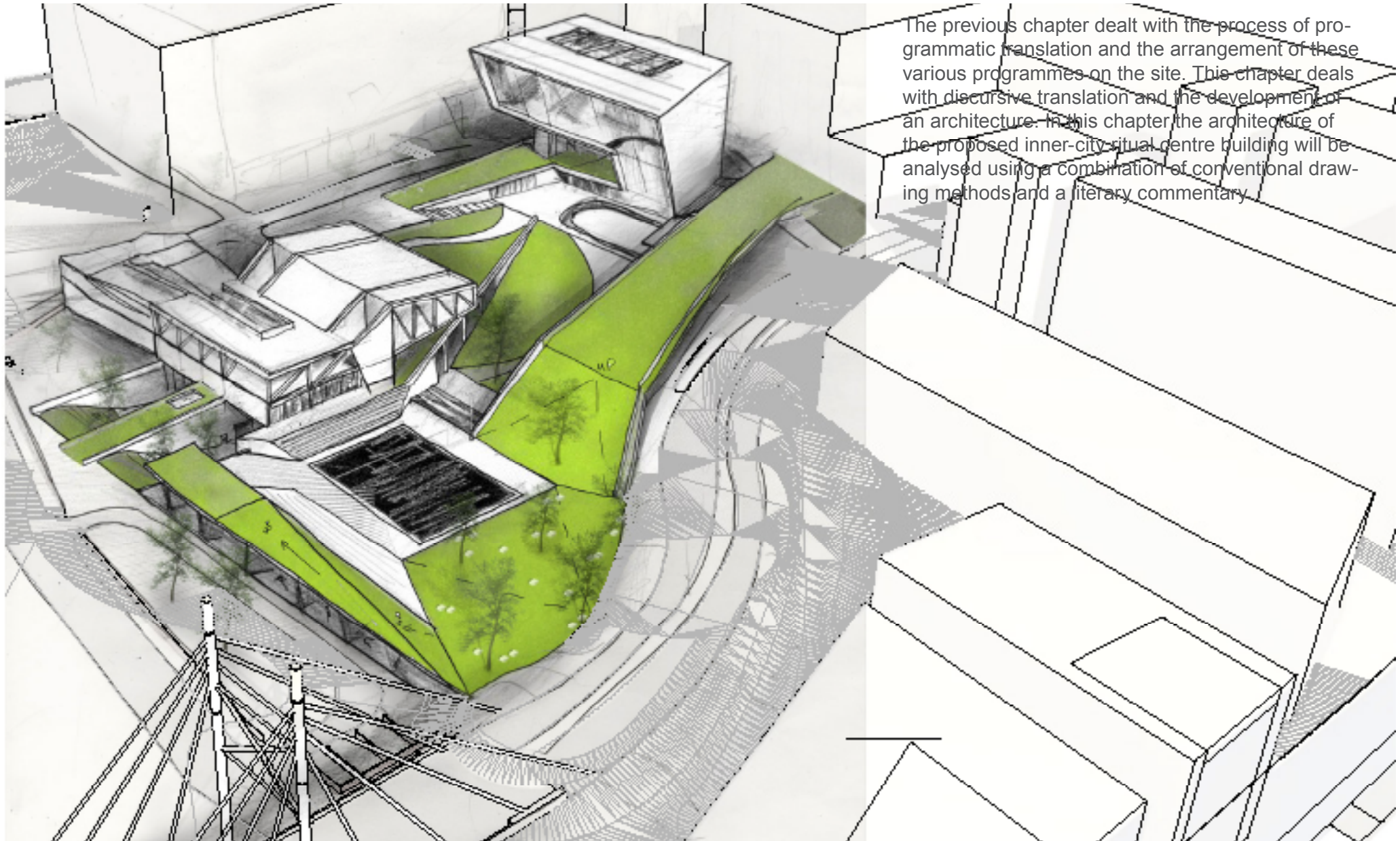


chapter overview



The previous chapter dealt with the process of programmatic translation and the arrangement of these various programmes on the site. This chapter deals with discursive translation and the development of an architecture. In this chapter the architecture of the proposed inner-city ritual centre building will be analysed using a combination of conventional drawing methods and a literary commentary.

fig 6.01 overall 3d (author)

discursive dialogues

Previous chapters propose the use of discursive translation to create a more inclusive built environment. Before translation of black architectural discourse can occur, they have to be unveiled, articulated and theorized through the study of their resultant forms. It is impossible to cover the plethora of black architectural discourses, in their entirety and only a few ideas are dealt with in this paper. It has been illustrated in earlier chapters that black discourses are not homogenous amongst all black people and are not entirely different from the dominant discourse. There will be areas of concurrence and areas of divergence, both within the black discourses and in relation to the dominant discourses. This paper therefore does not present a prescriptive stylistic manifesto; it only proposes a modus operandi. The following section attempts to uncover various marginalised black discourses and illustrate the proposed method of discursive hybridisation in the design of Inner-city Ritual Centre.

A discourse is the body of knowledge and practice that is distributed in the architectural field, the imaginative processes of architecture are therefore bound by discourse. It is the individuals imaginative interpretation of discourse, that results in the generation of varied, specific architectural forms. The following exercise hopes to deduce some marginalised black architectural discourses through the analysis of the forms emerging from these rationales. The exercise will awaken the creative consciousness and allow marginalised discourse to influence the design process. It is important to stress the subjective nature of the following exercise as it is intended to achieve an understanding of black discourse through a personal interpretation of the resulting forms which is ultimately subjective.

reconstitute-reconfigure

To create a new urban ritual spatial typology for black practices, it is an imperative to understand what constitutes ritual space in existing black typologies. When rituals take place in rural areas the spaces of everyday use are reassigned and reconstituted for the enactment of rituals. In the Zulu tradition, the kraal, which on ordinary days is the place for cattle becomes the alter for sacrifice, the place in which spirit mediums communicate with the ancestors or even the sports arena as shown in the programmatic analysis of the previous chapter. In the Bira tradition as shown in fig 6.02 the homestead is transformed for ritual purpose. Shared communal spaces between houses are reconfigured into public gathering spaces. These spaces being open to multiple use, are the venue for both sad and joyous occasions, for commercial (market) as well as purely social functions. Similarly in the townships for ritual purposes the street is reconstituted. The street which is built primarily for vehicular traffic is transformed into a public space for social interactions. During the everyday, informal traders, children playing and groups of teenagers inhabit the street as public space. On special occasions the street is transformed into a ceremonial space where events such as weddings and funerals are shared with the community. It is a common site to see wedding parties parading, as they perform choreographed dances from one end of the street to the other. On these special days the place of everyday interactions becomes an integral part of ritual and ceremonial space.



fig 6.02 Bira dance (Spencer 1932)

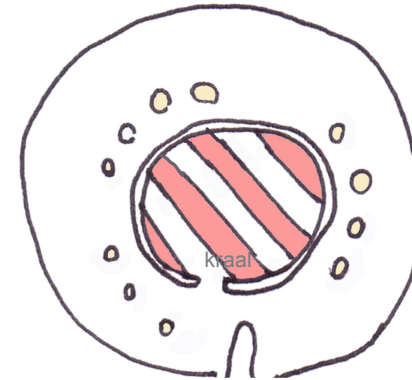


fig 6.03 diagram showing ritual space in Zulu Kraal



fig 6.04 diagram showing ritual space in township



ritual space/ utility space



houses



public interaction

legend

A discursive translation of this phenomenon, does not mean that the inner city ritual centre should be or resemble the kraal or street in its appearance. Though It is acceptable to translate this imagery; to achieve Bhabha's notion of postcolonial hybridity, the building must also engage with the discourse and not just the resulting imagery or built form. A discursive translation would try to uncover the underlying rationale; that of spatial reconstitution, multiple reinterpretation, reconfiguration of space and spatial economy. In this respect, the proposed inner-city ritual centre has been designed as a place for everyday social and commercial interactions, that is transformable on special occasion to become the place of ritual. The mixed use programme as shown in the programmatic diagrams, allows for the overlaying of different activities through time. The ritual center could potentially host car shows, concerts, product launches, theatre and it could be used as a fan park for sports events. The design is conceived as "reconfigurable", through its built form and "reconstitutable", by the users to host different events at different times. Reconfigurable refers to the buildings capacity to adapt and reconstitutable, refers to the users capacity to reinterpret the space.

The rural hut depicted in fig 6.05 functions at certain times as either a kitchen, dining room, nursery, baby bath, or bedroom. Sleeping mats are hung on the wall as "decoration" and the baby bath is the stand for the clay pots. In this conception of dwelling, both space and individual building elements do not have to have a singular designation (e.g. kitchen or lounge) they accommodate various programmes and uses. In this instance the building is

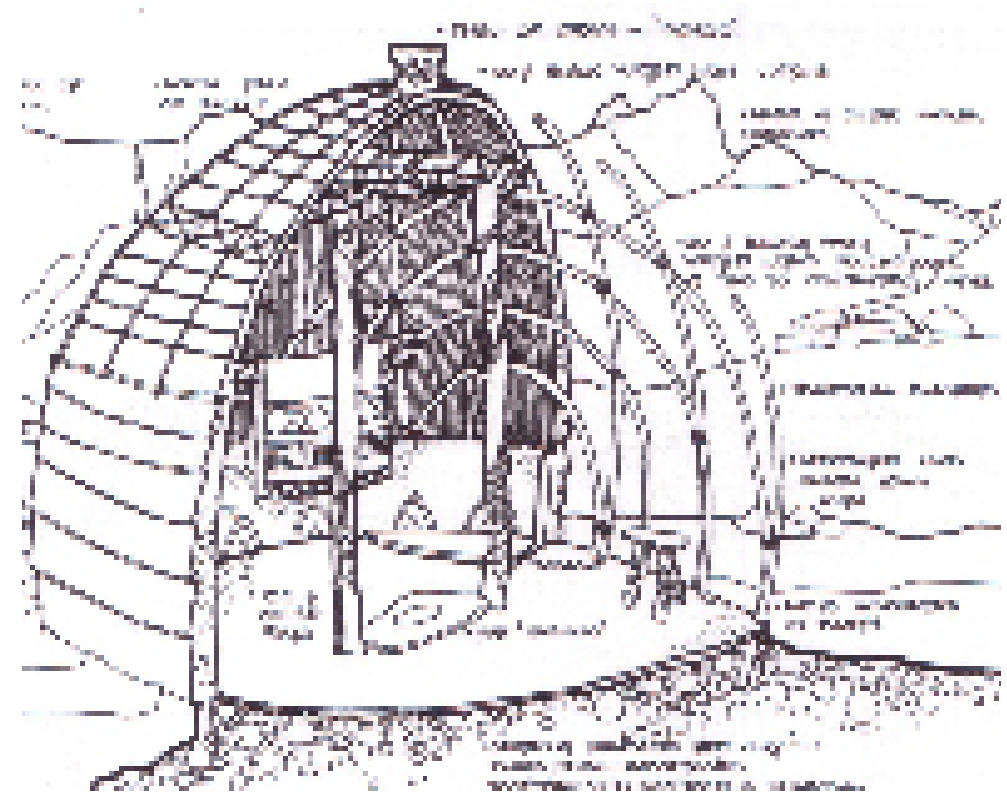


fig 6.05 diagram showing ritual space in Zulu Kraal (Marshcall 200:175)

more than a field open to user interpretation it is adaptable and is designed to facilitate the varied use of space.

In this similar manner the building elements of the proposed ritual centre facilitate various uses. The park spaces facilitate everyday recreation, sport, art and social interactions, but are transformed into processional routes on ritual days while grand staircases become spectator seating.

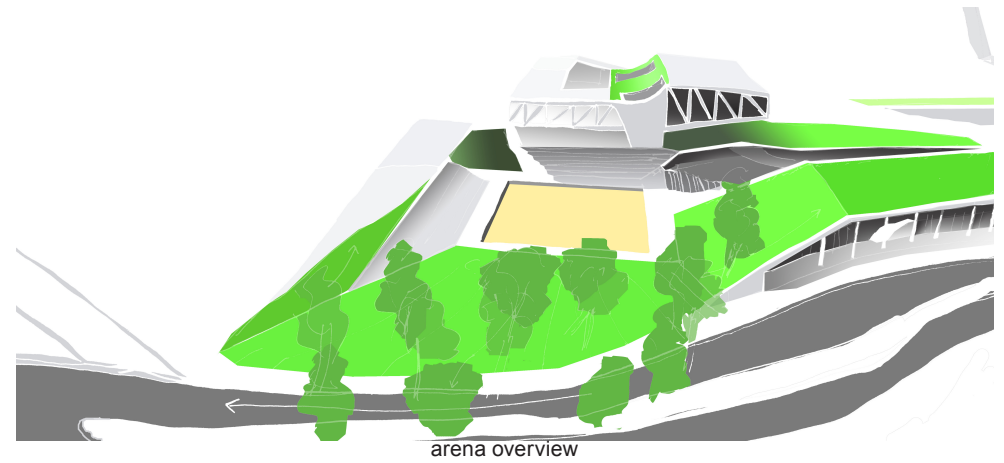
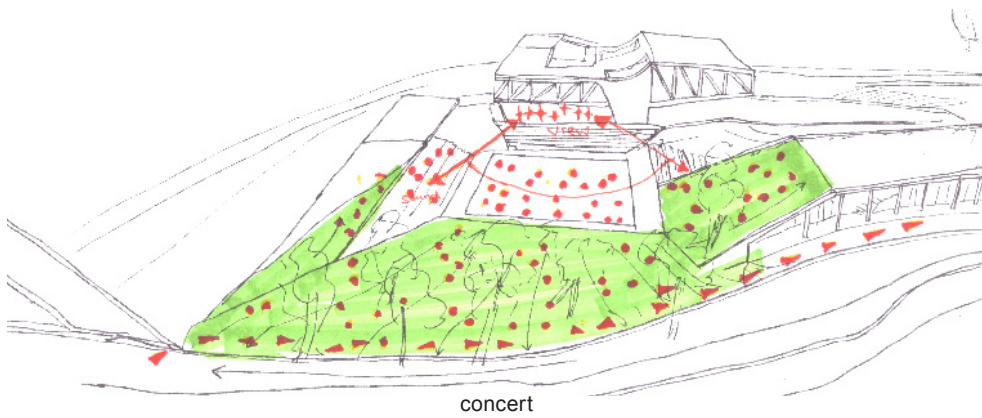
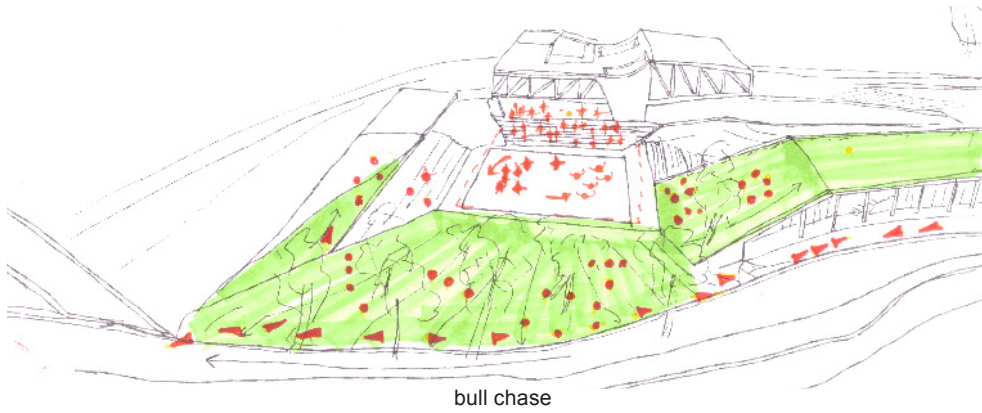
The arena depicted in fig 6.06 is primarily an arena for the Zulu ceremony described earlier in the previous chapter. The chase requires a soft ground surface to slow the cattle down, as well as to minimize the risk of injuries, both to people and cattle. To cater for this functional requirement, a deep soft sand pit forms a ring in the centre of the arena. On ordinary days this ritual space becomes a sand pit for children, a beach volleyball or soccer field or just a place to relax in the city. This arena could also be used for formal and informal outdoor performances in the various configurations shown in fig 6.06.

The concept of reconfigurable and reconstitutable space, is evident throughout the design of the ritual centre. The main function space can be divided into two theatres each with a back stage. The back stage is convertible into bridal change rooms, family negotiation spaces and funeral sleeping quarters as dictated by the function.

The outdoor space depicted as the amphitheatre in the sections could be used for church services during a funeral or wedding. The sacrificial altar is reconstitutable into a pulpit for the preacher, it is the water feature that washes sacrificial blood away as well as an evaporative cooling device.

The layering of meaning and uses, pluralises the identity of the emergent architecture, which becomes attributable to both dominant and subjugated discourses. This inclusion of black architectural discourse not only enriches the design, but allows the reflection of black rationale (discourse) in the built environment while facilitating the cultural practices of these formerly marginalised people. Through this facilitation and reflection, the goal of achieving a more inclusive built environment is achieved.

The use of electronic screens and graffiti walls on the building facades enhances the notion of a transformable building. The images on the screens and the walls are changeable, this adaptable aesthetic or form facilitates varied for varied use and interpretations of the space. The building is then easily transformed from a fan park to a digital art exhibition.



