Occupy Hong Kong: Blossoming in the Gaps

by

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Contents

Abstract

In addition to rapidly increasing political repression in recent years, the people of Hong Kong have long suffered economic repression, facing challenges such as severely constrained living space and world-leading inequality. All this culminates in a growingly defiant demand for human dignity.

The thesis design is conceived as a linear park with coworking and co-living spaces on top, where facilities are de-privatized and shared. This is used to test the thesis that decommoditizing space in a pluralistic and multi-layered way helps bring about political and economic agency by fostering free enterprise and free expression.

The project employs a few strategies, such as having a central location, occupying the urban void, inverting and fracturing the mall typology, exposing the circulatory systems, accommodating a mix of use and mix of scales, ensuring visual connection and continuity between spaces, and creating means for users to modulate their privacy.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Cristina Verrissimo and Niall Savage for your continued support and guidance.
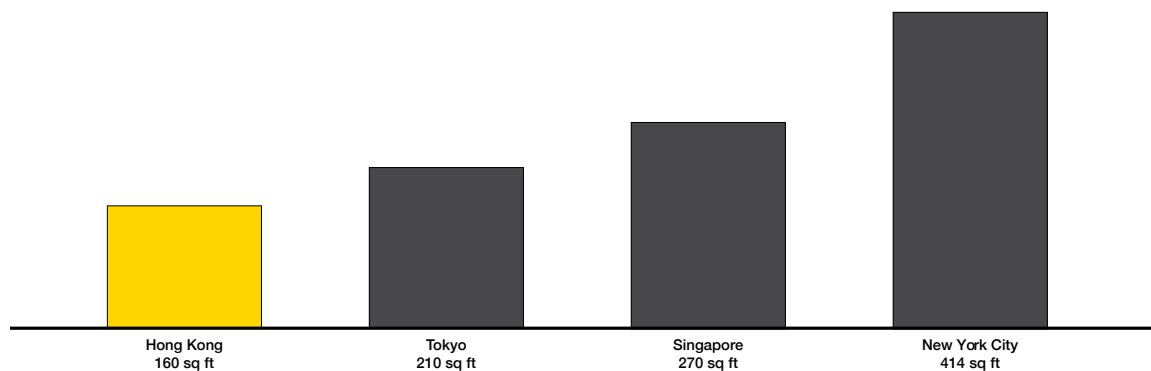
Chapter 1: Introduction

Hong Kong, a former British colony, was returned to China in 1997 and is governed under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, which guarantees the city its rights and freedoms, its capitalist economic system, a government with a high-degree of autonomy, and an independent judiciary under the English common law system. Commonly described as the gateway between China and the world, Hong Kong today is an affluent global financial centre and a key logistical hub.

Behind the glamour, however, big problems are brewing.

In 2019, the normally peaceful and obedient society of Hong Kong broke into its angriest, most violent protests in more than half a century. The protests began as opposition to the proposed Extradition Bill that allows for extradition to China, due to broad mistrust in China's judiciary. While the bill was withdrawn after three months, the protests morphed into demands for independent investigation of police misconduct as well as democratic participation.

In response, on June 30, 2020, Beijing bypassed Hong Kong's legislature to impose the National Security Law criminalizing almost any acts that threaten national security

Average living space per person.

Hong Kong 160 sq ft — Tokyo 210 sq ft — Singapore 270 sq ft — New York City 414 sq ft

- an serious assault on Hong Kong's autonomy and freedom promised in the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Behind the political discontent, Hong Kong has long suffered deep social problems, like not having enough space. At the size of a parking space, 160 square feet is the average amount of living space per person (Stevenson and Wu 2019), compared to 200, 270, and 414 square feet in Tokyo, Singapore, and New York City respectively. This is further exacerbated by the deep inequality there. Despite having a high GDP per capita compared to other developed nations, Hong Kong's inequality is among the worst in the world, outranking countries such as Colombia, Rwanda, and Nigeria (UNU-WIDER 2018).

Under such charged context of severe space crisis and political unrest, could architecture add political and economic

Protests in Hong Kong, summer of 2019; Photograph by Yik Fei Lam. (New York Times 2019)

agency in this pro-market, neoliberal place that is highly commoditized and highly productive? This thesis contends that by sharing space in a multi-layered and pluralistic manner, architecture can boost the utilization of space while facilitate free enterprise and free expression.

Below is a roadmap pertaining to the theoretical bases for this thesis and the design methodology applied.

Chapter 4 and 5 explain the core underlying theories driving this thesis. With the urgency of creating spaces of empowerment for the people, the project adopts the paradigm of pluralism, which by its own defining nature creates the necessity to deprivatize and share spaces.

Chapter 6 to chapter 9 delve into the strategies at various scales that allow the design project to create a sharing lifestyle in a pluralistic manner.

In the city scale, in order to engender a pluralistic mix of various social sectors, the project requires a central, well-connected location, a site that is not yet privatized, and a mix of programs that bring together existing and new users with varying needs.

Rejecting mega architecture that creates an oppressive interior space that is endless and disorienting, the project requires a massing design that provides views of the surrounding urban environment, as well as a clear understanding of the circulatory system.

In the human scale, aiming to boost social intersections, the project must maintain a sense of relatability and continuity between public spaces at different heights, while creating space and opportunities for human interactions at the eye

level particularly when different programs encounter one another.

Finally, to empower everyone with the autonomy in how they express themself, especially in spaces that are public or deprivatized, the project must allow for varying degrees of privacy.

To test the above design directives, the thesis design is conceived as a linear park with coworking and co-living spaces on top, where facilities are de-privatized and shared to achieve maximal efficiency. Occupying the space above a highway infrastructure and in-between tall commercial buildings, the park serves as a new major pedestrian infrastructure that plugs into the existing network of elevated walkways. To facilitate views and orientation, the design inverts and fractures the conventional mall podium typology and clearly displays vertical circulations. To bring together a broad spectrum of users, the project accommodates different events, scales, and speeds. The terracing roofs of the park pavillions ensure that public spaces at various heights are relatable to one another. Meanwhile, edges between programs are blurred with layers of inviting, inhabitable, and ambiguous spaces to spur the most opportunities for free appropriation and the intersections of lives.

By employing the above strategies, the design is able to orchestrate a free, engaging, and resourceful urban lifestyle that fosters free enterprise and free expression, in spite of the current constraints and repressions.

Chapter 2: Spatial Repression

The people of Hong Kong have very limited living space per person. At 160 square feet on average (Stevenson and Wu 2019), it is much lower than other densely populated cities such as Tokyo at 200 square feet, Singapore at 270 square feet, and New York City at 414 square feet. Geographic constraints, policies, and socioeconomic conditions in Hong Kong all contribute to this spatial repression of the people, who must put up with dire living realities.

2.1 Geography

Only 24.9% of the land in Hong Kong is urbanized (Planning Department 2019), largely because of Hong Kong's restrictive geographic conditions. Bounded by steep slopes and the ocean, there is no space to expand,
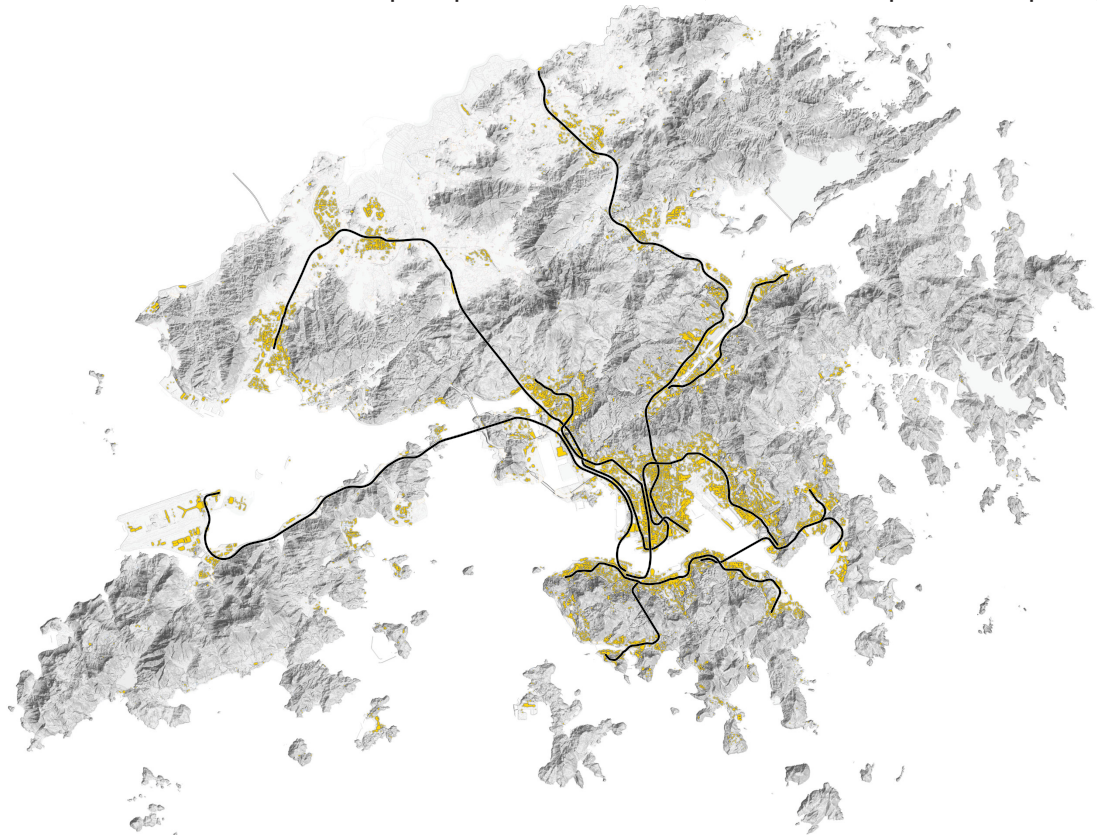
Map of Hong Kong showing terrain, distribution of urban areas, and the MTR network (Base map from Stevenson and Wu 2019).

especially around Hong Kong's urban areas, the Kowloon Peninsula and Hong Kong Island. To further maximize land utilization and minimize need for vehicular infrastructure, the government encourages the public to use public transit by taxing car ownership heavily.

The squeeze is particularly severe on Hong Kong Island, where the central business district (CBD) is located. As an island, it is bounded by water on all sides, while most of the island is characterized by mountainous terrains. Most of the urbanized areas on the island are concentrated along a strip on the northern shore of the island overlooking Kowloon Peninsula across the Victoria Harbour. Bounded by very steep slopes in the south, this urbanized strip has almost no room to grow.

Satellite towns were built on the other sides of the mountains from the urban areas and are connected by the Mass Transit Railway (MTR), the local rapid transport network. Despite a highly developed public transit system, these satellite towns mostly located in Hong Kong's New Territories outside the urban areas of Kowloon Peninsula and Hong Kong Island are nonetheless spatially and economically segregated from the heart of Hong Kong's economic and cultural activities.

2.2 Policy

Another reason for the severe constraint in available space is the local government's land policy. The government, which owns virtually all the land in Hong Kong, derives a large part of its revenues from land sales – 26.6% in 2018 (Census and Statistics Department 2019a). As such, the government is incentivised to retain a tight control over the supply of land in order to maintain revenue levels.
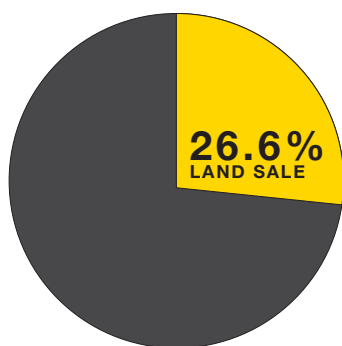
Percentage of government revenues from land in 2018.

Additionally, because business groups have a disproportionately large influence over the election of the chief executive (the head of the government) and the Legislative Council (LegCo), as evidenced by the large number of seats on the election committee and on LegCo that are assumed by "special interest groups," the government has an interest in artificially controlling the land supply to ensure healthy profits for private developers.

In particular, 30 out of 70 LegCo members are elected by industry or professional groups, not by the broad public. Likewise, the chief executive election committee consists of 956 votes representing such special interest groups, 87 direct votes from China, and merely 157 votes broadly representing the public of Hong Kong, making up a total of 1200 votes. Real estate development in particular has an outsized role in Hong Kong's economy. On the Hang Seng Index, a stock index of the top 50 firms in Hong Kong weighted by market capitalization, 11 of the firms are categorized as "property and construction," representing 11.09% of the total capitalization, the second largest sector of the index after "financials" (HSI 2018).

2.3 Socioeconomics

As an important financial hub in Asia, there is a high number of multinational firms stationed in Hong Kong that benefit from the city's free and non-interventionist economy. This brings in a high number of talented expatriates who enjoy very high incomes. Sharing the title with Paris and Singapore, Hong Kong is the most expensive city in the world for expatriates - an unmistakable indication of the high value of expatriate workers in the city (EIU 2019). Mercer the consulting firm concurs, ranking Hong Kong as the top most expensive city

in the world for expatriates, followed by Tokyo, Singapore, Seoul, and Zurich (Mercer 2019).

As such, as per the author's observation, the most premium spaces in the centre of the city are often dominated by the presence of these transient and wealthy expatriate workers, as evidenced by the proliferation of short-term full-service apartments, as well as expat-oriented amenities in the city. This causes the demand for space near the central business district to become prohibitively expensive and competitive, reserved only for the wealthiest and the most productive.

This can be verified by data. Hong Kong enjoys a relatively high GDP per capita similar to other developed nations. At US$48,700, Hong Kong outranks countries like Germany, the UK, and Japan (UNU-WIDER 2018). However, Hong Kong's inequality stands out as an anomaly among other developed nations. The top fifth of the population earns almost 14 times the bottom fifth (UNU-WIDER 2018). This number is 4.6 in Germany, and 6.2 in the UK and Japan (OECD n.d.). In fact, Hong Kong's Gini Coefficient ranks among the most unequal countries on earth, outranking severely unequal developing countries like Paraguay, Colombia, Rwanda, and Brazil (CIA 2020). Therefore, the average income of $48,700 does not reflect the well-being of an average person. In fact, the median wage (the income earned by the average person in the middle of the pack) stands at $27,900 (Census and Statistics Department 2019b), an astounding 43% discount from the average income.

