

Dream City - Hijacking the Void

MARCH Thesis By Alexandra Gauthier



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Alex Gauthier is a young designer pursuing her Masters of Architecture degree at the University of Southern California, where she enjoys turning abstract ideas into **visual narratives**. Originally from Chicago, she grew up around famous architectural projects and was exposed to them at a young age, inspiring her interest in the field.

Her interests within the field of architecture involve **graphic representation**, analysis of form and function, and **urban intervention**.

The Thesis

Dream City recognizes the potential of liminal and underutilized spaces within the contemporary metropolis. It eclipses the traditional urban design perspective by re-imagining the *void alley network* of DTLA as a threshold to alternate urban possibilities. This thesis blurs the line between reality and fantasy, presenting this liminal network as a complex construct shaped by *dreams, desires*, and the perceptions of its inhabitants. Void spaces within the city are *hijacked by the fantastical*, combining and mutating themselves into a heterotopic network of *liminal dreamscapes* adjacent to the pre-existing built environment. Speculative scenarios and *provocative narratives* exploit the potential implications of navigating these

fictional architectural environments, prompting the reflection on the nature of spatial perception and identity, and inspiring new ways of thinking about the relationship between architecture, society, and time.

By embracing speculative fantasy, this thesis challenges architects and designers to reconsider their role in shaping reality and imagine new forms of experience that can *transcend* the limits of space and our disciplines devotion to the “real.”

In the words of *CJ Lim*: “Time, scale, and relationships become fluid, and the city is forever on the brink of the strangely familiar and the familiarly strange.”

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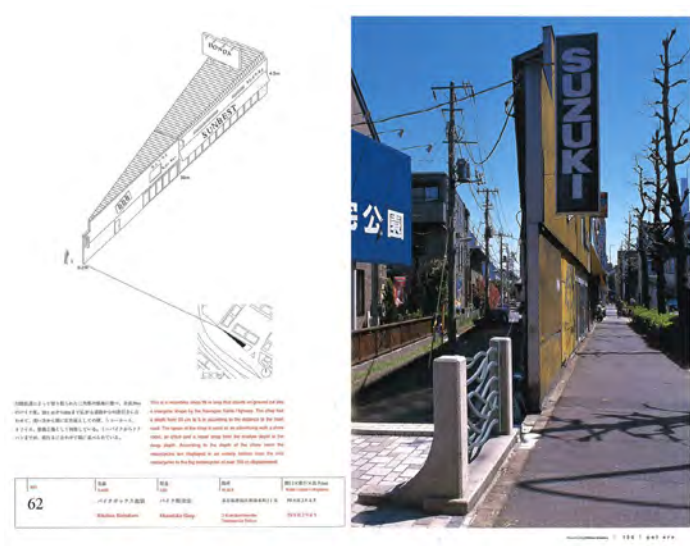
Pet Architecture and Friends: *Precedent Analysis and Collection*

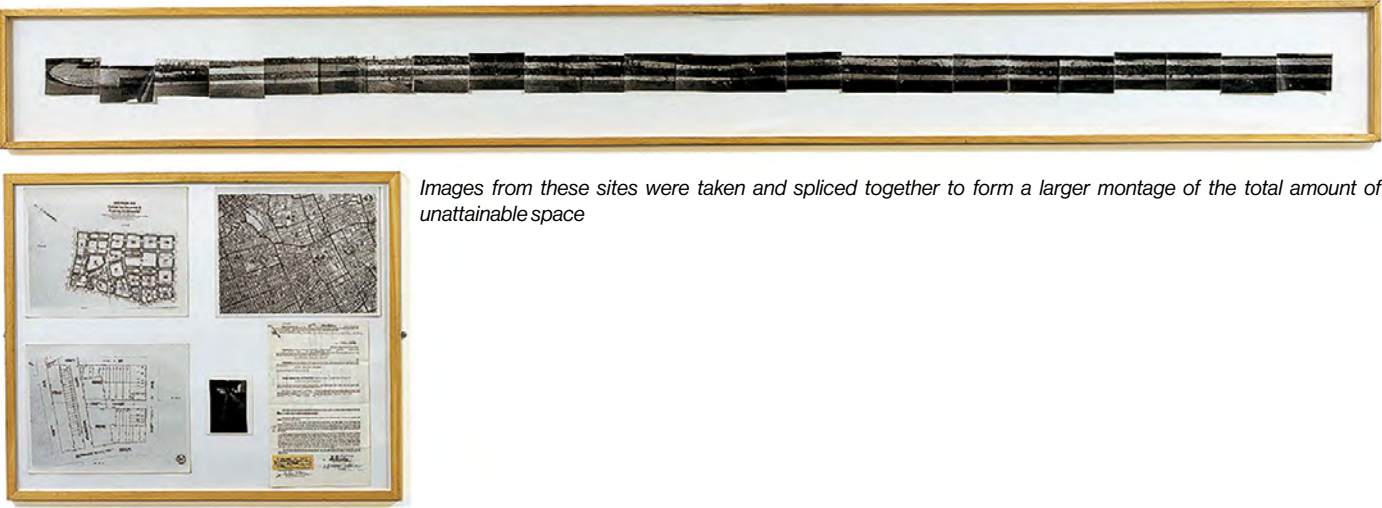
Multiple precedents were used as inspiration for further field research. Each precedent was chosen based on the process of **documentation**, the analysis of **form** and function, and **graphic** representation.

Each precedent contributed something **different** to the overall thesis statement and documentation process for the precedent translation drawing.

As opposed to strictly researching each precedent project and analyzing the built projects specifically, precedents were analyzed for their **process** and documentation methods instead, and these methods were used to further document research for this thesis.

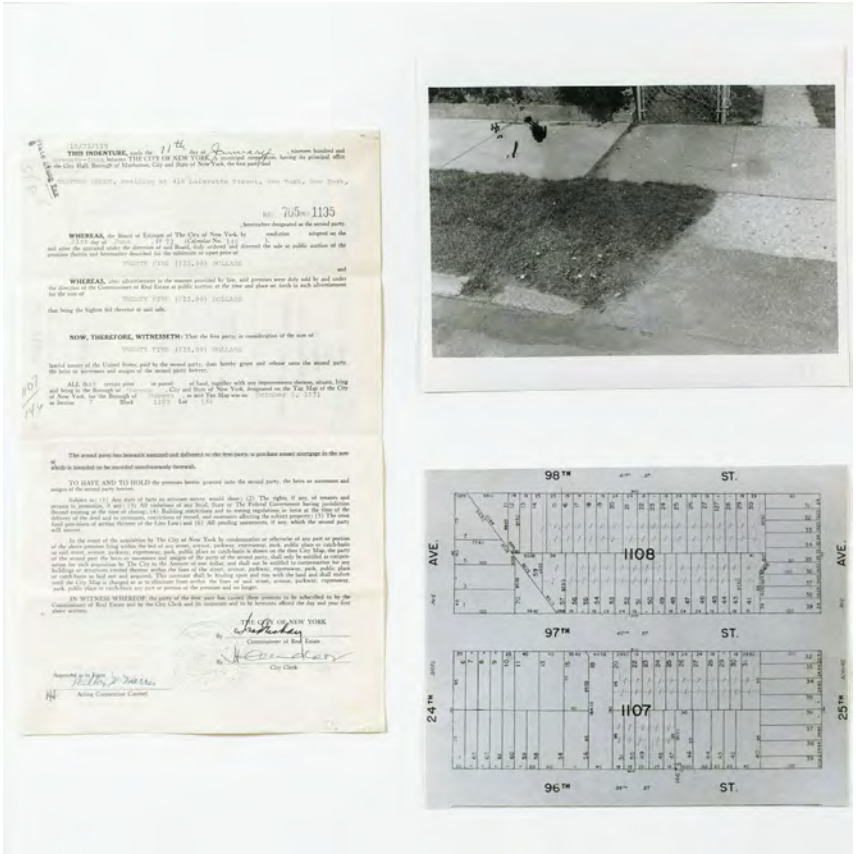
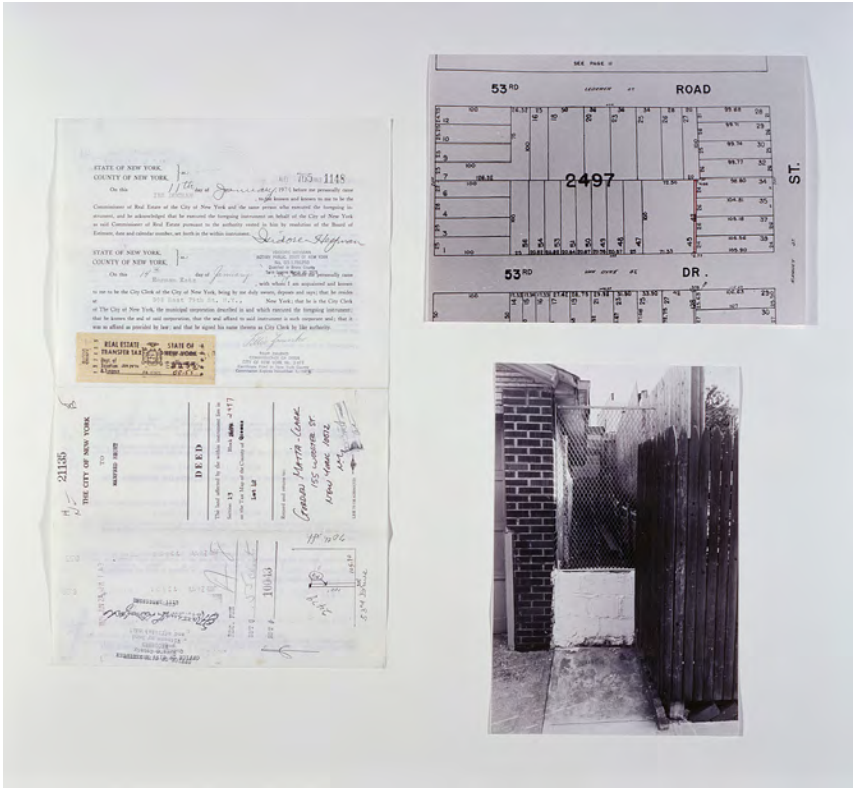
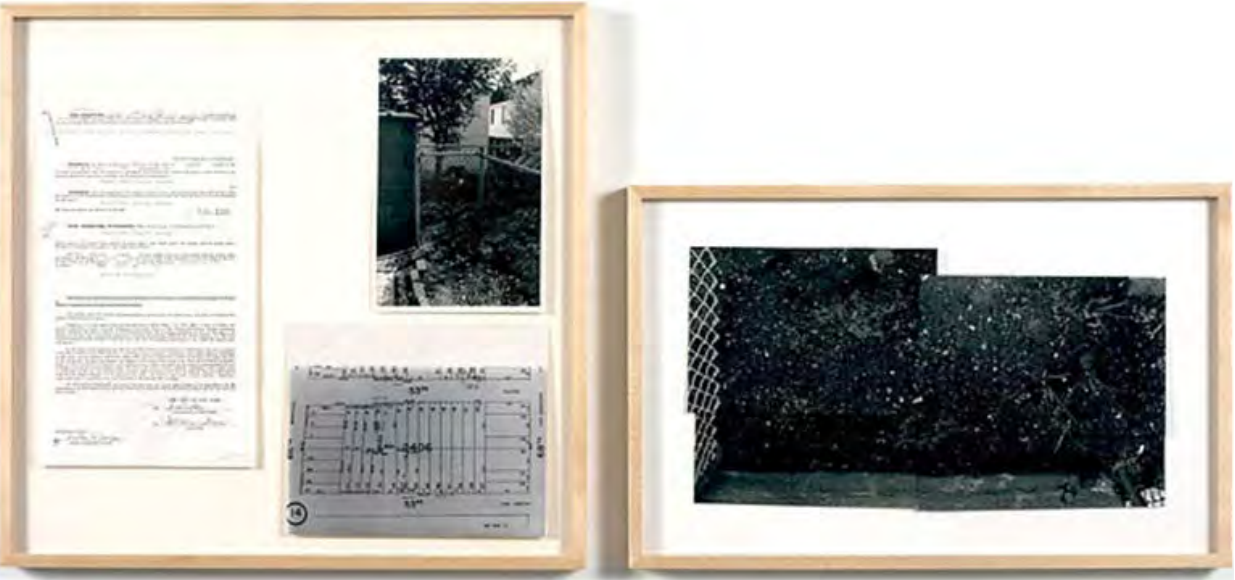
Inspiration was drawn from Atelier Bow-Wow's approach to documenting "Pet Architecture". Atelier Bow-Wow's typological analysis of small spaces inspired the capturing of the essence of voids in a similar manner of cataloging. The small form is drawn, a short description provided, along with image(s) of how this space sits within the urban fabric. The spaces are first showcased individually, then arranged into a typology at the end of the book.

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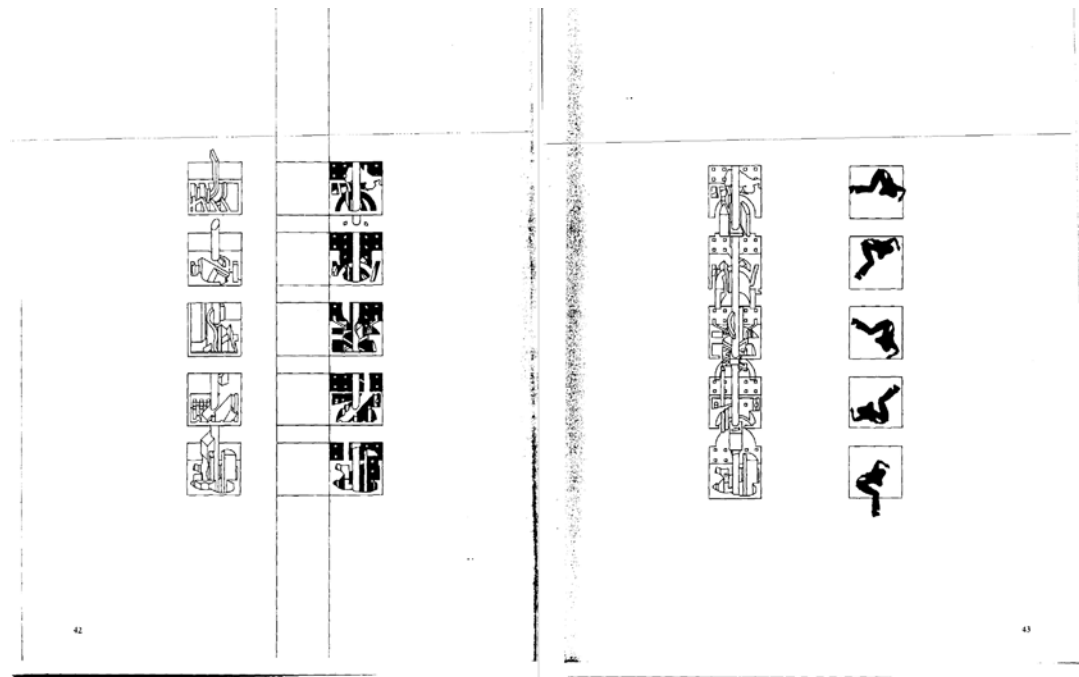


Images from these sites were taken and spliced together to form a larger montage of the total amount of unattainable space

The economic implications of private property are at play in Gordon Matta-Clark's "Real Properties and Fake Estates," which incorporate deeds to microplots of land—slivers of curbsides, and alleyways in Queens—that the artist bought at auction for 25 dollars a piece and combined with maps and montaged images of each site. Fascinated by the idea of untenable but ownable space, Matta-Clark purchased these residual parcels to comment on the arbitrariness of property demarcation. Each lot was analyzed, photographed, and archived along with the deeds to each parcel.

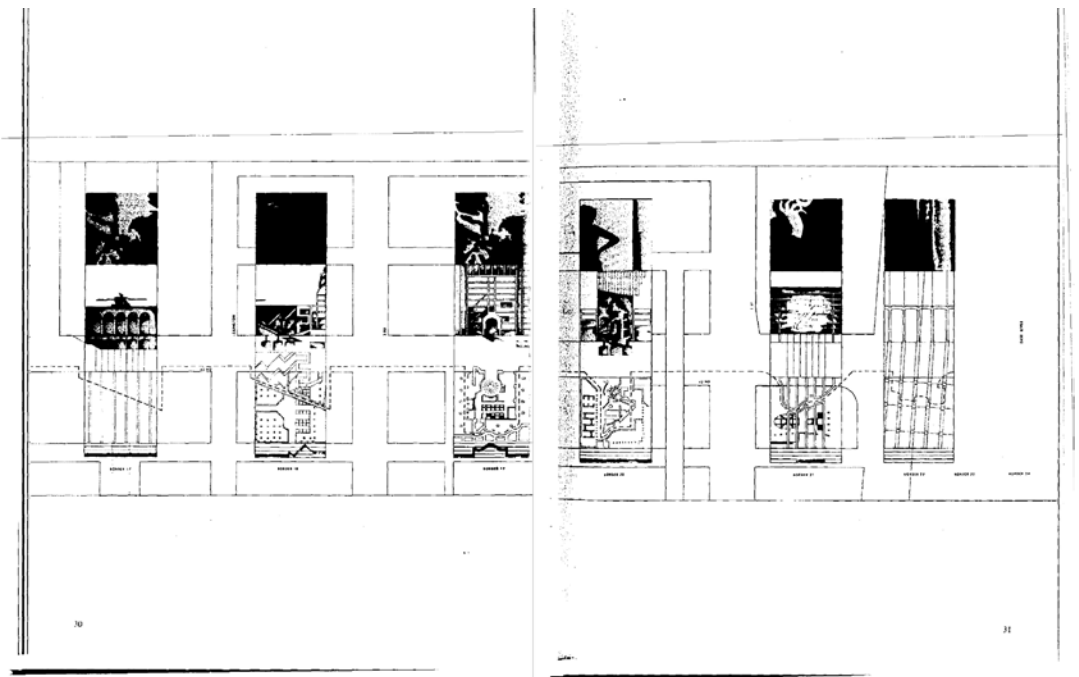
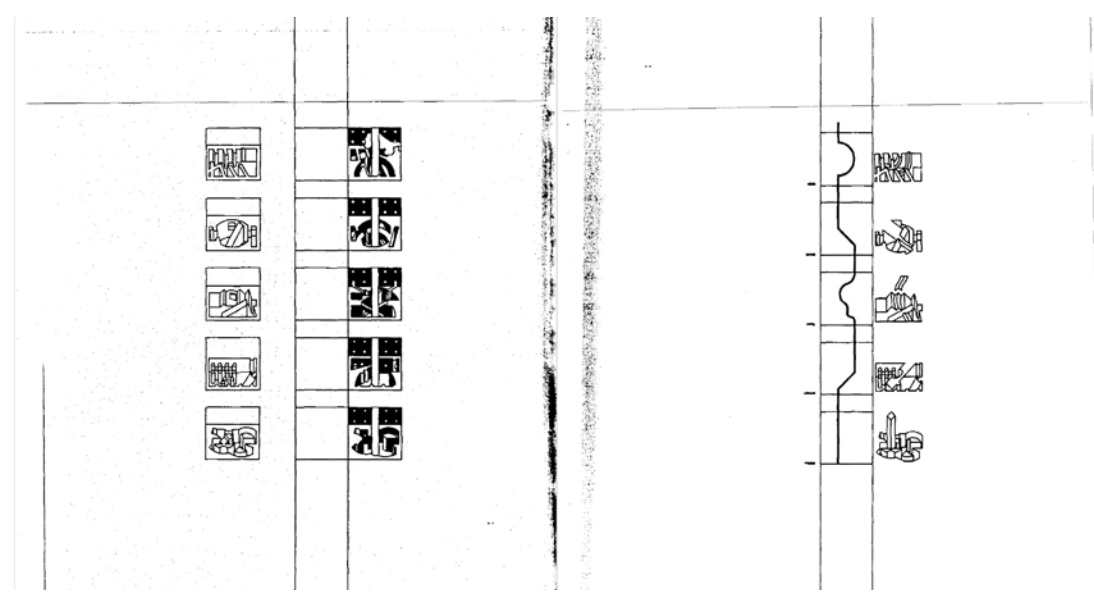


Insights were drawn from Matta-Clark's method of documenting via this project, harnessing his method of lot analysis. The addition of many small and unclaimed parcels together to form large zones inspired this same analysis of the void liminal spaces of downtown Los Angeles.



