

**TIME, SPACE AND ADAPTATION:  
A Strategy Towards Growth From Within**

by

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for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

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## **ABSTRACT**

To adapt is to transform to become better suited to the conditions of an environment. Through expressing a narrative of adaptation in architecture we can evoke both cultural continuity and the potential for change through an entity commonly thought to be static, a building. This expression of the adaptable nature of the world confirms our potential as the sovereign arbiters of the conditions of our environment. At best this would inspire continued adaptations, building upon our past successes and directly confronting the failures of our current reality.

The concept of this thesis has been explored through architectural studies of the St. Patrick's Alexandra site in the North End of Halifax. The site currently contains two vacant school buildings and is the locus of a political controversy involving the community, a developer and the government. Based on historical research, dialogue with the community and architectural studies, my work is oriented towards design that understands the existing culture as the foundation that supports the demands of the present and carries the potential of the future.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank my Family foremost. Your support and guidance has been the largest influence on me and has made this experience possible.

The Dalhousie School of Architecture. I feel privileged to be among the inheritors of the culture and knowledge that is passed on here. Roger Mullin, Ted Cavanagh, Jeffery Reed, Catherine Venart, Frank Palermo, Grant Wanzell, Austin Parsons, Jonathan Mandeville and all the other faculty members and administrators that have facilitated my education over the past four years, thank you for your generosity, patients and wisdom.

My peers at the school for your friendship and support. I've received so much from so many of you. I hope the bonds we've formed continue into the future and I wish the best to you all. A shout out to Ilya for the help when there was no time to spare.

Mark Tholen for your mentorship and inspiration.

And to all my friends, thank you so much.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Time

This thesis begins with gathering fragments of history through researching archives, conversations with people and observations. With these fragments I make interpretive and speculative drawings to enter a dialogue with what has been collected. Through the process of making and the results of these drawings, I arrive at an interpretative historical narrative upon which a reality begins to be constructed<sup>1</sup>. This research informs a deeper understanding of context, inspires design through extension of what is/was and continuously provokes re-assemblage.

Architectural design requires an understanding of context in the past and present time, however it is the future that our propositions seek to project into<sup>2</sup>. With this in mind, it's vital to imagine, represent and discuss the possible implications of the future propositions. Given the impossibility of projecting into the future with any accuracy, there are obvious limitations to these explorations. Nonetheless, continuously attempting to project into the future through architectural representations is an important element to my work. These representations influenced the path that my design work followed and also my attitude towards designing armatures for an unpredictable future.

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1. Philip Ursprung describes a similar process when encountering the work of Walter Benjamin and John Soane.

Philip Ursprung, "Anachronism and Entropy," in *Caruso St. John: Almost Everything*, ed. Philip Ursprung (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrapha, 2008), 167.

2. Bruno Latour, and Alben Yaneva. "Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move: An Ant's View of Architecture," *Explorations in architecture: Teaching, design, research*, ed. Reto Geiser, (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2008),. 81.

## Space

I am interested in connecting my thesis to social, political, cultural, and physical space. I chose to study a site near to where I live that's currently the locus of a political controversy between the city, community and a developer. This site offered the opportunity to connect with the community to learn about memories and visions for the sites future. Through synthesizing this information with my research into the history of the site and the current controversy, I'm can begin to integrate the skills I've learned as a social worker with my education in architecture. My thesis explores the intersection of these two practices towards architecture that is social and politically oriented. If design work can become firmly rooted in the realities of space, it can act as both activism for a communities interests and contribute to dialogue and action towards what could be.

My approach shares common ground with the work of philosopher Richard Rorty in both method and intention. I seek to be simultaneously pragmatic and idealistic and like Rorty, I believe the most distinctive and praiseworthy human capacity is our ability to trust and cooperate with one another so as to improve the future<sup>3</sup>. I'm foremost interested in any experiment that contributes to my understanding of how architecture can contribute to the project of building on the foundations of our past towards social equality and beauty in real space.

---

3. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), xv- xviii.

## Adaptation

Considering architecture as adaptable aligns with Bruno Latour's insistence that all buildings are dynamic (albeit slow moving) things, and with theorists that are interested in the relationship between architecture and the ecological paradigm<sup>4</sup>.

An adaptive strategy embraces existing conditions as material capable of being transformed in the present and beyond. Through adaptation we shape our environments towards a desired end, an important concept if we are interested in promoting a self actualizing, sovereign society<sup>5</sup>. This is in opposition to *tabula rasa*/consumer-supplier based approach in which the old must be discarded in favor of the new to improve our conditions.

As noted above in relation to time, we cannot predict the future. We can however, design catalysts that intend to provoke future adaptations that build upon the structures of the past. If this is accepted, then our designs should endeavour incrementally improve our conditions and re-affirm in people their potential and right to be arbitrators in the definition of their environments.

## Synthesis

My thesis is positioned where time, space and adaptation intersect. In synthesis, explorations through time reveal what was, is and what could be, operating in real space attempts to negotiate the realities of our world and adaptation provides a strategy for action.

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4. Nina Marie Lister and Chris Reed challenge us to think of design through the ecological paradigm, suggesting an approach based on networked connections, employing strategies that are adaptive, flexible and indeterminate.

Nina Marie Lister and Chris Reed, "Ecological Thinking and Design Practices" in *Projective ecologies*. (New York: Harvard School of Design, 2014), 15-16.

## CHAPTER 2: HOW DID WE GET HERE?

### Halifax's North End Through Time



Site Location in Halifax

I began my research collecting historical maps of the community that my site was located in. With this information I made figure ground drawings exploring how the community changed over time. Questions concerning what events lead to this pattern of change inspired historical research through books, archives and conversations with people in the community. The following is an assemblage of material relating to History of the North End of Halifax.

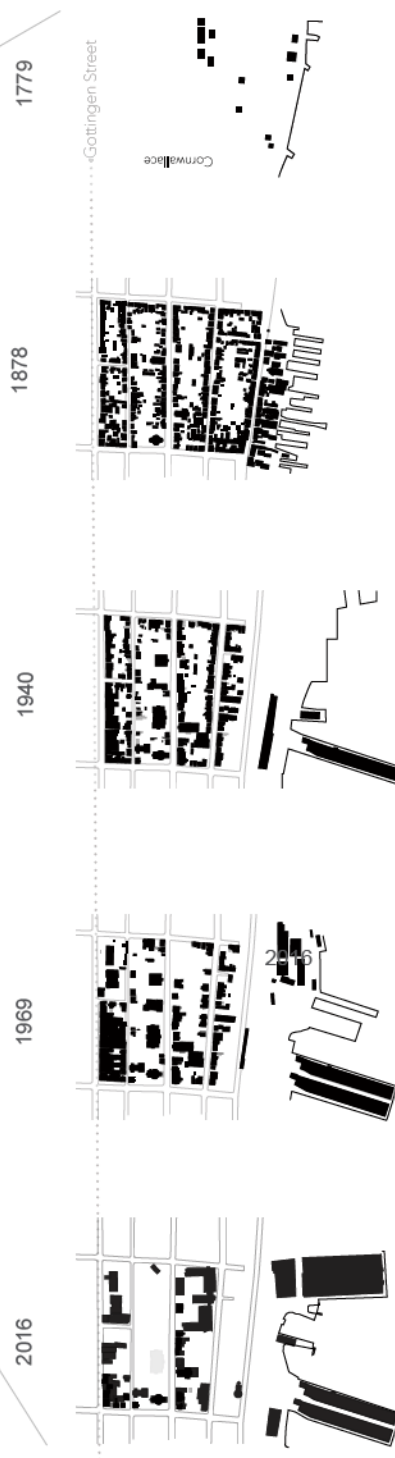


Figure ground through time



Mi'kmaq people have been living where Halifax is now for over 10,000 years. Their culture and way of life has centered around a deeply harmonic relationship with the environment.

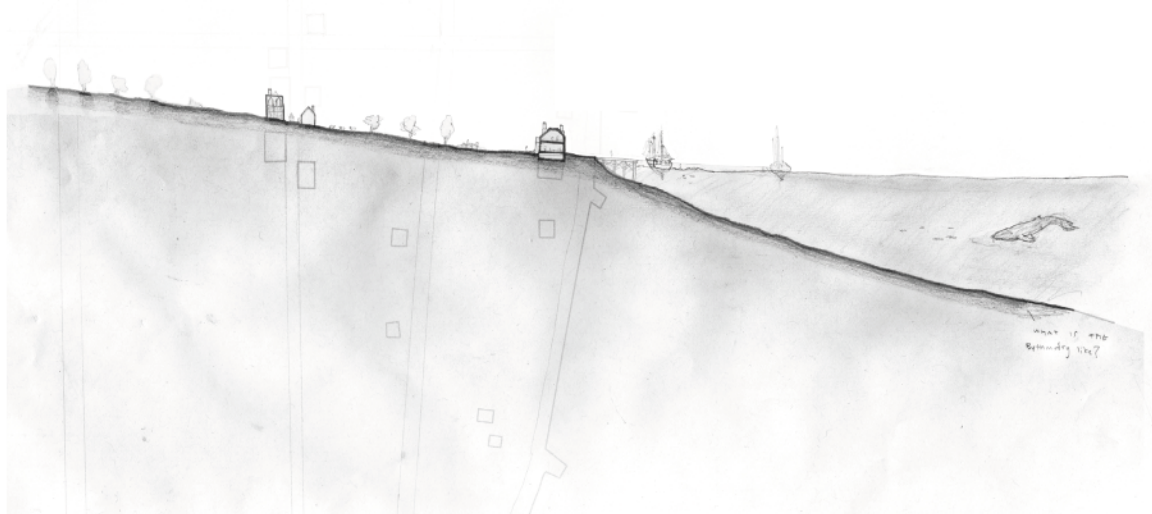
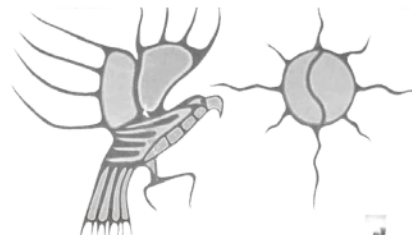
In 1749, two-thousand five-hundred Immigrants arrived by sea and established the British settlement of Halifax. Among the settlers were the "Foreign Protestants" whom established a community to the North along the streets of Brunswick and Gottingen. The little Dutch Church built by them in 1756 remains at Gerrish and Brunswick. It is the second oldest building in the city <sup>6</sup>



The Little Dutch Church; Image by Greg Whistance-Smith

Mi'kmaq mural by

eb  
90



Section from Gottingen Street to the Halifax Harbor, 1779.

6. Paul Erickson, *Historic North End Halifax* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2004).

Since its establishment, Halifax has had a strong military presence. Already, by 1759 the military had become established in the North End, buying a plot of land to build a ship yard at the foot of Gerrish street and extending North.

As the city began to prosper during the late 18th century, more affluent residents moved North from the city center to Brunswick Street for more space and harbor views. The construction of St. George's Round Church built in 1800 at the corner of Brunswick and Cornwallace is representative of this shift.

In 1832 the Cornwallace Street Baptist Church was founded by Black Refugees, making it one of the first churches established by a black community in Canada. The first reverend, Richard Preston became an important community leader, forming the Black Abolition society in 1846 and helped to lay a foundation for a socially engaged black community in Canada.<sup>7</sup>



Naval Dockyard in North End Halifax, 1890; from Halifax Archives



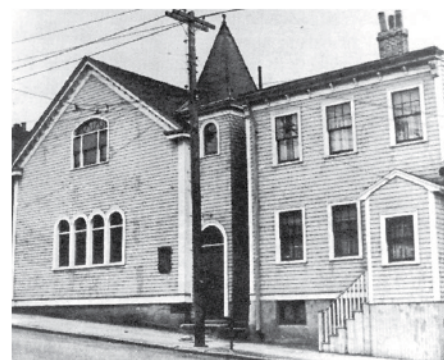
The Round Church; from Halifax Archives



1878

7. Cornwallace Street Baptist Church, "History", accessed December 26th, 2016, <http://cornwallisstreetbaptist.ca/about/history/>

In 1877 the Railway was extended through the North End of Halifax and a large depot was established at the foot of North Street. This led to increased noise and smoke in the neighborhood which resulted in the wealthy re-locating to the South End of the city. The railway also provided for industry and led to the neighborhood being re-established by those working in this new industrial hub.<sup>8</sup>



Cornwallace Street Baptist Church; from Gottingen.ca

Sometime between the 1st and 2nd World War, likely as a result of destruction caused by the Halifax explosion, the military expanded both North and South along shoreline of the North End. This severed the neighborhood's public connections to the water front.



Railway looking north on Water Street C. 1900; from Halifax Archives



8. Erickson, *Historic North End*, 45.

During the first half of the 20th century, the community grew. Schools shifted from being within churches to being public facilities. Gottingen street developed into one of the most prosperous commercial streets in the city.

