

SURFACE EAST SITE

Prison
Temporary Housing
Open air cultivations
Theatre / Cinema
Workshop space
Botanic Garden
Sport Facilities
Hospital
Library

On the east side of the Ring R3, two simple interchanges and the built fabric insert a residual green space spreading on the two sides of the ring. The two small interchanges are the result of the intersection between the ring and two streets the N90 (that crosses the Wolfson Dorsal) and the less relevant N50 that connects the West site from the northern interchange of the Line with Châtelet, crossing Charlevoix.

On the East site, the topography of the residual green space forms a valley inside which the ring runs. The intervention consisted in the formation of a new horizontal ground spanning over the highway and connecting the two higher sides of the hollow. Ideologically speaking, it connects the 'world' inside the ring with the 'world' inside the ring.

The surface is the largest intervention in terms of built volume. It is 825 meters long, 158 meters wide, having a thickness of 11 meters (two stories plus the roof top). On its outer side of the ring, the building is 13 meters lifted from the existing ground, whereas on the opposite side it digs part of a flat terrace.

The biggest of the slab allows a multitude of programs to coexist; however, the leading function is the prison. Among the many issues rising in Belgium and Wallonia, there is one concerning the overcrowding of prisons. Facing this topic, what becomes immediately evident is the lack of debate within architecture in the regards of the theme of the confinement. This is a consequence of a general political and philosophical stagnation of remarkable dimensions upon the topic since the Seventies. Hence, from the perspective of rehabilitation of the individual, one of the aims of this intervention is to bring together activities that are in strong contrast with the very closed character of a prison. These activities should require the presence of public, attempting a constant interaction between the prison-inhabitants and the city-inhabitants. Such activities are: a library, an aula for theater as well as screening, workshops for acting school, a workshop area where electrical or mechanical devices can be repaired or realized and which can serve both as school and serve for the citizens, a botanic garden, spaces for cultivation (open-air and greenhouse). The main circulation and distribution to the activities is solved by means of a bridge that cuts the volume of the slab. In the bridge there are two levels, the bottom one for the prison-inhabitants and the top one for the city-inhabitants. However, the two levels are connected by means of stairs that bring to enclosed spaces (located in-between the two stories) where the two inhabitants can meet. The in-between capsules are hosting the meetings between free people and those deprived of liberty in two ways: either talking sessions or more physical meetings where social activities can be fulfilled. In addition the two kinds of inhabitants can also meet in some of the main activities' spaces, where another manner of interacting is pushed forward on a daily basis in order to avoid the social alienation given by the confinement.

The bridge cuts the grid of the building resembling the system of avenues and boulevards of cities such as New York. This is a typical architectural gesture chosen to represent the main connective element. Similar devices' are visible in landscape designs such as the Parc Giron in Paris.

The bridge as a path leads to a ritual in the building in which the prison-dwellers are immersed. The bridge allows them to move from their cells to a variety of functions which keep the inhabitants busy during the day trying to restore their social abilities by means of the labor as well as the studies.

Some of them may spend years before being able to reach the end of the route, which provides them the much-needed freedom and rehabilitation. If on the outskirts of Charlevoix, over the Ring R3, the bridge starts from the ground of the periphery bringing up people by means of stair lifts on the opposite side, inside the Ring, the bridge leads upwards, reaching a tower from which is possible to both look back at the prison and to the city center of Charlevoix.

Looking the top side of the surface, the general layout is a grid into which some major and larger elements (two circles and two squares) are superimposed. These elements house part of the public activities. The squares claim for agricultural programs, which are stacked on steps, higher the sides and lower in the center. In the western square, there is space for a botanic garden that can be daily entered by visitors. Instead the eastern square, where a variety of plots are grown and sold, it attracts private buyers.

