

FRAMING THE COMMON

# THE CASE OF MUMBAI: COMMONS AND TYPES







## Mumbai Commons and Types

### 1: Housing, Class Representation and the Maximum City.

It is evident by now that Mumbai, the Maximum City is a city of paradoxes; of classes, people, beauty, public engagement, governance, collectivism and so on. This project will also be looking at such paradoxes but in a limited framework of the modern, formal and collective housing type of the apartment and a very specific range of variations defined by the economic classes of the society.

Although the issue of class representation and struggle seems a little old fashioned it is interesting to observe how these ideologies have been crystallized in concrete forms; from the World One to Dharavi. This means that there have to be very specific types, archetypes, for every gradation of the class in the society. One glance across this large urban agglomeration and the variations in the typologies present themselves like a strange montage.

This acknowledgment is important if we are going to talk about the 'common' or the 'shared spaces' within each of these typologies. As much as 'architecture without content' has nothing to do with the way life occupies buildings, paradoxically, it is also about life taking over the work of architecture after building. It is well established that spatial practices of different classes vary drastically and hence also their nature of commonness.

## 2. The Commons and the Common Types – The case of Slum Redevelopment.

That working class of the society of Mumbai which is employed, formally and/or informally, in those sectors of daily labor is time and again argued as a very important class – which ensures the functioning of the city by its mysterious efforts and dense networks. The informal –self organized settlements –slums of this megalopolis are where this “essential labor” class has made their home.

One can say that if there has been that one intriguing subject of architectural thinking in Mumbai then, it has been the question of the slums or the shanty-towns. And this has been true for almost ever since the first wave of mills attracted a flood of population to the, then, city of Mumbai. And ever since then the bourgeoisie of Mumbai want their houses to be clean but, contradictorily, seldom think if that person who keeps their house clean has a house for oneself or not. Today, with over 50% of the megalopolis living in slums, it is in this contradiction of simultaneous desire and apathy towards this dense mass of “essential labor” frames the first “common” subject – dealing with the ideas of right to the city and class representation within this sea of built environment.

To address this condition on both social and architectural fronts an institutional body called the Slum Rehabilitation Authority was established - Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act, 1966 – with the project of housing the “essential labor” to protect the rights of the slum dwellers and also to rehouse the inhabitants into formal housing types – from the informal slums. Like every other authoritative insti-

tution the S.R.A has elaborately written norms and mandates which prescribe every process of formalization of the housing type and re-housing the slum life into these formal types. The question of acceptance and the possibilities of engaging with “the written word” frame the second common condition to address – the subject of active public engagement in the formalization of the built environment.

The Modernist Slab type has been readily adopted as the most appropriate model for the formal housing types developed by the S.R.A. More than the slabs it is just the idea of the economical R.C.C frame structure which is considered as the model for these projects. In adopting only the model of the Modernist Slab type and not paying attention to the overall organization of the cluster of these types, most of the projects have resulted into strange spatial and urban conditions – conditions which challenge the convention of the very idea of livability itself; which even raises questions on the very project of re-housing the slum life into formal housing types. This simultaneous act of willfulness and tokenism frames the third “common” subject to address – the subject of the spatial organization and architectural types employed in these projects.





# INTENTIONS & METHODS

## INTENTIONS AND METHODS

In 2010 me and two of my friends, all architects, rented a One-Room-Kitchen in an S.R.A building. Oblivious to what that means. Written and illustrated in hindsight this project narrates a biography of the time lived in the S.R.A through spatial and architectural notation systems - a spatial biography.

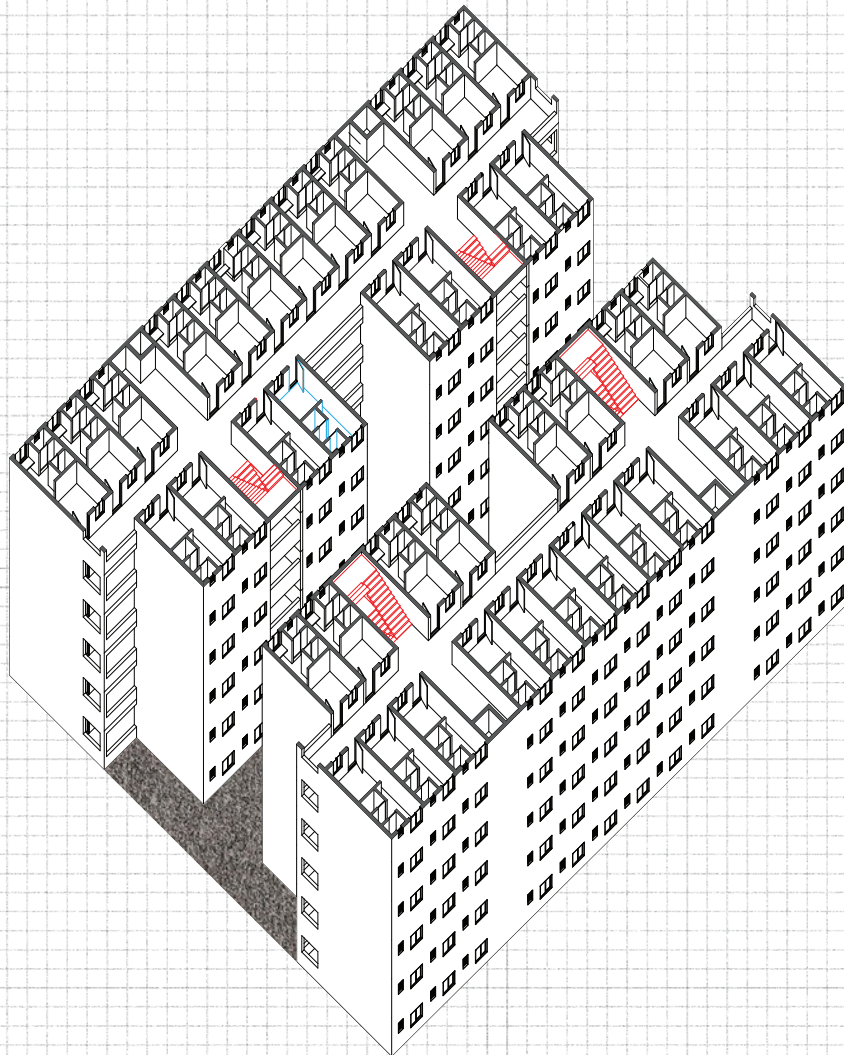
This project employs my memory of the lived experience in an S.R.A. building as the primary tool for the study of this case. These memories are recollected or re-drawn using typical architectural drawing systems of plan, section and axonometric drawings. Where needed free hand drawing method or drawing from memory and even collage is employed to convey the ideas more candidly or vividly.

A narrative structure beginning from the modest room going to the scale of the neighbourhood is used a method to illustrate various aspects of the S.R.A. building and also certain glimpses of life in an S.R.A.

The project primarily acknowledges the absence of a sense of commonness by portraying a sense of complete isolation or indifference to the communal life of S.R.A. extending all the way to the entire city. This acknowledgement is important in order to begin the project on commons with a clean slate - perhaps like a confession which read only between the lines.

The case used here is the S.R.A. building on Dr. Ambedkar Road, Khar (west), Mumbai. The actual conditions might differ in the present - partly also because the project is entirely reconstructed from memory.







PROJECT

THIS WAS OUR ROOM...

OR WHAT IS POPULARLY KNOWN AS 1-R-K (ONE ROOM KITCHEN).

STRICTLY SPEAKING THE PLAN FORMS 5 ROOMS.

