

part three\_ **intention**

# programming

## weak architecture

Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo's introduced the notion of 'weak ontology' or 'fragile thought,' which supposes that the value of thought and of objects is brought about by direct and varied experience with the subject. From this, Pallasmaa introduces the concept of 'weak architecture' as:

*...an architecture of weak structure and image. Whereas the latter desires to impress us through an outstanding singular image and a consistent articulation of form, the architecture of weak image is contextual and responsive: it is concerned with sensory interaction instead of idealized and conceptual manifestations. This architecture grows and opens up... (1995: 328)*

Weak architecture has a positive connotation in it's ability to host a rich experience. Weak architecture also begins to address the process of aging – the physical and metaphorical results of weathering, erosion, and decay. In the traditional sense of robust structural integrity and programmatic usefulness, old buildings are too often rendered useless. Heritage is regarded in this city of forgetting as reference for nostalgia and melancholy rather than a rich base from which to build upon.

I take the definition of weak architecture one step further to include architecture that has been stripped of its original

purpose and re-purposed to suit new programmatic and spatial needs. The conversion (and adaptive re-use) of buildings for a new purpose can also characterize weak architecture as, “[t]he insertion of new functional and symbolic structures short-circuits the initial architectural logic of the structure and opens up emotional and expressive ranges of experience” (Pallasmaa 1995: 329). The layering and collage of materials and spatial conditions, the very nature of weak architecture, is what gives it character and intrigue. The scars and traces of use have been intentionally kept and have been carefully considered in this project. It is the imperfection of the real that brings to life the memories of the building and its life and imparts a sense of duration and humility to the new design.

## loose space

In their recent book, *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, Karen A. Franck and Quentin Stevens explore, "...the many ways that urban residents, with creativity and determination, appropriate public space to meet their own needs and desires. Familiar or unexpected, spontaneous or planned, momentary or long-lasting, the activities that make urban space loose continue to give cities life and vitality" (2007: 1). Loose space is space (urban or architectural) that can support multiple experiences and interpretations.

My objective for this project is to create an architecture that must be completed by human action and experience. The spaces are simple and considered enough to support a variety of activities and are intended to be appropriated for multiple programs over their lifespan. As people engage the building they infuse it with their personal actions and memories.; they approach the building as wanderers, "...experiencing the city as such a hedonist, engages in a phenomenological exploration, collecting syncopated patterns of fragments which collect as new perceptions brush against the body" (Michalski 2002: 101).

The notion of experiencing a city as 'wanderer' is fundamentally different than experiencing the city as a resident. As residents of this city, we often pass the same routes, oblivious to the idiosyncrasies of urban scenes passed hundreds of times - we 'forget' its significance.

The architect has the opportunity to intervene by re-introducing spontaneity + multiplicity into the urban realm by acting as a curator of experience in the media of space and materiality. Michalski continues, "[w]e perform roles, interpret events, and participate in the interplay which writes the city large...while we inherit language, architecture and culture from the ages, our contemporary use of them entails a disassembly, reworking and reassembly of fragments based on the situational demands and emotional needs of our time and place" (ibid. 103).

Adding significance and meaning to space is an essential part of 'remembering' it, embuing it with memory, and forming it as a true place. Place attachment is seen as, "...a centre of felt value; much more than an environment, it provides meaning in life and is a fundamental human need, and is enhanced when people are involved in the shaping of places" (Landry 2000: 37).

## the potentials of creative production

Opening the building up as an art facility introduces the potential for the public to interact with the building in an authentic way on an ongoing basis (whereas the building is for exclusively private use in its current state). My goal is to facilitate an experience that is rich enough to evoke past memories of the building/space and also to facilitate the making of new memories, especially as people are able to more fully engage the building and to be a part of the act of creating (in the context of the arts).

The act of creative production confronts us with time and materiality – the two aspects most directly related to architectural memory. Time and memory exist in the confines of our collective psyche and are difficult for us to comprehend or explain. Throughout history, civilizations have used art and creative making not only for survival, but also to question the psychological and metaphorical bounds of life. Through creative production and the physical act of making we can domesticate time we can have a tactile relationship to the evidence of time and to its implications on our lives. Creative production gives us as a culture the ability to participate in memory-making in its most active sense by making cultural artifacts relating to this time and place.

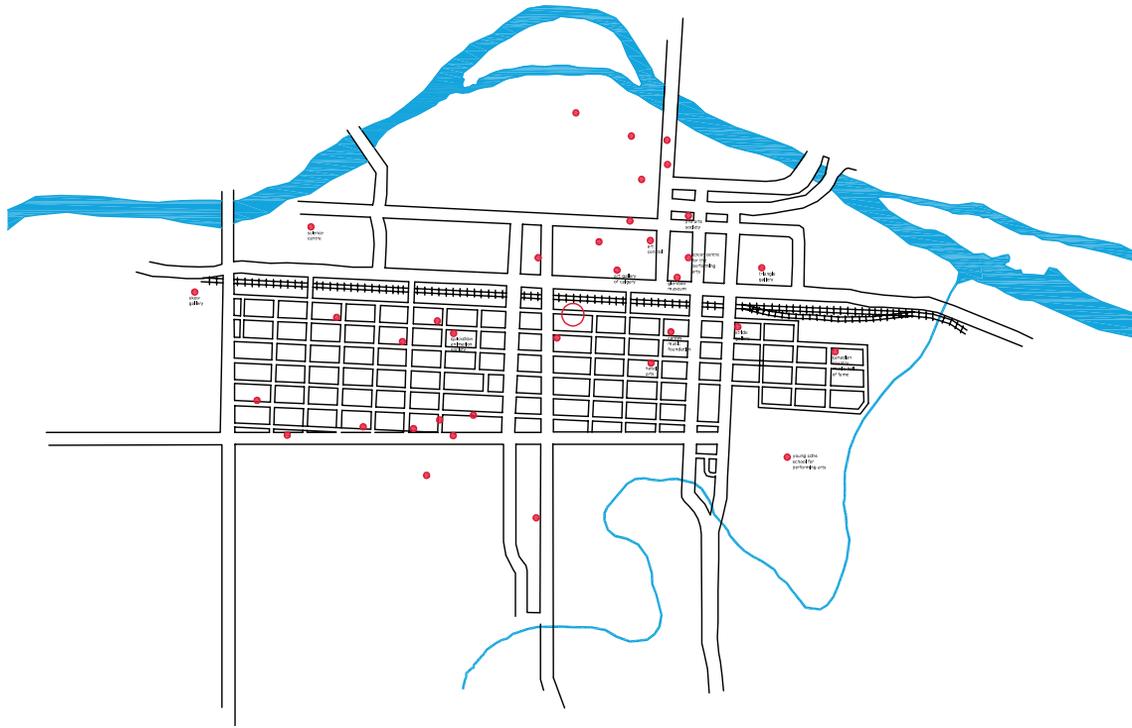
At its core the project is about stripping the building down to its essence and highlighting parts of its history in a collage with new architectural elements. The programming aims to

