

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: IDENTITY CRISIS: REINTERPRETING  
OUR BOUNDARIES & COMMUNITIES.

**Nicholas Tomaszewski, M.Arch, 2013**

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Preservation.

Communities are defined as a unified body of individuals sharing common interests, values, and/or beliefs. Often we speak of community as a united population, which bonds people together. However, Structuralist studies of Claude Levi-Strauss and Edmund Leach, in conjunction with the arguments of Richard Sennett, reveal communities are founded upon ideals of homogeneity and identity, through the generation of boundaries. The cultural construct of boundaries suppresses the complexity of the world around us, to rationalize and organize a more understandable one.

Through the manipulation of architecture, boundaries may be reinforced to support a single interpretation or division of the urban context. However, this exploration seeks a different perception of contextualism, taking into account the complex variety of continuities and discontinuities apparent within our surrounding cities.

Ultimately, this research and exploration attempts to generate an identity crisis, through the amplification of ambiguous space, which exists in the reality of urban form.

IDENTITY CRISIS:  
REINTERPRETING OUR BOUNDARIES & COMMUNITIES.

By

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## **Dedication**

To my friends, family, and loving girlfriend, Clare, who I owe for all their faithful love and support over the years.

## **Acknowledgements**

A huge thanks to the University of Maryland, David Cronrath, Michael Ambrose, Madlen Simon, and the entire architecture community for their constant discussion, guidance, and support in the pursuit of knowledge.

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## Introduction

Communities are defined as a unified body of individuals sharing common interests, values, and/or beliefs. Often we speak of community as united population, which bonds people together. Richard Sennett goes as far to assert communities are founded on ideals of homogeneity and identity, stating "the bond of community is one of sensing common identity, a pleasure in recognizing *us* and *who we are*."<sup>1</sup> Many planners and designers claim their projects reinforce or support the community they serve. However, homogeneity within communities is a cultural construct, developed through the careful structuring of identity, the ordering of similarities, and the suppression of differences. Ultimately, the homogeneity celebrated by communities is a fantasy, ignoring the complexity of society and sheltering people from difference.

We learn and develop by experiencing new things. People gather new perspectives, interactions, and experiences, which allow a person to broaden their understanding and enrich their own point of view.

Richard Sennett argues that communities, when contained within themselves, do not allow people to grow and develop because

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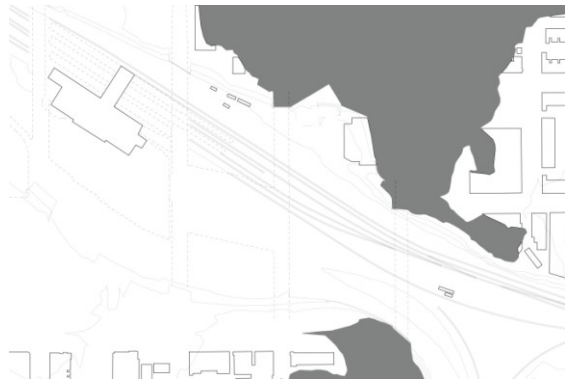
<sup>1</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity & City Life*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 31.



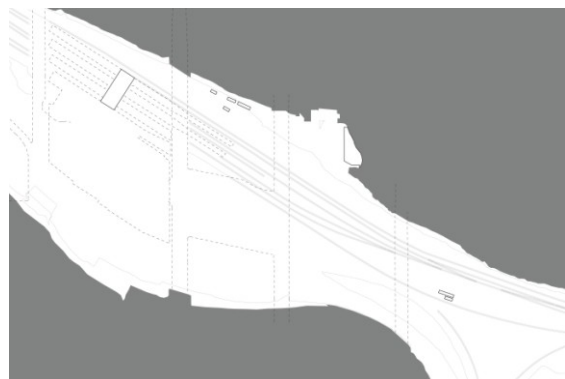
**Figure 0.1** +55' Baltimore Site Plan Diagram (Source: Author)



**Figure 0.2** +35' Baltimore Site Plan Diagram (Source: Author)



**Figure 0.3** +20' Baltimore Site Plan Diagram (Source: Author)



**Figure 0.4** +10' Baltimore Site Plan Diagram (Source: Author)

homogeneity limits individuals' interactions with those who are different and inhibits new experiences. Communities fostering a homogenous environment, offer an opportunity for people to withdraw from the complexity of society and fail to develop new perceptions.

These divisions are established by a means of reinforcing natural boundaries of separation and difference. Structuralist theory, lead by Claude Levi-Strauss and Edmund Leach, provides the basis for this fundamental framework. Cultural interpretations break apart the complexity of varying stimuli and defines an order to the world that is easier for people to understand. The boundaries which result can be utilized to reinforce ideals of homogeneity, identity, and the basis of communities.

Reinforcing natural boundaries through urban composition and architecture emphasizes apparent continuities and discontinuities, supporting specific interpretations of the surrounding context. However, this thesis argues the same techniques can be manipulated to develop an ambiguous architecture, which may support multiple interpretations and the complexity of the surrounding context.

# Chapter 1: The Theory

## *Introduction*

### *Withdrawal and Failure to Grow*

Once belonging to a community, Richard Sennett asserts it offers the individual an opportunity to withdraw from the rest of society.<sup>2</sup> The homogeneity of which communities are structured is embellished, allowing individuals to shelter themselves amongst people of similar identity. Withdrawn and unexposed to opposition, difference, and newness, the individual fails to continue learning and developing.

Richard Sennett states withdrawal from complex experiences is the result of a fear of newness, which may disturb an individual's understanding of identity. Sennett supports his interpretation of fear through a comparison of adolescent tendencies versus the maturity of adulthood. Before reaching adult maturity, we tend to fear or avoid complex or different situations, due to the threat of disturbing an individual's understanding of identity.<sup>3</sup> Identity is conferred through communities, because some belong and others do not belong. Communities are derived upon homogeneity; *sameness* within and *otherness* outside.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 8-59.

<sup>3</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 9-36.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 57-61.

Catering to the fear of the *otherness* is the desire to shut-out opposition; to eliminate contact with the complexity of reality within, beyond, and between the boundaries of community. These contacts or interaction with *otherness* are the experiences that instigate our growth and understanding of the world around us. Without the degree of difference in the experiences and interactions throughout our lives, we fail to gain new perspectives and expand our comprehension of reality.

Richard Sennett continues to declare affluence sponsors the ability to socially withdraw from engagement with complexity through the creation of communities segregated from the rest of the city. Affluence allows for communities to become self-contained, homogenous institutions. However, as Sennett continues to explain, "But the lie they have formed as their common image is a usable falsehood -- a myth -- for the group. Its use is that it makes a coherent image of community as a whole."<sup>5</sup> The reality of communities is that their underlying structure of homogeneity is a mythical cultural construct.

### ***Mythical Homogeneity***

Community is a cultural construct. Community is an institution which defines itself through separation and supports an ideal of internal

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<sup>5</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 36.

homogeneity. However, homogeneity is quite mythical and is ultimately an illusion predicated by the ordering / grouping systems of our cultural application.<sup>6</sup> As Structuralists assert, such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Edmund Leach, in order to understand the complex world among us, the human brain begins to interpret stimuli for degrees of similarities and differences.<sup>7</sup> The interpretation is prejudiced on cultural understanding and simplifies stimuli into groups, which because of their complexity, could be interpreted in a multitude of different arrangements. This same process is apparent in defining communities. These groups of similar attributes are the basis for the structure of community, which also manifest around the idea of a collective group sharing similar values, beliefs, or traits. However, as Mary Douglas points out, homogeneity is a utopian construct which ignores complexity and Richard Sennett argues is the illusionary perception of community.

### ***Ordering and Grouping***

Essentially, the world as we understand it, has been broken-up, divided, separated, and organized into manageable pieces by culture in order to discount ambiguity and complexity. The world is incredibly complex. From a Structuralism standpoint, each phenomena we perceive consists of stimuli, variables, and characteristics which the

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 57-61.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: Oysters, Smoked Salmon, and Stilton Cheese*. (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 15.

human brain orders and interprets to form a logical understanding through simplification.<sup>8</sup> Edmund Leach describes "the way the human brain is designed to order and interpret the stimuli which are fed into it" and "we cut-up the continua of space and time."<sup>9</sup> The segments which remain allow degrees of similarities and differences to emerge when comparing one phenomena to another. As the process continues, things are placed in different groups based on a logical interpretation of the stimuli which make things similar or different. We arrange subjects through interpretation of their degrees of similarities and differences, eventually devising classifications, groups, and clusters of entities, which seem to "belong". Due to the complexity of the world, many varying interpretations are possible, but culture dictates which interpretation of order and arrangement takes precedent.

Edmund Leach continues to explain the basis of Structuralism arguments through the simple example of the color spectrum.<sup>10</sup> Fundamentally, the color spectrum consists of a continuum, where the changes between colors undergo variations in a gradient. However, the human brain naturally partitions the color spectrum into specific

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<sup>8</sup> Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, 15.

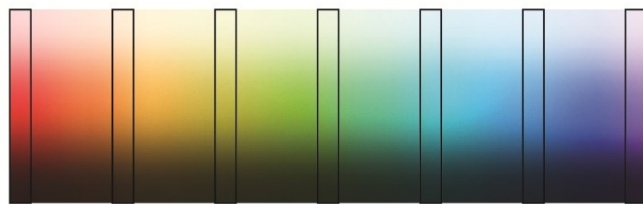
<sup>9</sup> Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, 16-18.



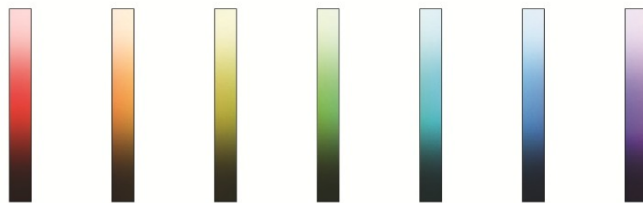


**Figure 1.1** Color Spectrum (Source: Author)



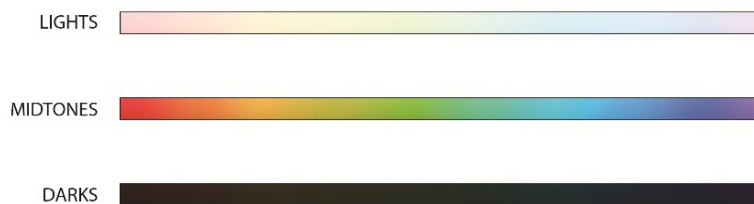
RED ORANGE YELLOW GREEN BLUE INDIGO VIOLET

**Figure 1.2** Color Spectrum Interpreted (Source: Author)



RED ORANGE YELLOW GREEN BLUE INDIGO VIOLET

**Figure 1.3** Color Spectrum Interpretation Reinforced by Separation (Source: Author)



**Figure 1.4** Color Spectrum Interpreted Alternatively (Source: Author)

colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, etc...) utilizing discrimination between these colors to apply a simple, understandable structure to the spectrum. The critical component to our comprehension of the example, is the spacing and separation between the classified colors. In fact, in our application of the ROYGBIV structure, the gradient still exists, but the erasure of large portions of the spectrum has been replaced by large portions of space. The now small portions of spectrum remaining, separated by the large portions of space allow for easy discrimination between the established colors through contrast. Without this spatial separation, it becomes difficult to designate where exactly along the gradient the structured interpretation crosses a boundary. i.e. Where exactly does red become orange, or green becomes blue?

Boundaries and oppositions are established through a simplified interpretation of the complex spectrum. But why is the spectrum ordered through the deliberate structure of ROYGBIV? Why not designate another specific set of equally-spaced colors for our primary understanding? Other interpretations and organizations of the spectrum are certainly logical. However, institutions which govern social order decide what boundaries, groupings, and homo-heterogeneities are engrained into our understanding of society.<sup>11</sup>

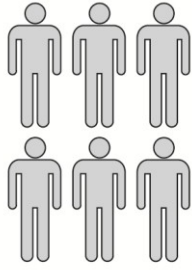
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<sup>11</sup> Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 55.

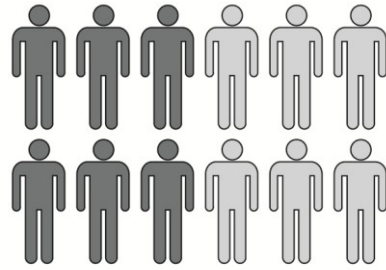
The ordering process is evident in all aspects of our lives; from understanding the color spectrum to defining our communities. The ordering process develops a cultural framework of identity, interpreting the stimuli of similarities and differences to determine belonging. Communities are an example of the ordering process in effect, as they group segments of complex individuals together to establish a specific identity of homogeneity amongst others. Institutions govern the cultural framework, prioritizing a particular interpretation, the arrangement, and ordering of society. Communities are institutions as they determine the specific similarities, which define the homogeneity of the collective group. However, to reinforce an ideal homogeneity, which in actuality encompasses differences amongst the individuals of the group, institutions rely on a contrast of otherness to support an illusion of sameness; the identity of a community.

### ***Reliance on Opposition***

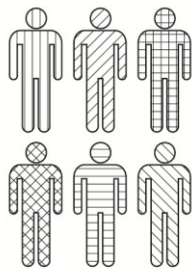
Institutions heavily rely on opposition to dilute complexity and support an ideal of homogeneity. This direct and simple construct of opposition refutes the reality of complex arrangements of similarities and differences, while also ignoring the possibility for multiple interpretations. In essence, by examining stimuli there is always some degree of difference always apparent. What permits classifying entities together is their relative sameness in comparison and contrast to entities with a higher degree of difference.



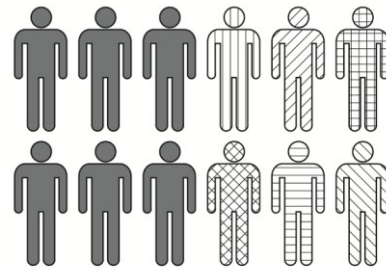
**Figure 1.5** Mythical Homogeneity  
(Source: Author)



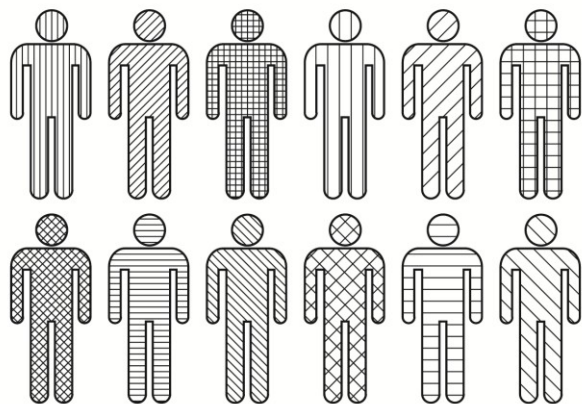
**Figure 1.6** Mythical Perception of Homogeneity and Heterogeneity  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 1.7** Heterogeneity within the "Homogeneous" Group  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 1.8** Reliance on Opposition to reinforce Perception of Homogeneity  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 1.9** Complex Reality  
(Source: Author)

Mary Douglas provides an example of similarity and difference ordering through the classification systems of biological species.<sup>12</sup> She compares scientific classification to religious classification, which interpret differently the grouping of species. Both systems are derived from a logical organization, arranging groups based on real similarities and differences. Because each species is different in some way from another, grouping similarities relies on a contrast to a group with a higher degree of difference. However, it is important to note in Douglas' comparison of two logical systems of classification, multiple interpretations of complex stimuli are valid and possible. The complexity of nature does not allow for the ordering structure to be concrete and entirely devoid of alternative interpretation. The comparison also reveals that the identity of a group is not sufficient for fully explaining the unique individual identities within the group.<sup>13</sup> Because parameters which establish a group are based on an institution's interpretation, these arrangements ignore the similarities spanning across from individual entities in one classification to entities categorized as *other*.

