

Body-ody-ody: A Formal Redress of Harlem
A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture
Harvard University Graduate School of Design, by

Oluwatosin Odugbemi
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

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Oluwatosin Odugbemi



Megan Panzano



Body-ody-ody

A Formal *Redress* of Harlem

Thesis by Oluwatosin Odugbemi

Advised by Megan Panzano

Harvard GSD 2023

Physical Model Construction Support by Eden Edghill

Draw-del Construction Support by Jacob Hoskins

Digital Modelling Support by Owen Mellett

“31.4% of incoming 2022 CEOs in the fashion industry were women

a 28.7% increase from 2021”

“17.4% of cases saw females replacing outgoing males in fashion leadership

versus 10.1% of males replacing females”

Nextail Fashion CEO Talent & Trends 2023 Report

We quickly judge what is important and worthy of our attention in the academy. The delineations between thoughtful rhetoric and superficial ramble follow closely with who benefits from acts. Is fashion written off as frivolous because it’s one of the ways in which women hold power? Or has wearing fur been culturally disavowed while leather prevails because Black women were able to build generational wealth through selling their softest Sundays best? Perhaps rap music has been labelled as inappropriate while the explicit works of English writers are lauded as poetry because of whom the stories are written about.

Architecture is central to considering the problems with these high and low art delineations. In architectural academic discourse, the word “form” has been weaponized to describe an incorrect way of paying attention. Critics of formalism insist that as the world suffers through environmental and social catastrophes, those designers unable to contend with current crises retreat into a formalist obsession, fiddling with objects and technique.

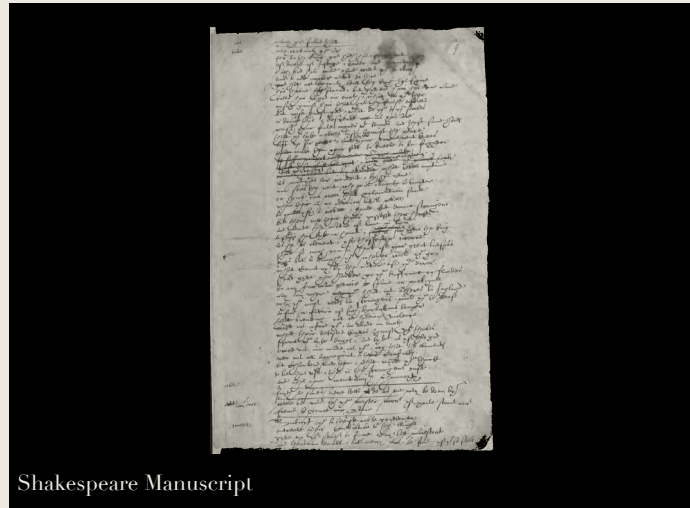
004



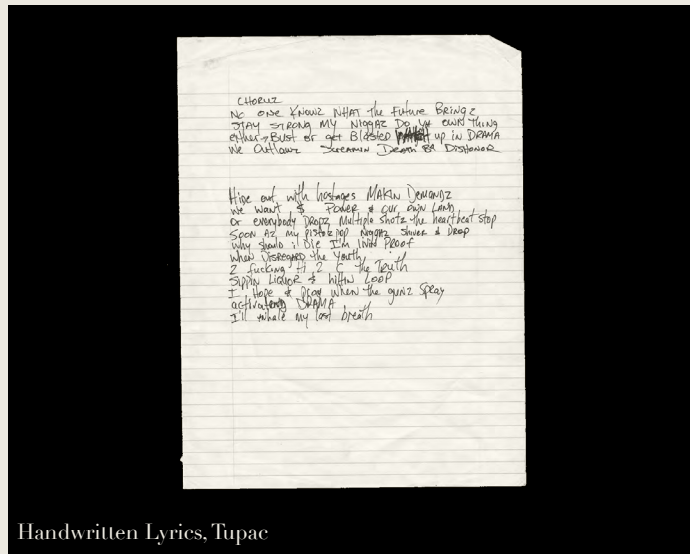
“A Black Legacy, Wrapped Up in Fur” from The New York Times



“Civil Suits” by Harold Valentine



Shakespeare Manuscript



Handwritten Lyrics, Tupac



A Collection of "Eidetic Houses," Andrew Holder

006



Adolf Loos, Looshaus, Vienna, Austria, 1911

Sandwiched by Ornament

I position the recent critiques of architectural formalism as an exclusionary action reminiscent of the cultural superiority embedded in modernist assertions for functionalism, which positioned ornament as a crime. Modernist architecture that is traditionally celebrated in the academy was designed with the body of a 6-foot-tall white man as its primary referent. These proportions have maintained themselves in building norms and codes, resulting in a built environment designed for the comfort of a narrow minority.

But what if we could design an unapologetically formalist architecture strategy to create accessibility through beauty? And what if, through this, the architecture itself could become an activist work, wholly intellectual yet deeply accessible? The resulting constructions would counter the rigid, rectilinear, and timidly proportioned building type.

Form can be socially conscious, environmentally sustainable, and address historical conservation.

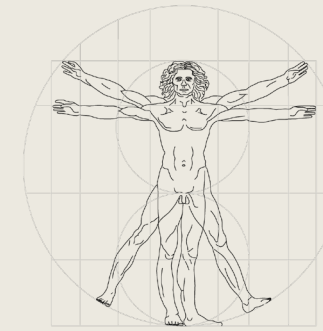
008



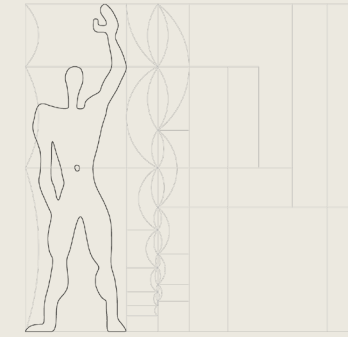
Oluwatosin Odugbemi, Harlem, New York, 2023

Embodied Ornament

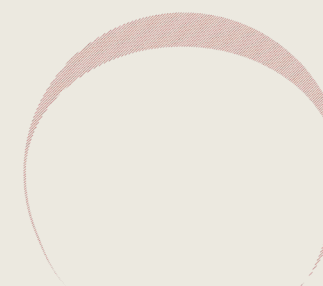
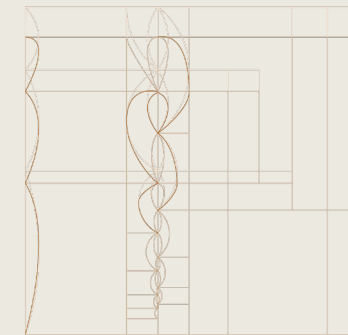
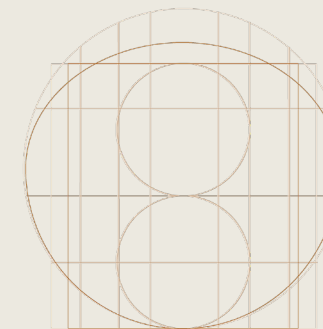
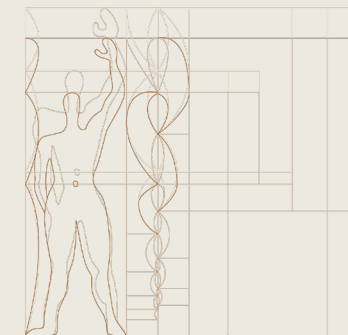
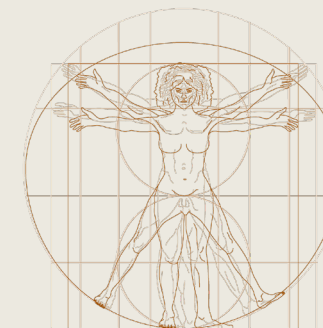
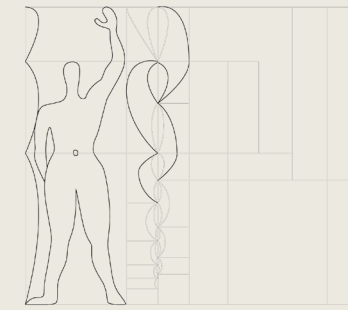
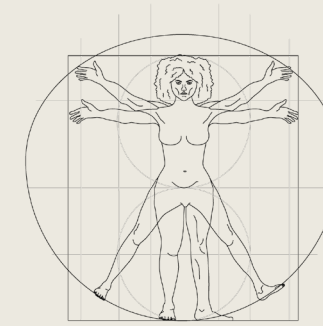
“Vitruvian Man”
Leonardo da Vinci



“Modulor”
Le Corbusier



010



Considering and questioning the bodies and ideologies our built environment is created for lead me to study two diagrams very familiar in architectural discourse. What we've claimed to be the proportions of the human body is skewed to accommodate a particular ideal, yet still guide many contemporary constructions, the Vitruvian and Modular men. Using the Black female body as a case study to compare, the shorter, wider proportions distort the lines projected off the figure. A new softness in curves and hair, as opposed to the angularity and stature of the previously embraced figure, is notable.

Overlapping these two bodies— divergent in form and opposites in historical consideration— provokes a new architectural body to be developed through a reinterpretation of building skin. The intrigue in these

overlaps is a lack of singularity. There is no one 'Black body,' so building around a new narrow will not produce fruitful results. However, accommodating spectra and multiples creates a productive jitter, space for a dynamic architecture that accommodates a rang of bodies. The clear "deltas," or "changes in," have the potential to blur the experience of being within or outside and to draw attention to (or thicken) in between spaces. The delta (the difference between the base standard of the past and the Black female body) creates a new opportunity to include and celebrate the array of bodies that exist inclusive of but also between these two.

This analysis motivates my agenda to direct architectural form through adaptive reuse; redressing architecture to invite a wider range of bodies.



Notre-Dame
de Paris,
Jean-Baptiste-
Antoine Lassus,
1163



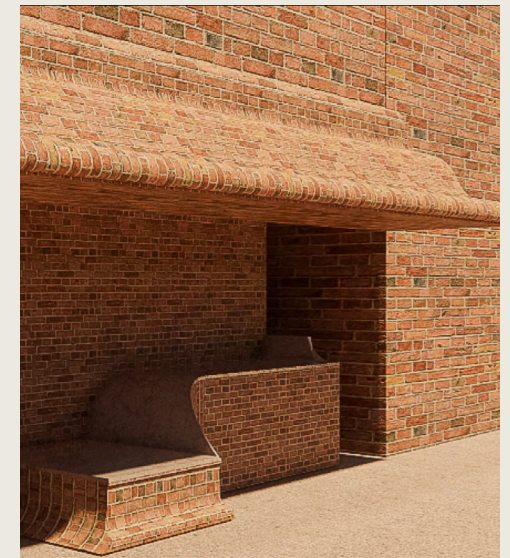
Casa Batlló,
Antoni Gaudí,
1904



Contemporary
Embodied
Vernacularism,
Oluwatosin
Odugbemi, 2023



Monticello, Jean-
Michel Basquiat,
1983



Contemporary
Embodied
Vernacularism,
Oluwatosin
Odugbemi, 2023

012

Today, ornament does not need to be secondary to form. Through technology, ornament can be super-sized, embodied and explored as a formal endeavour.

Through the thesis' framework, contemporary embodied vernacularism becomes a critique of classical Western historical tradition in content and form. It actively reinterprets history as we've come to traditionally define it through a new identity, just as Basquiat translates history into art, creating a new structure and aesthetic for his medium.

“Decorating is a process in which one willfully changes one’s perception of what is to imagine what could be.”

Decorating is architecture that understands itself as contingent, as existing within an infinite web of relations.”

Nicholas Korody

“The Fabulous Miss Adolf Loos: Redecorating

Ornament and Crime”

Offramp, 2017

Decoration— which ornament is a means of— is essential in remembering and responding to the history of a place. Its contingent on the past.

014



Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Spread from the book *Ghetto Gastro Black Power Kitchen*

“The kissing exterior surface permits architecture to become socially enveloping, a means of producing collectively embracing atmospheres rather than imposing diagrams of social order.”

Sylvia Lavin

“Kissing Architecture”

POINT: Essays on Architecture, 2011

Sylvia Lavin cites Kiesler’s storefront design as a precedent for façade’s potential to be a player in the action and life beyond the limits of an architectural interior. Kiesler considered the shop window to be more than a device for offering a view into the interior from the street. It was instead “[an almost independent, quasi-three-dimensional event. An interactive conjunction of outside, inside, spectacle, desire, and the movement of passersby.]”

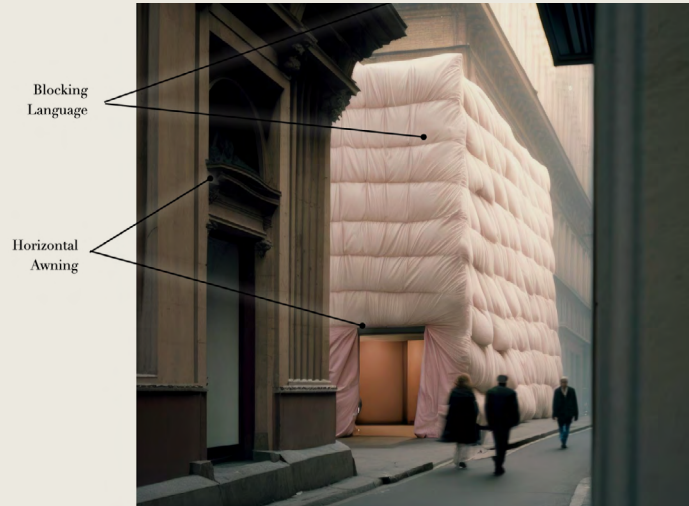
Through apparently minor changes to the detail of the exterior, there is a relinquishing of the surface’s sense of obligation only to architecture and its internal needs. The exterior gains social agency and the capacity to shape the collective experience of the contemporary city.

Through apparently minor changes to the detail of the exterior, there is a relinquishing of the surface’s sense of obligation only to architecture and its internal needs. The exterior gains social agency and the capacity to shape the collective experience of the contemporary city.

Put poignantly by Lavin, “The kissing exterior surface permits architecture to become socially enveloping, a means of producing collectively embracing atmospheres rather than imposing diagrams of social order.”