2.4 Realities

All of the above translates into very dire living realities that people need to contend with. The average living space of

GDP PER CAPITA (US DOLLAR)
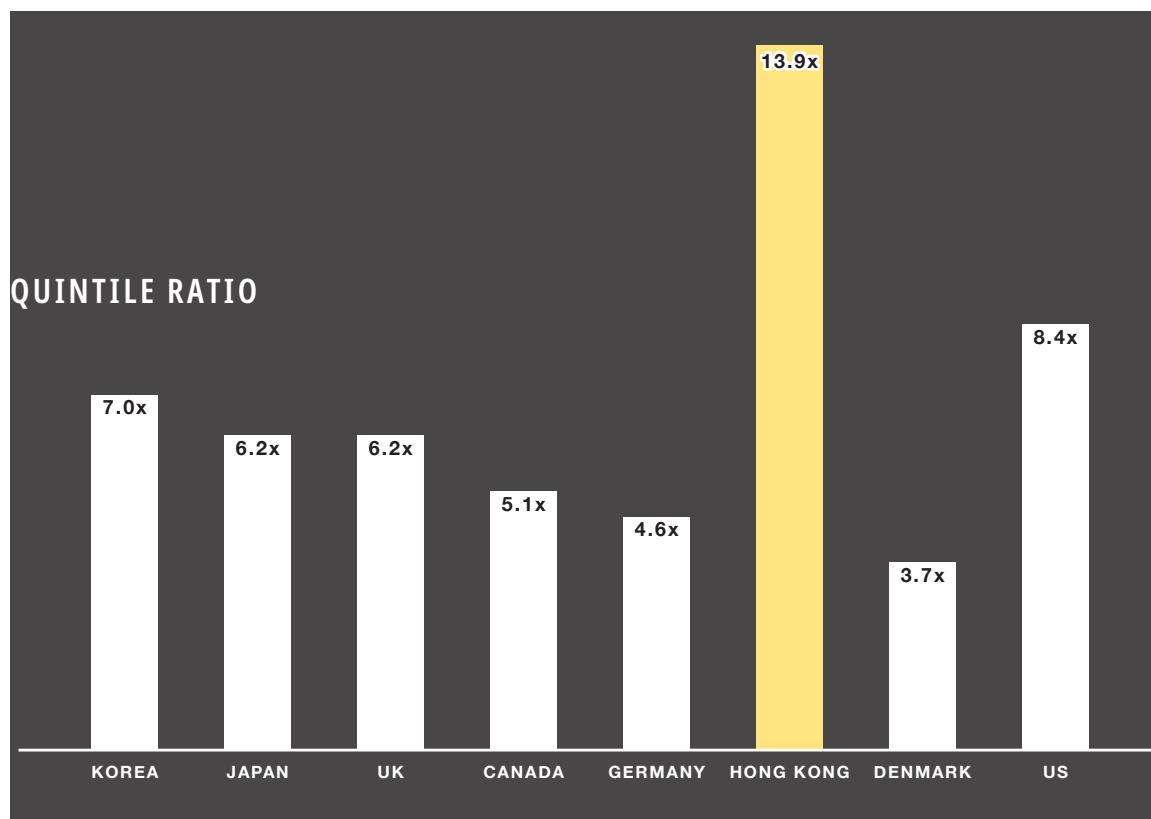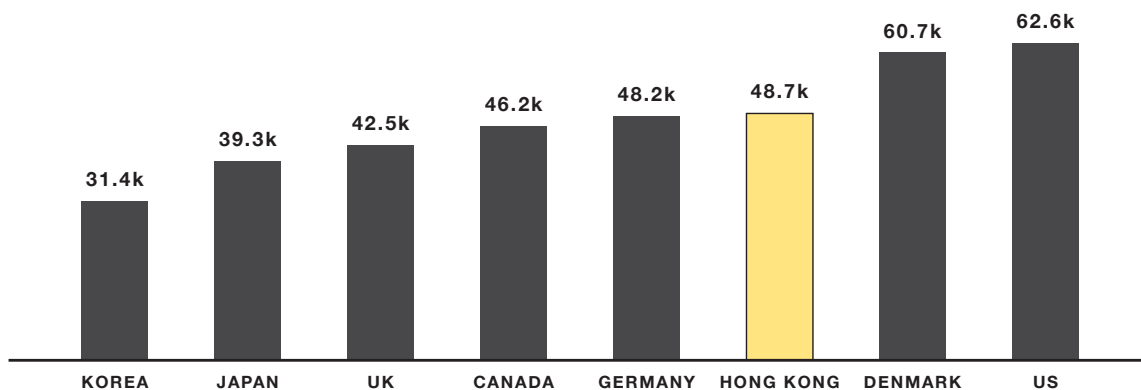
QUINTILE RATIO

Above are charts comparing the average incomes and quintile ratios, respectively, among various countries.

160 square feet per person can be visualized as a compact studio apartment the size of a parking space. Equipped with miniaturized facilities such as the minimal bathroom and minimal counter space in the kitchen, the apartment nonetheless represents a comparatively livable and luxurious condition in Hong Kong, as the average person

does not attain this average amount of living space, but only the median. If the 43% discount in income mentioned earlier is to be reflected accordingly in the amount of living space, then the average person may only enjoy as little as 160 square feet x (1 - 43%) = 91 square feet.
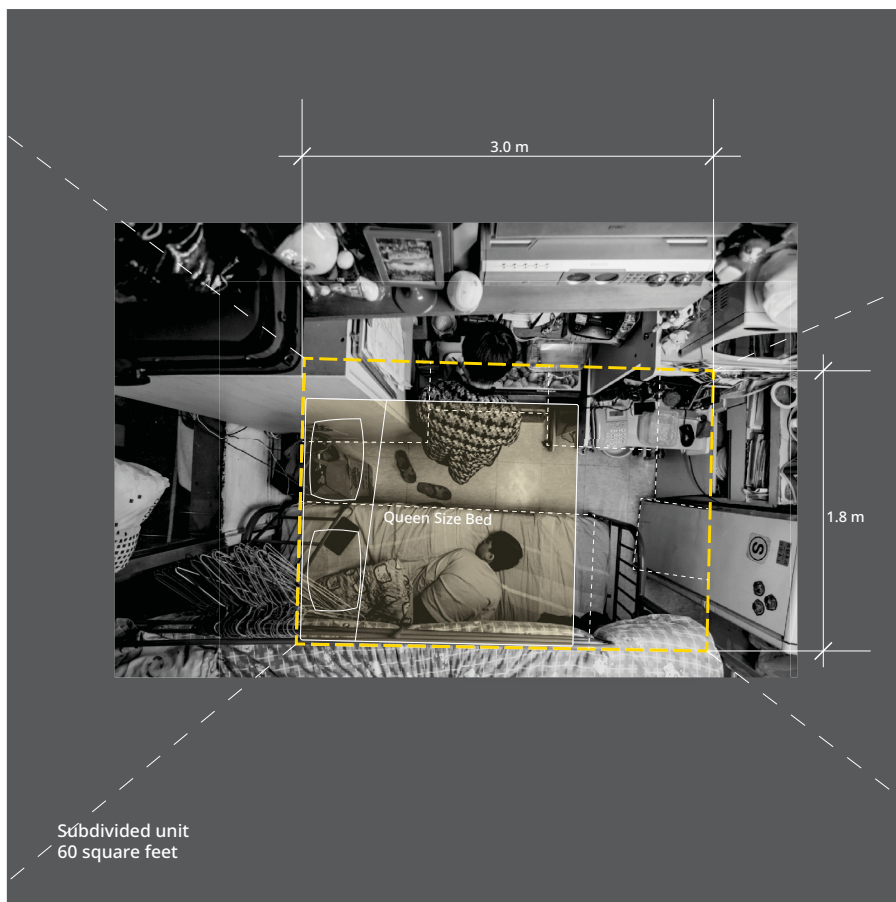
In fact, many lower class residents are forced to make do with extremely small spaces like the one shown here. Such living quarters are created by subdividing originally larger apartments to become rent-seeking machines. In such a small space, approximately 60 square feet in the picture, the vertical space must be fully utilized for storage, and cooking must be done without proper counter space and appliances.

As cooking becomes difficult in such a small space, there's evidence that the kitchen has moved into the public realm for better efficiency. A survey by Polytechnic University found almost two-thirds of the respondents ate out more than 4 times a week, while one-third ate out every day (Chan 2016).

Therefore, spatial repression is a severe practical problem in Hong Kong affecting many. As such, many young people face immense difficulties in affording homes and thriving in urban areas that are most economically and culturally rewarding, areas that would in turn benefit from the energy of young people.

2.2 m   2.2 m

Queen Size Bed

2.55 m
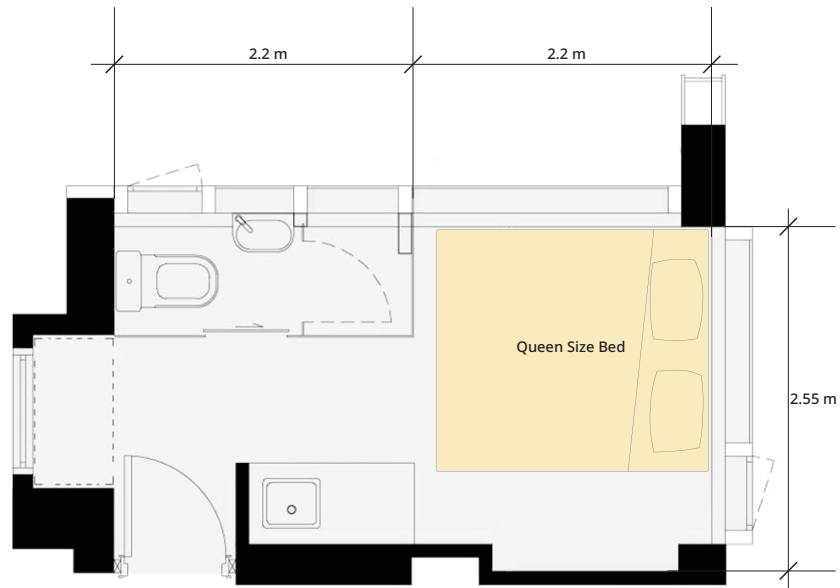
Mosquito Flat
163 square feet

3.0 m

Queen Size Bed

1.8 m

Subdivided unit
60 square feet

Above: Plan of a typical nano flat at 163 square feet. Base plan from the sales brochure of One Prestige, 2020. (Henderson 2020, 20)
Below: A typical subdivided unit, scaled for comparison. Photograph by Tyrone Siu, 2019. (Stevenson and Wu 2019)

Chapter 3: Political Repression

3.1 Confucianism in Chinese Culture

Composed of 92% Han Chinese, Hong Kong is a Chinese-majority society with a culture deeply rooted in Chinese Confucianism. As one of the three main teachings in Chinese culture, which include Taoism and Buddhism, Confucianism is the most widely adopted and most deeply entrenched teaching especially in regards to its philosophy on social structure and governance; in contrast, Taoism and Buddhism are commonly practiced more ritualistically (Kwong 2002).

In particular, Confucianism emphasizes social hierarchy and order, respect, rituals, as well as kindness and righteousness. An important part of its indoctrination is subservience and the virtue of the "subdued self," (Ho 1995, 118) which come in deep conflict with individualistic and democratic values. Clarence Hahn, a US scholar in Philosophy, writes the below on Chinese Confucian culture:

> His will to assert himself above the group is suppressed. All learning and education have had as their final trim the service and welfare of the family and society, not the culture of the individual or the knowledge of the Absolute. Obedience is the core of Chinese moral ideals. The common people must obey the ruler; the son, the father; the younger, the elder; the wife, the husband… Obedience is essential to social prosperity, and therefore righteousness consists in suppression of the vigorous urge of life… It is therefore necessary for every man to be just and honest…by compulsion of those in authority. Justice and honesty appear to them as the means of a happy life…[preceding] the utilitarianism of Plato and Aristotle. (Hahn 1928, 11-12)

This account makes it abundantly clear the inherent repressive nature of Confucian teachings, which have permeated widely and deeply throughout Chinese and East Asian societies. This helps explain that in Hong Kong, despite

its severe levels of inequality, the people are shockingly well-behaved. With its world-leading low crime rates, Hong Kong is ranked in the top three cities on personal security in a report by the Economist (Kiestra 2019, 15).

As a classist and obedient society, the people of Hong Kong then channel their energy towards pragmatic material pursuits. Hahn observes that "Politics and ethics are identical in [Confucian] worldly teachings. How to make this life happy and comfortable is the chief aim of the Chinese," due to the emphasis on "common sense, the absorption in the present, and lack of citizenship in the future" (Hahn 1928, 10). In a 2013 survey conducted by IPSOS, a market research firm, 71% of Chinese respondents agree with the statement "I measure my success by the things I own," outranking all other surveyed nations including India at 58%, Brazil at 48%, Germany at 27%, Japan at 22%, and Sweden at 7% (Ferdman 2013). This confirms a deep cultural distinction of the Chinese regarding their materialistic pursuits that are not merely explained by the development status of the nation.

3.2 Confucianism as Political Tool

The indoctrination of Confucianism in Chinese culture has been used as a political tool in modern Chinese history. In addition to giving "China an unbroken unity of national existence through its doctrine of 'filial piety' and reverence for the ancestral past," Confucianism also, "ethically, protected China through all her civil turbulence, from falling into license and confusion by its teaching of fundamental social distinctions, and natural obedience to the higher class in society. Confucius strongly repudiated the ideal of equality and insisted upon an absolute discrimination between high and low classes" (Hahn 1928, 6).

"The Confucian ideal of a government is a family-state. A patriarch, as his principal duty, strives for the well-being of his family members… A good ruler must… keep the balance of powers in society" (Kwong 2002, 100). Kwong observes "a great deal of continuity…between the Confucian governance and that of the Chinese Communist Party" (Kwong 2002, 101). For example, both former presidents of China Mao and Deng "ruled the country from a hierarchical position. They had the final say on every sphere of life in society. Under them, there was a hierarchical and pyramidal organization with four cardinal levels… The flow of authority was from top to bottom" like the Confucian cadre system (Kwong 2002, 102). Secondly, the Confucian governance features a "person-oriented" ruling operation. "The political dynamic is not derived from a constitution or a legislature, but from the ruler's personal influence… In this person-oriented governance, personal influence always outweighed the li, social regulation, which always led to authoritarianism and endemic nepotism" (Kwong 2002, 101). In the Chinese Communist Party, "personal connection is the key to political power." Many political leaders are related to previous political leaders. "Moreover, every time the Chinese Community Party wants to change someone's policy, they will personally attack that person first," as illustrated in Mao's criticism of the PLA head Li Biao, Deng's criticism of Mao, and the "trial of the Gang of Four" (Kwong 2002, 102).

