

**progression of the hegelian  
paradigm through architec-  
ture + urbanism**

a thesis project by james milicevic

## master's project [MP] report

The principal tragedy regarding suburbia is that the built environment is constructed as though the sole desire of its users/occupants is to consume, both frantically and irrationally. While many would like to believe that the issue to be confronted is one of legal prescription (i.e., zoning, building code, etc.), I am willing to make the case that the issues plaguing the suburban built environment—singularity of use, subordination of the public realm to the private, anemic pedestrian experience—are symptomatic of the Hegelian historical paradigm to which suburbia belongs: post-industrial, late capitalism. Therefore, it is not a stretch to state that this thesis takes issue with an outdated paradigmatic condition as much as a built urban and/or architectural condition. Likewise, this thesis project establishes a prototypical urban condition within a realm that has been hither to now developed in a suburban fashion that initiates critical discourse and a heightened social awareness of social/ political/ economic conditions—at both a global and local scale—in order to usher in the next Hegelian paradigm.

The design exercise is a two-part process: one part urban and a second part architectural in scope. The urban design will be discussed first herein, as the fabrication of an urban condition antithetical to the suburban model is a critical first step in creating a viable place in which to deposit an architecture of change. For this project, I chose the Greenbriar Mall in South Metropolitan Atlanta. The site was chosen in particular due to its anonymity—since this thesis project is prototypical in nature, it would not be unreasonable to select a site immovably mired in the conditions plaguing suburbia—in addition to its anticipation of transit connectivity, an integral factor in an incrementally developed metropolitan condition.

For the actual urban design, I looked to the principles and rules-of-thumb advocated and published by the Congress of the New Urbanism. The utilization of C.N.U. principles is founded upon two primary bases, one of approbation and one of a more critical nature: C.N.U. design tools can effectively generate an increased urban density and proximity, conditions arguably expeditious of interchange and exchange of ideas; C.N.U. doctrine represents a sort of “status quo” condition that should be juxtaposed sharply against a critique of conditions currently regarded as such. The design includes a demolition of the existing mall in conjunction with a preservation of the mall’s ten-acre footprint and orientation as the site of architectural experimentation, an increased density of blocks roughly two hundred feet wide by six hundred feet long—although there is a broad range of variation, as the urban grid is allowed to become “cranky” in response to existing streets and site conditions—and a concentration of density at its highest intensity around the preserved mall footprint in order to generate the threshold of tension necessary to prompt the critical consciousness this thesis project seeks. The intended density is roughly fifteen gross residential units per acre. The design conditions regarding the individual buildings not located on the site of architectural experimentation are governed by a selected, abridged portion of the Duany, Plater-Zyberk & Co. SmartCode Version 9.2 in order to guarantee a coherence of aesthetics and a corroborated sense of place. Furthermore, the urban design is culminated with the design of three street typologies, one of a boulevard street type, a “primary” street type, and a “secondary” street type (listed, as it were, in an order from the most broad to the most narrow). Finally, an effort is made to generate no net loss of trees with the urban design intervention. Rather than the abject absence of trees, characteristic of the asphalt parking oceans surrounding

many of the big-box retailers, composed abrasively against the impossibly dense tree cover, characteristic of undeveloped suburban lots, the urban design seeks to integrate an infiltration of trees throughout the locale in conjunction with the proliferation of streets.

Once the urban framework is established, the architectural investigation is given an appropriate context in which to operate. The architecture of this site takes very seriously the three-part dynamic of the Hegelian Dialectic—that is, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—and likewise reflects this dynamic in the utilization of three architectural programmatic elements, each representing a component of the dialectical model. For the element representing “thesis,” I employ an agricultural component, as a renewed commitment to a working of the land not only re-familiarizes individuals with the input and products of their labor—something lost with the advent of Capitalism—it furthermore informs individuals of the magnitude of labor necessary to sustain their respective needs, an element wholly lost with the big-box consumerism of our current paradigm. For the element corresponding to “antithesis,” I locate on site a home for a particular group of the economically disenfranchised, namely those who formerly occupied the middle class and have made good on their end of the “American Dream Promise” (that is, they have dedicated themselves to their education and their professional and economic mobility) only to find as their reward that society has no longer any real need of them. A housing of the disinvested corresponds agreeably to antithesis because it makes individuals sentient of the inexorable tie between their needs and the needs of others sharing a particular society. Finally, for the element epitomizing “synthesis,” I make use of two twin monument towers. These towers operate under the banner of synthesis because they first of all make individuals aware of their place in a global collective, as the two towers enclose two perfected atrium spaces (perfected because the design is comprised only of vertical spatial volume and shell) that, in one tower, displays constantly-refreshing news tickers throughout the volume and, in the second tower, houses a water collection facility and vertical greenhouse; they secondly operate as an innovative anchoring of place in the wake of suburban proliferation, a built typology that has otherwise fundamentally robbed locales of any substance which they may exclusively call their own.

With an explanation of the elements established, it is worth discussing the composition of the elements on site a propos one another. First and foremost, it should be made clear that, given the dynamic of the designed urban framework in addition to the mass of the monument feature, a concentration of density is expected to cluster at the center of the site. Consequently, the monumental towers and housing are centered on the architectural site, and the arable land is allowed to extend from the center to the eastern and western site boundaries in a manner anticipating reduced densities at the respective peripheries. In a further substantiated effort to highlight the center of the site as the concentration point of crowds, a series of pedestrian-path grids are laid across the site in a fashion mimicking the density of accumulation (that is, the grids become smaller and denser at the site center and likewise grow larger and less dense as they move away from the center). Thus, the three architectural elements on site are composed in a manner anticipating crowd accretion and, accordingly, in a manner prompting critical social interchange.

There remain two architectural decisions to speak of in order to

## master's project [MP] report

present herein an exhaustive account of this thesis exercise: site orientation and water harvest/distribution. The site has two orienting directionalities which it addresses: one acknowledging the urban positioning generated in the first part of the design exercise and a second reflecting in its layout cardinal directionality. The ostensibly violent juxtaposition of the two systems of direction, while offensive to refined designer sensibilities, elegantly illustrates the duality of modern life, namely regarding the belonging of individuals to a global community and a local community (this duality is further highlighted, as previously mentioned, in the respective atria of the twin-tower monuments). Moreover, there exists within this component of the design a shred of poetic play on the Marxist critique of modern timekeeping, as the cardinaly-oriented grid acts as a datum of register for solar paths and likewise as a more meaningful chronicle of the passage of time.

Rain water is collected in a number of rain-harvest facilities on the roofs of the buildings surrounding the ten-acre site. The collected rainwater, in addition to piped gray water from the building interior is pumped from the buildings of harvest into an underground series of detention structures and ultimately amassed in a large, cylindrical container within the greenhouse atrium of the appropriate monument tower. From this point of collection, water is distributed as necessary along a series of structural grids strictly following the pedestrian footpaths mentioned above. Thus, it is assumed that the cultivation of the land must be in direct correspondence with what the land can sustain as a function of rainfall and season, further underscoring sensitivity to place, individual labor, and the consequences of consumption.

Perhaps the best means of contending with the idea of design success or failure is to take the reader through the anticipated activities of a day in the life of an occupant of the site. A resident of the housing facility takes leave of his "private" upper story unit and bids his friend good morning—his friend on his own way to work in one of the building adjacent to the site. He buys his breakfast from a neighbor selling her delicious, personal recipe—all ingredients grown on-site, of course—for a quarter-hour of promised labor and proceeds to his own field at the western end of the site. Being the harvest season, he has a long morning of work in the field to consider. Nevertheless, the work never becomes tedious or unbearable, regardless of the heat, as a number of neighbors work in a series of shifts that is both productive and pleasant, and they are able to speak freely with one another without undue anxiety over an employer demanding the highest possible yield per hour. On this particular morning, the laborers are abuzz over the news of the DOW-Jones decline of yesterday, an approaching Rage Against the Machine concert date, and a bus bombing in London (all seen in the news tower on the previous day). At lunchtime, the resident collects his harvest and carries it home to his family, who busy themselves cleaning and preparing the various vegetables and flowers for sale in their downstairs market. He takes his lunch to the news tower and meets the same friend he greeted that morning for an hour break (he would like the lunch break to be longer, but his friend has to return to work promptly on the hour). The hour is spent reviewing the various news tickers crossing the banners and discussing what is seen with a collection of people, of whom only about half actually live on site. After the hour expires, the resident spends a few lingering minutes speaking with the amassed group, as a hot though not unpleasant debate has arisen in the few short minutes spent eating, and the resident is

unwilling to concede his point. Ultimately, he finds a window to tactfully escape the dialogue, and he returns home to display his family's produce in the downstairs market of their live-work unit. For the remainder of the evening, the resident exchanges produce for promised labor time among both residents and nonresidents alike (in fact, the evening exchange is briefly interrupted as a young businessman seeks to make good on a previous time commitment that afternoon and a task has to be generated for his businessman debtor to complete). In the evening, the resident's family joins him in the tower for a meeting with the neighborhood families to discuss the news of the day, the anticipated harvest yield this season, and the current water level. Everyone laughs as the employees of the surrounding businesses as they frantically hurry home in their cars, buses, or on the suddenly congested sidewalks. No one envies them.

If I were made to reflect upon the success and/or shortcomings of this thesis endeavor, I would say first of all that the great difficulty of this design exercise has been in faithfully representing in graphic and oral format a spatial experience that denies any conventional representation. Indeed, there is no such thing as an "anti-capitalist architecture," and any effort to draw, model, or speak over precisely how a site such as this one is to be used in a day feels like inexcusable pretense on my part—the paragraph above notwithstanding. In addition, it has been suggested that an accumulation of density around the architectural site arguably lends itself to a sort of voyeuristic showcase of the economically disenfranchised, although I would suggest as a retort that it is difficult to generate any real thresholds of tension without such an abruptness of programmatic juxtaposition. In conclusion, I would say that the strength of the exercise lies in its faithful commitment to Hegelian and Marxist philosophy, as there is absolutely no disconnect in the project's driving ethos or its critique of the status quo. Whether or not the commitment to tension makes critics uncomfortable remains outside the realm of my responsibility as a designer. Perhaps they should be made uncomfortable.