Richard Sennett is cognoscente of this concept's formulation within communities, stating "*community* is a deceptive social term."<sup>14</sup> He discusses how communities "shut-out" otherness in order to create the

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 58-62.

<sup>14</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 30.

collective "we" feeling within a community itself. In reality, complexity and difference always exists between people, disproving perfect homogeneity. Through the contrast of *otherness*, a community establishes a fantasy of pure homogeneity. Avoidance of complex experience occurs, when community members buy-into the illusion that the group is homogenous. Alternative perceptions are subdued in order to maintain the community's bond and individuals may fail to expand their own perspective.

Therefore, the contrast of opposition becomes critical to supporting the illusion of homogeneity within an ordered group, but for institutions to successfully reinforce their interpretation, clear natural boundaries and spatial separation must be established.

### ***Establishment of Boundaries***

Communities and identity require opposition to reinforce a culturally-constructed homogeneity. Because similarities and differences can be argued in a multitude of contradicting arguments, institutions must emphasize a logical and obvious truth to support its interpretation of what belongs and what does not belong. Therefore, separation often relies on significant natural boundaries, both man-made and in nature, which can easily be recognized and used as a divider. Institutions

reinforce certain boundaries, while subduing others, to argue their interpretation of sameness and otherness.<sup>15</sup>

A group's homogeneity is constructed through the perception of difference/opposition outside of clearly established natural boundaries. Communities utilize these clearly constructed boundaries to protect their identity and way of life. The contrast of otherness supports the illusion of homogeneity, but the establishment of a boundary also insights a utopian perspective that beyond the boundary exists absolute *otherness*. The reality is *otherness*, separated by a cultural interpretation, is not a complete, binary opposite, but again, a variance in degrees of similarities and differences. Homogeneity is not only a fantasy of *sameness* within a community, but coincides with an ideal that no similarities span across one side of the boundary to the other.

### ***Real Complexity (Mythical Homogeneity)***

The reality is society and the world around us is highly complex, disorderly, and riddled with degrees of similarities and differences. Institutions interpret homogenous classes through ordering and grouping to simplify the complex world into understandable pieces. However, the fact that the world is so complex, allows for a multitude of various interpretations of the degrees of similarities and difference. The reality of the ordering process is that for a group to appear homogenous, it must rely on comparison to opposition. Culture

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, 55-67.

dictates how society perceives degrees of difference/similarity and institutions govern followers/members/people within to buy-into a collective interpretation. A group's homogeneity is constructed through the perception of difference/opposition outside of clearly reinforced natural boundaries. The fantasy of homogeneity operates at two levels. Beyond the boundary, the interpretation shuts-out perceived similarities across borders. Within a group, the interpretation ignores the existence of differences within a contained classification. Ultimately, the cultural ordering of communities dissolves a mature understanding of the complex world.

Homogeneity is a fantasy, however degrees of similarities and difference amongst society is quite real. Although cultural ordering of institutions identify separations and boundaries, what must be realized is the potential for multiple interpretations and a crossing-over of similarities and differences.

### ***The Space Between***

The ignorance to complexity and degrees of similarities and differences is a ideological viewpoint of the organization of society. Slavoj Žižek describes *ideology* as "a reduction to a simplified *essence* that conveniently forgets the *background noise*."<sup>16</sup> The *background*

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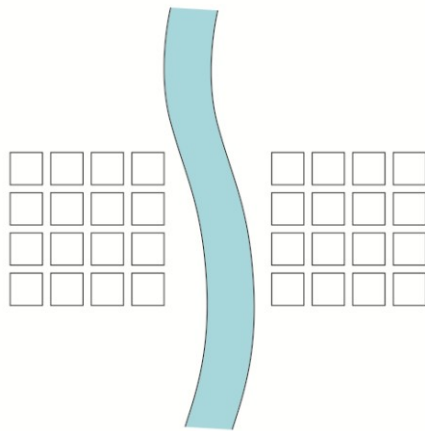
<sup>16</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End of Times*.(London: Verso, 2010), 5-6.



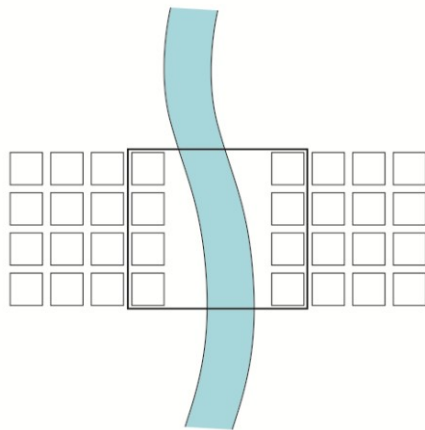
*noise* in this case is the similarities that span across boundaries and the differences within "homogeneous" groups, which are suppressed by culture and institutions.

The boundaries which are established by institutions and communities are true, because they rely on natural degrees of similarities and differences. However, because classification is a process of simplifying a complex system, the system can be ordered according to a number of different interpretations. Every boundary can be challenged as a result of a different perspective or analysis of the entire context.

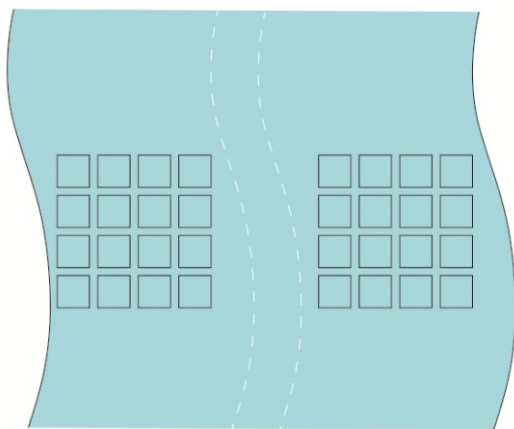
For example, a river naturally divides two sides, creating two distinct river banks, which are separate from one another. However, the boundary situation could be argued as a unifier rather than a divider. In fact, the river is something that the two river banks share. Communities often form amongst rivers out of economic interest or transportation. Therefore, those structures which develop along the edge of the river share a commonality, irrelevant to which side of the river banks they occur. In this scenario, the difference occurs instead within each community, as structures built directly adjacent to the river's edge or not. This argument of the river as a unifier might be better understood if we imagine the river were to flood, encompassing both banks within the flood plain. Now that the edge of the river has



**Figure 1.10** Identifying Boundaries: River interpreted as a boundary of difference (Source: Author)



**Figure 1.11** Identifying Boundaries: River interpreted as a similarity of economic interest (Source: Author)



**Figure 1.12** Identifying Boundaries: River flooding interpreted as a similarity (Source: Author)

been expanded beyond the edge of the banks, the two originally separated entities are now part of the same body. Often understood to separate communities, all boundaries consist of multiple, simultaneous interpretations, exposing their truly complex nature. The powerful quality designating a boundary as a divider is reliant on a spatial separation and the downplay of the transitional space between.

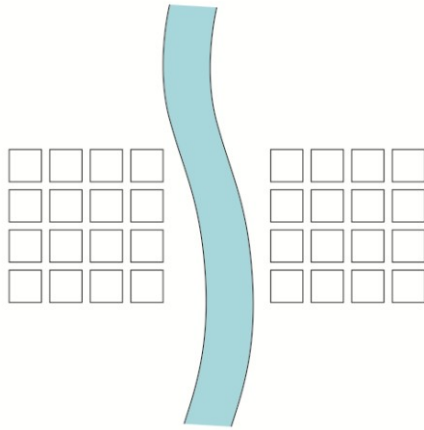
***Transitional Space vs. Other Space: Neither Here nor There***

Spatial separation is necessary to distinguish clear difference between stimuli. Returning to the example of the color spectrum, the application of a ROYGBIV interpretation brings up the question: where does the identity of yellow end and green begin? In presentation of the ROYGBIV structure, eliminating the in-between colors reinforces the logic of a simplified interpretation applied to a complex gradient. Chartreuse, which could be argued as either green or yellow, proves the complexity of gradient still exists, but is ignored as background noise for the ideological purpose of the ROYGBIV interpretation. The transitional space of gradient is ignored for the interpretation and replaced with an *other space*, neither this or that.

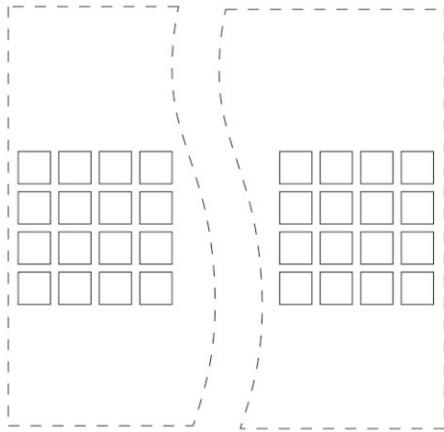
Michel Foucault refers to these *other spaces* as *heterotopia*; real places where simultaneity or multiple interpretations of space may occur, but may or may not be ignored by society.<sup>17</sup> Utopian

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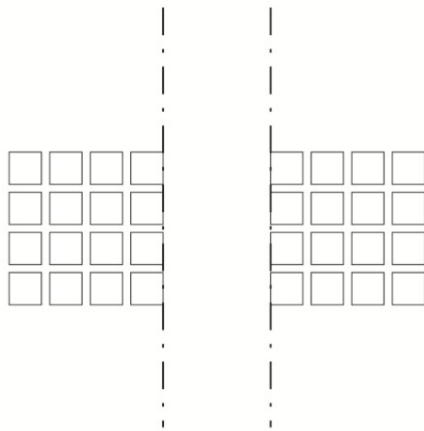
<sup>17</sup> Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27.



**Figure 1.13** Spatial Quality of Boundaries (Source: Author)



**Figure 1.14** Spatial Quality of Boundaries (Source: Author)



**Figure 1.15** Spatial Quality of Boundaries (Source: Author)

constructs and ideals of perception ignores the complex, transitional information between groups or classifications. However, the spatial separations, described for the purpose of reinforcing an ideological interpretation, do in fact exist, but as heterotopias.

### ***Heterotopias Exist as Real Space***

*Other spaces* exist in all interpretations and organized structures of the complex world. In the terms of spatial conditions of urban and natural form, these heterotopias have a physical presence as well. The river can be viewed as such a powerful boundary of separation because of the readily available argument that it is something *other* than either of the land-banks. The river is neither one side or the other, but in fact has a spatial quality of its own. Spatial separation occurs between our communities and urban forms through natural boundaries; the reinforced *other space*. This space may be a street, railroad, landscape, topography, barrier, waterway, or any space utilized to reinforce a separation. These *other spaces* exist, but are reinforced by certain formal continuities and discontinuities pertaining to specific interpretations of spatial separation.

### ***Ideology and Utopian Dreaming***

Designers, planners, and architects all utilize continuities and discontinuities to support or develop an interpretation of the surrounding context. Communities are devised by the deliberate containment of people under a common identity. This clustering is a

direct result of ordering processes, utilizing boundaries and spatial separation to organize a complex world. This theory has outlined how these understandings of separate entities may be reinterpreted against the cultural majority due to the apparent similarities and differences throughout all entities of society.

Utopian dreaming occurs when we conveniently eliminate the notions of complexity to support an ideal interpretation of the world around us. Attempts to physically realize ideology are apparent in much of the architecture and built form of the past and present, but ultimately the underlying complexity always exists, even if suppressed.

## Chapter 2: The Precedents

### ***Structure for Analysis***

#### ***Statements of Community***

As we've acknowledged, boundaries and opposition are established to reinforce a mythical sameness or a fantasy of homogeneity. Communities often advertise a collective identity, which promote unity, shared values, and support a group. However, the shared sameness of the group cannot be declared without a clear separation and contrast to otherness. The following precedents have been selected because the design claims to reinforce an ideal of community. Because hundreds of projects of contemporary architecture claim to reinforce community, the samples selected include projects world-renowned and respected within the profession of architecture; Unité d'habitation, Habitat '67, and Battery Park City. Each project will be critically analyzed for their architectural and formal qualities, which reinforce the idea of community in reference to Structuralist theory, the works of Richard Sennett, and utopian-dreaming.

#### ***Separation from the City***

The process for reinforcing communal homogeneity derives from a desired ideal or utopian thought, which ignores the background noise of complexity and varying degrees of similarities and difference.

Separation or isolation allows for a clear spatial boundary to develop, supporting an interpretation of contrasting or opposing identities. We see this separation and implied opposition in people fleeing the disorder of the city to live amongst the homogeneity of the suburbs.<sup>18</sup> However, this separation merely supports a fantasy and the complex nature of reality consists of similarities and differences which span within and across the established boundaries. The successful attempt to establish contrast between the suburbs and the city is the spatial separation from one another.

However, communities are also claimed to be present in the city, amongst density, and tighter spaces. Although the proximity boundaries of communities may seem less obvious than the relationship of the city to the suburbs, spatial separations are always apparent to generate contrast and distinction between collective groups. The three projects described reside in varied physical proximity to the city center; ranging from far outside the city core to directly abutting it. However, all three projects rely on separation from the disorder of the city to define its distinction and identity as a homogenous community.

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<sup>18</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 9-98.





**Figure 2.1** Outside the City: Unité d'Habitation, Marseille, France  
(Source: Author via Google Maps)



**Figure 2.2** Amongst the City: Habitat '67, Montreal, Canada  
(Source: Author via Google Maps)



**Figure 2.3** Abutting the City: Battery Park, New York City, United States  
(Source: Author via Google Maps)

## ***Unite d'Habitation***

*If you want to raise your family in seclusion, silence, and in natural surroundings, place yourself amongst 2000 people. Take each other's hand, walk through one and the same door and get in one of four lifts that each has the capacity to carry 20 people, you will enjoy solitude, silence and swift interior-exterior contact. ...*

*The house will be set in the grounds containing children's play areas as well as distractions for teenagers and adults. The city will be green. And on the roof there will be incredible kindergartens.<sup>19</sup>*

- Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation of Marseille is a Modernist project, attempting to provide all of the potential needs, services, and facilities for living in a collective housing development. The project provides space for residential units of varying types, school rooms, offices, retail shopping, and community services amongst other significant spaces to support the residents. Le Corbusier claims the building reinforces a communal atmosphere, allowing for people to live without having to leave the comfort of the Unité.<sup>20</sup> However, Le Corbusier's aspirations for the project are quite utopian in nature and an attempt to simplify or rationalize complexity. How could one building provide all the necessities and comforts of life for all types of residents? This idea

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<sup>19</sup> Le Corbusier, *CeuvreComplete*, Vol 7.

<sup>20</sup> Le Corbusier, *CeuvreComplete*, Vol 7.

must assume the residents of the Unité are completely homogeneous and devoid of any difference. As Structuralists have concluded, varying degrees of similarities and differences are apparent amongst all identities and the fantasy of sameness is of cultural construct. With this in mind, we realize the building cannot function solely within the confines of its walls, however Le Corbusier is attempting to establish a self-sufficient community different and separate from the surrounding urban life.

### ***At the Edge of the City***

Rather than engaging the existing communities of the city, Le Corbusier's Unité has instead desired to define an intense, new community of its own. Although the project claims to establish a community mimicking the density of the city, the actual site of the project is quite removed from the Marseille city-core (See Figure 2.1). Unité's distant removal from the density of the city and placement amongst the low-rise surroundings of the suburbs aids in the community's definition through separation and contrast. This spatial separation is the driving factor, which seeks to aid in its utopian community fantasy.