recognize the significance of the creative process and the potential for creative processes and the making of art to re-infuse our culture with memory and imagination. Loose programming and a creative approach to space re-molds the building to fit this particular site at this particular point in history, and to give it relevance and the ability to respond to its future.

*Imperfection is in some way essential to all that we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change. Nothing that lives is, or can be, rigidly perfect: part of it is decaying, part nascent...And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies, which are not only signs of life but sources of beauty.*

*John Ruskin*

*(As quoted in The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art by John Ruskin, 1980:238)*



The project site is located in a locus of creative activity. Most of Calgary's design firms and creative industries such as advertising, music production, and art galleries, are sited within the city's core. It is this proximity of the project to other cultural centres that allows for a greater potential mix of creative people and energy.

Adapting this existing industrial building into an art collective aims to infuse the creative community and to appropriate some of the city's 'loose space' for public use. Whereas existing art centres focus on rentable art space, it is the intention that this project function as a non-profit collective wherein the public is not only able to rent space for creative production, but also to use the space in a more adhoc manner.



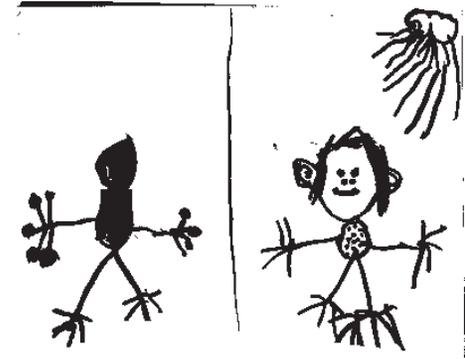
*Beltline arts locations*

program	notes	approximate size (sm)	(sf)
<b>public spaces</b>			
galleries (s, m, l)	could be one large space that could be subdivided	1000	10 764
roof garden	public outdoor space	120	1292
atrium	indoor, cut to expose party wall	450	4844
café/bar	accessible after gallery hours	140	1507
kitchen		60	646
<b>semi-public places</b>			
metal + woodworking shop		110	1184
ceramics workshop		135	1453
photography darkroom		80	861
media arts lab	computers and equipment for digital art and film editing	180	1938
classrooms	to accommodate approximately 30 students	230	2476
auditorium	for public lectures	370	3983
projection room	adjacent to auditorium	35	377
<b>private spaces</b>			
administration offices		210	2260
meeting rooms		180	1938
resident artist studios	on upper floors, natural light an important consideration	675	7266
curatorial workshop	proximity to loading dock and exhibition spaces	40	431
technical/server room		85	915
<b>service spaces</b>			
vestibules		50	538
stair/elevator		60	646
exit stairs		340	3660
washrooms		330	3552
storage		990	10 656
vaults		35	377
loading/unloading	from the rear of the building, incorporate historic loading dock	50	538
mechanical/electrical	to be located in the existing basement	95	1023
total area (not including structure)		6050	65 122

building floor plate is 1204 sm (12 960 sf) per floor x 6 floors (including basement)  
total building area 7224 sm (77 760 sf)



*New York Movie, Edward Hopper, 1939*

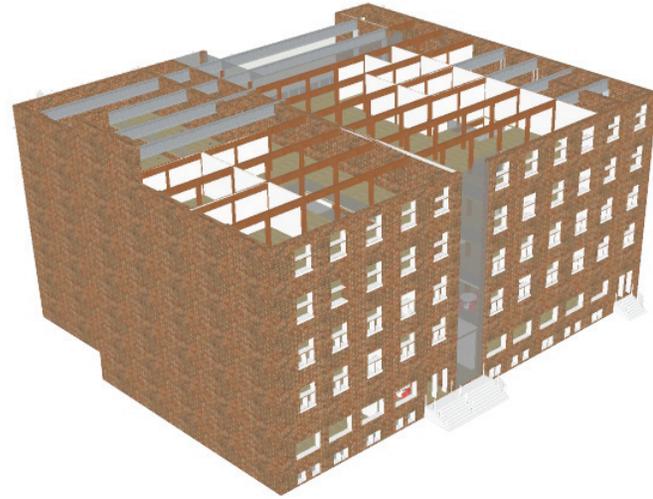
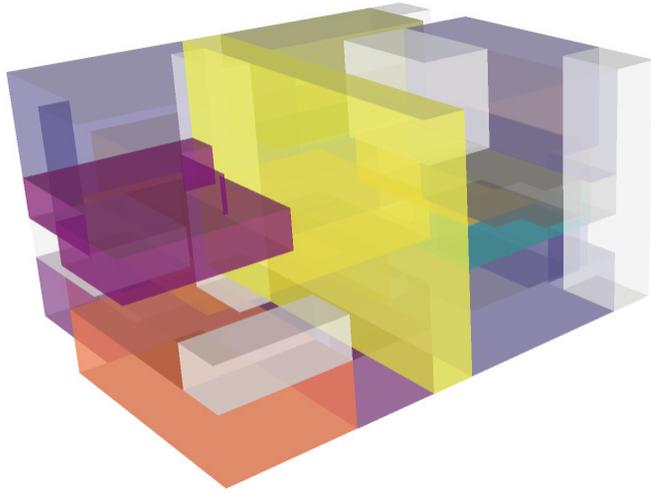


*My Shadow, Reggio Emilia School art*

## detailed programming

building floor plate = 1204 sm (12 960 sf) per floor x 6 floors (including basement)

