



**LITTLE INDIA**  
**SOCIAL CONDENSER**  
a foreign workers' recreation centre  
**FU YINGZI**

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# ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a critique of Singapore's problematic relationship with our foreign workers. While Singaporeans recognize the economic logic of having them, they are also associated with the potential threat of disorder and disrupting our social fabric.

State policy is firmly committed to managing these workers as a transient and controlled phenomenon. Apart from administrative policies such as work permits, this approach is also translated spatially into urban control strategies, such as the remote locations of worker dormitories and attendant recreation centers.

Nonetheless, every weekend sees the influx of 20,000 South Asian labourers into Little India, due to their cultural and ethnical affinities, thus creating a vibrant symbiotic relationship with the urban ecology. Yet it is also a site of contestation and social tensions, stemming from Singaporeans' reluctance to recognize the ethical obligations of sharing common spaces.

Thus, this thesis proposes a Little India Recreation Centre, a mega one-stop destination that is designed to cater directly to the foreign workers. In the wake of the 2013 riot, it is both politically and socially necessary to re-examine and address the needs of the workers. While the provision of collectivised recreation and welfare is not a purely altruistic gesture as it aligns with the state's stance on control and management, it nonetheless enables the workers by allowing them to reclaim a space of their own and a sense of freedom.

Thus, the centre is conceived as a city in a city, and serves as an alternative social condenser that takes Little India and reorganizes, augments and compacts its programs into a centralized vertical system, hence reflecting the bustling vibrancy of its environs.

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Lilian Chee



# INTRODUCTION

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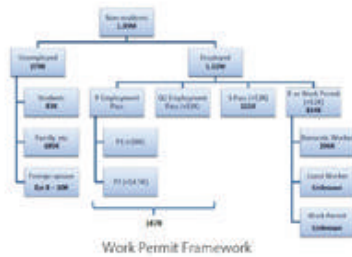
# INTRODUCTION . CONTEXT

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This thesis is a critique of Singapore's problematic relationship with our foreign workers. While Singaporeans recognize the economic logic of having them, they are also associated with the potential threat of disorder and disrupting our social fabric.

State policy is firmly committed to managing these workers as a transient and controlled phenomenon. Apart from administrative policies such as work permits, this approach is also translated spatially into urban control strategies, such as the remote locations of worker dormitories and attendant recreation centers.

# INTRODUCTION . CONTEXT



## Administrative Control "Employment framework"

## Urban Control "Invisible city"

State

Taxes & levies  
Man-year allowances  
Training requirements

Land tendering process  
Housing standards  
Image control

Private sector

Recruitment  
Work & salaries  
Welfare schemes

Housing market  
Transport offer  
Recreational offer

Foreign workers



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# INTRODUCTION . CONTEXT

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# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS

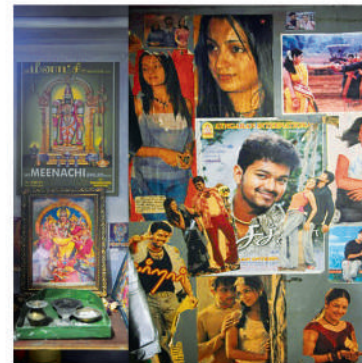
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Every weekend sees the influx of approximately 20,000 South Asian labourers into Little India, due to their cultural and ethnical affinities, thus creating a vibrant symbiotic relationship with the urban ecology. Yet it is also a site of contestation and social tensions, stemming from Singaporeans' reluctance to recognize the ethical obligations of sharing common spaces.

Private chartered buses ferry the workers from their respective dormitories to Little India, where they alight along Race Course Road. Spread across the site, these workers with limited financial resources tend to appropriate public spaces, especially the open empty land plots which can accommodate their sheer numbers, for a variety of leisure and socializing activities. Their distribution is dependent upon the amenities such as supporting trades and religious facilities in the vicinity, and as such they also tend to congregate together with others from the same homeland districts in specific parts of Little India.

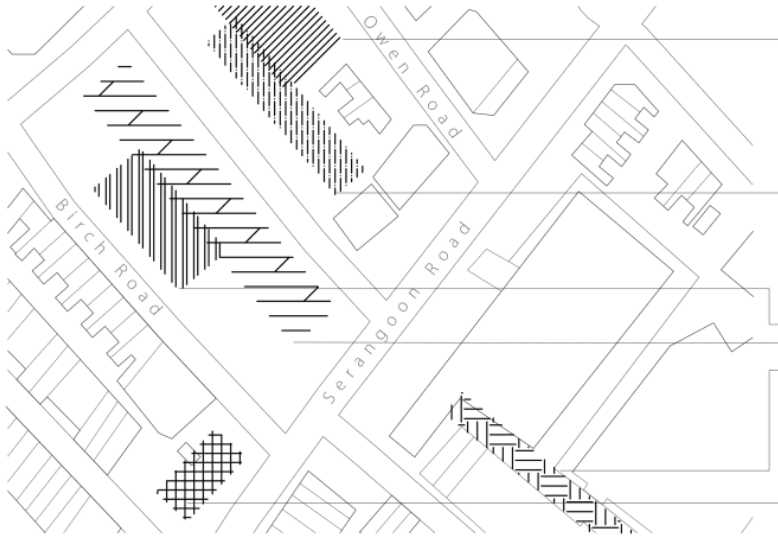
At other times of the week and year, these open spaces are also utilized for various different festivities and large scale events.

# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS

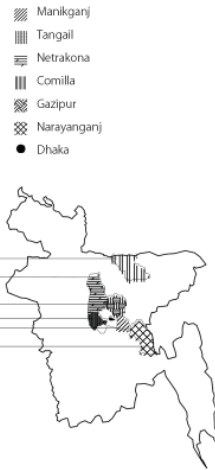




# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS



## Territorial Distribution



## Crowd Density

- People standing
- People sitting at table
- People sitting on ground



## Land Use

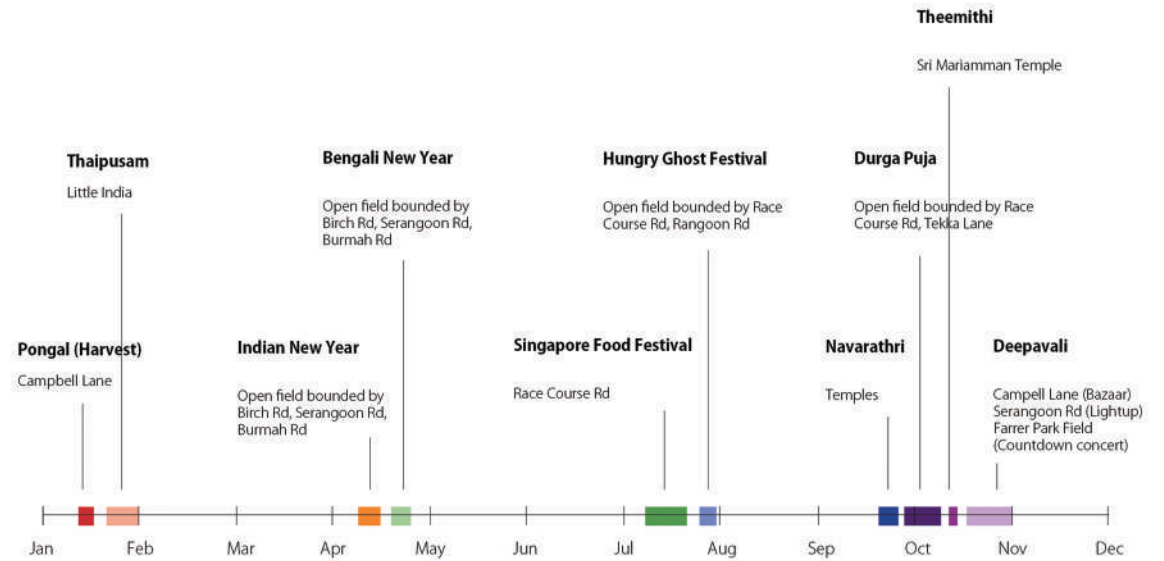
- South Asian F&B
- Groceries
- Mixed Retail
- Telecommunications
- Remittance
- Religious

