

A NEW "SQUARE DEAL"  
FOR THE "SOUL" OF EAST HARLEM'S  
SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS

## 1. RESTORING THE COVENANT MADE BETWEEN SOCIAL HOUSING AND THEIR INHABITANTS

NYC is made up of varying morphologies that range from imposing skyscrapers, to the humble infill tenements of old. Between these rich and dynamic forms and functions exists an anomaly - projects of repetitive red brick social housing towers that stand in defiance of the status quo. These places are leftovers of a time when progressive ideas influenced politics and policies that pushed for social and economic equality. These experimental projects have deteriorated over time, and now exist in a state of disrepair.

In order to help the disenfranchised inhabitants of the projects, there must be an intervention that both increases their quality of life, and preserves their right to the city. Jane Jacobs (1961) explains that in order to achieve this, the monofunctionality of their public space needs to be made more functionally diverse. This is because the lack of diversity, in both social and programmatic elements, results in low public activity, which in turn leads to an increased sense of crime and vandalism due to a lack of self-awareness.

In addition to this, James Howard Kunstler (2004) states that the International Style planners who designed the social housing projects provided an over-simplified hierarchy and variety, inadvertently denying inhabitants a properly functioning public space. He also argues that the high-rises of the projects themselves removed any sense of human scale, and therefore eradicated the inhabitants' connection to the public realm.

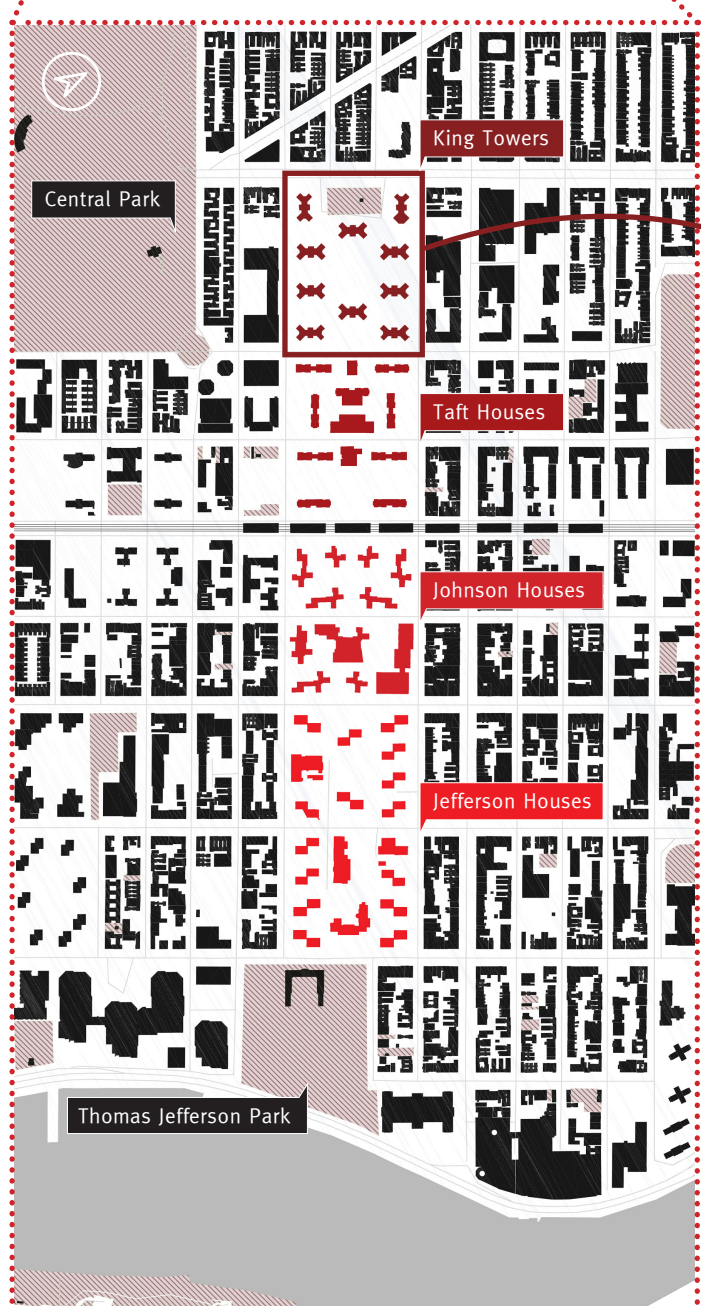
These flaws propagate issues of health and safety for the inhabitants, therefore increasing the feeling of disconnection between themselves and the environment they live in. The motivation behind this thesis is to recognize that the people living in these projects have a right to the city, and do not deserve the quality of life that they are living through now. In order to find a solution, a transformational framework must be developed in order to help its residents become a healthy community once again.

