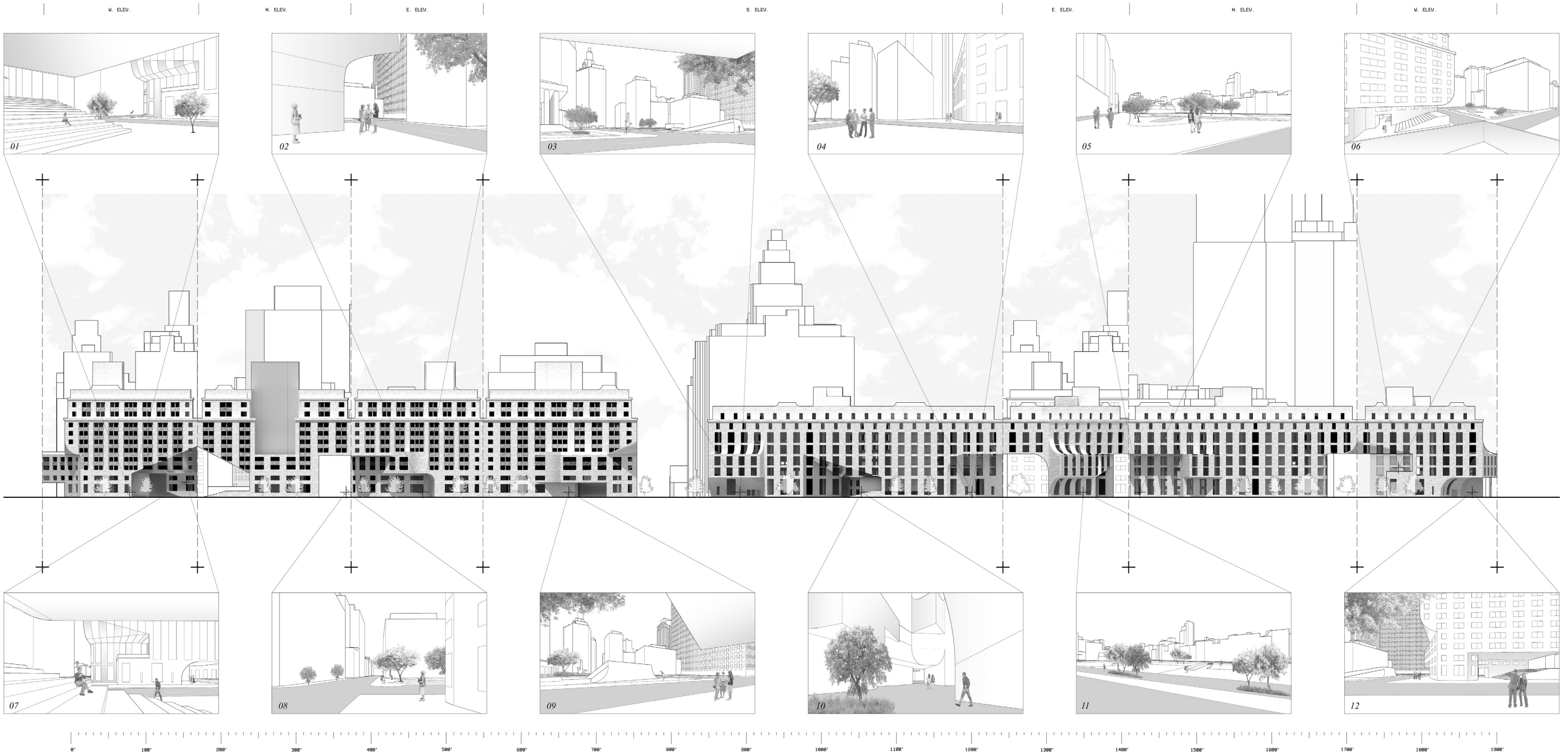
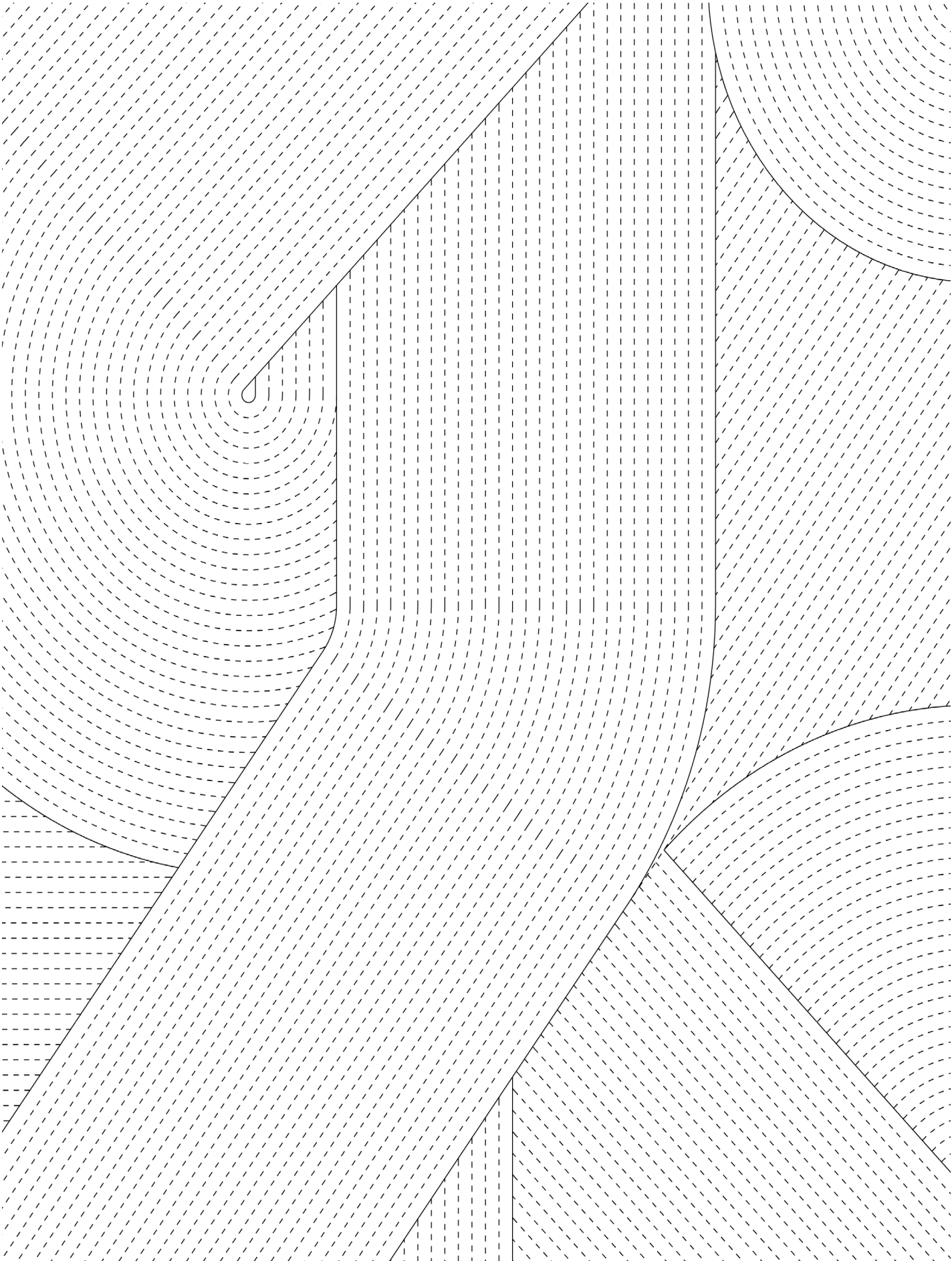


MANHATTAN TRANSVERSE

— Retuning City Grids &
Urban Typologies





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ABSTRACT

Manhattan's vertical paradigm is long-overdue for a change as the delirious grids and narrow streets suffer from the extremity of urban density and has failed to keep up with the rapid growth of social and political structures of the 21st century. Urbanism was once mediated by the streets and buildings, but today the dependence on digital systems has enabled people to coexist in different places simultaneously resulting in the urban environment to be less relevant. The finite geography of Manhattan has pushed buildings to grow vertically as single entities within a grid, resulting in lack of shared public programs on the ground level. The public spaces hold significance in civic engagements between the inhabitants of the city leading to ask how static architecture could be renewed and loosened to reinforce intersection between the social and the urban forms that are more aligned to contemporary routines. Therefore, the question becomes whether architecture could exist outside the governed city grids. The constant change and instability of social systems demands an alternative typology of shared spaces where public programs are no longer bounded by zoning laws and property lines.

Manhattan Transverse explores a new architectural paradigm in which forms and envelopes are driven by public circulation and site context. This speculation inverts the civic programs by enabling urban traffic into the existing building envelopes, where the streets morph into civic programs. The site is located in Lower Manhattan Civic Center which is home to public services as well as governmental buildings that remain detached from the urban circulation. The grandiose nature of the state buildings cover the whole city blocks, yet the interior sits empty filled with archives and records that are now digitized. The civic typologies once represented exclusivity and status; however their significance today remain unclear as they are costly to maintain. By manipulating the existing buildings to reconnect with the ground, the buildings become part of the streets and no longer act as barriers to the neighborhood. The building enclosures formally and programmatically react to the urban circulation with different spatial opacity and ambiguity to enable new formal and social potential.



FIG.1A Doppler Effect

“... to unite two opposing polarities into twin phenomena is to establish an inbetween...not a matter of choosing between two elements, but of employing both in conjunction in such a way that the right reciprocal effect is obtained.”

