All The Way Down, This Time:
Urban Agriculture and Food Justice in Detroit

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
June 2021

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Contents

Abstract iii
Acknowledgements iv
Chapter 1: Introduction 1
  Legacy of Redlining 2
    Environmental Racism 3
    Bankruptcy 5
Chapter 2: Urbicide 12
  Property as Whiteness 12
    Blight and Urban Renewal 12
Chapter 3: Complicating Re-Greening 15
  Urban Agriculture 15
    Self-provisioning and Resistance 17
    Green-Washing 18
  Detroit Future City 22
Chapter 4: Black Psychogeography 25
  Slave Patrols 25
    Can’t Relax, Black 26
Chapter 5: Design Responses 29
  Site 31
    Roosevelt Park 33
    The Station 37
    Greenhouse/Undercarriage 59
Chapter 6: Conclusion 65
References 68

Abstract

The redevelopment of Detroit as a colonial wasteland naturalizes the present and denies the racial capitalism that reproduces the crisis in an overwhelmingly black urban environment. The denial of local community organizations and small scale growers of ownership over lots they have stewarded with informal caretaking stands in stark contrast to the direct access white for-profit farming businesses have in negotiating with city planners to purchase bundled property. This kind of racial discrimination is not new;they are centuries-old patterns of exclusion that legal scholar Cheryl Harris famously described in her 1993 article “Property as Whiteness.” Detroit’s urban agricultural community increase the values of the lots they operate on while increasing profits for white speculators.

The thesis project explores a speculative decolonialized zone within Detroit; with Michigan Central Station as an escape from state endorsed racial capitalism/oppression and a flight into an architectural mountain built for autonomy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Roger Mullin, for his patience and insight. I would also like to thank my advisor Steve Parcell for his support and positivity.

I would also like to thank my friends for their encouragement and support. Thank you Aziza Asat, Jamie Leer, and Lydia Lovett-Dietrich.

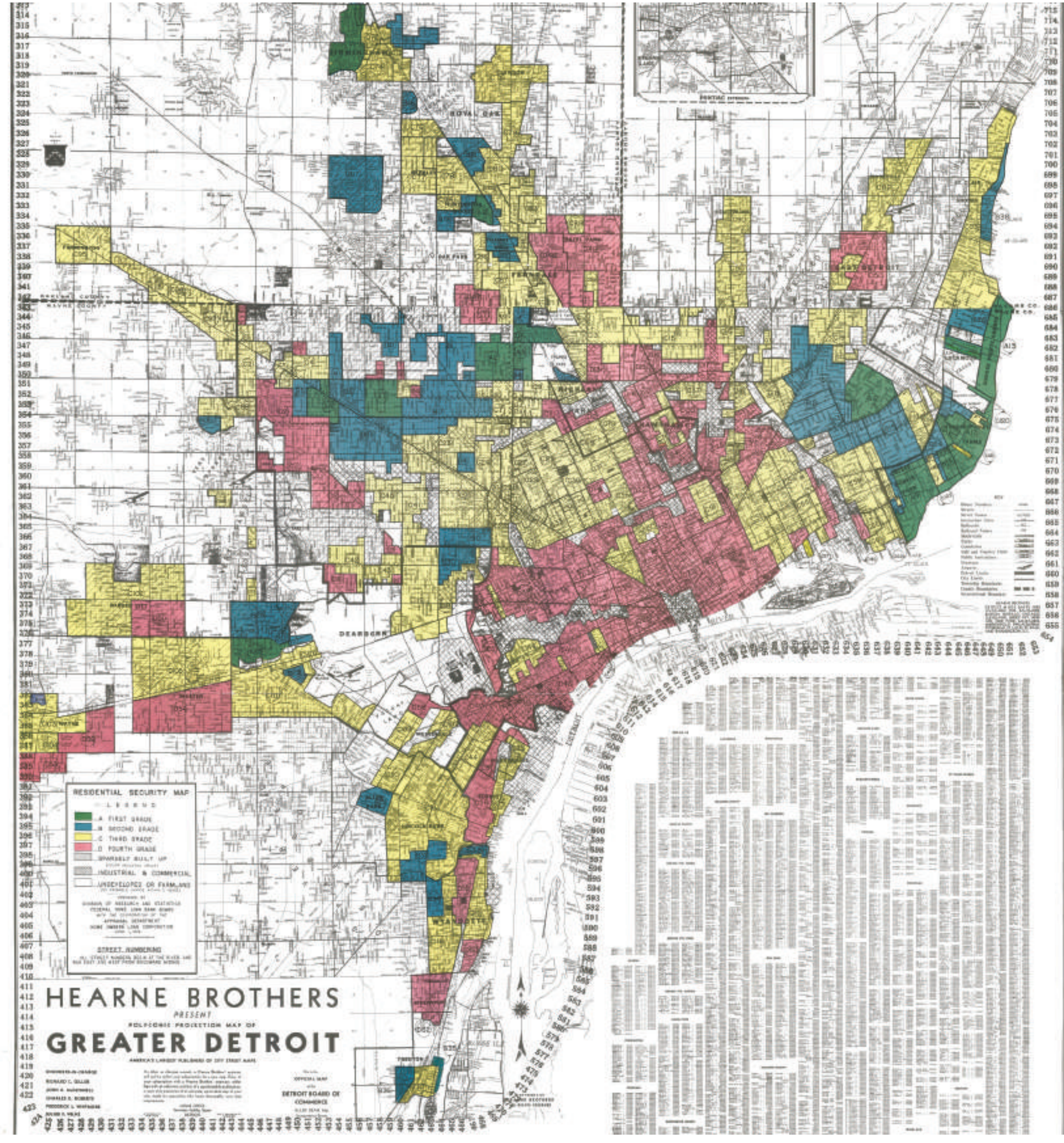
Finally, I would like to thank my sister, Tane, for her feedback and wisdom.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The problems evident in Detroit are shared by every American city that has a majority African American population; however, Detroit is unique in that it has the largest Black population by percentage of any major American city, and therefore has arguably suffered the most from racial capitalism. Detroit scholars Sara Safransky and Andrew Newman succinctly express Detroit's plight in relation to the historical oppression of African Americans throughout the country:

> Detroit is a predominantly low-income city, and more than 80 percent of its residents are African-American. Many of the surrounding suburbs are predominantly white and significantly more affluent. This polarizing geography is the result of racist patterns of block busting, a predatory real estate practice whereby agents stoke fears that immigration of a racialized population will depreciate home values. The aim is to persuade property owners to sell their homes cheaply; agents then flip them for a profit. The movement of white, middle-class residents to the suburbs paralleled the socio-spatial mobility of African Americans in the city, and a series of localized but numerous violent confrontations centered around race and housing preceded the so-called "riot" of 1967. (Safransky and Newman 2014, 19)

This kind of systemic discrimination that targeted people of colour has found new forms in contemporary America. The subprime mortgage crisis represented a paradigm shift from traditional segregation/redlining policies. This was possible when risk itself was commodified through risk-adjusted mortgage rate pricing, a move away from "financial exclusion to expropriation through financial inclusion" (Wang 2018, 134). The mortgages appeared to be an attempt to close the racial wealth gap through credit access expansion, but they were in fact designed such that borrowers would be dispossessed of their homes, thus becoming a source of revenue for lenders.



Redlining map of Detroit (Detroit HOLC 2014).

Legacy of Redlining

The history of redlining and blockbusting in major American cities has had a deeply profound and lasting effect on African American communities and their ability to secure stable housing and the generational wealth it confers. The flight to the suburbs occurred in part to escape the depreciating

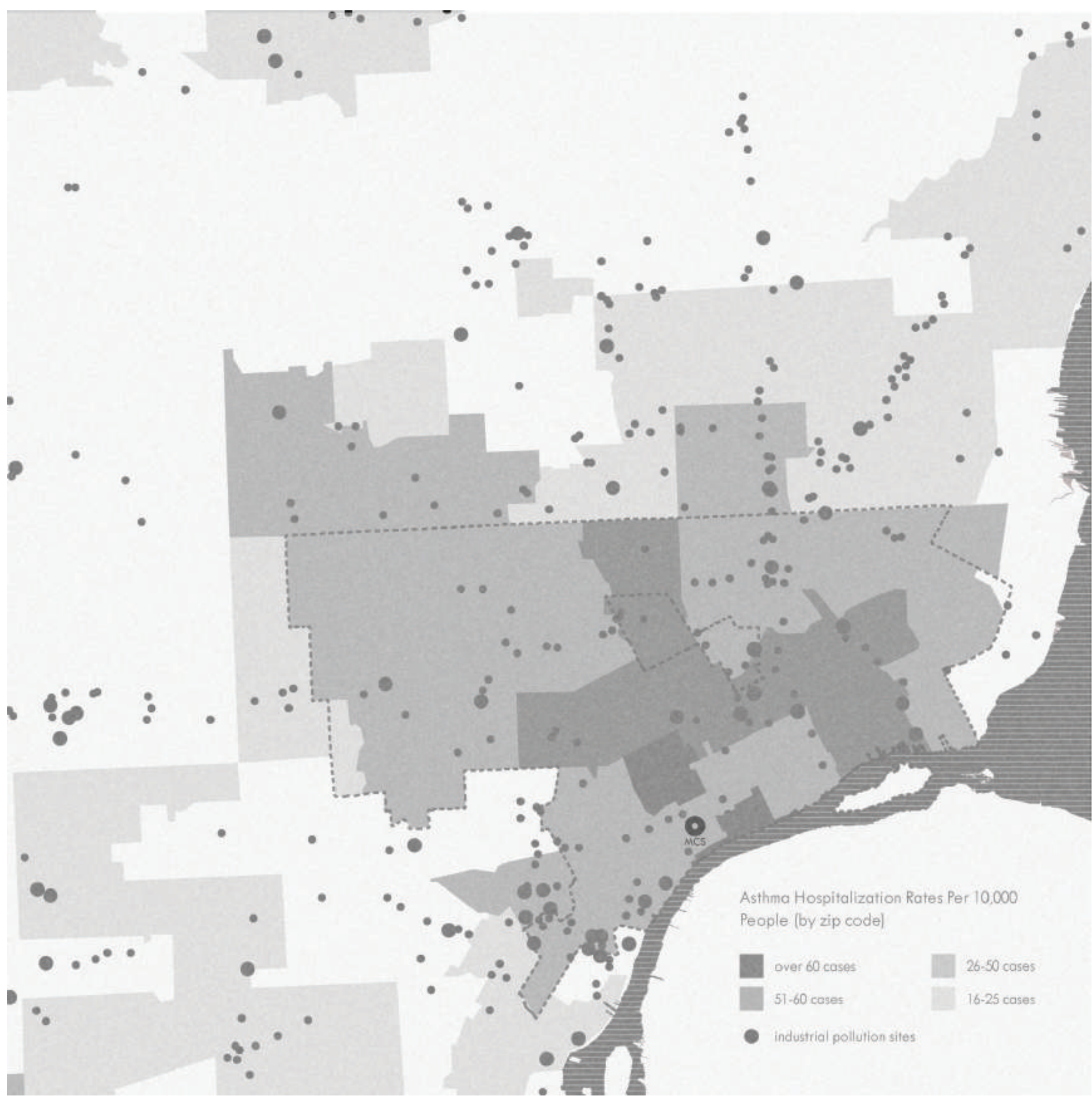
effect black neighbours would have on property values due to widespread racism. Nancy Denton describes the racist attitudes of white Michigan residents:

> Given that a home is widely viewed as a symbol of a person's worth, these views imply that whites perceive blacks to be a direct threat to their social status. This interpretation is underscored by a 1985 study of white voters commissioned by the Michigan state Democratic Party. After carrying out a series of focus-group interviews in blue-collar suburbs of Detroit, the study concluded that working-class whites "express a profound distaste for blacks, a sentiment that pervades almost everything they think about government and politics... Blacks constitute the explanation for their vulnerability and for almost everything that has gone wrong in their lives; not being black is what constitutes being middle class; not living with blacks is what makes a neighborhood a decent place to live." (Denton and Massey 1993, 18)

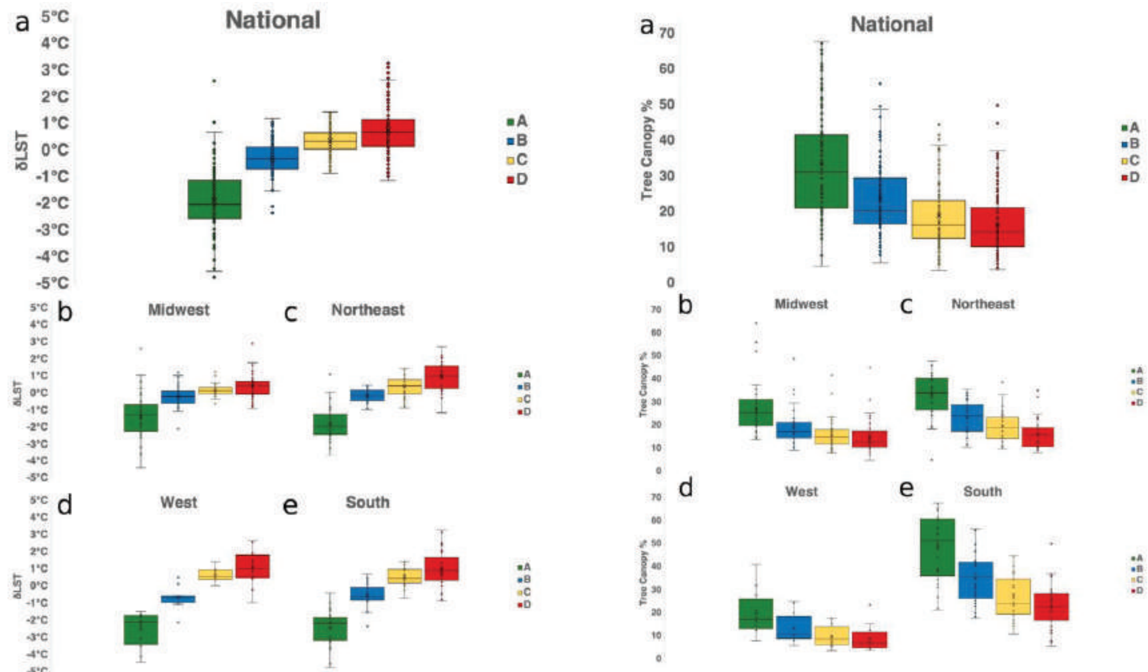
This legacy of discrimination and segregation is a large part of Detroit's current situation; the city's population has sunk from almost two million in 1950 to under 700,000 by 2012 (Safransky 2016, 2). More recently, the racialized predatory lending of the 2008 subprime crisis further hollowed out Detroit with foreclosures; between 2000 and 2010, Detroit had lost 25 percent of its population (Safransky 2016, 4).

Environmental Racism

Recent studies have shown a link between historically redlined neighborhoods in American cities and extreme heat effects in urban environments. Research has shown that industrial architecture is sited overwhelmingly in black and minority neighborhoods; this contamination leads to chronic health conditions plaguing black neighborhoods all over the U.S., as evidenced in Detroit. These underlying conditions are further exacerbated by extreme heat in urban areas that can be directly tied to segregationist policies; studies have shown that redlining has created uneven heat distribution across intra-urban land surface temperatures (LSTs). No



Asthma rates and polluters in the Detroit area, rates being markedly higher in the city of Detroit (Campbell et al. 2020, 145)



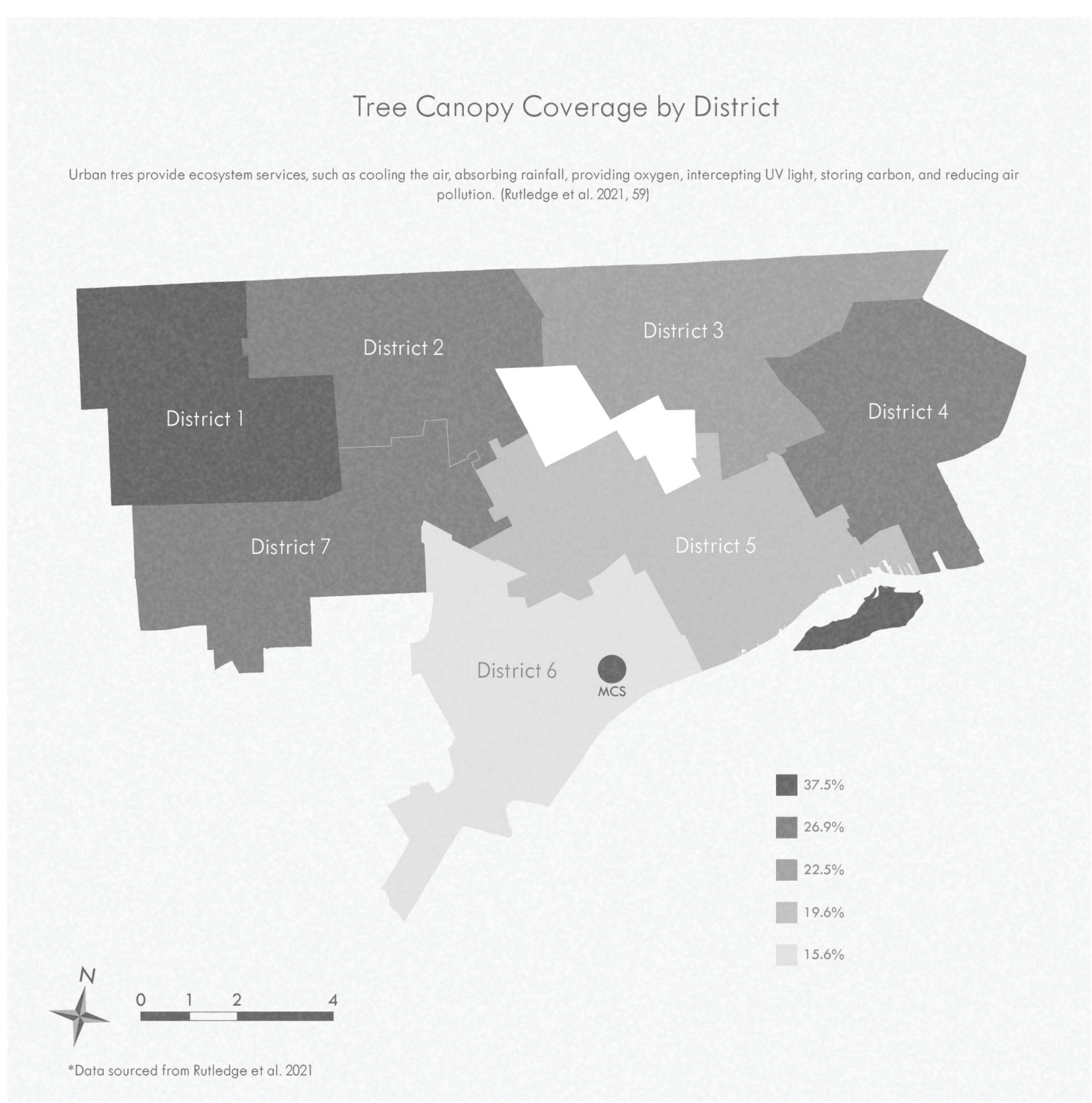
Land Surface Temperatures (LST) and redlined zones (Hoffman et al. 2020, 7)

