

Bridging Fragmented Realities

Architecture as a Catalyst for Social Cohesion through Sequential Spaces



Abstract

My interest stems from the investigation of 'sequencing' within spatial memory, montage theory, and phenomenology in architecture, composed around four interconnected pillars: adaptation, hybridity, craftsmanship, and interactivity. These themes interlock to reinforce the overarching aim to form a "Public Condenser," a hybrid cultural hub. The project confronts urban complexity and social fragmentation by establishing sequential areas dedicated to healing, interaction, and resilience. Meticulously, crafted environments serve as hyperlinks, bringing together various groups within inclusive communal spaces.

Problem Statement and Location

A “Public Condenser,” a hybrid community hub, can be reinvented as a “psychological space” that elicits meaning through spatial sequences. Architecture can be perceived through a series of episodes and events that occur sequentially, which aid in comprehending the pure needs of a specific site. From an architectural lens, the sequencing of programs and activities, the arrangement of public and private spaces, the interplay of light and darkness, and the design of open and closed volumes are all fundamental.

Addressing Sundholm’s complex social dynamics and challenges from the ‘Parallel Societies’ and ‘Ghetto Plan’ calls for an interdisciplinary approach. The concept of parallel societies in Copenhagen emphasizes the division between distinct socioeconomic groups, leading to social isolation and limited resources for marginalized communities. The Danish government endeavors to eliminate these gaps by means of integration policies, stricter regulations, and urban renewal.

Nevertheless, these initiatives have frequently led to displacement and stigmatization, particularly in diverse regions like Sundholm, which encounter complex social challenges.

Architectural sequencing provides an approach for bridging these divisions by establishing environments that nurture interaction among various social groups, thus contributing to community cohesion.

Through the lens of montage theory, the Sundholm neighborhood embodies a series of dramatic events and episodes, which coexist within the same area. Incidents such as street fights and police interventions serve as pivotal moments that juxtapose the struggles of marginalized groups, like the homeless and those battling addiction, against the backdrop of working-class families and artists striving for community engagement. Deliberately, weaving together these fragmented realities which exhibit multi-layered complexities, demands the reinvention of a cohesive narrative through sequential spaces.



Figure 1. Photographs and Collage by author, 2024.