- Georges Teyssot, Aldo van Eyck and the Rise of an Ethnographic Paradigm in the 1960s (2011)

ANTI-GRID

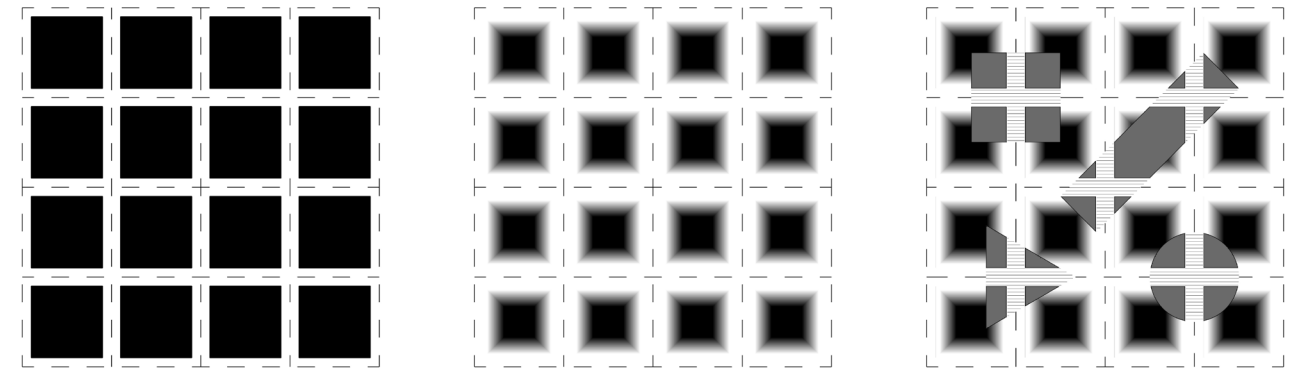
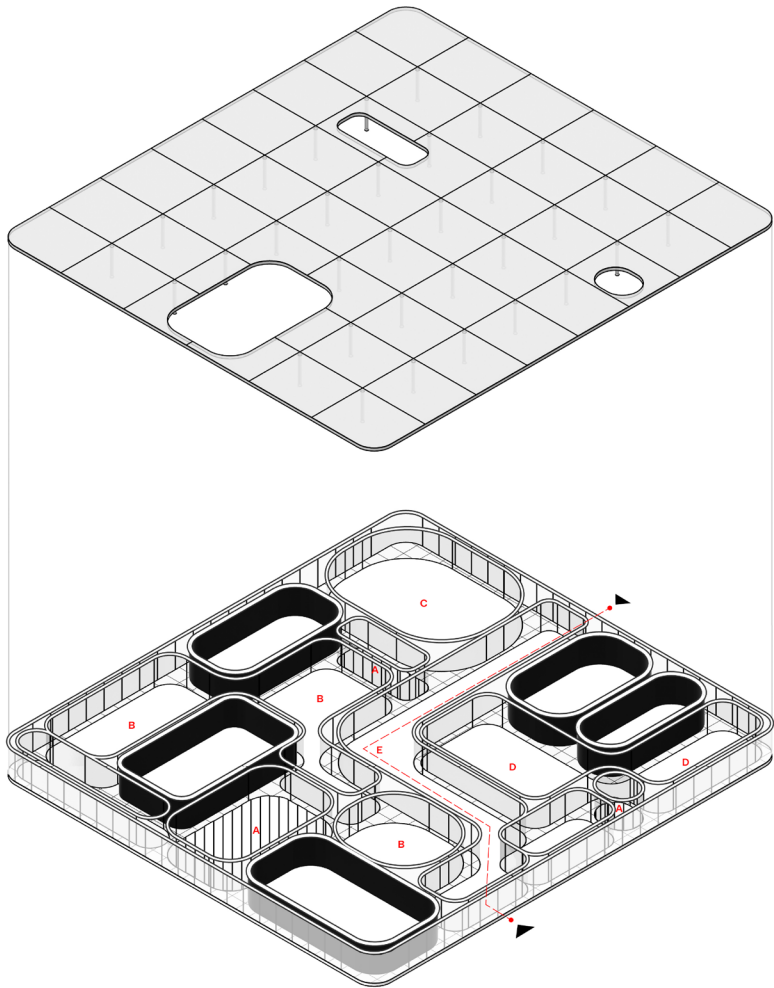


FIG.2A Softening of City Grids & Envelopes

Modern implementation of city grids and property lines has been long-overdue for change as it has failed to keep pace with the changes in social structures of the 21st century. The relationship between the city and the inhabitants is analogous, meaning the organization of the premise of city blocks dictate how the people occupy the space. As for Manhattan, the vertical living paradigm has enabled high urban density in the narrow streets of New York; yet the urban circulation remains controlled by the delirious grid with limited access to shared public spaces. Urbanism, in fact, was once mediated by streets and buildings, but today the dependence on digital systems has enabled people to coexist in different places simultaneously resulting in the urban environment becoming less relevant. One way to interpret this is by looking at architecture as “production of directed fields in which program, event, activity can play themselves out” rather than as “production of autonomous objects” that embed their own identities labeled by unique zip codes (Allen). The public spaces hold significance

in civic engagements between the inhabitants of the city leading to ask how static architecture could be renewed and loosened to reinforce intersection between the social and the urban forms that are more aligned to contemporary routines. Manhattan Transverse explores a new architectural paradigm in Manhattan’s Civic Center that resists the governed boundaries of the existing city grid; one where forms and envelopes are driven by public interactions and civic programs rather one where building enclosures conform to the property lines. The constant change and expanding instability of social systems demands an alternative typology of shared urban spaces and asks how the ground interactions could be reconfigured by nesting interconnected fragments into the existing public institutions with different spatial opacity and ambiguity to enable new formal and social potential.

Contemporary urban fabric is established through the organization of typologies that house programs and circulation. Such constructed living spaces operate as closed systems with sustaining physical environments demarcated from their surroundings by boundaries that separate themselves from the surrounding context. These miniaturized worlds are mass-produced and commercialized at every city block through sameness despite its obvious disconnect to the streets at the urban scale. Thus, such practices become a form of image and form making exercise where the appearance and symbol of the envelope becomes more prioritized over its relationship to the urban fabric; these worlds become “conditioned and measured version of a simulated piece of nature; it is contented and luxurious, allowing one to camp out in an idealized and manufactured climate” (Kallipoliti). Wes Jones in “Can Tectonics Grasp Smoothness?” reevaluates that value in architecture lies in the tectonics at the intersection of two sources, “embodying the logic of architecture’s unique sense of necessity and



serving as the medium for expressing judgment.” He questions what new material and techniques could enable new spatial experiences as well as to unlock new functional logic for everyday use. By altering the building envelope and interiority to connect with the surrounding city fabric, the public programs could intertwine and complement with the existing civic programs. One alternative to the current urban model is evident in Alison and Peter Smithson’s Berlin Hauptstadt. The project explores an urban pedestrian network system on top of the existing old city grid for Berlin, which aims to resolve the growing nature of urban cities as the ground becomes occupied by vehicular traffic. In fact, this notion of characterizing architecture through porosity and local interconnectivity derives

from the era before society’s dependence on digital infrastructure. Nowadays, technology allows us to move through the city at such a rapid pace that people are no longer attentive of the surrounding environment. Instead, the GPS on the small screen notifies one the shortest and fastest route to the destination, forcing people towards a more planned circulation with specific agendas, diminishing the chances for multi engagements between different occupants. Thus, the question becomes how the existing flow of urban traffic could be transformed and revitalized to better fit the needs of the modern society, where the public circulation could start to morph into programmatic forms, thereby mitigating the need for separate identities for each program housed inside the building enclosures.

