



PARALLEL REALITY

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Backstage respite for the sex worker community in Geylang

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Parallel Reality | backstage respite for sex workers in the geylang red-light district

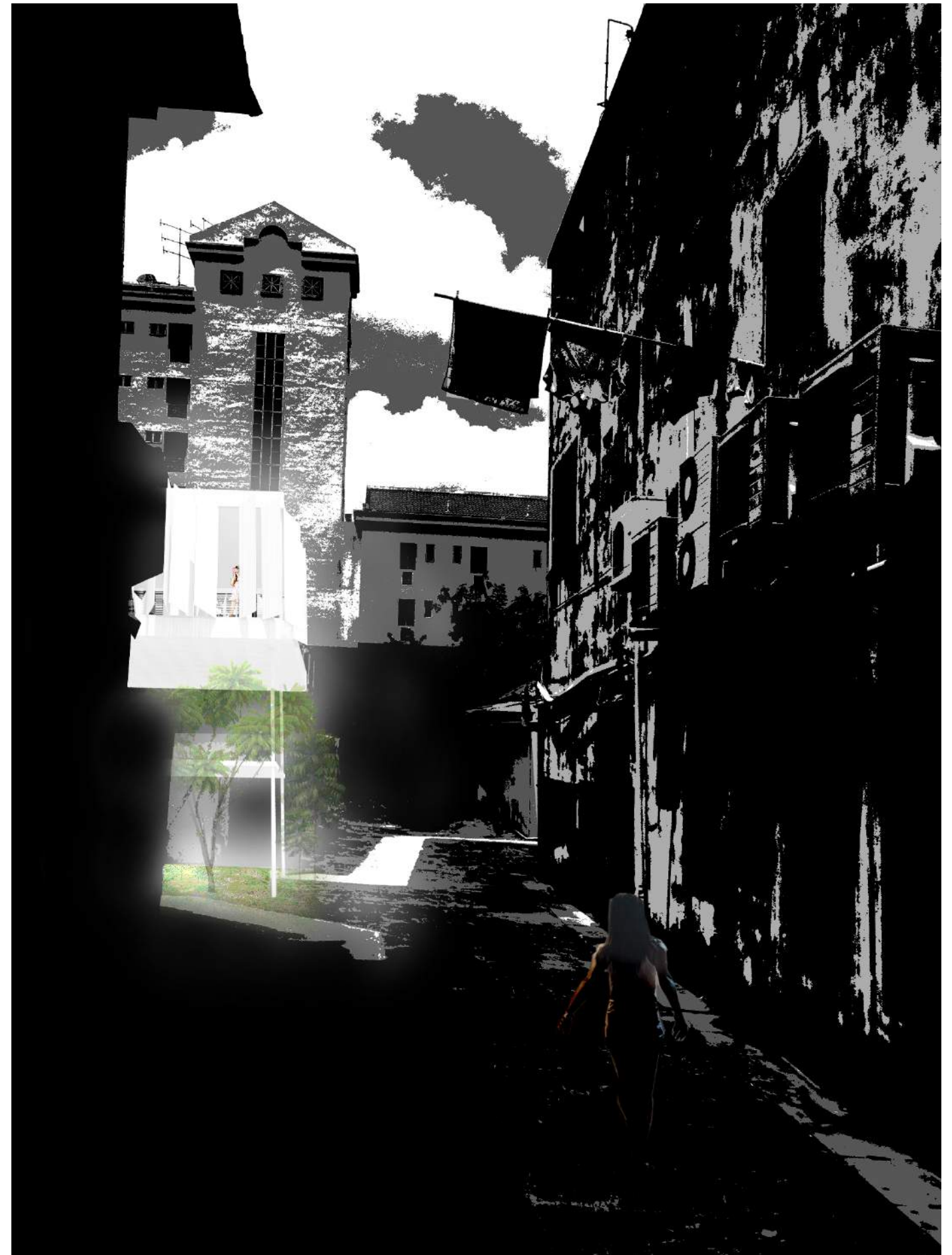
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Thesis submitted to the Department of Architecture in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE
at the
National University of Singapore

May 2014

This thesis is an urban and architectural proposition to better manage the geulang red light district, by superimposing a discreet network of programmatic facilities that cater to the needs of sex workers, so as to offer a point of reference and stability within this transient and informal community, and by doing so establish a peer support structure, thereby maintaining a more effective mode of surveillance and management of the workings of the sex trade and its stakeholders, as well as for the overall betterment of the neighbourhood.



This thesis belongs to everyone who has made it possible...

To my loving family, for their unconditional love, support and provisions, so that I never have to worry about anything other than school work.

To Chan Hui Min, for giving me the strength and courage to finish this. Love you.

To Dr Lilian Chee, for not giving up on me on the many occasions when I have disappointed. Thank you for walking me through this very difficult journey. Heartfelt thanks also to Peter Sim, for his patience and invaluable advice so that the work can be where it is.

To Sister Lianne, Pastor Gerard and everyone else in the Oikos Fellowship, for their willingness to share about their mission in Geylang. Also to Vannessa Ho from Project X, for having the patience to educate a noob like me. This thesis would not have happened without you.

To dear friends and seniors, Diane Yeo and Yap Shan Ming, for their extra hands in the final push to submission. I'm grateful.

To dearest compatriots Mandy and Yingzi, for their company and endless whining sessions and constant encouragement. It's been an awesome journey (in hindsight) with all of you. We're done with thesis!

To Phoaw Yen Shan, for all the great ideas, and for making sure the drawings are as impressive as they are. Couldn't have asked for more.

To my uncle, for always being there to deal with my last minute requests for the various pieces of woodwork i needed. Really appreciate it.

To the girls on the streets. This is for you.

Thesis Premise The sex trade in singapore is a growing industry, due to the influx of male foreign labourers, as well as the growing number of sex tourists with the burgeoning tourism sector. As an inevitable part of society that cannot be eradicated, there needs to be a better management of the trade on the part of the government acting in the interest of the public to manage and contain prostitution by virtue of its nature as a moral and disease contagion.

There is clearly a flaw in the way prostitution is managed by the authorities, which to a certain degree has even back fired, so that it has actually perpetuated the red light district to be a seedy and dangerous place not only for the public but for the sex workers themselves. This is foremost a problem with the attitude of the government, who has been trying relentlessly hard to maintain a pristine image of the country by trying to control and restrict the growth of the sex trade. Up to now, there is no comprehensive legislation that directly addresses sex workers or prostitution in Singapore. They are instead represented in various statutes such as the Women's Charter and the miscellaneous Offences Act, which effectively criminalises all forms of prostitution. Furthermore, it doesn't help that double standards are practised in the way that some prostitution activities are tolerated but not the others. This makes the legal status of sex workers ambiguous, which is problematic as it not only fails to resolve the issues at its roots, it has also fundamentally compromised principles of human and labour rights of individuals that are enshrined in a fair and civilised society such as ours.

It is also the reason why the country remains one of the top destinations for human trafficking in Asia, which sex workers in Singapore are very much a part of. Just this year, the government has set up an inter-agency task force to address the problem of human trafficking. Its relation to the sex trade is clear when practically all the stakeholders in the sex trade, including the NGOs and even sex workers themselves are involved in it.

