

**ALTERNATIVE REALITY: THE MONUMENT, THE
MEGASTRUCTURE AND THE LUXURY HOTEL**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis inherits the infrastructure of Lower Manhattan's Exit 2, where the Brooklyn Bridge and elevated FDR highway intersect. A recent proposal for a nearby ultra-exclusive luxury hotel is controversial. The site faces issues of national security, flood-risk, seismic activity, historic preservation and social disjunction. Using social criticism as the vehicle for design, an alternative reality is suggested, one in which the luxury tower's hotel program is relocated, confined to the abandoned vaults beneath the bridge. The dynamics of the site are addressed through the formation of characters from the surrounding disjointed neighbourhoods. The resultant design focuses on seven key sectors: the approach, the lobby, the datum, the gardens, the hotel room, the structural jungle and the bunkers. Experienced through the eyes of the characters as passersby, the ornate structure of the vaults is juxtaposed against mundane city life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Steve Parcell and Diogo Burnay (for their guidance and willingness to entertain wild propositions), Kristie, Matt, Aria and Mom (for their patience with my exhausting academic pursuits), my studio colleagues (for the advice, criticism, beers and dance parties) and to Sam (for caring about cadence, bringing a non-architect's eye to the work and keeping me sane throughout the process).

Special thanks to the Bruce and Dorothy Rosetti Scholarship for providing me with the opportunity to study Manhattan.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Fiction is the impetus to architecture. Imagination is an upstream process toward making the fake become real. The fiction that architects write, as an inspiration for and a response to culture, forecasts the fabrication of cities, which marks history. To advance culture, architects must embrace the power of unrealized ideas and nurture wild propositions. By realizing the seemingly unimaginable, architects lay down a new milestone of tangible realities.¹

Architecture as Social Criticism

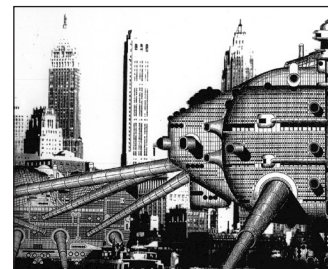
Manhattan has long been subject matter for the imaginative architect. Examples of speculative architectural fictions are Buckminster Fuller's Midtown Dome, Ron Herron's Walking City and Rem Koolhaas' Delirious New York. These fictional designs have served as a vehicle for social criticism, operating as the medium by which future, more productive realities are inferred. This thesis reconsiders the role of fictional narratives as a tool for both interpreting the complexities of a site and establishing a framework for alternative design trajectories. The site chosen as a testing ground is positioned between three disjointed neighbourhoods: the Civic Center, the South Seaport Market and the social housing district, Two Bridges, in Lower Manhattan. The area serves to support a residential and commuter population of more than fifty thousand people. The insertion of the Brooklyn Bridge in the late 19th century, and the subsequent construction of the elevated portion of Robert Moses' East River Drive (FDR), resulted in the formation of barriers and uninhabitable spaces where the infrastructural network meets the ground plane. Initially constructed to accommodate the masts of passing ships in the East River, the Brooklyn Bridge's elevation now precludes future development due to the obstructive nature of its on and off ramps.



Midtown domed city
(Fuller, 1960)



Hotel Sphinx in Delirious
NY (Koolhaas, 1978)



Archigram's walking city
(Herron, 1964)

1. Jimenez Lai, *Citizens of No Place: An Architectural Graphic Novel* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), 12.

Architectural landscape firm Weiss Manfredi noted the complications evident on site when developing a diagrammatic masterplan proposal in early 2003:

The challenges of this area were exacerbated following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Street closings, meant to increase security in this important civic precinct - that includes the municipal building, city hall, and the police headquarters, have had the unfortunate effect of impeding vehicular and pedestrian circulation. New security issues raised by the existing police headquarters near the base of the bridge led to the creation of new barriers undermining the already frail pedestrian and roadway connection to the north and south.²

In 2012, the site was again confronted with challenges as Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc upon the entirety of the northeastern seaboard. The devastating damage, affecting a great deal of Lower Manhattan, called for the attention of teams of architects, engineers and planners, as they sought to re-establish the commercial sector and ensure future resilience through the Rebuild by Design initiative.

As the second most expensive natural disaster in the country's history, the cost of resulting damage revealed the true threat that weather events exacerbated by climate change can and will pose. Sandy also marked a new era of public awareness, an understanding that helps us change our practices, thinking, and, ultimately, our way of living to address this new reality.³

The vast majority of resultant design proposals embody promises of an artificial utopia or assert an unwarranted degree of "environmental machismo," undermining the already weak relationship between the surrounding communities.⁴ To borrow a term from Rem



Hurricane Donna flooding
(Life Magazine, 1960)



Hurricane Sandy black out
(NY Magazine, 2012)



Rebuild by design collage
(OMA, 2013)

2. Marion Weiss, David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi, *Surface/Subsurface* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 56.
3. Rebuild by Design, *Working Together to Build a More Resilient Region*, last modified November 12, 2013, <http://www.rebuildbydesign.org>.
4. Alan Feuer, "Building for the Next Big Storm: After Hurricane Sandy, New York Rebuilds for the Future," *The New York Times* (2014), <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/26/nyregion/after-hurricane-sandy-new-york-rebuilds-for-the-future.html>.

Koolhaas, they are in many ways, “junkspace.”⁵ In light of the difficulties facing Manhattan’s East River development, Case Western Professor Ted Steinberg urges a reconsideration of New York’s approach to future coastal building. “We need to retreat, especially intellectually” he says, “from the idea that we can keep building anywhere we want. New Yorkers are tough. They can take whatever nature throws their way. But you just can’t grow forever at the expense of the sea.”⁶ This stems from the concept that the “key to the making of a more resilient city is not more money, but the understanding that disasters like Hurricane Sandy are not caused by nature alone, but by human beings too.”⁷ As such, this thesis embodies an alternative perspective.

Form Follows Fiction

Inspired by myriad fictional precedents and adopting one particular proposal’s program, this work reimagines the abandoned vaults beneath the Brooklyn Bridge as invaluable public space. The controversial proposal for a nearby ultra-exclusive luxury hotel is reappropriated, as the hotel program lends itself well to the juxtaposition of use and users. The construction of fictional characters and their inevitable intersection and interaction becomes the primary mode of both exploration and representation.

History unfolds as a series of events. Secondary stories coalesce and become a grand narrative, the history of a people, and the history of a place. The physical world we inhabit emerges from these various stories, incidents happenstance played out. Thousands of parallel histories exist, and as such, unlimited alternative realities. Each individual inhabits his own story. Form follows Fiction.⁸

The prioritization of the public aspects of the hotel program serve to focus the design to seven key sectors that belong to the city, rather than the private sector. The generation of seven corresponding perspectives (both written and drawn), housed within the vaults of the bridge, suggest tectonic and material resolution. Throughout, fictional avenues are implemented as a way of embodying social criticism, and even humour, in an attempt to mediate between the complexities of the site and the mundane realities of its daily use.

5. Rem Koolhaas, “Junkspace,” *October: Obsolescence* 100 (2002): 175-190.

6. Feuer, “Building for the Next Big Storm.”

7. Ibid.

8. SO-IL, *The End of Fictionalism*, last modified March 2014, <http://so-il.org/archive/2040-the-end-of-fictionalism/>

The architect does well to develop and depict alternative futures. The use of evocative imagery is a well practiced pastime of the discipline, but it should be taken further. The architect can give this imagery a narrative, and in storytelling he/she is able to make connections with those most primal and emotive aspects of the human condition, often overlooked in a rationalized approach.⁹ Armed with narrative, this work reflects upon the lives of four primary characters as they navigate through the ornate spaces of the forgotten vaults - the site's history, inextricably intertwined.

Thesis Question

How can narrative, rooted in social critique, assist in imagining the potential of abandoned infrastructure?



Architecture as social criticism

⁹ Jim Holt, "Two Brains Running," *The New York Times* (2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/27/books/review/thinking-fast-and-slow-by-daniel-kahneman-book-review.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

CHAPTER 2: THE SITE AND THE SETTING

Site Complexities and Pressures

Archigram, Superstudio, Buckminster Fuller and Rem Koolhaas have all addressed the complexity of New York City through fictional frameworks, whether through drawing or writing. “New representation modes have rapidly been absorbed within the mechanics of the discipline [architecture] where, since the last decades of the last century, there’s been a growing tendency to understand projects as (inter)active processes rather than as objects.”¹⁰ The potential to engage in “21st-century paper architecture” becomes particularly appealing when faced with the daunting task of framing, and subsequently designing, a proof for an architectural thesis, where feasibility and reality become subjective measures. The work presented in *MAS Context*’s latest issue, *Narrative*, explores this very domain. Focusing on the work of cartoonist Klaus and architect Jimenez Lai:

Often in the form of in-jokes, they play satire both on architecture’s latest news and on the most remote corners of the history of the discipline. Thus, Klaus’ work belongs in the new rise of architectural satire, illustrating the power of humor as a tool for more complex thinking on reality, and, therefore, architecture. Both Klaus and Jimenez Lai portray, in the end, the fruitful products of architectural narrative, fiction and caricature, elements located in the periphery of a discipline that is reinventing itself.¹¹

This thesis embraces narrative with the aim of addressing the complications presented by issues of national security, flood-risk, seismic activity, historic preservation and social disjunction on site. With a crowd of divergent characters present, narrative is used as a tool throughout to describe the varying perspectives of passersby. This approach prioritizes specificity over a generalized analysis. Blurring lines between literary and architectural domains throughout its development, the work seeks out parallels between the concepts of site and setting, users and characters, as well as sequence and plot. A brief description of the setting is first required, encompassing the site’s context and inherited infrastructure.

10. Koldo Lus, “A (not so) short recount of the interactions between architecture and graphic narrative,” *MAS Context: Narrative 20* (2013), <http://www.mascontext.com>.

11. Iker Gil, “Architectural Narratives,” *MAS Context: Narrative 20* (2013), <http://www.mascontext.com/20-narrative-winter-2013>.

A Brief Morphology of the Built Environment

New York is built, from 1850 to 1933, in a single spurt of imagination and energy. The first prototype of the modern metropolis, Manhattan is turned into a laboratory to test the potential of modern life in a radical, collective experiment. A freeform coalition of developers, visionaries, writers, architects, and journalists intersects with popular expectations to make the city an extreme and exhilarating democratic machine, one that is able to process all newcomers into New Yorkers.¹²

The island of Manhattan would eventually inflate to 125% of its original size, which was documented by Henry Hudson and the Dutch settlers upon its inception in 1609. Entire communities were built atop infill. Battery Park City sits upon reclaimed land on the Hudson River, owing its existence to the enormous amount of soil taken from the excavation site of the first World Trade Center complex. Factoids litter the surrounding context with an air of secrecy. Now appearing as an anomaly through the grid, Broadway once marked the path taken by cattle through agricultural lots. Today, Broadway demarcates the northwestern boundary of the Civic Center in Lower Manhattan.

Manhattan is the 20th century's Rosetta Stone. Not only are large parts of its surface occupied by architectural mutations (Central Park, the Skyscraper), utopian fragments (Rockefeller Center, the UN Building) and irrational phenomena (Radio City Music Hall), but in addition each block is covered with several layers of phantom architecture in the form of past occupancies, aborted projects and popular fantasies that provide alternative images to the New York that exists.¹³

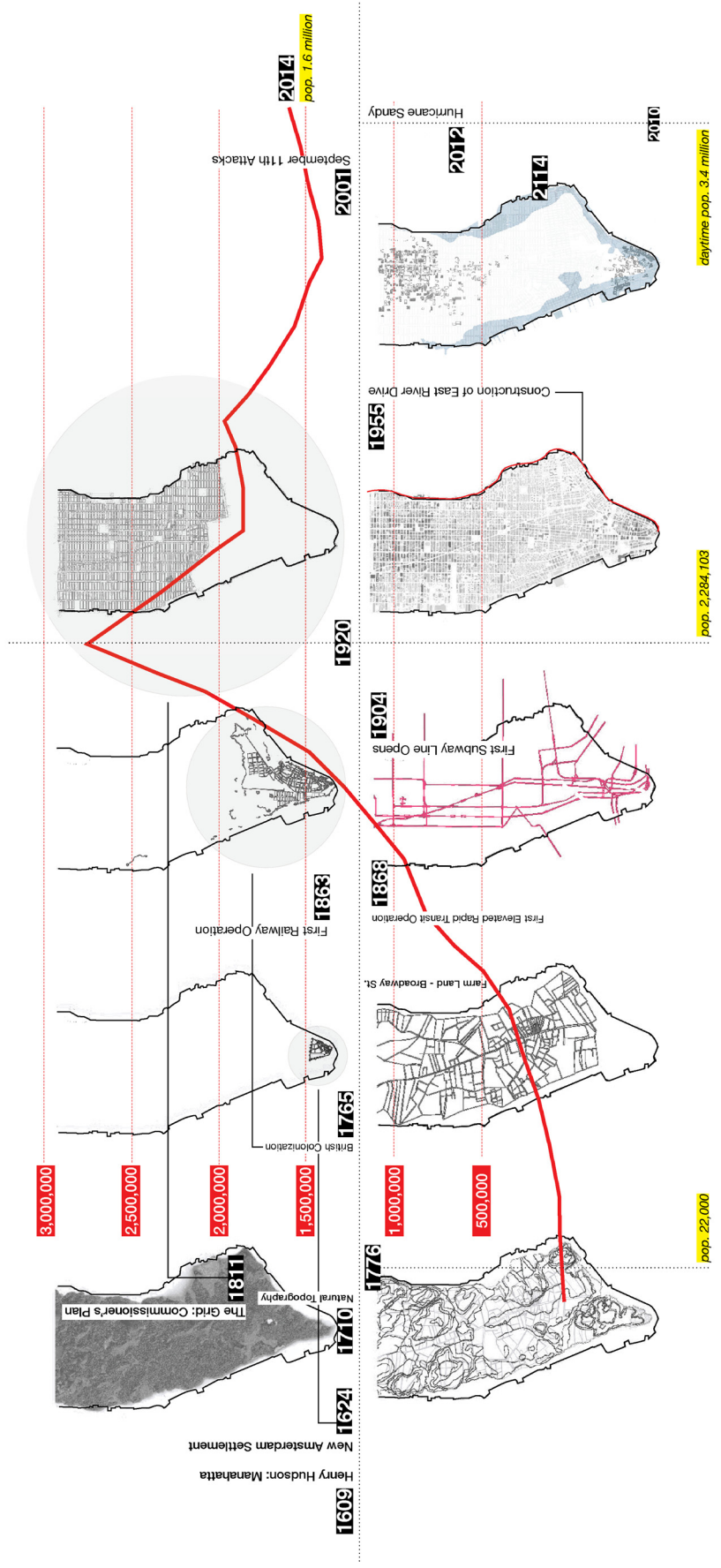
The looming ghosts of architectural development, both past and future, have situated this site in a unique position. With a now ancient history of functioning as a public promenade, the future of the underside of the Brooklyn Bridge is bleak. As the East River is arguably considered the “barometer for urban restructuring” within the city context, the reimagination of the Brooklyn Bridge and FDR interchange could offer up potential solutions for the near 700 miles of underutilized elevated infrastructure casting shadows across New York City's five boroughs.¹⁴ After all, the island has limited space (35% of which is occupied by streets) and the “maintenance of its landlocked status is essential to its identity.”¹⁵

12. Rem Koolhaas, “Delirious No More: Waning Space I _ NY,” *Wired Online* 11, no. 6 (2003), http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/11.06/i_ny_pr.html.