Therefore, it can be said that the current functionality of public space in the social housing projects of East Harlem is passive, low in activity, and has no variety in both space and function - propagating problems of health and safety that the low-income families of the projects have to face on a day-to-day basis. In order to help these inhabitants attain a higher quality of life, their public space needs to be redeveloped through a transformational framework that incentivizes the development of both diverse residential areas with

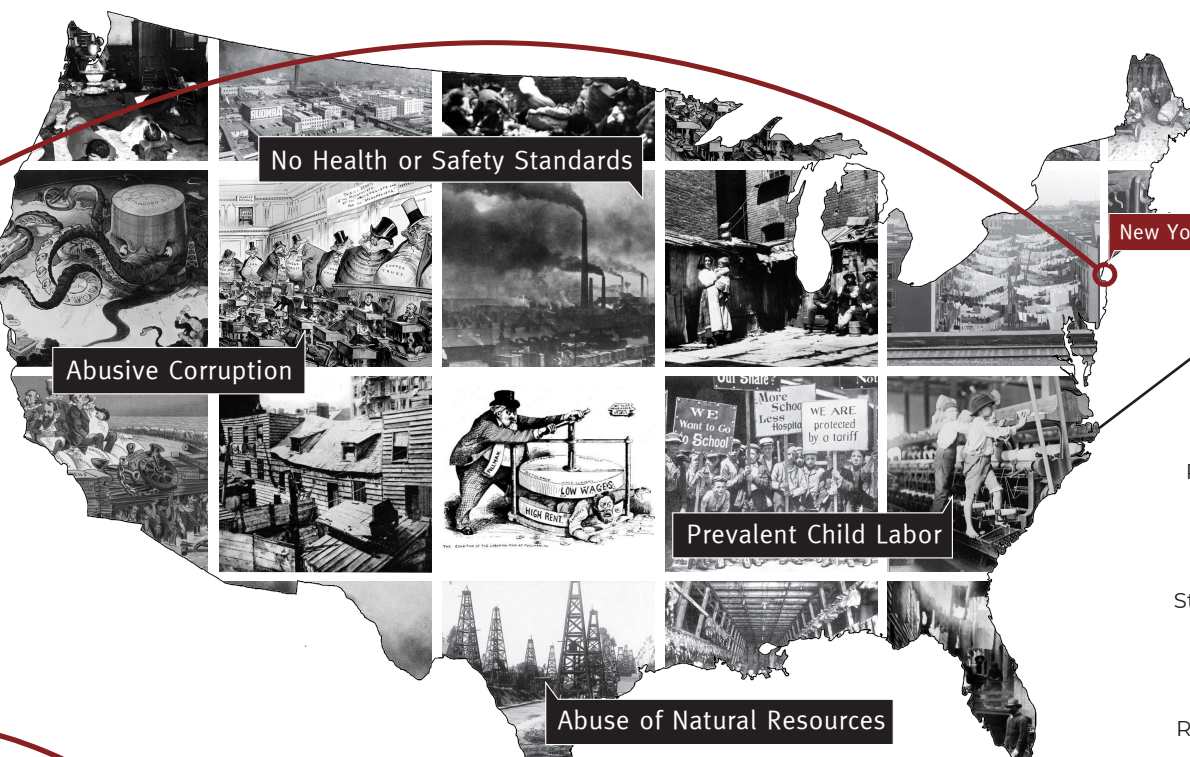
social-cultural elements that will help bring more activity, self-awareness, and diversity to the projects. This framework also needs to prevent the displacement of the current inhabitants, and preserve a sense of community among them. This will allow the people living in the projects to be better positioned to protect themselves from future gentrification and preserve their community.

