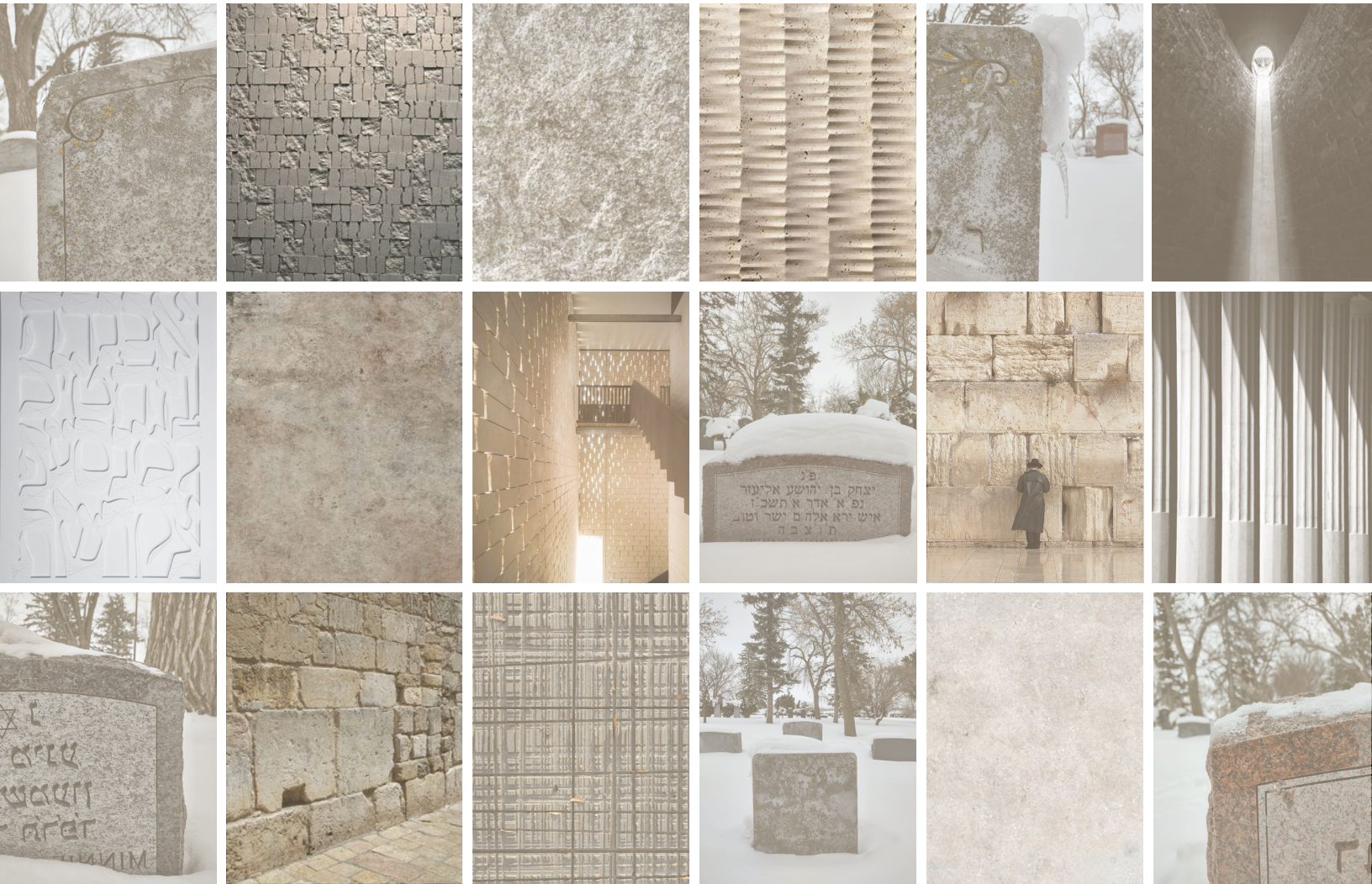
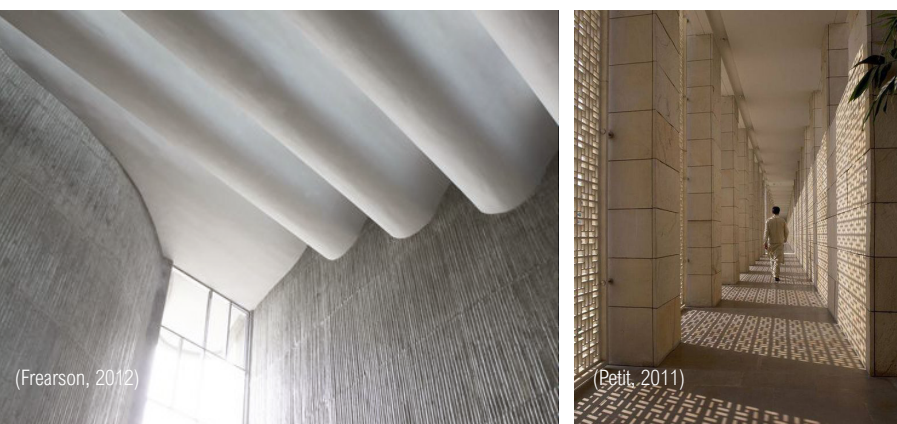
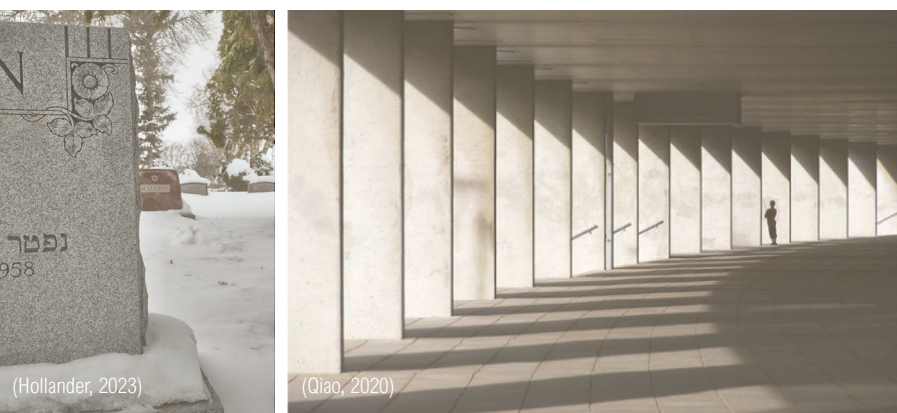


illuminating the invisibility of the other:

FARGO JEWISH CEMETERY CHAPEL

sophie hollander / ndsu architecture





illuminating the invisibility of the other
FARGO JEWISH CEMETERY CHAPEL

A Design Thesis Submitted to the Department of Architecture
North Dakota State University

By
Sophie Hollander

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Architecture

Primary Thesis Advisor : Stephen A. Wischer

Thesis Committee Chair : Stephen A. Wischer

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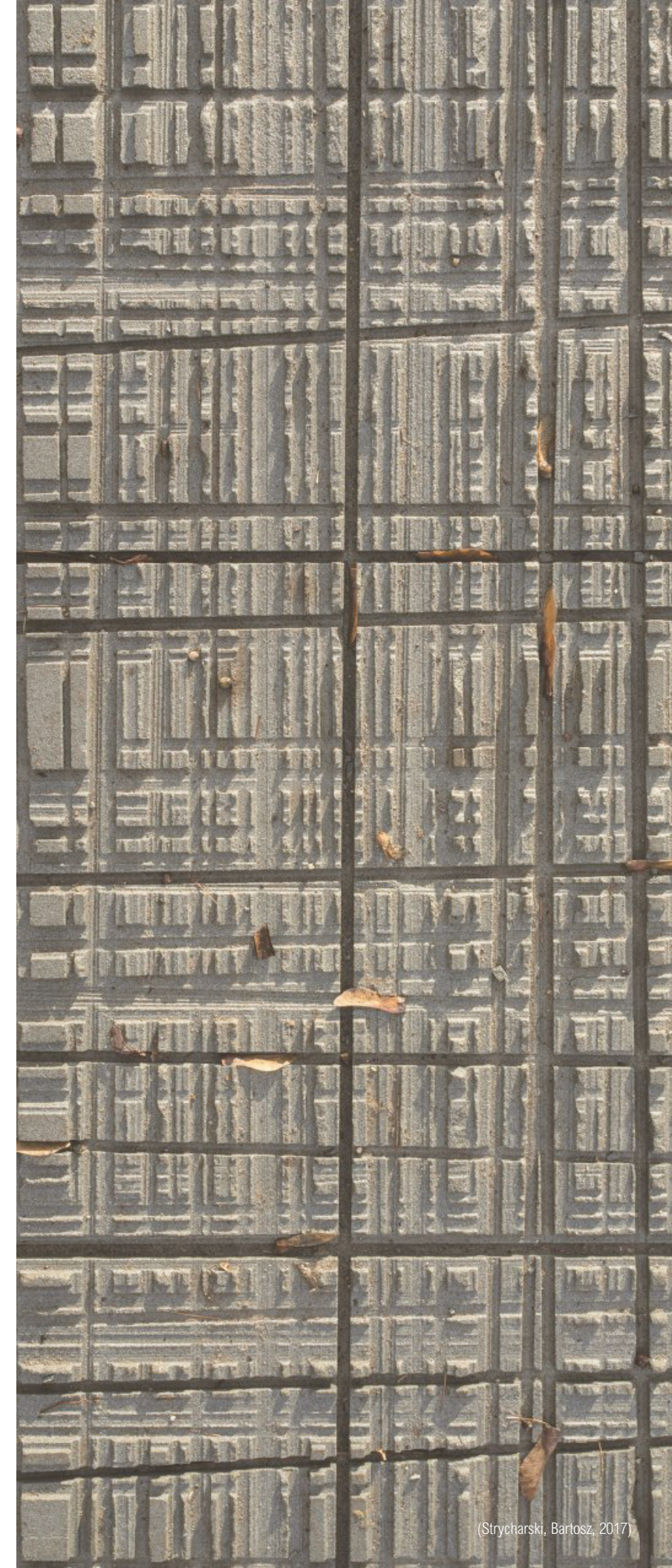
I am especially grateful for my father, Dr. Joel A. Hollander, for his continual support and guidance through the topics of Jewish identity and art. Lastly, special thanks to my family and friends for their encouragement and support through this thesis process.

THESIS ABSTRACT

When we unravel the stories of Jewish people in North Dakota, we see that they intersect with layers of Jewish experience across history. This community is both one of the most obscure and exemplary examples of the Jewish American story throughout the world and time - a scattered people, continually the “other” of society, whose future rests in the sacred rituals of remembrance that have sustained the culture for thousands of years.

In the late 1880s, Jews were a notable minority among the waves of ethnic immigrant groups flocking to North Dakota. In the 1950s, the population of Fargo, alone, was around 500 people (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). Yet in 2022, it is estimated there are no more than 400 Jewish residents in the state of North Dakota.

This number suggests the reality that the Jewish community in North Dakota is nearly invisible, dwindling and in need of a reinvigoration of communal memory. A cemetery chapel here holds the potential to become a destination of remembrance and an opportunity to participate in Jewish life. The fundamentally spiritual and communally mnemonic nature of cemeteries holds the potential to illuminate the invisibility of Jewish stories in North Dakota while uniting them with Jewish experiences throughout history.





research

METHODS & OVERVIEW

In the following sections we will embark on a literature review & narrative exploration of the topics most deeply related to this project: memory, identity, Jewish American identity, the role of the “other” in society, the nature and craft of sacred space, and the history of Jewish people on the prairie.

Acts of remembrance have always been the central pillar of Jewish religious and cultural life. The deeply ritualized and mystifyingly intrinsic communal memory this creates has connected Jewish identity over thousands of years of diaspora and fragmentation. Jewish identity has been sustained through its continuous transformation in response to the context and location of its people.

In the United States, this has created a complex landscape of Judaic-religious variety, an increasingly secularized culture, a significant percentage of interfaith and inter-ethnic couples, and the necessity for young people to make an intentional choice to participate in Jewish life. The legacy of the tiny Jewish community in North Dakota is an exemplary microcosm of this Jewish American story.

To further understand the inter-personal nature of the Jewish history in North Dakota and how the religious divide in the community of Fargo has impacted the site, I conducted interviews with members of the Sons of Jacob, Cemetery in Devils Lake, ND, the former Fargo Hebrew Congregation, and Temple Beth El Memorial Park.

These larger narratives and the research we’re about to explore aims to broaden the context of this proposal, understanding of my artefact, and inform the design process of a Jewish cemetery chapel in Fargo, North Dakota.

research

NARRATIVE

When we unravel the stories of Jewish people in North Dakota, those in blessed memory and those with us today, we see that they intersect with layers of Jewish experience across history. While seemingly invisible, the Jewish community in North Dakota has tangibly and permanently affected this region. Likewise, despite the remote and harsh characteristics of North Dakota that have made Jewish experience difficult and distinct, the stories here are beautifully paradigmatic of Jewish collective memory throughout the world and time.

Inevitably, at the start of this conversation, someone will ask, “Are there even any Jews living on the prairie?” The question is completely reasonable, and it points us to the significance of creating a space to share these stories.

In 2022, it is estimated there are no more than four hundred (400) Jewish residents in the state of North Dakota. Jewish people correspond to roughly 2.4% of the total US population, but only 0.1% in North Dakota (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). This number suggests the reality - the Jewish community in North Dakota is nearly invisible. Yet, it was not always like this.

In the late 1880s, Jews were a notable minority among waves of ethnic immigrant groups flocking to North Dakota to claim free land under the Homestead Act. By the 1930s, there were over 2,000 Jews in the state and permanent synagogues and cemeteries in Fargo, Grand Forks, and Devils Lake (Sons of Jacob Cemetery, n.d.). In Fargo, the neighborhood surrounding the modern-day City Hall was known as Fargo’s ‘Jewish Ghetto’ with Jewish barbers, butchers, and an Orthodox bath house (Brinkman, 2012). In the 1960s, the Jewish population of Fargo, alone, was around 500 people. Today, there are no more than 30-45 Jewish families living in Fargo. The synagogue meets every other week, but is struggling to keep a Minyan (Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, 2022).



(Hollander, 2023)



(Hollander, 2023)



(Hollander, 2023)

research

NARRATIVE

So, why are young people leaving and not returning to the Dakotas? Why is Fargo, a city of transplants with three major colleges and universities and two major healthcare systems, struggling to retain these families, students, and professionals and keep its Jewish community active? How did post-WWII dynamics, anti-semitic views and actions, and connections to Israel impact this tiny group of Jews living on the prairie?

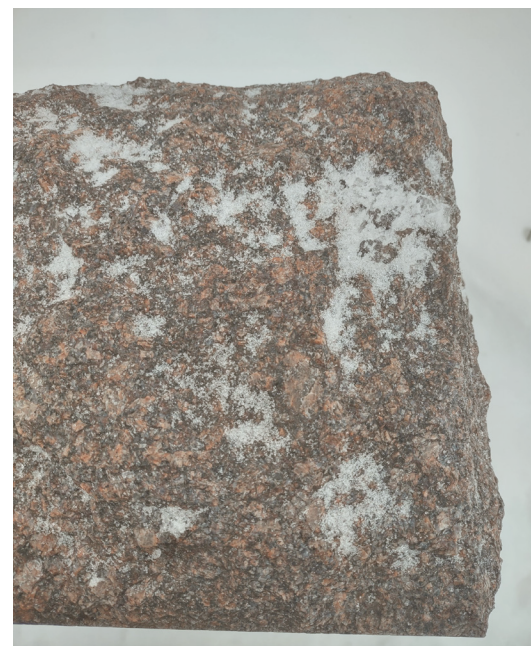
Looked at this way, the Jewish community's situation here is disheartening, but it can also be fascinating and transparent when put in the context of larger narratives. Acts of remembrance have always been the central pillar of Jewish religious and cultural life. The deeply ritualized and mystifyingly intrinsic communal memory this creates has connected Jewish identity over thousands of years of diaspora and fragmentation. Jewish identity has been sustained through its continuous transformation in response to the context of the environment and location of its people.

In the United States, this has created a complex landscape of Judaic-religious variety, an increasingly secularized culture, a significant percentage of interfaith and inter-ethnic couples, and the necessity for young people to make an intentional choice to participate in Jewish life. The legacy of the tiny Jewish community in North Dakota is an exemplary microcosm of this Jewish American story.

But how can this story be shared? Could there be a space that brings awareness towards and reinvigorates participation within Fargo's Jewish community?



(Hollander, 2023)



(Hollander, 2023)



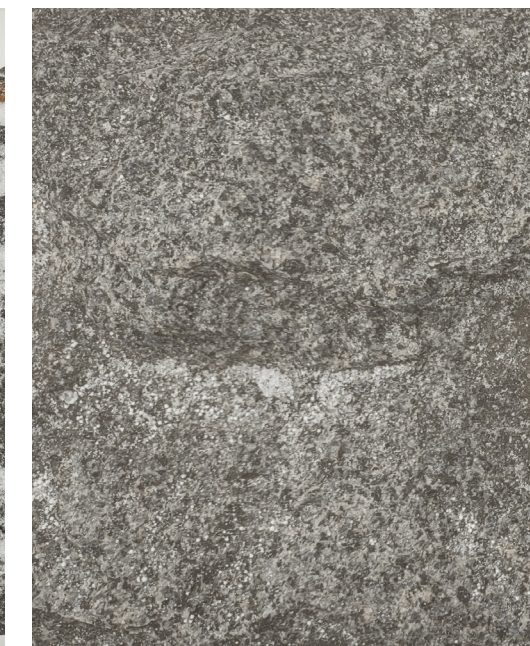
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research

NARRATIVE

I believe the sacred and spiritual nature of cemeteries provides an opportunity to illuminate the invisibility of Jewish stories in North Dakota. Cemeteries hold moments to purposefully and palpably encounter the past, pull it into the present, and bring the intangibility of the deceased back to our side. Every visit to a cemetery is an act of participatory memory.

Specifically within a Jewish cemetery, each visit (especially those done by descendants and Jews themselves) is a testament to the resiliency and presence of Jewish people across the earth. The addition of a mausoleum, chapel, or commemorative monument in a Jewish cemetery is an even larger statement. It stands to say that, despite the placelessness of identity accumulated over thousands of years, the Jewish people remain connected and possess a tangible hope in future generations.

In Fargo, the presence of a Jewish cemetery chapel or mausoleum could become a destination of remembrance for the entire region. The fundamentally spiritual and communally mnemonic nature of cemeteries holds the potential to unite the stories of Jews on the prairie with Jewish experiences throughout history.



research

MEMORY

Memory is the fabric of our existence - individual, communal, dead and alive.

The only reason we know who we are, our beliefs, and place in the world is recollection of the past - memory. Each day we wake up, interact with others, and in every action completely “depend on memory for our individual and collective sense of identity, meaning, and purpose” (Vivian 2010, p.10). The nature of this neurological process of ordering, retrieving, and assigning meaning to past (both lived and learned) is incredibly fragile, hazy, and subjective.

I would argue the inherently non-sequential nature of our encounters with memory are due less to an allusive past, and more a result of an intangible present. As Suzanne Cataldi explains, in our “experience of time, as it is lived, the past and the future reversibly cross over into each other in the chiasmic medium of the present” (Cataldi 1993, p.195). We infinitely approach the present through integrals of time, but our consciousness never arrives precisely there. In this sense, the phenomenon of the past (and the future) are much more physically real than the present. Furthermore, it is clear that our interpretations of the past are a critical mechanism for understanding time and we rely on memory to make meaning of the world and our temporal location within it.

On the individual level, it is obvious that memory is fragmented, suggestible and involuntary. We see it quite drastically in the uncontrollable psychological effects of patients with obsessive-compulsive-disorder (OCD) or victims of physical abuse who struggle reliving their trauma through everyday triggers. The elusive and involuntary nature of memory is demonstrated every week as students studying for exams (hard as they might try) struggle to retain information the next day. Personally, I find it most fascinating how memories can lie latent. For example, the sudden ability to ride a bike, figure skate, or use a sewing machine after years of never touching it.

In the same way personal identity is shaped by individual memory, cultural identity is the product of collective memories. We know ourselves through our memories, and likewise culture recognizes itself through the memories it inherits from its members. As we go about this process, the individual complexities of memory become exponential when placed on the public stage. Because while we can easily notice the gaps and failures in our own memories, stories and memories that are not experienced viscerally but instead through culture and historical rhetoric, it is incredibly easy to be incognizant of the fragmentation and suggestibility of our own interpretations.

research

MEMORY

This suggestibility leads us to the most critical impact of memory studies - an awareness that memory is incredibly malleable.

