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Access (the modern paradox): a student clinic law hub re-scripting the border between institutional infrastructure and the public realm, in Braamfontein, Johannesburg

Norwood-Young, James

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Technology:

"The Facades of great cathedrals of the Ile de France re two dimensional picture planes at the scale of the whole; they were to evolve at the top corners into towers to connect with the surrounding countryside. But in the detail these facades are buildings in themselves, simulating an architecture of space in the strongly three-dimensional relief of their sculpture."[1] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, Learning From Law Vegas, 1972.

6.01

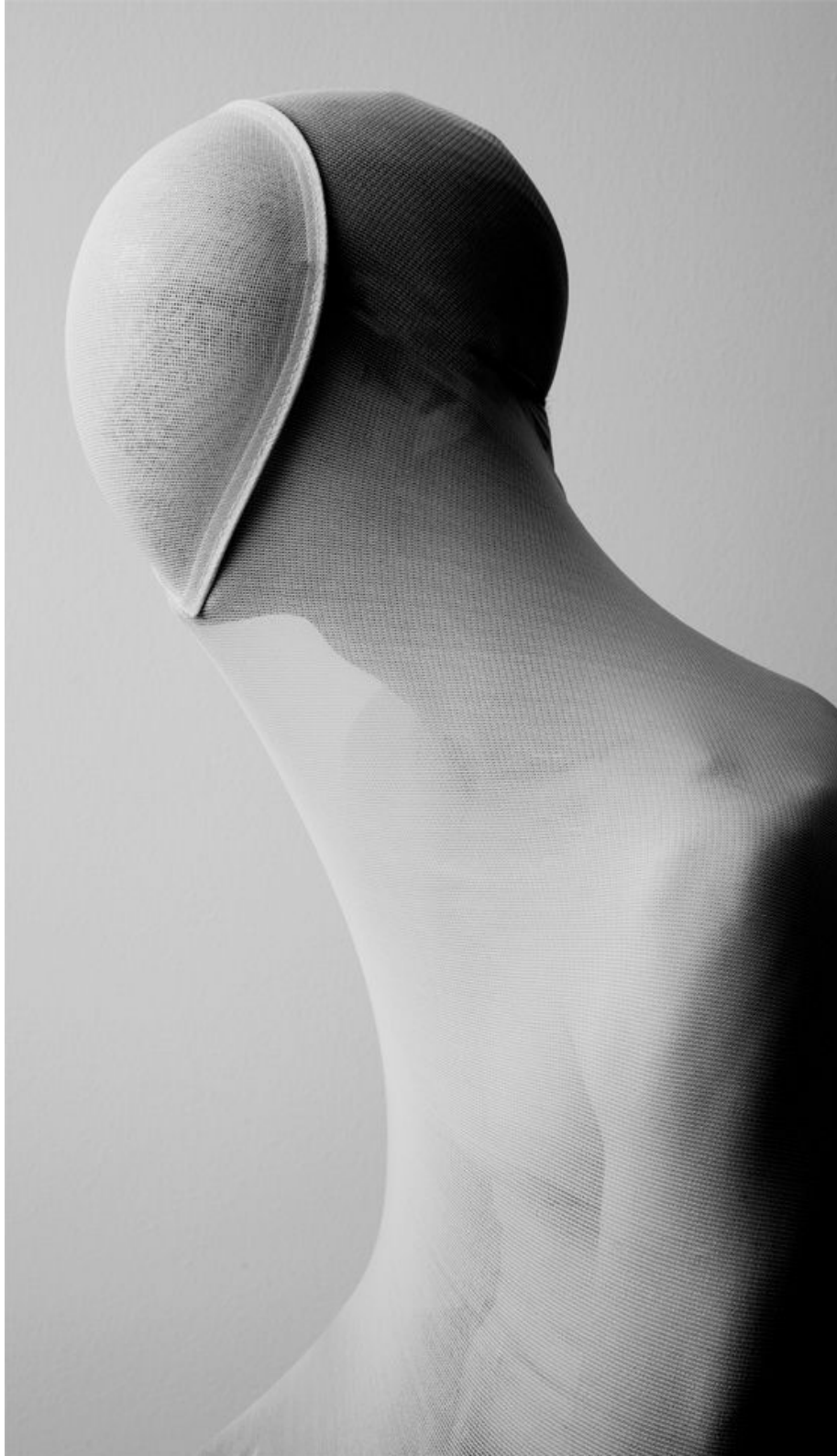
Introduction:

Architecture can be considered as the built form of man's attitude towards his or her environment, context and neighbour. As Architecture's primary role is to offer shelter and protection (from the elements and, in more recent times, invasion) my focus, for the technology chapter - is on the skin/facade (the border) of the Student Clinic Law Hub.



001. Looking at what sits behind the skin.

"The Incredulity of Saint Thomas" Carvaggio, Oil on Canvas, 107 x 146, 1601 - 1602.



002. The skin of the Student Clinic Law Hub has to offer its users protection and anonymity.

(Photograph: Cope Vedas, Nicholas Alan Cope, still.)

