

**PEOPLE MEET IN PUBLIC:
SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE VERTICAL CITY**

by

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ABSTRACT

Privatization, urbanization, and advancements in communication technology and social media have contributed to social isolation and the degradation of public space by removing the real-life interactions and chance encounters, essential for producing valuable offline social networks, from urban life. This trend is exemplified by partnerships between private developers and the city resulting in condo lobbies masquerading a public space. Post offices are explored as an opportunity to capitalize on a declining public building typology, with a history of communal use, in order to retain them as public assets amid rampant development. The appearance and strategic location of post offices evoke in our collective memory a valuable notion of *civic* and *public*. Postal Station K at Yonge & Eglinton in Toronto serves as a prototypical site. Vertical connections are explored as a means to encourage social interactions between multiple publics accessing the building, by providing visual connections as well as conditions that allow people to transcend typical social segregations that may stunt life in public spaces. This thesis aims to negotiate a symbiosis between latent public buildings and the forces of urbanization through the conception of a new type of vertical public space that catalyzes social interaction.

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I would like to thank those in my corner for their continuous distraction and motivation.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social Isolation

For the jostling crowdedness and the motley disorder of metropolitan communication would simply be unbearable without such psychological distance...The peculiar character of relationships, either openly or concealed in a thousand forms, places an invisible functional distance between people that is an interior protection and neutralization against the overcrowded proximity and friction of our cultural life.¹

Advancements in technology, globalization, and urbanization have contributed to social isolation for city dwellers, the degradation of public space, and require a reconsideration of the built environment in which we connect. Online technologies allow us to be more “connected” than ever, while absolving us of a requirement for a physical space. We can instantly find someone online with whom we have similar interests, without spending time sorting through our neighbours. The time we spend in public has decreased; instead leisure time is spent isolated by technologies, ranging from private cars to headphones.² Several indicators demonstrate our social isolation including: increased generalized distrust, less time spent with neighbours, leisure time mostly spent watching TV, private swimming pools outnumbering public ones, the popularity of driving alone, and the sorting of populations into like-minded geographies.³ This phenomenon can be called estrangement: “the estrangement of the inhabitant of a city too rapidly changing and enlarging to comprehend in traditional terms; the estrangement of classes from each other, of individual from individual, of individual from self, of workers from work.”⁴

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1. Anthony Vidler, “Spaces of Passage,” in *Warped Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 65.
 2. Joe Cortright, *City Report: Less in Common* (June 2015), 2.
 3. Mary Rowe, *Reimagining the Civic Commons*, Municipal Arts Society of New York, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.mas.org/reimagining-the-civic-commons/>
 4. Vidler, “Spaces of Passage,” 65.



Fig 1a. HER (2013); photo from *The Guardian*

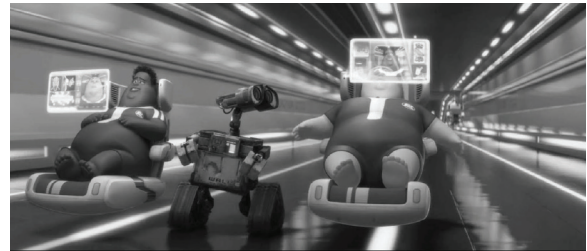


Fig 1b. Wall-E (2008); photo from *Cinemablography*

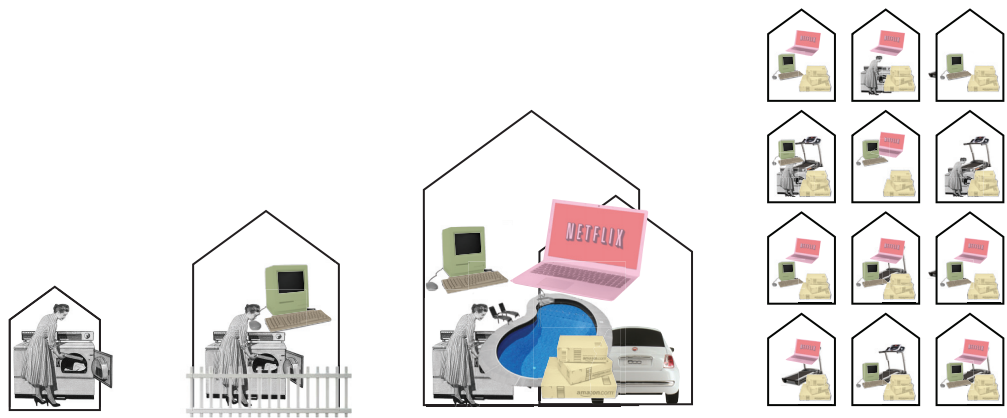


Fig 2. The house grows to accommodate the increasing number of activities done privately, horizontally, now vertically

Chance encounters

There is a growing counter-development to Internet and Facebook expansion. People still want to be surprised, and they still want to live with others, but now in a semi-anonymous manner. That's what density can offer, in addition to a wider range of facilities that would otherwise be unaffordable, like theatres, libraries, shops and so on.⁵

Social capital is the value attributed to social networks and interactions. It functions through information flows (learning about jobs, exchanging ideas), norms of reciprocity (inclinations to help each other), collective action, and the formation of broader identity.⁶ For example, Wilma Innis, 77, told Toronto Life in February 2015 that her seniors walking group “safeguards the mall” while also providing a platform to socialize for her and her friends. Social capital can be found in friendship networks, neighbourhoods, churches, civic associations, and bars. Joining and participating in one group reduces the odds of dying the next year.⁷ These forums provide opportunity for low-intensity or passive contact (seeing and hearing other people), which leads stimulates more comprehensive relationships, a source of information about the world,⁸ and a chance to maintain acquaintances.⁹ The deprivation of “relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness, where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form.”¹⁰ Environments and opportunities for people to interact, for strangers to say hello, are a dwindling urban amenity.

5. MVRDV, *The Vertical Village*, (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2012), 280.

6. “About Social Capital,” Harvard Saguaro Seminar, accessed Sept 30, 2015, www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/about-social-capital

7. Ibid.

8. Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2011), 15.

9. Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter and Kurt Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups: A Study of Human Factors in Housing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 34.

10. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 59.



Figure 3. The classical Agora; photo from National Geographic

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH

2.1 Public Space

“The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves.”¹¹ The opportunity to interact with others is accepted as essential for children’s social development and is equally important for those of all ages in order to establish a confident relationship with the surrounding world.¹²

Public space has several functions. It facilitates public order by helping us to understand our place in society and how society expects us to behave.¹³ The interactions we have in public are the basis of our social networks and provide “a sense of security and belonging.” Displays of power and resistance occur in public. It is a stage for art and performance, the place we go to see-and-be-seen, “where we go to express our identities to each other.”¹⁴

2.1.1 History

The Greek Agora provided a focused place for public life, which at that time included legal, political, educational, and commercial proceedings. (Fig. 3) The Medieval Commons were a resource owned by an individual (a King or Lord) and collectively stewarded to sustain resources for city dwellers, for instance a pasture for grazing cattle. As city dwellers’ collective needs shifted from firewood collection towards a desire to escape the city, this type of public space evolved into the public park, a transformation

11. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.

12. Gehl, *Life Between Buildings*, 21.

13. Zachary P. Neal, *Common Ground in Metropolis and Modern Life* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 12.

14. *Ibid.*, 15.



Figure 4. The Renaissance Piazza; photo from reidsitaly.com



Figure 5. The Enlightenment Coffeehouse; painting by William Holland, 1789

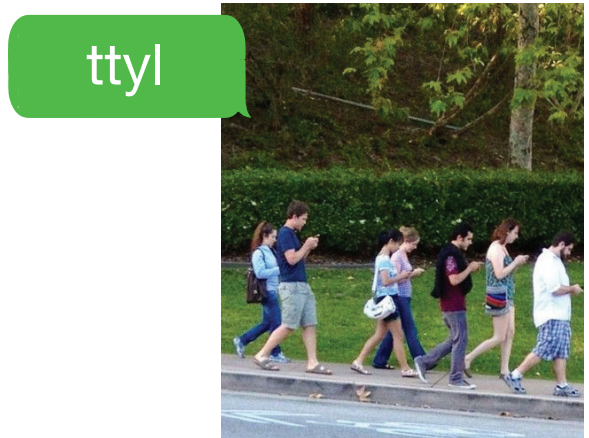


Figure 6. Alone together; photo from Dogo News

administered in America by Frederick Law Olmstead.¹⁵ During the Enlightenment, coffeehouses became the place to see and be seen in British society.¹⁶ (Fig. 5) During the 19th century, the boulevards of Paris were introduced as a new type of public space. This need to escape the city further became apparent during the Industrial Revolution, when factories polluted the city and living conditions for workers were cramped and unsanitary. Those who could afford to moved to the edges of the cities, which began the pattern of segregated uses in cities. New medical knowledge explained the requirement for light and air for healthy living conditions and resulted in functionalist zoning that separated working and living areas, thinned out buildings to allow access to expansive green spaces while increasing distances between them, without regard for the social value of the street. This new layout reduced possibility for contact between city dwellers. Cities with segregated functions have become dull and monotonous, highlighting the need for mixed use development. Trapped in cars in suburbs we “grind along together anonymously, often in misery.”¹⁷ (Fig. 6) Additionally, Capitalism has led to the disproportionate emphasis of the production (working) and consumption (buying) aspects of our lives, leaving little time for leisure or non-productive social interactions.

Communication and Technology

Previous technologies have expanded communication. But the last round may be contracting it. The eloquence of letters has turned into the un-nuanced spareness of texts; the intimacy of phone conversa-

15. Neal, *Common Ground*, 7.

16. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 32-33.

17. Julie Beck, “How Friendships Change in Adulthood,” *The Atlantic*, October 22, 15, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/10/how-friendships-change-over-time-in-adulthood/411466/>.



"When I make eye contact for the first time, I want it to be with the right person."

Figure 7. "When I make eye contact for the first time, I want it to be with the right person." 2015; by Drew Dernavich in *The New Yorker*

tions has turned into the missed signals of mobile phone chat...The new chatter puts us somewhere in between two deep zones, a safe spot between the dangers of contact...with others.¹⁸

Communication among people is “the means by which the general process of social existence is made possible.”¹⁹ Technology allows us to be connected irrespective of our physical location. Connections with others can be formed in the private space of our homes, which previously occurred in public space. We can also be plugged into virtual public space while sitting individually and independently in real public space (e.g. laptops in Starbucks). Online, “by masking their identity or using alternative personae, people feel less inhibited and online conversations are often highly spirited and lively.”²⁰ New media can be used as a tool for change. Facebook played a role in the Arab Spring, and Occupy Wall Street was originally a Twitter hashtag, but “the old, irreplaceable dance of democracy, which those digital media helped make happen, still took place between bodies in public.”²¹ Although “media are used differently in new formats on a daily basis, changing the functions of place where people gather, such as movie theatres, conference venues and universities,” physical public space is still an important arena for contemporary life.²²

18. Rebecca Solnit, *The Encyclopedia of Trouble and Spaciousness* (New York: Trinity University Press, 2014), 258.

19. Festinger, Schachter and Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups*, 114.

20. Charles Soukup, “Computer-Mediated Communication as a Virtual Third Place,” *New Media & Society* 8 (2006), accessed January 18, 2016, doi: 10.1177/1461444806061953.

21. Rebecca Solnit, *The Encyclopedia of Trouble and Spaciousness* (New York: Trinity University Press, 2014), 258.

22. Yuko Hasegawa, “The Sensibility, Emotion and Fluidity of the Architectural Program,” in *People Meet in Architecture* (Venice: Marsilo, 2010), 29.

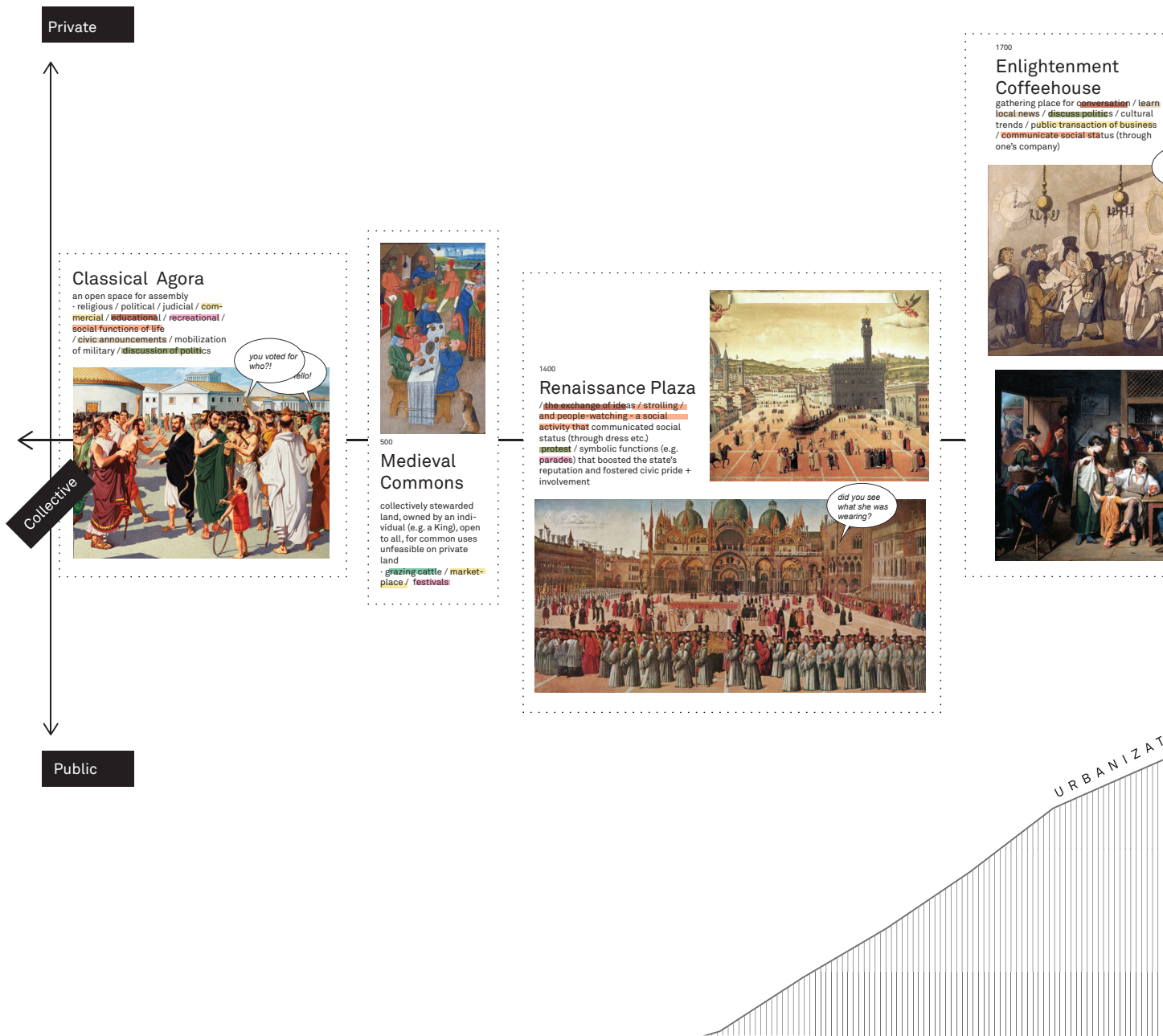
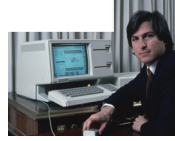
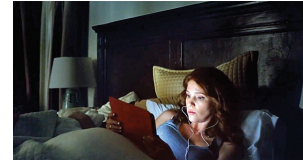
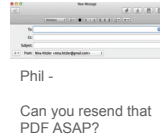


Figure 8. Timeline showing the blurring of the public/private distinction throughout history



2000

Online Social Media

can enable democratic capacities for **political discussion** does not require a physical location, mainly **entertainment, consumerism, and sharing among friends**



100%



Individual

1800

19th Cent. Boulevard

paved pedestrian-friendly streets lit with new electric or gas lamps and arcades became more popular public spaces (e.g. Hausmann boulevards) / **people-watching** / **strolling** for leisure



1900

Public Works

public amenities and facilities financed and constructed by the government (under the 1934 Public Works Construction Act enacted to stimulate employment after the Depression, like FDR's New Deal) / **schools** / **playgrounds** / **auditoriums** / **gymnasiums** / **libraries** / **postoffices**



ttyl



ION



Figure 9. "If you love nature, don't live in it;" illustration from *Country of Cities*

2.1.2 Privatization of Public Space

The transformation of the contemporary city has shifted the division of public and private space,²³ underlining the new less-easily defined but “equally treacherous and fertile” hybrid condition.²⁴ Herman Hertzberger translates the concepts ‘public’ and ‘private’ into the spatial terms ‘collective’ and ‘individual.’²⁵

Examples of this obscured distinction occur in the sharing economy, such as Uber or AirBNB, made possible by new information and communication technologies. These forms of collective consumption, though often cited as a departure from individualistic motivations, are actually a result of a changing economic climate rather than a new desire to share your living room with strangers.²⁶ These trends may be more economically than socially driven, but still represent a profound shift in the location of ‘public’ or ‘collective’ space.

