PORTFOLIO

Xuan Cui's
Selected Works 2024-2025

GSAPP MS.AAD

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Architectura silentium loquitur

Architecture is a silent language.

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HETEROTOPIA

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THE MINISTRY
OF DISASTER
MANAGEMENT

01

HETEROTOPIA

This project begins with the spatial framework of Freie Universität Berlin, whose open, decentralized layout reflects ideals of accessibility and institutional transparency.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, the design reimagines a homeless shelter in California. Here, sunlight acts as a mediator—guiding transitions and softening boundaries—transforming the shelter into a heterotopic space marked by transitoriness, simultaneity, and multiplicity. It becomes a site of social assimilation, dissolving the divide between margin and center, evoking collective identity, and reintegrating marginalized lives into public visibility and civic space.

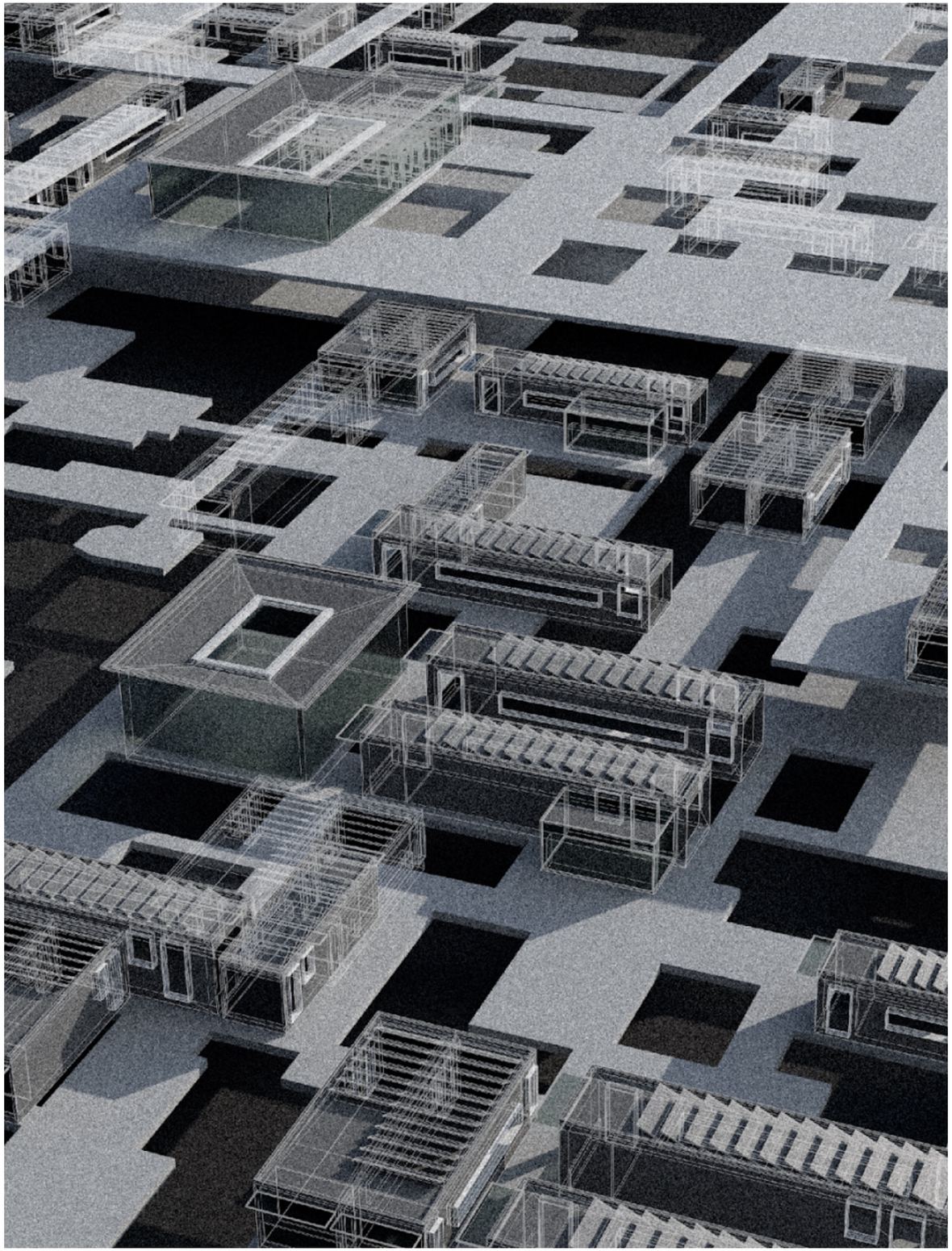
Individual Work

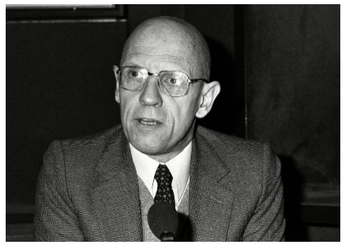
Future's Future Studio

Instructor: Micheal Bell

Site Location: Los Angeles

Fall 2024





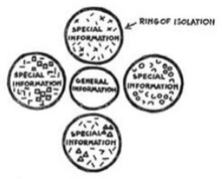
Michel Foucault

Concept of Heterotopia

Heterotopia, as defined by Michel Foucault, refers to spaces that exist within society yet operate outside its normative structures. These tangible sites disrupt and reorganize social order through three key spatial qualities: Transitory Space, reflecting temporal fluidity; Simultaneity, allowing conflicting realities to coexist; and Multiplicity, embodying layered functions and meanings. Together, these conditions position heterotopias as zones of resistance, reflection, and transformation within the built environment.

[Concept]

[Composition]



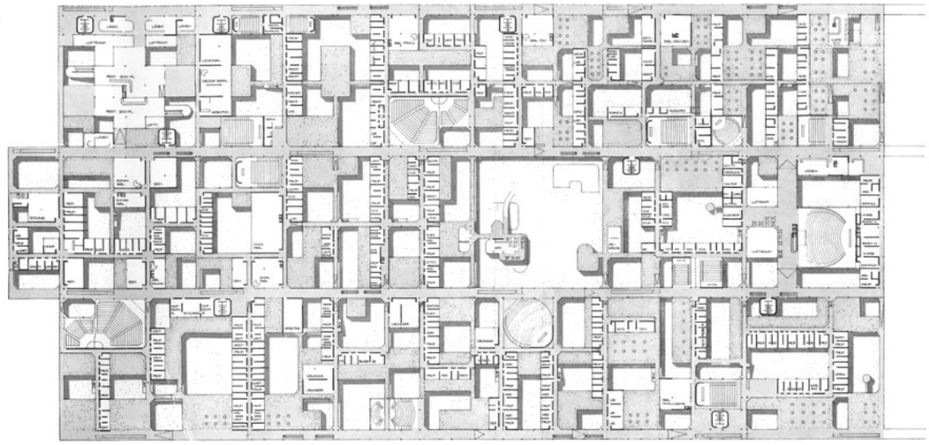
[Atomization]

[Association]

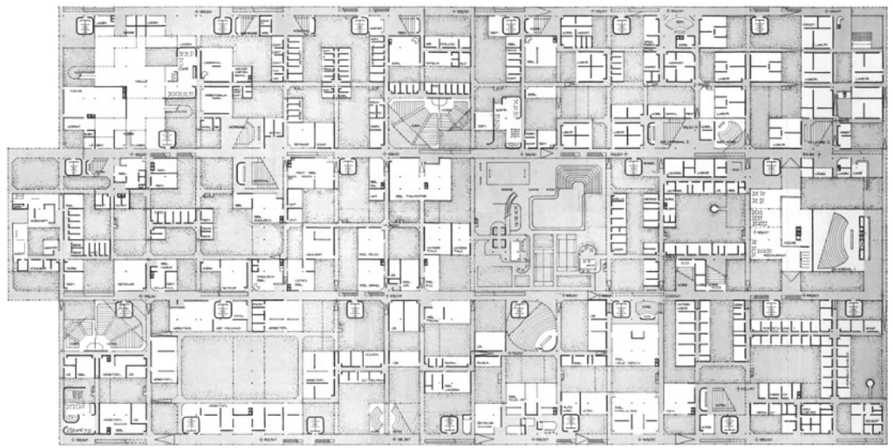
[Relationship]

Heterotopia and Spatial Multiplicity

According to Foucault, spaces are not merely physical—they embody social structures and power dynamics. Heterotopias exist on the margins of normative society, simultaneously real and symbolic. They disrupt dominant systems, revealing tensions between control and freedom, and offer alternative frameworks for resistance, reflection, and reimagining social order.



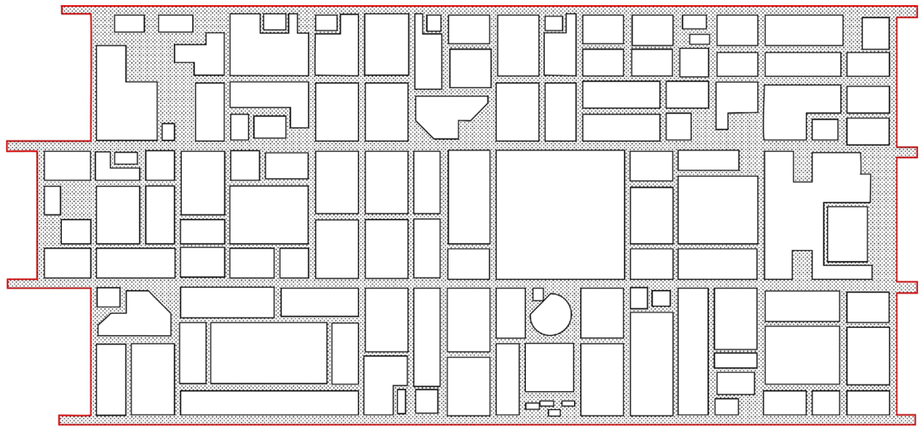
Ground Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

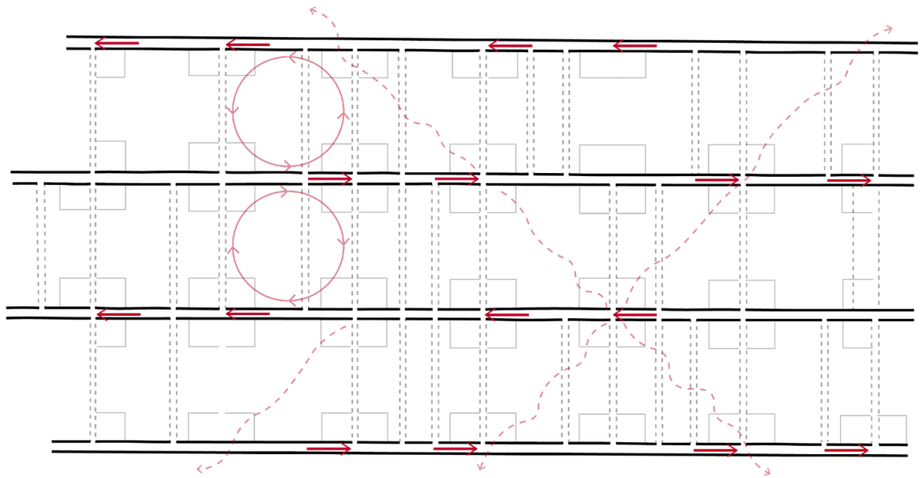
Berlin Free University as a Heterotopic Model

The Freie Universität Berlin exemplifies heterotopic thinking through its matrix floor plan and decentralized layout. Teaching spaces are placed on the ground level for openness and accessibility, while upper floors house staff offices, creating a layered structure of circulation and use. A pedestrian network links these zones, allowing simultaneity and spatial fluidity. This architectural logic reflects a break from traditional, hierarchical institutions—creating a dynamic environment where autonomy, knowledge exchange, and institutional transparency coexist in a complex spatial system.



