

# THE ANCHOR

## REVITALIZING THE GENERAL POST OFFICE - A NEW VISION FOR CENTRAL'S WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

RECLAIM THE CIVIC GROUND AT SITE 3 IN THE FACE OF NEO-LIBERALISM

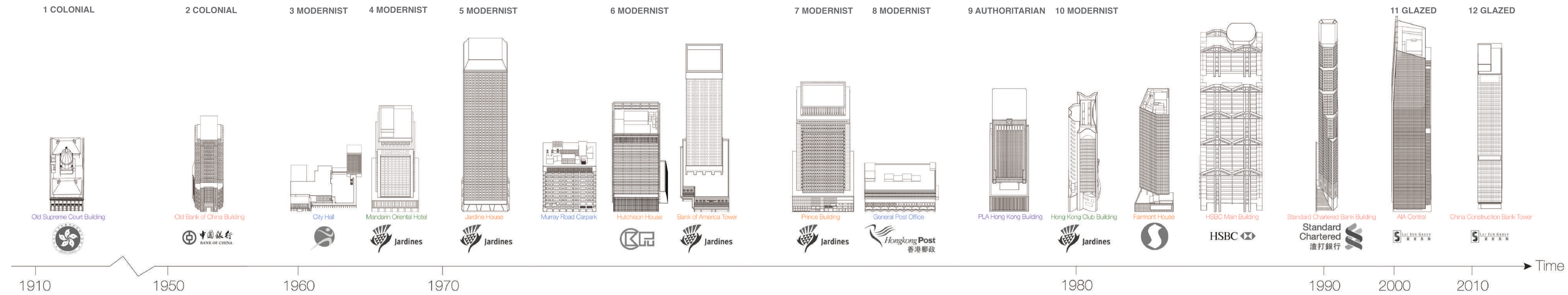
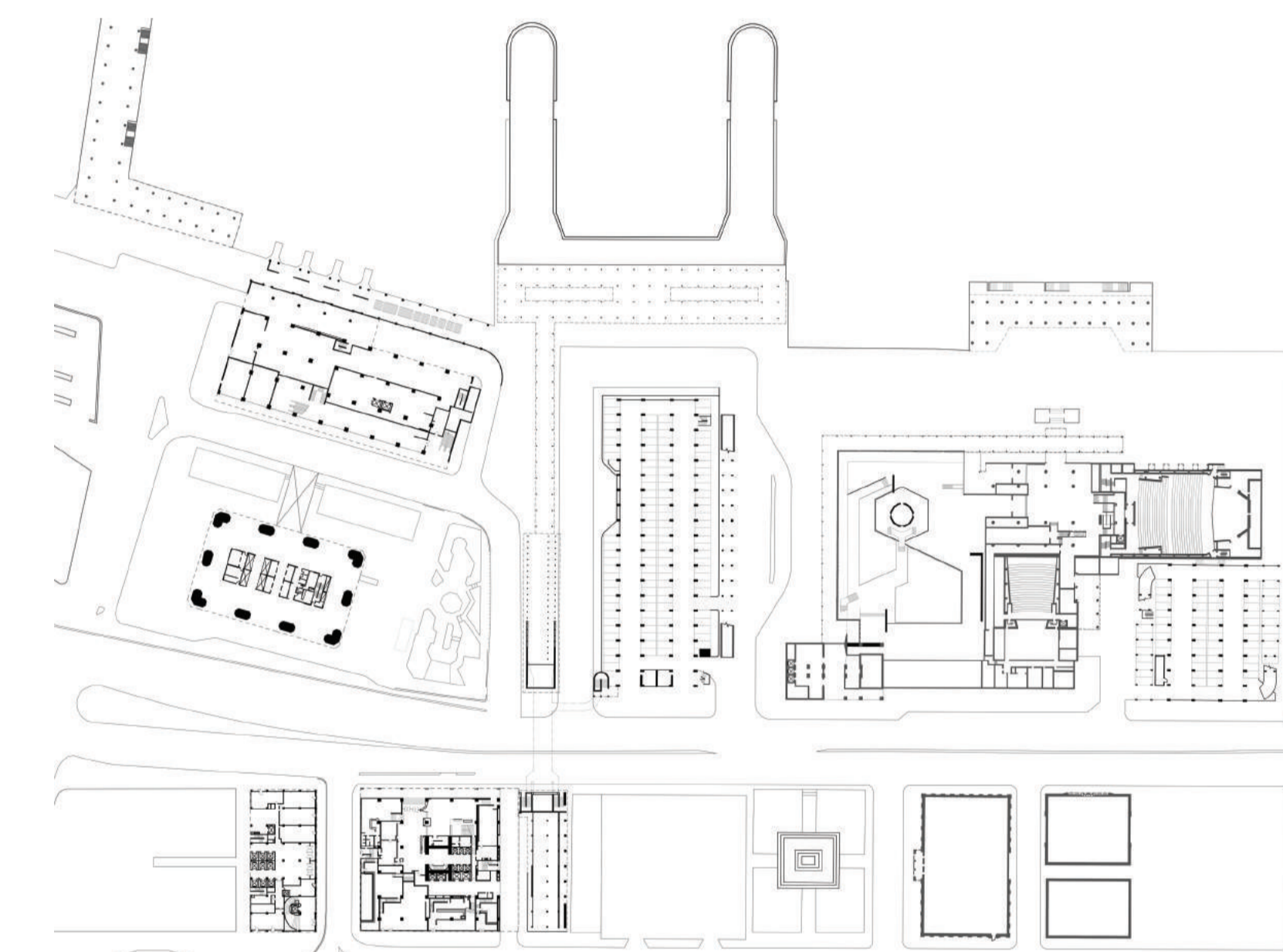


