



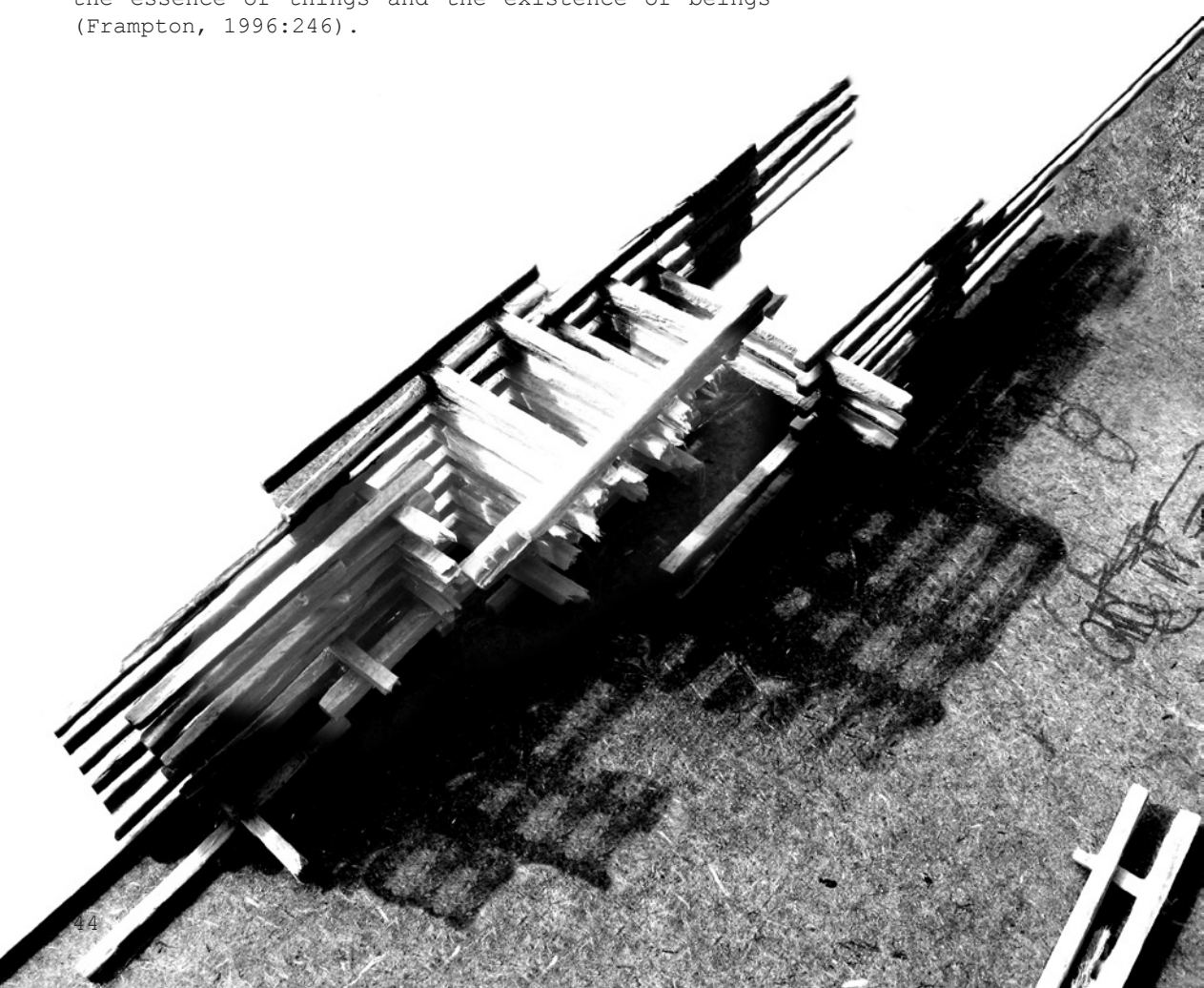
03. Design development



Theoretical discourse

This dissertation proposes an investigation to establish the manner in which a public bathhouse would manifest in a South African urban context. The focus is on enriching and celebrating a daily ritual as a means of addressing the shortcomings of urban ablution as a necessary building typology. In a similar manner to which the programme is considered primary to human nature, the built form is to find roots in that which is primary to architecture. Informing the design process is a theoretical discourse exploring and celebrating this essence of architecture; the reality of a built artefact. The approach is supported by the statement that beauty must always grow from the realities of life (Higot et al, 2000:14).

The investigation into reality implies that architecture is not merely the reduction of abstract thoughts into buildable form, but rather the creation of experience from the basis of the real, essential and tectonic nature of architecture. An exploration on multiple levels starts with exploring the requirements of a bathhouse and its implied essential ritual as root for developing spatial experience through physical composition of the artefact. With the ultimate goal as a return to the tactility of the tectonic in all its aspects; to a meeting between the essence of things and the existence of beings (Frampton, 1996:246).



According to Michael Benedikt this meeting of things and beings is realised when objects do not point to another realm, but rather when signs fall silent and conventional associations fall away. A time when one is not conscious of reference, allusion or instruction. Benedikt refers to these as times of 'direct aesthetic experiences of the real', that in the current media-saturated era it falls onto architecture to have this direct experience of the real at the centre of its concerns (Benedikt, 1987:4). The design manifestation of this concept draws from and elaborates the programmatic and pragmatic realities of the proposal.