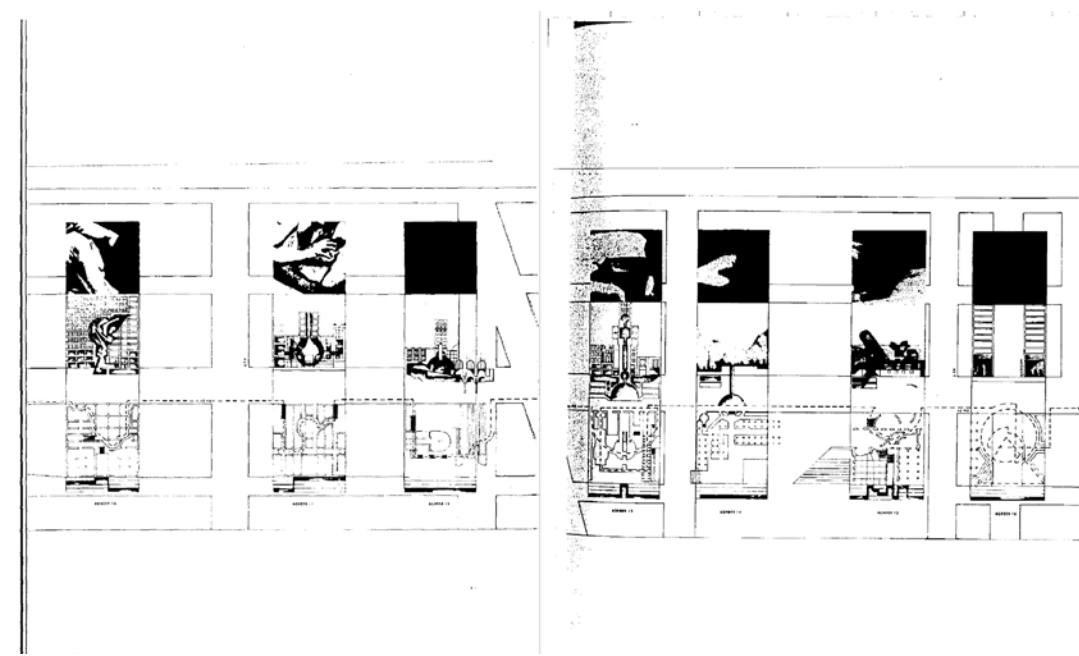
"Their explicit purpose is to transcribe things normally removed from conventional architectural representation, namely the complex relationship between spaces and their use ... between 'type' and 'program'; between objects and events." (Tschumi p.7)

"The Transcripts try to offer a different reading of architecture in which space, movement and events are independent, yet stand in a new relation to one another, so that the conventional components of architecture are broken down and rebuilt along different axes."



The Manhattan Transcripts by Bernard Tschumi are theoretical propositions executed through drawing.

Tschumi's Transcripts propose that, beyond its traditional conventions of representation, architecture resides in the superimposition of space, movement, and events.



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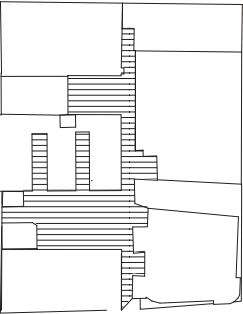
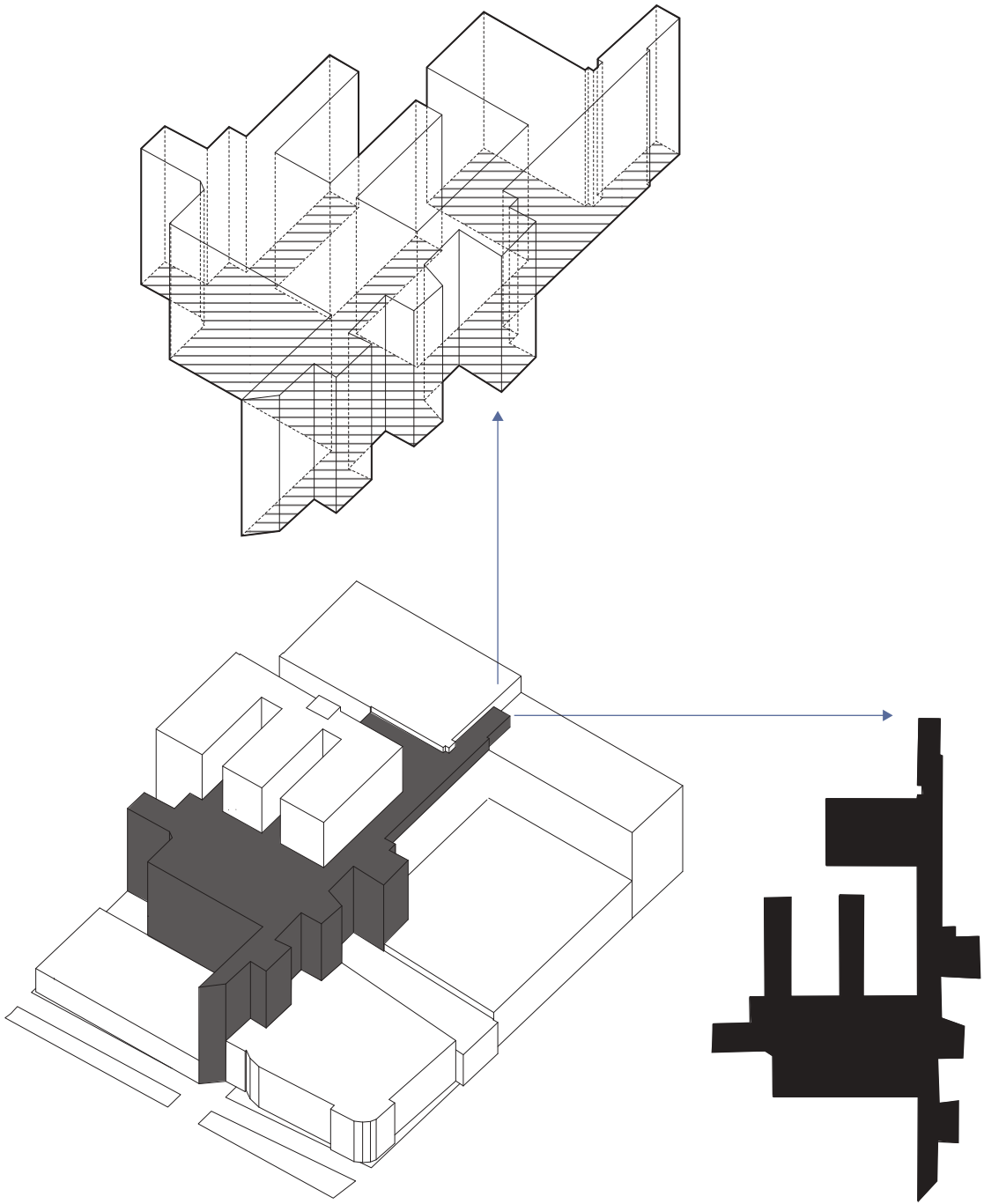
Typologies:
*Case Studies and Field
Research*

An in-depth **analysis** of under-utilized alley spaces in downtown Los Angeles was conducted over a period of five weeks.

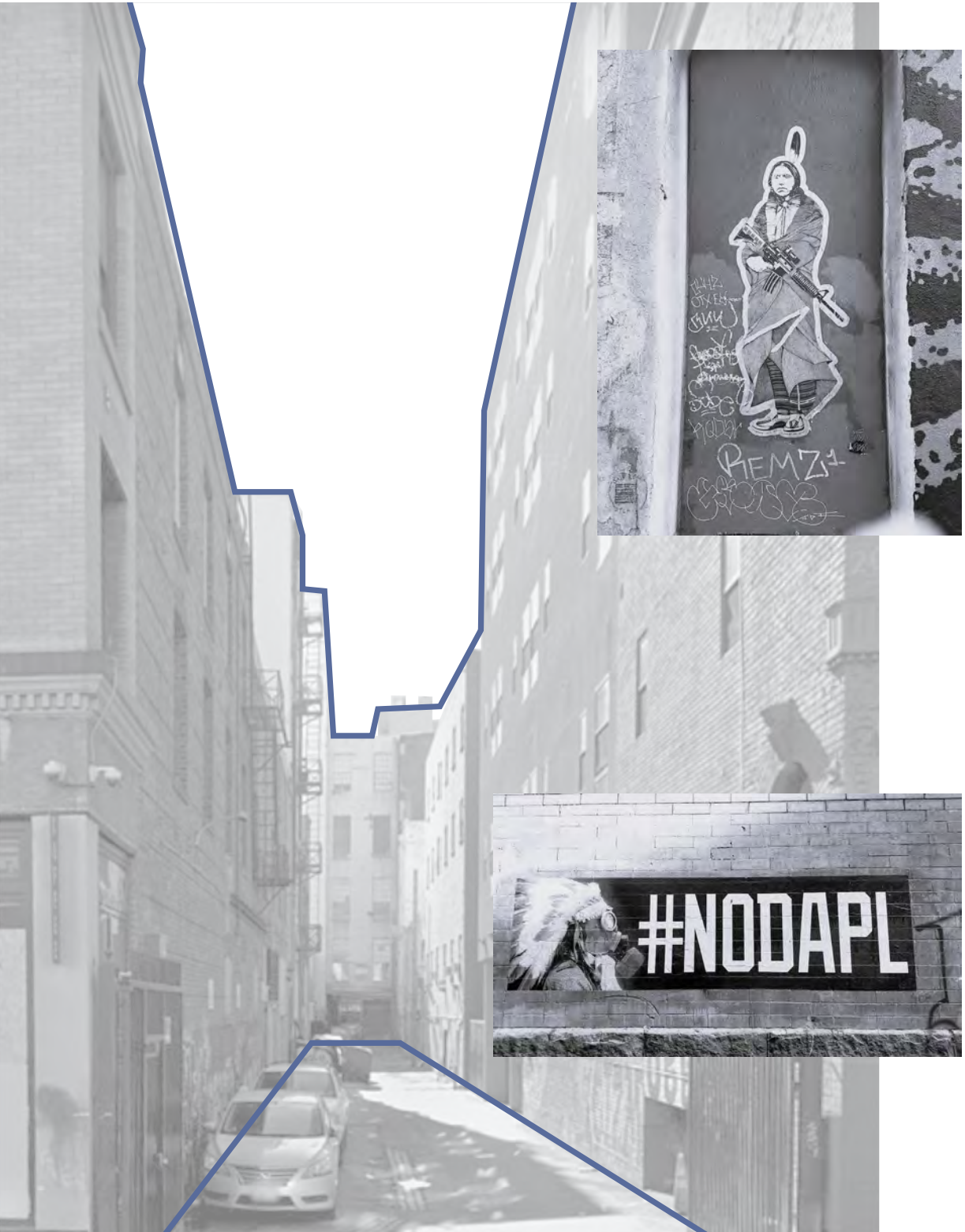
3D modeling and **photography** were the methods used to capture the form of each space, and document the perspectives one would see if walking through each case study.

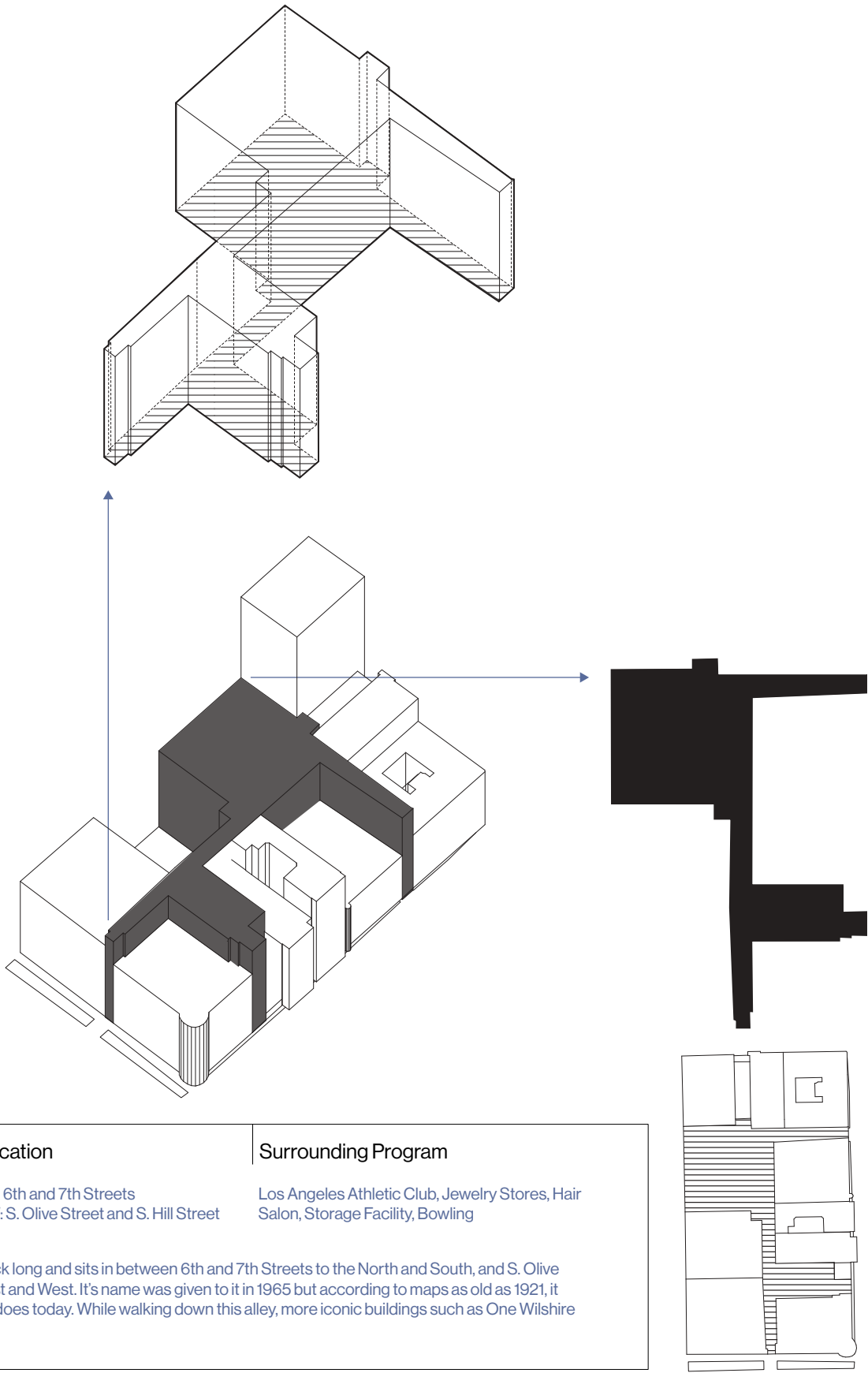
Ten case studies were conducted ranging from southern downtown by Venice Blvd. all the way up to 4th Street. Each case was studied in **axon** and **plan** views.

Greater understanding was achieved while studying each case, and further propelled research into surrounding **programs** and functions of the built environment encasing each liminal space.