2.1.3 Densification

Cities deliver economic prosperity and stability.²⁷ Most of America’s economic output is generated in cities.²⁸ Cities are the most globally sustainable formation of human dwelling and the

23. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven de Cauter, “Heterotopia in a Post Civil Society,” in *Heterotopia and the City* (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.

24. Hasegawa, “The Sensibility, Emotion and Fluidity of the Architectural Program,” 29.

25. Herman Hertzberger, *Lessons for Students in Architecture*. (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010 Publishers, 1991), 12.

26. Juho Hamari, Mimmi Sjöklint, and Antti Ukkonen, “The Sharing Economy: Why People Participate in Collaborative Consumption,” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* (2015), doi: 10.1002/asi.23552.

27. Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1984), 50.

28. Vishaan Chakrabarti, *A Country of Cities: A Manifesto for Urban America* (New York: Metropolis Books, 2013), 55.

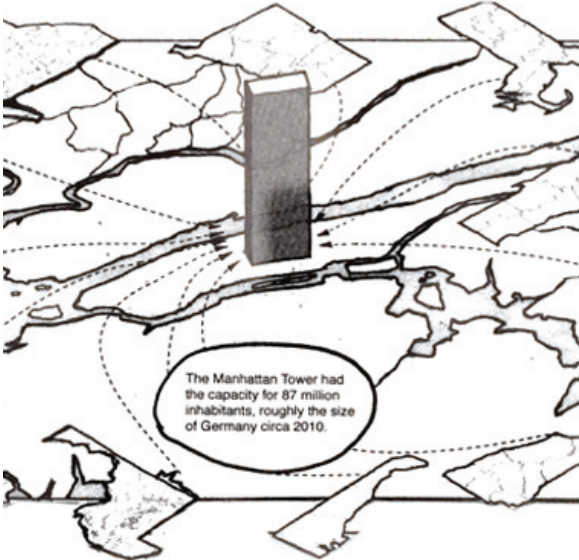


Figure 10. The Manhattan Tower is the area of Central park and houses 87 million inhabitants; from Jiminez Lai, *Citizens of No Place*



Figure 11. The weather beacon provides a service to the city on top fo the Canada Life building; from *BlogTO*

most efficient use of natural resources. People that live in cities have lower carbon footprints. Cities are “green without trying,” not because citizens are more conscious of environmental issues, but out of convenience.²⁹ “A father and daughter walk to the playground because it is easy and they will probably run into friends.”³⁰ City dwellers use shared city services, which use less resources than individually maintained amenities. Living in dense cities, rather than sprawling suburbs, has been linked to health benefits such as decreased obesity and less chance of motor vehicle accidents. Cities provide a more vibrant social environment, that Vishaan Chakrabati notes has been elevated by new genre of pop culture, including “urban sitcoms” like *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Sex in the City*. Intense proximity of amenities: parks, theatres, gyms, recreation centres, shops, is critical for enjoyable, livable neighbourhoods and the city dweller’s everyday experience.³¹ The opportunity to see, hear, and meet other is an important benefit of city living.³² Density creates “urban vibrancy, liveliness, and intensity that comes from the pressure of a large amount of programme and people compressed into a small area.”³³

The “right to the city” is a phrase first described by Henri Lefebvre as a “transformed and renewed right to urban life.” David Harvey decries “freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves” as “one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”³⁴ The phrase’s meaning is distorted for various causes, however its popularity highlights the common aspiration for a

29. Chakrabarti, *A Country of Cities*, 81.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 118.

32. Gehl, *Life Between Buildings*, 2.

33. MVRDV, *The Vertical Village* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2012), 38.

34. David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (2003), 939-941.



Figure 12. Old and new North Toronto Collegiate Institute; from urbantoronto.ca and Yonge & Eglinton Condos Blog

city for the people. The common cause connecting groups who appropriate “the right to the city” phrase is the “rejection of the profit motive in favour of other collective forms of solidarity (i.e. cities for people, not for profit).”³⁵ Amid rapid urbanization and expansion upwards, public spaces that provide collective resources and amenities for urbanites must be protected and prioritized.

2.2 Civic Assets

First created to provide shared services for the needs of the people that lived in cities, civic facilities were strategically located to deliver services. Publicly funded and managed, they served the broader, collective needs of neighbourhoods and benefited the city economically and socially.³⁶ They provided a location for chance encounters that brought people in contact with others - a type of interaction that “fostered neighbourhood cohesion, cultural expression, a sense of belonging, and created something that is crucial to enabling a city: social capital.”³⁷

City dwellers do not have the same requirements of civic institutions and services as they had in the past. Some civic institutions have evolved with changing demands and urban pressures. Libraries have been reinvented as multimedia centres. Universities hold lectures in movie theatres. Public washrooms have become extinct, replaced by Starbucks.

In the Yonge & Eglinton neighbourhood, several civic buildings have been anonymously absorbed into a compressed urban

35. Peter Marcuse, “Reading the Right to the City,” *City* 18 (2014), doi: 10.1080/13604813.2014.878110

36. Mary Rowe, July 17, 2014, “Reimagining the Civic Commons,” *Municipal Arts Society of New York*, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://www.mas.org/re-imagining-the-civic-commons/>.

37. Ibid.

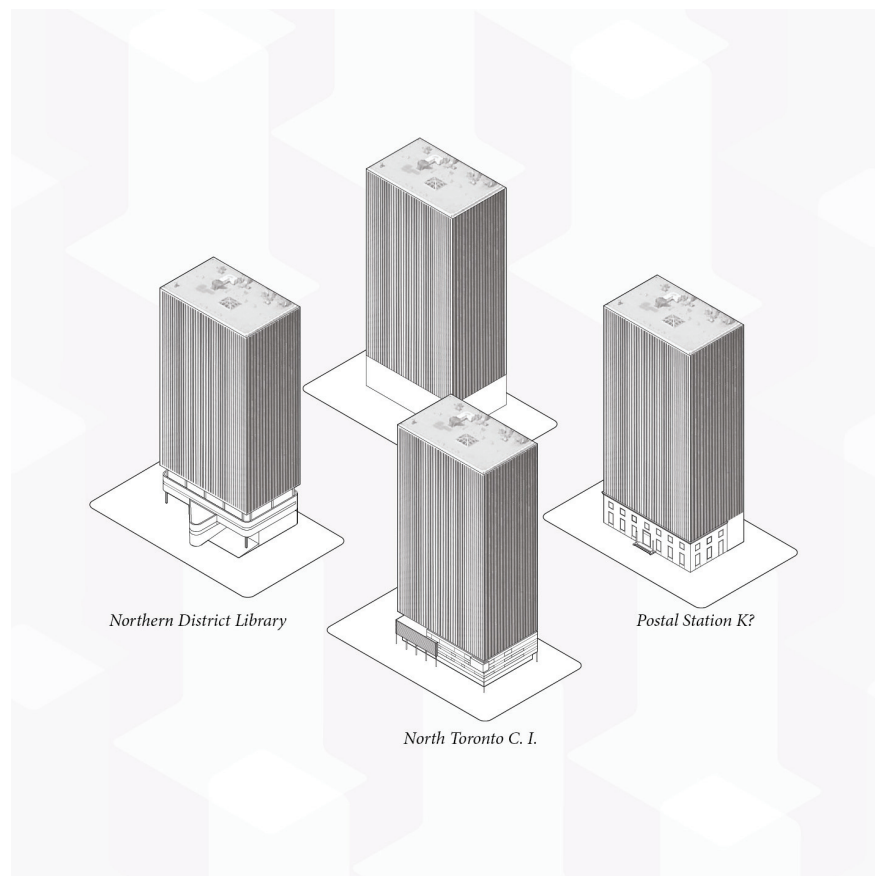


Figure 13. On each plot stands a purportedly unique base podium, usually filled with commercial ventures or glossy lobbies meant to meet a planning standard to contribute to the public realm at street level. On top sits the towering extrusion, capitalizing on valuable real estate. Public-private partnerships result in public institutions disguised in indistinguishable glassy podiums beneath luxury condominiums, leaving innocent urbanites lost in a homogenous city. Is this the destiny of Postal Station K or can public space extend beyond the ground floor?



Figure 14. Conversions to community mailboxes proposed for 2014-15; from Canada Post's *5 Point Action Plan*

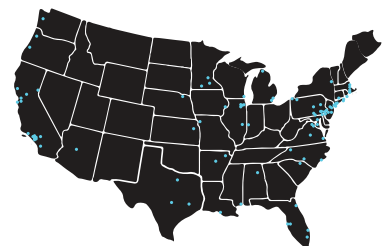


Figure 15. Historic post offices sold or for sale in the United States; from 2009-2014, compiled by savethepostoffice.com

fabric. A public-private partnership allowed the 1912-built North Toronto Collegiate Institute to be demolished and relocated into the glassy podium of a condominium development, losing the character built up through over 100 years of memory. Today, these civic buildings possess a latent potential.

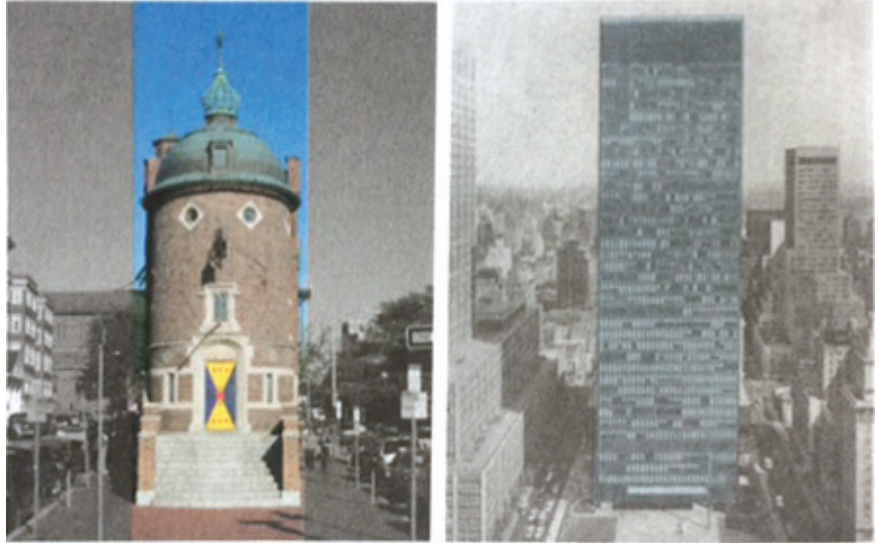
2.2.1 Post Offices as Prototypes

Post offices risk ceasing to be public assets, when the liquidated land is lost and local branches become counters at the back of Shoppers Drugmarts. Historically, the post office's mandate was the practical delivery of mail, with the added benefit of being a place to run into others. Today, this informal function has become more relevant than the primary one. Canada Post's restructuring of mail service presents an opportunity to focus on this important social dimension.

These well-networked civic assets have served to connect all, by providing both a practical mail service and an informal community meeting place. In our collective memory they are a symbol for communication and can evolve to function beyond their original programming. How can this civic space be managed and connected across public, private, institutional, and community systems?³⁸ How can new social possibilities be created for this evolving typology?

The advent of the internet and email resulted in a shift to more parcels (e-commerce) with less paper mail correspondence. National postal services, like Canada Post, struggle to compete with private couriers (e.g. FedEx), who can more fluidly and reliably

38. "Re-imagining the Civic Commons," YouTube video, 25:42, posted by "Municipal Art Society of New York," on October 30, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WGRjMKmn50.



FACE
1909 Harvard Lampoon Building, Cambridge,
Edmund M. Wheelwright.

FACELESS
1959 Seagram Building, New York,
Mies van der Rohe.

Figure 16. Facial facades; from Rem Koolhaas in *Facade*



Figure 17. Community members protest the sale of Postal Station K, 2012; from *The Toronto Star*

operate across international borders. To evolve with this trend, in 2014, Canada Post put in action a plan to replace door-to-door mail delivery with “community mailboxes.” Though, as of 2016, this aspect of the plan has been suspended by the current government, many urban branches are closing and change is still necessary for this Crown Corporation to fulfill its mandate.

2.2.2 Public Appearance

The facade is the building element “most invested with political and cultural meaning.”³⁹ Codes of the classical facade, such as orderliness and composition, are so embedded in “our neurological wiring, [that they] trigger Pavlovian reactions to certain types of architecture.”⁴⁰ Facades, like faces, elicit value and hierarchy judgements.⁴¹ The facade of a modern classical building (like many civic building built in the 1930s in Toronto) evoke the collective memory of *civic* or *pubilc*. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why nostalgic citizens routinely rally to protest and condemn the demolition of post offices.

2.2.3 An Absent Civic Service

Modern societies can not function well if the local civic dimension is weak.⁴² Declining participation in local groups forecasts a “broader decline in our society’s economic vitality,” since that vitality depends on local community connectedness.⁴³ Cuts in public funding leave civic facilities crippled and unable

39. Rem Koolhaas et al., *Facade*, in *Elements* (Marsilo, 2014), 703.

40. *Ibid.*, 703.

41. *Ibid.*, 745.

42. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

43. Nicholas Lemann, “Kicking in Groups,” *The Atlantic*, 1996, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/detoc/assoc/kicking.html>.



Figure 18. Spectators imitate a sculpture; photograph from *Art and Travel Blog*

to administer services and undermine the state's ability to maintain common assets as public goods. This condition gives rise to enterprising community groups and private citizens who must fill the void by starting their own local garden or walking group, made possible by crowd-funding, open-source data, or the temporary nature of the project. This can be considered a type of privatizing public space - if citizens must work themselves to create community programs in lieu of a working system, the services become less accessible and neutral.⁴⁴ Pop-up projects and initiatives underline a desire for a type of civic service or form of interaction required by urbanites.

2.3 Play

Curiosity is a new vice that has been stigmatized...Curiosity, futility. To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes "concern"; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and essential.⁴⁵

2.3.1 The Social Role of Play

People are inherently playful and curious.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, opportunities to exercise this characteristic behaviour are decreasingly common as public space erodes. Play is an important mode of behaviour that allows people to escape typical social segregations that often stunt public life. Play is "indispensable for the well-being of the community, fecund of cosmic insight and

44. Francesca Ferguson, "Renegotiating the Urban Commons," *Uncubed Magazine* 20 (2009), accessed January 18, 2016.

45. Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher" in *Foucault Live: (Interviews, 1961-1984)*, trans. John Johnson (New York: Semiotext(e) Double Agents Series, 1996), 198-99.

46. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 30.

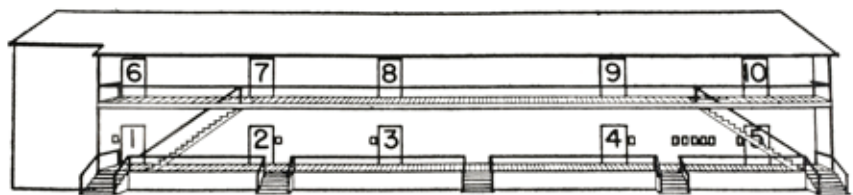


Figure 19. "If there is a stairway at each end of a floor, there is a good chance that people living at opposite ends of the floor will never or rarely meet"; from Festinger, Schacter, and Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups*

social development.”⁴⁷ Having long been accepted as a crucial aspect of children’s social development, playing is a valuable mode of behaviour for those of all ages, which facilitates them finding their place in and interacting with the public.

The Situationists practised the “derive” (urban drifting) as a critique to urban planning driven by capitalism. This method or “mobile space of play” involves “playful-constructive” behaviour and conscious attention to the psychogeography of the city, allowing for non-instrumental and more spontaneous use of the city. Today, it seems “the flaneur’s sacred act of walking down the street is gone - or at least half gone, as one ear and one eye become snagged in the device.”⁴⁸ As cities compress and grow upward, coincidences for interactions on the street are replaced by silent elevator rides.

2.3.2 Catalysing Contact

Triangulation occurs when external stimuli creates a bond between strangers.⁴⁹ Play can induce “the feeling of being ‘apart together’ in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms.”⁵⁰ In the same way, snow can triangulate neighbours after a storm, a delayed bus might spark a conversation between travellers, and art can triangulate people by physically positioning them or by simply sparking a conversation. This type of low-intensity interaction is the basis for more comprehensive collective relationships.⁵¹ Research has

47. Ibid., 25.

48. Andrew Blum, “Here But not Here,” *Metropolis Magazine*, April 2011, accessed January 18, 2016, <http://goo.gl/XO57bc>.

49. William H. Whyte. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (Washington DC: Conservation Foundation, 1980), 94.

50. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 12.