Diagram & Timeline | Program and visual change in the area near GPO



Site plan 1970s

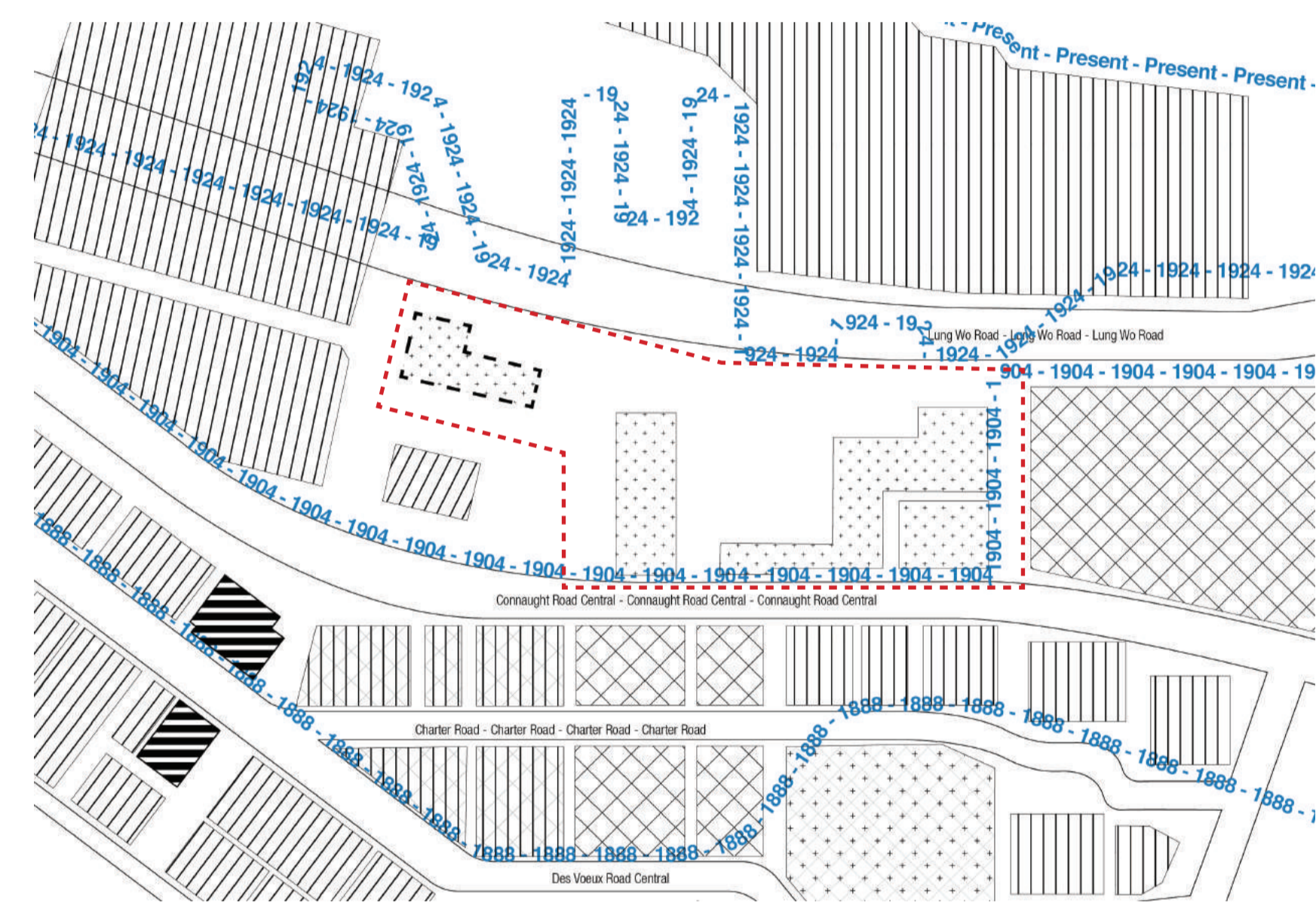


Diagram | Plot usage in Edinburgh Place and surrounding area | Potential change of land use in Edinburgh Place

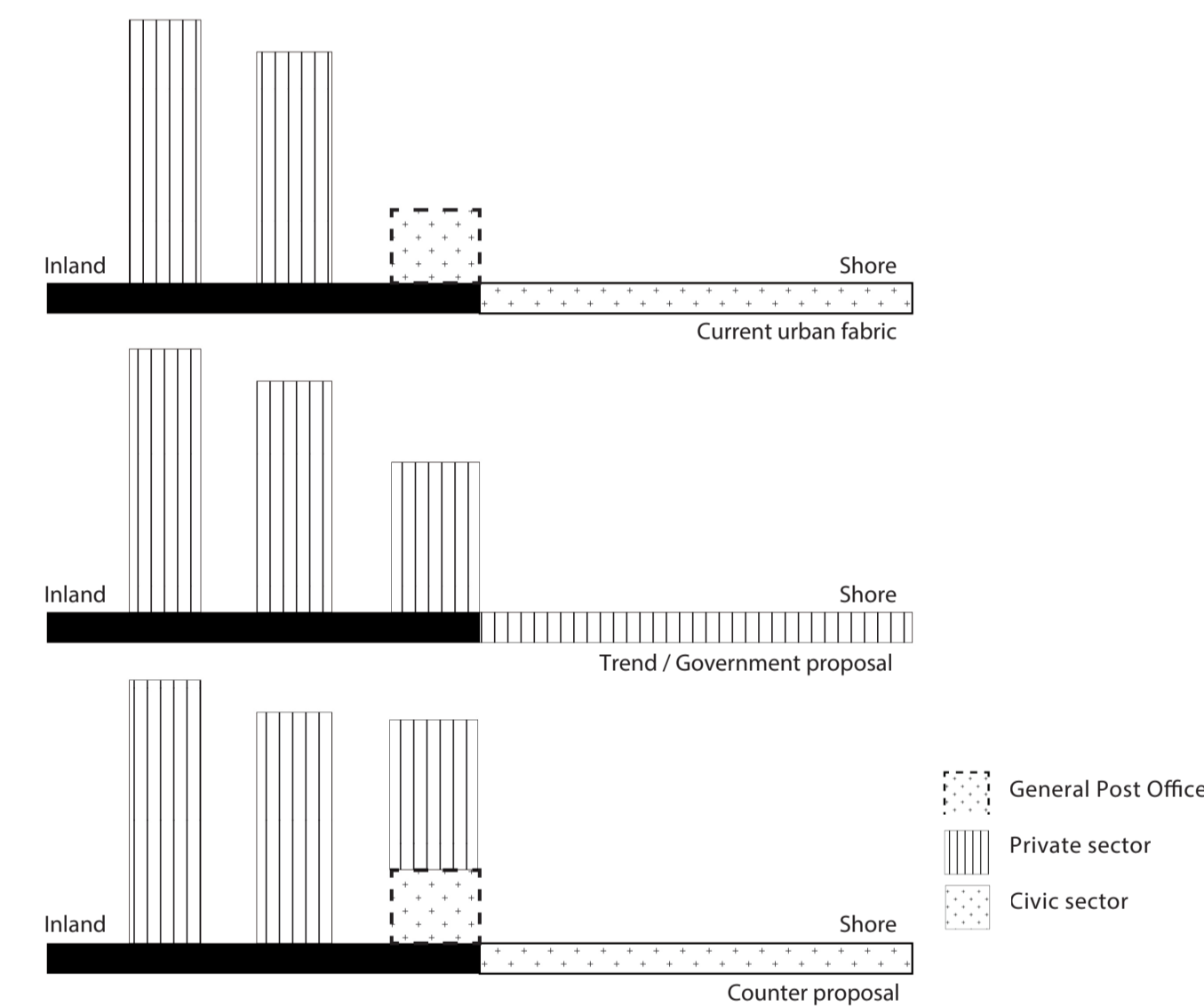
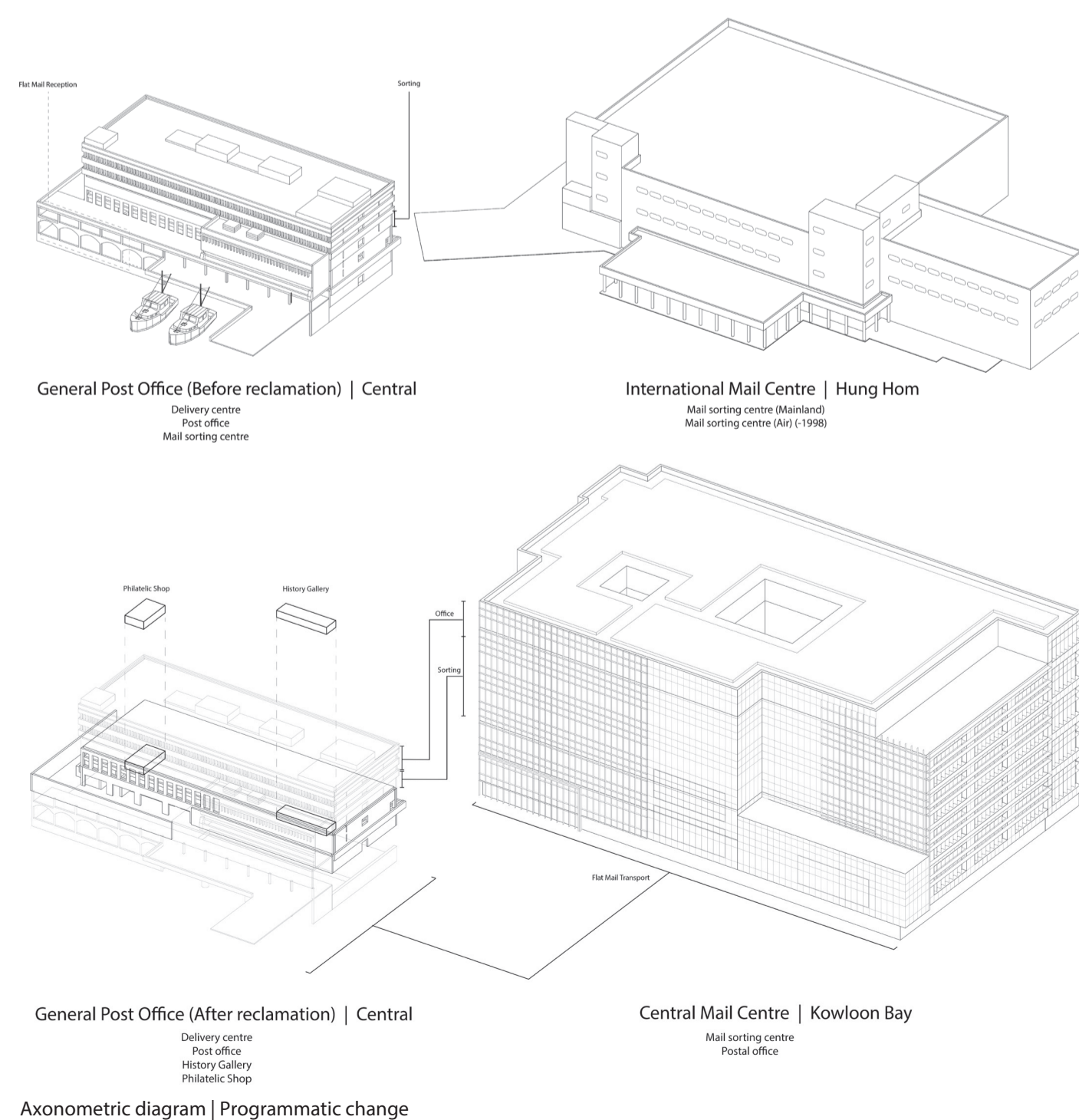