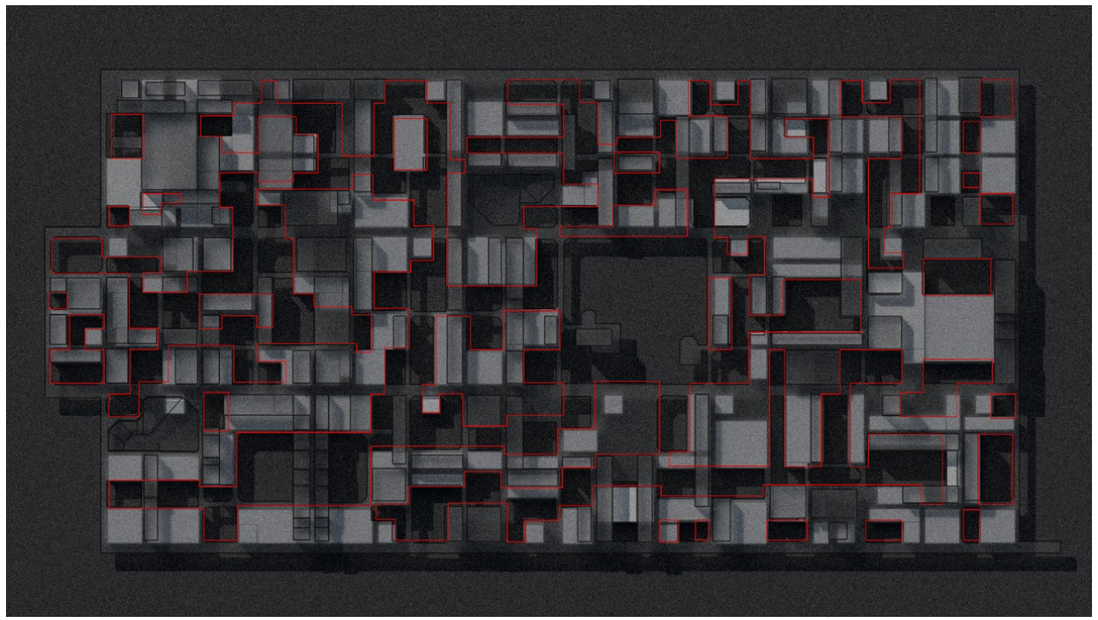
Pedestrian Network System
[Transitory Space]

System serves both functional and symbolic role, pathways provide efficient circulation and create a liminal space between buildings, representing both the literal and metaphorical movement between structured academic engagement and spontaneous socialization.



Circulation System
[Simultaneity of Inside and Outside]

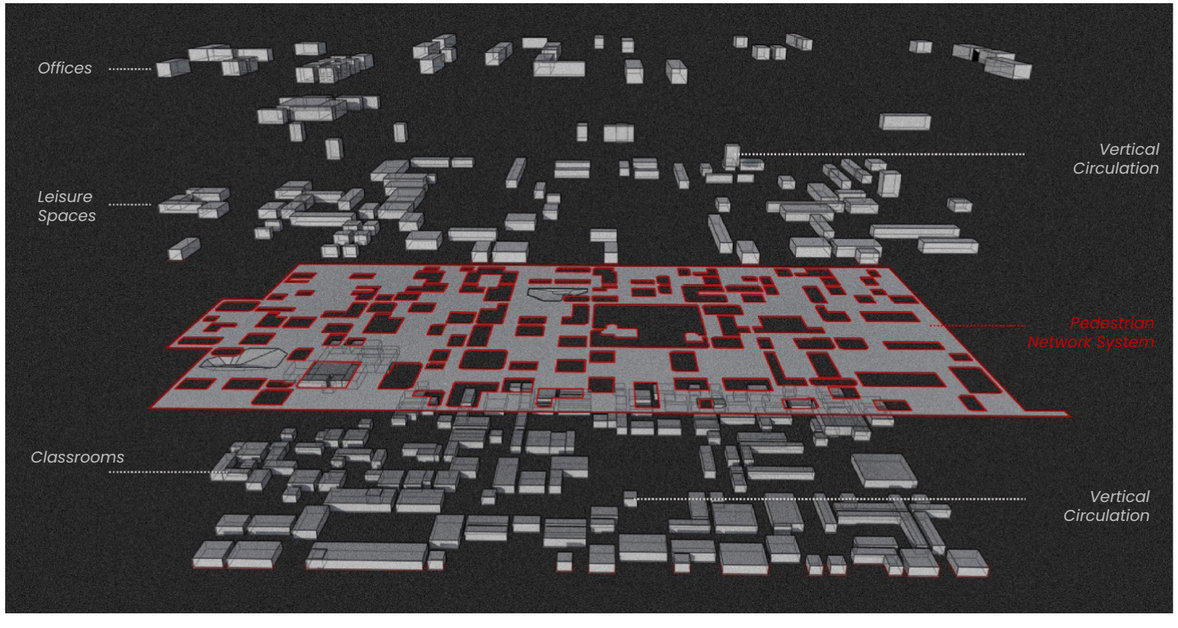
Circulation system guides individuals through regulated environments while subtly allowing for moments of freedom, creating opportunities for physical and mental pauses that embody the paradox of being inside a controlled system.



[Multi-layered topological operations]

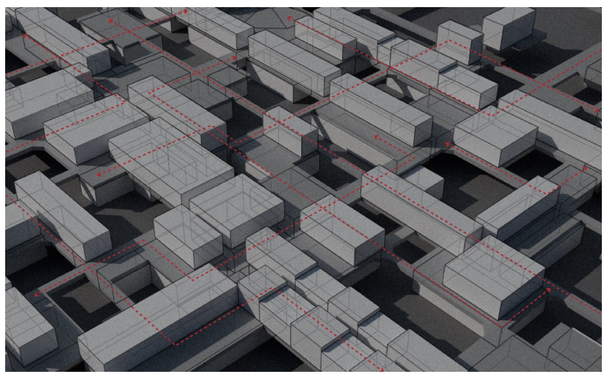
Open Space System
[Multiplicity]

The architecture with open spaces constructs a multi-layered environment both functional and liberating, revealing how spatial design can shape experiences beyond institutional rigidity. It shows the space that exists within and outside the norms of everyday life, inviting moments of reflection, interaction, and alternative ways of inhabiting the built world.



Exploded Perspective

The building adopts a MATRIX floor plan, with teaching spaces on the ground floor and staff offices above, connected by a Pedestrian Network System. This layout reflects the philosophy of spatial multiplicity—breaking the enclosed nature of traditional architecture and allowing diverse functions and experiences to coexist. The university remains institutionally independent, yet mirrors and participates in broader social dynamics, intertwining with the larger urban space system.



Spatial Circulation Details

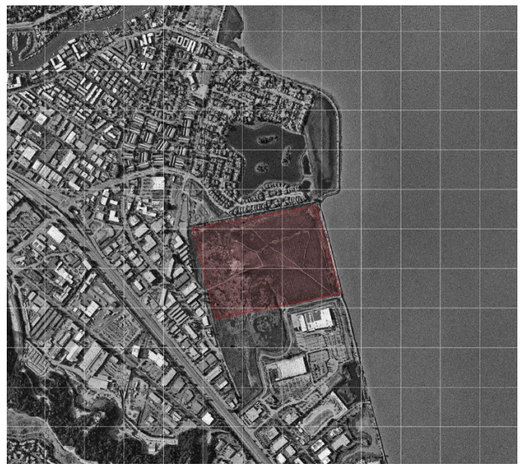
This dynamic flow creates a network of knowledge, where ideas from different fields are interconnected and interrelated, forming a Heterotopia unique to the academic space.

From Berlin Free University to Homeless Shelter Design

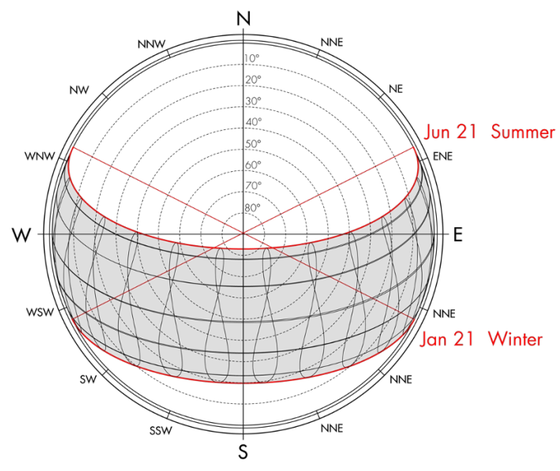
Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, the design reimagines a homeless shelter in California where sunlight acts as a mediator—guiding transitions and softening boundaries. The shelter becomes a heterotopic space of transitoriness, simultaneity, and multiplicity—a site of social assimilation that dissolves the margin-center divide, evokes collective identity, and repositions marginalized lives within public and civic space.