3.3 Confucian-Style Governance in Hong Kong

Since the handover to China, Hong Kong has adopted Confucian governance modelled after Singapore. The first chief executive who governed Hong Kong under China, Tung Chee-hua, has publicly confessed his admiration for

the then Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan-yew as an exemplary leader of a Confucian-style government.

Under Tung's rule, the government abolished many democratic reforms made during British colonial rule. For example, they reversed universal suffrage for the election of LegCo, immediately replacing the democratically elected body with a provisional one appointed by Beijing (Kwong 2002, 116). The process for generating LegCo was eventually amended to having just 40 out of 70 seats that are publicly elected, as detailed in section 1.2. This represents a serious damage to Hong Kong's democracy and bolsters the authoritarian power of the government.

Another example of the repressive governance is shown in a bill to amend the Public Order Ordinance, proposed and passed by the Beijing-appointed Preparatory Committee prior to the handover. The bill includes "giving the police the authority to require police approval before a demonstration can be held…an explicit move to restrict civil liberty"(Kwong, 115). When questioned, Tung indicated it was merely "a balanced perspective between personal rights and social order" (Kwong 2002, 117).

Wielding immense authoritarian power, Tung made no effort in winning public support. His abolishment of the elected Urban and Regional Councils over the mishandling of the bird flu crisis in 1997, and his establishment of a policy bureau to take over their responsibilities, were "interpreted as an attempt to expand state power, and in so doing to suppress the democratic force." Worse still, Tung acknowledged "the opposition of many legislators to abolition but [indicated] that he still expected them to fall in line with his wishes" (Kwong 2002, 119).

3.4 Social Shift: Signs of Post-materialism and Disobedience

In the past decade or two, however, Hong Kong is seeing a shift in the society especially among the younger generation. There are signs that people are rejecting materialism and obedience, the hallmarks of a Confucian society.

Even at the beginning of the handover, the public of Hong Kong have raised objections to the governance style. Kwong makes the observation below:

> The people of Hong Kong, incited by Tung's failure to cope with the recent financial crisis, have demonstrated their misgivings and resistance against this new-style government. As Lau Suikai puts it, Tung has received criticism from the right, the middle, the left, the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class. Lau also suggests that Tung reshuffle his administration. Other observers have called for an end to any more disturbances by the government. Some have asked for a change in Tung's leadership style characterized as a top-down approach, to a style that would embrace the democratic demands of the public, incorporating their ideas into government proposals. Some have asked Tung to abandon his autocratic image. In short, Tung's attempt to remodel Hong Kong along the lines of Confucian authoritarianism has not been welcomed by the people of Hong Kong. (Kwong 2002, 124)

Over the past 20 or so years since the handover, public resistance have grown. Lee observes that the younger generation of the city are shifting away from materialism, and are placing more value on self-actualization in reference to the concept of the hierarchy of needs coined by Abraham Maslow (Lee 2016). Lee declares that Hong Kong has entered the post-materialistic era, where young people are overwhelmingly placing more importance on democracy and justice.

3.5 Demand for Democracy

In the summer of 2019, 22 years since Hong Kong's return to China, the resistance to Confucian-style authoritarian rule exploded, ignited by a proposed bill that would enable the government to extradite criminals to China for trials. Due to distrust in the Chinese judicial system, millions of people marched on the streets to protest the bill that the Chief Executive Carrie Lam planned to force through the undemocratic LegCo. Reports of brutal crackdown on the protests further fueled public anger and led to prolonged multi-month protests calling for transparency and democracy. Violence escalated between the state and the predominantly young protestors, which only cooled when Covid-19 hit.

It is clear that especially young people are desperate for human dignity and political empowerment. Lam's public support is down to 15%, while as much as 69% of the people demand a reorganization of the police force responsible for handling the protests (HKPOP 2019). A resounding rejection of the authoritarian-style government is demonstrated in the landslide victory by pro-democracy parties against pro-Beijing parties in the 2019 district council elections in November, taking nearly 90% of the seats and gaining control of 17 out of 18 districts in Hong Kong. The outcome of this election, although only representing minimal actual political power, is nonetheless a legitimate reflection of people's dissatisfaction with the Beijing-backed government.

While the thesis project primarily concerns itself with new ways to occupy the incumbent pro-market urban space, the context of the ongoing political challenges in Hong Kong inform specific ambitions of the project.

Chapter 4: Pluralism

In light of the political repression in Hong Kong, where voices calling for political participation are suppressed, giving voice becomes an urgent and imperative matter. In order to create democratic spaces that allow for free expression and free enterprise, the architecture must adopt a pluralism that allows for tactical and flexible use, in which different voices from various social classes and walks of life are given a chance to thrive and have meaningful impacts.

4.1 The Production of Space

Through rigorous attention to the everyday life in the city, Henri Lefebvre outlines his thinking regarding the various layers to the understanding of social spaces. Firstly, he makes the distinction between concrete space (the space of everyday life) and abstract space (commoditized and bureaucratized space). In particular, for Lefebvre, abstract space is:

> A space of quantification and growing homogeneity, a merchandised space where all the elements are exchangeable and thus interchangeable; a police space in which the state tolerates no resistance and no obstacles. Economic space and political space thus converge towards an elimination of all differences. (Lefebvre 1979, 293)

In such space of homogeneity and commodification, Lefebvre warns of its fundamentally contradictory nature because the homogeneity only exists by accentuating and exacerbating the differences (Lefebvre 1991, 52). Such contradictions translate into fragmentation and marginalization, which eventually brews frustration and revolt.

To understand social space, Lefebvre proposes three moments that come together to produce space as we understand it: Representation of space, representational

"For unexpected intersections and differences to flourish"
- Margaret Crawford, 1999

Hong Kong streets becoming protest sites, 2019. Photograph by Yik Fei Lam (Ramzy 2019).

space, and spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991). Representation of space alludes to the way a planner conceives of a space. This space is always abstract because it's planned, not lived. On the other hand, representational space is how people understand and imagine a space. It is the meaning that they attach to the space. The third moment, spatial practices, is the everyday activities that inform and are informed by both the representation of space and representational space.

Through these three moments, people are empowered to belong again in a social space, and make an abstract space concrete. This conceptual framework serves as a crucial framework for creating pluralistic spaces that offer opportunities for people to thrive.

4.2 Incompatibility Between Pluralistic and Commoditized Space

As alluded by Lefebvre, abstract space is a commoditized space that engenders homogeneity. Therefore, a commoditized space is inherently incompatible with pluralistic space.

For example, a shopping mall is one such building type where spaces are heavily commoditized. Each moment a visitor spends in the mall represents a monetary value to the mall and shop owners. And the visitor only has value to the mall if they behave in a certain homogeneous way, which is to dwell and shop. As such, a mall is often then designed to create a circulatory loop that compels everyone to move in a singular direction and constantly consume the merchandized spaces. There is not just a lack of accommodation for other uses of the space, but an outright hostility towards them. For instance, hosting a symposium or a protest would be impossible in most malls as the spaces are not flexible enough to accommodate large gatherings. They will also not be welcomed as they do not conform to the homogeneous behaviour required to bring in revenues for the mall.
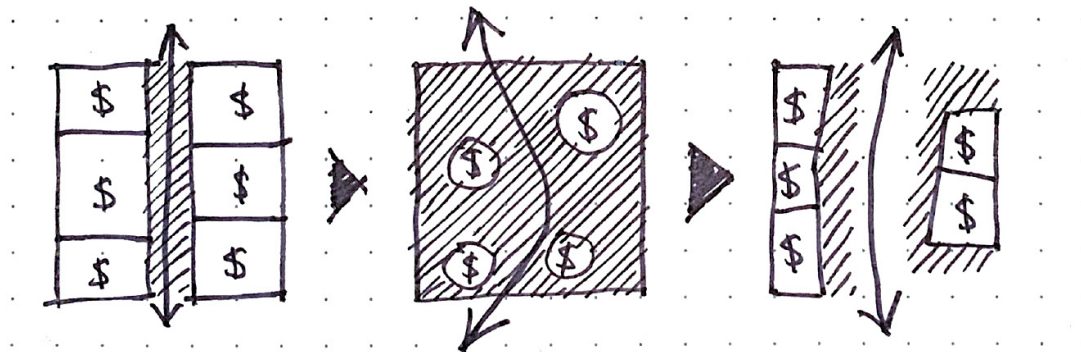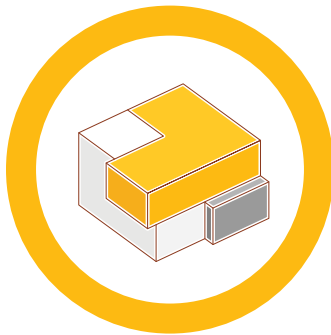

Diagram showing the strategy for decommoditization and adding the in-between space.

Therefore, to create pluralistic space, one must first de-commoditize it. In the project, this means seeking to occupy the gaps between the already commoditized urban spaces, such as above the highway in between the towering office spaces on its sides. The design will also feature reduced formal retail spaces or other privatized spaces in order to make room for multitudes of "spatial practices" that spurs a variety of "representational spaces."

4.3 Accommodating Different Users

As a pluralistic space that allows all voices to thrive, the project aims to create programs that are useful to a high diversity of people and social classes in order to increase the opportunities of their lives intersecting one another.

Conceived as a raised linear park in the city centre connecting to major transport hubs and office towers, the project serves as a key pedestrian infrastructure and provides rejuvenating green space, which will be useful for the white collar workers in the city. At the same time, residential towers that go on top can bring affordable housing to those previously excluded from this city centre. Then, in between the park and the residential towers, the project adds places for public gatherings, forums, and other informal interactions - places that allow all lives to intersect. Furthermore, publicly accessible co-working spaces are added next to the various public spaces in the park, adding another form of dwelling in public life for those who may also have been excluded from the commoditized office spaces in the city.
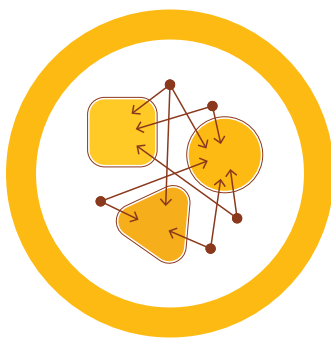
It is only through such orchestration of public life that makes it possible for architecture to provide economic and political agency for the people.

mix of use

Diagram: Strategy of creating programs to accomodate different social sectors

Chapter 5: Necessity to Share

With the objective of providing pluralistic space that brings in different voices, while at the same time recognizing the severe limited availability of space in Hong Kong, it becomes clear that spaces and resources must be shared to maximize their benefits.

5.1 Access to Replace Ownership

To effect a more efficient use of space, the concept of the sharing economy is applied. In particular, given the same amount of space per user, the opportunity to relinquish and share some of the traditionally privatized spaces to create more diverse, generous, and comfortable communal spaces is examined.

According to economist Jeremy Rifkin in his description of the sharing economy, "the capitalist era, wedded to the exchange of property in markets, is ceding ground to the access of services in the Collaborative Commons" (Rifkin 2014, Chap. 13). He contends that the shift from private ownership to communal access is fundamental in the upcoming surge in efficiency and economic growth. This new efficiency can be explained by examining the car sharing industry as an analogy.

Instead of owning cars which are used only a fraction of the time over the duration of the ownership, people can now subscribe to car sharing communities, gaining access to a fleet of shared vehicles. This results in less idle time for the vehicles which boosts their efficiency. "A study of 11 leading car-sharing enterprises found that 80 percent of the members sampled who owned a car before car sharing sold it after joining the network. Of those households that still

shared resources

Diagram: Strategy of replacing ownership with access.

owned cars, the number of vehicles owned dropped from 0.47 vehicles per household to 0.24 vehicles per household after joining a car-share club… In 2009, each car-share vehicle eliminated 15 personally owned cars" resulting in a reduction of "CO_2 emissions in the United States by 482,170 tons" (Rifkin 2014, Chap. 13).

Thinking about various spaces within the home, there are also inefficiencies of use much similar to car ownership. In a New Zealand study, people spend 28% of their day in their living room, 36% in their bedrooms, just 3.4% in bathrooms, 1.7% in study rooms, and 0.4% in laundry rooms (Khajehzadeh and Vale 2015, 157). This shows that living spaces are left vacant most of the time, and presents an important opportunity to optimize their efficiency, which is especially crucial in Hong Kong's context of severely constrained amount of affordable space.

In particular, as lower rent helps free up financial resources towards personal enterprising pursuits, thus enabling personal empowerment and upward mobility, the thesis design prescribes that the average amount of space per person must be below the current median amount of gross building area per person in Hong Kong:

160 square feet x (1 – 43%) x (1/75%) = 122 square feet,

where 160 square feet is the average amount of living space per person, 43% is the discount factor to derive the median value, and 75% is the average percentage of leasable area per gross building area, the inversion of which would be the gross-up factor.

5.2 Co-living Model

The act of sharing living spaces is exemplified in the co-living model which have been proliferating in recent years in various expensive cities around the world, including in Hong Kong. That said, the idea of sharing spaces communally is not new.

One can look to examples such as the MIT Simmons Hall students' residence designed by Steven Holl Architects, where organically shaped communal spaces dramatically penetrates multiple storeys of the otherwise rectangular building of student housing units. Students can use these communal spaces to traverse across different parts of the building to meet their friends. In effect, these spaces become an important infrastructure that galvanizes the network of communities in the building. More importantly, the students are afforded access to an intermediate semi-public space where they can escape the confines of their individual units without having to confront the vast scale of the public realm instantly. Humanly, such intermediate spaces that offer extra choices of different scales and privacy in turn empowers the residents by instilling a stronger sense of control and freedom.