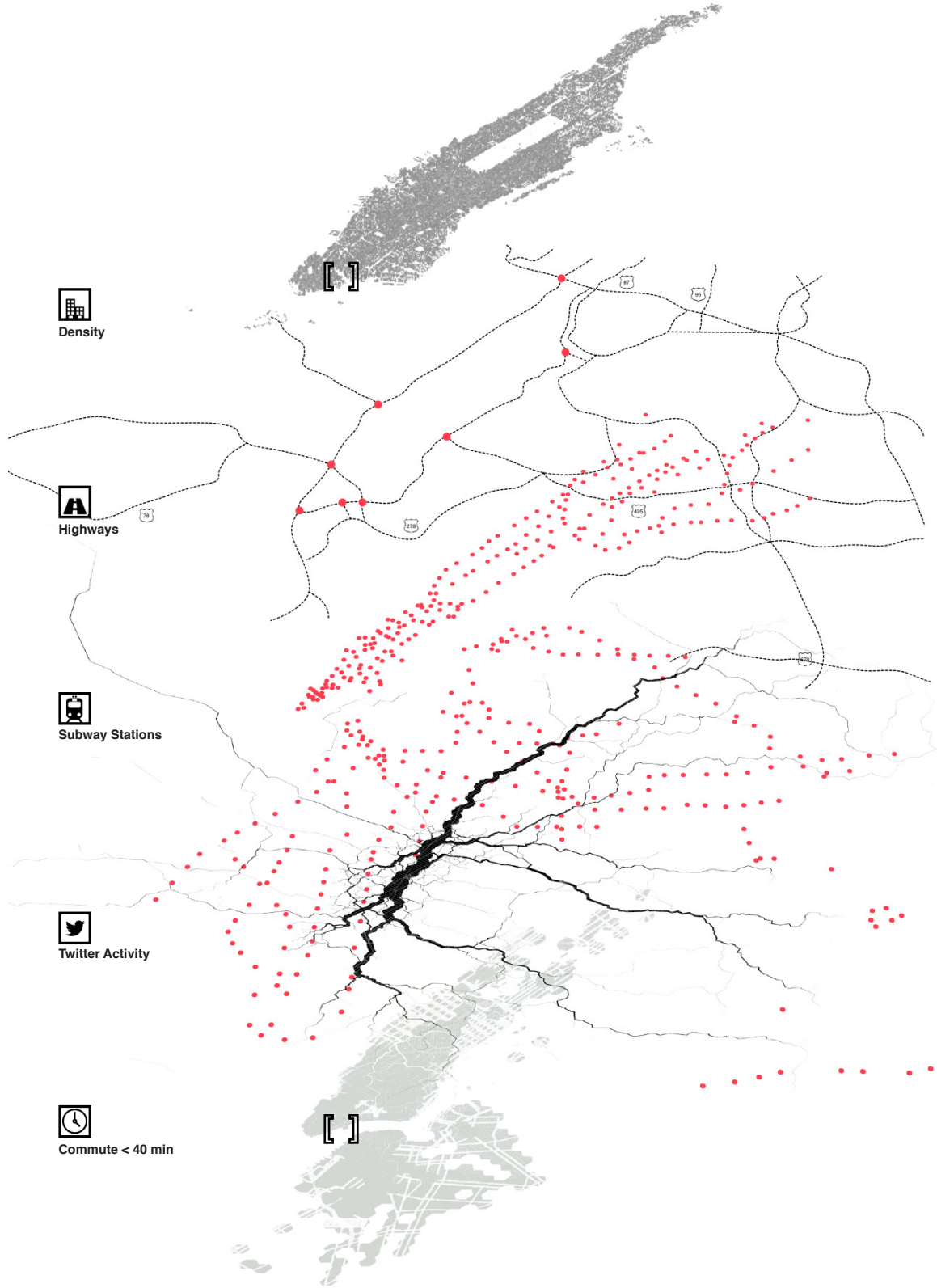
13. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994), 9.

14. Paul Greenberg, Roland Lewis and Joan K. Davidson, “The War of New York's Waterfront,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 2014.

15. Elizabeth Fazzare, “A Short History of Manhattan's Population Density,” *Architizer* (2014), <http://architizer.com/blog/manhattan-population-density>.



Morphology of the built environment



A network of connectivity surrounds the site



The island, its finite connections and its speculative proposals



Operating below the grid: distinct neighbourhoods

National Security, 9/11 and the Inaccessible

New Yorkers surrender to empathy. The tragedy of 9/11 inspires a mood of collective tenderness that is almost exhilarating, almost a relief: Hype's spell has been broken and the city can recover its own reality principle, emerge with new thinking from the unthinkable. But politics interfere. In spite of Bloomberg's pragmatic sobriety, the transnational metropolis is enlisted in a national crusade. New York becomes a city (re)captured by Washington. Through the alchemy of 9/11, the authoritarian morphs imperceptibly into the totalitarian. A competition for rebuilding Ground Zero is held, not to restore the city's vitality or shift its center of gravity, but to create a monument at a scale that monuments have never existed.¹⁶

Social Disjunction: Three Disjointed Neighbourhoods

The Civic Center is inhabited by Manhattan's elite and is defined by iconic buildings including the Supreme Courthouse, City Hall and Municipal Building. The area boasts below average density, a median age of 33 and an average income of \$197 962.¹⁷ Manhattan's growing gap in wealth distribution is made starkly apparent between the Civic Center and the adjacent Two Bridges neighbourhood, marked by a series of social housing projects built in the 1950s. Two Bridges has historically served to support a dynamic immigrant population and is thus considerably more ethnically diverse than its surrounding counterparts. Comprised of 35% Chinese, 40% Puerto Rican, 12% Caucasian and 12% African American, the area has strong ties to both Chinatown and the sub-district of Little Fuzhou.¹⁸ To the southeast, positioned alongside the East River, is the historic South Seaport Market. The district has a celebrated history of commercial success, a hot spot for herds of tourists since the injection of suburban spirit in the form of a 120-store shopping mall bulging out of its piers in 1985. The destruction caused by Hurricane Sandy, albeit ruinous, has situated these neighbourhoods in an intriguing position, providing them with an opportunity to rebuild with greater sensitivity to context.

Given the ripeness for redevelopment and underlying commercial potential, the area has become the subject of multiple mega-proposals and architectural competitions. As architectural critic Nicholai Ouroussoff points out in a piece for the *New York Times*, the bulk of these proposals offer up "traditional lamp posts and quaint park benches, a drop of nostalgia for a city that never was" and contain "all the charm of an open-air suburban

16. Koolhaas, "Delirious No More."

17. Point-2-Homes Online, *Civic Center Demographics*, last modified January 2014, <http://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/NY/Manhattan/Civic-Center-Demographics.html>.

18. Ibid.



Civic Center: City Hall



South Seaport Market



Two Bridges

mall.”¹⁹ The perpetual desire for developers to exploit the water’s edge to realize their suburban dreams of commercialization is particularly apparent in this district. “The virus ascribed to ‘junkspace’ is in fact the virus of shopping itself; which, like disneyfication, gradually spreads like a toxic moss across the known universe.”²⁰

Although the FEMA-regulated 100-year flood line travels equally through Two Bridges and the South Seaport Market, the majority of submitted Rebuild by Design proposals opt to depict fantastical renderings along the coastline, featuring a variety of improbable activities given the notoriously contaminated status of the East River’s water. These propositions are embodied by Koolhaas’ description of “junkspace” as “superstrings of graphics, transplanted emblems of franchise and sparkling infrastructures of light, LEDs, and video” which are authourless in nature, yet “always unique, utterly unpredictable, yet intensely familiar.”²¹ Serving up contrast, Ouroussoff suggests New York’s celebrated High Line project is a “much-needed break from the quaint Jane Jacobs-inspired vision of New York that is threatening to transform Manhattan into a theme park vision of itself, a place virtually devoid of urban tension.”²² Many of the East River proposals threaten to eliminate the gritty integrity of the waterfront, the remnants of the 1970s “decrepit piers, graffiti-covered warehouses and tetchy drag queens” that serve to provide this desired urban tension.²³ These utopian depictions “tend to be one-dimensional, purged of any internal complexity and contradiction. Because of this, they come across as being removed from reality and the deeper texture of life, and therefore lose any power of

19. Nicholai Ouroussoff, “Making the Brutal F.D.R. Unsentimentally Humane,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2005.

20. Koolhaas, “Junkspace,” 177.

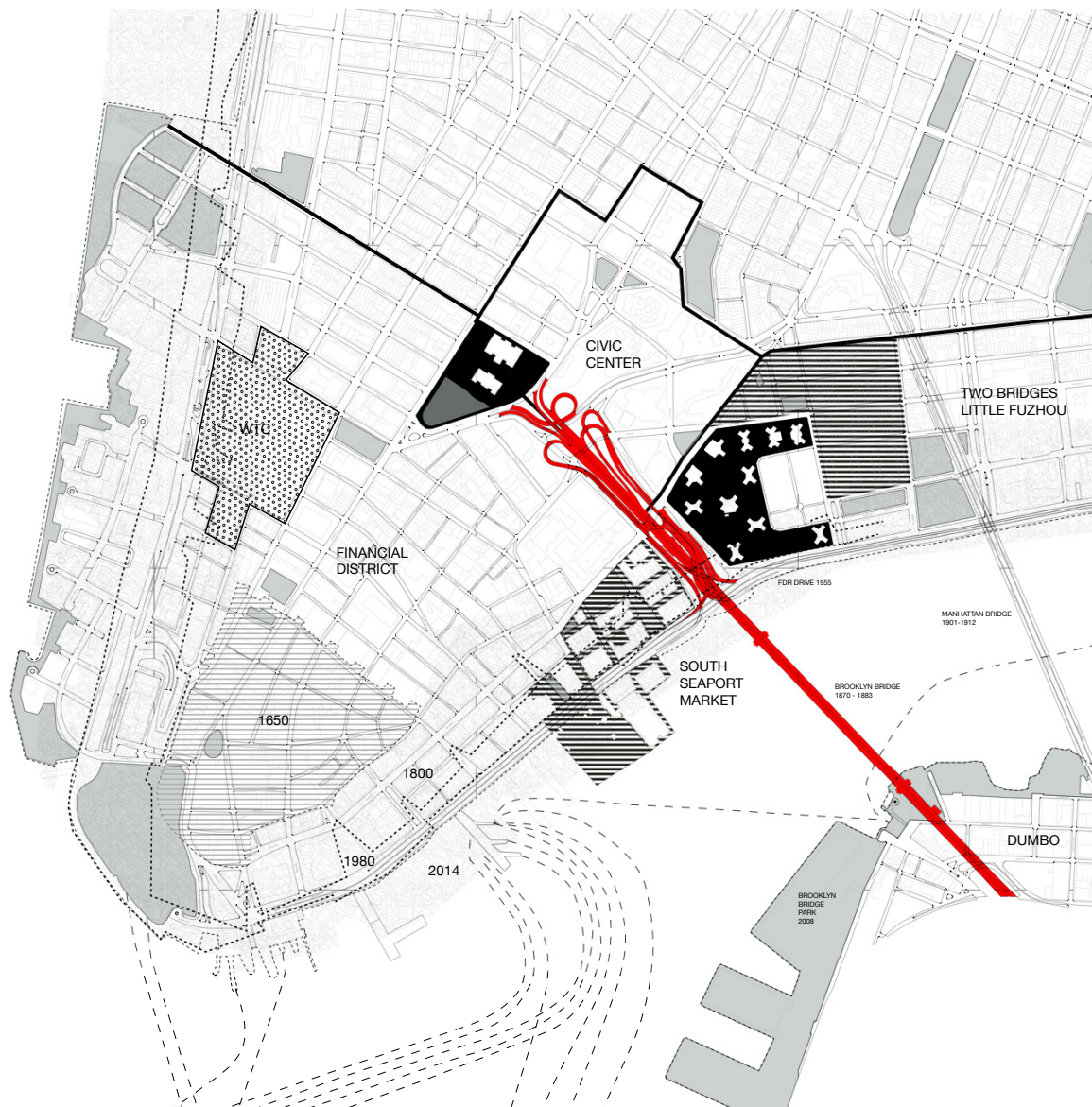
21. Ibid.