Concept Analysis

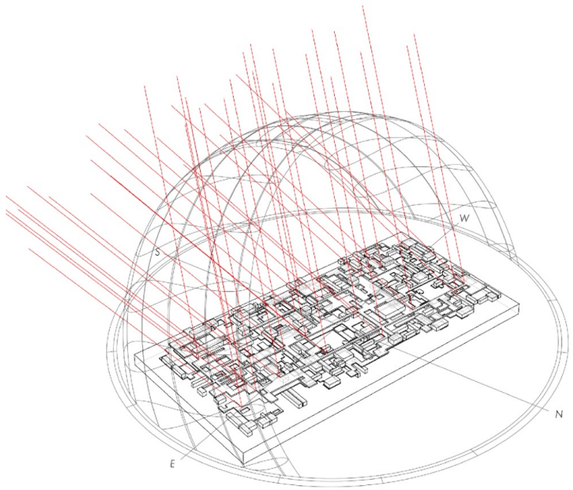
Transforming the shelter into a social space that not only provides physical refuge, but also fosters a sense of belonging, shared memory, and emotional resonance—reflecting collective identity and the nuanced spectrum of public emotions tied to displacement, resilience, and care.



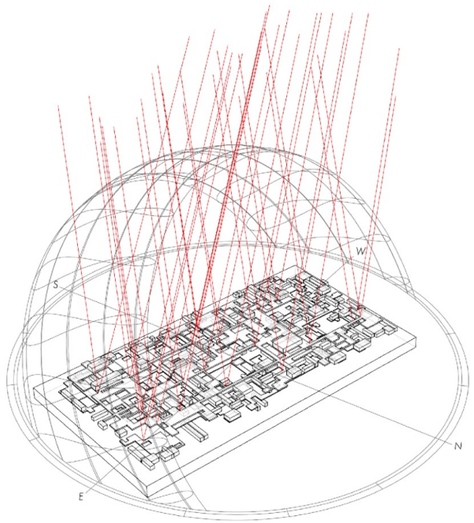
San Rafael, California
[37.957256, -122.492236]



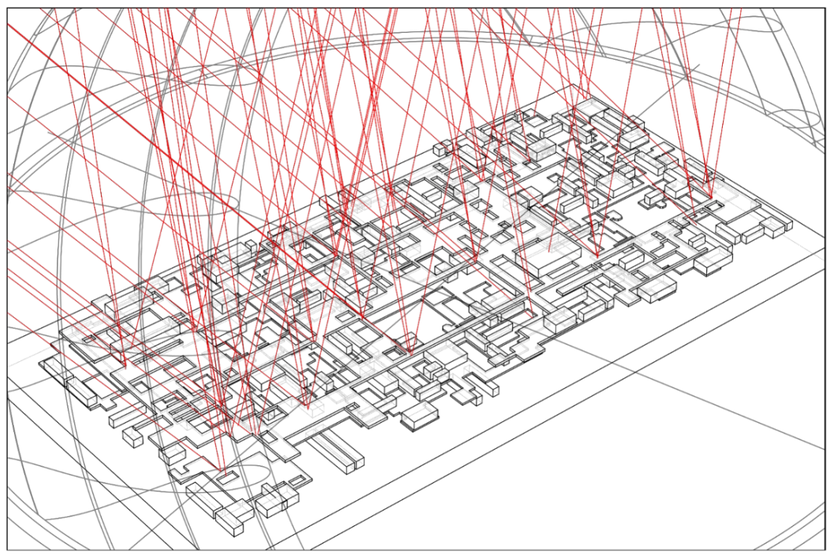
Location Sunshine Diagram



Minimum Incident Light Angle
Jan 21[Winter]

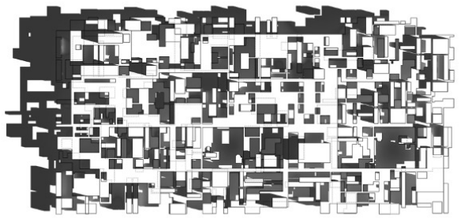


Maximum Incident Light Angle
Jun 21[Summer]



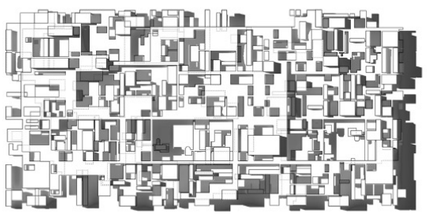
Chrono-Luminance Morphology Analysis

Through morphological adjustments to the MATRIX housing cluster structure, the interaction between spatial forms and variations in sunlight is achieved.

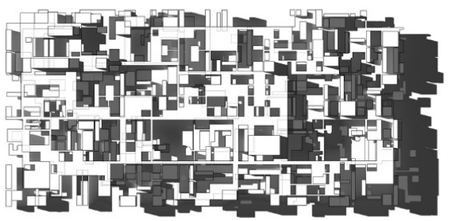


Summer [Jun 21] 5:00AM

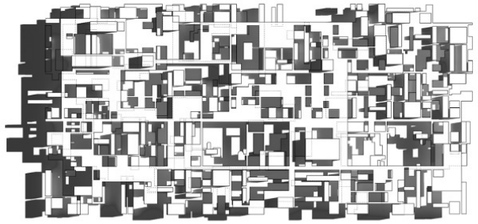
Summer [Jun 21] 11:00AM



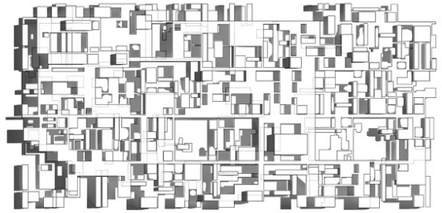
Summer [Jun 21] 3:00PM



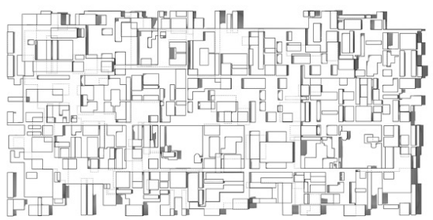
Summer [Jun 21] 6:00PM



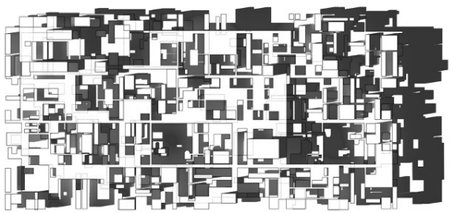
Winter [Jan 21] 3:00PM



Winter [Jan 21] 6:00PM



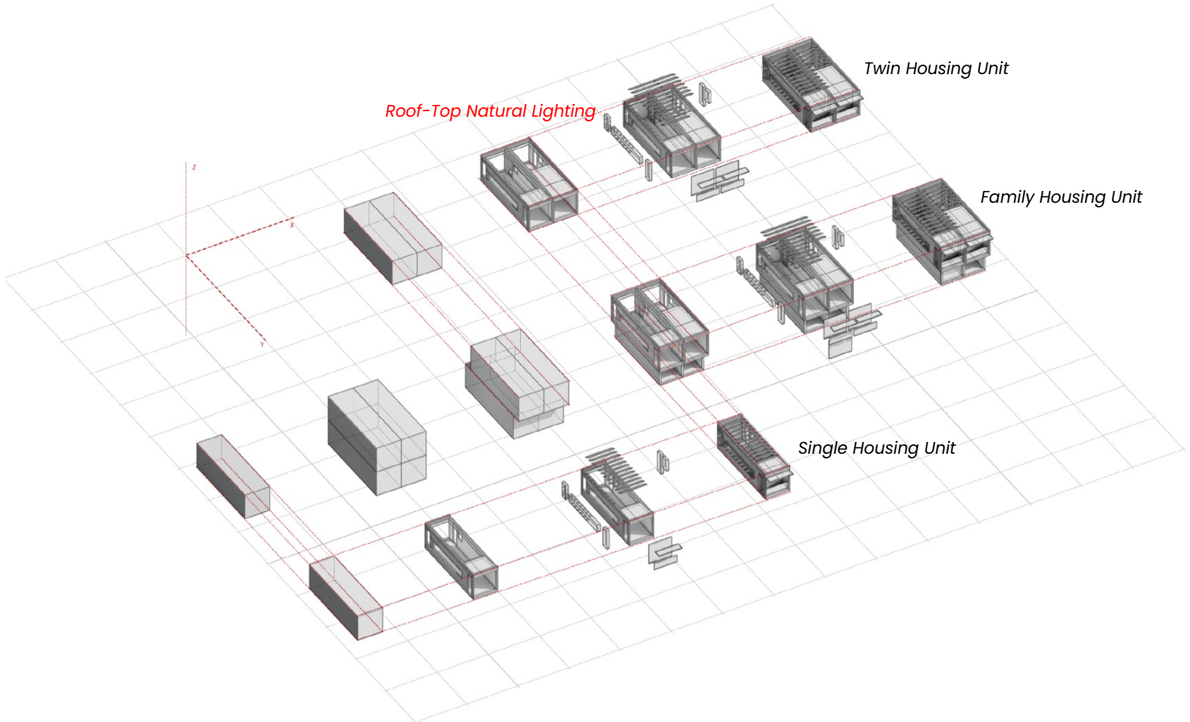
Winter [Jan 21] 3:00PM



Winter [Jan 21] 6:00PM

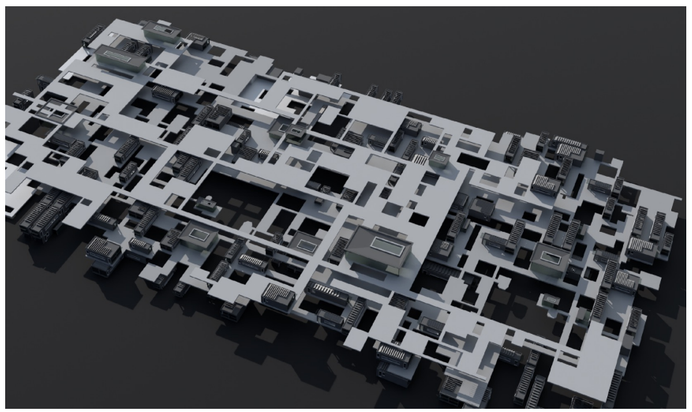
Shadow & Shade Study

Use shadows to carve the form until a social space is created that maintains overall illumination for most of the year



Modular Housing Unit Design

From the community framework to the small residential units, everything is modular. Residents with different needs can immediately find a sense of belonging here.



