

# Essais

A Portfolio  
Columbia GSAPP  
2022

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Je veux qu'on me voit en ma façon simple,  
naturelle, et ordinaire, sans étude et  
artifice; car c'est moi que je peins...  
Je suis moi-même la matière de mon livre.

Essais (1595), Livre I  
Michel de Montaigne

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# L'habitude

## An Essay in Aiding Everyday Coviviality

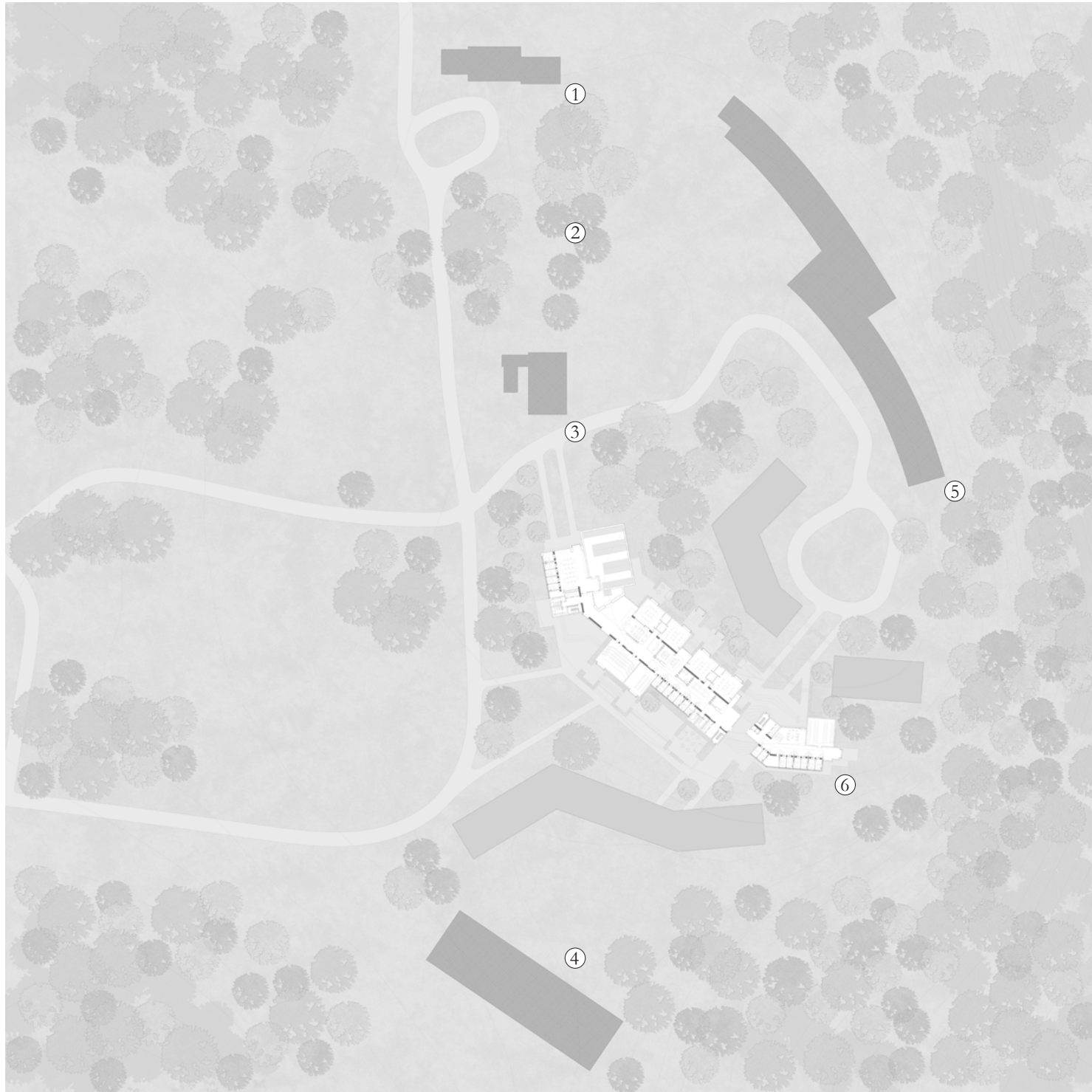
Advanced V  
Critic: Mark Rakatansky



1 Perspective Section  
Shown herein the layering of programming along the central spine: labs, break-out rooms, circulation, flex-space and offices.

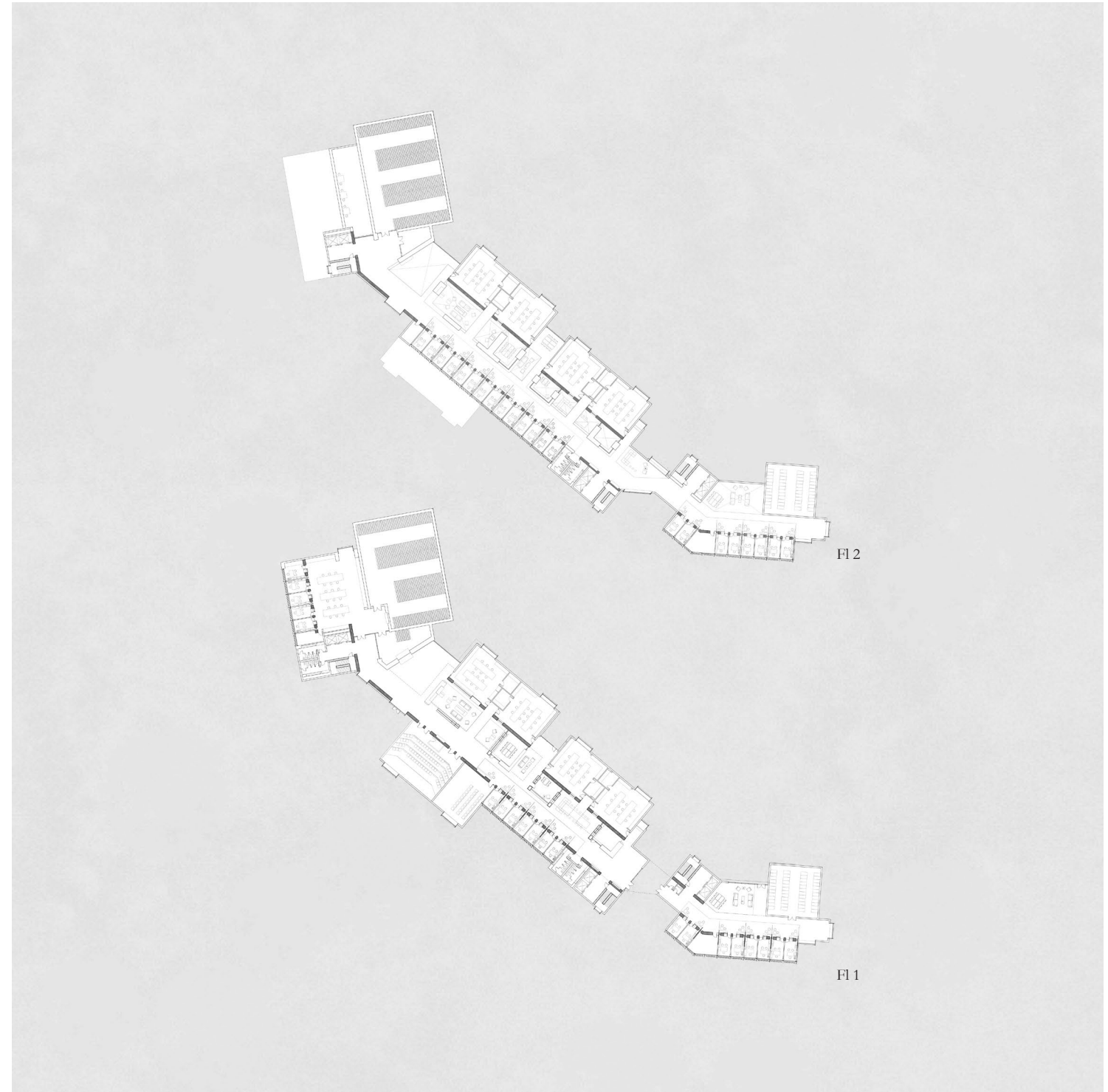
The central aim of the project for a new geophysics lab building at Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory is to develop an alternative to the double loaded corridor, an armature that reaps the organizational and social benefits of corridors—namely their ability to generate spontaneous, unplanned interactions—while simultaneously improving environmental performance. Within such an armature, social, energetic, and informational vectors gather and are channeled through the building, enhancing its functioning as the container of a lively community of knowledge. The creation of such a spine that can incorporate social and work space within it, rather than off of it, is contingent on the ability to light and ventilate these spaces passively. Skylights provide daylighting as well as natural ventilation. On the edges of the spine, rammed earth walls support CLT beams that span the wide central spine and provide thermal mass to help regulate temperatures. The spaces embedded within the spine range in size and function: from informal conference rooms, to small break out rooms for small groups or for intensive, individual work, and lounges.

The organization operative at small scales would also operate at the campus scale, if additional buildings were also designed. The central armature of the building follows the contours of the topography and points to the manor and tree ring lab and the river, while flanking buildings would connect to the Comer and Monell buildings. The negative space between these buildings would function in the same way as the central armature on the interior, creating layers of program, both interior and exterior, of varying formality and environmental control.



2 Site Plan:

- ① Lamont Manor
- ② Rose Garden
- ③ Tree Ring Laboratory
- ④ Garcy C. Comer Geochemistry Building
- ⑤ Proposed Geophysics Building
- ⑥ Monell Building



3 Floorplans of proposed Geophysics Building



4 View of Central Spine  
Offices spill out onto porch-like spaces with movable partitions in the form of pocket doors that allow portions of the 15 foot wide space to be cordoned off for informal, collaborative work or for waiting for a professor or for casual socializing in close proximity to individual offices.



5 Longitudinal Jogging Section

- ① Earth Core Repository
- ② Core Repository Showing Room
- ③ Vestibule
- ④ Great Hall
- ⑤ Break-out Rooms
- ⑥ Informal conference within armature
- ⑦ The armature bridges over
- ⑧ Offices



6 View of Great Hall

As a public facing space, the great hall is one of the chief places where Lamont Doherty is on display: visual connections are thus made between the spine, the labs and the historic objects that convey the groundbreaking work conducted within the institution's history.





7 Exterior View

The same principles applied on the interior armature are applied in the exterior, where the landscape flanking the building is also embedded with collaborative and social spaces usable during the summer months.