## 2. IN SEARCH FOR A “NEW SQUARE DEAL”

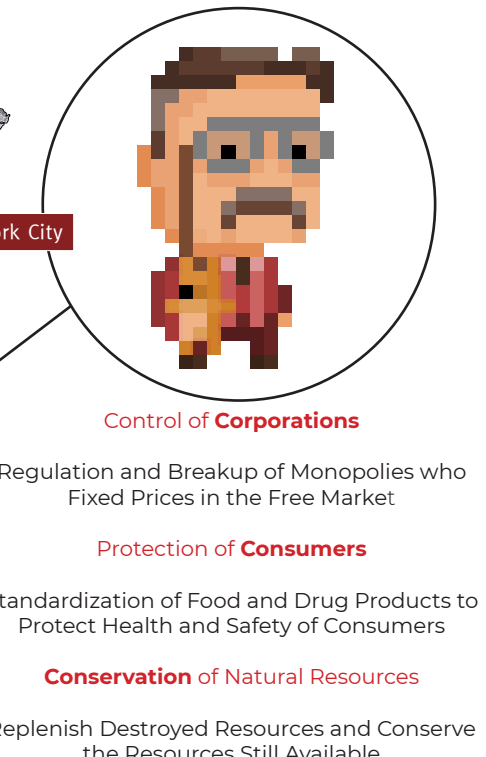
## 2a. MORPHOLOGY OF INEQUALITY



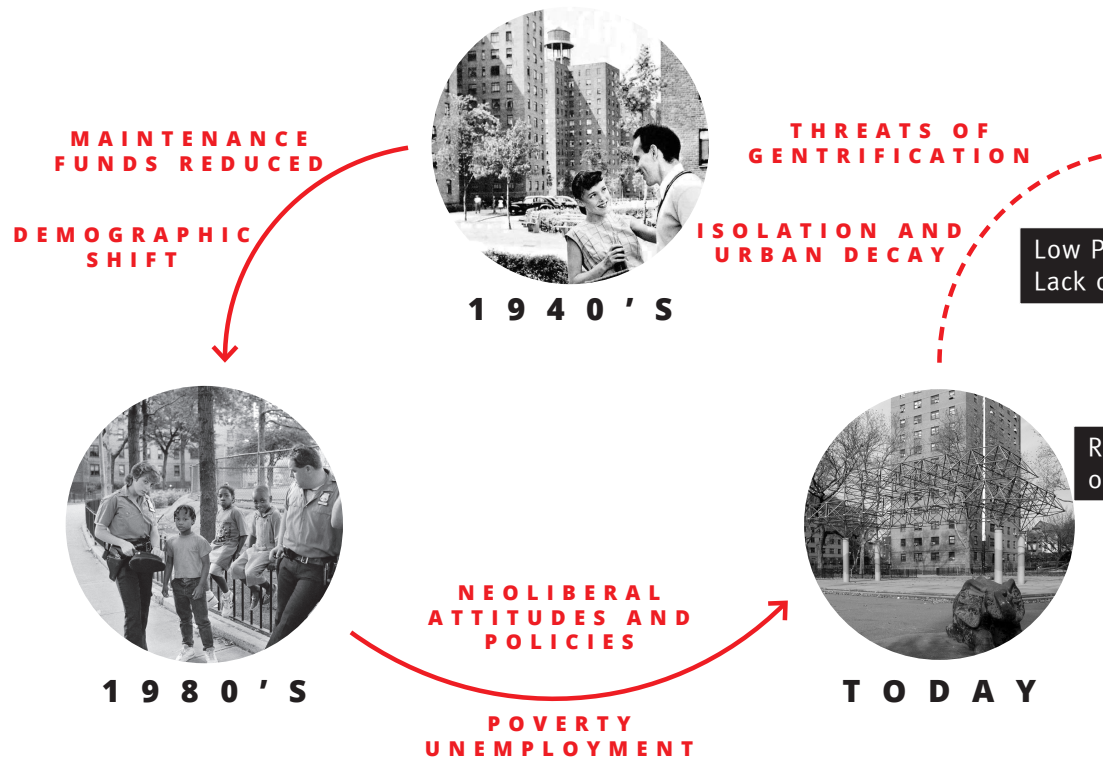
## 2b. TOWARDS AN AGE OF PROGRESSIVISM



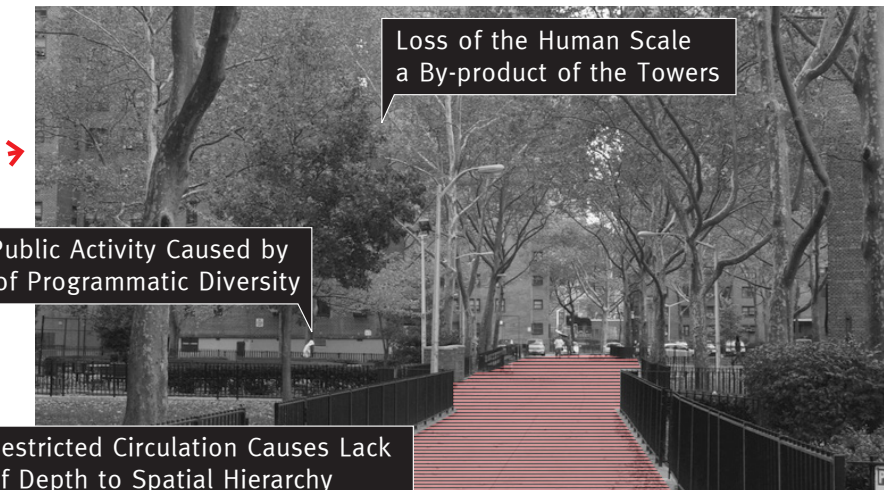
## 2c. T. ROOSEVELT'S THREE C'S



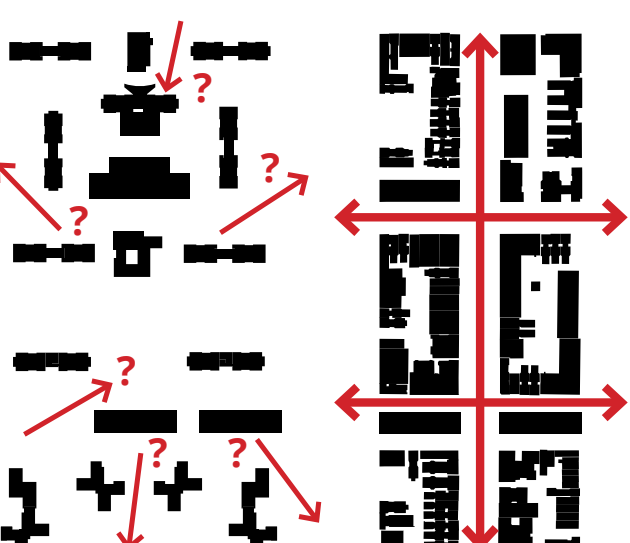