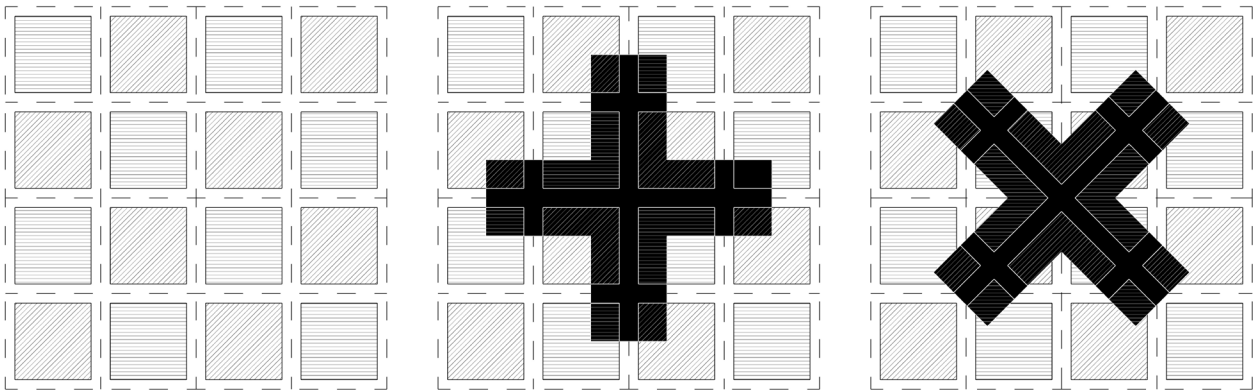


FIG.2C Urban Cross Engagements

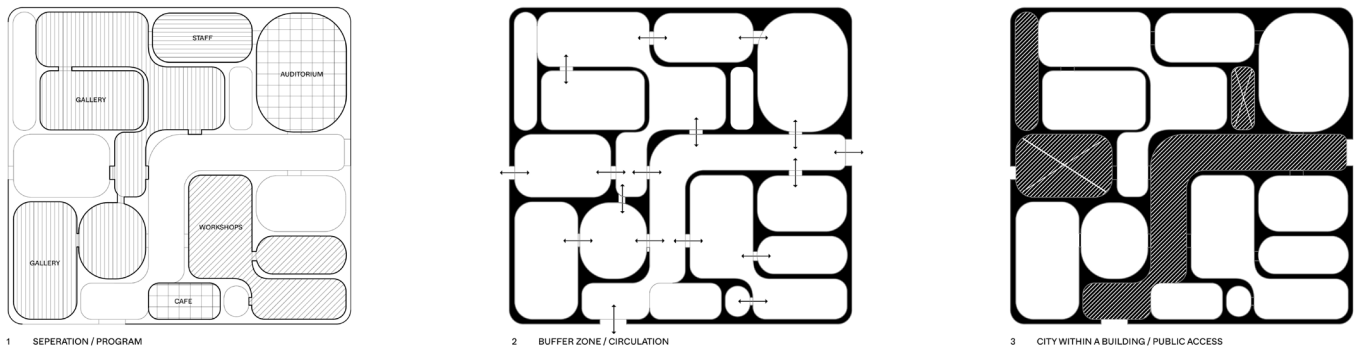


FIG.2B Glass Pavilion Circulation / Inside Out

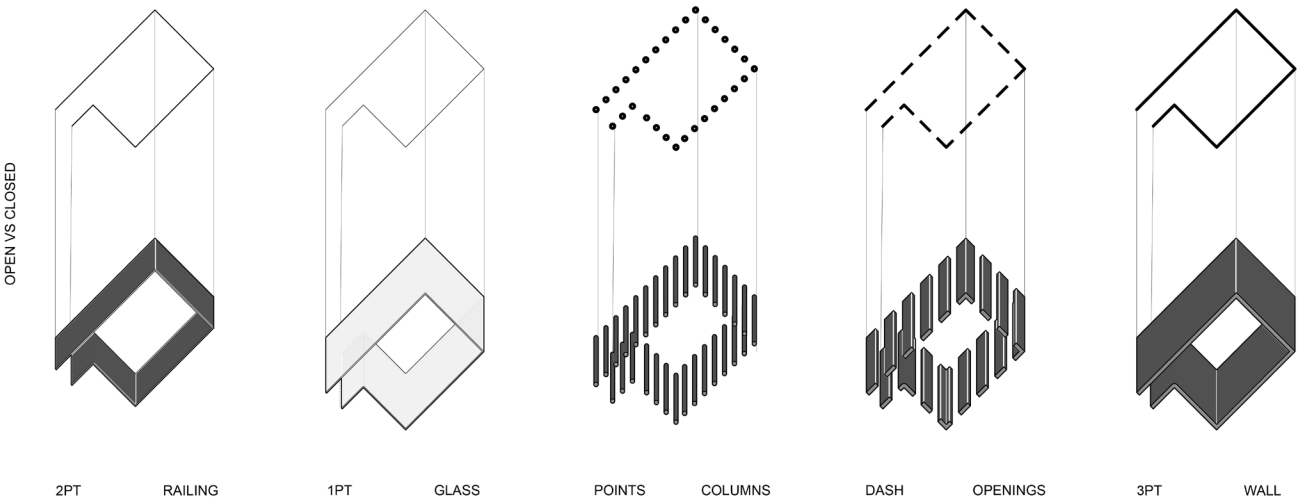


FIG.2D Points, Lines and Surfaces

The term ‘in-between,’ borrowed from Martin Buber’s philosophical model I and Thou, was adopted by early architects, such as Aldo Van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger, as a way to express the spatial condition for the meeting of two architectural orders. In-between spaces set up the common ground between two opposing factions, such as past and present, classic and modern, old and new, archaic and avant-garde, constancy and change, public and private and open and closed. Van Eyck’s twin phenomenon explores non-hierarchical harmony between mutually exclusive entities to construct a space that corresponds to the ambivalent nature of man: interpreting “a city like a large house”; the commonality is “not a matter of choosing between two elements, but of employing both in conjunction in such a way that the right reciprocal effort is obtained” (Teyssot). However, Van Eyck’s phenomenon is less evident in the contemporary cities as vehicular infrastructure

dominates and stitches the urban fabric, resulting in limited pedestrian traffic outside in the urban realm. Rapid urbanization in the finite cityscape leads to vertical expansion of cities adding more social and racial divisions within the different districts within the city. Modern urbanization mainly relies on capital growth of the city, which results in gentrification of districts and building structures built to heighten tourism. For instance, the recent establishment of Hudson Yards in midtown Manhattan was built with funds intended for low income housing in Harlem, which shows new commercialized architecture prioritizing the city’s economy over the well-being of the locals. With Manhattan’s constant effort to push towards vertical living paradigm, the delirious grid along with the high urban density and the culture of congestion, the question remains as to how unused spaces within the dense city could be reprogrammed to prioritize shared public spaces for the locals (Koolhaas).



FIG.2E Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York (1978)

DEFORMING URBANSCAPE

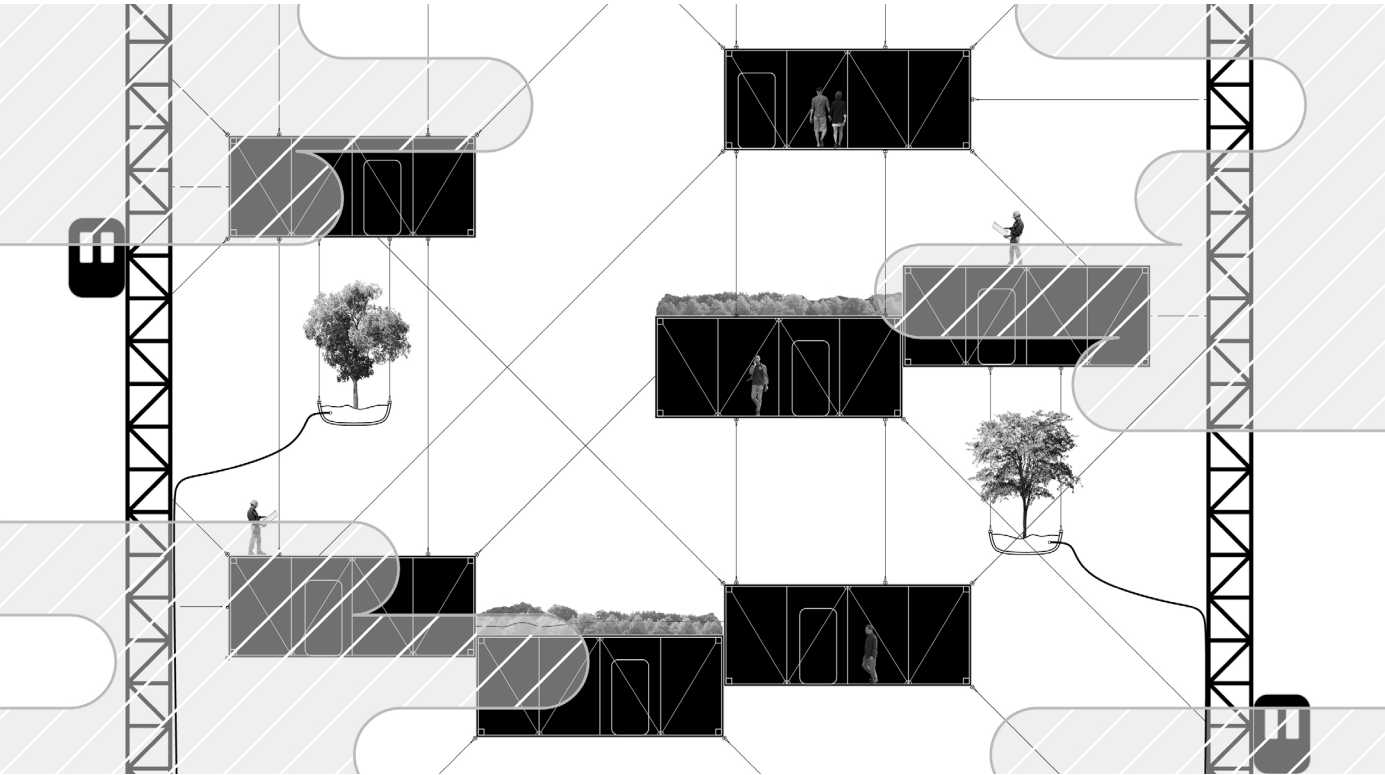


FIG.3A Architecture Beyond the Grid

Somol and Whiting positions architecture “not as a fixed datum or entity, but rather an active organism or discursive practice, unplanned and ungovernable”, where programs overlap to form neutral fields “rather than figuring multiple programs with its formal identifications” (Somol & Whiting). The spatial and programmatic divide is enabled through the placement of the wall in architecture, whether it is external or internal. The wall has become a critical separation in architecture that delineates inside from outside, programmatically and thermodynamically. In fact, architectural practice has narrowed down to enclosed envelopes that differentiate its programmatic intentions from the outside, thereby leaving the buildings to be less responsive towards their surrounding context. With the city constantly reforming, spaces being actively reprogrammed to fit the new demands, the

walls can no longer be solid enclosures. Stan Allen’s “Mapping the Unmappable: On Notation” denotes that “today the technologies of communication, information exchange and war...have produced a condition in which the urban site is no longer simply geographic” nor a collective unitary form; architects need to integrate and address the societal context and its surrounding through building (Allen). The interior and exterior relationships of the city and the buildings are in desperate need to be reconfigured to cross engage; every surface, apertures and windows could be rearticulated formally and programmatically to create ambiguity between public and private spaces. The existing property lines could start to alter vertically for the public to inhabit by bringing new engagements between different occupants and agencies to form overlapping programs.

Manhattan’s vertical paradigm and culture of congestion have challenged the inhabitants to have limited shared public spaces on the ground level, resulting in public spaces such as pocketed parks, plazas and lobby spaces to remain separated from one another. Despite the heavy urban density of New York, public spaces are bounded within the city blocks with very little intersection between different agencies and occupants partly due to the enclosed barriers of state buildings. Such non-linearity and lack of connection between shared spaces are most evident in Manhattan’s civic center. The site is home to public services as well as governmental buildings that remain detached from the urban circulation between the Chinatown and Soho districts. With municipal records and services moving to the

digital realm, new public programs could replace the unused spaces and revitalize the district with loosened circulation for shared engagements. According to Betsky, civic entities no longer hold significance to the contemporary bureaucracy and state; “perhaps civic architecture can be temporary. Pop-up election information booths, or tents where hot propositions or candidates can be discussed, would seem to fit within the tenor of times” (Betsky). One example of disposed monumental architecture is The Louis J. Lefkowitz State Office Building in the civic district of lower Manhattan. Located adjacent to the Supreme Court, the office building was previously home to Departments of Taxation, Finance and Motors, which was later transferred to the state of New York for marriages in 2009.