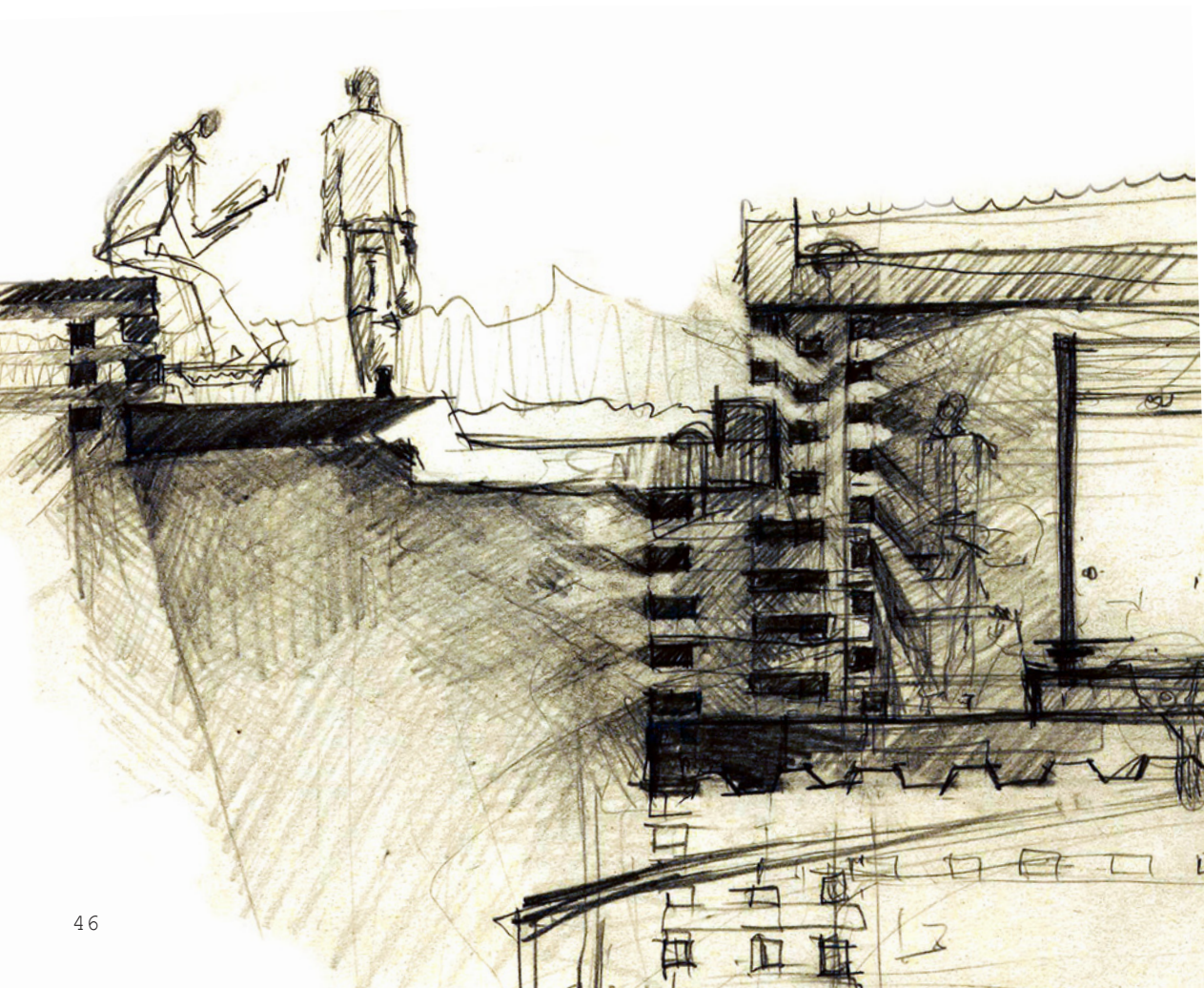
The implication is that architecture has its place in the concrete world, where it can make its statement (Zumthor, 2006:12), as a building being; and being experienced. Accepting the term 'building' as an integral part of architecture as an act and object from which architecture can derive legitimacy. Not founding architecture 'in some other discourse' (Grassi, 1980), but rather exploring within the realities of making and experiencing architecture.

An exploration of the essence of architecture, spatially and functionally, implies that programme, structure, skin, materiality and comfort, as functional requirements, act as sources and tools of inspiration, not unfortunate afterthoughts. Within this dissertation systems are encouraged to find roots in communal goals. Questions posed by the programme of a public bathhouse is used as origins for explorations. Thereby deriving poetic potential from the requirements for a typological investigation, through theory and pragmatic exploration, culminating in built form.

The goal of creating an architecture without pretence, as to encourage democratic access and use, implies that the design is not a sign representative of ideals, ancient or irrelevant, but is a utilitarian artefact. Through architectural exploration of inherent properties of the building, enrichment of the experience of users is envisioned, placing value in people and their celebration of a primary ritual.

The proposed building aims to be self-reflective, self-referential, dissolving the objective illusion of architecture, as referred to by Tzonis and Lefaivre (Nesbitt, 1996:488), to ensure a situation of subjective experience. The building thereby strives to exist, as Zumthor (2006:16-17) proposes, as a building that seems to be at peace with itself in a similar way certain objects, machines, tools or instruments are what they are. Through a celebration of inherent properties, these objects are not mere vehicles for an artistic message or channels for the implementation of technology; their presence is self-evident.