Land use and programs of Little India, correlating to the social and material needs of foreign workers

# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS



Event	Details
Pongal (Harvest) Celebrations	- Tamil/ Hindu. LISHA
Thaipusam	- Hindu. HEB
Indian New Year	- Hindu. LISHA/ HEB
Bengali New Year	- Bangladesh Universal Society/ LISHA/ Supported by Bangladesh High Com
Sarawati Puja	
Singapore Food Festival	-IRAS (India Restaurants Association Singapore)/ LISHA - Guinness World Record: Longest Table in the World 2011/ Most number of curry fishhead served in a single dinner 2012 - Spiciest food/ Fastest laddu eating Challenge/ Chef showcase competition/ Industry networking mixer
Hungry Ghost Festival	-Getai
Navarathri (Nine Nights Festival)	- Hindu. Temples
Theemithi (Fire Walking)	Hindu
Durga Puja	Hindu
Deepavali	- HEB/ LISHA - Bazaar (Campbell Lane. Indian outfits, jewellery, handicraft, spices) - Heritage & Craft Exhibition - Ustoy/ Deepavali Street Parade & Lightup - Deepavali Countdown Concert



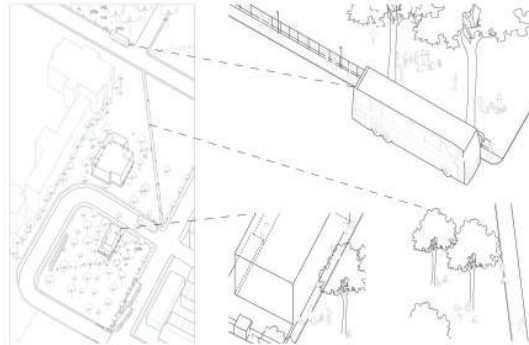
Utilization of open spaces, mapped against calendar of events over the year

# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS



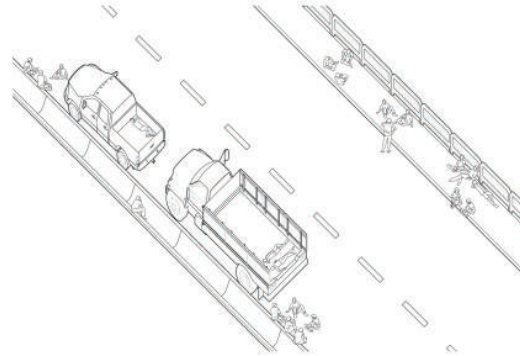
function: foreign workers' transport stop and meeting point  
 site: Race Course Road, T-aka Lane, Hampshire Road  
 - foreign workers arrive via charter buses and drop off along Race Course Road  
 - Hampshire Road (low busy secondary street) serves as pickup points where workers wait to get buses back to their respective dormitories  
 - height, sunlit open green spaces, semi-enclosed gathering and socializing, left-over spaces such as building ledges, pavement's, grassy surfaces are utilized

## Drop Off & Socialize



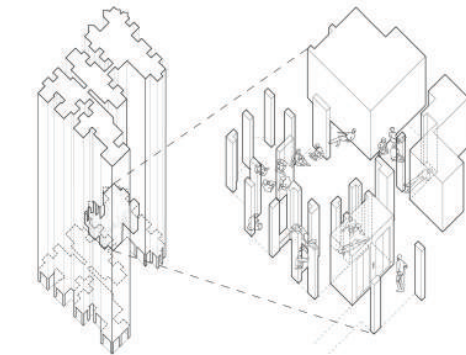
function: roadside picnic  
 site: Northumberland Road, Little India  
 - long road is relatively unused and quiet, flanked by open green space on both sides  
 - small company trucks ferrying foreign workers to Little India are parked along the road  
 - workers sit along the pavement, on the canal ledges, on the road itself (next to or in-between trucks for privacy) to eat, drink and socialize  
 - urban edges are effectively utilized

## Roadside Picnic



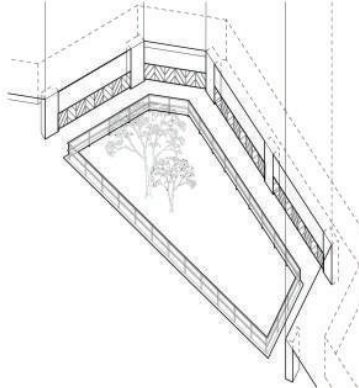
function: HDB void deck picnic  
 site: Chander Road, Little India  
 - HDB is sandwiched by race course and serangoon road, located between where foreign workers frequent on Sundays  
 - void decks are shaded, open, public (least contested) spaces which the workers appropriate for their use  
 - multiple columns create semi-enclosed pockets of space for privacy and surfaces for leaning against  
 - activities determined by brightness and degree of enclosure (darker areas for napping, brighter areas for socializing)

## HDB Void Deck Picnic



function: spatial demarcators and boundaries in HDB  
 site: Belkis Lane, Rochor  
 - the normally open green spaces and HDB void decks are fenced up  
 - measures implemented after complaints from residents  
 - this is to deter informal gatherings of foreign workers in such public spaces  
 - the boundary edges and surfaces themselves are thus utilized instead

## HDB Railing Boundary

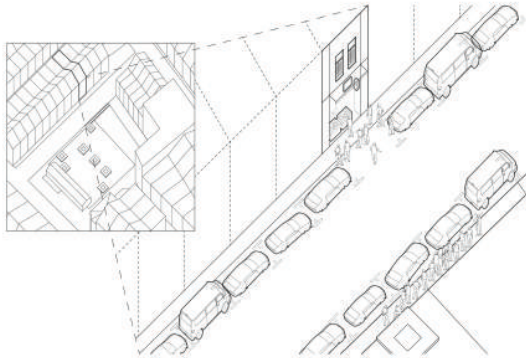


# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS



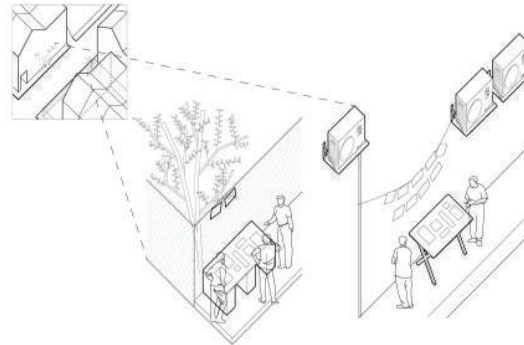
function: movie screening by DVD shop on Sunday  
 site: Lembu Road, Little India  
 - Lembu Square frequented and colonized by foreign workers on their day-off  
 - DVD shop shows movies on big screen TV for public entertainment and advertising  
 - viewers crowd around the adjacent parking lot and pavement along Lembu Square  
 - street becomes an outdoor urban TV common room

## Outdoor TV Room



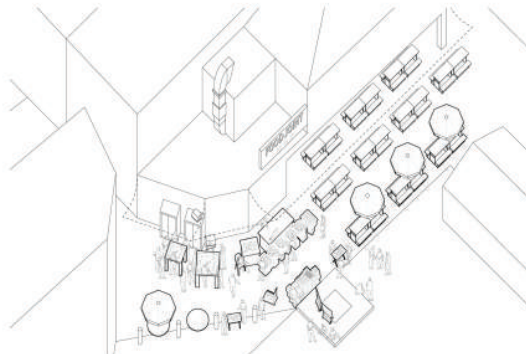
function: makeshift newsstand on Sunday  
 site: Lembu Road, Little India  
 - Lembu Square colonized predominantly by Bangladeshis workers on their day-off  
 - site for gathering and exchange of info through verbal and written word  
 - opportunistic news vendors tailor products to suit target audience  
 - makeshift simple stalls with minimal setups, using existing structures for display of newspapers