FIG.3B 1:10,000 District Divide

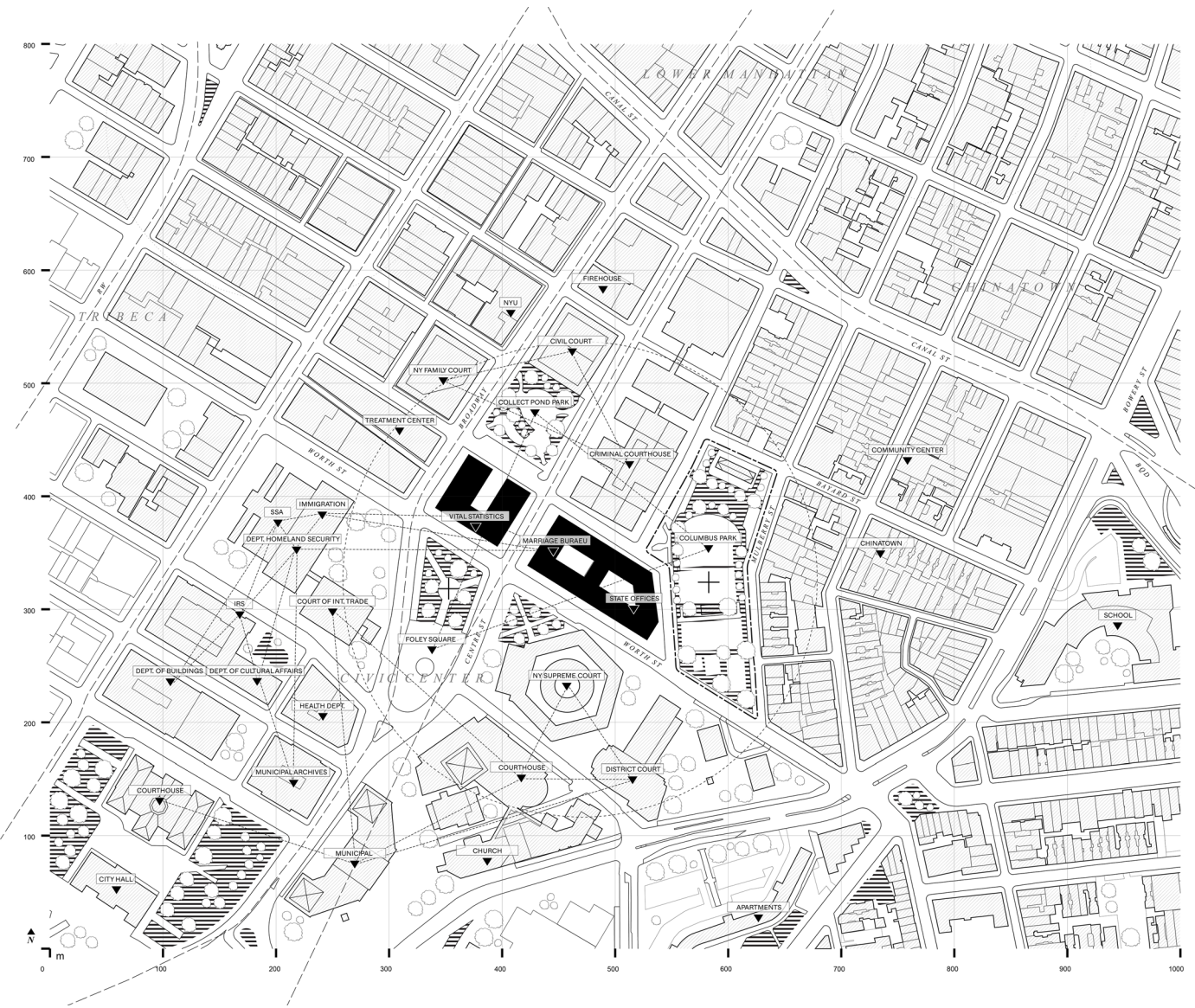


FIG.3C 1:100 Lower Manhattan Civic Center

Despite numerous attempts to take it down or renovate for a new program, the building remained 80% unused by the state offices, blocking the urban traffic flow on the ground level. The building sits on the border between the two districts of Chinatown and civic center as a costly concrete blockage for urban traffic to flow towards west Manhattan from the denser Chinatown. The civic typologies are built to represent its exclusivity and grandiose nature, resulting in occupants feeling powerless. In fact, the buildings remain mostly empty as the governmental

systems move to digital space, especially after COVID-19, questioning whether or not the existence of state buildings are necessary for the near future. Their inefficiency in building systems and heavy expense to maintain questions the longevity of old civic presence in the district remains unclear. Moreover, despite being named New York’s “Civic Center,” the area remains almost empty as though the thick granite facades of the state buildings are synonymous to a “Do not cross” sign.

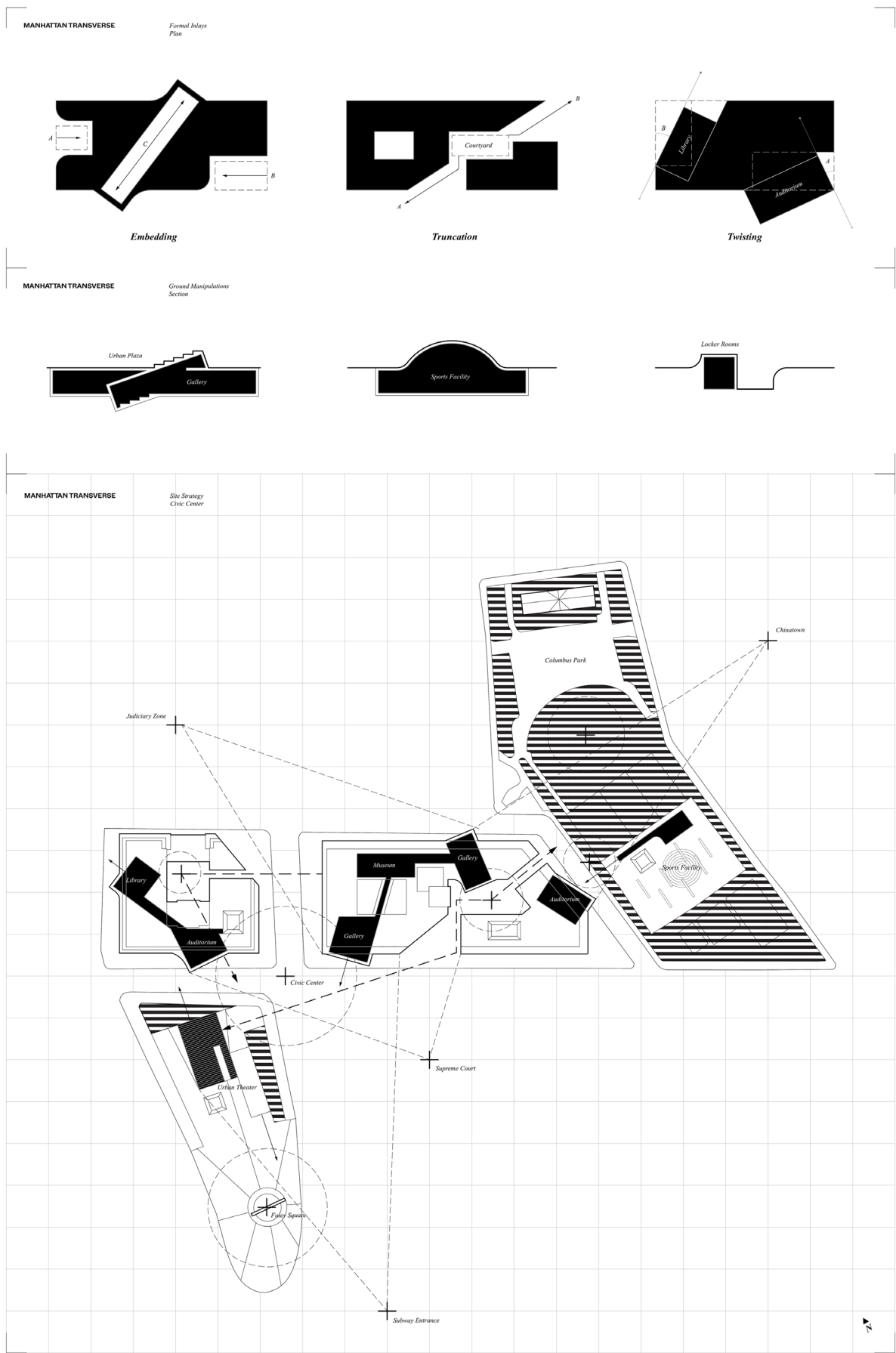
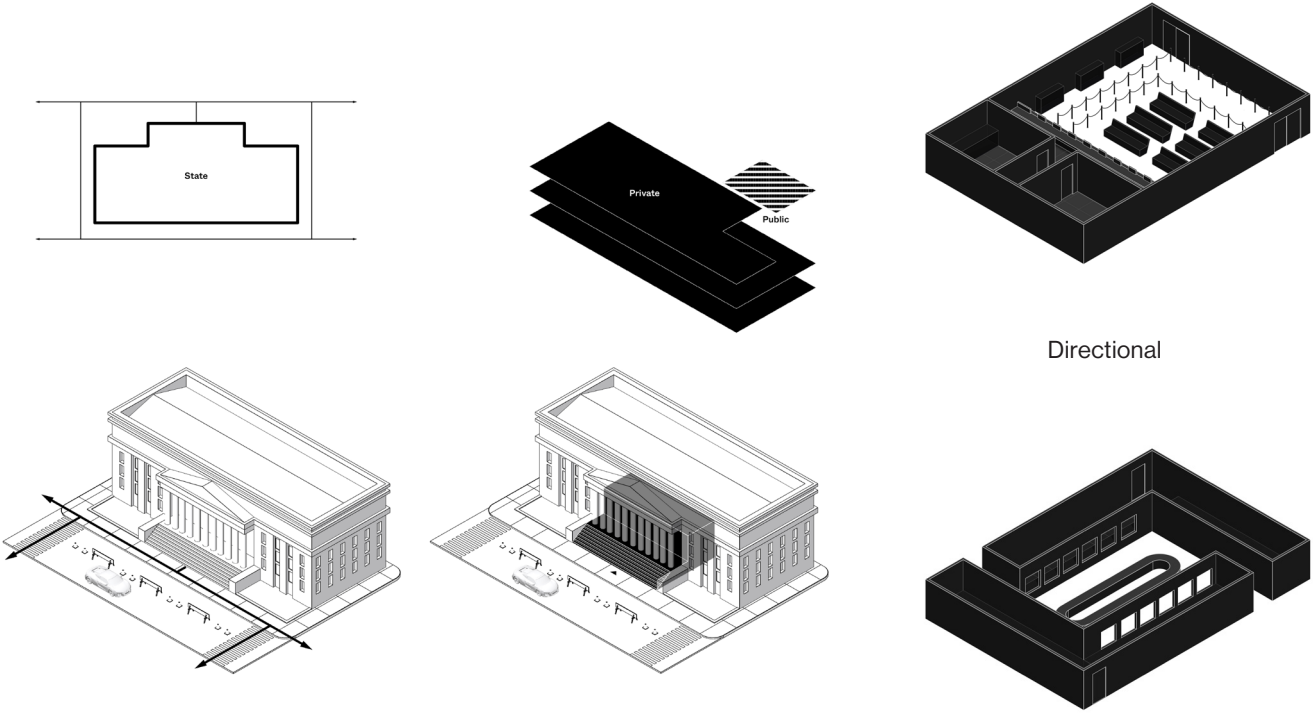
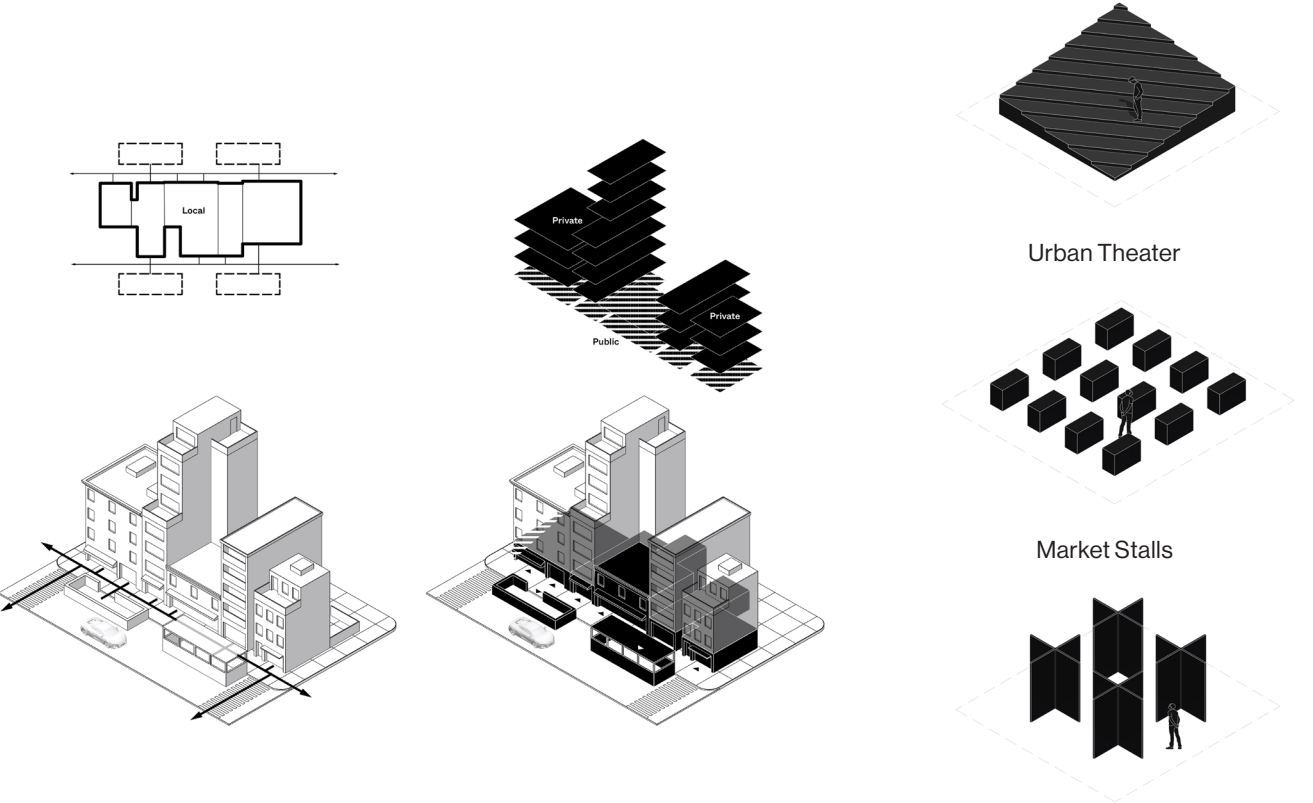


