

Design Intent

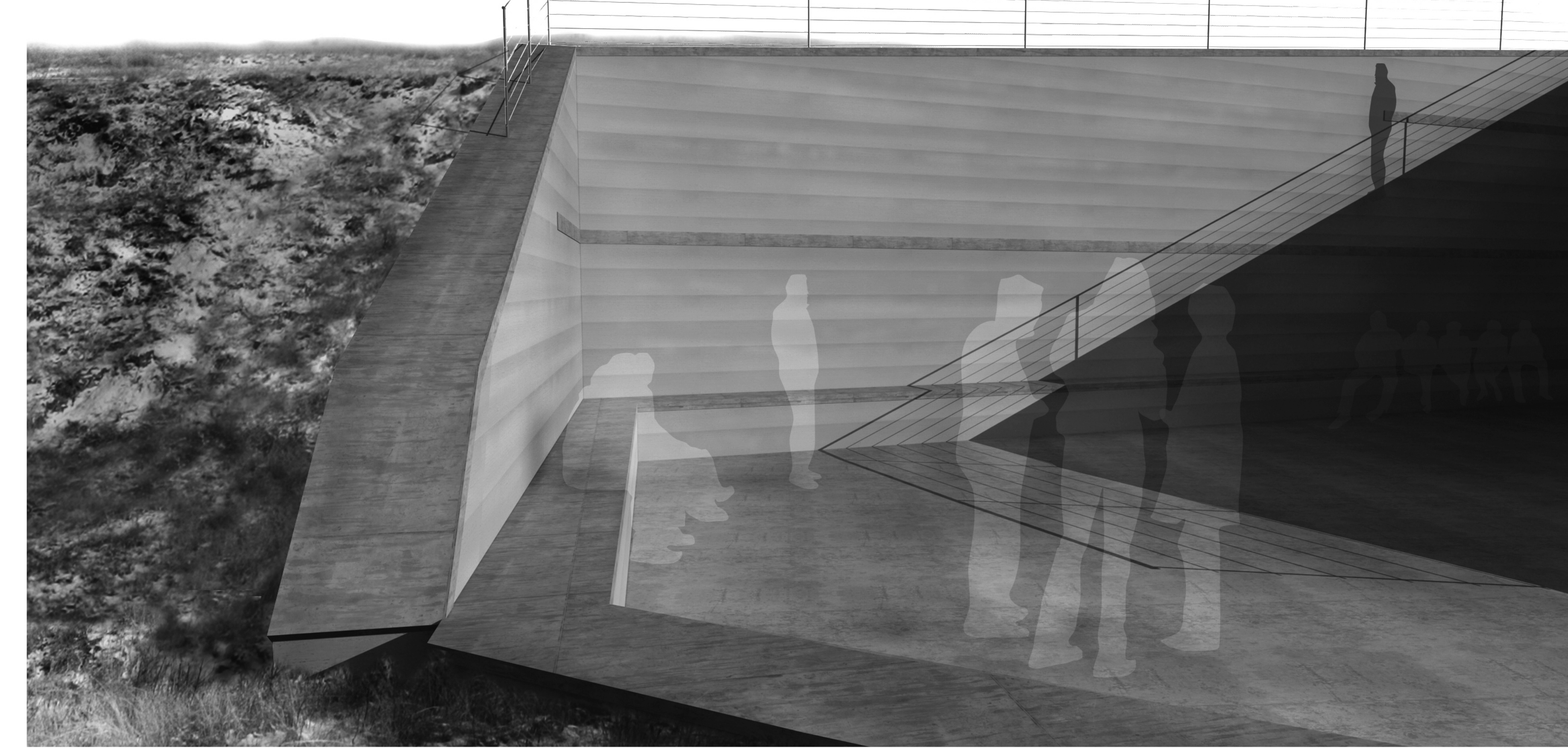
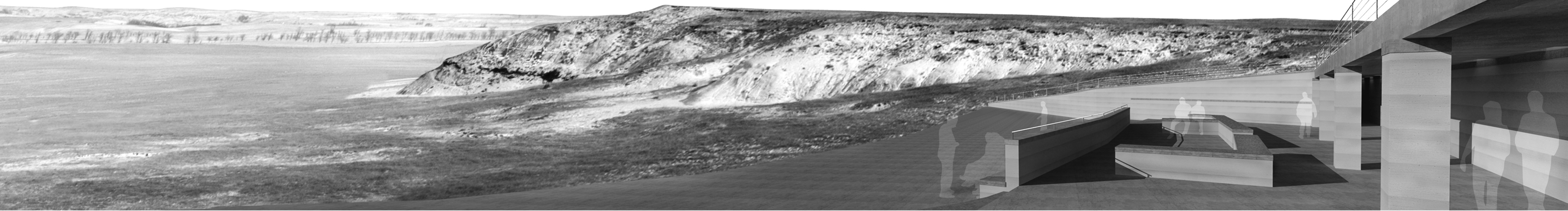
To existentially reconcile an individual's spirituality, they must understand that they are a product of their own choices, rebuking the power of deterministic, external forces that are so easily made in our lives. It is the goal of the Center to provide the individual with an environment that more readily allows them to define their own truth. Following this existential methodology, a similar treatment was applied to the formal conditions of the Center's functional elements. These elements are defined within the bounds of the butte. Spaces are revealed from the butte as the human condition is drawn through it. No external, superfluous conditions need further define the nature of the Center.

