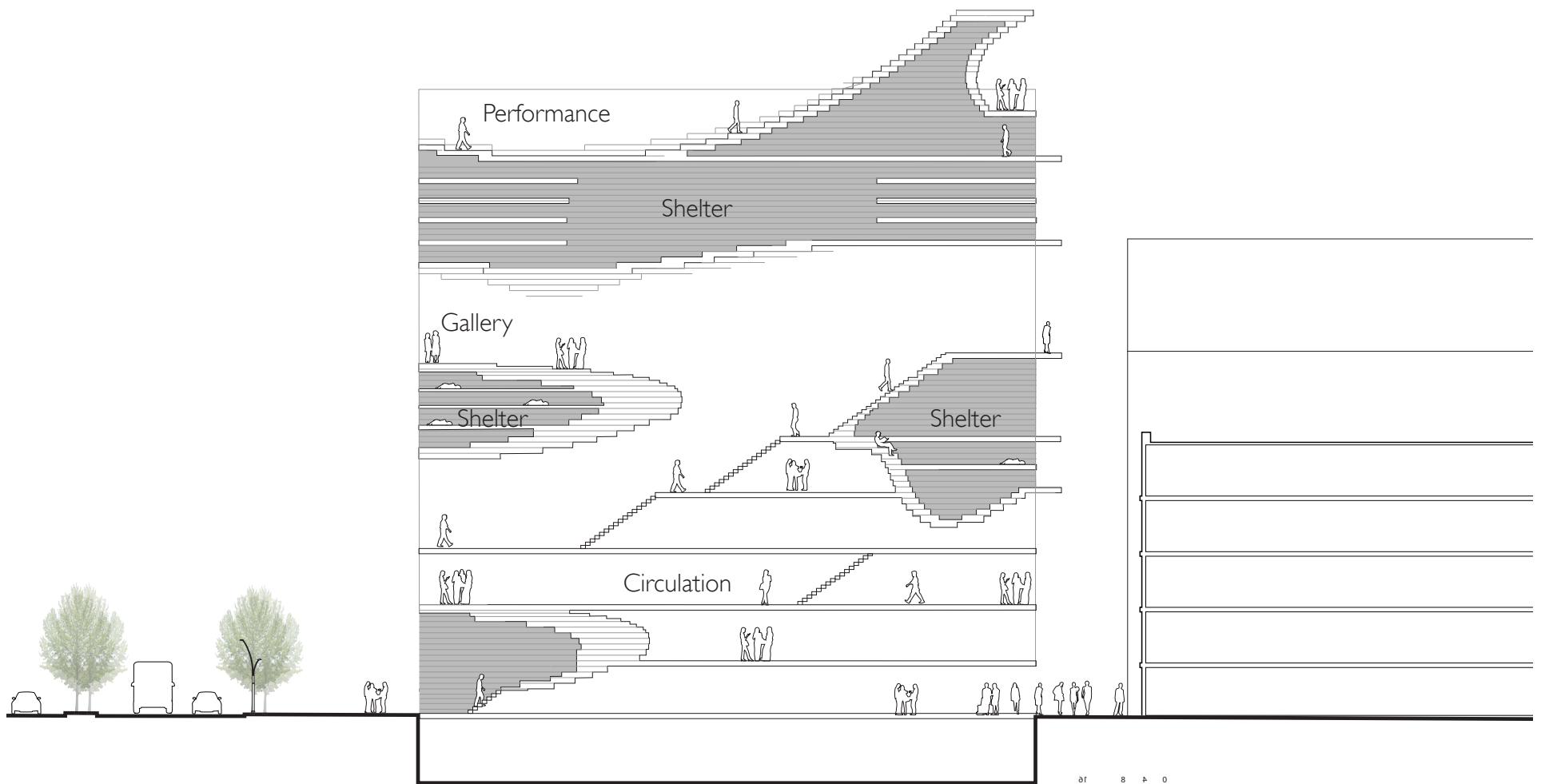


Figure 4.6 Longitudinal Section



Figure 4.8 Alley Building Entrance

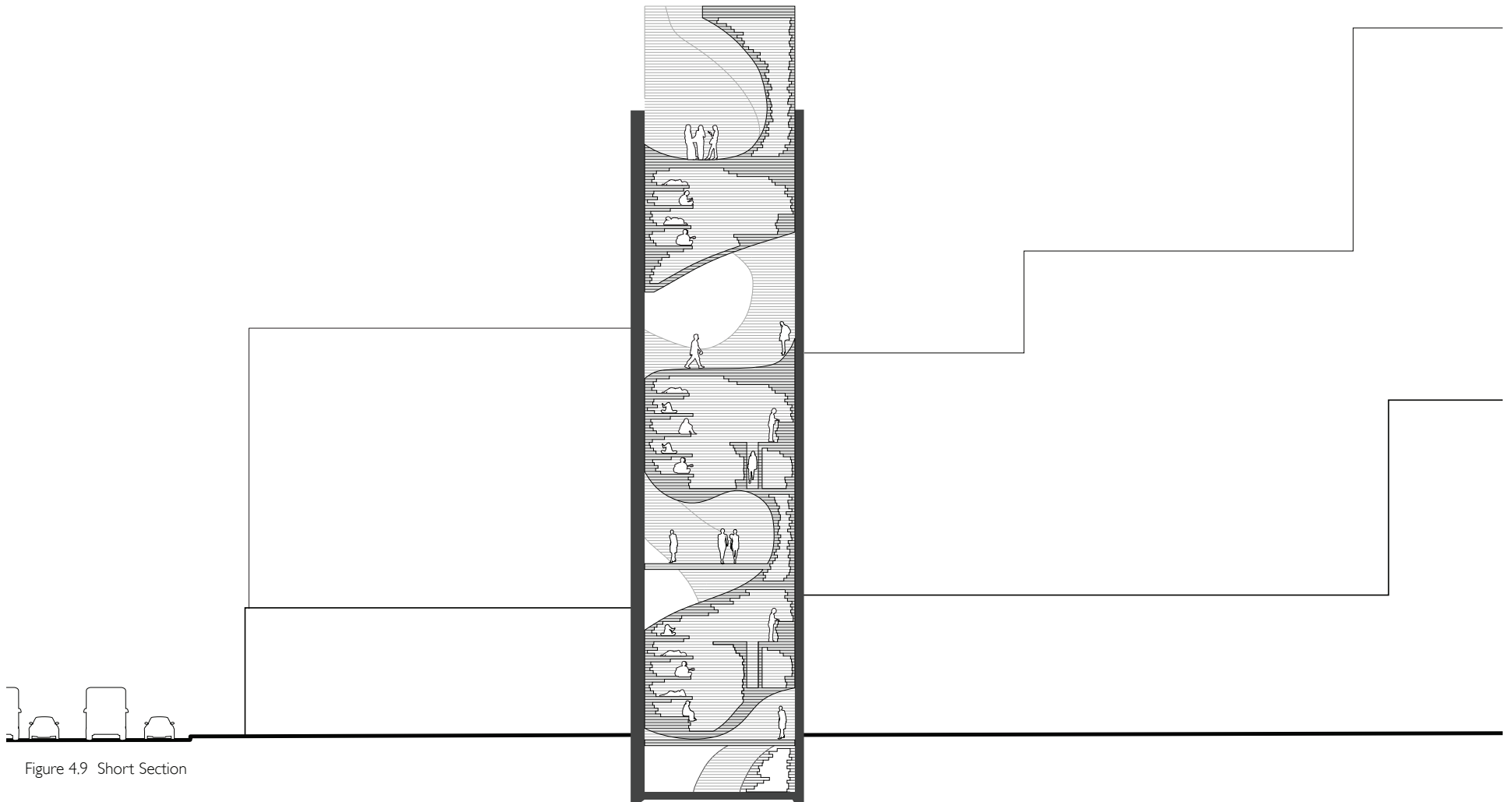


Figure 4.9 Short Section

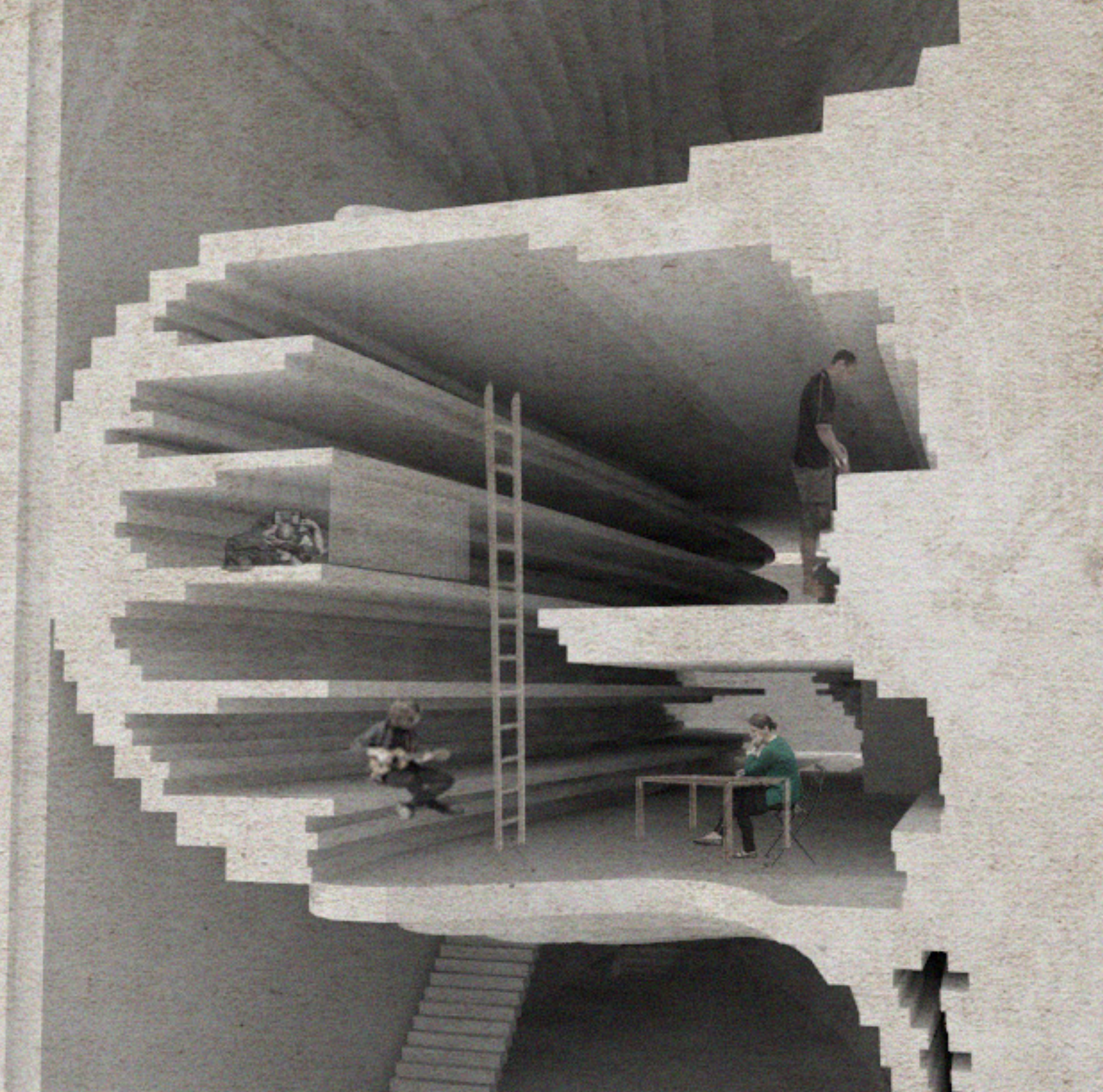


Figure 4.10 View of Habitable Spaces

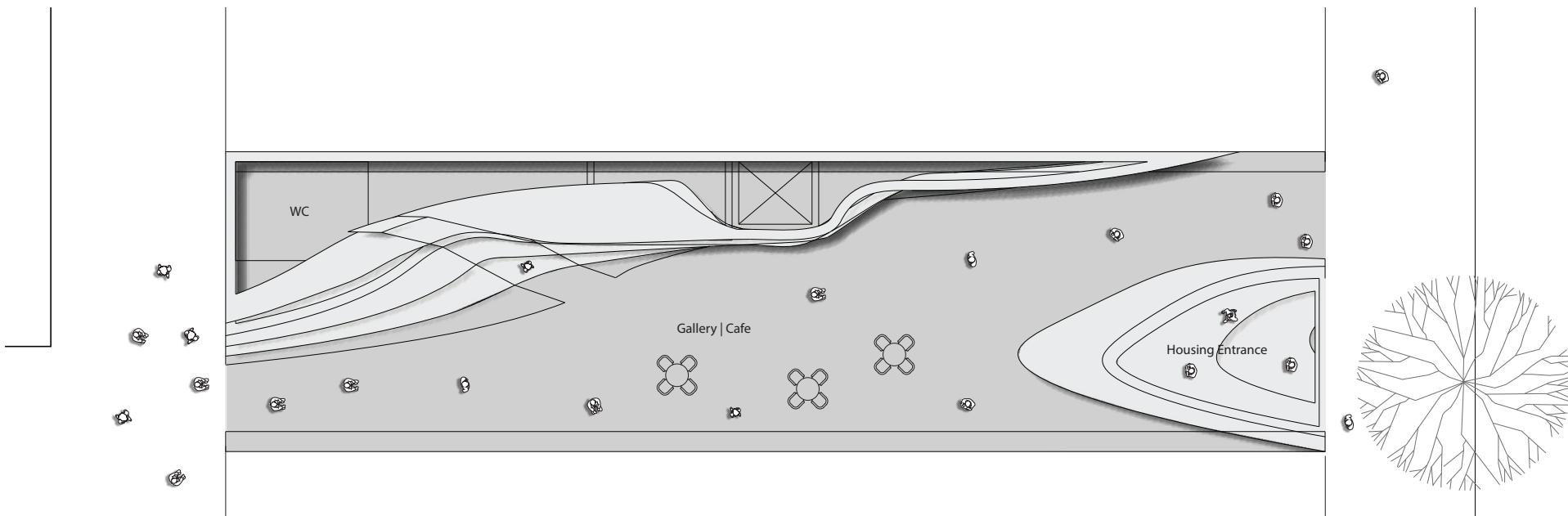
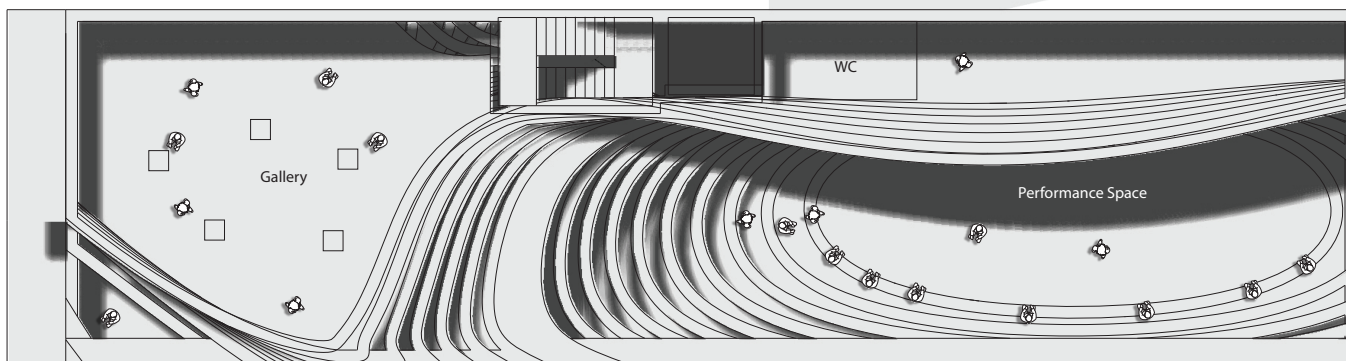


Figure 4.11 Ground & Top Floor Plans



Figure 4.12 Street View of Facade

5. A Shifted Perspective

My approach to this project was not to solve world problems or to show I have a solution to dealing with them. More simply I wanted to show that there are alternative paths that generate alternative results. This path in particular showed an architecture that is constantly changing and moving in every direction creating a variety of spaces that other processes would