FIG.3D Formal Analysis

INSTITUTIONAL - PRIVATE



SOCIAL - PUBLIC



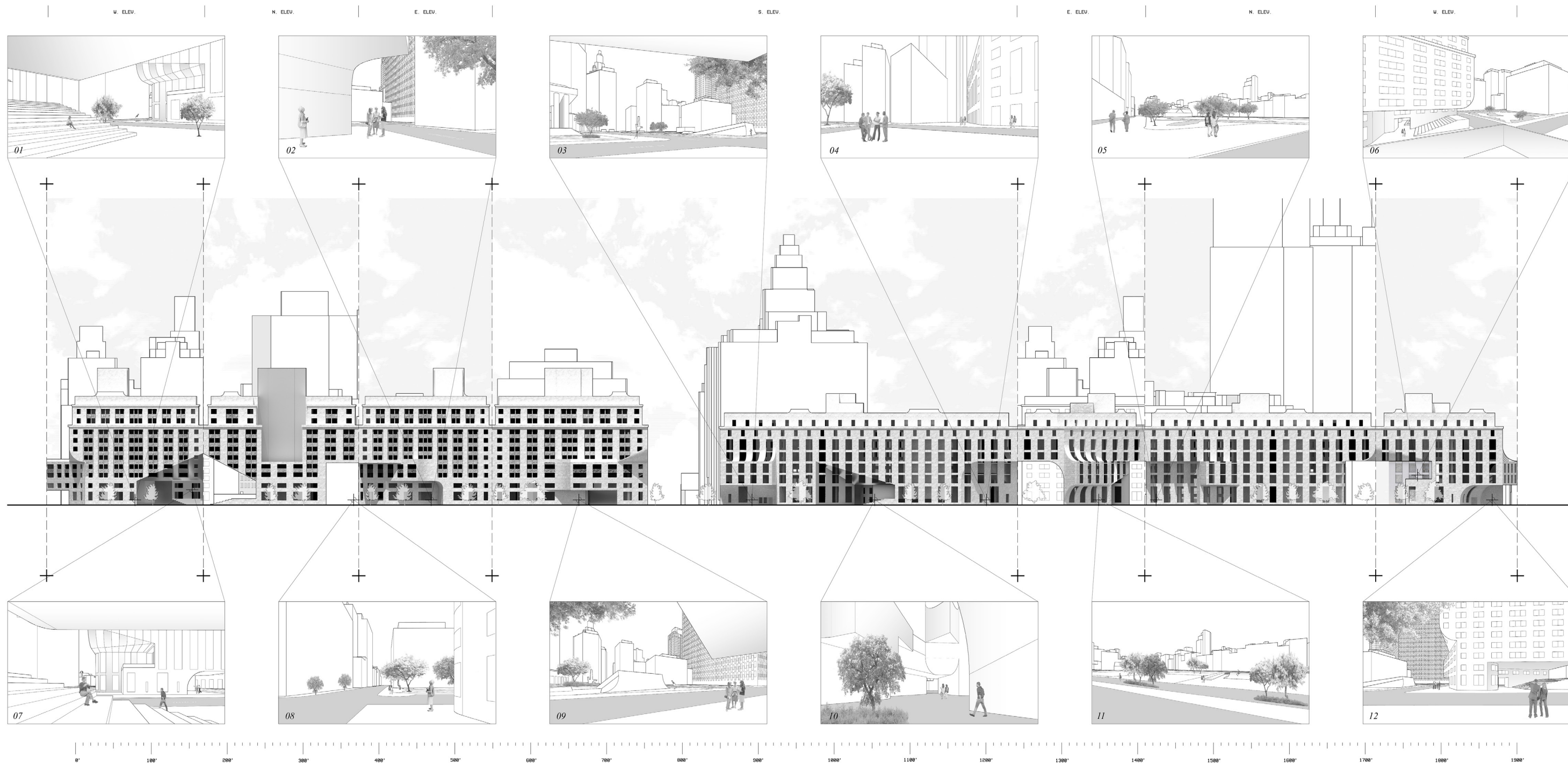


FIG.3E Unrolled Site

Projective architecture is not “a fixed datum or entity, but rather an active organism or discursive practice, unplanned and ungovernable.”

- Somol & Whiting, Notes around the Doppler Effect and other moods of Modernism (2002)