22. Ouroussoff, “Making the Brutal F.D.R. Unsentimentally Humane.”

23. Ibid.

conviction.”²⁴ Overlooked are the complexities introduced by the disjointed nature of the surrounding neighbourhoods directly inland.

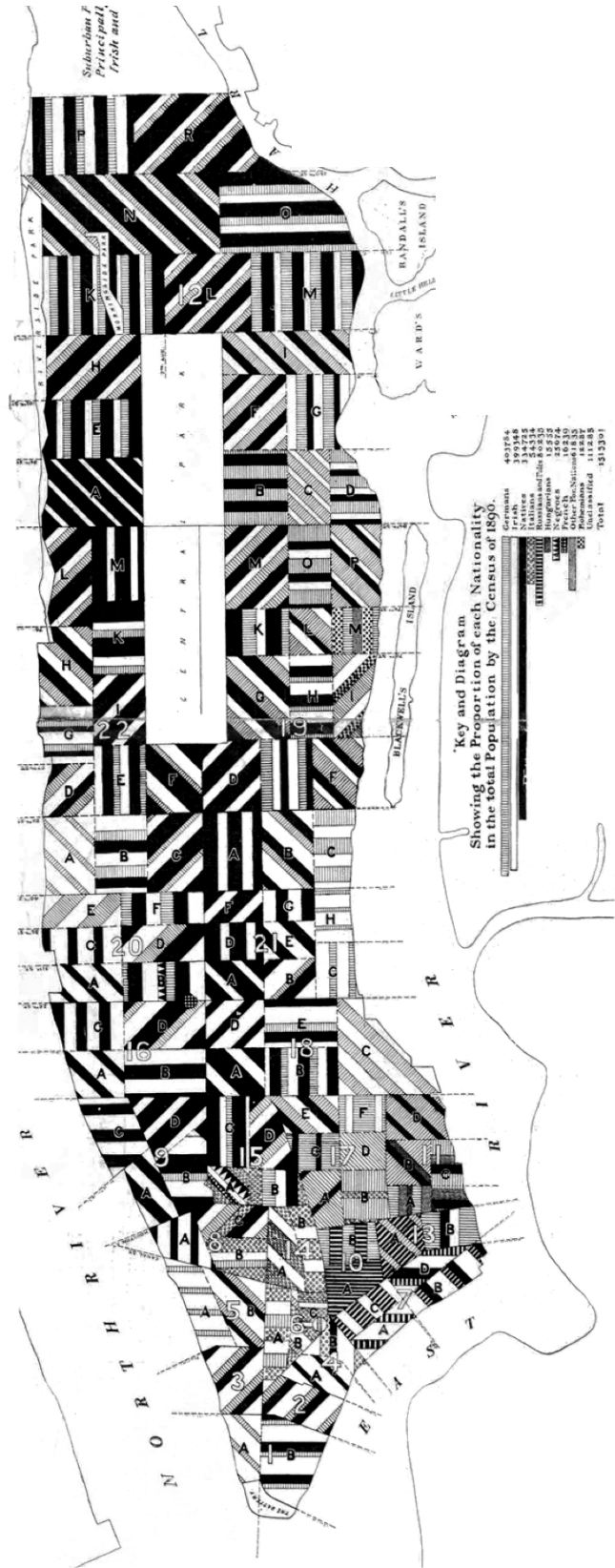
These neighbourhoods are severed by a series of support structures that render the majority of the ground plane either inaccessible or obstructed. The result is particularly disorienting for visitors, who require the assistance of city dwellers to locate the pedestrian on-ramp to the Brooklyn Bridge from the disconnected, overly flamboyant waterfront.



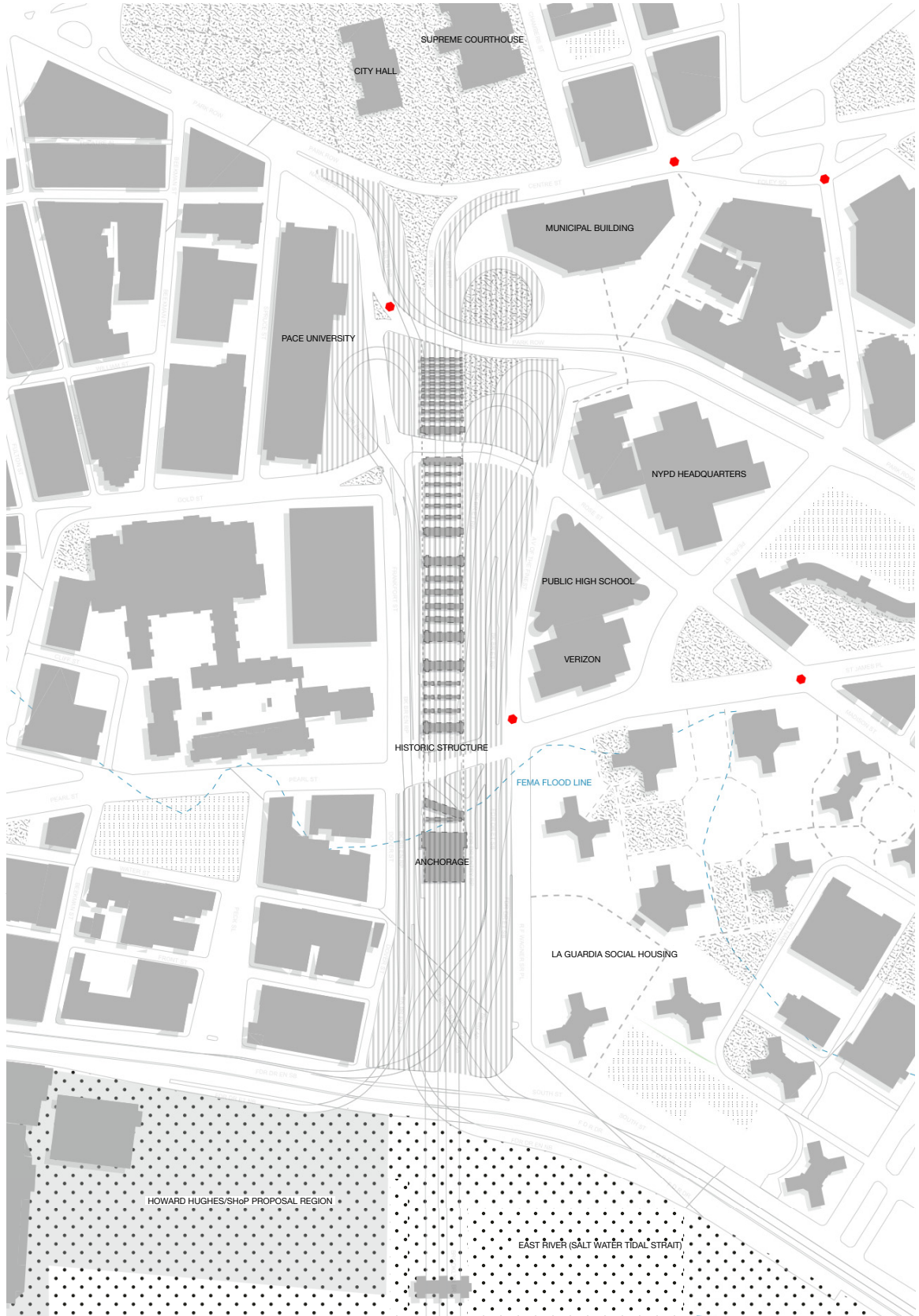
Three disjointed neighbourhoods and a fluctuating coastline



24. Pedro Gadanho, *Once Upon a Place: Architecture and Fiction* (Lisbon: Caledoscopio Press, 2014), 20.



A history of patchwork neighbourhoods (US Library of Congress, 1890)



Current conditions: access and inaccessibility



Inherited Infrastructure: The Monument and the Megastructure

In fact, when dealing with the consolidated city, a territory mostly made of time, maybe architecture should let down its artistic aura and convert into crafts work that could invest in the reconfiguration of the city imaginary through new strategies of connection between its dissonant parts - linking space fragments while trying to overcome the city's past traumas through a renovated spatial narrative.²⁵

The abandoned vaults beneath the Brooklyn Bridge are remarkable in scale. Past uses have included city storage, wine cellars, illegitimate housing, and performance spaces. Today, however, the vaults function solely to support vehicular circulation and views to the monumental, Neo-Gothic towers above.²⁶ The disconnection between the perceived monument and its underside is crucial to this thesis work. In contrast to the Brooklyn-side abutment and anchorage, the Manhattan-side of the bridge has sealed off all but five of its once penetrable archways. There are currently 29 vaulted spaces above-grade, two of which service vehicular traffic perpendicular to the bridge. The bridge's designer, John A. Roebling, intended for the bridge to have the capacity to support more than the population of New York City at the time of construction.²⁷ Subsequent structural retrofitting has secured the robust nature of the historic structure. In stark contrast to the rigidity of the solid-stone support walls is the megastructure comprised of ramps to and from the elevated FDR highway running alongside the East River. Tacked on as if temporary, the FDR's steel support columns have established permanent obstructions on grade. Speed is controlled by constant traffic and the overwhelming presence of on and off ramps, unintentionally quieting the discarded vaults beneath.



