

See(k)ing Phantoms

An Architectural Enquiry

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A thesis submitted to

the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture (M.Arch. Professional)

Azieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-71540-6
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-71540-6

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“It is in the admission of ignorance and the admission of uncertainty that there is a hope for the continuous motion of human beings in some direction that doesn't get confined, permanently blocked...”

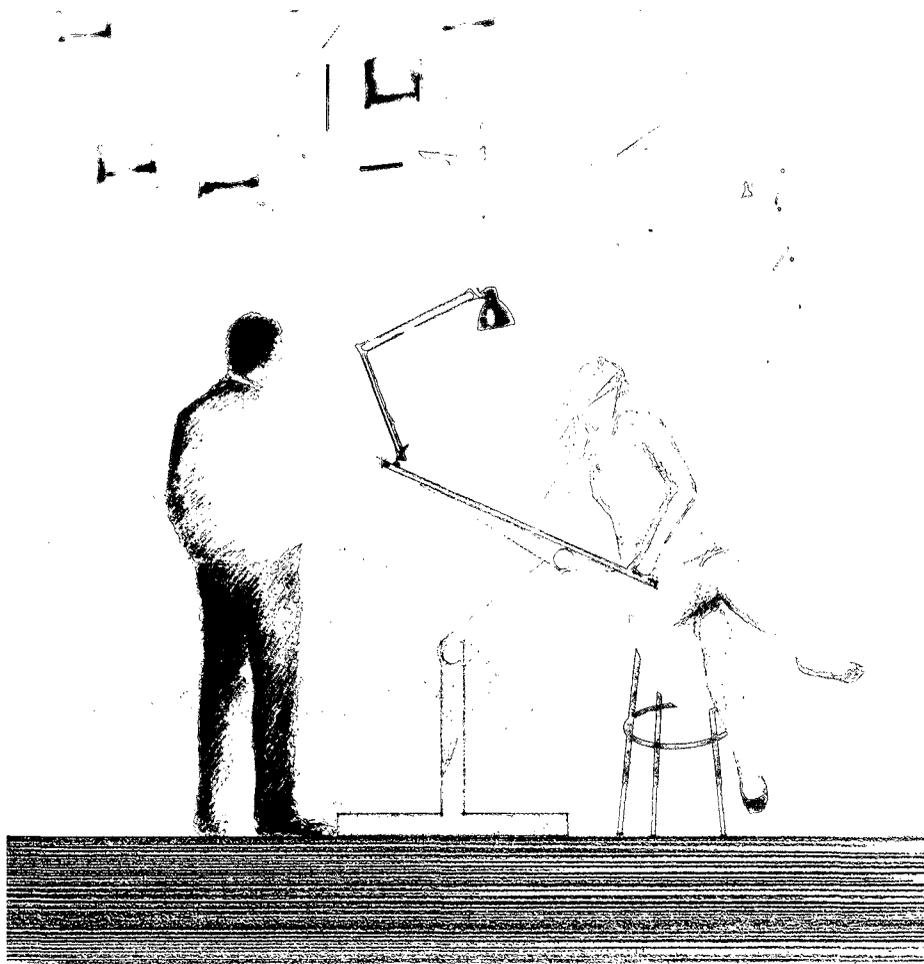
Richard P. Feynman

The Meaning of It All: Thoughts of a Citizen Scientist (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1998), p. 34.

“Something is uncanny – that is how it begins. But at the same time one must search for that remoter “something,” which is already close at hand. [...] There must be something to this case after all.”

Ernst Bloch

“A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel (1965),” in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988.) p. 246.



ABSTRACT.

See(k)ing Phantoms

An Architectural Enquiry

Phantoms are those notions that arise from direct experience with unfamiliar, ambiguous or fractured information when operating on the periphery of our understanding. What if architecture endeavoured to exploit phantoms, expose us to the unfamiliar and celebrate the ambiguous, all in the hopes of provoking intellectual uncertainty? Although typically associated with unease and confusion, this kind of architecture presumes that under these circumstances our understanding shifts in a way that stimulates and engages us, prompting inquiries and allowing us to operate in a wider field. While one cannot claim that architecture can or should be designed to trigger specific phantoms, it is the acknowledgement of this very process – unpredictable, unprescribeable and very personal as it may be – that contributes to the relevance of an architectural experience.

Through the proposed extension to the existing main building of the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, *See(k)ing Phantoms* considers the relationship between the architectural setting and the education that takes place within, and examines how architecture plays a role in shaping our phantoms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I would like to thank my parents, Bea and Peter Schvan, for their unwavering support, commitment and encouragement along every step of the way. They have been an amazing source of advice and inspiration, and to them I will be forever grateful. I would also like to thank my advisor, Federica Goffi, for her invaluable guidance and encouragement. It was a privilege to be her student. I am extremely grateful to my friends for their enthusiasm, patience, and the care with which they have reviewed my writings at various stages throughout the process – their questions and conversations have helped immensely to improve on my work. To Dylan Durst, who has shared this adventure with me – an experience that I will cherish greatly. My gratitude also goes to my former instructors at Carleton, among them Andrew King, Thomas Mical, Roger Connah, Lucie Fontein and Dave Lepage, who have inspired, encouraged and motivated me throughout the years.

Without all their support and insight, this thesis would not have been the same.

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PROLOGUE.

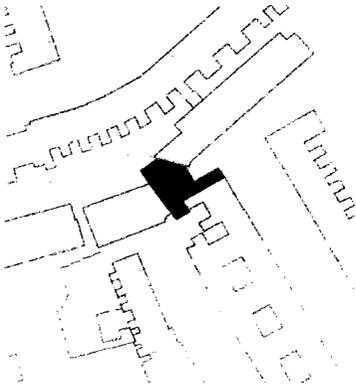
The curious case of the house with no street façade

Figure 2 Brick House, site plan. Caruso St John. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*. Per Aurora Fernandez, ed. Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain: A+T Ediciones, 2005)

The Brick House has been described as having “virtually no elevations.”¹ Despite the initial impression of being unusual – that is the interior appearance as it lacks an exterior one – the house presents an austere, yet delightful home. The first encounter with this house is always a conceptual one; you don’t see it – you can’t. Its lack of appearance does not make sense, your mind struggles, yet it compels you to construct a version of it, a phantom of it, in your head.

Designed by Caruso St John Architects and completed in 2005; the Brick House is a private residential dwelling in west London. Located on an irregularly shaped residual site, the house is only accessible via a former carriageway of a Victorian terraced house; with no elevation facing the street, its existence remains hidden. (Figure 2, p. 1) The architectural setting plays with the disparity between perception and knowledge.

The architects claim that “the form [of the house] appears unbound and soft, as if an internal force is pressing the walls and roof out against the buildings around it.”² The upper level, in a response to the site boundary conditions imposed upon the house, shakes the prevailing order of the regularly shaped domestic layouts, while the lower level contains smaller rooms as private retreats of quiet and calm.

¹ Hugh Pearman, “Caruso St John / Cover Versions,” *The Architects' Journal*, vol. 222, no. 21 (Oct 2005), p. 30, http://www.brouwer-edition.com/img/godow_arch_works.pdf (accessed 9 March 2008)

² Caruso St John Architects, “Projects / Brick House,” <http://www.carusostjohn.com> (accessed 10 February 2008)

The skin-like brickwork is laid in the same pattern inside and out, from floor to walls; therefore, choosing brick as the main material irrespective of different tectonic function was more of an ideological position rather than a question of necessity. The load bearing structure remains ambiguously hidden within the homogeneous brick planes – a further play on mystery and uncertainty. Squeezed into walls and regulations, the Brick House has more than reversed all its initial predispositions for being a fine example of unprepossessing architecture. A seemingly paradoxical task that the architects achieved by physically hiding the building but making it stand out by departing from conventions.

When the Brick House was one of the unexpected contenders for the Stirling Prize in 2006, it stirred passionate debate about its merits or lack thereof; yet, only a selected few have actually been to it – or even seen it. For those who have not visited the Brick House, and perhaps even the ones who have, this hidden house embodies the myth of a secluded world, a vestige from another realm that lives in our imagination. The myth helps to reinforce and promote the main function of the house, which is to be a private and composed retreat in the busy heart of the city.

The most noteworthy impact of this hidden house is through the intellectual constructs it evokes, the notions people create in response. This aspect of architecture was highlighted by Keith Mitnick, professor at the University of Michigan, and author of the book *Artificial Light*:

“...rather than trying to block the disparity between how we think about things and the way they appear to us, what if architecture embraced the disconnect by allowing things to exist multifariously... ? [...] the sense we make out of the world has very little to do with actual objects and

material attributes, and everything to do with the way our abstract notions determine our sense and experience of them."³

Although, the physicality of a work of architecture informs us; it is the internal images that we form in response and the subsequent attempts at interpreting these inner notions, which ultimately qualify the relevance of an experience. The following discussion is an attempt to undertake a further exploration of this process.

³ Keith Mitnick, *Artificial Light: A Narrative Inquiry into the Nature of Abstraction, Immediacy, and other Architectural Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p. 27.

PART 1. / CH. 01.

Mental constructions

SECTION 1: THE EMERGENCE OF 'PHANTOM NOTIONS'

Our lives are more and more influenced by everything that takes place at or beyond the periphery of our immediate sphere of interests and activities. We have grown accustomed to the instantaneous spread of information that makes everything potentially available to us. Indeed, we are more aware of activities that are only peripheral to our interests and therefore, attach a greater relevance to them. However, in this multifaceted world where different pursuits coexist, we no longer have the time or ability to fully comprehend all those additional influences. Yet, we have the urge to understand, or at the very least, we have an innate curiosity towards them. French anthropologist Marc Augé, in the following passage from *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, articulated a similar sentiment:

"The world's inhabitants have at last become truly contemporaneous, and yet the world's diversity is recomposed every moment; this is the paradox of our day. We must speak, therefore, of worlds in the plural, understanding that each of them communicates with the others, that each world possesses at least images of the others... [...] Still, [...] no one can any longer doubt that the others exist."⁴

Perhaps, what is even more important than the physical existence of these other spheres is the perceived importance to understand everything that we only glimpse.

⁴ Marc Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 89.

This phenomenon has also been recognized outside of anthropology, in other disciplines as well. As a reflection on this global phenomenon, Bruce Mau, creative director of Bruce Mau Design, and the founder of the Institute without Boundaries, stated that:

“The patterns that emerged reveal complexity, integrated thinking across disciplines, and unprecedented interconnectivity.”⁵

How do we make sense of this highly complex inter-related world of activities? We do not have all the information available that we would need to comprehend it all; and besides, this would be an impossible quest. The vast flow of stimuli, even without being clearly understood, inevitably affects our thought processes and forms our awareness, perception, and view of the world. Taken to its logical conclusion, we exist in a world where vast amount of information is available, often in a limited or fragmented condition – in March Augé’s words, “...deformed, mangled, retouched...”⁶ – leading to an incomplete understanding. Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, in *Thinking Architecture*, reiterates this view:

“Postmodern life could be described as a state in which everything beyond our own personal biography seems vague, blurred, and somehow unreal. The world is full of signs and information, which stands for things that no one fully understands...”⁷

Implied is the question of whether we can ever truly validate the information. It is reasonable to conclude that our lack of expertise outside of our sphere of interests and the fragmented nature of the information will inevitably lead to partial understanding, and perhaps prompting attempts to fill in the missing pieces.

⁵ Bruce Mau, et al. *Massive Change* (London: Phaidon, 2004), p. 16.

⁶ Augé, p. 89.

⁷ Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, trans. Maureen Oberli-Turner and Catherine Schelbert (Boston: Birkhäuser, 2006), p. 16-17.

It is worthwhile to investigate the kind of understanding that emerges as a consequence of the phenomenon described above. The concepts and images we generate under certain circumstances have the quality of phantoms. Although the term 'phantom' is used in a variety of contexts⁸ covering a wide range of interpretations; in *See(k)ing Phantoms* it is proposed that the term 'phantom' will denote a specific experience or mental state. A more detailed discussion will be undertaken in subsequent chapters, but is briefly defined here as follows:

Phantoms, as in phantom notions, emerge when:

- a. available stimuli or information is incomplete, and of unfamiliar origin; yet, provoking through exhibiting uncanniness or ambiguity;
- b. we are not sure about our degree of understanding or the accuracy of our knowledge;
- c. in fact, how much we have unknowingly distorted by inevitably incorporating our subjective biases, desires, experiences; and also
- d. it is unlikely we can ever easily resolve these uncertainties. Therefore, such notions retain phantom-like qualities and will form a part of our conception of the world.

It is recognized that despite this definition, in practice it is not easy to define a phantom precisely because in essence it refers to something not clearly understood. Since every concept will have some degree of uncertainty, the boundary between a 'sufficiently understood concept' and a 'phantom concept' is obviously blurred, and is unique to the individual. It is likely the manner by which a phantom impacts on one that is most relevant. However, since the measure of

⁸ See: PART 1. / CH. 03. SECTION 2: DISAMBIGUATION

relevance is subjective, it depends not only on external stimuli, but on the engagement of the individual with it.

SECTION 2: CONCRETE FILTERS

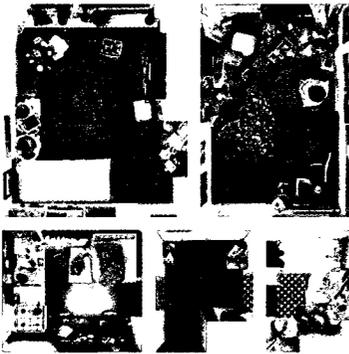


Figure 3 Dólina 4/51 from the series "Plan". Aneta Grzeszykowska and Jan Smaga, 2003. (source: http://www.raster.art.pl/galeria/artysci/smaga/plan/XL_grzeszykowska_smaga_plan_320.jpg, June 2010)

Our immediate physical surrounding influences how and what type of stimuli we receive, and in this way, how we are connected to the world around us. It acts as a filter, allowing, shaping, or even blocking signals but also guiding our movements, behaviour, and impacting those of others. Buildings, as part of the physical environment, contribute to our immediate surroundings; thus, shape our interactions. Also, they inherently introduce a layer of separation by dividing spaces and assigning activities to them. (Figure 3, p. 7) Through this divide, buildings interfere with our awareness of the world beyond our own sphere; they act as filters, porous boundaries, through which we perceive and engage the world. In the introductory essay of the 11th International Architecture Biennale held in Venice in 2008, director Aaron Betsky highlighted the relevance of architecture's ability to shape our conception of the world, by stating:

"The architecture that interests me most is that which is not apparently critical or even real, but that has the ability to transform one's perception of one's world, and to let one make that world be one's own."⁹

In a narrower sense, architecture can and should be concerned with how it acts as a filter between an unattainable complete picture of the world and our understanding of this world. Therefore, the focus of the following discussion will

⁹ Aaron Betsky, "Questions concerning architecture: Speculations on the spectacle out there," in *Out There: Architecture beyond Building*, vol. Installation (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008), p. 20.

lie more specifically in how architecture is instrumental in filtering and contributing to the very process by which we create phantoms.

An approach based on the concept of phantoms is proposed that emphasizes architecture's role as an intermediary in forming a conception of our world. Built on this, it is argued that as long as a work of architecture promotes a dynamic change of perception of the world, therefore accommodates that very change, it continues to maintain its relevance. While one cannot claim that a building can or should be designed to trigger *specific* phantoms, it is the acknowledgement of this very process – unpredictable, unprescribeable and very personal as it might be – that contributes a great extent to the relevance and perceived character of a building.

PART 1. / CH. 02.

*The First Encounter**How architecture and phantoms come together*

In 1966, the notion of phantoms within architectural discourse was put forth by Warren Chalk from Archigram. In the publication *Archigram 7*, a letter and supplementary collages by Chalk, addressed to David Greene, appeared. (Figure 4, p. 10) After acknowledging that “Our lives exist within a complex web of [...] influences which we either accept or reject,”¹⁰ Chalk’s discussion focused on

“...the capacity for architecture to adapt to the ever-changing climate [and that this is being in direct correlation] with the capacity for its language to incorporate the range of ever-changing influences from outside.”¹¹

To classify these influences which already reinforce or may become suggestive of architectural attitudes, language, ideals, constraints, theories, and rules,¹² Chalk introduced an apparent distinction between ghosts and phantoms.

In the first collage, titled “Ghosts”, Chalk combined contemporary images symbolizing the new way of life at the time; including drawings of the four-door sedan “one of modernism’s most enduring ghosts,”¹³ architectural images, such as Andreas Weininger’s design for a Spherical Theatre (1924), the plan of the 50-by-50 House (1950-1951) by Mies van der Rohe, and a plan of Corbusier’s

¹⁰ Hadas Steiner, “Brutalism Exposed: Photography and the Zoom Wave,” *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 59, no. 3 (Feb 2006), p. 24.

¹¹ Steiner, p. 25.

¹² Steiner, p. 25.

¹³ Steiner, p. 25.

Ronchamp (1955).¹⁴ For Chalk, “Ghosts” captured those influences from the immediate past that we have accepted as representative notions associated with contemporary life, and have already become influential in subsequent architectural thinking. In the second collage, labelled “Phantoms”, he included images of things that were only anticipated to be influential in the future. Incidentally, as Hadas Steiner, author of the article “Brutalism Exposed” observed, Chalk included no architectural works in this collage.¹⁵ By Chalk’s definition, phantoms held the promise of the future, and by this definition: phantoms could only be uncertain because we do not know if and how they will exert their influence within the architectural discourse. Further, Chalk asserted that

“old ghosts may be cast out and replaced by new; it is right that influences should last only as long as they are useful to us, and our architecture should reflect this. [...] ghosts of the past ... will succumb to ... the phantoms of the future.”¹⁶

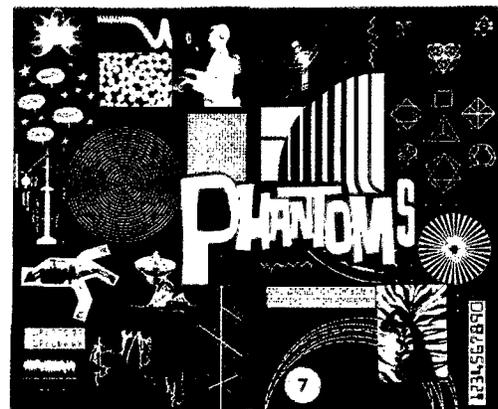
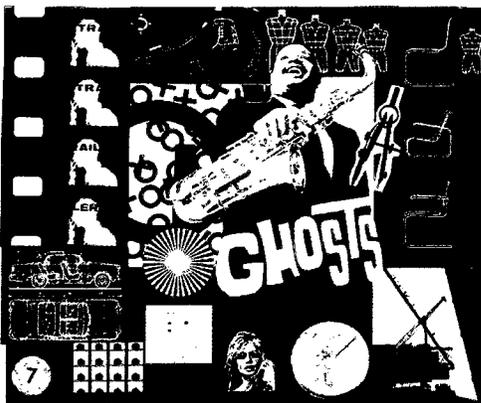


Figure 4 “Ghosts” and “Phantoms” in Archigram 7. Warren Chalk, 1966.
(source: Archigram Archival Project, <http://archigram.westminster.ac.uk/magazine.php?id=102>, May 2010)

¹⁴ Steiner, p. 24.

¹⁵ Steiner, p. 25.

¹⁶ Steiner, p. 25.

Focusing on the context of the visual language of architectural imagery as a representation and a vehicle of communication of contemporary ideals, Chalk emphasized that 'ghosts of the past', established influences that are "intrinsic to the discipline"¹⁷, should be continuously replaced by 'phantoms of the future', anticipated influences which are "still external"¹⁸.

Using the terminology of 'ghosts' and 'phantoms' perhaps to allude to the difficulty in pinpointing where influences originate, Chalk was reflecting on main themes of an era, and argued for an architecture that reflects the fast-paced dynamic shifting of influences in the everyday world. In *See(k)ing Phantoms*, the focus is instead on the aspect of architecture that allows for a process whereby one is granted the opportunity to form phantoms, the kind of understandings that emerge as a result of stimulating intellectual uncertainty. For Chalk, phantoms materialize as part of the collective consciousness, embodying society's expectations of the future; therefore, inherently containing uncertainties. However, in the current discussion, phantoms will refer to a much more personal, intimate response to one's immediate experience. It is not the influence or stimuli itself that will be labelled as a phantom but the term will be used to denote the generated response itself.

¹⁷ Steiner, p. 26.

¹⁸ Steiner, p. 26.

PART 1. / CH. 03.

Ascertaining 'Phantom'

Phantom noun

Collins English Dictionary:

1. an apparition or spectre
2. the visible representation of something abstract, esp. as appearing in a dream or hallucination
3. something apparently unpleasant or horrific that has no material form

Wikipedia:

1. something apparently seen, heard, or sensed, but having no physical reality; a ghost or apparition; something elusive or delusive
2. an image that appears only in the mind; an illusion

Online Etymology Dictionary:

1. illusion, unreality (c.1300)
2. spectre, spirit, ghost (attested from 1382)
3. something having the form, but not the substance, of a real thing (from 1707)

fantum English (c.1300 – c.1590)*fantisme* Old French*fantasma* Italian*phantasma* Latin*Related to...*

Phantom adjective

Wikipedia:

1. illusive
2. fictitious or nonexistent

*Related to...**Umbra* noun

Dictionary.com:

1. shade, shadow
2. phantom or shadowy apparition, as of someone or something not physically present; ghost; spectral image
3. an uninvited guest accompanying an invited one (from 1696)

Paired antonyms...

fiction (invention, falsehood) – fact

fantasy (imagination, illusion) – reality

SECTION 1: DEFINITION

Phantom has a connotation that mystifies, and the idea it introduces has been depreciated due to this. At its very essence, it embodies something that is not verifiable, and not clearly understood. Nonetheless, in the current context it captures an essential state of mind relative to our perception of the world on, or even beyond, the periphery of our immediate field of awareness.

Phantoms are evoked in response to stimuli that have no objectively verifiable basis, thus prohibiting any finite conclusion or making it tenuous at best. Uncertainty or ambiguity is constantly associated with it; in fact, phantoms thrive in the simultaneous acknowledgement of contradictory possibilities. However, undefined, uncategorized notions that lack the concreteness (and maybe rationality) of our convictions may be invaluable motivation for further quests to understand, and allow us to operate in a wider field. Although phantoms are a function of the observer, one does not set out to deliberately evoke a phantom; it is a spontaneously initiated awareness. It is a process in the present, encompassing the interaction between the external world and the observer, a process through which our existing understanding and perception is constantly being transformed. Phantoms have the quality of being highly subjective and unprescribable; therefore, their very nature and existence can be debated. For those who are aware of this uncertainty however, phantoms can make a significant impact. Ultimately, phantoms alter the way we navigate, operate in, and experience the world, both in a physical and conceptual sense. For it is their ability to make us re-evaluate our assumptions and question, that signifies the importance of phantoms.

SECTION 2: DISAMBIGUATION

The term 'phantom' has been used in a variety of contexts with considerably different meanings, ranging from the denotative to its more figurative senses and connotations. It appeared in the English language around the 13th century. Its origin can be traced back to Old French and Latin, meaning "illusion", "unreality", or an "image that appears only in the mind". From the 14th century onwards, phantom has also been understood as "spectre" (as in "spirit"), "presence", or "a ghostly apparition". Around the turn of the 18th century, its meaning shifted from a literal definition to a more abstract one; "something having the form, but not the substance, of a real thing."¹⁹ A certain usage evolved and the definition tried to capture this, but in its vagueness and generality it is a reflection of the fact that the term itself is vague and therefore applicable for a broad range of situations.

To clarify the differences between its definition in this thesis and some other common usages, a brief acknowledgement of the sources of possible misconceptions is due. The following review cannot be an exhaustive one; however, it attempts to include the most well-known occurrences.

¹⁹ See list of definitions on p. 12.

Further references:

Collins English Dictionary: Complete and Unabridged. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 2003.

Douglas Harper, Online Etymology Dictionary. (Nov 2001). <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php> (accessed Feb 2010)

A phantom is distinct from a ghost...