MANHATTAN TRANSVERSE

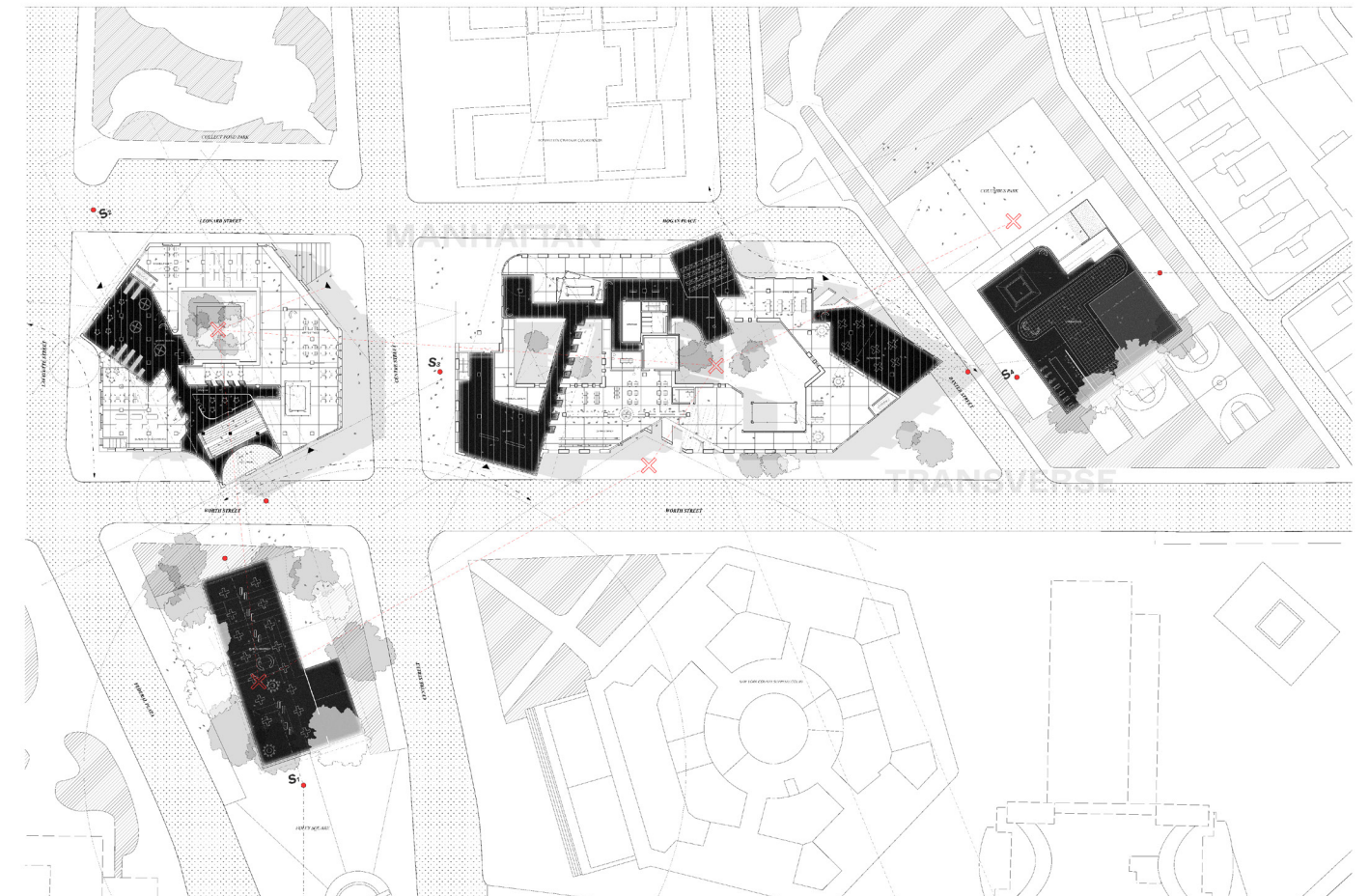


FIG.4A Injected Public Program

Manhattan Transverse aims to revitalize the unused civic center by connecting public ground and the existing facade of the civic entities as one through reforming the programmatic uses. The architecture envelopes and the grids begin to react to the surrounding context by breaking the enclosed barriers formally through different modes of wall transparencies that enable the public and private realms to intersect. In fact, by enforcing public and civic service programs alongside circulation, the separation between the urban traffic and the private agencies become ambiguous enabling intersectionality between the two. This new

architectural paradigm in Manhattan's Civic Center, therefore, resists the governed boundaries of the existing city grid; one where forms and envelopes are driven by public interactions and civic programs rather one where building enclosures conform to the property lines. The constant change and expanding instability of social systems demands an alternative typology of shared urban spaces and asks how the ground interactions could be reconfigured by nesting interconnected fragments into the existing public institutions with different spatial opacity and ambiguity to enable new formal and social potential.

DESIGN METHODOLOGY

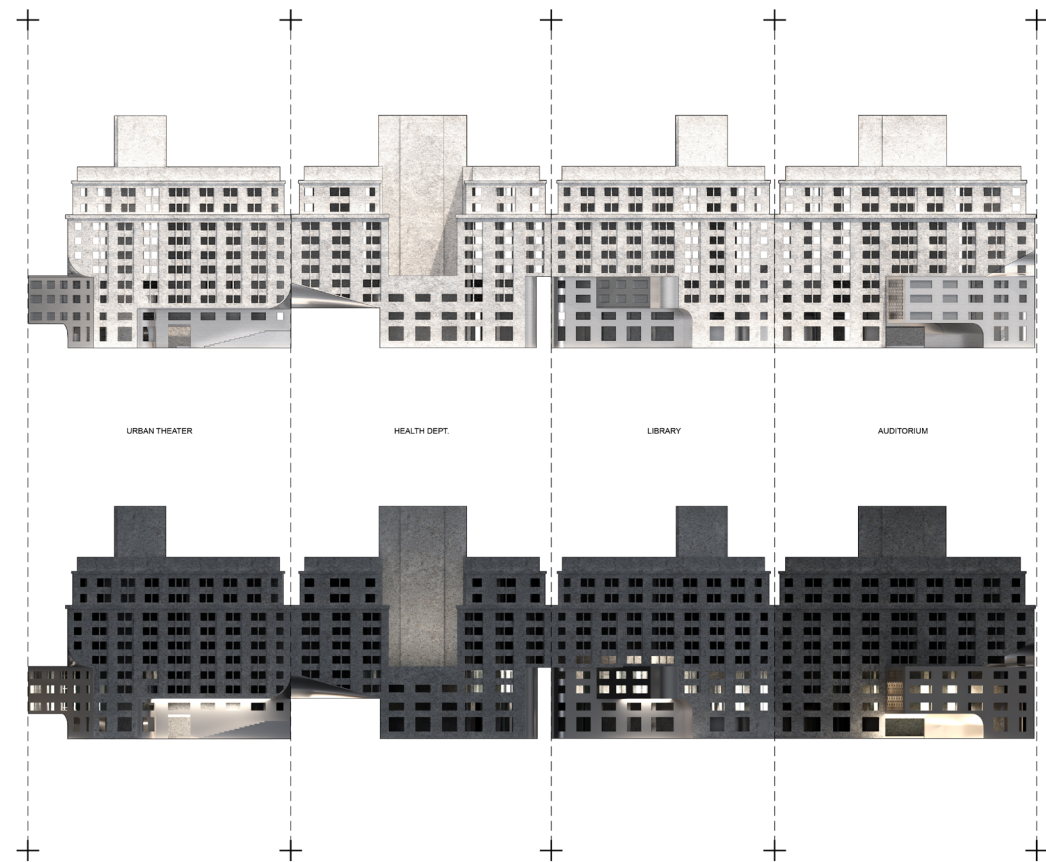


FIG.5A Day & Night Activation

Delirious grids and extremity of vertical density has resulted in isolated blocks with generic forms, facades and programs deployed across each district of Manhattan. As society becomes more dependent on digital systems, the locality and premise of urban form has failed to keep pace with the changes in social and political structures of the 21st century. The intersection of urban context and social form is analogous, as the organizations of city blocks dictate how the people occupy the space. However, the sameness of architecture enclosures and geometric city grids have left the urban traffic to be detached from the shared interactions between the public and the private realms. Before reliance on technology, urbanism, in fact, was mediated by

streets and buildings, but today the dependence on digital systems has enabled people to coexist in different places simultaneously resulting in the urban environment becoming less relevant. One way to interpret this is by looking at architecture as “production of directed fields in which program, event, activity can play themselves out” rather than as “production of autonomous objects” that embed their own identities labeled by unique zip codes. The public spaces then hold significance in civic engagements between the inhabitants of the city leading to ask how static architecture could be renewed and loosened to reinforce intersection between the social and the urban forms that are more aligned to contemporary routines.