1. ROOM 2. KITCHEN 3. BATHROOM 4. W.C.

5. THE ROOM BETWEEN THE BATHROOM & W.C.

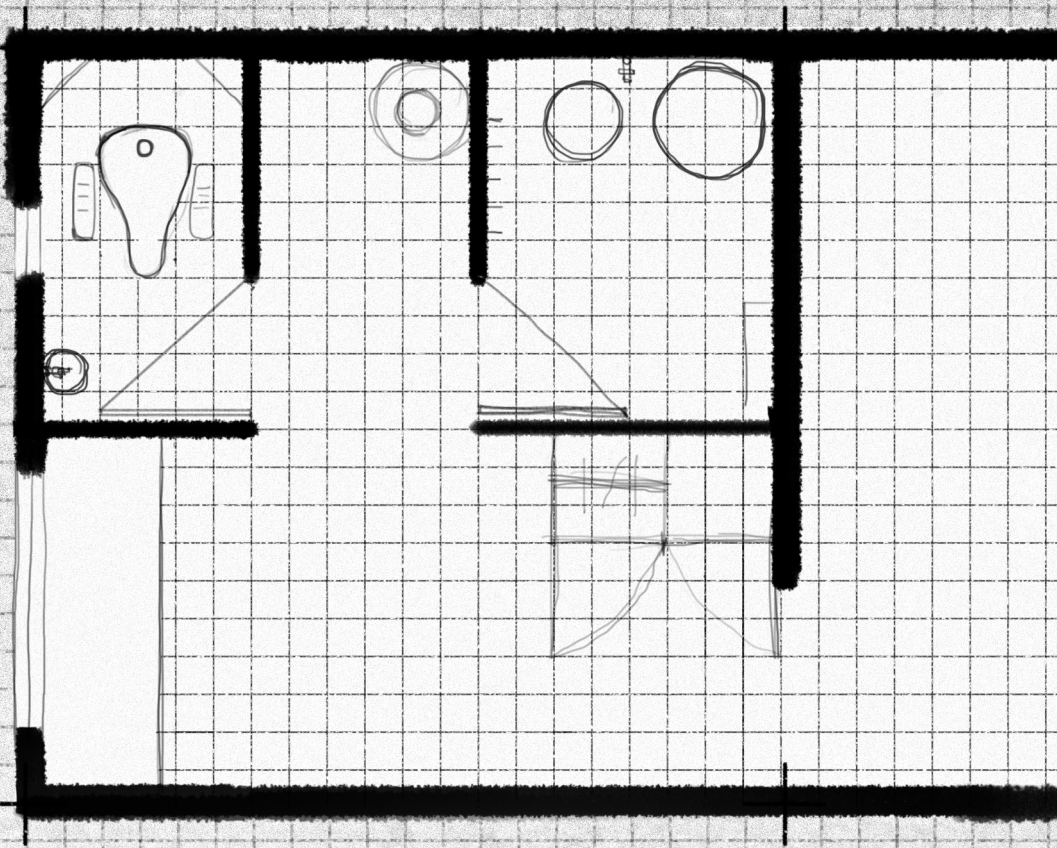
THE AVERAGE AREA OF THE UNIT WAS 225 SQ. FT.

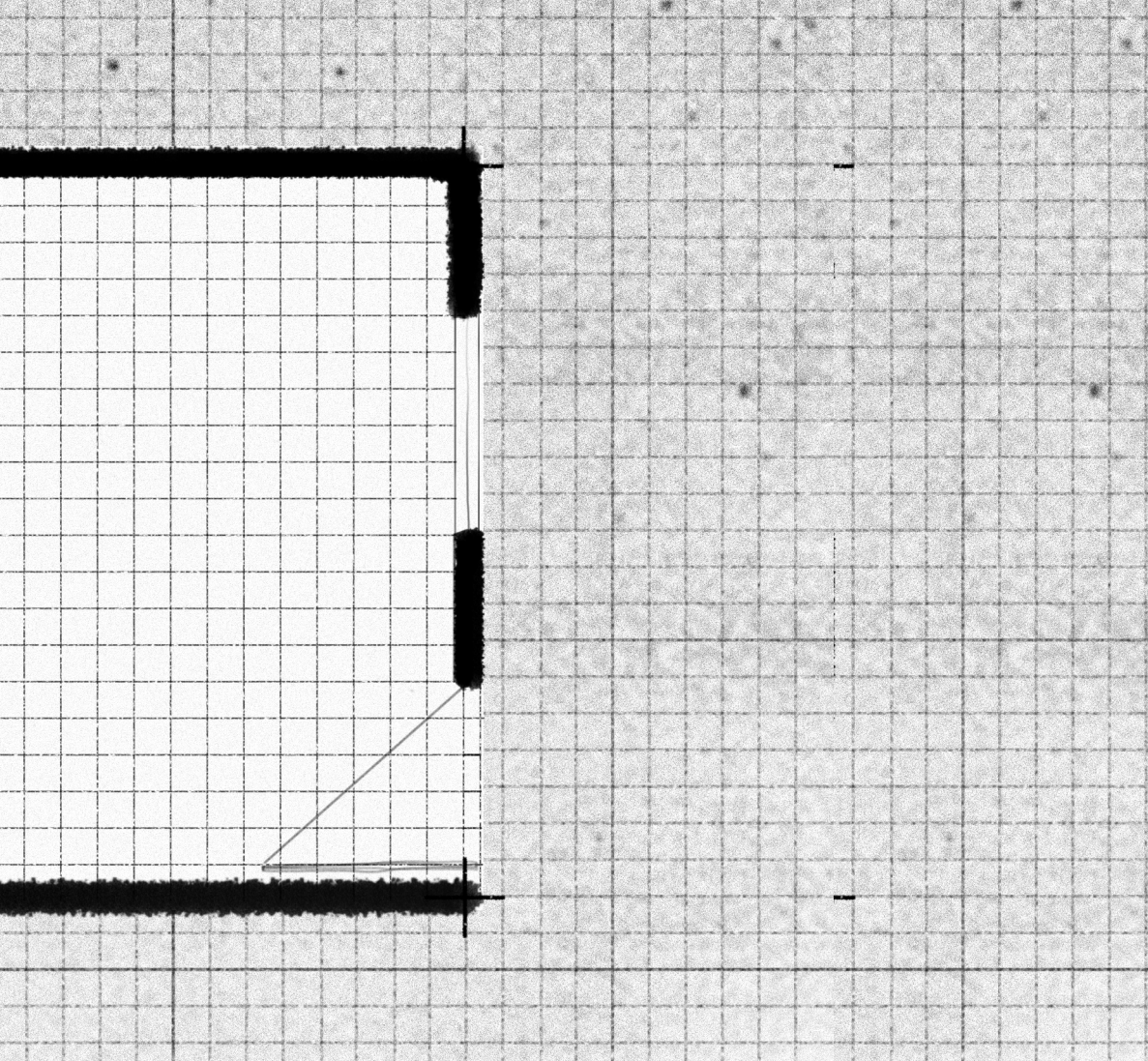
I THINK WE NEVER UTILIZED MORE THAN 165 SQ. FT. AS WE NEVER COOKED WE NEVER EVEN BOTH-  
-ERED ABOUT THAT ZONE. IN HINDSIGHT THAT SPACE COULD HAVE BEEN A GOOD WORKSTATION  
FOR AT LEAST FOUR PEOPLE.

IT WAS EVEN WHAT I BELIEVE A PERFECT STUDIO APARTMENT... BUT OF COURSE IN ANOTHER CONTEXT.  
MOST OF THE UNITS HOUSED A FAMILY OF 5 PEOPLE AVERAGELY.

IF MY MEMORY SERVES ME RIGHT THERE WERE 10 SUCH TYPICAL UNITS PER FLOOR.  
SO WITH 7 FLOORS AND 4 WINGS THERE WERE 280 UNITS.

WE WERE JUST 3 OTHER PEOPLE AMONG 1,000'S OTHERS.