Tree Canopy coverage and redlined zones (Hoffman et al. 2020, 9)

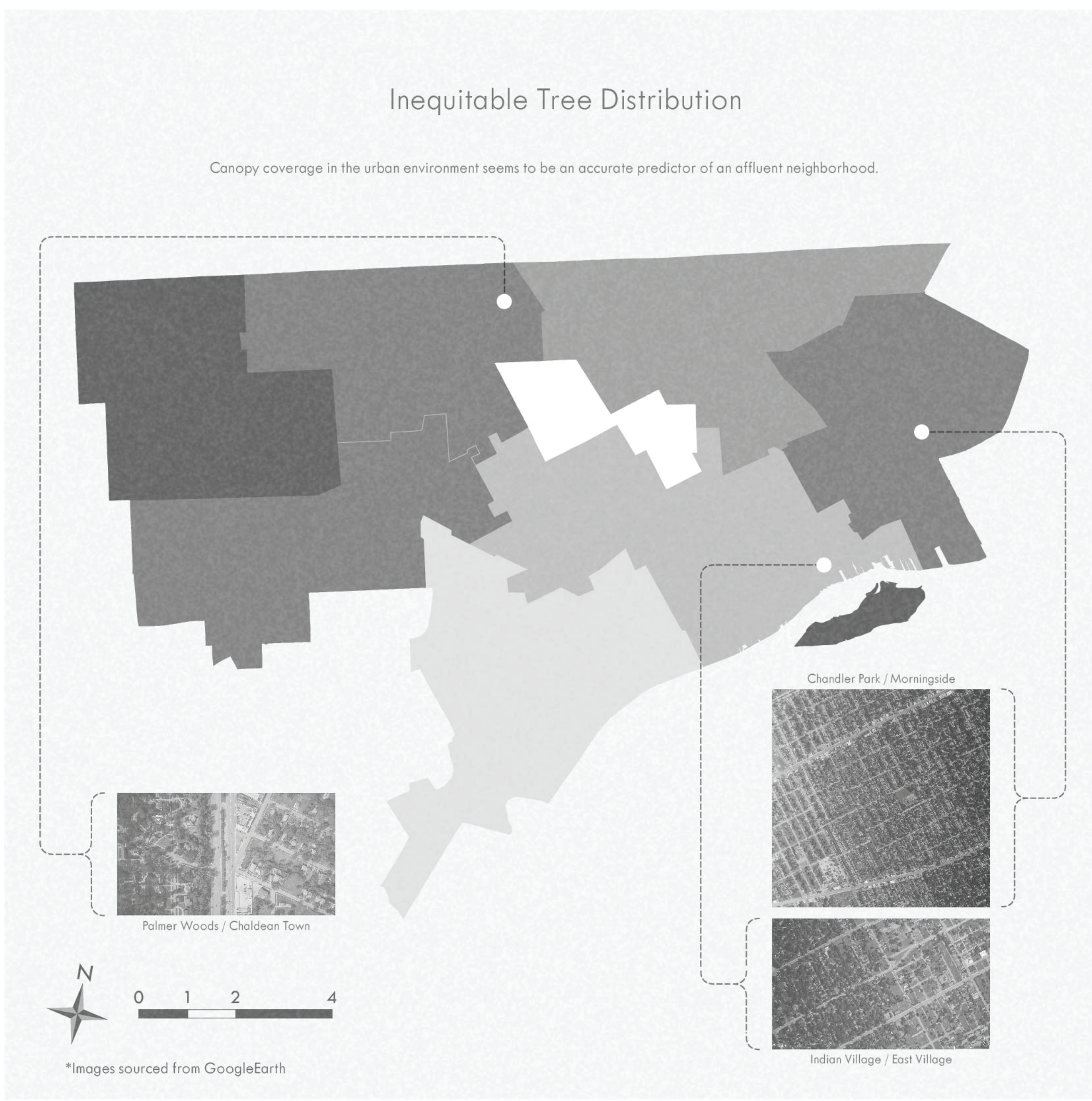
other catergory of hazardous weather events in the U.S. has caused more fatalities in the last few decades than extreme heat, and the hottest urban spaces can be predictably traced along former redlined neighborhoods (Hoffman, Shandas and Pendleton 2020, 6). A primary reason for this inequity is a result of uneven tree canopy distribution, with green spaces being consistently more abundant in wealthier and majority white-identifiying neighborhoods; this is in addition to roadway infrastructure, railway terminals, and industrial or manufacturing sites designed into low income neighborhoods that transform solar radiation into heat (Hoffman, Shandas and Pendleton 2020, 10).

Bankruptcy

Racial segregation and flight from Detroit leave the city with an invisible black population as well as a great deal of



Tree canopy coverage diminishes as you move outward from downtown Detroit; trees provide a great number of functions that improve the health of a community (data from Rutledge et al. 2021, 104).

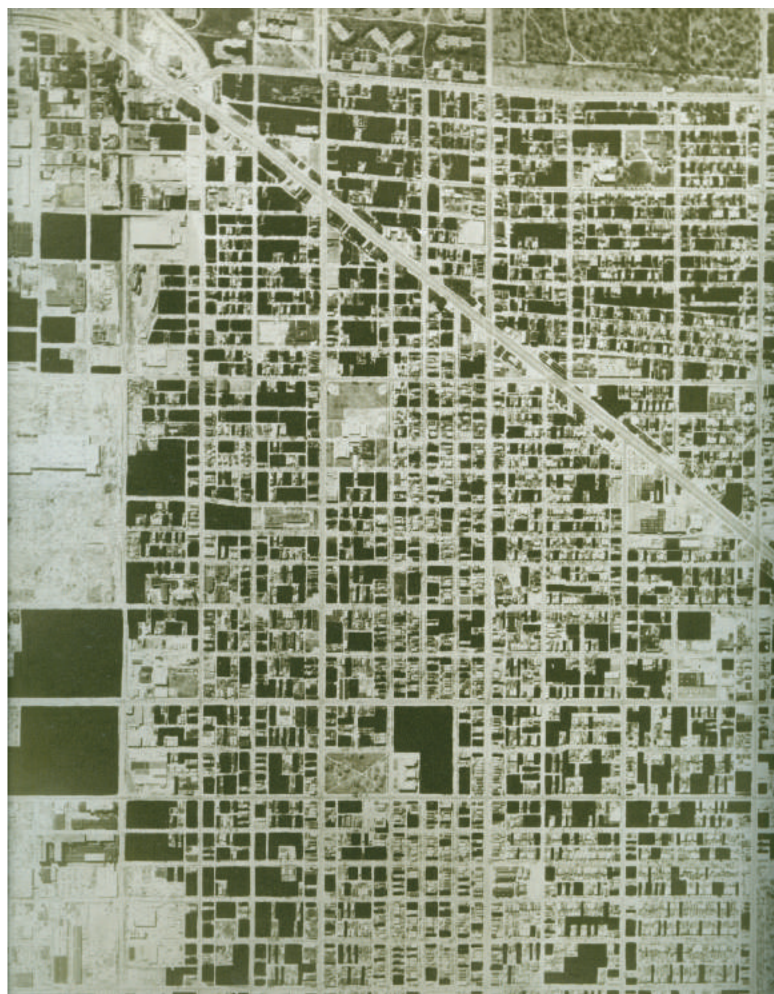


Aerial views of affluent neighborhoods expose the stark difference in urban conditions and the deep segregation that persists today (Image sources on following pages).

Closer view of Palmer Woods and Chaldean Town divide. (Detroit n.d.)

Closer view of the historic Indian Village and East Village divide. (Detroit n.d.)

Closer view of Chandler Park and Morningside disparity. (Google Maps 2020)



Painted black vacant lots by Dan Hoffman (Bonnemaison and Eisenbach 2009, 117)

vacant property ripe for resettlement; this “myth of Detroit as empty cannot exist without the accompanying idea that black people don’t matter” (Stovall and Hill 2016, 119).

The city declared bankruptcy in 2014; this followed Michigan’s then Republican Governor Rick Snyder’s order that Detroit be placed under emergency management. The emergency managers are unelected and granted sweeping powers that nullify the power of elected officials; they assume control of all city affairs, which include the power to break union contracts, privatize public land and resources, and outsource

the management of public services (Safransky 2014, 239). It should be noted that on the same day Snyder appointed an emergency manager for Detroit, a new security coalition called Detroit One was assembled; this resulted in a six day sweep of the city that included 245 arrests, 105 raids of suspected drug homes, 4,586 traffic violations and 500 towed vehicles (Safransky and Newman 2014, 22). While there was no money to be found for water, schools, parks or streetlights, austerity measures are ostensibly accompanied by an intensification of the state's repressive capacity. Peter Marcuse explains that:

> The other point is that the government has always played, and continues to play, a constitutive role in that market, creating the legal and institutional structures without which the market could not act as it does, subsidizing various aspects of its operations. The conduct of users of housing continues to be thoroughly regulated; only that of the housing industry has been deregulated. Thus "deregulated" is not a withdrawl by government from the market, but a change in its role in that market. (Marcuse 2012, 220)

It is in this undemocratic austerity that we see the rapid dismembering of public infrastructure; the residents, faced with dwindling city services and employment opportunities, have long since begun organizing themselves and self-provisioning. They began gardening in empty lots, acting as informal realtors to fill empty houses, destroying vacant housing to deter crime, cleared trash, cut grass, shoveled snow for neighbors, and monitored street activity to keep each other safe (Sugrue 1996, 28).

Chapter 2: Urbicide

Property as Whiteness

Perhaps Detroit's abandonment can best be comprehended by juxtaposing Cheryl Harris' concept of whiteness as property and Wendell Pritchett's analysis of blight and urban renewal. In her seminal article in the *Harvard Review*, Harris develops a framework for examining how whiteness has come to have value as property, encoded in property law and social relations. She explains how chattel slavery was premised upon the appropriation of indigenous land, and the deployment of different racial logics in the treatment of black slaves as property and indigenous nations as inferior and consequently without claim to the land. She examines how the concept of race interacted with the concept of property; how propertizing human life created the historical footing for the merger of white identity with property. She argues that whiteness shares the critical characteristics of property and is indeed the analogue of property: the right to use and enjoyment, the reputational value, and the power to exclude (Bhandar 2018, 7).

Blight and Urban Renewal

While Harris interrogates property and race and foregrounds the unspoken white supremacist backdrop to contemporary America, the proliferation of the concept of blight details the mechanisms of this interaction of race and property on an urban scale. Coined by the Chicago school of sociology, blight described an "ecological approach" to analysing poor districts in major American cities. Originally used to descibe plant diseases, its usage evocated the image of a plague spreading across the city. Clearing out slums and wielding

eminent domain became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century, disproportionately affecting minorities, particularly the African American community; in cities across the country, urban renewal came to be known as “Negro removal” (Pritchett 2003, 47). Settler colonial logics are particularly visible within the urban renewal perspectives; the land can be seized because it is not being properly utilized and thus threatens the economy of the city itself. The conceptual framework, of course, is the racial inferiority of the inhabitants and therefore the inferiority of their property rights.

Pritchett notes that early proponents of urban renewal were conflicted with expanding the use of eminent domain. The principle that one’s property could not be taken away and given to another by the government was enshrined in the public use clause that protected them against socialism. The discourse of blight became a method through which they could operate; whiteness as property is neither undermined nor in jeopordy when it is racial land titles that are devalued and forcibly transferable. This cycle of settler-colonial-supremacist ideology continues to play out in the contemporary American cities; just as indigenous land use and ontologies were denied because white possession and logics were privileged as a basis for property rights, black communities are similarly dispossessed because of the privileging of market value over use value. The land they occupy is not seen as yielding sufficient capital gains, and only white possession can remedy blight. As Patrick Wolfe pointed out, “invasion is a structure, not an event” (Wolfe 2006, 388).

Eminent domain wielded in the name of infrastructure projects became a popular method of clearing blighted

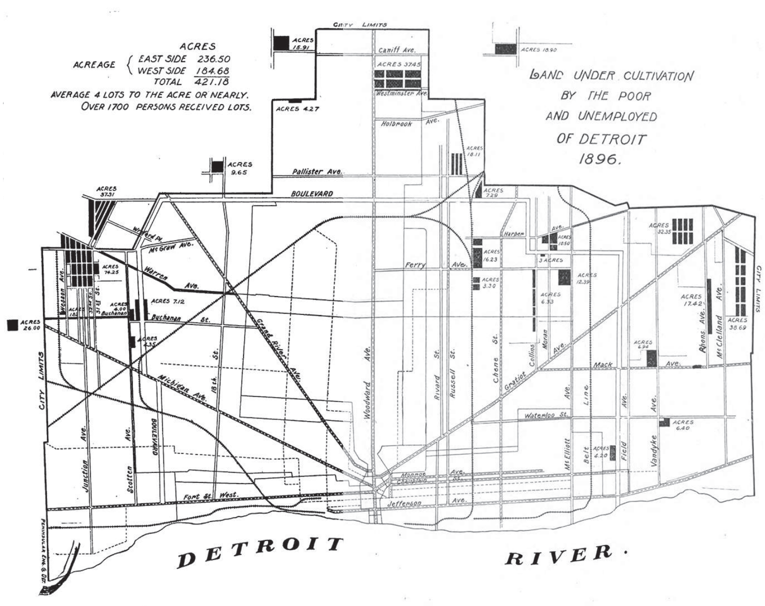
neighbourhoods. In 1947, the city of Detroit razed the community of Black Bottom to build the I-375 highway, displacing approximately 2,000 African American community members, expediting and subsidizing white flight to the suburbs through this newly minted transit route to the downtown core. Former mayor Albert Cobo described the razing as the “price of progress,” though a price borne exclusively by the black community, to the benefit of white suburbanites (Moskowitz 2018, Chapter 6). This urban technique of racial segregation and removal was not uncommon during this period of urban renewal; others included the I-95 in Miami, Highway 101 in East Palo Alto, the I-880 in Oakland, a turnpike in Delaware, the I-64 and I-77 though Charlestone, West Virginia—the list goes on (Schindler 2015, 1967).

Lafatette Street composition in the former Black Bottom neighborhood (Michigan Radio 2021).

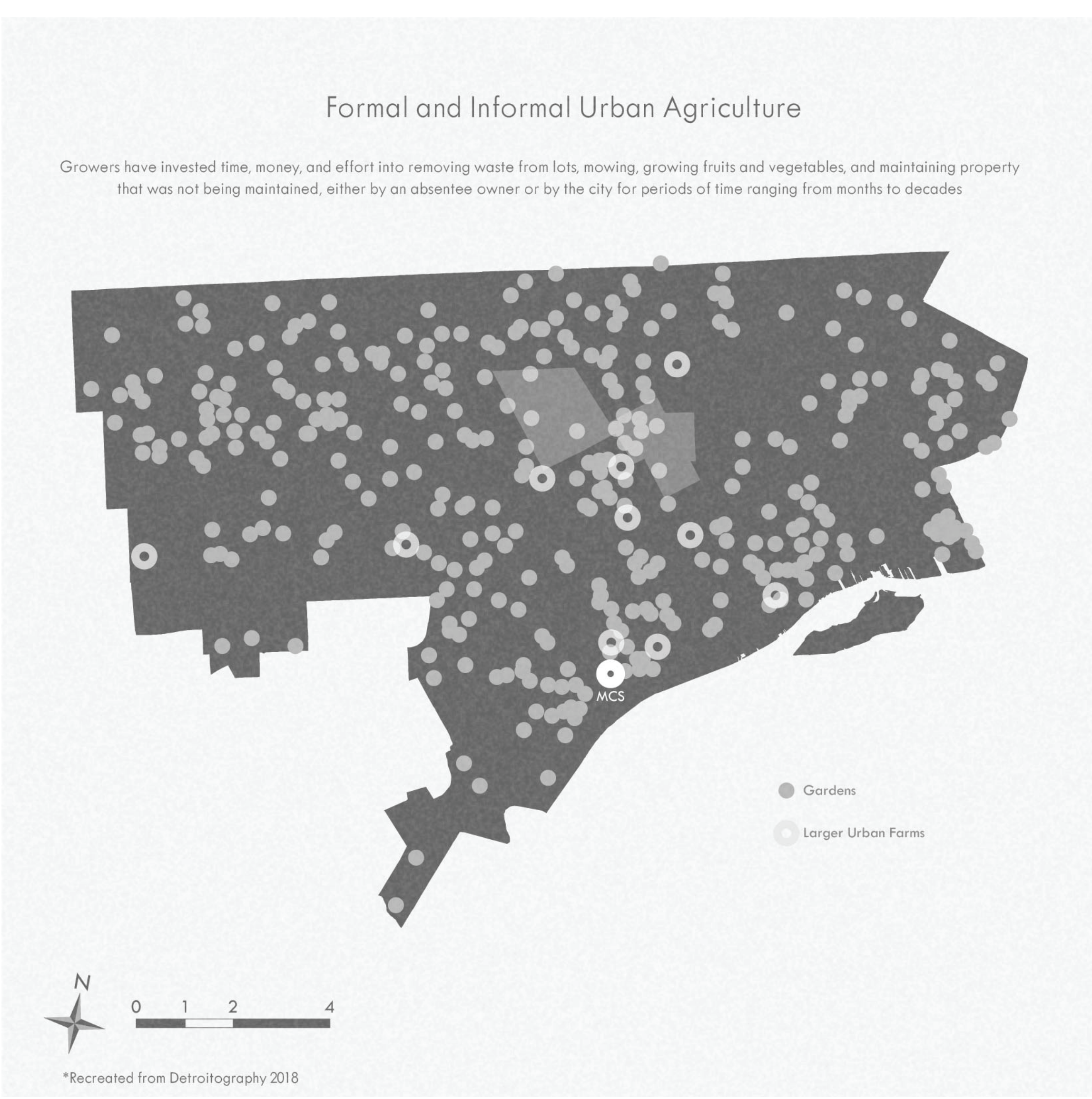
Chapter 3: Complicating Re-Greening

Urban Agriculture

With a declining population, Detroit faces the additional problem of insufficient access to healthy food. By one estimate, upwards of 80% of the city's residents must purchase food from fringe food retailers such as liquor stores, gas stations, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies, convenience stores and other venues (White 2011, 407). This is not the first time the city has faced food shortages; in 1968, city hall established the Farm-a-lot program to redistribute properties following the riots of 1967, sparked by police brutality. This communal land usage model was a Detroit precedent introduced during the recession in the 1890s with Mayor Pingree's Potato Patch farming initiative (Baker 2020, 25).