In 1943 the city created a civic planning commission, which issued a report in 1945 calling for the revitalization of the city through constructing superhighways and new commercial high-rises<sup>9</sup>. As a part of this initiative, in 1955 the Macdonald bridge is built and buildings behind Gottingen street are demolished to create parking spaces for auto commerce. A controversial building code lead to the demolition of many other buildings in the North End, making way for “urban renewal projects” such as Uniacke square and Ocean towers and leaving many empty lots. During this period the North End experienced a 42% population decrease<sup>10</sup>.



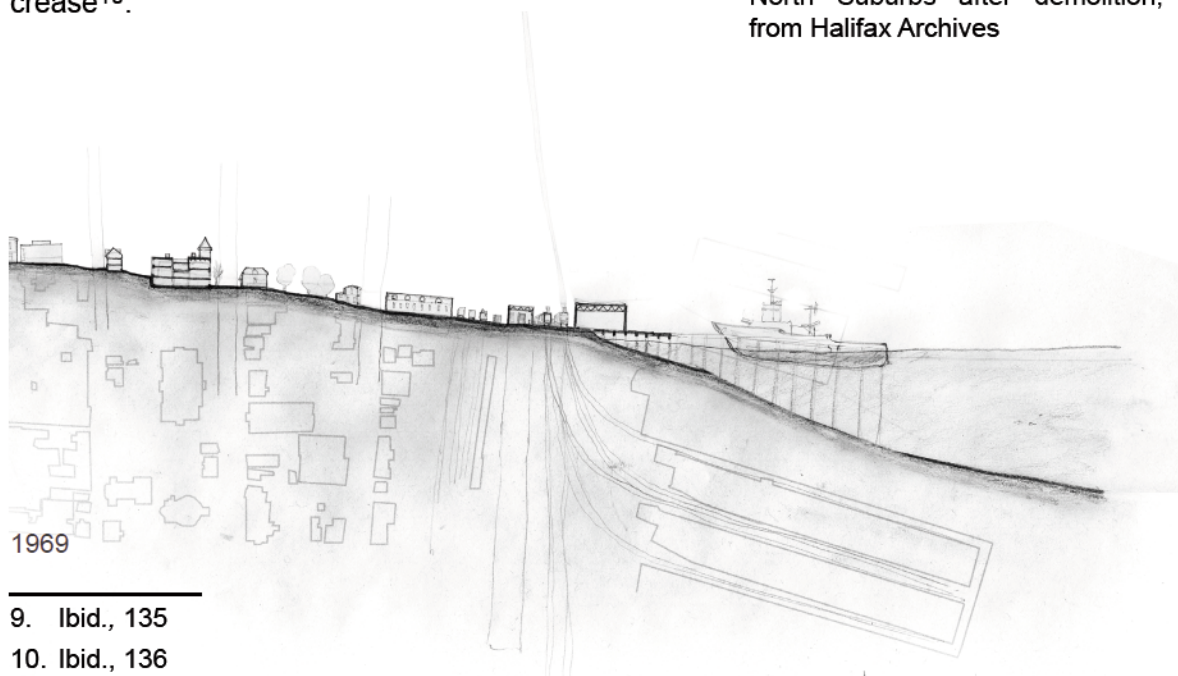
St. Patrick's Boys School, opened 1921; from Halifax Archives



Gottingen and Cornwallace, 1949; from Halifax Archives



North Suburbs after demolition; from Halifax Archives



9. Ibid., 135

10. Ibid., 136

In the 60's other urban renewal initiatives were undertaken that influenced the North End. In 1964 residents of Africville, then Halifax's only black community, were expropriated under the pretense to construct a new industrial port. In the end the community was destroyed and the land became a tax exempt city park. Many residents of Africville re-located to the North End to live in Uniacke Square, the Mulgrave housing projects and pre-existing housing <sup>11</sup>.



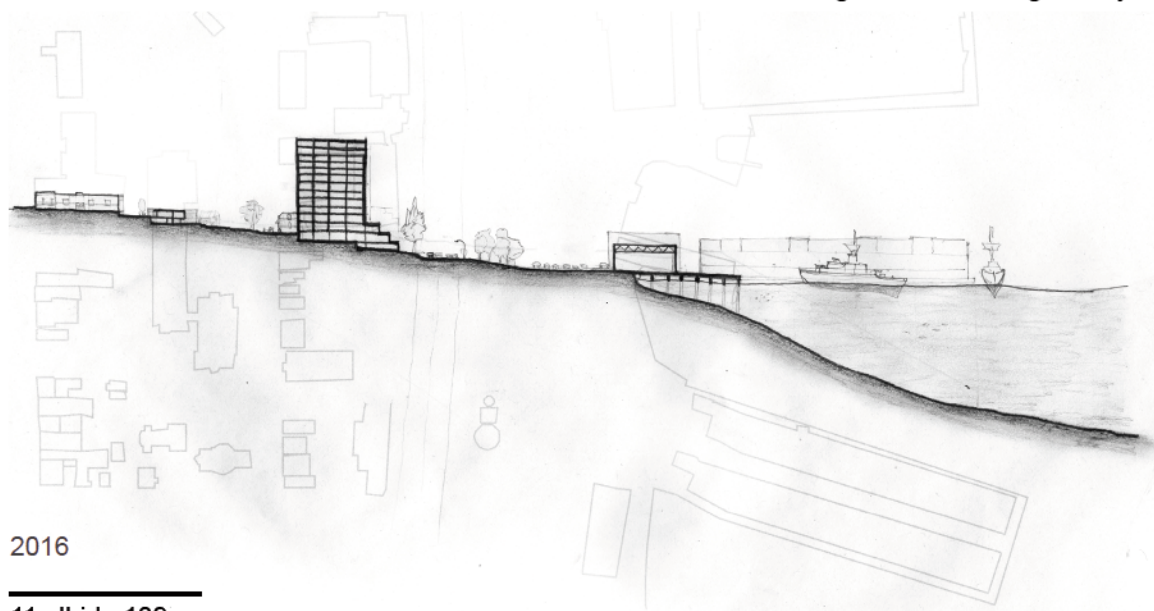
North End housing projects built in the 60's; base image from Bing Maps



Africville prior to destruction; From Halifax Archives



The Cogswell Interchange today



2016

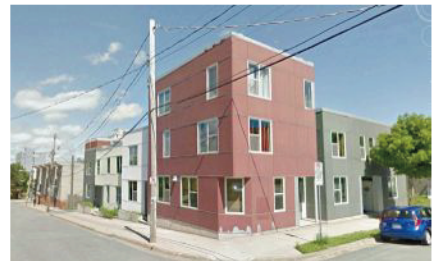
<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 139.

The North End's population continued to decline until the 90's. Over the past 25 years this trend reversed, accompanied by the most significant increase in housing prices in the city at 319%. This shift reflects the trend of migration from suburbs back into city centers. Possible explanations for the shift include: escalating energy costs, disinterest in long commutes and the attraction of more culturally diverse and established inner city communities<sup>12</sup>.

Growth over the past 25 years has come through a variety of forms. Recent developments have tended to be of a reduced scale (3-5 stories) and more informed by the existing context when compared to the urban renewal projects of the previous generation. During this era growth has come from both private developers and publicly funded projects.



Recently built private housing in North End.



Publicly funded Creighton/Gerrish Street Development by Nial Savage and Grant Wanzel.

The map on the following page depicts Halifax's population density and average income per person. The drop down graphic from the city plan includes socio-economic indices of 3 census tracts in the North End relative to city averages.

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12. Mackenzie Childs, "*Residential Change in Halifax's North End: Inventory and Pattern Analysis.*" (Masters Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2014).



**SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICIES**

NO-HIGH SCHOOL/DIPLOMA	16%
LOW INCOME	11%
LOW PARENT FAMILY	17%
VISIBLE MINORITY	7%
HEM AVG	
NO-HIGH SCHOOL/DIPLOMA	16%
LOW INCOME	11%
LOW PARENT FAMILY	17%
VISIBLE MINORITY	7%

**POPULATION DENSITY**  
people/hectare



**INCOME**  
avg \$ / yr / person



Research by Dr. Jill Grant and the Dalhousie Planning Department.

[Http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca](http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca)

Population Density, Average Income and Socio Economic Indices In Halifax.

## CHAPTER 3: THE STORY OF A SITE

### From the Urban Scale to the St. Patrick's Alexandra Site

Now I focus in depth on a single block in the community. This block is currently the location of the decommissioned St. Patrick's Alexandra School and the site of my design work. Over the following chapter I will attempt to tell the story of the site through time and clarify its current status.

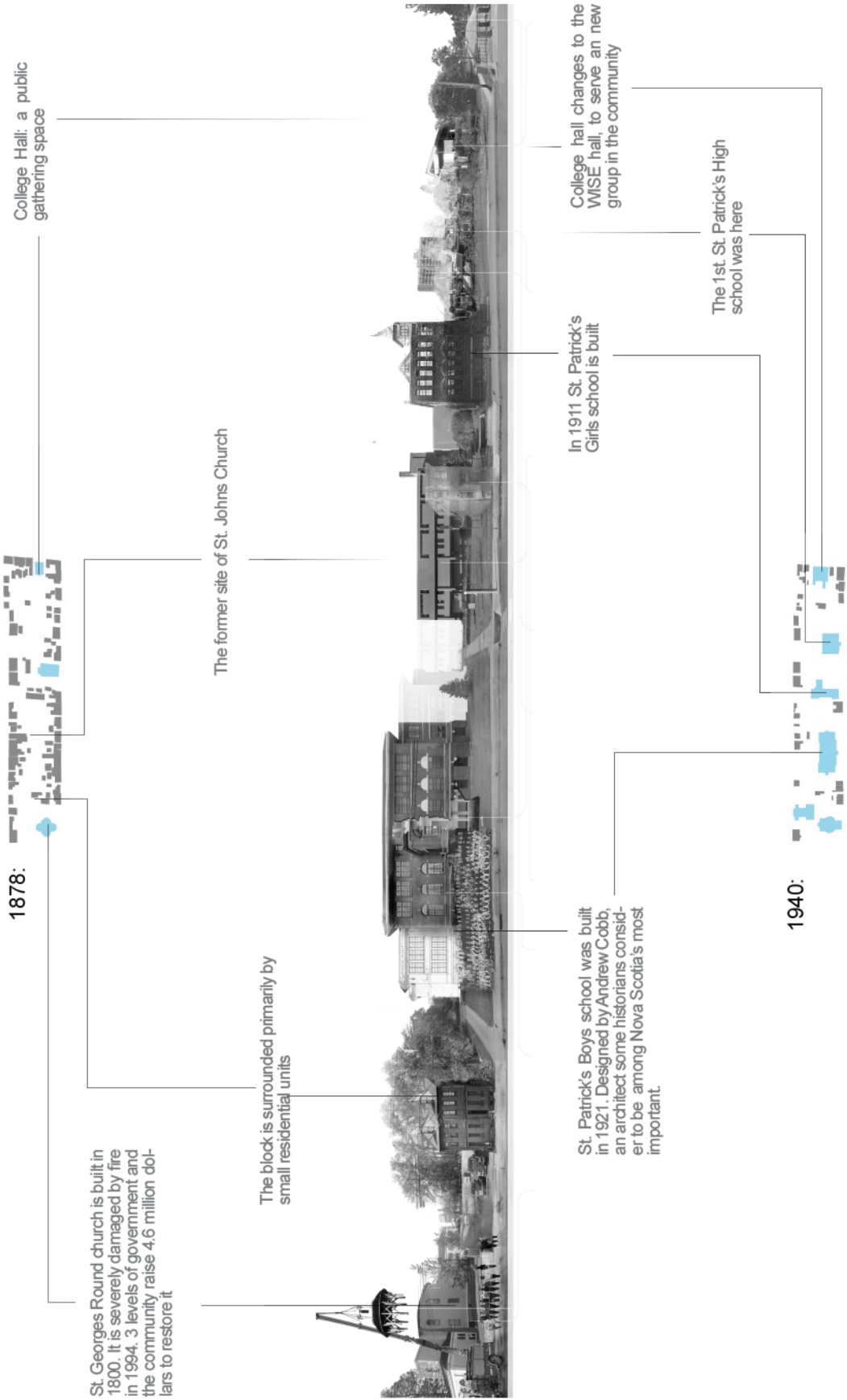


All Buildings Past and Present in this Part of the North End





Prior: Mi'kmaq land turns to agricultural land, then to urban space.



1969:



Community protest about the quality of their school results in expansion in 1971. This comes through demolishing the entrance of the former boys school, the girls school and building a new school as cheaply as possible designed by the city.

The majority of housing has disappeared from the site by now

The Wise Hall becomes the Gerrish Street Hall an important venue in for events in the black community such as dances and music performances. The hall is demolished sometime in the early 70s.



- 2011 St. Patrick's school is decommissioned. Since that time it has been vacant and under 24 security.
- 2013 RFP's are written for the school buildings by different community organizations,
- 2013 the entire public property is sold to Juno developments for 3 million dollars.
- The community takes the city to court for the unlawful sale of public property and wins.
- Juno Developments appeal the decision at the supreme court level and wins.
- Currently, the community is expecting the demolition of all buildings on site after Juno gets legal possession

In 2008 Hope Blooms a community garden is founded. In 2015 they build a greenhouse.