Spatial Circulation Details

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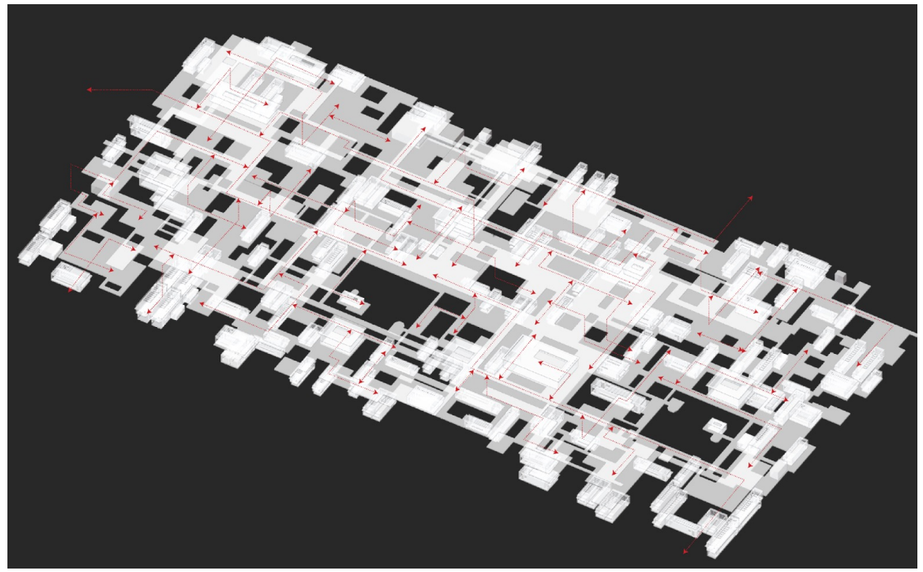
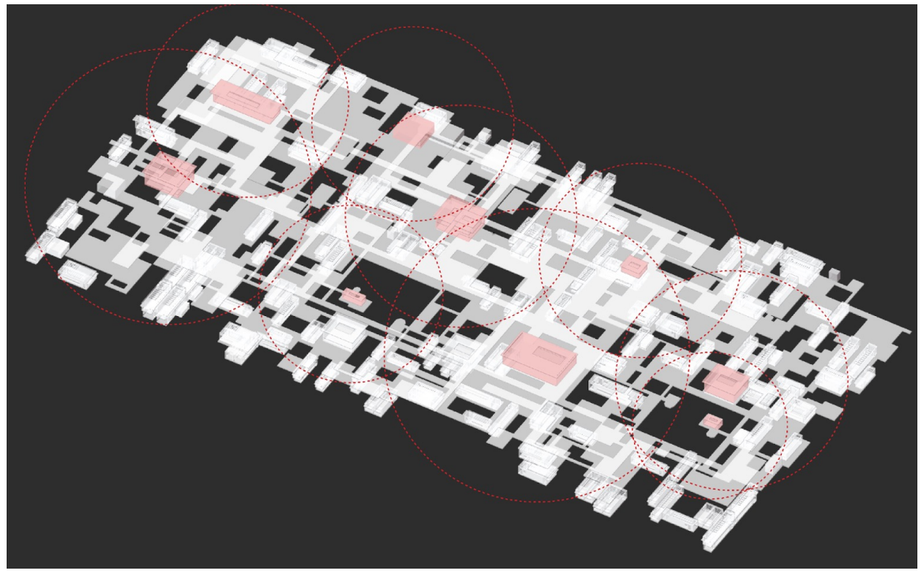


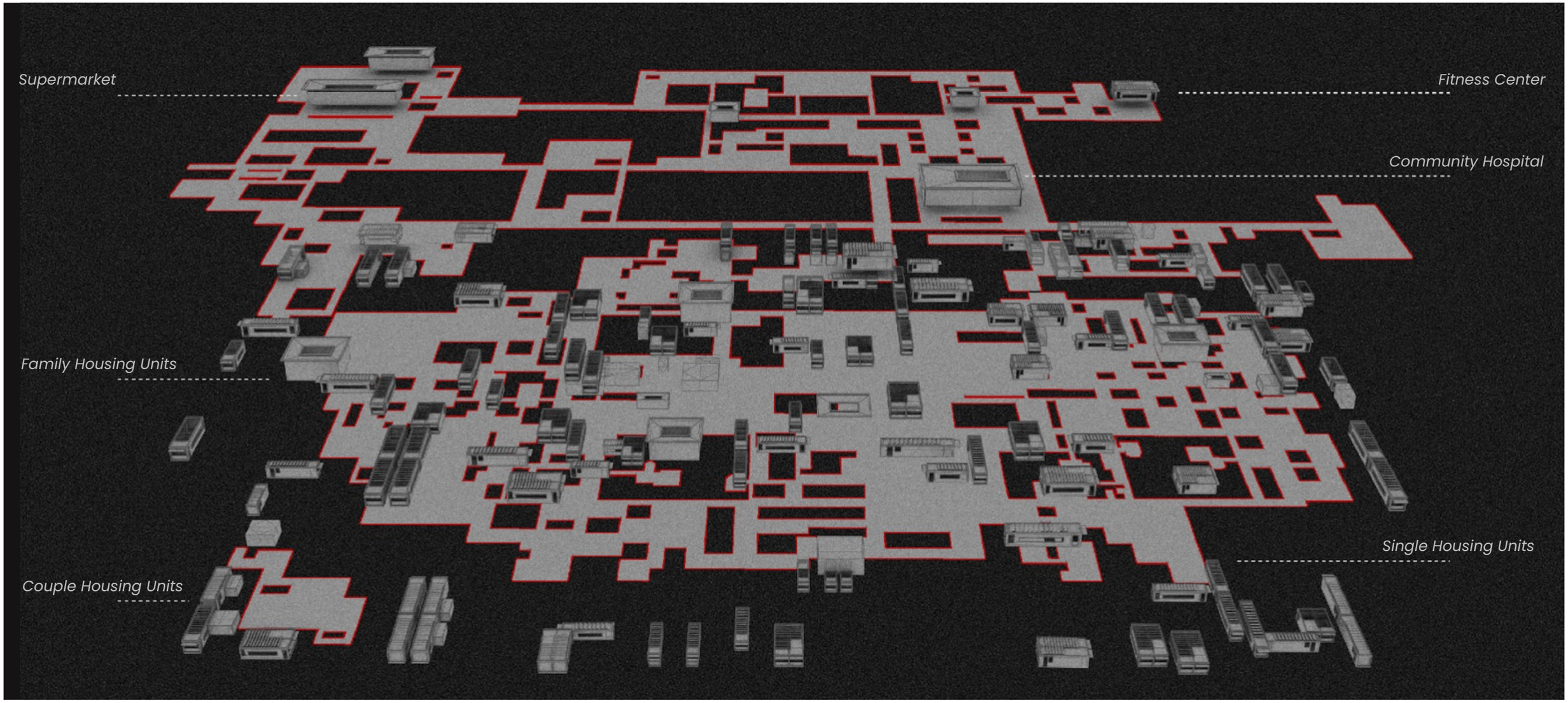
Circulation System

The three-floor community layout organizes traffic circulation into multiple layers, enabling all residents to connect.



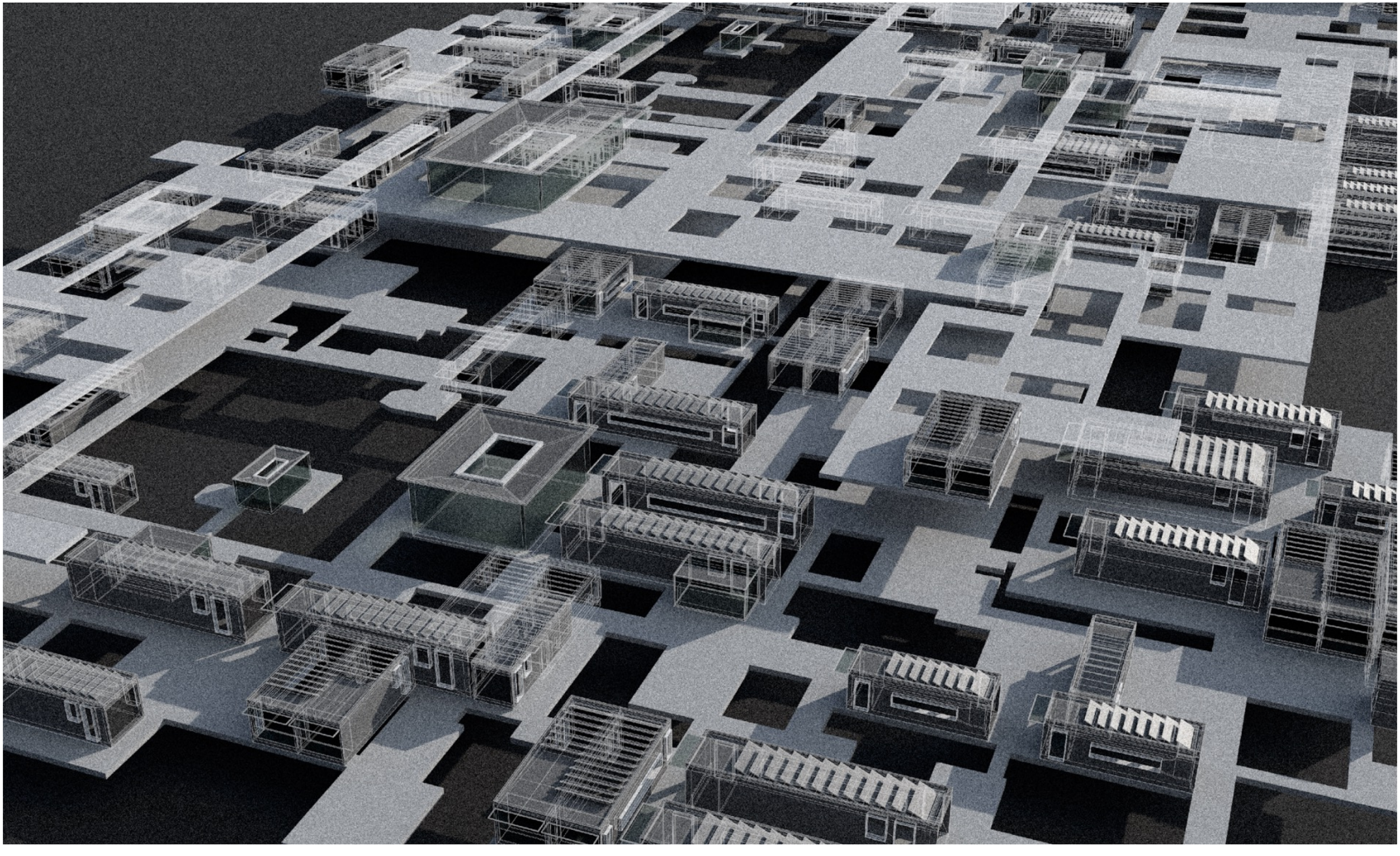
Community Facilities

Each node of the community is equipped with facilities to serve the residents, making it a complete and cohesive community.