Pingree Potato Patches grown on public land (Campbell et al. 2020, 121)



Community gardens and urban farms (base map from Detroit Community Gardens 2018)

Volunteers from the East Michigan Environmental Action Council install a sunflower garden for Earth Day 2011 on Detroit's East Side (Campbell et al. 2020, 145).

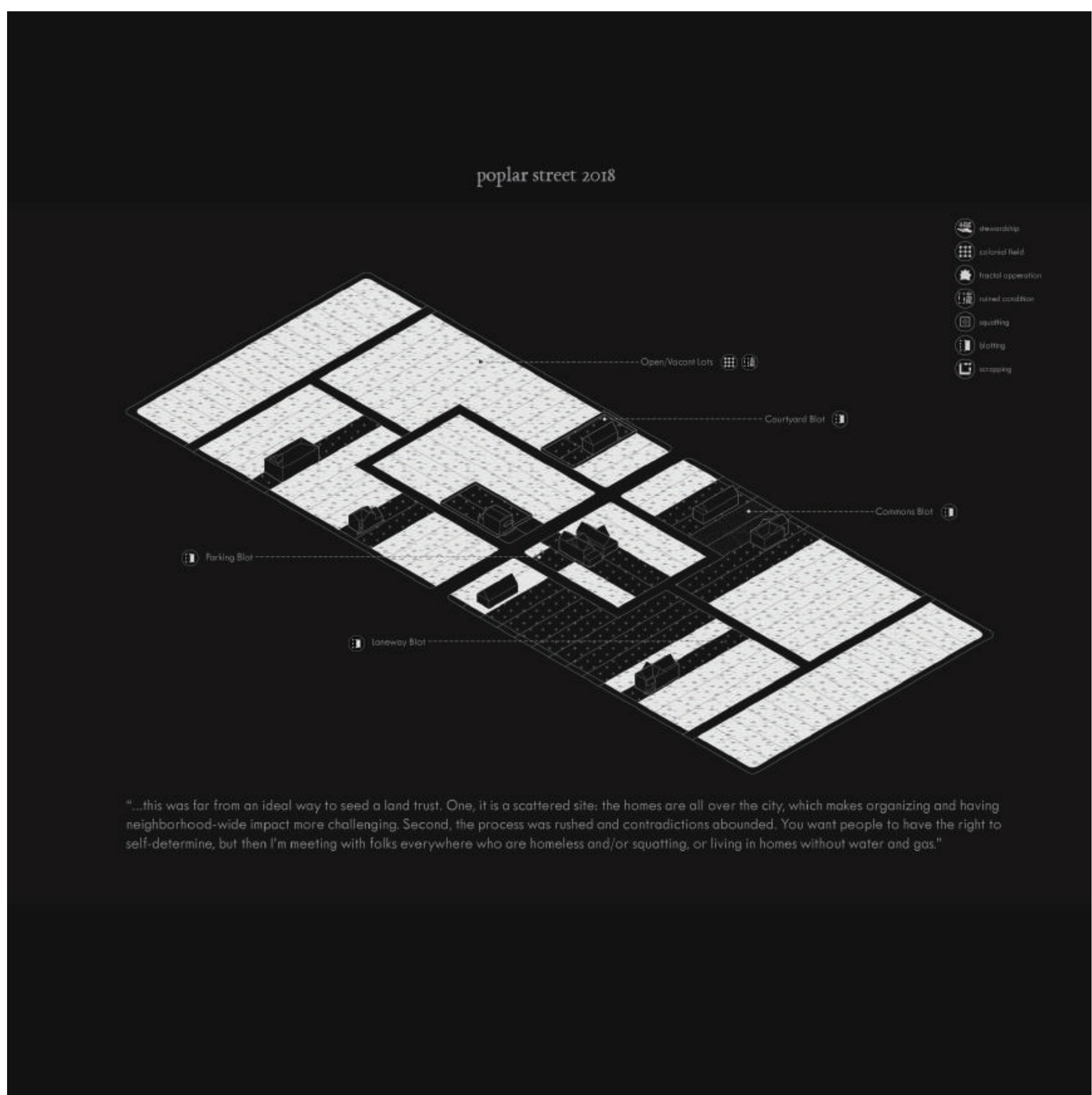
Self-provisioning and Resistance

The citizens of Detroit have resorted to self-provisioning through informal land stewardship and urban agriculture. Organizations such as the Detroit Agriculture Network (DAN) offer resources to community and family gardeners, such as seeds, educational tools, and an estimated 120 tons of produce for 263 community gardens, 55 schools, and 557 families (White 2011, 408). The activists who operate D-Town farming understand their work as a form of resistance, as an opportunity to work toward food security and to gain greater control of the food system. Their strategy focuses on control of social institutions such as community-controlled education and community-based policing (White 2011, 412). While the growers have invested time, money, and effort in removing waste from lots, mowing, growing fruits and vegetables in lots that were not being maintained by the city (Baker 2020, 25), their inventive and experimental strategies are being 'captured' and placed in service of market-oriented greening and gentrification (Vasudevan 2017, 239).

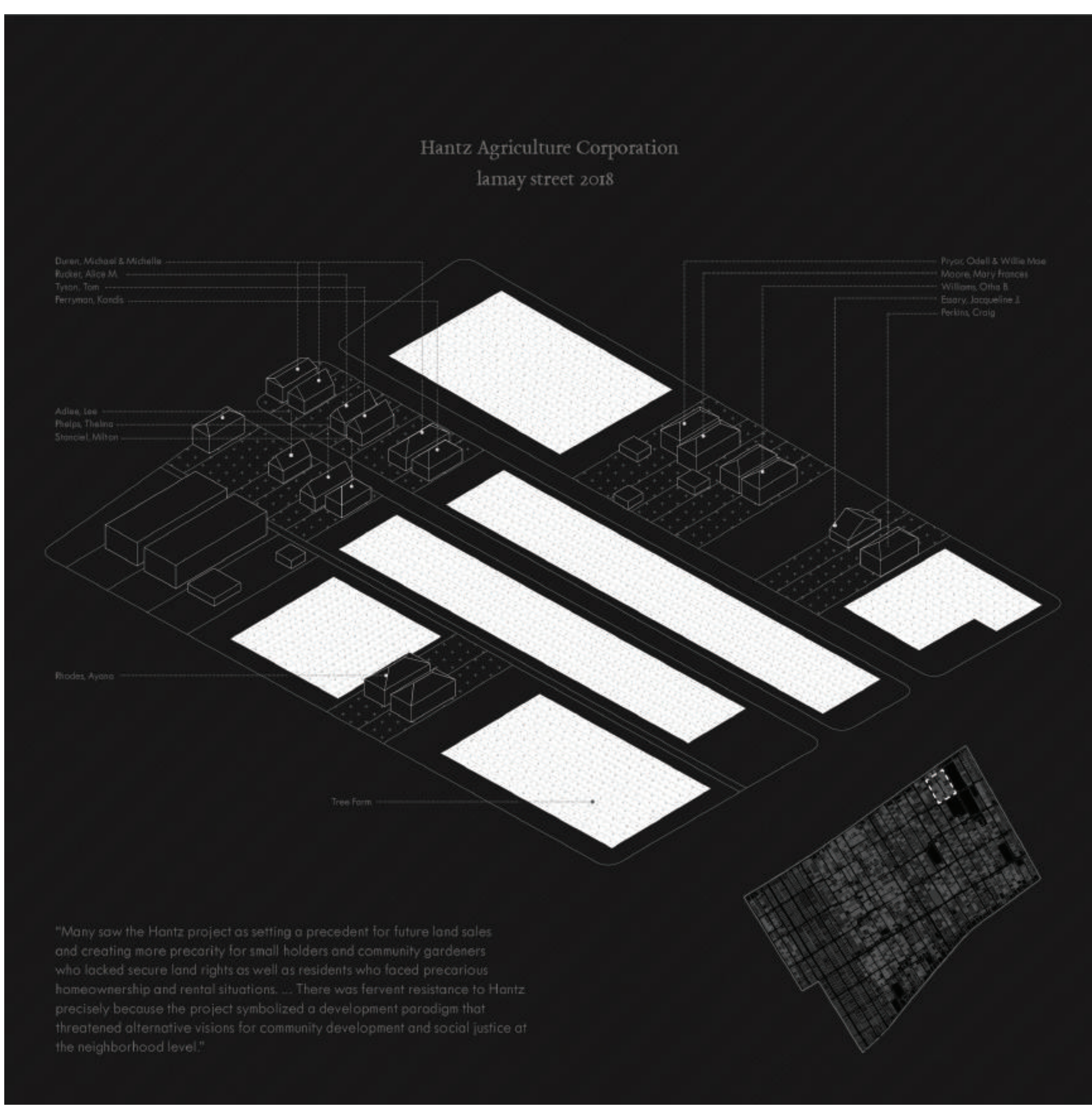
Green-Washing

By the late 2000s, city planners were discussing Detroit's ongoing provisional spatial development from a new marketing angle that could stimulate new investment by making neighborhoods feel trendy and lively (Sugrue 1996, 27). Casting nature as a corrective method of renewal beyond blight helps to paint whiteness as essential to urban and societal health. Neil Smith points out that gentrification sees inner-city populations as a natural element of their physical surroundings and therefore less than social: colonial discourses that legitimate displacement through redevelopment and imagine the inner city as an urban wilderness (Safransky 2014, 240). Interestingly, this analysis preceded contemporary techniques of utilizing conceptions of 'urban greenfields' (Pedroni 2011, 211), utilizing a return-to-nature narrative to obscure the removal and dislocation of inner city residents.

Green-washing becomes increasingly problematic when we consider political access and ease of land acquisition. While individual residents often garden on vacant lots, when they do attempt to buy the land they have been caring for, they find that the city has no appetite in giving them full title. Conversely, a large white-owned business such as the Hantz Woodland can purchase 1,900 parcels on the east side, despite a public town hall where ninety-nine percent of those who spoke expressed opposition (Safransky 2014, 245). The sale to Hantz Woodlands was attractive in part because of its green business model, where Hantz agreed to plant at least 15,000 hardwood trees; in reality the project is simply a cheap model that requires little overhead maintenance and does not restrict his land use to tree farming after 4 years (Safransky 2014, 245). Meanwhile,



Small scale formal and informal land appropriation.



Majority of Hantz Woodlot eastside parcels

North facade of the Michigan Central Station (Marcus 2019)

Edith Floyd, who has been farming for nearly 40 years near the Hantz Woodlands, has had trouble acquiring even a temporary permit for her greenhouse. She points to the obvious double standard when she remarks that “it’s two laws: one for the rich and one for the poor” (Safransky 2014, 246).

Ruin Porn

The depleting population of Detroit and abandonment has brought about the creeping return of greenery through the cracks of the urban environment. This phenomenon has been romanticized by the sub-culture of ‘ruin porn’ that documents and celebrates a narrative of the ‘return to nature’: trees and vines asserting themselves on abandoned buildings and skyscrapers or curious wildlife sightings. A journalist for the *Huffington Post* remarked wrote:

> Who can complain when vast tracts of downtown Detroit are being reclaimed by nature. Like the ancient temples of Cambodia the Earth always wins against the will of men. The city’s asphalt is cracking open and reverting back to prairie; foxes and deer are making malls and parking lots their new hunting grounds. (Safransky 2014, 240)

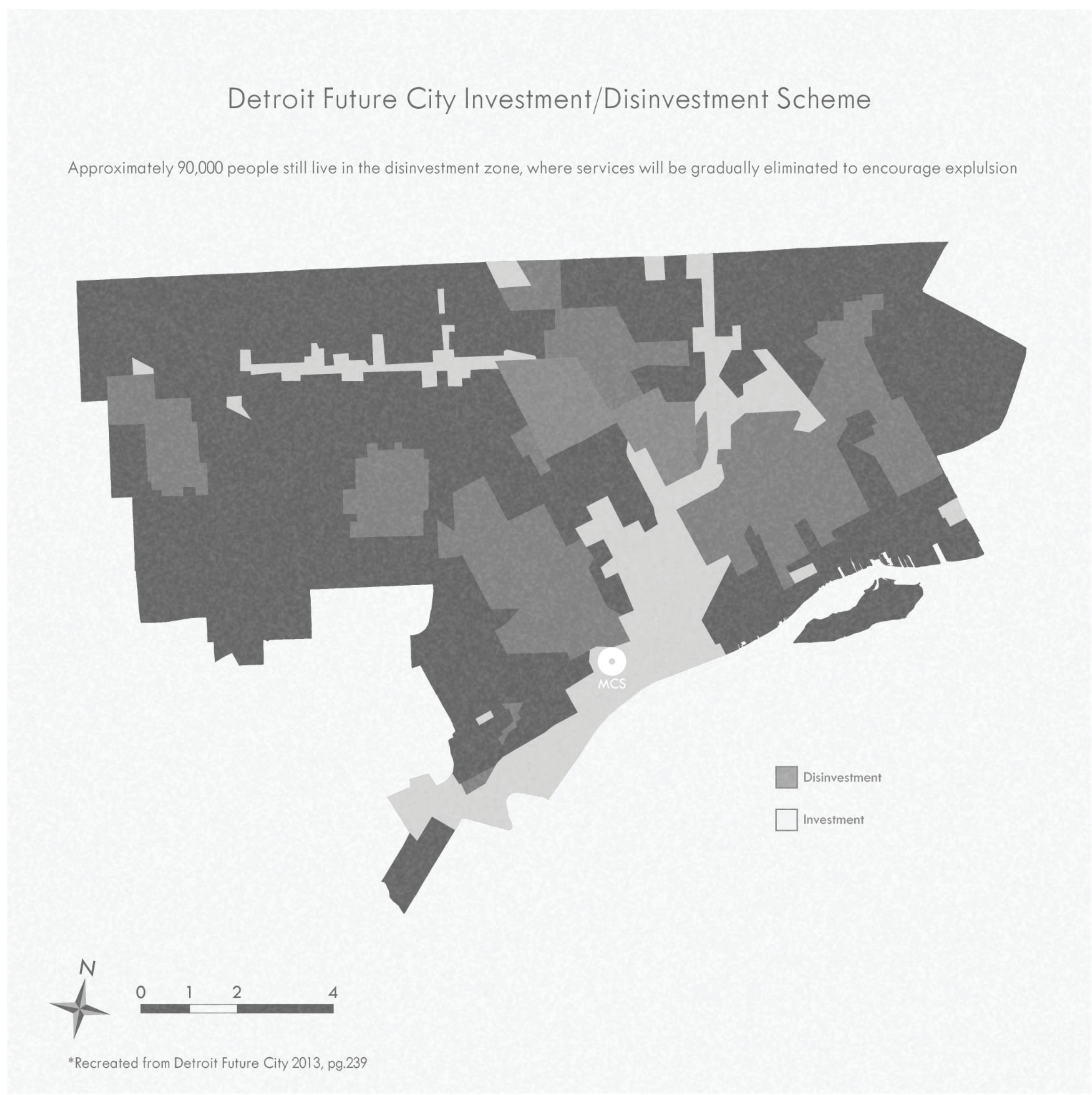
Describing neglected urban spaces in these post-apocalyptic terms works to foreground an eco-friendly ideology while overlooking the considerable dispossessions it entails. These are highly problematic representations, when "excessive nature is celebrated as cleansing, a discourse with racial connotations" (Safransky 2014, 240).

Detroit Future City

The greenwashing strategy for Detroit is well underway. Launched in 2013, the Detroit Future City plan is organized around a blue and green infrastructure within a 50 year time frame (Safransky 2014, 238). The plan is an exceptional example of a greenwashing scheme that implements environmental ethical cover while ignoring the invariable displacement of the local residents.

Although a sustainable urban future is ultimately imperative, we would do well to recognize that environmentalism has intersectional ramifications, and a greener tomorrow at the expense of the racialized other is unacceptable. Patricia Nelson Limerick writes, "Workers, often minority workers, provided the essential labor of environmental change, and members of minority groups often absorbed a disproportionate share of undesirable environmental impacts ... yet environmental history and ethnic history have been very separate enterprises" (Hayden 1995, 20). While the DFC plan has attractive goals of ecologically sustainable communities, complete with carbon forests, urban farms and greenways, it achieves this by targeting neighborhoods appraised by the market as valueless—and therefore lootable—and scheduled for public service withdrawal to 'encourage' residents to leave (Vasudevan 2017, 238).

One of the most striking omissions in the DFC report is the lack of acknowledgement for the historical discrimination and segregation that defines southeast Michigan. The words “race” and “racial” appear only eight times in the lengthy report, while the words “discrimination,” “segregation,” “Black,” “white,” “white flight,” and “redlining” do not appear at all (Hammer 2015, 7). Although race is a social construct, the DFC plan projects a city beyond race without interrogating the historical and present divisive suffering that raciology has wrought (Millington 2011, 11). This denial of history and context is evident in how the DFC plan utilizes data-driven cartography called the Market Value Analysis (MVA) in order to color-code Detroit neighbourhoods. It works by highlighting key investment/disinvestment opportunities in the city, and because it operates only in terms of capital, it neglects how the racialization of space is ingrained in its algorithms. Sara Safransky points out that “by classifying urban space into zones worthy and unworthy of investment, the MVA represents a type of 21st century redlining” (Safransky 2016, 10).



Investment/disinvestment map (base map from Detroit Future City 2013, 239)

Chapter 4: Black Psychogeography

> We have laws, jails, courts, armies, guns and armories enough to make saints of us all, if they were the true preventives of crime. - Lucy Parsons (Osterweil 2020, 83)

Slave Patrols

Paul Butler makes the claim that there has never been peace between police and black Americans. Riots—or as they are known in black communities, rebellions—in Watts in 1965, Newark in 1967, Miami in 1980, Los Angeles in 1992, Ferguson in 2015, Baltimore in 2016, Charlotte in 2016, and Minneapolis in 2020, were all sparked by the killing of a black man (Butler 2017, Introduction). Academics and abolitionists working in the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT) trace the institution of policing to slave patrols and continue to police and brutalize black bodies to this day. Abolitionists advocate for redirection of money from police and prisons into community services such as housing, food and education, thus making those institutions obsolete (Kaba 2020). Prominent author and activist Angela Davis is among those abolitionists calling for the dismantling of the prison-industrial complex and is firmly against claims that reform will suffice, noting that "for those who recognize that racism feeds the proliferation of police violence and the decades-old surge of prison populations but who still insist that these institutions are simply in need of deliberate reform, it might be helpful to reflect on the fact that similar logic was used about slavery ... Just as we hear calls today for more humane policing, people then called for a more humane slavery" (Davis 2020). The movement to defund the police has emerged into mainstream discussions after the death of George Floyd, with the Minneapolis City Council even

pledging to move in this direction of redirecting funds from police budgets into programs that could potentially make the prison-industrial complex obsolete, such as healthcare programs and education.