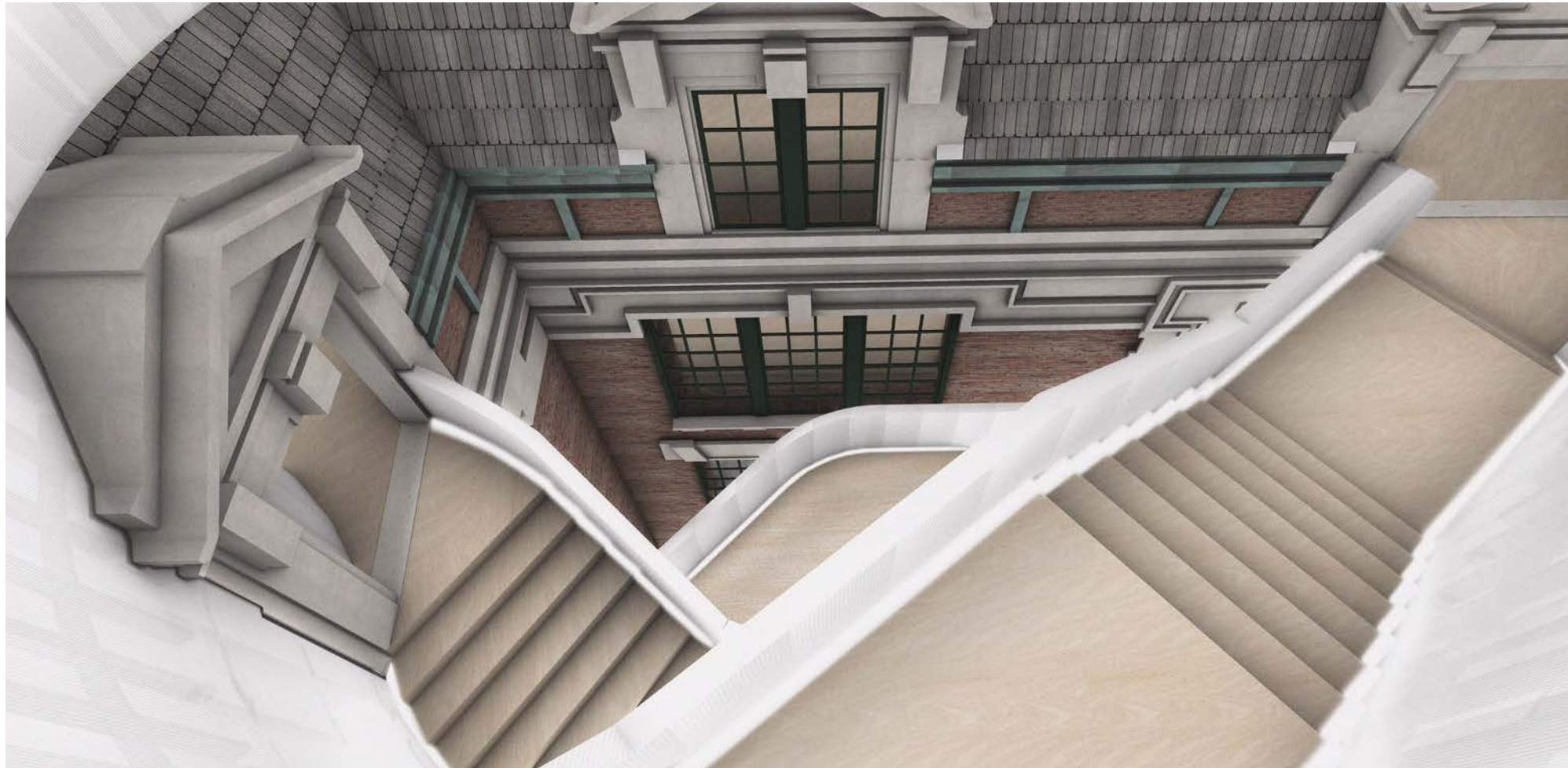
# PS 64

## An Essay in Preservation

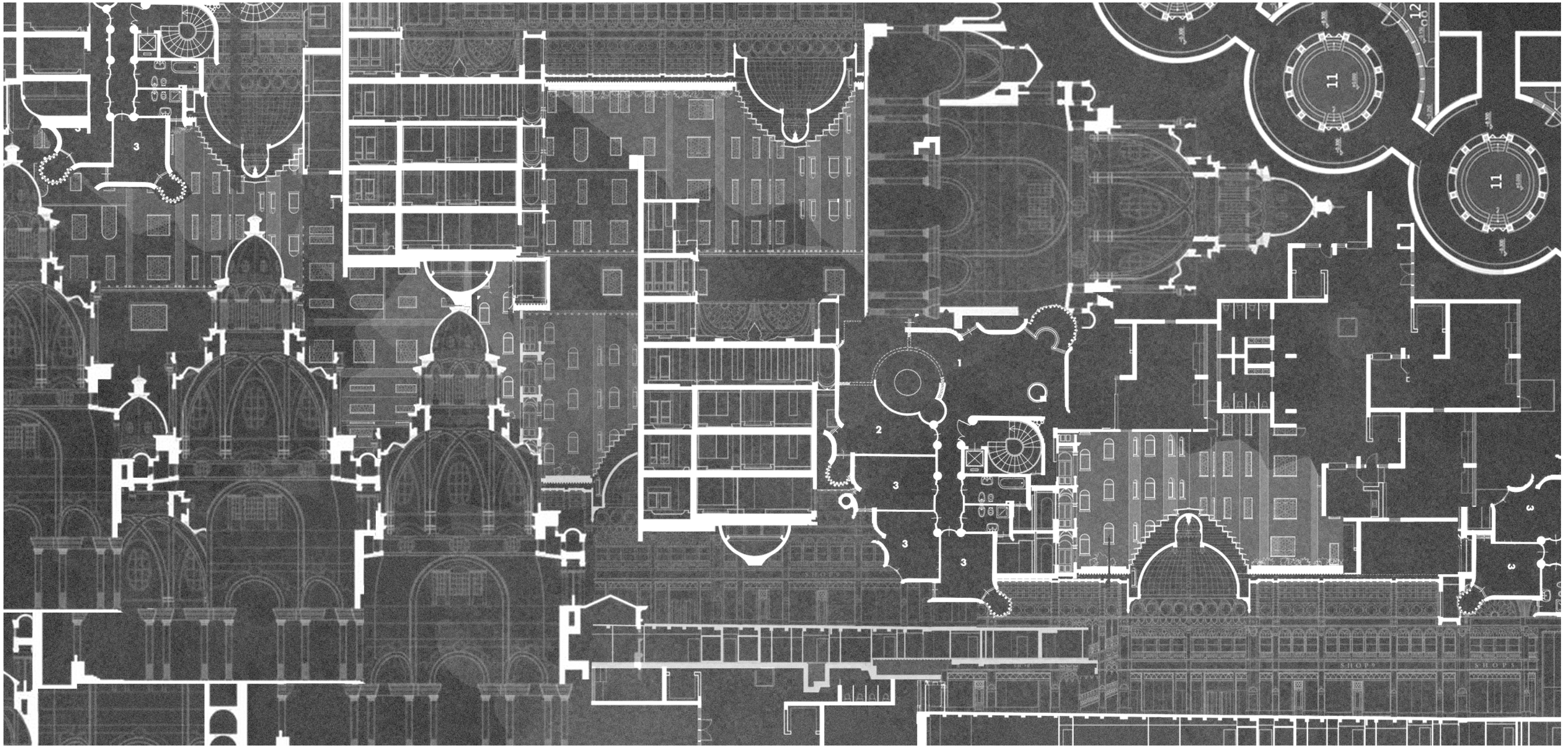
Core II  
Critic: Emmett Zeifman

Once a community hub, for the past twenty years former ps 64 has been in impasse, as community members continue to resist virtually all efforts by the owner to develop the property. Insofar as the building is still, after decades of vacancy, a powerful symbol of the neighborhood's history of community activism, demolishing the building would signify an overt erasure of that history. The overall strategy toward the project therefore involves preserving as much of the building as possible, intervening in the physical fabric of the facades with a light touch, even when overall changes are significant. The new addition is conceived of as a continuous surface that weaves through the existing building, extending across the facade of the school and becoming a quasi-autonomous form on the exterior, though woven into and partially supported by the existing building. The building, as reconfigured by the addition, would once again be a community center and would preserve the good qualities of Progressive-era classrooms, while still creating flexible spaces amenable to contemporary pedagogical practice. Given the site's history of activism, the project was informed by an emerging trend in early-childcare called radical childcare, in which activism and childcare are integrated in order to allow young parents to remain politically active and to reconceptualize childcare, which has traditionally been private and domestic, into a community-based, politically engaged practice.

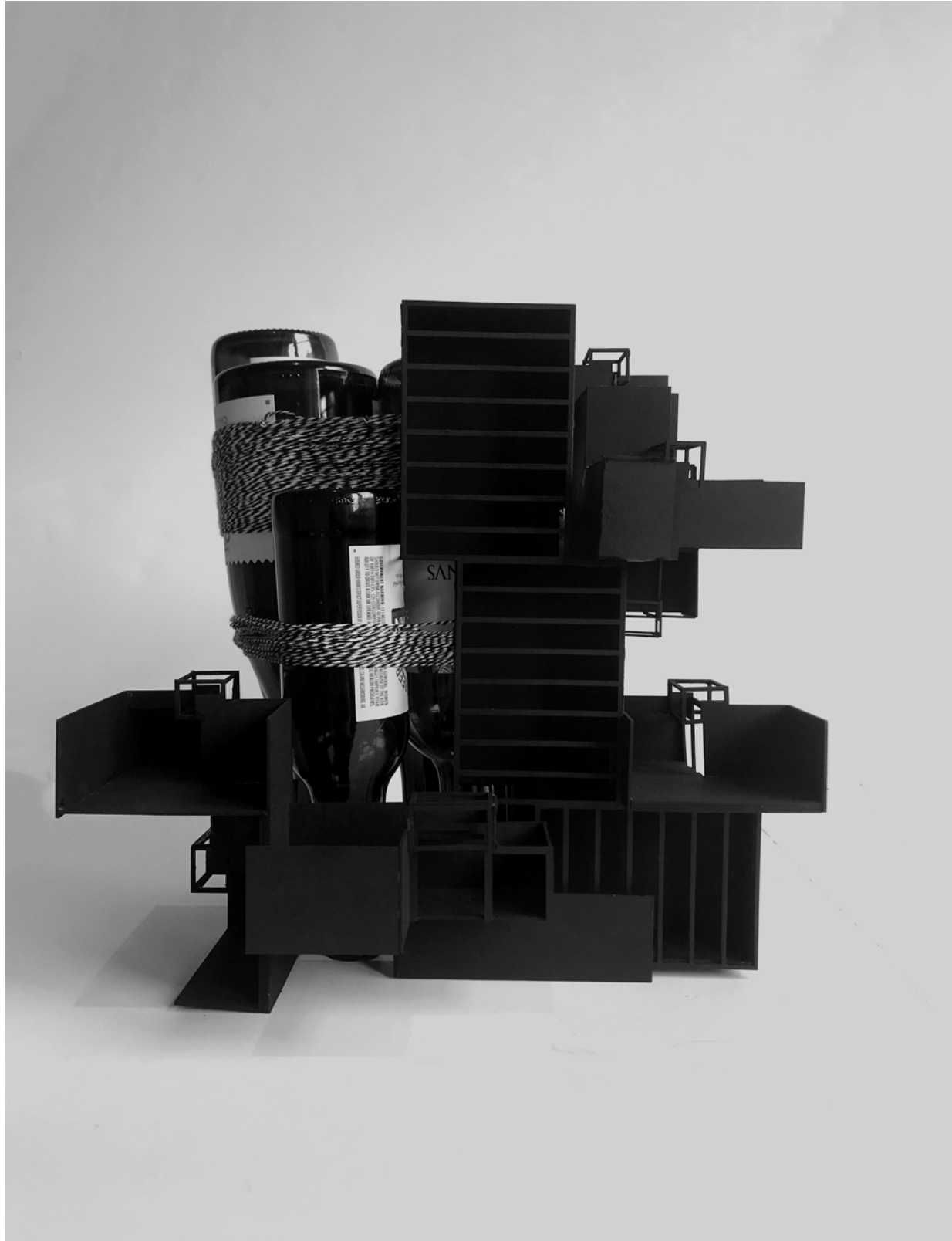
This studio's approach to designing a school consisted of deploying readymades as a means of generating architecture. The studio began by taking readymade objects and recombining them with parts of models. In conjunction with these physical models, the studio produced collages using found plans and sections. Gradually, the studio transitioned from using exclusively readymade plans and sections to drafting our own drawings and producing our own models and transforming them through iteration.



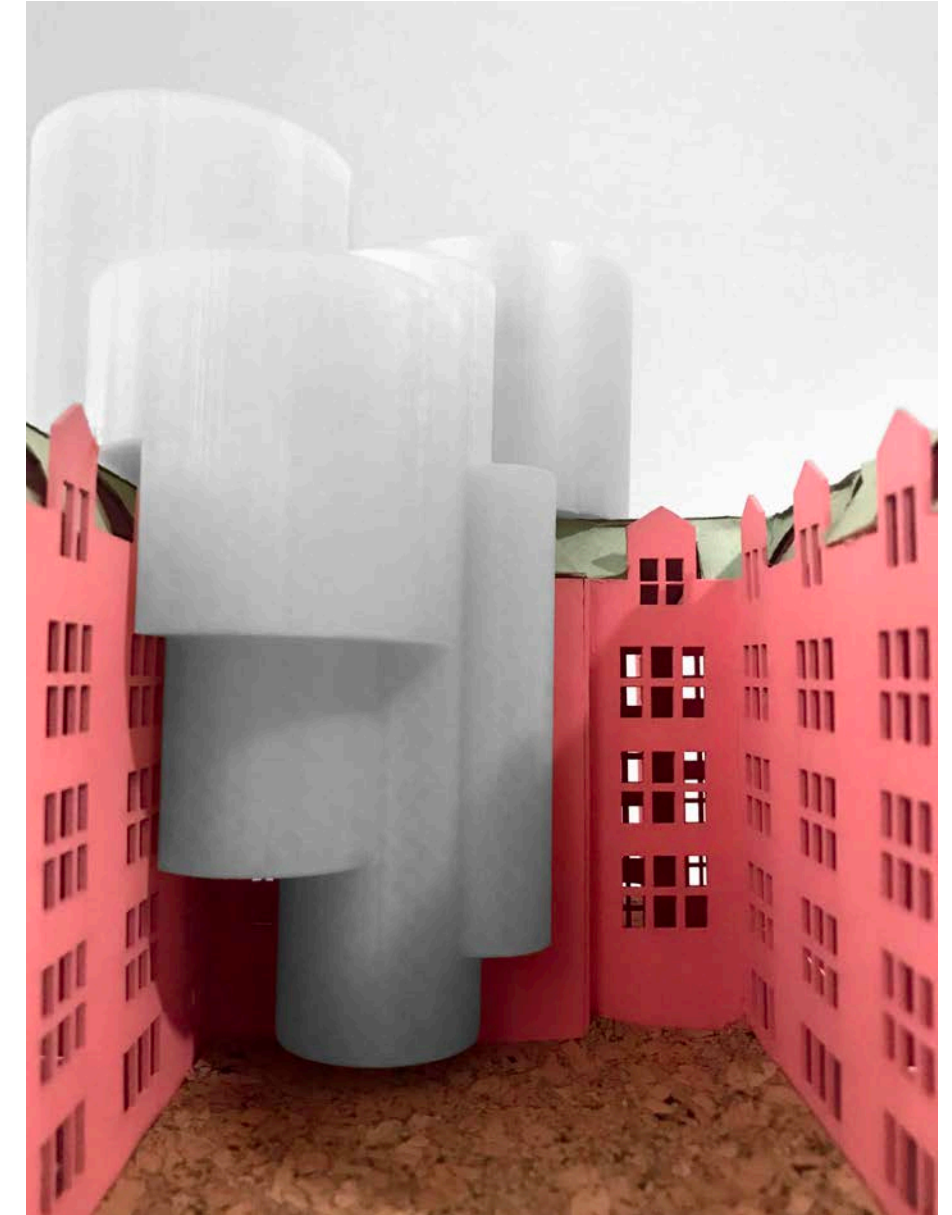
1 View of Interior  
The new stair as seen from the top floor. The stair weaves in and out of the old building and becomes the heart of the school; interspersed in the landings are spaces for spontaneous gathering.



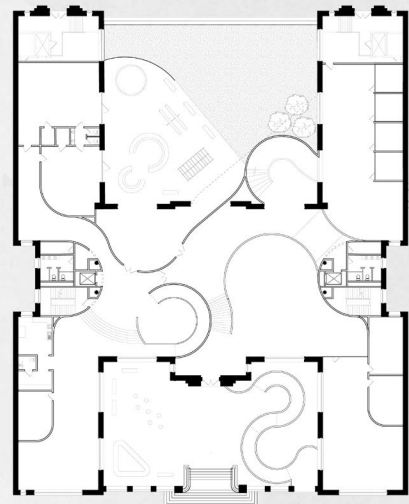
2 Collage—Formal Exploration  
Taking ready-made plans and sections and collaging them together generated initial formal concepts: the project would thenceforth be concerned with mediating curving and rectilinear forms.



