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## Immersive Theater & The Physical Narrative

Lauren Prisco

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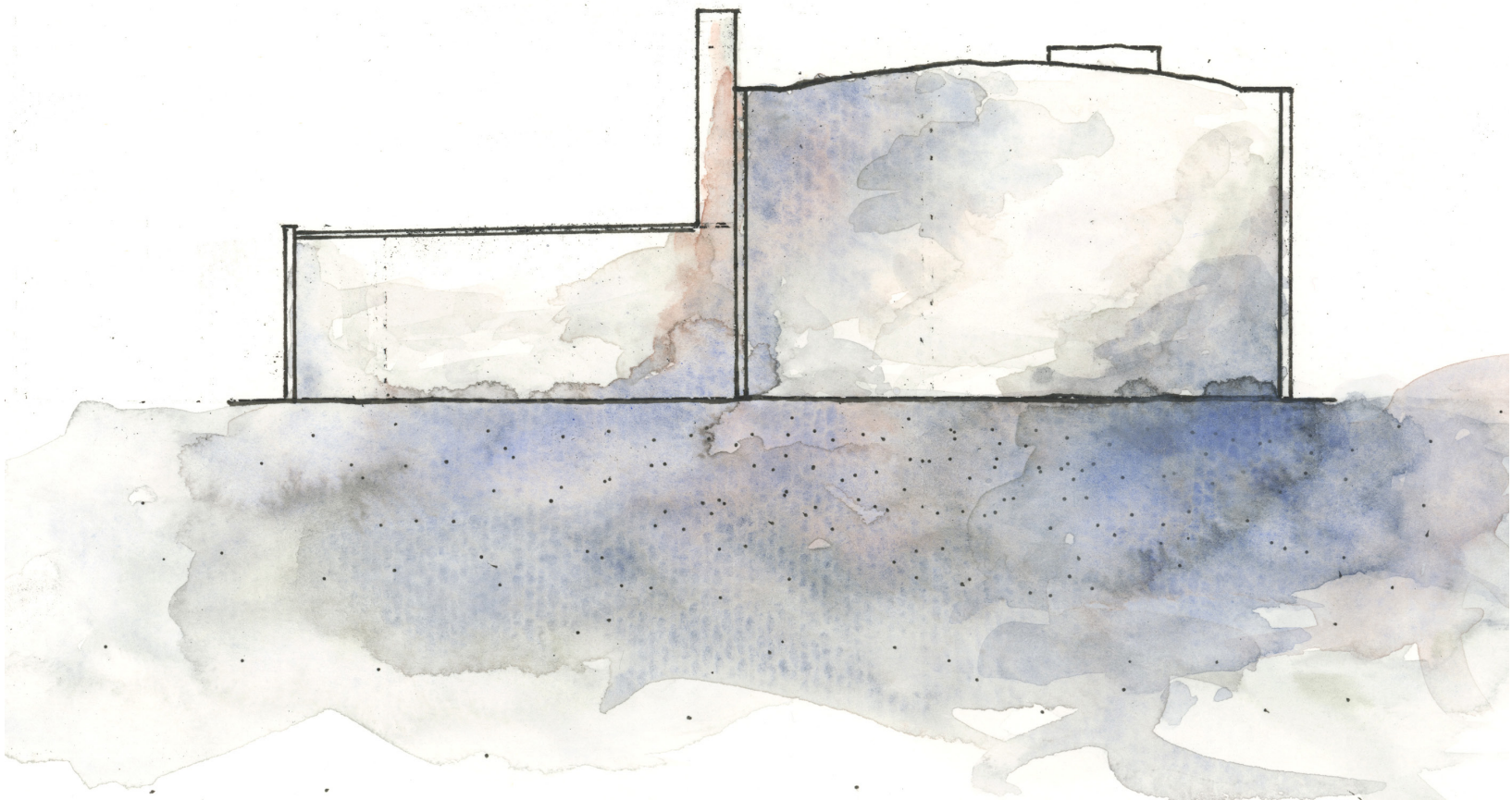
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# IMMERSIVE THEATER & THE PHYSICAL NARRATIVE

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lauren prisco  
mfa candidate  
interior design  
virginia commonwealth university



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“Every room is a stage, every public space is a theater, and every facade is a backdrop. Each has a place for entry and exit, scenery, props, and a design that sets up potential relationships between people. In this sense, architecture and theater are sister arts, creating worlds where people interact in studied spatial relations.”<sup>18</sup>

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## RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

How can Interior Design enhance a performance by creating spaces where limitless paths are possible?

### **Immerse:**

*to make (yourself) fully involved in some activity or interest<sup>1</sup>*

### **Immersive:**

*providing information or stimulation for a number of senses, not only sight and sound<sup>2</sup>*

## WHAT IS IMMERSIVE THEATER?

The term “immersive” is used to describe a strand of experimental theater performances that place the spectator at the heart of the created work. Supported by the definitions provided to the left, immersive productions strive for submergence “in an alternative medium where all the senses are engaged and manipulated - with a deep involvement in the activity within that medium.”<sup>3</sup> This is accomplished primarily by purposeful interaction between spectators, actors and a large-scale installed environment.

Audience members are mobile throughout a performance, and are encouraged to explore, touch, and interact with the interior elements as a way to enhance their experience with the narrative. “Immersive theatre...makes use of cleverly structured interiors and ingenious invitations for them to explore, addresses their bodily presence in the environment and its effect on sense making, and teases them with the suggestion of further depths just possibly within reach.”<sup>4</sup>

## HOW IS IMMERSIVE THEATER RELEVANT?

The practice of theater as an institution dates back centuries, and has mapped the social context of life and culture along the way. By connecting design and theater, it’s fair to state that the built theater also defines social periods. Immersive productions are filling a need in the modern audience, as proven by the overwhelming response and attraction to this form of work. They boast a new demographic of spectators, ones who would not typically consider themselves to be theater-goers. This is due in part to the way in which immersive productions are marketed. While some companies may have small box offices, many rely on word-of-mouth exposure or advertising on social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter. This limits the scope of patrons aware of the event, and eliminates any perceived formality associated with conventional theater.<sup>5</sup>

Audiences also show signs of craving human connection and intimate interaction. In Machon’s *Immersive Theater*, she cites several artistic directors who surmise that “audiences today are keen for visceral experiences as more people spend time online. It suggests that this type of work can remind an individual what it is to feel alive.”<sup>6</sup> Immersive environments transform into a place where spectators can share in a communal experience with actors and fellow spectators alike, and all involved become critical to the success of a performance. David Jubb, Joint Artistic Director of Battersea Arts Centre, states, “theatrical situations where genuine human connection occurs holds the greatest potential for transformation; which is why it’s good theater, because theatre ought to be transformative.”<sup>7</sup>

### HOW DOES IMMERSIVE THEATER IMPACT INTERIOR DESIGN?

Immersive Theater not only challenges how audiences experience a performance, but **where** they experience a performance. Instead of the traditional playhouse, immersive productions take place in re-purposed buildings or large, vacant spaces that are perfect for molding plot-specific interiors. Occasionally, the chosen site will have some underlying connection with the narrative. For example, Third Rail Productions inhabited a century-old institutional facility in Brooklyn for their depiction of Lewis Carroll's Alice-inspired tale, *Then She Fell* - an appropriate nod to the physiological subtext of both the book and Carroll's own life.

While Immersive Theater varies in scale and subject, the overarching premise of these installed environments challenges conventional theater design in many ways. Audiences are freed from the constraint of static seats and are empowered to navigate their own storyline through physical and instinctual gestures. Below are strong examples of design features that influence and impact a spectator's journey.

### METHOD OF EXPLORATION

Research will involve examining the work of dynamic production companies specializing in immersive theater, with specific attention paid to London-based Punchdrunk and New York-based Third Rail Projects. As a pioneer in the field, Punchdrunk has produced numerous theater experiences in which the lines between performer, spectator and space are constantly fluctuating.

I will experience two different immersive productions, putting myself in the shoes of the spectator: Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*, currently running at the McKittrick Hotel in New York City, and *Then She Fell*, set in a century-old institutional facility. These performances will serve as a primary means of research, as very little information is published on the design of these secretive experiences. The most relative sources of information I've found have been through interviews with the artistic directors of the above companies, as they discuss the design process behind creating one of these immersive experiences.

I will also take inspiration from venue design that pushes the boundaries of what traditional theater looks and feels like. Centers like the Wyly Theater in Dallas and the Taipei Performing Arts Center both have stages that are extremely adaptable and flexible, allowing for many different types of performances to appear on stage.

TRADITIONAL THEATER <sup>8</sup>	IMMERSIVE THEATER <sup>8</sup>
<p>Advertised through mainstream media using strategic marketing efforts.</p> <p>Tickets are purchased through the venue's box office in advance, or at the door night of.</p>	<p>Announced through online channels like Facebook, or simply word-of-mouth.</p> <p>Tickets can be purchased through the venue's box office, or through online channels only.</p>
<p>Occurs in a traditional theater, most likely with a lobby, a chamber, and a proscenium stage.</p>	<p>Makes use of abandoned buildings like warehouses, or structures like dockyards.</p>
<p>You enter the main doors of the theater, and show ticket to a Front of House staff member.</p> <p>You are directed to the appropriate seat inside the chamber, and wait until the show begins.</p>	<p>You may have an intriguing and unnerving journey to the performance location - part, if not all, may be outside.</p> <p>You are taken into an unconventional installed environment. Little or no seating is provided.</p>
<p>You wait in the chamber for the show to start, perhaps chatting idly to your neighbor.</p> <p>The program may provide information about the cast, crew &amp; production.</p> <p>You are here to watch a piece of theater - waiting for the show to begin.</p>	<p>You are placed within an environment in which the performance has already begun.</p> <p>You are excited and nervous - unsure of exactly where you are and what you are about to experience.</p> <p>You are separated from your group - potentially paired with strangers, or left alone to begin the journey.</p>
<p>An announcement prompts you to turn off your mobile phone.</p> <p>The lights dim, a curtain is raised.</p> <p>You observe another world in front of you on the stage.</p>	<p>You are physically surrounded by the other world, and become intensely aware of the details of the space.</p> <p>Your senses are alert and heightened, and you rely on them as you navigate through space.</p> <p>You may be aware of your role as a character in the performance.</p>
<p>Performers enact the narrative on the stage - as a spectator, you watch and listen to the story unfold.</p> <p>You are engaged in the narrative cerebrally, but have little or no impact or influence on the actors' deliverance or actions.</p>	<p>You are an active part of the unfolding narrative and have the ability to interact with the actors and/or spectators.</p> <p>You explore a series of rooms and corridors, encounter actors and place together pieces of the narrative.</p>
<p>The performance ends, there is a curtain call and actors take a bow.</p> <p>The audience applauds, and leaves the chamber.</p>	<p>There may or may not be a concluding scene.</p> <p>The party continues at the bar, as you compare experiences with your friends.</p>
<p>You leave the theater having seen a piece of theater.</p> <p>You determine whether it was good and bad, and think about it maybe for a couple hours until it's out of your mind.</p>	<p>You leave the building still reeling from the experience, as you try to process what you've seen and understood.</p> <p>Your senses are still heightened and feel the physical demands just endured.</p> <p>There is a level of uncertainty to the experience that creates a desire to revisit.</p>

## CASE STUDIES

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# SLEEP NO MORE

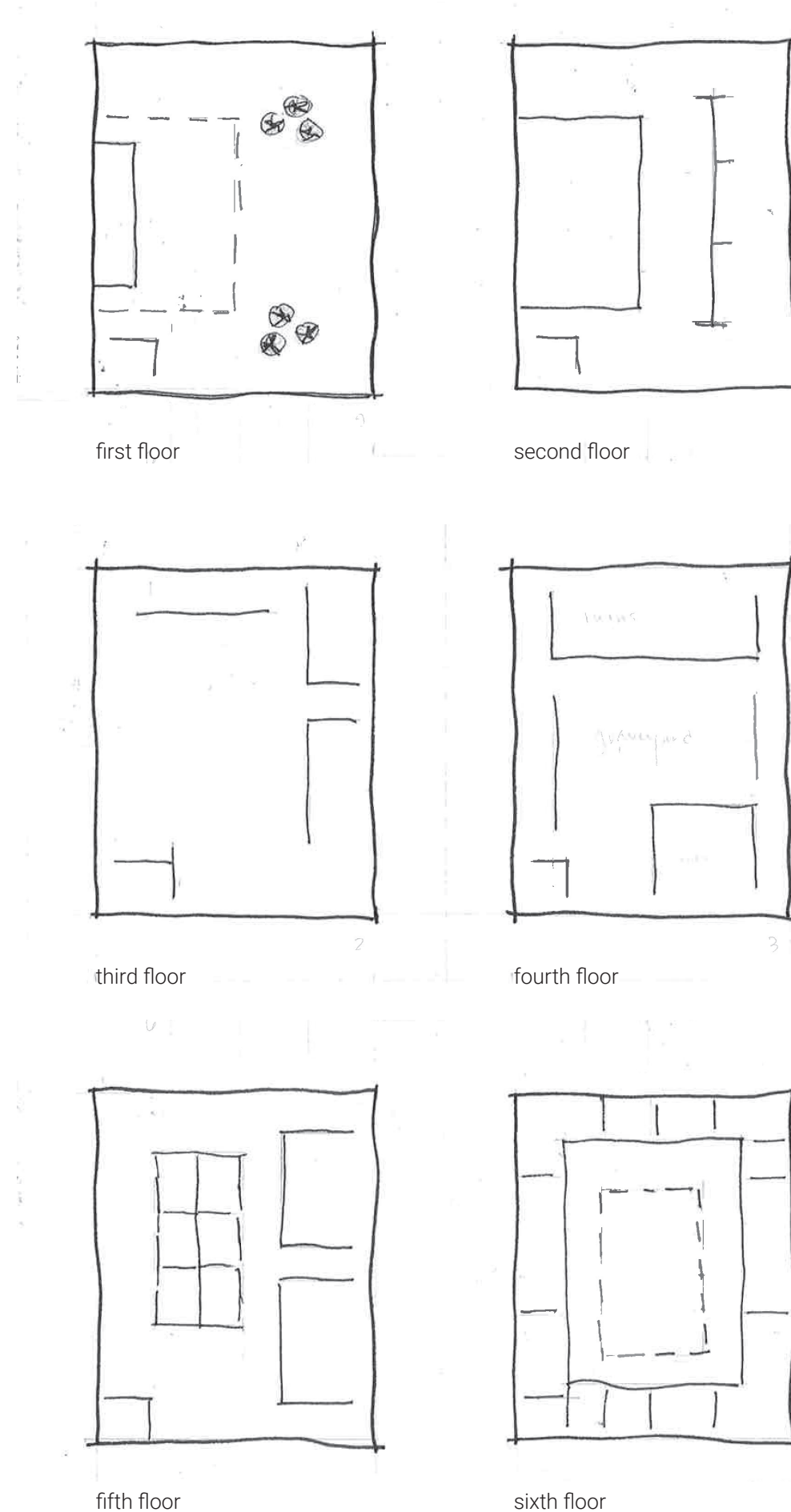
Pundrunk  
McKittrick Hotel, NYC  
Ongoing

*Sleep No More* is perhaps the most commercially successful immersive theater production. The experience was imagined and designed by Punchdrunk, a pioneer production company in the immersive theater industry. *Sleep No More* originated in London and opened in New York City shortly after, where it continues to run due to its critical success.

The narrative of the production is loosely based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but presents the scenes independent of the linear storyline. Patrons, upon entering, have the option to either explore the overly detailed set at their own pace, or follow the individual actors as they interact with the story and the space. Each actor's journey cyclically repeats three times during the three hour performance, giving patrons multiple chances to catch major scenes, follow different characters, or explore independently.

The physical location weaves patrons through a five-story Chelsea Warehouse designed under the premise of the 1930's-themed McKittrick Hotel. Patrons enter on the second floor, which serves as the lobby, cocktail bar and waiting room for admittance. Once the journey begins, the floor plan is intentionally meant to confuse and disorientate, as patrons are lured through series of rooms and spaces with the promise of the next surprise or encounter. There is full reign to explore all five levels, including the initial second floor lobby area if desired.

The variety in scale amongst all the spaces is another remarkable feat. There are several large performance spaces - like the first floor ballroom and accompanied mezzanine - in which groups of patrons amass to watch. On the opposite spectrum are tiny detailed spaces, even claustrophobic at times, that no more than a couple people can enter comfortably. A dimly lit cemetery and an eerie orchard are other spaces in which the designers successfully bring an outside setting inside the building.



SPACIAL DIAGRAM  
of the McKittrick Hotel,  
recorded after my  
experience as a spectator

## RELEVANCE

This precedent is perhaps the most closely related and critical project for my thesis at this point. *Sleep No More* successfully pairs down traditional theater elements and instead focuses on the actors engagement and interaction with the designed spaces. I am fascinated with how the design team has created these paths of circulation both within each individual floor and also throughout the whole building. As addressed before, all spaces were varietal in size which spoke directly to the content inside. Each space (or room) also physically connected to at least one other space, allowing for constant movement and flow for both patrons and actors.

Many of the larger rooms contained elements that at first glance looked like simple set pieces - such as a wardrobe, a bed, a bar table - but which transformed into a stage surface that supported the weight and motion of the actors/dancers in action.

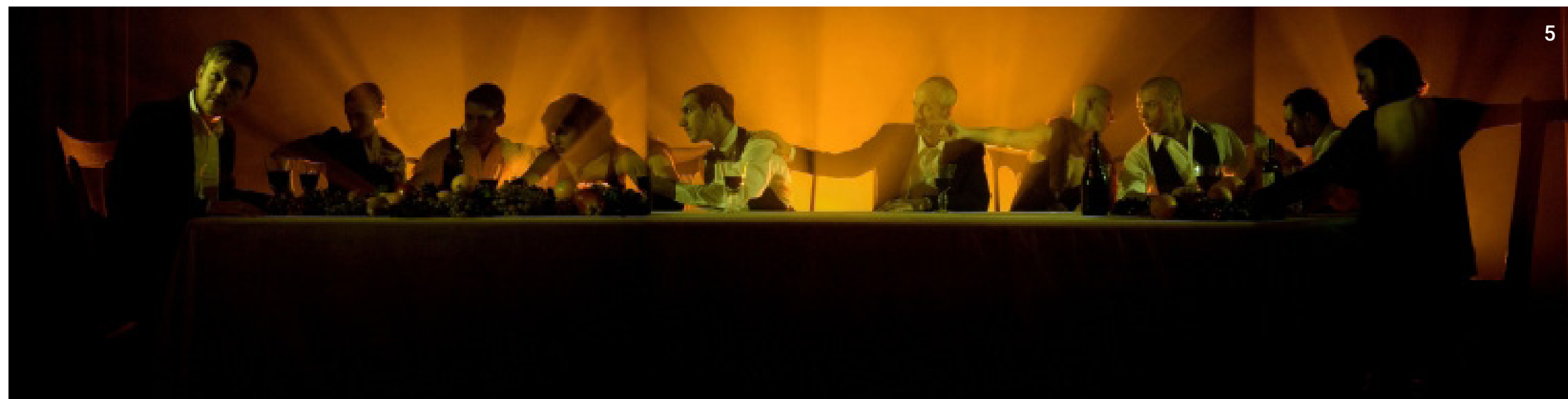
At one point, I stumbled across a scene in which two men were fighting in the corridor. Gracefully, one of the men lifted the other in mock battle, and the latter scaled the wall and walked upside down across the ceiling as naturally as if that was a common occurrence in scuffles. Suddenly, an overlooked corridor ceiling became the stage floor.

Also critical to my project was their use of surface material. For example, when entering the tavern room, the floor material changed dramatically from the hardwood of the corridor, to a much softer, loose material which I gathered was rubber strips or something similar. With the dim light and absence of actors at that moment, it was a sensory cue that this space unique and important in some context soon to be uncovered.



Lady Macbeth washing blood off of the hands of Macbeth

a scene of passion between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth



banquet scene in *Sleep No More*

## THEN SHE FELL

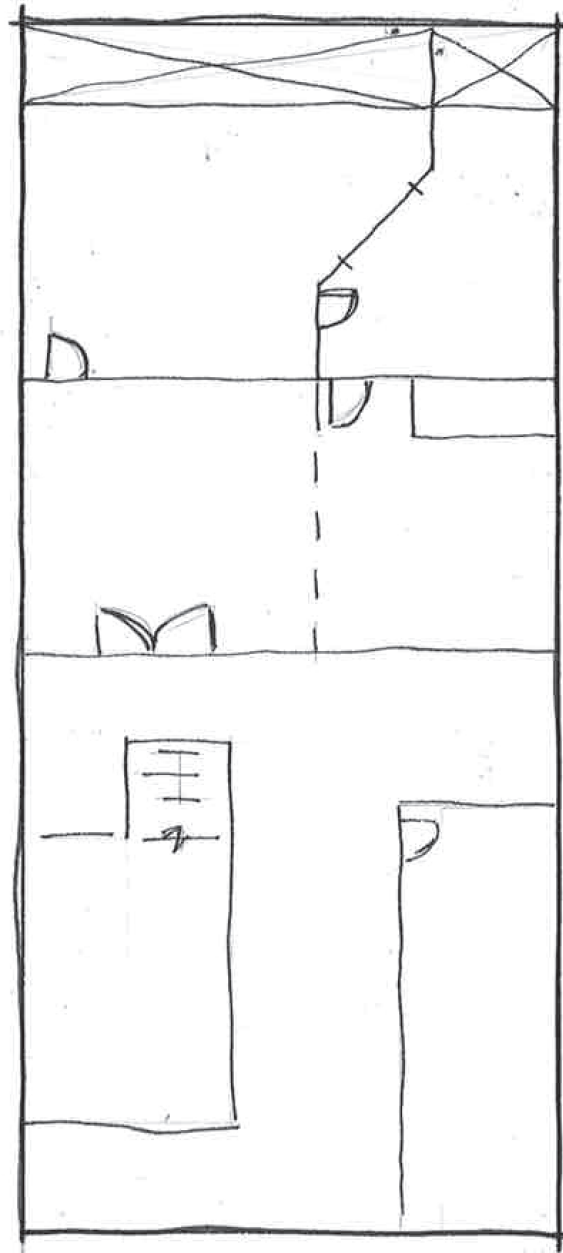
Third Rail Productions  
Kingsland Ward, Brooklyn  
Ongoing

*Then She Fell* is a fully immersive production based off of the writing of Lewis Carroll's Alice tale. Dreamlike and hallucinatory, the set is designed within a three-story, century-old institutional facility. Special attention is given to every inch of the space and every action taken is deliberate. Spectators are given a key upon entering, which gives them power to open up hidden spaces and compartments throughout the experience.

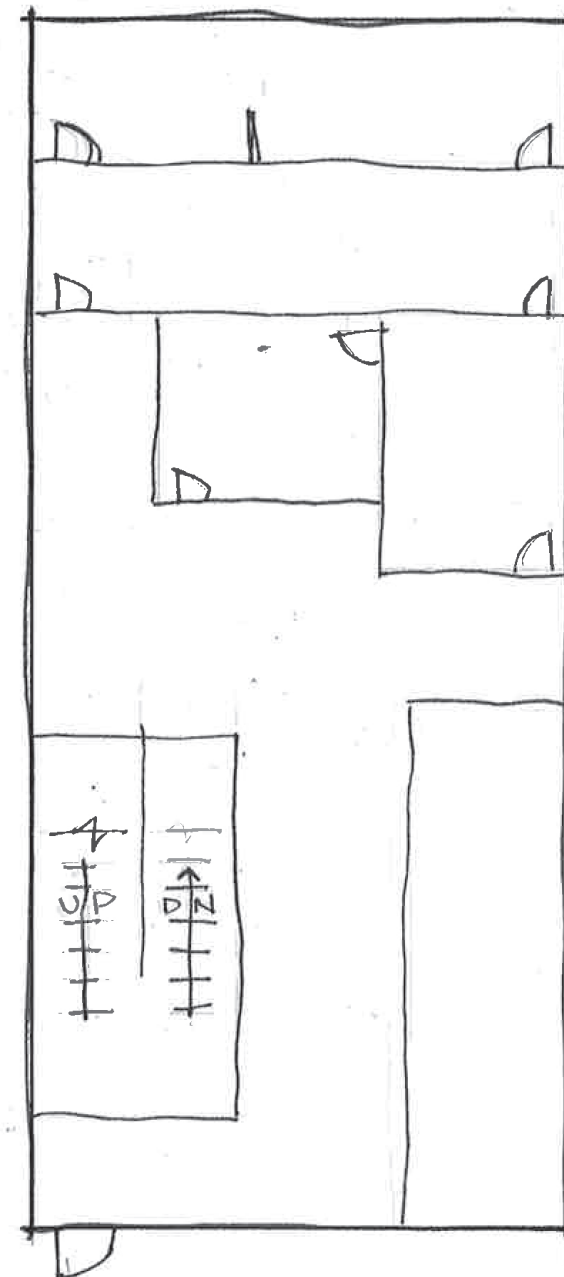
The scale of this performance is much smaller compared to *Sleep No More*, with only 15 audience members per performance. In order to provoke movement through the smaller space, actors move spectators to and from rooms in a choreographed sequence of events. Each room has multiple exits and entrances, so paths seldom cross, unless intended to. Through the diagrams to the right, you can see, based on memory, the potential paths designated for circulation and movement.



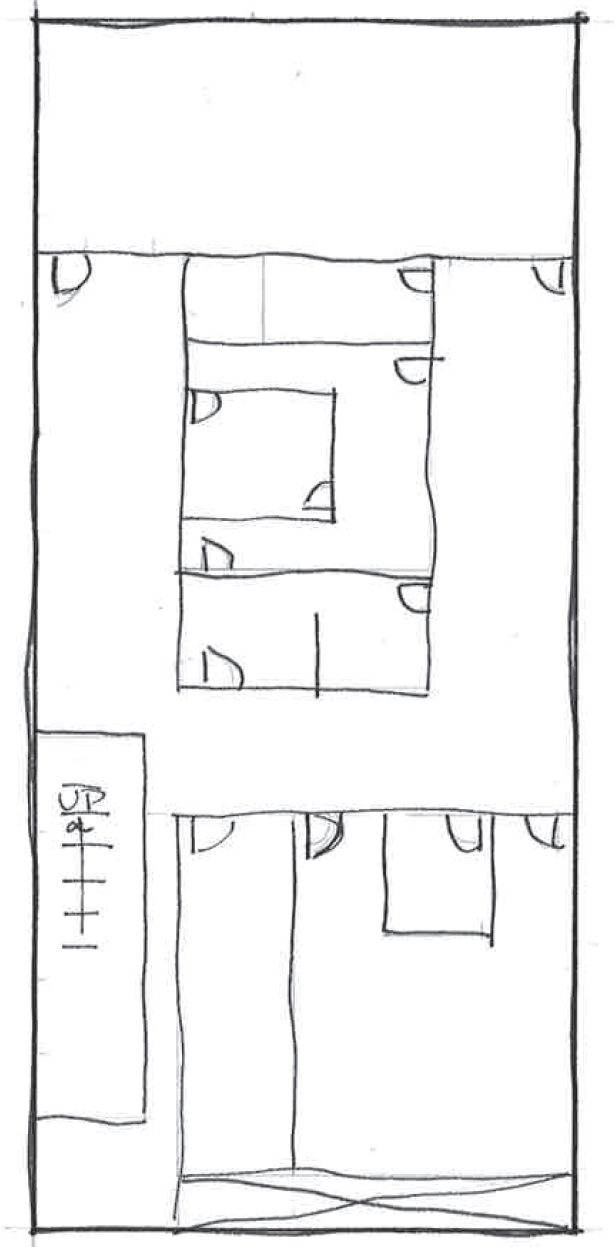
a nurse leads spectators up a flight of stairs



basement level



entrance level



second level

ROUGH PLAN of Kingsland Ward,  
recorded after my experience as a spectator

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## RELEVANCE

From the moment a spectator enters the building, they are immersed in Kingsland Ward. A nurse greets you at the door and sends you down a shadowy hallway to wait for the experience to start, though in a way it already has.

Everything about the experience appeals to the senses. As a spectator, you are given a key that unlocks certain items, encouraging you to explore and sift through objects. Throughout the evening you are served fragrant elixirs that you sip unnervingly. You are more engaged in moments with the actor and at times feel as though you are a character in the story. This hands-on approach makes up in detail what it lacks in volume.

As previously mentioned, the overall floor plan is relatively small. The building is a narrow, three story structure that you could easily cover. However, the production company has slowed the pace of the experience by including multiple entrance/exits in each room. This way, spectators are shuffled in and out of each space through different passages, causing a sense of disorientation even among the limited space. As a spectator, you feel as though you are part of a dance, part of a larger choreography that you only begin to understand by the time the experience is over. Even in the fixed space, there is a sense of movement.

## THEATER OF PUBLIC SPACE

Architectural Experimentation in the Théâtre de l'Espace

Edouard Autant

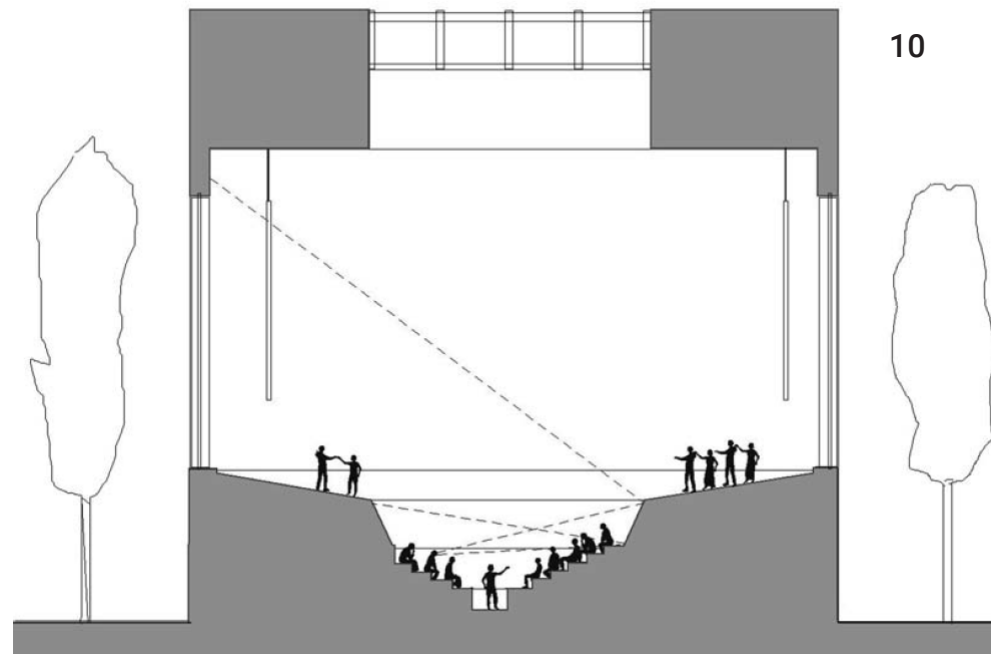
Paris - 1937

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a strong, but short-lived link between modern architecture and modern theater. As a response to this movement, Architect Edouard Autant, alongside actress Louise Lara, set out to design theaters that represented how a building acted, rather than how a building looked. The goal was to create spaces that stimulated interaction between spectator and actor, and to fully immerse the spectator within the action.