016



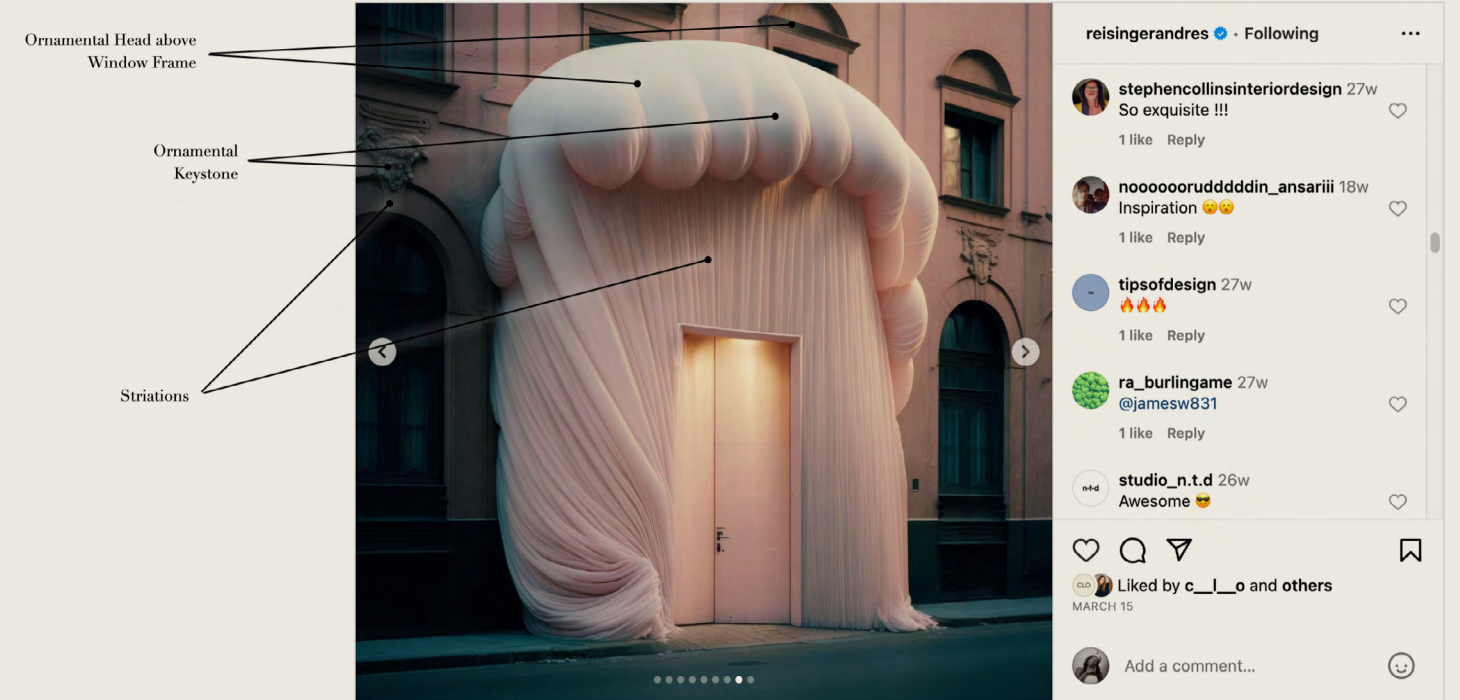


Criminal Skins

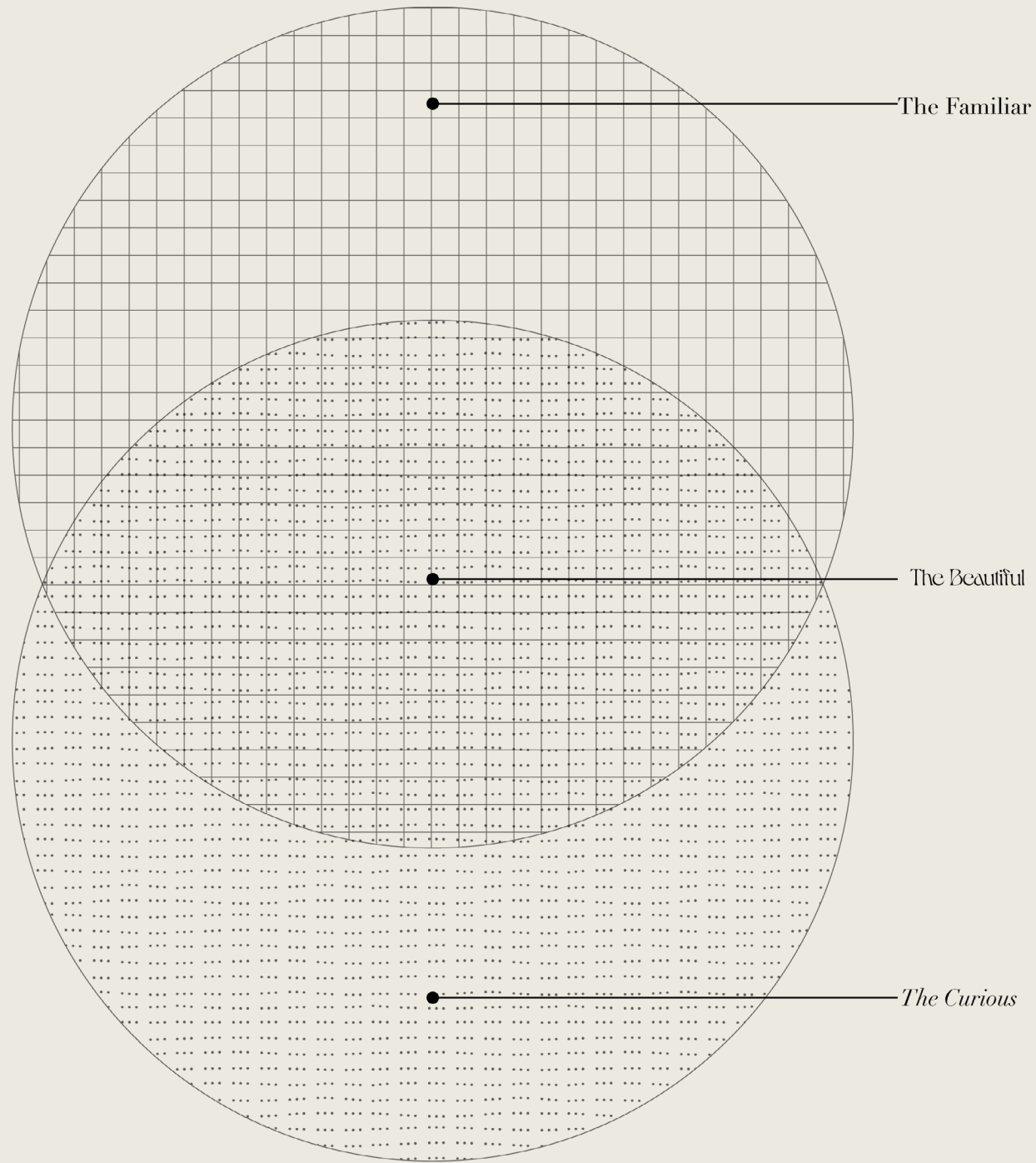


As a provocation for this idea, I am pulling the work of Andres Reisinger. These anatomical analyses show how his imagined storefronts articulate the vernacular of place with an applied material change, the puff of fabric, and new colour to make it something new and wonderful. The takeovers mimic stereotomic construction, translating stone construction to tailored fabric through a sheathing of the buildings. Reisinger is puffing the ornamental structure of the architecture, accentuating details like a person tattooing themselves to add flamboyance to their figure protesting the modernist call through a transformation of classical ornament for a contemporary age. This is a celebration of the sublime and a transformed embodiment of vernacular ornament.

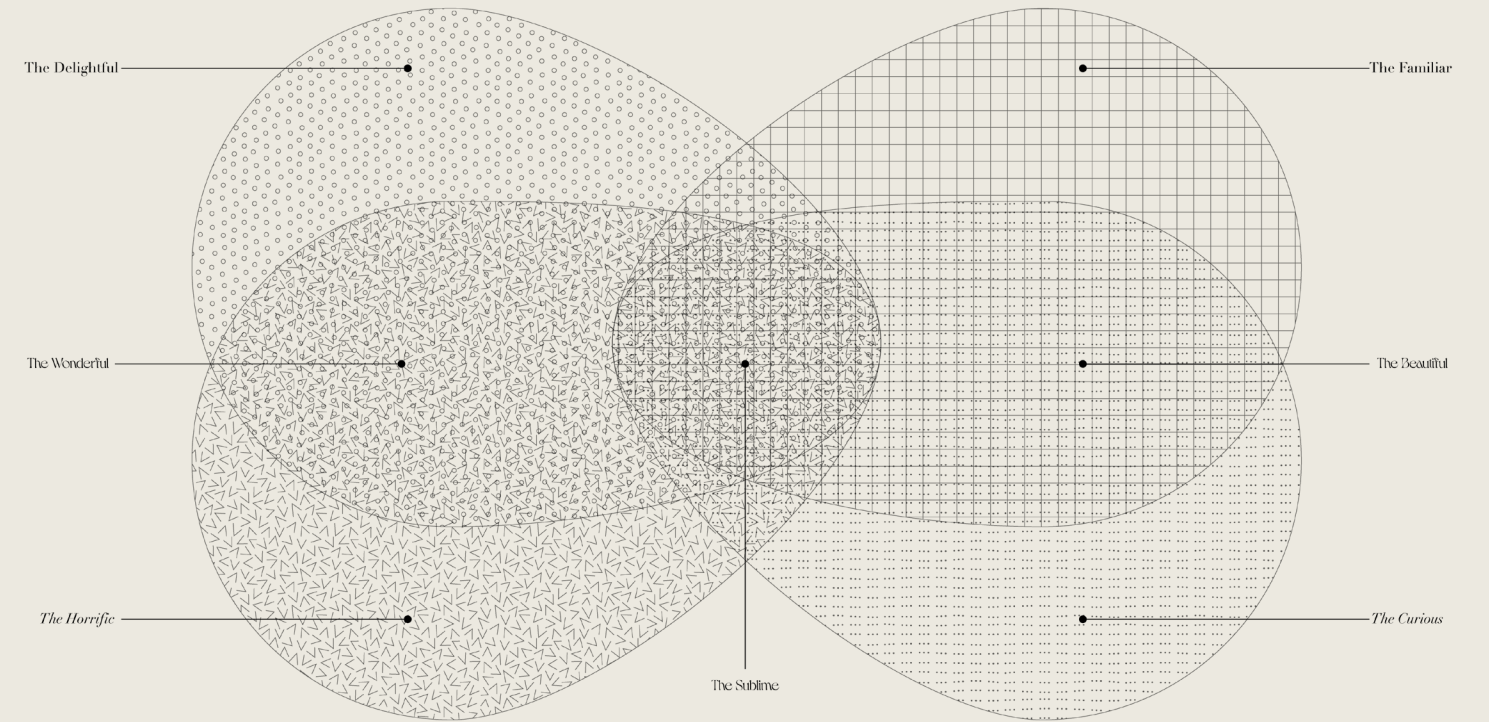
018



The Sublime: a Pungent Cocktail of Familiarity & Curiosity



020





022



"Vernacular Openings" by Oluwatosin Odugbemi

vernacular | *vər'nakyələr* |

noun

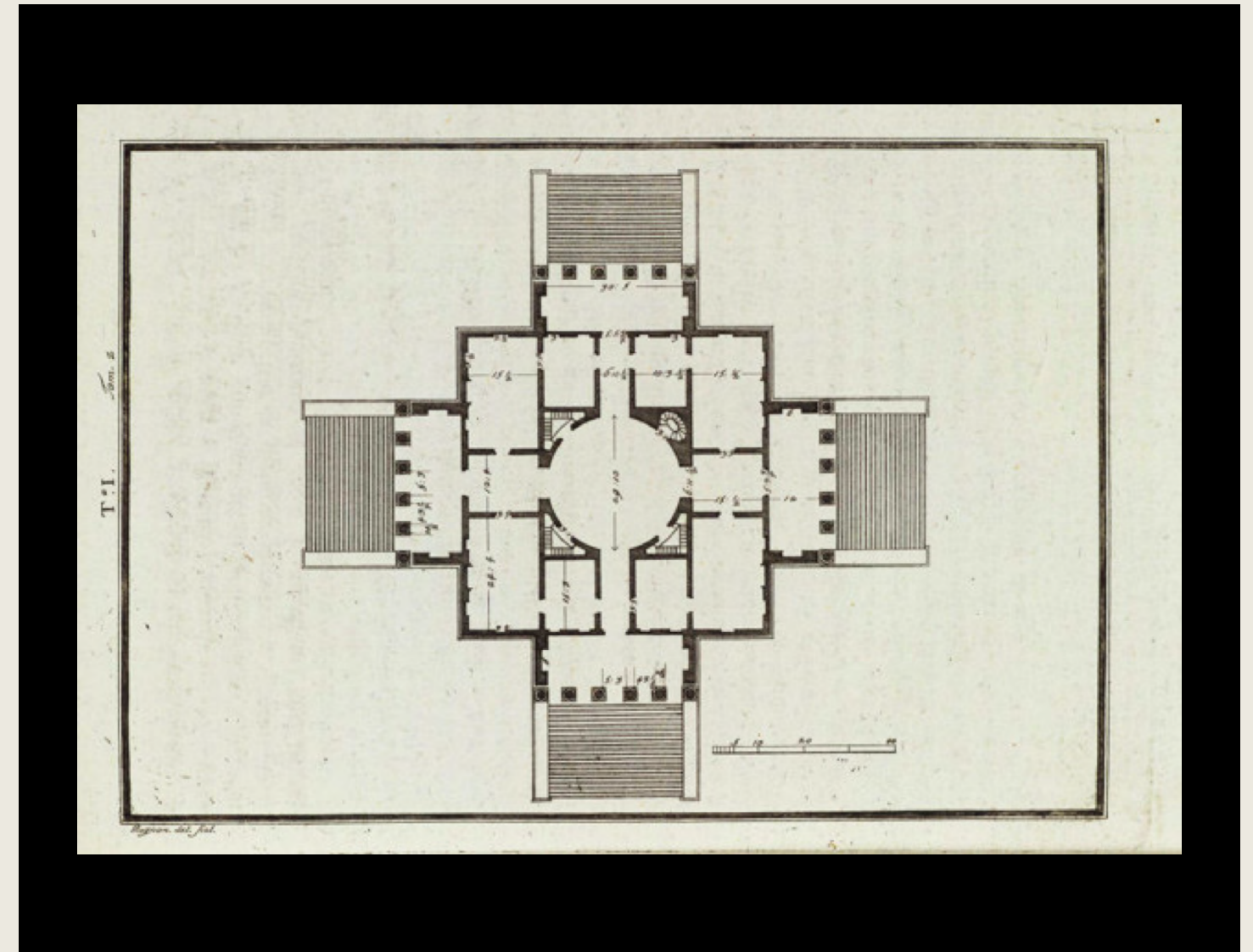
the language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region

vernacular | *vər'nakyələr* |

noun

architecture that closely engages a type of local or regional construction, using traditional materials and resources from the area where the building is located

024



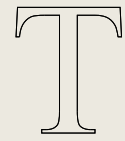
Villa la Rotonda Plan, Andrea Palladio, Austria, 1571

Saved Familiarity

My design work bridges the dual definition of vernacular, one pertaining to spoken language and the other to built form. In both definitions, a specificity to place and people groups is essential. Though impalpable, dialect already is and has additional rich potential to influence the physical experience of being in a place.

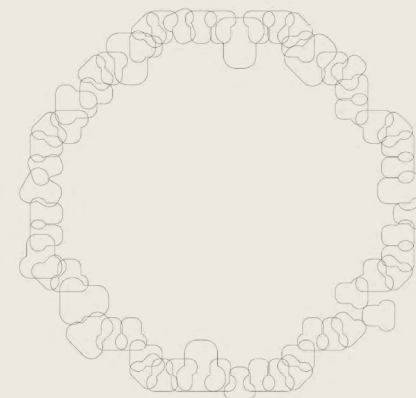
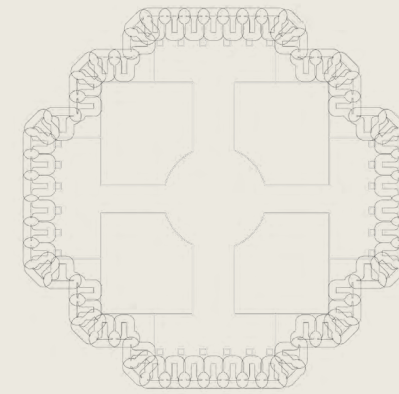
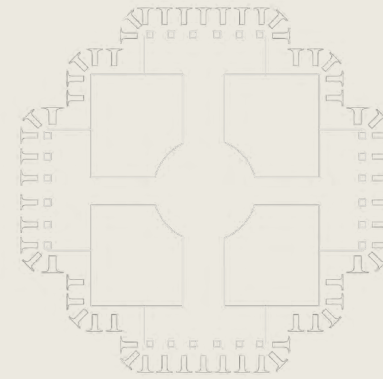
To illustrate these definitions, I began this project in early studies pulling from the work of Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Le Corbusier, and Palladio— all representing a vernacular common to the architectural cannon.

Type on Type

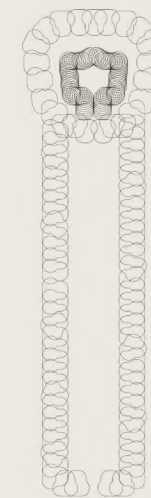
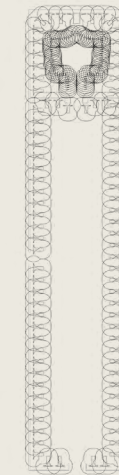
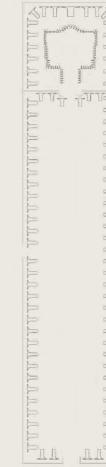


026

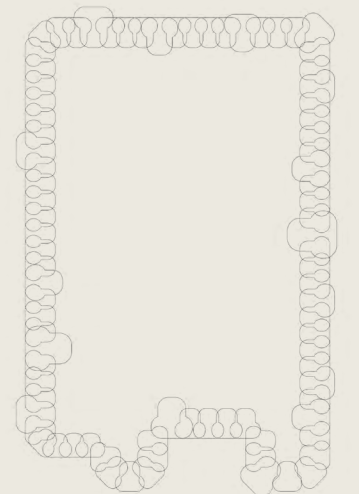
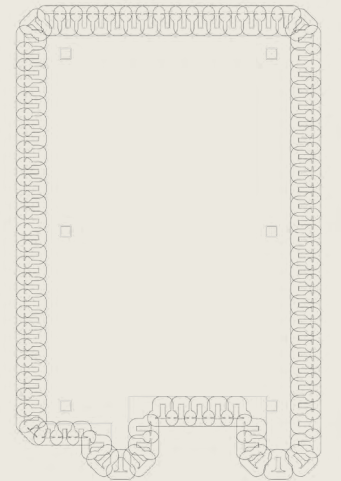
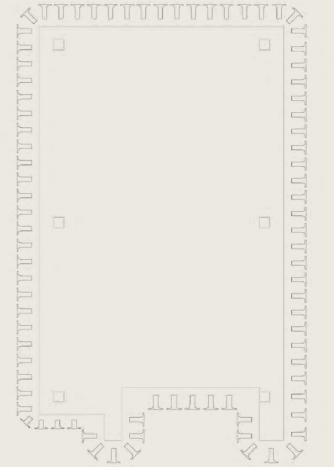
Andrea Palladio's
Villa La Rotonda in a Dress



Michelangelo's
in a Dress



Le Corbusier's
Maison Dom-ino in a Dress



My early studies liberalized vernacularized word on vernacularized form. I take the serif— a type tool that is leveraged to communicate a reputability and traditionalism in graphic design— and appropriate it

into a whimsical wall ornament that wraps around the plan. Then, applying a puff, the building puts on a dress that can then flow and subtly misbehave, dissolving the lauded plan while remaining reminiscent.

“Word”

“Word?”

“Word!”

“Word.”

Type

Type?

Type!

Type.

028

To translate these early studies to the material world and issues of today, we must deeply understand the existing (but lesser-considered) ways in which words regulate space. Certain means of speaking have been placed in a hierarchy. Some dialects are classified as civil, acceptable, and important to know— others as undignified. I am interested in taking on bell hooks’ call to “disrupt the cultural narrative that one is worthy of being heard only if one speaks in standard English” (Teaching to Transgress, 1994) by hacking the written rules reinforcing the notion that architecture is only worthy of being built if it was designed with the priority of a single body.

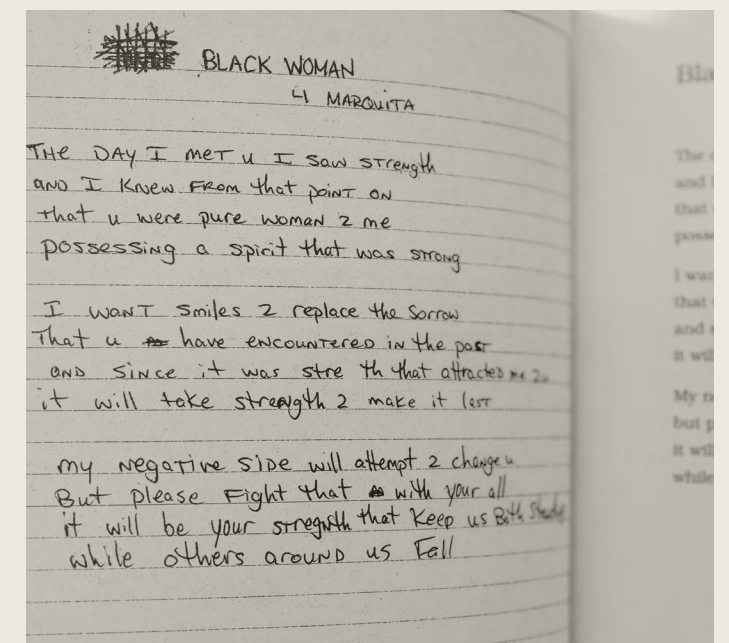
Bringing specificity to the Type on Type experiments (on Villa La Rotonda, Laurentian Library and Maison Dom-Ino)

the two definitions of vernacular – text and type – are applied to a particular site: the New York City Historical District. This hacks the written rules that reinforce problematic singular notions.

The codes that govern space are the written vernacular of sites.

