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Accademia di architettura
Università della Svizzera italiana

Spring Semester 2013
Low-rise, high-density 4

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Introduction

Jonathan Sergison

The understandings that had emerged through the studies undertaken on previous occasions could not adequately assist in the work undertaken during the course of this semester. Bucharest is an eastern European city developed initially as a summer residence for the Romanian royal family. Unlike many significant European cities, Bucharest was never constrained by the limits of walls and defensive structures, the absence of which left it exposed to numerous assaults from Turkish invaders. The centre of Bucharest is not generally a dense city. In fact, it is the opposite of many European cities in the sense that the greatest level of density can be encountered around its perimeter, the periphery or the suburban areas that generally, elsewhere, favour the lowest level of built urban tissue. This fact allows Bucharest to densify the city centre relatively easily although the question that needs to be asked here is how can this be achieved in a reasonable and appropriate manner.

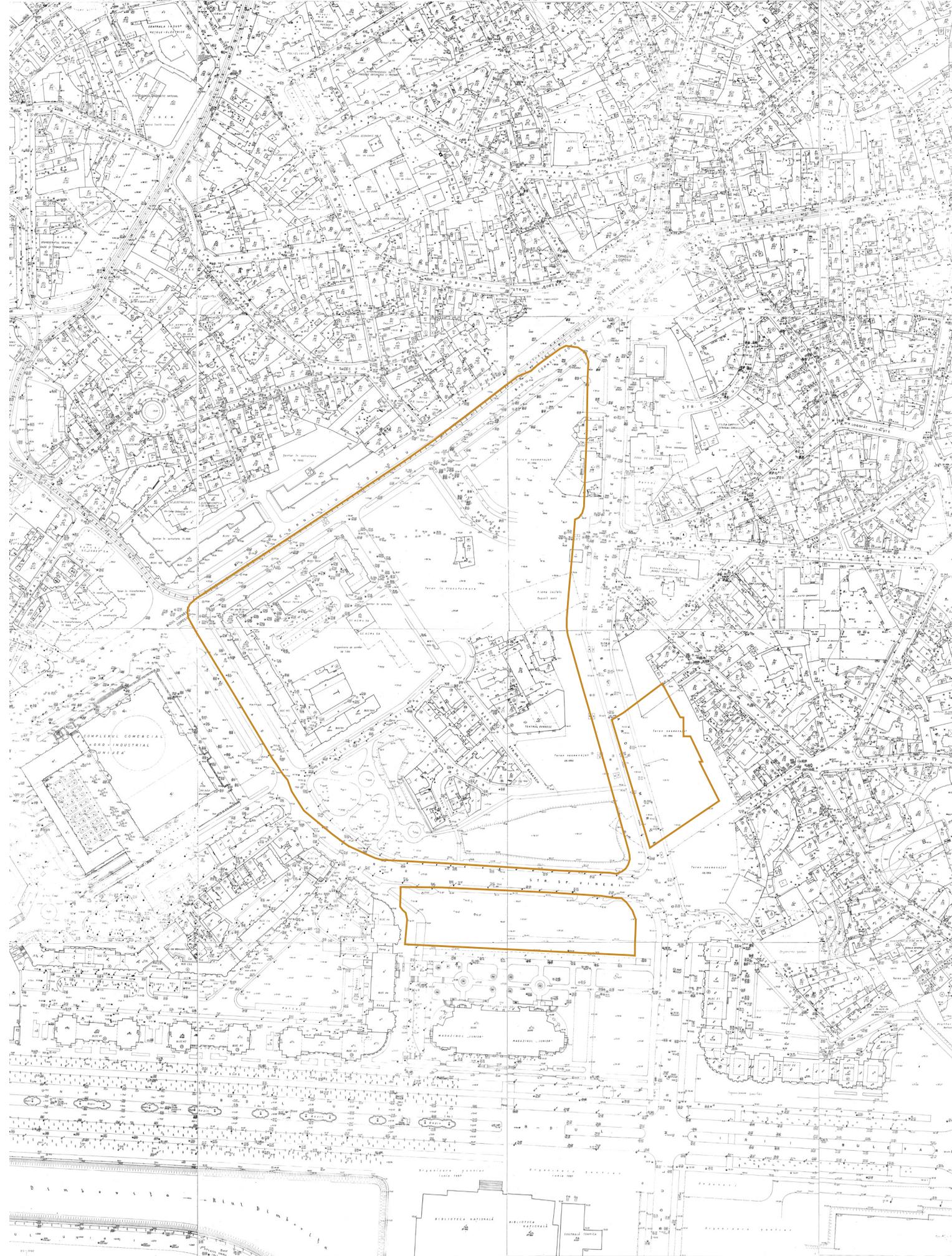
In studying the build urban fabric that exists in Bucharest we encounter many late nineteenth examples of an architectural ambition to produce a national architecture that drew upon regional styles and motifs. Alongside this are more international or universal models, firstly Beaux Art examples, and it should be remembered that Bucharest held an ambition at the beginning of the twentieth century to build itself in the image of Paris. In the 1920's and 1930's the city embraced the equalising logic of international modernism and there are many fine examples of buildings from this period. The post war period witnessed the large-scale peripheral urbanising programme of the Communist period where large numbers of the agricultural population were encouraged to settle in the city.