...in that there is nothing paranormal about it. As presently used in colloquial language, 'phantom' tends to be synonymous with 'ghost', but in the current context this would be a misrepresentation.

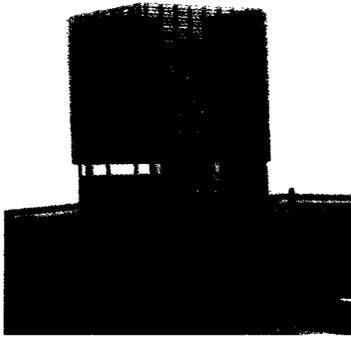


Figure 5 "Wilson in the Haar", Ghost Lab 8 construction, 2006. Photo by "archaalto". (source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/drustudio/194840919/in/set-72157594204903563/>, July 2010)

To exemplify the notion of ghostly apparitions from an architectural perspective, the work of Brian McKay-Lyons's Ghost Lab architecture workshop is referenced.

(Figure 5, p. 15) Describing one of the earliest projects of the lab, Christine Macy writes about the impact 'ghosts' can offer:

"Ghost stories are a form of travel – not across space to other countries and cultures – but across time, carrying our imagination with us."²⁰ [...] "This Ghost house, resurrected from the past, served as a conduit between history and story, memory and possibility. [...] By allowing multitude of ghosts – "generations of ghosts" – to speak, we can break the domination of the present, open ourselves up to memory and heritage..."²¹

Here, 'ghosts' refer to the historical context, the layers of stories emerging from the site and the project, some which may have been forgotten or abandoned, may resonate with earlier layers and establish continuity, but can be revived with new meaning. There is certainly value in ghosts in the sense that they impact our behaviours and thoughts relative to a site – not unlike phantoms. However, while neither is tangible, the fundamental difference between phantoms and ghosts lies in their origins. Time-frame is central to McKay-Lyons's concept of ghosts. Although ghosts may exert their influence in the present, they always appear in reference to other times and as traces of currently non-existent entities. Phantoms,

²⁰ Christine Macy, "Ghost Stories," in McKay-Lyons, Brian. *Ghost: Building an Architectural Vision* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p. 15.

²¹ Macy, p. 17.

on the other hand, are direct responses to stimuli and contingent on the person experiencing the stimuli; therefore, can only exist in the present tense.

A phantom is like speculation when...

...speculation refers to an opinion, reasoning, understanding based on incomplete information. To speculate is to think, to consider, to hypothesize, to cogitate. One sets out to understand something or predict an outcome, even though one is aware of the insufficient information available which prohibits reaching a definite conclusion. Speculation does not lack in a conscious effort, it is a deliberate activity; while phantoms are often formed as a result of an unplanned, spontaneous process, reaction, rather than a conscious decision.

Phantoms compose the part of our understanding and views about the world that, for the time being, lack clarity. This implies an intermediate state between different states of awareness, a simultaneous acknowledgment of numerous possibilities.²² This may only last for a very short period of time, or may never get resolved (one either loses interest or carries the phantom along). Once the uncertainty or ambiguity is eliminated, it is no longer a phantom. In the case of speculation, there is an expectation that sooner or later one will find out the answer; however, for phantoms usually there is no question that can be answered, no definite solution to be found. To arrive at a phantom should not be seen as a cul-de-sac to speculation. For currently not having a resolution for a phantom should not

²² In this sense, experiencing phantoms is similar to being in a *liminal zone*, a threshold or an intermediate state between states of awareness, simultaneous acknowledgements of varying world views.

reduce its significance, as the end result of the process is less gratifying than the process itself.

A phantom is different from fantasy if...

...fantasy is to be understood as a thrill-seeking, self-indulging creation of the mind, or the kind of literary genre that relies on magical, or paranormal elements. However, if it occurs as a genuine reaction to an experience, to fantasize is a way to absorb and process stimuli, to understand our environment, to exercise the imaginative power of our minds. Even so, fantasy may completely lack any basis, and have very little relationship to reality, but it is not expected to have one. On the other hand, phantoms are assumed to have a link to reality as they originate from a direct response to real experiences.

A phantom is different from fiction because...

...fictions impart information but do not pretend to project reality, while phantoms are part of the process through which we try to establish our reality. Fictions are not expected to follow conventions, rationality, logic, the laws of physics, and so on. On the other hand, phantoms are supposed to be part of the real world, except we do not know if they actually are – we cannot know if they are. Therefore, a part of a phantom could be fiction, when one is trying to fill the gaps between patches of reality.

Kendall Walton, a professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan, discussed the complexity of fiction in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. He concludes that the term 'fiction' refers to invented or imagined things, concepts, ideas that do not need to be based on facts or follow from logically deduced conclusions. On the contrary, works of nonfiction tend to be "used to claim truth for certain propositions rather than to make propositions fictional. Instead of establishing fictional worlds, they purport to describe the real world."²³

By 'reality' we tend to refer to actual things, things that are known to exist based on factual evidence, and not on assumptions, beliefs, or imaginings. Numerous theorists and scientists have attempted to explain the unclear boundary between fiction, fact, and what we perceive as reality. Neurologist Leif H. Finkel approached this argument by stating that

"Our view of the world may be more subjective than we realize, even beyond any cultural conventions."²⁴ [...] "We inhabit a mixed realm of sensation and interpretation, and the boundary between them is never openly revealed to us. [...] amid this tenuous situation, our cortex makes up [...] stories about the world..."²⁵

Based on this we can conclude that our understanding of the world, of cultures, of architecture is constructed of both factual and fictional fragments. Walton's discussion on fictional works versus works of non-fiction reflects similar views:

"A particular work of fiction [...] establishes its fictional world and generates the fictional truths belonging to it. A particular biography or history does not itself establish the truth of what it says or produce the facts it is concerned with. What generates facts, if they are our own creations, is not individual pieces of writing but something more like the

²³ Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 70.

²⁴ Leif H. Finkel, "The Construction of Perception," in *Zone 6: Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Urzone Inc., 1992), p. 393.

²⁵ Finkel, p. 401-402.

whole body of a culture's discourse, or the language itself as opposed to what is said in the language, or the conceptual scheme embodied in either of these."²⁶

Reality is not determined by a set of constraints that are embedded within individual works, but based on the conventions that emerge in a particular cultural context and era, beyond individual works. Therefore, the major difference between fiction and a phantom is that the former establishes its own context, but the later always has a link to a context outside of it.

The Phantom of the Opera's "phantom"

What people most often recall in association with phantoms is the fictitious main character of *The Phantom of the Opera*. (Figure 6, p. 19) On an analytical level, the phantom in the story did represent notions that existed (or may still exist) in society about "the mysterious side of human psyche"²⁷; however, in its fictitious representation it is a mere symbol. Contrary to this, the phantom in the context of this thesis cannot explicitly be represented, nor can it be prescribed. A more detailed analysis is as follows:

Erik, the fictitious character, was originally envisioned and labelled as 'the Phantom' in 1910 by Gaston Leroux, a French writer of detective novels and newspaper reports. Since this time, his story has been recreated through several authors' writings and numerous stage and film adaptations. Having been inspired



Figure 6 Cover of the 1920 French edition of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera*. (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Phantom_of_the_Opera_Cover.jpg)

²⁶ Walton, p. 100-101.

²⁷ Ann C. Hall, *Phantom Variations: The Adaptations of Gaston Leroux's Phantom of the Opera, 1925 to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2009), p. 179.

by the sprawling extent and the curious history of the Paris Opera house, and the vague rumours which claimed that...

“...once, years earlier, there had been a phantom living in the building; that things simply went missing, that unexplained accidents had occurred and that a shadowy figure had occasionally been seen flitting from dark corners and always heading downwards to the catacombs where none dared follow.”²⁸

Leroux created the now infamous tale, in which fiction and factual accounts seemingly blend “leaving the reader guessing as to whether what he is reading truly happened or not.”²⁹

The story’s popularity and persistence reflects many prevailing fascinations of society with dark, repulsive, strange things, and as in most good detective fiction, there is suspense involved.

Many argue that Erik and his story was perhaps intended to be a symbol for the workings of the Freudian unconscious, the “Freudian world”³⁰; or according to others, a symbol for the “the repressed”, “the marginalized”, “the dispossessed by the culture.”³¹ Whichever interpretation the reader sides with, various kinds of “alienation” (estrangement) and the “theme of masking and unmasking” is salient.³²

Ann C. Hall, author of the book *Phantom Variations: The Adaptations of Gaston Leroux’s Phantom of the Opera, 1925 to the Present* explains that the mask,

²⁸ Frederick Forsyth, preface to *Phantom of Manhattan*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. xviii.

²⁹ Forsyth, p. xxii.

³⁰ Hall, p. 2.

³¹ Hall, p. 3.

³² Hall, p. 2.

employed as a symbolic disguising device, represents the divide between the positive and the negative forces of the story. Interestingly, from a neurological perspective studying how the brain responds to visual stimulation, British neurologist Semir Zeki, author of the book *Inner Vision* explains, we attach great importance to the information a human face can deliver, and above all we rely on this for identification.

"Recognition of individuals is most often realised through their faces, and facial expressions are of paramount importance for human interaction and communication. [...] ...the brain can acquire a great deal of knowledge by looking at a face."³³

Consequently, if one's face is obscured with a mask, as is the case with Erik (the Phantom), we are inhibited from grasping his identity. If such an obscure, unknown character must be represented, to label it a 'phantom' and give it a mask might be the simplest way to do so. Ultimately, the character would become a metaphor – but only a metaphor, a substitute, and not the real thing – for creating an ambiguous situation when critical information is denied.

The nebulous aura surrounding the main character lends itself well to a novel that sets out to question how we portray, describe, and discuss events that are questioned to be real but cannot be determined with certainty. Ann C. Hall offers the insight that: "At its very essence, the story, the narrative, the plot, challenges traditional distinctions between truth and fiction."³⁴ As a result, some readers may be left with varying levels of conviction about the fabricated, fictitious nature of the story.

³³ Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 167.

³⁴ Hall, p. 3.

It is acknowledged that a reader can have a phantom generated as a response to a story; however, it is not the phantom Leroux's book labels as such. The revealing difference between the meanings lies in Leroux's short paragraph in the Preface of *The Phantom of the Opera*. He writes:

"The Phantom of the Opera existed. He was not, as was believed for a long time, a creature imagined by artists; a superstition of directors; a droll creation of the excitable minds of young women in the corps de ballet, their mothers, or the box attendants, the cloak room employees or the doorkeeper."³⁵

Whether Leroux's claim about the existence of the Phantom was true or not is irrelevant. However, since he claimed that the Phantom refers to a real person that supposedly existed, there is no question of similarity between his representation and phantom, as a notion. The latter cannot be the representation of something, it is not a label attached to a crystallized notion, but a spontaneously formed awareness in response to everyday interaction with one's environment.

Phantom notions are incongruent with Phantom Limbs...

...despite the shared terminology between phantom ideas used here and phantom limbs; it would be misleading to draw a direct parallel. As the psychologist Oliver Sacks pointed out "in health things are seamless,"³⁶ but when the brain is processing something out of the ordinary, for instance involuntary associations to

³⁵ Gaston Leroux, preface to *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910). in Hall, Ann C. *Phantom Variations: The Adaptations of Gaston Leroux's Phantom of the Opera, 1925 to the Present* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2009), p. 1.

³⁶ Oliver Sacks, in "Q&A with Oliver Sacks: Hallucinations, neurological curiosities and a passion for understanding," interviewed by TEDBlog, TED.com (17 Sept 2009), http://blog.ted.com/2009/09/qa_with_oliver.php (accessed 10 Feb 2010)

visceral sensations, it allows us a view into the workings of the brain. He remarked:

“You talk about phantom limb, you don’t talk about a hallucinatory leg. Somehow, a phantom limb sounds better.”³⁷

The expression ‘phantom limb’³⁸ refers not to an appendage that is ‘ghostly’, rather, to the condition whereby the person experiencing the phantom processes a vague but real sensation, and involuntarily associates it with an absent limb.

It is a neuroscientific process for which there is no conclusive medical explanation; although, phantom limbs and memory have been disassociated based on reports that people born without the respective limb often also experience phantom limbs.³⁹ The mechanism causing the sensation is unknown. There is no debate about the fact that the limb itself is absent, and equally so, there is an undisputable agreement about the sensation’s felt reality, its often unpleasant “enduring mental presence.”⁴⁰ The mental process results in the so called “phantom experiences, i.e., experiences of a discrepancy between the spatial extents of physical and phenomenal body.”⁴¹ The account of Vivian Sobchack, an American cinema and media theorist and cultural critic, as well as an amputee, is moving:

³⁷ Sacks, in “Q&A with Oliver Sacks”

³⁸ A phrase coined in 1871 by Silas Weir Mitchell (Philadelphian physician, 1829-1914). Nicholas Wade, “The Legacy of Phantom Limbs,” *Journal of Neuro-Aesthetic Theory: Phantom Limb 2004*, Airbrain.org, <http://www.artbrain.org/the-legacy-of-phantom-limbs/> (accessed 29 Jan 2010)

³⁹ Peter Brugger, “Phantomology: The Science of the Body in the Brain,” *Journal of Neuro-Aesthetic Theory: Phantom Limb 2004*, Airbrain.org, <http://www.artbrain.org/phantomology-the-science-of-the-body-in-the-brain/> (accessed 29 Jan 2010)

⁴⁰ Mariette DiChristina, “Letter from the Editor,” *Scientific American: (Special Edition)Secrets of the Senses* (Dec 2006), p. 1.

⁴¹ Brugger, “Phantomology”

"[...] feeling my body subjectively, along with significant (albeit not long-lived) pain, I most certainly experienced "something" here – the "something" sort of like my leg, but certainly not coincident with my memory of its form; and the "here" somewhere in the vicinity my leg had previously occupied, but not exactly coincident with its objective boundaries."⁴²

Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, neurologist and author of *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind* have extensively studied people who experience phantom limb sensations. He defined this phenomenon as a "compelling sensory delusion"⁴³ and developed a treatment that employs a simple box and mirrors to retrain the brain by altering the visual stimuli the patient sees.

(Figure 7, p. 24)

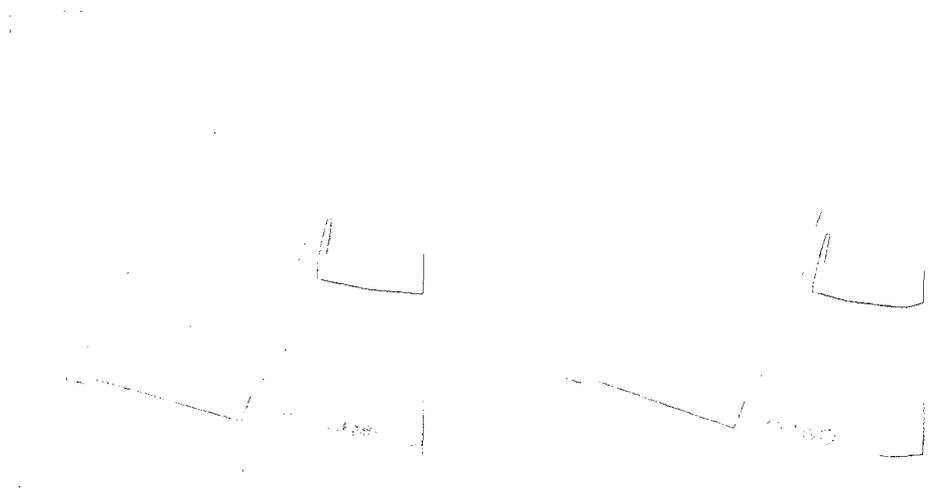


Figure 7 The mirror box experiment: by seeing the reflection of one hand in the mirror, the reflection tricks the brain to assign the experienced movements of this hand to the one that is not actually visible. This device artificially generates an apparent contradiction between reality and perception, and demonstrates that experience, even if it is based on something non-existent can have a profound effect on our cognitive processes.

⁴² Vivian Sobchack, "Real Phantoms/Phantom Realities: On the Phenomenology of Bodily Imagination," *Journal of Neuro-Aesthetic Theory: Phantom Limb 2004*, Airtbrain.org, <http://www.artbrain.org/real-phantomsphantom-realities-on-the-phenomenology-of-bodily-imagination/> (accessed 25 Jan 2010)

⁴³ Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, in "VS Ramachandran on your mind," video on Talks, TED.com (Oct 2007), http://www.ted.com/talks/vilayanur_ramachandran_on_your_mind.html (accessed 18 Sept 2009)

With the mirror box it can be demonstrated that perception, even when it is clearly misrepresenting reality can have a profound effect on our mental processes. Thereby, the person simultaneously inhabits a physical environment and a different perceptual world.

Although, the phantom limb phenomena shares similar attributes with the phantom (*referring to a kind of understanding*), in that it essentially contains an apparent contradiction between reality and perception; but the fundamental difference lies in that it is the result of the way the brain functions when faced with an incoherent sensation, and is not the result of a creatively engaging mental process.

INTERLUDE 01.

Prosthesis for imagination

An experiment has been carried out to demonstrate the impact of the conflict between the perceived attributes and the existing attributes of the physical environment. Based on the idea of the mirror box neurologist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran developed to treat patients with phantom limb sensation (see PART 1. / CH. 03., p. 24), this device creates a discrepancy between the visually perceived and the physical environment. (Figure 8, p. 26) it can be demonstrated, that even when perception is clearly misrepresenting reality it has a profound effect on our mental processes.



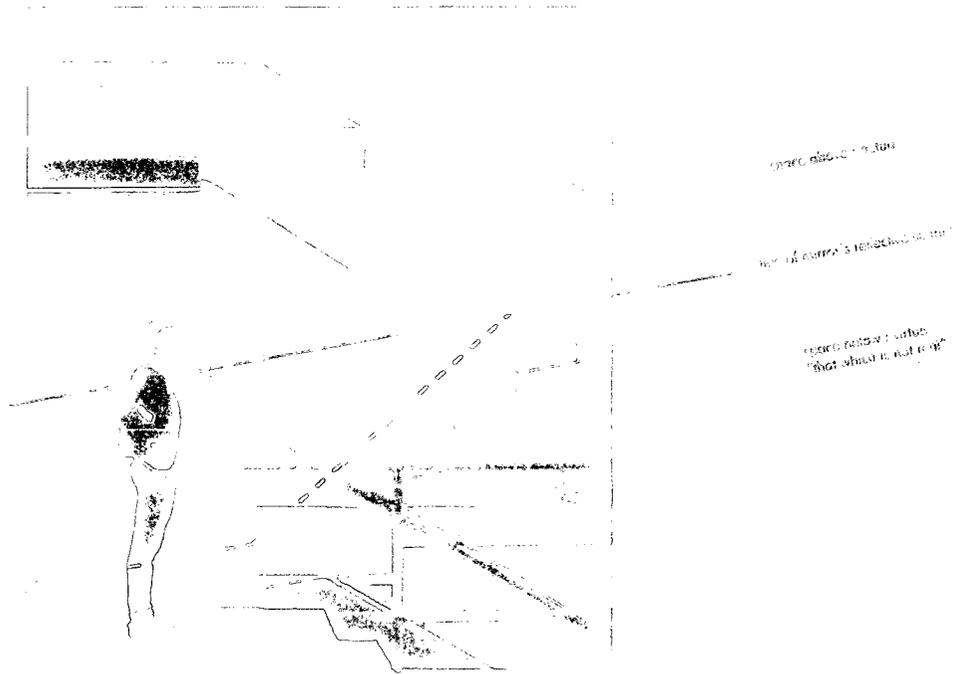
Figure 8 Prosthesis for Imagination The device is a prosthetic; it incorporates a mirror attached to a head-gear. Two padded steel bands rest on the skull; on the sides, plywood arms help balance the device on the head and brace it around the user's upper torso. A flat mirror surface extends forward which can be adjusted to a comfortable position for the user, ideally just below the nose, but not touching the lips, parallel to the ground. (above)

Figure 9 Wearing the prosthetic device. (right)

While wearing the device, the reflection in the mirror replaces one's view of the actual floor; thereby, the reflected space in the mirror combined with the space above the mirror's surface – the top half view of the actual room, will form one's perceived environment. (Figure 9, p. 26)

Trying to navigate the space, the half actual/half virtual upside-down world – a hybrid space – familiar spaces are rendered as new territory awaiting rediscovery. The space one sees is mismatched with the physical space one is immersed in. Yet, depending which spatial experience one focuses on – the known reality or the hybrid illusional space, one is capable of experiencing, comprehending and navigating both realms simultaneously. (Figure 10, p. 27) The illusion creates a space, a mental construction that the body responds to. The person simultaneously inhabits a physical environment and a different perceptual world.



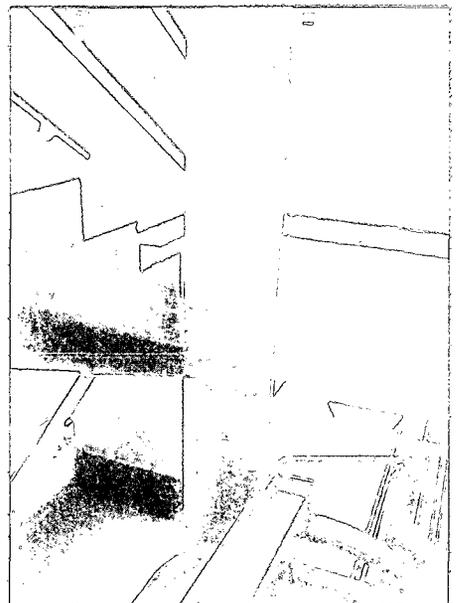
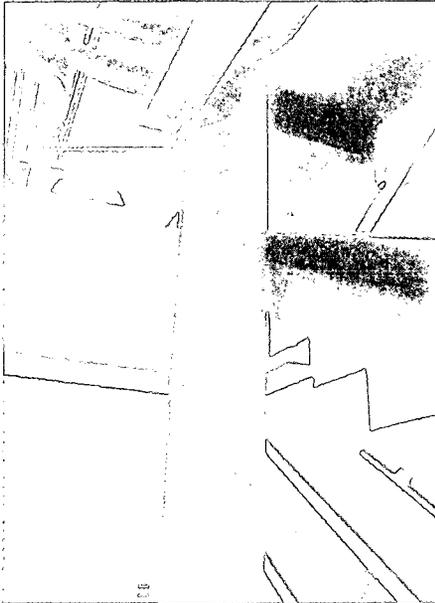
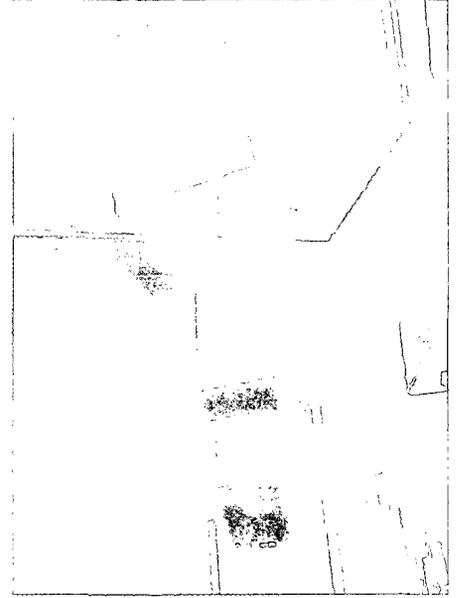
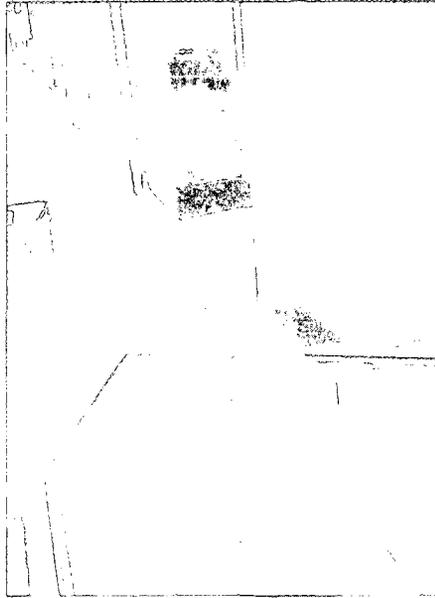


The device is a metaphor; it makes explicit the process by which one's mental state projected onto a physical environment alters one's spatial experience. You, as much as the architecture, shape your own spatial experience. Accordingly, the experience of every built work of architecture is a hybrid, originating partially from physical and partially from conceptual experiences. Using a mirror is an obvious architectural trick that alters the experience beyond what physically is there. It creates a perception of space that does not exist. Less subtly than the process of how our inner conceptual world re-renders actual spaces, with the help of a mirror we can turn a non-existent space visually available to our senses.