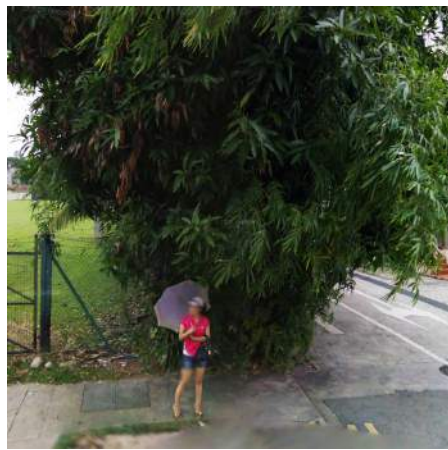
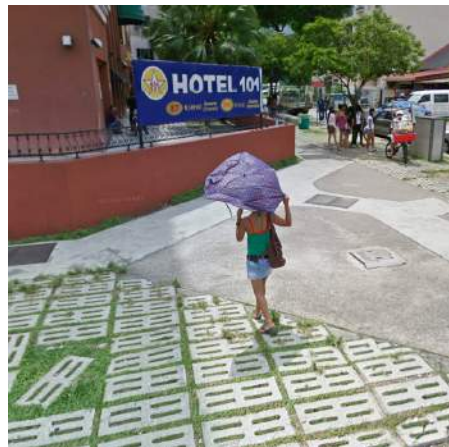
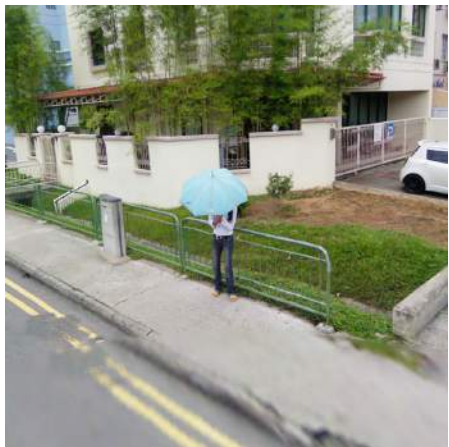
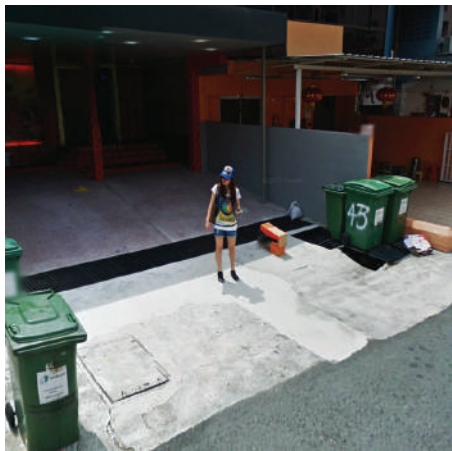
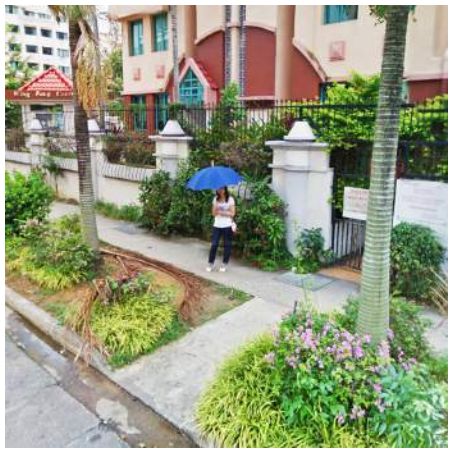
Hence this thesis is premised on the likelihood that the government is beginning to realise its inefficiencies in managing the local sex trade and is willing to embrace prostitution as an inevitable evil in our society and accepts sex workers as legitimate workers and dignified individuals to be respected and saved if need be.

Choice of Site The red light district of Geylang is chosen as it is the largest in scale, in terms of its physical extent, urban impact, as well as the variety of commercial sexual services available. Specifically, the officially designated red light zone between lorongs 16 and 20 is selected as the site for the thesis.

Urban Strategy The underlying urban strategy is to utilise leftover spaces such as the presently unoccupied interstitial plots and under-utilised backlanes. These sites, collectively, are planned to provide as spaces of privacy, empowerment, and security, catering to both the domestic and personal needs of sex workers. A list of programmes are dervied based on a thorough understanding of the issues at hand, which would benefit all the stakeholders of the sex trade. The programmes are loosely organised into three clusters.

Architectural Strategy The visual language of the interventions is intended to look rather nondescript, with the choice of lightweight construction and detachable footings, so that the interventions appear light on-site, coupled the use of materials such as polycarbonate cladding, giving the impression of subtle glowing lanterns that in a semantical sense appear as a safe haven or beacon of hope and light for the sex workers. This dichotomy of grime versus the clean, radiating positivie energy seeping out from the Geylang fabric is an important poetic image.

The design of the spaces, although simple and clean in its aesthetics, have been considered to great lengths to accommodate habitation and privacy for the sex workers. They are also designed to be climatically responsive, with full heights operable panels that encourages natural cross ventilation, but also crucially, allow the sex worker full control over the privacy that the space needs by varying the degree of opacity as she desires. Another feature that is important is that the lightings are installed by the sides, along the perimeter of the space, just behind the panels. This is so that shadows are not cast onto the translucent panels, so that the lighting does not reveal the activities that are going on in the spaces within.



Geylang, from Google street view

Women’s Charter [Chapter 353]

Clause 148: Suppression of Brothels

(1) Any person who keeps, manages or assists in the management of a brothel shall be guilty of an offence under this section.

(2) Any person who is the tenant, lessee, occupier or person in charge of any place which is used as a brothel shall, unless he proves that he has no knowledge that the place is used as a brothel, be guilty of an offence under this section.

(3) Any person who being the tenant, lessee, occupier or person in charge of any place lets such place or any part thereof shall, notwithstanding such letting, be guilty of an offence under subsection (2) if the place or any part thereof is used as a brothel, unless he proves that he has no knowledge that the place or any part thereof is used as a brothel.

(4) Any person who being the owner of any place or the agent of that owner lets the same or any part thereof with the knowledge that the place or some part thereof is to be used as a brothel or is wilfully a party to the continued use of the place or any part thereof as a brothel shall, notwithstanding such letting, be guilty of an offence under this section.

(5) Any person who is guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 years or to both and, in the case of a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or to both.

(6) In any proceedings under this Part, any evidence given by any police officer not below the rank of sergeant that any place has been used as a brothel or a place of assignation shall, until the contrary is proved, be deemed to be sufficient evidence of the fact.

Clause 146: Persons Living on or Trading in Prostitution

(1) Any person who knowingly lives wholly or in part on the earnings of the prostitution of another person shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years and shall also be liable to a fine not exceeding \$10,000.

(2) Any male person who is convicted of a second or subsequent offence under this section shall, in addition to any term of imprisonment imposed in respect of such offence, be liable to caning.

(3) Where any person is proved to live with or be habitually in the company of any prostitute or is proved to have exercised control, direction or influence over the movements of any prostitute in such a manner as to show that the person is aiding, abetting or compelling her prostitution with any other person or generally, the person shall, in the absence of proof to the contrary, be deemed to be knowingly living on the earnings of prostitution.

Immigration Act of Singapore [Chapter 133]

Clause 8: Prohibited Immigrants

Every person who in any public road or public place persistently loiters or solicits for the purpose of prostitution or for any other immoral purpose shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$1,000 and, in the case of a second or subsequent conviction, to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or to both.

Miscellaneous Offenses (Public Order and Nuisance) Act [Chapter 184]:

