

FRAMING THE COMMON

THE CASE OF TEHRAN

Monireh Askari, 2015.



COMMON
APARTMENT

THE COMMON APARTMENT

The project in Tehran sets its basis on the current most common form of apartment building in the city. An average-five-storey apartment building that its construction starts from demolition of the existing row-houses (of the 1920s–1980s) and construction of the new Common Apartment.

This process was exaggerated from the post-Iran-Iraq war economic liberalisation policies, starting from 1989 when a free market economy was adopted as key to recover the war damages. Privatization of housing construction resulted in tremendous number of private investors, essentially the common man, engaging with the construction market. Apartment construction became a form of “business”, a safe investment for the citizen.

In such wise, the financial benefit of such construction grew into the most decisive criterion of the architecture of the apartment. Building regulation constraints, somehow, turned into the only determining factor for spatial layout of the “homes”. And the city of Tehran became a field of analogous apartment buildings.

The form of the Common Apartment is not as much defined by schools of thought or alternative political ideologies, as it is by mere regulations. The consequences of this condition is extremely predictable standardized spatial arrangements; simple, yet extreme forms of spaces.

The overly-determined internal space divisions of the apartments, both the privately-

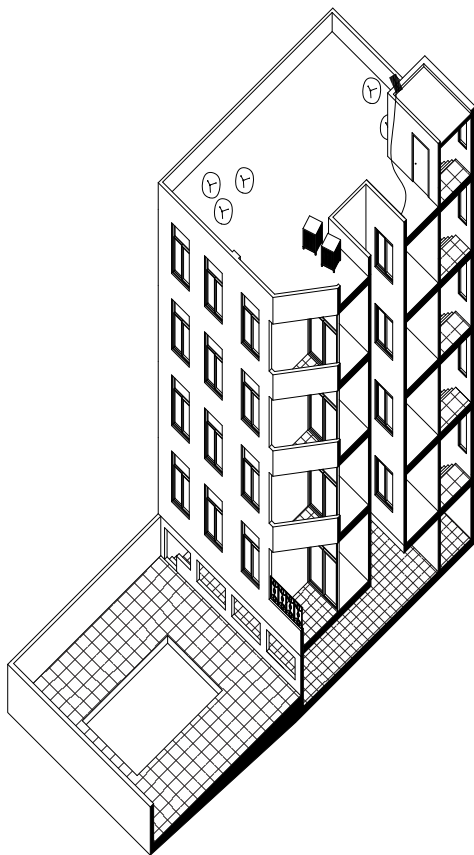
Monireh Askari, 2015.

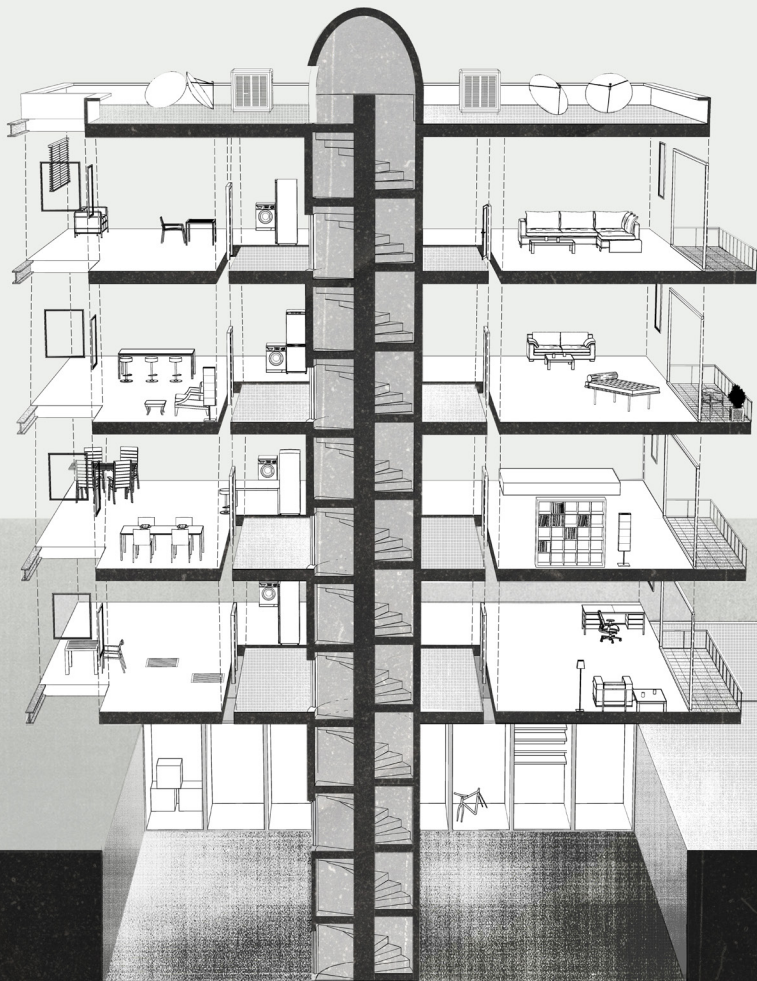


owned units and the commonly-owned share spaces predefines the relation amongst the units and their inhabitants.

The extreme limitations of the width of the corridors, the dimensions of the elevator shaft, of the approved facilities on the rooftop, the location and proportions of the yards, etc. all condition the activities that take place in these spaces.

Based on this reading of the project of housing in Tehran, Mosha proposes to study the Common Apartment through various forms of these shared spaces: “yard” as a project, “entrance” as a project, etc. The projects criticize, re-imagine, and redefine the internal relations of the apartments of Tehran today.





Front: The domestic and the shared spaces of the Common Apartment in Tehran.

The Common Apartment in construction, Monireh Askari, 2015.





PROJECTS

Border of Privacy

A project on the Yard

The front/back yard, referred to as the “outside” of the house, played an essential role in the arrangement of the house. In the best scenario a space of leisure, was once the heart of the household. In the courtyard house of the Qajar period was the core of the everyday performance of life; from storing food, to celebrations and collective activities of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood and the city was formed from the impromptu arrangement of these courtyards.

With modernization and application of the modern modes of ownership, the land of the city was divided by a grid of ownership. The new plot of privately-owned land followed new regulations of construction which put the yard on the one side of the plot. The courtyard house was replaced by smaller rowhouses, whose yards in front or on the back, divided the land into two parts, the built mass and the unbuilt.

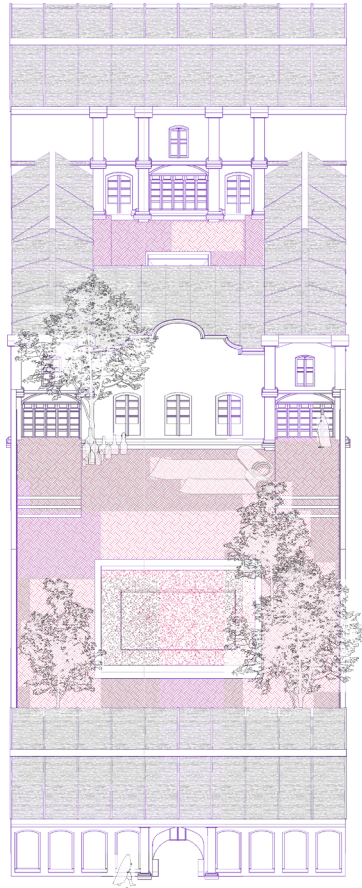
Hence, the relation between the life of the inhabitants, their interior and exterior space transformed. The extended family in the courtyard house, was now separated from one another, housed in several rowhouses. The new front/back yard housed activities of leisure as well as remnants of the previous collective rituals; a space of

cultural conflict and adaptation.

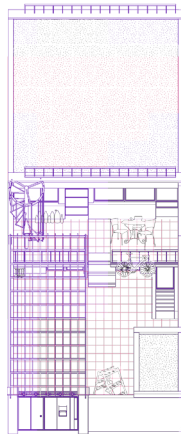
With the adoption of the free market economy and privatization of housing market, and replacement of two-storey rowhouses with five-storey apartments, the yard turned into a space shared by several nuclear family members, the inhabitants. The border of privacy of the home, which was once beyond the neighborhood area, and then extended to the entrance of the rowhouse, now moved to the very door of the apartment unit. This has conditioned many forms of domestic or collective activities be pushed back to the (safe) sphere of the apartment interior; leaving the visible sphere of yards and the balconies all empty.

On the other hand, more recently, some of these activities find refuge in other unused spaces of the apartment that provides the conditions of the former yard; for example the rooftop. It is not immediately visible which provides a certain level of privacy, and houses activities that do not fit the safe place of the house interior; a space of potential.

This project questions the extreme limitation of the plots of ownership, dividing these spaces of potential into separate unrelated compartments. It invites us to imagine the non-existence of the dividing architectural elements, and the connection and relation of the spaces, in the way they would make various forms of (collective) activities possible. It imagines a strategic fundamental investigation in the current divisions of ownership units, that would make possible a larger difference.



Left: Qajar courtyard house.
Middle: Pahlavi row-house
Right: Current common apartment



Collective religious gathering, women
and men both attend. Antoin Sevruguin.
Tehran, Qajar period.