The fundamental difference between individual and communal memory is that public memory is always formed purposefully. The only means to create shared interpretations of the past is through intentional craft of the communicative mediums: language, ritual, and art. This craft is known as history, and it always takes a stance. All of the most terrifying acts of history: the Holocaust, crusades, slavery and segregation, were achieved by powerful leaders taking full advantage of our pliable minds through careful manipulation of public memory.

In the book, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again*, Bradford Vivian defines communal memory as “the result of a perpetual rhetorical process with which communities deliberate over how best to interpret the past as a resource for understanding and making decisions in the present” (Vivian, 2010, p.13). The book explores rhetorical processes for generating public memory and public forgetting. Vivian’s main argument is that both memory and forgetting are essential tools for healthy and robust public judgment of complex past events. In this process the author also proves how memory and forgetting are interrelated and provides a solid framework for understanding how memory functions in the public sphere.

The book begins with the Greek legend of the rivers Mnemosyne and Lethe. These parallel rivers of memory and forgetting in the underworld are where souls would go to drink and gain their fundamental wisdoms of life, and likewise (if they are unlucky enough) to forget their past lives before reincarnation. Throughout the first half of the book, Vivian analyzes similar classical tropes to show and challenge our commonplace acceptance that forgetting is always bad and remembering is inherently good.

In the process of defining these classical tropes, Vivian touches numerous times upon the foundational and exemplary role Jewish culture has played in memory studies (Vivian, 2010, p.22). Western culture owes the majority of its intellectual and social paradigms to greco-roman or judeo-christian roots. Despite minimal acknowledgment, Jews have lent a disproportionately large impact to global understandings of memory. Memory has been the central story of the Jewish people since their origin - with God’s covenant with Abraham to preserve his descendants for eternity - and later with the law of Moses that if they remember God’s commandments, God will be faithful to remember his promises with them. As Vivian states it, “the Hebrew Bible, and the ethos of the people it continually calls into being, is a monumental work of memory” (Vivian, 2010, p.22). Indeed, the only tangible explanation that the culture of this tiny, bronze age, ethnic group has survived millennium of exile, diaspora, persecution, and assimilation are its deeply powerful traditions of remembrance.

MEMORY

If we define public memory as the product of strategic communication to create shared interpretations of the past, public forgetting follows the same process, but aims to supplant instead of sustain memory. Therefore, public memory and forgetting both require external expression to communicate their position.

Part two of Vivian's book explores the rhetorical methods and mediums used to create these moments of significant change in public memory - also known as public forgetting. The manifestations of forgetting that Vivian examines come in the forms of national commemoration, public history literature, cultural folklore, and political rhetoric during times of national crisis. Vivian's goal is to prove that intentional acts of forgetting are a powerful tool for deriving new interpretations of history and serve a "substantive resource of public judgment regarding communal lessons of the past" (Vivian, 2010, p.16).

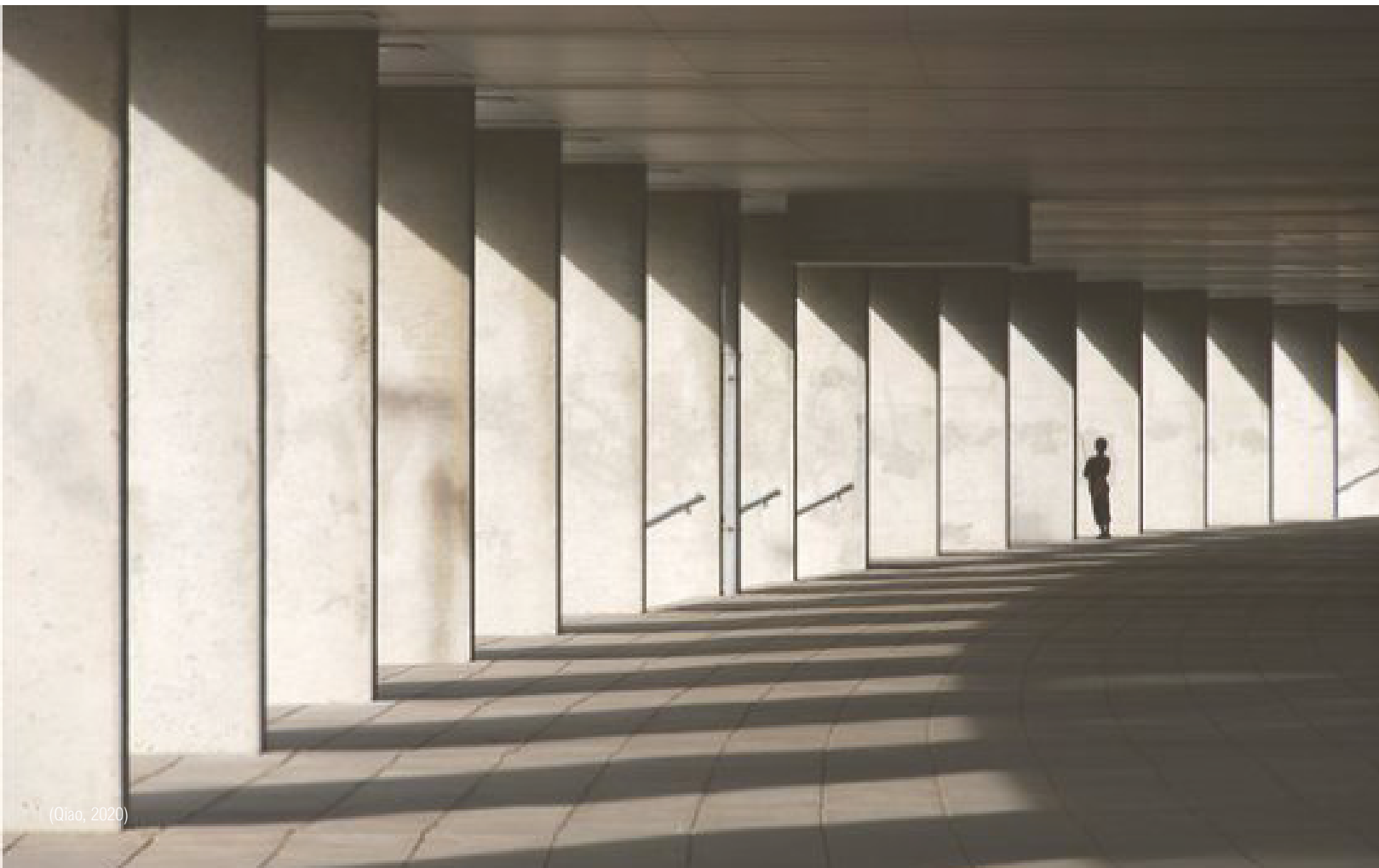
The first case study Vivian analyses is the decision by political leaders not to include any original speeches during the first anniversary of September 11th. Instead they chose to reuse the familiar speeches of famous past presidents and national heroes. It seems they felt the safest way to comfort the nation during this time of mourning and crisis. Vivian argues this was intended to reinvigorate our blind faith that America is divinely blessed and hearken back to better times and themes of 'good will always win' (Vivian, 2010, p.83). More specifically, Vivian believes this was intended to dull public perception, or forget the magnitude of the crisis of terrorism.

Vivian's next example is the incredibly potent writings of revisionist, scientific historian John W. Draper. His book, *History of the Conflict*, completely reshaped 20th century understanding of the medieval belief in a flat earth. There is an abundance of evidence proving christian-Europe never lost "Greek astronomical knowledge of a spherical globe", yet due to the overwhelmingly positive reception of his landmark book, this is what the majority of the Western world now teaches and believes (Vivian, 2010, p.102). His work successfully created a "comprehensive revision of the historical record" (Vivian, 2010, p.107). This success was clearly not based on empirical evidence, but clever rhetoric. His narrative appealed to and inserted itself within the most heated philosophical debate of his age - the war of science and religion. His brilliant success demonstrates the terrifying fluidity and suggestibility of public memory, and illustrates that history is inherently communicative, rhetorical, and a "strategic endeavor tailored for persuasive effect in public deliberations" (Vivian, 2010, p. 94).

History is always biased. Far from an objective end in itself, history is the product of constant renegotiation and reinterpretation of our communal memories.

Vivian's book concludes with a beautiful reinterpretation of the Mnemosyne and Lethe legend. Instead of rivers flowing in opposite directions, Vivian suggests the rising and setting sun as a better metaphor to understand the relationship of memory and forgetting. He argues that in order to achieve a healthy understanding of the past, "memory needs the freedom of its evening" and through the process of forgetting, history is "waiting to be seen anew when morning breaks again" (Vivian, 2010, p.181). This cyclical view posits that memory and forgetting are interdependent instead of opposite, and both are incredibly valuable tools for generating new communal memories and beginning again.

These arguments of forgetting are skillfully supported by Vivian's analysis and examples, but the most relevant concepts of his work to my proposal are the assertions that memory is the fundamental substance of our individual and collective identities, and the process of forming collective memory is inherently communicative and rhetorical. Therefore communal memory requires expression through the mediums of language, ritual, and art.





(Esakov, 2010)

research

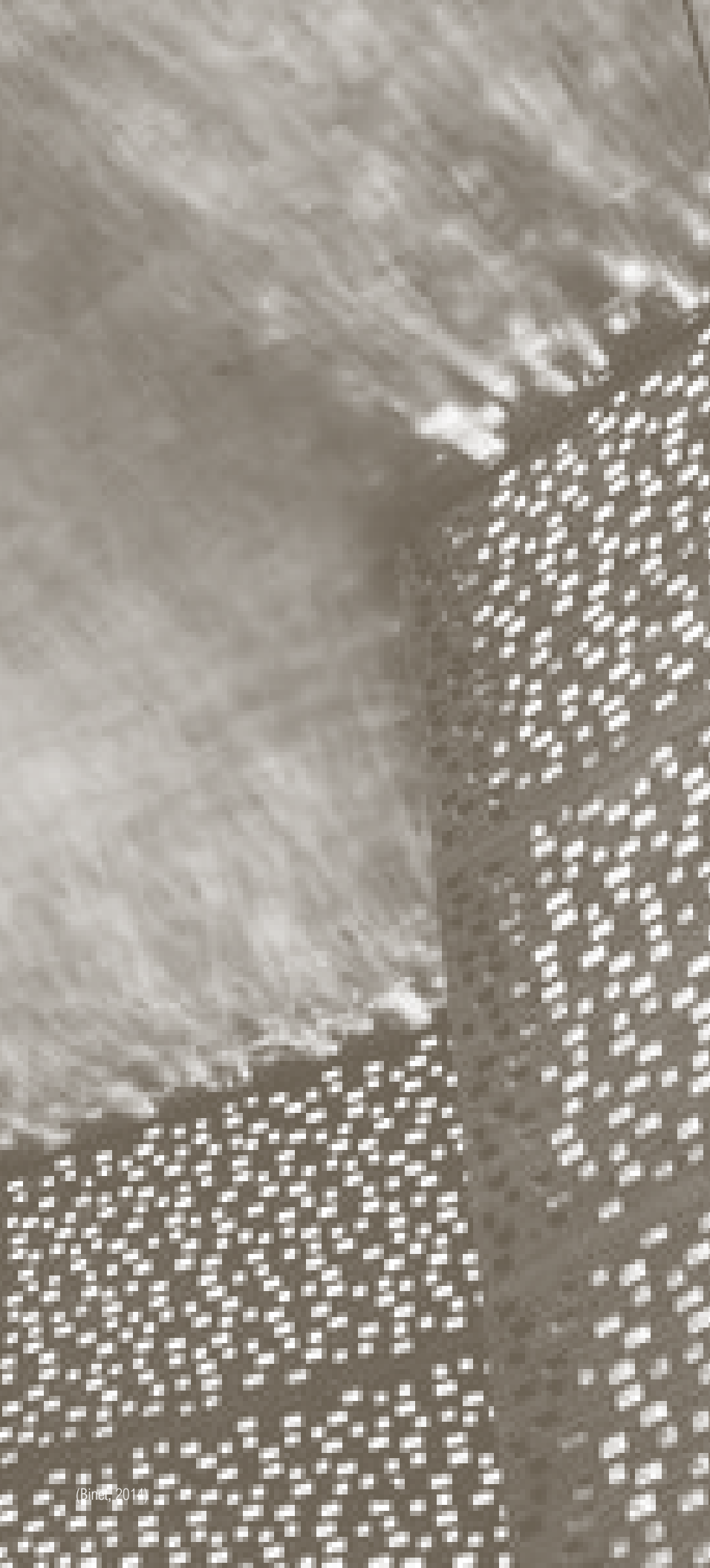
MEMORY

Furthermore, the continuity of public memory hinges on the efficacy these communicative mediums to make users active participants in assigning meaning to their presence and the past. This participation and the successful use of these mediums is our only hope for forming a sober, well-examined understanding of history.

Libeskin's Jewish Museum in Berlin is an exemplary case of a memory artform that makes users active participants. The fractured lines on the facade, leading towards a central void of the museum is meant to represent the unfathomable emptiness and loss of the futures that will never be, because of the holocaust. Yet this space does so much more than simply represent the idea of loss. Precisely the moment we step into the space - as we participate with it - we're engulfed by an atmosphere and a visceral experience of this loss. Libeskind's profound efficacy to express loss through his art, makes the user a member of holocaust memory.

James E. Young is a leading theorist of memory studies and the foremost expert in the study of holocaust memorials around the world. His work specifically examines the process and efficacy of these memorials to make users the active component of generating their meaning, and whether these artefacts truly make their inscribed memories, present again.

Young points out, that "In this age of mass memory production and consumption, there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialization of the past and its contemplation and study... once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember (Young, 1993, p.181). In shouldering the memory-work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory burden". The conclusion of his work is that memorials - our memory artefacts - ought simply to be the vehicles, the material witnesses in our rituals of reuniting ourselves to the past. Because indeed, "to the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful" (Young, 1993, p.181).



research

IDENTITY

We've determined personal memory creates our personal and cultural identities. We've also seen that individual and collective memory is incredibly malleable and the product of a constant process of reinterpretation, effort, and artforms. Lastly, that the efficacy of these memory artefacts is dependent on their ability to create visceral encounters with memory.

There's an essential component to identity that we have yet to address - the formativeness process of time. Indeed, how can cultural identity be sustained when it constantly is being transformed?

I believe the continuity of communal memory hinges on the efficacy of our communicative mediums of art to provide meaning to the present while also pointing beyond themselves, and back to their source as created work. Successful commemorative art, literature, and ritual must do substantially more than simply depict a memory. This type of art needs to make users active participants in assigning meaning to its presence, reunite the present with the past, in doing so both storing and generating memory. The English word "remember" holds in its structure what I mean by this - (re)member - to become a member again. Successful 'mnemonic artifacts' viscerally connect participants with the story, cultural meaning, and identity from which they are created.

Frederica Goffi's book, *TIME MATTER(S): Invention and Re-Imagination in Built Conservation*, demonstrates the essential role mnemonic artifacts lend in sustaining communal memory. The book is a micro-historical study of the multi-temporal ichnographic drawings by Tiberio Alfarano of the New and Old St. Peter's Basilica, the Vatican. Over the course of its one-hundred-twenty (120) year reconstruction, Old St. Peter's was completely disassembled while simultaneously construction of the new temple took place. Yet, "despite radical changes to the physical fabric leading to significant renewals, and a dramatically different exterior appearance" the laity and clergy of its time, along with the historians of today, never distinguished the two buildings - somehow, "St. Peter's maintained its identity and continued to be regarded as the same building" (Goffi, 2013, p.5). The footprint of Old St. Peter's now sits completely engulfed by the walls of the Vatican. Its foundation walls mark the subterranean boundaries of the reliquary and act as the only built trace of the earlier temple.

So how did they manage a complete "demolition of the most important sanctuary of Christianity in Europe, and yet preserve the essence of the old structure after the building itself had disappeared?" (Goffi, 2013, p.72).

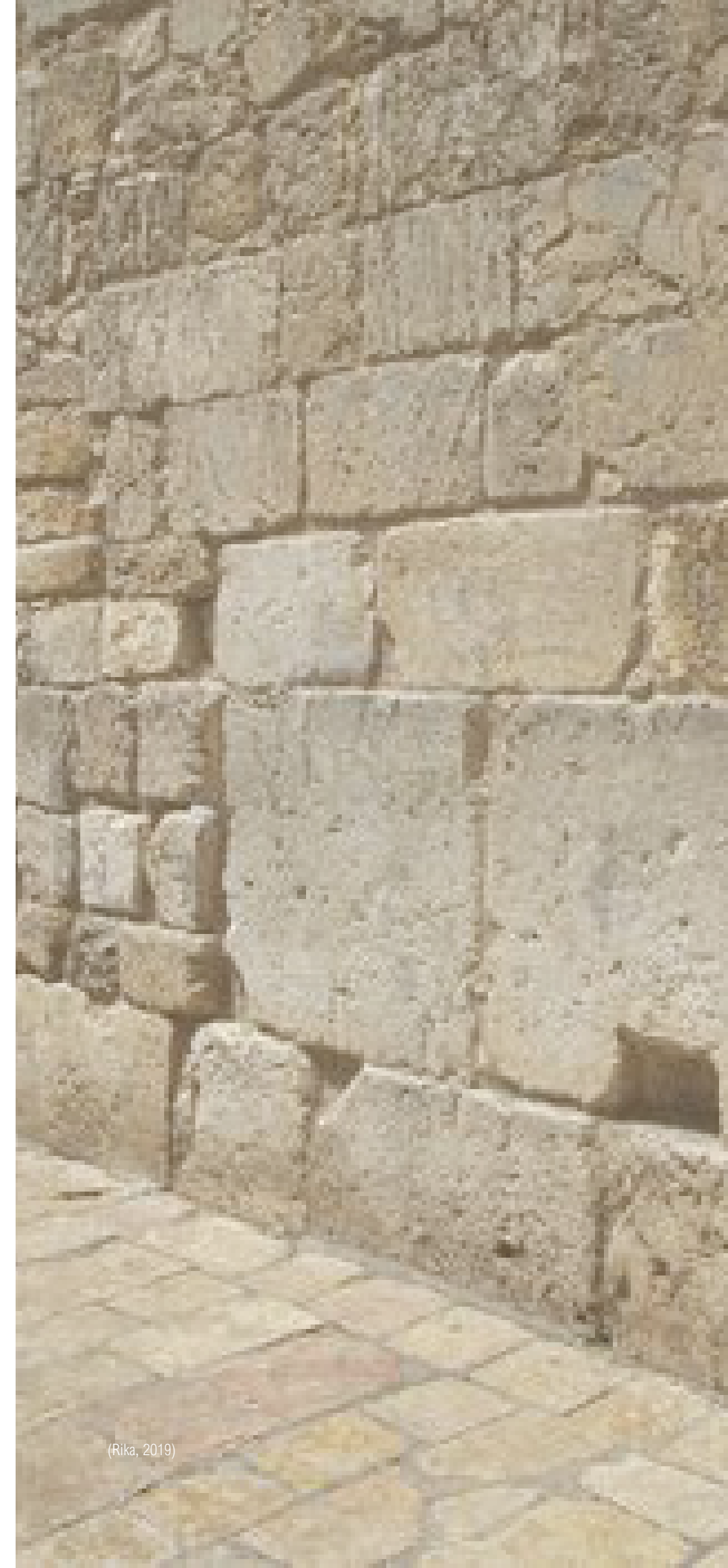
IDENTITY

Goffi's answer to this question lies in the complex web of religious, political, and architectural meanings wrapped up in Alfarano's ichnographic drawings. As architectural connoisseur and right-hand-man to the Pope, Alfarano oversaw the reconstruction of St. Peter's for seventeen years. His tenure came immediately following the death of Michelangelo who left more than a few open ends on the future of the church's renovation. Alfarano's drawings were inherited by his successor and used to complete the renovations of the church.

The drawings went far beyond our modern understanding of construction documentation, which are typically static depictions of buildings already determined and with meanings extending only so far as to explain constructability. Alfarano's series of drawings were imaginative, multidisciplinary explorations of how to create an architectural incarnation of the church's position towards the most heated religious and political debates of his day - to oppose Protestantism and reform the Catholic church. Alfarano's drawings weren't just an instruction manual for his craftsmen, they were a rhetorical, communicative endeavor to conjure support for this enormous, transformative work to expand, beautify, and modernize the political and spiritual center of the Christian world.