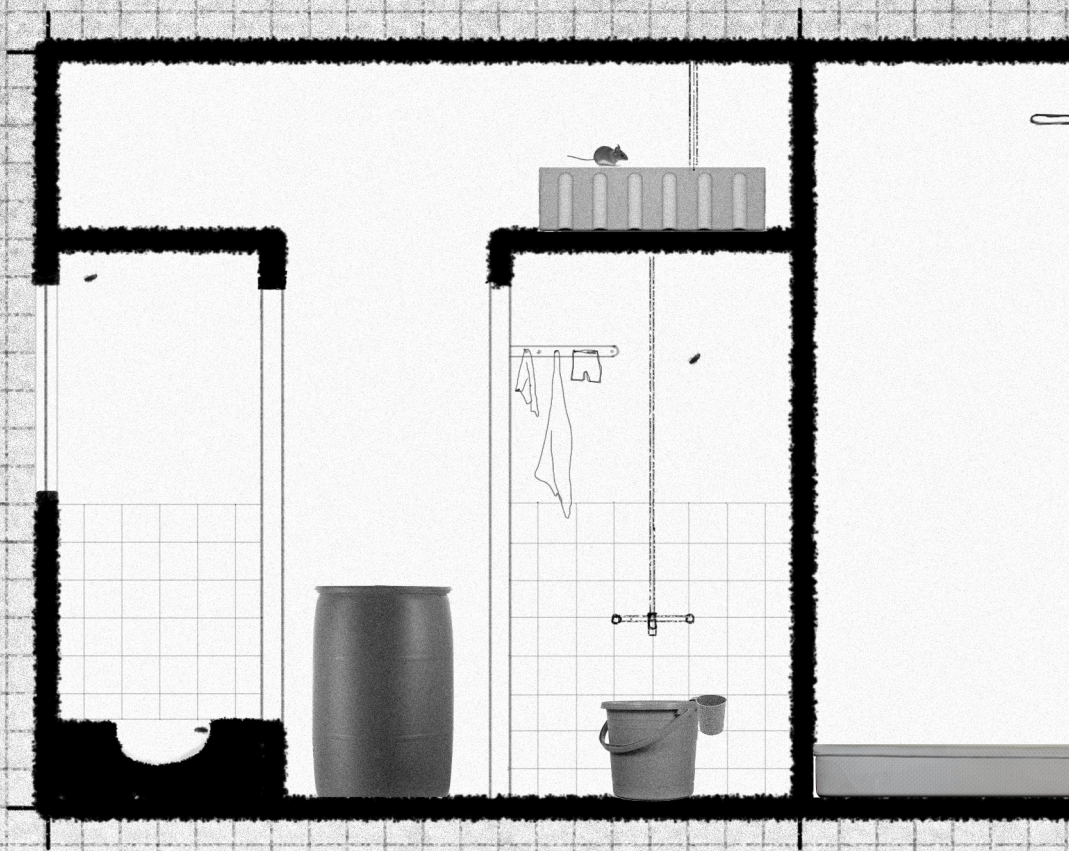
MORNING ALARM

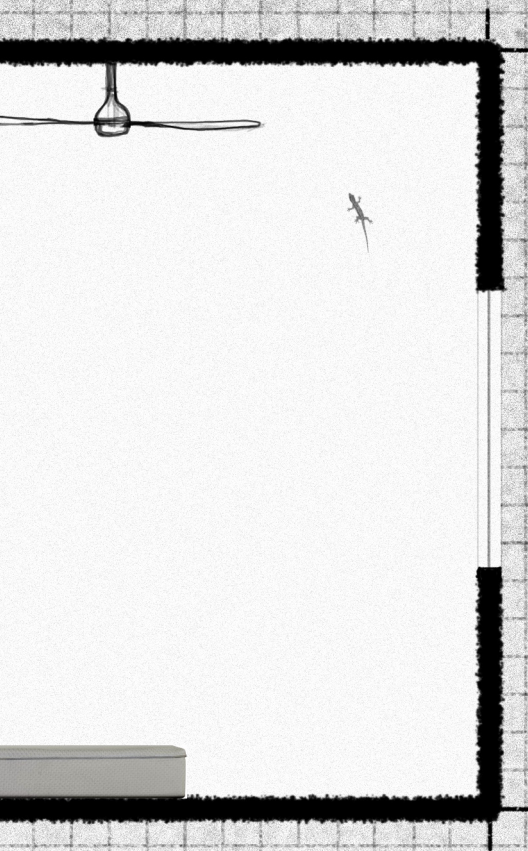


EVERY MORNING THE WATER WAS RATIONED BETWEEN 6:00AM & 6:30AM.  
IT WAS AN UNSAID COMPETITION OF SORTS - "WHO CAN STORE MAXIMUM WATER IN 30 MINS?"  
THE TANK OVER THE BATHROOM USUALLY WOULD START TO OVERFLOW AT AROUND 6:15.  
THAT WAS OUR 'MORNING ALARM', WAKING UP TO THE SOUND OF A WATERFALL.  
THE DAYS WHEN WE FORGOT TO TURN ON THE TAP IN THE NIGHT...  
WELL... LET'S JUST SAY THANK YOU TO THOSE DEODORANTS & BODY TALCS!

WITH AN AVERAGE OF 2,000LTS OF WATER PER UNIT THE AVERAGE WATER CONSUMED  
BY AROUND 280 UNITS OR FAMILIES IS 5,60,000 Ltrs/DAY.

FRANKLY SPEAKING, WE NEVER KNEW WHERE THE WATER CAME FROM. NEVER CARED.





NEIGHBOURS &  
OTHER UNCOMMONS



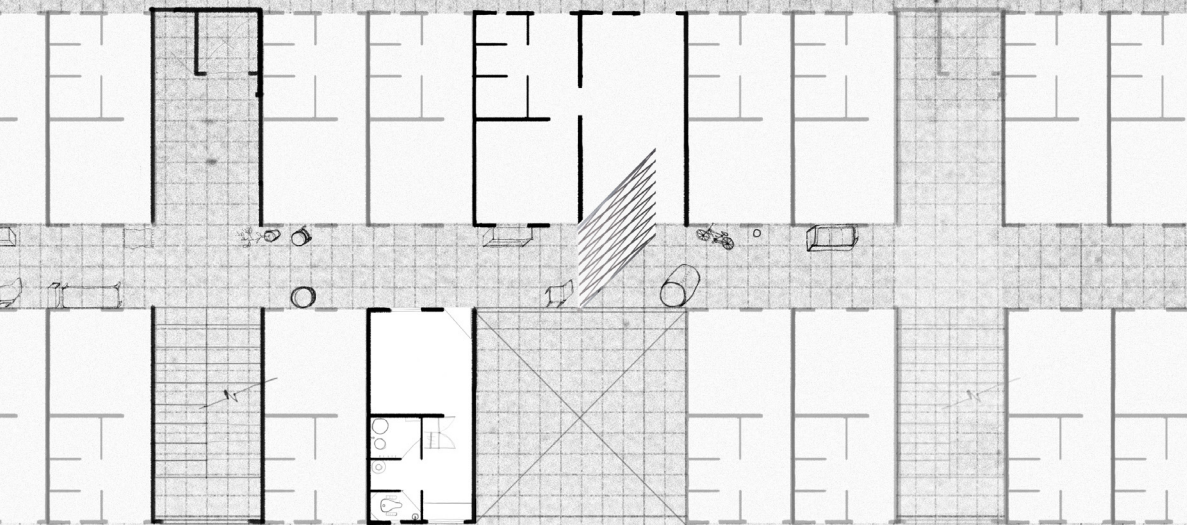
THERE WERE THREE DOORS IN FRONT & ONE NEXT TO OUR UNIT. THEN THERE WAS THE STAIRWELL & THE LIFT LOBBY AND A MIRRORED CONFIGURATION ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LOBBY. ALL OF THESE 10 UNITS CONNECTED BY A CENTRAL CORRIDOR.

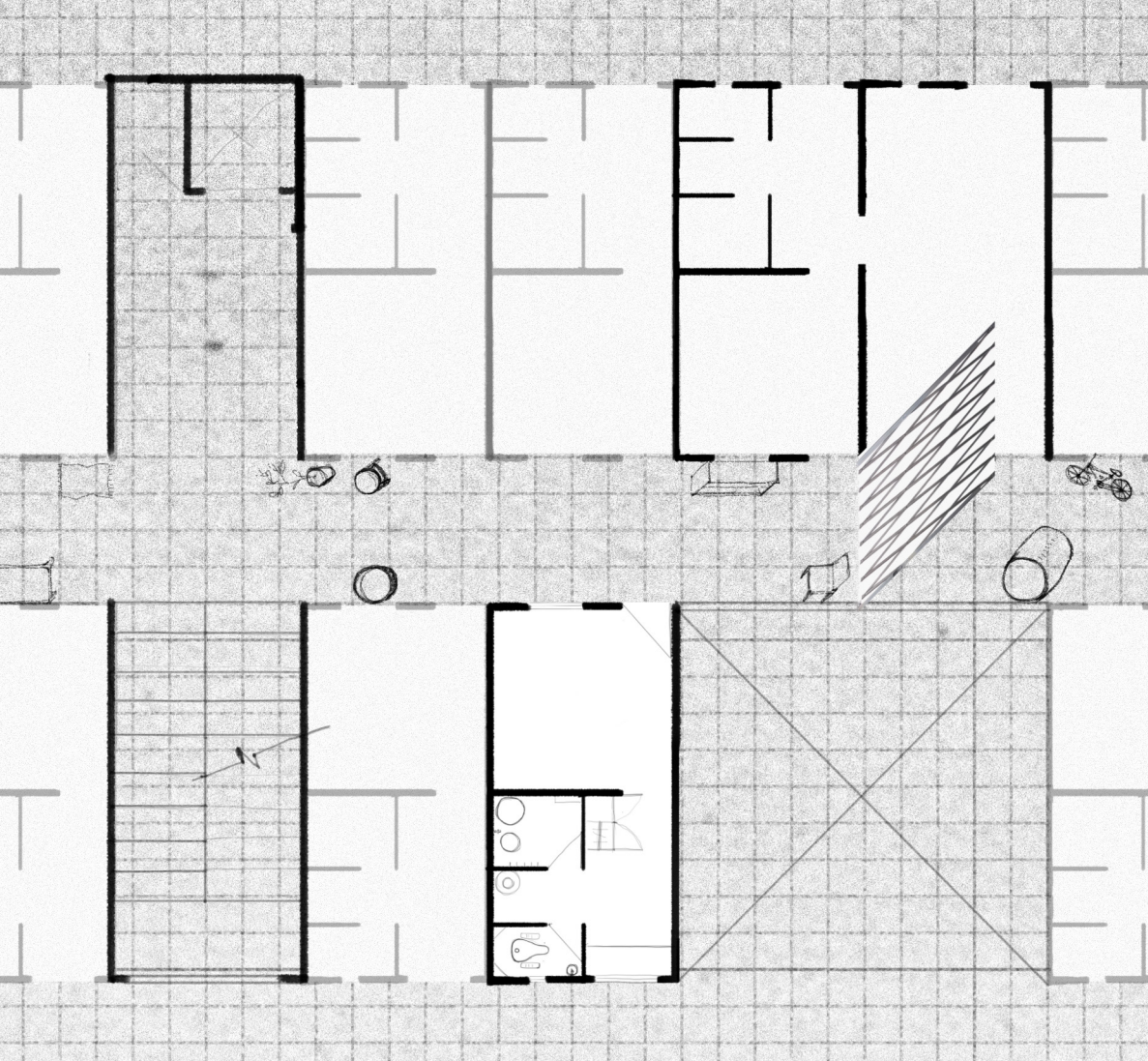
FOR US THE CORRIDOR WAS JUST A SPACE THAT TOOK US FROM OUR ROOM TO THE LIFT/STAIRS & BACK. BUT FOR MANY OTHERS IT WAS A COMMON EXTENSION TO THEIR UNIT. THE CORRIDOR WAS THEIR TRUE LIVING ROOM, PLAY ROOM, CRECHE, COMMUNITY ROOM, STORE ROOM, NURSERY...BASICALLY EVERYTHING THAT THE UNIT CANNOT HOUSE IS ABSORBED BY THE CORRIDOR.

