

The Myth of the City

On broadening public access to the esoteric City of London

Delft University of Technology

the City

design tutor:
Roel van de Pas

bt tutor:
Rufus van den Ban

research tutor:
dr. Amy Thomas

the Square Mile

by
tom punte





Oil painting of the Square Mile (source: Carl Laubin, 1997)



An investigation into the City of London, combining personal experience, historical research, and theoretical writing. Using various media, the work is an ongoing process aimed at making the City more accessible and rooted in its surroundings.

in existence; now peopled by human beings, large with about * On the north, men wandered over the site of bone, and over of the space now of Finsbury lets. Islington and poets loved and repose with of the monster with the capital is suburb by seven in magnificence est works of the single line of irre- g by piles of and garnished, of the naked with scores of ded the naviga-

the City, properly the most import- at the time of the n built, for the d plaster; the used were ill ere goods were ed far into the erhung by the specimens of this e seen in those t reached by the d, in a few days, tle less than a ruins of eighty- thirteen thousand had risen again had excited the uring countries. d lines of the a great extent lines, originally even princesses ws on horseback

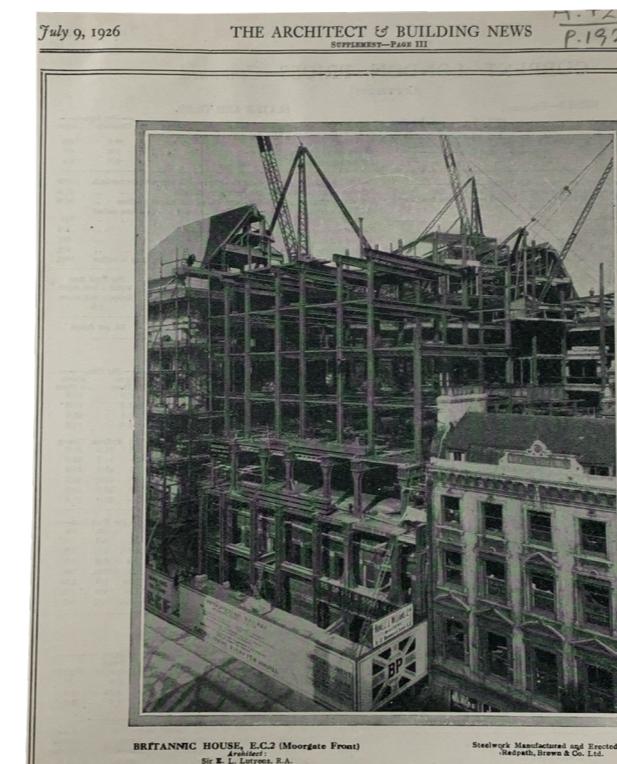
residence of wealthy persons in an age when a coach and six was a fashionable luxury. The style of building was, however, far superior to that of the City which had perished. The ordinary material was brick, of much better quality than had formerly been used. On the sites of the ancient parish churches had arisen a multitude of new domes, towers, and spires which bore the mark of the fertile genius of Wren. In every place save one the traces of the great devastation had been completely effaced. But the crowds of workmen, the scaffolds, and the masses of hewn stone were still to be seen where the noblest of Protestant temples was slowly rising on the ruins of the old Cathedral of St. Paul.*

The whole character of the City has, since that time, undergone a complete change. At present the bankers, the merchants, and the chief shopkeepers repair thither on six mornings of every week for the transaction of business: but they reside in other quarters of the metropolis, or at suburban country seats surrounded by shrubberies and flower gardens. This revolution in private habits has produced a political revolution of no small importance. The City is no longer regarded by the wealthiest traders with that attachment which every man naturally feels for his home. It is no longer associated in their minds with domestic affections and endearments. The fireside, the nursery, the social table, the quiet bed are not there. Lombard Street and Threadneedle Street are merely places where men toil and accumulate. They go elsewhere to enjoy and to expend. On a Sunday, or in an evening after the hours of business, some courts and alleys, which a few hours before had

* The fullest and most trustworthy information about the state of the buildings of London at this time is to be derived from the *Survey of the British Museum*.

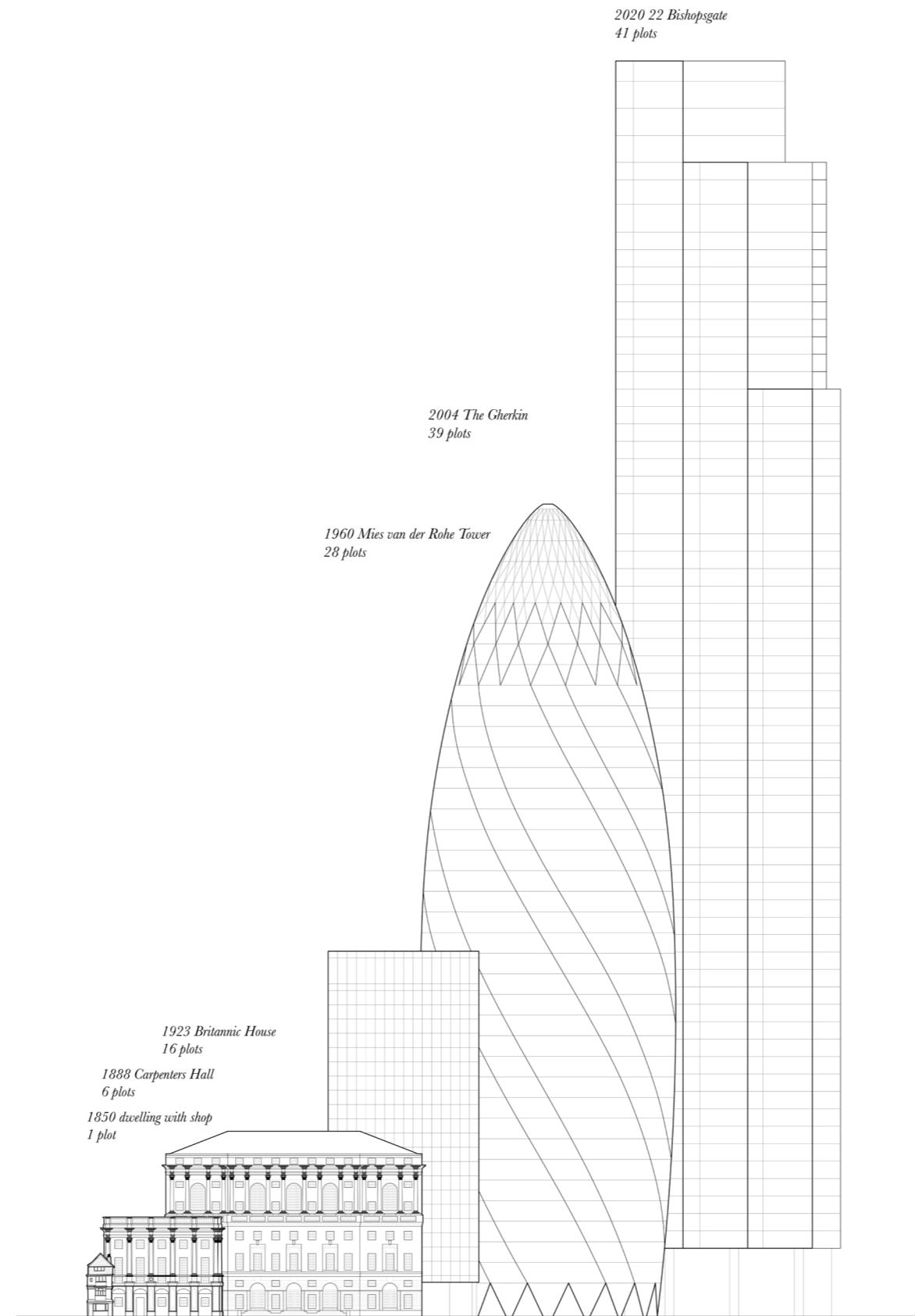
been alive with hurrying feet and anxious faces, are as silent as the glades of a forest. The chiefs of the mercantile interest are no longer citizens. They avoid, they almost contemn, municipal honours and duties. Those honours and duties are abandoned to men who, though useful and highly respectable, seldom belong to the princely commercial houses of which the names are renowned throughout the world.

In the seventeenth century the City was the merchant's residence. Those mansions of the great old burghers which still exist have been turned into counting houses and warehouses: but it is evident that they were originally not inferior in magnificence to the dwellings which were then inhabited by the nobility. They sometimes stand in retired and gloomy courts, and are accessible only by inconvenient passages: but their dimensions are ample, and their aspect stately. The entrances are decorated with richly carved pillars and canopies. The staircases and landing places are not wanting in grandeur. The floors are sometimes of wood, tessellated after the fashion of France. The palace of Sir Robert Clayton, in the Old Jewry, contained a superb banqueting room wainscoted with cedar, and adorned with battles of gods and giants in fresco.* Sir Dudley North expended four thousand pounds, a sum which would then have been important to a Duke, on the rich furniture of his reception rooms in Basinghall Street.† In such abodes, under the last Stuarts, the heads of the great firms lived splendidly and hospitably. To their dwelling place they were bound by the strongest ties of interest and affection. There they had passed their youth, had made their friendships, had courted their wives, had seen their children grow up, had laid the remains of their parents in the earth, and expected that their own remains would be laid. That

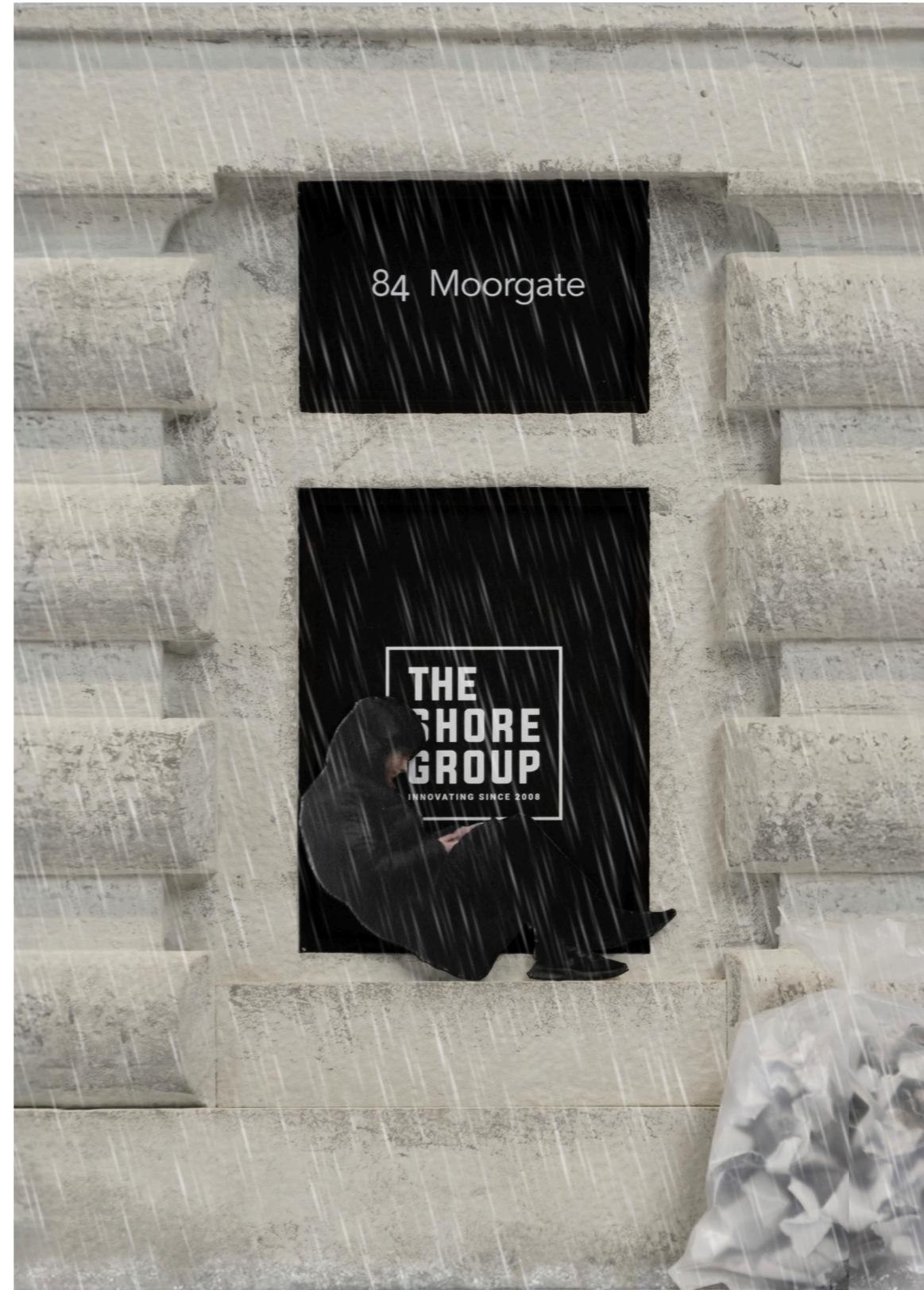




The scale of the bank (source: fragment of the movie Mary Poppins, 1964)





