American University of Beirut

# Communal Condenser

Elias Chamoun

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Department of Architecture and Design

Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture

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ADVISOR: [KARIM NAJJAR]

Approved by Thesis Advisor:

1

Karim Najjar, Assistant Professor AUB Department of Architecture and Design

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# Communal Condenser

Elias Chamoun Final Thesis I Advisor: Sinan Hassan

# Lebanon: War, Oppression and Revolution

When we long for the good memories of Lebanon, we go back to its era before the civil war. It was a time of peace and notable evolvement of agriculture, tourism, commerce, and banking. Because of its financial power and diversity in its heyday, Lebanon was referred to as The Switzerland of the Middle-East during the 1960s.

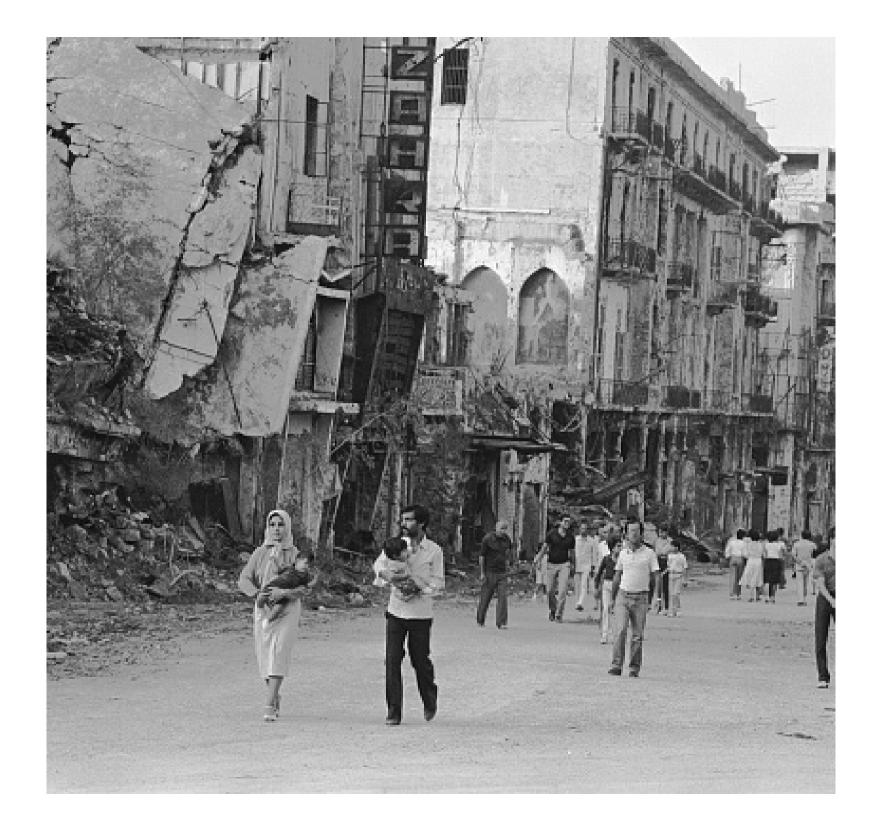


Following the French Mandate after World War II, the Lebanese capital became a tourist destination and such a notable hub of vibrant cultural, social, and artistic life.

In the fifties, Beirut entered its golden era. For 20 years, our capital was a center of international trade and regional finance, and also of education, communication, shipping, and transportation. Beirut became a magnet of entertainment, fashion, art, a venue for international movie shootings, and the home of a unique multi-national society.



In the 1970s, various internal tensions inherent to the Lebanese system and multiple regional developments contributed to the breakdown of governmental authority and the outbreak of civil strife in 1975. The cause of the Lebanese civil war was neither exclusively internal nor exclusively external, nor was its settlement. The civil war came to an end at a specific historical juncture when movement toward internal reconciliation coincided with favorable regional and international developments.



The capital was known for its beauty, with many colonial structures dating from the French protectorate era that have been adapted to the Lebanese way of life. Now many beautiful historical buildings are in poor condition or being lost to rapid urban growth; corruption in Lebanon has led to a focus on immediate gains instead of long term sustainable development.

After a recent history of trauma and conflict, corruption is still a major flaw and has resulted in a society that has no use for communal infrastructure.



## Revolution

The Russian October Revolution was a period of political and social revolution across the territory of the Russian Empire, commencing with the abolition of the monarchy in 1917, and concluding in 1923 after the Bolshevik establishment of the Soviet Union.

Similarly, the Lebanese October Revolution was a turning point for the whole country. People marched together in unity to reject sectarianism.

Raging against a nepotistic and corrupt ruling elite who had been duping the mass for decades, the Lebanese people broke free from sectarian and political allegiances.

Together, they transformed their protest into one of the largest revolutions the country has ever seen; one that was heard all around the world.



How does corruption affect architecture?

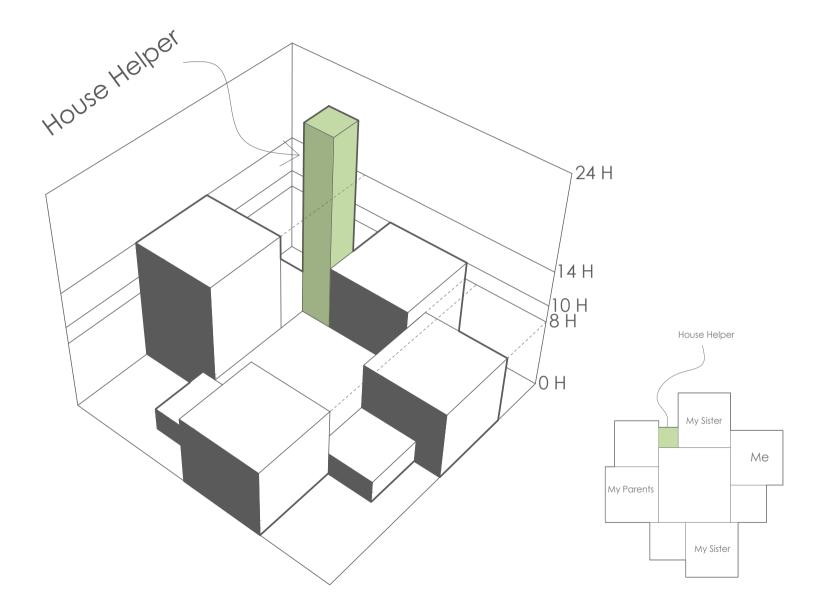
Corruption runs deep throughout the country, beginning with children in schools through to planning departments, professional services and transportation. Having an opaque government means that nobody needs to justify development, what gets built where and why, is not openly disclosed. Most major developments happen behind closed doors without addressing the public or current residents. The quality of new structures also diminishes with unforeseen costs or bribes that are commonplace, and the construction sector is no stranger.

Other effects of corruption on architectural design and quality in Beirut include:

- Poor education, with less youth joining the technical field
- Lack of historic preservation or vernacular design;
- Poor quality;
- No unified plan for city design;
- And, decreasing livability/public amenities.

Having a house helper at home has become part of the lebanese culture. Most households got dependent on a helping hand most of the time. Apartment plans generally integrate a small room for the house helper next to the kitchen.

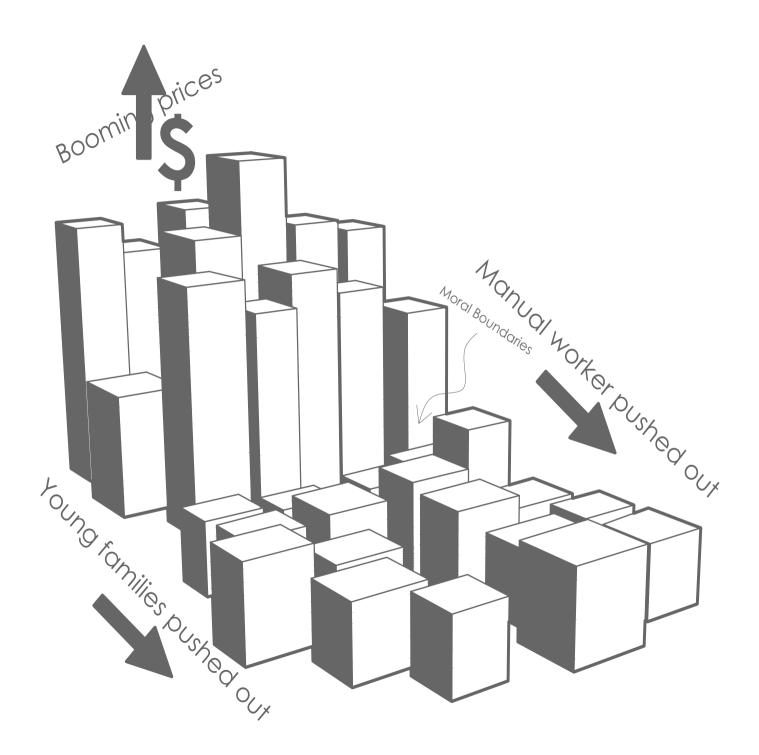
By comparing space through time, I extruded the diagrammatical plan of my own apartment. The house helper spends the most amount of time at home, comparing to my family and me. In a plan perspective, a blatent discrepancy is visible.



The extinction of the working class in Lebanon is caused by the reckless provision of diplomas through countless uncertified universities. Youth tends to leave the country, and the lower class is fulfillied by foreigners.

Similarly, people rely on foreign house helpers in households, and owners become more and more work-shy. This stigmatic trait has evolved and has become part of the lebanese lifestyle.

Due to booming prices and accelerated consumerism, manual workers and lower class people are pushes out of high end cities. Not only a physical boundary is created between a town and a shantytown, but also a moral boundary.



Considering how corrupt Lebanon is (ranks 143 of 145 countries in the world) and that Beirut does not have an implemented zoning or investment plan for future urban development, the architecture in the city reflects these unplanned conditions. So what does corrupt architecture look like – does it have a style, quality or impact? Since Beirut is currently undergoing unprecedented urban expansion, the architecture of the city is rapidly changing into a more globalized modern society, but at what cost to the livability and design of the city?

With the omnipresent "Big Brother" oppressing the lives of every citizen, this authoritarian regime sustains its perpetual power by gas-lighting the public with "doublespeak" — a deliberate conflation of truth and lies designed to force a confused populous into submission.

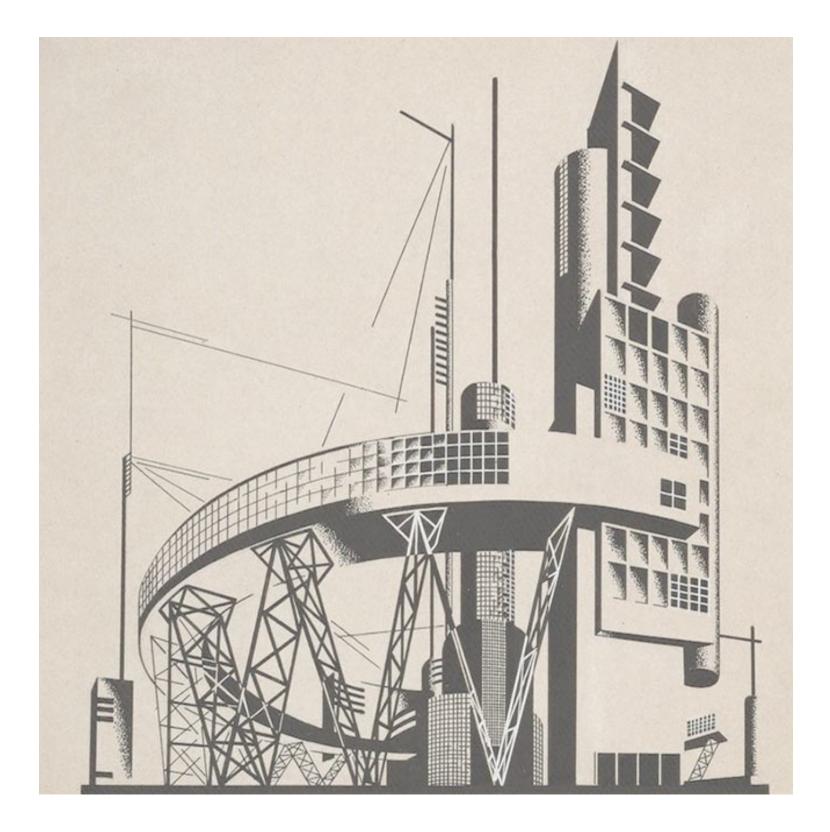
The architectural manifestation of an authoritarian regime is blatently noticeable across the country.

New cities are emerging, representing the threat of governmental oppression. The built environment has become a key weapon in the politicians symbolic arsenal.



Constructivist architecture and the social condenser

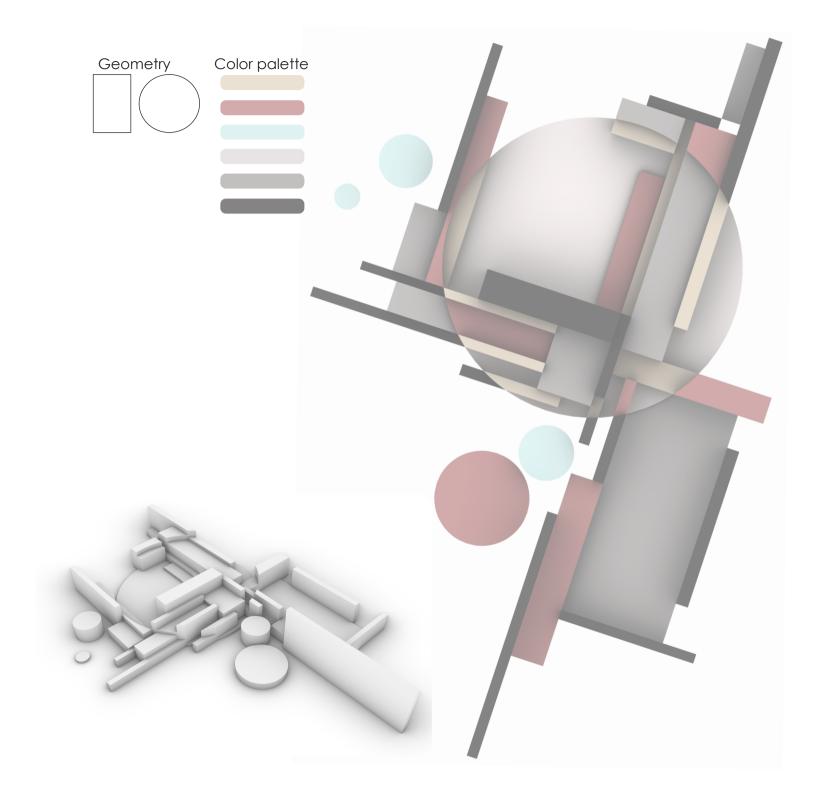
Constructivist architecture was a form of modern architecture that flourished in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and early 1930s. It combined advanced technology and engineering with an avowedly Communist social purpose.