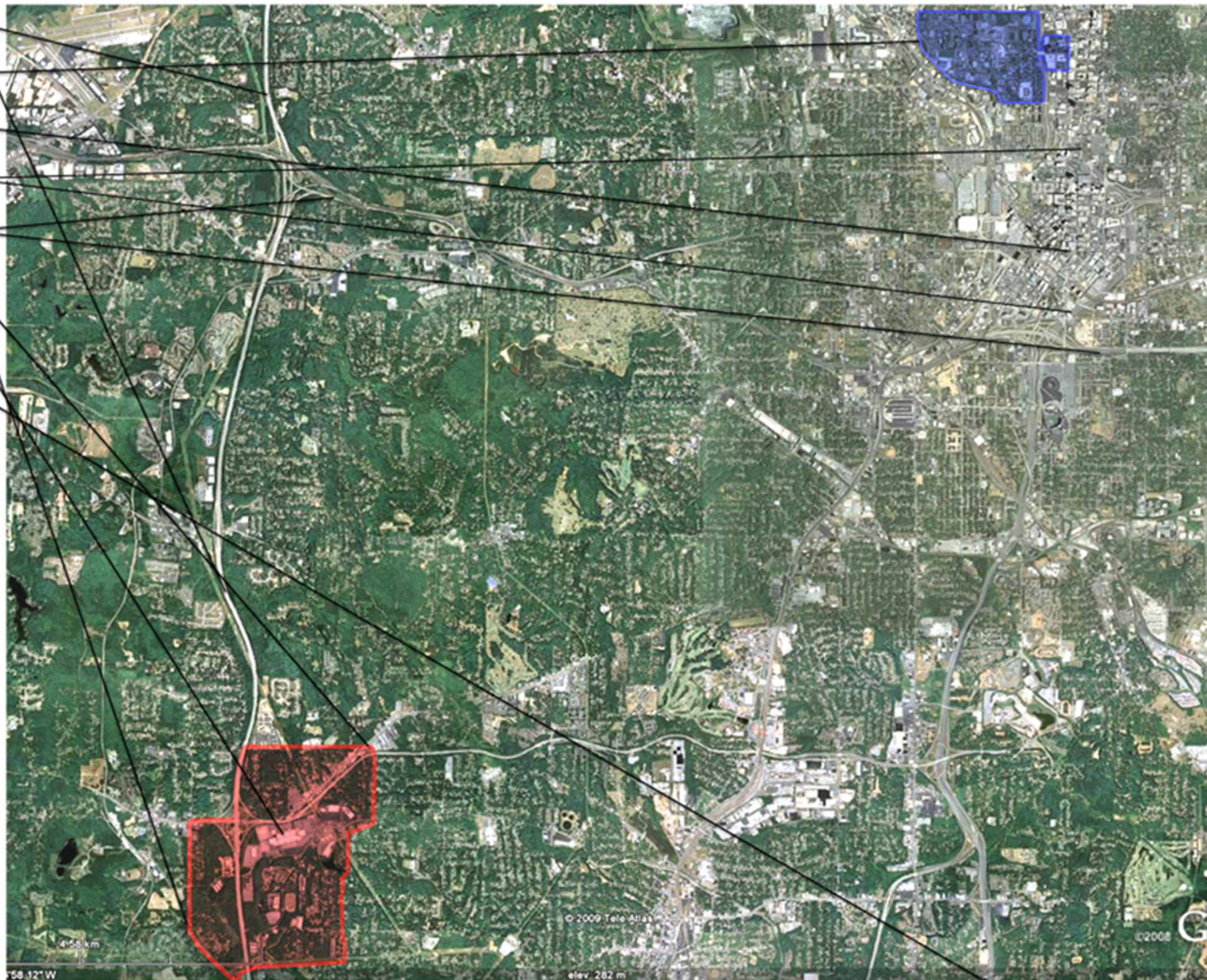
## **selected critical positions research**

material relevant to the progression of  
thought

greenbriar lci vs. atlanta region

- interstate 285
- georgia tech campus
- downtown atlanta
- downtown connector
- interstate 20
- greenbriar lci outlines
- greenbriar mall
- to airport beyond

The Greenbriar LCI study area is outlined in red to the right. The other land area indicated [for both distance and scale considerations] is the Georgia Tech campus. The most striking realization that occurs to an observer is the actual mass of land being studied in this particular site [comparative to Downtown and/or the GT campus]. A second striking indication here is precisely how far this particular area is from the central downtown core. It could safely be considered a "first-ring" suburb, as, phenomenologically speaking, has a sort of regional centrality that this image perhaps does not do the best job of conveying [indeed, the airport isn't even featured herein]. Thus, with the approval and inclusion of transit in the retrofit of the Greenbriar Mall LCI area, this portion of the Atlanta Metropolitan region can enjoy a REAL centrality rather than a purely phenomenological one.



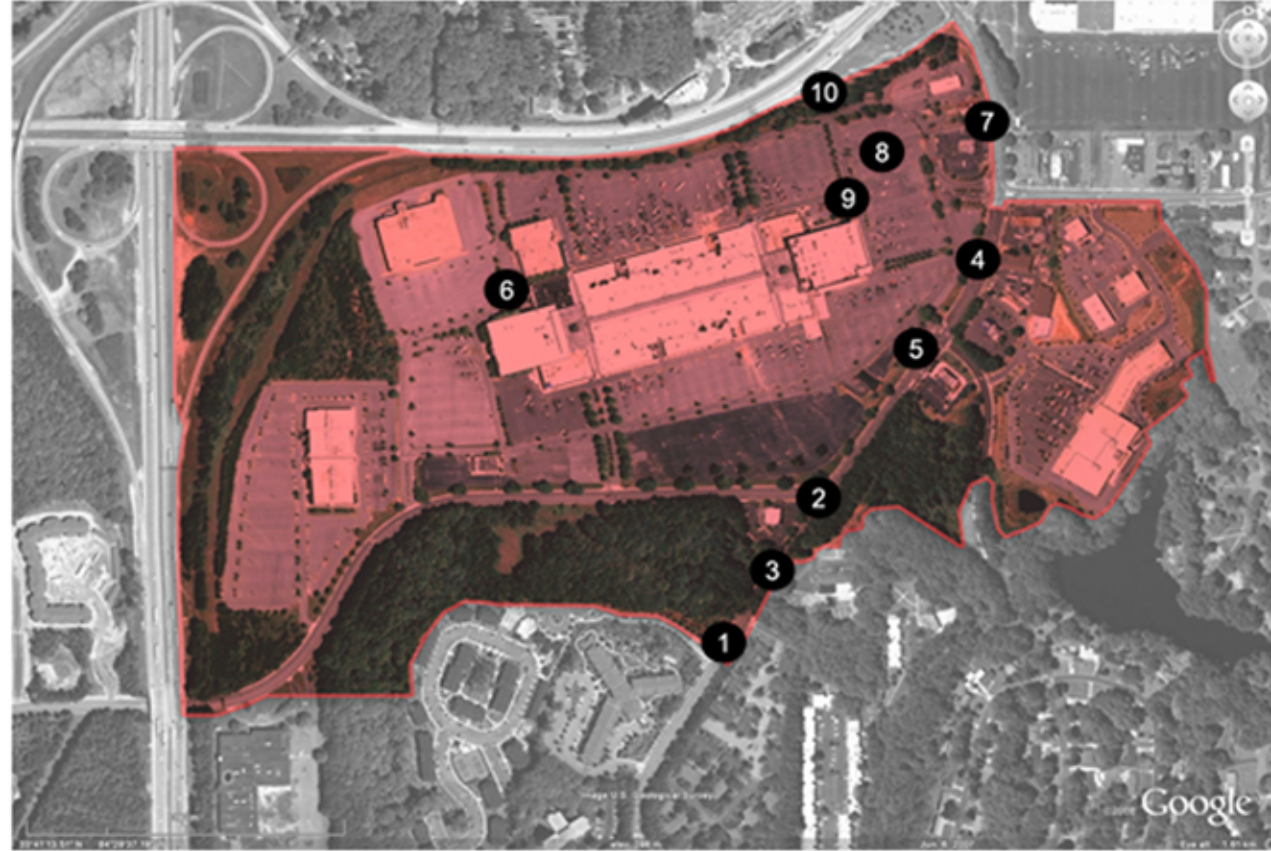
**research**

**greenbriar lci vs. immediate vicinity**

- interstate 285
- lakewood pwy
- lakewood greenway
- greenbriar mall
- big box national retail
- undeveloped creek/low space
- locked-gate communities

Looking here at the LCI study area and its immediate context. What's clear is that the standard, legal street nomenclature [local and connector roads feeding arterials] is the ruling precedent of the spatial layout. Likewise collectors and arterials are extremely wide and designed for maximum speed. One would have an incredibly difficult time finding sidewalks anywhere on the site, and, in the event that sidewalks are provided, they are generally in poor repair. Nevertheless, upon my site visit, I found a number of people trying against all the odds to walk around the Greenbriar mall, overlooking the interruptions in the sidewalks and darting dangerously out in traffic when even the smallest opening presented itself. Another thing that is quite apparent from this image is how much land is going towards parking as well as how much parking is actually being used. I cannot account for when the satellite image was taken, but I visited the site after 5:00 P.M. on a Friday, and the amount of occupied parking was similar to the image shown to the right. Finally, one element I consider an appealing opportunity is the amount of undeveloped low-laying land with dense tree cover. Overall, this site is disconnected within itself let alone the entire Atlanta Metropolitan area.





site exterior views

Although there is only a sampling of exterior images shown on this page [ten in all], I am willing to stand behind the image selections because this sort of site arrangement is unfortunately all too familiar. Most of the images are taken along the collector road Lakewood Greenway [an ironic name], and the sort of parking ratios, building setbacks, and landscaping shown are no surprise. Image ten is taken of an arterial road [Lakewood Parkway] which feeds an even larger interstate arterial [interstate 285 to the west and the downtown connector five miles to the east]. Image one indicates that the boundary of my site at the southeast corner is a luxury gated community, and the northern boundary [shown in image ten] a major thoroughfare. This makes for a rather insulative condition that will need to be addressed in the design. Finally, I would like to point attention to image two, a tragic reminder of just how badly people desire and need a walkable environment. The stop sign that might've saved that victim's life was laying on the ground nearby.

#### thesis statement

The suburban focus on consumption in the modern American capitalist paradigm translates into a built environment characterized by shopping destinations “anchored” by national retail brands and likewise a disenfranchised local population with no differentiating factors to really anchor the place. I propose a new “third place” that gives the suburban locale a real anchor that, using the principles of Kenneth Frampton’s “Critical Regionalism,” focuses attention on the environs, tectonics, and materials particular to the location. The thesis project will invoke public discourse over the economic conditions of Post-Industrial, Late Capitalism that have generated the prevailing ethos that has hijacked urban design and likewise generated outdated, dying regional shopping centers.

#### critical position

1. Profit motive—the economic modus operandi of any practice regardless of profession—can only be dangerous to the design of a building or place and should likewise be kept as far away from the design process as possible. Client budget must necessarily be respected and adhered to, but architects should practice discretion in accepting a commission or responding to an R.F.I. or R.F.P. in order to filter out potential clients who are, for their part, entirely profit/budget driven. Projects/clients of this nature can only have a parasitic relationship to the built environment and the practice of architecture.
2. Architecture is a profession of service, regardless of the public or private nature of a particular commission/design objective. As such, the priority of the architect in the design of a project should be to impart on the built environment not simply what is in the best interest of the client but should furthermore consider the interests of people at all scales (the scale of the community, the state, the nation, and even the global community).
3. It is reprehensible that architects generally have marginal impact on the legal framework that prescribes how so much of the built environment will materialize over time. The community and the natural environment consequently suffer in many well-documented ways. Thus, it is of paramount importance that architects take a more active role in the fabrication of zoning, building codes, and other legal configurations that have direct impact on the built environment (or, as it were, where we choose not to build).
4. Architecture, politics, and philosophy are inexorably tied! Indeed, architecture and urban design are the most tangible manifestations of the economic and political paradigms within which they come to exist. In addition, architecture and urban design exemplify those qualities that the community and society hold philosophically indispensable. Hence, an architect who is not cognizant of the economical, political, and philosophical paradigm underlying his or her practice practices blindly and dangerously.

#### thesis abstract

Capitalism has evolved since its origins in the Industrial Revolution into a manifestation with an unfortunate corresponding built environment. Architecture of big box distributive-channel consolidation, a largely automobile-centric means of conveyance, and the sort of single-use logistical urban counterfeit combine into the tragedy otherwise known as suburbia. While it is often stated that there is nothing inevitable about how the suburban built environment evolved, I am willing to argue that the ethos behind the evolution was in fact inevitable, deliberate, and fervently protected by those who have a vested financial interest in the current economic paradigm.

This thesis project seeks an answer to the following question: can issues of capitalist excess, frantic consumerism, and the consequent lifestyle implications be effectively resolved through architectural design? If so, what is the measure of success? In the course of undertaking this thesis initiative, I intend to impart an alternative built environment to shopping and the hermetic vehicular conveyance between shopping/sleeping/working destinations [this endeavor is not unlike Ray Oldenburg’s Third Places mentioned in his seminal work *The Great Good Place*]. I furthermore aim to utilize architectural design to raise critical awareness of place and social context by encouraging discourse among inhabitants of a place. My ultimate and most ambitious objective is to expedite the process necessary to achieve the next Hegelian social paradigm [a la Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit*] and thus the definitive resolution to the issue of capitalist excess.