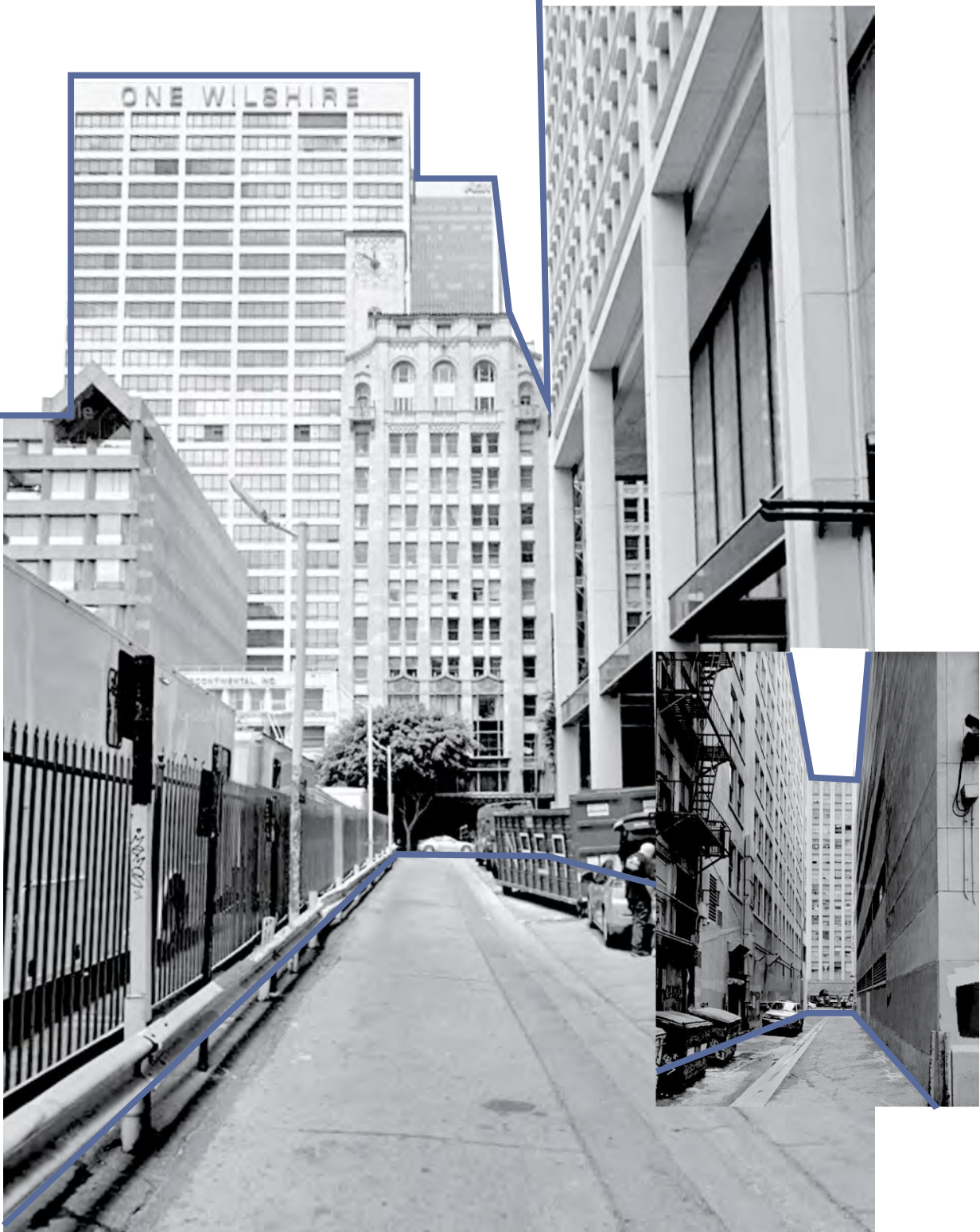


Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Werdin Place	NS: 5th and 6th Streets EW: Main Street and S. Los Angeles	Hotel, Apartments, Art Gallery, Beauty Supply, Wholesale, Electronics
<p>Werdin Place is a small alleyway about a half block long and sits in between 5th and 6th Streets to the North and South, and Main Street and S. Los Angeles Street to the East and West. It has been nicknamed "Indian Alley" because of its location next to an outreach center that provided support for the Native American population in the '70s through the '90s. The Alley is covered with murals depicting difficult moments in Native American history.</p>		

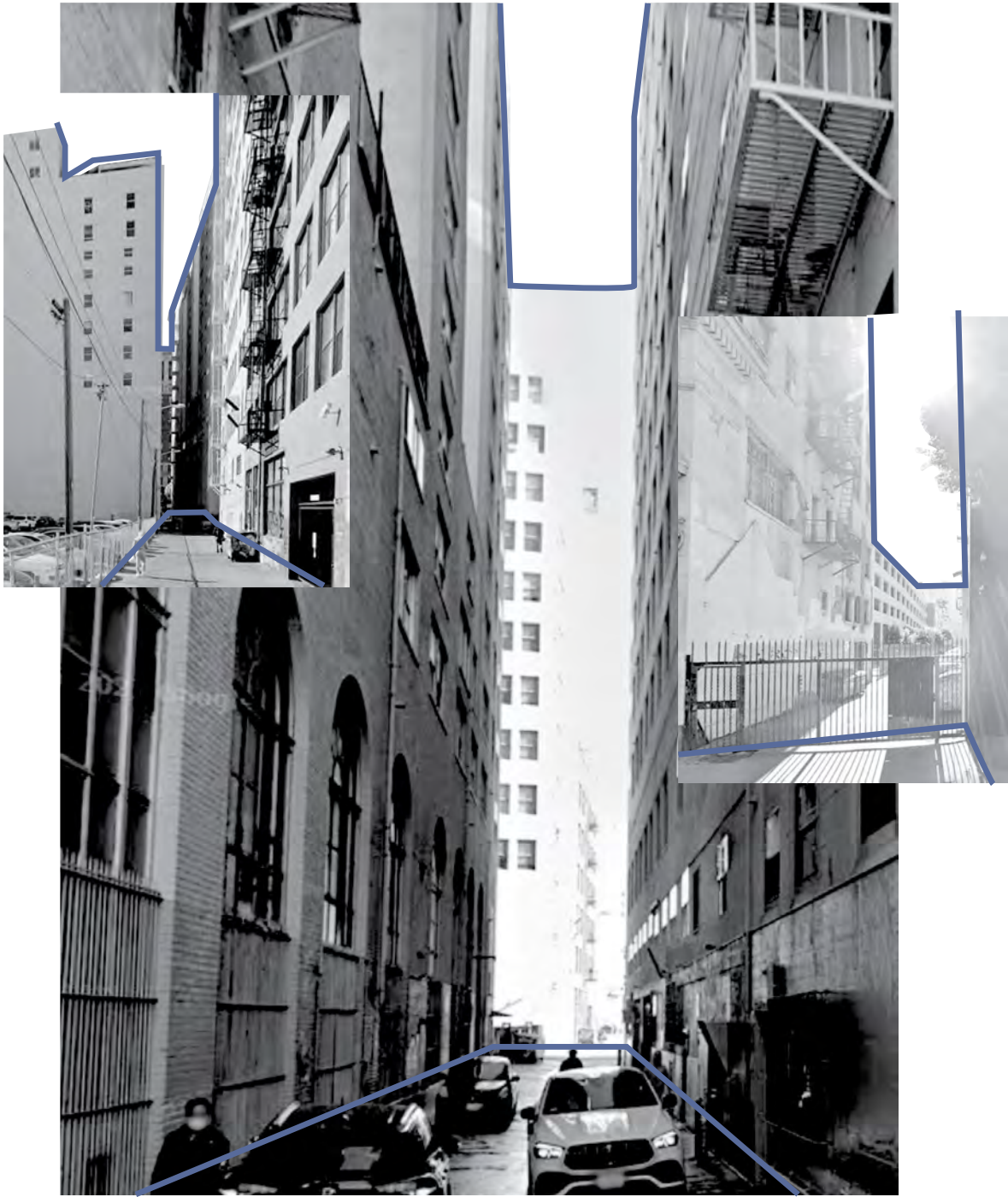
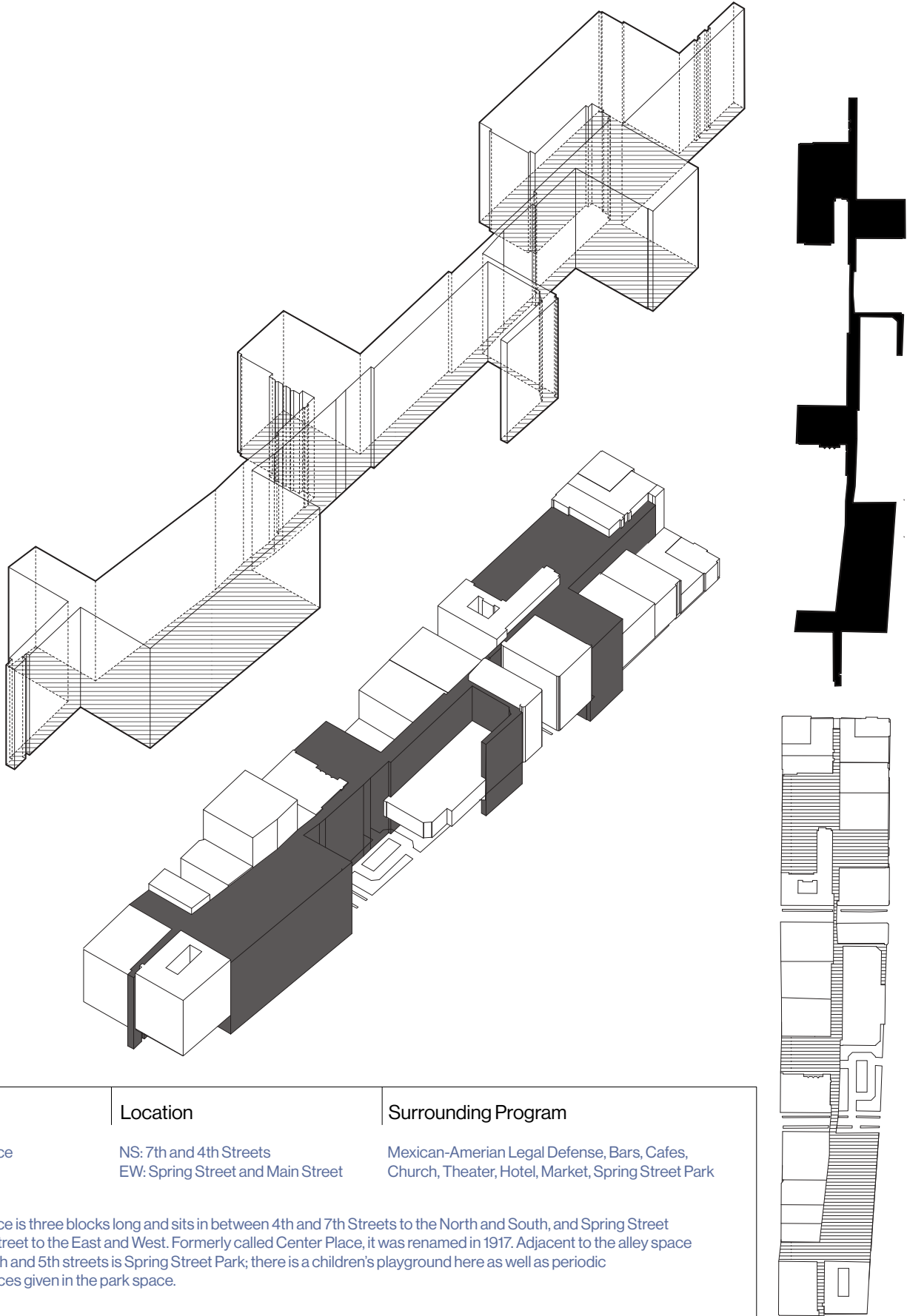


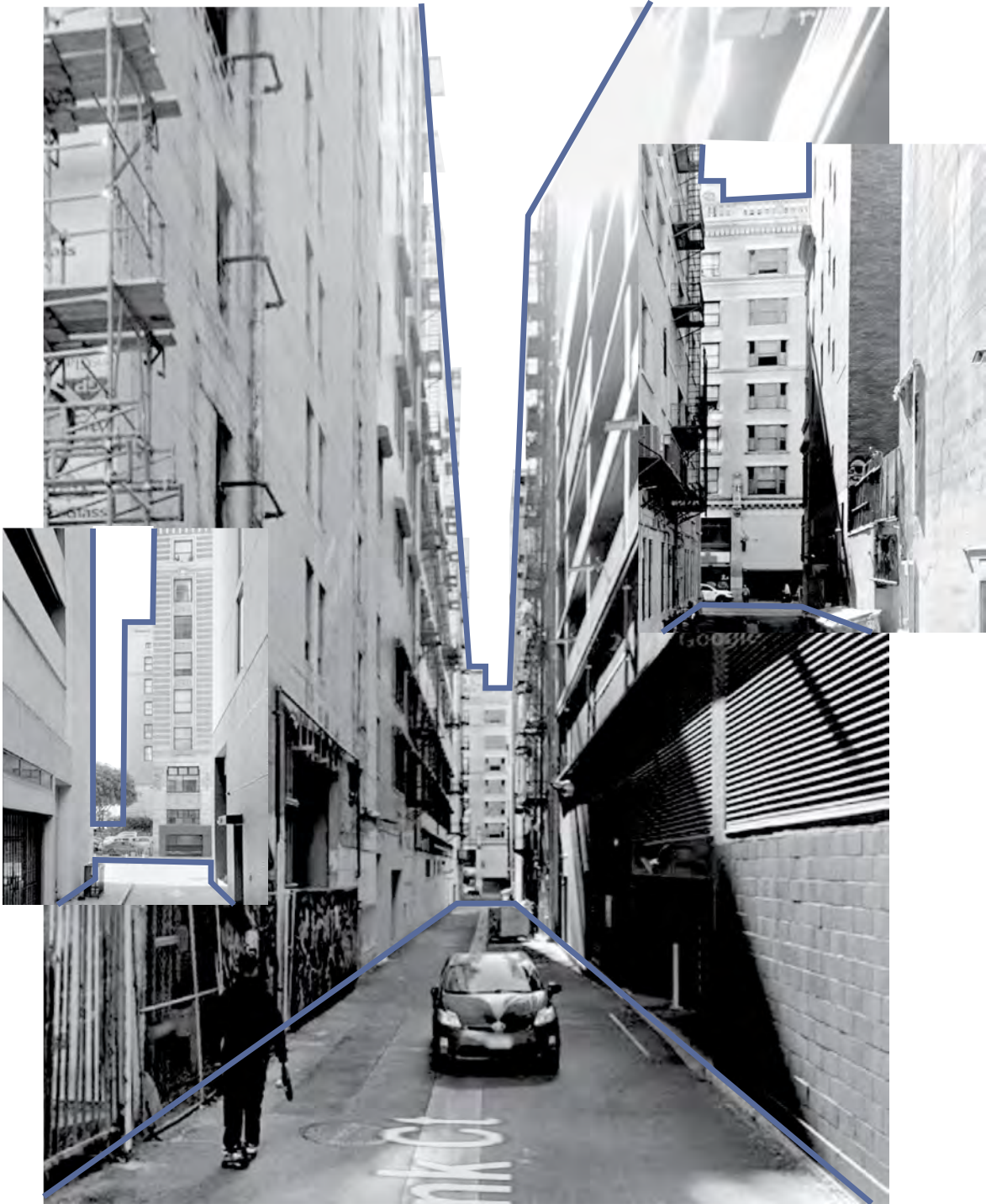


Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Mercury Court	NS: 6th and 7th Streets EW: S. Olive Street and S. Hill Street	Los Angeles Athletic Club, Jewelry Stores, Hair Salon, Storage Facility, Bowling
Mercury Court is about a half block long and sits in between 6th and 7th Streets to the North and South, and S. Olive Street and S. Hill Street to the East and West. It's name was given to it in 1965 but according to maps as old as 1921, it served as a service road and still does today. While walking down this alley, more iconic buildings such as One Wilshire are visible on a stroll here.		



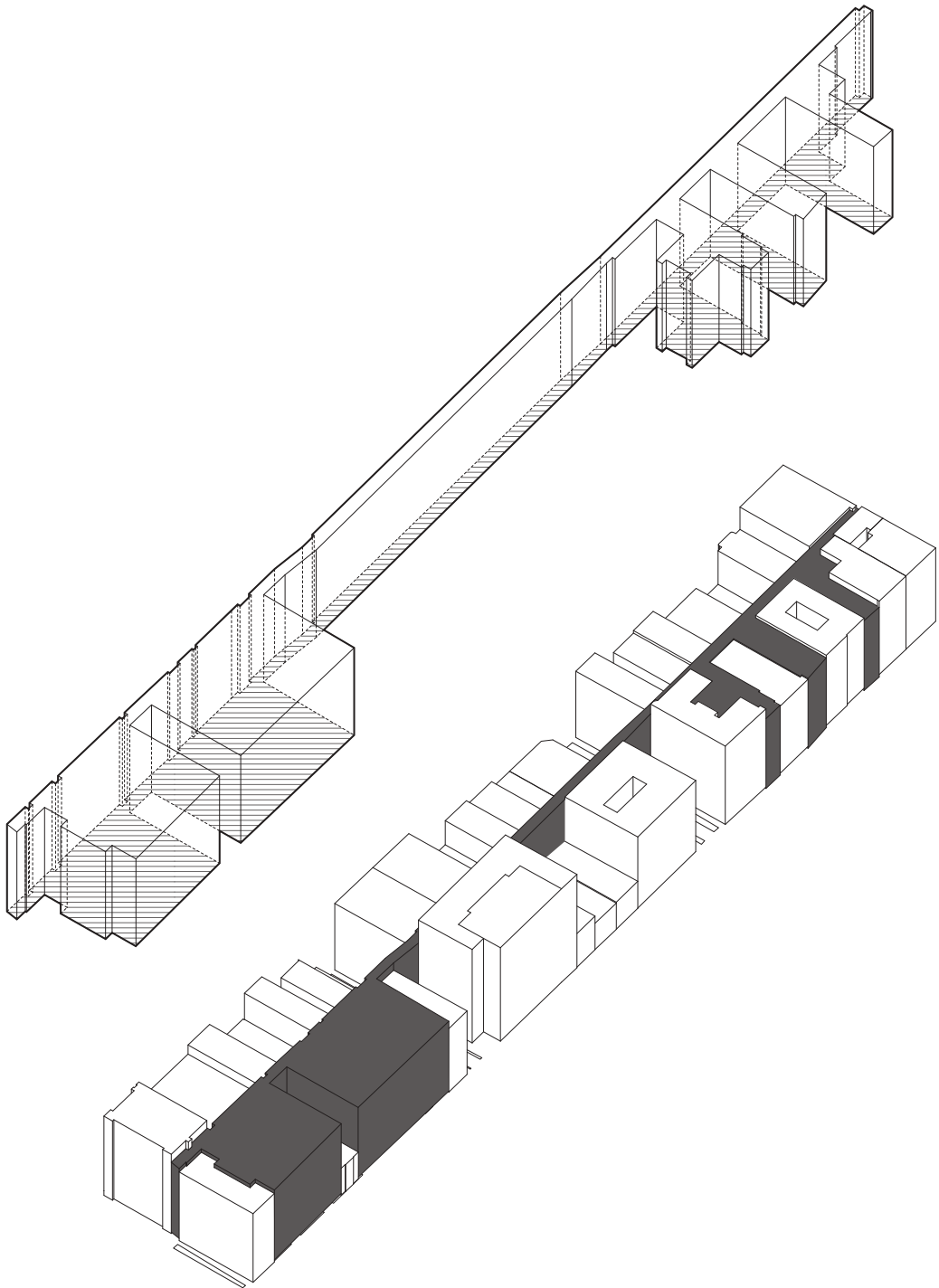
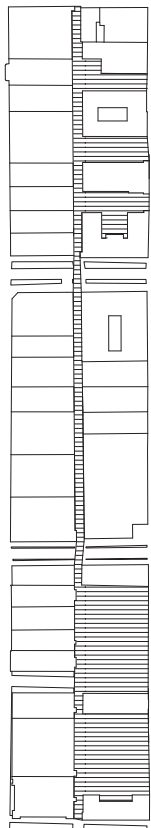
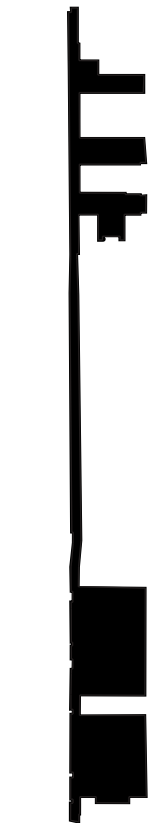
Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Harlem Place	NS: 7th and 4th Streets EW: Spring Street and Main Street	Mexican-American Legal Defense, Bars, Cafes, Church, Theater, Hotel, Market, Spring Street Park
Harlem Place is three blocks long and sits in between 4th and 7th Streets to the North and South, and Spring Street and Main Street to the East and West. Formerly called Center Place, it was renamed in 1917. Adjacent to the alley space between 4th and 5th streets is Spring Street Park; there is a children's playground here as well as periodic performances given in the park space.		