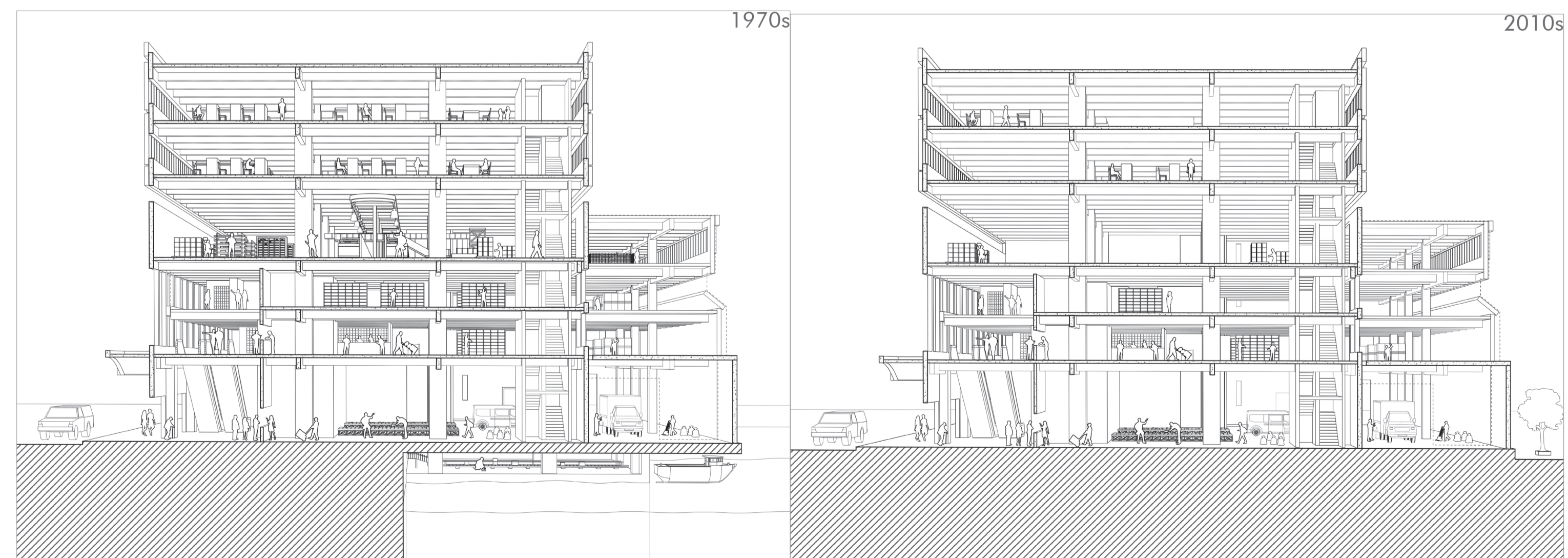
Diagram | Sectional program change



Diagram | Postal service in the area near GPO

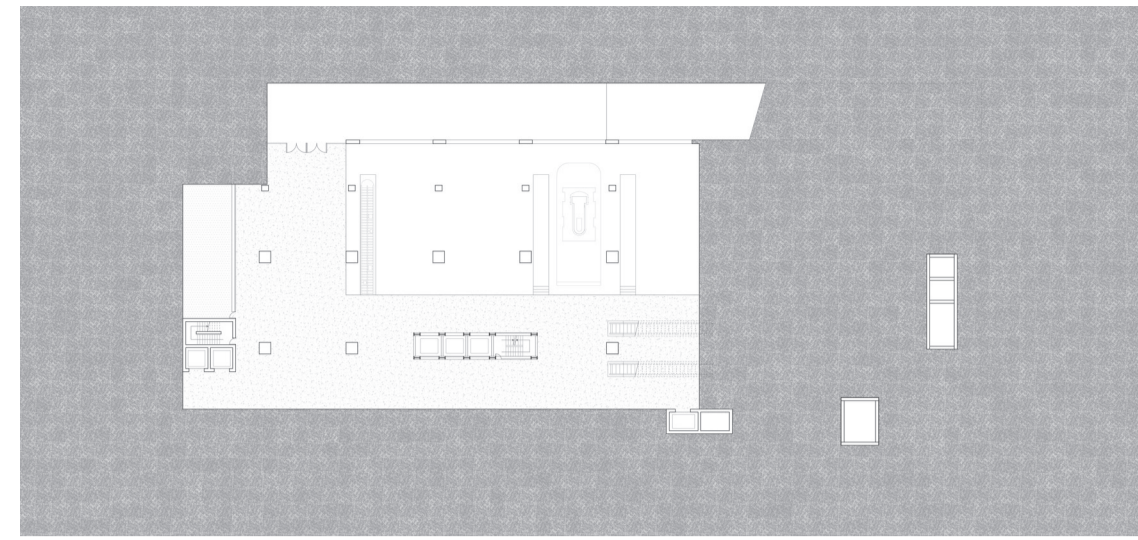


Axonometric diagram | Programmatic change

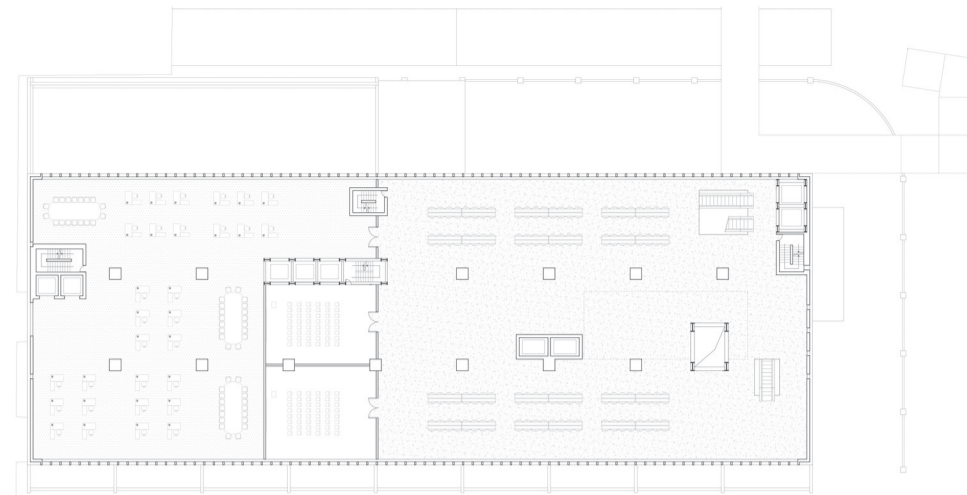


Sectional perspective drawing | Programmatic change

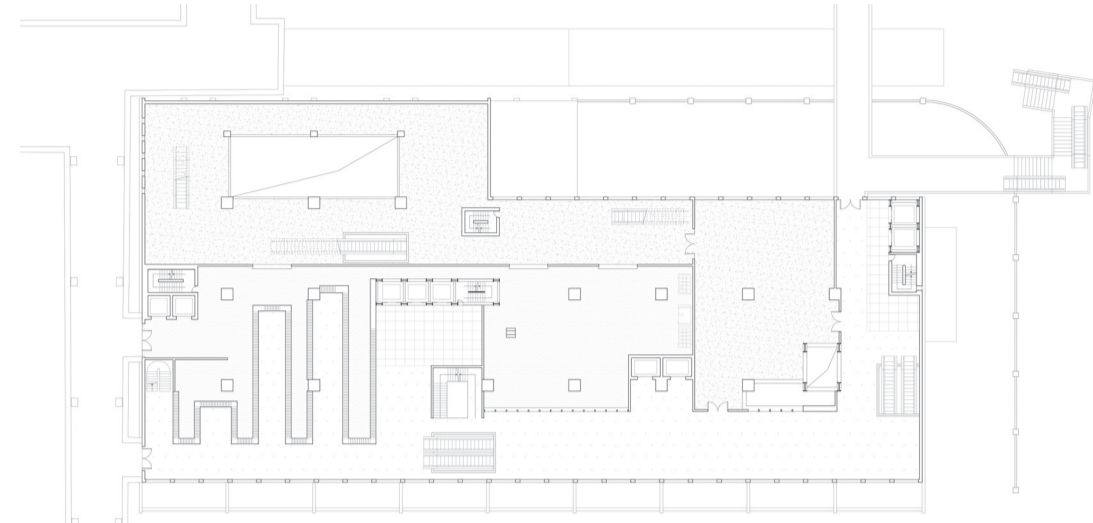