Although, the series of photographs capturing the views one sees when wearing the device (Figure 11, p. 28) are by no means representations of the phantoms a person have in reaction to a space, they contain ambiguity. The experiment proves that an altered mental state alters the way one navigates the physical environment.

Figure 10 Navigating the real and illusionary spaces of Building 22 while wearing the head-gear. (above)

Figure 11 Image pairs. Locations: Building 22, Level 1 and Level 3 corridors. (next page)



PART 1. / CH. 04.

The process by which phantoms are born and sustained

Uncanny adjective/noun

Unheimlich German
un-home-ly

Collins English Dictionary:
beyond what is normal or expected

Encarta English Dictionary:
eerie, too strange

Online Etymology Dictionary:
Originally Scottish and northern
English, from un- "not" + canny.

A. Vidler (p. 23):
beyond ken, beyond knowledge

Canny adjective

Encarta English Dictionary:
crafty, clever, shrewd, astute, careful,
sly, smart

Online Etymology Dictionary:
knowing hence careful
1630s, Scottish and northern England
formation from 'can'

A. Vidler (p. 23):
possessing knowledge or skill

Can modal verb

Encarta English Dictionary:
be able to, allowed to, be possible

Online Etymology Dictionary:
know how to

Ken noun

Encarta English Dictionary:
(somebody's) knowledge,
acquaintance, understanding,
awareness, comprehension

Online Etymology Dictionary:
to know (Scottish dialect)

cennan Old English
kenning English (1580s)
kenna Old Norse

SECTION 1: PHANTOMS AND THE UNCANNY

As 'uncanny' denotes a situation which is unhomely, where one is not quite at home, the realization that one is operating in a world with phantoms is akin to the mental state evoked in response to something uncanny. In other words, uncanny experiences are similar to what is described to evoke phantoms; situations where one deals with incomplete, possibly conflicting information, and operates at the boundaries of one's understanding, outside the range of what is familiar. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the resulting unease as a response to this realization is the same as those typically associated with the uncanny. In fact, a *phantom is uncanny*. Therefore, examining the theory of the uncanny bares relevance to the current discussion and will be presented in this section, with particular attention to whether there is anything more to phantoms, or the uncanny, beside a bleak discourse.

The uncanny has been widely discussed in various contexts. In the book *The Architectural Uncanny*, architectural theorist Anthony Vidler presented a comprehensive study of its historical, philosophical, and cultural evolution. He traced back the first mention of the uncanny to as early as the second half of the 18th century with "origins in romantic thought,"⁴⁴ the period of Enlightenment, or the "Age of Reason." It appears that until this period, the issue of not fully

⁴⁴ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. ix.

understanding something was not considered to be relevant. Interest in the uncanny coincides with the introduction of the requirements for evidence during legal trials. Interestingly, as Ernst Bloch pointed it out in his essay "A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel (1965)," the demand for evidentiary trials in turn also marked the beginning of the popular literary genre, the detective novel ("the genre of the uncanny tale"⁴⁵), as these stories revolved around tracing clues to arrive at a logical proof of guilt.⁴⁶ Perhaps, it could be argued that phantom stories also became exciting subjects around the same time, precisely because they eluded evidence and logical investigation.

The first comprehensive theory of the uncanny appeared in 1837/1842 in the "Philosophie der Mythologie" written by the philosopher Friedrich W. J. Schelling, who "had proposed an origin for the uncanny that was itself joined to the origins of religion, philosophy, and poetry."⁴⁷ In other words, Schelling set out to prove that the uncanny is the underlying concept of religion, philosophy and poetry, with the emphasis on uncanny being the underlying mechanism to generate ideas inaccessible through pure logic alone.

Continuing with Vidler's observation, "...the uncanny emerged in the late nineteenth century as a special case of the many modern diseases, from phobias to neuroses, variously described by psychoanalysts, psychologists, and philosophers as a distancing from reality forced by reality."⁴⁸ It appears that by the dawn of the 20th century in the public's eye, the uncanny (and in no doubt

⁴⁵ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. xi.

⁴⁶ Ernst Bloch, "A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel (1965)," in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988.) p. 246.

⁴⁷ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 26.

⁴⁸ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 6.

phantoms also) was generally associated with something sinister, undesirable – something to be wary of.

The first systematic psychological study of the uncanny, an essay titled “On the psychology of the uncanny”⁴⁹ was written in 1906 by Ernst Jentsch, a physician. He begins by pointing to the critical connection of language to thought, and states:

“Without a doubt, this word [*Unheimlich*, German for “un-homely”] appears to express that someone to whom something “uncanny” happens is not quite “at home” or “at ease” in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him.”⁵⁰

As Jentsch’s argument develops, it becomes clear that he assigns the discomfiting feeling to a “difficulty of establishing quickly and completely the conceptual connections that the object strives to make with the previous ideational sphere of the individual”, to a lack of “intellectual mastery of a new thing,” to “something unknown and incomprehensible,” and all of these in turn result in “a particular feeling of uncertainty.”⁵¹ Jentsch further indicates that the source of the uncanny sensation can be ascribed to “the perception of the unusual or inexplicable” – referring to things, situations or daily phenomena – that “elude explanation or whose conditions or origin are unknown,” and this sensation

⁴⁹ An interesting note from Roy Sellars (trans.) in the Preface of the first English publication from 1997 to Ernst’s essay: “Reference is sometimes made to Jentsch’s essay, in the vast secondary literature on the Freudian uncanny, as if its content were known – familiar in advance, and therefore not requiring to be read. But especially since (as far as we can see) the essay has never before been translated into English, it might be more appropriate to call its appearance here ‘uncanny’.”

Roy Sellars, preface to Jentsch, Ernst. “On the psychology of the uncanny (1906),” trans. Roy Sellars, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 7-16., in the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09697259708571910>, (accessed 1 July 2010)

⁵⁰ Ernst Jentsch, “On the psychology of the uncanny (1906),” trans. Roy Sellars, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 8., in the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09697259708571910>, (accessed 1 July 2010)

⁵¹ Jentsch, p. 8-10 and 14.

(especially easily observed in children) “can represent dark secrets.”⁵² Finally, Jentsch’s insight that “the same impression does not necessarily exert an uncanny effect on everybody”⁵³ has an important message. It is easy to recognize that these notions of the uncanny are practically overlapping with those associated with phantoms in the present discussion.

Thirteen years later, a study of the uncanny (which became more influential) was undertaken by Sigmund Freud, who in 1919 published “Das Unheimlich” [“The Uncanny”]. Freud acknowledged in his essay that the word ‘uncanny’ was not “always used in a clearly definable sense, so it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general.”⁵⁴ Like Jentsch, Freud began his argument with a linguistic study, *but a much lengthier one, emphasizing the delicate relationship between the terms ‘heimlich’ [homely] and ‘unheimlich’ [un-homely];* then supported the argument with an analysis of scenarios that are known to arouse uncanny sensations; and lastly, Freud used Schelling’s statement that “*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light.”⁵⁵ Being unsatisfied with Jentsch’s explanation,⁵⁶ and having an innate interest in the implications of the subconscious, in his paper Freud asserted the fundamental principle that “the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is

⁵² Jentsch, p. 9-10.

⁵³ Jentsch, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’ (1919),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Volume XVII: An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works); Transl. from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey; in Collab. with Anna Freud; Assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson*, (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1968), p. 219.

⁵⁵ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 26. and p. 53.

⁵⁶ Freud, p. 221.

secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*] which has undergone repression and then returned from it."⁵⁷

The validity of this characterization of the uncanny, being the frightening end-result of the recognition of the recurrence of something repressed, was not sufficiently challenged until the re-reading of Freud in the second half of the 20th century.⁵⁸ In fact, in Nicholas Royle's book *The Uncanny*, there is a quote from Robert Young, philosopher and historian of human sciences and psychoanalysis, stating that: "Of all Freud's writings, "The Uncanny" is generally recognized as the text in which he most thoroughly finds himself caught up in the very process he seeks to comprehend."⁵⁹

Vidler's own theory of the "architectural uncanny" as he is applying it to the interpretation of contemporary buildings and projects, relies heavily (like most who studied the topic) on the Freudian, psychoanalytical understanding. Vidler admits that,

"...it is perhaps difficult to speak of an "architectural" uncanny as of a literary or psychological uncanny; certainly no single building, no special effect of design can be guaranteed to provoke an uncanny feeling."⁶⁰

We cannot speak of a building on its own having uncanny qualities. Only once a person engages with it, can we talk about the uncanny, and even that will be dependent on the individual. For this, he provides an important insight:

⁵⁷ Freud, p. 245.

⁵⁸ This argument was put forth, among others, by feminist Hélène Cixous, author of *Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche* (1976)
For further explanation refer to: Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 230., endnote 14.

⁵⁹ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 14.

⁶⁰ Anthony Vidler, "Theorizing the Unhomely," in Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p. 575.

"...the "uncanny" is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity..."⁶¹

Although, a space cannot be uncanny by itself, since it is only through engaging with the space that the quality of uncanniness can arise, it is possible to deliberately design a building that opens up the opportunity for people to experience something unfamiliar, possibly ambiguous. This may lead to uncanny experiences, prompting intellectual uncertainty and ultimately evoking phantoms.

From the quotation above it appears that Vidler assumed, ambiguity is always disturbing and therefore undesirable. But could one not imagine a kind of ambiguity that is not disturbing? If 'disturbing' has the connotation of something unpleasant, could it not be at the same time also thought-provoking?

Since ambiguous experiences generate the mental state of the uncanny and are the prerequisite to phantoms (as per its definition in the current discussion), further investigation is required of whether ambiguity and the uncanny could lead to constructive, stimulating, in fact satisfying experiences.

As Nicholas Royle simply remarked, "Uncanniness entails a sense of uncertainty..."⁶² Despite the fact that much of the influential literature about the uncanny was originally written in German (Hoffmann, Hegel, Schelling, Jentsch, Freud, Heidegger, Adorno, Bloch)⁶³ – hence, inherently beginning with the notion

⁶¹ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 11.

⁶² Royle, p. vii.

⁶³ Although there is a rich literature on the uncanny, for the purposes of the discussion, it seems appropriate to restrict it to the aforementioned references.

of *unheimlich* [un-homely] – Vidler admits, that “the English word is perhaps more helpful [...]: literally “beyond ken” – beyond knowledge – from “canny”, meaning possessing knowledge or skill.”⁶⁴ This aligns more with Jentsch’s interpretation; that is, the uncanny being the result of intellectual uncertainty.

SECTION 2: IN PRAISE OF ‘INTELLECTUAL UNCERTAINTY’

Jentsch argued that the “human desire for the intellectual mastery of one’s environment is a strong one,”⁶⁵ and cautiously added the idea that:

“...the feeling of uncertainty not infrequently makes its presence felt of its own accord in those who are more intellectually discriminating when they perceive daily phenomena, and it may well represent an important factor in the origin of the drive to knowledge and research...”⁶⁶

Here it is hinted for the first time that the uncanny is not necessarily an undesirable phenomenon; in fact, it can be constructive and have a positive influence. It is the desire for understanding that stimulates human inquires. Just over a hundred years later, advancements in neurology provided a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, confirming Jentsch’s hypothesis.

British neurologist Semir Zeki studied the way the brain interprets and responds to ambiguous visual stimulus. Zeki’s book *Inner Vision*, published in 1999, is an exploration of how his neurological findings support the effects of works of art. His theories offer an explanation for the processes of how phantoms could keep us engaged.

⁶⁴ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 22-23.

⁶⁵ Jentsch, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Jentsch, p. 9.

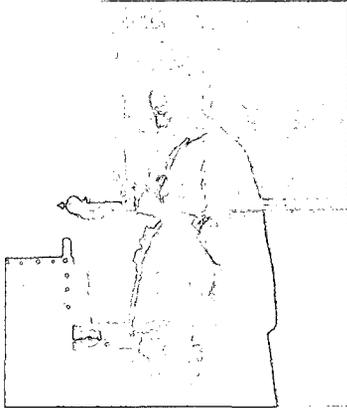


Figure 12 Detail from *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*. Jan Vermeer, c. 1664, © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. (source: <http://daystarvisions.com/Pix/Masters/pg2.html>)

Zeki explained that the fundamental function of the brain is “the seeking of knowledge in an ever-changing world.”⁶⁷ In doing so, the brain creates hypotheses and attempts to verify them. This process continues until a satisfactory interpretation, in Zeki’s terms, a “constancy” or an “essential” is reached. He extensively studied the psychology behind the captivating qualities of great pieces of visual art and concluded:

“Great art can thus be defined, in neurological terms, as that which comes closest to showing as many facets of the reality, rather than the appearance, as possible and thus satisfying the brain in its search for many essentials.”⁶⁸

He stressed that ambiguity in works of art is the essence of the potential to engage and trigger the brain to come up with personal interpretations, construe several plausible meanings, and actively use our imagination to reflect on what we see. If limited information is presented that lends itself to equally valid multiple interpretations, it awakens our curiosity, our desire to unveil, to discover, to understand. This reaction is often exploited in works of visual art, and in works of literary fiction.⁶⁹

To illustrate his theories, Zeki brings up many of the Dutch artist Jan Vermeer’s paintings as examples. He observed that Vermeer depicted “daily events seemingly without special significance,” “banal subjects,” situations that are familiar to most of us. For instance, in the painting titled *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* (Figure 12, p. 36) Vermeer shows nothing more than a young female figure

⁶⁷ Zeki, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Zeki, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Peter Zumthor recalled:

“Italo Calvino tells us in his *Lezioni americane* about the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi who saw the beauty of a work of art, in his case the beauty of literature, in its vagueness, openness, and indeterminacy, because this leaves the form open for many different meanings.”
Zumthor, p. 30.

reading a letter in a room. Zeki notes that the French writer Paul Claudel used the words “eerie” and “uncanny” to describe a certain undefined quality in Vermeer’s paintings,⁷⁰ and concludes:

“...the viewer is invited to look inside, as if through a keyhole, but not to enter. He is a voyeur, peering into the private moments of private, unknown, individuals; what they are doing, or saying, or thinking is a mystery. [...] It is this aspect of Vermeer that, I believe, has the immediate power to attract and provoke...”⁷¹

Pondering on the psychological power of Jan Vermeer’s work, he discovered that it is the ambiguity the painting evokes which engages the viewer, but here Zeki is not using the term ambiguity in its colloquial sense. In his vocabulary,

“... ambiguity – which is a characteristic of all great art – [has] a different, and neurological, definition; not the vagueness or uncertainty found in the dictionaries, but on the contrary, certainty – the certainty of many different, and essential, conditions, each of which is equal to the others, all expressed in a single profound painting, profound because it is so faithfully representative of so much.”⁷²

The painting is uncanny precisely because in a sense there is a great deal of ambiguity, unanswered questions, depicted in it. It leaves the viewer wondering what is actually taking place. The information available allows for a wide range of equally plausible explanations and invites the viewer to get actively involved by speculating on the content of the letter and what the woman is thinking.⁷³ The appearance of clarity combined with the possibility for several interpretations, leaves the viewer facing a virtually unsolvable situation. Unresolved, because of the absence of the information to determine which interpretation renders the other

⁷⁰ As Zeki noted in a footnote, Claudel here used the English terms, not the French. Zeki, p. 23. (original quote: Claudel, Paul. (1946). *L’oeil écoute*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 240.)

⁷¹ Zeki, p. 23-24.

⁷² Zeki, p. 26.

⁷³ Zeki, p. 27.

competing interpretations invalid, therefore resolving the conceptual conflict. However, as Zeki emphasizes: “The true solutions remains ‘forever unknown’: because there is no true solution, there is no correct answer.”⁷⁴ It is not that something essential is lacking, it just *appears* lacking.

In other instances it is the unfinished, or seemingly unfinished – open-ended – that creates the same effect, where a number of different interpretations remain plausible. In both cases the end result is the same, that multiple solutions will remain permanently valid.

When the mind is presented with an uncanny situation, and in the process to make sense of the information, ambiguity not only provokes active engagement, but indeed, it is desirable because it induces creativity. Zeki concludes,

“...the inestimable quality is the opportunity that the brain is offered to give several interpretations, all of them valid.”⁷⁵

Even if one’s curiosity is not satisfied in a sense that there is no final end result, in the long term the very process of searching may become a permanent source of satisfaction. When Jentsch refers to the uncanny in terms of “intellectual uncertainty,” he could have conceivably meant uncertainty resulting from inconclusiveness, rather than vagueness. In response to that, the brain forms a phantom that would represent one plausible interpretation including the uncertainty associated with it.

⁷⁴ Zeki, p. 27.

⁷⁵ Zeki, p. 23.

SECTION 3: CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we accept that there is merit in the kind of understanding that has the quality of phantoms and that architecture inherently shapes our perception of the world, then architecture should employ an approach which consciously attempts to provide opportunities for people to form phantoms. Rather than something undesirable or disturbing, phantoms can enrich our experiences and stimulate our creative activities. While particular phantoms cannot be created deliberately, an environment that is conducive to allowing phantoms to emerge can be designed. To demonstrate such an approach a proposed extension to Building 22, the building that houses the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, is described in Part 2.

INTERLUDE 02.

Constructing the uncanny

"First published in 1818, [...] [the tale of "Councillor Krespel" by E.T.A. Hoffmann] sets out the relationship between the uncanny and architecture without relying on the apparatus of dream, of haunting, or of mystery. The story opens with an apparently incidental description of the building of a house; on the surface, indeed, as the narrator notes, this is no more than an illustration of one of "the craziest schemes" of this Councillor, himself "one of the most eccentric men" (K 80). The house, described as having been the gift of a local lord in payment for legal services, was built at the bottom of the Councillor's garden according to his own somewhat peculiar specifications. Having bought and assembled all the building materials, stacked and cut the stones, mixed the lime, and sifted the sand, the Councillor had proceeded to amaze the neighbours by refusing all architectural help, directly employing a master mason, journeymen, and apprentices on the work. What was more extraordinary, he had neither commissioned nor drawn up a plan for the four walls. These, following his instructions, were built up by the masons, without windows or doors, just as high as the Councillor indicated. Despite the evident madness of this procedure, the builders seemed happy enough, plentifully supplied with food and drink. One day Krespel shouted "Stop!" and the walls were complete (K 80-81). Then the Councillor began a most strange activity, pacing up and down the garden, moving toward the house in every direction, until, by means of this complex triangulation, he "found" the right place for the door and ordered it cut in the stone; similarly, walking into the house, he performed the same method to determine each window and partition, deciding,

seemingly spontaneously, their position and size. The house was then finished. To celebrate his new home, Krespel invited the builders and their families, but no friends, to a feast at which he played the violin. The result of his maneuvers was a home "presenting a most unusual appearance from the outside – no two windows being alike and so on – but whose interior arrangements aroused a very special feeling of ease" (K 82)."⁷⁶

"The house [...] was described as a house "unusual" from the outside, and homely inside, [...]. That is, in the terms we have been using, the house was homely inside but most unhomely outside, illustrating Freud's intuition that from the homely house to the haunted house there is a single passage [...]. But Krespel's house, viewed in these terms, is a structure that in fact reverses the general drift of the uncanny movement from homely to unhomely, a movement in most ghost stories where an apparently homely house turns gradually into a site of horror. Krespel's house makes no attempt to hide its uncanniness on the exterior. In this context, it should be remembered that in fabricating the house Krespel's activities were themselves decidedly *unheimlich*..."⁷⁷

Excerpt from:
Anthony Vidler
The Architectural Uncanny, 1992

Original quotations from:
E. T. A. Hoffmann
"Councillor Krespel," translated by L. J. Kent and E. C. Knight, in E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Tales*, edited by Victor Lange (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 80-100 and will be cited in the text as "K."

⁷⁶ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 29-30.

⁷⁷ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 32.



Figure 13 South and West facades, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

PART 2. / CH. 05.

Catch Building 22

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

As part of the Faculty of Engineering and Design, the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism⁷⁸ is the institution for undergraduate and graduate studies in architecture at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

Architectural education at Carleton began in 1968, but the program did not have a purpose-built building at that point. In September 1972, a new building – designated “Building 22”⁷⁹ – was inaugurated and has been in continuous use ever since. (Figure 13, p. 41, Figure 14, p. 43) Although, currently the architecture program occupies limited space in two other buildings on campus, Building 22 is the only structure that was, from its inception, intended specifically for

⁷⁸ Established under the name “Carleton University School of Architecture”; in 2008, it was renamed “Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism”.

⁷⁹ Also known as “the architecture building”, and “school of architecture”; not to be confused with *Building 22*, the annual review of student work coming out of the School.

architectural education, and still currently houses the entire School with the exception of the graduate studios and the Carleton Immersive Media Studio (CIMS) research unit.

The architects, Elin and Carmen Corneil (b.1935 and b.1933) and Jeff Stinson (1933-2008), had been involved from the early planning stages, beginning in 1968.⁸⁰ It was an open process among all interested parties, including the first classes of architecture students; "all [committee] meetings were open to the entire school."⁸¹ In a 1973 article, Jeff Stinson recounted:

"Some of the very early design discussions about the school were concerned with the role of the building, particularly, the ambitions of the staff and students to improve the general physical environment of the University while providing a developmental model and social focus."⁸²

It has been recognized from inception that both the building and the community residing in it would have the potential to provide a significant positive influence on the campus. Carmen Corneil's short sentence, "You need to make a workspace that is not inhibiting,"⁸³ summarizes what was thought to be essential to fulfill this opportunity.

⁸⁰ Architects: Carmen and Elin Corneil with associate Jeff Stinson (Toronto); and Schoeler, Heaton, Harvor, Menendez Architects (local Ottawa firm); Other consultants: structural engineers: Seethaler & Bernard; mechanical and electrical engineers: R. E. Crossey & Associates; landscape consultants: VanDer Meulen, Zohar & Associates; general contractor: Ball Brothers Ltd.

Douglas Shadbolt, Jeff Stinson and Ron Thom, "School of Architecture, Carleton University, Ottawa," *The Canadian Architect*, vol. 18, no. 9 (Aug 1973), p. 39.

⁸¹ Douglas Shadbolt, "Programme & Rationale," in Shadbolt, et al., p. 30.

⁸² Jeff Stinson, "Design Rationale," in Shadbolt, et al., p. 34.

⁸³ Carmen Corneil quoted in Maria Cook, "At Carleton there were no boundaries," *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa: Southam Publications Inc., (25 October 2008) p. D3., Canadian Newsstand Database, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/pqdweb?did=1583813461&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=13709&RQT=309&VName=PQD> (accessed 25 Nov 2009)



Figure 14 West elevation during the day, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

The first critical task was to locate a suitable site. Although a previous campus planning policy was already in place in line with contemporary planning theories⁸⁴ favouring “the separation of urban functions through zoning and the wanton, indiscriminate employment of green space,”⁸⁵ Corneil was not hesitant to express his scepticism. In a site selection report from November 1969, “Corneil advocated keeping the site “compact” by reducing the spaces between buildings in order to increase access among Faculties.”⁸⁶ As expressed by Stinson, such siting would be necessary because:

“The essence of a school [...] is that it encourages contact between the various members of the community. The shared problems and common goals and the clear sense of an enterprise with horizons wider than those of any individual are seriously threatened by our thoughtless pursuit of personal privacy. [...] The best model we have for the public and private life of this community is the street.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Shadbolt, “Programme & Rationale,” in Shadbolt, et al., p. 30.