51. Gehl, *Life Between Buildings*, 35.

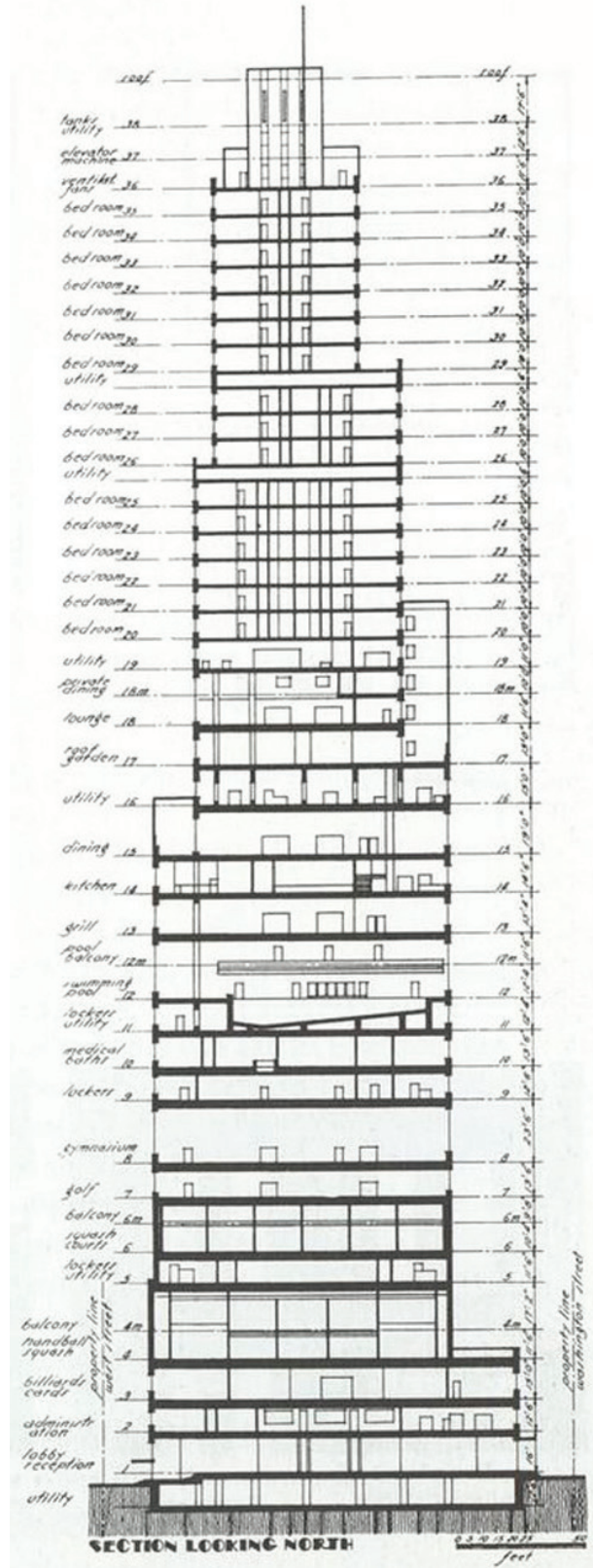


Figure 20. New York Athletic Club section; from *Delirious New York*

shown that physical space is the key to social interaction - that relationships develop from “brief and passive contacts made going to and from home or walking about the neighborhood.”⁵² It has been found that it is not people with same attributes that form social relationships but rather people who passed each other during the day who then form relationships later and adopt similar attitudes.⁵³ Conditions that sociologists consider crucial to making social relationships include proximity; repeated, unplanned interactions; and a setting that encourages people to let their guard down.⁵⁴

2.4 Hybrid Buildings

In Pamphlet Architecture 11, three types of hybrid buildings are defined: fabric hybrids, camouflaged in their surroundings; graft hybrids, with clearly expressed programs added over time; and monolith hybrids, gigantic buildings that are “products of the industrialized Twentieth Century city.”⁵⁵ All types are the product of a “programmatically spark brought about by urban compression.”⁵⁶ They are “inherently multifunctional and responsive to the constraints of the grid, [and] can be offered as model for the stimulation and revitalization of American cities.”⁵⁷

Russian constructivists applied the term “social condenser” to buildings that aimed to influence the social behaviour of its

52. Festinger, Schachter, and Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups*, 34.

53. Alex Williams, “Friends of a Certain Age: Why is it Hard to Make Friends over 30?,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2012, accessed November 23, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/fashion/the-challenge-of-making-friends-as-an-adult.html.

54. Williams, “Friends of a Certain Age.”

55. Steven Holl and Joseph Fenton, *Pamphlet Architecture 11: Hybrid Buildings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Books, 1985), 8.

56. *Ibid.*, 41.

57. *Ibid.*



Figure 21. Public space (pink) in the vertical city is considered in various locations and forms above ground level - on bridges, roofs, pixels, cantilevered boxes - as the depictions of the city in utopian films of the past become reality. (Unite d'Habitation, Le Corbusier; Walking City, Archigram; Linked Hybrid, Steven Holl; House of Industry, Ivan Leonidov; Big Cross, BIG; Shanghai Stock Exchange, OMA; Cloud Village, ADEPT/MVRDV; SBF Tower, Hans Hollein; Tour Signal, Jean Nouvel; Markthalle, MVRDV)

inhabitants, through the collectivization of domestic functions.⁵⁸ These buildings were developed soon after the creation of the Soviet Union and were a product of the State. Per positions “hybrids” instead as products of the capitalism, born in the United States in order to optimize land use.⁵⁹ While social condensers originally focused inward on their residents, hybrids integrate different programs, developers, managements, and users in an attempt to also attract outside users. Per argues that although Rem Koolhaas’ classifies the Downtown Athletic Club in New York as a social condenser, it is actually more accurately described as a hybrid.⁶⁰ Rem Koolhaas describes a social condenser as a “machine to generate and intensity desirable forms of human intercourse.”⁶¹ Ultimately, both “hybrids” and “social condensers” have similar goals.

58. Per, Mozas, and Arpa, *This is Hybrid*, 48.

59. *Ibid.*, 50.

60. *Ibid.*, 56.

61. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994),152.

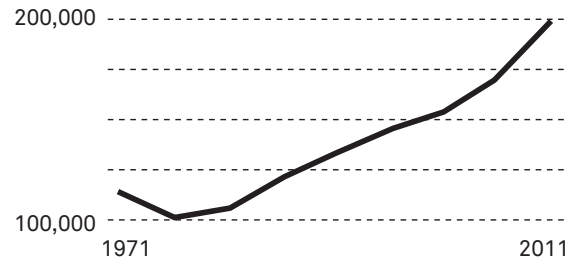


Figure 22. Downtown Toronto population growth 1971-2011; data from StatsCan



Figure 23. Yonge and Eglinton is a “skyline knuckle on Toronto’s Yonge Street spine.” (Micallef, *Stroll*, 43)



Figure 24. Towers in the park; photograph from Panoramio



Figure 25. Cranes in the sky; photograph from *A Bit More Detail Blog*



Figure 26. Postal Station K

CHAPTER 3: SITE

3.1 Toronto

More than half of Canadians live in cities. Toronto is the fourth-largest city in North America by population and the largest city in Canada. At the last census (2011), The Greater Toronto Area had a population of just over 6 million inhabitants. It is often cited as one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world, with a large proportion of visible minorities, recent immigrants, and those with a mother tongue other than English. It is one of many cities in Canada coping with rapid urbanization and provides a testing ground.

As seen in the following map, standalone post offices, often historically and architecturally significant, are near to corridors of development or “avenues.”

3.2 Yonge and Eglinton

There seemed to be a disproportionate number of specialty food shops with baguettes and jam jars...all of them closed. In between them were dry cleaners, a dark Second Cup, an imitation British pub at the base of a mirrored office building.⁶²

Postal Station K is located in the Yonge and Eglinton neighbourhood, an area nicknamed “Young and Eligible” in reference to its high population of young professionals living alone. It is a densely-populated and trafficked neighbourhood, but often described as characterless and devoid of culture.

62. Shawn Micallef, *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto* (Toronto: Eye Weekly, 2010), 33.

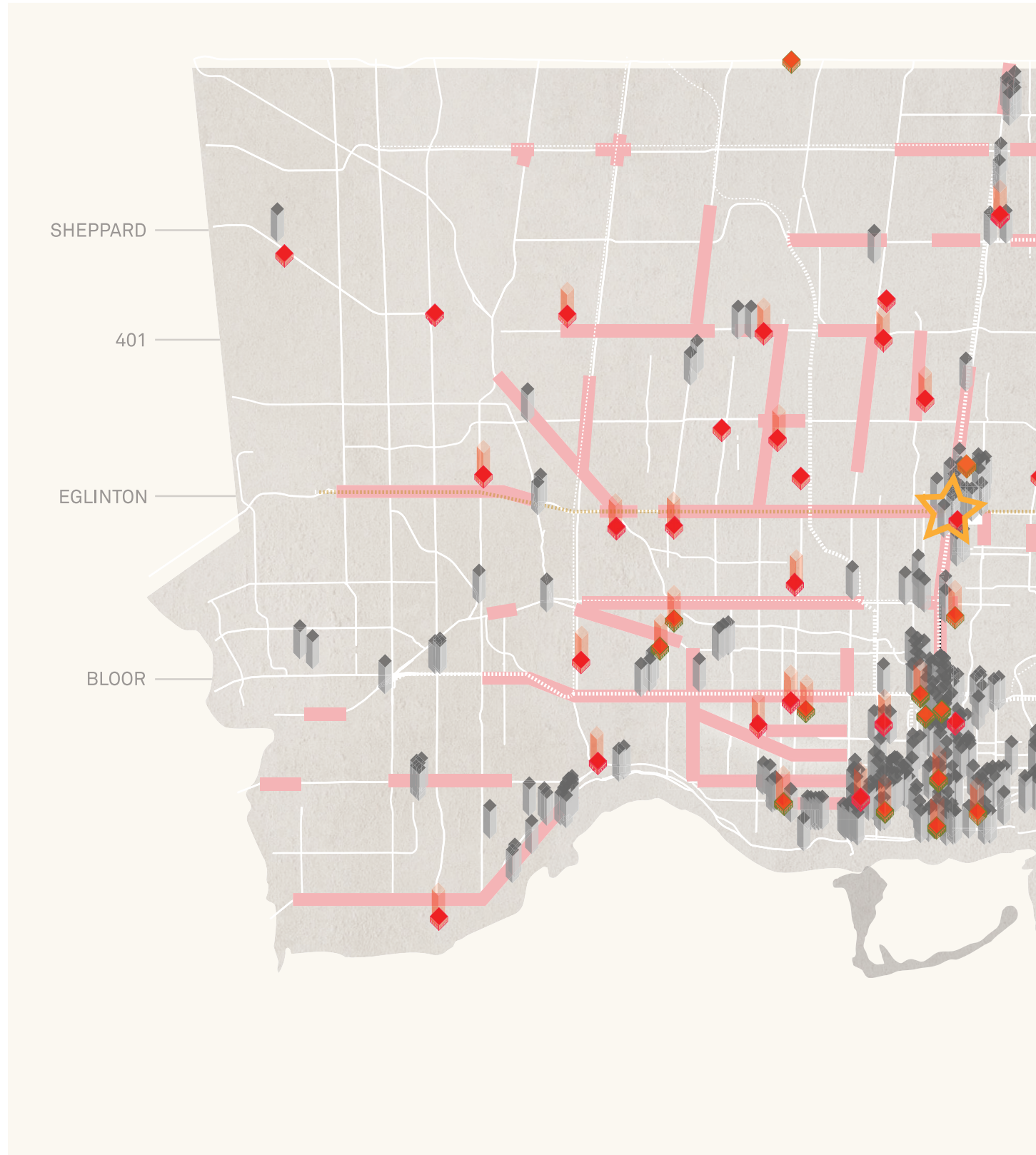
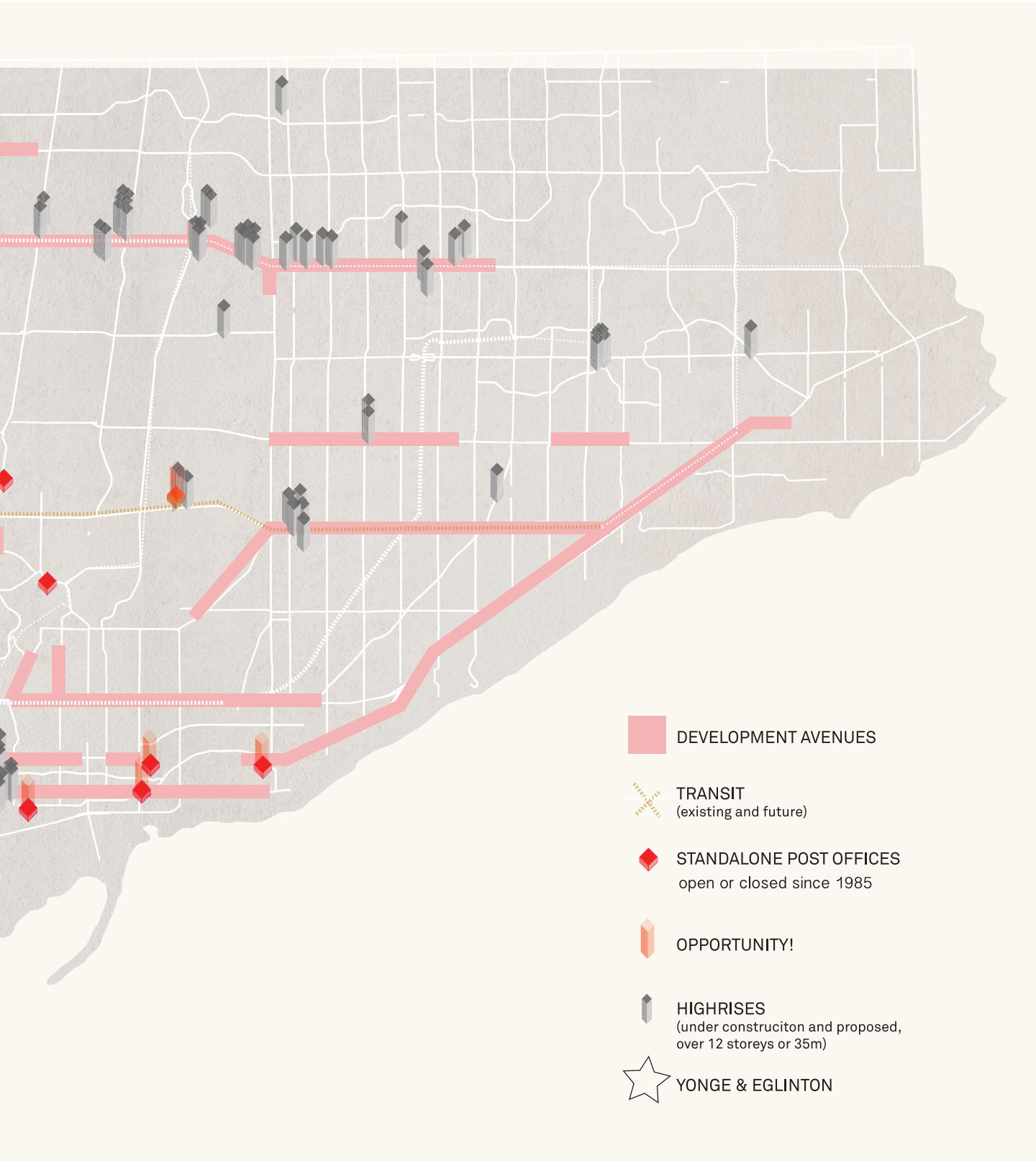


Figure 27. Map of standalone post offices and avenues of densification in Toronto; from Toronto Official Plan Urban Structure 2010 and the Toronto Skyscraper Map, skyscraperpage.com