# DESIGN



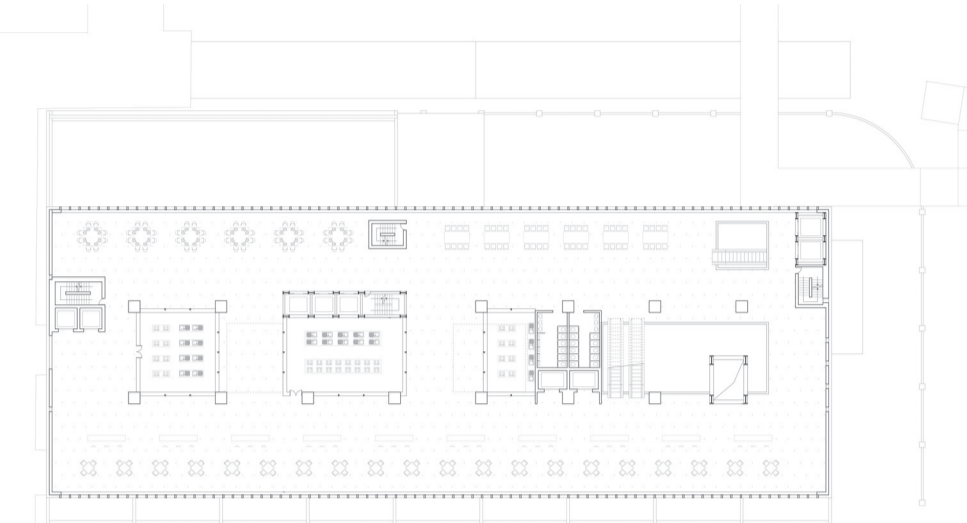
8/F (Entrance, Ticketing, Post Museum)



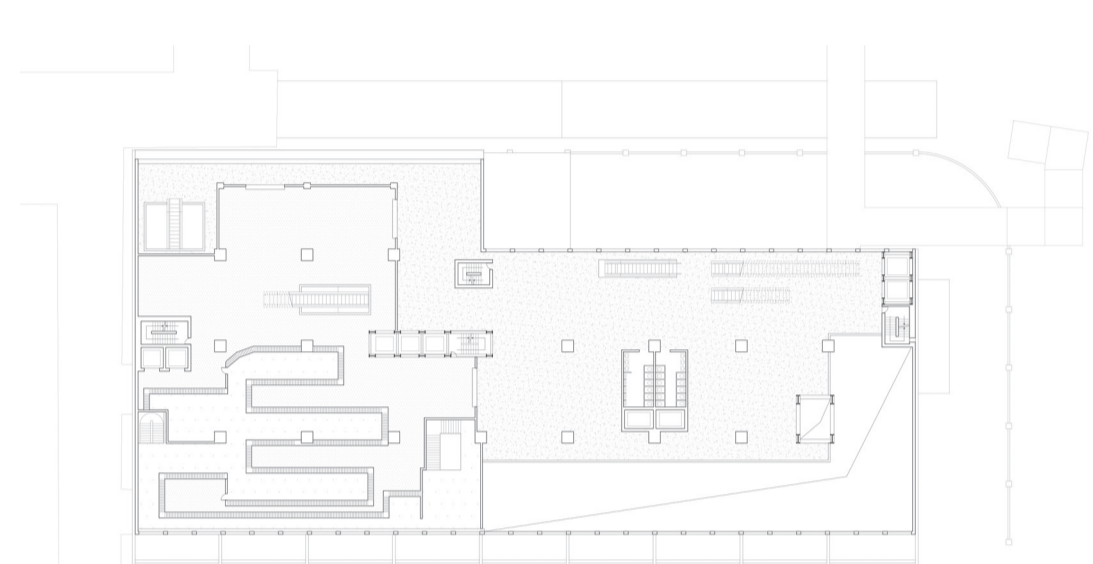
3/F (Public Archive)



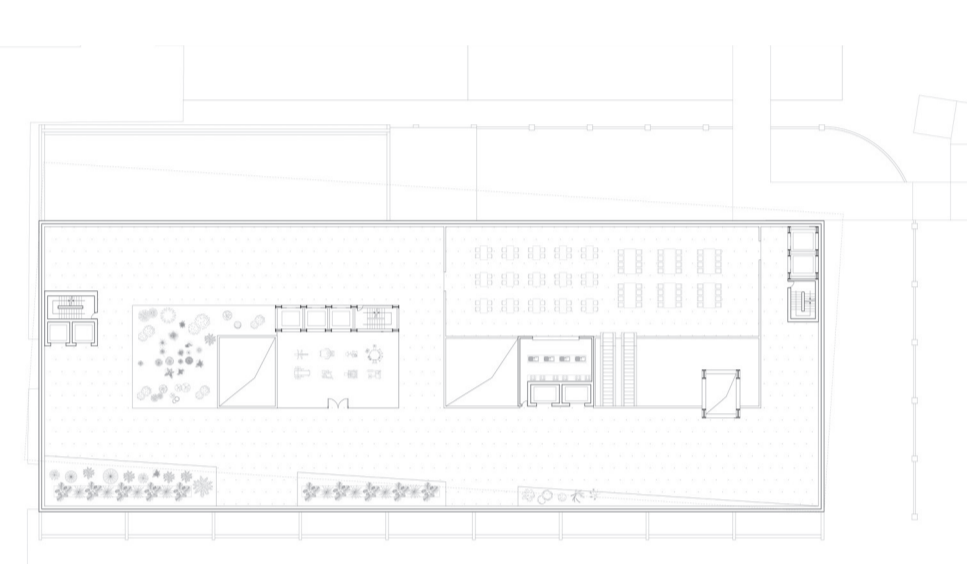
1/F (Elevator lobby for commercial block, Daily Postal Service, Exit for museum)



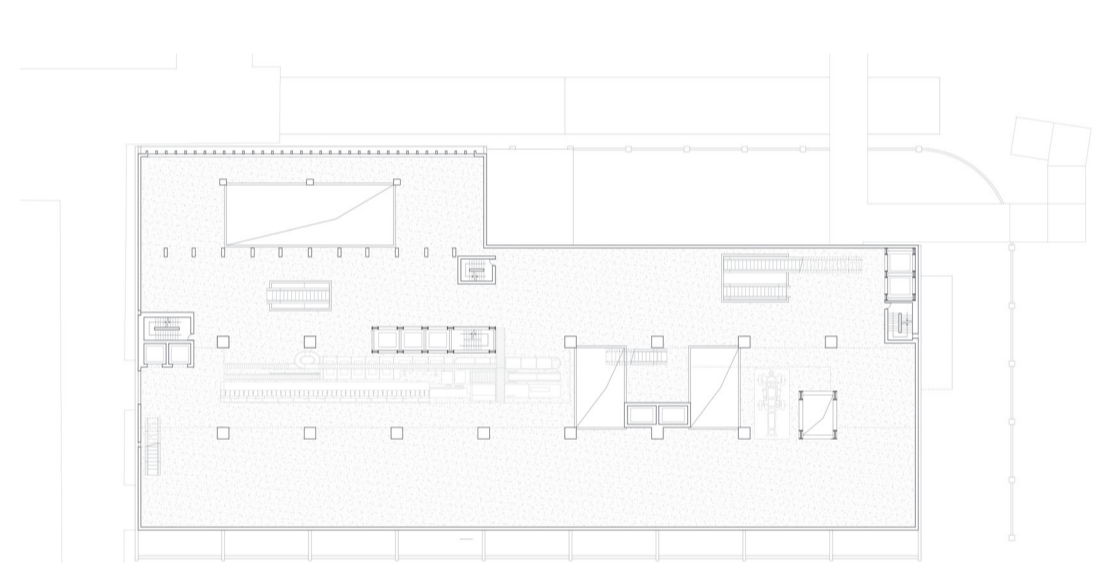
4/F (Food Court)