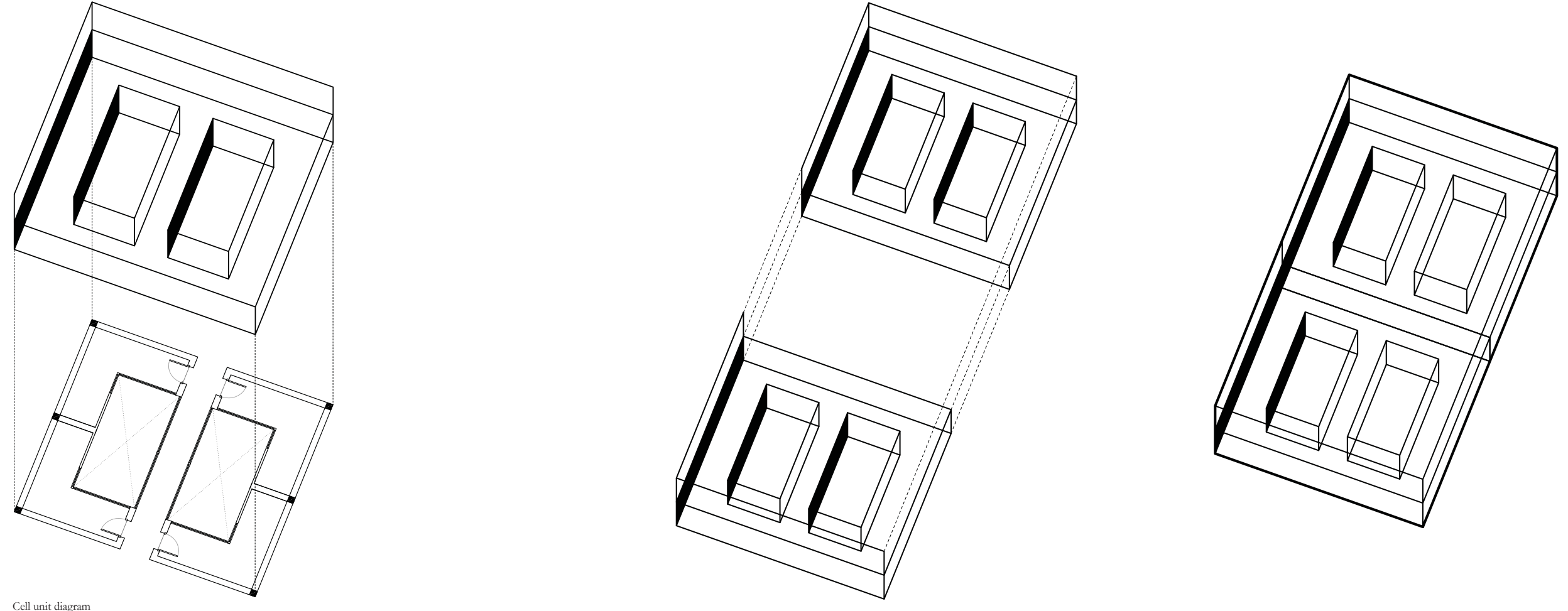
For what is concerning the two circles, the eastern one inscribes a panoptic building which hosts a series of high security cells accompanied by an 'arm' dedicated to hospital for the recovery of the prison-dwellers as well as prisoners from other penitentiaries. The panoptic building is one of those that touch the ground permitting direct entrance to it.

The western circle inscribes a plaza and two circular envelopes, one is hosting the workshop area and another one is a watchtower embedding vertical circulation. Both of them pierce the surface touching the ground below. The workshop area is meant to be a place for teaching practical subjects related with mechanics and electronics. Here people can learn how to construct or repair things, used in everyday life. The face-space contains open laboratories with machines and so on. This space can be accessed by the public that can both participate in the provided courses as well as it can bring objects that need a fixing. The watchtower connects the ground with the surface level as well as it is device of control for the upper side of the surface.