Exploded Perspective

The first floor consists of parks and a few residential areas, the second floor is the main residential area, and the third floor includes public facilities



02

SANCTUM

This project explores the layered experience of cultural identity through a three-part spatial installation inspired by the immigrant condition in American Chinatowns. The outer shell takes the form of a Western-style church, symbolizing the dominant societal framework—imposing yet fundamentally disconnected from the immigrant's inner world. Inside, a network of industrial chimneys and pipelines represents invisible labor—migrant bodies sustaining the system while remaining unseen.

At the core, a quiet Buddhist presence reflects cultural memory and spiritual continuity, buried yet intact. Together, these layers form a heterotopic space—real yet displaced—revealing the tensions between visibility and erasure, belonging and exclusion within a stratified cultural landscape.

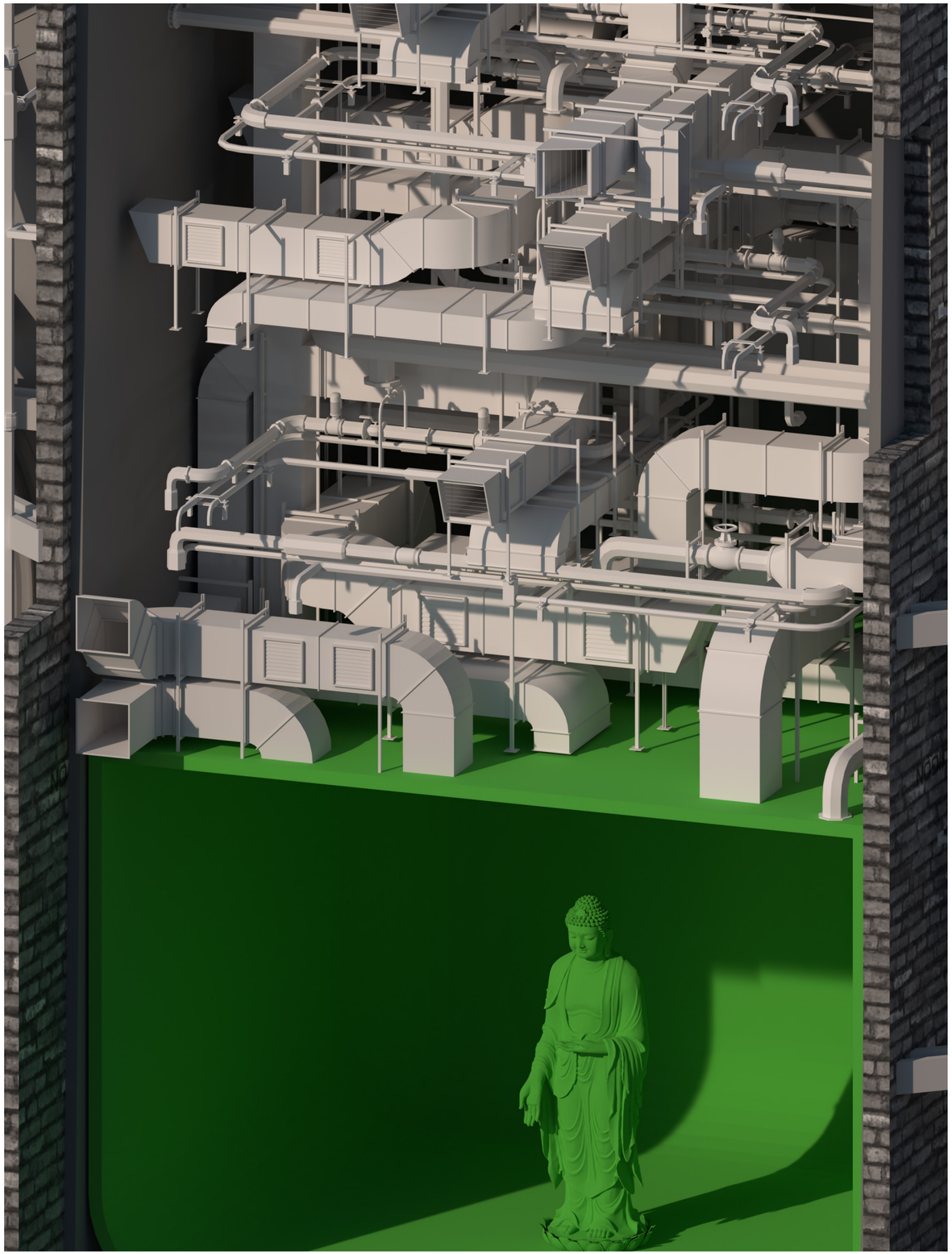
Individual Work

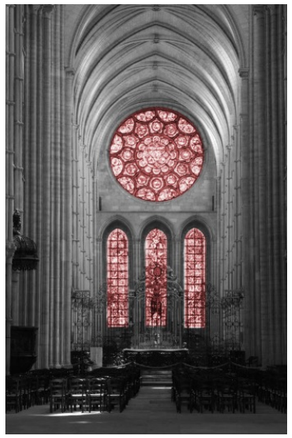
The Crossing Moment Studio

Instructor: Jayden Ali

Site Location: New York

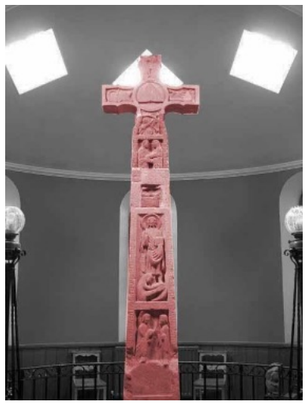
Spring 2025





Concept Analysis

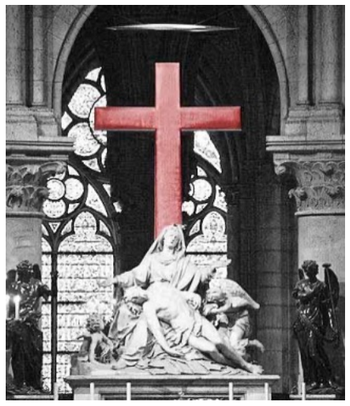
Architect Amos Rapoport, in The Meaning of the Built Environment, argues that humans construct spatial identity through"non-verbal symbol systems"—from tribal totems to rose windows, Visual Contract serves as a tangible expression of cultural boundaries in space.



[1] Primitive Stage

Ruthwell Cross (8th Century)

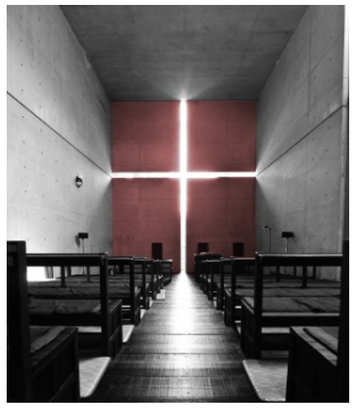
Original Symbol



[2] Geometric Stage

Catedral Notre Dame Paris(1345)

Symbol Transformation



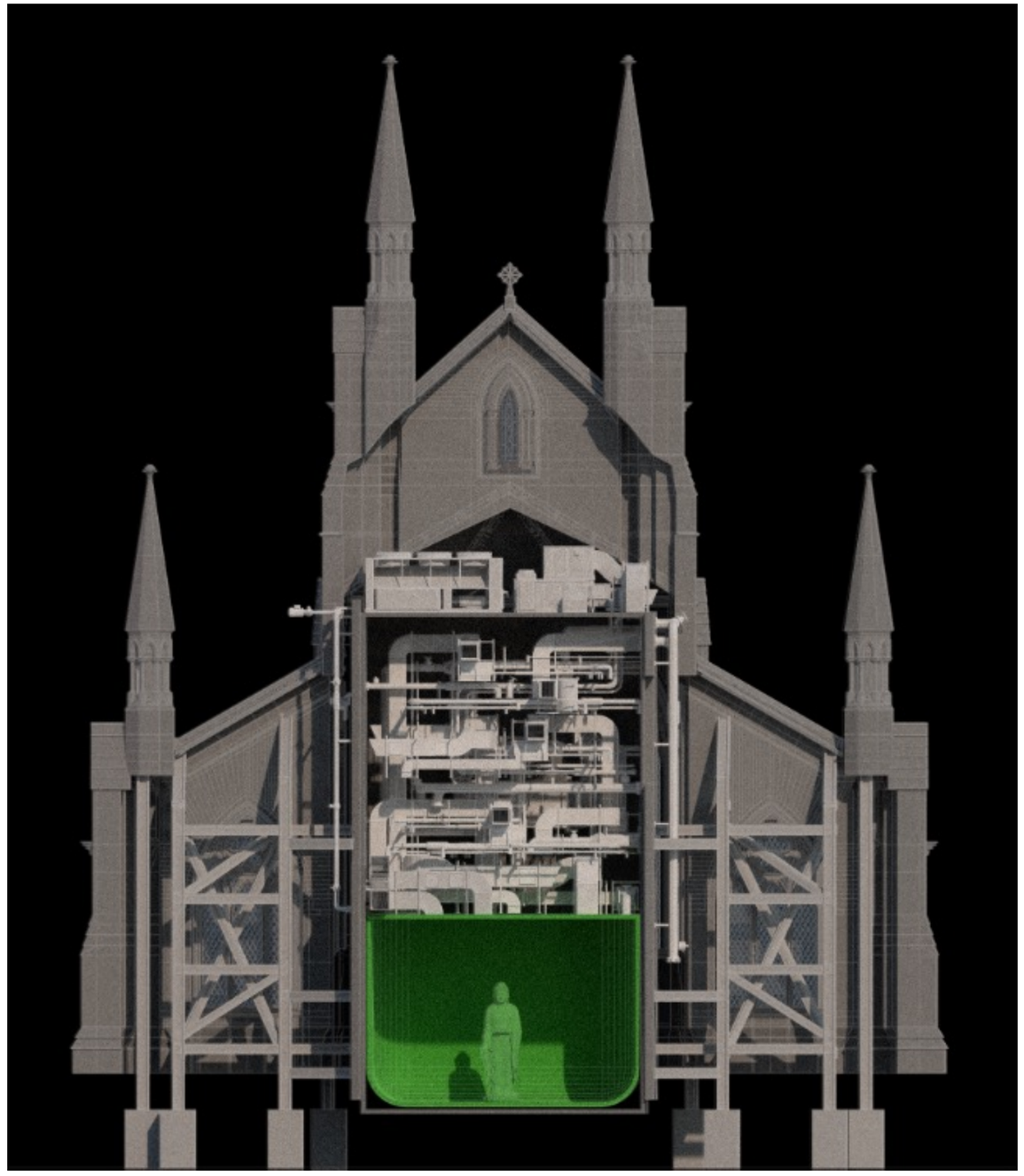
[3] Spiritual Stage

Tadao Ando's Church of Light (1989)