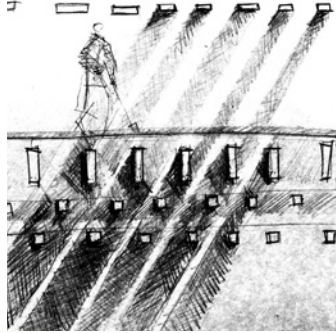
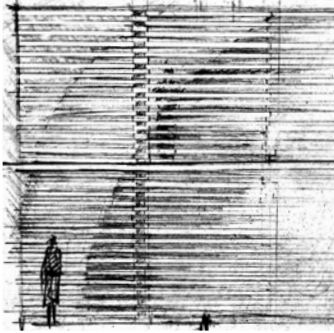
Figure 52. (opposite)
Photograph of a conceptual model illustrating a skin explored and composed into a structural system that allows light and air to filter through.



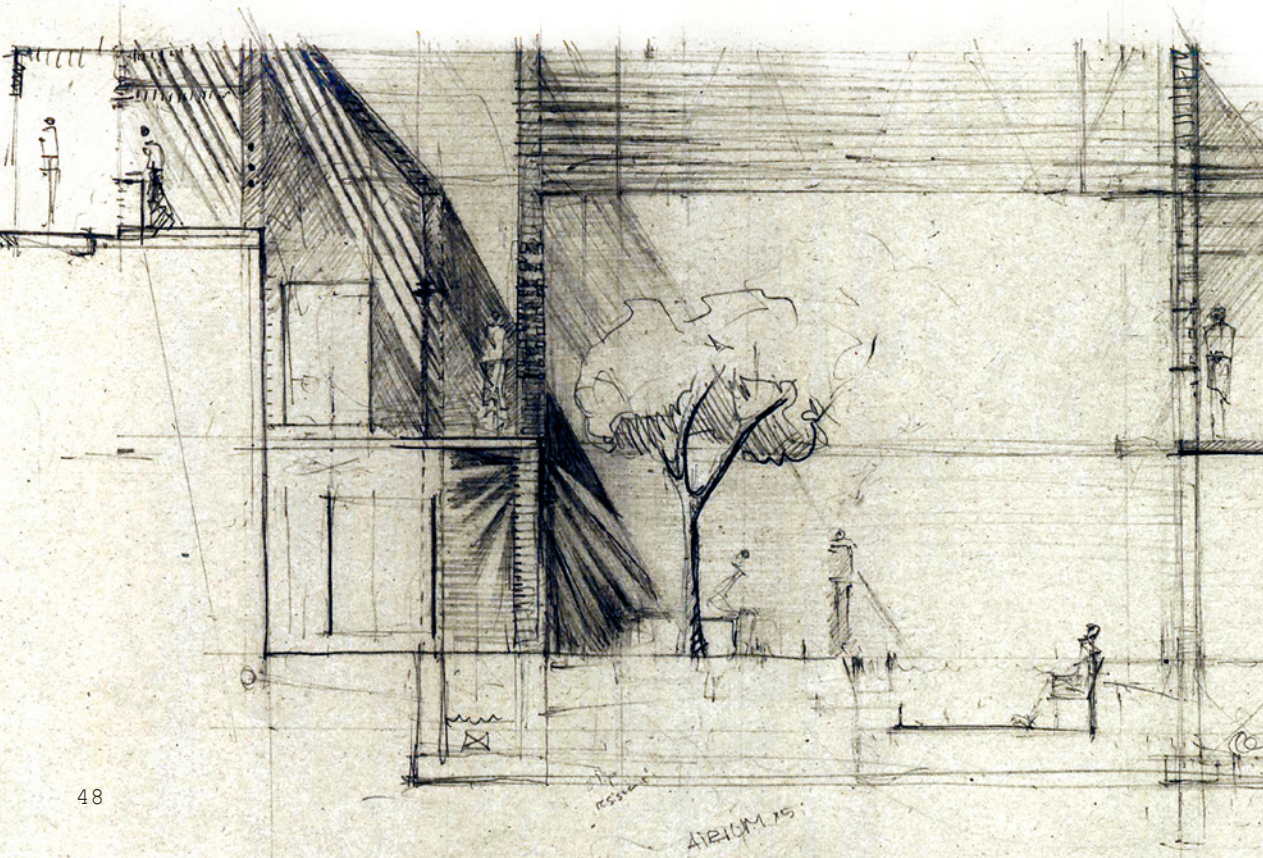
Exploration: structure and shelter

Parallel to programme, this dissertation explores the realities of architecture as generator and source of the manifested object and space. As a public building with a private programme, a means of achieving privacy, light quality and ventilation is proposed as a weaving of precast concrete beams. Originating from Frampton's interpretation of Gottfried Semper's *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst* (Frampton, 1996:6), where the wall, *wand* or *mauer* made of masonry is considered a form of weaving. In this proposal the concept of weaving is employed as a translation from the stereotomic to the tectonic, capitalizing on the advantages of both systems. Through an exploration of membrane as a fundamental architectural source in support of the programme, structure is achieved, composing the building as a singular entity. Hierarchy based on structural and experiential requirements result in precast concrete beams translated into shelter as structure.

Figure 53. (opposite)
Sketch exploring light quality
through a layered skin acting as
structure to support slabs.



The act of layering permeable concrete skins establishes a hierarchy of privacy. Movement through the structure aims to manifest this layered concept seamlessly, resulting in deep edges. Circulation through the structure, the user is progressively sheltered. Ultimately Finding privacy below the natural ground level.