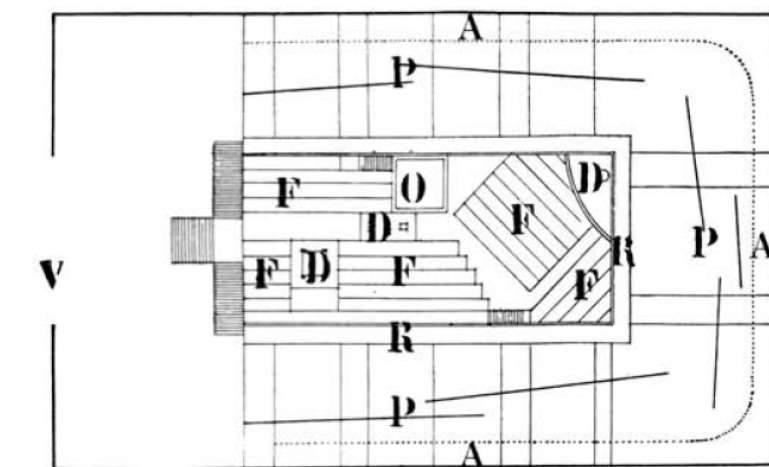
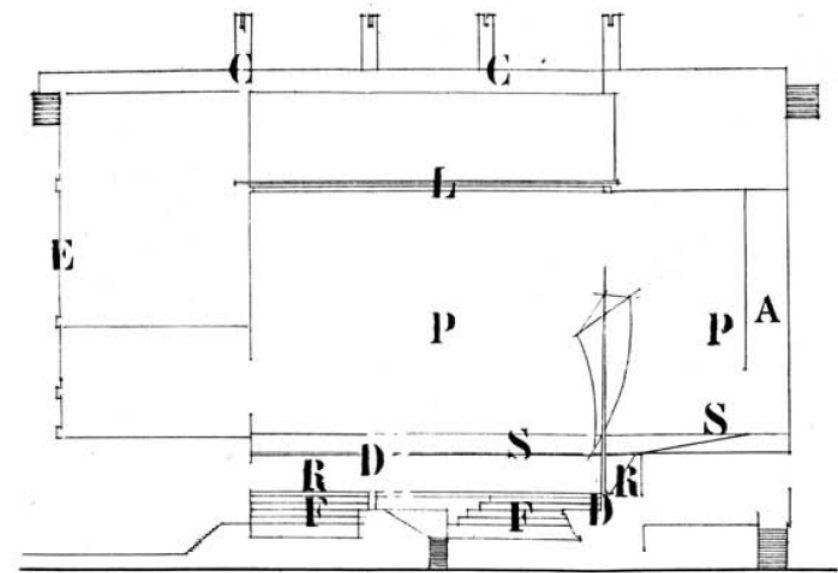
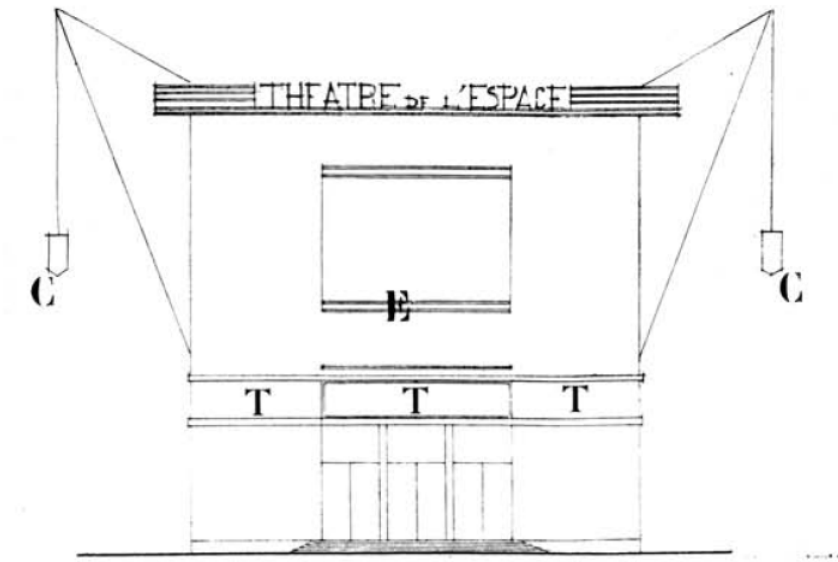
The Théâtre de l'Espace is one of five theaters designed by Autant which explored architecture's influence and relationship to urban life. The spatial theories of the design would then be poetically tested by actors and dancers.<sup>9</sup>

Théâtre de l'Espace elevation drawn by Autant

- a. transparent atmospheric band
- c. counterweights for movable ceiling
- d. scenery
- e. closed-circuit television screen showing performance progress
- f. seating for audience
- l. movable ceiling
- o. orchestra funnel
- p. panoramic stage
- r. mirrors
- v. entry hall
- t. advertising poster



Section of the space, depicting the different audience sight lines. Also noticeable is the unique slop of the upper stage floor that dismantles the allusion of perspective



## RELEVANCE

The design of the theatre incorporates five stages, three on the upper level and two on the lower level. The five stages allow for five scenes to be enacted independently from each other, dividing spectators' attention. This creates a system where spectators may observe one thing and hear another. This technique parallels the intention of immersive theaters.

Layered stages also provide a variation in spectator/actor engagement. On high stages, actors represent the rhythm and choreography of daily life. On lower stages, actors improvise dialogue and engage with spectators directly. The audience is placed at the heart of the performance, positioned inward towards each other. The reaction of other spectators become part of the overall experience.

The building becomes part of the scenography, as the partially exposed windows allow for views out towards the countryside, and retractable skylights provide views of the above. Scenery panels layer over the windows, representing a typical view of a city square. All these features are adaptable and interchangeable depending on the performance.



above: perspective from inside the audience core. the sloped upper stages are perfect for choreographed, background scenes.

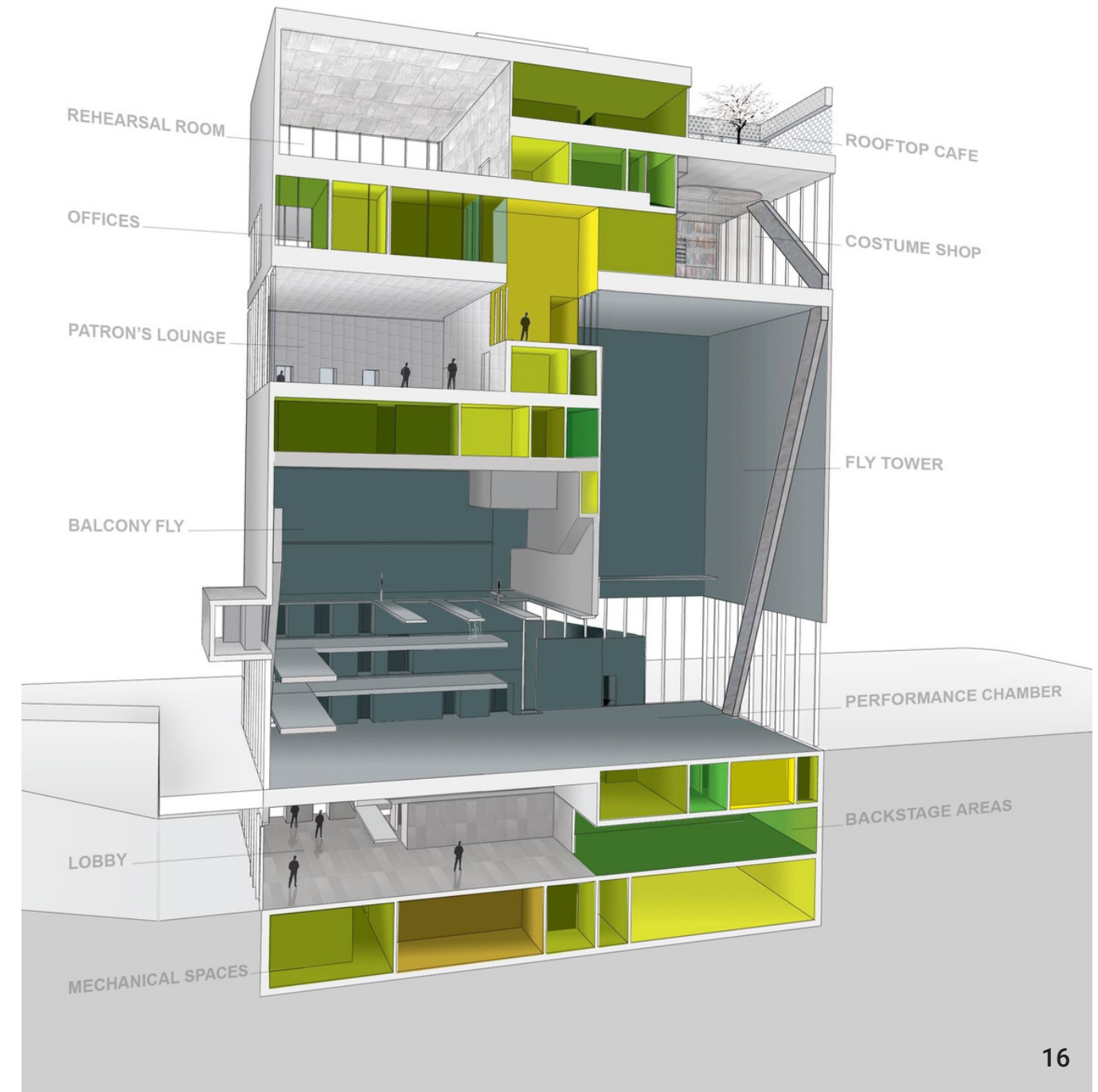
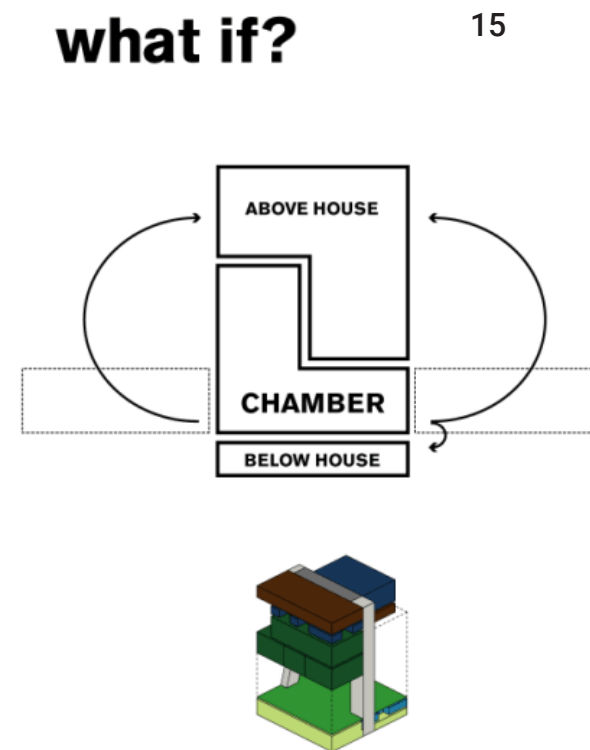
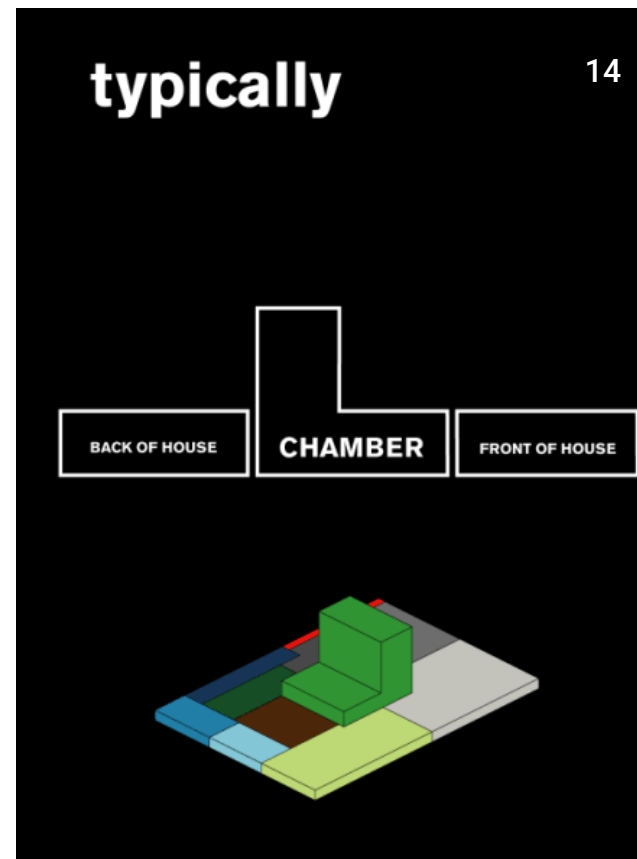
below: perspective from the interior audience core. levels of staging, the scenery backdrop, and large windows are depicted.

# THE DEE & CHARLES WYLY THEATER

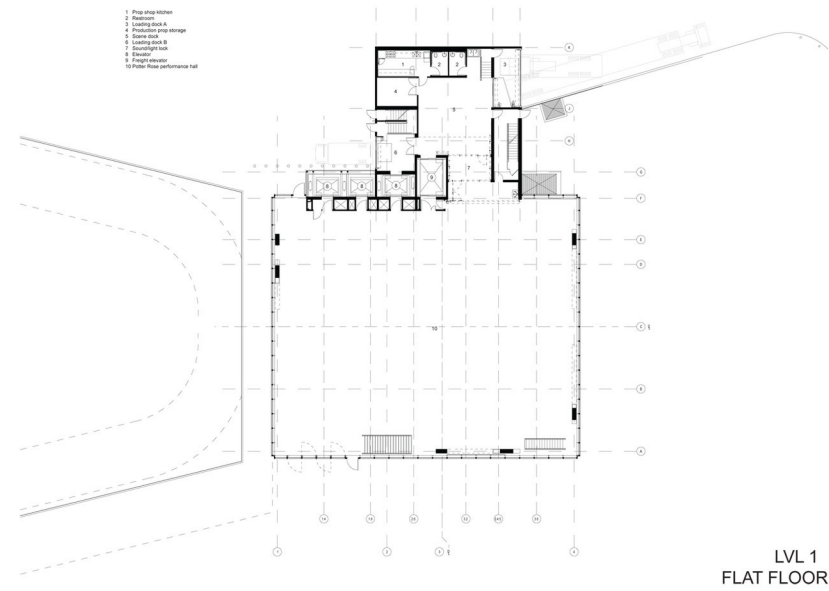
REX / OMA  
 AT&T Performing Arts Center - Dallas, Texas

The Wyly Theatre serves as another precedent into original and functional design of theater space. This theater in particular arranges the front-of and back-of house functions above and below the chamber space (as opposed to surrounding the theater), as a way of liberating the entire perimeter. It arguably improves upon (or challenges) the conventional theater layout – relevant to the theme of immersive theater design. Because of the layout, patrons or actors to enter directly into the chamber from the outside if intended or necessary, bypassing the lobby.<sup>10</sup>

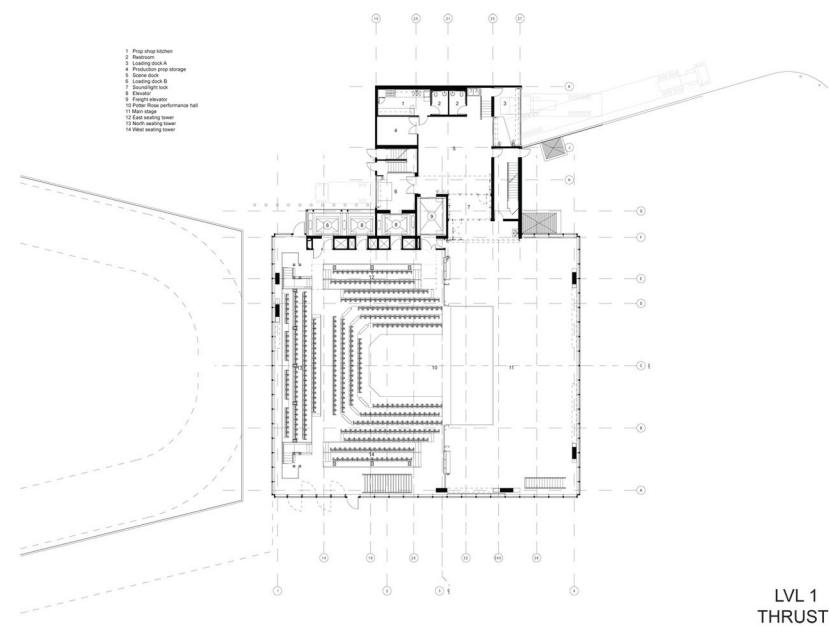
Large windows looking out on the outside complex allow for lots of light or none at all (by use of blackout curtains) contingent upon the artistic direction. Windows also provide glimpses from the exterior in, blurring the lines between public and private. The idea of voyeurism goes both ways - passersby can look into the chamber from the outside, and spectators have views of the Dallas skyline from inside. Blackout shades can be engaged if needed.



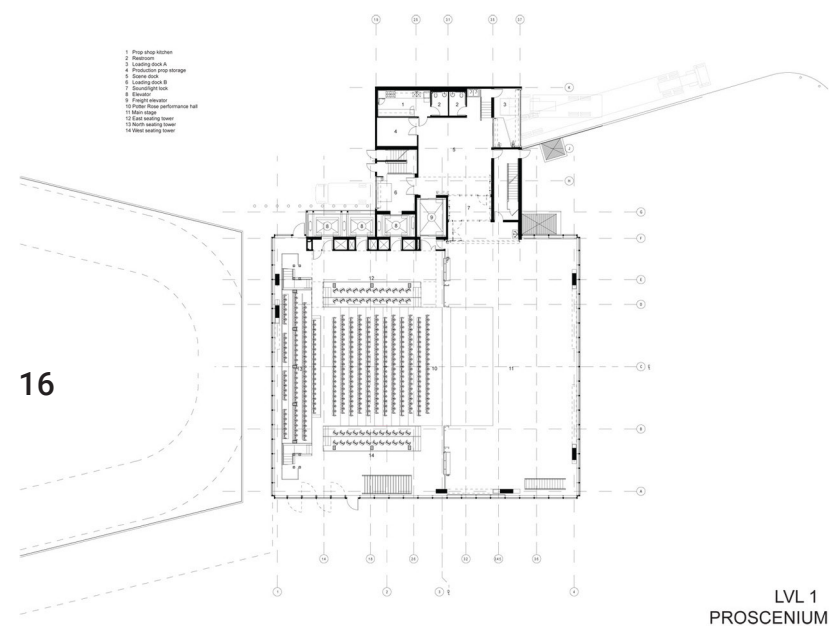
section perspective of the wyly theater, showing the layering of spaces and functions



LVL 1  
FLAT FLOOR



LVL 1  
THRUST



LVL 1  
PROSCENIUM

diagrams of the different  
floor configurations



interior view of the audience chamber

**RELEVANCE**

Conventional theaters are normally surrounded on one side by front of house functions (lobby, box office, patron lounges) and back of house function (green room, dressing rooms, mechanical, loading dock) on the other. By stacking above and below the theater space, this frees up the chamber to be an independent level.

A superfly system also allows for the chamber to be reconfigured into multiple layouts - proscenium, thrust, arena, traverse, studio, flat floor, bipolar, or sandwich – creating limitless flexibility

Looking at my own design, I am interested in creating a version of a fly system that allows flexible walls to be locked into place along the grid, depending on what the production team chooses.

For cost-efficiency, materials used on the stage and auditorium are intentionally not precious, in order to encourage alterations among each show - particularly interesting when it comes to my thesis material study.

Again, for my own decision, this attention is important because of the reorganization of performance space layout with each passing production company. There is a high level of flexibility that accommodates the different types of shows, making it adaptable to the needs of the production company.



# TAIPEI PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

**OMA**  
**Taipei, Taiwan (in progress)**

The Taipei Performing Arts Center is an interesting precedent for study. While very different from an immersive theater space, there are aspects of its design that speak to flexibility, blurred boundaries between public and private, and pathways that offer views from very untraditional sight lines.

TPAC consists of three independently functioning theaters, all connected by a singular cube that consolidates the stages, backstage, technical components and ancillary areas.

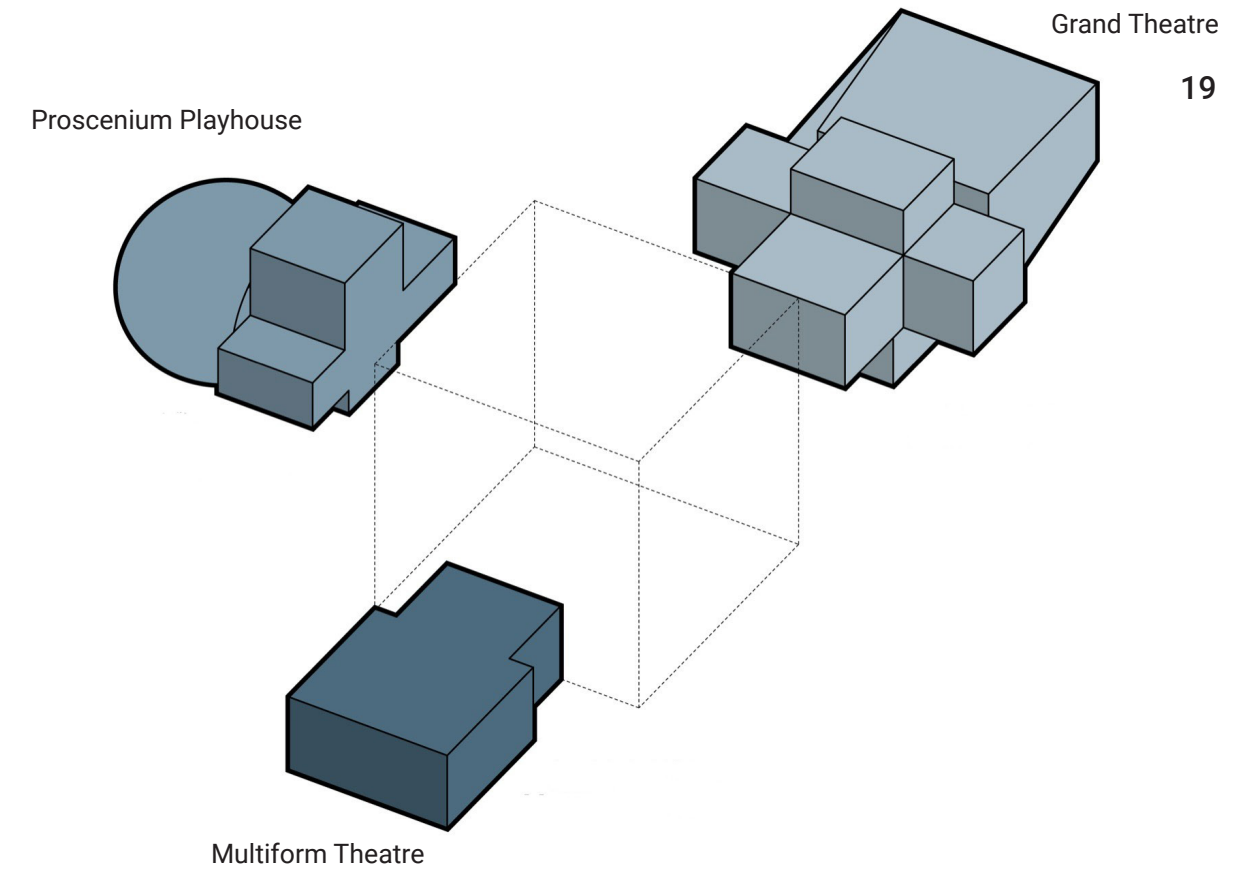
The lobby is shared between the three theaters, and respective patrons separate gradually as they ascend through the space.<sup>11</sup>

The Proscenium Playhouse exposes the merging of the circular and cube forms, creating a unique proscenium whose frame options are limitless.

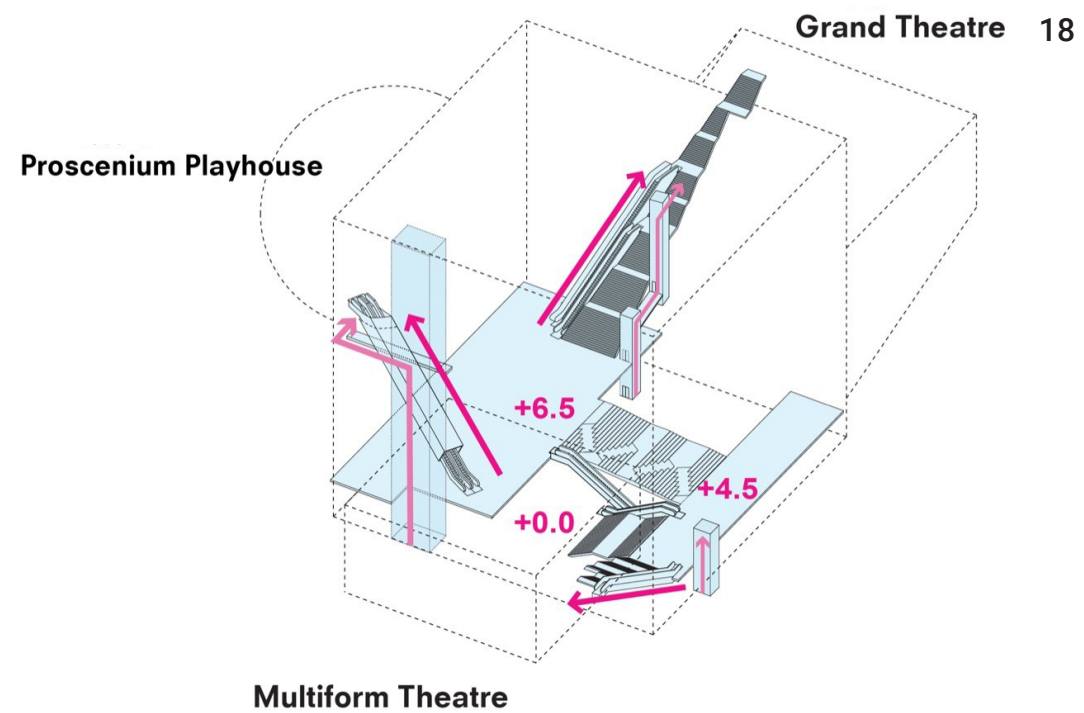
The Grand Theatre is the closest resemblance to a traditional theater, seating 1,500. The stage level, the mezzanine and the balcony all exist on a singular sloping plane.

The Multiform Theatre exists on the same level as the Grand Theater, and is a flexible space that can accommodate a variety of arrangements.

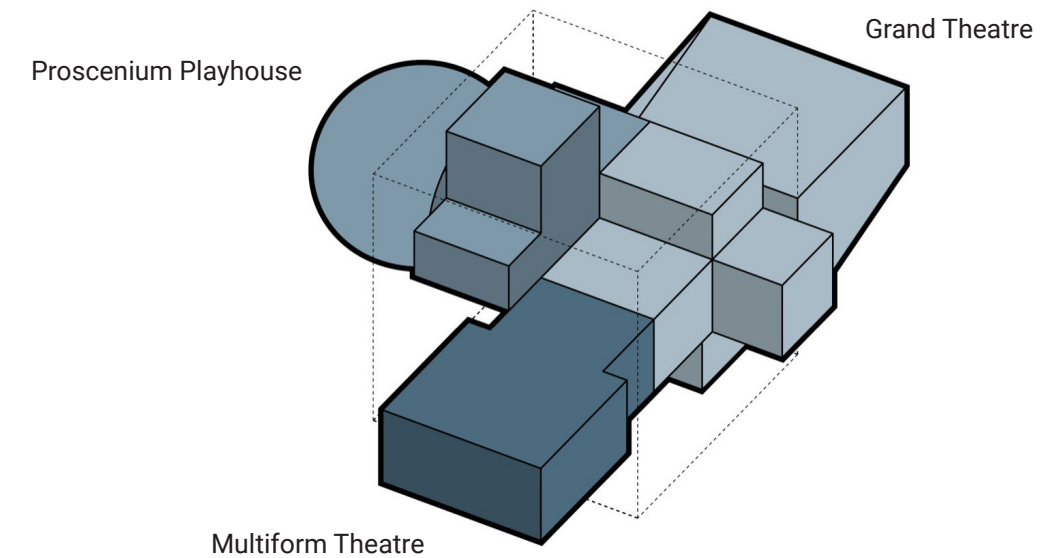
A Super Theatre can be created when the Multiform Theatre and the Grand Theatre combine through the shared central core, and can accommodate a 100-meter-long stage.<sup>11</sup>



19



diagrams depicting the incline of public spaces which patrons traverse to reach the three theaters



diagrams depicting that together, the three theaters are more than the sum of their own parts

RELEVANCE

The TPAC has an interesting feature which they call "the public loop." It takes the public on a path through all three theaters, and provides vantage points different from a ticketed patron, blurring the lines between public and private in a very direct and purposeful way.

The public loop also provides a way for the theater to engage and attract a broader community – it allows people unfamiliar with theater to enter the space and catch glimpses of not only the theatrical stage, but the theatrical technical workings of the backstage areas.

Similar to immersive theater, it brings a physical element to experiencing theater. You aren't static, you aren't constrained. You are in fact understanding the theater better by walking the full journey through the interior.

Also relevant is the flexibility between performance spaces. Each theater has its own purpose and structure, but they share a back-of-house feature that unites them when intentional or necessary. This flexibility at being one thing, and becoming another, is important to my research.

