



The city through the lens

Trish Geraghty

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The City through the lens

Trish Geraghty



What is it about the city that draws me to photograph it? Is it that the people that live in it don't see it? Or is it me trying to portray it so that the beauty that I see is available and appreciated by others. I have taken thousands of photographs, but only a tiny fraction of which come close to achieving this portrayal. I trust intuition, I don't question why I raise the camera to my eye, I see something, and it may not make any sense until it is framed, composed or seen without so many contexts.

What does the photograph do to the image of the city? Can it change what I see, or how I see it? The rural landscape has been portrayed in a romantic light for centuries; its beauty has been well documented. But why are rural scenes far more likely to be framed and displayed? Is it that people find them more relaxing, whereas the urban is too stimulating. Are rural images a form of escapism? Liz Wells states "By the nineteenth century "landscape" also stood as an antidote for the visual and social consequences of the industrialisation, offering a view of nature as therapeutic, a pastoral release from commerce and industry"ⁱ

But what of the urban landscape? This is portrayed as a place of dirt and grime, a place not worthy of respectable habitation. How can we change this? The photos I have chosen to show are real, they are not altered to soften or exaggerate the light. I continue to photograph Limerick city, I wander the streets looking for something of interest, a detail perhaps that tells a story, not particularly of histories past but of how the light reflects off a surface, or how direct sunlight highlights the materials that make up the city. In the book *Thinking Photography* Victor Burgin says: "Photographs permeate the environment, facilitating the formation/ reflection/ inflection of what we take for granted"ⁱⁱ

The following selection of photographs all tell something of the city, a story, but only a fragment not the whole. Figure 1, Gerald Griffin St. shows the materiality and colour of Limerick. The car gives it a scale, not only in relation to the surrounding buildings but in depth of the scene. The light in this photograph highlights the buildings surfaces; their texture and colour give an air of vibrancy. The shadows tell the direction of the light but these also tell something of what is out of the frame. (In appendix 1 I have included a photo essay, where I explore Limerick and its fringes and try to tell its story.)

How many of Limerick's inhabitants have never walked the city like I have, most simply move from point A to point B in cars, seeing no reason to deviate from a well worn route. On my journeys I look to discover something I have not seen before, it may be a small detail, that one thing that catches my eye; it is not the main focus of the shot, but something off to the side or hidden among everything else. Liz Wells in her book *Photography: A Critical Introduction* mentions Edward Weston a landscape photographer who "sought clarity of form and extolled the camera for its depth of focus and its ability to see more than the human eye."ⁱⁱⁱ The camera suspends time, giving the eye a chance to catch-up on what is to see.

John Berger discusses the role of the image in the visual language of recent society in his book *Ways of Seeing* "we are now so accustomed to begin address by these images that we scarcely notice their total impact"^{iv}. The constant bombardment on the eyes of images has made it difficult to discern one from the other. To be noticed an image must be seen in some form of isolation, or be so forceful in its message, that it evokes a reaction from the viewer.



Fig. 1. Gerald Grittin st, Authors own, 2014

Having looked closely at the urban environment, I have come to appreciate the aesthetic of the city. It is not a landscape of emptiness or one of cleanliness. I'm not interested in the touristic view of the castles, churches or stadiums; they show a iconic view, but it is the everyday living and working environment that attracts me, this is constantly changing and evolving, not only in the things that have been built but also how they are been inhabited. I am also interested in the features that can be seen but aren't noticed, the things that happen on the periphery. The dictionary defines peripheral vision as "all that is visible to the eye outside the central area of focus"^v. These are such things as obstacles we navigate around or traces of recent past inhabitation, and even how people interact with each other and their surroundings. The perception of the city changes as these features are highlighted and this will allow an alternative reading of the city. The photograph becomes a tool for recording traces of people and the histories of the city before their stories fade. Roland Barthes says: "The photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been"^{vi}.

In her book *On photography* (1977) Susan Sontag writes: "Photography gave a tremendous boost to the cognitive claims of sight, because – through close-up and remote sensing – it has greatly enlarged the realm of the visible."^{vii} It's through photography that I have come to see the world differently and especially the city in a broader way. Photography gives you a alternative view, one which is framed and cropped to the liking of the photographer, it is something that they have glimpsed and been drawn to. Photography also allows you to capture a moment, a memory, the evidence of this moment could last much longer than one's life time and certainly well after the moment has passed. The photograph allows you unlimited time to examine what is framed within it, to assess and to notice what may have been previously overlooked.

I am interested in seeing what is on the bounds of visible and what is ignored, to see the extraordinary contained within the ordinary. Susan Sontag proposes that "Photographic seeing meant an aptitude for discovering beauty in what everybody sees but neglects as too ordinary"^{viii}. I will examine the city through the lens, looking not only at the built environment and the things that surround us, but also look at how people live in it. The life of the city is the people and how we relate to each other in it, is its story. People live behind screens and filters; this is what is seen from the street. We filter our lives from others to differing degrees, we control their own view-ability, and we protect our own privacy.

Our perception of things is informed by what we think we know, but there may be many different ways of seeing the same thing. When things are pointed out or we take the time to really look at something our perception will change or be strengthened. The next step in my examination in how things are seen, I begin with a zoomed in view showing how the perception of an object can change with the scale at which it is viewed. How the city is perceived and how it is photographed is next to be discussed, which leads into the highlighting of traces left behind, these tell the story of the space's inhabitation. The *Unnoticed* looks at how we have encounters everyday with people and things that barely register with us. From here I have looked at how objects and places are interpreted differently by different people; no two views are the same. This then opens the discussion about the constant tension between public and private in the city and how its inhabitants create a threshold between the two. Finally I look at how a city is seen by an outsider in particular Thomas Struth, and how he interprets it through photographs.

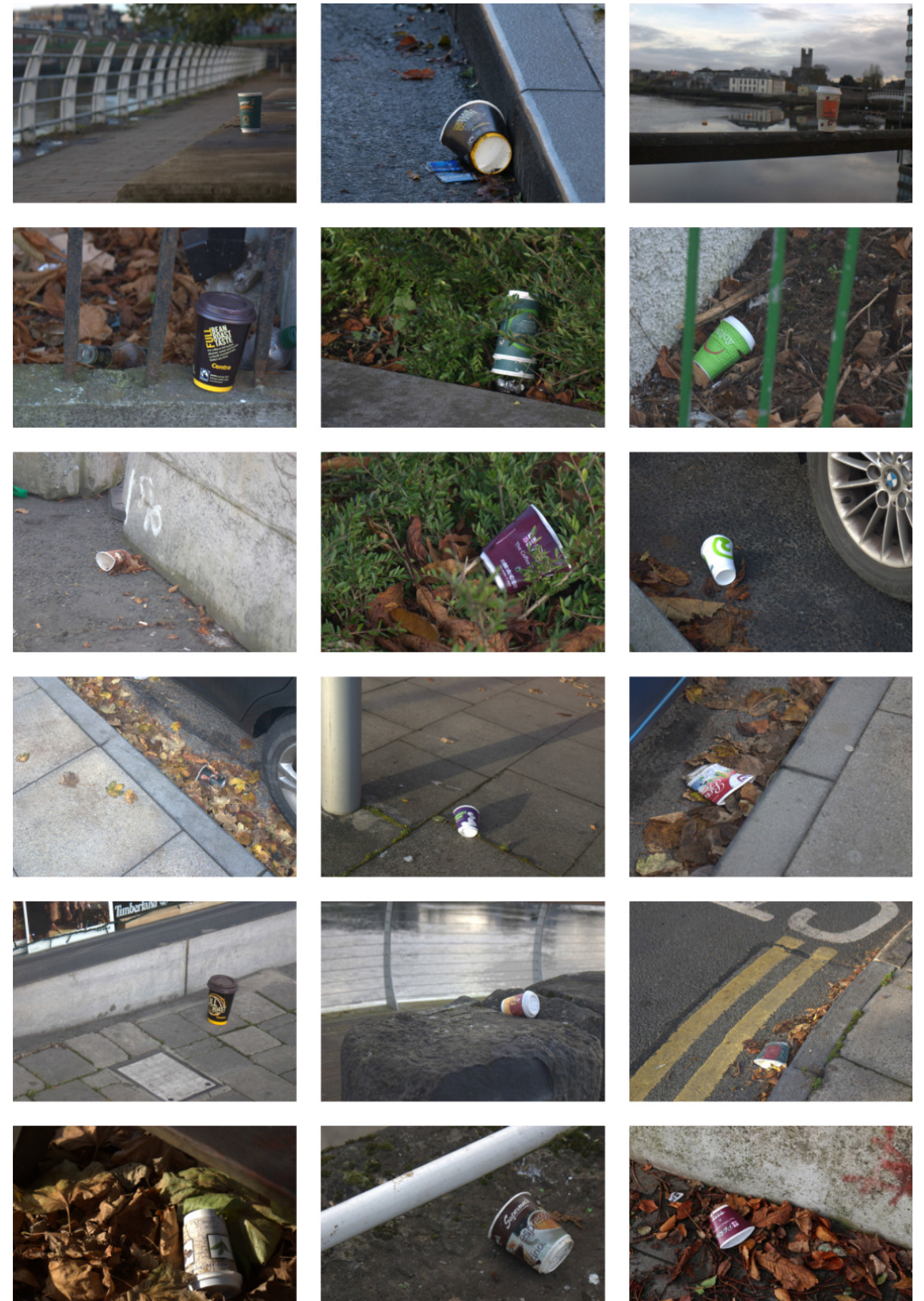


Fig. 2 Limerick Coffee Cups, Authors own, 2013-2014

Close-up Photography

Close-up photography looks for the beauty in everyday objects, something you may have seen countless times before, but you only just realised its close up beauty; it tells the story of the structure and how the object really is. When I think of the way macro photography has changed the way that I perceive something, I think of the egg. The following two photographs (fig 3&4), show how the perception of an object can change dramatically at different scales; an ordinary object like an egg which you have seen a thousand times before, which seems so solid is actually porous, with a fibrous structure. Susan Sontag tells us at the time in which close up photography was de-familiarising everyday objects; “photography seemed to have found its grandiose role, as the bridge between art and science”^{ix}. The close-up view was the view of science explaining how things worked, but at the same time these views were abstract and beautiful making them works of art in their own right.

When macro photography became the fashion it changed how we saw things, Susan Sontag states:

“When ordinary seeing was further violated - and the object isolated from its surroundings, rendering it abstract – a new convention about what was beautiful took hold. What is beautiful became just what the eye can’t see; that fracturing, dislocating vision that only the camera supplies”^x.

In an architectural sense of how we read the city, close-up photography highlights what makes up the city. It can show the materiality, and it tells us something of how the city is made. It can tell you the character of an object, a surface or even a street. Figure 5 shows us something of the materiality of Limerick; it’s a section of footpath, it shows the wear of time on the surface. With this form of photography I question the whole by interrogating its parts. Breaking something down, looking more closely at one thing without the distraction of everything else around it.

I believe everything exists in context, but close up photography looks only at a fragment; it removes the context making the object seem alien. All photographs are fragments of the world, in architecture we use fragments as inspiration. We use pieces of other places in the design of new spaces. Photographs help the architect’s project into the future; we imagine the spaces we want to create, as a new image forms in our mind we are pulling together fragments of things we have seen before, whether this is through experience or through photographs. They are visual references, we accumulate these images not only in our mind’s eye but physically on pin boards and in files waiting for an opportunity to bring them into play.

Even if a building is broken down and the pieces alone appreciated, when these pieces are brought together the camera may not be able to capture the sense of the space or how complex their relationship is to each other. It is this relationship that leads on to how photography may not tell the whole story, only a fragment of it; there are many buildings that never make it to a wider audience because they do not photograph well.



Fig. 3 Egg with the naked eye. 2009

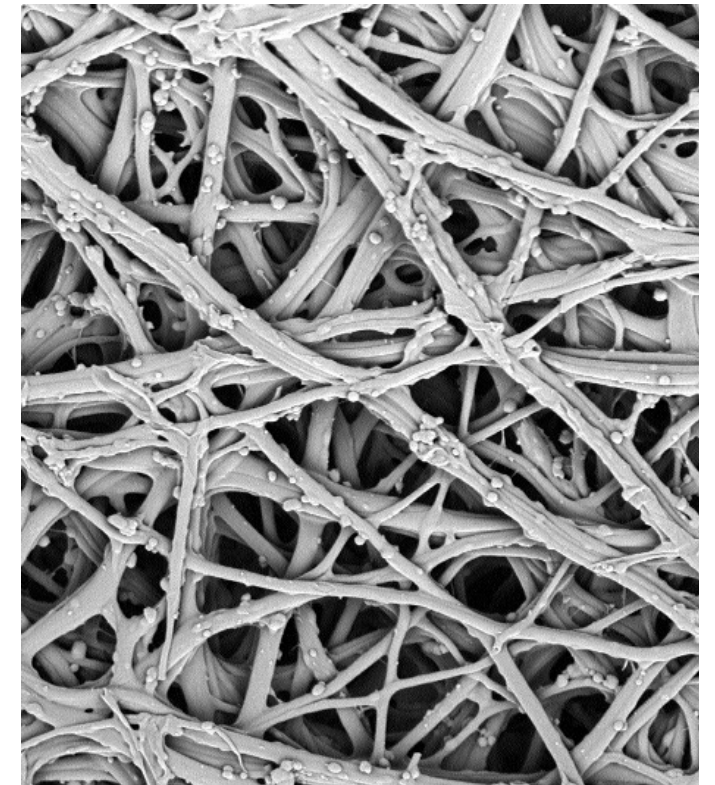


Fig. 4 Egg under microscope



Fig. 5 Footpath showing the wear and corrosion that time brings.
Mallow Street, Limerick, Authors own, 2013

Photographic portrayal of space

Can a photograph tell the whole story of the city; can it address all of the senses? It is only a fragment, no edges can be shown but at the same time completely contained within frame.

In Juhani Pallasmaa's book *The Eyes of the Skin* he discusses the dominance of the visual in society, and photography is a purely visual sense, but he does state "Vision reveals what the touch already knows. We could think of the sense of touch as the unconscious of vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience."^{xi} He goes to explain this statement in terms of art "we do feel the warmth of the water in the bathtub in Pierre Bonnard's paintings of bathing nudes and the moist air of Turner's landscapes and we can sense the heat of the sun and the cool breeze in Matisse's paintings of windows open to a view of the sea."^{xii} Like the above mentioned paintings, some photographs can tell you part of the story, e.g. *Windows thrown open* in a night-time shot tells you something of the temperature, or how the light reflects off a surface hints as to its smooth surface. Can the camera portray the sense of a space - how it makes you feel. We can use photography to show others what the space is like in form and function, and we can hint at what the space may feel like. If the person has experienced the space in the past, the photograph can remind them of the sensations that they felt at that time, sometimes temporally transporting them back into that space.