Their mission statement is "to empower at-risk youth to be actively engaged in building environments that directly impact the social determinants of health in their communities."

2016:



## **CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

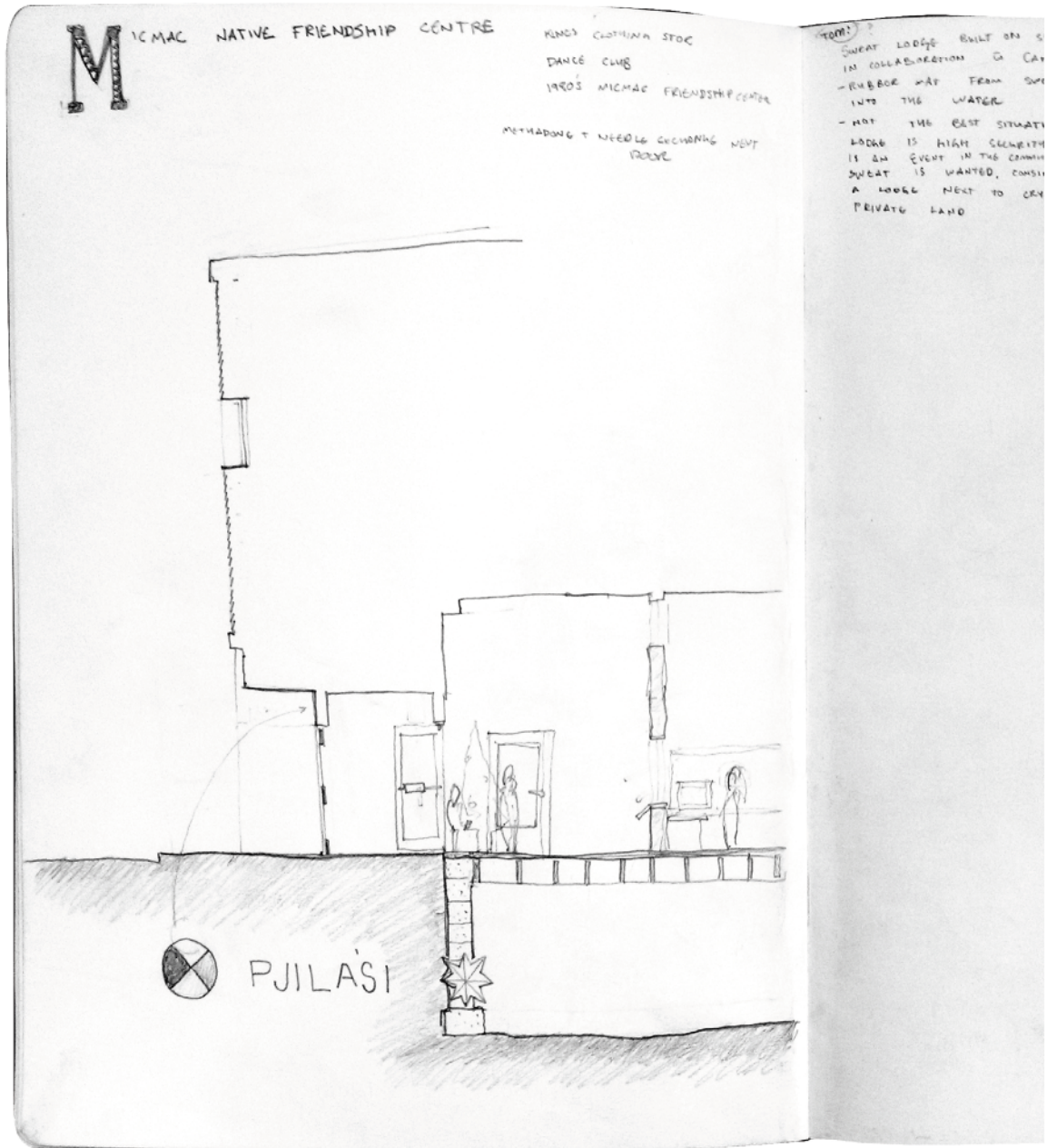
### **Connecting the Past to the Present**

Entering architecture school after having done social work for years I felt it important to try to understand the space I was studying through direct engagement with the community. This provided an opportunity to connect historical research with the community currently.

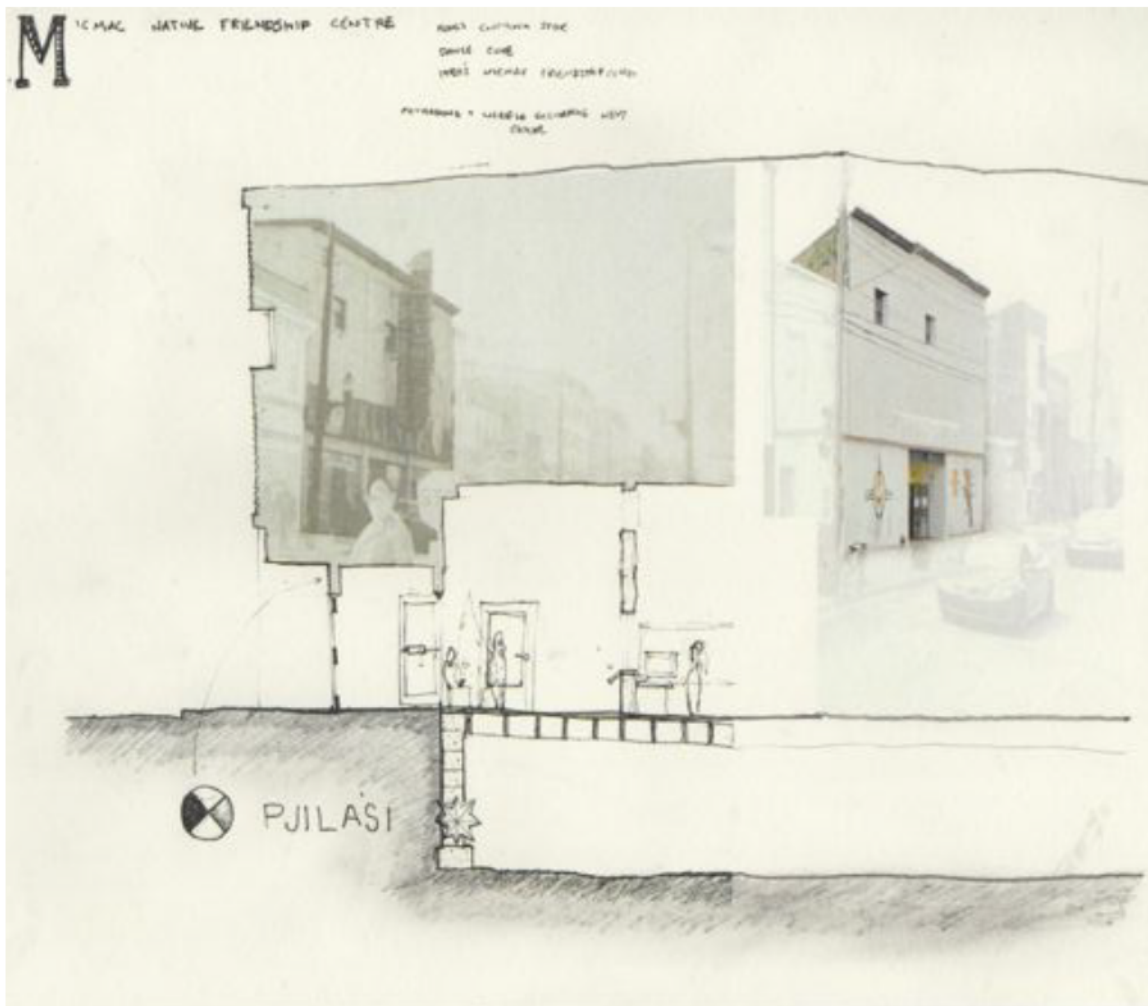
At the beginning of my thesis, I met with a number of people familiar to the site, including local architectural historian Jeffery Reed, professor and urban activist Frank Palermo, Dr. Margaret Cassidy (manager at the North End Community Center that has taken a lead role representing the communities interest in the site) and friends that do community work near by.

After beginning these conversations, I was recommended by my supervisor to go into the community to draw wall sections of some buildings. Through this exercise I learned about building articulation in the neighborhood and began had more encounters in the community. The buildings I selected for these drawings attempted represent a sample of the diversity in the community. I drew the George Dixon Community Center, the Cornwallace Baptist Street Church, the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Center, Anhern Manor (a 14 floor housing project built in the late 60's) and a 180 year old Heritage house on Brunswick Street.

After going into the community and making the 5 original wall section drawings, I continued to add to them through visiting the places I was drawing, conversations with people and research. I will now describe in more detail the path I followed beginning with one of the wall sections of the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Center.

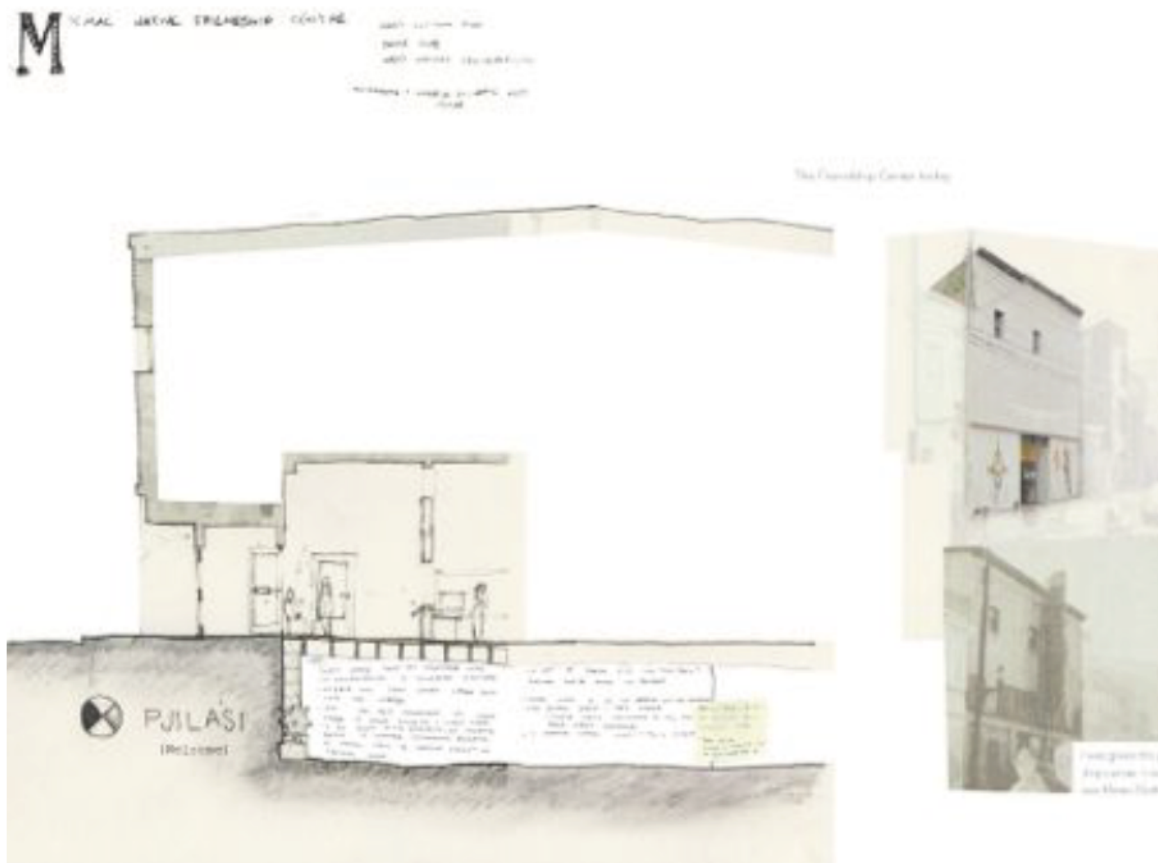


This drawing was made from in front of and inside the Lobby of the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Center on Gottingen Street. While In the lobby I met a number of staff members and people from the community. During the hour I spent at the MNFC I began to get an idea of the importance of this space to the community.



In this drawing I collaged my original drawing, a photo I was given during my first visit (depicting the building in the 1960's as a clothing store) and a photograph of the building today.

I prepared this drawing as one of five to pin up at my desk reminding me of the experiences that I had in the community while continuing with my work.



In this 3rd iteration of the drawing I made additions and revised the composition by:

- Adding what I'd written down after a conversation during my first visit related to the importance of sweats in the community and both current and ideal facilities.
- Some text describing the drawings and photographs
- Moving the photos of the front of the building out of the section and attaching a post it note as preparation to return to for another visit to ask questions and share drawings.