Life in yards, Pahlavi row-house, Tehran, Manoochehr Khaki. Available at: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-bHfC_fN-lqhw/UqM-6iLS23I/AAAAAAAAAQg/Pkp5FzINI_o/s1600/IMG_0005.jpg (accessed September 04, 2015).

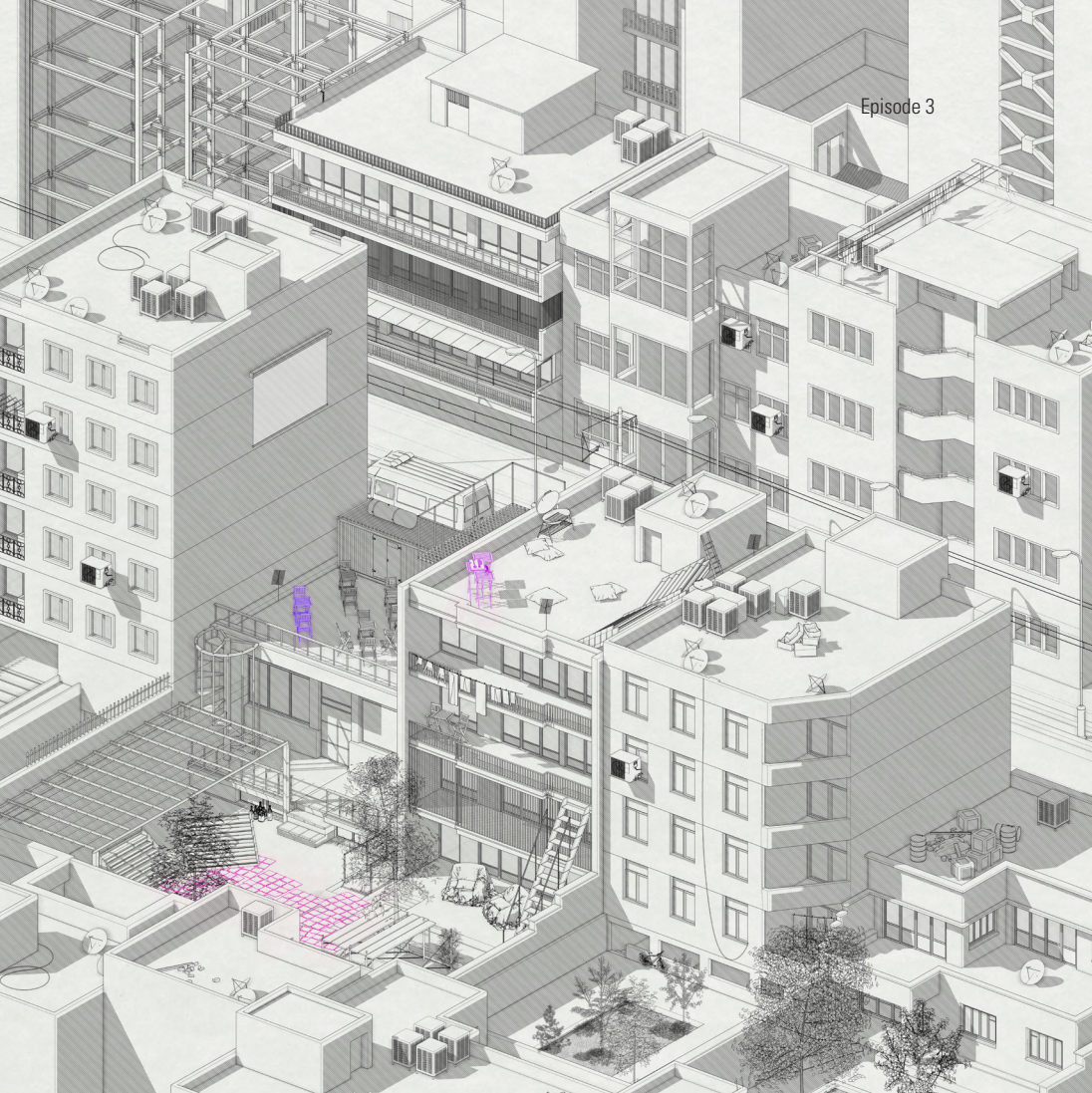




Episode 2

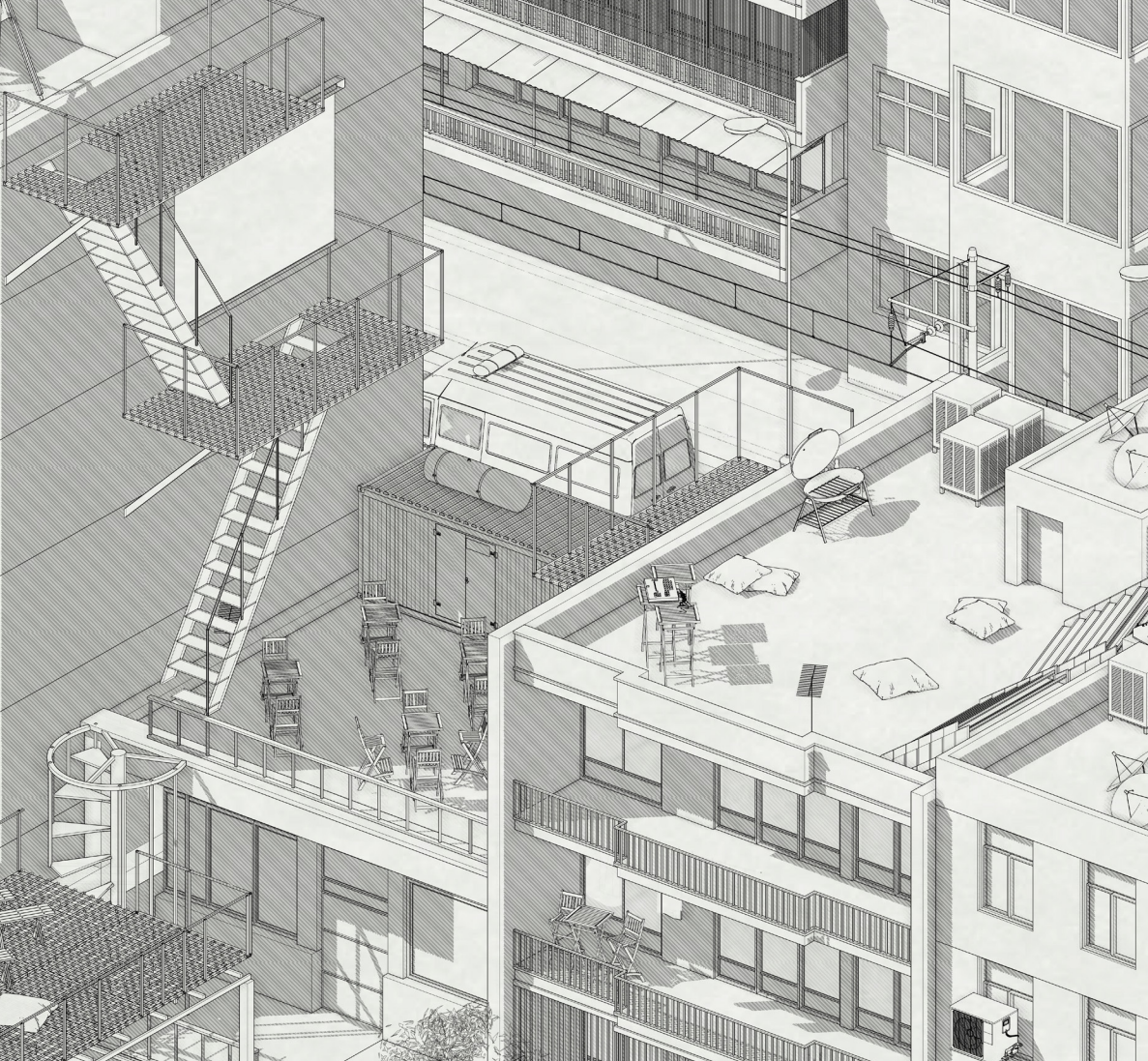


Episode 3



Episode 4





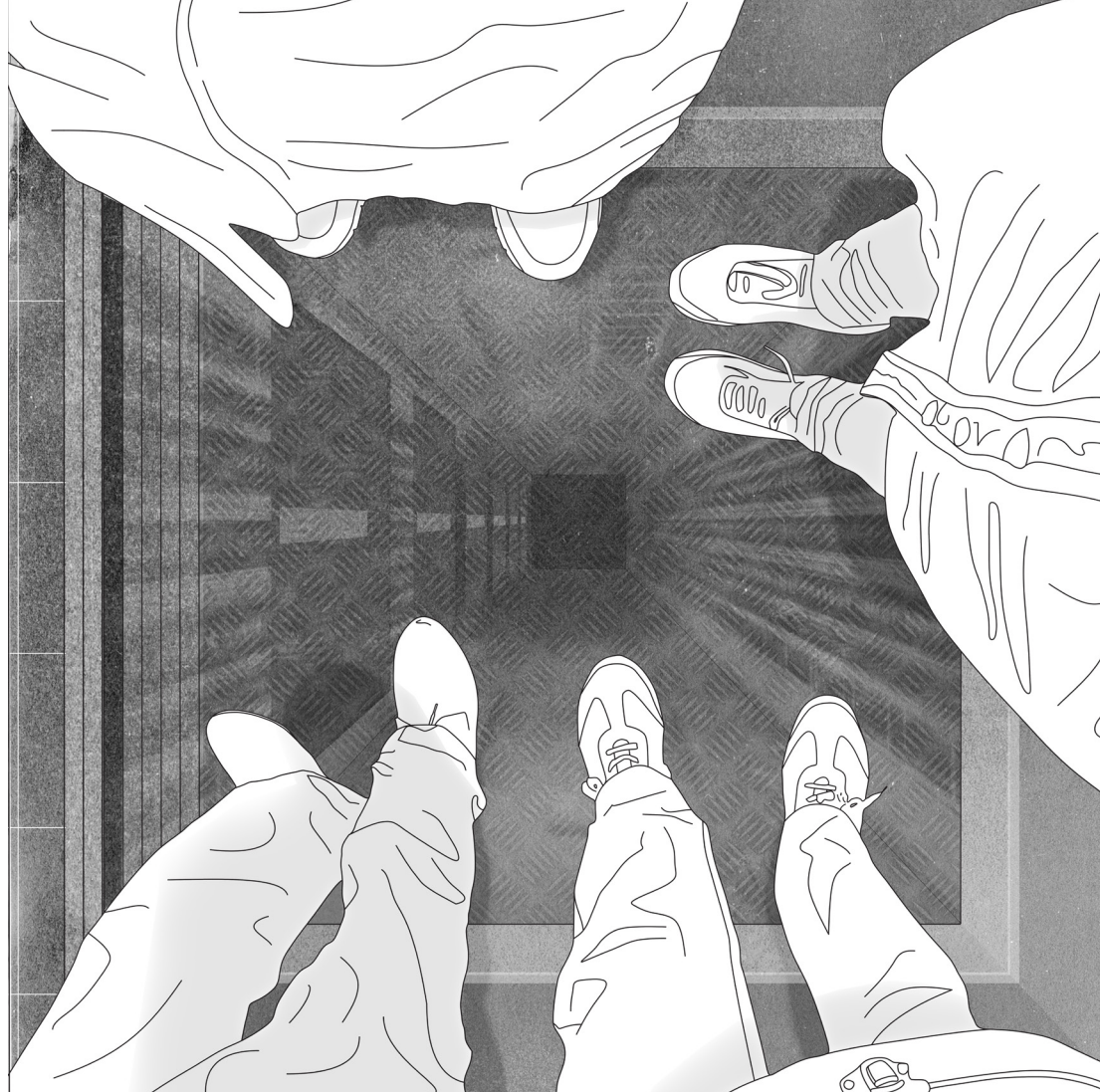


Elevator

The everyday performance of entrance

1.

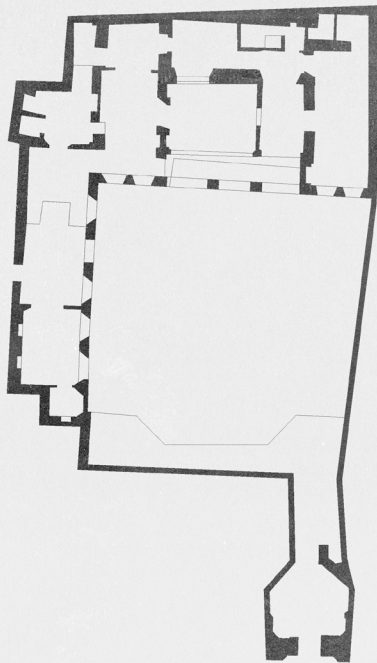
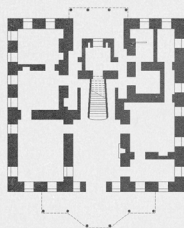
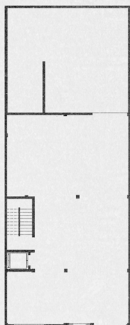
The division of space between the house as the institution of family and the outside world is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental aspects of traditional Iranian houses. Almost all pre-modern residential houses built in Iran, was composed of two major spaces: a semi-public space known as exterior “biruni”, and living spaces for all close (mahram) relatives, who are allowed to see female member unveiled, known as interior “andaruni” (Haeri and Elr, 2012). Due to sacred importance of private domain of house, entrance (both physical and visual) was always controlled and limited through a series of transitional structures that identifies a unique life pattern as well as the ideological context of housing in Iran. Entering to a house started from the outside through a narrow line and followed by several specified units inside : Paakhoreh, sar-dar, entrance door, Hashti, Dalaan, Miansara, and etc. In the line toward modernisation, starting from Qajar era (1785-1925), new patterns of housing emerged in which, control of entry was followed through the maximum manipulation of space and minimum actual checkpoint structure. Today, in modern vertical residential buildings, new elements toward division of space have been introduced with a set of techniques and institutions for training, controlling and regulating of individuals, in which the body is subjected continuously.



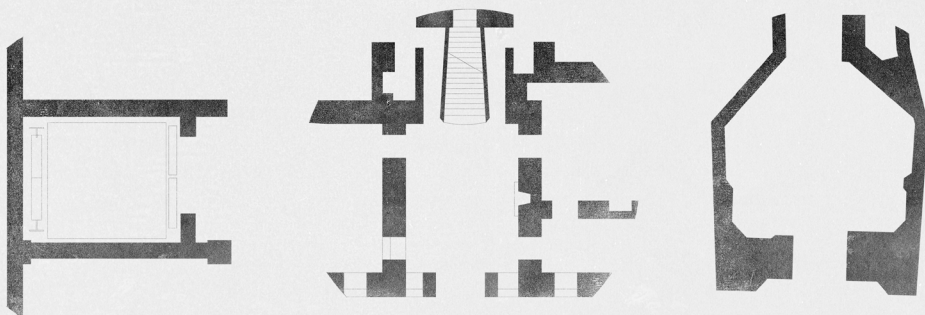
2. Hashti and Sarsara

Hashti has a clearly defined function as an entranceway in Iranian traditional houses. After the main doorway, a small enclosed vestibule links the outside world to the private dwellings. Built in different shapes of octagonal, hexagonal or square with low ceiling and dim light, Hashti as a waiting room distributes and controls both physical and visual access to the private domain of house. After one passes the doorway, she/he has to pause in Hashti till the house owner arrives giving the permission to enter or having a short interaction in this place. In addition, when someone wants to give a news, or talk with the residents without entering the private zone, has to stay in Hashti on the demand for privacy.