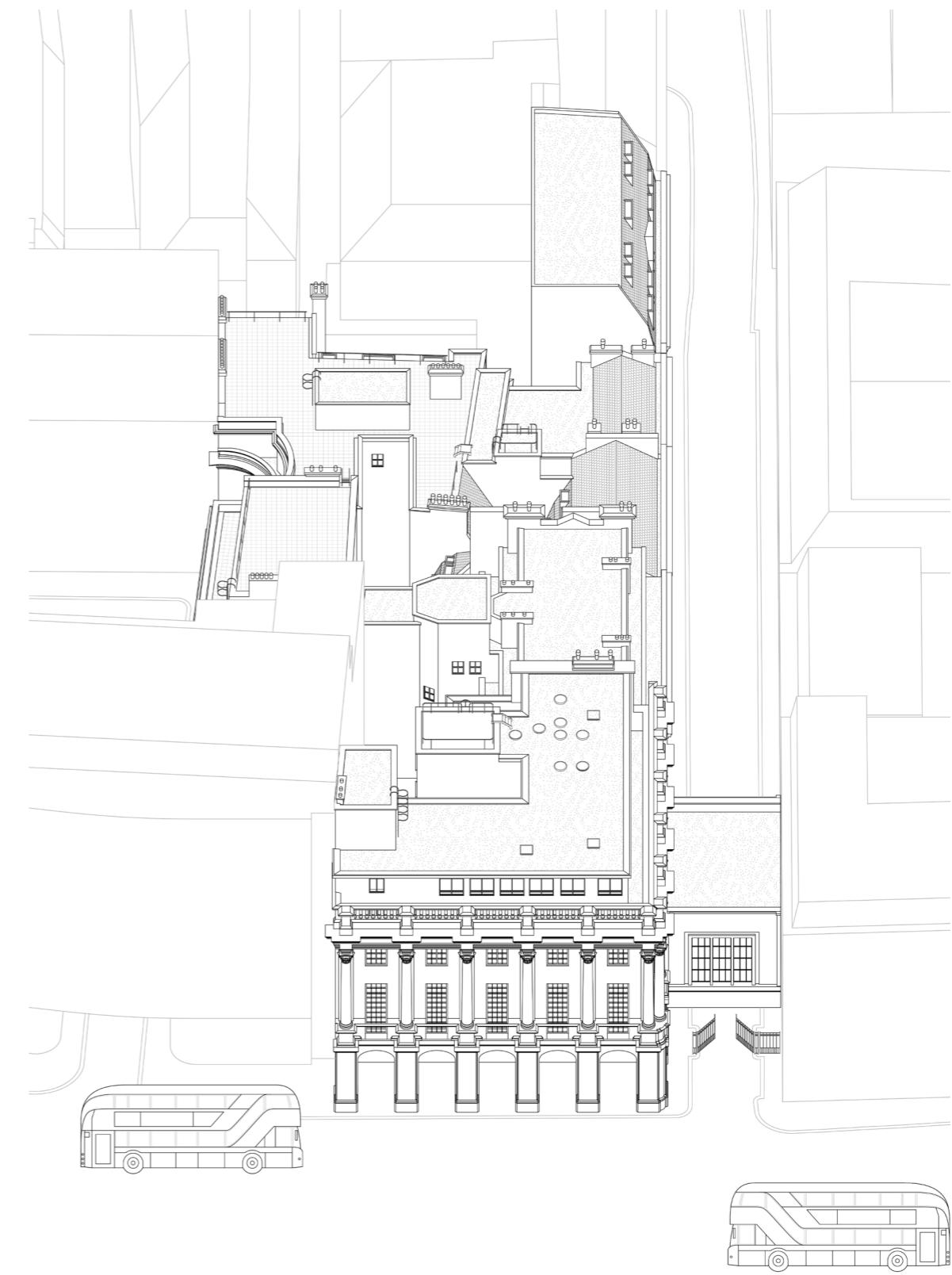
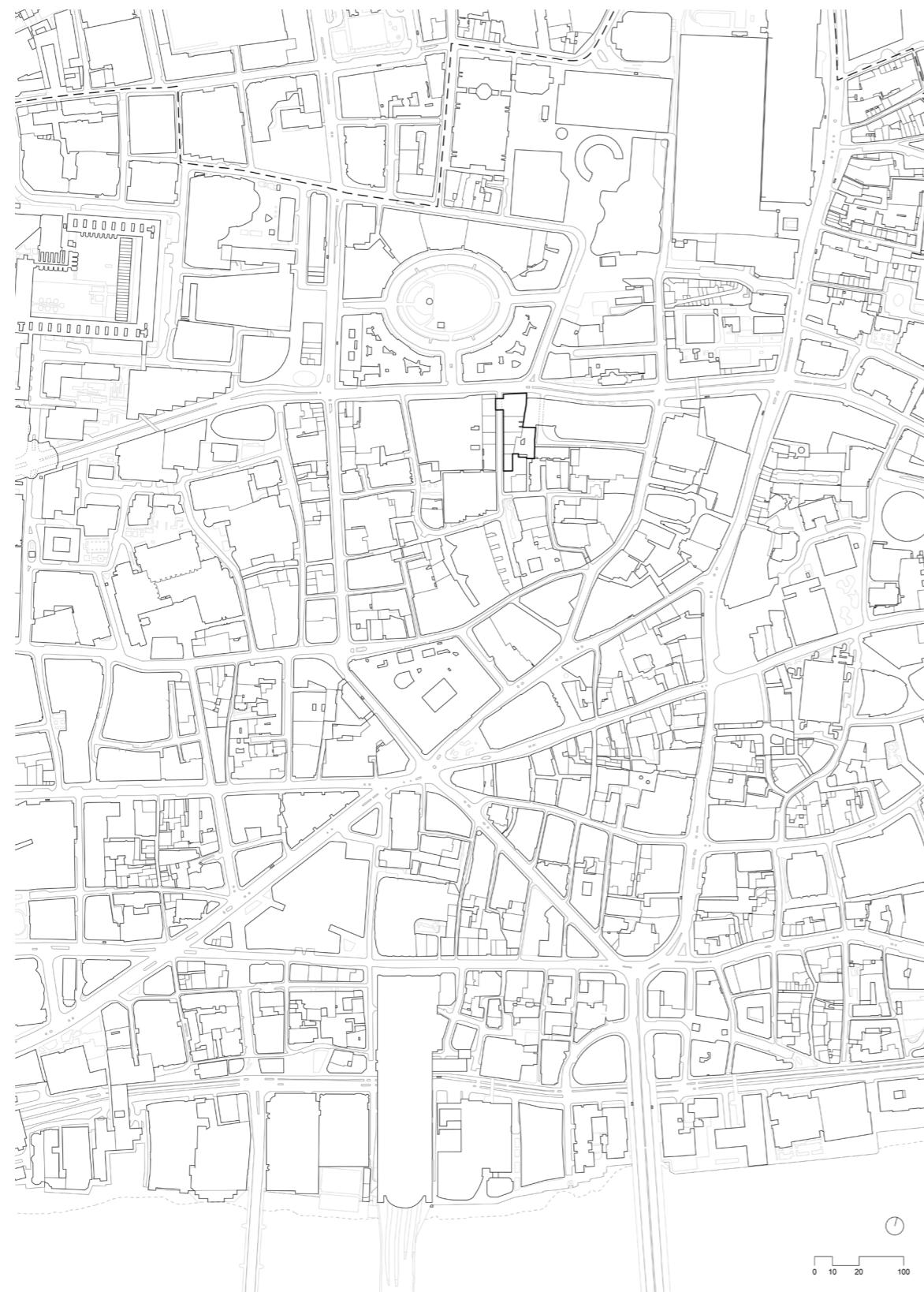


The endless growth of the city overlooks existing opportunities, a new public layer should activate spaces that reach beyond the facade.

Large-scale development in the City risks eroding a sense of place, situated architecture at a human scale can avoid this.

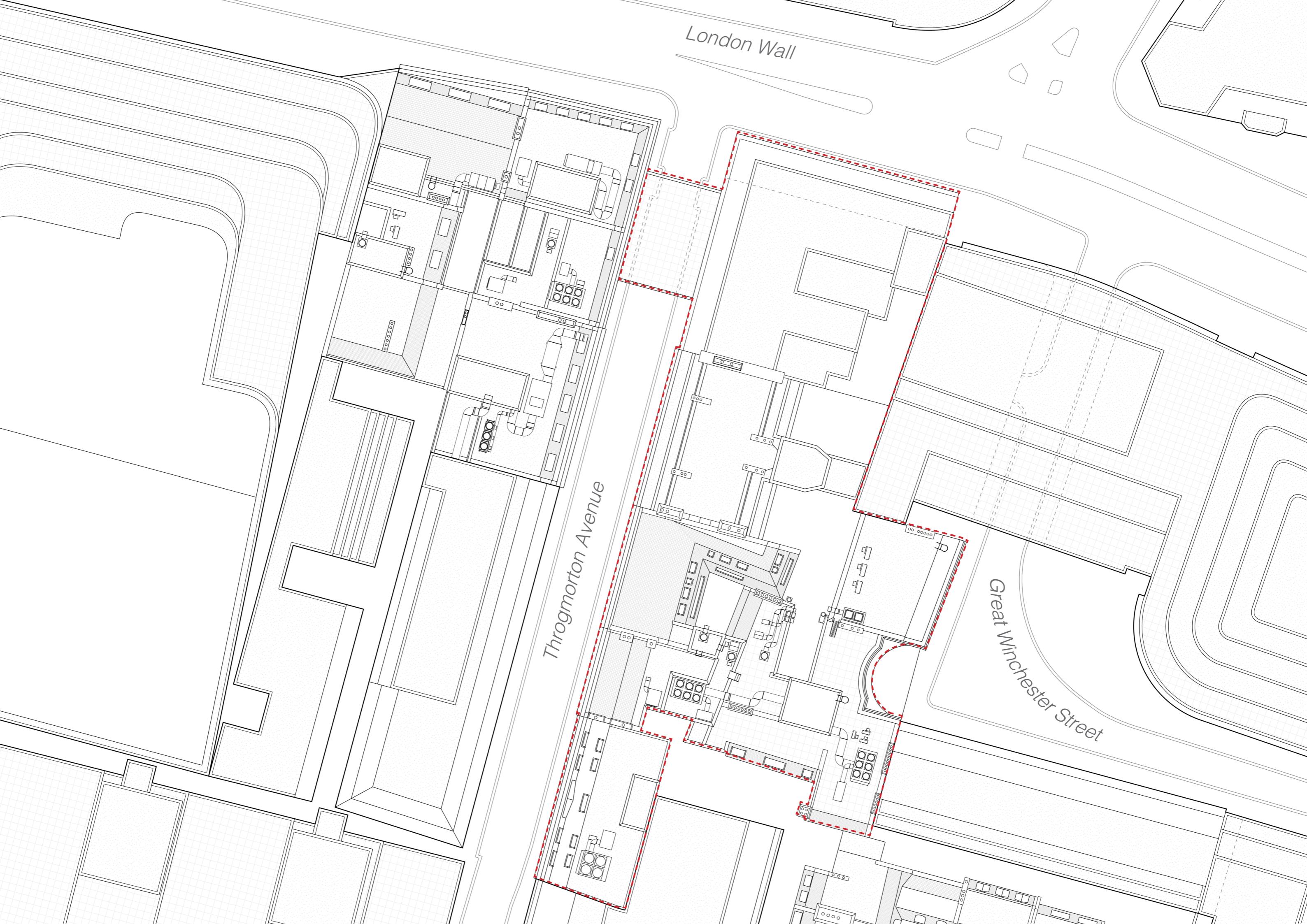
The City's esoteric image is strongly tied to its horizontal and vertical plane, challenging both will allow to better integrate the public and private sphere.

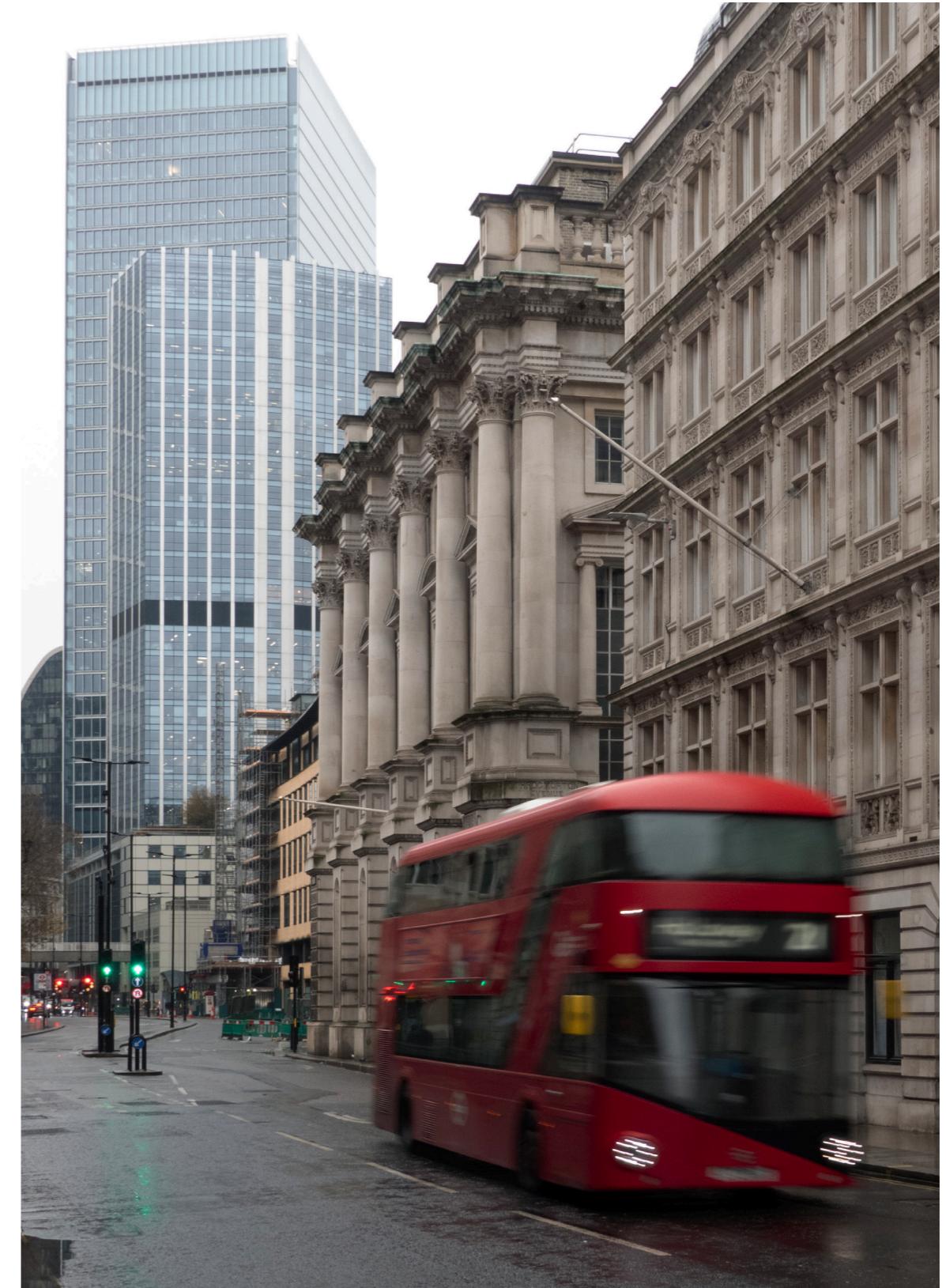
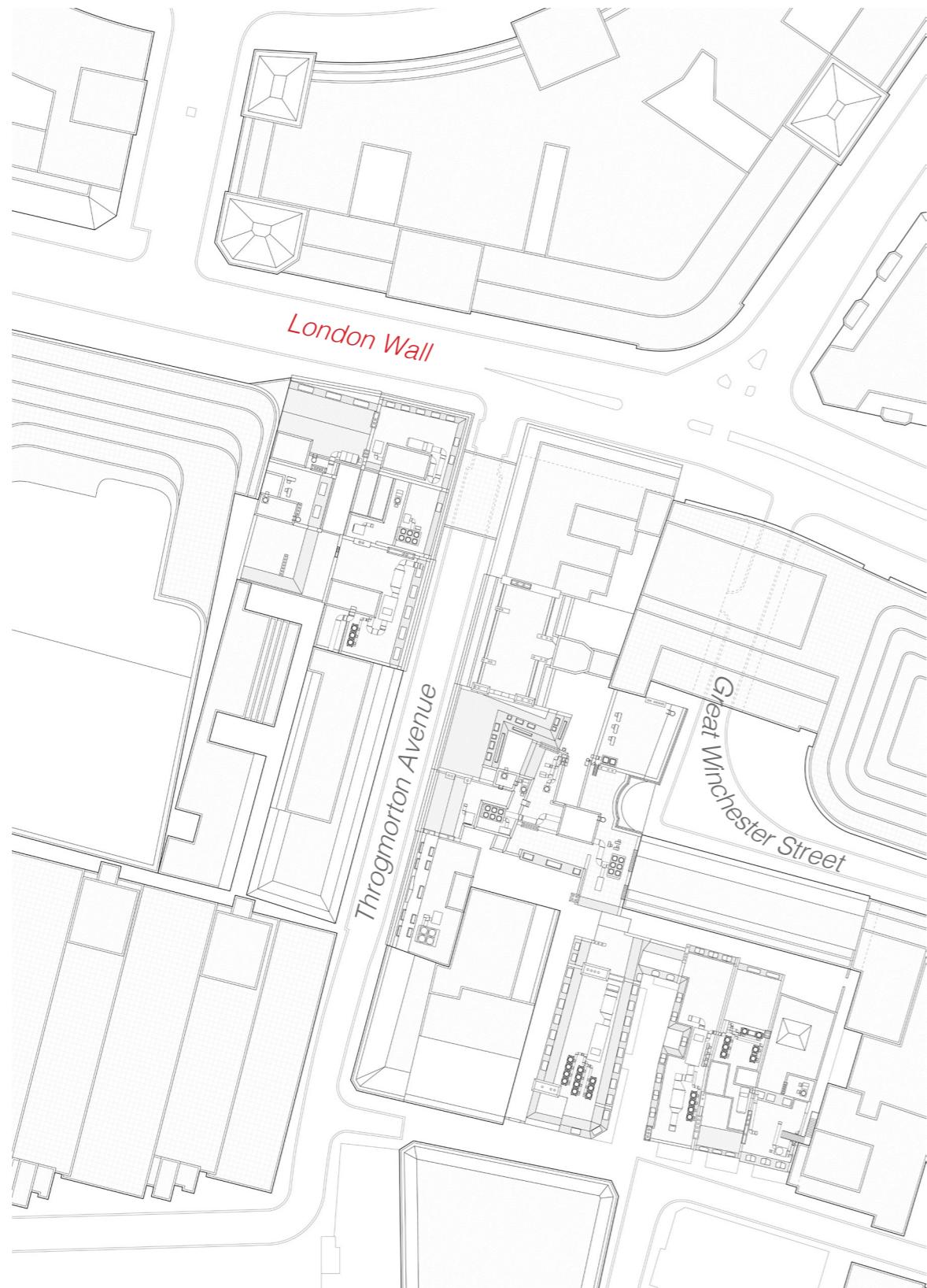
The City's public sphere is internalised, a true accessible public space must be perceivable, its access clear and hold some meaning.