Grey areas in the text are the deltas to intervene within, just as the space between the Corbusian or Modular Men and Black female body produce a space of opportunity. These texts are interpreted through design to produce a vernacular form that addresses a wider range of bodies than the norm.

Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Tupac Written Lyrics



(2) ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS. Details such as cornices, eaves, bases, sills, headers, band course, opening frames, sun control devices, rustications, applied ornament or sculpture, grilles, windows when fully open, air conditioning units, and other similar elements may be constructed to project not more than four inches beyond the street line when less than ten feet above the ground or sidewalk level, and not more than ten inches beyond the street line when more than ten feet above the ground or sidewalk level.

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diff rules for bulkheads though

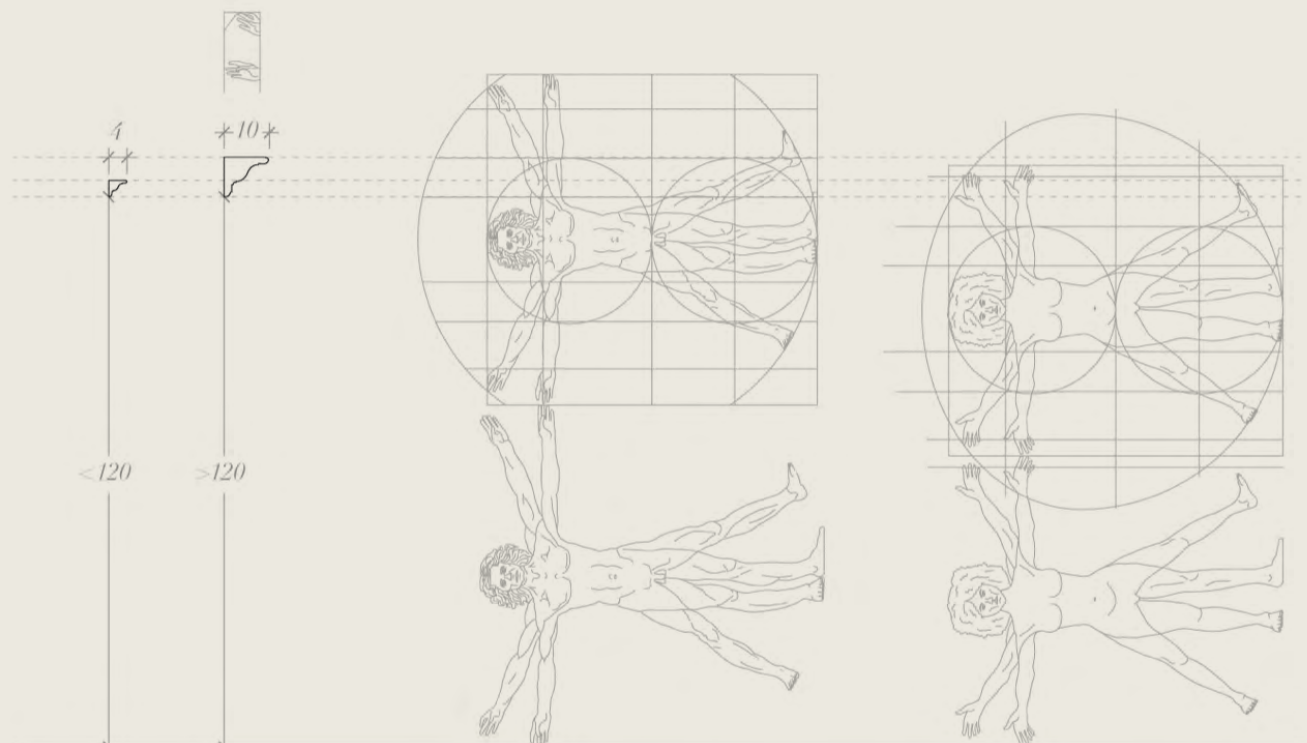
what if embodied?

but not awnings

030

New York City Historic District Code Snippet
 Article 9 - Permissible Projections Beyond Street Lines
 Section 27-313

New York City Historic District Code Snippet
 Article 9 - Permissible Projections Beyond Street Lines
 Section 27-313





032

An apt testing ground for this intervention within New York is existing commercial sites in Harlem: a land rich with the palimpsest of a Black spirit of self-determination, pride, and social consciousness manifested through creativity. Through the past generation, this area has moved from being populated almost exclusively by Black bodies to an amalgamation of diasporas. Research into the architectural vernacular of Harlem reveals a palette of typologies that can be defined and then made curious

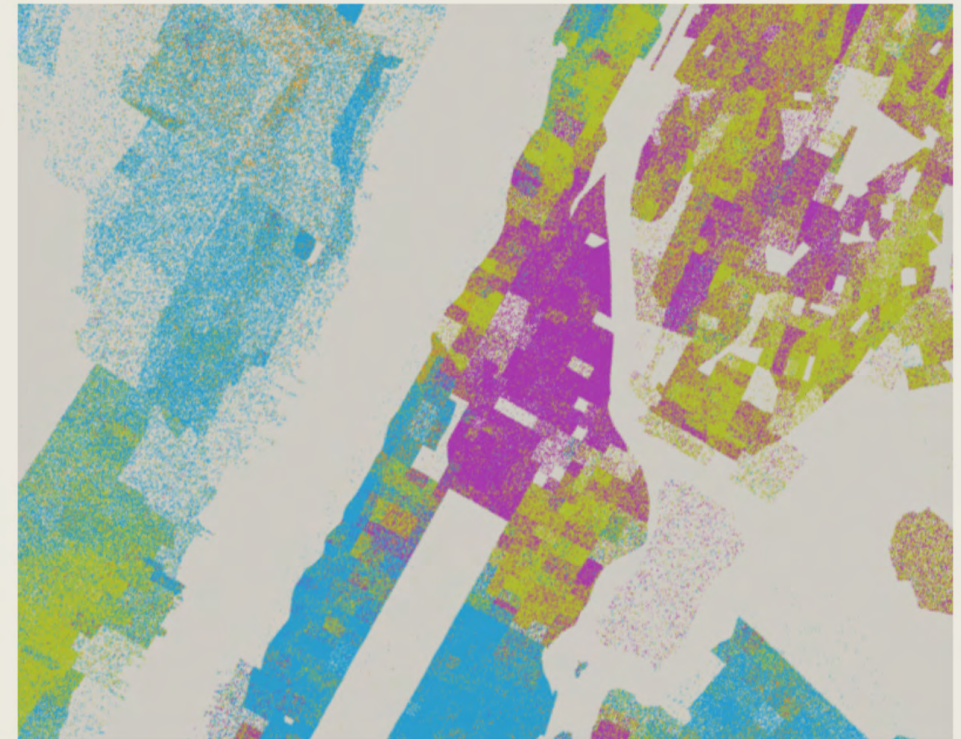
through altered proportion, number, skew, extrusion and materiality. Elements like brick and masonry ornament found throughout the site, become some of the most notable elements of the palette to be made strange. In Harlem, we can use retail experience design to interrogate the scoff of formalism in contemporary discourse, celebrating the exceptional qualities of Blackness and other lesser-acknowledged personhoods.

Harlem!



New York Avenue by Jörg Dietrich

034



1990

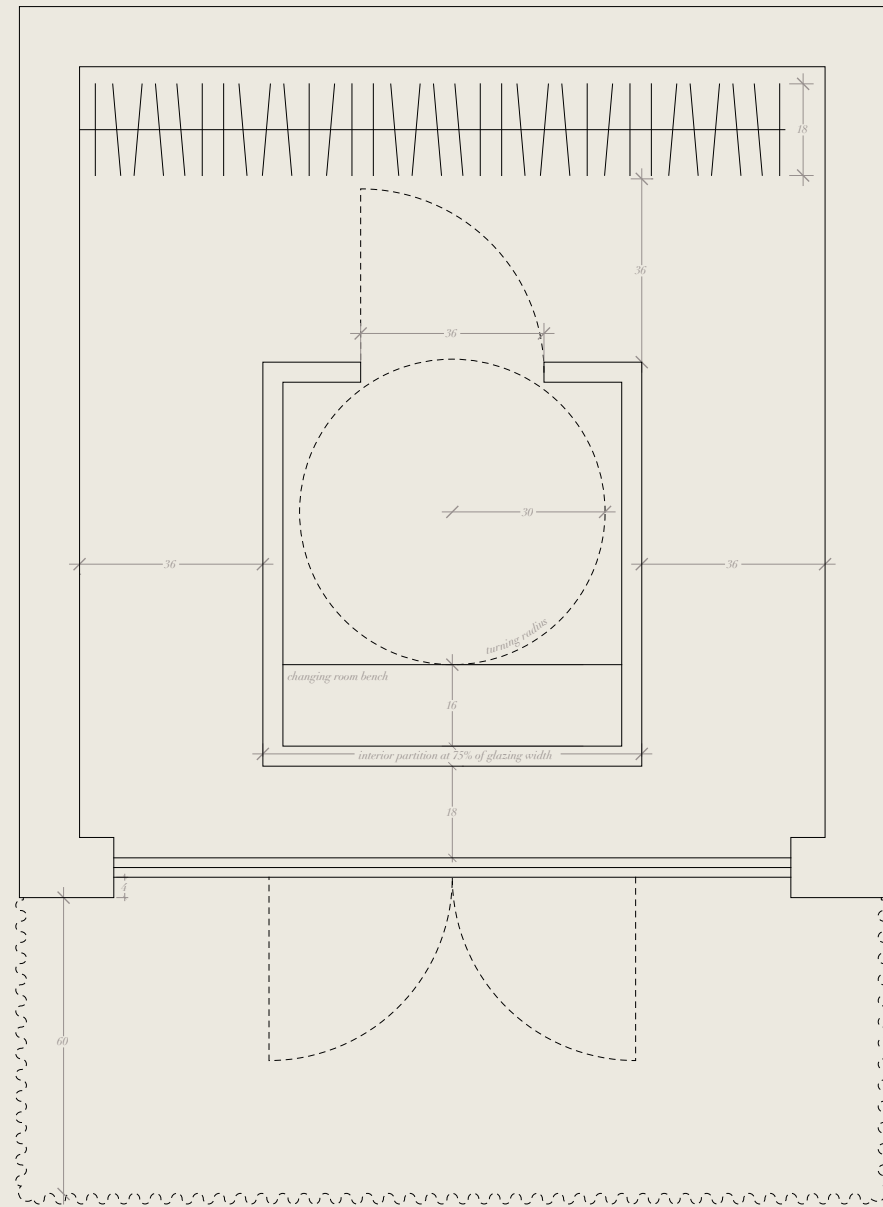


2020

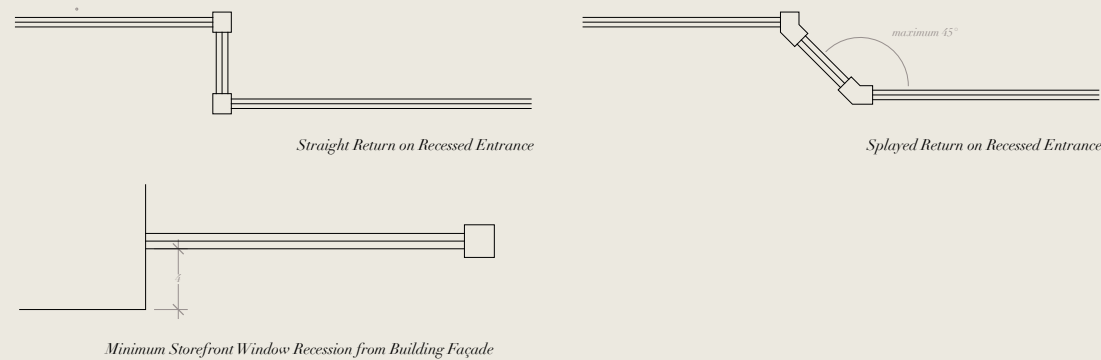




NYC Store Plan at Limits



Window Plan Limits

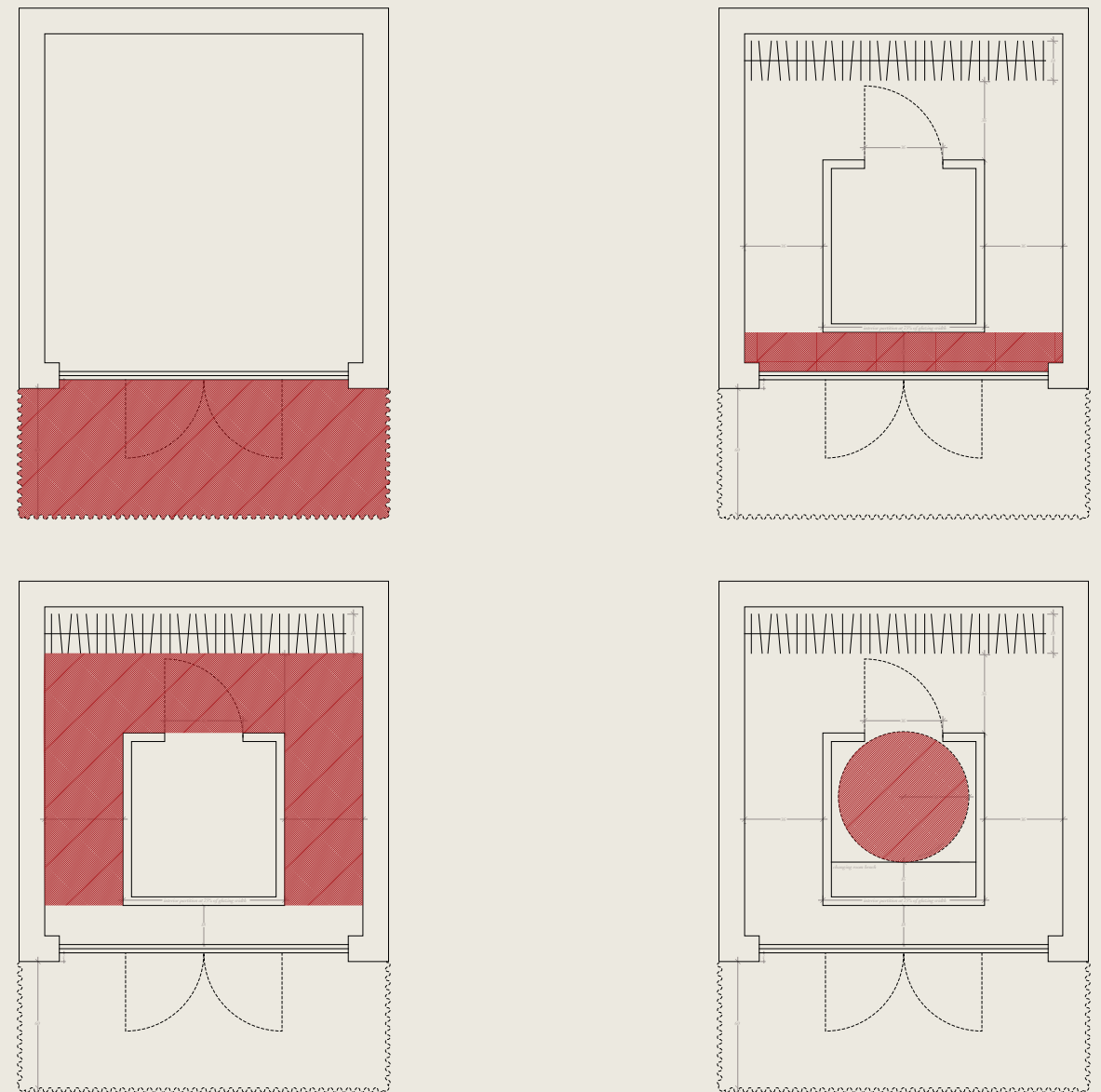


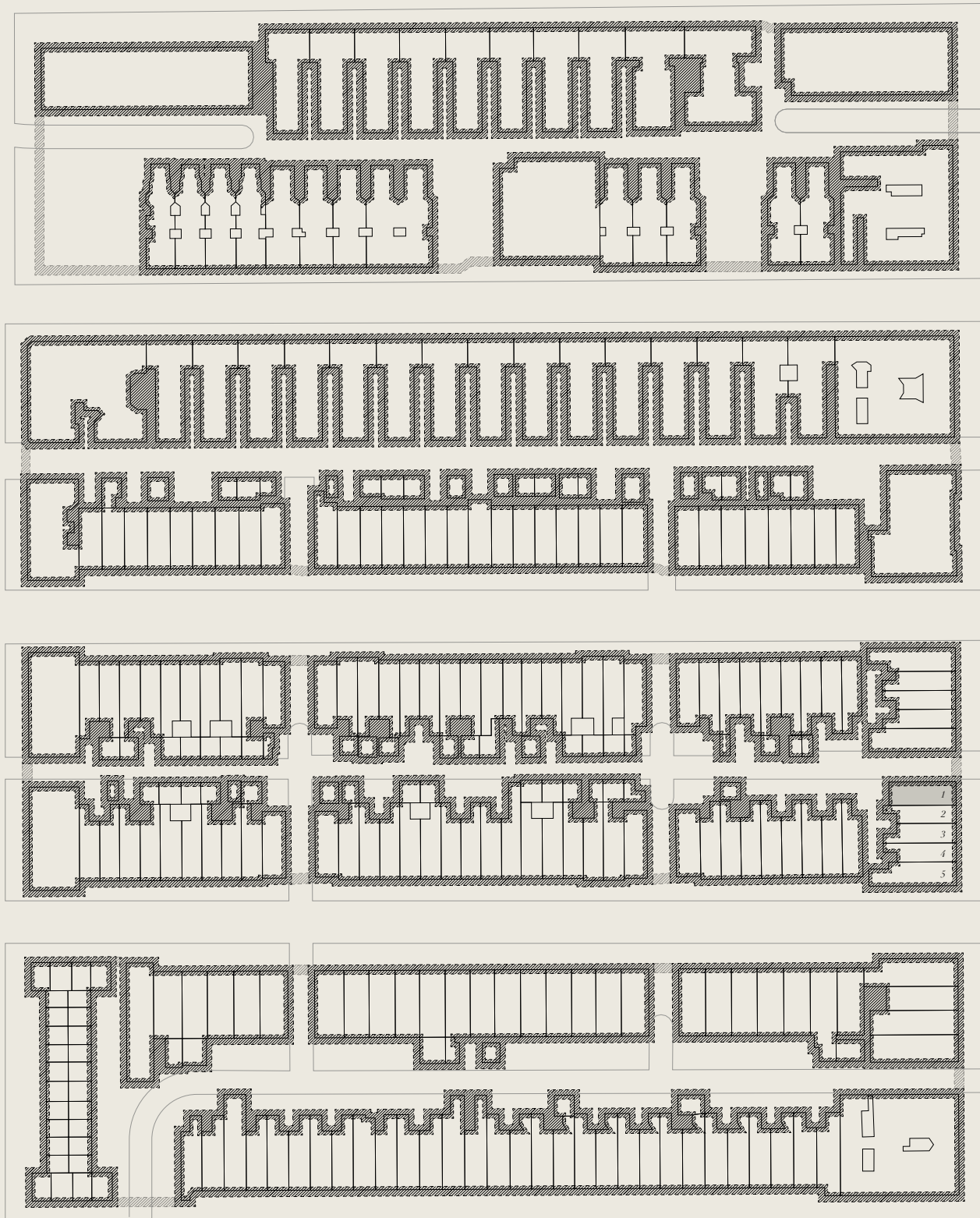
Amongst the abundant urban fabric is a spatial ribbon of potential. A close reading and illustration of the New York City code for historical districts reveals the constrained but productive limits of a commercial footprint in our adaptation project.