Sarsara is a small entry area inside the house by the front door. This space connects the entrance room to the main halls through a staircase. Starting from 18th century, Sarsara came into view mainly in royal palaces and mansions. Extreme manipulation of environment; decorations and furnitures in these entranceways conveyed a power image and great impression on guests waiting or passing through. However, Sarsara is not only a transitional space, it has a unique form which offers inhabitants a visual control of entrance hall from the upper floor. As such, Sarsara serves as a backdrop or stage set with a focal point on the entry and people in this space. Family as observer or spectator can have visual supervision on this vibrant performance space, while guests as players are just the subject of visual control.



Right to Left:
Common Apartment, Tehran.
Sardar Asad House, Ghajar, Tehran.
Savojbolaghi House, First Pahlavi, Tabriz.

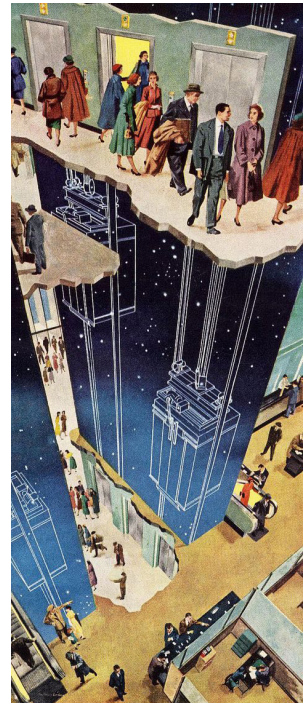
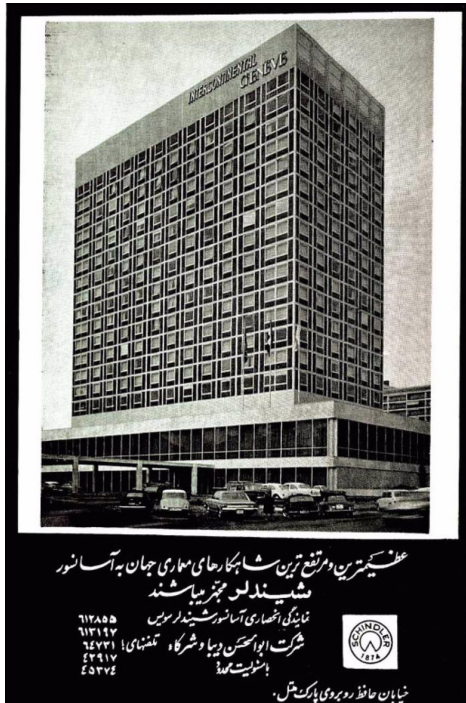


3. Elevator

The Asch conformity experiments are a series of studies conducted by social psychologist Solomon Eliot Asch in the 1950s. Among them is a famous elevator experiment, which was reconstructed as a part of a Candid Camera episode titled "Face the Rear." The original clip shows a group of confederate supporters and an individual entering into a simulated elevator environment. The confederates direct their bodies and gestures in similar positions, making the individual passenger confused about how to react further. As it turns out, the authority of the group influences the individual test subject to comply with the majority. "Apparently, people conform for two main reasons: because they want to fit in with the group (normative influence) and because they believe the group is better informed than they are (informational influence)" (McLeod, 2008). The Asch conformity experiment, therefore, demonstrates the social process of normalisation through which actions and gestures come to be seen as standard and become taken-for-granted or "natural" in daily life. Force is not used here to constrain the citizen to good behaviour. Normalisation is one disciplinary technique in exerting social control with the minimum expenditure of force and punishment on the actual bodies. The disciplinary institution could be so smooth in this regard.