⁸⁵ Terri Fuglem, “Carmen Corneil at Carleton,” *Architecture and Ideas: Experimental Modernism*, vol. 8 (2009), p. 74.

⁸⁶ Fuglem, p. 75. (original quote: Carmen Corneil, “The Site Selection Report” (1969), p. 12.)

⁸⁷ Stinson, “Design Rationale,” in Shadbolt, et al., p. 34-36.

Jane Jacobs's theories on urban complexity were highly influential in shaping the architects' own ideas⁸⁸; hence the 'street' as a prominent organizational "model"⁸⁹ was devised, and carried through on a campus planning level, as well as applied to the arrangement of spaces within the building.

The following quotation from the article "Reading Structure through the Frame" by current professor Lucie Fontein provides a concise description of the physical characteristics of Building 22:

"The School of Architecture is a three-storey building⁹⁰ structured on a regular grid of concrete piers spaced 16 feet from east to west and in a tartan pattern ranging from 8 to 32 feet from north to south. The ground floor, with its major east-west 'street' extending the full three-storey height, is dedicated to public spaces, classrooms, and workshops..."⁹¹

Still on the main floor adjacent to the 'street', the largest gathering area of the building, the 'Pit', is located. (Figure 15, p. 45) It is similar to a rectangular auditorium due to the steps on its one side that function as seating, but its openness makes it informal. It is frequently used for student presentations, school gatherings, hosting various events ranging from lectures by invited architects to exhibitions and spontaneous movie nights. This space is hard to miss due to its location, openness and high visibility, even from the other floors and landings, and through the internal windows of the studios and offices above. Continuing the description of the upper floors with a passage from Fontein's article:

⁸⁸ Elin and Carmen Corneil, "Storm Windows: an Exhibition of Northern Projects," Exhibition Catalogue (1986)

⁸⁹ Stinson, "Design Rationale," in Shadbolt, et al., p. 34.

⁹⁰ The original 1972 building was three floors and a basement. In 1986, a 5th floor was built on top.

⁹¹ Lucie Fontein, "Reading Structure through the Frame," *Perspecta*, vol. 31, Reading Structures (2000), The MIT Press on behalf of Perspecta, p. 54-55.

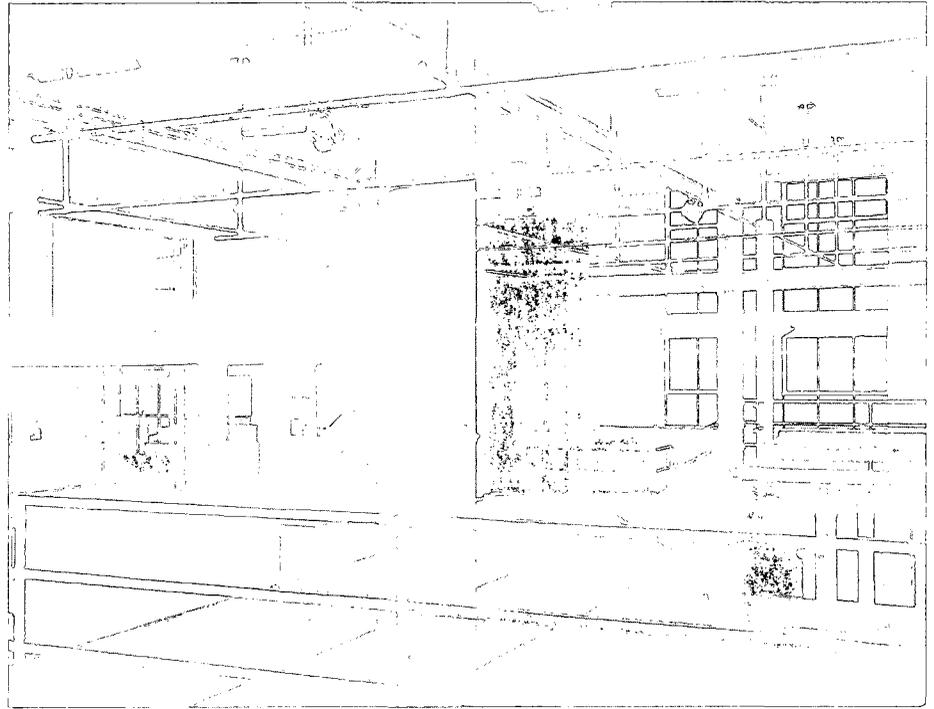


Figure 15 The Pit, the informal multipurpose room on the main floor, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

"The design studios, computer labs, and faculty offices of the top floor are organized along another street, which runs perpendicular to the ground level. It becomes a bridge connection to the neighboring engineering building. The middle mezzanine floor contains the director's office and some faculty offices. Throughout the building the concrete structure is exposed; partitions of concrete block define the more irregular enclosed areas. There is not a square foot of drywall to be found."⁹²

The bareness of the structure and the activities that take place inside makes it reminiscent of a factory building – a factory for ideas and experiments. This rough, unfinished character of the structure serves to signify the blurred boundary between student space and the institution by extending a symbolic invitation to the students to make their mark on the building and on the campus through their creative activities.⁹³ Indeed as Stinson pointed out, through both the design of the

⁹² Fontein, p. 54-55.

⁹³ Stinson, "Design Rationale," in Shadbolt, et al., p. 38.

building and the deliberate selection of the central site “architecture’s inhabitants are exposed (to themselves and to the University).”⁹⁴ Though some might say unusual in its exterior and interior appearance, the building has earned the acclaim and recognition of the architectural community.⁹⁵



Figure 16 Lower Street viewed from east mezzanine, 1973; Event in the ‘Pit’, 1982; Room 404, also known as ‘the fishbowl’, with bean bag chairs during a studio pin-up session, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

The only major change that has been executed on the building is the 1986 addition of a 5th floor, designed by Otto Bryden Architects, a local Ottawa firm. It houses dry-walled corridors and windowless computer labs for the use of other engineering departments. Although this floor is capping Building 22, it is severely cut off from the four floors below, lacking any interaction with the building. Connected via a bridge to the adjacent engineering building, it is more of an appendix to that, rather than an extension to the building it is sitting on.

In spite of the fact that the number of students occupying Building 22 has nearly doubled in the last four decades, no major alterations have taken place since then. This has resulted in crowded conditions that are beginning to interfere with the intended use of the building.

⁹⁴ Stinson, “Design Rationale,” in Shadbolt, et al., p. 38.

⁹⁵ Fuglem, p. 84.

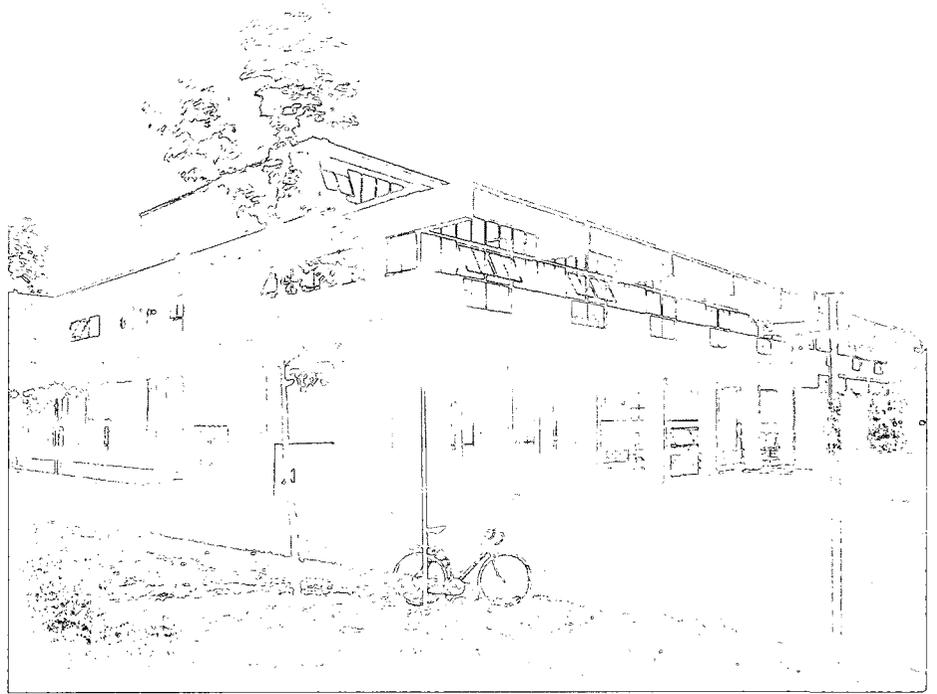


Figure 17 West elevation at night, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

SECTION 2: SEEING PHANTOM WORLDS THROUGH A BUILDING

“Remarks/Hints: Due to unusual design and split levels, the building is initially confusing. However, it is quite accessible.”⁹⁶

The above quotation is from the University’s main website; and admittedly indicates that this building is an anomaly among the institutional buildings on campus. The door that confronts the daily passers-by as they approach the central quadrant of the campus is a double-height and glazed garage door the students use to move large models, installations and equipment in and out of the building; the main entrance door of the building remains less known to the infrequent

⁹⁶ “Architecture Building (AA),” Accessibility Guides, Carleton University (2009), <http://www2.carleton.ca/campus/accessibility-guides/architecture-building-aa-accessibility/> (accessed Dec 2009)

visitor. As one proceeds towards the University Centre building, posters in the ground floor windows of past projects obstruct the wandering gazes. While exposure to activities outside is preferable, without a buffer zone such immediate proximity to pedestrian traffic proves distracting. By having to hide behind posters and shutters, the vivacity of the school is confined to the inside. Once inside, the lack of finishes grants students the freedom to experiment with materials and larger constructions without having to worry about damaging the building. Furthermore, the structure and other components of the building remain visible to perform a didactic role. Still, on the top of everything, there is a floor that does not belong. In light of these it is easy to see how – for the unaccustomed eye – Building 22 exerts a strange, seemingly unfinished character, as if it is still under construction. Quite a contrast from the typical institutional building where corridors are calm but sterile as all activities are performed behind closed doors; here, ambiguity and uncanniness manifestly resides.

As Michael Milojevic, a scholar on the Corneils' work observed, the structure is "neither overly-specific nor overly-general."⁹⁷ Bearing resemblance to a theatre – through the interconnected spaces that put the ongoing activities on display – and perhaps also to a parking structure – in its skeletal frame of slabs and columns – the interior spatial quality of the school is at once extremely familiar and unfamiliar. One simultaneously sees both typologies at every glance at the building, ambiguity cannot be denied.

⁹⁷ Milojevic, Michael. "Between Helsinki and Los Angeles: The Early Work of Carmen and Elin Corneil," <http://www.alvaraalto.fi/conferences/universal/finalpapers/michael.milojevic.rf> (accessed 26 Nov 2009)



Figure 18 Interior view of a studio bay with the yellow lines on the floor, May 2010.

The architects credit the typology of a warehouse for being a “useful model”⁹⁸ for the school; still, the multi-story parking garage is not a far-fetched analogy. After all, the students sit in ‘bays’, they have allocated studio spots marked out on the floors with yellow lines, the studios are entered from the ‘streets’. (Figure 18, p. 49)

The building’s warehouse syntax is derived from its purpose – unobstructed placement of items and utilitarian efficiency, which is indeed also true for the parking structures. The frame and the austere treatment of the surfaces establish the resemblance, and – similarly to a parking garage – make people feel out of place at first.

“...surfaces (floors, walls and ceilings) are spare and utilitarian; there are no ‘finishes’ to mask crude construction. [...] there is a lack of familiar detail.”⁹⁹

The description is from Simon Henley’s book *The Architecture of Parking*, but could have been used to describe the Architecture Building. Such treatment of the interiors might be suitable for the storage of vehicles, but seem definitely spartan as a setting for a learning environment. It raises the question, how can such a building provide an inspirational setting? Yet, as Henley’s words testify, finding skeletal shells captivating is easy if one dares to see the possibilities:

“Outside, their forms and elevations can surprise. Inside the landscape, material and light into which one is immersed can be bewildering, sometimes terrifying, and occasionally beautiful. [...] It is a type of warehouse or silo. [...] an array of columns supporting repetitive decks. In its purest form, the parking structure is a hypostyle and, although finite, gives the impression of being limitless. The disorienting nature of repetition suggests the notion that we are confronted with a labyrinth.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Stinson, “Design Rationale,” in Shadbolt, et al., p. 34.

⁹⁹ Simon Henley, *The Architecture of Parking* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2007), p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Henley, p. 23.

Building 22 may be seen as “initially confusing”, but with the right attitude, the mystery of the unfamiliar within the building can become captivating; it can evoke associations of a number of archetypal settings.

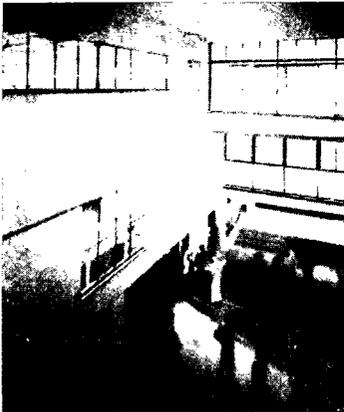


Figure 1.9 'Lower street' viewed from 'upper street' landing, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

The appearance of the building establishes its initial oddness and unfamiliarity; however, this depiction does not do justice to the character of the building. While the repetitious studio bays occupy the upper floor, the “complex arrangement of sightlines through the building”¹⁰¹ prevails on the main and intermediate levels. (Figure 1.9, p. 50) The dynamic arrangement of the variously scaled interwoven spaces and levels, as Milojevic remarked, allows people in the school to be seen, their daily actions to be part of an “improvised”¹⁰² act, which in turn establishes the resemblance to a theatre.¹⁰³ University of Manitoba School of Architecture professor and Carleton alumni Terri Fuglem reinforces this observation in her article “Carmen Corneil at Carleton”, when she writes:

“Moving through the Carleton School of Architecture today, it is apparent that at the heart of the building’s nature, the particular kind of world it creates [...] is a sense of theatricality. Everyone who enters the school becomes an actor, immediately implicated in the drama of the school. [...] The pit-street-studio arrangement seems to encourage a theatre of community, where discourse and making are the central acts. [...] The building dramatizes students carrying their models from the wood shops to their studios.”¹⁰⁴

People go to a theatre to see an act, but also to be seen – this has always been part of the allure of theatre buildings. When the activities of the students tend to

¹⁰¹ Fuglem, p. 84.

¹⁰² Fuglem, p. 85.

¹⁰³ “[The Corneil’s] imperative towards the theatrical has led them to orchestrate the inclusion of a variety of podia, stages and arenas within their works which serve to enhance the activities of day-to-day life and imbue the ordinary life of buildings and people with the theatrical...” Michael Milojevic quoted in Paul Makeham, “Performing the City,” *Theatre Research International*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2005), p. 157., <http://www.cidadescratiivas.org.br/performingcity.pdf>, (accessed 12 June 2010)

¹⁰⁴ Fuglem, p. 85.

require extensive amount of hours of solitary and often repetitious work, it becomes more bearable in such a theatrical setting. The building provides a stimulating environment that is the prerequisite for creative endeavours. Although the building plays on the healthy exhibitionism of a creative community, it is certainly not a theatre. As Fuglem stated:

"As a theatre proper, the pit is pitiful; it lacks a stage, sightlines around the column are obscured; the space cannot be isolated acoustically. But as an urban configuration, the space works brilliantly."¹⁰⁵

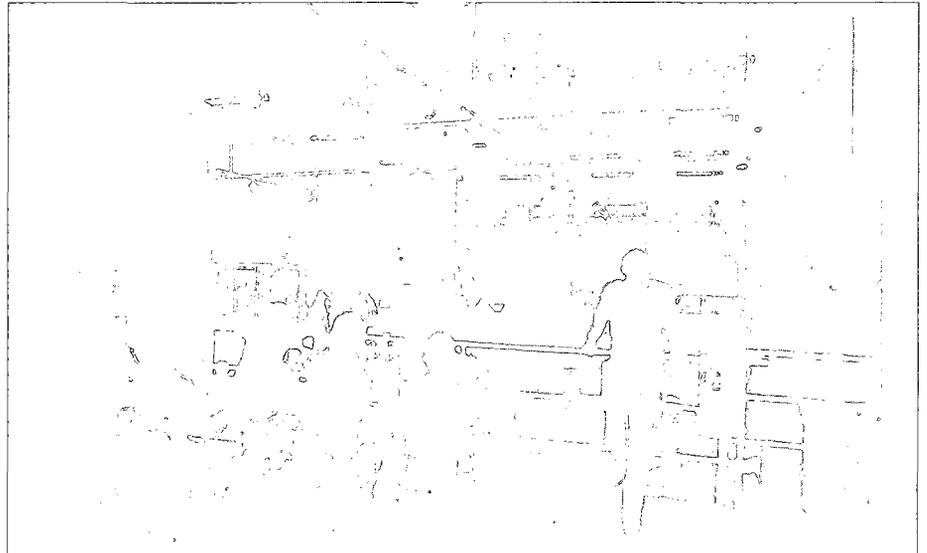


Figure 20 Parachute in the Pit, viewed from the east mezzanine, 1973. (source: School of Architecture photo archive)

Resemblance only goes so far as to offer up opportunities, but it is up to the inhabitants to pick up on the clues and act according to the implied settings. It is within the juxtaposition of the contradicting themes – institution, warehouse/garage, theatre – where the uncanny lurks. The garage takes the utilitarian rationality to its extreme, to the point that it feels ‘un-homely’; while the

¹⁰⁵ Fuglem, p. 85.

theatre plays into our desire to be the centre of attention, to be part of an act, it dramatizes every movement; the exaggeration is bordering the irrational. (Figure 20, p. 51) The school's character fluctuates in-between, and precisely this ambiguity of the underlying resemblances that visitors initially experience, either consciously or unconsciously, as uncanny. This intellectual uncertainty percolating through one's head is what propels attempts to understand and resolve the conflicting impressions, thus rendering the environment engaging and stimulating. These exemplify the type of thoughts and influences – confusing and irrational at first – that evoke phantoms; and in turn, shaping our experience and leading to a new awareness. Through this process they engage us in a way that triggers creative ideas.

PART 2. / CH. 06.

Designing for phantoms

SECTION 1: GENERATIVE CONCEPTS

It has long been recognized that architecture is intimately coupled to all other human activities; it is both a reflection of and an influence on current conditions. "Architecture is not an isolated or autonomous medium, it is actively engaged by the social, intellectual, and visual culture which is outside the discipline and which encompasses it..."¹⁰⁶ – as was highlighted by Carol Burns and Robert Taylor, the editors of *Perspecta 21*. The inherent paradox in the condition of architecture, as it has been articulated by architectural sociologist Garry Stevens, is that:

"Of all the values architecture cherishes most, originality ranks the highest. Yet few disciplines expropriate so much from others."¹⁰⁷

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of architecture, it is therefore inevitable that phantoms from all other disciplines reside in it. Phantoms arise from experiences outside of our immediate sphere of expertise, or understanding, from incomplete, ambiguous information. These phantoms are desirable, as they have the potential to engage us, capture our interests and promote inquiries leading to creative ideas. Accordingly, a building for an architecture school should provide an environment that enhances the individuals' opportunity for informal exposures to activities (in a physical and a conceptual sense) both inside and outside of the building.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting. "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism," *Perspecta*, vol. 33, Mining Autonomy (The MIT Press, 2002), p. 73, in Jstor.org, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567298> (accessed 17 Feb 2010)

¹⁰⁷ Garry Stevens, "L'Affaire Eisenman," in *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), p. 120.

The following design process, and ultimately the proposed extension of Building 22 is guided by the inquiry into phantoms that has been presented, while it also attempts to answer more specific needs. These needs are threefold: (1) to respond to the 'inside voice', the opinions and needs expressed by the primary users of the building, (2) to incorporate the 'outside voice' based on the recently published Campus Master Plan, and (3) to follow the architects and the faculty's original intent as it pertains to the current conditions.



Figure 21 Debate in the Pit, March 2010.

The inside voice

As it has been mentioned briefly, many incremental changes have taken place since the School first moved into the building; yet, the building itself has not been altered in any significant way. To stir a discussion among the community of the School in order to give voice to some of the issues, a debate was organized by current graduate director Roger Connah. The aim was to raise the question and discuss "what functions does the building serve besides housing an institution

which teaches architecture.”¹⁰⁸ The debate, titled “This House Believes That Architecture Has Left The Building” was held in the Pit in March 2010. (Figure 21, p. 54) Some of the issues raised at the event are relevant to the current discussion and are worth noting here.

The side representing the argument for the motion began by saying that they were “interested in focusing the debate on [...] the spirit of collaboration that is felt to be highly relevant to the current condition of architecture as a multi-disciplinary endeavour,”¹⁰⁹ and continued that

“...Building 22, in its underutilized and un-programmed open-frame condition does not allow the sharing of or dissemination of ideas conducive to an actively vibrant educational setting [...], it breeds and perpetuates an unnecessary need amongst the students to covet their ideas and design firmly insulated from outside stimulus.”¹¹⁰

While the condition described above by current graduate student Richard Anderson is grim, it is important to keep in mind that the building was designed for a significantly smaller student population. This was reinforced by the statement of another graduate student, Leila Emmrys, representing the same side:

“We are simply trying to say that architecture has left the building in terms that perhaps we are not meeting its full potential any longer. [...] ...with drastic changes in student population and the slow obsolescence of a number of pre-programmed rooms, there has been a keenly felt shortage of space...”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Roger Connah, “Preamble from the chair” (20 March 2010) written for the event “Graduate Debate: This House Believes Architecture Has Left The Building,” held in Building 22 at the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, 29 March 2010.

¹⁰⁹ Current graduate student Richard Anderson in his opening statement, (00:04:55 – 00:11:00). “Graduate Debate: This House Believes Architecture Has Left The Building,” held in Building 22 at the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, 29 March 2010.

¹¹⁰ Richard Anderson, (00:04:55 – 00:11:00).

¹¹¹ Current graduate student Leila Emmrys, (00:23:18 – 00:26:51).

To further investigate this situation, an analysis of the current use of the space in the building was prepared, with particular attention to the voiced perception that significant portions of the building are underutilized. (see APPENDIX 02) This analysis found that what the primary users are lacking the most are studio spaces, model assembly spaces, offices, and areas where they can set up collaborative work without being disrupted or disruptive to others. Furthermore, the users would also benefit from more computer labs, lecture rooms, presentation or pin-up areas and group discussion spaces.

On one hand, it was also pointed out by Emmrys that a “chaotic mix of private moments” in communal areas invites accidental intrusion rather than “lingering curiosity”¹¹²; on the other hand, “isolated islands of independent thought and research”¹¹³ – as phrased by Anderson – are not contributing to the spirit and creative endeavours of the students. Outside stimuli are seen as being extremely positive, and would be welcomed. Clearly, there is a need for both kinds of spaces.

The outside voice

When arriving at or departing from the Carleton University campus via public transportation, and after walking across insufficient surface parking lots, Building 22 is among the most prominent buildings that one encounters. It is located in the central academic quarter, adjacent to the main student services building, the

¹¹² Leila Emmrys, (00:23:18 – 00:26:51).

¹¹³ Richard Anderson, (00:04:55 – 00:11:00).