## 2e. THE REEMERGENCE OF THE SLUMS



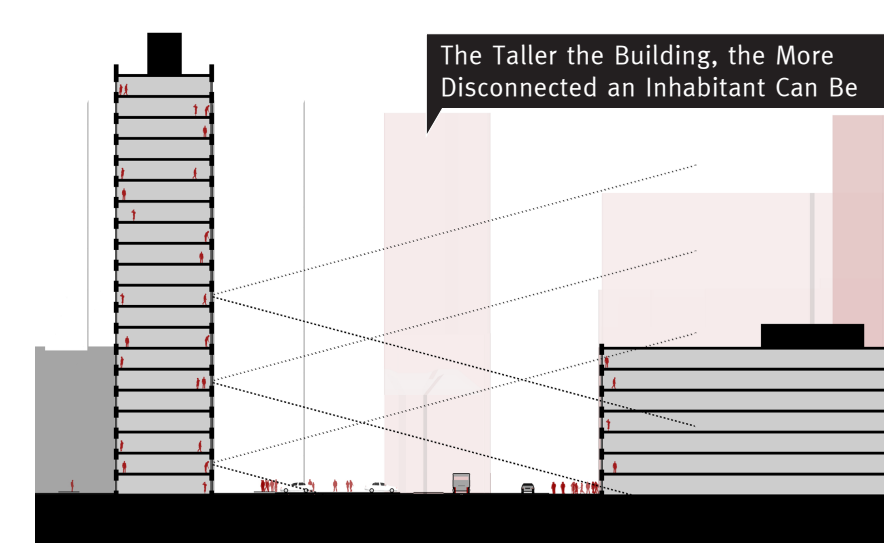
## 2f. A FAILURE OF PUBLIC SPACE



The public space within the NYCHA projects are frozen in time, as they did not ever evolve to meet the needs of their actual inhabitants.



One of the main reasons as to why there is no spatial hierarchy within the social housing projects is that there are no street walls.