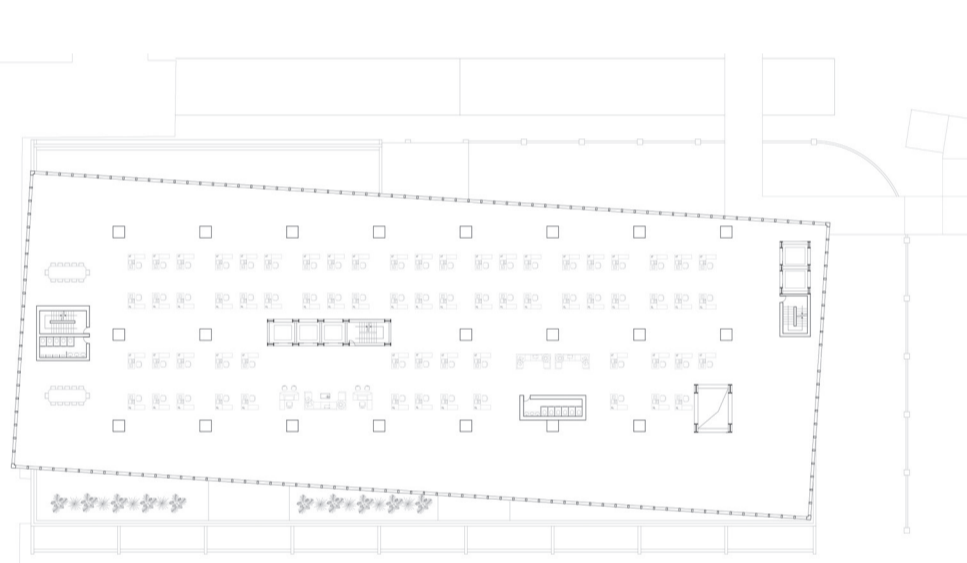
Mezzanine (Postal Service, Post Museum)



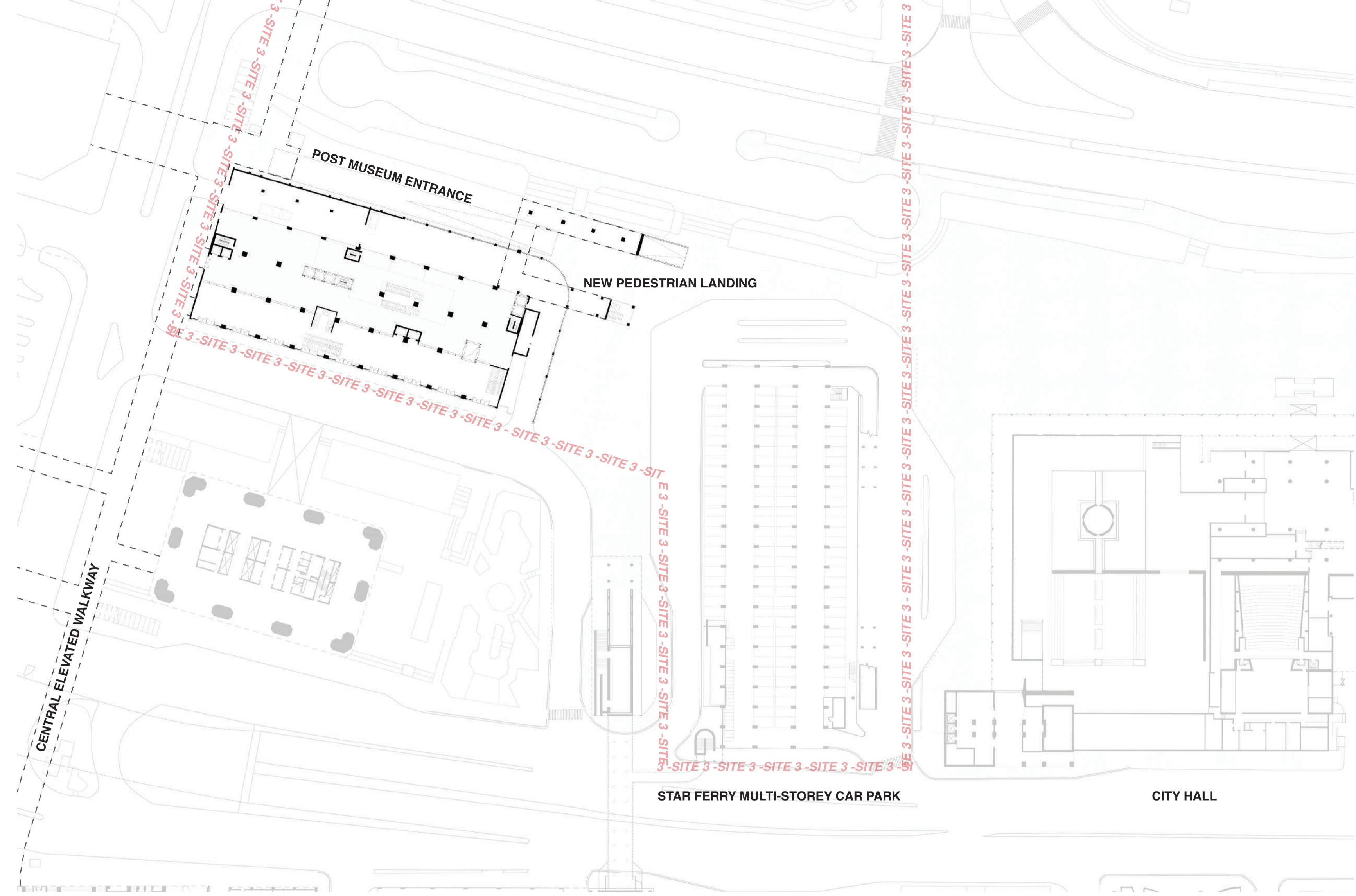
5/F (Public Sky Terrace)



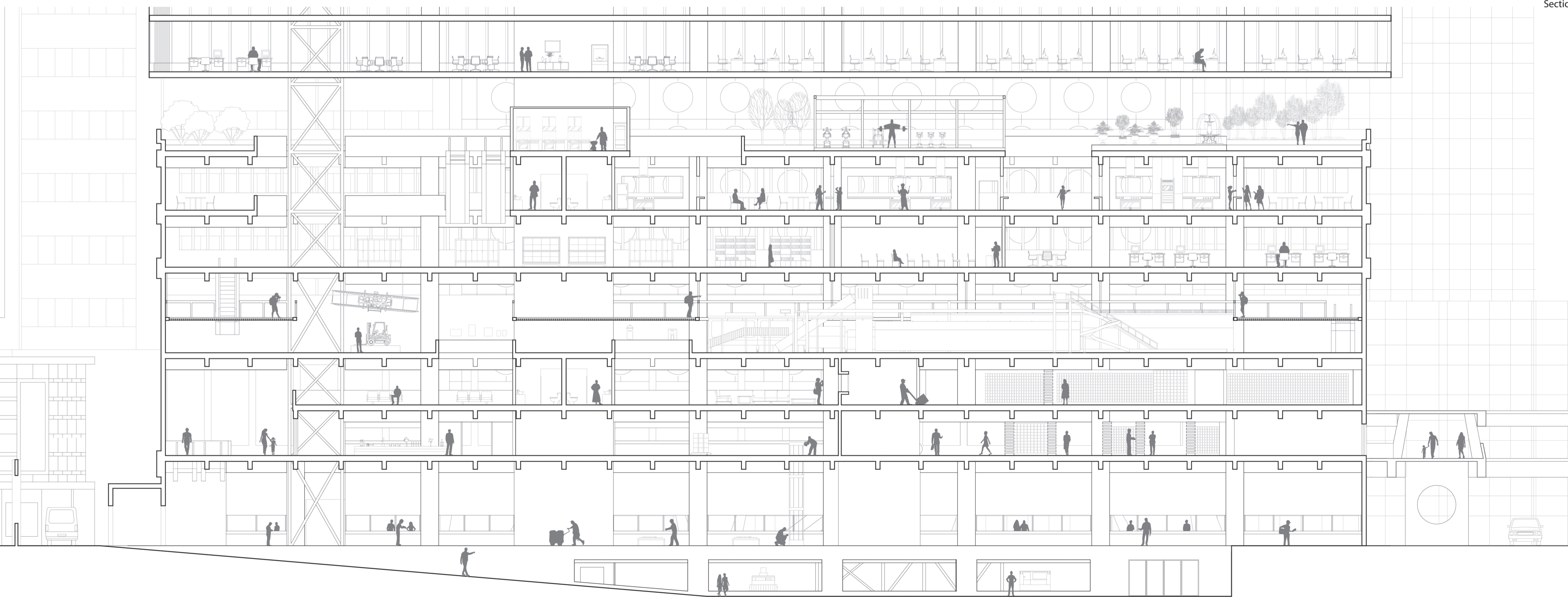
2/F (Post Museum)