Andrew Higgott and Timothy Wray, in the book *Camera Constructs* question whether architectural photography can replace experience; they state, "...it is all but taken for granted that a series of photographs of a building can make sense of and adequately represent the complex experience of encountering and occupying architecture"^{xiii}. They also discuss that the buildings that do not photograph well do not get any coverage in magazines, they may be very good buildings and have complex spaces that just cannot be portrayed successfully by the camera; so these buildings may never be brought to a wider audience's attention or are quickly forgotten by people who have not actually experienced them first hand.

Architects have a certain amount of control over the photographs released of their new buildings. They tell us only the story the architect wants us to see. Robert Elwall in his book *Building with Light*, discusses the relationship between the photographer and architect "At their best such relationships become creative partnerships that led to a deeper understanding of the architecture portrayed; at their worst they smacked of censorial control that raised fundamental questions about the role and independence of the photographer"^{xiv}. Elwall later states "Photography has become too important to be left to the photographer alone"^{xv}, the photographer may come up with a more interesting way of showing a project. As an outsider brought in at the last moment, he or she comes with a fresh set of eyes, a new perspective, one which is not influenced by the histories of the building. the photographer Thomas Struth does this in relation to cities, he looks from the outside in, with distance and objectivity (ideas I will discuss later on).

In the terms of the city, can it be said that the only cities that are celebrated are the ones that photograph well? How do we see the city? for me the next step is to examine how photographer David Grandorge has categorised the city environments into six defined conditions. By using these we can evaluate the cities that we inhabit, defining spaces will make us really see them, fitting them into one category or other. One photograph may not be able to tell the whole story of the city, but a series of them over varied conditions may give you a more realistic sense of the environment.



Fig. 6 Hanging gardens, Henry Street, Limerick. 2013. Author's own

City Conditions

The artist David Grandorge has defined six city photographic conditions, the building portrait, the territory space and periphery, the street, the internal street, the city from above and the night-time.

When I imagine a city I usual think of an image contained within one of the above categories, when I experience a new space I find myself questioning which one it belongs to, some spaces belong to more than one, and on the odd occasion don't seem to fit easily into any.

The building portrait focuses only on one structure, whether it is shown in context or not, it is where our eye rests. Figure 7 Geneva XI is by Grandorge, he shows this building face-on, we cannot tell anything of its depth, just what the facade shows. It stands proud of its context; we can tell it's on a corner site, with the river Rhone to the front and what seems to be a square to the side. It is a slightly overcast day, so there is a low contrasts to the shadows on the gridded facade. The greyness seems clean and crisp maybe because we compare it to the warm stone of its neighbours. When I first look at this photograph I see the grid, but then I started to notice the varieties contained within it; the way the blinds have been moved or damaged from one section to another. Figure 8 is my own photograph, taken in Limerick at dusk, but the building outline is still clear and it still stands apart from its context. The photograph is shot to express the three dimensions of the structure and its corner location.

The periphery is the edges and gaps of a city, the non-places, and the overlooked. The two example (Figures 9&10), I have chosen are both gaps in the city fabric. Hackney Rd. III by Grandorge shows a nearly empty site; locked against the city but it is still visible to it. The materiality is one of twisted metal and sagging roofs, this is in contrast to the clean and crisp footpath that abuts it. My photography is of Davis St. Lane, this space is surrounded by the backs of other buildings, it's main function is to access these buildings back yards. The materiality of this space has a roughness to it, the corrugated metal and the uneven walls add a great deal of texture. The person and the car act as scalable items, they also allow us to judge the depth of the space. This is the place within the city that has more interesting features or moments; it is where materials clash, textures of different surface planes collide. It is the undulating matter that tells the story of the city, the materials used over time.

The street is where the voids cut through the solid, this type of photograph places the viewer in the void surrounded by forms. Figure 11, Paris XVII is shot from a central viewpoint, standing at street level. There are a few people and cars included in the shot, but they do not crowd it. On the left hand side of the shot the buildings continue from background to foreground without interruption, but on the right the building line is broken by the merging of another street; this opens up the shot allowing more room to breathe. The street continues into the far off distance, giving the shot a very clear vanishing point. This shot like the photographs of Thomas Struth that I will examine in a later section, has a lot of detail, it doesn't let the eye rest on any particular area, and it is constantly moving over the details searching. My photograph of this condition (figure 12), is of Catherine St. Limerick, it has a similar viewpoint, centred and at street level, but the scale of the street is much smaller, the sunlight is at a similar direction. The vanishing point is not as clear or as powerful, there are a lot of cars and wires which distracts the eye from the build environment. The reflectiveness of the cars is not something that I expected when I took the shot, but this is another feature that reduces the buildings to the background; they look matt surfaces with nothing to offer.

David Grandorge Building Portrait



Figure 7 Geneva XI, 2013



Figure 8 Dominican Research Centre, Cecil St., Limerick, 2007

The territory space and periphery



Figure 9 Hackney Rd. III, 2011



Figure 10 Davis St Lane, Limerick, 2013

The Street



Figure 11 Paris XVII, 2013



Figure 12 Catherine St., Limerick, 2013

David Grandorge
The internal street

The internal street is a cave like environment, again surrounded but this time also covered. Figure 13 Eveux III is of La Tourette by Le Corbusier taken by Grandorge in 2008. The covered street like condition is glazed to one side; it is still enclosed but flooded with light. The roof steps down creating a darkening affect, cave like atmosphere. The columns and the legs of the benches create a rhythm, the eye moves along the objects as they create a path. Figure 14 is of Rheims Cathedral, I took this in 2011, the cloister is a condition that is open to the air but it is enclosed space. I have included it in this condition of the internal street because it forms a threshold between inside and out; it can be both or part of either. You are surrounded on all sides but there are gaps, you may not be able to see them but you know their location due to the light. There is a rhythm to the columns and the arches like the buildings do in the condition of the street, this creates the strong feeling of perspective.

The city from above is the elevated or aerial shot; this gives an overall view helping to give the city a shape, but this also maps the streets and gives the pattern of the streets within the shape; this is shown in figures 15 & 16. In both of these photographs shown something of the patterns contained within the shape of the cities in which they are taken, Lagos and Belfast. In my Belfast overview shot the chimneys indicate the pattern of the street; they are all at relatively the same height and are made of the same material, so their paths (and therefore the streets) are identifiable. The market in Grandorge's photograph has the same flatness to it, with the gaps indicating the paths through it. These stalls are surrounded by taller buildings like Belfast is surrounded by hills. The density of the terraces of Belfast is not apparent from the ground, because the streets are wide and give the impression of airiness; but I doubt when you are in the market shown in Lagos that you would have the same feeling, the gaps between the stalls seems tight, barely adequate to allow light to pass through.

The night-time photograph tells an alternative story, where a different type of atmosphere exists, and one where the shadows have more power than the light. Figure 17 is Hackney VII by Grandorge has very few shadows, the orange artificial light seems to be coming from all directions at once, which unlike natural light, it can. The orange light gives this scene a softer atmosphere, the reflective surfaces indicate a harder surface, compared to the masonry elements. Very few of the lights themselves are visible. Figure 18 is of Todd's Bow, the same orange light is present but there are deep shadows, the eye searches these spaces trying to see what they may contain. the sources of the light are clearly visible and create a rhythm as the eye moves along the street. The figure present introduces movement into the photograph, it is dawn and the city is just waking up, deliveries are taking place.

Even though the all of these categories show the city in different ways, it is when you put them all together a more complete picture becomes clear. I believe that it takes more than one photograph to give a sense of place, whether it is a street, a corner or a city. Moving on from the city condition, I am going to look at the overlooked components, all the little things, that make up the visual of the city street.



Figure 13 Eveux III 2008



Figure 14 Rheims Cathedral 2011

The city from above



Figure 15 Lagos III 2005



Figure 16 Belfast from above 2013

The nighttime view



Figure 17 Hackney VII 2012



Figure 18 Todd's Bow, Limerick 2013

Traces left behind

The city's form is a layering of material over time, constantly changing and evolving and erasing. These may be the permanent or at least long lasting traces of what has gone before; but everyday there are other more fleeting ephemeral traces of what makes up the now. In the first page of his book *Image of a City* Lynch writes: "At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored."^{xvi} By the medium of photography we are able to assess a scene from the outside. By dissecting a photo, separating out its layers we can isolate each of its components without the scene constantly changing.

There are lots of traces left of people, of things, clues of former activities. Earlier I have shown a series of photographs of disposable coffee cups that have been hap-hazardly abandoned across the city (fig 2). It is not only the cups bright colours and eye catching logos, which attracted me but the story that they tell; most of these were photographed along the river front, where I imagine people would have paused to take in the view, and then moved on leaving evidence of their presence behind. Even if we don't see the people we do know something about them, whether or not they liked their coffee, where they got it, and even sometimes what kind it was. As I moved around the city it was not only the coffee cups I noticed, there are other drinking vessels scattered around, but they did not have the same air innocence as the coffee cups. People move on leaving remnants behind whether they are intentional or not. Walking through the city you see poorly disposed trash, political stickers stuck to poles, graffiti that means more to some than to others.

There are a number of traces that were not created by accident or by careless abandonment. In his book *The Conscience of the Eye*, Richard Sennett states "In a city that belongs to no one, people are constantly seeking to leave a trace of themselves, a record of their story"^{xvii}, here he is referring to graffiti. Graffiti is a purposeful act; the artist sets out with the intent of leaving their mark. There is usually a signature so others can identify it; it also shows they are proud of their creation; and the uniqueness of each piece. This form of street art sometimes has a political message like Banksy (fig 19), who was reacting to the political situation of his time. His works have become part of the identity of their environments, causing outrage among the local residences when removed or sold. In graffiti's case it is meant to be seen and in some instances shock, but at the same time it isn't meant to be permanent.

All of the little pieces contribute to the city environment. Most people would not notice them individually but if they were missing, the scene would feel quiet sterile, giving us no clues to what has gone before. The more permanent traces are the ones that make up the fabric of the streetscape, for example, the old mooring posts along the river front, which are no longer in use but hint at a different urban landscape. From traces left behind brings me on to the more permanent or purposeful street obstacles which go unnoticed to most; put there usually by the local authority or utility companies, these elements have a defined use in their precise locations.



Fig. 19 Banksy, Boston, 2010



Fig.20 One trace I found gave me cause to pause; it was a flyer for a missing person. This wasn't like the other signs of activity, it was a trace of someone's life, a trace of hope and love, of a search, of a news story. I hesitated before taking this shot, was it too soon after a sad ending. In the shot itself, the positional relationship of this decaying flyer and a disposable coffee cup seems tragic, but also the naturally distributed chestnut shells may serve as a reminder of the natural cycle of living things. O'Callaghan Strand, Limerick, Author's own, 2013.

The Unnoticed

A book published by Limerick Civic Trust in 2002 'The Limerick we don't see', was a series of one hundred photographs of a particular part of the city, but there were no titles or captions or any clues to where they might be located within this area given. The aim of this was to make people find them, a game, a treasure hunt but the real aim was to encourage the people of the city to become more aware of their surroundings. To take notice of the small details that makes up the city.

When studying the street through photographs I started to really look at the elements that an urban environment contain. By suspending a scene and separating the elements from each other, it is possible to see each piece. On every street we encounter obstacles, bollards, lampposts, traffic lights and sign posts. We are constantly judging distances, widths and the path of other around us. We are deciding which path to take, where to cross or how to avoid (fig 21 & 22).

Like in close-up photography, removing the context helps to evaluate and see what makes up the whole. Most of the time we do this subconsciously, when we do look, it is surprising at the number of things in the street. The people who notice these obstacles more are children; for them these elements are ingredients of a playground, something to climb over, or to swing on and jump off. Even the cracks in the pavements are a source of entertainment, the signposts are colour in an otherwise grey world. In recent months there has been collaboration between Limerick City Council, ESB, UPC and Limerick City Art Gallery which involves the painting of ESB junction boxes on the streets; this makes what once were overlooked objects into highly visible and noticeable elements of the street (fig 23 & 24).

By highlighting these objects I change the interaction I have with them, these objects now fill the streets in which I walk, because I notice them on one street they become more visible on every other. It is not through photographs that I see them now it's through the eye, but it was through photographs that I noticed them first. Most people will never notice the individual details that make up the street in which they move along regularly. I will now look at how the same scene will always be interpreted differently by different people; each individual will have their own view.

Within the unnoticed , is often traces and evidence of the journey a city has made, previously figure 5 showed us how beneath our feet is the history of the city, captured in a moment the unnoticed connection of the modern to the old.



Fig. 21 Removing distractions, Uncovering the unnoticed, Author's own, 2013.



Fig. 23 William St., Limerick, Author's own, 2013



Fig. 24 Thomas St., Limerick, Author's own, 2013

Same city, different interpretations

Charles Dickens in his novel Bleak House about London questions: “what does the city mean and how can one represent it.”^{xviii} Does the city mean something different to each individual who inhabits it, and if I was to ask for people to describe it in anyway their responses would be completely different. Some using words other images. If these descriptions were to be put together it would be a book like Italo Calvino’s Invisible Cities, very different descriptions of the same place.

Every person experiences their environment differently, so the photographs will differ too. Kevin Lynch writes: “The image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers.”^{xix} Any photograph taken is influenced by the photographer; there is a little piece of them in each shot.

Andrew Higgott and Timothy Wray state in relation to architectural photography “one only needs to compare photographs of the same building taken by different photographers to immediately highlight the simple fact that photography offers a selective view of architecture and constructs its own narratives of it”^{xx}. If the world is viewed through the viewfinder, it is framed and cropped to the observer’s liking. Victor Burgin states:

“Photographs are sensorially restrained objects: mute and motionless variegated rectangles. Looking at photographs can nevertheless occasion great interest, fascination, emotion, reverie- or all of these things. Clearly, the photograph here acts as a catalyst- exciting mental activity which exceeds that which the photograph itself provides.”^{xxi}

We can imagine what is happening; we can expand the story beyond the frame of the photograph.

So even when two people are shown the same photograph their reading of it could be quite different, because the imagination will construct a story or extend the boundary of the scene differently.

The camera is a barrier or filter; it does create a distance between the observer and their subject, like space creating a threshold between public and private. This space is forming a layer of protection around the photographer. He /she is seeing the world through something else, a machine. Detached from the world that is being viewed, like not really part of it, somehow looking from the outside in. The observer does not participate in the activities, but may influence it by his/her presence. Some people act differently around the camera, they tense, they smile or they avoid. Figure 25 is by Michael Wolf a photographer who studies the mega city and its occupants. He has said that the negative of the city is the crowds. He refers to the spatial register, this is the physical distance the viewed is from the lens. In this photograph the viewed is aware of the presence of the camera and reacts against the intrusion. The threshold between the private and the public is examined next; using Michael Wolf’s photographs to illustrate the tension between the two conditions.



Fig. 25 Tokyo Compression 42, by Michael Wolf 2010

Private versus public in the city.