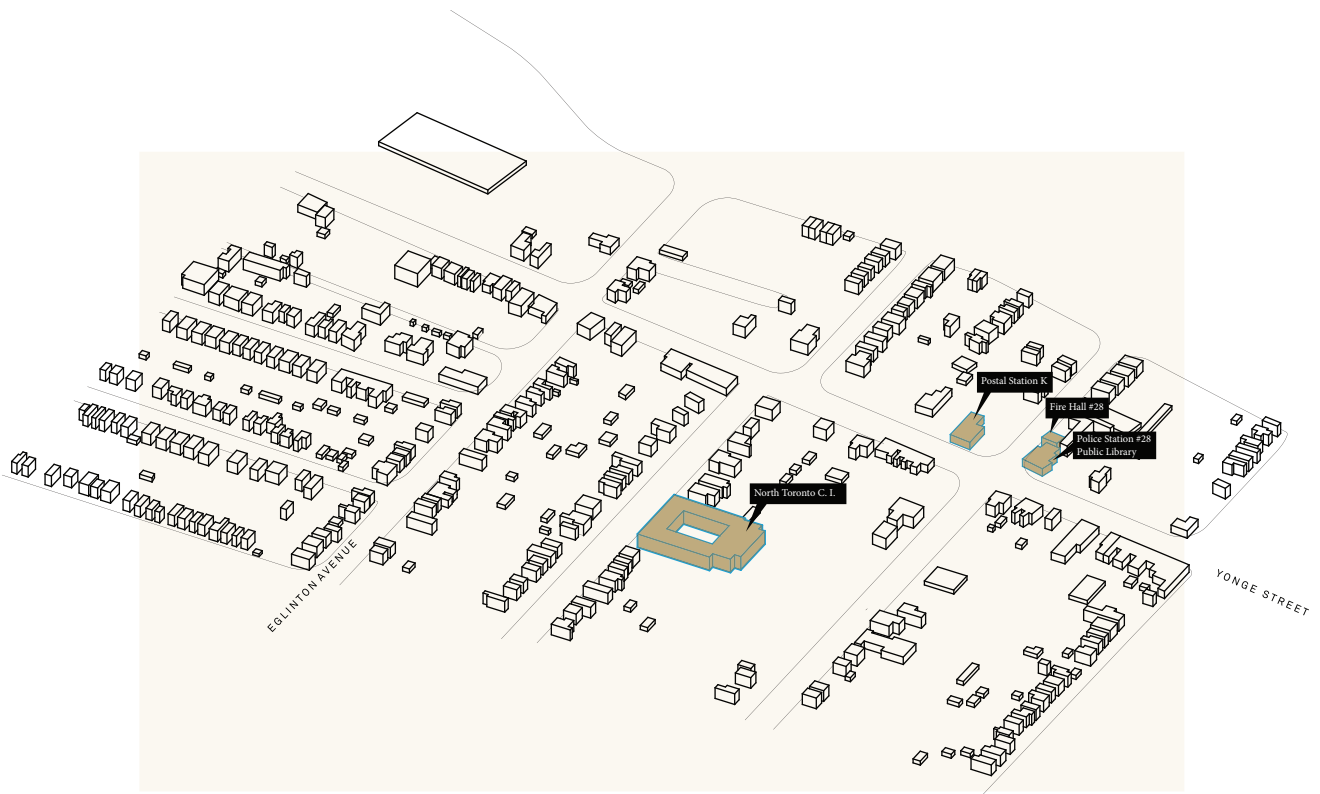


Figure 28. Yonge and Eglinton ~1930, based on Goads Fire Insurance Maps

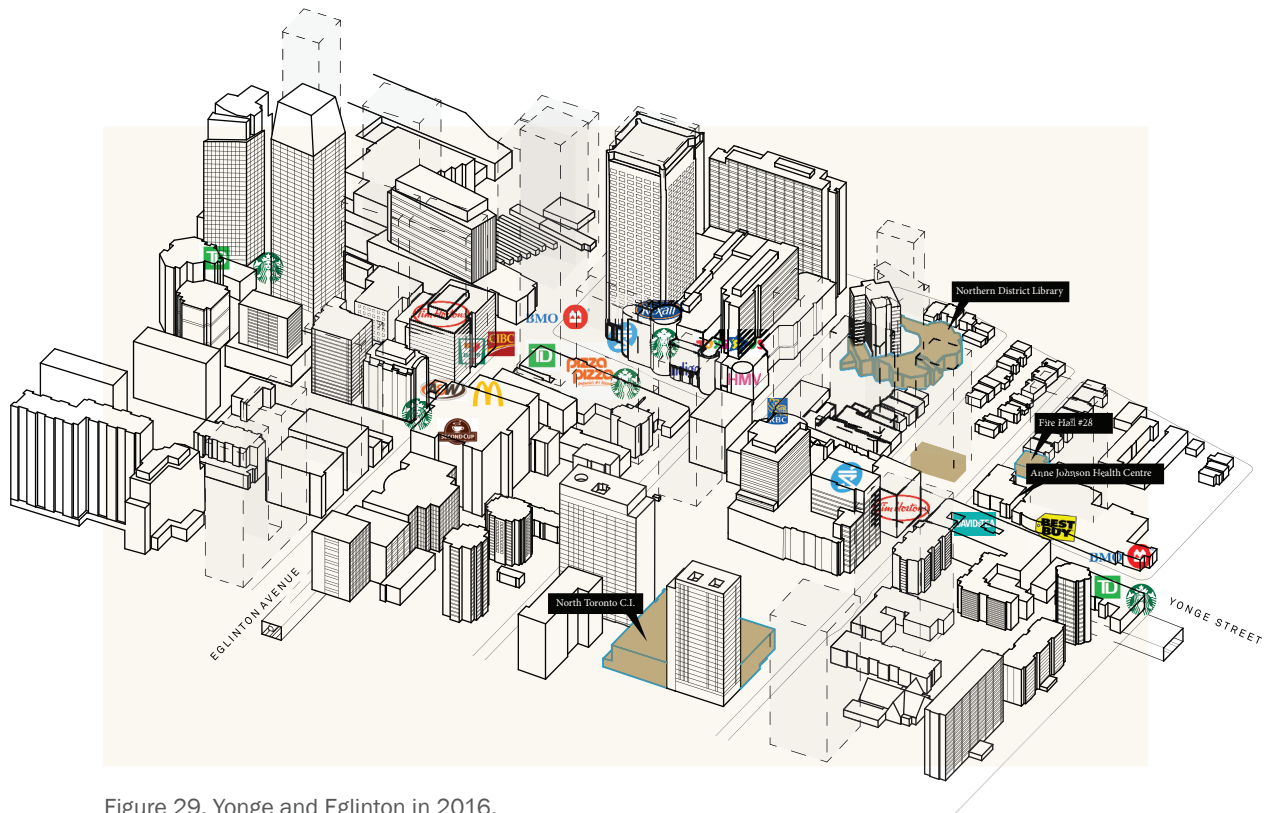


Figure 29. Yonge and Eglinton in 2016, with all towers proposed or under construction in the next 20 years



Figure 30. History of Postal Station K and the decline of letter mail

3.3 Postal Station K

Many original post offices in Toronto are historically and architecturally significant. The limestone-clad Postal Station K was built in Art Deco style in 1936 by architect Murray Brown.⁶³ (See Appendix for original drawings.) It is built on the site of Montgomery's Tavern, where William Lyon Mackenzie led the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1837. The post office is one of the few buildings in the Commonwealth that bears the insignia of King Edward VIII. In 1925, the location was designated as a National Historic Site, but this only protects a five metre radius around the flagpole and Upper Canada Rebellion commemorative plaque, not the building. Additionally, although the City of Toronto lists the building as historic, federally owned buildings are exempt from the Ontario Heritage Act, leaving it unprotected.⁶⁴ The inscription reads "Dominion Public Building" which was part of the Public Works Construction Act of 1934, aimed to generate jobs during the depression through the construction of public works, similar to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the United States.

In 2012, the site was sold to Rockport Developers and, as of December 2015, construction is underway for the conversion into a residential tower, a decision that had many residents protesting. ERA Architects prepared a heritage assessment report for the City of Toronto, outlining the requirement to retain the facades of the frontal portion of post office. Alterations allowing for barrier-free access are permitted. The public area created by setback from Yonge St., and the views of the facade were highlighted as most important, as opposed to any interior character.

63. ERA Architects, *Heritage Impact Assessment: 2388 Yonge Street*, July 2, 2014.

64. Jane Switzer, "A new uprising at Montgomery's Tavern," *The Globe and Mail*, August 10, 2012.

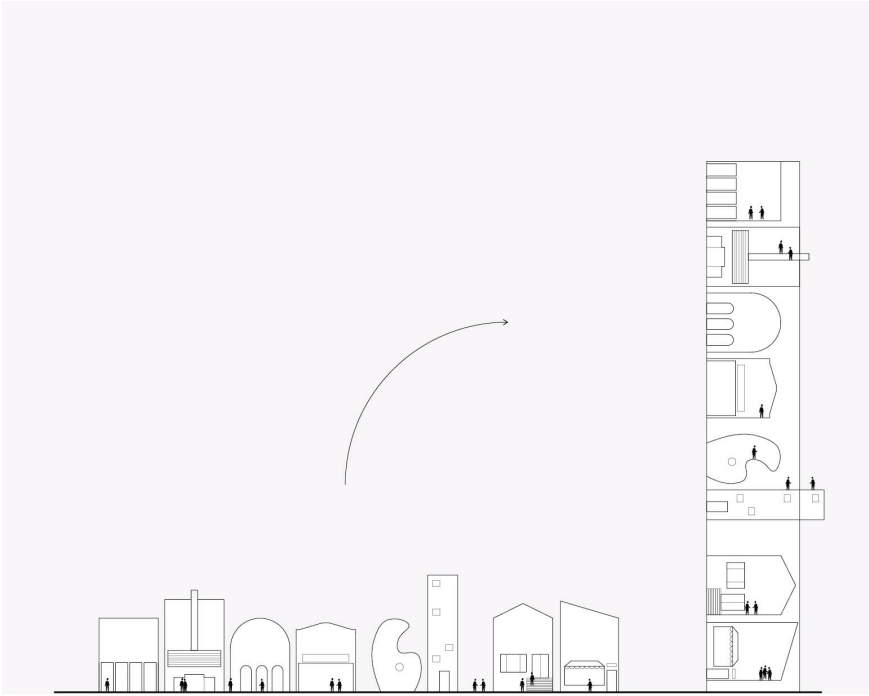


Figure 31. Vertical meandering

CHAPTER 4: DESIGN

This design aims to combat social isolation in cities by encouraging real-life interactions in public. The spaces will allow for conditions that are important to stimulate social interactions that lead ultimately to a stronger sense of community. In response to current conditions of rapid upward development, a new type of public space is conceived of through the vertical arrangement of public elements with special consideration to the legibility of public spaces and to the encouragement of “chance encounters.” One of the aims of this design is to provide opportunities for people to run into one another as they do on the street. (Fig. 30) Another is to make public space that is above ground level appear public, accessible, and connected. (Fig. 31)



Figure 32. Vertical nollimap

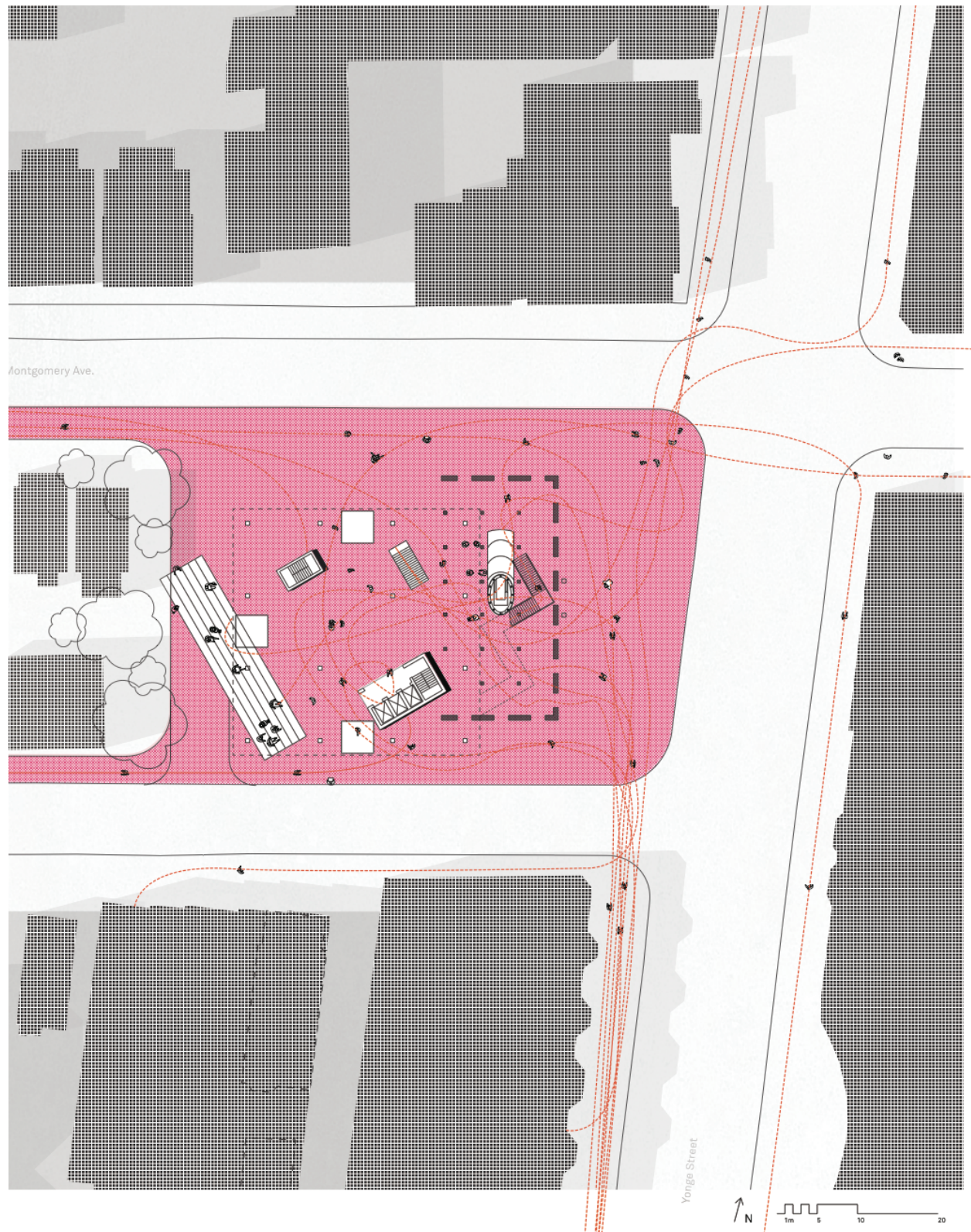


Figure 33. Ground floor plan allows the paths of various users to overlap

4.1 Public Access

The ground floor is opened to provide a rare open space in the city, which may be used for any number of public functions, from a farmers' market to a political protest. The openness allows one to enter the building unobstructed by the typical boundaries, physical and mental. It is a place to *be* in public rather than loiter in a privately-owned lobby - a truly nondiscriminatory and public place.



Figure 34. Open ground floor enables multiple publics to overlap

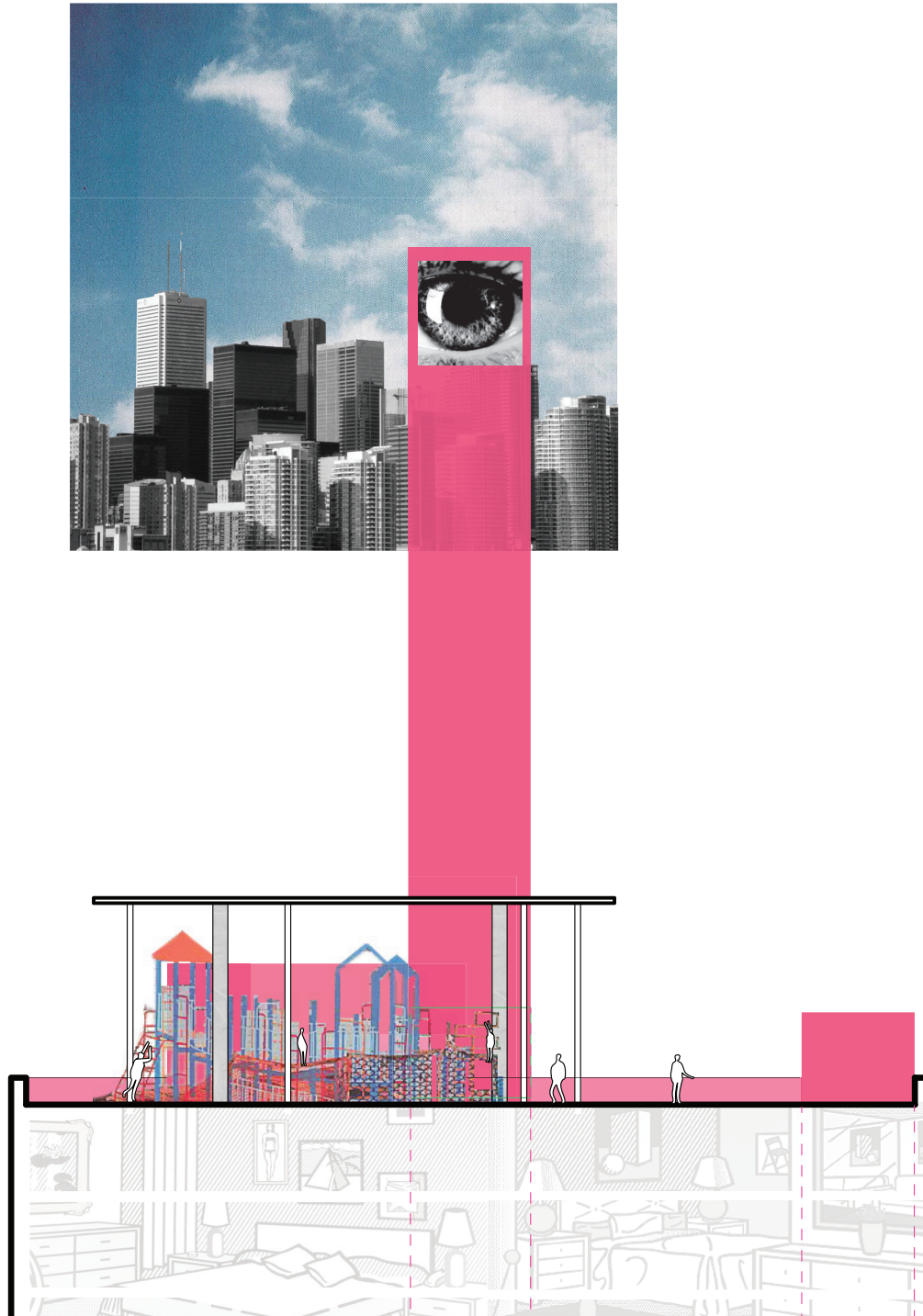


Figure 35. The public eye participates in the city skyline

Open Roof

A periscope extends above the building creating a presence for the building in the city skyline dominated increasingly by private condominiums, also providing permanent public access to the privileged view. (Fig. 35) Another periscope renders the public roof more accessible by making this typically unseen space visible.

