

From Third to Fourth Place

Rethinking Social Infrastructure in the Hybrid Society

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Architectural Design Crossovers

Supervisors:

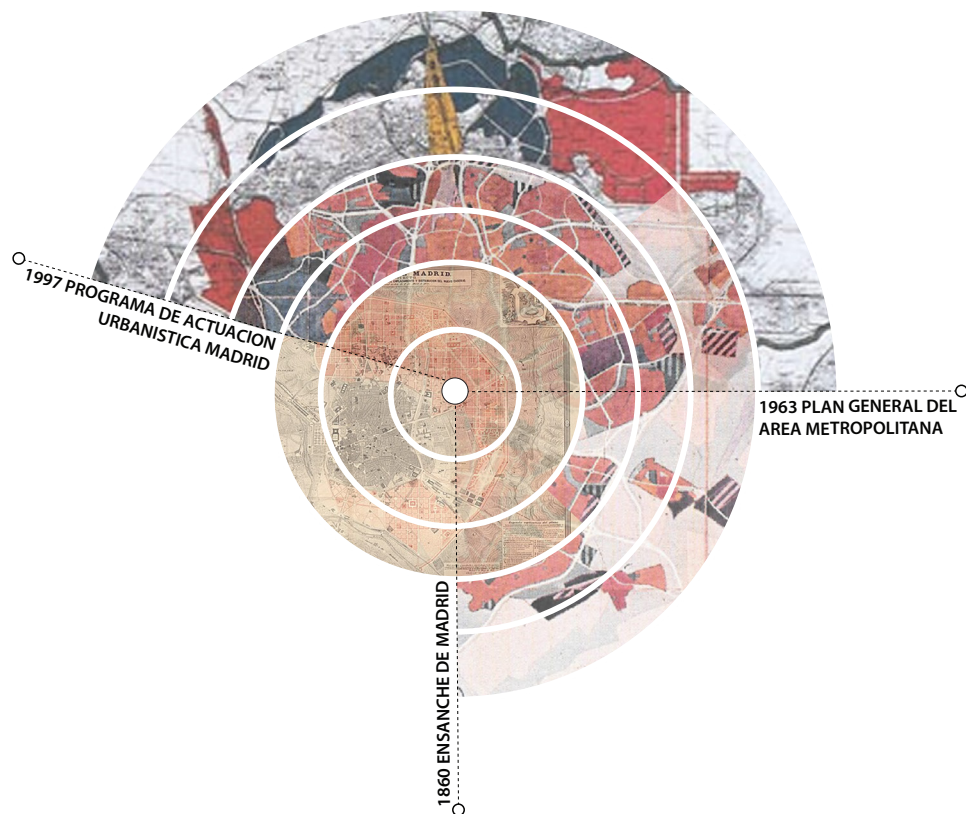
Johan van Lierop

Roberto Cavallo

Abstract

Madrid's Programas de Actuación Urbanística (PAU) were designed for the car-centric, 20th-century commuter workforce that no longer exists. We now live in a hybrid society where the daily life of our home and work are blending. The result is a repopulation of these neighborhoods, while the urban grid is still dominated by massive, isolated blocks and overscaled infrastructure, focused on vehicles and pedestrian transience. This research argues that these overdimensioned layouts create a socio-spatial mismatch, generating non-places where a localized population is physically contained by an inward-looking architecture built for temporary daytime absence. While prioritizing car efficiency and absolute privacy, this closed morphology eliminates the intermediate human-scale street life required for community building.

Utilizing a Research-by-Design methodology focused on Sanchinarro, the study deconstructs these defensive, car-dominated boundaries through Actor-Network Theory. Now our lives are hyperconnected, this research argues we should be looking differently at Third Places. It proposes the vital social infrastructure as a Fourth Place: a system of porous thresholds inhabiting the sidewalk edge. Proposing a network of architectural micro-interventions, this project reclaims the oversized urban voids, shifting the PAU from isolated architecture towards a series of open, collaborative urban commons.



Crucially, these building blocks are engineered to act as self-contained communities. By incorporating all private necessities and recreational amenities, including swimming pools, paddle courts, playgrounds, and parking garages, directly inside their secured walls. This results in all daily domestic and leisure activities happening strictly from within.



Furthermore, the overdimensioned municipal voids between these blocks create a psychological failure of what psychologists call prospect-refuge (Appleton, 1975). The architectural block provides absolute refuge without prospect because it is visually and physically blind to its surroundings. Conversely, the street provides infinite prospect without refuge because it is an overexposed, empty landscape. This spatial mismatch completely eliminates the intermediate territory necessary for the cultivation of weak ties, the low-intensity, casual connections that bridge social groups and foster community resilience (Granovetter, 1973; Aelbrecht, 2016). Consequently, the car-centric landscape dissolves into what Marc Augé (1995) defines as non-places: landscapes of pure transition space. These non-places suppress the spontaneous social friction required for communal bonding (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). As a result, the resident is relegated to the role of a mere passenger, not an active participant of the urban space (Gehl, 2011; Sennet, 2018).



ACQUA STUVA 8/10

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VICTORIA
BARI EL. BORGARIN PIZZERIA
GOSTA
GOSTA

A primary driver of this oversized morphology is the Dotacional Reserve, a legal mandate requiring that for every square meter of housing, a specific percentage of land must be ceded to the City Council for public use (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 1997; Blasco, 2013). Because Sanchinarro was designed for a projected workforce that took decades to arrive, these plots were sized for massive facilities, such as hospitals, sports complexes and schools, rather than the organic growth and local amenities the neighborhood actually requires (Iñigo & Mace, 2018).



Madrid Centro
Pre 19th Century



Barrio de Salamanca
End 19th Century



Ciudad Lineal
Beginning 20th Century



San Blas
'60 & '70



Sancharro & Las Tablas
Beginning 21th Century

Relevance

In an era where hybrid work has permanently decentralized the population, society faces an immediate shortage of local, non-commercial public infrastructure, leaving remote workers isolated within their fragmented neighborhoods. For the architectural profession, this study offers a critical, repeatable strategy for reclaiming underutilized public space. By shifting the role of the architect from a designer of isolated residential blocks to a curator of a distributed network of micro-interventions, the project establishes a new benchmark for how the profession can treat overscaled, urban voids as active community assets. It provides a concrete, physical design method to transform municipal liabilities into vibrant urban commons that directly restore a neighborhood's social cohesion. Socio-theoretically, this study utilizes an Actor-Network Theory (ANT) lens (Fallan, 2008; Latour, 2005; Law, 1992) to deconstruct how car-centric infrastructure actively repels community interaction.

By analyzing the physical streetscape as an active participant in human behavior, the research contributes to the academic evolution of the Fourth Place (Aelbrecht, 2016; Morisson, 2019), facilitating a clearer spatial understanding of how hybrid societies utilize the physical environment. This framework marks a fundamental shift away from the traditional Third Place (Oldenburg, 1989) and introduces non-commodified thresholds that weaves together architecture, infrastructure, and landscape into a hybrid morphology (Angélil & Klingmann, 1999). Ultimately, the research advances architectural scholarship by expanding Gibson's (1979) theory of spatial affordances, proving how low-cost, high-density physical hardware can be systematically deployed to convert dead infrastructural non-places (Augé, 1995) into urban commons (Akbi et al., 2022; Borch & Kornberger, 2015).

1903 GEORG SIMMEL ○

Argued that the sensory overload of the city forces individuals to adopt a protective emotional detachment, establishing the modern paradox where physical proximity leads to social isolation.

1989 RAY OLDENBURG ○

Defined the "third place" as the neutral social ground distinct from home and work, arguing that these informal gathering spots serve as essential infrastructure for community building, personal well-being, and democracy.



1961 JANE JACOBS ○

Laid the foundation for urban vitality by arguing that successful public spaces rely on diverse pedestrian interactions and the self-regulating social order of "eyes on the street." She demonstrated that a neighborhood's safety and liveliness are fundamentally rooted in its architectural and social complexity. ○

○ **2009 MOORE ET AL.**

Views MMOs as public spaces, analogous to those in the physical world, because they simulate 3D spaces and contain thousands of people who do not know each other, and they take face-to-face conversation as their primary metaphor for user interaction.



○ **2008 EDWARD SOJA**

Defined "Thirdspace" as a comprehensive way of looking at the world that merges the physical environment we see with the abstract ideas we have about it, creating a "real-and-imagined" whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

○ **2021 MINA AKHAVAN**

Sees "third spaces" as new coworking spaces and maker spaces, that serve as alternative solutions for work within the context of the digital revolution and the rise of the sharing economy.

Objective and motivation

The motivation for this research originates from a globally visible widening gap between top-down architectural design intent and social reality. This mismatch is heavily visible within Madrid's PAUs, but it represents a systemic failure found throughout modern urban planning worldwide. The vibrant street life that historically characterized traditional city centers are systematically missing from modern residential developments. Contemporary life operates within a hybrid society where the boundaries between production and domesticity have blurred, leaving a significant amount of residents present in their neighborhoods throughout the day. Because of the rise in remote and flexible work, the demand for active, lively public infrastructure within local neighborhoods is higher than ever. Yet, the physical built environment remains static in a car-centric past, leaving residents stranded in empty, dead streetscapes.

The ultimate goal is to adapt the physical reality of the city to the fluid, daily needs of contemporary hybrid society. To achieve this goal, the project's objective is to design a multi-scalar network of public pavilions along the overscaled boulevard grid, transforming a municipal liability into a vibrant, self-governed urban common. Urban isolation and loneliness cannot be solved by simply adding more residential units. Instead, architectural intervention must reclaim the underutilized, empty urban voids. Technically, the project aims to integrate a dual-layered technical and social ecosystem. This includes deploying a circular construction framework using locally extracted thermo-clay materiality for optimized thermal mass, while structurally managing internal metabolic resource loops, such as solar energy, water management, and organic waste recycling, optimized to operate continuously across shifting 24-hour hybrid work cycles.

Research and design questions

Main Question:

To what extent can a network of architectural interventions be designed as a distributed fourth place to mediate the scalar mismatch between Madrid's car-centric PAU perimeters and its oversized urban voids?

Sub-Questions:

Which material and infrastructural actants within Sanchinarro's car-centric grid enforce pedestrian transience, and where do they produce the specific socio-spatial gaps between the closed block and the oversized urban voids?

What critical lessons can be extracted from a comparative analysis of historical and contemporary precedents to unveil why certain urban interventions failed while others succeeded in fostering community vitality?

How must these strategies be programmatically layered, multi-scalarly deployed, and structurally managed, integrating tectonic materiality and socio-metabolic resource loops, to transition a municipal liability into a self-governed urban common?

Scope

The spatial and theoretical boundary of this research is strictly situated within the oversized urban voids, empty sidewalks, and unmaintained public spaces of Sanchinarro, a PAU (Programa de Actuación Urbanística) in northern Madrid. While the PAU's high-density residential blocks provide eyes on the street (Jacobs, 1961), the closed city characteristics (Sennett, 2018) force all daily activity inward. This results in a critical failure of prospect-refuge theory (Appleton, 1975) directly along the central avenue: the residential blocks provide absolute refuge without prospect to their surroundings, while the overscaled voids of the Boulevard offer infinite prospect without refuge, leaving pedestrians entirely exposed within a hostile, car-dominated streetscape. The core design and research challenge is to break this binary without modifying the private interior courtyards or altering the residential blocks themselves.

Instead, this project operates exclusively within the public ground-plane voids of this central corridor (Augé, 1995). To establish a targeted and overseeable field, the architectural intervention concentrates on Sanchinarro's main boulevard. Within this physical field, the programmatic scope introduces a network of hybrid Fourth Place pavilions. This specific programme combines digital co-working spaces, flexible workstations for the remote workforce, makerspaces, material repair shops, community event rooms, and integrated shared-mobility hubs. Institutionally and legally, the scope is framed by the current 2025/2026 wave of Concesiones Demaniales authorized under Spanish public property law (Ley 33/2003). This positions the architect not as a builder of closed private blocks, but as a strategist who utilizes legal frameworks and material hardware to deploy a porous, self-governed urban common.



Theoretical Framework

The Madrid PAU model is the manifestation of 20th-century functionalist planning, which prioritizes vehicular efficiency and strict land-use segregation (Blasco, 2013). In Sanchinarro, this zoning logic has produced what Sennett (2018) terms a closed city. On one side are massive, isolated residential blocks built for a traditional commuter lifestyle, on the other is a contemporary hybrid society of remote and flexible workers whose daily lives are localized yet digitally interconnected (Gratton, 2021; Alonso, 2025). This phenomenon is deeply rooted in the structural friction between the planned and the lived city (Helleman, 2015). This framework exposes the fundamental disconnect between how city environments are envisioned and constructed by professional planning institutions, and how those same spaces are actually navigated, experienced, and physically populated by their everyday users (Helleman, 2015). In the context of Sanchinarro, the planned city enforces empty landscapes designed for the car, completely ignoring the contemporary needs of the lived city. While currently, hybrid workers actively seek localized sites for community and social infrastructure (Alonso, 2025).

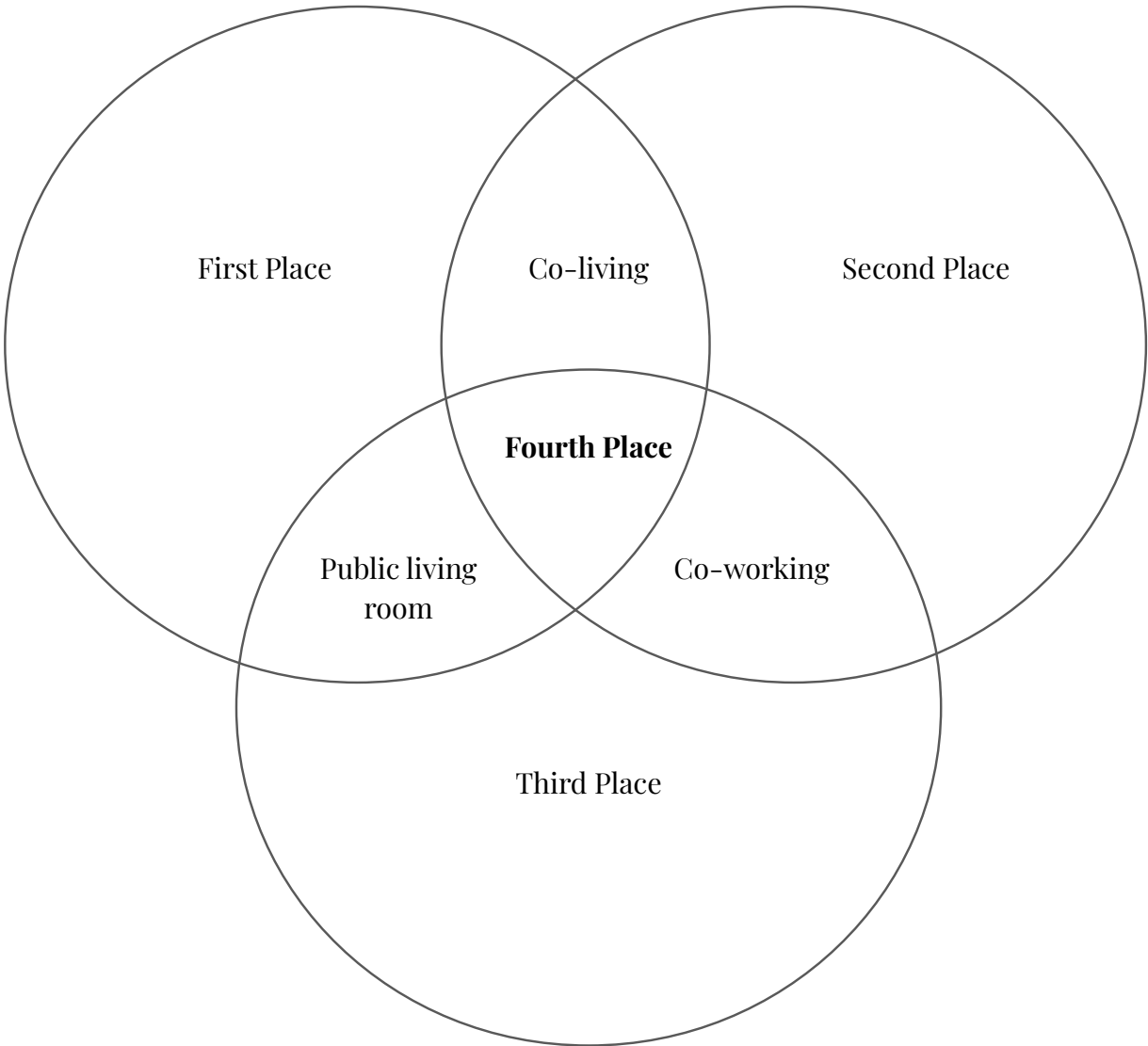




While the PAU was engineered for the 9-to-5 commuter, the contemporary reality has shifted toward a state of permanent fluidity. According to Eurofound (2025), remote work has stabilized as a core pillar of the European economy, but the local data is even more striking: as of 2025, 73% of Spanish employees explicitly reject a full return to the office (Alonso, 2025), prioritizing hybrid models that allow for localized professional life. This shift has resulted in a radical inversion of daytime presence within Sanchinarro. Before the hybrid society, the PAU was a dormitory suburb, functionally deserted during the day. Today, it is inhabited by hybrid workers, digital nomads, remote workers and entrepreneurs who are physically present but socially isolated (Chile et al., 2014; Bower et al., 2023). This demographic represents a massive, untapped pool of eyes on the street (Jacobs, 1961). The neighborhood is full of people, yet it remains empty of public life.