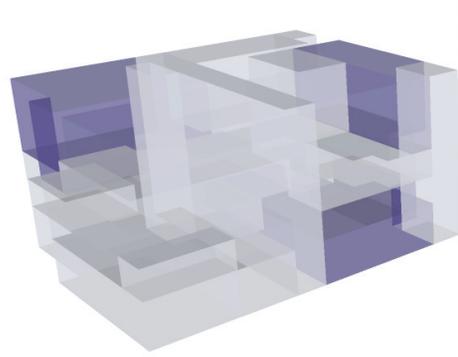
total building area = 7224 sm (77 760 sf)



## public spaces

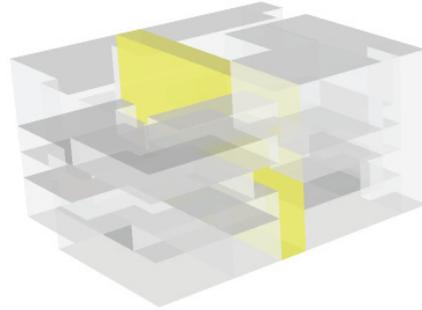
### *galleries (3)*

There are three gallery spaces spread throughout the building of various size and shape. The primary gallery is on the main floor of the building.



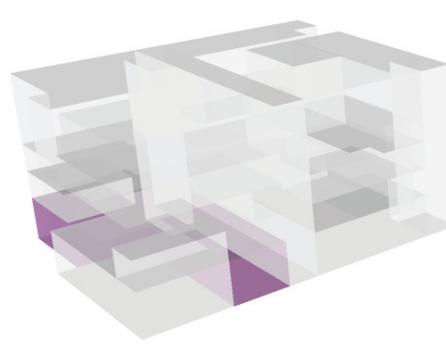
### *atrium*

The atrium is cut on the north-south axis all the way through the building and is the main space that ties together the programming and spatial experience of the project.



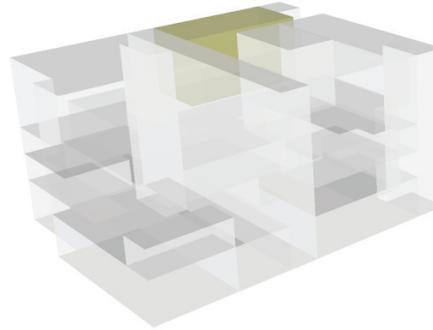
*café/bar*

The café/bar is located on the main floor and has a separate entrance from the main entrance so that the public may gain access after regular gallery hours.



*roof garden*

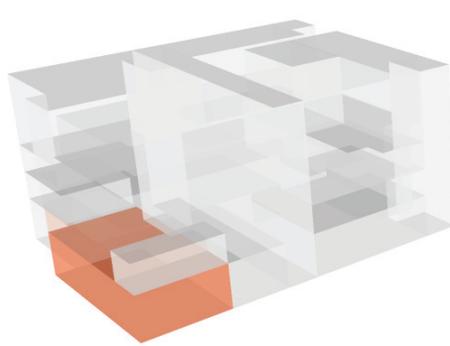
The roof garden is cut out of the southwest corner of the building. The outdoor garden is two-storeys in height and offers views to the historically relevant back lane. Its adjacency to the two upstairs galleries allows the garden to be used for exhibition openings and other events.



## semi-public spaces

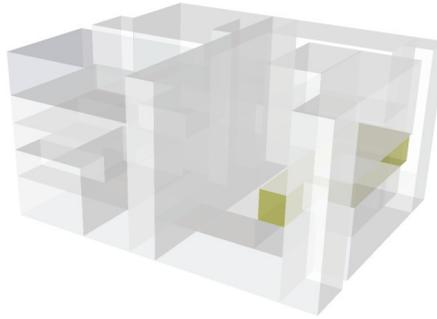
### *auditorium*

The large auditorium space on the main level of the building is intended to house public lectures where creative and critical ideas can be expressed and a critical discourse can be created.



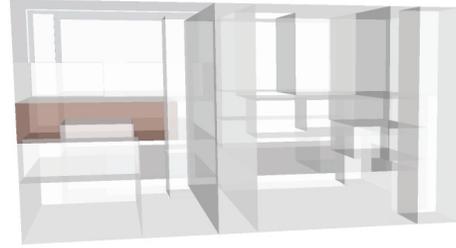
### *woodworking + metalworking shop*

A fully functional woodworking + metalworking shop is provided for the making of projects on an individual and group basis. Following an orientation, the public can pay to use the facilities.



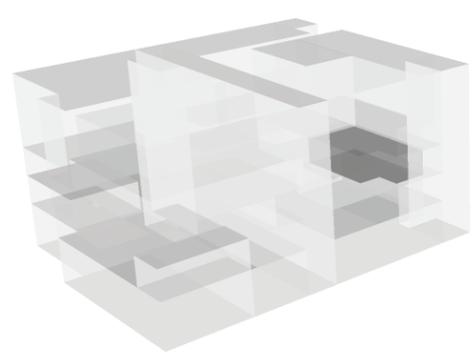
*ceramics workshop*

The ceramics workshop offers pottery wheels and kilns as well as assembly space for ceramic artists.



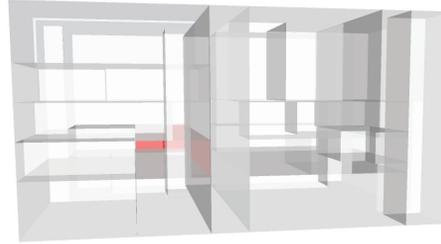
*photography darkroom*

Although perhaps an old technology, I have chosen to include a photography darkroom for developing film. Photography is one of our first and truest ties to memories with photographs acting as mementos (keepsakes) and as mnemonic devices (memory aids).



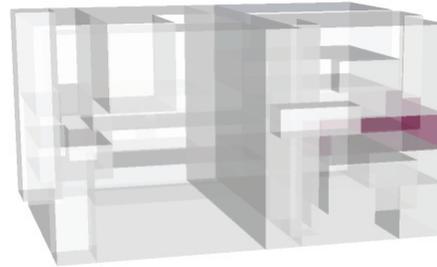
### *media arts lab*

The media arts lab is a creative laboratory intended for the production of video and new media arts that require digital manipulation. The space is equipped with digital editing equipment as well as a media lab with computers for use by all building patrons.