Monument



Megastructure

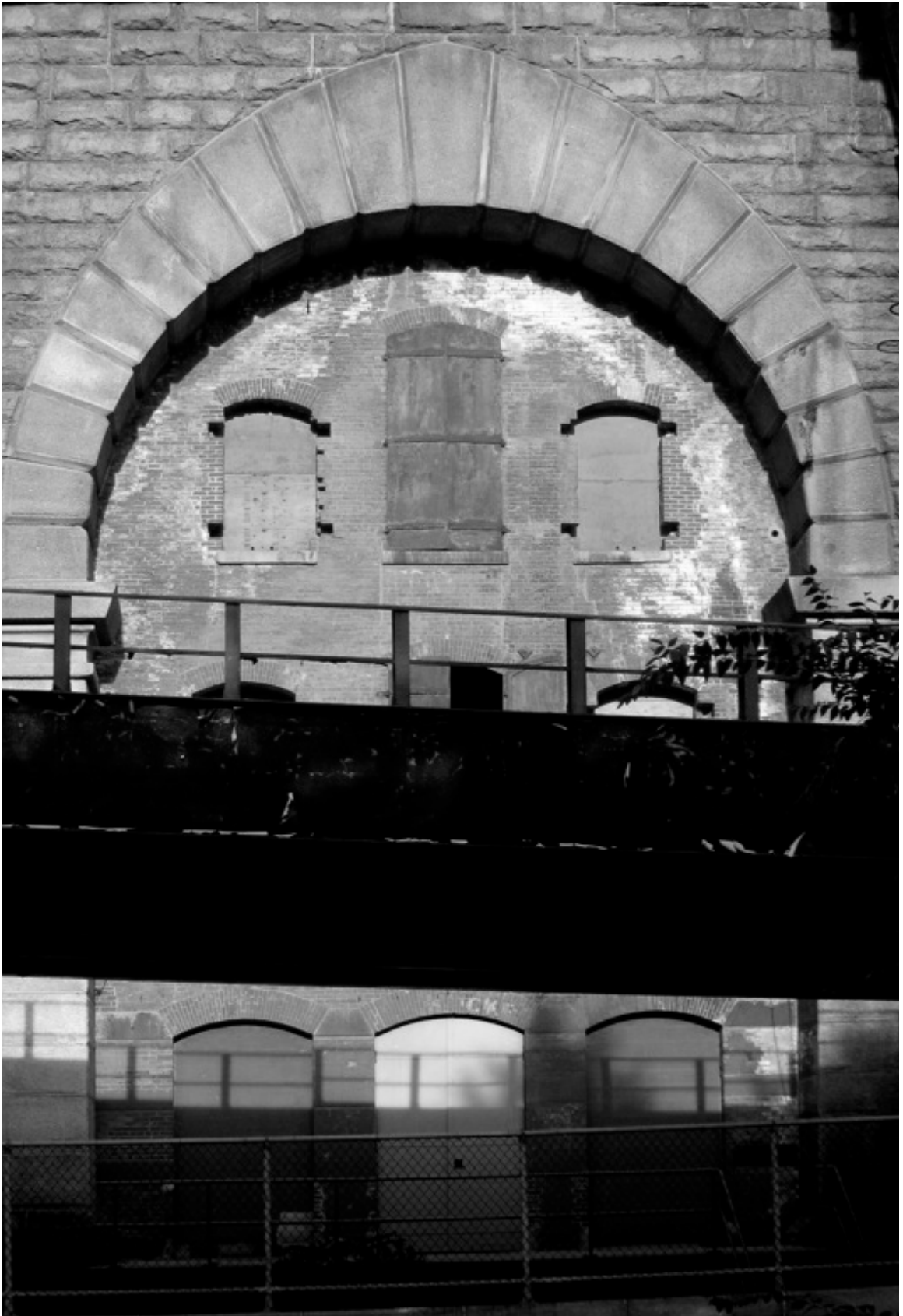


By the discarded vaults

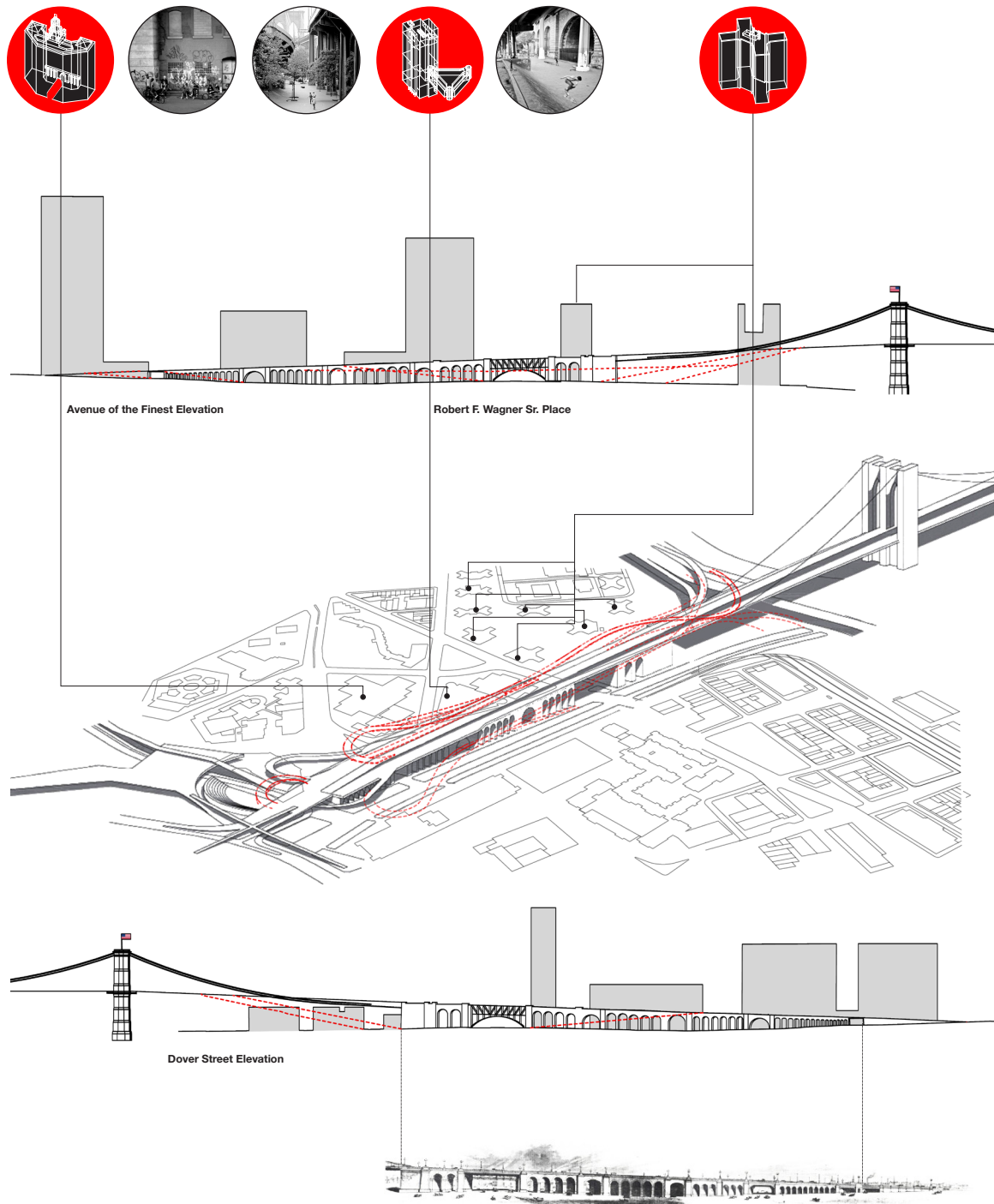
25. Ibid., 66.

26. Sewell Chan, "Inside the Brooklyn Bridge: A Whiff of the Cold War," *New York Times*, March 21, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/21/nyregion/21capsule.html?_r=0.

27. Ken Burns, "America: Brooklyn Bridge," *PBS* (1982).



The Monument and the megastructure

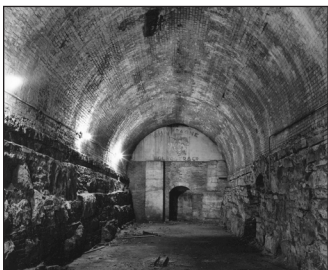


Street elevations: infrastructure in the city context
(base image courtesy of Weiss et al., 2008)

Documenting the abandoned vaults has proved challenging for several reasons, particularly due to security concerns placing restrictions on corporations such as Google and Bing from using traditional mapping and imaging techniques. The massive amount of closures and general inaccessibility to the area prohibit first-hand documentation at a detailed scale. This leads to the use of historical drawings, anecdotal articles, personal accounts and a mere two interior photographs as the primary means of investigation. Surprisingly, the most thorough documentation of the abandoned vaults is attributed to an informal coalition of skateboarders and BMX-bikers that called the Brooklyn Banks home, until its closure in 2010.²⁸ The *New York Times* described their occupancy:

It is a long, sloping plaza covered in smooth red brick, with a few trees stretching for rare beams of sunlight. Those who amble into this area generally are children passing to and from a nearby school, or misplaced tourists looking for the bridge's pedestrian walkway to Brooklyn. But for generations of skateboarders, and an increasing number of BMX bikers, the place carries an iconic name and a sacred meaning. It is the Brooklyn Banks. It is the place to go, to be, and to be seen.²⁹

The stories collected from the undercurrents of the bridge served to narrow the focus of the project to the area between Gold and Madison Street and the Anchorage (190 feet inland from the coastline) as well as inspire additional, fictional means of investigation. The selected site contains the largest of the vaulted spaces (some soaring over 50 feet high) and the least obtrusive portions of the adjacent F.D.R. megastructure. The site houses highly contrastive structural support systems and consequentially showcases a dynamic interplay between light and shadow reminiscent of Piranesi's drawings.



Below the anchorage
(Greenberg, 2010)



The Gothic Arch
(Piranesi, 1750)



Interior perspective
(Greenberg, 2010)

28. John Branch, "To Fix Bridge, Skateboard Mecca May Be Lost," *New York Times*, May 14, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/sports/14skateboard.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

29. Ibid.

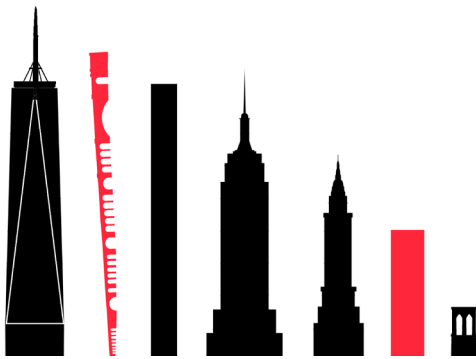


Current site conditions

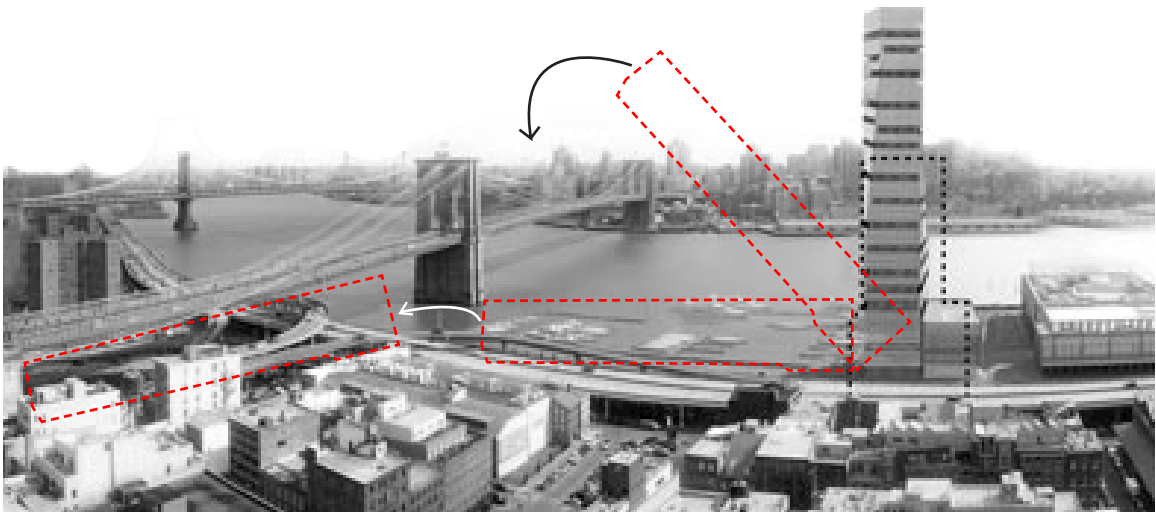
Program

Alternative Reality: Reconfigured Program

The program adopted for this thesis is re-appropriated from a recent proposal for a luxury hotel directly adjacent to the Brooklyn Bridge, built upon reconstructed infill on the East River. The proposal is controversial for several reasons. It jogs around a National Historic District, ensuring its capacity to dwarf the adjacent towers supporting the Brooklyn Bridge. At the time of construction, in the late 1800s, these were the tallest built objects in New York City. The proposal also places the required affordable units off site and plops a swimming pool for its inhabitants atop a nearby middle school. The proposition of an adjacent marina further demarcates its exclusivity. This thesis attempts to adopt many of these programmatic considerations, reconfiguring them within the underutilized structure of the vaults, situated just inland of the FEMA-regulated 100-year flood line.



Scale of abandoned vaults and proposed luxury tower



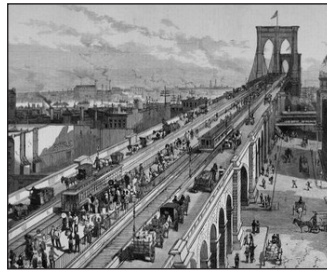
Reconfiguring the Howard Hughes proposal
(base image courtesy of SHoP Architects)

Reviving Public Space off the Grid

In many ways, the spirit of this thesis is reminiscent of the original capacity of the Brooklyn Bridge's support structure to accommodate pedestrian traffic along a perpendicular grain. Archived drawings completed at the time of construction indicate a multitude of users and activities situated within and around the base of the bridge. Roebling's initial intention was in fact to infill some of the archways as a commercial arcade, although it would eventually be deemed cost prohibitive.³⁰ In spite of the barriers created by the surrounding infrastructural network, there remains potential to reactivate this grain through the insertion of public program and throughfares. Much of the site is already located off the city grid proper, introducing the prospect of becoming exclusively pedestrian.



Public promenade
(Shapiro)



Bridge vs. street level
(Harpers, 1883)



Interior cables housed
(Shapiro)

30. Ken Burns, "America: Brooklyn Bridge."

CHAPTER 3: THE USERS AND THE CHARACTERS

Modes of Representation

Architects typically receive sites: delimited entities, already partitioned and given boundaries. Oftentimes, the subsequent analysis of these sites is limited to the reading of geographical data, whether it be in the form of contours, property lines, building footprints, transportation networks or water systems – all readily accessible and represented graphically with ease. Arguably, this stems from a model in architectural education taken from the natural sciences in which students are encouraged to perform site research analogous to data mining. The overall goal of which is to extract information from a given data set. However, the “data” obtained and processed throughout this practice are often mistaken for intimate “knowledge” of a particular site. The result of this reductive approach is a loss of consideration for the everyday life-world that is undeniably ever-present on site, where the everyday life-world refers to the “inter-subjective pool of perceiving.”³¹ Multiple hidden networks serve to support the perceived reality of the city - the delivering of fresh coffee, activation of road crossings, removal of snow from the streets, all of which are inextricable from our perception of a place, and all of which are consistently underrepresented by traditional modes of architectural representation.

In this work, the filter of representation acts on the inherited architectural artefacts of the site in the development of a working method. This process is influenced by a significant number of precedents in the artistic movements of Dada and Surrealism and the political movements of Lettrism and the Situationist International. The underlying theme is an exploration of the unimaginable and impossible through graphic technique as well as the reuse and subversion of existing imagery. While these explorations have a long tradition in art, they have become somewhat forgotten in the architectural discipline. “The beginnings of Dada,” poet Tristan Tzara recalled, “were not the beginnings of art, but of disgust.”³² Dadaists both embraced and critiqued modernity, imbuing their works with references to the “technologies, newspapers, films, and advertisements that increasingly

31. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 142.

32. William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 12.

defined contemporary life.”³³ In the same way that Dada artists were reacting to the cultural pressures of the day, this thesis work reacts to development proposals situated on Manhattan’s East River, particularly those engaging utopian ideals and those exerting “environmental machismo.”³⁴ As Dada poet Hugo Ball stated, art “is an opportunity for the true perception and criticism of the times we live in.”³⁵ The same can be said for architecture. Influenced heavily by Dada and Surrealist art, the Lettrists and Situationist International would eventually employ a similar method to subvert the ideologies of the Western world. These movements attacked established institutions and the values they represented, leaving their mark upon the libertarian left, the punk movement and postmodernism, the unifying goal of which was to counteract the “spectacle”. This was accomplished through the insertion of moments deliberately constructed for the purpose of reawakening people towards authentic desire.³⁶ One particular tactic, referred to as *détournement*, is described as follows:

The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of those means. In a more elementary sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.³⁷

Although these may seem disparate considerations, they become incorporated into both the representational strategy of the project and the resultant design work through the exploitation of opportunities to disrupt the expected within the functioning of the hotel proper. For instance, exit doors lead through structural jungles, elevators open into grand theater spaces and utilitarian corridors are interrupted by large, centered columns. Fictional narratives operate as both the means and method by which these programmatic (and formal) insertions are realized. The distortion of an expected reality aims to undermine the exclusive nature of the luxury hotel’s program. By introducing unpredictable public intersections between users and the built environment, the hotel is designed to encourage the inevitable crisscrossing of its diverse occupants.

33. Museum of Modern Art, *The Role of Visual Art in Dada*, last modified 2014, http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/dada.