## Sunday Newsstand



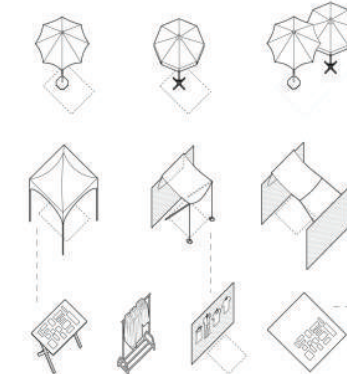
function: expansion of coffeeshop on Sunday  
 site: Lembu Square, Little India  
 - Lembu Square colonized by foreign workers on their day-off  
 - opportunistic expansion of coffeeshop business under shaded awnings in response to increased catchment  
 - workers playing and watching carrom games  
 - selling of cold drinks and ethnic snacks, to be hand-held and consumed while standing in the crowded square

## Carrom & Snacks



function: flea market  
 site: Sungei Road, Rochor  
 - display of wares by laying out on a groundsheet, collapsible tables  
 - groundsheet helps to demarcate boundary of stall  
 - sellers as a community because of the open spatial quality of flea market, shared sources of goods, time spent together in proximity  
 - activities besides selling: chatting, playing chess, repairing goods

## Old Thieves' Market



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# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS

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The influx of the sheer number of foreign workers into Little India on Sundays is a temporal spectacle which radically changes how the space is used and experienced as opposed to every other day. The appropriation of public space for their own desires and uses, frenzied bustling of activities and spillages of crowds into the streets presents an almost carnivalesque atmosphere to Little India, which temporarily inverts and suspends the normatives and hierarchy.

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*“Carnival **celebrates temporary liberation** from the prevailing truth of the established order; it marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.”*

*“On the positive side, carnival suggests the joyful affirmation of becoming. It is **ecstatic collectivity**, the superseding of the individuating principle in what Nietzsche called ‘the glowing life of Dionysian revellers’ ... On the negative, critical side, the carnivalesque suggests a **demystificatory instrument for everything in the social formation which renders such collectivity difficult of access**: class hierarchy, political manipulation, sexual repression, dogmatism and paranoia. Carnival in this sense implies an attitude of creative disrespect, a radical opposition to the morose and monological.”*

*“Carnival is so vivaciously celebrated that the necessary political criticism is almost too obvious to make. Carnival, after all, is a **licensed affair** in every sense, a **permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off** as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art. There is no slander in an allowed fool.”*

*-- Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1986)*

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# INTRODUCTION . SITE ANALYSIS

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*(From left) Pieter Breugel, "Carnival and Lent" (1566), Deepavali celebrations spilling into streets of Little India*



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# PROPOSAL . DESIGN STRATEGY

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This thesis proposes a Little India Recreation Centre for the foreign workers. In the wake of the 2013 riot, it is both politically and socially necessary to re-examine and address their welfare and needs. While the provision of collectivised recreation and welfare is not a purely altruistic gesture as it aligns with the state's stance on control and management, it nonetheless enables the workers by allowing them to reclaim a space of their own and a sense of freedom. The centre is thus conceived as a mega one-stop destination that is designed to cater directly to the workers.

With the opening of the Downtown Line and increased connectivity via Little India and Jalan Besar MRT station, developmental pressures and land use are set to intensify correspondingly. The currently vacant land parcels which are the workers' key gathering spaces, will be built up in the near future. Thus the centre serves as an alternative social condenser by vertically stacking a series of open, urban planes that function as a new public space with various organized activities, such as movie screenings and weekend bazaars.

These planes are connected as a continuous circulatory system via open-air escalators that draw people up from the street level. The structure is also segmented into specialized clusters of commercial, recreational, residential and administrative functions, which are tucked underneath these urban planes, with visual and physical links to core activated spaces.

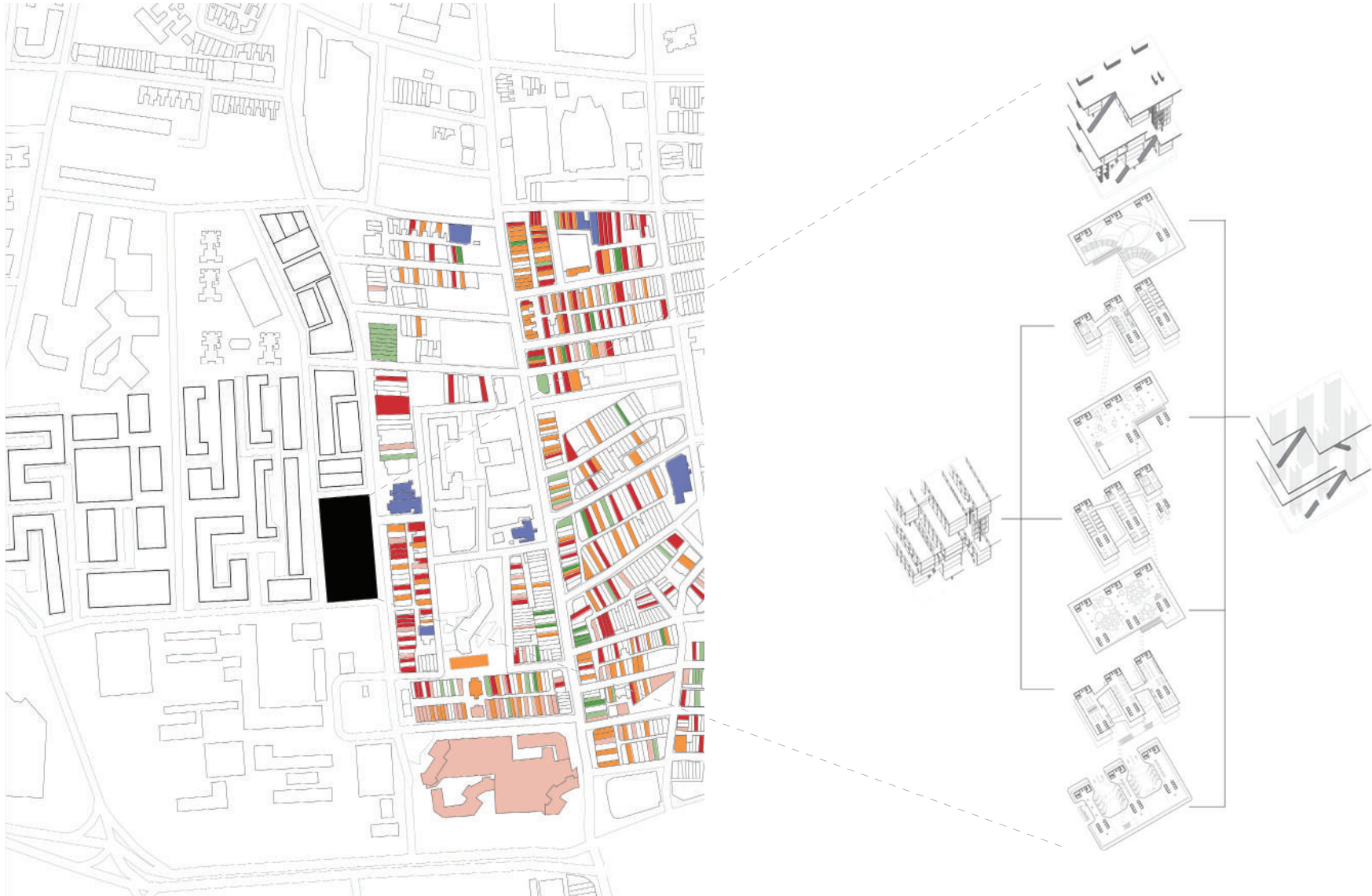
The sheer size of the building may be seemingly incongruent with the fine grain of shophouses that characterizes a large part of Little India. However, it is necessary in order to cater to the sheer volume of foreign workers and to relieve the physical congestions and pressures placed on the site.