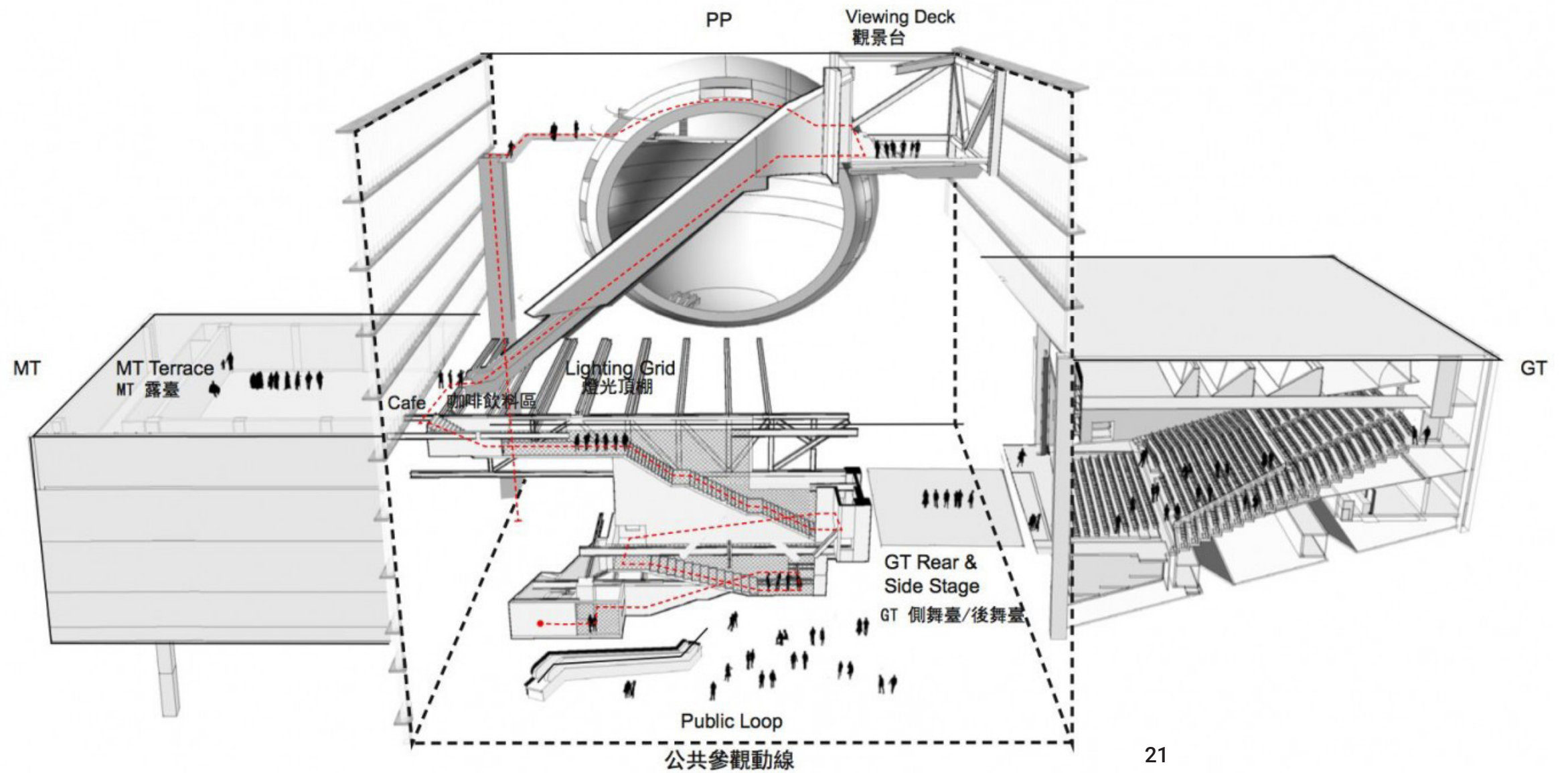
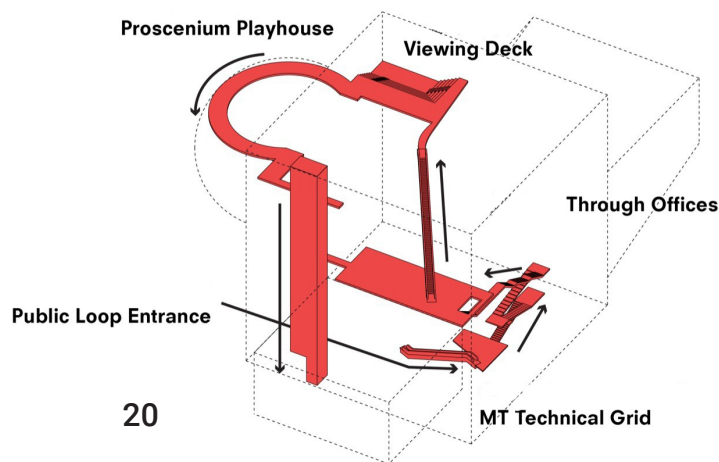


diagram depicting the public loop that patrons and the public alike can travel, weaving through the front- and back-of-house spaces



## SITE ANALYSIS

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## BUILDING

Bliley's Garage is located at 408 N. 3rd Street, at the cross of Marshall Street and on the boundary of Jackson Ward in Richmond, Virginia. The building was originally constructed for Bliley's Funeral Home in 1912 by funeral director A.C. Price. The original designation was as a stable for the horses and storage for the funeral carriages.

The building is a two-story, 5 bay brick building with an attached 1-story, 4 bay section, laid entirely in coursed American bond. The building has a flat roof, and the two-story side has an arched parapet that is decorated with inset geometric motifs and a corbelled cornice. Both sides have garage door openings with corbelled, soldier course brick outlines. The interior of the building also features original steel beams, which are still exposed now in the current iteration of loft apartments.

The decision to place an immersive theater at this location was based on several factors:

The building is within walking distance from the VCU campuses, important as young adults are the majority demographic of immersive theater-goer. Bliley's Garage is also located in the arts district of First Friday, and in proximity to other local theater and concert venues.

Jackson Ward is a dynamic neighborhood that continues to grow and develop. Houses in the area are being renovated, while maintaining their original character. The area is also a popular neighborhood for new restaurants and shops. The activity level of the neighborhood is on a rise.<sup>12</sup>



facade of 408 N 3rd street



brick pavement sidewalk runs parallel to the facade



view from side alley, looking towards 3rd street



parking lot at rear of building

## EXTERIOR



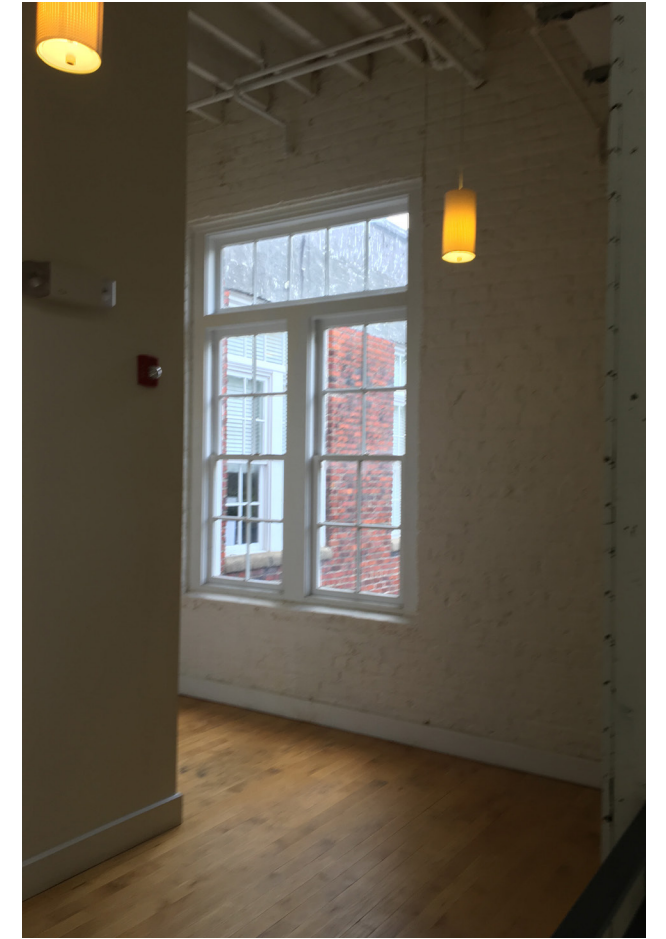
view from the garage: concrete floors and exposed steel beams are evident



view from the garage: painted brick and the layers of exposed ceiling are visible



view looking in from front entrance: terrazzo flooring is used throughout the first floor



view of second floor interior: hardwood floors and exposed ceiling

## INTERIOR

## NEIGHBORHOOD

Jackson Ward is a historical neighborhood in Richmond, located less than a mile from the Virginia State Capital. The district flourished post-Civil War as a cultural and economical hub for the African American community. Once known as the “Harlem of the South,” Jackson Ward hosted famous acts of the time such as Billie Holiday, Nat King Cole, and Louis Armstrong at The Hippodrome Theater.<sup>13</sup>

While Jackson Ward has undergone much change since the thriving period of the early twentieth century, the neighborhood has also experienced an upswing. Jackson Ward was deemed a Virginia Historical Landmark in 1976, followed shortly by its recognition as a National Historic Landmark in 1978. Urban planning renewal projects are underway, while efforts are being taken to preserving the rich and beautiful landmarks of the district.

In 2008, the Jackson Ward Historic District Boundary Increase expanded to include Bliley’s Garage, among other buildings on 2nd and 3rd Streets. 408 N 3rd Street was constructed during Jackson Ward’s period of significance (1800-1926), and while it had previously been excluded from an early nomination because it was a commercial building instead of a residential, the 2008 nomination approved the designation.<sup>14</sup>



wall mural in Jackson Ward, with visible downtown Richmond skyline



brick pavement leading up to Bliley's Garage



view from across the street, looking out on n 3rd street and towards neighboring buildings



residences located on the same block of n 3rd street

## SURROUNDINGS

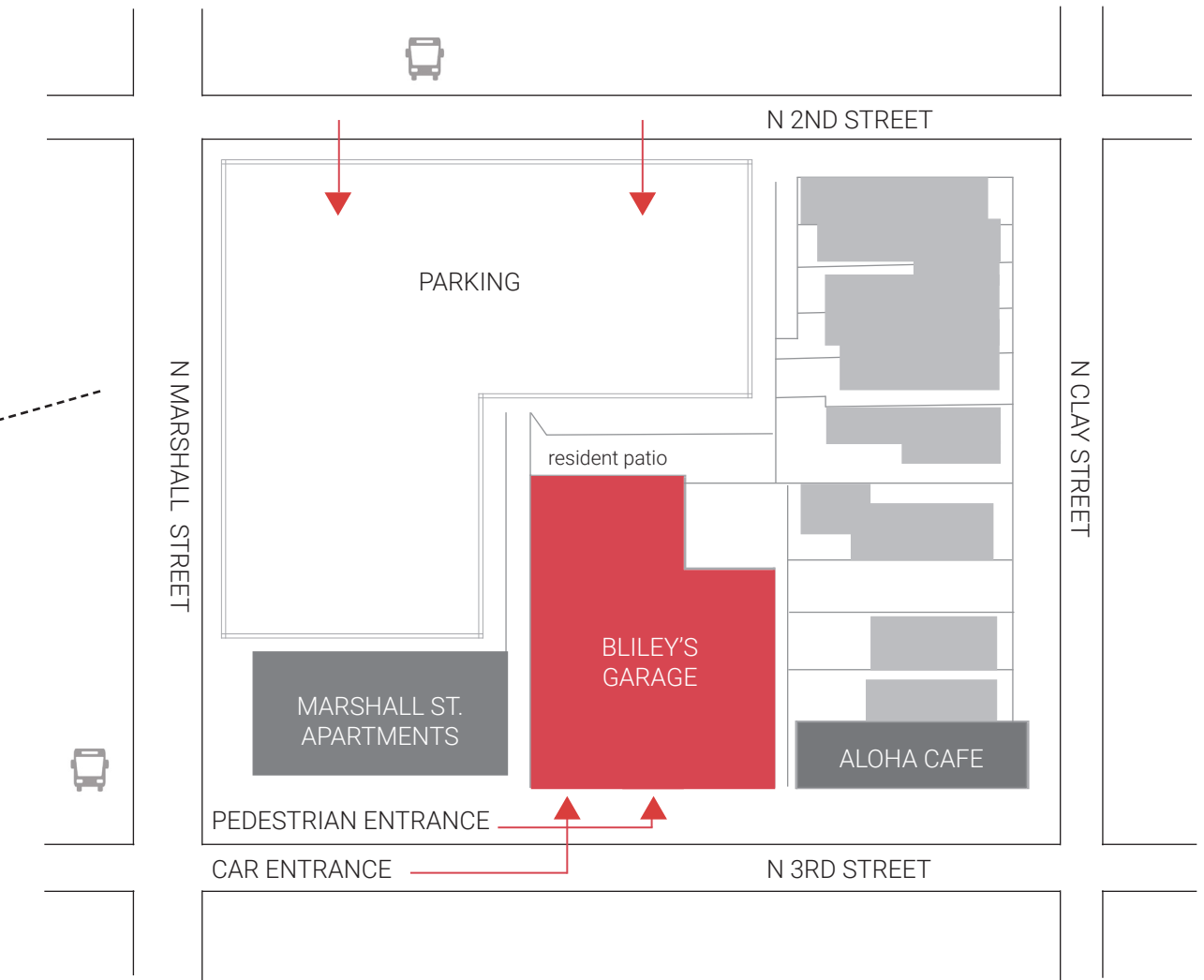


# SITE MAP



## LOCAL performance venues

- 1 Altria Theater
- 2 Institute for Contemporary Art
- 3 Virginia Repertory Theatre
- 4 Coalition Theater
- 5 Hippodrome Theater
- 6 Bliley's Garage
- 7 Richmond Convention Center
- 8 Carpenter Theater
- 9 The National