The style was inspired by suprematism. It combines straight lines and various forms such as cylinders, squares, rectangles, cubes.

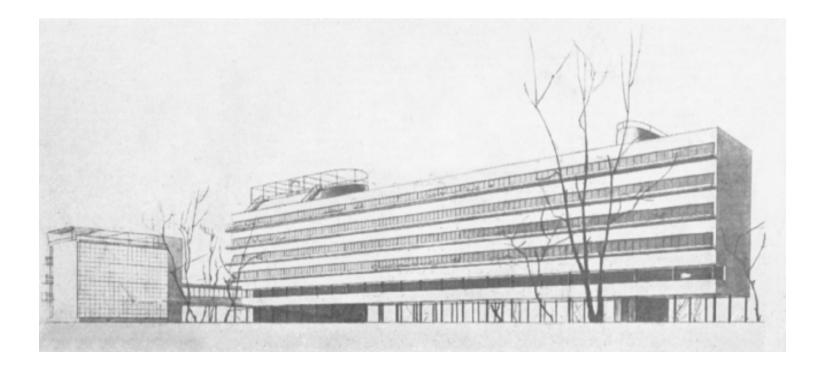
Elements of Constructivst art/architecture are:

-minimal -geometric -spatial -architectonic -experimental



The social condenser remains one of architecture's purest experiments in social engineering. Emerging from the revolutionary ferment that followed the First World War, its essential purpose was to break down social hierarchies and bolster a new working-class.

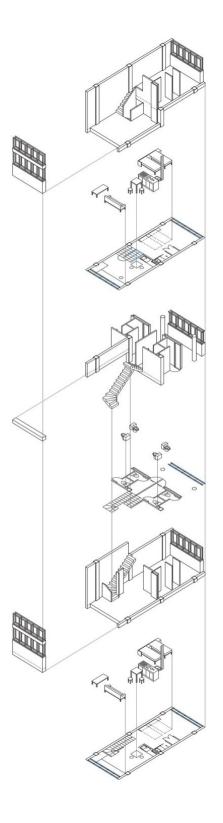
Probably the most well-known example is the Narkomfin Building (1932), a block of flats located at 25 Novinsky Boulevard, in Moscow. Designed by Moisei Ginzburg and intended for high ranking members of the Commissariat of Finance (shortened to Narkomfin), the building's most striking feature is that none of its 54 housing units had a dedicated kitchen. Instead, the building was built with communal kitchen, laundry and creche facilities, a move which was intended to socialise the kind of reproductive labour that was traditionally carried out by women in the home.



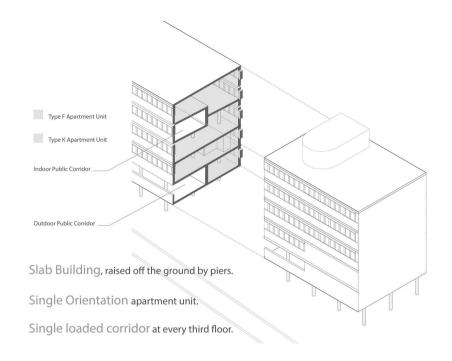
### Narkomfin

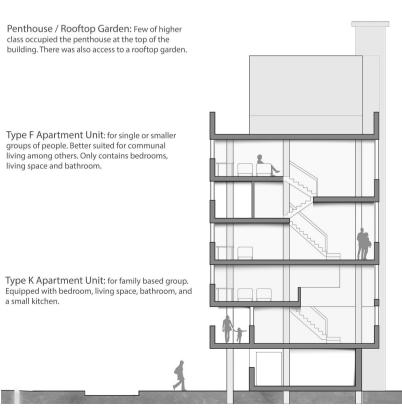
Moisei Ginzburg,1928 Pencil on Paper, 21x30 cm

The building represents an important chapter in Moscow's development – as both a physical city and an ideological state. Narkomfin was a laboratory for social and architectural experimentation to transform the byt (everyday life) of the ideal socialist citizen.



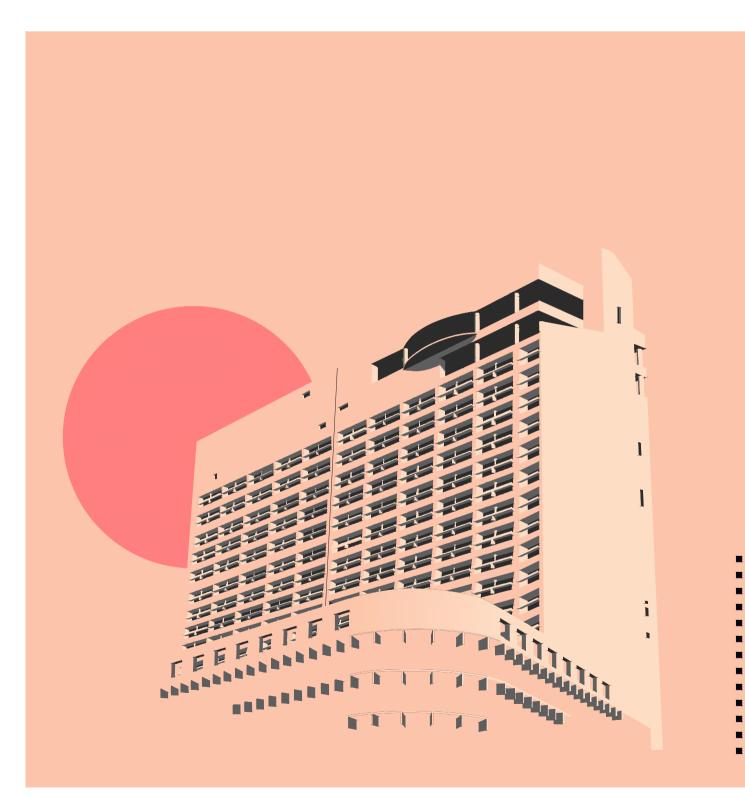
The duplex flats were divided into two types, the K Types which still included a surface for children and cooking, and the F Types, where all the communal functions, located outside of the apartments, implied that all children should be raised collectively in order to contrast patriarchial relationships. The transformation of cooking into a communal activity would also allow women to be freed from household responsibilities and question the privatization of couple relationships.





### Goal

Re-defining the Social Condenser in a way that is consistent with the spirit and ideology of the Soviet 1920s, but which is not restricted to the aesthetics and realities of that time and place. We want to consider the Social Condenser as a concept born of the 1917 revolution and the Soviet avant-garde, but at the same time to un-anchor it: to deploy it beyond the narrow confines of its origins in order to make sense of—and imagine—heterodox architectural horizons both within and without the former socialist world, and make it adaptive to the pre-war lebanese lifestyle.



### Urban Suprematism: Holiday Inn

2020 Digital art, 42x42 cm

The Holiday Inn plan view reveals different characteristics that follow the typical constructivist principles of the social condenser. The dense living units with the wide double loaded corridor referred as streets. The elements of the facade also showcase fundamental shapes and forms and the building itself overlooks the whole city, overpowering the neighbouring buildings.

# 

### Holiday Inn Plan

2020 Digital art, 42x42 cm

In the former Soviet Union, but also across the rapidly-dismantling welfare states all over the world, public spaces, social housing projects, leisure facilities and other sites of Social Condensation are being dismantled, neglected, gentrified, or sold off to the highest bidder.

This is what the idea of the Social Condenser—and its actually existing materializations in built form—is able to do today: to estrange and de-familiarize our predicament by providing a body of concrete proof—both conceptual and architectural—that the more or less mainstream aspirations of Soviet architectural ideologies one hundred years ago really were more "advanced," more equitable, more sensitive to the social asymmetries



# The egg

2020 Digital art, 42x42 cm

Neo-Plasticism and the Modernization of Society

# The fetters of private property ownership

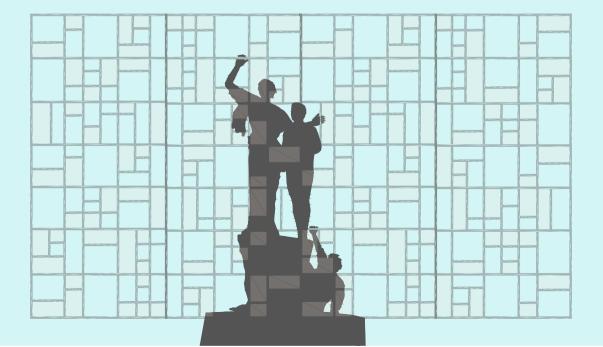
Giving permission to foreign developers to build where and how they like, not only creates a disjointed style but does not recognize the local environment or cultural traditions. Unfortunately, with higher density needs and uncontrolled zoning regulations due to corruption, new buildings are built accommodating to the modernized lifestyle, the individualistic culture and behavior.

The public realm suffers from this and the local architectural style is being lost to foreign investment. Over the next few decades, the face of Beirut could change drastically to reflect this uncontrolled exploitation of the built environment. Corruption is present in all societies to some degree, it manifests itself differently but still influences the shape of our cities.



Neo-Plasticism is an artistic philosophy that called for the renunciation of naturalistic representation in favor of a stripped-down formal vocabulary principally consisting of straight lines, rectangular planes, and primary colors.

Van Doesburg and other members of De Stijl (most famous members: Piet Mondriaan, Gerrit Rietveld, Bart van der Leck) were expressing new types of art that would fit this modern era. Another reason De Stijl started, was more political: the Netherlands were neutral during World War I.



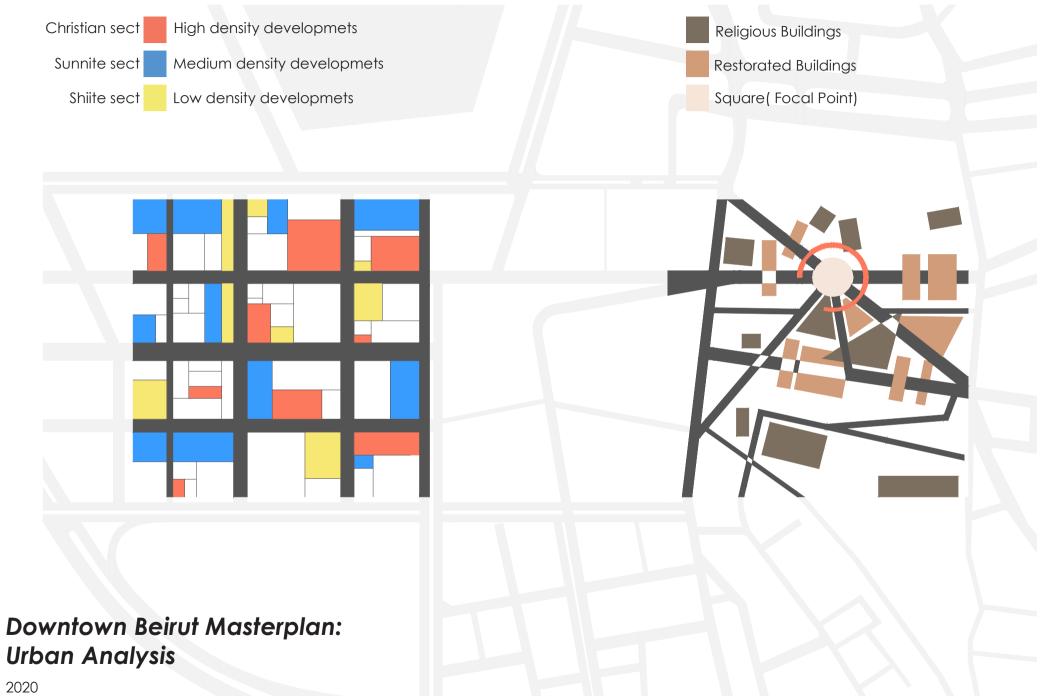
## Encaged

2020 Digital art, 42x42 cm The Beirut downtown Master Plan, planned to be finished in the near future is a perfect example of urban parasitisim. The circulatory scheme and the disposition of the new developments disrupts the coherence of the city, the equity and sensitivity of traditional social constructs. It is a forced adaptation to modernization.

The pre-war urban design that revolves around the nejmeh square is a figurative manifestation of the traditional lebanese way of life. The radial spatial organization enhances the human connection. The plan reminds us of a suprematist painting, combining many elements and fundamental forms with interlocking shapes. Opposingly, the expansion of the city through marine landfill imposes a new city scheme. The new developments are spread systematically on a grid of streets. The plots vary from high , to medium, to low density developments. The relation between streets and plots is reminiscent of the Neoplasticism movement, especially the De-stijl art style.

Neo-plasticism was considered as a universal visual language appropriate to the modern era, a time of a new political and spiritualized world order. It was intended to modernize society.