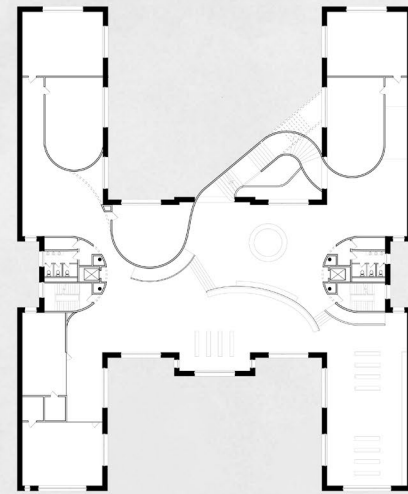
3 Exploratory Model Photograph  
Exploratory model made with fragments of precedent model and wine bottles.



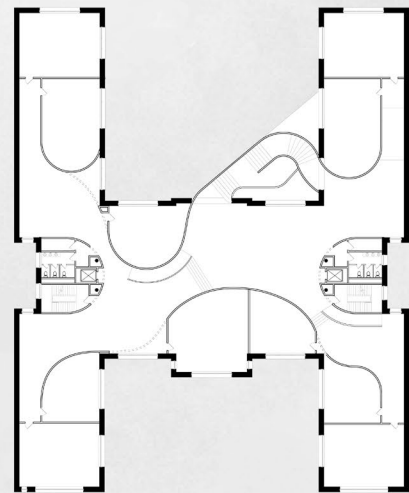
4 Midterm Model Photograph  
Development of spatial strategies based on earlier explorations in model, plan and section.



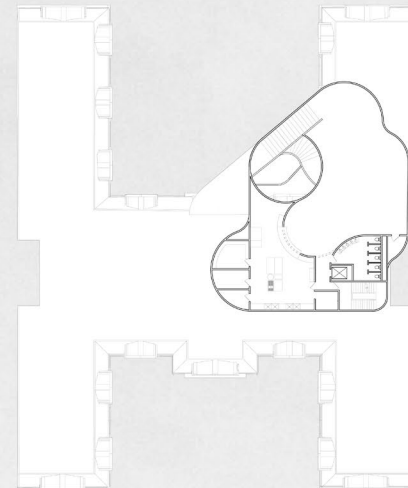
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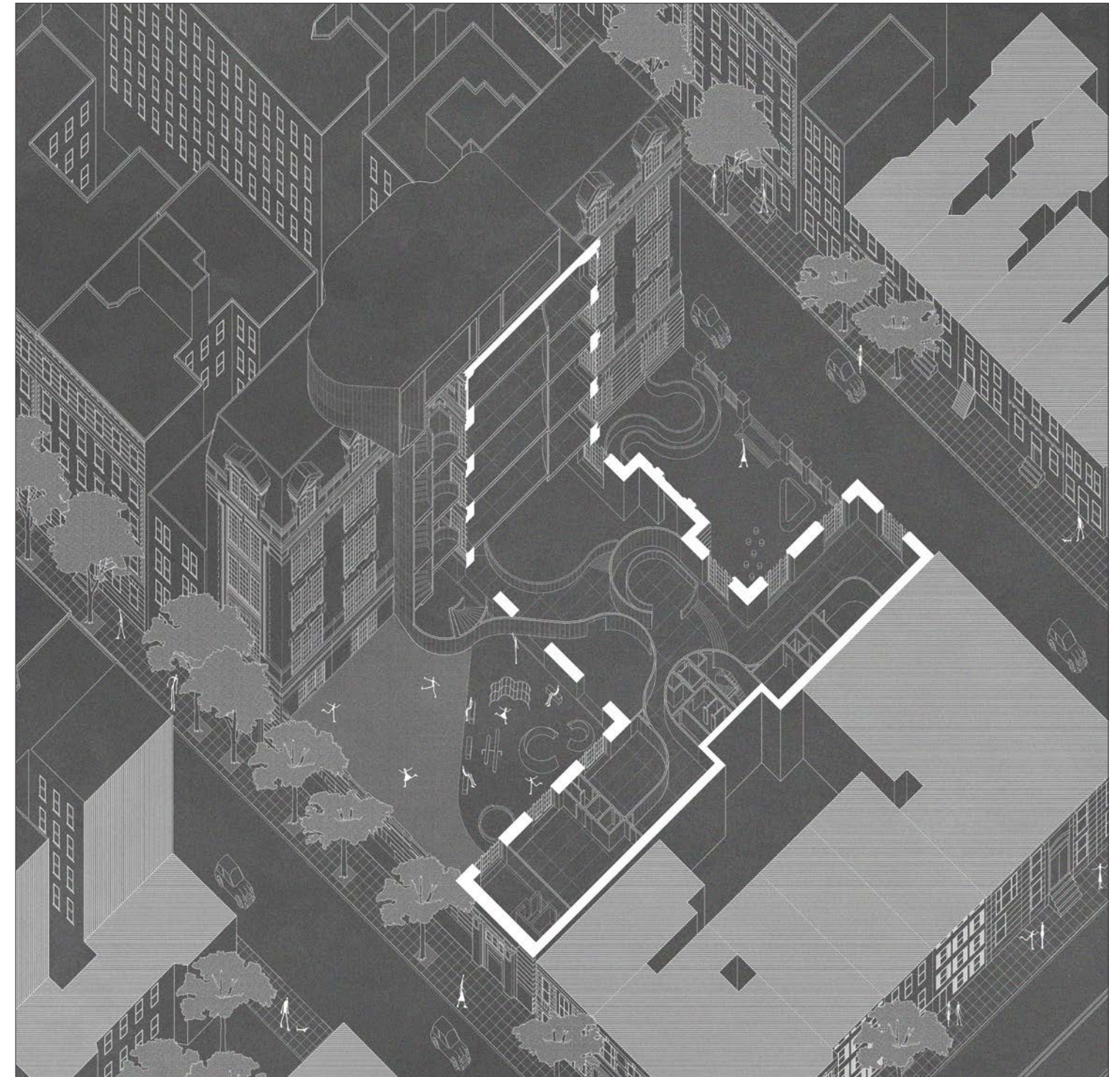
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F1 2-4



F16



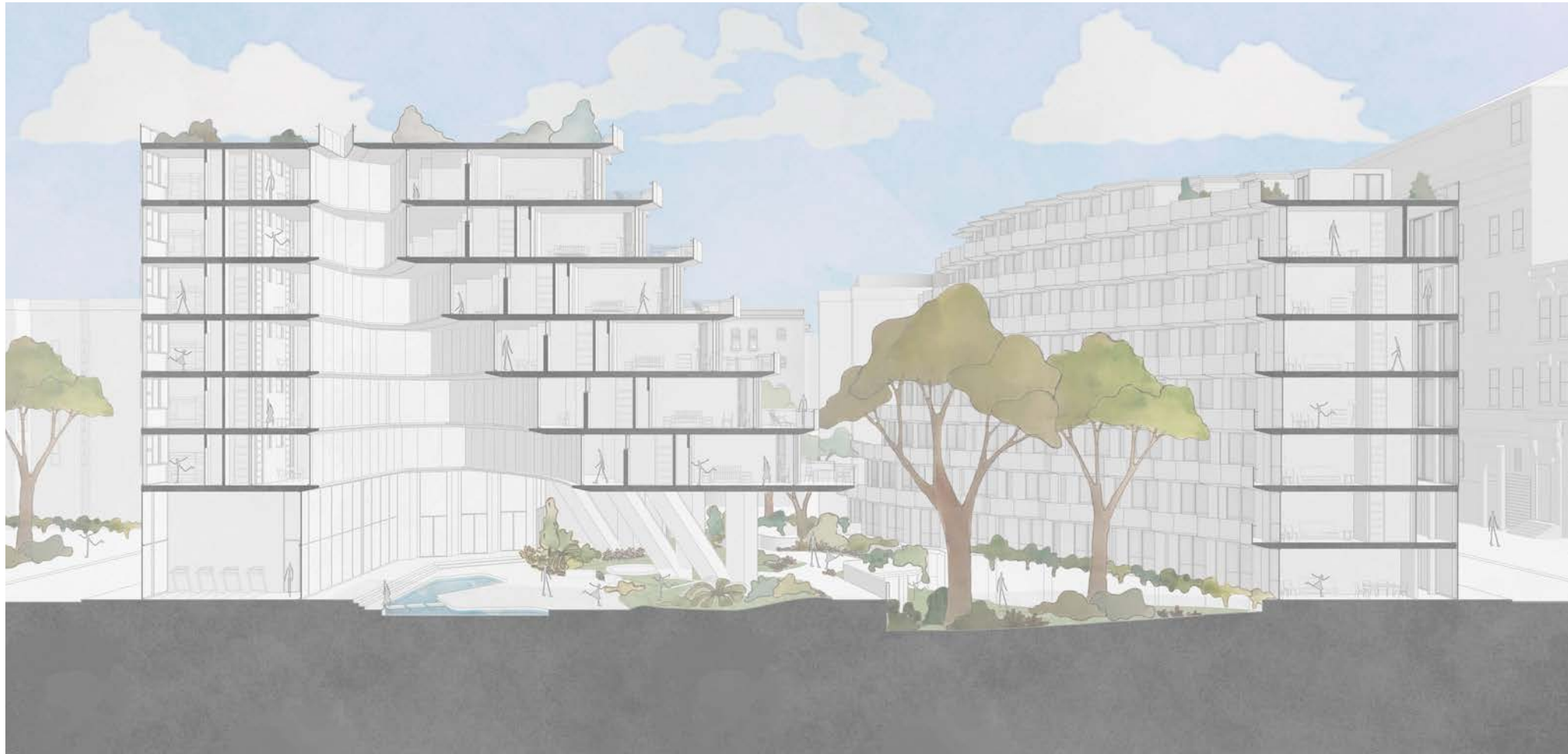


7-8 Interior Views of Stairs

# Carve

## An Essay in Urbanity

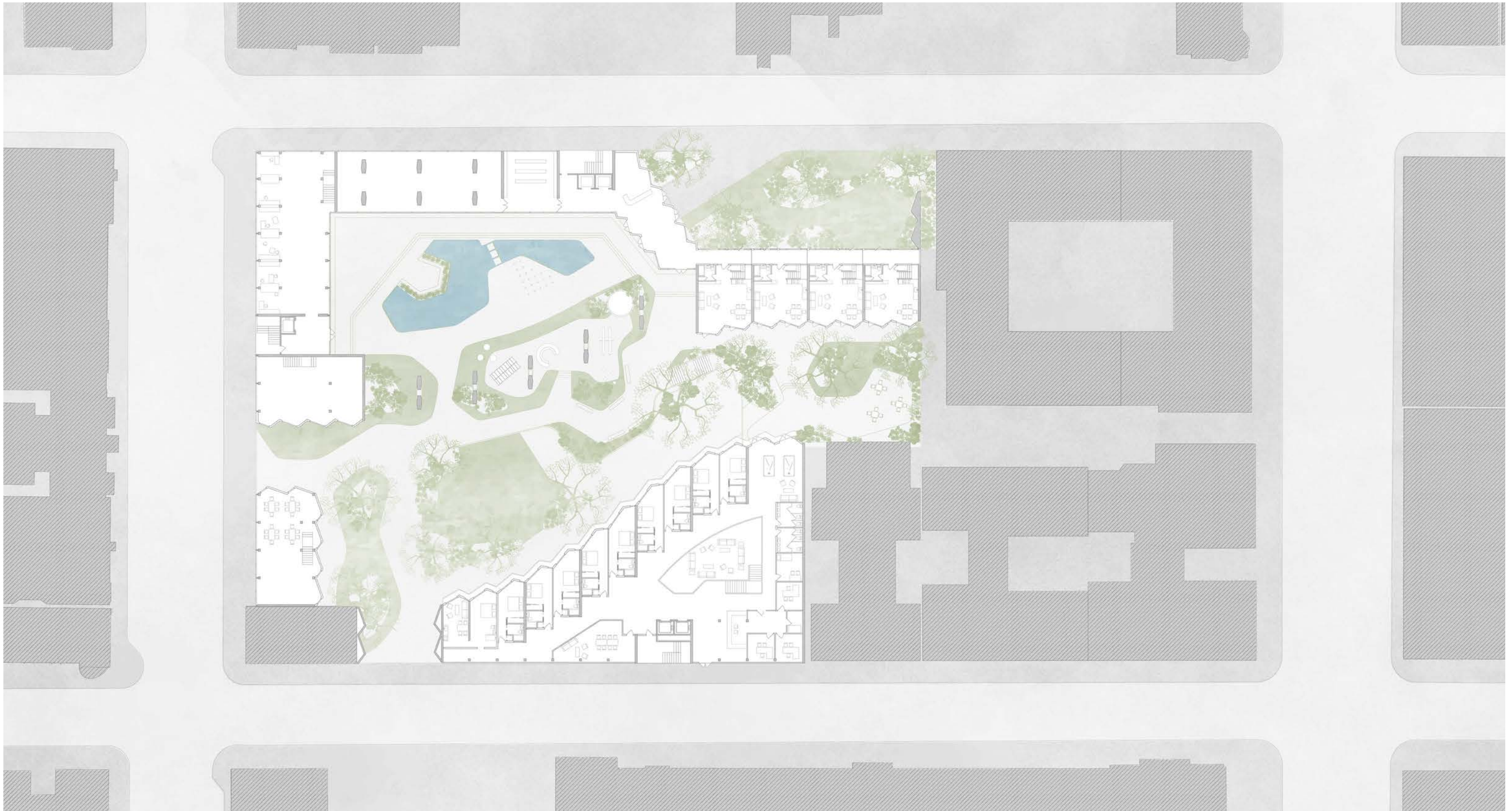
Core III  
Studio Partner: Zak Meghrouni-Brown  
Critic: Erica Goetz



1 Perspective section  
Shown is the public space in the interior of the lot and the northern bar's central courtyard. Floating above this public space in the interior of the lot are the units themselves, which are suspended between the urban-scaled void and atrium spaces within the building.