### *classrooms*

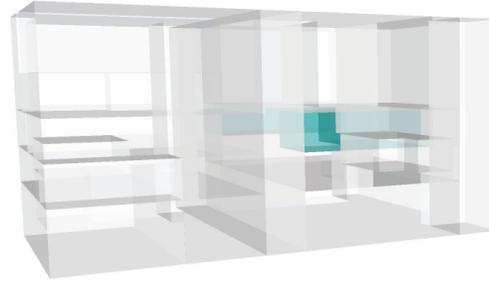
The art collective will host continuous programming including classes in creative production, marketing and urban issue. The classroom spaces can be used for teaching and may also be rented out for conference or seminar functions.



## private spaces

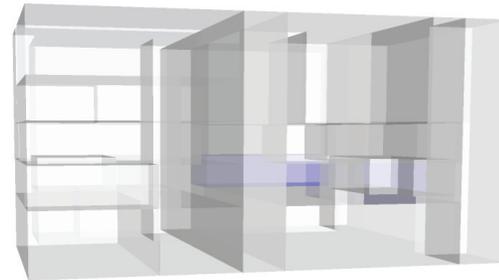
### *administration offices*

The offices are open in plan and serve the administrative functions of the art collective.



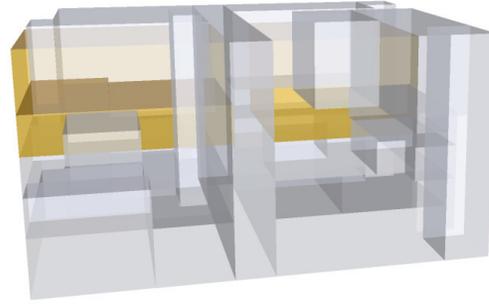
### *meeting rooms*

Three meeting rooms of various sizes are provided for administrative or public use. The meeting rooms can also be used as collaboration space for group projects.



### *resident artist studios*

The project articulates nine individual spaces for creative use, all of which are located on the top two floors of the building. The spaces are intended to be rented for short or long periods by a variety of creative practitioners. The form and character of each studio space differs depending on its location within the plan. Stairs are a key element introduced into the spaces and act both as spatial dividers and infrastructure which can be appropriated for display and use.



### **service spaces**

*stair/elevator*

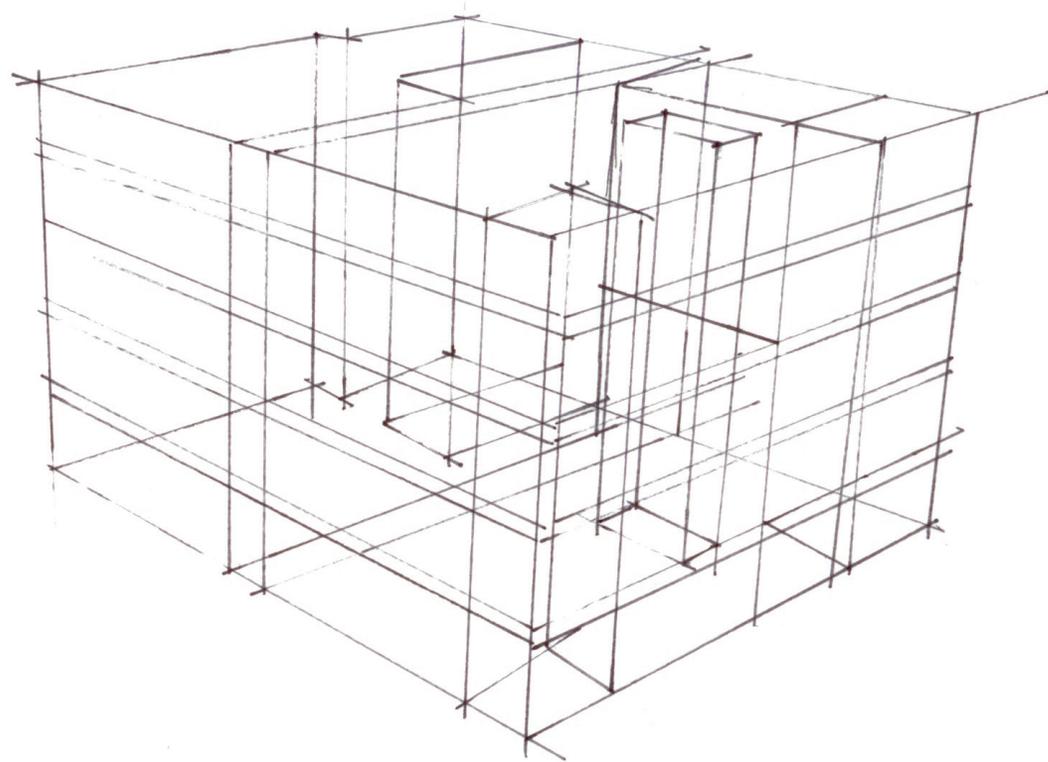
*washrooms*

*storage*

*loading/unloading*

*mechanical/electrical*

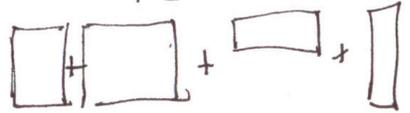
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REVEAL  
PEEL



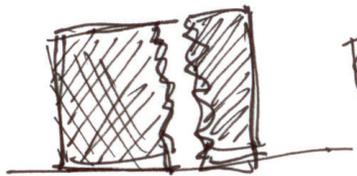
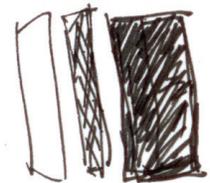
RECONSTRUCT



CUT



SEPARATE



RUPTURE

111

## formal strategies

It is the intention that this architectural intervention navigate the potentials for 'new' architecture to include remnants of the past, as embodied memories and physical traces of what once was. The design recognizes the act of architectural design is not a 'tabula rasa' (a blank slate, a starting over), nor does it follow the ethos of postmodernism which references the past as a style. The formal strategy implemented here, rather, approaches architecture as collage.