Left: Schindler Elevator Ad in Iran. Honar-va-Memari Magazine, 1970. volume (6-7), pp. 214.
 Right: Otis Elevator Ad. "The tenants think it's

wonderful", 1952. <<http://rogerwilkerson.tumblr.com/post/66312570479/1952-otis-elevator>> [Accessed April 2, 2016].



4.

The conformity paradigm is always around us in a variety of routine circumstances, while we train, manipulate and adjust our behaviour, opinion and gestures to obey and coincide with the norms. The elevator riding is one of the typical situation in this regard, that body is subjected to the disciplinary power. The behaviour of people inside an elevator is pretty unique, but also pretty standard. Passengers usually conform to the etiquette of taking an elevator without knowing why and how they behave in these certain ways. The everyday practice of elevator riding consists of several social scripts. The first one is the rational decision making between the elevator and the stairs. A list of indicators would influence this decision, for instance: the length of distance, the direction towards up or down, the number of fellows, travel comfort, optical or acoustical signs on the monitor platform and the physical condition of users. These factors are mainly dependent on the time investment and the aptitude of speed and efficiency. The next concern when entering into an automatic vehicle is precise timing, meaning "adjustment of the motoricity of the body to the motoricity of the automaton", as Hirschauer (2005) cites. The regulation of "turn" is the next consideration that people have to be aware of when they get in. The priority of entrance depends on a series of factors. For example, parents with strollers and seniors take precedence. It is important to note that the priority of entrance is based on social niceties and the moral concerns of dealing with the time resources of others. As such, a latecomer who is successfully reopens the already closed door steps into the cage as if expecting punishment for stealing time.

Candid Camera, "Face the Rear". Filmed [1962].
YouTube video, 2:31. Posted by Prudential [May,
2013].< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgRoiTWk-BHU>> [Accessed March 29, 2016].



5.

The moment of entering the cell can be considered as the most awkward part of the experience of taking an elevator due to a quick reversal of roles: turning fellow elevator riders from outsiders to intimates. The forced closeness of elevator travel breaks down the boundaries we all have to create in our lives. If someone else comes in, the single passenger has to move to keep the maximal distance and to protect his/her personal space. The standing position, therefore, relies on two important factors: protecting personal distance and allocating enough space to other passengers. Discipline inside the elevator proceeds from the distribution of bodies through the space. The standing order in the elevator's room depends on the selection of the first individual. So, only the first passenger has the power of choice and latecomers can only take other unoccupied spaces. As such, the pattern of distribution and spatial arrangement of bodies are followed by others as moves in a chess game. And here, it has been observed that elevator travellers unthinkingly go through a set pattern of movements, as predetermined as those in a square dance (Kremer, 2012). Kremer explains "square dance," as being:

"On your own, you can do whatever you want—it's your own little box. If there are two of you, you take different corners. Standing diagonally across from each other creates the greatest distance. When a third person enters, you will unconsciously form a triangle [...]. And when there is a fourth person it's a square, with someone in every corner. A fifth person is probably going to have to stand in the middle".

Alishiri, Mohsen, 2015. Tehran, Iran.



6.

The disciplinary technique of the elevator is one that, “individualises bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations.” (Foucault, 1977). In spite of the cellular form of the elevator’s cabin, its different sections can affect the pattern or standing order of one single user as well. As Hirschauer (2005) explains: standing in the back offers the best visual control of the entrance, leaning against walls gives backing, protection from some views and marking one side of a territory, stopping by the door ensure the exit for short distant travellers, “otherwise they are avoided, the same place in the middle, since they are in the way of people going in and out, and of gazes directed toward the doors”. In addition, a clear social order could be seen regarding where people stand and also interact with mirror and platform. According to an ethno-graphical elevator survey in two office towers in Adelaide, Australia by Rousi, 2013, senior men direct themselves toward the back, while younger men seem to prefer standing in the middle. Women of all ages take up the front space close to the door. Rousi finds that men in particular look in the mirrors to see themselves as well as others. Women would watch the monitors and escape from eye contact with other passengers. She also noticed that women look at mirrors only when they are with other female passengers. One interviewee mentions that she only looks in the mirror when there was no one else in the cabin.

Personal archive of the author, 2016.

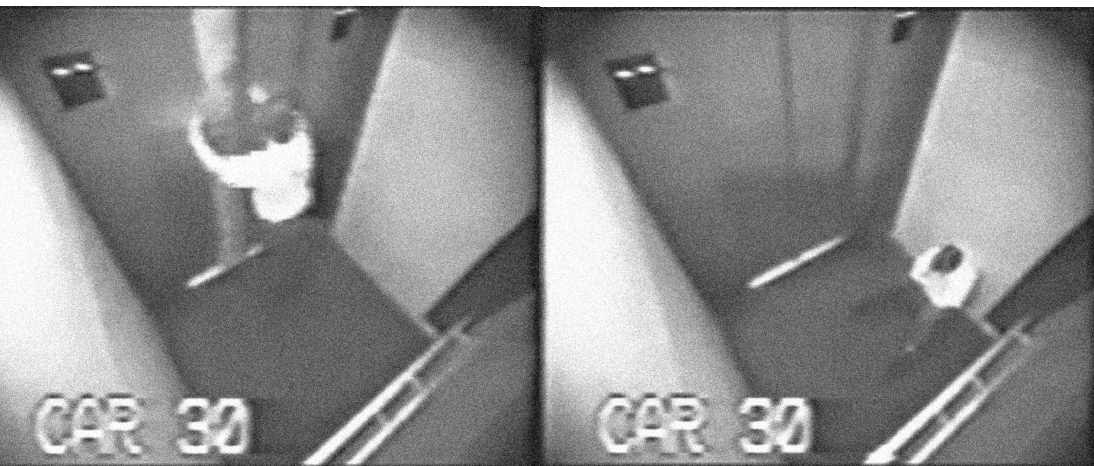


7.

The spatial distribution of bodies does not seem the biggest challenge of elevator rides. Nothing needs so much space in elevators as looks do (Hirschauer, 2005). Glances are objects in the elevator that need to be placed like bodies. The eyes are usually considered to be the principal means by which we gather information (Hall, 1966). However, people should not overlook the complexity of functions of the look besides conveying information, which can also punish, encourage or establish dominance, as Hall cites. The visual organisation of space in the elevator is the way that passengers try to avoid facing each other. Thus, they direct bodies and looks toward the door or the floor indicator. Besides, elevator riders define a certain up-flight path for their looks to avoid simultaneous looking, as Hirschauer (2005) claims. According to him, the only moment that a “license to glance” would be issued is when an outsider gets in, and becomes an eye-catcher for all intimates inside the elevator. But, the outsider does not remain the only subject of looks, s(he) has the chance to catch a glimpse of the fellows in order to find a place to stand. This system of visual order works when the number of passengers is limited.

8.

Talking and hearing in elevators can be considered both as an opportunity and an obligation. Nevertheless, in a setting which is so inimical to conversation, there are some well-defined opportunities for talking, which at the same time illustrate the structural restrictions elevators set for their unfolding (Hirschauer, 2005). Elevator fellows have several avoidance techniques to escape from unwanted elevator interactions: showing busy themselves with their smartphone, refraining from eye contact, and communicating with body language to express the lack of interest for both verbal and visual communication. In spite of the avoidance techniques, all elevator riders have the experience of being faced with the continued conversation of outsiders who enter into the lift without stopping their talk, or of getting in the cabin while intimates are in a conversation. The continuation of the talk depends on some factors, such as the privacy of the topic, or the power of parties involved in the conversation (whether there is one speaker and a silent majority, or vice versa). As mentioned before, the most important concern in elevator taking is timing. If somebody starts a chat, s(he) should be able to end it before the exit door opens.



The New Yorker. "Footage of a Man Who Spent Forty-One Hours Trapped in an Elevator". Filmed [1999]. YouTube video, 3:10. Posted [April, 2008]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_bMhNI_TY8>. [Accessed Feb 29, 2016].



9.

Elevator music (also known as Muzak) is another fascinating subject here to understand how a simple manipulation of environment is supposed to get people to be more in concordant with the requirement of the cell. Muzak was among the first productivity aids of the modern era, and probably the first step into the annoying world of sensory marketing (Baumgarten, 2012). After the World War II, muzak became more famous in the industrial production section, as researchers made a surprising discovery that muzak, due to its "stimulus progression that offered 15-minute blocks of instrumental background music that provided listeners with a subconscious sense of forward movement, could apparently make workers happier and more productive" (Trex, 2011). In addition, this music, often instrumental, is commonly played in public spaces: shopping malls, hospitals, airports, and etc. Then, people have its melody in their auditory memory and feel better to tolerate the condition of being in the cell. Muzak is not very commonplace nowadays, perhaps, because of the acceptance of this machine in current urban life. Getting out of an elevator is accomplished in a concerted action of moving apart; one could also call it "standing easy" (Hirschauer, 2005). As soon as the machine brakes, passengers look for ways of getting out. Lanes are formed for people who want to find their way out, before the door closes. Here again, the timing of these practices is considerable. People have to get out at the right time; it is "a correct use of the body, which makes a correct use of time" (Foucault, 1977).