Theoretical Framework

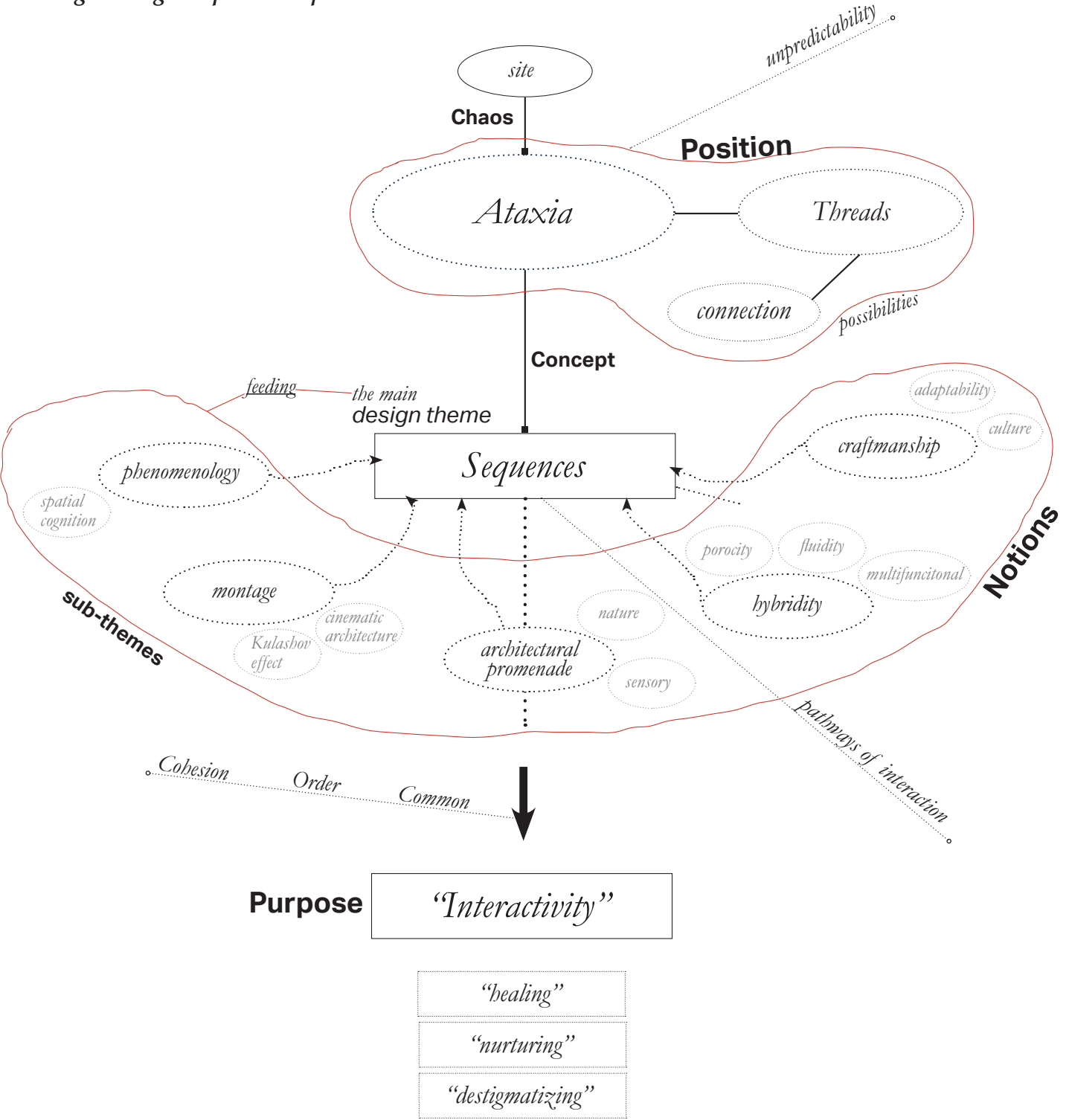
The title encapsulates architecture as a tool for connecting Sundholm's fragmented social landscape. The program interconnects "threads" of connection within the community, establishing pathways that encourage interaction between diverse groups, such as individuals who are homeless or addicted, working families, and children. Forming structured places for meaningful social encounters and bridging the gap between disconnected realities, this endeavor strives to stimulate movement and progress through architectural sequencing.

"Ataxia" is indicative of the fundamental disorder unpredictability and disconnected social realities that define the urban fabric of Sundholm. This disorder is not solely spatial; it is societal in nature, characterized by dislocation from healthy, connected lifestyles. By promoting "Healing Through Sequential Spaces," the project suggests that architecture has the potential to transform isolated spaces into homogeneous environments that encourage the interaction of diverse groups, the discovery of common ground, and the experience of inclusion.

Additionally, this project aims to foster healing within the Sundholm community through a culturally rich program, supported by architecture designed in carefully orchestrated sequences. A thread is woven into the broader fabric of Sundholm with each space sequence, which fosters resilience and promotes connections within the community. By creating spaces that encourage cultural engagement and meaningful social interaction, the design seeks to bridge fragmented realities, promoting resilience and well-being through structured, sequential experiences.

Architectural promenade principles, articulated by Auguste Choisy and further developed by Le Corbusier, provide an effective method for addressing the complexity of urban environments, particularly in neighborhoods such as Sundholm. As demonstrated by Choisy's analysis of the Acropolis, dynamic spatial experiences are characterized by intentional asymmetries and varying perspectives (Richard A. Etlin 2024). Consequently, these elements engage the observer in a journey through the built environment, emphasizing that architecture is more than just a static structure, but also a medium for experiencing movement and interaction. A narrative that unfolds through spatial exploration is enabled by Le Corbusier's manifesto on an observer's journey as a sequence of orchestrated perspectives (Birksted 2006). Sequencing is a critical component of this research. Through the implementation of architectural sequences based on Choisy's dynamic compositions, this framework aims to design architecture and public pathways in Sundholm that promote movement and interaction among residents.