The act of collage – be it of ideas, materials, experiences, and ultimately of specific site memories - is an essential process in this exploration. The formal manifestation of this project is a collage of three main architectural elements:

SOLID (saving)

VOID (revealing)

SURFACE (reconstructing)

These elements are used to facilitate the embodied memories of the building, as well as to evoke new experiences and new memories.



## collage as experience

By engaging an existing building with a lived history, I am attempting to build upon its embodied memories. Architectural intervention has the potential to interact in our lives both conceptually and physically. As Pallasmaa explains, “[i]n moving architectural experiences, space, material, and time seem to unite into a single dimension that penetrates our awareness...The experience of place returns the experience to ourselves: at the bottom it is an experience of the self” (1982: 75). It is the tangible and tactile nature of architecture that allows for the facilitation of cathartic experience. He continues, that the task of architecture is, “...not simply to render the landscape comprehensible, but to eroticize the landscape, to fire our imagination with it” (1985: 100). For this, it is essential to question the definition of location and to create spaces that act in dialogue with the existing context + culture – spaces that offer a multiplicity of experiences and facilitate a multiplicity of interpretations.

Buildings are, “...designed for a timeless present, and objects are replaced before they have acquired any trace of use and age. Time has become instrumentalized and commodified” (Pallasmaa 1995: 309). It is essential for our collective identity experience a broader timeframe and to, “...participate in times cycles that surpass the scope of an individual life” (ibid. 312). The author continues that, “[w]hereas the construction of the human habitat used to be a slow local accumulation, it has become a global mosaic, and architecture has lost its role

as the prime source of permanence, stability and security of the existential experience...Identity is now sought through momentary consumption” (ibid. 313).

Alternatively, this intervention accepts that time is in perpetual motion and our experience of time in the present is infused with references and memories of the past, as well as anticipation of the future. By re-programming the Wigalo Block with its memories, the building is renewed by both a new function as well as a richer material and spatial palette from which to experience the building in the present.

*Collage and assemblage: media that enable an archaeological density and a non-linear narrative through the juxtaposition of fragmented images deriving from irreconcilable origins. Collage invigorates the experience of tactility and time.*

*Juhani Pallasmaa*

*“Melancholy and Time,” 1995: 325*

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## **solid**

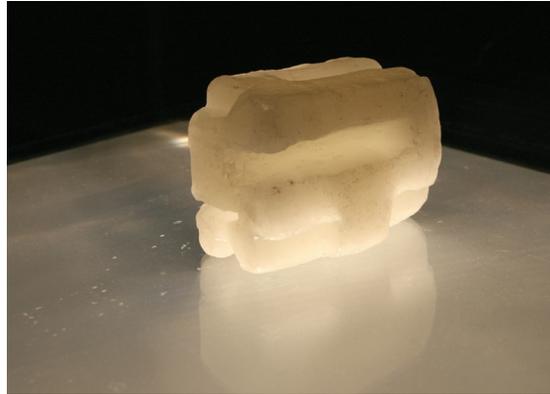
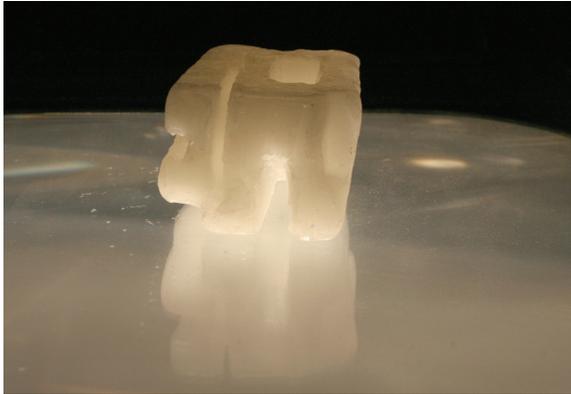
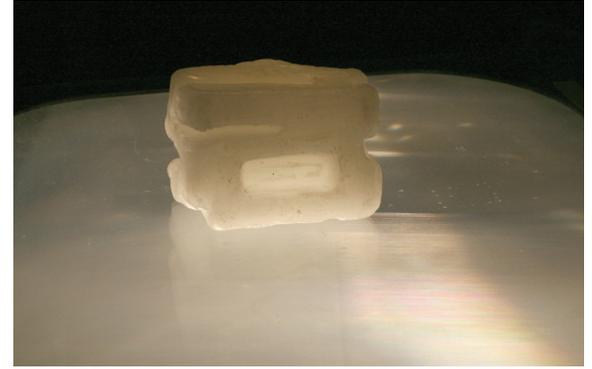
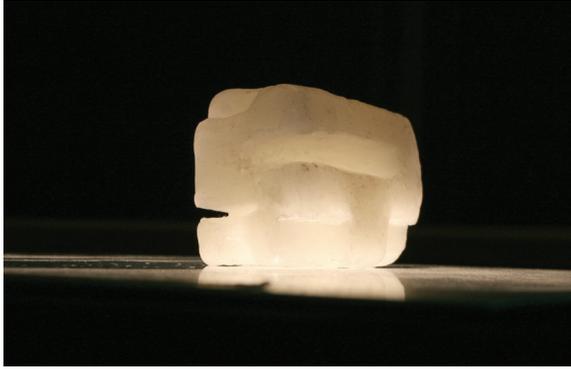
The asymmetrical positioning of solid elements such as service blocks and stairs both contrasts the rigid symmetry of the existing structure and to facilitate a new spatial organization in both plan + section. The solid nature of the existing exit stair cores were maintained in the new design. A third exist stair was added in the southwest corner of the building to accommodate the new programming, and a new public stair was added just off the central atrium.



