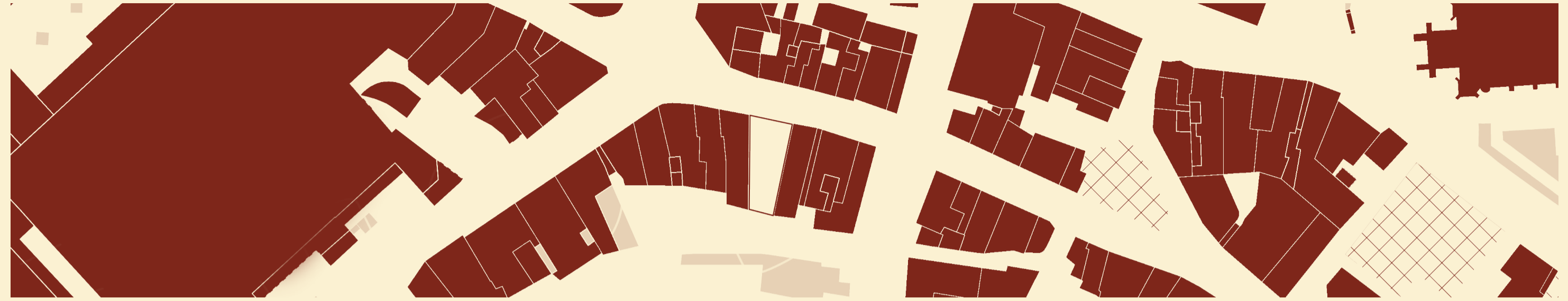


COMMON GROUND.

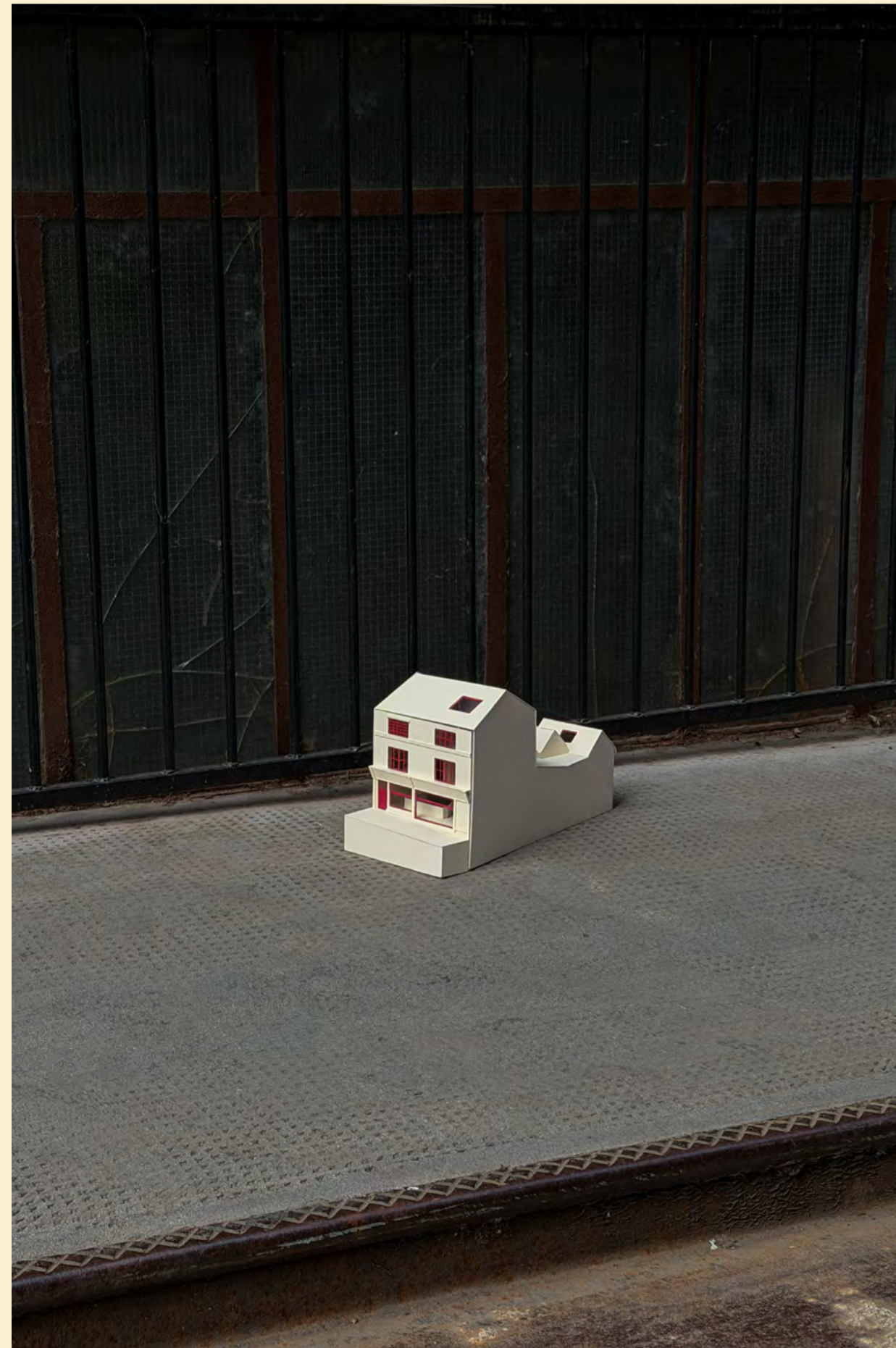
What happens when empty space is no longer seen as a void to fill, but as an opportunity to connect?

Common Ground reimagines a vacant site as a civic space. Rather than repairing the town through addition, the project works through subtraction, creating opportunities for making, gathering, and collective activity within a space that has been overlooked.

Rooted in the idea that absence can be spatially productive, the proposal uses negative space as a design tool. Openness creates contrast, reveals relationships, and allows the town to be understood in new ways. Through participation rather than occupation, vacant spaces become active again, transforming subtraction into a framework for connection.



4 - 6 Little Underbank, Stockport SK1 1JT



MODEL 1:50

The model communicates the overall form, spatial composition, and visual identity of the design, highlighting the relationship between mass, void, and the surrounding context.

PROTAGONISTS



/ Young local connectors / The social resident / The local creative starter

VACANCY CONTEXT

The site reflects a broader national condition. The UK retail vacancy rate stands at 14%, rising to 17.4% in town centres (Knight Frank, 2024). Research confirms that persistent vacancy does not simply reflect decline, it accelerates it, reducing footfall and eroding community confidence (Institute of Place Management, 2024).