Can’t Relax, Black

The surveillance and policing of African American bodies has a storied history and is well documented. In March of 1713, the Common Council of New York passed a “Law for Regulating Negro & Indian Slaves in the Nighttime” that declared, “no Negro or Indian Slave above the age of fourteen years do presume to be or appear in the streets ... on the south side of the fresh water in the night time above one hour after sun set without a lantern and a lighted candle” (Browne 2015, 78).

Panoptic technologies illuminating black bodies continues into the present, a notable example being New York’s Omnipresence program in 2014 under Bill de Blasio where floodlights were installed in East Harlem and Brooklyn housing projects throughout the night, disturbing residents as they tried to sleep. Simone Browne points out that this takes a psychic toll on residents trying to rest, living with a large hum of a generator light in their homes (Chiel 2016).

The policing of black bodies is a cultural legacy that traces its roots from antebellum to our contemporary urban crisis. Angela Davis points out that “George Zimmerman, a would-be police officer, a vigilante, if you want to use that term, replicated the role of slave patrols. Then as now the use of armed representatives of the state was complemented by the use of civilians to perform the violence of the state” (Davis 2016, Chapter Two). The urban environment is thus fraught with tension and unease that is lived by some and

A floodlight in a Brooklyn neighborhood (Inserra 2020).

absent from the experiences of another. Although Baldwin and Jacobs wrote about the same neighborhoods, Baldwin's retelling is a place "where as a queer Black man he was regularly harassed by the police and viewed as a dangerous outsider, rather than part of the delightful diversity of Jacobs' own version of Greenwich Village" (Kern 2020, Chapter Six).

The cumulative effect of the collective white gaze constructs an entirely different lived experience of the urban environment for African Americans. After the barristas in a Philadelphia Starbucks called the police on two black men sitting in the coffee shop while waiting for their friend to arrive, Teju Cole wrote a lengthy Facebook post about how there is no seemingly neutral space in the city for African Americans: "We are not safe even in the most banal place. We are not equal even in the most common circumstances.

We are always five minutes away from having our lives upended. ... This is why I always say you can't be a black flâneur. Flânerie is for whites. For blacks in white terrain, all spaces are charged. Cafés, restaurants, museums, shops. Your own front door. This is why we are compelled, instead, to practice psychogeography. We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance. Can't relax, black" (Kern 2020, Chapter Two).

Being embedded in a white supremacist terrain is what Christina Sharpe descibes as 'the weather' (Sharpe 2019, 106); it is the totality of the African American environment—and it is a climate that is antiblack. In this climate, the effects differ as pressure regions move about through space and time, but there is not a space that is not engulfed in its effects. "The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies" (Sharpe 2019, 112). The thesis aims to create what Sharpe calls a 'micro climate', a respite from the atmosphere of antiblackness.

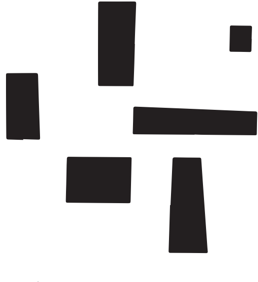
Chapter 5: Design Responses

A thesis sited in Detroit requires understanding the historical racial context of the internal colony in order to resist and break from a vicious cycle of failure in order to propose something that does not pander to reform. Regreening strategies are a myopic and one-dimensional approach to the intersectional problems that racial capital poses. Solutions to the problems in Detroit are being enacted in the work done by the many local community organizations that are working to combat market austerity with mutual aid, food justice, support systems and education. Waves of African Americans escaping the south in the Great Migration would have arrived at Michigan Central Station, with its grand spaces holding the promise of a better life for themselves and their families. Instead, they were confronted with familiar obstacles and discrimination: from racial covenants in property deeds to redlining, mob attacks, block-busting, and the transition from de jure segregation to de facto segregation. Systemic white supremacy denied black Detroiters equal access to federal mortgage subsidies and hence generational wealth, while waves of municipal and federally mandated urban renewal erased black neighborhoods in favor of freeway infrastructure that facilitated white flight into the surrounding suburbs. The thesis reimagines the station as a new gateway outside settler colonial logics, a scaling-up of their organizational reach, and the programmatic synergies that could be augmented by a shared central muster point. The project reinterprets architectural erasures on site in service to contemporary strategies by local organizations that both resist settler colonial logics and engender within their communities a common purpose in transforming vacant lots into gardens.

One possible way forward in Detroit is already being enacted by the many different community organizations, as well as individuals who spend their time stewarding vacant lots. Rachel Baker reports that:

> The continued use of city property without legal ownership by small-scale Detroit farmers demonstrates that the ability to access land enables some degree of autonomy without pandering to city zoning and bylaws, though does not grant access to the formalized legal rights imbued through ownership. The ability of the residents to have access to vacant property for the last several decades has enabled neighbourhoods to be more adequately resourced and maintained than what has been possible through urban governance structures or free market interventions in a deeply austere environment. The use of urban land for collective benefit and capacity building could be the pathway to a more equitable and socially democratic urban future, for non-monetized uses of urban property offer a potential to challenge urban manifestations of White supremacy in the form of land accumulation ... The capacity of Detroit's small-scale farmers who have appropriated publicly held property was unquestioned for periods upwards of three decades. This fact urges further ontological questions about challenging the Whiteness as property and necessitates further discussion about what the configuration of a post colonial common could look like, and whether in fact it is already in the making. (Baker 2020, 35)

Indeed, many Detroiters see common property as an alternative to private land ownership, arguing that de facto public land held by the city should be redefined as "commons" (Safransky 2014, 246). Alternatively, in 2012, a coalition of over 14 organizations argued that community land trusts—a legally sanctioned alternative to private property and state property—were the best path for future development (Safransky 2014, 246). In addition to land as a common pool resource, collectively governed with broad access and benefit, activists in the city ultimately hope for agency and a right to the city. The thesis proposes a commons where all of the different community programs delivered in Detroit can find a shared space that could allow them to scale up their operations, as well as spark



Fumihiko's collective form categories (Fumihiko 1964, 6)

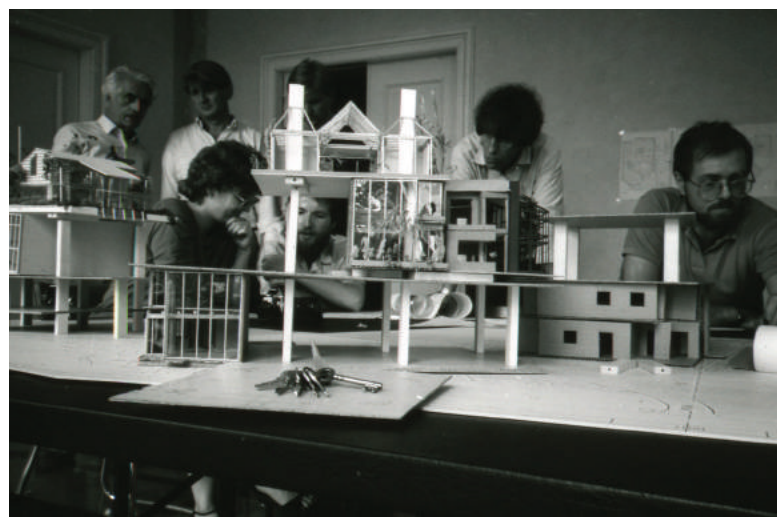
opportune synergies between them. A top-down approach would only result in the same paternalistic project schemes that organizers have been critical of; alternatively, a kind of soft framework approach could suggest site strategies that could organize programs spatially, but still amendable by the residents. Fumihiko Maki's work on collective form suggests different types of collective organization, where compositional or mega-frameworks can be installed as a skeletal outline that can be adapted by the users (Maki 1964, 6). Similarly, Frei Otto's Ökohaus was an insightful example of collective improvisation on a multi-level platform designed by Otto (Offbeats 2017).

Site

Along with the Packard Automotive Plant and the Grande Ballroom, the Michigan Central Station features prominently in dystopian coffee table books about Detroit. According to former mayor Mike Duggan, "Michigan Central Station has long been a symbol of Detroit's vibrancy, and then it became an international symbol of decline" (McConnon 2020). It was also the gateway into Detroit for thousands of African Americans who fled the south as part of the great migration looking for a better life in the north; labour historian Steve Babson described the station as the "Ellis Island of Detroit" (Marcus 2020).

Working with a building that has been abandoned for more than thirty years, the thesis imagines a speculative future where the station is reclaimed to fulfill the promise it held for so many immigrants arriving throuigh its gateway. Whether understood as the history of trains and tracks, as stations and yards, or as the right or wrong side of the tracks, we can tell a story of turning "an abandoned set of railroad

Site drawing showing the amount of industrial, commercial, and vacant lots around the station

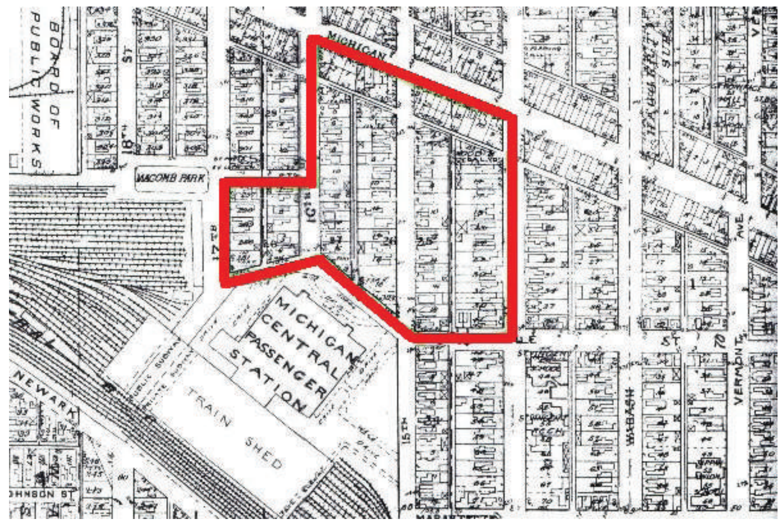


A design charette with Frei Otto and participants for the Ökohaus (Offbeats 2017)

tracks or decaying freight shed into a potential resource for projects concerned with larger public meanings in the urban landscape" (Hayden 1995, 22). As it stands now, the station has been purchased by Ford Motor Company as part of the Detroit Future City plan. The thesis instead imagines alternative uses that escape from colonial cycles of settlement. The site is divided into three parts that attempt to address the various legacy hardships of redlining and de-facto segregation: the park, the station, and the tracks.

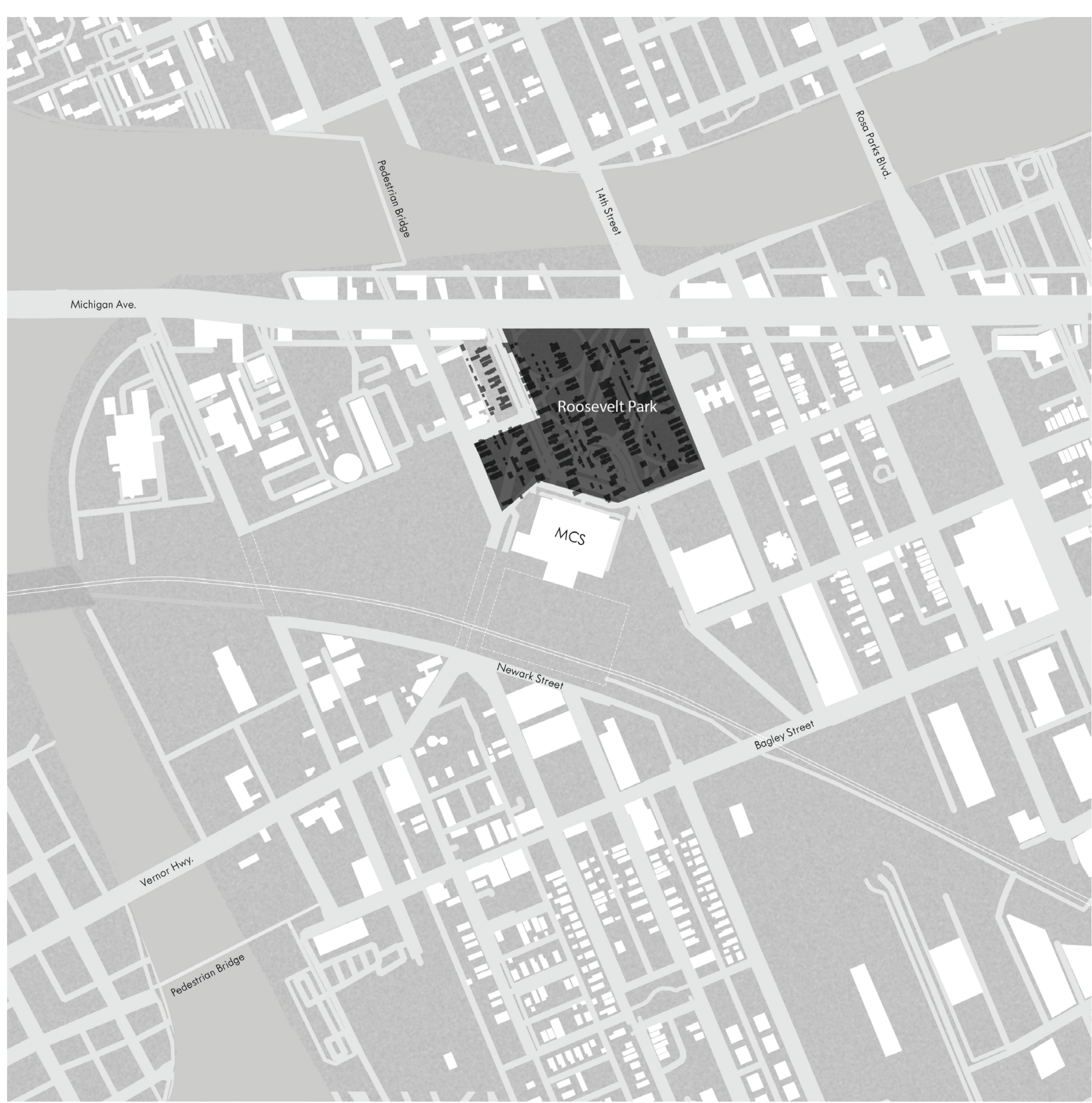
Roosevelt Park

A micro-climate might begin to interrogate a relationship between the weather and the lungs: the transformative properties of breathing free air, and who has access to that freedom (Sharpe 2019, 112). The connection between the weather of antiblackness and the lungs is all too literal in environmental racism literature.

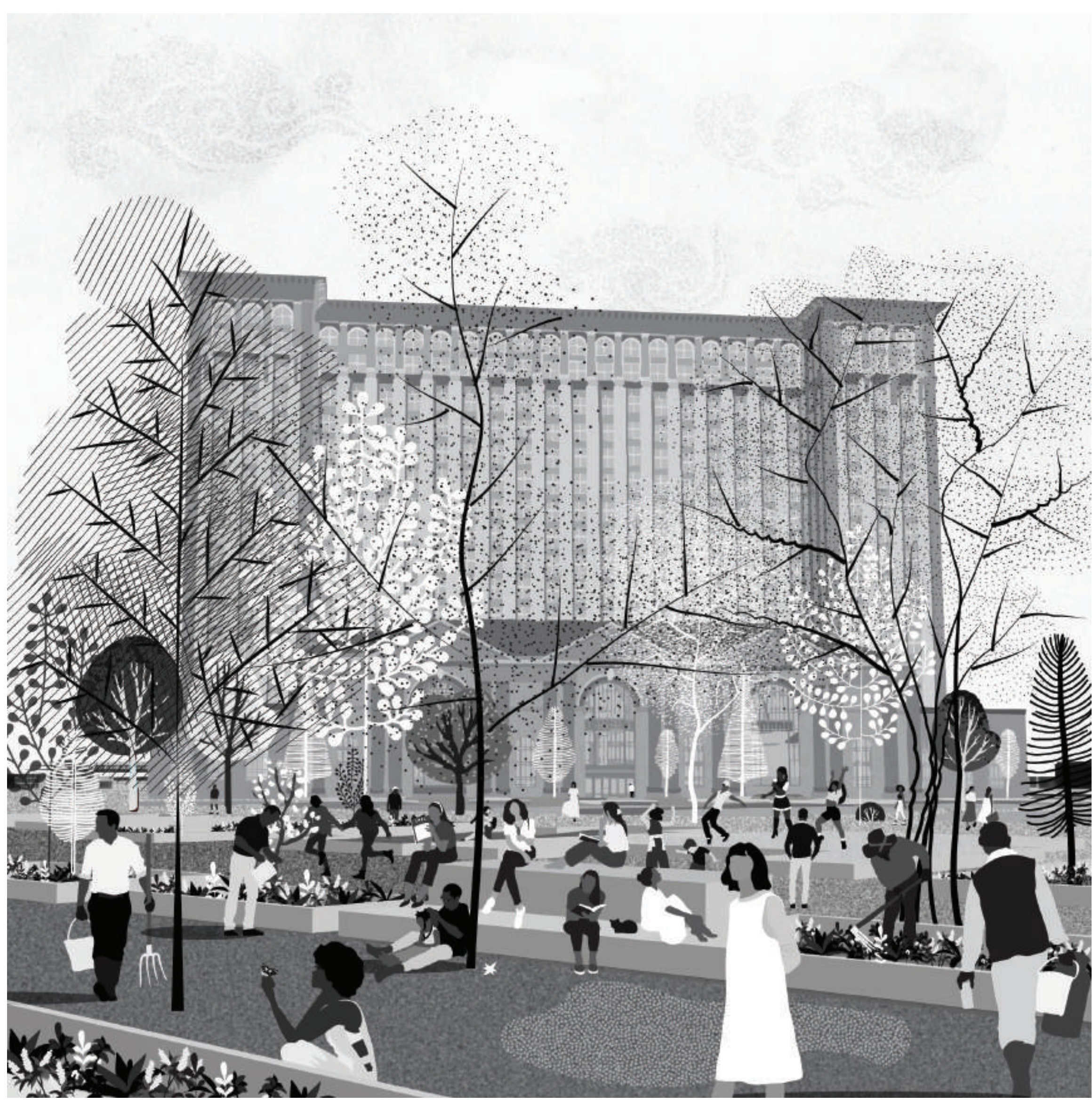


Public circulation with ramp down (The Condemned Area 2012)

Roosevelt Park—Michigan Central Station's lawn—is reimagined as a rewilding project that begins to redress both urban renewal erasure and the unequal intra-urban heat distribution. The removal of hard road surfaces and replanting of trees will provide a large canopy to shelter a new foraging area for planting medicinal herbs and root vegetables. Self-provisioning on public land in Detroit is not new: from Detroit Mayor Hazen Pingree's Potato Patch program in the 1890s that encouraged unemployed residents to grow food on 400 acres of public land, to the post-war Victory Gardens, to Mayor Coleman Young's Farm-A-Lot program in the 1970s (Safransky 2016, 1085). The park itself was a site of urban renewal, with as many as 130 homes being razed by the city to make way for the park's construction. By retracing the lost neighborhood that was displaced by Roosevelt Park's construction with salvaged bricks from demolished homes in the Detroit area, the former dwellings can be wayfinding plots for community gardens, seasonal events and temporary pavilions. By engendering the informal culture of stewardship and self-provisioning



Roosevelt Park and the traces of the former neighborhood that was demolished



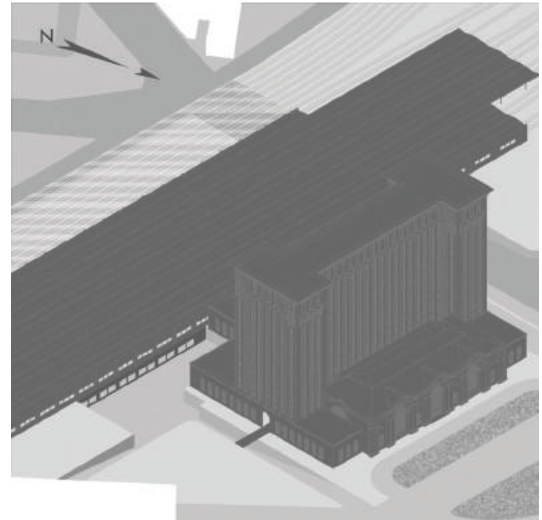
The new park that uses the footprints of the former razed neighborhood as planting beds and activity spaces

evidenced throughout Detroit, the project encourages us “to see alternative spatial imaginaries and radical subjectivities that fail to fit nearly into the private property system and the possessive individual ideal type it calls into being. To recognize these quotidian practices of claiming space upon contested landscapes (e.g., slave plots on the plantation, maroon communities, heirs, property, land cooperatives) is to consider how things can be otherwise” (Safransky 2016, 1088).