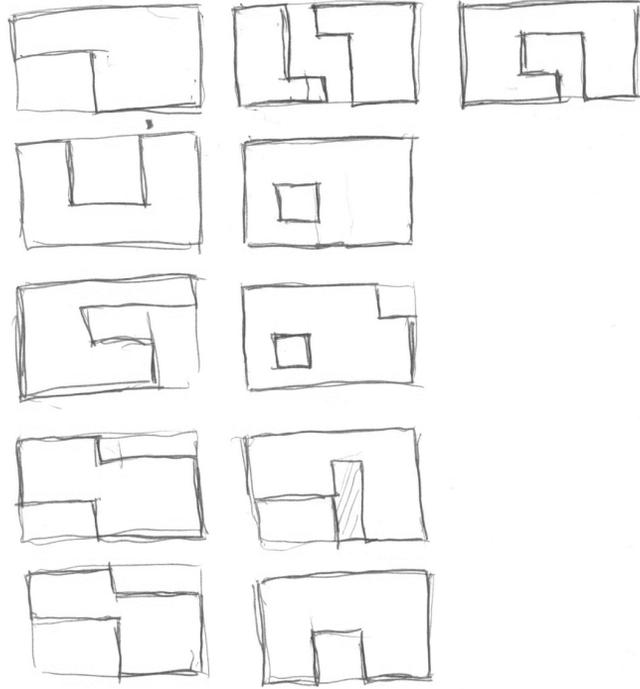
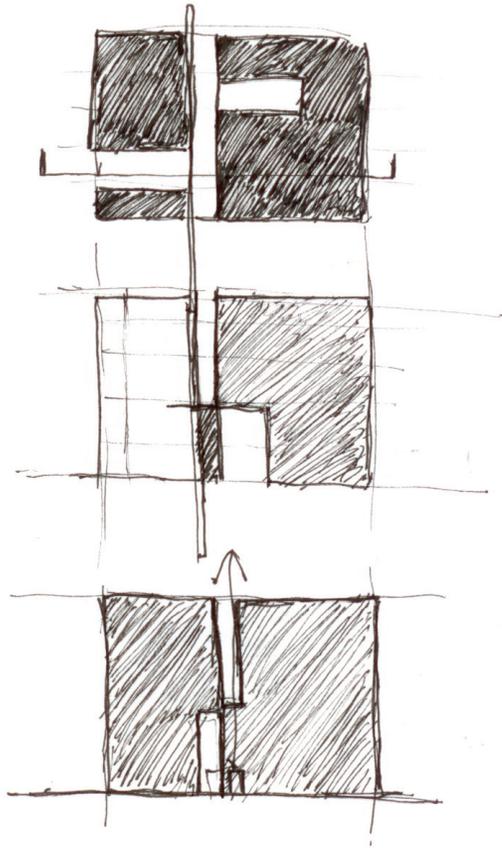
*formal strategies parti model, wax*

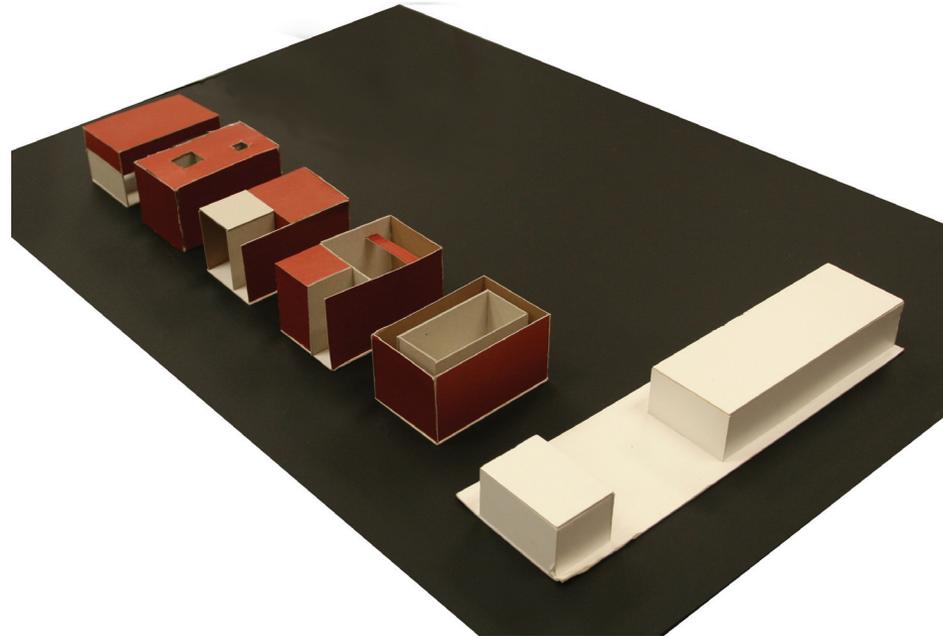
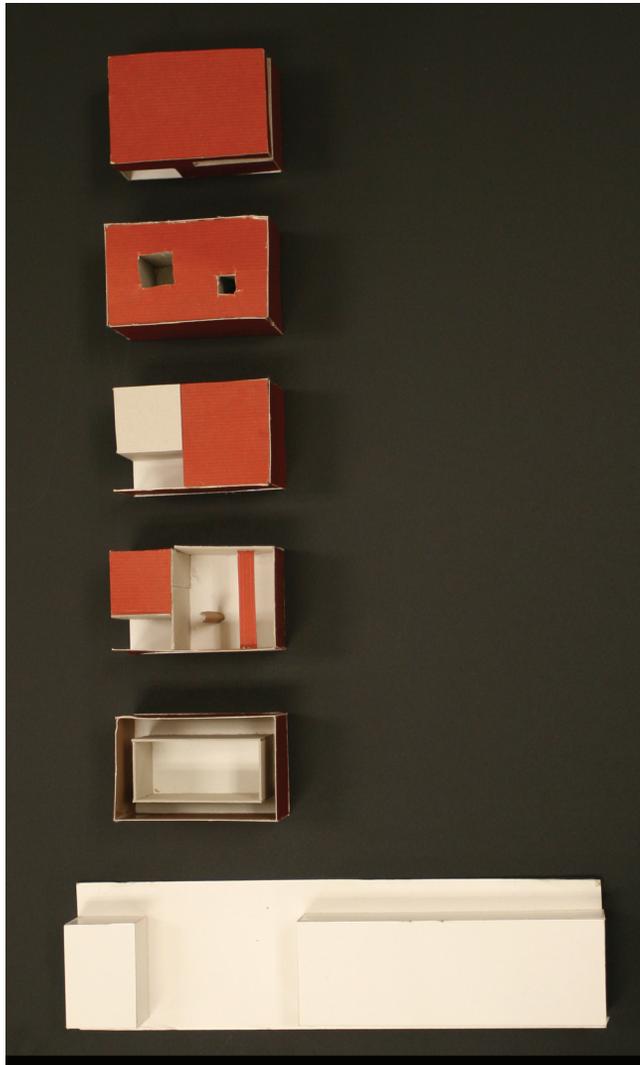
*It is not the obvious spatial relationship, but the use of a volume well articulated by its involucres, extending or enclosing, to complement the cavity of its interior. A portion of expanding space, but stayed by a shell that confines it: it may be a part that breaks through to the front, or is contained by an interior. Space yielded up by a void, but also space appropriated from a solid: a game of opposites, transposing the meanings of spatial categories that are deliberately complex in their roles, yet straightforward in formal definition. On the plane, this reads as balancing of parts, play of chiaroscuro, modulation of rhythms, relating of multiple symmetries and concealed alignments. Nothing here is casual. Every factor has a purpose and represents a new departure.*