For decades, urban sociology used Oldenburg's (1989) concept of the Third Place, a dedicated social realm separate from the distinct environments of the home (the first place) and the workplace (the second place). Oldenburg argued that these spaces, such as traditional cafés, pubs, and public libraries, were essential for community cohesion because they operated as neutral grounds where individuals could gather. However, the traditional Third Place framework dictates a separated, stable routine: a worker leaves their home (first place), commutes to a centralized corporate or manufacturing workplace (second place), and visits a social hub (third place) during dedicated leisure hours.

In the contemporary urban landscape, this model has fundamentally collapsed. The rise of a digitally mediated, hyper-connected hybrid society has thoroughly blurred the boundaries between labor, domesticity, and leisure (Gratton, 2021; Alonso, 2025). The modern remote professional, flexible freelancer, and digital worker no longer operate within fixed geographical or temporal constraints. Instead, their workspace routinely bleeds into the domestic sphere, while their professional obligations are carried out across shifting, unconventional hours of the day. This dissolution of spatial and temporal boundaries means that urban citizens can no longer rely on social hubs that assume a strict separation between work and life.



The site visit to Sanchinarro reveals how the current fabric is dominated by monolithic, fortress-like residential blocks, massive, inward-facing structures that foster a sense of visual repetition and deep social isolation. This monolithic character is enforced by a hard perimeter of fences, gated entrances, and long, blank facades that dominate the street level. These elements create a physical and psychological barrier between the resident and the city, resulting in a total lack of active frontages.





Research and design questions

Main Question:

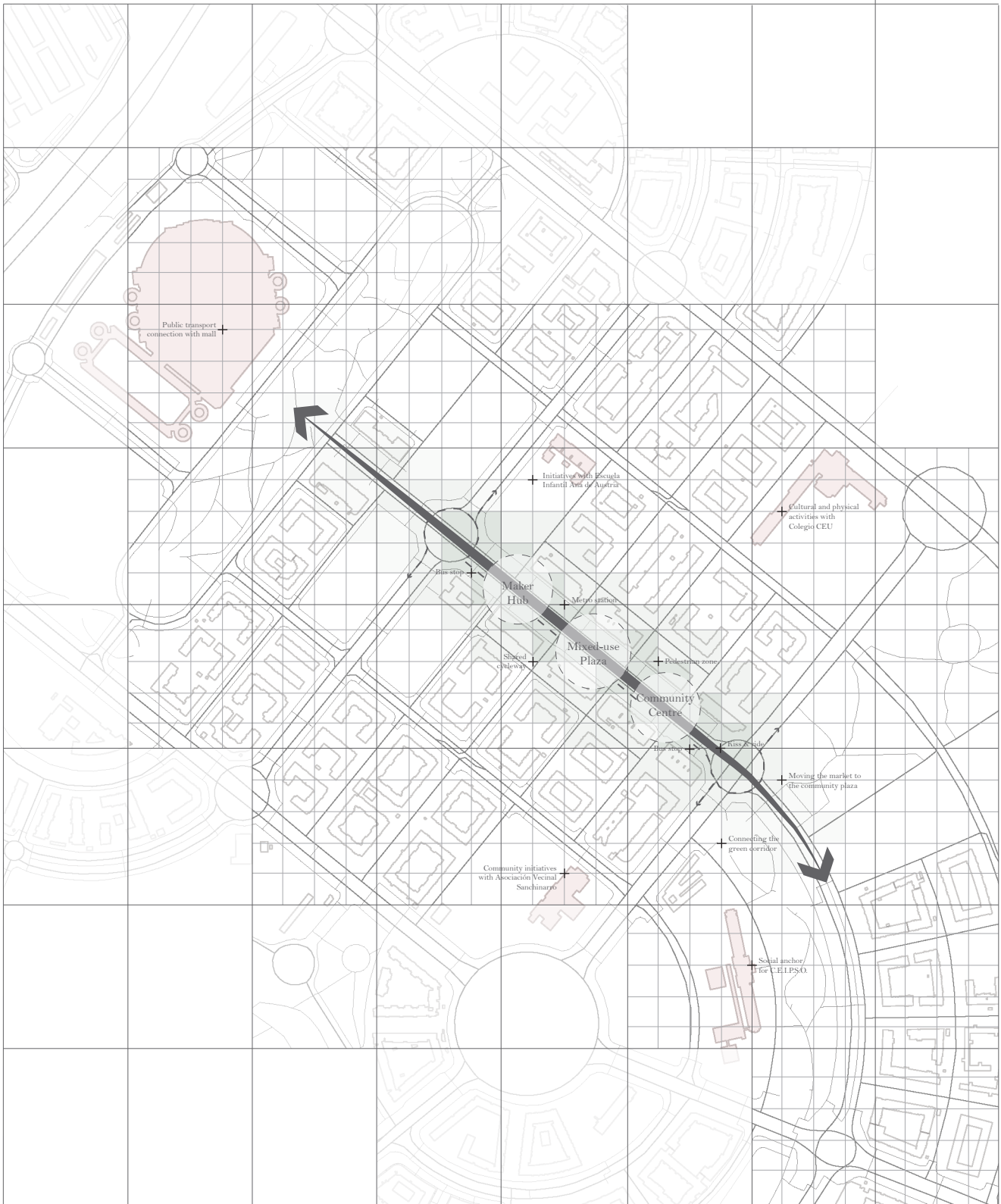
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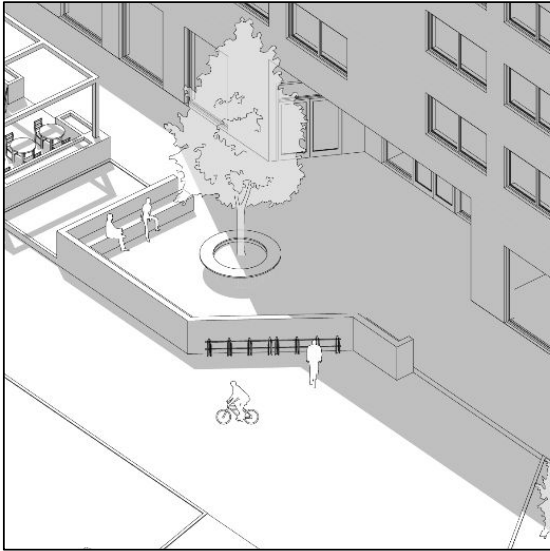
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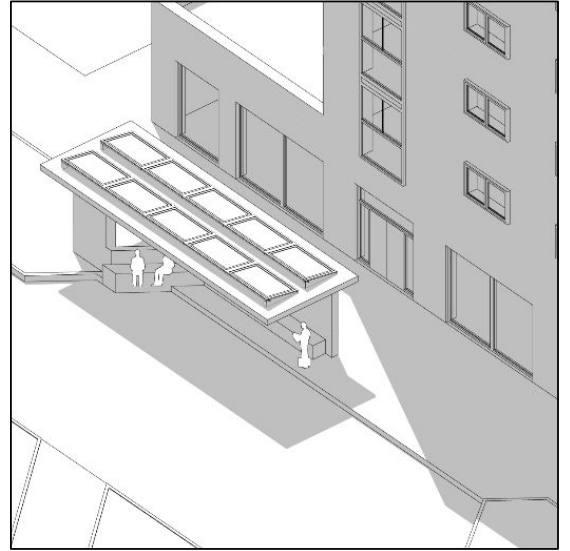
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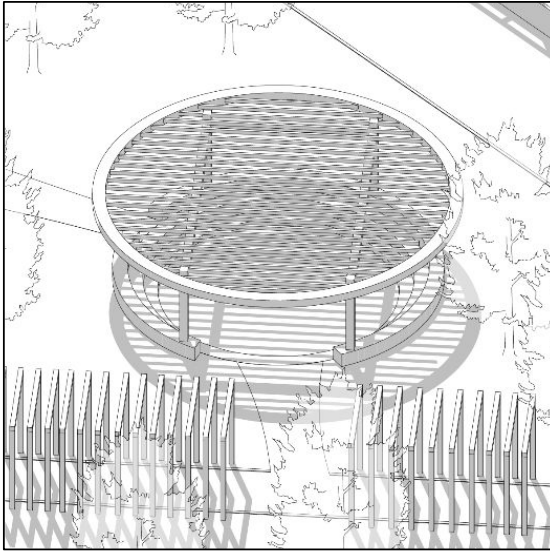