THE CORRIDOR EXTENDED BEYOND INTO WHAT THEY REFERED TO AS ANOTHER 'WING'. THE WINGS WERE SEPERATED BY A SCISSOR GATE. THE LAND LORD LIVED NEXT TO THIS GATE. HE IS THE ONLY NEIGHBOUR WE EVER KNEW.

THE 'LANDLORD' WHO OWNS NO LAND BUT THREE UNITS HAD THIS MYSTERIOUS OTHER ROOM ATTACHED TO HIS UNIT. THIS ADDITIONAL ROOM WAS ACROSS THE GATE. WE SAW HIM EVERY MONTH YET, WE COULD NOT GET OVER THE FACT THAT HE COULD CROSSOVER TO THE OTHERSIDE WITHOUT HAVING TO GO THROUGH THE TROUBLE OF GETTING TO GROUND FLOOR, TAKE THE STREETS, & THEN ENTER THE OTHER WING. THAT EXTRA ROOM WAS LIKE SPACE WARP MACHINE.

IN THE 'CULTURE OF CONGESTION' PERHAPS FLOOR SPACE, ROOM, IS THE MOST MYTHIFYING APPARATUS OF ALL.





*CORRIDOR OF COMMONS*



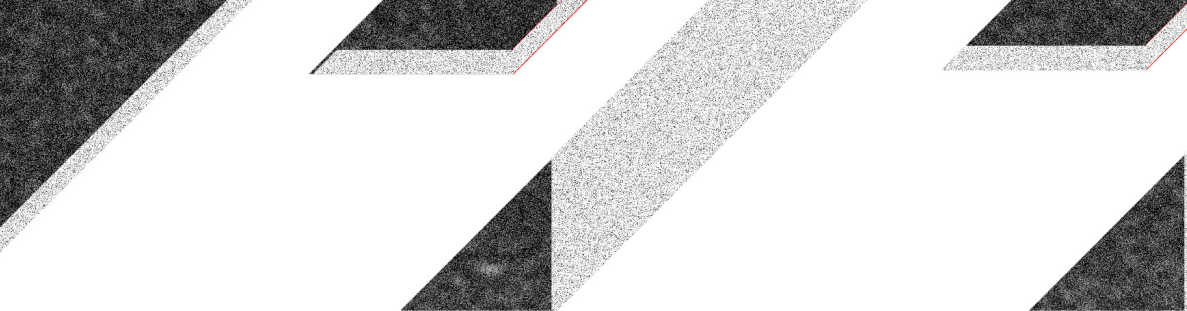
OFTEN WE SAW PEOPLE HOSTING ELABORATE EVENTS LIKE BIRTHDAYS, WEDDINGS, FESTIVALS & EVEN FUNERALS.

I THINK WE SAW MORE WEDDINGS & FESTIVALS THAN FUNERALS.

WHICH MEANT THAT NOT ONLY DID PEOPLE GATHER IN THE CORRIDOR THEY OFTEN DANCED TO VERY LOUD MUSIC - COMMONLY REFERED TO AS D.J., DOLBY OR WOOFER-, HAD A FEAST, PRAYED TOGETHER & EVEN DISCUSSED EVERYDAY POLITICS.

NO MATTER WHAT THE EVENT THEY ALWAYS DISCUSSED EVERYDAY POLITICS.

IT IS SURPRISING HOW MUCH COULD HAPPEN IN THAT 8 FT WIDE SPACE.





*THE LAST STREETS...*

IN AN OTHERWISE AUTOMOBILE HEAVY PLANNING & DESIGN OF BUILDINGS & NEIGHBORHOODS  
THIS PROJECT WAS FREE OF ALL THE AUTOMOBILE PREOCCUPATIONS.

MAINLY BECAUSE NONE OF THE FAMILIES OWNED A CAR. BUT IT IS ALSO ASSUMED NONE WOULD EVER  
OWN ONE.

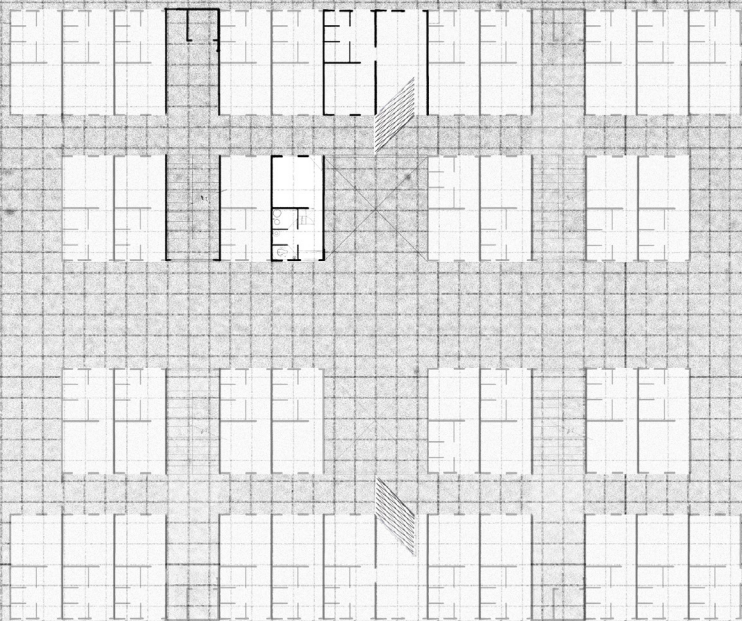
THE SPACE BETWEEN THE TWO BUILDINGS WAS A MODEST 6M.

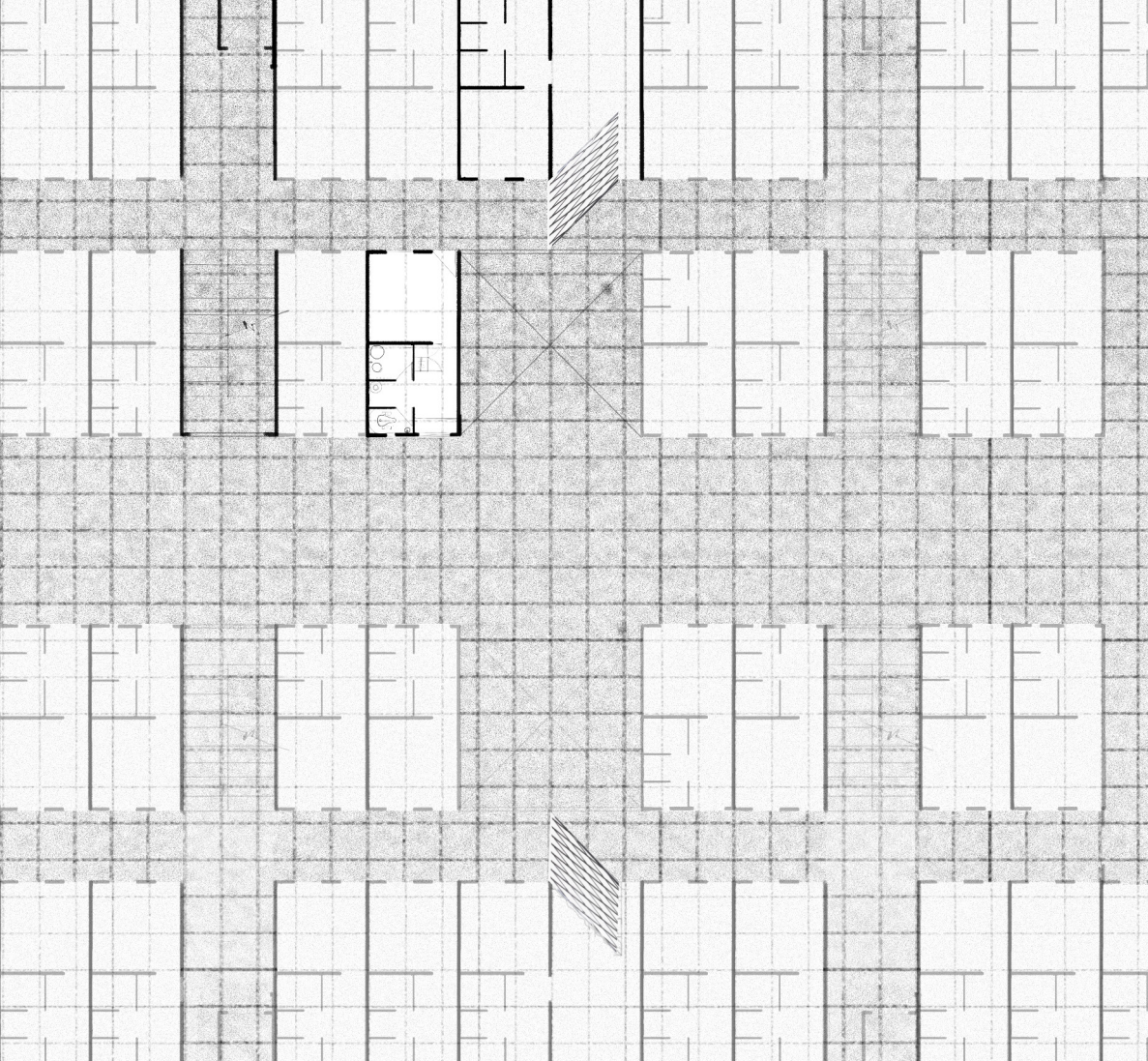
LIKE THE CORRIDOR THE STREET BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS WAS A VERSATILE COLLECTIVE  
SPACE.