not have produced. Perhaps this approach can give the homeless community a sense of space that allows one to feel beauty, strength, support, and dignity in conjunction with the support of the community that is also coming to this space to view art.

If a dance can transform an audience's views of the homeless, than I believe architecture can as well. By using site-specific dance people can use their bodies in new situations, acting as a catalyst which can play an important role in pulling people out of their stereotypes.

I began this process with no preconceived notions of where I wanted to conclude. I wanted to find a way of joining my past with my future. I have concluded that this process is not right for every project but these experiments are valuable tools for myself in exploring space as well as for audiences seeing the world in new ways.



Figure 5.1 View of Performance Space



Works Cited

- Biron, Rebecca E., ed. *City/Art The Urban Scene in Latin America*. London: Duke University Press, 2009. Print.
- Briginshaw, Valerie A. *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. Print.
- Burgin, Victor. In *Different Spaces*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Print.
- Cohen-Cruz, Jan, ed. *Radical Street Performance*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Costa, Libero Andreotti and Xavier, ed. *Theory of the Derive and other Situationist Writings on the City*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporano de Barcelona, 1996. Print.
- Dance-Space-Architecture. 2007. Web. <http://humanitieslab.stanford.edu/49/75>.
- Doherty, Clair, ed. *Situation*. London: the MIT Press, 2009. Print
- Fernie, Jes, ed. *Two Minds Artists and Architects in Collaboration*. London: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2006. Print.
- Grynsztejn, Madeleine, ed. *Take your Time Olafur Eliasson*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007. Print.
- Jodidio, Philip. *Architecture:Art*. Munich: Prestel, 2005. Print.
- Kaye, Nick. *Site-Specific Art Performance, Place, and Documentation*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Moore, Kent C. *Bloomer and Charles W. Body, Memory, and Architecture*. London: Yale University Press, 1977. Print.
- Rosenthal, Mark. *Understanding Installation Art*. Munich: Prestel Publishing Ltd., 2003. Print.
- Zumthor, Peter. *Thinking Architecture*. Basel: Birkhouser-Publishers for Architecture, 2010. Print.