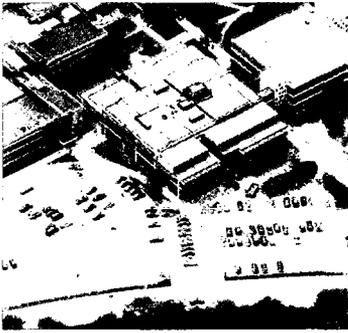


Figure 22 Aerial view of the Architecture Building with adjacent parking lots, and corner of University Centre building to the left. (source: <http://atlas.freshlogicstudios.com/>)

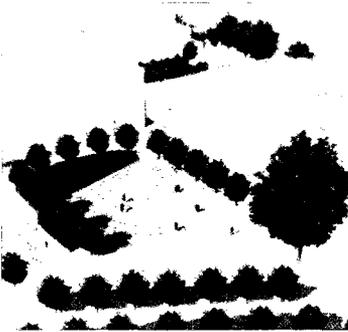


Figure 23 Carleton Master Plan Proposal: Entry Quad in place of existing Lot P2; Architecture Building on the right and University Centre building on the left. DTAH, 2009. (source: <http://carleton.ca/campusplan/documentation/index.html>)

University Centre. (Figure 22, p. 57) Although the building occupies a central location on the campus, there is a disconnect, a lack of informal communication between the activities (both in a physical and intellectual sense) of the School and the rest of the campus. Both the campus and the Architecture School would benefit from a reorganization of this central gateway. Indeed, the official 2009 Campus Master Plan has suggested such development.¹¹⁴

The planners proposed an “arrivals forecourt to act as a proper reception zone,”¹¹⁵ whereby the existing surface parking lot adjacent to Building 22 would be replaced with a landscaped area on the surface and an underground parking facility below. The University Centre building would define the west edge, while the Architecture Building’s south facade would define the north edge of this “arrival forecourt.”¹¹⁶ (Figure 23, p. 57)

The Master Plan recognizes that there is “little consistency between buildings,”¹¹⁷ except for brick cladding that is shared among many of the buildings. There is, however, ambivalence about it. To guide future developments, the official planning proposal suggests adhering to the architectural language and material palette of the recently erected buildings. The Architecture Building – although not a contemporary structure – provides an undeniable architectural legacy, and should be considered an asset to the campus. To consider the existing character

¹¹⁴ Prepared by DTAH (du Toit Allsopp Hillier), a Toronto-based architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning firm.

¹¹⁵ “Carleton University,” Projects, DTAH, http://www.dtah.com/projects/urban_design/campus/carleton/ (accessed June 2010)

¹¹⁶ See p. 56 in DTAH. “Planning Base Working Paper,” Campus Master Plan: Documentation, Carleton University, <http://carleton.ca/campusplan/documentation/index.html> (accessed June 2010)

¹¹⁷ See slides 78-80. in DTAH. “Public Forum – Draft Plan Presentation,” (prepared for Public Forum on 20 Oct 2009), Campus Master Plan: Documentation, Carleton University, <http://carleton.ca/campusplan/documentation/index.html> (accessed June 2010)

and to follow the philosophy of Building 22, it is appropriate to deviate in this respect from the suggestion of the Master Plan.

The proposal in this thesis also takes into consideration that in the future there might be a building adjacent to Building 22 on the east (as indicated by the Master Plan), and that there is a requirement for an underground parking facility at this central location on campus.

Original intent

Some of the driving ideas from the inception of the original building (1968-72) are still relevant. One of the ideas of the architects was to allow the users a greater awareness of activities that are going on within the building. The Corneils wrote, when reflecting on the design a few years later, that:

“...the idea of interweaving movement was influential in the forming of the circulation core. It could get people and information around in the school: the placement of entrance points, stairs, windows and washrooms was part of this strategy.”¹¹⁸

The building is open and encourages, at least, visual interaction inside among the daily users. (Figure 24, p. 59) This strongly resonates with the current discussion in that the environment should promote the possibility to observe and be exposed to various activities. Former director and faculty member Gil Sutton acknowledged the success of these strategies, and the success of the building as he pointed out:

¹¹⁸ Corneil, “Storm Windows: an Exhibition of Northern Projects”

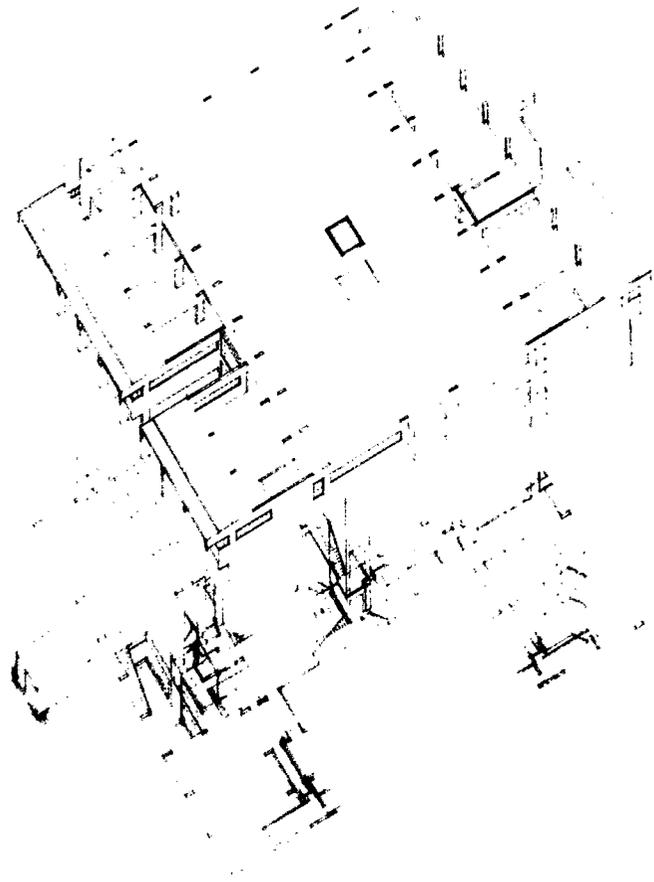


Figure 24 Exploded axonometric drawing of Building 22 showing Levels 1 to 4, including 5th floor slab, focusing on the numerous circulation routes within the building and their intricate spatial relationships.

“If a fundamental component of the programme is interaction and exchange (and it is) the building responds very well and gives people a greater awareness....”¹¹⁹

Within the walls the existing building still performs this role, but four decades later with the incremental changes around it, it seems insular in terms of exposure to outside influences. Architectural education greatly benefits from influences of

¹¹⁹ Gil Sutton quoted in Shadbolt, “Feedback,” in Shadbolt, et al., p. 40.

other disciplines and collaborative efforts. In fact, reflecting that notion there was an original expectation, expressed by the late founding director Douglas Shadbolt, that there would be an increased opportunity for interaction and possible coursework in “areas of mutual interest” with other departments on campus.¹²⁰ This curriculum however, has not materialized as expected, possibly due to the lack of awareness of the opportunities between the disciplines, and the availability of the appropriately located designated space.

SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

It has been discussed, that (1) architecture is a conduit for the formation of phantoms, the kind of understanding that emerges in the face of ambiguity and intellectual uncertainty; and that (2) this process requires active engagement from the individual; and (3) there is merit in these kind of phantoms, in fact they are necessary to stay relevant in today’s world. Therefore, a mode of representation that is congruent with these principles was chosen.

The hybrid | ‘Modelled-Drawing’ or ‘Drawn-Model’

The purpose of most contemporary architectural representation is to define design intentions and convey information clearly and efficiently. In order to do so, they follow conventions. Relying on formally agreed conventions, architectural drawing elements act as components of a visual language. As with any language, there

¹²⁰ Shadbolt, “The Process Defined,” in Shadbolt, et al., p. 26.

are always areas which – deliberately or not - remain open to interpretation and may require further clarification. From a conventional perspective, it might be seen as an annoyance; however if deliberate, ambiguity can be a powerful way to engage the viewer.

Arguably, the most conventional medium to articulate an architectural idea is the drawing. As Adrian Forty, professor of Architectural History at University College London and author of *Words and Buildings*, states: “drawing was (and continues to be) the principal material object that architects themselves produced,”¹²¹ but he continues to argue that:

“...drawings presuppose that one is *outside* the object: subject and object are conveniently separated by the surface of the paper. The drawing itself becomes a simulacrum of perception...”¹²²

There is the material reality of the drawing surface (the paper), and beyond that, the information conveyed relies on a coded language, thus the experience is mediated. Scale models are viewed differently; in their three-dimensional physicality they engage the viewer, but precisely due to their scale, this medium is not ideal for communicating details. These and other frequently used conventional modes of representation, such as sketches, perspectives, and renderings are all aimed at an objective portrayal of a design, the depiction of expected tangible and intangible effects of that design.

Since the thesis argues for the kind of architecture that engages people and invites various interpretations, instead of emphasizing the expected effects of the

¹²¹ Forty, Adrian. “Language and Drawing,” in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p. 30.

¹²² Forty, p. 41.

proposed building, a mode of representation is required that promotes an interaction, a mental process, akin to what this kind of architecture would induce. This mode of representation must have the potential to leverage ambiguity to grant the viewer the opportunity to engage in visual, thus intellectual uncertainty. Through this process the viewer is actively engaged, and granted the opportunity to add their own perception, and possibly phantoms. Because phantoms cannot explicitly be represented, they cannot be prescribed either.

Both drawings and models are powerful vehicles for articulating elusive intuitions, contemplating, representing and discussing architectural ideas; nevertheless, each mode of representation contains unique information (the medium of the drawing allows for more details, while the three dimensional model communicates spatial relationships better). The viewer is prepared to interpret the media according to its customary nature, and due to conventions, there is an ingrained expectation regarding the type of information one can obtain and process.

By mixing the two different media – the two dimensional drawing and the three dimensional model – to create hybrids, the depiction of the proposal is only partially informed by the medium and by conventions that are the vehicles to articulate the architectural idea. When the two techniques are used jointly, the viewer is forced to reconsider the expected type of information to be obtained, and is prompted to employ new, unfamiliar ways to interpret it. The process asserts a level of ambiguity in a sense that option for multiple interpretations is inherently present in the experience, leading to unexpected and subjective perceptions. This is very similar to a process that leads to phantoms.

SECTION 3: DESIGN PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION

The proposed architecture consists of two components, an additional floor replacing the present 5th floor, and a subterranean expansion. The construction below ground includes an extension to Building 22 and also an underground parking garage below the adjacent lot to the south. These two structures are separated by a lightwell, which would extend to the east and reorganize the pedestrian path running from Campus Avenue to the University Centre building.

A number of architectural strategies are employed to offer and facilitate informal exposure of people to activities. It is expected that these experiences would provide opportunities for the formation of phantoms – engage people and prompt inquiries. Here, architecture is to be a porous boundary and not a barrier.

A new interdisciplinary 5th floor – The ‘Attic’

The 5th floor is to be reconnected to the School of Architecture and would provide areas dedicated to interdisciplinary or collaborative activities. A connection to the 5th floor is made through the ‘fishbowl’, a room situated between the 4th floor ‘street’ and the north-east studios, that is to be made double height, and transformed to be the dedicated exhibition area of the school.¹²³

The ceiling of the 4th floor is to be opened up above the ‘street’, and a series of ‘pods’ inserted into the openings between the beams that once supported the 5th

¹²³ Although the ‘fishbowl’ is currently used as a studio space, by its central position and lack of ventilation it offers an inferior studio space. With the proposed extension, students would have access to more space and would not require to spill over to this room from adjacent studios.

floor slab. Each would be a sky-lit enclosure, that could operate as a transition vestibule between the adjacent larger and more open areas of the 5th floor, or to be closed off on both sides with doors and function as an office, meeting room, pin-up area, reading room, or a small exhibition space.

The pods, running along the north-south axis of the building, would divide the 5th floor into four quadrants, two larger and two smaller, that are largely left open as workspaces for interdisciplinary or collaborative activities. On both the north and the south, this level's new facade is to be fully glazed. Carrying through the language of the original building, the four large, open spaces together with the pods would provide opportunities for "intricate minglings of different uses"¹²⁴ among the users of this floor.

The pods, suspended above the 'upper street', would hang ½ metre into the ceiling room of the 4th floor. Varying in sizes from 2x4 metres to 4x5 metres, each pod would be inserted in such a way that there would be sufficient gaps left between its outer walls and the adjacent beams where light could filter through and illuminate the 'upper street'. Viewed from below, the pods would be fully visible, and seemingly hover in the ceiling space. They would be of light construction; solid cross-laminated timber slabs would form the walls and the floor of each pod. Muffled sound suggesting occupancy – sound of footsteps and voices – would be somewhat audible below, leaking fractured information about the activity contained within.

¹²⁴ Fuglem, p. 83.

The pods would provide a controlled environment, yet their continuous visibility and central location would place them 'mentally' in the centre of activities. Within the concrete structure of Building 22 they are foreign, unfamiliar entities that bring attention to their unknown contents and invite guessing as to their function. They would be constant reminders of the varied activities which are at once different, somewhat mysterious, still, readily accessible. Their precarious position would also imply that the activities associated with them are tentative, not a constant part of the regular architectural activities, yet, even though just temporary, firmly connected. They would represent seeds planted in the middle of architecture to 'germinate', and if successful in attracting interest, could grow out of their limited space, and spill over to the larger areas around them in a flexible and spontaneous manner.

The subterranean extension

In addition to the Level 5 extension, it is also proposed that Building 22 be expanded with two additional levels below the ground floor. The first level is an extension to the current basement (Level 1) that opens up the occupiable space to the edge of the foundation walls, south of the adjacent campus tunnels. The second, lower basement level (Level 0) would reside below the addition to Level 1. To provide direct daylight to these subterranean levels, along the south side of the building a 5 metres wide and 2 levels deep lightwell would be formed. On the other side of the lightwell, below the currently existing surface parking lot, an open-elevation underground parking garage is proposed with a new landscaped area on the surface.

The structural grid of the extension would follow from above. Internal partitions, where necessary would be of concrete block, otherwise, internal windows would allow for light and sightlines within the interiors of Level 1 and Level 0. Main access would be via the existing staircase that connects Level 1 to the ground floor 'street'. In addition, the existing stairs from the Pit would remain in use. The south-east and south-west firestairs, as well as the elevator would be extended to the new floors. The south-east staircase would have direct links across the lightwell to the parking garage.

Level 1 would be used to provide additional studio spaces, offices, a lecture room, a computer lab, and an open gathering area that in one of its corners extends into Level 0. This open area between the two floors would be a similar but smaller multi-purpose area as the Pit. It would be narrower but steeper, with stairs on the side and steps as seating along its entire width. Once standing at the bottom of these steps the space extends all the way to the fully glazed south facade, forming an informal lecture and pin-up area. The rest of Level 0 is occupied by more studio spaces, offices, meeting rooms, and a new Audio Visual section.¹²⁵ During the day, the spaces would get warm south-light, while at night, the building would be illuminated from below and function as a 'beacon' at this central area of the campus.

Although subterranean territory is conventionally seen as subsidiary to spaces above ground, it is an important strategic move due to the inherent connotations that come with the territory. Whatever lies below the ground is associated with

¹²⁵ Changes to the existing building would be the demolition of small storage rooms and the former art store at basement level, as well as the release of the spaces currently occupied by the AV section, to be replaced with the graduate model assembly room in order to better meet the needs of these functions.

where things develop – the territory of the ‘not-yet-defined’ – and plays the role of foundation; while also perceived to be secure and protected. It is a newly revealed world of activities, possibilities, surprises and wonder. Although how people will respond to working in that underground environment is unpredictable, it is reasonable to assume that they will create phantoms along these connotations. Also, by being able to look out from the subterranean studios and seeing the movement outside, the feeling of being a participant on campus would be reinforced. Ultimately, it is through the lightwell that the internal activities are ‘brought to the surface’.

The lightwell, or ‘canyon’, inserted in between the subterranean extension of Building 22 and the underground parking garage, serves a dual purpose. It establishes an immediate spatial connection between one of the campus’s major pedestrian thoroughfares and the occupants of the Architecture Building, while also introduces a buffer zone. Without being intrusive, it allows passers-by a direct ‘view in’ to the school, displaying the vivacity of the activities inside.

The proposed architecture would enhance voyeuristic possibilities, staging opportunities for people to peer into a moment of other’s sphere of activities without trespassing. Having been exposed to activities in architecture, even in a casual way, could spark curiosity, speculation and vague ideas. People could build an awareness, ‘phantoms’ about what architecture is, and consequently be more inclined to engage somehow, possibly as in an interdisciplinary activity when opportunity arises. Therefore, reorganizing the area in front of Building 22, thus reconciling the passers-by traffic and the occupants of the building, would open up the insular environment.

As seen from the studios looking across the 'canyon', the underground parking garage would extend the repetitious and bare structure of the school, thereby, literally and symbolically extend the School of Architecture beyond its footprints – beyond its physical boundaries.

The hybrid representations are withheld until the presentation of the thesis to allow readers to form their own interpretations first based on the text only. By presenting the hybrids during the discussion, discrepancy between individual interpretations formed based on the text and on the visuals may emerge. It is proposed that following the presentation the hybrids will be photographed and included as an appendix, rather than as part of CH. 06.



Figure 25 The new school, Level 1.

EPILOGUE.

Do phantoms exist, do they affect us? If they do, can they play a useful role, and if that is possible, how can architecture help to create them?

These are the questions that have been investigated. It is hoped that even if a clear answer eludes us, the arguments are sufficient to make us ponder about these questions long enough to plant a seed of uncertainty, and let us consider that architecture is a conduit in a sense that supports the creation of phantoms. What each of us perceive as *Architecture* (with a capital 'a') is somewhat subjective, precisely because this kind of architecture can only exist if it evokes a phantom within us. Can we say, *there is no Architecture without phantoms?*

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APPENDIX 01.

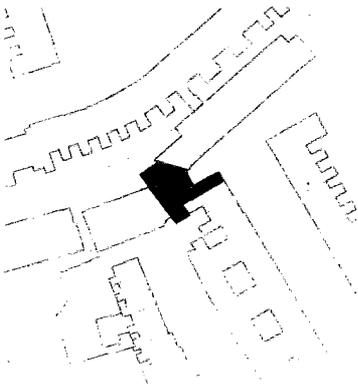
*The curious case of the house with no street façade**(expanded version)*

Figure 26 Brick House, site plan. Caruso St John. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*. Per Aurora Fernandez, ed. Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain: A+T Ediciones, 2005)

The Brick House, completed in 2005, is a private residential project situated in the bustling and well established neighbourhood of Notting Hill in west London. The client, who to date continues to share their time between their New York City SoHo loft and their new London property, approached Caruso St John in 2001. The motivation force behind the project was the client's frustration with the limitations their former Victorian house imposed on the family's life.¹²⁶

As the architects were involved from the very conception of the project, they could work with the client to develop the brief. The client did not explicitly ask for new construction, but were open to the idea of any type of home that better suited their lifestyle. They were also very keen on staying in this particular area of London. After months of considerations of various options, including extensive refurbishments and office space conversion to loft style living, the search for the ideal property resulted in an irregularly shaped residual site at the end of a cul-de-sac. (Figure 26, p. 74) The site not only belonged to one of the tall Victorian terraced houses that surrounded it, but was only accessible through a former carriageway at the ground level of that structure.

¹²⁶ Rob Gregory, "Modern Romance – Hidden love: beyond an anonymous Victorian arched carriageway, Caruso St John bring New-Romanticism to the heart of Notting Hill," *The Architectural Review* (March 2006), <http://www.arplus.com/broch/articles/armarch06/armarch06carusodone.pdf> (accessed 10 February 2008)

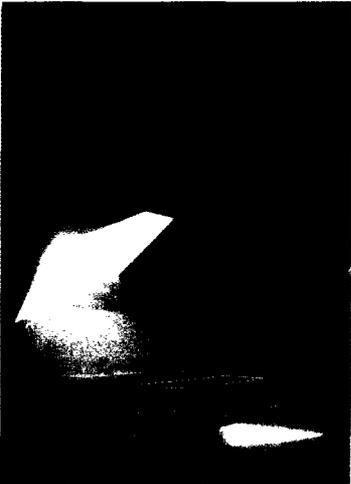


Figure 27 Main living area and kitchen of Brick House. Caruso St John, 2005. (source: *As Built*: Caruso St John Architects)

To best utilize the conditions of the site in order to achieve the required internal spaces, the new house occupies the centre and spreads outwards terminating at site boundary. Because the house does not have an elevation facing the street, and apart from rare glimpses of part elevations one can catch from the side walk, it is only visible in its totality from the neighbouring windows overlooking the roof.

Through the former carriageway, the entrance ramp leads to the upper ground floor where the open main living, dining and kitchen area is located. (Figure 27, p. 75) Adjacent, there is also a smaller study room, and stairs leading to the lower ground level. On the lower level there are four bedrooms, three bathrooms, and other auxiliary spaces. Each of the bedrooms opens onto one of the three external courtyards that fill in the corners of the site. (Figure 30, p. 78)

The material palette is reduced and all materials are exposed. Every internal and external wall as well as the floor of the upper ground levels are constructed out of brick, while the entrance ramp, the floor of the lower ground level, and all ceilings are poured in-situ concrete. Light enters the spaces via skylights and the full height windows that face the courtyards.

The Brick House has been described as a house that “has virtually no elevations.”¹²⁷ For those who have not visited the Brick House, and perhaps even the ones who have, this hidden house embodies the myth of a secluded world, an almost fictitious universe that lives in our imagination. Numerous tales and films have been preoccupied by the idea of stumbling upon a non-descript door that

¹²⁷ Hugh Pearman, “Caruso St John / Cover Versions,” *The Architects' Journal*, vol. 222, no. 21 (Oct 2005), p. 30, http://www.brouwer-edition.com/img/godow_arch_works.pdf (accessed 9 March 2008)

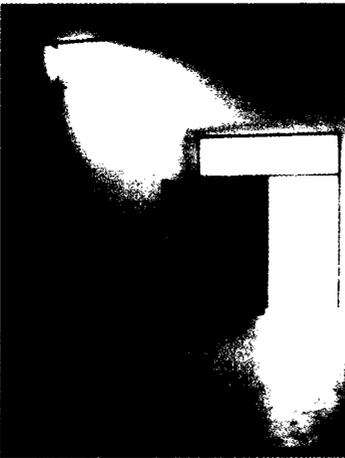
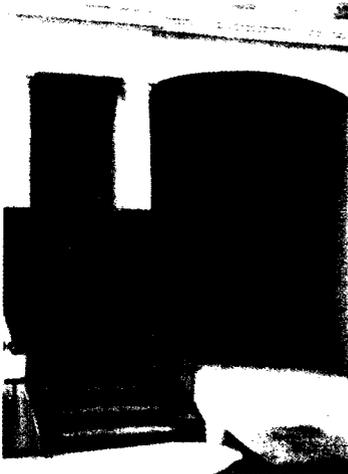


Figure 28 The new door under the Victorian carriageway at end of the cul-de-sac of Hatherley Grove, London, and the door as viewed from the inside. Caruso St John, 2005. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*)

turns out to be the gateway into a completely different world. And yet, this project is no more than a house in London constructed out of bricks as an infill between existing buildings.

“You don’t see it, and this absence compels you to inspect the panorama once again, to look for this point which is missing in your structure; your knowledge [...] struggles with your perception.”¹²⁸

Roland Barthes’s description of the experience of observing Paris from atop the Eiffel Tower coincidentally is a fitting comparison when looking for this house. One of the journalists who visited it portrayed the entry into the Brick House with the following words: “it [...] is reached through a carriageway through the façade of an adjacent Victorian terrace.”¹²⁹ This disposition of the entrance door of the house in relation to the street supports the thesis that even the door does not truly belong to the house’s secluded world, as the Victorian carriageway the door fills in acts more like a disguise, a mask, a last gateway to the house.

Directly behind the non-descript door that does not hold much clue to what lies behind, the ramp is an extended threshold that elongates the journey from the ordinary London street to the private interior of the house more so than traditionally an entry hallway would do. (Figure 28, p. 76) One visitor described the entry experience, as

“...if London ends and the house beings.[...] This flowing procession begins with the shallow ascending floor [...], which, [...] feels like a funnel directing one into the heart of the house. [...] in the ramped entrance space – a re-orientation device distancing the internal world of

¹²⁸ Roland Barthes, “The Eiffel Tower,” in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 176.

¹²⁹ Jonathan Glancey, “Bricking it,” *The Guardian* (5 Sept 2005), <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1562699,00.html> (accessed 10 February 2008)

the house from the city – the sense of scale that brickwork would inevitably bring is altogether removed.”¹³⁰

The encompassing skin-like brickwork, denoting the true entrance of the hidden house, only beings beyond the top of the ramp.