Contract Sublimation

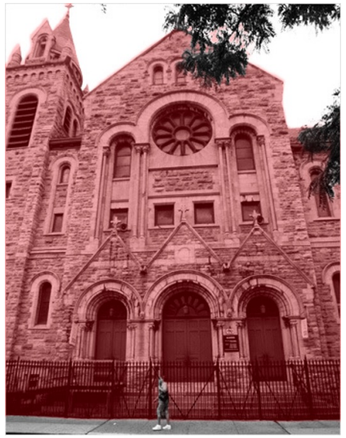
Evolution of the Visual Contract

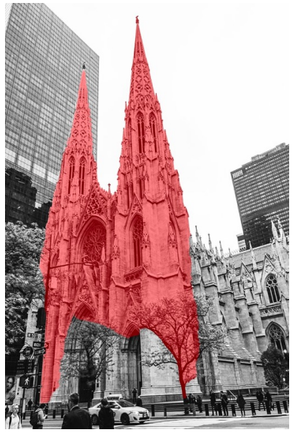
When Tadao Ando replaced wooden crosses with light crosses, he revealed that visual contracts are space itself. The light cross is not a decorative element of the church, but the proof of spatial existence.

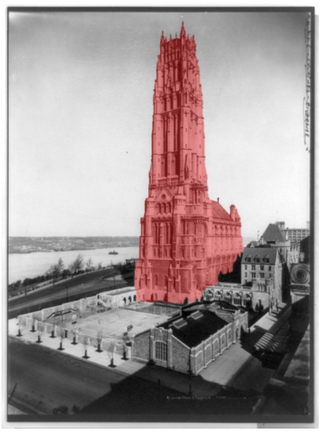


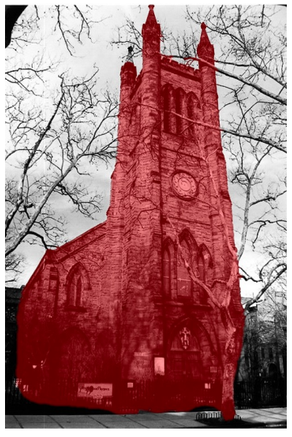
Spatial Echoes of What's No Longer Lived

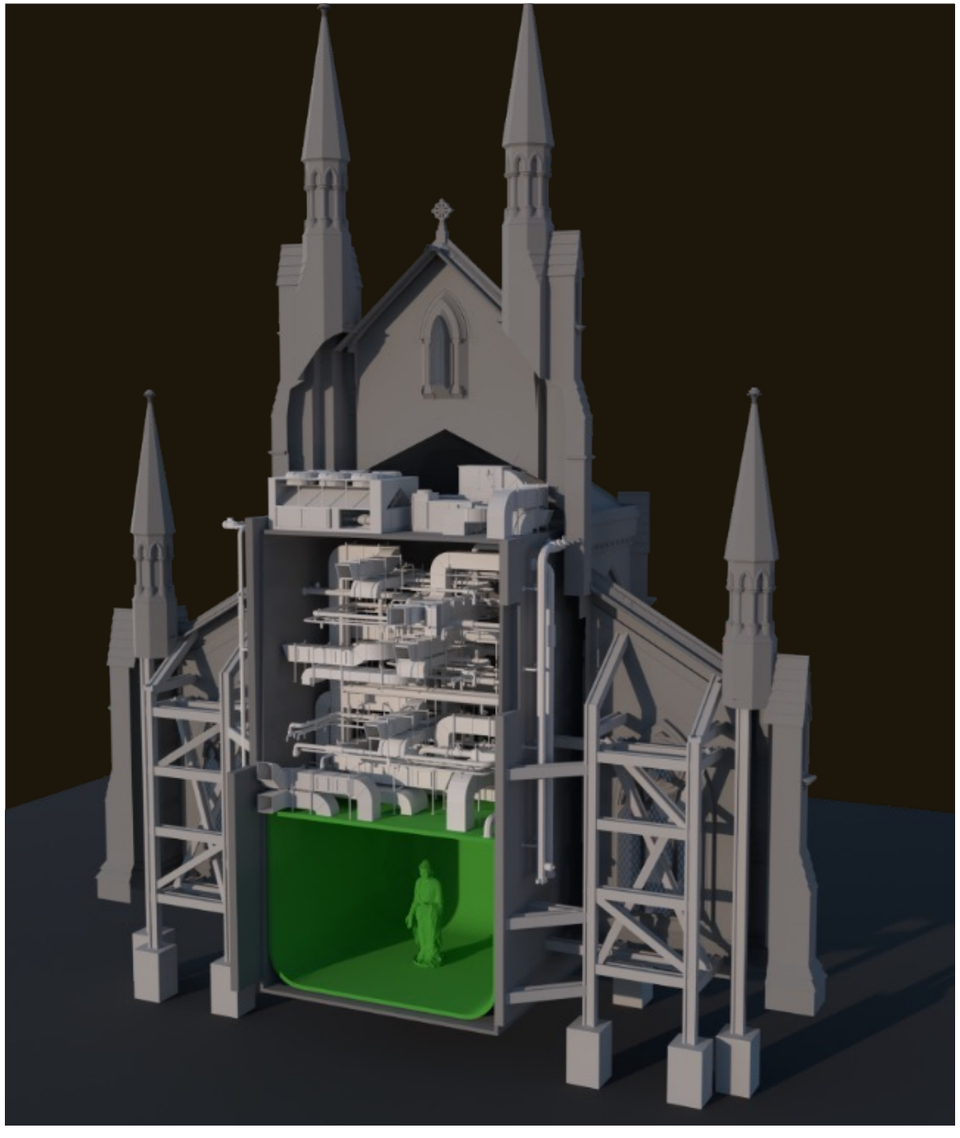
This is a project about how cultural structures collapse, reorganize, and linger within the spatial conditions of diaspora. It doesn't aim to reconstruct a homeland or tell a complete story. Instead, through a method I call visual contract, it reorganizes the spatial dissonance I experienced in New York's Chinatown.





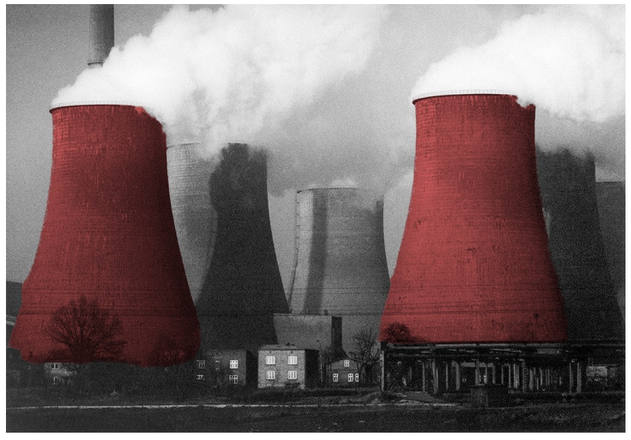


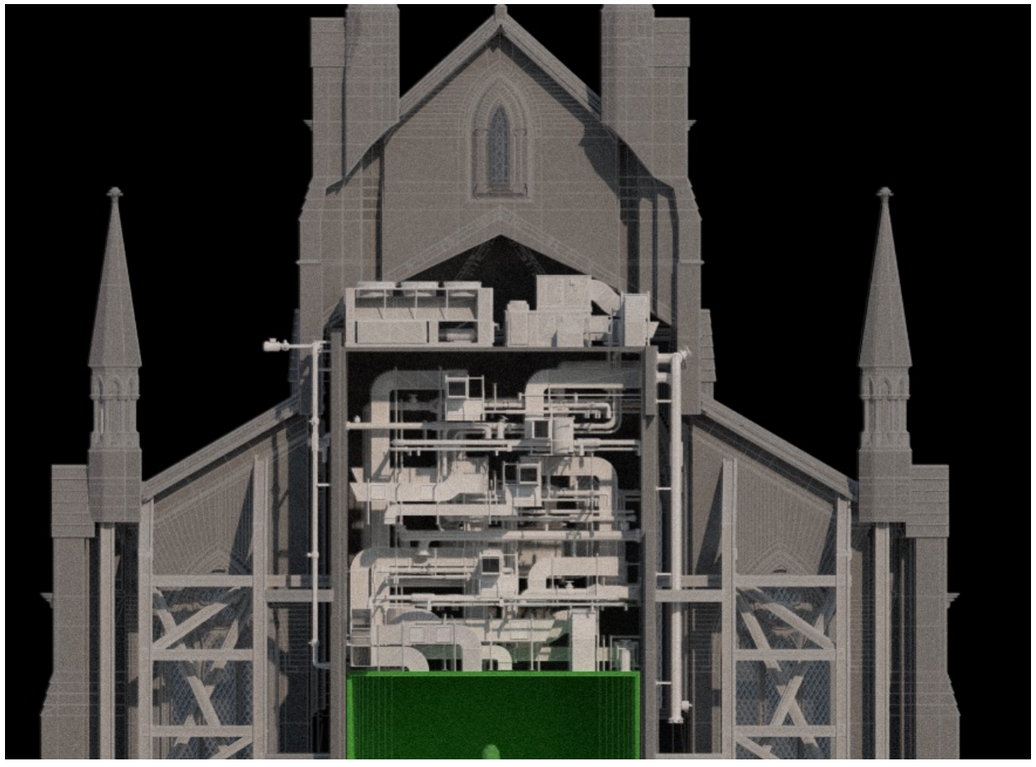




The Western Church Exterior

The outer shell takes the form of a New York-style church, a familiar icon of Western cultural and institutional power. It represents the dominant system that immigrants must navigate—one they live inside, but never truly belong to. This structure isn't just religious; it reflects a broader cultural order, one that defines legitimacy, morality, and inclusion through architecture. Immigrants pass through these frameworks daily, often adapting their behaviors without being accepted within them. The church becomes a façade of assimilation—imposing, symbolic, and ultimately indifferent to those inside it.