The meanings wrapped up in Alfarano's drawings are multi-faceted, and so were his representational techniques. The New and Old footprints of St. Peter's were always represented together, layered on top each other as a palimpsest, expressing the unchanging heart of the church. Surrounding the ichnographic floor plan was a detailed written description of the theological reasoning for the church's architectural expression along with the political dogma for undergoing such a prolific change to the fabric of the building, that no expense shall be spared in this all out fight against Protestantism.

Even the method of painting that he employed holds tremendous meaning. Alfarano utilized the same gold-leaf painting techniques used for painting holy icons. Furthermore, lying along the bottom of the copy now hanging in the basilica and those sent to clergy and parishes all around Christendom, small print clippings of actual icons frame the floor plan drawing of the church. Not just any icon, he specifically incorporated an icon of St. Veronica's, relic cloth. This well known relic is the cloth that St. Veronica offered Jesus as he carried his cross to Golgotha, so he could wipe his face, oozing blood and sweat in this tremendous moment and leaving behind an imprint of his face on the cloth. This relic is one of the few "touch relics generated by direct contact" with the savior (Goffi, 2013, p.49). These touch relics are as real as it gets - physical embodiments of their archetype.





(Kaplan, 2023)

research

IDENTITY

The purpose of an icon is not to be an end in itself, but to facilitate our attention back towards the holy person or concept being venerated, not visible in our time or realm. To be a stamp, or a 'type' of the original 'archetype'. A representation, but in the sense of, (re) (presencing) - truly making present again - the memory and meaning it conjures through its form. The iconographic nature of Alfarano's work was intended "to reveal not just likeness but presence, not just body but soul" of the old church (Goffi, 2013, p.49). Not only did Alfarano include icons in his drawing, he intended his drawing to be an icon.

The use of iconographic language is key to understanding how these drawings enabled St. Peter's to sustain its identity through such enormous physical change. Alfarano makes the analogy that New St. Peter's is a touch relic of the Old St. Peter's. Not just housing Old St. Peter's in its physical form, but housing its spirit as well. His goal through all of this was to gain support for the massive changes needed to sustain the church during its precarious moment in history, and reiterate that not only would his architecture represent a victorious church - its creation would be the fulfillment of a victorious church. His drawings are powerful 'mnemonic artifacts' in their ability to allow the identity of the Vatican to completely transform into a new architectural expression because all the while the object exists to point back to the original essence and identity.

Goffi uses the incredible efficacy of Alfarano's drawing to sustain the memory of St. Peter's to indict the modern architectural preservation profession of its in-imagination and loss of skill since the renaissance era. Her arguments are persuasive, but more so, I see Alfarano's brilliant use of the commemorative art as a paradigmatic case study of the power and framework of 'mnemonic artifacts'. The nature of this art requires it to point back to its source, making it present again. If done successfully - truly creating a visceral experience of memory - this identity can be transformed as often as it needs.

JEWISH IDENTITY

As internationally renowned author and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel states, “To be a Jew is to remember” (Rittner 1990, p.31). Indeed, the only tangible explanation that this tiny, bronze age culture has survived millennium of exile, diaspora, persecution, and assimilation are its deeply powerful traditions of remembrance.

Remembering to remember - as reductive as it sounds - has sustained Jewish culture through millennium of persecution and fragmentation in which otherwise it would have been destroyed. The nature of memory to sustain identity, combined with the unparalleled Jewish traditions and rituals of memory have unified these people through endless transformations of place and time.

Memory has been the central story of the Jewish people since their origin. In the story of their founding, God makes a promise to Abraham that he will remember and preserve his descendants for eternity. Later the law of Moses concretized the moral of remembrance, with the great covenant - remember God’s commandments, and God will be faithful to remember his promises to you. This imperative of remembrance is embodied through language, as the law is quite symbolically inscribed on stone for the sake of permanence and as an artifact of commemoration. The Jewish calendar continuously guides its people through acts of remembrance in its many rituals and holidays of Judaism. For example, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year commemorating the creation of the world. Yom Kippur, the most holy and sacred ‘day of atonement’, is set aside to pray, repent, and plead with God to remember you in the book of life. And certainly, the liturgical traditions of the week of Passover are commanded for the very sake of remembering the miracle of God delivering his people from slavery in Egypt.





(Medhurst, 1970)

research

JEWISH IDENTITY

With these transformations of place and time, Jewish architectural traditions have also transformed. After leaving Egypt, the Jewish people wander through the desert for 40 years. In this time, the Israelites craft a holy wooden ark to house the stone tablets of the law. Fascinatingly, when this linguistic space is formed it becomes the literal dwelling place of god - the holy of holies. While they're in the desert, they also create a traveling temple, the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle houses the ark and serves as a means for worship despite their placelessness.

When they arrive in Israel, they recreate the Tabernacle, but this time as a permanent building. The structure is essentially a series of courtyards and enclosures that lead to the ark. This is the space that only the high priest could go, once a year, to offer sacrifice and worship. Years later the Temple is destroyed. They go into exile, but after returning they rebuild the temple in the exact same spot.

During this time of the second temple, a new Jewish space is created - the synagogue. This isn't a place of high, sacrificial worship. It is a communal space for learning and teaching the law, yet its modeled after the same spatial framework of the temple and the tabernacle. In each synagogue, in place of the holiest of holy, is an ark that hold the scrolls of the Torah.

In 70 CE, the second temple is destroyed by the Romans and the Diaspora begins. The Jewish people scatter across the earth and their tradition of placelessness is reinstated. This was a continuation of their biblical histories, and memory of these experiences provided Jewish people with a hope of their eventual return to Israel. Yet, this event also forces Judaism into an existential crisis that fundamentally transformed their religious traditions due to the inability to fulfill the laws and commandments of sacrifice in the temple. Reliance on oral and written forms of memory necessarily became an even larger part of Jewish life.

research

JEWISH IDENTITY

As Jewish people began carving out spaces in Europe and the Middle East, they settled in patterns of isolation or assimilation as means of self preservation. This reality of placelessness paired with patterns of isolation sedimented the Jewish position of 'other' around the world. This cycle of isolation and otherness proliferated the anti-semitic thought and action seen throughout medieval, renaissance, and early modern ages.

It is important to note that as Jewish identity transformed to its temporal location, so did antisemitism. Whatever the societal ill of the age, someone inevitably blames the Jewish people for this problem. When religious uniformity is the crisis of the age, the Jew is the enemy of Christianity. When the evil is capitalism, the Jew is a financial monster. When the evil is poverty, the Jew is a social vermin, sucking resources from the economy. When the evil is colonization, the Jew is a white Zionist. But when Aryan, whiteness is the definitive mark of belonging, the Jew is a threat (Moadeb & Wahba, 2022)

The Holocaust is the ultimate testament of the resiliency of the Jewish people and their communal memory. Hitler's aim was not to simply exterminate the memory of Jewish people, but to alter and craft his own. He recognized the intrinsic power of memory to Jewish experience, and that exterminating the entirety of its people is the length necessary to accomplish a perversion of their memory. In the acclaimed memoir *Night*, Wiesel describes how "the conviction to remember is all that remains after the Holocaust has obliterated not only his personal faith in God but, more profoundly, the apparent presence of God in the world" (Vivian, 2010, p.31). We see through the lessons of the Holocaust, that even beyond religion, remembrance is inextricably melded with Jewish identity.



(Einfahrt, 1945)

JEWISH AMERICAN IDENTITY

Jewish immigration to the United States is unique because both patterns of isolation and assimilation had room to thrive in this relatively welcoming and newly available locus for Jewish life.

Most immigrants congregated in large urban centers like New York, Chicago, Boston and Miami where the Jewish population was so large it created a micro economy, where one could participate in all elements of Jewish life while never needing to leave (Flanzbaum, 2013). At the same, the location of these Jewish centers in America, provided ample opportunity for economic prosperity just outside the Jewish bubble.

In the generations following the early waves of Jewish immigration to the US, specifically the early to mid 20th century, there was a surge of affluent Jewish professionals (actors, financiers, educators) who chose to pursue opportunities outside the Jewish community, yet this success was contingent on minimizing their Jewishness (Flanzbaum, 2013). Compounded with religious fragmentation and increased inter-ethnic or religious marriages this has created an increasingly secularized Jewish American culture. In 2013, “over 50% of all those claiming Jewish identity” do not practice the religion of Judaism (Flanzbaum, 2013, p.488). So what does it mean to be Jewish then?



(Brous, 2023)



research

JEWISH AMERICAN IDENTITY

In the book, *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society*, Shaul Magid explores what it means to be a Jewish American - what of an American Jew? Where does the emphasis lie, and how does this identity manifest? His conclusion is that in this post-ethnic, post-religious world of Judaism, taking part of Jewish life is an active choice. Jewish American identity today is no longer inherited but deliberately created through participation in Jewish communal memory (Magid, 2013, p. 2).

These questions - "Are you Jewish?" - "How Jewish are you?" - are important, but they have also created deep wounds within Jewish communities. Some see others as too religiously observant, others not enough, and on it goes. Yet since ancient times, there has never been a monolithic Jewish experience, belief, or identity. It is impossible to define Jewishness by these categorical terms.

So either between the various Jewish sects or by other cultures looking in, the heart of the question - what does it mean to be Jewish? - is truly - what is the role of the other?

research

THE “OTHER”

Understanding the role of the “other” is the essential goal and function of this project.

This concept matters so much, because just as memory forms my individual, equally formative on who I am - is the presence of the “other”. I can only recognize myself through encounters with someone else.

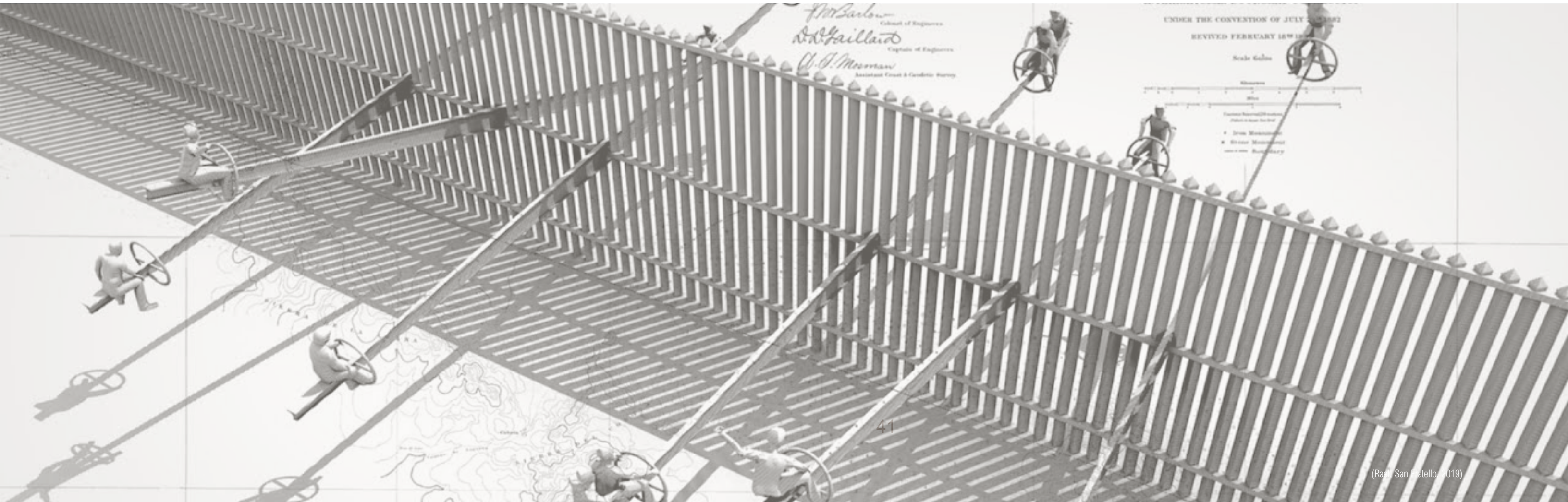
Culture is formed through these exchanges, and yet all of human conflict is staged around the idea of the “other”. Humanity has never resolved the “us vs them” conflict created by the “other”. Yet if we ever want to attempt it, we need a communal place to make our converge and experience our differences. This is the role of public art.

Public art has the capacity to resolve the conflicts of otherness, because “rather than presuming a common set of ideals, the public monument functions to create shared spaces that lend a common spatial frame to otherwise disparate experiences and understanding [around]which even competing memories may be figured” (Young, 1993, p. 181).

As discussed earlier, Jewish people have been the archetypal “other” in society for millennium, and as such a tiny minority, the Jewish community of Fargo are also one of the clearest examples of “other” in our society. While the Jewish story is easy to trace through the world and time, the connections of Fargo to the rest of the world are harder to trace.

This is the role of a Fargo Jewish Cemetery Chapel - forming the intersections between the Jewish community of Fargo with Jewish stories around the world. Simultaneously, forming the connections between Fargo and the rest of the world.

The unity of pain and death are one of the most humanizing experience of life. Creating a space to understand the history of life and the rituals of death in Jewish life, holds the opportunity to illuminate the indivisibility of the “other” in Fargo, North Dakota.



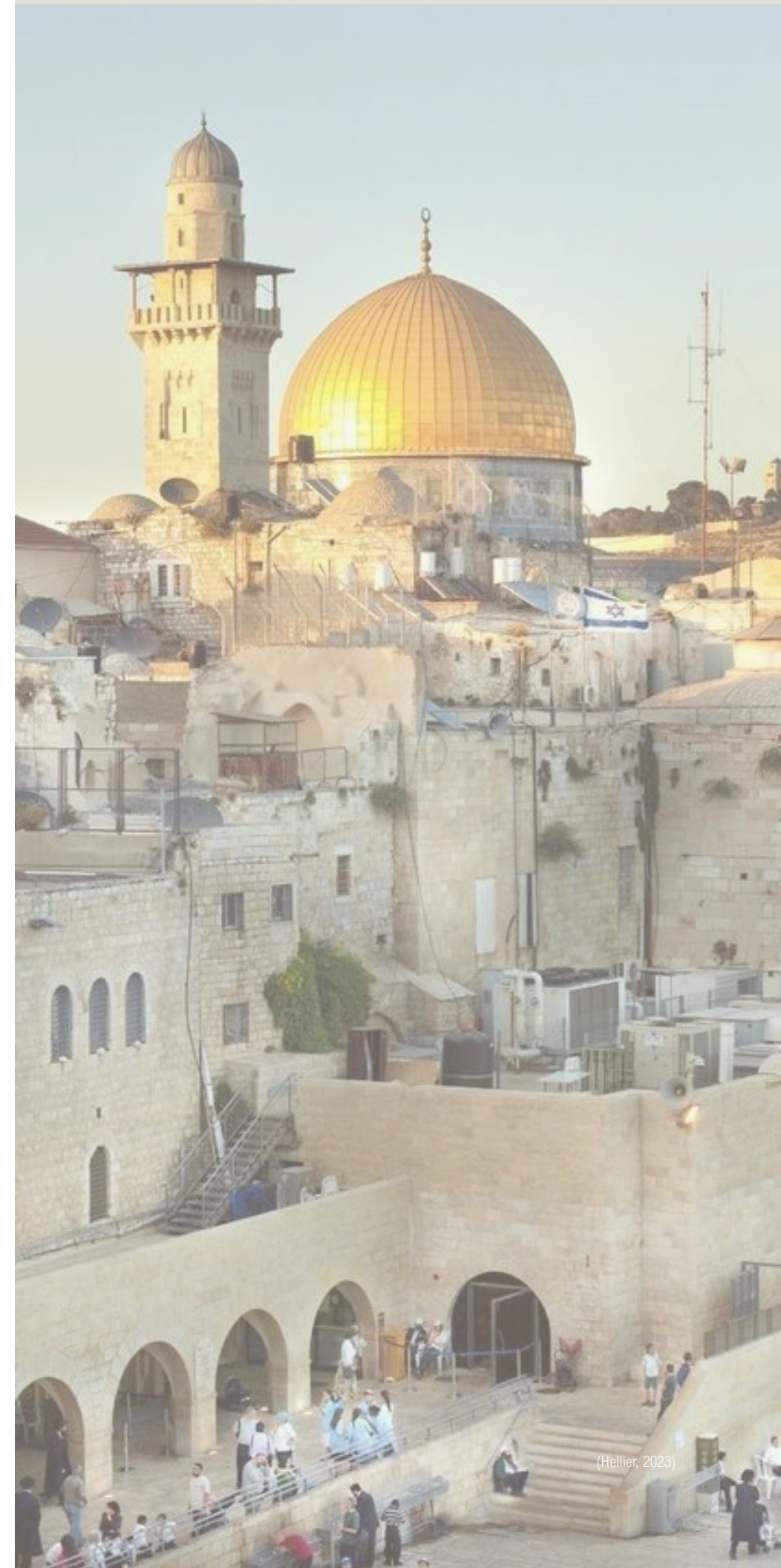
research

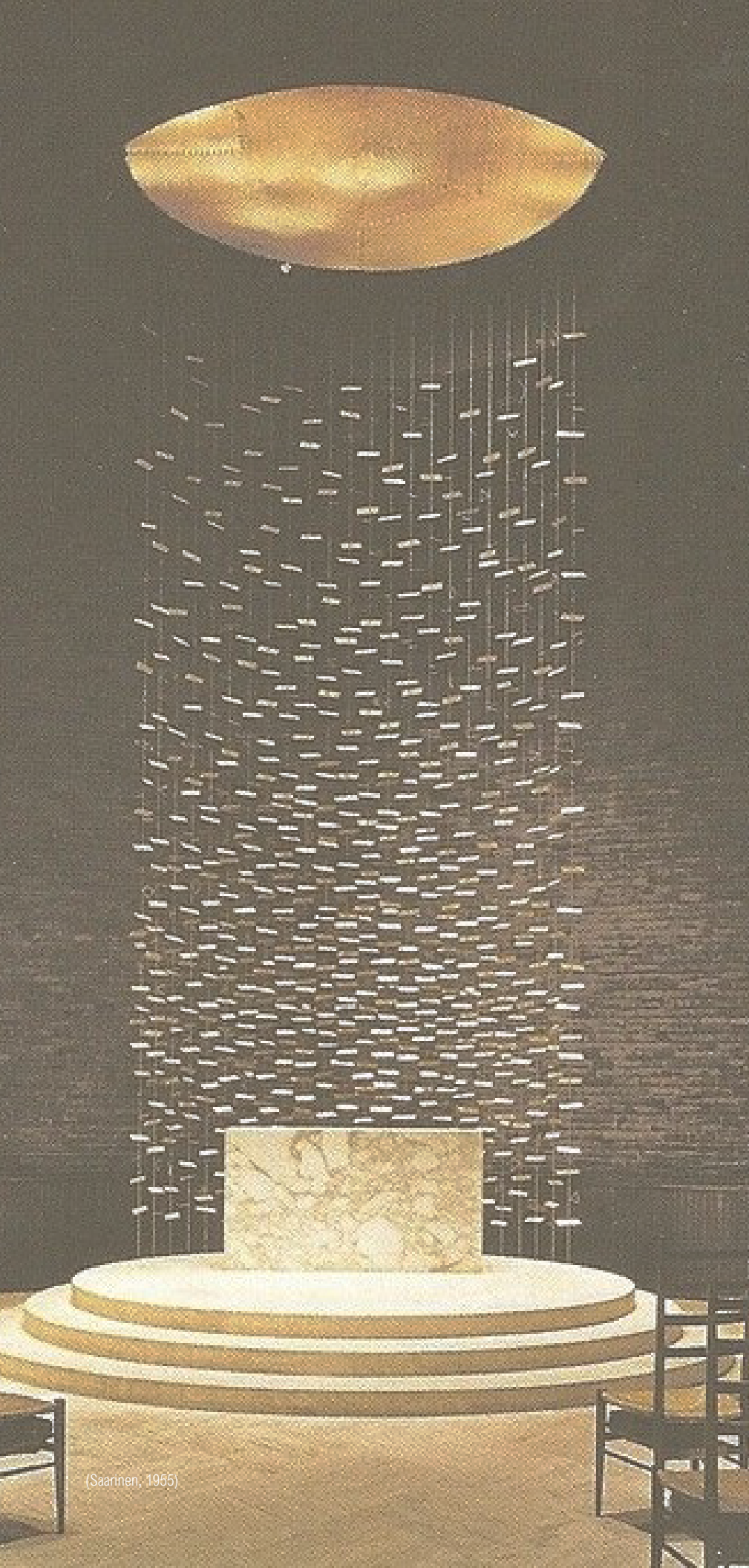
SACRED SPACE

Navigating the situation of the “other” engulfs the world of sacred space today.