Image References

All images created by author unless noted.

1. My Beliefs

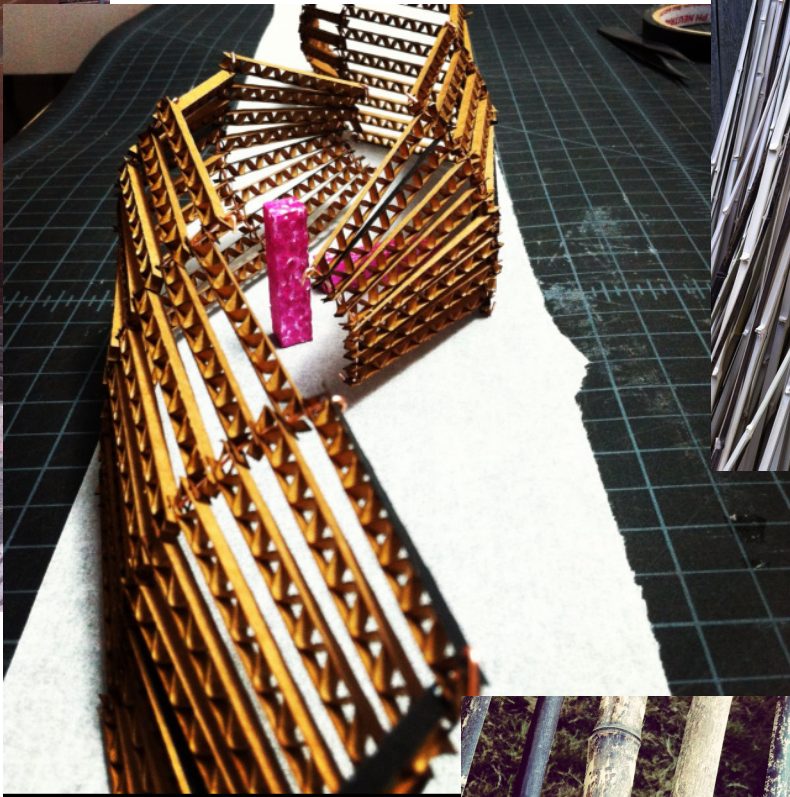
- 1.1 *Unknown*. <http://openendedgroup.com/images/kinesphere.jpg>. Web. 10 Nov. 2013.
- 1.2 Morgan, Barbara. *Martha Graham: Letter to the World*. 1940. http://lifeyostaticfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/static/user_files/74393/images/upload_269884/full/74393-90668-269884.jpg. Web. 1 Dec. 2013.
- 1.3 *Unknown*. http://www.cotidianul.ro/images/meredith_webster_si_corey-scott_gilbert.jpg. Web. 10 Oct. 2013
- 1.3 *Unknown*. <http://balletthebestphotographs.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/meredith-webster-and-corey-scott-gilbert-in-scheherazade-alonzo-king-lines-ballet-photo-rj-muna-2.jpg>. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.
- 1.3 *Unknown*. http://www.ballet.co.uk/images/lines_ballet/ms_long_river_high_sky_shi_yanguo_corey_scott-gilbert_double_image_500.jpg. Web. 10, Oct. 2013.
- 1.4 Sugimoto, Hiroshi. *Theaters*. 1978-93. <http://aaastern.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/c.jpg>. Web. 26, Oct. 2013.