While not very well executed much of the building from this period was architecturally well intended. Hindsight reveals the chasm between the ambition of this building programme in terms of intention and means. Much of the building work undertaken during the post Second World War period was badly built with poor levels of insulation.

Aerial view of Fitzrovia

When we turn our attention to the actions of the Communist Regime in the centre of the city it can only be understood as an act of urban vandalism. The manner in which whole neighbourhoods were raised to the ground and communities displaced was clearly pursuing a particular agenda especially when we understand that the community that was forcibly moved was an ethnic minority. At moments in history a particular, normally authoritarian regime deemed it necessary to build at the limits of the capacity to do so and realise a structure that guaranteed that it would be remembered for all time. Many of the examples that come to mind were realised in ancient times, the Great Pyramids, The Coliseum, as well as more recently the Palaces build by the French Absolute Monarchs, the Loeuvre and Versailles. The palace and surrounding urban plan at the centre of Bucharest is version of this condition. The fact that it exists is uncontestable. But this particularly urban ambition was not entirely realised. It was curtailed by the revolution in 1989. It has presented a problem ever since. The first impulse, to destroy it was beyond the means of the country in the post revolution period and it is now logically used as the home of the Romanian Parliament. The site chosen for our work this semester takes an large area of land that was destroyed, as part of the wider urban plan, but one that has remained mostly empty since the 1980's.

We saw the primary purpose of the work undertaken in this semester as a form of urban repair, albeit one where the consequences of the past are present and feelings of loss, absence and nostalgia all need to be carefully managed. The principle task was to prepare a strategy plan for the area described above. Throughout the semester priority was given to the spatial and atmospheric character of proposals, and these were developed and tested through models and three-dimensional investigations. Out of an act of urban destruction work attempted to make careful and well considered buildings that will repair a fractured urban condition. This could be seen as a service to the city of Bucharest and in some way small way mitigate the damage done in the past.



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Aerial view of Bucharest from Borzesti
Siteplan