Photograph of the interior communal space at MIT Simmons Hall by Paul Warchol. (Steven Holl Architects 2002)
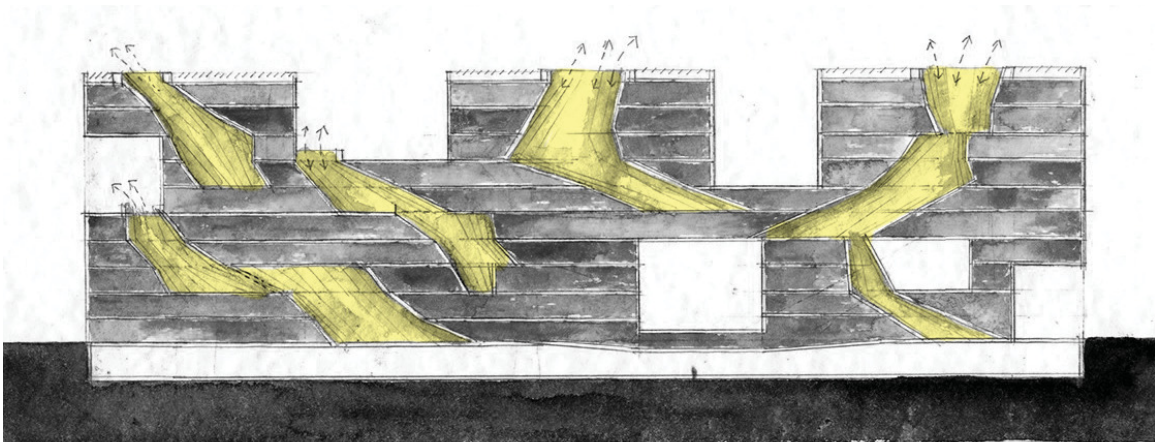
Section of MIT Simmons Hall recolourized by the author. (Steven Holl Architects 2002)
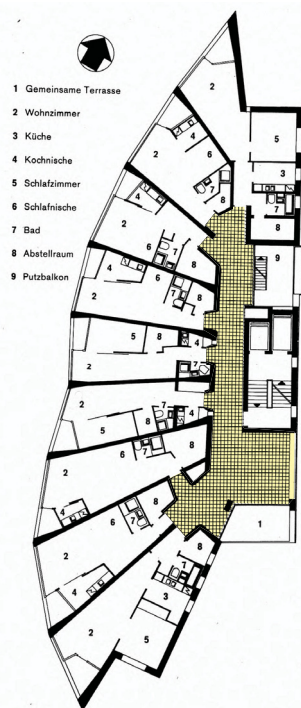
Plan of Neue Vahr Apartments by Alvar Aalto, 1959. (Aalto 1959)

Photograph of PodShare San Francisco on their web booking portal (PodShare n.d.)

Likewise, Alvar Aalto's Neue Vahr Apartments also feature a very un-capitalistic communal space on each floor, where all apartment residents can occupy. Again, the extra choice of sociability and scale gives residents the autonomy over how they express themselves.

Modern coliving models are pushing to the extremes in the name of economy. At PodShare, a coliving space startup in California, the founder Elvina Beck created stacked sleeping pods that are essentially semi-enclosed bunk beds. With one side open to the shared room, the sleeping pods have zero privacy, where everything and every sound the resident do or make is on full display to the other residents in the room. Beck claims that this design allows for social surveillance, a way to keep all residents in good behaviour (Bahney 2019).

While the idea of social surveillance clearly violates the ideals of individual liberties, by the number of locations PodShare is expanding into, it shockingly proves to be a very successful business model. Beck mentions that people tend to stay for a short time – usually several weeks – until they befriend someone in the commune and find an apartment to share. Although this may indicate that people do not enjoy staying at PodShare for long, it could also be an effect of the high price of PodShare. At US$1000-1200 per month, the cost is comparative to a shared bedroom in the same Californian cities.

5.3 Who Is It For?

In a CNN interview (Bahney 2019), one of the tenants Stephen Johnson, a founder of a marketing company, mentions that the loss of privacy is something that he was able to quickly adapt to, and that the problem is alleviated by having access to multiple hangout spaces. Regarding

his economic situation, Johnson indicates that his firm does well and that he pays himself very conservatively at $3000, which illustrates his intention to keep profits in his company to drive maximum growth. Another tenant Rayyan Zahid shares a similar sentiment. As a software engineer, Zahid mentions that even though PodShare is very affordable to him, implying that he has the financial means to afford something larger and more private, he chooses to live in PodShare because he is able to save more money. He is unfazed by the lack of privacy "at the moment" as he is a newly graduated bachelor.

The interviews of the tenants hold important revelations: that this type of coliving environment although may not please everyone yet serves a particular demographics very well. It is for those with a deeply enterprising spirit, who are willing to sacrifice privacy to liberate themselves from the prohibitive housing costs in the most productive and lively cities and to direct financial resources towards their enterprising goals. It works particularly well for those with little baggage or attachment to personal privacy and space, such that their "sacrifice" is minimal.

Therefore, through the strategies of sharing resources and the coliving model, the project is able to gain spatial efficiency which is a particularly crucial criterion from the beginning due to the spatial realities of Hong Kong. It is recognized that such model will not serve everyone well, but shows promises for the particular targeted demographics of this thesis – young people who seek free enterprise and free expression.

Chapter 6: Location

To combat the economic and political repressions in Hong Kong, the earlier chapters have established the need to create pluralistic spaces and to share the limited spatial resources. These objectives lead to the decision to locate the project in Central, the epicentre of power and wealth in Hong Kong.

6.1 Disrupting the Exclusivity of Powers

To achieve maximum agency, the architectural solution must first bring together different stakeholders in order to remove the physical barrier to participating meaningfully, both economically and politically. In particular, situating in urban centres provides the best opportunity for a mixed-class civic life and economic empowerment. Central, the central business district of Hong Kong, is chosen as the
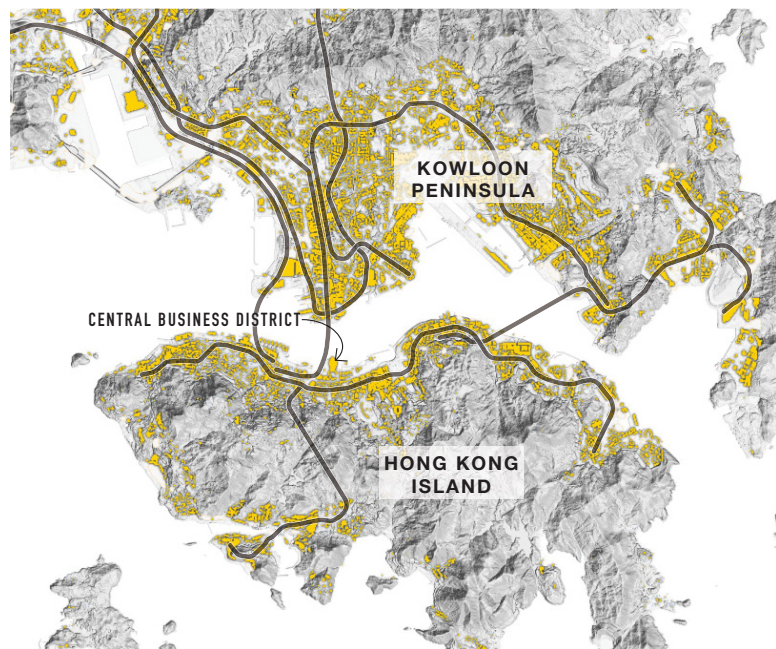
Close up map showing urban Hong Kong, where dark yellow represents built forms and dark lines represent the MTR. (Base map from Stevenson and Wu 2019)

site of the intervention due to its concentration of talent and wealth and its position as a hyperconnected transport hub.

The economic empowerment comes from the opportunities to leverage the existing urban network, including superior access to jobs, talent, a broad range of business and consumer demands, and investment capital. These feed on one another to create a self-reinforcing economic network. For example, more talent brings in more investment capital; more investment capital brings about more jobs; more jobs in turn generate more consumer and business needs, which then attract even more capital.

Featuring the most expensive office spaces in Hong Kong – and the world (Choo 2019) – Central hosts only the most productive and talented workers, who come from all over the world. This network of highly competent professionals represent enormous economic opportunities, but yet lack diversity, as the highest incomes often goes to those that serve the finance and banking industry, which makes up nearly half the capitalization of the Hang Seng Index, the main stock index of Hong Kong. The outsized role of the finance and banking industry in Hong Kong can be best demonstrated by the fact that its stock market capitalization is 10.5x its GDP, compared to 2x in Switzerland, 1.5x in the US, and 1.1x in Canada, Malaysia, and Japan (The World Bank n.d.).

The concentration of talent and wealth, and the lack of diversity, present an important opportunity to leverage and expand the existing network with new energy and creativity. The potential result is a network that is more diversified, more powerful, and most importantly, more empowering, if

Map of Central. Stylized by author. Yellow paths indicate elevated walkways. Hatched orange-yellow areas are MTR stations. (Base map derived from Survey and Mapping Office 2019)

centrality

Diagram: Strategy of central location.

the project succeeds in its mandate to lower the barrier of participation.

In addition to being a wealth and talent hub, Central is also a hyperconnected transport hub, adding to its relevance and legitimacy as a potential site of pluralistic participation. Four MTR lines emerge from this neighbourhood, conveniently connecting riders to west, east, and south of Hong Kong Island, to Kowloon Peninsula across Victoria Harbour, as well as to the airport in 24 minutes. It is also where two major ferry terminals are located, one transporting passengers to Macau outside the border while the other connecting to various islands in Hong Kong. Arterial roads filled with double-decker buses pierce through the neighbourhood to ensure the most direct vehicular access, whereas an underground highway along the northern shore connects to further destinations in the city. Finally, a network of elevated

pedestrian walkways allow pedestrians to comfortably and expediently get to all corners of the neighbourhood without confronting the fast and noisy vehicular traffic on the ground level. This system also connects to the Central-Mid-Level Escalators system, which brings riders up the steep hills of Hong Kong to the vibrant SoHo neighbourhood populated with restaurants, bars, and galleries, as well as to the upper residential neighbourhoods in Mid-Levels.

The overlay of these various transport systems makes Central a hyperconnected place in Hong Kong where all lives cross, in turn attracting even more wealth and talent here. As such, Central is an irreplaceable place to conduct business and build a support network. Adding young energy and talent into this area can help spark further economic and political potential of this place, mutually benefitting the incumbents and the new blood.

6.2 Occupying Urban Void - the Infrastructure

The urban centres of Hong Kong are fully built, with almost no free plots to take. The option of purchasing an existing building and redeveloping it would also come at an enormous cost due to the price of land. Following the theoretical framework of decommodification in this chapter, this next design strategy pertains to utilizing urban voids, the spaces in between buildings, which are just about the only remaining free spaces in the city that haven't been fully compartmentalized, commoditized, and privatized. In particular, wide multi-lane road infrastructure not only consumes a significant amount of urban spaces, but also creates divisive limits in the city that inhibits the continuity and quality of the pedestrian experience. This presents an important opportunity for this thesis to utilize the space above
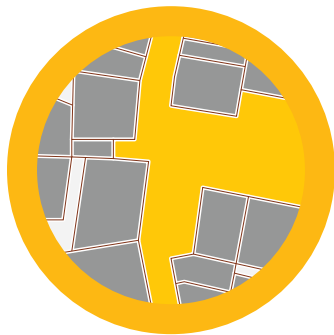
Above: Satellite image of the site area. Urban void highlighted. (Google Maps 2019)
Below: Photograph of Connaught Road, Pedestrian realm highlighted. (Bahlmann 2007)

such infrastructure to further densify the urban environment and improve the connectivity in the pedestrian realm.

With a width of 8 to 12 lanes, Connaught Road is the major arterial road that pierces through Central, creating a divisive

rift in the city that isolates the office buildings to the north from pedestrian access on the ground level. However, dubbed as a city without ground, pedestrians have claimed triumph over vehicular traffic on the ground with the use of elevated footbridges. This results in the main public pedestrian level moving up to the level of the footbridges, where the ground level north of Connaught Road is left as a no man's land, only dominated by the road infrastructure.

While creating an elevated level, whether as a pedestrian footbridge or a vehicular highway, usually comes with detrimental impact to the pedestrian experience below, Connaught Road presents a unique opportunity, because creating an elevated level here comes with zero impact on the pedestrian experience, as there are no pedestrian on the ground anyway.

urban void

Diagram: Strategy of using the urban void.
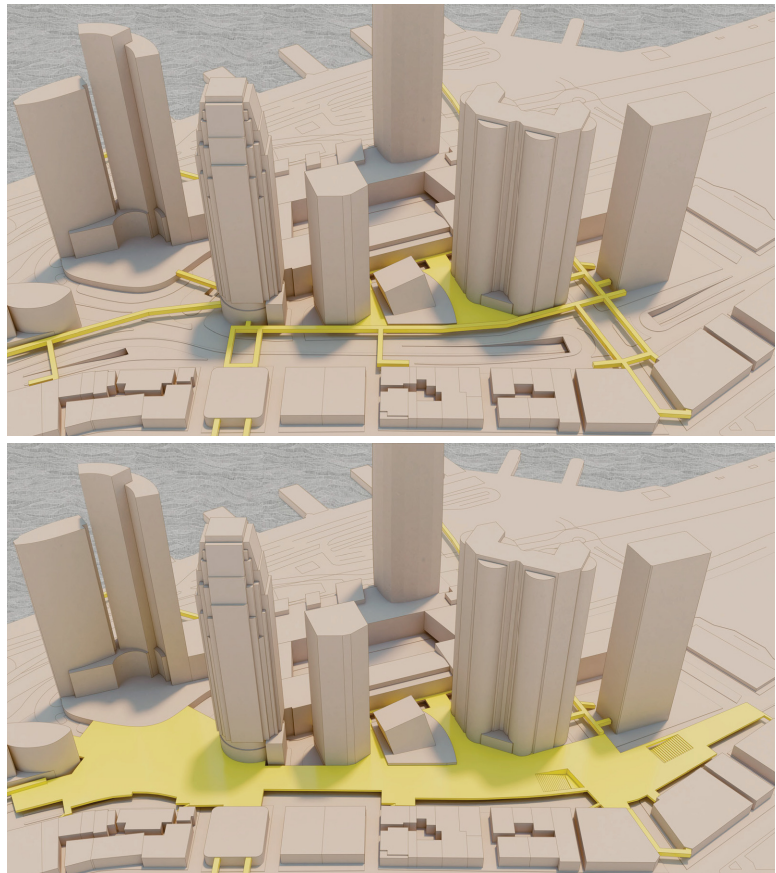
Before and after the addition of a new pedestrian platform.
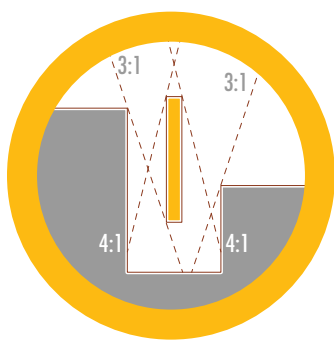
The realization that creating an elevated platform over the road comes with zero pedestrian impact is profound because it means that the design can feature an extensive platform that is effectively free new land, except for the cost of creating the structure which is negligible when compared to the cost of land in Hong Kong.

In addition to creating new land for further densification of the city, this proposed platform will also mitigate the divisive nature of the arterial road by reducing the perceptibility of the road and re-stitching the urban fabric into a seamless pedestrian experience.