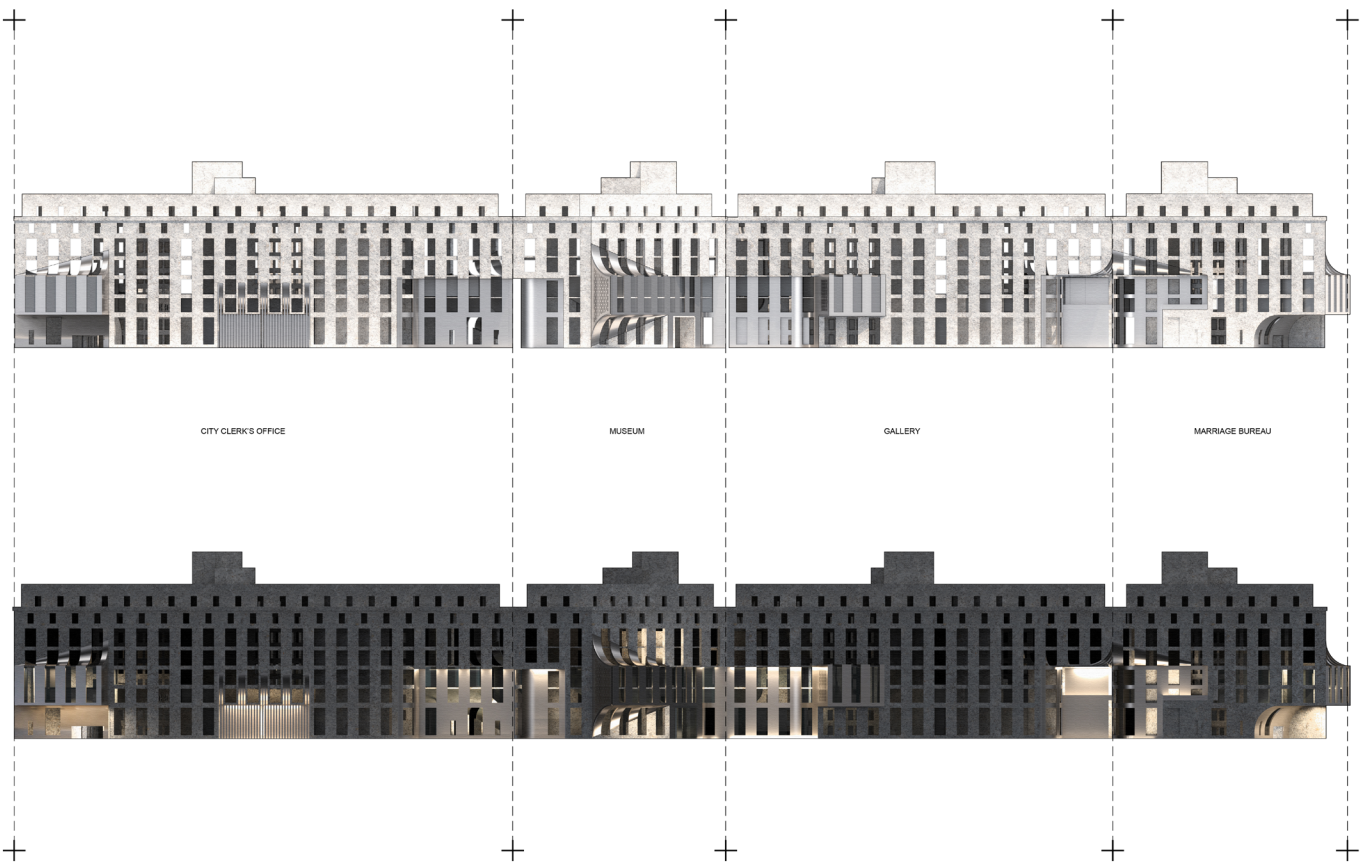


FIG.5B Foley Square Lift

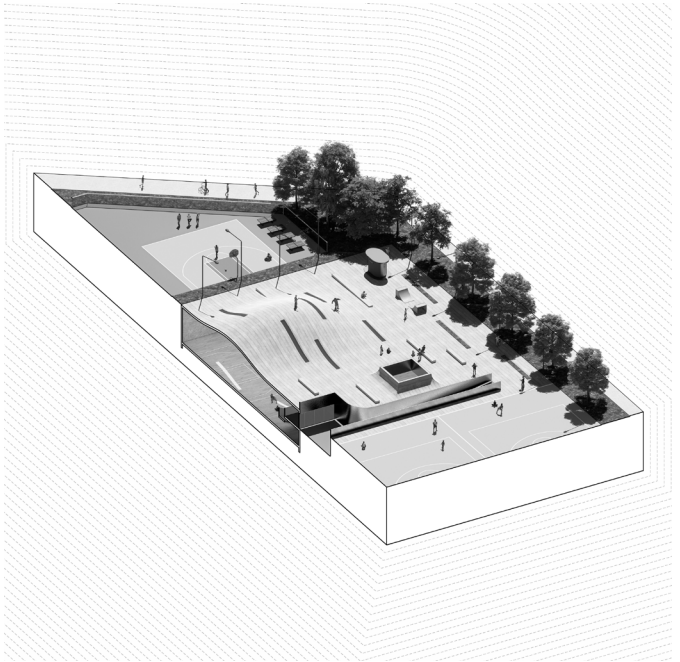
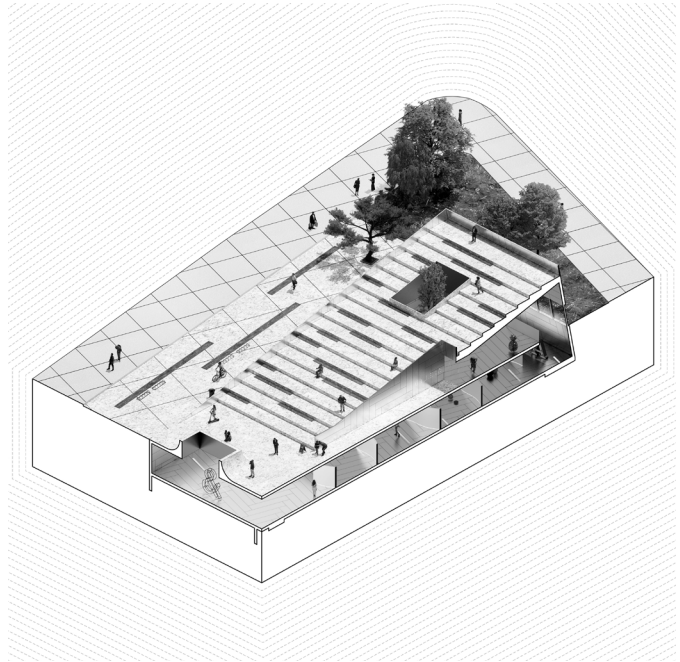