-  participants
-  cattle
-  pedestrian traffic
-  spectators

legend

fig 6.06 multi function arena (author)

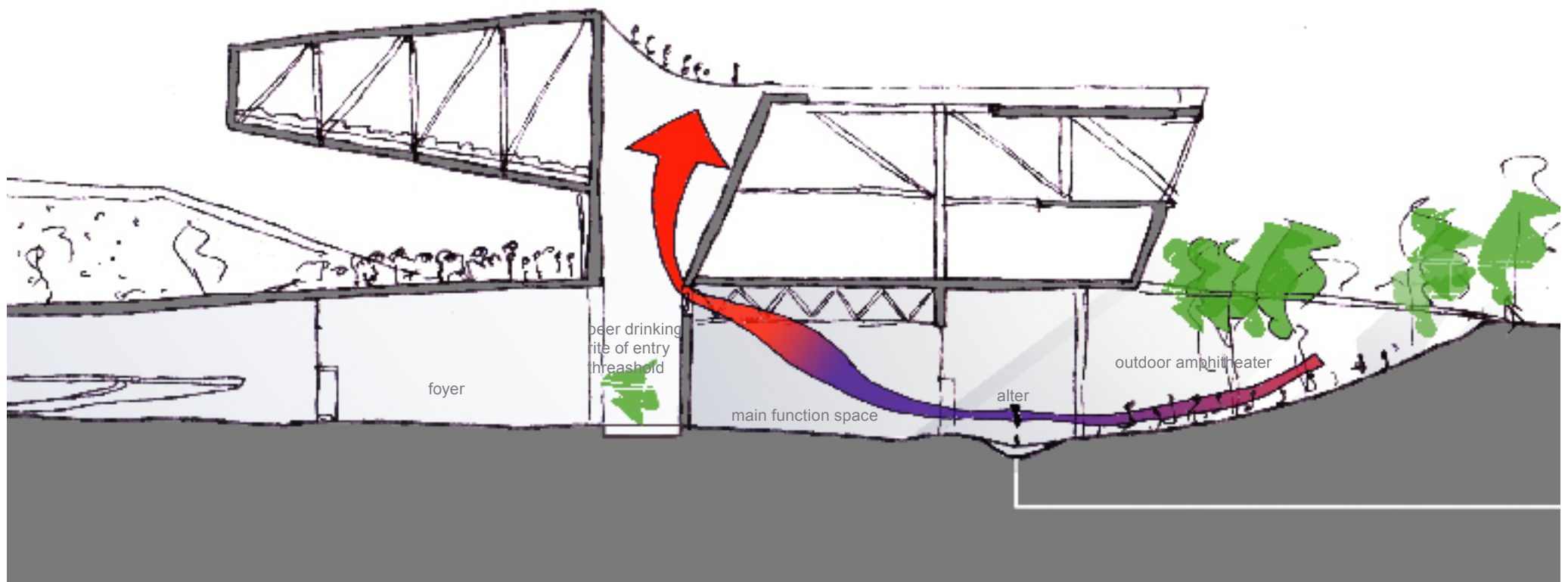


fig 6.07 amphitheater and main function spaces (author)

the vastness

An investigation into the tree used as a symbol of the constitutional court uncovers yet another black discourse. It is an accurate observation that a lot of gatherings in black tradition take place under a tree. A practitioner could abstract the tree and create a building that evokes the image of a tree. This evocation of “tree” imagery would be associated with black practices, which is laudable as an attempt to include those previously marginalised in architectural representation. However that type of dialogue would only be an engagement with the “resultant form” of a black discourse and not the underlying reasoning (discourse), behind the “form”. The use of trees as gathering spaces is attributable to a combination of various reasons. It could be argued that intent to inhabit the vastness (as opposed to enclosure) in conjunction with climate considerations are the underlying rationales behind the extensive use of outdoor space.

Architectural discourse is dominated by the desire to enclose space and to scale the surrounding environment according to human proportions. A different attitude is displayed in the subjugated discourse in question. The tree merely provides shade but man inhabits the vastness of his surroundings. Fig 6.08 shows a traditional black court proceeding. In this image the tree sits squarely in the public domain that forms in between houses. There is a sense of openness and transparency in this court. There is no boundary around the men, making the court accessible to those walking from one house to the next.

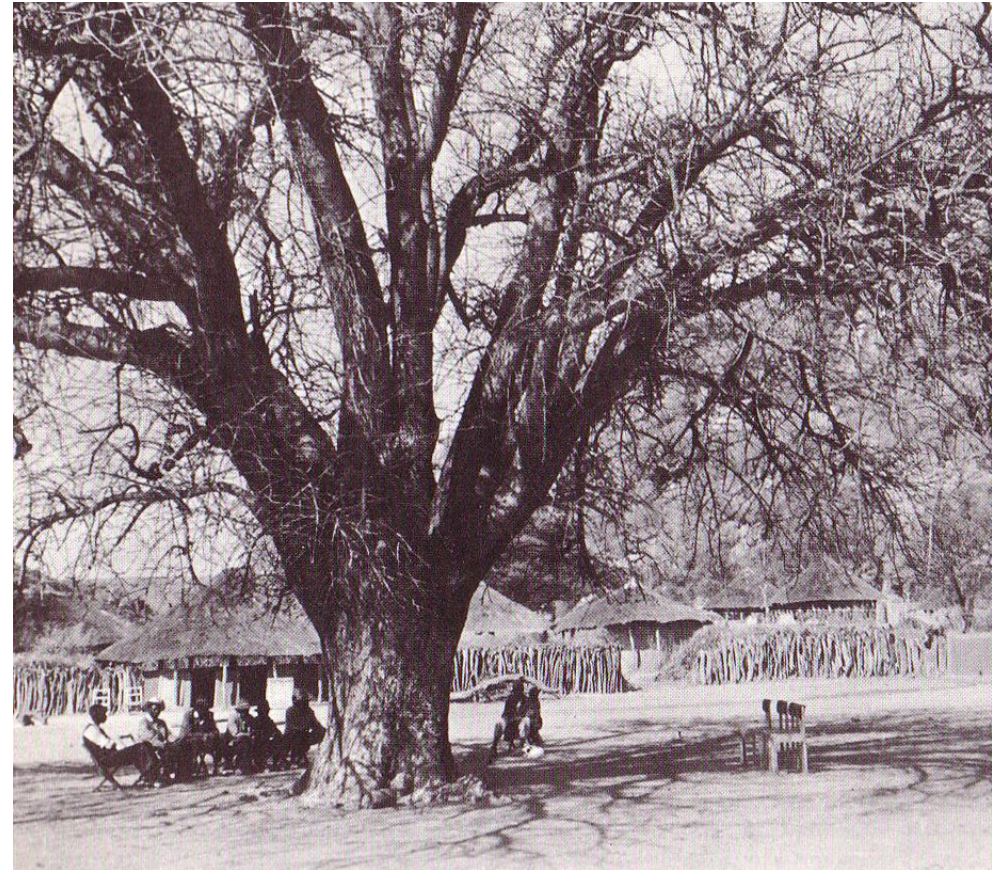


fig 6.08 tree court (Krige 1981:175)

Although the photograph of the traditional court and the artistic depiction of the court in fig6.09 appear to be the same, a closer look reveals a form of architectural hybridity. The artistic image depicts what appears to be a built enclosure around the bottom of the tree, which would not traditionally be done. This enclosure does not protect from weather, it is too low to create privacy and it could not possibly protect against intruders. It can be argued that the wall is the result of the artists subconscious desire to create enclosure, despite it not being customary in this type of outdoor gathering. In this image the artist synthesizes two opposing discourses, a need for a sense of enclosure and the desire for openness. In this regard the processes of unconscious hybridity are displayed in the content of his work.

In most parts of Southern Africa, the climate generally stays within the comfort zone, minimizing the need to build protection from the elements (especially during the day). In the colder climates of western world, which dominate our architectural discourse; it is necessary to enclose space, making it easier to modify the internal environment to attain comfort levels. The enclosed space then becomes a necessary shelter from the harsh climatic conditions. In most climatic regions of South Africa, there is often an inversion of this relationship. It is not uncommon, to find people leaving the cold shade of our poorly insulated buildings, to bask in the warmth of the winter sun outside. Conversely it is common, to find a teacher and his pupils, escaping the excessive heat of the class room to learn in the shade of a tree outdoors. Highlighting the fact that dominant discourse encourages us to build; and to build in a certain manner, which might not be appropriate in

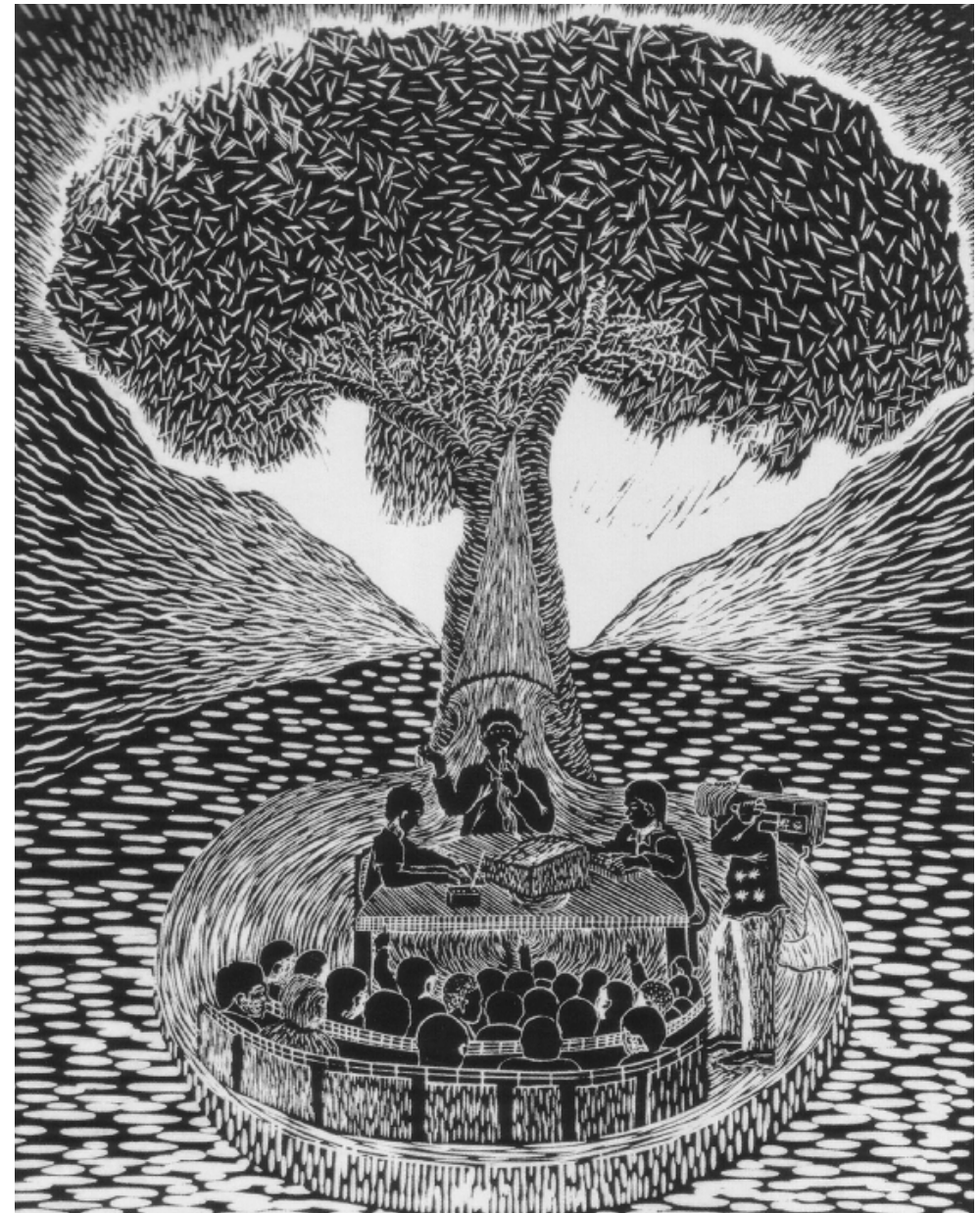


fig 6.09 hybrid tree (Makin 2006:60)

local climatic conditions. It can be argued that climatic conditions in South Africa favour the use of outdoor space, more than they do in the western world. Our buildings should therefore reflect this specific climatic condition through more meaningful programming of outdoor and semi outdoor spaces. The architectural movement called critical regionalism addresses the issues of climate specificities, however regionalism is not the focus of this thesis and therefore falls outside the scope of study.

With reference to the constitutional court design; it is evident that the sense of loyalty to the hybrid artistic impression of what the constitutional court should be, resulted in the abstraction of the tree. More profoundly however, it resulted in an architectural discursive hybridity similar to the content of the artists image. The architects conscious endeavour to produce the hybrid space depicted by the artist is most evident in the foyer. According to Makin (2006) the foyer offers a degree of shade and shelter while connecting the outside with the inside. This foyer is essentially conceived as a covered outdoor space with sliding glass walls on all sides that open up to enhance the connection with the outdoors. The high ceilings reduce the sense of enclosure and the internal use of face brick and off shutter concrete which are traditionally external materials enhances the sensation of being outdoors. This sublime foyer blurs the boundaries between the notion of enclosed space and open space, the outcome is a hybrid space similar to the artists depiction. This space is a covered open space that is neither indoors nor outdoors but both simultaneously; it is the ultimate syncretic expression.



fig 6.10 Constitutional Court, Hillbrow Johannesburg (Makin 2006)

In his description of the court, Makin (2006:50) refers to the foyer in the following manner “an enclosure and a clearing, a clearly defined space and a limitless, edge-less ethereal one.” It does not make sense to describe a building using dialectically opposed terms, nonetheless, the architect is forced to, because there are no singular terms in the language of dominant discourse to describe what he has achieved. It is a hybrid space which speaks both within and beyond the bounds of dominant discourse. This is an architectural example of what Bhabha (1994:114) refers to when he says that a subjugated discourse can enter a dominant discourse and “estrangle the basis of its authority.”

In the design of the Inner City Ritual Centre the same type of hybridity manifests itself in the extensive programming of outdoor space which takes advantage of our specific climatic conditions. There is a conscious attempt to blend the outdoors and the indoors. Transitions from outdoor to indoor spaces are gradual. Indoor spaces open out on to the outdoors, incorporating both spaces into the programme. When outdoor space is covered, the scale of it is vast. Diminishing the sense of enclosure which is an embrace of the vastness of outdoor space. This building defines space as limitless yet bound. Some enclosed spaces open to the sky and “funnel like” elements as shown in fig 6.07 permit natural sun light into the building and give a view of the star lit skies at night, bringing the outdoors into the interior domain. Integrating planting on the inside further blurs the boundaries between indoors and outdoors.



fig 6.11 sketch perspective showing indoor-outdoor spaces (author)

In this discursive dialogue an investigation into the rationale behind the use of trees, has led to a hybrid conceptualisation of space, which includes marginalised discourse. It is important to note that while it is valid to translate the imagery of the “tree” it is important to analyse the principles and to avoid uncritical mimicry of “black” forms. According to Marshall translation in architecture “often focuses on recognized imagery of familiar forms of traditional architecture and well known historical monuments” (2000:167). Such an approach carries the danger of lapsing into “banal clichés devoid of authenticity and meaning.” (Marshall 2000:167)

inhabit, refine and deform land

Fig 6.12 shows a traditional Tswana house, the ground plane is not horizontal as dominant architectural rational would prescribe. The “floor” is a morphing plane that is deformed and moulded like a landscape. Fig 6.12 shows the Great Zimbabwe Ruins hill complex, the building takes advantage of the natural landscape, refining it, to make it more habitable in places. It is a secret building almost indistinguishable from the natural landscape. The images are exhibited as evidence of a black architectural discourse which falls outside the realm of dominant architectural discourse. An influential architectural commentator, Betsky describes an architectural understanding that has spread throughout the world through the development of the beaux arts. The discourse asserts that buildings should “organize themselves according to geometric division of spatial cells, with hierarchical importance given to central functions,” (Betsky 2006:98) the outside face of the building was then an “inflection of this arrangement” (Betsky 2006:99). Betsky goes on to state that modernism modified this system by arguing for “broken or fractured organizations and facades that where purposefully off centre or blank” (Betsky 2006:98). Both these movements lead to the entrenchment of the idea that buildings should always have facades, be centred, have main axes and instantly legible (Betsky 2006). However images of the Tswana house and the great Zimbabwe ruins, there is evidence of an understanding of architecture that is complex has no façade to speak off, revolves around multiple centres and is not instantly legible.

The ubiquitous modernist discourse perceives the building as a discreet entity which often floats above a neutral landscape. The building is not nature, it is not the landscape, it is not the earth. The building is man-made and ac-



fig 6.12 Tswana house (Chipkin 1993:3)



fig 6.13 Great Zimbabwe (author)

cording to modernist ideology man through technology can conquer nature. Industry and technology have given architects the “man made materials” steel, concrete and glass. The modern master Le Corbusier spoke in his rhetoric about the use of “natural light and greenery” (Silverman 2007) in the built environment, yet it was always perceived as being an opposition to the man made. In modernist discourse both man and his materials are not considered a part of nature. This premise is fundamentally flawed because both man and all materials are from nature. Man who is a part of nature only modifies and refines nature, to “create” what is referred to as “the man made.” Modernist architecture imposed a sense of “rationality” and “simple” man made “order” on the seemingly chaotic natural world. At the Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe ruins the antithesis of this modernist view on land and nature is displayed. The buildings and nature are inextricably linked and similarly to the natural world they are complexly ordered and non geometric. The boundaries between what is “man-made and natural are ambiguous. This architecture inhabits, refines and creates landscape for the purposes of habitation, it unfolds the land.