2. The Body | Happenings | Installations

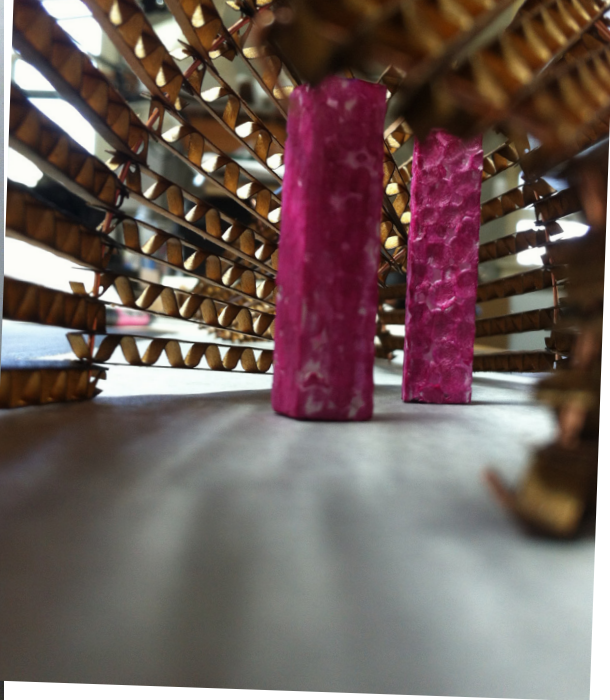
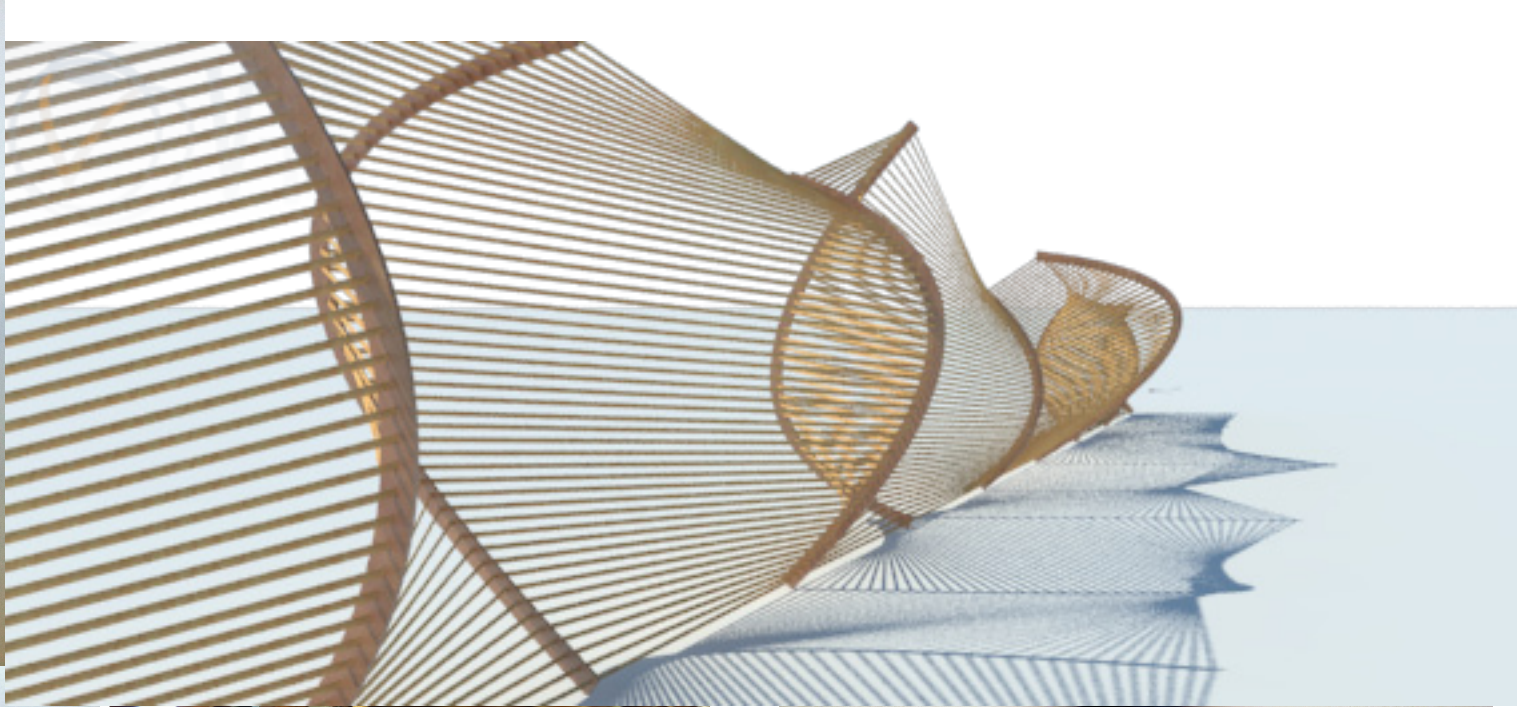
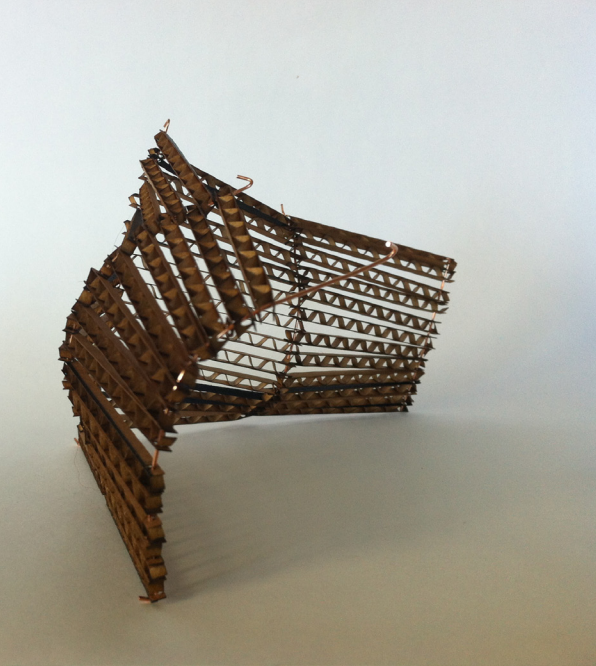
- 2.1 Reinitz, Mitch. *APS_Color_Large (20 of 125).jpg*. 1, Aug. 2013. Seattle, WA.
- 2.2 Goldberg, Sol. *Household*. 1964. <http://pervasivegames.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/happening12b.jpg>. Web. 9, Dec. 2013.
- 2.3 *Unknown*. http://www.blueverticalstudio.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/hans_hemmert_06.jpg. Web. 26, Feb. 2013.