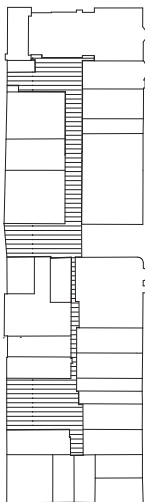
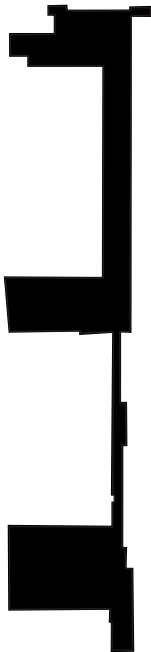
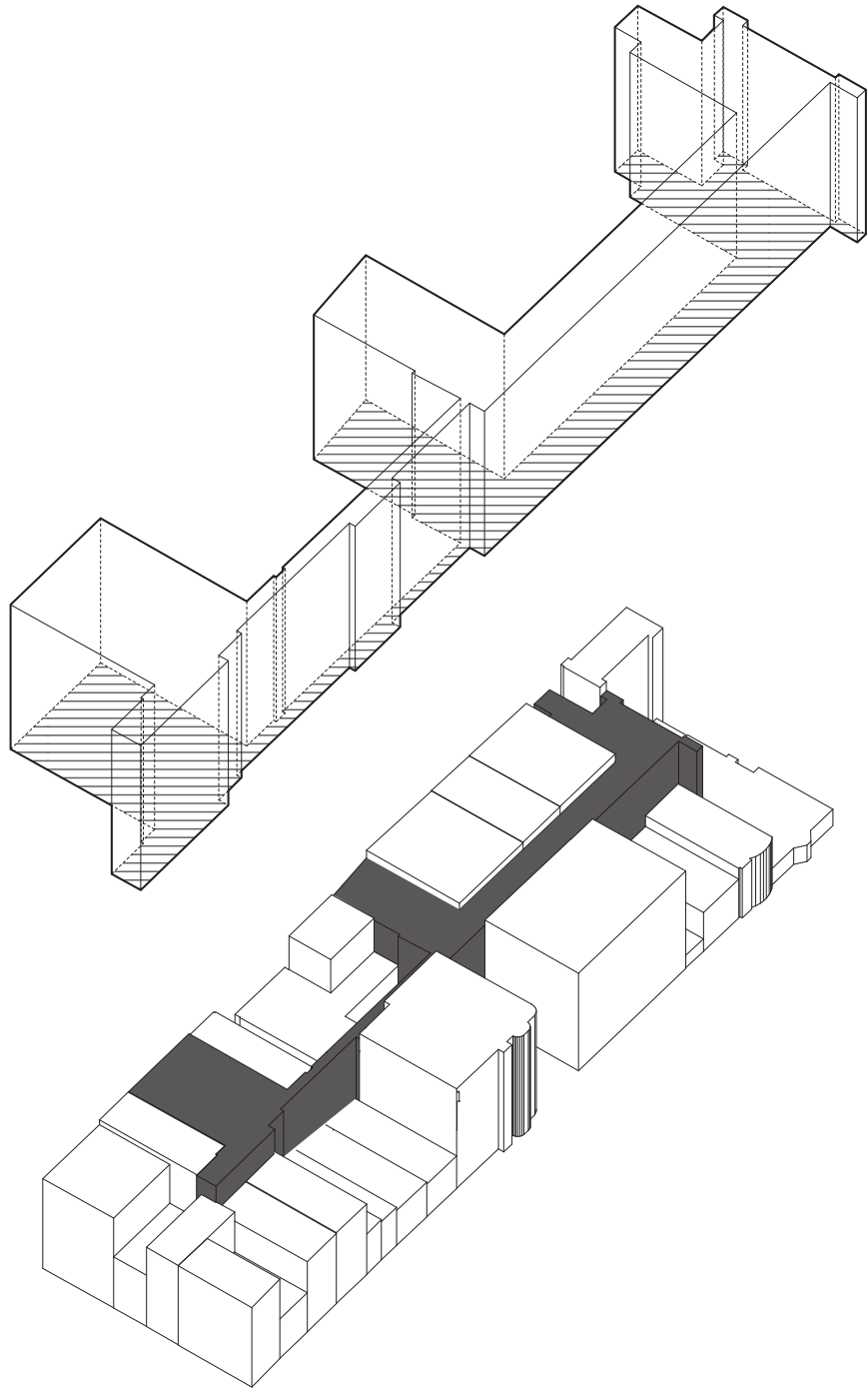


Case Study IV

No Name Alley

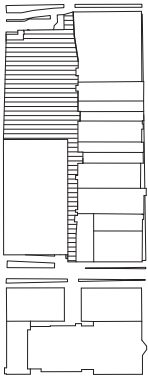
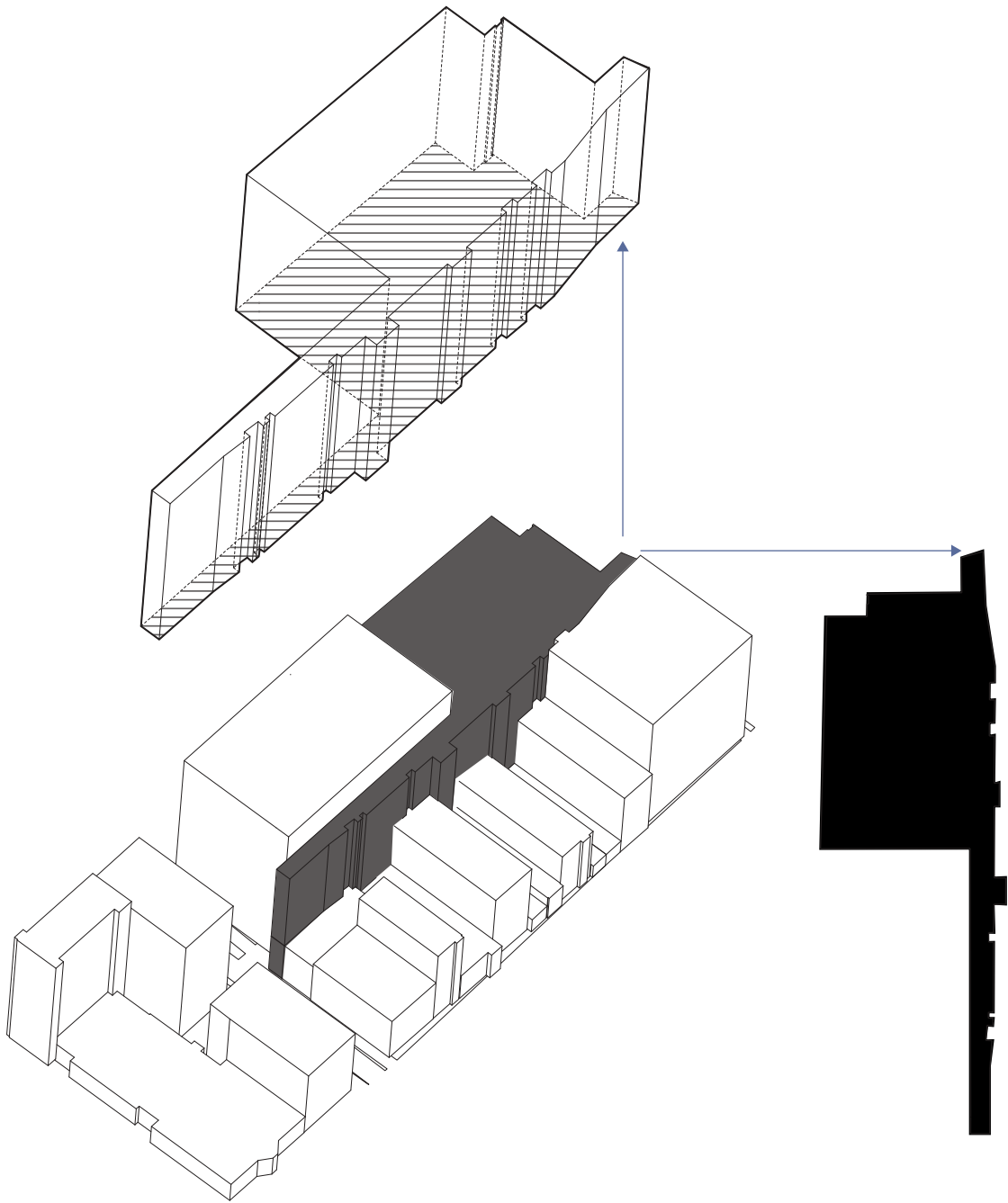


Name	Location	Surrounding Program
No Name Alley	NS: 6th and 9th Streets EW: Spring Street and Broadway Street	Cafe, Restaurant, Clothing Stores, Market, Yoga, Drug Store, Hair Salon, Parking
The No Name Alley is three blocks long and sits in between 6th and 9th Streets to the North and South, and Spring Street and Broadway Street to the East and West. The alley was protested by citizens at its opening in 1897 and to this day remains nameless and fenced off to the public. At least three lots of surface level parking and one raised parking garage sit adjacent to this space.		



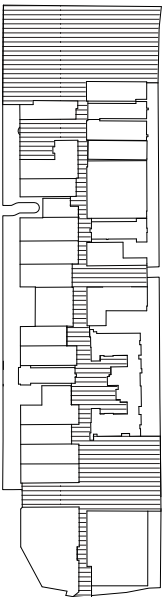
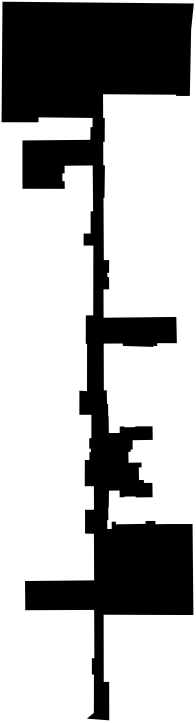
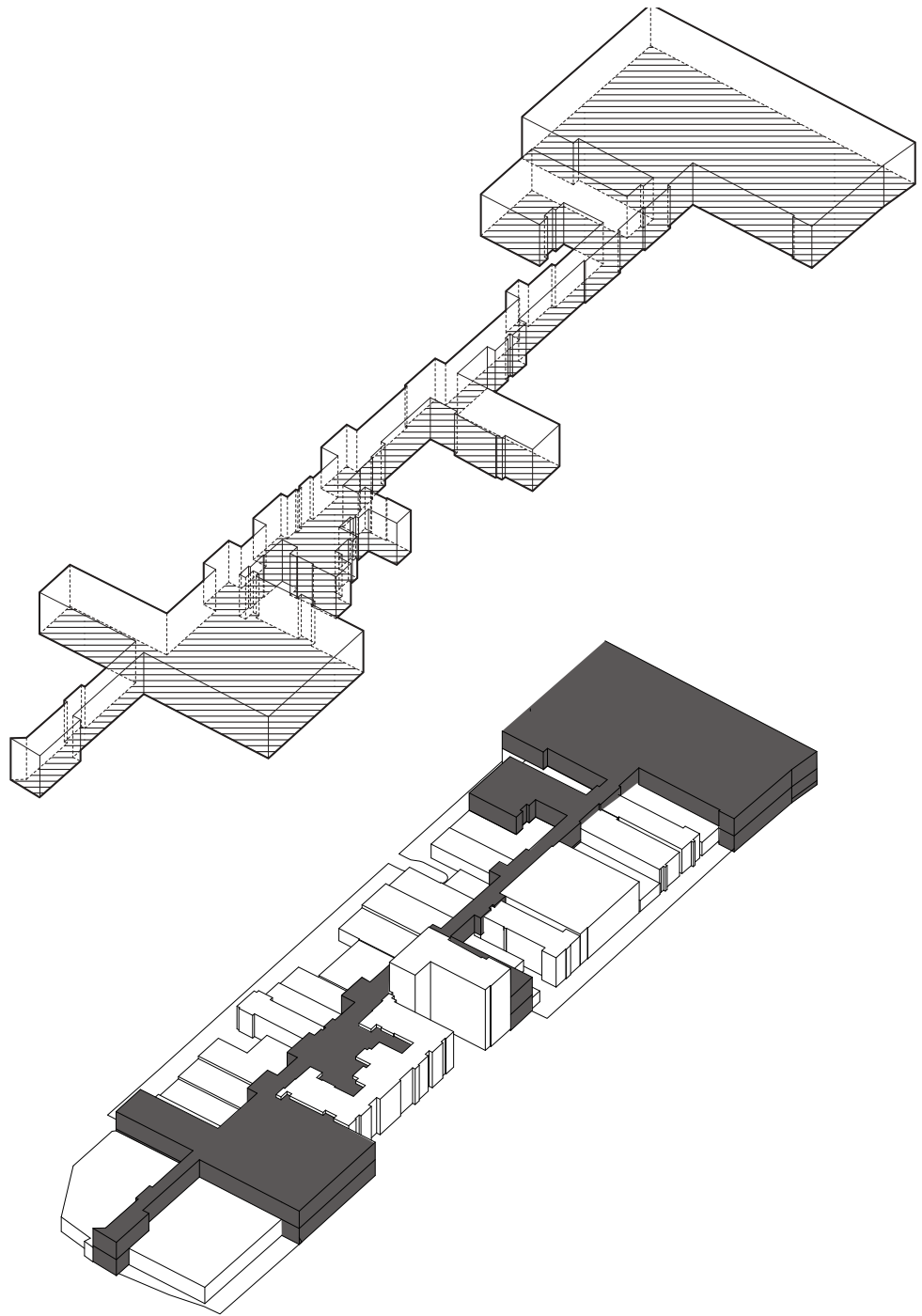
Name	Location	Surrounding Program
St. Vincent Court	NS: 6th and 7th Streets EW: S Hill Street and S Broadway Street	Cafe, Deli, Restaurant, Clothing Stores, Jewelry, Theater, Parking
St. Vincent Court is one block long and sits in between 6th and 7th Streets to the North and South, and S Hill Street and S Broadway Street to the East and West. This is one of the more developed alleyways in the downtown area with quaint storefronts lining either side of the alleyway, resembling an arcade in Europe. It was named originally after St. Vincent's College, now Loyola Marymount University.		