14%

UK RETAIL VACANCY RATE

17.4%

TOWN CENTRES VACANCY RATE

DESIGN INTENT

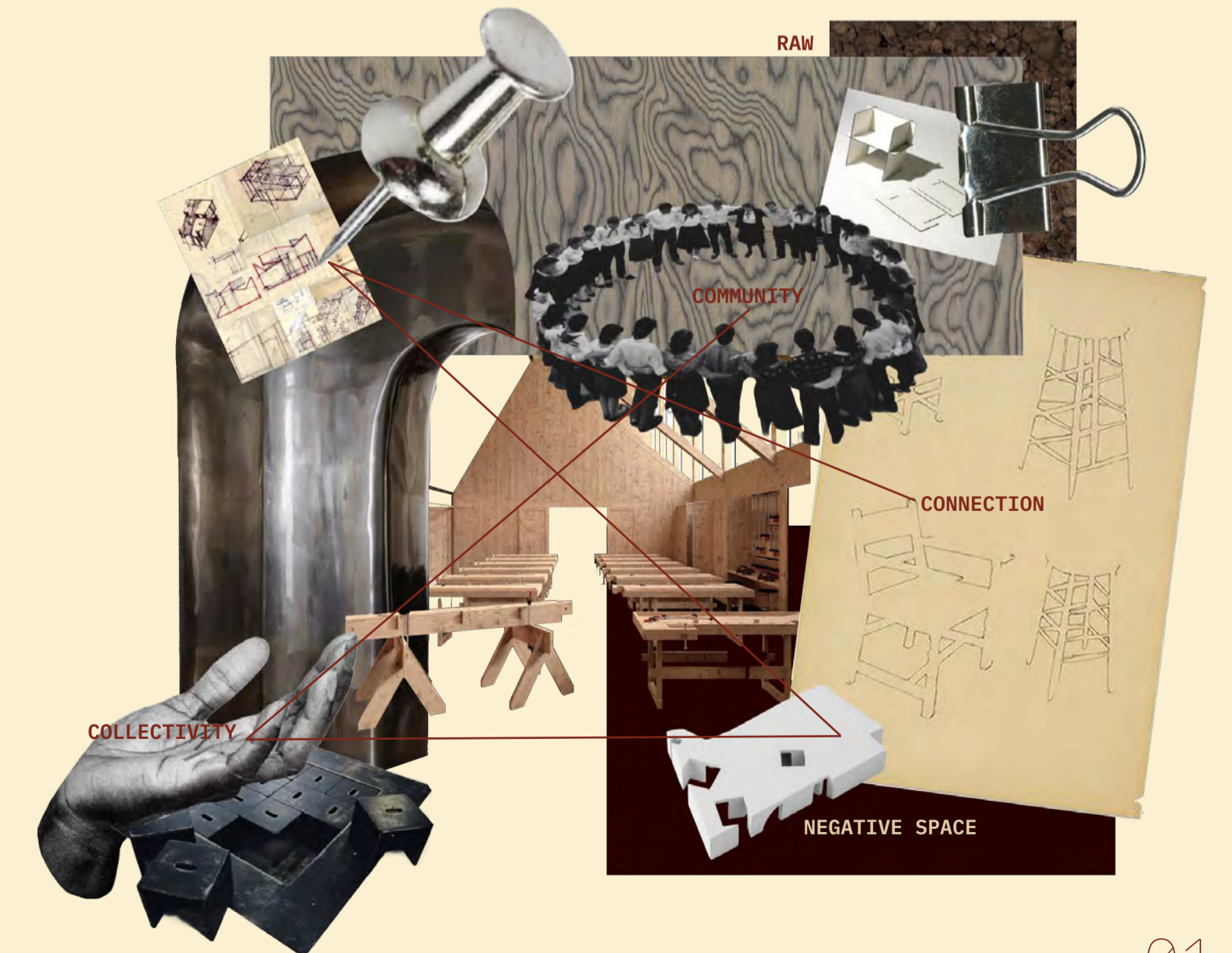
01. / WHO The residents of Stockport. Those who feel disconnected from their town centre, who have watched it gradually empty, and who are looking for a reason to return to it.

02. / WHAT A civic space that reactivates a vacant building in Stockport town centre, transforming it into a shared ground for community, creativity, and encounter.

03. / WHY Vacancy in Stockport is not simply an aesthetic problem, it is a social one. As buildings empty and activity fades, so does community pride and collective presence. This project treats absence as an opportunity, and design as a tool for reconnection.

04. / WHEN The space is intended for everyday use, not for special occasions alone. It is active across the week, adapting to different rhythms and needs, from quiet individual use during the day to shared events and gatherings in the evening.