In his book Cities for People, Jan Gehl raises a profound concern with human senses and scale in the design of cities. Criticizing cars and car traffic as a pressing urban planning problem, Gehl contends that the scale of cars do not relate well to the human scale of a traditional, organic city that "grew on the basis of everyday activities" (Ghel 2010, 55). In particular, cars are unrelated to the human scale in three different aspects, size, speed, and noise. In terms of size, cars are big; even a compact European car would feel too big in a room for humans, not to mention enormous trucks and buses (Ghel 2010, 55). Cars also move much faster than humans, at 50-100km/h compared to the average walking speed of 5km/h. Lastly, cars make a lot of noise, often overwhelming human conversations on the sidewalk. Therefore, the 8-12-lane Connaught Road obliterates the human-scale experience of the street, and would benefit from having a new platform that isolates the road noise and hides the car traffic for a much better pedestrian experience of the city.

Readers can look to Chicago as a working model of implementing a new ground plane over existing streets. Its multilevel street system features as many as three street levels, thereby increasing the capacity of the streets without widening them to unhuman scales. Pedestrian traffic would always be on the top level for minimal road noise, natural light, and fresh air.

The strategy of creating a pedestrian platform over the existing arterial road allows the project to take advantage of the current urban void and rift, to create valuable new real estate right in the centre of the city, and to convert the existing road of unrelatable scale into a continuous urban fabric that offers a much more pleasant pedestrian experience and therefore a much better city life.

## 6.3 Obeying the Law and Capturing Views

With the addition of the elevated platform, the next task is to evaluate how to occupy the urban void volumetrically, with two opposing goals: 1. Minimize impact to incumbent buildings and users, and 2. Maximize built area.

As a new urban addition striving to coexist with the incumbent formal and privatized properties in the area, the project will observe the existing building rules as a way of legitimizing its politically defiant act of occupying Central Hong Kong. Therefore, this next design strategy is to use the local building regulations to determine the massing strategy of the project. Compliance with the regulations also aligns with the goal of capturing views for the residential towers.

Within the same block of development, the existing regulations require that windows of inhabited and office spaces that do not face the street have an adequate amount

legitimacy

Diagram: Strategy of obeying the law.

of fresh air and daylight. In particular, there must be no obstruction above an upward tilting plane extended from the window at 1 metre above the floor, at an angle of 1:3 for inhabited spaces and 1:4 for office spaces (B(P)O 2018).

Compliance with this regulation means that the residential towers must stay distant from the office buildings on two sides of the road in order to gain height. It also means that, in order for the lower residential units to get a sufficient amount of daylight, the residential towers also need to avoid facing the much taller office buildings to the north. As a result, the residential towers are able to capture views of the Victoria Harbour to the north.
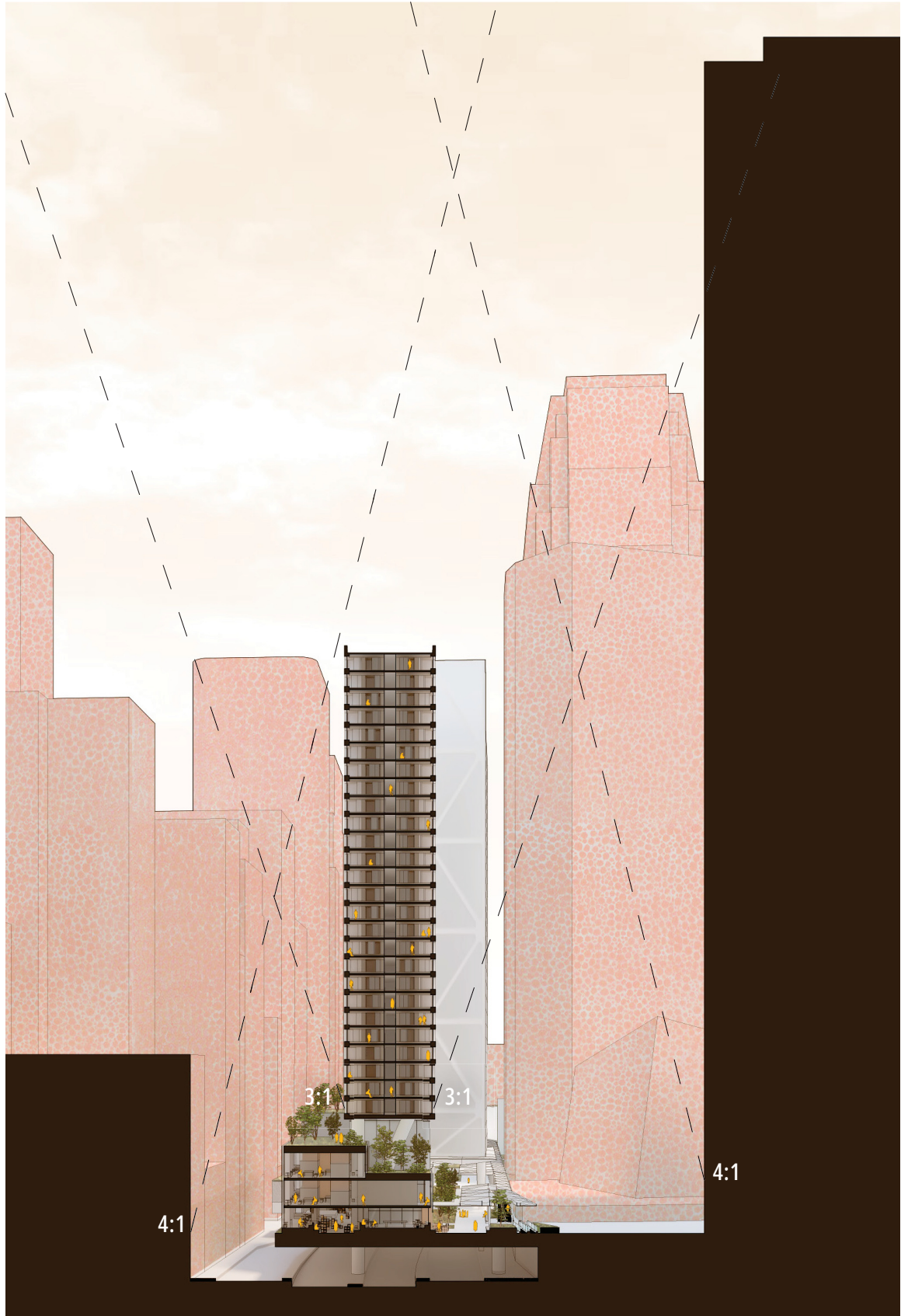
Cross section of the project in relation to the local legal daylight requirements.

Chapter 7: Rejecting "Junkspace"

Now that the site and its related parameters are established, Rem Koolhas's idea of the "Junkspace" offers some inspirations about how to shape an urban landscape in a way that rejects repression.

7.1 Spatial Clarity

Referring to the oppressive nature of big shopping malls, Rem Koolhas coins the term Junkspace to describe such highly commoditized spaces, featuring an endless interior space that is enabled by air-conditioning and escalators:

> Continuity is the essence of Junkspace; it exploits any invention that enables expansion, deploys the infrastructure of seamlessness: escalator, air-conditioning, sprinkler, fire shutter, hot-air curtain... It is always interior, so extensive that you rarely perceive limits; it promotes disorientation by any means. (Koolhas 2002, 175)
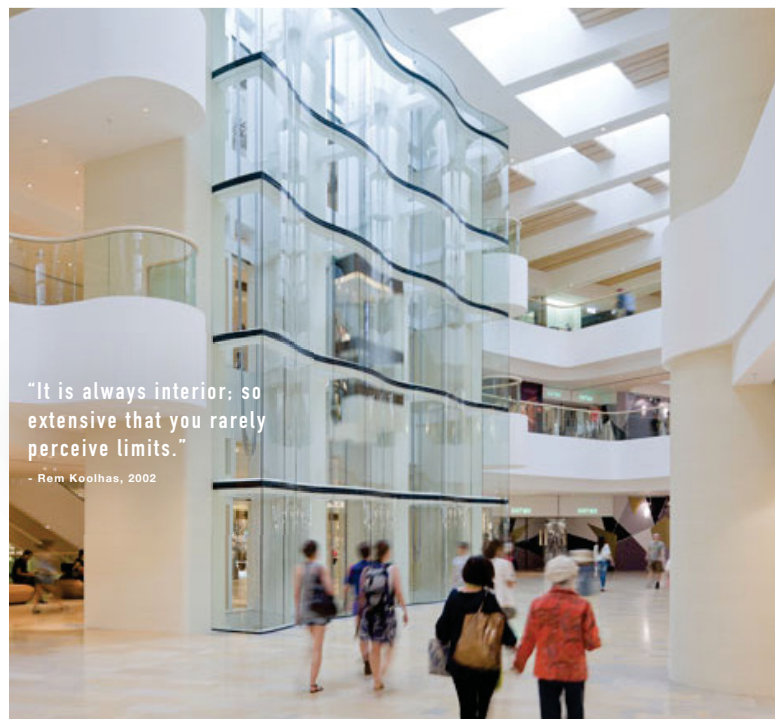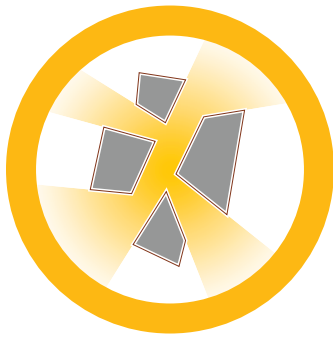

"It is always interior; so extensive that you rarely perceive limits."
- Rem Koolhas, 2002

Interior of Pacific Place, an upscale mall in Admiralty, photographed by Iwan Bann. (Frearson 2011)

Within Koolhas' lamentation of Junkspace lies critical hints in possible answers towards eliminating the oppressive nature of such spaces. In particular, in order to reduce the sensation of inescapable limitless space, where one is trapped within and feels disoriented, the space must allow people to see out and orient themselves in reference to other urban elements outside.
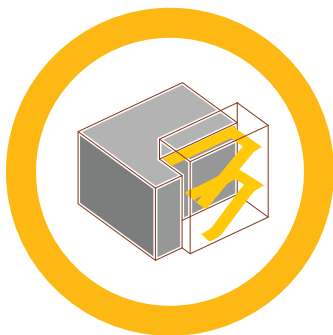
7.2 Inverting and Fracturing the Mall

Views outside promotes a clear understanding of the space and a sense of control and autonomy. To achieve this goal, the project rejects the common podium-tower typology in Hong Kong featuring a big-box shopping mall with an endless interior loop. The strategy is to invert the mall (by placing the circulatory path on the exterior of programs), and to fracture the mall (by splitting the big-box volumes into smaller volumes more relatable to the human scale). This way, the pedestrian is no longer constantly surrounded by a disorienting interior space, but is able to see around or between smaller buildings, and understand the urban context beyond the project.

7.3 Clear Vertical Circulation

The next strategy to address Koolhas' critique of the Junkspace is to clearly display vertical circulation outwards, where pedestrians on the exterior path can easily understand where and how they can access the upper public realm. This design strategy again aims to increase the legibility and accessibility of the public realm, empowering people to use the space as they wish.
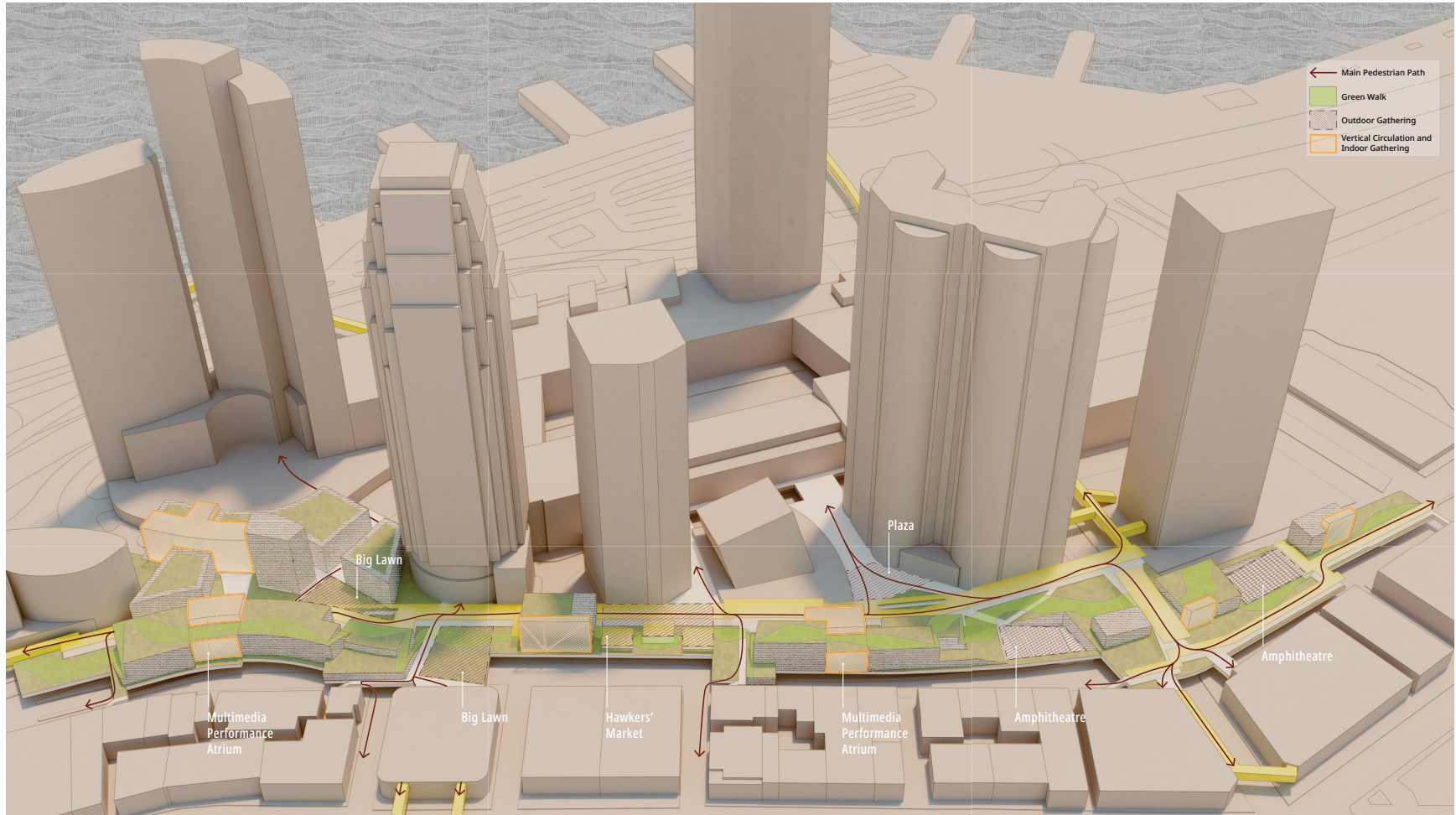
invert+fracture