4.2 Program

Functions of daily life that have been privatized are re-imagined as communal activities. For example, an auditorium replaces individual entertainment such as personal television, a swimming pool replaces personal exercise equipment. The notion of community life in a vertical tower is emphasized by the provision of triple-height shared amenity spaces throughout.

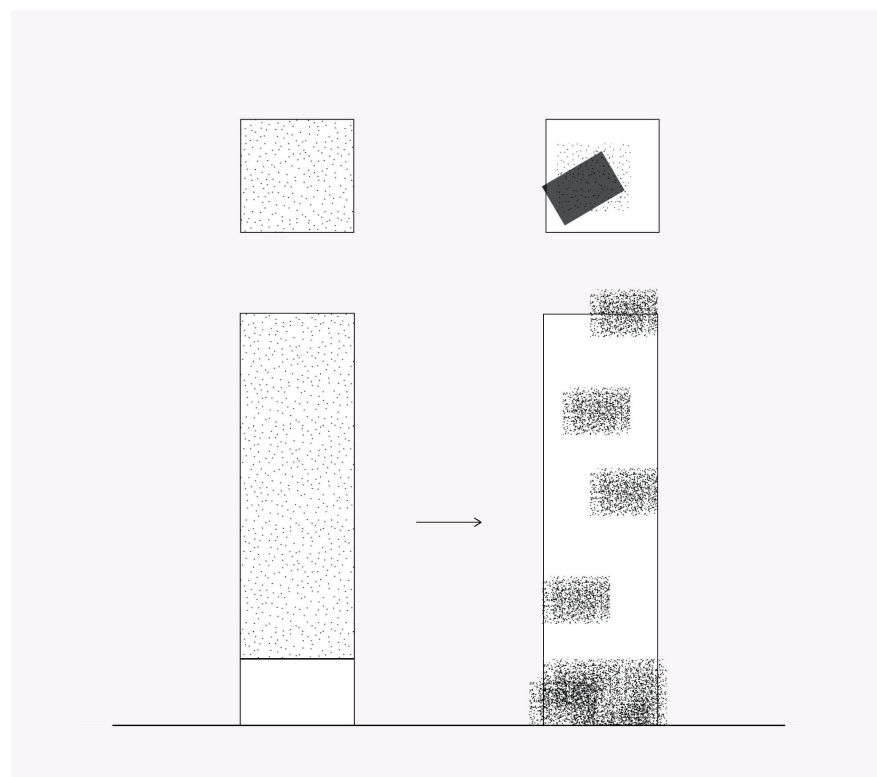


Figure 36. Individual to collective

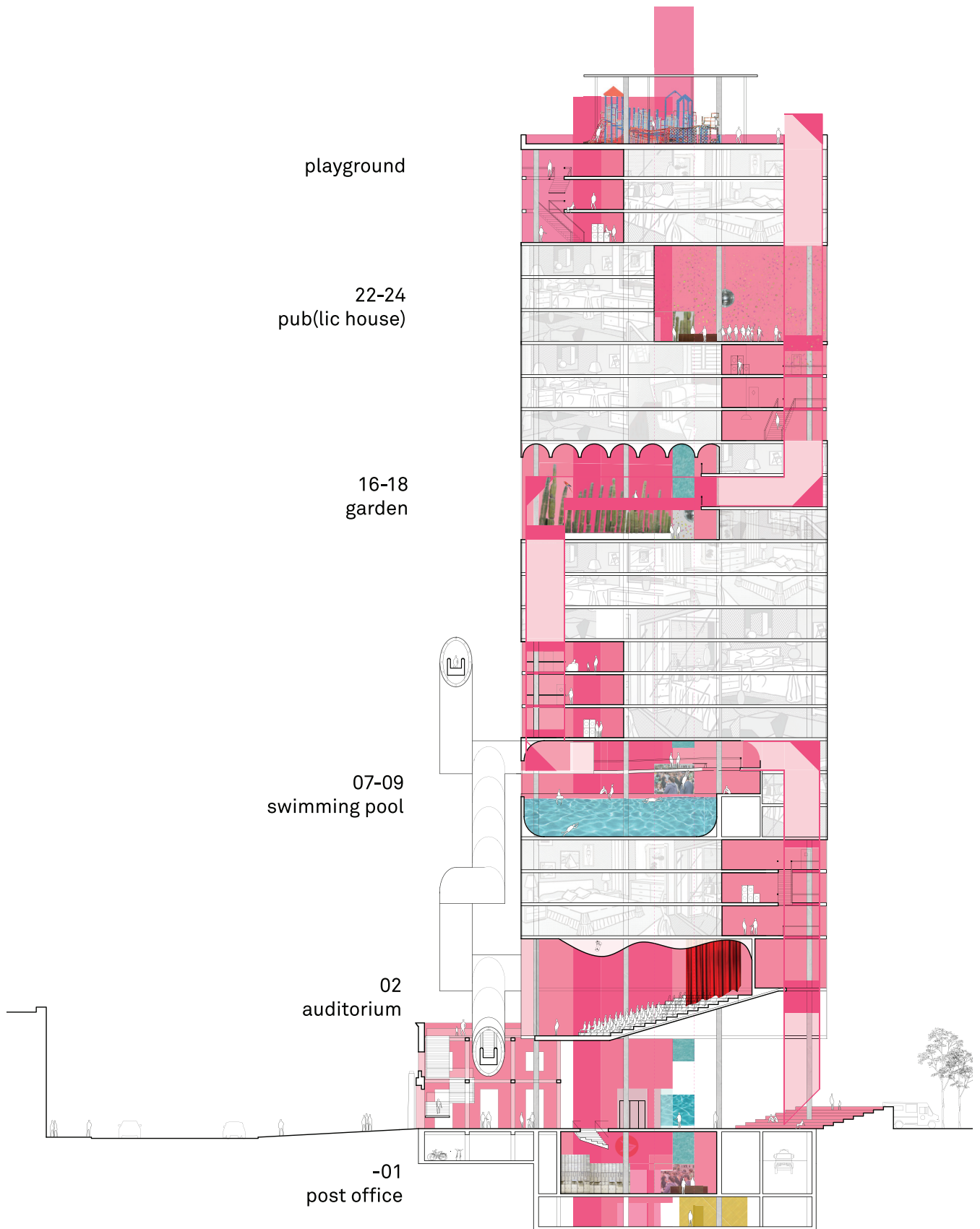


Fig 37. Section showing organization of public spaces vertically as well as their expression on the facade of the tower

4.3 Hybridization

Public programs are dispersed among residential floors, creating unusual relationships and adjacencies. (Fig 38.) Circulation for public and residential programs are shared, increasing chances for encounters between various users. Like on the horizontal street, if your neighbour is cooking with extra garlic, you may smell it through the atrium. Residents can look through the atria to check if the aquafit class has started yet. While searching for keys to unlock your front door, you may catch a view of someone eating popcorn before the movie downstairs.

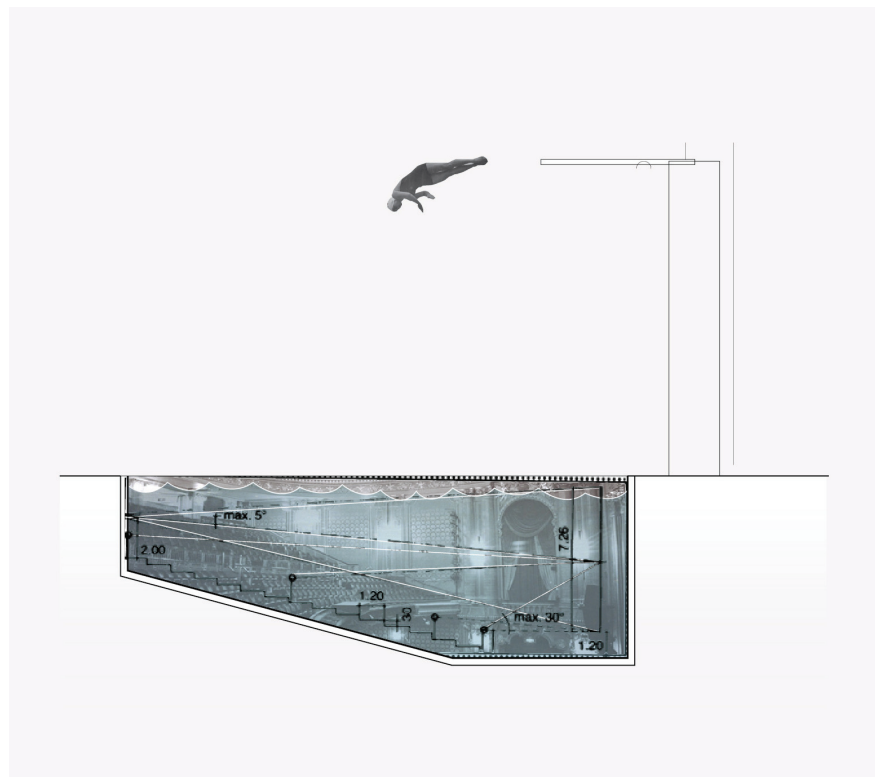


Figure 38. Surprising programmatic relationships, “Crossprogramming”

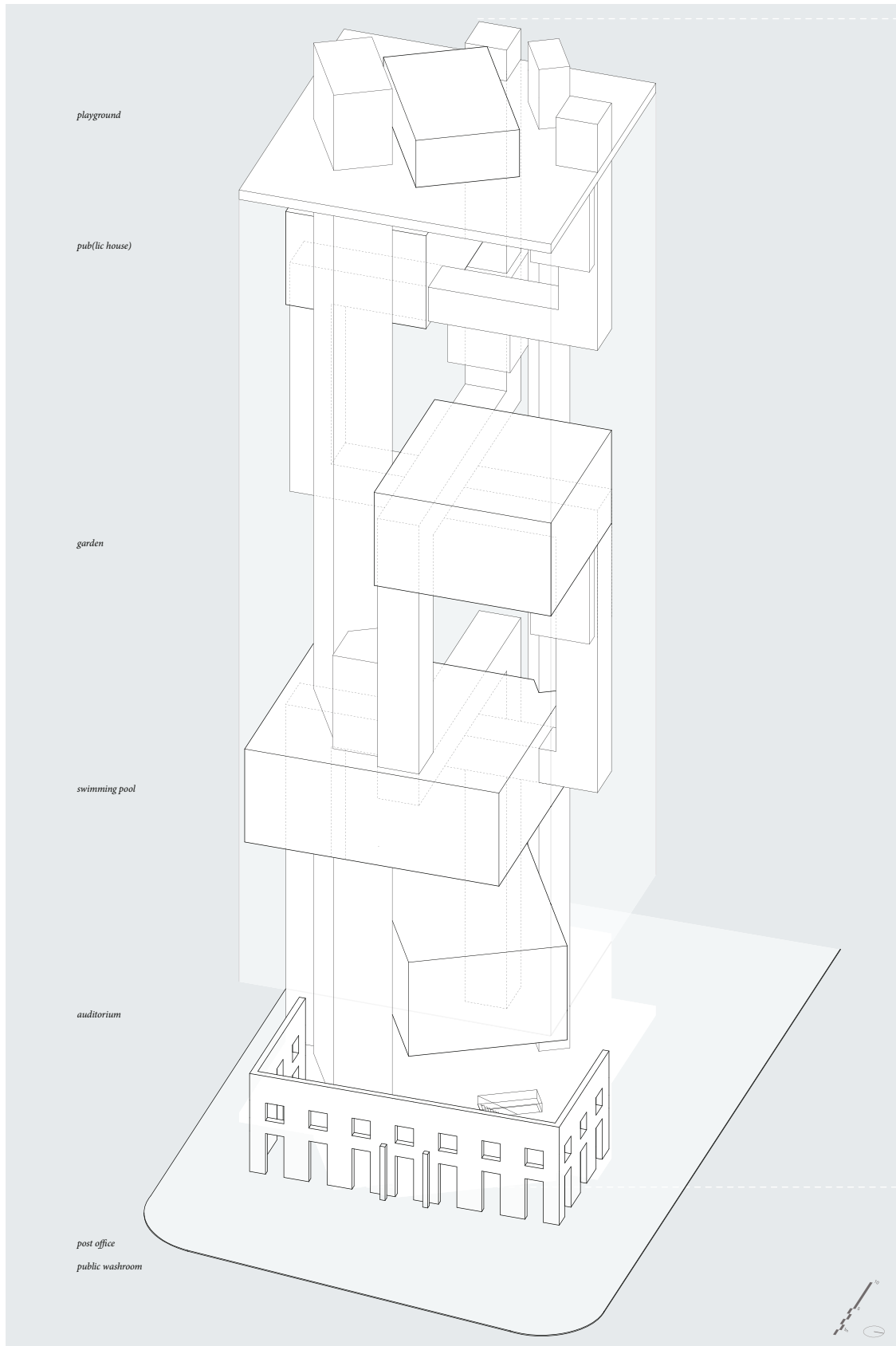
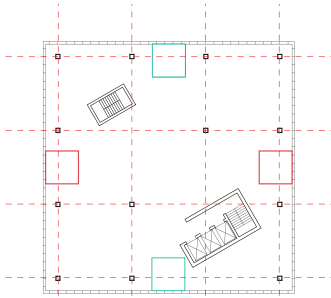
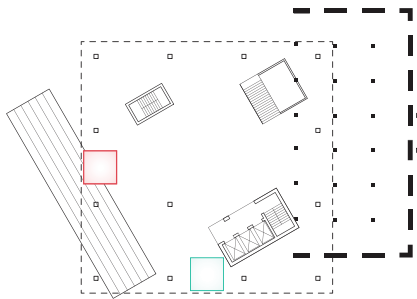


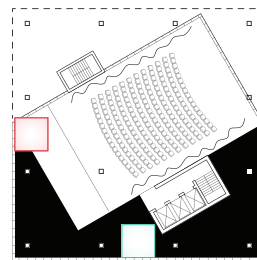
Figure 39. Axonometric view of public spaces, communal rooms, and periscope connections