CONCEPT BOARD

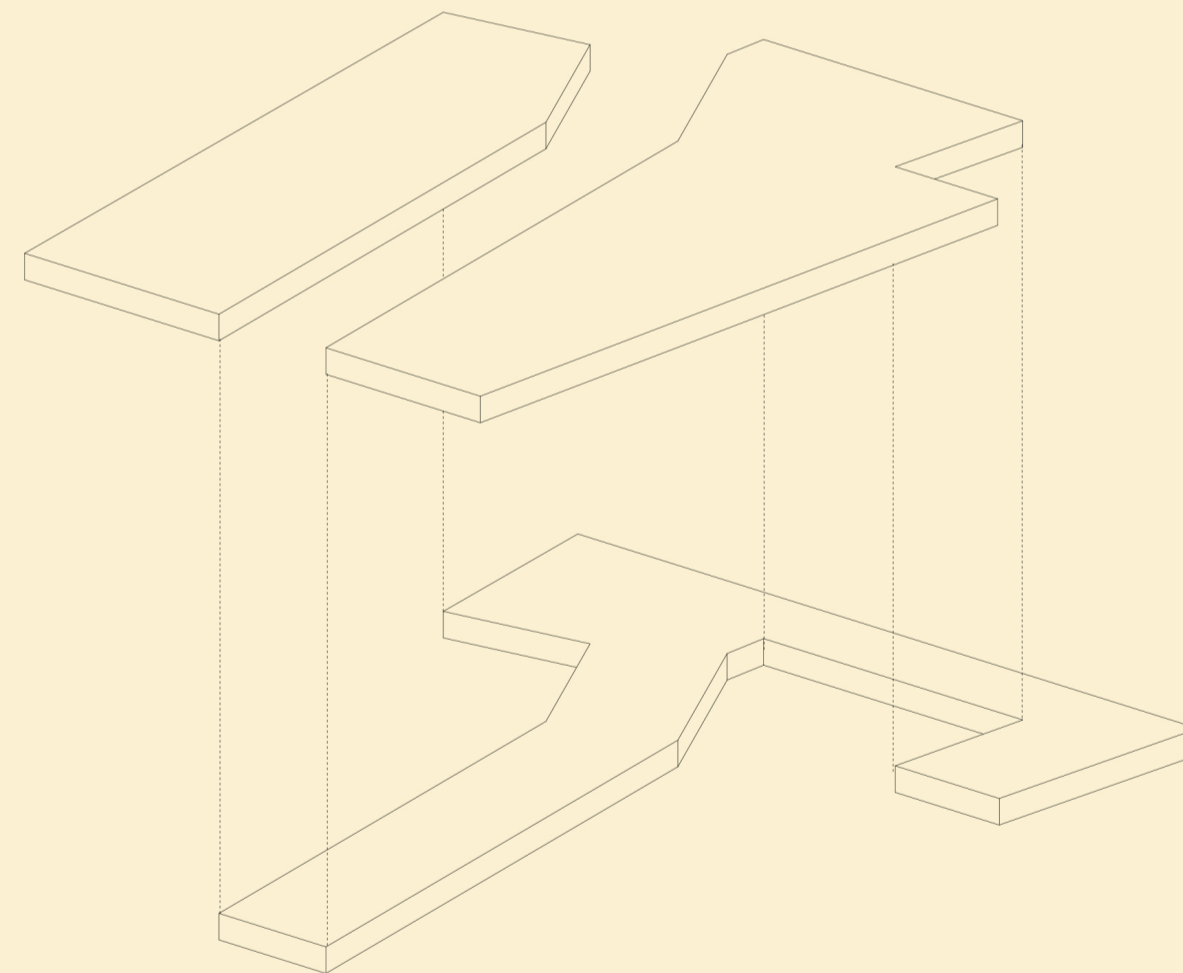
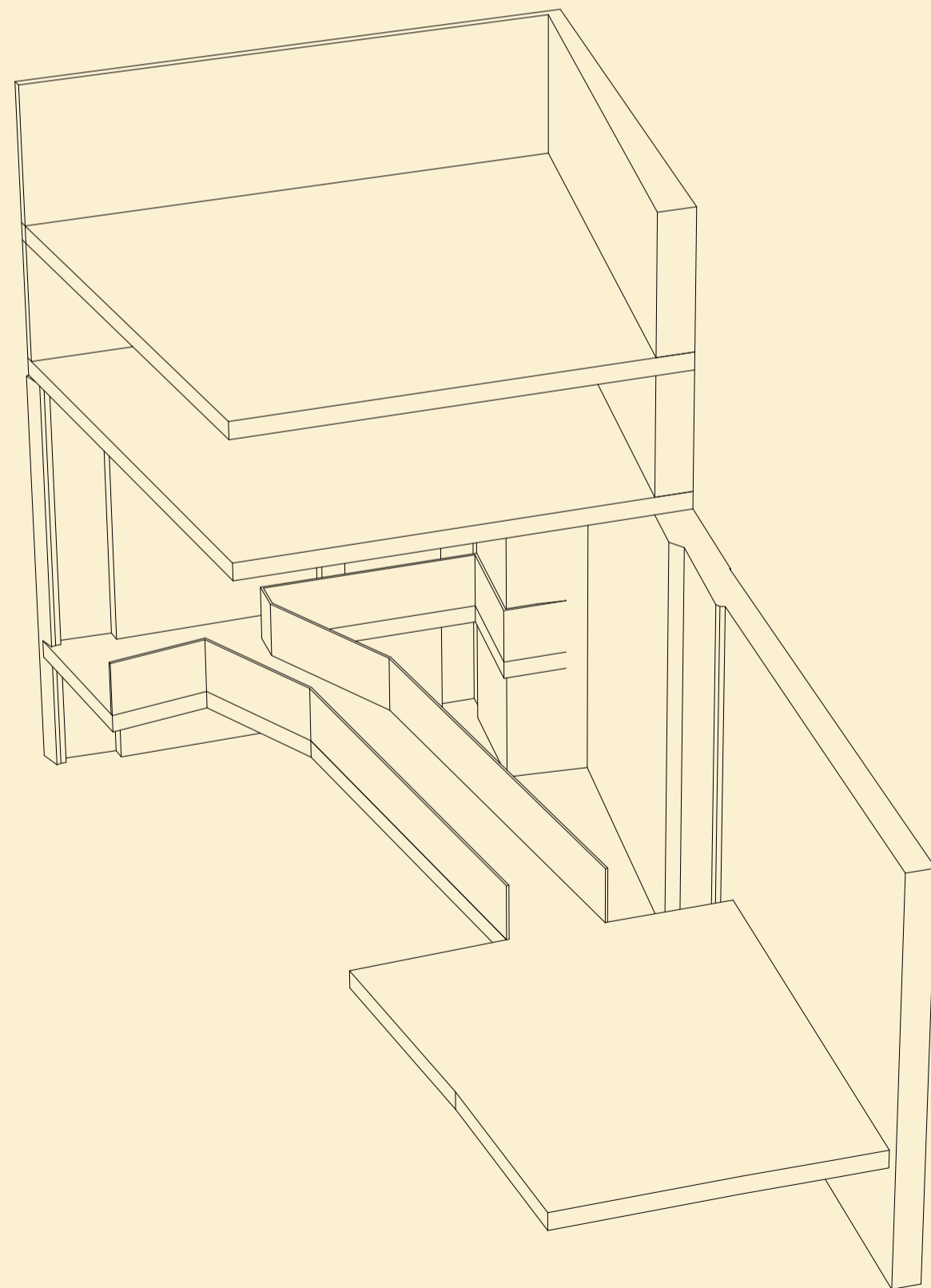
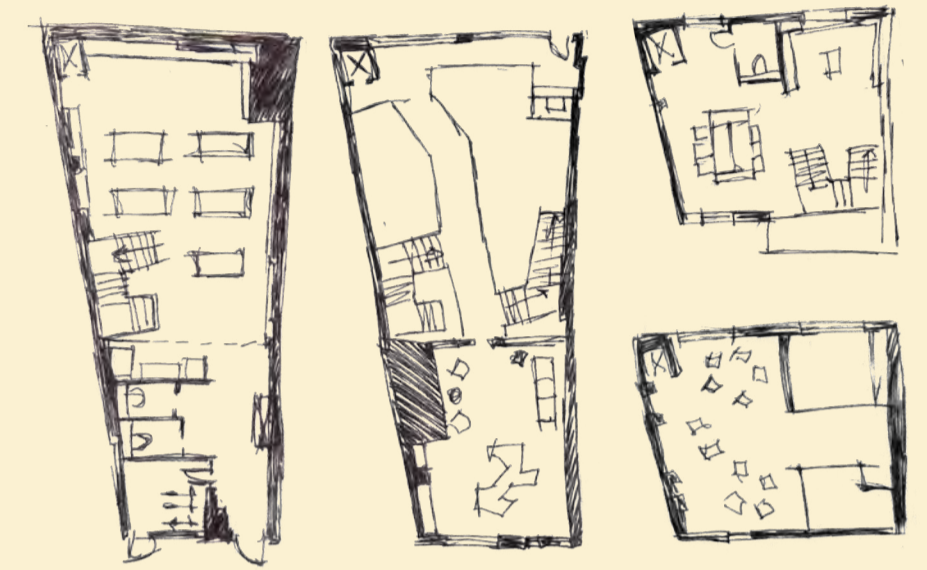
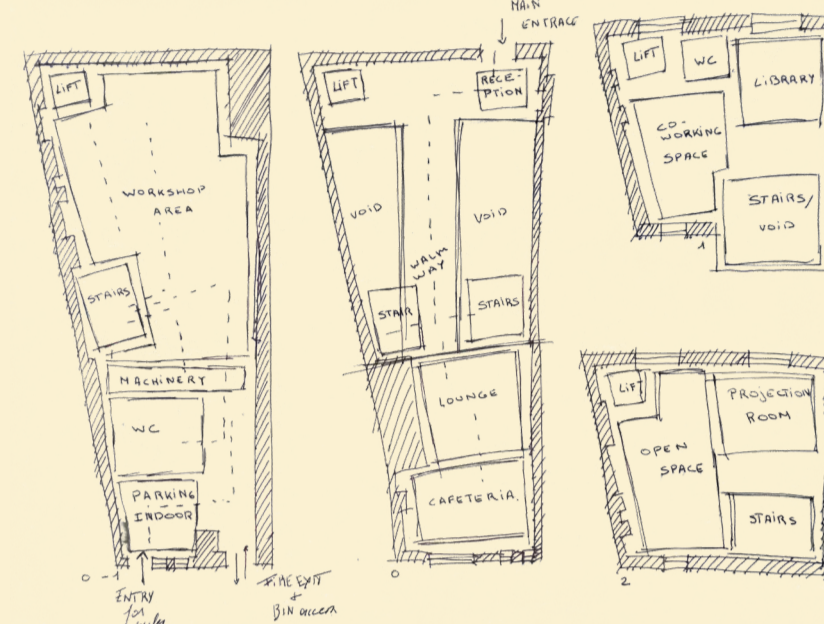
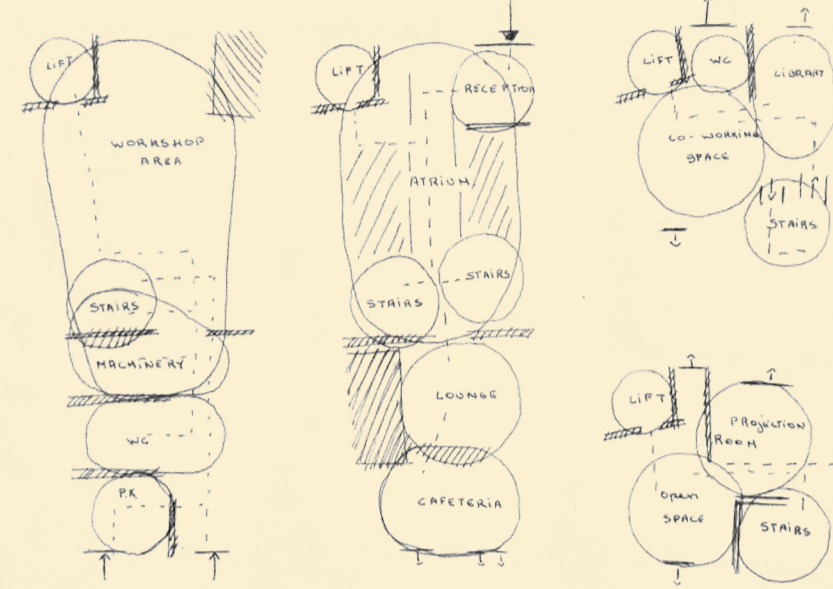
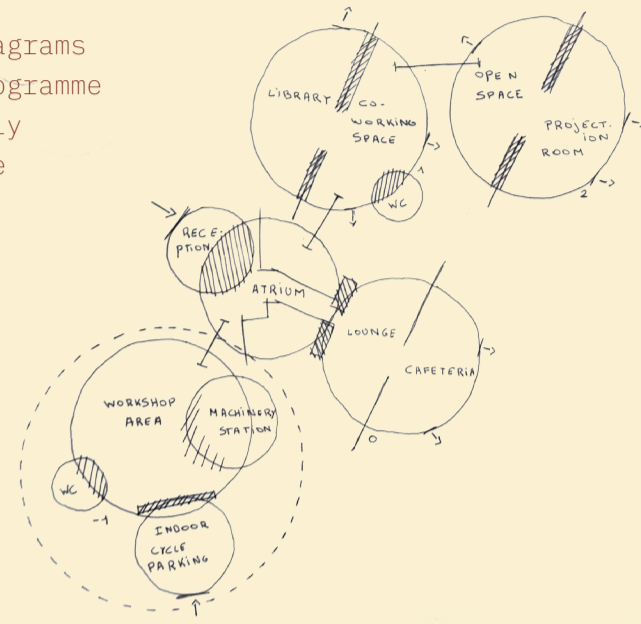