In the essay, *Risk Of The Ineffable*, Britton discusses the liability a designer takes on while designing sacred space in the 21st century. It is a precarious endeavor because it requires balancing the politics of religion with our universal cries for spiritual space. The other shows how there is a certain advantage to designing universalistic sacred space, as not to impose on the practices of others, but the risk here is creating meaningless work that doesn't speak to the convictions particular of your client (Britton, 2015).

But what principles of space are spiritually meaningful for everyone?





(Saarinen, 1955)

research

SACRED SPACE

A major way I explored this question was through case studies. I examined how the masters of sacred space have achieved a balance of this universalism in their designs.

What I found is that creating a visceral connection with the fundamental elements of earth, sky, and water creates very strong emotions in our human hearts. Along with the sky, comes the essential architectural tool of light. In sacred space, the craft of light, but even more so, taking advantage of its shadow, is an incredibly powerful element.

The ancient myth of the “Invention of Drawing” lends a framework to explain this inherent spiritual power in shadow. The story goes - a young maiden is heartbroken because her lover is about to be sent off to war. Before he leaves, she draws his shadow cast upon a stone. After he leaves, his shadow will remain (Pérez, Pelletier, 2000). This story shows that whether its a memory of a loved one or our faith in a higher power, that which we don't see is often what we hold onto the most.

Lastly, my case study survey showed that the strategic use of symbols, can be a powerful way to achieve all of these concepts at once.

research

SACRED SPACE

The issue facing the Jewish community in Fargo is that their population is too small to supply itself with living links to the cultural pulse of the larger Jewish world. Yet the stories that lie in memory connect directly to the larger narratives of Jewish experience.

As we've seen, the continuity of communal memory hinges on the efficacy of our memory artifacts to make users an active participant. Cemeteries are fundamentally spiritual and communally mnemonic, and each visit itself is an act of participatory memory because these spaces are fundamentally fragments of the past.

Each time we enter a cemetery, we're recalling the memory of someone's life - making their memory present again - and as Cataldi describes it, we experience the reversibility of death (Cataldi 1993). Through our presence in cemetery spaces, we bring the intangibility of the dead back to our side.

This nature of cemeteries holds the potential to illuminate the invisibility of Jewish stories in North Dakota. It stands to say that, despite the placelessness of identity accumulated over thousands of years, the Jewish people remain connected and possess a tangible hope in their future generations. A cemetery chapel here, could become a destination of remembrance for the region, and serve as an opportunity to choose to participate in Jewish communal memory.



research

NORTH DAKOTA JEWISH HISTORY

The means, motives, and demographics of Jewish settlement in North Dakota is illustrative of the variety of Jewish American experience and diagonal nature their history took compared to majority groups.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Homestead Act, rapidly expanding railroad, and allure of the American Dream was fueling massive population growth. Continuous waves of ethnic immigrant groups settled in North Dakota. The majority of these immigrants were Norwegian, German, Scottish-Irish-English, and Germans from Russia (Sons of Jacob Cemetery, n.d.). In the midst of this, and for many shared reasons, the Jewish people were also settling in the prairie. By 1886, over 100,000 Homestead claims had been filed in the state of North Dakota. 800 of these claims were made by Jewish families (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.).

Most of these families were Eastern European Jews, specifically from Russia and Ukraine. They generally settled in small colonies made up of multiple families, in order to support each other's farming practice and sustain religious life. This model was distinct and significant to Jewish agricultural settlement and was due to the religious imperative of the Minyan. The earliest and biggest colony was Painted Woods, located outside Devils Lake in northeast North Dakota. The rest of the early settlers were clustered near North Dakota's four biggest cities: Fargo, Grand Forks, Bismarck, and Minot.





(Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, 2012)



(Froshe, H. Erin, 2002)

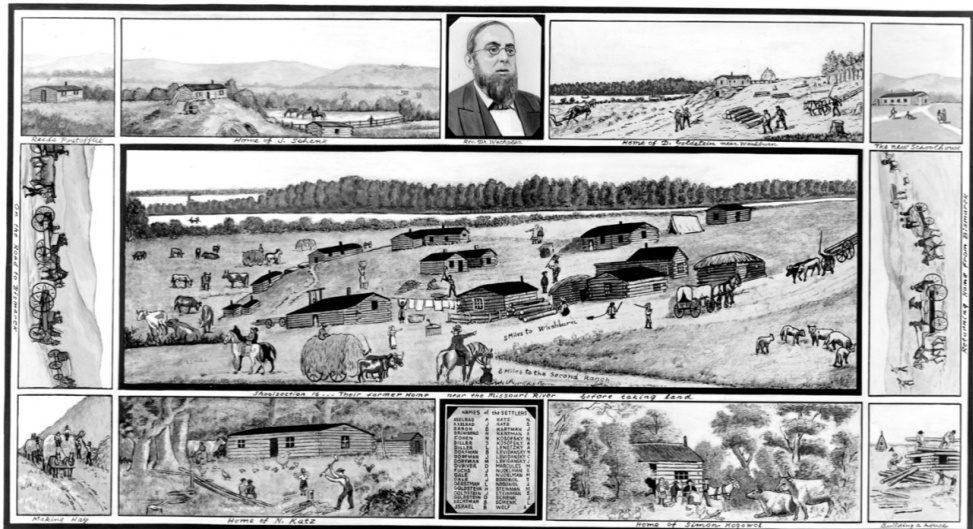
research

NORTH DAKOTA JEWISH HISTORY

Most of these colonies and individual homesteads were financially supported by the synagogues and Jewish associations in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The community in Minneapolis primarily consisted of German Jews. This previously settled group was generally wealthier and more educated. than the newer, less educated and non-english speaking Eastern European Jews.

Beyond these socioeconomic tensions, the influx of Russian Jews in the 1880s prompted new concerns that Minneapolis would not be able to absorb the large number of newcomers. Jewish urban ghettos were already cramped and difficult enough, and it was worried that increased concentration might increase anti-semitism in the area Sons of Jacob Cemetery, n.d.). Agricultural settlement in the Dakotas was seen as a positive alternative to these concerns.

The 'free land' in North Dakota was especially attractive to Russian Jews, because they had no hope of owning land in their previous county. This lack of land owning opportunities turned out to cause serious implications for Jewish homesteaders. Most Jewish homesteads and colonies did not last long. Lack of farming knowledge, unexpected financial burden of maintaining the land, and poor crop years prompted many families to sell their farmland after the required five years and open businesses instead (Sons of Jacob Cemetery, n.d.).



THE RUSSIAN JEWISH FARMER SETTLEMENT WECHSLER (American Jewish Archives, 1882) BURLEIGH COUNTY DAKOTA TERRITORY. COPYRIGHTED BY T.W. INGERSOLL

research

NORTH DAKOTA JEWISH HISTORY

The Jewish population shifted quickly back to city centers. Fargo and Grand Forks established permanent synagogues in 1892 and 1896 respectively. Religious and cultural life in the rest of the state relied on circuit-riding rabbis to travel for performing circumcisions, officiating weddings and funerals, and even the slaughtering of cattle (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). By 1927, over 75 percent of the 2000 Jews living in North Dakota were located in city centers.

In the 1960s, the Jewish population of Fargo, alone, was around 500 people. The neighborhood surrounding the modern-day City Hall was known as Fargo's 'Jewish Ghetto' with Jewish barbers, butchers, and Orthodox bath house. Fargo's youngest and longest serving Mayor, Herschel Lashkowitz was Jewish (Brinkman, 2012).

But following the split of the conservative and reform Jewish congregations, the Jewish community here has quickly dwindled. The reasons cited for this are that young people are leaving for school and not returning. What other reasons are there? What is missing from the landscape of Fargo's Jewish community that makes life here undesirable?



research

INTERVIEWS

Janet Shark Frisch
Sons of Jacob Cemetery, Board Member
Devils Lake, ND

The biggest takeaway from my meeting and interview with Janet Shark Frisch was that the Jewish story in North Dakota is small and yet deeply meaningful to its members and descendants. We discussed her involvement in getting the Sons of Jacob Cemetery onto the National Historic Register, memories of Devils Lake while she grew up and the trials and joys of a Jewish lifestyle in such a remote location. She also shared her experience of moving to Fargo, suddenly having other Jewish friends at school, but still traveling to Minneapolis to gain real Jewish education. She mentioned that the most impactful part of working to get the cemetery on the historic register, was including a guest book on the site. Over time, they've received guests from Russia, Romania, Israel, and across the US. The connections to this community run far.

Pictured to the right is the Jewish Cemetery in Ashley, North Dakota. This was the largest Jewish Homesteading area of the state, with over 400 Jewish individuals in the surrounding area. The cemetery was rededicated in 2017. Rebecca Bender's book, *Still*, delves into the process of re-dedication, getting it onto the historic register, and what it means to "still" be Jewish when living in North Dakota.



(Ashley Jewish Cemetery Association, 2017)



(Ashley Jewish Cemetery Association, 2017)



research

INTERVIEWS

Theodore Kleiman
Temple Beth El, Board Member

Cary Geller
Fargo Hebrew Congregation Cemetery
Board Member

Throughout the year I had multiple phone interviews and general conversation with Theodore Kleiman, the outreach coordinator, at Temple Beth El in Fargo, ND. My biggest takeaways from our conversations were that the existing synagogue, while a bit dilapidated, is a beloved building and not the appropriate site for a design project. Second, the biggest concern facing the Jewish community from the outside is lack of membership, but internally it seems to be the apparent lack of future leadership. In a bigger community it would not matter if he misses a service, but here the continuity of the congregation depends deeply on each person's participation.

I also had a in depth conversation with Cary Geller, a member of the FHC Cemetery board. He was also a member of their previous synagogue as a child. Our conversation brought the history of population changes in Fargo to light. He described the times in his youth when seeing friends from temple was an everyday, everywhere you went occurrence in Fargo, but watching these friends and families move away after high-school and marriages. He also had interesting perspectives on the religious divide - that despite the reform community splitting off, members of the FHC congregation had attempted to reconnect but were not met with much cooperation. Inversely, the Ted from Temple Beth El, seems to perceive the religious or cultural differences so extreme that there really is no hope for a renewed relationship.

design exploration

ARTEFACT

After completing the research phase, and landing on a cemetery chapel to design, I was tasked with creating an artefact object that embodies the atmosphere and actions of my architecture.

This meant transferring the essence, rituals, and communal memory held in a Jewish cemetery, into our gallery and studio space!

These charcoal rubbings, taken from the grave markers on the site, felt like the most honest way to bring that atmosphere in. As we've seen through Cataldi, death and time are reversible. By translating stone into paper - now material has these same haunting and embodied characteristics.

I arranged the rubbing into a scroll, with blank pages representing future generations of this community. Eventually, I layered these fragments with my architectural drawings at the back - making architecture the stage for telling these stories.

I also layed a strip of cloth along the scroll to represent the threads of communal memory and time that connect this community with the larger Jewish world. Here, I invited users to lay a memorial stone on top of the cloth, and explained how through this act they are participating in one of the most prolific rituals of Jewish memory around the world.



Artefact Installation at NDSU MU Gallery



Artefact Installation at NDSU MU Gallery



Artefact Installation at NDSU MU Gallery

design exploration

ARTEFACT

In the lens of modernity, we see stone as cold and incapable of communicating our stories and memories. But today, with a journey through my artifact, I hope to challenge that view and share with you all a glimpse into the meaning of stone in Jewish experience. I think this material can be incredibly empathetic - porous to the thoughts and lives it sets a stage for. Stone is all that will remain to tell the story of who we are, here and now, in two thousand years.

That is what's so valuable about cemeteries. These spaces are full of physical fragments from the past. And when we enter these spaces, we're recalling the memory of someone's life - making their memory present again and bringing the intangibility of the dead back to our side.

From the oral traditions passed down for thousands of years, to today in this room, rituals and metaphors of stone cut deeply through Jewish culture.

One of the earliest symbolic mentions of stone in the Torah, is the memorial that Jacob makes for his wife Rachel at her grave. In Genesis 35:20, it states that he "set a pillar upon her grave" and in some traditions, it's said that her twelve sons then each lay a small stone near it on the grave.

Later, when Moses receives the law on Mt. Siani, he inscribes it - quite symbolically on stone tablets. Then, after wandering in the desert for 40 years, Joshua leads the nation into Israel, by crossing the river Jordan. Here it says, God commands them to pick twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, and place them along the other side. Then it says, "This shall serve as a symbol among you in time to come, when your children ask, 'What is the meaning of these stones for you?' And you shall tell your children, 'The waters of the Jordan were cut off because of the Ark of the Covenant.' And so these stones shall serve the people of Israel as a memorial for all time."

Artefact Textural Collage



design exploration

ARTEFACT

Hundreds of years later, when the nation of Israel is in exile in Babylon, knowledge of Rachel's monument becomes a place of refuge, encouragement, and motherly comfort. When they return to Israel generations after that, they rebuild the temple. This time out of stone. In the year 70 C.E, when the second temple is destroyed and the diaspora begins. All that remains is the western wall. Today people make pilgrimages from across the world to kiss, pray, and leave notes between the stones of this wall.

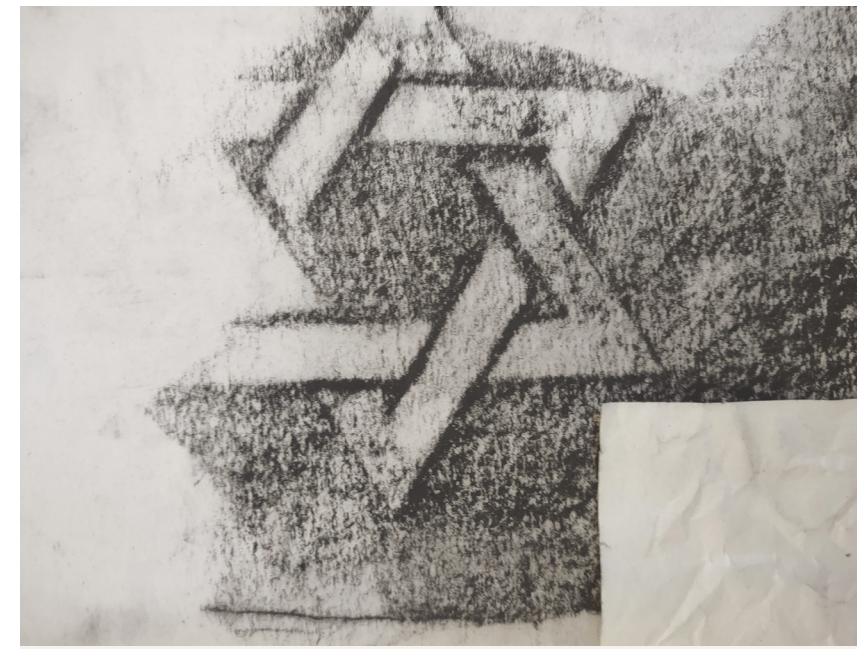
Following the holocaust, a German artist created a project known as the "stumbling stones". This decentralized monument commemorates over 70,000 victims of the holocaust, in more than twelve hundred cities and towns across Europe (Apperly, 2019). These small gilded stones are inscribed with names and dates of individuals, placed on public sidewalks outside just outside their last-known, freely chosen residence.

When the Jewish Homesteaders Cemetery in Ashley, North Dakota was placed on the National Historic Register in 2015, the descendants grappled with how to mark its humble place on the prairie. Rebecca Bender, describes it in her book about this process as an epiphany - it had to be an engraved stone (Bender & Bender, 2019).

For Jews stone represents resiliency, permanence, and a steadfast God - it serves to connect these people who are scattered throughout the world to their ancestors of ancient times.

If you ever visit a Jewish cemetery, anywhere around the world, you're likely to find small pebbles placed on top of the graves. There are varying explanations for this tradition - that opposed to flowers which will wither and die, stones will last forever just as our memories - or that stones keep the soul with us, weighted here to the earth. As it states in the Talmud, "A person is only forgotten when [their] name is forgotten" (Apperly, 2019). The beauty of walking through these spaces is witnessing the traces of all the people who came before and come someday after you .

Artefact Textural Collage



design exploration

ARTEFACT

As I lay this stone, all at once, I'm connected to my biblical ancestors and the soul of the ancestor right here. I'm face to face with the friend who came before me and also left a stone.

As I lay this stone . the past and present are suddenly indistinguishable .

I see everyone who's come before me, but also to the future generation. Those who will witness what I've left behind, and who have come to participate in this same moment...



Artefact Textural Collage

design exploration

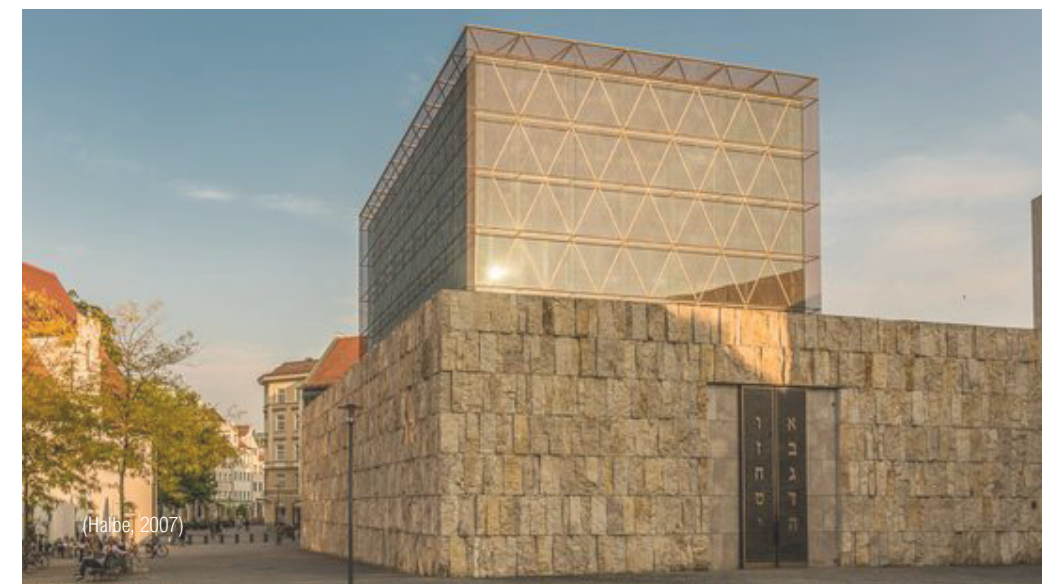
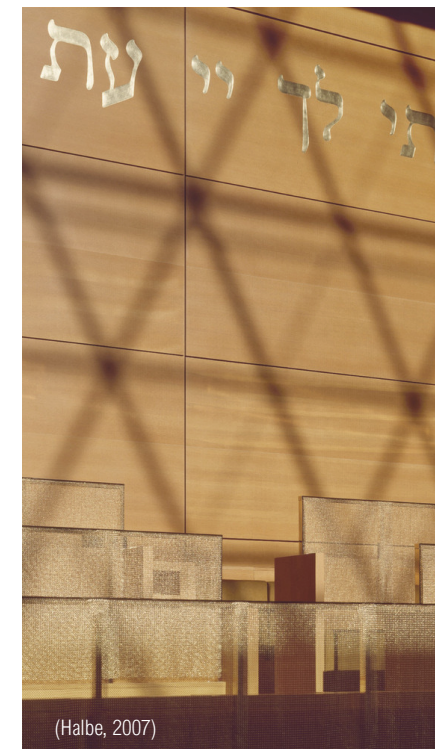
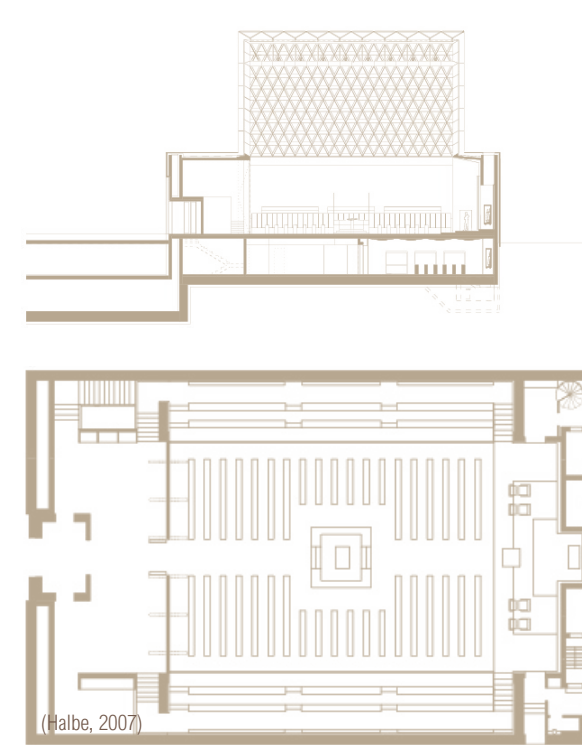
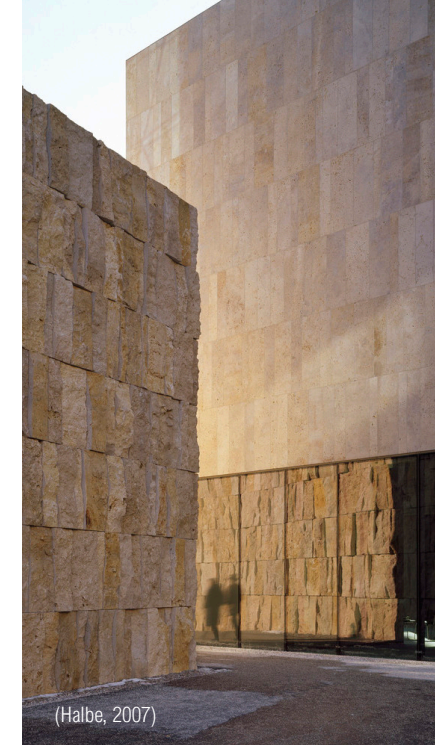
PRECEDENT STUDIES

The Jewish Center and Synagogue
Wandel Hoefler Lorch + Hirsch
Munich, Germany

A major inspiration for my choice of topic, materiality, subtle use of symbols, and approach to creating Jewish spaces in hostile social climates was the Jewish Center and Synagogue in Munich, Germany.