According to Betsky (2002:8). contemporary philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jacques Derrida and Jean Lyotard argue that architects should “unfold the land” “Instead of seeing buildings as autonomous appearances on the land, they should understand them as part of the land that happens to coalesce and congeal into a solid structure.” (Betsky 2002:8). Betsky reveals an emergent undercurrent of contemporary western architects who are beginning to view architecture in a similar manner



fig 6.14 Water Pavilion, Netherlands, NOX (Betsky 2002:43)

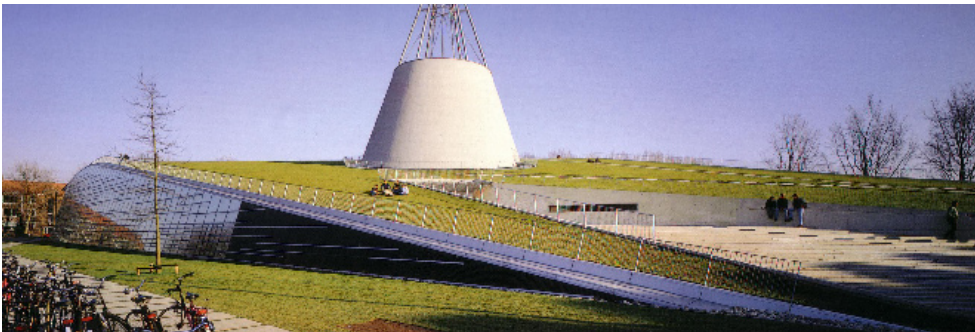


fig 6.15 Central Library, Netherlands, Mecanoo (Betsky 2002:109)



fig 6.16 Diamond Ranch High School, California, Morphosis (Betsky 2002:3)

to the black discourse which seeks to inhabit, refine and create landscapes for habitation. The images show in fig 6.14 to fig 6.16 illustrate how this discourse has been applied by contemporary architects, whose work is not derived from black discourse but from the writings of philosophers mentioned earlier. The use of this discourse in the Ritual Centre is attributable to both the subjugated black and the emergent western discourse, which serves to pluralise the identity of the emergent architectural response.

The inner-city ritual centre as illustrated later in the chapter, is conceived as an immense landscape that folds over itself to create covered spaces. The tilted planes facilitate the seamless vertical movement of ceremonial processions to access the ritual spaces which have to be vertically stacked for reasons of economy and urban densities.

The natural bowl in the land, highlighted by the dotted line in fig 6.17, is refined to form the arena. The two main ceremonial ramps are conceived as new land forms moulded into the site, with the parking tucked underneath them. The main ritual space is partially submerged and from the square one descends down the ramp into the bowels of the earth. Expecting to find a dark cave one is pleasantly surprised to discover the funnel like skylights that reflect light into foyer. The outdoor seating and animal access to the main ritual space is carved out of the land, allowing for natural ventilation and lighting as shown in fig 6.07. Part of the landscape is formed by large scale stairways that provide access between levels. These stairs double as audience seating creating valuable public space within the city. The incor-

poration of planted planes makes nature an architectural element and not a mere backdrop or stage set for the building. The building has become a curious combination of landscape and building.

This building synthesizes landscape and building; it is flat in some areas and tilted in others. In some areas it merges with the landscape in others it floats above it like modernist buildings. This combination between a modern building and a landscape architecture enables the expression of marginalised discourse within the inner-city built environment.

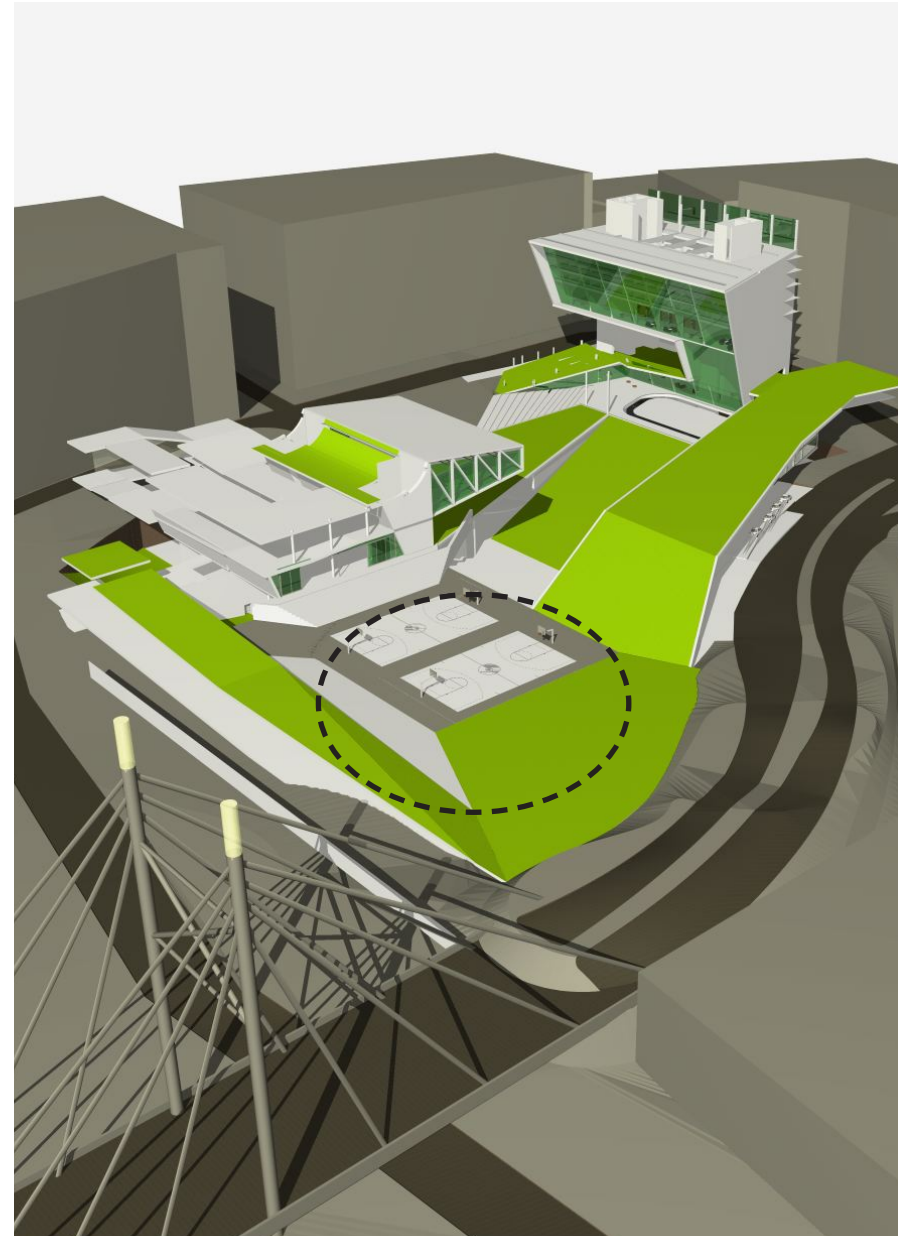


fig 6.17 sketch showing refinement of natural bowl in the land (author)

ornament or media

The resort to decoration is often the first inclination for architects wanting to present an “African” image, where the term African refers to black rather than a geographical location. In his critique of contemporary South African buildings Noble makes the following assertion “Facades are commonly thickened with decorative motifs that open a dialogue with multiple narratives, spanning across different time scales, from pre to post-colonial times.” (2008:2) According to Noble the application of these African looking motifs to conventional western style buildings “allows or at least attempts to allow, for new dialogues, both actual and imaginative, across divided subject positions: black/white,/black, both, neither, and in-between” (2008:3). Modernist architectural discourse forbids the use of decoration and ornamentation in design, advocating functionality, rationality and structural honesty in buildings. Adolf Loos a key modernist architect and theorist asserts that “ornament is crime” (Noble 2008:5) and that decoration is the way of the conquered degenerate subjects, which in this case refers to black people (Noble 2008). According to Noble (2008:5) “in Loos’ discourse, the savage and the degenerate stand in a relation of ‘otherness’ to the privileged status of the modern rational subject – the savage is a subjugated subject vis-à-vis the modernist ban on decorative practice in design. Indeed, theoretical support for the ‘modern’ has commonly relied upon pejorative notions of the pre-modern, just as the colonial has tended to silence histories of the pre-colonial.”

While not offering an opinion on the acceptability of decoration on buildings, this paper contests the widely held perception that the motifs on

traditional black buildings were merely decoration or ornamentation. Prima facie, these elements seem to be mere decoration but a closer inspection reveals that they are usually a system of abstracted symbols or they serve other utilitarian purposes. Originally, Ndebele murals such as the one depicted in earlier chapters, were intended as a method of communication as well as being decorative. This makes Loos doubly wrong, firstly in his wrongful assumption that otherness is savage and secondly in discarding these motifs on the wrongful basis that they serve no functional utilitarian purpose. Anthropologists have known for many years that the so called decorative beads on traditional black women as shown in fig 6.18, serve the purpose of signifying the status of the person in society. Colours and patterns form an abstract language that is legible to members of the society but concealed to outsiders. Similarly in buildings, particularly in Ndebele wall murals the abstract paintings “communicate information about the family’s identity, such as ethnic affiliation and sense of place.” (Bagby 2004:3) Politically, these walls were used as signs in the face of the oppressive apartheid regime of South Africa, as women painted their homes in the colours of the A.N.C. as a disguised display of support for the movement. It can be argued that for people who did not have text in the western sense, the building became the media and the motifs a legible text. The wall murals were repainted and changed often resulting in a media similar to billboards which communicated messages through the text. A similar rationale can be observed in the ancient architecture of the western world. Stories were told through a layer of literal depictions sculpted onto the surface of buildings illustrating, that the buildings of both ancient western tradition and



fig 6.18 communicative ornaments (Krige 1981:8)

black tradition were perceived as a form of mass media. While these motifs have a decorative value, they have a deeper utilitarian purpose which exceeds their artistic value.

Modernist theory makes the assertion that buildings should only communicate their inherent structure. This fallacy has been argued by the post modern theorists, which illustrate that buildings always convey meaning and symbolize something other than themselves. If all buildings intentionally and unintentionally symbolize and communicate something other than themselves, there can be no argument for the purging of communicative motifs on the building.

Besides communication these seemingly decorative elements often serve utilitarian purposes. An example of this would be the protrusions on the Dogon mosques, these motifs are not merely decorative, they serve as scaffolding for the annual resurfacing of the adobe walls.

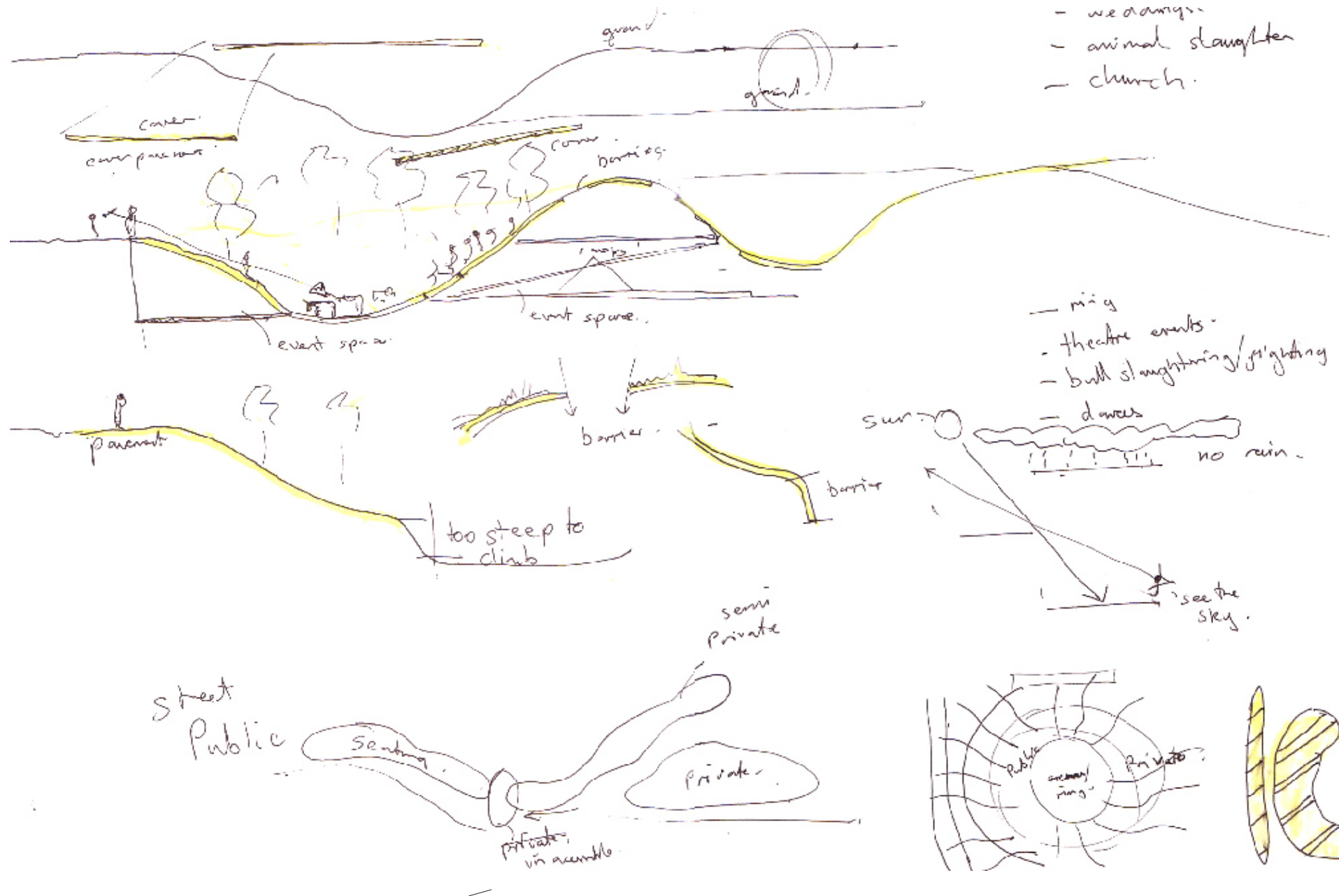
The notion of building as mass media and communication device manifests itself in various forms in the design of the inner-city ritual centre. The integration of screens indicated on the drawings allows technologically mediated communication through the building's surfaces. These screens are perceived as electronic murals giving information on the events taking place, they could convey public addresses and could also be used to expose the realm of digital art. Through the transformability of the message or sign conveyed by the building, the building can communicate varied things

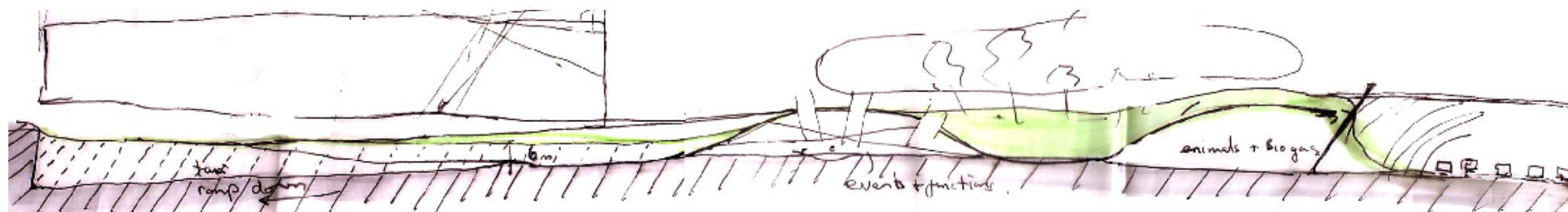
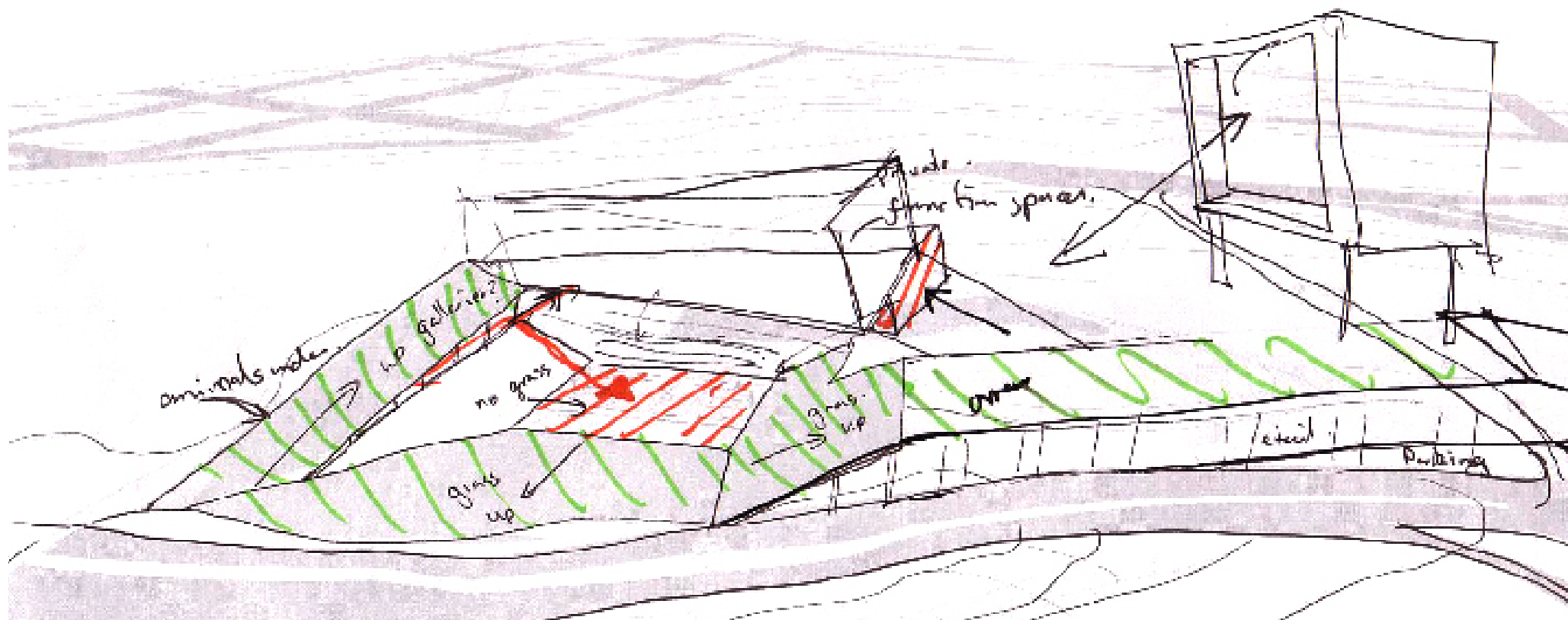
through time.