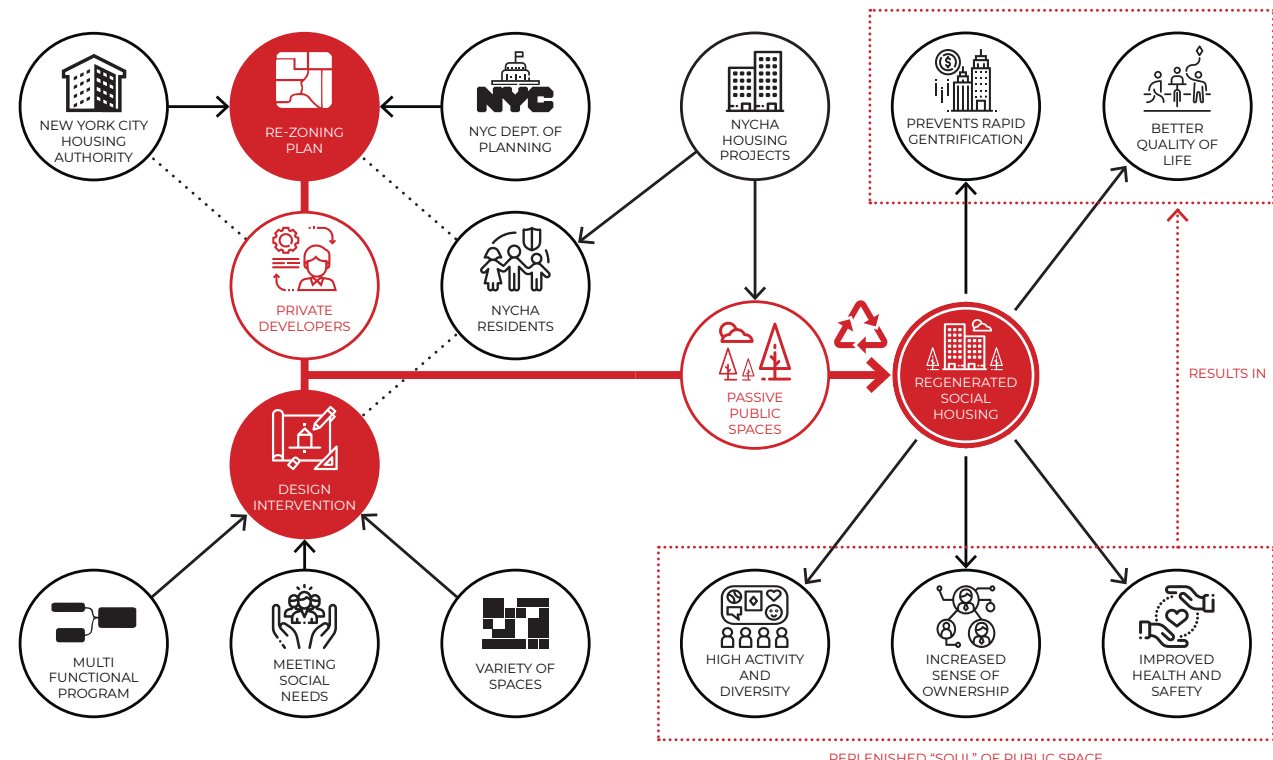
The height and monofunctionality of the towers creates a disconnection with both the street and the public space as a whole as the sense of human scale is lost.