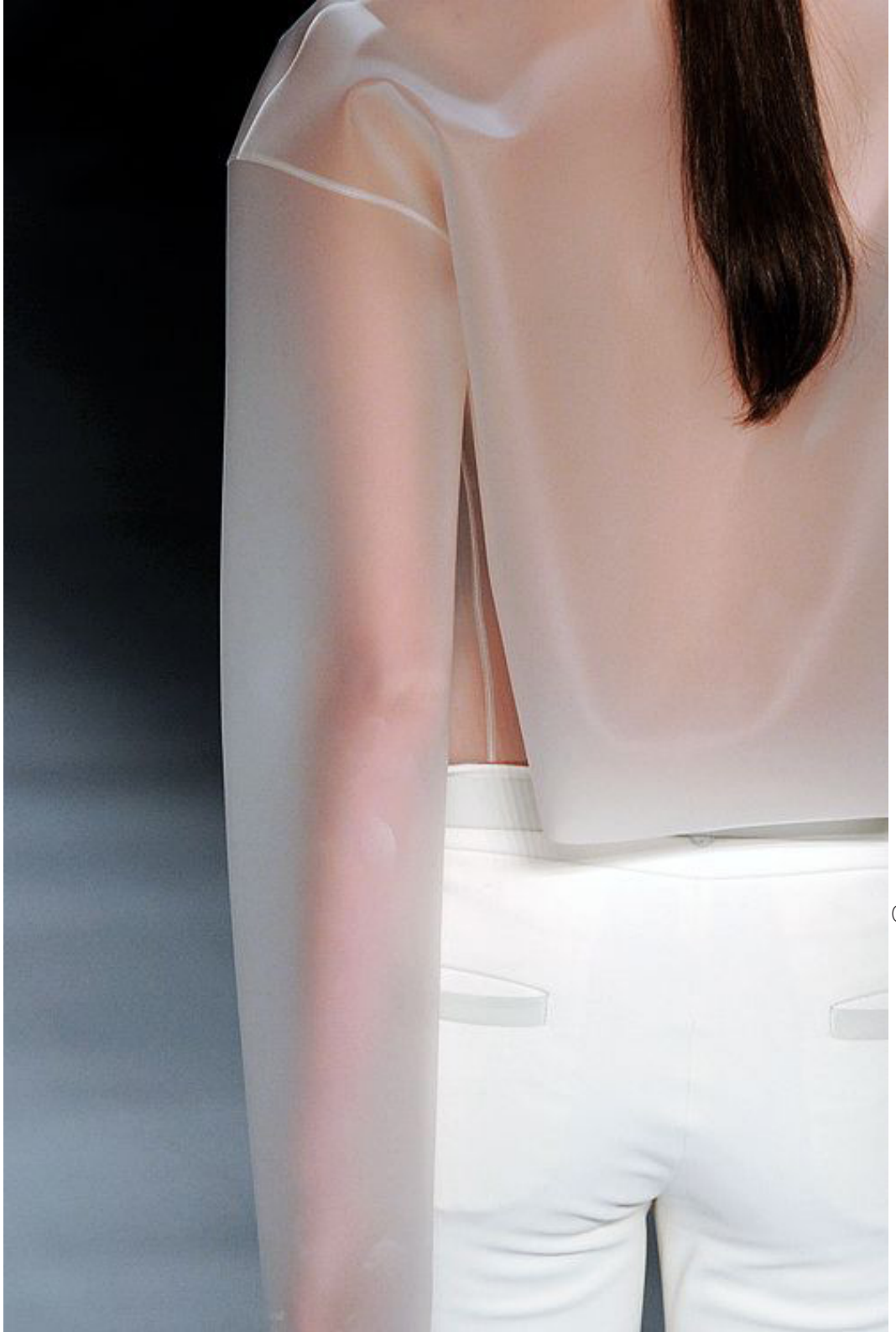
Border, or skin:

The skin is the ultimate border; it depicts where two distinct and different spaces meet; it speaks of closure and enclosure and a space where the public realm meets private intervention. Architecture, and especially in the case of the Student Clinic Law Hub, has to offer protection to its inhabitants – as well as create an environment that is comfortable and allows its users to flourish. Rafael Tover y de Teresa, President of the National Council for Culture and Arts, states that; ". . . Its [Architecture's] main goal is to create spaces that serve as an environment for human beings, that shelter their activities, as well as society's development and growth."

The facade of the Student Clinic Law Hub offers different levels of privacy for the users, as well as create connections with the street, university and public spaces offered to pedestrians. The facade of the building, matched with the form creates an ominous but