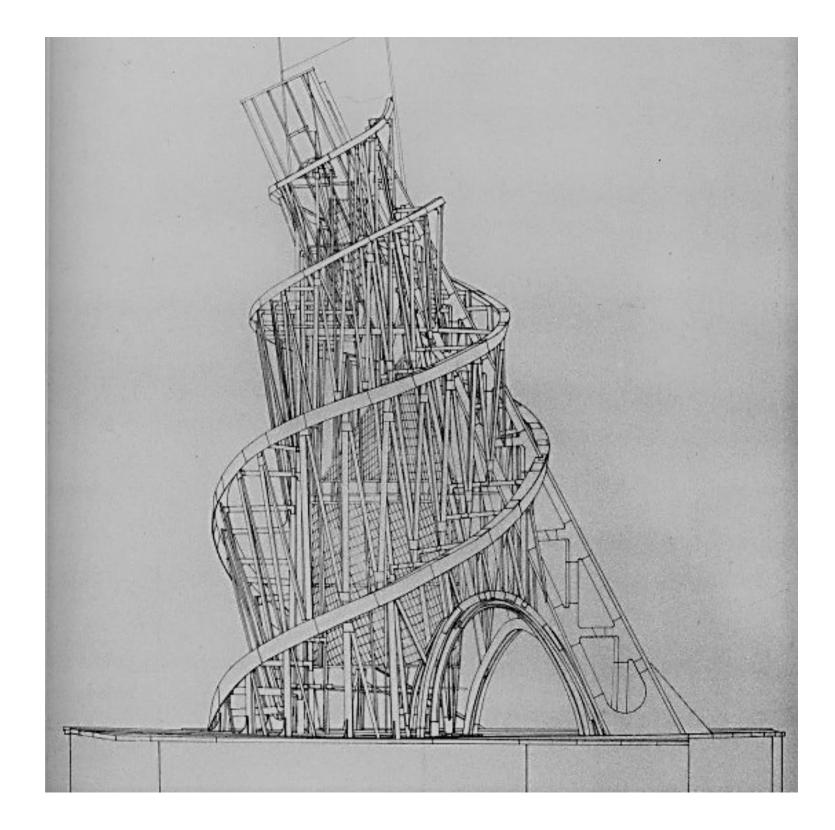
The colors used, typical of the DeStijl movements, can also be associated to the colors of the three most prominent sects with different religious backgrounds.



Digital art, 30x21 cm

Architectural Satire: The Fruit of Corruption

The Tatlin tower was a symbol for the new Russia, and for the governmental and political prospects, goals, and power of the upcoming nation. Its monumentality epitomized the peak of a new regime.

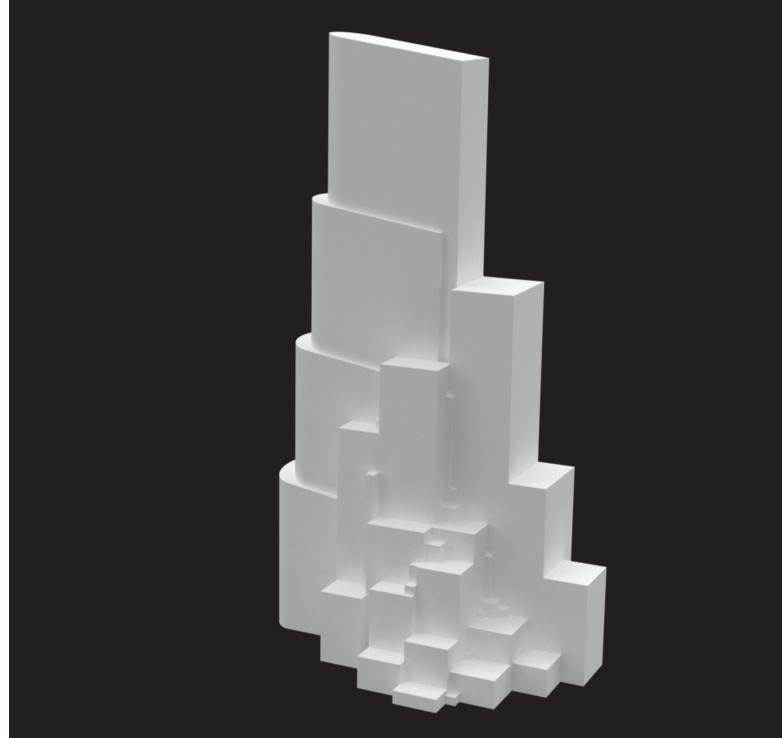


### Monument of The Third International

Vladimir Tatlin,1919 Pen on Paper, 42x42 cm

Unfortunately, the icons of the ideological avant-garde have been sterilized, reupholstered and served up to an image-starving audience that devours them as visual gourmet while overlooking their original potential.

If the dreams of the avant-garde were an improbable mission when their idealistic nostalgia was at its peak, it became almost impossible for them to succeed with a looming economic meltdown, asphyxiating ideological persecutions, and the authorities' sudden aesthetic preference for neo-classical kitsch.

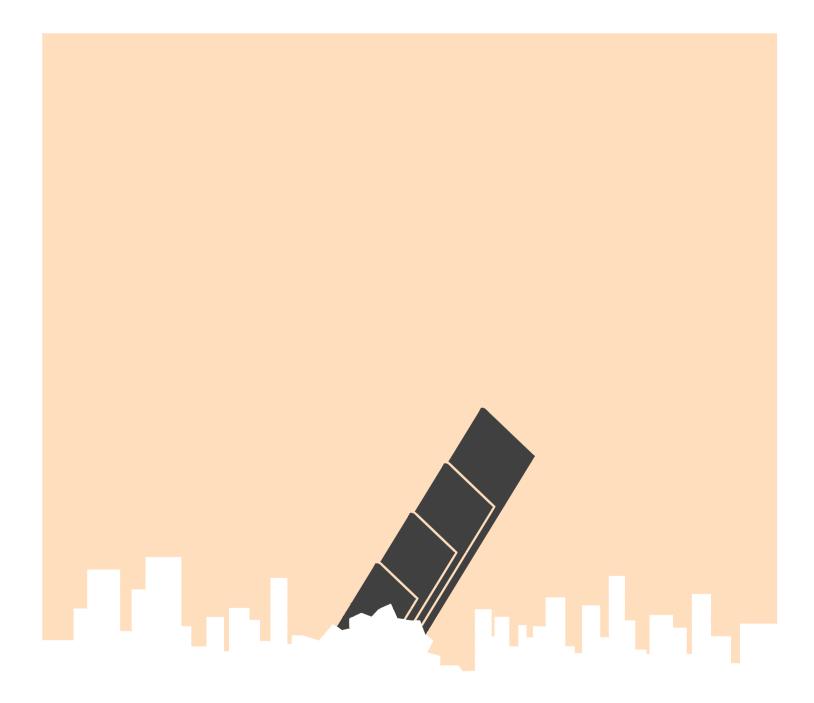


# Achrafieh Arkhitektons

2020 Digital model, 42x42 cm

Like organs without a body, these icons' lack of any clear ideological manifesto, put into evidence how contemporary architecture not only borrows its shapes, but that through image overexposure, and over use, neutralizes the inherent potential of previous forms of ideological urbanism. The new icons offer no hidden subversive messages, state no unprecedented manifestoes, and represent no underground ideologies. The more they become infatuated with their own image, the more they become like Architectural postcards.

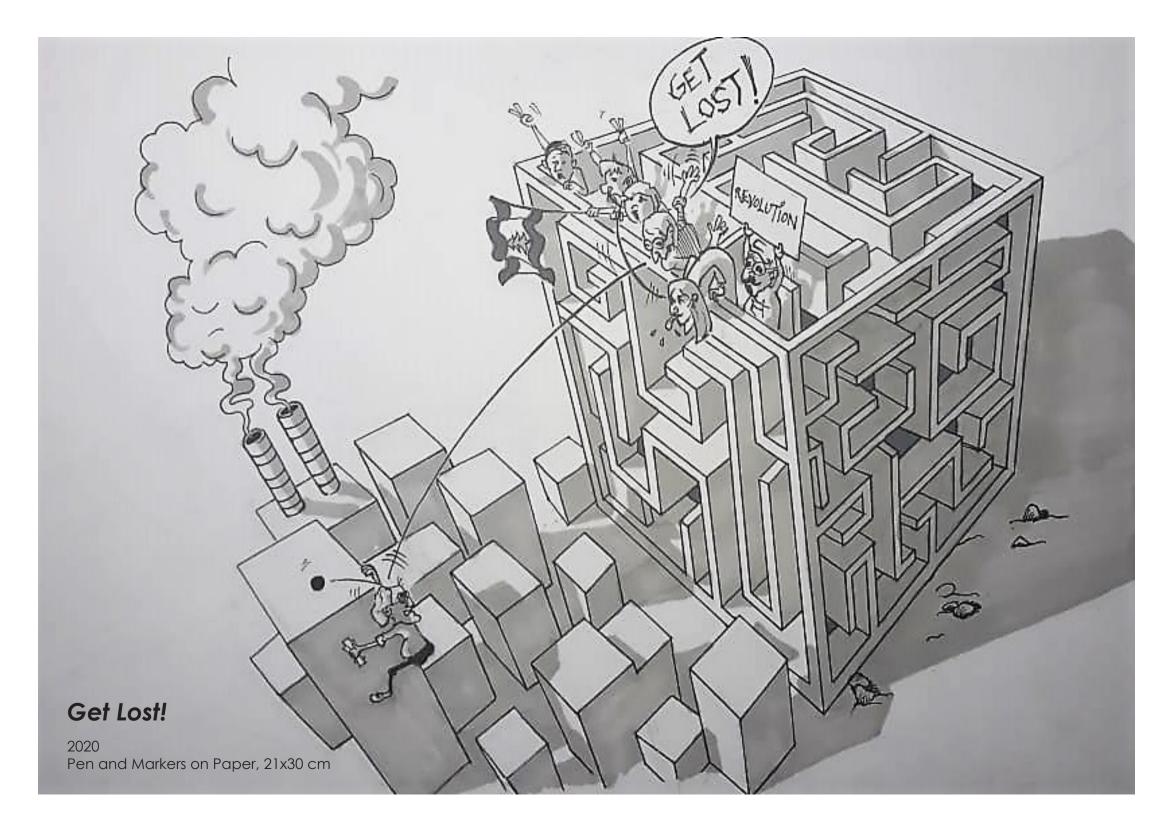
The images display symptomatic manifestations of hardcore ideological urbanism in the form of constructivism.



#### **Urban Graft**

2020 Digital art, 42x42 cm

The architecture of the revolution is a way of switching sides with the politicians. The unified spirit of the protesting mass is manifested into an architectural ideology that abolishes the authority, and sets new grounds for a new independent way of life. The ideals are built within a social context that involves all classes of people, far beyong the understanding of the political dominance.



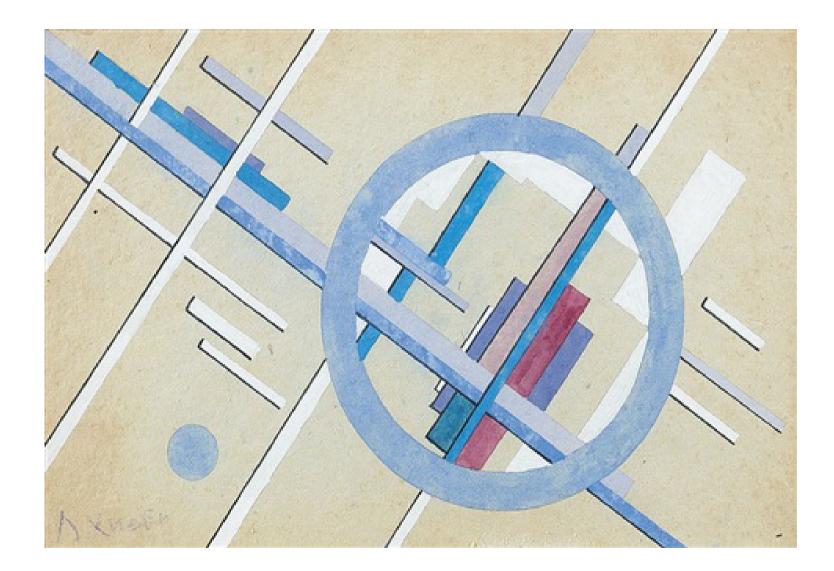
« While classical origins were thought to have their source in a divine or natural order and modern origins were held to derive their value from deductive reason, `not-classical' origins can be strictly arbitrary, simply starting points, without value. They can be artificial and relative, as opposed to natural, divine, or universal. Such artificially determined beginnings can be free of universal values because they are merely arbitrary points in time, when the architectural process commences »

Peter Eisenman, 1984

Architectonics: the Utopia of the Floating City

Lazar Khidekel (1986 – 1904) classified himself as an "artist-architect," later adding the moniker "fantasist" in reference to one of the central features of his art and architecture: "vision of Suprematist structures floating in space,"

He played an important role in Suprematism's historical development by applying its precepts to both practical architectural projects and imaginary floating structures for the future. He was instrumental in the transition from planar Suprematism to volumetric Suprematism.