"ABSENCE IS WHAT ALLOWS PRESENCE TO BE PERCEIVED."

Common Ground explores how negative space, from the scale of the vacant building to the scale of the architectural void, can become a tool for orientation, sequencing, and spatial organisation.

PLANNING

The planning process began with bubble diagrams to establish spatial relationships and programme priorities, before moving into increasingly resolved floor plan iterations. Each stage tested the placement of key spaces.

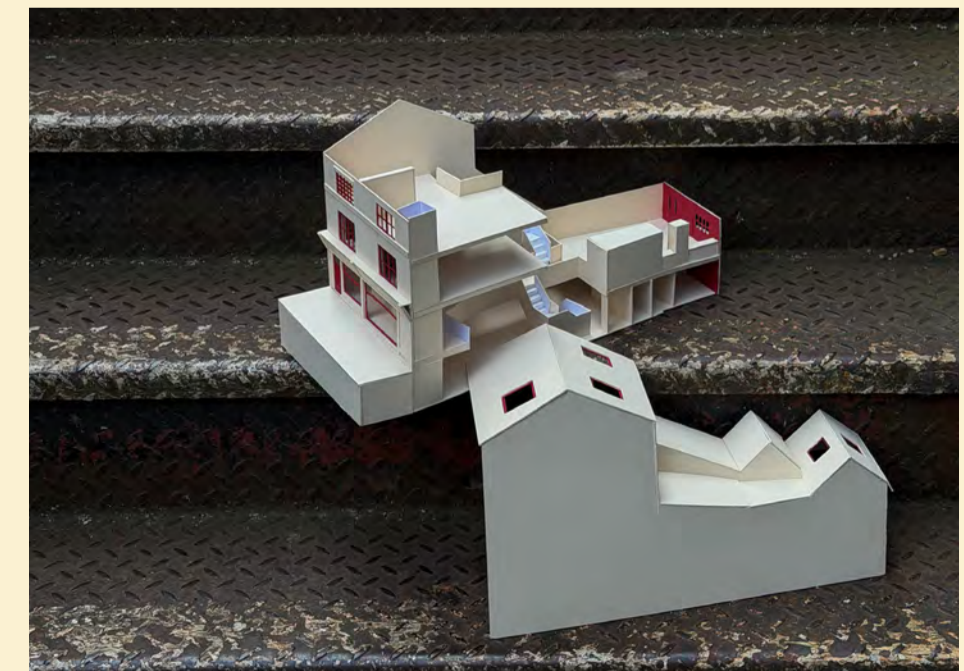
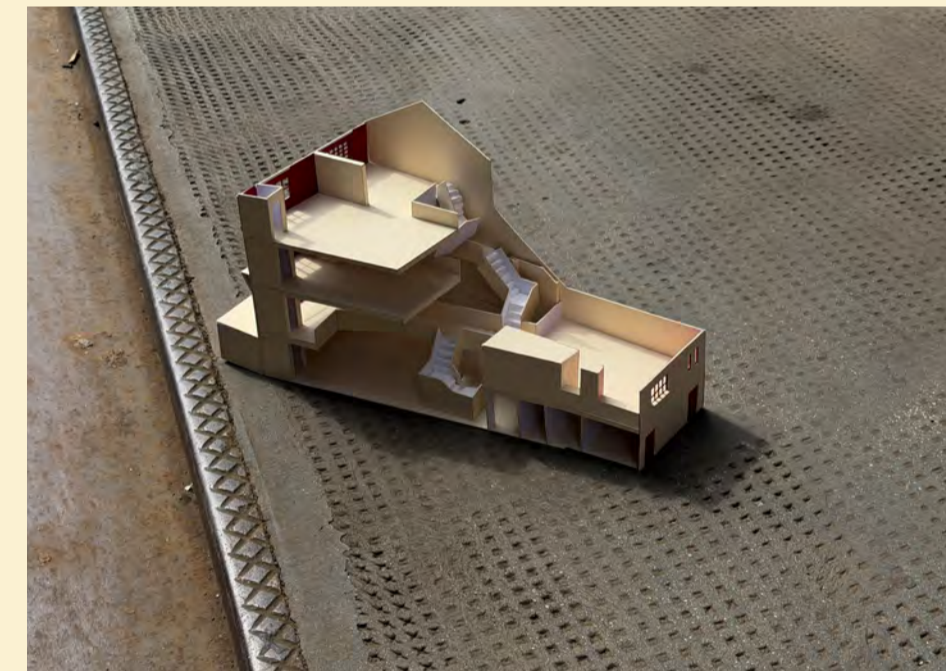