**Micmac Native Friendship Centre**  
 2134 Gorington Street  
 Halifax, Nova Scotia B3K 3B4  
 Phone 1 902 423 1374 Fax 1 902 423 6130

August 12, 2011

Halifax Regional Municipality Government Office,  
 Suite 303, First Floor Alderney Gate  
 40 Alderney Drive, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada B2Y 2N3

To whom this may concern,

I am the executive director of the Micmac Native Friendship Centre and have been authorized by the board of that same organization to make this offer to the Halifax Regional Municipality.

In regard to your RFP 11.039, Sale of Surplus School Properties, responses required before 2PM on Friday, August 12, we offer to purchase all of that property P.J.S. Number 00148643 for the price of One Dollar (\$1.00) which price is meant to include the Harmonized Sales Tax. As required, bundled with this proposal, is a bank draft in the amount of 5% of the bid price.

Our complete offer and substantiating documentation is contained in the attached proposal bearing the title:

**A Proposal from the Micmac Native Friendship Centre in response to the Halifax Regional Municipality's Request for Proposal in regard to the St. Patrick's - Alexandra School Property**  
**RFP 11.039**  
**ID No. 00148643**

Please contact me directly if there is any problem.

Yours sincerely,  
 Micmac Native Friendship Centre

*Patricia Clarke - Davidson, Executive Director*  
 Patricia Clarke - Davidson, Executive Director

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Note that the term "Micmac" is used here only to refer to the organization the Micmac Native Friendship Centre, as this is its legally registered name. Elsewhere the term "Mi'kmaq" is used to refer to the indigenous people of Eastern Canada and the term "Mi'kmaq" is used to refer to a person (singular).

**SPACE St. Patrick's - Alexandra Community Enrichment**  
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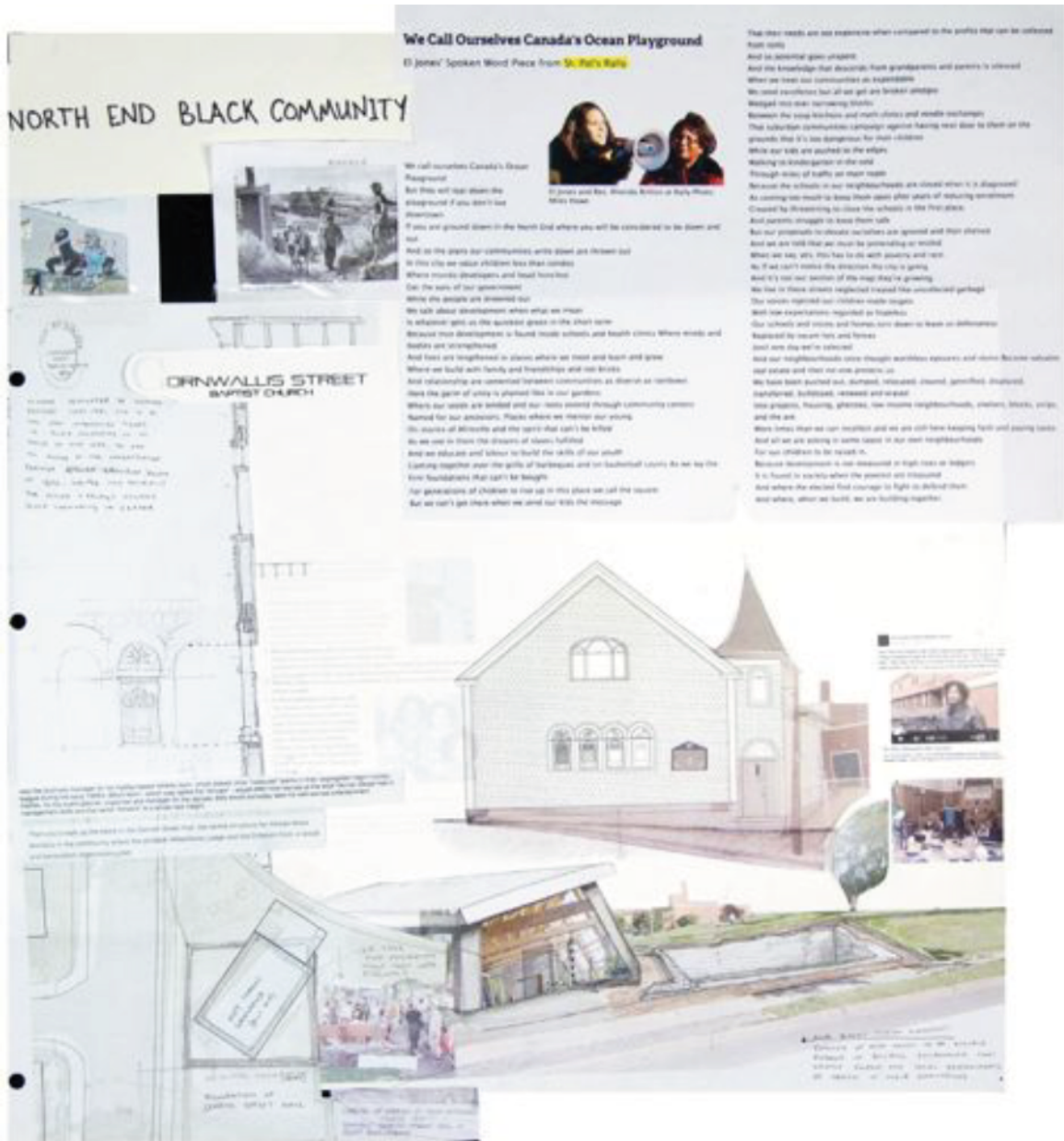
The final iteration of this drawing included:

- Excerpts from MNFC's 2013 proposal for the St. Patrick's School site (this was shared with me during my 2nd visit). These pages related to programmatic ideas and letters written that backed the proposal. The letters were written by elders in the Mi'kmaq community, the acting community MP, a financial institution and over 15 others.
- A photograph of the front entrance and mural of the MNFC I was given during my first visit.

What I learned through my visits to the MNFC and by reading their proposal for the St. Patrick's Alexandra site had a significant influence on my understanding of the community through history and today. These experiences also became important sources for my design work.

The other 4 wall sections I began evolved through a similar process into 2 drawings depicted on the following pages. The surrounding images are samples of those drawings in process.





This drawing reflects experiences and information I collected related to the Black Community in the North End. The drawing began with a wall section of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church and evolved through experiences in the community and research. Along the process a variety of sources were added including:

- A spoken word piece by El Jones, Halifax's current Poet Laureate, that was read at a St. Patrick's Alexandra rally.
- Drawings of the foundation of the Gerrish Street Hall, bisected by the Hope Blooms Greenhouse.
- Quotes by members of the community and current and historical images.



This collage began by drawing a heritage house from on Brunswick Street with a gentrification poster on the door. Weeks after the initial drawing I went to the house to take a photo and met a tenant who happened to be a leader of the Brunswick Tenants Society. We talked for a while and they invited me to a community meeting relating to development in the neighborhood. At the meeting I learned from a discussion among many community members and met people. Discussions relating memories, attitudes towards change, interested in being represented in community decisions and concern about the affordability of housing influenced me most.

## Collaboration With Dalhousie Planning

Early in my research I had a discussion with Frank Palermo, a Professor with the Dalhousie Planning Department. I learned that Frank was a member of the North End Community Council and has been an advocate with the community regarding the St. Patricks Alexandra Site.

After our first conversation Frank introduced me to Mina Seddigh, a thesis student of his that had begun work on a development plan for the St. Patrick's Alexandra School Site. After being introduced, Mina and I many times during our thesis work, sharing our ideas and research that we had collected.

**BACKGROUND ANALYSIS: VISION FOR SITE**

The NCCC provided a proposal for acquisition of the site to the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. Although the court refused the proposal, the NCCC's vision for St. Patrick's Alexandra School site was based on community preferences and needs. In the proposal NCCC aimed to work closely with local residents and organizations to turn the site into a neighborhood center, a new focal point for North Central Halifax - a hub for community activities, organizations and services that share the common goal of improving the quality of life for residents of North Central Halifax. The following are NCCC's proposal components for the site:

### Community Hub

The community hub would include:

- Incubator Space: The NCCC intended to create an incubator space on the site for local arts groups and other non-profit organizations to ensure the economic viability of the property in the short term and also to help the site have a lively and dynamic public use.
- A Home for the Richard Preston Centre for Excellence (RPCE)
- A new location for the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre (MNFC)
- A new location for the North End Community Health Centre (NECHC)

### Housing

Part of the NCCC's holistic vision for the site was building a healthy community by developing affordably-priced mixed housing on the site that provides home ownership opportunities for residents who otherwise couldn't afford to purchase a home in the area.

### Alignment with HRM Priority Outcomes

The NCCC's plan for the site could help support HRM's goal of creating greater residential density on the peninsula in ways that are well planned and sustainable.



Pages from Mina Seddigh's Thesis Report.

The proposed connections and divisions of the through the site described in Mina's report along with information collected through community workshops were influential to my work.

Mina, Seddigh, "Community Development Plan St. Patricks Alexandra School Site: Halifax, NS." (Masters Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2015).

## **SUMMARY**

An intention of my thesis work was to find program through engaging with the community rather than invent it. Discussions I had with people in the community influenced my understanding of the culture, the communities interests and continuity between events of the past and present.

## CHAPTER 5: DESIGN

### An Incremental, Adaptive Strategy

In relation to design methodology and content I'm interested in flexible, incremental, adaptive and networked strategies. Research into the relationship between ecology and design have been a significant influence on these Ideas.

In *Projective Ecologies* Nina Marie Lister and Chris Reed write " In the past 2 decades ecology has become interested in understanding dynamic systemic change and the related phenomena of adaptability, resilience, and flexibility. These thoughts are increasingly found useful as metaphors for cultural production and design.<sup>13</sup>" I'm interested in experimenting with how these concepts can be applied to design.

#### Conceptual Studies:

Adjacent is a study based on networking a variety of ideas and an adaptive/flexible process achieved through incremental actions.

Here I experimented with:

1. Concrete mix's. In this iteration I used a light sand with slate aggregate. In another not illustrated I used slate crushed to sand with a granite aggregate.



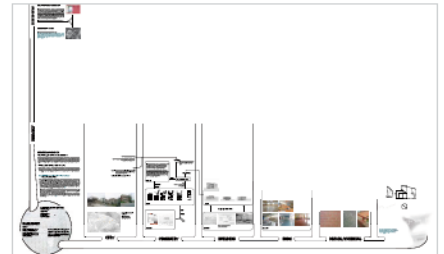
<sup>13</sup> Nina Marie Lister and Chris Reed, "Ecological Thinking and Design Practices" in *Projective Ecologies*. ed. Nina Marie Lister. (New York: Harvard School of Design, 2014), 15-16.

2. Using found materials (adaptability/flexibility): The slate aggregate was found in a nearby foundation pit, and the empty vase used to cast the form in near my desk.

3. As an architectural study I cut into the concrete, revealing its interior substance and changing the form of the object.

In another study under the same conceptual framework I designed an organizational system for my work. It began as a system organized by scale designed to reveal connections between drawings, photos and text related to my thesis work. This system was later adapted it to a binder with a similar organization and a digital file management hierarchy.

These conceptual studies gave me an opportunity to experiment with this design strategy through simple problems prior to engaging the denser network of inputs encountered in architectural propositions.



## Site:

### Process:

Early in my design process I began a model representing the St. Patrick's Alexandra site and blocks immediately surrounding it. I designed it to use only mechanical fasteners and friction and be made of robust materials that could support subtraction and addition.

Throughout my design process the model was adapted to reflect my growing understanding of the site. Some examples of this are: the addition of Gottingen street as the foundation of the model and the reduction of 3 sections to lighten the models weight and evoke its position as part of a continuous network.

Based on contextual research and influenced by the writing of Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in *Collage City* I began to think of the sites relationship to its context.

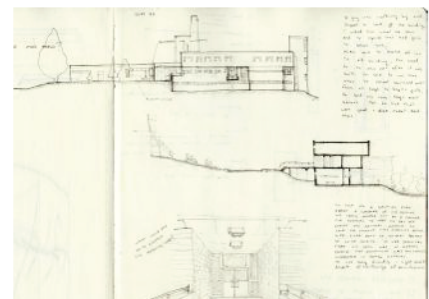
To Summarize: It is here proposed that, rather than hoping and waiting for the withering away of the object (while, simultaneously manufacturing versions of it in profusion unparalleled), it might be judicious, in most cases, to allow and encourage the object to become digested in a prevalent texture or matrix. It is further suggested that neither object nor space fixation are in themselves, any longer representative of valuable attitudes.<sup>14</sup>



Threaded rod and wood connections allowed for the model to be disassembled to work on.



One of many sketch models



Photo, site drawings and stories

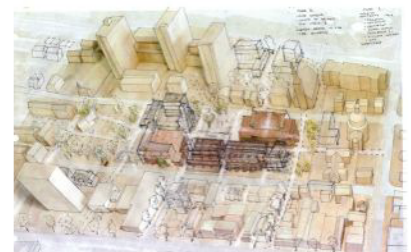
<sup>14</sup> Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978) 83.