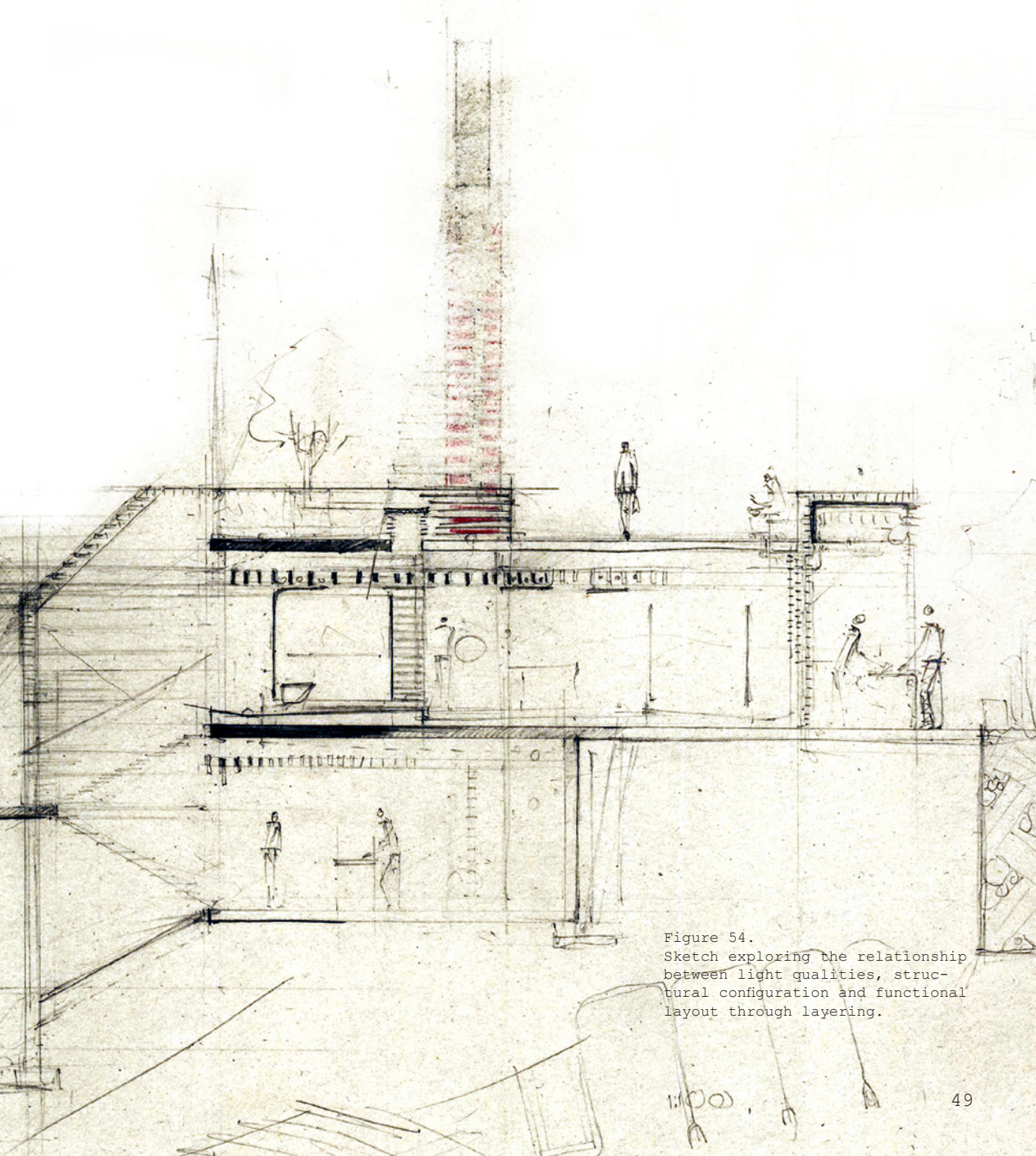


Figure 54.
Sketch exploring the relationship
between light qualities, struc-
tural configuration and functional
layout through layering.