Upper Floors (Office)



Site Plan - G/F Plan

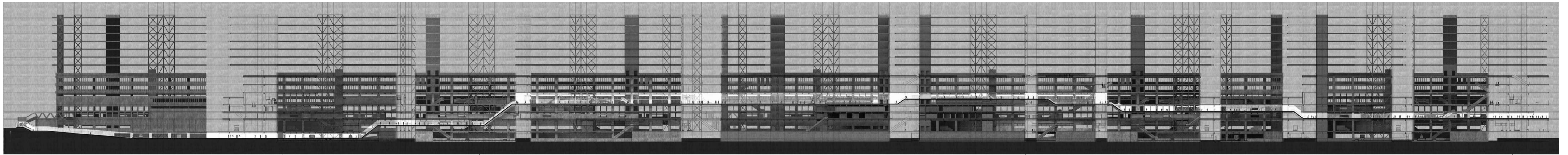


Section



Section

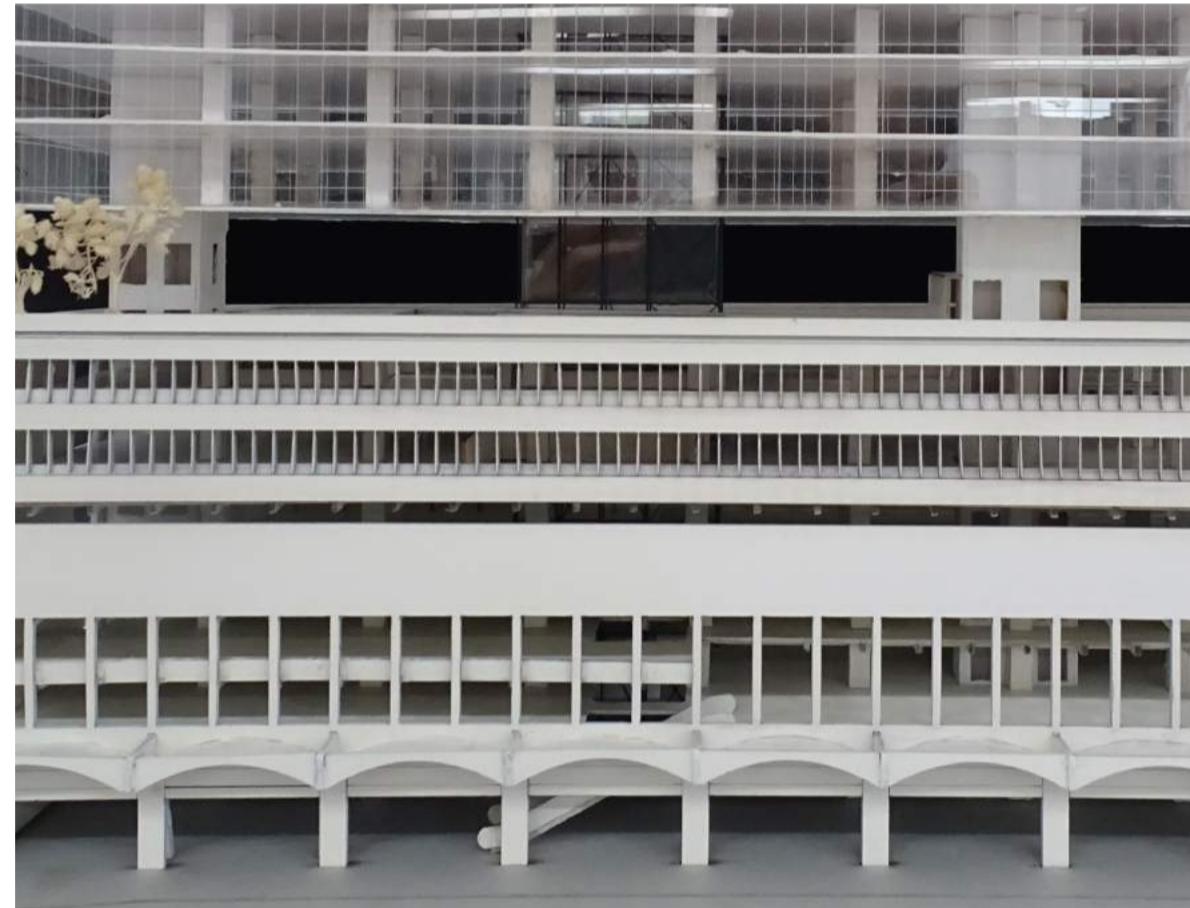
# DESIGN



Processional Route of Post Museum



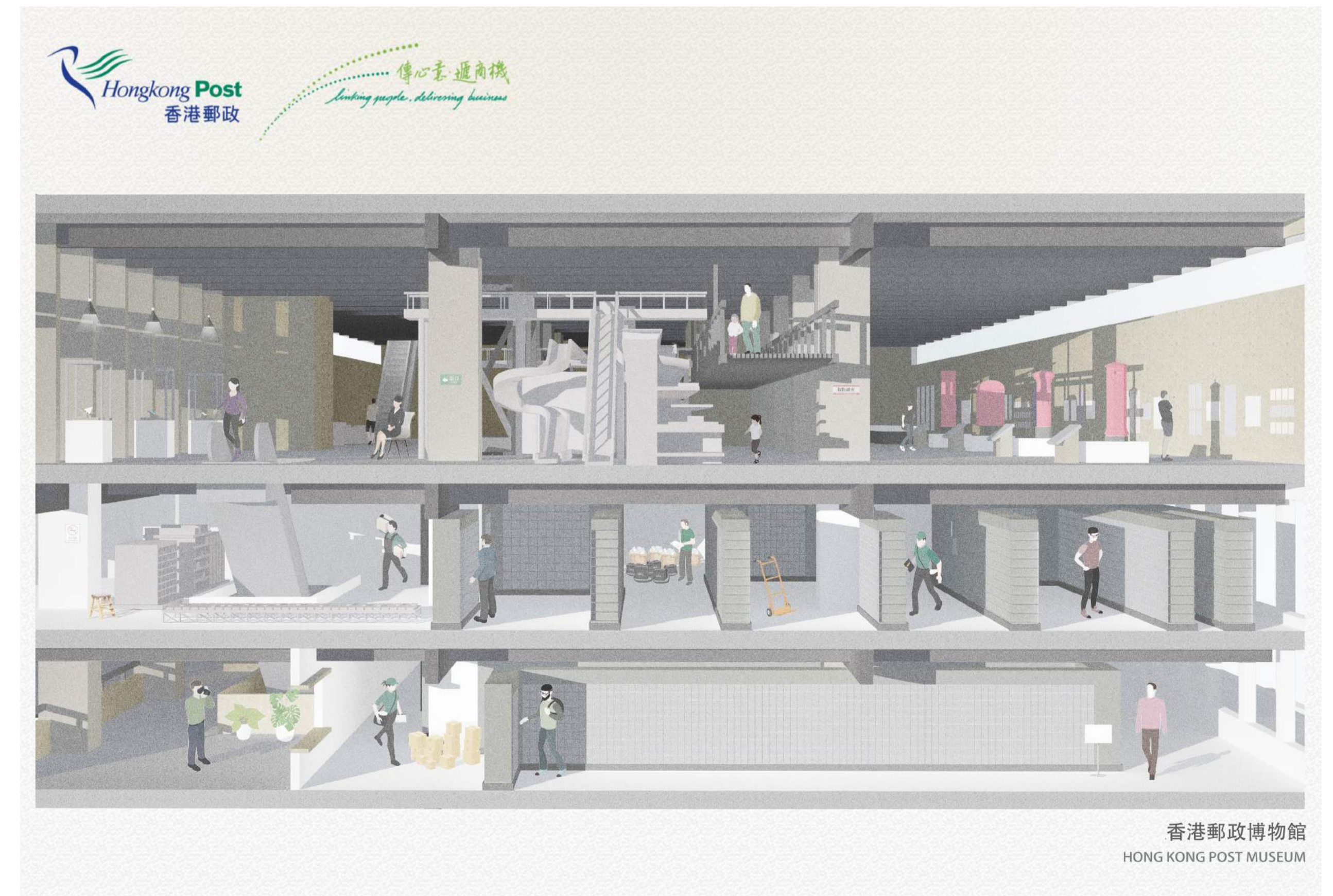