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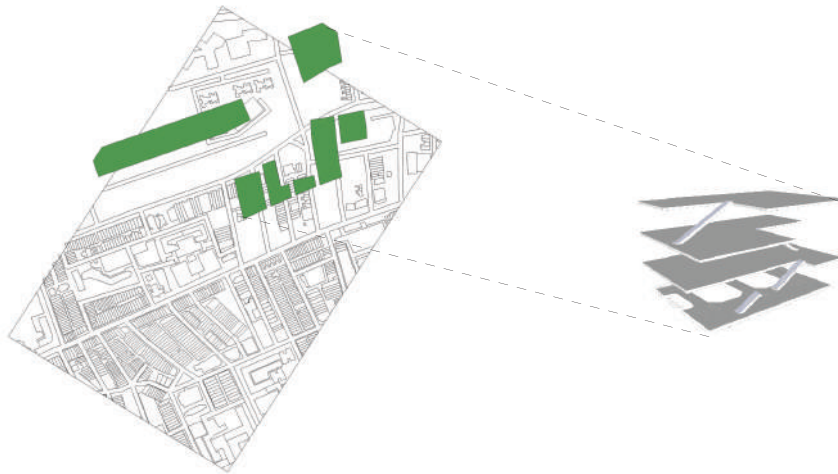
# PROPOSAL . DESIGN STRATEGY

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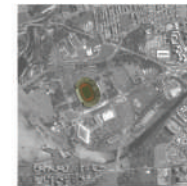


*Site masterplan according to URA masterplan (residential/ ground floor retail commercial)*

# PROPOSAL . DESIGN STRATEGY



Building	Footprint/ m <sup>2</sup>	Total Floor Area/ m <sup>2</sup>	Lifts	Escalators	Occupancy Load/ pax
Suntec Convention Centre	19,100	76,310 (4)	12	6	30,520
ION Orchard	10,930	87,490 (8)	11	9	20,830
Ngee Ann City	12,840	110,450 (29)	15	6	26,300
Plaza Singapura	15,360	46,226 (9)	9	6	11,000
Bugis+	7,535	18,050 (10)	6	2	4,300
Orchard Central	5,280	58,080 (10)	20	3	13,828



National Stadium  
(Maximum Capacity)



50,000 m<sup>2</sup>



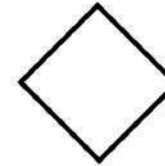
55,000 pax



1,100,000 pax/km<sup>2</sup>



Marina Bayfront  
(New Year Countdown)



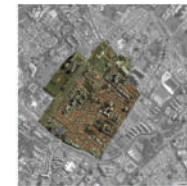
1,037,000 m<sup>2</sup>



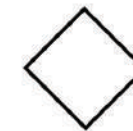
300,000 pax



289,000 pax/km<sup>2</sup>



Little India  
(Weekend)



654,000 m<sup>2</sup>



100,000 pax



153,000 pax/km<sup>2</sup>



Little India, Proposed  
(Weekend)



875,000 m<sup>2</sup>



70,000 pax

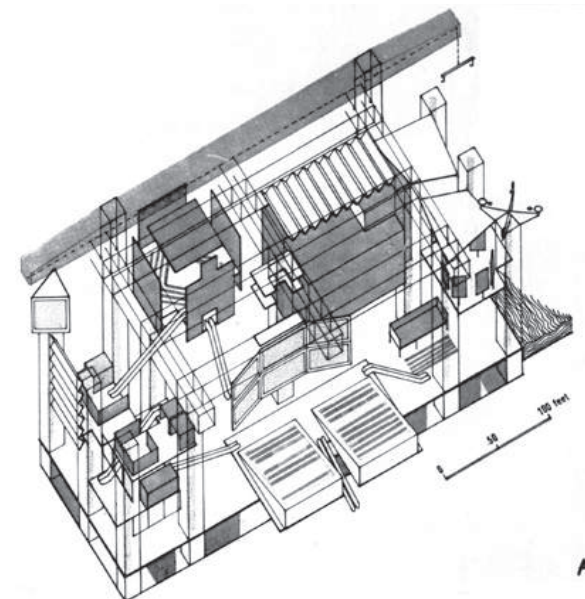
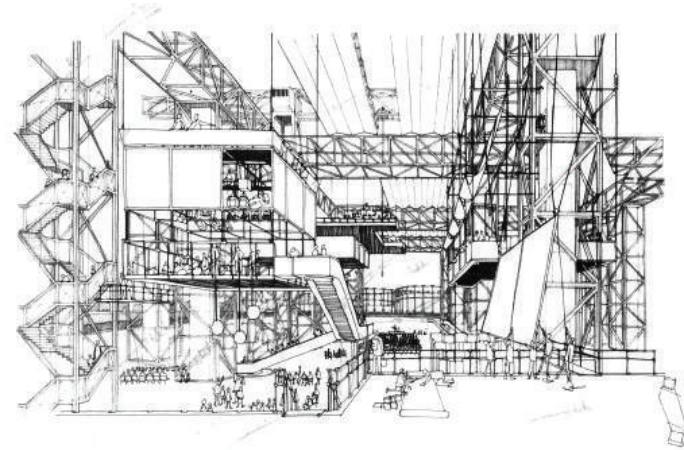


80,000 pax/km<sup>2</sup>

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# PROPOSAL . DESIGN STRATEGY

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(From left) MVRDV, Netherlands Pavilion at Hannover World Expo 2000; OMA, Milan Prada Foundation; Cedric Price, Fun Palace

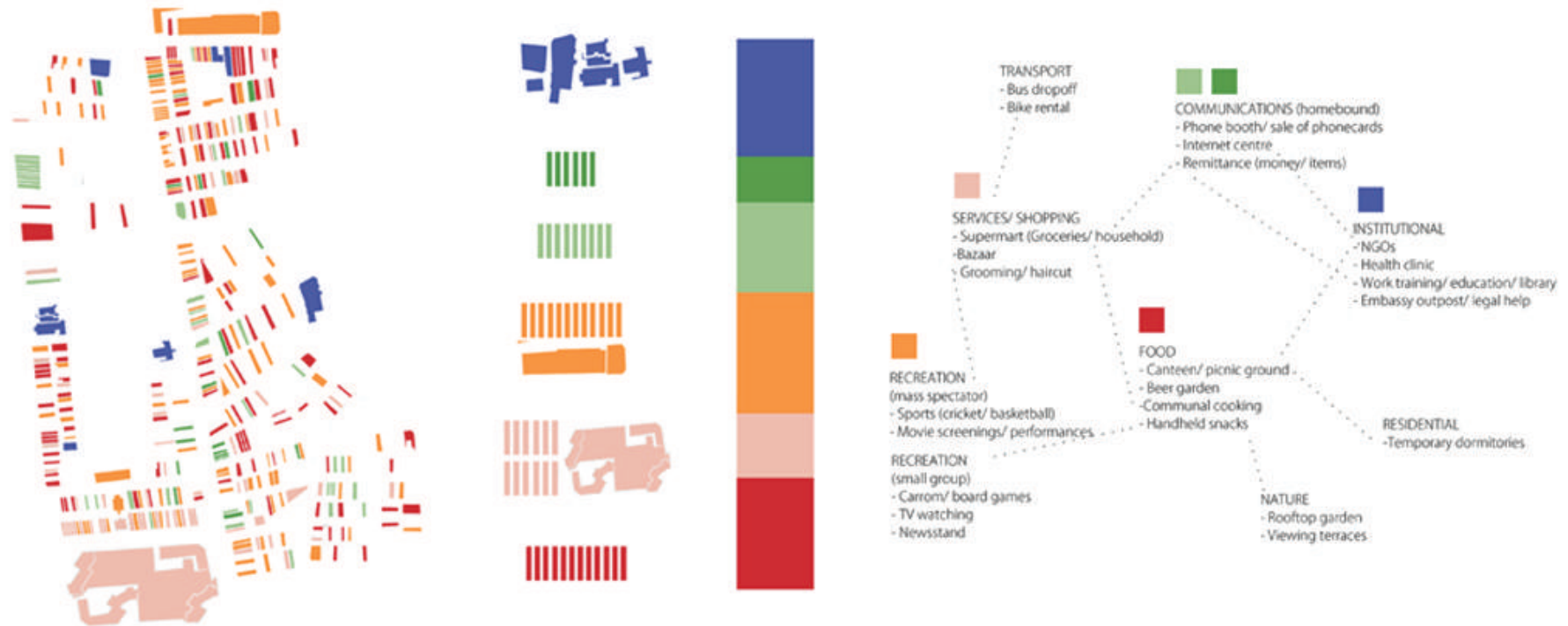
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# PROPOSAL . PROGRAM & SPACE