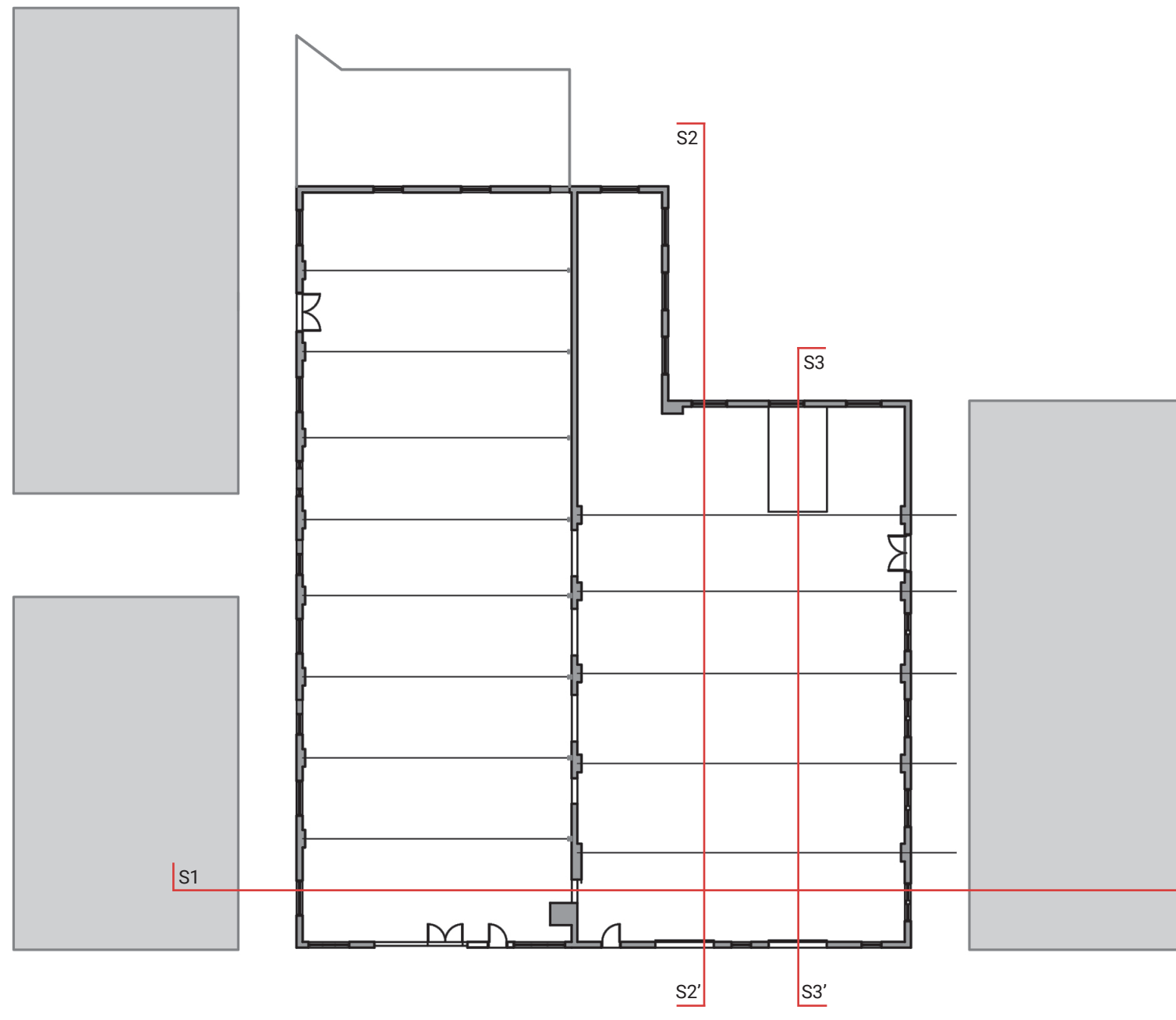


## ACCESS

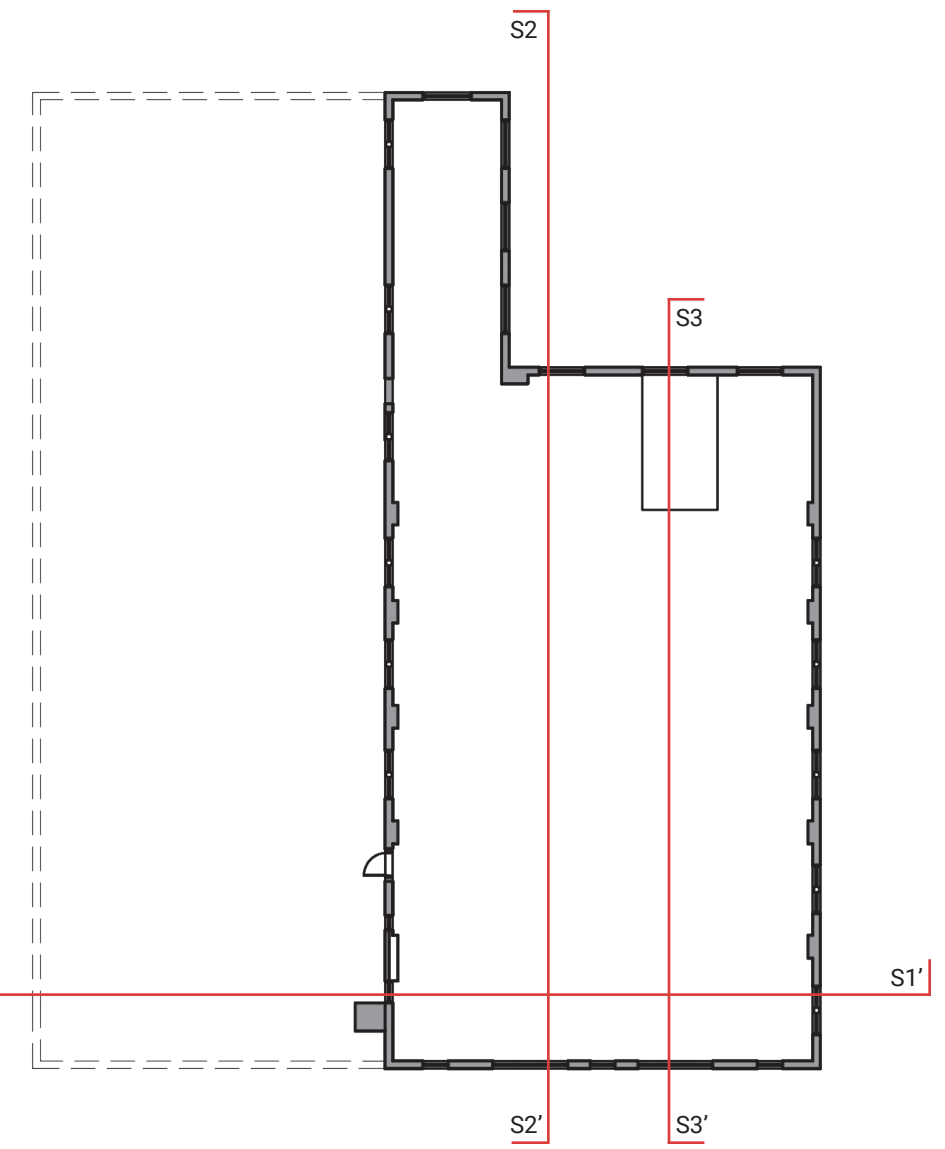


walking and driving access to Bliley's Garage in its current condition

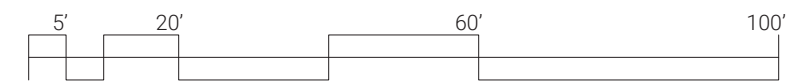
# EXISTING DRAWINGS

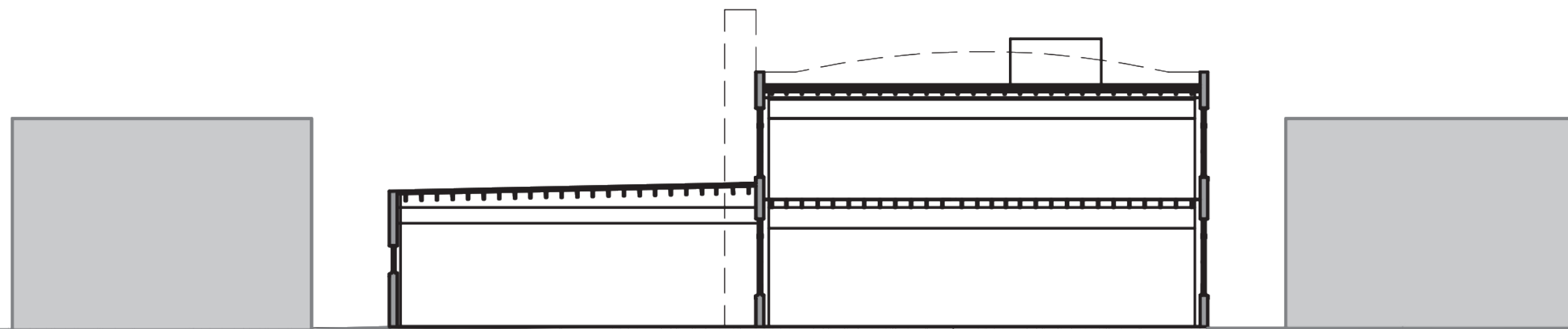


N 3RD STREET

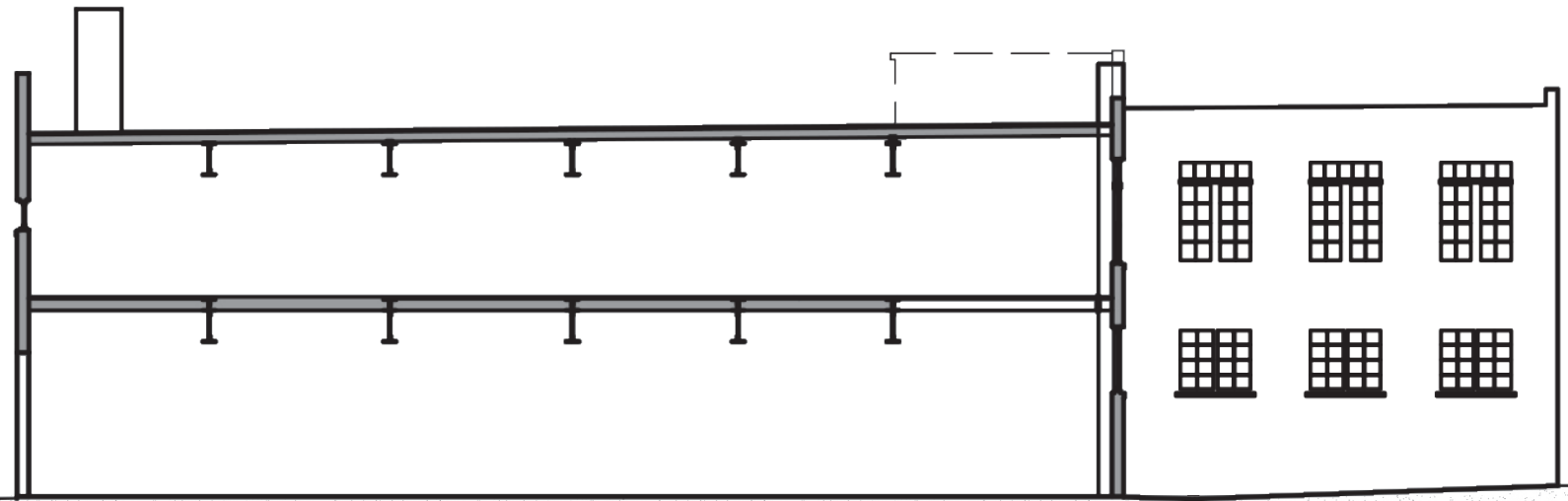


PLAN | floor one  
PLAN | floor two

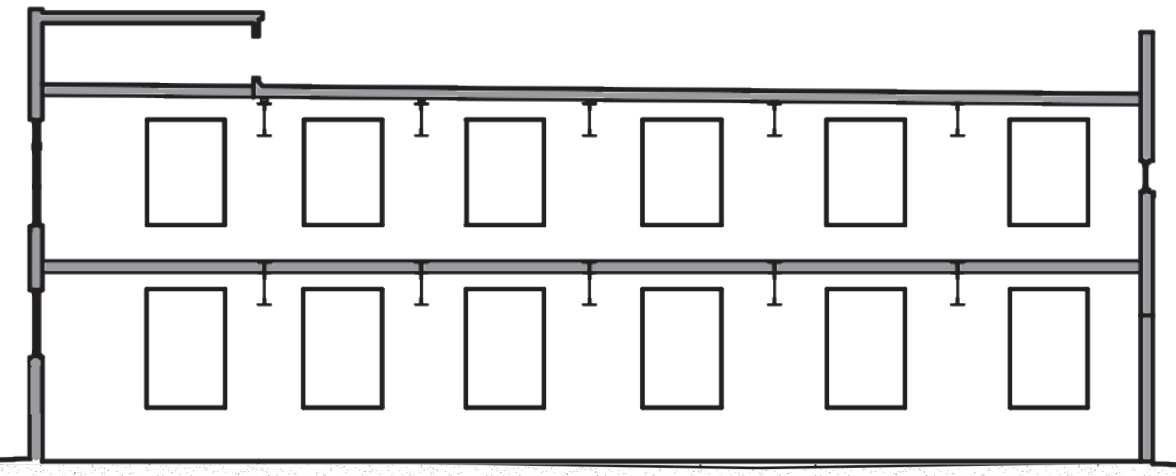




SECTION 1 | southeast view



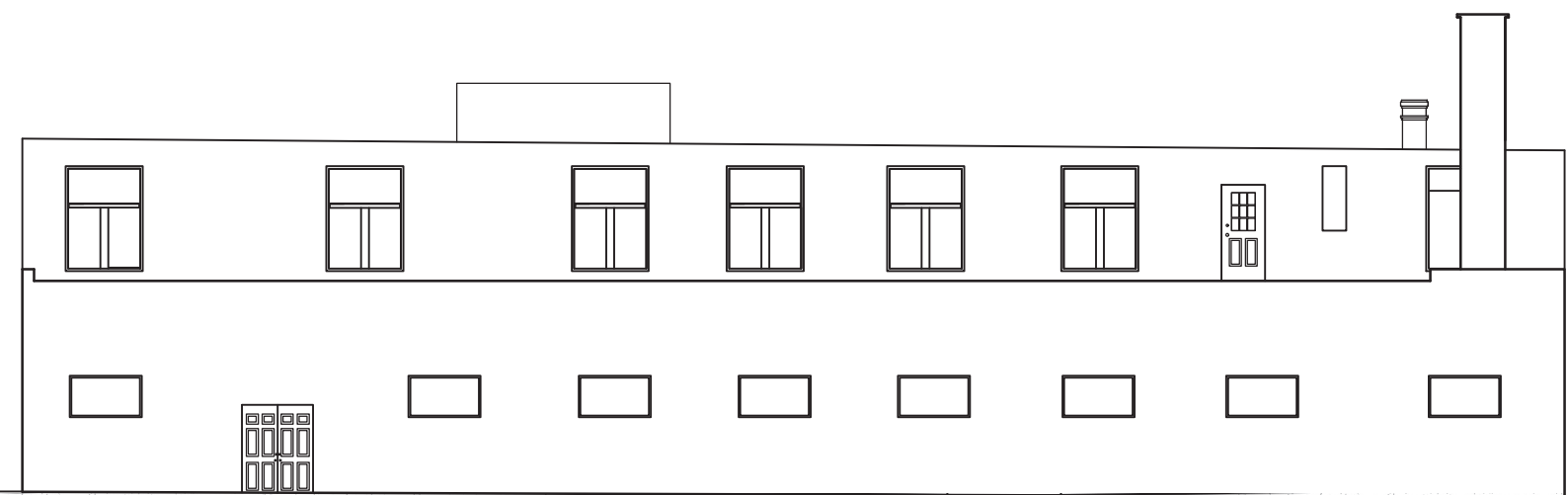
SECTION 2 | northeast view



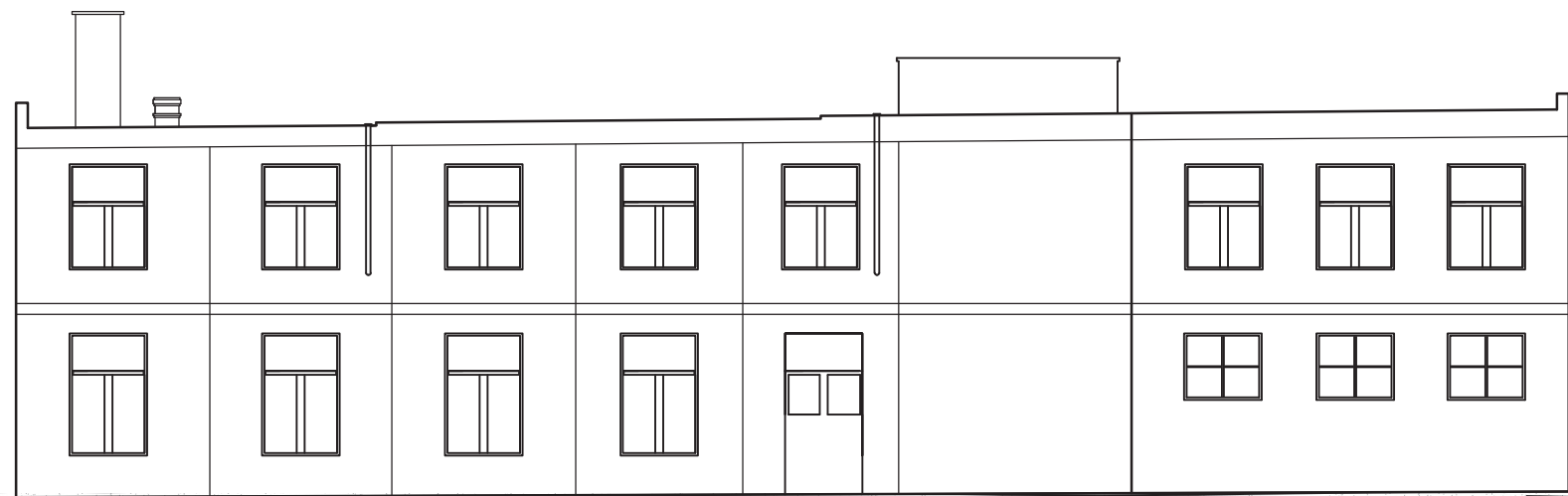
SECTION 3 | northeast view



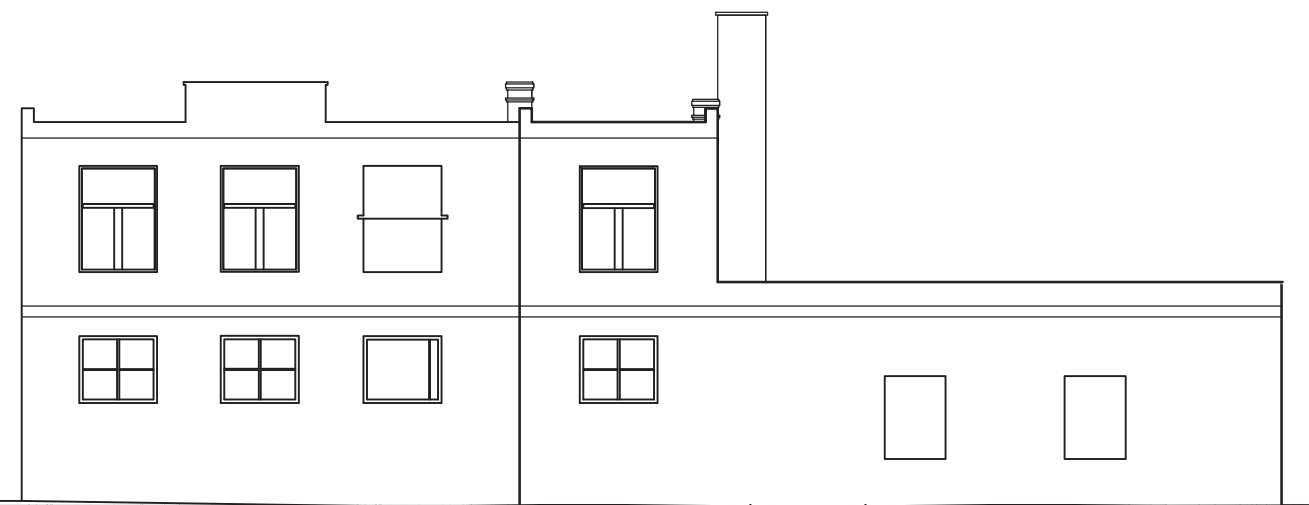
ELEVATION | southeast view



ELEVATION | southwest view



ELEVATION | northeast view

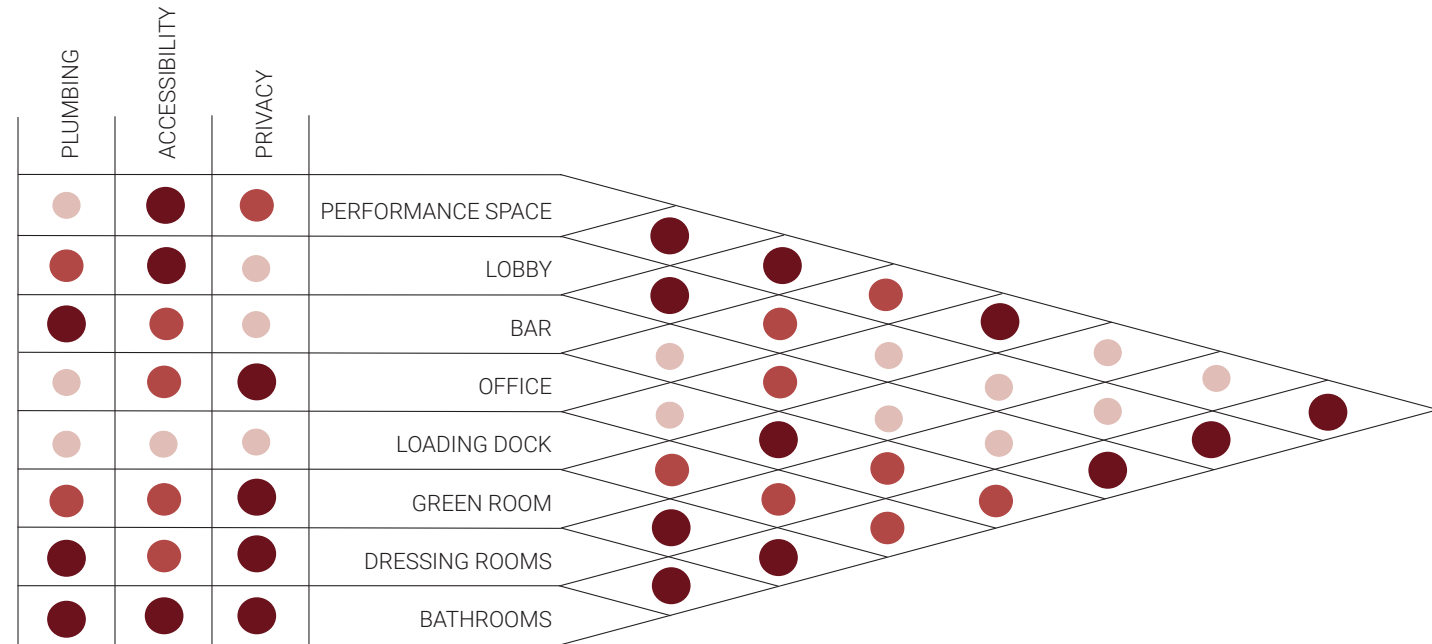


ELEVATION | northwest view

# PRELIMINARY PROGRAMMING

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# USER PROFILES



LOW ●  
 MEDIUM ●  
 HIGH ●

**ADJACENCY**  
matrix

## FRONT OF HOUSE

### LOBBY

Serves as the Initial point of entrance for patrons; a threshold into the experience. Includes a small ticket office for entrance. Seating is available for those waiting to meet their party.  
 Occupancy Type: assembly-3  
 Occupancy Load: 30 net

### BAR

A waiting area for patrons prior to commencement. Option to return to the bar post-performance. Cafe seating and tables are available in addition to seats at the bar. Bathrooms are adjacent, as well as entrance into performance space.  
 Occupancy Type: assembly-2  
 Occupancy Load: 15 net

## PERFORMANCE SPACE

Access into the performance space for the spectator is from the bar. Spectators have a number of entrances into the performance space dependent on the production company's decisions. The performance area is divided into three segments: the first floor, the second floor, and the transition space, located at the front of the building. The first two of which utilize a system of flexible walls and columns, adjusted by the production company to meet the needs of the narrative. Once in the space, spectators have the freedom to explore what they wish.  
 Occupancy Type: assembly-3  
 Occupancy Load: 30 net

## BACK OF HOUSE

### DRESSING ROOM + GREEN ROOM

Multiple dressing rooms comprise the backstage area, in addition to other ancillary rooms like a green room, which is a place for actors/production staff to share meals and relax. The company manager also has a small office adjacent to the green room, which serves as the center operation for the production company.  
 Occupancy Type: business  
 Occupancy Load: 100 gross

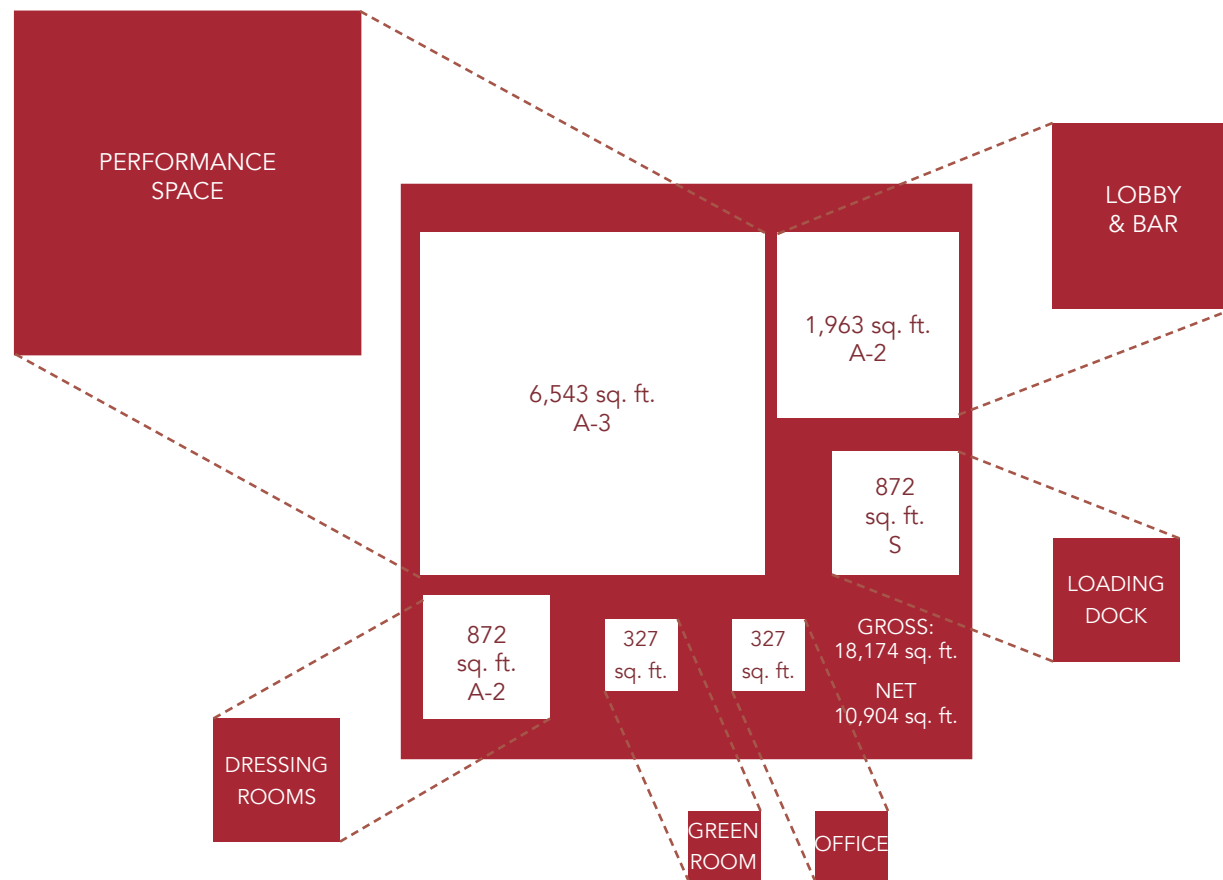
### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

Designated for the theater management team. Adjacent to other back-of-house spaces for convenience and access. Provides an area of solitude where business can be conducted if meetings are scheduled with outside partners or inside employees  
 Occupancy Type: business  
 Occupancy Load: 100 gross

### LOADING DOCK

Necessary for all theaters; an area of access from the outside in which scenery, staging, props, and food & beverage can be loaded in. Actors, company members, and theater staff have a private means of entry and exit separate from spectators. The space constantly fluctuates: maintenance and cleaning in the morning, management throughout the day, and actors in the evening.  
 Occupancy Type: storage-1  
 Occupancy Load: 300 gross





**GRAPHIC PROGRAMMING**  
of square footage

**CONSTRUCTION TYPE**

type III  
non-combustible brick exterior structure with exposed steel beams and joists

**GENDER BREAKDOWN**

	male	female
percent	50%	50%
figure	182	182

\*used to determine restroom fixtures

**AREA (square feet)**

	gross	net
1st floor	12,145	7,287
2nd floor	6,029	3,617
total	18,174	10,904

**RESTROOM FIXTURES PER GENDER (IBC)**

female: 1 per 40  
182 females = 5 fixtures  
male: 1 per 40  
182 males = 5 fixtures

**REQUIRED EXITS**

two egress stairs per floor

**OCCUPANCY CLASSIFICATION**

mixed use (to include assembly-2, assembly-3, business, storage-1)

**ACCESSIBLE RESTROOM FIXTURES PER GENDER**

female: 1 per cluster; one alternate per six toilets  
female = 2 accessible fixtures  
male: 1 per cluster; one alternate per six toilets  
male = 2 accessible fixture

**OVERALL OCCUPANT LOAD**

approximate total 363

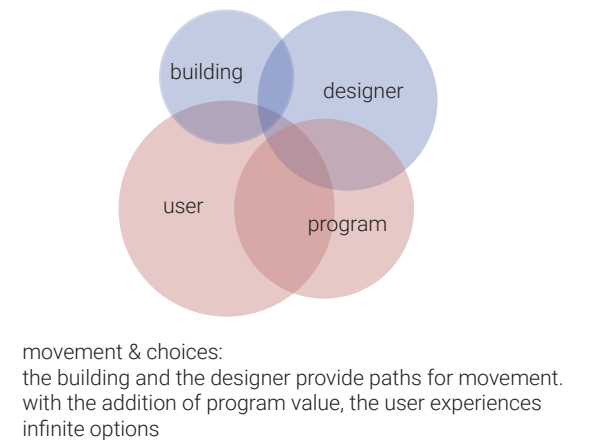
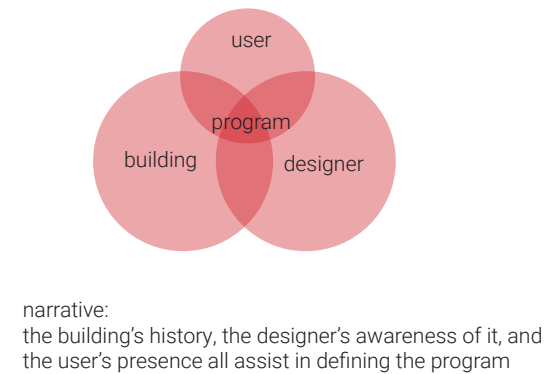
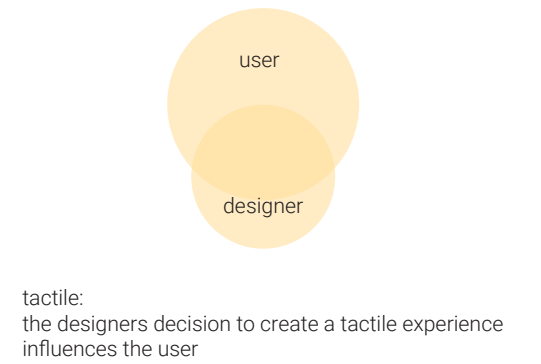
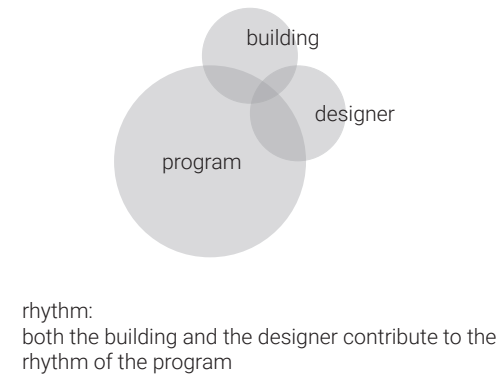
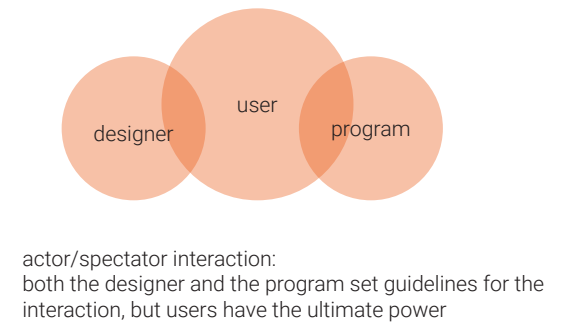
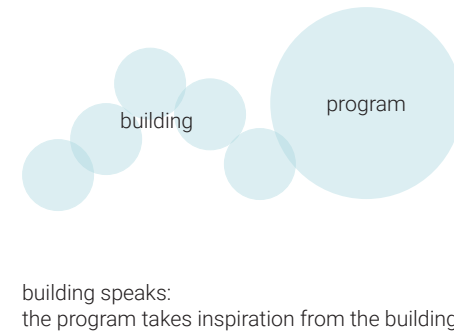
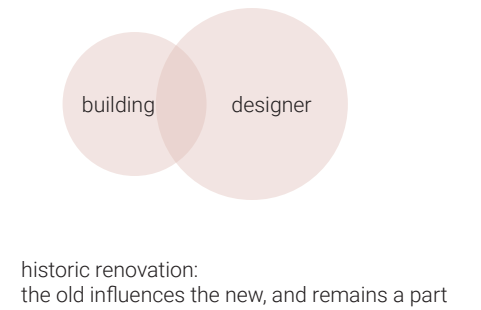
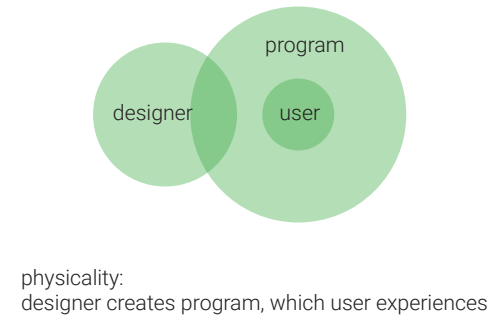
**WATER FOUNTAINS (IBC)**

1 per 500 = 1 water fountain

**CODE**  
analysis

# CONCEPTUAL DRIVERS

BUILDING	PROGRAM	USER	DESIGNER
Since Bliley's is located in Jackson Ward, I would like to incorporate iron details in tribute to the past industry.	The program needs to challenge the way the Richmond community views theater and performing arts.	The users need to come away from this experience feeling exhilarated in an unexpected way.	The designer should analyze the space and make efficient and insightful design decisions.
As a historic renovation, I want to highlight the architectural and structural features which speak to its history.	The program should engage users in an instinctual and physical manner, rather than just cerebrally.	The user should have a more direct and personal connection to the actors and dancers in the space.	The designer should allow the natural rhythms of the building to come through.
I want to effectively incorporate the large garage doors that visually identify the facade.	The program should provide ways in which each user has an independent and unique experience.	The user should experience a physical connection with the space - both kinetic and tactile.	The designer should let the history of the building play a part in aesthetic, structural and program details.
I'm interested in finding a solution for the number of windows in my building, due to the fact that performances spaces normally block exterior light.	The program should unify the back-of-house spaces, front-of-house spaces and the performance area, whether it be through theme or material.	The user should be driven by instinct as opposed to logic.	The designer should let the buildings history influence the narrative of the program
I want to take cues from the form and material of my building, allowing it to speak to the design.	The program should encourage a rhythm, but with moments of intensity and disruption.	The user should feel as though they have the power to determine the outcome of their experience.	The designer should focus on how to enhance the relationship between actor and spectator.
Despite its rectangular shape, I would like my design to exude fluidity and motion.	The program should question the relationship between audience, actors and the space in which they interact.	The user should physically feel the memories of their experience after the performance has ended.	The designer should focus on how to break down barriers between stage and audience chamber.
The building should encourage movement between levels, and take advantage of the split levels.	The program should take inspiration from the site and building that hosts it.	The user should be critical in the narrative of the performance - they should become part of the background architecture.	The designer should focus on how to use subtle tactile materials to provoke instinctual reactions in spectators.
The history of the building should be woven into the narrative, even if it's just hinted at.	The program should emphasize a variety of "stages" or platforms rather than a singular focus point.	The user should always have multiple options to chose from, whether it be what they see or where they travel.	The designer should use built elements as a way of enhancing a spectators physical connection with the space.
The height of the ceilings needs to be considered and accentuated.	The program should challenge the notion of the "Fourth Wall," the invisible barrier between actors and audiences.	The user should be as intrigued with the space as they are the performers.	The designer should analyze how to incorporate movement and motion into a variety of forms.
Special attention paid to the entrance and exit, whether they share a space or not.	The program should entice audiences to come back.	The user determines the level of interaction they have or want to have with the actor.	A designer should utilize simplicity but absolute intention.



# SCHEMATIC DESIGN

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## PARTI diagrams

The word *parti* derives from the French phrase *prendre parti*, or "to make a decision" - it's an organizing idea or departure point. We were tasked with developing parti diagrams based on organizers in our thesis building as a way of better understanding the site.

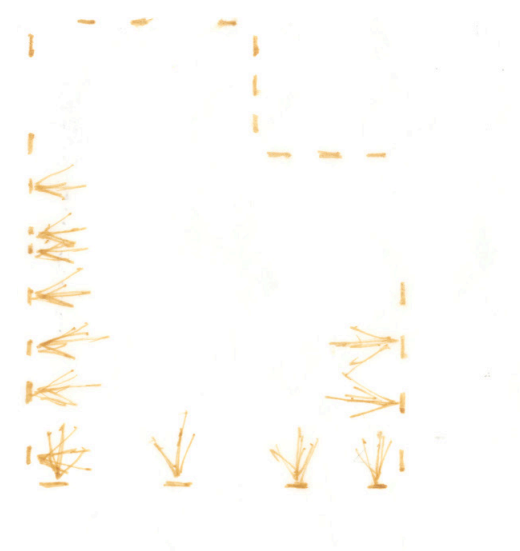
- geometry
- column grid
- structural/load-bearing elements
- entry axes and vertical circulation
- fenestration patterns
- indirect/direct sunlight throughout the day
- major and minor compositional axes

### SUN STUDY

january - november



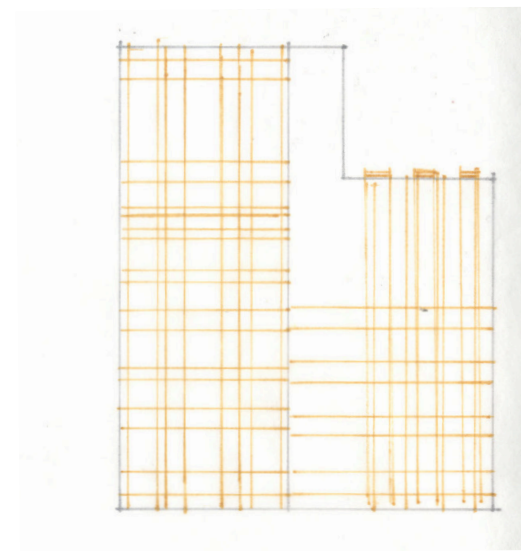
march - september



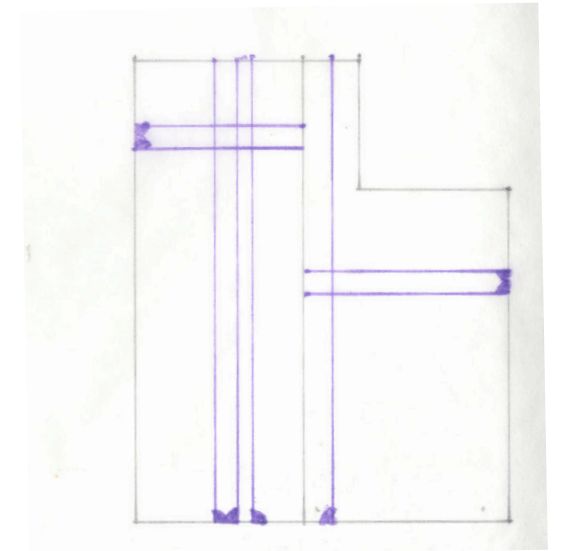
may - july



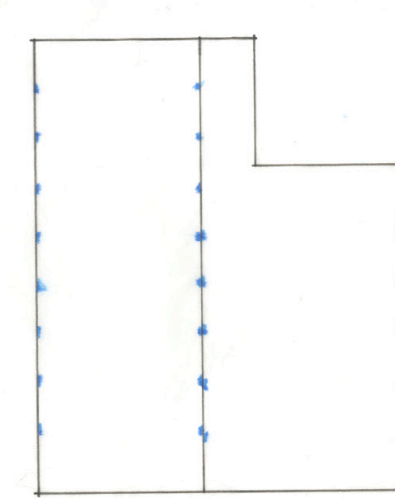
### FENESTRATION



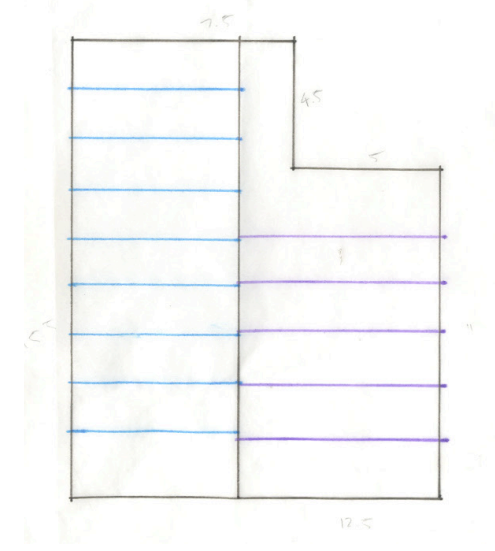
### ENTRY ACCESS



### LOAD-BEARING

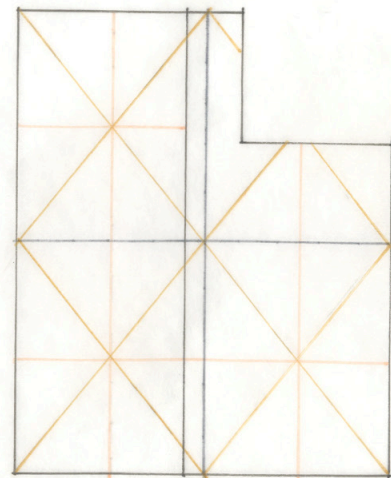


### COLUMN GRID

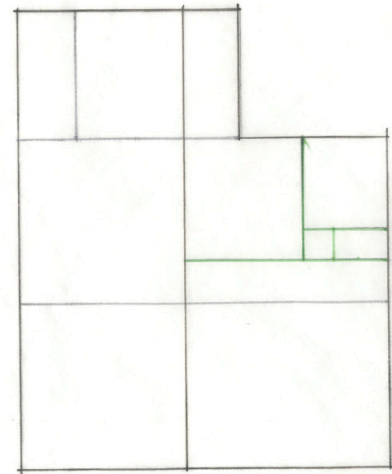


PARTI diagrams

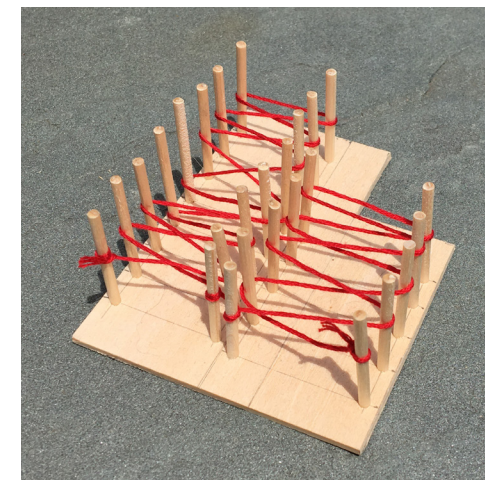
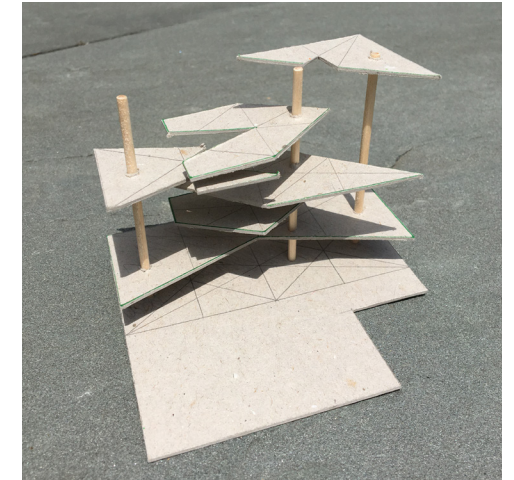
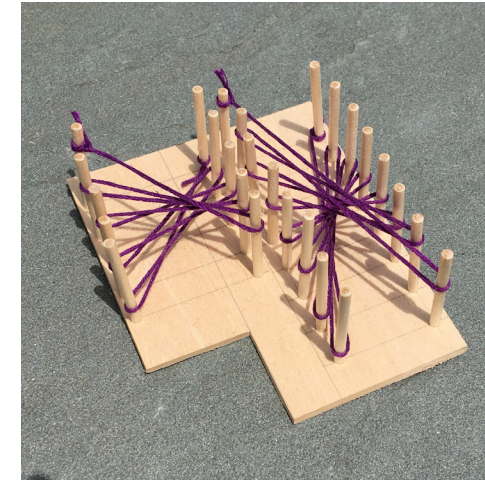
COMPOSITION