PERHAPS THIS IS THE ONLY SPACE WHERE STREETS CAN BE DISCUSSED WITHIN THE  
EMERGING URBAN TYPES IN MUMBAI.

IN HINDSIGHT I CAN SEE THAT WE WERE LIVING IN A CORNER UNIT WITHOUT A CORNER WINDOW.  
EVERY UNIT HAD ONLY ONE WINDOW & NO MORE. A PERFECT APARATUS FOR EQUALITY.







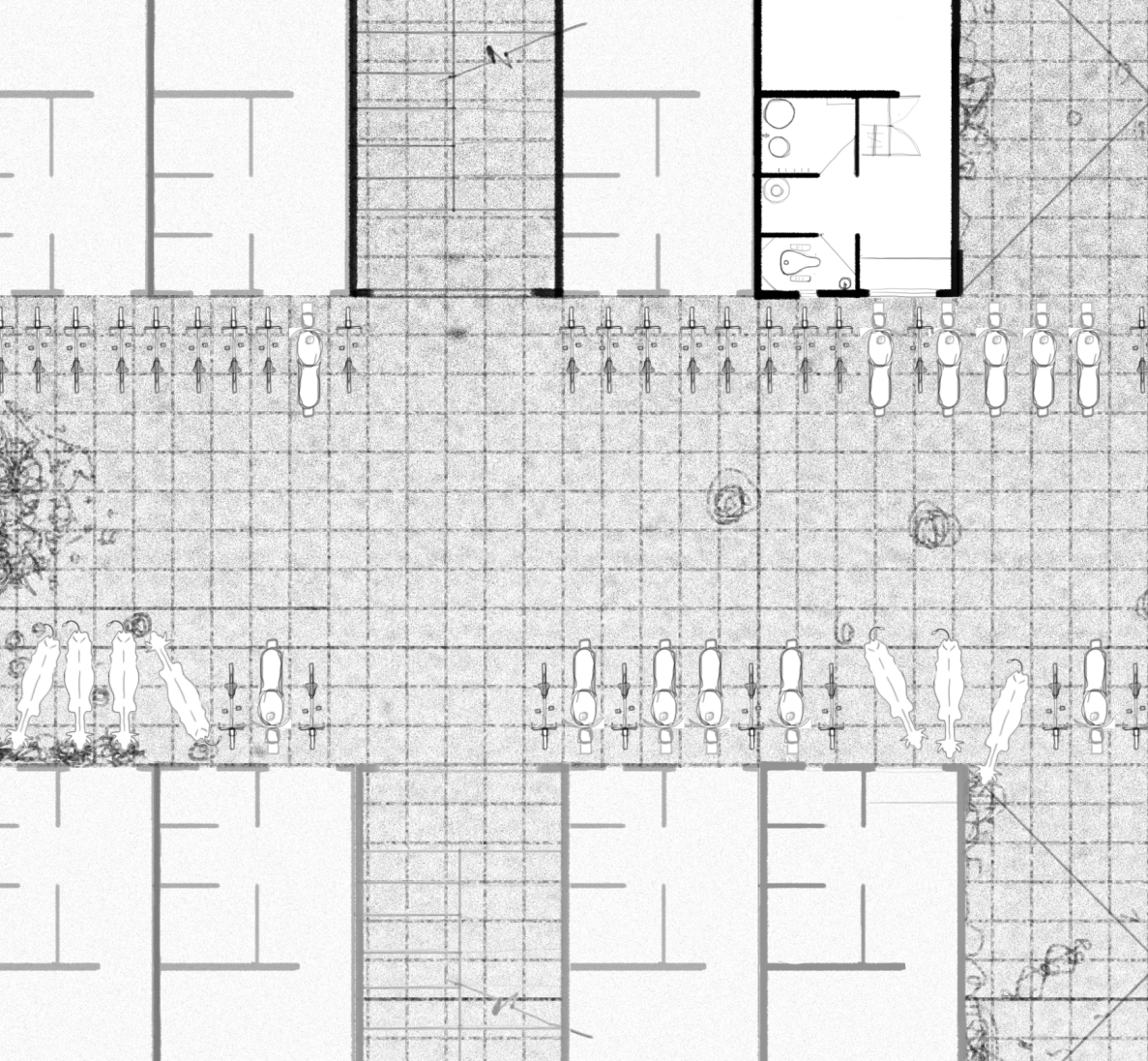
*WHO'S PARKING IS IT ANYWAY.*

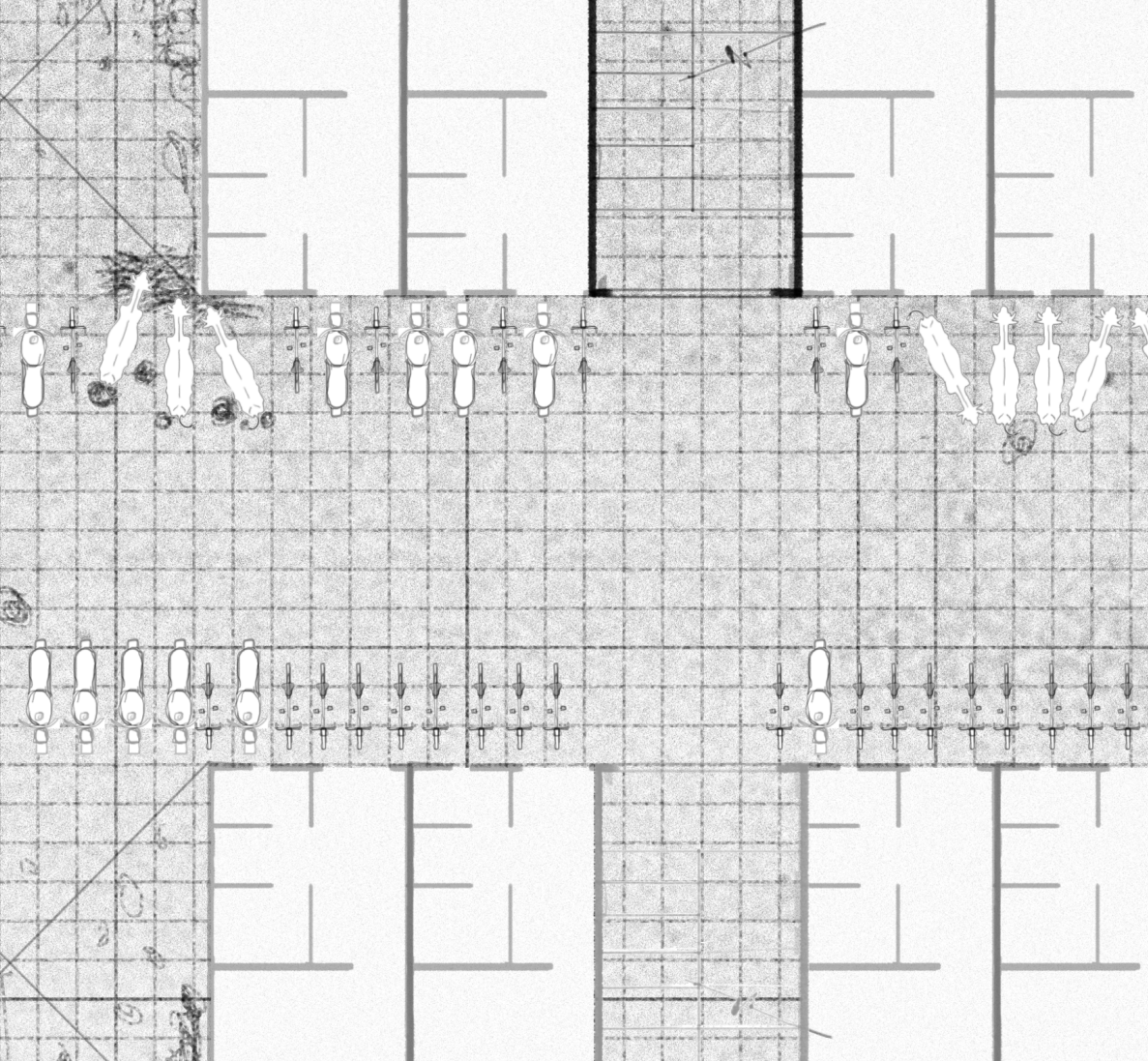


EVERY MORNING WE ENCOUNTERED ON THE STREET PLENTY OF MOTORCYCLES & BICYCLES  
MANY OF THEM RENDERED WITH BRANDS. IT WAS I THINK THE EARLY DAYS HOME DELIVERY  
TRENDS.