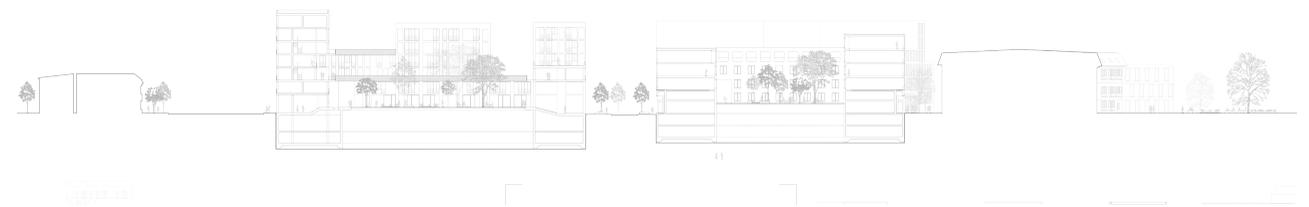


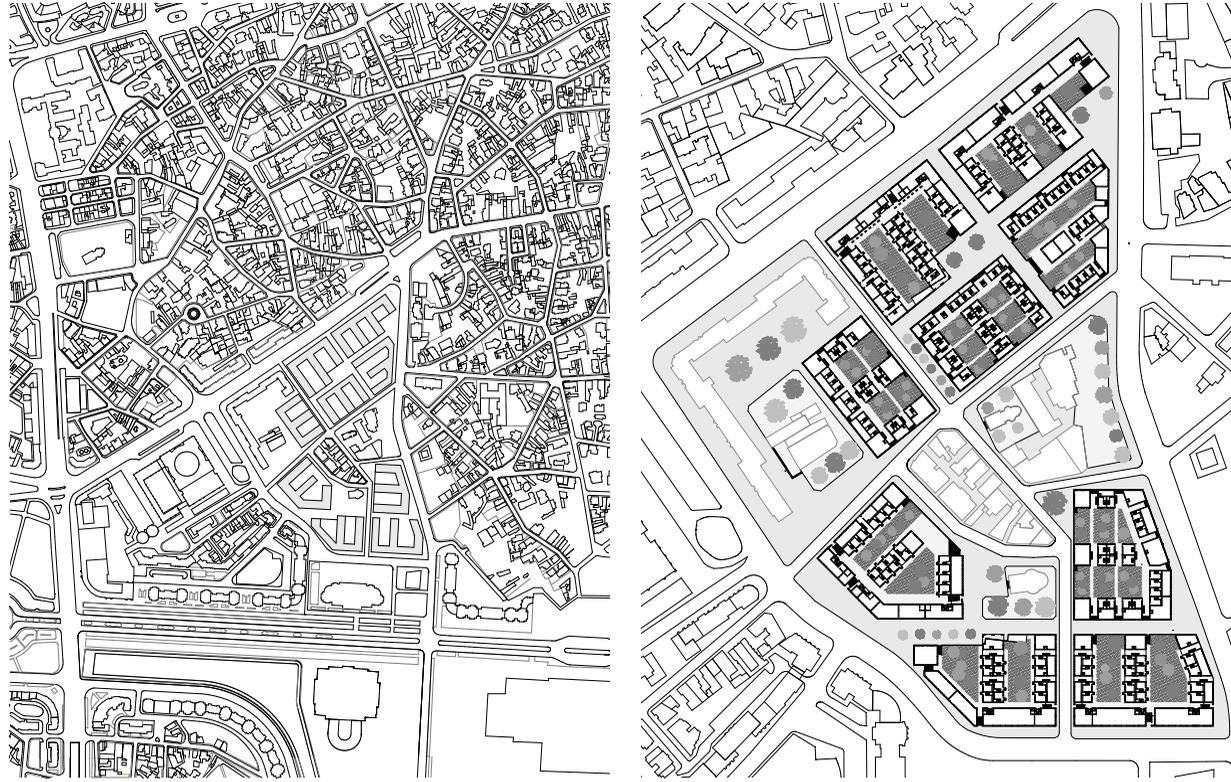


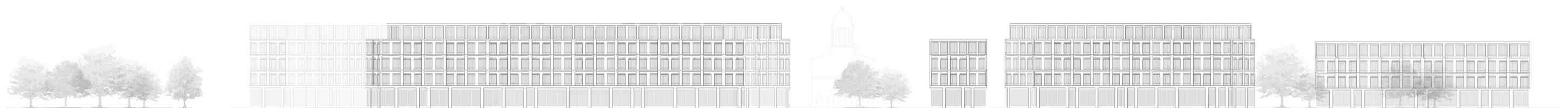
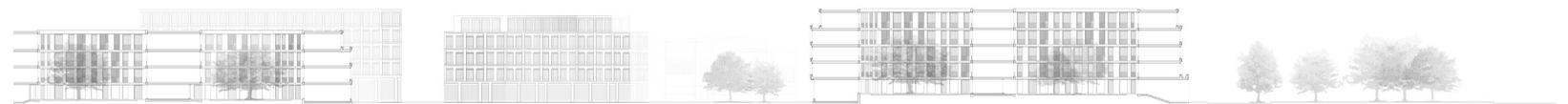