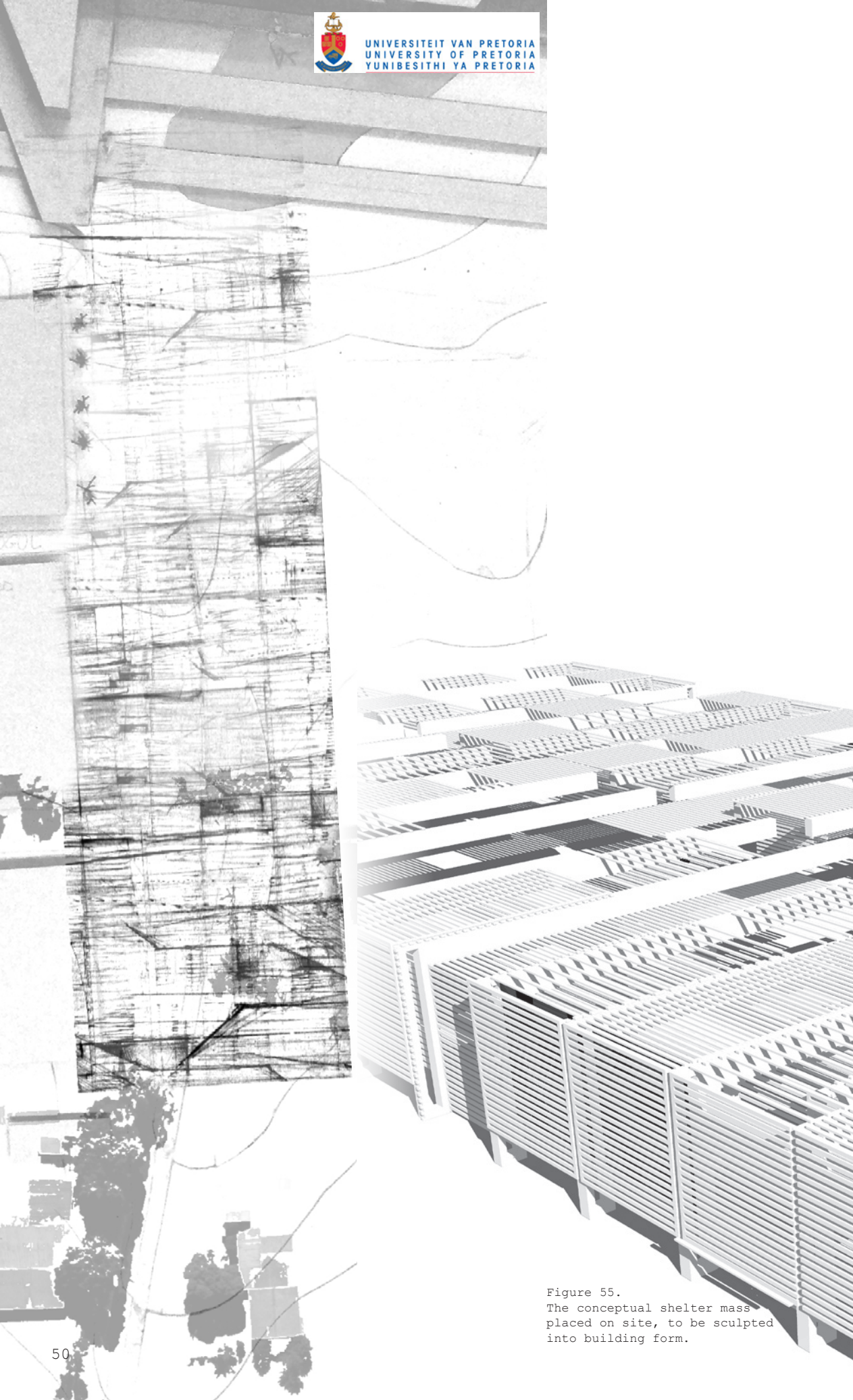
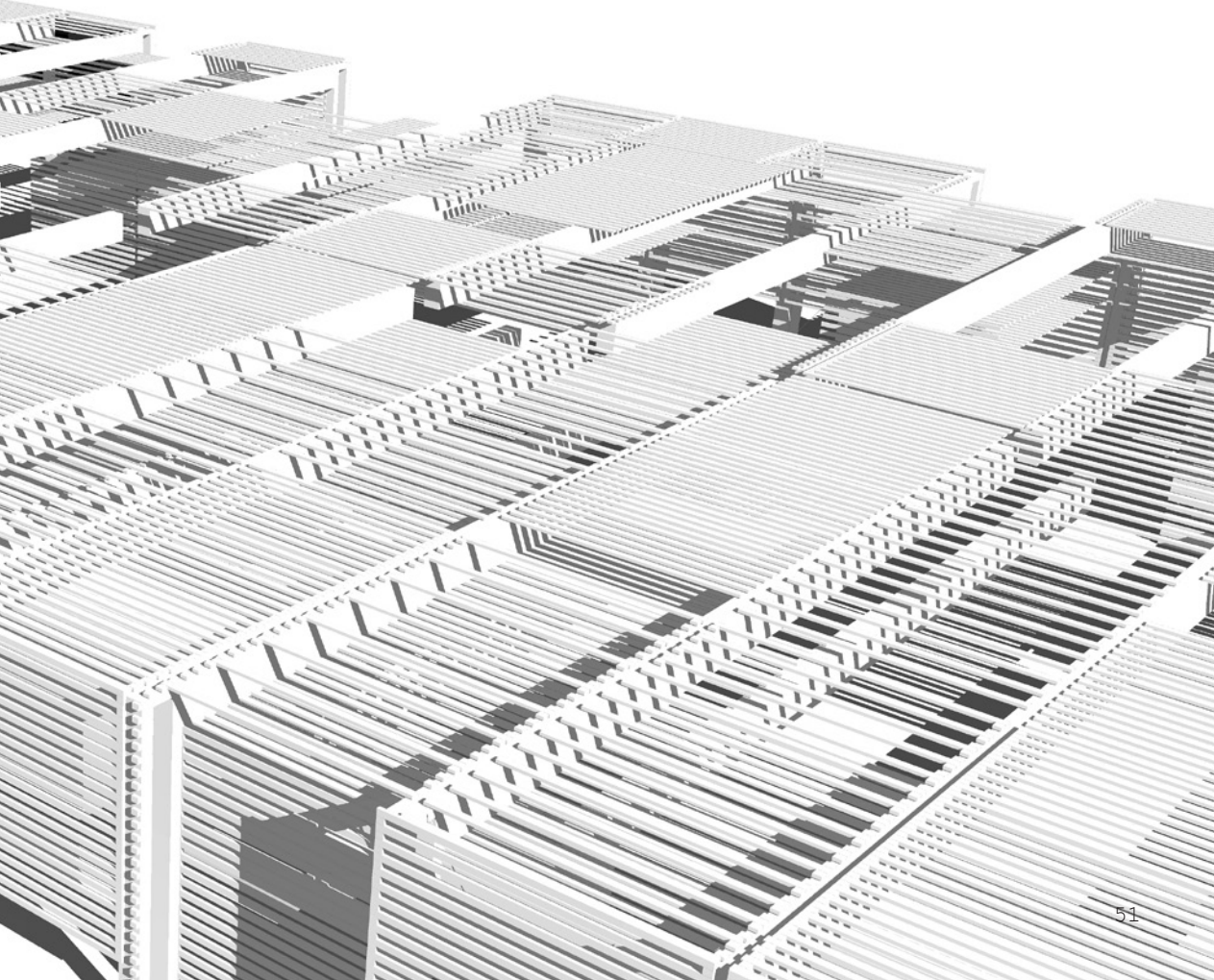


Figure 55.
The conceptual shelter mass
placed on site, to be sculpted
into building form.