I visited this site in the summer of 2022. As I stood in the building square, I reflected on how beautifully subtle - with its delicate, geometrified constellation of the Jewish star hanging in the roof structure - and yet strong the building stood. It felt like a fortress of stone - a reference through size, color, and texture to the stones of the Western Wall in Jerusalem - projecting safety, resiliency and permanence, despite the location and story of the site being the exact opposite, as its city being the birthplace of the Nazi party.

It was a moving example of architecture providing hope in the presence of a problem and making the user an active interpreter and participant in the story it was telling.



design exploration

PRECEDENT STUDIES

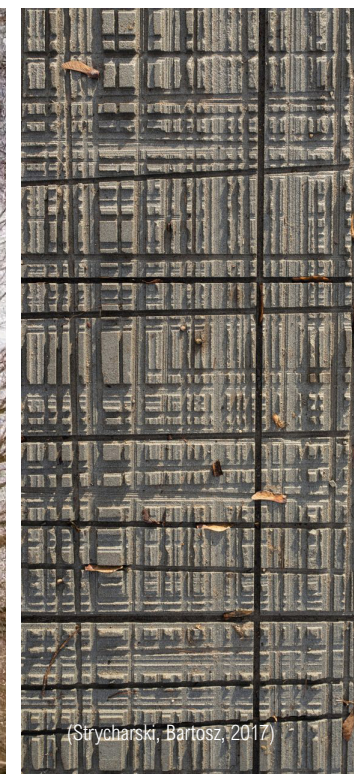
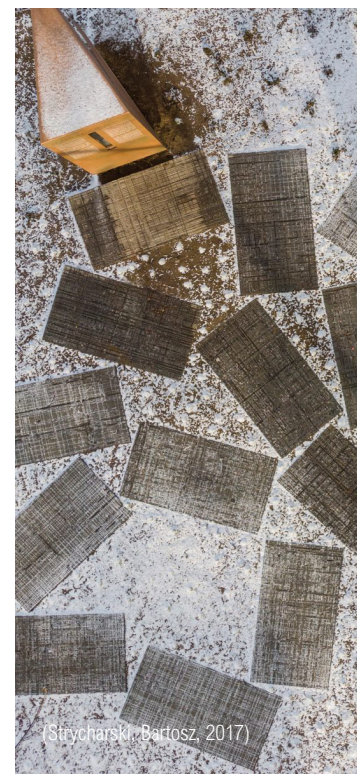
The Great Synagogue Memorial Park,
Narchitektura Studio
Oświęcim, Poland

The Great Synagogue Memorial Park, is located in the town of Oświęcim where the Auschwitz concentration camp was located, and rests on the site of a former synagogue, destroyed by the Nazi party in 1939.

The park is one of many projects completed by Narchitektura to highlight the city's Jewish history and the impacts of Auschwitz. It was "created to be a place of reflection... A peaceful isolated space within nature that would evoke the feeling of being inside a temple. The existing trees form a natural 'vault' over the memorial park."

The footprint of the former synagogue is marked in stone. It surrounds Corten steel benches and pathways created by 40 sandstone slabs that have been gashed and scored to represent the human and cultural fissure that occurred under the Nazi party. An outdoor arc, reflection pool, and informational panel also reside in the courtyard.

This project has a similar program to my proposal of a cemetery chapel. It is a powerful and pragmatic example of an outdoor, non-traditional, Jewish sacred space intended for reflection, meditation, and remembrance.



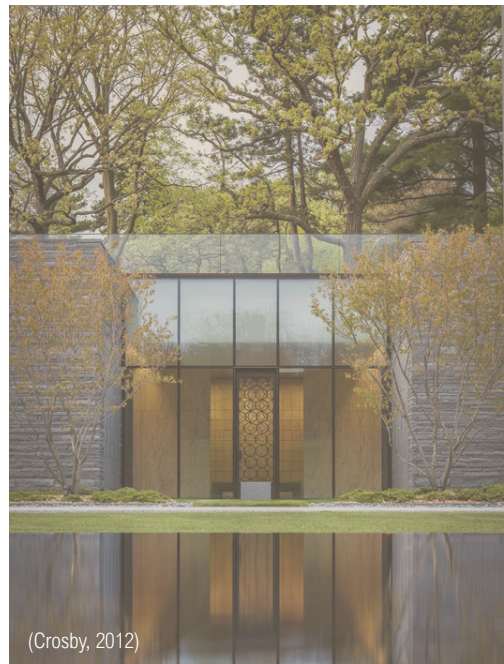
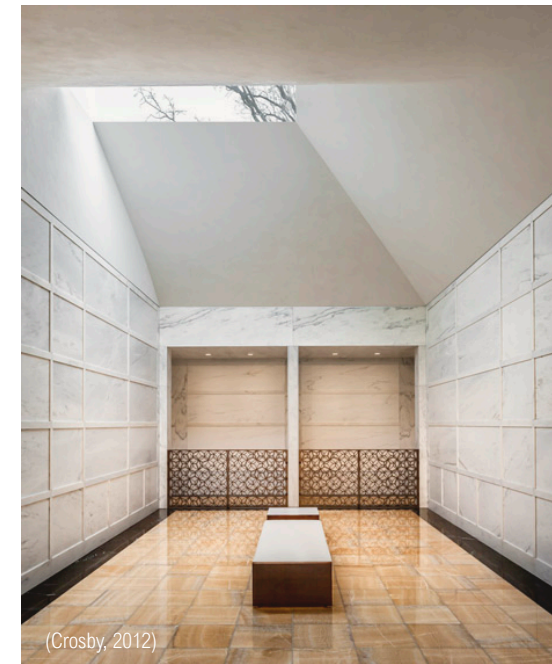
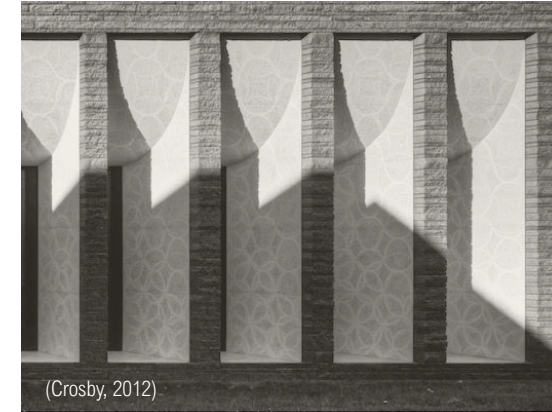
design exploration

PRECEDENT STUDIES

Lakewood Cemetery Mausoleum
HGA Architects and Engineers
Minneapolis, Minnesota

The Lakewood Cemetery Mausoleum was a valuable design resource for multiple reasons. Mainly, the similarity in program function to my proposal - cemetery spaces for reflection and meditation. Its other major implication to my design process was providing an example of crafting the architectural elements light, earth, water, and the sky into meaningful and spiritually evoking spaces for all people regardless of religious tradition.

The curving skylights and exterior walls created diffused lighting for the interior spaces. Strategically placed windows and skylights direct the gaze upward to the sky or outward into the reflection pond. The sectional quality of the building being built into a hill creates a visceral experience of decent to visit loved ones, and re-awakening as you ascend to rejoin the world. The subtle circular mosaic used throughout the project adds a touch of human craft and creates a symbol for the project. The repetition of building forms, oscillating from solid to transparent, and contrasting light and dark materials, creates a peaceful but conscientious rhythm while walking along and withing the building.



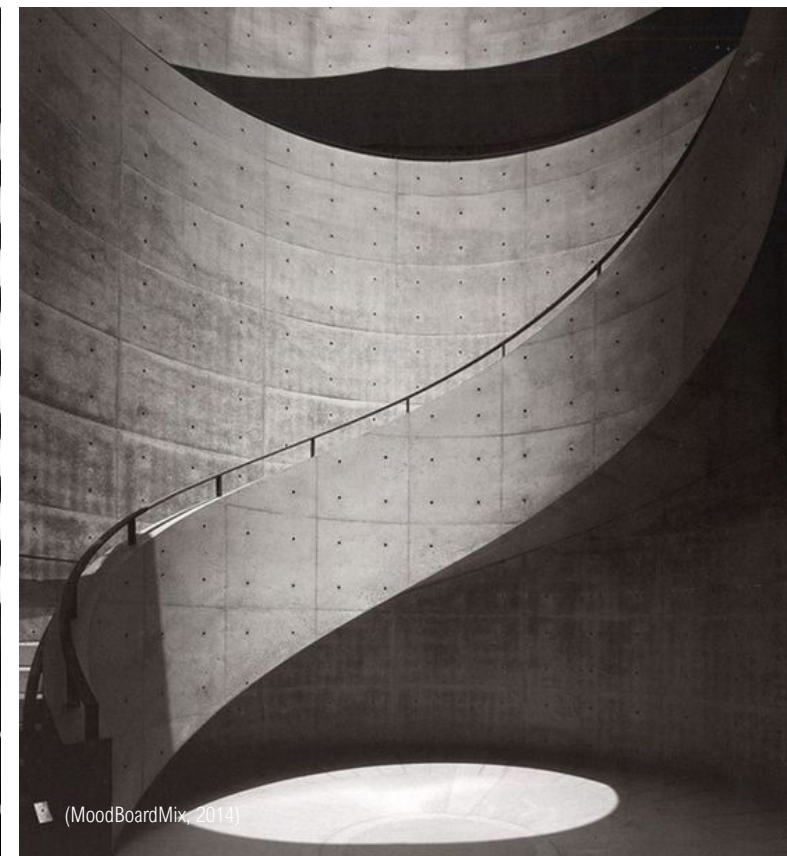
design exploration

PRECEDENT STUDIES

Tadao Ando
Multiple Works: Church of Light, Festival
Okinawa, Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art,
Water Temple

Looking at multiple works by Japanese Architect, Tadao Ando, provides an exemplary model of creating universally spiritual space. His work is a master-class in the articulation of light and shadow to create dynamic and other-worldly spaces.

I took specific inspiration from his use of descent in the water temple. I noted how skylights and openings from above can connect multiple levels and programs of a building like in the Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art. I also implemented a similar method for prompting pause instead of circulation in the corridors like in his Festival Okinawa project. Lastly, I also noticed that utilizing symbols as the mechanism for crafting this light can pack loads of meaning into small spaces like my chapel and his, Church of Light.



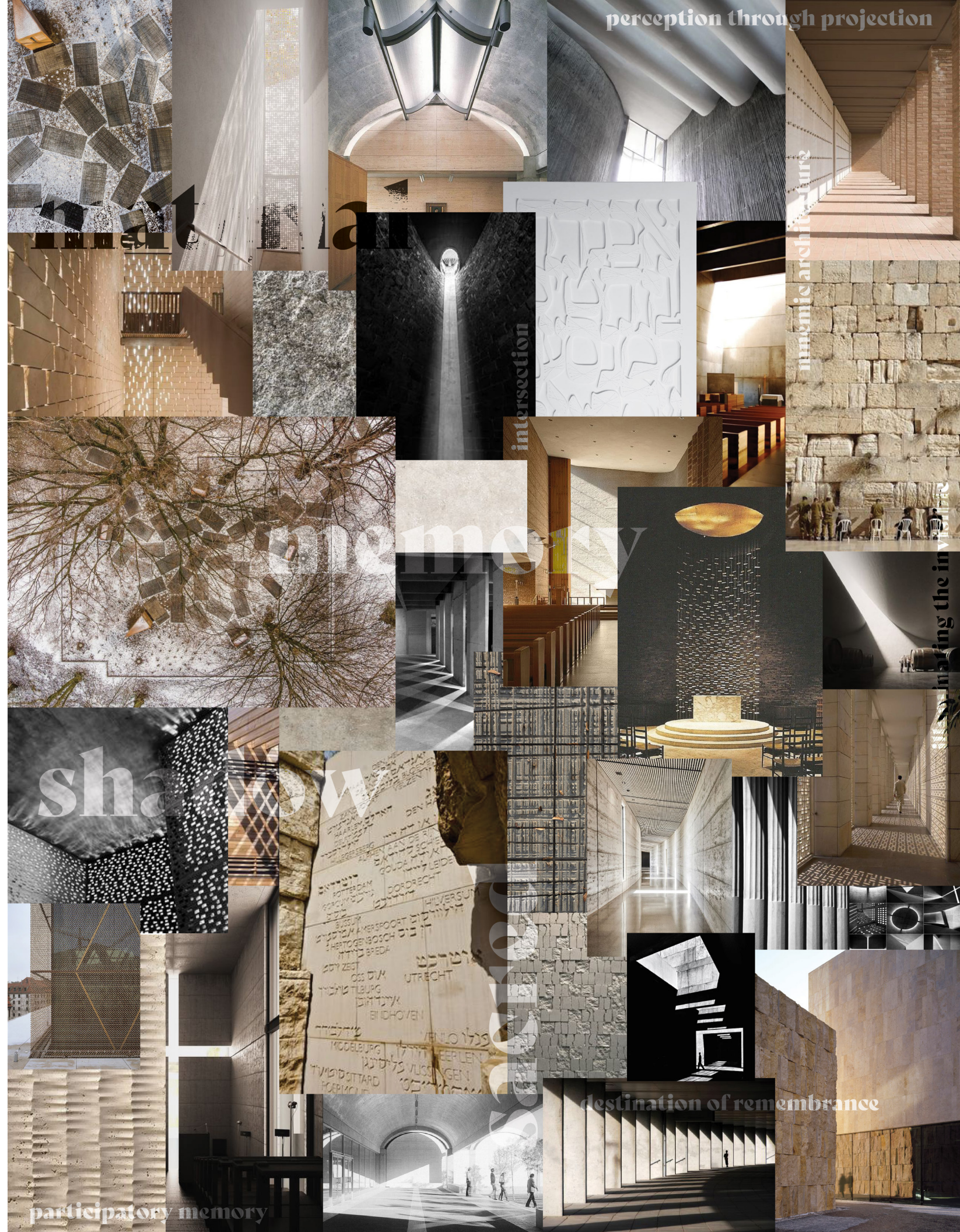
design exploration

ATMOSPHERE & MOOD

Following the precedent studies shown above and others that will be shown in the process scroll below, I created an atmosphere and mood board that is a collection of these spaces, textural and shadow qualities, and concepts that I want my architecture to include or embody.

Seen here, my intent was to include spaces that have dramatic but delicate show patterns, warm materiality, a unique ceiling or sectional quality, and a program that evokes: participatory memory, becomes a destination of remembrance, illuminates the invisible, and draws visually and pragmatically the intersections of the Jews on the prairie with Jewish tradition worldwide, and at the same time, prairie history with the rest of the world.

Inspirational Collage, Made by Sophie Hollander



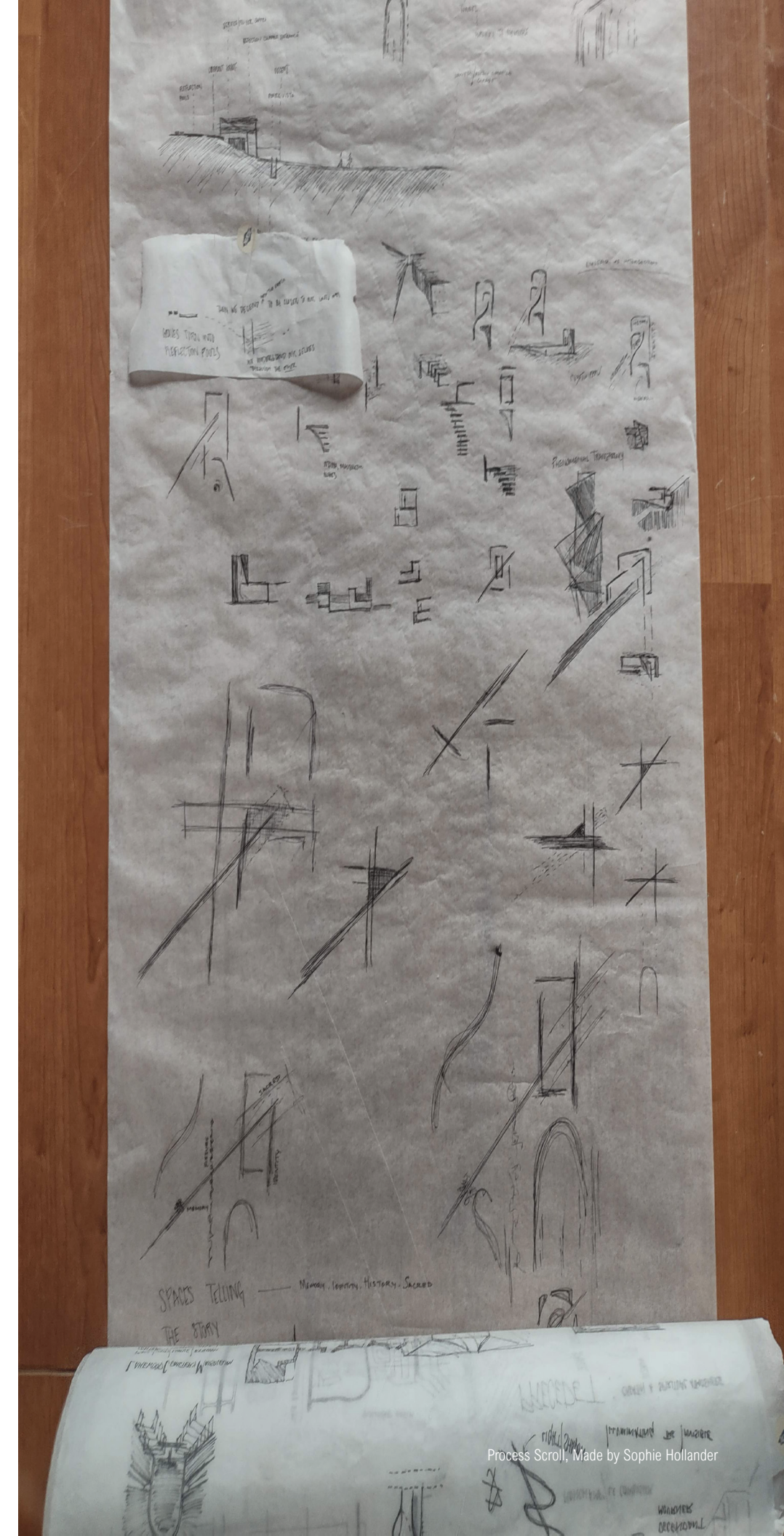
design exploration

PROCESS

To document my design process and add the last layer to my artefact, I kept my project sketches and notes on a trace paper scroll.