This quote inspired me to think of the community as texture composed of a network of different types of spaces that had been formed through a particular history. The spatial and formal conditions of the St. Patrick's Alexandra site embodies a particular history and the growth of the community around it. Given that the city's education structure has changed, no longer supporting a public school in this location, something else can be proposed to adapt to the site.

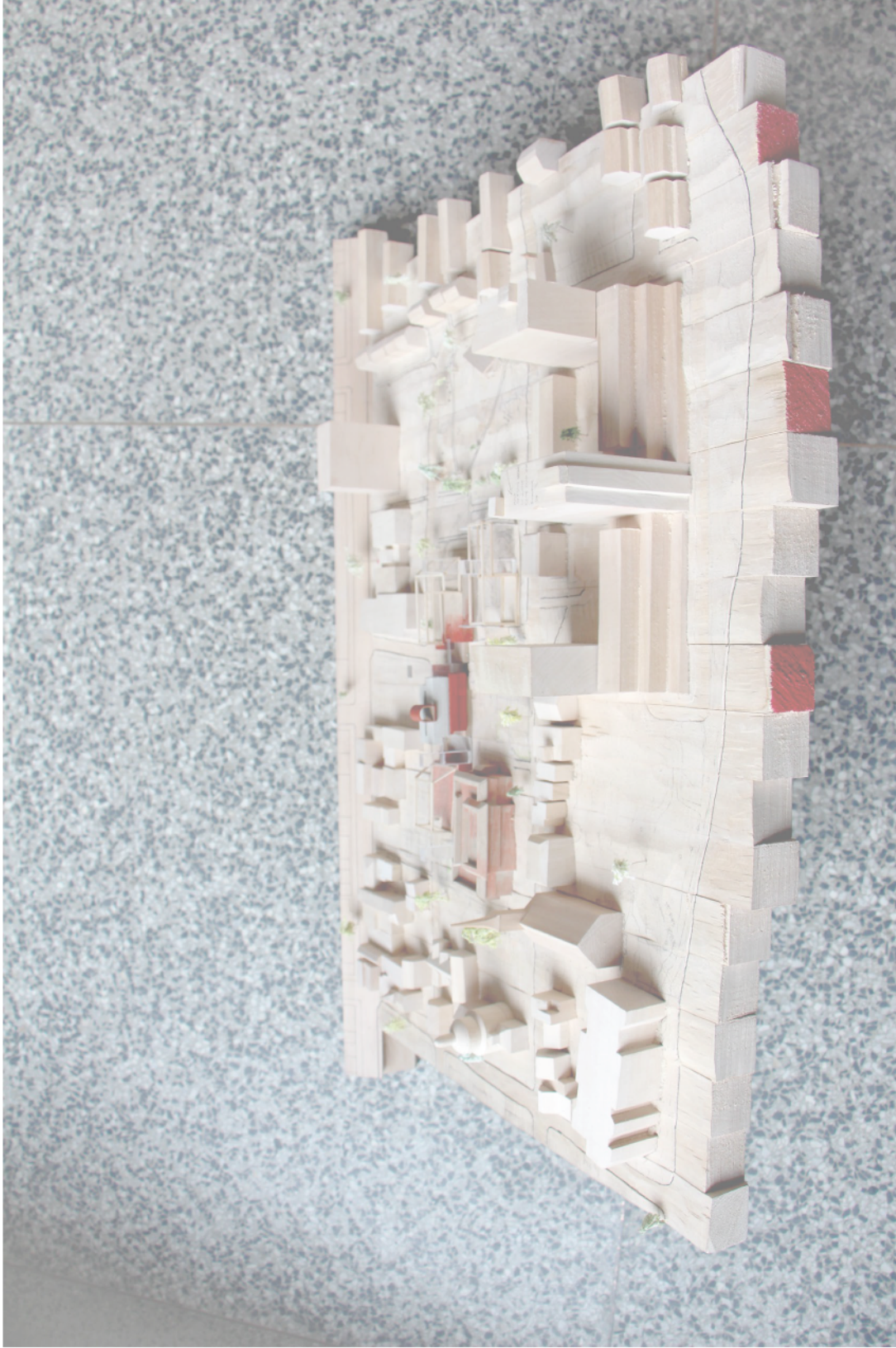
As a design proposition I was interested in a strategy to digest the site into the texture of the community while continuing it as an important public space.

To do this I first thought about how the community might change over time and the site could relate to this change. The series of drawings to the right is a study of this.





5th Iteration of a series of drawings based on photographs of site model: Here pedestrian streets through the site, connect Brunswick to Gottingen. The site exists as a mixture of old and new buildings. The community grows together with the site.



The texture of the site model reflects the expression of ideas and things learned through the making of it.

**Strategy:**

Focusing into the site scale I developed a strategy to adapt the site into the community . (right)

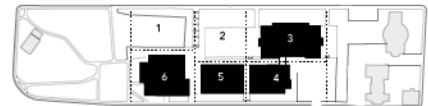
The strategy seeks to increase porosity and activate the site through breaking down walls, creating pathways and introducing program.

I focused my design on one piece of the site allowing for an incremental approach. This allowed me to test ideas that could be adapted elsewhere on the site or be improved upon in future iterations. The design was thought of as a catalyst in the sense that it would attempt to catalyze activity on the site and dialogue through process.

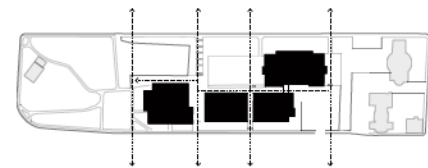
As a part of this scheme, each portion of the site would respond to it's unique contextual inputs, but together be a part of a larger network. For example, the site labelled 2 would be most influenced by it's adjacencies and its prior condition as a playground.



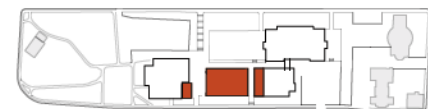
Existing Condition



Divide Site



Activate Pathways

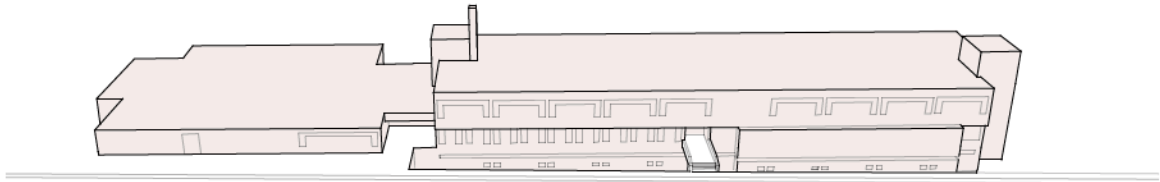


Design a Catalyst

## **The Catalyst:**

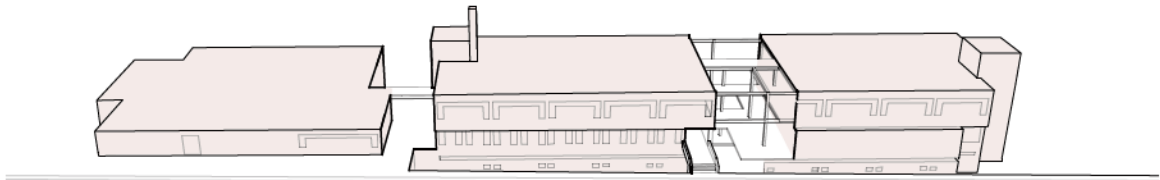
To begin I'll summarize my design approach through diagrams. Then describe the design in greater detail through process and drawings.

## **Strategy:**



## **Document the Existing Conditions:**

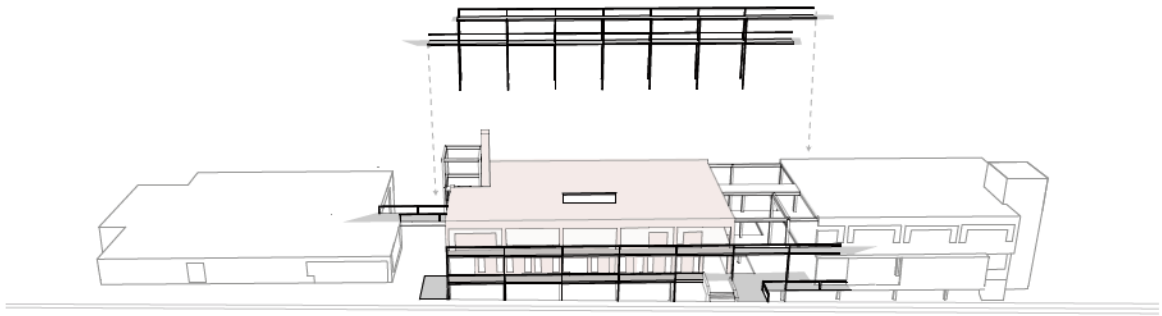
An in depth understanding of existing structure and meaning is vital for operation.



## **Cut Streets Through the Building:**

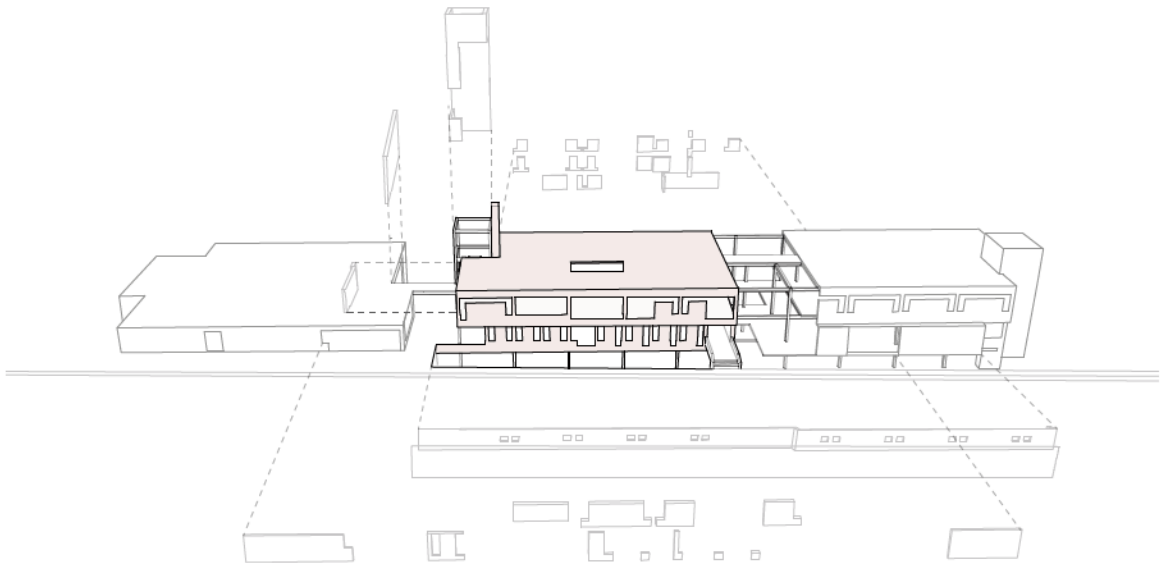
Erode the structure selectively to create porosity through what was once a wall.

-Retain above ground connections and traces of the past.



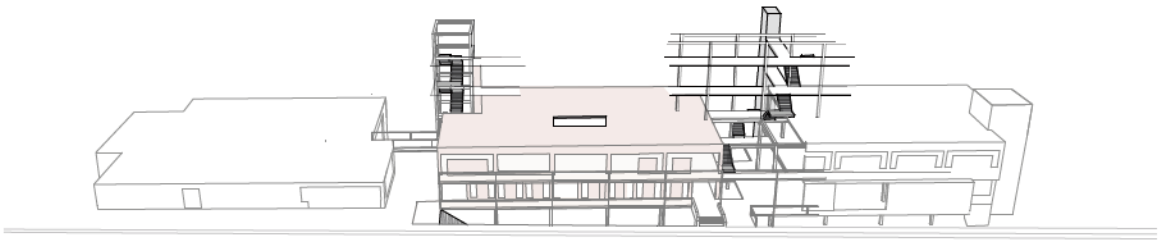
### ***Add Horizontal Connectivity:***

-This functions to increase porosity and make space more flexible. Through making this scaffolding habitable, the activities of the building begin to interact with the street.



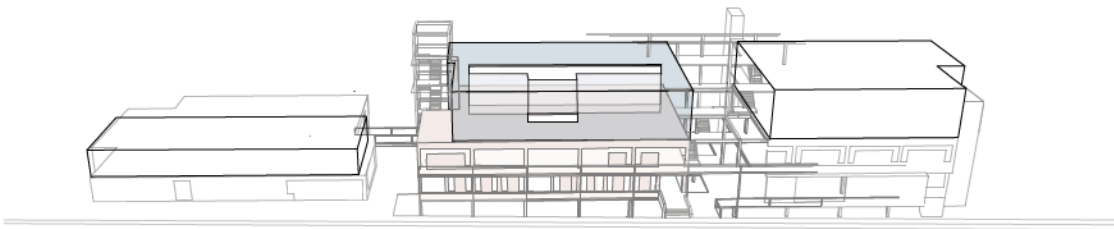
### ***Excavate the Lower Rooms and Subtract From the Envelope***

-Subtractions are made selectively to re-define the building relative to its past rather than erase the past entirely.