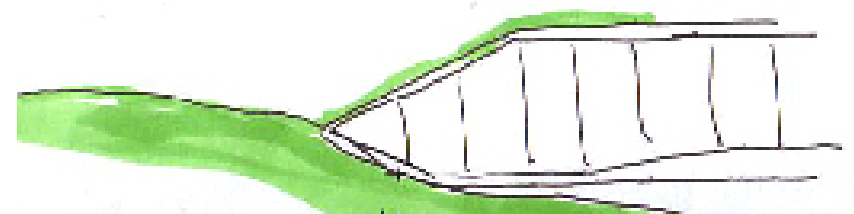
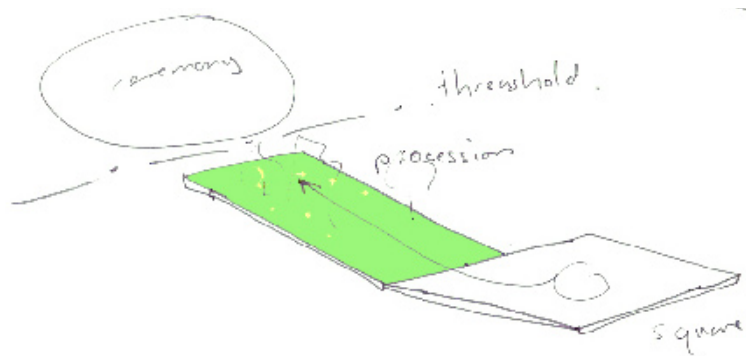
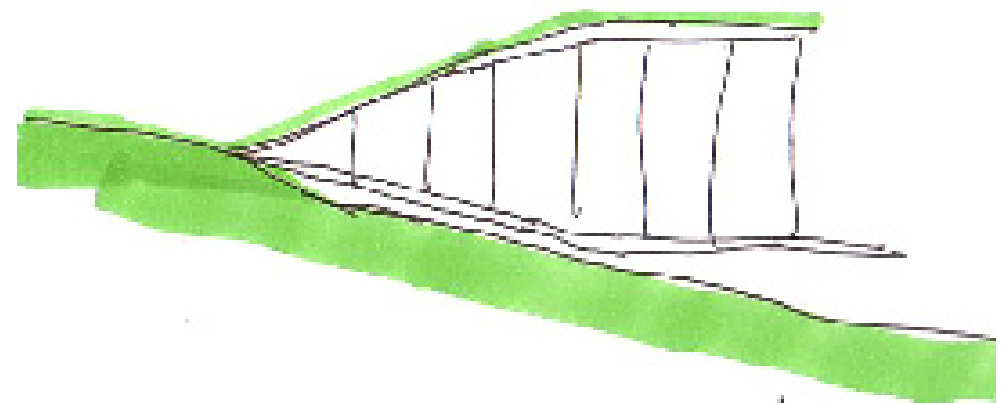
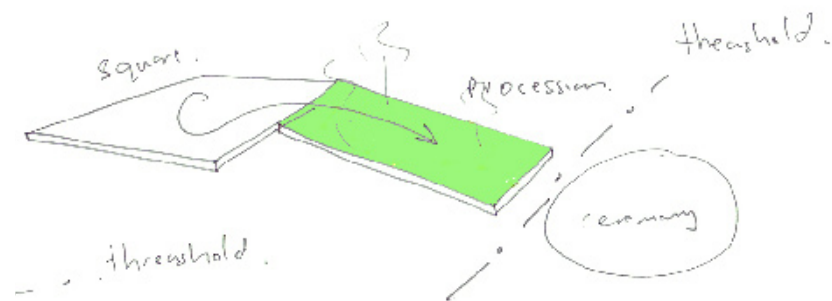
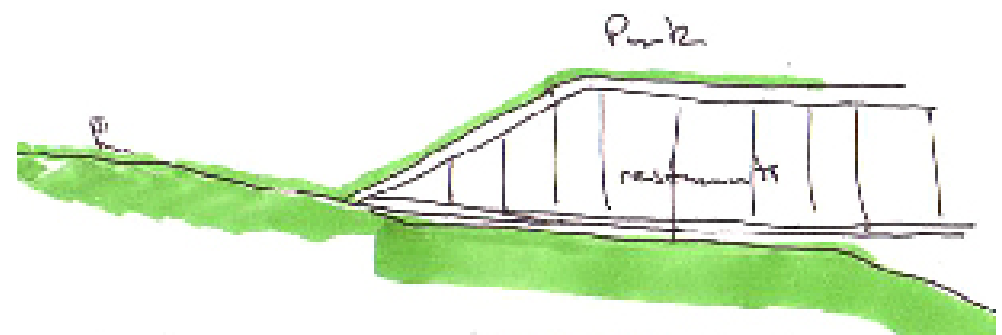
The building becomes the “place making” canvass of graffiti artists. The sections depict a reinterpretation of the Dogon architectural scaffolding system which is intended for use by the graffiti artists, when they paint murals on the walls. The resultant overlaying of the urban signs and symbols of graffiti artists through time, not only gives them a platform to display their art work but it also allows them to affect the aesthetic of their built environment.

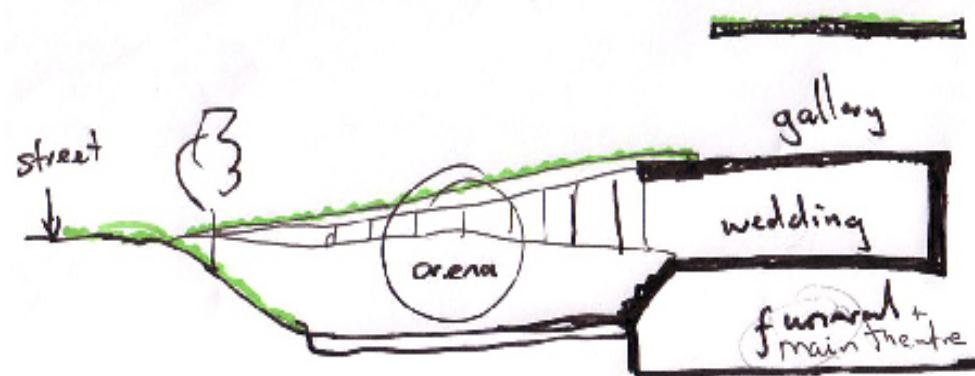
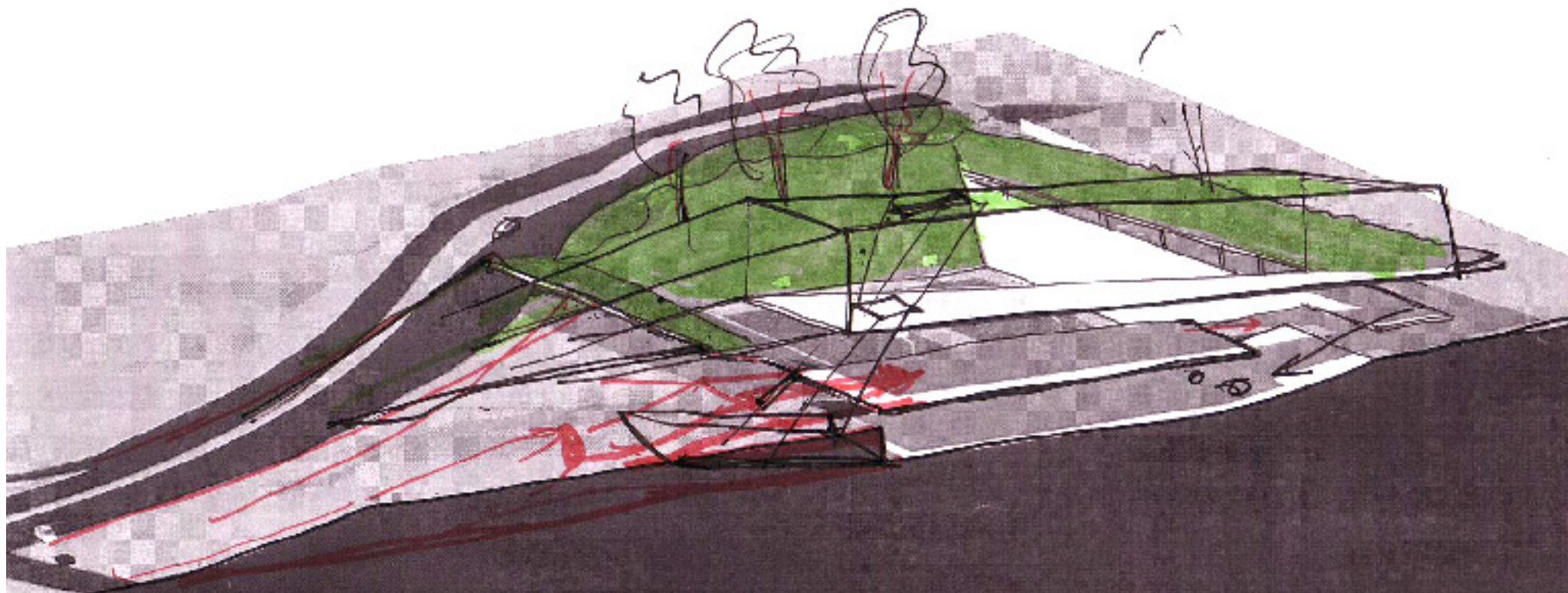
The building does not seek to emulate or evoke historical motifs, instead it translates the underlying logic into a contemporary form. In this instance the building achieves an imperceptible hybridity similar to the type displayed in the Rich house mentioned in earlier chapters.