The Reveal

The condition of the reveals reflect the environment in which they are set. Across the broad face of the butte, the entry condition simply pokes the individual through, into the Center. The residential brow reveal is dug out and adjusted upward to complement the line of the ridge in which it sits. Each of the three delineated reflection areas are formed to compliment the area in which they are positioned, from a tight, narrow setting to one that is wide and expansive. Fully sunken on the end of the residential brow, the narrow office reveals, above the space, allow light to wash down into the Center.

Second Reflection Area

First Reflection Area



not even jail.

- a Center for the Achievement of Greater Understanding

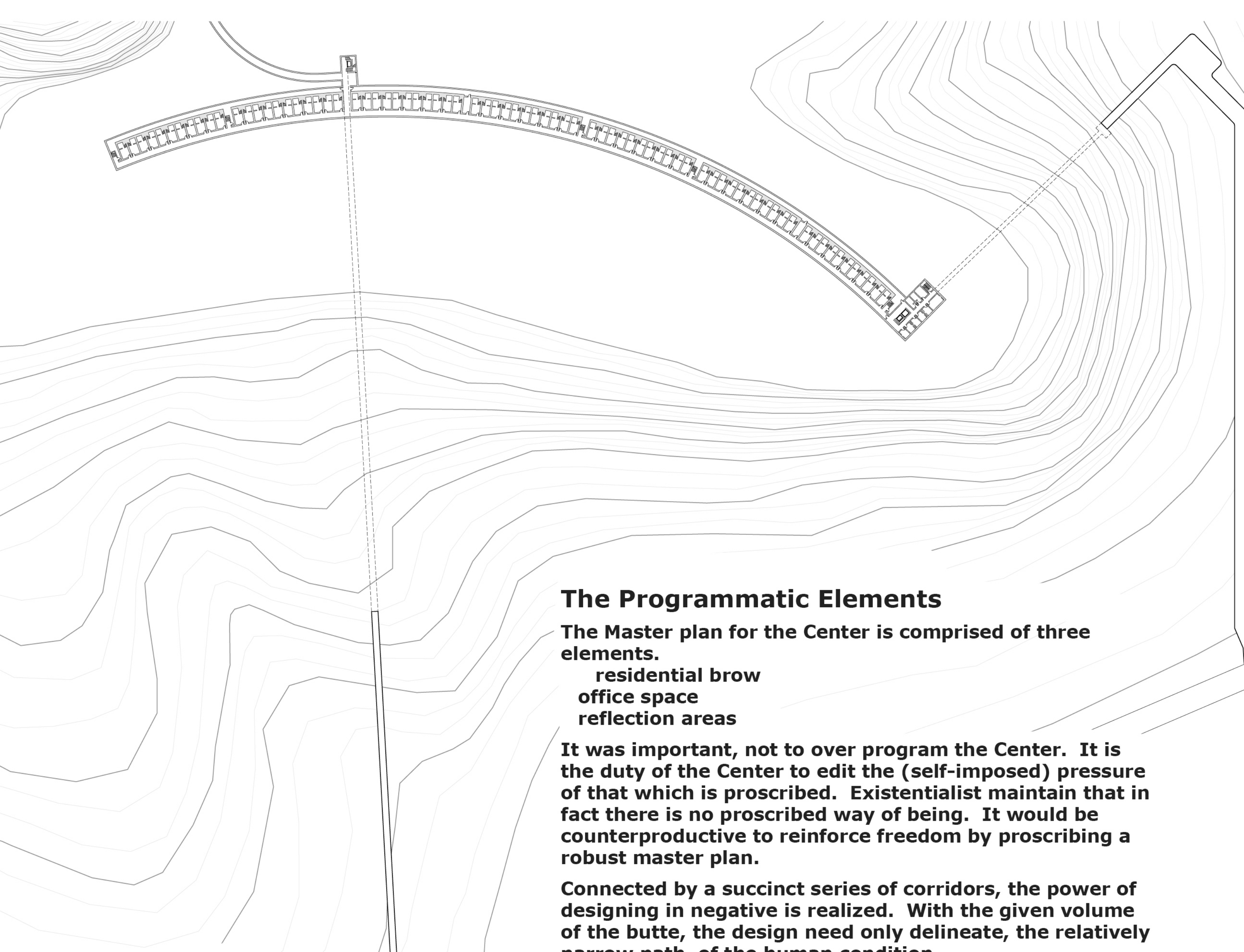
"I must find the truth that is true for me."
-Soren Kierkegaard, existential philosopher