The scroll begins with my initial project goals and how to use shadow as a tool for connecting with the past. Then I dive into site studies and additional precedent research.

The last half of the scroll takes us through my concepts sketches, design development, perspectives on the building spaces, and to a rough layout of my final presentation boards.



design exploration

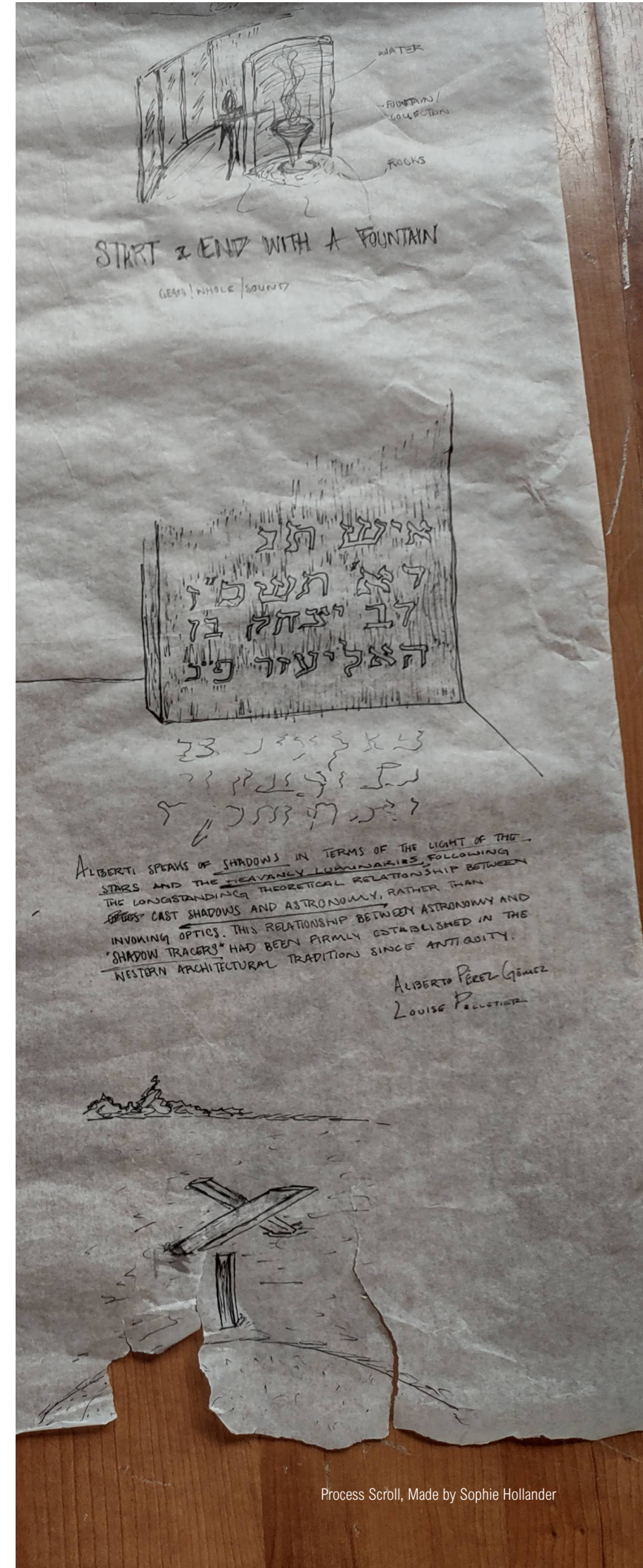
PROCESS

My initial design explorations were focused on some small scale elements such as these memorial beams sticking out of the prairie grass, and a bench design that would be pieces of a broken Jewish star placed around the relevant historic sites in Fargo.

Then I began to focus back on the concept of shadow discussed earlier and its power to connect us to whats invisible. A quote from Alberto Perez speaks to this and is shown here, we speak of “shadows in terms of the light of the stars and the heavenly luminaries... The relationship between ‘shadow tracers’ and astrology has been firmly established in western architectural tradition since antiquity” (Pérez, Pelletier, 2000, p.112). His point is that the concept of shadows holding spiritual associations, is a highly held presumption in our society, and therefore a useful tool in evoking spiritual atmospheres.

Following these readings, I imagined a hallway or wall etched through with names and histories, somewhat like a tombstone, and light shining through it. Walking through this space would enable us to pass through the impermeable material of stone and through this person’s life again.

I also did a quick concept of a fountain-type water feature. The exact form was not very specific, but through this exercise I determined that I wanted to include a water element and the start and end of the journey through my buildings. Water holds lots of metaphorical meaning, but I Jewish burial rituals it also holds religious purity meanings as well.



design exploration

PROCESS

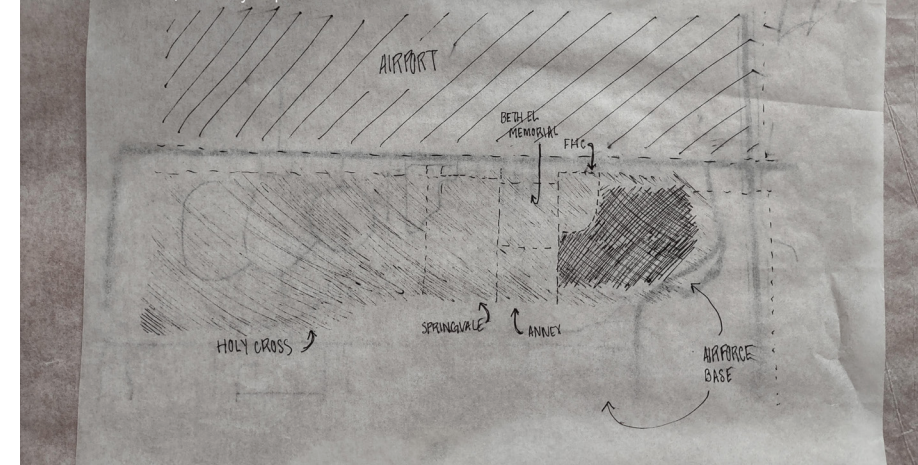
Next I did some analysis of the surrounding area. Starting with the full Fargo town limits, the North Fargo area where the site is located, and lastly the block that the site share with a few other cemetery associations.

Looking at the town of Fargo, we can see that the old and current Synagogues were located at what was the heart of the city back in the early and mid 1900s. The cemeteries are located far North of the city, on 32nd Ave. Keeping the cemetery far from city life is a common Jewish practice, but back in 1892 when the cemetery was established this must have been the most remote end of the Fargo area.

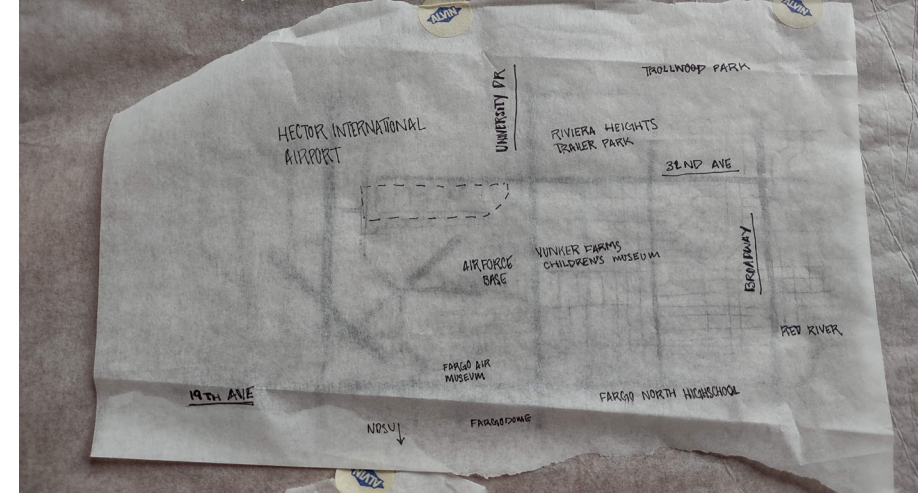
Looking closer at the map of North Fargo, we can see that this once remote area burial has been surrounded by the city's sprawl. Single family homes stretching north, up to 19th Ave. The area immediately surrounding the cemetery, from 19th to 32nd Ave, has been filled with significant infrastructure for the city. NDSU campus just a few blocks from the site, a public highschool and sports complex as well. Two small museums are just 3 blocks from the site. A trailer park and apartment complex are 2 blocks to the east, and completely engulfing the site is the Fargo Hector International Airport and a North Dakota Airforce Base. It is certainly not on the periphery anymore.

The site resides within a block long enclave with a few other cemetery associations. The largest is the cemetery land of the Catholic cathedral from downtown. The Springvale Cemetery immediately next to the Temple Beth El cemetery is a city owned burial ground. Many of these graves were relocated from the land of the apartment complex mentioned earlier, which used to be a mental hospital. Patients who died at this hospital and were unable to afford personal funeral arrangements were given unmarked graves there - popper graves. Recent flooding began to erode those unmarked graves and bones began to wash up in the parks, so the city moved them to their current location. The Airforce Base and Airport hold the other surrounding land, but their activities there seem to be minimal.

Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander



Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander



Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander

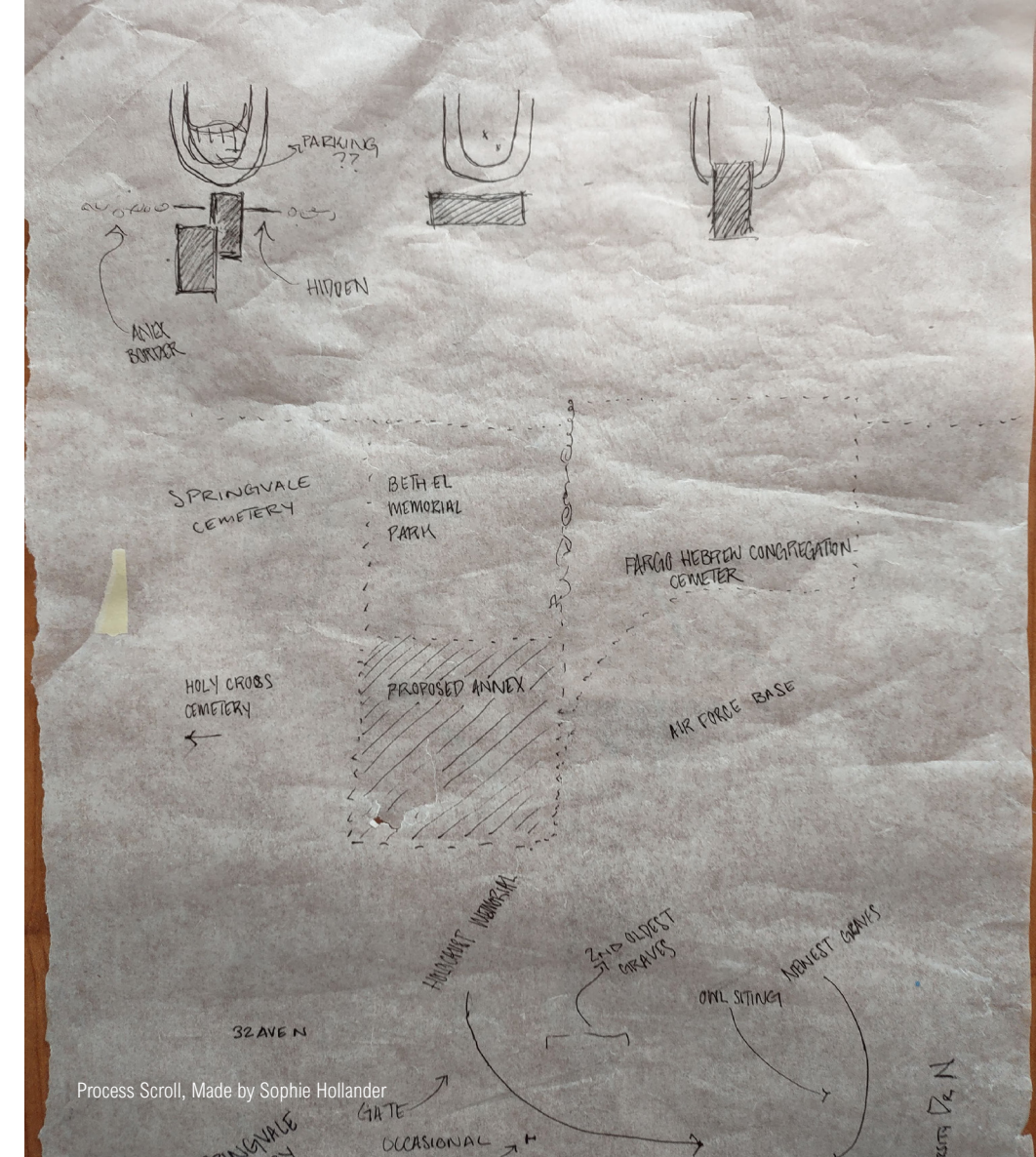


PROCESS

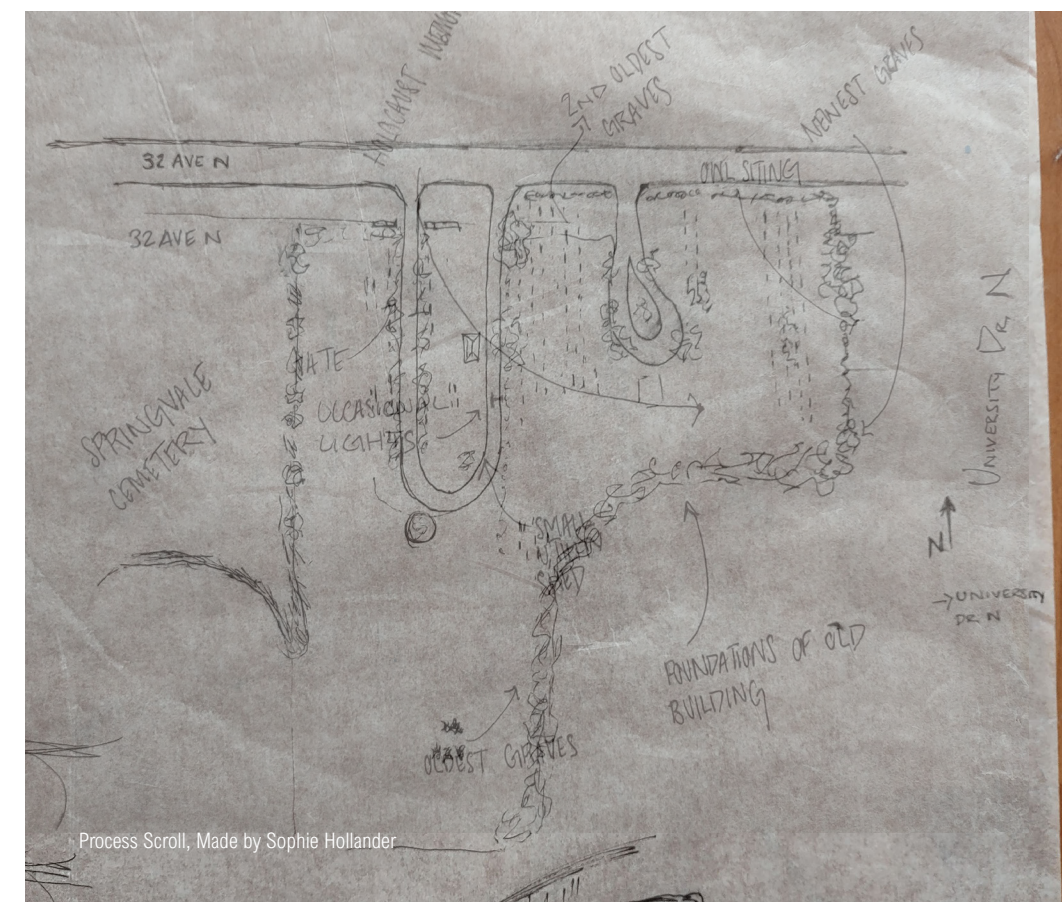
Next I developed a site analysis. I focused on recording the physical environment but also my personal experiences on the site. Important things to note: the site is divided into the two congregations by a hedge-wall, near the entrance to the Fargo Hebrew Congregation Cemetery is a Holocaust memorial to lost family members that became central to the project, the graves are grouped in various locations of the site mostly based on age and family, and there are far fewer graves on the Temple Beth El plot, with a large open area to the south.

The open area on the south of the Temple Beth El land became a clear place to site my building. So next, I began exploring how to situate it onto the site and considering how it should be approached, whether from a car coming off the street or walking from within the site.

These observations were mostly made during the two month process of making the artefact seen above. I took frequent trips out to the cemetery, recording the place and making my artefact. This is when I truly became familiar with the site, the history I had learned about and connecting the family names on the graves with the letters and interviews I had been having. It was through this process that the site became sacred to me.



Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander



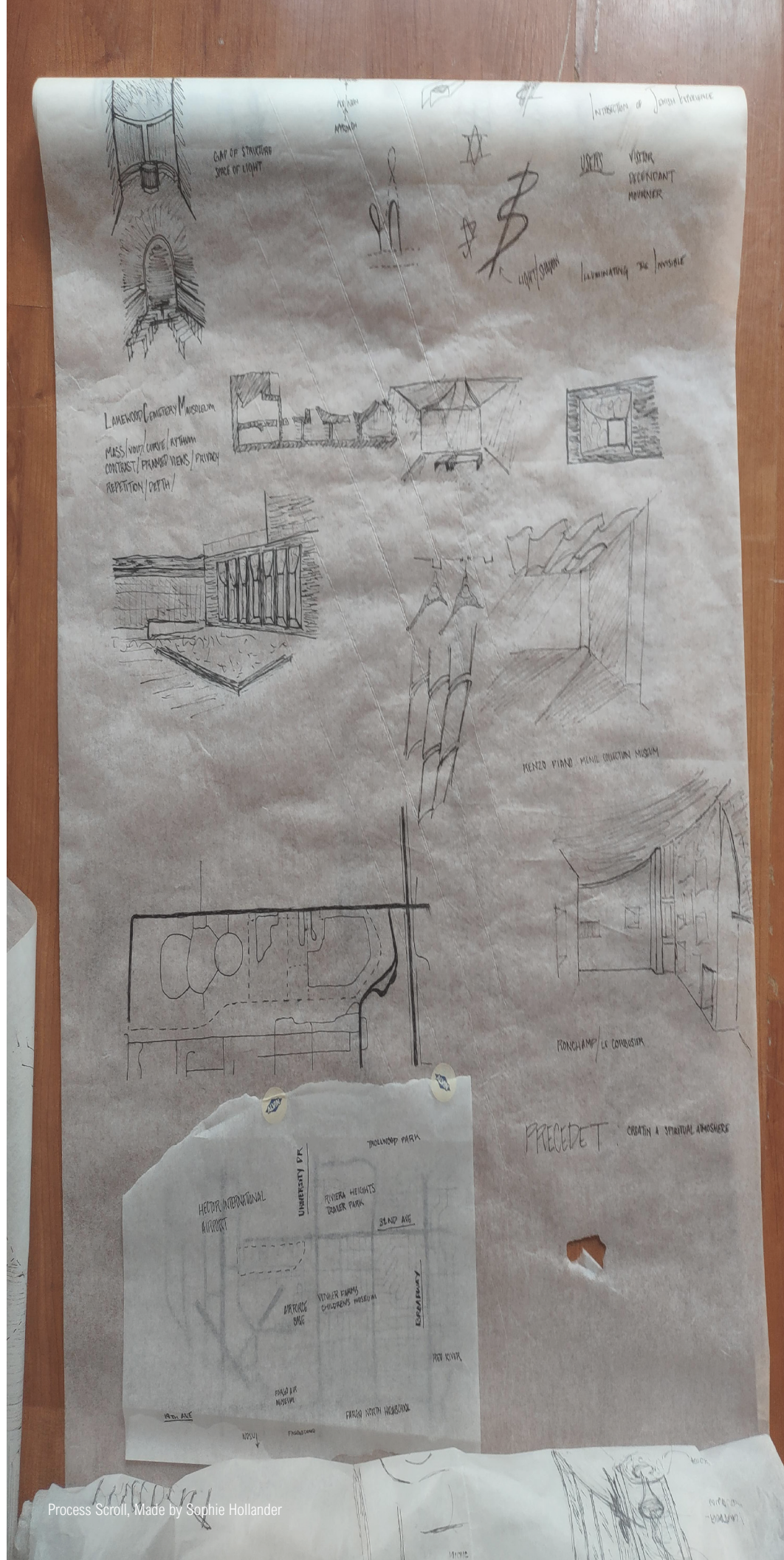
Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander

design exploration

PROCESS

Following my site analysis, I wanted to take some time to do a bit more precedent study. I was specifically interested in examples of using the ceiling condition to create spaces with diffused light and a peaceful atmosphere.