#### Composizione

Lazar Khidekel, 1927 Mixed Media, Collage on Canvas, 21x30 cm

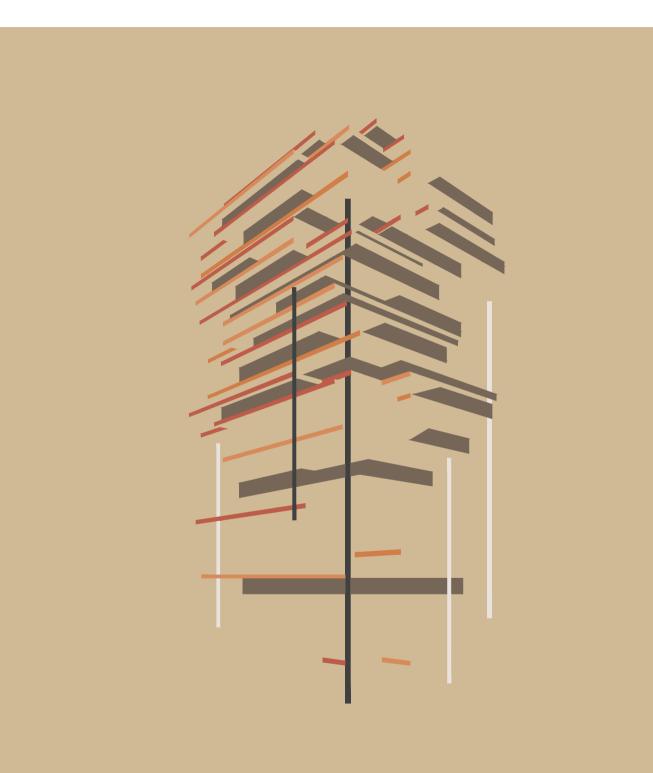
It is in the architectonic works that we see Khidekel's unique talent, in translating the essence of Suprematist composition to architectural forms. His Architectons matched Malevich's own sculptural explorations, but Khidekel also went further in designing projects meant to be built, such as the Aeroclub project of 1922. As well as practical architectural projects, Khidekel continued to dream of floating cities and futurist visions of space and form. Malevich had called for his students "to show the entire development of volumetric Suprematism in accordance with the sensation of the aerial (aero) type and dynamic", and Khidekel responded with his designs for Aerograd, a city on stilts, hovering above water.



#### Floating Planes

Lazar Khidekel,1929 Watercolor on Paper, 42x42 cm "The training of architects who at the same time will be the organisers and designers of the architectural units of the blocks that will constitute the streets and cities; the training of architects who will also be able to design and plan the economic centers."

Lazar Khidekel



#### Urban Suprematism: Beirut Terraces

2020 Digital art, 42x42 cm

The Communal Condenser

#### Goal and Design intention

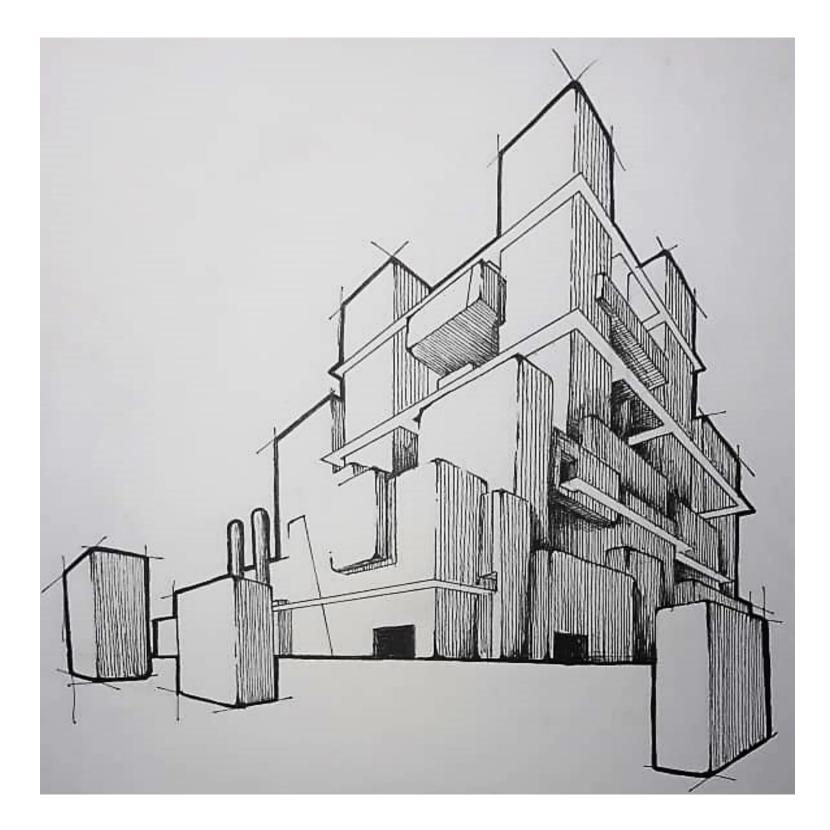
Theorize the design intentions, long-term social effects, successes and failures, and shifting political-economic foundations of a range of sites: planned Condensers, which were explicitly designed as Social Condensers, or at least designed according to a comparable set of architectural and social principles; and accidental Condensers, which became social Condensers due to the unexpected convergence of a set of external social and spatial factors on a specific site.



#### **Beehive Diagram**

2019 Digital art, 20x20 cm

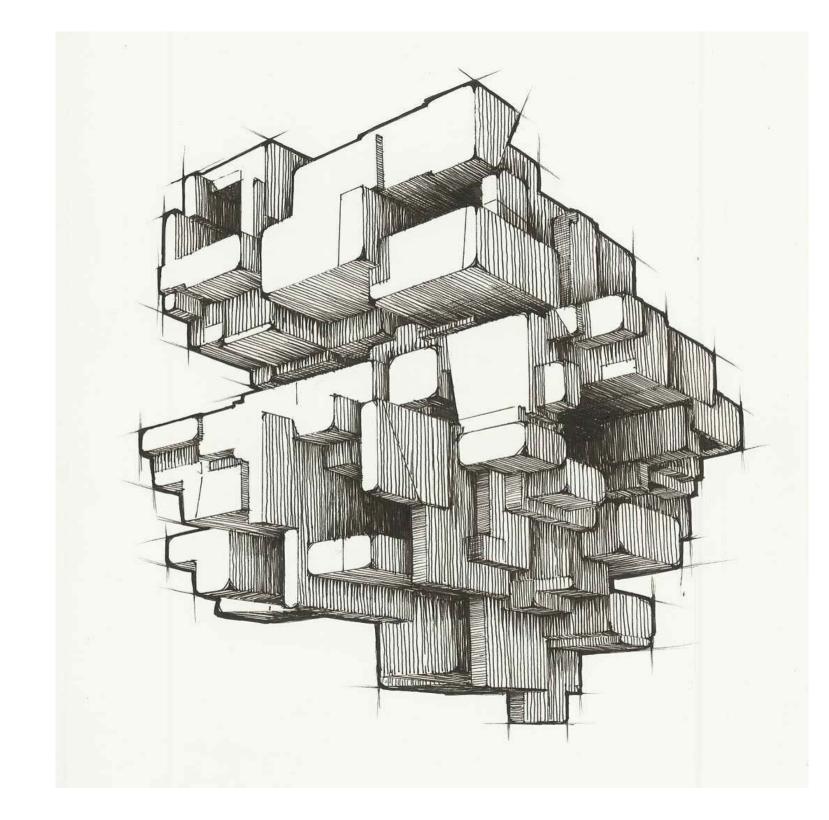
Ultimately, the design approach for our next step is to push the constructivist ideology to its fullest potential, by adapting the architecture to the revolution of the people, by rejecting the system, and by fantasizing about a better future through spaces and communal activity. The project will be a segregated community with its own building laws to create endless possibilities, through the layering of urban settings above each other, with interconnecting spaces and programs.



#### Megalopolis

2020 Pen on Paper, 21x30 cm

Aesthetically, the design will be reminiscent of the pre-war times, a nostalgic flashback of the booming industrial epoch. The project will also hold a distopian aura, an identity of a scarred country that has gone through brutal situations. It will be organically dispersed in the logic of a city, that follow programs chosen by the people, to the people. The design will be inspired by the principles of constructivism, but also relative to the Lebanese revolution. This will be an architecture of the revolution rather than a revolutionary architecture.



#### Splintered, fragmented and layered structure

2020 Pen on Paper, 42x42 cm

# **COMMUNAL CONDENSER**

ALL FALLER







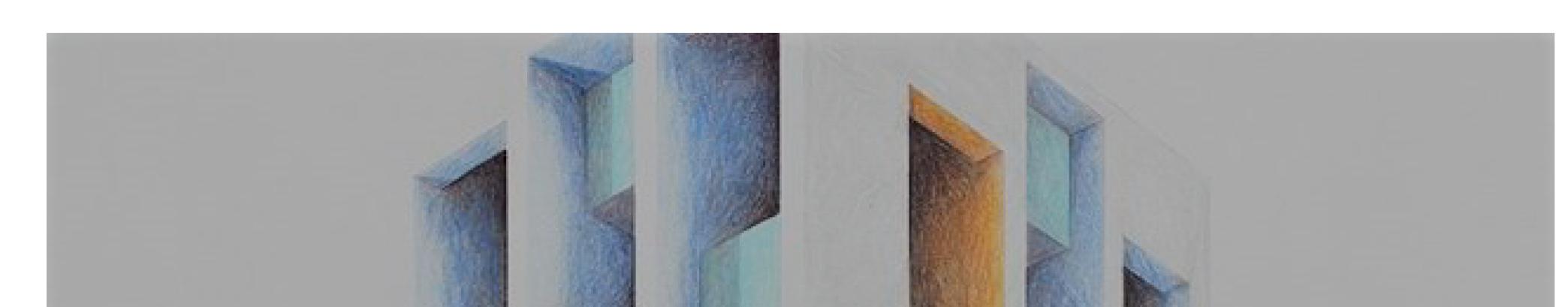
# EXPLORATIONS AND CONCEPT

CONSTRUCTIVISM INSPIRED DRAWINGS



### URBAN PROXIMITY

A literal representation of interlacing buildings with different users (colors). Intersecting blocks create new spaces that overlap a multitude of urban programs.