The architectural form of the Le Corbusier's housing project continues to promote a distinct community through a series of spatial strategies. Not only is the high-rise structure located from the density of the city

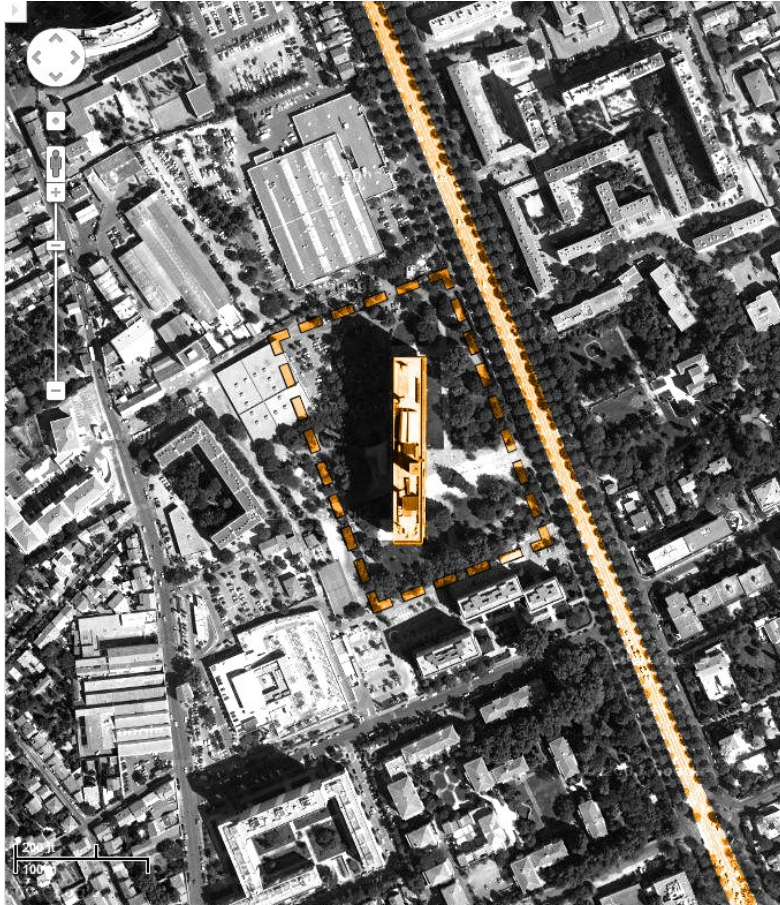
core, but the building is strategically set-back and cranked at an angle from the main boulevard, to which the site is addressed and directly abuts. A regiment of large trees along the boulevard and scattered throughout the site obstruct sightlines to the lower-half of the building. Instead, the only visible portion of the Unité from the boulevard's approach is its lofty vertical surface, which seems distant and distinctly different from the neighboring facades oriented directly along the street. Finally, the building is lofted on piloti above the ground-plane that constrain all other surrounding buildings and establishing another degree of difference. In his critique of utopian cities, Michael Johnson describes Le Corbusier's project as " a monolithic block raised off the ground on stilts and elevated above the decay and disorder of the city."<sup>21</sup> This strategy to achieve purity in form in opposition to the surrounding context aids in establishing the fantasy of a utopian community. Although Le Corbusier's Unité ambitious goals contain merit and good intentions, it can be argued the project's design fosters social withdrawal through the formation of an intensely-driven community.

### ***A Secure Microcosm of City Life***

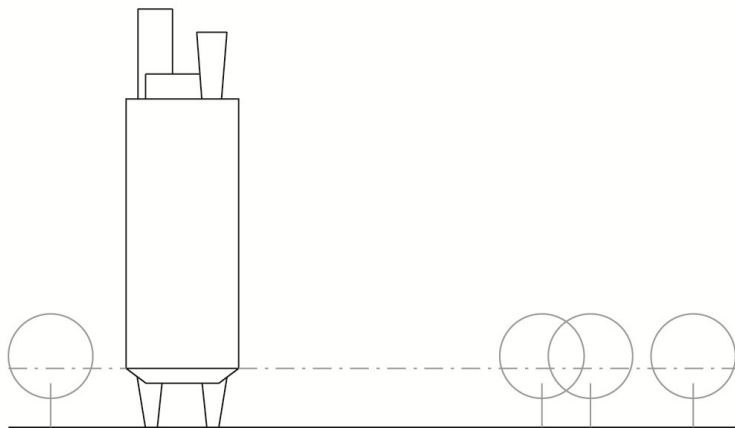
The Unité' d'habitation's spatial separation may be mere coincidence of the design, however these formal occurrences cannot be denied to play a role in the building's distinction amongst its surroundings.

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, Michael. "Utopian Cities." Knoj. (accessed October 18, 2012).



**Figure 2.4** Separation from the Boulevard: Unité d'Habitation  
(Source: Author via Google Maps)



**Figure 2.5** Separation from the Ground-Plane: Unité d'Habitation  
(Source: Author)

Ultimately, spatial separation provides boundaries to be easily recognized and interpreted between the Unité and the adjacent communities, reinforcing a fantasy of homogeneity amongst otherness.

Le Corbusier intended to create a building which would provide for and serve the all the functions necessary for residents of the Unité. In a sense, the architect's vision was to construct a microcosm of city life within the comfort and secure proximity of the home. This argument should not be understated, considering when describing the design of the Unité, Le Corbusier acknowledges the corridors of the building as "interior streets."<sup>22</sup> The "streets" are lined with homes, complete with individual drop-boxes for mail and milk delivery, while the third-floor is describes as a retail street hosting services and shopping opportunities for residents. As described, the Unité seems to resemble an upright suburban neighborhood or a gated-community, protected by its single, secure lobby through which all entrants arrive.

In fact, most high-rise housing structures resemble similar spatial qualities to single-family home arrangements of the suburbs. For instance, in many single-family home neighborhoods of the United States, houses are distinctly separated from one another by a gap of space. These sprawl conditions often consist of endless roads lined with numerous single-family homes. The communities described are

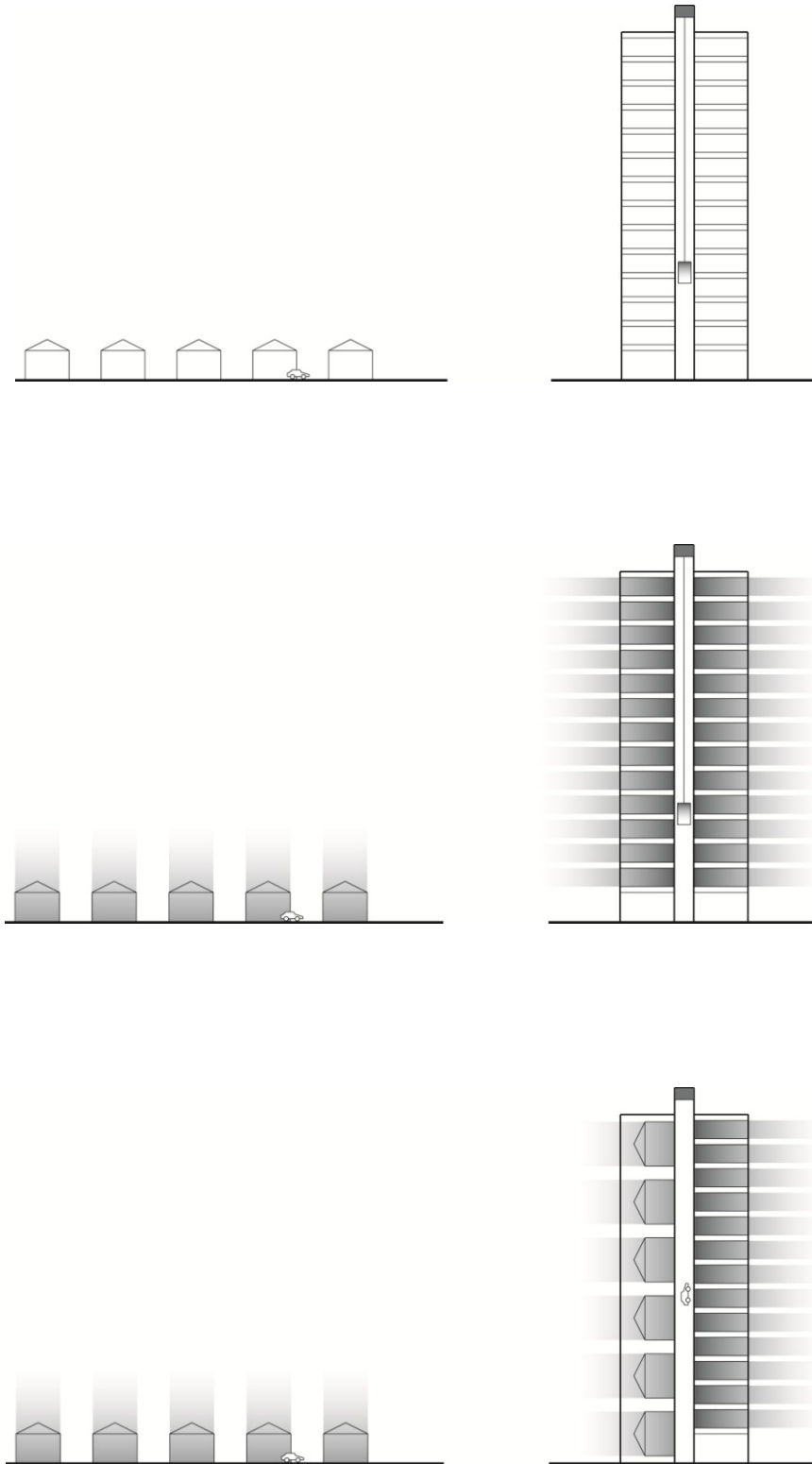
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<sup>22</sup> Le Corbusier, *CeuvreComplete*, Vol 7.

often large and rely on vehicular transportation to escape the confines of the residential neighborhood and access the resources necessary for life. When a resident enters their vehicle, they swiftly bypass their neighbors and are not really engaging or getting to know the people they live amongst in the community. A resident may interact with their neighbors directly adjacent to their home, but the situation allows for the resident to socially withdraw from the remainder of the community.

High-rise communities allow for a strikingly familiar situation to occur, only in a more condensed and efficient condition of space. Although large spatial gaps between homes do not occur, within the building, units are typically separated by the floors, ceilings, and walls. Again, a resident may be familiar with the neighboring residents with which they share walls, however the form and arrangement of units does not convenience a resident to interact with all of their neighbors. Instead, the vehicular-car of the suburbs has become the elevator-car of the high-rise building as a resident once again bypasses their neighbors in an effort to swiftly reach their destined floor.

Most high-rise housing communities are guilty of this spatial condition within their building complexes, however Le Corbusier's Unité takes the idea of vertical community to entirely utopian ideal through the recognition of "interior streets" and attempting to facilitate all of the residents' needs within one building. The construct of the microcosm



**Figure 2.6** Separation of Homes: Comparison of Single-Family to Stacked-Apartment Dwellings (Source: Author)



combined with the spatial separation between Unité d'habitation supports the realization that Le Corbusier has established a distinct community based on the opposition and separation from all surrounding otherness.

### ***Habitat '67***

*Such villages have a tremendous unity about them, and you cannot regard them as individual buildings, but building systems which make up a community.*

*These same things are true of Habitat, although the vernacular of Habitat is not a dome or adobe roof, but the standardized unit themselves. Because of mass production , we have one element which is repetitive. These elements then come together in intricate ways to make a whole system and a total environment.*<sup>23</sup>

- Moshe Safdie

The Habitat '67 project's origins developed in the thesis of Moshe Safdie, before becoming a headlining work of the 1967 World Expo.<sup>24</sup> Similar to Le Corbusier's Unité, the project originally aspired to provide all the comforts of living in one communal architectural mass. Although the project's ambitious attempts to provide for all the necessities of life did not come to full fruition, Habitat '67 remains respected in the field for its unique approach and arrangement of

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<sup>23</sup> Gray, John. *Habitat: Moshe Safdie Interview with The Montreal Star*. 1967.

<sup>24</sup> Safdie, Moshe. *Beyond Habitat*. Edited by John Kettle. Cambridge: The M.I.T.Press, 1970.

community. Where Le Corbusier's project seeks to define the appearance of a collective whole, Safdie claims Habitat forms a community which fosters individuality and identity.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Amongst the City***

The site of Habitat '67 is much closer in proximity to the city center of Montreal, when compared to the distance separating Unité from the core of Marseille. Although, Habitat '67 is located near primary routes connecting the city, the project is extremely isolated, creating a clear distinction from the surrounding urban fabric. Safdie's community is constructed upon a peninsula projecting into the river, Fleuve de Saint Laurent, allowing for separation occur, although the city surrounds the location in nearly 360 degrees.

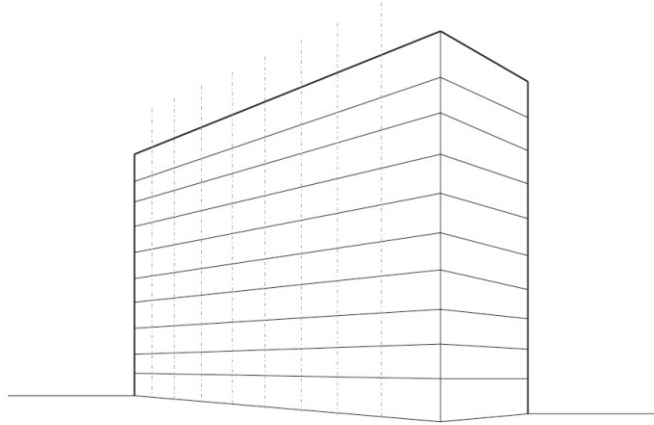
Similar to Unite, the form of Habitat '67 radically contrasts the typical urban form of the surrounding context. Habitat '67 does not respond directly to the site it is situated, nor does the design reflect conventional urban form of the city. In essence, Habitat provides a community through the clear establishment that the form is something other from the surrounding city.

### ***Individual Identity***

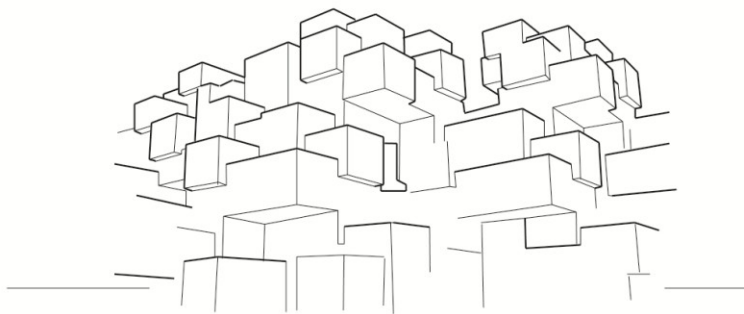
Another intent of Safdie's design was to provide high density housing, which simultaneously provides residents with a celebration of individual

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<sup>25</sup> Safdie, Moshe. *Beyond Habitat*. Edited by John Kettle. Cambridge: The M.I.T.Press, 1970.



**Figure 2.7** Individuality and Identity: Typological Stacked-Apartment Housing (Source: Author)



**Figure 2.8** Individuality and Identity: Moshe Safdie's Habitat (Source: Author)

identity. Safdie argues that in typical high-rise construction, it is difficult for a resident to be able to point-out their unit from the ground. He states this is a result of a lack of uniqueness between units and their relationship to one another as they are arranged into a single form. Building upon this observation, Moshe Safdie stacks modular units amongst each other in varying arrangements to develop unique protrusions and residual spaces as a result.

However, the modular units and their arrangements may be interpreted to be more similar than different from one another. The very fact that the units are modular and repetitive in nature, begs the question: are the units really different from each other at all? Ultimately, the forms are so radically different to housing of the surrounding context, one interpretation is the modular units do not express individual identity, but a collective identity that is different from the city context. This system of incredible elaborations to express individuality, results in a failed attempt to manifest a utopian ideal.