Diagram: the strategy of discrete volumes to facilitate views.

clear circulation

Diagram: the strategy of clear vertical circulation.
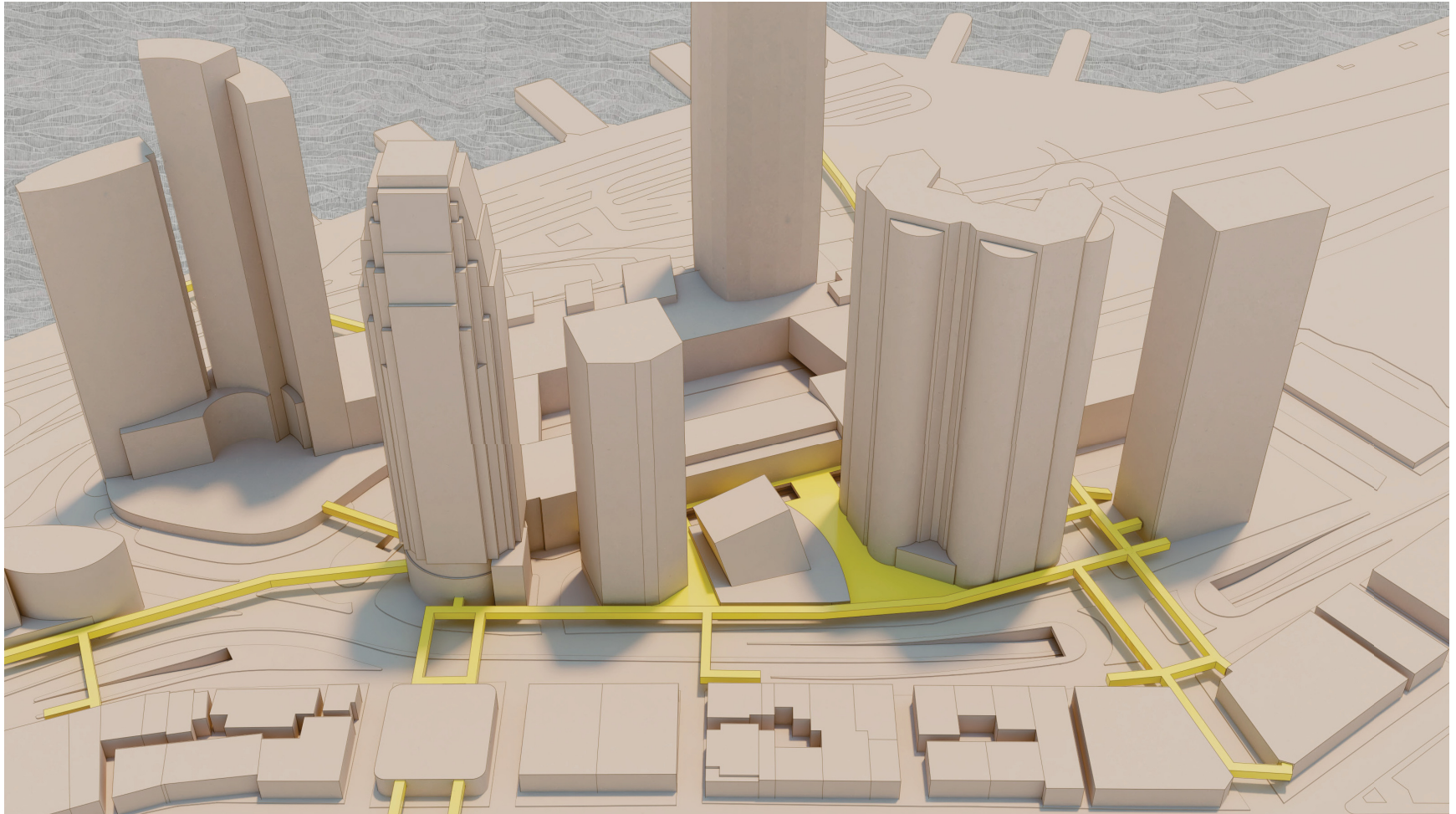
Original state, with commercial towers to the south cut out.
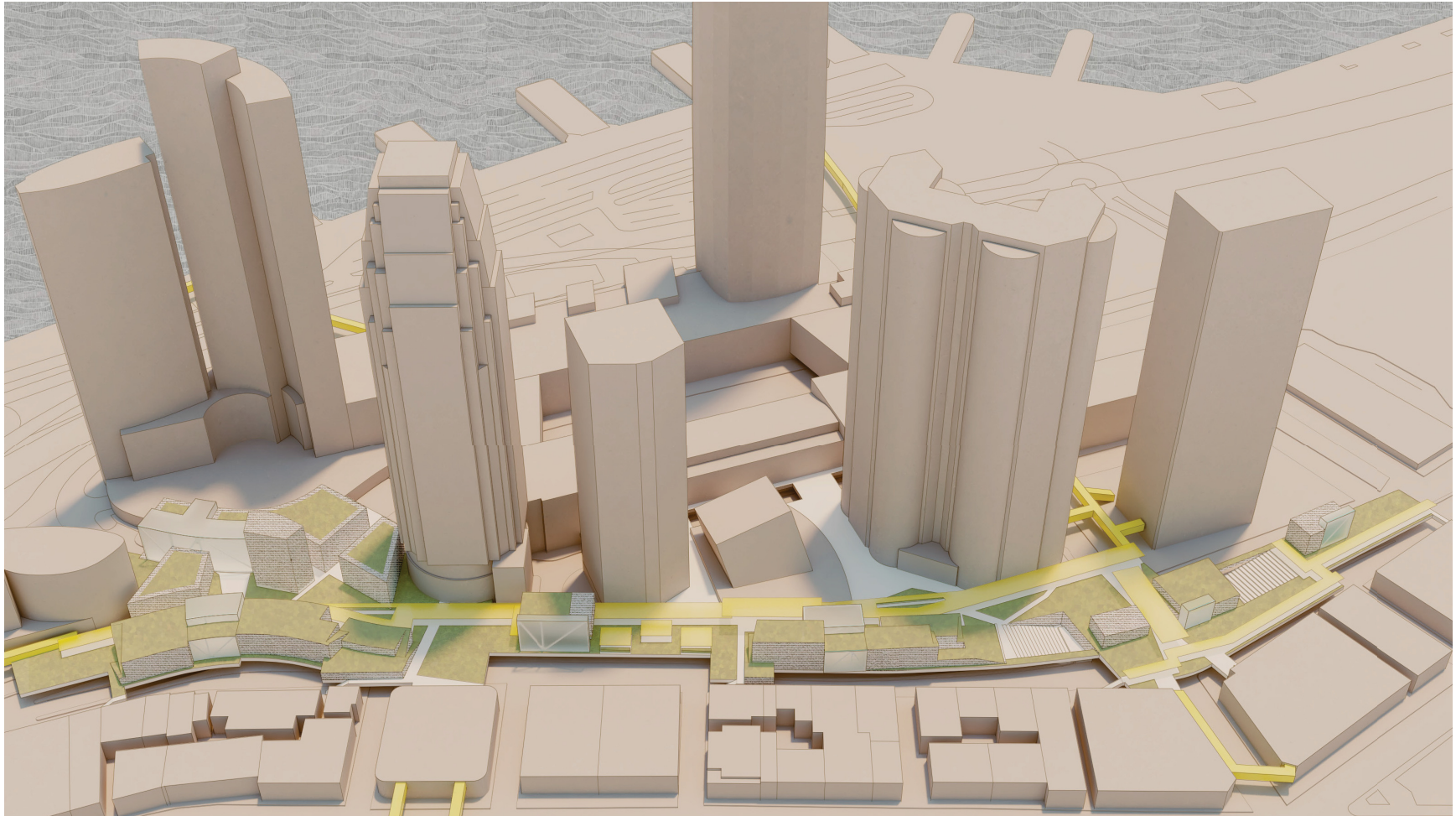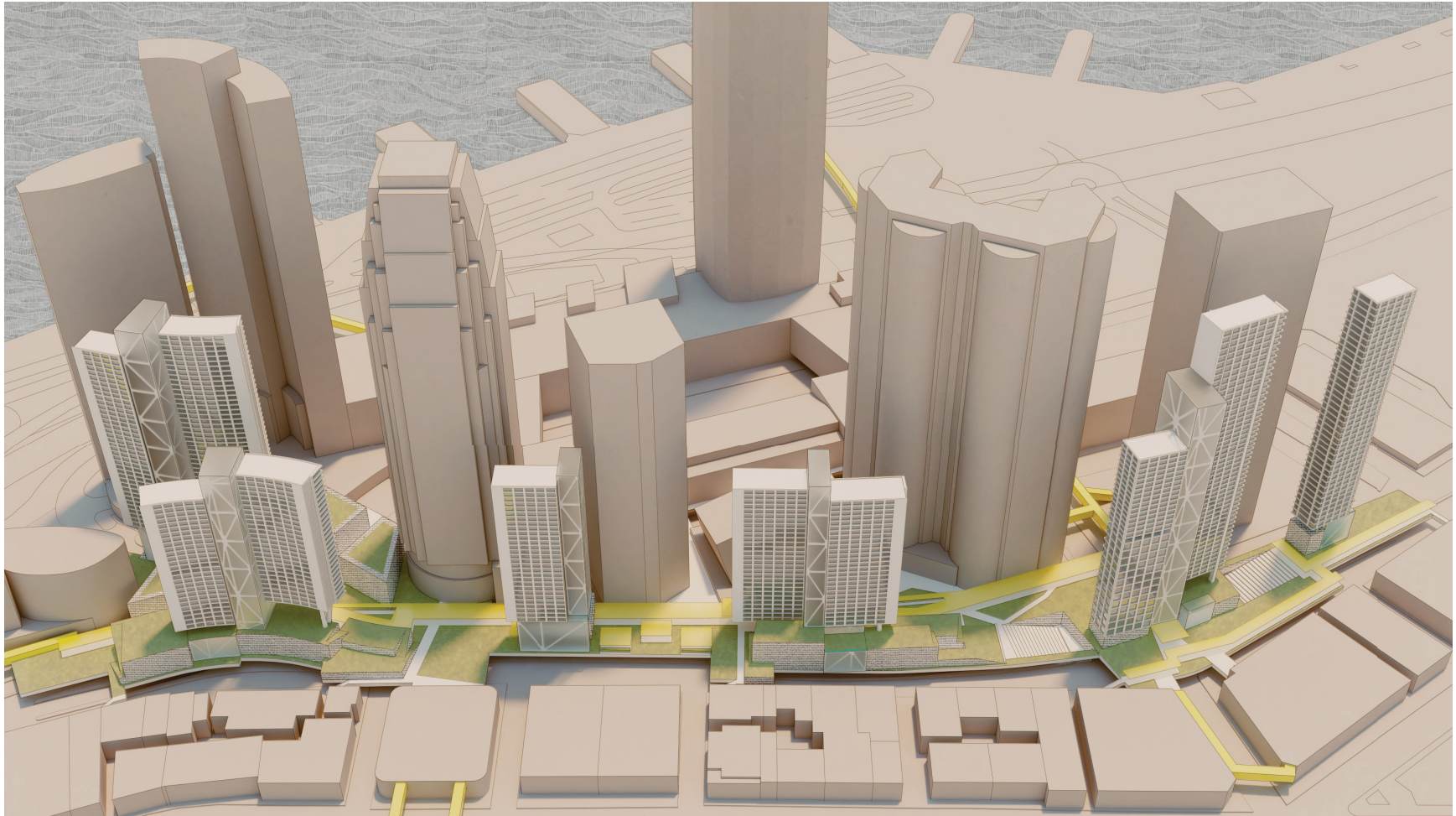
Massing design of the park, featuring terraformed pavillions and a canopied
pedestrian footpath that connects to the elevated walkway network in the area.
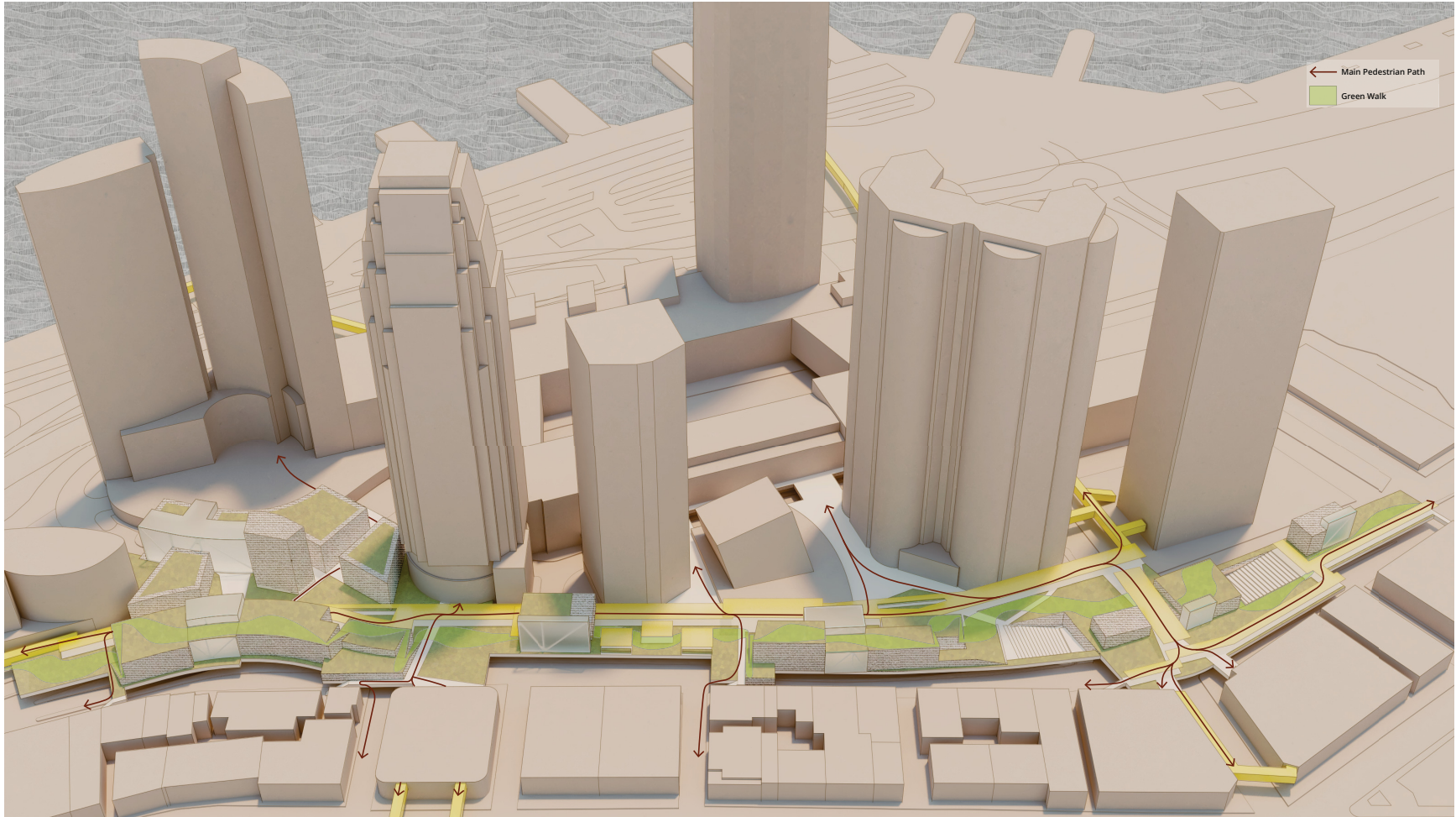
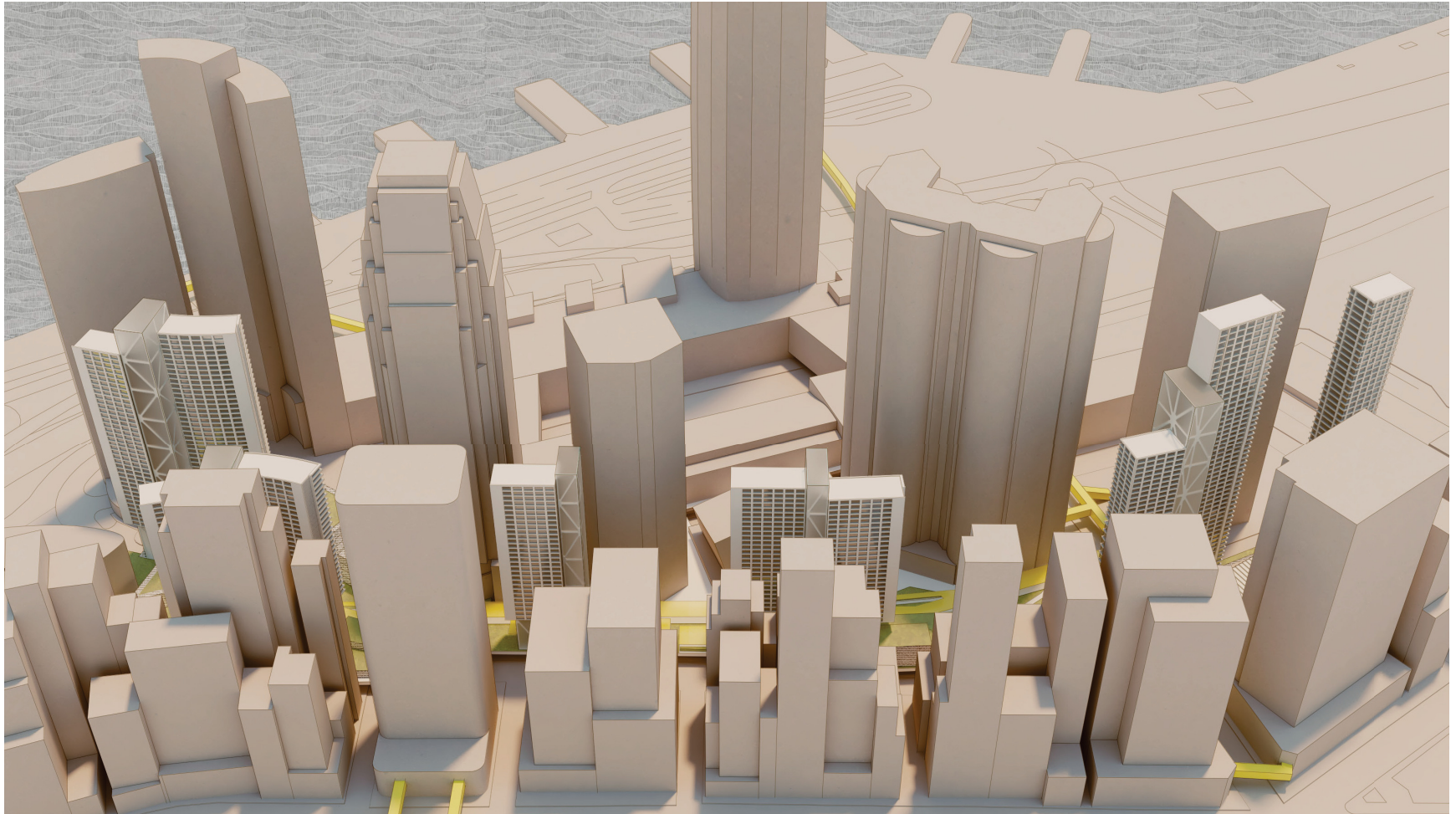Massing design of the park, with the main pedestrian paths and the green walk highlighted.