***Add Vertical Connections:***

-Vertical connections allow for the site to densify. These connections are designed as vertical public streets through transparency and adjacencies.



***Program the Building:***

-The site is returned to its composition prior to 1970 as a mixed public and residential space. Mixing programming mutually benefits a space through creating opportunities for the intersection of a diversity activities.

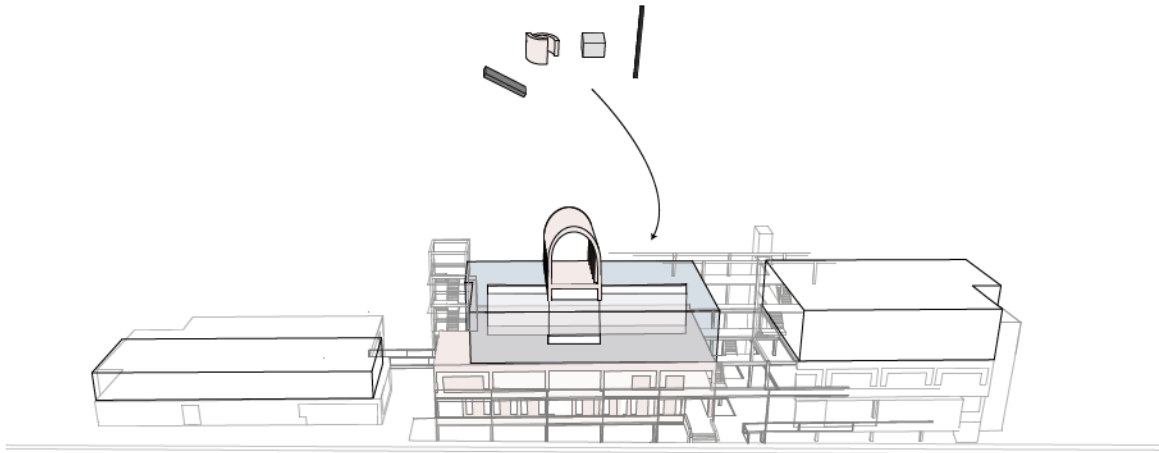
**Lower 3 Floors:**

Public resources managed collaboratively by community establishments:

- Micmac Native Friendship Center
- Richard Preston Center for Black Excellence
- North End Community Health center

**Upper 2 Floors:**

Mixed housing



***Prioritize Public Space:***

This site has been a locus of important public space in the community through history. Any new development should continue this.

By designing a public space on top of the residential addition, the vertical connections are reinforced as public pathways. This space is conceived of as a flexible public space with a view over the coastal military developments to the harbor. This view begins towards re-establishing dialog relating to the communities connection with the harbor.

To the East of the building where the schools playground has been dismantled, a new playground is designed using materials subtracted from the existing building and foundations of the previous schools excavated from the ground.

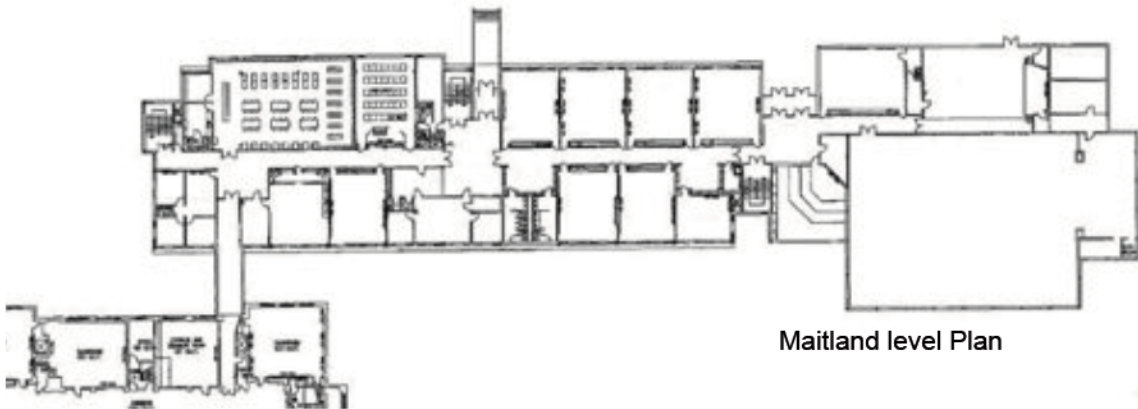


## Existing Conditions

The building is a continuation of the sites 250 year history as an educational center in the community. It was built as part of an expansion in 1971 that saw the destruction of the St. Pat's Girls school, the "renovation" of the former Boys school and the acquisition of the last of the residential properties on the site. This expansion occurred as a result of pressure through protest and the formation of the St. Patrick's School Citizens Committee an event well remembered in the community. Once built the school became the largest elementary school in the city and the first in Canada with a focus on black history.



Front Entrance



Maitland level Plan



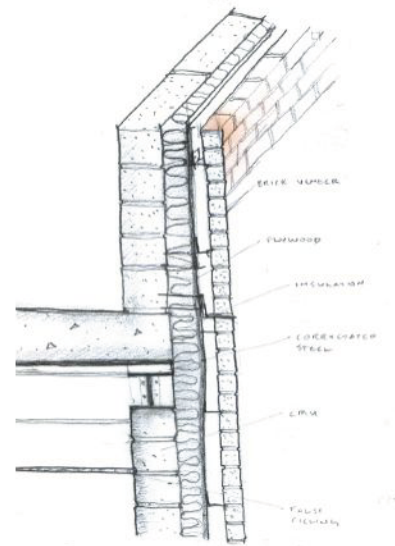
View from Brunswick Street

The building's primary structure is steel frame, with concrete slabs. It's envelope is brick veneer. Concrete masonry units form it's exterior and partition walls. Windows are composed to limit outward views while illuminating rooms from one direction.

Formally the building acts as a wall across the site dividing Brunswick from Gottingen street. The Western elevation is disconnected from the sidewalk by a 7m wide trench. On the eastern side of the building the upper 2 floors project over ground floor supported by columns forming a colonnade.

Sectional connections in the building are limited to stairwells, rooms are accessed through double loaded corridors with limited interstitial space and natural light.

The building appears to be in good condition with little damage from weathering on the envelope.



Wall Section



Structure and Interior Spaces



Maitland Street Elevation

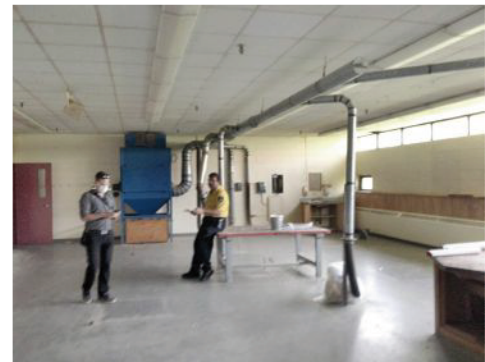
Designed as an educational building emphasizing control, isolating interior spaces from exterior spaces and maximizing capacity. The building has over time become appropriated by the community and provides an opportunity through which to encounter the past through direct sensory experience<sup>15</sup>.

This structure has much to offer in respect to a base through which to build off of to adapt into the future.

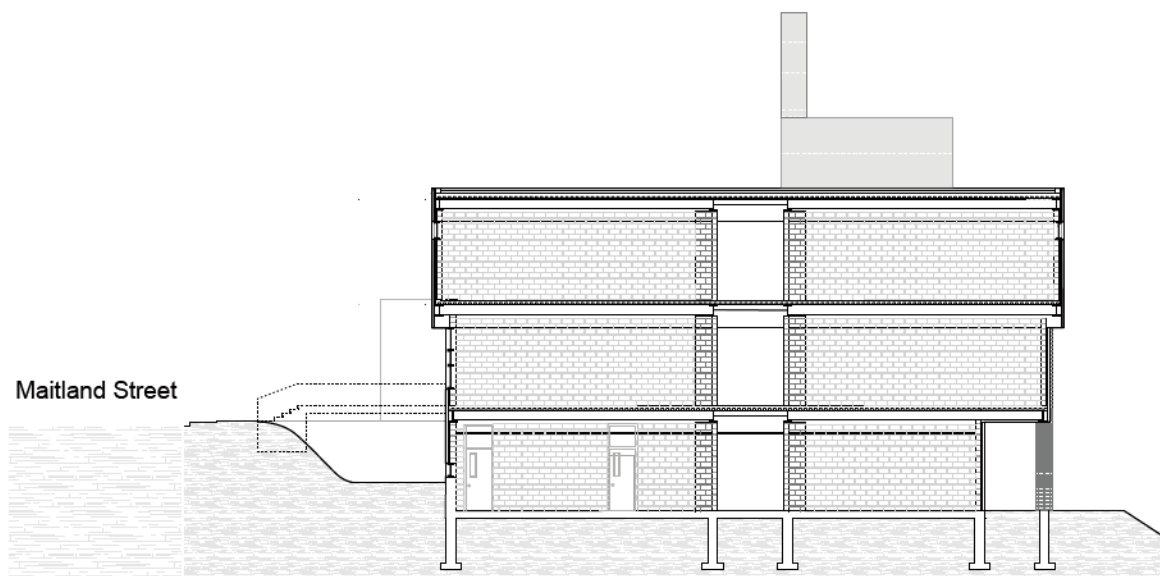
It's steel and concrete structure is robust and adaptation can be designed for through, subtraction, addition and preservation of material. The adaption of this existing structure presents the possibility to reveal the adaptive nature of reality through expressing both continuity and change.



St. Patrick's Alexandra Classroom  
by Dalhousie Planning



Wood Shop Space, Dalhousie Planning



Cross Section

15. Jules David Prown "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Cultural Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17 (1982): 3-4.

## Adaptations

### Cutting streets

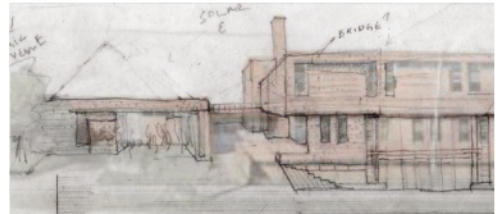
Cutting streets through the building creates new pathways through the site that activate it by allowing people to inhabit the space by passing through and gathering. The two streets are different in character as a result of their different contexts but are both connectors.

### *Prince Williams Street Extension*

The drawings to the right reflect design process. Beginning with base drawings iterative adaptations were made to test and integrate new ideas. The final perspective drawing expresses this layering through retaining traces of past versions while the plan drawing communicates this through illustrating subtractions, additions and preserved material.