*Carlo Scarpa, as quoted from Architecture in Details*



*formal strategies parti model, wax*





*three-dimensional study models*

I created these sketch models to examine different ways of making cuts in the existing building. The interplay of solid and void has been fundamental to my understanding of the project from its inception.

## void

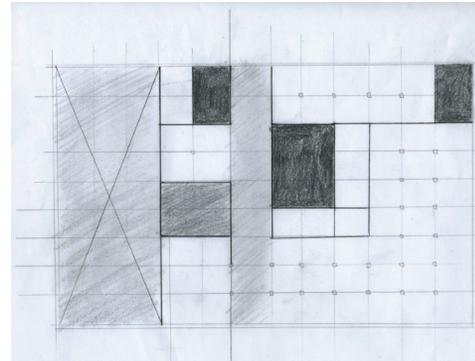
The introduction of voids into the building was the first major decision strategy implemented to expose the original memories of the building that were previously buried under layers of temporary partition walls and ill-conceived spaces. Several major incisions were made in the building including the first, and most significant – the central atrium – designed to bring to life the existing party wall between the two original buildings. The spatial flow of the new program is articulated around the party wall, allowing the atrium to act as a unifying ‘memory space.’ Other architectural elements such as catwalks and translucent materials such as frosted glass allow for a more fluid transition through the building. Richness of experience is facilitated through the physical and programmatic layering of spaces.

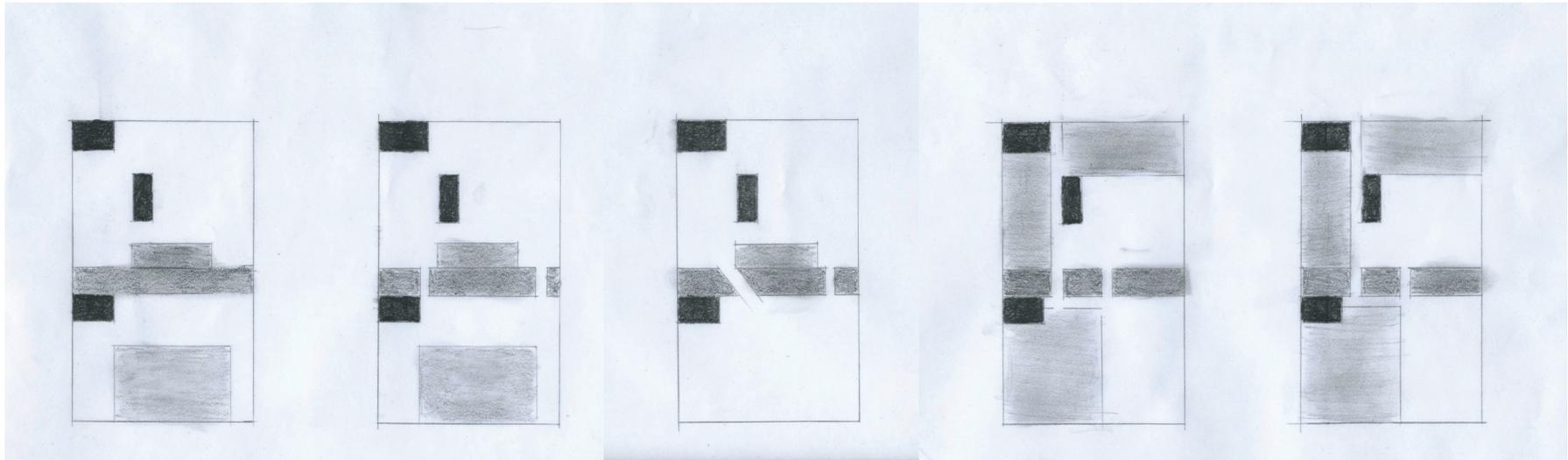
The two-storey auditorium makes use of an exposed exterior wall on its east side, and allows for the infill of a new program to facilitate the making of new memories in the space. The transfer of knowledge and the engagement in new ideas through public lecture series’ is one way in which the building can maintain relevance in an ever-changing cultural context.

The roof garden was cut into the back of the building to expose the extra-wide laneway to the south of the Wigalo Block – significant to the building’s history as a grain warehouse on the CPR line. The roof garden was conceived

of as a void for the upper floors of the building to infuse the entire building with pockets of public programming (gallery spaces). The intention is that evening events and parties could also be hosted in the roof garden.

Nine studios for resident or visiting artists were also carved into the upper floors of the building. These studios facilitate the act of making and ensure that the building be flexible enough to allow for a variety of creative activities. Architecture is, “...fundamentally an art of actions, not forms” and as such, it is the experience and memory fostered by the space that acts as its soul, not the physical components of the space itself (Pallasmaa 1995: 319). The spaces are designed loosely so that artists working in different media can appropriate the studios to suit their needs.





⊖ *void studies*





*material studies - 321-325 10th avenue sw, calgary*

## surface

As many theorists have discussed, modern consciousness and sensory reality have gradually developed towards the unrivalled dominance of the sense of vision, an ocular bias in our culture (ocularcentrism). Much of contemporary architecture has been, "...transformed into an art form of the instant visual image" – how the buildings looks rather than how it functions and facilitates experience (Pallasmaa, 1995: 321). Pallasmaa continues that, "[t]he Modern surface is treated as an abstracted boundary of volume, and has a conceptual rather than a sensory essence...aspiration to geometric purity and reductive aesthetics. Abstraction and perfection transport us into the world of ideas, whereas matter, weathering, and decay strengthen the experience of time, causality, and reality" (ibid. 323).