### ***Battery Park City***

*The new residential neighborhoods along the Lower Manhattan waterfront will represent a major positive step towards increasing the vitality of the downtown center of the City and thereby implementing The Lower Manhattan Plan. New residents will stimulate a diversification of activity in Lower Manhattan that will increase the*

*attractiveness of the area for the working population as well. The special districts seek to encourage cultural, recreational, and shopping uses that will be necessary and viable when the new residential communities are established.*<sup>26</sup>

- Office of Lower Manhattan Development

The Battery Park City is a large-scale urban landfill development, formed against the west bank of Lower Manhattan. The project was a successful attempt to create additional property directly adjacent to the highly valuable urban fabric of New York City. The Office of Lower Manhattan, who provided the guidelines for neighborhood development and urban strategies for the project, claim Battery Park City creates a diverse community, well connected with the bustling city-center.<sup>27</sup>

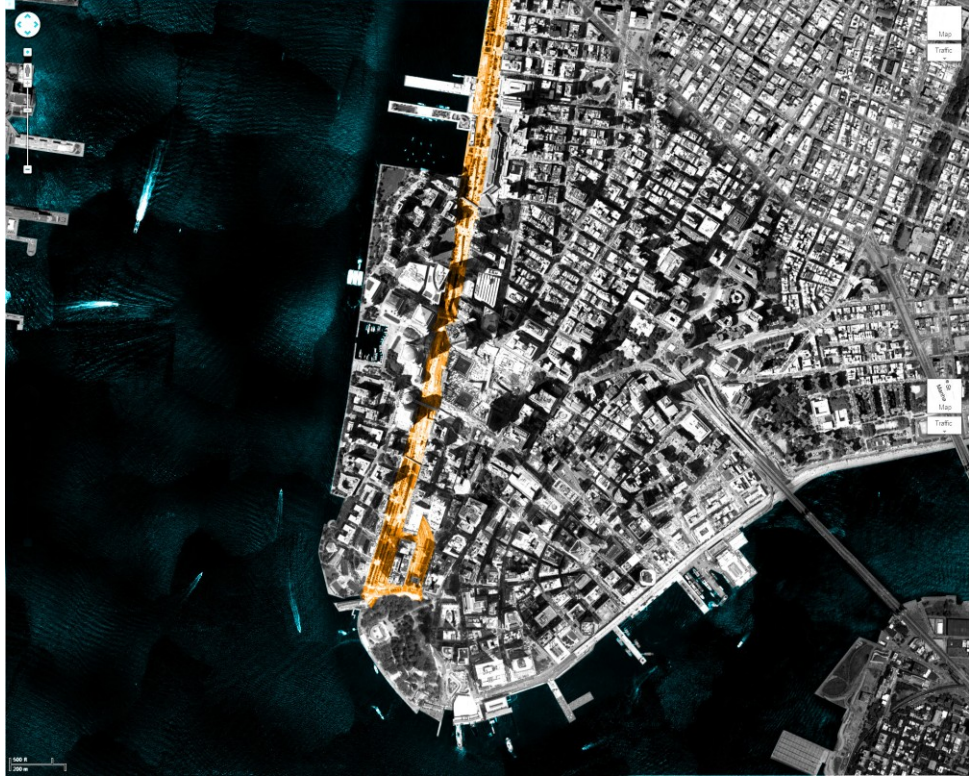
### ***Abutting the City***

Of the precedents analyzed, Battery Park City is the closest in proximity to its respective city core. The landfill development has been stitched directly adjacent to Lower Manhattan, however is isolated from the urban fabric by the 12 lanes of dominating traffic as West St seams the edges of Battery City and Lower Manhattan. The Office of Lower Manhattan Development (OLMD) established planning guidelines to

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<sup>26</sup> Baiter, Richard. *Lower Manhattan Waterfront*. Office Lower Manhattan Development, 1975.

<sup>27</sup> Baiter, Richard. *Lower Manhattan Waterfront*. Office Lower Manhattan Development, 1975.



**Figures 2.9 & 2.10** Separation of Battery Park City from Lower Manhattan via West St. (Source: Author via Google Maps)

maintain visibility and connections to the waterfront from the city grid. Unfortunately, the attempts for seamless integration of Battery Park City to the rest of New York City fails due to the dominating separation caused by the former expressway. Although the project is technically inside the city, the result is an isolated affluent community defined by a maintained boundary. The expressway, now limited in flow by traffic lights and crosswalks, still remains an influential boundary between Battery City and Lower Manhattan. Ten to twelve lanes of traffic separate one side from the other, daunting pedestrians from crossing between the communities. The city also continued to recognize the traffic as a boundary, commissioning SHoP Architects to develop pedestrian sky bridges at certain locations. Although these bridges provide more pedestrian connectivity between the two communities, there development reinforces the strong forces the former expressway serves in spatially separating the city.

## Chapter 3: The Principles

### ***Experiencing Complexity***

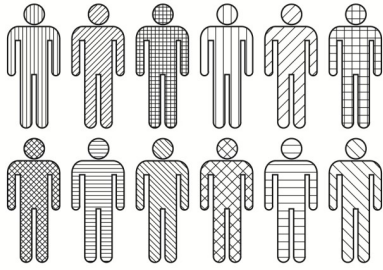
We recognize withdrawal from society does not allow for complex experience and consequently, stunts our growth as human beings. Institutions, intense communities, and affluence allow for this withdrawal from society to occur. As Sennett declares, change to the methods or conditions of these institutions must occur in order to allow for people to experience degrees of difference and expand their understanding.<sup>28</sup> Sennett describes how in the past, social arenas allowed for a variety of complex experiences amongst adults, as city-dwellers were not limited to belonging to one entity, but many. However, Sennett asserts that reverting to the conditions of the past are not the intentions of the call for change.

In fact, attempting to reintroduce the old social arenas of the past would be completely utopian in theory and quite unsuccessful in reality. Affluence has already allowed from withdrawal from society, through the creation of microcosms of communities, which provide all the necessities for life. Sennett's ideas suggest that affluence will continue to allow people to withdraw from society, by replicating or omitting versions of these social arenas in their own microcosms.

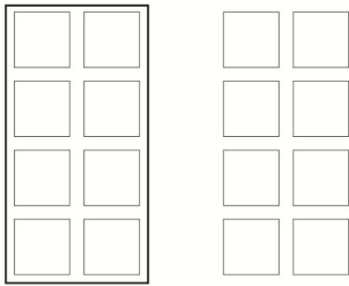
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<sup>28</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity & City Life*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

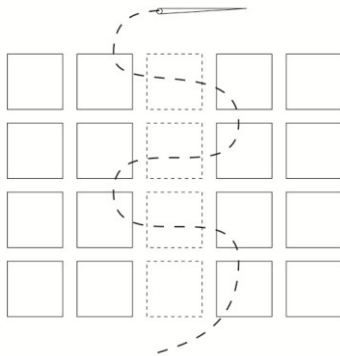




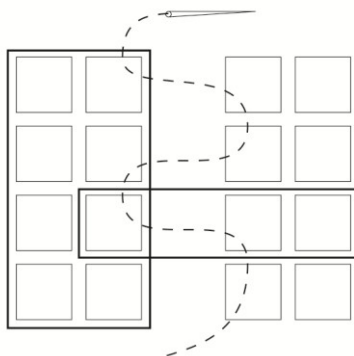
**Figure 3.1** Recognizing Complexity  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 3.2** Utopian Tendencies: The Contained Community  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 3.3** Utopian Tendencies: Stitching Together  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 3.4** Identity Crisis: Amplify Ambiguity  
(Source: Author)

Perhaps it is the boundaries themselves that should be addressed to counteract the withdrawal from society. If the logic or ordering of the institution is challenged, the organization which condemns the *otherness* to the outside begins to deteriorate. In terms of architecture or urban planning, this means reinterpreting the natural boundaries which divide distinct communities, while manipulating the continuities and discontinuities of the surrounding context.

## ***Contemporary Design Methodologies***

### ***Utopian Tendencies: The Contained Community***

As outlined in the analysis of Unite, Habitat '67, and Battery Park City, communities may be established through the reinforcement of boundaries and spatial separation. Often, the separation becomes apparent through the emphasis of specific continuities and/or discontinuities of urban form. Many contemporary design methodologies seek to reinforce ideals of community through the manipulation of spatial situations. The most obvious arrangement of such a manipulation is the idea of a gated-community. In essence, a gated community provides a contained community with protection and separation from the outside world. Through the manipulation of form, gated communities create a continuity, which borders or encapsulated the community, while also establishing a discontinuity from inside to outside. Fundamentally, all utopian attempts to establish a contained community reflects an effort to reinforce specific boundaries or edges.

### ***Utopian Tendencies: Stitching Together***

On the opposite end of the spectrum, elimination of boundaries are also utopian in nature. As credited earlier, pure homogeneity is a fantasy and complexity always exists. Switching an interpretation of division to an interpretation unification does not reinforce complexity. Simple flipping of all variables is utopian in theory because it assumes problems will be resolved by applying complete opposites. This sort of logic believes to resolve a negative situation, we take all the existing inputs and apply the complete opposite, resulting in a positive result. For example if it is *white*, paint it to *black*; or if it is *big*, make it *small*. However, this is a ridiculous assumption that does not investigate or even recognize the complexity of most situations.

Some contemporary approaches to solving spatial separation between communities is to stitch together the urban form, transforming a discontinuity into a continuity. However, this ideological application must believe with the elimination of boundaries, the elimination of difference will result. Of course, through examination of Sennett and Structuralism, we understand the elimination of difference is simply unachievable. But overall, stitching together urban form only recognizes one interpretation of context and reinforces another in its place. Ultimately, the goal of the thesis exploration is to reveal the complexity of our surrounding context, which is open to a variety of simultaneous, but differing interpretations of space.

## ***Identity Crisis: Amplify Ambiguity***

Instead of completely supporting a reinterpretation of a boundary, the goal of our proposal is insight recognition of the entity as an ambiguous form; that any spatial separation could be interpreted as a dividing or unifying element. The utopian alternative of supporting fully the gap as a unifying element, assumes society will reach across with open-arms to the *other*. Architecture cannot control people, their actions, and behaviors. However, architecture can assert social commentary, which may create a stir or change in society's interactions.

The intent of intensifying the ambiguity of the entity as either a divider or unifier, is to promote awareness and reveal the existence of this social order. Challenging the logic of the ordering method generates conflict in the justification of an institution. The tension which is created is essentially an identity crisis, where without complete assurance in the separation between "us" and "them," we don't know if our microcosm will collapse and crash into the other.

However, any attempt to address complexity cannot limit exploration to purely the spatial separation. Instead, all variables and physical attributes of the site and surrounding context must be taken into careful consideration. An exploration into creating an ambiguity of space relies on complete attention to a broader contextualism, beyond built

form. This will require an examination into the existing continuities and discontinuities in three-dimensions pertaining to a site. Reinforcement and contradiction to the scenario may then be applied simultaneously in an effort to reveal the ambiguity of the space. The process of reinforcing these continuities and discontinuities through urban form is the same which conventional contemporary design utilizes. However, the desired result seeks a recognition and appreciation for complexity, rather than support for only one cultural interpretation of the spatial situation.

## Chapter 4: The Site

### *Criteria for Site Selection*

In order to test the principles established for experiencing complexity, an appropriate site must be selected, which currently ignores or subdues complexity to a single interpretation. As described previously through the works and interpretation of Sennett, Ziezak, Douglas, Levi-Strauss, and Leach, ordering, arrangement, and dominant interpretations of similarities and difference surround our everyday lives as a result of the culture framework established by institutions. Therefore, potential sites are abundant amongst the natural boundaries and mythical homogeneities emphasized by institutions and our communities. However, the manipulation of the transitional space, which always exists in the process of interpreting similarities and differences, is ultimately where the principles are intended to be utilized.

The space which is neither here nor there is critical to the validity of an institution's simplified interpretation of complexity. For the purposes of this thesis, a site will be selected with the intent to challenge the interpretation of a definitive boundary, which separates one community from another. Because all boundaries consist of a transitional space due to their complex nature, this transitional space between the two



**Figure 4.1** Jones Falls Valley through Baltimore  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 4.2** Site Figure Ground along I-83 Corridor through Baltimore  
(Source: Author via Google Maps)

identities must be large-enough to support architectural intervention. A logical site for exploration could be found along the Jones Falls Expressway (I-83), carves a swath through Baltimore City and divides the grid-based urban fabric.

### ***Baltimore City and the I-83 Corridor***

Baltimore City is inhabited and experienced by a variety of people ranging significantly in socio-economic class, profession, race, and identity. Acknowledging the complexity of the world and its ordering through cultural application, Baltimore is distinctly segregated into distinct neighborhoods, communities, and districts by natural boundaries established within the city. Examples of these natural boundaries include highways, avenues, waterways (the harbor and Chesapeake Bay), infrastructure, railways, parks, cemeteries, and parking among the infinite other possibilities for interpretation.

The Jones Falls Expressway (I-83) traverses a shallow valley carving through the city and enabling a significant boundary to be interpreted as a division between communities. In Baltimore's case, this valley has been interpreted as a boundary between communities and space for infrastructure, rather than human habitation. Buildings typically abut and maintain the harsh edge of the boundary, as the traditional city blocks engage the valley through the city. At ground-level along



the gridded streets of the city, the valley is rarely visible. Walls, fencing, buildings, dense vegetation, and billboards often obstruct sightlines and access to the valley. In the few instances where the city grid spans across the valley, the bridges' guardrails are clad in a frosted plastic, denying visibility to below. These bridges are merely intended to serve as a vehicular connection, as the long, barren bridges deter pedestrian movement. Crossing this large, perceivably empty space between the urban fabric on either side of the valley, serves as the natural boundary and the spatial gap supporting the interpretation of separate communities.

The specific location for exploration along the valley was selected based on accessibility to the valley, a vacant lot, and an experience of vast spatial movement. A suitable location along the valley was discovered between N. Calvert Street and Guilford Ave. At this particular instance, the valley is not only an experiential boundary between the adjacent communities, but is also recognized by the city, which has deemed the area south of the valley as the Mid-Town Belvedere neighborhood and the land north as Greenmount West.

### ***The Transitional Valley***

The valley serves as the transitional and separating space between the neighborhoods located on either side. In essence, the valley is a heterotopia. Buildings are perched on the edge overlooking the valley,

but loyally maintain their position on their side of the boundary. The only buildings which reside within the confines of the valley is the old Parcel Post Office and Penn Station, the primary rail-transportation hub in Baltimore City. These buildings do not belong to neither neighborhood on the adjacent sides of the valley, but have become their own monumental identities. To further complicate their relationship with the valley, these buildings have been raised on piloti above the topographical ground-plane to coincide with the city's elevation on either side. Combined with the few bridges spanning the gap, the raised buildings form a constructed ground-plane at city grade, which seems to ignore the very existence of the valley at all.

The selected site is directly east of Penn Station and is partially filled with the major arteries of the city's transportation infrastructure, with a vehicular ramp into the valley for employees accessible from Guilford Ave. The Jones Falls Expressway (I-83) runs through the southern side of the valley and if six lanes of traffic wasn't already an obstacle, dirt-strip parking, fences, six lines of railway, station platforms, and roughly 30' of steep topographic change make the valley impossible to traverse at grade. To cross the valley, movement must occur at the raised, constructed ground-plane of the spanning bridges located along Guilford Ave and N. Calvert Street. With steep topographical drops and retaining walls on either side, the only vehicular and

pedestrian access down into the valley occurs at the ramp spurring from Guilford Ave on the north-side of the valley.