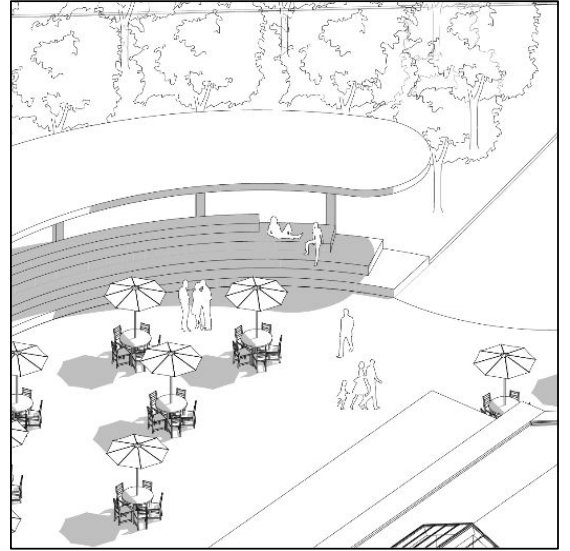
Mobility hub



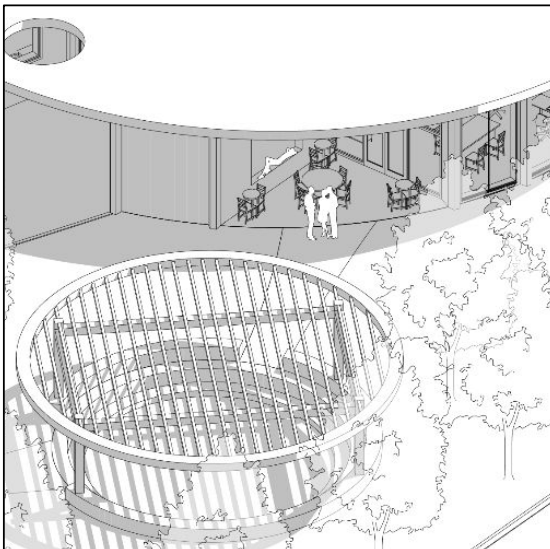
Bus stop



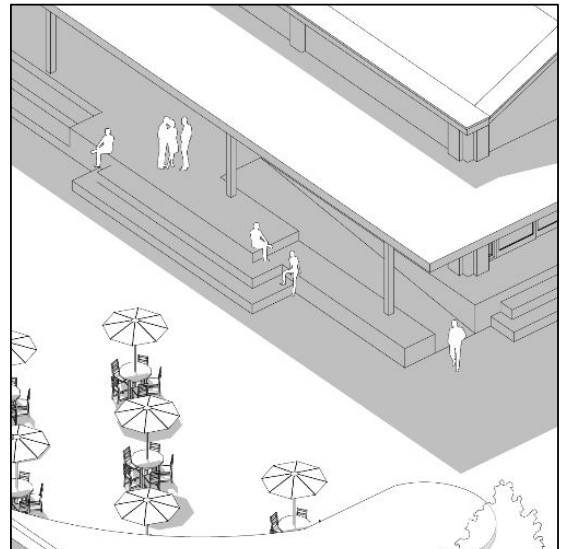
Wi-Fi zone



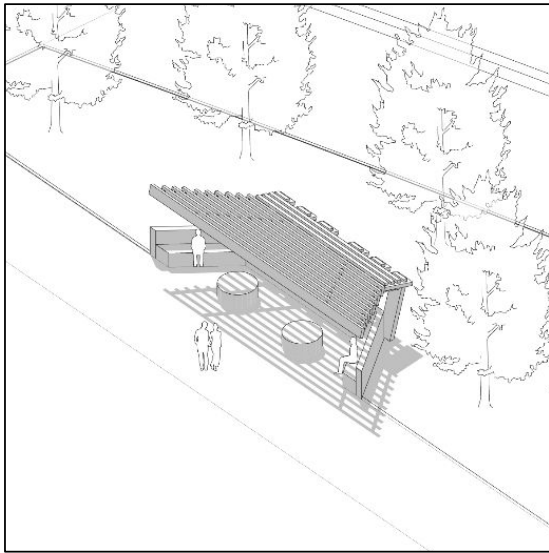
Shaded terrace



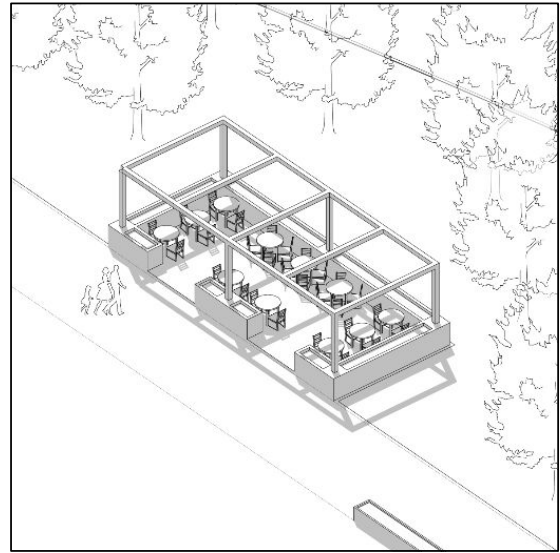
Inhabited wall



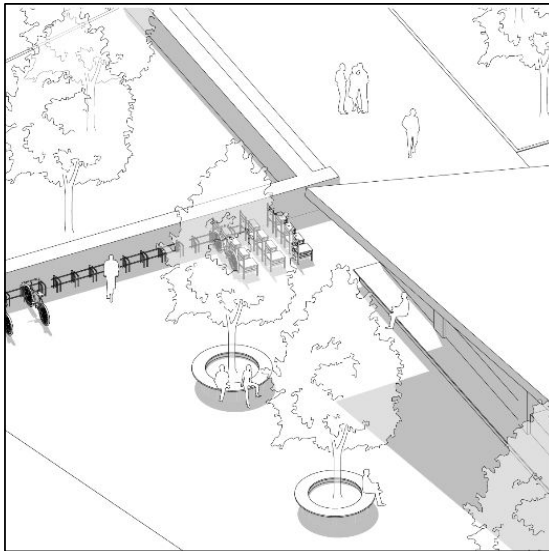
Terraced seating



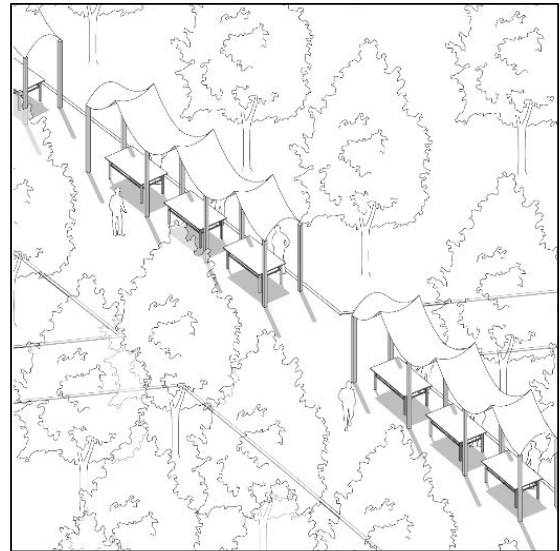
Shaded seating



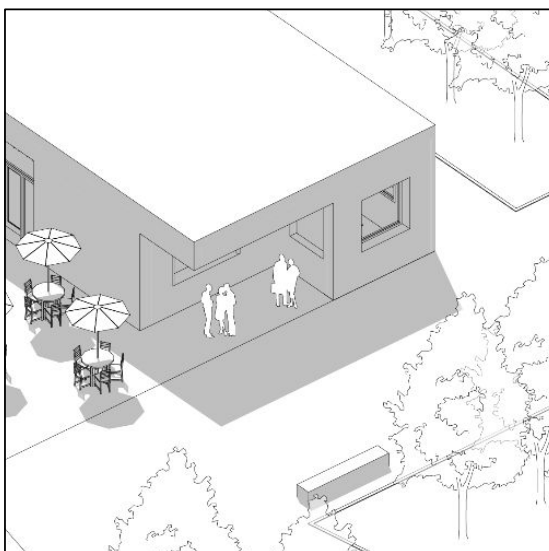
Modular terrace



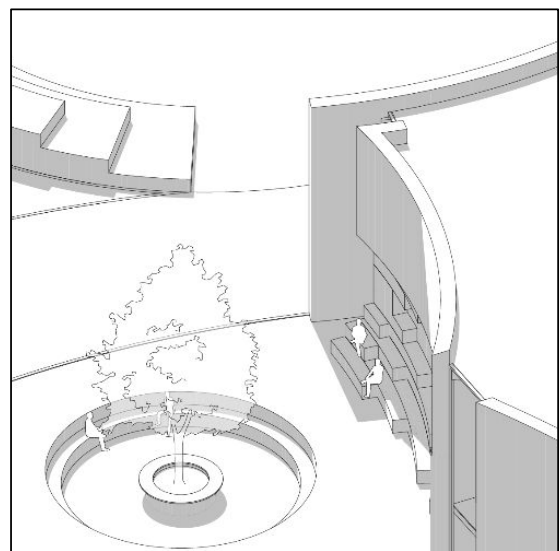
Metro as social node



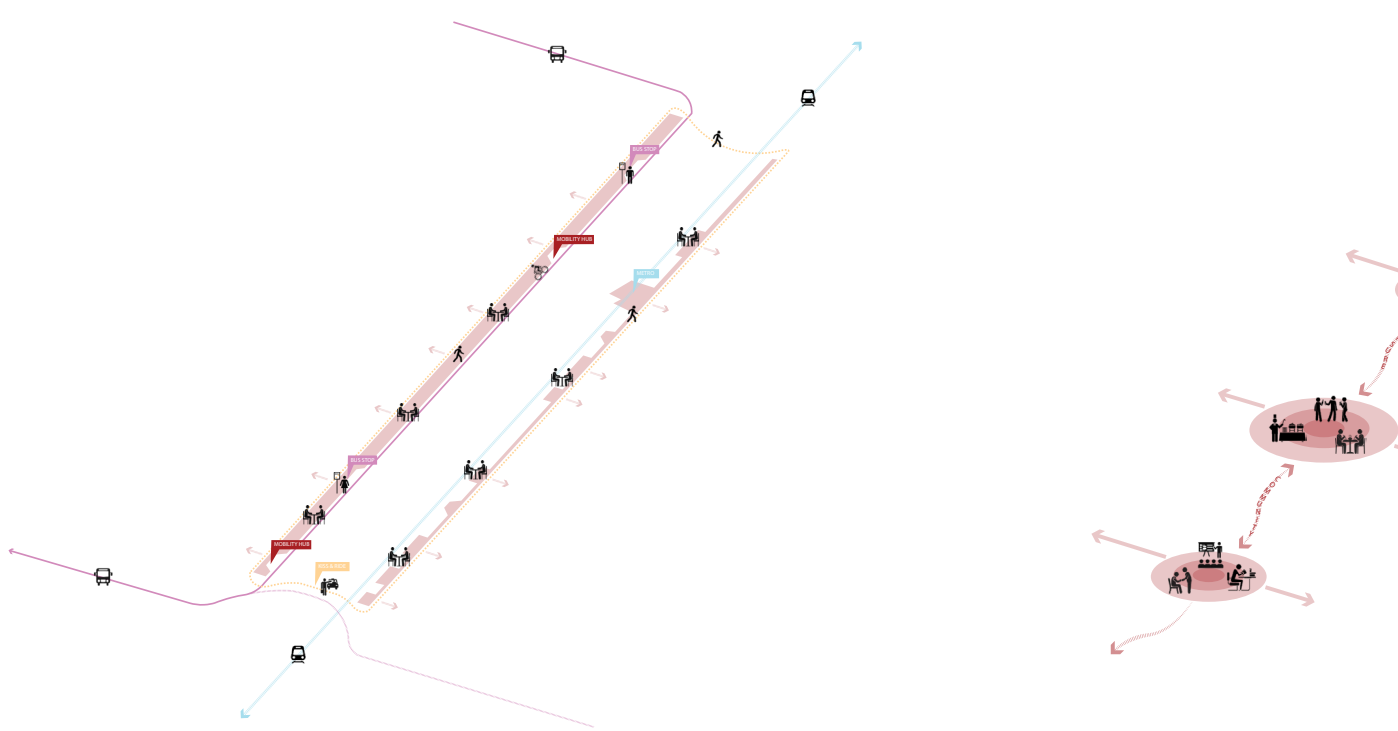
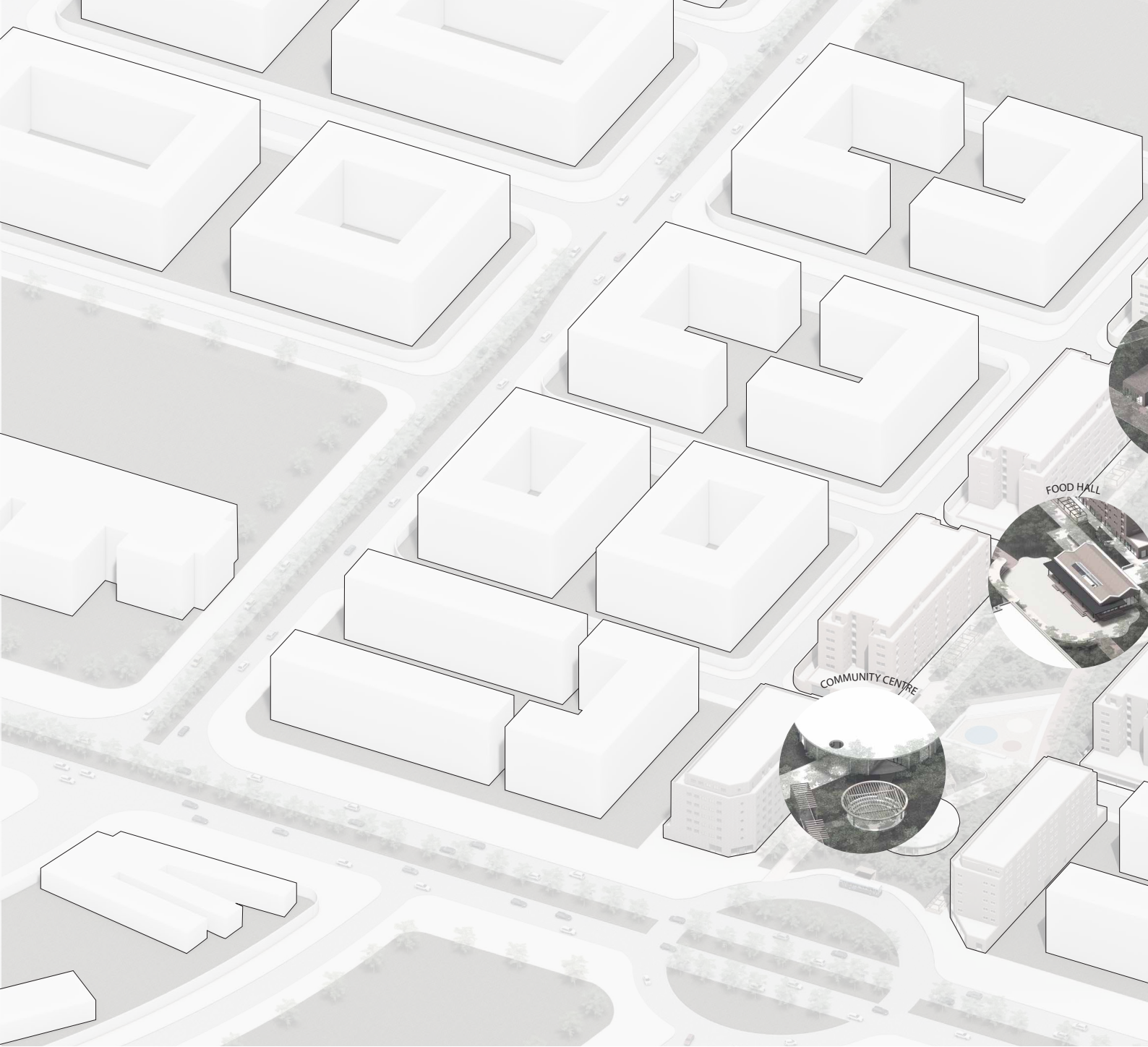
Multi-use streets

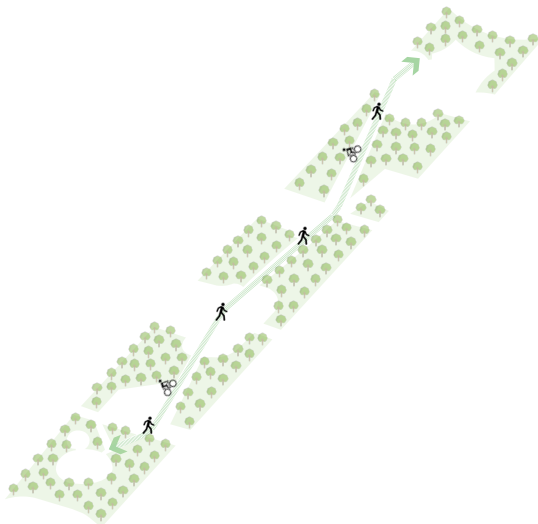
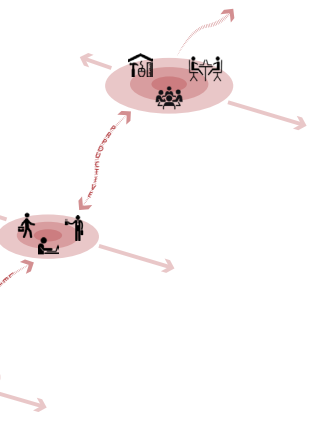
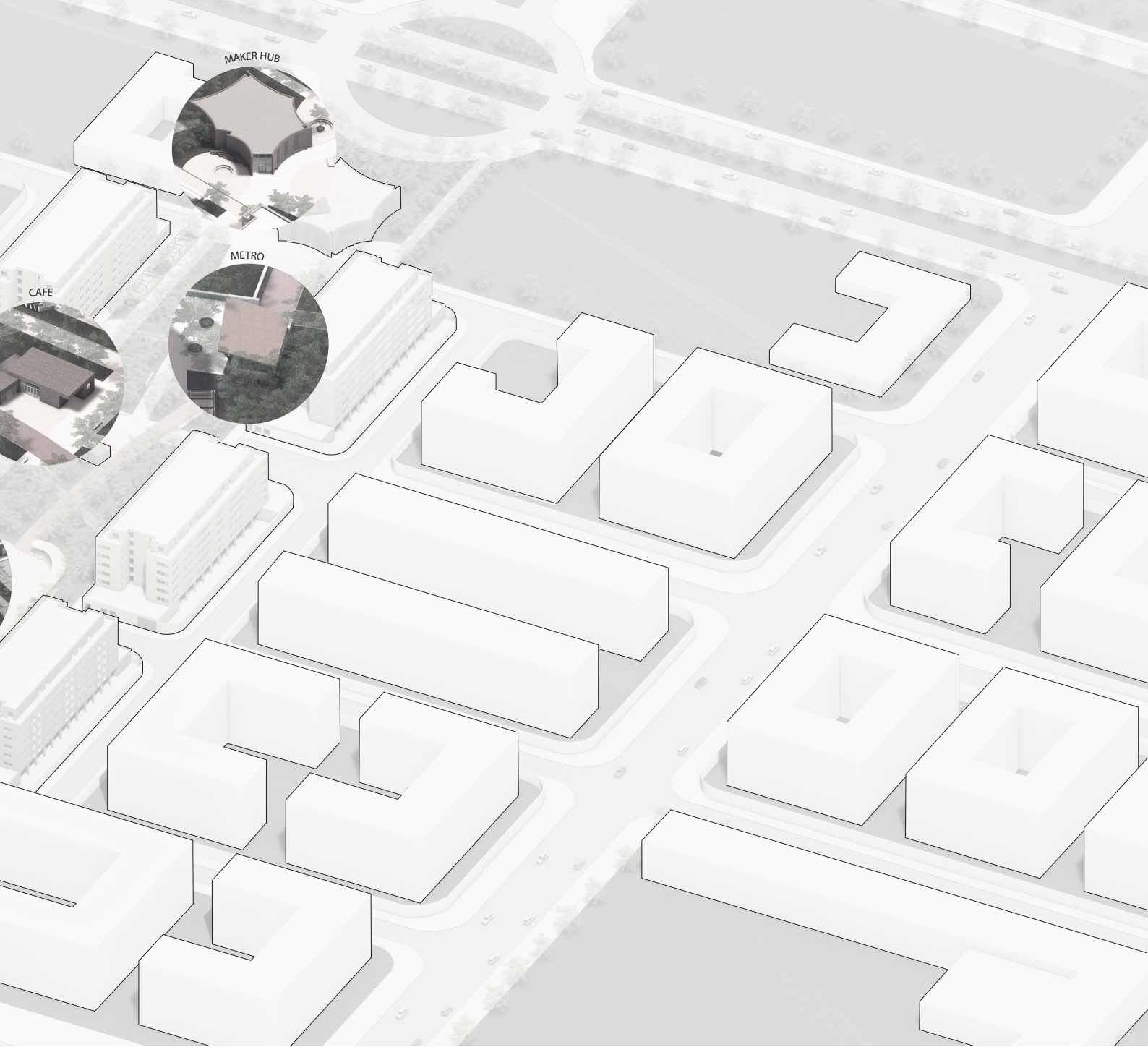