Awnings may protrude up to 60 inches from the façade as long as they are 96 inches above ground level. A

storefront window must be recessed at least four inches from the building façade. This recess can be straight or angled up to 45 degrees. The closest interior partition to the recessed window in question must be at least 18 inches away. Aside from this front display, all interior halls must accommodate a standard 3-foot width. And a private space within a commercial context (like a changing room) must accommodate a 36-inch turning radius.

038





- 1 Spa
- 2 Hair Salon
- 3 Dance Studio
- 4 Residential Entrance
- 5 Tattoo Shop

Retail Experience
2368 Adam Clayton Powell Jr Boulevard

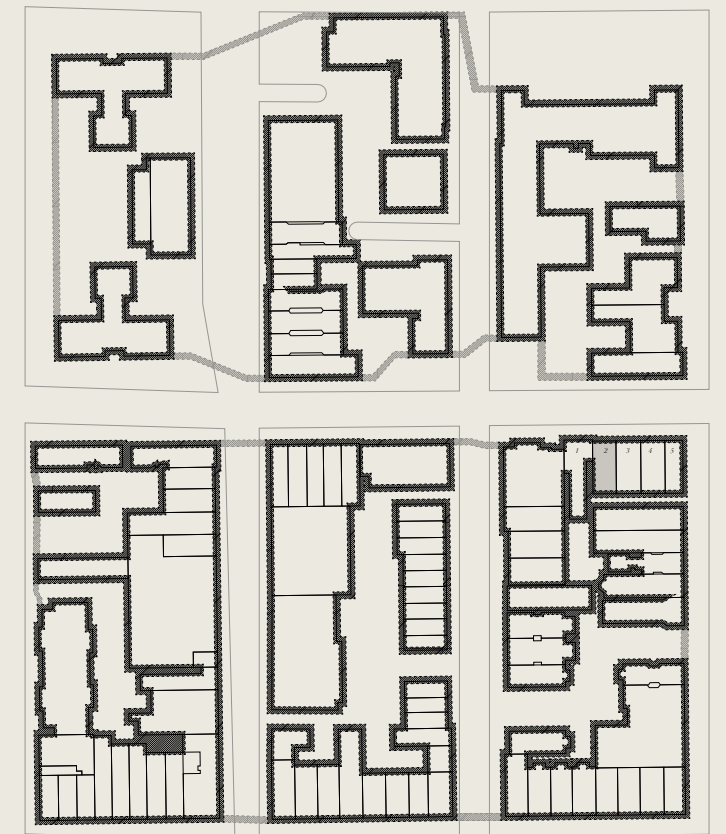


040



- 1 Small Retail Space
- 2 Car Wash
- 3 Restaurant
- 4 Social Club
- 5 Residential Entrance

Dining
2546 Frederick Douglass Blvd

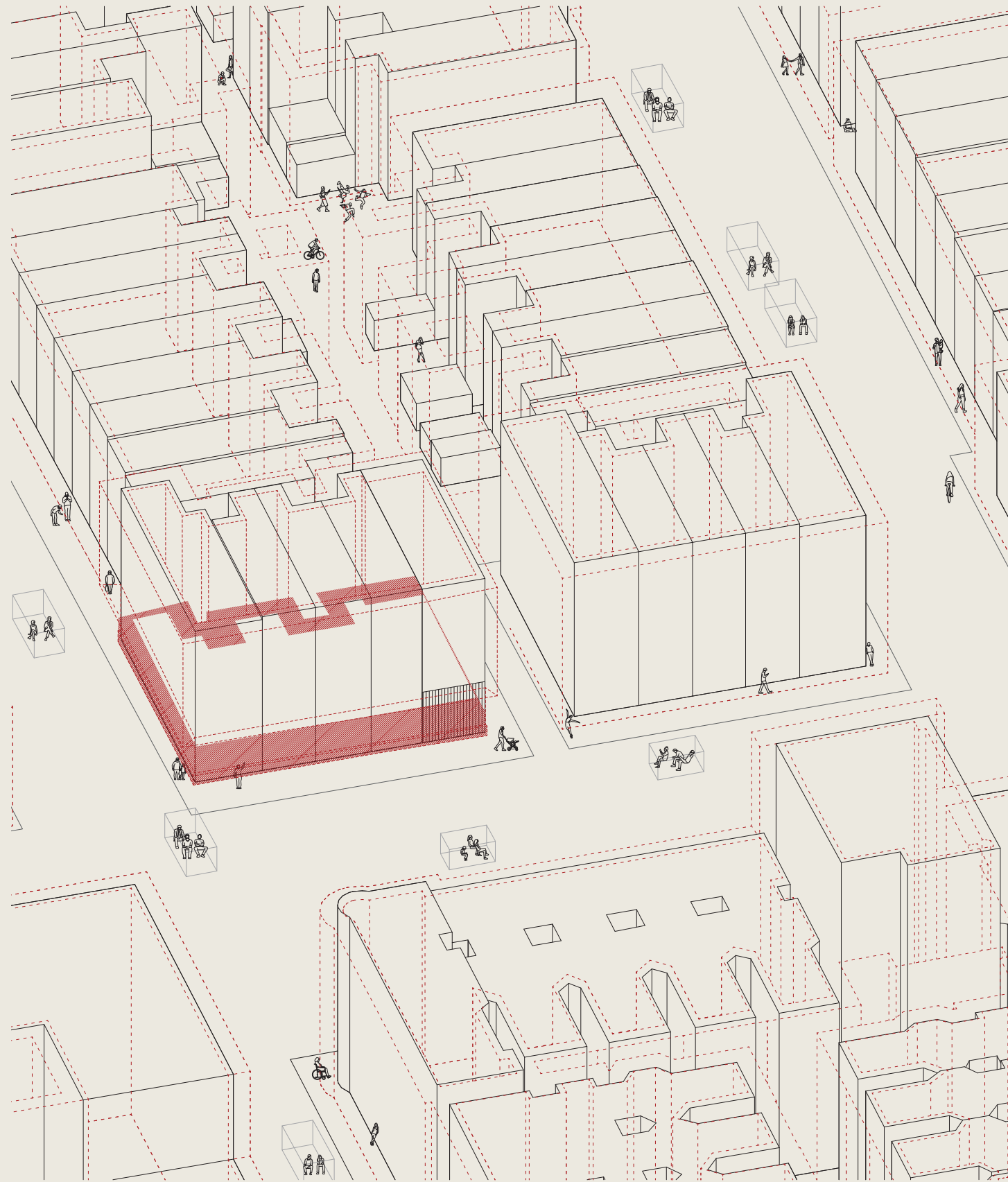


- 1 Small Retail Space
- 2 Car Wash
- 3 Restaurant
- 4 Social Club
- 5 Residential Entrance

Circulation
1785 Lexington Ave



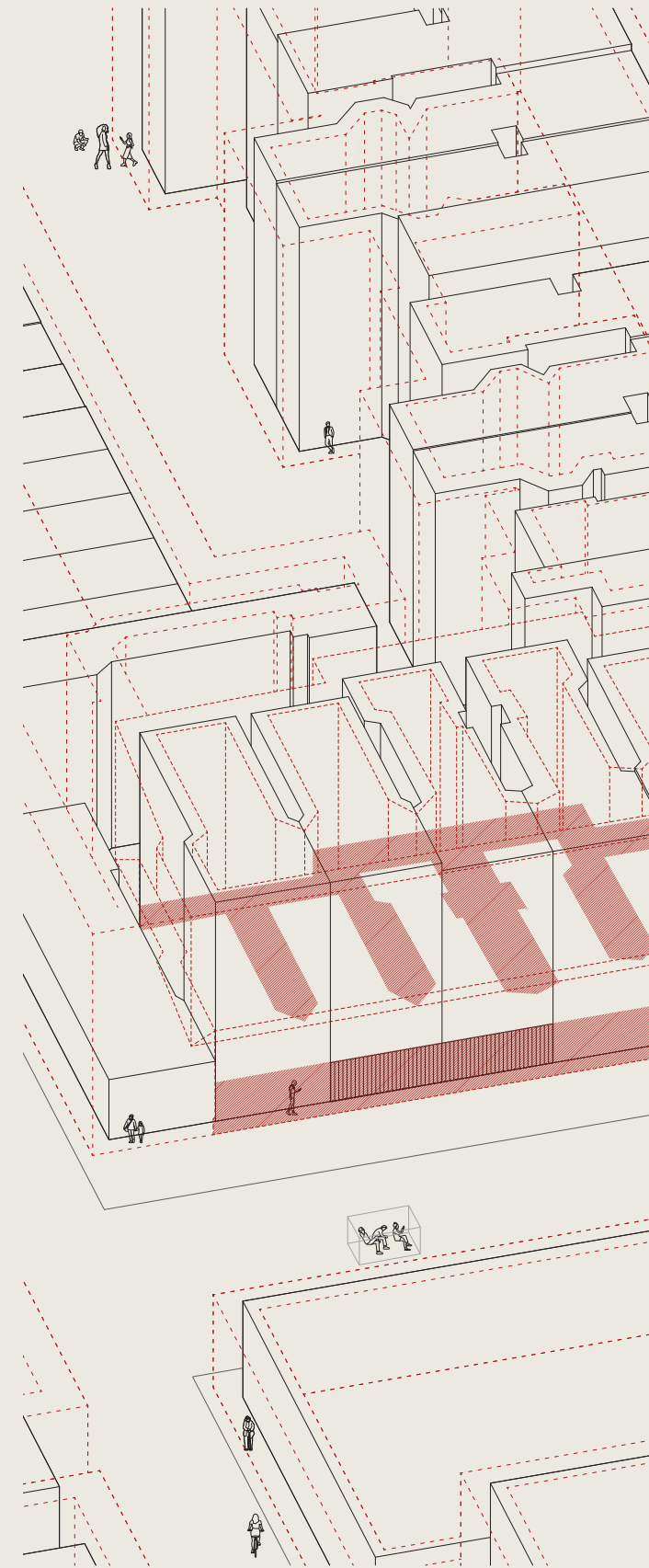
These limits become a spatial ribbon of potential redress and selective adaptation to existing architecture at its skin, inviting a range of bodies to engage with form and space. The project focuses on the potential of this ribbon concentrated at ground level. At street front ground level, pressures of the city meet the scale of the building.



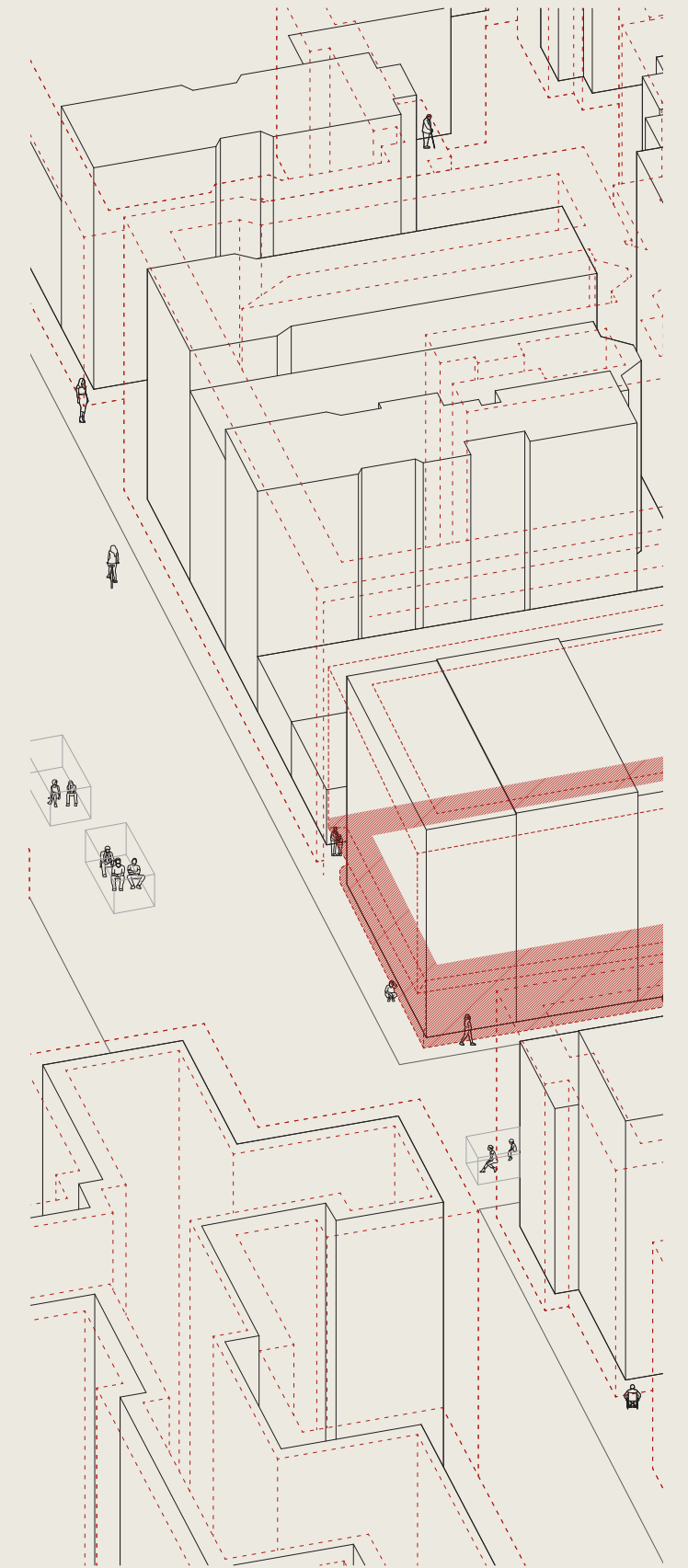
Retail Experience
2368 Adam Clayton Powell Jr Boulevard



042

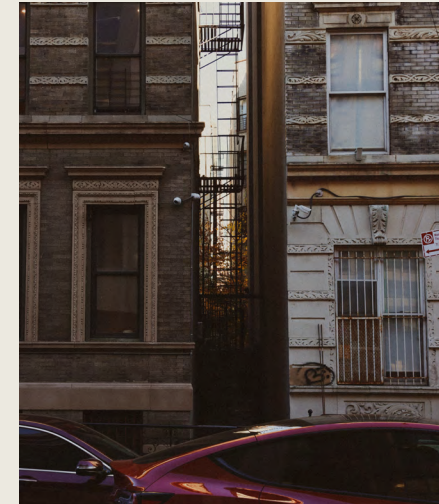


Dining
2546 Frederick Douglass Blvd

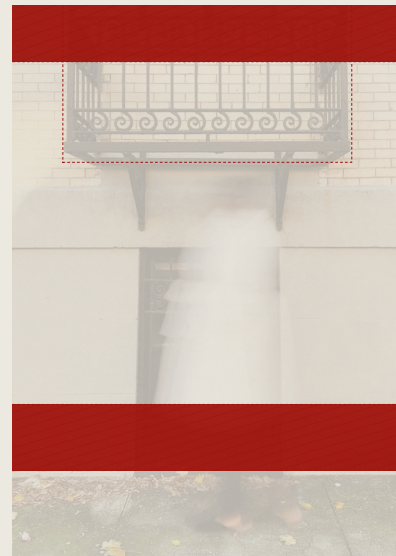


Circulation
1795 Lexington Ave





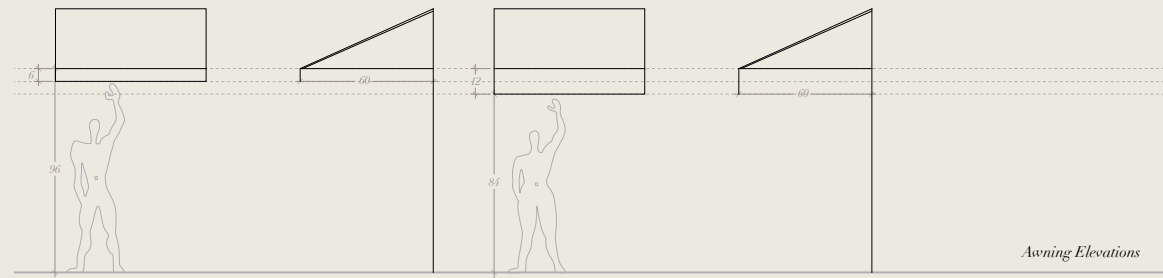
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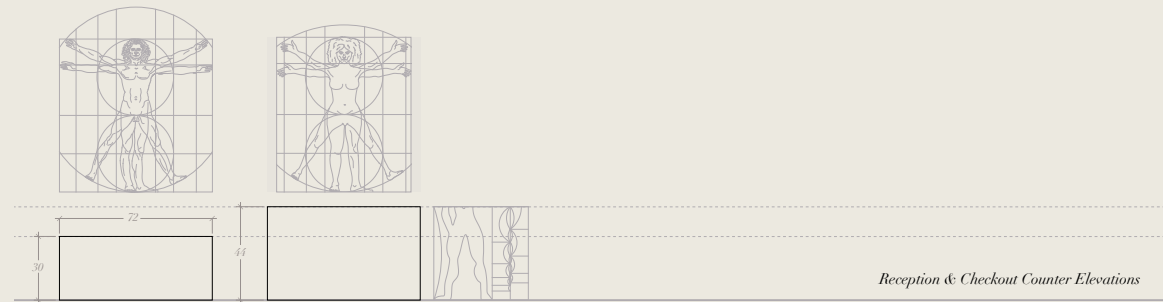
“Timid Activations” Series by Oluwatosin Odugbemi

Spatial ribbons are already being activated throughout Harlem, though timidly. This project will bring coherence and exuberance to the street edge. We see these occupations of the ribbon of opportunity take shape as awnings, fire escapes, benches, balconies, bulkheads and stoops.