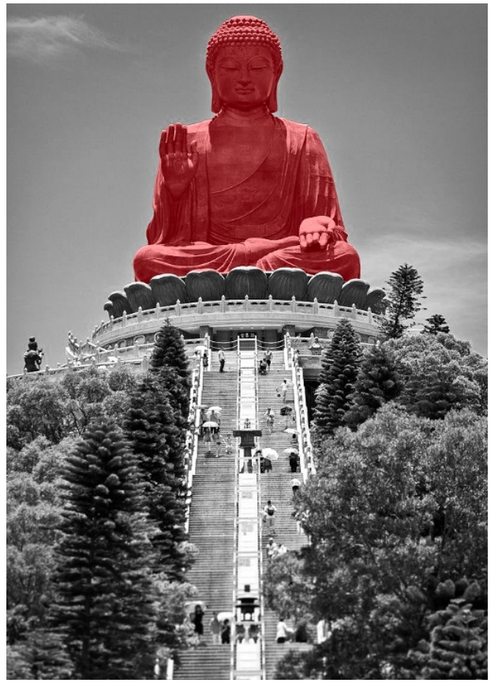


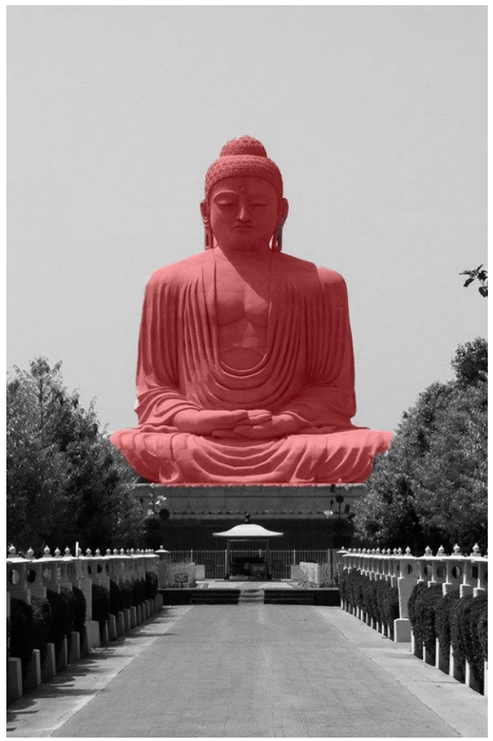


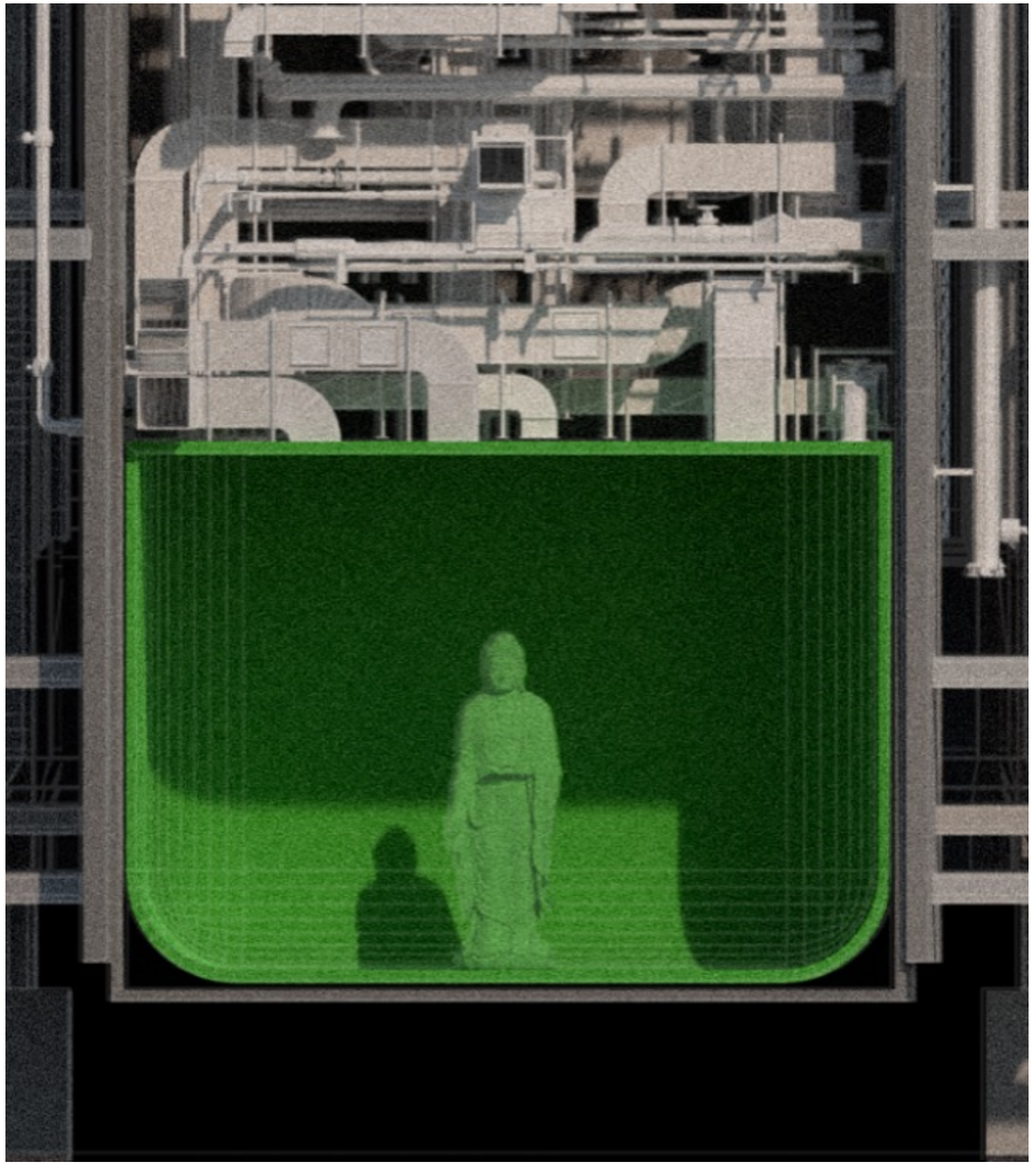
The Chimney and Pipelines

Inside the church, sacred symbols are replaced by a dense network of chimneys and pipelines—metallic, utilitarian, and cold. These industrial forms represent the invisible labor of immigrant life: washing dishes late into the night, chopping vegetables in back kitchens, cleaning floors before sunrise, repairing machines no one sees.

This work never stops. It flows beneath the surface of the city like a secondary circulatory system. Like smoke, it has no form, no center, yet it fills every space. The pipes and chimneys speak not only of function, but of fatigue, of repetition, of systems built on people who are never named. This is the unseen engine room of the city, and it runs not on fuel—but on human endurance.







The Buddha at the Core

At the center sits a Buddha—not as a symbol of organized religion, but as a quiet remnant of a life once lived. It speaks to the values, habits, and rhythms passed down through generations: eating in a certain way, speaking certain words, honoring invisible boundaries. In diaspora, these traditions may no longer appear in public life, yet they persist internally, held silently by individuals. The Buddha stands not for faith, but for cultural memory—something too quiet to be seen, but too enduring to fully disappear.

03

THE MINISTRY OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT

In the future, the UN establishes a Disaster Management Department to address global climate crises. Using a triage system, data flows from a 24-hour analysis unit to a Decision Council, then returns for implementation.

The headquarters is powered by solar panels, achieving carbon neutrality. It houses rapid response teams and analysts, supporting real-time monitoring, early warnings, and international cooperation. The department plays a central role in enforcing global climate policies and driving technological innovation to build a more resilient, coordinated response to environmental disasters.