GEOMETRIES



PARTI models

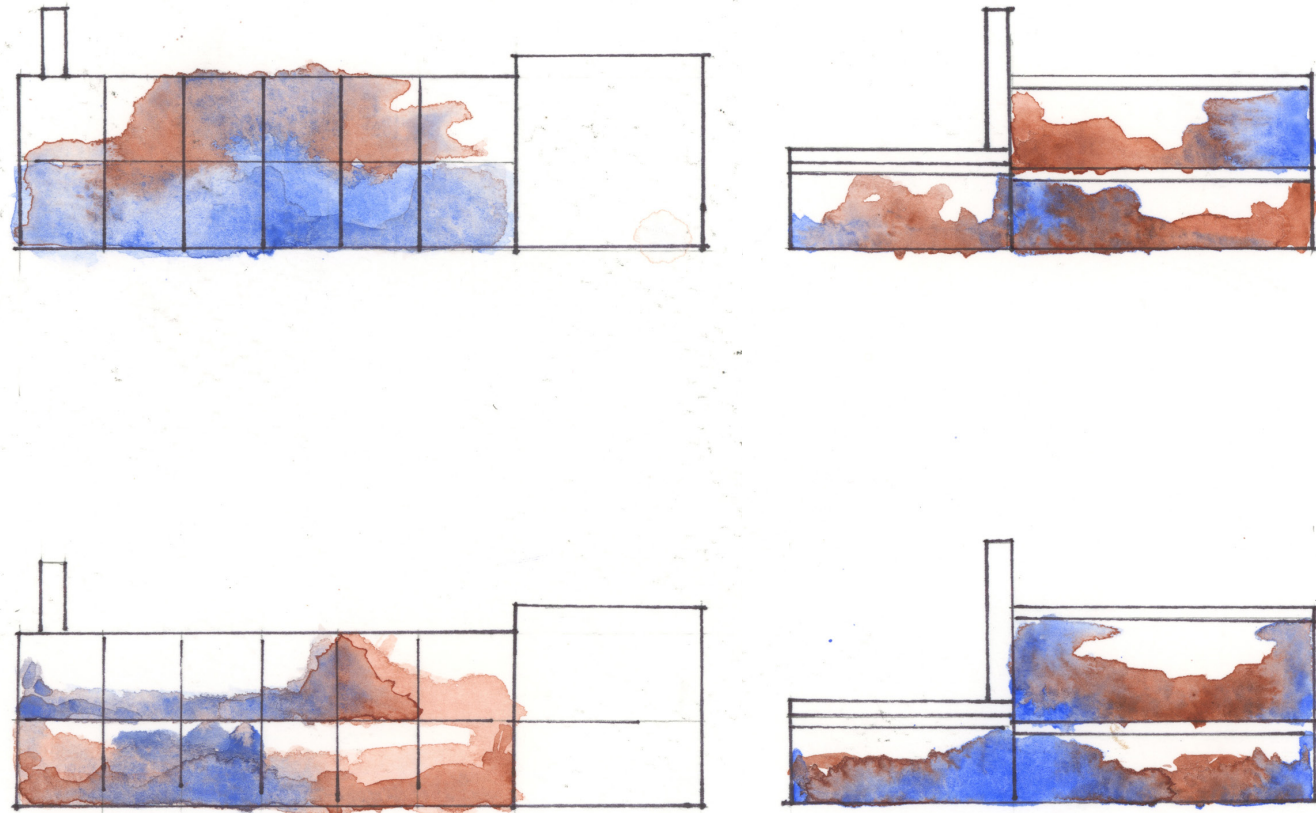


models based on the composition parti

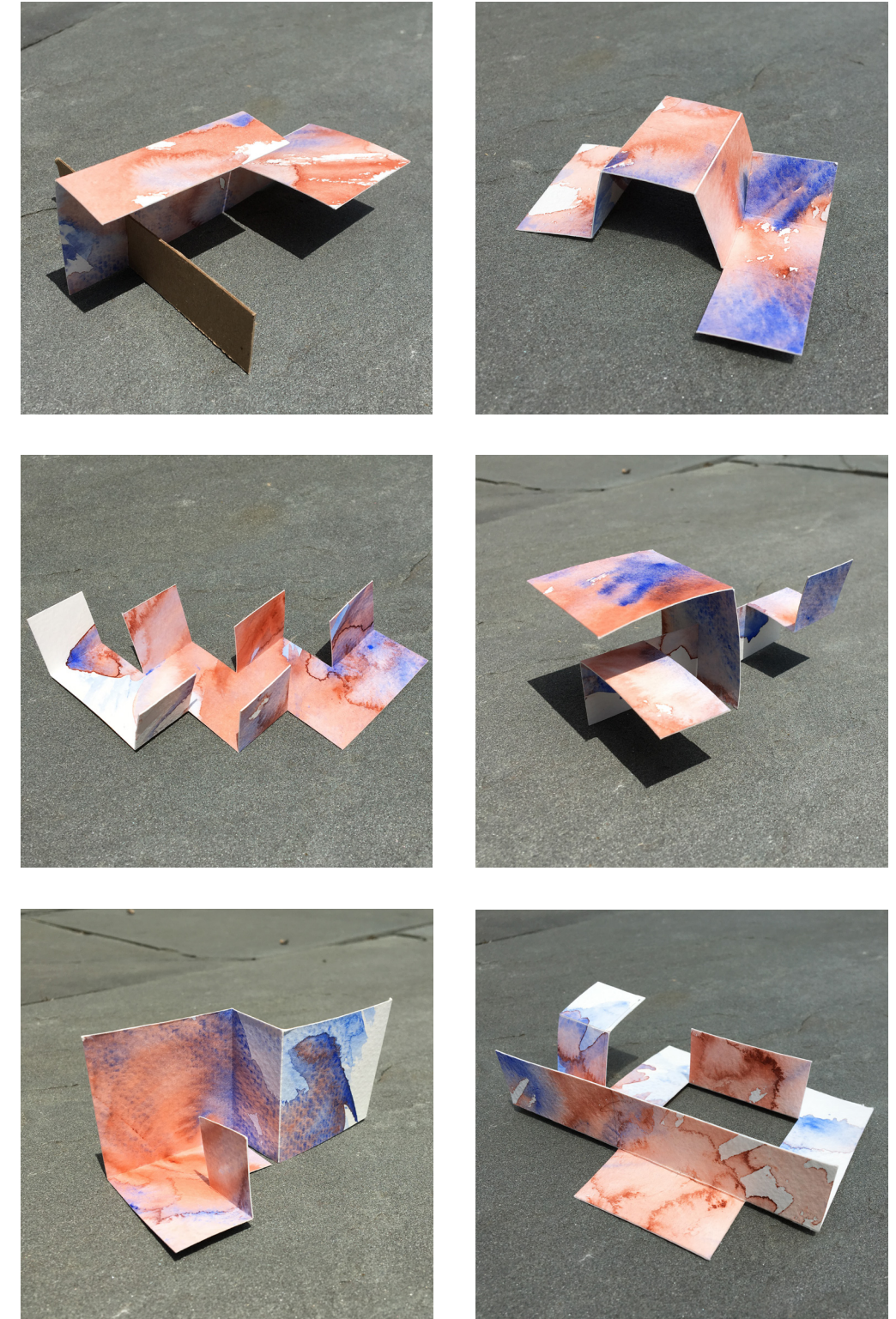
models based on the geometry parti

## INTERACTION

In traditional theater, the audience chamber and the stage are separated by the fourth wall, an invisible barrier that falls along the proscenium. In immersive theaters, there is no one stage - the interior of the building is a stage. Therefore, the relationship between the actor and the spectator is challenged, as there is no formal separation. The following watercolor studies explore the potential relationships between actors and spectators. What kind of separation exists, if any? From my experience as a spectator, the physical boundaries are challenged, but a level of reverence still exists. The models on the opposite page translate the watercolor studies into 3D, and further examine how the interactions happen on different planes, or stages, in the theater.



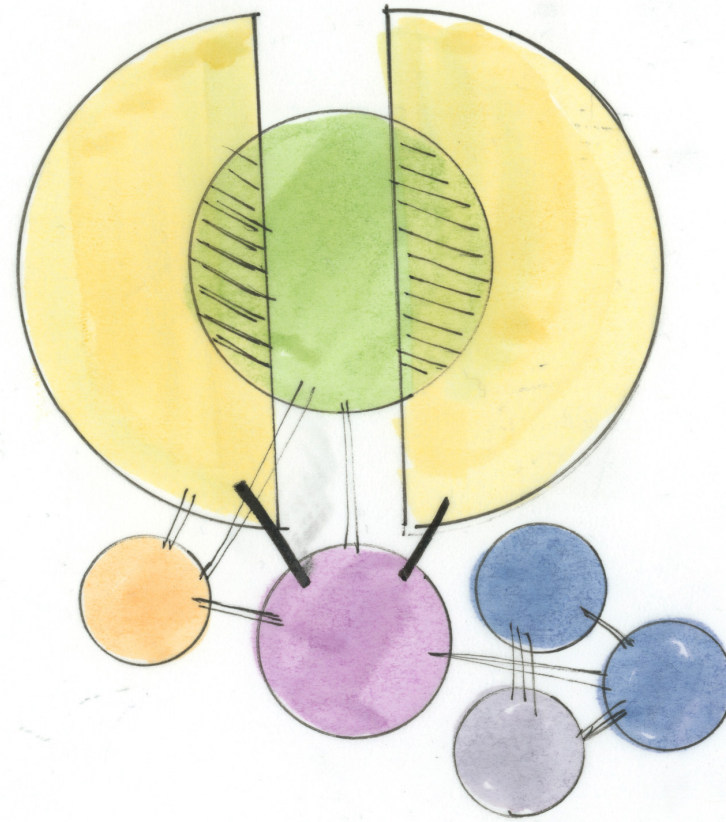
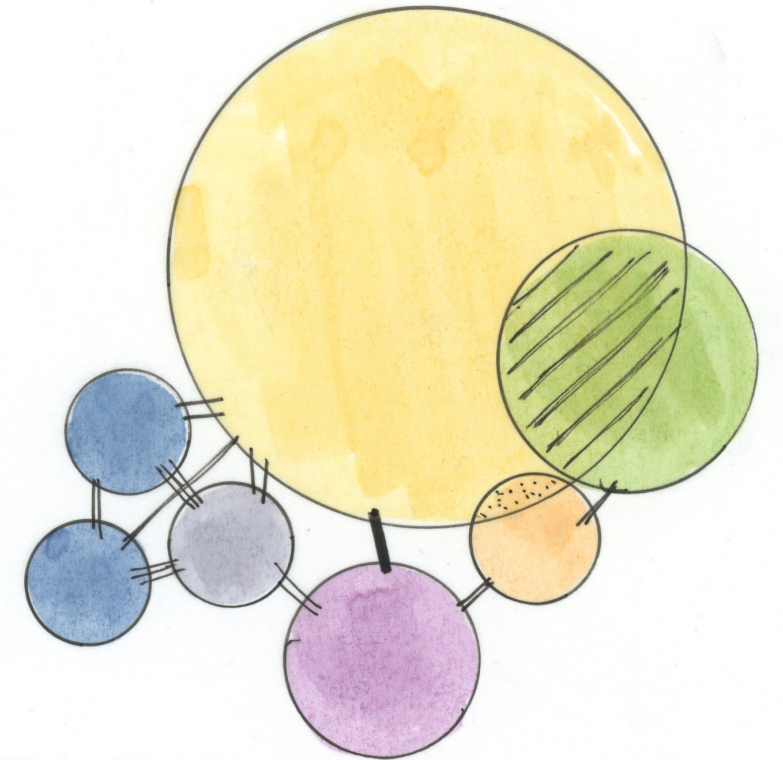
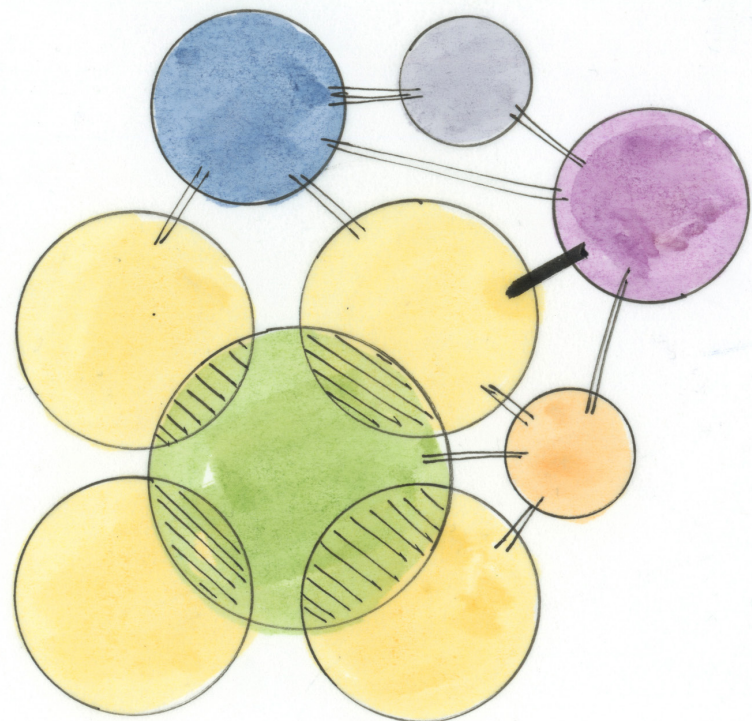
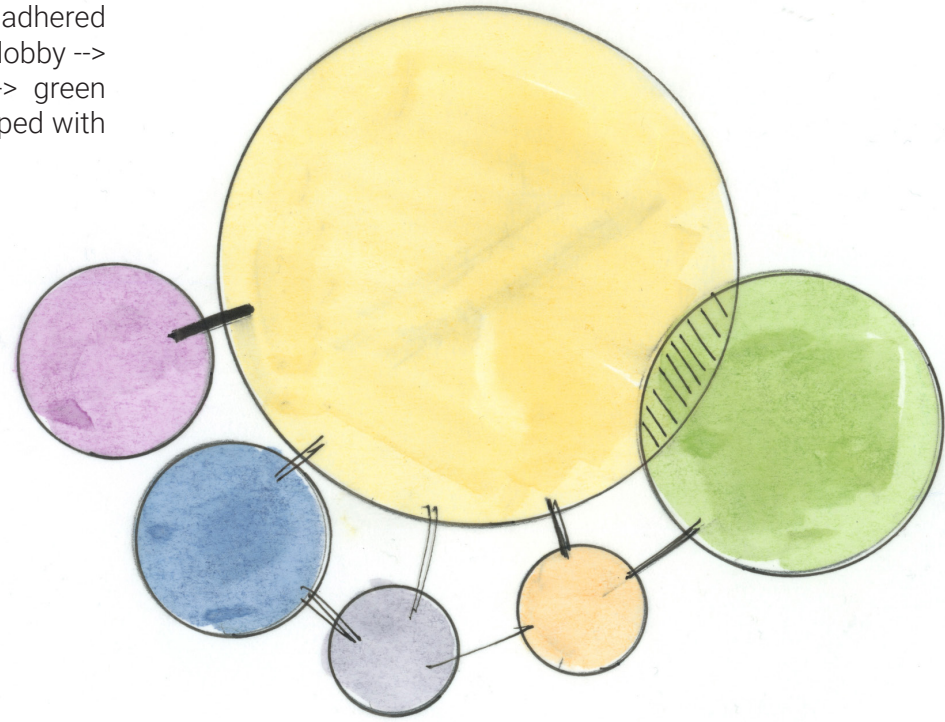
watercolor diagrams depicting actor/spectator interaction within and during the performance



3d concept models based off of the watercolors of actor/spectator interaction

**BUBBLE diagrams**

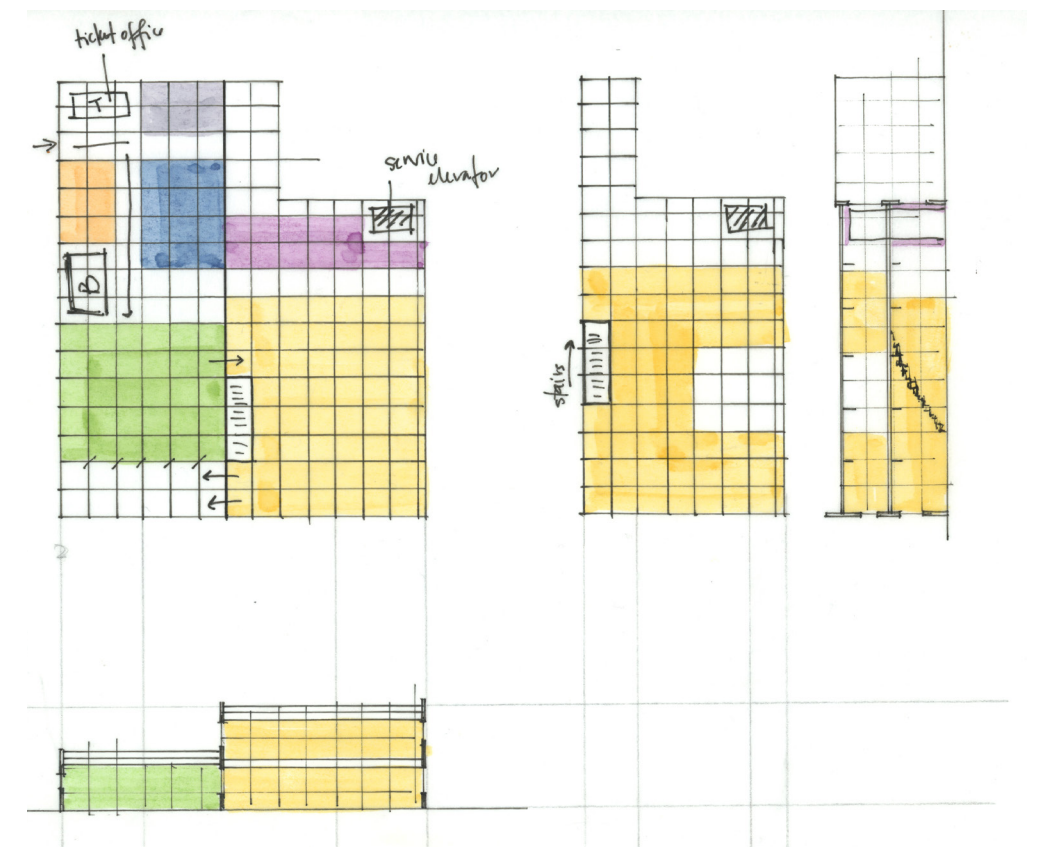
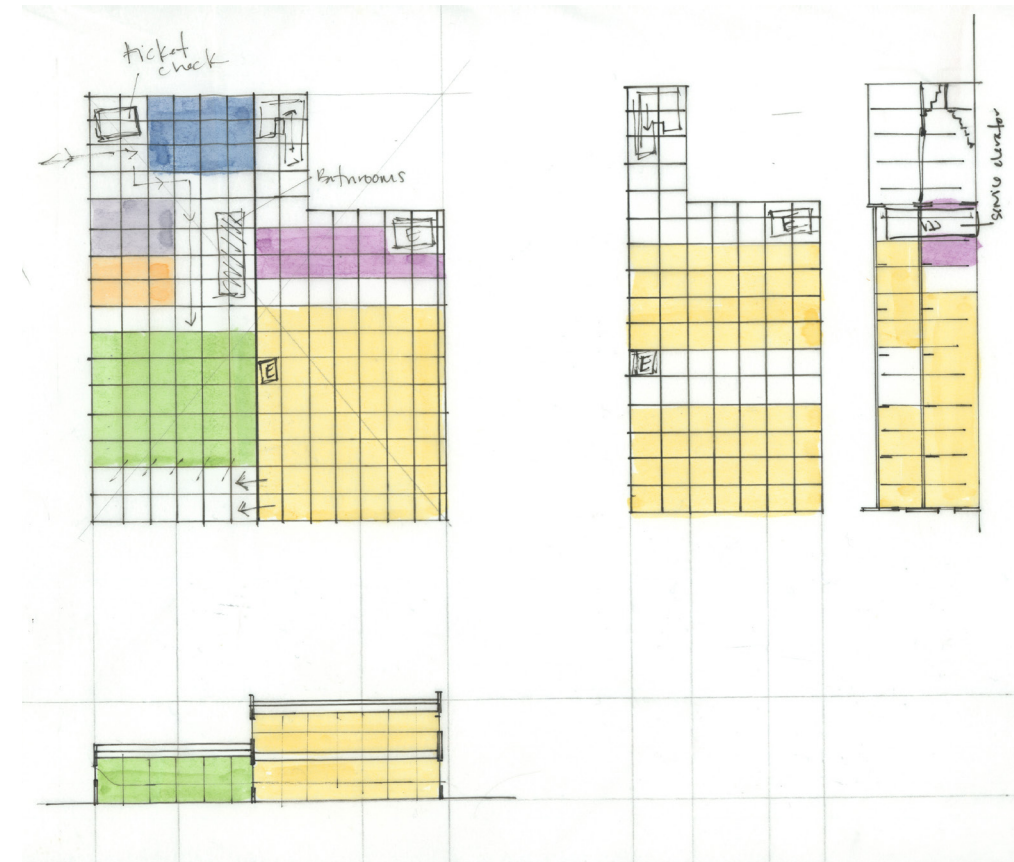
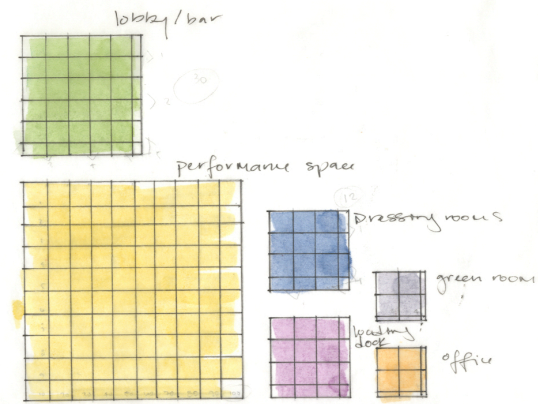
The schematic design process started by creating bubble diagrams as a way of understanding general adjacencies. With theater, there are some strict adjacencies that have to be adhered to: loading dock --> performance space; lobby --> performance space; dressing rooms --> green room, etc. However, this process still helped with working out some finer ideas.



- performance space
- lobby/bar
- dressing rooms
- green room
- loading dock
- office

### BLOCK diagrams

Based off of the information developed in the graphic programming and adjacency exercises, I began to investigate preliminary space planning tactics through block diagrams. I was interested in maintaining a boundary between the front-of-house spaces (lobby, bar) and the performance area, and found the existing wall separating the two halves of the building provided this designation. I was experimenting with the idea of the support spaces (dressing room, green room, administrative offices) being partially visible to the spectator, breaking down the traditional boundaries of theater. These diagrams were an exploration into possible layouts.

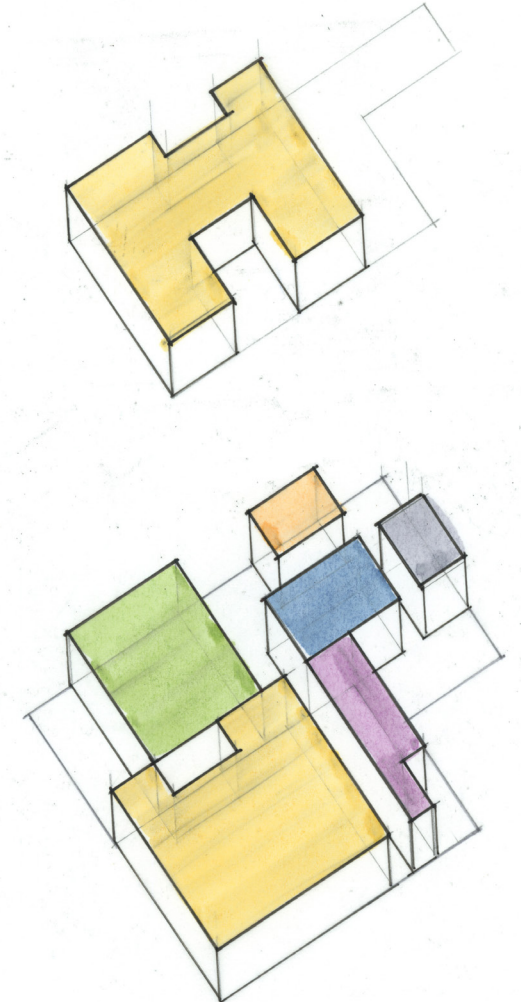
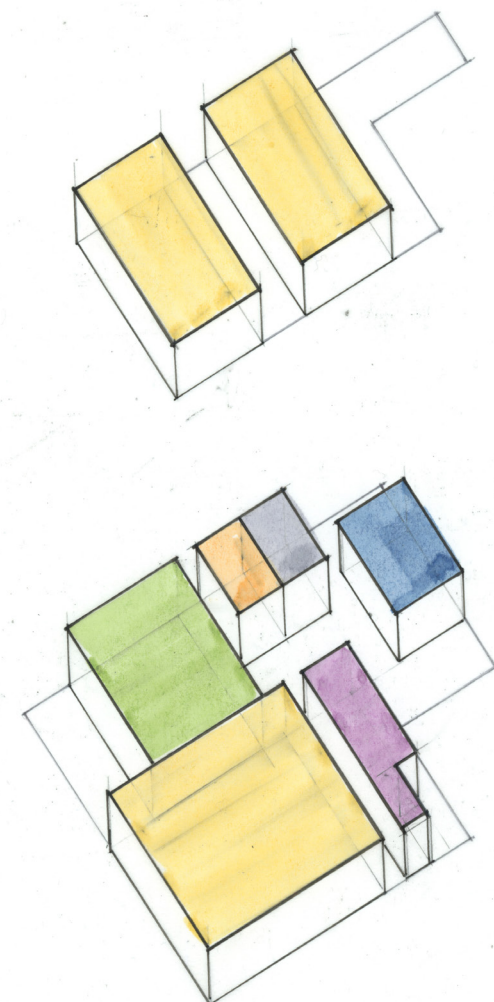
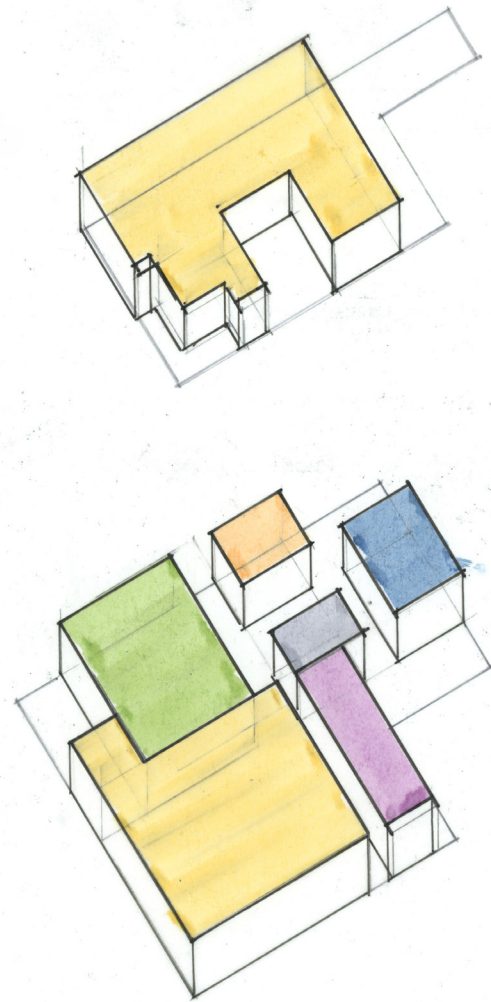
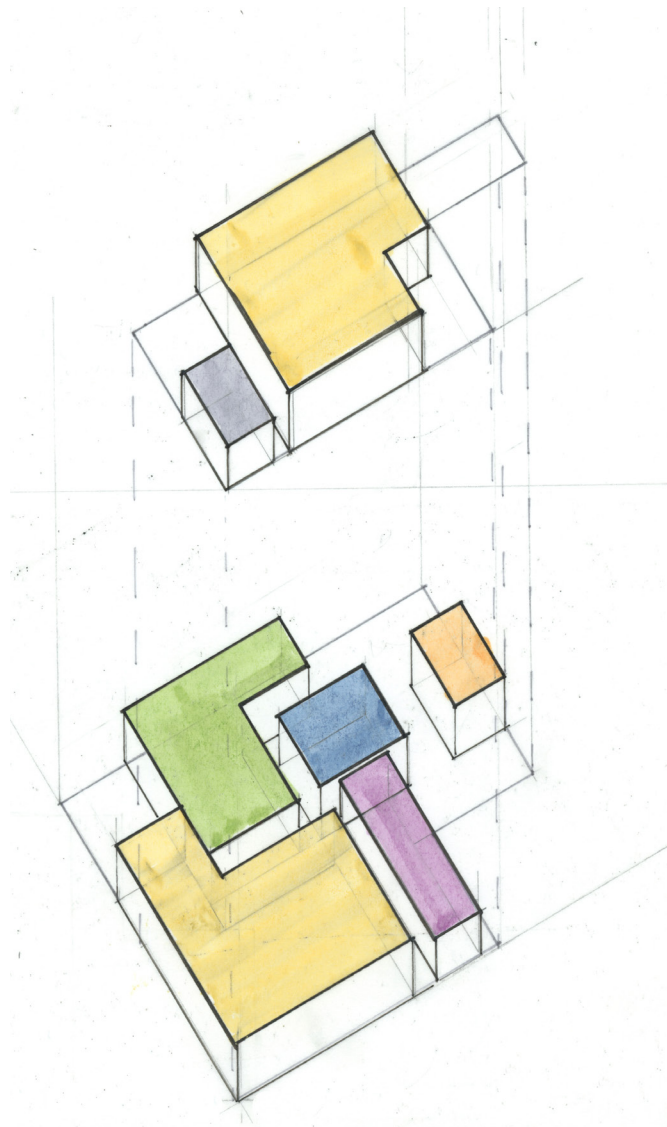




**AXON**

## block diagrams

As a continued exploration into block diagrams, I took some of the more successful arrangements and expanded them into an axonometric view, in an attempt to get a better sense of mass.



## COLOR PALETTE

In an exercise to determine a color palette for the interior, I selected an image that matched the intended tone of the space, and attempted to draw those colors out. I explored how each color responded to other colors in the palette, and what they created when combined together. This inspiration led to a color style for my final renderings as well.