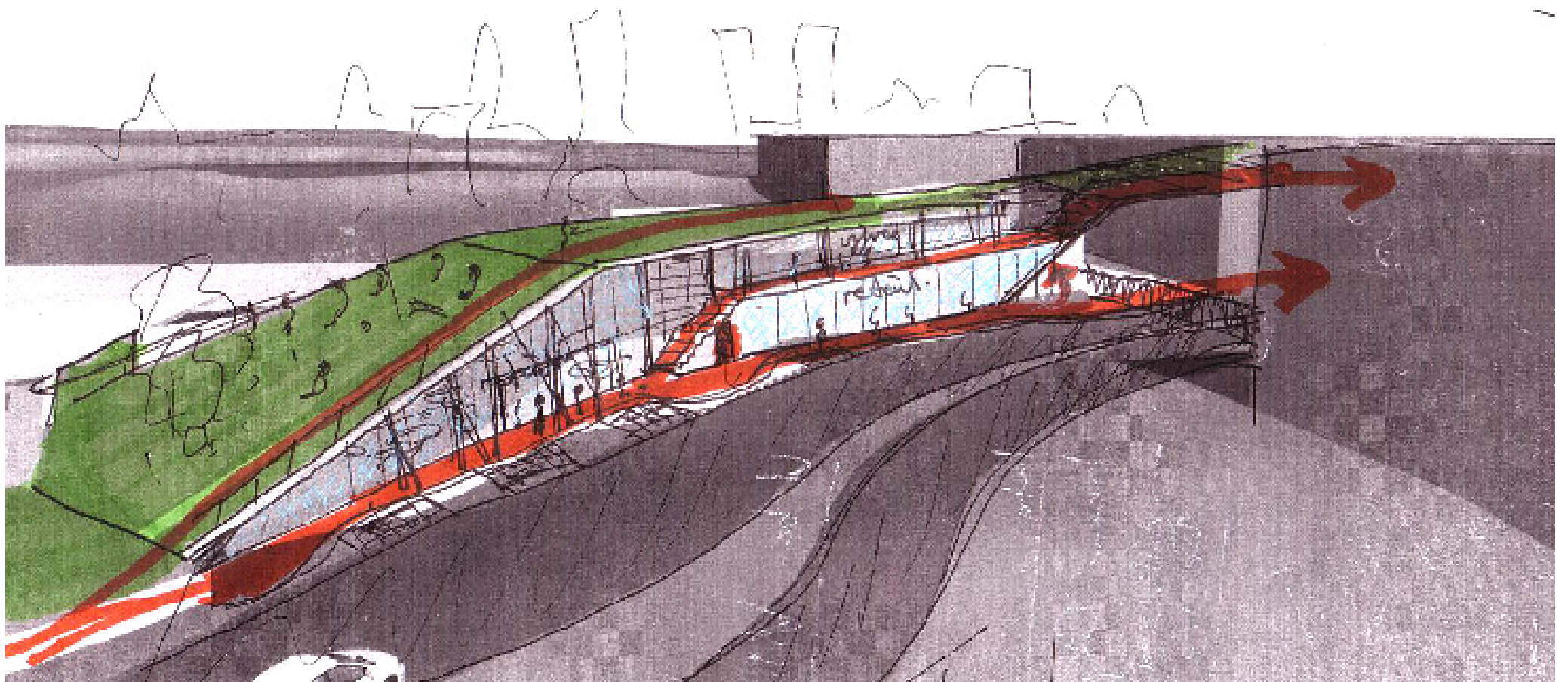
initial sketches

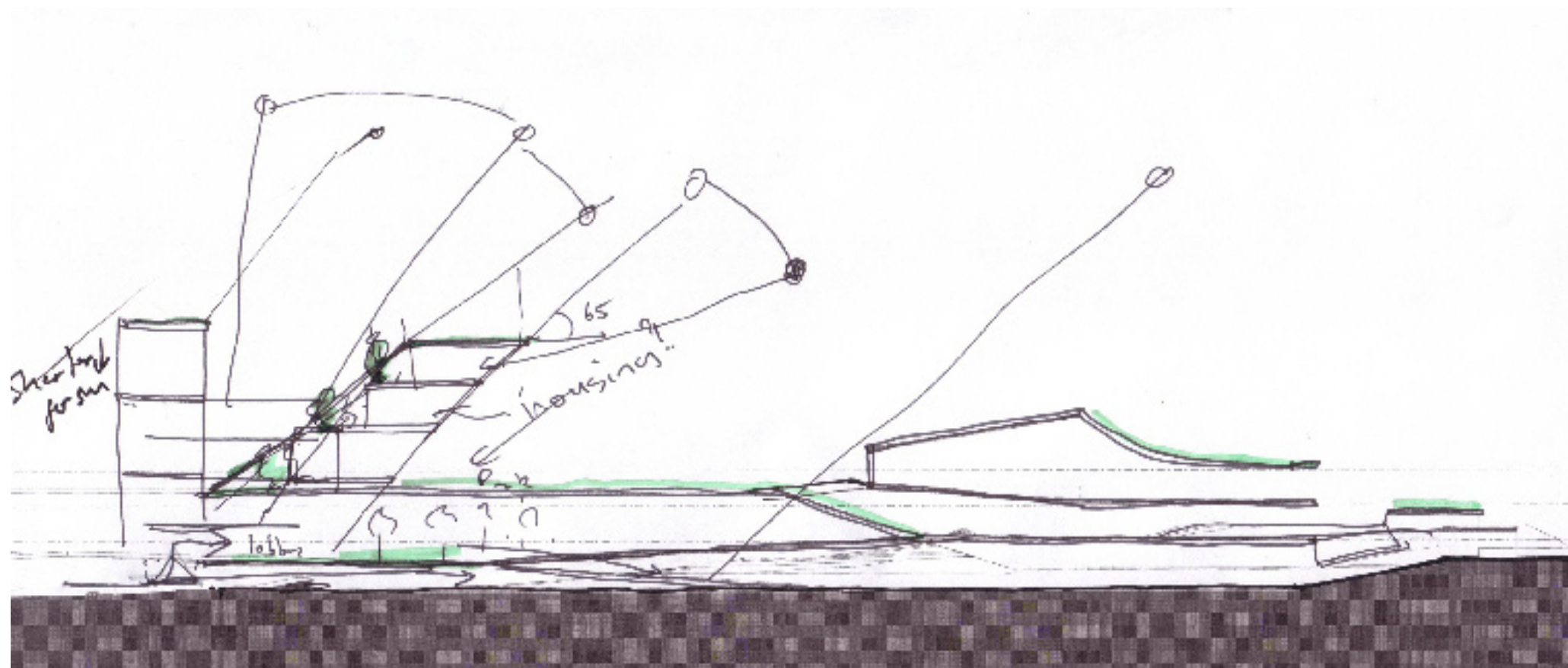


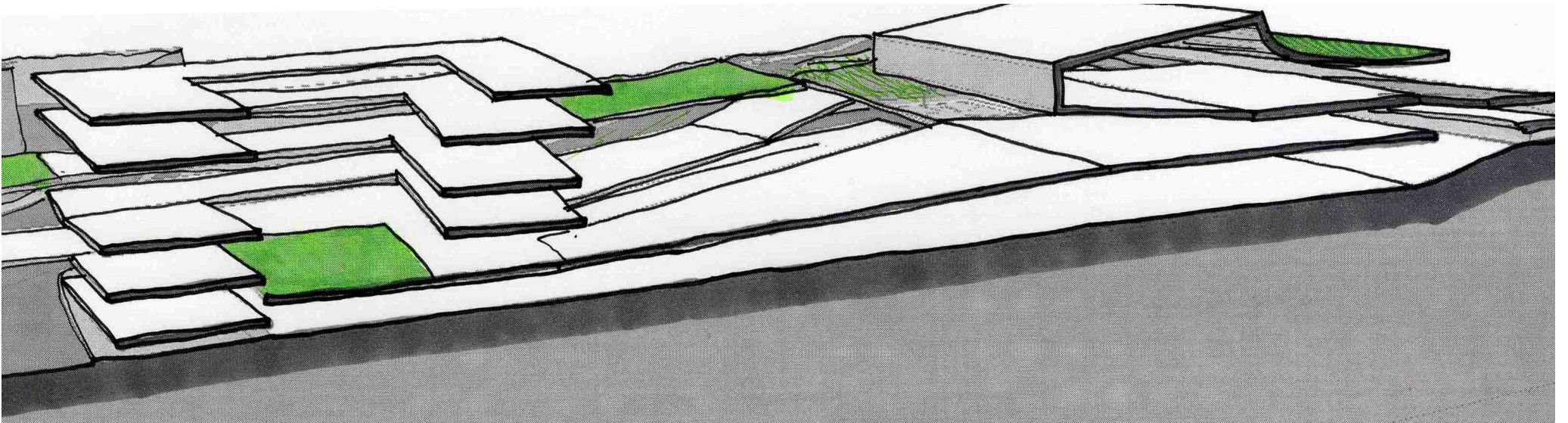


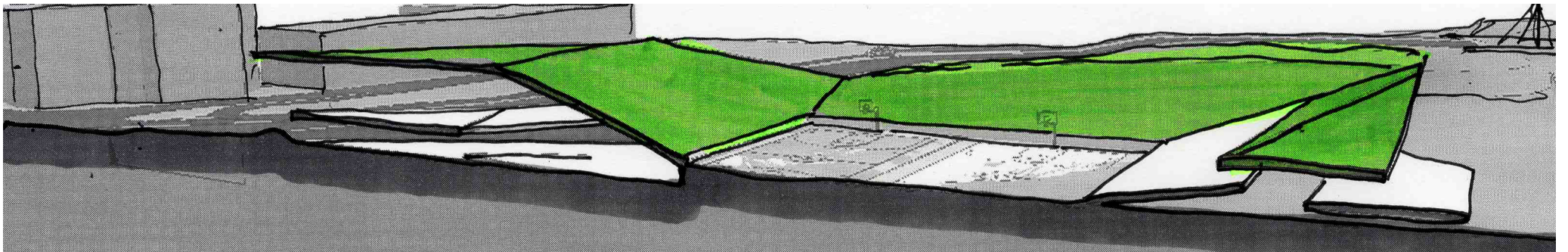


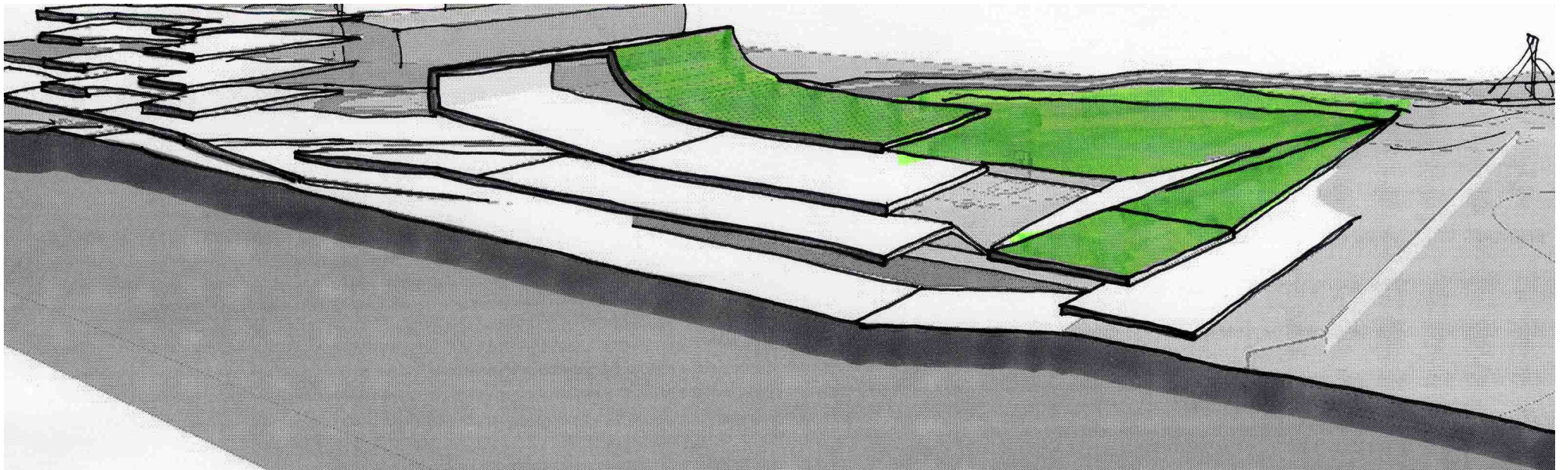


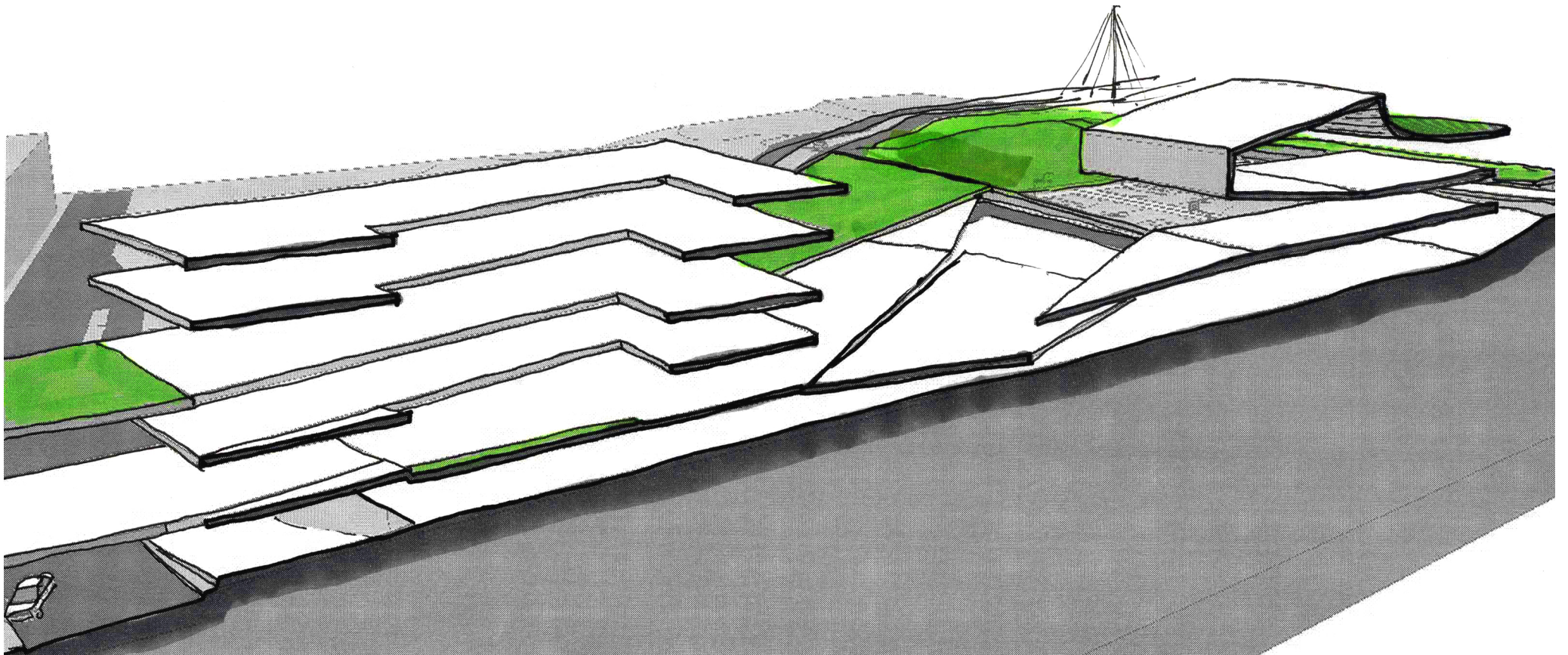


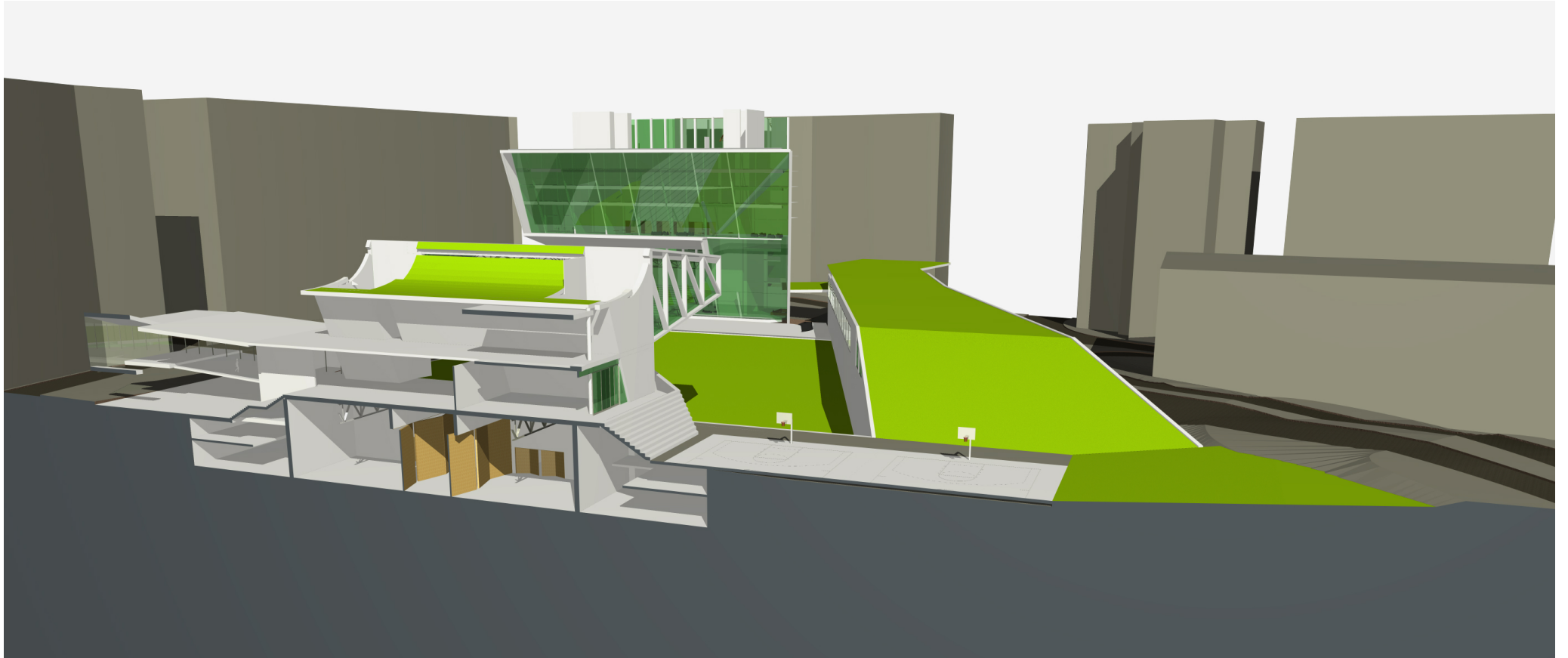