***The South-Side: Mid-Town Belvedere***

Mid-Town Belvedere is located on the south-side of the valley, directly abutting the B-4 Central Commercial District of Baltimore. This commercial district continues southward to connect to the city center and recognizable downtown area. A light mixture of residential and office land-uses speckle the Mid-Town Belvedere neighborhood with buildings ranging from three-storey row-homes to ten-storey high-rises. The district is active throughout the weekday, bustling with people working, moving-through, and living in the neighborhood. The University of Baltimore also owns a few educational buildings in the Mid-Town Belvedere district as well. Mt. Royal Ave bounds the northern edge of community, abutting a tall, retaining wall against the valley. The top of the retaining wall is overgrown with dense vegetation, thwarting ground-level views of the valley and the Greenmount West neighborhood on the north-side.

***The North-Side: Greenmount West***

Located on the north-side of the valley, the Greenmount West neighborhood is considerably quieter compared to the activity present in the nearby Mid-Town Belvedere district. Although residing within the same mixed O-R Office-Residence District as the south-side neighborhood, Greenmount West is composed of more residential low-

rise buildings and less occupied offices in comparison. A few higher-density buildings litter the edge of the valley, however many of these structures appear to be abandoned or run-down. The majority of the row-homes of the neighborhood are well-maintained, but are located a block north from the valley's edge. With the exception of a few office and light-industrial buildings, the area resembles a more traditional residential neighborhood. The Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School serves central to the surrounding area, flanking Calvert and Federal Park, while other open green-spaces function in the residual spaces of the residential blocks. In addition, the Baltimore Design School is located in the area, helping to designate the neighborhood for the Arts.

This neighborhood provides the optimal take-off point for an intervention, since Federal Street is set-back from the valley's edge, allowing for building lots. Currently, the space between Federal Street and the valley condition is composed of an old office-building, an abandoned warehouse, and vacant lot. The south-side of the vacant lot continues to flow down into the valley, allowing ample room for architectural intervention. The goal will be to manipulate architectural form in this specific location, attempting to establish tension between the Greenmount West and Mid-Town Belvedere communities in an effort to reveal the complexity and current cultural interpretation of the valley as a boundary.

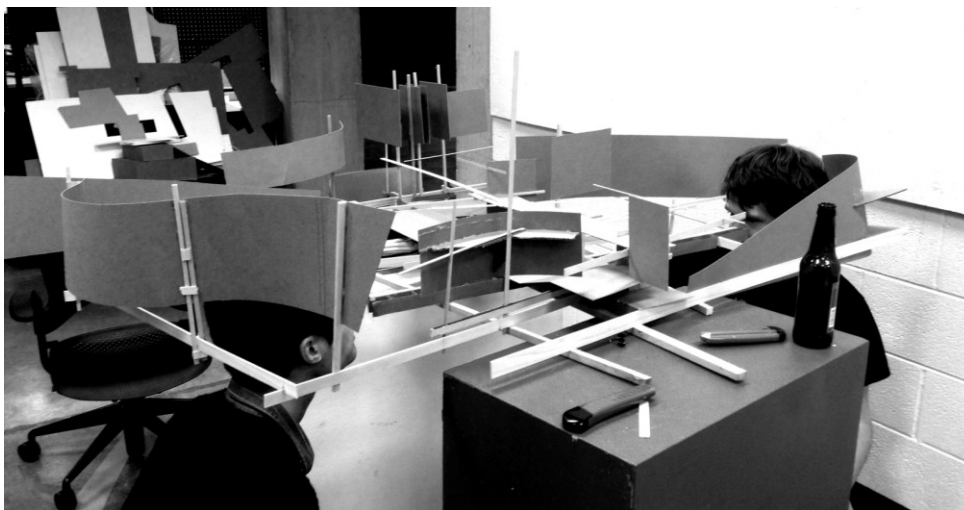
## ***Modeling the Site***

To accurately design pertaining to all of the forces of the site context, development required documentation of the site beyond conventional drawings and models. Traditional figure grounds, site sections, and images are useful to understanding the conditions of the site, however these methods tend to lack significant information realized through actual in-person experiences. The selected site is rich with complexity and contradicting forces that appear through strong continuities and discontinuities.

In an effort to replicate these forces for immediate access and feedback throughout design iterations, an experiential site-model was developed. This model developed throughout the course of a month, while visiting the physical site on a regular basis. Building the model requires the designer to actually insert their head into the model from a visitor's point of view, then model abstract portions of the site through observation. Many times pieces are placed, glued, removed, and placed again multiple times before they reflect an abstract reality of the site conditions.

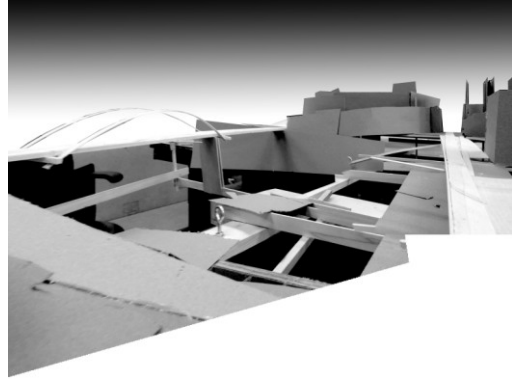


**Figure 4.3** Experiential Model of the Baltimore Site (Source: Author)

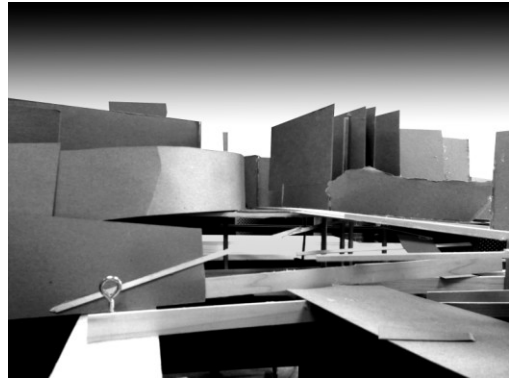


**Figure 4.4** Experiencing the Site Model (Source: Author)

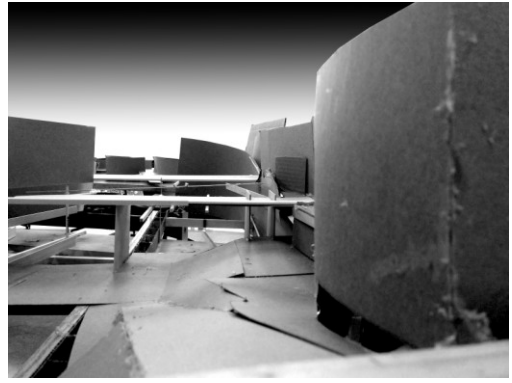
The final model was capable of being photographed and compared to direct photographs of the site. The results are abstractly similar, however, the model provides a vessel for placing your head directly into the site. By putting yourself in the model, the warped peripherals and depth perception of our eyes recreate the forces of the site; a feat photographs and conventional models cannot replicate.



**Figure 4.5** Site to Model Comparison at Street Grade (Source: Author)

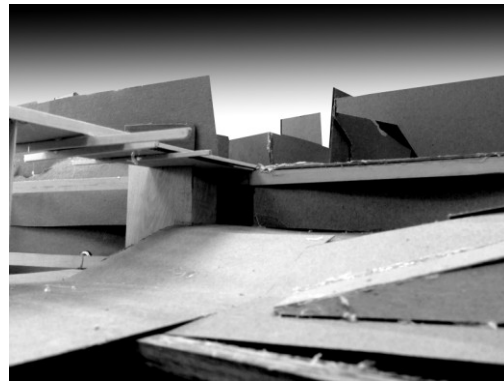


**Figure 4.6** Site to Model Comparison looking across the Valley (Source: Author)



**Figure 4.7** Site to Model Comparison walking down into the Valley (Source: Author)





**Figure 4.8** Site to Model Comparison at Valley Grade (Source: Author)



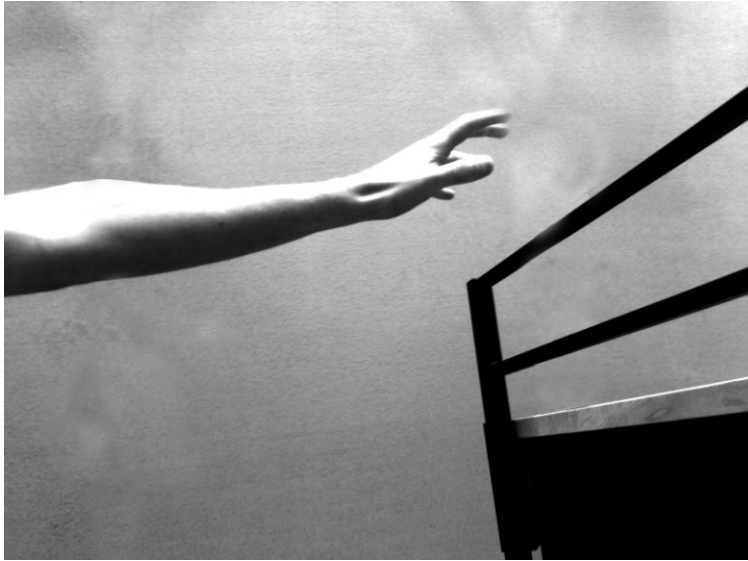
**Figure 4.9** Site to Model Comparison at Valley Grade (Source: Author)

## Chapter 5: The Project

### *Proposal*

In an attempt to amplify the ambiguity of the site, a proposal must reinforce continuities and discontinuities which simultaneously support contradicting interpretations of the spatial condition. Although a building is static in nature, the implied movement of the composition must seem in constant flux.

The form should generate a moment of tension amongst the spatial condition, similar to the moment when a person might take a leap of faith hoping to grasp a ledge beyond. This tension can be captured in a single-frame moment, when the reaching hand is near enough to the edge to almost touch, but is still far enough to fail. In terms of the site condition, the architecture must seem to be reaching out towards the opposite side of the valley, but fall short. Simultaneously, the architecture must be attempting to maintain the valley as a boundary. Perched upon the edge, another separate structure must be struggling to hold edge with the adjacent building context, but is slipping along the topography as well. Again, this static structure must seem to be in motion; teetering on the edge of holding ground or falling into the boundary.



**Figure 5.1** Tension in Reaching (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.2** Tension in Slipping (Source: Author)

## ***Program***

For the purposes of this exercise, the process will examine the role of housing in exploring the outlined principles. Residential communities are directly related to the site or place they are located in their social construct. Other forms of community, such as professional, religious, or online communities may or may not be less rooted in their physical architecture, but through other culturally organized interpretations. The unmistakable separation of the city blocks north and south of the Jones Falls Expressway, provides a distinctly unarguable fact of living on one side or the other. Exploring housing programs allows the existing conditioned of the site to be challenged directly. How do we create a residential component, which is unsure about its connection or separation from the community across the boundary?

Although other programmatic elements such as retail, may be included into the housing later, the primary exploration does not seek to be potentially further complicated by "destination" programs. "Destination programs" are those I consider to character a land-use, which people seek out to obtain services, entertainment, or resources beyond their home. These "destination programs" may include, but are not limited to, retail stores, libraries, schools, markets, museums, etc. "Destination programs" function through people visiting the destination, whether they reside within the destination's location or not. Although

these "destination programs" could promote the intermingling of people across a variety of backgrounds, the goal of the thesis is to address complexity through the manipulation of architectural forms and space, rather than the strategic placement of a service or institution. Housing consists of the resident belonging to a specific location, which can be directly questioned by the architectural form.

### ***Challenging Social Withdrawal within the Home***

The exploration should address the recognition of complexity at a multitude of scales. Thus far, the thesis has challenged the role of architectural form at the scale of the building and its relationship with the surrounding urban context. This process will also explore and challenge the social withdrawal at the residential unit and family scale as well.

In the *Uses of Disorder*, Richard Sennett continues to discuss the observable occurrence of social withdrawal carried through the perception of community into the culture of our homes. He describes that many of our families become intensely-driven, protecting themselves within the security of their homes, with the belief this structure can exist as a microcosm of the world. As we have gathered, only interaction with new complex experiences allow us to grow as

human-beings and an intense-family lifestyle seeks to avoid conditions beyond our comfort zones<sup>29</sup>.

Although we may be aware of this social-withdrawal in the structures of many suburban, single-family homes, our analysis of high-rise apartment housing proves density and proximity are the sole-culprits of the occurrence. Instead, it might be the privacy and boundaries between dwellings, which allow people to retreat from the rest of the world. The explorations should question the boundaries and spaces which typically divide our individual homes from one another in a community and an apartment building. What are the limitations of privacy and transparency between units? How does the architecture of the unit express their existence and complexity in relation to other occupants? These are only the beginnings of the possible questions to be explored to create tension and struggle to recognize the complexity within our communities.

### ***Logistics for Housing***

To fit the program appropriately within the surrounding context, the explorations will begin with a baseline target of approximately 60 - 80 units. The appropriateness of scale is important to the exploration to ensure the intervention becomes integrated within the current situation, rather than a distinctly other identity. The scale of the housing project

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<sup>29</sup> Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, 58-70.

must be large enough to create an impactful intervention, but also must be careful not to overshadow the surrounding communities. For instance, if the scale of the housing were to dramatically exceed the context of the site, the condition would become escalate from two abutting communities to three; side "a", side "b", and the skyscraper.

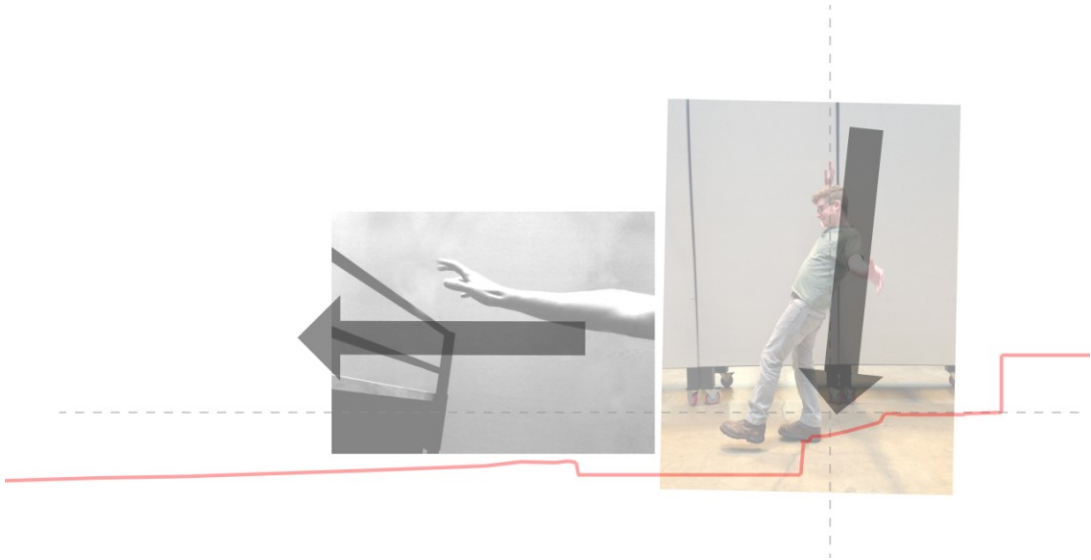
Although the explorations will seek to challenge some of the standard spatial conditions of housing, the project will require many of the typical amenities and spaces necessary for contemporary city-life. However, the intervention will not seek a utopian-ideal apparent in projects such as Le Corbusier's Unite d'habitation, to provide all the amenities and needs necessary for life. Residential units will be challenged to recognize, rather than thwart complexity, but otherwise may continue to manipulate typical sizing and amenities for one, two, and three-bedroom apartments. Expected facilities and amenities for contemporary housing should be provided, including laundry facilities, transportation access, street-access, parking, concierge and administrative offices. Of course, mechanical, infrastructure, service, and egress spaces must be incorporated into the building as necessary. Open-spaces may be incorporated into the housing project, providing a unique and pleasant outdoor connection with the city's transportation infrastructure and natural valley condition.