This thesis is an experiment...

An experiment which examines an individual's need for greater understanding. Addressing specifically, the way in which an individual reconciles their spirituality. The fallibility associated with external reconciliation is negated when an existential approach is employed, increasing responsibility of the individual for their own condition.

Can the design of a retreat center promote greater understanding? It is this question that *not even jail - a Center for the Achievement of Greater Understanding* was designed to answer. The tested solution, in a word, is "edit."

A Design Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture of North Dakota State University by Dan Benson



The Services

Anchoring the ridge reveal, the offices maintain minimal presence while having easy access to the residential brow via the two corridors that runs concurrently. Connected to the ground below by a separate entry corridor and vertical circulation shaft, the Center can be serviced without interrupting the tranquil nature of the Center.

The Residential Units

These 77, two-tiered units are designed as the individual's principal space for the duration of their stay. For it is quite possible to achieve existential reconciliation without leaving this unit. There is no greater understanding of truth than that found by oneself. Most importantly, these units are the private sanctuary where personal reflection and meditation is nurtured. Acting as a base condition, additional interaction becomes something that the individual must seek, editing the proscribed.

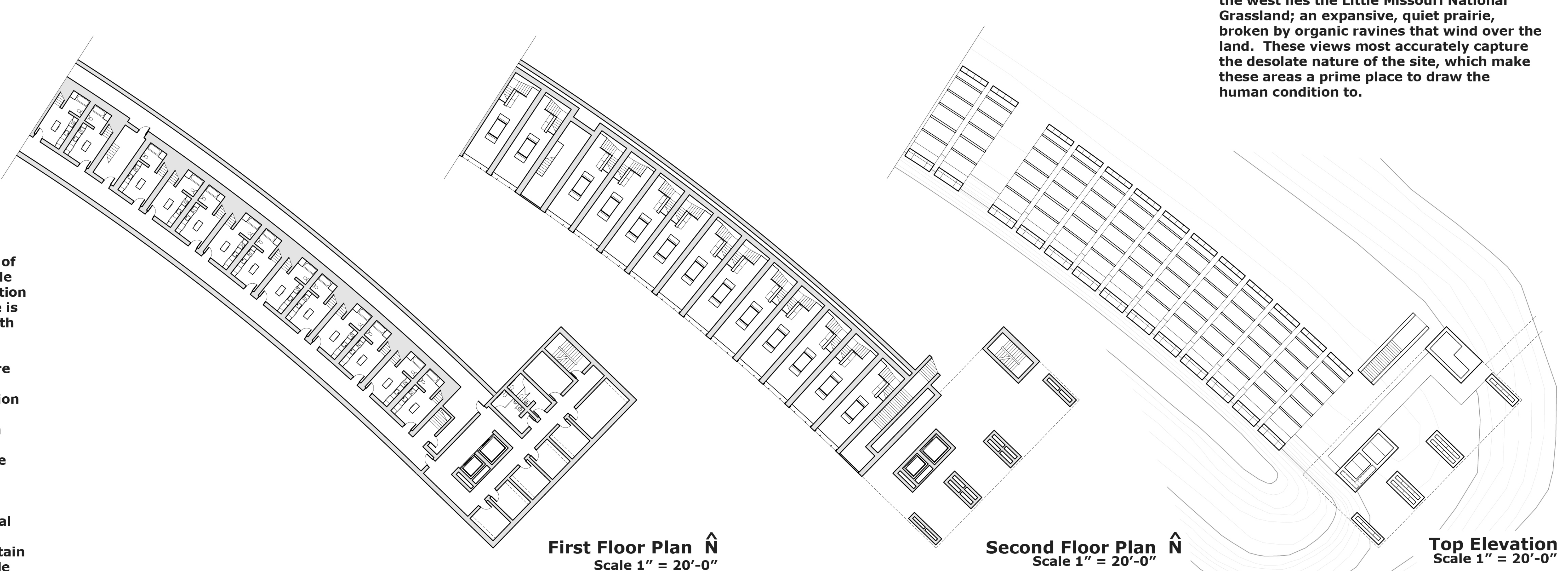
On the first floor, the basic functional needs of the individual are accommodated. Kitchenette, bathroom and dining area maintain a modest level of existence while allowing meditation in the above bedroom.

The Programmatic Elements

The Master plan for the Center is comprised of three elements:
residential brow
office space
reflection areas

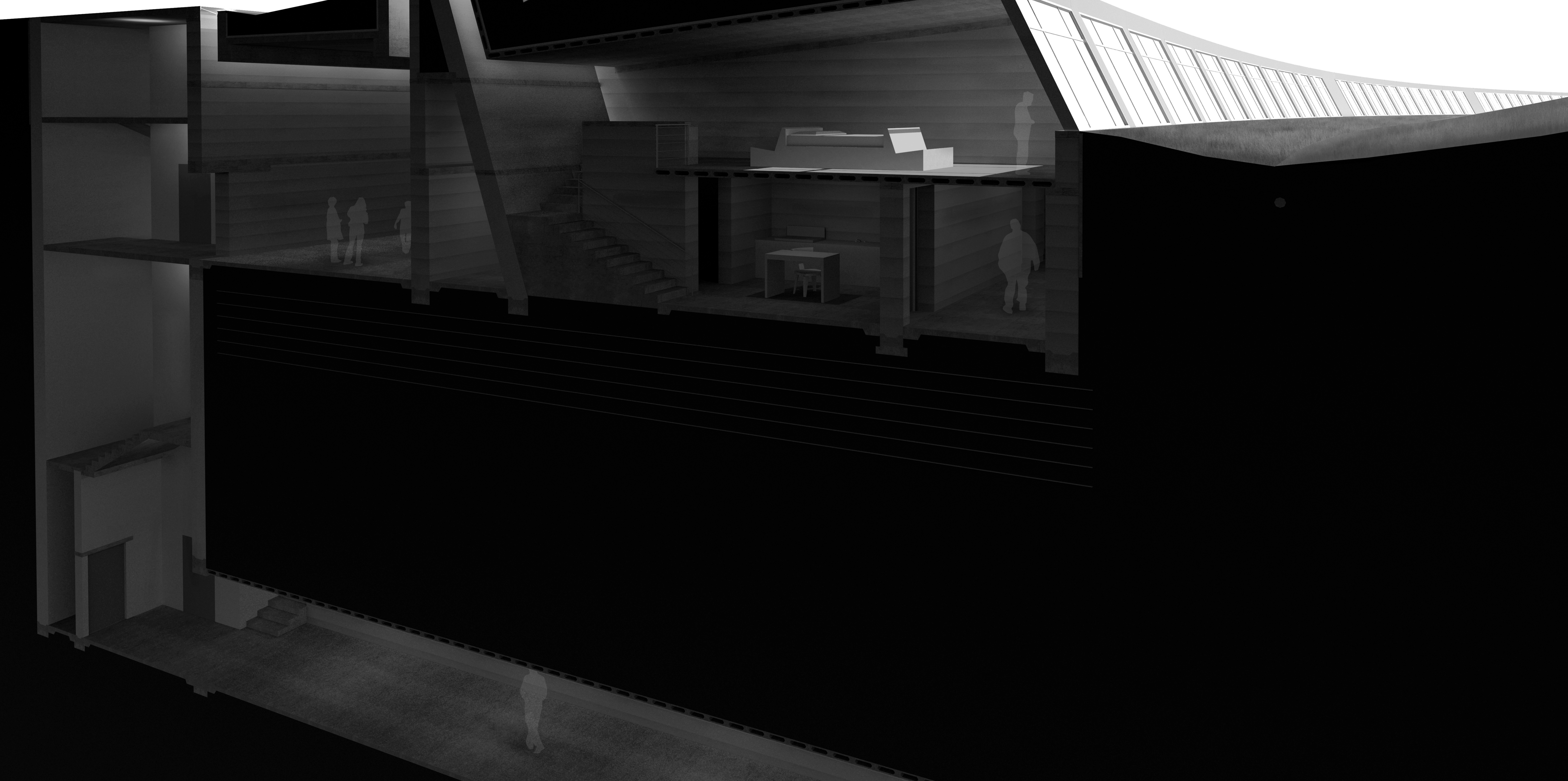
It was important, not to over program the Center. It is the duty of the Center to edit the (self-imposed) pressure of that which is proscribed. Existentialist maintain that in fact there is no proscribed way of being. It would be counterproductive to reinforce freedom by proscribing a robust master plan.