*Untitled*, Jesús Leguizamo

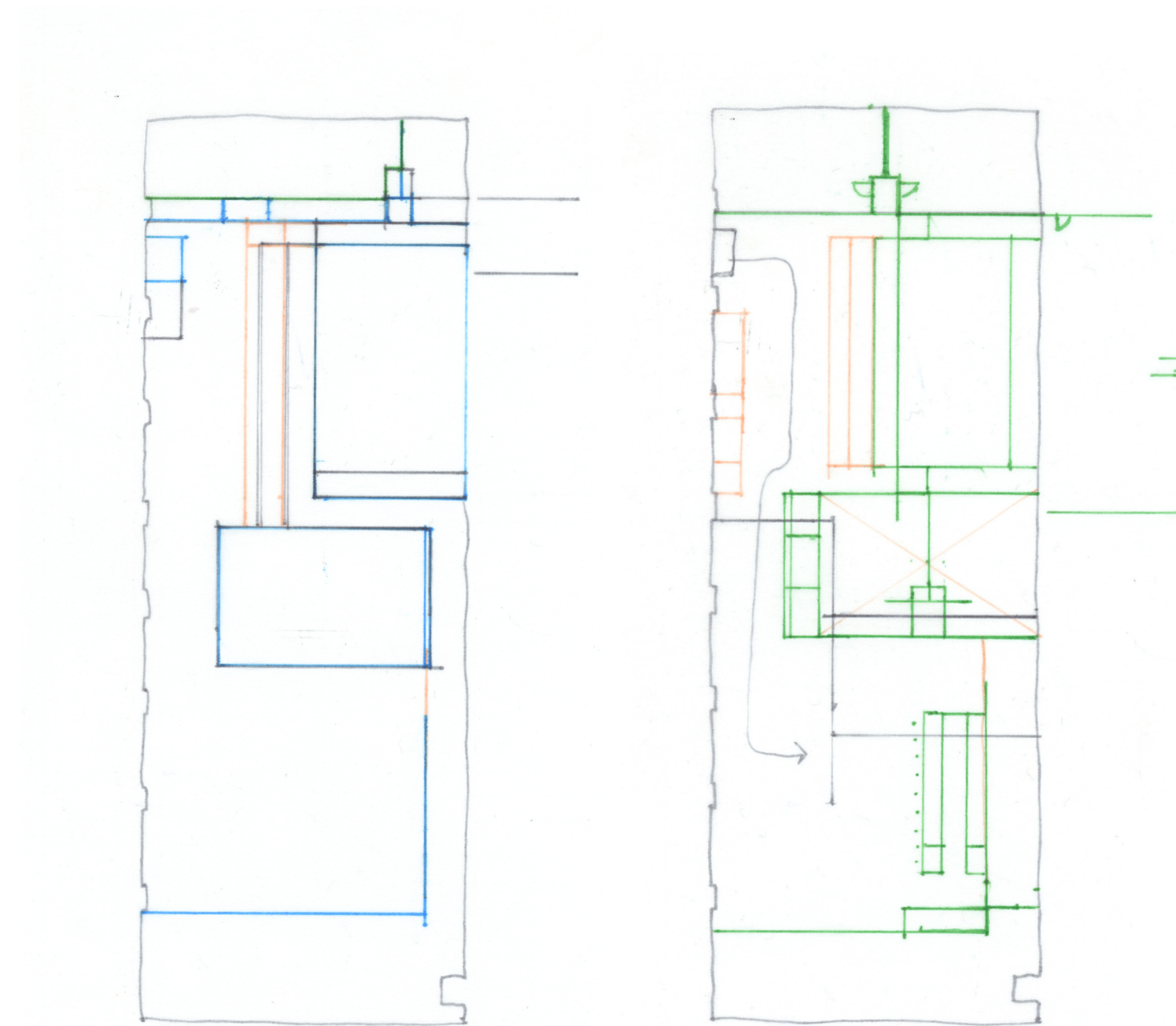


DESIGN  
DEVELOPMENT

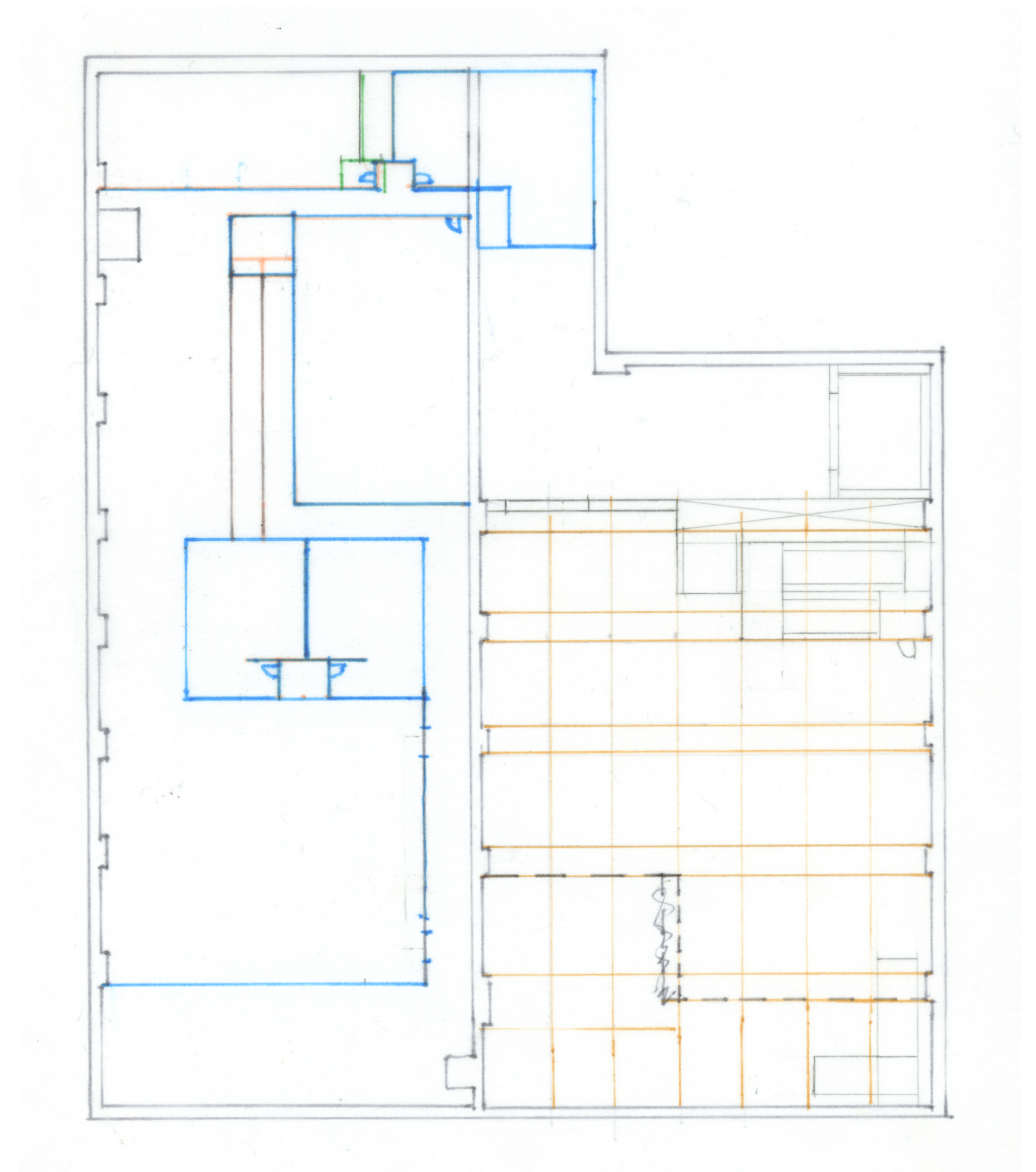
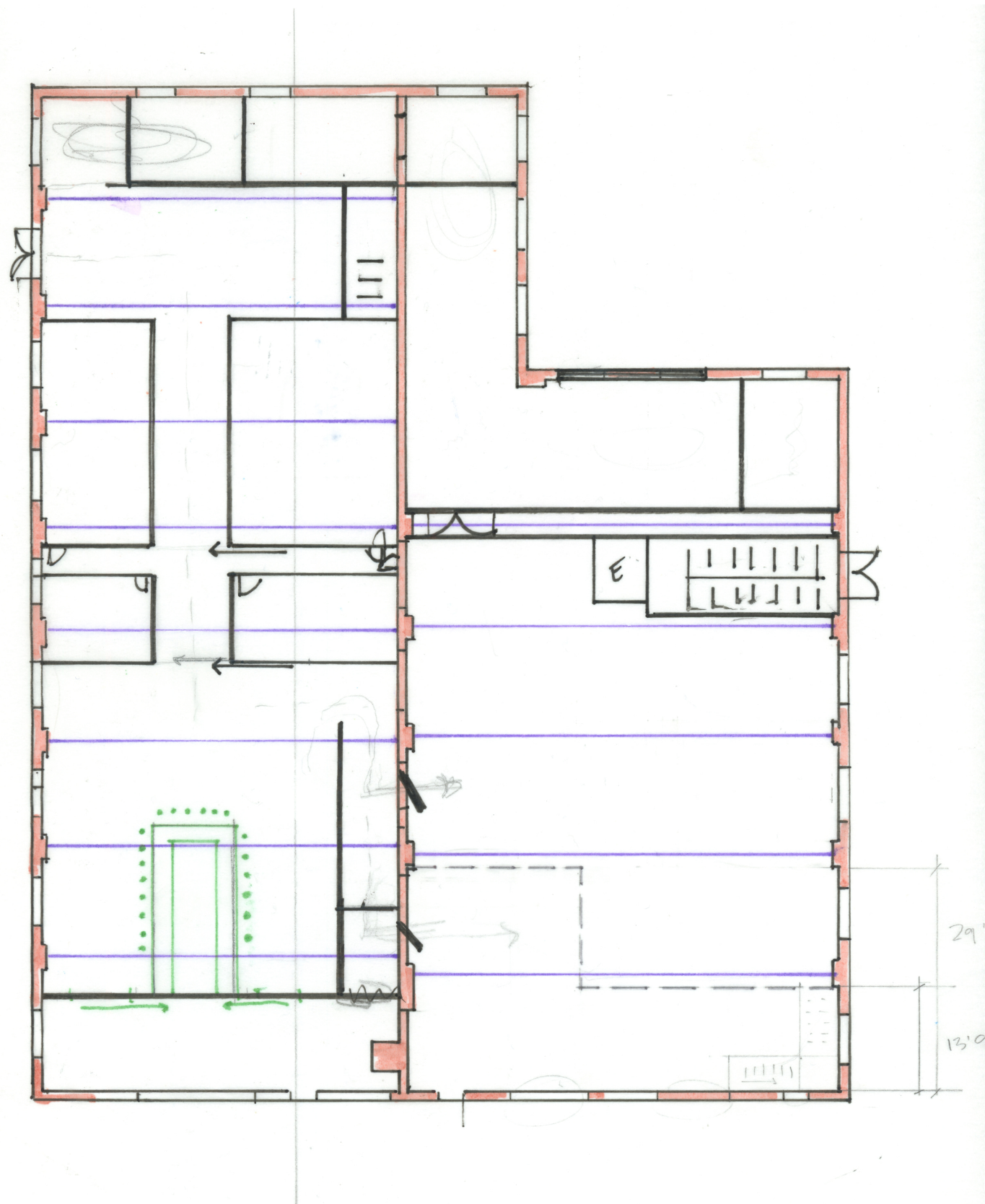
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## PLANS IN PROGRESS

These diagrams take the preliminary blocking a step further, by considering existing structural elements of the building like the column grid, doors, and windows. The differences are primarily in determining the path of travel for spectators upon entrance and then through the space.

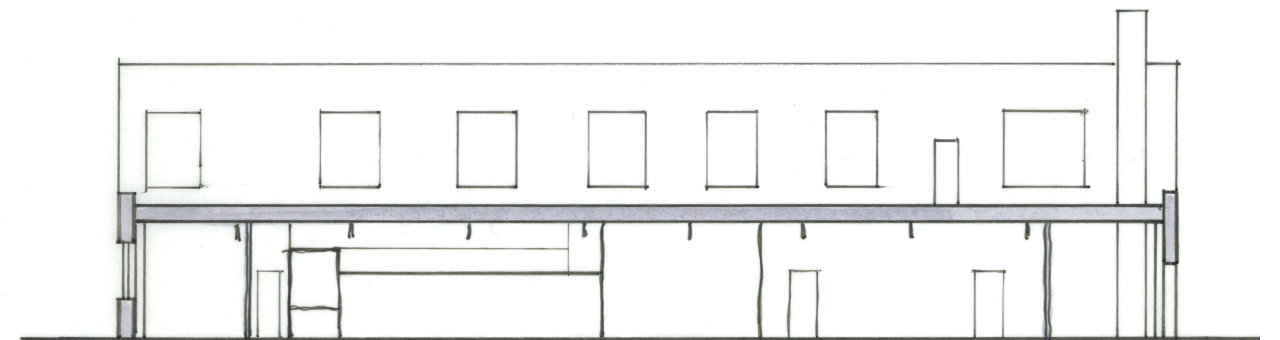
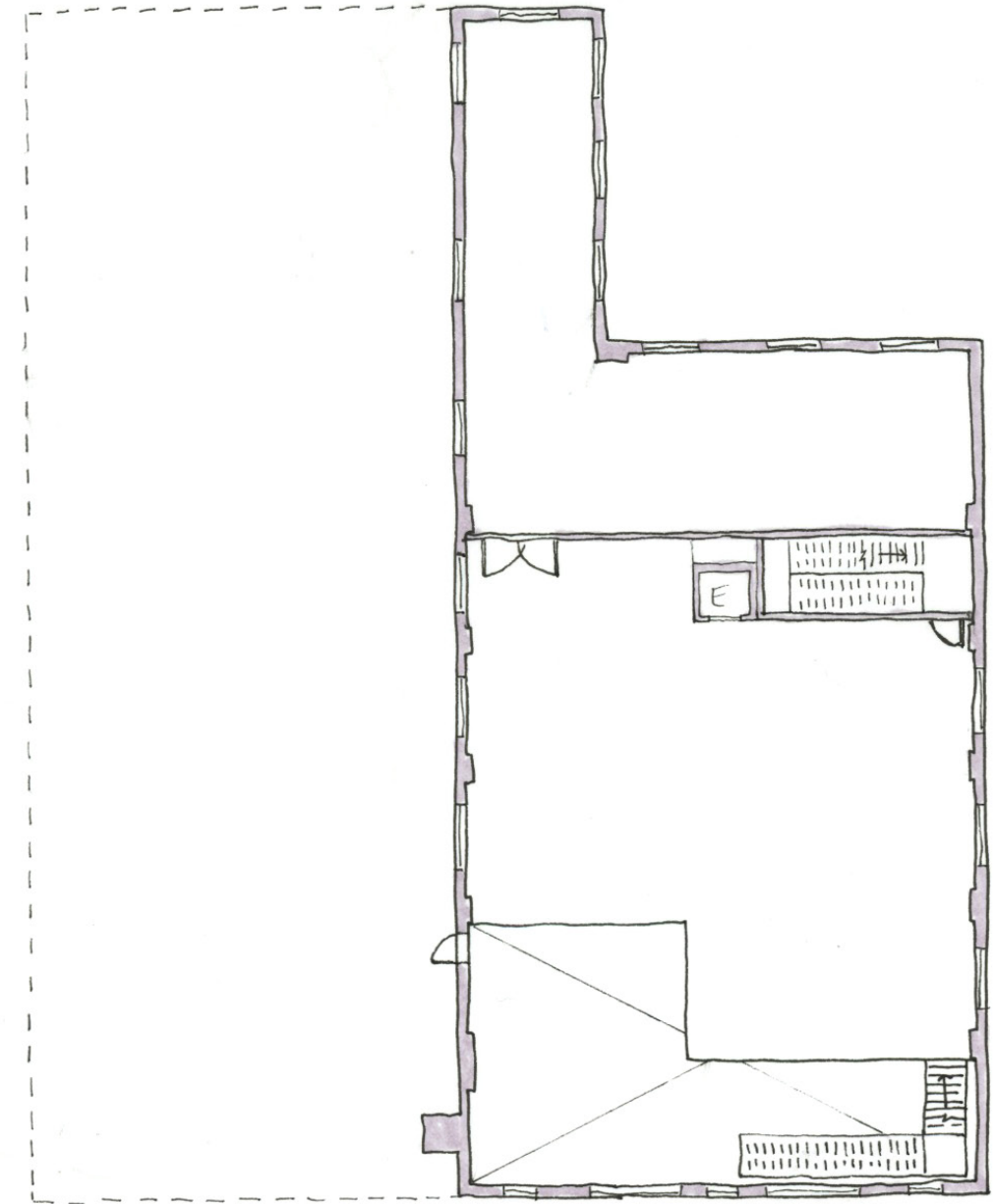
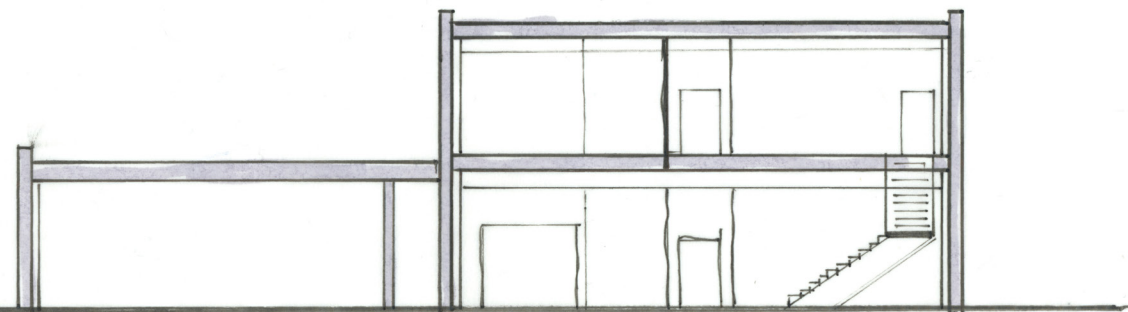
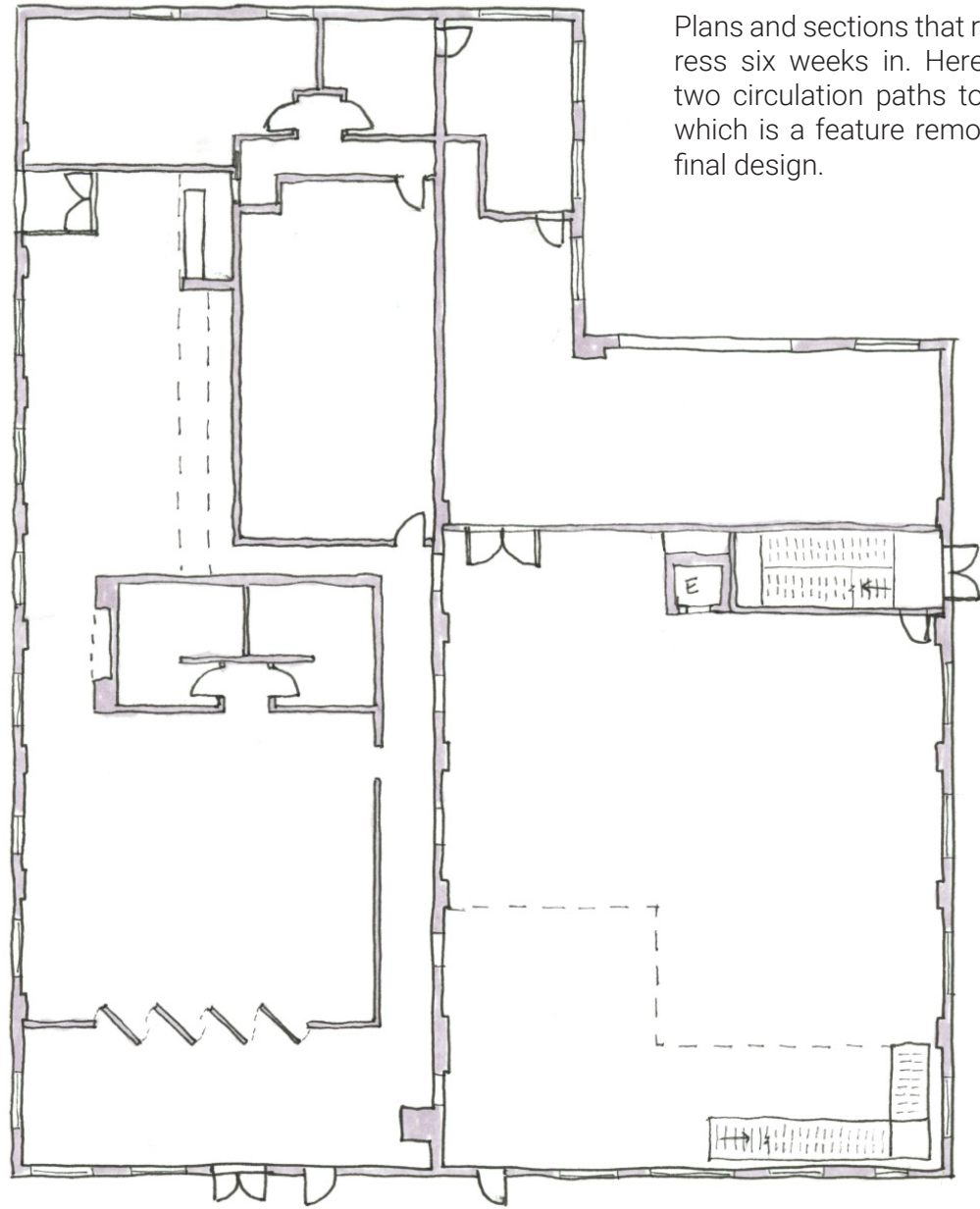


PLANS IN PROGRESS



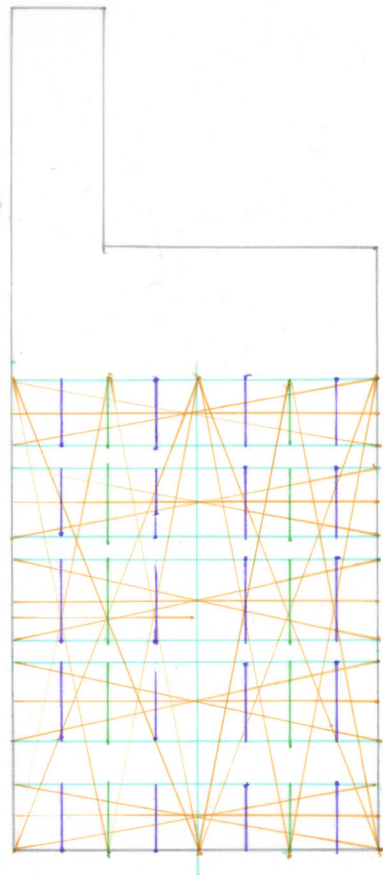
### DEVELOPING PLANS

Plans and sections that reflect progress six weeks in. Here, there are two circulation paths to the lobby, which is a feature removed for the final design.

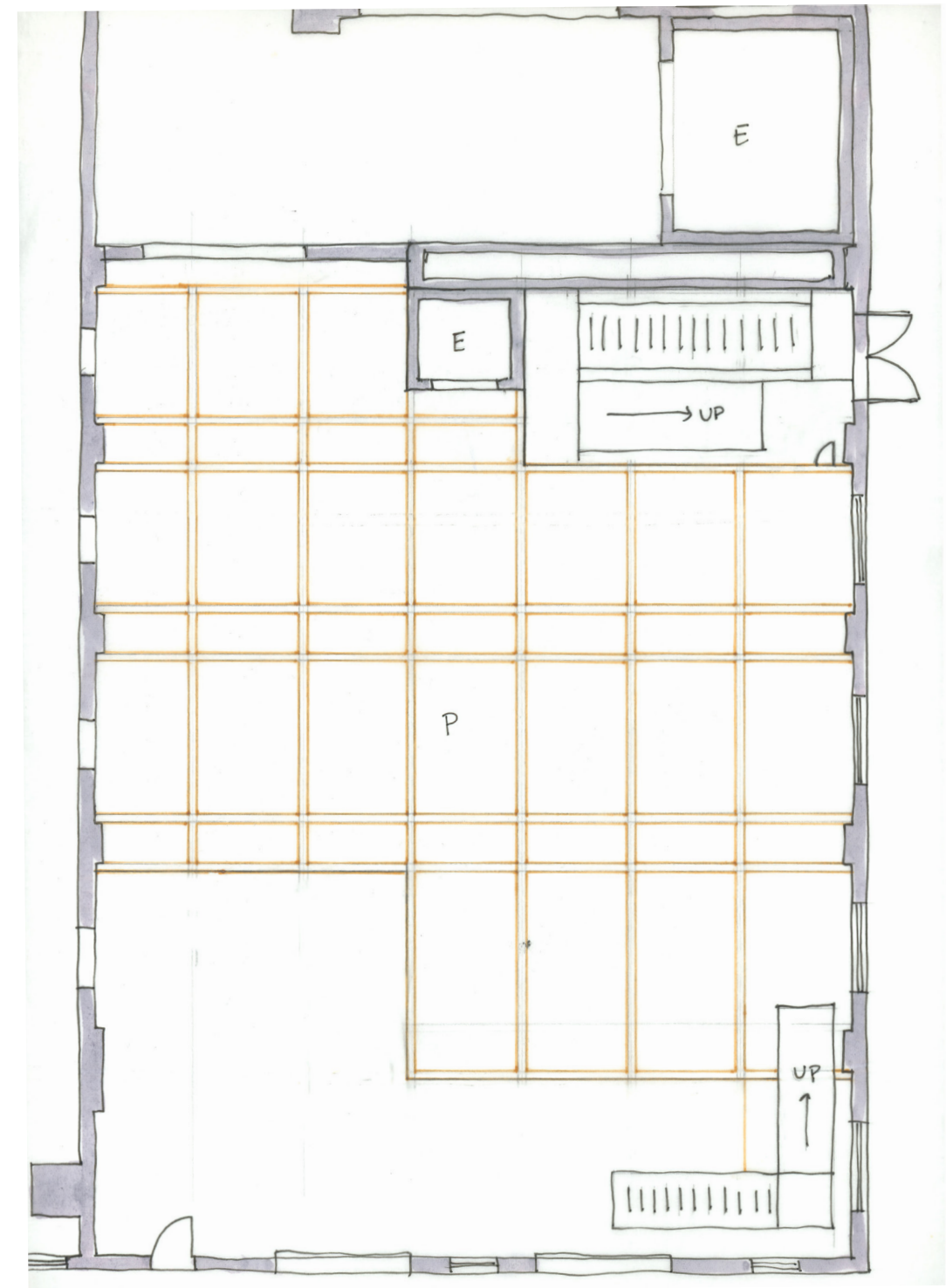
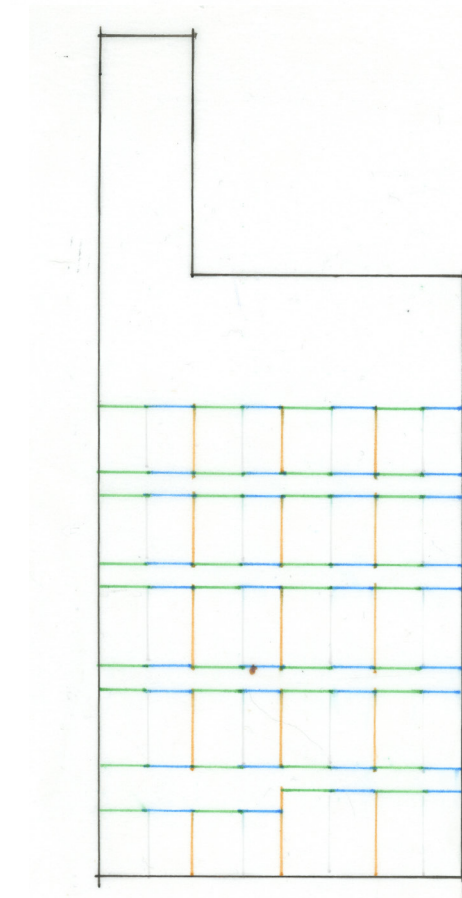
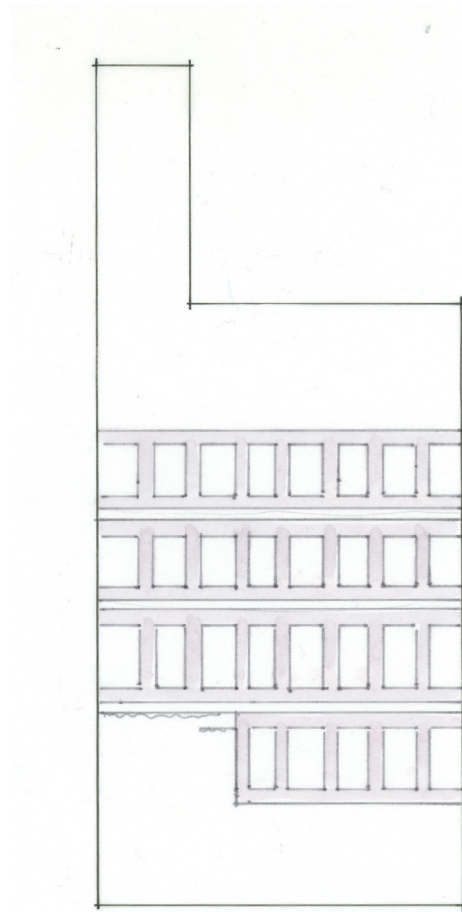


## GRID STRUCTURE

Having designated the two-story side of the building as the performance space, the next step was designing a flexible system parts for a production company to manipulate depending on the production's needs. The idea emerged to create a series of columns and walls that can be manipulated different ways. An overhead grid would be needed for the columns secure in to. The drawings are an exploration into the grid design. Considerations included existing column structure, existing windows, and appropriate increments for wall sizes.