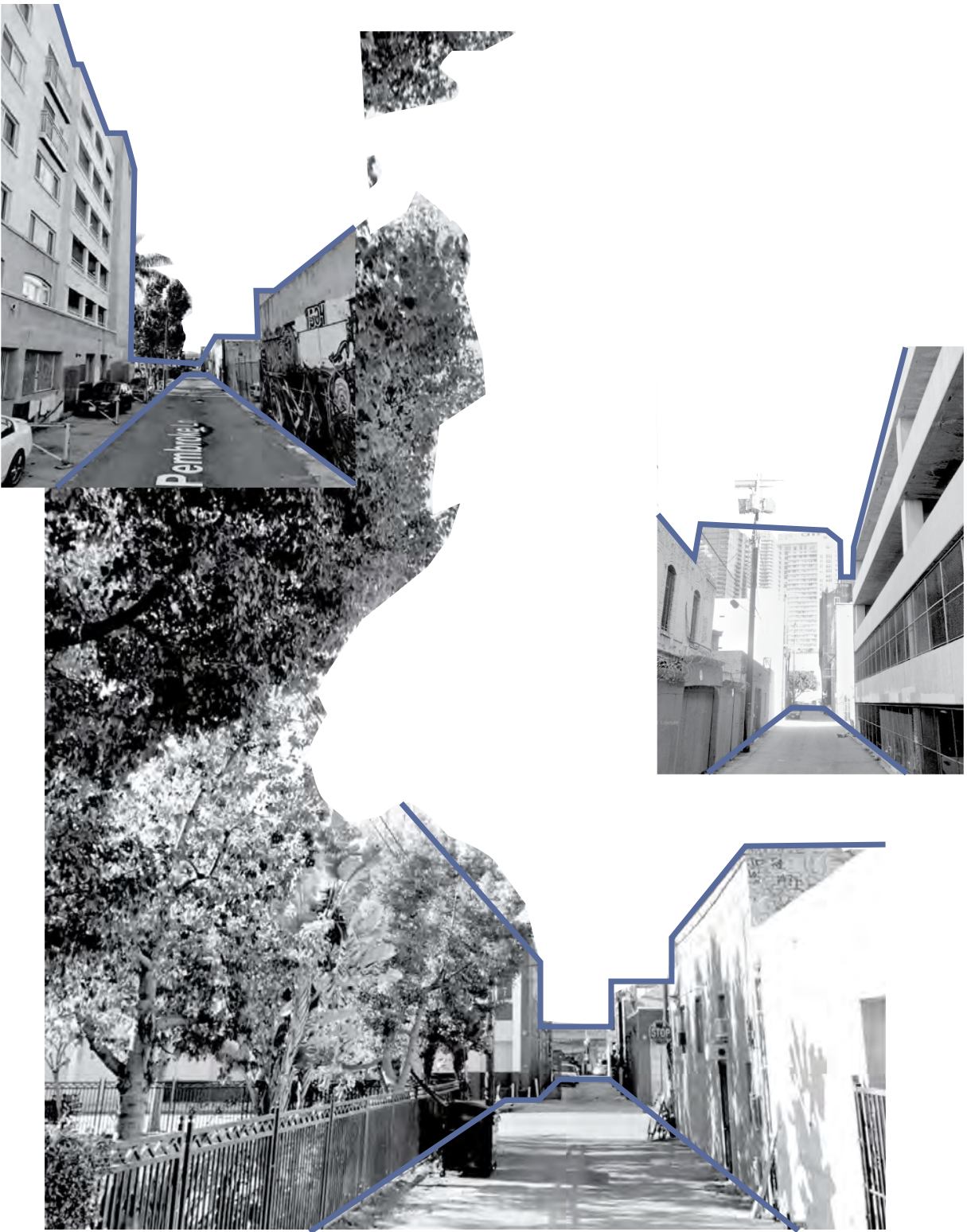


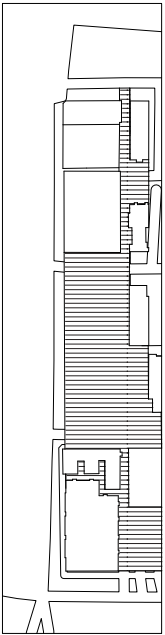
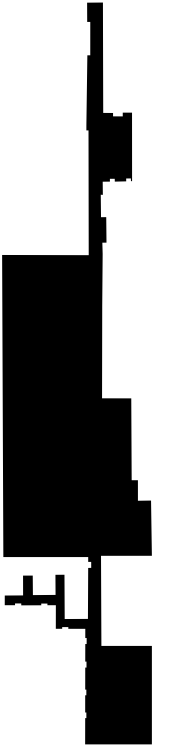
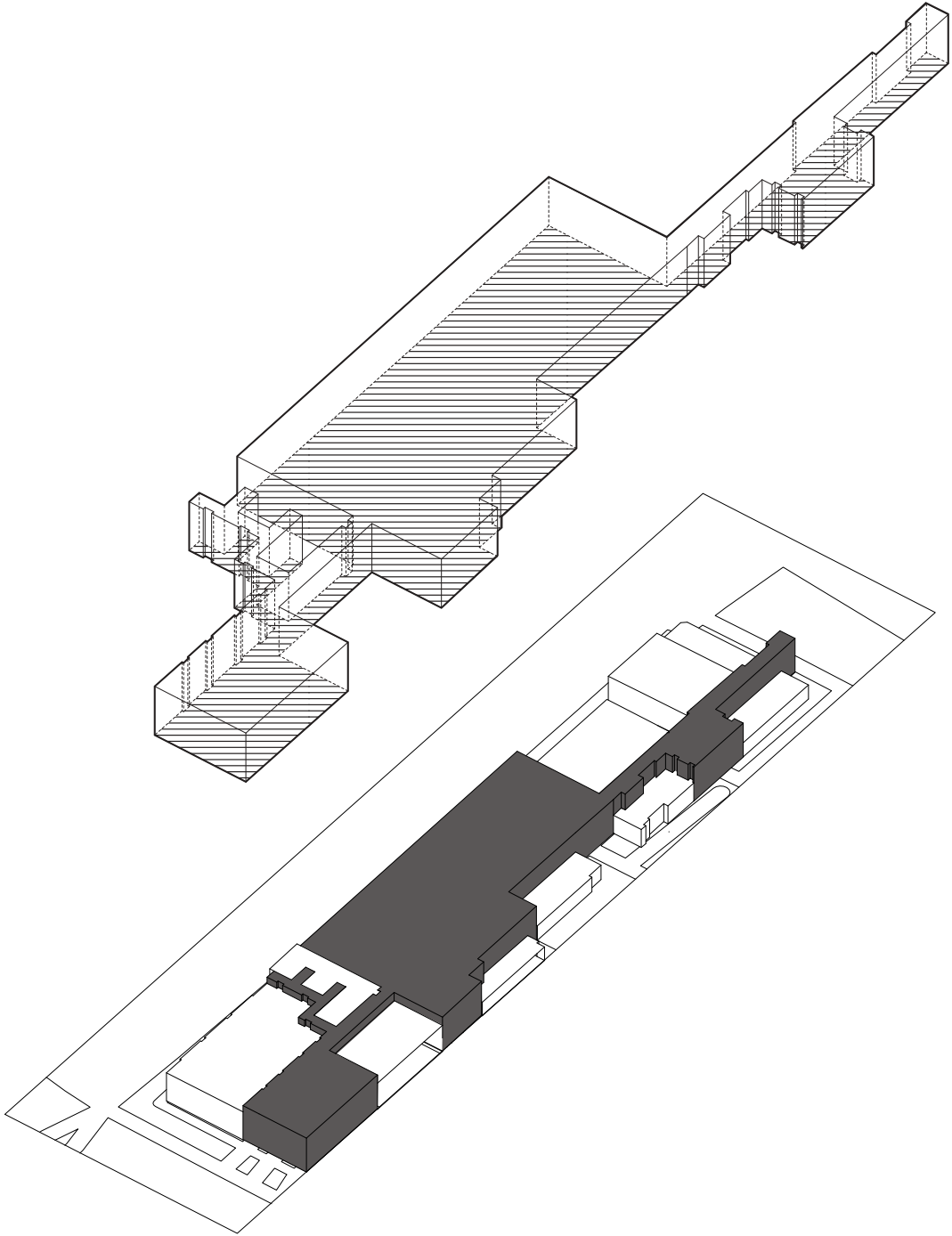
Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Lindley Place	NS: 5th and 6th Streets EW: S Hill Street and S Broadway Street	Jewelry, Ghost Tours, Perfumery, Smoke Shop, Vintage and Antique, Public Art
Lindley Place is one block long and sits in between 5th and 6th Streets to the North and South, and S Hill Street and S Broadway Street to the East and West. The alley was named in 1921 for Dr. Walter Lindley, a man who established many firsts in the city - the Orphans' Home, the College of Medicine at USC, and many other accomplishments. This alleyway is directly above St. Vincent's Court, although the two do not currently connect.		





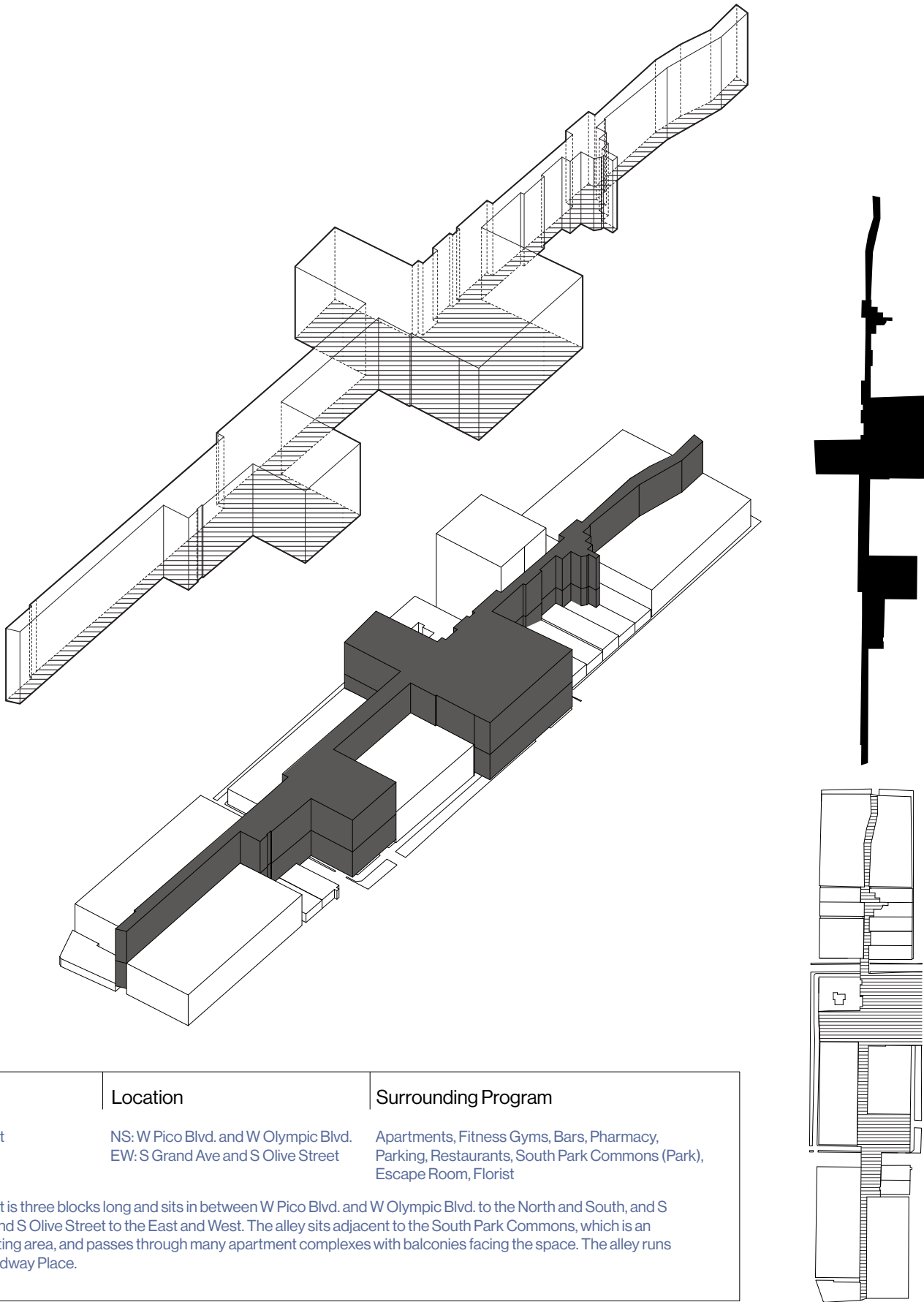
Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Pembroke Lane	NS: 5th and 6th Streets EW: S Hill Street and S Broadway Street	Venice Hope Park, Apartments, Screen Printing, Architects Corner, Restaurants
Pembroke Lane is two blocks long and sits in between Venice Blvd. and Pico Blvd. to the North and South, and Flower Street and Hope Street to the East and West. This alley is part of a system of alleys that sit in the southern part of downtown (South Park area). It is adjacent to Venice Hope Park as well as many apartment complexes. It connects perpendicularly with Cameron Lane to the north, and runs parallel to Lebanon Street.		



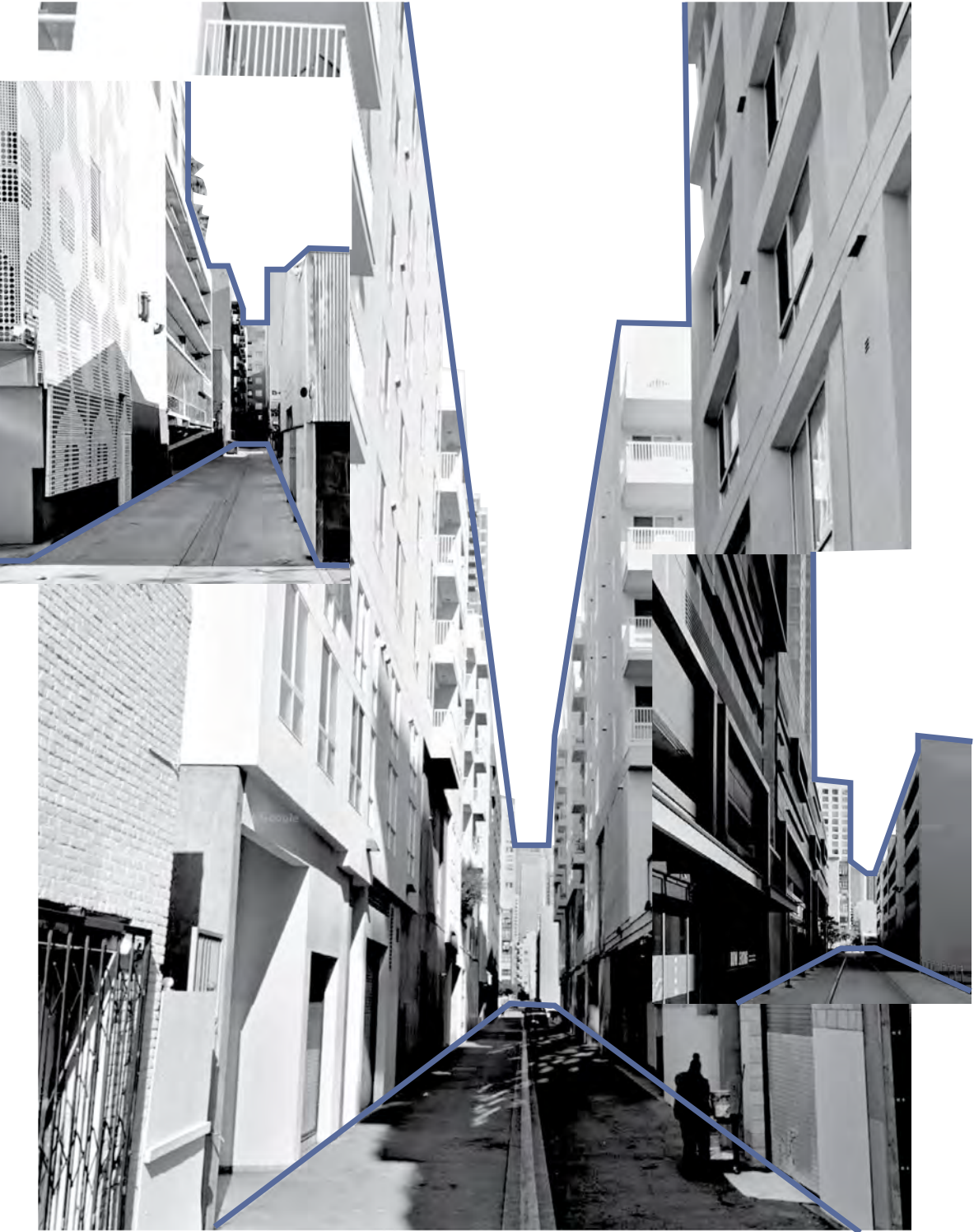


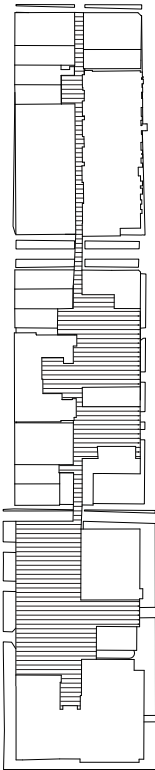
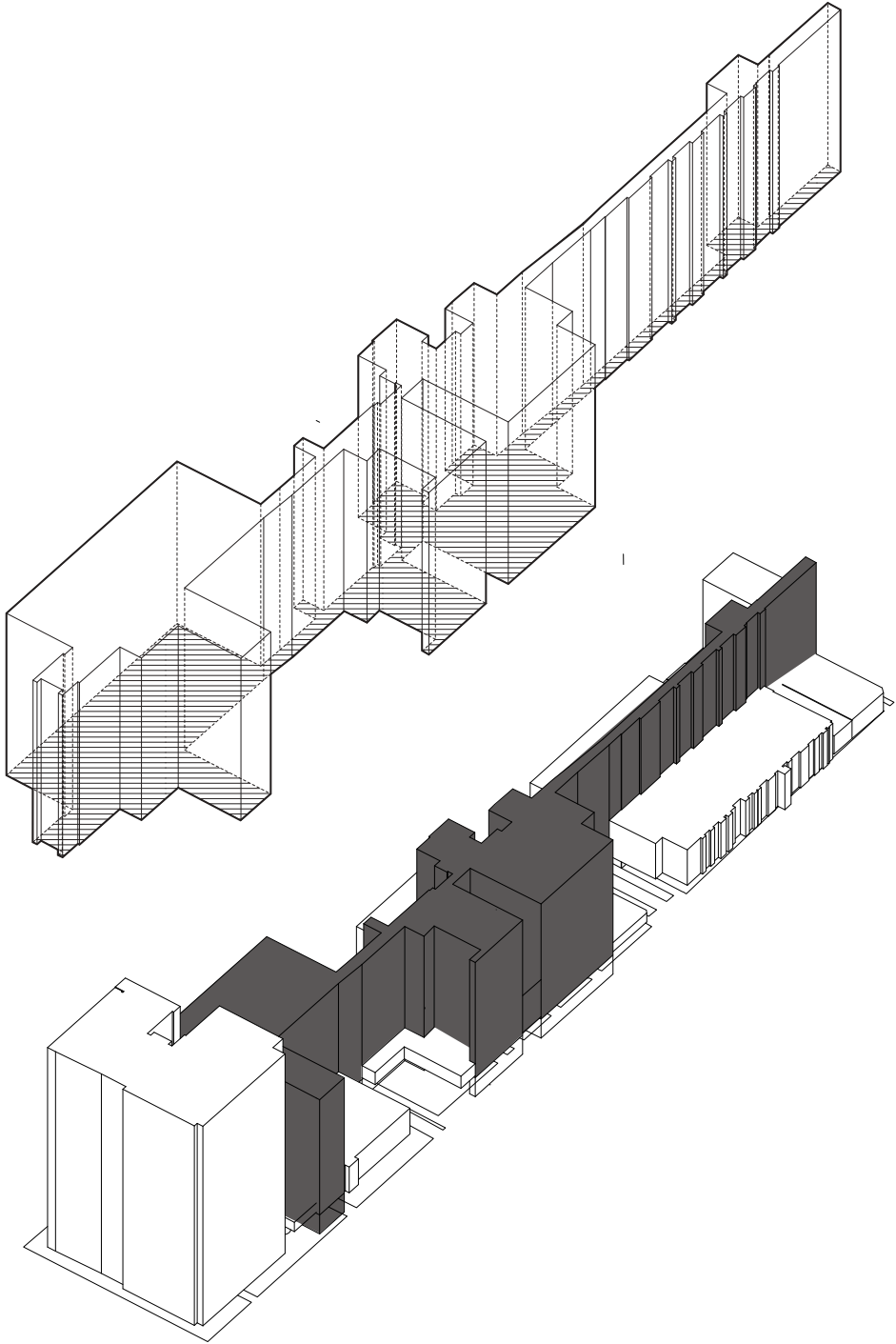
Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Cameron Lane	NS: Pico Blvd. and Venice Blvd. EW: Flower Street and S Hope Street	Parking, Church, Architects Corner, Abandoned Apartment Complexes
Cameron Lane is one block long and sits in between Venice Blvd. and Pico Blvd. to the North and South, and Flower Street and Hope Street to the East and West. This alley is part of a system of alleys that sit in the southern part of downtown (South Park area). It connects perpendicularly with Pembroke Lane to the south.		



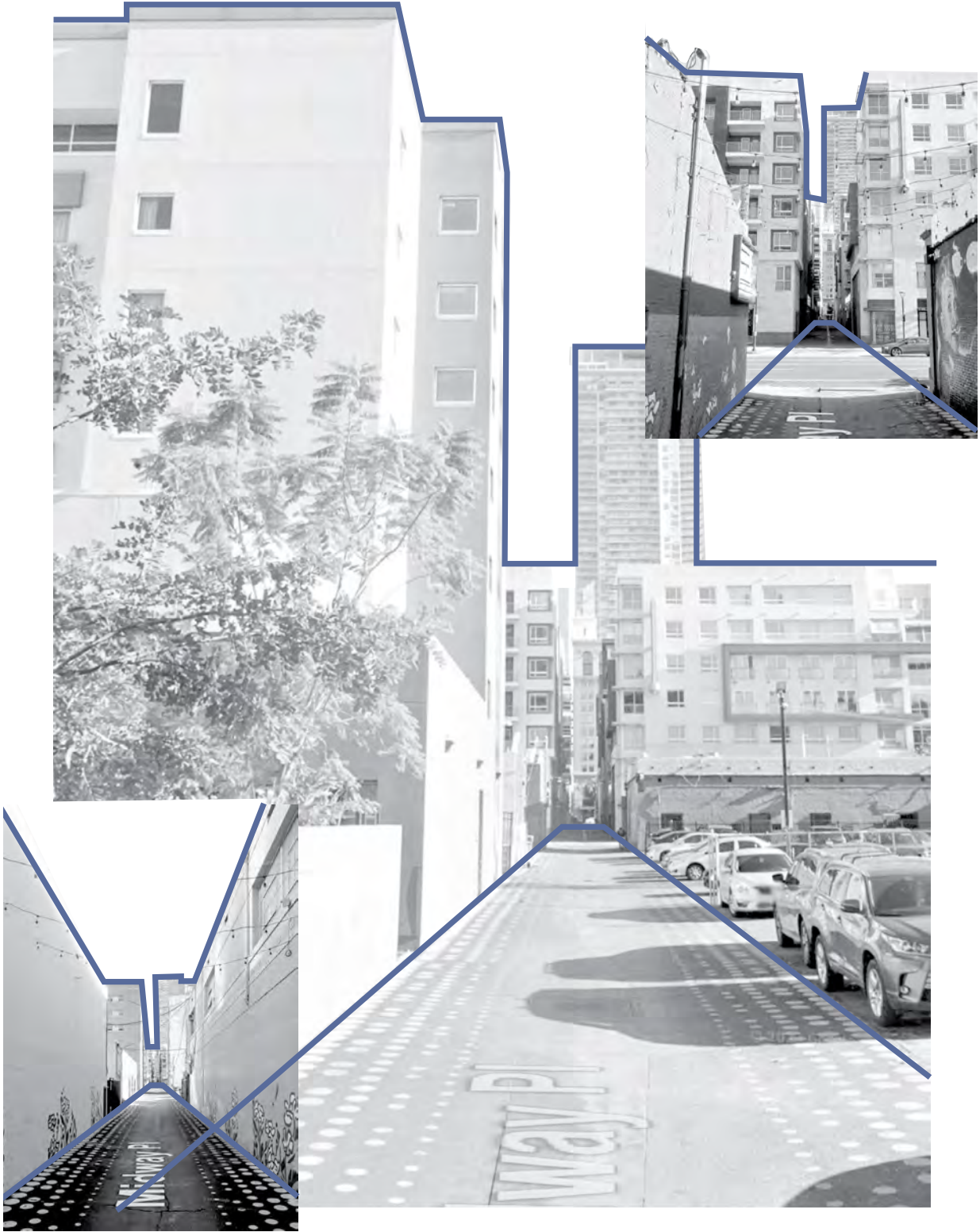


Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Margo Street	NS: W Pico Blvd. and W Olympic Blvd. EW: S Grand Ave and S Olive Street	Apartments, Fitness Gyms, Bars, Pharmacy, Parking, Restaurants, South Park Commons (Park), Escape Room, Florist
Margo Street is three blocks long and sits in between W Pico Blvd. and W Olympic Blvd. to the North and South, and S Grand Ave and S Olive Street to the East and West. The alley sits adjacent to the South Park Commons, which is an outdoor seating area, and passes through many apartment complexes with balconies facing the space. The alley runs parallel to Midway Place.		