The Melrose Carve introduces a sculptural carve into the fabric of the city block that mediates between the domestic and urban scales by inviting the neighborhood into the park and performance venues at the heart of the building. The project contends that the space of air can not only be shaped in a way that provides fresh air and light, but it can also become a medium to enhance the relationship between residents, their neighbors, and the city.

The massing strategy for the project offers an alternative to the adhoc collection of generally unusable, small, unpleasant light wells and air shafts in the interior of lots resulting from speculative development, constrained by laws that govern access to light and air. In comparison to this jumble of voids, the streetfacing facades generally have the best light and air, ensured by the application of setbacks based on the sky exposure plane. As a key massing principle, the sky exposure plane was applied in reverse, carving a light-filled void in the interior of the lot. The result is a reciprocating row of undulating, stacked bars that carve out the main voids of the building, creating atrium spaces for each half of the project and the central carve of the public park—a terraced valley screened by a contextually scaled streetwall on the periphery.



2 Ground floorplan





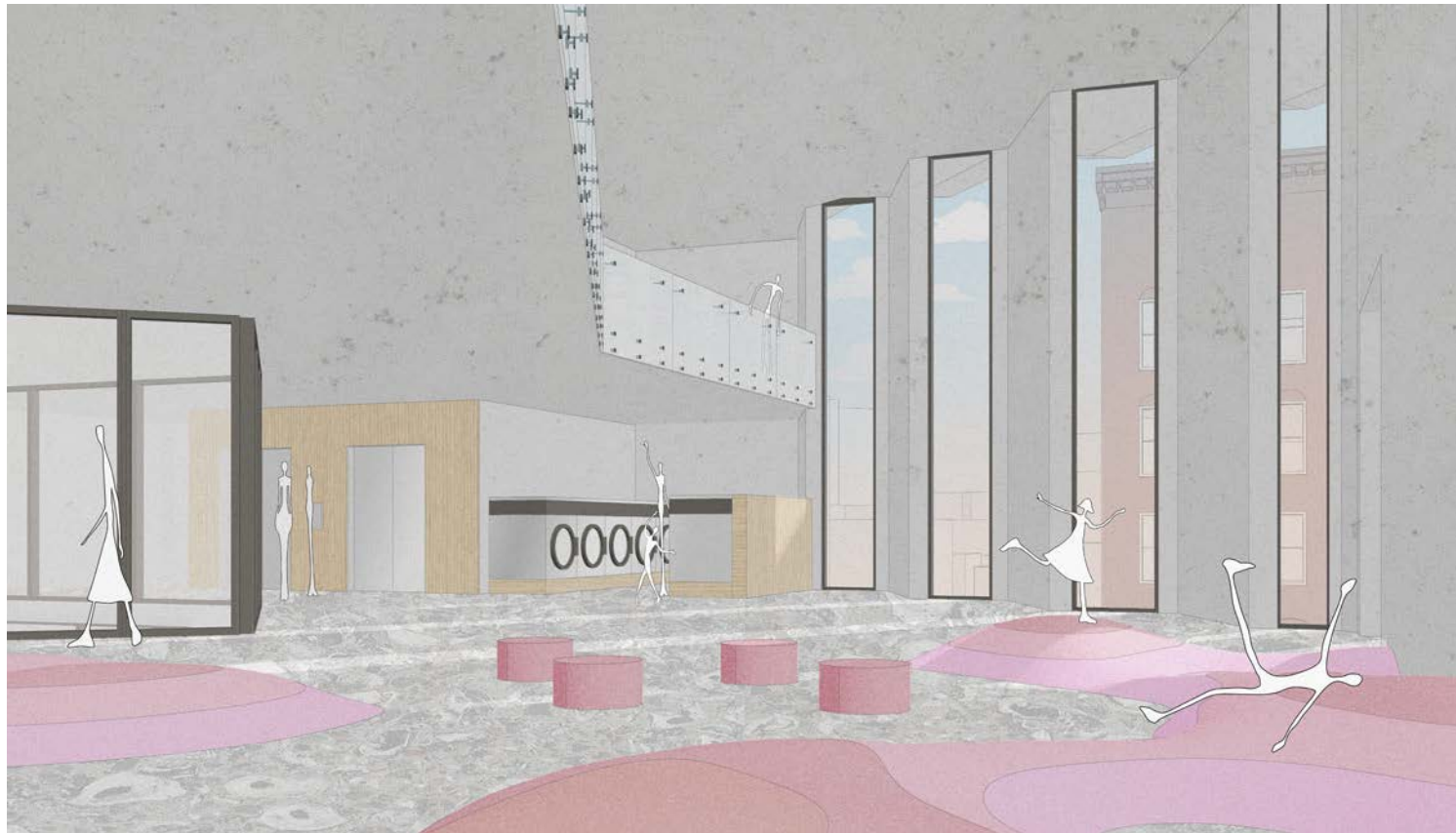
3 View of the courtyard  
Beneath the cascading terraces of the units the interior of the lot is richly planted and provides a mixing space for residents of the senior center, the typical apartments, and the neighborhood at large.



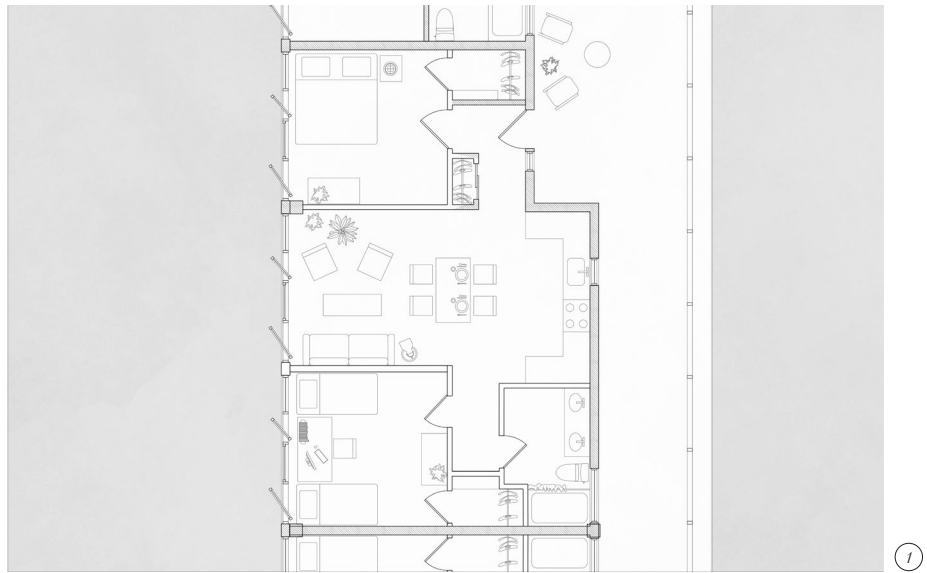
4 Elevation



5 Floorplan of 5th floor



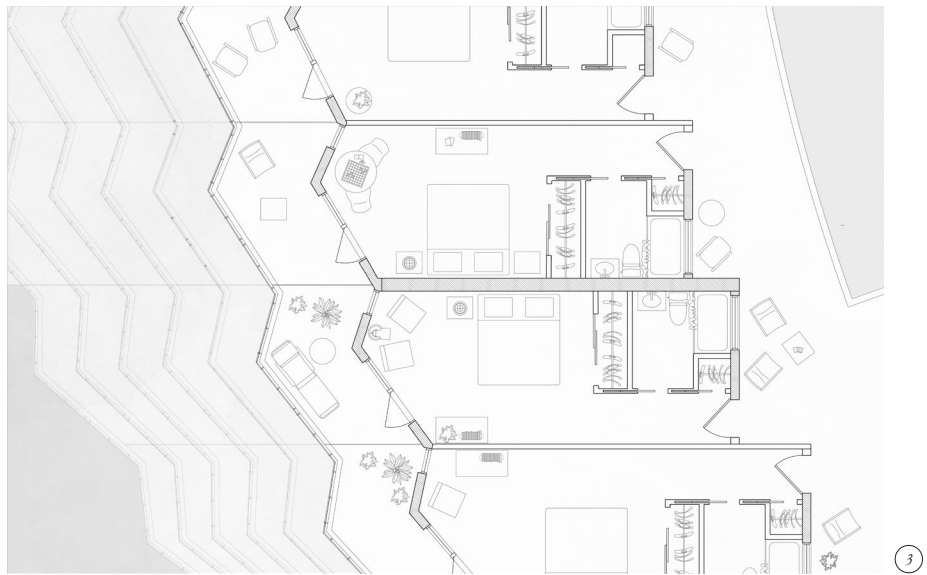
6-7 Interior views  
Illustrated above is a day of the life of the building: from a view of the horizon from a duplex unit (top left), to interior playgrounds-cum-laundromats (bottom left).



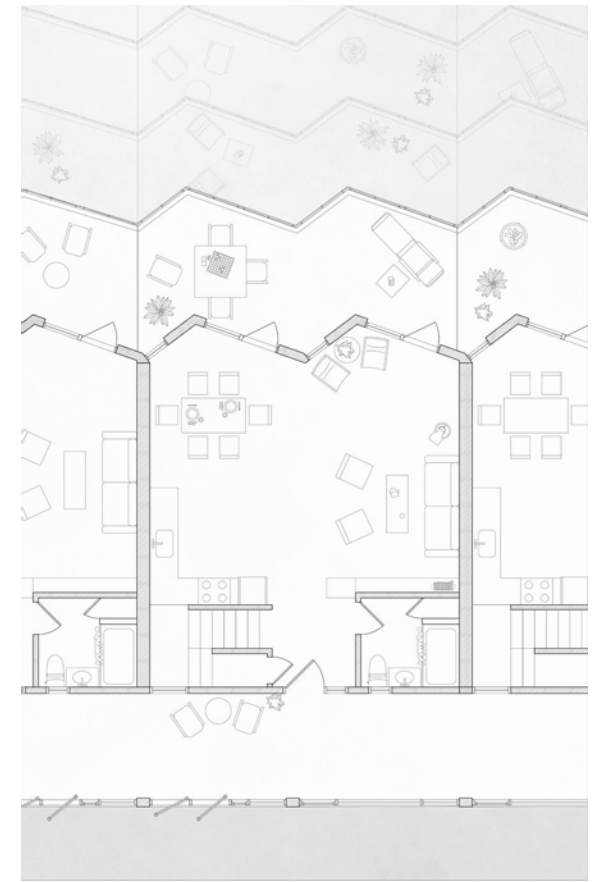
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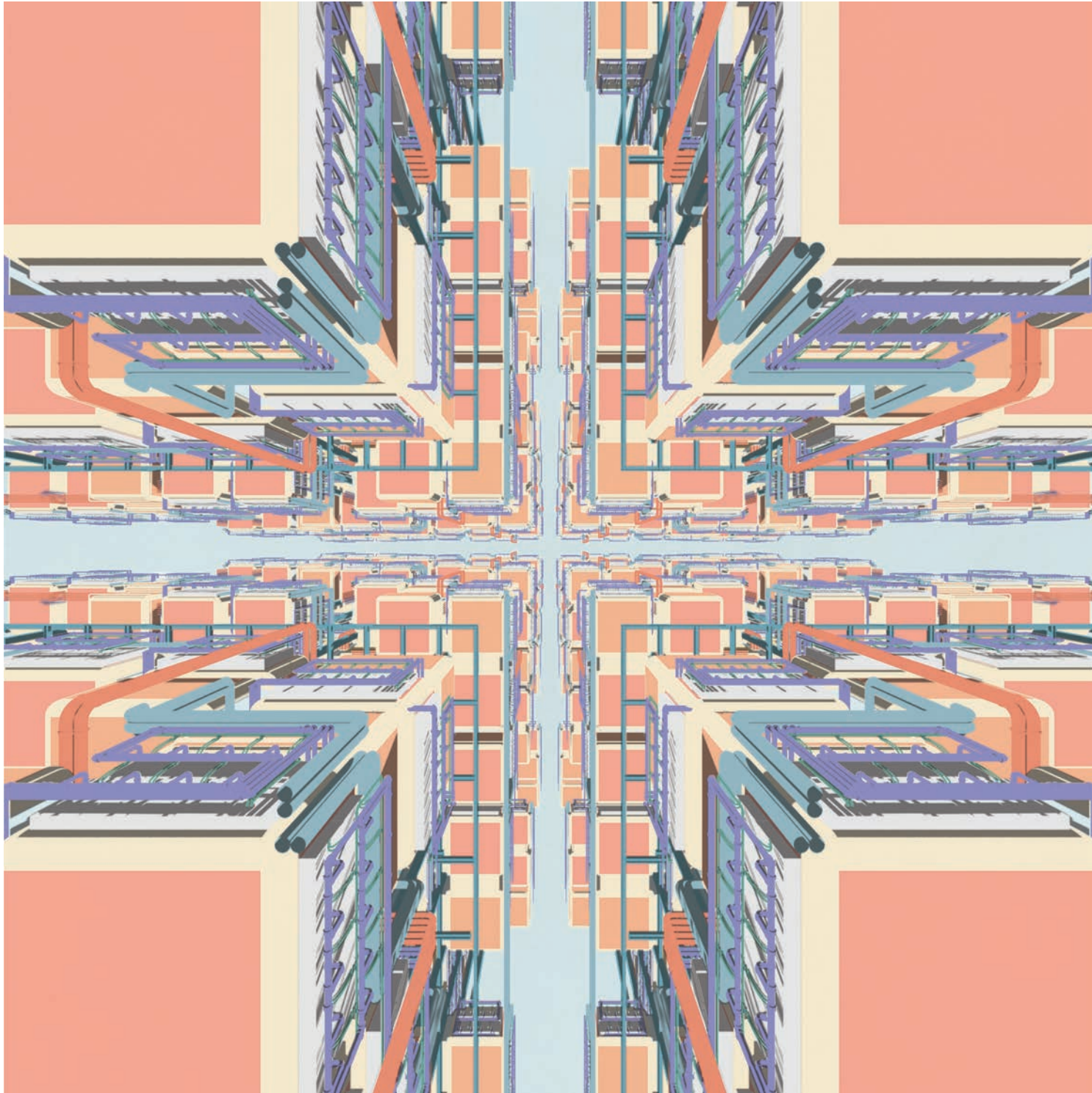
④

8 Unit Plans

- ① Assisted Living Unit
- ② One-Bedroom Unit
- ③ Two-Bedroom Unit
- ④ Three-Bedroom Duplex: (Left) living spaces, bottom floor; (right) bedrooms, top floor



9 Model photograph  
Pictured here the stacking and offsetting form, clearly showing the piers that support the building touching the ground.