The proposed thesis program includes a publicly-accessible, tax-funded place-anchor consisting of both interior and exterior spaces. Oldenburg’s research into third spaces informs decisions regarding programmatic subdivision, as building and exterior programs are selected for their proven ability to encourage awareness, interaction, and conversation. Exterior spaces include a mall space, an amphitheater, private vending, private gardening plots, and beer gardens. Indoor spaces are to incorporate a lobby/entry, an exhibition gallery for local art, an indoor performance theater, a children’s playing area with nearby café seating, a homeless shelter, and a library and periodicals collection. The design of the final urban and architectural manifestation will be inspired by the precepts of the *Congress of New Urbanism Charter* and Kenneth Frampton’s “Critical Regionalism,” respectively.



thesis research | capitalism



Capitalism & Place: An Observation

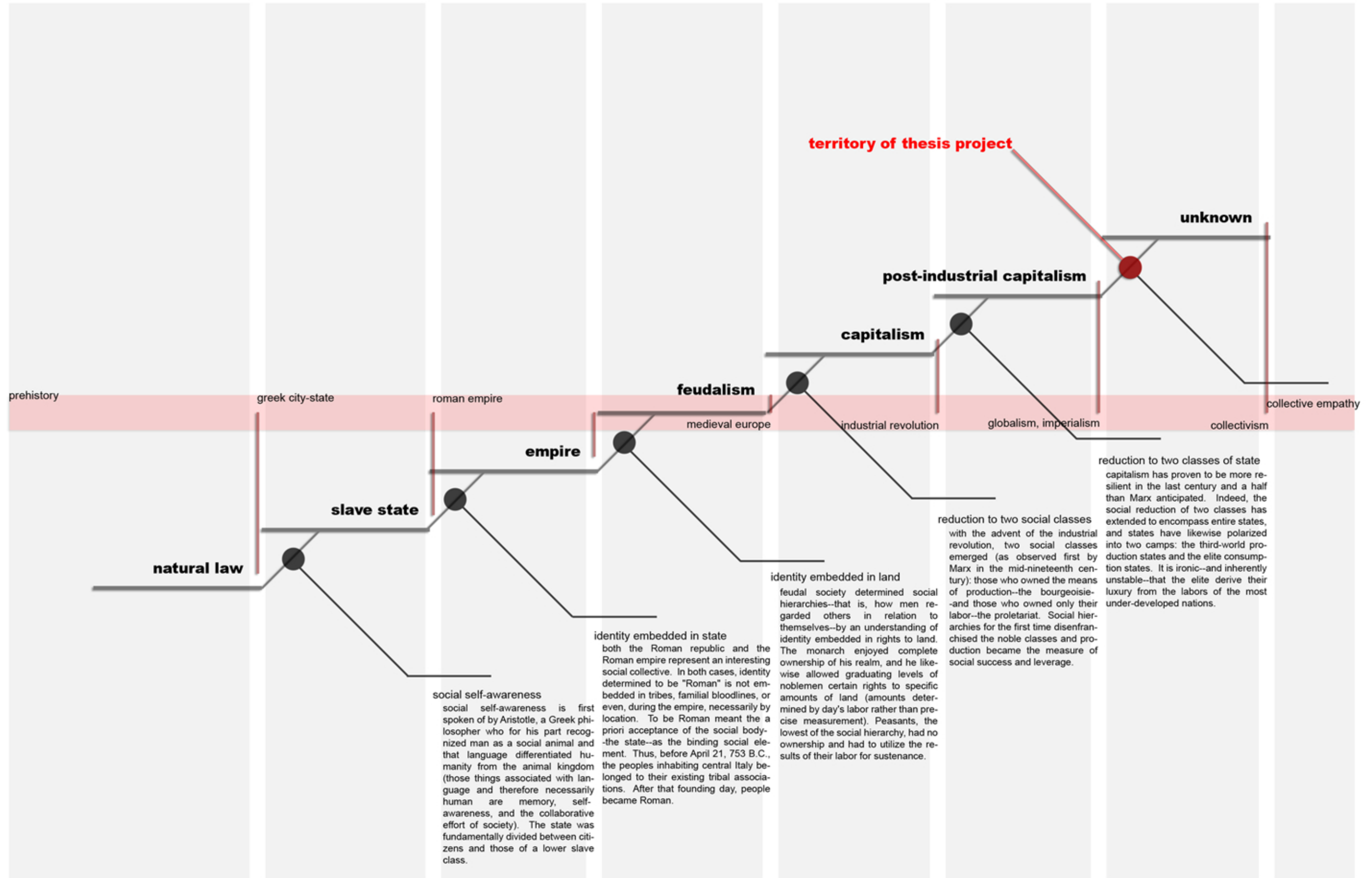
It is astounding to think that such a proliferation of brands can translate into such a flattening of the American built environment. Nevertheless, this is precisely what has happened and likewise spawned so much of the academic backlash that will inundate architectural thesis projects, New Urbanist Congresses, and published/periodical reviews. The greatest failure of our current, mutant-form of Capitalism isn't simply a matter of class struggle. Rather, it is the assumption that the greatest aspiration of man is to consume: impulsively, frantically, and conspicuously. Likewise, the built environment has evolved into a means of conveyance between shopping destinations (the places of purchase), work (the means of procurement of spending resources), and home (the place of consumption). The quasi-public in-between spaces are built entirely for the machine of conveyance (largely the automobile).

Perhaps the most unfortunate result of Post-Industrial, Late Capitalism is the successful hijacking of democracy and the implications upon the built environment. Notions of "equality" generally translate into homogeneity and blandness (that, after all, is accessible to everyone). Meanwhile, the revenue generated from consumption ships to the various corporate headquarters across the nation, is concentrated into the hands of the very wealthy (corporate CEOs, shareholders, and other enablers of big business). Equality is exploited while generally unachieved.

I believe that people are generally aware that there is something very wrong with the way the built environment has manifested itself over the past half century, although I think people are too invested in the current economic paradigm to really understand precisely what the problem is. Critical awareness and discourse are necessary. The built environment is where awareness will be raised. The built environment is furthermore the place where the agents of change will be mobilized.