34. Feuer, “Building for the Next Big Storm.”

35. Museum of Modern Art, *The Role of Visual Art in Dada*.

36. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1970).

37. Situationist International, *Definitions*, last modified August 2003, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline///si/is1.html>.

The Undercurrents: Formulating Site Characters

Fiction will always be ahead of reality. That is its poetic function. Its feet, if it can be said to have feet, are more nimble. Its role is to explore the outer edges of reality, to scout the territory beyond as well as the hidden depths within. Reality needs fiction in order to probe the unknown and be prepared for the future. Evolution is dependent on fiction. Fiction, if it can be defined as experimental recombinations of elements of the known, is the evolutionary process behind mutations as well as one of the filters leading to the survival of the fittest ideas. It is reality itself that commissions fiction to think wildly. All scientific research starts with fiction. All art is fiction. Urban fictions are no exception: it is the manner in which our civilization reflects upon its destiny.³⁸

The development of a consistent representational strategy, initially inspired by these artistic and political movements, are the means by which fictional avenues are explored. Representation is used as a design tool, as opposed to being reduced to a mechanism of production. The Lettrists and Situationist International subverted existing imagery as a means of criticism. The reuse of the proposed luxury hotel's program opens up similar channels of personal expression in this work. Embracing fictional forms of representation enables the blurring of boundaries between literary and architectural domains. Writing and drawing are used in tandem throughout the design process to explore themes in setting, character, plot, sequence, material and structure. A constant search for graphic techniques capable of expressing nonlinear and multifaceted perspectives is significant for the realization of the work. Jimenez Lai discusses how comics can do just this:

Cartoon is an enticing way to convey complexity; it is more than just a rendering technique. If we distill the attitude of the collection of stories in this graphic novel into two words, they would be *calibrated superficiality*. It is the idea that something difficult does not need to rely on effects of obscurity. It is a celebration of impressionable thoughts - a visual impact that contains many layers to be unpacked and explored.³⁹

Lai's architectural graphic novel is particularly salient due to the level of specificity achieved via first-person perspectives alongside more traditional, orthographic drawings. The aim of the drawings included in this work is to embrace, even exaggerate, the degree of artificiality in the architect's pursuit to come to know a place. "Context is, after all, the most fickle category in architecture's bag."⁴⁰ The development of four specific characters are the means by which the complexities of the site are addressed. Each character is distinct in origin and brings a contrastive, subjective experience of the infrastructure to

38. Colin Fournier, quoted in Gadanho, *Once Upon a Place*, 19.

39. Lai, *Citizens of No Place*, 7.

40. Francesca Hughes, ed., *Drawings that Count: The Work of Diploma 15* (London: Architectural Association Publications, 2013), 22.

the design work. Their descriptions are intended to be highly specific. They have names, birth dates, opinions and desires. In engaging the mundane realities of their day to day lives, the work attempts to provide an overall impression of Husserl's "intersubjective pool of perception."⁴¹



Connor hails from New Jersey and works as a law clerk at the Tweed Courthouse. His friends live in the Civic Center neighbourhood, but he can't afford it yet. He was born on June 12, 1982.



Kit's parents are high profile doctors at Bellevue Hospital. She is a senior at the Murry Bergatraum High School for Business Careers. She is dating a skateboarder who frequents the Brooklyn Banks. She was born on January 21, 1997.



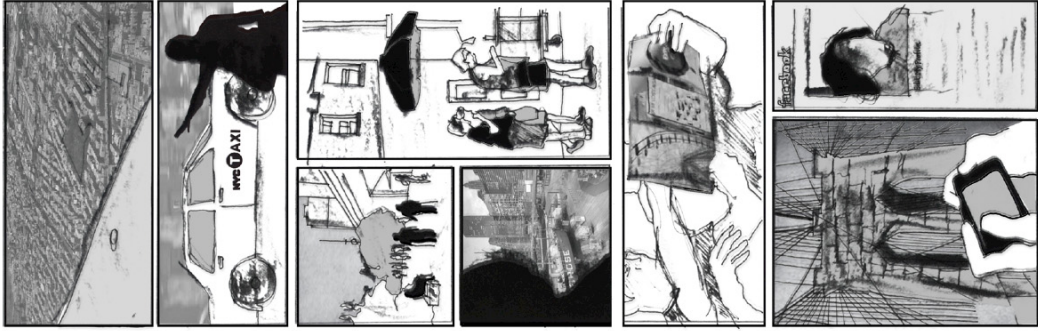
Bo is a first generation immigrant from the Fuzhou district of China. He works as the hotel manager and a part-time fisherman on the East River, selling his catch in the local Chinatown markets. He was born September 20, 1970.



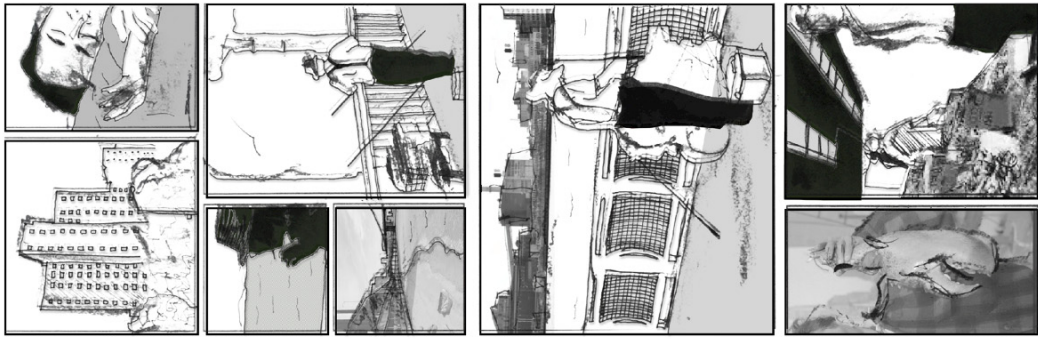
Maude hails from the mid-western United States. She teaches the third grade but is taking some time off, as she has saved a lot of vacation days up over the years. She used AirBnB for the first time to book a weekend stay in the luxury hotel with her husband and best friend. She was born May 9, 1952.

Undercurrents: formulating characters

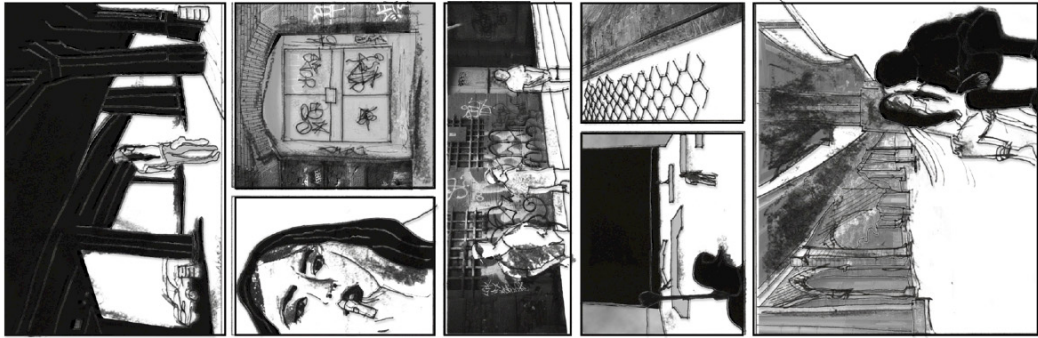
41. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 142.



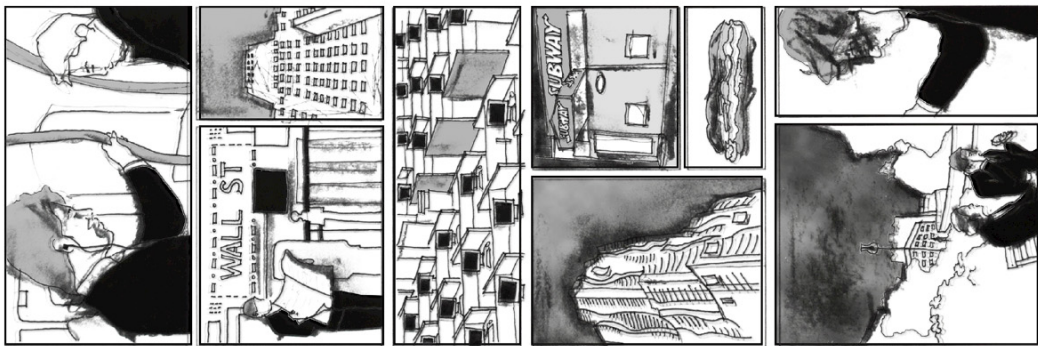
Maude



Bo



Kit



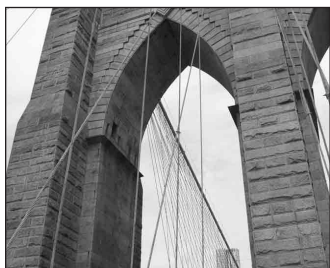
Connor

CHAPTER 4: THE DESIGN SEQUENCE AND THE PLOT

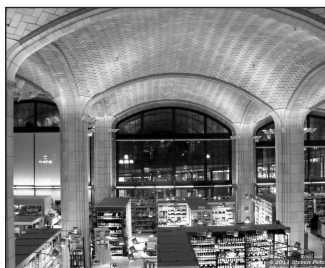
Extracting Gothic Geometry

If the architect is to give physical form and visible statement to the utilitarian needs as well as the highest aspirations of man, if the building is to be more than an expensive toy, economy in the use of material and logic in the use of structural techniques is essential. Architecture is far more than the playful and enchanting evocation of theatrical effect by the use of decorative detail, mechanical gadgetry, and exhibitionism in structure.⁴²

Gothic geometry is used as both an organizing principle and referential device throughout the design work. The symmetry and tessellated nature of the geometry introduces opportunities to jump scale as a means of mediating between the monumental, Neo-Gothic towers of the bridge and the scale of an individual person's hotel room. The geometry also serves to introduce a particular aesthetic, overtly ornamental in nature, indicative of the hotel's luxurious program. As such, it is used as a framing tool in an attempt to emphasize the discrepancies between the lavish hotel interior and mundane realities of the surrounding city. This intention is not dissimilar from the Queensboro (59th St.) Bridge interior, which famously houses a generic grocery store. The resultant design work makes a concerted effort to reassign the luxurious amenities of the tower proposal to the public sphere, where they become increasingly accessible to the neighbouring communities. Gothic geometry is also used in the development of a structural strategy that necessarily engages a conversation on preservation. The tracing of curved elements throughout the rectilinear plan of the vaulted spaces suggest minimal interaction between the old and new structures, limited to point loads marked by their intersection. When engaging the vertical axis, these geometric formations gain the capacity to appear in either tension or compression. The lobby is the playground for these experiments.



Brooklyn Bridge tower
(Spak, 2011)

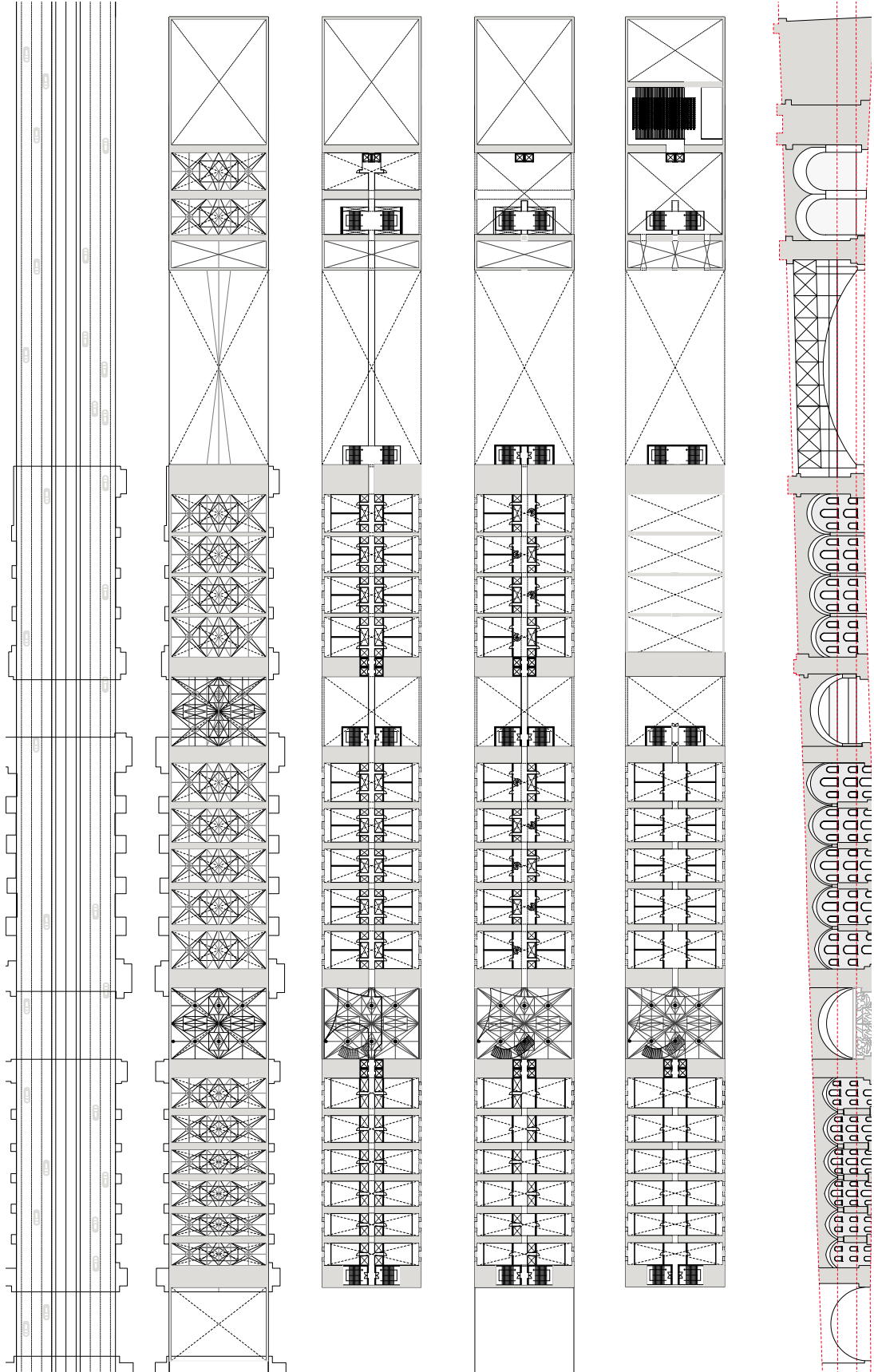


The 59th St. Bridge
(Peterson, 2011)