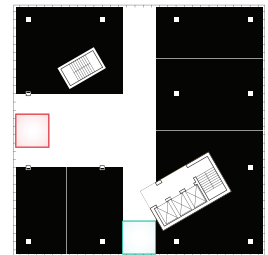
structural grid + periscopes



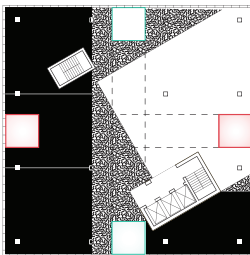
post office pavilion



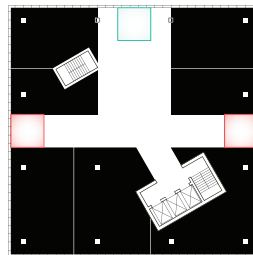
auditorium



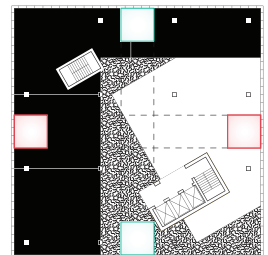
communal room



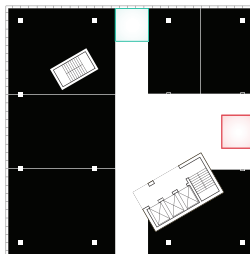
garden



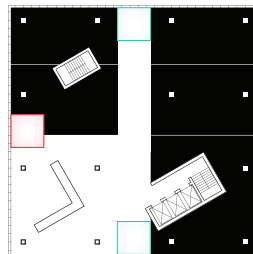
communal room



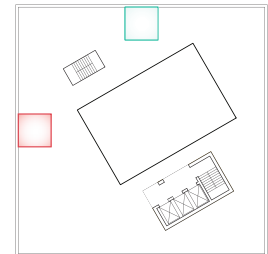
swimming pool



communal room



pub



roof playground



Fig 40. Plans

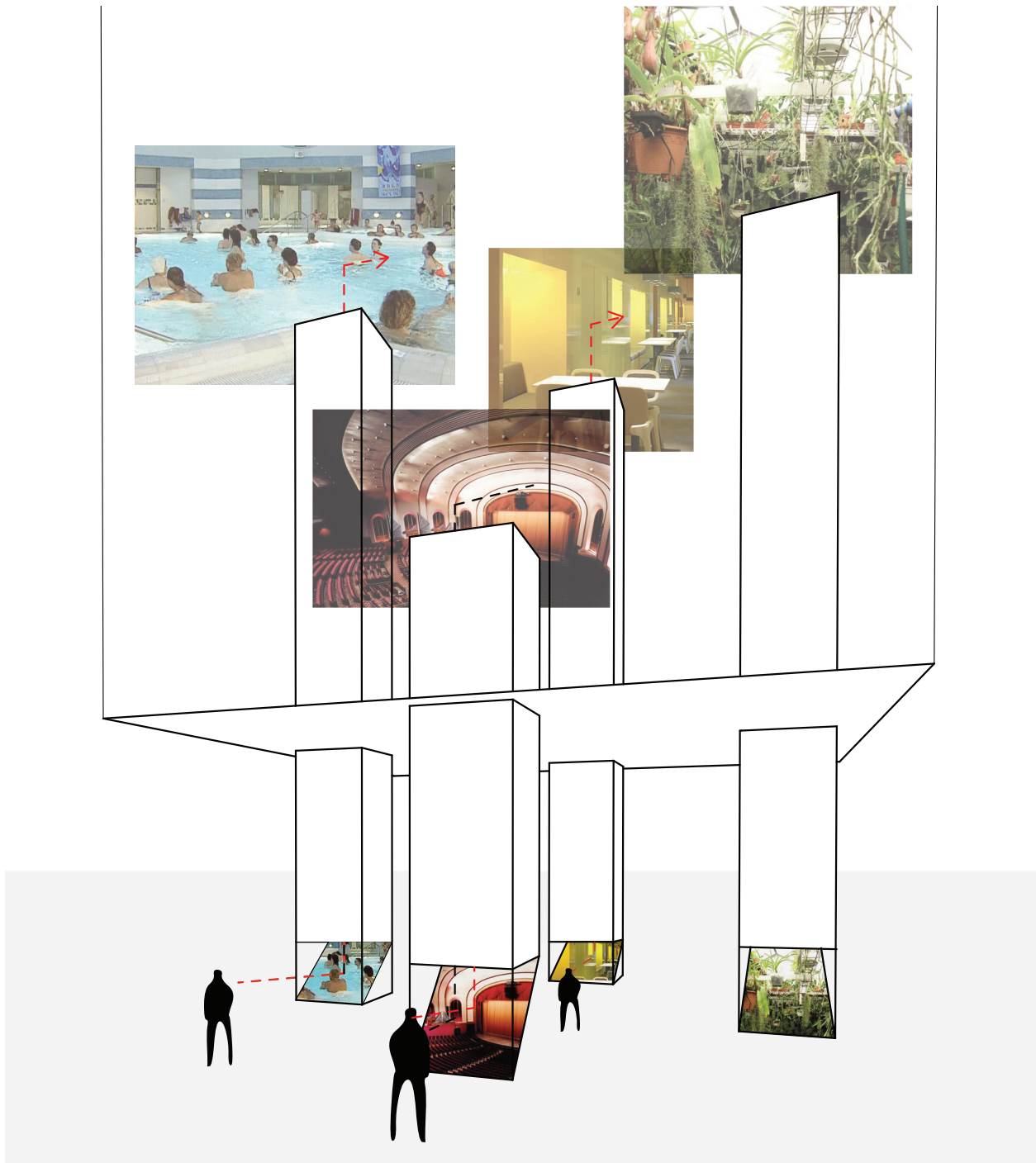


Figure 41. Periscopes connect public programs and spaces in the tower to people on the ground floor by providing multiple views

4.4 Periscopes

periscope (n): an apparatus that contains reflecting elements to permit an observer to see things that are otherwise out of sight from a position displaced from a direct line of sight

Public spaces are connected by periscope atriums. Here, they operate vertically and horizontally offering views to spaces that would otherwise be hidden. (Fig. 43) They pass through the communal rooms of residents (laundry etc.). Units have windows that open into them, similar to the condition in MVRDV's Markthalle, where units look into a large market hall.

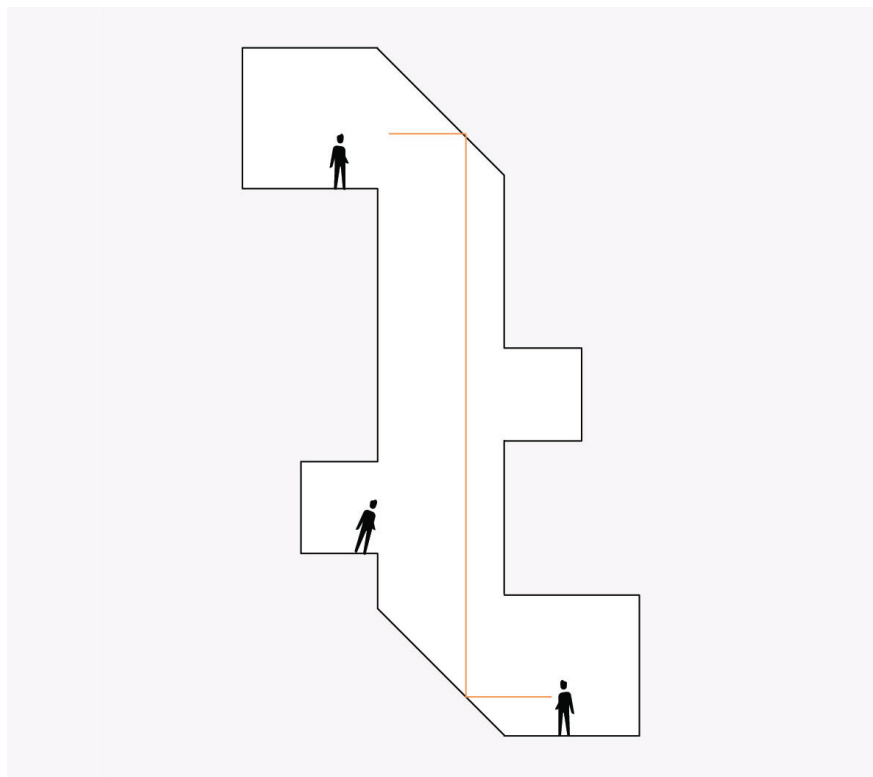


Figure 42. Voids traverse the building vertically, connecting various public programs visually (both directly and indirectly through periscopes).

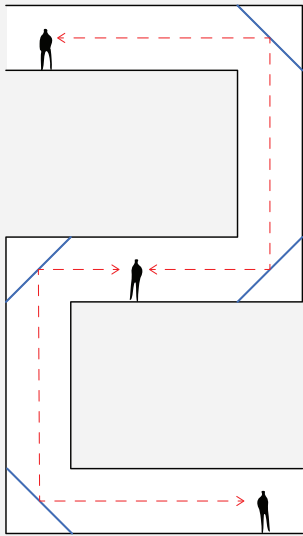
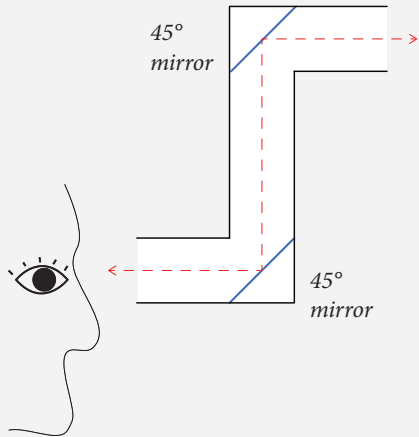


Fig 43. A typical periscope is a set of parallel mirrors at a 45 degree angle that can re-route one's line of sight around obstacles. Here it is imagined at a larger scale as a connective building-scale device that is occupiable and comprises hallways and atriums through private and public program.

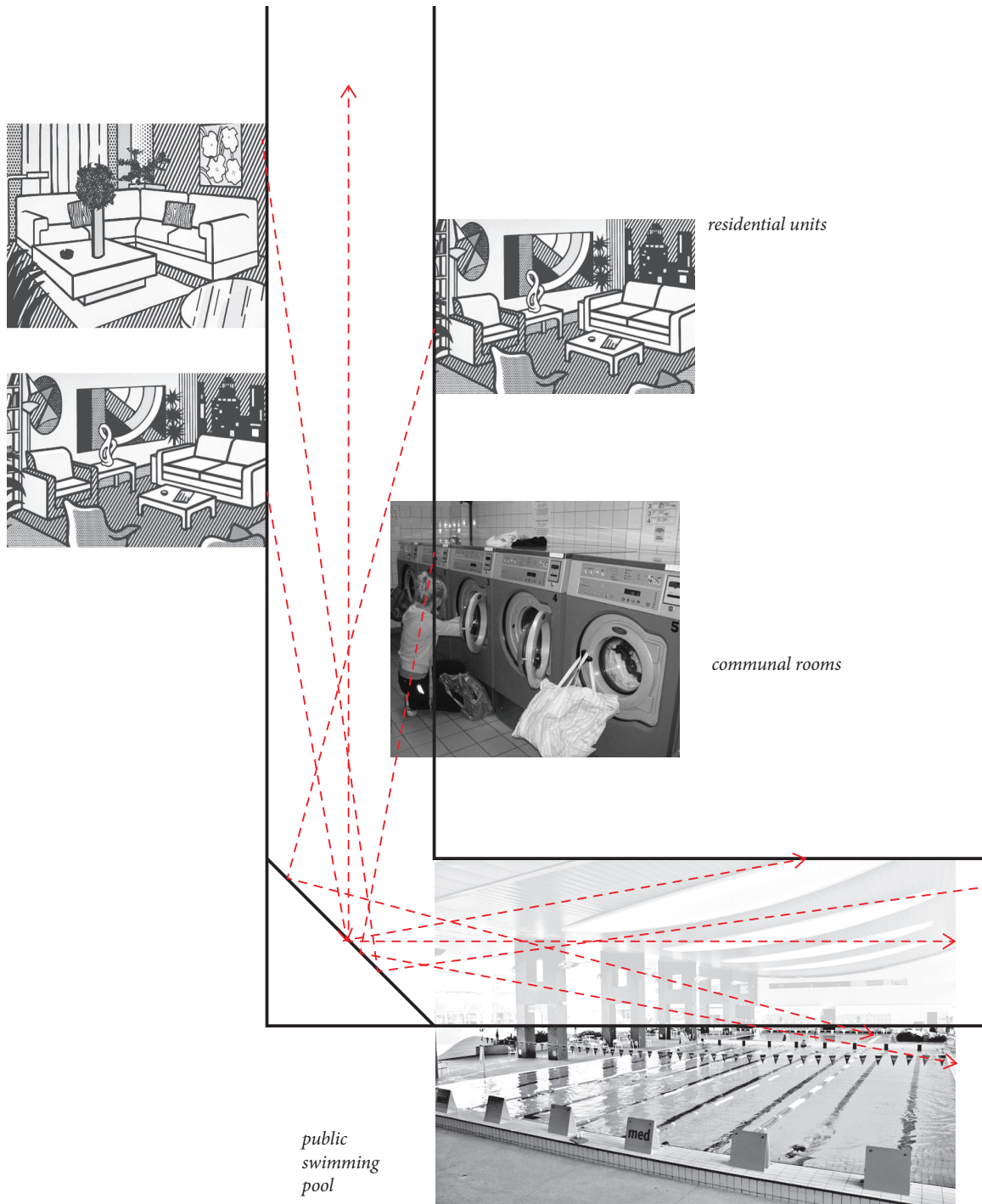


Fig 44. Periscopes create visual and spatial relationships between individual residential units, communal rooms, and public spaces

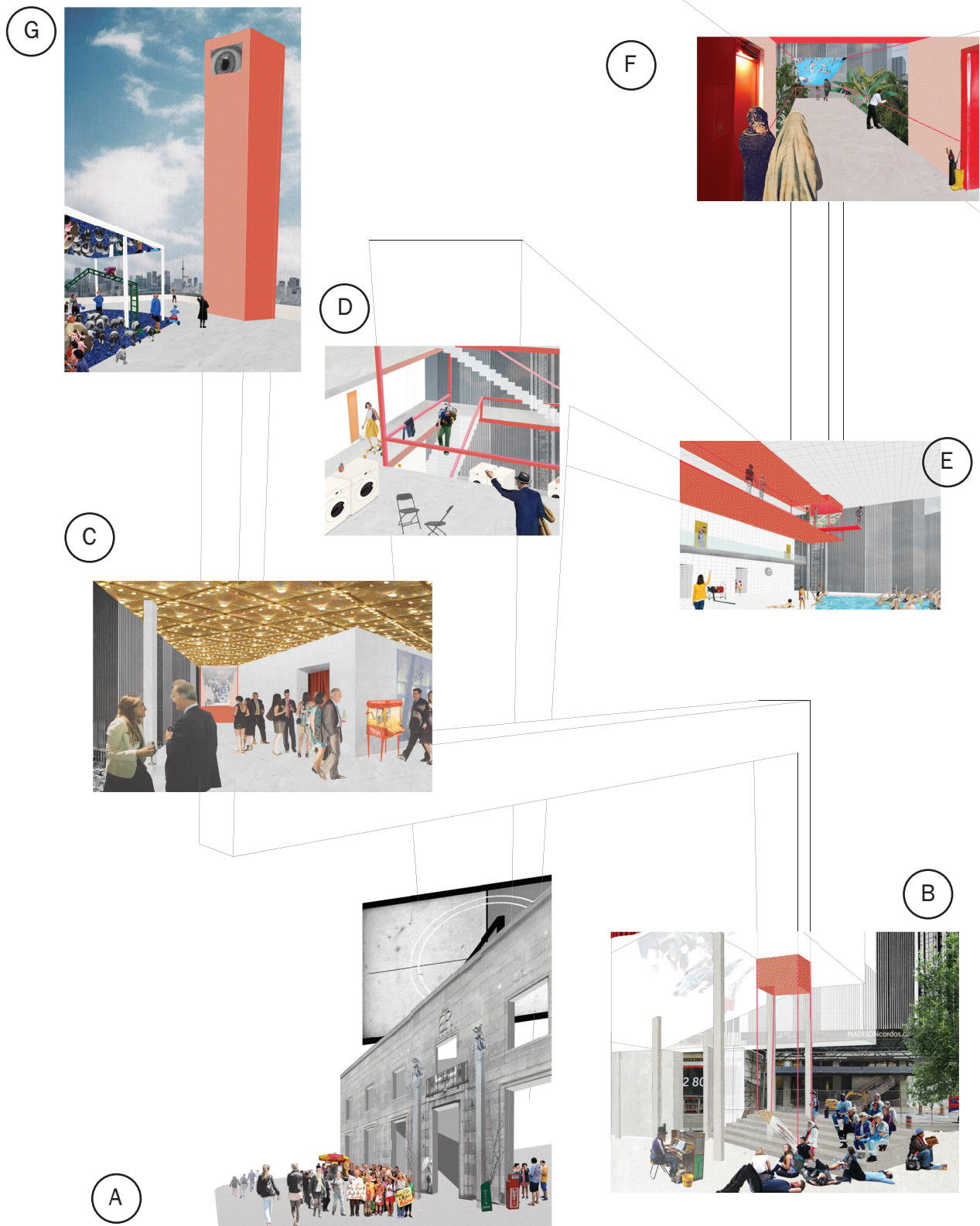
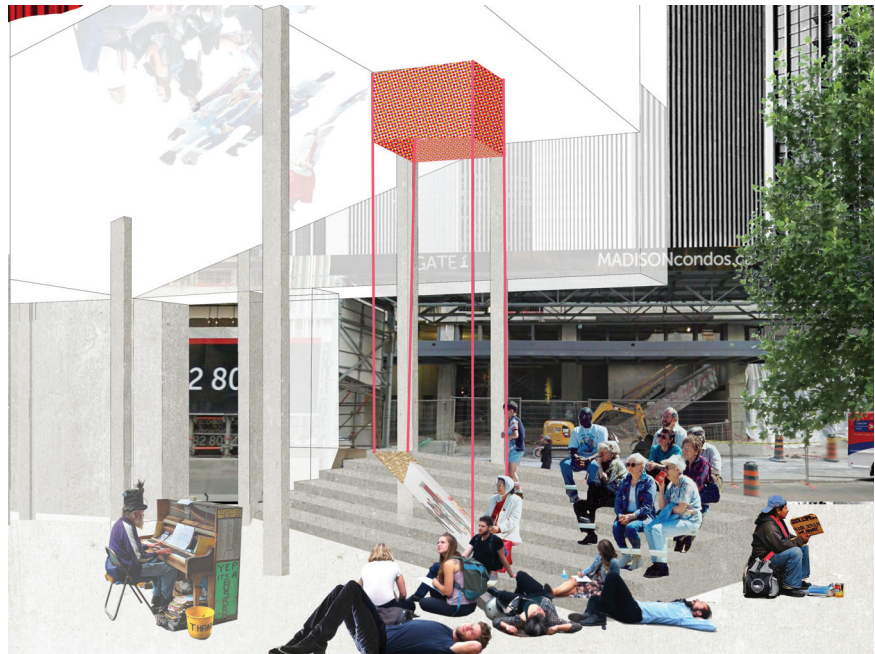


Figure 45. Perspectives illustrating periscopes connecting public rooms and communal areas



A

The view from Yonge Street, with the projection in the auditorium visible above the preserved facade of the old post office.