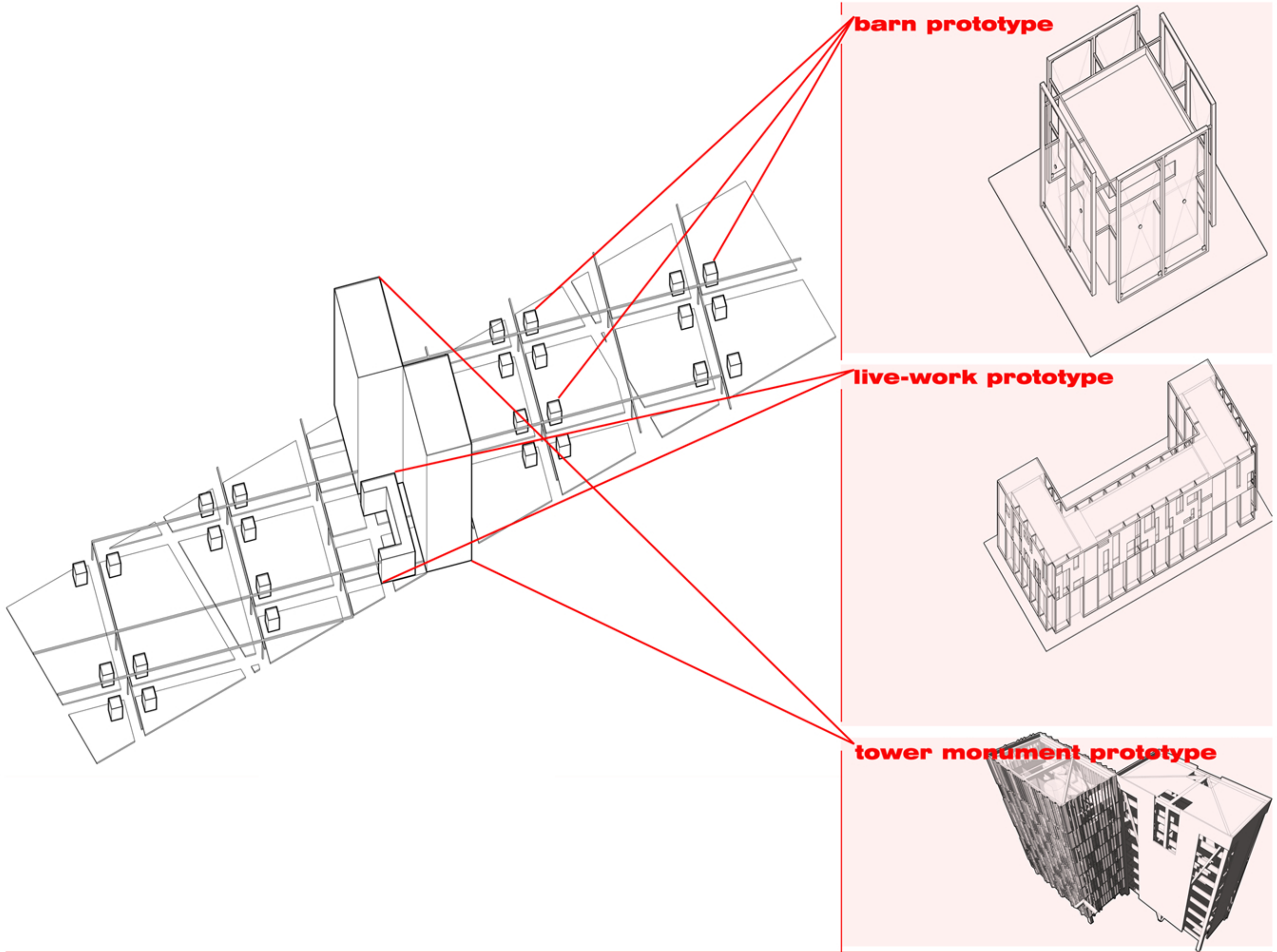
**selected thesis project  
images**

a collection of diagrams, plans, details, and perspectives

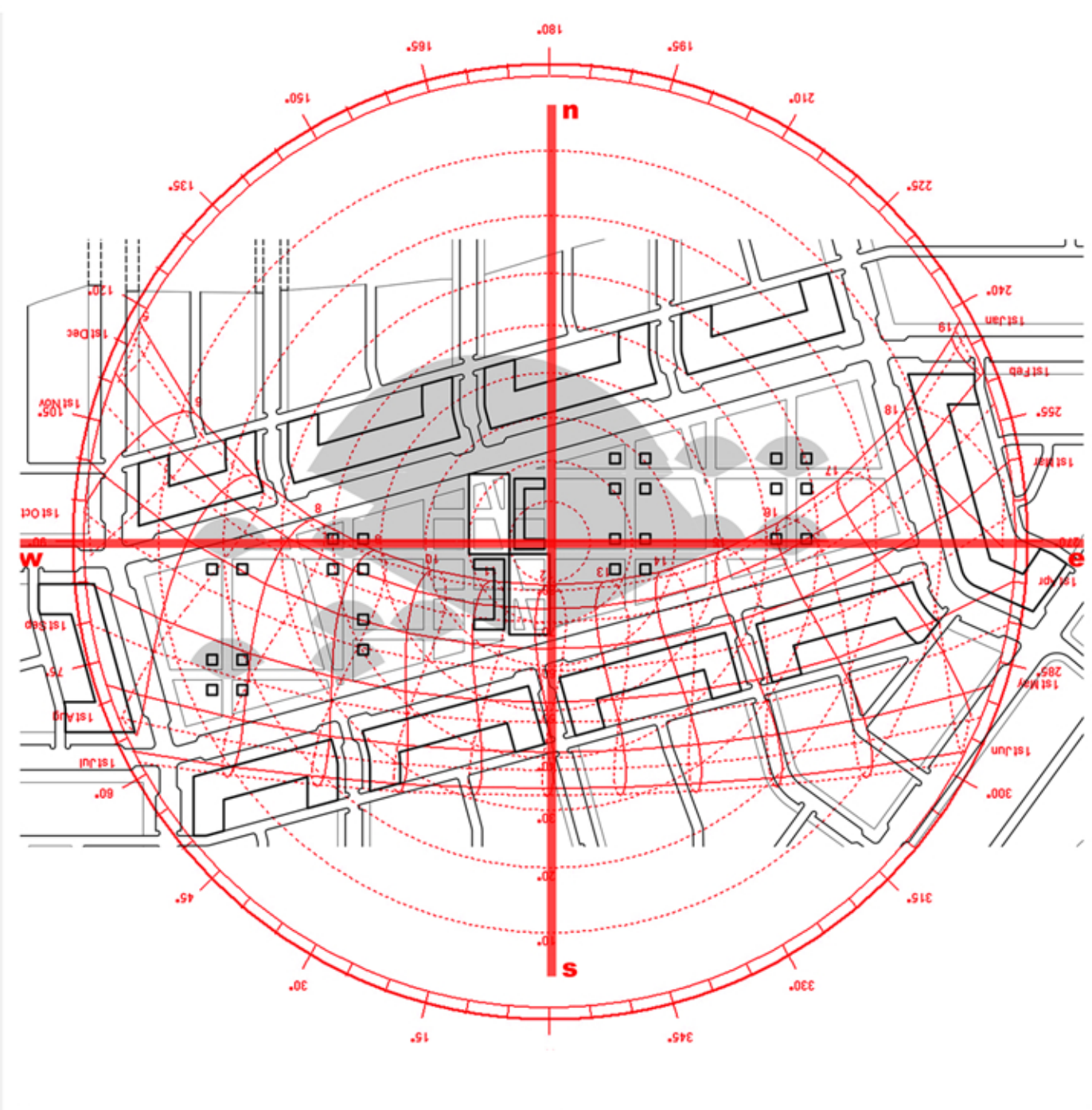
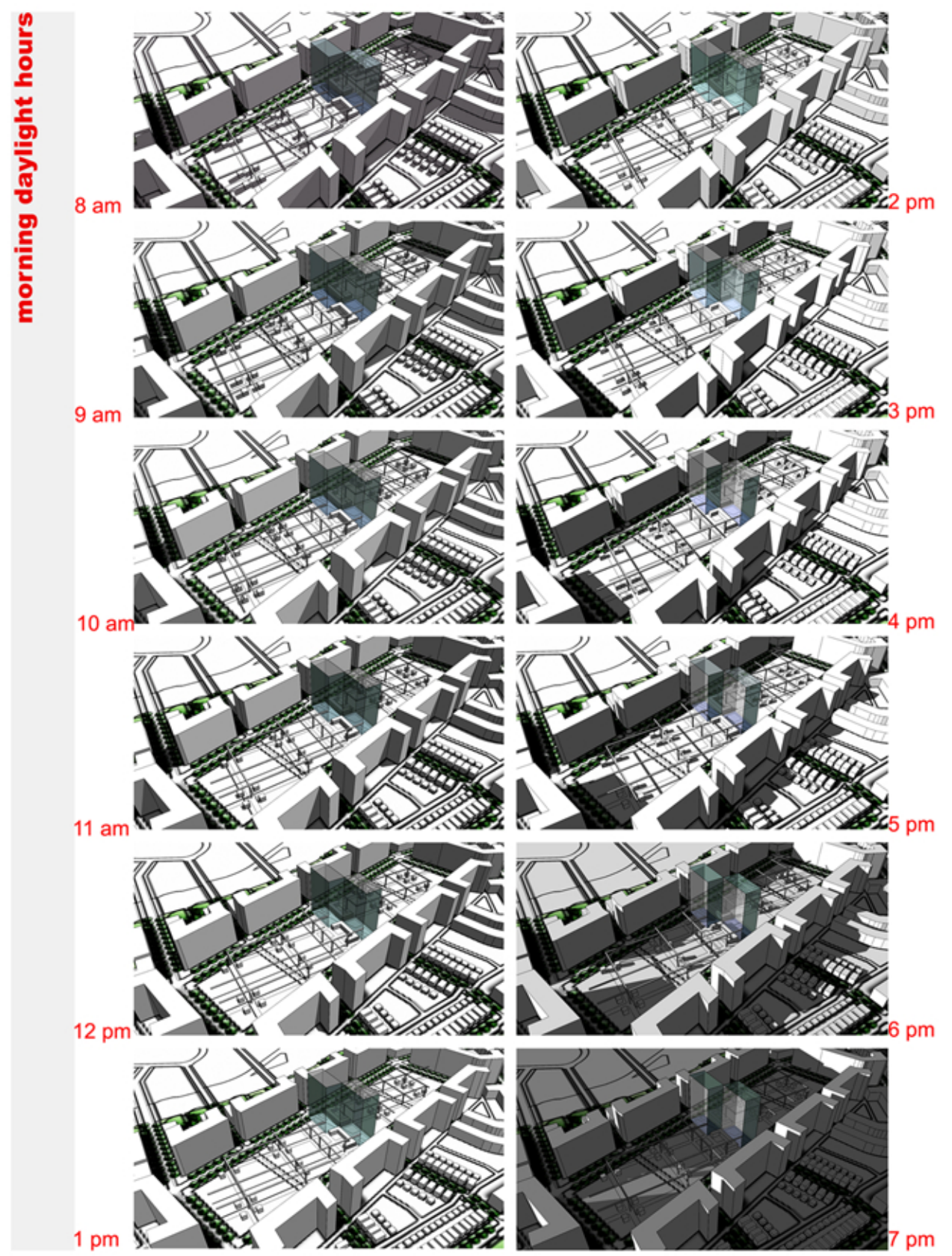


**progression of the hegelian paradigm through architecture + urbanism**  
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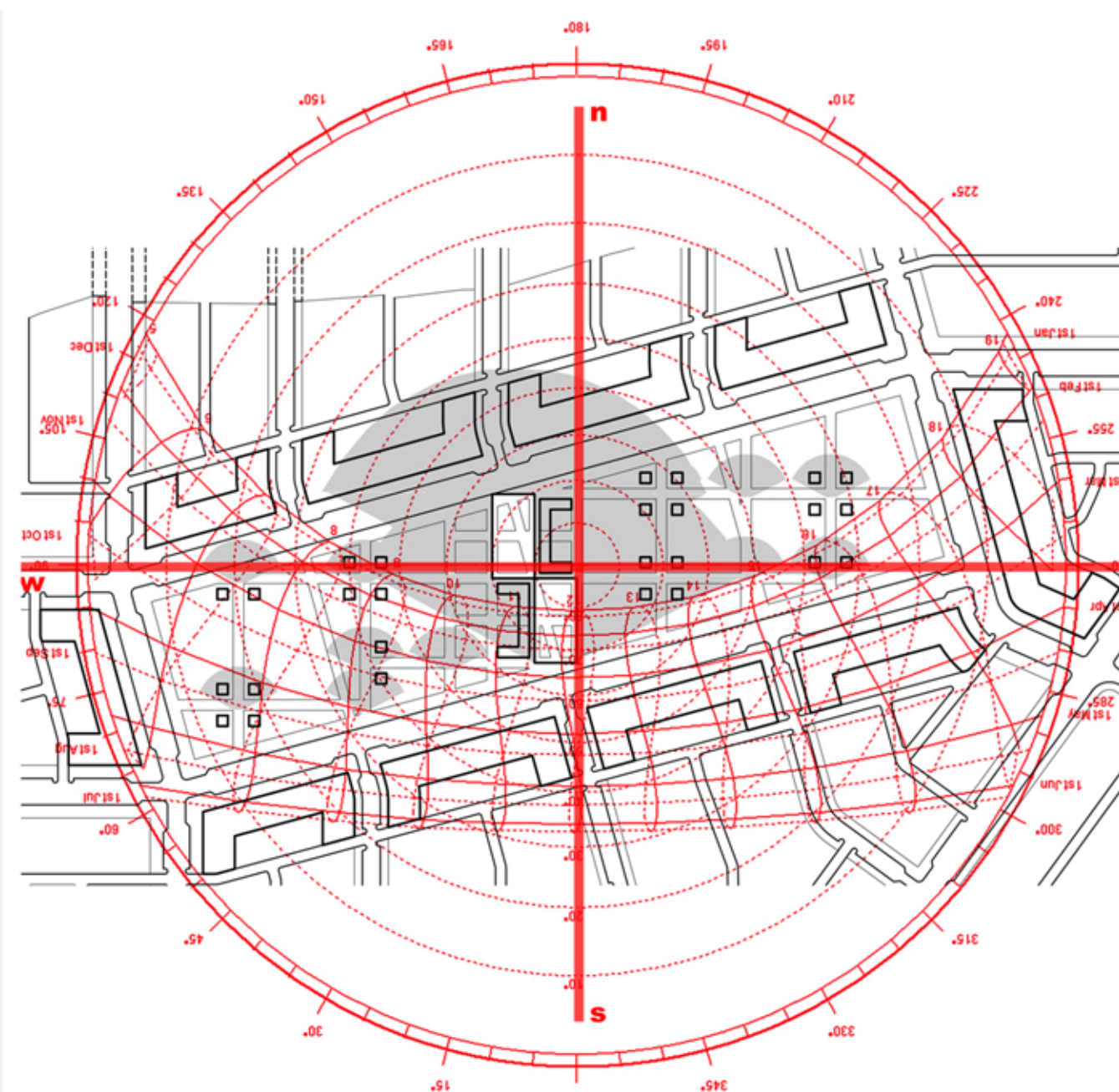
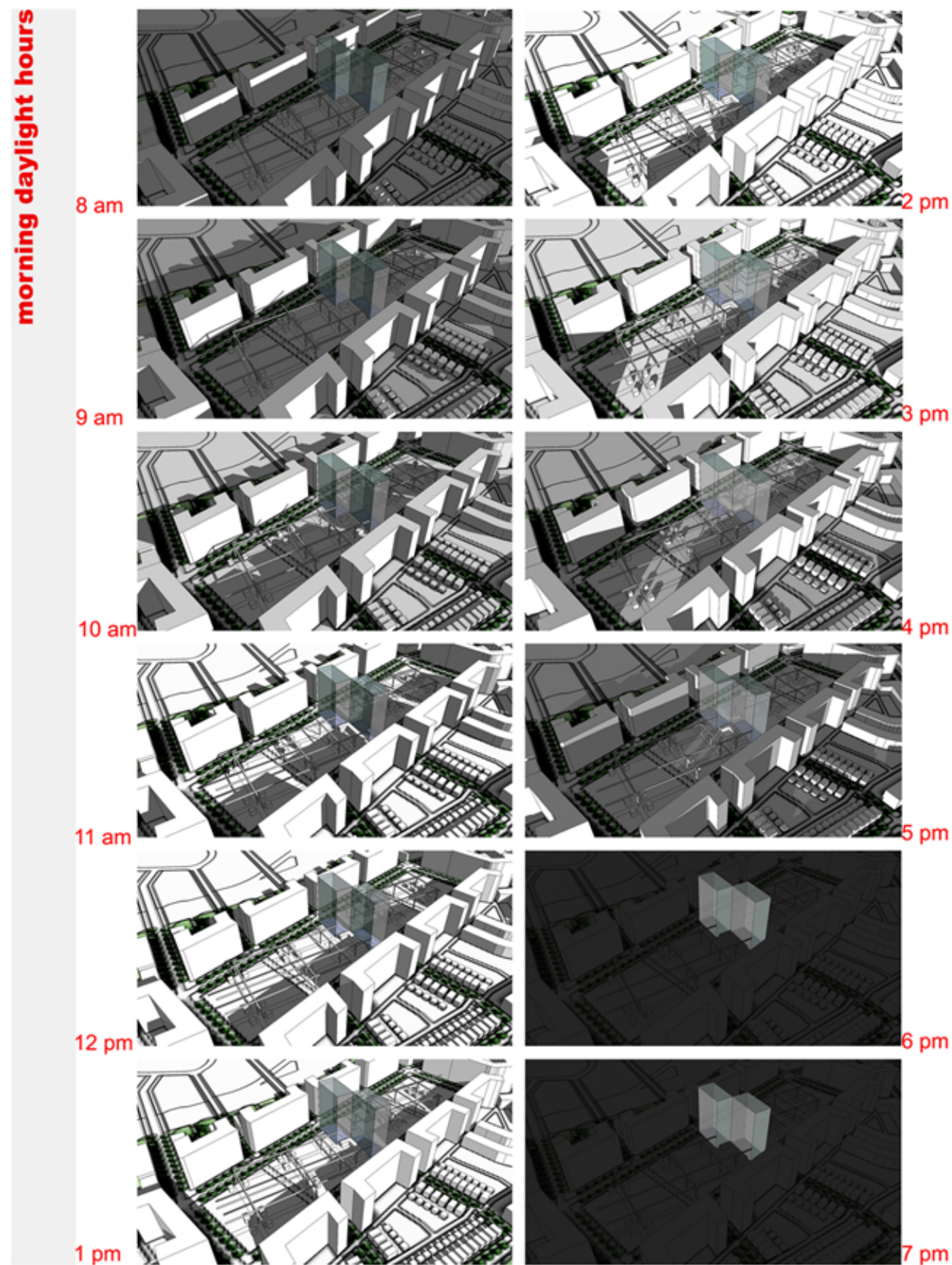


shadow paths & patterns | summer solstice



Above—A juxtaposition of the Atlanta sun path diagram and the site plan [nts]. The image is oriented according the cardinal directions. The illustration is to indicate the relationship between the rotated grid systems & how they map the orientation of the buildings [highlighting the memory of the demolished mall] versus the Atlanta solar orientation;  
 Left—A matrix of images illustrating the shadows per hour on June 21 in Atlanta, Georgia [the summer solstice and likewise the longest day of the year].