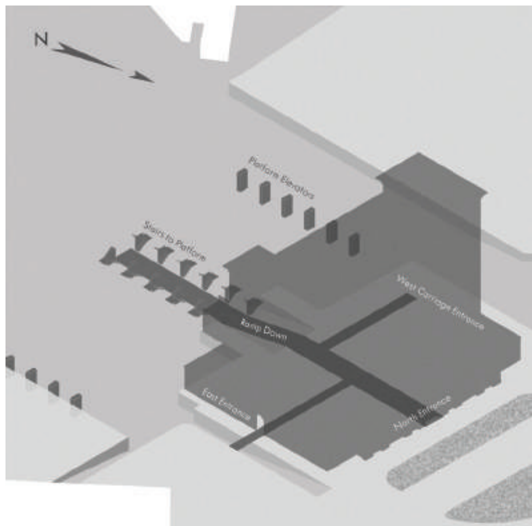
The Station

Circulation into the station has three primary entrances. The east entrance was once a trolley station, and connected directly to the elevator lobby which served the office tower exclusively. The north entrance was the park entrance, the primary threshold for the general public. The carriage entrance to the west was more exclusive. The proposal opens the entire site up to the public, which requires a new southern entrance that makes the station accessible to the residential community directly south. Formerly a transitory space in and out of the city, the station becomes a public street that connects neighborhoods once severed by the tracks, reprogrammed as an inhabited space that fosters community participation in its development.

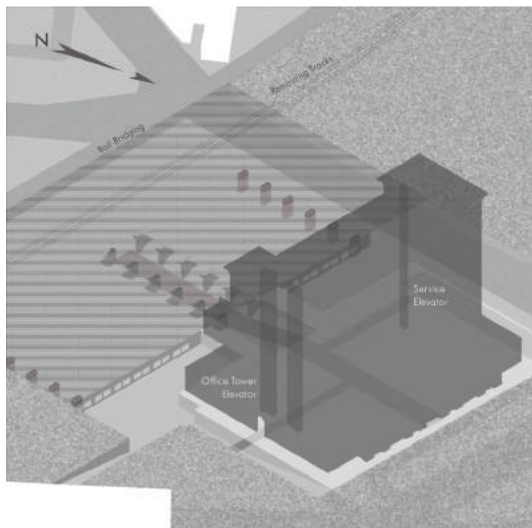
The site is repurposed with programs outlined by activists and academics who call for the abolition of police and the prison-industrial complex (PIC). The abolitionist movement believes that by redirecting the billions of dollars from police budgets into health, housing and education, it would in effect make policing and prisons obsolete. The thesis speculates that this redirection of the city budget could fund the station’s operations.



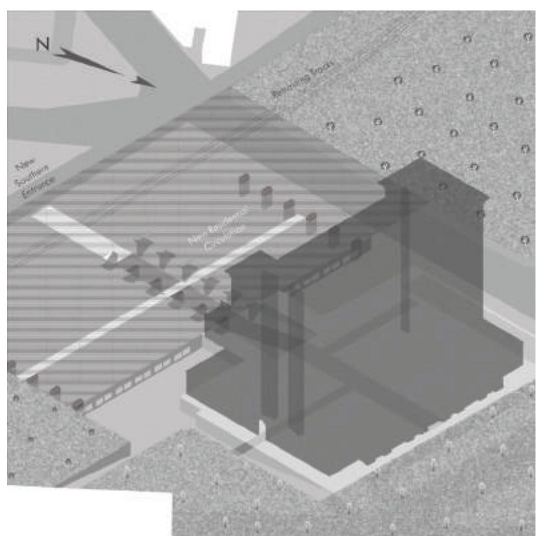
Original site with demolished shed



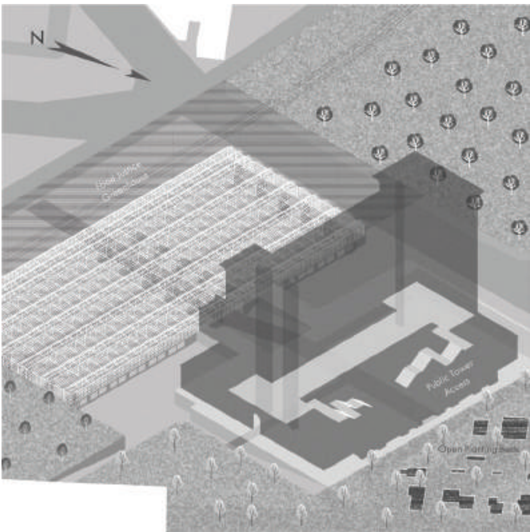
Public circulation with ramp down



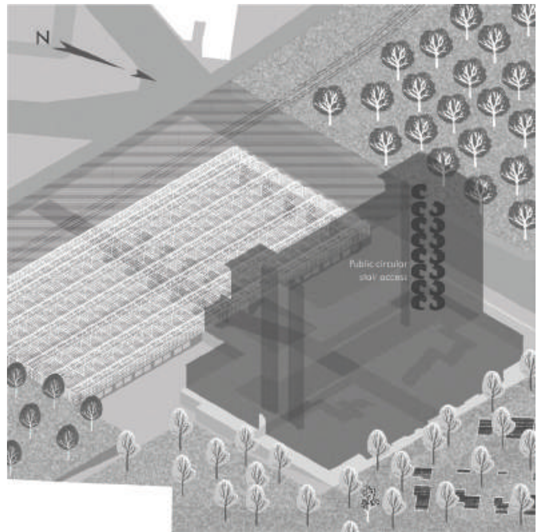
Rail structure and private office tower access



New south entrance and public circulation



New greenhouse and public tower access

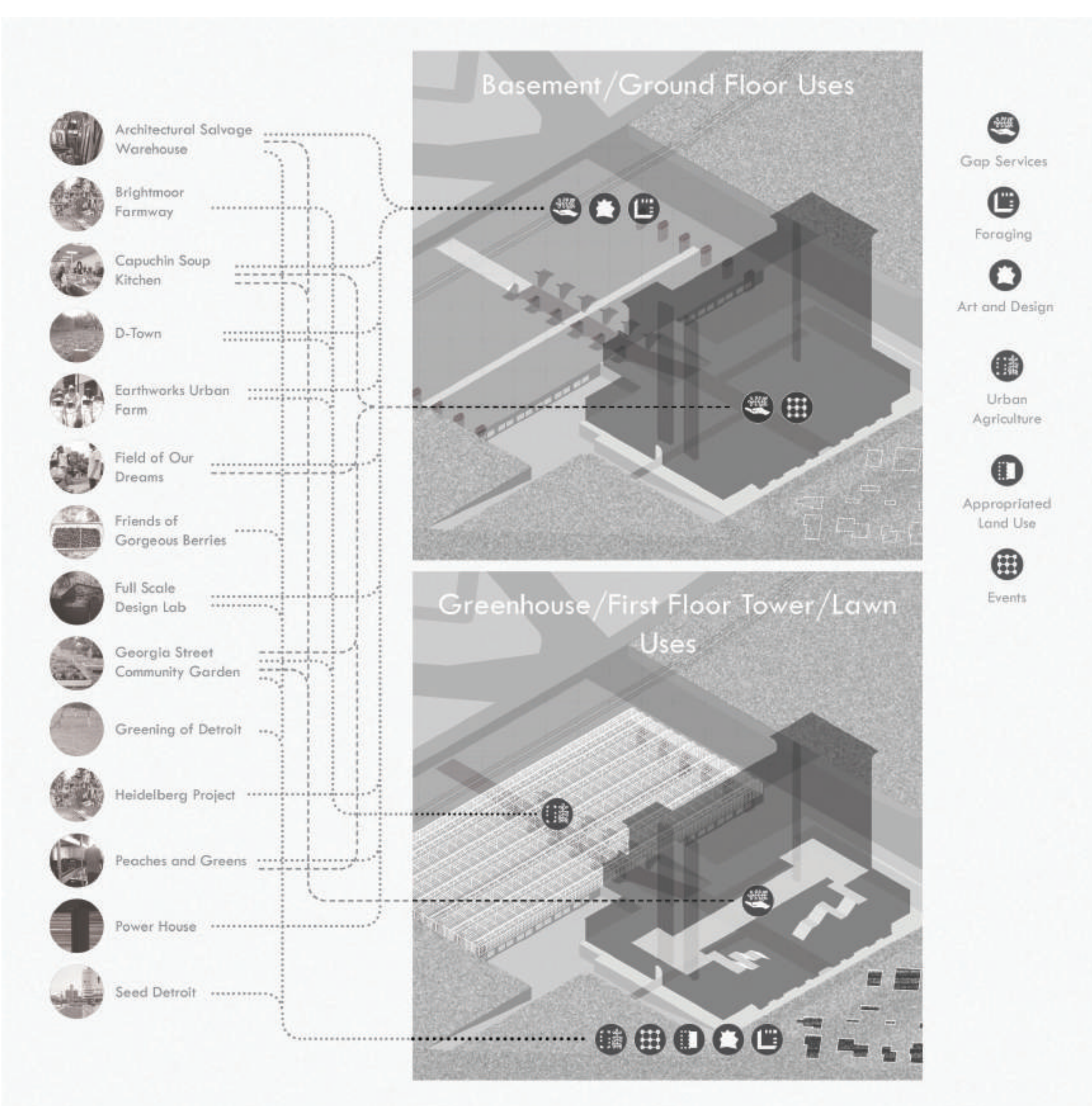


New public tower stair and lawn tracing

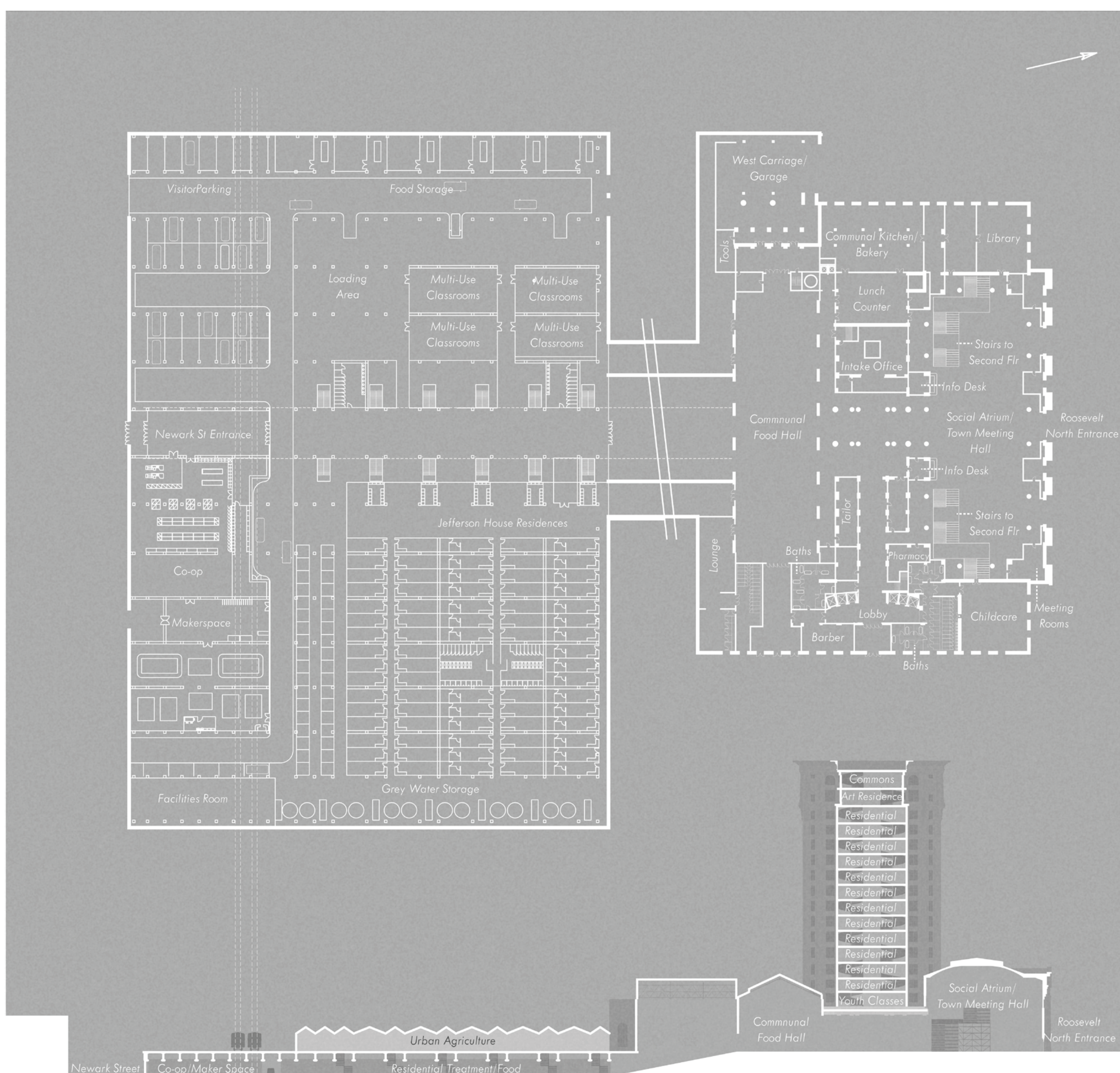
Detroit Community Organizations Map (Campbell et al. 2020, 119)

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS	Foraging	Art and Design	Urban Agriculture	Appropriated Land Use	Events	Gap Services
Architectural Salvage Warehouse	Disassembly of abandoned buildings for reusable parts, as well as skimming components such as doors and windows					Offers inexpensive architectural elements for small renovation projects
Brightmoor Farmway				Using adjacent vacant lots and converting them into a neighbourhood farm		Creating pocket parks and market garden for neighbourhood youth
Capuchin Soup Kitchen						Treatment facility for recovering from addiction, employing men recently incacerated men, and art therapy
D-Town Farm			Organic vegetables, two beehives, a hoop house for year-round food production, and a composting operation		Annual Harvest festival	Cooperative Food Buying Club, elementary school program teaching children about urban agriculture
Earthworks Urban Farm			75 acre site, bee hives, provides seeds and seedlings to new gardens	Often collaborates on vacant lots, or open roof spaces for aviaries	Monthly community potlucks where food justice issues are discussed and advanced	Youth Farm Stand program, where children participate in the community food system
Field of Our Dreams			Mobile produce market sources some of its produce from local gardens			Providing mobile food market to underserved or unserved neighborhoods
Friends of Gorgeous Berries	Gathering from wild bulberry and blackberry bushes to make berry-based goods			Harvested from rewilding occuring on vacant lots	Annual summer gathering	
Full Scale Design Lab		Architectural experiments exploring architectural thinking and making		Architectural experiments on a house outside of the market economy		
Georgia Street Community Garden			Garden that provides vegetables for the community, tended to by the community	Clearing city owned and neglected vacant lots and turning them into vegetable gardens	A venue for children's book readings, family film nights, and public barbeques	Adjacent buildings are being converted into a corner market and community center
Greening of Detroit			Collaborated in the transformation of Romanowski Park into a fruit tree orchard	Neglected city owned land is planted with wildflowers and infill parks.		Provides assistance to community gardeners, creating new gardens on vacant lots
Heidelberg Project	Use of found objects, often garbage repurposed	Creating art with detritus, waste objects of oppositional aestheticization		Appropriates abandoned house and lots in combination with found objects, framed as squatting		
Peaches and Greens	Re-purposed USPS truck retrofitted to become a mobile food justice vehicle		Mobile produce market sources some of its produce from local gardens			Providing mobile food market to underserved or unserved neighborhoods
Power House		Social art project intended to be a catalyst for new ideas about community-building		Supports other art projects and groups that animate vacant homes		
Seed Detroit		Guerrilla style seeding project 'tagging' vacant lots with wildflowers by random citizens		Seed bombing lands of absentee owners		