1 Study of Infinite Proliferation of System  
 As imagined, the library-laundromat is situated between Archizoom's No-stop city and Dogma's Stop City: a parasitic, fundamentally ambivalent system that can occupy voids in the ever expanding city.

# Libromat

## An Essay in the Revaluation of Values

Core I  
 Critic: Alessandro Orsini

The present proposal posits a new typology that responds to the existing social, political and environmental conditions of the contemporary city: a combination laundromat-library. The new typology could, theoretically, be deployed anywhere, but in this case it was implemented in a particular location—inside Renzo Piano's Forum, at Columbia. The building, conceived as a parasite, straddles the boundary between the public street and private, University-owned city block, in order to challenge received notions and hierarchies of private and public space, domesticity, and labor. Far from being an arbitrary mash-up of programs, the library-laundromat is derived from the relationship between private labor and public space in the laundromat and from recent studies that show that introducing books in laundromats can successfully improve childhood literacy.

The laundromat is a place of largely under-valued labor. In contrast to the quasi-domestic, gendered and classed space of the laundromat, the library represents modernity's architecture of public discourse par excellence. This collision between laundromat and library brought out a tendency found in both: the library and the laundromat both suggest the infinite. As envisioned, these spaces, laden with the potential of infinite expansion, would be enclosed by a continuous surface of recycled plastic panels. In the end, the project attempts to produce a potentially expanding, parasitic recycled-plastic architecture that responds to and makes manifest some of the social, political and ecological conditions that define the interrelated and networked contemporary city.



2 Axonometric of floor detail in laundromat module

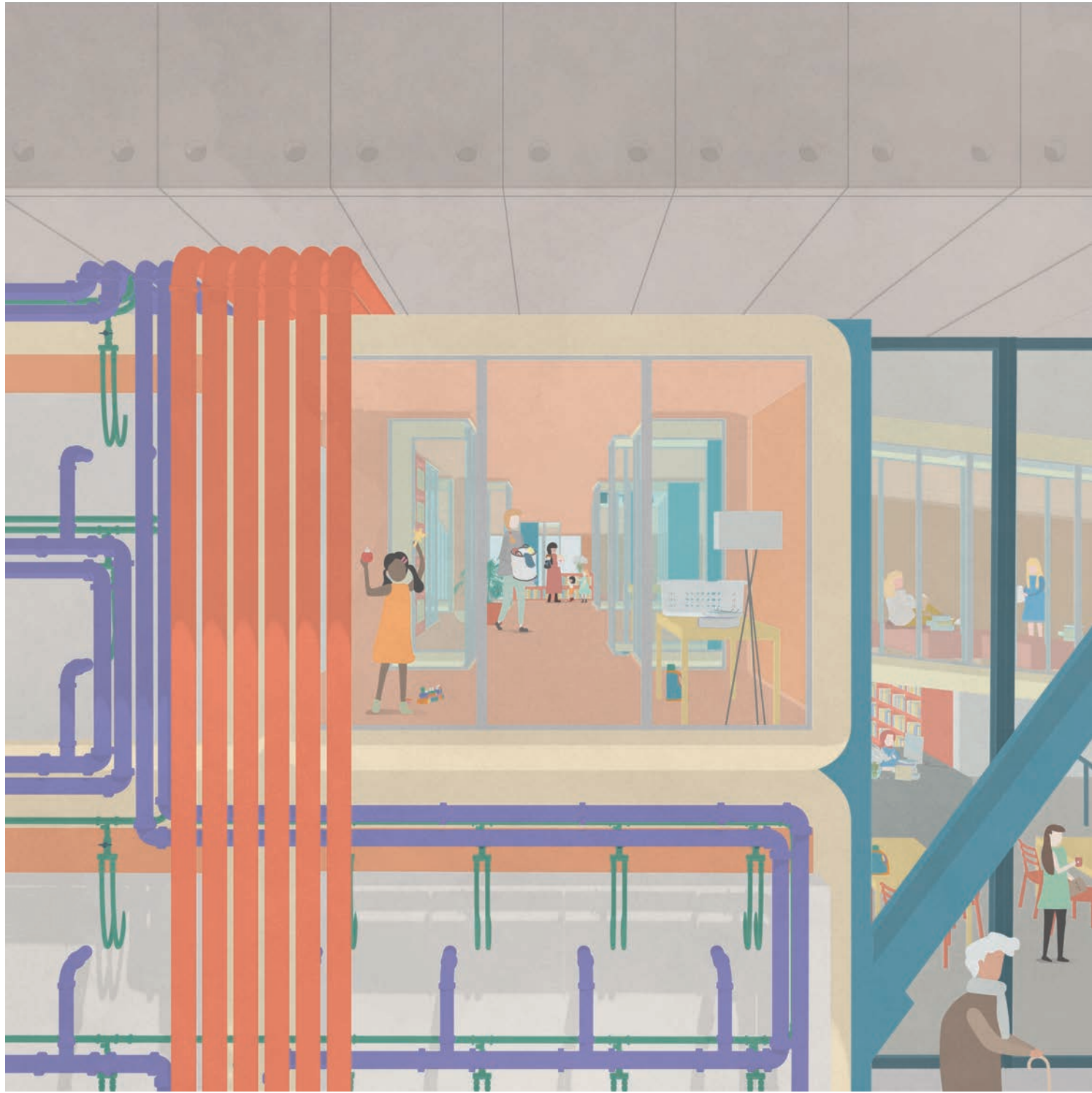


3 Plan oblique of mezzanine level



4 Photograph of 1" to 1' Mock-up  
The plastic used to make sample tiles came from detergent bottles collected from local laundromats that were cut and melted into shape in a kitchen oven. This was a laborious process that not only underlined the ubiquity of plastic but also recalled the haptic dimension of the laundromat—even after being melted, the tiles gave off the unmistakable scent of laundry detergent.





5 Perspective of mezzanine level from Broadway



6 Perspective section of children's corner of the library

# Weedtopia

## An Essay in Production

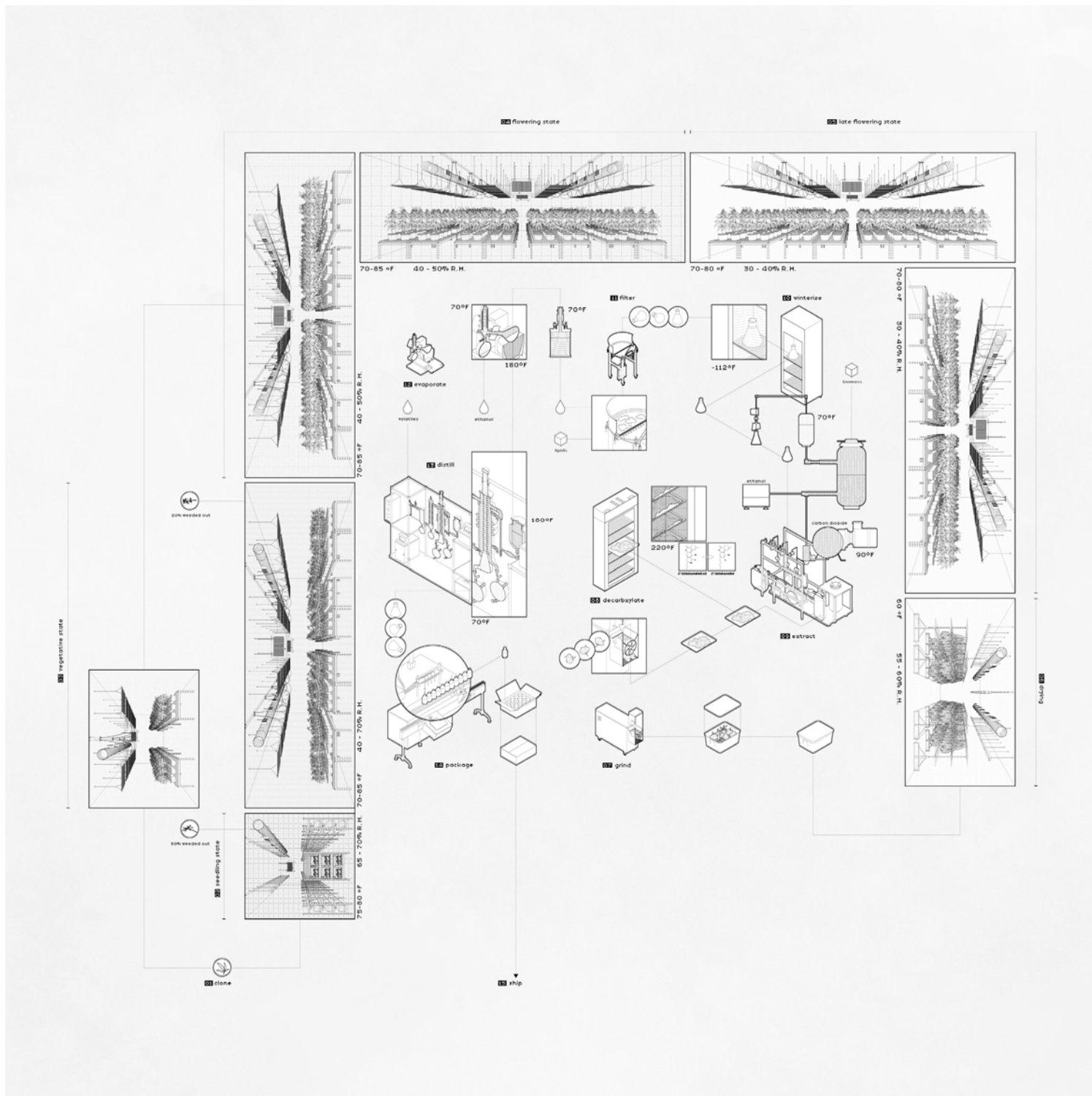
Advanced IV

Studio Partners: **Zak Meghrouni-Brown** and **Jules Kleitman**

Critic: Phu Hoang

More than a set of buildings, we call for an expansive process of vaccination, remediation, construction, cultivation, and rewilding that becomes an alternative to current modes of production, including those in the nascent cannabis industry, which has largely followed existing paradigms in big pharma. The project accomplishes this in two principal ways: first, by remediating the former IBM site in Kingston, reversing the pollution from the ruins of this corporate landscape; second, by redressing past wrongs and allowing minority populations affected by the “war on drugs” active participation in the ethical production of cannabis. The remediation processes that accompany the production of cannabis provides the building blocks for the proposed landscape and architecture. In the short run, this future cannabis commune serves as a vaccination center, building trust with marginalized communities through vaccination and the promise of future participation in a form of cannabis production radically different from current paradigms.

Stringent safety regulations, the drive for maximum productivity, and pre-existing bodies of knowledge have resulted in the creation of a new typology—the cannabis cultivation park, a permutation of the office park exemplified in the derelict IBM Kingston campus. Despite cyclical changes in the economy, individual industries and land use, a data-centric, corporatized epistemology is instantiated in both the obsolescent architecture of IBM’s abandoned campuses and in the emerging cannabis cultivation facilities. In response to these spatial practices and structural inequities in the nascent cannabis industry, we propose the creation of a new typology and a new form of organization: a co-cooperative model that will also provide vocational and educational programs for people formerly incarcerated for possession of marijuana. As vaccination, remediation and construction processes unfold, the



1 Cannabis Processing Diagram  
Cannabis cultivation as it has evolved into a tightly controlled process, concomittant with legalization and the turn to pharmaceutical-like production



site will be covered with greenhouses, incubator and educational spaces--a library, offices, a conference room, and a classroom—and a social hub, including a refectory, shared kitchen, and both interior and exterior common spaces.

In the very distant future, a clean site, which will have allowed the production of cannabis for many years, will return to nature in the form of a ruin. In essence, we propose a paradigm of production that, rather than extend racist practices and extractive logics, predicated on models of infinite growth and other such myths, also becomes a generator of justice and an ecologically productive part of the environment, inherently limited in space by the confines of past industry and temporally by natural cycles of healing and growth.

## 2 Process

- ① Earth is excavated and cleaned as an extension of ongoing remediation processes.
- ② Concurrently, rammed earth walls are built to house greenhouses & dispersed programs.
- ③ Excavated earth is then bermed around these walls.
- ④ A mesh is installed in the greenhouses.
- ⑤ Hemp, an ideal plant for bioremediation, is planted on the bermed hills, while cannabis for human consumption is grown inside the resulting greenhouses.
- ⑥ Programed space is vaulted over.
- ⑦ Once followed, the mesh and earth-work landscape disintegrates and becomes overgrown, merging with the surrounding environment.