10.

Despite the mentioned universal scripts of the elevator, this complex space remains

as a revealing apparatus to identify local practices. Conformity and obedience are not universal attribute, instead they fluctuate in different historical, social and cultural settings. A well-disciplined elevator rider has to conform to the specific norms that each society asks for. In Iran, for instance, people usually consider the dress code. The elevator, therefore, is not only a vertical transformation mode, but also it is a complex space with constant division between the normal and abnormal, to which each individual is subjected. The existence of a set of techniques and institutions for controlling, regulating and manipulating the abnormal brings into play a modern disciplinary mechanism, in which bodies are supervised constantly by themselves, instead of the state; a conscious and permanent visibility that assure the automatic functioning of power with the minimum expenditure of force. In short, the disciplinary power in the elevator has its own principles in a certain spatial partitioning of individuals, space, architectural features, gazes, sounds, in an arrangement whose this mechanism produces docile bodies.

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Constant Theatre of Everyday Life

A Project on the balcony

Privacy, the product of norms and legal definitions, and the constant affirmation of the status quo, is historically a contingent concept. Its establishment as one side in the private/public dichotomy, is entangled with the emergence of the binaries of public space and private space, or private and public ownership in the city; with the emergence of the *facade* of the house.

However, these two concepts do not exhaust the totality of our available space. There are intermediary spaces that have a transitional status. They are not within the span of our complete private property rights, and yet they do not entirely belong to the public realm. Balconies are one of the paradigms of these in-between spaces, in spite of all the architectural obsessions for their design.

The paradox lies in their simultaneity of being both inside and outside; they belong to the individual owner, and yet they are others' to observe; as if stages, scenes, except there is no fixed audience.

The peculiar position of the balcony, half-way between the serene private and the

exposed public sphere, turns them into a focal point. Balconies can be a spotlight one gets, just by standing there; on the obtrusive body jutting out from the facade standing on “high grounds” to make them even more conspicuous.

They are designed to be dramatic, yet in the mass-production of apartments today, they have turned into nothing but ironically conditioned spaces. No longer spaces of potential visibility, but simply projections of our privacy into the precarious public territories; a public sphere not home to spectators of our stories anymore, but threats to our privacy. They are at best a distorted reality, a place wherein no specific act is expected to happen. A haven of irrelevancies.

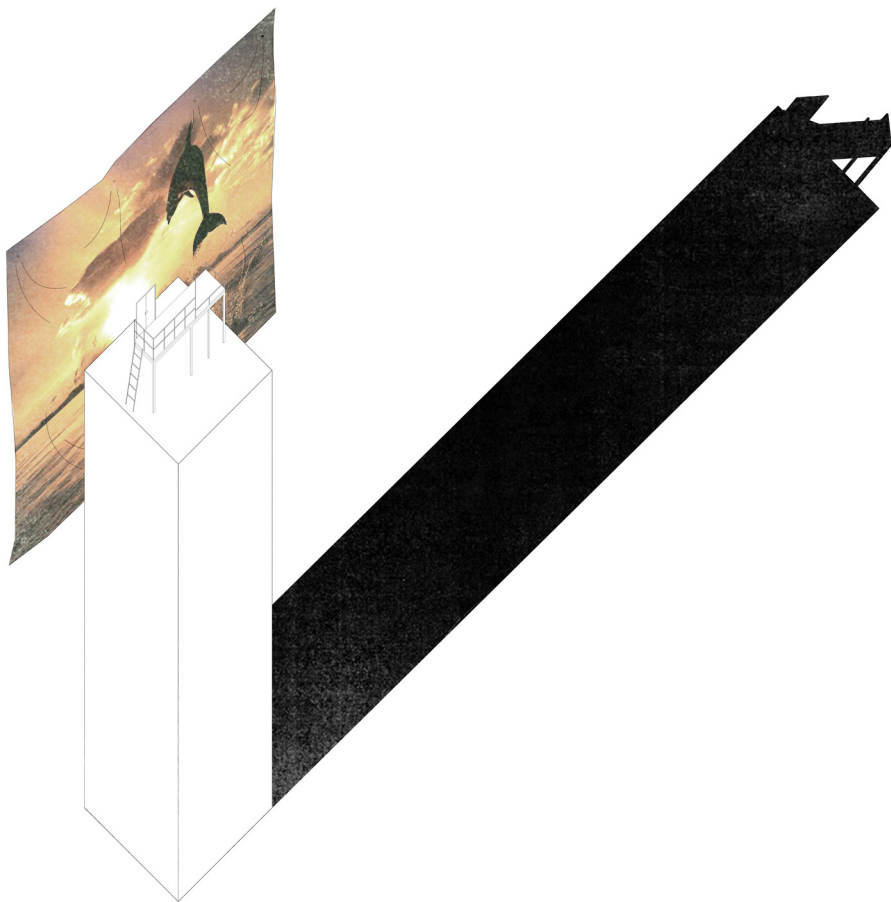
Balcony in Tehran, author's personal archive, 2015.





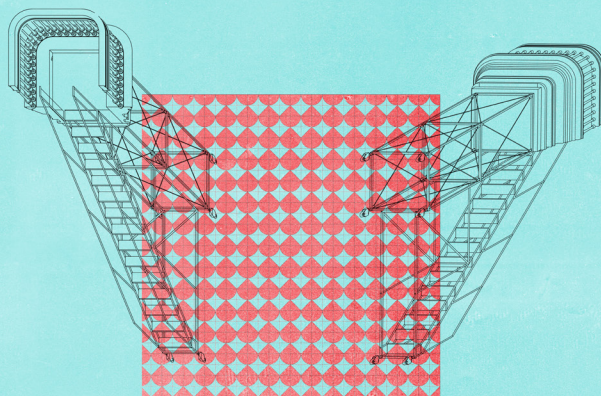
Romeo and Juliet, the balcony scene, Ford Madox Brown, 1870.

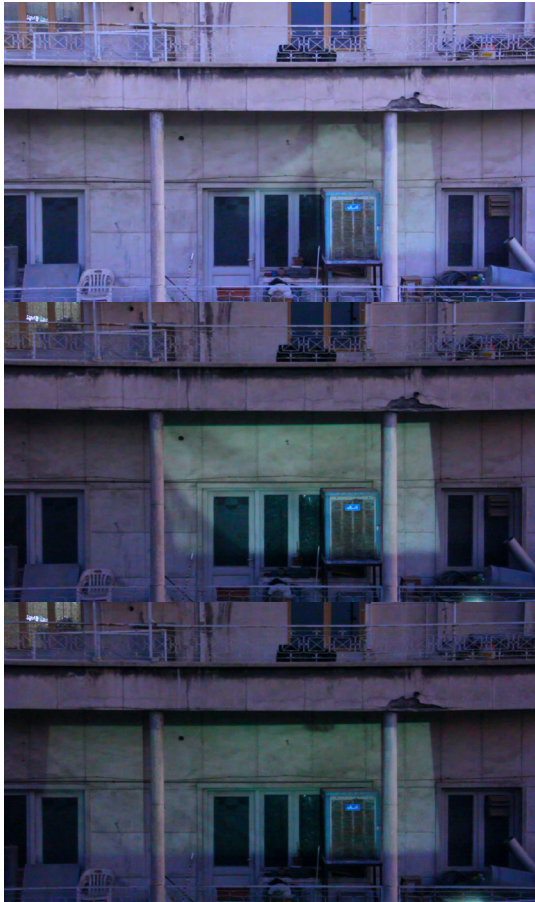


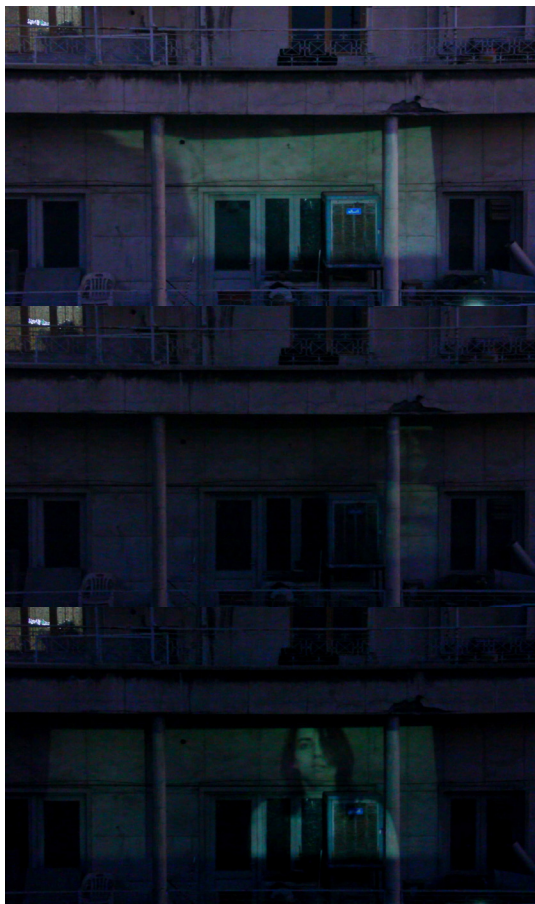


A Romanian public television employee jumps off Parliament Hall's balcony, to protest the government's austerity drive in Bucharest, Dec 23, 2010.