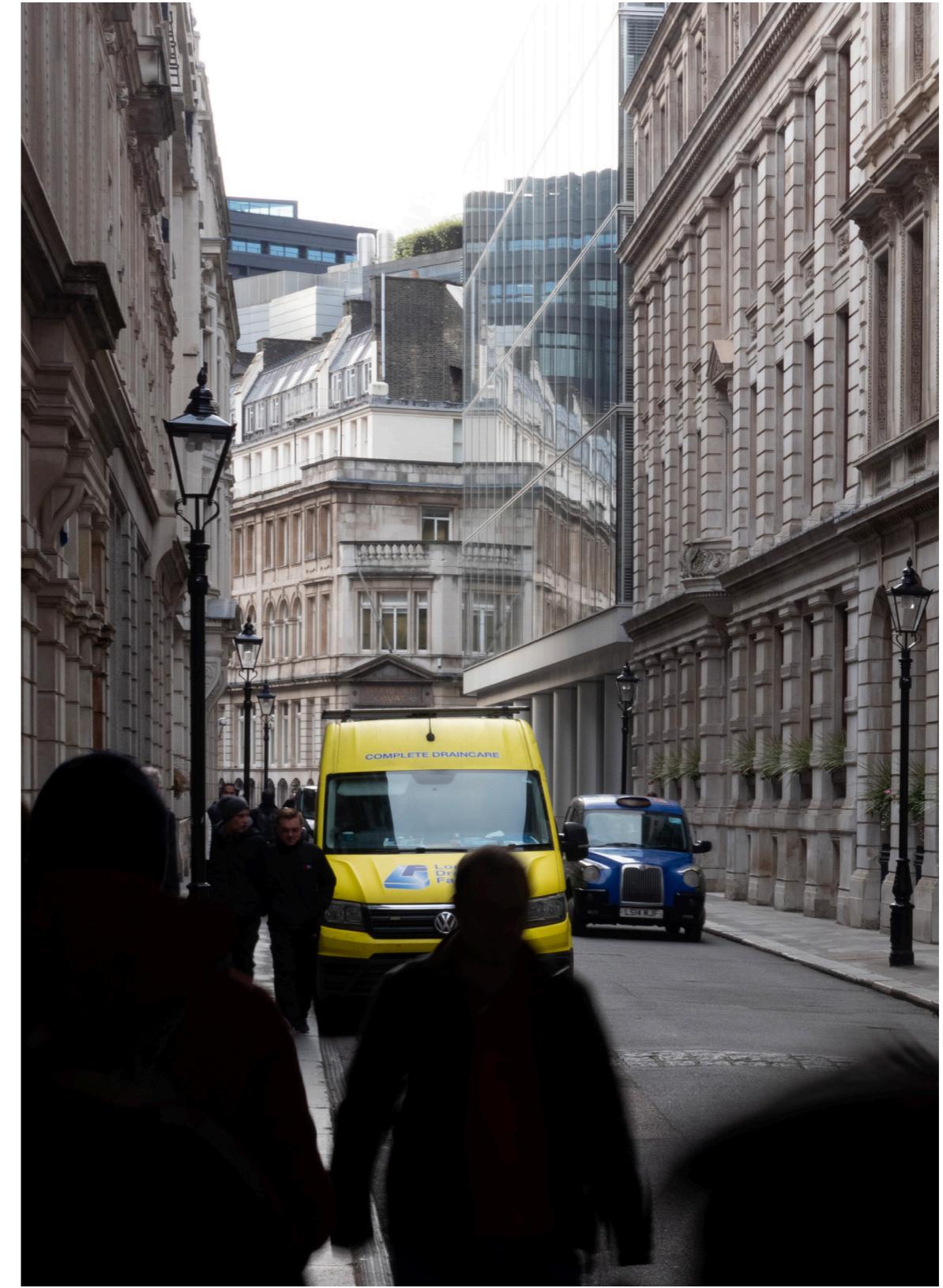
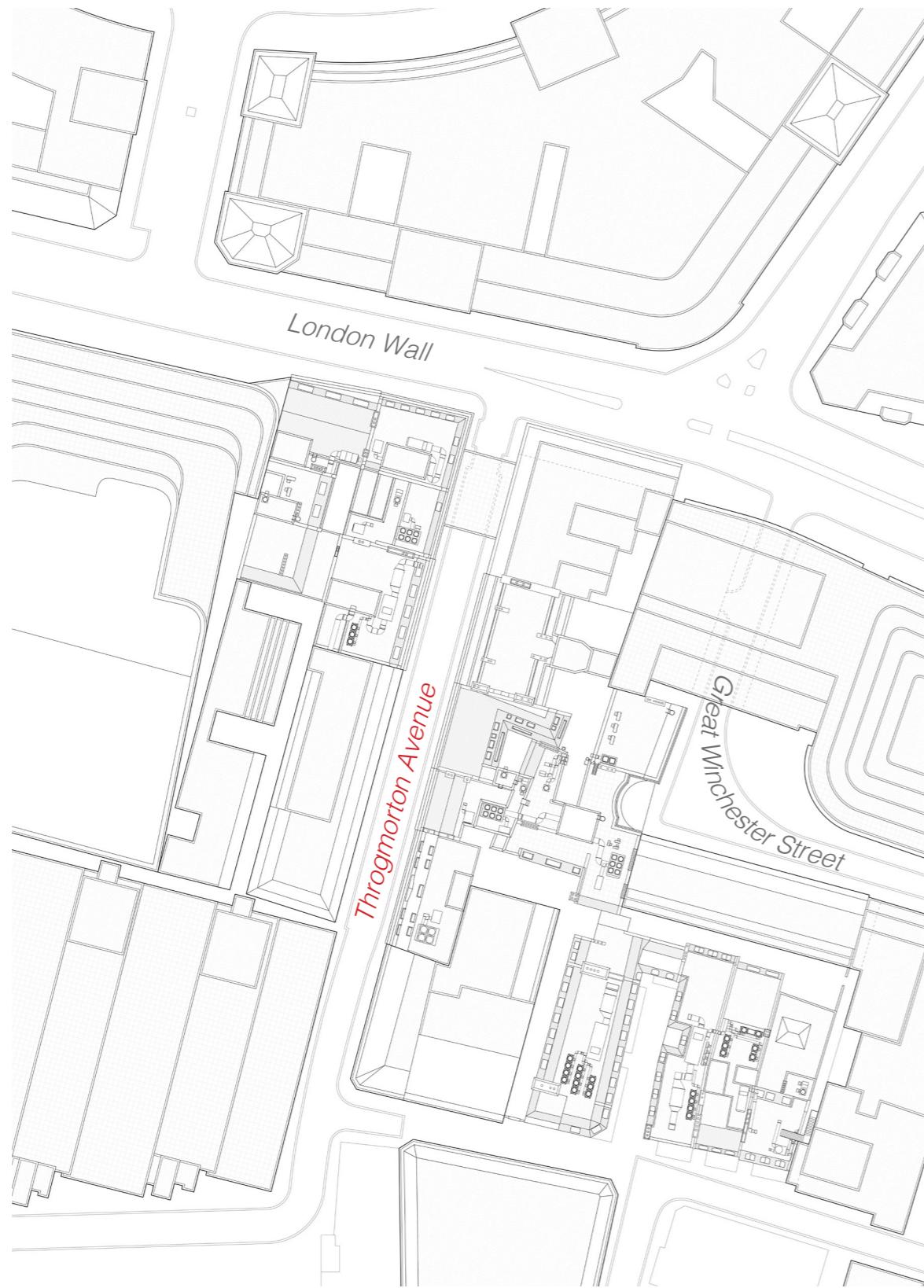


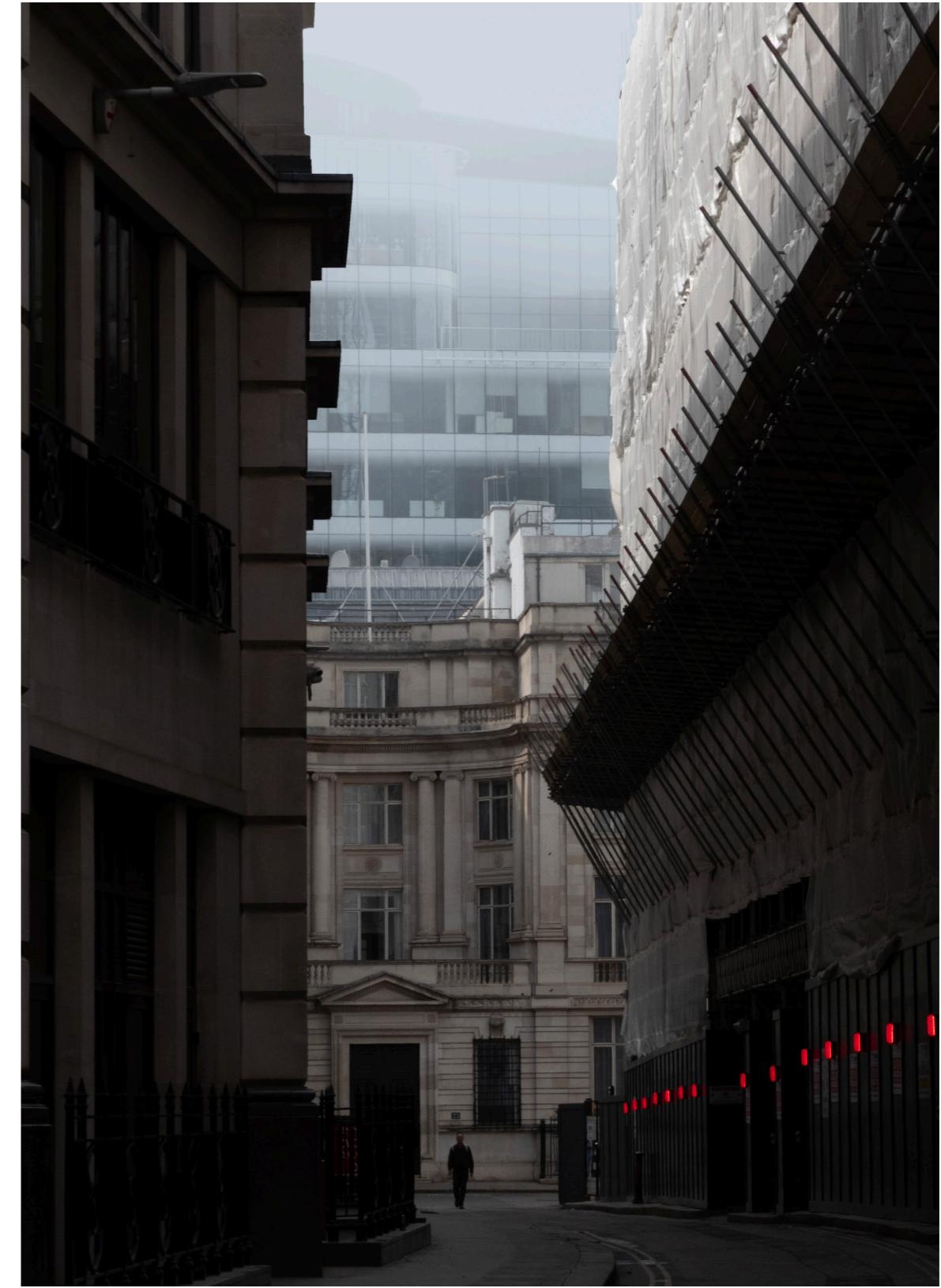
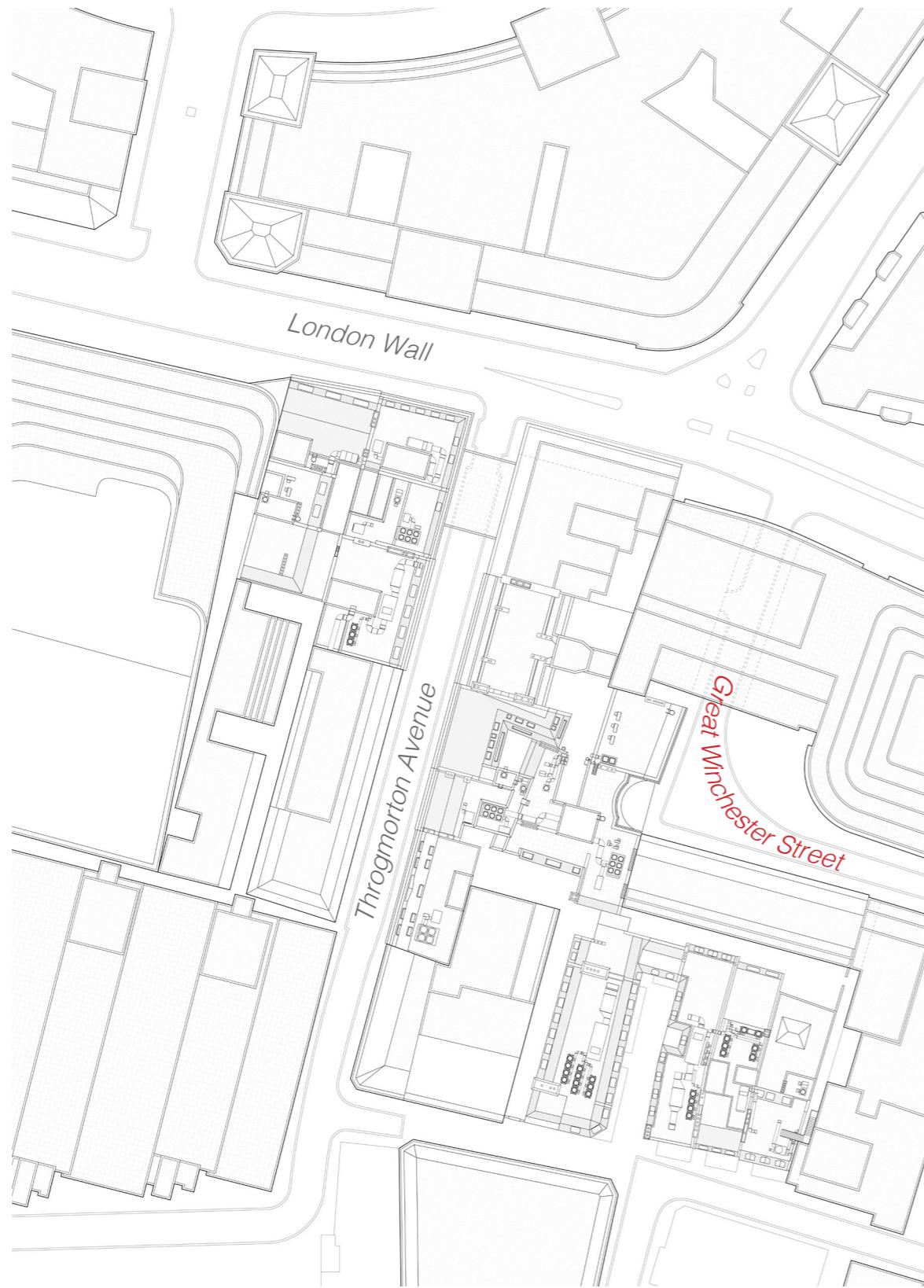