003. Student Clinic Law Hub

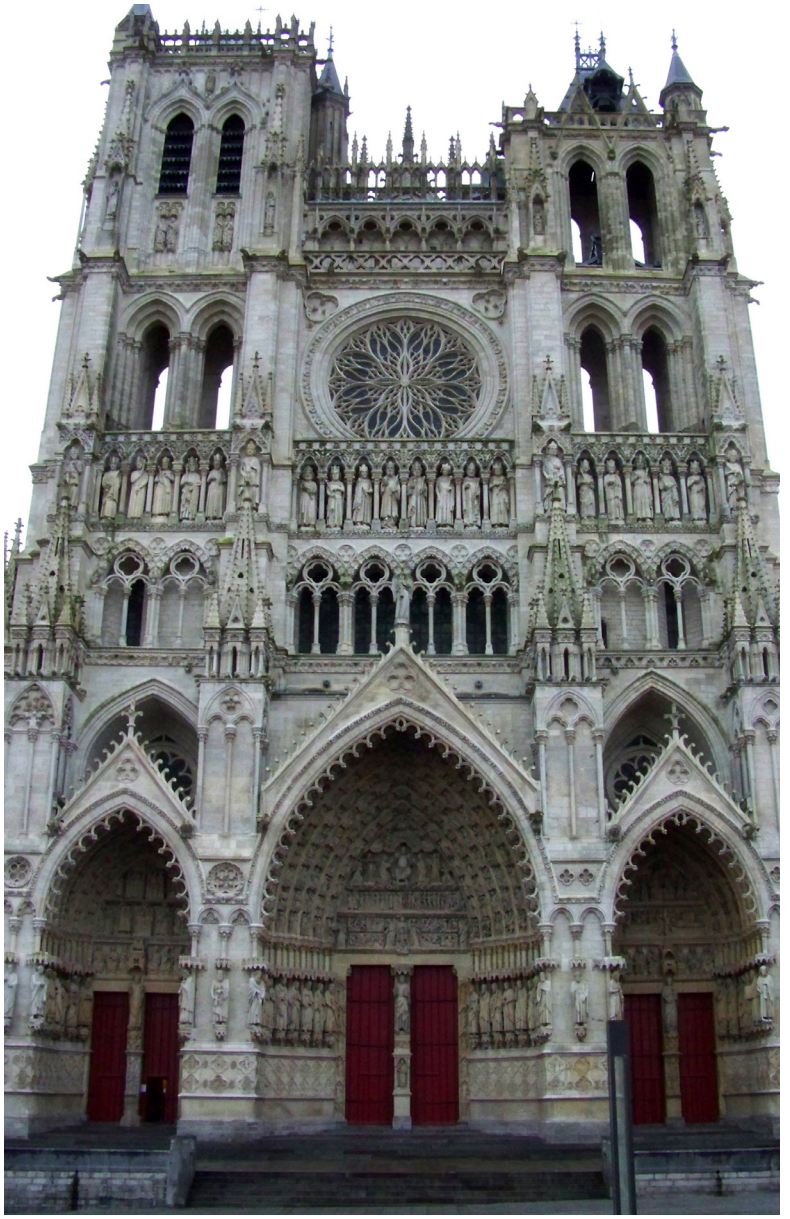


004. Anonymous yet transparent.

uniform space. This speaks to the concept of the building not being a student hub AND a law clinic but rather one uniform "Student Clinic Law Hub" where social hierarchy becomes dissolved through space.

Access, or skin:

Access to the building, and Justice, are key areas of exploration for the technology chapter. The building skin offers an opportunity to explore what an architectural border could be in the present. In the 21st Century access is gained in one of three ways: Visually, Physically and Digitally. The facade becomes a picture plane that represents these three forms of access. The Student Clinic Law Hub in essence is a 'decorated shed,' an eclectic combination of facade treatments that create connections with the built context, building user and passer-by, which wraps around the programme of the Student Clinic Law Hub. The concept of the 'decorated shed' as a billboard, presented by Venturi, Scott Brown and



005. Amiens Cathedral, front.

Izenour in 1972's **Learning From Las Vegas**, becomes most apparent in the facade. In writing about the Amiens Cathedral Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour discover a contradiction and complexity when re-assembling the iconography and content of the Gothic Cathedral typology.

"Amiens Cathedral is a billboard with a building behind it. Gothic cathedrals have been considered weak in that they did not achieve an "organic unity" between front and side. But this disjunction is a natural reflection of an inherent contradiction in a complex building that, toward the cathedral square, is a relatively two-dimensional screen for propaganda and, in back, is a masonry systems building. This is the contradiction between image and function that the decorated shed often accommodates."[2]

Transgression:

As mentioned above the form of the building is uniform and ominous, creat-



006. Cathedral or billboard?

ing a sort of architectural anonymity. The vast facades of the building become a clear border between what is public and what is private yet dissolve to create connections with the University, public space and Braamfontein (and to some extent the Johannesburg CBD). As explored on Jorissen Street; Signage, Front and Facade play a main role in understanding what the building is and what its programme offers the public. The Student Clinic Law Hub becomes a sign within space and a place within a sign. The juxtaposition between outside, skin and inside creates paradox within the architecture. The harsh street environment in Braamfontein can be balanced within the building by creating comforting light spaces. Certain spaces require a level of anonymity for user. Materiality and transparency become key in creating the juxtaposition of interior and exterior connection as well as visual and physical access.