Sergei Eisenstein, in his theory of montage, explores the relationship between space, movement, and narrative (Doudova 2023). Through juxtapositions of sequential images, Eisenstein creates meaning through cinematic montage, enabling the viewer to form emotional or intellectual responses based on the contrast between the images (Yve-Alain Bois, n.d.).



By combining these theories, we can comprehend architecture not as a static form but as a temporal, experiential phenomenon that is shaped by events as well as the movement of users through space. Analyzing the various activities and events occurring on the site will enable us to determine the extent of our interventions required to guide users into a sequenced hybrid program that will encourage active participation and inclusion.

Hilde Heynen notes 'the spatial interpretation (Durchdringung) leads to an overlapping of social realities, spaces, and media and network of meaning (Doudova, 2023).

Research Questions

How can architectural sequencing and sensory design promote social cohesion in fragmented urban spaces?

Sub questions:

In what ways can cinematic techniques, particularly montage theory, be applied to architecture to evoke emotional responses and manipulate human behavior within public spaces?

What role does architectural sequencing play in shaping communal experience, and how can these sequences be designed to promote social interaction within hybrid public spaces?

How might future public spaces evolve as active participants in social and environmental exchange, and what design strategies can ensure this evolution to support community building?

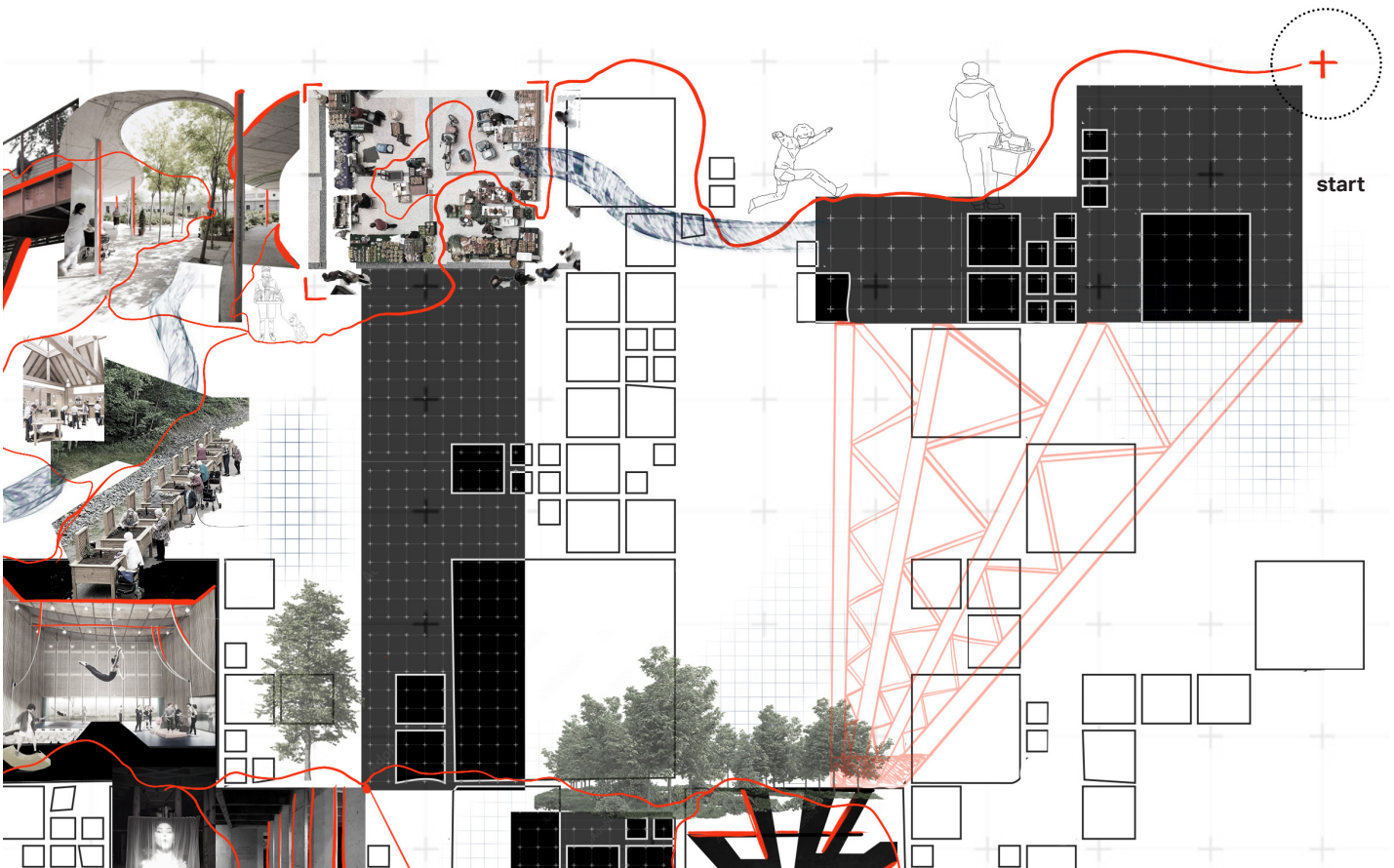


Figure 2. Collage by author, 2024. 5

Methodology

This research uses quantitative and qualitative methods to capture Sundholm's social dynamics. The investigation intends to build an inclusive community environment that bridges social divisions while enriching sensory experiences. On the other hand, qualitative methodologies emphasize the psychological and sensory elements within Sundholm. Mental and memory mapping offers additional qualitative depth by visualizing personal and collective associations with Sundholm's spaces. These maps disclose symbolic and functional zones within the