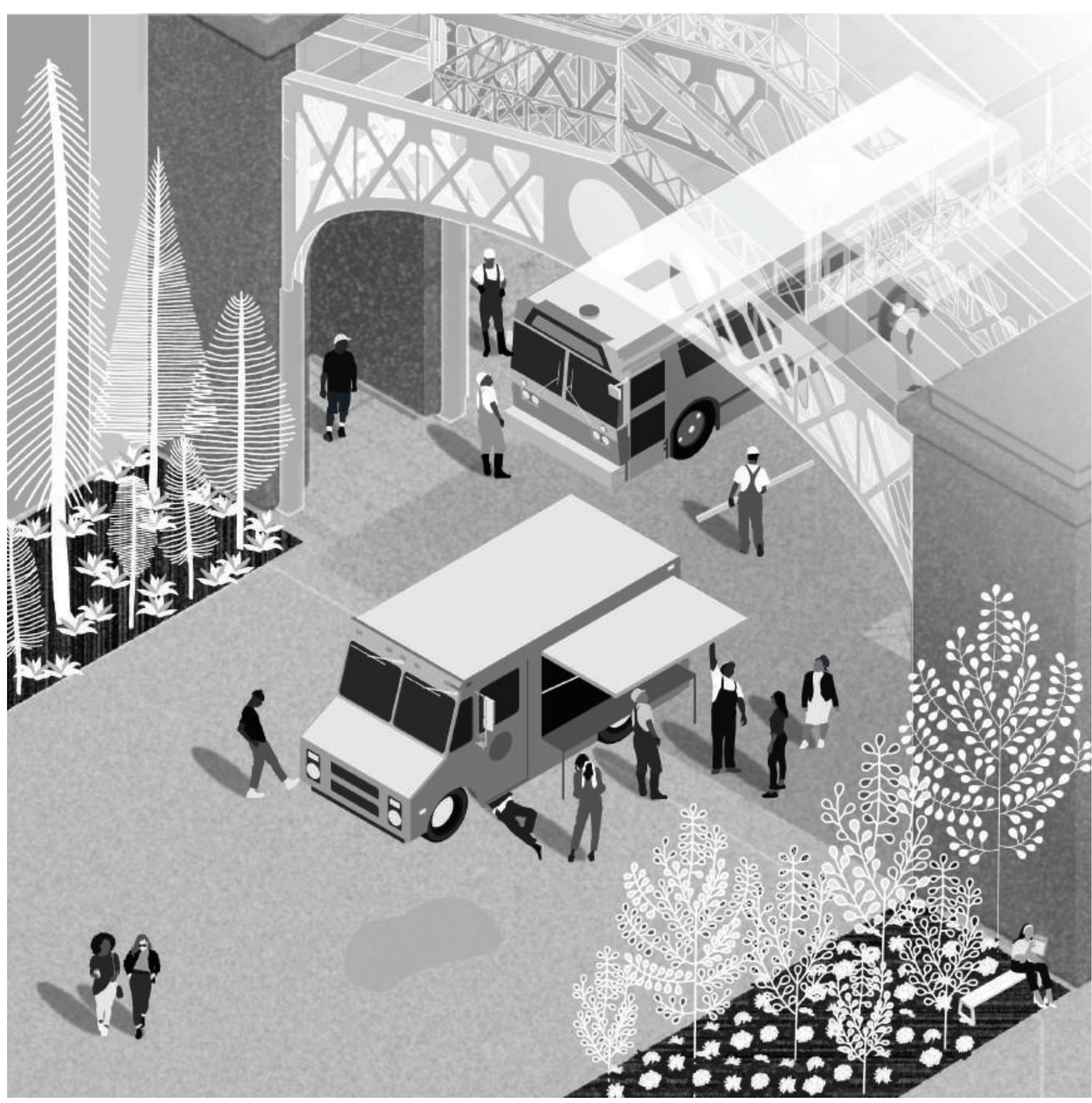
Various community Detroit organizations and their various functions (Herscher 2020)



Community groups to be housed in the station (data from Herscher 2020)



Plan of the ground floor and a central east/west section identifying the different programs



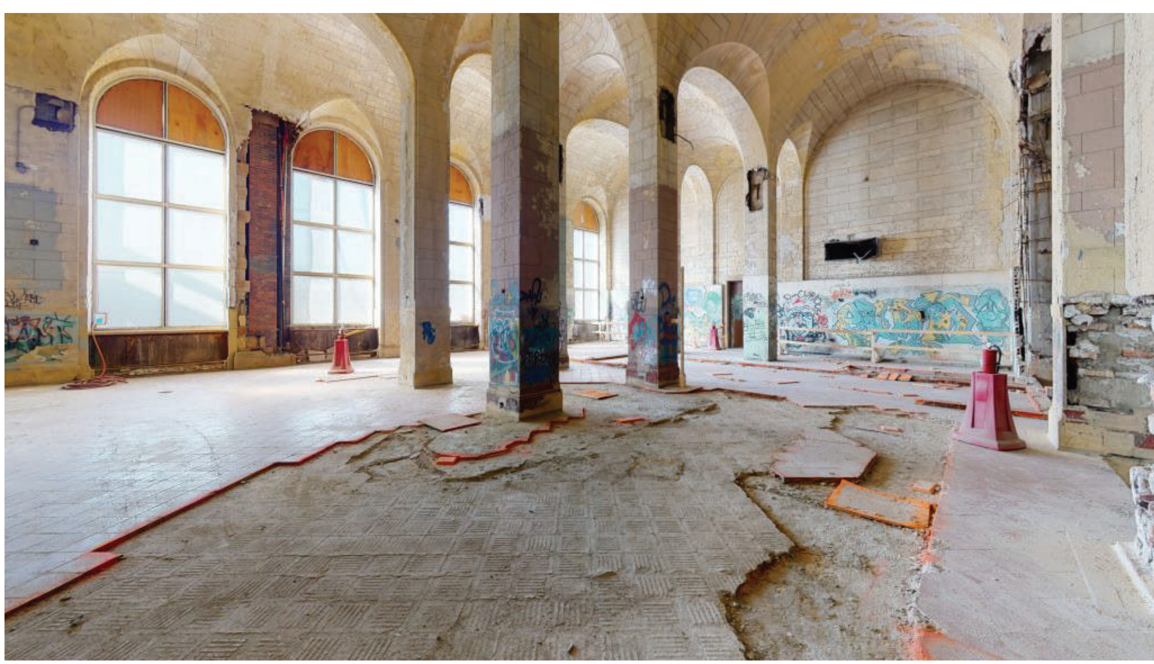
The east entrance garage, depicting community members modifying old and disused city vehicles for mobile programming

An east/west section that shows the life of the commune through the kitchen and the tower

The former carriage entrance is reimagined as a working garage, where old USPS trucks are converted into mobile food markets. Community organizations in Detroit such as Peaches and Greens have outreach programs that work to get fresh produce to neighborhoods that do not have access to healthy food alternatives. The station as a central organizing hub can link food production and mobile outreach design that can create a place for community gathering as well as support for those in the greater Detroit area.

The first floor of the station has been reprogrammed to act as an extension to various initiatives carried out by a number of Detroit organizations in the abolitionist spirit. The communal kitchen and dining hall is a central program for working towards food justice. The Capuchin Soup Kitchen, started in 1929 during the Depression era, has transformed in recent years from a charity model into a more transformative model where guests in need and volunteers build connections by working together. Among Capuchin's many programs is their bakery, staffed by recently incarcerated men and those leaving treatment centers; they work alongside white suburban volunteers who come to learn how to bake (Campbell et al., 2020, 140). The original space for the bakery/communal kitchen was initially a grand dining room with enormous ceiling height. The new layout is a modification that can take advantage of the grand vertical height. Mezzanines and walkways can be constructed where cooking classes and administrative duties can be placed above the busy cooking floor.

Other areas of the station can be optimized in order to take advantage of the abundant vertical space. The corridor connecting the large waiting area to the concourse was originally where patrons could wait and purchase tickets,



The former dining room as it exists today (Zorach 2020)

The former dining room becomes a kitchen and bakery, where On The Rise Bakery bakes goods for the community below, while holding classes and events above

and like other rooms on the ground floor, this space too has a tremendous height and volume. As the station transitions into an inhabited commune, this generous space has the potential to become more than just a transitory corridor space and instead a destination itself, with places to meander, linger and observe the station life from above. The initial layer of this new intervention would be the floor treatment, with the tiling being oriented towards true north. This orientation would be a subtle turn away from the building orientation, and a small reference to the importance of the north/south divide during the great migration.

Adding to the flooring layer would be the subversive circulation pattern situated above the corridor. Working against the marching order of the beaux arts columns and structural grid, a winding self-contained circulation can be inserted above floor level, creating small platforms to gather and meet neighbors and strangers alike. This new addition could be suspended from above, supported by the building's robust steel frame and allowing the structural graffiti to float above the ground.

The station can also house another Capuchin program: a tutoring and art therapy center that aims to empower young people and their families. Another educational program that could call the station home is the Food Warriors Youth Development Program run by the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN). Currently, the program serves more than 150 children at three different schools, teaching them about sustainable agriculture, nutrition, movement and exercise, but also about the dangers of the current industrial food system and food security in their own communities (Campbell et al., 2020, 125).

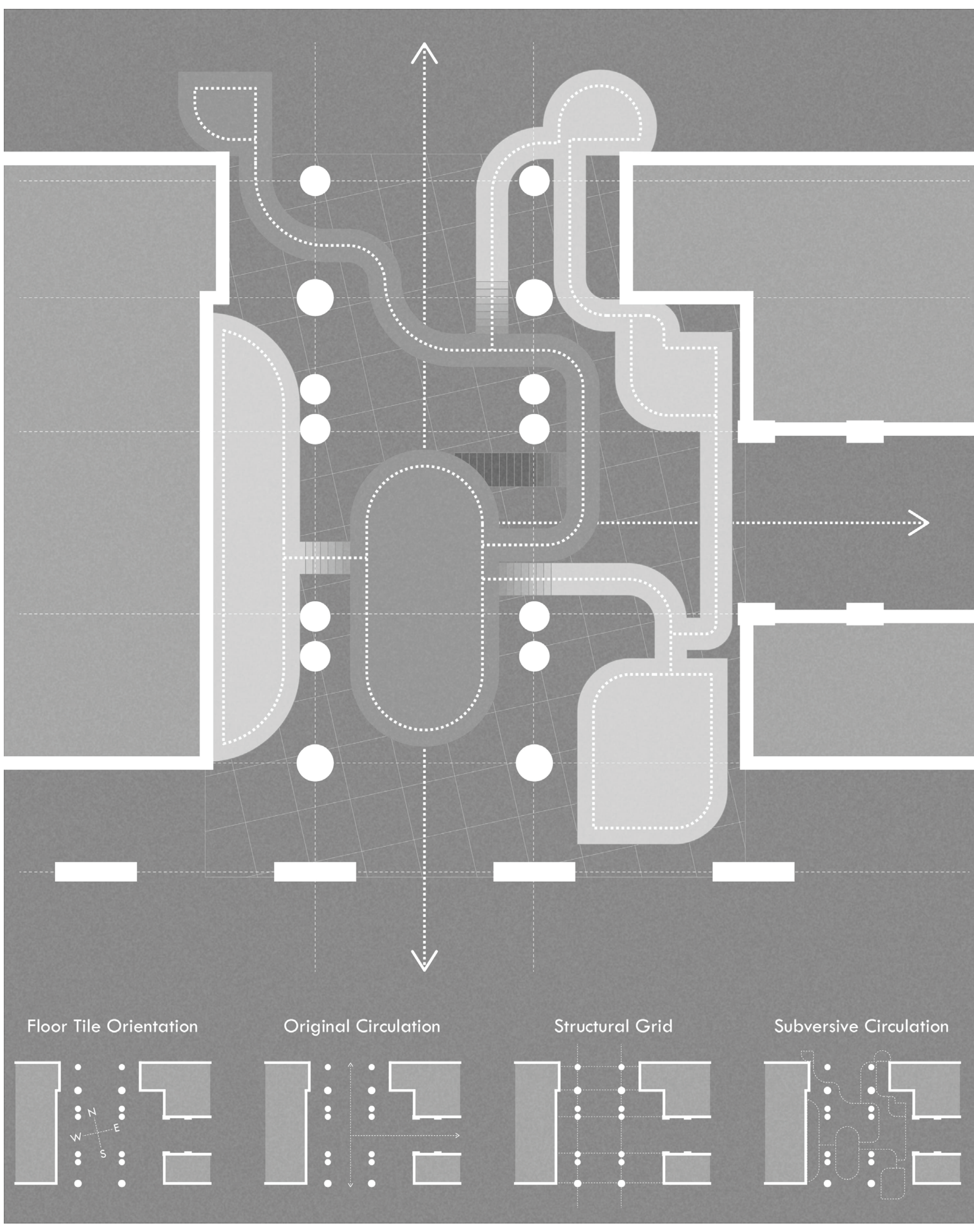


Diagram of the corridor concept, showing the layering of order and disorder placed above

The corridor linking the atrium and the concourse as it exists today (Marchand and Meffre 2013)

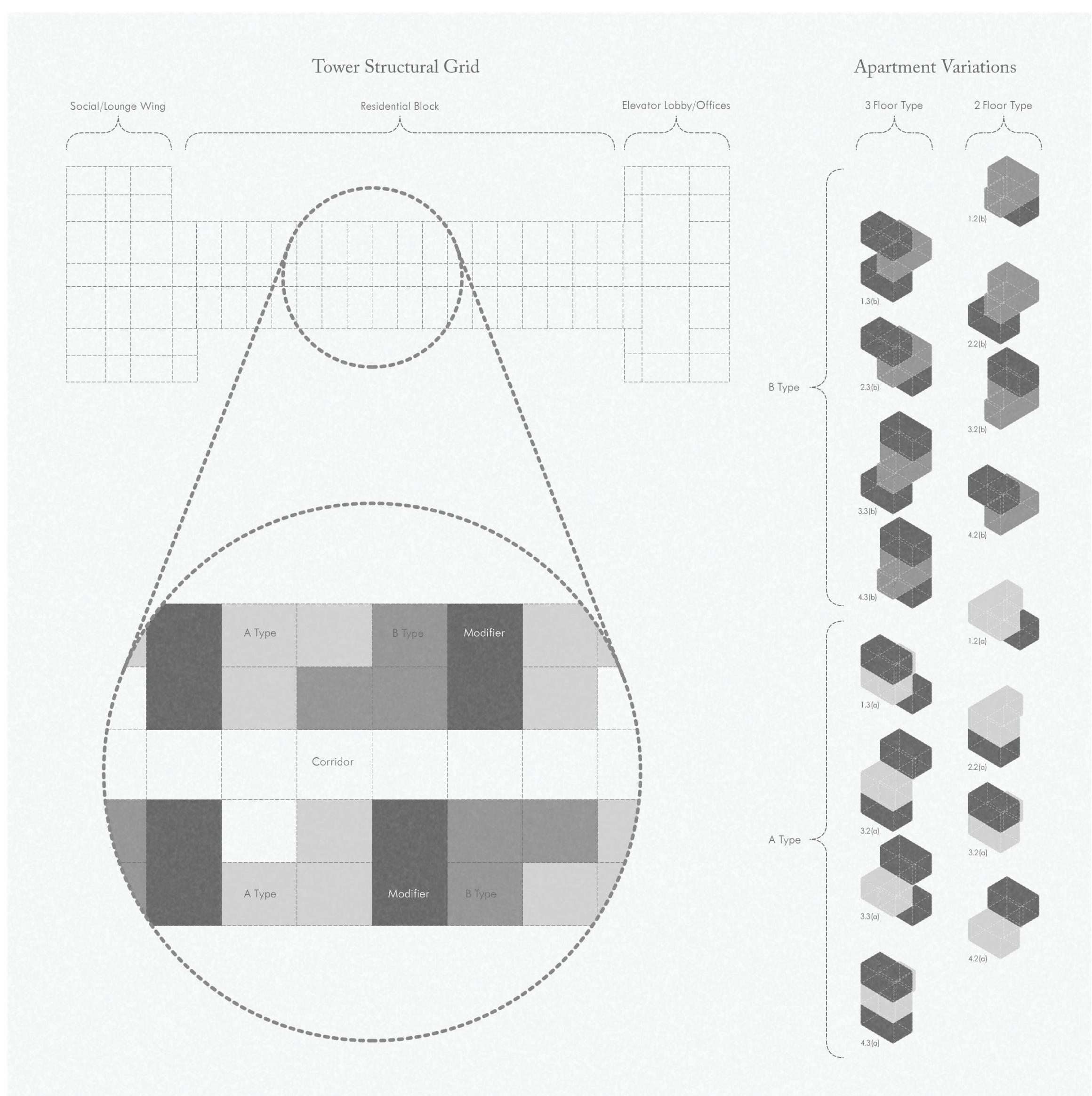
The corridor that links the atrium and the concourse is laced with a subversive structural graffiti that creates a number of public gathering spaces above

The Tower

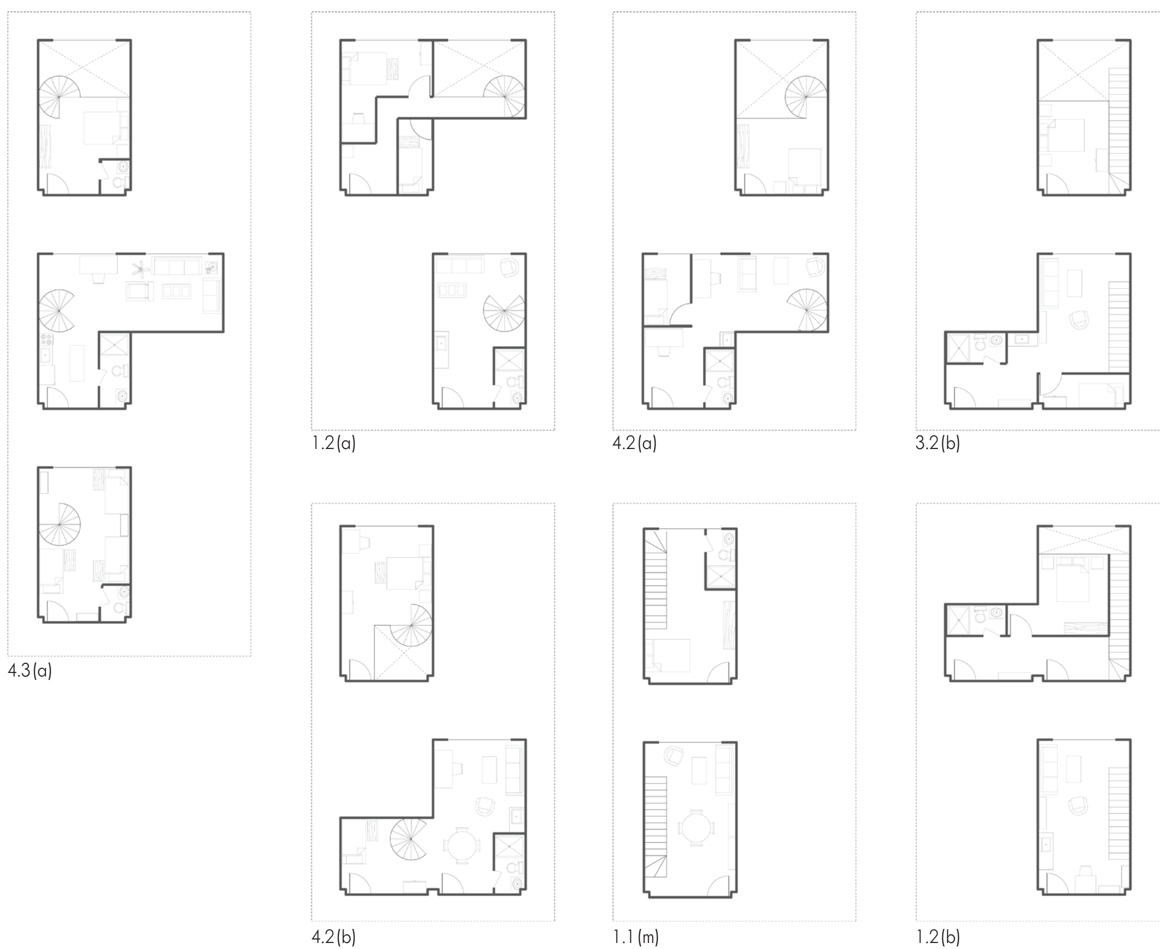
The tower was originally office space, and was closed off from the public. The overall strategy of the proposed site use was inspired by communal planning that aimed to minimize private dwelling and maximize collective social space. The kibbutz and Soviet architecture provided inspiration for this type of organizational strategy.