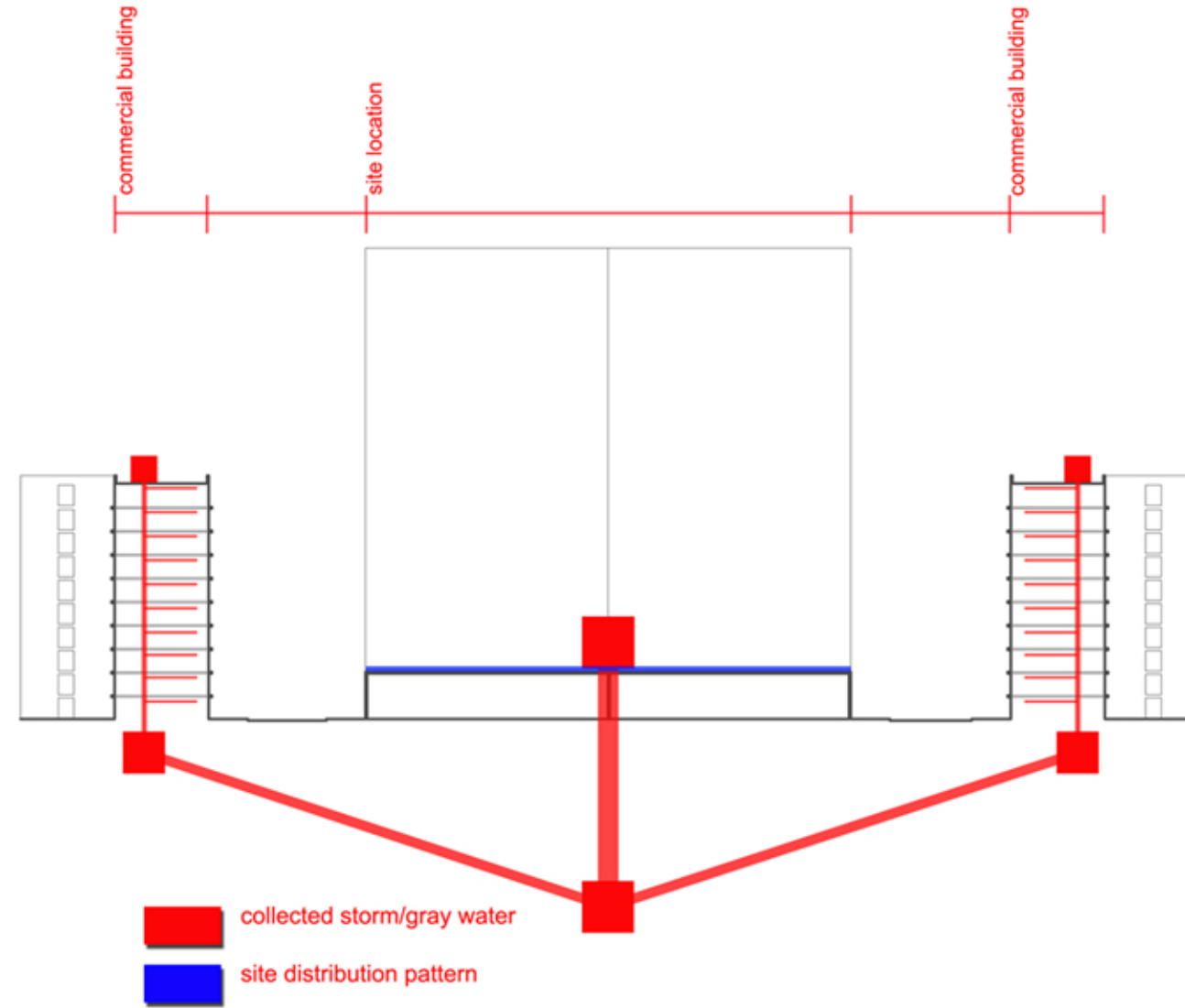
shadow paths & patterns | winter solstice



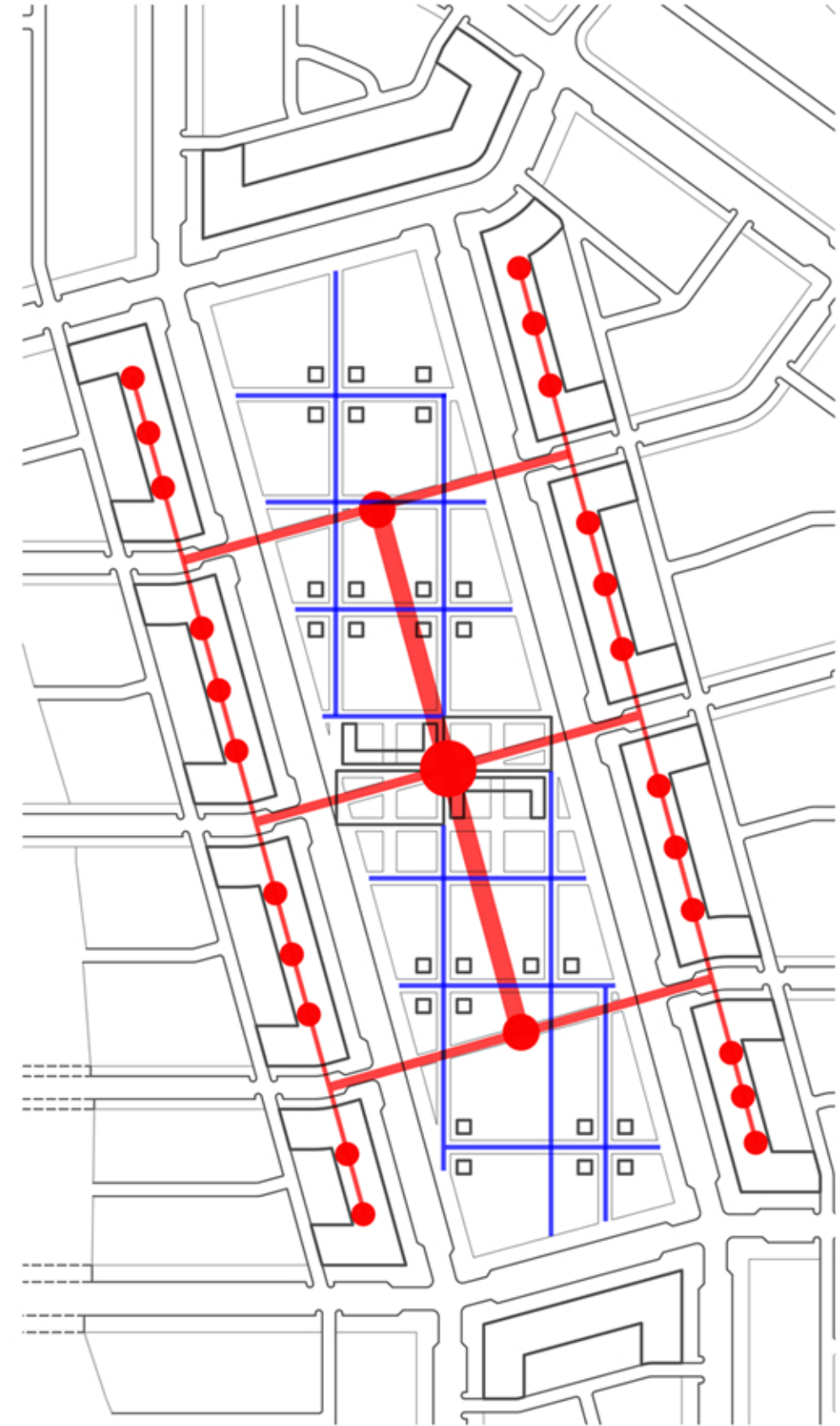
Above—A juxtaposition of the Atlanta sun path diagram and the site plan [nts]. The image is oriented according the cardinal directions. The illustration is to indicate the relationship between the rotated grid systems & how they map the orientation of the buildings [highlighting the memory of the demolished mall] versus the Atlanta solar orientation;

Left—A matrix of images illustrating the shadows per hour on December 21 in Atlanta, Georgia [the winter solstice and likewise the shortest day of the year].

water collection & distribution

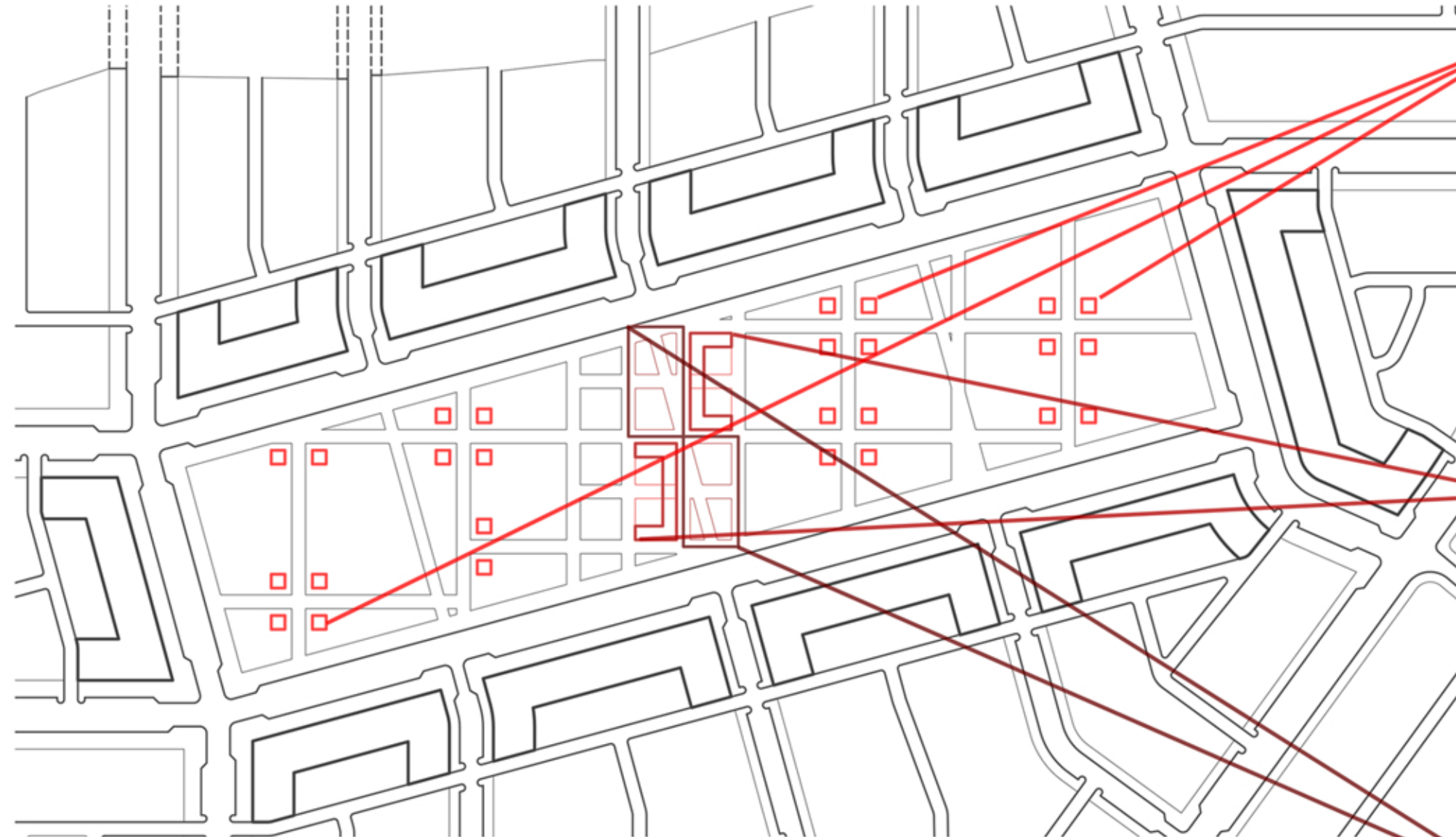


An illustration of water collection and distribution for agricultural purposes. The surrounding commercial buildings will be required per their development approval to collect rainwater in a minimum of three rooftop cisterns. In addition, gray water accumulated throughout the building will be collected and added to the surplus. The collected waste water will then feed via gravity drain into a series of three underground detention facilities that will themselves feed the water tower at the center of the site as shown. This network is indicated herein in red. The grid suspended thirty feet above grade will distribute the collected waste water away from the tower and to the arable land along the network of footpaths.