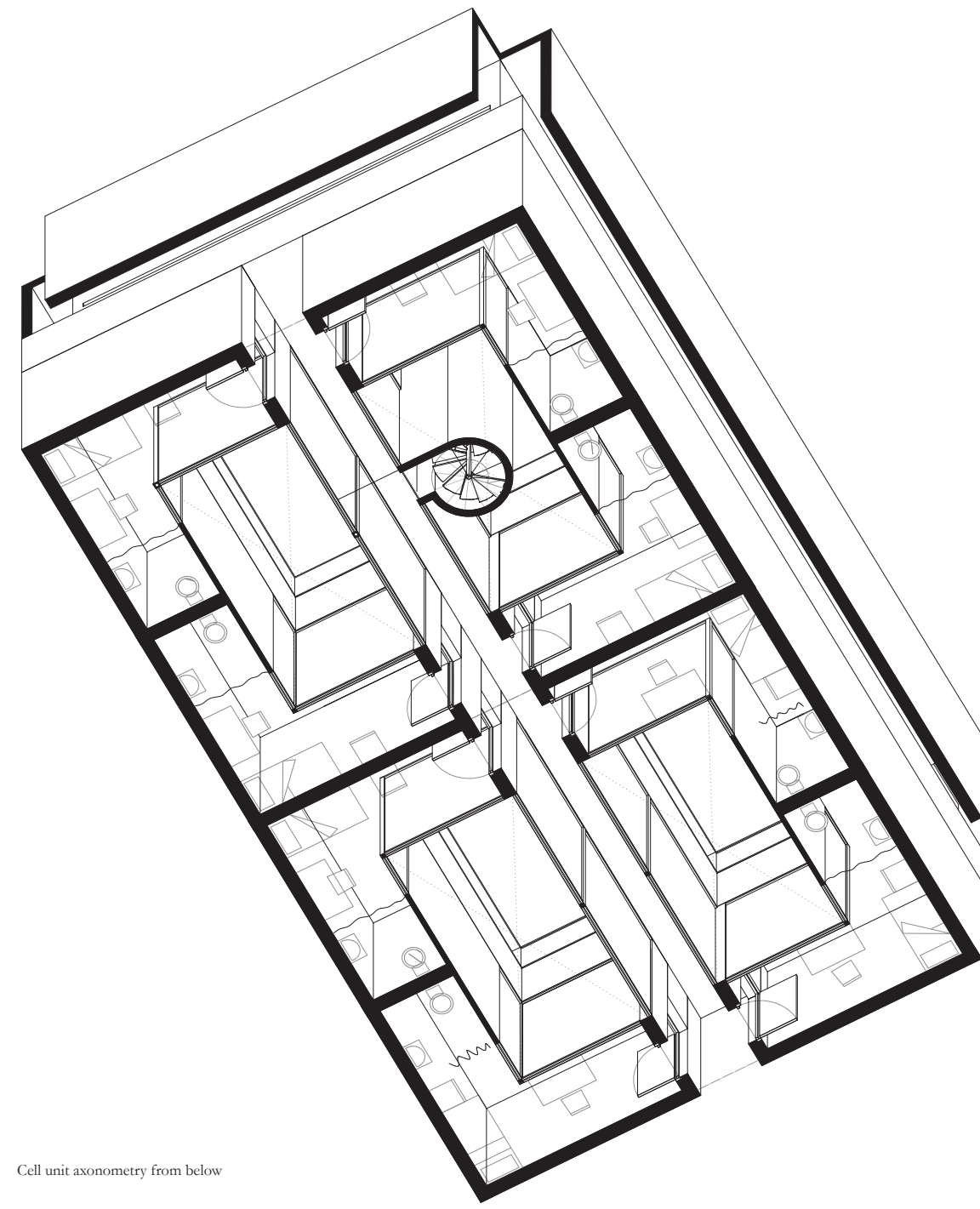
Looking at the bottom of the surface, some other elements such as pillars, blocks containing stairs and lifts, and part of the main elements for public activities are extruded down, touching the ground. The slab owns two surfaces that give birth to two different environments, two different landscapes.