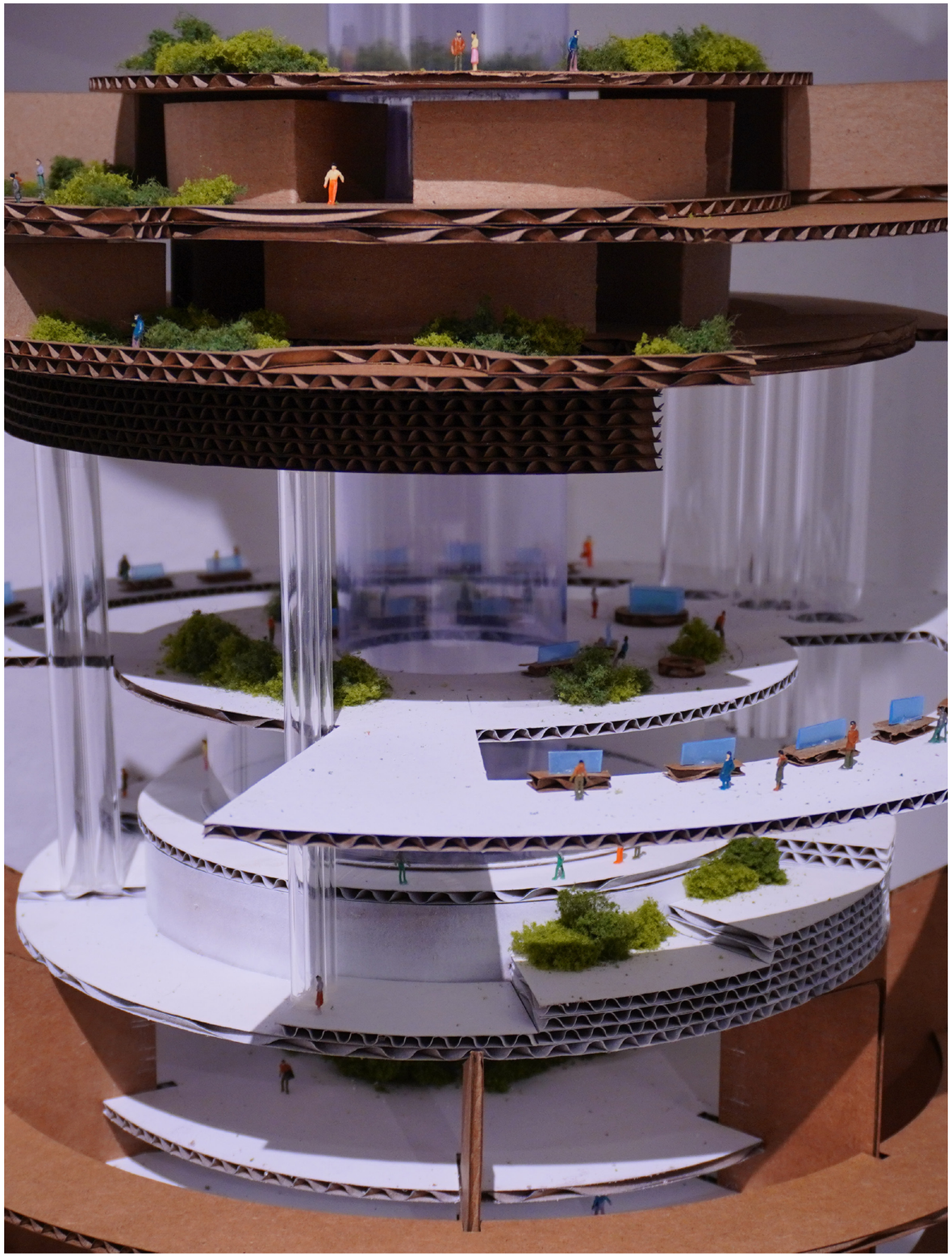
Individual Work

Future's Future Studio

Instructor: Dan Wood

Site Location: New York

Summer 2024



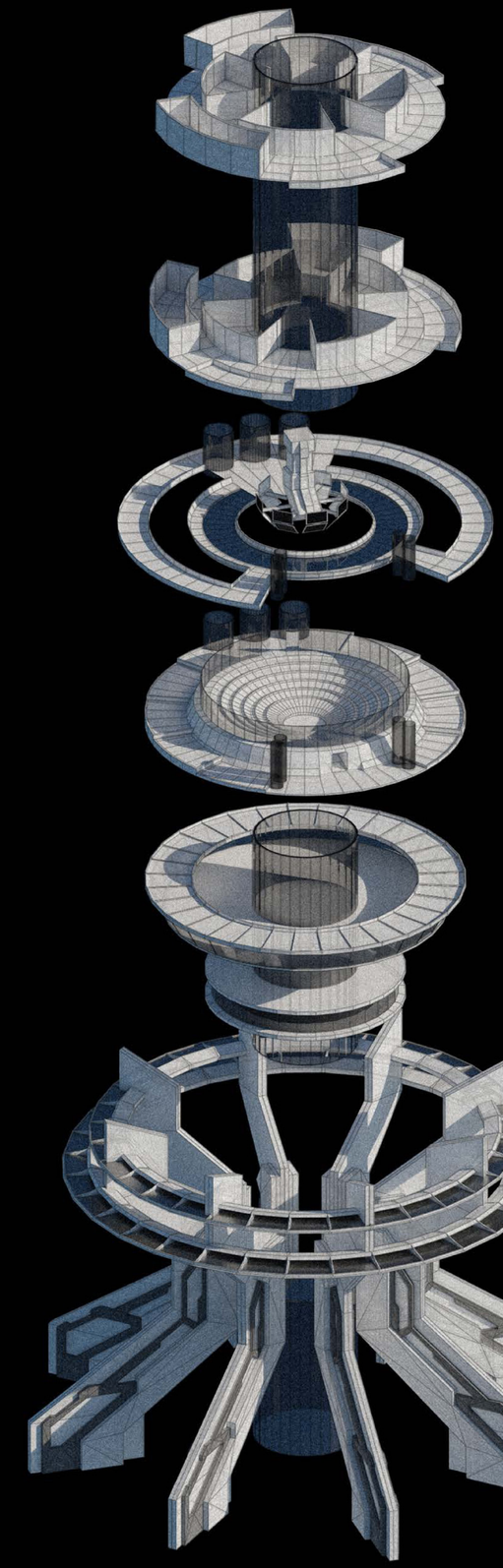
Background & Concept

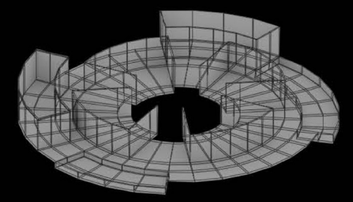
In the future' future, the United Nations establishes a Disaster Management Department to address global climate disasters. The design of its headquarters aims to efficiently and comprehensively manage crises, advance climate policies, and drive technological innovation.

The workflow of Disaster Management Department is based on a Triage system. The upper level consists of a 24-hour data analysis department that provides data, which is then sent to the lower-level Decision Council Center. The council makes decisions based on this data, which are subsequently returned to the data center for specific administrative instructions, resource allocation, and other concrete measures.

At the top of the headquarters is the daily work area for the 24-hour rapid response team and the living quarters for the data analysis department staff. Additionally, the bottom of the structure is equipped with multiple large solar energy panels to power the entire department, achieving carbon neutrality.

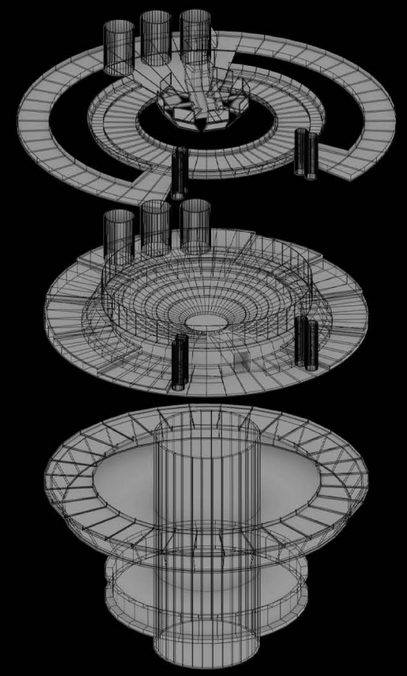
The department emphasizes global early warning systems and international cooperation. It monitors and issues climate warnings in real time, collaborates with governments and international organizations, and implements global climate policies and innovations.





Quick Response & Living Level

Daily work area
Living quarters



Data Analysis

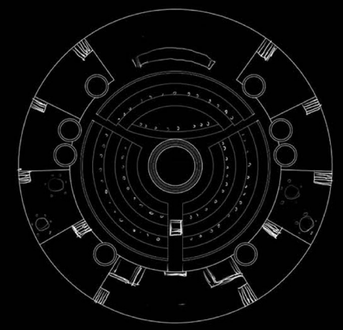
Monitoring
Cleaning, transformation
Resuce resource allocation
Continous data tracking

Resolution Council

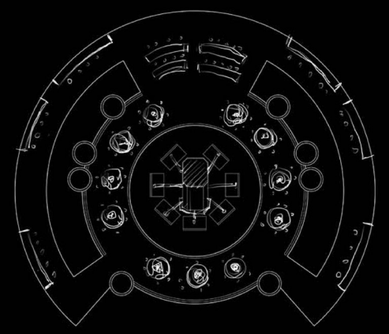
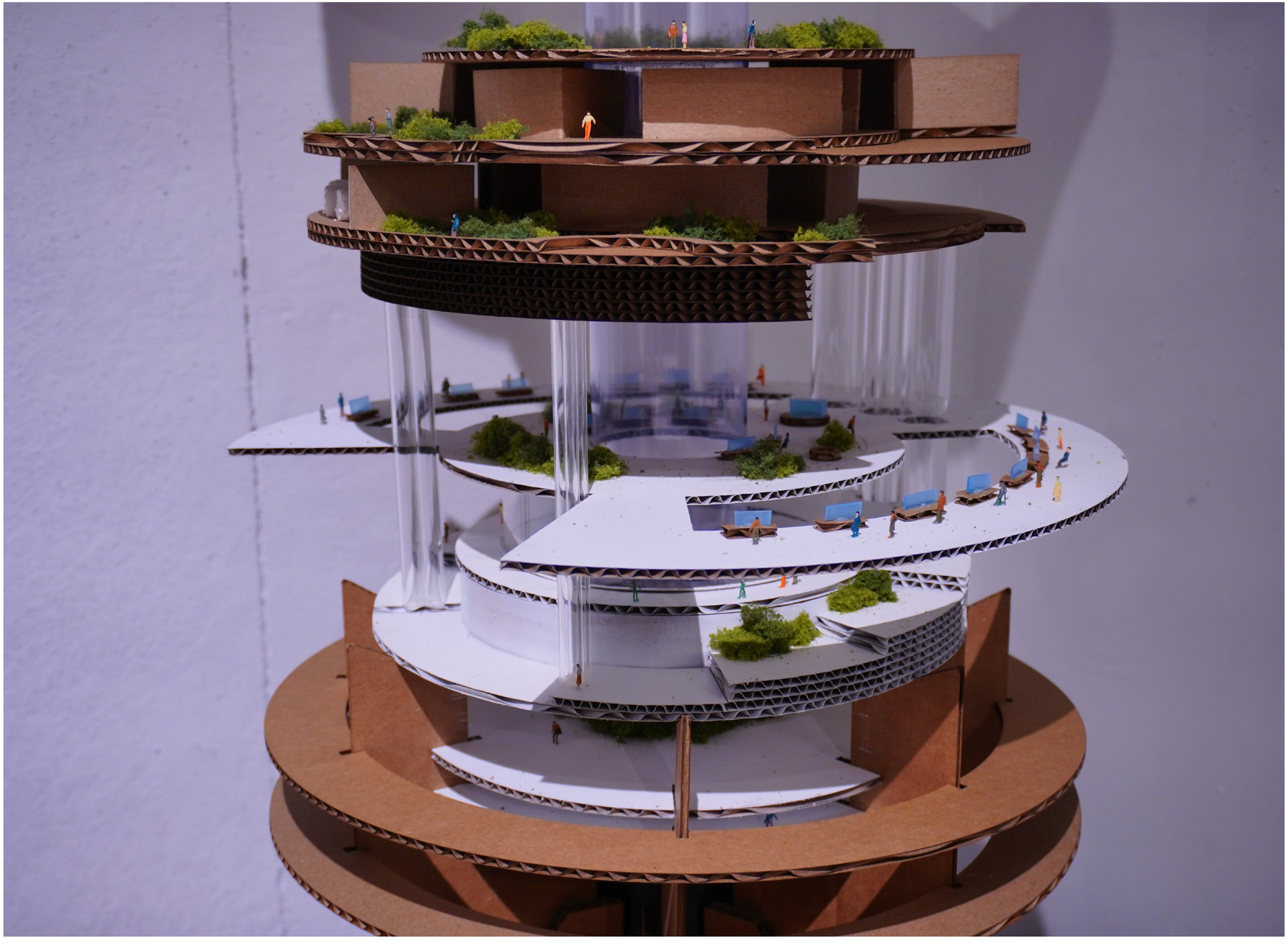
Make decisions based on data

Entrance Rest Level

Entrance hall



Resonlution Council Level



Data Analysis Level