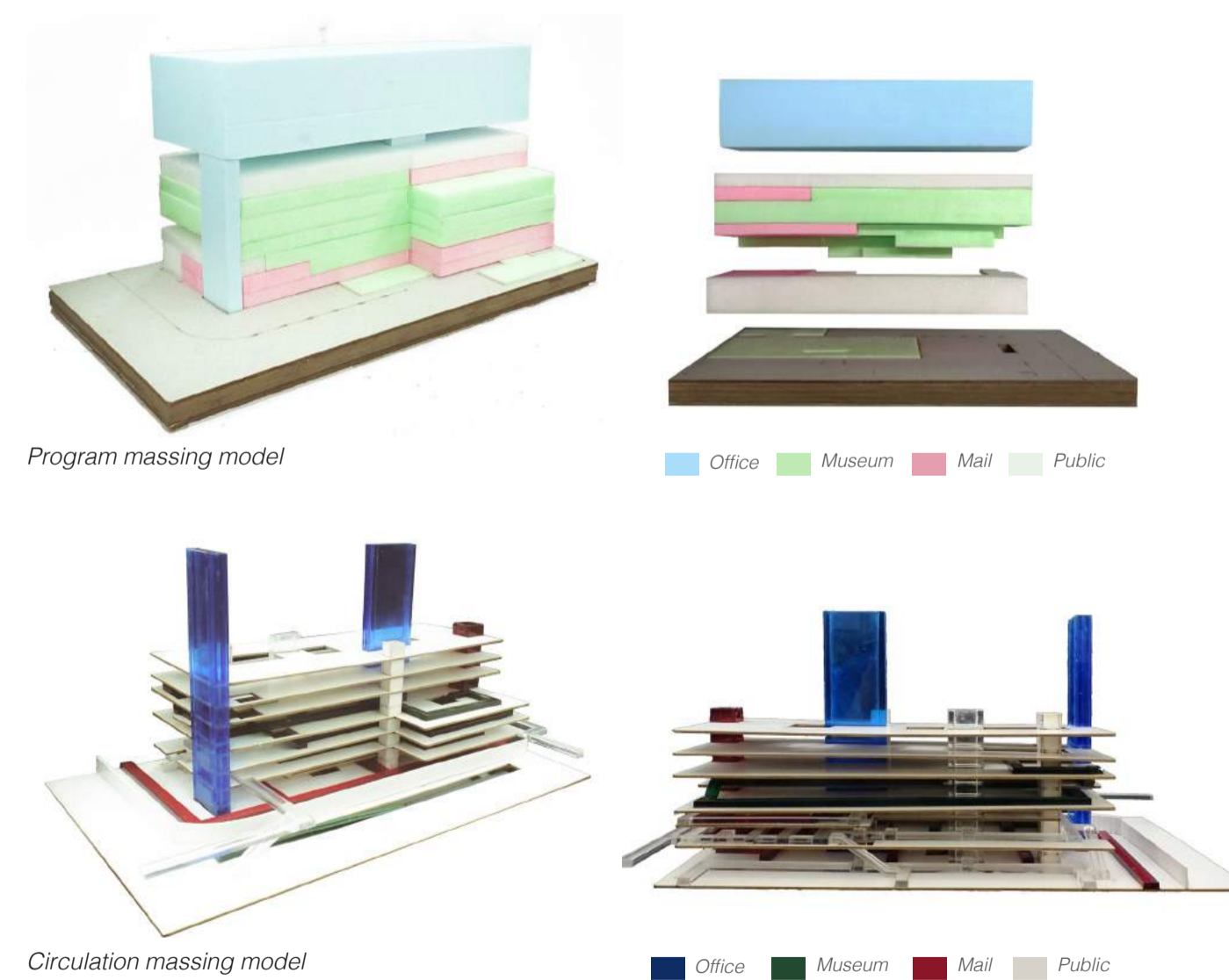
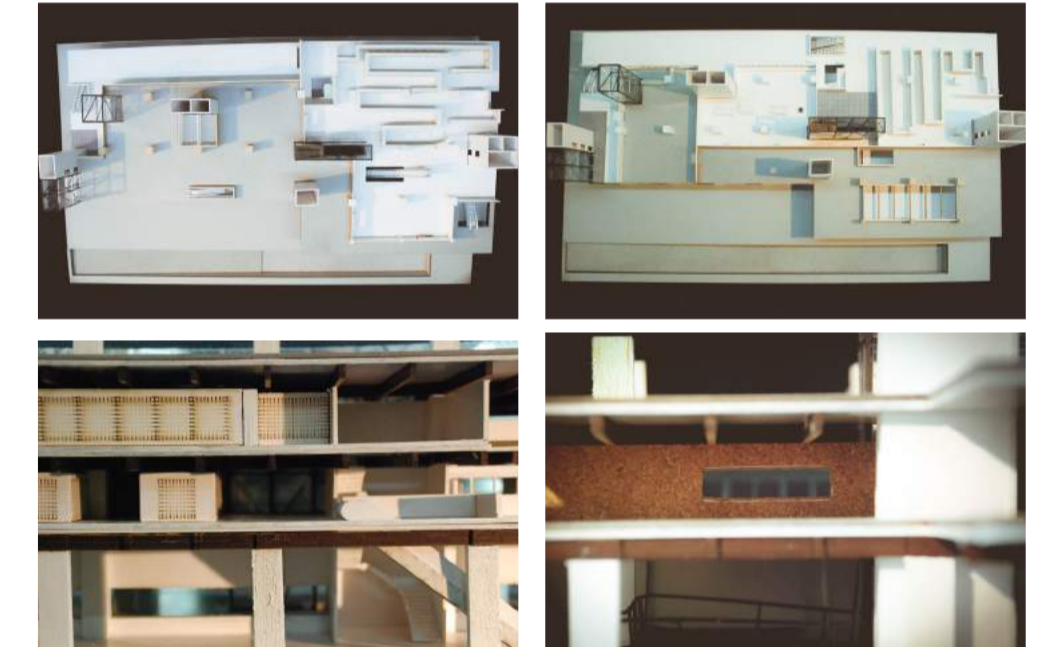
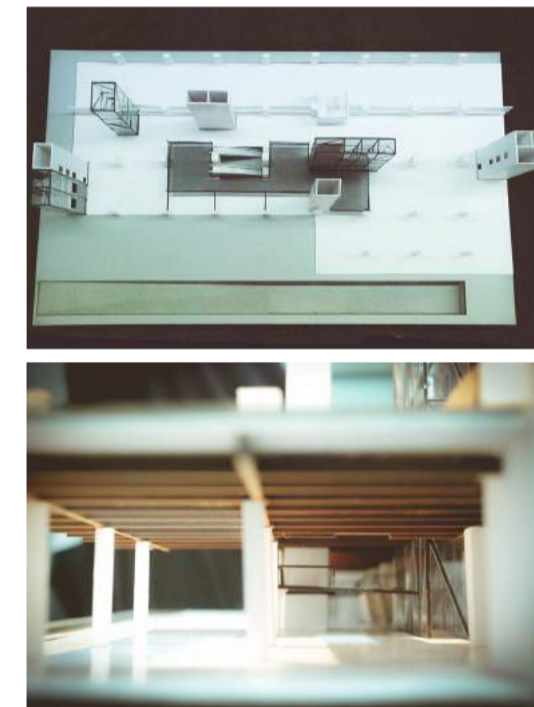
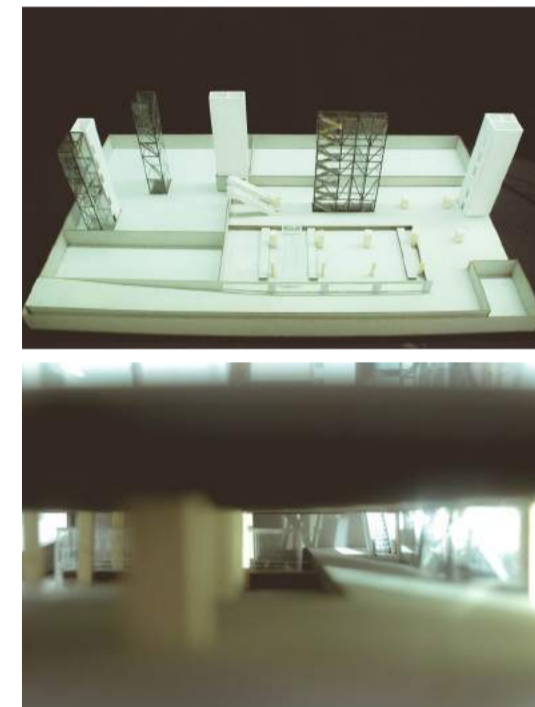
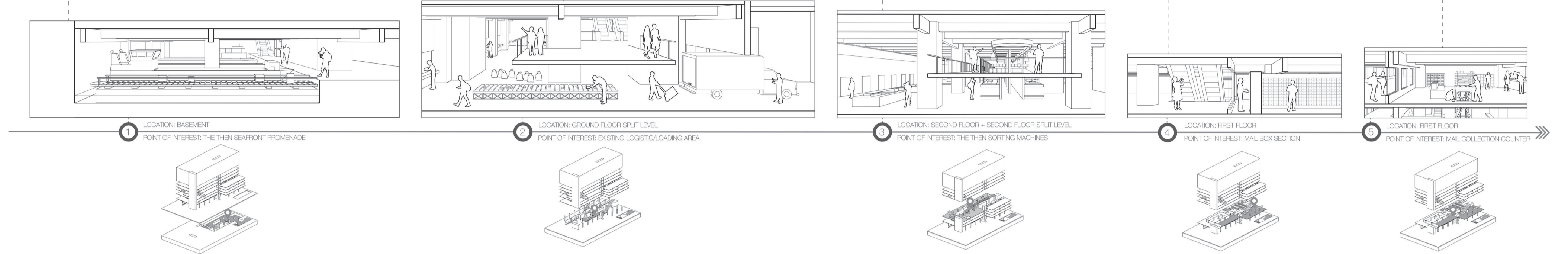
Site model