neighborhood, providing residents with an enhanced awareness of how to navigate and perceive the area. Similarly, the Kuleshov Effect and other cinematic techniques, such as photomontages, are implemented to investigate disparate social realities, as influenced by Sergei Eisenstein. The sensory experience of traversing the constructed space is mirrored through sequential montages and storyboards, provoking critical reflections on Sundholm's urban setting and building empathy among diverse user perspectives. Virtual reality (VR) testing will enable the exploration of the phenomenological value of space and to interact with the proposed design within a simulated environment. Thus, rendering these explorations more concrete. Furthermore, Virtual Reality (VR) and Unreal Engine will be utilized to scrutinize and document these "moments of exchange."

As a matter of architectural design, montage creates spaces that engage the observer through sequential, contrasting experiences, which enables a narrative to unfold dynamically within a built environment. Incorporating Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory into the design approach, a sequenced spatial journey arises that reflects the diverse narratives within the Sundholm neighborhood.

Eisenstein's concept of montage involves assembling contrasting shots to evoke complex meanings that neither image alone could convey. By juxtaposing spatial elements, I hope to highlight Sundholm's social and spatial contrasts. This architectural 'montage' generates a layered experience by presenting distinct moments in a particular sequence to promote an intellectual and emotional connection with space. From Eisenstein's analysis of the Greek Acropolis as a montage of sequential experiences, while envisioning the creation of a 'textbook' documenting the events and episodes of the site as a living collage (Galofaro, 2017). Like a flaneur discovering a city's reality and sequencing possibilities, this design unfolds as a spatial trajectory, engaging the spectator with dynamic, contrasting perspectives that choreograph a continuous narrative (Doudova, 2023).

Hybridity will be manifested through a 'Public Condenser' that serves as a bridge between fragmented social realities within Sundholm.