Le Cobusier's Ronchamp chapel is a classic example of a rounded ceiling structure defusing the light. The soft curves of the ceiling, diffuse the colorful beams created by his pin-hole opening and the gaps surrounding the ceiling. I also took interest in the Menil Collection Museum by Renzo Piano. His intricate ceiling structure brings in a very delicate and soft quality of light. Lastly, I did a quick dive into the sectional quantities of the Lakewood Cemetery Chapel discussed earlier. They used angled openings on the skylights and window, to direct light and view while diffusing the light into the areas below.



design exploration

PROCESS

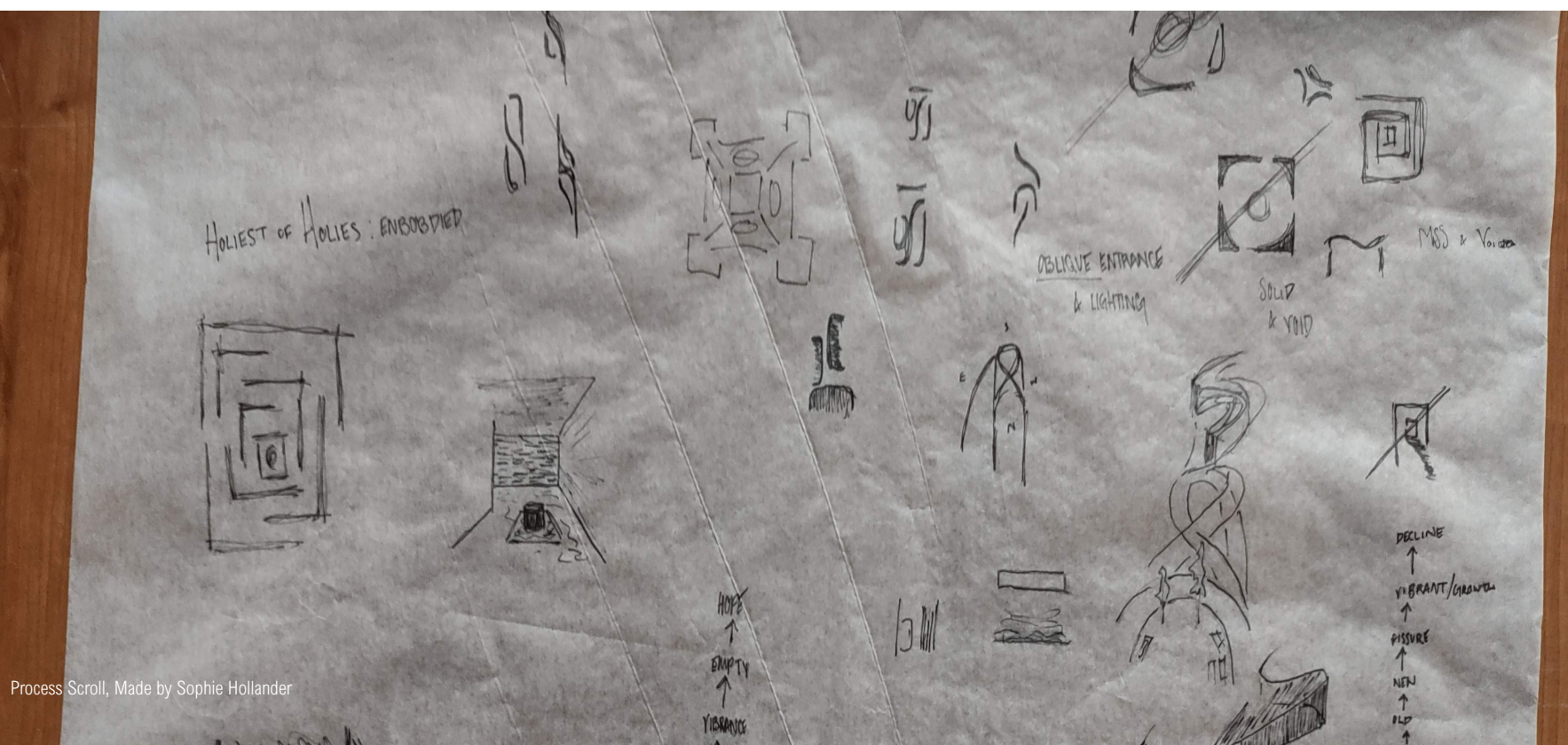
At this point, I began to truly develop my building form, experience and program. I defined a few different user groups: descendants, mourner, and visitor (Jewish or non-jewish).

The program: illuminate the invisibility of Jewish stories in North Dakota and how these stories are an intersection of Jewish experience worldwide, become a destination of remembrance, serve as an opportunity to participate in Jewish communal memory, and reinterpret the “holy of holies” concept to create a new Jewish sacred space appropriate for the 21st century.

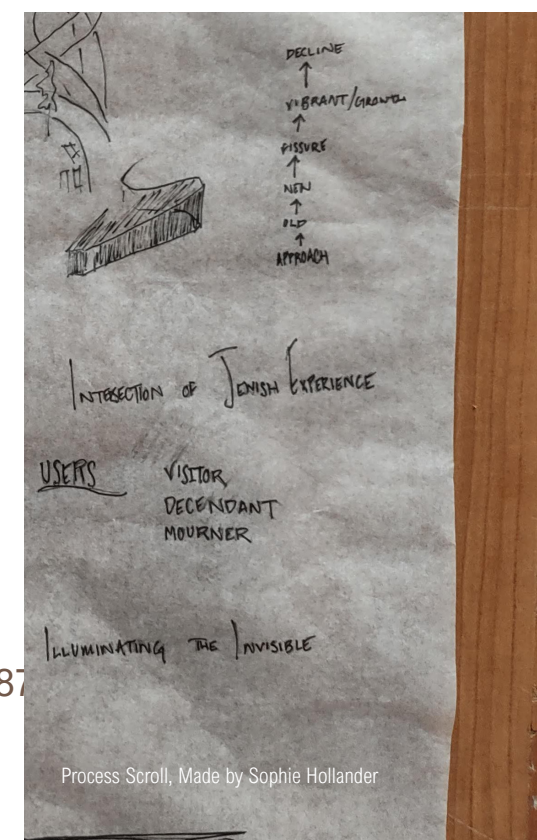
The themes of “intersection” and “Holy of Holies” became evidently the most important when driving the building form.

I began exploring maze like enclosures, similar to the temple and synagogue structures discussed earlier. I imagined interventions like the shadow word wall shown above, to break the maze into a sequence that told the Jewish story here. These iterations followed a very sequential order: first the user would encounter a place intended for remembering the dead, then an introspective moment to reflect on their own identity, etc.

After exploring these ideas, I came to the conclusion that they were far too literal of a reinterpretation of the center, most secure, “holy of holies” and too linear of an experience to express the intersections and unifying experiences of Jewish memory.



Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander



Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander



Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander

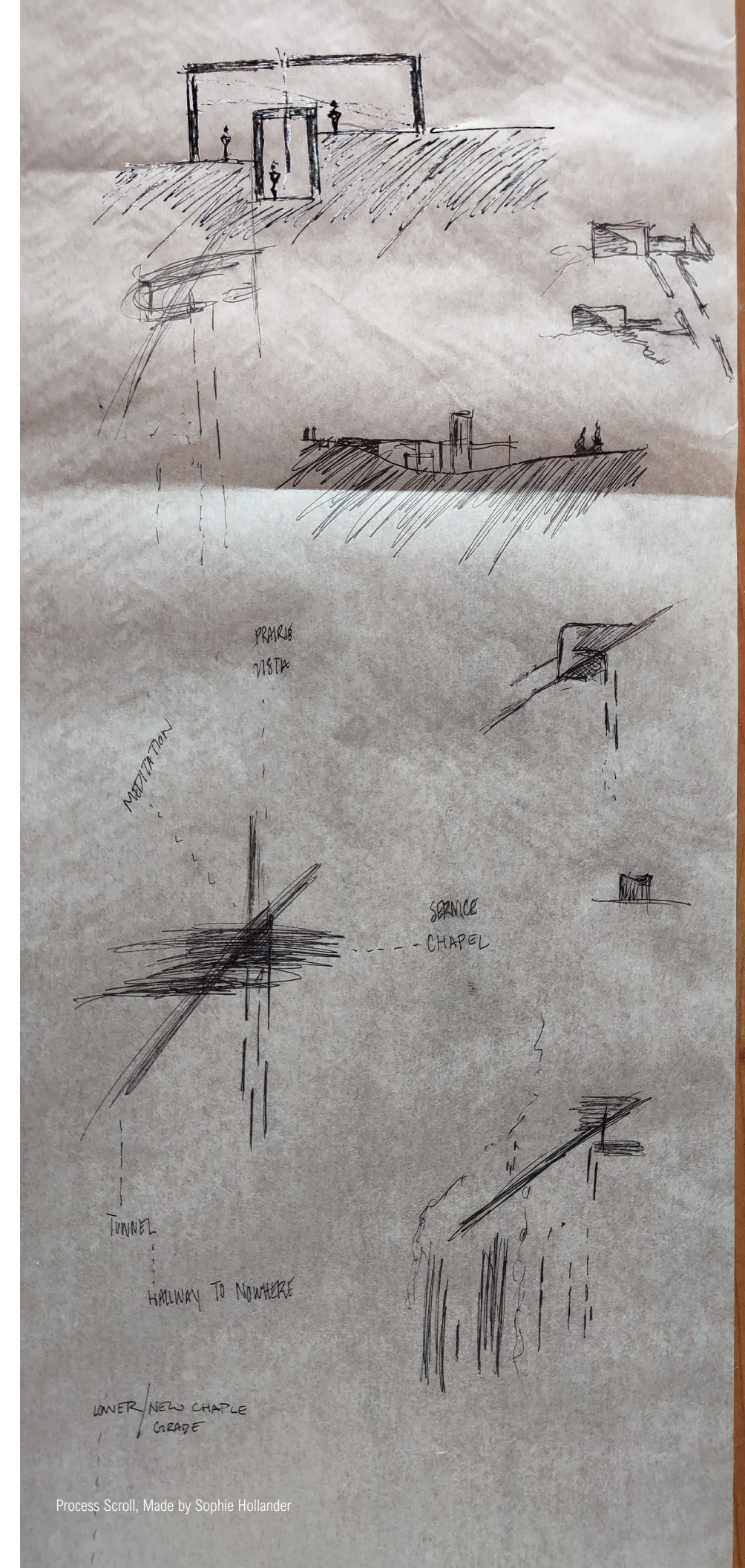
design exploration

PROCESS

As I redirected away from a linear progression, I realized that sectional relationship would be a far better means of creating a reinterpretation of sacred Jewish space. My aim became to create a central moment where all the other spaces overlap, connect, and intersect.

I also redirected my focus towards the experiences I had on the site. I began tracing the “lines” I saw within the site and creating vectors towards my building area and creating an experience that would accommodate them.

The connection between the Holocaust memorial and the open building area became very apparent. I imagined cutting a tunnel through this open path, down into the earth, meanwhile spanning the divide of the hedge-wall and the broken community of the two congregations.

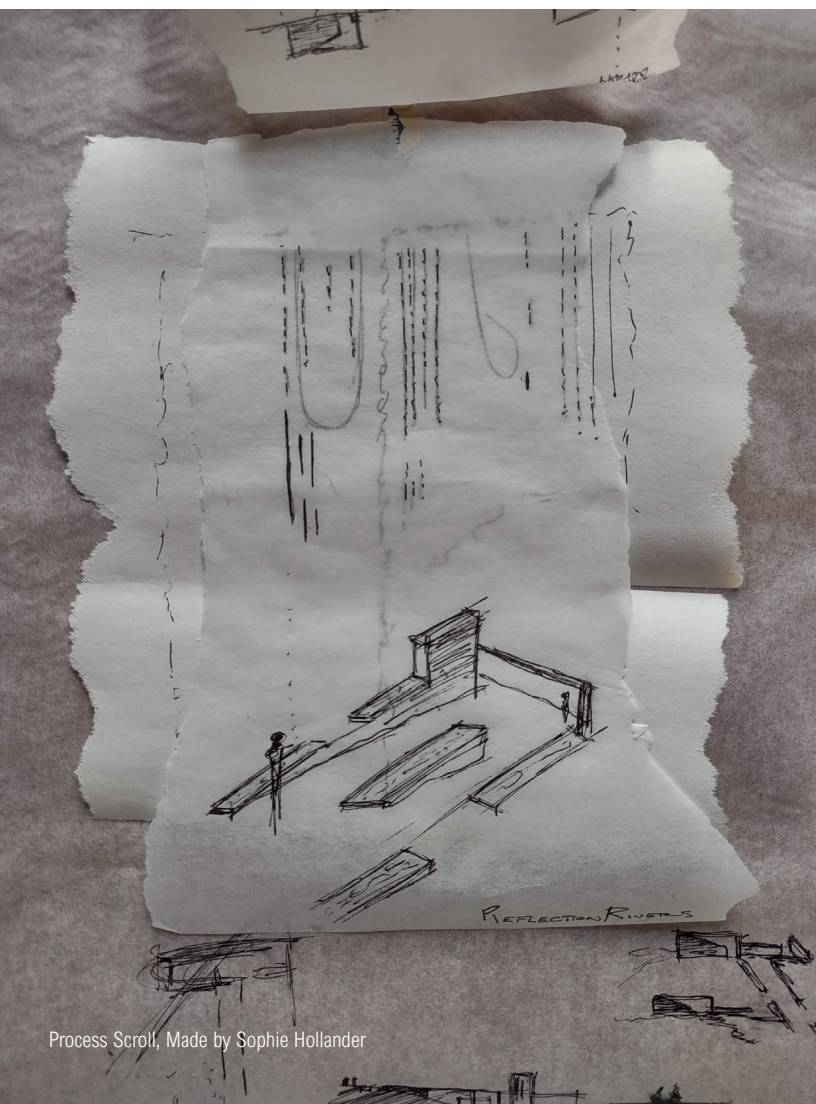


design exploration

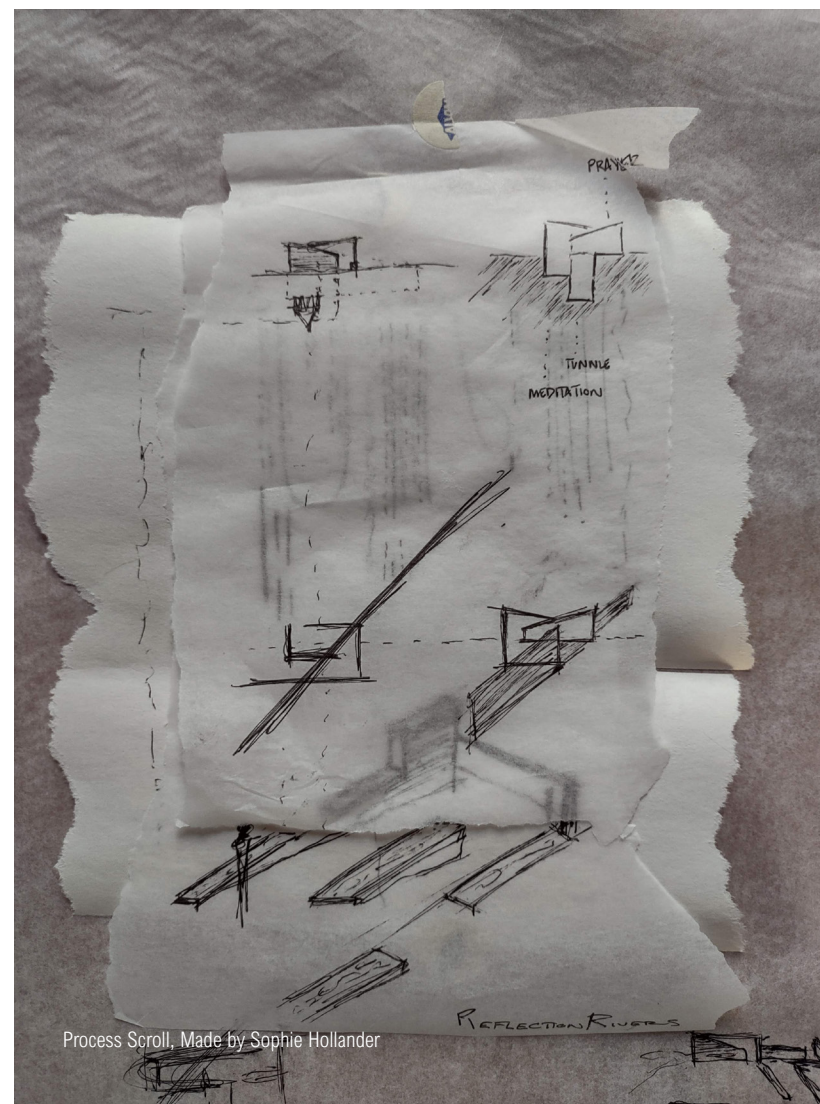
PROCESS

The vectors created by the graves on the Temple Beth El side of the cemetery, lead straight to the building location. Seeing that these lines would guide users at the start and end of their journey through the building, I decided to create my water feature along these lines - continuing a staggered line of reflection pools that lead to the building entrance.

I then had to consider how the sectional relationship of the tunnel cutting underneath the buildings would resolve at the other side of the building. I decided that I would let the tunnel bisect my building - creating a public and private aspect to the chapel. Seen in the section drawing at the top of the image, the tunnel crosses under the building, and then rises up into a courtyard. To resolve all these changes in grade, I made the reflection pool entrance split into a downward corridor that leads to the private meditation chapel and the tunnel courtyard.



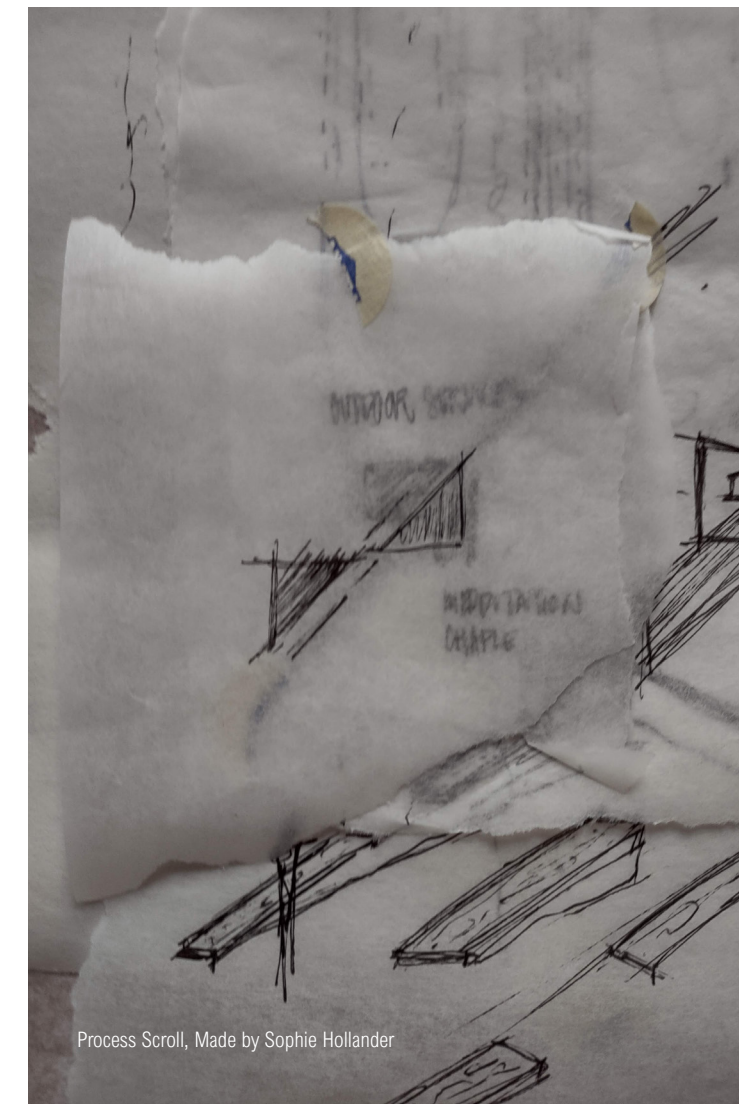
Process Scroll, Made by Sophie Hollander



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design exploration

SOLUTION



The process shown above was flushed out into the following image here - my final presentation board completed for this project.