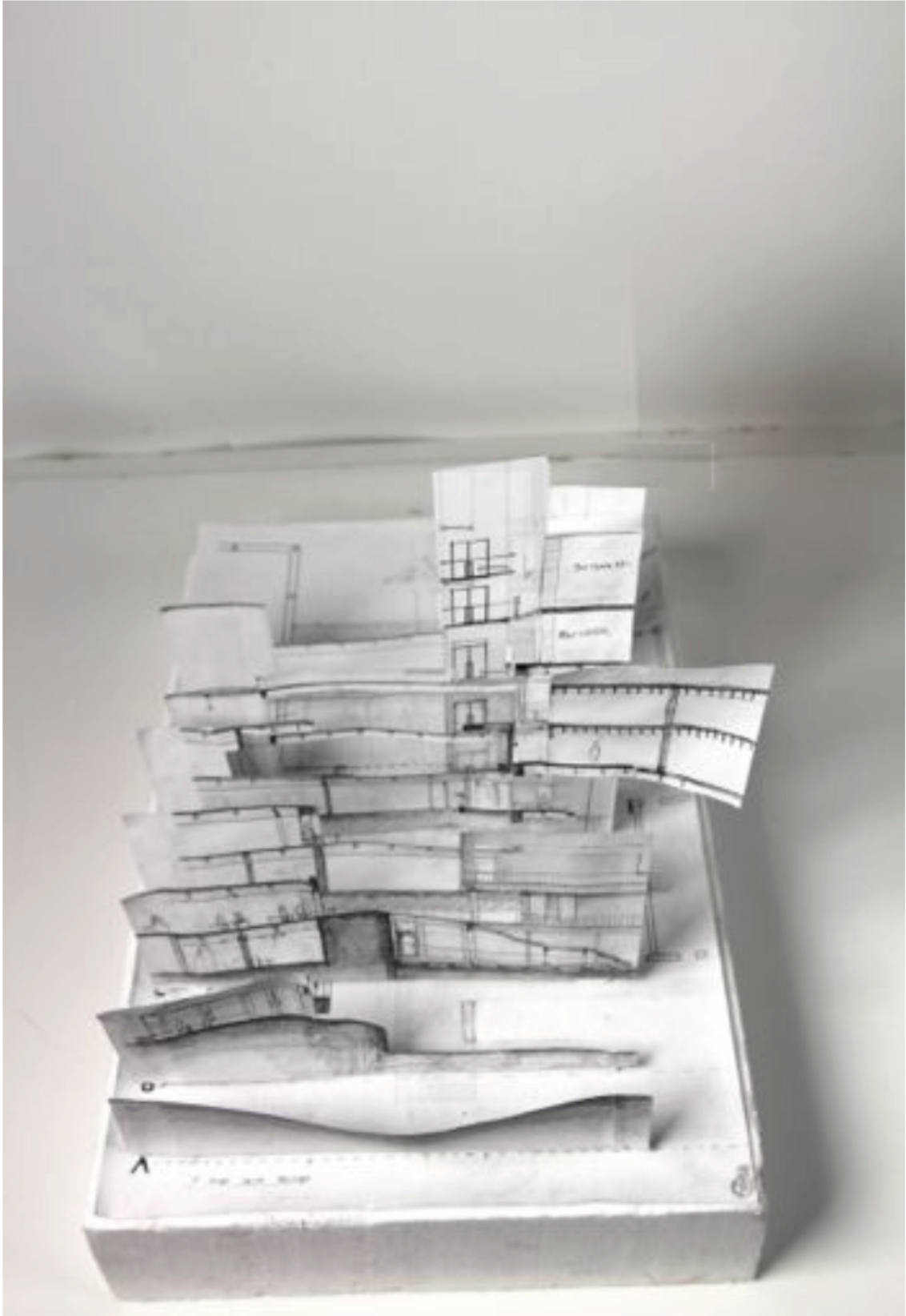


Maitland Street





Last Iteration of Prince William Street Extension



Model of Plan and Sequential Sections

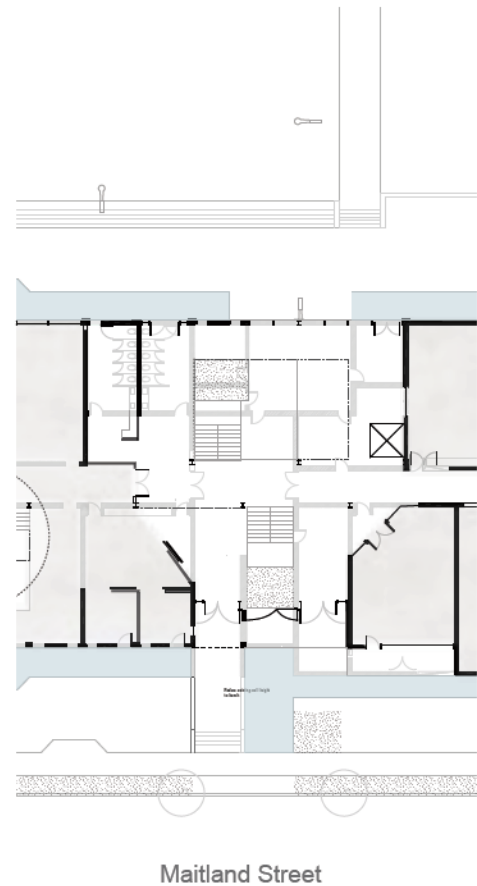


Plan:  
Prince William Street Extension

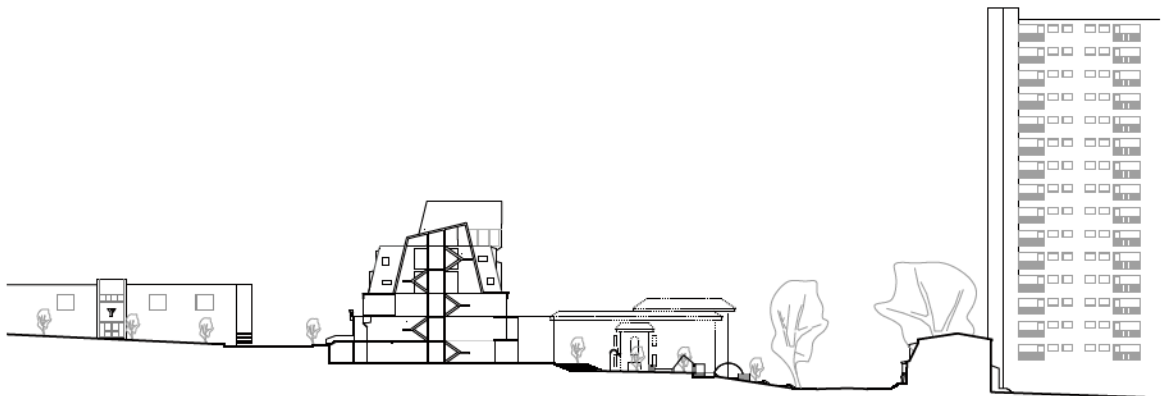
### ***Alexandra Public Atrium***

The second cut is made through the buildings former entrance and connects to an existing pathway to the North of the former Boys School. Here a space is designed that's a continuation of unprogrammed public space of the street within the frame of the former school. Here slabs are subtracted entirely with the exception of sections that become overhead pathways. The primary steel frame is retained to support glazing that has replaced the brick cladding and additional vertical structure.

Inside this space pathways link residential housing, commercial businesses and public spaces. This mixing of program keeps the space alive at all times of the day and offers an unprogrammed public space that could be conditioned during winter months.



Plan: Alexandra Street Atrium



Section Through Alexandra Street Atrium





The void subtracted through the school and continued in the additional structure follows the pathway that daylight enters into the space. Stairs and an elevator following this void (see Brunswick perspective) connect spaces vertically. The additional param primary structure grafts to the existing steel columns. Holes cut in the ground slab reinforce the spaces connection to the landscape surrounding it.

## **CONNECTING PROGRAM TO STREETS:**

The site comes alive through the activities of people. Some of these activities take place in unprogrammed spaces cut through the former building. These spaces are supported through activity within the building. Adaptations to the building intend to increase connectivity to its surroundings. Habitable pathways surrounding the building provide access and space for things to happen between the building and the street.

Interior spaces are inhabited by a mixture of programs. The structure of the former school is activated by organizations in the community including the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Center, the Richard Preston Center for Black Excellence and the North End Community Health Center. Three levels are added to the existing structure, two are residential and the third is an indoor/outdoor rooftop public space,.

## MAITLAND STREET LEVEL PLAN

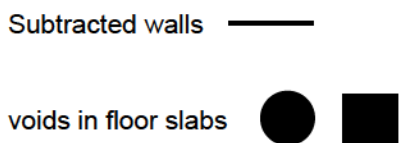


## MAITLAND STREET ELEVATION

The plan and elevation above depict the two paths cut through the building, and its relationship to the streets surrounding it.

Similar to the cutting of voids through the building, within the building a strategy of selective subtraction and addition are used creating dialouge between the memories of the building and its adapted state. The most significant design device inside the building is a central void connecting a diversity of spaces through light and circulation. The void provides space for intersections between people and activities. To achieve this void space existing floor slabs are subtracted to respond to their particular spatial, programmatic and structural conditions.

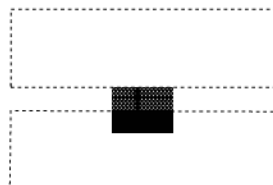
The diagrams to the right describe program and adaptations to the building. Plans correspond to the section on the adjacent page.



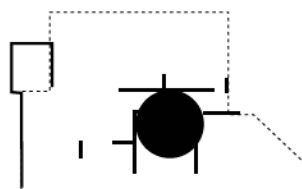
**6. Public Space**



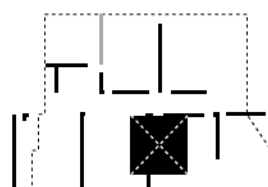
**5. Residential**



**4. Residential**



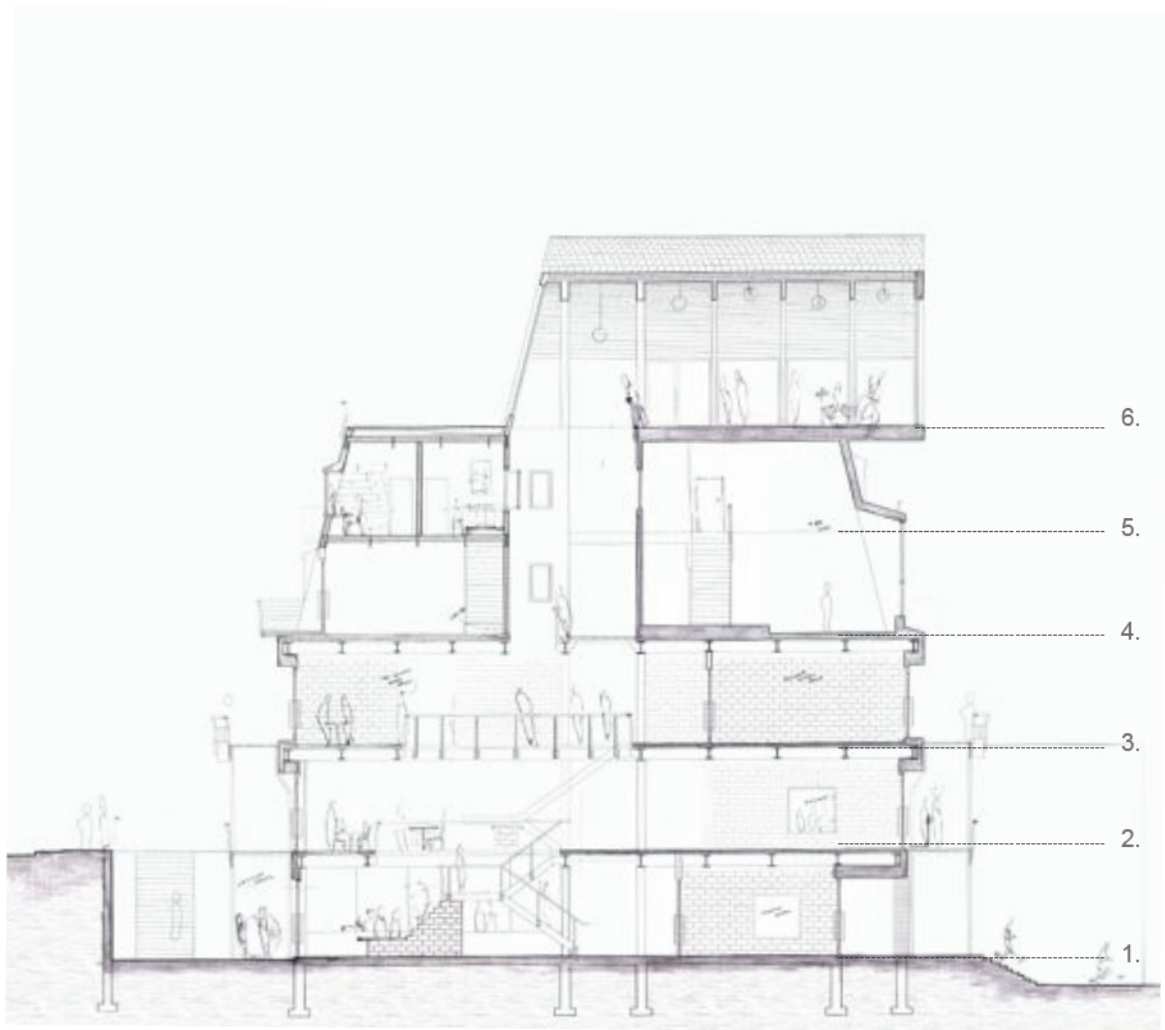
**3. Classroom/Meeting rooms enclosed/semi-enclosed and adaptable**