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The program of the center is derived from the existing ecology of the site, and aims to not only aggregate and intensify these functions by organizing and juxtaposing them to create a new network of relations within the building, but also to augment those which are found wanting. The programmatic contents and hierarchy of spaces can be distinctly read in the building façade through different corresponding materiality treatments and textures.

# PROPOSAL . PROGRAM & SPACE

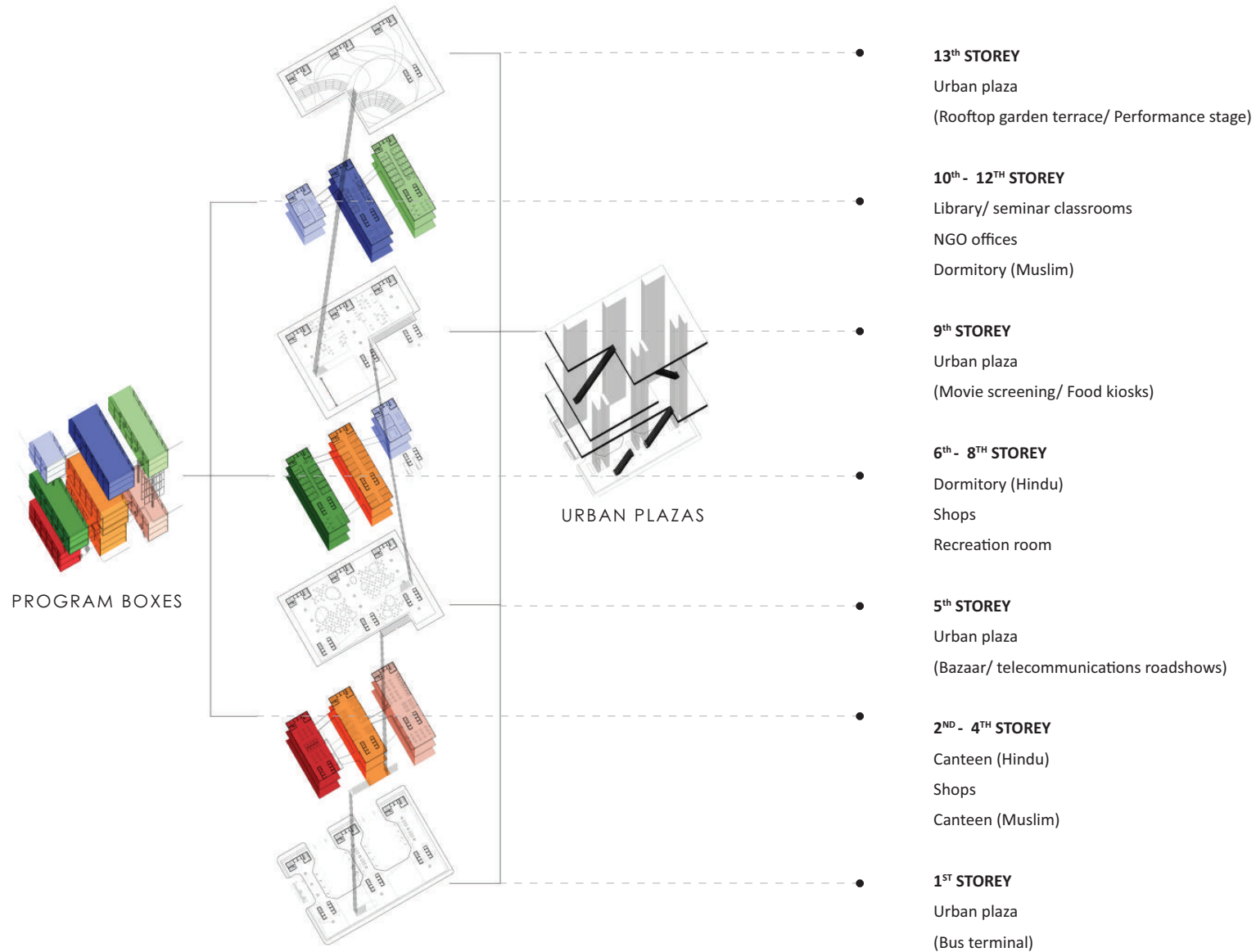


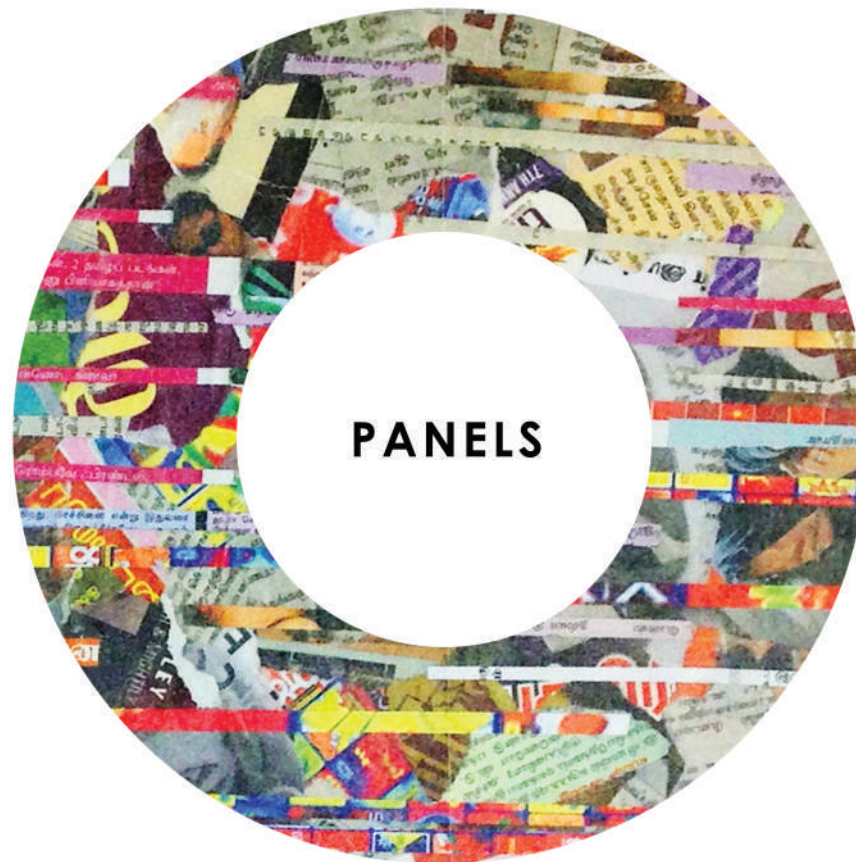
Program list and network of relations, developed from Little India urban studies