City Nomads

Re-defining shared spaces of the apartment for the precarious worker

A noticeable number of people in metropolitan Tehran live nomadic forms of life. Nomadic life, however, has a history with different definitions of nomadicism as well as its spatial needs, in Iran. It starts with the Caravan, a group travel whose time contains weeks to years, and their transportation vehicle animals; Caravanserais was a form of minimum space outside cities for temporary stay of Caravans. The courtyard was the place in which social and collective interactions took place. Later, with industrialization and the shift in travel means, mass production of everyday objects and introduction of modern forms of living, the first lodging houses emerged. The spatial arrangement of this spaces was temporary living units connected by narrow corridors; and absence of any common space eliminated the possibility of collective or social activity.

Today, again, with the emergence of precarious nomadic forms of work the concept of nomadic life has been pushed to new extremes. Extremes that work closely with the notion of time and technology, but also its spatial implication.

The nomadic worker of today lives either in dormitories, or shares the spaces within

houses made initially for the nuclear family. It is a subject not imagined in the scope of housing construction, as not considered a major form of living; it remains a subject to be addressed through architectural means.

This project investigates this subject through redefining the relation of privately-owned and commonly-owned spaces of the Common Apartment today. It proposes a series of minimum living units, taking temporariness and low-budget rent as a criteria, and dedicated the large amount of remaining commonly-owned space as a form of shared space. A plain space with basic facilities that could potentially house collective activities based on sharing, communing, or commoning.

Minimum living, Amir Salmani, Tehran, 2016.

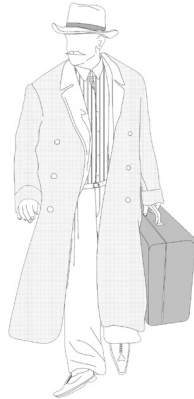


Minimum living, Amir Salmane, Tehran, 2016.





1. Pre-modern nomadic subject: Caravan-man travels months and years, and stays in Caravanserais; he moves with all of his belongings: his transporting animal, food and water resources, merchandise, etc.



2. Early modernization nomadic subject: In the industrialized Tehran, Luggage-man's belongings accommodate one suitcase. His travel time is reduced and stays temporarily in lodging houses.

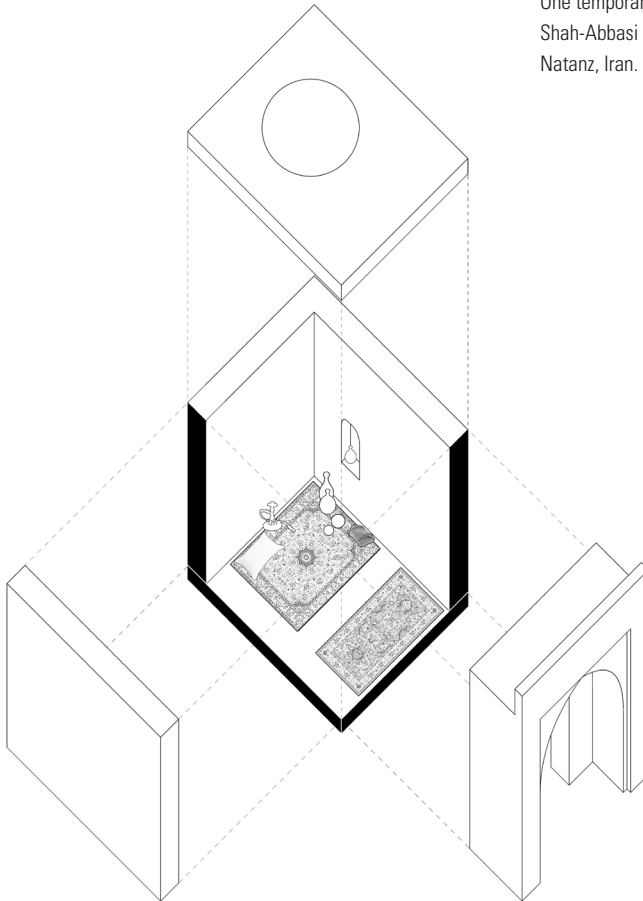


3. Today: Iphone-man's belongings of life and work minimized: smart phone, laptop and tablet. Traveling is part of his daily life, he is in a constant condition of moving within his city of residence.

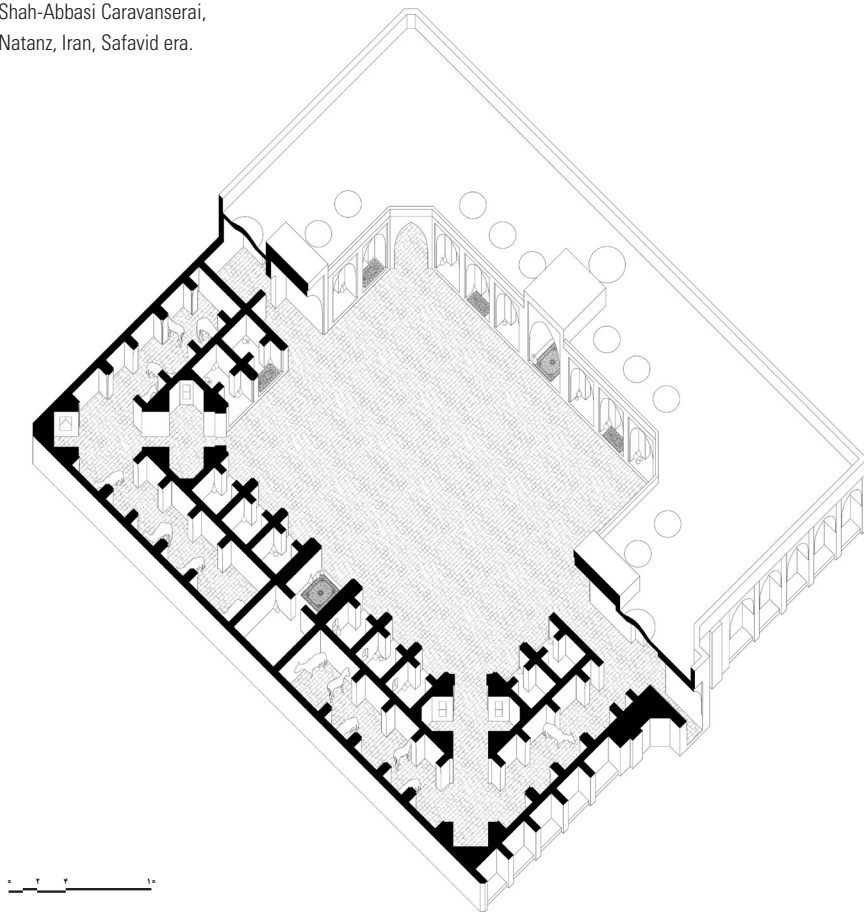
Caravan, Antoin Sevruguin, 1890.



One temporary living unit in
Shah-Abbasi Caravanserai,
Natanz, Iran.



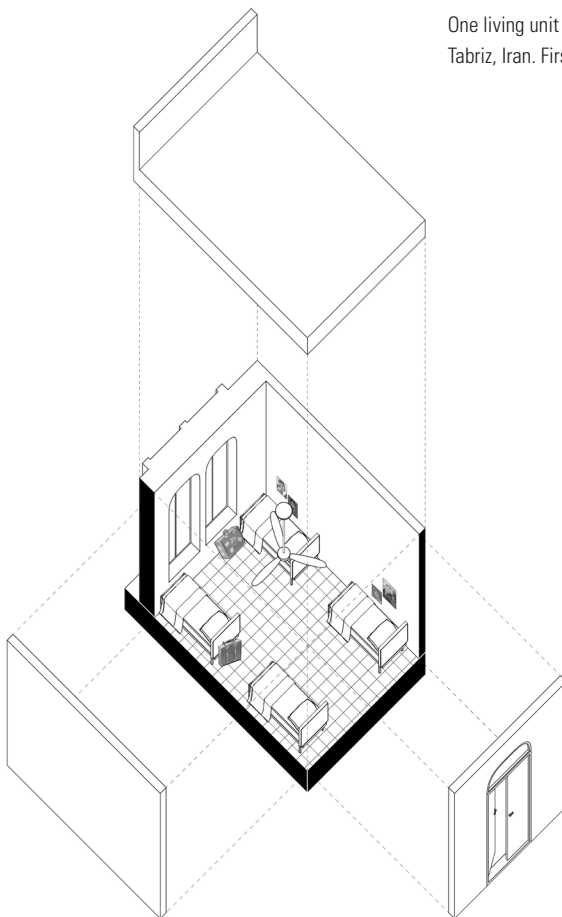
Shah-Abbasi Caravanserai,
Natanz, Iran, Safavid era.



Grand Hotel, Tehran. Late Qajar period.



One living unit in Jaaleh hotel,
Tabriz, Iran. First Pahlavi period.