diagrams depicting the existing geometries



new column support grid based on the existing column grid

**PROCESS MODELS**

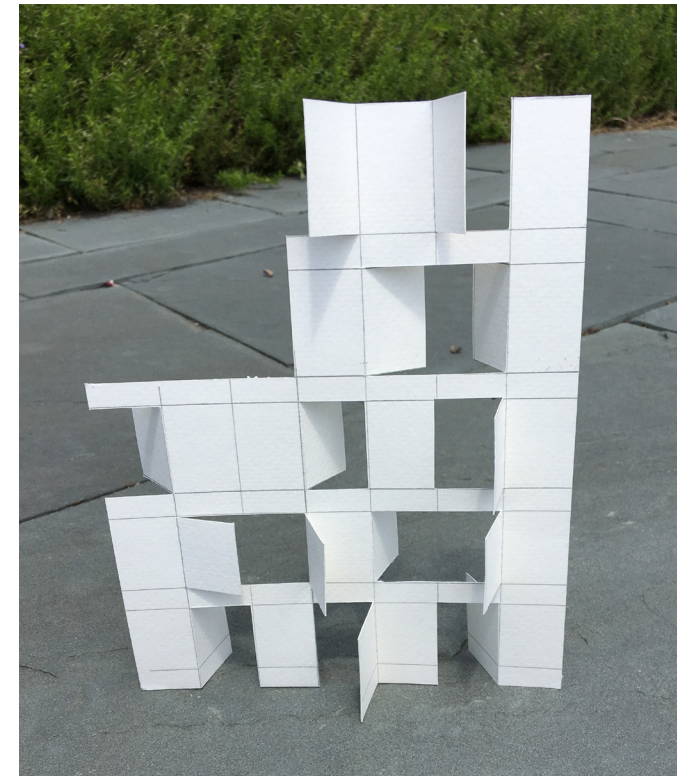
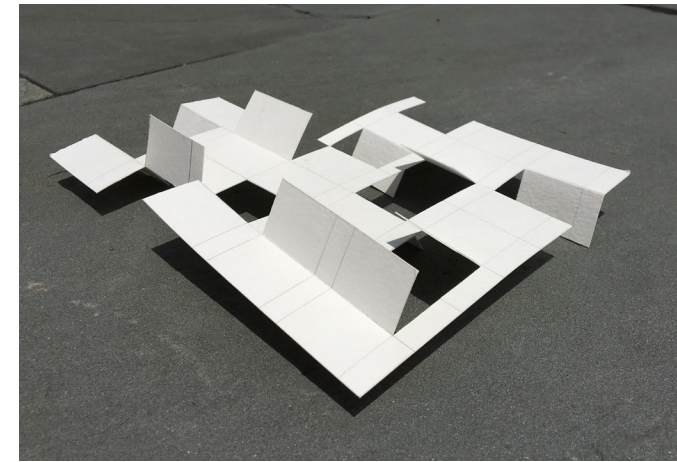
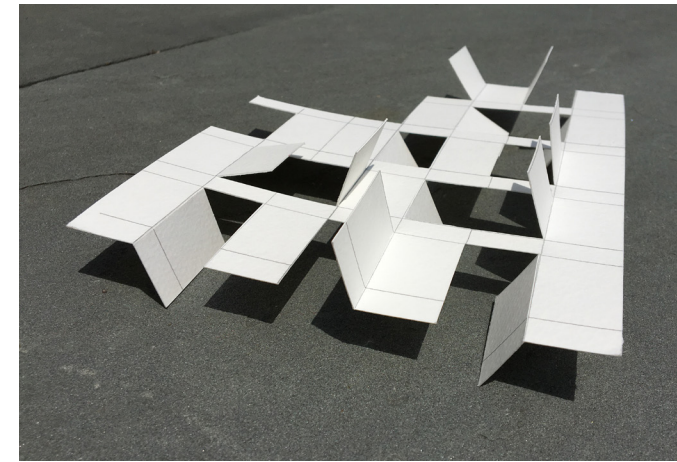
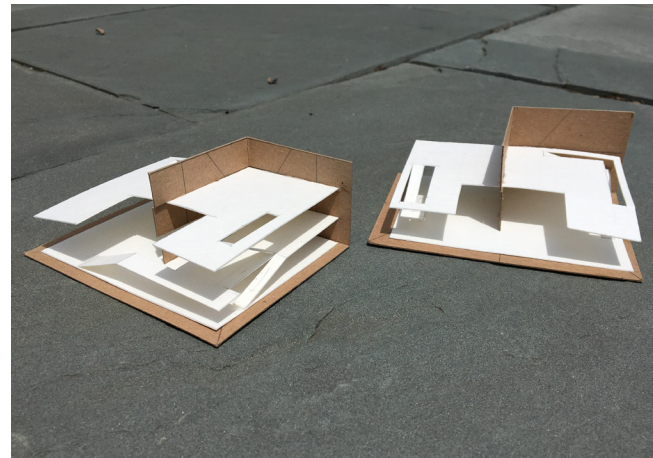
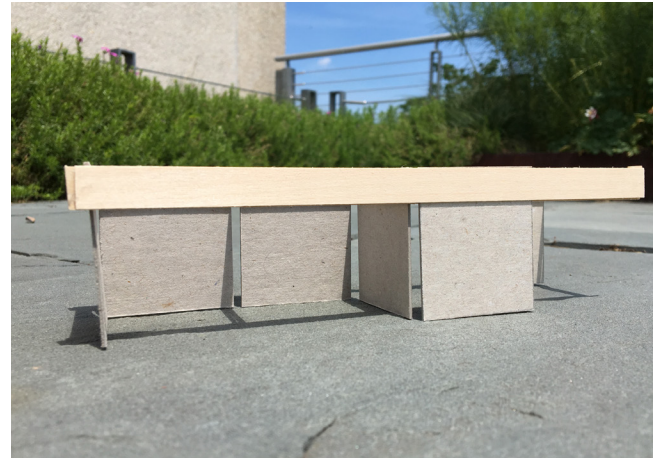
Models were constructed to explore concepts like flexibility, movement, voyeurism and attachment throughout the design process.

this page\_

left: a prototype of the column design  
 top: walls and connection into the grid  
 middle: paths of travel in the performance space, moving between floors  
 bottom: column connection

opposite page \_

a series of paper models creating to understand potential room sizes and layouts





# INTERIOR DESIGN EDUCATORS COUNCIL Annual Conference | 2017 | Chicago

In the fall of 2016, I submitted my thesis abstract to the 2017 Annual IDEC conference in the category of student posters. My abstract was selected for presentation at the conference, and after securing a few travel scholarships, I was able to attend with the support of my IDES department, and external scholarships. The scholarships I received were:

- Graduate Travel Award from the IDEC South Region
- VCU Graduate Student Travel Grant
- VCU School of the Arts Graduate Travel Grant

Thank you to all those who made this experience possible, including my professors and the IDES department!



picture of me with my boards

## IMMERSIVE THEATER + THE PHYSICAL NARRATIVE

This project is an exploration of the relationship between Interior Design and Immersive Theater - a rising form of performance engaging movement, space and installed environments.

How can Interior Design directly enhance a performance and create spaces which challenges a spectator's physical understanding of the narrative?

**Immerse:** to make (yourself) fully involved in some activity or interest!  
**Immersive:** providing information or stimulation for a number of senses, not only sight and sound\*

**"Every room is a stage, every public space is a theater, and every facade is a backdrop. Each has a place for entry and exit, scenery, props, and a design that sets up potential relationships between people. In this sense, architecture and theater are sister arts, creating worlds where people interact in studied spatial relations."**<sup>14</sup>

### WHAT IS IMMERSIVE THEATER?

The term "immersive" is used to describe a strand of experimental theater performances that place the spectator at the heart of the created work. Supported by the definitions above, immersive productions strive for submergence "in an alternative medium where all the senses are engaged and manipulated" - with a deep involvement in the activity within that medium.<sup>15</sup> This is accomplished primarily by purposeful interaction between spectators, actors and a large-scale installed environment.

Audience members are mobile throughout a performance, and are encouraged to explore, touch, and interact with the interior elements as a way to enhance their experience with the narrative. "Immersive theatre... makes use of cleverly structured interiors and ingenious invitations for them to explore, addresses their bodily presence in the environment and its effect on sense making, and teases them with the suggestion of further depths just possibly within reach."<sup>16</sup>

### HOW IS IMMERSIVE THEATER RELEVANT?

The practice of theater as an institution dates back centuries, and has mapped the social context of life and culture along the way. By connecting design and theater, it's fair to state that the built theater also defines social periods. Immersive productions are filling a need in the modern audience, as proven by the overwhelming response and attraction to this form of work. They boast a new demographic of spectators, ones who would not typically consider themselves to be theater-goers. This is due in part to the way in which immersive productions are marketed. While some companies may have small box offices, many rely on word-of-mouth exposure or advertising on social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter. This limits the scope of patrons aware of the event, and eliminates any perceived formality associated with conventional theater.<sup>17</sup>

Audiences also show signs of craving human connection and intimate interaction. In Macho's *Immersive Theater*, she cites several artistic directors who surmise that "audiences today are keen for visceral experiences as more people spend time online. It suggests that this type of work can remind an individual what it is to feel alive."<sup>18</sup> Immersive environments transform into a place where spectators can share in a communal experience with actors and fellow spectators alike, and all involved become critical to the success of a performance. David Jubb, Joint Artistic Director of Battersea Arts Centre, states, "theatrical situations where genuine human connection occurs holds the greatest potential for transformation, which is why it's good theater, because theatre ought to be transformative."<sup>19</sup>

### HOW DOES IMMERSIVE THEATER IMPACT INTERIOR DESIGN?

Immersive Theater not only challenges how audiences experience a performance, but where they experience a performance. Instead of the traditional playhouse, immersive productions take place in re-purposed buildings or large, vacant spaces that are perfect for molding plot-specific interiors. Occasionally, the chosen site will have some underlying connection with the narrative. For example, Third Rail Productions inhabited a century-old institutional facility in Brooklyn for their depiction of Lewis Carroll's Alice-inspired tale, *Then She Fell* - an appropriate nod to the physiological subtext of both the book and Carroll's own life.

While Immersive Theater varies in scale and subject, the overarching premise of these installed environments challenges conventional theater design in many ways. Audiences are freed from the constraint of static seats and are empowered to navigate their own storyline through physical and instinctual gestures. Below are strong examples of design features that influence and impact a spectator's journey.

#### SPACE & SCENOGRAPHY

Felix Barrett, Artistic Director of Punchdrunk, states "I'm a firm believer that every space you go into is saying something, there are echoes in the walls. All we do as a company is draw those out."<sup>20</sup> The building becomes a framework for creating the world within. A crumbling Victorian mansion has an inherited theatricality and presence that can be naturally adapted to the narrative. By celebrating the qualities of the original building, the new and old work together towards a complex, layered other world.



#### SPACE & MOVEMENT

Many immersive interiors are designed to provide a series of spaces of varying sizes, for spectators and actors alike to occupy. This entices constant movement by the spectators, as they move forward to explore rooms or encounter actors. There is a deliberate and disorganizing intention behinds this design plan, "creating the conditions for this space to be perceived as being 'in motion', as a site that constantly changes character and dynamics, even though its primary structure appears to be solid and stratified".<sup>21</sup> The fluidity between spectator, actor and narrative creates an infinite number of ephemeral moments, intrinsic to an immersive production.



#### SPACE & VOYEURISM

"Voyeurism is an intrinsic part of any theatrical experience, since the Greeks, artists have exploited the forbidden excitement of witnessing moments that are technically meant to be private."<sup>22</sup> Immersive Theater expands on this notion by encouraging spectators to gaze through strategically placed reveals, or encroach on a seemingly intimate area as a means of exploration and discovery. Voyeurism becomes an approved part of the adventure, and a key behavior for unlocking pieces of the narrative.



#### SPACE & SENSES

Plot absorption through sight and sound has always been important to the theatrical experience. However, "the prioritization of all the human senses, not just sight and hearing, opens up (and requires) a new taxonomy for holistic appreciation in immersive theaters."<sup>23</sup> The spectator's understanding of the narrative is elicited by instinct, which is triggered by the sensory interaction. It also engages with "a (syn)esthetic sense, an intuitive sense that goes beyond the five senses which appreciate the general aesthetic quality of an event, and the intellectual experience of that."<sup>24</sup>



TRADITIONAL THEATER <sup>25</sup>	IMMERSIVE THEATER <sup>26</sup>
Advertised through mainstream media using strategic marketing efforts.	Announced through online channels like Facebook or simply word-of-mouth.
Tickets are purchased through the venue's box office in advance, or at the door night of.	Tickets are purchased through the venue's box office, or through online channels only.
Occurs in a traditional theater, most likely with a lobby, a chamber, and a proscenium stage.	Makes use of abandoned buildings like warehouses, or structures like dockyards.
You enter the main doors of the theater, and show ticket to a Front of House staff member.	You may have an intriguing and unscripted journey to the performance location - part, if not all, may be outside.
You are directed to the appropriate seat inside the chamber, and wait until the show begins.	You are taken into an unconventional installed environment. Little or no seating is provided.
You wait in the chamber for the show to start, performance has already begun by your arrival.	You are placed within an environment in which the performance has already begun.
The program may provide information about the cast, crew & production.	You are excited and nervous - unsure of exactly where you are and what you are about to experience.
You are here to watch a piece of theater - waiting for the show to begin.	You are separated from your group - potentially paired with strangers, or left alone to begin the journey.
An announcement prompts you to turn off your mobile phone.	You are physically surrounded by the other world, and become intensely aware of the details of the world.
The lights dim, a curtain is raised.	You senses are alert and heightened, and you rely on them as you navigate through space.
You observe another world in front of you on the stage.	You may be aware of your role as a character in the performance.
Performs enact the narrative on the stage - as a spectator, you watch and listen to the story unfold.	You are an active part of the unfolding narrative and have the ability to interact with the actors and/or spectators.
You are engaged in the narrative centrally, but have little or no impact or influence on the actors' deliverance or actions.	You explore a series of rooms and corridors, encounter actors and place together pieces of the narrative.
The performance ends, there is a curtain call and actors take a bow.	They may or may not be a concluding scene.
The audience applauds, and leaves the chamber.	The party continues at the bar, as you compare experiences with your friends. <sup>27</sup>
You leave the theater having seen a piece of theater.	You leave the building still reeling from the experience, as you try to process what you've seen and understood.
You determine whether it was good and bad, and think about it maybe for a couple hours until it's out of your mind.	Your senses are still heightened and feel the physical demands just endured.
	There is a level of uncertainty to the experience that creates a desire to revisit.

final conference presentation posters

## THEATRICAL PRECEDENTS



**SLEEP NO MORE**  
Punchdrunk  
McKittrick Hotel, NYC - Ongoing

Sleep No More, loosely based on Shakespeare's Macbeth, is perhaps the most commercially successful immersive theater production, imagined and designed by renowned theatrical production company Punchdrunk.

The physical location weaves patrons through a five-story Chelsea Warehouse designed under the premise of the 1930's-themed McKittrick Hotel. Patrons enter on the second floor, which serves as the lobby, cocktail bar and waiting room for admittance. Once the journey begins, the floor plan is intentionally meant to confuse and disorientate, as patrons use their instincts as a guide for exploration.



**THEN SHE FELL**  
Third Rail Productions  
Kingsland Ward, Brooklyn - Ongoing

*Then She Fell* is a fully immersive production based off of the writing of Lewis Carroll's Alice tale *Dreamlike* and hallucinatory, the set is designed within a three story, century-old institutional facility.

The scale of this performance is much smaller compared to Sleep No More, with only 15 audience members per performance. In order to provoke movement through the smaller space, actors move spectators to and from rooms in a choreographed sequence of events. Each room has multiple exits and entrances, so paths seldom cross, unless intended to.

Relevance to Thesis Program:

- Spectators are placed at the center of the work, and their presence becomes part of the architecture of the narrative.
- Understanding relies on interaction, exploration, and engaged senses.
- Differing scales of rooms provide a diverse environment - communal and one-on-one.
- Circulation within each floor and between each floor encourages constant movement.
- Surface materials and props activate senses.
- Architectural or built structures are transformed into unexpected stages.
- Lighting and sound are strategically used to set the tone and enhance the scenography.

## DESIGN PRECEDENT

### THEATER OF PUBLIC SPACE: Architectural Experimentation in the Théâtre de l'Espace<sup>28</sup>

Edouard Autant - Paris - 1937

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a strong, but short-lived link between modern architecture and modern theater. As a response to this movement, Architect Edouard Autant, alongside actress Louise Lara, set out to design theaters that represented how a building acted, rather than how a building looked. The goal was to create spaces that stimulated interaction between spectator and actor, and to fully immerse the spectator within the action.

The Théâtre de l'Espace is one of five theaters designed by Autant which explored architecture's influence and relationship to urban life. The spatial theories of the design would then be poetically tested by actors and dancers.

Relevance to Thesis Program:

- The design incorporated five stages, three on the upper level and two on the lower level.
- Five stages allow for five scenes to be independently enacted from each other, dividing spectator's attention.
- Creates a system where spectators may observe one thing and hear another.
- Layered stages also provide a variation in spectator/actor engagement.
- On high stages, actors represent the rhythm and choreography of daily life.
- On lower stages, actors improvise dialogue and engage with spectators directly.
- Audience is placed at the heart of the performance, positioned inward towards each other.
- The reaction of other spectators becomes part of the overall experience.
- The building becomes part of the scenography as the partially exposed windows allow for views out towards the countryside, and retractable skylights provide views of the above.
- Scenery panels layer over the windows, representing a typical view of a city square.



Théâtre de l'Espace floor plan drawn by Autant

Théâtre de l'Espace elevation drawn by Autant

Relevance to Thesis Program:

- management atmosphere band
- retractable skylights for movable ceiling
- scenery
- closed curtain television screen showing performance program
- seating for audience
- scenography panels
- scenography panels
- entrance
- entrance hall
- advertising poster

## PRELIMINARY CONCEPT WORK



Relevance to Thesis Program:

- building and design provide paths for movement with the addition of program value, the user experience creates unique



preliminary schematic design - floor one

preliminary schematic design - floor two

Relevance to Thesis Program:

- Multiple doorways open performance space provide multiple environmental options
- Rotating walls open up performance space to lobby or the director's conditions.

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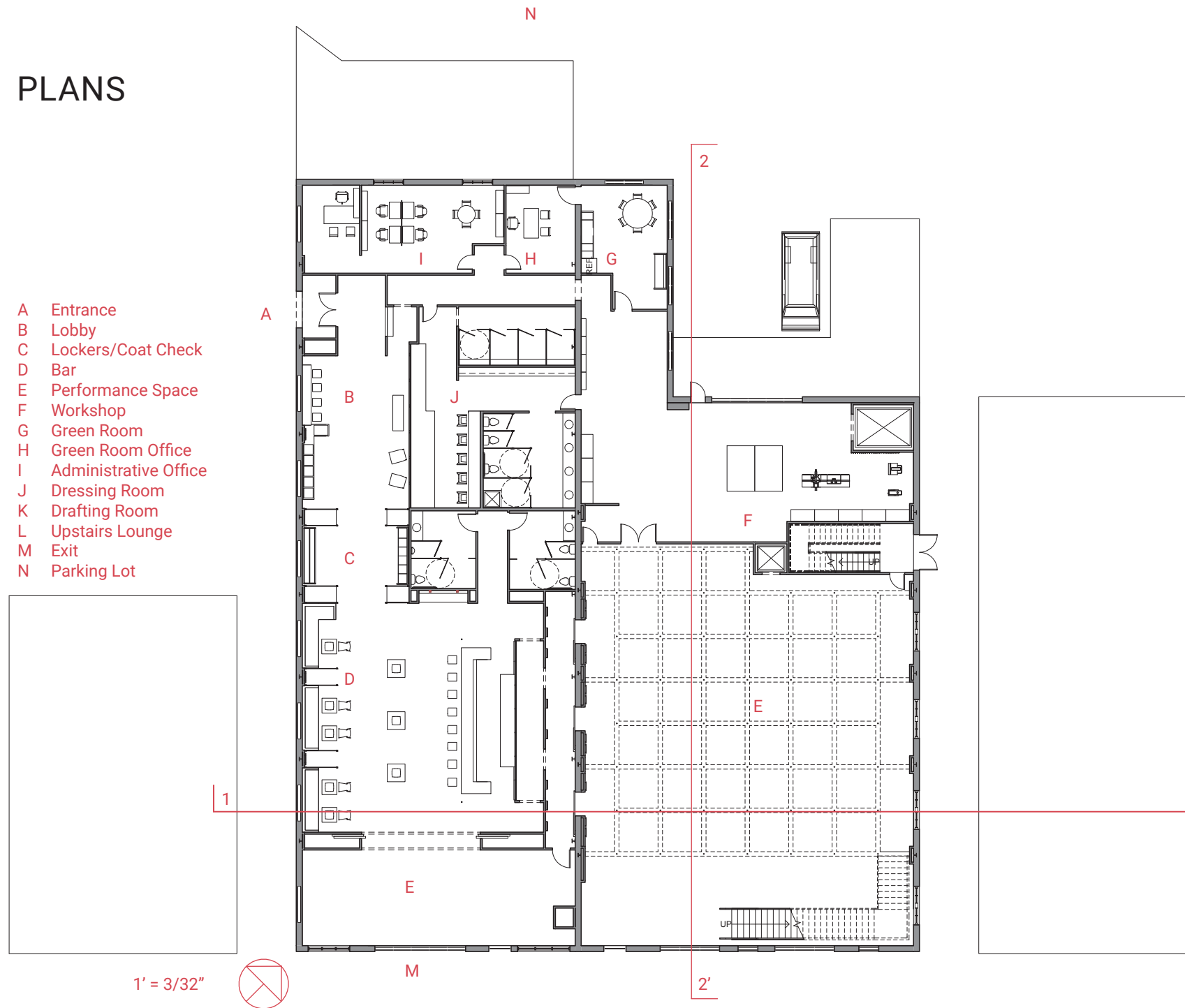
picture of me with my boards

FINAL DESIGN

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# PLANS

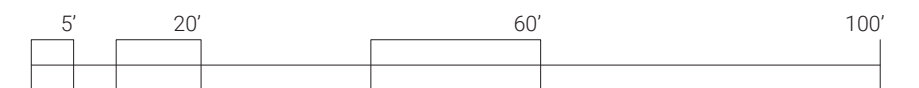
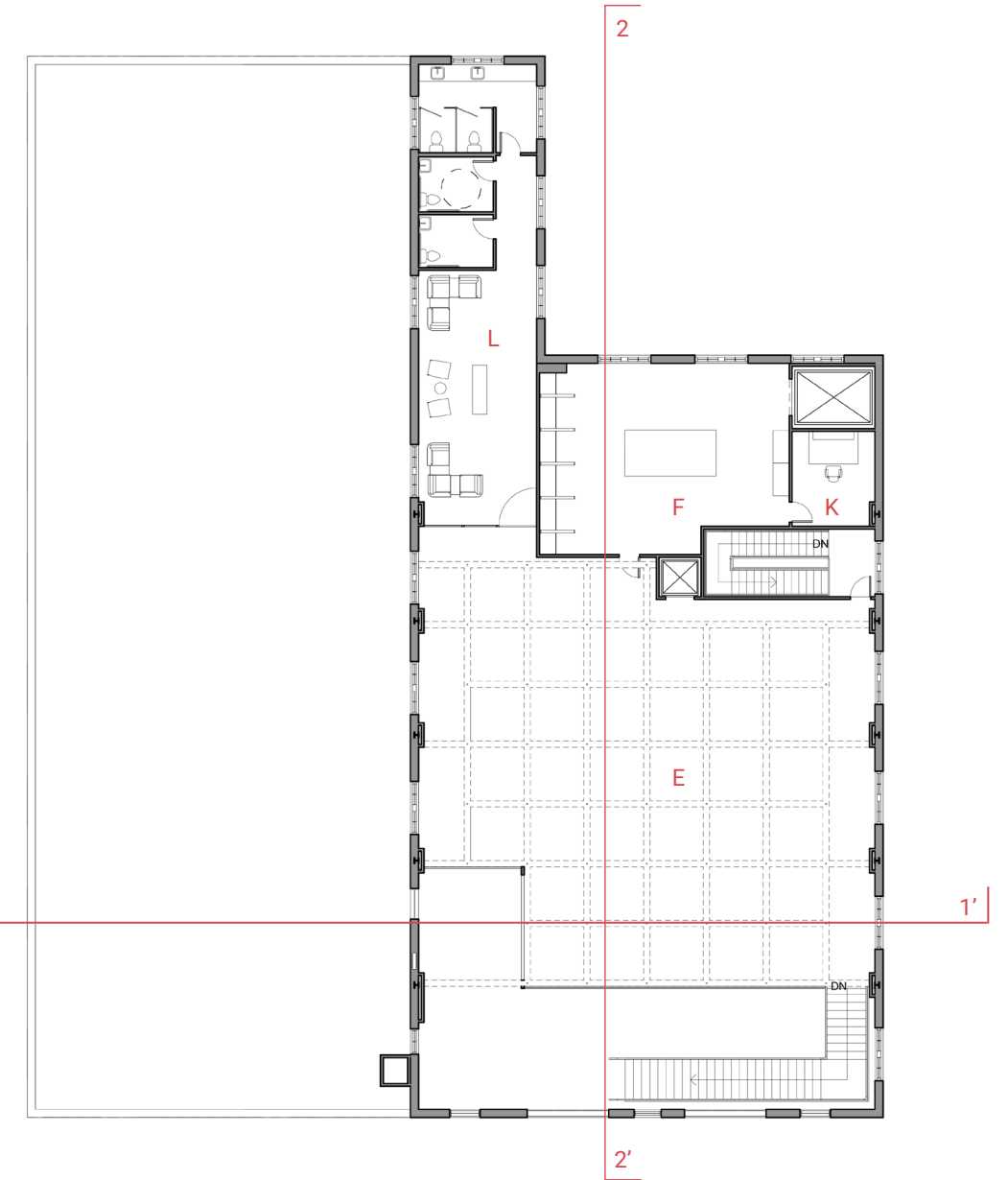
- A Entrance
- B Lobby
- C Lockers/Coat Check
- D Bar
- E Performance Space
- F Workshop
- G Green Room
- H Green Room Office
- I Administrative Office
- J Dressing Room
- K Drafting Room
- L Upstairs Lounge
- M Exit
- N Parking Lot



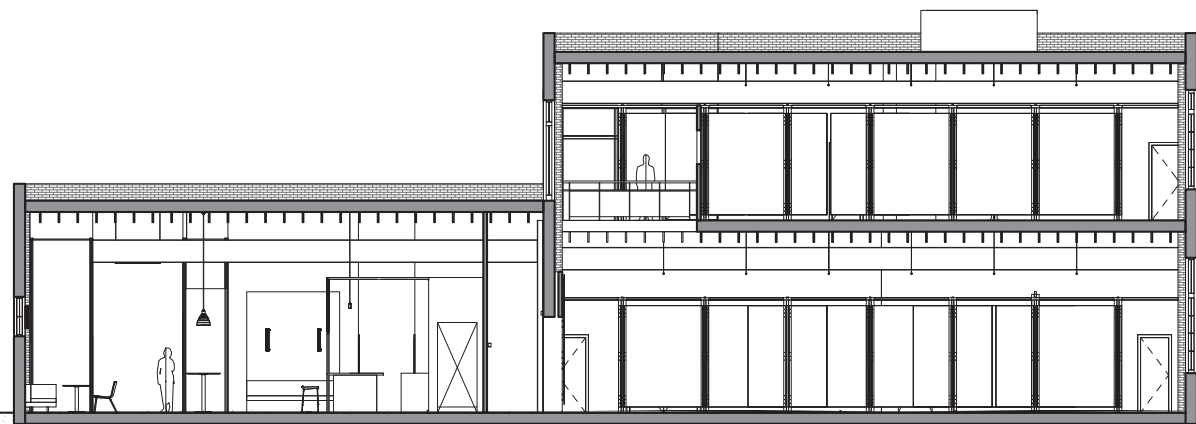
N 3RD STREET

PLAN | floor one

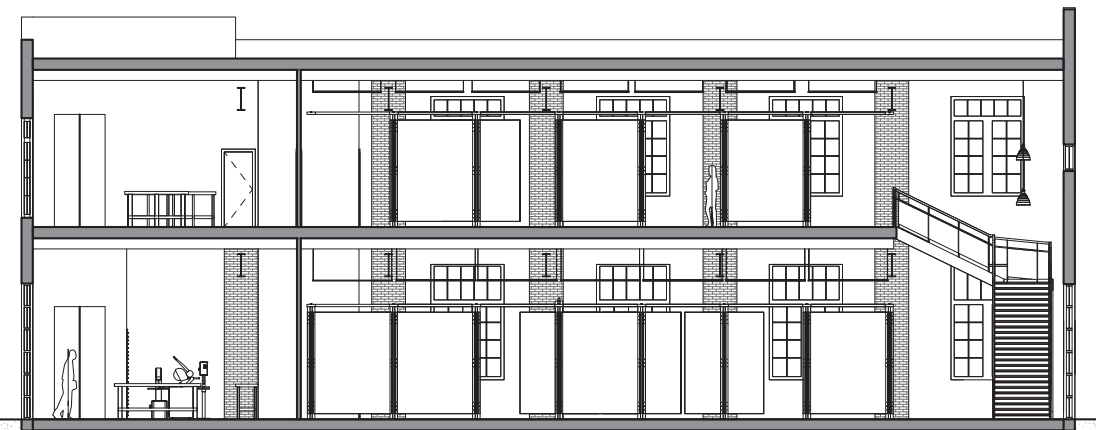
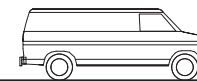
PLAN | floor two



# SECTIONS

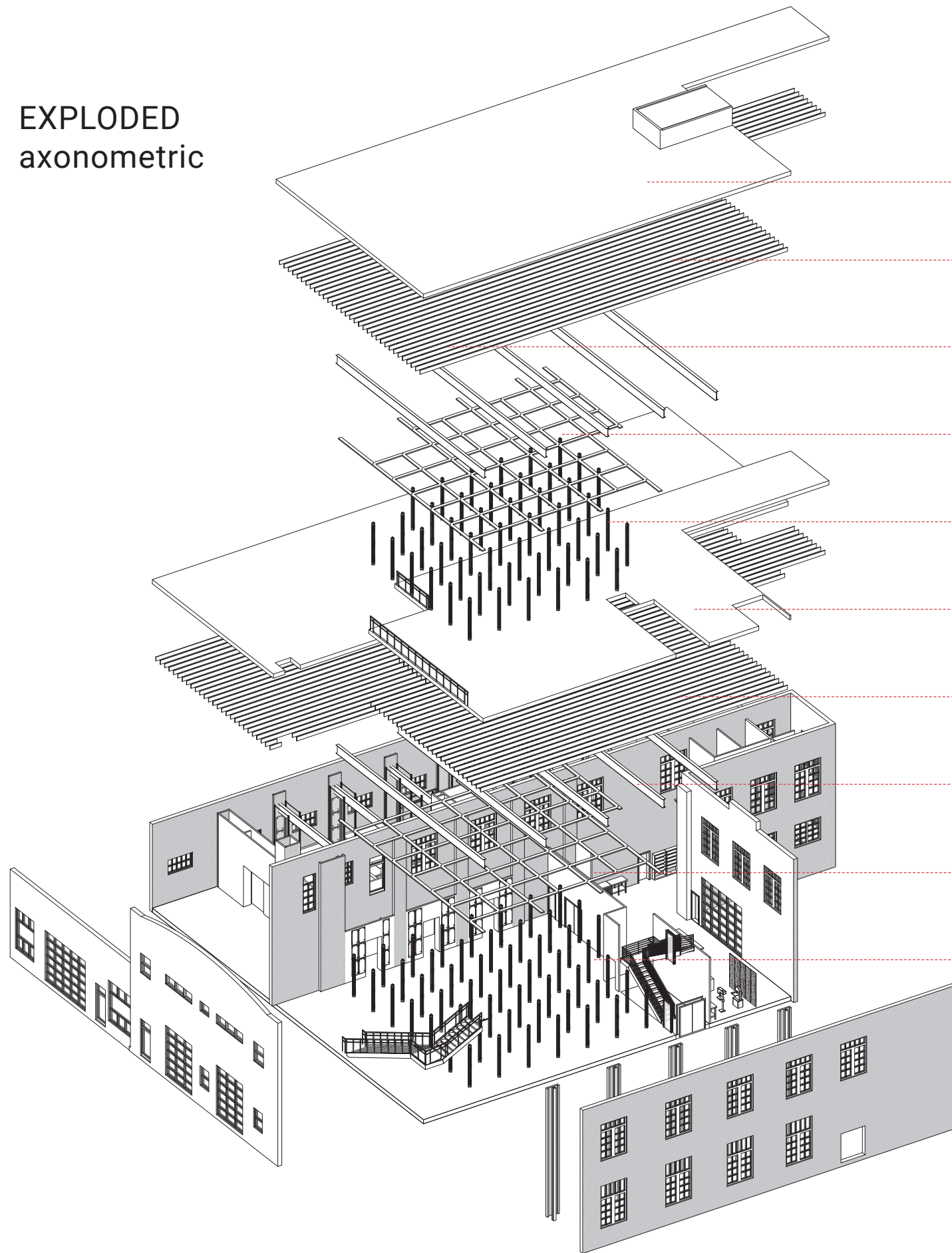


SECTION 1 | cross

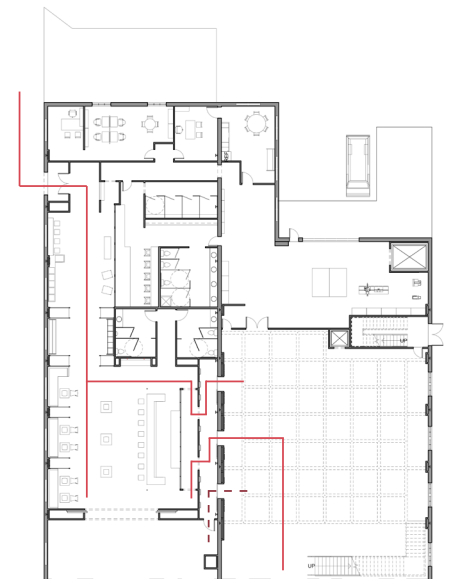
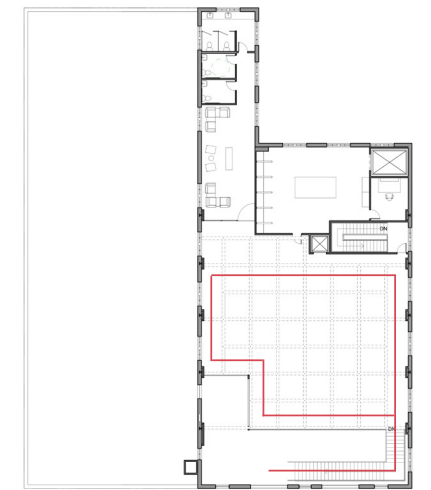


SECTION 2 | longitudinal

EXPLODED  
axonometric



- roof
- dimensional lumber beams - second floor
- structural eye beams - second floor
- column grid system- second floor
- column system - second floor
- floor - second floor
- dimensional lumber beams - first floor
- structural eye beams - first floor
- column grid system - first floor
- column system - first floor



path of travel diagram

# ENTRANCE / LOBBY



seem 4 led  
pop-down lens  
focal point



branch sconce  
rich brilliant w



hifi lounge  
leland



hifi bench  
leland



perspective of hallway leading spectators through the space



spectators peer over the shoulder of an actor as he writes in Punchdrunk's production of *Sleep No More*

## SPACE & VOYEURISM

"Voyeurism is an intrinsic part of any theatrical experience; since the Greeks, artists have exploited the forbidden excitement of witnessing moments that are technically meant to be private."<sup>15</sup> Immersive Theater expands on this notion by encouraging spectators to gaze through strategically placed reveals, or encroach on a seemingly intimate area as a means of exploration and discovery. Voyeurism becomes an approved part of the adventure, and a key behavior for unlocking pieces of the narrative.