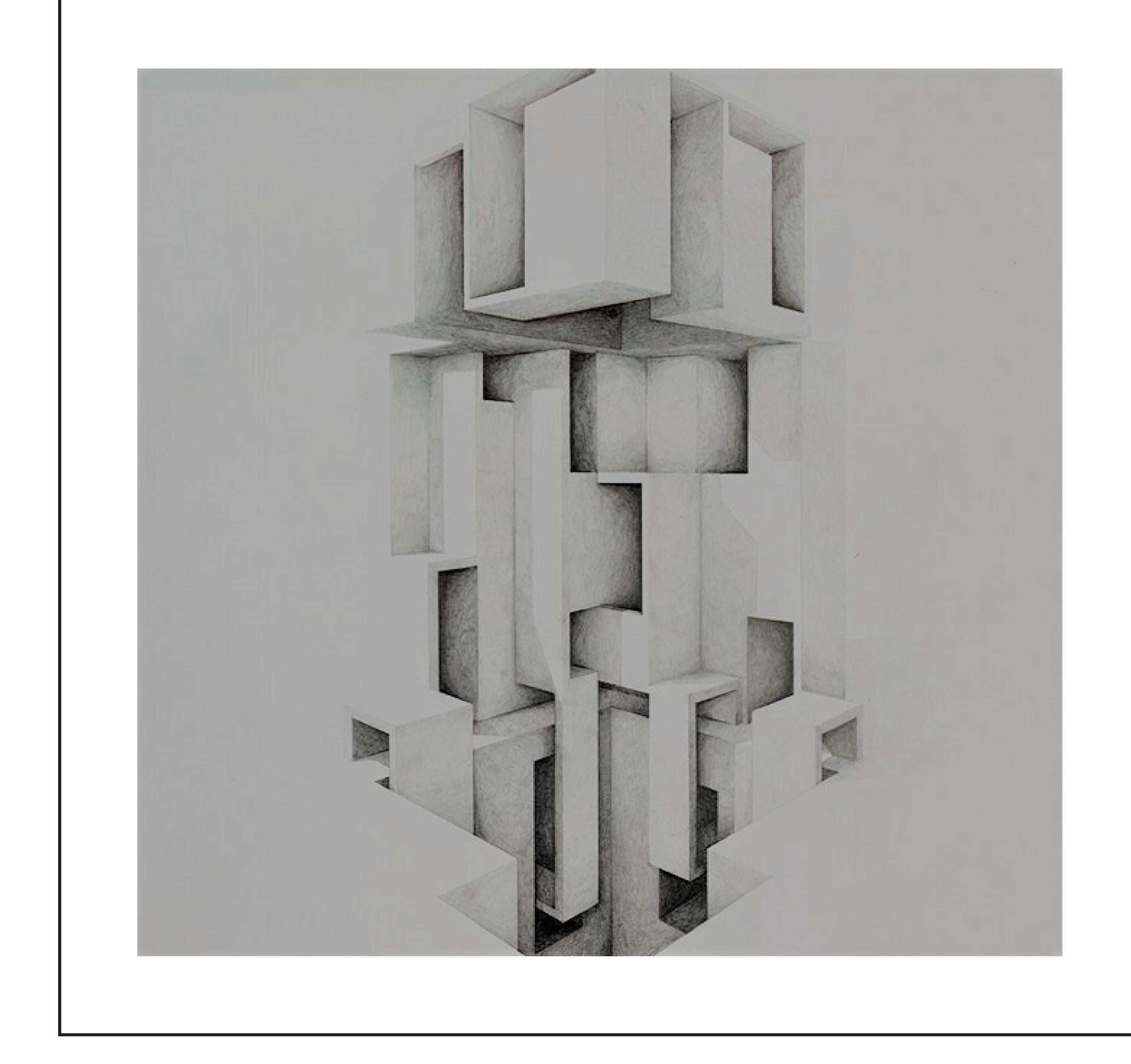


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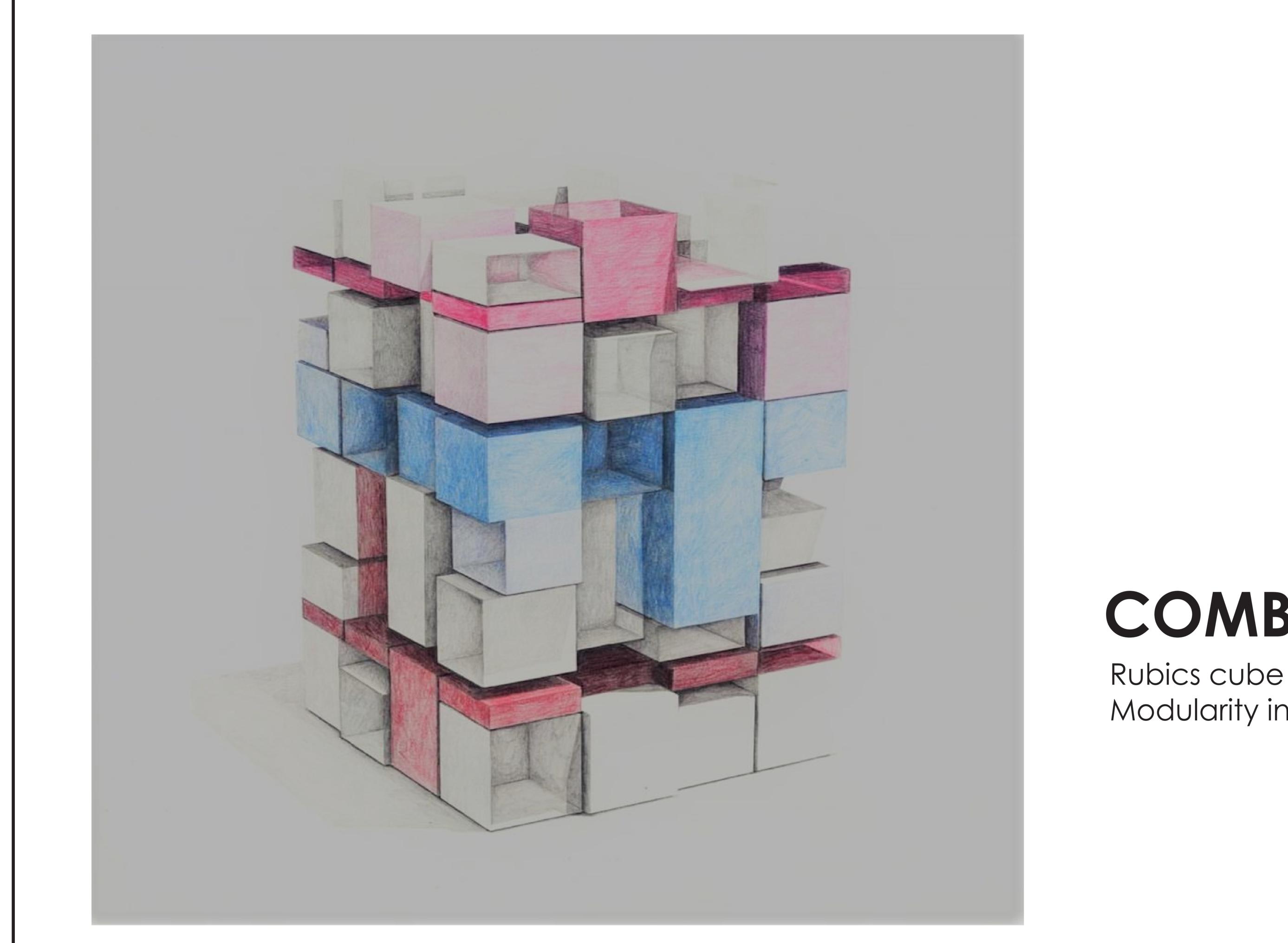
## ENDLESS PATH

A vertical and horizontal circulation through the structure in bright color creates a maze like shape that represents endlessness.



# NO PRIVACY

A visual representation of entangled building openings. Openings symbolize privacy.

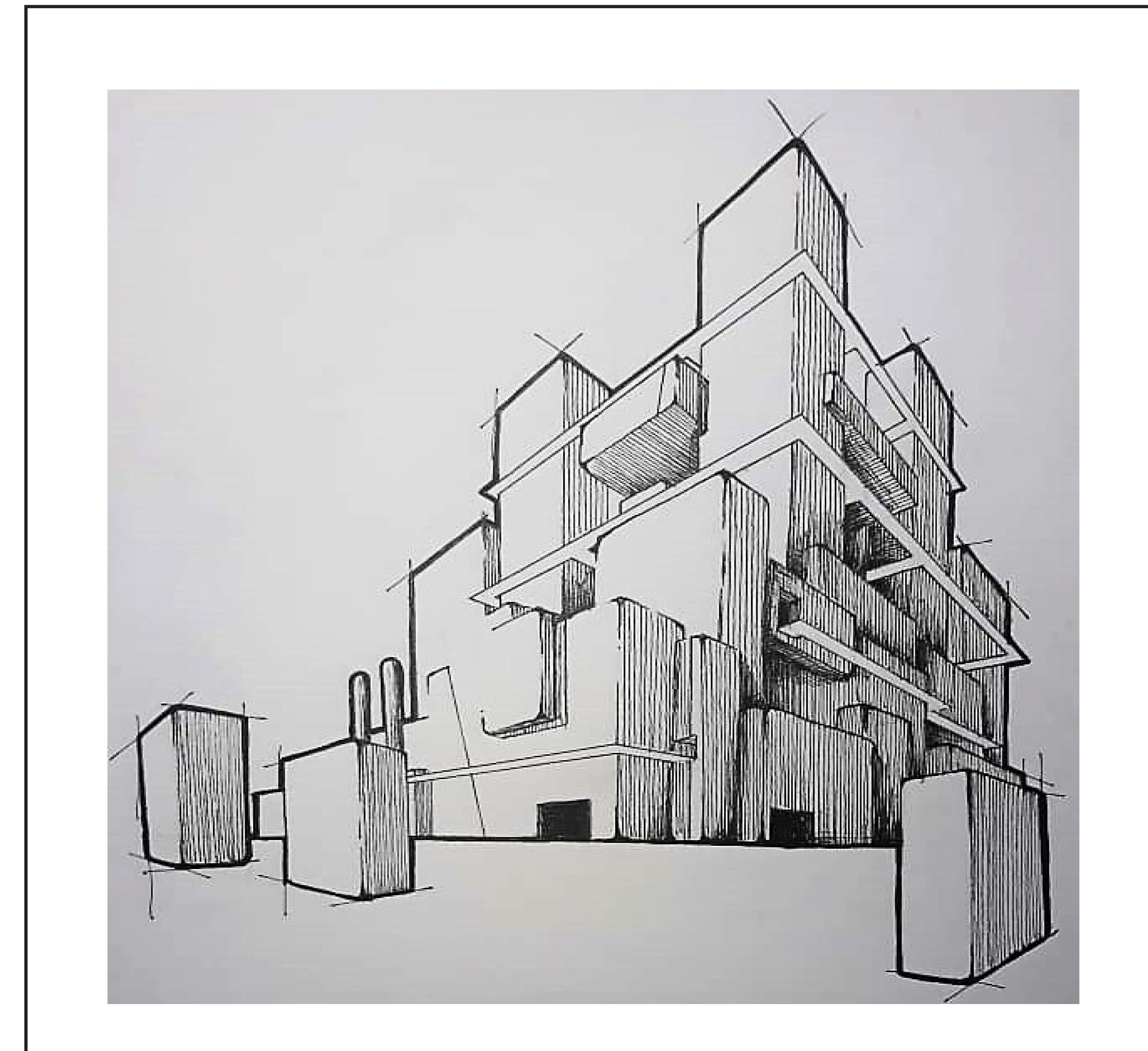




4

# **COMBINATIONS AND ITERATIONS**

Rubics cube inspired. A representation of millions of possibilities for a simple cluster of shapes. Modularity in urban living offers flexible engagement between communal environments.



5

# VISIONS

The city of the future. A layering of urban settings to balance out vertical and horizontal contact.

# **CONCEPT DIAGRAMS**

### **COMMON AREAS MAPPING**

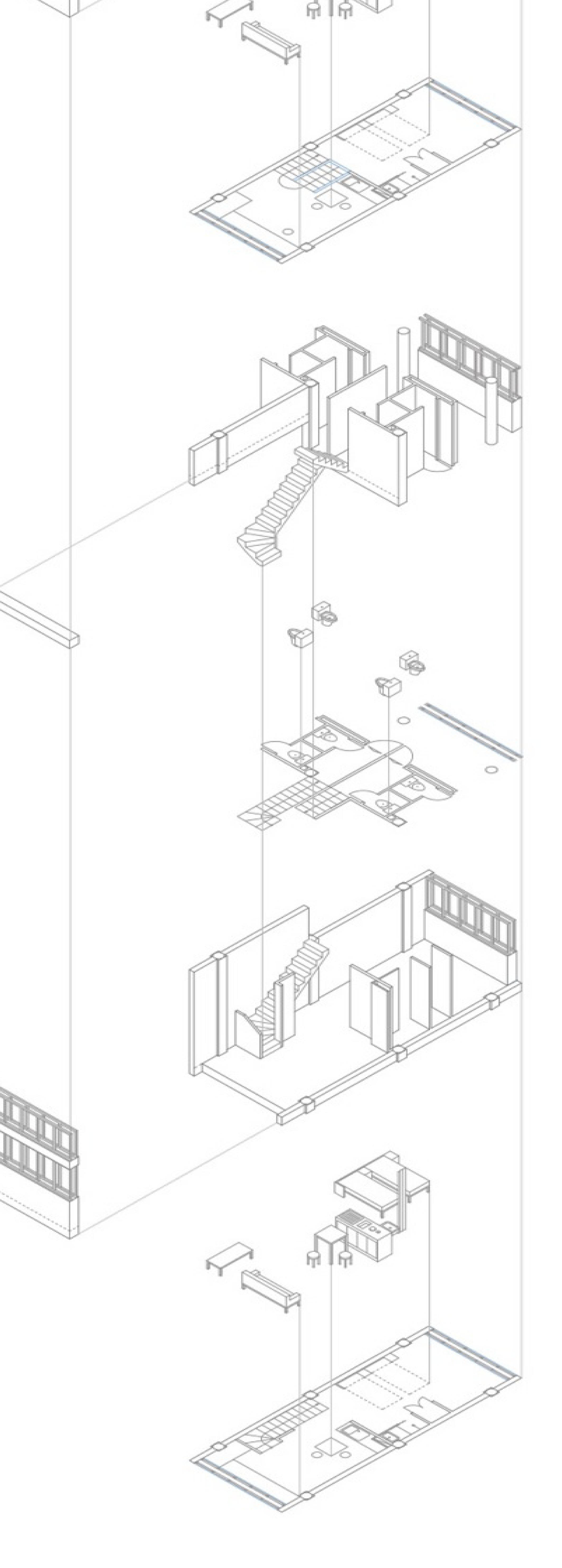
Staircases, elevators and lobbies stand as core features in every building of a dense urban area, regardless of the program. It is not only a circulation path, but also a social path.

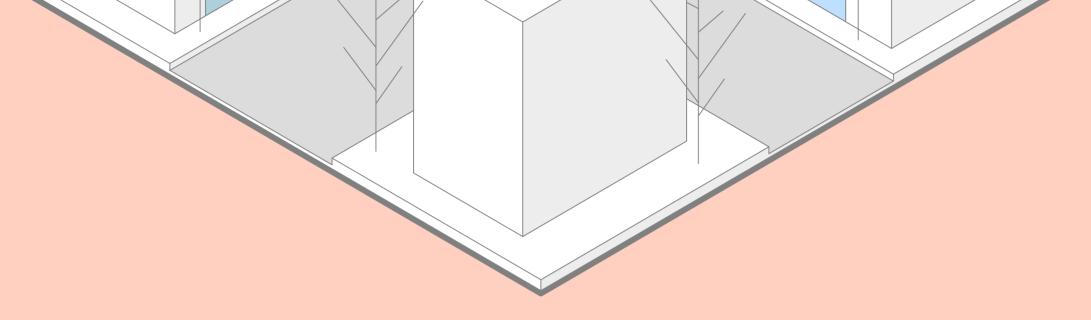
> Building common spaces can be considered as an extension of the street, or an informal public point of reunion between two strangers. In fact, inhabiting the staircase by adapting to it can theoretically be the maximized condensed typology for enhanced social interaction.

2

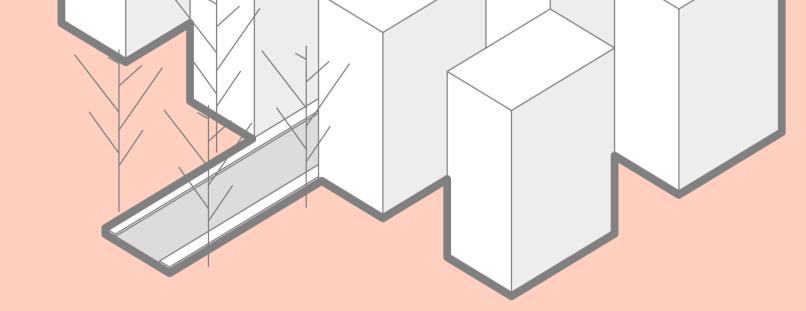
### MAKING SENSE OF NARKOMFIN

The social condenser marked the era of constructivism. Ginzburg says that it is a new architecture that would plan the total urban environment in such manner as to generate a new life.