Connected by a succinct series of corridors, the power of designing in negative is realized. With the given volume of the butte, the design need only delineate, the relatively narrow path, of the human condition.



The Master Plan \hat{N}
Scale 1" = 100'-0"

The Section
Through Residential Brow and Entry Condition



Sustainability

While promoting a level of reconciliation that does not extend beyond the individual, the Center too reconciles itself existentially by decreasing the amount of reliance on the fallible. Instead, turning towards a stable relationship with the site and nature. Issues of sustainability are reconciled on two levels, energy efficiency and materiality.

Energy

Energy use is the most important consideration of the overall wellness of a design. Issues of energy for the Center were met on two levels. First, to conserve energy and secondly to provide energy back to the grid.

Spaces revealed at the Center are done to increase the amount of surface area that is contacting the ground. The earth acts a massive heat sync that stabilize temperature swings within the Center. Coupled with a south facing, glazed facade, the brow profile is sized to allow for optimum sun penetration into the space.

Photovoltaic panels are implemented as a means of electricity generation that maintain the Center's low, public profile. Placed above the residential units in what would have been fill, the panels are sunken, protected from the wind running over the butte.

This flow of wind over the profile of the butte provides an opportunity to implement a natural cross ventilation system, which decreases the need for mechanical equipment.

A common criticism of existentialism is that it is too self-centered and refuses to look beyond the individual's condition. However, this is not the case. It is only through appropriate reconciliation of one's self, that any contribution to society is valuable.

Materials

With the principal design feature, a reveal, involving large amounts of excavation, the Center was gifted with an abundant material from which to base the material palette. There are two types of earthen construction used at the Center.

First and most predominantly used, is the manually impacted rammed earth. Two sided formwork defines a wall cavity in which a precisely mixed layers of earth and cement are rammed to an appropriate level of compaction around a matrix of reinforcing bar.

Second, is a type of rammed earth that is applied with an uncommon technique called Pneumatically Impacted Stabilized Earth. This technique only requires one-sided framework. The mixture is applied with highly pressurized air, which compacts the mixture as it is applied. This was utilized for the north wall in the residential units. It allowed the wall to be slanted as long as a bond beam was maintained across it's breadth.