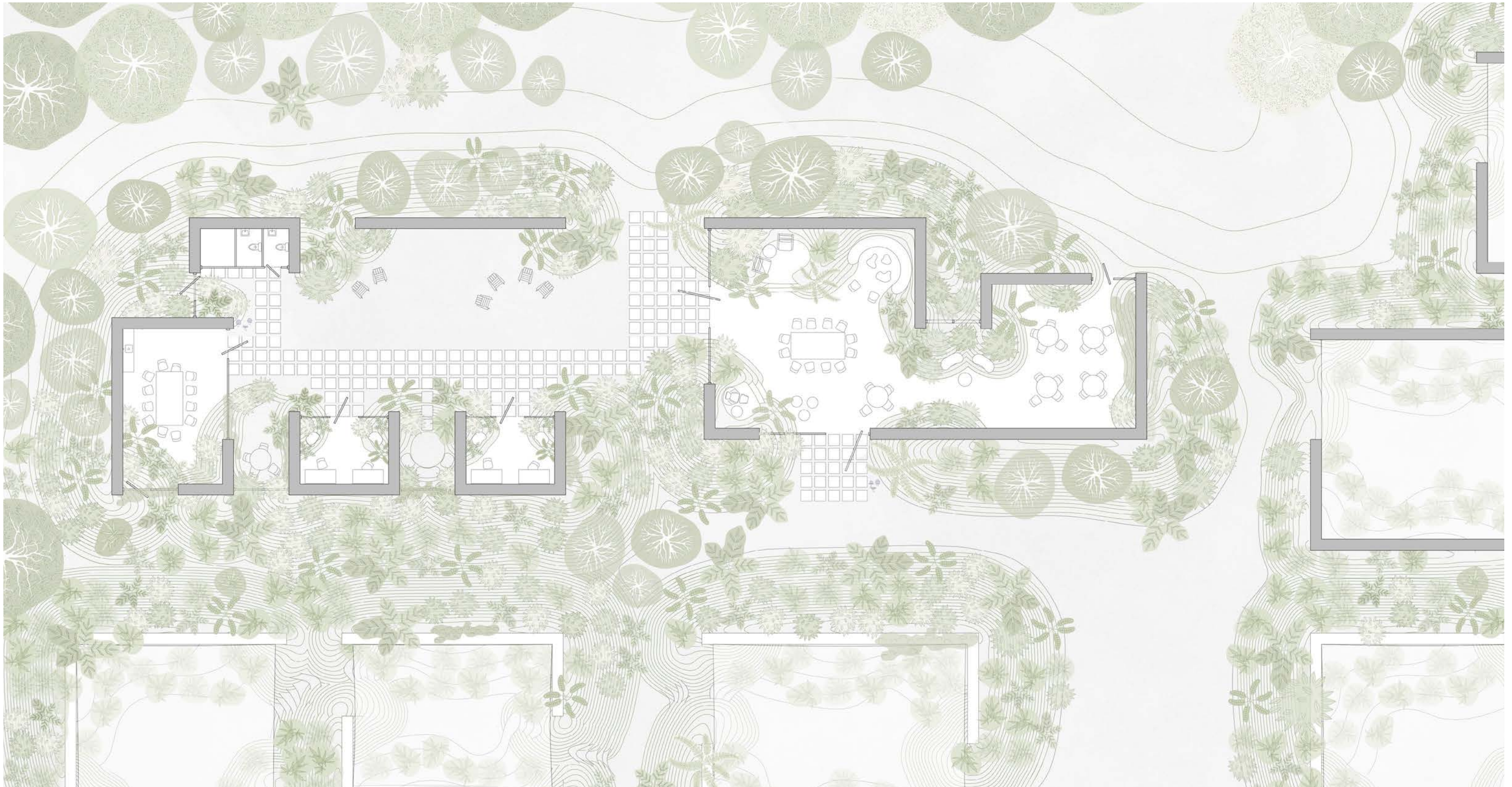
### 3 Vaccination Section

The first portion of the commune to be built within this long process, the future incubator building, will host the vaccine center, at the edge of the as-yet un-excavated parking lot. In this closer up view, you can see the vaccination pods and waiting spaces, all literally embedded within the landscape. In the short run, these spaces are roofed over with mesh.

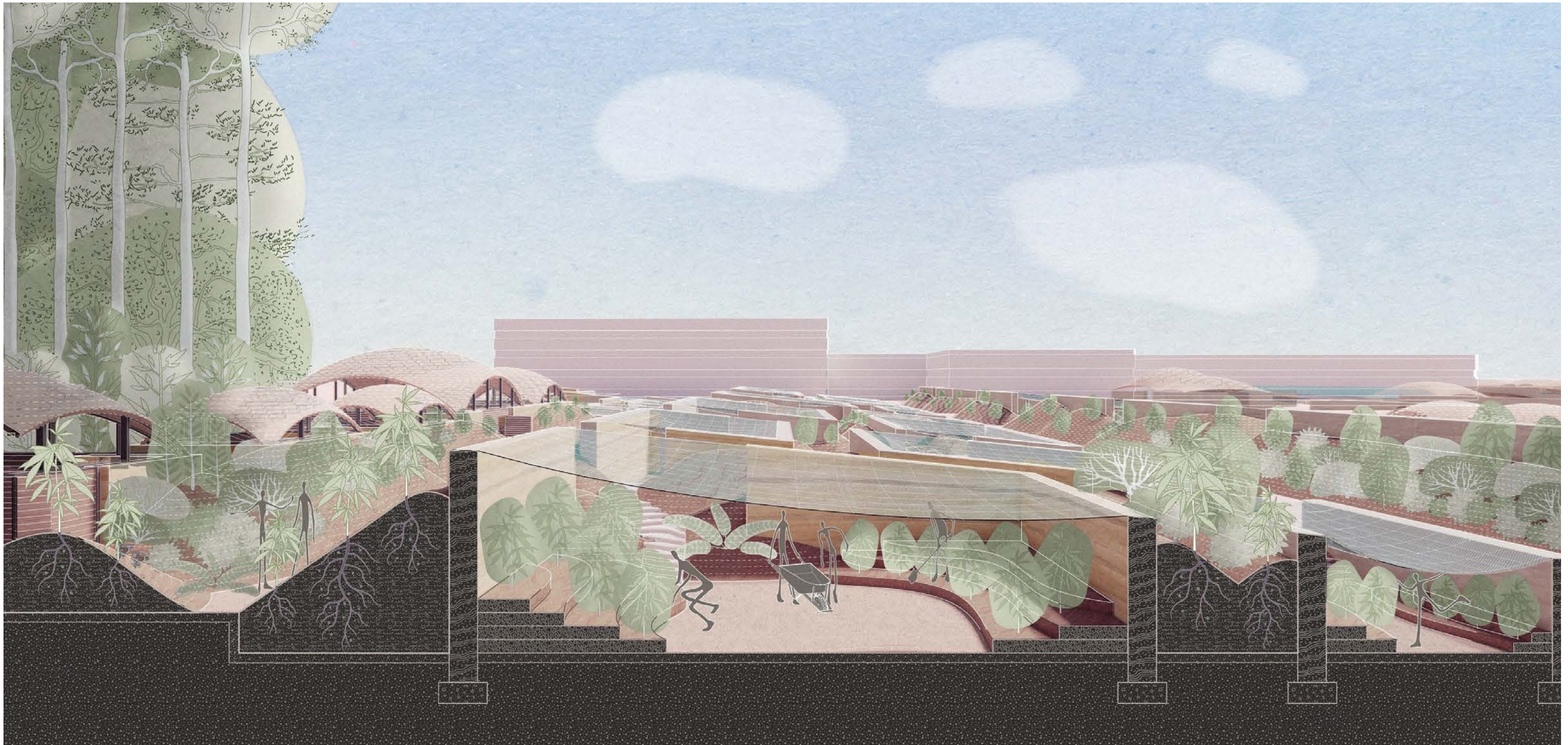


### 4 Incubator Section

In the longrun, this building will transition into the incubator spaces: a library, offices, a conference room, and a classroom pictured here. The mesh roofs are replaced with more permanent masonry vaults as construction proceeds.



5 Floorplan of Incubator



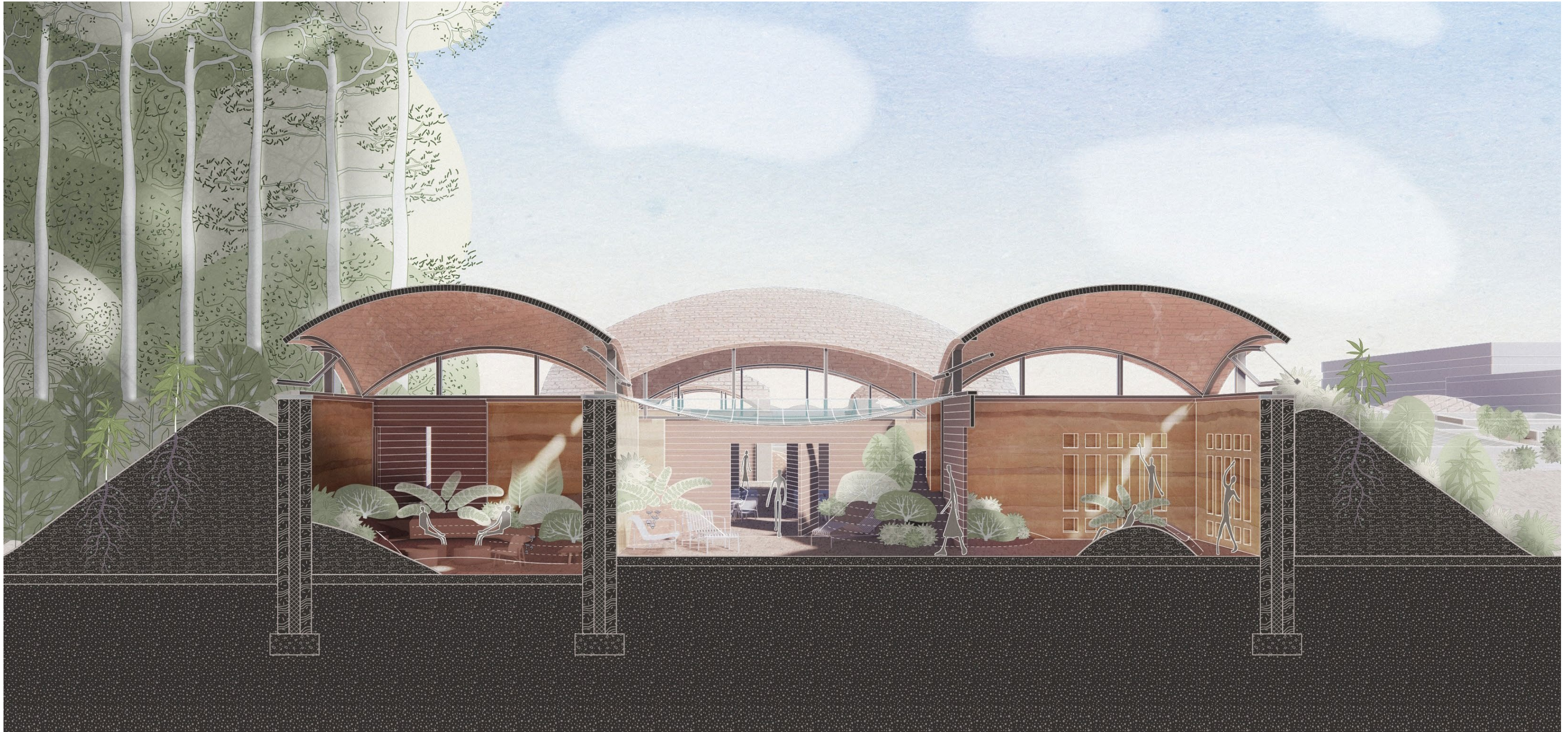
6 Greenhouses Section

Greenhouses will be underground structures. Cannabis on the exterior, which remediates the biopiles, is left to grow in a less controlled way, but can still have economic value for industrial applications. The earth functions as a thermal mass. As time passes, the remediating plants on the exterior will grow, until the entire site is overtaken.



7-8 Views of Incubator  
The mounded landscape crosses the threshold between interior and exterior, collapsing, even at the human scale, the strict dichotomy between the natural world and artificial worlds of production.