Name	Location	Surrounding Program
Midway Place	NS: 11th Street and 9th Street EW: S Olive Street and S Hill Street	Bars, Hibachi, Parking, Youth Empowerment Services, Pottery Classes, Cafe, Salons, Apartments
Midway Place is two blocks long and sits in between 11th Street and 9th Street to the North and South, and S Hill Street and S Olive Street to the East and West. The alley passes through many restaurants and apartment complexes, with the buildings decorated with flower art all throughout. The alley runs parallel to Margo Street and has both exposed moments to the street as well as enclosed moments in between tall high rises, providing a variety in environment.		



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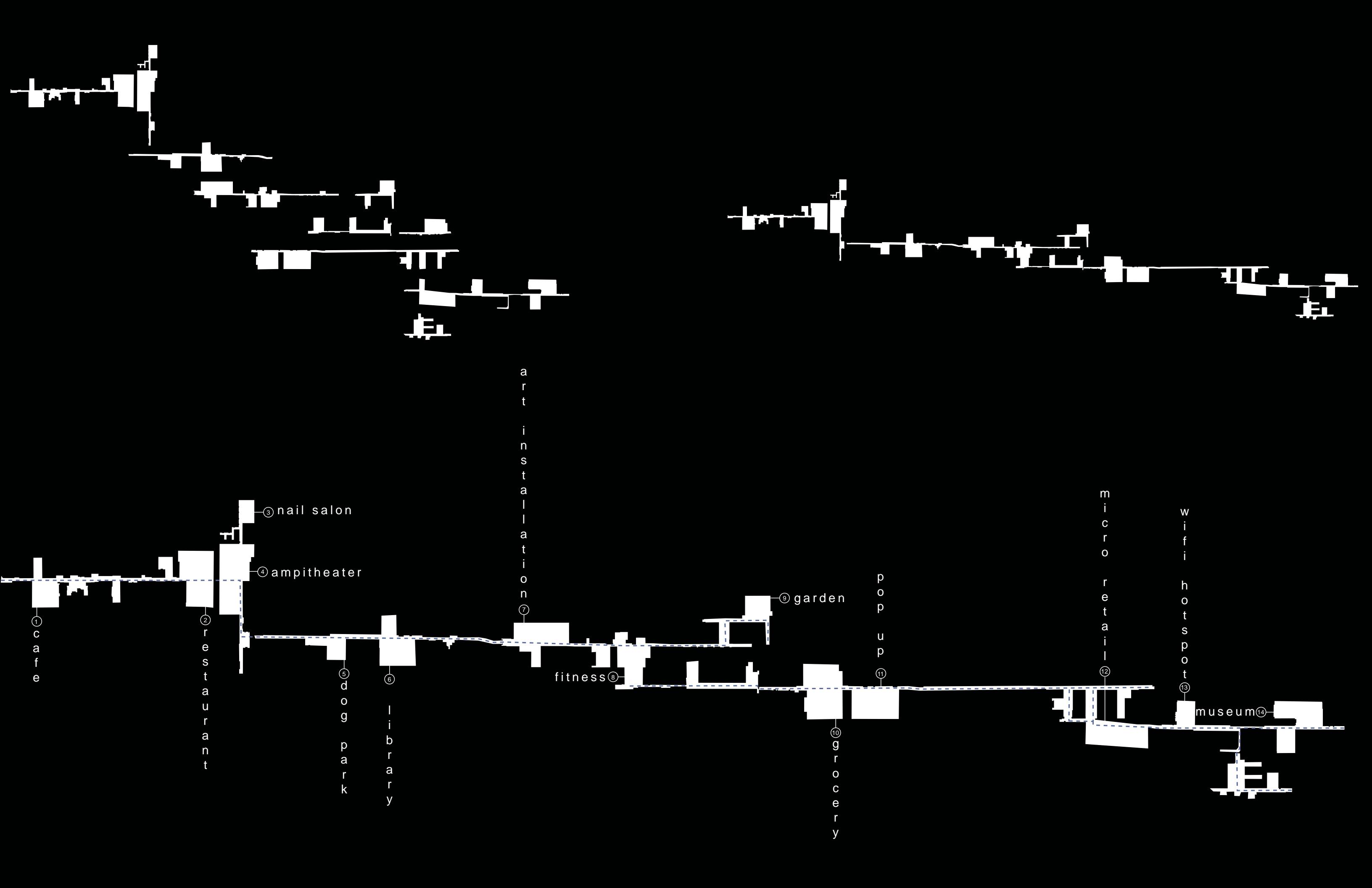
Mapping: *Placing Voids Into Context*

The taxonomy of spaces documented above were further arranged in accordance to their **position** within downtown Los Angeles.

Mapping exercises were conducted to locate each void in space and in the **urban fabric** of the downtown.

After this was done, the linear spaces were then further **connected** together while keeping their general locations in mind, forming one combined liminal space that works itself from Venice Blvd. all the way to 4th Street. **Eleven blocks total.**

The spaces were then further analyzed by pinpointing the **pockets** within each linear void, and placing potential programmatic function within each pocket. The network of void spaces are imagined to hold not only an alternate method of transport through the city, but hold many **programmatic elements** that would further enrich this secondary network that would otherwise be disregarded and looked over.



① cafe

② restaurant

③ nail salon

④ amphitheater

⑤ dog park

⑥ library

⑦ art installation

⑧ fitness

⑨ garden

⑩ grocery

⑪ popup

⑫ micro retail

⑬ wifi hotspot

⑭ museum

The precedent translation drawing incorporates all research, documentation methods drawn from precedents, and mapping exercises, using each as **layers** over top of one another.

This emphasizes the **process** of acquiring information, starting with acquiring **precedents**, conducting **field research** to develop a taxonomy, and **mapping** the individual components of this taxonomy as they reside in space to form one cohesive **system**.

The drawing **unfolds** itself into one connected liminal space of its own, emphasizing the **linear continuity** of this secondary network that resides in downtown Los Angeles.

6

Translation:
Precedent Translation
Drawing

Unfold Me!

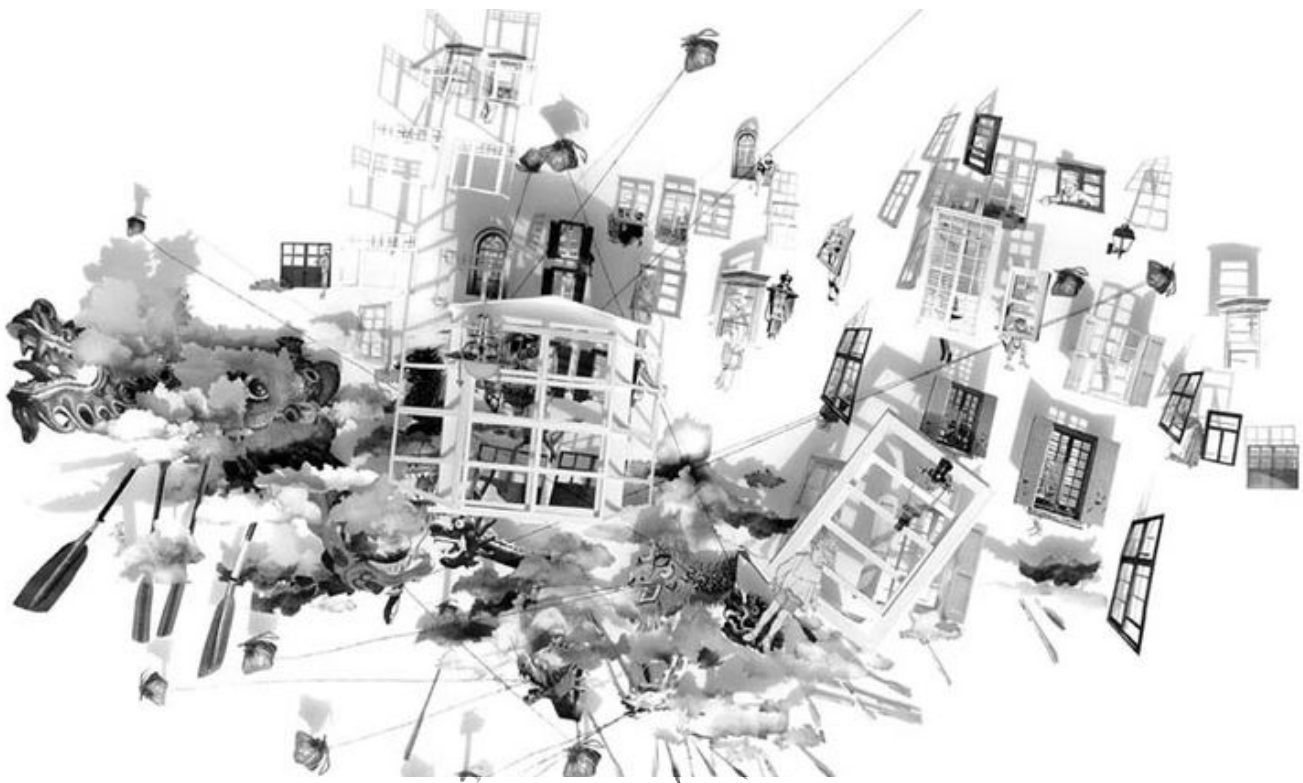
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CJ Lim and Narrative Architecture: *Precedent Inspiration*

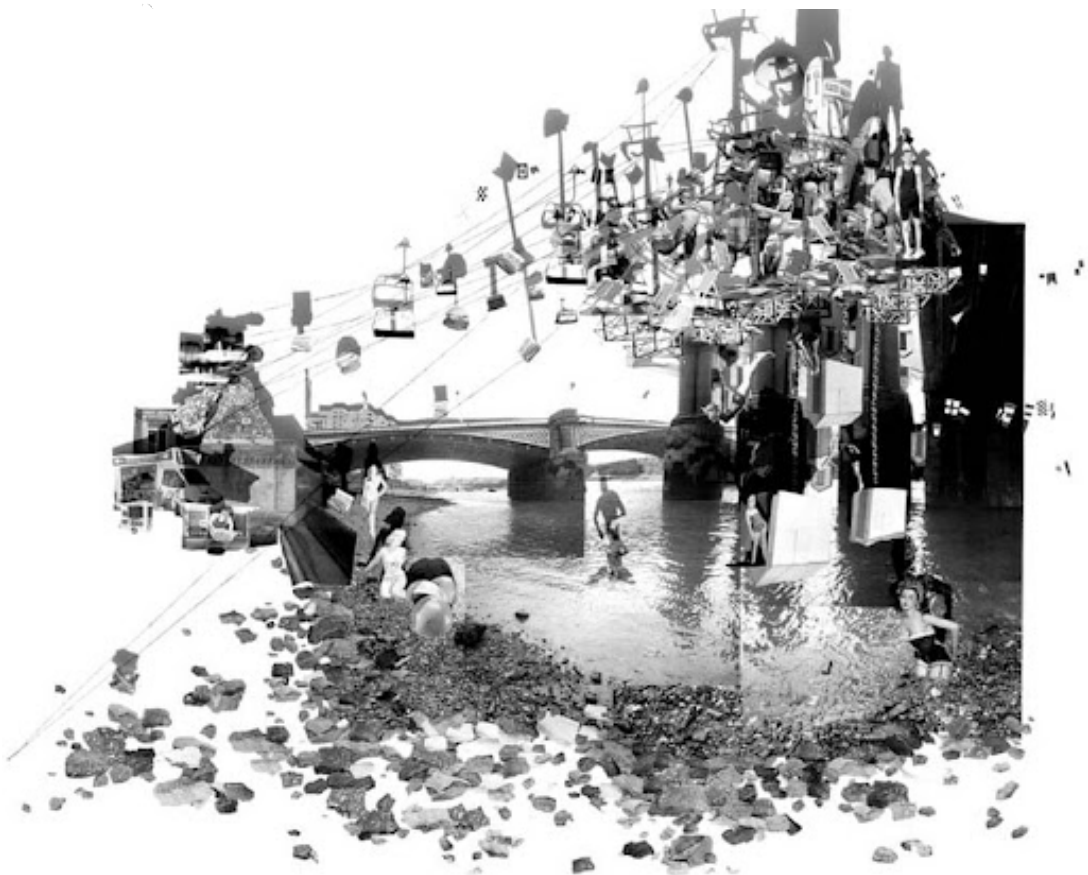
The book *London in Two and a Half Dimensions* is a collection of short narratives that sit in between fiction and architecture to provoke readers into thinking about fantastical architectural environments.

The short stories represent new spatial relationships in various works of collage, both two and three-dimensionally. Some of these stories include a celestial river, a suitcase that transports itself to locations carrying program inside, and a bridge that appears between the months of June and September.

Fictional architecture brings into light the concept of creativity and imagination, and to what extent imagination can work itself into the physical built environment. The stories present in the book push the boundaries of architecture's power to make fantastical and strange environments come true.

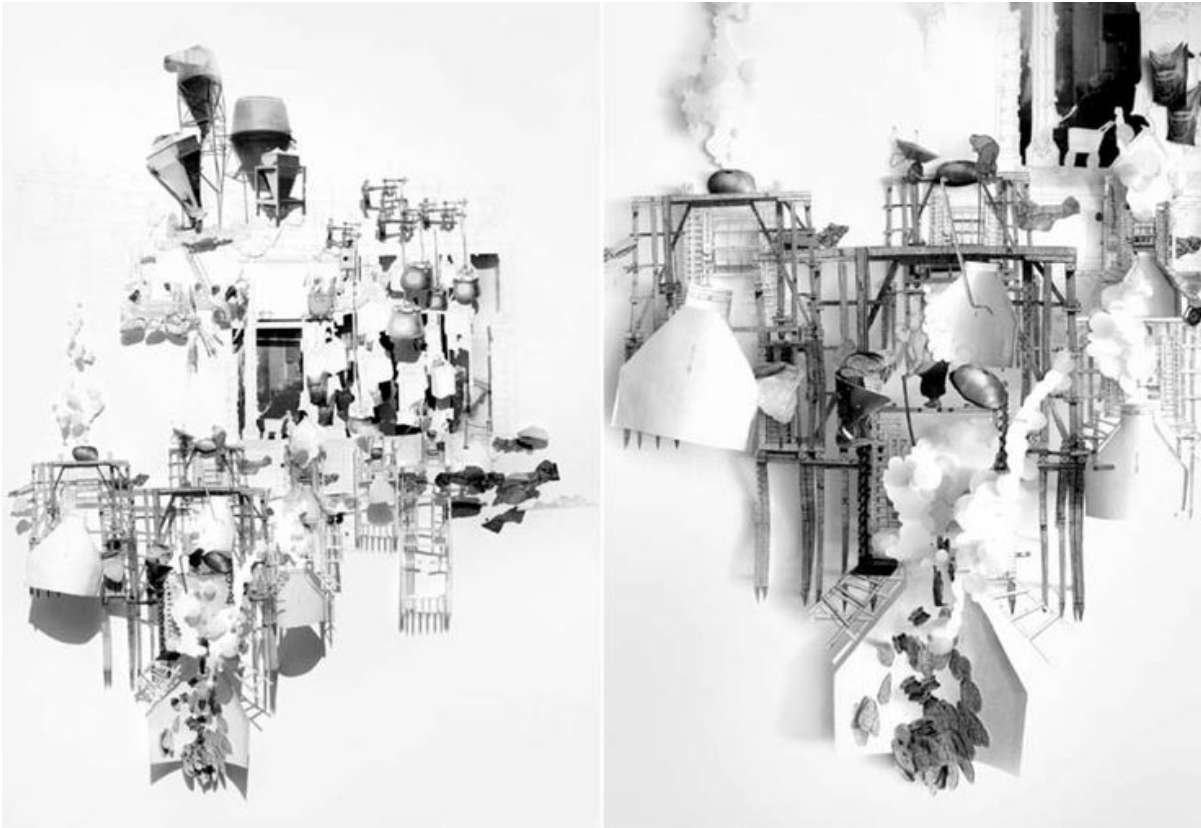


From "The Celestial River"

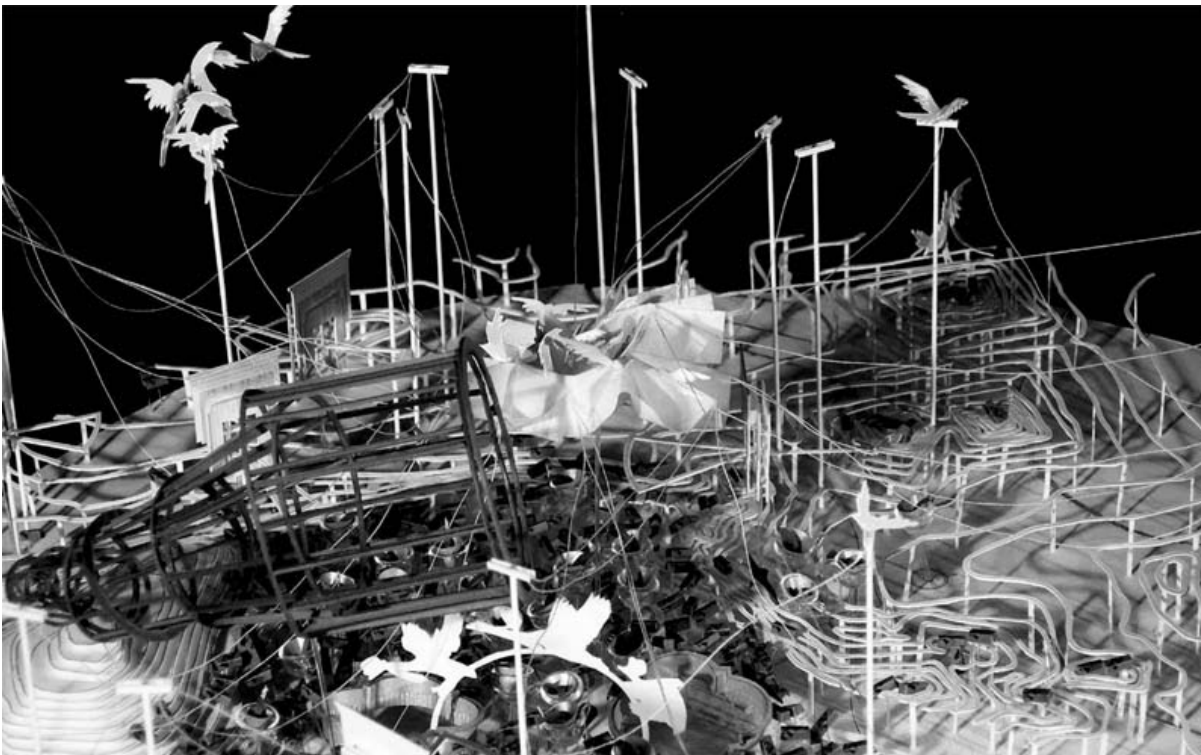


From "Discontinuous Cities"

From "The Bakers Garden"



From "Dream Isle"



To further propel the thesis forward, eight different short stories were created that sit in between fiction, and the real. Each story then manifests itself into a program, which was explored through collaging.