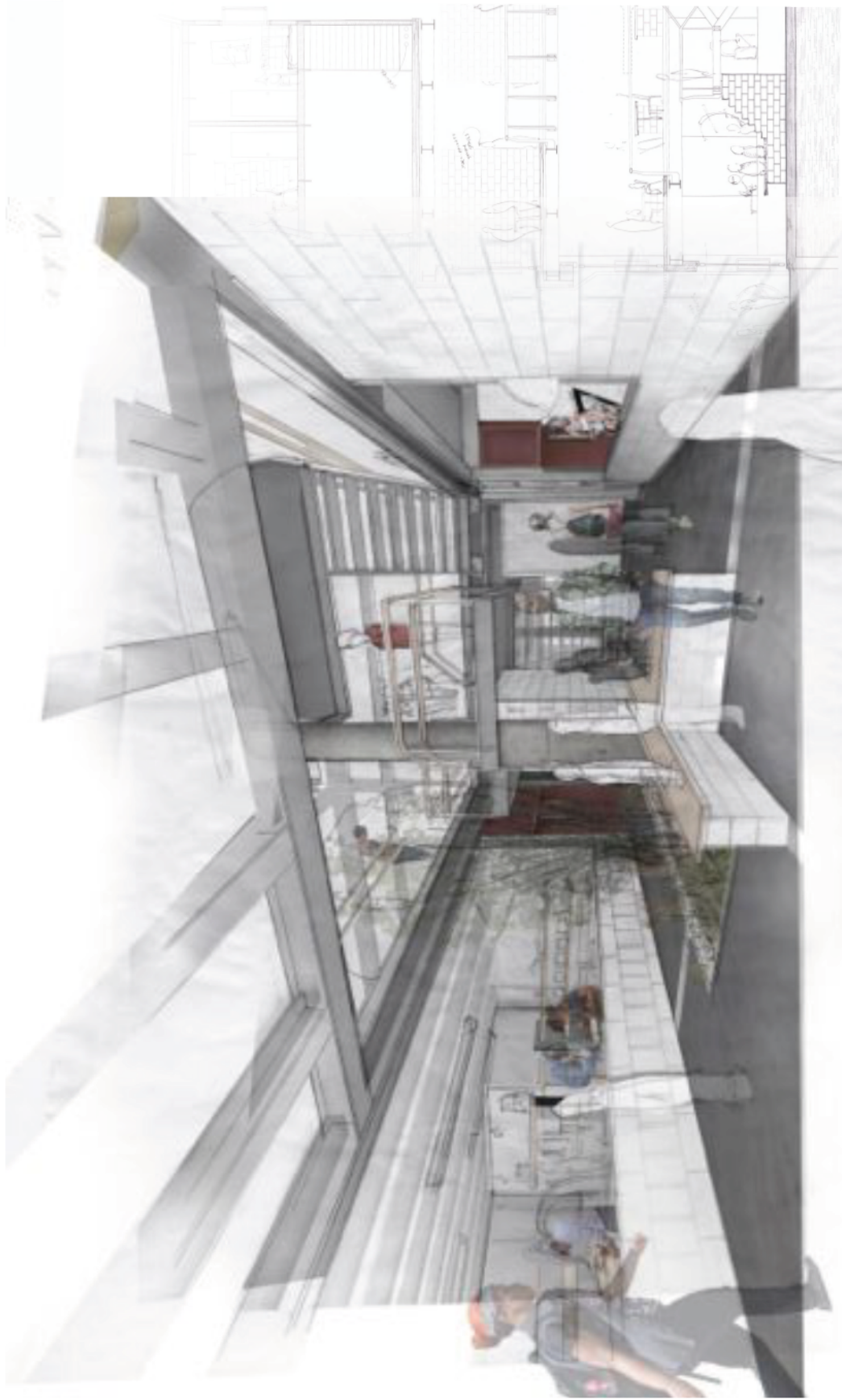
**2. Learning resources**  
digital tech, study space, social spaces, admin for employment and education programs.



**1. Workshops/Studios**  
metal, wood, textiles, casting



The following pages follow in sequence up through the building



Ground Floor: Existing shop spaces on the lower floor are adapted through selective subtraction. Former walls become benches, others, low walls with windows, some continue only as traces on the ground. The added structure and foundation supports the stairs through a hole in the floor. These work spaces provide resources for people to adapt their own environments.

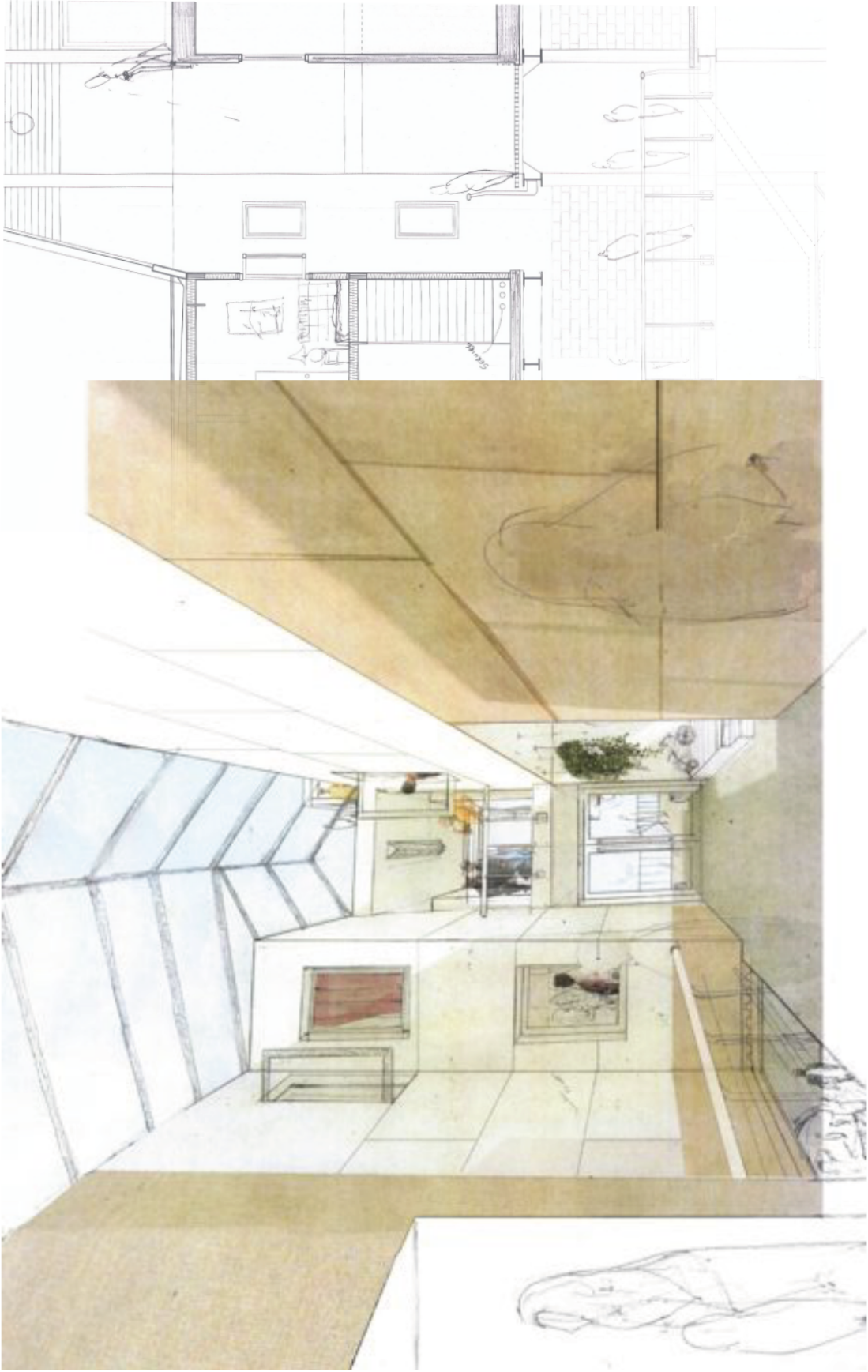


Maitland Street Level: This floor becomes an open learning and resource space. It is managed by the Richard Preston Center For Black Excellence and the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Center. There are offices here for the employment resource and learning administration, however the majority of the space is open with tables and digital resources for people to learn and connect with others.



The 3rd Floor: Here a variety of enclosed and open spaces provide opportunities for classes and gathering. Some existing walls are maintained where others selectively removed to creating connectivity between spaces and a variety of enclosure types accommodate diverse activities. Through the roof of the former school a hole is cut connecting natural light from the new residential street above .





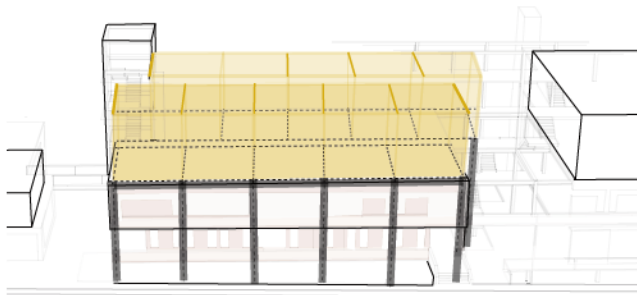
4th floor: Here an interior street connects to new residences. The following pages provide a detailed explanation of the design of this addition.

## Housing

Having been abandoned as a public space by the city, the sites future comes into question. The prospect of it continuing as a solely public space, but of a different nature has much to offer, but isn't the direction explored in this thesis. Here population growth and designing affordable housing is responded to in conjunction with continuing the site as public space.

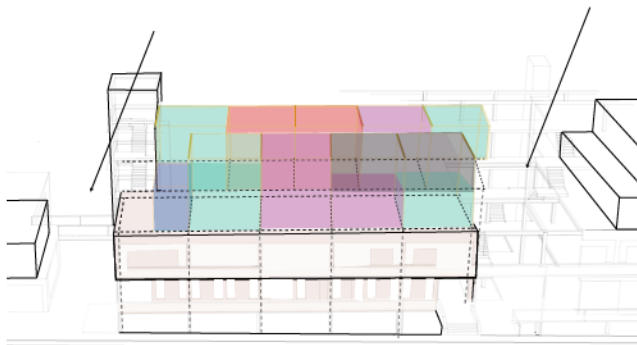
Adding residents to the space creates the conditions for a viable street where social contact between local residents can be established<sup>16</sup>. Grafted to the existing network of the community, this connection between public and private space supports the collectivization of resources in the building and beyond. The intimacy here between public and private space becomes a design challenge to resolve for the space to be comfortable.

### Strategy:



#### *Add to Existing Structure*

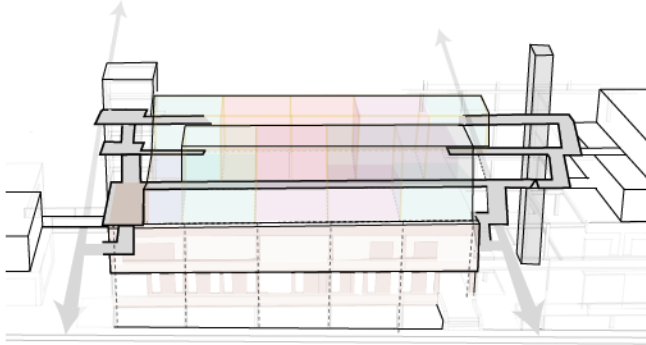
A light wood Frame/Post and Beam hybrid transfers point loads directly to the existing structural grid.



#### *Adapt Structural System:*

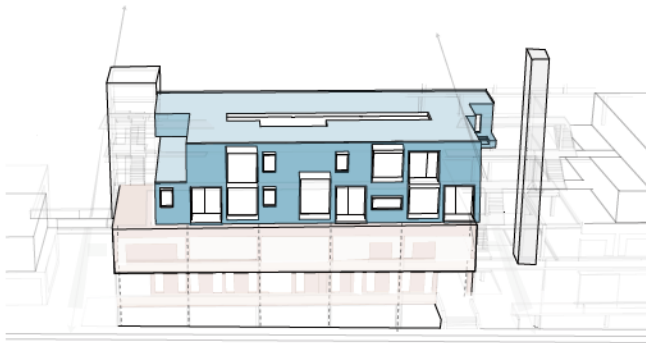
Accommodate varied units (1-4 bedrooms), respond to sunlight direction and articulate spaces.

16. Herman Hertzberger, *Lessons for Students in Architecture*, (Rotterdam: 010, 2005).



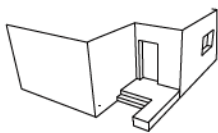
*Connect Elevated Streets to Ground level Streets:*

Vertical public pathways connect to residential pathways



*Integrate Contextual Housing Articulation:*

Design elements related to the community's dwelling culture.



Stoops



Bay Windows



Balcony's



Kitchens at Entrance



Bedroom Windows

These Two drawings lead from the landing of the 5th floor staircase of the Alexandra Atrium into the interior residential street (from the perspective of a man in a black jacket and hat on page 45).



Continuing into 4th floor residential street. Light fixtures re-located from school and connections between existing and new structure are depicted. This view continues to the perspective on p53.

## **Public Space**

This site has been a locus of important public space in the community through history. The buildings that exist on it are a continuation of the sites 250 years as an educational center in the community. Any design proposed for the site should consider the memories embodied there and its continuation as an important public space in the community.

By designing a public space on top of the residential addition, vertical connections are reinforced as public pathways and the space occupying the highest point is open to anyone.

To the East of the building where the schools playground has been dismantled, a playground is designed, built with the material of the past and present.



View of the building and playground space from Brunswick Street



6th Floor: Above the residential addition is a new indoor/outdoor public space. This space offers a visual connection over Barrington Street and the military docks to the harbor. At best the space would begin dialogue towards re-establishing public access to the harbor for the community.

## CONCLUSION:

I believe that many design decisions I made in my work could be improved upon, and I hope that they are. My thesis lead me to further my understanding of what is at risk of being lost and also what could be gained at this particular site.

“The Idea of the city as a layering of different eras goes back to first civilizations, when one built on the fragments left by one’s ancestors and literally, on their bones. The reverse of the modernest tabula rasa is the tabula scripta, an urban landscape that keeps rewriting its memories the more it ages.”<sup>17</sup>

Our spaces are saturated in memories. To clear the material substance of our past without restraint, is to deny our history and sever our narrative through place and time. The effect of this de-stabalizes cultural roots, breaking connections to our past selves and the people that have lived in our spaces before us.

Conversely, to attempt to preserve without alteration all memories would be at the expense of what could grown from them. Here we would deny our capacity to adapt to the conditions of our world, to manifest our culture through building our future on the foundations of the past.

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<sup>17</sup> Jencks, Charles, and Nathan Silver. *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013), xii.



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