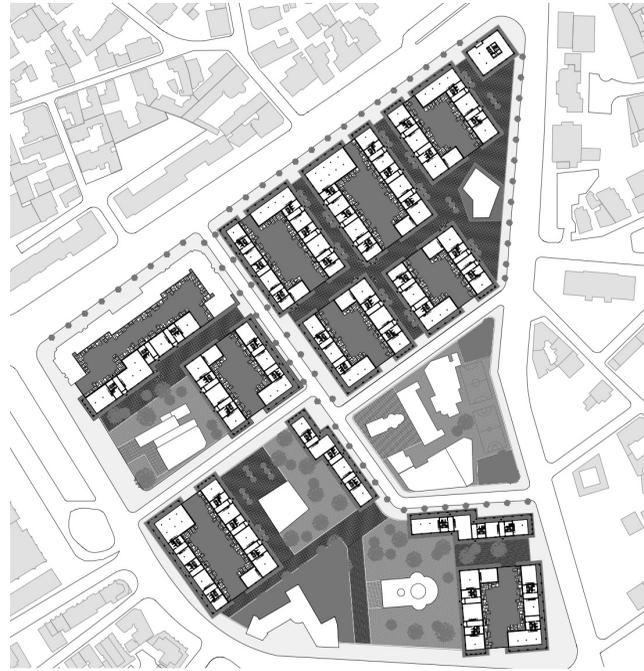








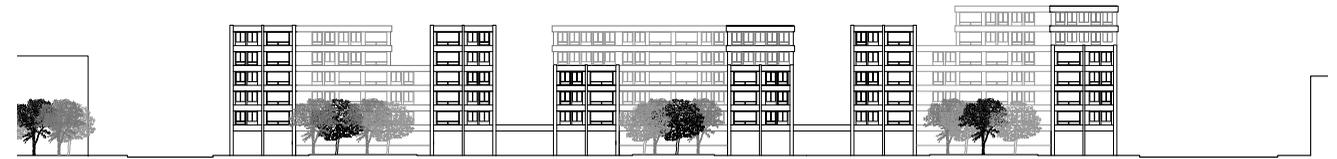
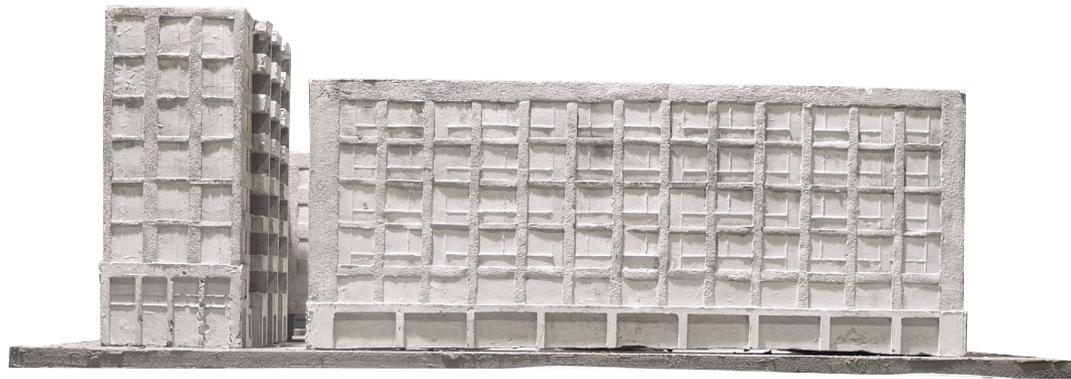
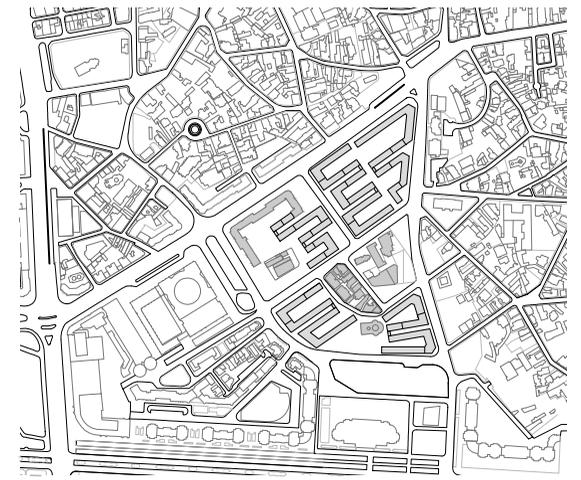