### 3. BRINGING THE “SOUL” OF THE NYCHA PROJECTS BACK TO LIFE

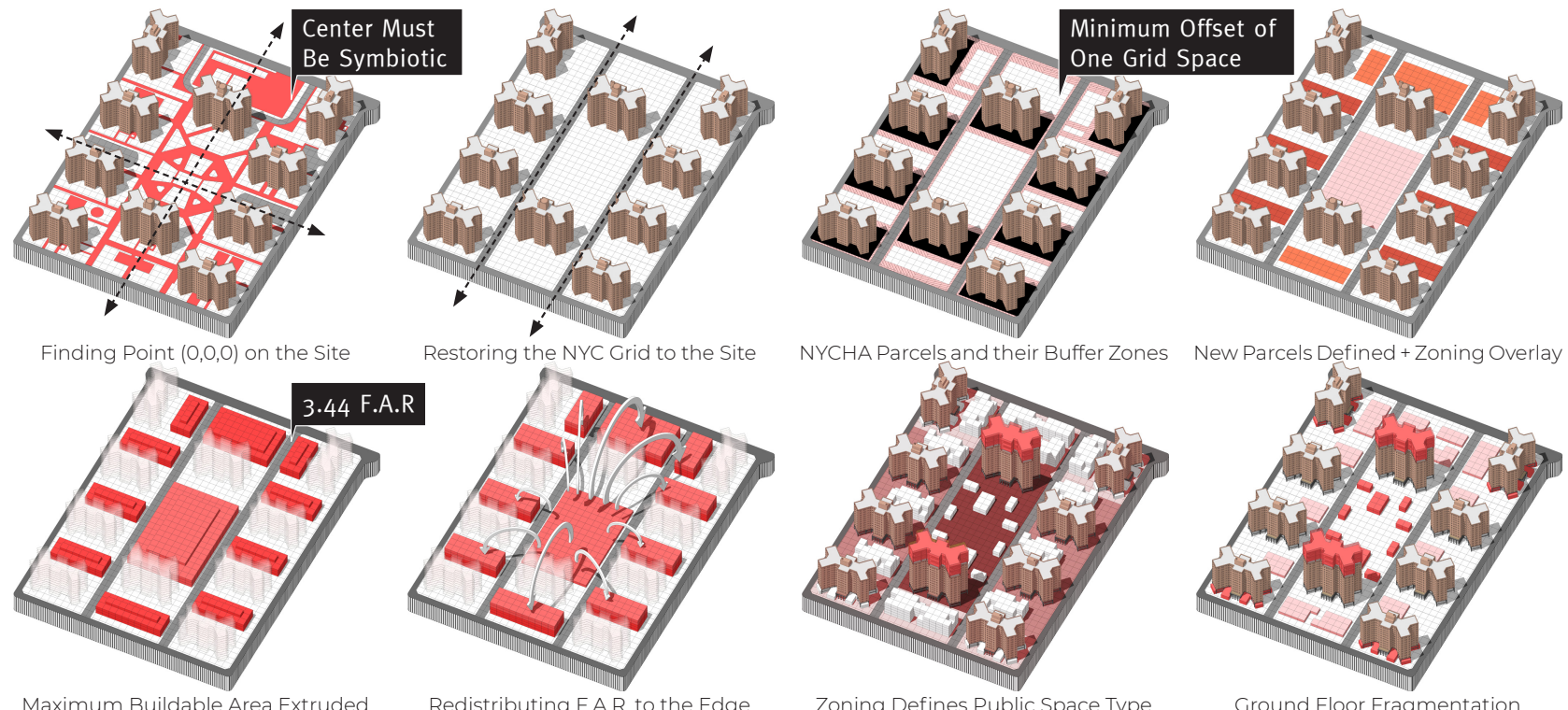
### 3a. MY THREE C'S



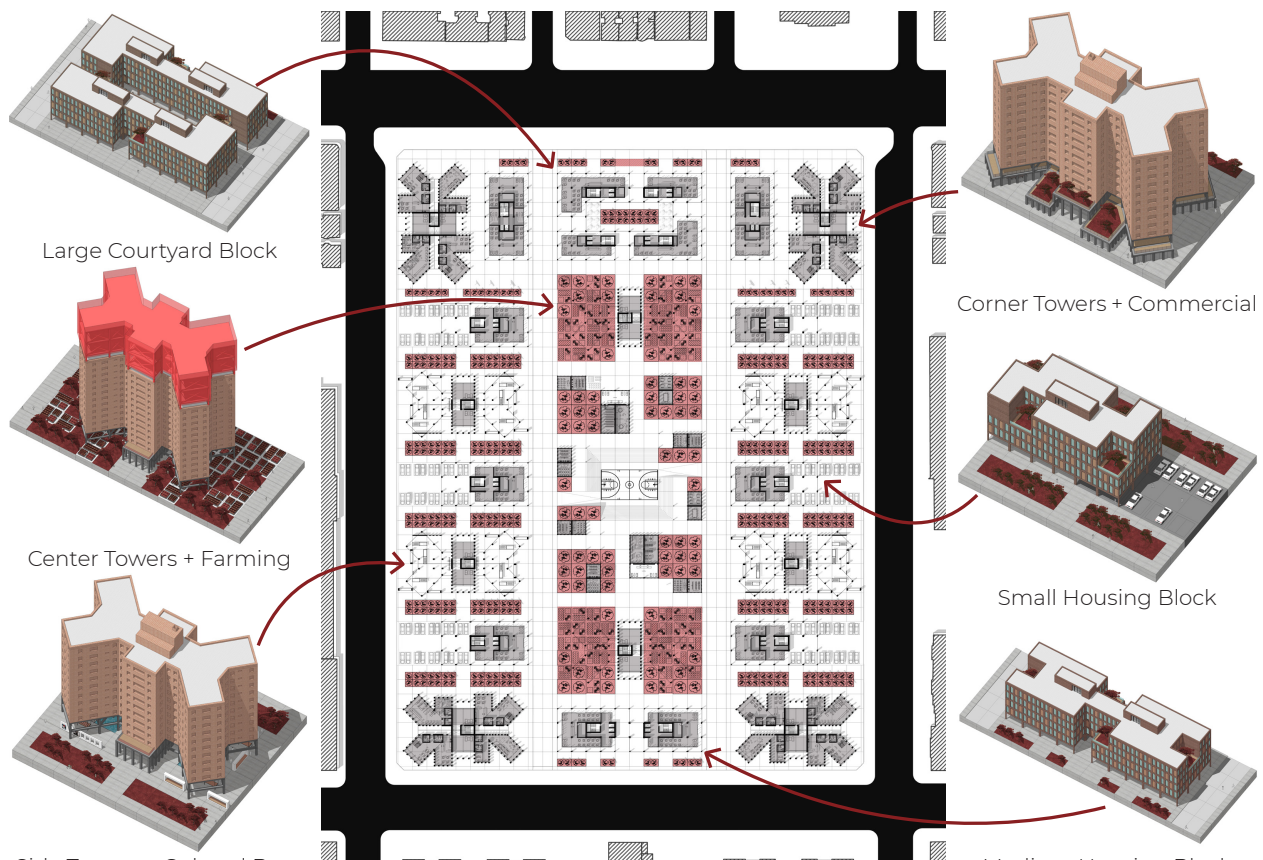
### 3b. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR REGENERATING NYCHA