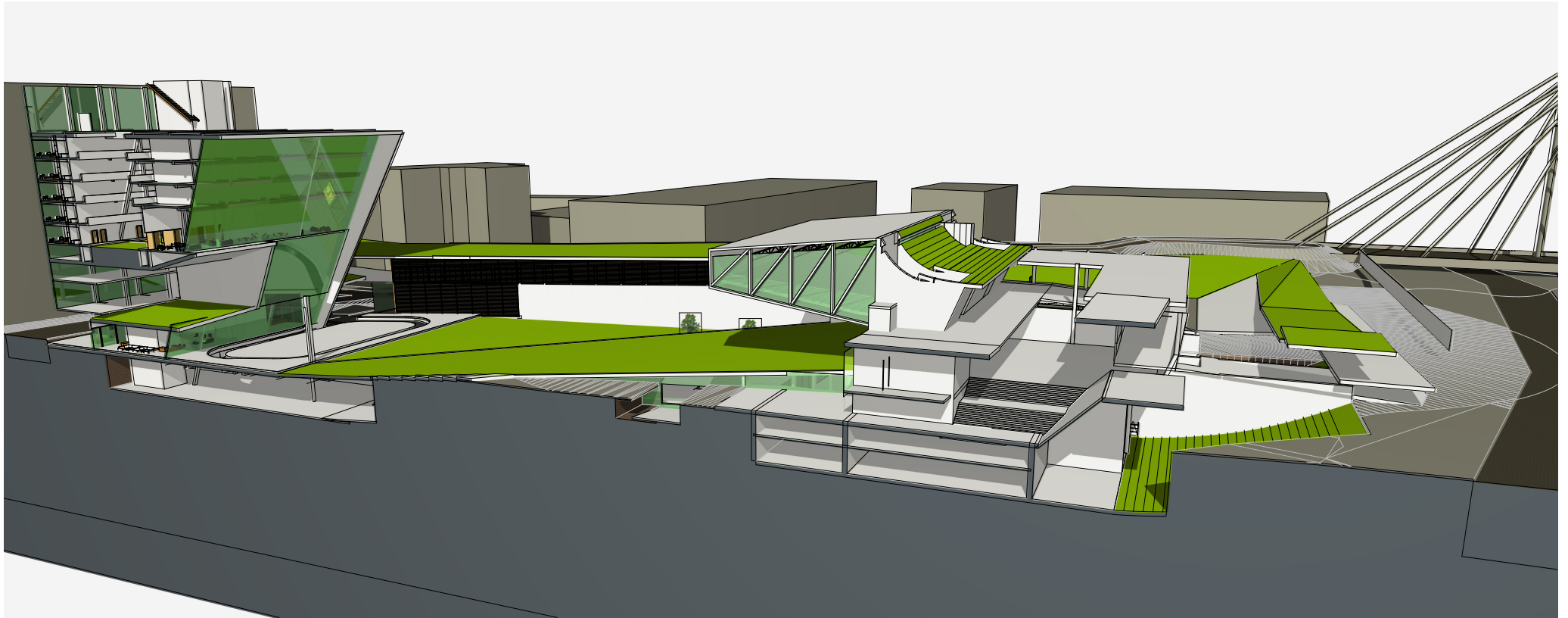


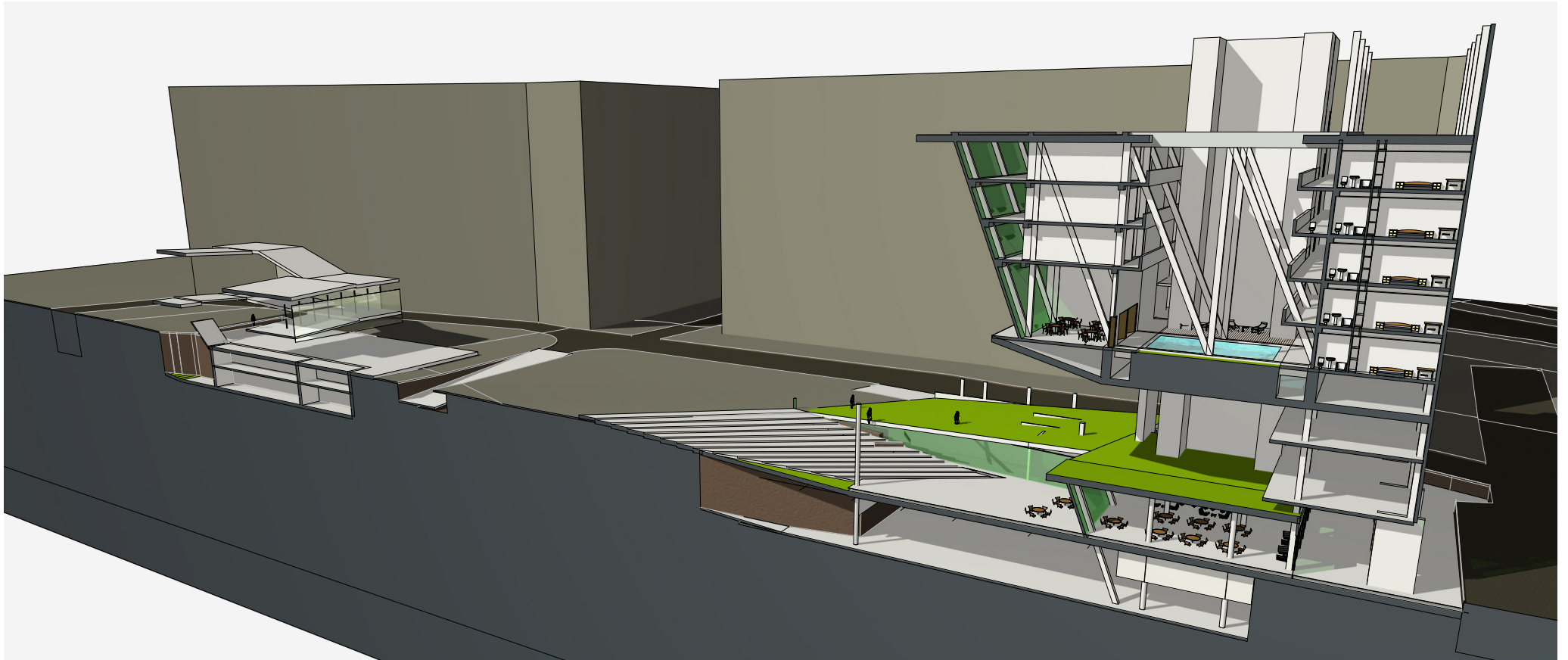


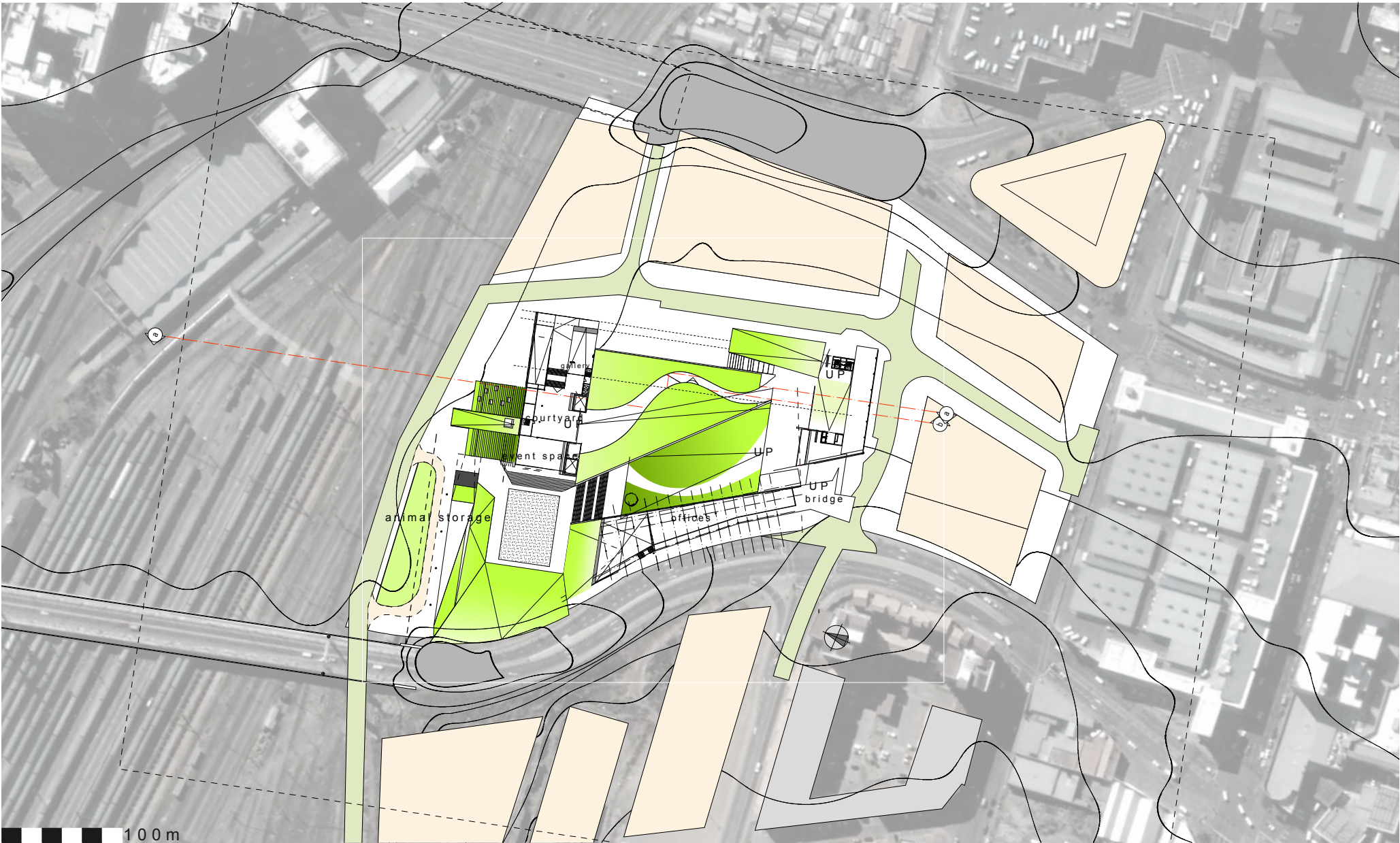


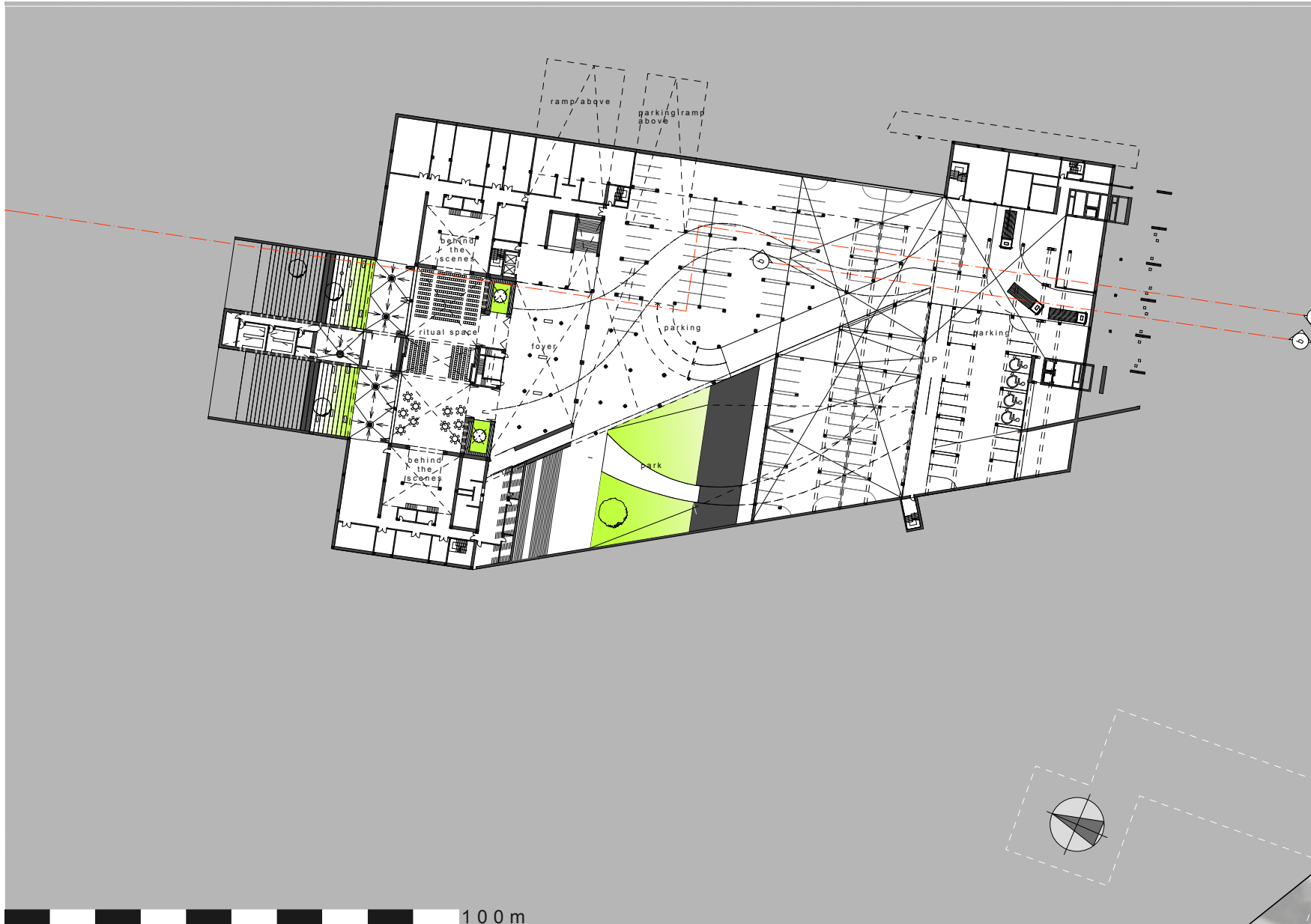




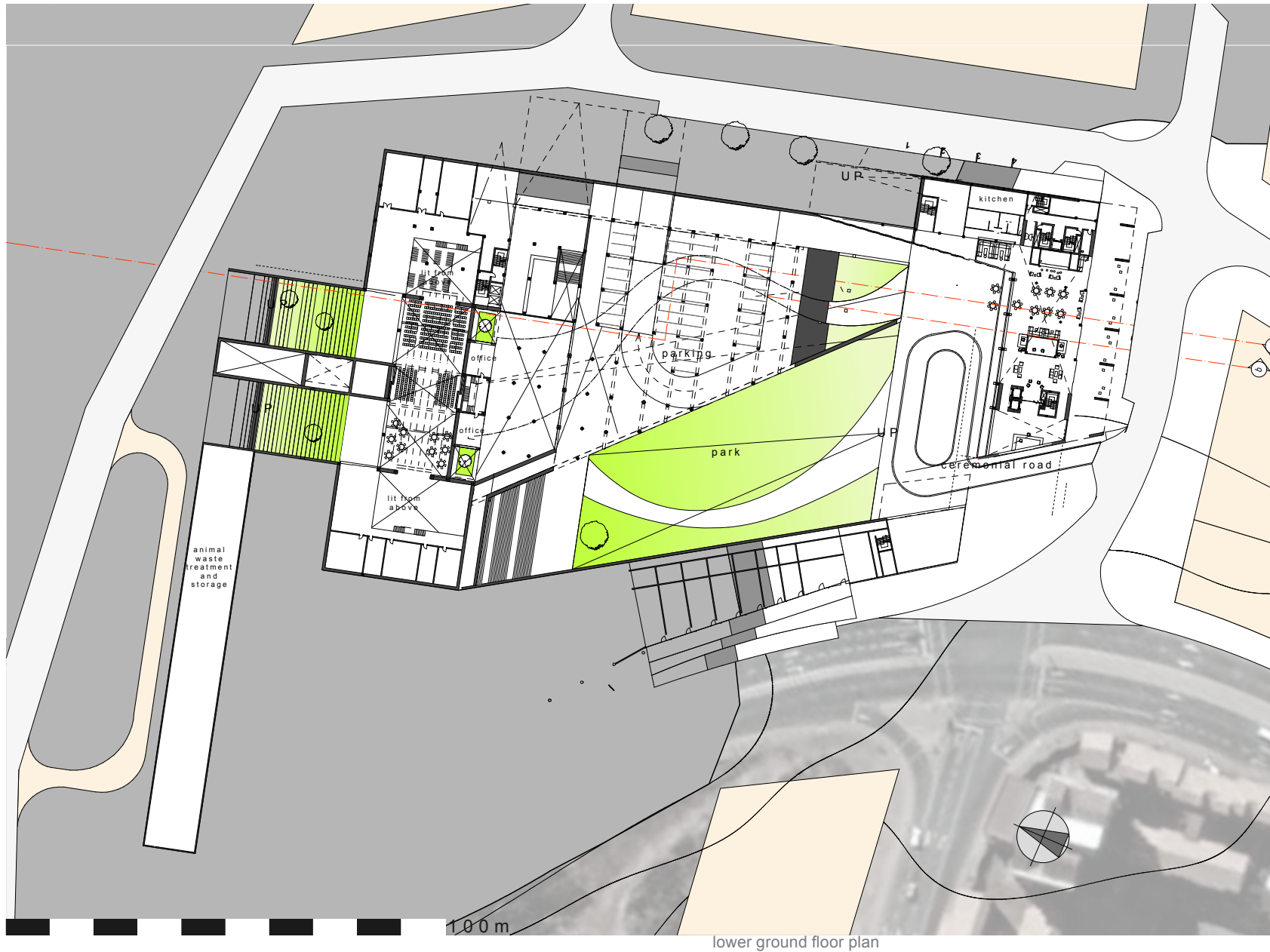




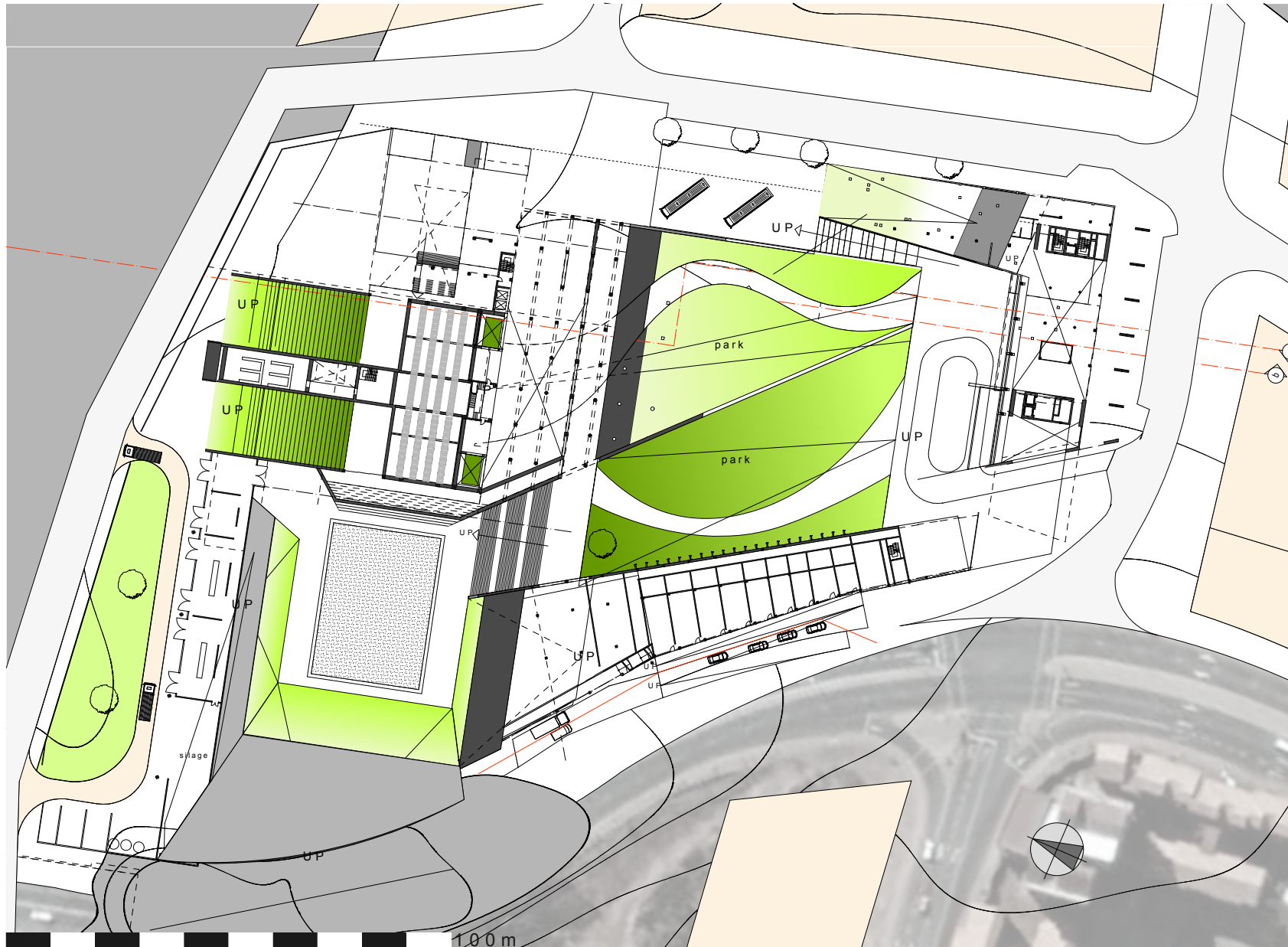




basement plan



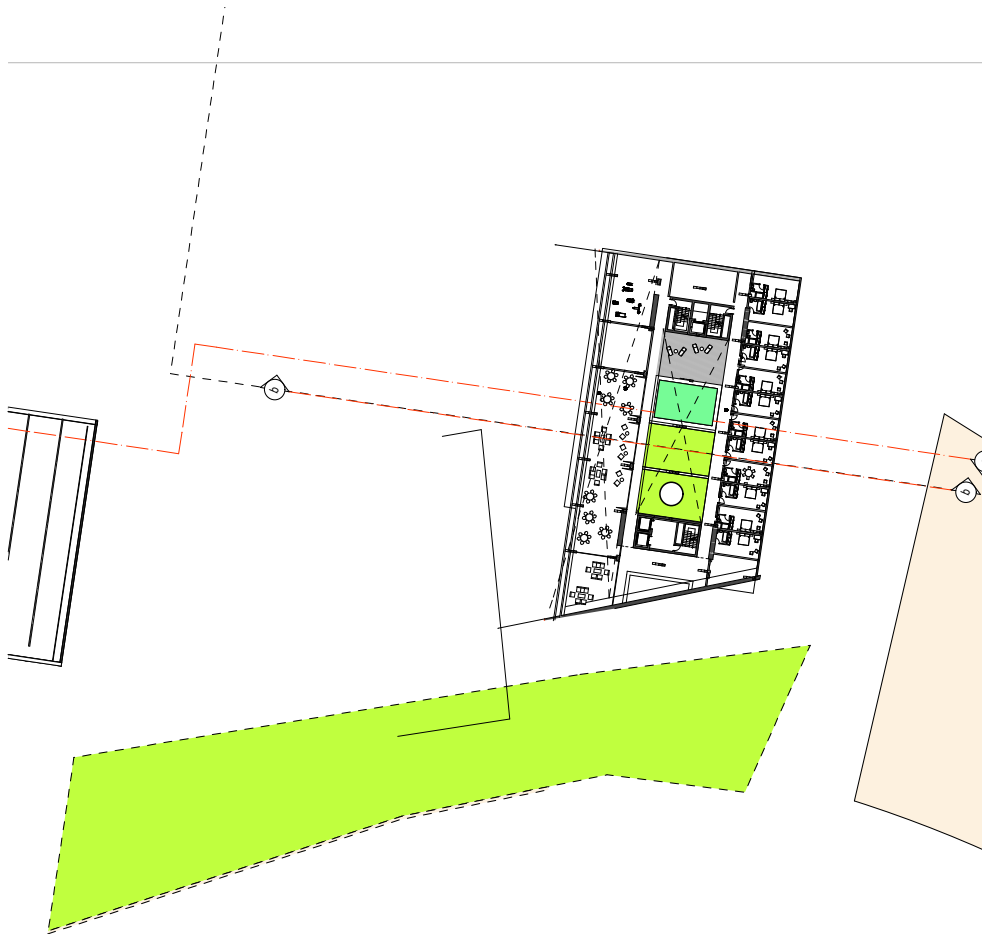