WE ALSO ENCOUNTERED & DODGED COWS & BUFFALOES, QUITE A LOT OF DUNG & THE DUNG  
DIPPED TAIL WHIPS. THE BUFFALOES WERE PARKED ALONGSIDE THE BICYCLES & MOTORCYCLES.

NOT TO FORGET THE FESTIVELY LITTERED CORNERS OF THE BUILDING.  
IT WAS A COMMONLY ACCEPTED PRACTICE TO LITTER THE CORNERS.



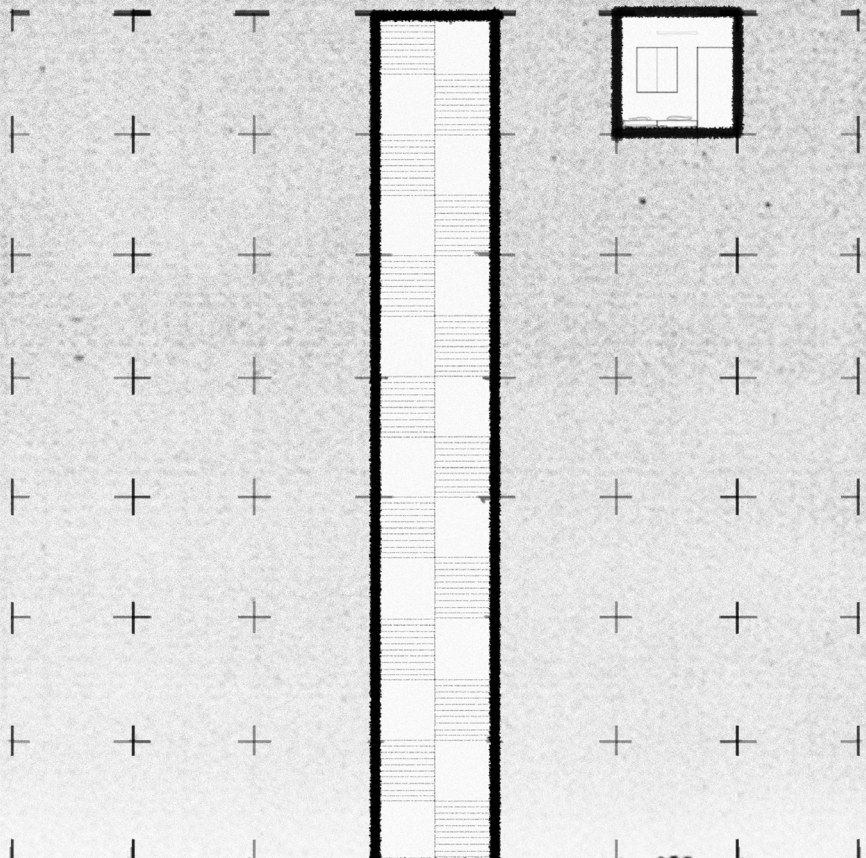


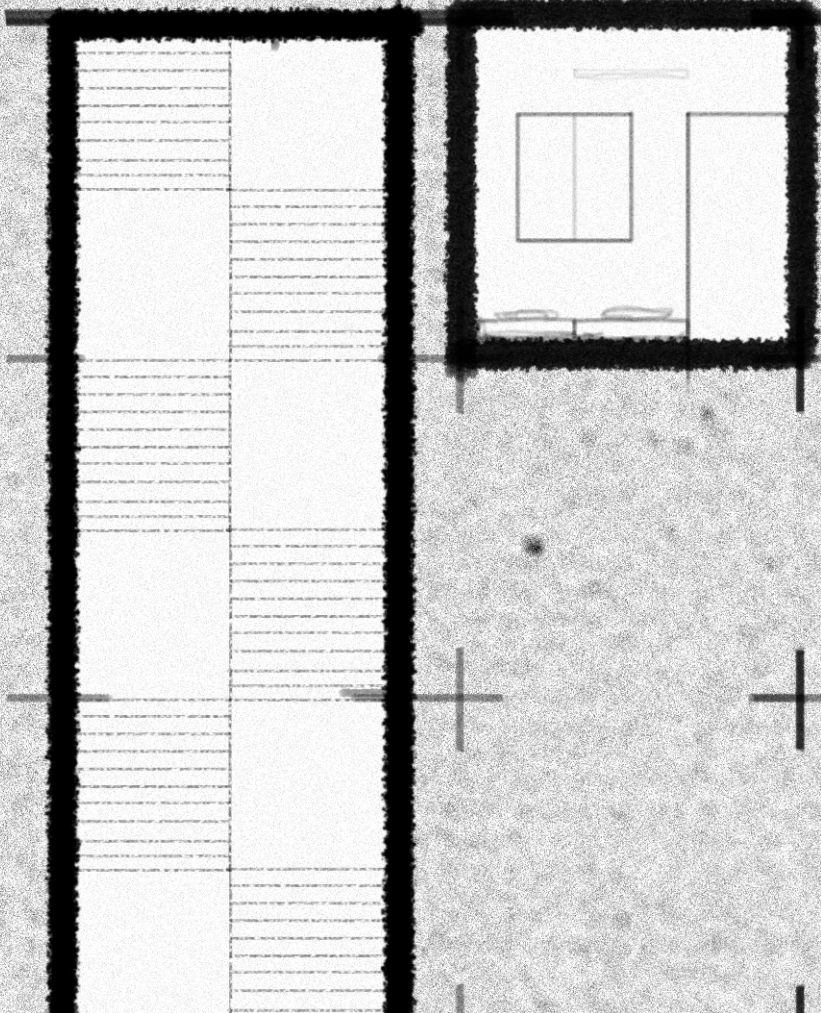
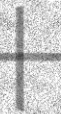
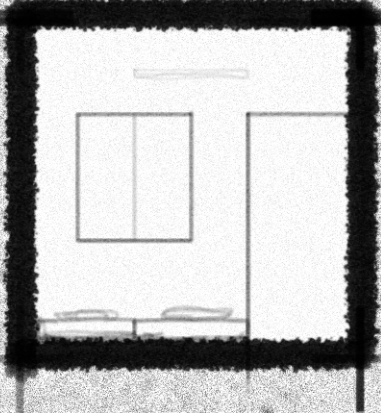
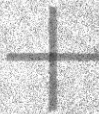
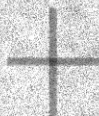
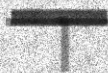
*STAIRWAY TO MY ROOM.*

WE LIVED ON THE SEVENTH FLOOR. WE HAD THE SAME INDIFFERENCE TO EVERYONE ELSE FROM EVERY OTHER FLOOR LIKE WE HAD FOR OUR NEIGHBOURS. I AM QUITE SURE THE FEELING WAS MUTUAL. ALL THAT MATTERED WAS OUR ROOM AND THE WAY TO GET THERE.

IT WAS EASIER TO TAKE THE STAIRS DOWN, IF THE LIFT WAS NOT WORKING, TO GET DOWN IN THE MORNING.

THOSE WERE THE ONLY TIMES WE GOT SOME GLIMPSES OF THE COMMUNAL LIFE HAPPENING BENEATH US.