Every collage was assembled with intention, aiming to evoke a certain mood distinct to each environment. Short narratives accompany each collage, telling a little bit about what and when each event is occurring.

These narratives transform and hijack the void spaces in which they occur, breaking apart and dissecting surfaces, points, trajectories, and direction.

8
Dream City:
Short Stories



6:00am — The Swimmer ... Chapter 01

As the first light of dawn breaks over the city skyline, a lone figure emerges from the quiet solitude of Margo Street. Clad in a sleek swimsuit and goggles, the swimmer steps onto the pavement, anticipation brewing as they await the arrival of the pool.

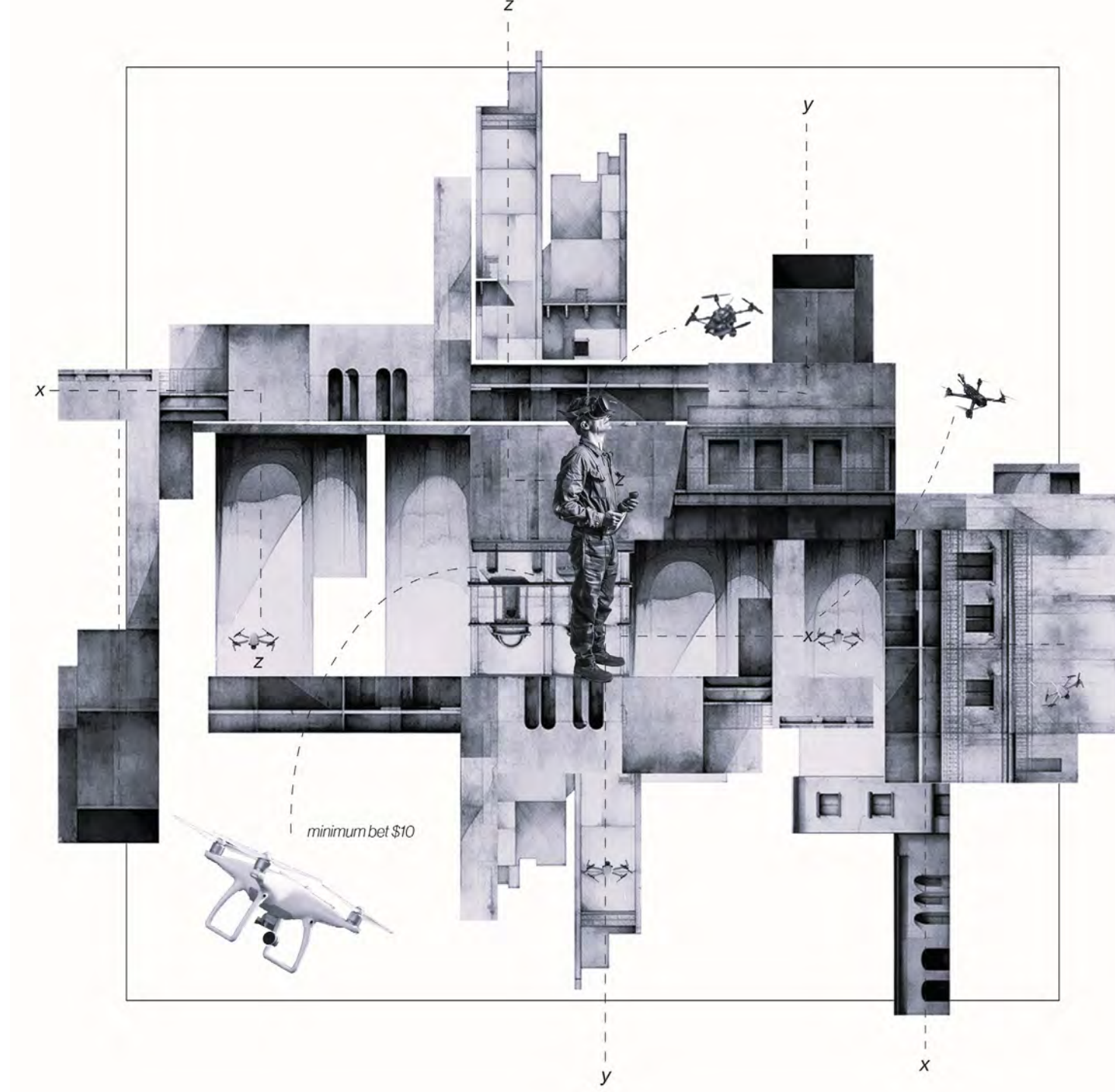
The water is unleashed, gushing up from the underbelly of the metropolis, it cascades forward, instantly transforming the black smear of asphalt into a shimmering expanse of liquid blue.

With a lunge, the swimmer propels themselves forward through the liquid landscape, destination unknown.

2:00pm — Drone Race ... Chapter 02

Time for competition. Drones circle and zip past spectators like a swarm of deranged bees. Their sleek frames and neon lights are a direct contrast to the monochromatic material composition of the alley. Pilots don VR headsets, their fingers poised over the controllers.

They pilot the drones through a fractured cartesian course, where X, Y, and Z collapse into architectural challenges to be overcome. The audience watches in rapt attention, their cheers drowning out the synchronized hum of the machinic competitors, occasionally ducking to avoid the swarm.





9:00am — Orange You Glad? ... Chapter 03

The scent of citrus sweetness drifts through the air, drawing pedestrians to its source. The alley pulses with life as vibrant orange trees seem to defy gravity, their roots reaching deep into the crevices of the earth.

Sunlight filters through the canopy of leaves, reflected into position by the mirrors that track the sun's movements throughout the day like sunflowers. Laughter and conversation fill the air as friends gather ripe fruit from the branches, their fingers sticky with juice as they indulge in nature's bounty.

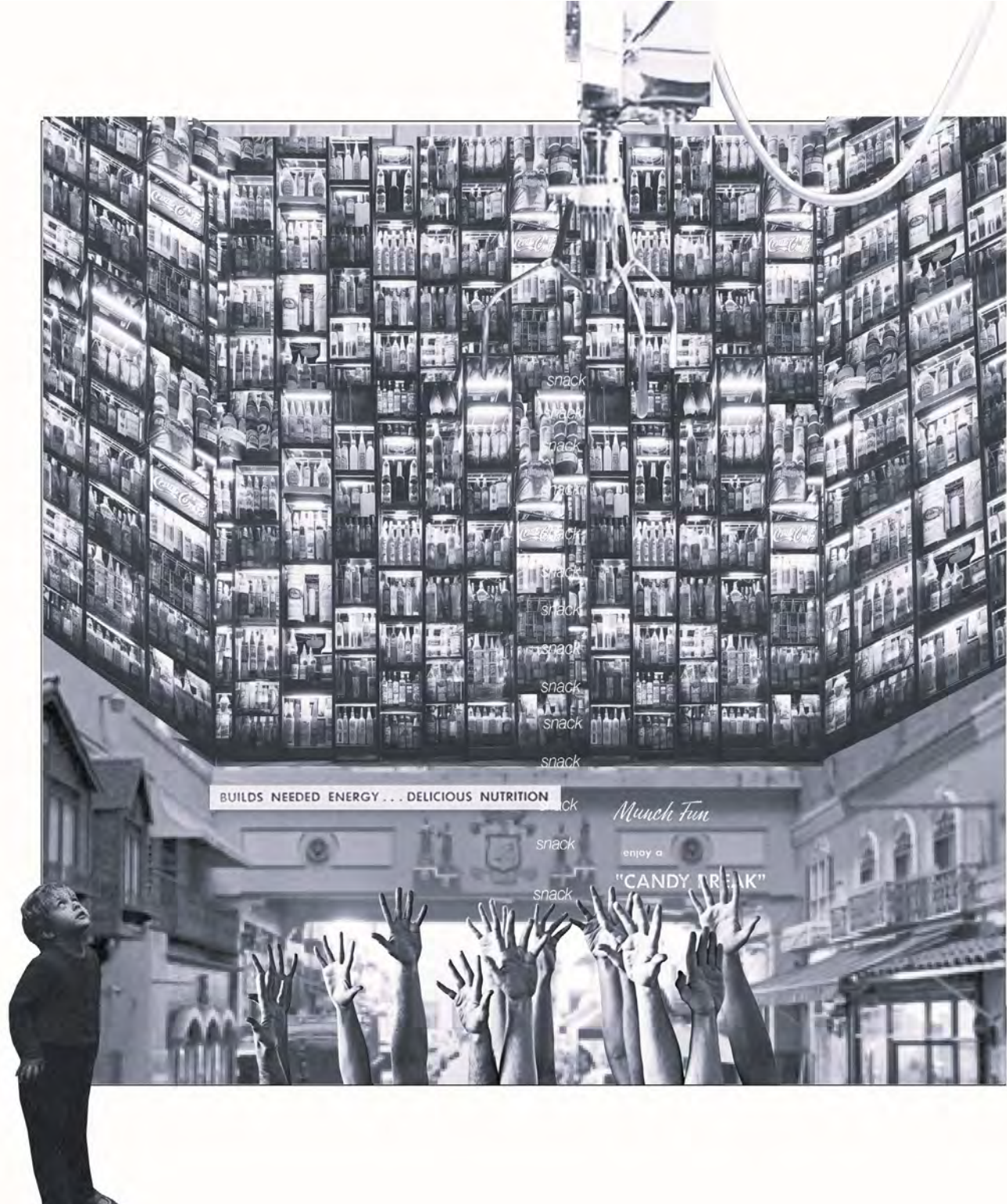
An oasis of quiet removed from the noise of the metropolis, the visitors find themselves enraptured in the simple pleasures of nature, a kind of spiritual space, where the impossible becomes reality.

12:00pm — The Buy and Trade ... Chapter 04

The alley is alive. Clothes of all styles, colors, and sizes glide along the confined space on conveyor tracks. Shirts, pants and jackets sway in the breeze, their fabrics casting playful shadows on the walls as they traverse the three cartesian points, a material architecture without permanence.

People gather, eager to participate in the exchange that defines the "Buy and Trade". The rules are simple yet profound: you may take but you must replace. It's a continuous cycle of giving and receiving that fosters a sense of community and connection amongst strangers. Here, amidst this ephemeral marketplace, clothes are more than just fabric; they are vessels of memory, identity, and creativity.





8:00pm — The Claw ... Chapter 05

From street level, the claw appears as a mere speck against the backdrop of the city. A marvel of modern engineering, available to those who know, although its mechanics remain a mystery. Orders are placed, collected, and delivered, to reaching hands, eager for an evening bite. The claw promises to deliver it all with pinpoint accuracy to a person's exact location.

Chips, waffles, tomato soup. The claw moves with fluidity, navigating the maze of buildings with ease as it seeks out its target. Cake, pasta, peanut butter toast. It swoops down, its metallic fingers closing around the carefully packaged meal before ascending once more into the sky.

7:00pm — Wall Ball ... Chapter 06

It's time for sport! The walls, floor, and ceilings are all adorned with bright lights and markings, transforming the space into a labyrinth of playing fields where tennis, pickleball, and countless other games come to life in unexpected ways. Simultaneous games unfold, merge, and separate, the players at times exchanging racquet for mallet or bat, moving down the alley as they compete with different parties.

Balls ricochet off the walls and floor, taking on new trajectories and surprise even the most seasoned players. One match may interrupt another, but that is the point. It's a reminder that the boundaries of tradition are meant to be challenged and redefined. People can push the limits of what's possible and be pleasantly surprised at the results.





7:00am — Cat Cafe ... Chapter 07

The comforting aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingles with the faint scent of catnip. Sunlight bathes the mismatched furniture and tacky decor that adorns the space, casting a gentle glow on everything. Felines lounge on perches that extend from the walls and windows, their eyes half-closed in contentment as they bask in the attention of their adoring fans.

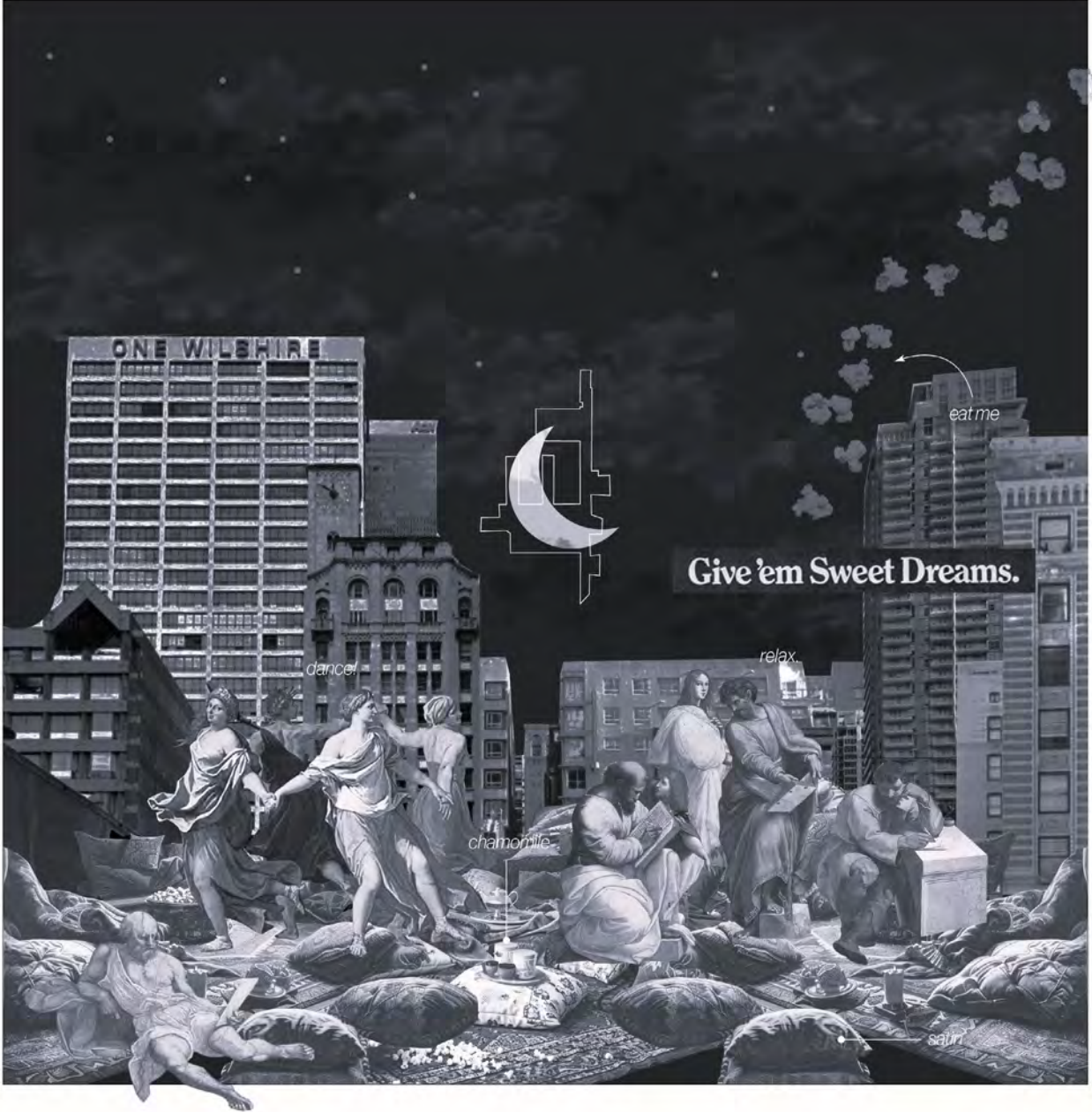
Every nook and cranny of the cafe is inhabited by these furry friends; every window and door, every hole and opening are an opportunity. For the lonely souls who frequent this spot, the cats provide more than companionship. They are a comfort, and a reminder of the simpler joys of life.

12:00am — Pajama Party ... Chapter 08

Neon lights flicker. The city at rest, but there exists a sanctuary for those who find themselves unable to sleep. Insomnia is not a curse but an invitation to join in a nightly ritual of comfort - the Pajama Party.

As the world grows still, the party welcomes all who seek refuge from the restless whispers of their night thoughts. The air is thick with the scent of freshly popped popcorn and steaming pots of herbal tea, inviting weary souls to indulge.

Some dance their worries away, their movements fluid and free; others lounge in cozy corners surrounded by mountains of pillows and blankets. Here, people lose themselves in whispered conversations, finding comfort in those who understand the struggles of the night.



9

Creating Heterotopia: *Translating Narrative Into Infrastructure*

How do these narratives manifest themselves **physically** in their environment? In the void? Experimental diagrams and models were designed to illustrate and **spatially design** how narratives might manifest themselves through architectural infrastructure.