## ***Process***

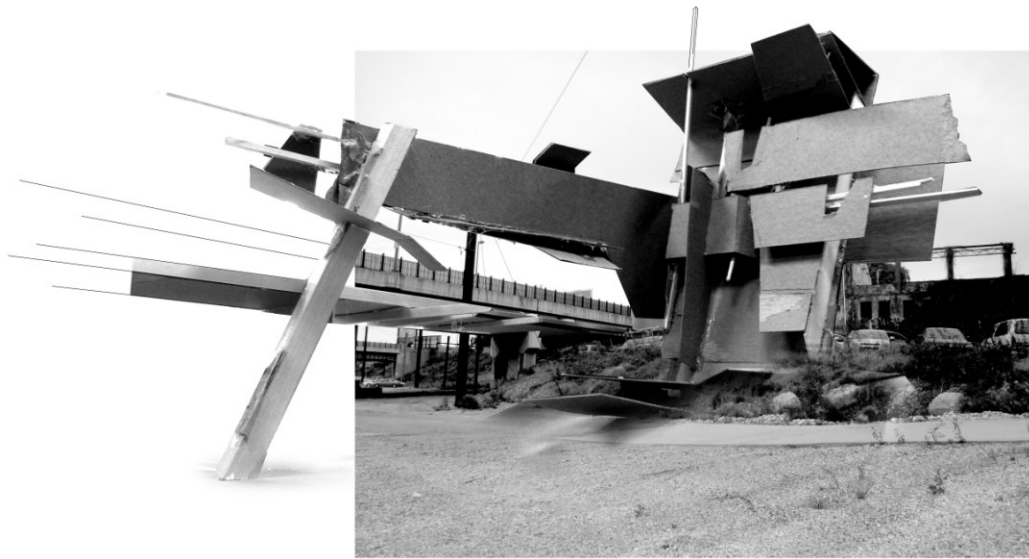
Traditional design methods reinforce boundaries through the support of apparent continuities and discontinuities in space. The proposal for exploration is not necessarily challenging the means of developing continuities and discontinuities, but where and when they are implemented. For the purposes of the thesis, the underlying process for generating architectural form is no different from typical design development. However, applying the process to all forces and conditions of the site requires immediate iteration and feedback within the site.

Utilizing the experiential site model in a similar fashion to the methods it was built, the designer may place their in the model at multiple locations to design. The designer can quickly iterate, analyze, rework, and develop a design within the abstracted site. The result of multiple explorations is an abstract diagram of the form, which may be further developed into architecture through more conventional methods.

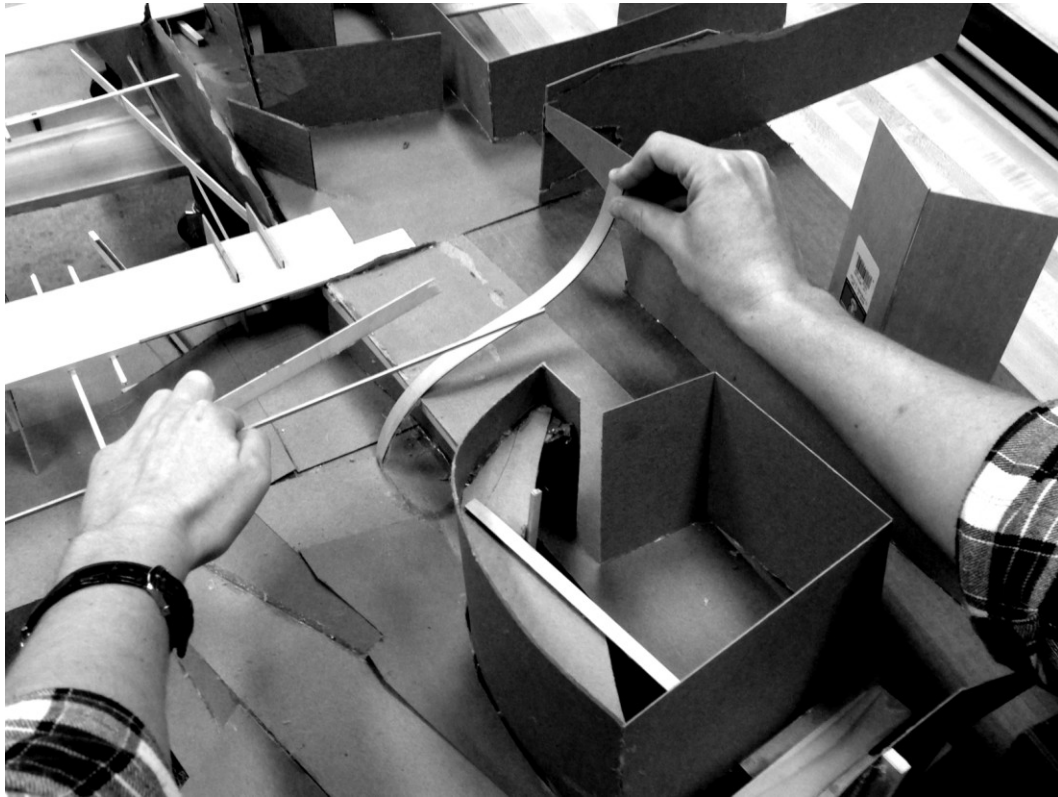




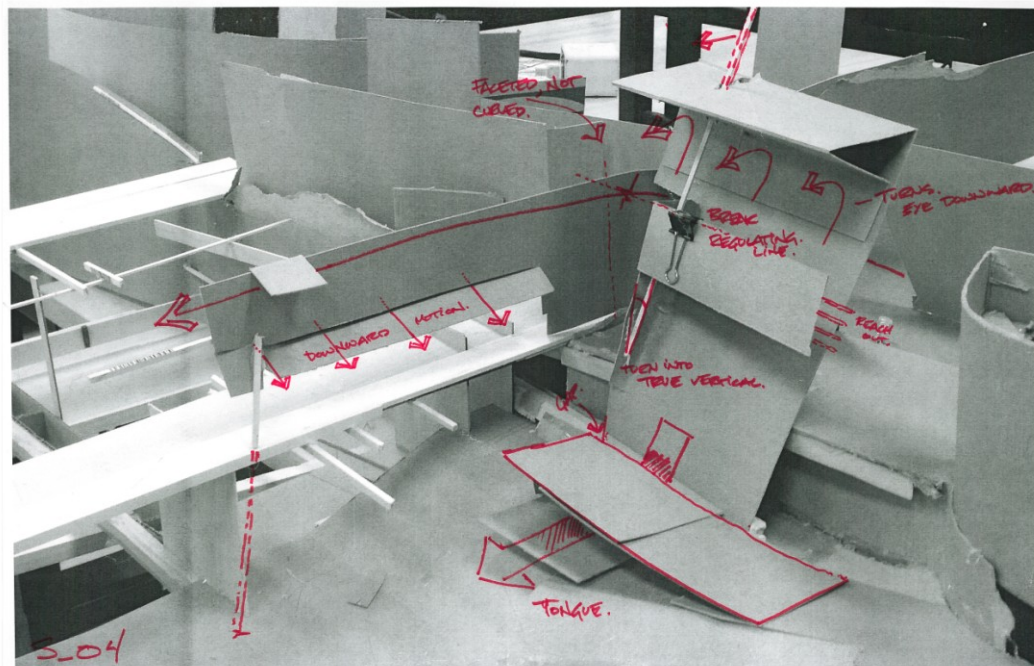
**Figure 5.3** Tension in Reaching (Source: Author)



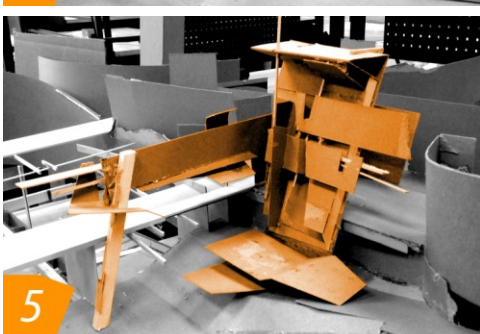
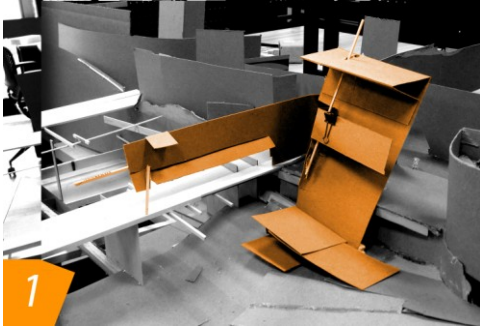
**Figure 5.4** Tension in Reaching (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.5** Designing within the Experiential Model  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 5.6** Record of Analyzing Formal Diagram  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 5.7** Development of Formal Diagram  
(Source: Author)

## ***Proposed Design***

The proposed design presents the architecture conventionally through four levels of elevation; +55', +35', +20', and +10'. The purpose of this arrangement is to show the varying levels carried through the topography in relation to the surrounding context. At each of these levels and in-between, the design suggests multiple interpretations of continuities and discontinuities in three-dimensions. Responding directly to the conditions and context of the site, the design is best presented in the moments of experiencing architecture within the surrounding context.

### ***+55' Elevation***

At the highest elevation, the structure maintains the continuity of built form which reaches across the valley. Although the existing condition of the valley creates a void in the building context, the intervention continues a perception of the city continues without disturbance. Essentially, north of the valley along Calvert Street, the intervention seems to be simply an urban infill project. However, walking further south as the topography begins to slope, a more complex situation is revealed.

### ***+35' Elevation***

When adjacent to the intervention, +35' occurs at street grade and continues along the bridges spanning the valley. At this moment one aspect of the structure is raised on piloti and it is understood that what

seemed to be simple urban infill is actually floating overhead. Additionally, this arm, which seemed to be spanning completely across the valley and bridging the urban gap is actually falling short but more than half the valley. Located at the edge of built form along the north side, the second structure seems to be slipping into the valley, but leaning back to maintain its footing. As the building struggles to maintain a certain identity, the lower worlds of the city are beginning to become apparent.

### ***+20' Elevation***

This level of elevation is not quite the bottom of the valley, but is underneath the bridges. Units are also located at this level, providing a unique perspective in-between the city and valley worlds. Most of the tension of the architecture occurs at this point, as the building fights to establish an identity with the multiple communities transitioning at this elevation.

### ***+10' Elevation***

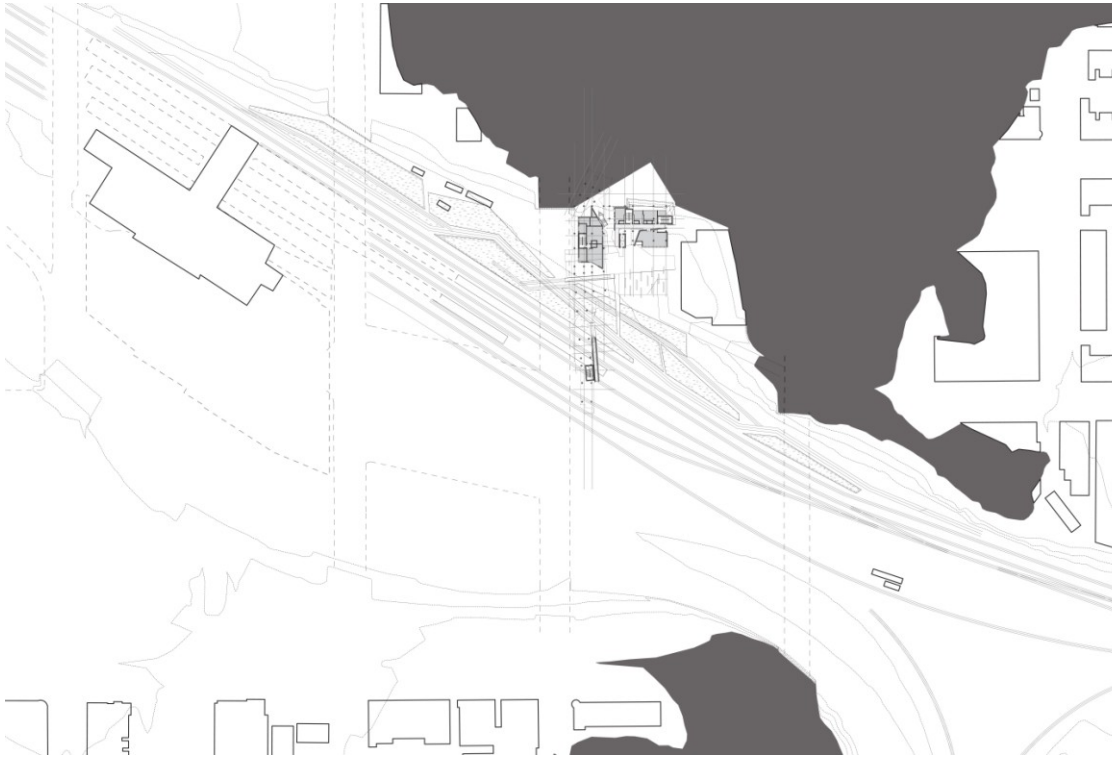
The lowest portion of the design develops a linear park, which parallels the railroad and the valley spatial forces. The park continues many blocks beyond the building site to reinforce the strong continuity of the valley. Units, underground parking, and a restaurant occupy this region, providing more suburban characteristics of space within the city.