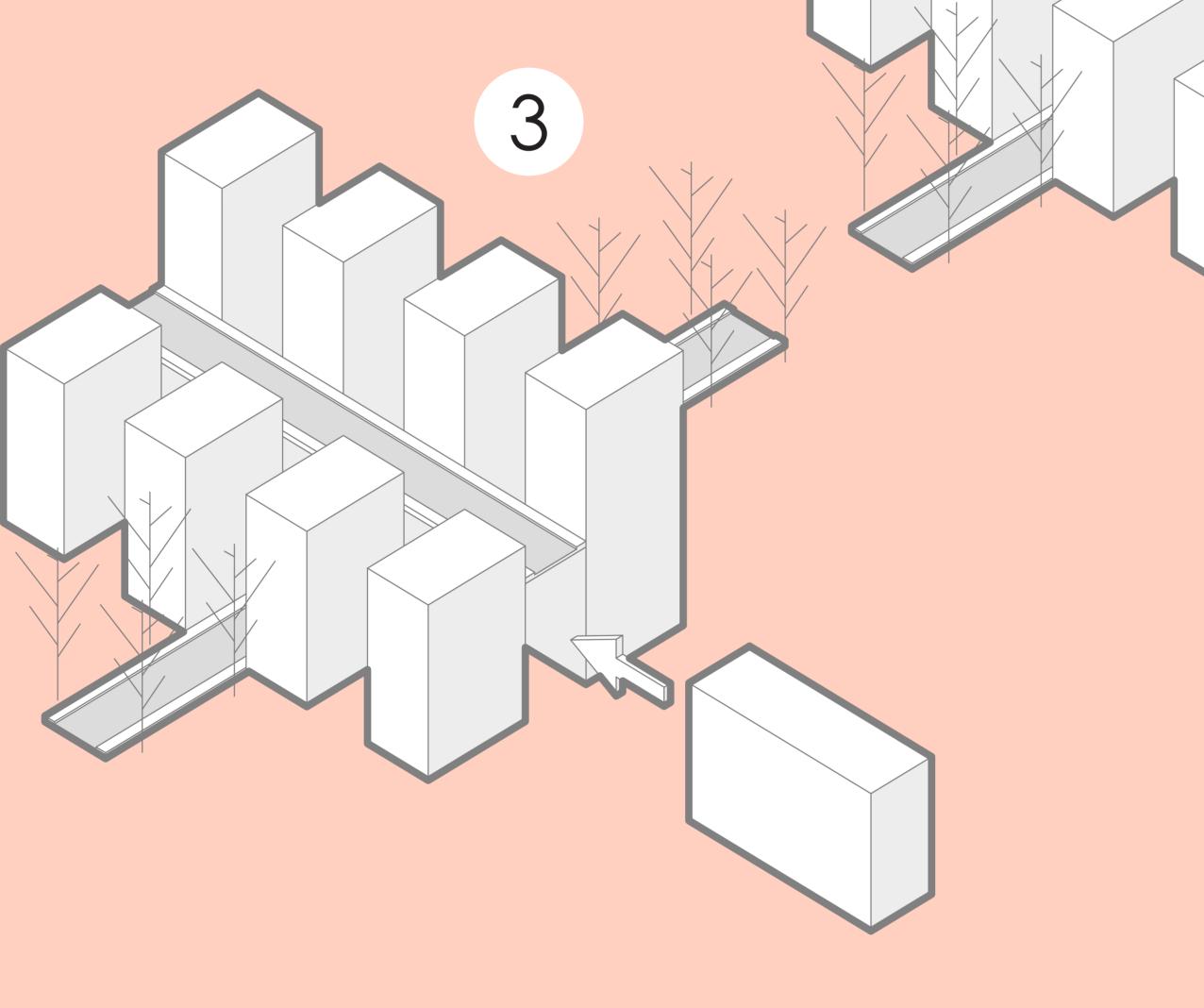




### CITY CONFIGURATION PROCESS DIAGRAM

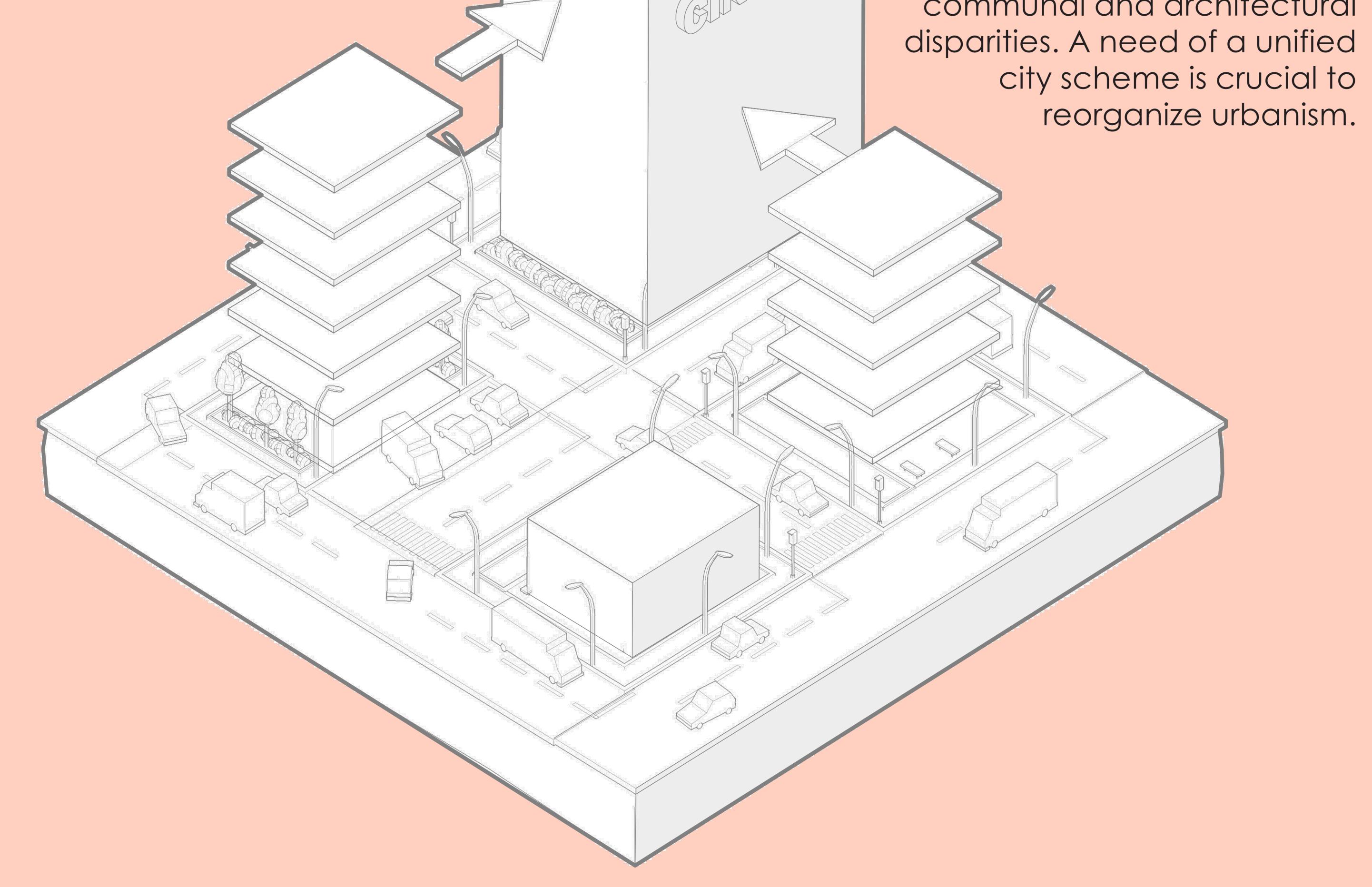


The project does not obstruct the built infrastructure or environment. It is rather a continuation of it. Elevated roads create horizontal circulation at heights, acting as common areas in buildings. Vertical and horizontal circulation interlock, generating a cyclical rather than a linear relationship of spaces and communities. Places grow out of the needs and actions of their formational communities, and in turn shape the way their communities behave and grow.



### **URBAN INCONGRUITY**

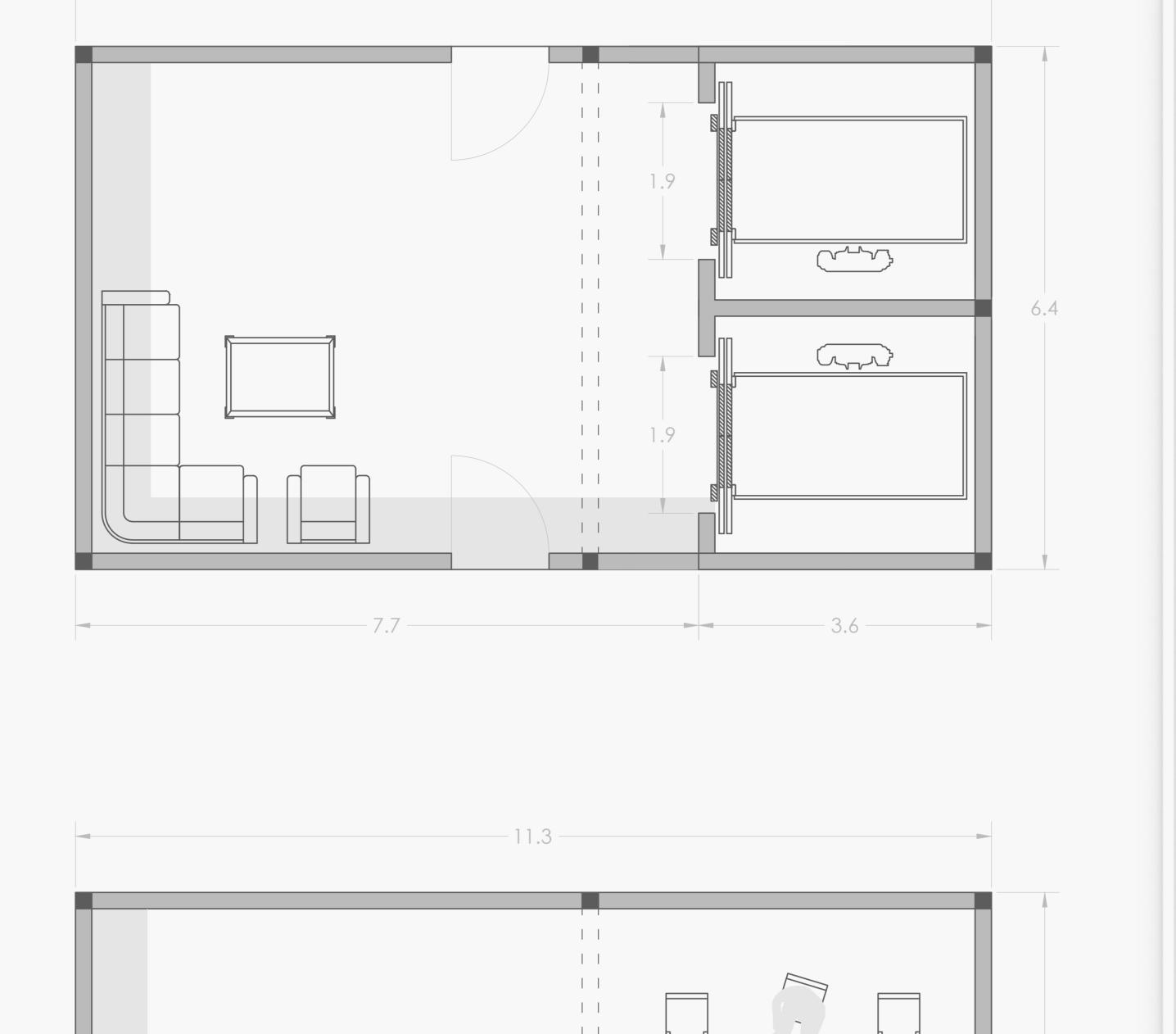
Monolithic buildings that need no sunlight or even daylight create an obstructive visual and environmental barrier to the residents. A lack of preconcieved urban planning in our cities today generates communal and architectural