007. Student Clinic Law Hub

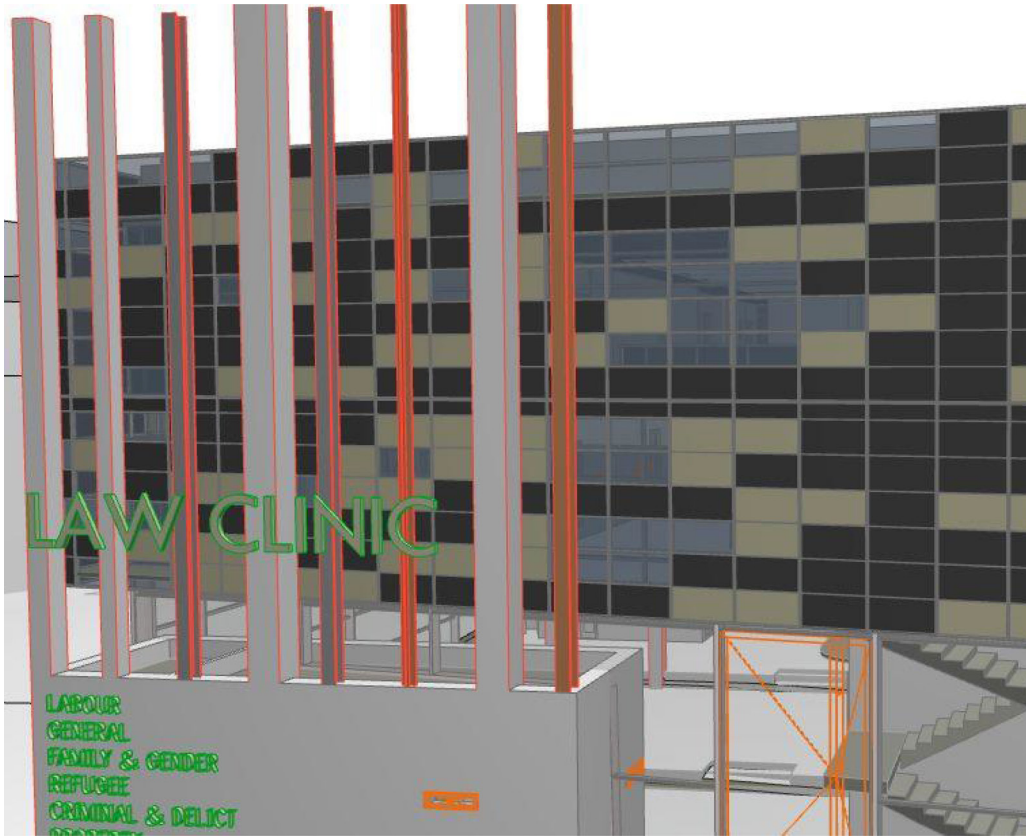


008. Solid but translucent.

The three elements, or panels, within the facade are translucent concrete panels (the physical), fritted glazed panels (the visual) and LED display screens (the digital). Each panel becomes the most simple (obvious) visual instructor (and obstructer).

Concrete: Concrete offers a physical presence as it is robust and dominates the streets of Braamfontein. The concrete reflects the loci of the built environment, yet slowly dissolves as the skin wraps around the building. The material may offer a connection to place but is a robust material that typical depicts harsh autonomous spaces. Translucent concrete on the other hand emits light in to a space during the day (and out during the night).

Glass: The glazed panels allow for a visual connection between the users of the building and the context that surrounds it. The ground floor of the building is completely glazed and raised on pilotis – typical of the modern buildings that Braamfontein esteemed to. This is to allow the passerby a connection with the truly public nature of the building. Taking cues from the Wits Art Museum – one of the only buildings on Jorissen street that successfully attempts a connection with pedestrians, allowing them to access the gallery without having to enter the building – the openness of the ground floor at the most public edge of the building allows for pedestrians to see people emancipating themselves through learning about the law in the Precedent Library.



009. Student Clinic Law Hub

Digital Screen: The screens that wrap around the building become more dominant in places where people dwell e.g. the arcade between the WITS Theatre and the Student Clinic Law Hub, as well as the public dwell space/ street amphitheatre on the Jorissen Street edge. The digital display panels can change from Wallstreet style ticker tapes, revealing discussions on the inside of the building and posting peoples tweets and social commentary on the law, to video display screens that pedestrians with phones (and earphones) can tap in to catch the audio for news stories and interviews about social justice and the law for the day.



010. LED Ticket Tape



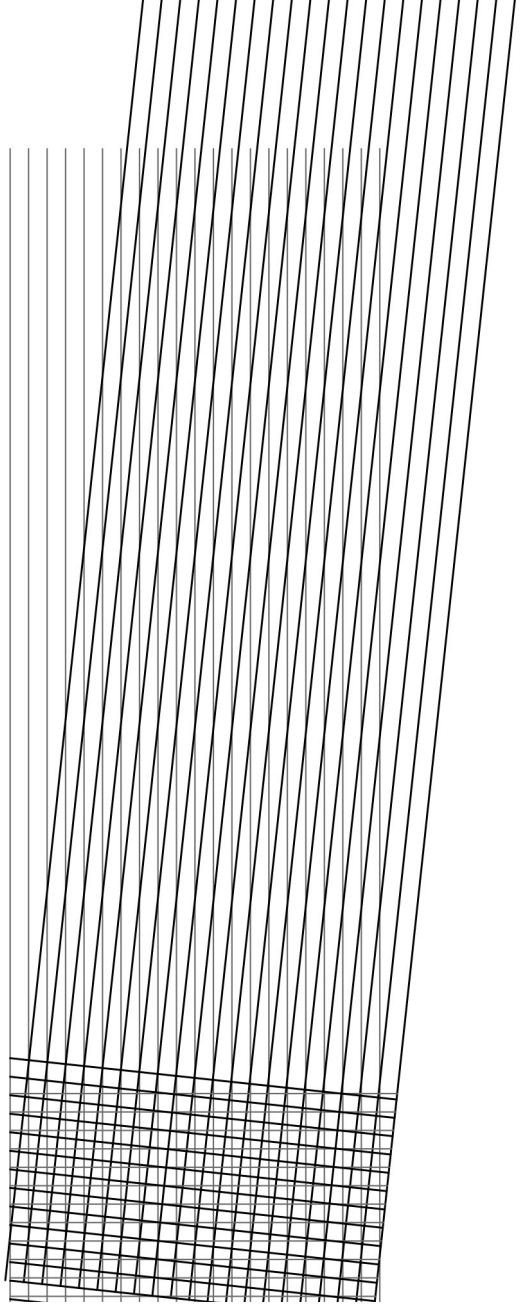
011. Facade as a communicator.

The facade becomes a moiré of physical, visual and digital access. Users can interact with the facade by using their smart phones and headphones to listen to talks or tweet how they feel. The skin acts as a datum that at times isn't part of the building (on the western facade). A section taken on the western facade depicts where the facade becomes a second skin to the building, allowing for the skin to become a shield against harsh solar heat gains. The skin allows the building to fit in to its harsh urban environment by day, and by night dissolves into space and emits light and character on to the street.