Municipal courthouse

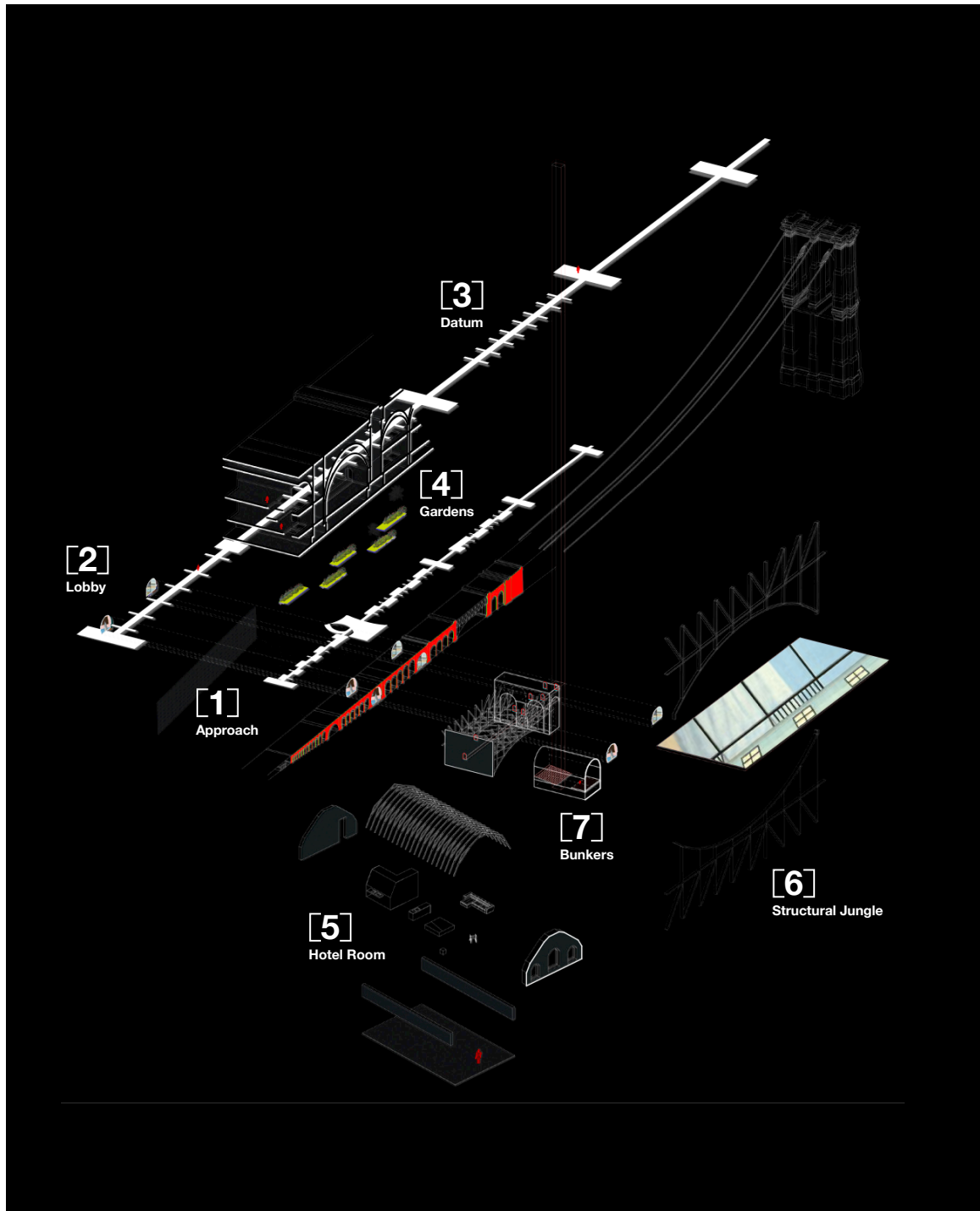
42. James H. Acland, *Medieval Structure: The Gothic Vault* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), vii.



Vertical layering

The Seven Sectors

Storytelling is architecture made with words. Architecture made with stories is a super story.⁴³

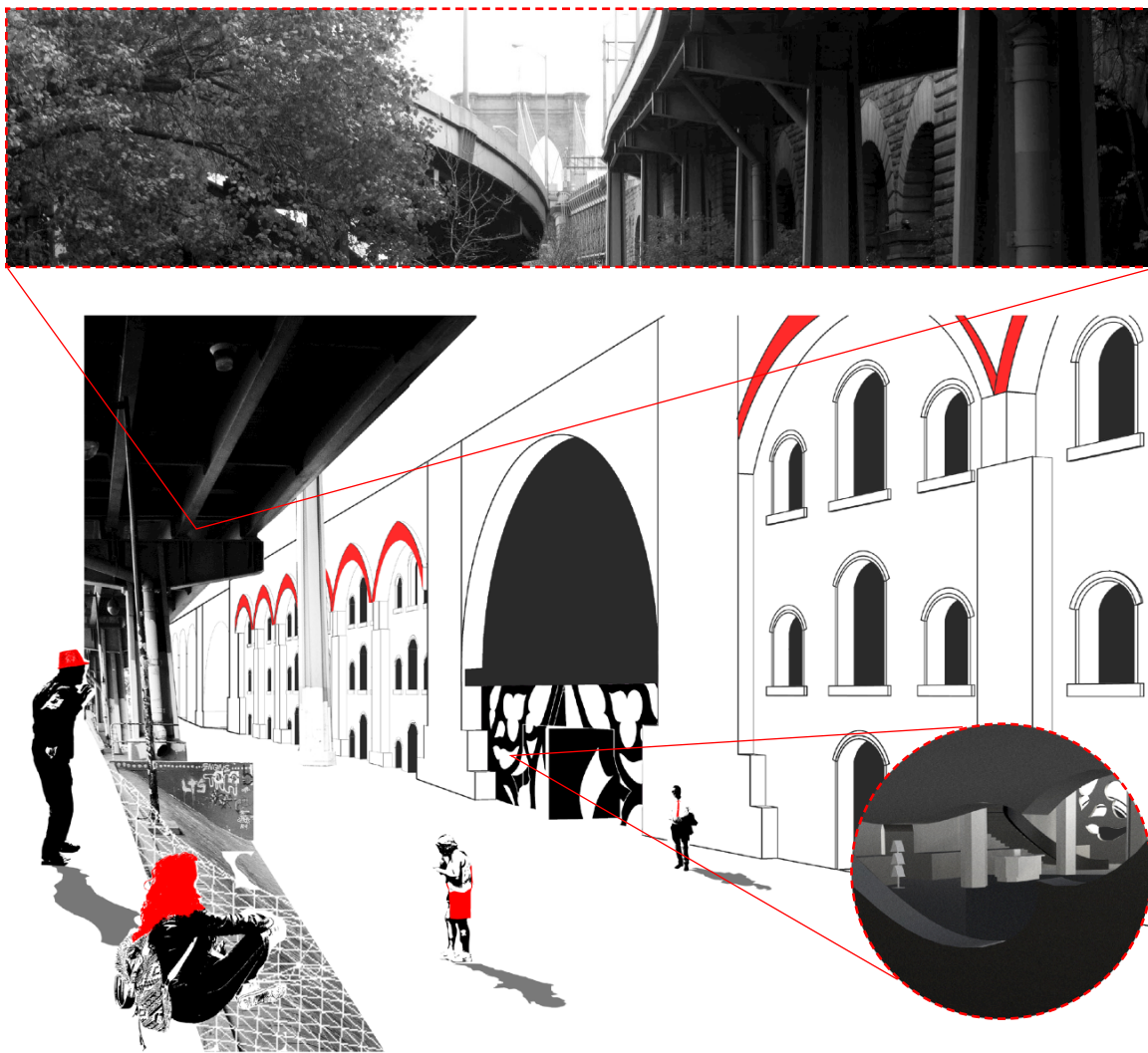


The seven sectors

43. Velimir Khlebnikov, quoted in Gandanho, *Once upon a Place*.

The Approach

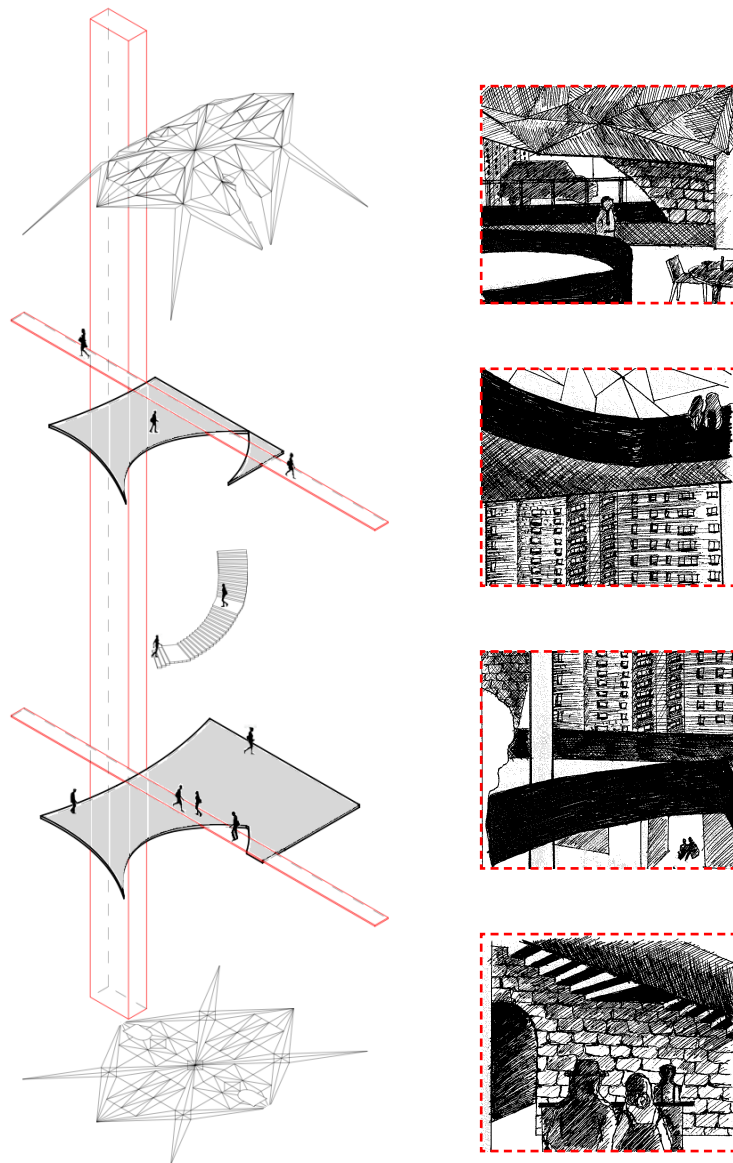
Movement off the grid, there is descent into an opening space below. Here one finds an invitation for pedestrian domination, foot-worn, smoothed red brick. The overhead vaults heave with a slow overarching rhythm, comfortably unfurled in the direction of the shore. Large pivoting doorways abut this flow, momentary disruptions to the rhythm, always opened perpendicular to the encouraged grain of traffic. The walls hold copses of cut-out shapes, odd and Gothic. There is engagement of the peering passerby and too, a hinted acknowledgement of the approaching monument.