There is always a tension between public and private conditions of the city. Is everything in the public realm free to be photographed? If so where does the public realm and private realm meet? We construct “an onion shaped structure of layers of protection” around ourselves. These maybe invisible, like the personal space we establish between us and others; but other thresholds exist, protecting the different degrees of privacy that we require. Some of these layers are more solid than others, and we sometimes get a glimpse of things we are not supposed to see. Michael Wolf’s Window Watching series of photographs looks at people’s private worlds, whether it is work or home. He doesn’t see this as an intrusion that will cause these people any harm. People are aware that they live in a city surrounded by others who can see them. Every photographer must make a judgement on what level of privacy is afforded to people. I consider it important that as long as the photographer doesn’t intentionally go out to harm or cause someone to become uncomfortable, then it is acceptable to photograph whatever he/she can see.

Michael Wolf brings the city condition down to the individual’s scale, he singles out the individual within a city of millions. The following photograph (fig 26) was taken in Hong Kong from the roof top of an adjacent building. It brings into question where public space ends and the private begins, where is the threshold between the two. In the book *Public and Private Spaces of the City* by Ali Madanipour it is suggested that “the mind is the inner most part of a conscious human being, his/her most private space”^{xxiii}. So is everything else in the public realm? The object of this photograph does not know there is a lens focused in on her, how would she feel if she did? Would she close the curtains like the apartment above her has? Would she even care? She is in control of the threshold; she could protect her privacy if she wished. This photograph would still be interesting even if she wasn’t in it, we would be still able to tell a certain amount about her from the objects she has chosen to surround herself with people make a choice whether to be seen or not, exhibitionists want people to see them, they enjoy it, the excitement of being the centre of attention. Madanipour states that “a boundary is part of both sides of the divide or of none, as it forms a threshold”^{xxiv}. The line between private and public is not always clearly defined, it could be the meeting point of two ground materials or as transparent as a sheet of glass. The threshold could also be layers of space as well as materials, the more layers there are the more privacy achieved. For example a terraced house in a city with a small front garden has a sense of more privacy than a house whose front facade abuts the footpath; I would even say it is a layer of protection from the street even though is both in public and private realms, the space created is part of the threshold between them.

In the introduction to Michael Wolf’s book *Transparent City* Natasha Egan says “We take great pleasure in reinventing ourselves for display, or in having the opportunity to catch a glimpse of someone else in a private moment. It seems people are inherently interested in other people’s lives”^{ixxv}. Voyeurism is something that everyone partakes in it at some stage, even the act of watching television is a socially accepted form of it, especially reality TV programs such as *Big Brother*. But the participants are aware of being watched and are happy to be a form of entertainment for the outside world. *Rear Window* is a film that deals with some of these issues. It calls in to question whether the main character L.B. Jeffries should be watching his neighbours; should he intervene or mind his own business and at what point should he remove his attention from the lives of others. As an inhabitant of a city I have to ask myself a similar question. I will now move away from the home and into the street again; from the very private condition to one where we know we are seen by others, it is where public life plays out.



Fig. 26 Window Watching 12, Hong Kong, by Michael Wolf

How we relate to the city

Figure 27 depicts an empty city street, even though there are no people visible there are still signs of them. There are still traces of them left behind. By leaving people out and suppressing the distractions there is a focusing of the viewer's attention on the built environment of the city; we really look at the surfaces of the streets and buildings. At the same time it is harder to judge scale and depth, we have to search for a point of reference, like a car or a doorway that we can equate a height or a dimension to.

We relate to a city through its streets, it is where we interact with it and with others. Richard Sennett refers to "Jacobs Rule"^{xxvi} when talking about the proportions of a city street; "our eyes have a thirty degree cone of vision when we stand on the ground and look straight ahead."^{xxvii} If the tops of the buildings of a street remain within this cone the street has what he refers to as a "human scale". Allan Jacobs created this rule by studying what he considers to be successful streets, ones which are comfortable to move along.

The following photograph of Bowman Street (fig 27) shows a residential street, which is slightly removed from the commercial centre of the city. People are absent, but there is a feeling that they could appear at any stage. The eye is drawn into the photograph by the line of the overhead wires, the line of the eaves and the highlights made from the reflections on the cars. The scale of the street is homely, with nearly all of the structures being two storeys. There is no looming presence, making the street very open to the sky. Even though the houses are all densely packed, there is a sense of space and air.

In figure 28 William Street one of Limerick's main arteries is shown, it is of a different scale and is a more commercial street. Again there are no people present and only a few cars; this allows the viewer to see where the facades meet the footpaths, this makes the buildings more forceful, reinforcing their presence and domination of the scene. Unlike the photograph of Bowman Street in which the ground seems to rise to meet the vanishing point, the ground here falls away drawing the eye down towards the darkness. The scale of the street as a whole is more overbearing as the previous example. The sky is given less space and the air seems thicker somehow.

There is a similar atmosphere in work of Thomas Struth, in the book Reading Photography Ulrich Loock's essay describes his photographs as "often devoid of human beings they are not images of city life, but a documentation and analysis of urban space"^{xxviii}, it is this idea that I will look at in more detail next.



Fig. 27 City Street, Bowman St., Limerick, 2013. Author's own



Fig. 28 William Street, Limerick. 2013. Author's own

An outsider view of the city.

If you were fresh to the city what would you notice? Would you look for the icon, what makes a city stand apart from another or what makes it different. You would see the fabric of the city, what is it made of, is it stone or brick, red or grey. You assess your surroundings, be it the built environment or its population

Thomas Struth's early photographs focus on the city through a series of streetscapes. The one photograph I have chosen to examine is of Crosby Street, New York (fig.29), in the book *Struth Unconscious Places*, Richard Sennett describes this scene as "an empty stage awaiting for public life to begin."^{xxix} It depicts a deserted place, there are no people just clues and traces of them; in this example the buildings loom over the observer, their presence is formidable. This photograph has flat skies, no shadows and no colour; the entire picture is in crisp focus, there is no blurriness around the corners; it is taken from a central view point at street level, the observer is in the centre and surrounded, they are as much part of the photograph as the buildings are. The materiality of the city is shown; you get a feel for the texture and what the city is made of, the unevenness of the snow on the road and smoothness of the shiny car. There is flatness to it; it is not trying to portray a sense of depth, indeed it is hard to judge the distance. As we explore this photograph, the eye doesn't find one place to settle, and it is constantly searching. Sennett writes: "his framing.....developed as a result of a larger reflection about how to treat the elements of the street, both sides and the spaces in-between as equally as possible"^{xxx}. In Struth's early streetscapes, they all have an end to them, some of these cities we know have a grid pattern, and the condition of the breakdown in the grid gives these photographs more strength. There is strength also in the architecture and the way it is portrayed, in the perspective viewpoint. In Struth's more recent streetscapes (fig 30) he tries to sum up the feeling of the cities with one photograph, but does this without using well know symbols, Andrew Mead explains "he [Struth] spends more time looking for the single location which could summarise the city"^{xxxi}. He doesn't look for the pretty view; he finds the streets were people work or live more interesting. He forces us to read the city "we are encouraged to pause in places which we would usually pass through and to consider how far they capture the essence of the surrounding places"^{xxxii} and to look around us more. In his work involving cities of recent years he has used colour, but these colours have the same tonal value as each other, so no one building stands out more than another. These later cityscapes are a little less desolate, but still quite lonely. Sennett also states: "Struth brings into play a technique he had already mastered, paying attention to dissonant details with the mass."^{xxxiii}

This particular photograph (figure 28) reminds me of a documentary *Life after people*. The buildings and infrastructure are left but the people have disappeared and how quickly buildings (the city), starts to degrade without us. We, as in people are only part of the story of the city. The city and its inhabitants are inter-dependent on each other to survive. Kevin Lynch says "Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves part of it, on the stage with other participants."^{xxxiv}



Fig. 29 Crosby Street, New York 1977 by Thomas Struth



Fig. 30 Ulica Truda, St. Petersburg 2005 by Thomas Struth

Conclusion

I use the lens as a tool to see something differently. The scale at which the city is viewed can completely change how I see it, from the macro to the all encompassing aerial overview, this changes my perception of it, and it will never look the same again. David Grandorge defines six conditions for photographing cities, these are conditions are familiar, they are not newly created, but by categorising them, he has me evaluating the environment as I move through the city. The things that are contained within the streets like the traces of what has gone before, some are more fleeting than others. Evidence of people, such as the coffee cups, even if I don't see the people I know a certain amount about them. I have explained in the highlighting of what were once unnoticed elements, changes how I now view a street. Thomas Struth looks at the city environment not the people, he shows us an empty city so we can evaluate without distraction. This allows us to see the street itself, and examine our relationship with the scale of it; and how we move along the street and what effect this may have on us. In the city the private and public are in constant tension, the boundary line between the two is constantly called into question, Michael Wolf is showing this in his photographs of the mega cities.

In Kevin Lynch's view of how the inhabitants of the city do not appreciate the role of the city in their lives, he says:

"They are clear enough about the ugliness of the world they live in, and they are quite vocal about the dirt, the smoke, the heat, and the congestion, the chaos and yet the monotony of it. But they are hardly aware of the potential value of harmonious surroundings, a world which they may have briefly glimpsed only as a tourist or as escaped vacationers they can have little sense of what a setting can mean in terms of daily delight, or as a continuous anchor for their lives, or as an extension of the meaningfulness and richness of the world."^{ixxxv}

People constantly pass by the details of the city, they may not even realise that they exist. Through photographs the city may be seen differently, allowing the city to be appreciated by its inhabitants and others, and some of them may come realise its beauty and potential.

From a photographer's point of view, I nearly always find something surprising or unexpected in my photographs of the city. The little details are what makes a photograph interesting, not the overall streetscape, it may be the undulating road markings or something fleeting caught in the reflections of a window. Roland Barthes discusses these details in his book Camera Lucida "Certain details "prick" me. If they do not, it is doubtless because the photographer has put them there intentionally."^{ixxxvi} He looks for some details that went without notice by the photographer's eye or were not considered until the photograph was developed.

Throughout this thesis I have discussed the differing ways of looking at the city through photography. I have examined how this environment is perceived and how it is portrayed to others. How the photograph permits you to stop, examine, assess the city and all it contains; or in some cases question what is missing. When I look at a photograph of a city which I am familiar with, I look for something that I recognise, I try to position myself where the photo has been taken. In the cases of rural landscapes I am usually happy to stand back and assess the scene from a distance, I accept it for what it tells me straight off, but with the urban landscape photograph I continue to search the shot, examining the details. These details will only be noticed by some, just like every photographers take on a subject will be different, so will every interpretation of the photograph.



My city through the lens.

The Site

When considering sites I knew for certain I wanted it to be in Limerick city center, I was drawn to sites within the Georgian grid and adjacent to the river. I only considered places where the existing buildings were not only unused but were under-scale for any city center. The block I chose had all of these factors. The block (shown in blue) is a slightly irregular block, bigger than most and separated from the river by a road.

The site itself has a drop of four and a half metres diagonally across it. The existing Georgians negotiate this by accessing the ground from the street level (ground) and accessing the basement from the Quay level.





1769



1827



1840



1865



1900



2008

Commissioned projects:

These were primer projects developed in the first semester.

Dating Box:

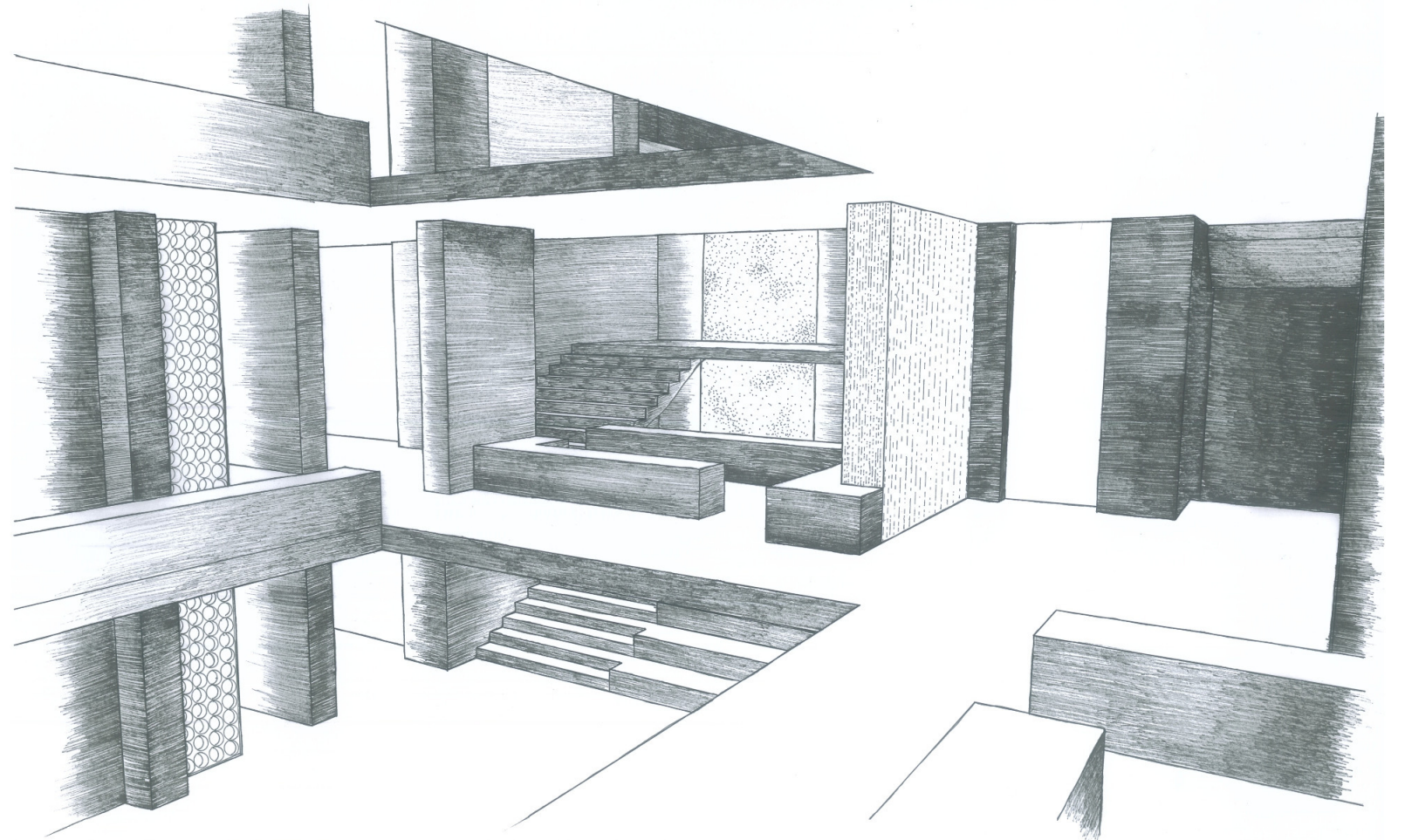
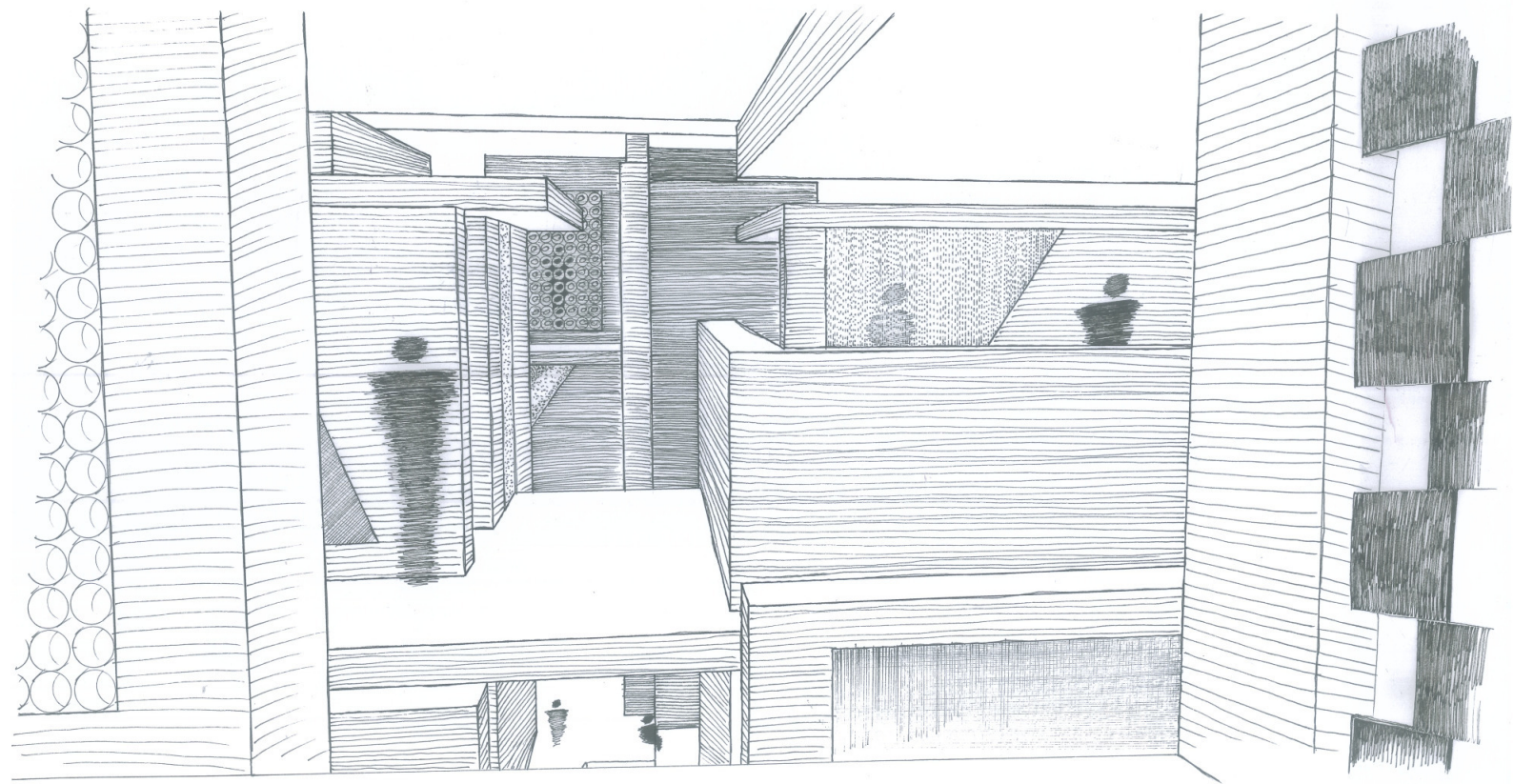
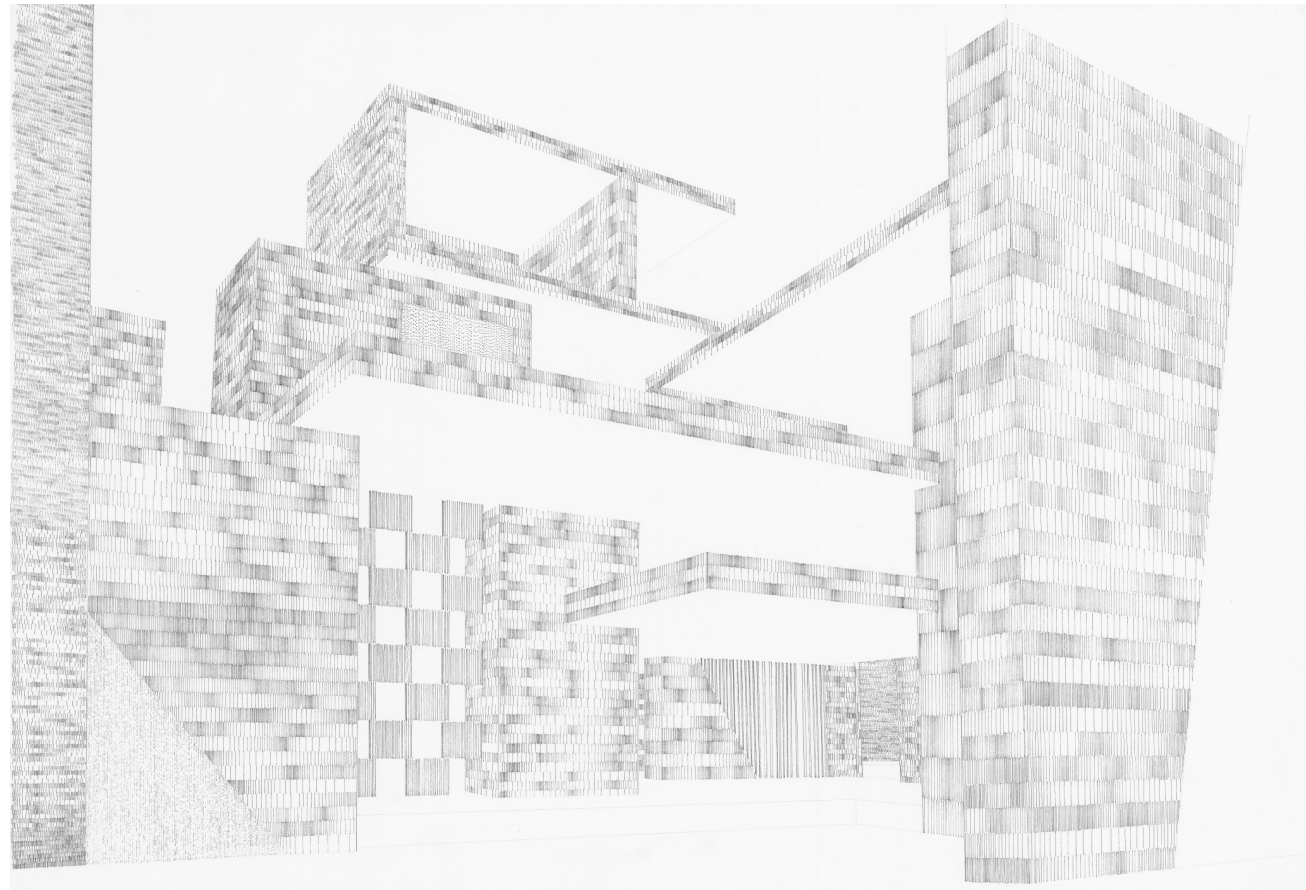
From my initial writings I looked closely at the condition of the city, and how we interact with each other in it, the public versus the private. I considered the social interaction and how more and more relationships start not in the real but in the virtual. The dating box is where these two worlds would meet. By using light as the controlling factor for what is seen and not seen, the idea is to be able to see but not be seen before you actually meet. There is a strong element of voyeurism, which I explore through design. I wanted the viewer to see the viewed and the viewed to be aware of the presence of the viewer. There is a feeling of uncomfortable-ness in the commission. Outside of these boxes a more open environment exists, this is a space controlled by physical screens, you enter through a series of layers and arrive into a light inner courtyard.

Maze:

The maze had no function, it was a series of layers some solid some opaque and some transparency. As you move through the space the relationship between these layers change, so your view of what is visible also changes. I set up the screens so that there were clear views from certain points on the plan.

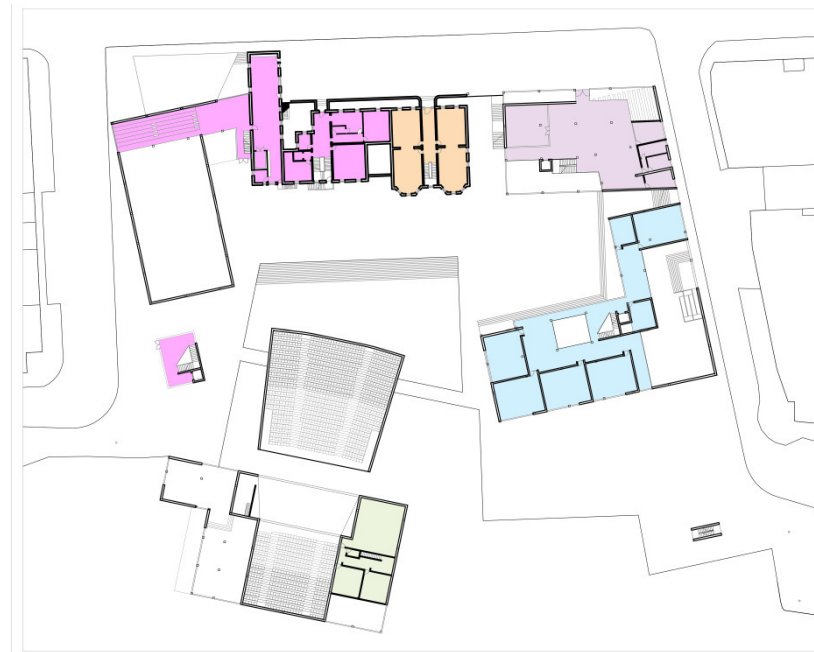
School:

Through research of the site I discovered that recently a local Gael Scoil did a feasibility study to move to this site. I felt that this function would benefit the city centre. I also wanted to extend the operational hours of the building outside that of a normal school. I included classrooms for adult education and night classes.





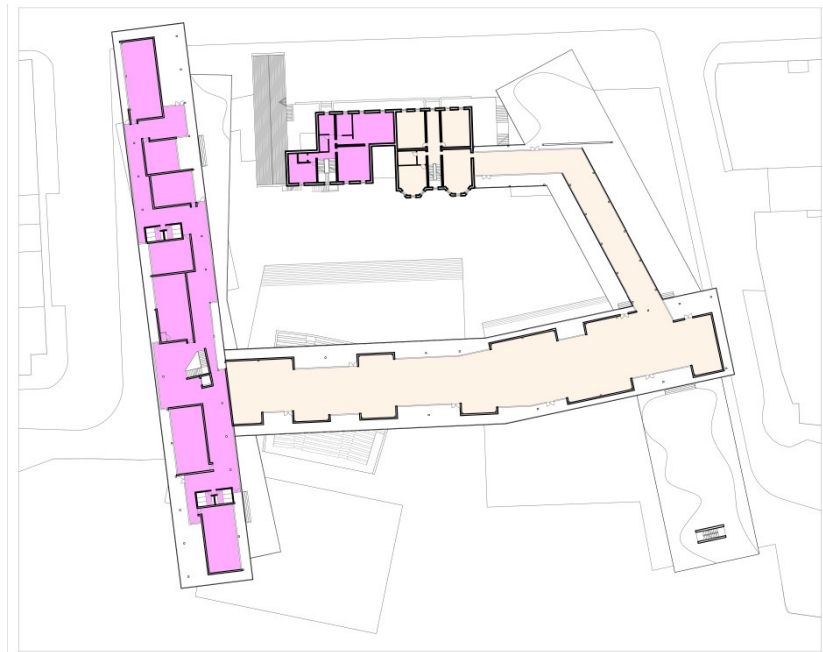
BASEMENT PLAN



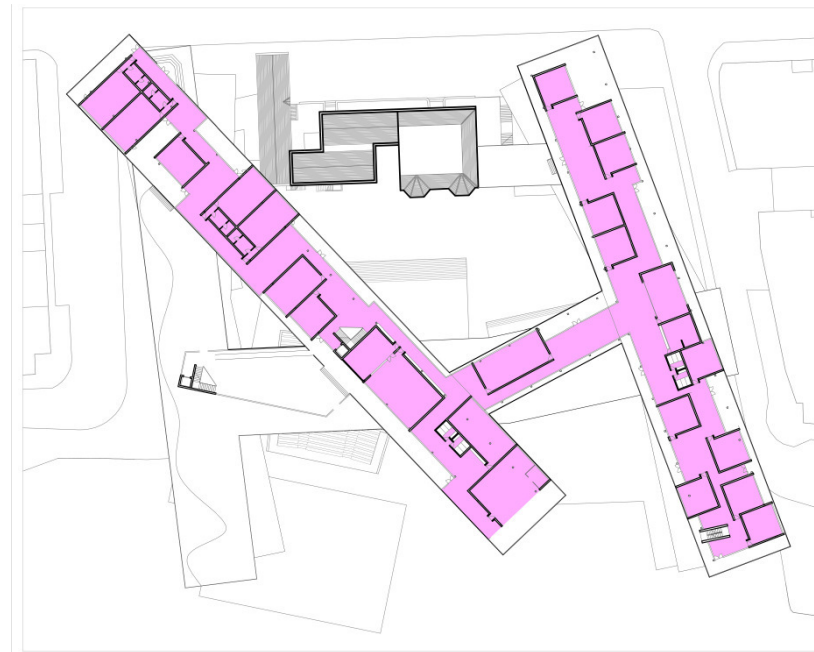
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



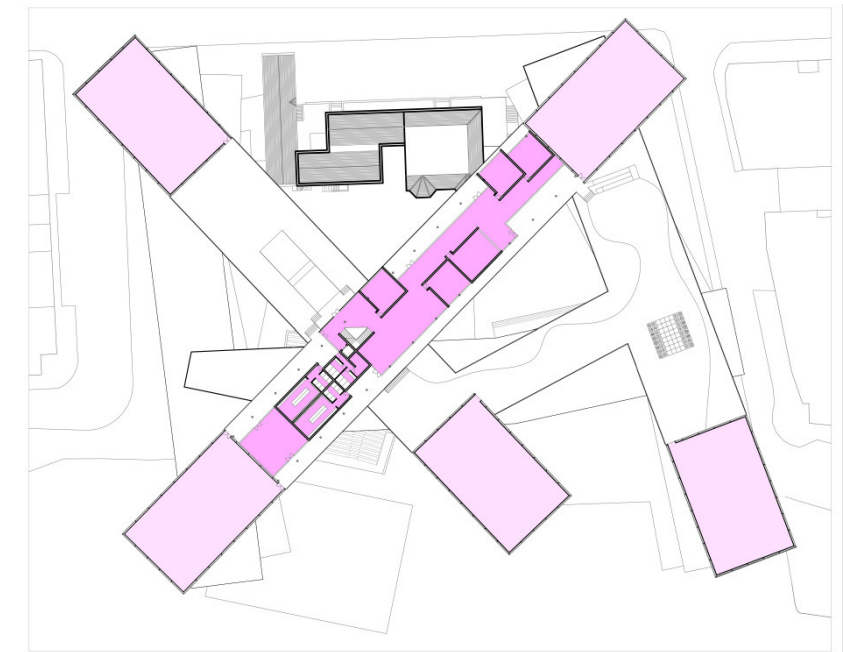
FIRST FLOOR PLAN








SECOND FLOOR PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN



FOURTH FLOOR PLAN

	NATIONAL SC 	SECONDARY SC 	GALLERY 	LIBRARY 	THEATRE 	TOTAL
BASEMENT	1230m2	1373m2	442m2	1163m2	1266m2	5474m2
GROUND FLOOR	871m2	732m2	278m2	520m2	241m2	2642m2
FIRST FLOOR	—	1187m2	278m2	1433m2	—	2898m2
SECOND FLOOR	—	1588m2	1973m2	—	—	3561m2
THIRD FLOOR	—	3689m2	—	—	—	3689m2
FOURTH FLOOR	—	1061m2	—	—	—	1061m2
TOTAL	2101m2	9630m2	2971m2	3116m2	1507m2	19325m2

The Programme

The programme is extensive it has many different aspects. The main function would be educational, with both primary and secondary schools; a theatre, a Library and a Gallery space.