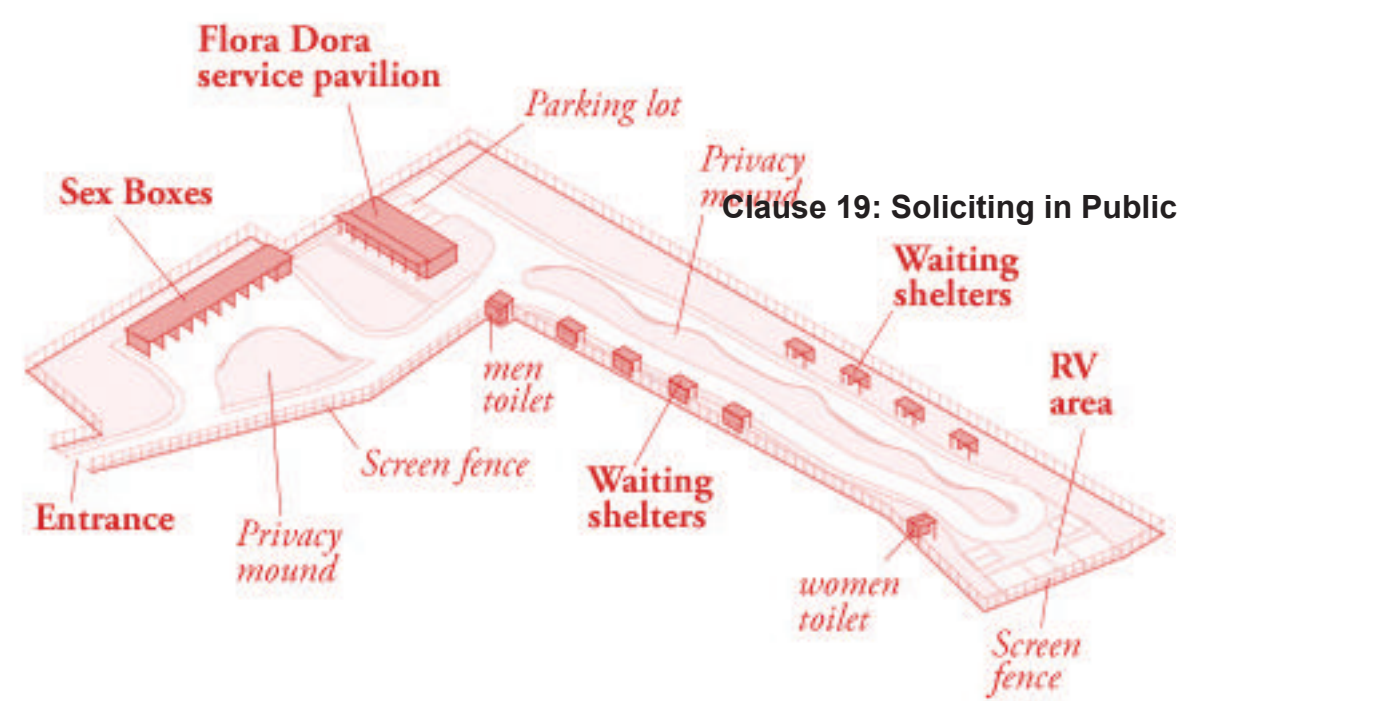
(3) The following persons are members of the prohibited classes:

(e) any prostitute or any person who is living on or receiving or who, prior to entering Singapore, lived on or received the proceeds of prostitution;

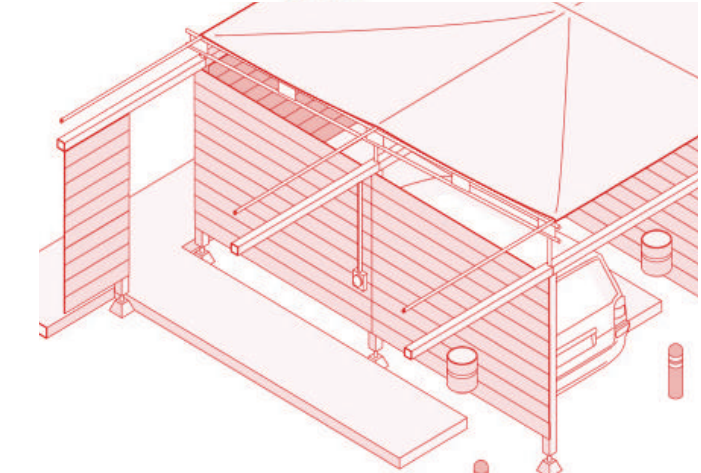
(f) any person who procures or attempts to bring into Singapore prostitutes or women or girls for the purpose of prostitution or other immoral purpose

1.

world view



Clause 19: Soliciting in Public



Drive-in Sex Box, Zurich

SEX AND THE CITY



WORKPLACE SAFETY



Prostitution Information Centre, Amsterdam





FREE SEX; PAID SEX



Big Sister, Prague



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Greek brothel revives local football club





**JULIA:
VIOLENT PIMP
NO FREEDOM
30 MEN A DAY
INDEBTED
ENSLAVED**

250,000 Slaves exist in North America,
27 Million worldwide.

thet



20 million women
and children have
been trafficked
into the
global sex trade.

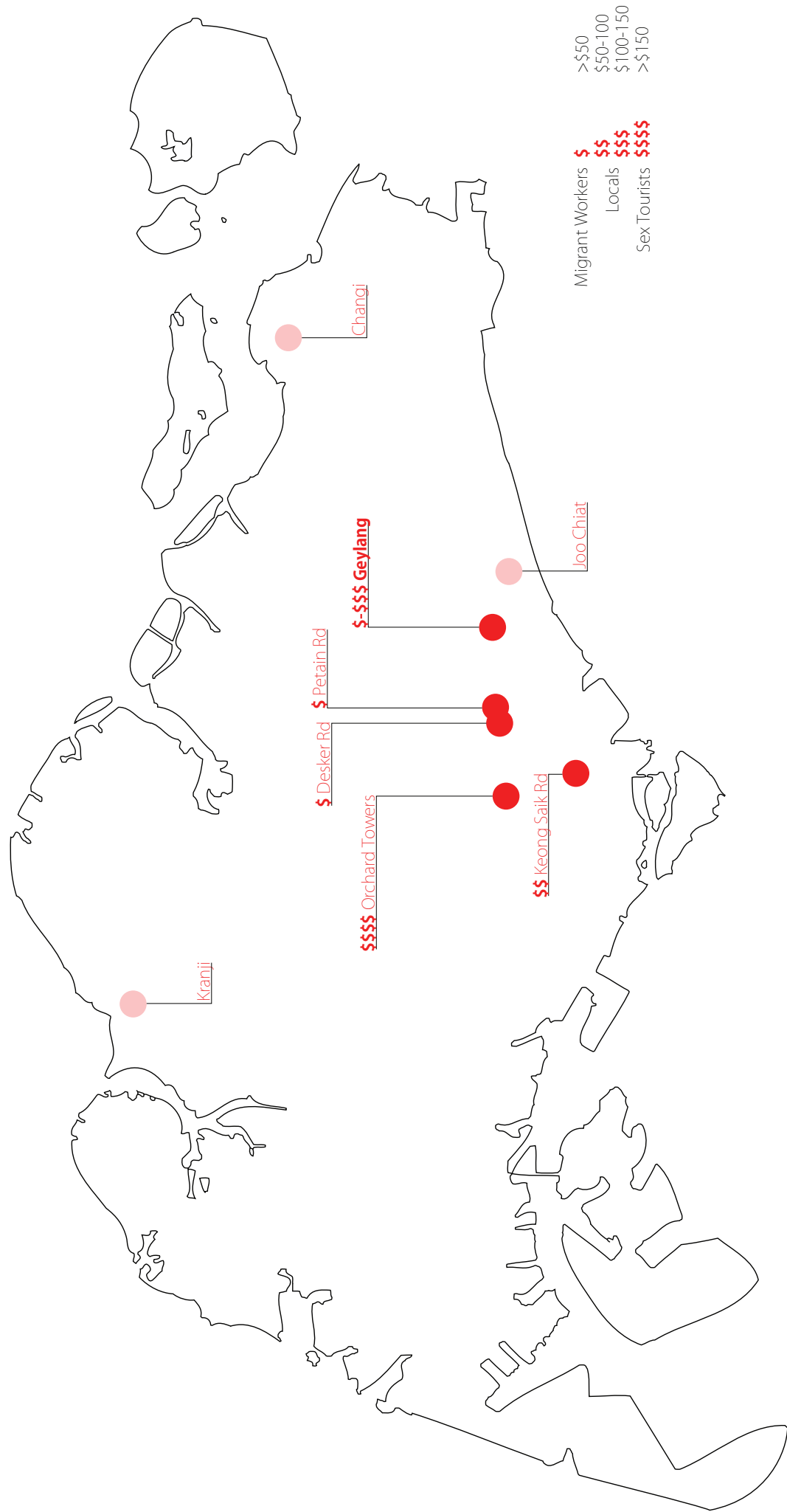
GABRIELA NETWORK
PO BOX 403 Times Square Station, NYC, NY 10036 212.592.3507 nynj@gabnet.org www.gabnet.org

A US-PHILIPPINES women's mass solidarity organization, est. 1989



2.