The spatial strategy is driven by subtraction, using absence as a way to shape experience.

Two large voids are carved through the ground floor, removing mass to expose the activity below. This slows the journey through the entrance and creates a deliberate threshold, where movement is held and direction is immediate.

Sightlines and sound travel through the void, bringing the noises coming from the basement into presence from the moment of arrival. At the end of the pathway, users are encouraged to pause, and decide their route through the building, turning circulation into a moment of choice.

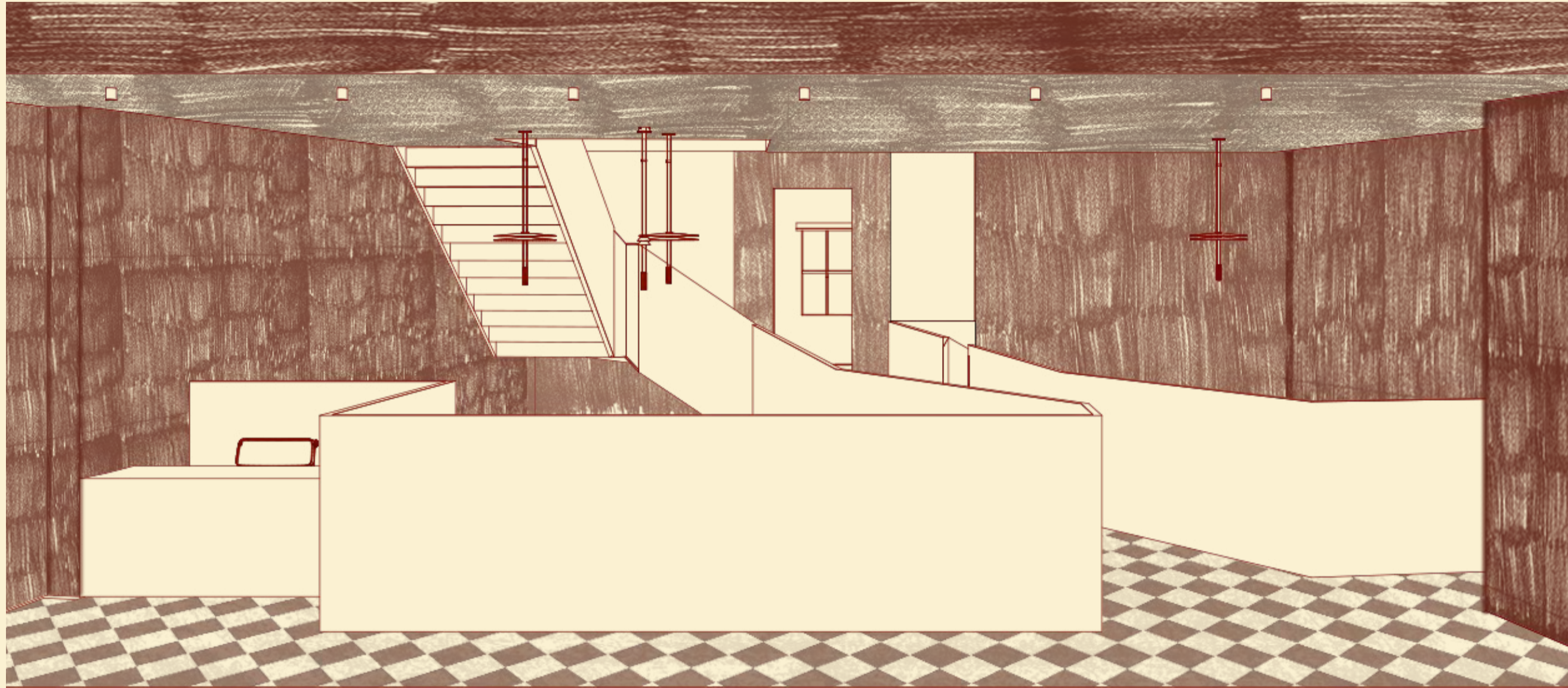
Making a model is an effective way to physically explore the balance between built form and negative space. It allowed the spatial impact of the interventions to be understood more clearly and helped test how people might occupy and move through the site.