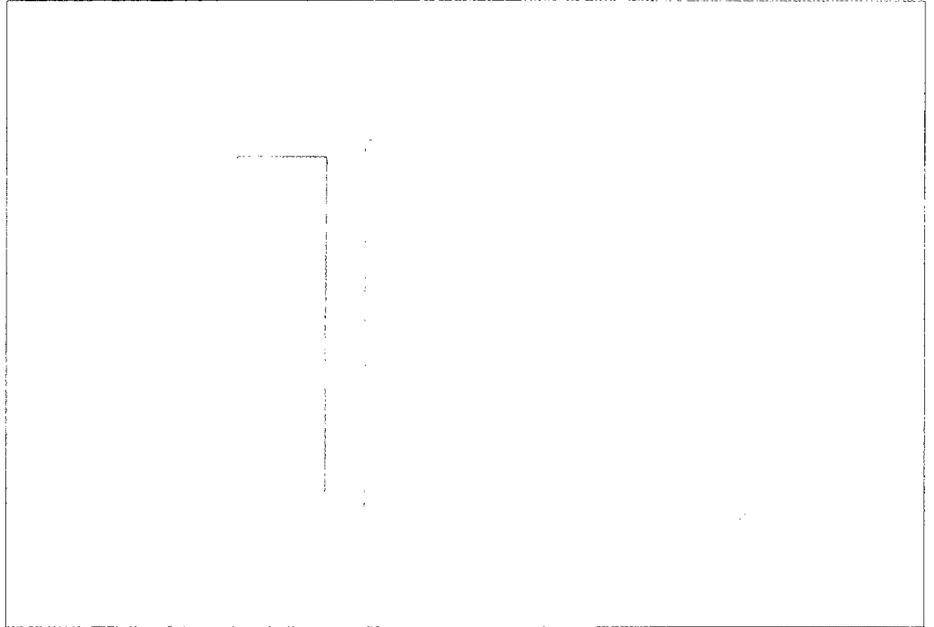


Figure 29 View into courtyard from master bedroom. Caruso St John, 2005. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*)

Stemming from Caruso St John’s preposition of using walls over columns for smaller structures,¹³¹ the necessary load bearing structure of the Brick House remains ambiguously hidden within the expanses of the homogeneous brick planes (a further play on mystery and uncertainty) that are laid in the same pattern inside and out, floor to walls. Therefore, only the door and window openings and the occasional built in closets and shelves break up the organization of the walls,

¹³⁰Irina Davidovici, “Rhapsody in brick,” *Building Design* (27 May 2005), <http://www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=3051678> (accessed 10 February 2008)

¹³¹ Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting, Weaving, Wrapping, Pressing / Stricken, Weben, Einhüllen, Prägen*. ed. Architekturgalerie Luzern, trans. Juliane Sattinger D-Reutlingen (Basel, Switzerland; Boston, MA: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2002) p. 76.

not the structure. This prevailing emphasis on the continuity of the same material throughout the house promotes the role of the walls as a skin that clearly marks and defines the edge of the house as if it could only swell up to the existing site boundary. Even the exterior courtyards are the continuations of the interior spaces because the perceived boundary of the house is not the actual external envelope but the brick wall that lines the site boundary.¹³² (Figure 29, p. 77)

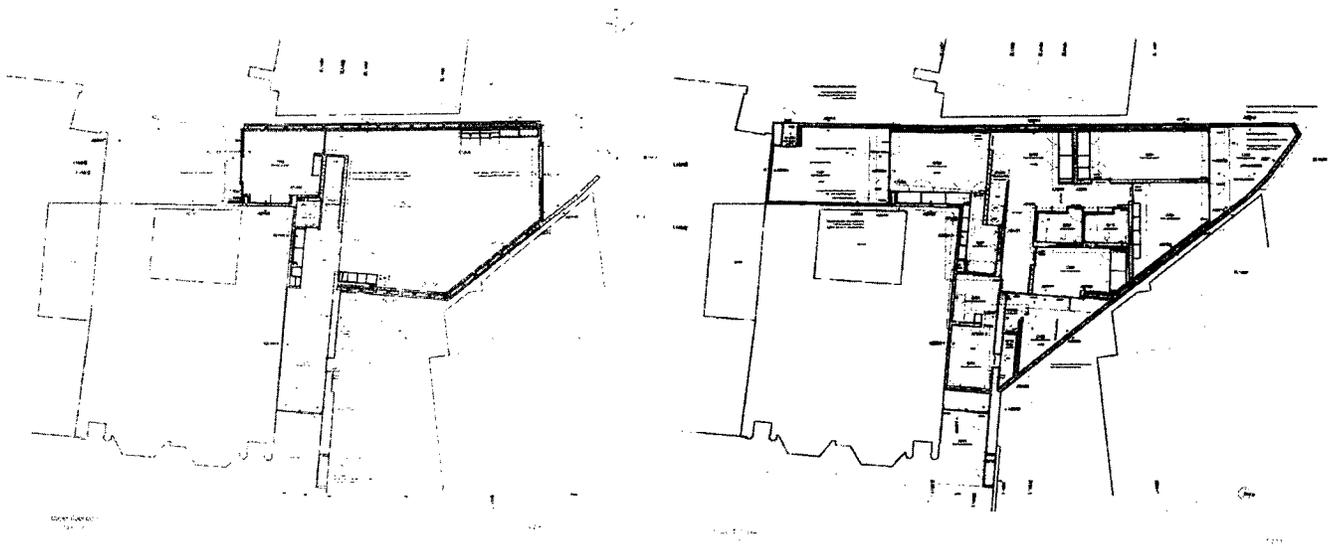


Figure 30 Upper and lower ground floor plans. Caruso St John. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*)

Caruso St John claims that “the form [of the house] appears unbound and soft, as if an internal force is pressing the walls and roof out against the buildings around it.”¹³³ This illusion is further supported by the angular composition of the concrete ceiling above the main living space where planes suddenly heighten to signify a “distorted dome.”¹³⁴ Even though the ceiling above this area retains the sharp and irregular geometric qualities that are typical of the rest of the main floor, the

¹³² Kieran Long, “The Brick House, icon 026,” *Iconeye* (Aug 2005), http://iconeye.sites.subhub.com/articles/20070323_83 (accessed 10 February 2008)

¹³³ Caruso St John Architects, “Projects / Brick House,” <http://www.carusostjohn.com> (accessed 10 February 2008)

¹³⁴ Ellis Woodman, “The Brick Layers,” *Architect Online*, vol. 95, no. 5 (May 2006), p. 46-55, VNU Business Publications: USA, <http://www.architectmagazine.com/industry-news.asp?sectionID=1013&articleID=384220> (accessed 18 April 2008)

increase in interior height and the concave relationship of the facets to one another is perceived as if the ceiling was rounded; therefore, it performs as the “illusion” – an icon – of a dome. The dome as a space defining element is so entrenched in most cultures that the ceiling here seems to evoke resemblance to the traditional type of dome, a symbol for gathering, which is very appropriate for the main living areas within the house.

On the other hand, the exact opposite effect was created above the area dedicated for dining. There the ceiling sharply drops to two-thirds of the adjacent height. In traditional domestic spaces, dining areas tend to have a secondary role among the more public interior realms. By assigning the low ceiling to where the dining table is going to be placed, the ceiling takes on the space defining traditional role¹³⁵ of walls to create a more intimate scale and the open plan of the main floor can stay intact. Once again, material takes on the mediator between the inner realm and the outer world as “the in-situ concrete [of the ceiling] offers a reassuring sense of adjustment between inside and out.”¹³⁶

The architectural setting is playing with the senses, it disorients the visitor to further reinforce the sense that they are far away from the everyday hustling city. One constantly struggles to understand one’s position relative to the context and comes to the conclusion that “the expansive interior is a place of escape and dreams.”¹³⁷

Caruso St John chose a somewhat irrational, non-standard, perhaps even uncanny approach to create an exceptionally purposeful family house, thus the

¹³⁵ Long, “The Brick House”

¹³⁶ Davidovici, “Rhapsody in brick”

¹³⁷ Caruso St John Architects, “Projects / Brick House”

house has a revolutionary quality. In fact, the approaches the architects took for the Brick House not only challenge but contradict the standardized norms, yet, still achieve a meaningful architecture. Squeezed into walls and regulations the house respects, obeys, conforms, struggles, negotiates, and challenges the constraints that are imposed upon it to form a subtle, but unexpected counterstatement with its environment.

The negotiation started with the site selection. Peter St John expressed his preference for urban planning that does not totally disregard the existing city fabric. He wrote, "In diversity there is tolerance, and my favourite pieces of the city are those in which change is visible and the ongoing negotiation between new and old is most extreme."¹³⁸ The strict regulations governing height, overlooking, rights of light, and party wall issues are direct reflections of the rigid yet democratic structure of British society; therefore the resulting form of the building is the negotiation between the client's need and the established order.

According to St John "there is a higher internal pressure within the building that is pushing out against the surrounding barriers of the site."¹³⁹ Implied by this statement is that even the ceiling is a site boundary when conventionally the ceiling is not viewed as such. The faceted ceiling with its varying heights is a reaction to obeying rights of light and height restricting regulations, at the same time the arrangement of the skylights are attempts at break free from constant surveillance. (Figure 31, p. 81) The "overbearing presence of neighbours"¹⁴⁰ proved

¹³⁸ Caruso St John Architects. *Knitting, Weaving, Wrapping, Pressing*, p. 84.

¹³⁹ Davidovici, "Rhapsody in brick"

¹⁴⁰ Stephen Bayley, "Clever brick! If only your average Berkeley Home could manage it," *The Observer* (3 Sept 2006), <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/features/story/0,,1863695,00.html> (accessed 10 February 2008)

to be a more complex issue than a usual design challenge. The feeling of seclusion that the interior spaces' quality disseminates is also contested by the fact that to realize the house not only the noise and hustle of a city had to be insulated but nearly two dozen party-wall agreements¹⁴¹ had to be entered into. "[The courtyard spaces'] shapes bear witness to the difficulty of this process."¹⁴²

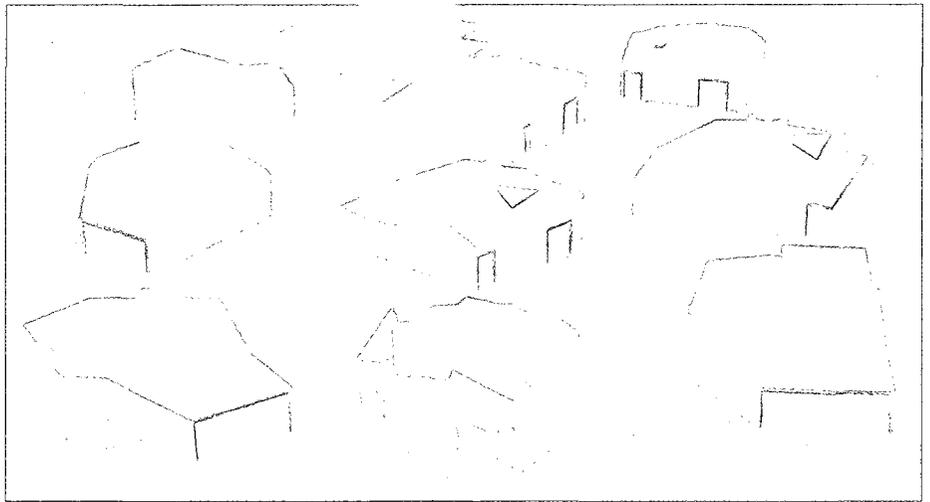


Figure 31 Study models for the ceiling. Caruso St John. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*)

Despite the seeming transgression, the architects believe that "interpretation of tradition has always been how you made art and architecture. [...] If you make pure invention, how can it possibly have any density, compared with something that has hundreds or thousands of years feeding into it?"¹⁴³ In fact, they frequently reference their work to the Arts and Crafts tradition¹⁴⁴, a movement defined by Theodor Adorno as "revolting against the shapelessness of mass-produced,

¹⁴¹ Bayley, "Clever brick!"

¹⁴² Davidovici, "Rhapsody in brick"

¹⁴³ Pearman, p. 32.

¹⁴⁴ Pearman, p. 30.

pseudo-individualized form,¹⁴⁵ to bring light to their care for material choices and attention to detail. Choosing brick as the main material irrespective of different tectonic function was more of an ideological position rather than a question of necessity. Brick performs well in compression and has been traditionally used starting from the Middle East across Europe to North America for building domestic, public and industrial building types. However, as Adam Caruso pointed out, brickwork is now considered “a luxurious way to build,”¹⁴⁶ perhaps partially due to the additional attention it takes from the architect to adjust the design to suite standard bricks, and also to the inefficiencies of constructing a bigger structure out of such small modules.

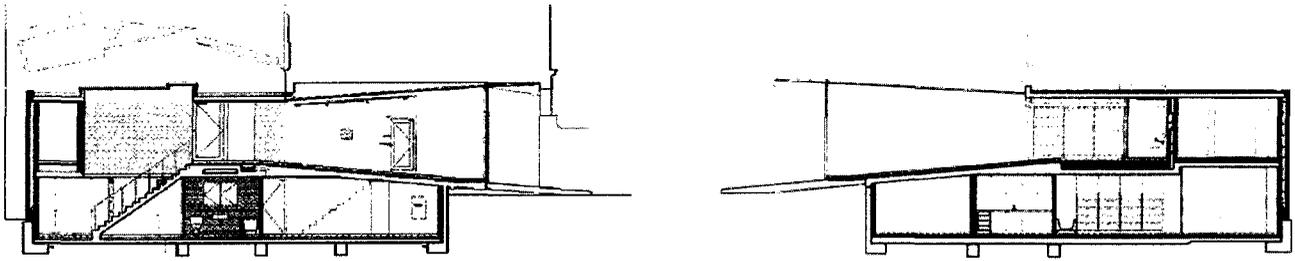


Figure 32 Sections through entrance ramp, looking in both directions. Caruso St John. (source: *As Built: Caruso St John Architects*)

The prevailing planning restrictions allowed for only one storey to be above ground level,¹⁴⁷ which the architects obeyed by sinking the entire lower ground floor three feet below street level. In retrospect, this anchors the internal world of the house within the site to mark its new found permanence among the older neighbours.

¹⁴⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, “Functionalism Today,” in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Long, “The Brick House”

¹⁴⁷ “Stirling judging / Brick House, West London,” *The Architects' Journal*, vol. 224, no. 13-98 (2006), London, p. 53.

The two floors are characteristically and functionally different from each other but both challenge the typical arrangement of spaces of an English town house as well as a New York loft conversion.¹⁴⁸ The upper level, in a response to the site boundary conditions imposed upon the house, shakes the prevailing order of the regularly shaped, formal and rigid domestic layouts, while the lower ground is a critique on the standard hierarchy of spaces.

Not only the basic hierarchy of spaces was reversed but the architects also broke with another deep held conviction when aiming for a more drastic play of contrasting light and dark spaces. Adam Caruso explained that

“...darkness is not a popular subject in architecture. It is something that irritated some British architects [...]. There is, in this country, an orthodoxy that says every interior must be flooded with light.”¹⁴⁹

The idea was that not all activities require the same quality of light in a space, thus nothing justifies flooding every room with light, and the varied atmosphere could be equally as or even more suited to the purpose.

The building is a statement of where the client wants to be seen in society. There is a duality in this role, as on the one hand the client is part of the affluent class; though on the other hand, as non-natives they are on the margins of British society. They had the power to commission a custom house in an area of London where land is a scarce resource and the demand is extremely high. The client's dual social role is reflected in the act of inserting this house into the established fabric of the city where they could free themselves from the rigid formality, the social oppression of the established rich aristocracy, and to restate but not impose

¹⁴⁸ Caruso St John Architects, “Projects / Brick House”

¹⁴⁹ Caruso St John Architects, *Knitting, Weaving, Wrapping, Pressing*, p. 76.

their identity, individuality, uniqueness and differences as outsiders who do not need to assimilate or to conform but they are independently above it all.

“Beauty today can have no other measure except the depth to which a work resolves contradictions. A work must cut through the contradictions and overcome them, not by covering them up, but by pursuing them.”¹⁵⁰



Figure 33 Light entering the kitchen area of the Brick House. Caruso St John, Photo by Helene Binet, 2005. (source: Royal Institute of British Architects website, www.architecture.com/Awards/RIBAAwards/Winners2006/London/BrickHouseLondonW2.aspx)

If Adorno’s statement on beauty is anything to go by, then it is safe to conclude that the Brick House had more than conquered all its initial predispositions for being a fine example of unprepossessing architecture. It achieved a double goal of fitting in an existing context, at the same time turning around to impart a revolutionary statement against it. A seemingly paradoxical task that the architects achieved by physically hiding the building but making it stand out by departing from the standard norms. The continuous skin-like wall resolves the conflict between a leftover land obeying existing boundaries and the carefully inserted new and different identity in the middle of all; it is to unite the internal spaces as one coherent entity, and distance and differentiate this entity from the outside world. Despite the initial appearance of being unusual, the house presents consistent design and message, and it is a serious, modest, yet delightful building. The myth helps to reinforce and promote the main function of the house, which is to be a private and composed retreat (in all its sense of the words) in the busy heart of the city. The clients are caught between fitting into a well established society yet remaining different, and the house is a true reflection of the search for their new identity.

In 2006, when the Brick House was one of the unexpected contenders during the time of the Stirling Prize judging, everyone in London architectural circles seemed

¹⁵⁰ Adorno, p. 19.

to have a passionate opinion about the project's merits or lacks of. Perhaps because the myth that surrounds the house feeds into a childhood fascination of so many people; and the question of private domestic space and the future direction of residential neighbourhood planning are two topics that resonate with many, it is no wonder that the house have been and continues to generate positive debates on so many levels.

This essay was originally written in April 2008, under the title "Caruso St John's Brick House, or how real architecture can be testimony for Alice's Wonderland and to a negotiated social identity", for the Carleton University course "ARCH 4502 Research and Criticism" instructed by Dr. Thomas Mical.

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APPENDIX 02.

Building 22: Analysis of space usage within the building

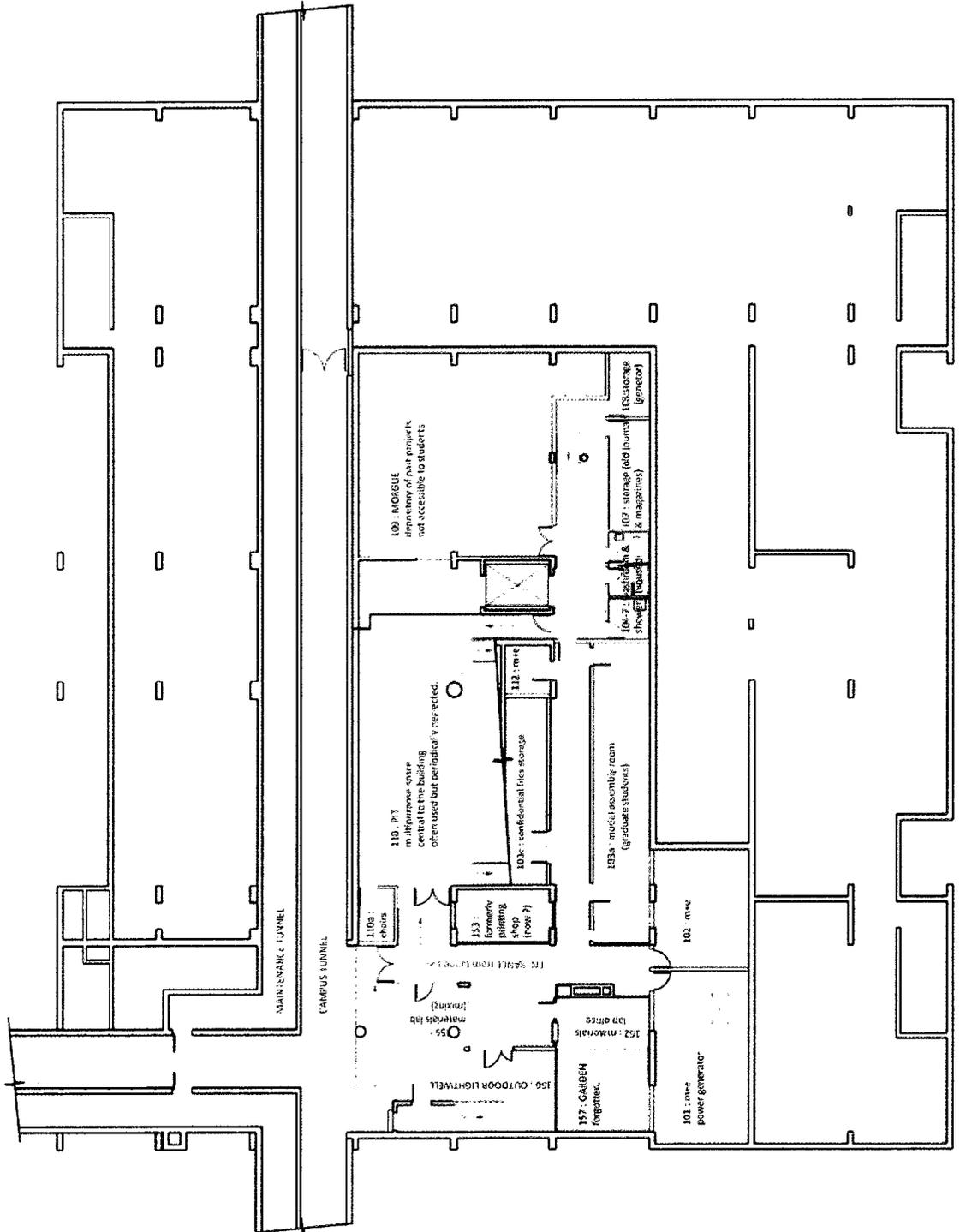
Level 01

storage architecture
 storage_admin
 storage_maintenance
 m+e
 bathroom
 underused space

cnc machine room
 material lab
 model assembly room
 hub (student kitchen, lounge)
 gallery (doesn't exist...)

lecture room
 seminar room
 computer lab
 studio space
 workshop space
 audio-visual section
 wood-metal shop

faculty office
 administration
 technical data room
 circulation (and multipurpose)
 outdoor space
 elevator



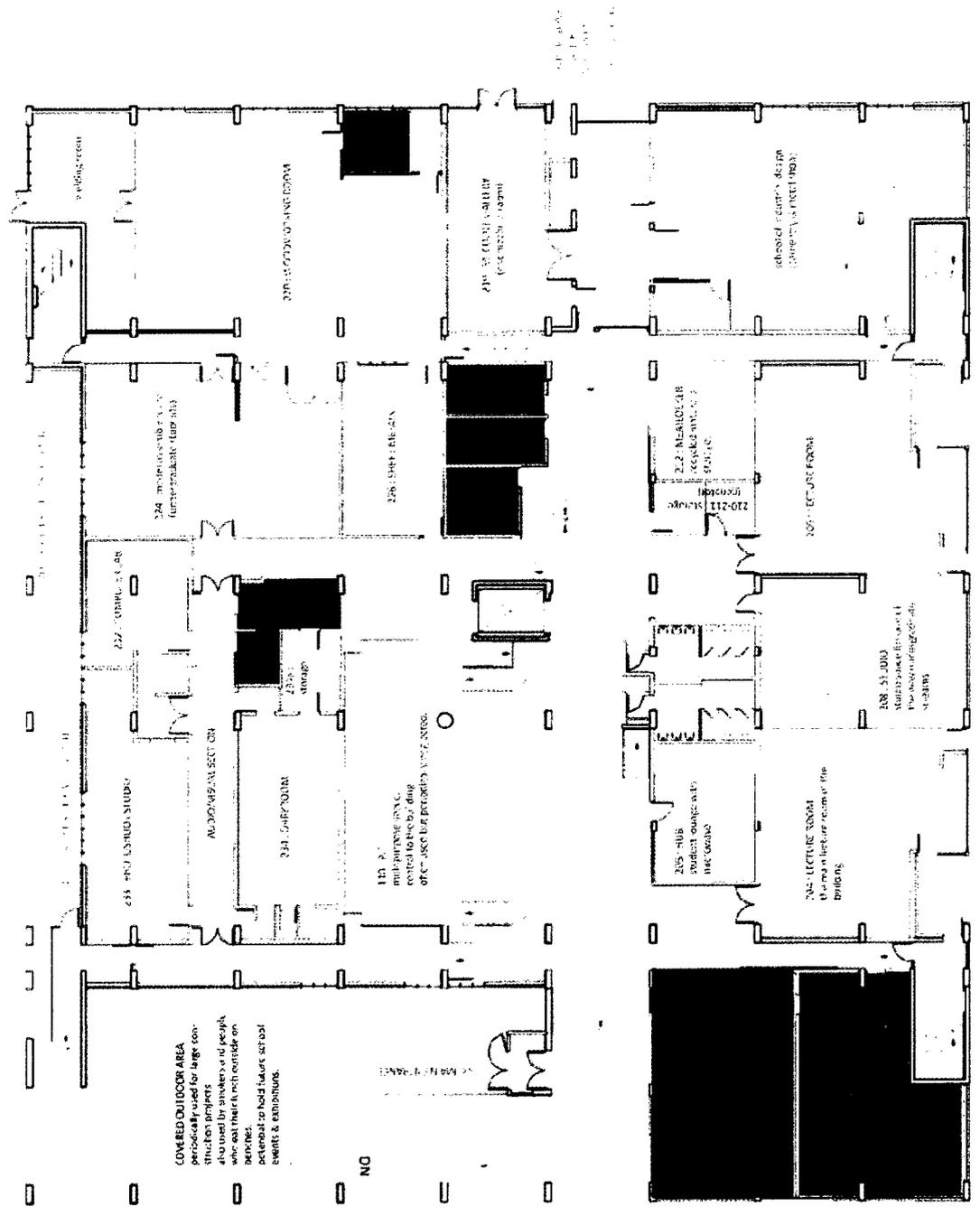
Level 02

- storage_architecture
- storage_admin
- storage_maintenance
- m+e
- bathmorr
- underused space

- crit machine room
- materials lab
- model assembly room
- hub / student kitchen, lounge
- gallery (doesn't exist...)