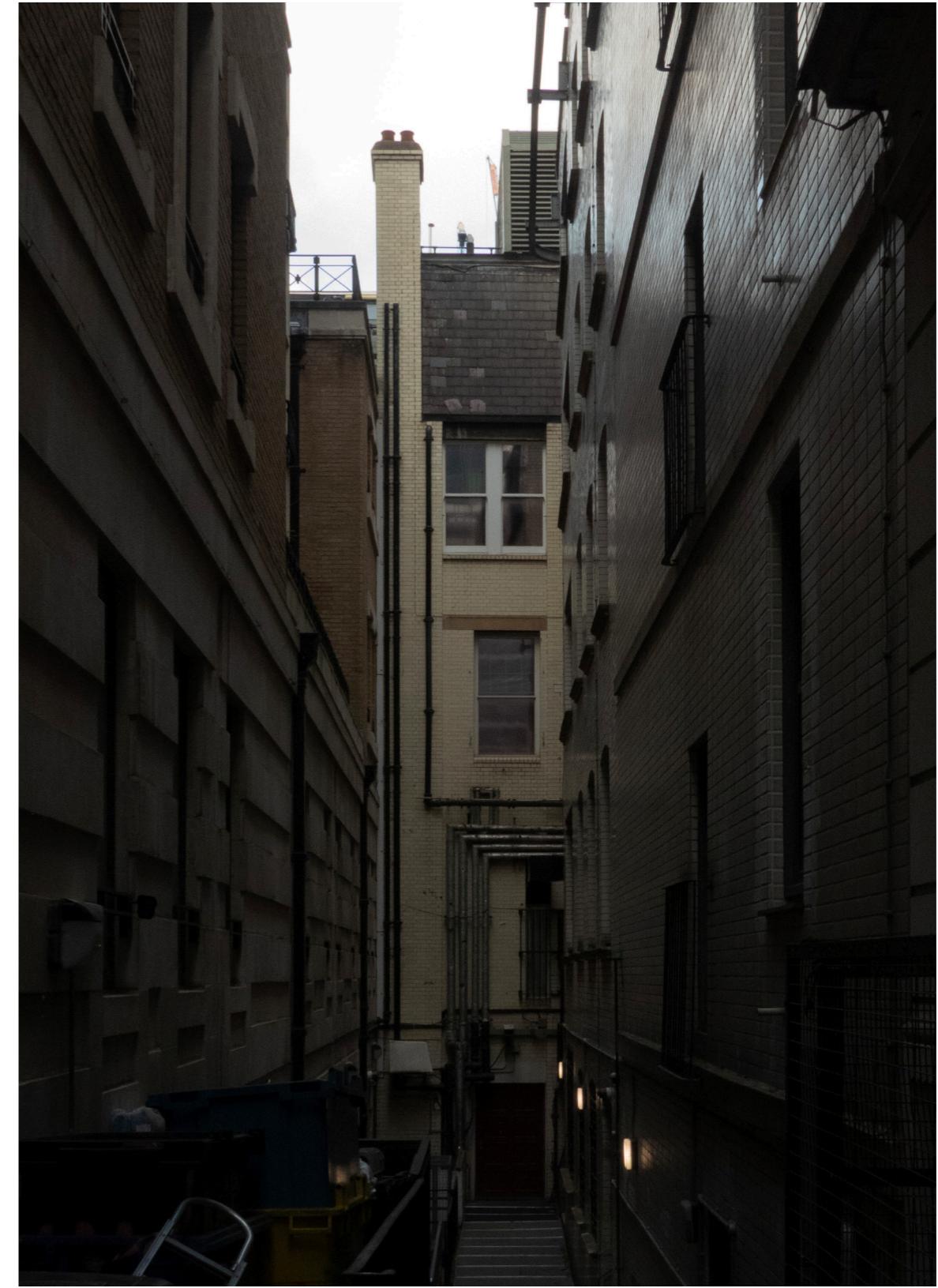
Proposed aerial view looking towards southeast (source: The Carpenters' Company)