9 Section through common rooms in the refectory  
The combined influence of the interior landscapes, rammed earth walls, mounds, and the vaults would, coupled with the concatenation of interior and exterior spaces, create a dynamic environment that produces atmospherically diverse effects—the complete opposite of the alienating, hermetically sealed facility which is the norm in large scale cannabis

# STOA™

## An Essay in Irony

Advanced VI

Critics: Steven Cassell and Annie Barrett

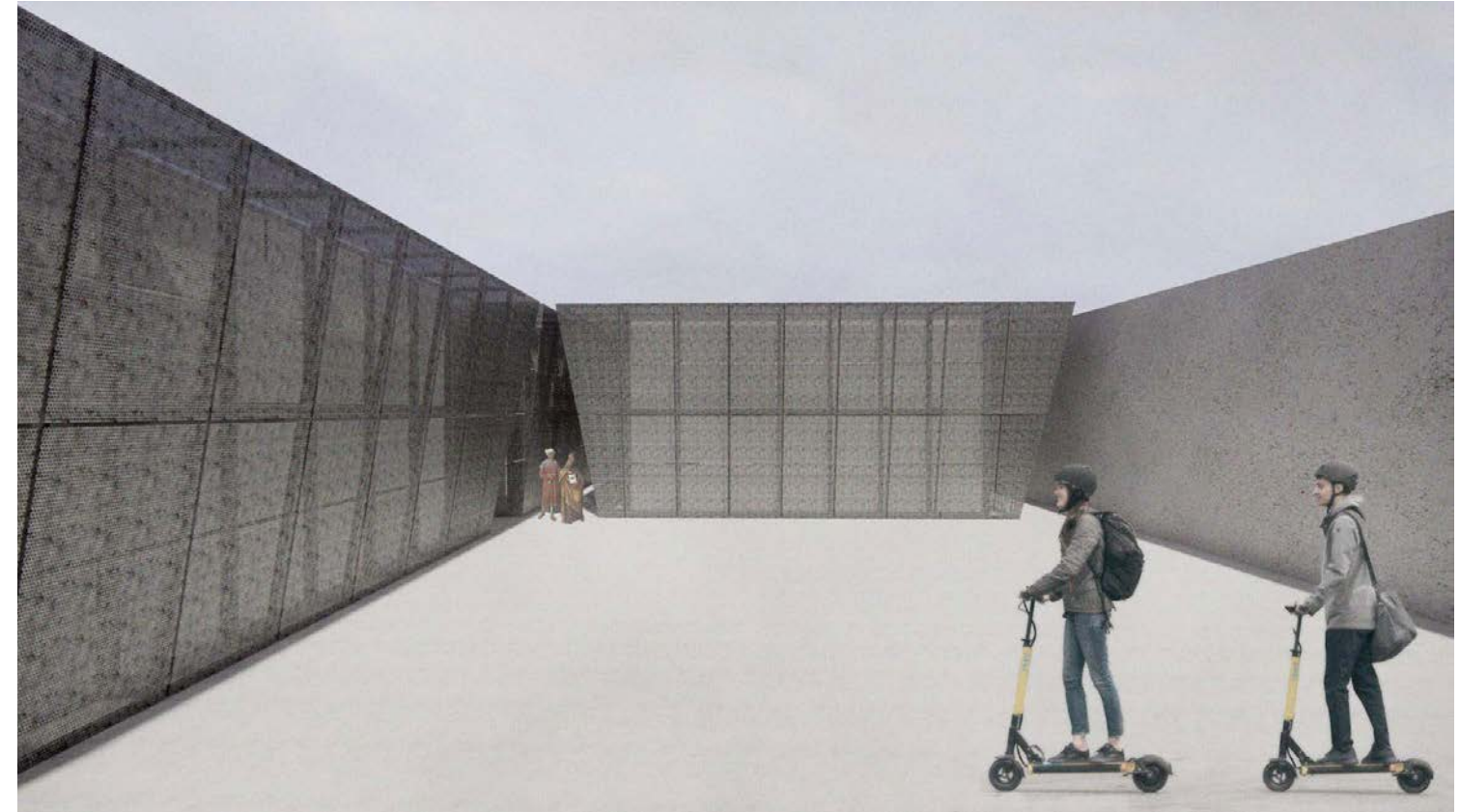
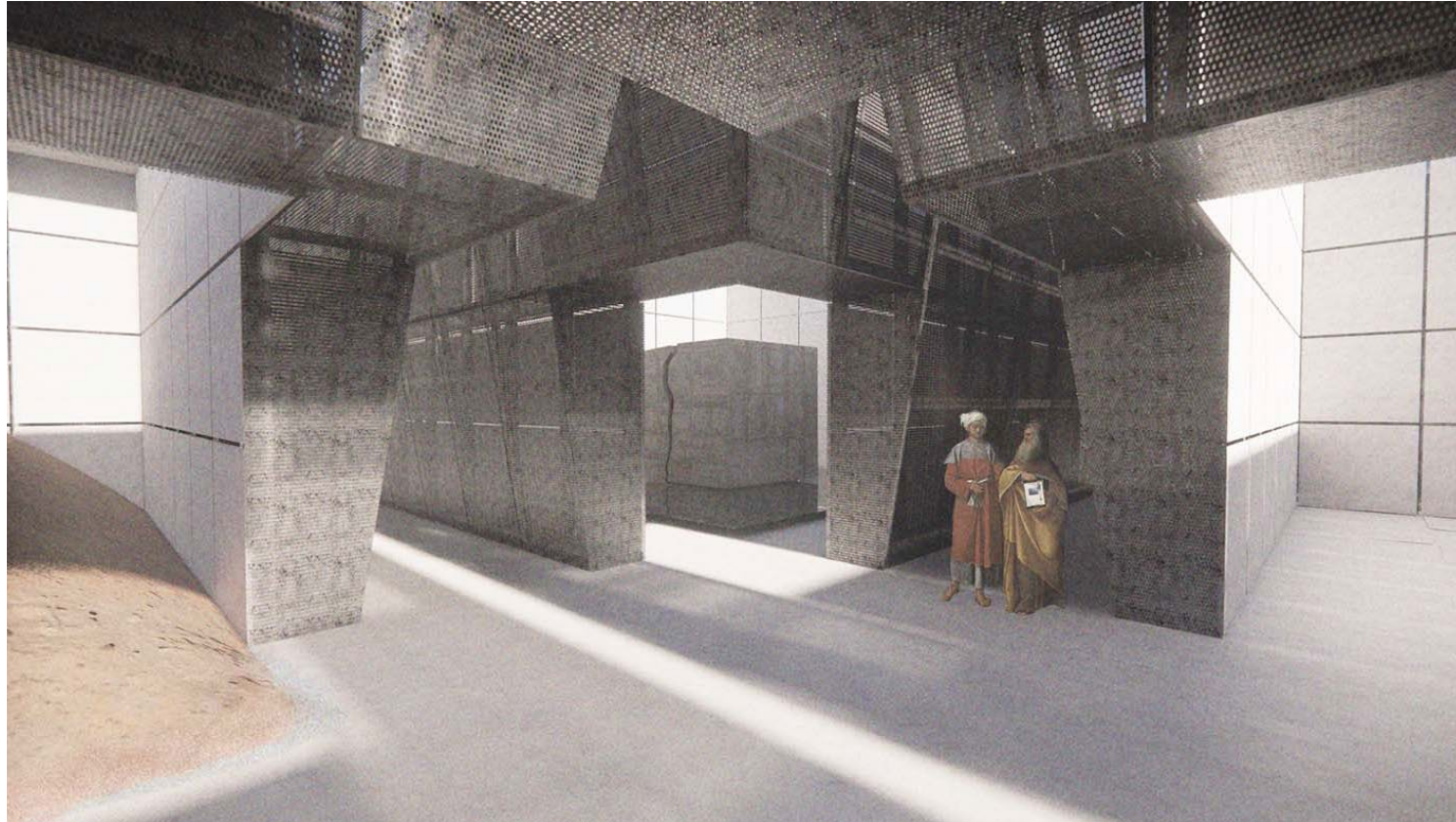


Over the last 10 years, Stoicism has gone from a topic confined to philosophy lectures to one consumed by the masses. This explosion of interest in Stoicism might seem unlikely at first, but stoicism's appeal makes sense: it advises us to accept that we cannot control the external world, but that we can find serenity and happiness by focusing on what *is*—our beliefs and actions. For consumers seeking wisdom on how to live the good life there are now daily digests of Stoic quotations, books and websites packed with Stoic wisdom to kick-start your day, podcasts, broadcasts, online crash courses, everything you need to know to overcome anxiety, curb anger, find stillness and calm. If it sometimes appears more like a series of life-hacks than a philosophy, adherents say it works.

Critics have pointed out that in some permutations, modern stoicism can support expressions of capitalistic individualism, and elide important aspects of ancient Stoic philosophy, for instance preoccupation with our social nature and the need for rational community with others. Ryan Holiday, public-relations strategist turned self-help sage and the founder of the popular blog the *Daily Stoic*, responds to criticism about stoicism's growing popularity by saying “We’ve only captured a very small fraction of the potential market. Stoicism is a philosophy designed for the masses, and if it has to be simplified a bit to reach the masses, so be it.”<sup>1</sup>

Alongside broad general interest, Stoicism has gained in popularity in the tech industry, where it has become a darling of high-ups in the offices of Apple and Google. “There’s huge wealth in this area. People have fancy cars, fancy homes, fancy jobs,” says Gerry Castellino, a 53-year-old software engineer in Silicon Valley. “Among our circle of friends we have some who are really, really rich, but that was something that didn’t appeal to me in terms of deriving happiness.”<sup>2</sup> There is evidently plenty to be Stoic about in the Bay area.

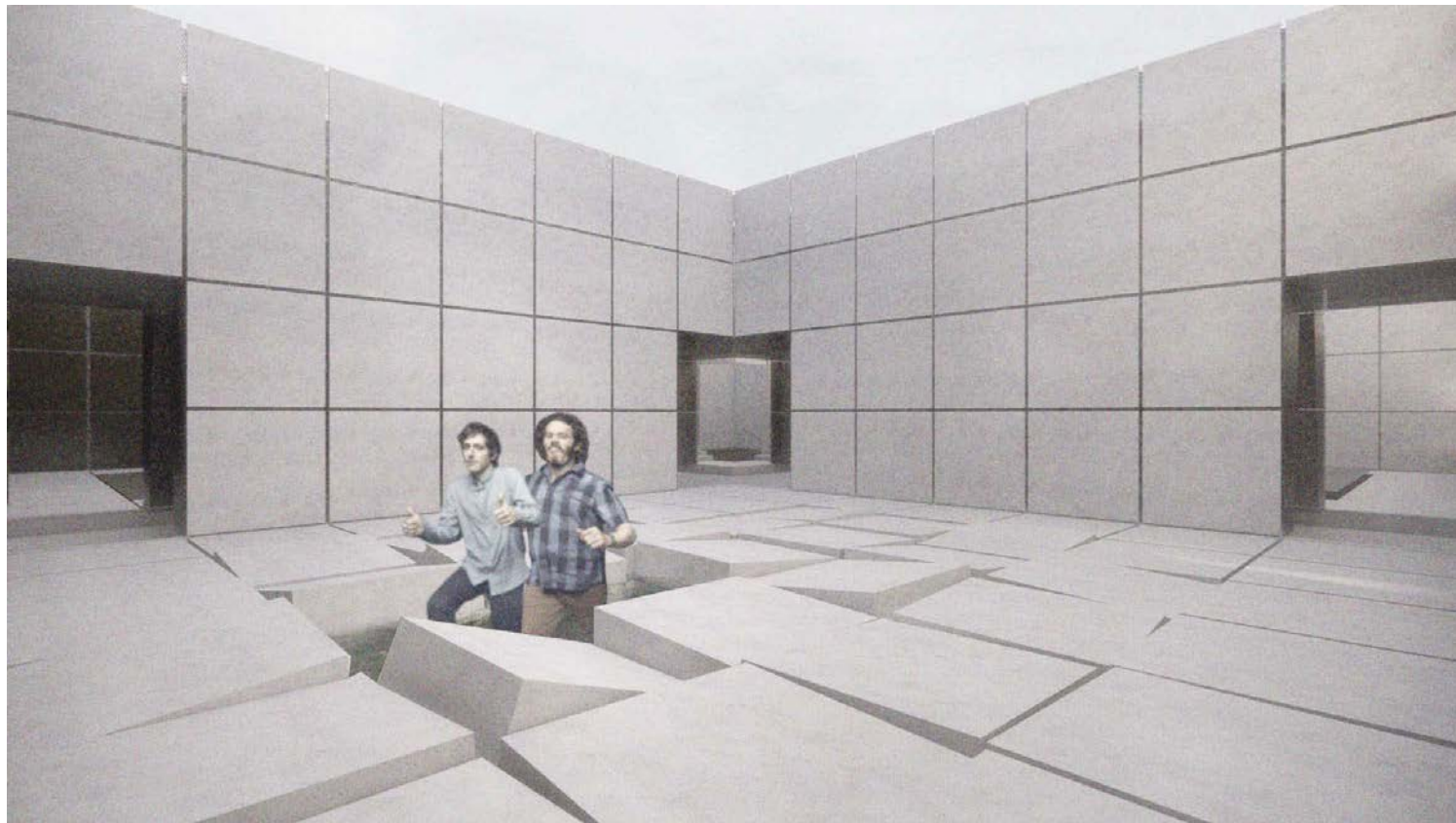
1 Entry  
The imagined Stoic theme-park is situated in designated “natural” spaces in Google’s proposal for a North Bayshore mixed-use residential quarter within its corporate campus.



Tech companies already offer immersive spaces for meditation in their offices, where workers can replenish their stores of mindfulness and fend off the dreaded ills of burn-out. Who is to say that, given growing interest in stoicism, in the not-too distant future spaces designed for stoic meditation might not dot the Bay area’s suburban corporate landscape? That a stoic meditation park might not be built into, for instance, Google’s plans for a mixed-use residential quarter within its main campus in Mountain View, California?

If such a thing were to exist, it could be designed in such a way that it becomes a crash course in “timeless” wisdom and “ancient truths,”simplified and packaged for today’s needs. The point is that passage through these spaces, with a bit of mental training, might just lead to something like a purposeful life.

2-3 Entry, Interior  
 Passage to the interior reveals an impassive, monumental architecture. Stoic acolytes make their way through a labyrinth of pavilions that instill Modern-Stoic virtue.