In this project, voyeurism is explored by use of translucent glass panels throughout the interior. The translucency provides glimpses into typically private moments and spaces, and provokes a sense of anticipation in the spectator as they observe the coming activity. These windows into beyond also break down the traditional separation between back and front of houses.



lobby view with glimpses into the back-of-house



view of bar and entrance into performance area

### BAR / PRE-SHOW



flavor paper  
where's warhol?  
licorice / mylar



mid-century dining chair  
velvet in lagoon

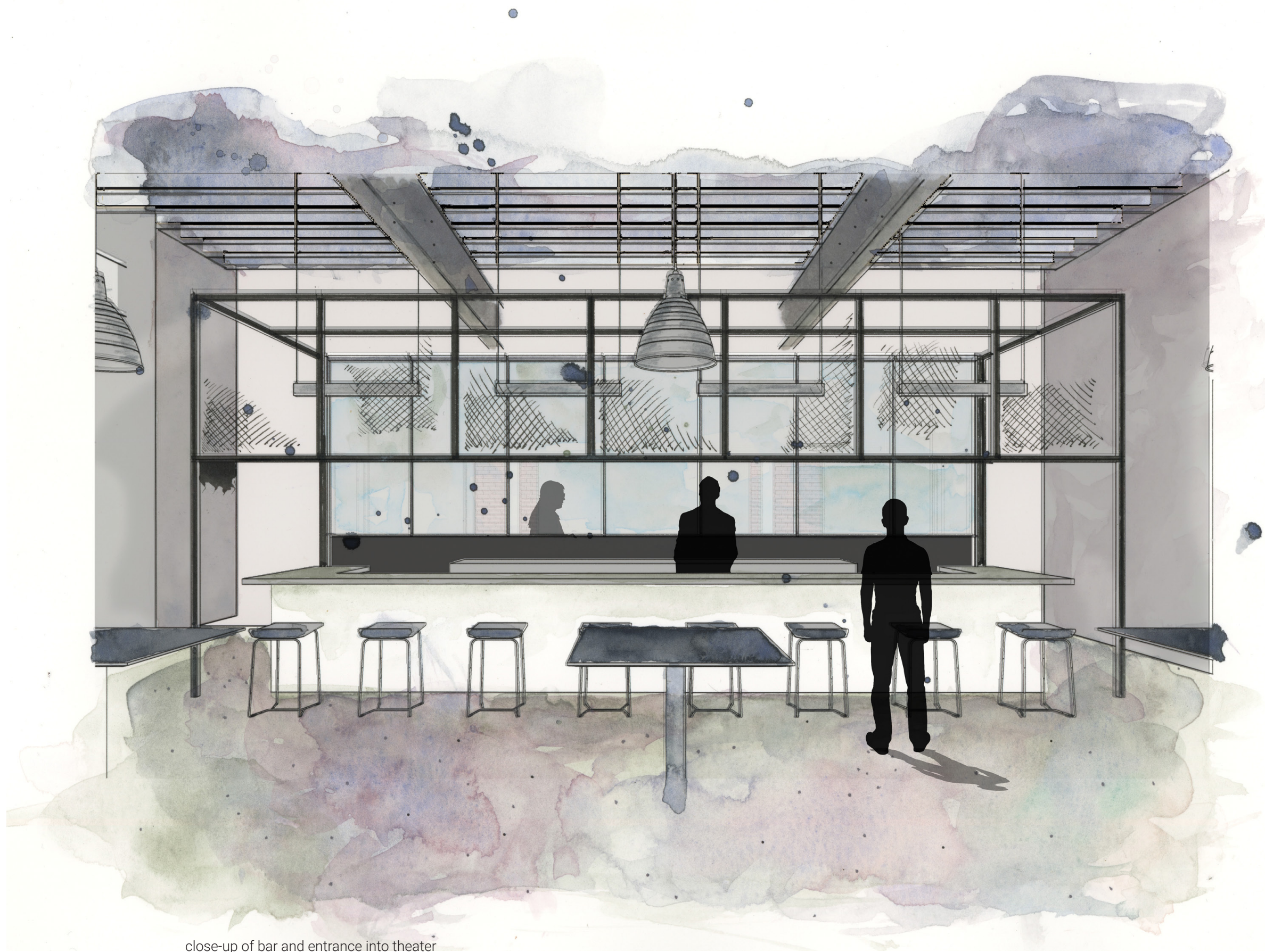


davis veer table &  
bistro table



modern chesterfield sofa  
oxblood





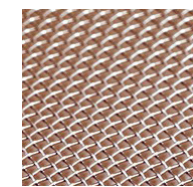
close-up of bar and entrance into theater



cahoots barstool  
black leather seat  
keilhauer



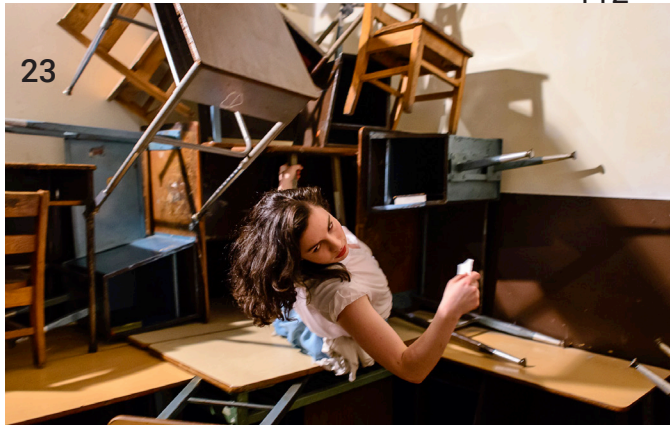
groove f  
focal point



copper & aluminum  
metal mesh  
sefar



terrazzo flooring



the actress's position amongst a pile of furniture depicts a disorienting sense of movement in Third Rail Project's production of *Then She Fell*

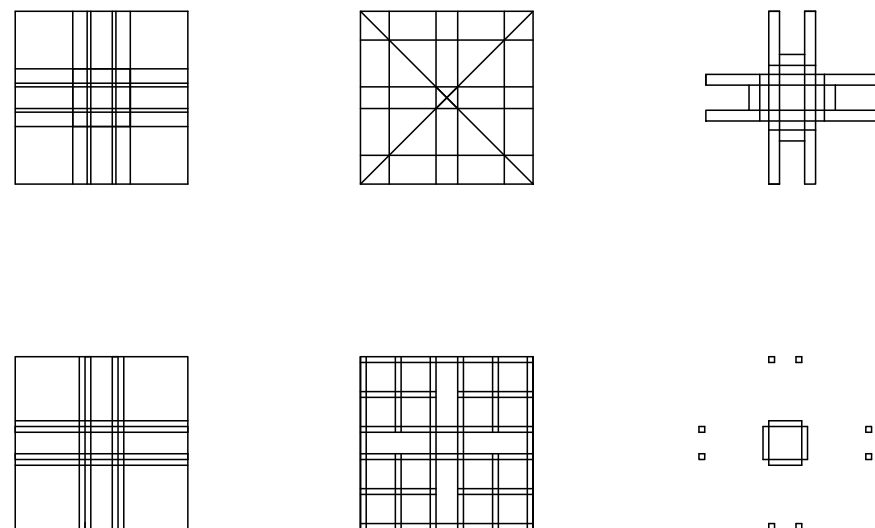
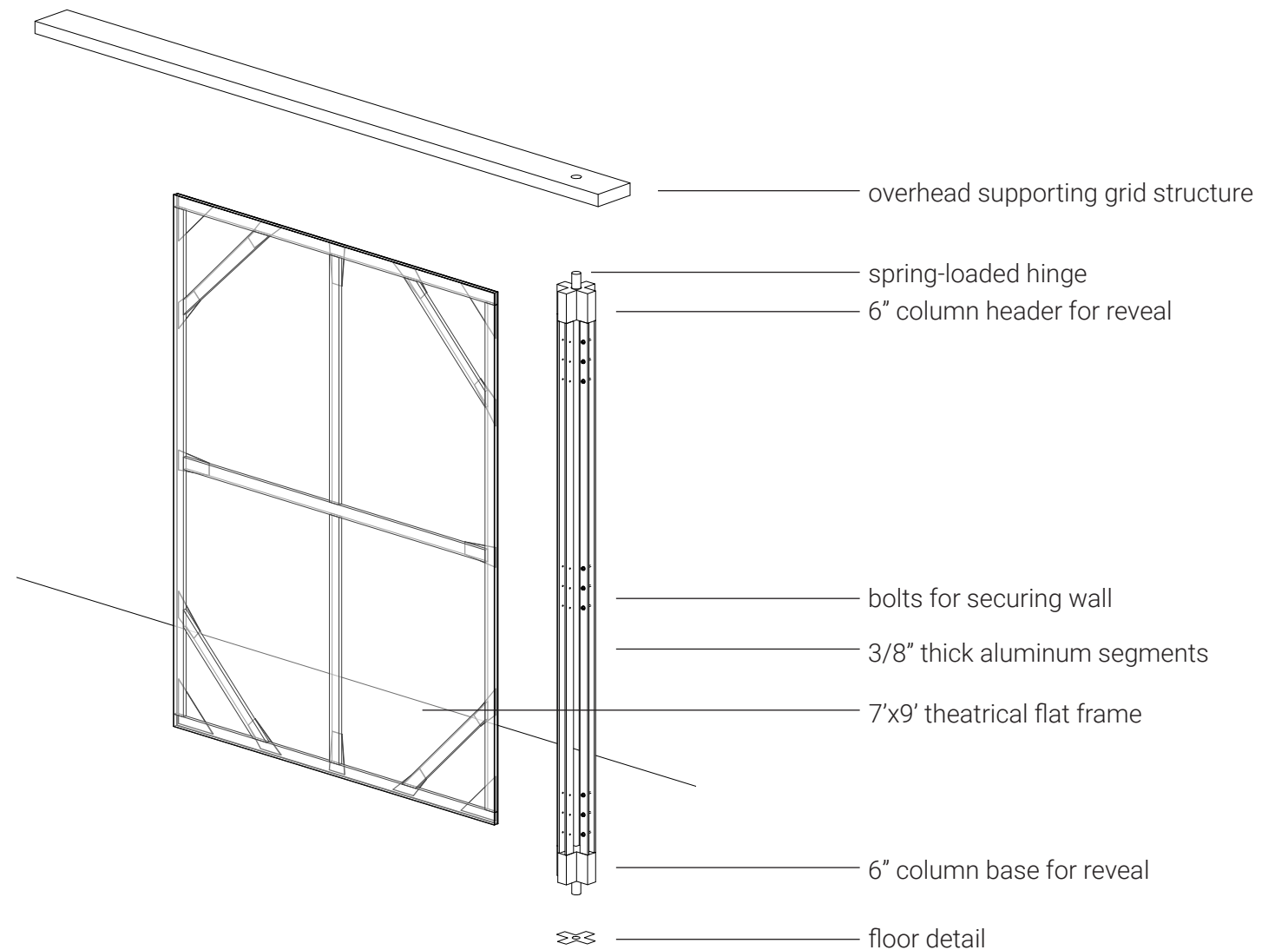
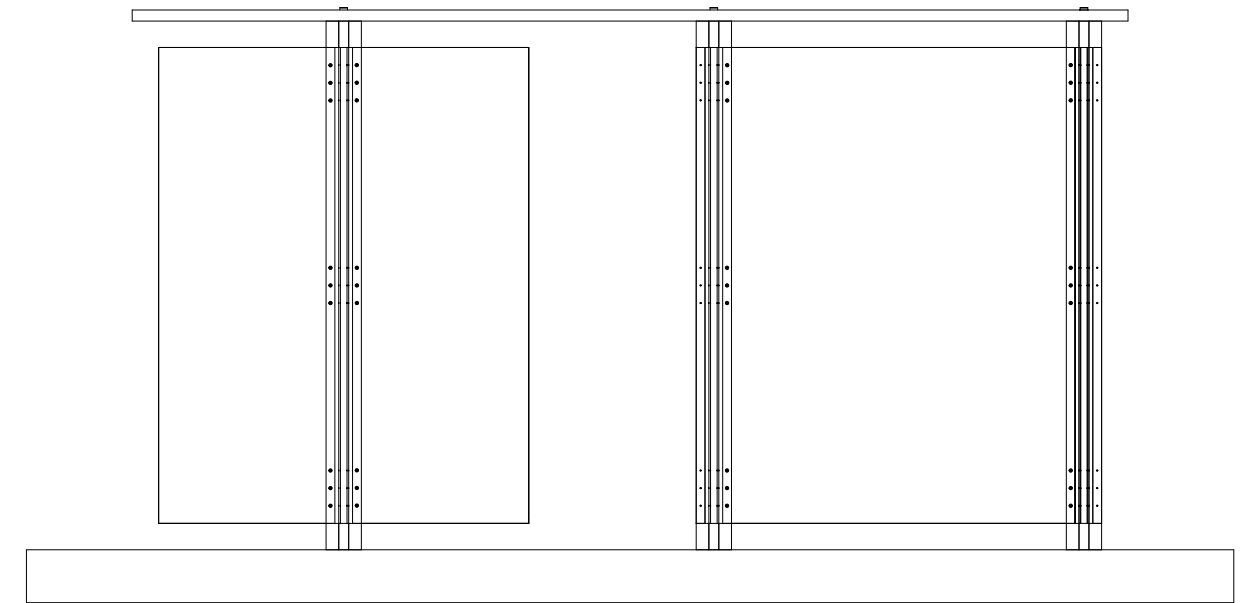
## KIT OF PARTS

### SPACE & MOVEMENT

Many immersive interiors are designed to provide a series of spaces of varying sizes, for spectators and actors alike to occupy. This entices constant movement by the spectators, as they move forward to explore rooms or encounter actors. There is a deliberate and disorganizing intention behinds this design plan, "creating the conditions for this space to be perceived as being 'in motion', as a site that constantly changes character and dynamics, even though its primary structure appears to be solid and striated."<sup>16</sup> The fluidity between spectator, actor and narrative creates an infinite number of ephemeral moments, intrinsic to an immersive production.

### A KIT OF PARTS

A system of flexible columns and walls was designed to provide options for the production companies using the theater. The columns are flexible and lightweight, made from thin aluminum. In line with the theme of voyeurism, the columns have reveals at the bottom, the top and along the length, so patrons can see into adjoining spaces. Standard theatrical flat frames have been specified to lock into the column. These can be modified or built into in support of the narrative's set design.

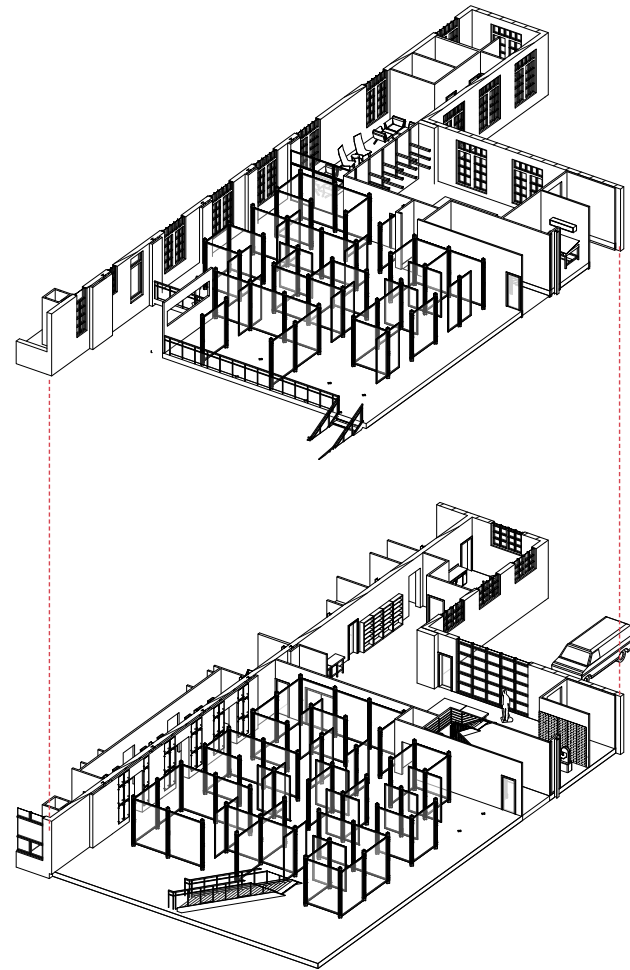


concept diagrams of potential column footprint

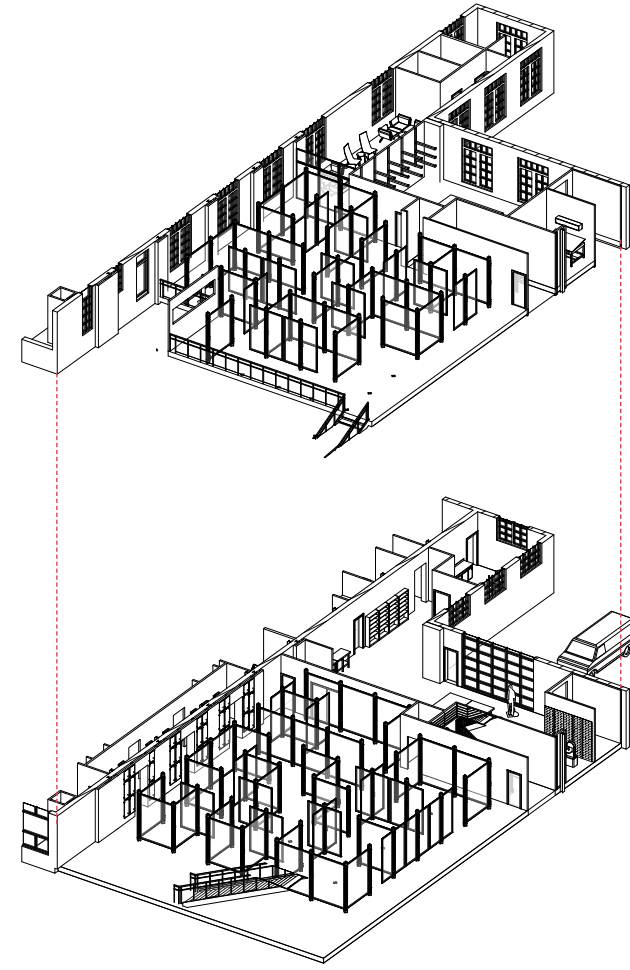
## ARRANGE

### column/wall connection examples

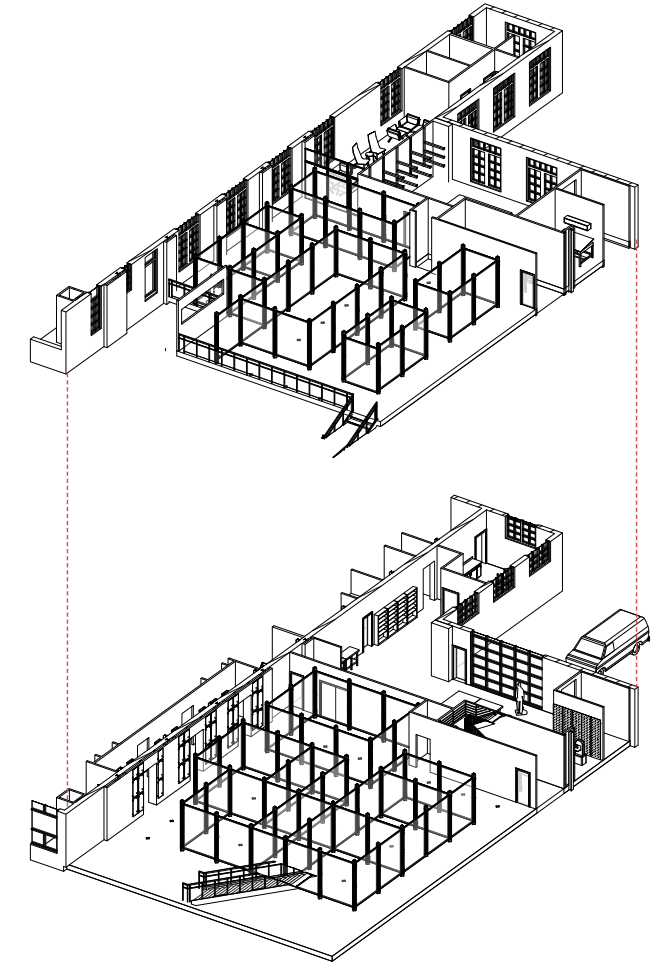
As part of the kit of parts, a production company has the flexibility to use walls and columns to create whatever interior layout is best depending on the narrative's needs. Below are three examples of potential arrangements to show the limitless options available. Rooms are made in increments of 7 feet, so they vary in both size and shape.



performance space layout  
option 1



performance space layout  
option 2



performance space layout  
option 3

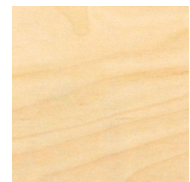
# PERFORMANCE SPACE



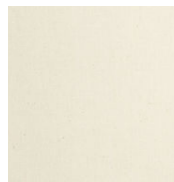
trac low-voltage system junco lighting



trac-master fix junco lighting



wall covering option 1: plywood sheets



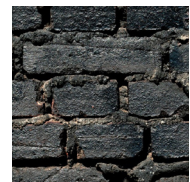
wall covering option 2: muslin



aluminum columns



masonite floor



black brick





24  
old railway tracks run through the underground tunnels in Punchdrunk's production of *Tunnel 228*

## SPACE & SCENOGRAPHY

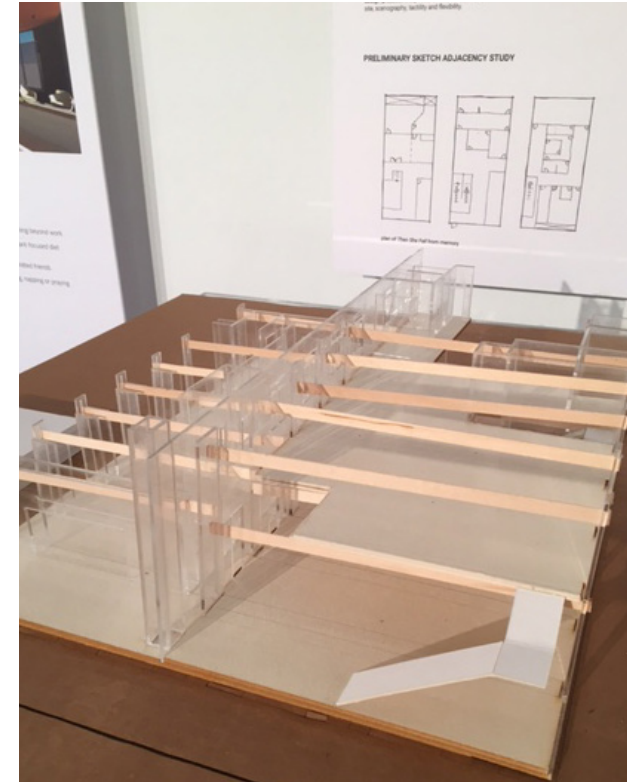
Felix Barrett, Artistic Director of Punchdrunk, states "I'm a firm believer that every space you go into is saying something; there are echoes in the walls. All we do as a company is draw those out."<sup>17</sup> The building becomes a framework for creating the world within. A crumbling Victorian mansion has an inherited theatricality and presence that can be naturally adapted to the narrative. By celebrating the qualities of the original building, the new and old work together towards a complex, layered other world.

This project took inspiration from the building's geometries and structure. The grid designed to support the column and wall system is based off of the proportions of the existing column structure, creating a layered ceiling. The idea of these grids supporting production after production in different configurations allows for each performance to leave its mark.



view of the double-story performance space

# POSTER + MODEL



# MFA THESIS EXHIBITION 04.28.17 | Anderson Gallery



design should

be seen with the eyes and felt with the heart  
 acknowledge the past but invent the future  
 be sensitive to all but firm in its intension  
 take guidance from nature and celebrate its place  
 utilize the senses through materials, textures and weights  
 appreciate form and all of its variety  
 maintain focus while still being playful  
 seek new challenges on all accounts  
 represent a concept in the final form  
 strive for purpose rather than simple aesthetics  
 find solutions in unexpected places  
 encourage exploration and not fear failure  
 be inclusive

## REFLECTIONS

Never have I gone through an experience so challenging as the last two years I've spent pursuing this master's degree. I have been encouraged and disheartened, supported and pushed, engaged and overwhelmed. Despite the peaks of emotion, I am where I belong. I have continued to be inspired by the knowledge, energy and kindness shown to us by our professors, and in them I recognized the strength of designing in a matter true to yourself.

I came into this program with a passion for performing arts venues, and I leave this program having explored a subject that is relevant and exciting to me. I appreciate the support shown while pursuing the subject of immersive theater, despite the unknown, and I think the project came out rich and informative.

The installation was a true test of patience, as tensions rose with approaching deadlines. However, my cohort is a strong group and we came together to create a beautiful show with the help of our professors. The exhibition was an out of body experience, and over before we even had a chance to acknowledge the accomplishment. The anticipation of the defense was terrifying, but the fear subsided shortly into the conversation.

My biggest challenge was not only communicating what my design was, but communicating what immersive theater is. Few people had ever heard of immersive theater and almost no one had experienced a performance. Immersive theater is about feeling the narrative through your body's exploration of space and content, rather than simply absorbing the narrative cerebrally, which is both difficult to describe and difficult to understand. I took a chance with my delivery, and I think it was successful enough to receive insightful feedback from the professors.

While I focused on themes of scenography, voyeurism and movement, there are many more considerations to explore, evident in the questions asked during the defense. I am proud of the project I put forth in the amount of time I had, and am excited knowing there is so much more depth in the details.





## THANK YOU...

to my family and friends, who've stood by and supported me the last two years. this dream wouldn't have been possible without you.

to my amazing classmates for pushing me forward. we succeeded together and i couldn't have hoped for a better group.

lucy dabney  
an lui  
lexy holcombe  
heather overby  
mj rhodes  
mingming zhao

to the amazing IDES faculty and staff. you have inspired me to dig deeper and think harder.

christiana lafazani  
roberto ventura  
sara reed  
camden whitehead  
emily smith  
jen fell  
jillian chapin  
rob smith  
hillary fayle  
eleanor barton

to all those who helped along the way

robert schoneman  
tabatha dunlap  
carla-mae crookendale  
quatro hubbard

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