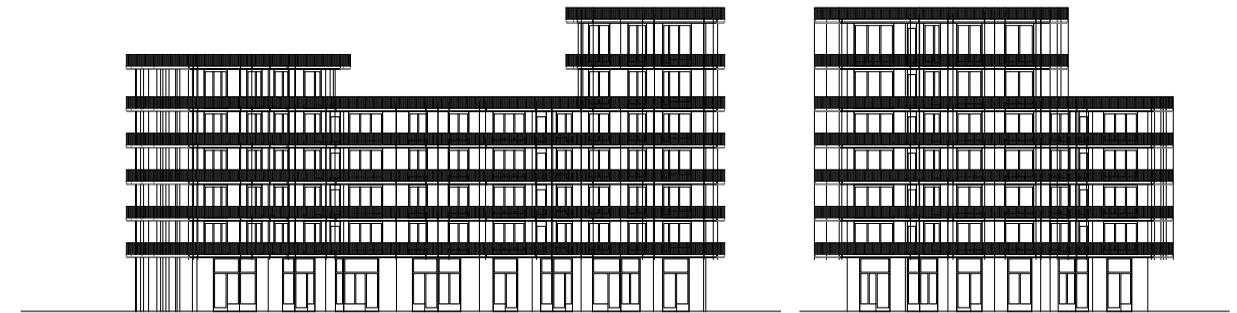
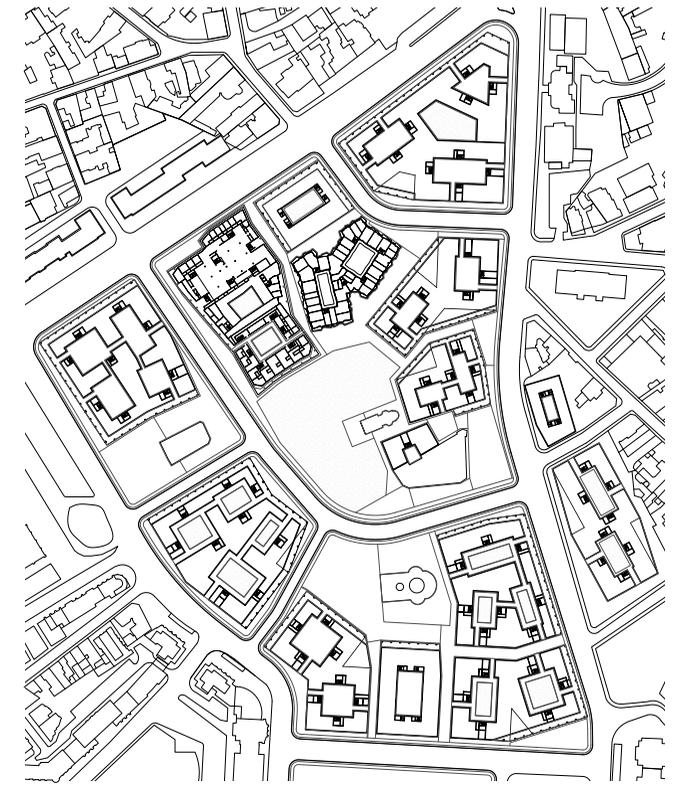