Massing design of the park, with the major public spaces highlighted additionally.

Legend:
- Main Pedestrian Path
- Green Walk
- Outdoor Gathering
- Vertical Circulation and Indoor Gathering

Labels in image: Big Lawn, Plaza, Big Lawn, Multimedia Performance Atrium, Hawkers' Market, Multimedia Performance Atrium, Amphitheatre, Amphitheatre
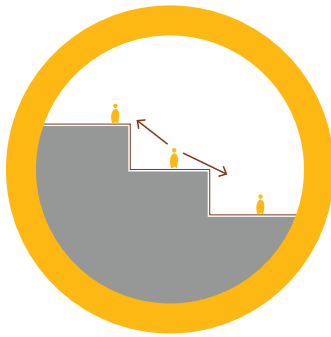
Massing design of the whole project, with residential towers added on top.

The project within the full context.

Chapter 8: City for People

This chapter, City for People, adds to the above rejection of "Junkspace" as it continues on the strategies that combat repression and foster a pluralistic space, in particular focusing on how to catalyze various social interactions in the human scale.

8.1 Visual Connection and Continuity

This section brings up a key observation by Jan Gehl that informs the next design strategy regarding the human scale – the eye level. Gehl points out that our sense of sight is primarily horizontal, and that we look down more than we look up (Gehl 2010, 38).

In order to create a park space that continues over the roofs of the public programs along the project, the roofs must remain low in order for the park to feel relatable and continuous. A tiered roof strategy is adopted to create the relatable scale while allowing for the pavilions to gain height and usable space. The residential towers above are raised to further create visual continuity of the park while adhering to the strategy of the fractured volumes in the previous chapter on "Junkspace."

8.2 The Activated Edge

Jan Gehl also points out that the city's edges – "where city meets building" – define space, foster exchanges, and create places to dwell (Gehl 2010, 75). In his observation, these city's edges are where the richest human sensory experiences are concentrated, and therefore are crucial in creating a lively urban experience. While he refers particularly to the delineation between building interiors and

terracing

Diagram above: the strategy of terracing the park pavillions to increase relatability.

Diagram below: the strategy to activating the edge between circulation and program.

activate edge

View of the park approaching one of the terraformed pavillions

the street, his ideas about the qualities of the city's edges can be extended to anywhere a circulation space meets another program or is otherwise delineated. The edge is what brings life to the space.

Following this observation, this thesis project places an emphasis on creating "edges" as opportunities to define space and allow for dwelling and exchanges. For example, on the main canopied walkway, plantation is added along the side of the travellators to create an edge along the footpath, creating a place to casually dwell or perform. On the monolithic landscaping pavilions along the park, the façade facing the footpath on the ground level is partly fractured with a sawtooth pattern in plan to provide a richer and more human-scale experience, allowing passers-by to peek into the space inside through the individual sawtooth windows. This sawtooth section facilitates dwelling along the edge on both sides, in order to maximize the richness.
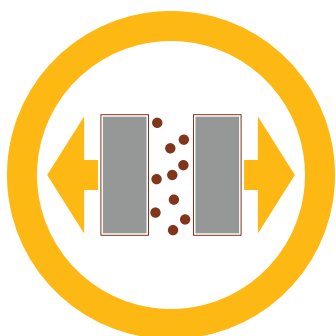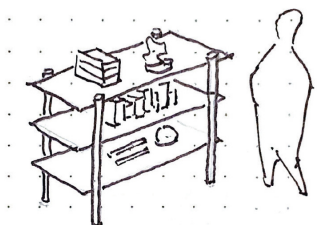
blurred boundary

Diagram: strategy of blurring the boundaries between programs, used in conjunction with the edge activation strategy above.

shelf

counter

bench

Various configurations of the stackable furniture

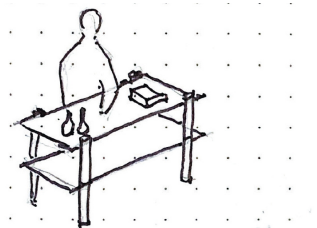## 8.3 Blurring Boundary – Emerging from the In-Between

Margaret Crawford suggests that ambiguous space can allow for unexpected intersections and differences to flourish (Crawford 1999, 34). Her view informs the strategy of creating an ambiguous in-between space that straddles between the formally commoditized space and the circulatory space, which helps enrich Jan Gehl's idea of the city's edges; This in-between space should allow for open interpretation and appropriation.

Her observation of garage sales in Los Angeles points to important qualities in the informal use of such in-between space, specifically the blurring and juxtaposition of the domestic, public, and commercial realms (Crawford 1999, 28).
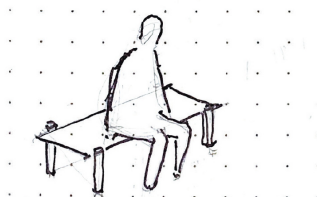
> The delicate patterning of lace, flowers, and pillows, the softness of T-shirts and stuffed animals – all invoke the intimacy of the interior rather than the no-man's-land of the street. In public places, familiar items such as tables, chairs, and tablecloths, usually seen inside the home, transform neglected and underused space into islands of human occupation… The vender's temporary use hijacks these spaces, changing their meaning. Publicly owned spaces are briefly inhabited by citizens; pricate spaces undergo an ephemeral decommodification. (Crawford 1999, 30)

She contends that such juxtaposition and collision of lives "create a new condition of social fluidity that begins to break down the separate, specialized, and hierarchical structures," which generates "the liberating potential that Henri Lefebvre attributes to urban life" (Crawford 1999, 34). Her conclusion shows the importance of leaving undefined spaces for the informal everyday life to flourish in between the boundaries of established understandings. Therefore, the project will intentionally create an in-between space between the

formalized uses of the commoditized retail space and the public circulation space.

For example, the café seating area in the project, the interior formalized space, is set against the sawtooth façade of the park pavilion, along which the benches outside can be augmented with additional furniture to become a market or a performance space facing the main pedestrian pathway. Performers can bring out stackable hollow cubes of 40 cm to make counters, display shelves, walls, or individual seats for whatever activities imaginable, fostering endless creativity and a slightly dwarfed domestic scale that creates an engaging and endearing contrast with the public realm.

Inhabited section of the project showing an accomodation of different kinds of users and the edges as opportunities of inhabitation and interactions.

Chapter 9: Privacy

As we share spaces and other resources in both the public realm and the residential areas, the issue of privacy intuitively becomes of chief concern. This chapter discusses the fundamental value of privacy philosophically and psychologically, as well as the related design strategies applied in the project.

9.1 What Is Privacy?

Within a collaborative space such the co-living space in this project, there's the question of how exactly to facilitate such collaborative sharing community in a way that respects individuals' dignity and comfort. Many readers will intuitively understand such respect as a fundamental right to privacy. However, privacy is not even a right defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And to this day, legal experts still struggle to define privacy as a legal concept, partly because of evolving technologies that create unforeseen problems regarding use of collected data.

With the legal ambiguities surrounding privacy, this article will dig deeper into the philosophical understanding of what privacy is at its core and what it means to human dignity. Dr. Andrei Marmor, a professor of Philosophy and Law at Cornell Law School, attempted to philosophically define privacy in his 2015 peer-reviewed article "What is the Right to Privacy?" In particular, he offers a revealing thought exercise:

> Suppose we found ourselves one day living in a world in which nothing can be hidden: walls are all made of glass with no blinds or shades of any kind, every conversation can be heard by others, and nothing that you say or do can be hidden from anyone. Everything is there for anyone to see, hear, or smell—a kind of global Panopticon, as it were. Whether

physically possible or not, this would seem to be a horrific world to live in. Why? For one thing, we would lose the ability to do some things that we really need to do in seclusion. Most people would feel extremely uncomfortable to be seen defecating, masturbating, or having sex, and most people do not normally want to see (or smell or hear) random others doing these things…

What we mainly lose in a Panopticon world, I will suggest, is something that is essential for shaping our interactions with others; it is, first and foremost, our social lives that would be severely compromised, not necessarily or primarily our inner or private world, so to speak. The main interest in question here is the interest in having a reasonable measure of control over ways in which we present ourselves to others and the ability to present different aspects of ourselves, and what is ours, to different people. This is an essential aspect of our well-being. It is something that has an important role to play in how well one's life is going. (Marmor 2015)

Here, Dr. Marmor concludes that the right to privacy protects a fundamental interest in "having a reasonable measure of control over ways in which we present ourselves to others and the ability to present different aspects of ourselves" (Marmor 2015). Furthermore, he qualifies this conclusion by pointing out two key reasons that we have such an interest: 1. Different relationships require different patterns of social behaviours and expectations, and 2. Intimacy creates expectations and responsibilities that should only be undertaken voluntarily (Marmor 2015).

Privacy is important because it protects our ability to regulate our complex social relationships by modulating which aspects of ourselves we show others, which is an essential aspect of being a human. Then, an architecture that affords privacy is not just about making rooms in which people can conceal themselves, but is fundamentally about giving a sense of control over how they present themselves.

Such a sense of control is empowering because it helps reduce stress, as psychological studies have shown that "prolonged experiences with uncontrollable environmental

conditions [is] associated with learned helplessness" (Evans and McCoy 1998, 88). In particular, "insufficient spatial resources [and] inflexible spatial arrangements…threaten individual needs to effectively interact with interior space" (Evans and McCoy 1998, 88).