The skin and structural system, as discussed, act as the conceptual field proposed on an urban level. This imposes a functional grid onto site, enabling the realisation of the building. Through a process of programming, thickening, thinning and cutting, the bathhouse is accommodated within the modified field. This design process allows for deep edges, as a hierarchical introduction to facilitate increasingly intimate spaces. This is achieved through said layering of permeable skins.



Exploration: Water, services and experience

'Once contained, water gives life, by providing something to drink, by washing wounds, by becoming the focal point of our activities. Within the realm of the man-made environment, water removes itself from the speculative

and becomes both sensual and economic. It becomes a representative and structuring element. It can become one of four things: a point, a line, a pool or an edge. As such it becomes a point of gathering, a source of power, a place of culture and reflection or a place of limits and imagination. These are the four fundamental characteristics water takes in architecture.' (Betsky, 1995:9)

With the intent of the above statement in mind, infrastructure and services intended to deliver water are considered as unexplored opportunities, capitalizing on the economic, structuring and sensual properties of water. Exploring the potential of that which is fundamental to the building, service areas are designed to act as buffers between the public realm and private spaces, acting as spatial elements. This is achieved by wrapping the service areas around serviced, and consequently protected, private areas. These areas take the form of courtyards, as informed by the extensive use of courtyards at the Alhambra complex as places which contain water. The service areas are therefore capable of service inward and outward to the public surrounds. Projecting

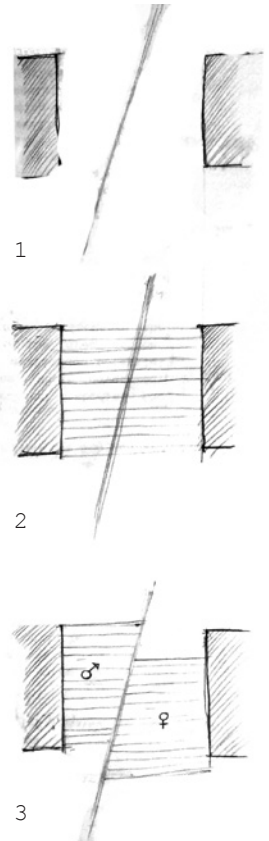


Figure 56. Sculpting of mass
1. context and channel
2. shelter superimposed
3. channel respected, legible gender partition generated

Figure 57. Aaron Betsky refers to the Alhambra as the locus classicus for the use of water in architecture, the manner in which water is introduced to a space, this point relative to movement through space and the extensive use of courtyards in the Alhambra complex informs the design process.

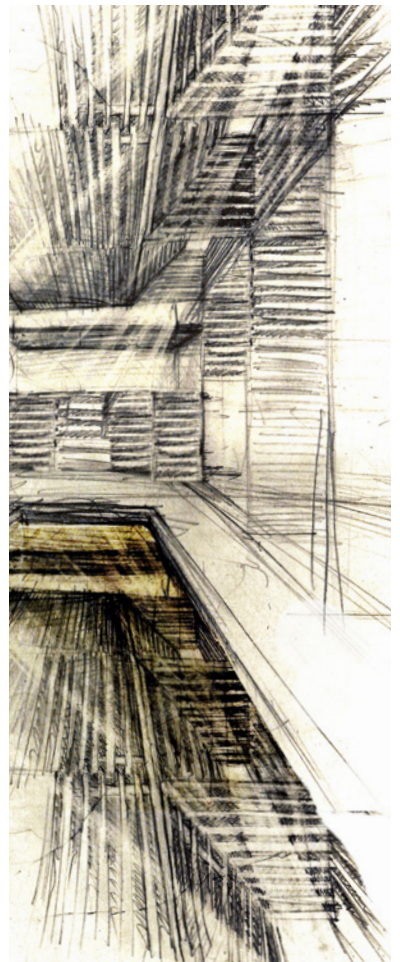
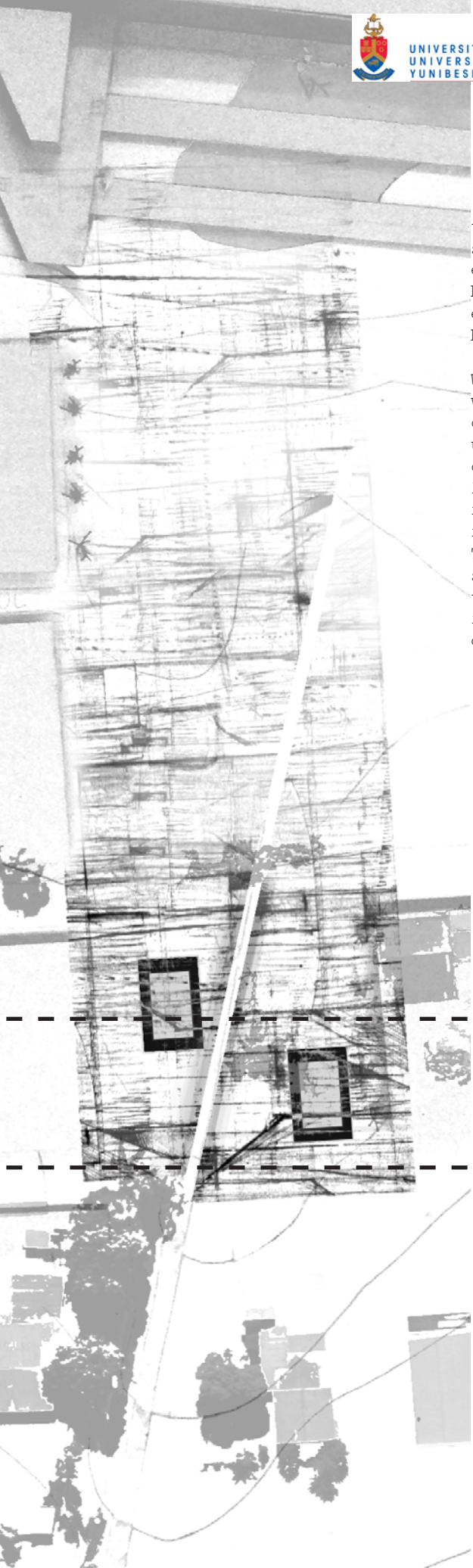
Figure 58. (opposite) Digital collage illustrating shift and courtyards.