MODEL 1:50

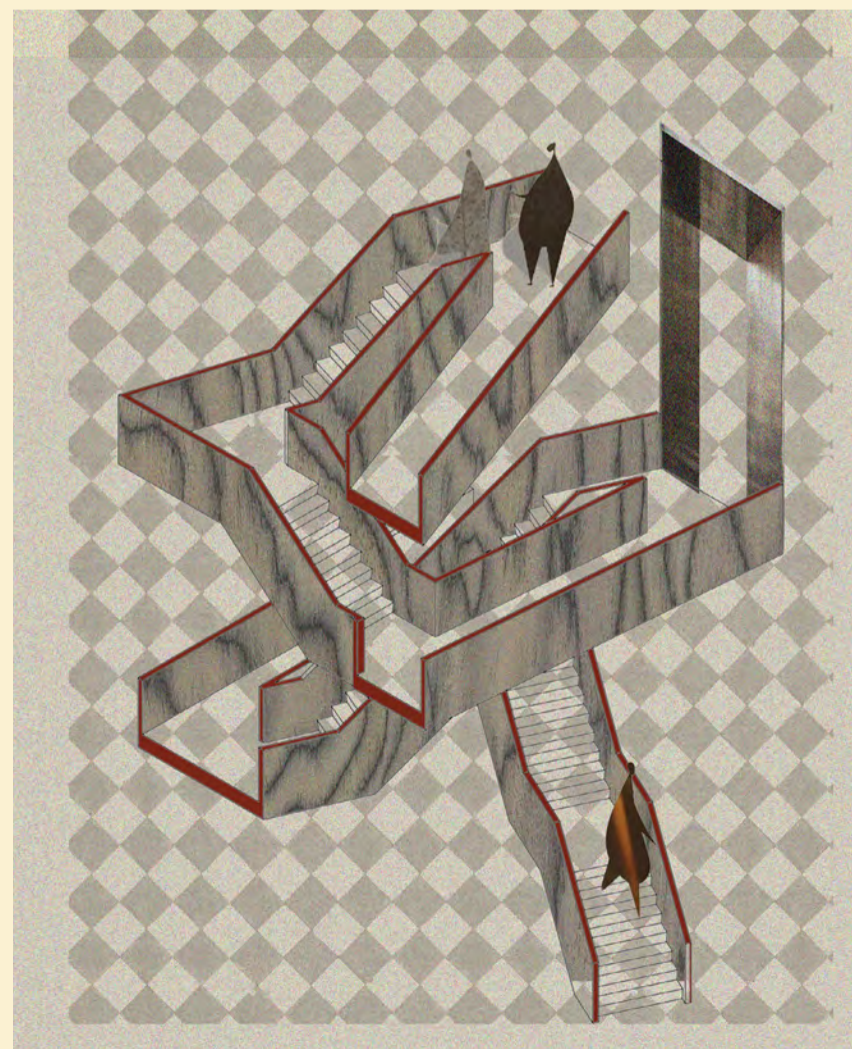
SPATIAL JOURNEY

The project unfolds as a journey of curiosity and discovery. Moments of openness and enclosure guide movement through the building, revealing glimpses of activity, conversation, and making. Spaces shift between energy and calm, from lively encounters to quiet reflection, creating a rhythm that encourages exploration. Through shared experiences and everyday occupation, the building becomes a place where learning, exchange, and community naturally emerge.



ENTRANCE

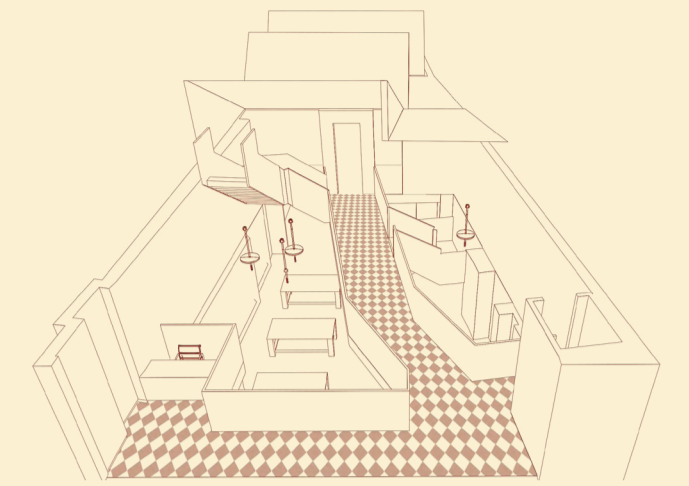
ATMOSPHERIC COLLAGES



SPATIAL SCHEME

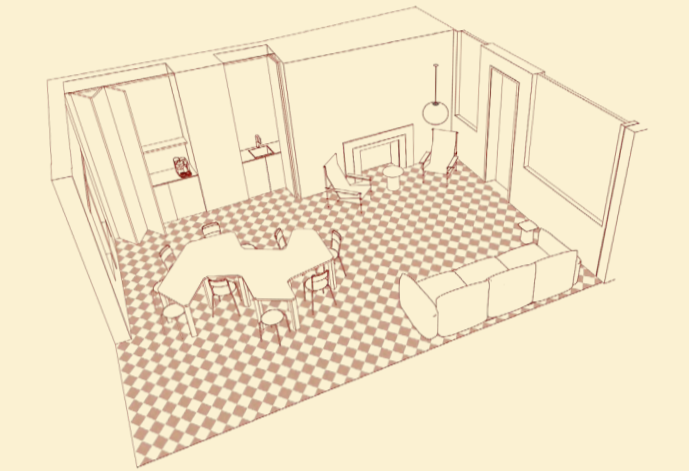
Reception and atrium
Ground floor. / +0.000

A carefully framed entrance that reveals just enough to spark curiosity. The atrium and central void orient visitors, drawing the eye and movement toward the activity below.



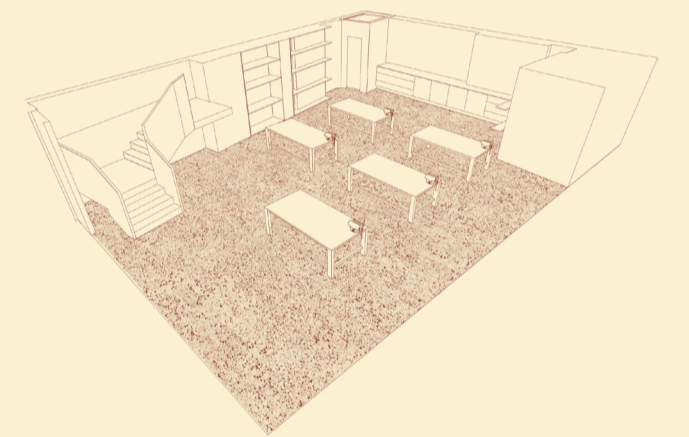
Lounge and cafeteria
Ground floor. / +0.000

A place for gathering, conversation, and pause. Shaped around a central table, the space demonstrates how subtraction can create opportunities for connection and exchange.



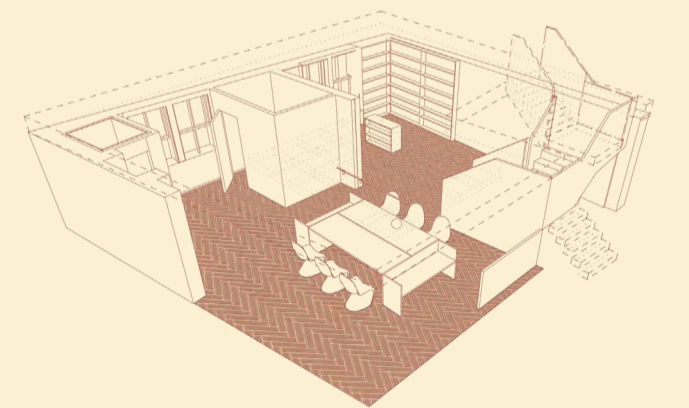
Workshop area Basement
Basement. / -2.565

A hands-on environment for making, repairing, and learning. Knowledge is shared through process, transforming individual skills into collective experience.