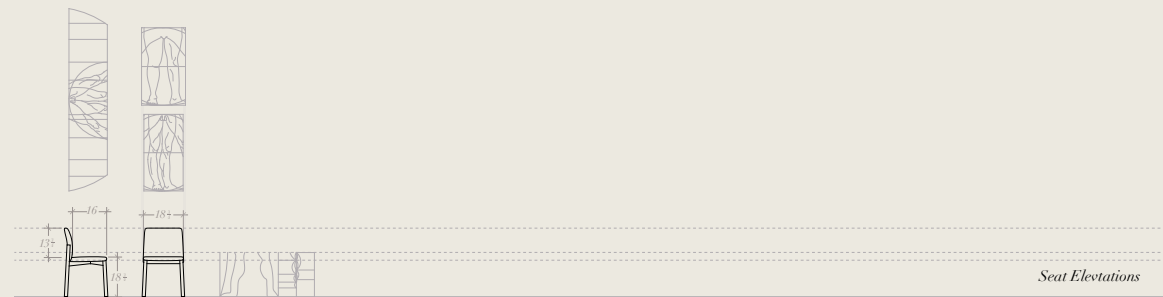
Architectural Element Limits



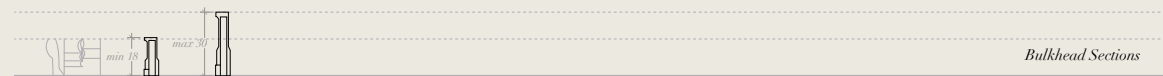
Awning Elevations



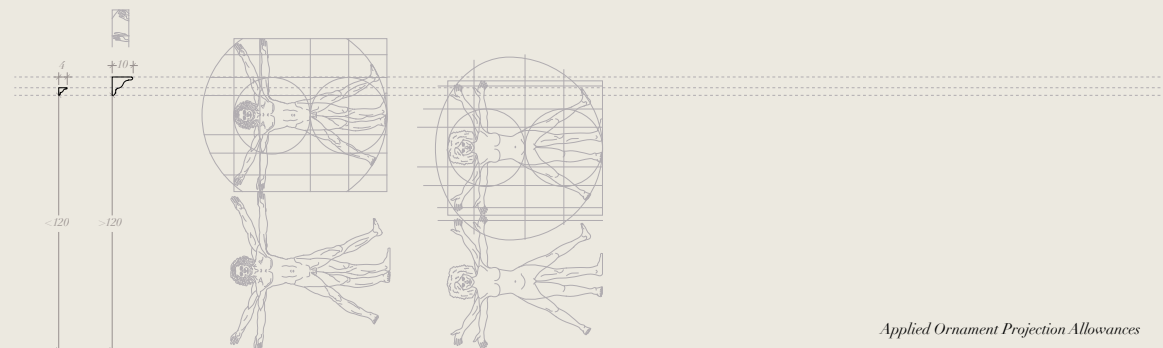
Reception & Checkout Counter Elevations



Seat Elevations



Bulkhead Sections

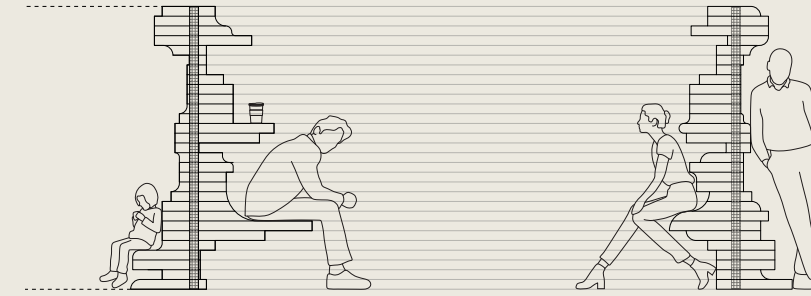
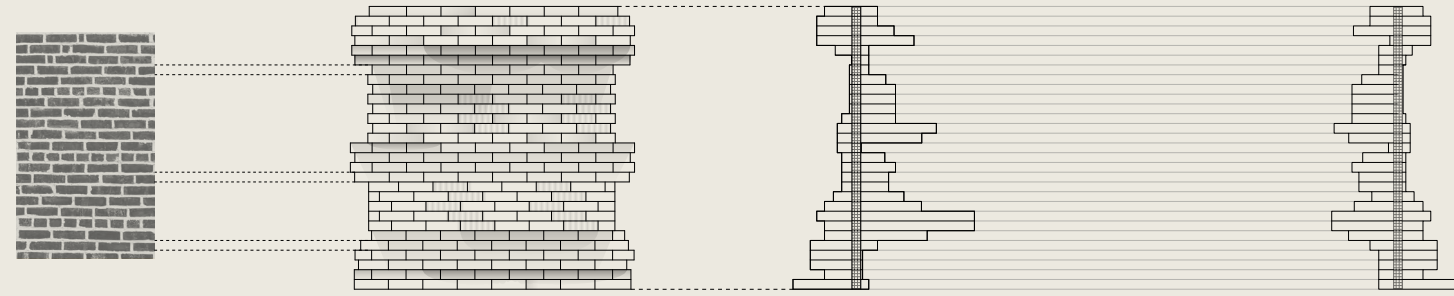


Applied Ornament Projection Allowances

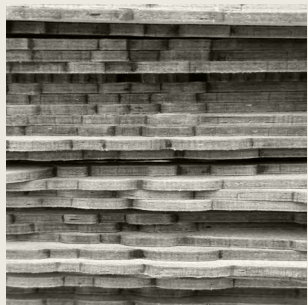
Each of these architectural elements proportions highly regulated, like bulkheads (an ornamental favourite of the historical district) that must be in about a knee height range, seating– standardized to a single body, or ADA

compliant purchasing surfaces. Awnings may protrude off the façade a generous 60 inches as long as they are 10 feet off the ground– out of arm’s reach. These limits become layers of data that register the body with space.





048



Photography of Final Defense
 Subject: Maison Dom-Ino in a Dress Play Model

Returning to my Type-on-Type explorations to understand the formal capabilities of an additive formal technique, I created stacks of wiggly sections, imagining brickwork (sampled from my site) that then provides layers of horizontal datum. What is normative (approximating

sameness) in elevation is voluptuous in section creating spaces for bodies to interact with. This became a design language using curves to draw together a range of bodies within space.





050



“Temporary Accommodations” Series by Oluwatosin Odugbemi



Through this new language, architecture can accommodate overlooked bodies, creating permanent spaces for transient activity and a typical surface typology like masonry can create space through depth and sculpting. Pop-up retail and street food cultures are specific to the people and place of my site. Retail is already a part of the active life of Harlem and the culture of convening the community together here. And for these commercial programs refutes the tendency to position works made accessible through widely appreciated aesthetics and simple language as “untheoretical” and, therefore, “unimportant.” The best of commercial spaces are designed for the masses’ delight. They are buildings made accessible for appreciation by non-academic audiences through the creation of beauty.



052



Harlem Street Culture Photographs from Historical Archives



054

“The Black Middle-Class” Series by James Van Der Zee

This project of Harlem formalizes the opulent Black home, creating spaces of comfort for an array of bodies in a gesture of curvaceous architectural tomfoolery. It layers ornamentation, bringing the action of redressing a domestic interior to a street-level storefront.

Body

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056

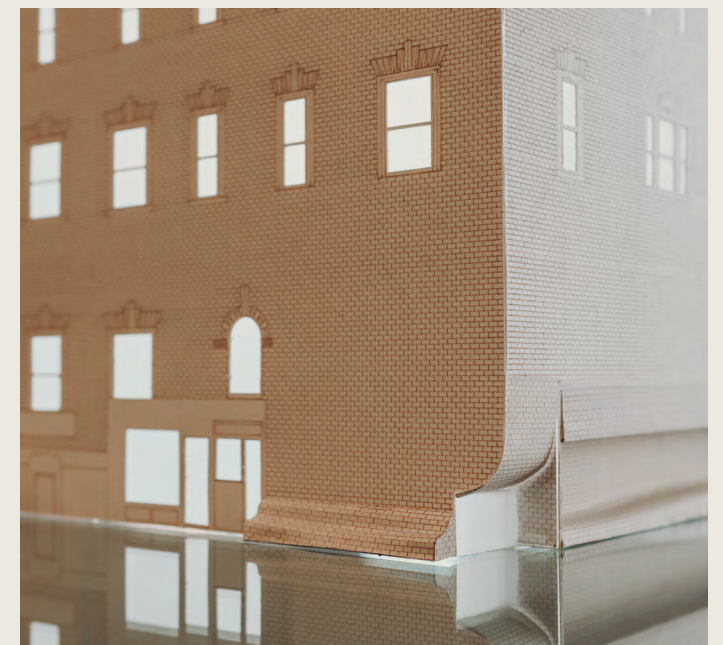
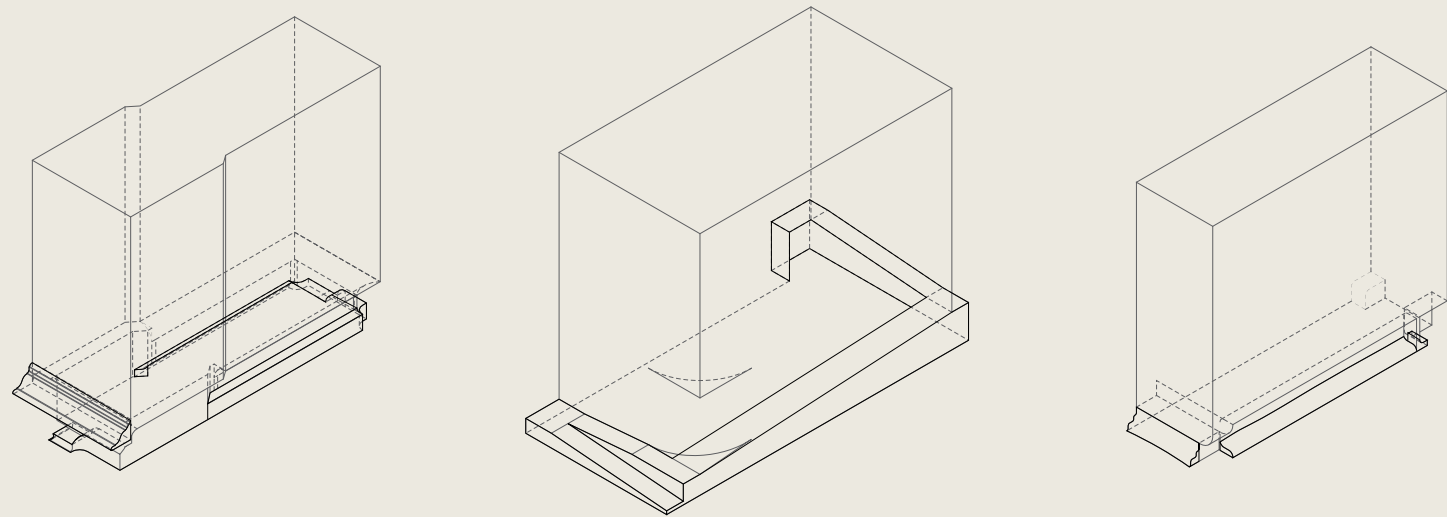


"Harlem Stoops" by Oluwatosin Odugbemi

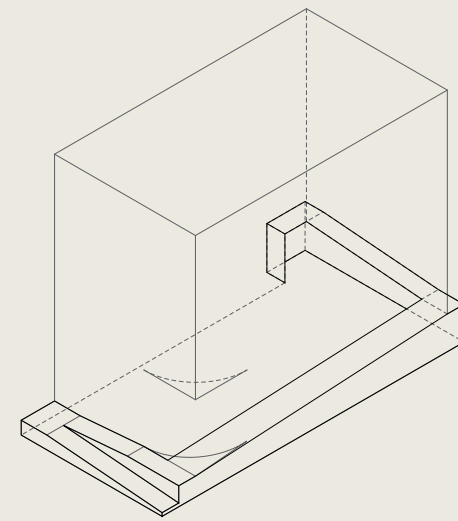
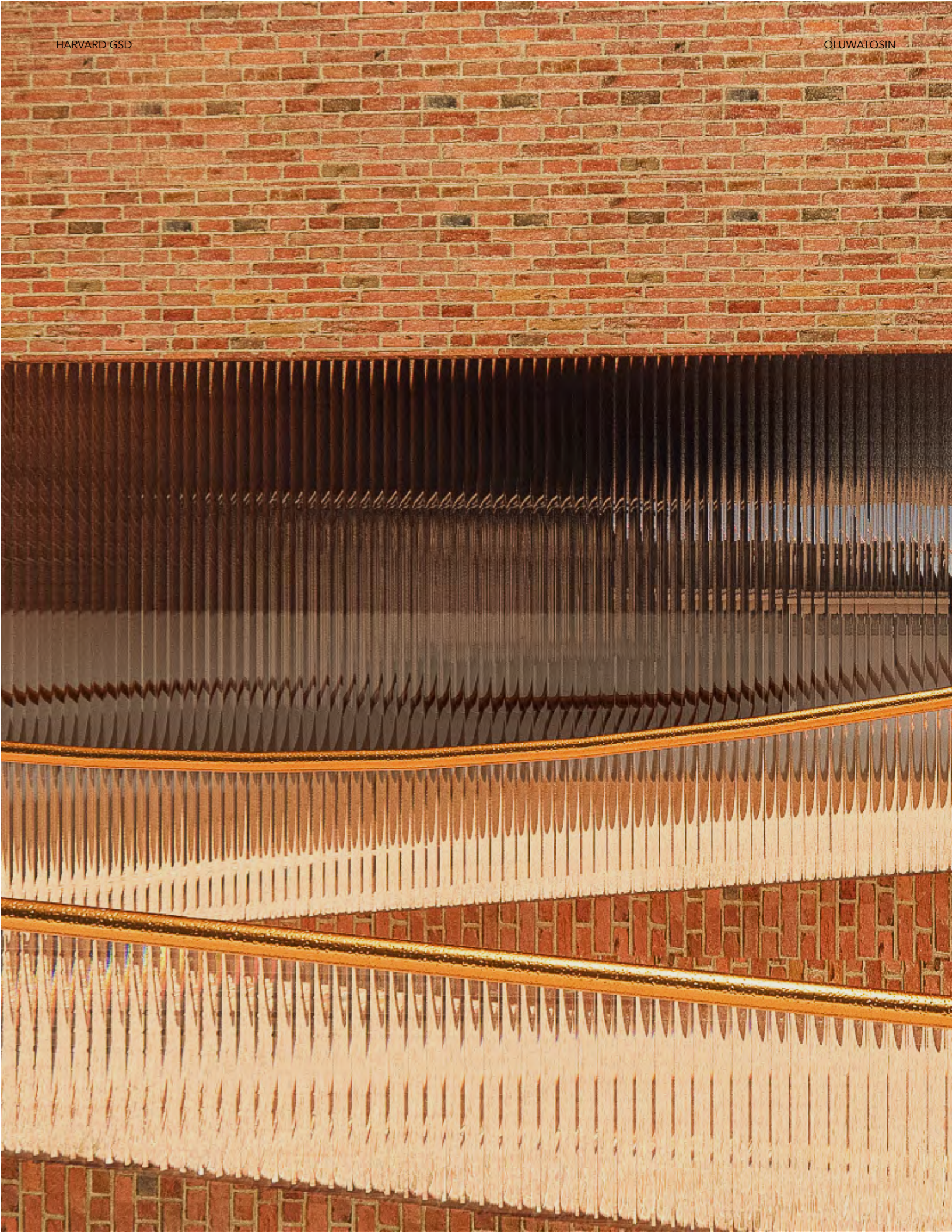


Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Massing Models

To test these ideas, I worked with three sites across Harlem that engage retail and dining challenges. Through each, I supersize an existing historical ornamental element to create space for circulation, rest, shopping, and eating for a range of bodies within the ribbon of potential.