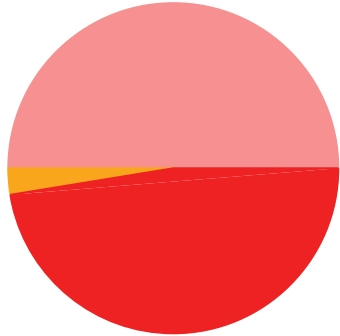
going undercover



Migrant Workers
Locals
Sex Tourists

>\$50
\$50-100
\$100-150
>\$150

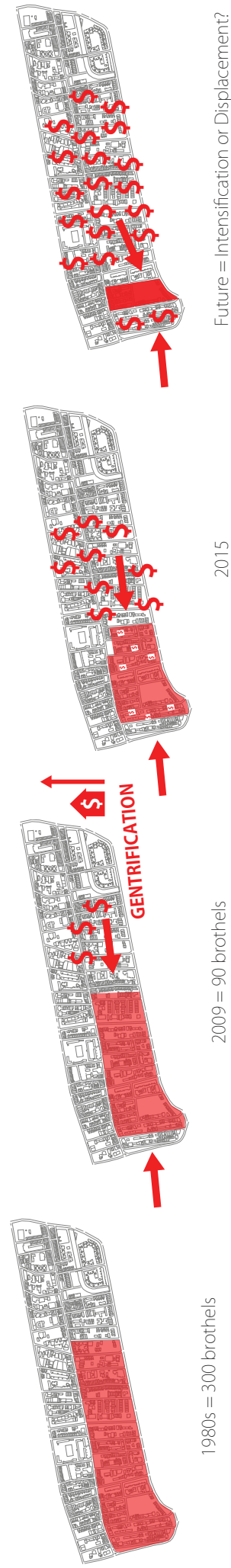
Red light districts in Singapore



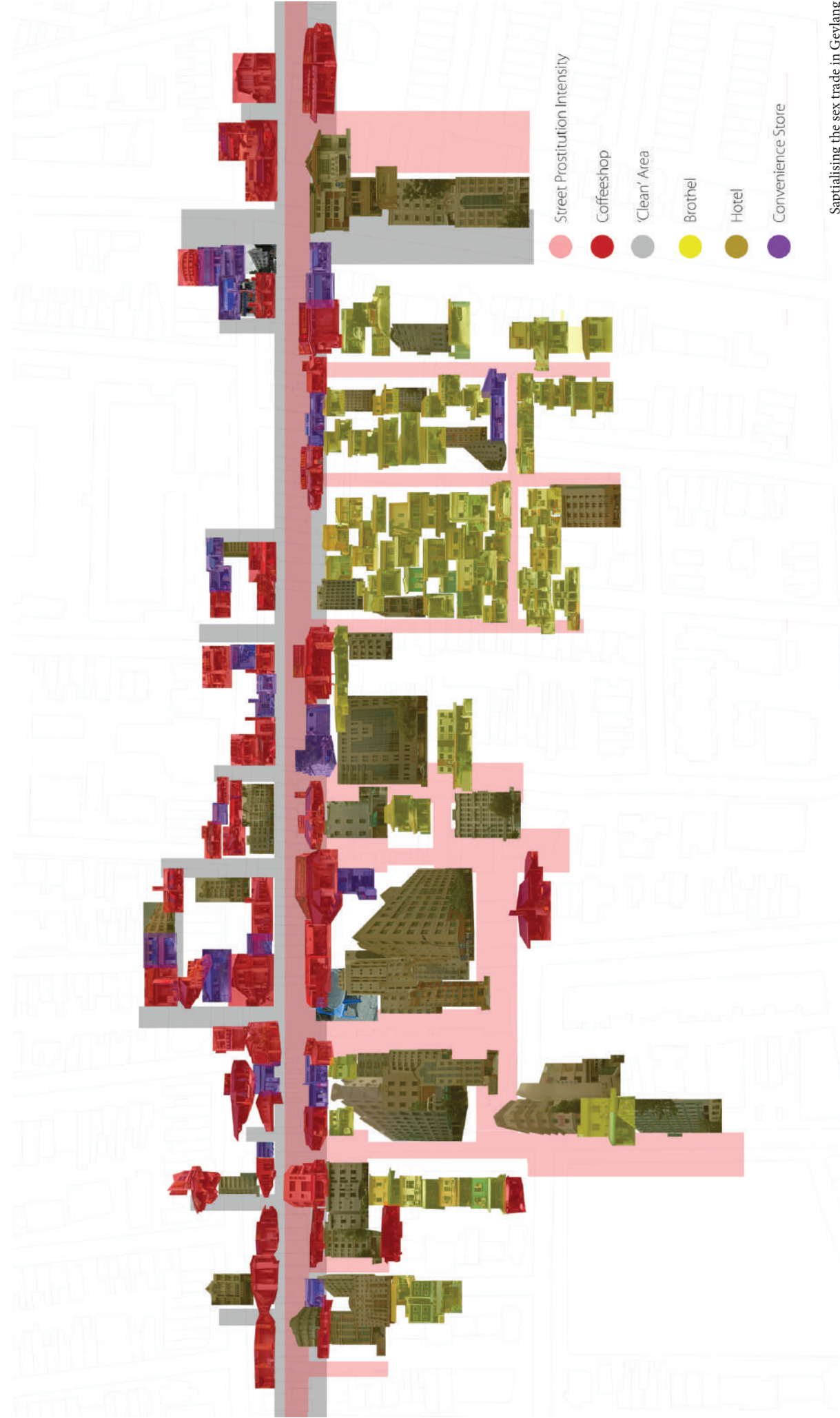
Brothel
Street Prostitution
KTV / Massage Parlour



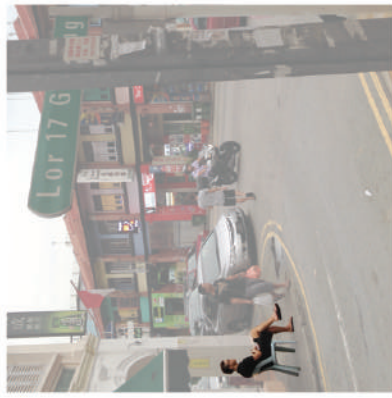
Nighttime Economy



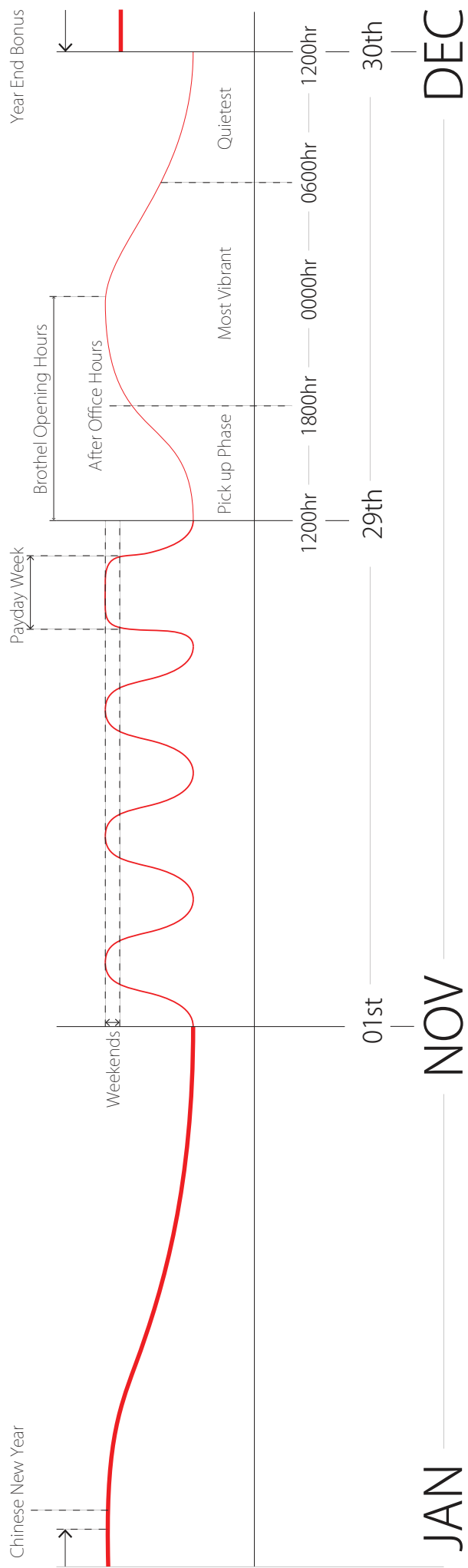
Impact of gentrification on the red light district in Geylang