Figure 59. (opposite right) Sketch applying courtyard principle to the design process.



the programme out and along the wrapping service areas activates the building edges through the use of water. Water becomes an edge, the level on which one engages with the building on the most basic level.

Water as a point of gathering is achieved when the role of the Steenhoven stormwater channel is expanded beyond its current use as infrastructure. Building on the channel as a local landmark, the manipulation of the site surface exposes and reconnects the natural water to the surrounding urban environment and people. The combination of landmark, infrastructure and place of gathering around the programme of a public bathhouse is intended, to build on the primal concept of going to the water to clean.





Exploration: Cross-programme and surface

As the site surface is manipulated, folded and serviced, the potential for informal appropriation of the area around Steenhoven spruit is envisioned. Informal trade, prevalent in Marabastad, is encouraged to infiltrate the facility. The surface aims to provide seating, shelter, storage and services in the form of electricity, water and light to encourage and facilitate hawkers. Services like shoe cleaning, hairdressing, clothes washing and repair in addition to general informal trade is envisioned. Products to be used within the public bathrooms and bathhouse can be produced and sold on site. This on-site production and additional formal trade and services, possibly a gym, restaurant, laundromat or clothes stores, are proposed to develop in the existing structures to the east and west of Steenhoven spruit. The deliberate presence of hawkers and trade throughout the site has the advantages of providing passive surveillance while an interest and market for local community and individuals is created. The social nature of the ritual of bathing is enriched by the presence of traders who provide a vibrant atmosphere.