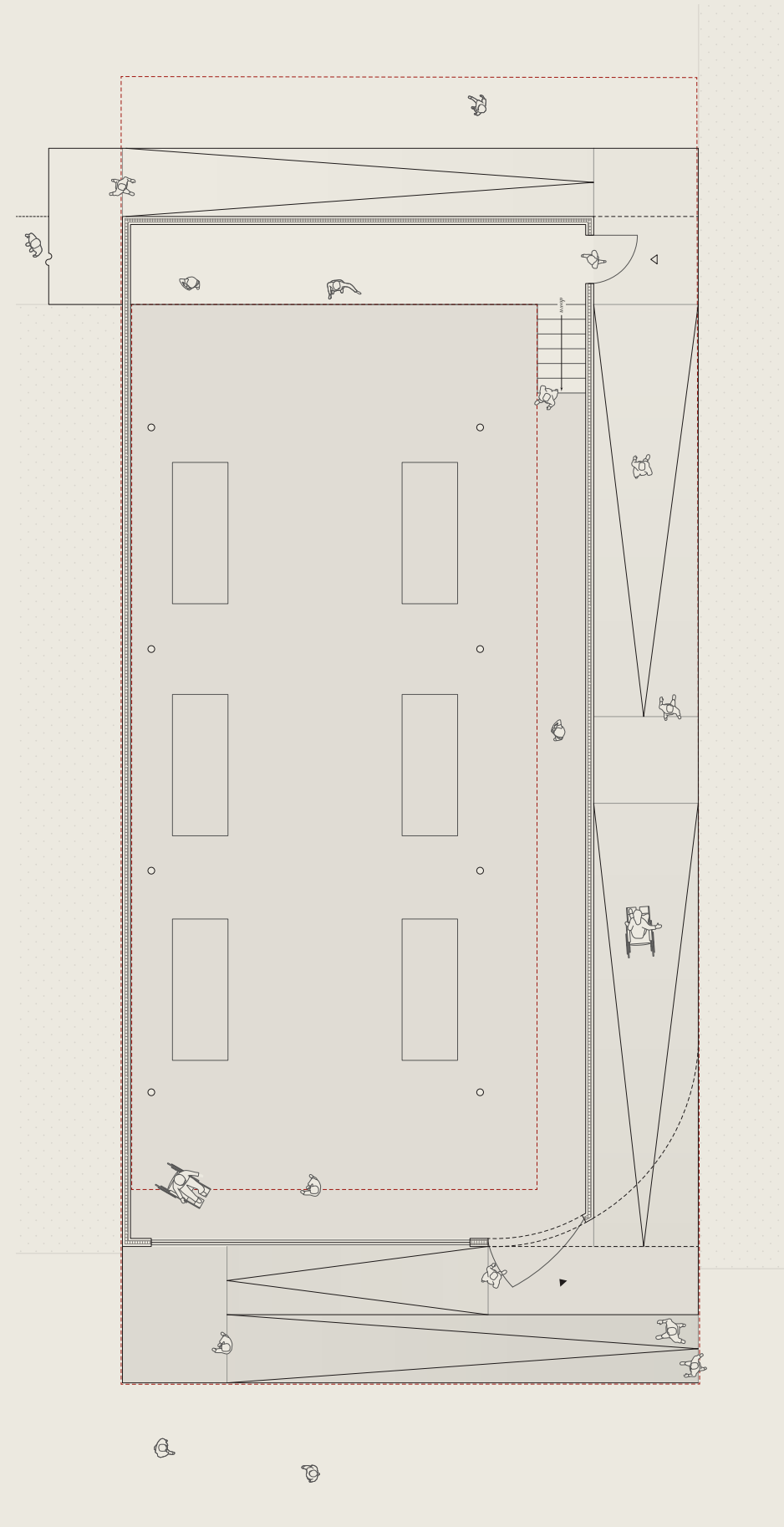
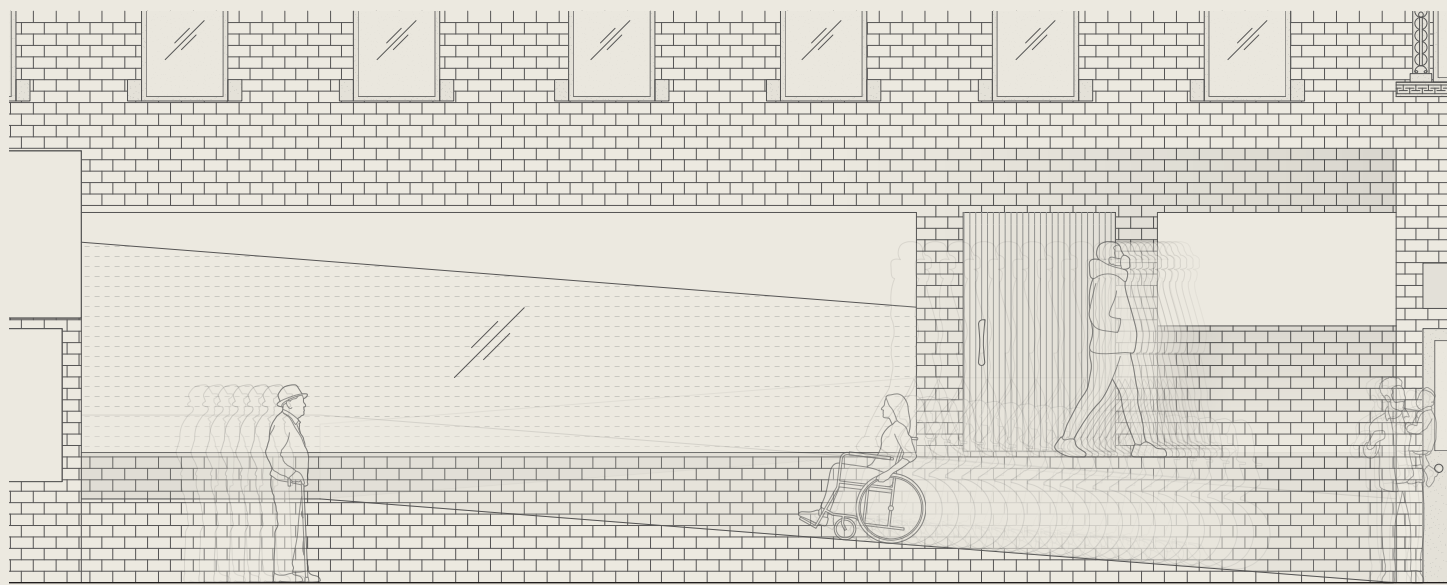
Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Façade Models



Circulation

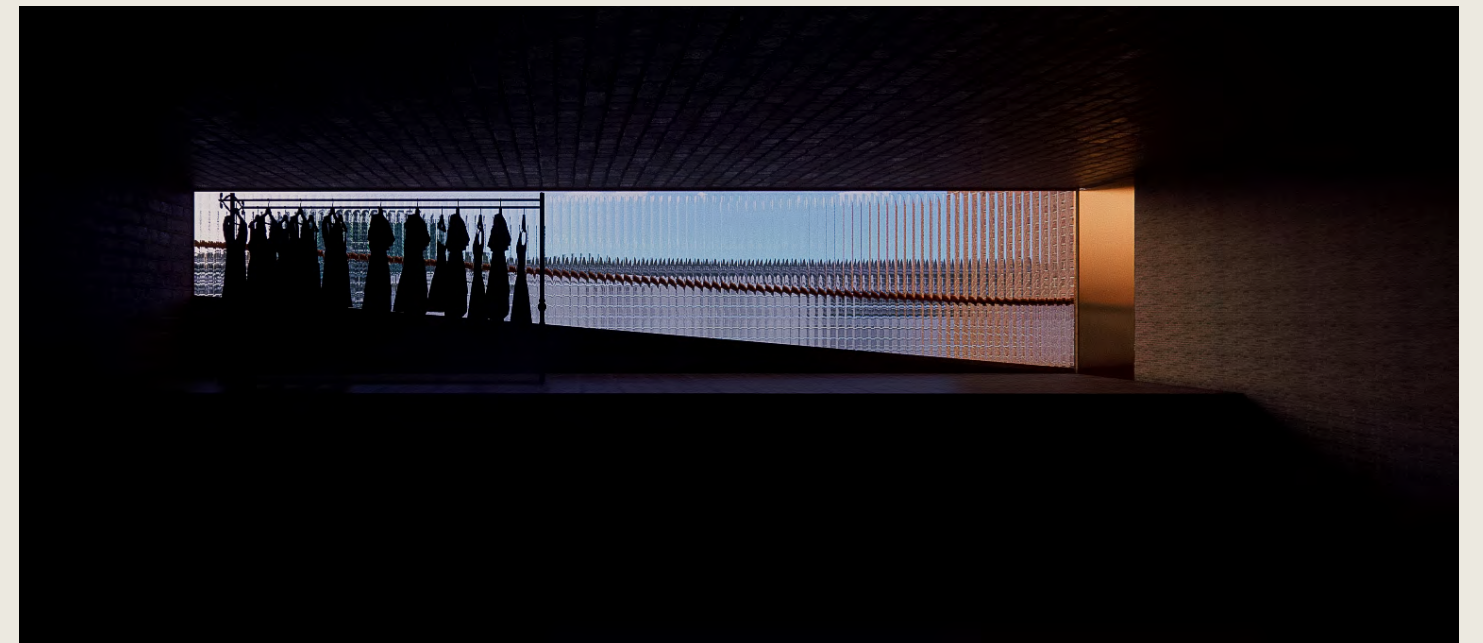
1795 Lexington Ave

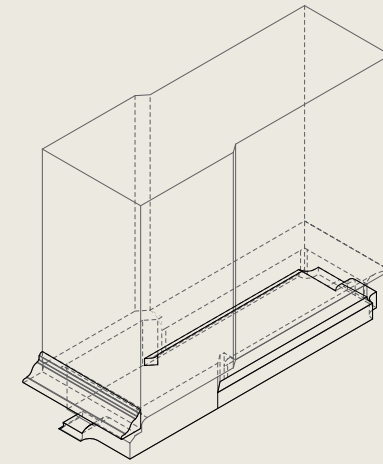
In this scheme, I reinterpret a stoop as infrastructural ramping for an aging population that I imagine to be able to expand at a neighbourhood scale.





066

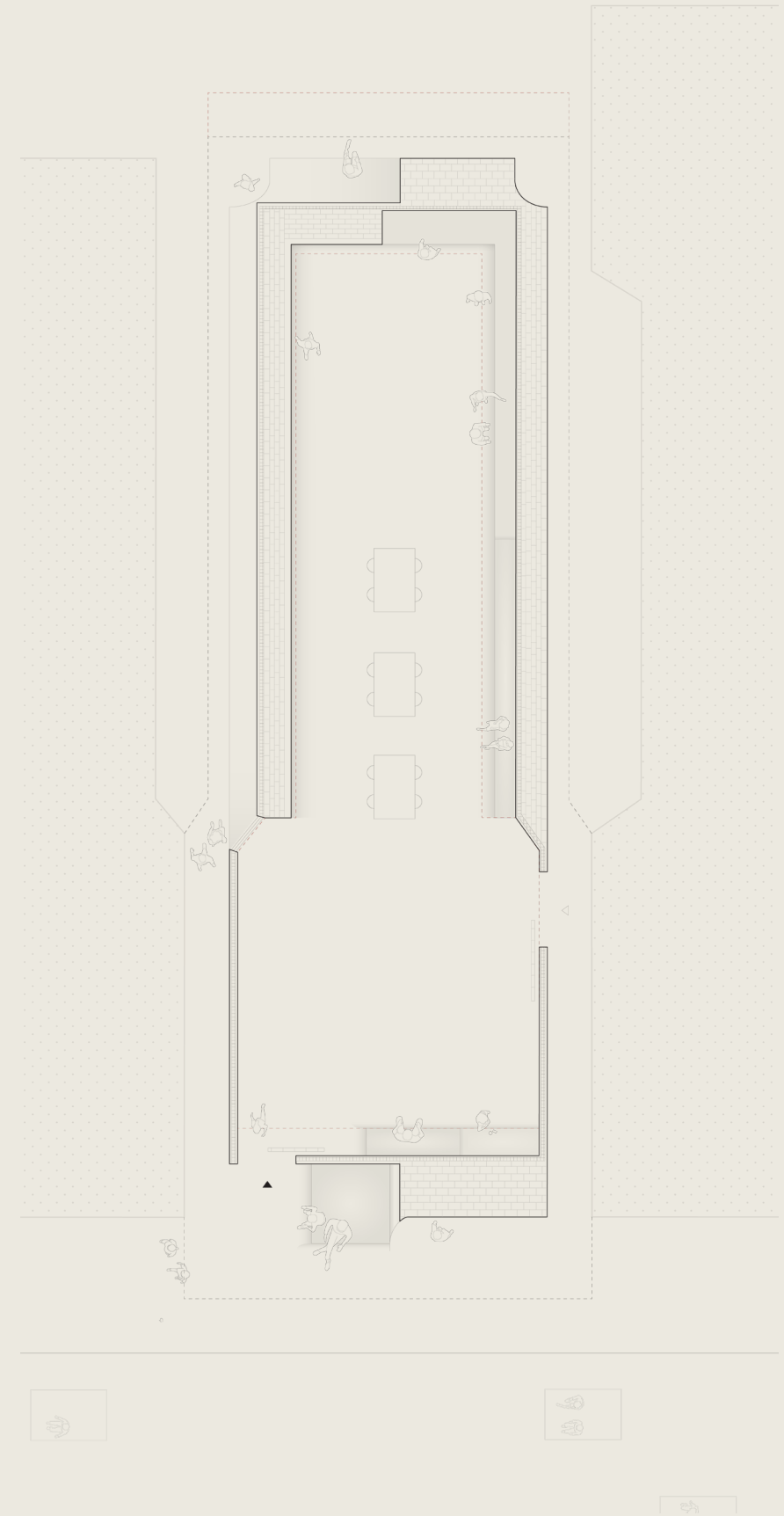




Dining

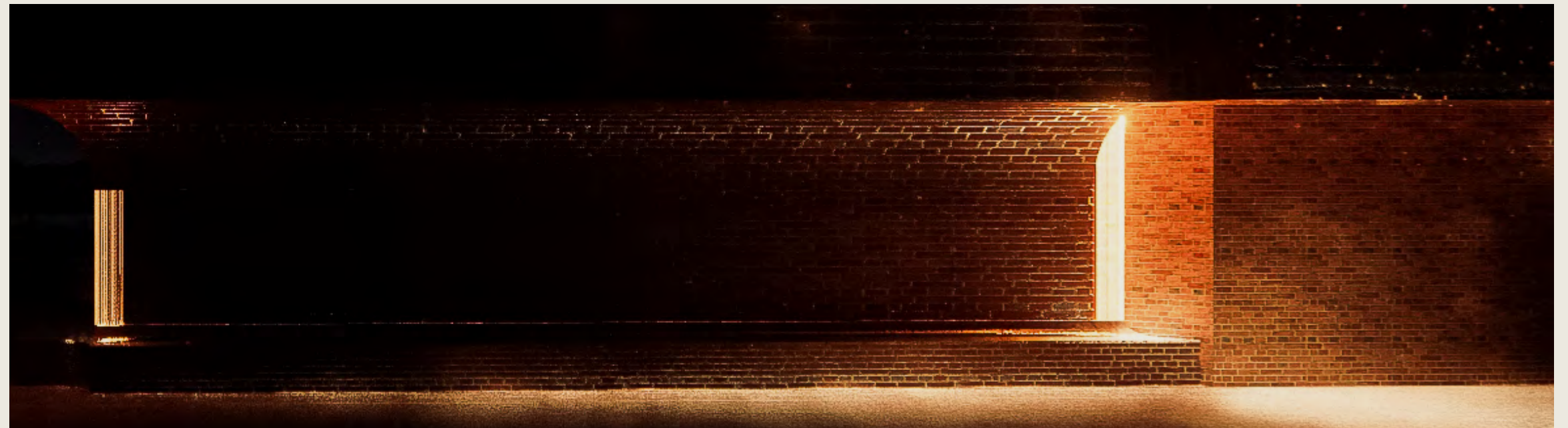
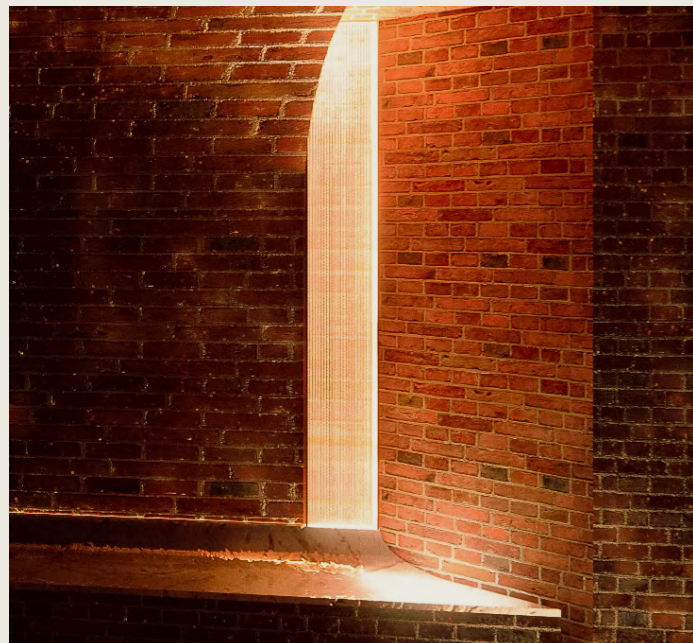
2546 Frederick Douglass Blvd

In this scheme, I am super-scaling the bulkhead and awning to provide new spaces for seating, leaning, and eating to bring the life of the street into connection with Harlem's food culture.