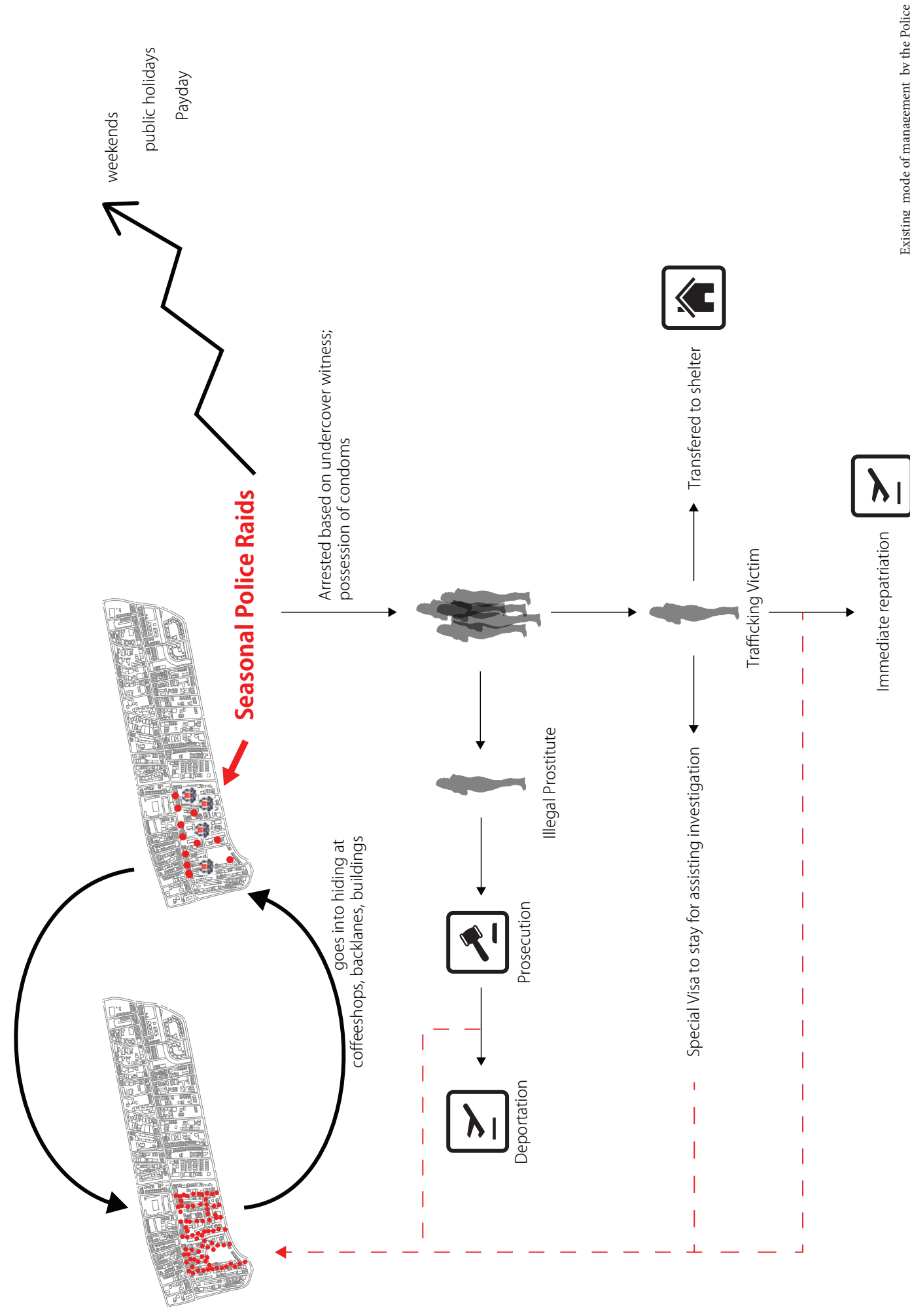
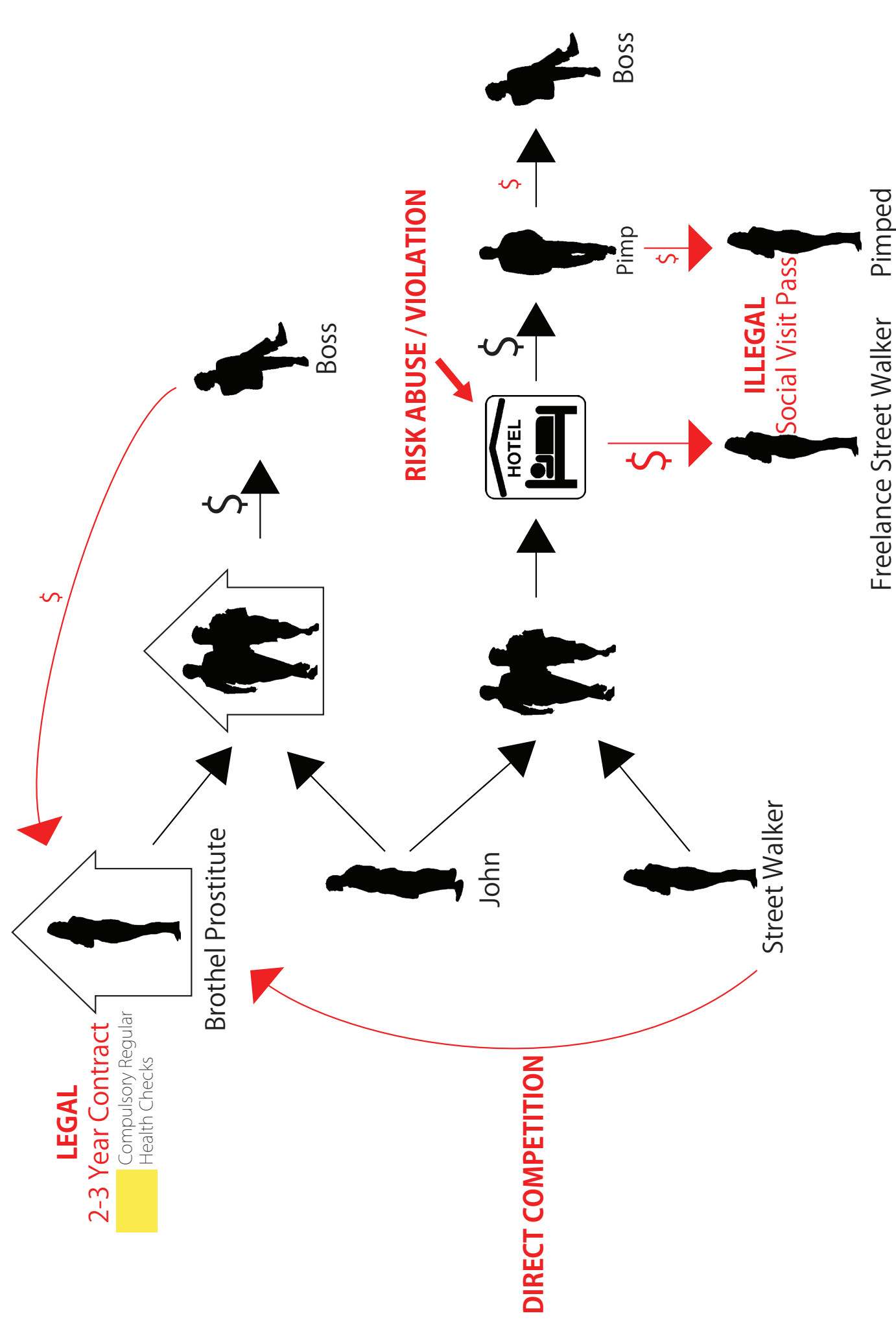