9.2 Choices of Speeds, Scales, and Engagements

One way to allow for such control is to create spaces of various levels of scale and social engagement. In the public realm of the project, for example, inhabitants can choose to dwell in the upper levels in order to be secluded from the moving crowds on the main level, or to dwell in the multi-storey-height atrium space with a transparent façade to embrace the ongoing social events, through which the major public vertical circulation to the rooftop park is routed.
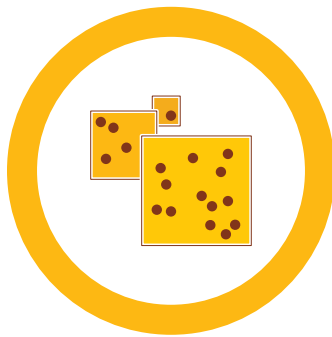
multi scale

Diagram: the strategy of creating different scales of spaces
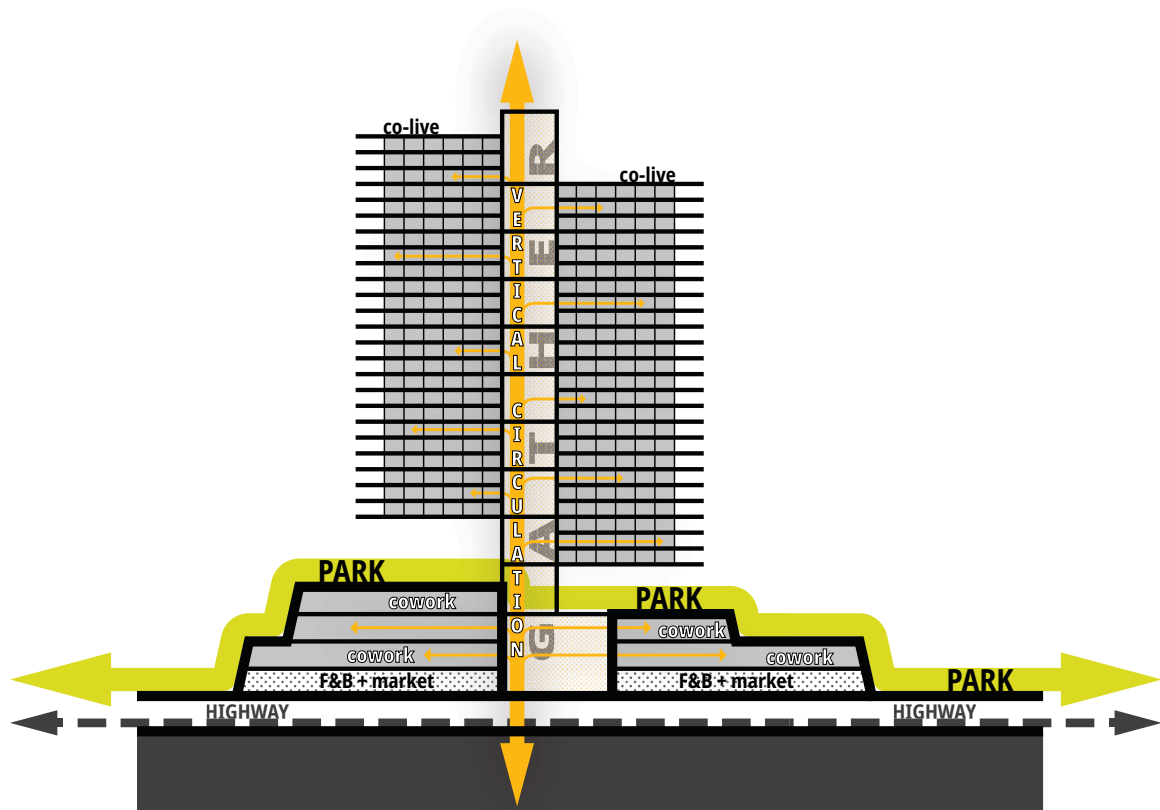
Diagram: Arrangement of programs of different scales and publicity.
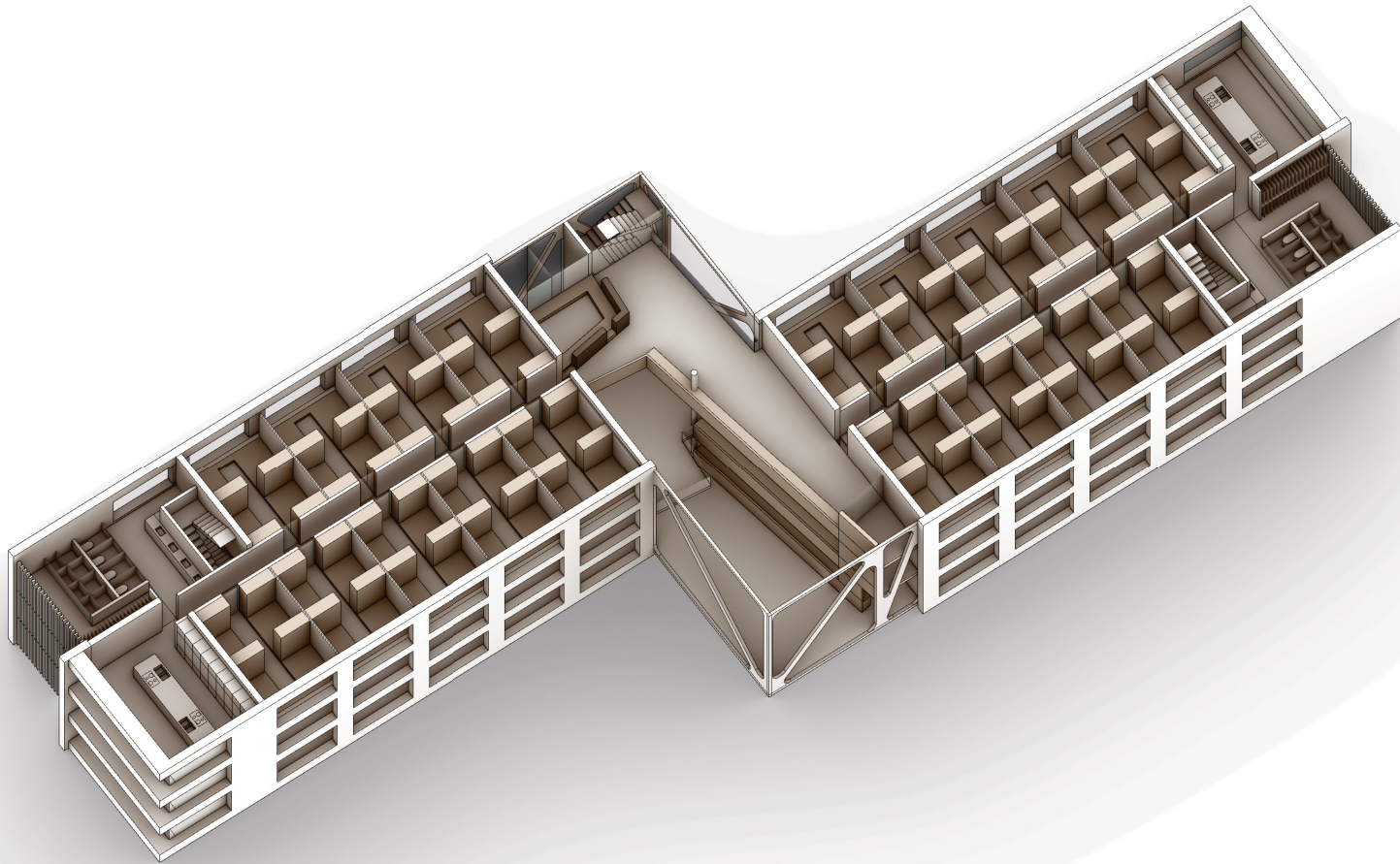
Diagram illustrating the organization of the co-living spaces. Each housing block has three levels, each of which contains a shared bathing space and kitchenette space. Two housing blocks share the triple-height communal space, which contains the main mean of vertical circulation. Residents arrive at the second level, take off their shoes, and then take the stairs one level up or down to their private spaces. Structure is placed on the exterior to allow for maximal flexibility.

View of the triple-height communal space shared by the co-living residents.

Similarly, in the residential communal space, there are three levels that allow for various levels of participation. The upper levels feature tables with half walls at the edge that overlook the larger, more exposed, and more social triple-height space. The edge tables, although having no partitions themselves, are designed with privacy in mind: Sitting at the table, the resident is shielded from public view from the lower levels by the half-height wall and the table, only joining the triple-height space by intentionally leaning forward and revealing their face. With their back to the rest of the communal space on the same level, they don't need to present their face to their neighbours until they choose to sit somewhere with a more engaging direction.

Different speeds of movement can also foster different levels of privacy – the faster one moves, the shorter the moment they present themself to others. In the main canopied footpath, travellators are provided on one side, not only as a crucial transport infrastructure that makes moving through the Central area much more effortless, but also as a way to provide the choice of moving at a different speed that results in a lower level of engagement. In parallel, the park which is located on yet the other side of the main footpath offers a slower meandering experience, conducive to more intimate and personal moments.

9.3 Depth

Besides providing a range of spaces that provide different levels of sociability, the way that spaces are interconnected also affects the sense of privacy. (Zeisel 1981) In particular, the concept of depth, i.e. the number of spaces one passes to reach a particular space (Hillier and Hanson 1984), will be
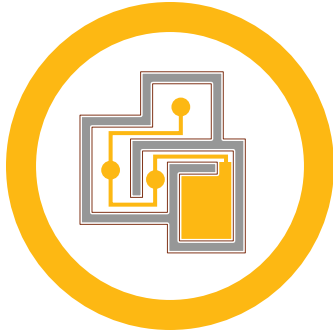
depth

Diagram illustrating the concept of spatial depth.

used as an important strategy to create a sense of privacy in the residential spaces.

In the project, the individual residential pods are designed with the concept of depth in mind. The beds face the direction of the outside, shielded by the closet acting as a wall against the interior communal corridor. This way, even with the privacy screens on the sides of the pods totally open, residents in the communal corridor are unable to see the face of the occupant unless they move inside the space housing the pods, and past the closet-walls shielding the occupant. This gives the pod occupant a sense of defensibility in terms of privacy of their space.

A similar concept is applied where the coworking space meets the public gathering atrium. At its edge, a lowered balcony is added for focused and seated participation in the atrium space. Behind the balcony is a casual communal co-working space which is yet separated from a quieter space
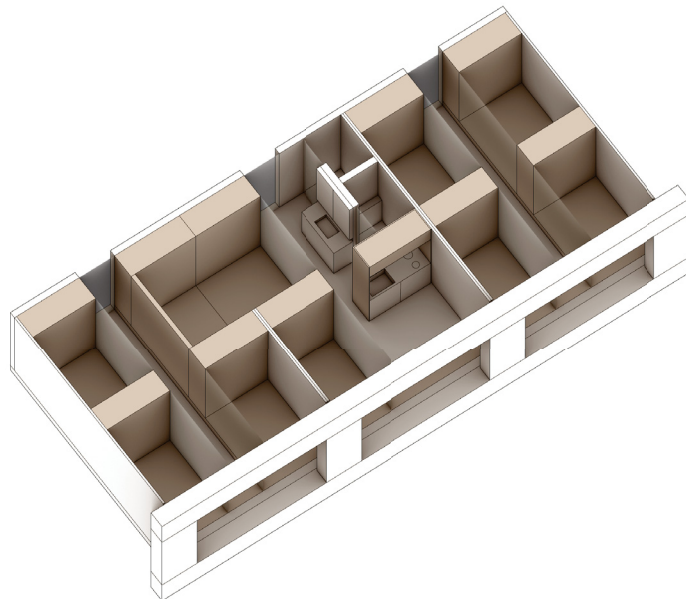

Diagram illustrating different modular modifications to the standard pod configuration shown on the right hand side.

View of public atrium space connecting two of the terraformed park pavillions that contain markets below and coworking spaces on top.

to its back. These spaces act as buffers to create various levels of privacy in the coworking spaces.

9.4 Devices

Finally, to give people direct control over their privacy, various architectural devices or furniture is deployed.

The half wall of 120-150 cm is used extensively in the project. It shields the occupant when they are seated, but still allows for the perception of spatial continuity when they aren't. Additionally, sitting with the back against the wall offers a sense of protection, because others can only approach the occupant from the front and sides, not from the back, reducing the chance of unexpected and startling encounters. This then confers to the occupant a sense of control over how they present themself to others because they don't need to prepare themself for unexpected interactions. The half wall comes in various forms to fit various spatial particulars, such as ordinary opaque walls, fritted/frosted glass, and greeneries.

Additionally, operable devices are also used in the residential part of the project. The dwelling pods, for example, contain privacy screens fitted with gaskets for full visual and auditory privacy, which can open up to create a larger social space with adjacent pods.

half wall

Diagram: strategy of using half walls to give a sense of protection and privacy without interrupting the continuity of the larger space..
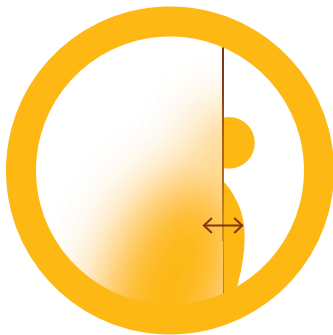
operable devices

Diagram: strategy of using operable devices to control privacy.

View of the standard 4-pod room. One pod is shown to be completely enclosed, with the bed down for sleeping. Meanwhile, the other pod is completely open with the bed inserted into the plenum space, transforming the space into a workspace, a living space, and a small garden.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Under the charged repressive context of Hong Kong, many young people find it difficult to pursue enterprising goals or freely express themselves. Spatially, they are often excluded from the most economically energetic parts of the city, whereas politically, their voices are completely disregarded. This architectural project intends to create a springboard that would lower the barrier to achieving their dreams and actualizing themselves. Through the investigation above, it is found that architecture that allows people to share spaces pluralistically can be immensely empowering. Not only does it facilitate lower-cost access to more financial and spatial resources, both of which are important for catalyzing enterprising pursuits, but it also helps restore dignity to the individuals.

Neoliberal capitalism nowadays often fails to meaningfully bring in the vibrant energy and creativity of the youth due to its exclusive and homogeneous culture. But the assumption that such energy brings no meaningful value-add to the economy is worth re-examining. This architectural thesis proves that by thinking deeply about the social and urban context, there is always a way to bring different stakeholders together to generate immense value for all.

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