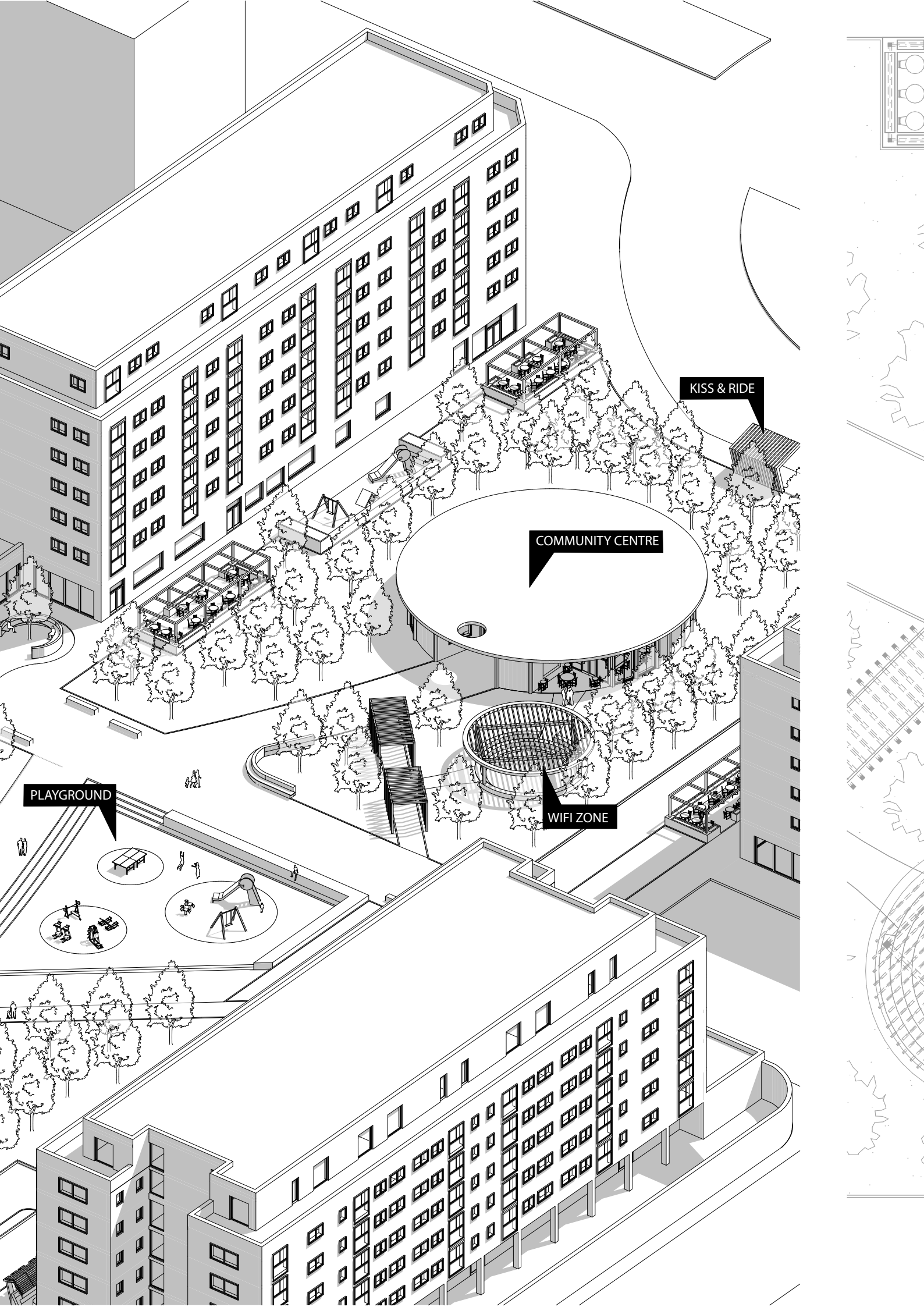
Active facade



Integrated landscape seating





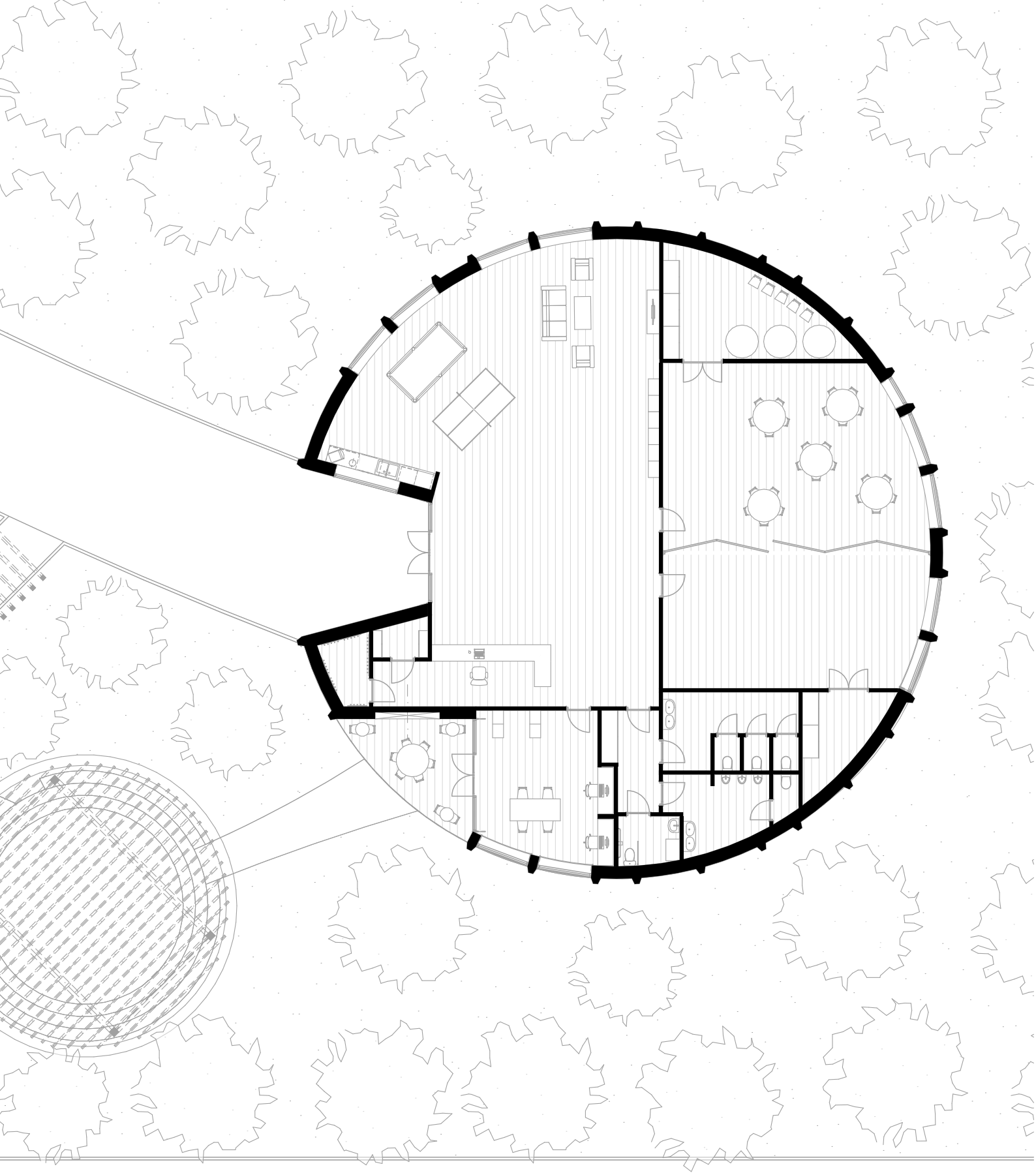
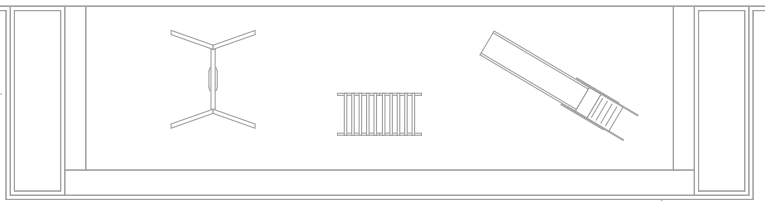
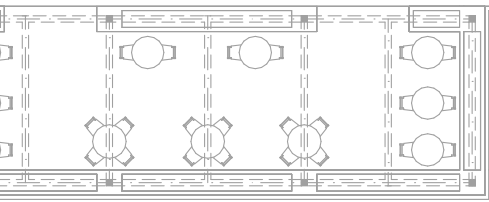


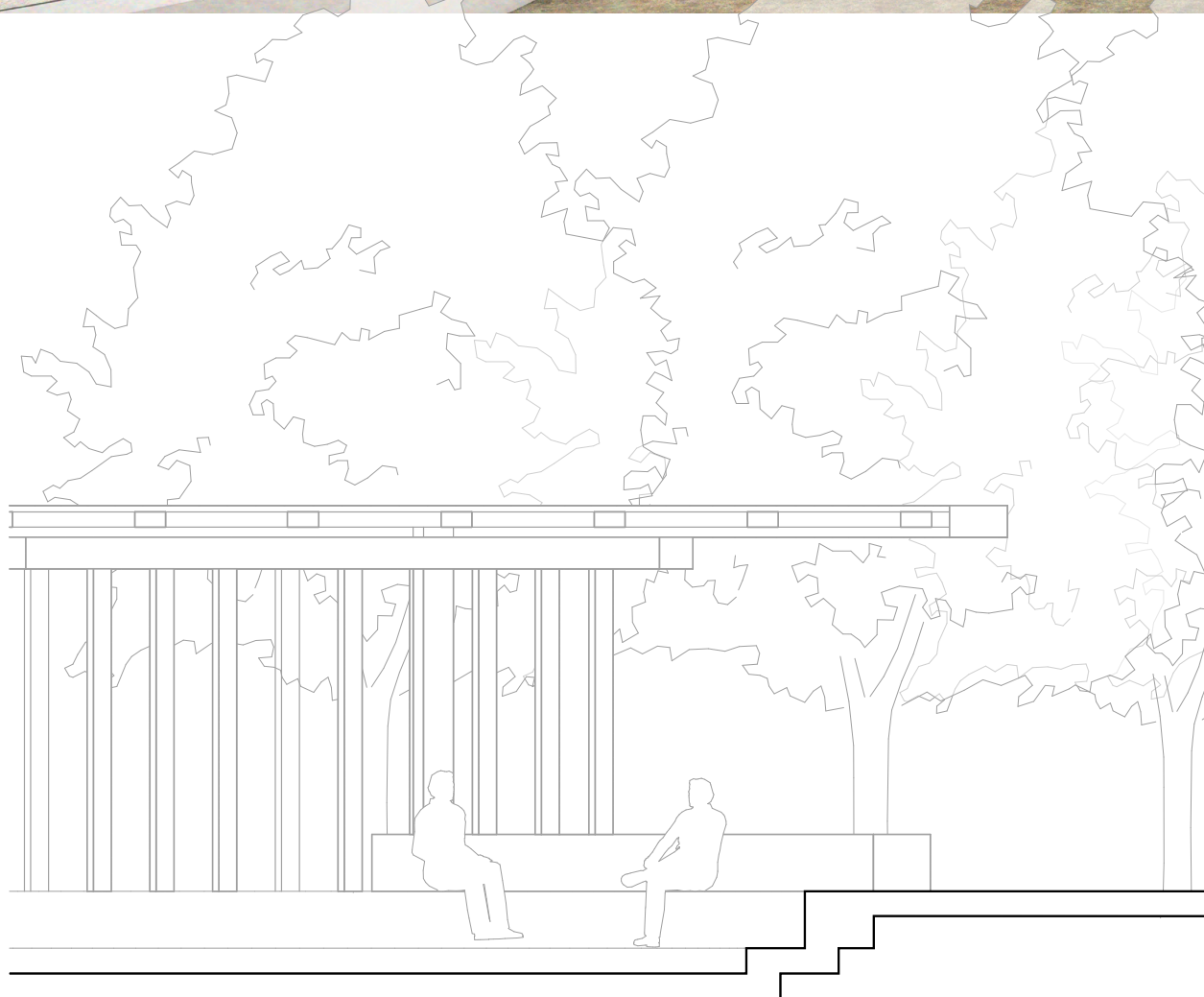
PLAYGROUND

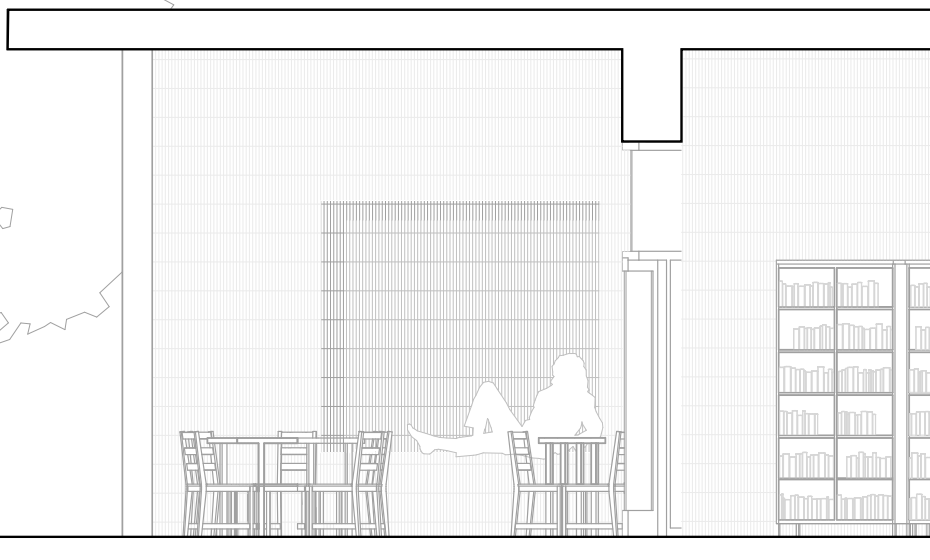
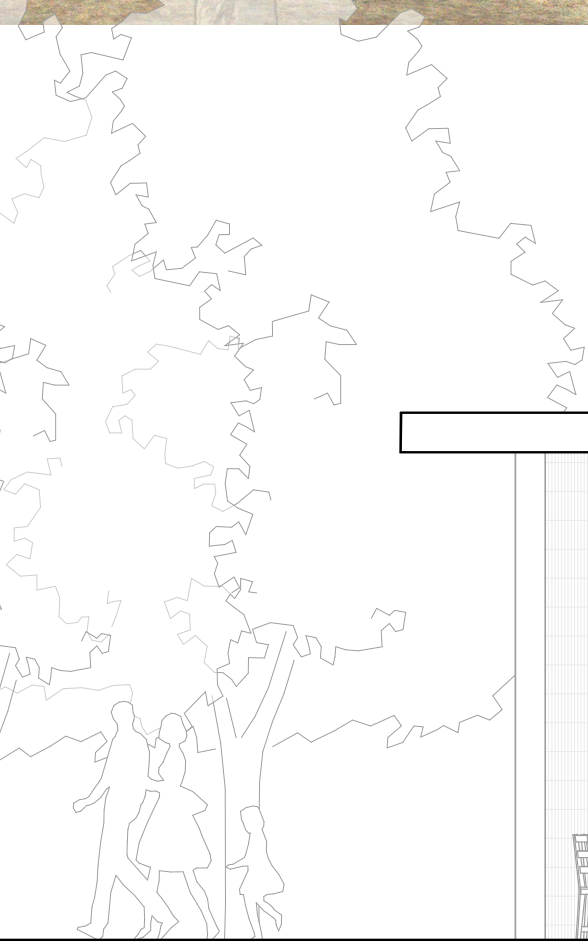
COMMUNITY CENTRE