Keeping black psychogeography and anti-state surveillance in mind, the apartments are organized vertically with an array of various organizational types; this makes the layouts difficult to discern from the public corridor. Planning for obfuscation is of course not new. Communities that are intentionally kept white, like one in Darien, Connecticut, have removed street signs to confuse strangers and deter criminals: a veiled reference to African Americans (Schindler 2015). Similarly, publicly accessible floor plans for historic houses deliberately omit certain key details such as staircases or bedrooms, so that intruders cannot use them in service to a burglary (Manaugh 2016, 233). Ironically, the technique that inspired the project's resistance to state violence was inspired by maneuvers advanced by state sponsored violence. Israeli military think tanks developed a fractal

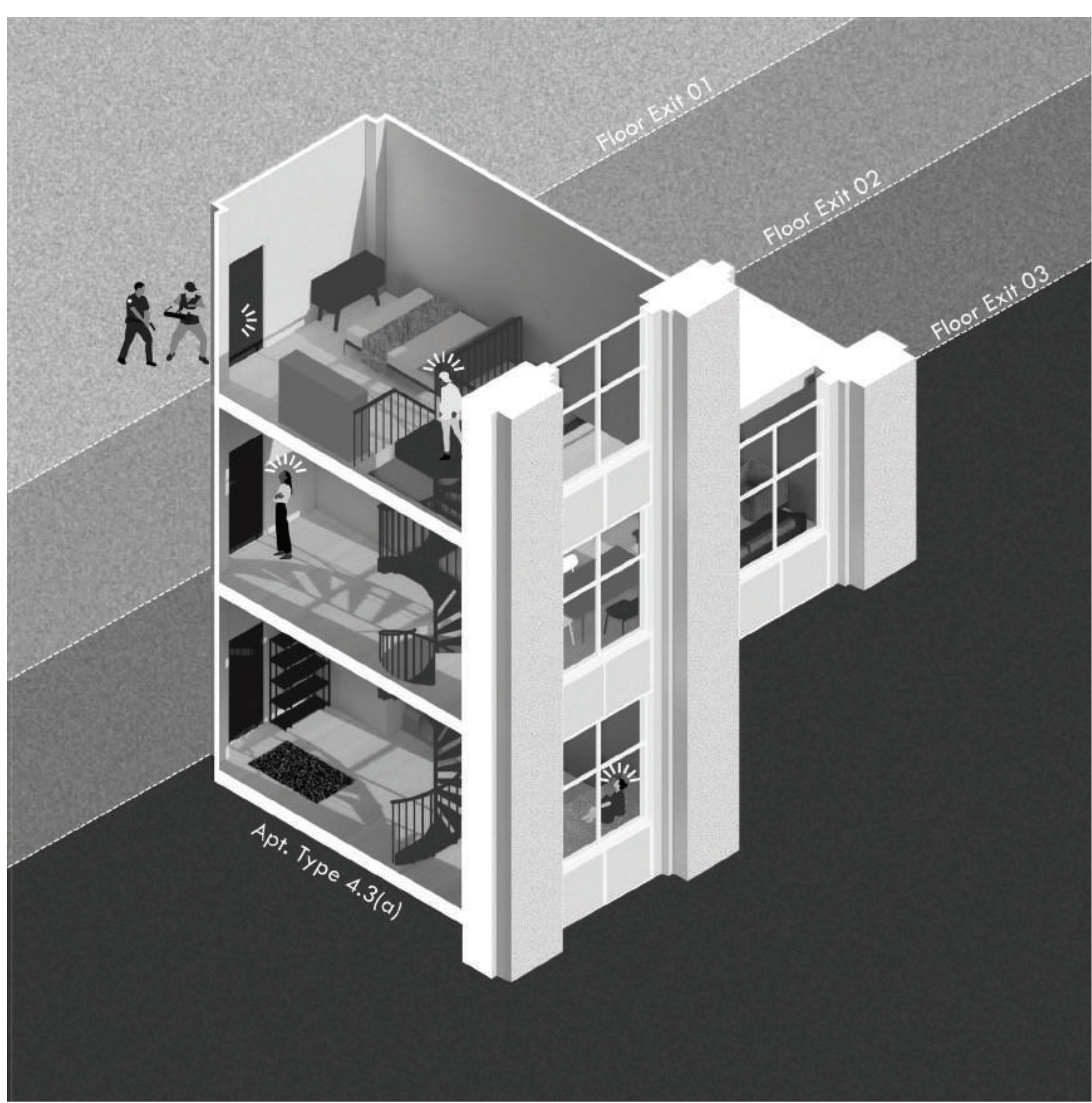
Left: Balata refugee camp 2002, Right: Nablus 2002. (Weizman 2012, 192)



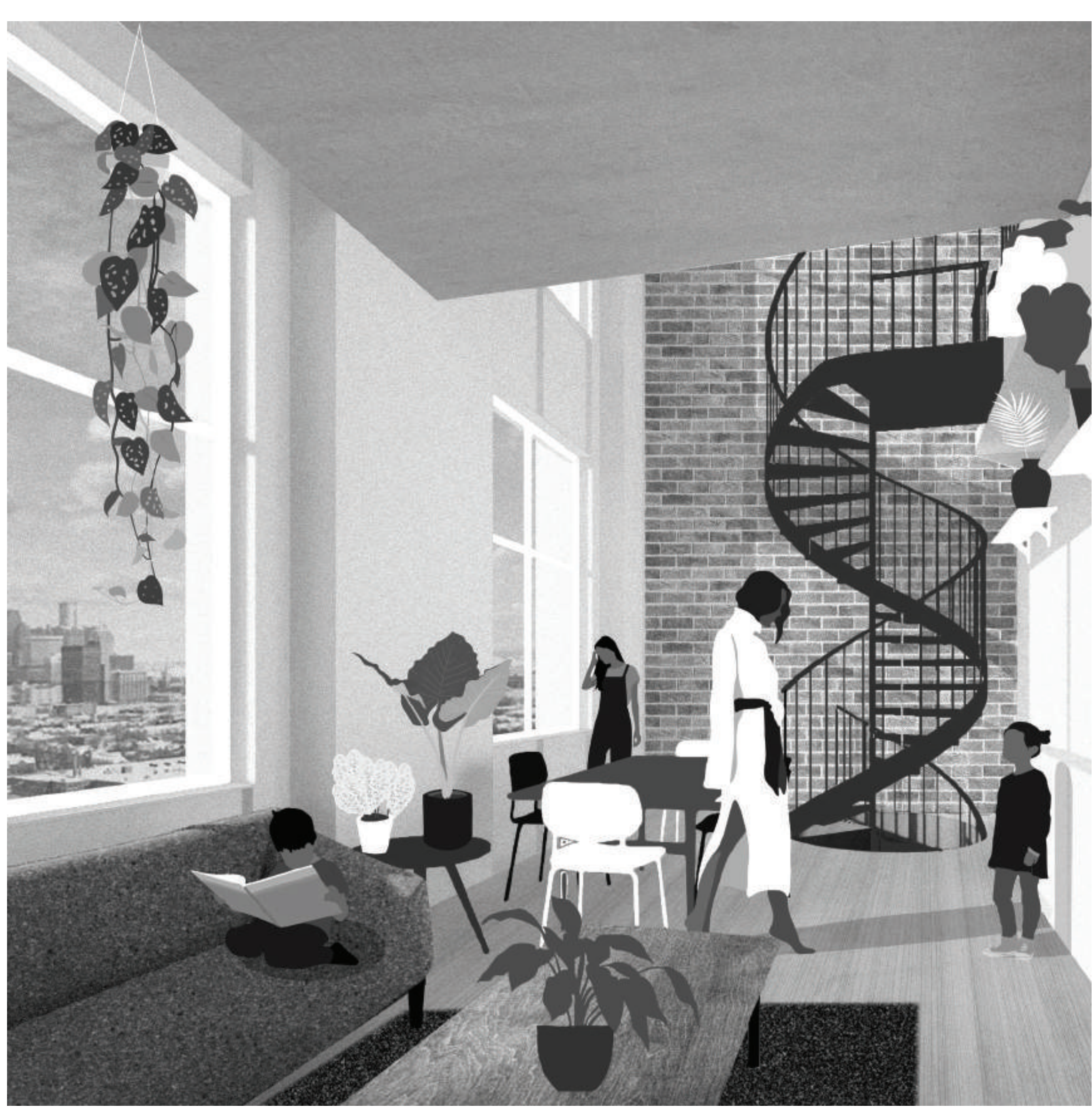
Tower apartment layout diagram. Working within the tower’s structural grid, the apartments are designed in a vertical arrangement in order to access several floors to facilitate escape



Sample floor plans for different apartment types, to be designed in collaboration with inhabitants

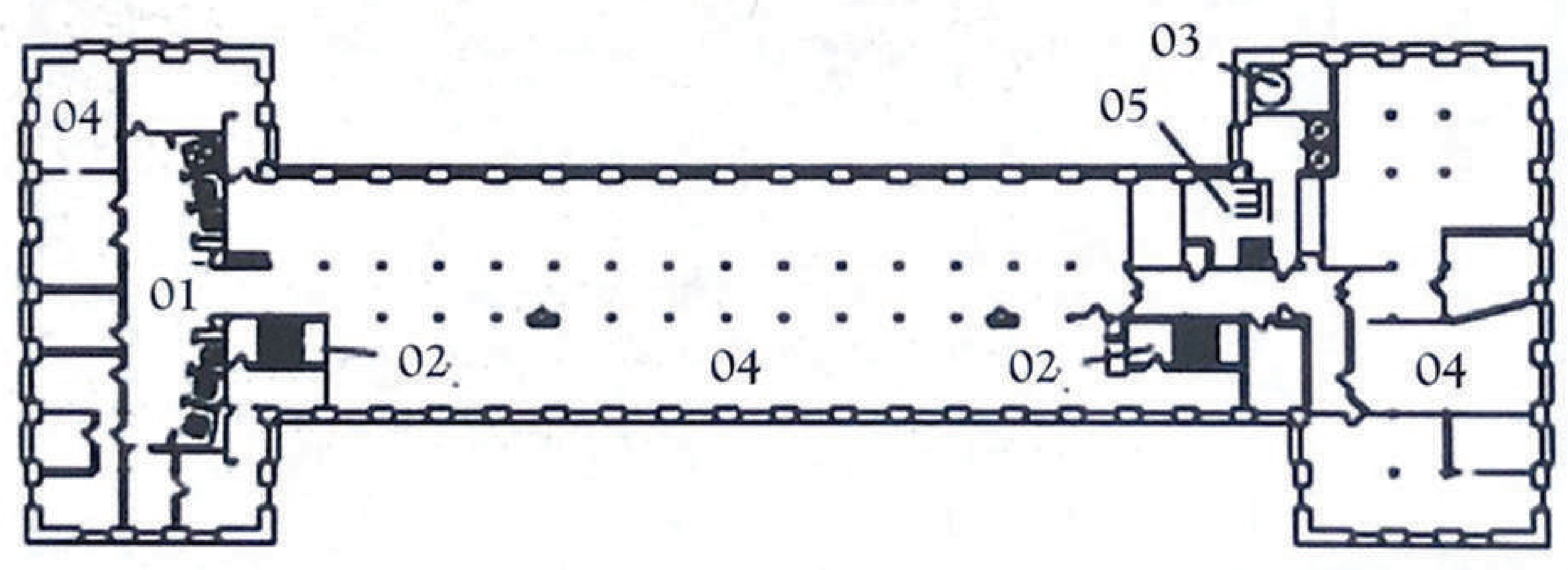


Axonometric of apartment type 4.3(a), illustrating the multiple exits available with this vertically distributed design scheme

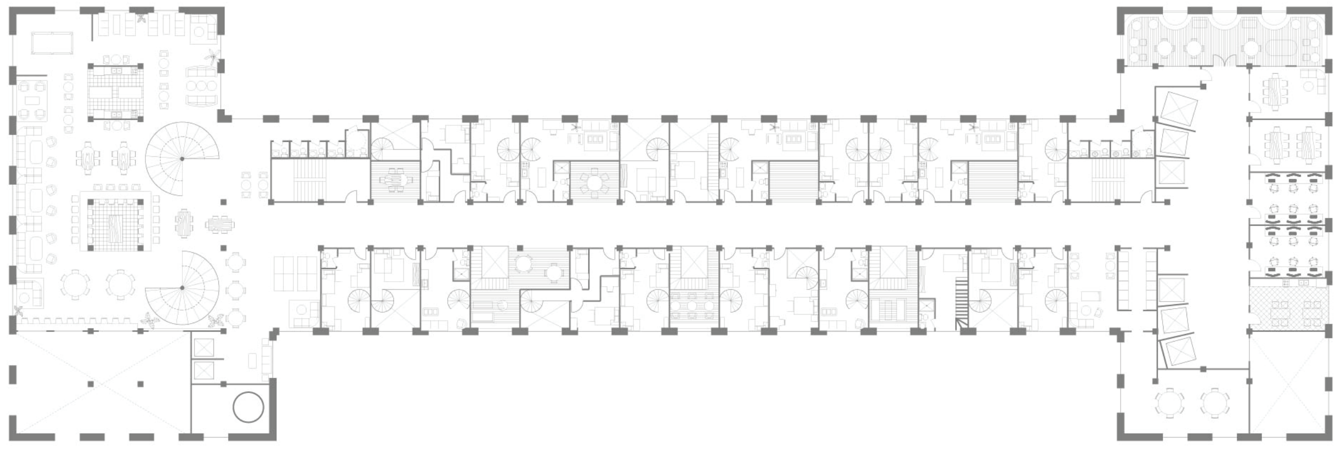


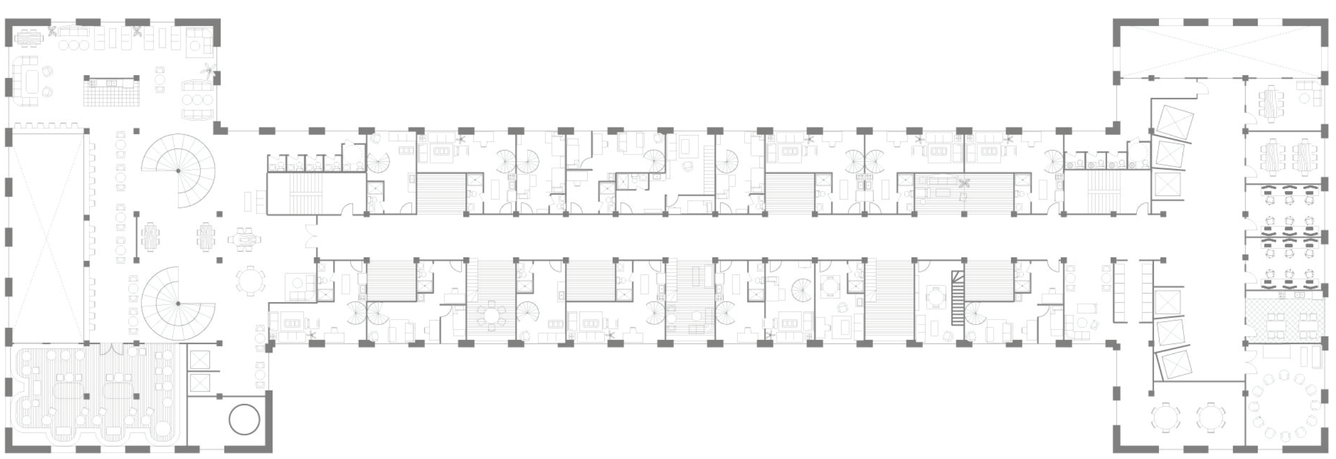
Interior render of apartment type 4.3(a) variation