site activities



thesis



antithesis



synthesis



thesis

Agriculture represents "thesis." Marx laments the alienation of laborers to the products and the consequences of their labor as a primary evil of capitalism that necessitates remedy. Agriculture, especially urban agriculture, is an excellent way for individual laborers to realize the results of their labor. Moreover, laborers can better comprehend the consequences of their respective magnitudes of consumption versus the labor and time necessary to sustain their demands.

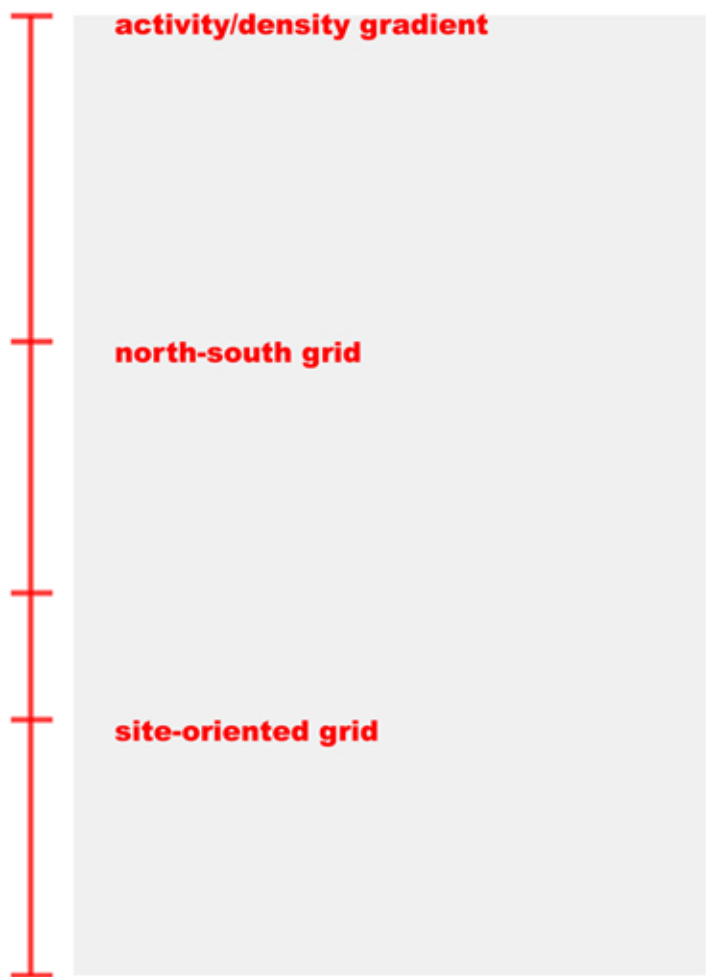
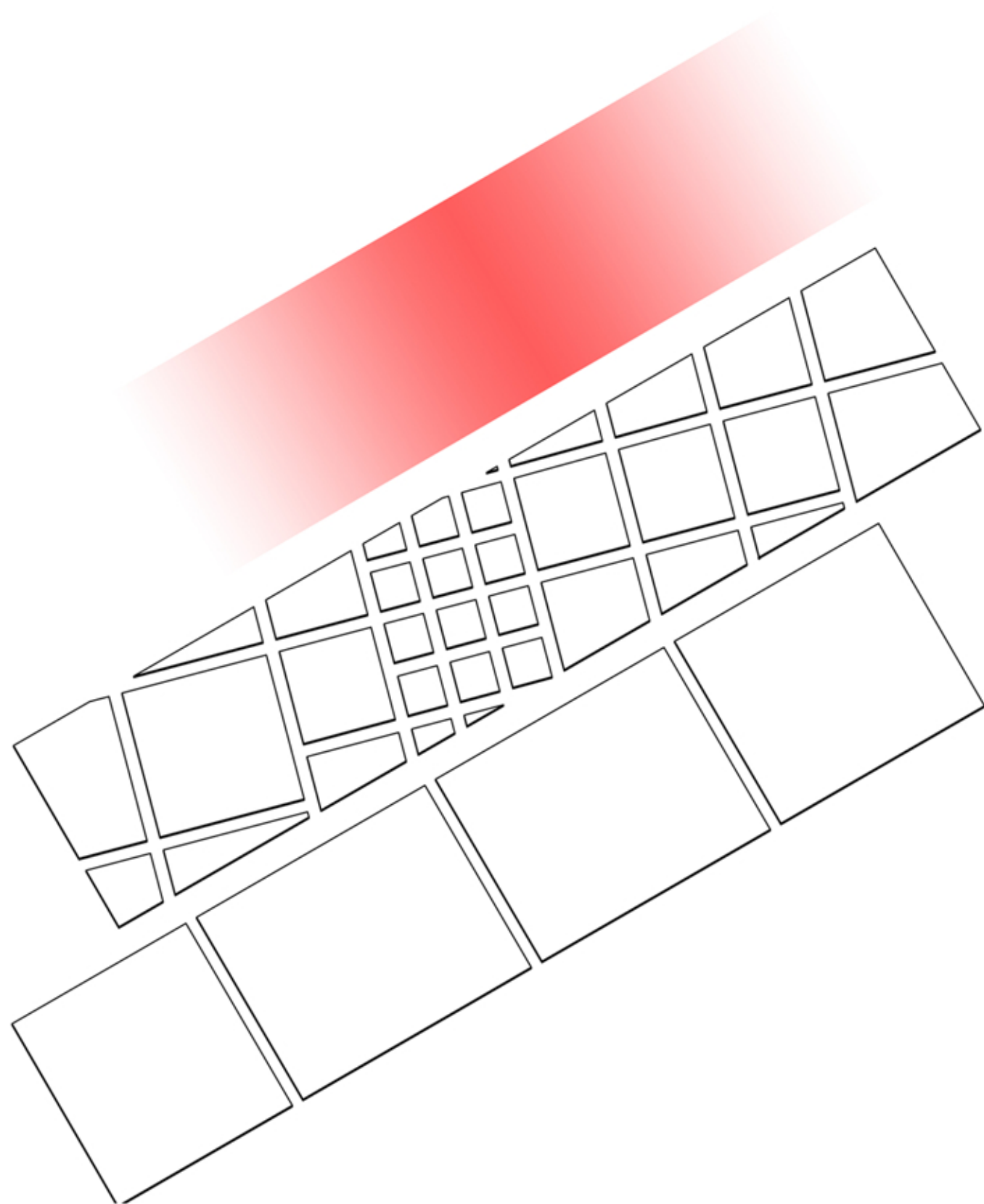
antithesis

"antithesis" is the dialectical complement to agriculture—a labor to sustain the individual. Likewise, "antithesis" communicates a notion of "collectivism." In the case of site programming, the collectivism mentioned is realized through provisions for homeless shelter. The homeless to be sheltered are a specific group: those of the evaporating middle class who have become disenfranchised in the wake of the recent economic condition. They live freely with the provision that they work the land daily.

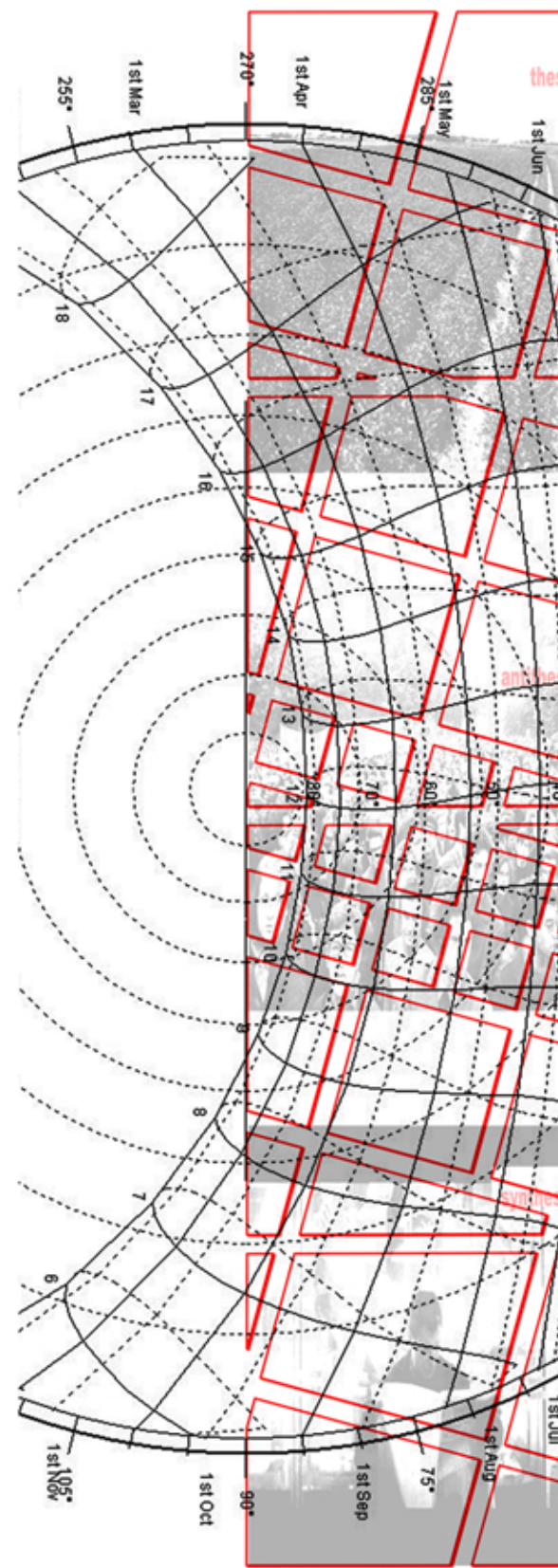
synthesis

"synthesis" can be realized where the individual and the collective are married in the "community." In the site shown above, "synthesis" is realized through the utilization of two towers: each atrium spaces with news tickers displaying current events relevant to the community at a gradation of scales (from the most local to the most global). Likewise, an individual, freshly renewed to his or her labor, can comprehend what it means for him or her to belong to a local, national, and global community.