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# PROPOSAL . PROGRAM & SPACE

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# PANELS · PERSPECTIVES

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*Perspective view in context from Race Course Road*



# PANELS · PERSPECTIVES



View of ground storey bus terminal

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# PANELS · PERSPECTIVES

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View of 5th storey urban plaza atrium space

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# PANELS · SECTIONS

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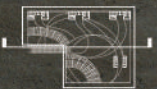


3 sectional perspectives – showing the continuous vertical circulation winding through the

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# PANELS · SECTIONS

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*building via the open-air escalators and change in activities and atmosphere from daytime to night*

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# PANELS · PLANS

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## SITE PLAN

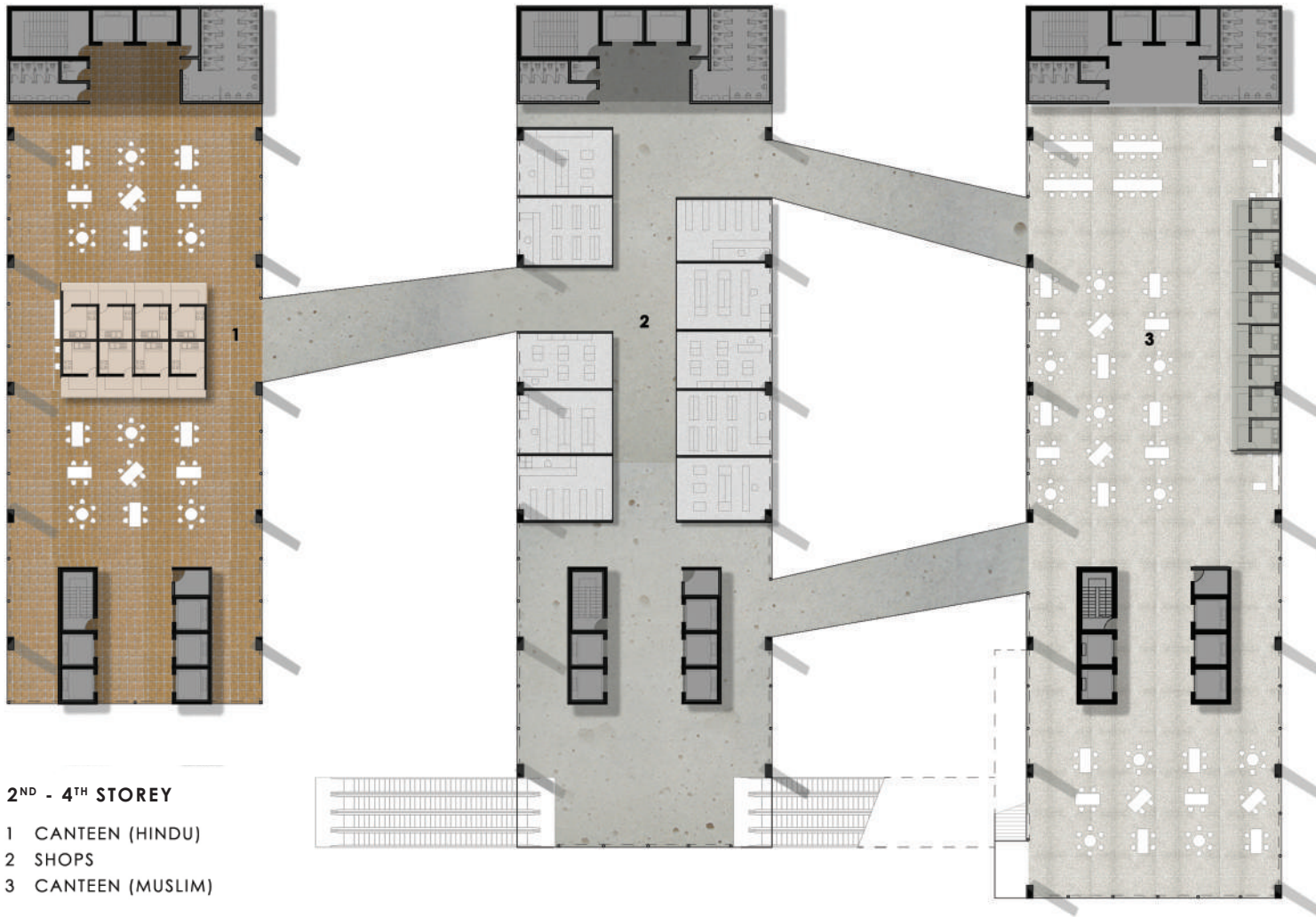
- 1 LITTLE INDIA MRT STATION EXIT
- 2 BUS ARRIVAL
- 3 BUS DEPARTURE
- 4 URBAN PLAZA



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# PANELS . PLANS

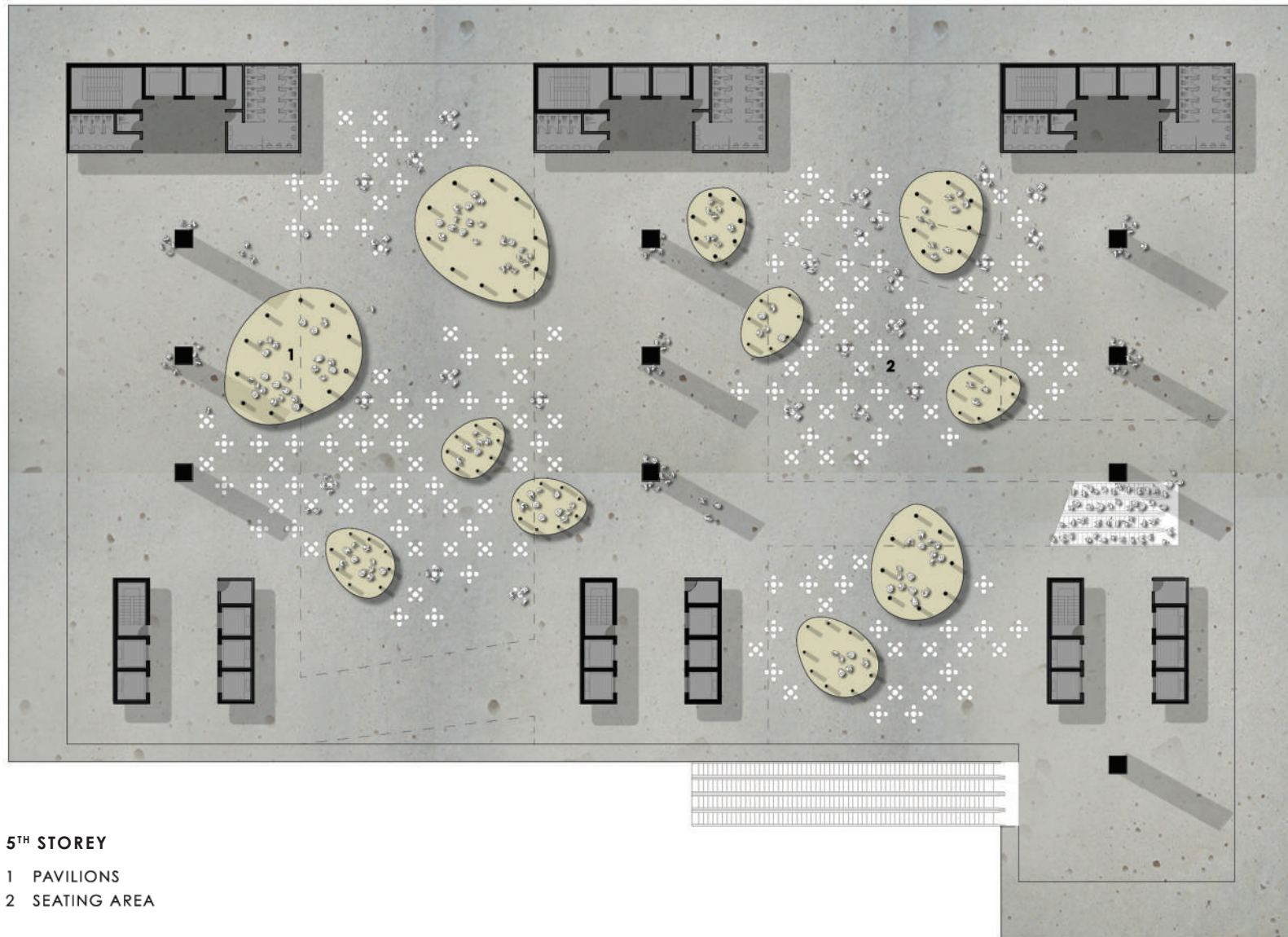
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# PANELS · PLANS