lower ground floor plan



upper ground floor plan



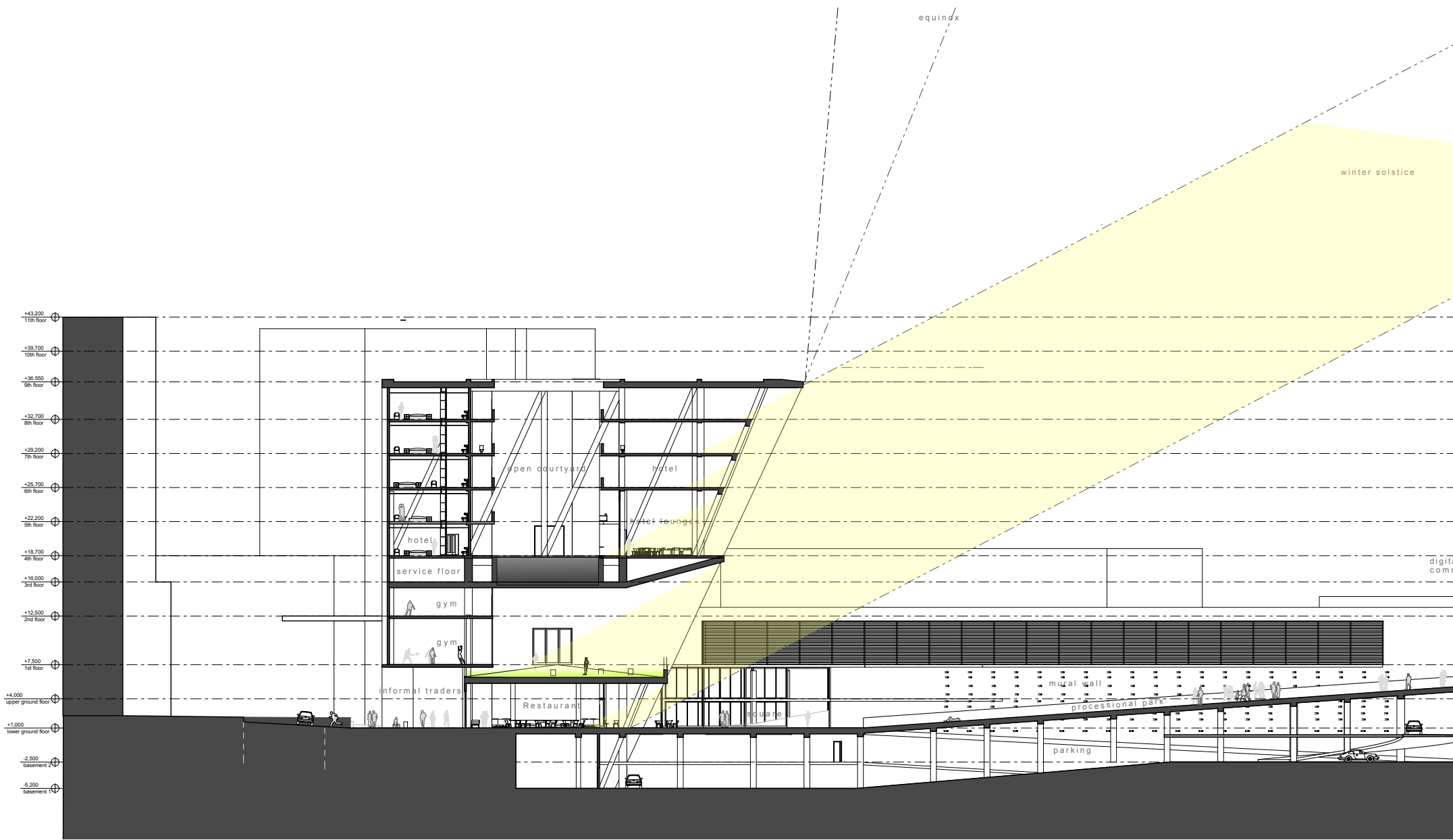
first floor plan

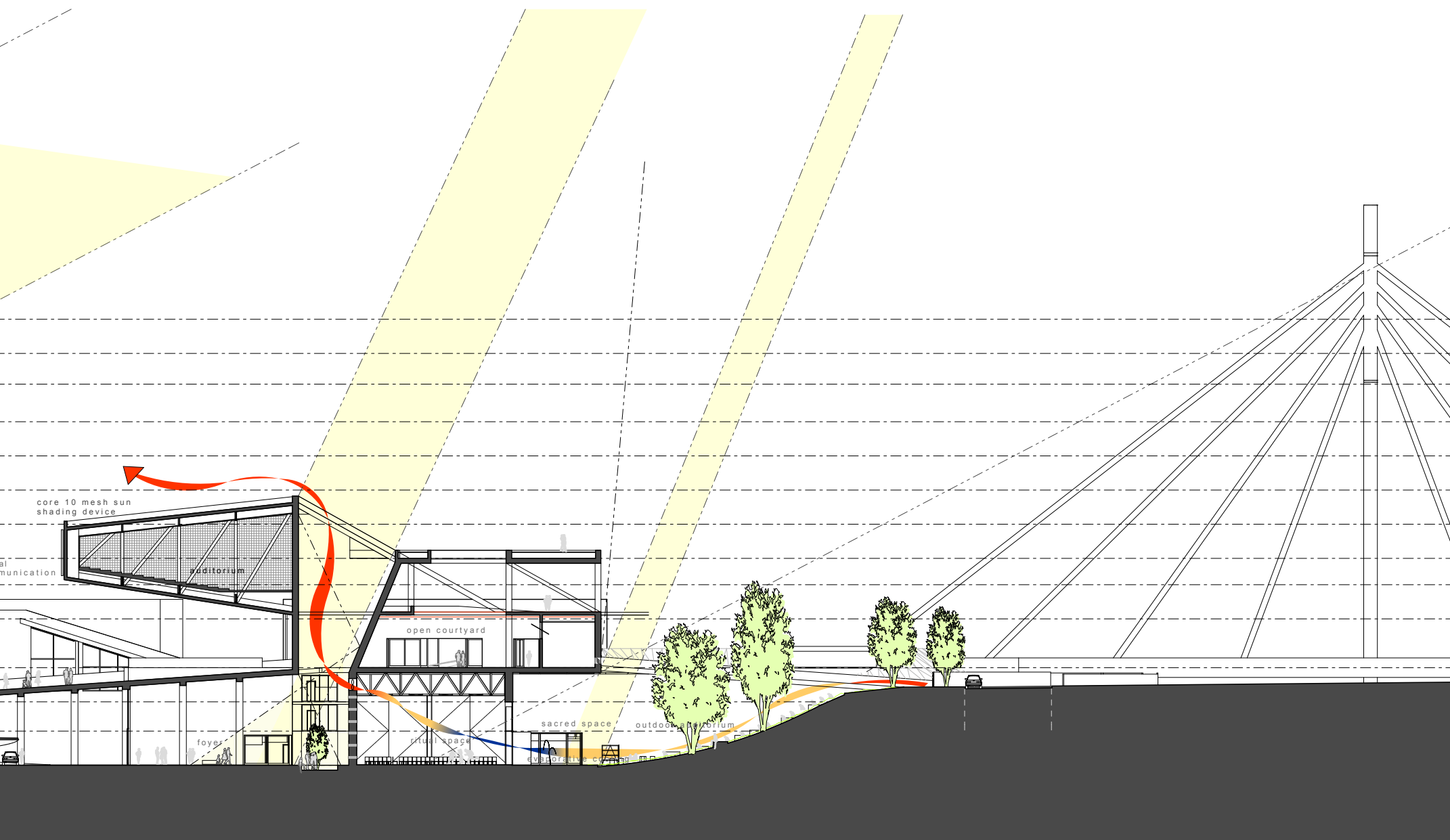


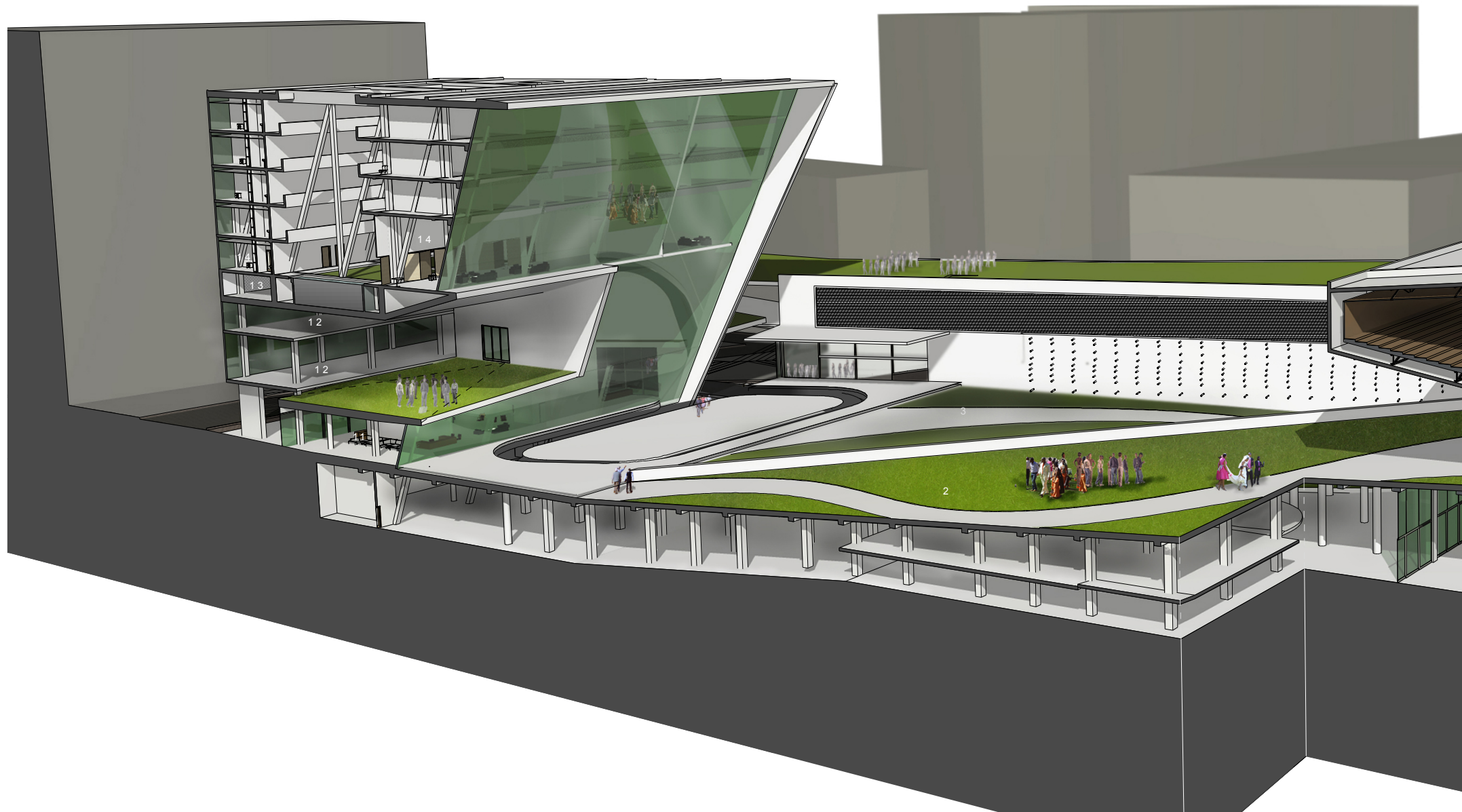
100 m

first floor plan

final design sections







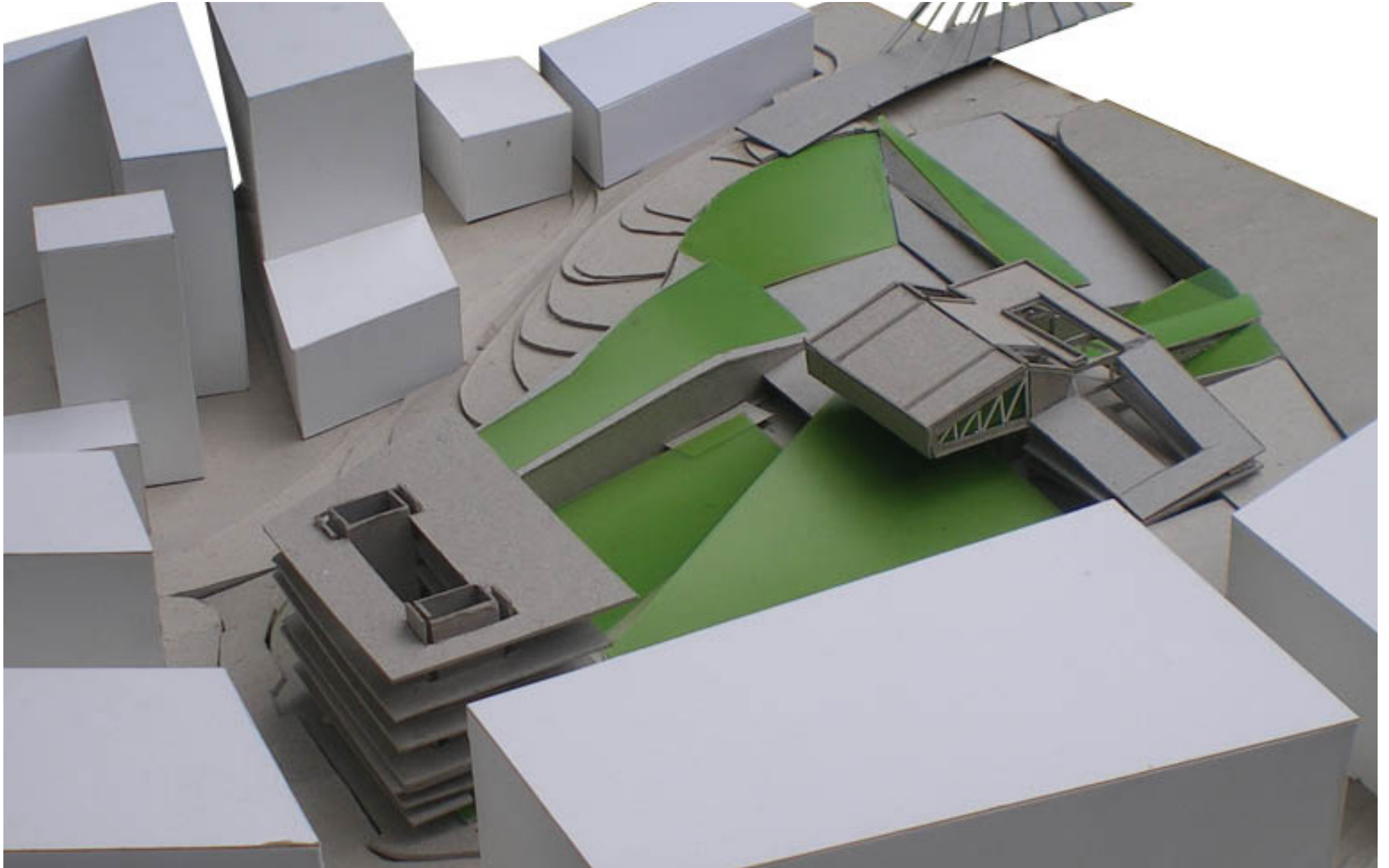