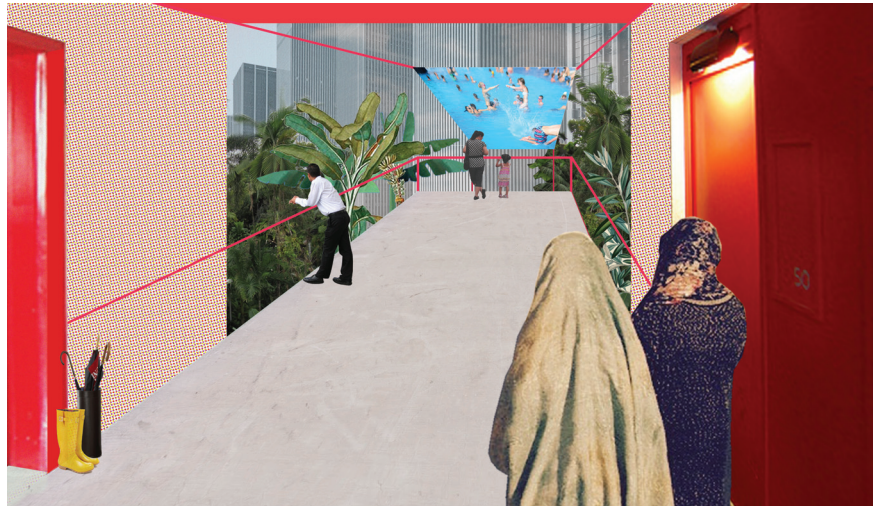
B Underneath the auditorium, a periscope protrudes providing a view up to the public activity above.



C A periscope passes through the auditorium lobby, providing a view to the public plaza below.



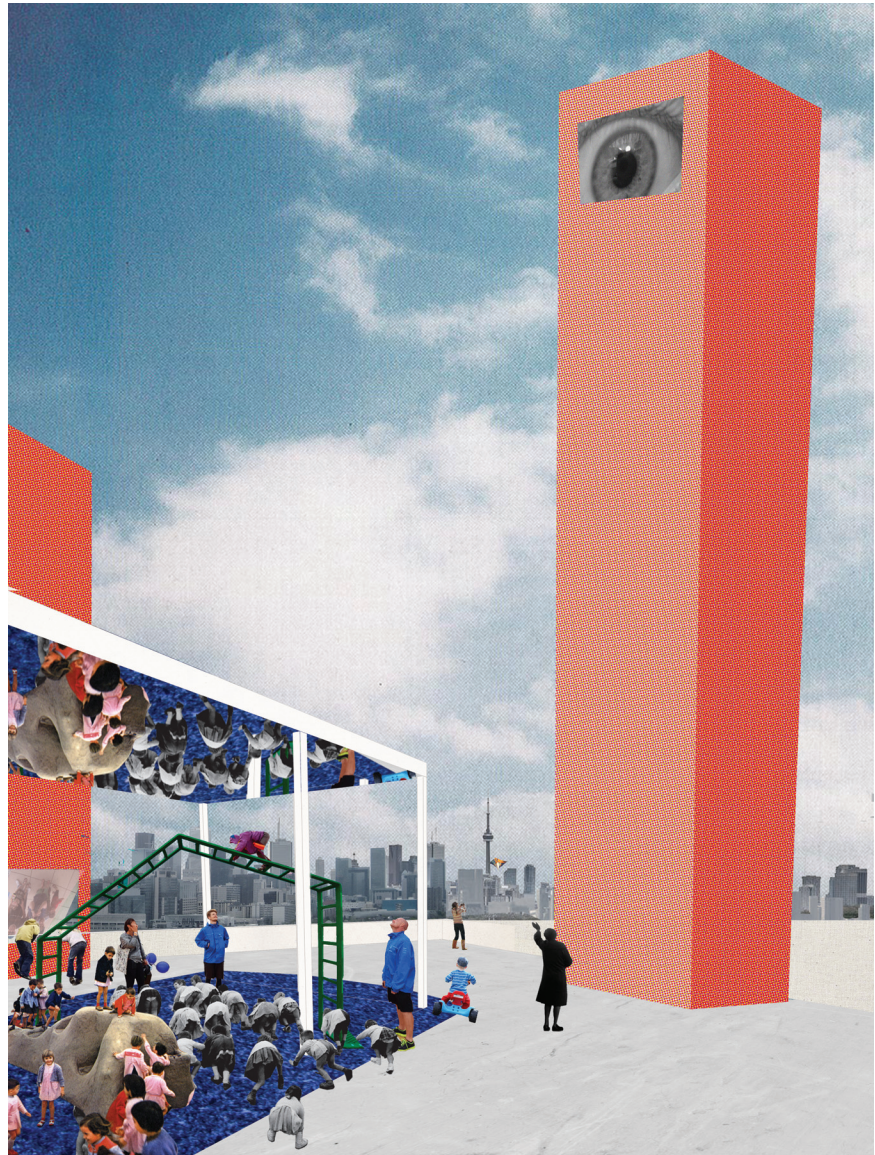
D A periscope passes through a communal room.



E A hallway accesses residential units and leads to the public garden with a periscopic view to the swimming pool several floors below.



F A periscope snakes through the swimming pool, providing a platform for diving boards and a view up to the garden, several floors above. Swimmers can see out to neighbouring buildings in the city.



G

Roof playground, with periscopes towering above. A periscope elevates the public eye to the increasingly privatized skyline, giving the privileged view to the public.

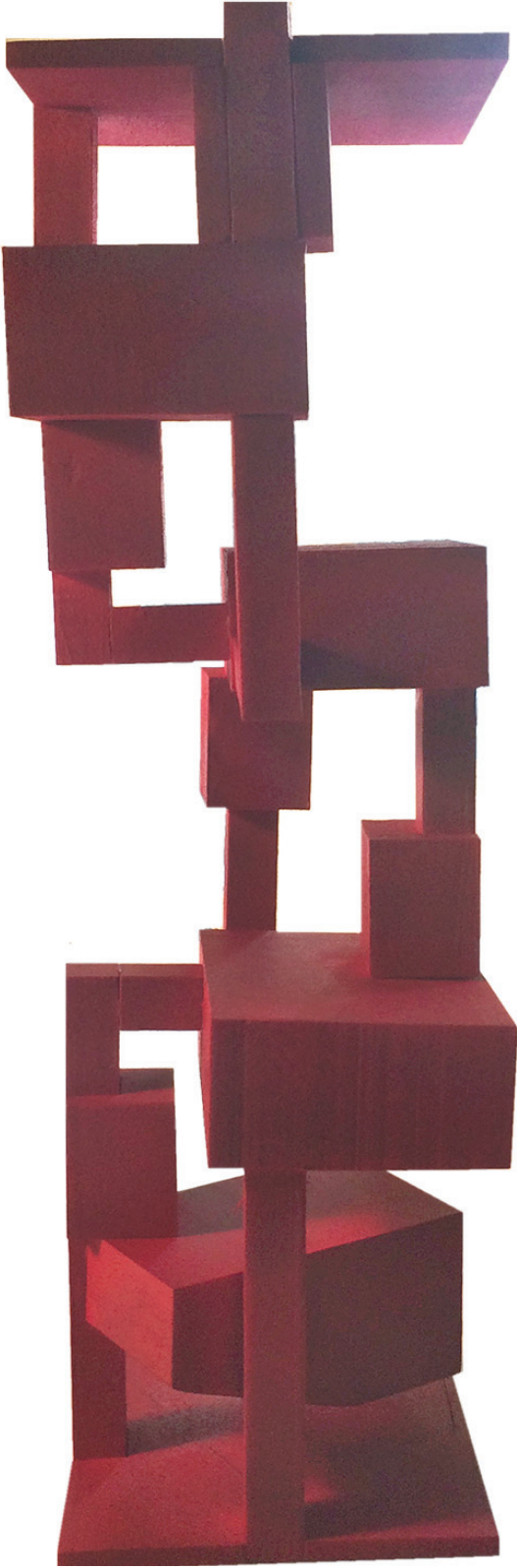


Fig 46. Model of public areas, communal rooms, and periscopes as a solid connection throughout the building

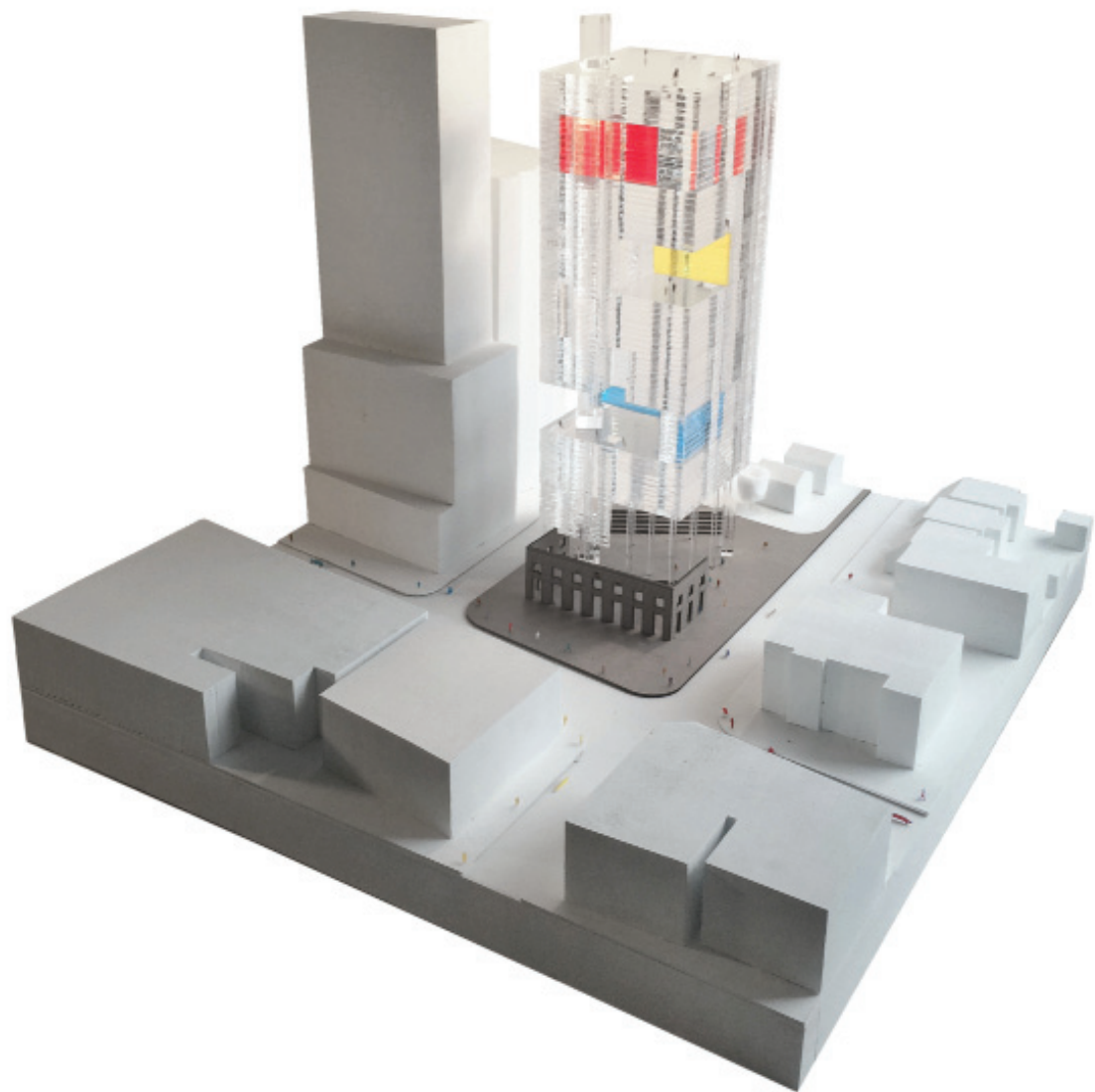


Fig 47. Model, view from north east

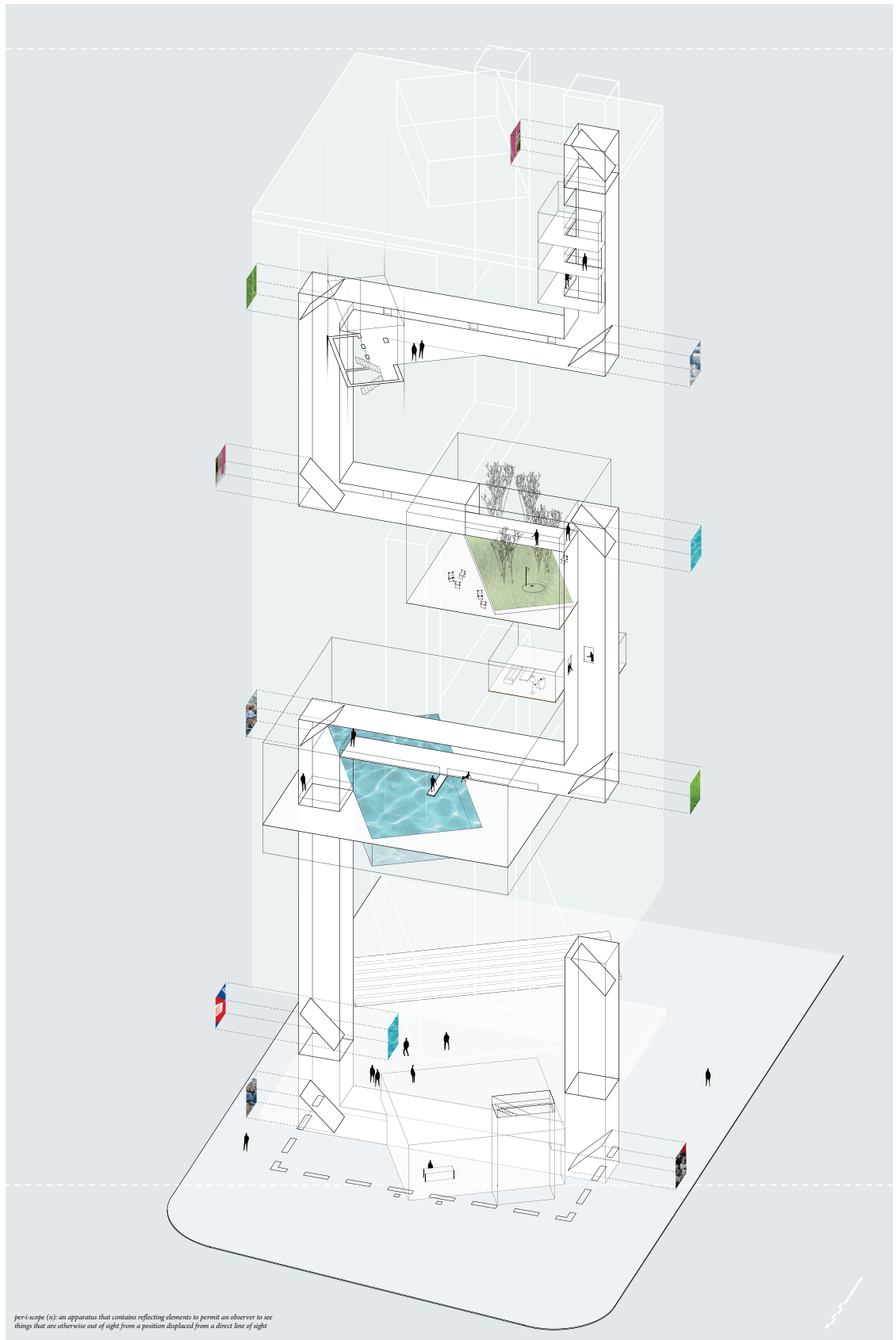


Fig 48. Axonometric showing a periscope's path through various programs and the displaced views they provide at various levels