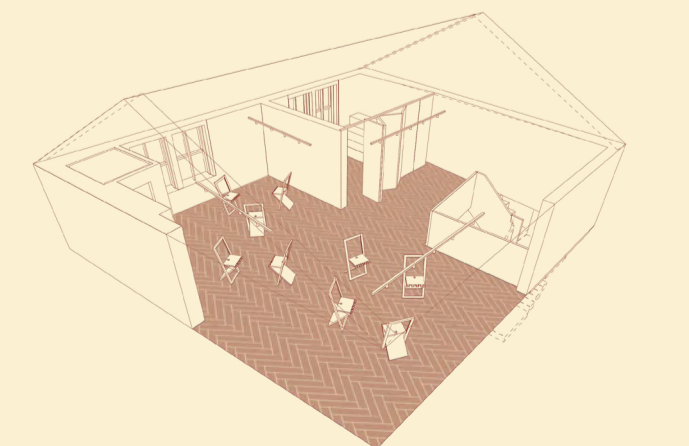
Library and co-working space
First floor. / +3.080

A quiet space for reading, working, and reflection. Books, study, and shared focus create an atmosphere of informal learning and exchange.



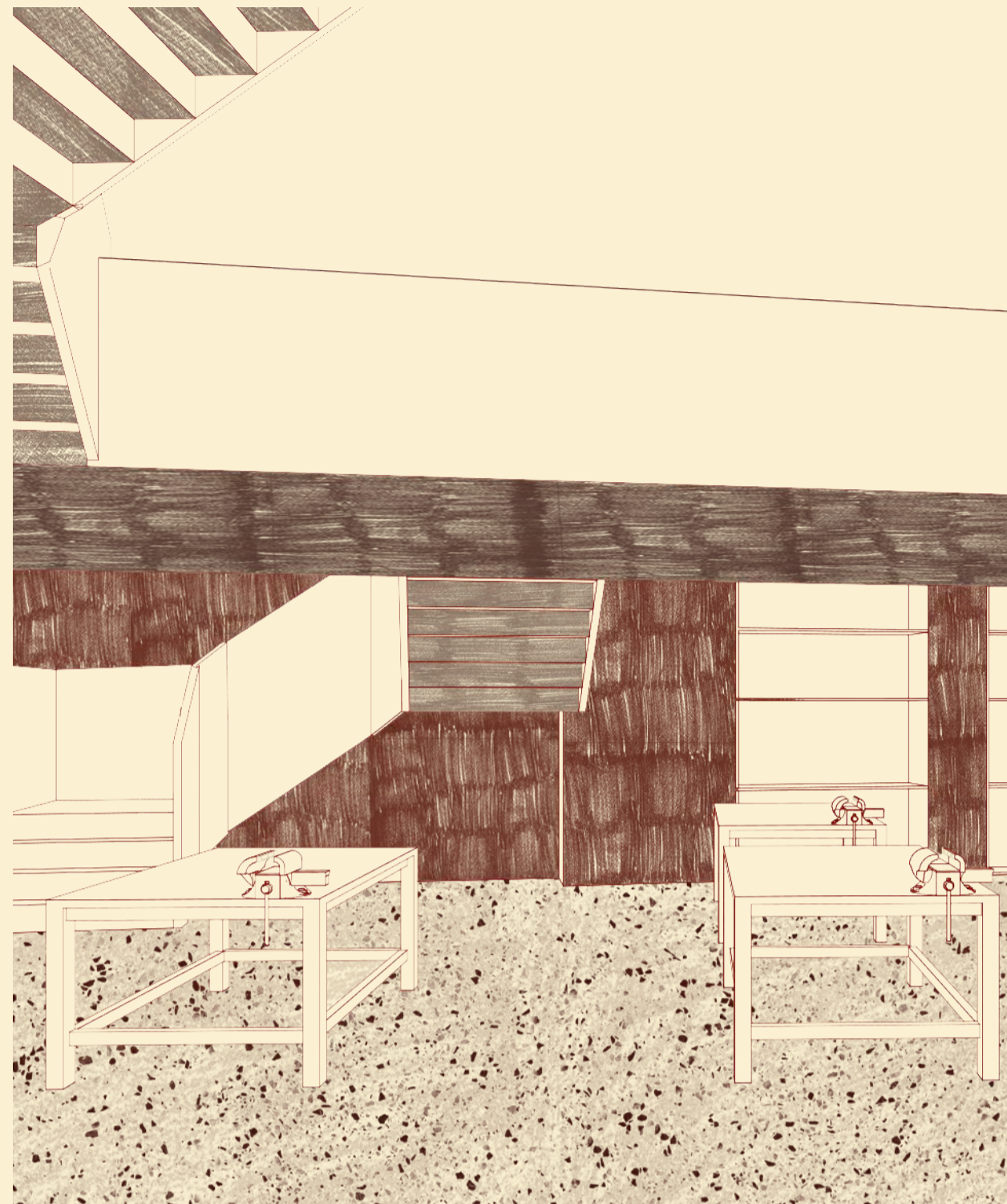
Projection room and polyvalent space
Second floor. / +5.825

An adaptable setting for teaching, presenting, performing, and gathering. Open and flexible, it evolves with the needs of its users while remaining a space of possibility.





CAFETERIA



WORKSHOP AREA

PATTERNS OF OCCUPATION

The interior is designed to support a range of ways of inhabiting the space. Areas can be occupied individually or collectively, allowing users to work, learn, make, gather, or simply spend time within the building. Furniture, thresholds, and shared surfaces encourage informal use and appropriation, enabling the space to adapt to different rhythms throughout the day. Rather than prescribing fixed behaviours, the interior provides a framework for everyday activity, shaped and enriched by its users over time.

MATERIAL BOARD

Materials were chosen with time in mind. Tile, metal, and timber are raw materials that endure while recording the lives around them. Scratches, dents, and softened edges become traces of use, revealing that people were here and kept coming back. Designed to age with its community, the building does more than remain useful over time, it becomes familiar.