072



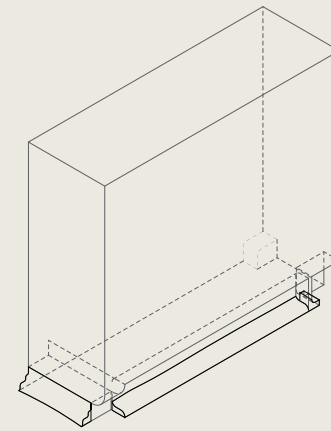


074



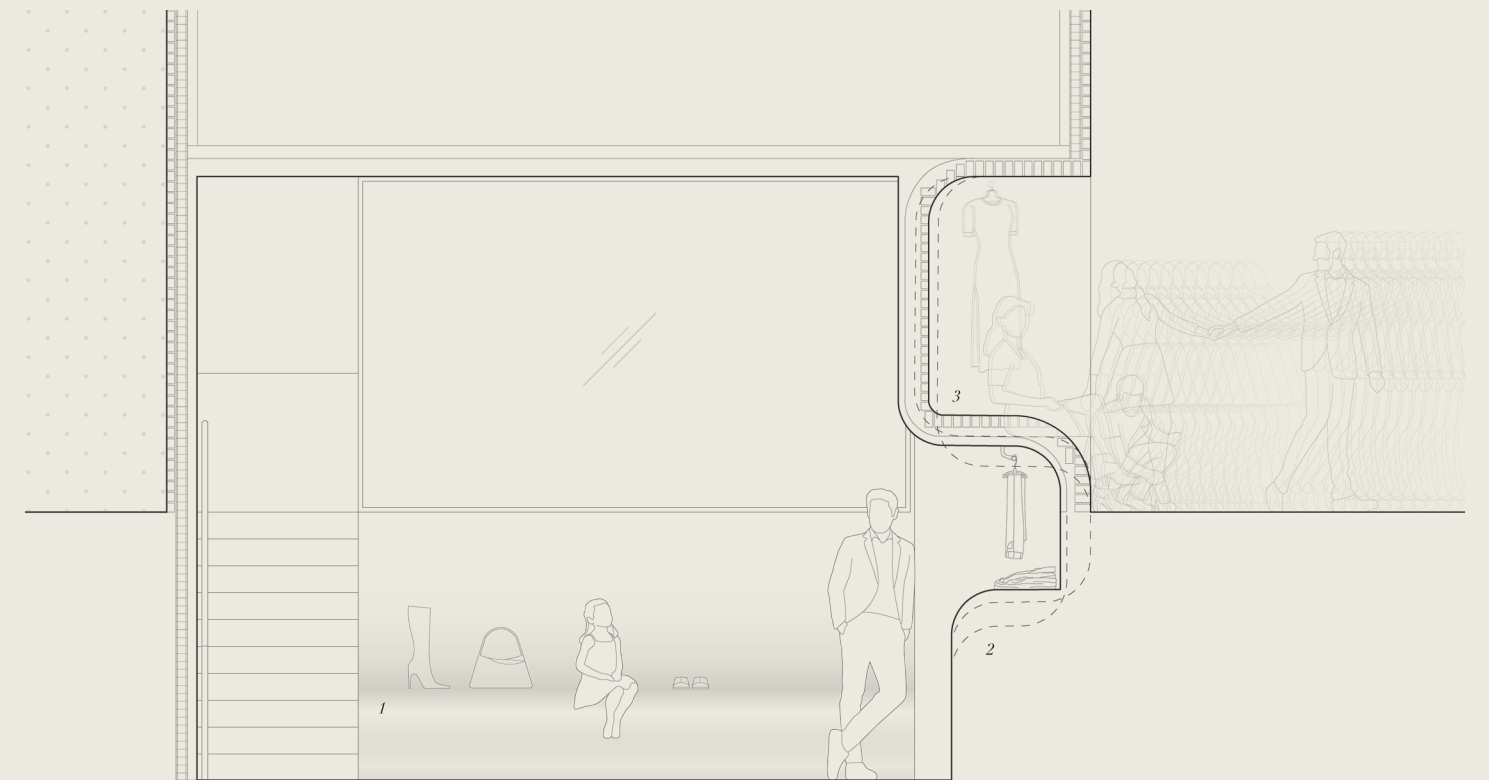
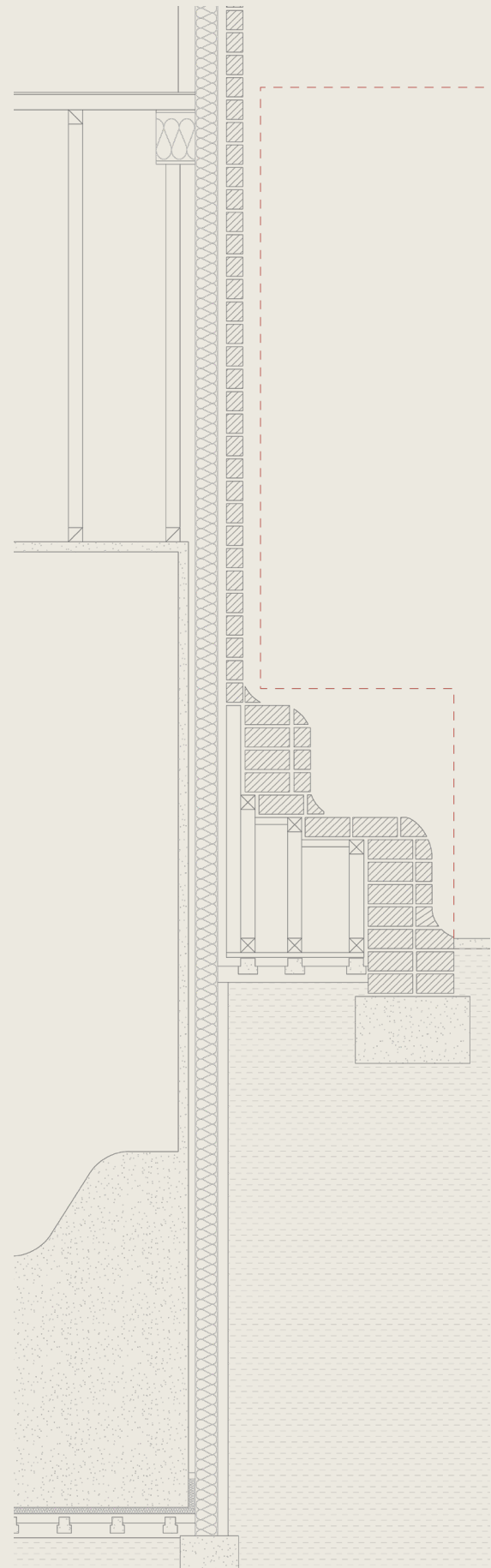
Retail Experience

2368 Adam Clayton Powell
Jr. Boulevard

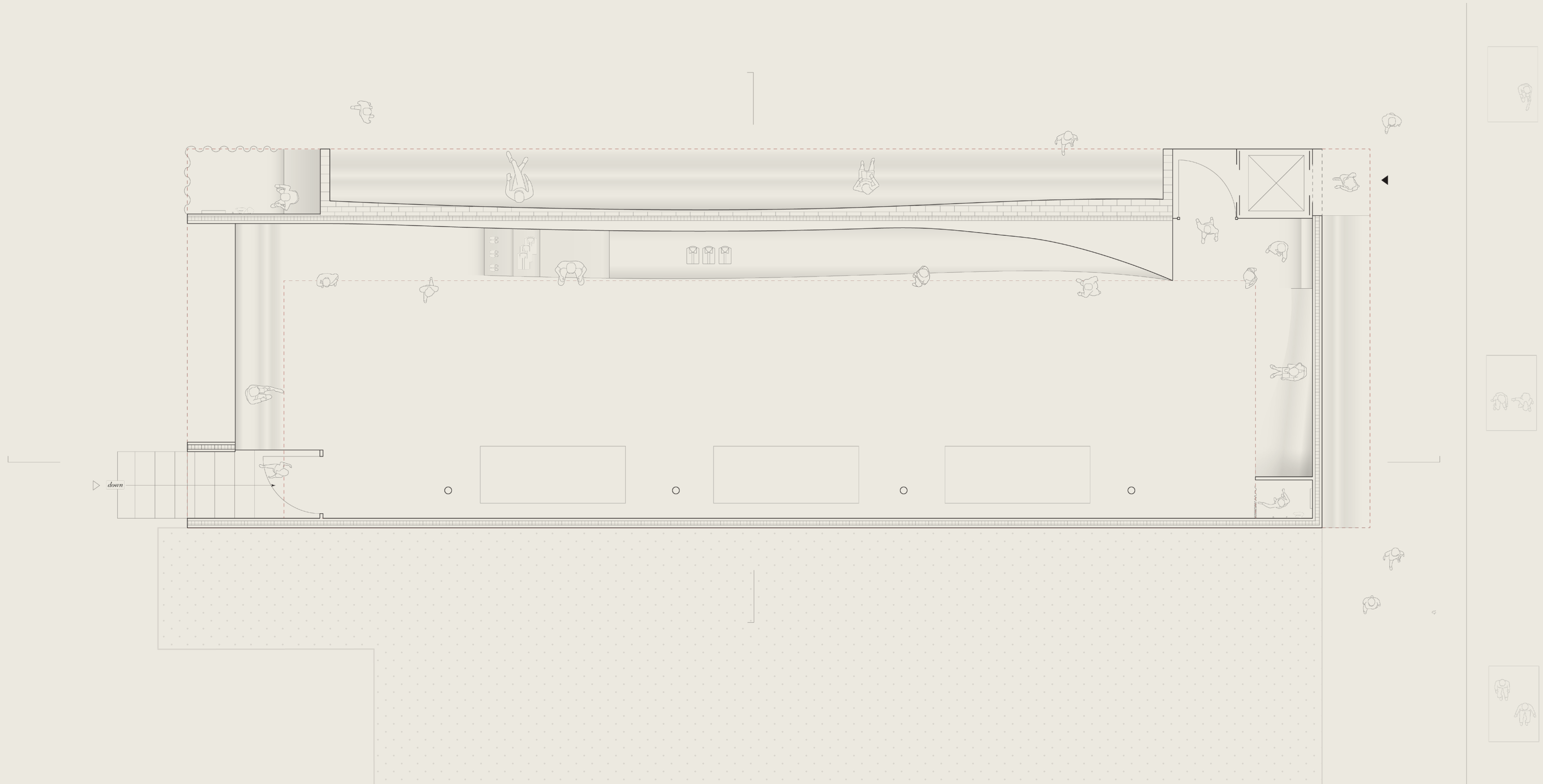


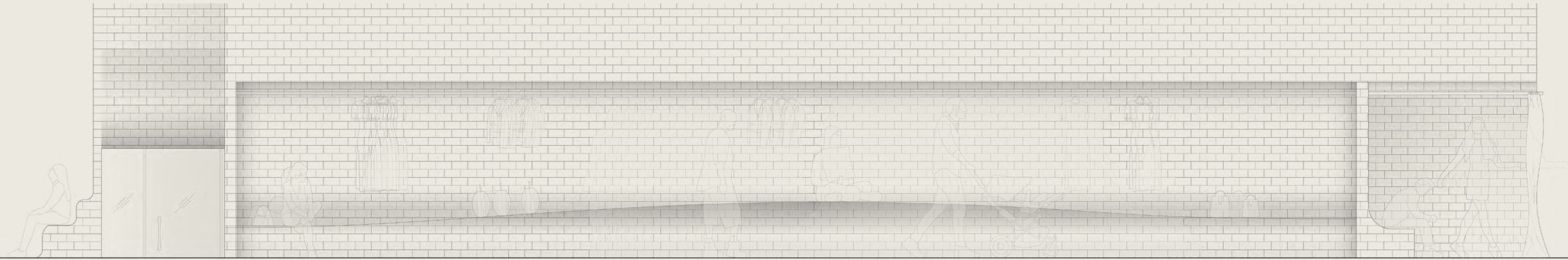
In this scheme, I amplify the bulkhead to create surfaces for seating and merchandising. In place of a conventional storefront window that peers into an interior retail life, the façade, instead, becomes an activated form and space for retail activity. Designing first in elevation, the façade is altered through a tactical additive strategy with intentional subtractive punctures to create alcoves for pop-up shops and as an aperture strategy for light. Design changes to the exterior produce consequences on the inside that are resolved by embracing and echoing the exterior to create similarly versatile spaces on the inside. This ribbon of potential produces a two-sided opportunity for the creation of form and space through the façade.

I am moving away from a singular language into a space of legibly designing for multiples. Negotiating between the lines of registration through undulating curves that return to a rectilinear language native to the masonry unity in areas where the human body isn't frequently in direct contact with the architectural body. The shadows created by the design language move us further from singular linework into a jittery fill, making visible the deltas.



- 1 Seating, Display Table, Foot Stool
- 2 Seating, Display Table, Arm Rest, Sales Counter
- 3 Seating, Pop-Up Shop Alcove, Foot Stool

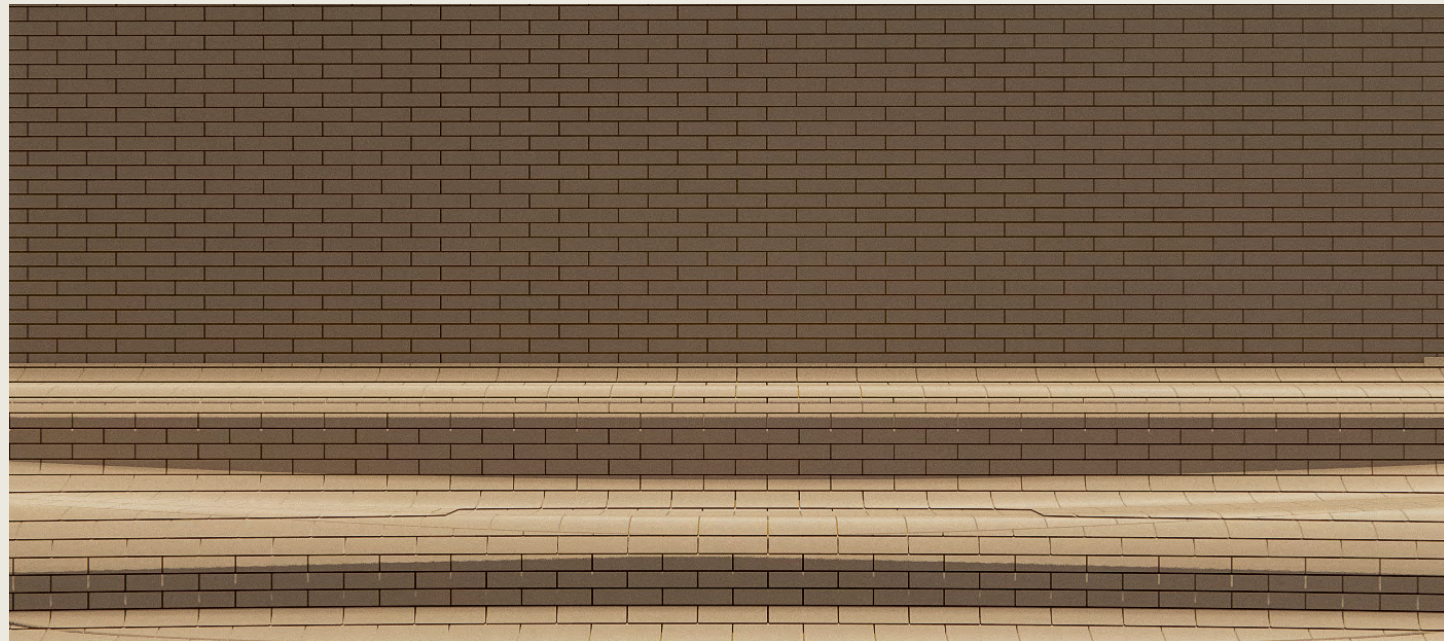


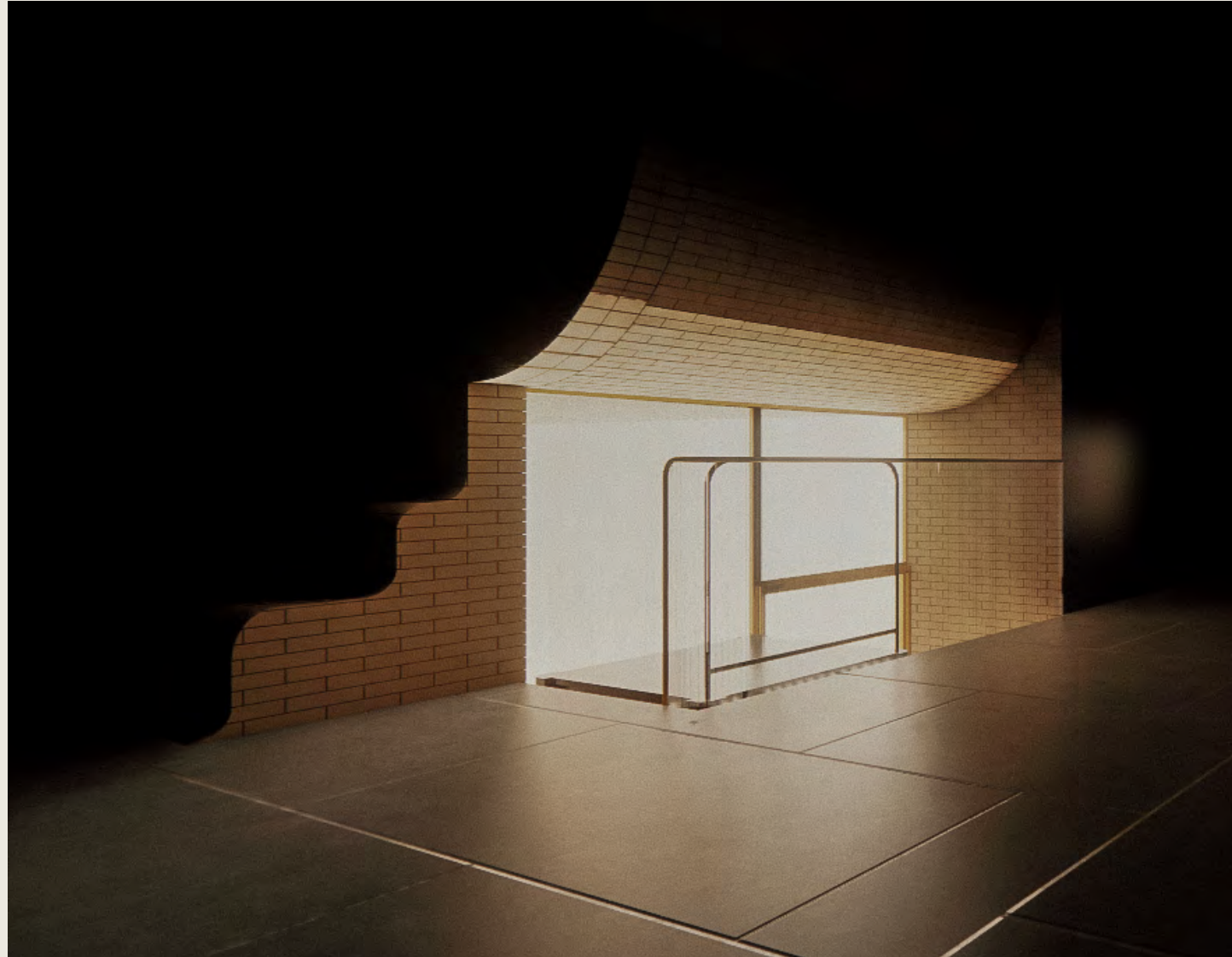


- 1 Seating, Display Table, Foot Stool
- 2 Seating, Display Table, Arm Rest
- 3 Seating, Display Table, Arm Rest, Sales Counter
- 4 Display Table, Arm Rest, Art Installation Surface



084





086





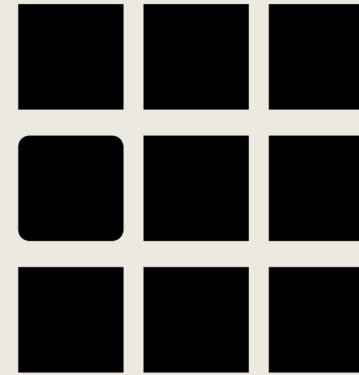
088

Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Inspirational Literature & Artwork