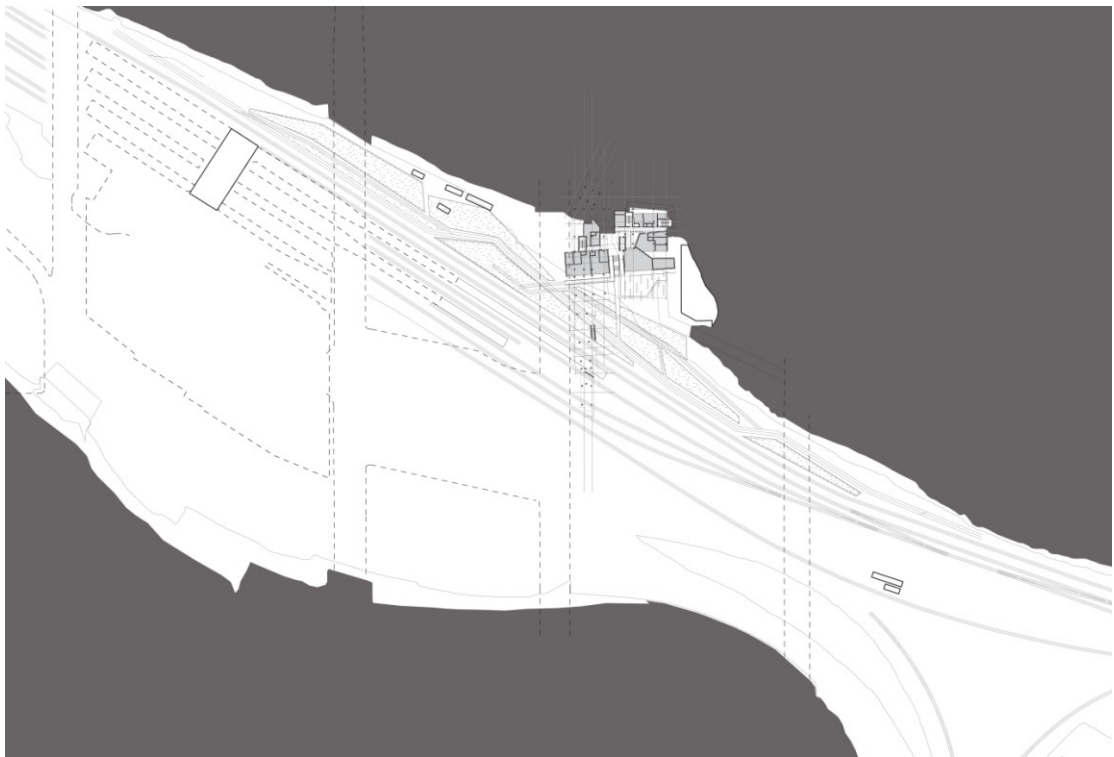
**Figure 5.8** +55' Urban Site Plan (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.9** +35' Urban Site Plan (Source: Author)



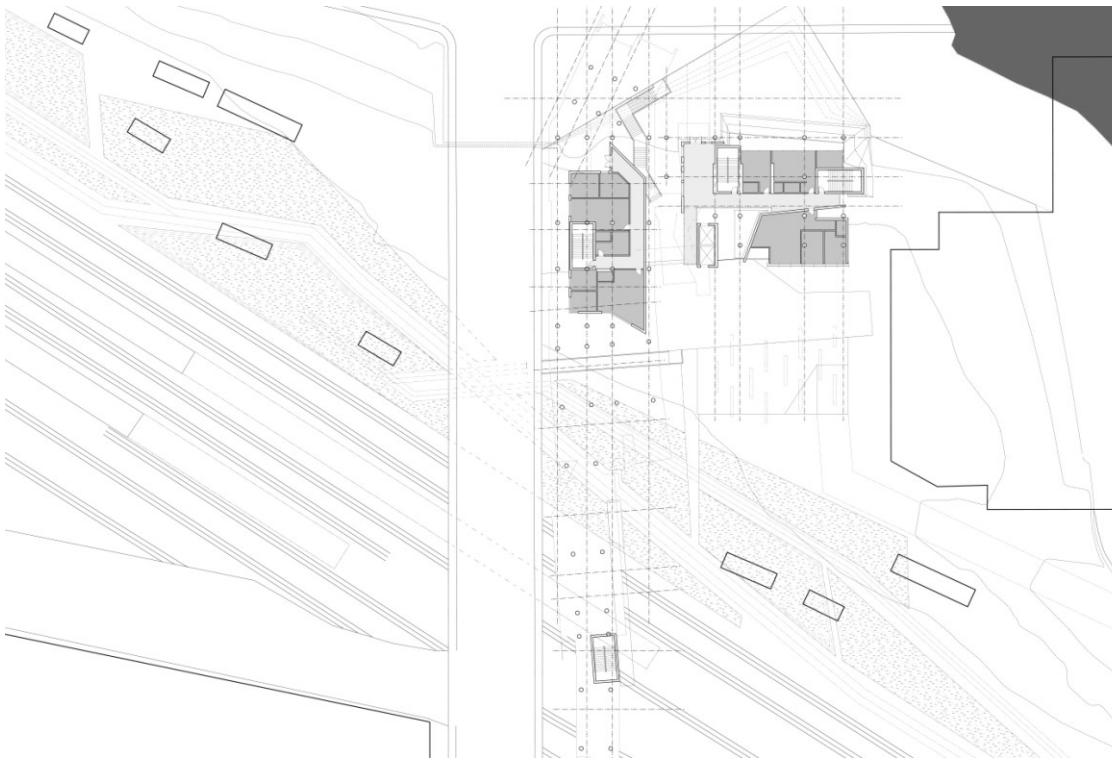
**Figure 5.10** +20' Urban Site Plan (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.11** +10' Urban Site Plan (Source: Author)

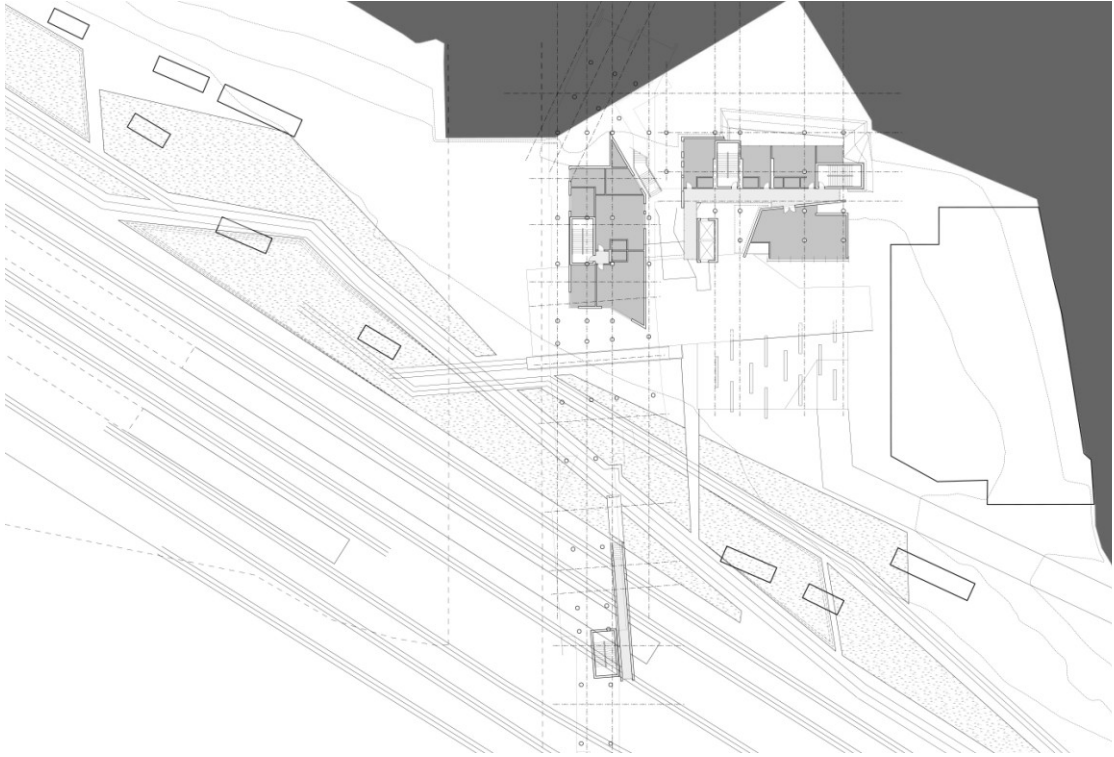


**Figure 5.12** +55' Building Plan (Source: Author)

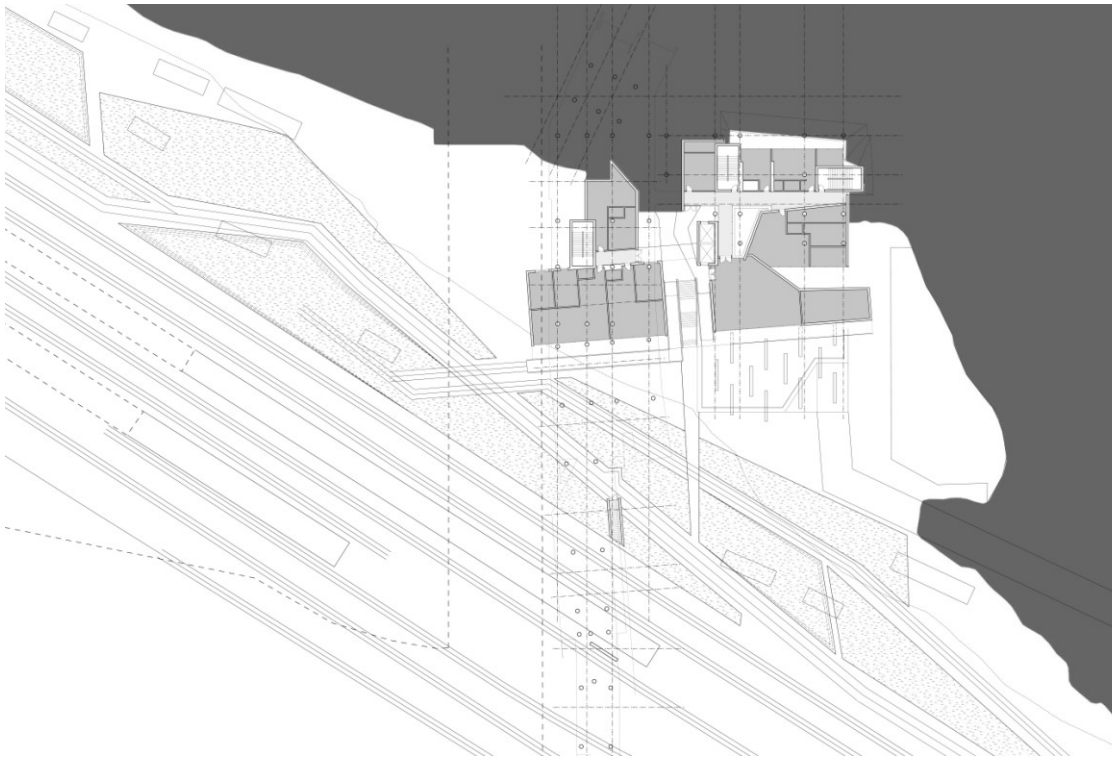


**Figure 5.13** +35' Building Plan (Source: Author)

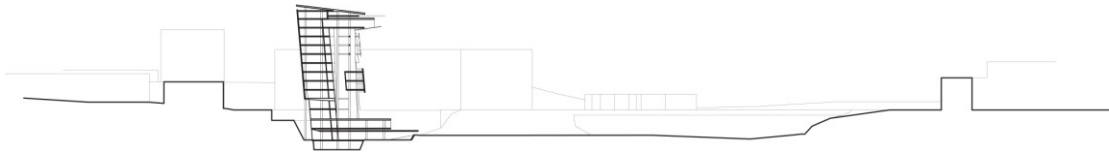




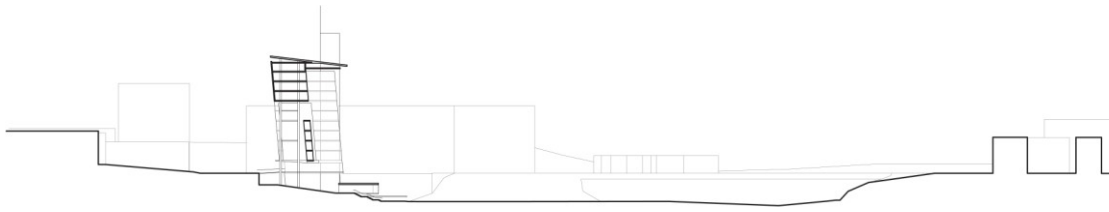
**Figure 5.14** +20' Building Plan (Source: Author)



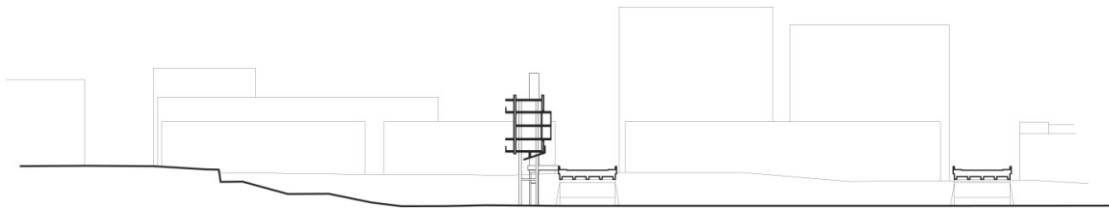
**Figure 5.15** +10' Building Plan (Source: Author)



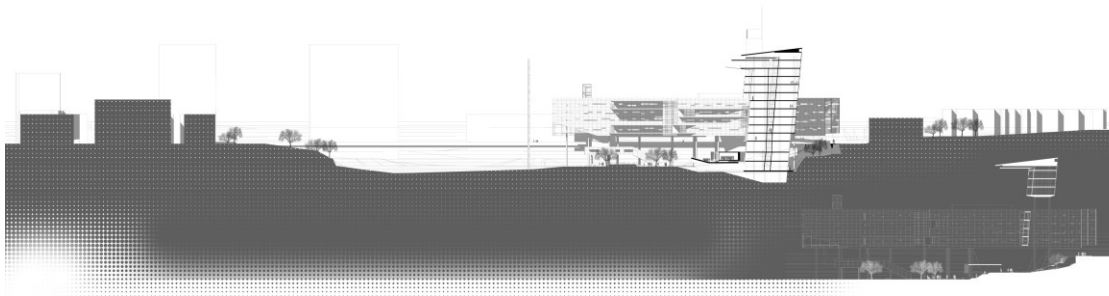
**Figure 5.16** Section through East Building (Source: Author)



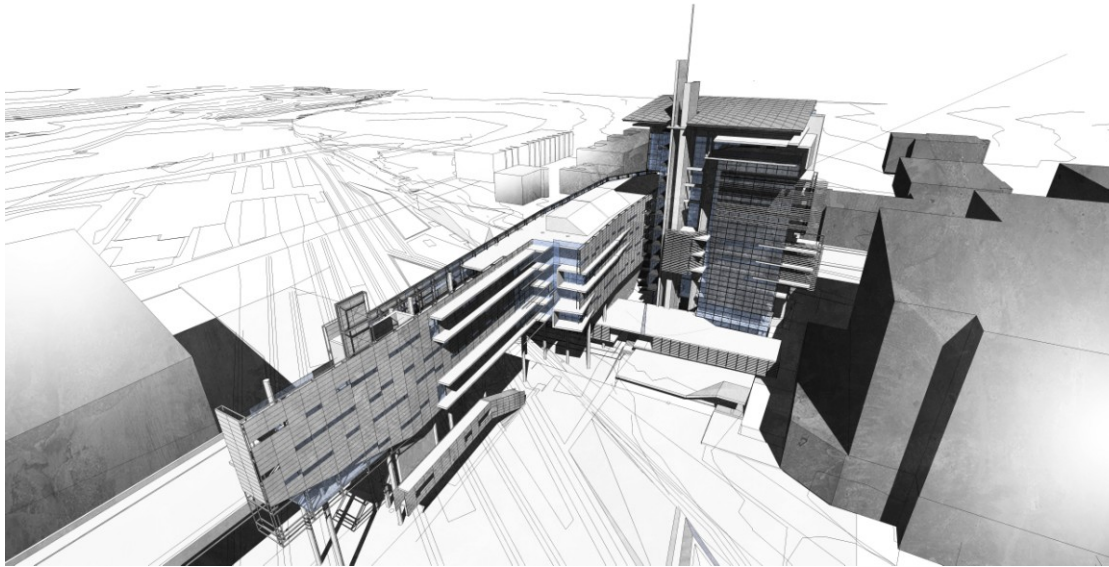
**Figure 5.17** Section in-between East and West Building (Source: Author)