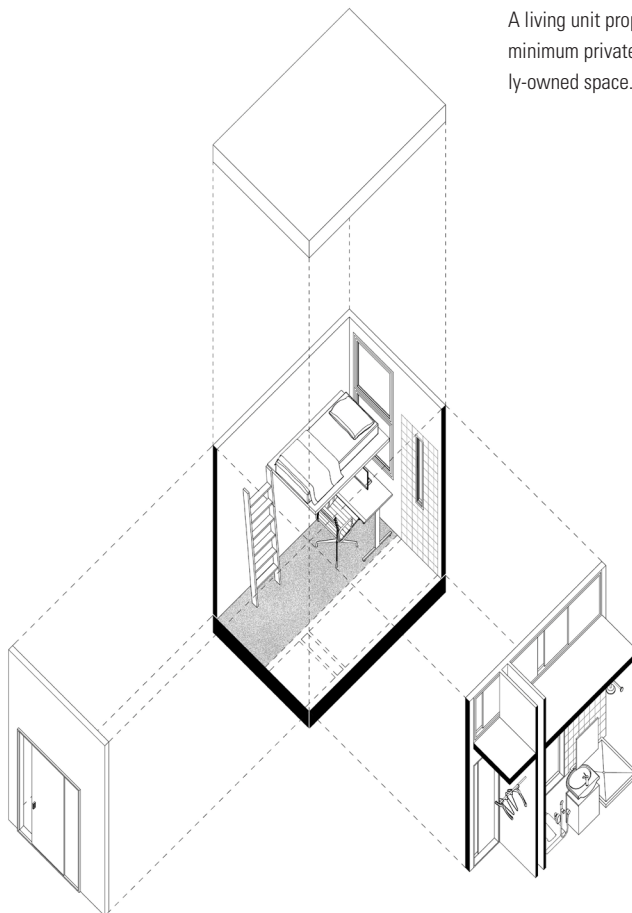


Jaaleh hotel, Tabriz, Iran. First
Pahlavi period.

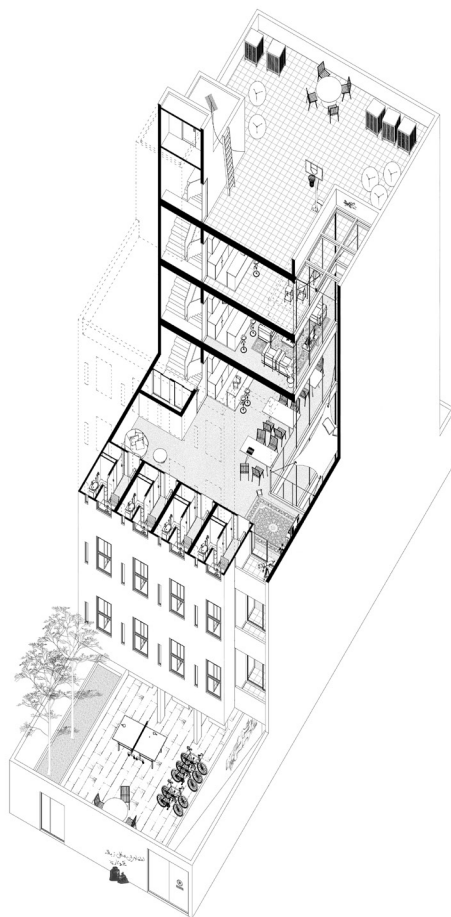


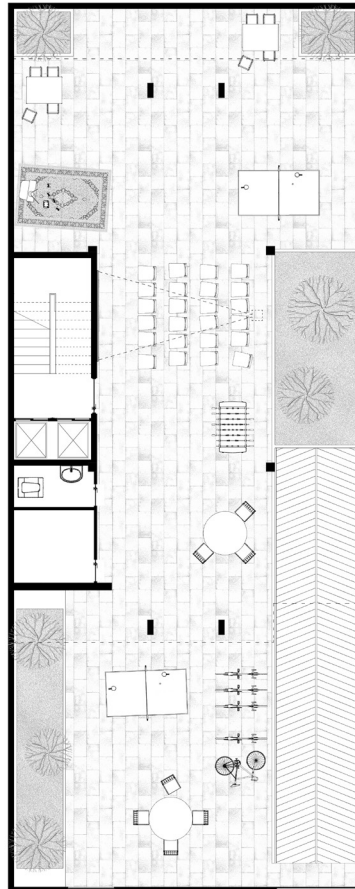


A living unit proposal,
minimum private-
ly-owned space.

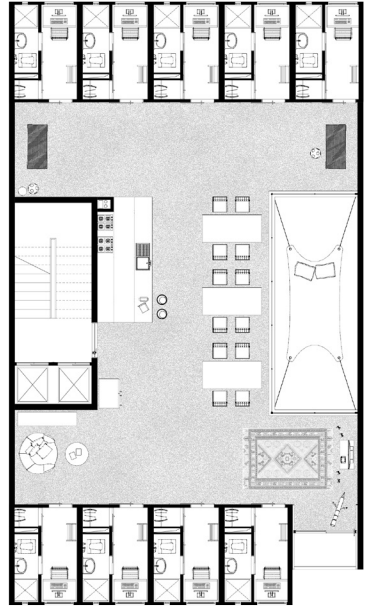
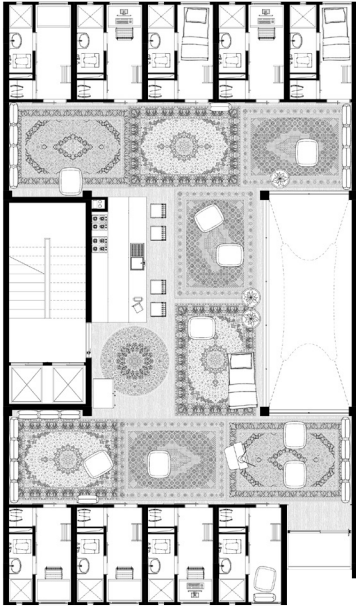


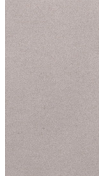
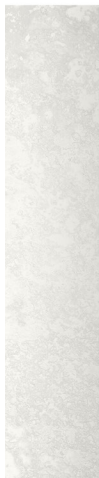
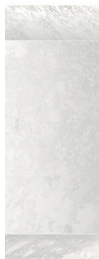
Proposal for an apartment, combination of privately-owned cells and commonly-owned shared spaces.





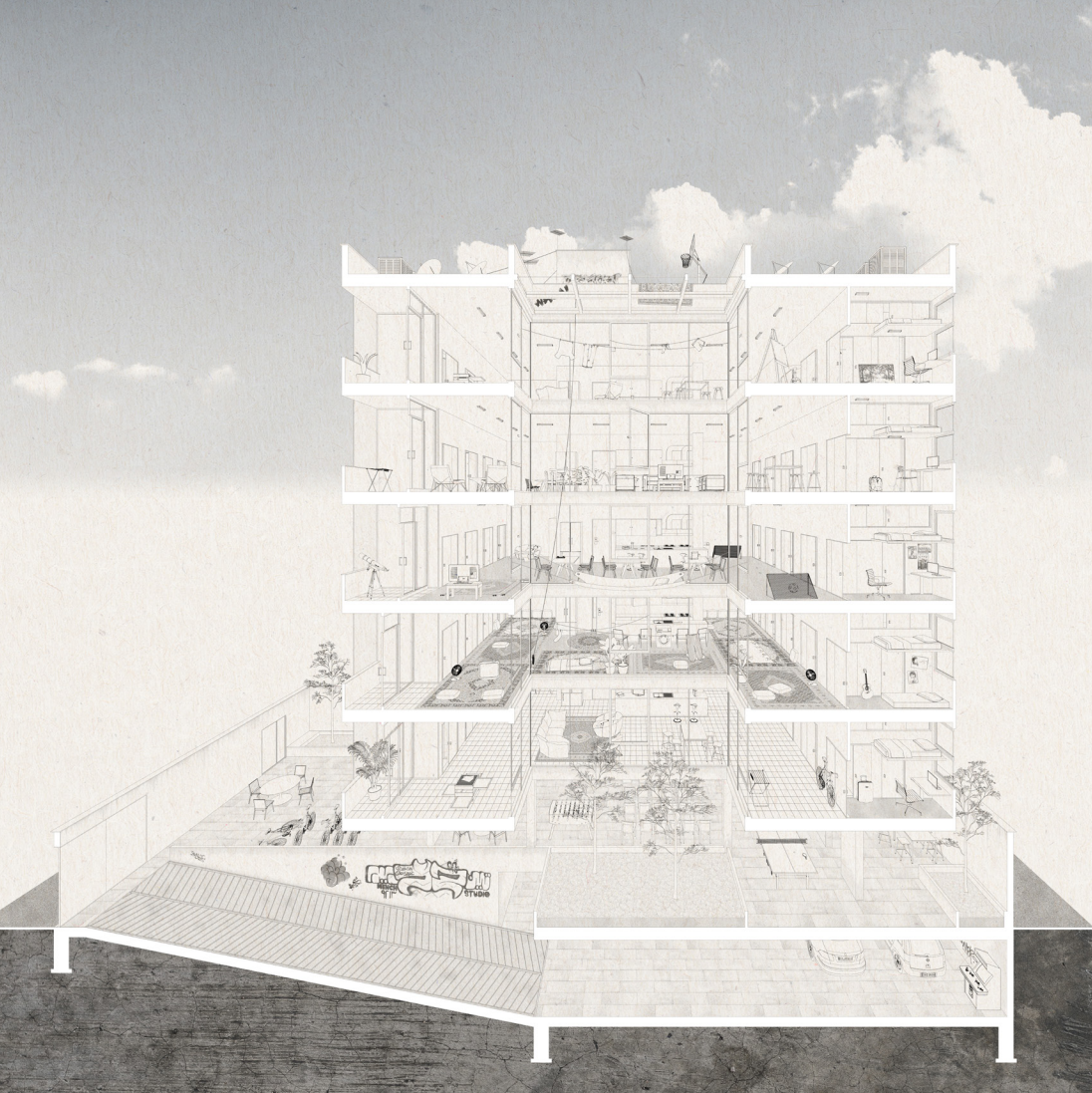
Ground floor plan of the proposed apartment.
Front: Typical floor plans of the proposed apartment.