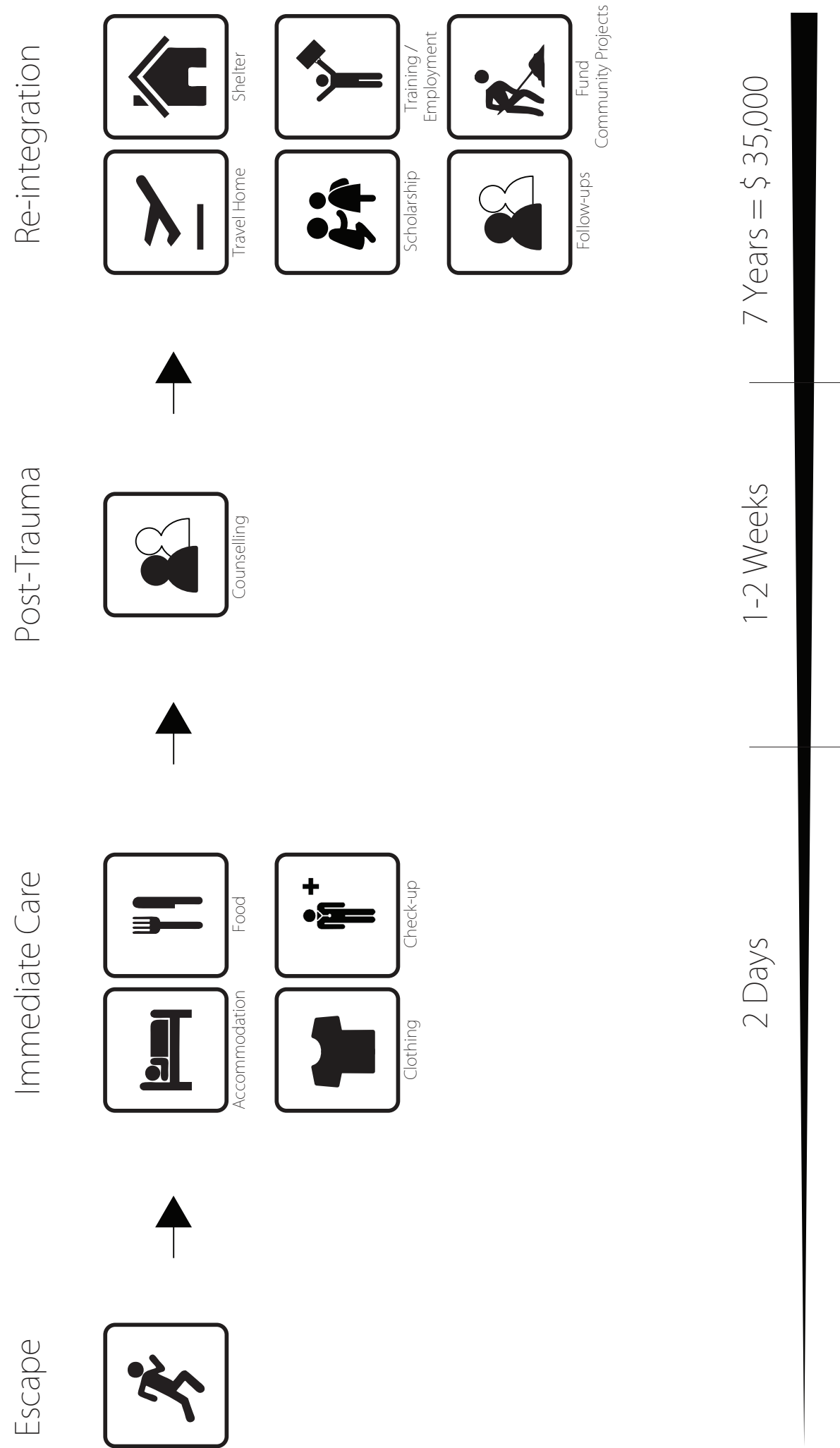
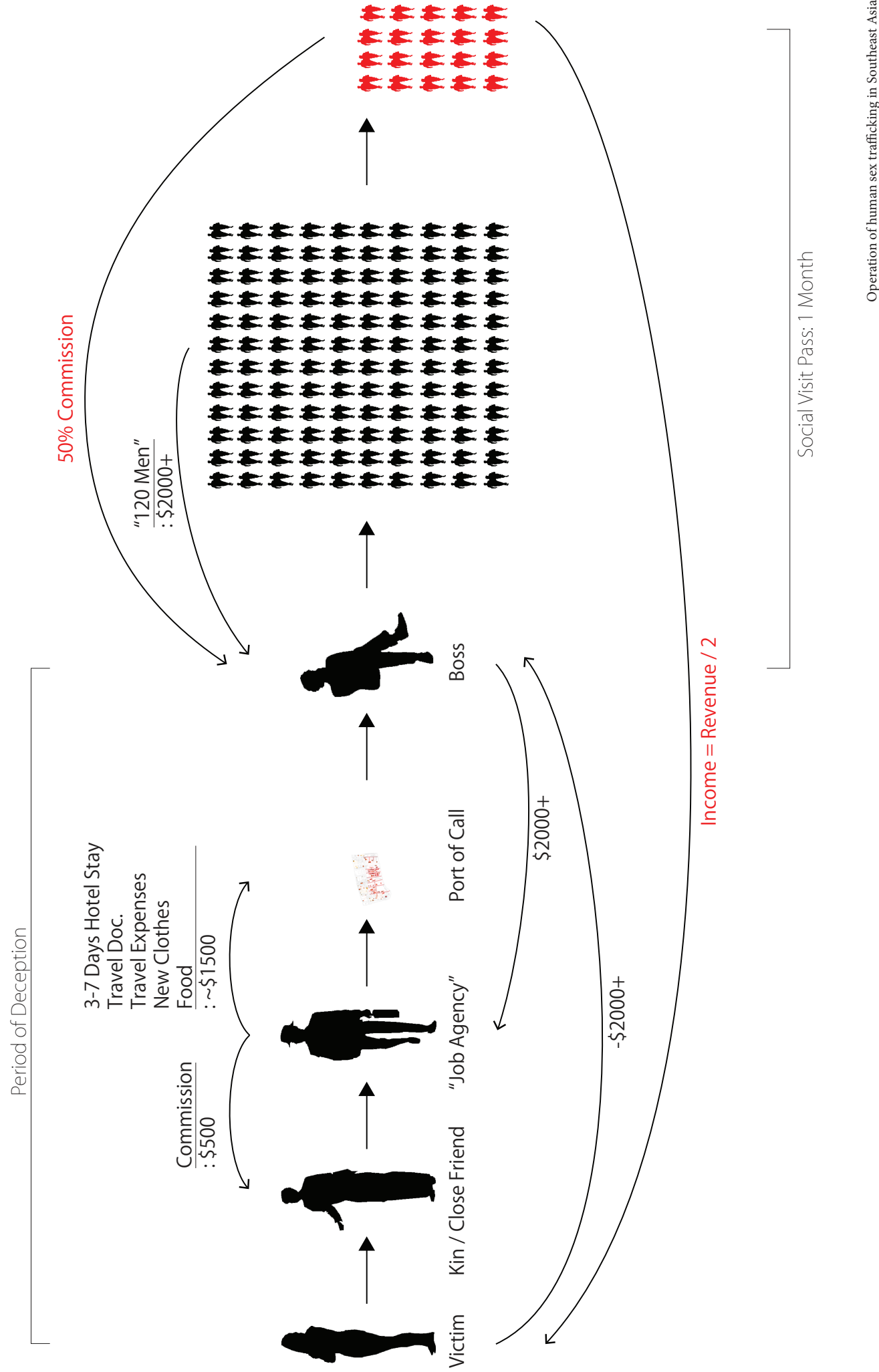
Spatialising the sex trade in Geylang