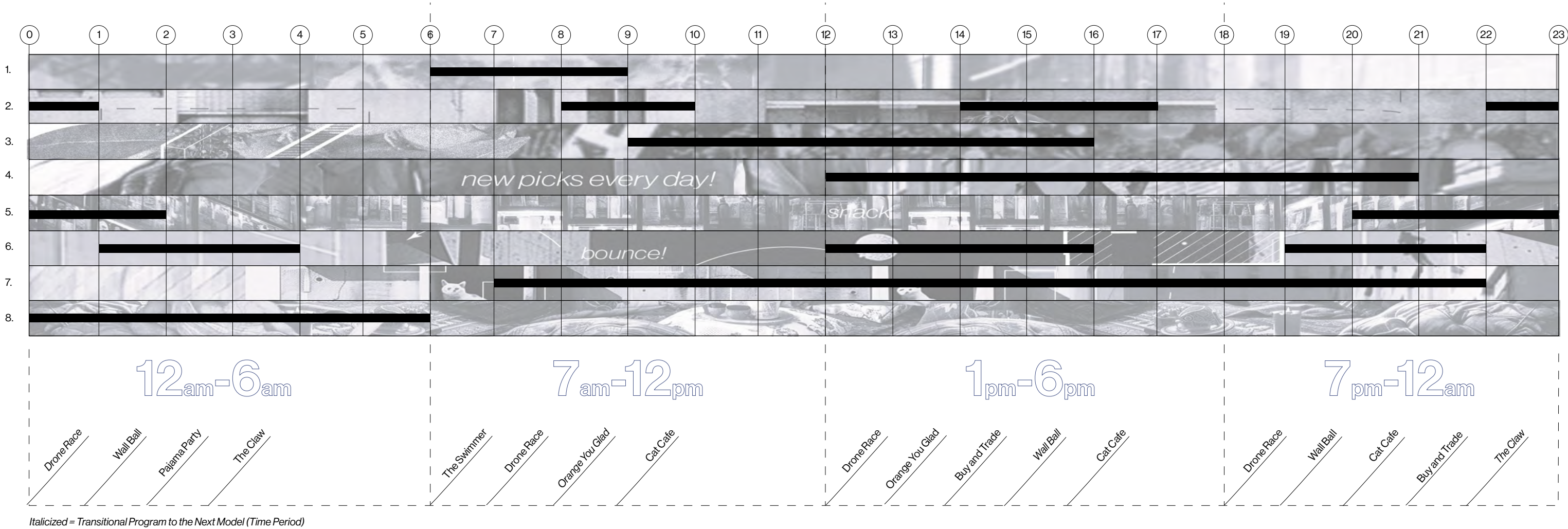
A **program schedule** was developed based off of when each narrative occurs throughout a **24-hour day**, as mentioned in each short passage. This results in certain programs occupying the same space at the same time, creating **odd spatial conditions** throughout the day.

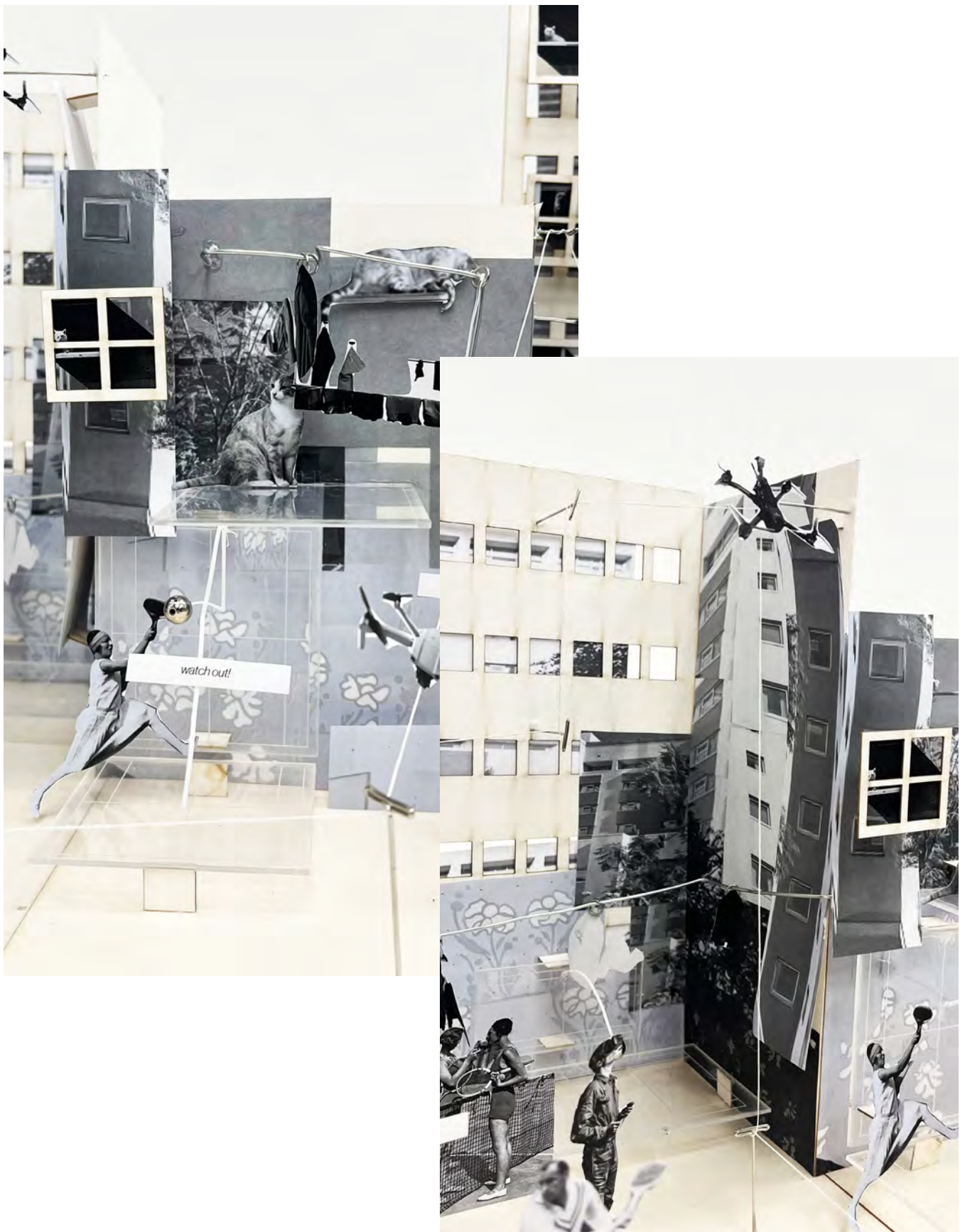
Narratives were **abstracted** down into architectural elements, such as apertures, surfaces, points, and lines. When programs are forced to interact with one another based on **narrative** and also **time**, this provides an extremely difficult architectural challenge, one that I am exploring through physical modeling.

A complex black and white collage titled "Give 'em Sweet Dreams." The composition is a dense assembly of various images and text. In the upper left, a woman's face is shown in profile, looking down. Below it, a tennis player in mid-swing is depicted. To the right, a cat is perched on a rooftop ledge. Further right, a hand holds a white mug. The collage includes several architectural elements, such as a building facade with many windows and a staircase. Text elements include "Give 'em Sweet Dreams." in the top left, "BUILDS NEEDED ENERGY... DELICIOUS NUTRITION" in the center, and "I HAVE A SEVERE SHOE SICKNESS" on the right. Other notable elements include a classical painting of figures, a tennis net, and a cat sitting on a ledge. The overall style is surreal and eclectic, combining modern and classical imagery.

A complex black and white collage titled "Give 'em Sweet Dreams." The composition is a dense assembly of various images and text. In the upper left, a woman's face is shown in profile, looking down. Below it, a tennis player in mid-swing is depicted. To the right, a cat is perched on a ledge. The central part of the collage features a hand holding a white cup, with the text "BUILDS NEEDED ENERGY... DELICIOUS NUTRITION" above it. To the right of the hand, a cat is sitting on a ledge. In the lower right, a tennis player is shown in a dynamic pose. The background is filled with architectural details, including windows and balconies. Other elements include a classical painting of a group of people, a hand holding a tennis racket, and a cat sitting on a ledge. The overall style is a mix of modern and classical imagery, creating a surreal and dreamlike atmosphere.

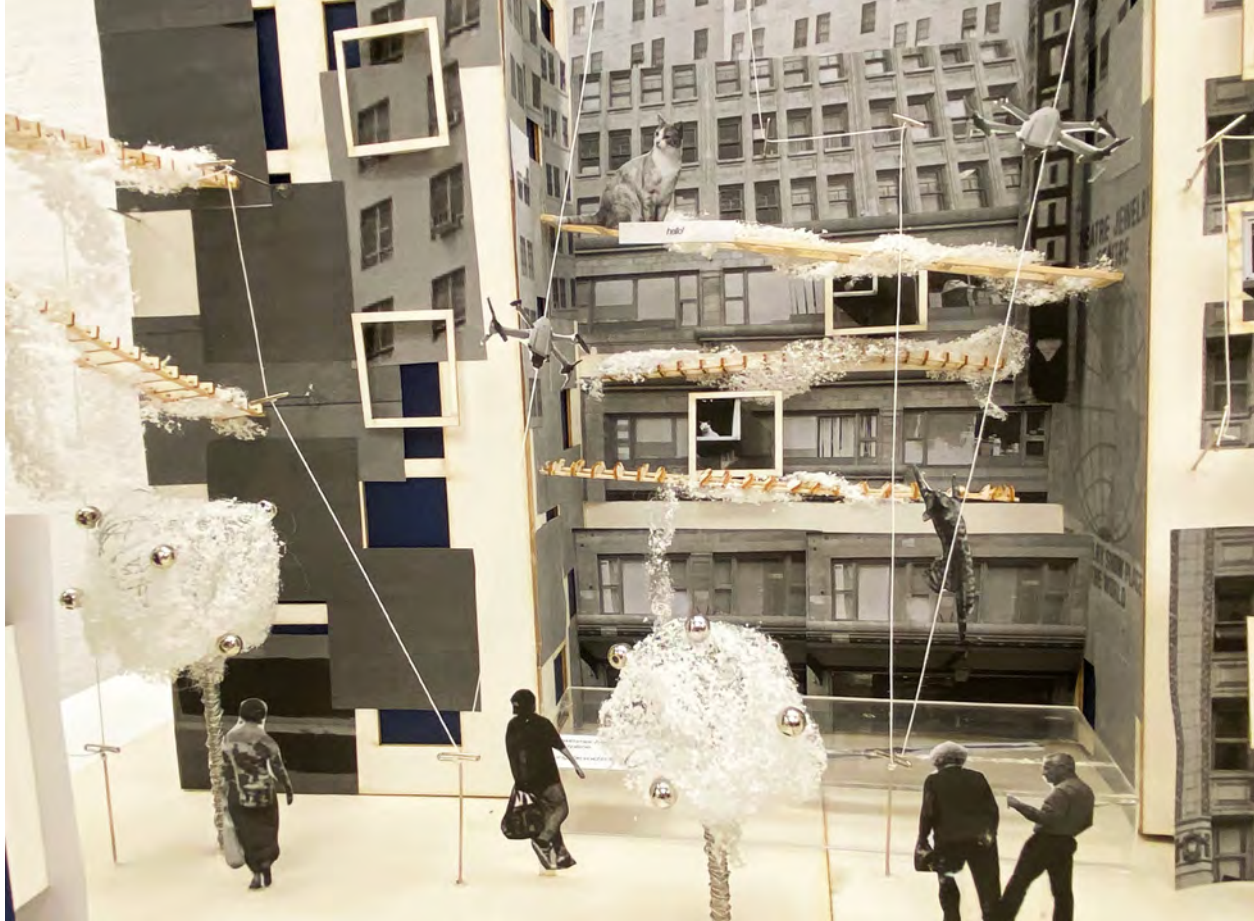
A complex black and white collage titled "Give 'em Sweet Dreams." The composition is a dense assembly of various images and text. In the upper left, a woman's face is shown in profile, looking down. Below it, a tennis player in mid-swing is depicted. To the right, a cat is perched on a ledge. The central part of the collage features a hand holding a white cup, with the text "BUILDS NEEDED ENERGY... DELICIOUS NUTRITION" above it. To the right of the hand, a cat is sitting on a ledge. The background is filled with architectural details, including windows and balconies. In the bottom right, a group of people are playing tennis on a court. The overall style is a mix of realism and surrealism, with a focus on everyday objects and activities.

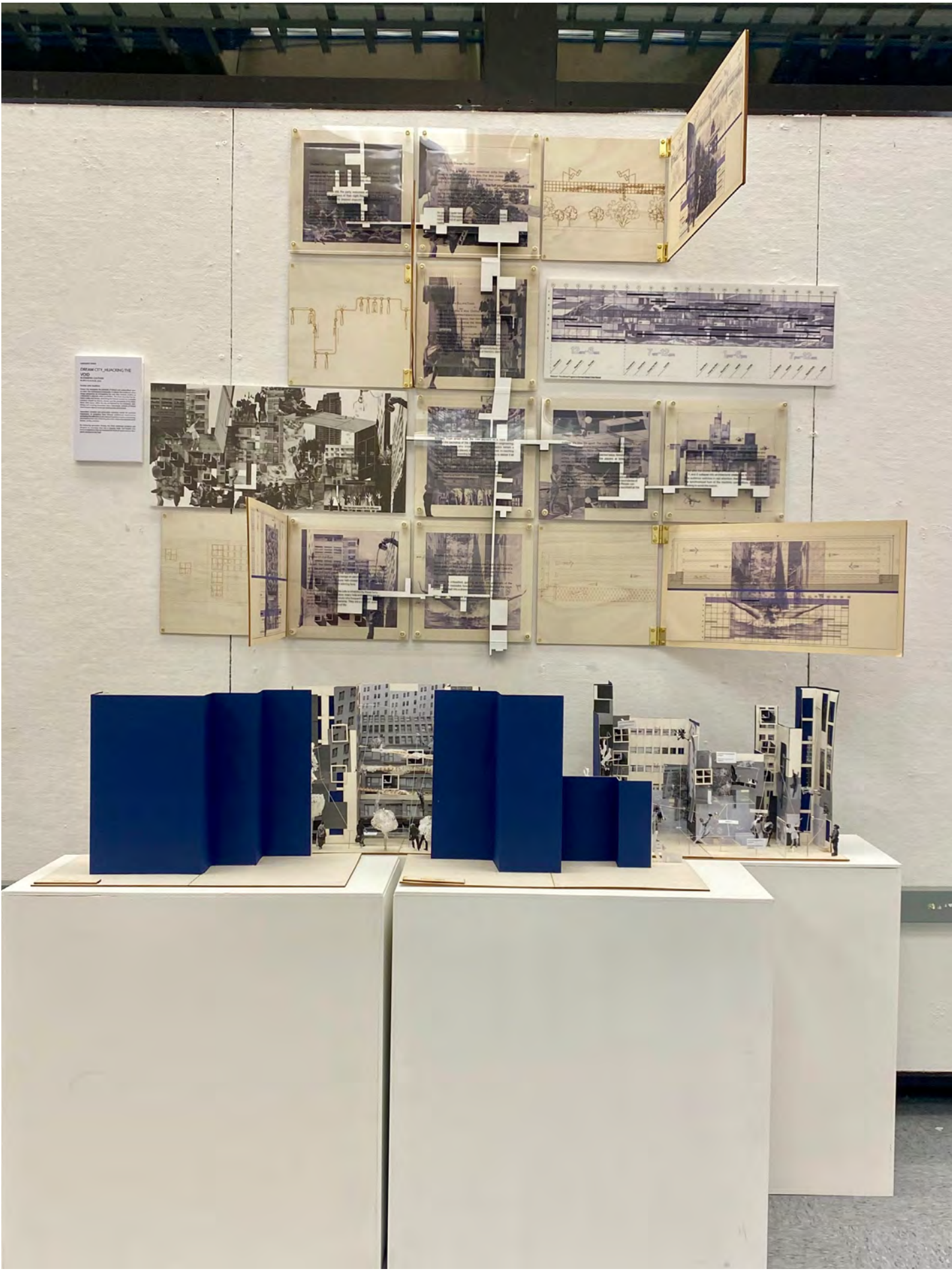
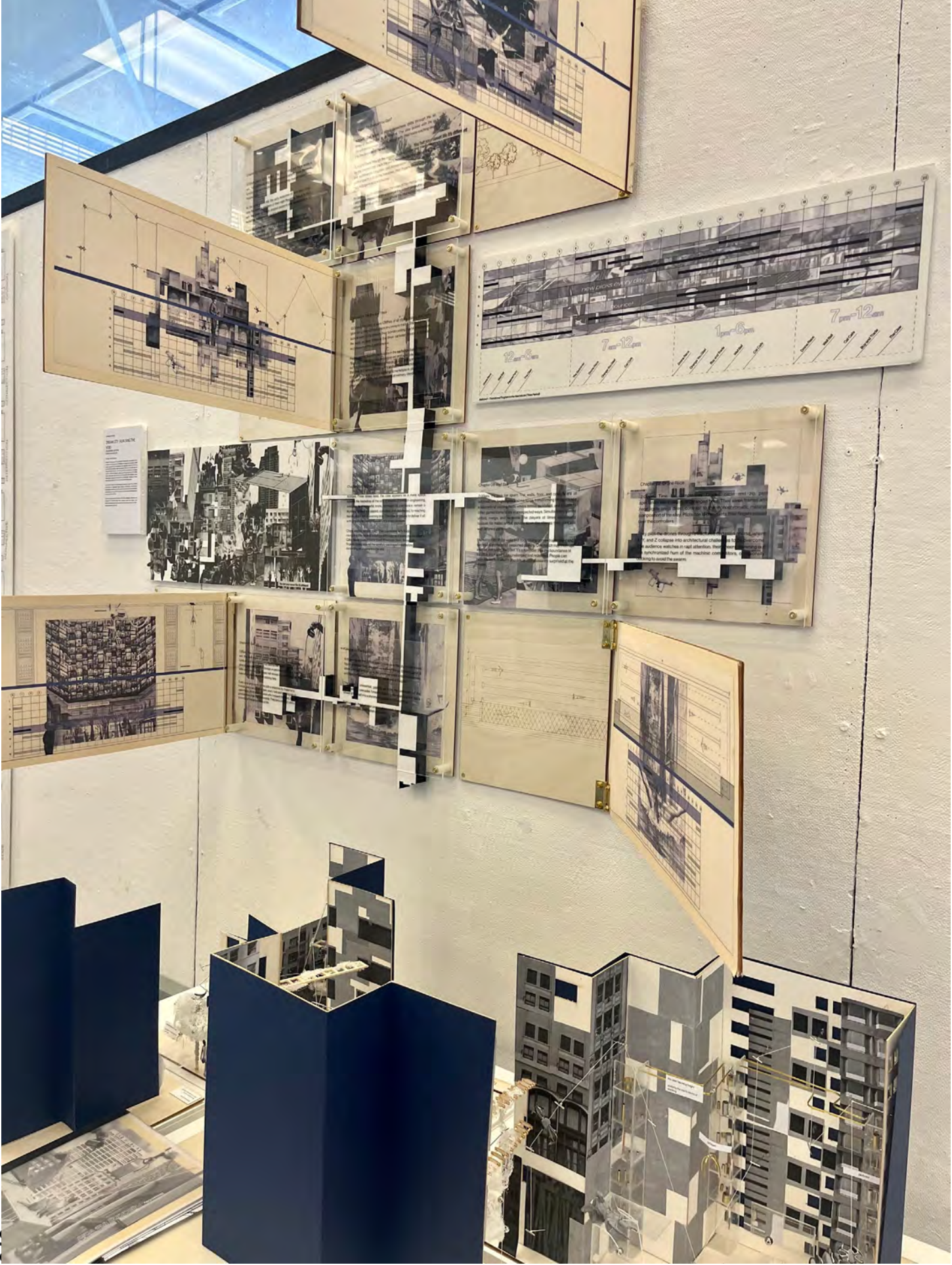












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Midjourney Image Generator