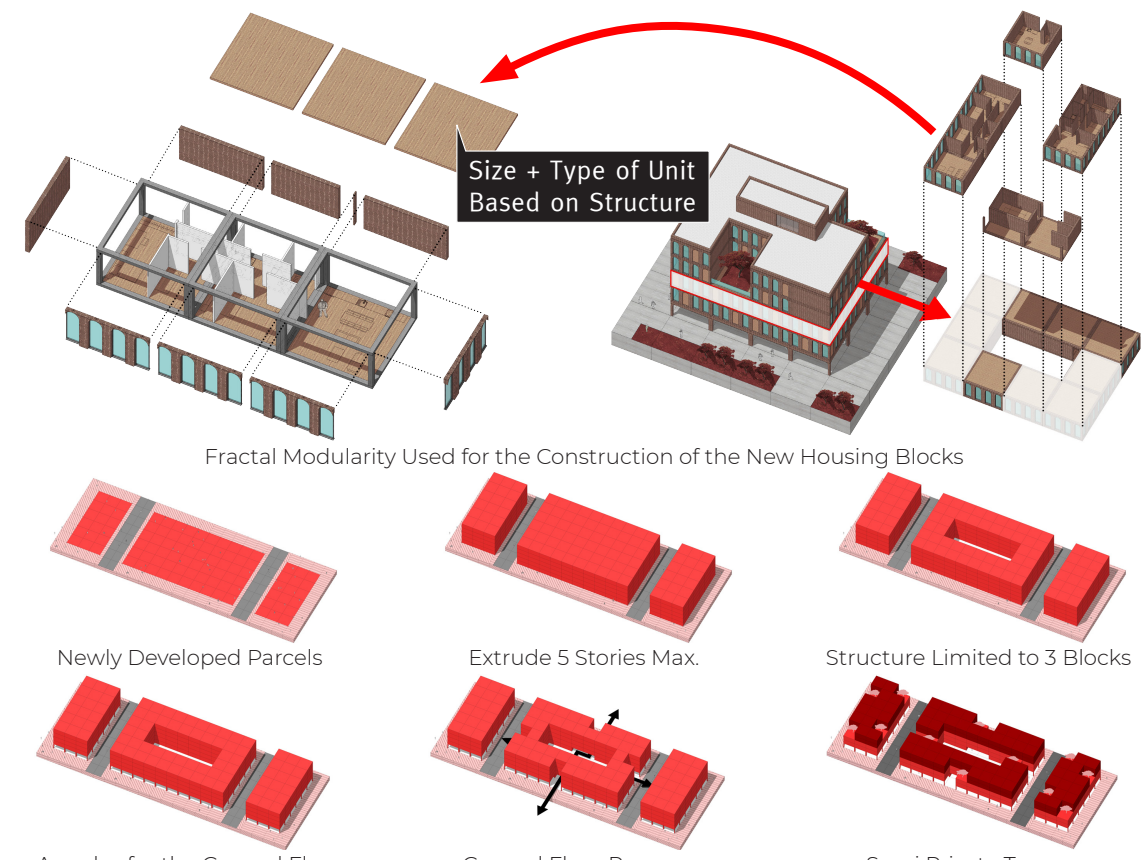
### 3c. DEVELOPING A TRANSITIONAL GRID THAT WILL RESUSCITATE THE "SOUL" (GRID AS POWER PROJECTION