01 Elevator Lobby
02 Stairs
03 Boiler Flute
04 Open to Below
05 Open Office Space

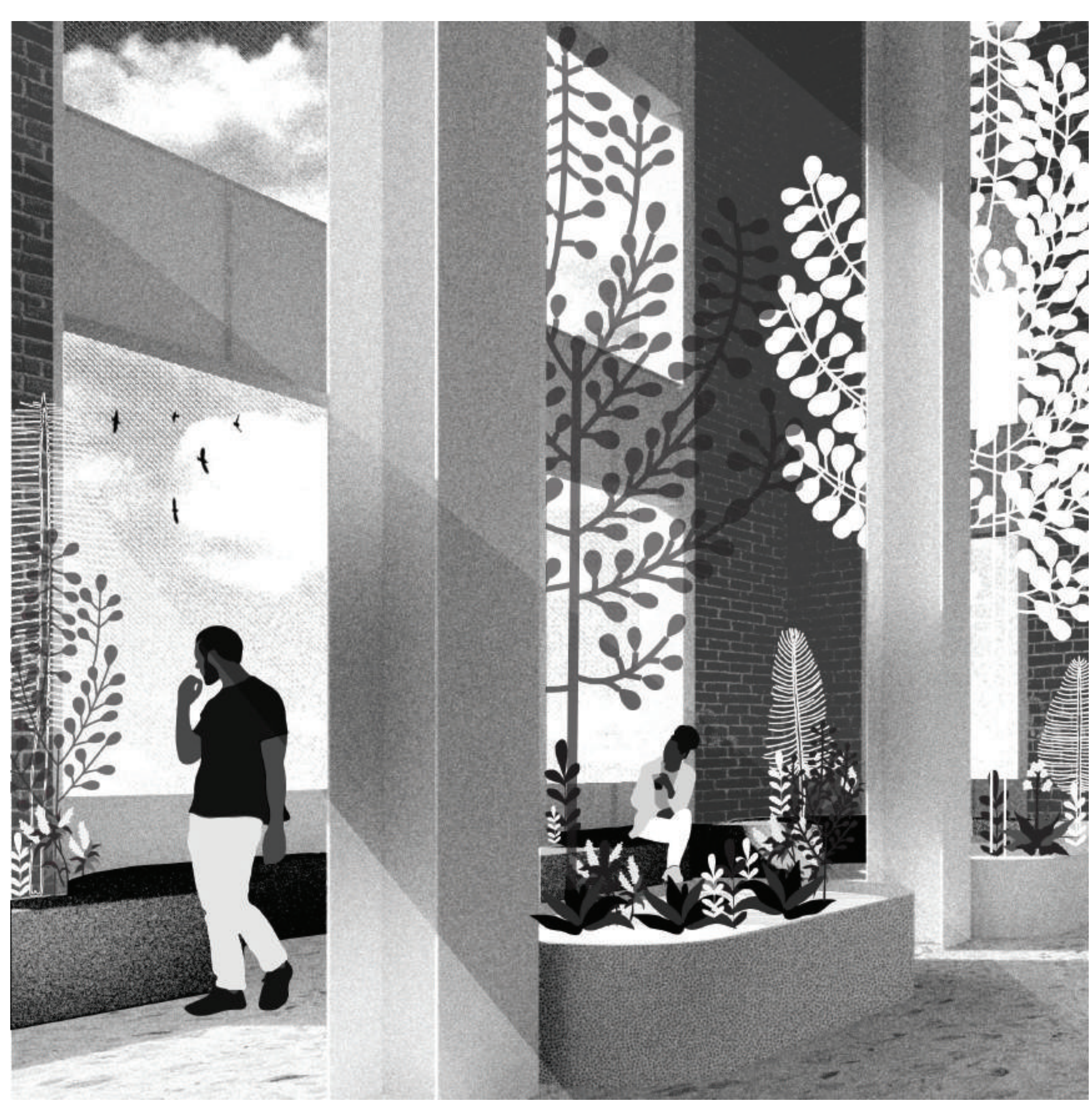


Original archived drawing of a typical tower floor (Kavanaugh 2001, 18)





Typical tower floor plans with lounge spaces and public balcony gardens on the west wing



Communal garden balconies are located on every floor, tended to and cared for by the community

swarm maneuver that was launched in the refugee camps of Balata and Nablus in 2002. Autonomous units penetrated a dense urban settlement from multiple locations and forced openings in walls; this creates an inverse urban geometry where they subvert expected routes of attack. The IDF have been studying the works of Deleuze and Tschumi in order to fight more effectively, with one director explaining that this new military "share more with architects; we combine theory and practice. We can read, but we know as well how to build and destroy, and sometimes kill" (Weizman 2012, 200). Fractal maneuvers behind corridor walls with a variety of unknown layout options make surveillance and capture more difficult. This kind of design might begin to address the sense of unsafety that black Americans feel by giving them various front door options on different floors. Writing about the home as unsafe, Taymullah Abdur-Rahman explains that:

> This silent anxiety is transgenerational. Not every member of a black household may admit it, but we know that the front door could be kicked in at anytime by law enforcement because of any ridiculous claim — real or imagined — made by a neighbor. For black families, danger has always lurked, even while we seek refuge in the privacy of our own space. (Abdur-Rahman 2019)

In Detroit, 7 year old Aiyana Stanley-Jones was shot in her bed in 2010 when policed forced their way into her home. In 2014, Yvette Smith was shot opening the door for the police, whom she called to settle a dispute she was not involved in. In 2020, Breonna Taylor was shot dead in a no-knock entry into her home. In addressing residential design that intersects the social construction of race, the project is foregrounding the real world issues faced by African American communities while simultaneously highlighting

the absurdity of those same realities through architectural gymnastics.

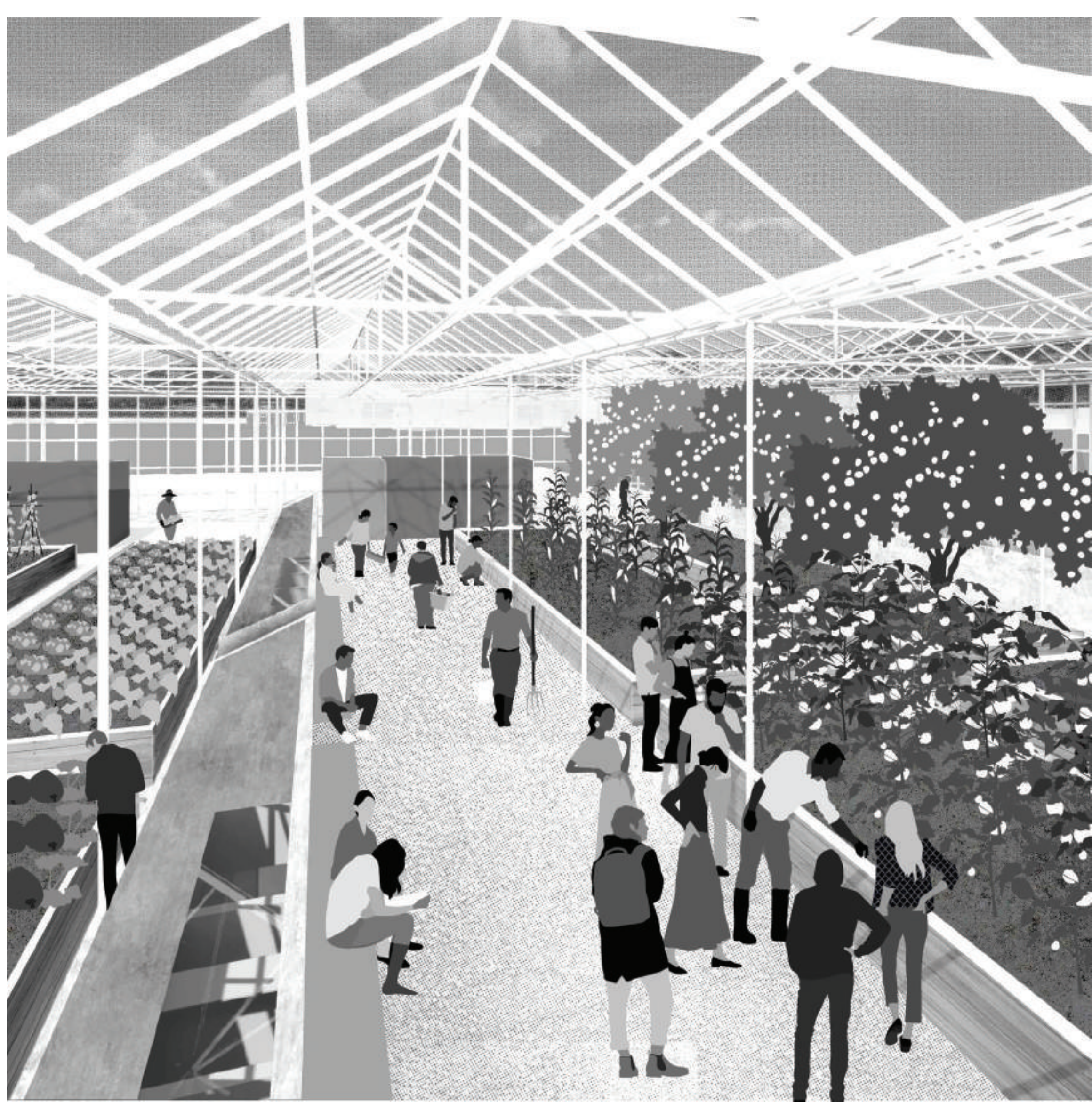
Greenhouse/Undercarriage

> We do what we do because we resist. It is also an act of love for ourselves, and our love for others. So when I do what I do, I'm not trying to get rich out of it; it's not going to save Detroit. You can grow all the food you want; it's not going to save Detroit because we are tied to this system. But it is an act of saying that I think differently than all these laws and policies that are being enacted. I am tapping into my consciousness. As a human being, I understand that food is meant to keep me alive, it's not meant to make me rich. For us, growing food is an act of revolution. It's a revolutionary act of love, not just for ourselves, but for others. - Myrtle Thompson-Curtis (Doucet 2017, 316)

The historic platform shed that once sheltered passengers was demolished in 2000 and only two tracks remain active today. Situated directly south of the station, the project imagines the platform shelter reborn as a commercial-scale greenhouse in which food justice projects can thrive through urban agriculture. The greenhouse is shared by organizations that use "mobilization, education, policy advocacy, and the physical improvements in neighborhoods to increase the food supply and prevent hunger, thereby enhancing the

The former passenger shelter, demolished in 2000 (The Michigan Central Station 2018)

Greenhouse and undercarriage section. Residential treatment rooms are connected to the greenhouse through lightwells along what was once the platforms to the trains

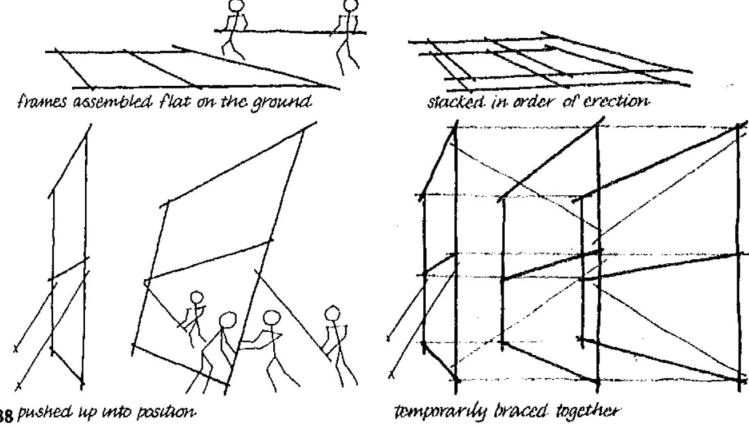


The greenhouse produce is sold at the co-op grocery below, as well as in mobile markets throughout Detroit

South entrance from Newark Street and access point to the Ujamaa Food Co-op

health of its residents, revitalizing neighborhoods through shared activities that also improve and strengthen the community's local economy, and building a sense of justice, equity, and self-determination" (White 2011, 408).

Underneath the tracks is an undercarriage that houses support programs, food storage, a maker space, and a co-op grocery. Capuchin runs the Jefferson House residential treatment program, where their existing 12-bed space can be expanded with in-house clinics and mental health services. The rooms would have sunlight access through lightwells that rise up into the greenhouse above and shade the platforms, but not the growing beds. The maker space is a workshop available to all of the community. After initial safety training classes new inhabitants can find a residential space and begin plans to modify their living quarters, however they see fit (within local community safety oversight). The open modification proposal is modeled after Frei Otto's work, as well as the work of Walter Segal, whose method of simplified instructions and modular design made



The Segal Method gave lightly trained participants the tools necessary to help design and build their own homes (Broome 1986)

architecture accessible to eager participants for a fraction of the price to buy and own a home (Broome 1987, 32). The station acts as a weather barrier, so the focus of the new construction would primarily be sufficient insulation and ventilation of each residence.

The undercarriage would have a neighborhood access to the south, which is beneath the station but at street level approaching Newark Street. The Ujamaa Food Co-op is a monthly buy-in club run by the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) that is projected to open a brick and mortar store in the coming years. The thesis suggests that they can situate the grocery along Newark within the undercarriage, where the community can participate in acquiring cheap food products purchased directly from global distributors. Currently the co-op has a buy-in model, but as it scales up into a larger store they can transition into a sweat equity model where work hours grant them access to membership. I personally have participated in such a model at the Park Slope Co-op; their program was well organized, decentralized, and held town halls monthly where community could vote on issues ranging from BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) activism against Israel to purchasing unpasteurized milk. They additionally work in tandem with other co-ops, redirecting funds to jump start new initiatives in other struggling neighborhoods, as well as to local farmers who have seen unfavorable and unfortunate crop returns.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death. (Gilmore 2007, 28)

Republican lawmakers have recently introduced a number of bills attempting to ban the teaching of race in public schools; an attempt to push back against reexaminations of American history as it relates to race. Critical race theory in particular is the buzz word in Republican talking points today: a disingenuous portrayal of a lens that largely existed in academia since the 1970s (Harris 2021). In examining Detroit with careful attention to race and space, this thesis points out what Republicans are denying is the case: that segregation ended when Jim Crow did; that racism as a concept is confined to individual cases of outward hatred instead of an insidious, institutional structure that is as all encompassing as the weather.

Redlining in every major American city has had long lasting legacy effects that continue to perpetuate defacto segregation, and this spatial condition allows for a number of uneven effects for black Americans, whether it is unequal intra-urban heat distribution, to a differential in government services to different urban areas. In addition to this is the ease in which white lead agro-businesses have access to blighted land in black terrain, where gentrification reproduces settler colonial imaginaries while weaponizing a regreening narrative as an ethical cover for displacing thousands of marginalized community members.

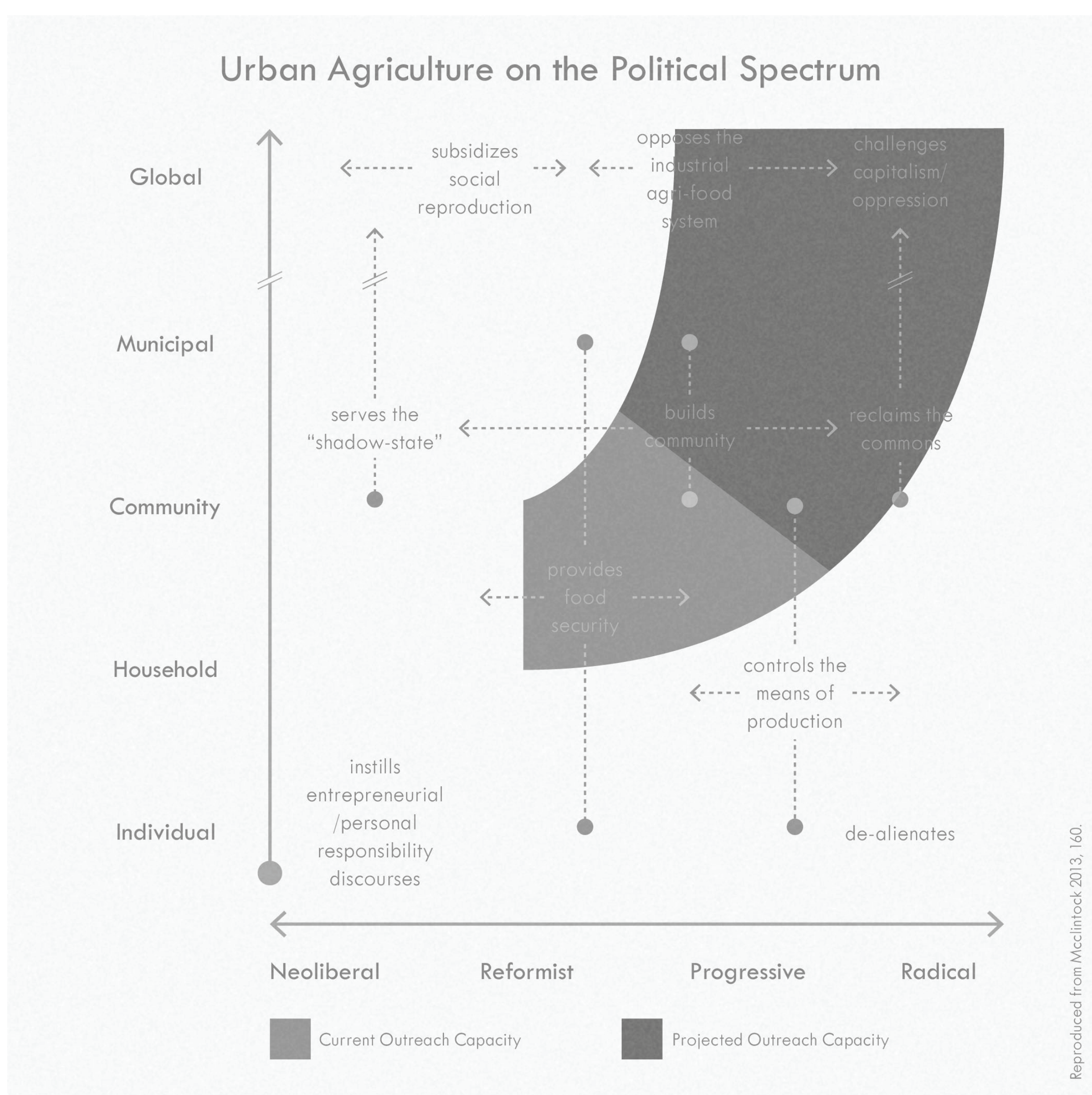
While urban agriculture is being practiced by communities as a method of claiming a right to the city of Detroit, it is also

used as a way of adding value to lots for profit in the near future. Nathan McClintock writes that:

> Urban agriculture projects often take root in the vacant "lumpengeography" of the inner city, awaiting the next wave of capitalist redevelopment. These neighbourhoods, wracked by disinvestment in the wake of capital's spatial fix to the suburbs in the post-war era, are now ground zero for reinvestment under banners of smart growth, walkable neighbourhoods, and downtown revitalisation. Across North America, these efforts have incorporated urban greening strategies – which include gardens – grounded in an "ecological rationality" that contributes to the increase of property values, while ultimately creating spaces of exclusion ... In cities where vacant and cheap land abounds (Detroit and other Rust Belt cities, for example), "land-grabbing" by nascent urban agribusiness has fuelled bitter debates over whose interests urban agriculture will ultimately serve. (McClintock 2013, 156)

The thesis takes the view that where market interests are involved, there can never be any real chance for local communities to have what they have been calling for: a right to self determination and real agency in a city and a government that has abandoned them.

With a shared and adequate space for development and growth, the work of community organizers can become a center for larger, structural changes. Community gardens or urban agriculture is not inherently radical, but rather it can be situated on a spectrum of political motivations and outcomes, either reinforcing social reproduction or challenging capitalism and oppression. Megan Blake argues that self provisioning and seeking neighborhood food security only represents an adaptive resilience, while the project attempts to imagine transformative resilience (Blake 2018, 492). Defunding and abolishing the police and redirecting these bloated budgets into health, education and housing can lead to what organizers and activists have long called for: a right to the city designed and determined by the community and not by land speculators or market systems.



A graph depicting the various effects and scales of urban agriculture, with the direction of the thesis graphically inserted (McClintock 2013, 160)

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