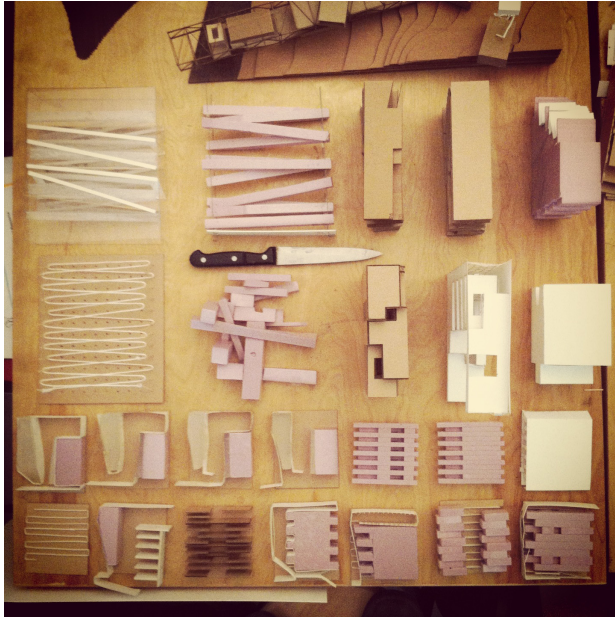
3. An Experiment

- 3.4 *Unknown*. http://alleynetworkproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/MG_4272_KQuaas_03012012.jpg. Web. 10, Oct. 2013.
- 3.5 Doran, Kelly. *Untitled*. Print. 1, Aug. 2013.
- 3.6 Arney, Doug. *Untitled*. Video Still. 1, Aug. 2013.
- 3.7 Reinitz, Mitch. *APS_Color_Large (14 of 125).jpg*. 1, Aug. 2013. Seattle, WA.
- 3.8 Reinitz, Mitch. *APS_Color_Large (27 of 125).jpg*. 1, Aug. 2013. Seattle, WA.
- 3.9 Reinitz, Mitch. *APS_Color_Large (33 of 125).jpg*. 1, Aug. 2013. Seattle, WA.