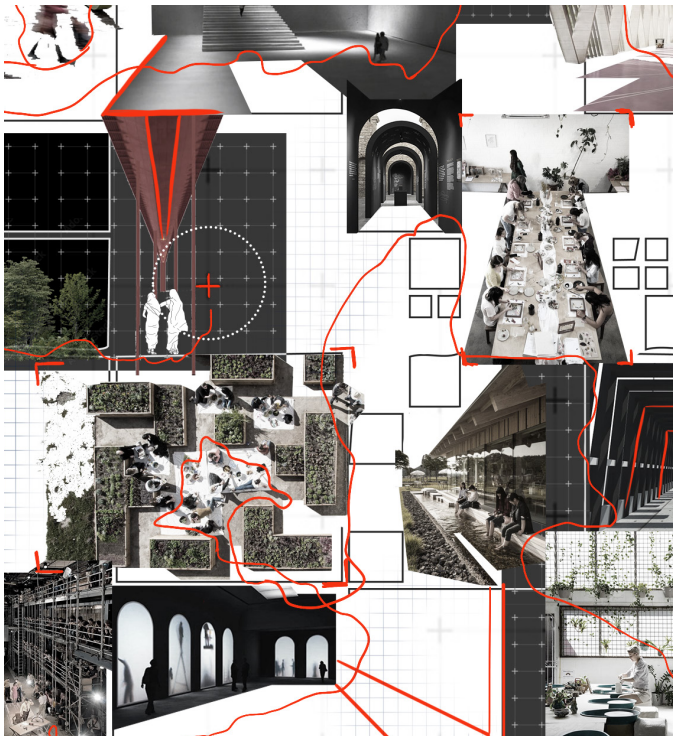


Figure 3. Collage by author, 2024.

Drawing on Herman Herzberger's theory of 'in-between' spaces, the design emphasizes transitional zones as crucial sites for spontaneous communication and social interaction. A variety of in-between spaces serve as buffers, softening the boundaries between diverse groups and promoting the coexistence and overlap of different social realities in an orderly but fluid manner. A sequence of architectural transitions inspired by Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory is employed to guide the user through moments of contrast and continuity. Such hybridity, as theorized by Steven Holl, enables architecture to act as a social catalyst, where hybrid functions coexist and interlock, creating a dynamic 'contamination' of uses that enriches each space.

Moreover, the phenomenological values embodied in the architectural promenade are crucial to the creation of emotional bonds with space. The purpose of creating environments that encourage sensory participation is to encourage not only social interaction, but to support the emotional and psychological well-being of vulnerable groups, such as children and those suffering from addictions. This aligns seamlessly with this research's focus on developing a "Public Condenser" that serves as a community hub, providing opportunities for social exchange, and healing through phenomenological doctrines. Incorporating craftsmanship facilities such as clay modeling and woodworking into the community embodies Richard Sennett's idea on the craftsman's ethos, which illustrates the importance of hands-on work for personal fulfillment and society benefit. These organized, imaginative activities offer therapeutic advantages to vulnerable populations by enhancing concentration, patience, and a sense of purpose that facilitate healing.

A phenomenological approach emphasizes how humans engage with, interpret, and emotionally engage with their surroundings. In turn, spatial cognition provides the framework through which these phenomenological experiences are understood and structured. Spatial cognition is essential for our interactions with the world, as it enables us to effectively navigate our surroundings by gathering, organizing, and utilizing information about location, size, direction, and relationships (Denis, 2018).

Relevance

My research seeks to construct environments that tackle the intricacies of social fragmentation by stressing how sequential places may induce healing and interaction. Transforming architecture into an intersection that generates affiliation and resilience among varied communities while bridging opposed realities. Consequently, this demonstrates the capacity of effectively organized spaces to serve as catalysts for social cohesion and reintegration, thus meeting the growing need for inclusive and empowering community scenarios.

Hybrid Diagram - open and closed volumes - sequence of spaces

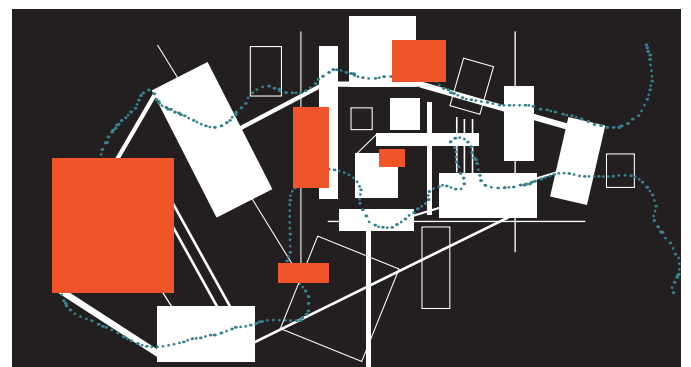


Figure 4. Diagram by author, 2024.