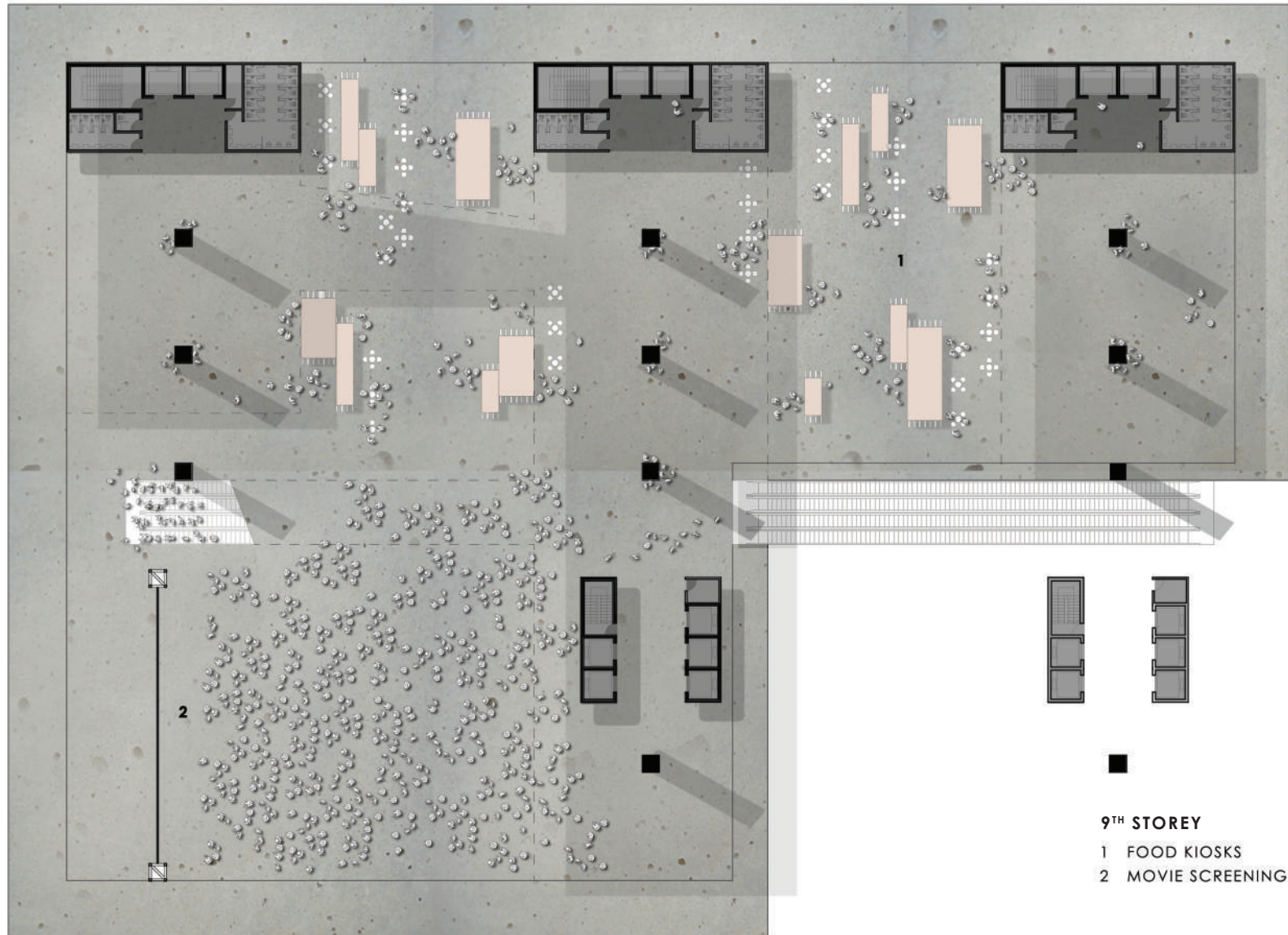
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## 5<sup>TH</sup> STOREY