- lecture room
- seminar room
- computer lab
- studio space
- workshop space
- audio-visual section
- wood/metal shop

- faculty office
- administration
- technical data room
- circulation (and multipurpose)
- outdoor space
- elevator



LOWERED OUTDOOR AREA
periodically used for large con-
struction projects
also used by students and people
who eat their lunch outside on
benches.
potential to hold future art and
events & exhibits.

NO

205 - HUB
Student lounge with
the kitchen

202 - LECTURE ROOM
to be used in lecture rooms in the
building

208 - 51-200
Multi-purpose Room
The new wing of the
building

220-212 Studio
222 - MATERIALS LAB
228 - MATERIALS LAB

205 - LECTURE ROOM

202 - LECTURE ROOM
to be used in lecture rooms in the
building

234 - OFFICE

236 - OFFICE

237 - OFFICE

Level 02

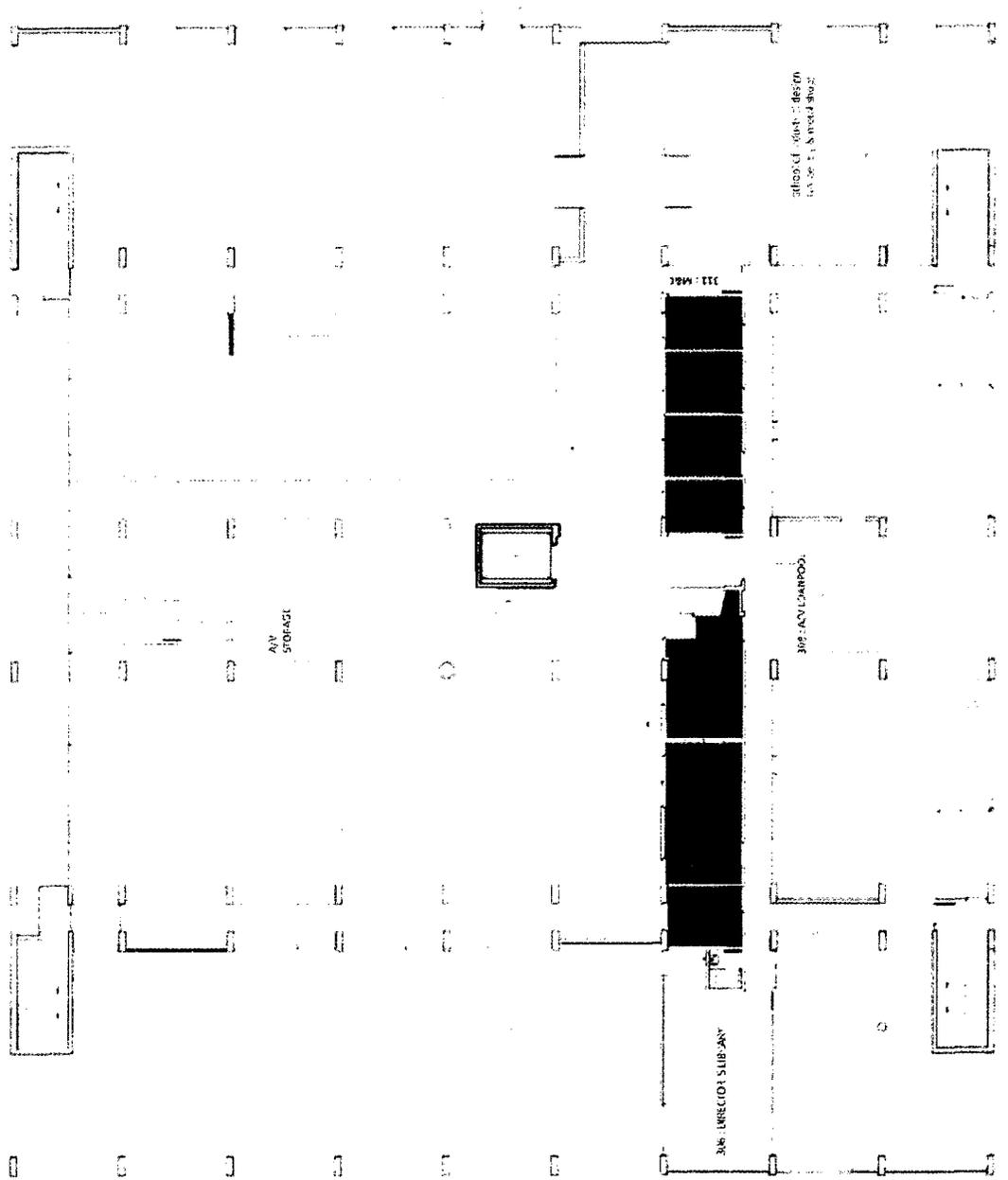
Level 03

storage_architecture
 storage_admin
 storage_maintenance
 m+e
 bathroom
 underused space

cnc machine room
 materials lab
 model assembly room
 hub (student kitchen, lounge)
 gallery (doesn't exist...)

lecture room
 seminar room
 computer lab
 studio space
 workshop space
 audio+visual section
 wood+metal shop

facility office
 administration
 technical data room
 circulation (and multipurpose)
 outdoor space
 elevator



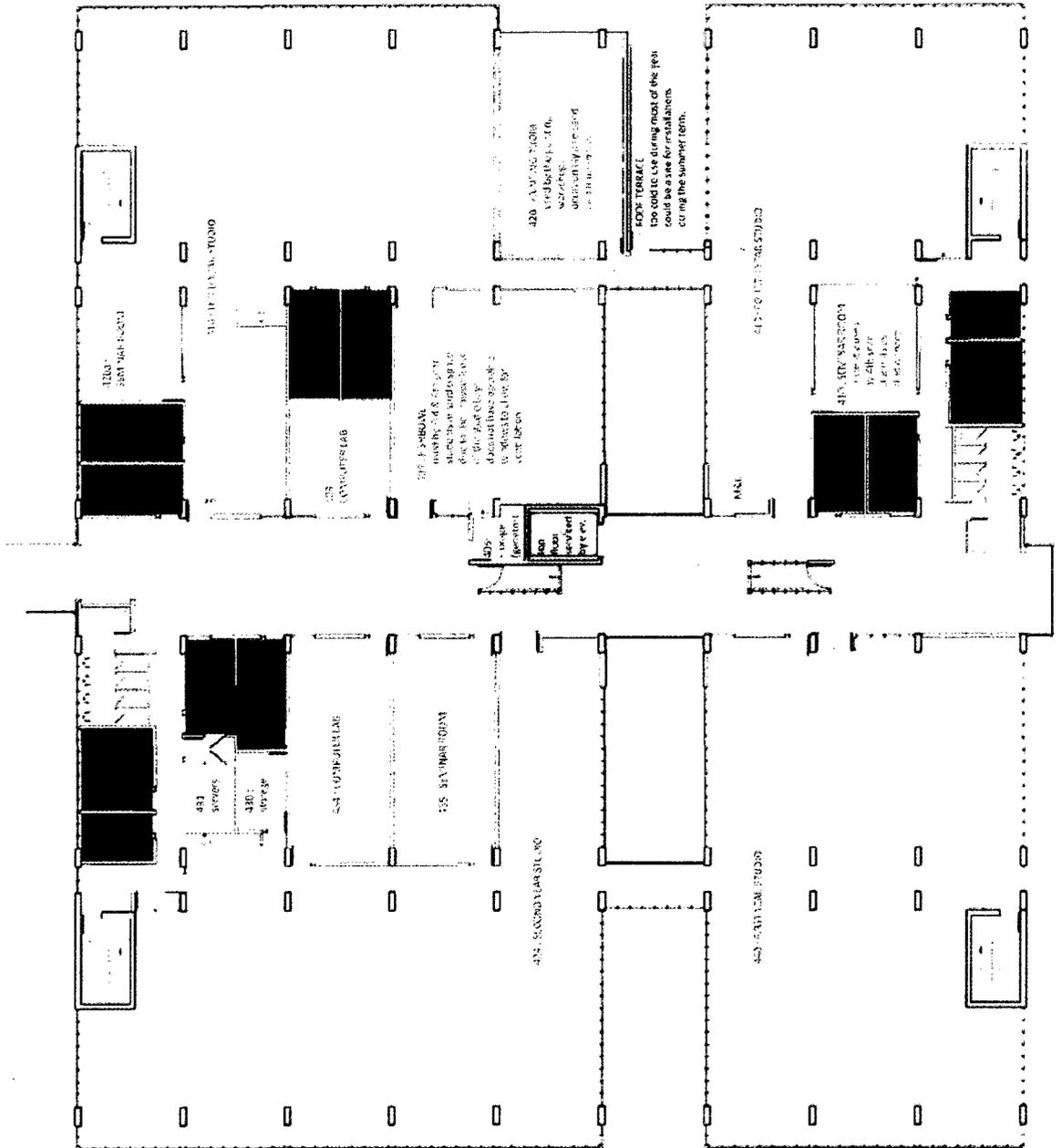
Level 04

- storage_architecture
- storage_admin
- storage_maintenance
- mic
- bathroom
- unrefused space

- crs machine room
- materials lab
- model assembly room
- hub (student kitchen, lounge)
- gallery (doesn't exist...)

- lecture room
- seminar room
- computer lab
- studio space
- workshop space
- audio-visual section
- wood+metal shop

- faculty office
- administration
- technical data room
- circulation (and multipurpose)
- outdoor space
- elevator



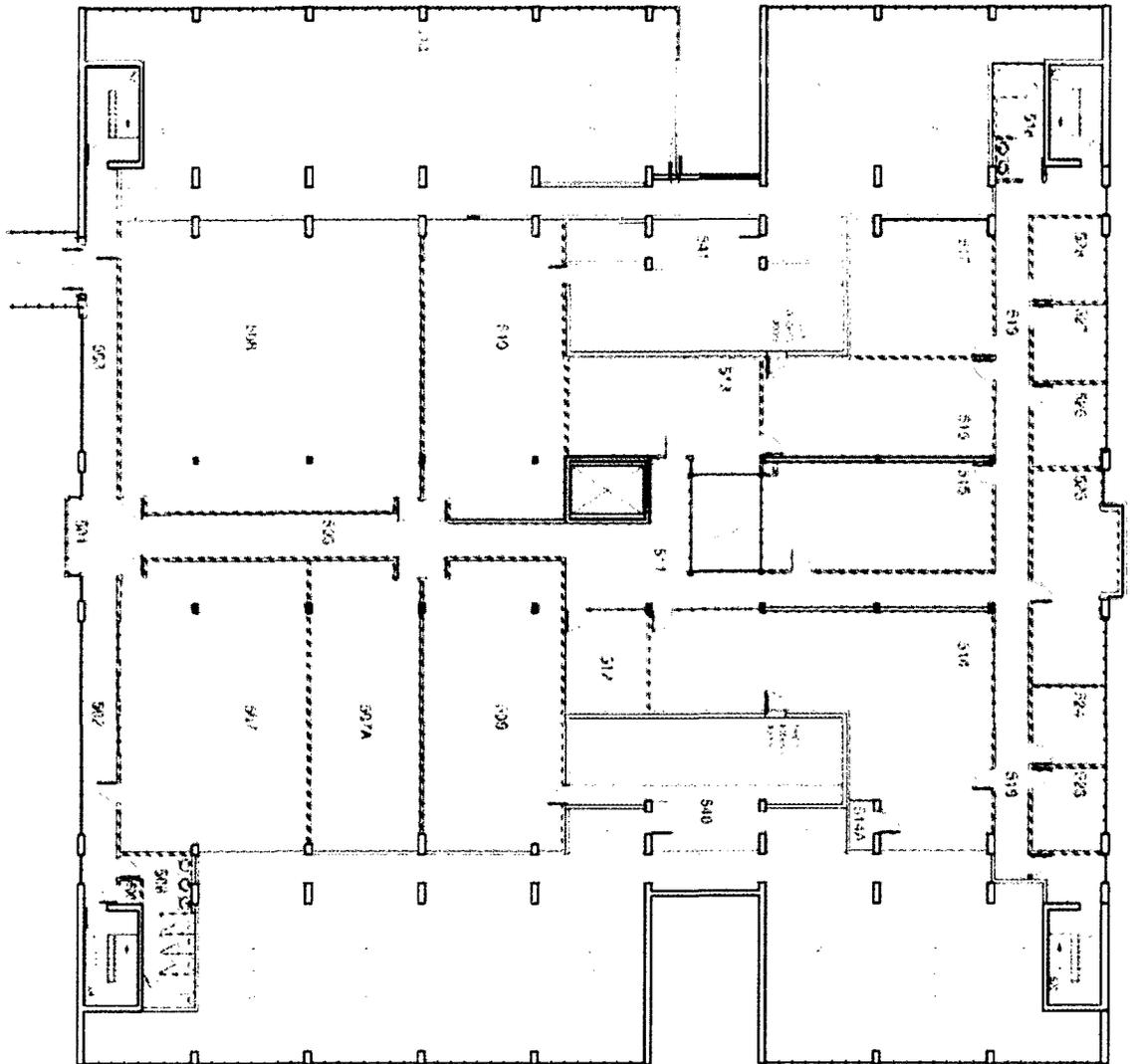
Level 05

storage_architecture
 storage_admin
 storage_maintenance
 m+e
 bathroom
 underused space

cnc machine room
 materials lab
 model assembly room
 hub (Student kitchen, lounge)
 gallery (doesn't exist...)

lecture room
 seminar room
 computer lab
 studio space
 workshop space
 audio-visual section
 wood-metal shop

faculty office
 administration
 technical data room
 circulation (and multipurpose)
 outdoor space
 elevator



APPENDIX 03.

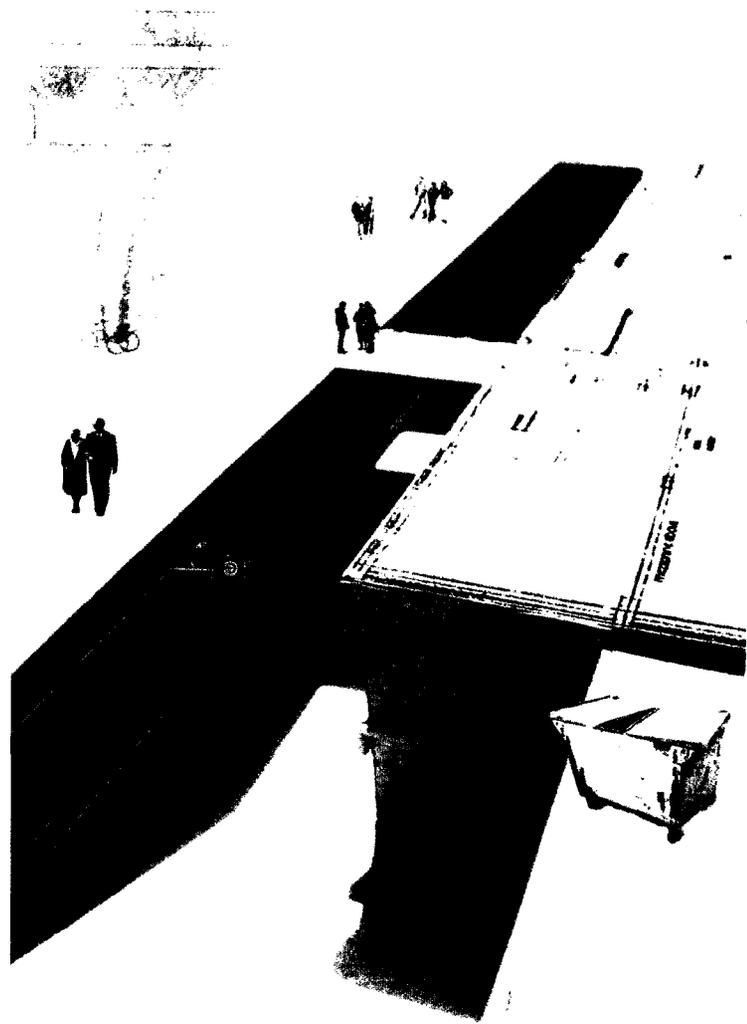
Hybrid representations

Figure 34 The subterranean extension as viewed when approaching from Campus Avenue. Building 22 ground floor / Level 2 plan (right); 'canyon' and underground parking garage (foreground); University Centre Building (background).

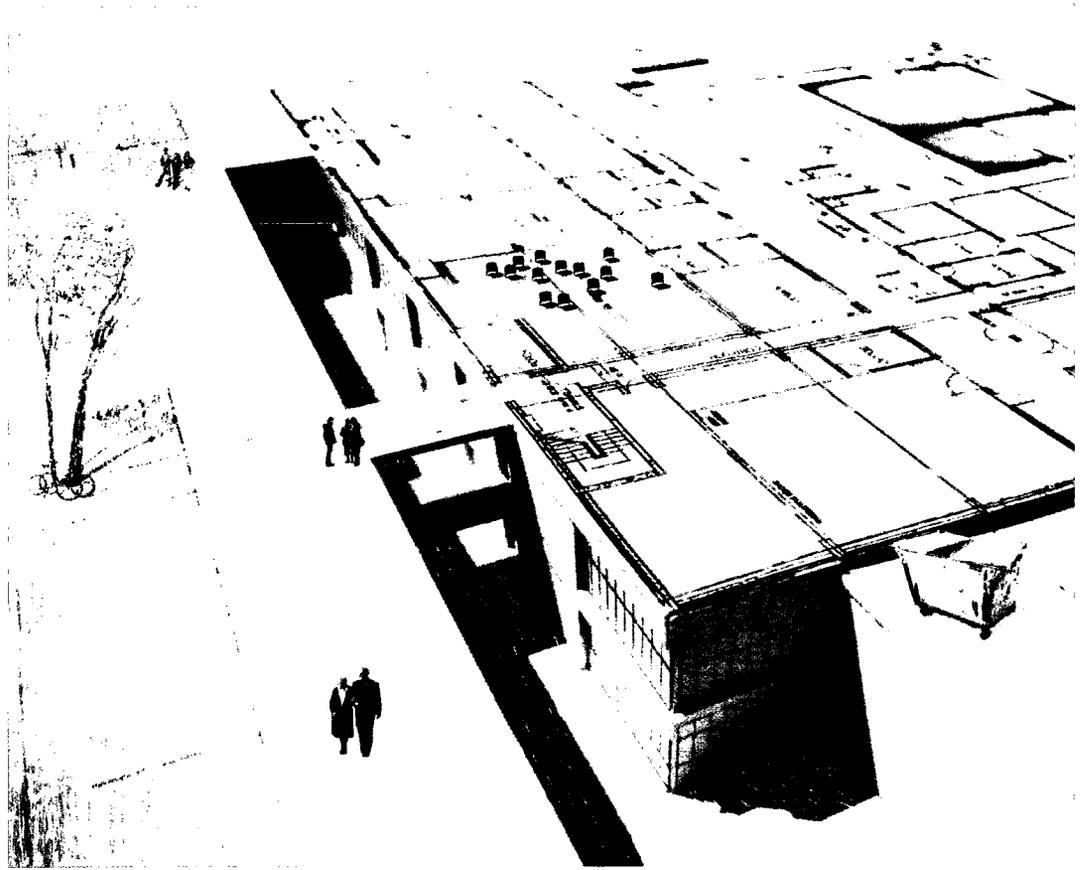


Figure 35 View along the pedestrian path when approaching from Campus Avenue. Building 22 ground floor / Level 2 plan and new subterranean facade (right); 'canyon' (foreground).

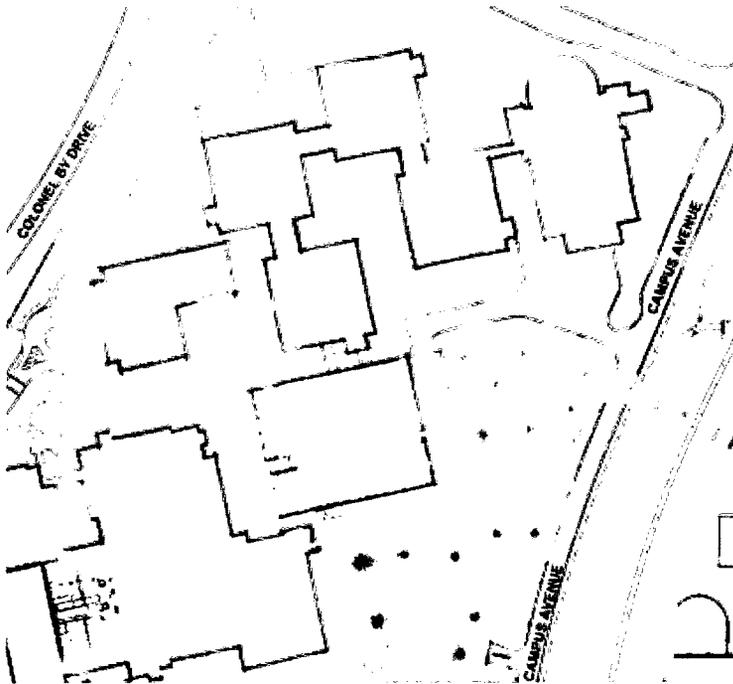


Figure 36 Site plan, central campus. Building 22 (dark grey, centre); MacKenzie and Minto Centre Buildings (top); University Centre Building (bottom left).