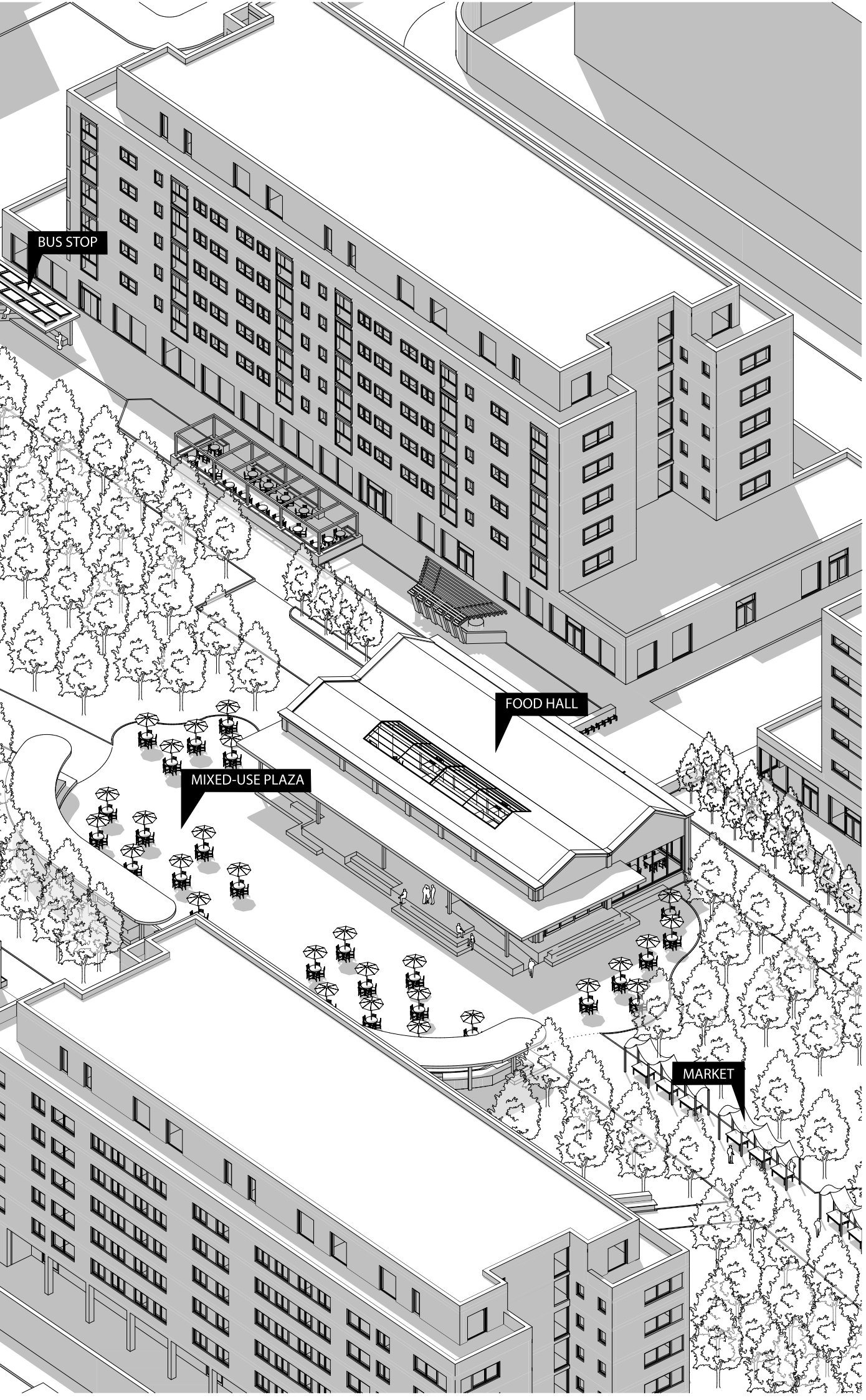
WIFI ZONE

KISS & RIDE









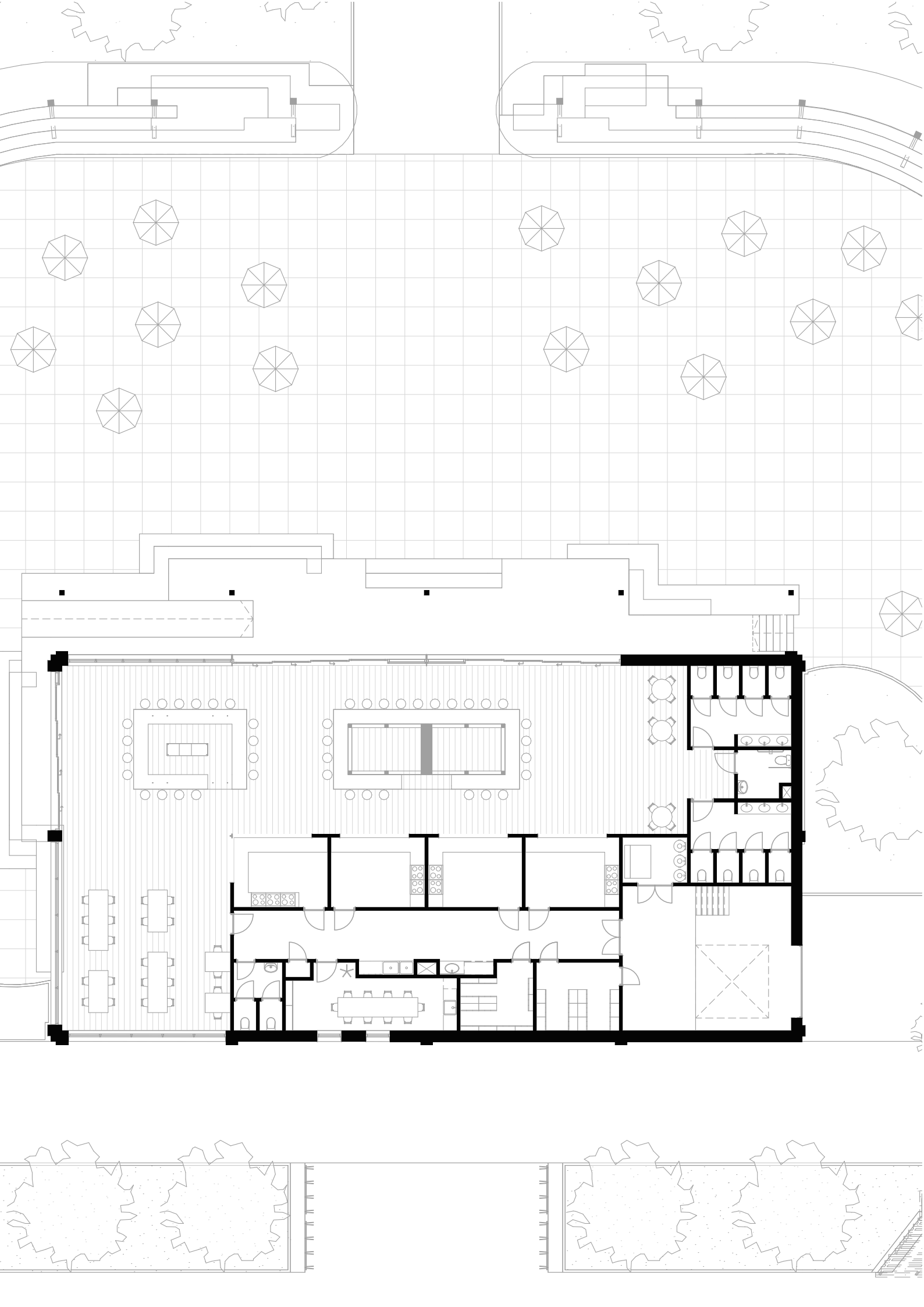
BUS STOP

MIXED-USE PLAZA

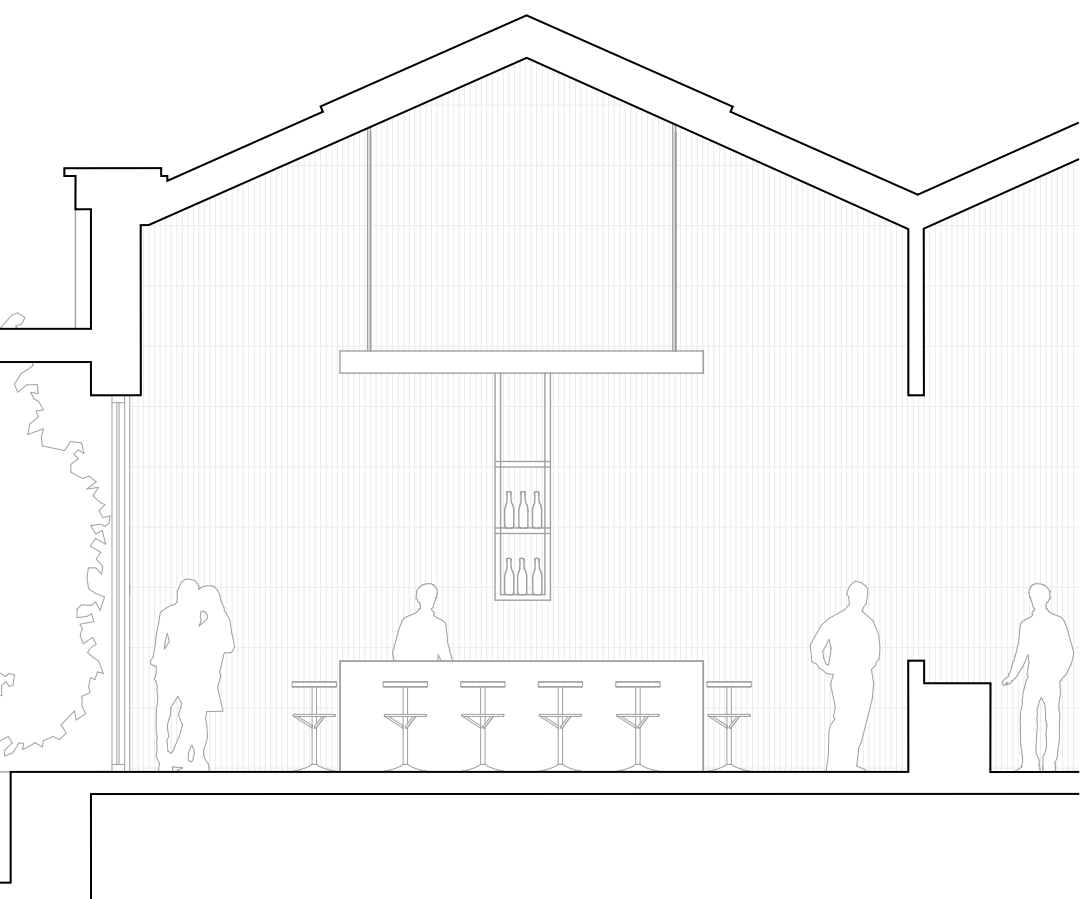
FOOD HALL

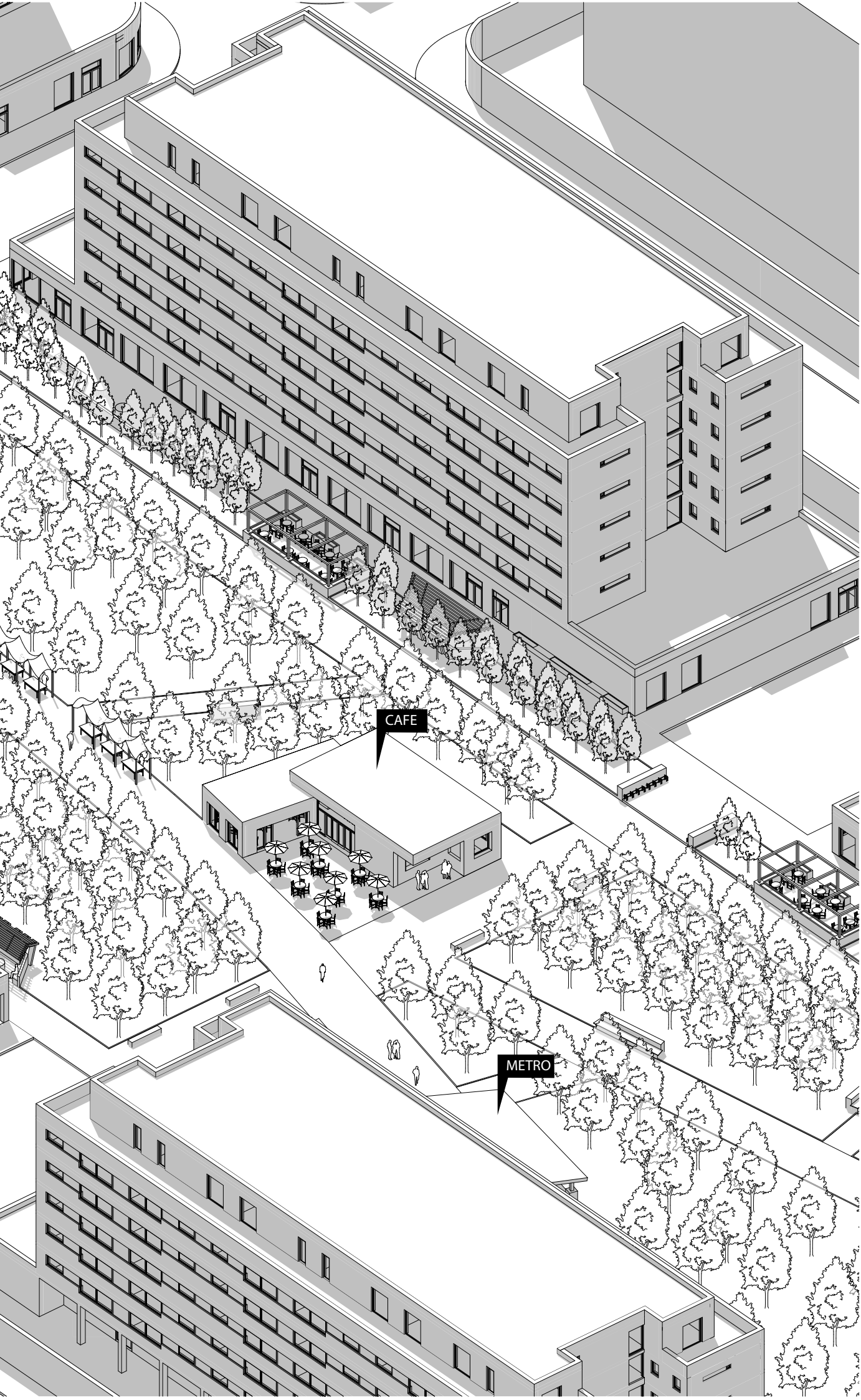
MARKET







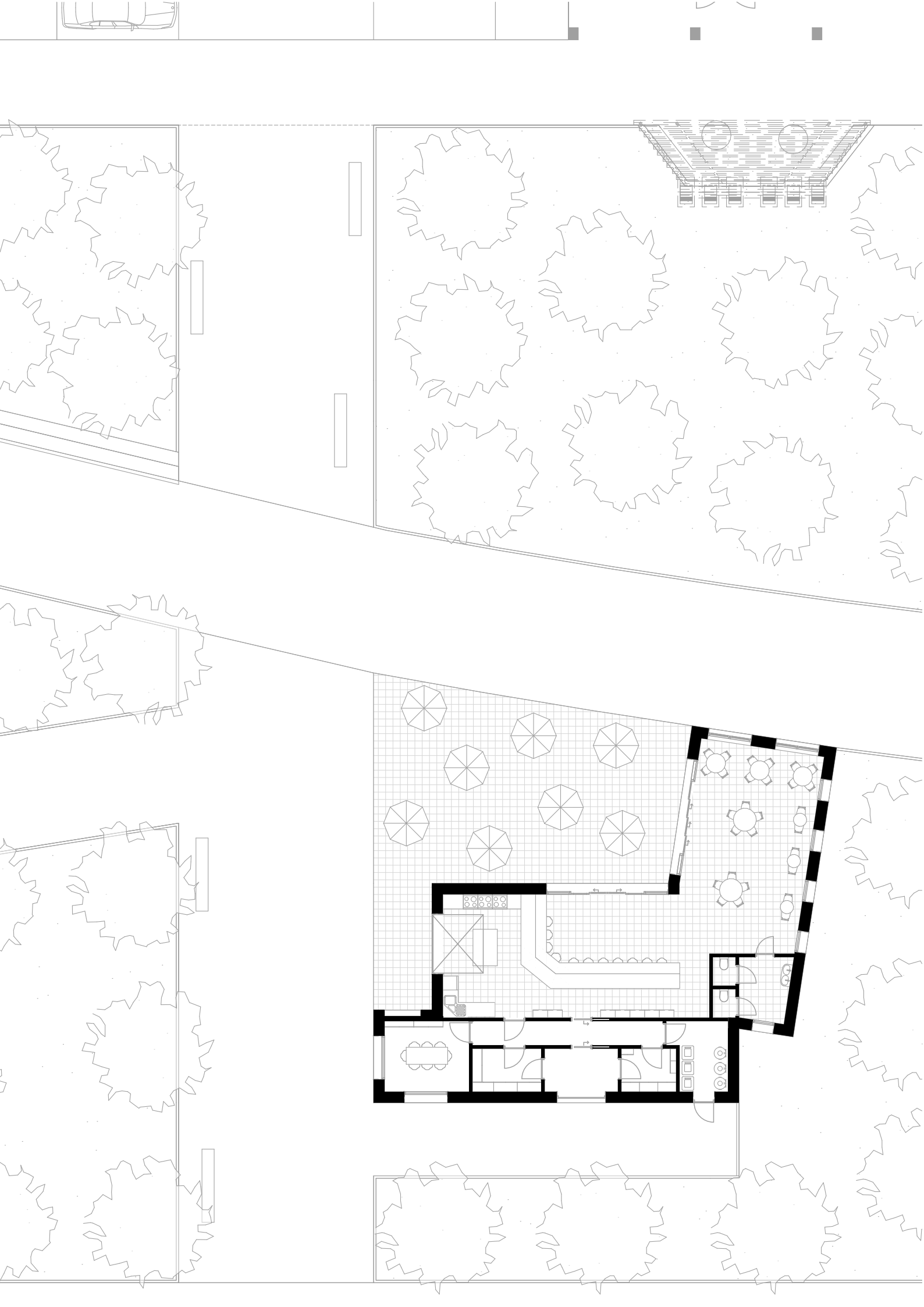