- 1 PAVILIONS
- 2 SEATING AREA

# PANELS . PLANS



9TH STOREY

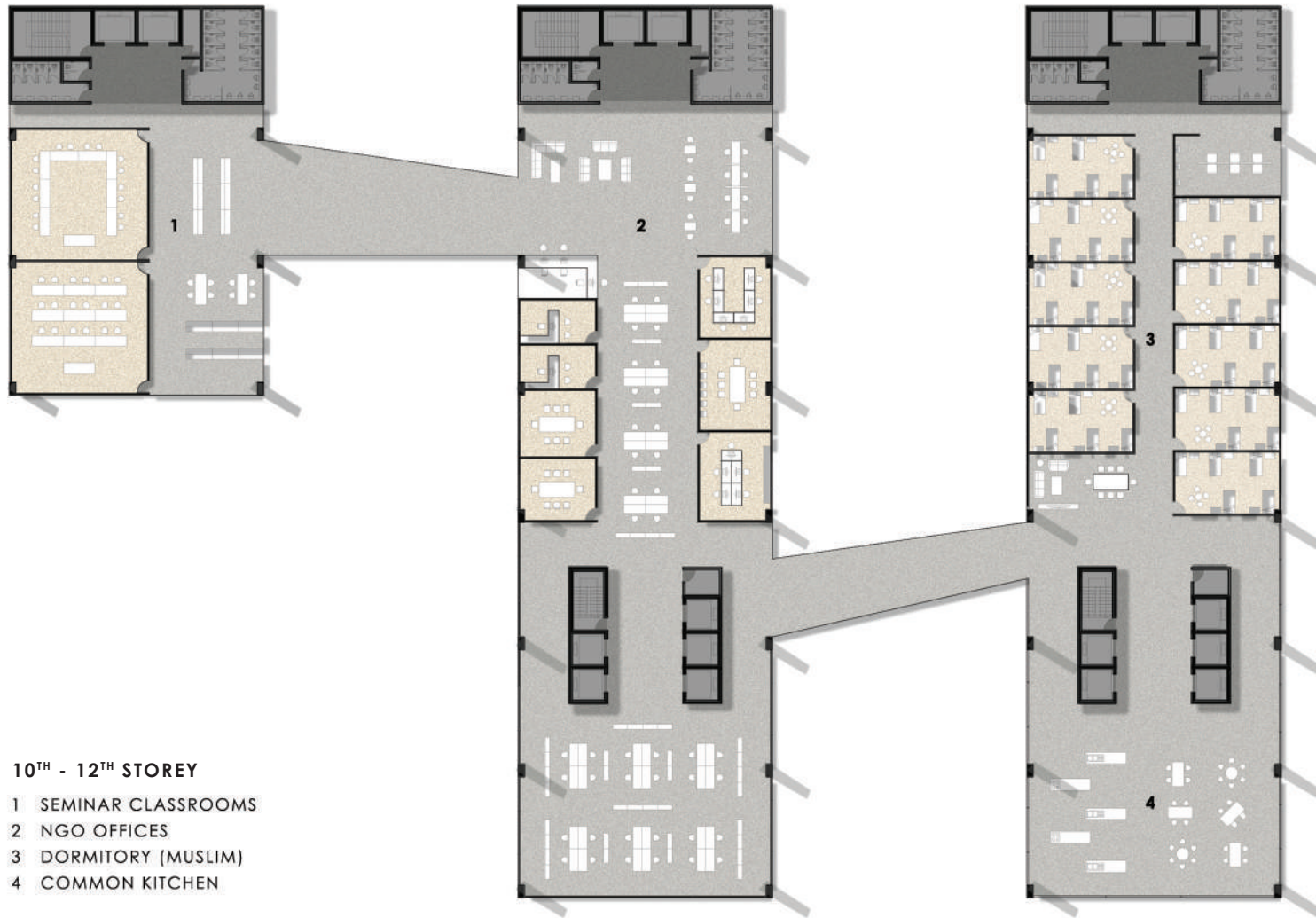
- 1 FOOD KIOSKS
- 2 MOVIE SCREENING



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# PANELS . PLANS

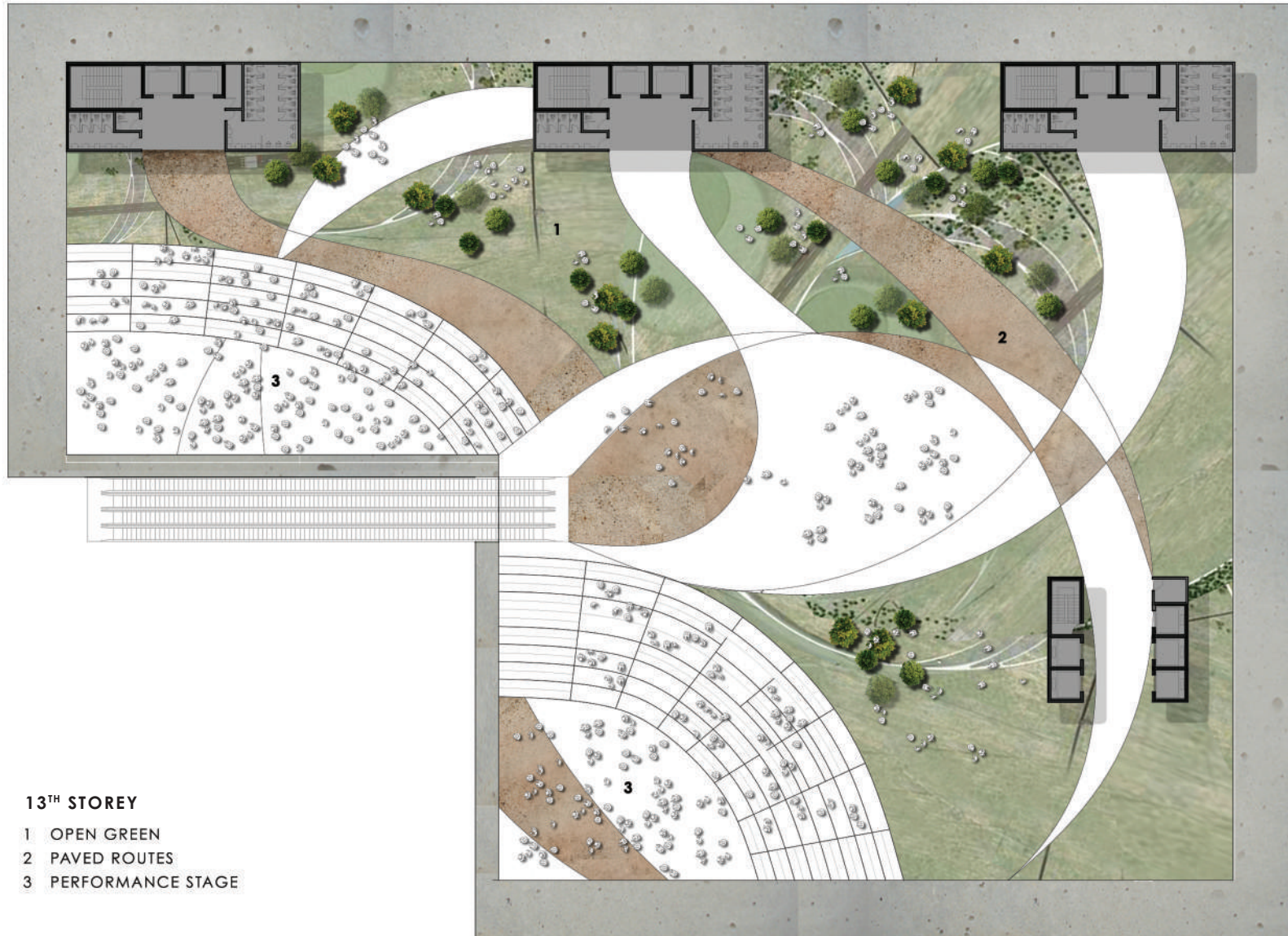
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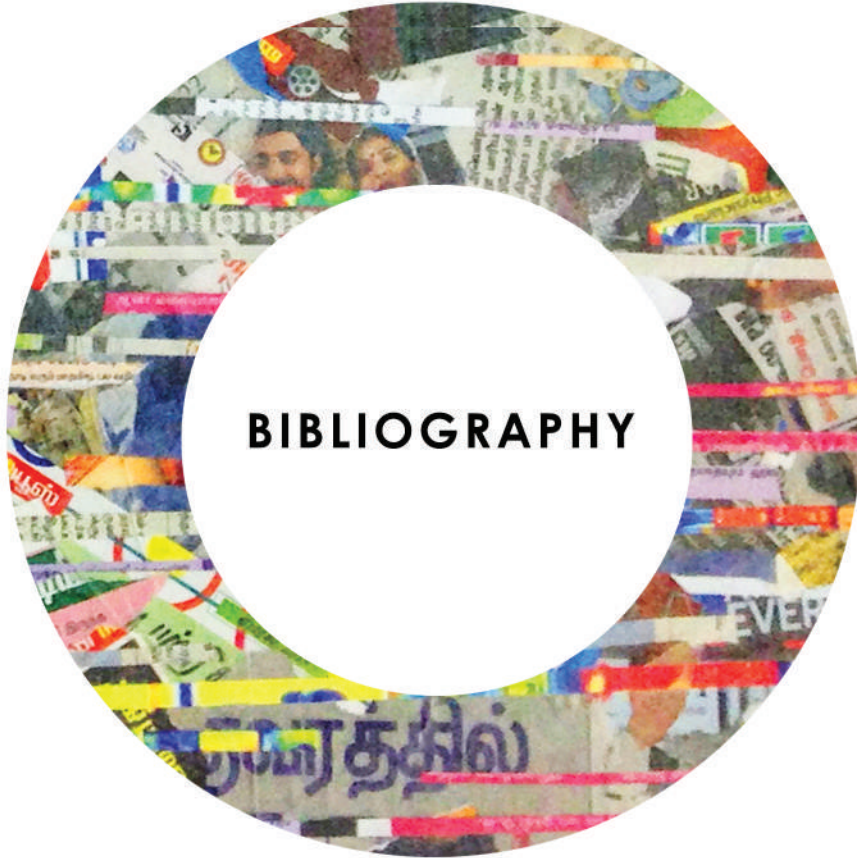


## 10<sup>TH</sup> - 12<sup>TH</sup> STOREY

- 1 SEMINAR CLASSROOMS
- 2 NGO OFFICES
- 3 DORMITORY (MUSLIM)
- 4 COMMON KITCHEN

# PANELS · PLANS





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