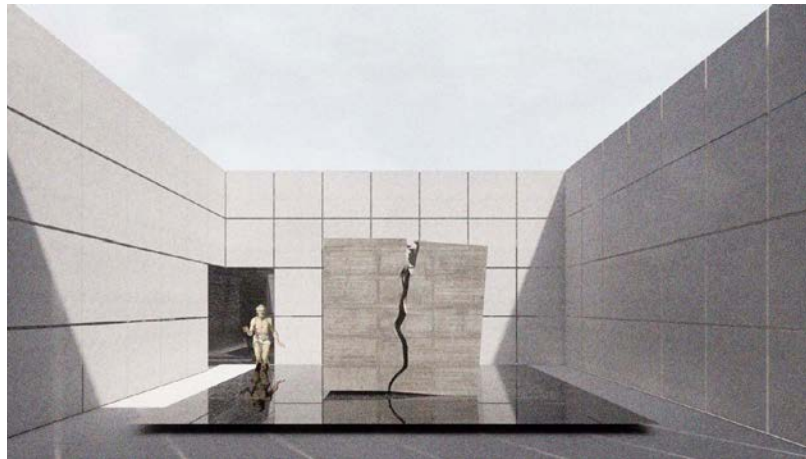
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## Stoic Theme-Park

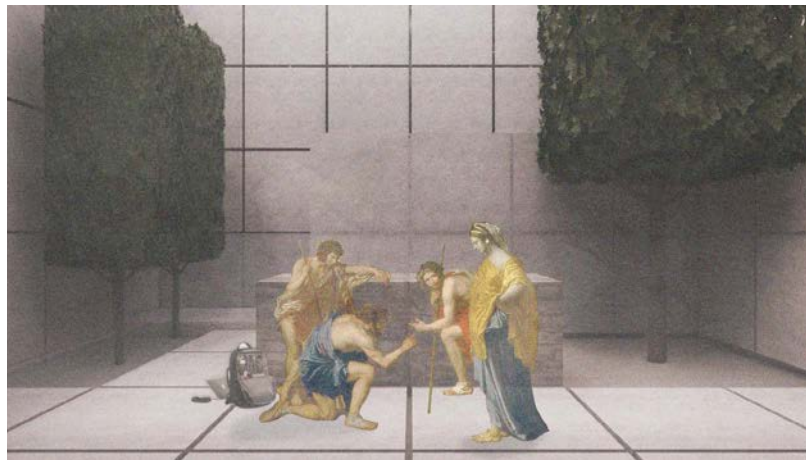
- ① A Path to Virtue  
Central to Stoic philosophy is the notion that virtue is the key to human flourishing. Only things that contribute to virtue are good, everything else is either bad or just indifferent. You might prefer to be rich than poor, but either way it doesn't matter. Virtuousness resides in the responses, based on reason, to external circumstances. The first step in the path towards virtue instills precisely this: sometimes as you make your way through life, the floor literally falls out from beneath you. Only by finding fixed points in the things you can control can you find happiness. In the face of life's vicissitudes, Marcus Aurelius steeled himself in his principles; quoting Epictetus, *Forbes* reminds us of the importance of a "mission statement" even if it has become somewhat of a corporate cliché.<sup>3</sup>



②



③



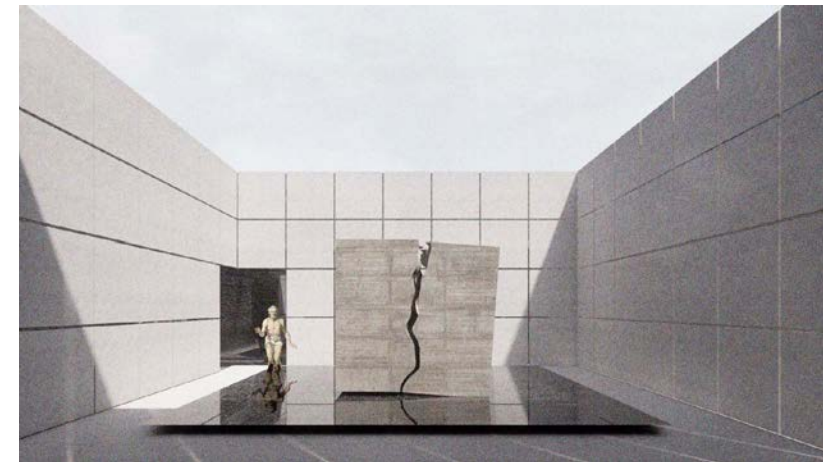
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- ② Premeditation of Evils  
The word “stoic” is associated with apathy: for the Stoics, emotions are based on incorrect judgments of our perceptions. You feel emotions because you give importance to things that don’t really matter rather than what is important—acting according to reason. One of the most important practices in the Stoic tradition—and countless youtube videos, listicles, podcasts, interviews, and other forms of “content” attest to its merits—is the premeditation of evils: The *Daily Stoic* invites you imagine the worst that can go wrong, the absolute worst to feel it in your bones and skin. Understand what it will look, for instance, to be crushed by a hulking mass of concrete. Now you’ve removed the surprise and some of the fear. <sup>4</sup>
- ③ Reflecting on Anger  
Seneca wrote that anger was like a rock that shatters when it hits its target. Feelings are choices: You choose anger over calm; you choose fear over courage; you choose misery over joy. Happiness is a choice. Which choice is more productive?<sup>5</sup>
- ④ Memento Mori  
Remembering one’s mortality always finds a place in manufactured list of timeless Stoic Exercises. It might sound morbid, but proponents say that, if used properly, memento mori is a tool to create priority and meaning in your life. The impermanence of life got one modern stoic to the following realization that “many entrepreneurs build companies following strict rules and create a life around that. I used to do that, and that led me to burnout and unhappiness. Let us do the opposite.”<sup>6</sup> Contemplating death, it turns out, might do the latter-day shepherds of Arcadia some good.

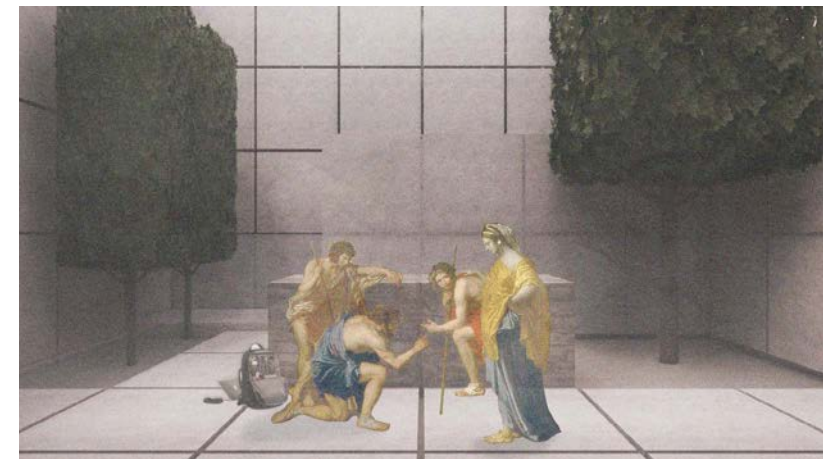
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5 **Memento Mori: A Broader Perspective**

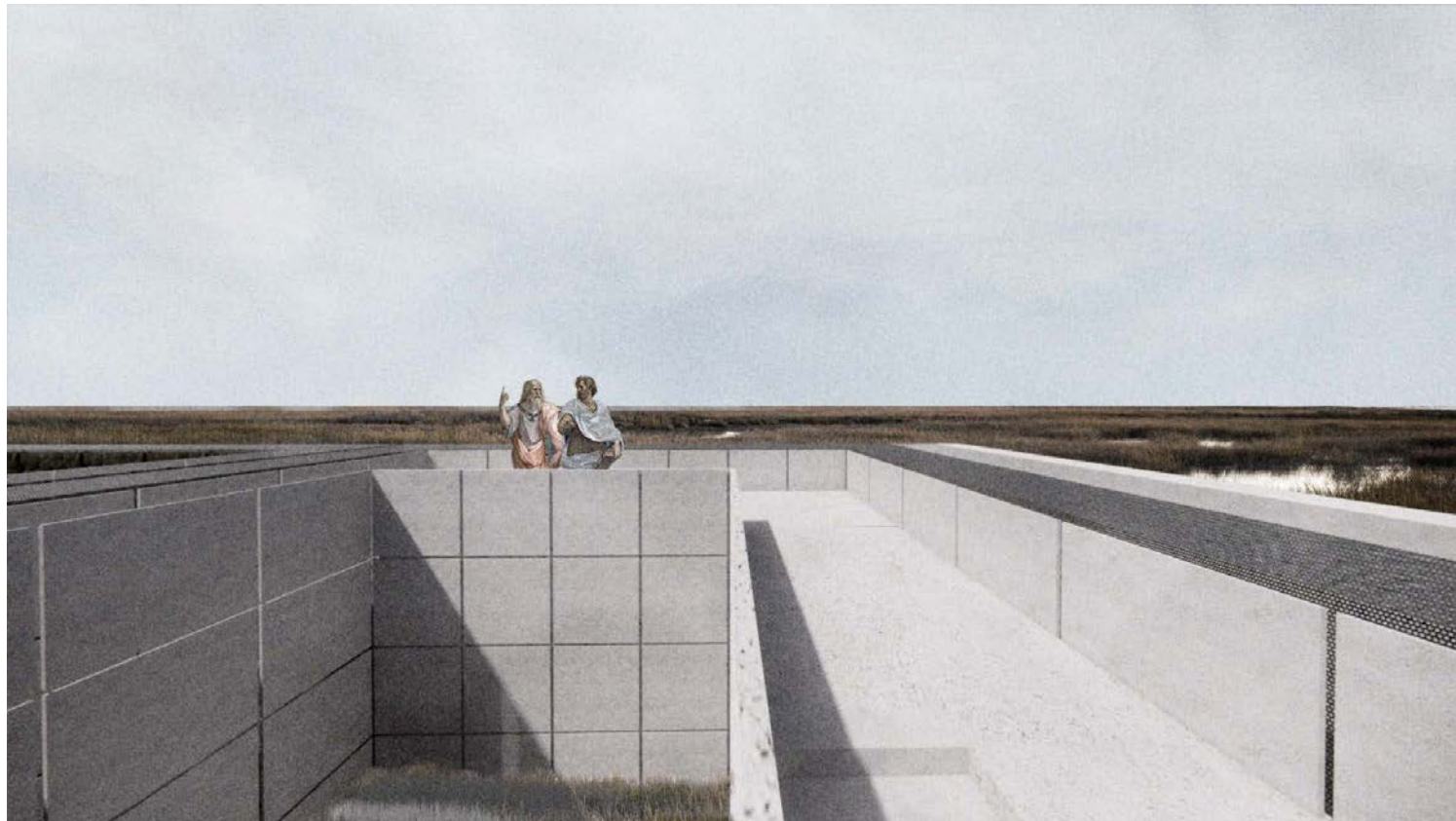
Indeed, in his *Meditations*—the indispensable stoic proto-blog—Marcus Aurelius trained himself to imagine his own demise. He says: “things soon pass away and become a mere tale, and complete oblivion soon buries them.”<sup>7</sup> Civilisations, like startups, have a lifespan; you think of the many great cities which have arisen and been destroyed throughout the ages... and your own civilisation as one in a series... perhaps in the future to be followed by new cities, peoples, languages, cultures, and ways of life...by something beyond AI and blockchain and the internet of things...<sup>8</sup>

6 **Logos**

We might not always see it, but things always happen for a reason; for the Stoics, reason or logos is immanent to the universe. Sitting in silence could help you find the truth the Stoics knew well: that this is not only the only possible world, it is the best of all possible worlds. Why change it?

7 **Adapting to Flux**

The nature of the universe is change. Marcus Aurelius wrote that while some things are rushing into existence, others out of it: “Some of what now exists is already gone. Change and flux constantly remake the world, just as the incessant progression of time remakes eternity.”<sup>9</sup> All that is solid melts into air. Entrepreneurs in the tech world must brace for flux and change, one CEO remarks quoting Epictetus.<sup>10</sup> With its earthen pillars that will, with heat, and wind and rain, erode and melt and change, this room is yet another micro-cosm of the universe for the savvy acolyte.



8

8 A View From Above

The stoics recognized that if human beings were rational, it was because they were part of the living reason of the universe; the human soul is a small piece of the cosmos. Taking a view from above—as proponents of stoicism suggest—will help you get a view of this ‘bigger picture’ Marcus Aurelius believed that each individual was a part of the cosmic whole and that as such they can contribute, alongside their fellow workers, for the common good. Speaking about the benefits of taking a view from above, one business-oriented stoic tells us that it helps you prioritise what will “move the needle” that day and make sure you are staying true to your “core mission.”<sup>11</sup> Another rhapsodizing about the benefits of stoic ritual: “I was much happier, and because of that, much more productive, which led me to better results.”<sup>12</sup>

Virtue, it turns out, is its own reward.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Alter, “Ryan Holiday Sells Stoicism as a Life Hack, Without Apology,” *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> John Metcalfe, “The 2,300-year-old philosophy stoicism has enjoyed a revival of late, including in Silicon Valley,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew McConnell, “The Stoic Startup: Three Modern Lessons From Ancient Roman Philosophy,” *Forbes*, Mar 25, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> “A Stoic Response to Fear,” *Daily Stoic*, <https://dailystoic.com/stoic-response-fear/>.

<sup>5</sup> “A Stoic Response to Anger,” *Daily Stoic*, <https://dailystoic.com/stoic-response-anger/>.

<sup>6</sup> João V Souza, “5 Stoic Strategies that Every Entrepreneur Should Know: Practical Advice from Ancient Greek Philosophy,” Medium, <https://medium.com/swlh/5-stoic-strategies-that-every-entrepreneur-should-know-162c5b4a90d9>.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Robertson, *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)* (London: Routledge, 2020), Appendix II.

<sup>9</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*.

<sup>10</sup> Eugenio Pace, “Can Philosophy Influence Business? Here’s What The Stoics Have Taught Me,” *Forbes*, Dec 26, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Poppy Higgins, “How to Be A More Successful Entrepreneur by Following the Principles of Stoicism,” N2, July 4, 2021, [https://n2.eco/n2-technology-blog/how-to-be-a-more-successful-entrepreneur-by-following-the-principles-of-stoicism/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=how-to-be-a-more-successful-entrepreneur-by-following-the-principles-of-stoicism](https://n2.eco/n2-technology-blog/how-to-be-a-more-successful-entrepreneur-by-following-the-principles-of-stoicism/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=how-to-be-a-more-successful-entrepreneur-by-following-the-principles-of-stoicism).

<sup>12</sup> João V Souza, “5 Stoic Strategies that Every Entrepreneur Should Know.”