Apart from the bigger elements, the end is constituted by the cells, which are the smallest entity forming the building. The cell becomes generator of the basic grid, since a reflection upon the cell has been done in order to establish a new standard. Basically, the cell can be reconnected with the issue of dwelling. In the design the cell plays the decisive role in defining the two stories of the slab in the lower level the cell itself is located, while on the top level there is a patio terrace surrounded by walls. Moreover some holes are pierced through the lower level in order to bring light inside the cell. The entire concept for the cell (as well as all the three interventions) revolves around the idea of the creation of a new horizon: the holes are placed on the sides letting people having views throughout the inner spaces as well as the ground and the sky. These kind of big glazed windows are in complete contrast with the usual narrow apertures that face the outer world. In this case the imposed view is mainly unobstructed, bringing the prisoners towards a constant and reorienting introspection. The outer world is represented by the ground and the sky, giving the feeling of being suspended in space as well as in time. The time in a prison is different from the time experienced outside of it, this is the consequence of a confinement state. Therefore, waiting to be freed and re-integrated in society is a status of suspension.

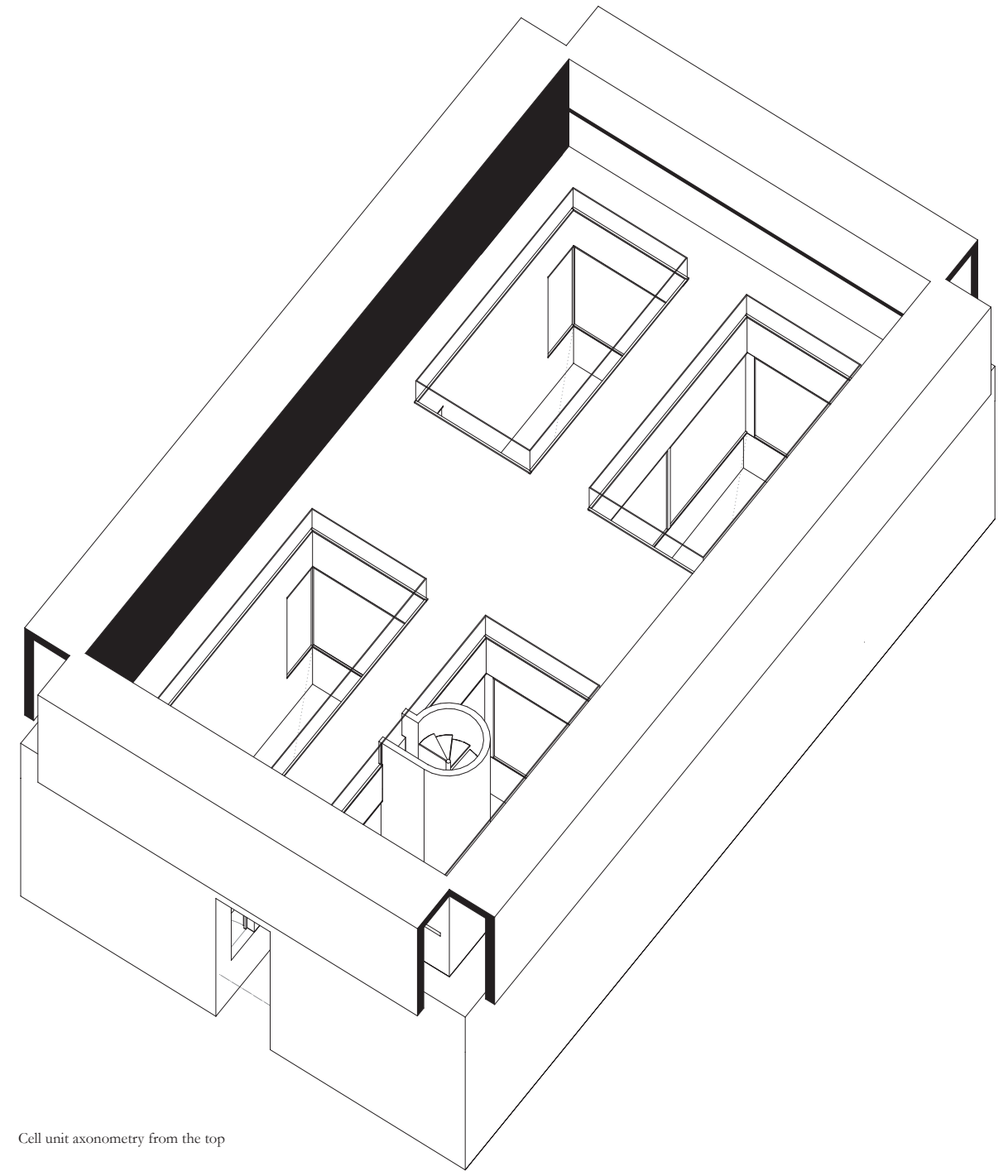
On the contrary, from the terraces, like in the Beistegui apartment (J.L. Corbusier), the height of the walls permits the visibility of specific elements against the sky, thus deleting the remaining context. The visible elements change according to the position of the terraces along the grid. The prison can host 1000 inhabitants.