TO EACH HIS OWN CAMP



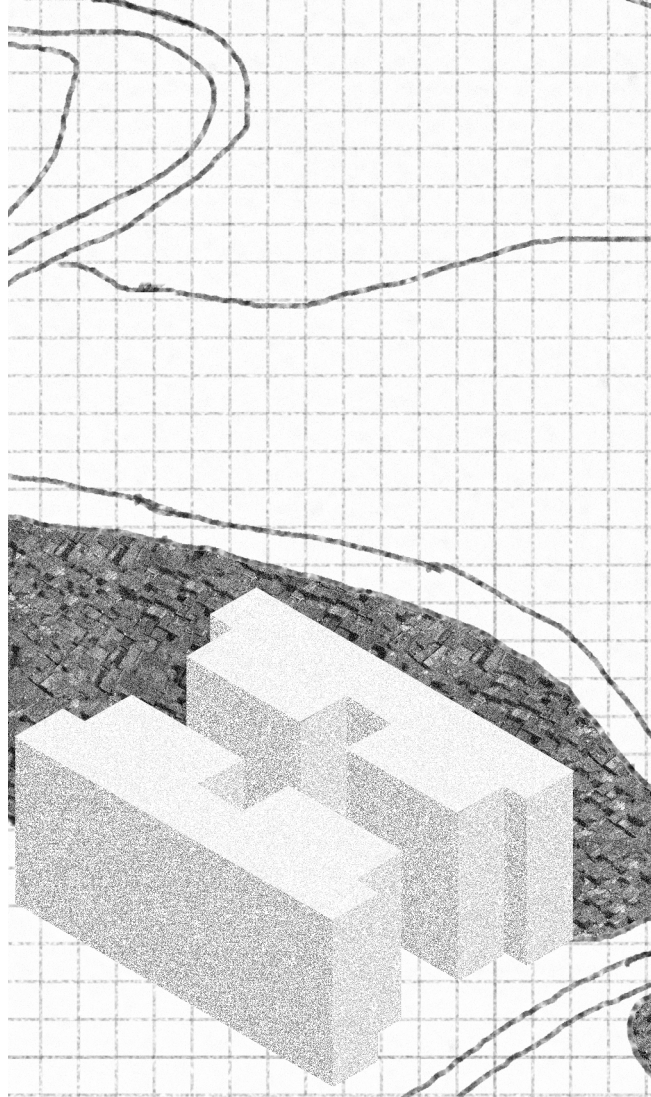
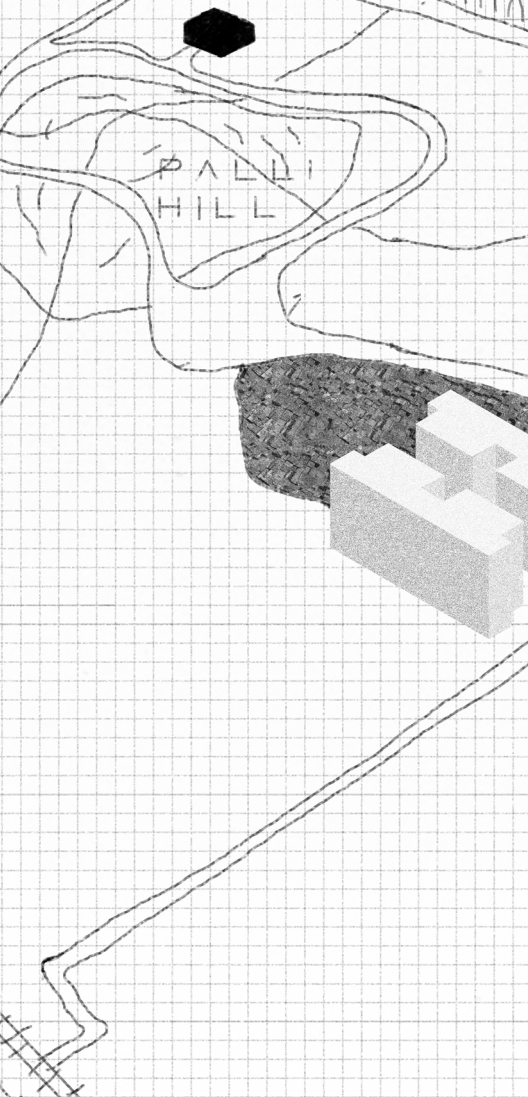
JUST LIKE IN THE APARTMENT ALL THAT MATTERED WAS THE BUILDING WE LIVED IN AND THE OFFICE, BEHIND THE HILL, WHERE WE WORKED?

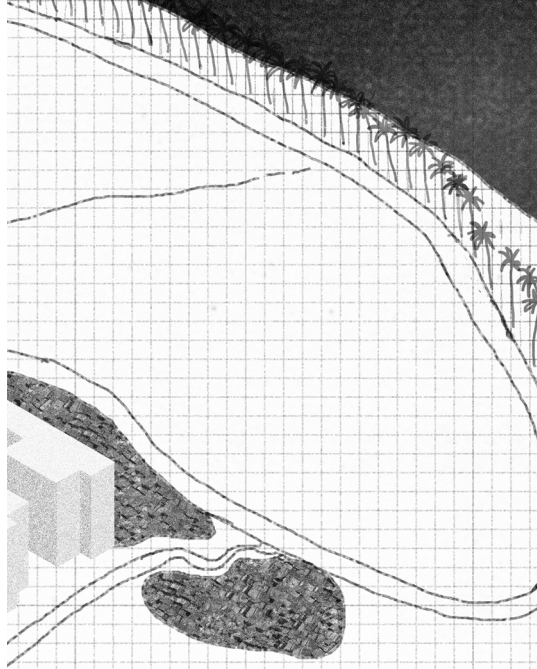
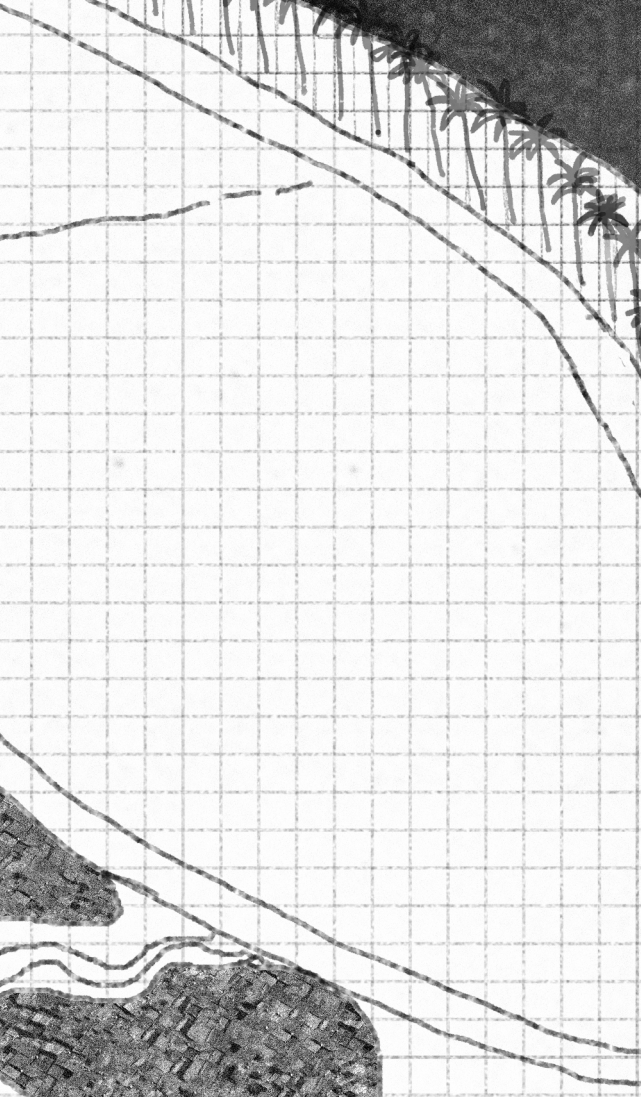
WE HAD TO CROSS THROUGH A SLUM - THE WAITING TO BE REHABILITATED SLUM - TO REACH THE MAIN ROAD FROM WHERE WE HIRED AN AUTORICKSHAW TO OFFICE. ONE OF US WORKED AT A LARGER OFFICE IN SOUTH MUMBAI. HE TRAVELLED BY TRAIN TO WORK.

SLUMS ARE LIKE CAMPS. BUT IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT EVERY SETTLEMENT BEGINS WITH A CAMP. THE FIRST SETTLERS, THE FIRST COLONIAL TROOPS, THE FIRST FACTORY LABOURS, THE FIRST TRADERS, ETC. ALL WAITING FOR THEIR ROOM IN THE MAXIMUM CITY.

IN THAT SENSE WE WERE TRAVERSING THROUGH VARIOUS CAMPS ON OUR WAY TO THE OFFICE - SOME SETTLED, SOME NOT SO SETTLED & SOME UN-SETTLING CAMPS.

THEN THERE WAS THE CARTER ROAD PROMENADE - A NEUTRAL EVERY MAN'S LAND WHERE THE SEA LIMITED THE TERRITORY. EVERYBODY FROM EVERY CAMP CAME HERE. THERE WAS A SENSE OF MODEST INDIFFERENCE IN BANDRA THAT REVEALED ITSELF BEST IN THE WAY PEOPLE CAME TOGETHER HERE. LET'S JUST SAY THERE WAS ROOM FOR VARIED SOCIAL PRACTICES.