Detail model



Detail model



Sectional perspective drawing | After intervention | Postcard version

# THE ANCHOR

Finn Chan, Samuel Tam

## Reclaiming the Civil Ground at Site 3 in the face of neo-liberalisation

Our design idea revolves around the General Post Office (GPO). We argue that our vision for the government building in question, which is as such the centerpiece of Site 3, can effect positive changes to the overall spatial planning of the area.

## BACKGROUND

A typological evolution of buildings over time observed in Edinburg Place, to which Site 3 belongs, reveals that civic functions no longer have a strong presence as they used to be in the post-war period, but are gradually outnumbered by financial premises under the influence of neo-liberalization. The last decades saw the demolition of the Queen's Pier and the Old Star Ferry Pier flanking the historic civic axis running across Site 3. With the latest reclamation of the coastline introduced in 2009, the existing public sphere is likely to experience again the same impact to the civic realm imposed by the 1924 reclamation on the Statue Square.

To satisfy the thirst for new office spaces, a number of urban design studies submitted to and released by the government in recent years call for a redevelopment of Site 3's GPO and its neighboring garage into a large-scale commercial complex, which comes as a further blow to the waning public ideals. We believe this is a negligence to the fact that the GPO, along with the adjacent car park, has been erected at the forefront of the civic strip of land as a signpost since the post-war colonial period. The new wave of disruption of "public occupancy" at the harbour front by the future commercial land use in the pipeline is very likely to signify the death of the precious civic ground, which has already managed to survive in the highly business-oriented financial centre for decades.

Deemed a constituent of the civic realm all along, the General Post Office is integral to the image making of the Central Business District. For this reason, we decide to treat the Post Office as a point of entry and put forward an alternative for the historic building, considering its strategic importance to Site 3 and greater Central as a whole. Our project aims to re-anchor GPO, and its respective civic realm, to the heart of the Site without compromising the topical commercial needs.

## DESIGN APPROACH

A scrutiny of the historic and current value chain of Hong Kong's postal service together with programmatic change within the building suggests the General Post Office' shift from a central mail handling centre to a regional delivery centre. However, the existing mail services, such as counters and mail boxes within the building, are still very important to citizens living and working in Central. Drawing from our analysis, we believe existing mail services within the Post Office

ought to be kept. The redundant spaces once occupied by the already relocated logistical or industrial operations, on the other hand, will be converted to the city's principal post museum presenting Hong Kong's unique postal history and crucial to the identity formation of the area. Meanwhile, a commercial block is added on top of the original GPO edifice.

Although we mainly act on the GPO, our scheme is derived from a reconsideration of the programmatic section at Site 3 from the inland all the way to the shore. As shown by our sectional diagram, the ground level is in essence a projection of the functions of buildings. The safeguard for the remaining civic ground is therefore impossible without the presence of the GPO. As opposed to concurrent governmental and market proposals, we try to push the commercial functions upward and place the volume above the GPO so that public functions can still be in direct contact with the ground.

## HERITAGE & CULTURE

The processional route of the public museum will first commence at the basement where mail boats were unloaded in the past, then circulate on the upper floors where a 20th century conveyor belt system is displayed, and finally end at the main reception hall on the first floor with a new gift shop. In other words, visitors can personally experience and be in direct synchronization with the historic mail flow inside the building as they move along the exhibition spaces. On the other hand, the program and logistics also echo with the functions and spatial sequence in the past, which shapes the form of GPO. The methodology reflects the principle of modern architecture - forms follow functions. The journey of the museum at the same time re-glorify one of the vital modern architecture in HK, once again echoing with the theme of heritage and culture.

## PUBLICNESS & CIVICNESS

In terms of the contribution to publicness, our proposal not only defends the citizens' right to access a wide range of postal service at the heart of the Central Business District but also creates new civic nodes, namely the post museum, together with associated point of interests, such as the archive library on the third floor, the food court on the fourth floor and the public sky terrace on the roof of the original building mediating between the public and private functions below and above. Such enrichment of existing public services with new educational, food catering and leisure-related programs allows Site 3 to embrace greater multiplicity of social content compared to the original planning strategy which tries to impose another massive and generic indoor shopping deck next to the waterfront.

## CONNECTIVITY & ACCESSIBILITY

When it comes to connectivity, our proposal avails itself of the existing footbridge serving the main reception hall of the General Post Office, which is part of the Central Elevated Walkway. We consider it an effective and indispensable public access whose potential should be

maximized. To do so we propose a new entrance in the northeastern corner of the building through which citizens can proceed to the City Gallery and the City Hall from the main reception hall with ease, opening up a new corridor which strengthens the connection between the Eastern and Western ends of Site 3. Next to the landing of the new entrance is a ramp descending to the underground entrance of the Post Museum, which is meant to draw more visitors and tourists to the currently less vibrant North Side of site 3.

## APPLICABILITY

Out of pragmatic concerns, we also propose to top the original Post Office Building with new commercial office blocks for our proposed preservation to balance profits and sustainable development. While we have worked out several locations for the insertion of new structural cores and suggest an architectural form for the new addition, its facade expression and the number of blocks to be added are still negotiable, provided that the elevational principle of the original GPO building is sufficiently respected. In this regard we suggest a slightly shifted rectangular form clad in brise-soleil to echo with the small windows of GPO on upper floors.

Our proposal puts forward a new mindset of dealing with the dialectic tension between civic values and economic aspirations, as well as heritage conservation and urban progress. Public and private programs are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can co-exist to generate new socio-economic and cultural merits. In the meantime, we notice that many nice public-oriented visions have been rejected by decision makers because of the projects' disregard for the economic reality. This explains why we strive to safeguard the civic roots of the site but at the same time acknowledge the need to settle private interests. What we propose might be viewed as a daring yet pragmatic development model applicable to many old buildings of monumental value in Hong Kong constantly threatened by real estate forces at play. To demolish or to not demolish - that is not the question. For there are always other more creative possibilities.

## TEAM BACKGROUND

We are architecture graduates of the University of Hong Kong. This proposal is in fact taken from our own Year 3 studio project under the theme of "Rethinking Edinburgh Place", supervised by Ying Zhou, Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture in HKU.