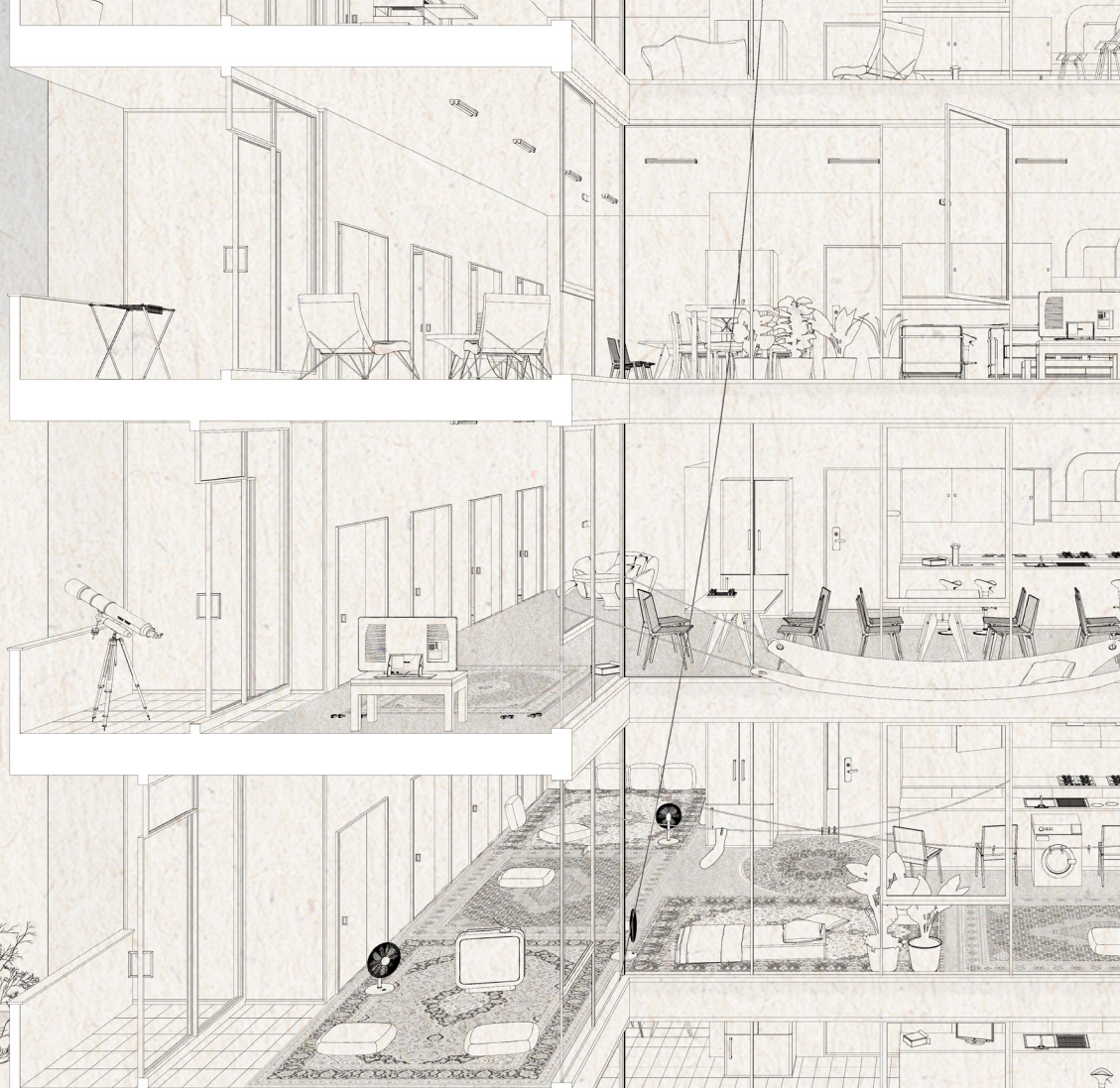


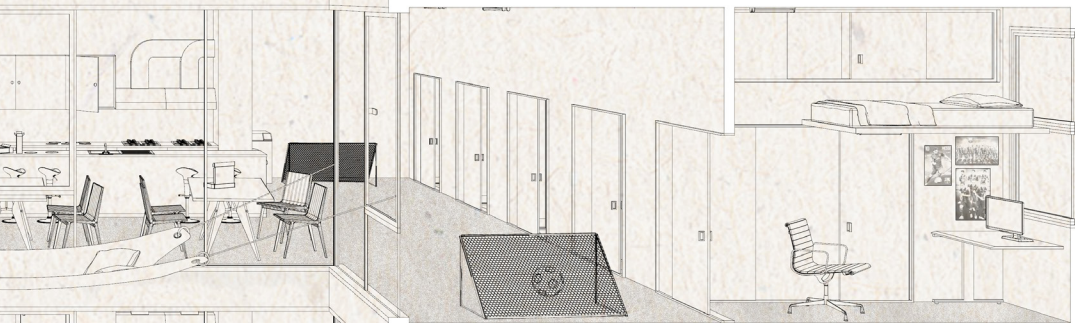
Example of a floor's shared space
Front: Private living unit









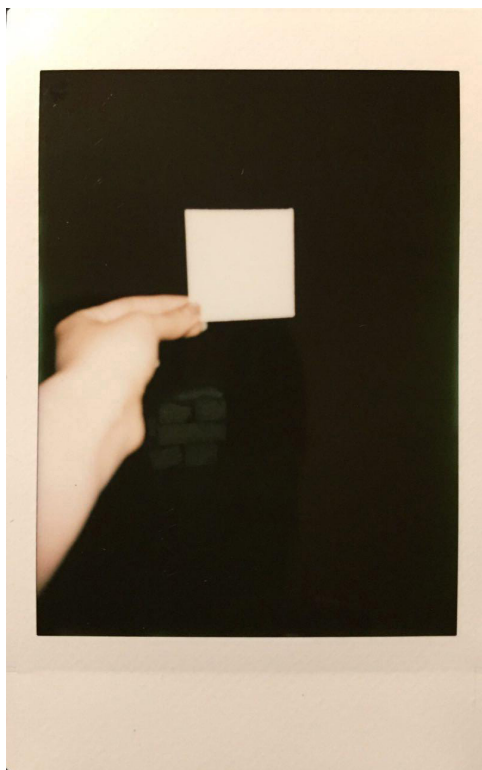


Common Possibilities

Shared spaces of the apartment are ideas of “space” realized as non-places. Places that embody human relations and their living histories, turns into spaces empty of human interaction, repetitive, and minimum; a state conditioned by the mass-production of housing units today.

This project believes that to critically investigate the potentialities of these spaces, the first step is to have a close and contemplating look at these fragmented spaces.









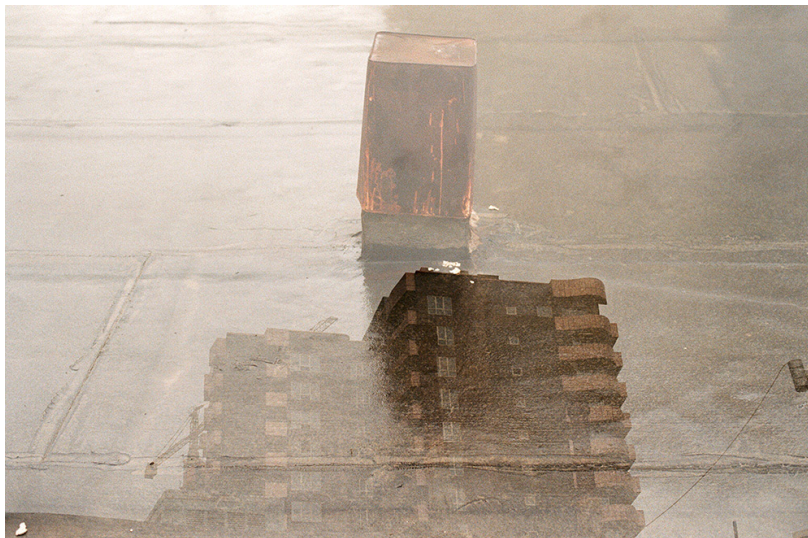












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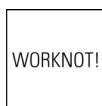
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C A M P O پروژه مشاع

ROOM

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