(References)

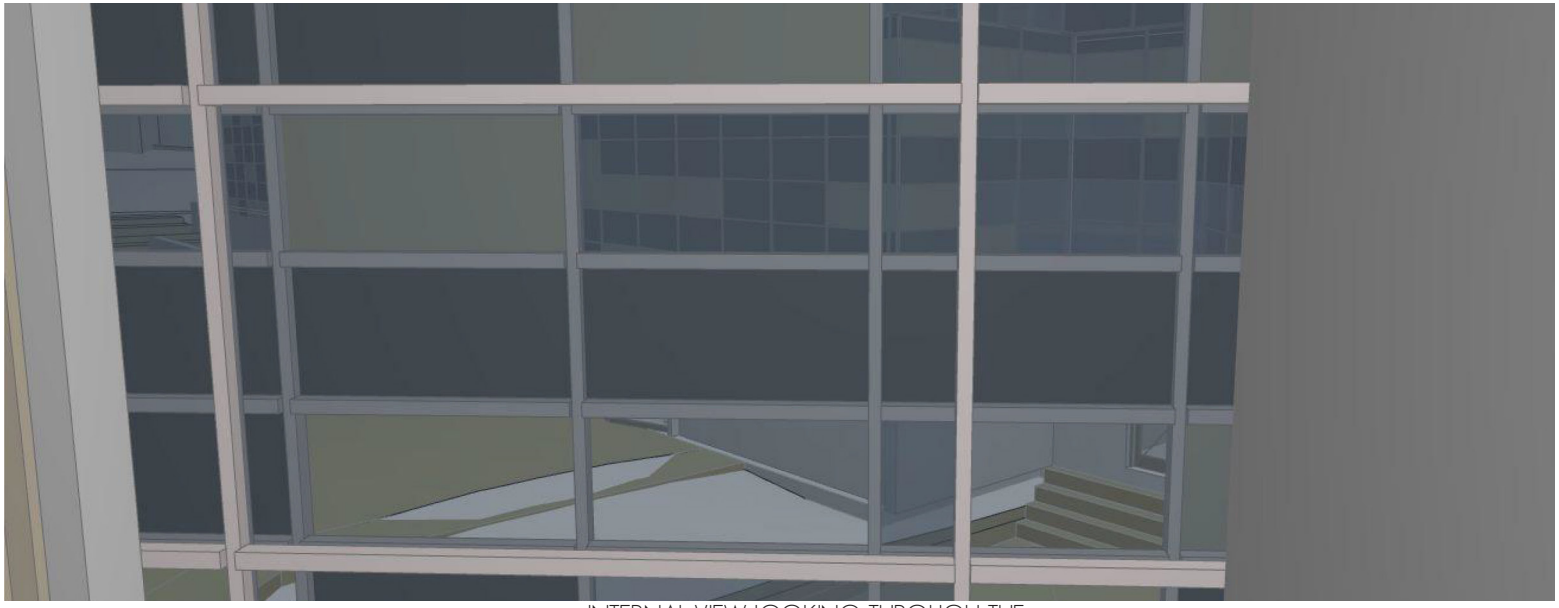
1. Venturi, R., Brown, D.S., Izenour, S., 1977. Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form. MIT Press. Pg 105.

2. Venturi, R., Brown, D.S., Izenour, S., 1977. Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form. MIT Press. Pg 105.