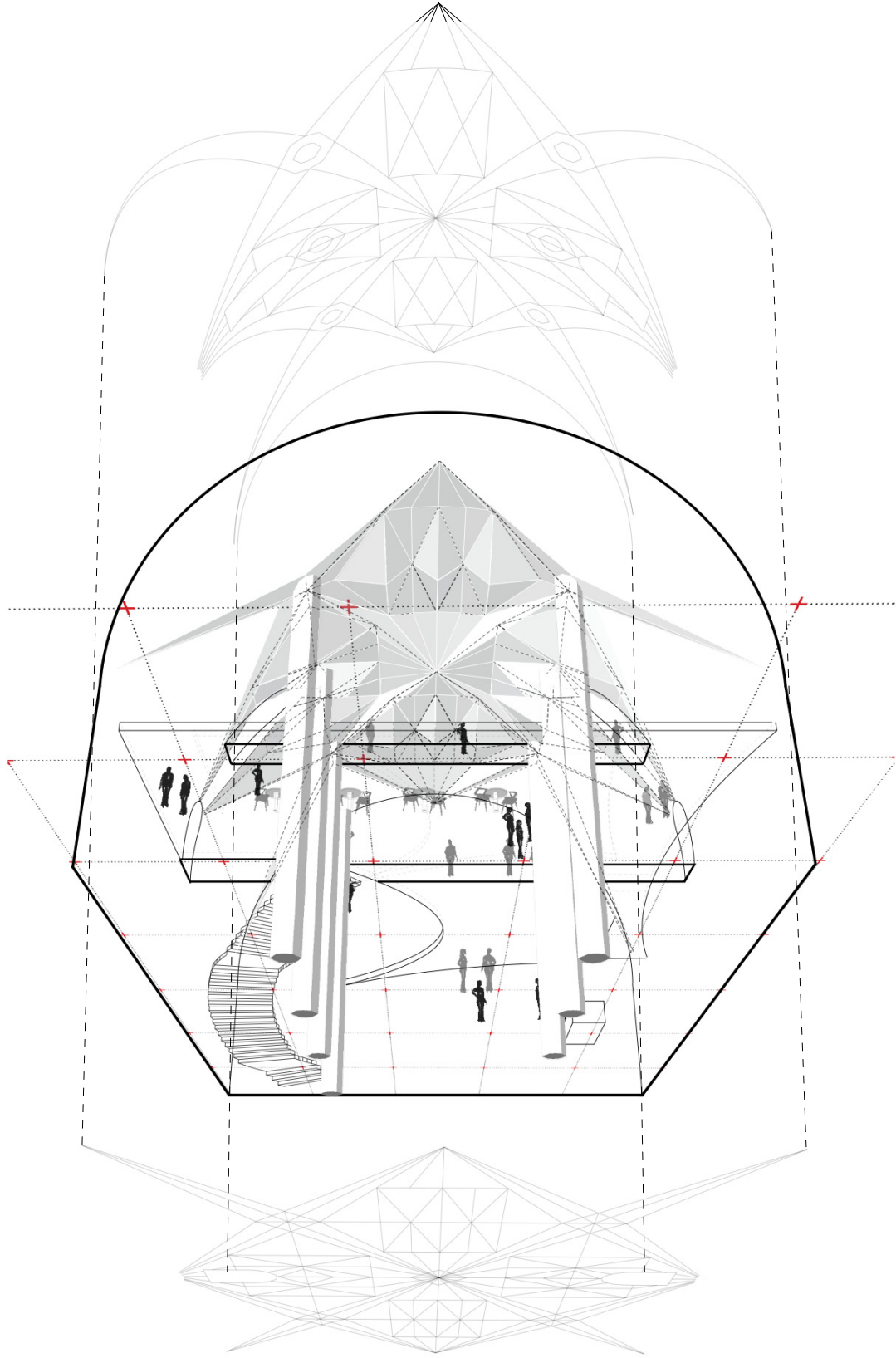
The four characters and the approach

The Lobby

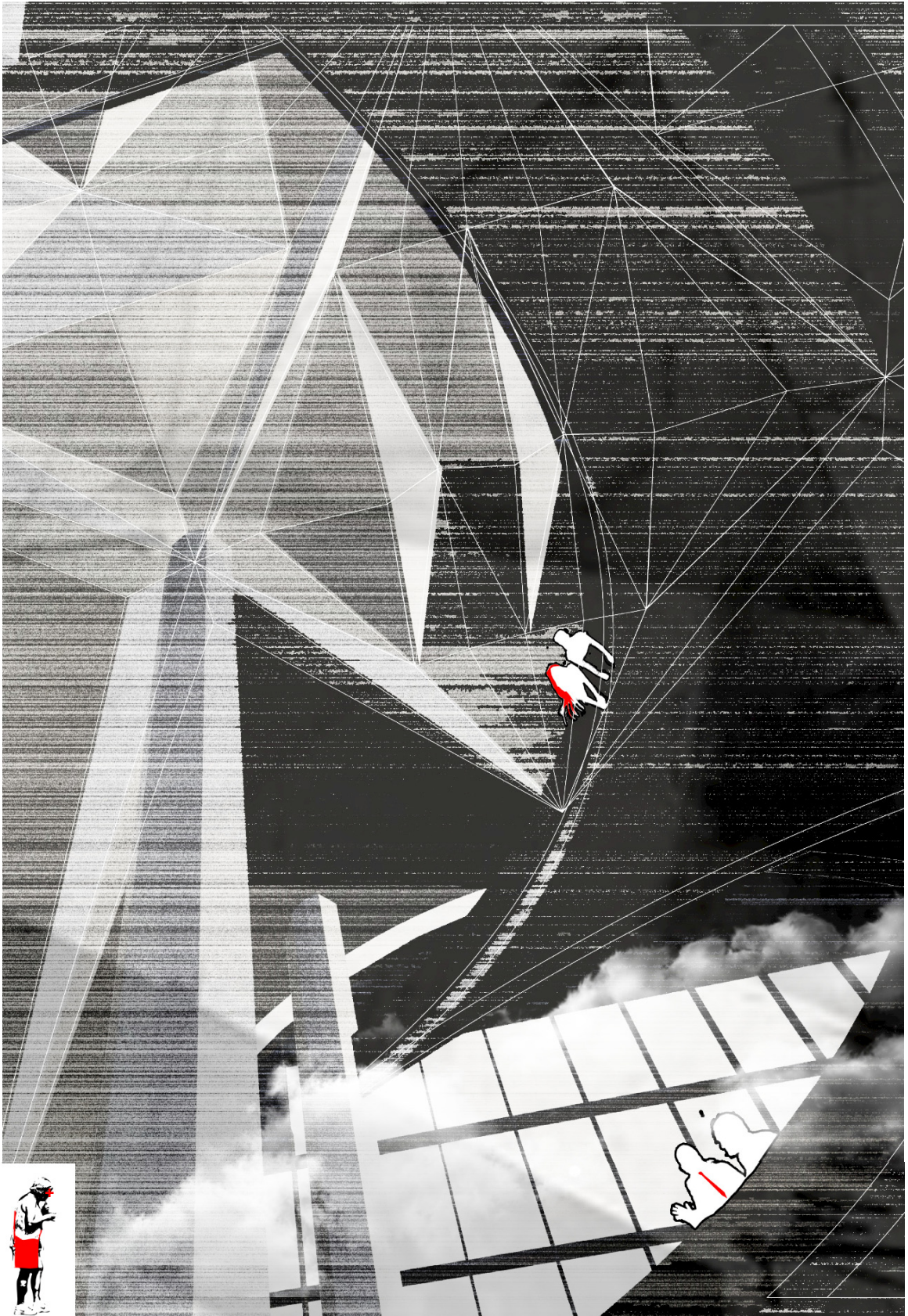
The lobby bustles with the excitement of movement expanding in all possible axes. The check-in, in contrast, is simple and still. Here, there is pause and the chance for a slow upward gaze to where the ceiling is found, luxurious and ornately omniscient. It dictates all scales of geometry throughout the space. Concrete floor plates appear pinned to the existing stone wall, giving the impression of a stretched material. There are people coming in and out of view; always there is movement.



Lobby circulation: vertical movement



Lobby ceiling derived from Gothic geometry



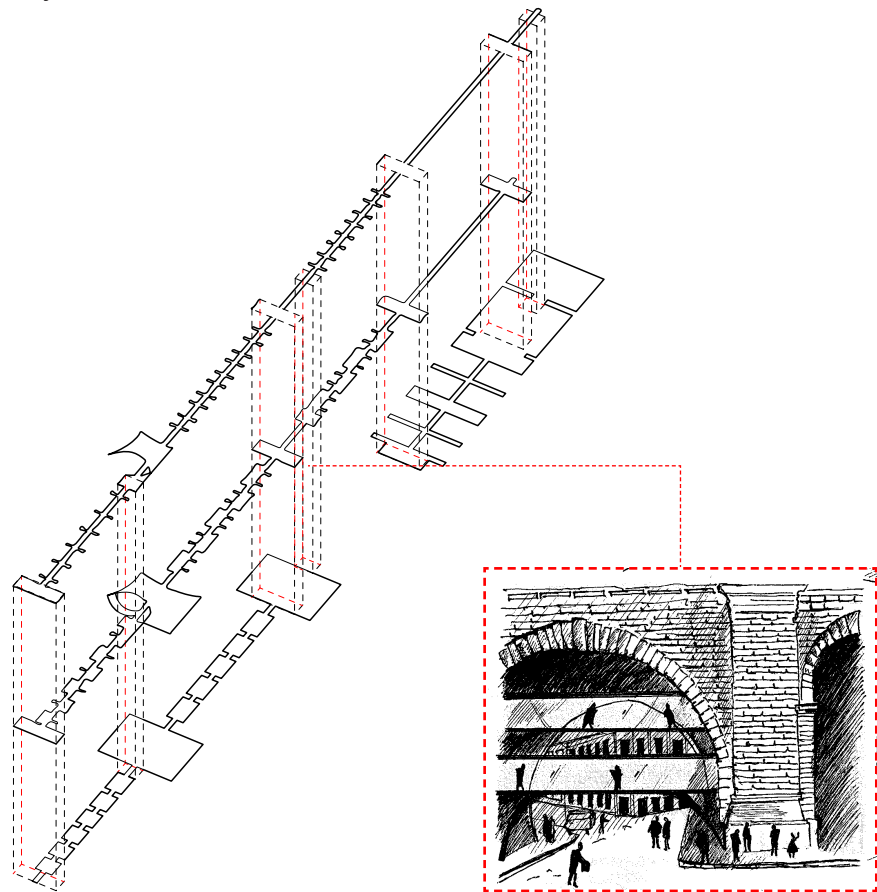
Maude sees Kit and Connor in the lobby

The Datum

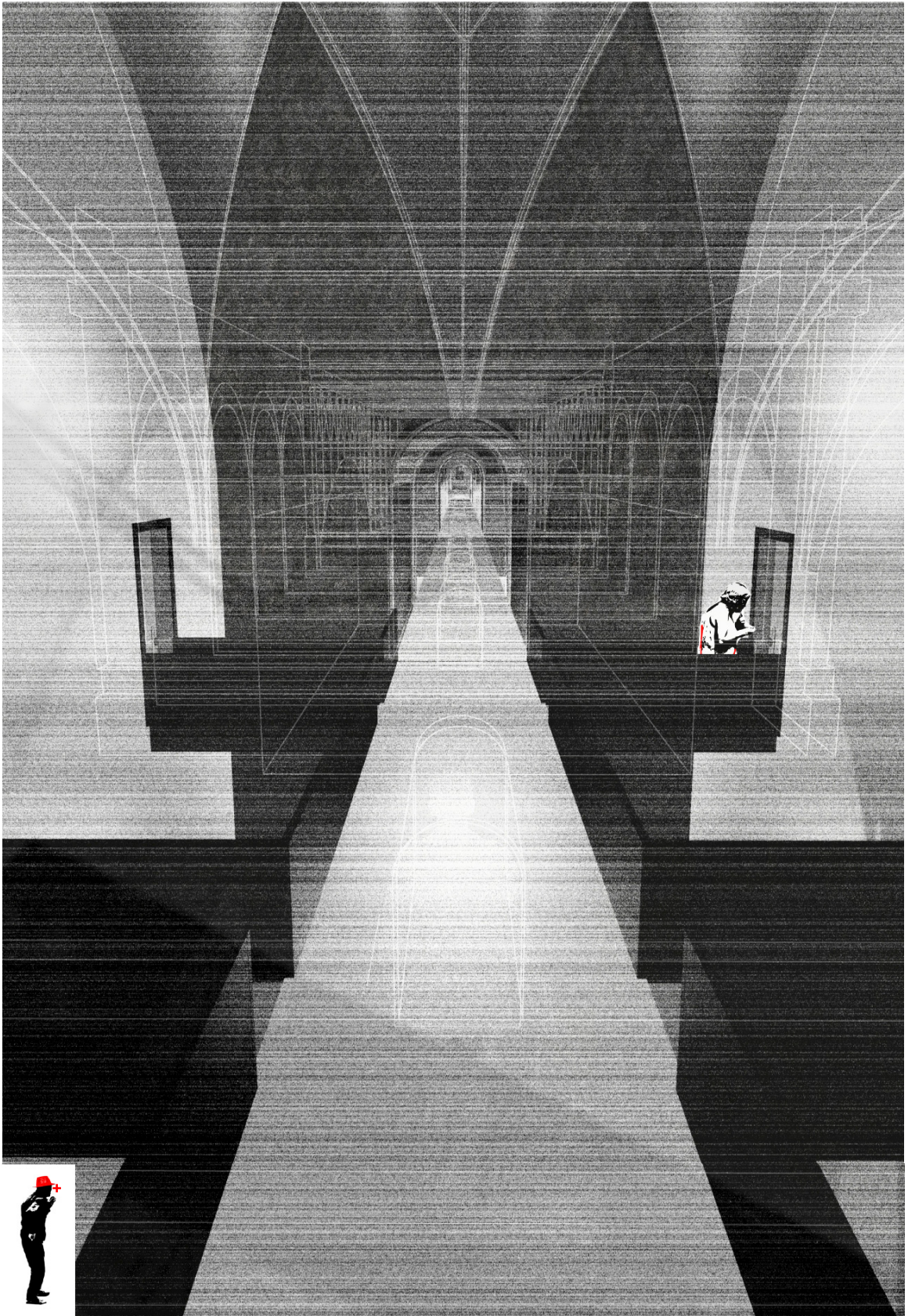
The Datum is rugged and protective, an endless corridor, doubly-loaded. Its size expands and contracts throughout, as if the structure were breathing. Its purpose, that steady movement towards a familiar destination, however, remains ever steadfast in its resolve. Systems everywhere are exposed, visibly plugging into each individual room. Privacy is explored with the juxtaposition of isolated catwalks against larger spaces that act as semi-public resting points for reading, conversing and the like. People watching is at an all time high; chance encounters become an invited mystery.

The Gardens

The gardens pilot hotel-goers upward, exploring the vertical movement so natural to the green and growing. Spiral staircases, twisting like vines, reveal isolated spaces which house a variety of plant species requiring only the bare necessities. Here one finds small respite from the busy data above and below.