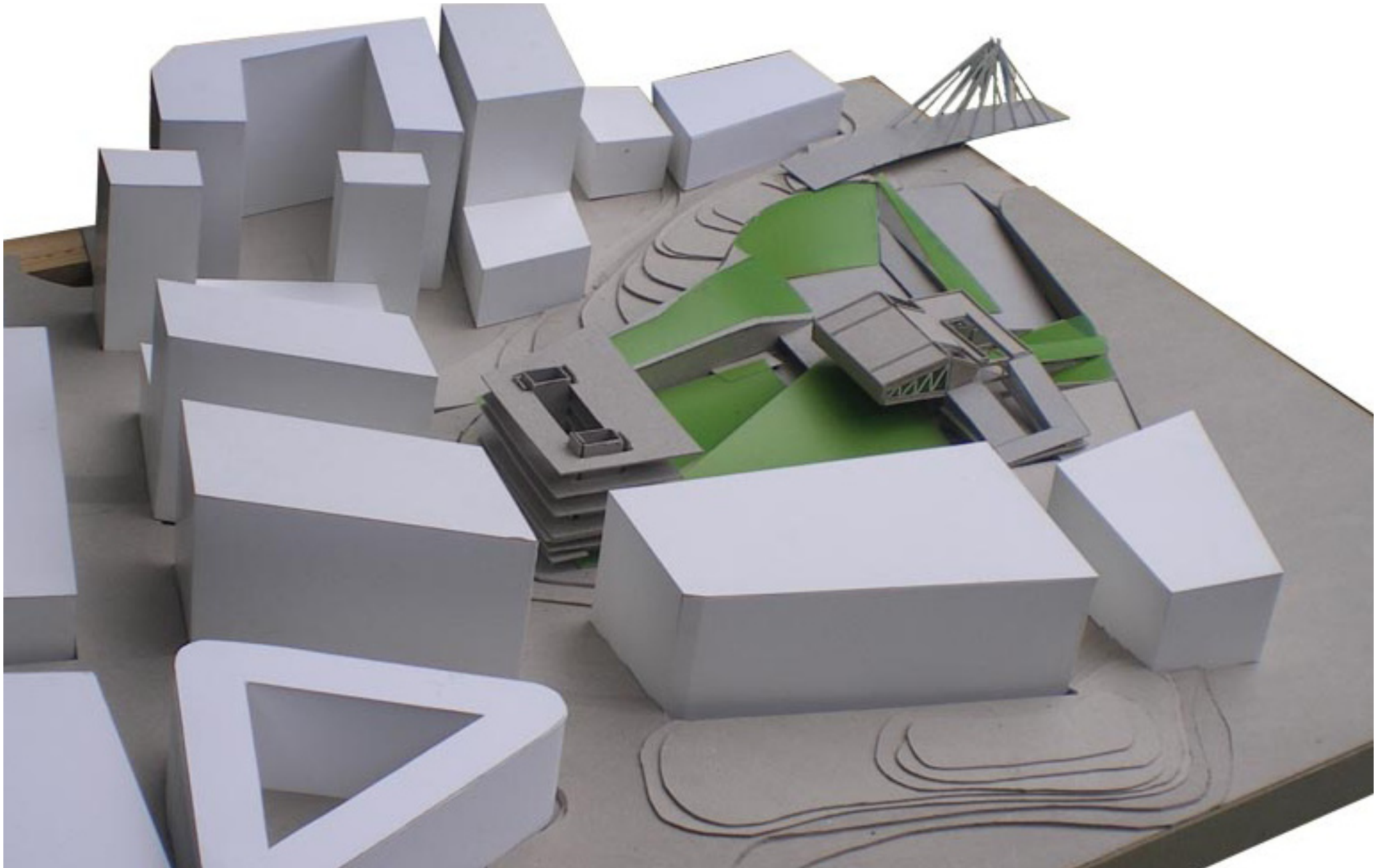
sectional perspective a-a



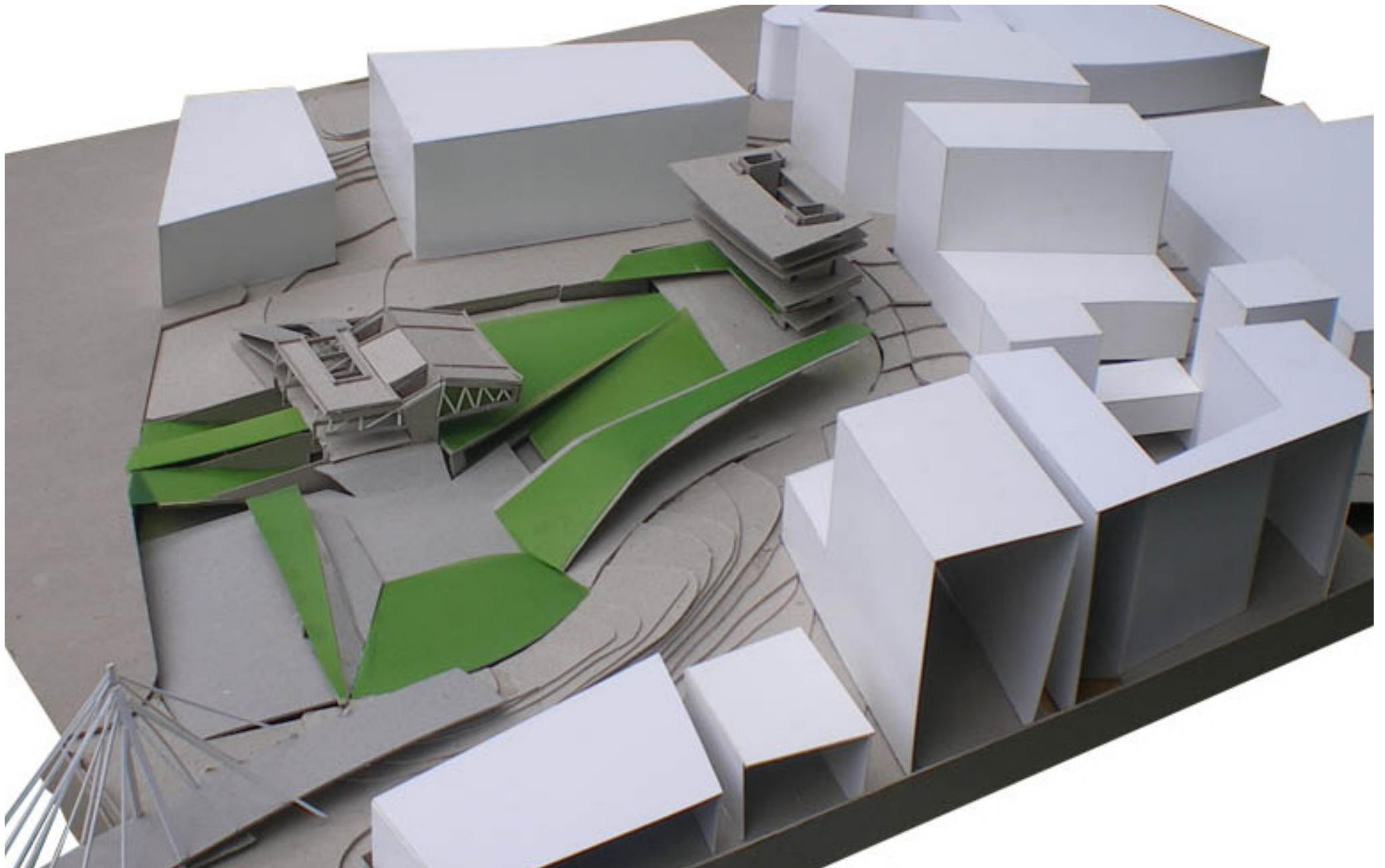
sectional perspective b-b

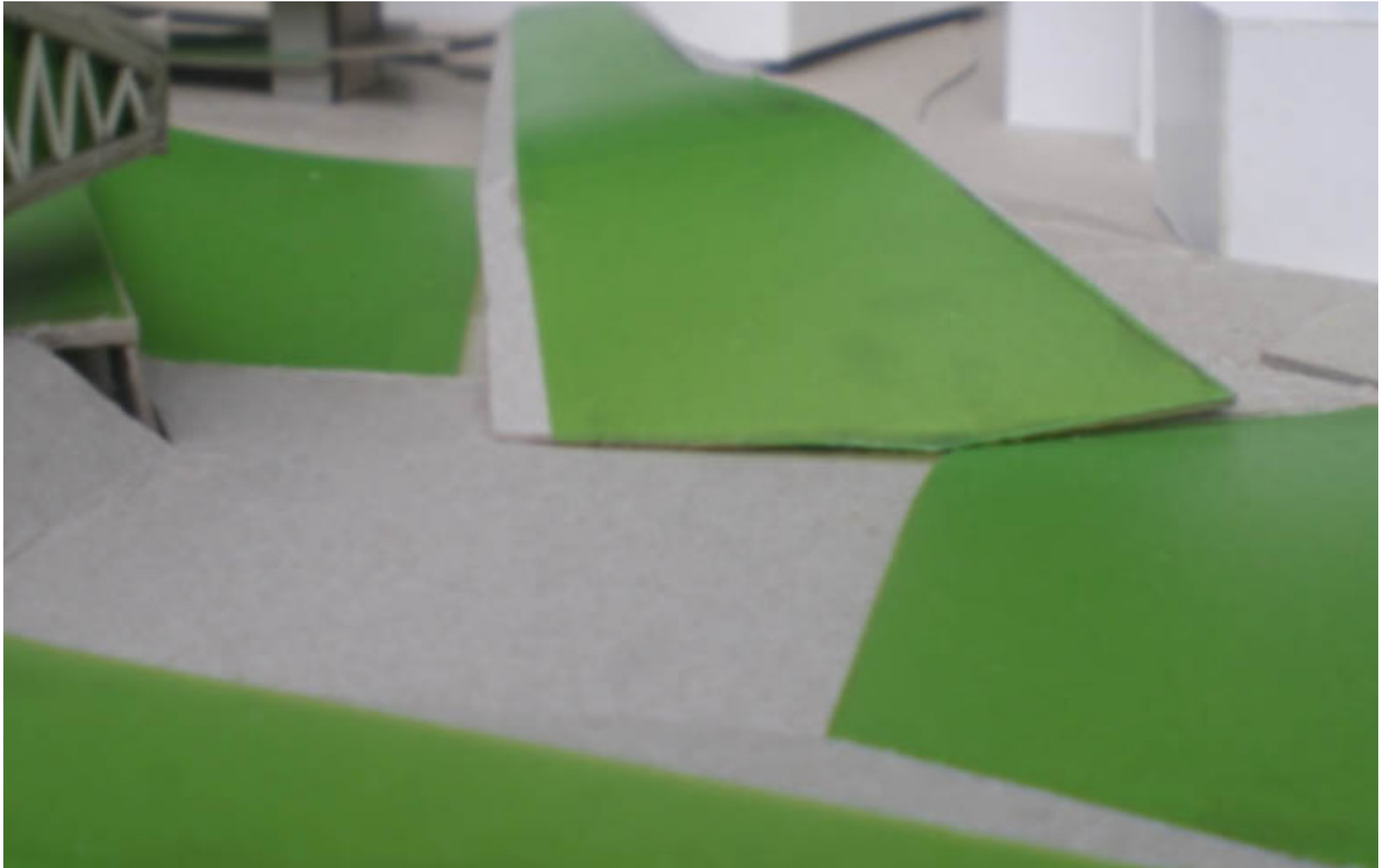
model



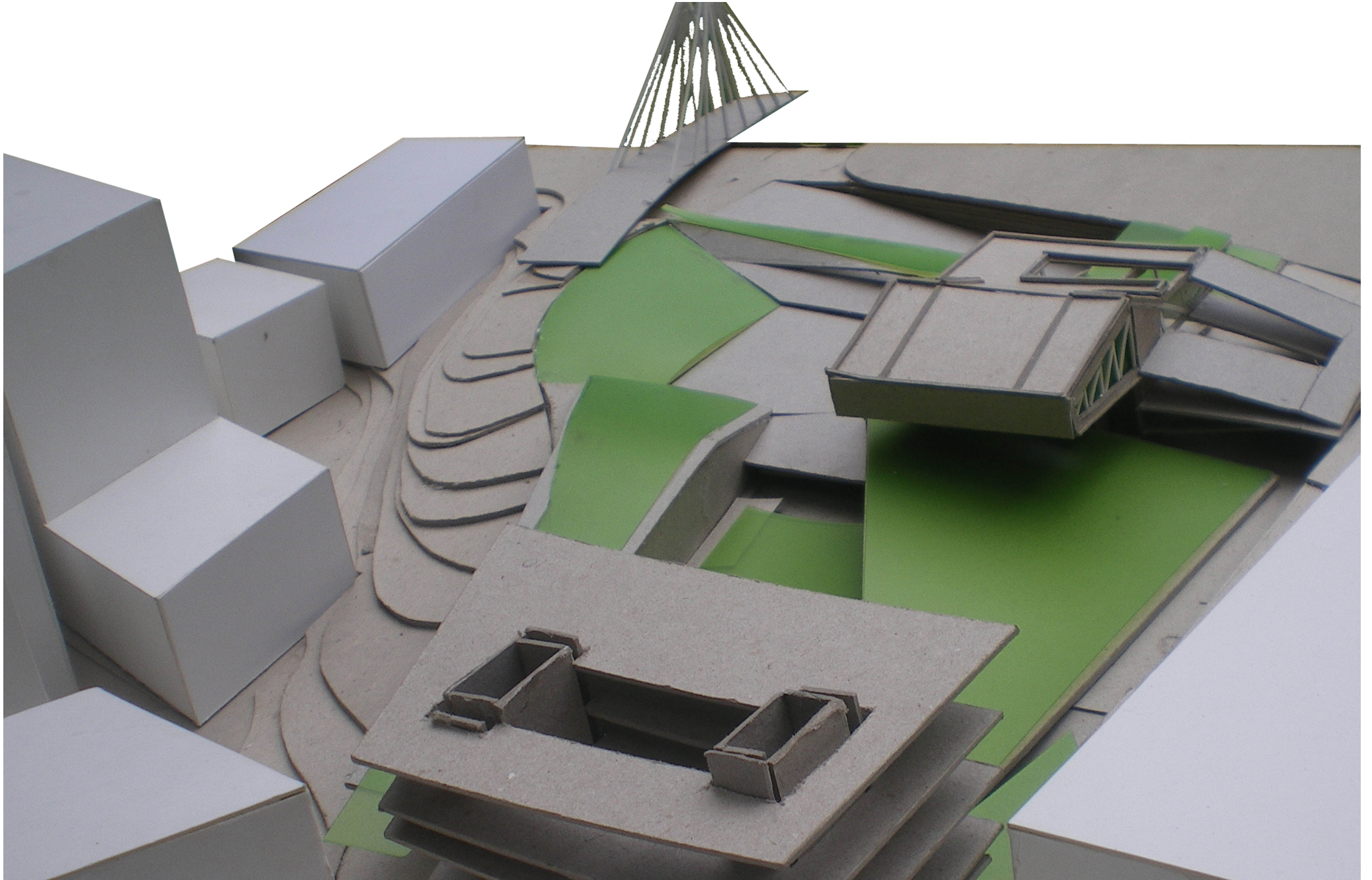


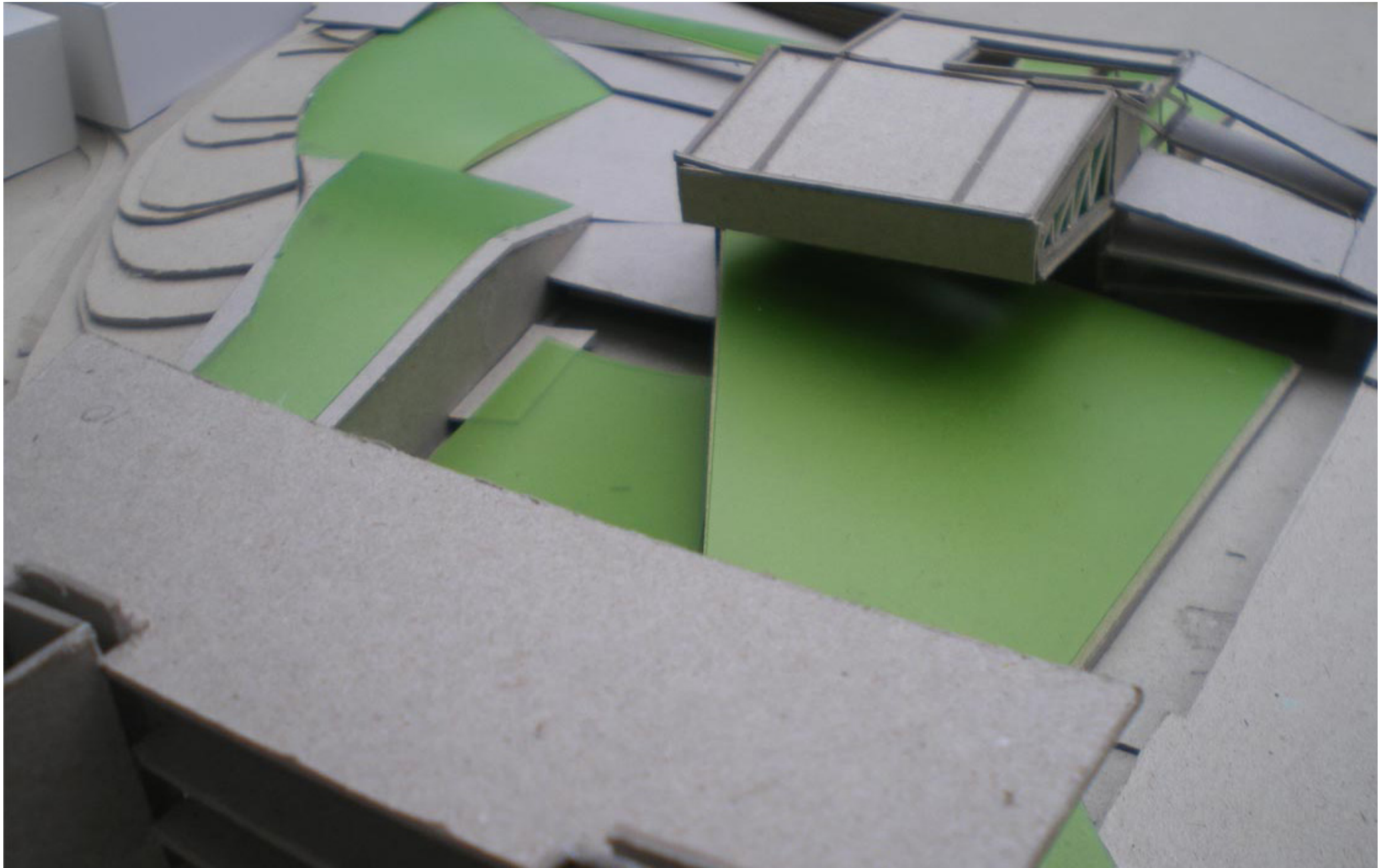
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