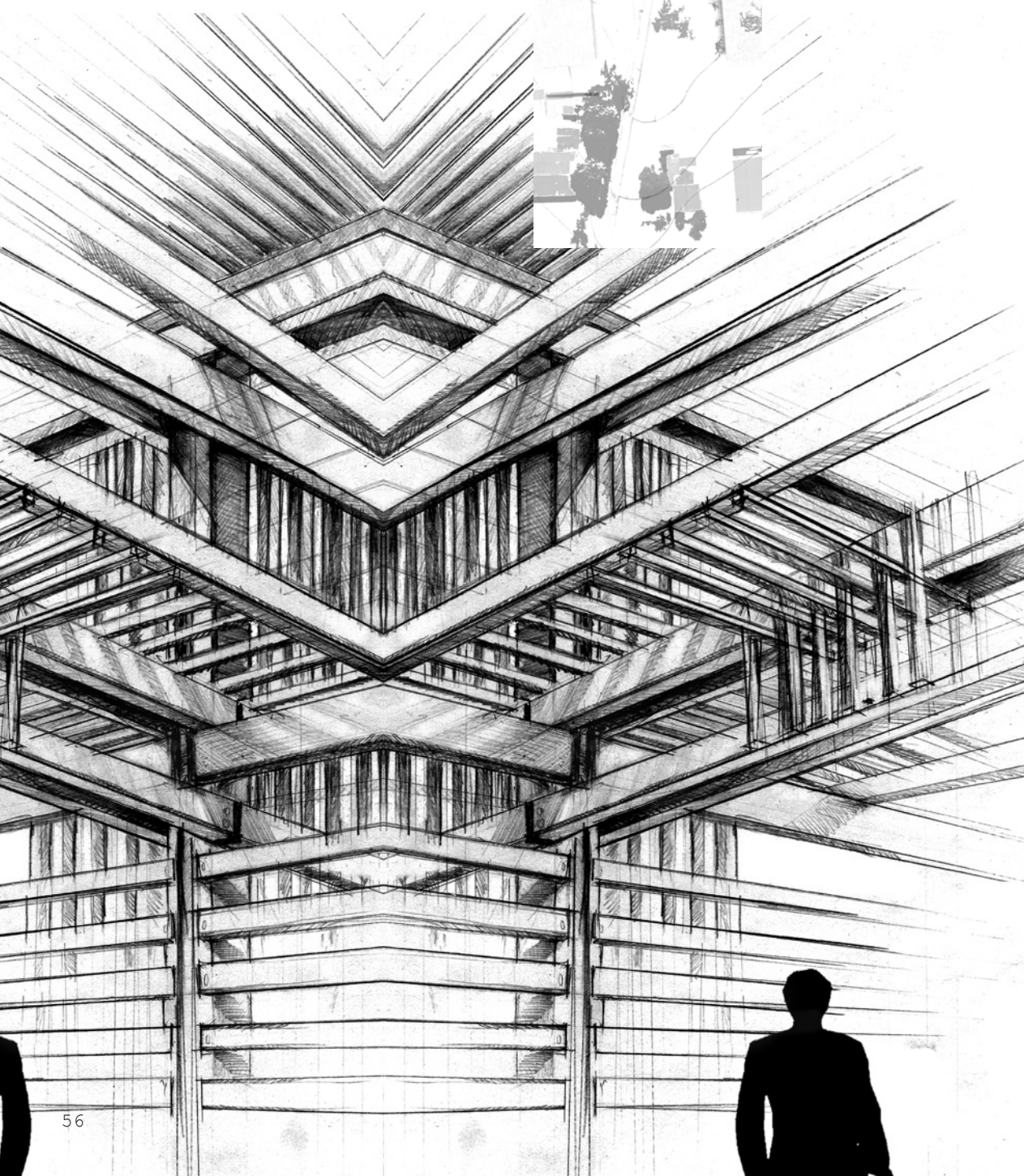


BOOM STREET



Figure 60. (opposite page) Digital Collage representing the incorporation of formal and informal trade, shown is an informal trader using a generator.

Figure 61. Digital Collage of proposed use, movement through facility in a north-south direction. Users of the building moving east-west, incorporating existing buildings.



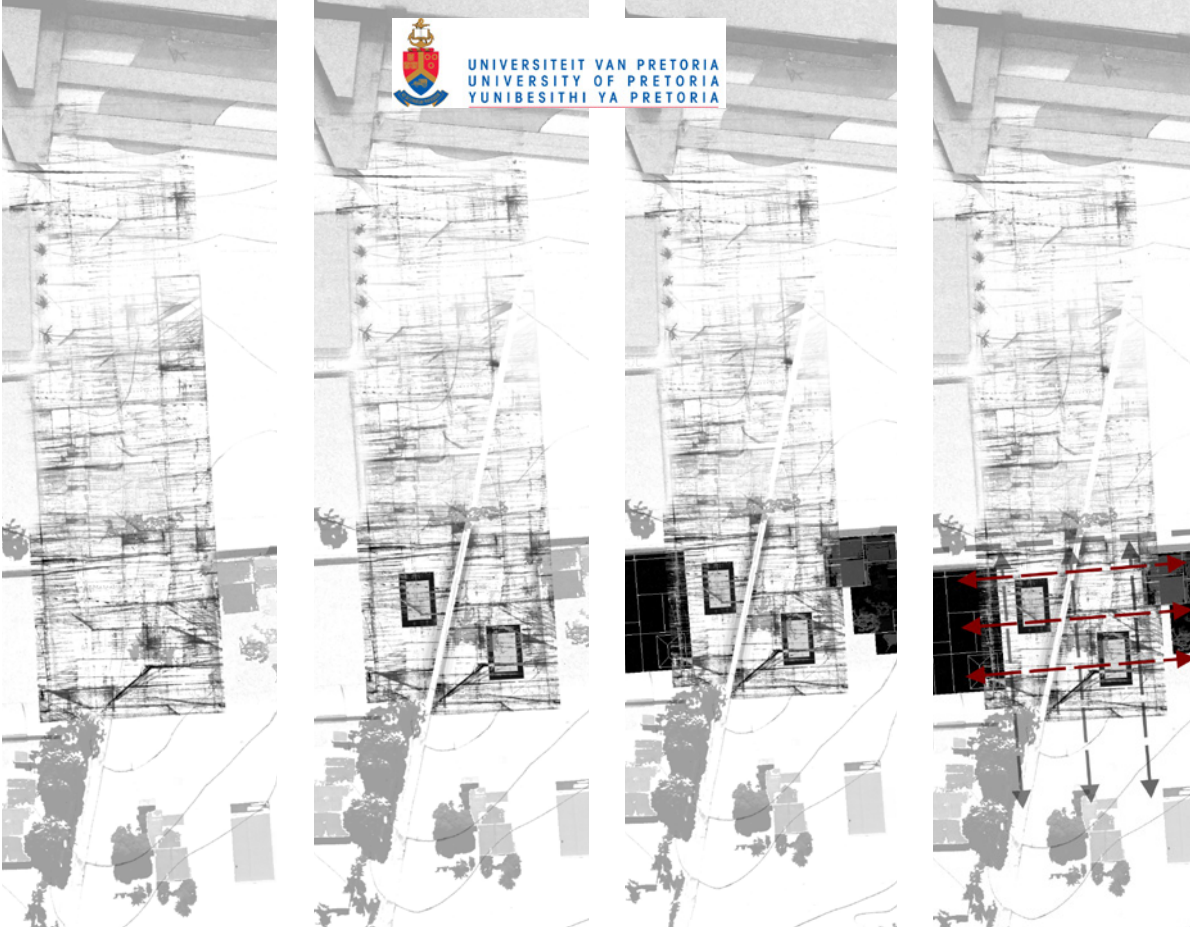


Figure 62. Digital collage of the conceptual design development process.

Figure 63. (opposite) An illustration of the structural system integrated with privacy cladding. A singular, permeable shelter is the result.