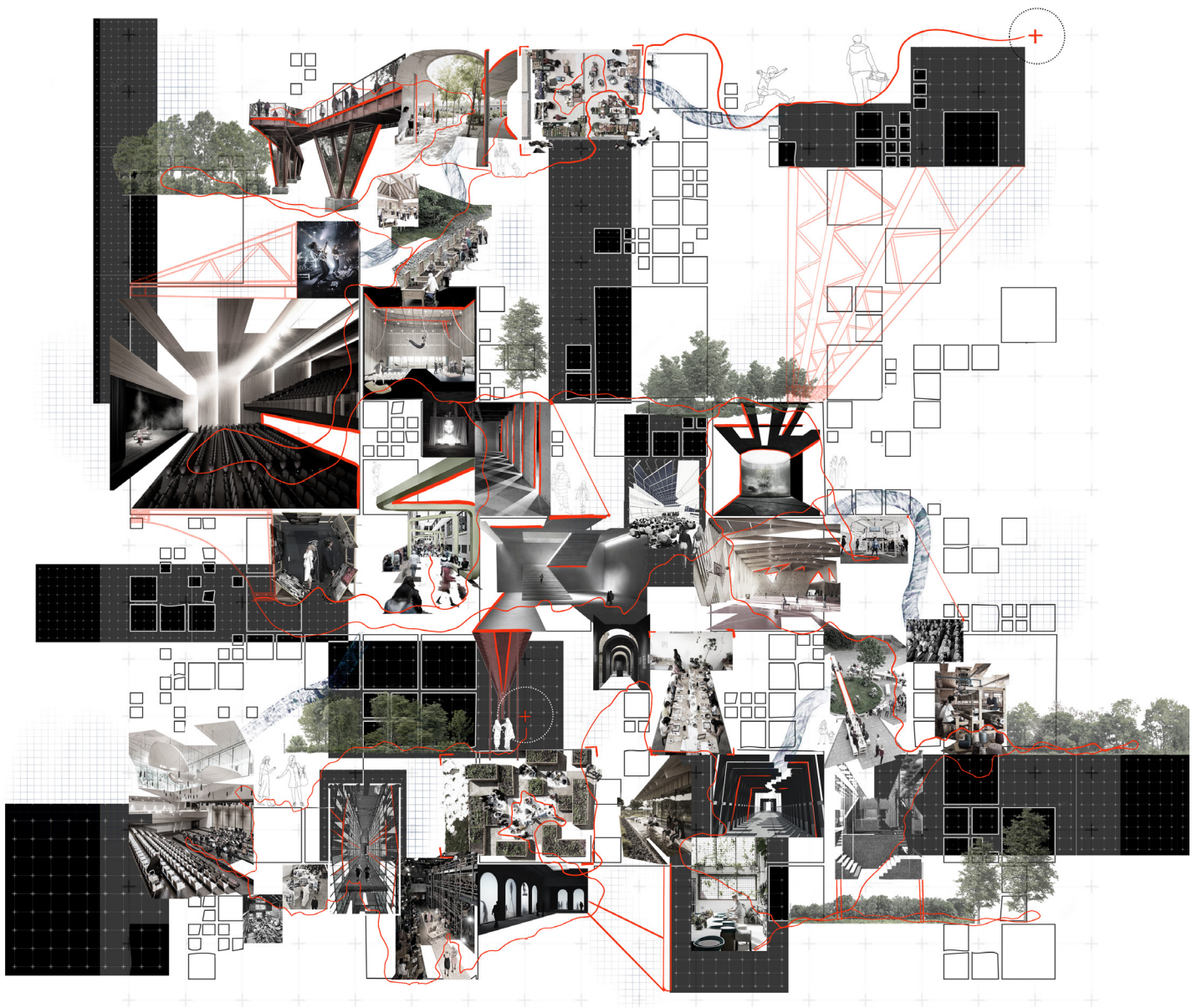


Figure 5. Collage by author, 2024.

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