The board is arranged with an aerial view of the site as the background. The vectors on the graves and Holocaust memorial form the boundaries of the project images which are placed approximately where they would be experienced on the site. My artefact and site photos are blended into the background to express some of the spirit of the place, as well as quotes from my research and the Temple Beth El website.

The following sections will briefly describe the experience and meaning of these spaces further...

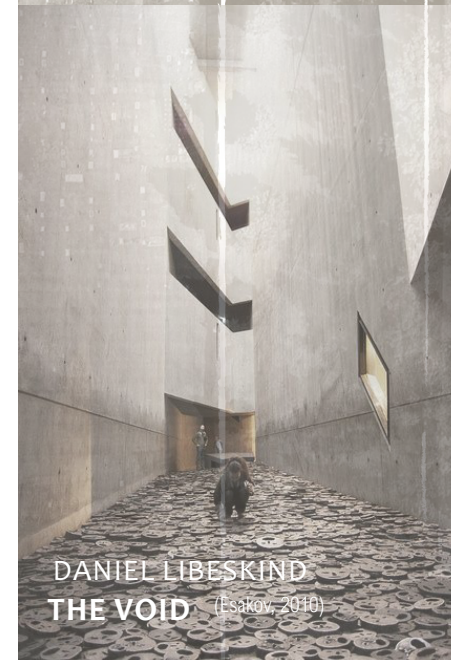
design exploration

SOLUTION

Tunnel :

Pictured here is the location and photo of the Holocaust memorial on the site. I found it to be a very personal and tender tribute to these family members. I also felt that the unity of this pain created an opportunity to span the divide of the two cemeteries and communities.

Just as the jagged lines of the broken Jewish star formed the angled cut and central void in Libeskins' Jewish Museum, this tunnel plunges us into the earth and forms a dramatic tear through the site. From this bitter divide - a physical and metaphorical mend is offered to their fracture.



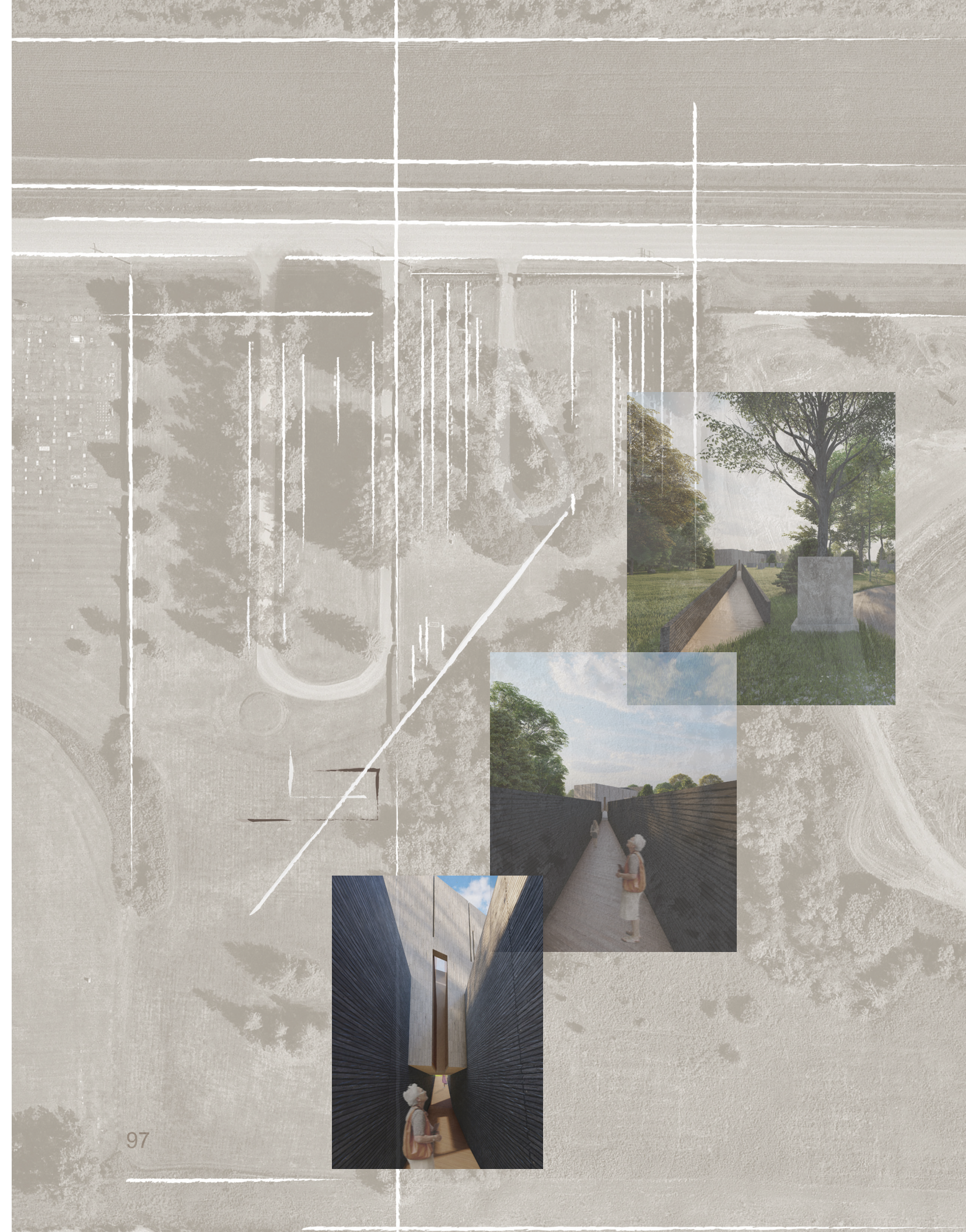
design exploration

SOLUTION

Tunnel :

Descending the tunnel, the walls engulf us as we cross the boundaries of the two cemeteries.

All we can see is the black stone wall and the sky above, until we pass under the building, catch a glimpse of what might be inside, and ascend to the other side.



design exploration

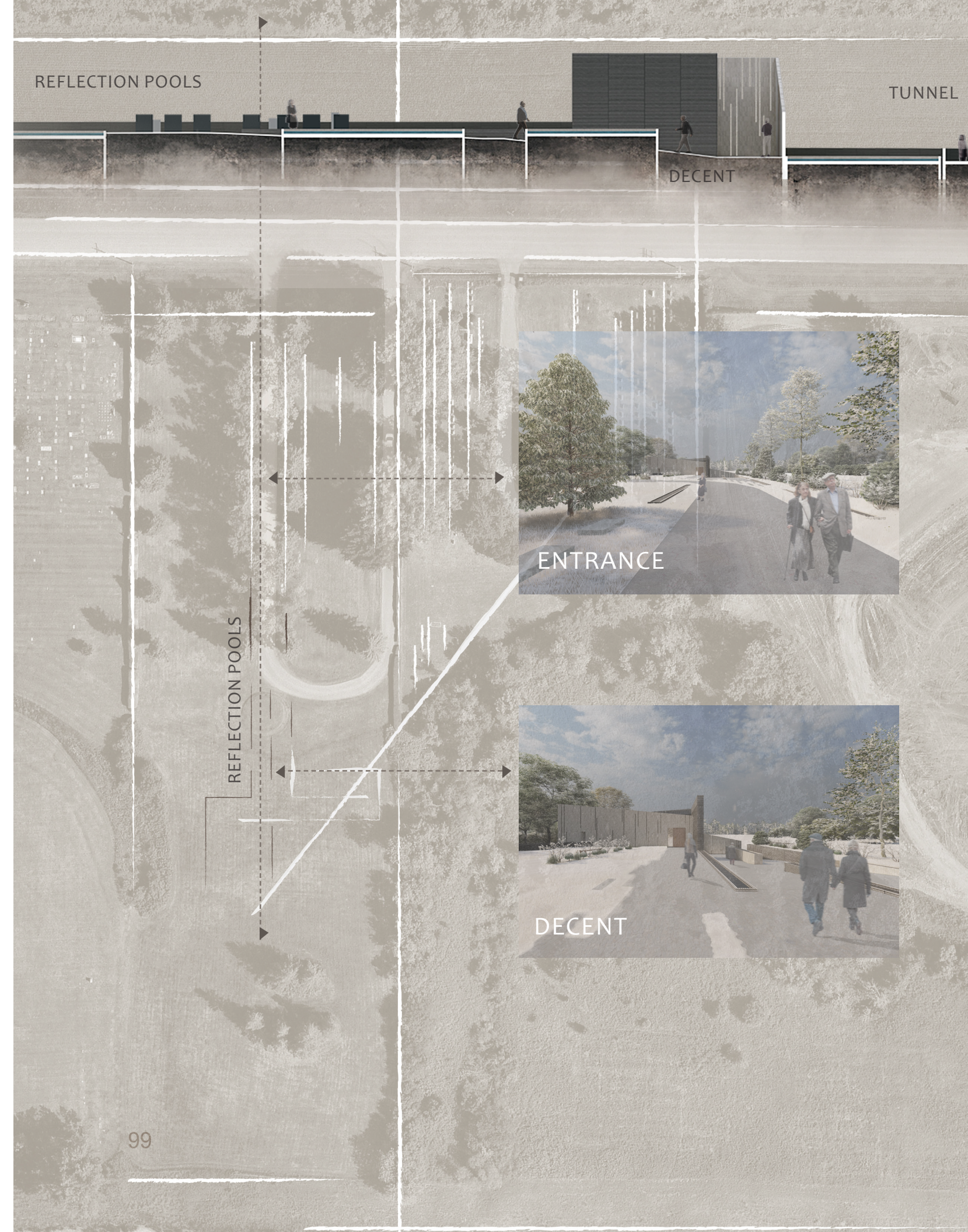
SOLUTION

Entrance, Reflection Pools, and Decent :

Progression through the site has been a major consideration. The tunnel begins on the Fargo Hebrew Congregation side, but many users would enter on from the round-about on the Temple Beth El side as well.

The path to the building became a direct continuation of the graves lining this round-about. As I designed this entrance sequence, I also imagined the actives of first arriving on the site. The first thing a user would likely do is find a stone to place during their visit to a loved one. The reflection pools were created to hold these stones and offer a moment to ponder the past while reunite with these memories.

The pools also lead users down the site towards the lower level of the tunnel, shown through the site section at the top of the page.



design exploration

SOLUTION

Exterior Spaces :

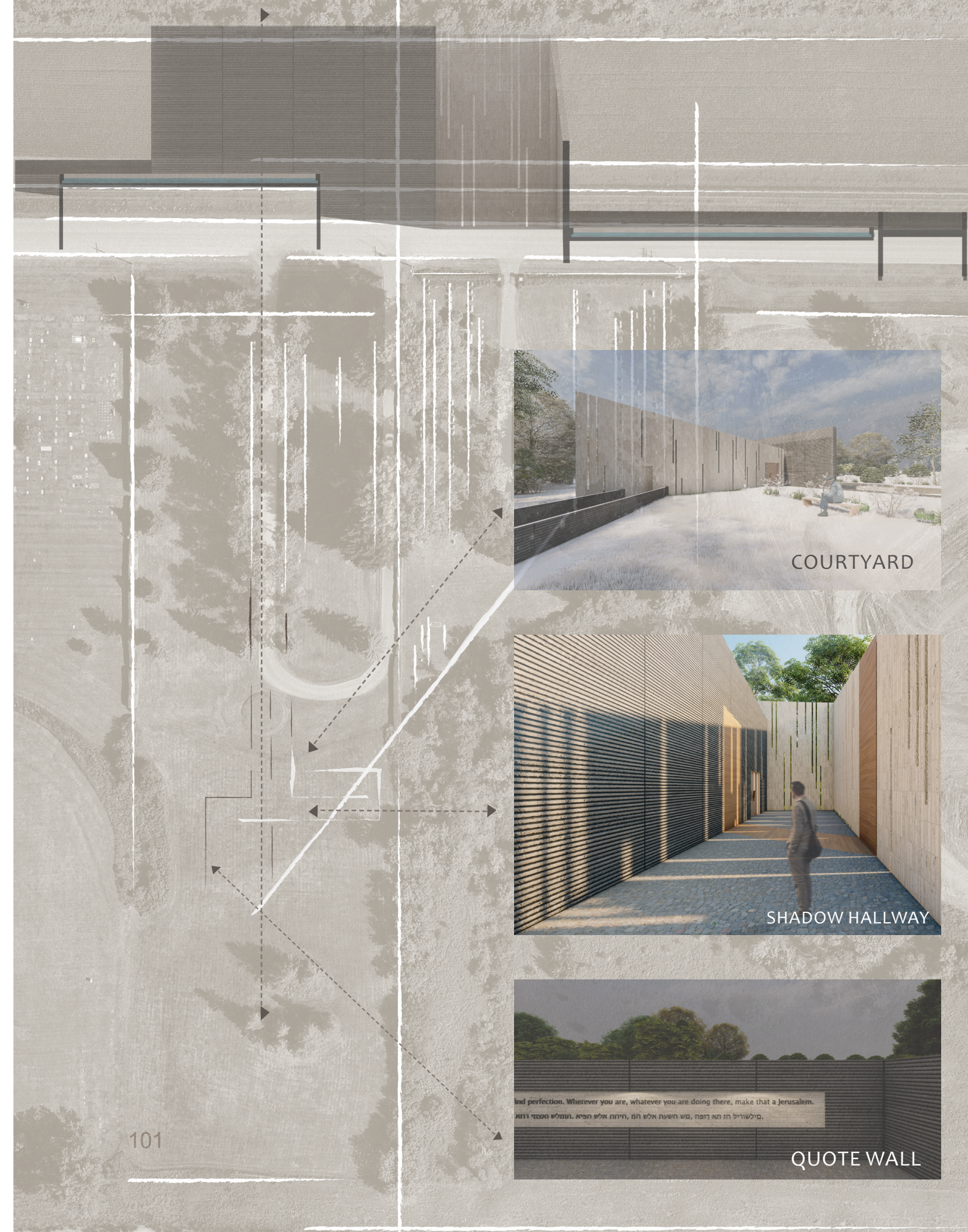
Progression down the reflection pools towards the intersection with the tunnel, creates a number of transitional, exterior spaces.

After reaching the end of the reflection pools, users can either take a left towards the semi-enclosed shadow hallway leading to the private meditation chapel, or to the right towards the plaza created by the tunnel exit.

In the plaza, I've included a quote inscribed to a retaining wall that read a quote by Rabbi Tzvi Freeman which is posted as the header to the Temple Beth El website, "People want to run away from where they are, to go find their Jerusalem--as if elsewhere they will find perfection. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing there, make that a Jerusalem."

I think this quote captures the heart of my project -that through intentional participation with memory, the placelessness of this community is connected to the rest of Jewish history.

My goal is all of these exterior spaces is to provide moments of transition and allow us to ponder the essence of Jewish identity.



COURTYARD

SHADOW HALLWAY

QUOTE WALL

design exploration

SOLUTION

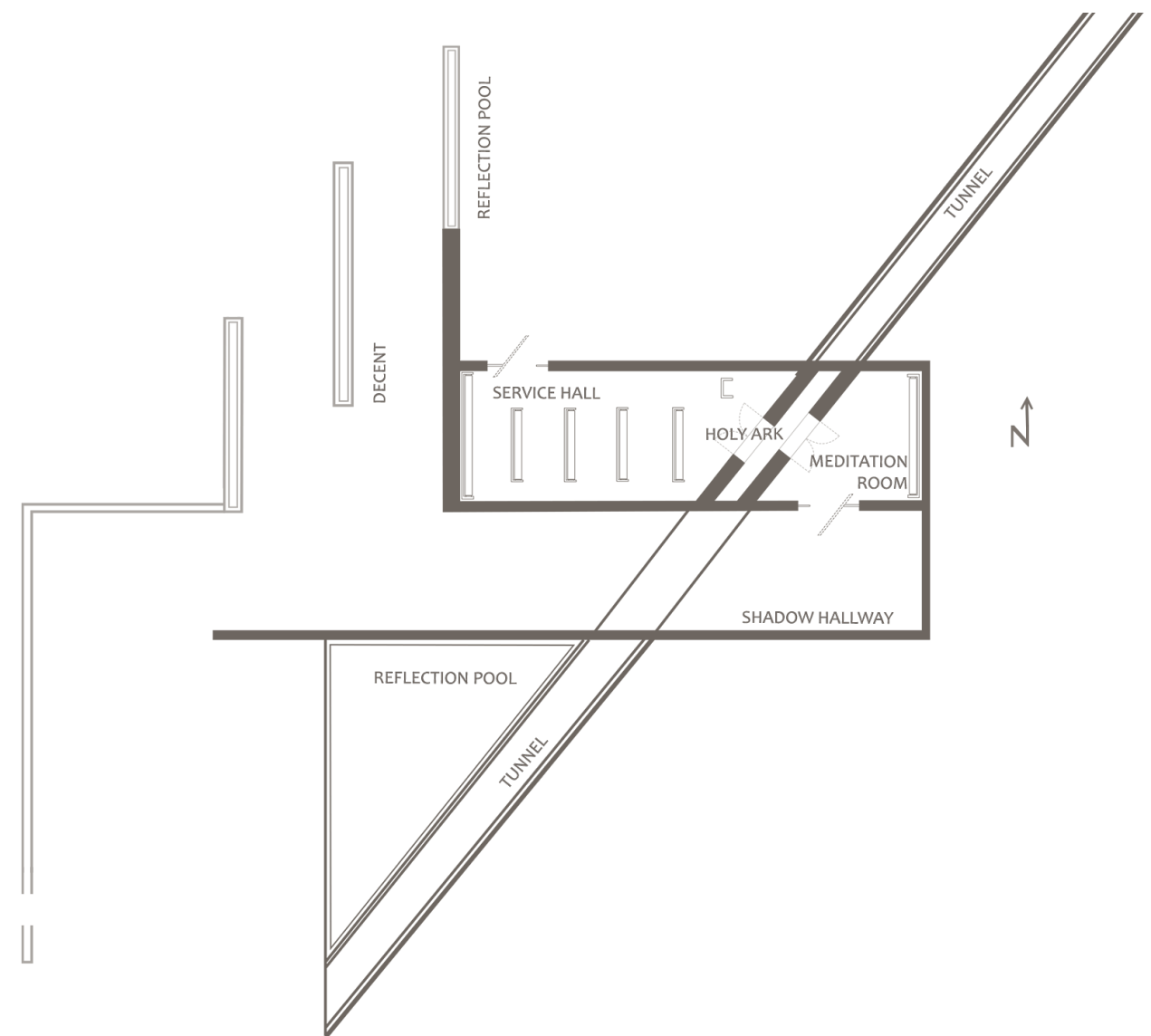
Interior Spaces :

Following those transitional spaces, we enter the interior of the building comprised of three simple spaces. On the left is the service hall. This would be used at burial or death anniversary services, where the prayers can be read and time is spent as a community.

On the right, is a private mediation chapel. This is the space appropriate for after visiting a grave, getting out of the cold, and lingering with your thoughts and memories.

The third space and most important space is the wooden ark that separates the two halves of the chapel. Within the patterned cabinet, one side would hold the Torah - the stories given to us. The other side would be a place to leave your own stories and family archives.

As we've seen through the history of Jewish sacred space, the linguistic spaces of memory are fundamental to shaping who we are.



design exploration

SOLUTION

Holy of Holies :

This ark is my reinterpretation of the “Holy of Holies”. Each moment of the project is connected through this central space. The tunnel walls form the wooden wall of the ark. The space above and below the arc is connected through skylight, slit to the exterior, and the gap in the arc brings it down to the tunnel.

Just as in biblical times, this is a place you cannot occupy, and yet it connects everything.

In this post-ethnic, post-religious age of Jewish identity, we need to reinvent what sacred space means and make it welcoming to all.



design exploration

SOLUTION

Detail & Form :

The formal qualities of the building were all prompted by the goal of resolving this sectional question - a space that intersects with every other space and yet can never be fully occupied - the "holy of holies".

I accomplished it by the use of distinct materials - black horizontal and white vertical stones - that create a rhythmic balance, and come together to form interlocking halves of the structure. The two halves also correspond to the dramatic changes in elevation across the site, and the distinct public and private meditation areas.



illuminating the invisibility of the other:

FARGO JEWISH CEMETERY CHAPEL

sophie hollander / ndsu architecture



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