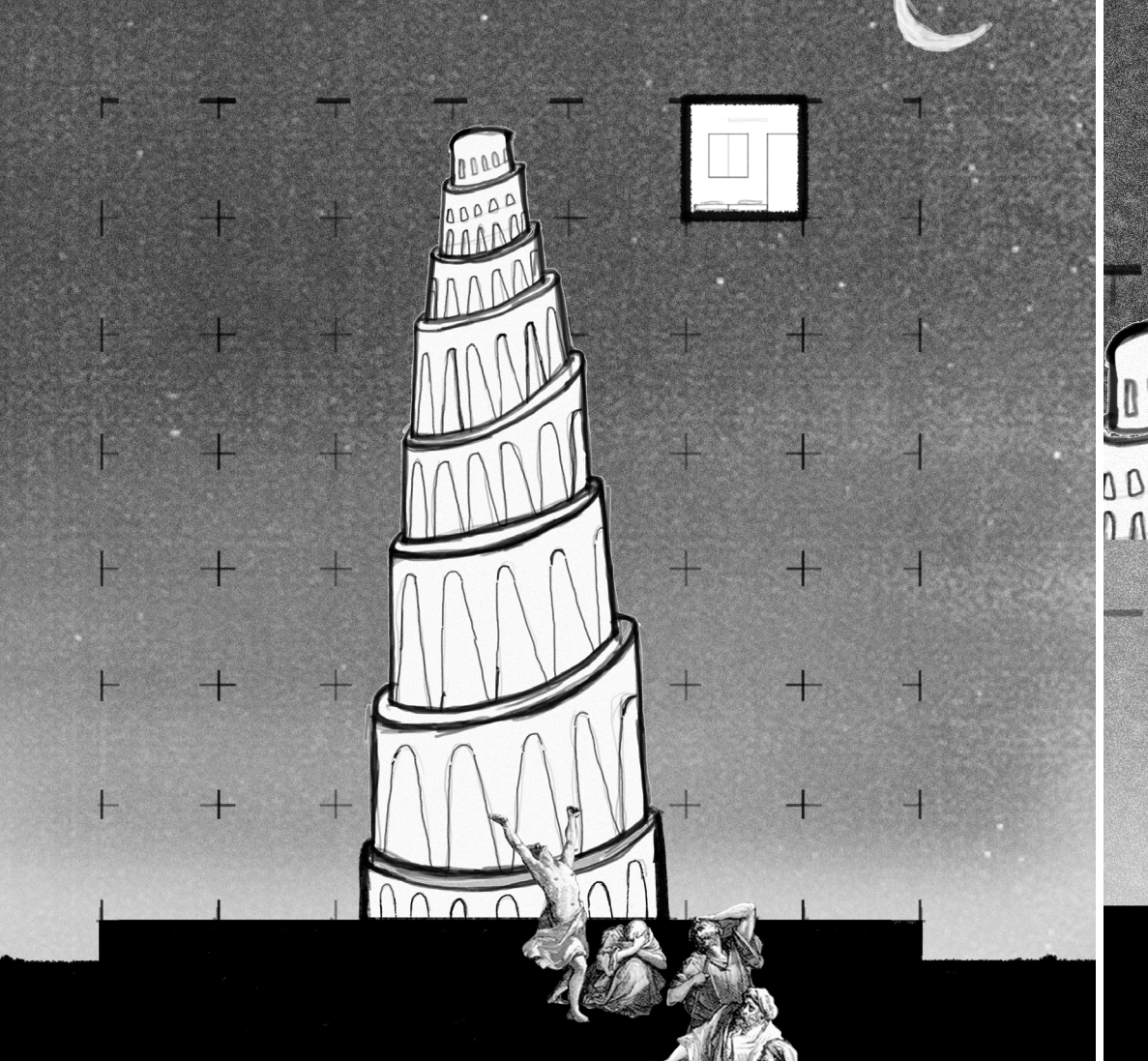


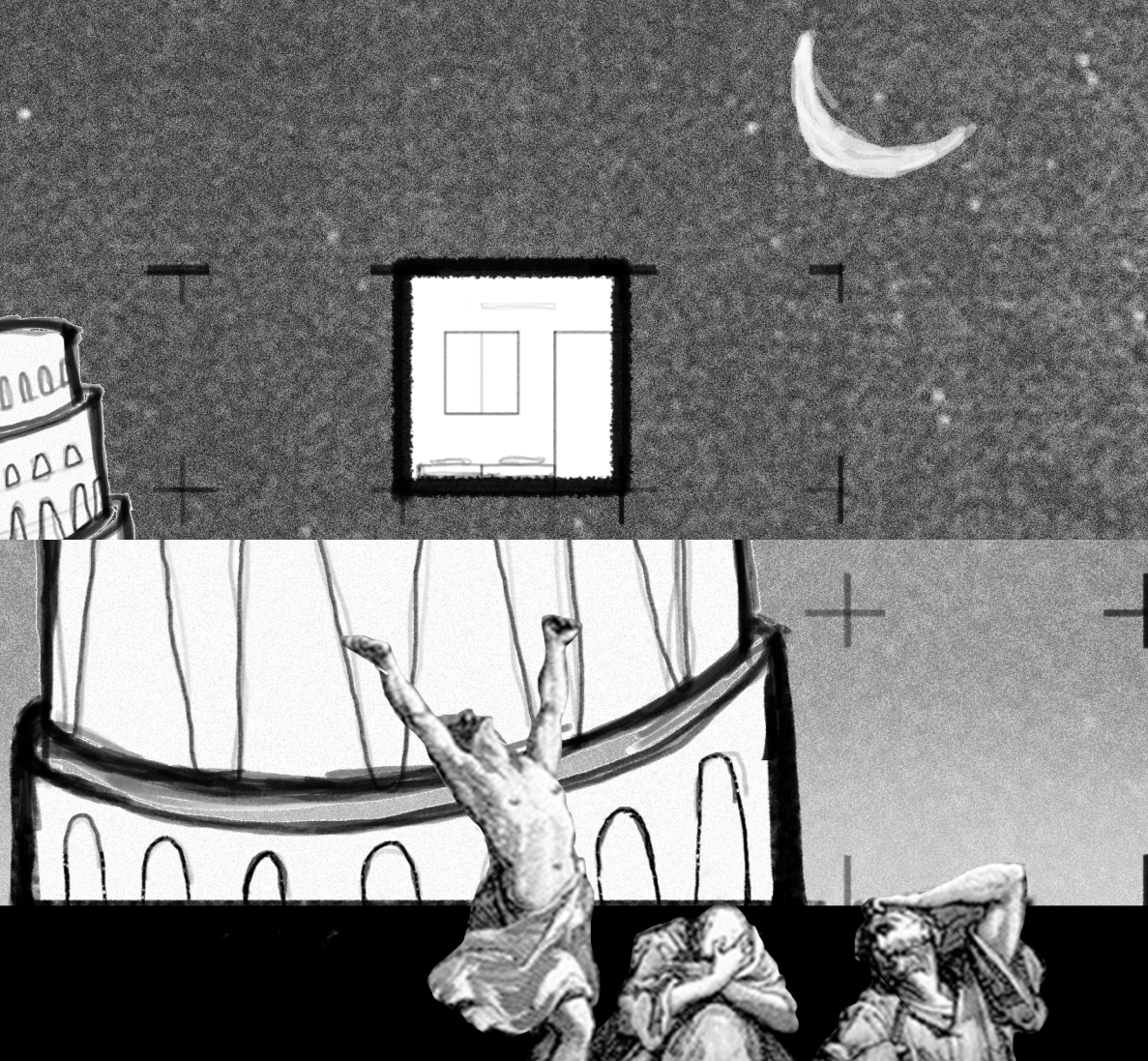
*MIDNIGHT'S AGONY*

LIFE BECAME HELL IF WE RETURNED TO OUR ROOM POST MIDNIGHT.  
THE LIFTS WERE SHUT DOWN AT 00:00 HOURS SHARP. THERE WAS THIS OLD MAN ON THE GROUND FLOOR WHO WAS TRUSTED WITH THIS RESPONSIBILITY.

IT WAS STILL OK WHEN YOU RETURNED FROM WORK. WORST WAS WHEN WE WERE EVEN MILDLY INTOXICATED. ALL THAT WE DESIRED WAS THOSE TWO COIR MATTRESSES -SHARED BY ALL THREE. IN THAT MOMENT THE OTHERWISE NEUTRAL STAIRWELL TURNS INTO A VICIOUS TOWER OF BABEL. IMPARTING GREAT AGONY TO THE ALREADY INTOXICATED & PERPLEXED MIND.

WITH REHABILITATION CAME 'COMMON MAINTENANCE EXPENSES'. THE LIFTS WERE SHUT DOWN TO CUT DOWN THE COMMON POWER BILLS.











Normal Architecture (Kuala Lumpur):  
[normalarchitecture.tumblr.com](http://normalarchitecture.tumblr.com)

Room for Architecture (Mumbai):  
[aroomforarchitecture.tumblr.com](http://aroomforarchitecture.tumblr.com)

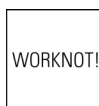
CAMPO (Bogotá):  
[c-a-m-p-o.com](http://c-a-m-p-o.com)

Project Mosha (Tehran):  
[worknot-sharedspaces.tumblr.com](http://worknot-sharedspaces.tumblr.com)

CAMPO پروژه مشاع

ROOM

N/A  
NORMAL ARCHITECTURE



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