# DRAWINGS AND MASTERPLAN

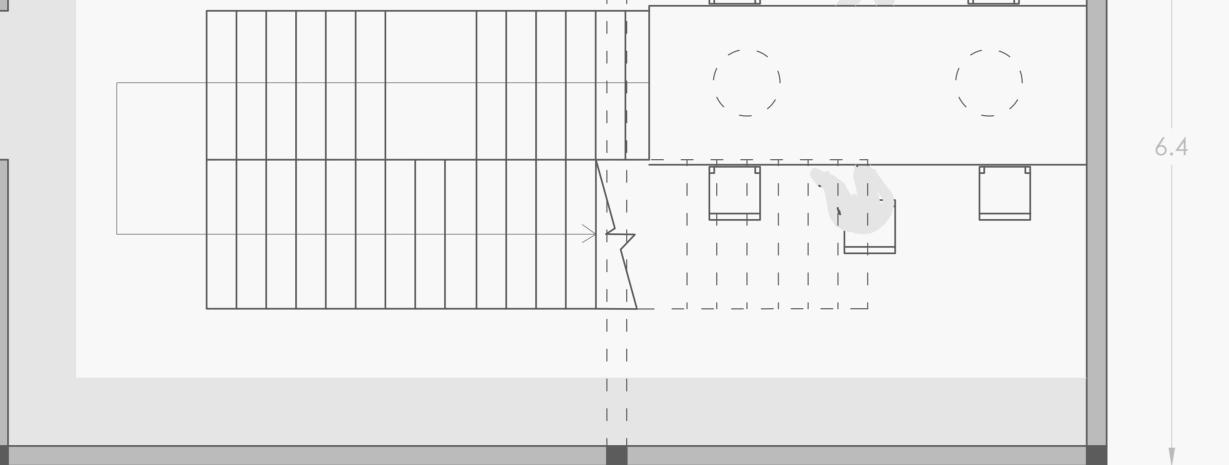
### ELEVATOR UNIT PLAN

TYPICAL UNIT PLAN



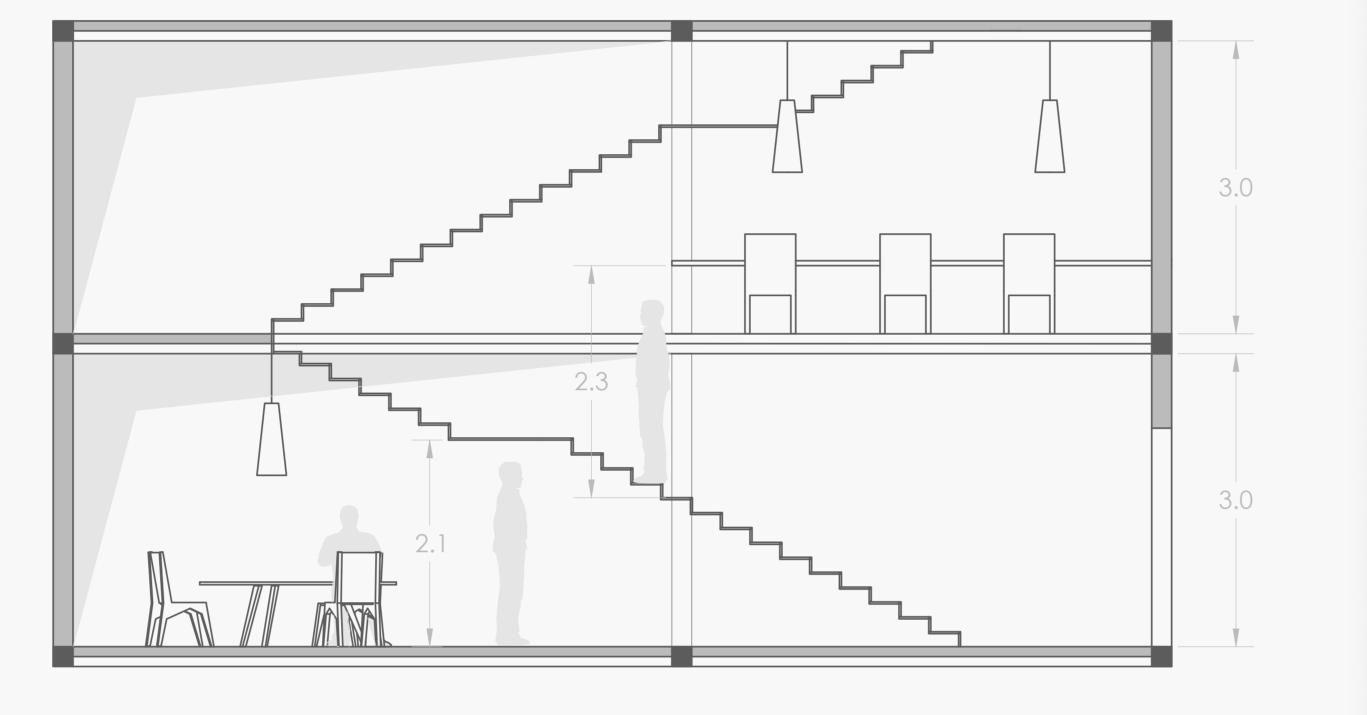
Vertical circulation through the city happens through elevators and stairs. Elevators are scattered between the buildings in an ireegular manner. Elevators create a direct and prolonged contact between strangers, familiarizing different communities.

Furniture of different programs are custom made to fit inside the units and ensure comfortable circulation. Residential apartments



#### may vary between two and four floors.

### TYPICAL UNIT SECTION

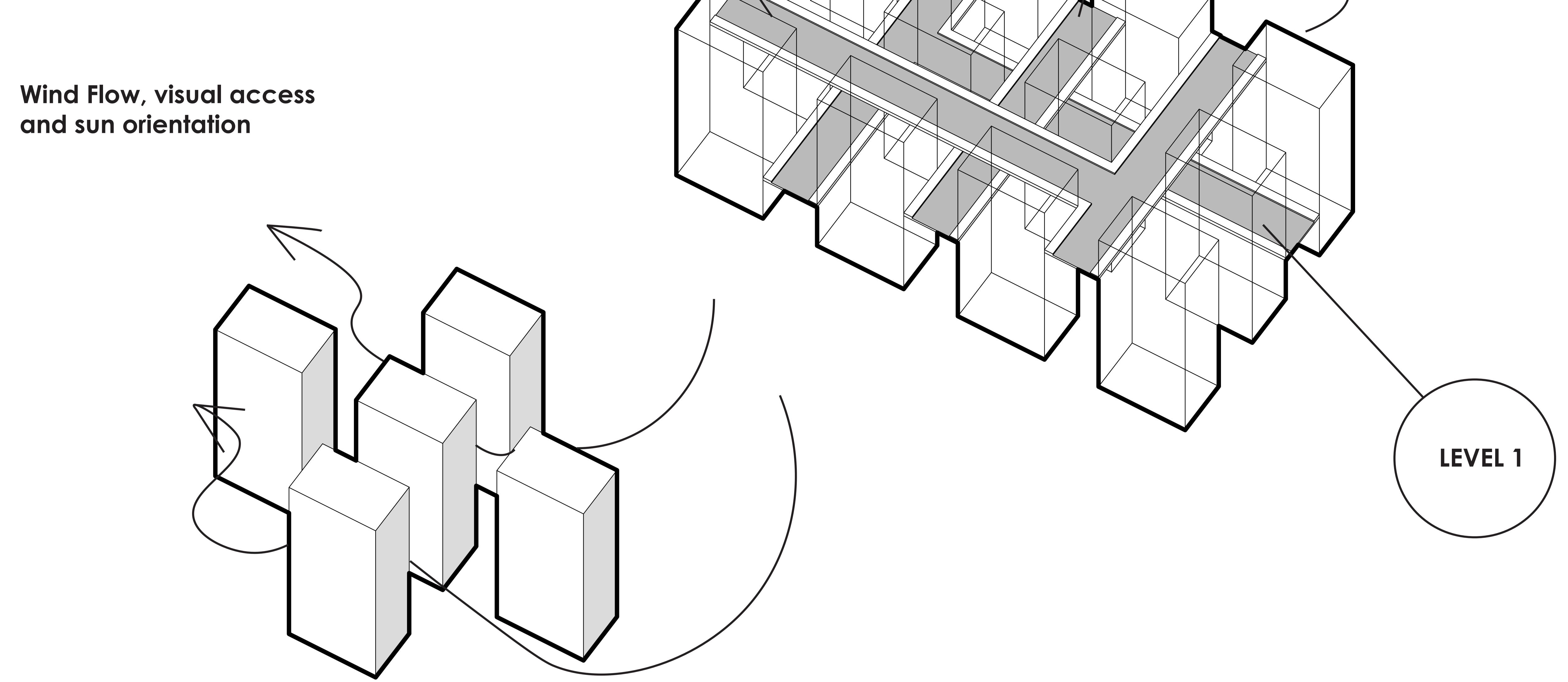


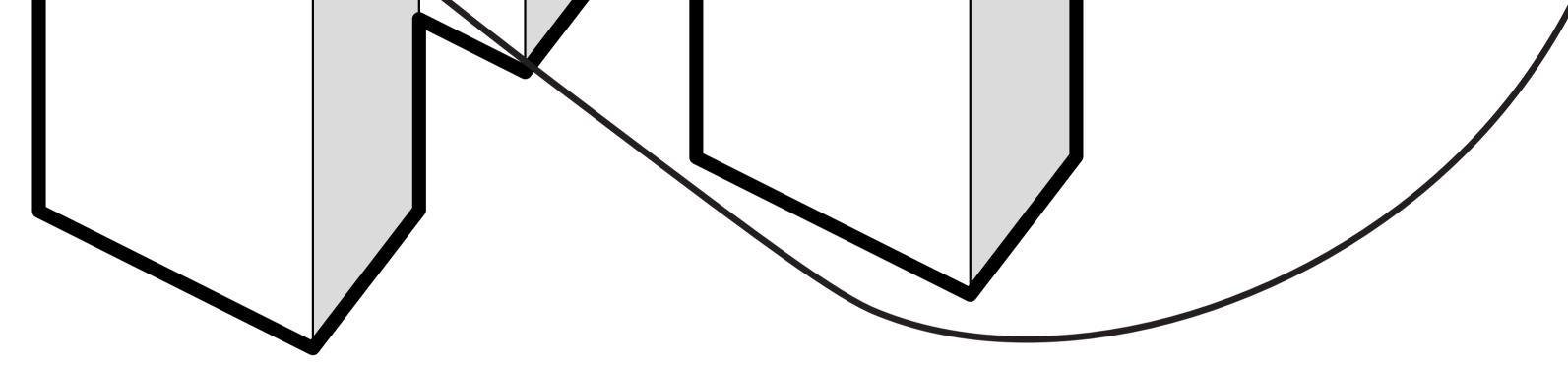
Circulation clearance is taken into account when customizing the furniture or setting the staircase. For example, the table profile above the stairs acts like half a doorway, and the staircase landing rises at a comfortable height to benefit from usable space under it.



# ENVIRONMENT AND PROGRAM

Wind Flow, visual access and sun orientation **SKY VIEW ABOVE ALL STREETS** LEVEL 3 LEVEL 2 infrastructure under suspended roads