Flatness of surfaces and materials, uniformity of illumination, elimination of micro-climatic differences are all qualities of non-places. Buildings lacking in opacity and depth, mystery and imagination characterize cities of forgetting, and abound in contemporary North American landscapes. In opposition, effective architecture facilitates an authentic experience – a relationship with matter, space, and scale.

The articulated materiality of this architecture is used as a way to generate a sensory interaction between physical spaces and the eyes, ears, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscles. As Pallasmaa elaborates so eloquently in *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (2005), touch is the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world and of ourselves.

This project explores the potentials of haptic architecture, that is, one that, "...promotes slowness and intimacy, [is] appreciated and comprehended gradually as images of the body and the skin, engages and unites" our sense of space and materiality (ibid. 323). The design embraces the existing material palette of the building and respects its internal and external rhythms. The robust post and beam structure of the building is celebrated and is left mostly intact – the places where columns are removed the ‘traces’ are marked in both the floor and the ceiling by inserting a new material in the remaining holes. The key ‘memory spaces’ in the building: the atrium, the auditorium, the roof garden, and the artist studios feature the existing patina of the building and show evidence of a temporal and cultural continuum.

Allowing surfaces to reveal their own imperfections through weathering and patina creates a memory-rich material palette. The scratches, graffiti that can be found throughout the building adds to its character and are left intact as emotive and physical traces left behind.



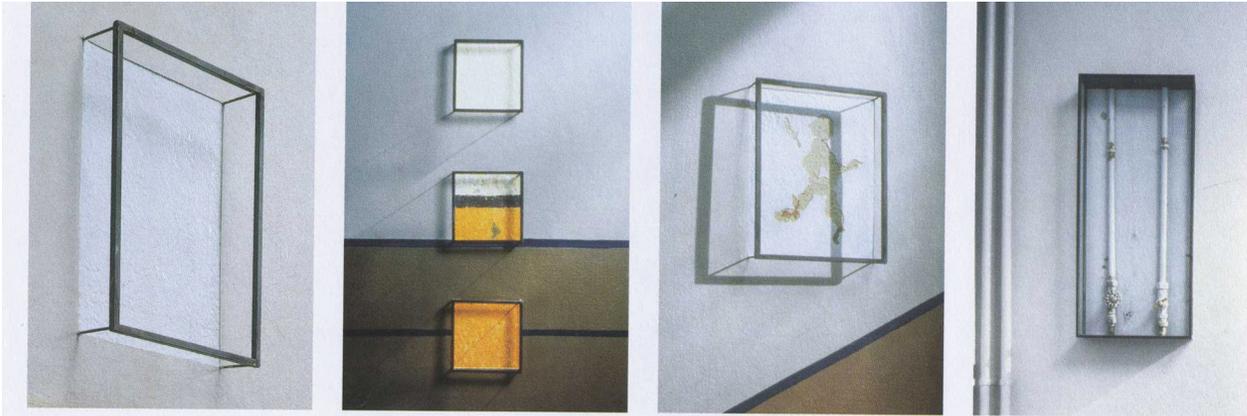
*material study - highlighting wooden floor patina*



In her installation, 'Notes,' Finnish artist Maaria Wirkkala created memory boxes highlighting architectural and cultural elements in a built renovation. Formerly the state Seed Inspection Authority building, Wirkkala's intervention was to save and highlight parts of the original structure, including sections of old central-heating pipes, fragments of crumbling paint, and cartoons that had been posted on a former employee's office wall. Perhaps the most interesting snapshot of the project is the framing of a bird's nest found in the rafters of the building during the renovation process.

In memory and respect of its former use, Wirkkala also hung and framed a single seed from a thread in every room. The project exemplifies an approach to place memory that is both tactile and evocative of individual imagination.

I visited this project while in Helsinki and was struck by the subtle power of the follies. Each one is unique to its specific place in space and time, and can be read as memory traces. It is this type of poetic approach to built and lived memory that I am trying to evoke in my design.

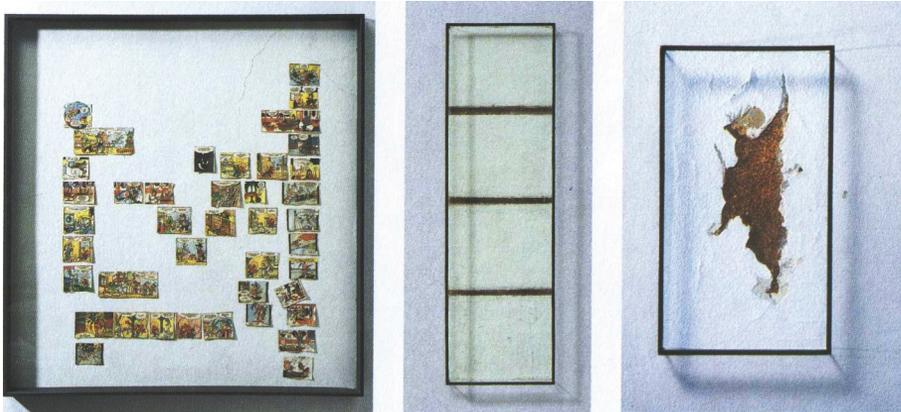


*Maaria Wirkkala  
Helsinki, Finland  
1996*

*I do not want to decorate a house, which has its own history.  
I want the house to decorate itself. I scratch out the historical layers.*

*I make visible the signs of the near past which are usually always covered.  
I make notes in the building's corridors, studies and attic.*

*Maaria Wirkkala  
23 February 1994  
Helsinki, Finland*



**note:** I have explored nine other precedent projects - they are illustrated in a separate book that accompanies this document

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*There is a tacit wisdom of architecture accumulated in history and tradition. But in today's panicked rush for the new, we rarely stop to listen to that wisdom. Architecture needs slowness to re-connect itself with this source of silent knowledge. Architecture requires slowness in order to develop a cumulative tradition again, to accumulate a sense of continuity, and to become re-rooted in culture.*

*Juhani Pallasmaa*  
*"Melancholy and Time"*  
*1995: 319*