I believed the site could and should be intensely inhabited, it is at the centre of the city and I felt it take a large building. In one of my earlier commissioned project I looked at a school, and I chosen to explore this function further by increasing the number of students and expanding the age groups.

I wove the other functions together, using creative therapy that exists in some Limerick schools as a common denominator. I also wove the function of a Library in, because it is something that exists in both types of school and worked for the benefit of the population of the city.

Project Drawings

Throughout the year I experimented with styles of drawing, I wanted to mix the skills of the hand and the computer. I was influenced by Paul Rudolph's work, so I took his style and developed my own from it.

The drawing on the left of this page is an earlier drawing the original is of a larger scale, it illustrated my interest in stacking inhabited boxes and how to get light deep into the plan from the south and addressing the river Shannon on the north side.

The drawing on the right shows a view along Henry street and how the project developed and it's present and effect on the street.

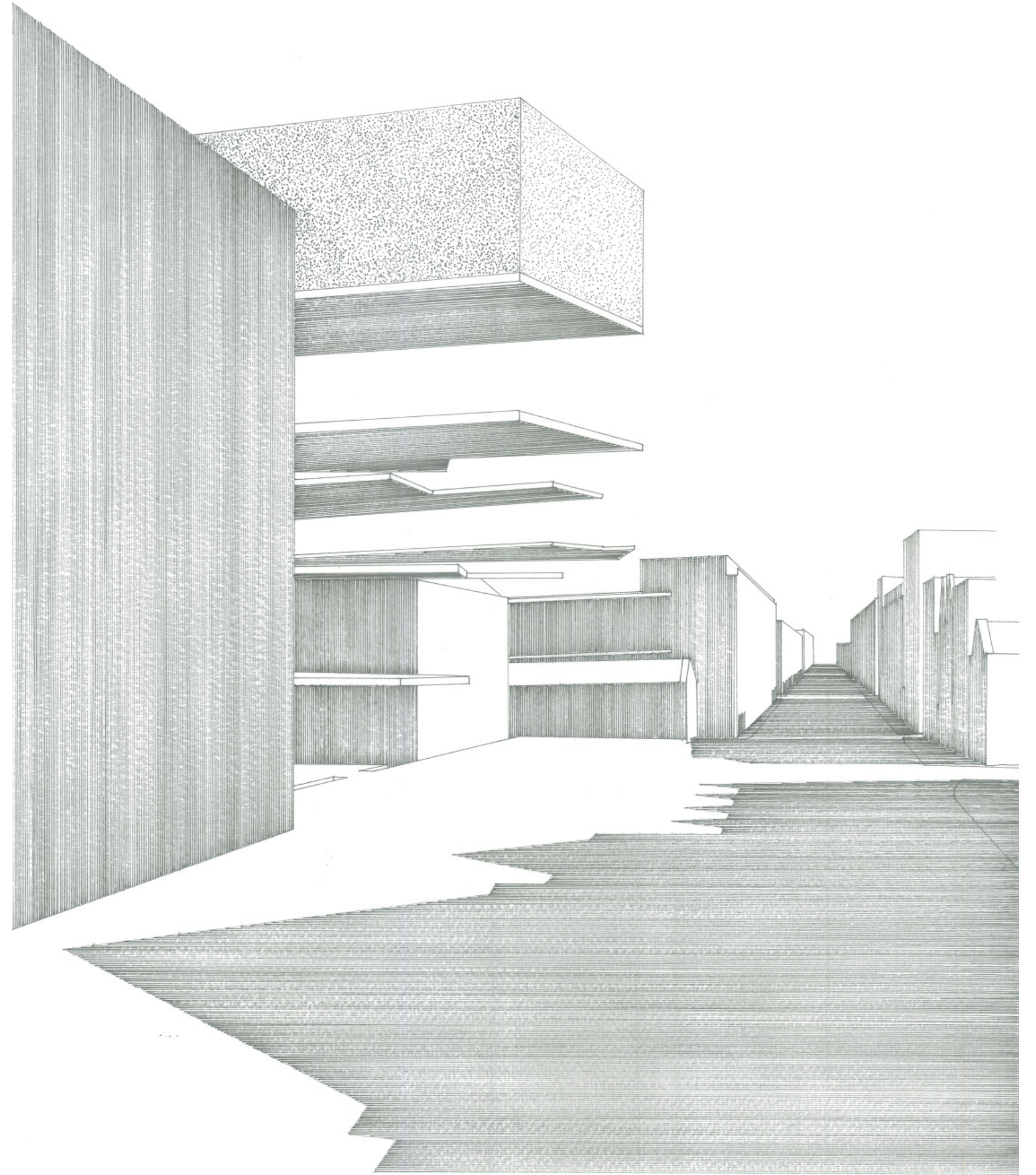
The three ink drawings that follow are of a the same series.

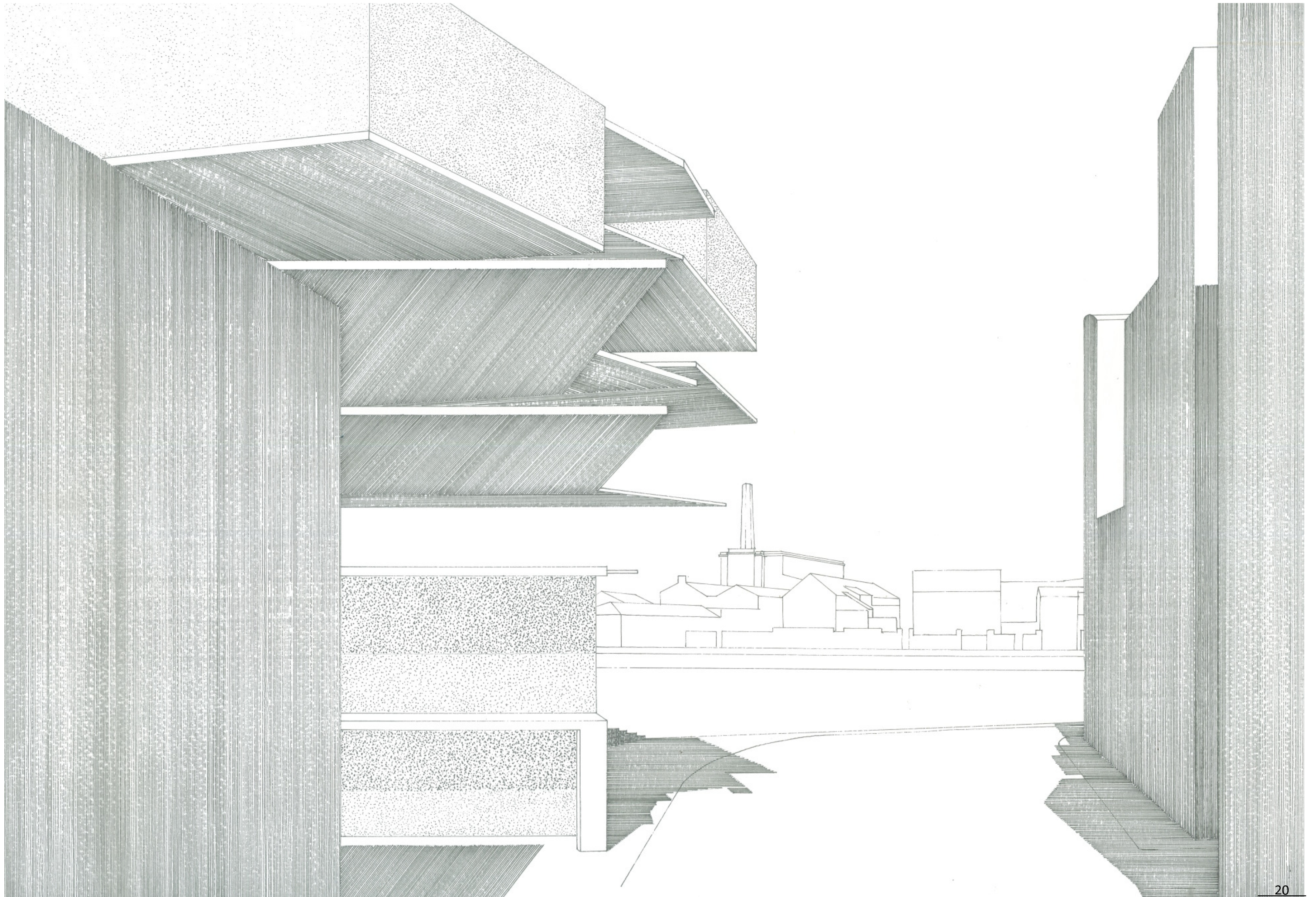
The first examines the street view that connects with the river and the projects connection with the far bank.

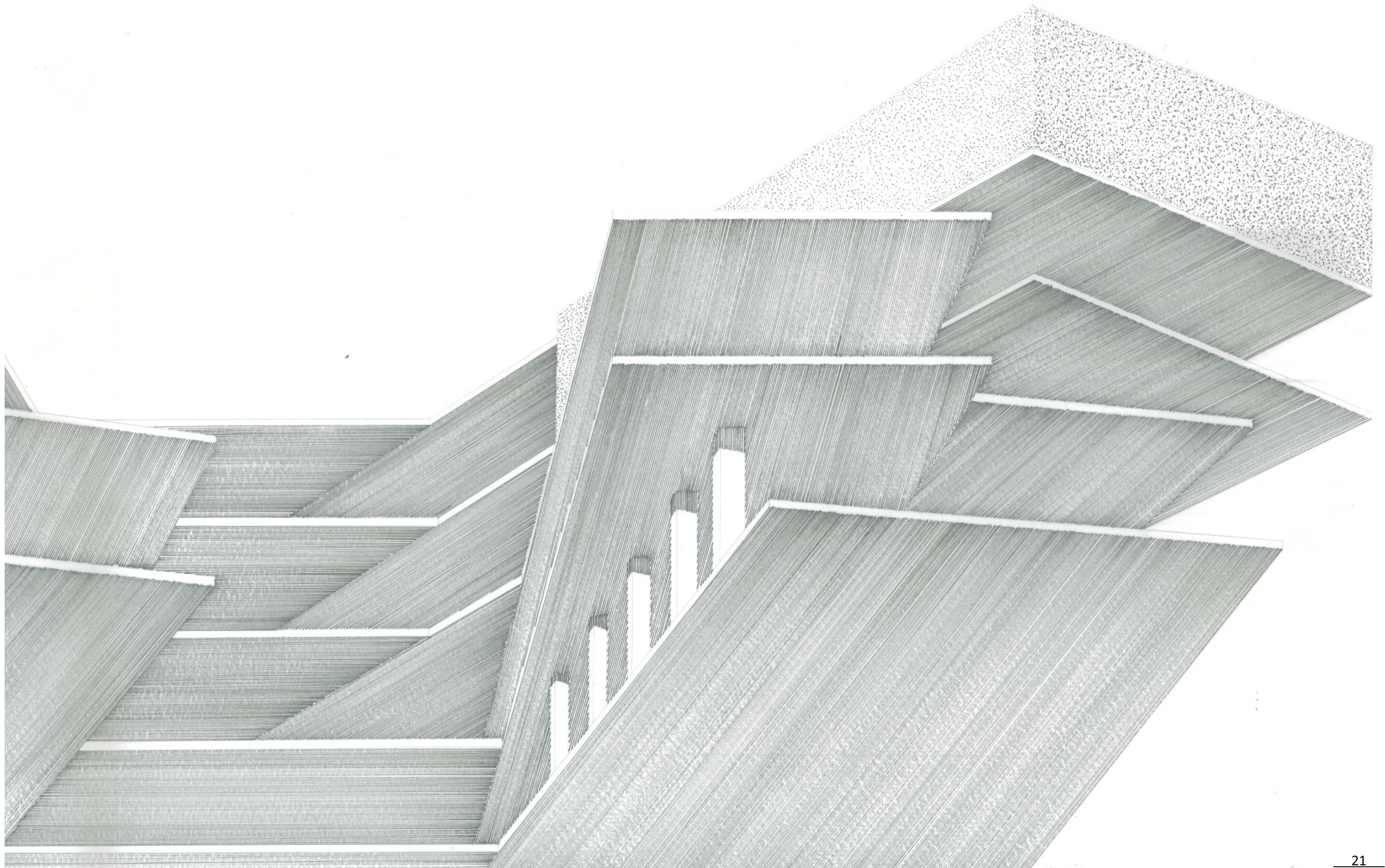
The next looks up at the floor and roof plates, this drawing made me reconsider what was happening on the underside of the floor slab was as important as what was happening on them.