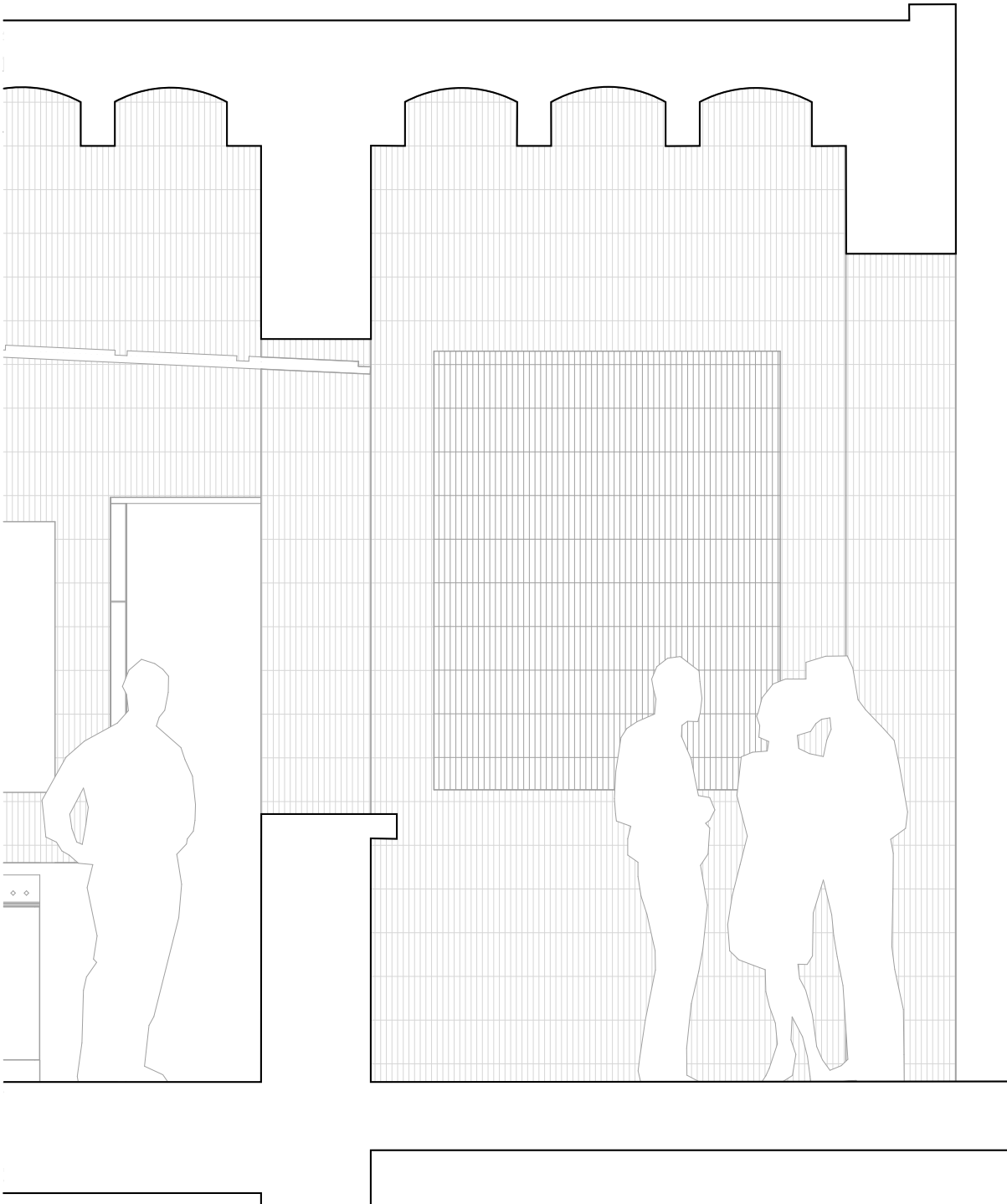


CAFE

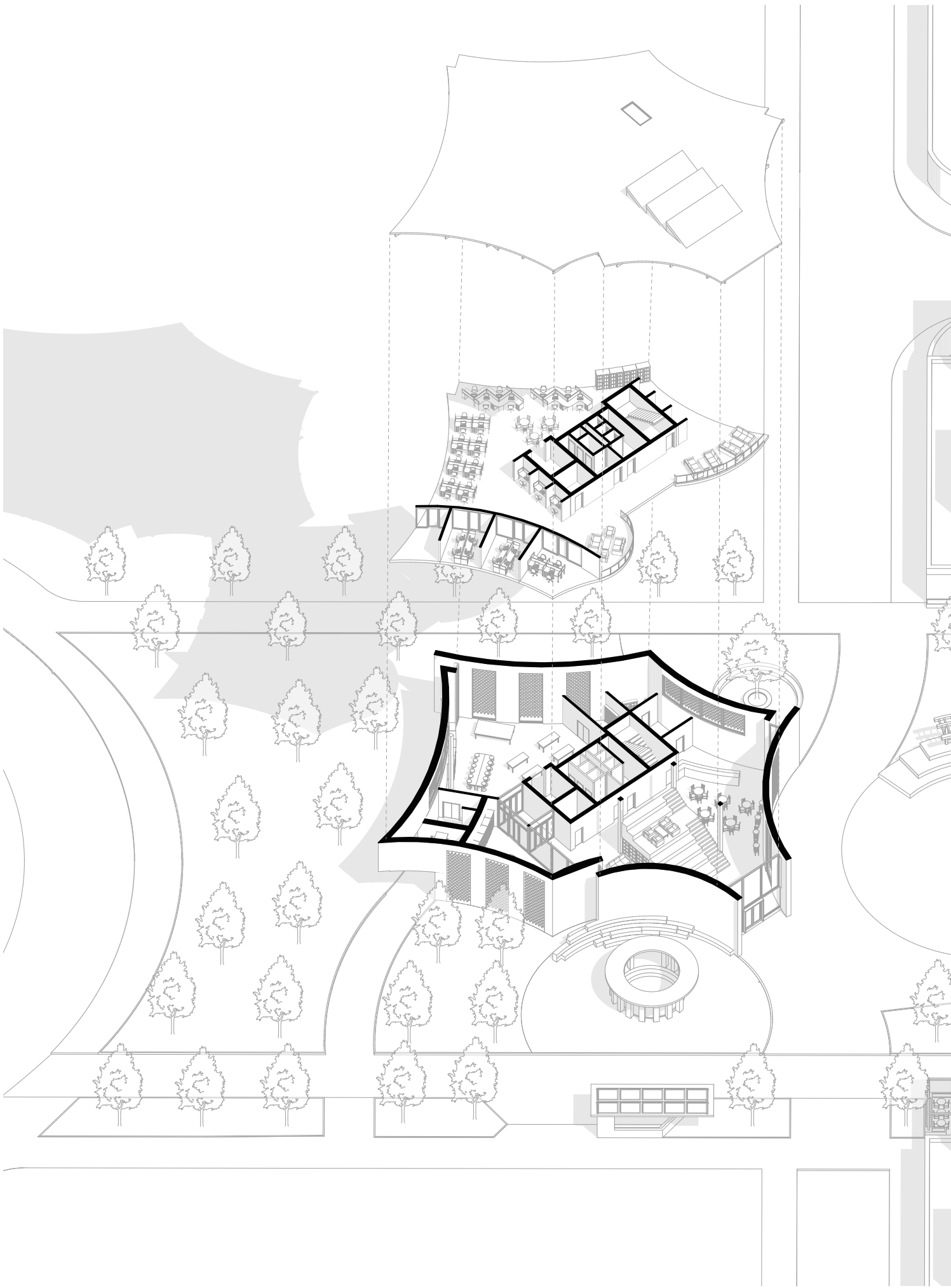
METRO

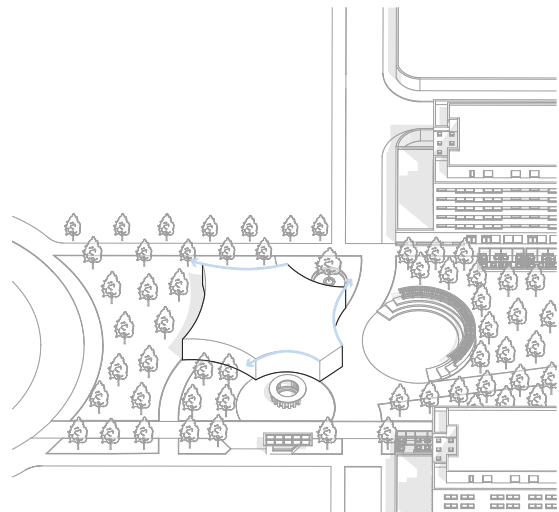
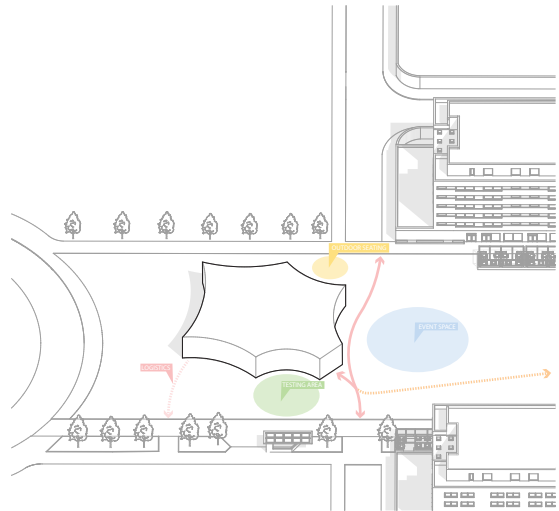
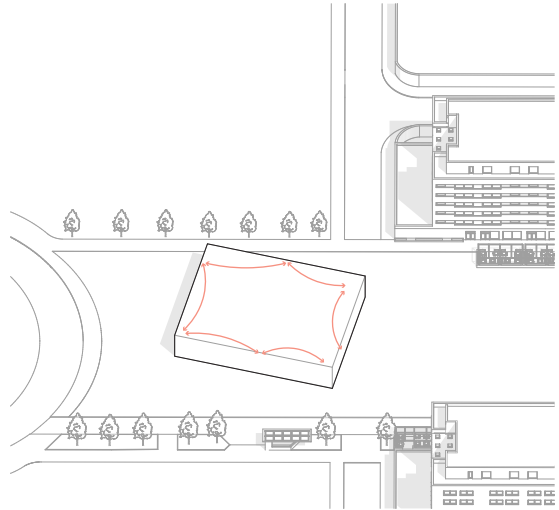
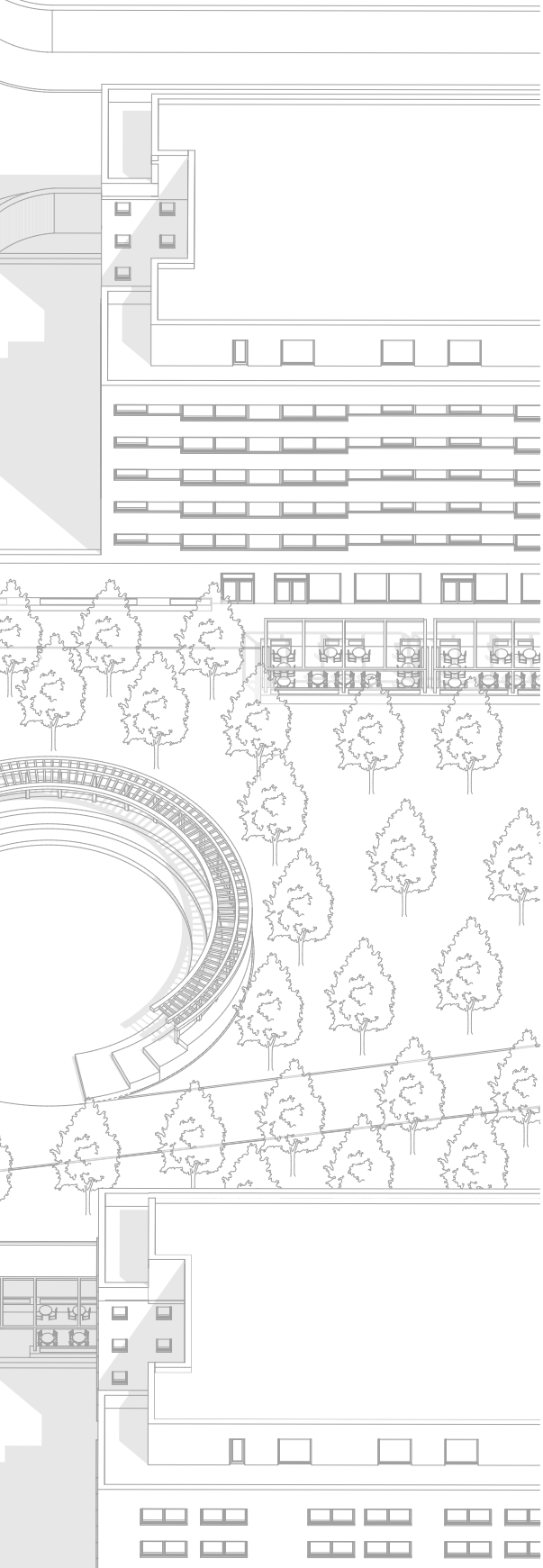