FIG.5C Deformed Columbus Park

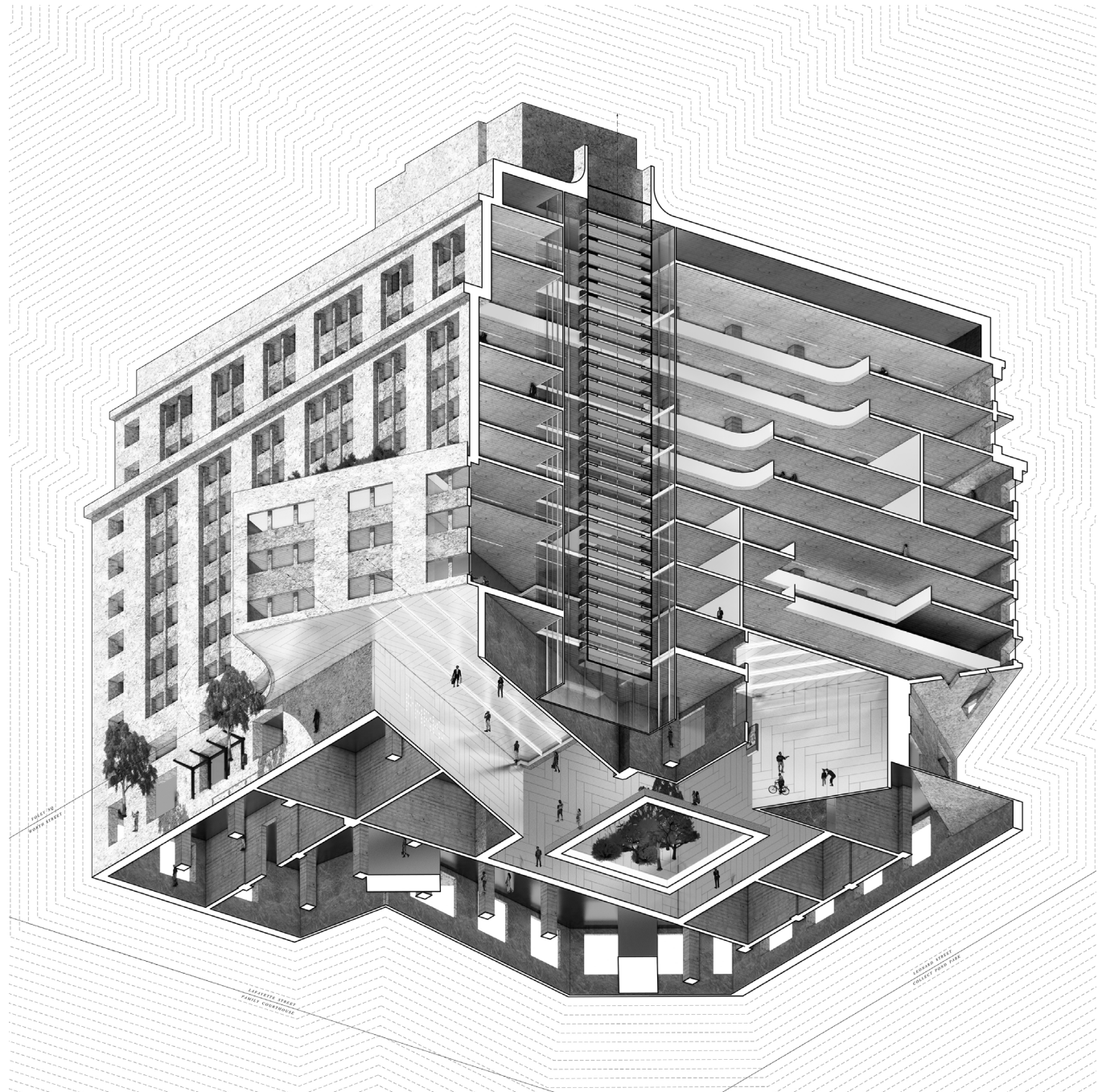


FIG.5D Courtyard Undercut

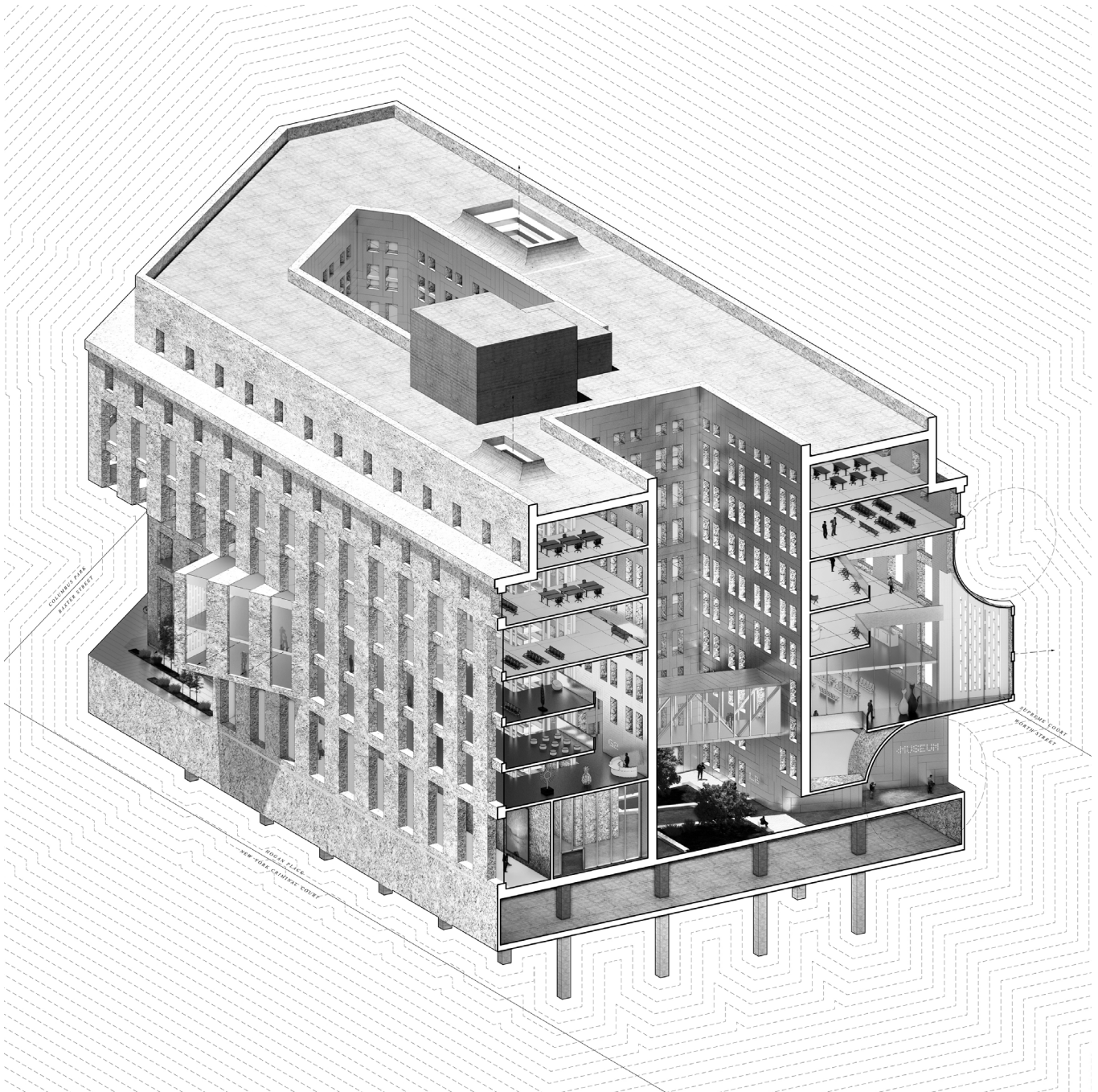


FIG.5E Facade Distortment

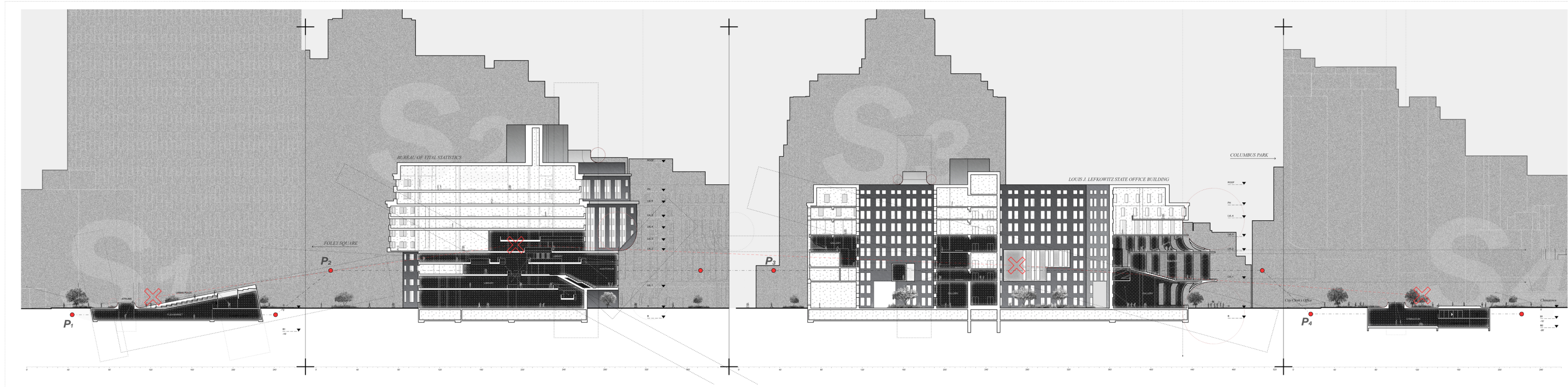


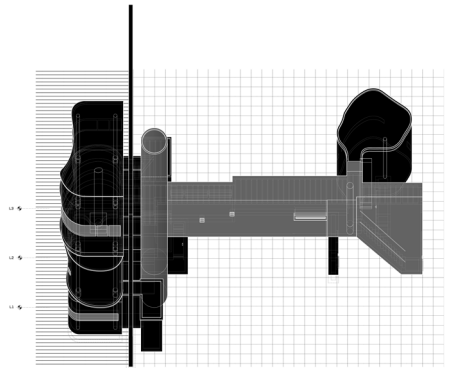
FIG.5F Site Section Unroll

PRECEDENTS

P01

Wall House John Hedjuk

Hedjuk's interpretation of wall as a surface condition where people transgress through. The vertical separation reconditions and divides the space into two: public and private realms. This barrier is represented as a line, yet the program and circulation on each side differ, resulting in two atmospheres.



P02

Conical Intersect Gordon Matta-Clark

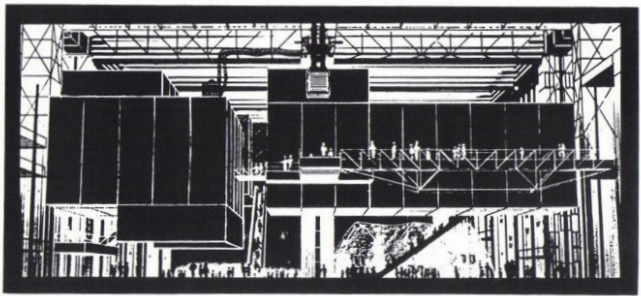
Matta-Clark's interest in the inextricable relationship to private and public space is depicted through physical destruction of the existing buildings. Such fantastical gesture represented a way for the public to view the internal skeleton of the building bringing the public engagement into the building.



P03

The 1960s Fun Palace Cedric Price

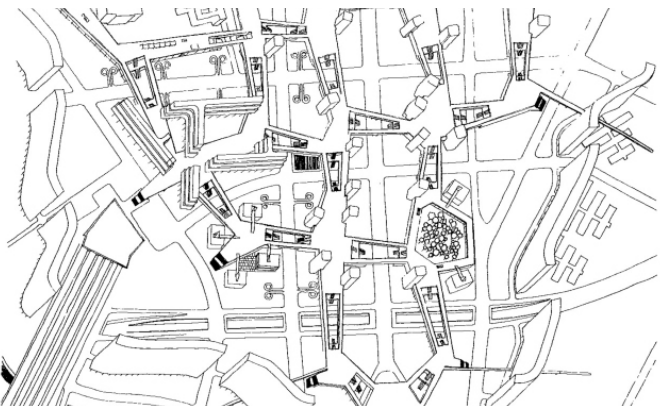
Fun Palace was conceived as a laboratory of fun with the intention to establish a framework for the public and to further human freedom through architecture. It framed architecture to exist outside the physical constraints and standardized laws.



P04

Berlin Hauptstadt Alison and Peter Smithson

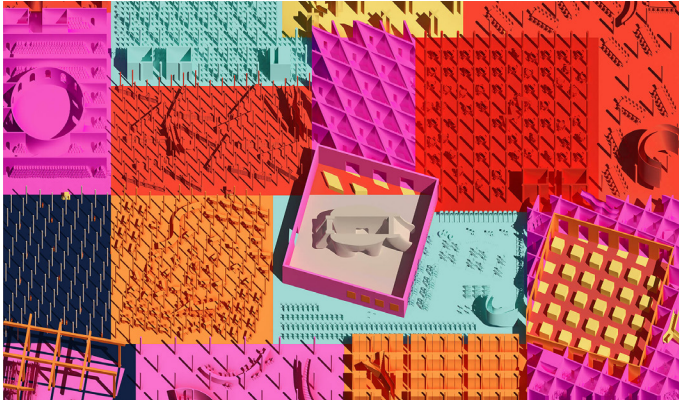
Alison and Peter Smithson's proposal imagined an overlay of pedestrian network over the existing vehicular traffic system to offer a way for the public to connect. The buildings become part of the urban realm, thereby blurring the private and public.



P05

Flatbed Junk Neme Studio

Flatbed Junk explores the compilation of conditioned planetary interiors within one large flattened building. The exterior roovescape hides the interiority that it contains through graphic ambiguity to revoke against the traditional approach to typologies.



P06

IntraCenter WW

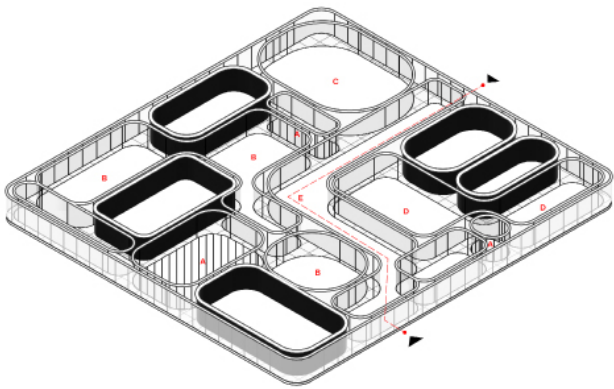
WW's IntraCenter encases multiple programs within a community center rather than figuring these multiple programs with its formal identification, or neutral fields to allow the programs to define the project. The linear alignment to create non-concentricity.



P07

Toledo Glass Pavilion SANAA

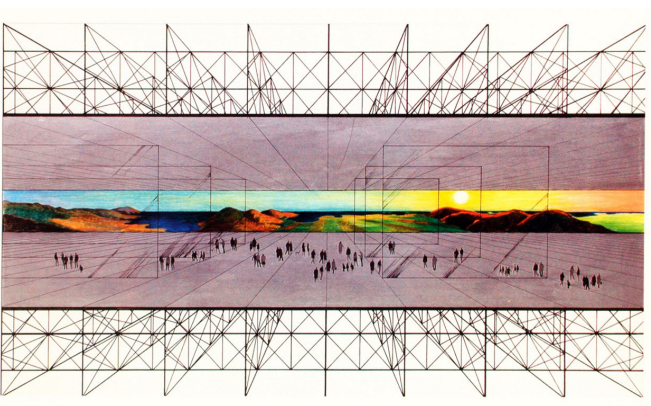
Toledo Glass Pavilion utilizes the layers of transparent glass walls that immerse users into the surrounding context. The uninterrupted corners blend the interior with the exterior conditions allowing users to circulate without visual disruptions.



P08

No Stop City Archizoom

No Stop City establishes a radical approach to a modern city where modernist architecture and practicality is downplayed. It proposes a city with infinite space with free-form organic elements that override the conventional grid structure.



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