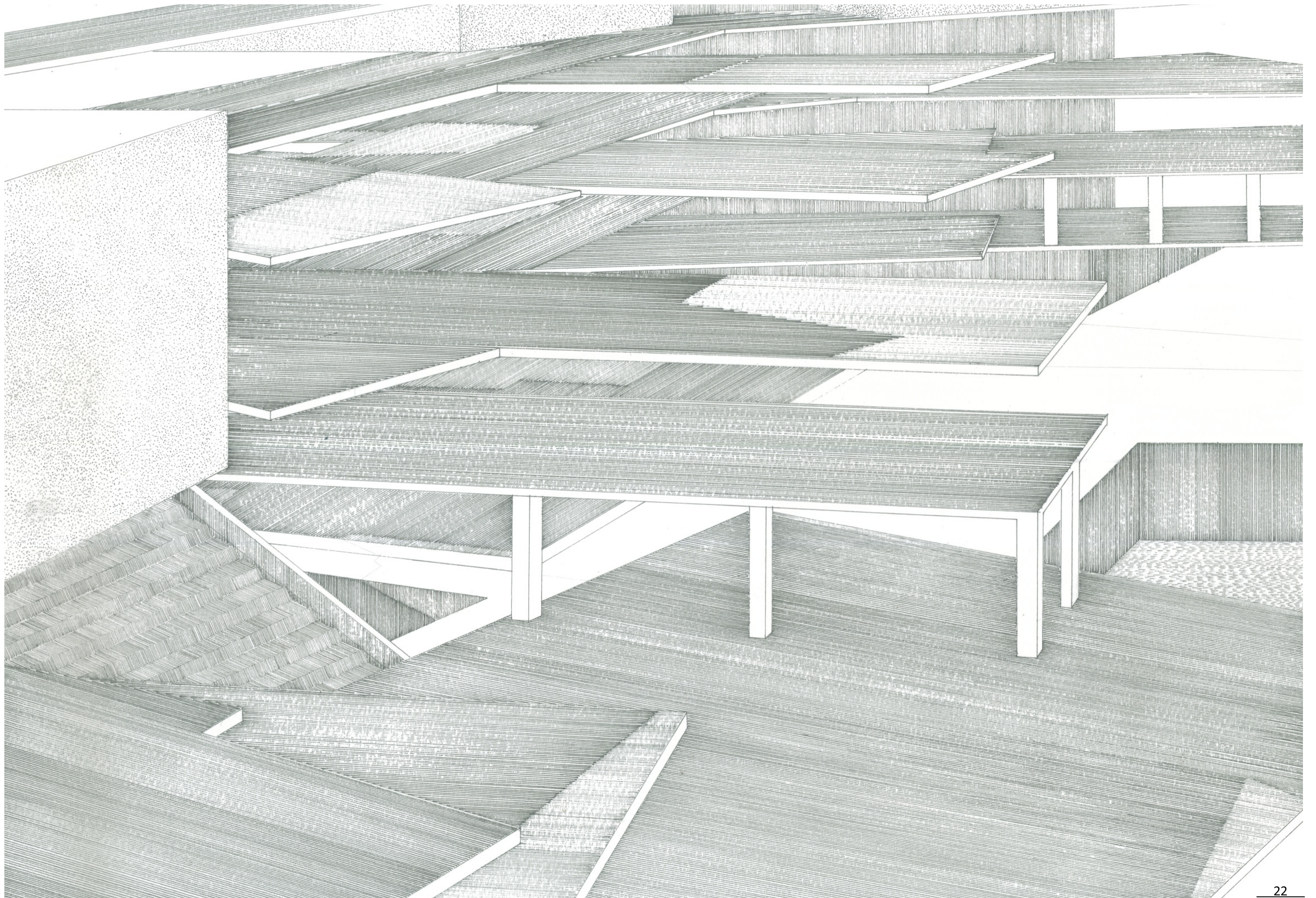
They developed a flat centre section which was thicker for structural strength, thinning towards the edge where the loading would be less.

The last of the series looks inwards, it shows the overlapping plates and fragmented views.









Project Description

As I have outlined in the programme the scale of this project is large, it is for a growing city. By introducing these functions back into the city centre, it would encourage more development and inhabitation surrounding it.

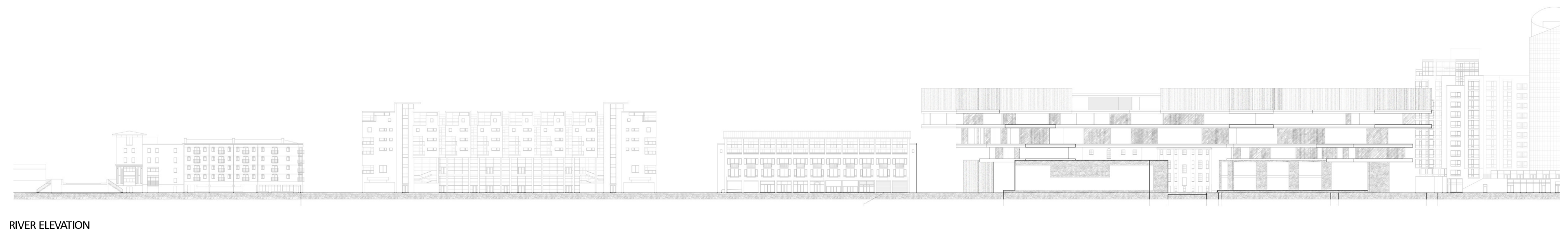
In terms of the site itself, I removed the road that divides the site from the water, I took a clue from the 1827 map of the site, in which the boundary wall of the site forms the edge of the river. I also wanted to break the straight edge condition that exists, breaking the existing quay line I was able to bring the water into the site, these recessions and protrusion are opportunities for natural sediment to build up, creating an environment for plant growth. It was important to be able to see the change of tide level, to be more aware of the passing of time.

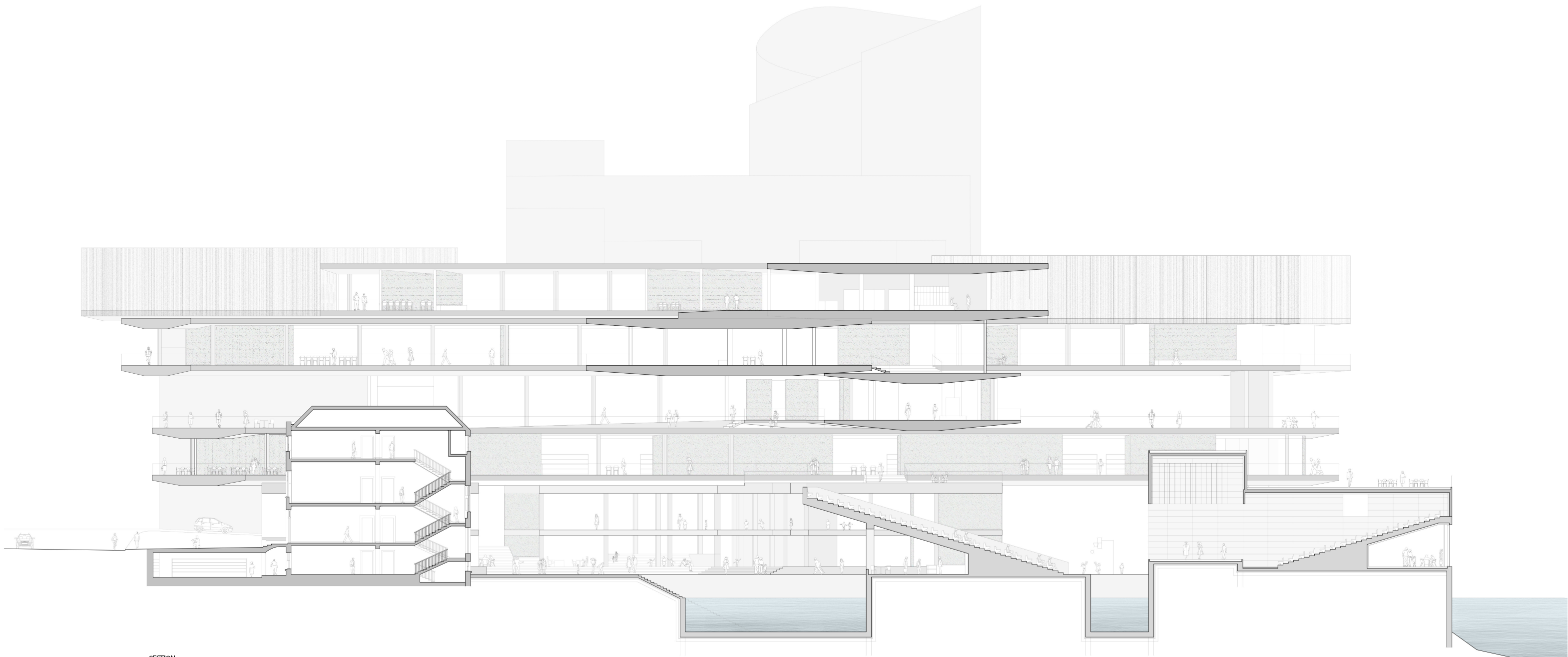
The existing buildings have a very detached present, they look inwards and neither relate to the street or to the river, they are of a small scale relative to those around them and in terms of being in centre of a city. On the 1827 map of Limerick there are two buildings shown on the block, the Bishops Palace (104 Henry St.) and Edmond Sexton Pery's own house (103 Henry St), these houses were surrounded by gardens up until relatively recently. My intention was that these two existing Georgian houses should remain and my new structure should respect their present. Both of these structures are currently vacant, their last use was for

offices. I noticed on one visit to the site, that 103 Henry St. has a strong connection to the water, in places I was able to glimpse through the blinds and have a view through the building and across the river to the chimney of the disused dairy on the far side; this was a view I protected throughout the design process.

Through a series of small scale models I experimented with the form closely judging the forms impact on its surrounding environment. As the project developed the idea of the fragmented view was an important idea, I modelled the floors taking into account not only the visual connection between floors, but the views out towards the city and the river. Each of the different uses has a view of the river and the street at some point. I also wanted to use the roof surface as useable external space related to the school. Poly carbonate walls act as containment for ballgames; I used this same material for the PE hall on the Basement level; the poly carbonate allows light through during the day and becomes a beacon of light at night.

The quay level was designed to give a feeling permeability, a visitor could enter at many different points, being able to see through and in-between the planes of the building, this element was introduced from an earlier project. Different uses were able to see each other through and around each other, catching a glimpse of other spaces and their inhabitants.