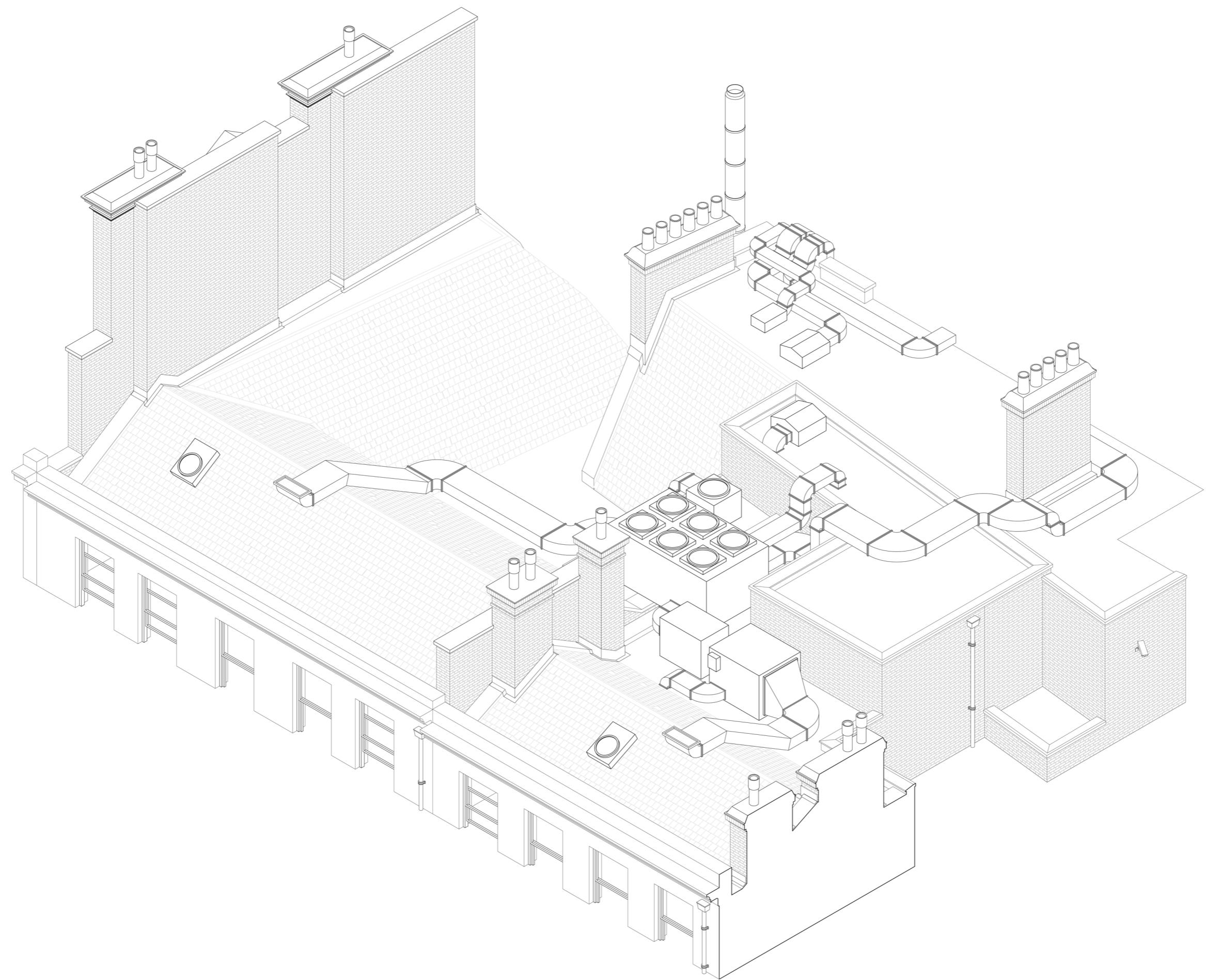




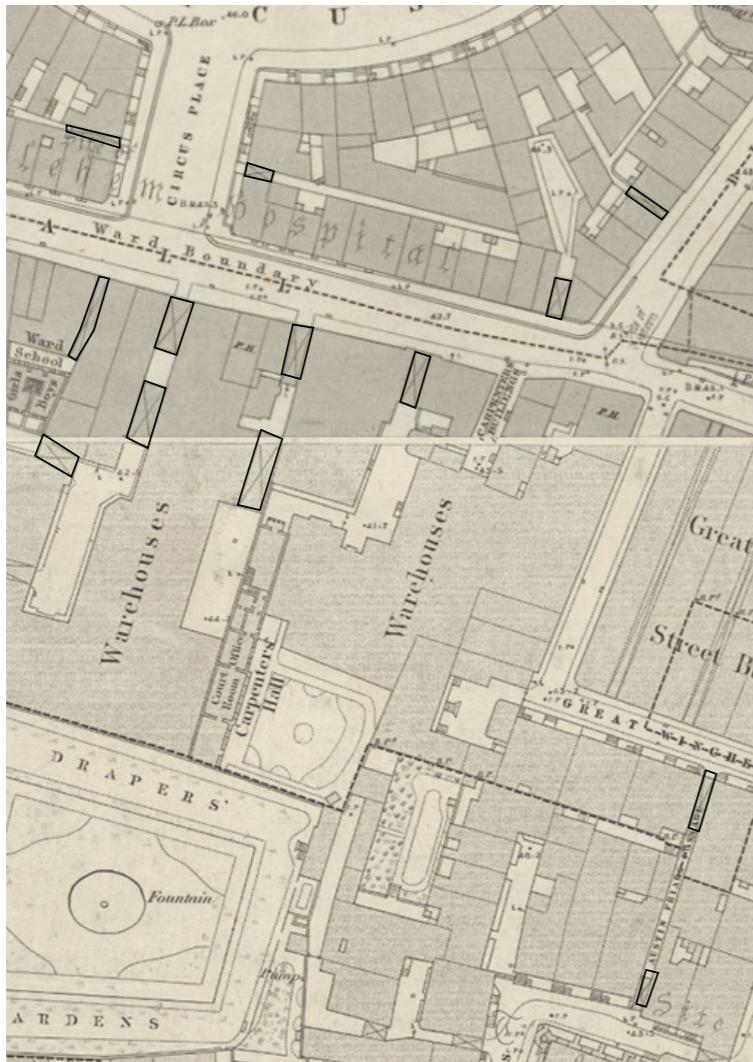












1875



1894-1896



1940-1960





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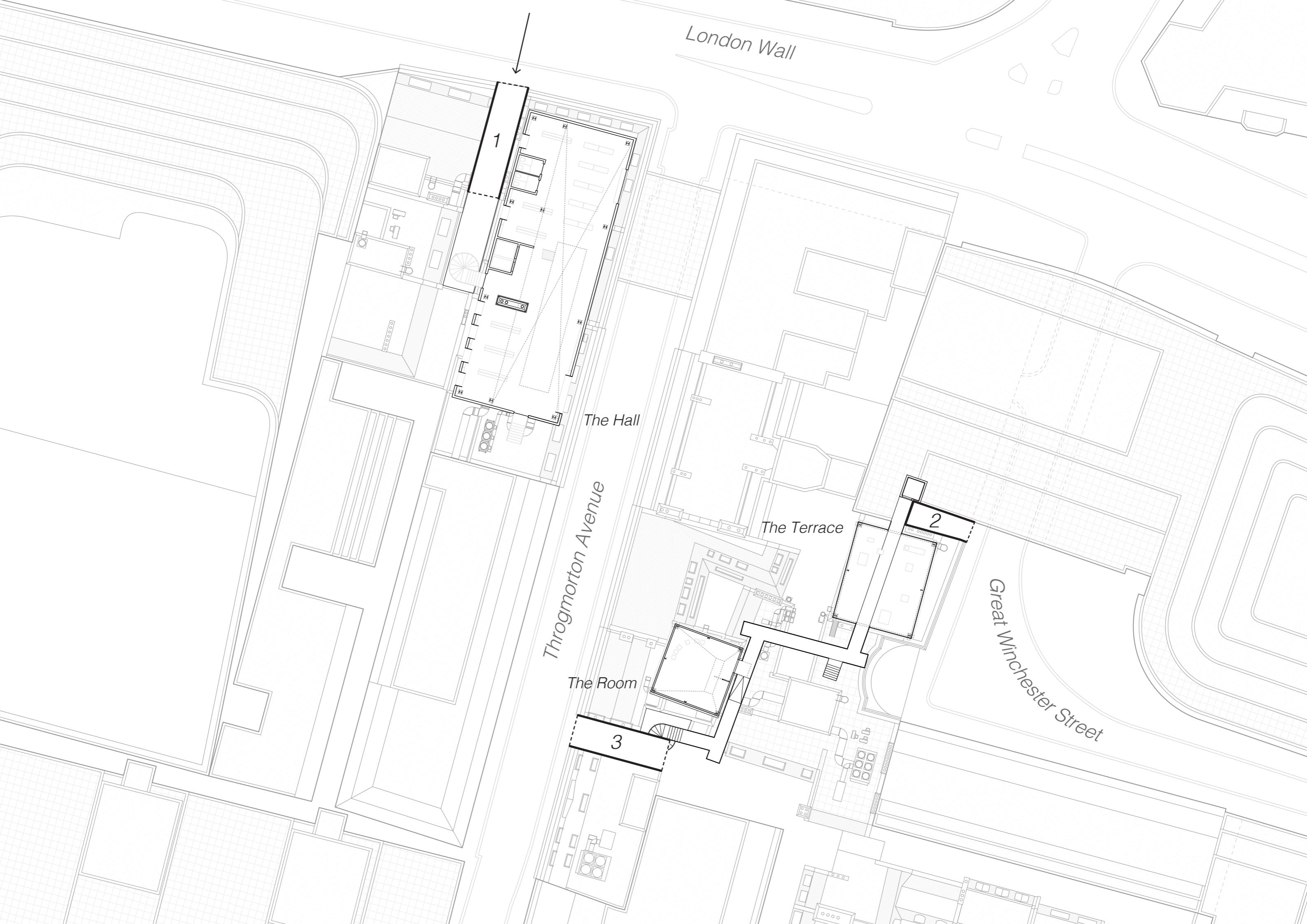
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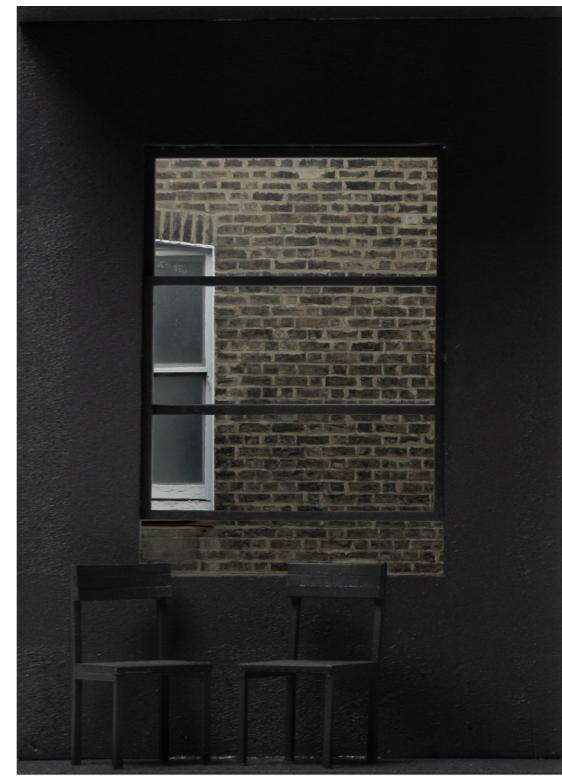
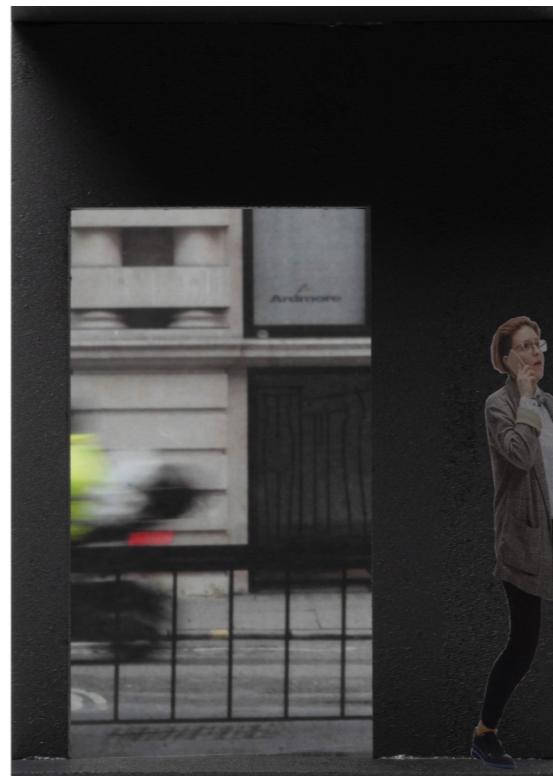
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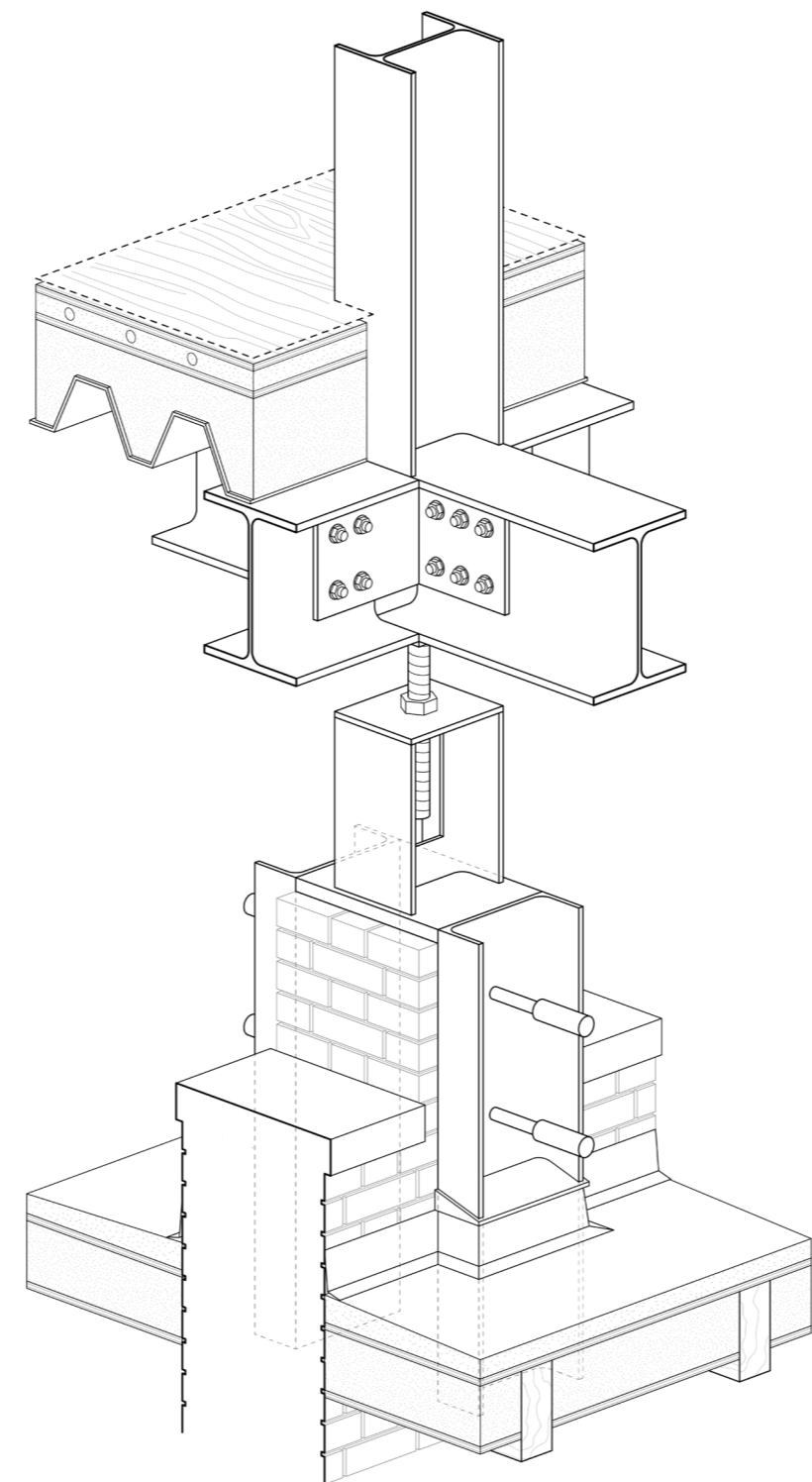
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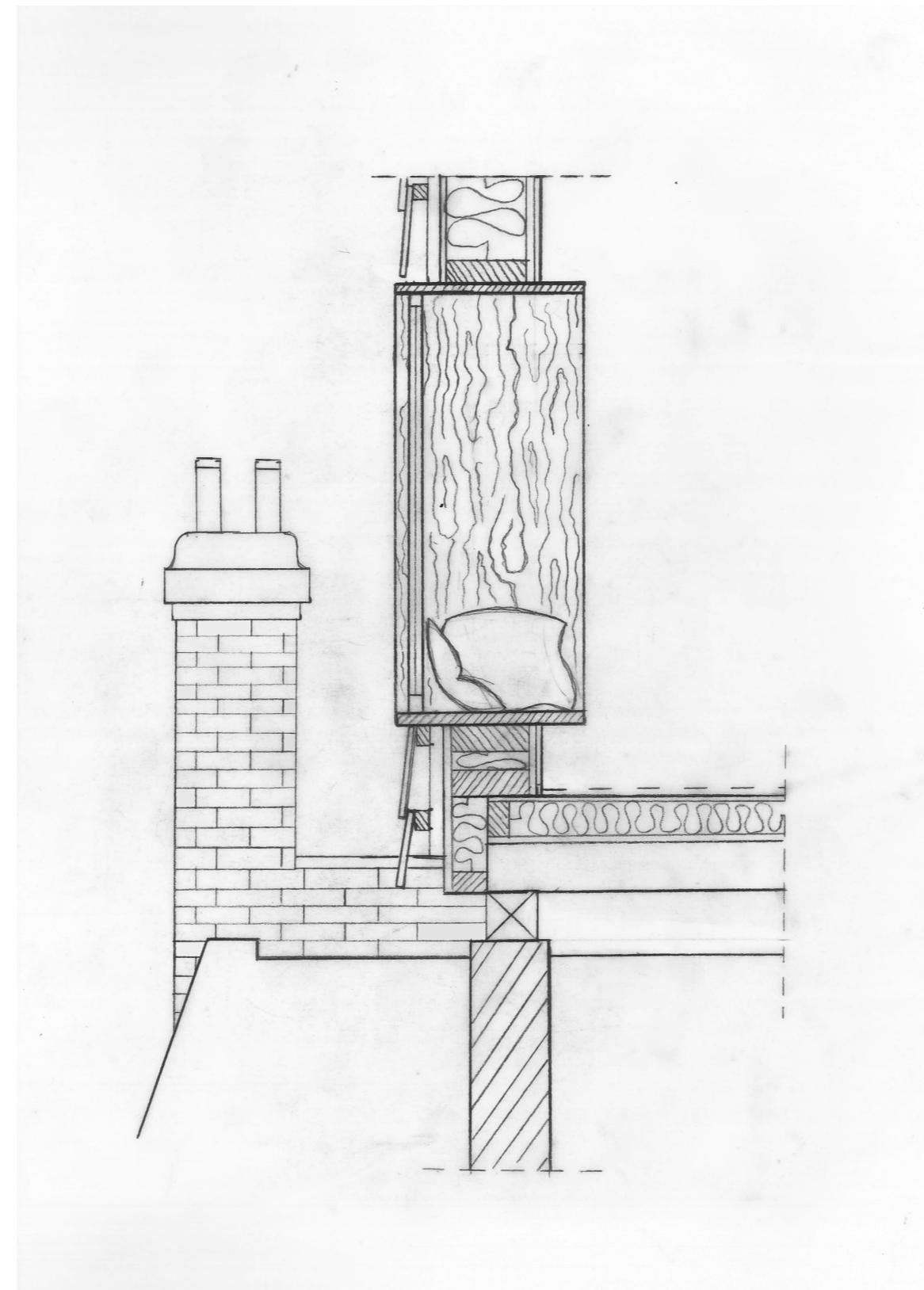