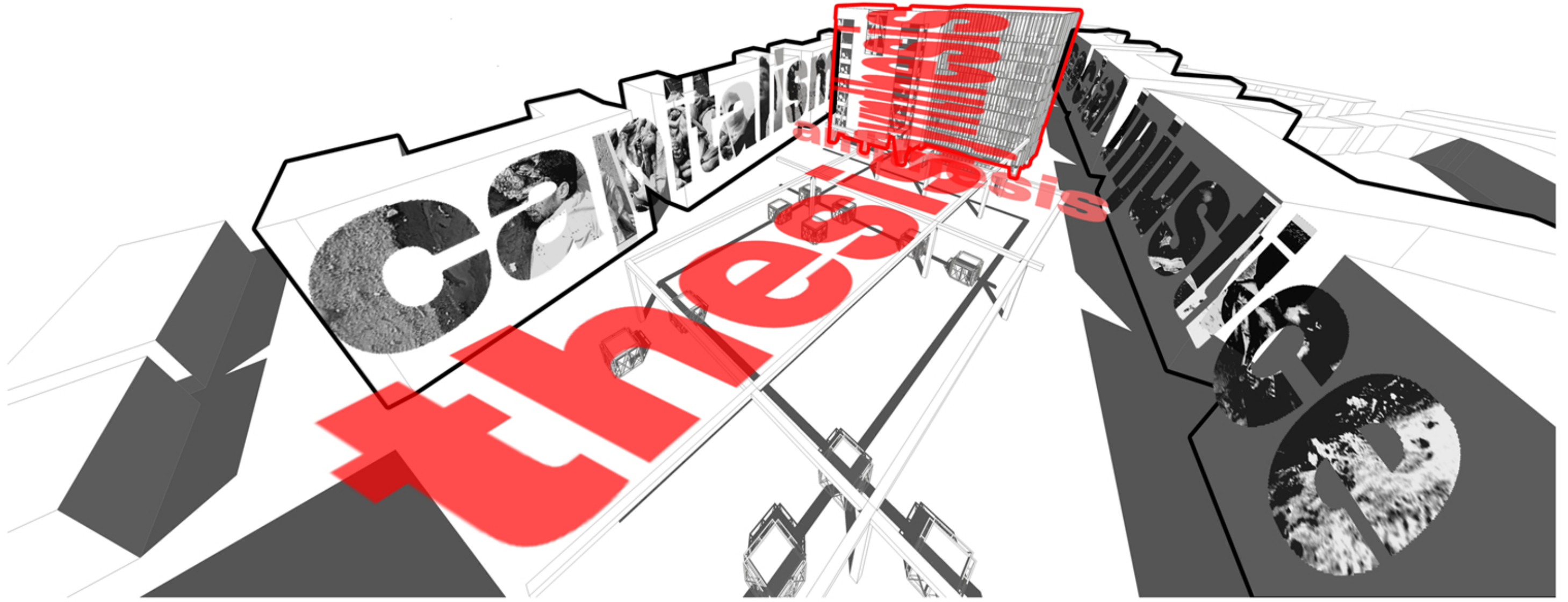
grid densities



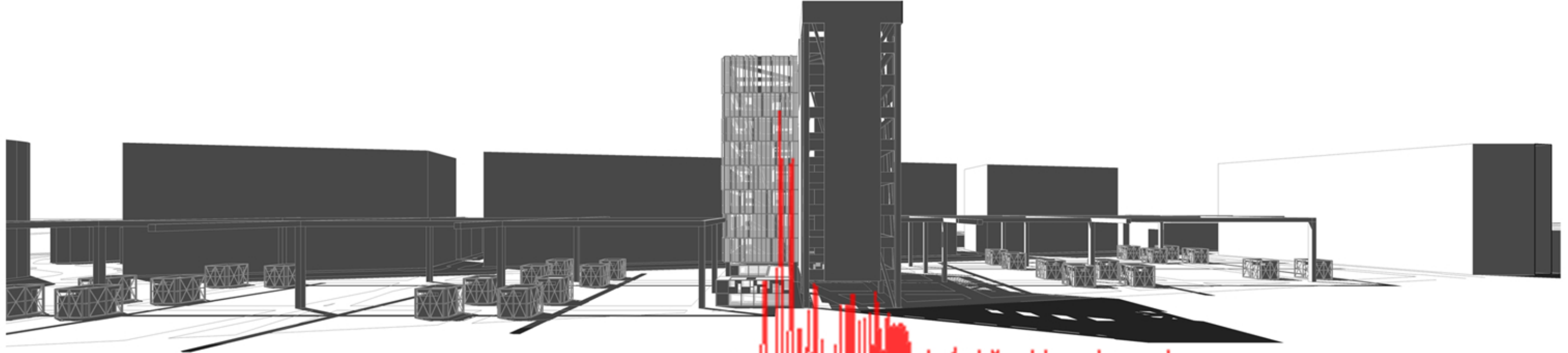
Where activity is expected to be highest, the design of the site reflects the anticipated levels with a utilization of varying densities of grids, particularly in the grid oriented according to the cardinal directions. The grid is another design tool being used in order to communicate a connection between scales of communities (since the primary grid network is oriented according to the cardinal directions and likewise sharply juxtaposed against the site orientation, one is made aware of how the site is situated according to global means of measurement). The diagram to the right shows the complete grid network overlaid with a sun path diagram and a graphic representation of the activities to take place on the site. This is again meant to communicate the somewhat harsh juxtaposition of communication methodologies, from the most individual to the most collective. This is a project of tensions. It is meant to be messy.