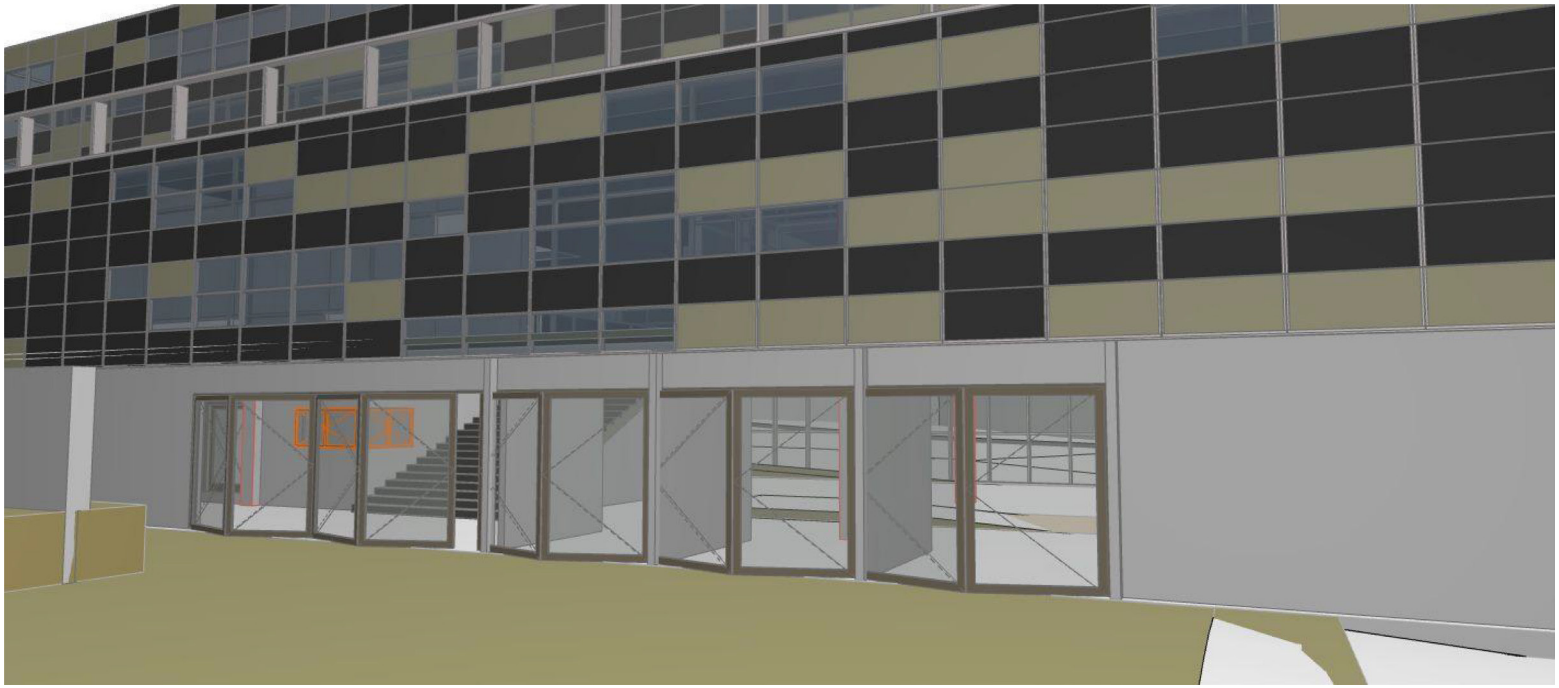
012. Moiré

Details:



INTERNAL VIEW LOOKING THROUGH THE
FACADE TO THE ARCADE

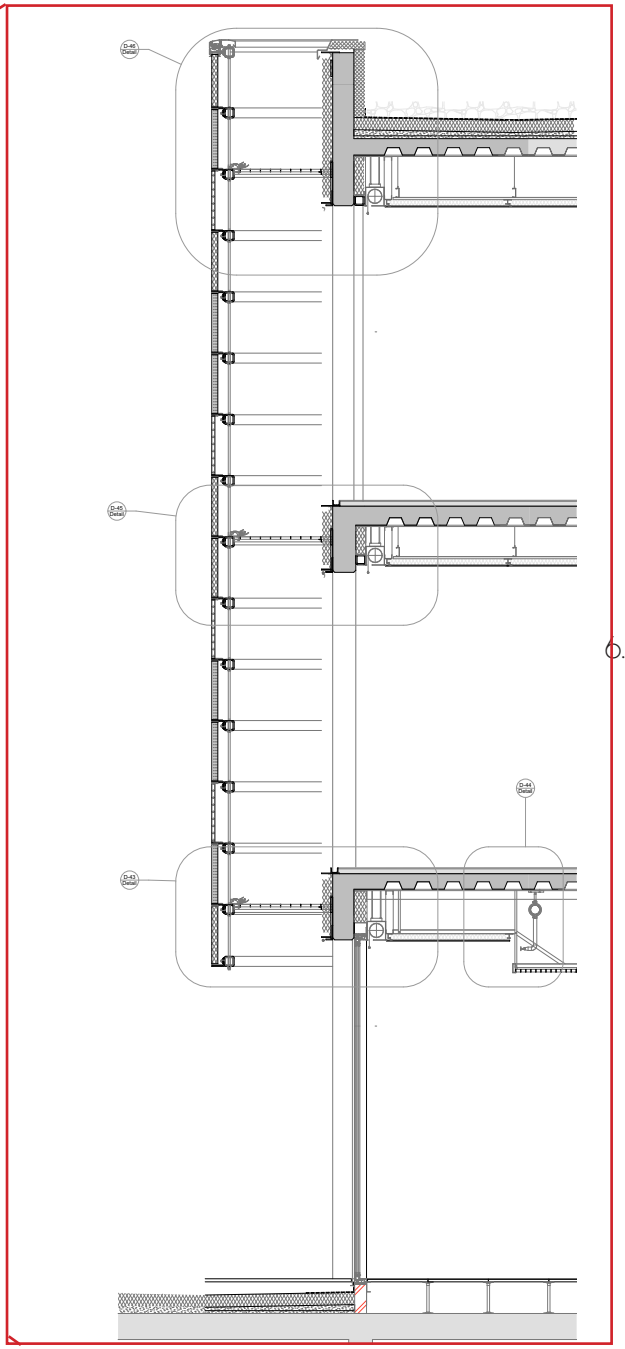
6.013

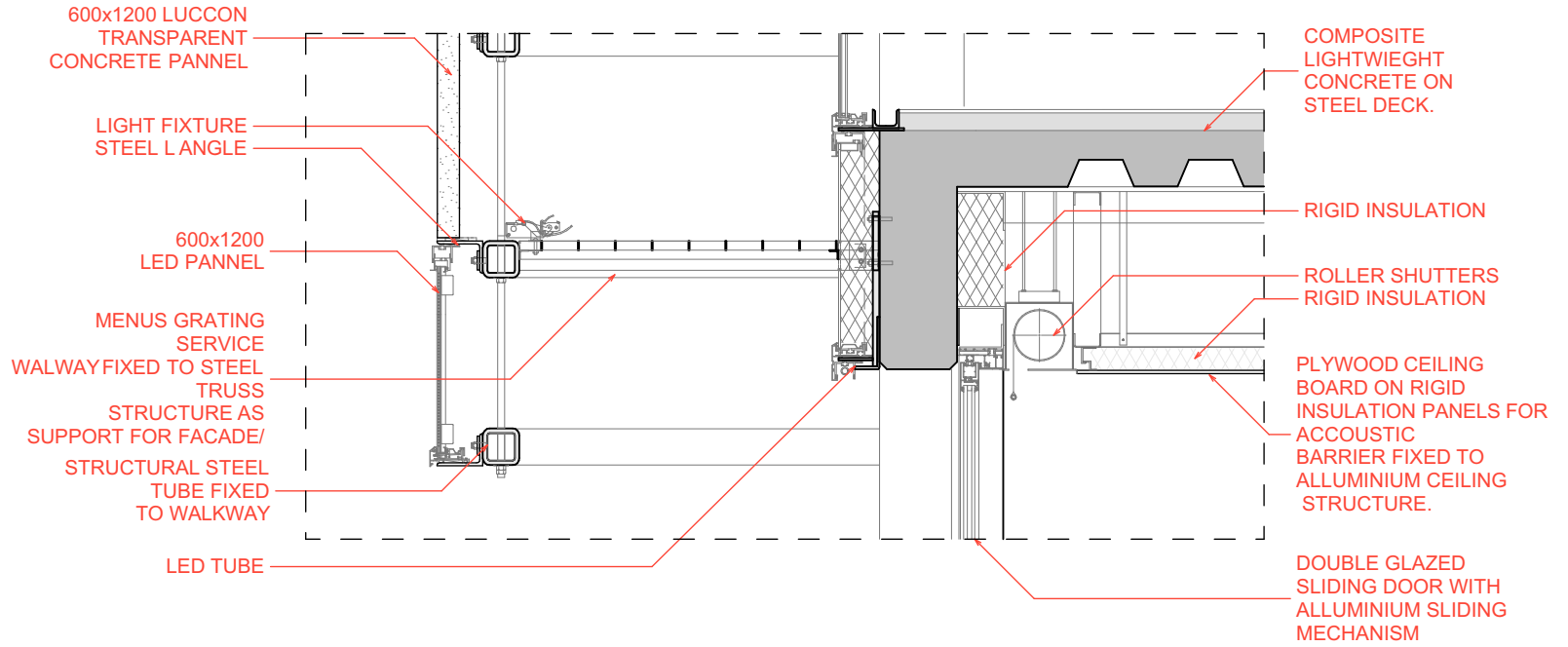


VIEW OF THE FACADE LOOKING AT THE STU-
DENT CLINIC LAW HUB.



SOUTH SECTION





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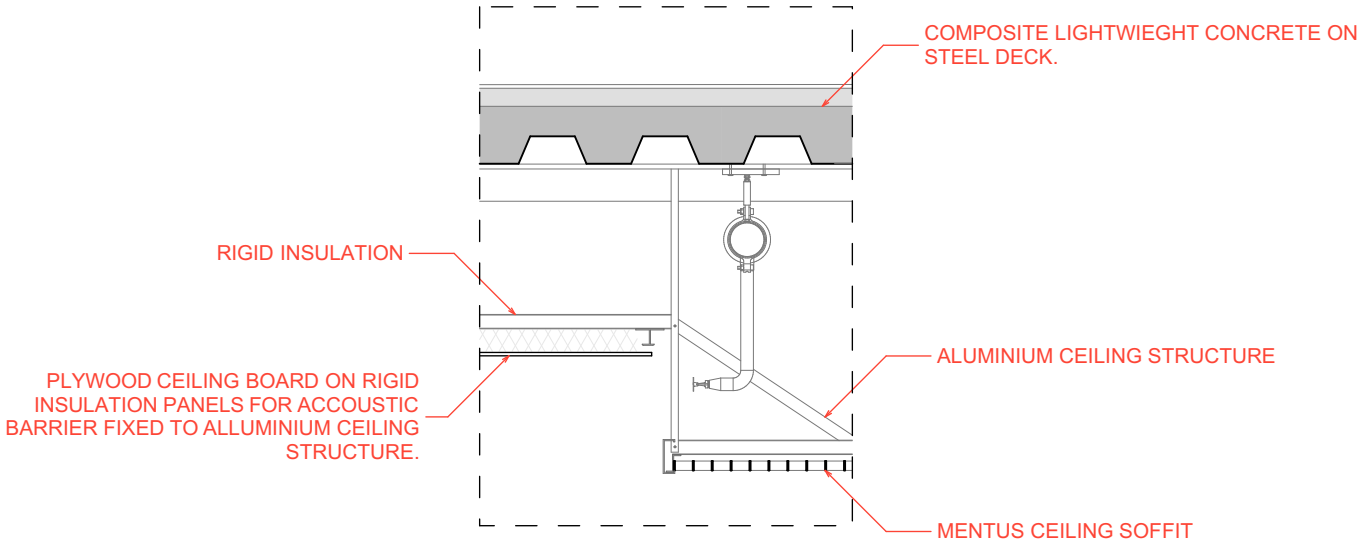