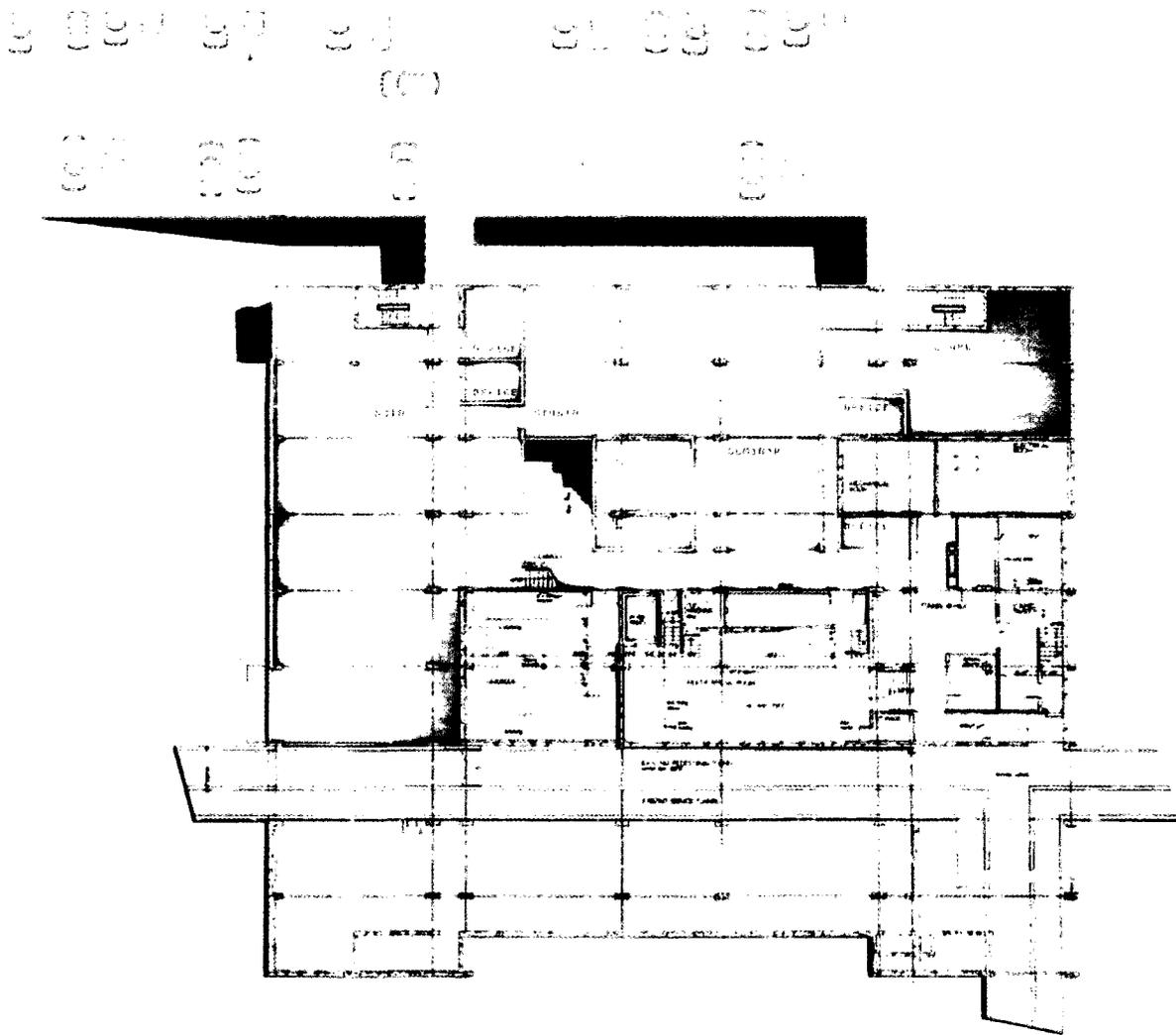


Figure 38 Building 22, extended Level 1.

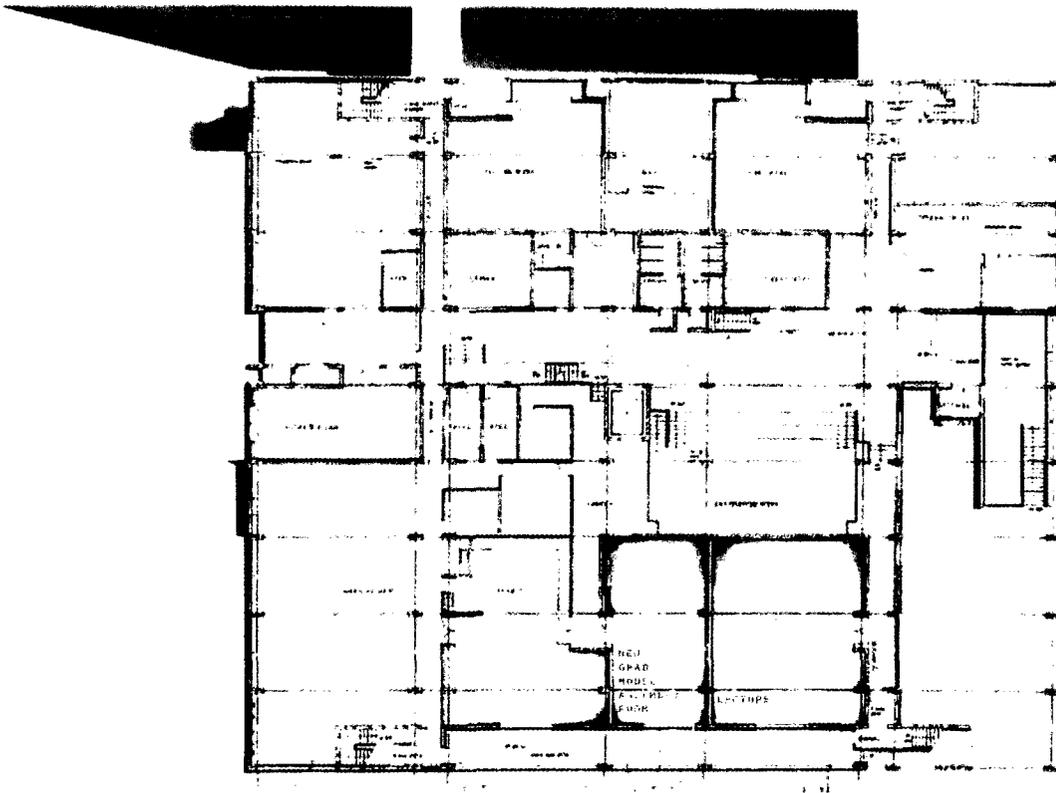


Figure 39 Building 22, Level 2, ground floor.

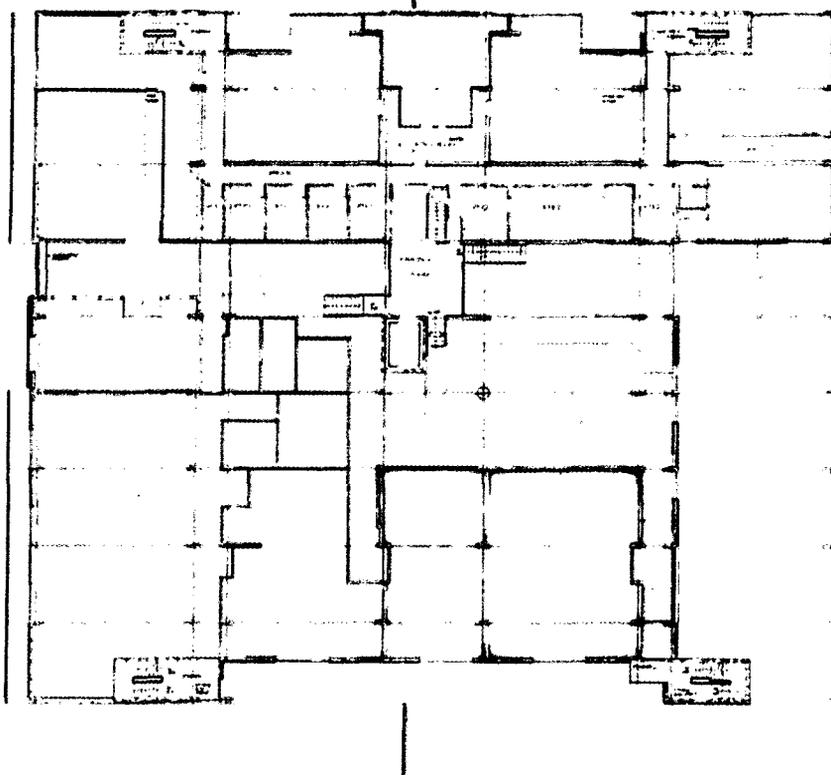


Figure 40 Building 22, existing Level 3.



Figure 41 Building 22, existing Level 4 with new stair in 'Fishbowl'.

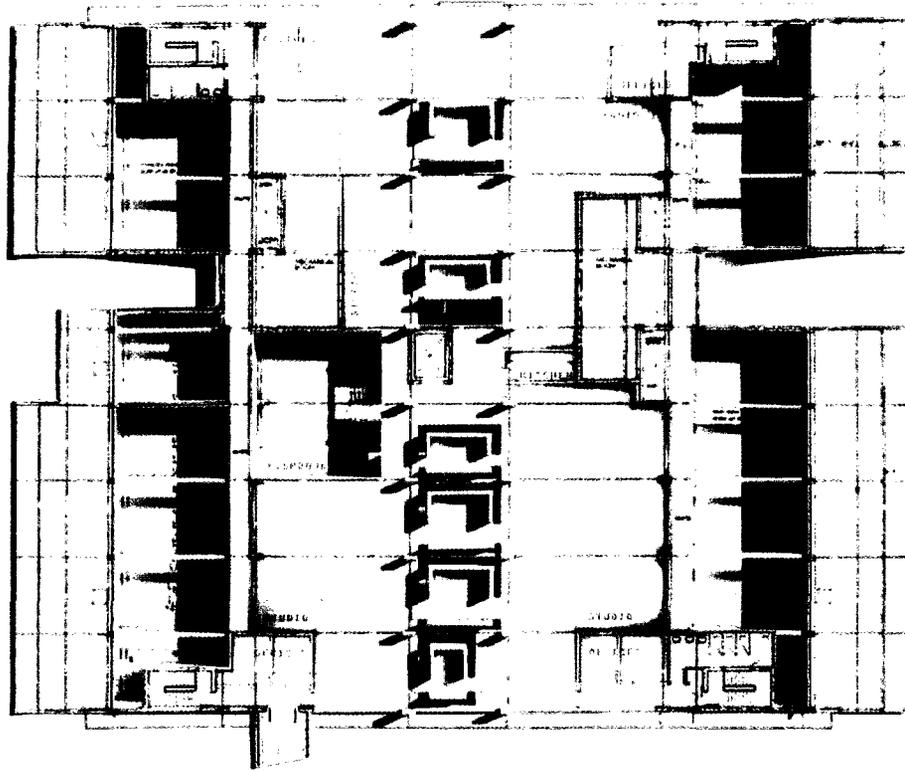


Figure 42 Building 22, reconfigured Level 5, the 'Attic'.

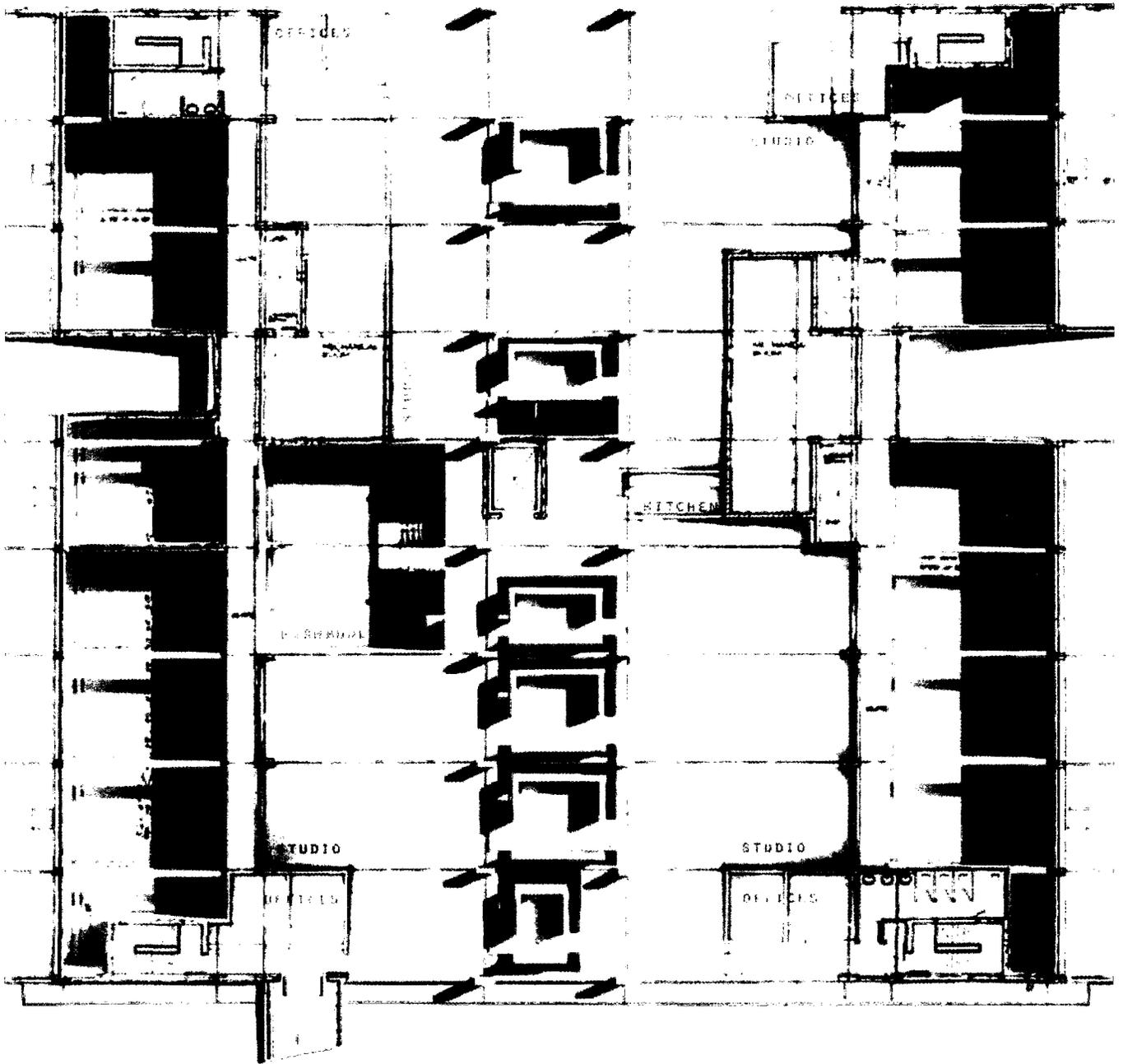


Figure 43 Building 22, reconfigured Level 5, the 'Attic' with 'Pods' (detail).

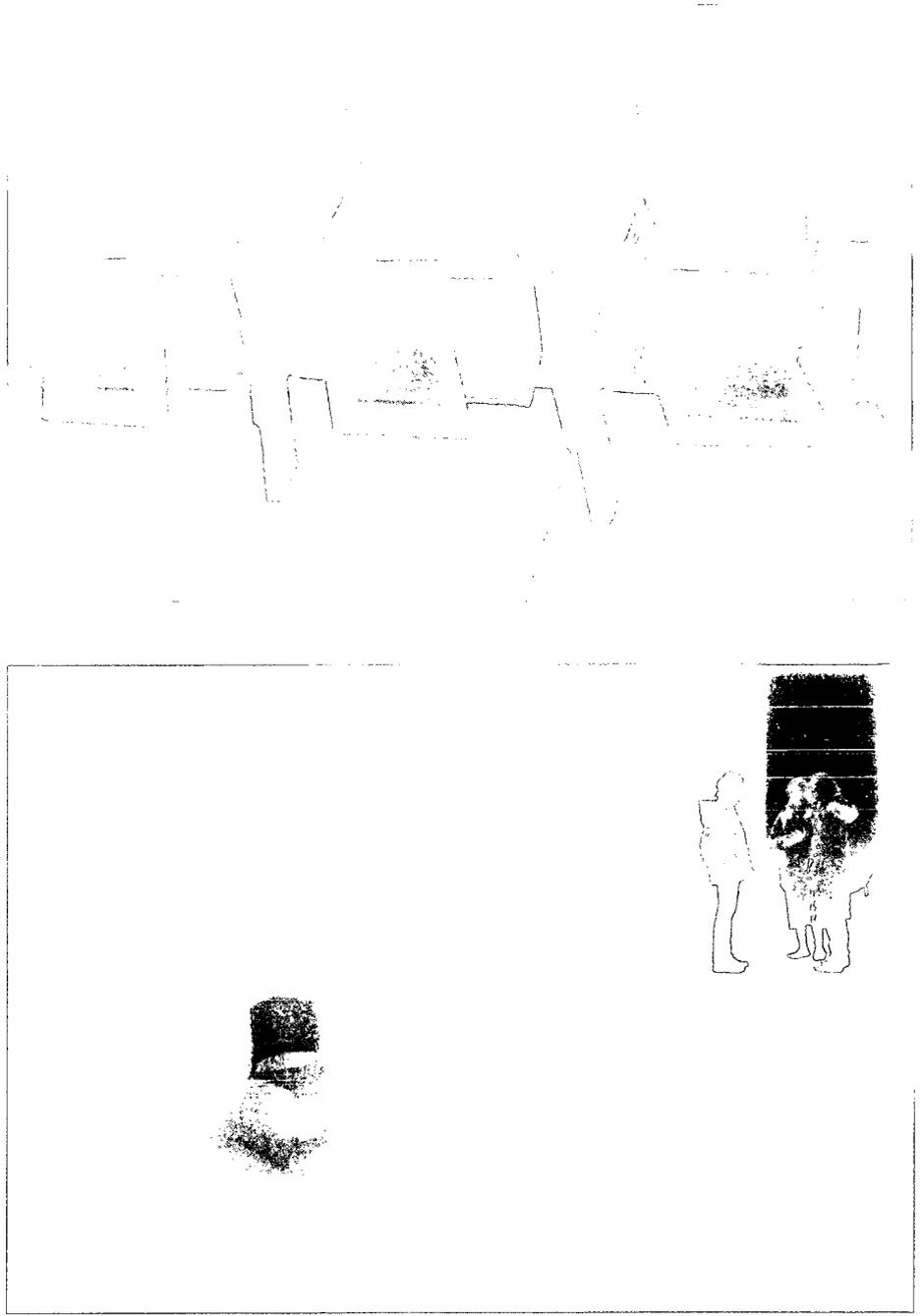


Figure 44 Building 22, 'Pods' on Level 5, 'Upper Street' below on Level 4.

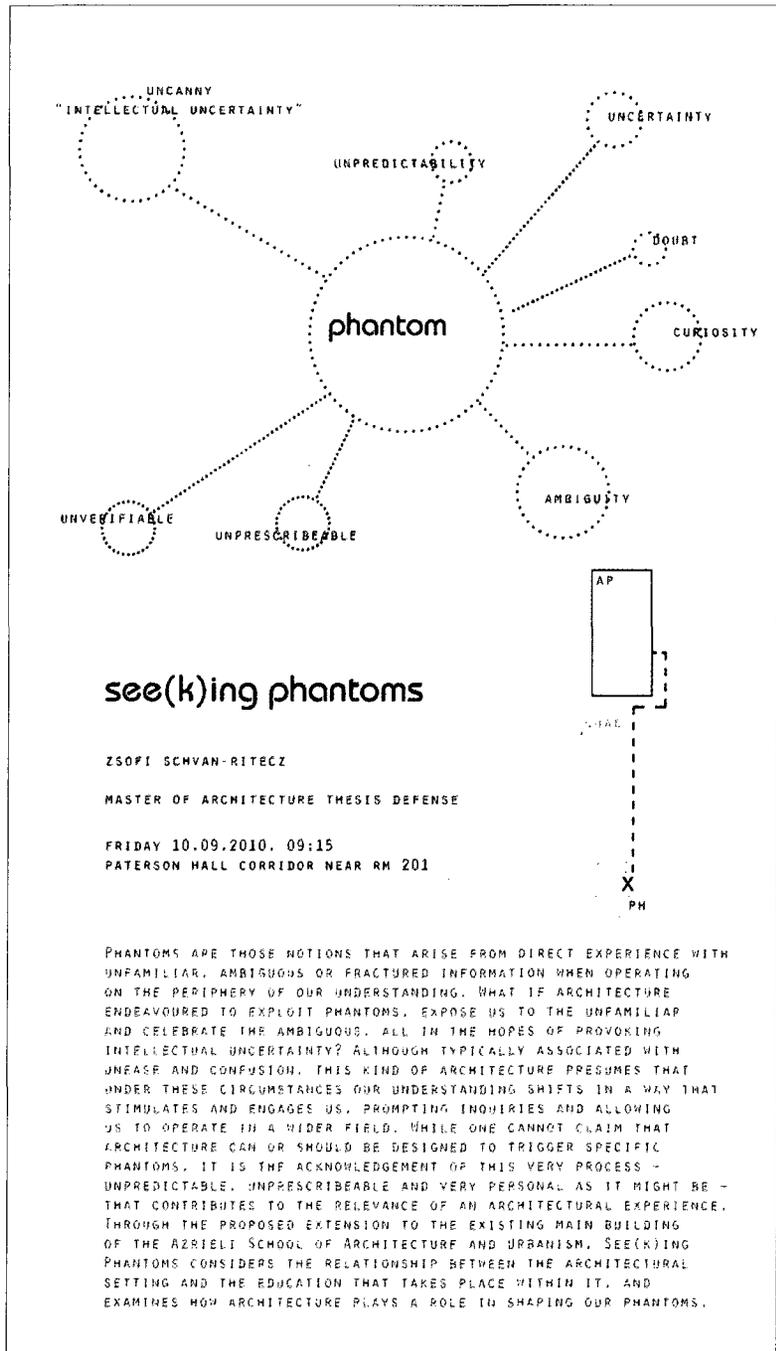


Figure 45 Building 22, Level 1. Looking in from the parking garage across the 'canyon' to the new subterranean studio spaces, seminar room, and multipurpose area.

APPENDIX 04.

Welcome to the School of Linguistics!

(maps to the thesis defense)



administrator was contacted in advance, who in turn informed their director, dean, scheduling office, faculty and staff. They were receptive of the unusual request to hold an architecture thesis defense in their corridor, and showed much interest during the set up. At the end, not many spectators from outside of architecture joined the audience; nevertheless, the space suited well its temporary purpose.

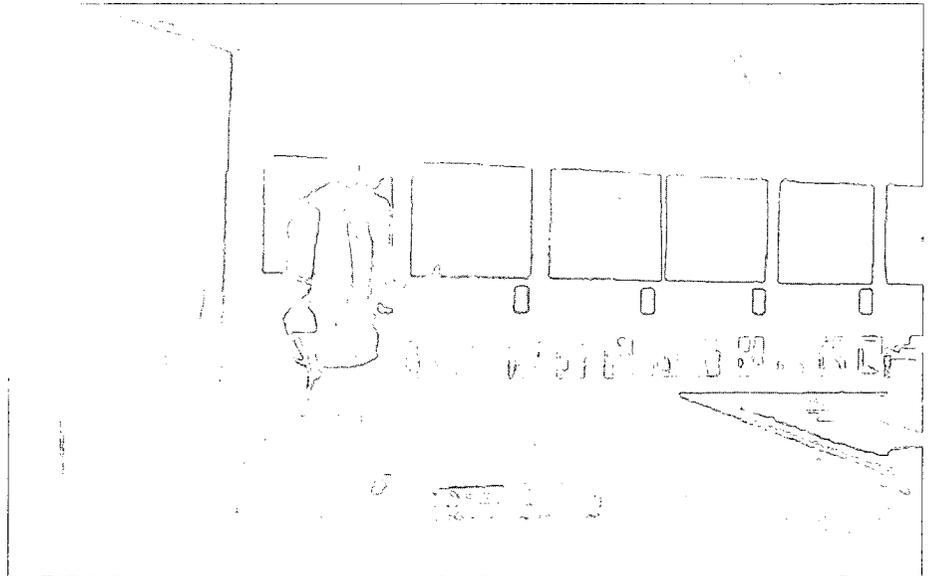


Figure 46 Thesis defense, Friday 10. 09. 2010. 9:15 – 10:15.