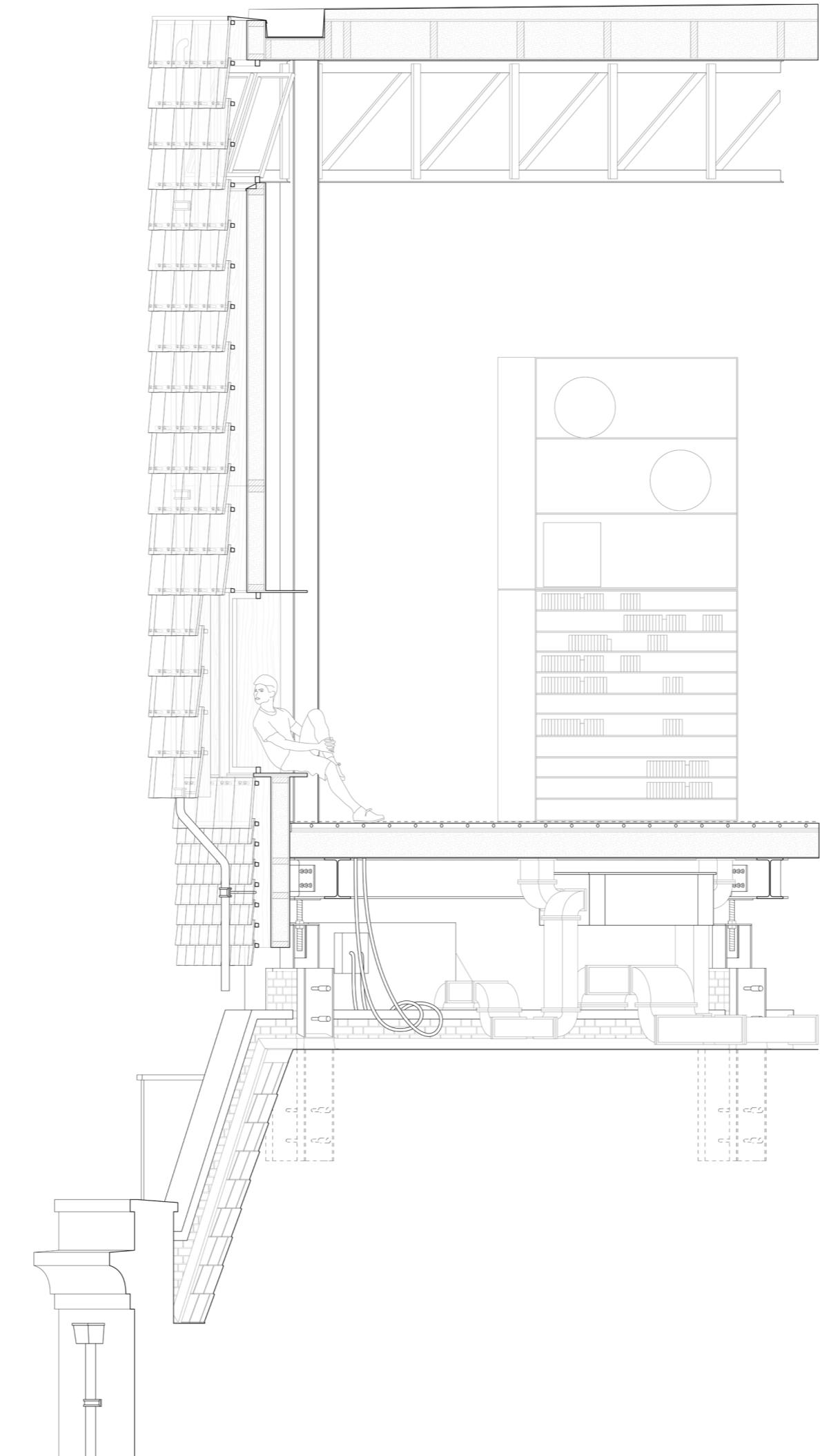


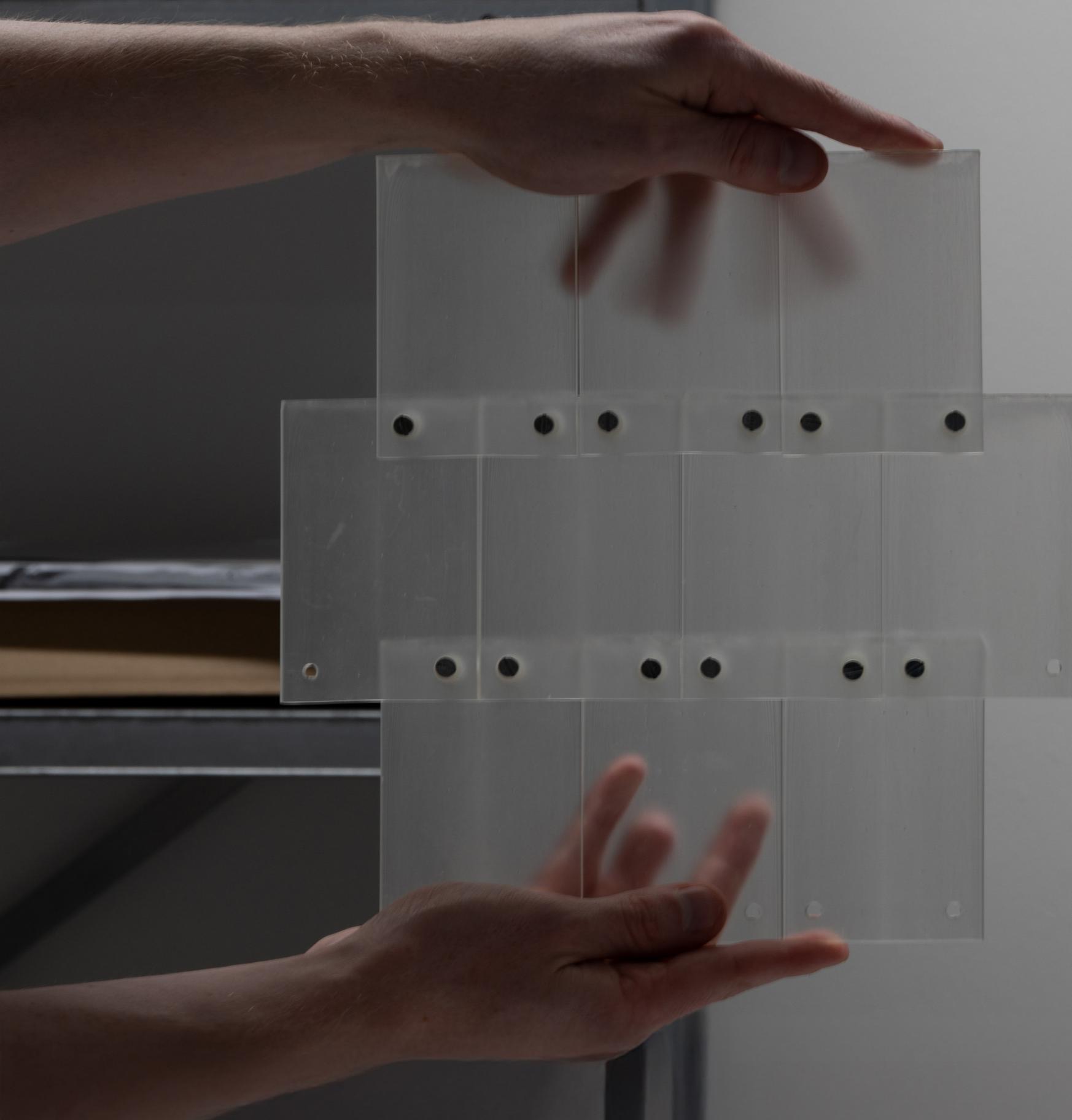


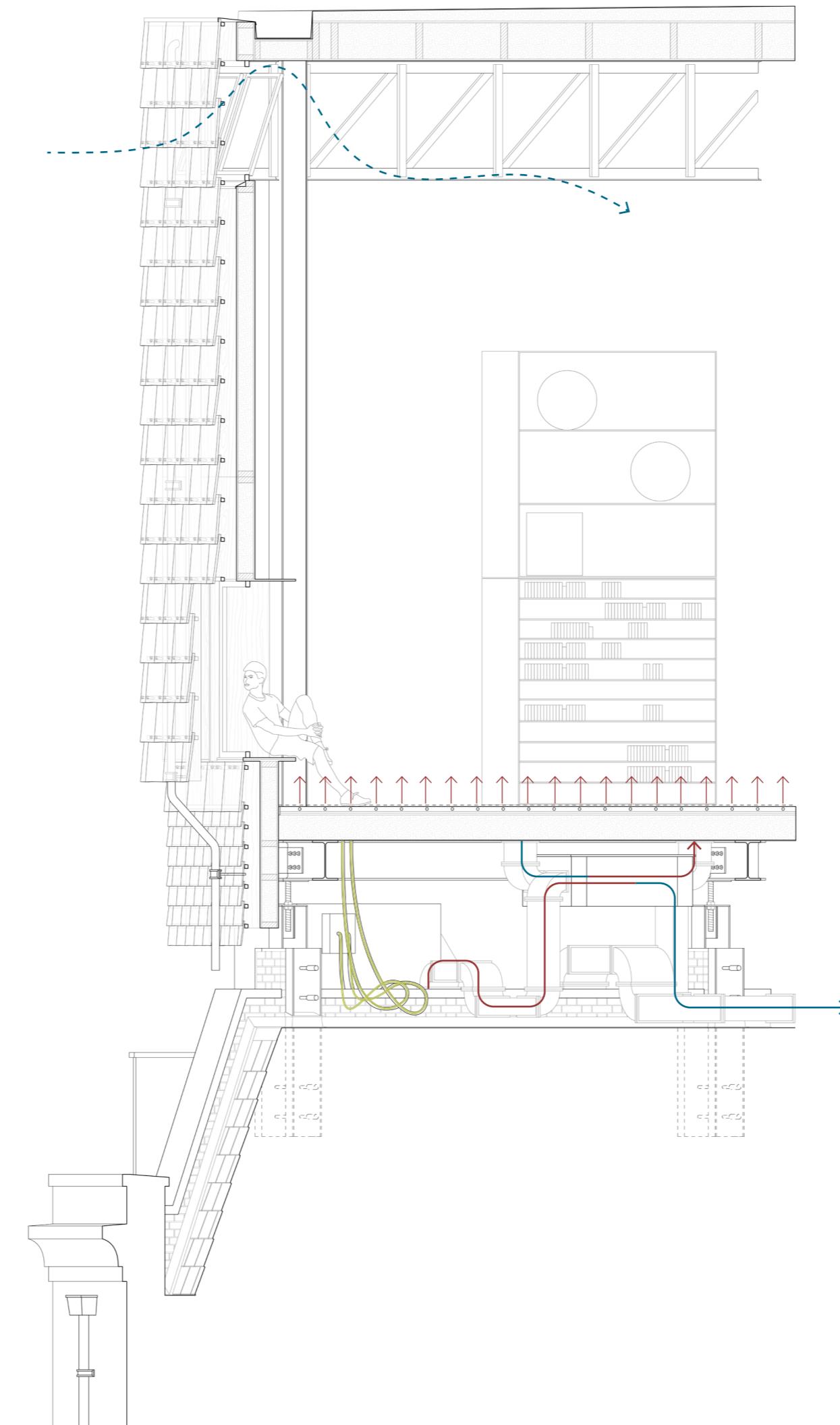


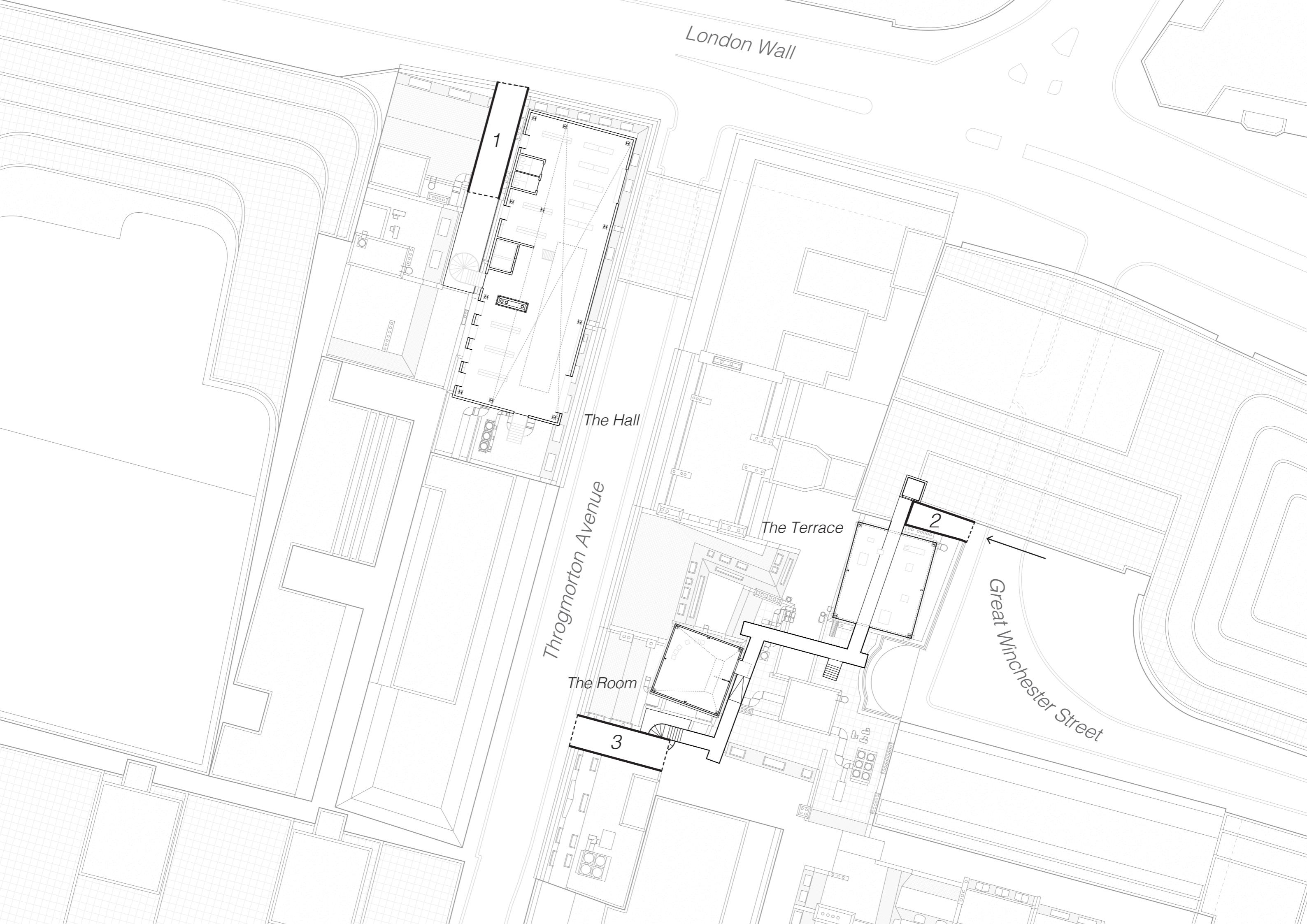




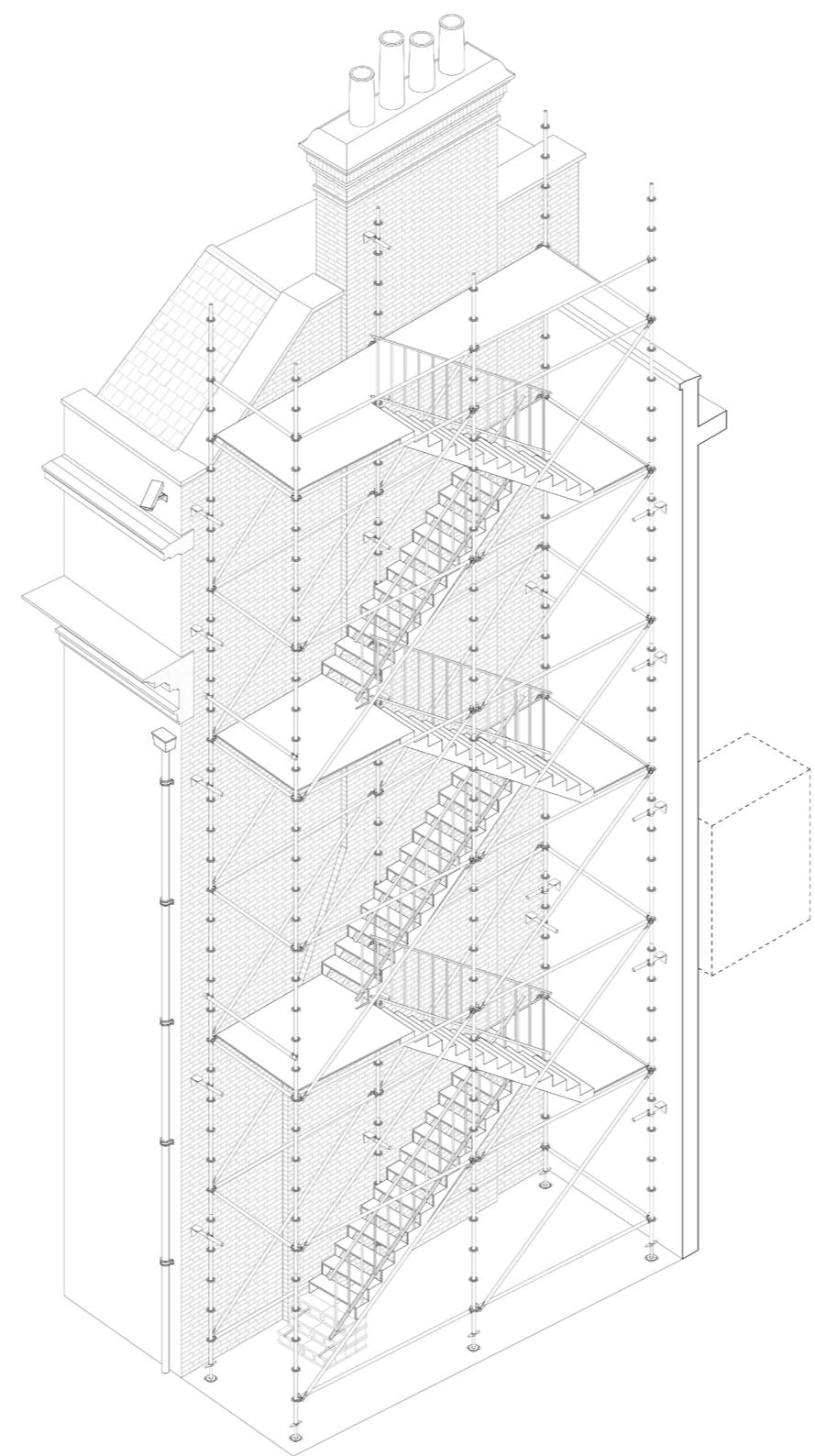


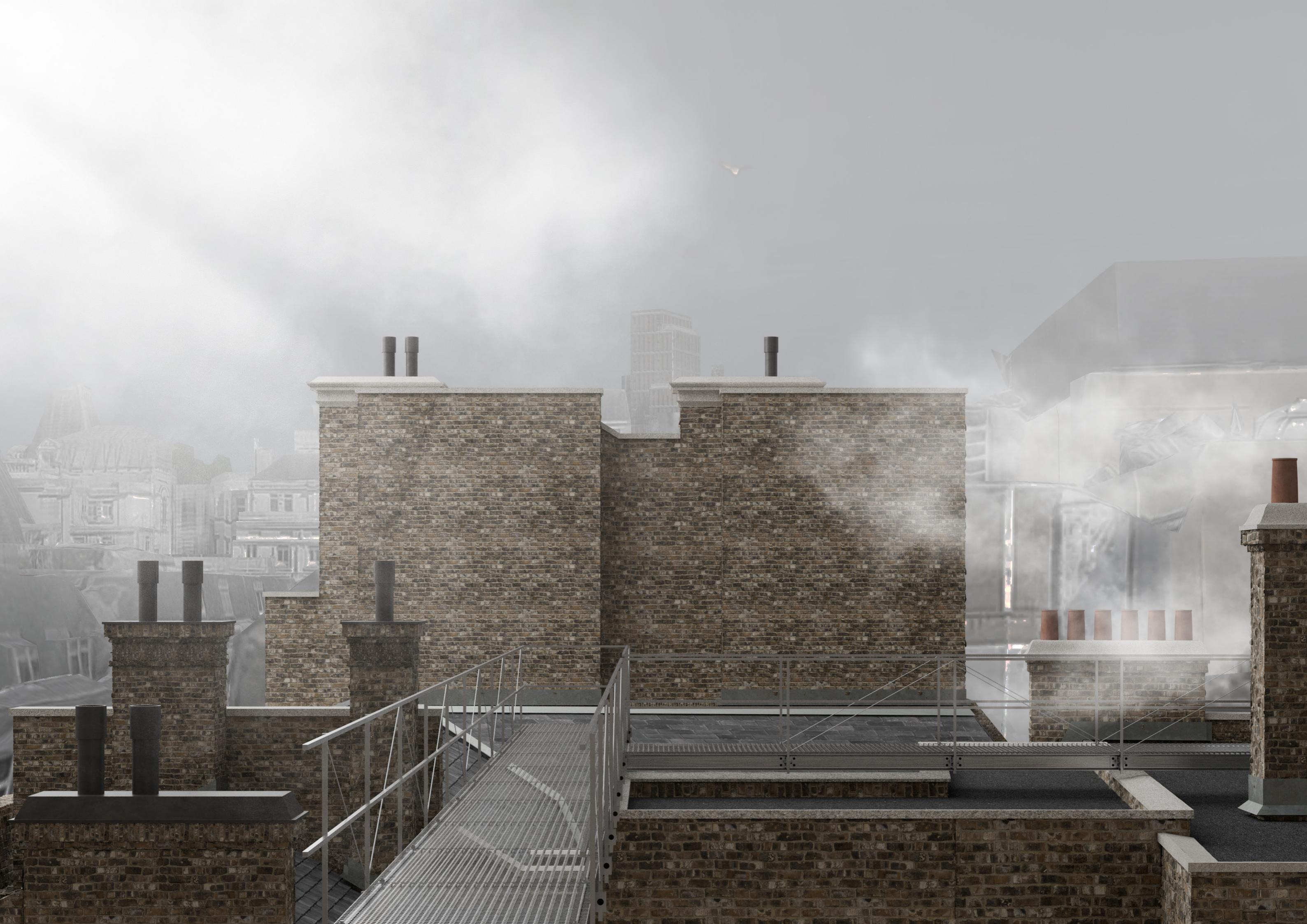