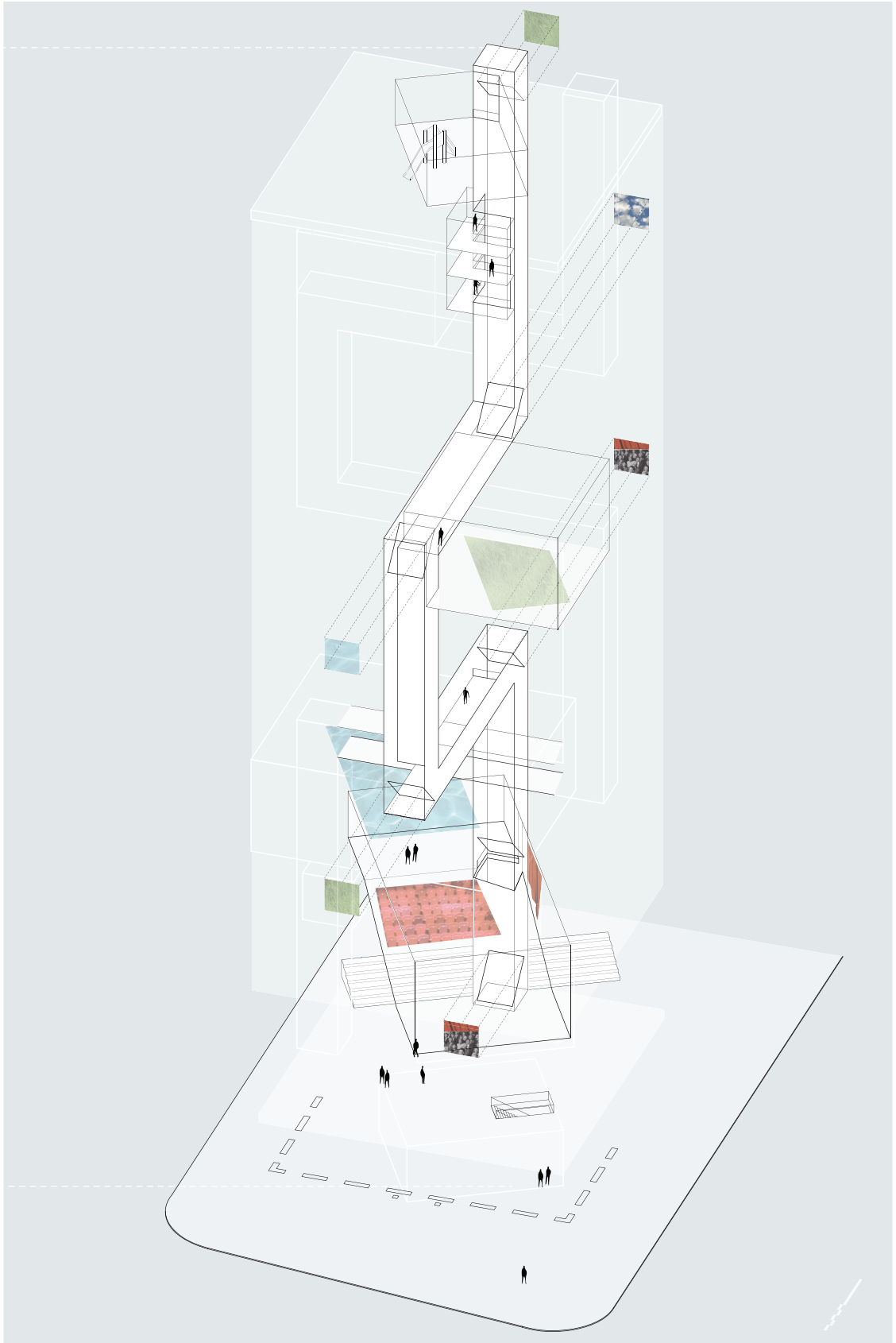


Fig 49. Axonometric showing the second periscope's path through the building

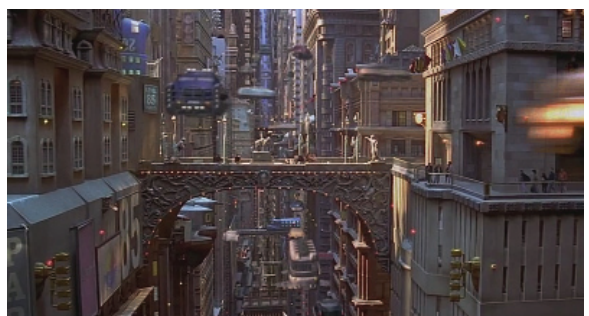
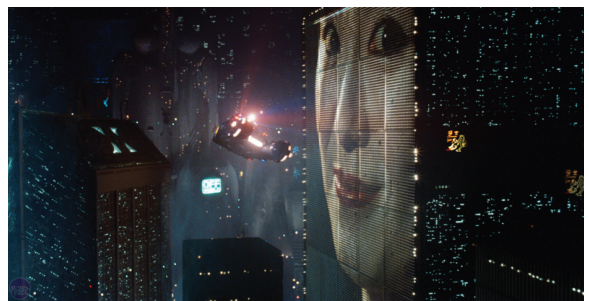
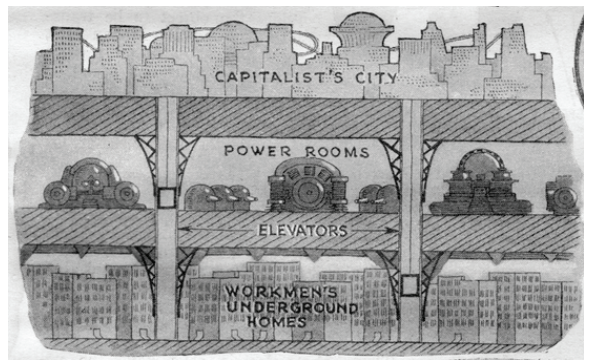
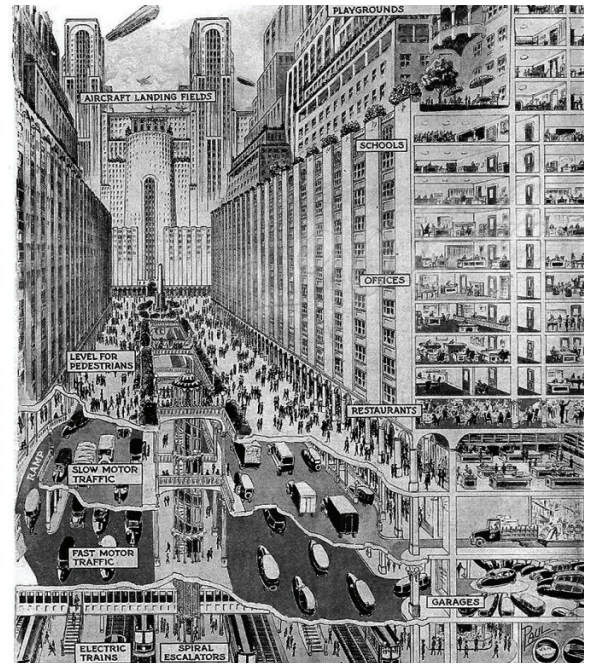


Fig 50. Corbett's Future City (1925), Metropolis (1927), Blade Runner (1982), The Fifth Element (1997)

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In a time when people increasingly communicate through different media in a non-physical environment, it is the responsibility of the architect to create actual spaces for physical and direct communication between people.⁶⁵

Currently in Toronto, this entails managing public space above ground level in towers, as development consumes the public realm and expands upwards. However, “as soon as you leave the ground, you have the problem of not feeling as if you’re in a real public space. But it’s not completely unthinkable; it’s a challenge for architects.”⁶⁶ Translating the informal interactions that occur by chance on the street, which are vital in creating vibrant city life, into the vertical dimension, was here facilitated by periscope atriums. In such a hybrid building, it is a challenge to balance the various users, from members of the general public, to residents of the building. The most important trait of vertically distributed public space is the clear expression of “public.” In this building, exterior circulation, periscope atriums, and an open ground floor attempted to blur the perceived boundary between outside public and interior private while also signalling the spaces above. While it is “a bit utopian to desire a certain kind of social mix,” collective living can provide the social aspect under threat in densifying cities.⁶⁷ “The experiment is worthwhile, knowing that verticalization for the time being is inevitable, or maybe even a good idea.”⁶⁸

65. Kazuyo Sejima quoted in *The SANAA Studios 2006-2008*, ed. Florian Indenburg (Baden: Lars Muller Publishers, 2010), 18.

66. MVRDV, *The Vertical Village* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2012), 272.

67. *Ibid.*, 276.

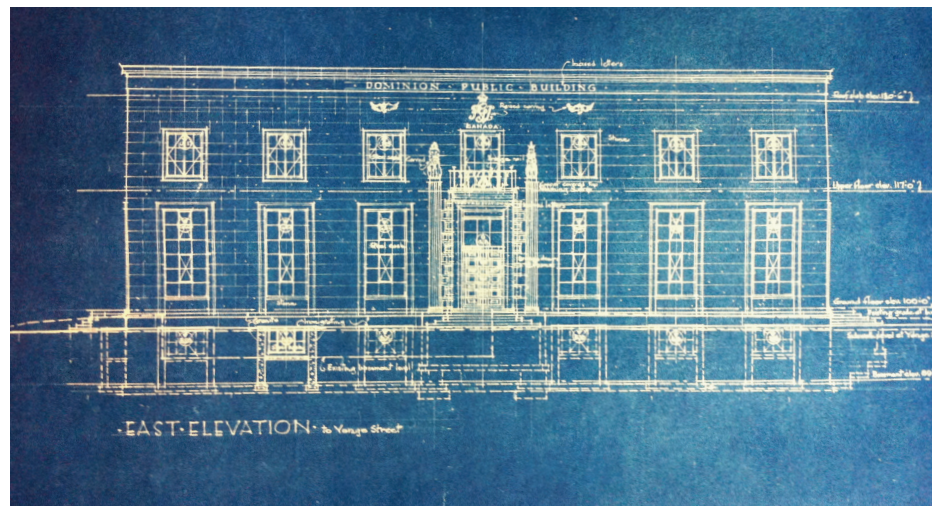
68. *Ibid.*, 271.

APPENDIX

Postal Station K Archival Drawings

The post office has been renovated throughout time, including the altering of original interior finishes. The most important heritage features include mainly elements of the facades including:

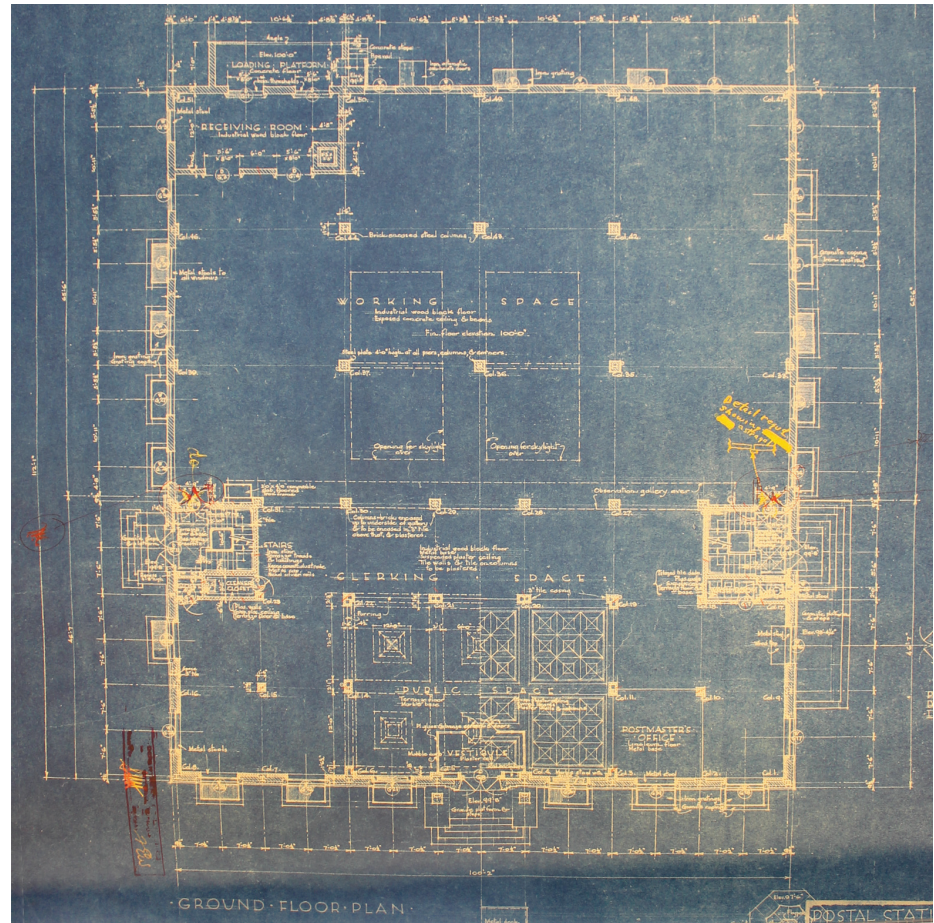
- reliefs of different modes of mail transportation by sculptor Frank Winkler
- cypher of King Edward VIII
- symmetry and classical orderliness of facade
- cladding material - limestone panels
- obelisks with horse and unicorn statues



Original elevational drawings of Postal Station K by Murray Brown Architects; City of Toronto Archives



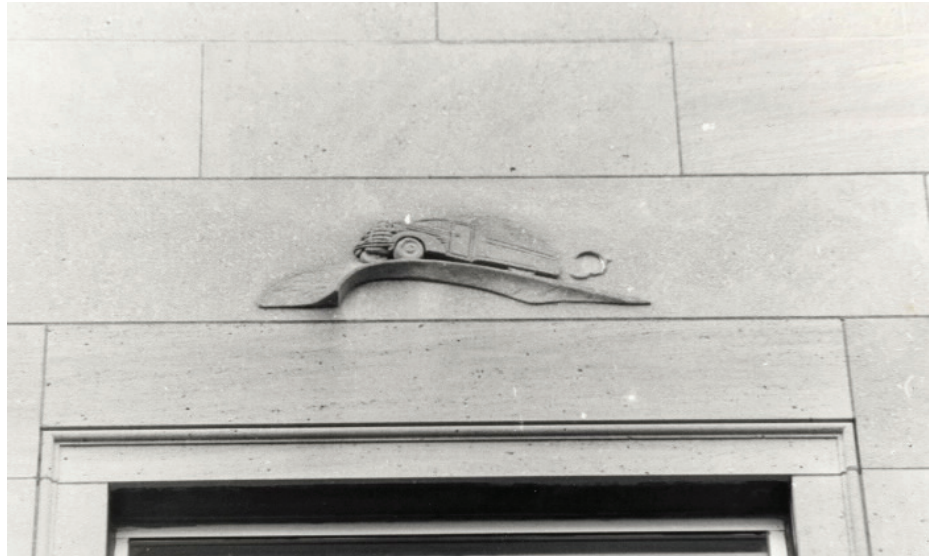
Original elevational drawings of Postal Station K by Murray Brown Architects; from the City of Toronto Archives



Original ground floor plan of Postal Station K by Murray Brown Architects; City of Toronto Archives



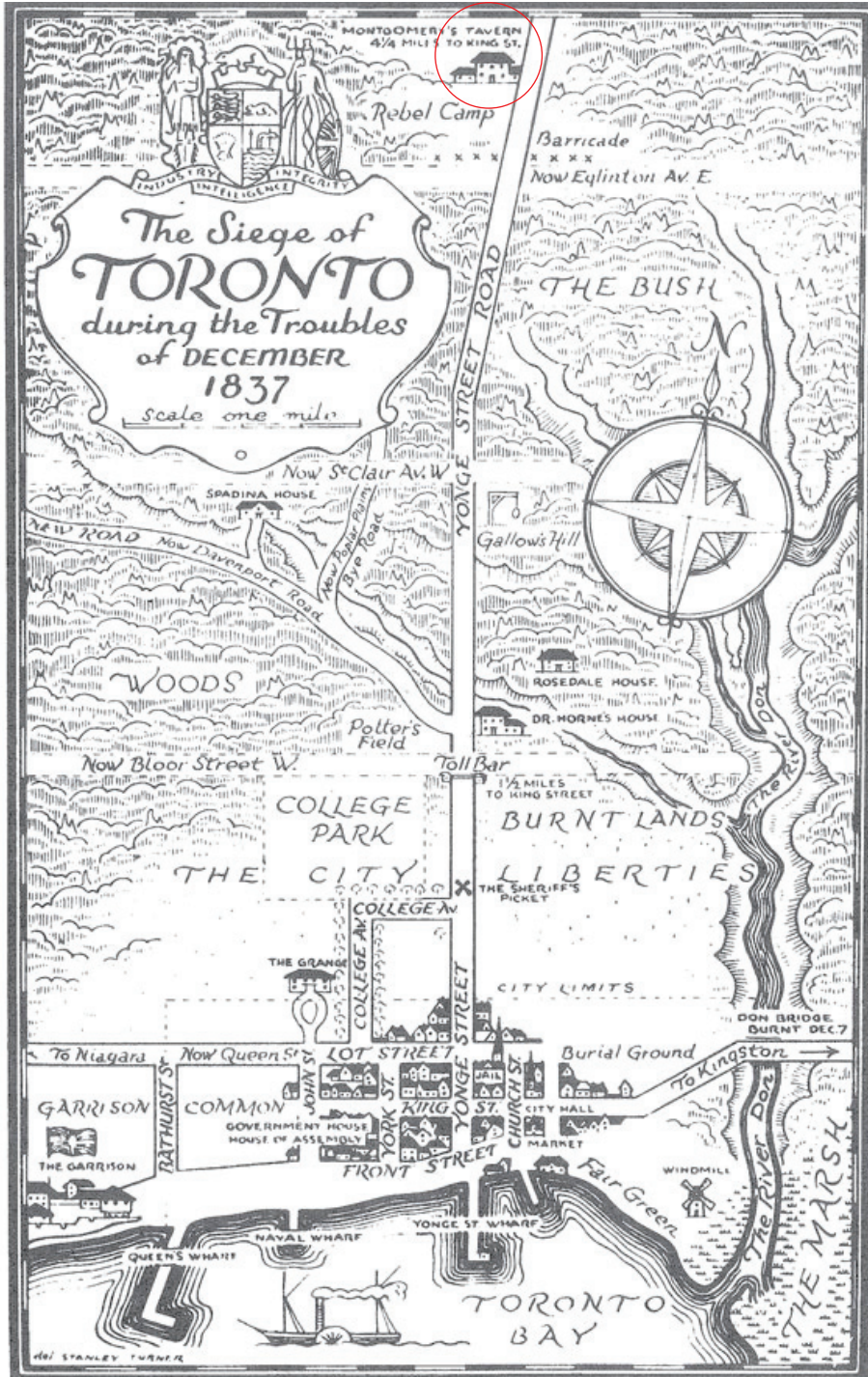
Postal Station K Entrance, 1981, showing King Edward VII Insignia (Toronto Public Library)



Detail of postal transportation motifs on facade, 1981 (Toronto Public Library)



Postal Station K, 1981 (Toronto Public Library)



Map during "The Siege of Toronto" showing original settlement and Montgomery's Tavern, the site of Postal Station K; map from Blogto.com

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