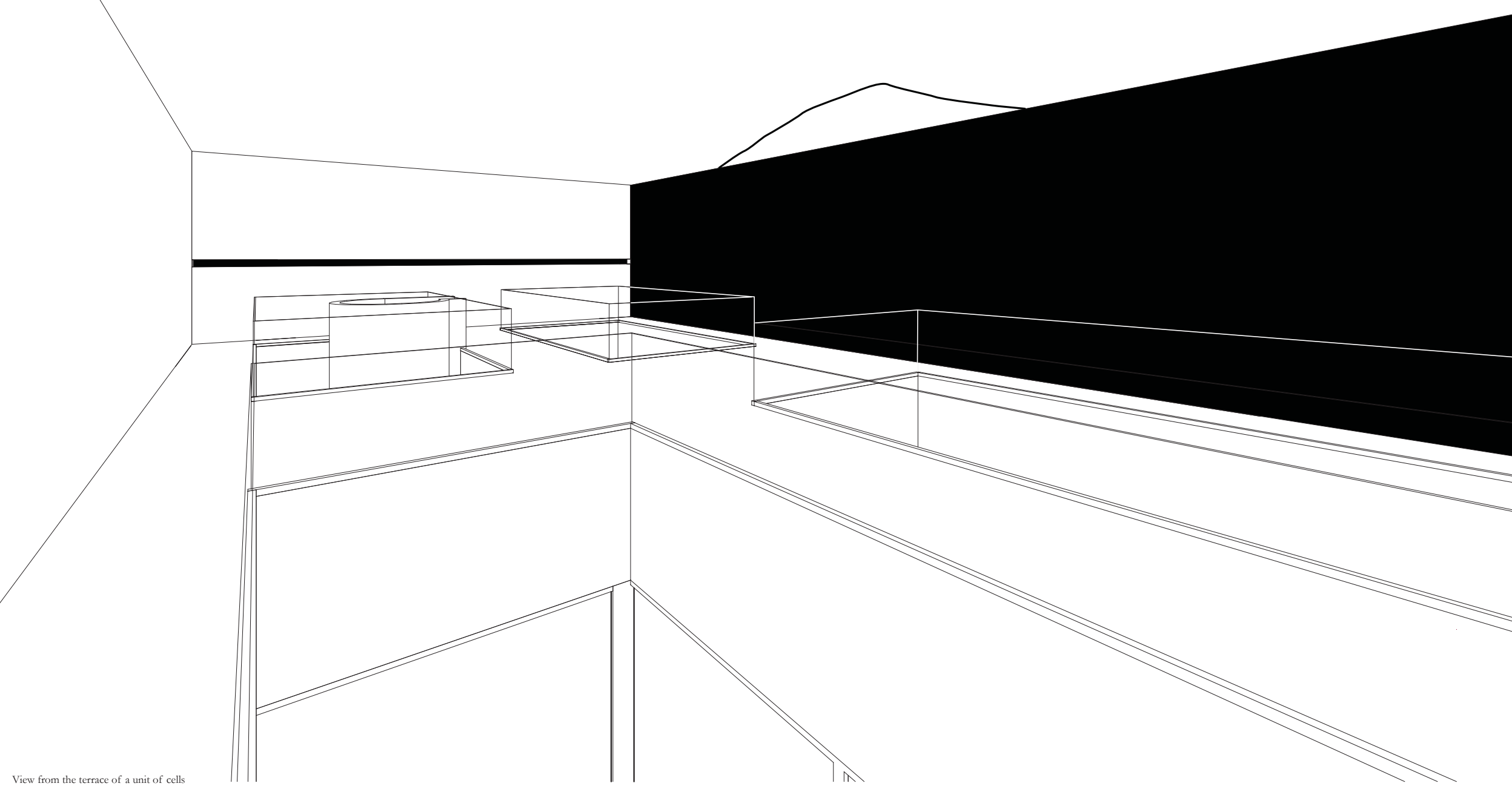
Cell unit diagrams



Cell unit anatomy from below



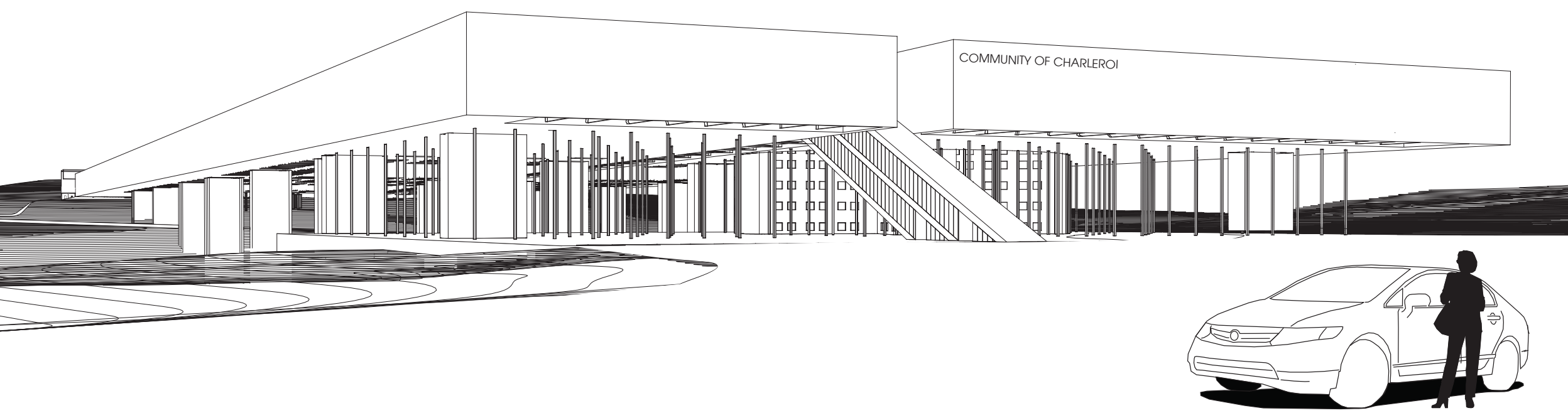
Cell unit anatomy from the top



View from the terrace of a suite of cells

THE FROG'S-EYE-PERSPECTIVE

It is an interface with two different sides, the top and the bottom. Both of this sides respond in a different way.
Under the surface the feeling is of being flattened by it. Another scale is revealed, humans feels as minor figures under or next to the surface.
A new environment, a new landscape is established under it.



THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF BEING

To go through the entire surface may take years for some people. The path leading to the city is a long walk, more than three 650 meters of bridge.
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From the tower one may look back at what he was.