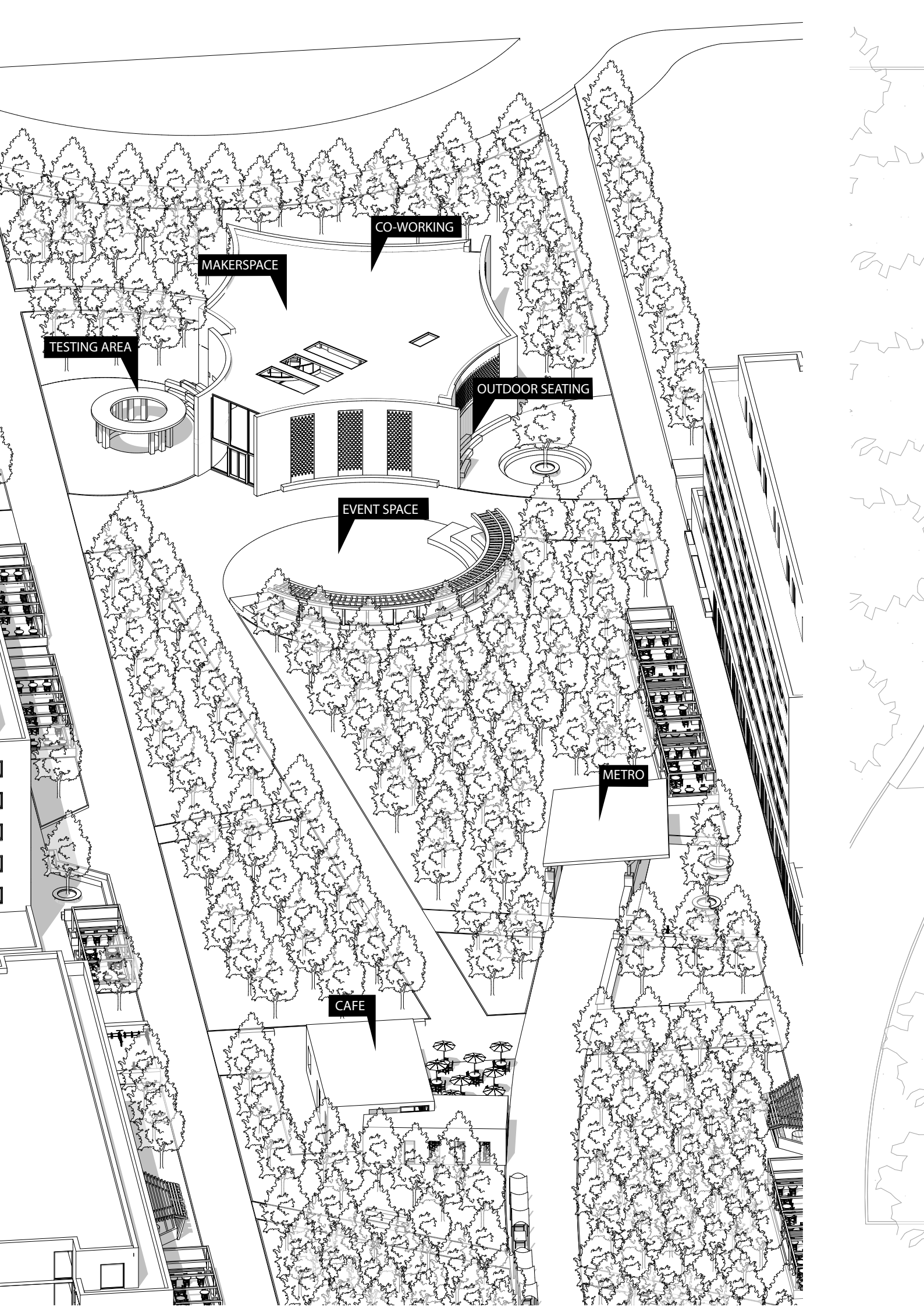












CO-WORKING

MAKERSPACE

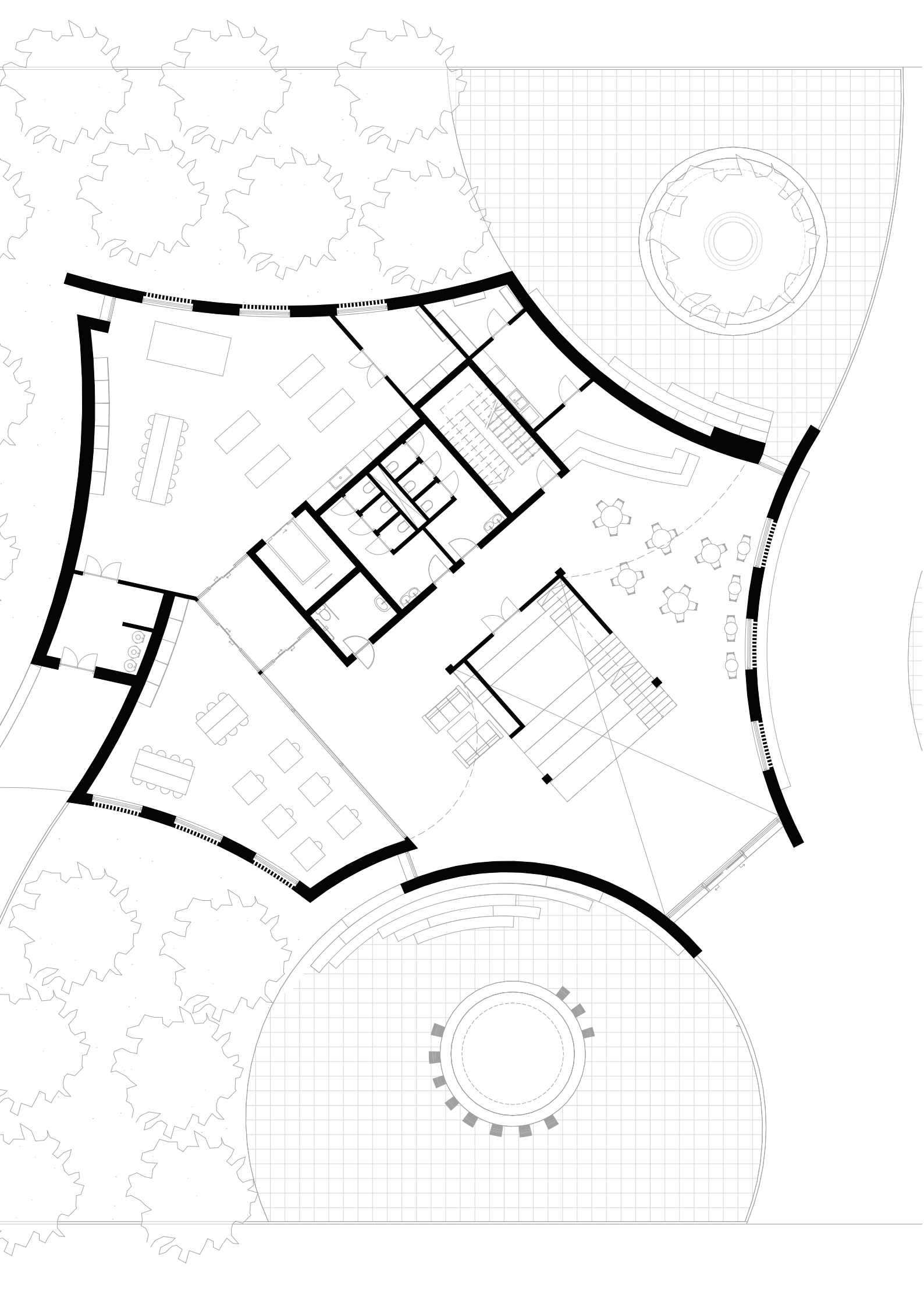
TESTING AREA

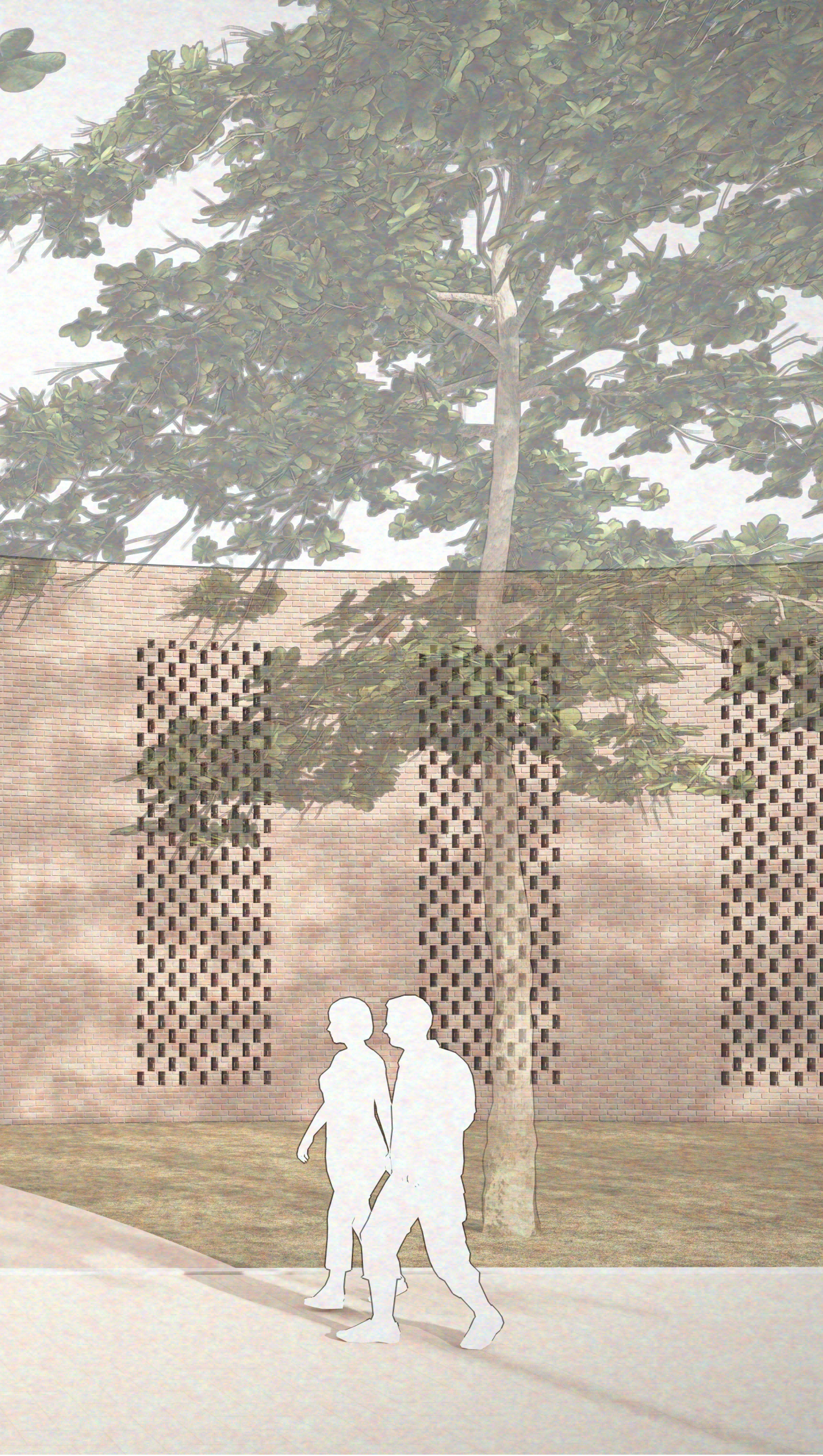
OUTDOOR SEATING

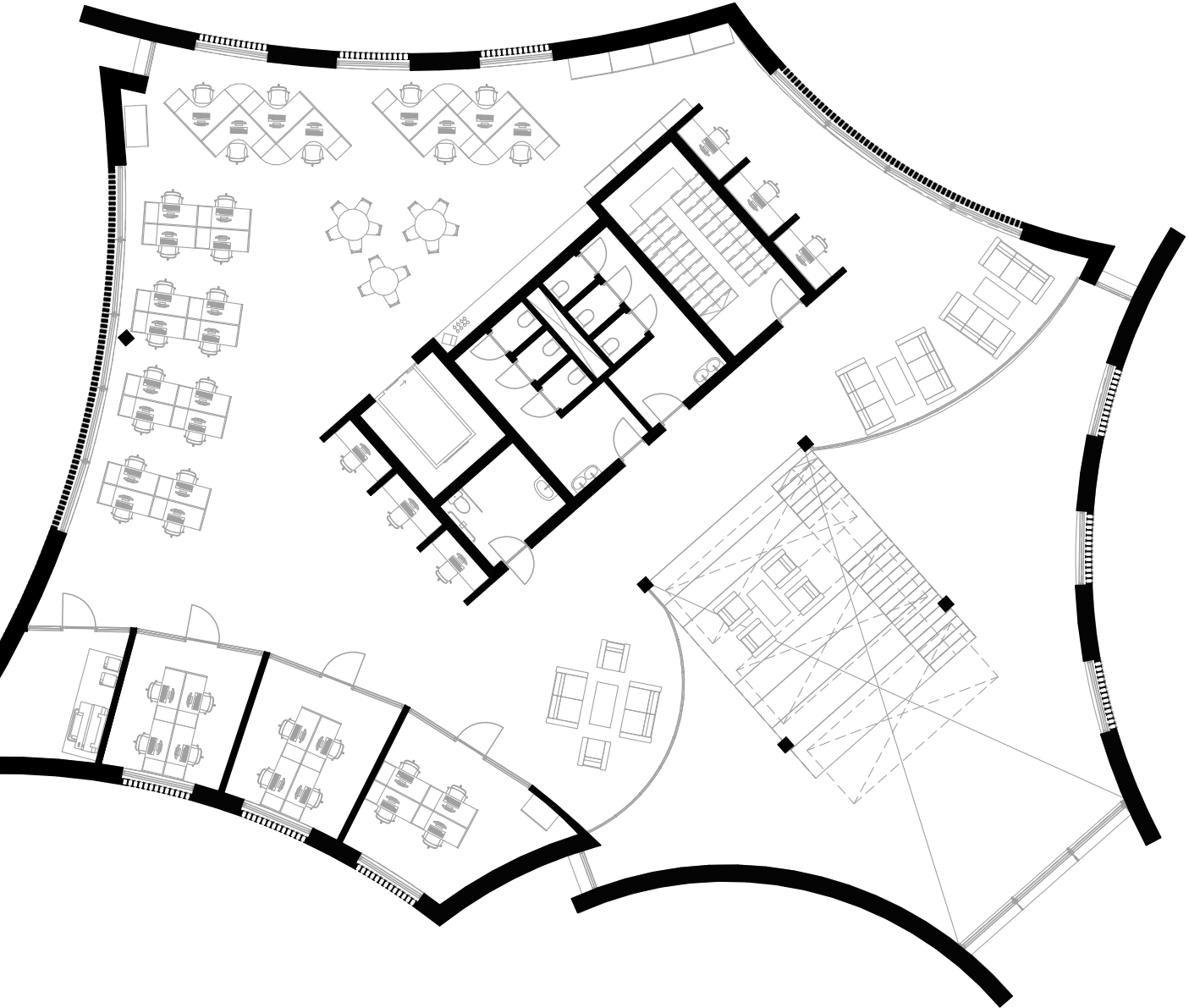
EVENT SPACE

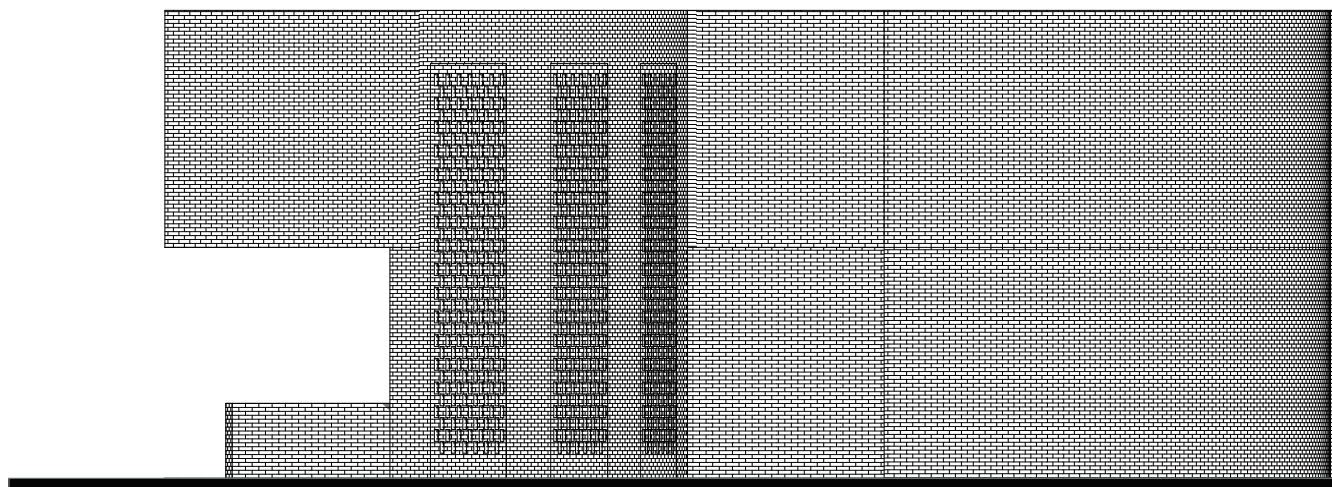
METRO

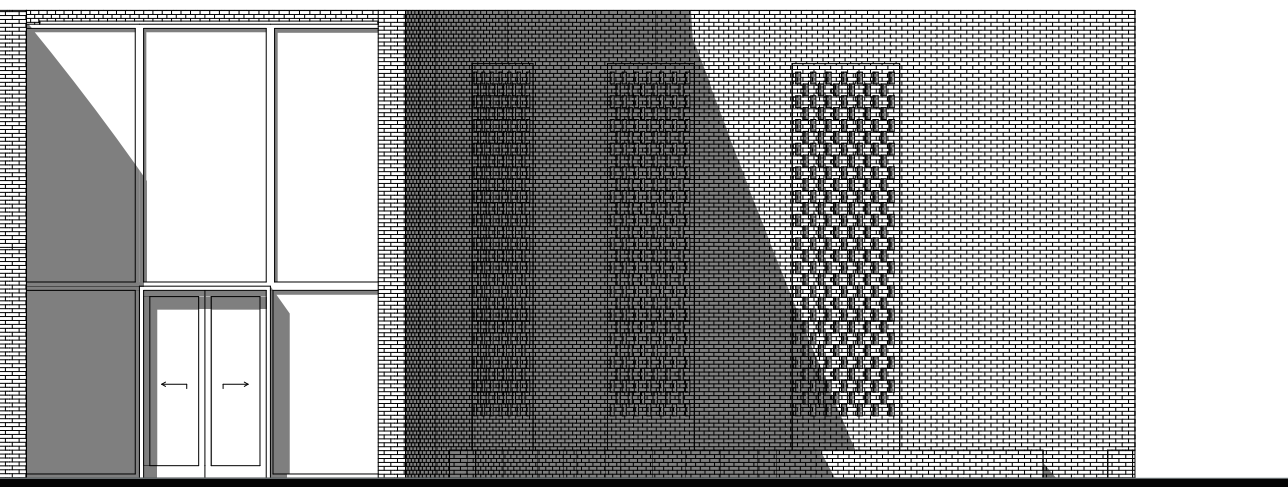
CAFE



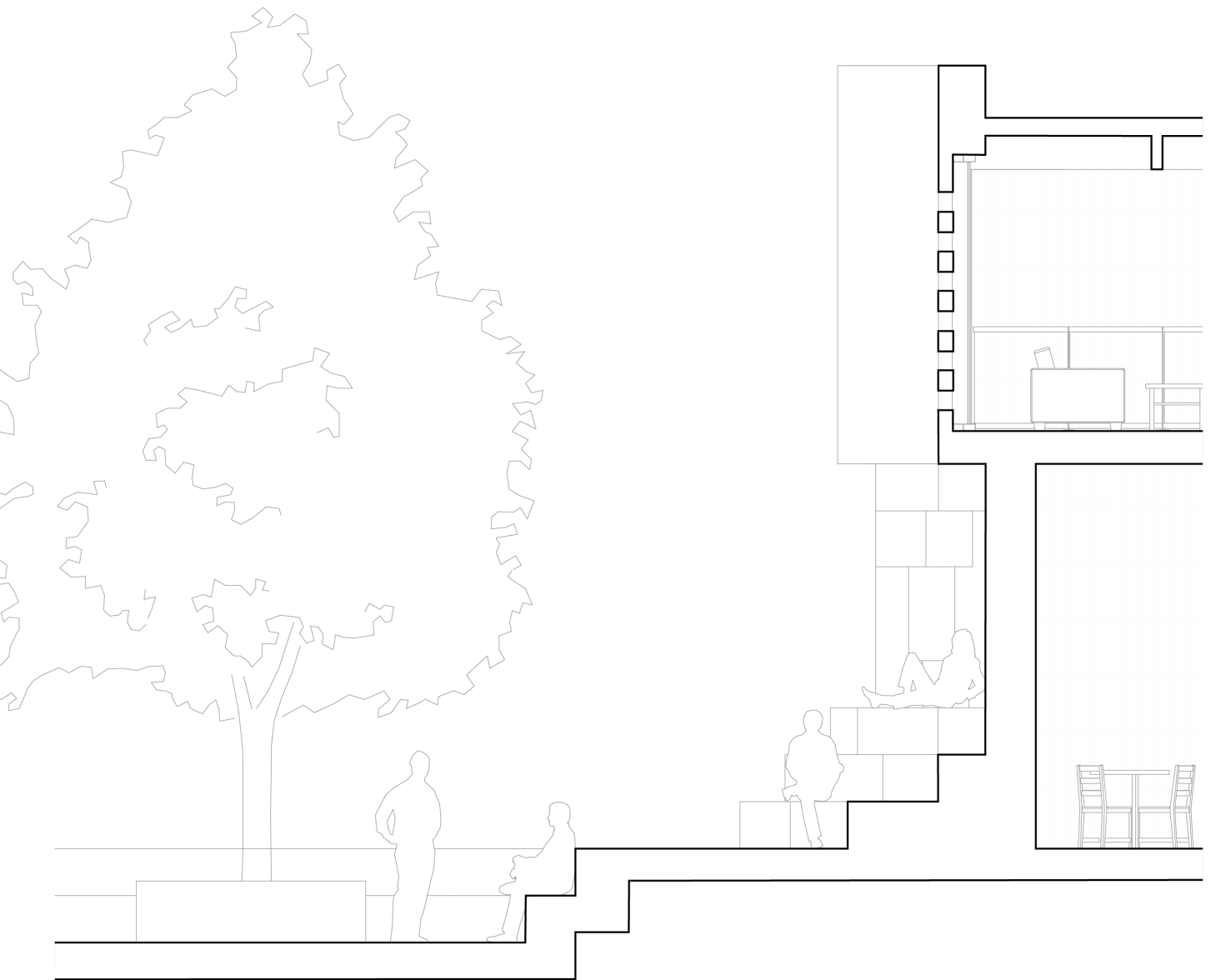


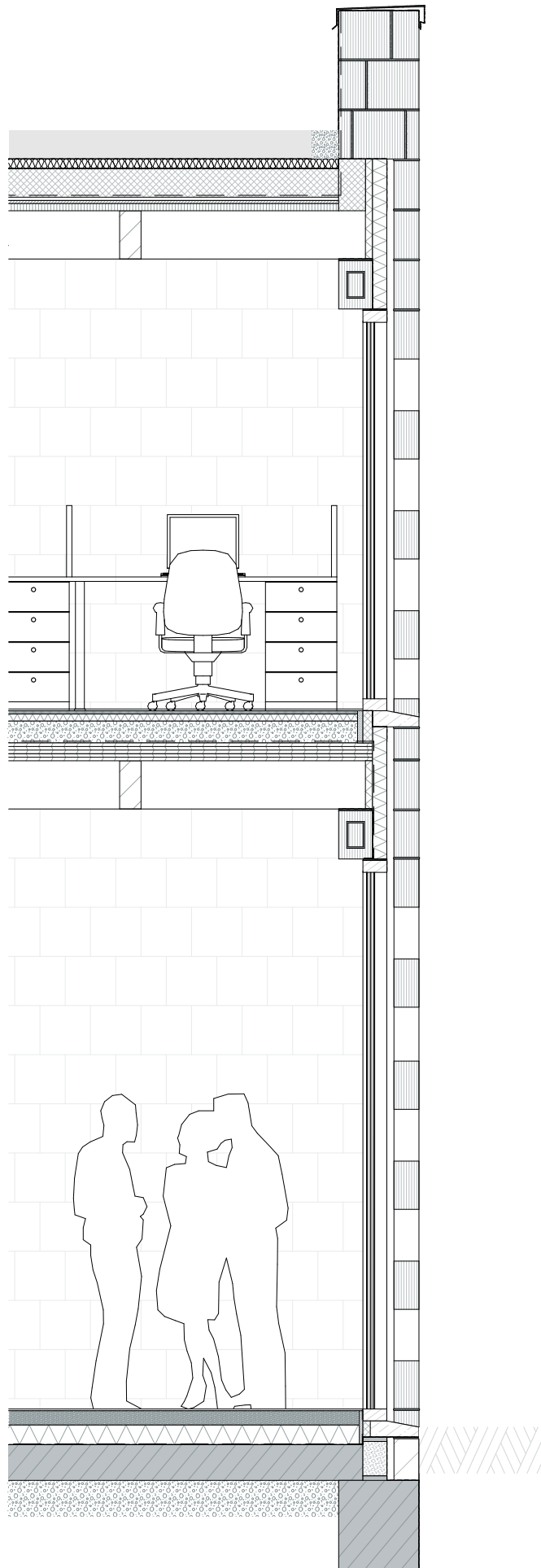