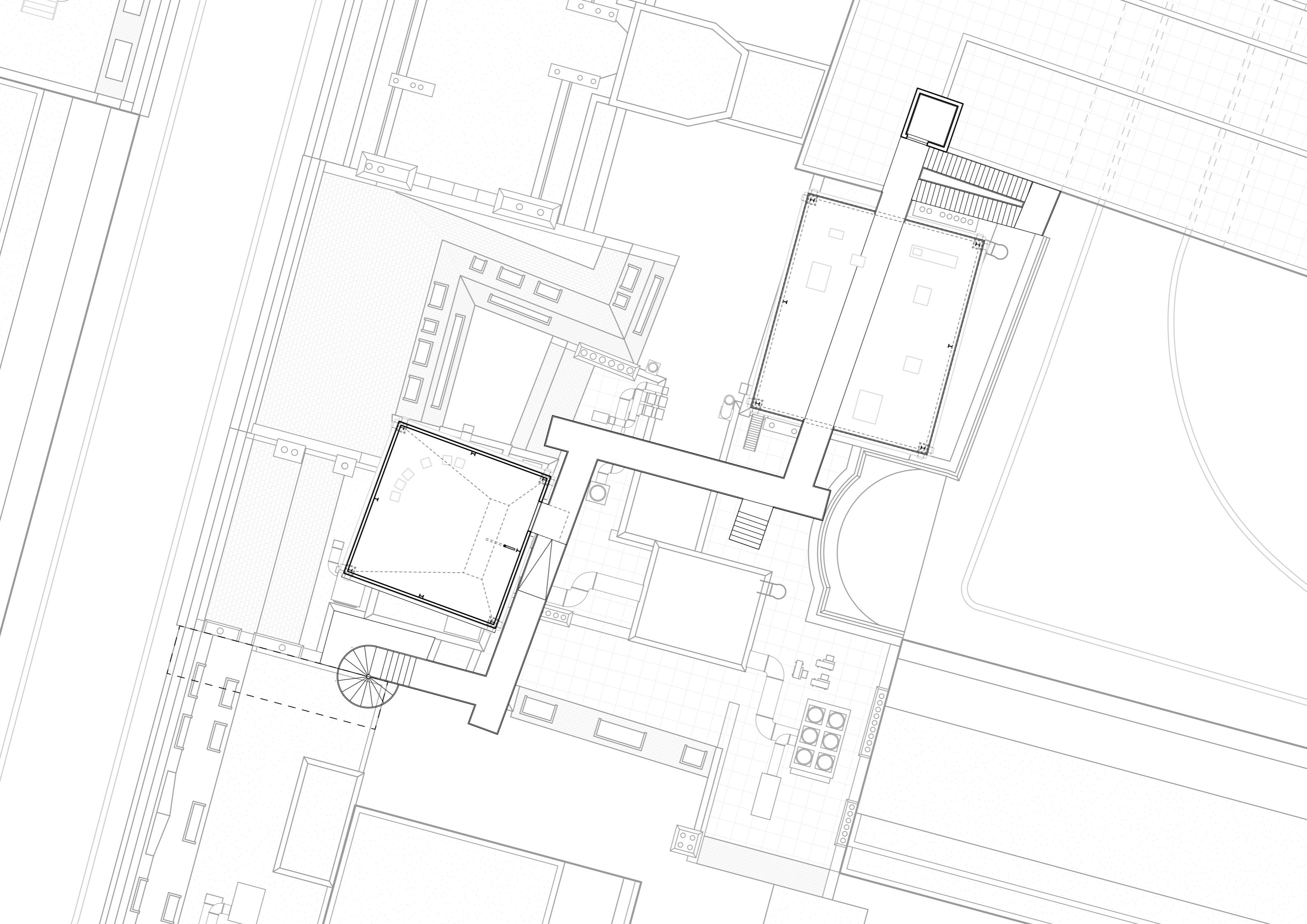


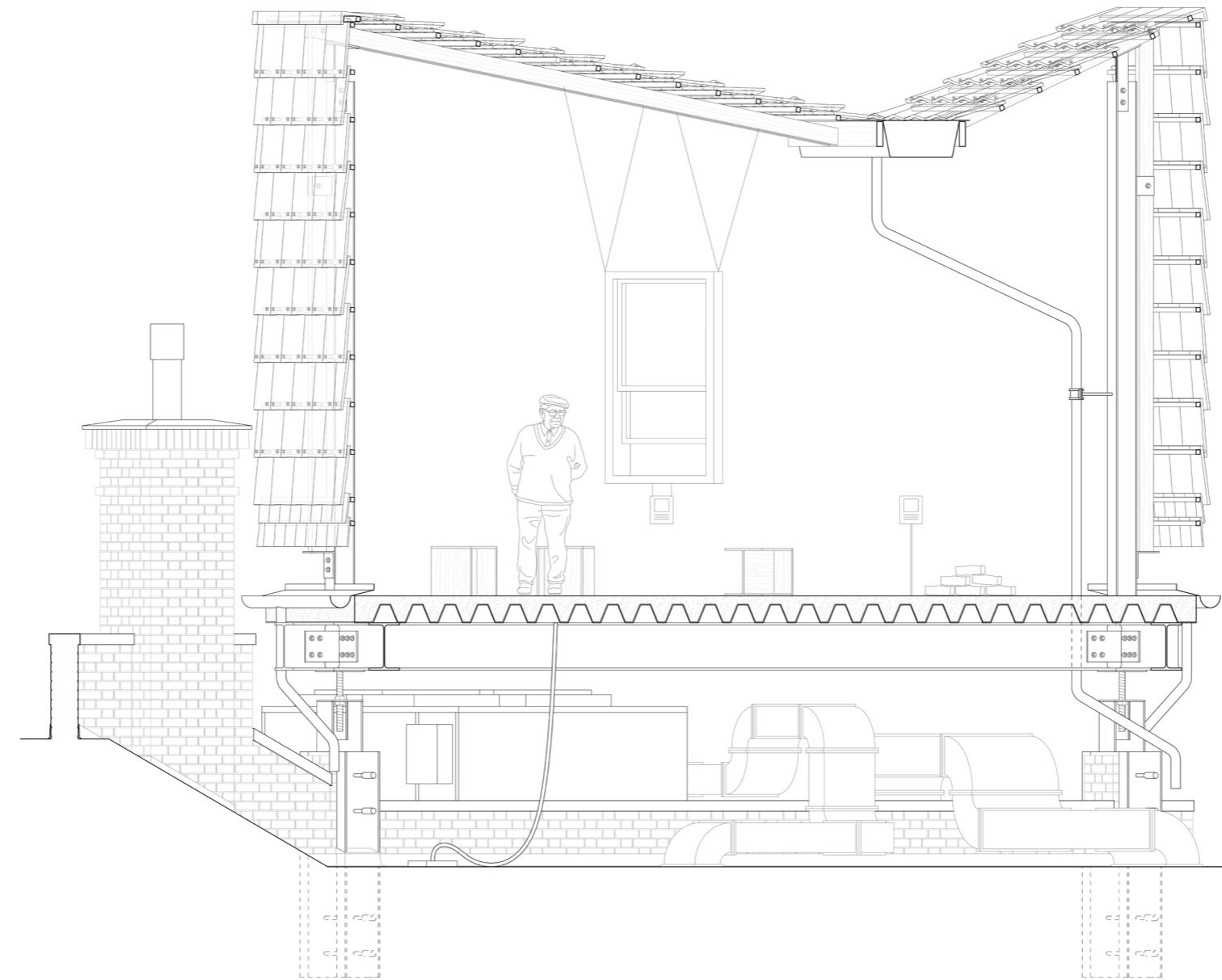


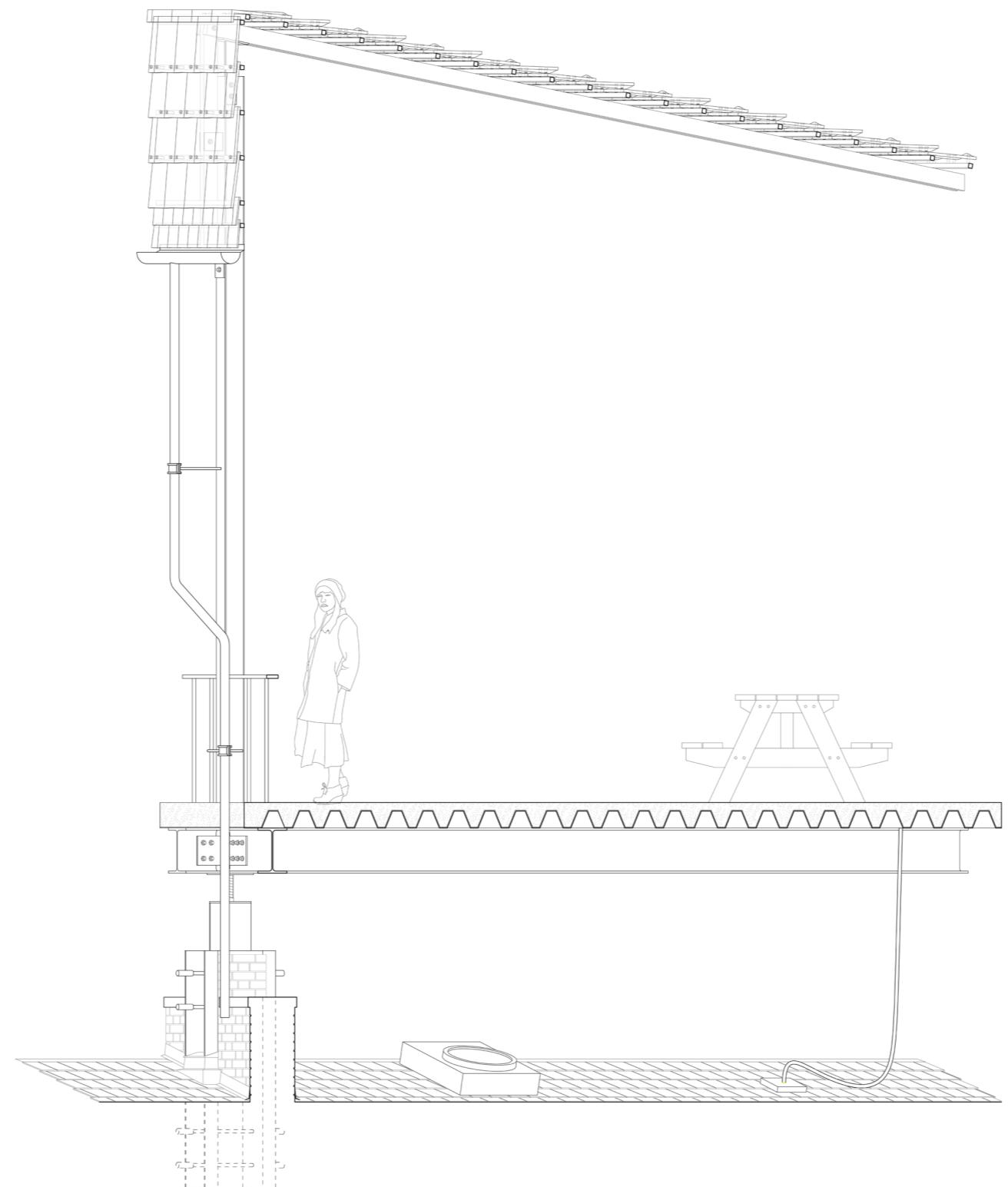


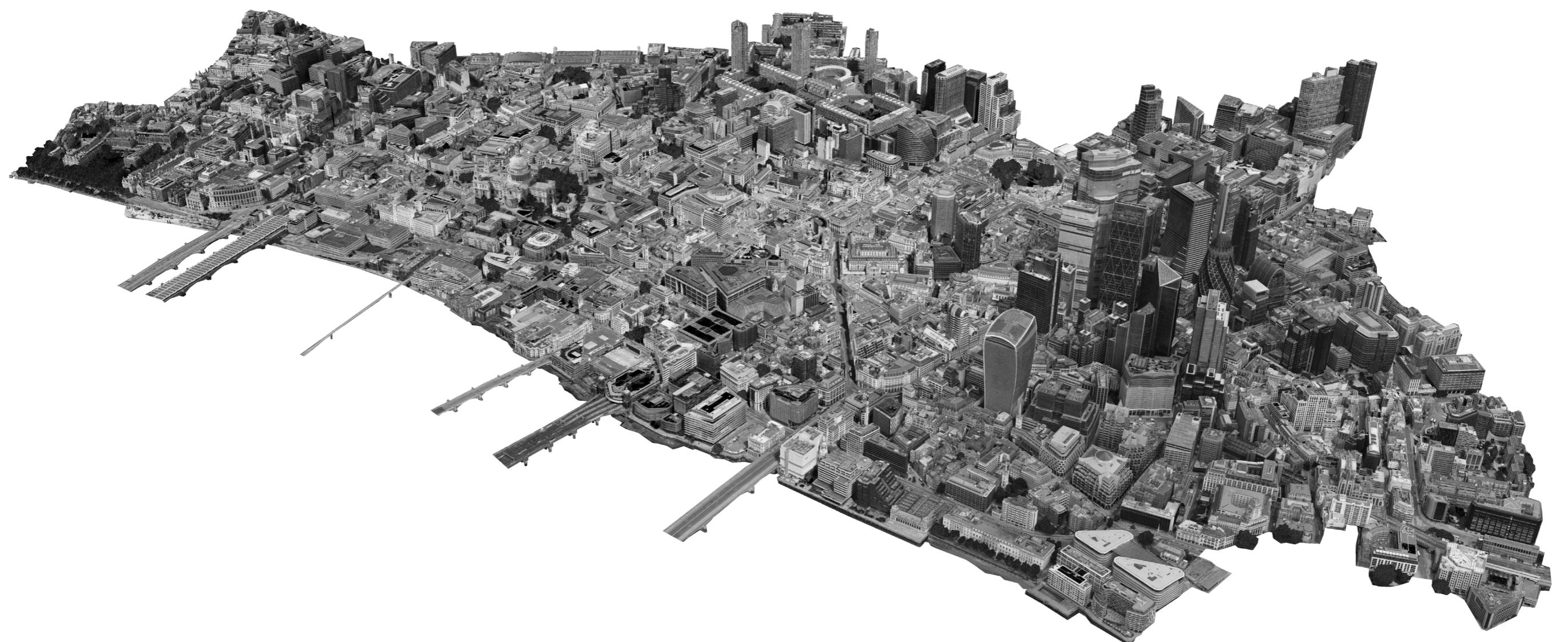


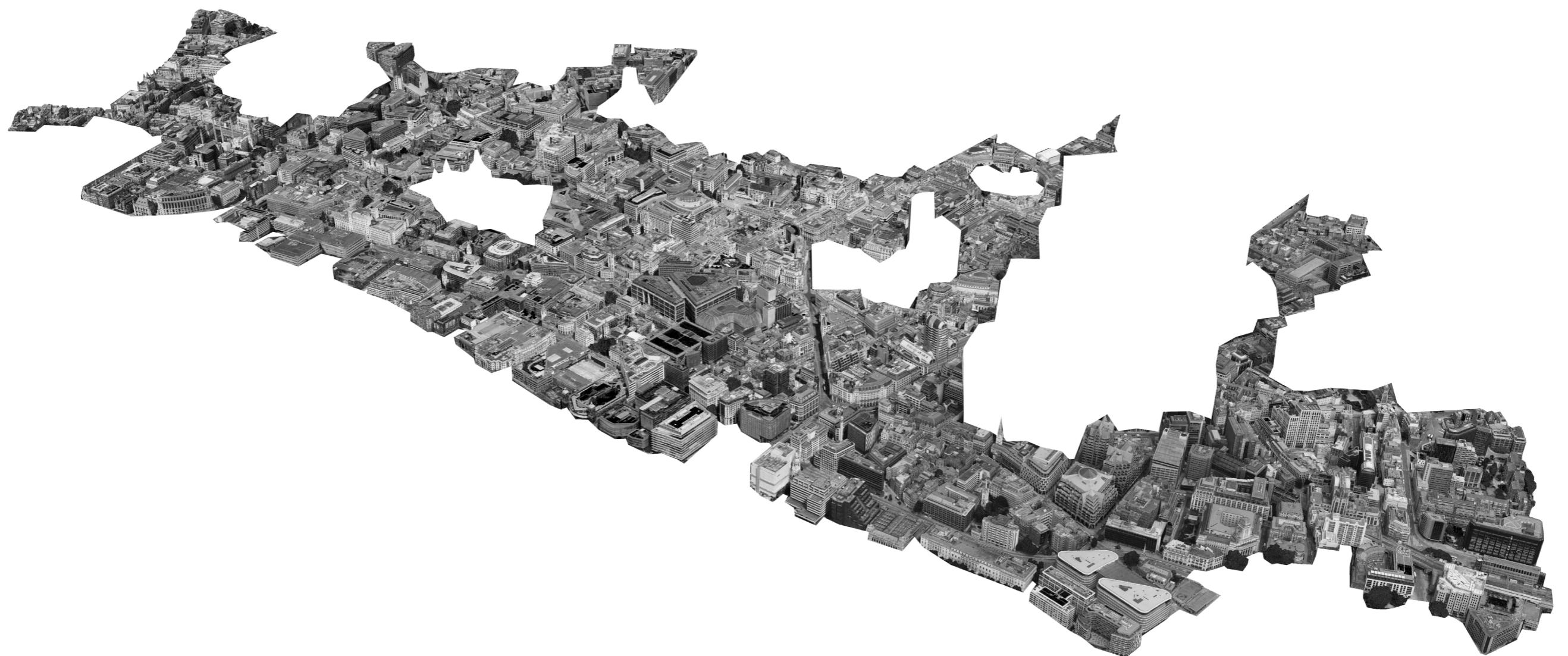