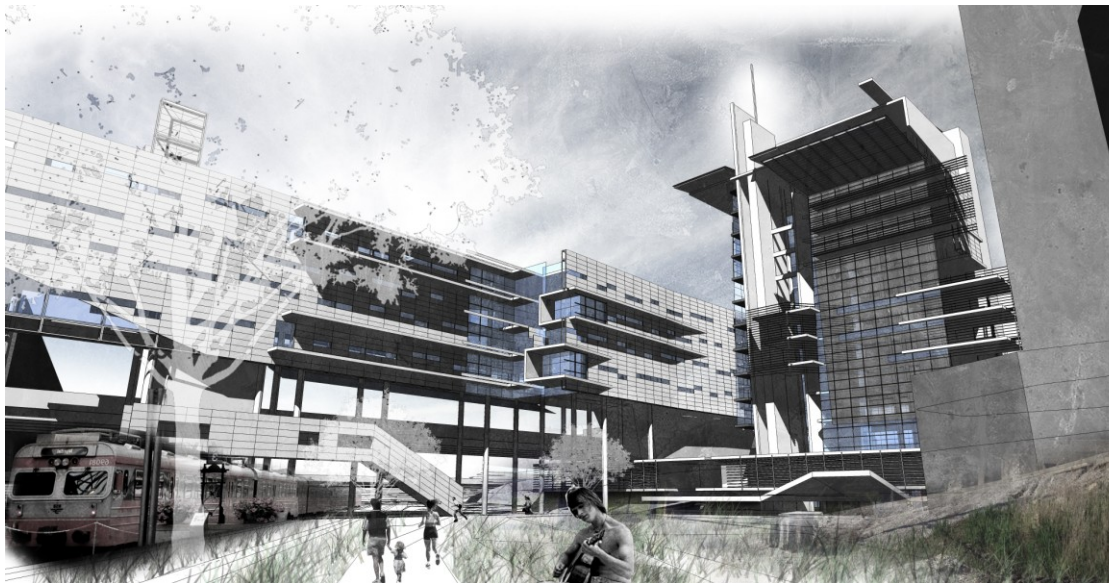
**Figure 5.18** East-West Section along Valley (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.19** North-South Section across Valley (Source: Author)



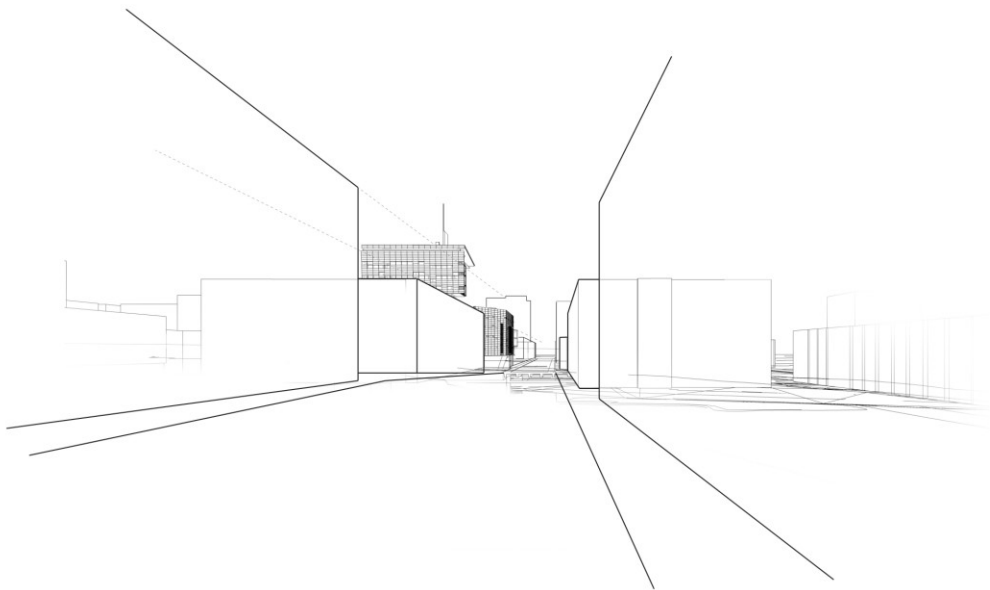
**Figure 5.20** Overall Aerial Perspective (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.21** View from within the Valley Park (Source: Author)



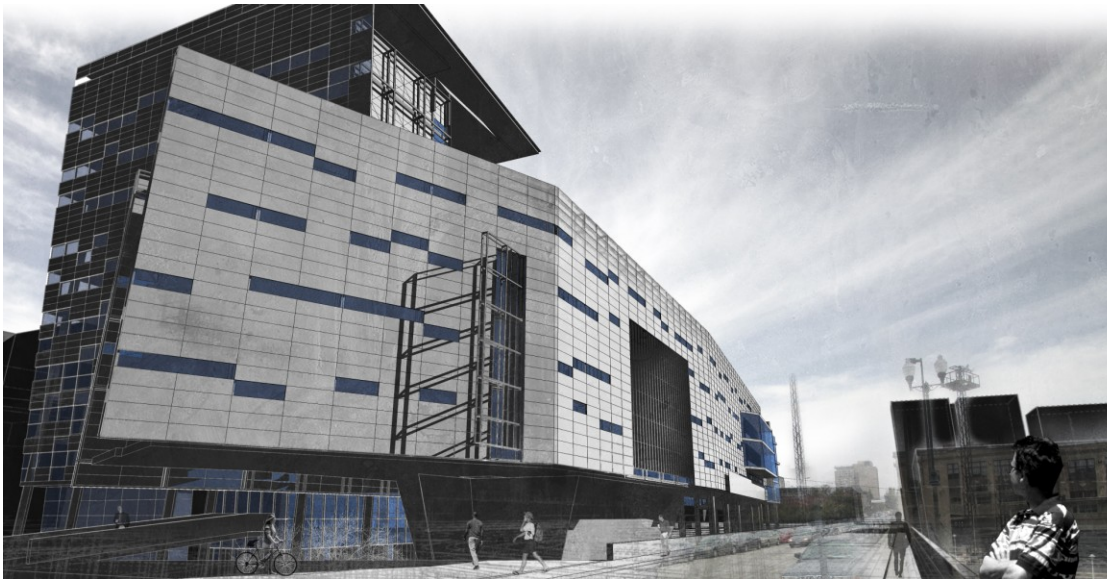
**Figure 5.22** Existing View North along Calvert St. (Source: Author)



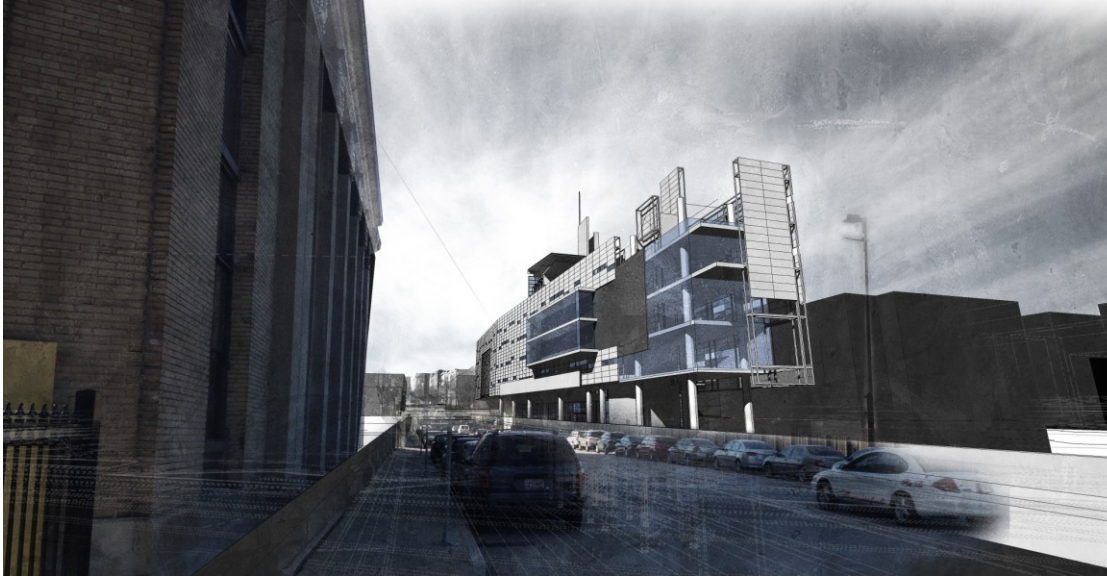
**Figure 5.23** Continuity Diagram of Intervention along Calvert St. (Source: Author)



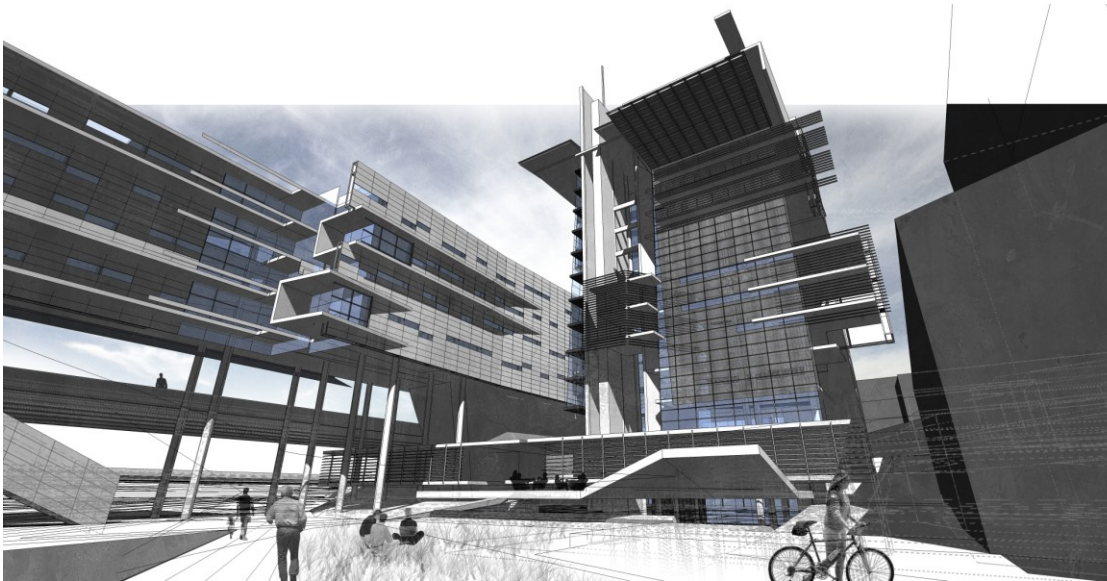
**Figure 5.24** +55' Proposed Intervention along Calvert St. (Source: Author)



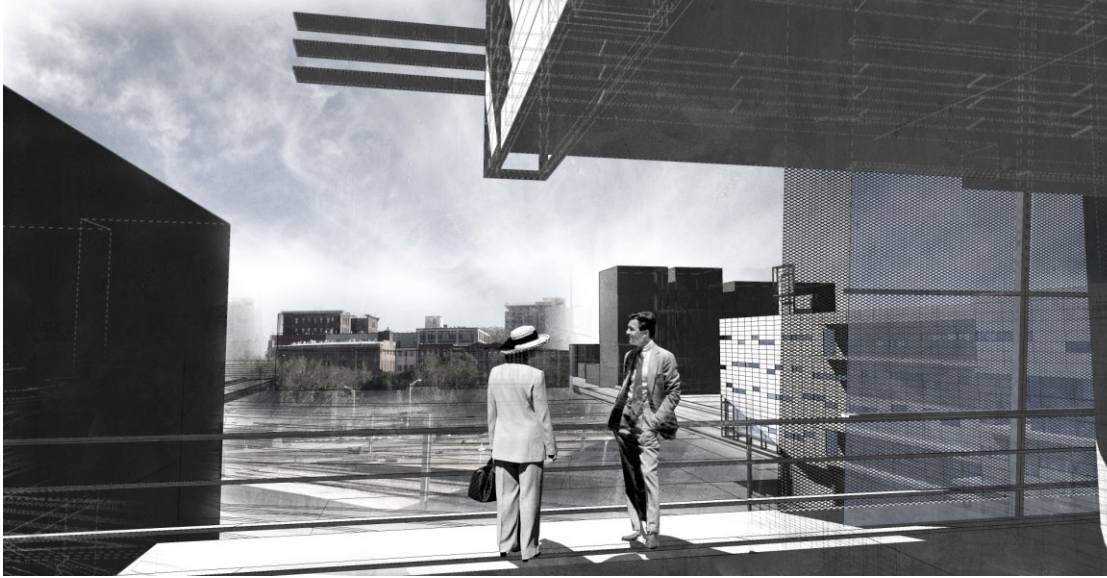
**Figure 5.25** +35' View along Calvert St. approaching the Valley (Source: Author)



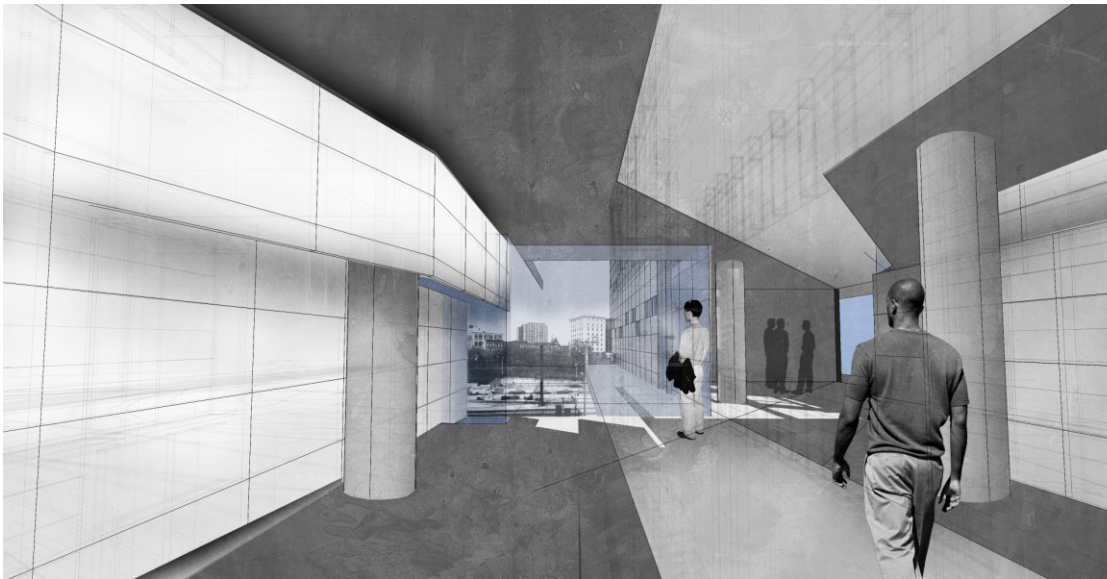
**Figure 5.26** +35' View along the Calvert St. Bridge looking North.  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 5.27** +10' View within the Valley (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.28** View from Balcony Unit (Source: Author)



**Figure 5.29** Interior View of Spatial Contradiction (Source: Author)

## Chapter 6: Afterword

Communities are established through the structuring and ordering process applied by our culture and institutions. Communities rely on boundaries and spatial separation of opposition to promote a state of identity. This thesis does not argue that communities in themselves are to avoided, for communities are often great places and organizations where people feel comfortable. The argument simply suggests communities dissect the complexity of their surroundings to make itself apparent and true. The purpose of the exploration was to develop a means of contextualism, which more appropriately addresses the complexities of our built and natural world. With this method of thinking, the heterotopias people often avoid or designate as boundaries may be realized for potential opportunities.

The final proposal is realized in a relatively radical, architectural form. It is important to note that the underlying research, process, and proposal is not an argument about style. Looking-back upon what was learned, the proposal may be achieved through a more moderate style of architecture, without losing its provocative challenge to the understanding of our boundaries. The primary concern of the exploration was to develop an architecture that formally responded to the urban context. With further development, the program of the



building would be taken into much more consideration and the role of the unit further developed.

However, the proposal raises several questions remaining unanswered and unexplored. What does this research mean for the future of architecture, especially along the invasive boundaries of freeways and infrastructure that carve through our cities? Designers are constantly engaging in the conversation of how to resolve the freeway situation through cities, often turning buildings' backs upon these routes. But the freeways, man-made topography, and infrastructure has all become part of the essential context to the complex and living city. We must somehow coexist with these elements in order to progress. The question is how will designers realize potential in these complex sites and heterotopias?

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