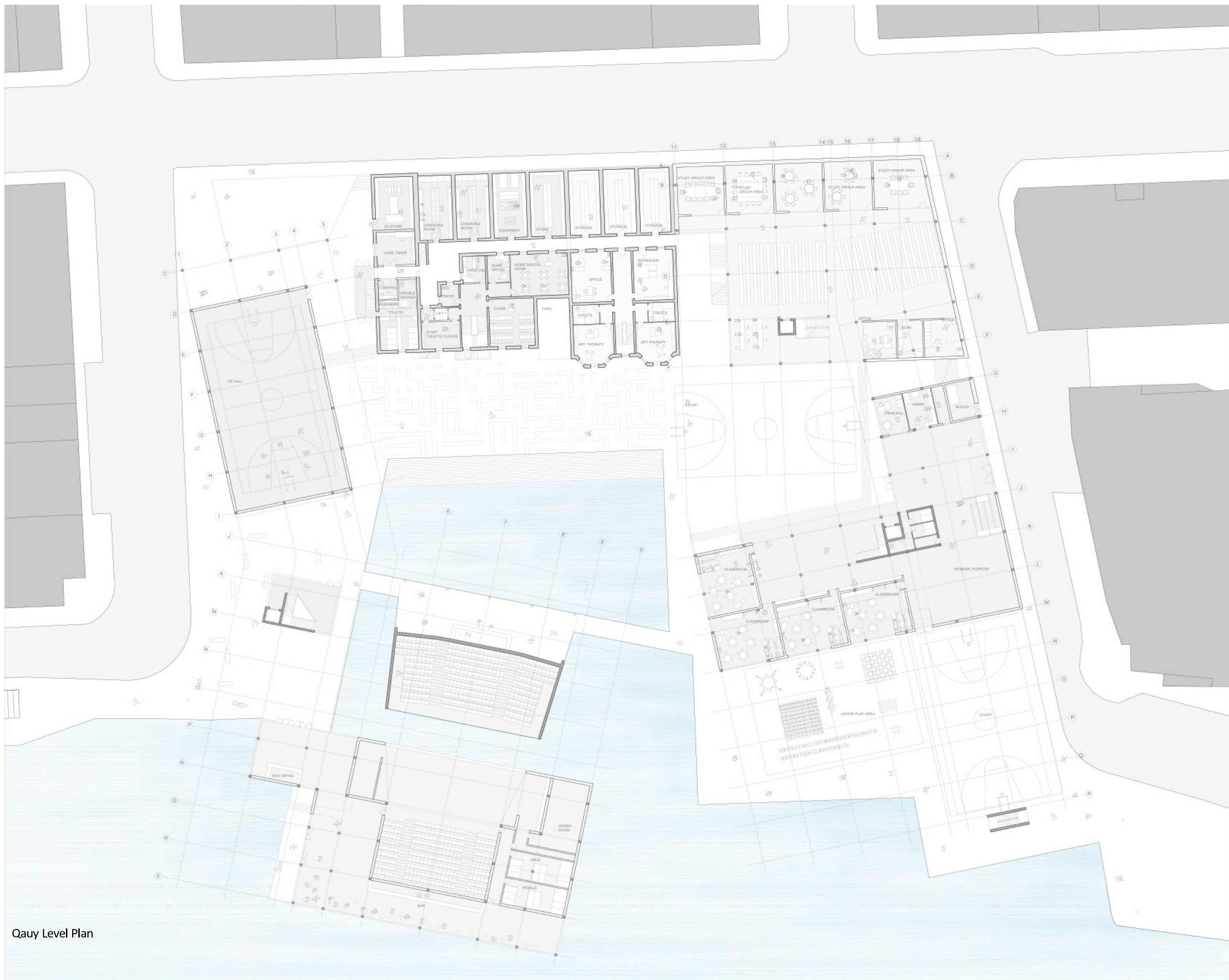


SECTION

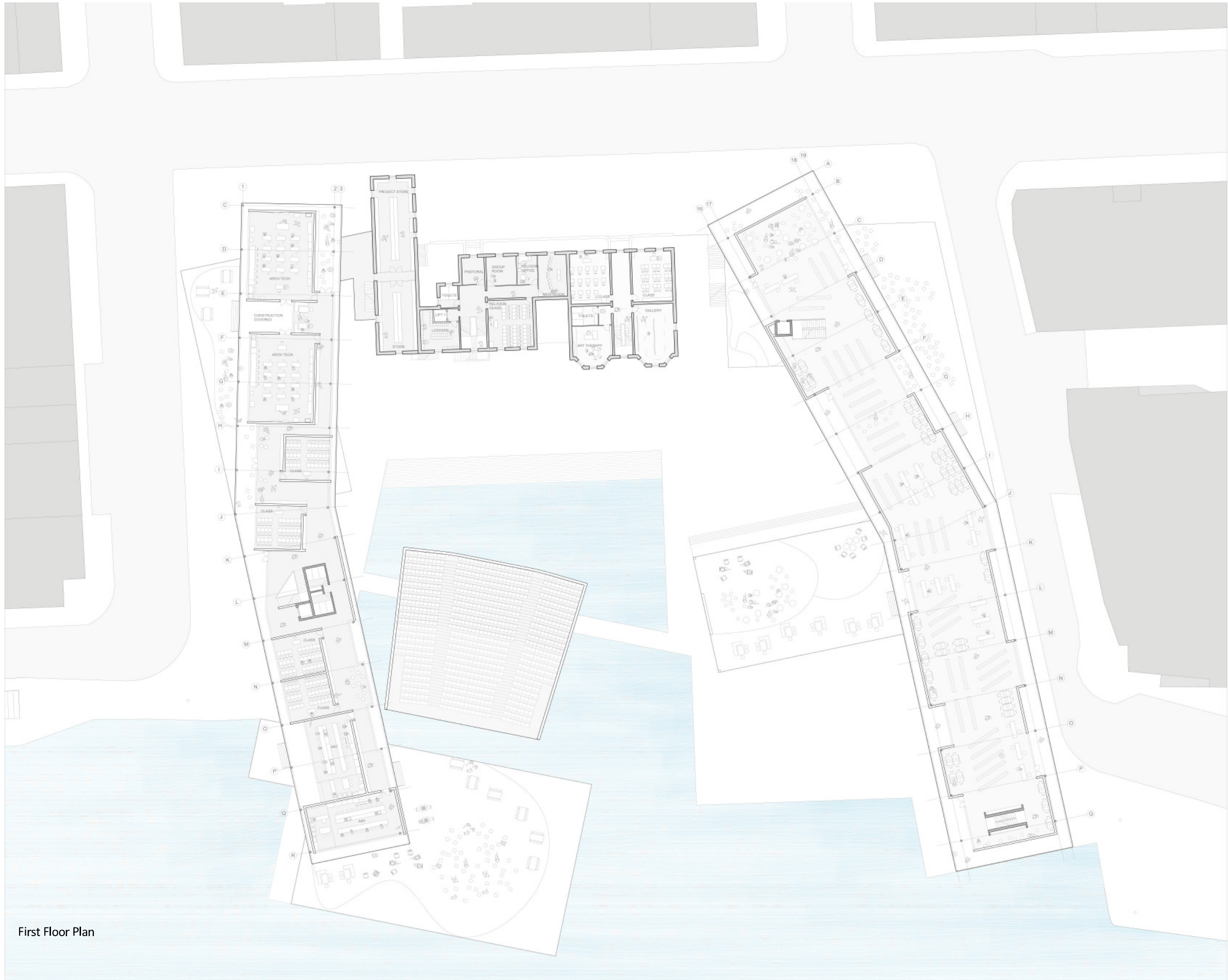


Both of these photographs show a 1:200 model of the project and its surrounding context.
In the bottom photograph the existing georgian house are visible, illustrating their continued relationship to the river and their views to the far bank.