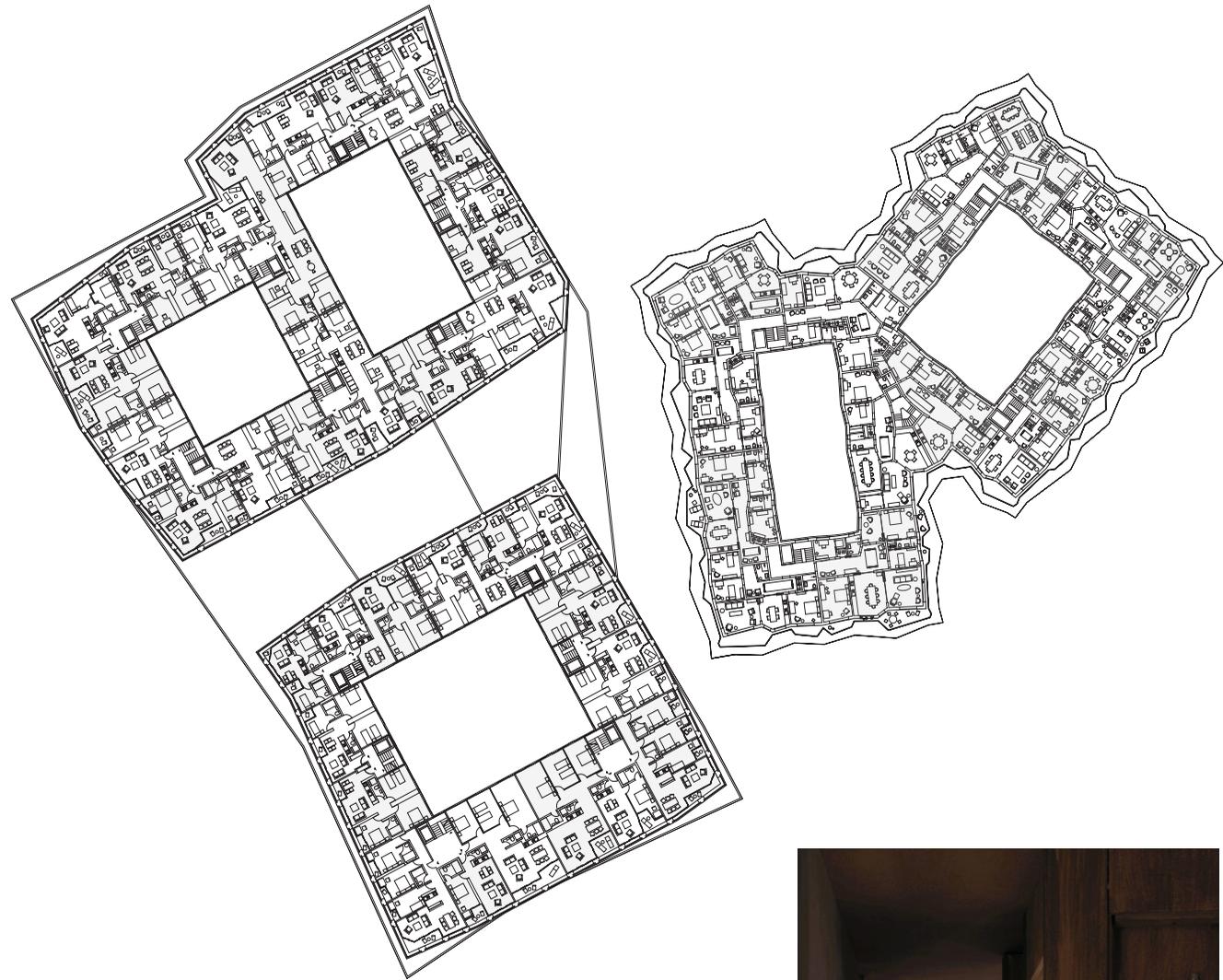
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