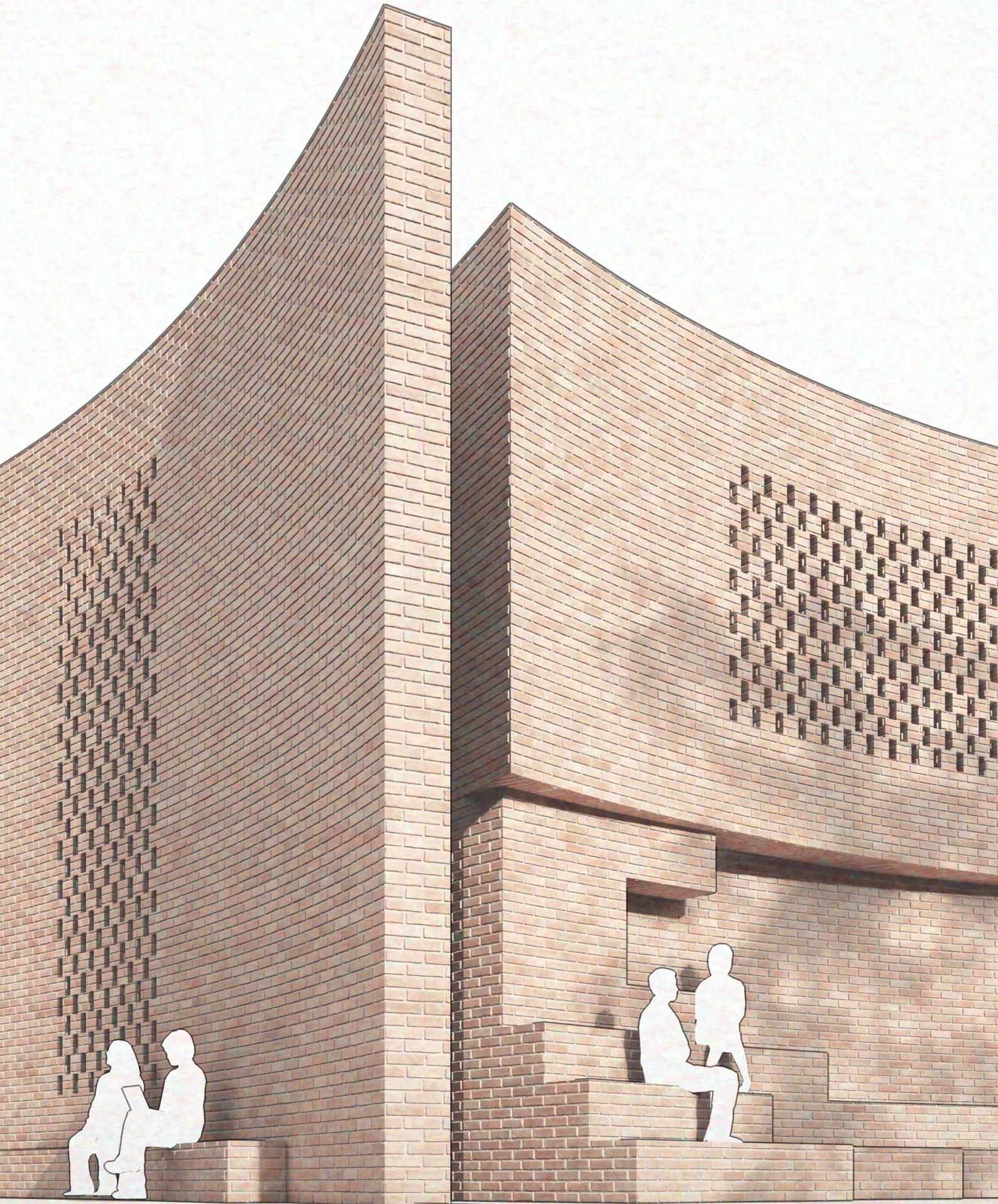




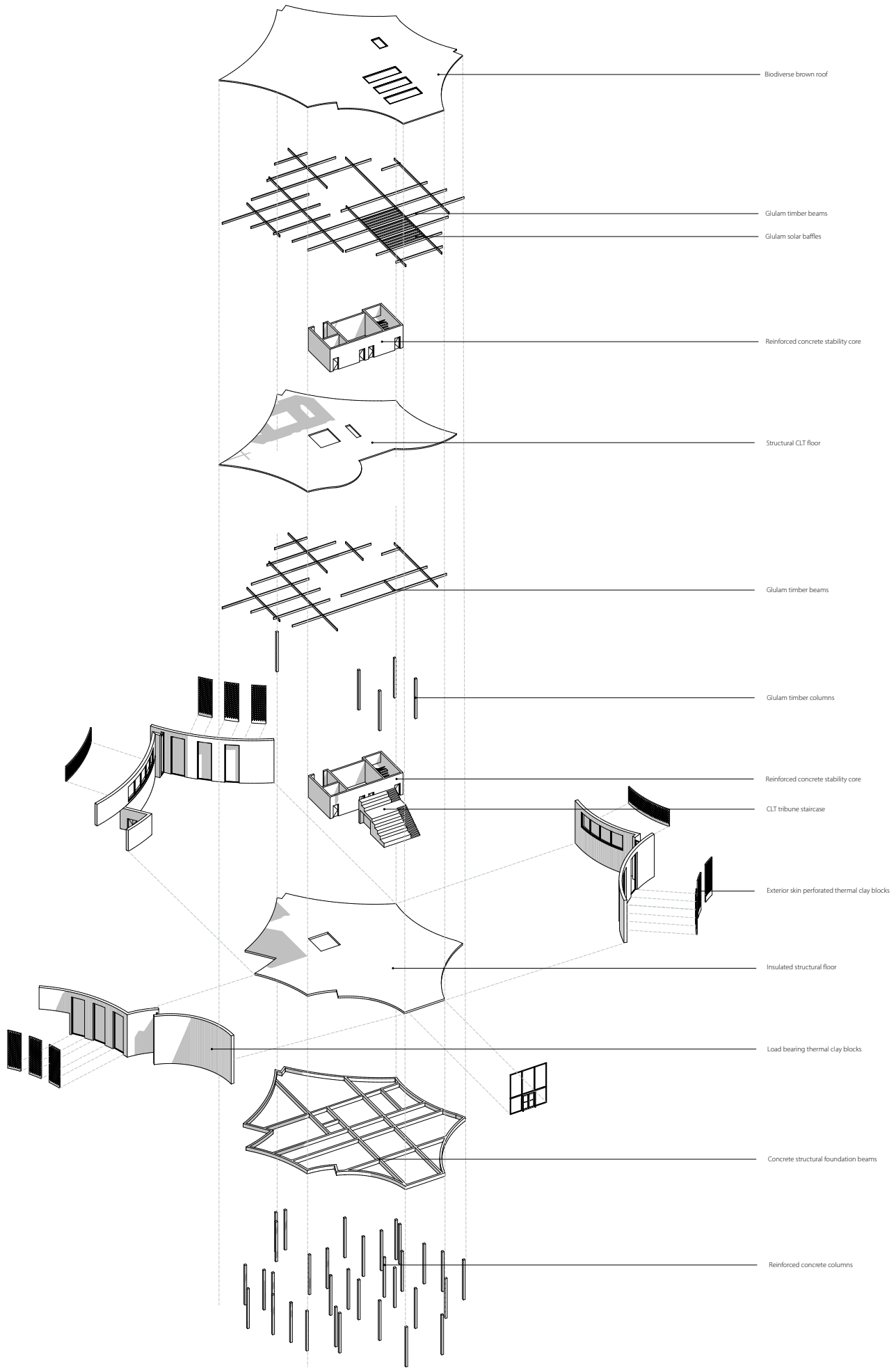


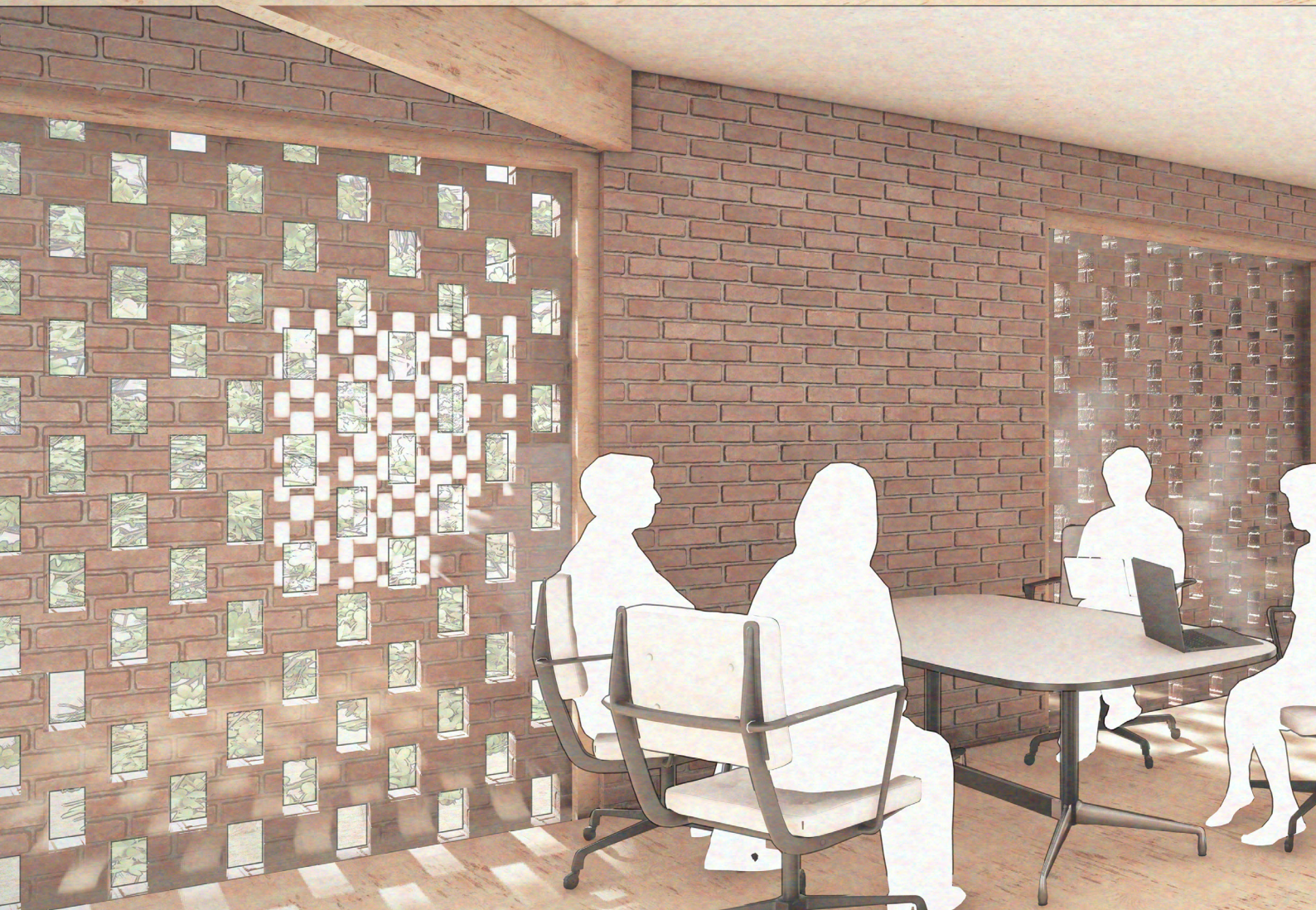












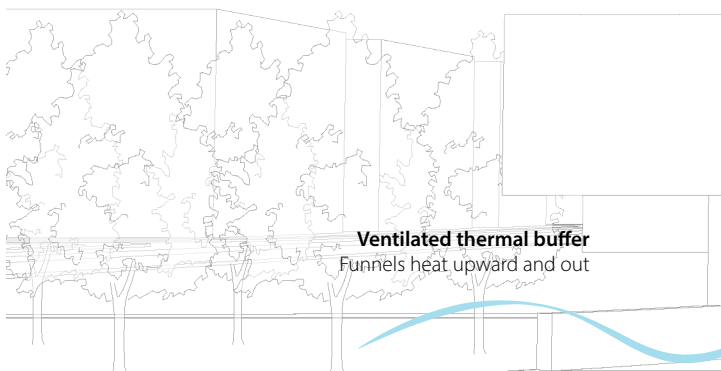
Indirect daylight

Steeper pitch facing north allows daylight to enter, while blocking direct solar heat gain



Biodiverse brown roof

Provides natural insulation while reducing the urban heat island effect



Ventilated thermal buffer
Funnels heat upward and out