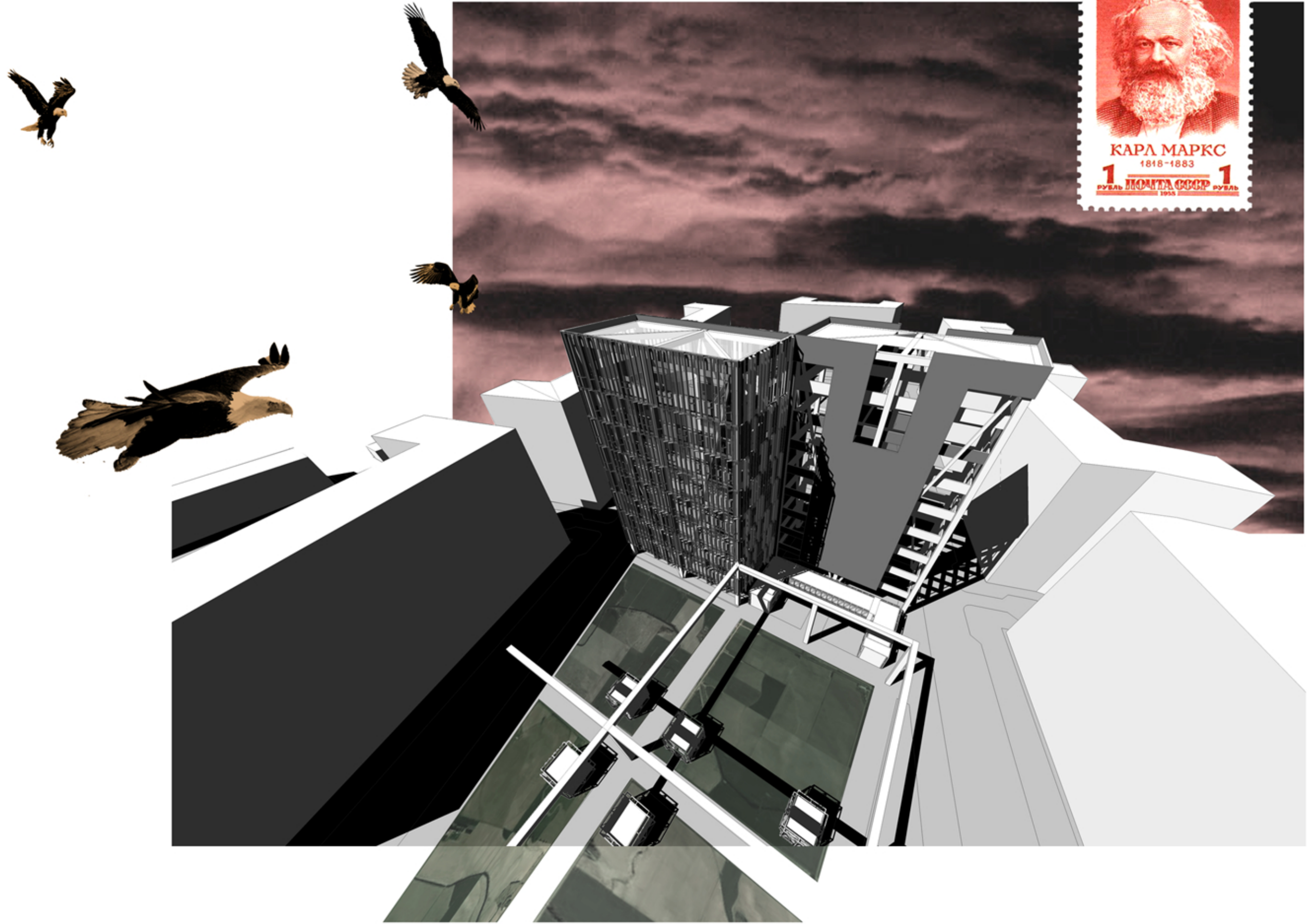
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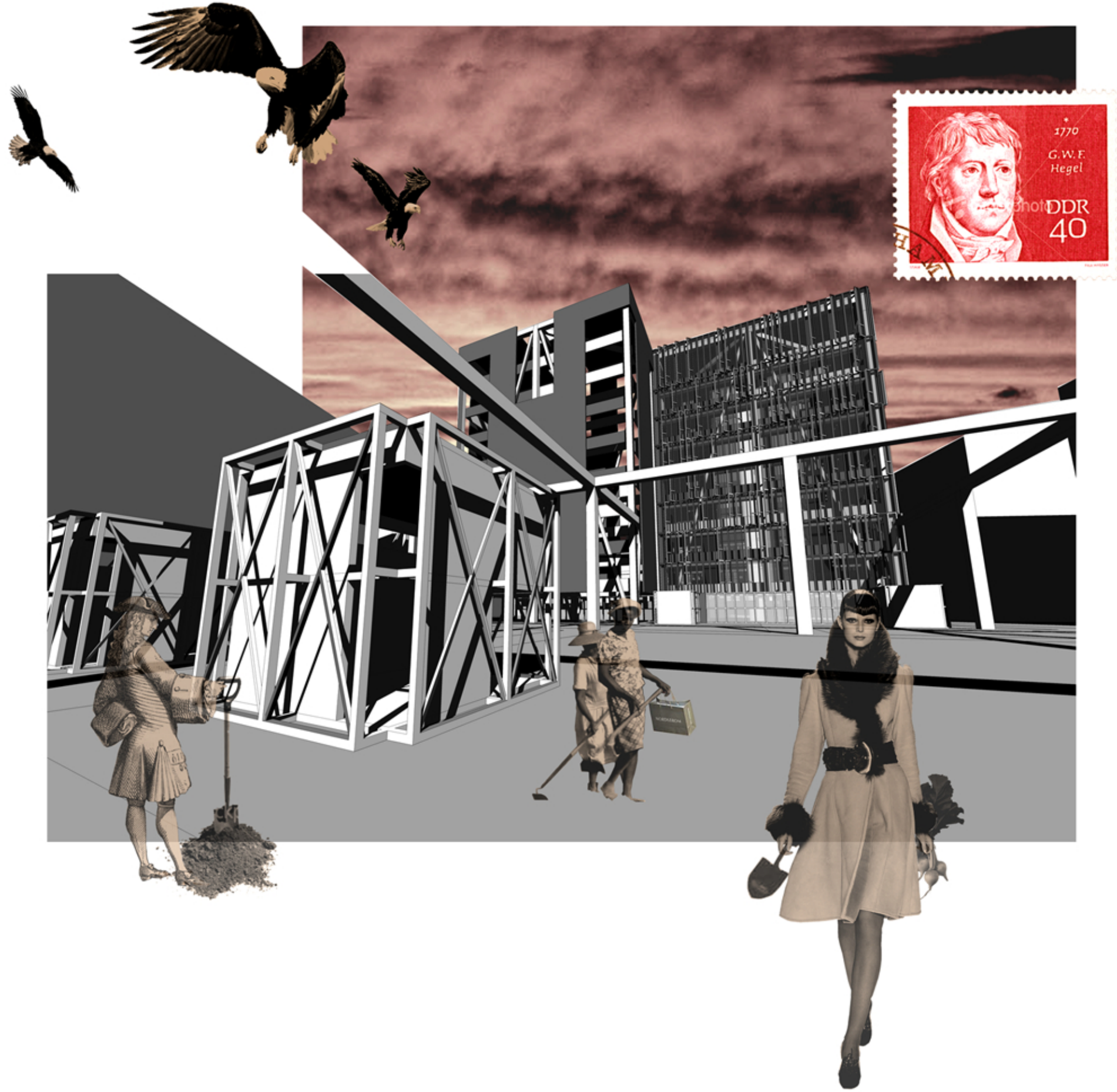
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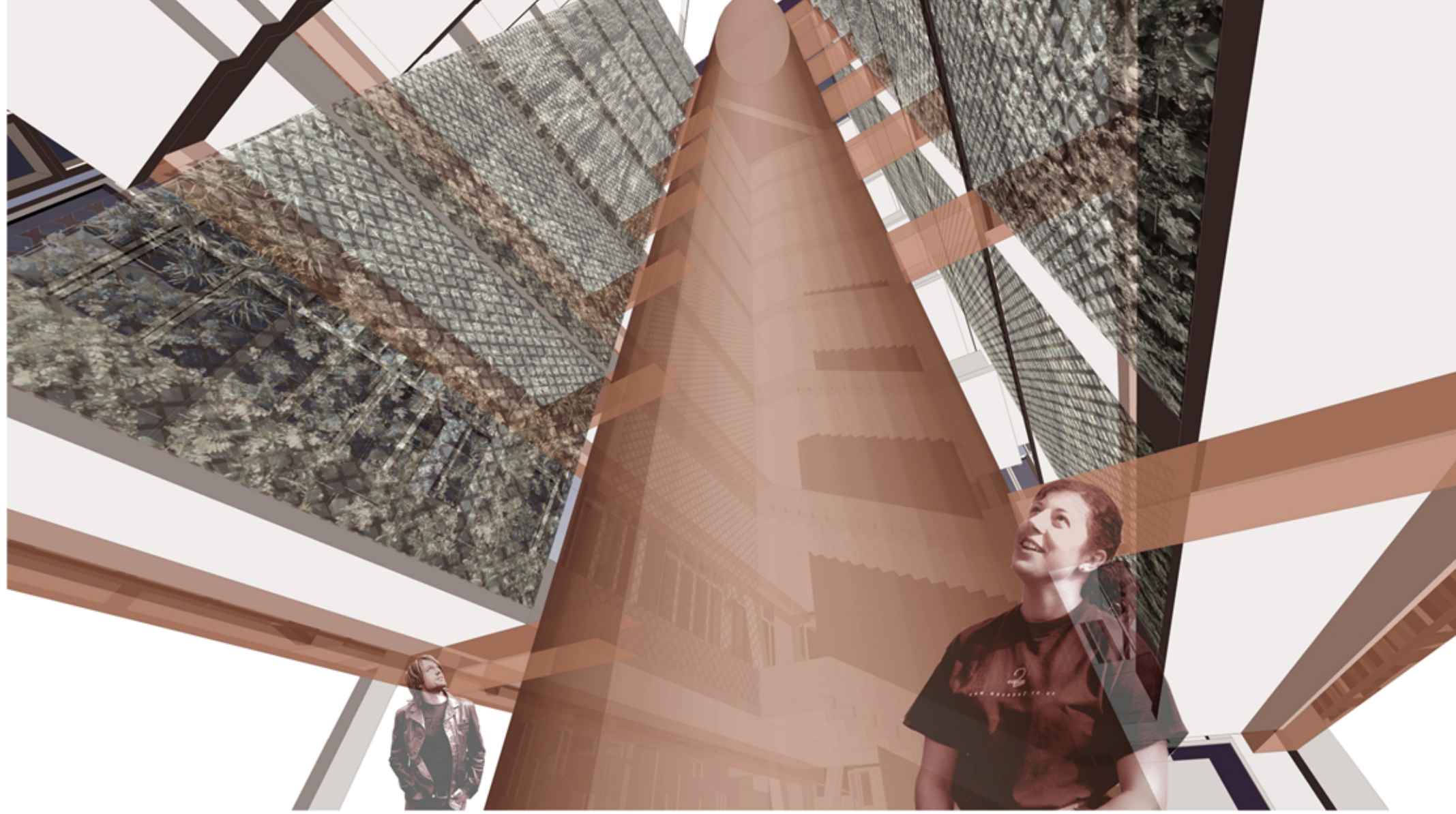
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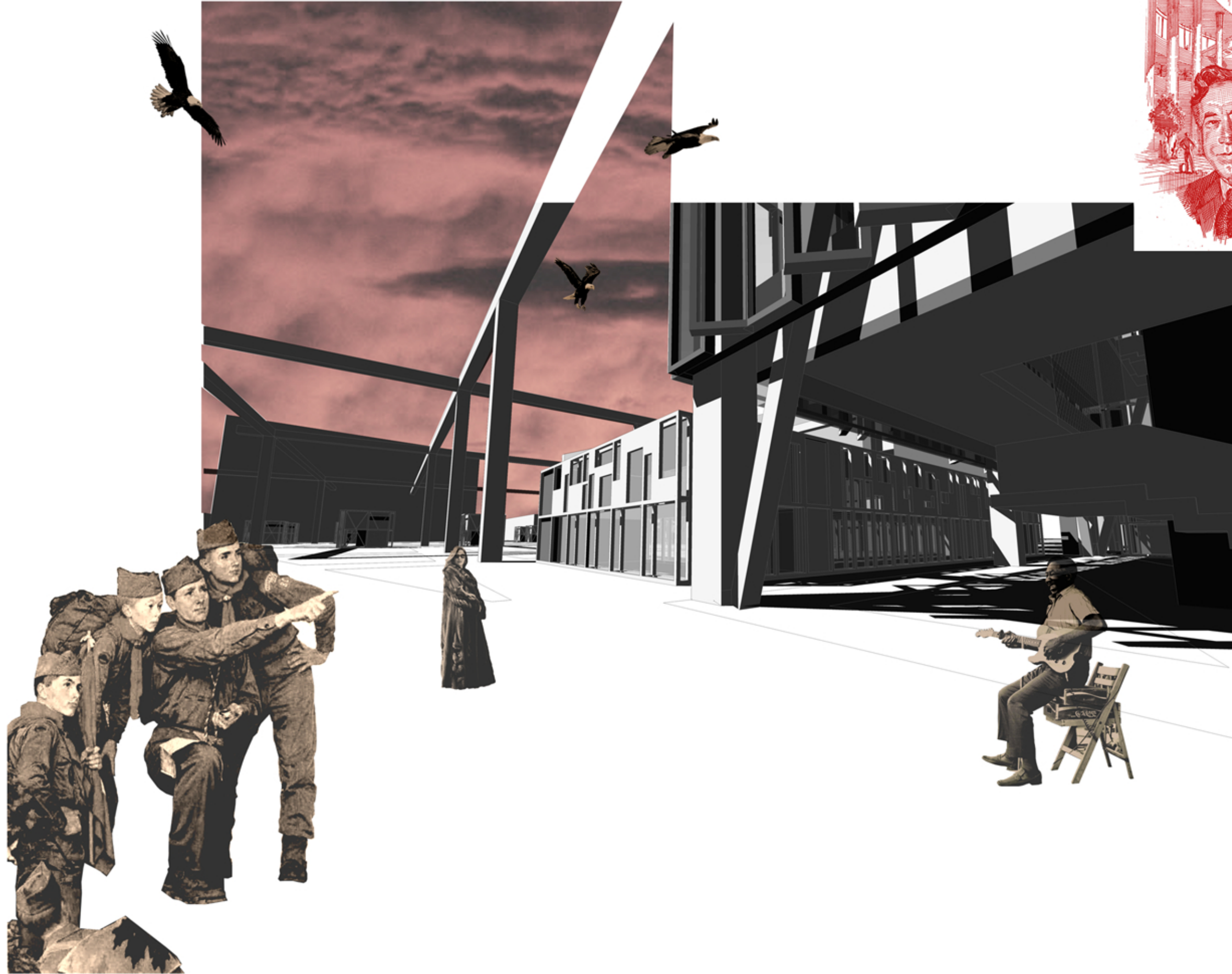


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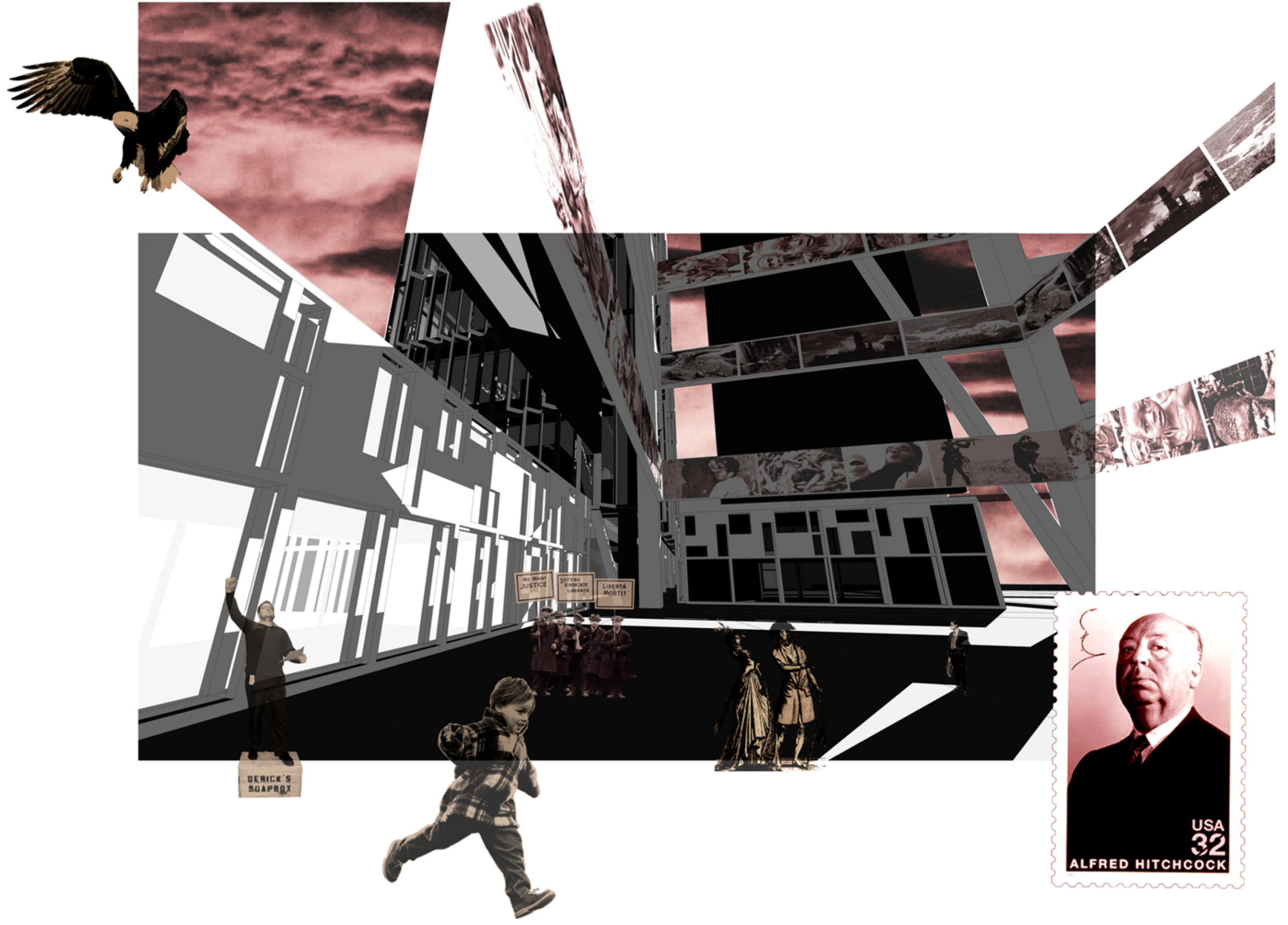




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