Datum circulation



Bo sees Maude checking into her room



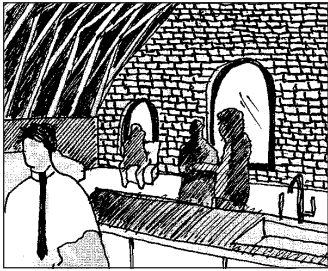
Kit sees Connor leaving his room



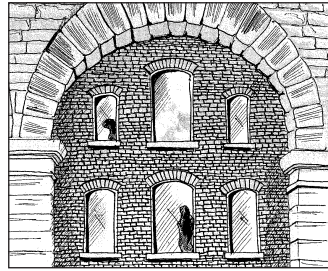
Kit calls out to her boyfriend on the lower datum

The Hotel Room

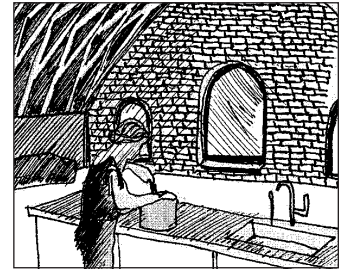
The hotel rooms are calm and warm. An expanse of windows welcomes the pouring of natural light. The megastructure outside, amidst its urban yawn, lets in the hum of city life. A bulk of heavy wooden trusses span the ceiling and suggest a sequence of construction perhaps still underway. Everything is painted white, adding a finished touch. The contents of the room are inserted as if built in place. A balcony to the exterior spans between the new and the glorified ruin. Rough openings are made through the existing masonry, framing views to the street life below.



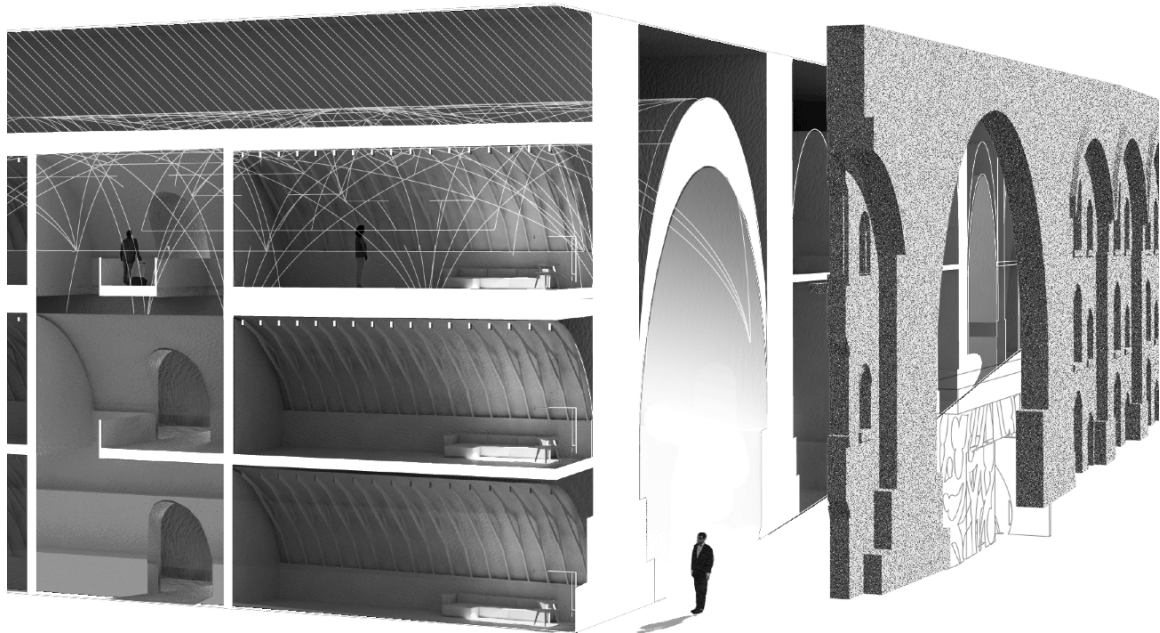
Connor socializes



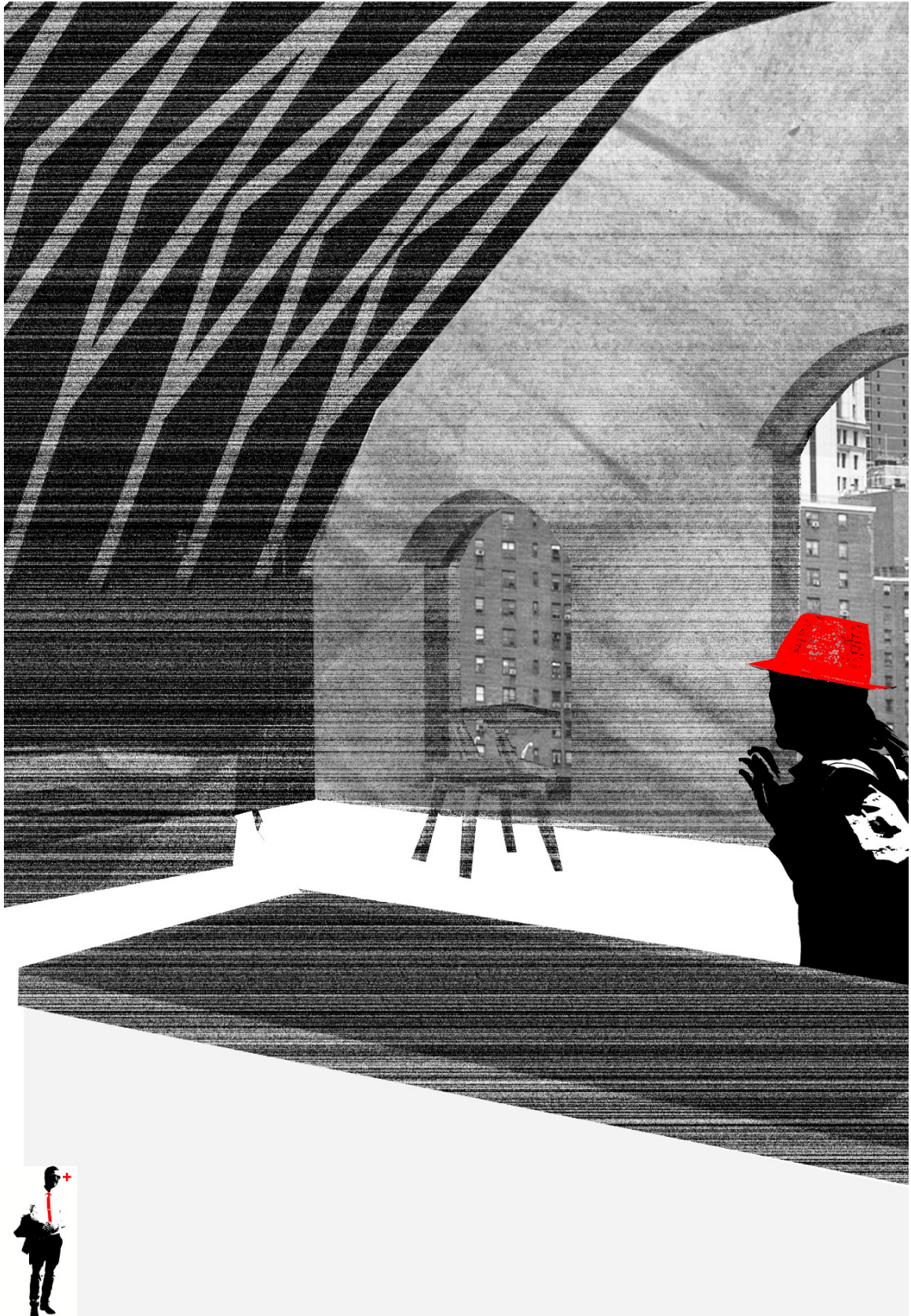
Kit peers in from outside



Maude cooks a meal



Hotel rooms and datum: division in natural and artificial lighting



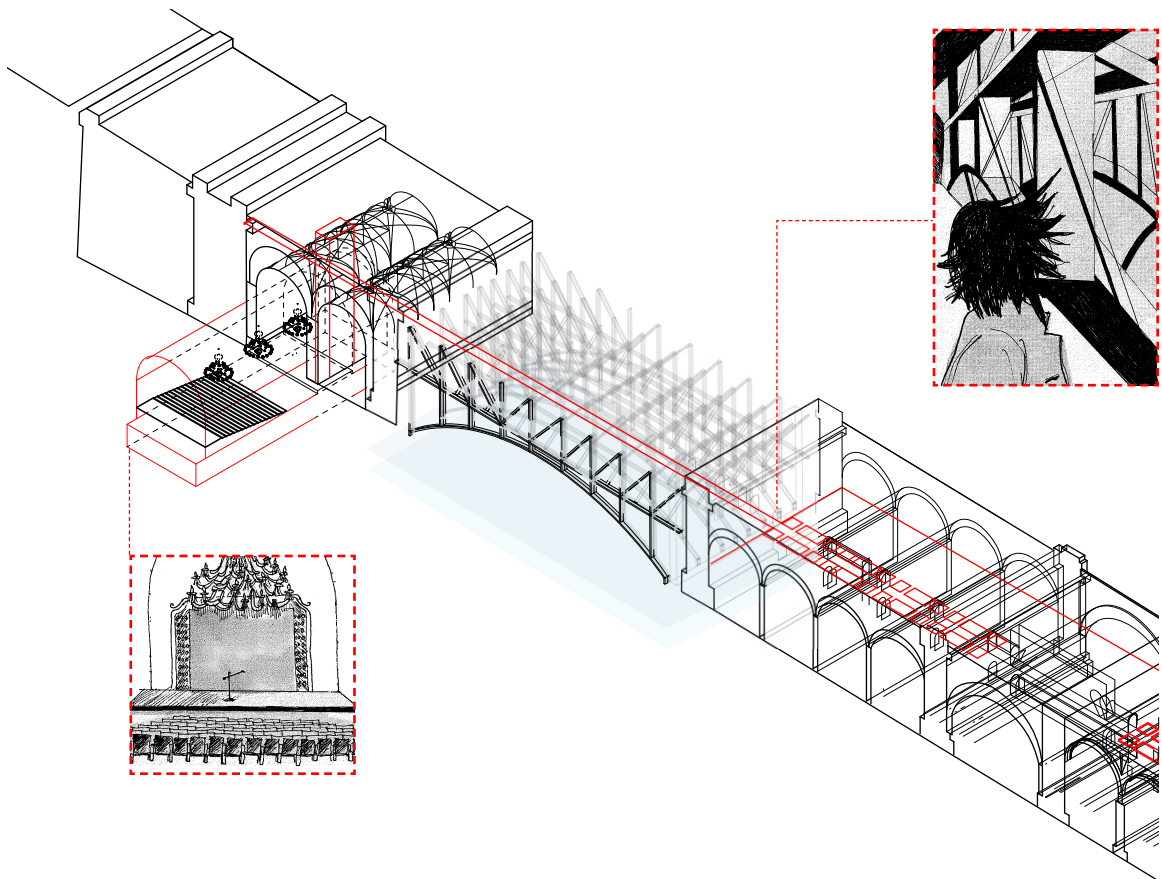
Connor asks the hotel manager (Bo) for help in his room

The Structural Jungle

The datum comes to an abrupt close. A single exit door is opaque. But what is beyond? With a swift swing, there is immediate immersion into the harsh environment of structure - columns, beams, trusses, cross-bracing, all painted a variety of colours. The din supports both the iconic monument and the needs of city dwellers below. Always returning to movement, there are two options: to descend to the ground plane or continue ahead towards the anchorage.

The Bunkers

Within the anchorage, the heavy cables of the monument are tied down. There is a feeling of completion, yet tension abounds. In small elevators, strangers are forced together. Collectively, they feel the slow descent into deep earth below. The elevator opens into the warm lighting of a grand theatre space. Here is the program's celebratory fruition.



Structural jungle and bunker sequence



Bo sees Kit at the end of the datum

CONCLUSION

As vacancy rates dwindle on the island of Manhattan, there is an increased need to capitalize on opportunities presented by abandoned projects in the built environment. This need does not stem solely from a preservationist perspective, but rather is primarily concerned with an economy of means. “Instead of providing new built shapes, this way of intervening would be focused on offering new links between old shapes, new perspectives and a renovated narrative.”⁴⁴ In the case of this thesis, the narrative explored is not dissimilar from the spirit of the place projected to be embodied in the historic operation of the bridge’s vaulted spaces.

The work calls for a reconsideration of traditional, digital means of exploration prioritizing the precision and accuracy of data. In accepting, and subsequently subverting, the artifice between the architect and built environment, the exploration of fictional modes of investigation carries the potential to tug on the heartstrings of a particular community. Manhattan’s current East River development proposals have lost sight of this potential as they continue to copy and paste these “anonymous, translucent and ubiquitous ghosts of modern real estate, celebrities of unbuilt space” into conceptual renderings as the primary means of communication.⁴⁵ They strive for a depiction so generalized they lose all power of conviction. The architect is well equipped with the means to employ a strategic specificity to better represent the deeper texture of life pervading these complex sites. This thesis attempts to embody a degree of “calibrated superficiality” in its working method, deprioritizing the resultant design - which merely represents one alternative reality to the trajectory of the abandoned vaults beneath the Brooklyn Bridge.⁴⁶ As such, the work stands as a series of experiments in representation to achieve these goals, the ultimate aim of which is to employ both written and drawn narrative in tandem - to enable an overlap that allows for one to fill in the gaps of the other. Important, too, is incorporating a degree of indecisiveness that enables the reader, and the viewer, to envision their own reality, and their own ending to the story.

44. Gadanho, *Once Upon a Place*, 67.

45. Geoff Manaugh, “People Textures on the Athletic Fringe of the City.” Last modified February 7, 2011, <http://bldgblog.blogspot.ca/2011/02/people-textures-on-athletic-fringe-of.html>.

46. Lai, *Citizens of No Place*, 12.

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