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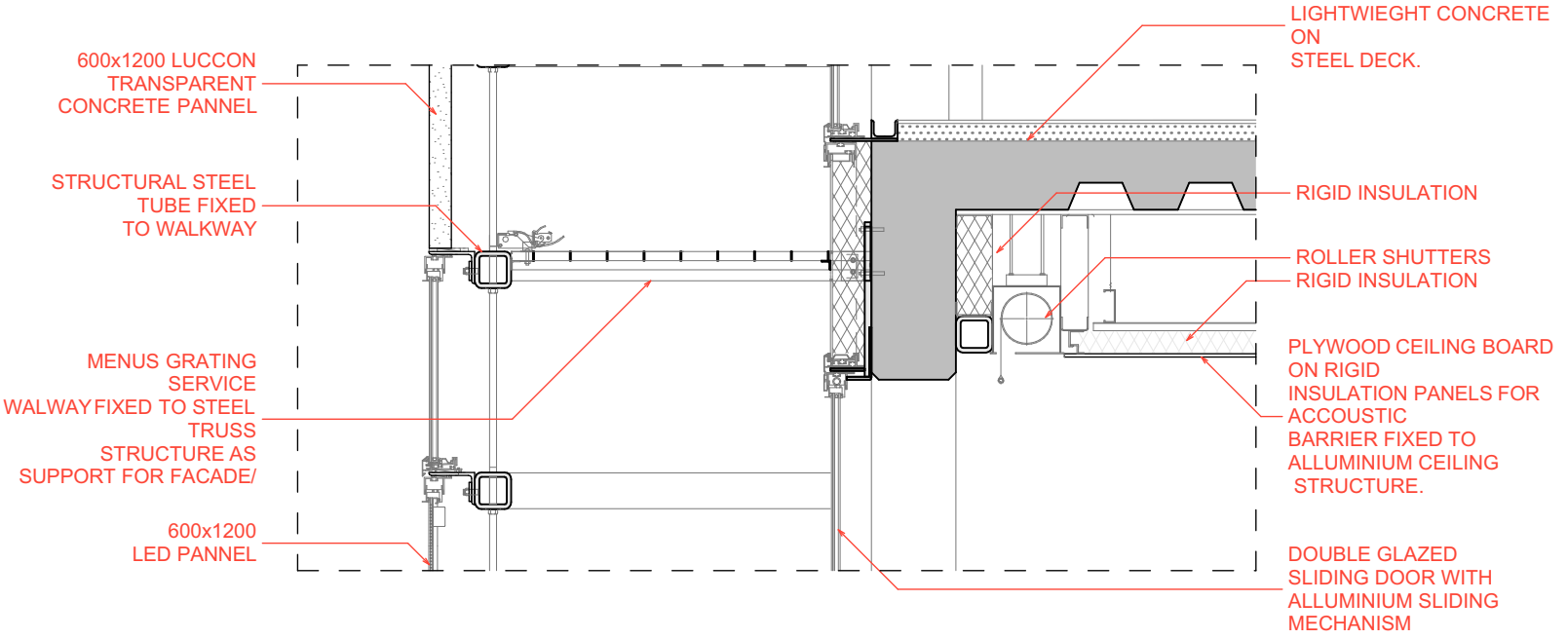

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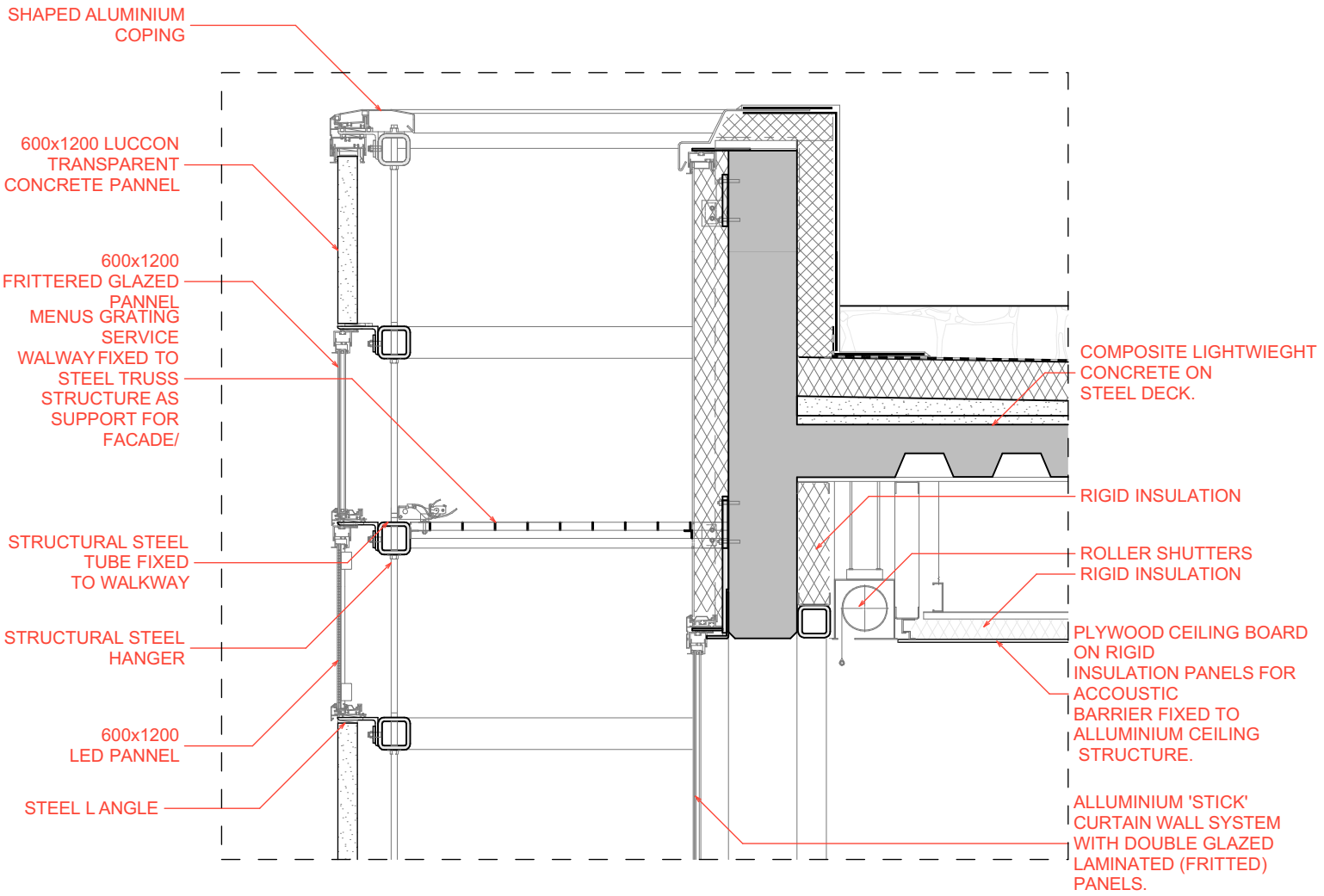
D-45 Detail



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D-46 Detail 1:20