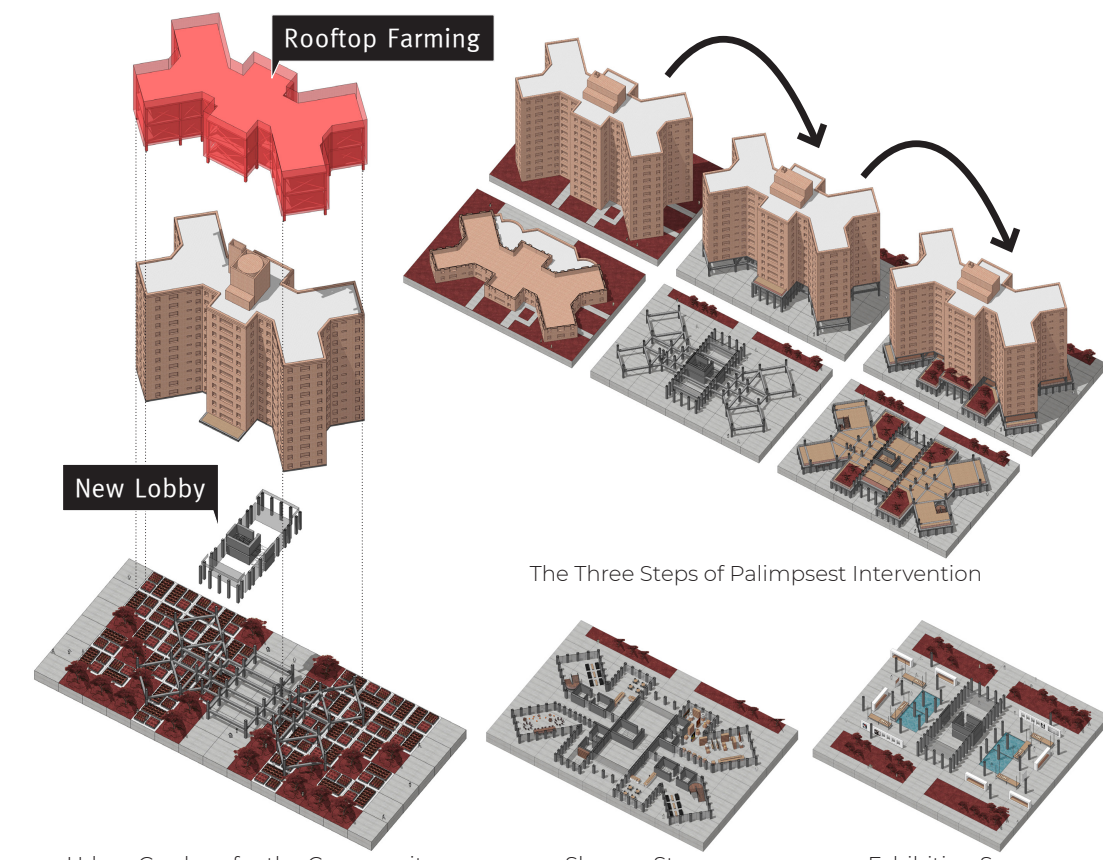
### 3d COMPONENTS OF THE TRANSFORMATION PROPOSAL



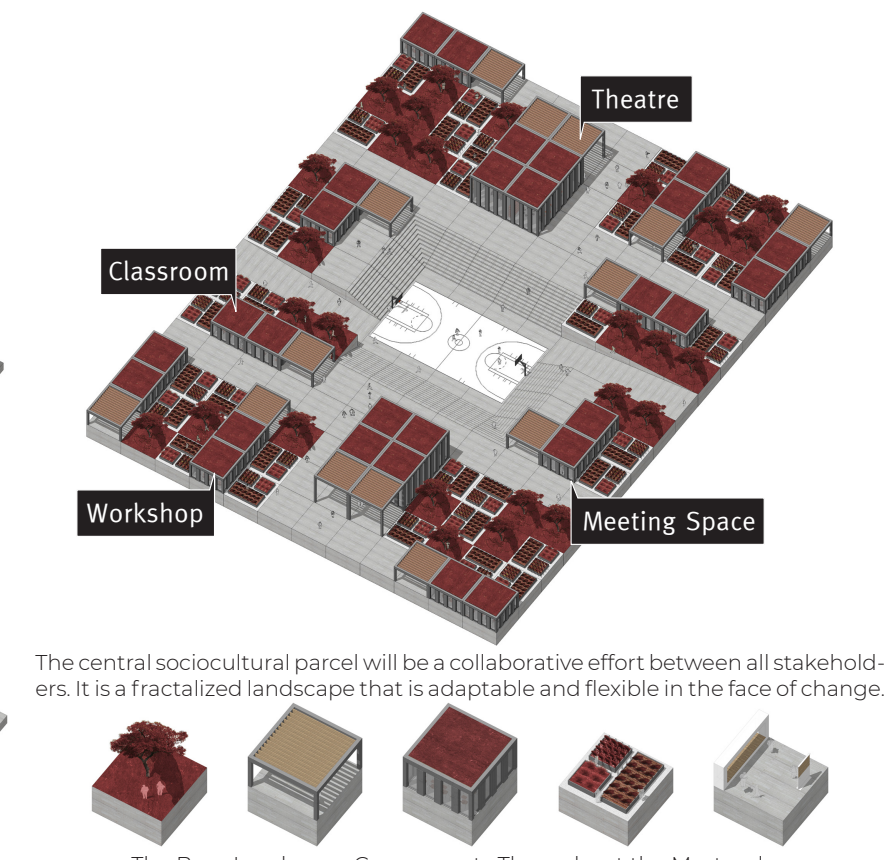
### 3e FRACTAL HOUSING DESIGN + PRINCIPLES



### 3f PALIMPSEST TOWER DESIGN + PRINCIPLES



### 3g SOCIOCULTURAL LANDSCAPE DESIGN



#### 4. A REINVIGORATED "SOUL" THROUGH THE TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