Communication network of street prostitution

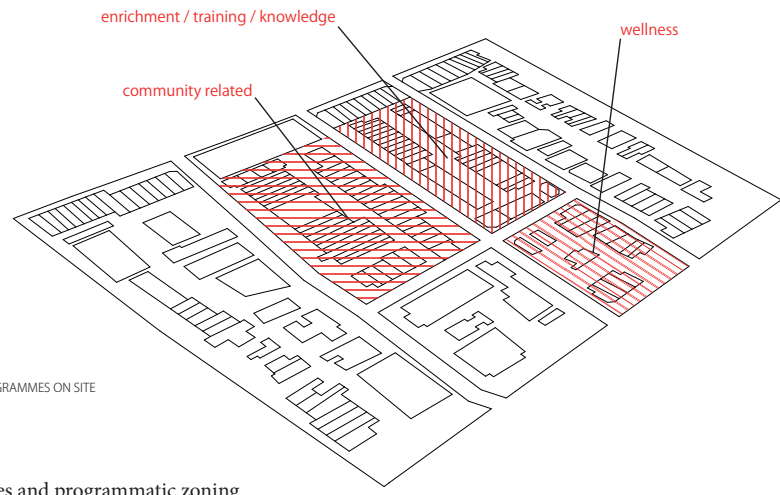
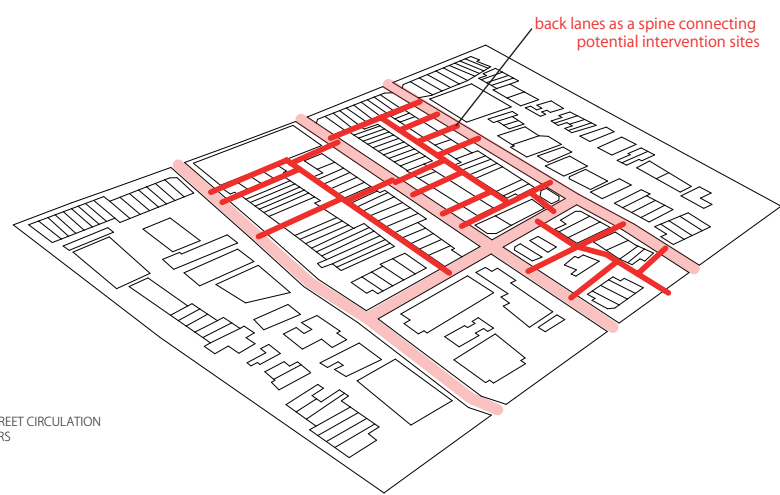
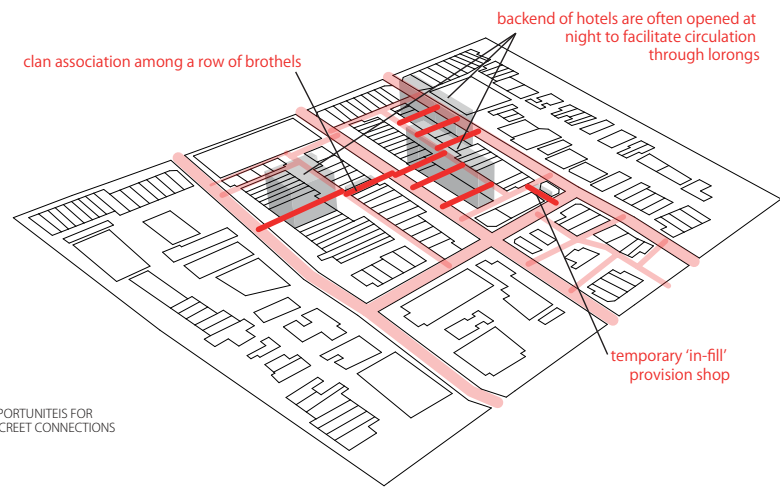
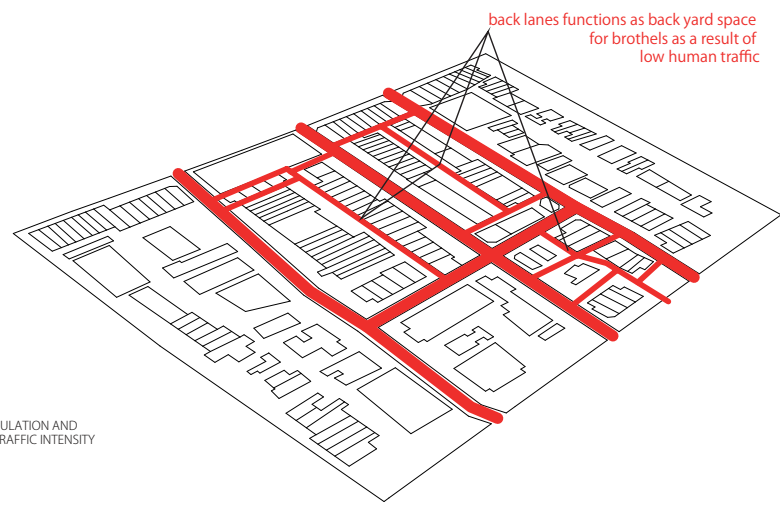