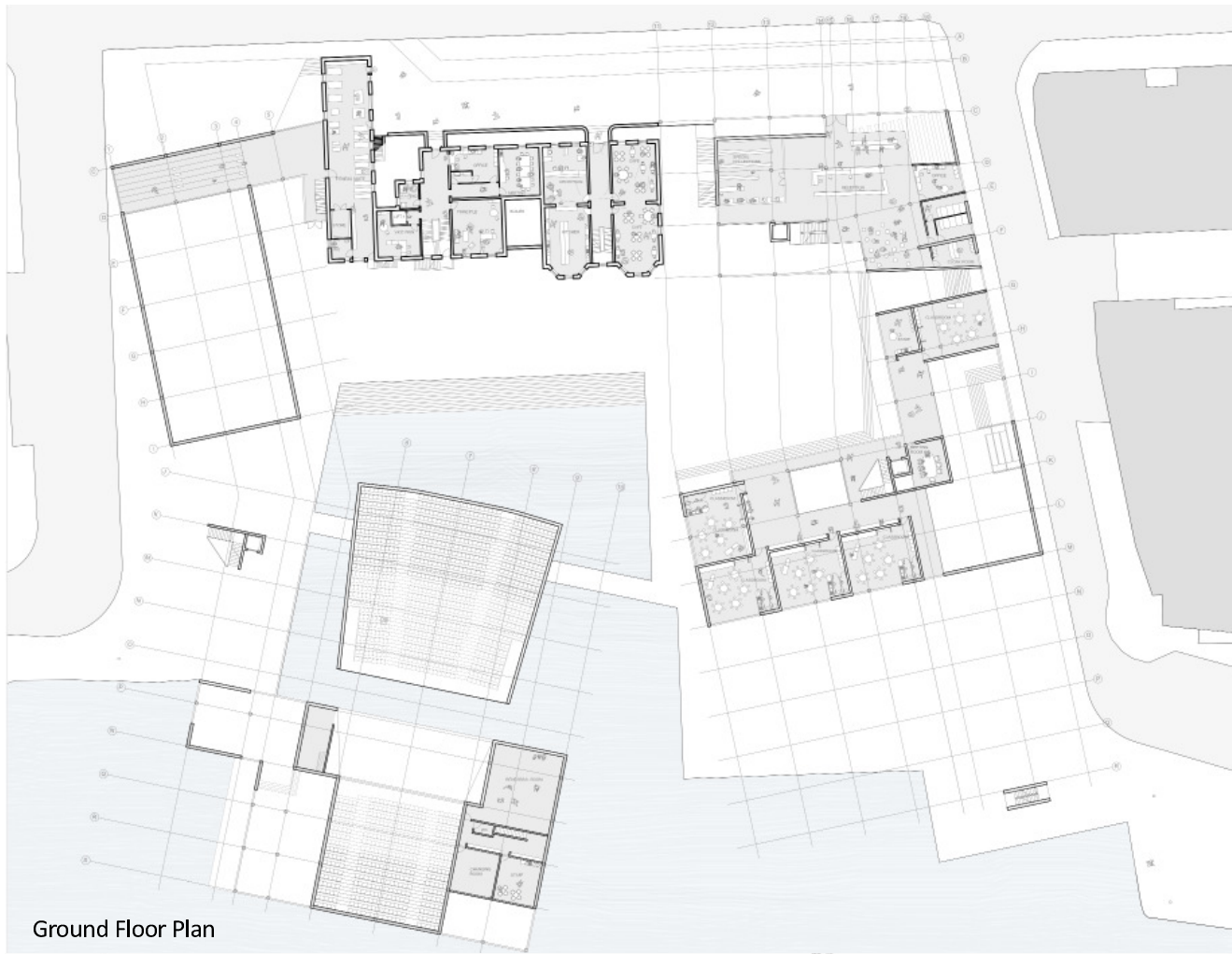




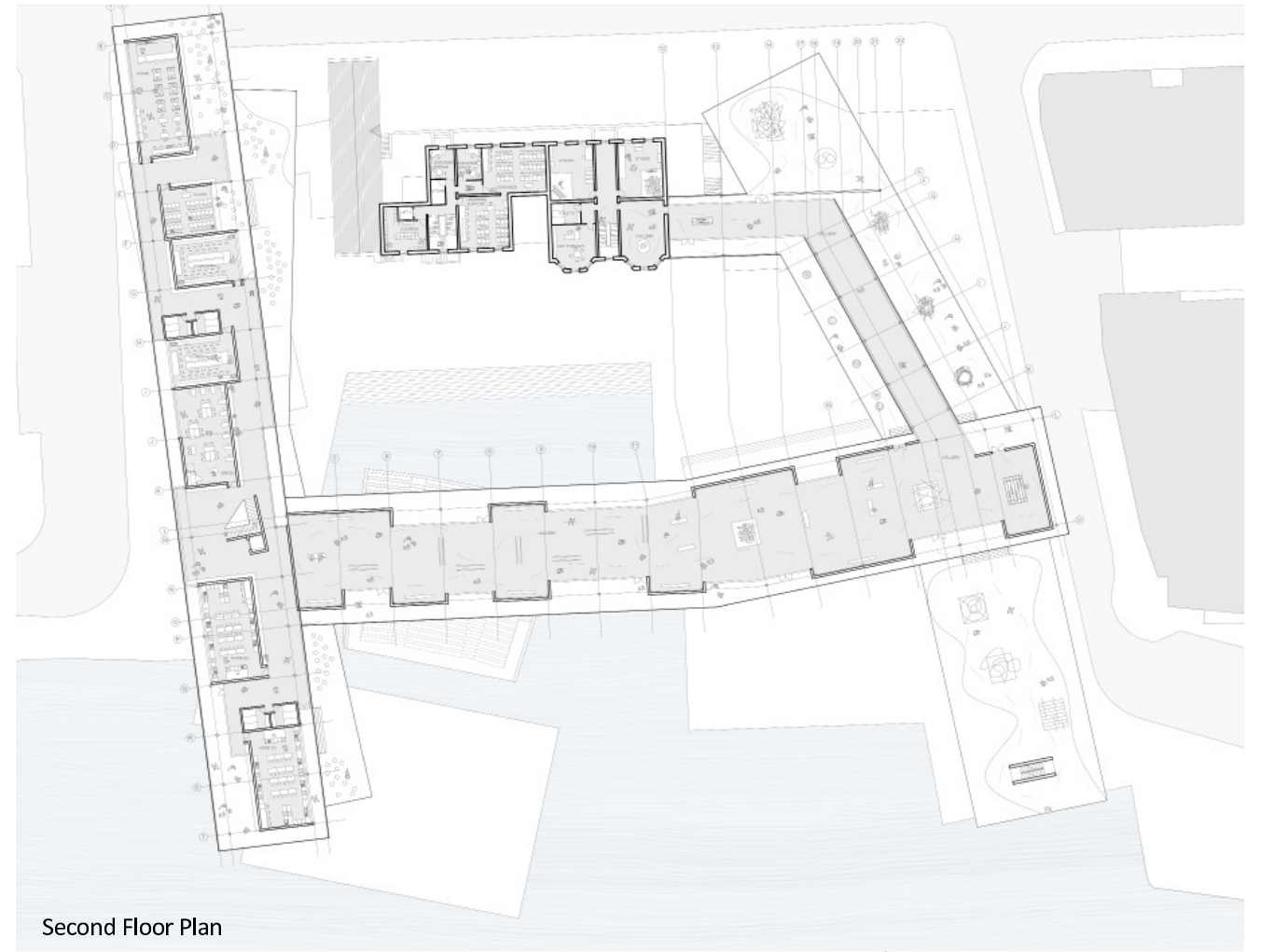
Qauy Level Plan



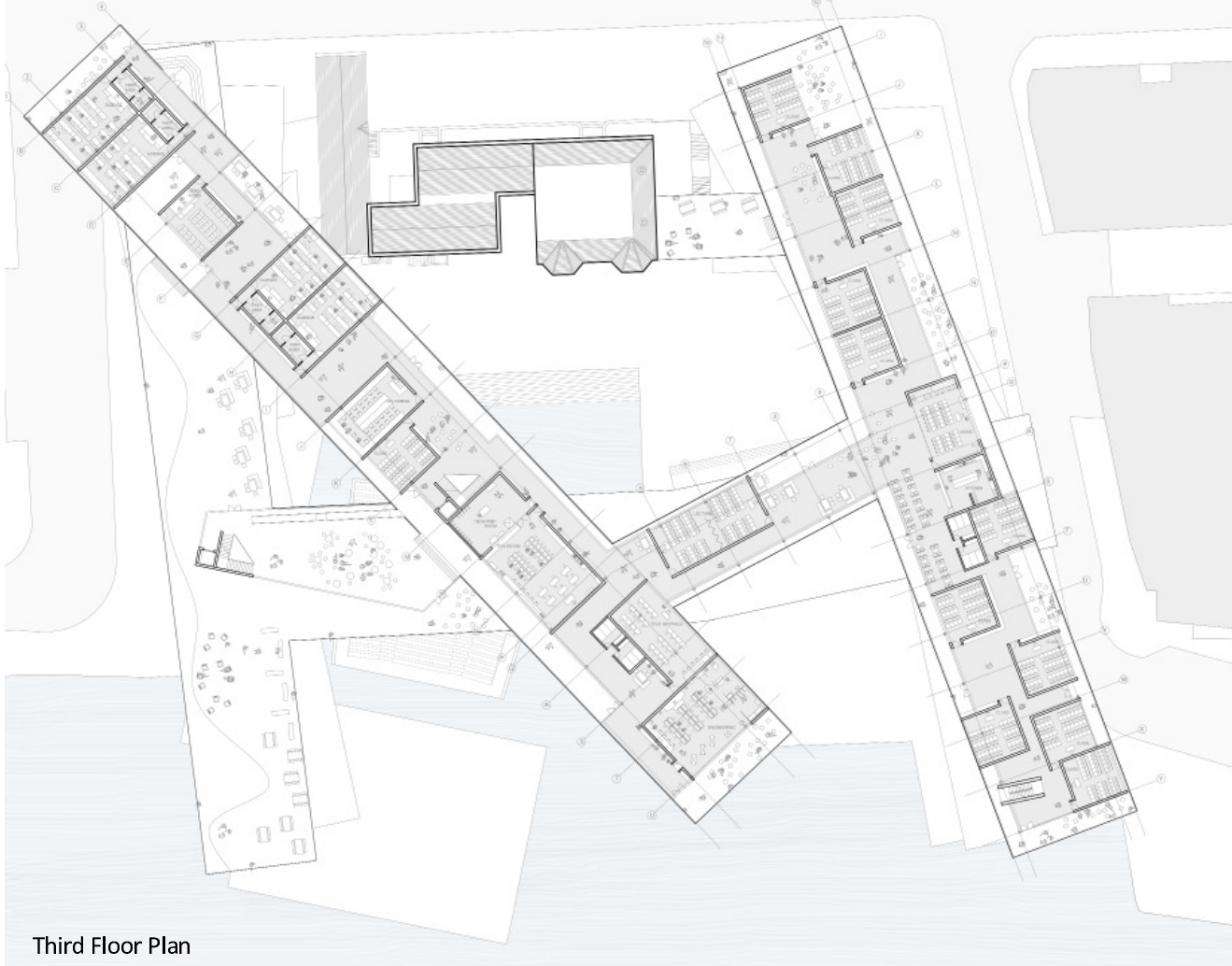
First Floor Plan



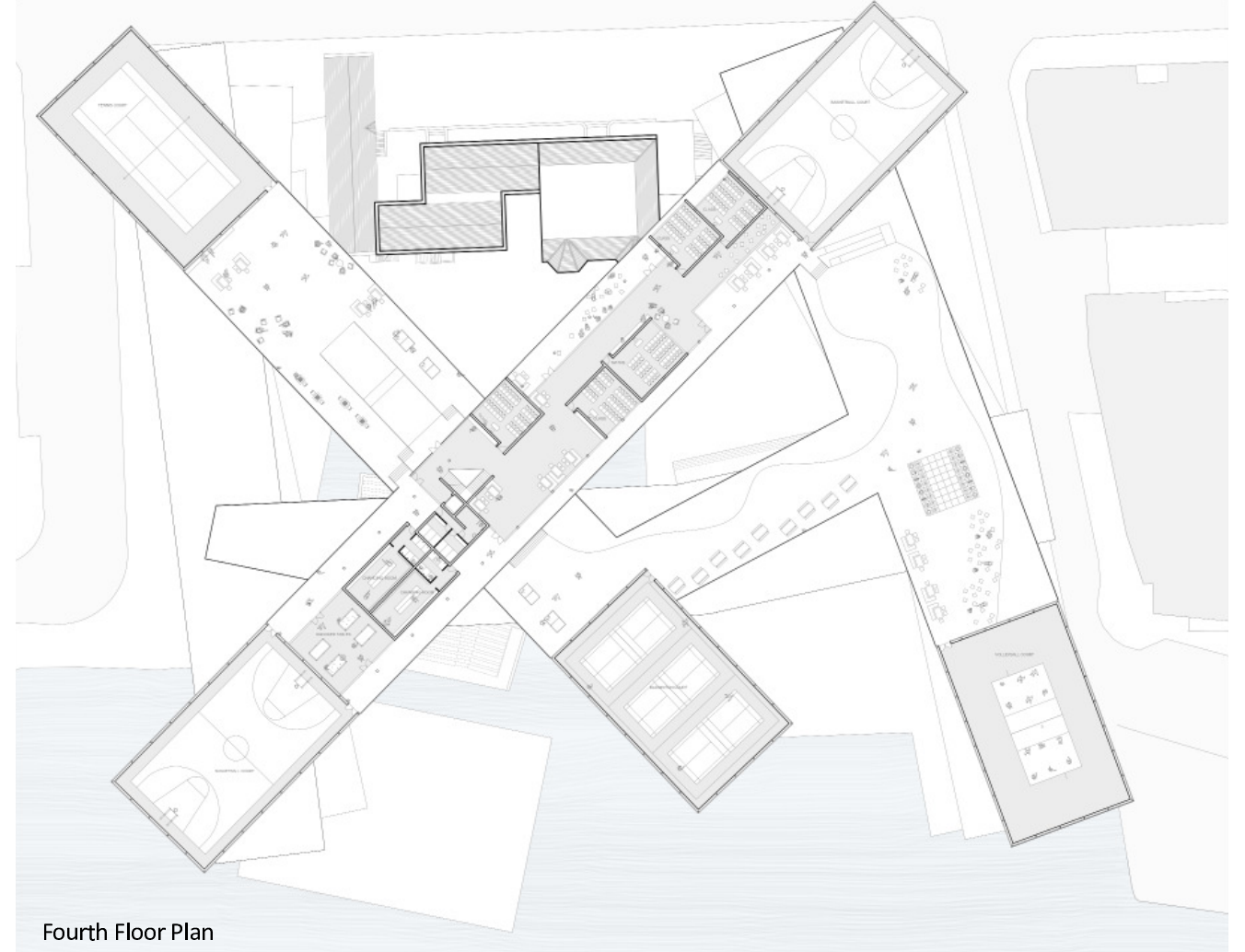
Ground Floor Plan



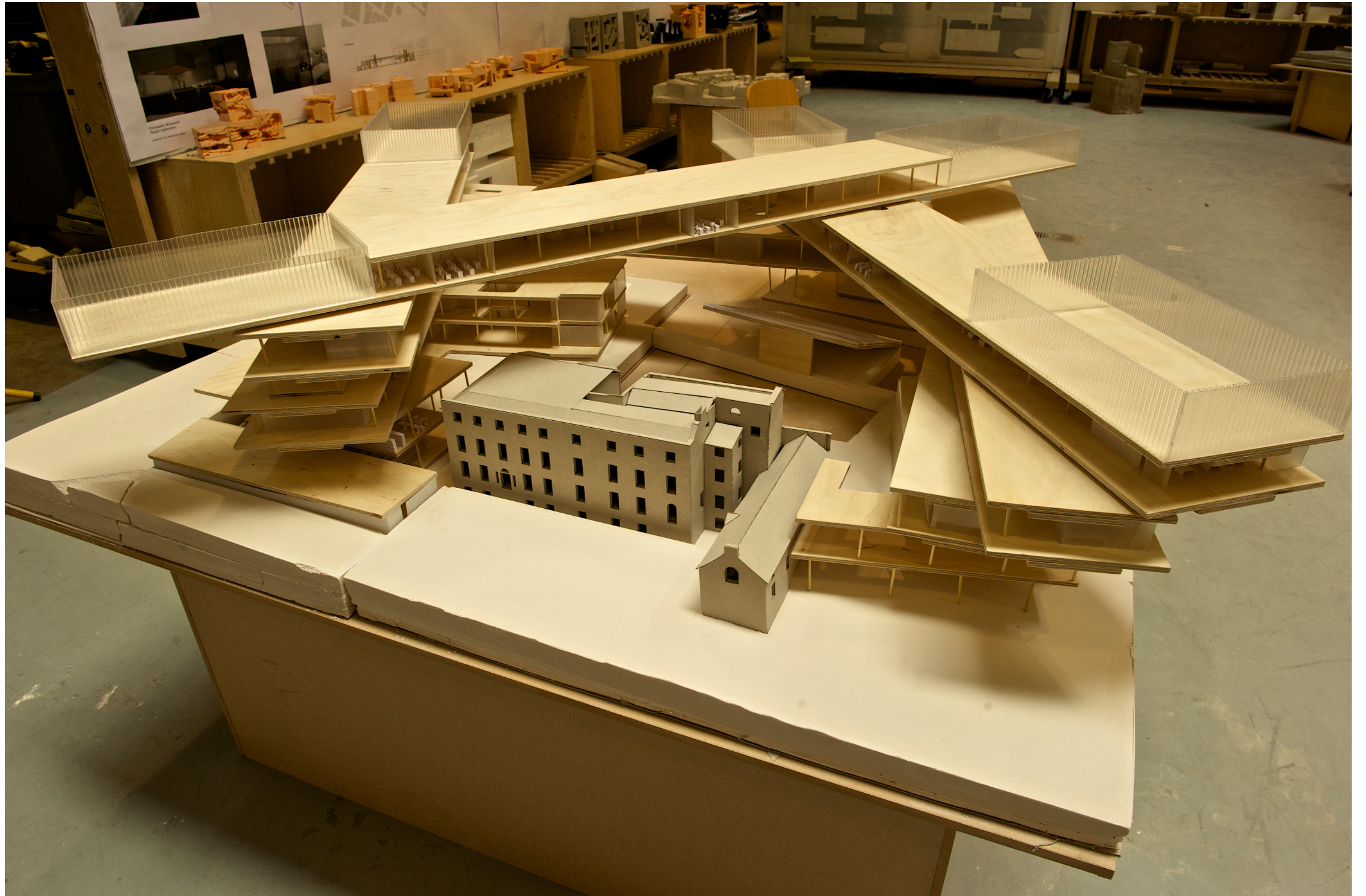
Second Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan



Fourth Floor Plan



The above photograph shows 1:100 model, the only context is that of the two existing georgian houses, which the project wraps around.

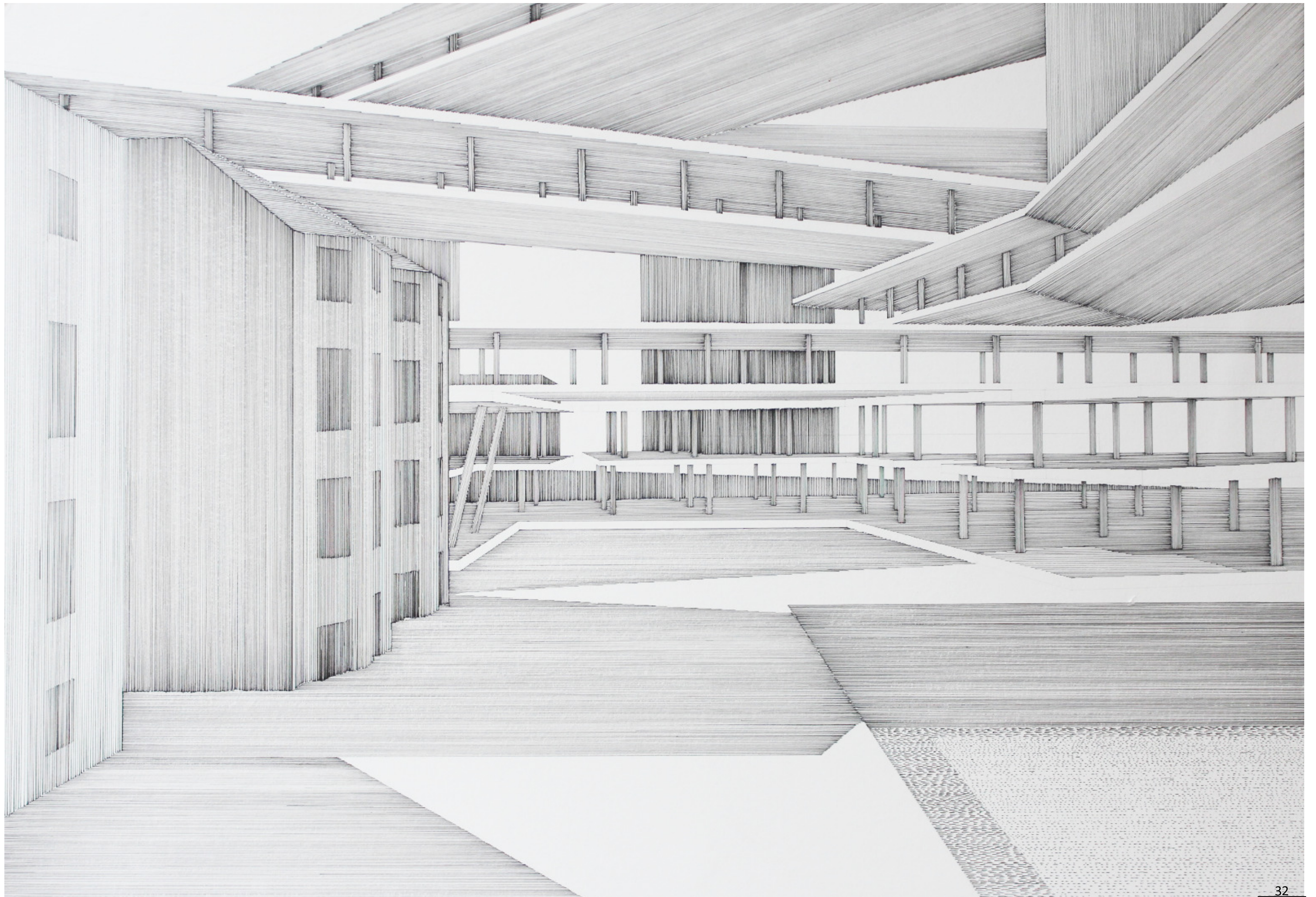


This photograph shows the riverside condition, the quay wall has been broken, this encourages the public to engage with the building by moving under and through it.



This page illustrates a inner view of the project. the stacking and overlapping of the structure and the spaces and veivs that this creates. I used the furniture to give a sense of scale.



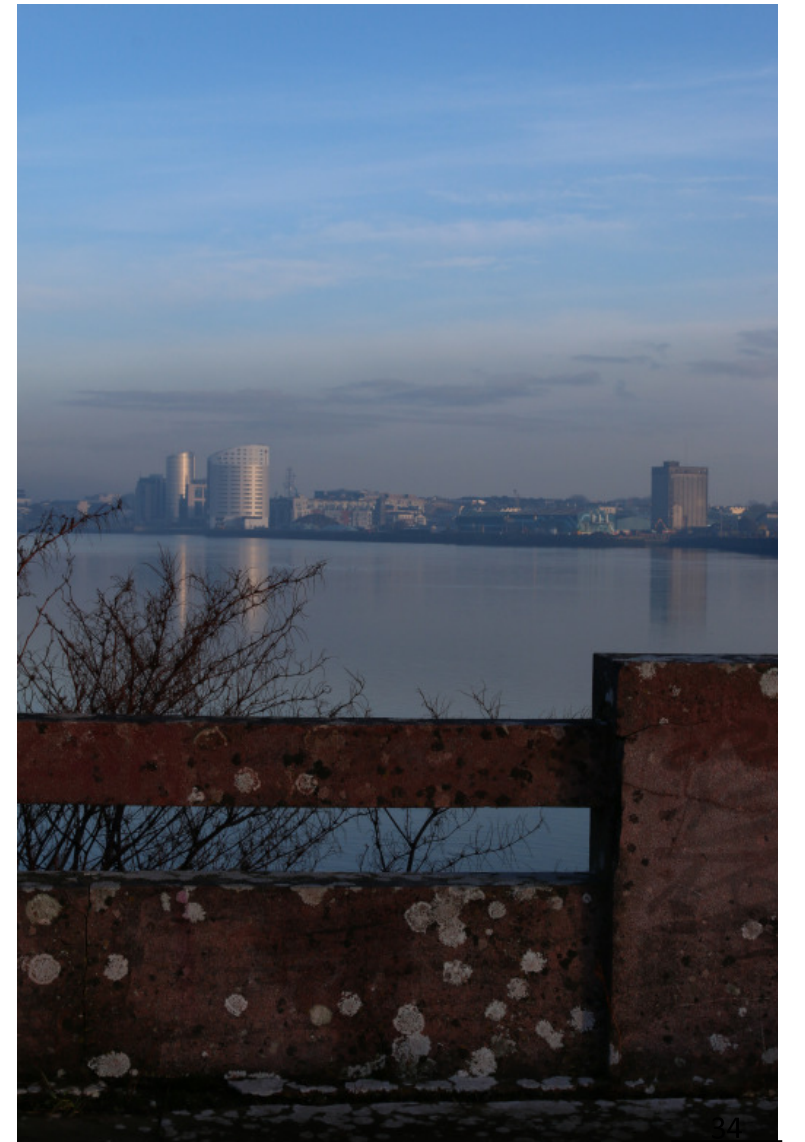


Appendix 1:

Limerick City Story: A Photo Essay

This photo essay shows the Limerick City that I see everyday, I have described the city and its edges, ignoring the iconic scenes therefore challenging its preconceived image. All of these photographs have been taken within the last few months, while I was writing and thinking about my thesis. I wanted the photographs to speak for themselves, so i have omitted captions.









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1. A Letter to Jane 1972 directors Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin
2. American photographers a century of images, 1999 PBS
3. Blow up 1966 director Michelangelo Antonioni
4. Blowout 1981 director Brian De Palma
5. Exit through the gift shop 2010 director Bansky
6. Life after people 2008 Author Steven Ross
7. Man with Camera 1929 director Dziga Vertov
8. Rear Window 1952 director Alfred Hitchcock

Figures:

- Fig.1 Wikipedia "eggshell" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eggshell>
- Fig.2 Inside of an egg shell http://www.teachnano.com/products/Desktop_SEM/G2_pro_gallery.html
- Fig.5 Bansky , Boston <http://www.neolaia.gr/2013/10/20/banksy-kallitexnis-afierwma/follow-your-dreams/>
- Fig. 11 Toyko Compression <http://photomichaelwolf.com/#tokyo-compression/12>
- Fig.12 Window Watching <http://photomichaelwolf.com/#window-watching/12>
- Fig.14 Crosby Street, New York 1977 http://www.thomasstruth32.com/smallsize/photographs/streets_of_new_york_city

- i. Wells, Liz. Photography a Critical Introduction. London: Routledge, 2004, 291.
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