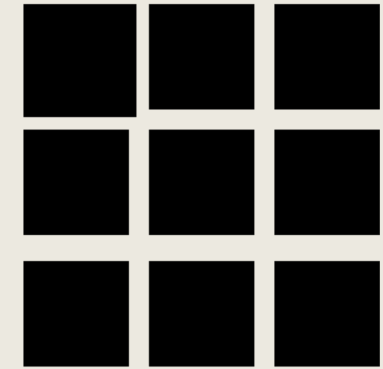


Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Texture Studies

*Spatial Hierarchy through Othering
Shape*



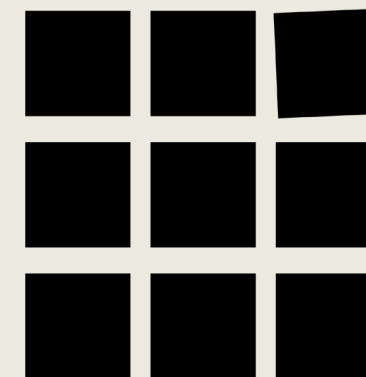
*Spatial Hierarchy through Othering
Proportion*



Approximating Sameness

Approximating Sameness

*Spatial Hierarchy through Othering
Arrangement*



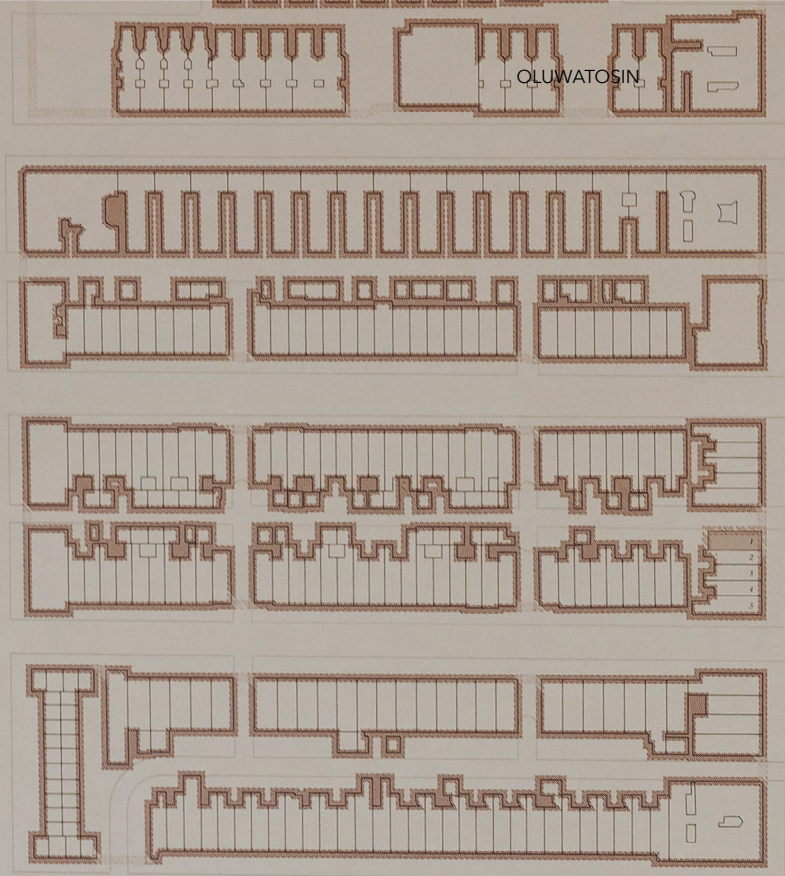
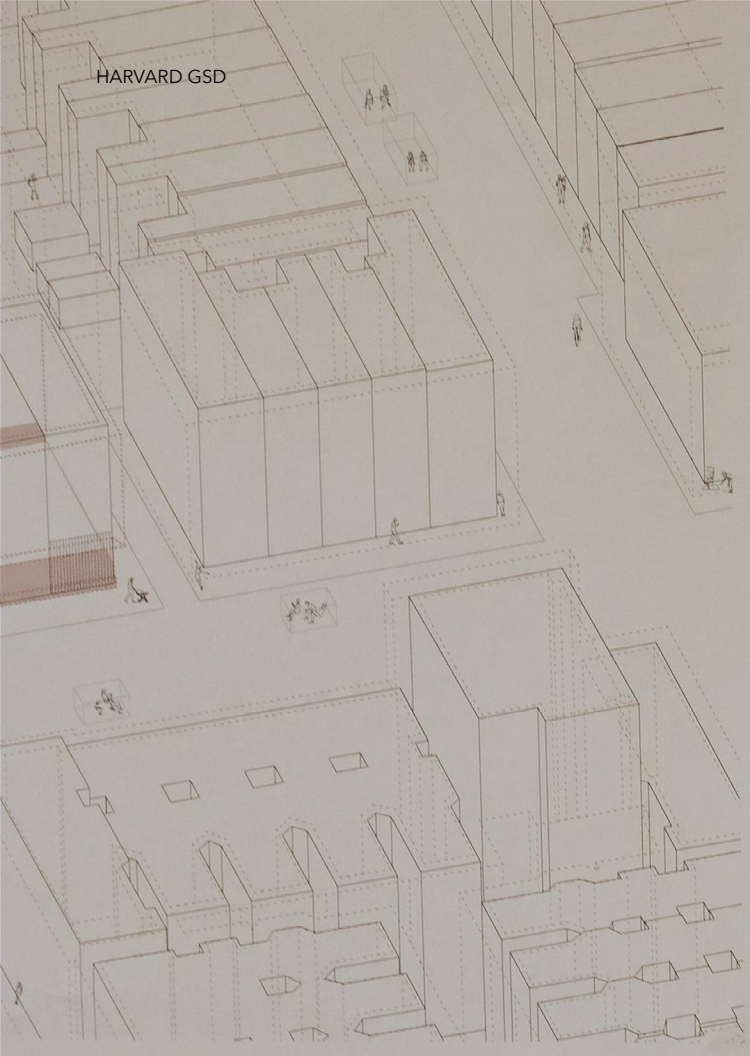
Approximating Sameness

This is protest, realized through celebration, making visible the exceptional qualities of Blackness. I am designing for a range of bodies – a delta – through the supersizing and embodiment of vernacular ornamentation.

I am calling for typologies to be embraced and then altered— approximating sameness for a new experience that is felt but not seen at first glance, just as the differed experience of living in a Black body in a modern white

society can feel obviously perceptible when lived; but not as such from an outside perspective unless one is actively seeking to understand.

Through accommodating and celebrating new bodies and leveraging vernacular as an architectural informant, I would like to create spaces that disrupt typical hierarchies, inviting and exciting a broader array of human bodies into a new architectural body of work.

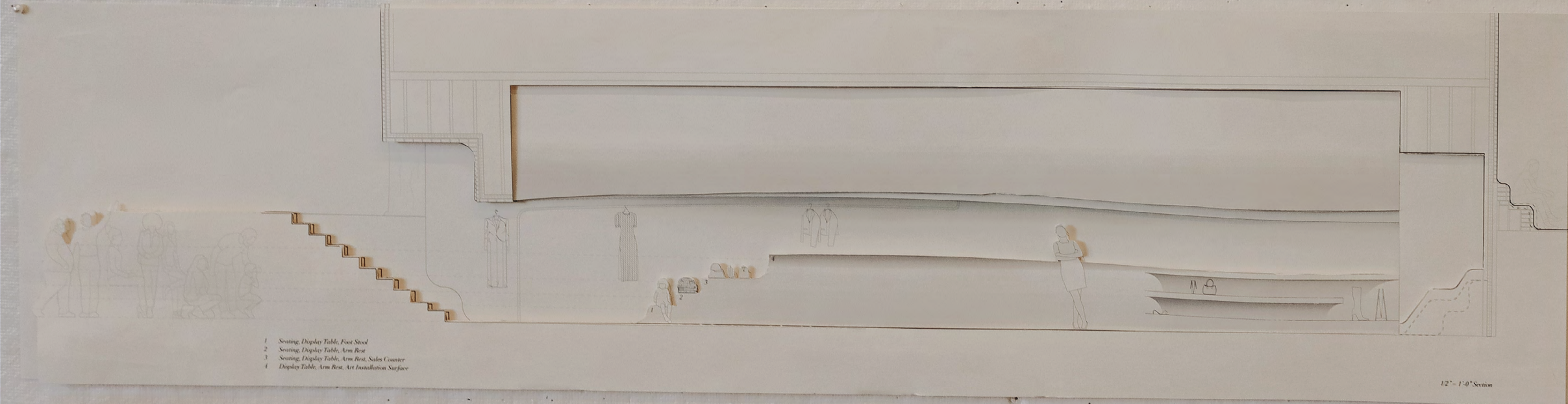
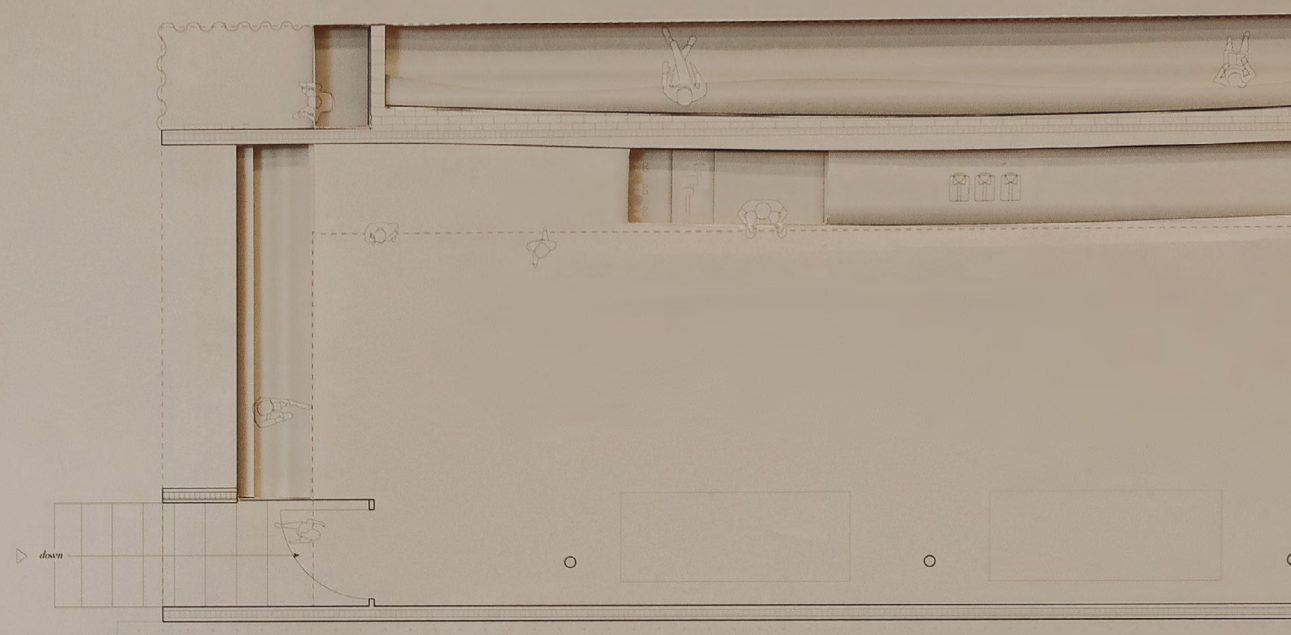


- 1 Site
- 2 Main Stairs
- 3 Dress Shop
- 4 Residential Entrance
- 5 Fashion Shop

Retail Experience
2368 Adam Clayton Powell Jr Boulevard

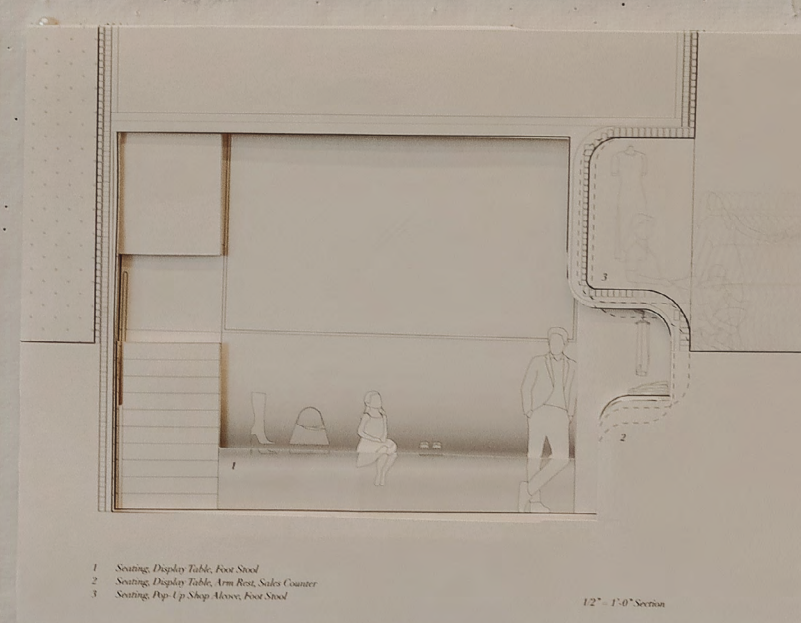


Retail Experience
2368 Adam Clayton Powell Jr Boulevard



- 1 Seating, Display Table, Foot Stool
- 2 Seating, Display Table, Arm Rest
- 3 Seating, Display Table, Arm Rest, Sales Counter
- 4 Display Table, Arm Rest, Art Installation Surface

12" = 1'-0" Section



- 1 Seating, Display Table, Foot Stool
- 2 Seating, Display Table, Arm Rest, Sales Counter
- 3 Seating, Pop-Up Shop Aisles, Foot Stool

12" = 1'-0" Section

Photography of Final Defense
Subject: Draw-dels



1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s

1909
Journal of the Philosophy of
City Planning was introduced in 1909, taught by
Assistant Professor Frederick D. Stone at
Harvard University. The first volume was devoted to
the history of the city as a living organism.

1912
The City Planning Commission was established in 1912, the first of its kind in the United States.

1930
From the very word of its origin, 'city planning' which is a composite of the words 'city' and 'planning', it is a composite of the two words. It is a process of planning for the future of a city, or a part of a city, or a group of cities, or a group of countries, or a group of continents, or a group of the world.

1936
The Graduate School of Design opened in 1936 with
Department of Architecture, Landscape Architecture,
and Regional Planning. It was the first of its kind in
the United States. It was the first of its kind in the
United States. It was the first of its kind in the
United States.

1944
Morris Bryan Lambie,
Acting Chair (1944-1945)

1948
The Graduate School of Design opened in 1948 with
Department of Architecture, Landscape Architecture,
and Regional Planning. It was the first of its kind in
the United States. It was the first of its kind in the
United States.

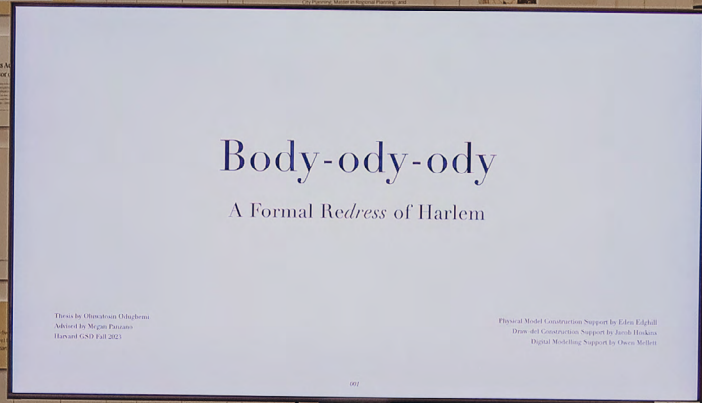
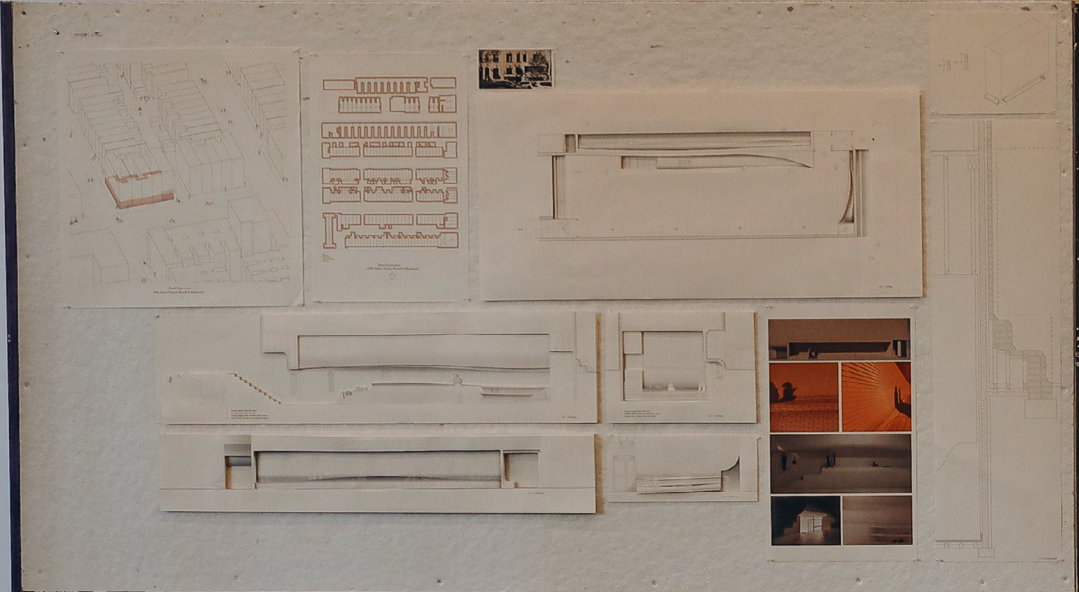
1956
Josephine Tyebkhan,
Assistant Chair (1956-1959)

1964
William H. H. H. H.,
Chair (1964-1969)

1969
Francis I. I.,
Chair (1969-1979)

1972
Florence I. I.,
Associate Professor of City Planning

1977
The Graduate School of Design opened in 1977 with
Department of Architecture, Landscape Architecture,
and Regional Planning. It was the first of its kind in
the United States. It was the first of its kind in the
United States.



Body-ody-ody

A Formal Redress of Harlem

Thesis by Oluwatosin Oluwatolani
Advisor: Dr. W. H. H. H.
Harvard GSD Fall 2023

Physical Model construction: Support by Edouard K. K.
Model: Dr. Construction: Support by Sarah H. H.
Digital Modeling: Support by Charles M. M.



Photography of Final Defense