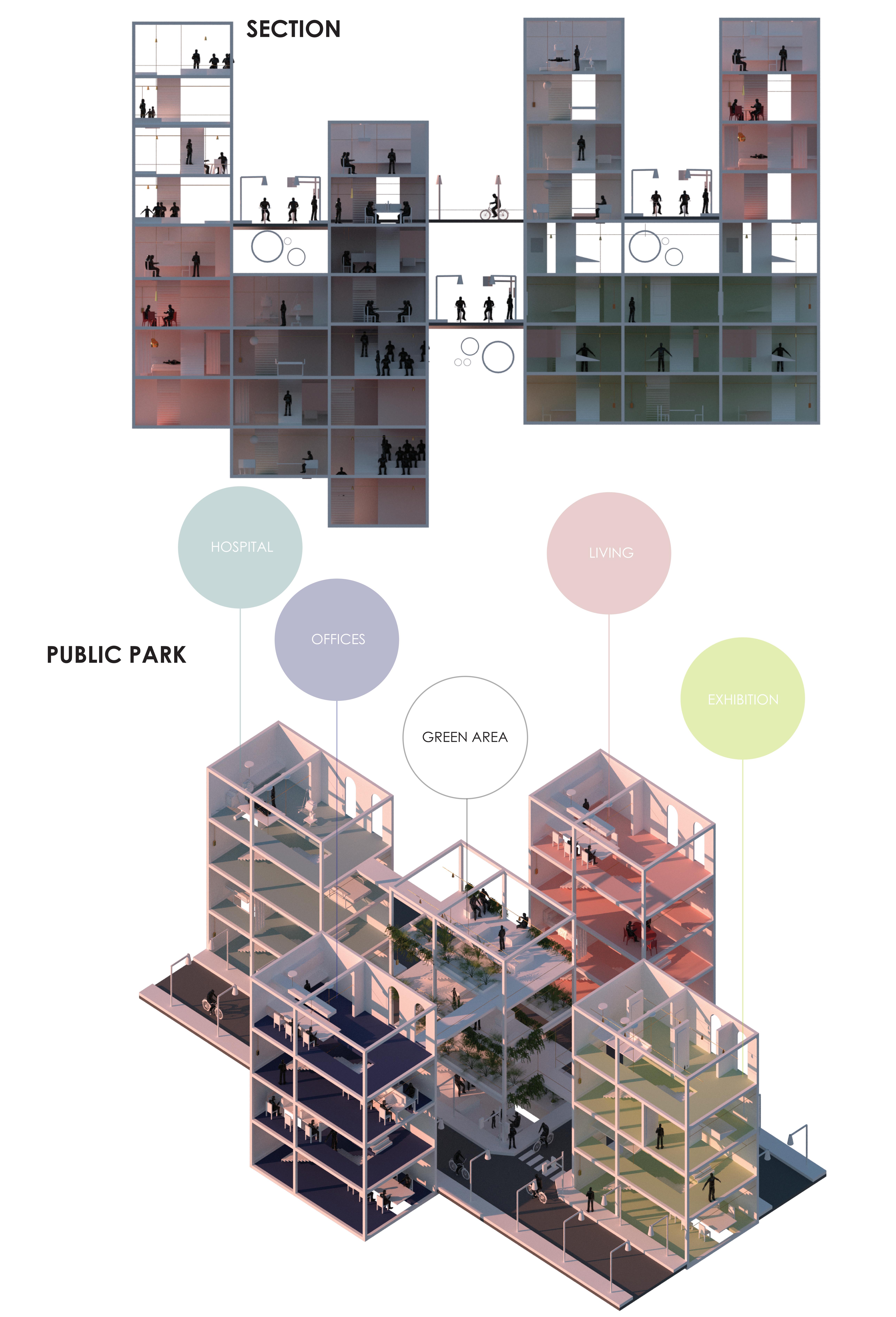




### PROGRAM AND SOCIAL SYMBIOSIS

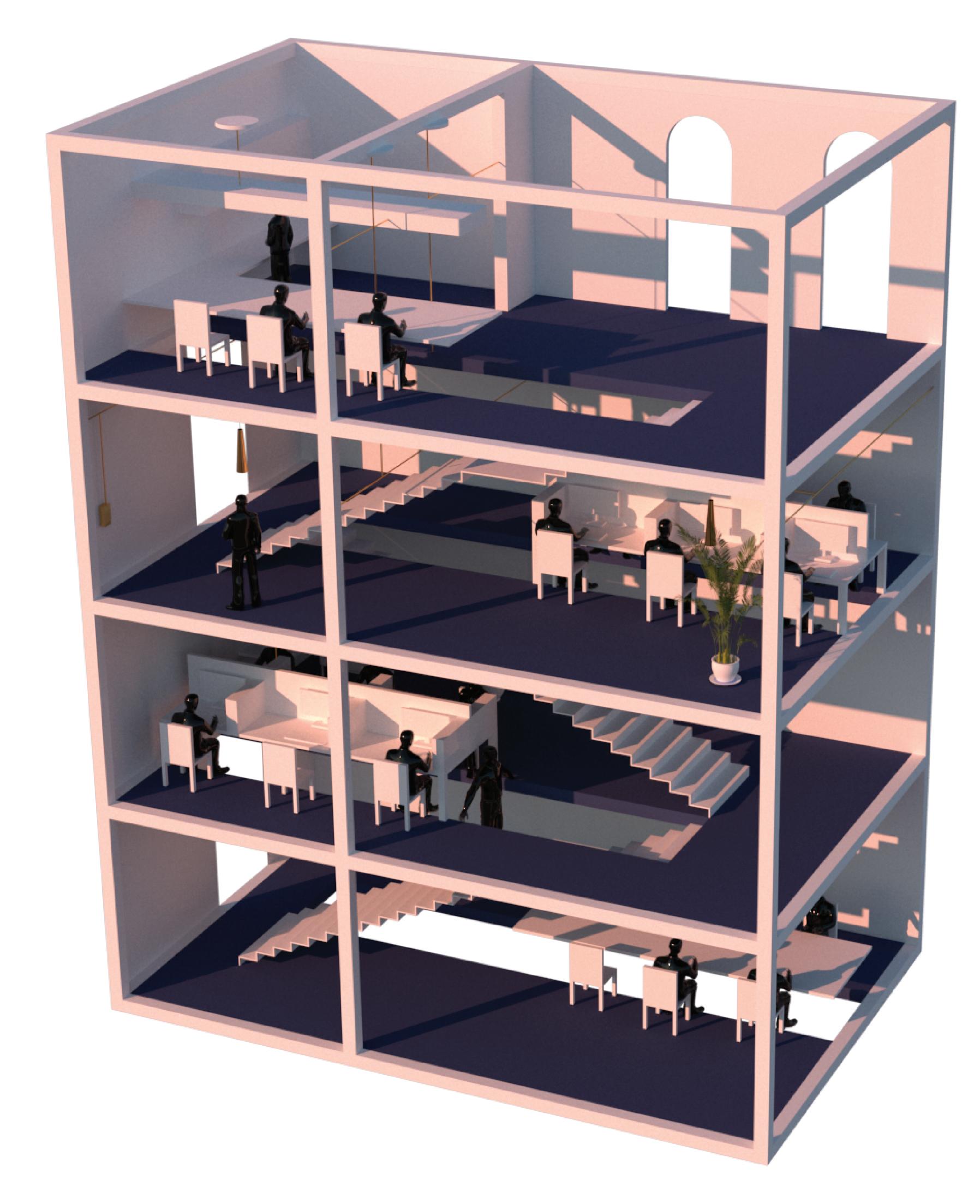


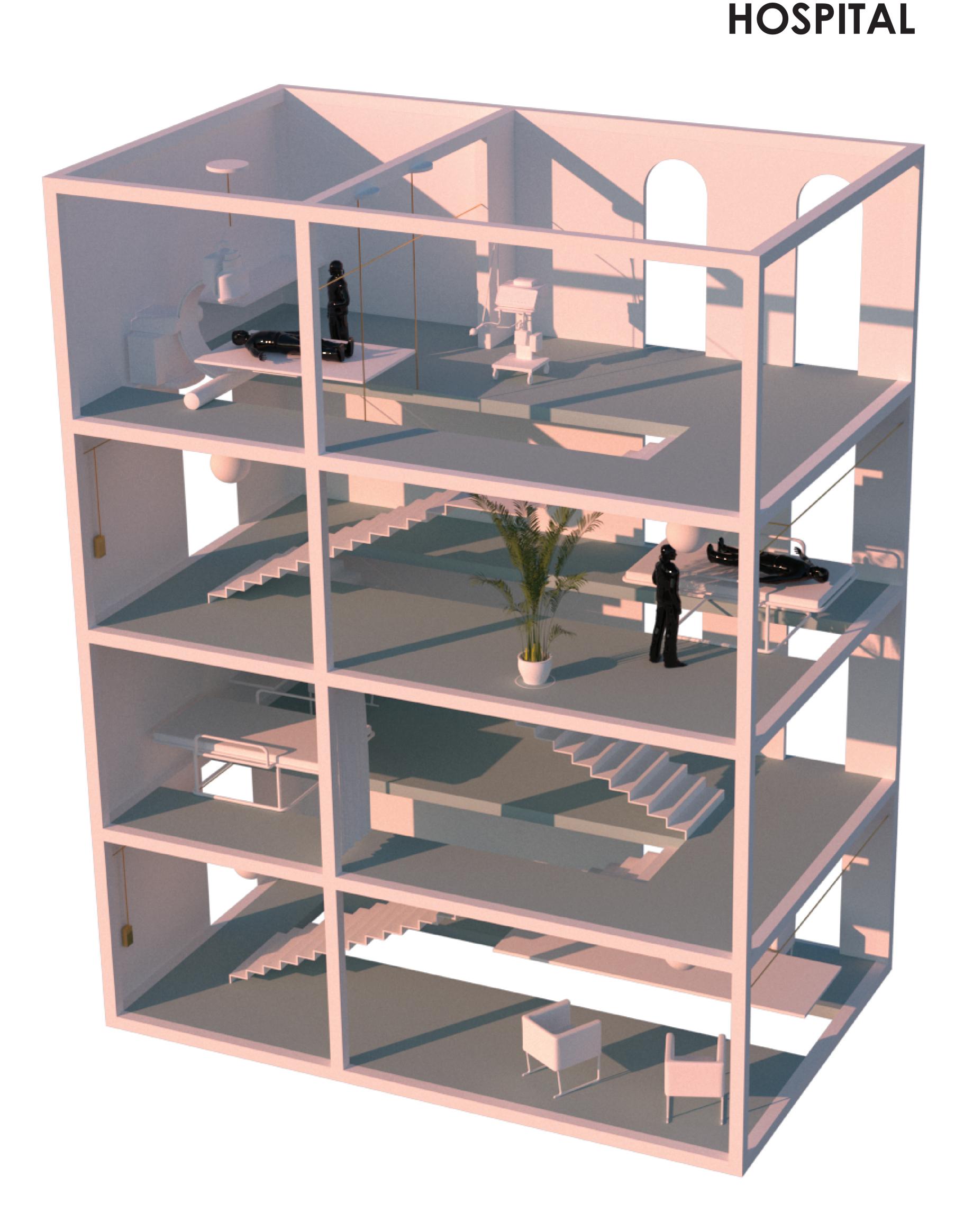






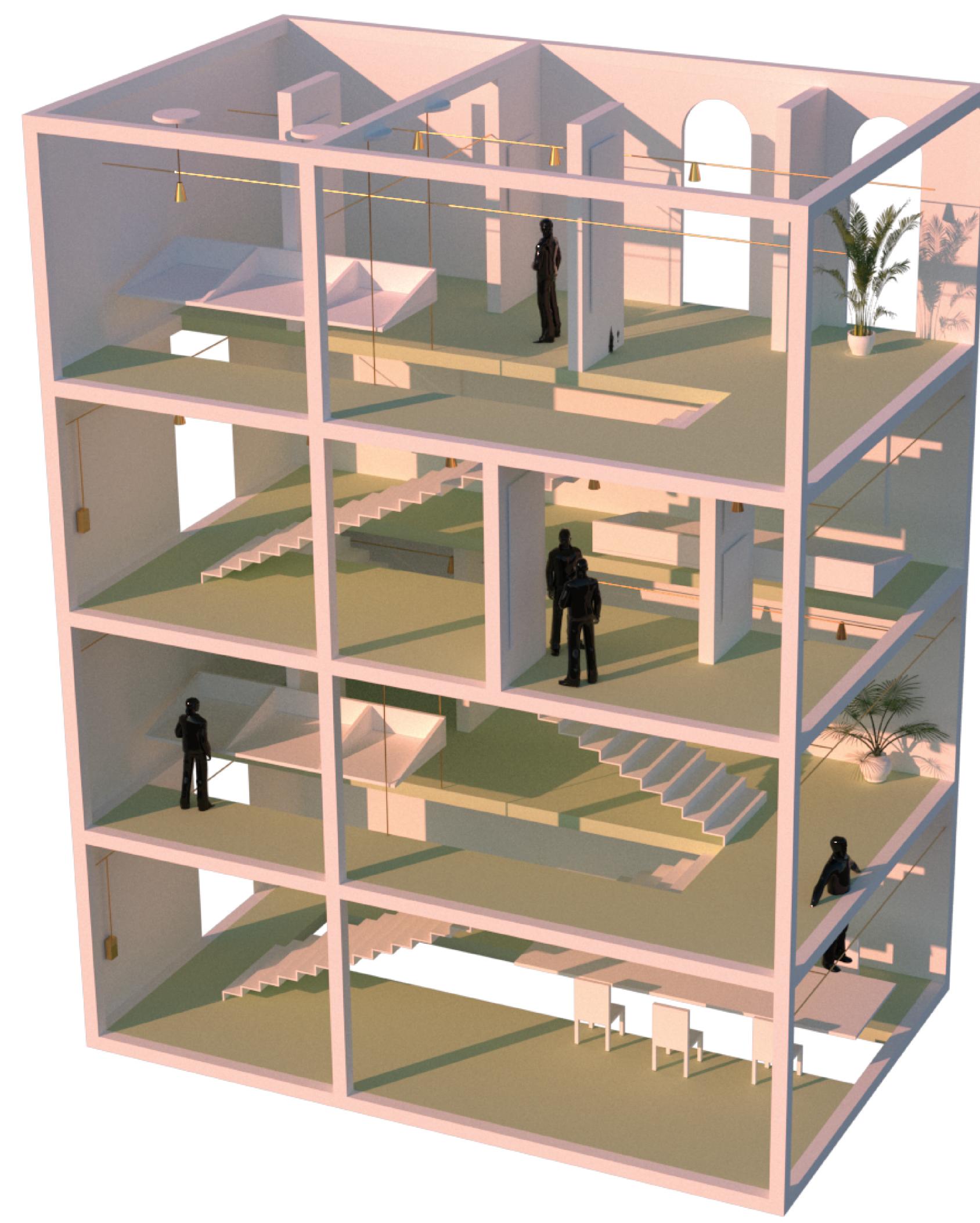
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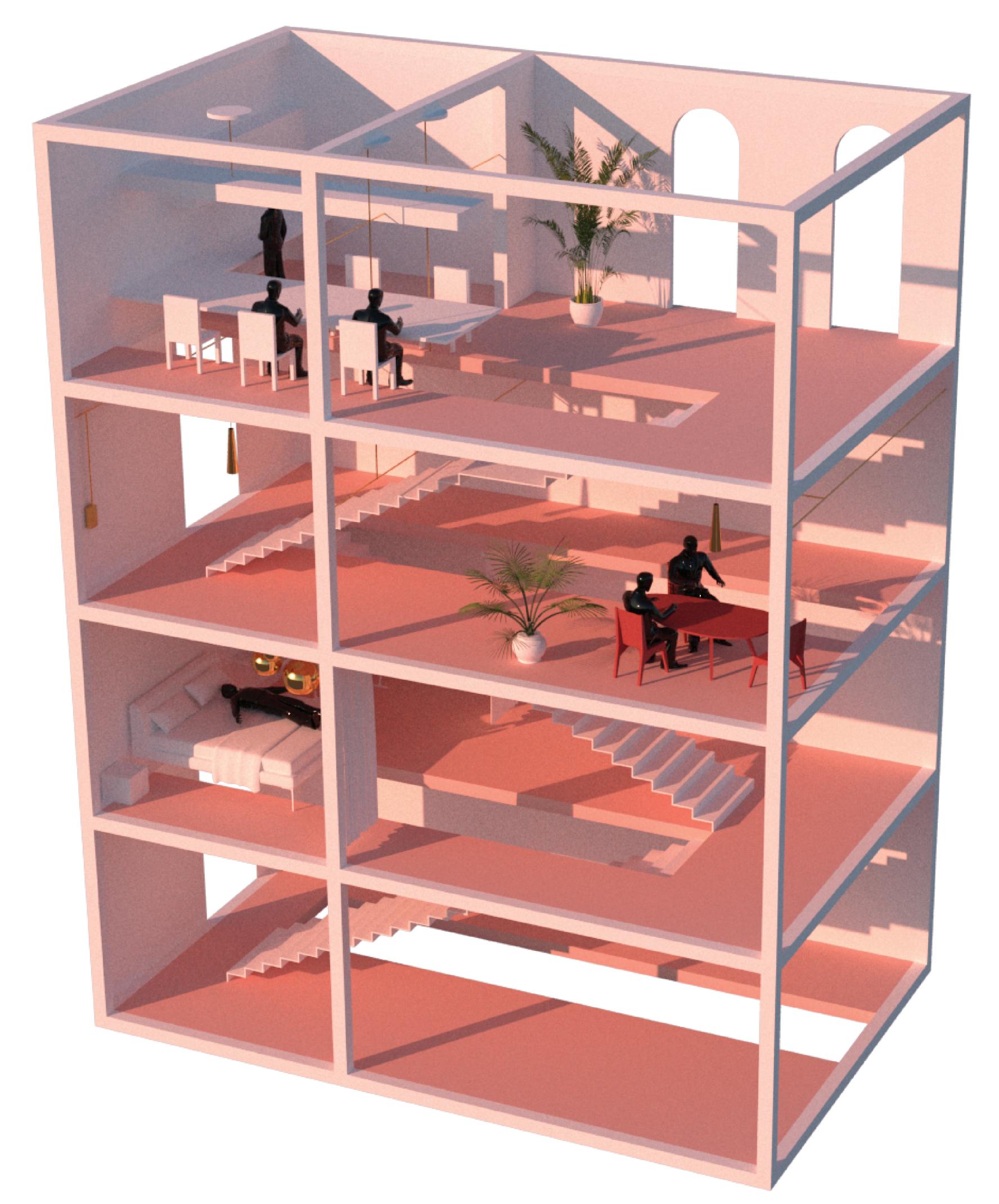












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