Rooftop landscape of London (source: fragment of the movie Mary Poppins, 1964)

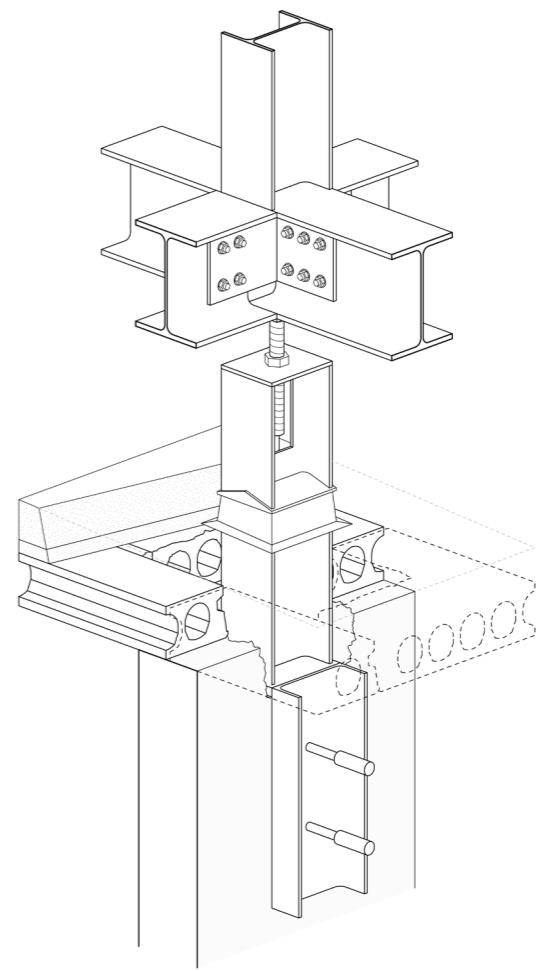
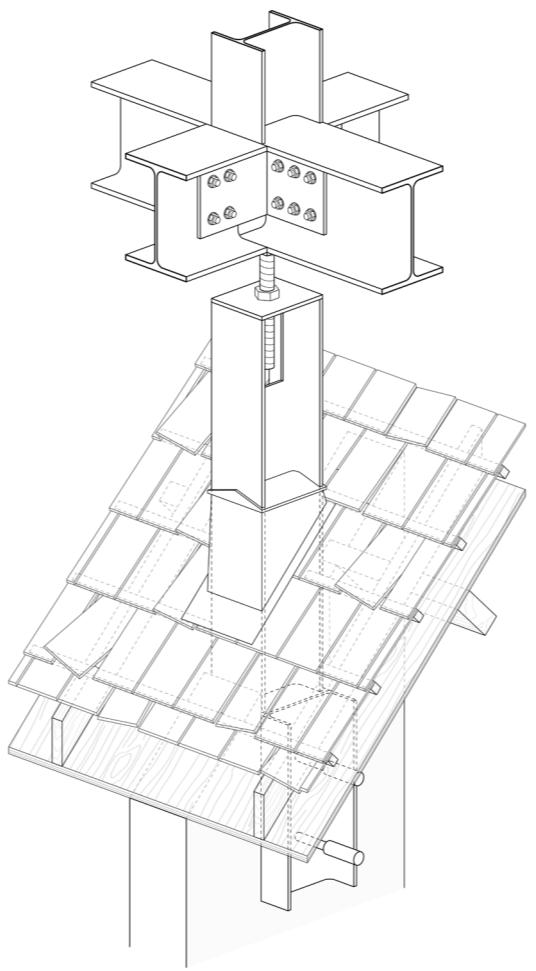
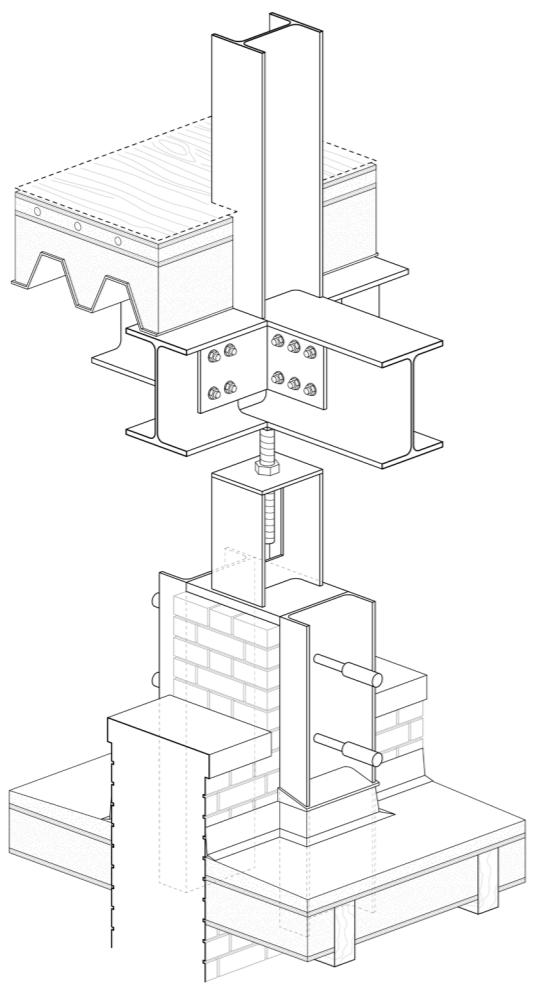
















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