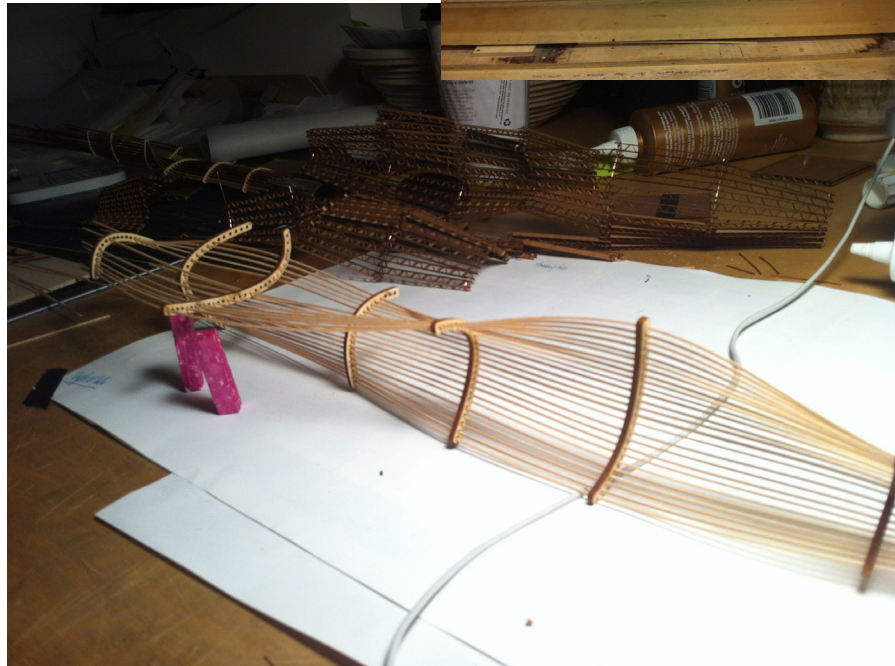


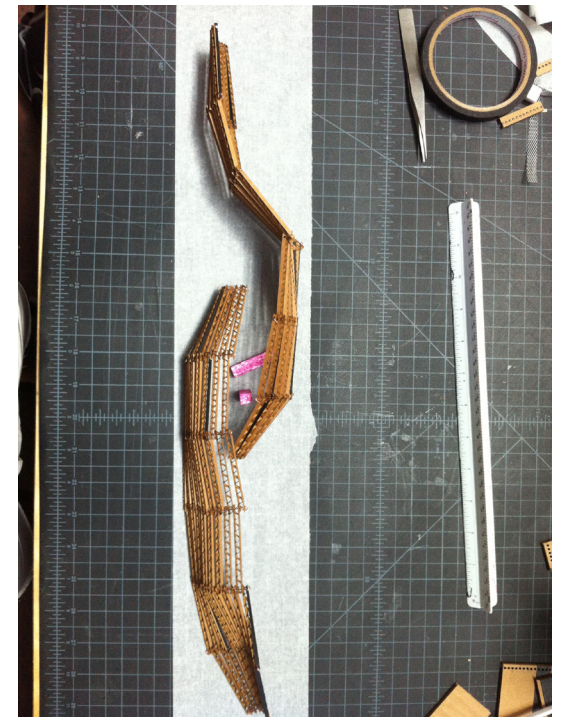
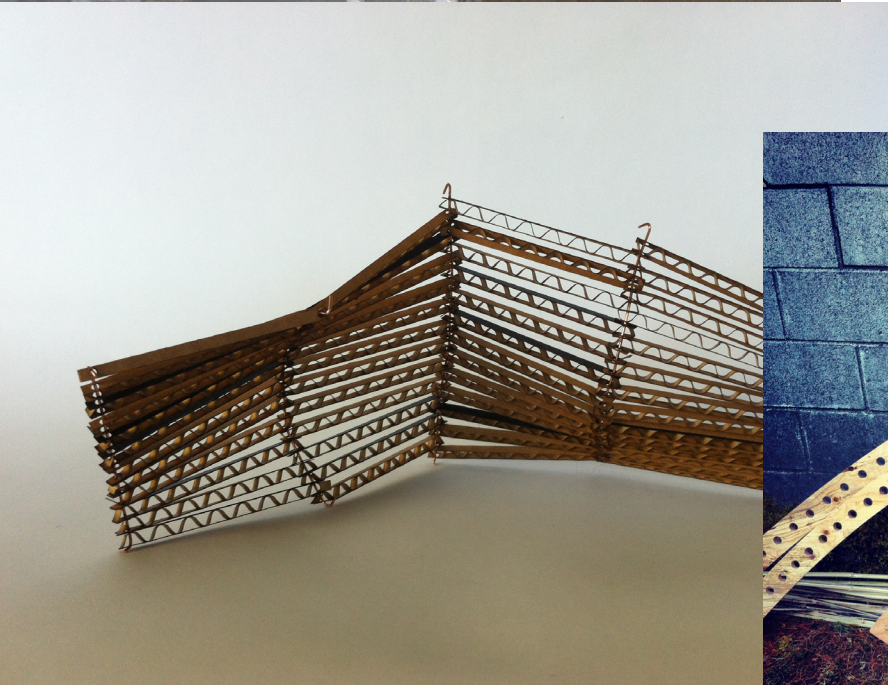
Process Images





Process Images





Process Images