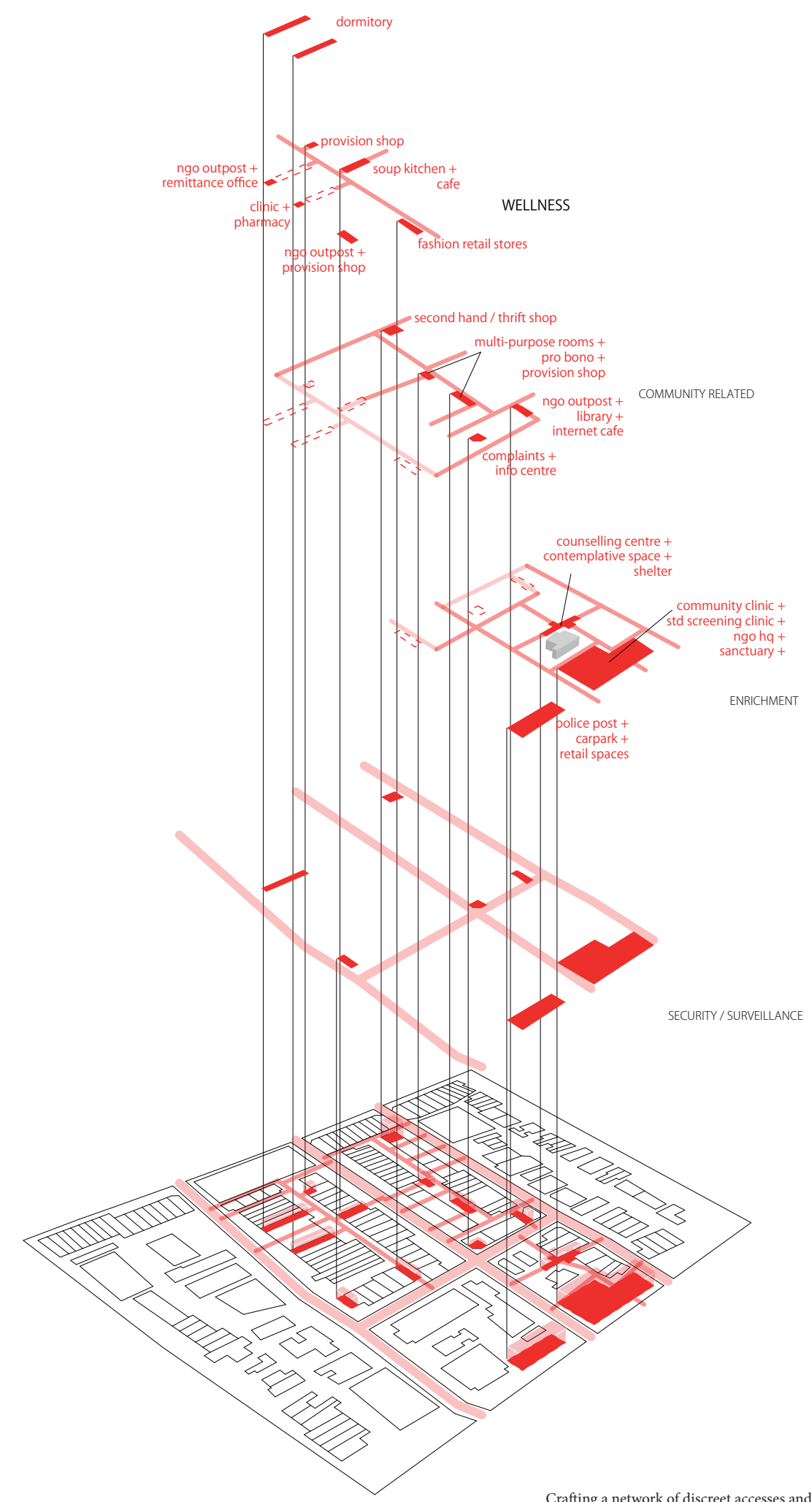


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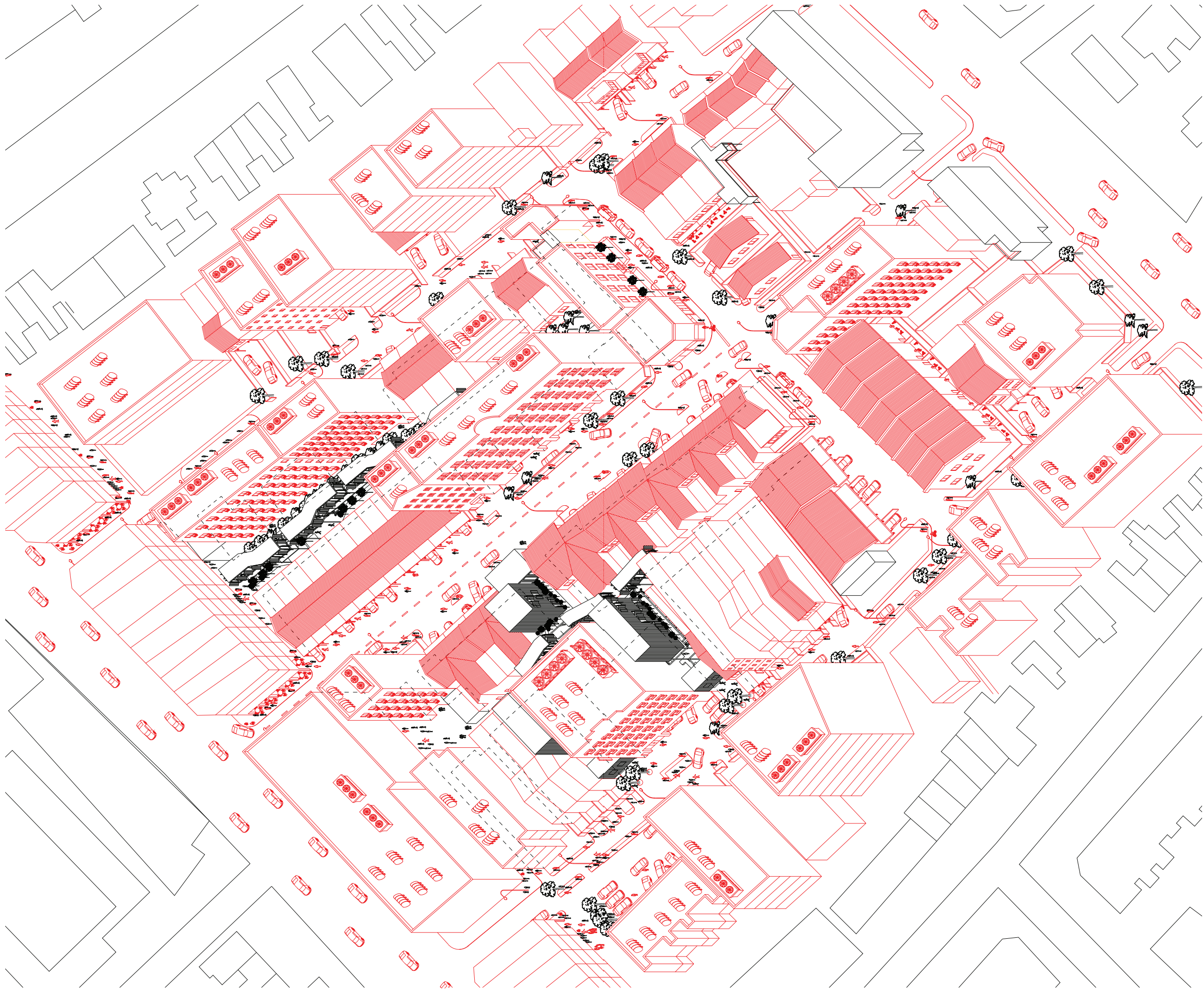
urban strategy



Crafting a network of discreet accesses and programmatic zoning



Crafting a network of discreet accesses and programmatic zoning

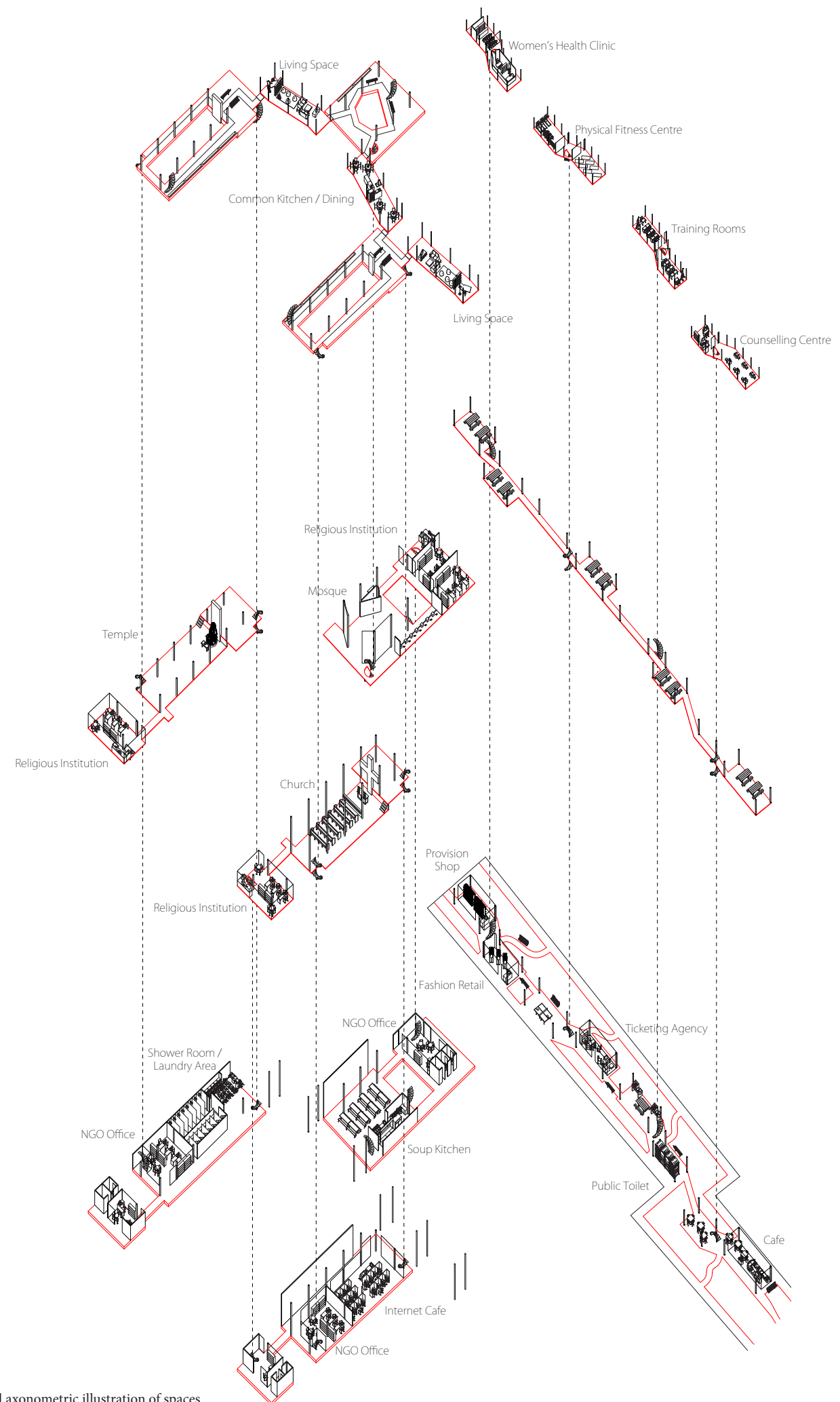


4.

form & function







Exploded axonometric illustration of spaces

This project recognises and is a response to the duality of the character of the sex worker (as both a commodified good, but also as an ordinary human being) by interjecting a relieving 'backstage' geography, which is antithetical to the cold, objectified front streets of Geylang where these women are seen as things to trade. Hence this parallel reality, for the ladies of pleasure plying the sexualised lorongs, where their unmasked, unpretentious private selves could find relief and support in a networked and secure communal setting.