/ SECTION AA
NOT TO SCALE

SUBTRACTION

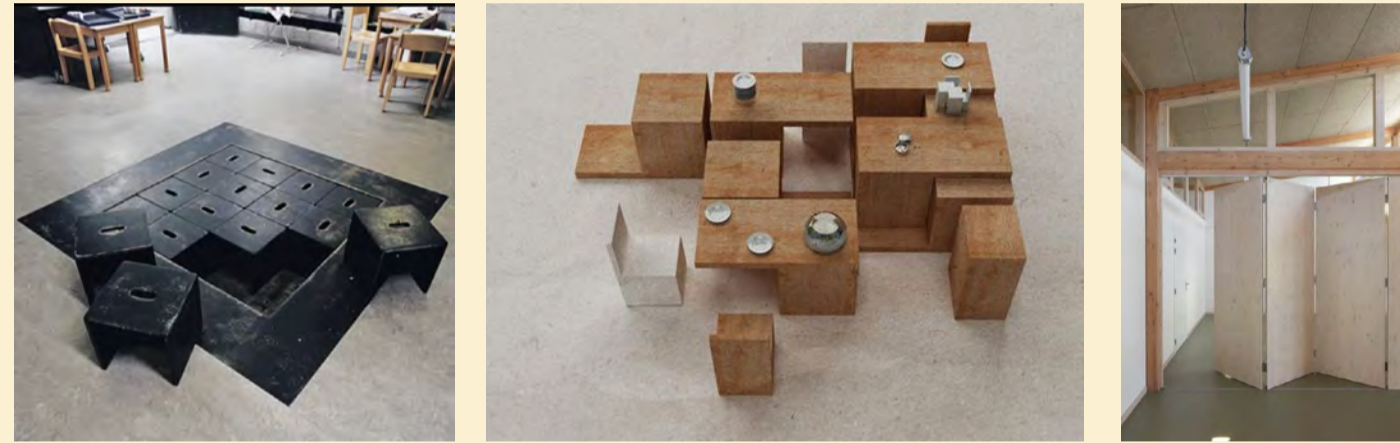
To remove one quantity from another.
To find what remains after taking away.



The concept of subtraction is most literally expressed in the floor itself. A portion of the ground floor has been removed, carving out a void that opens a visual connection to the basement and adds a sense of depth to the space.

CONVERTIBLE

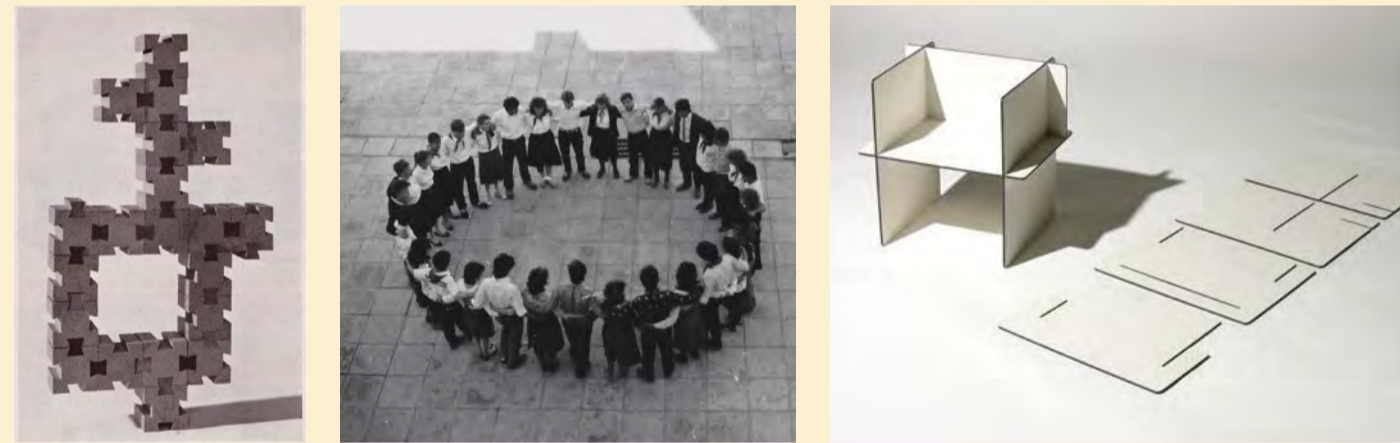
Able to be arranged in a different way and used for a different purpose.



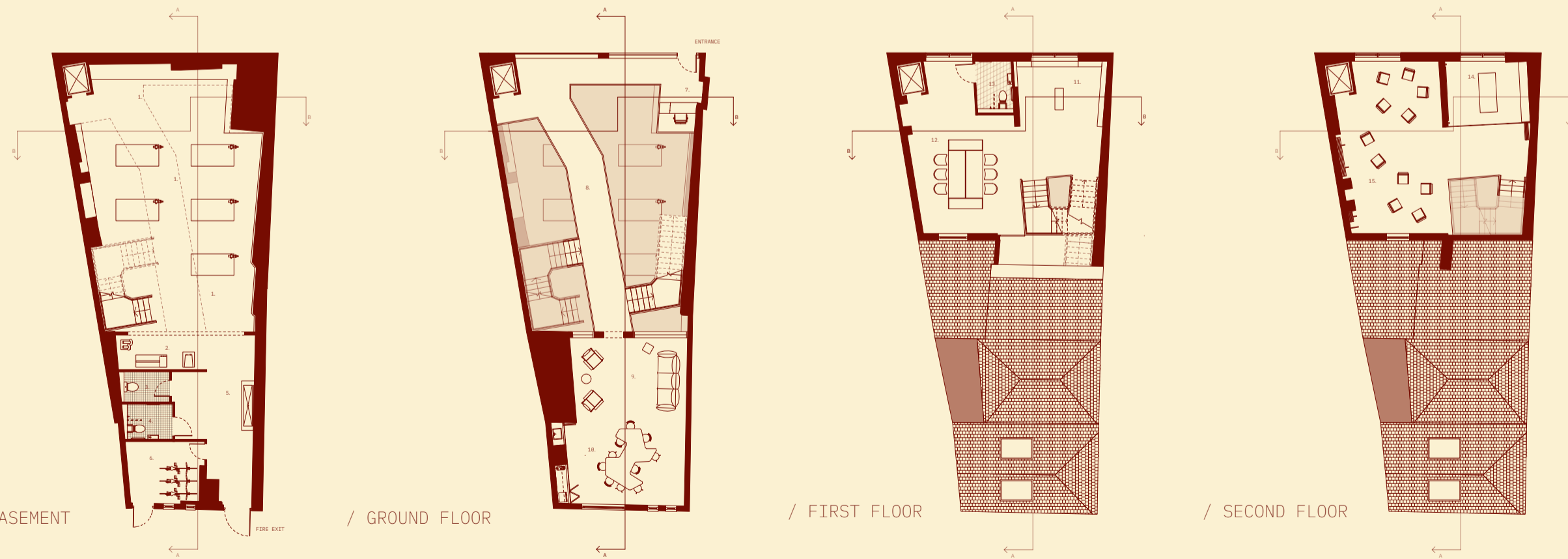
Flexibility is embedded into the furniture throughout, and particularly on the second floor, where the space is designed to shift and adapt depending on how it is being used at any given moment.

ASSEMBLE

To bring separate parts together or to come together in a single place.



Common Ground is, at its core, about bringing people together and this idea extends into the furniture itself. Every table is detailed with a considered joinery system, designed specifically to be assembled, taken apart, and reconfigured with intention.



/ BASEMENT

/ GROUND FLOOR

/ FIRST FLOOR

/ SECOND FLOOR

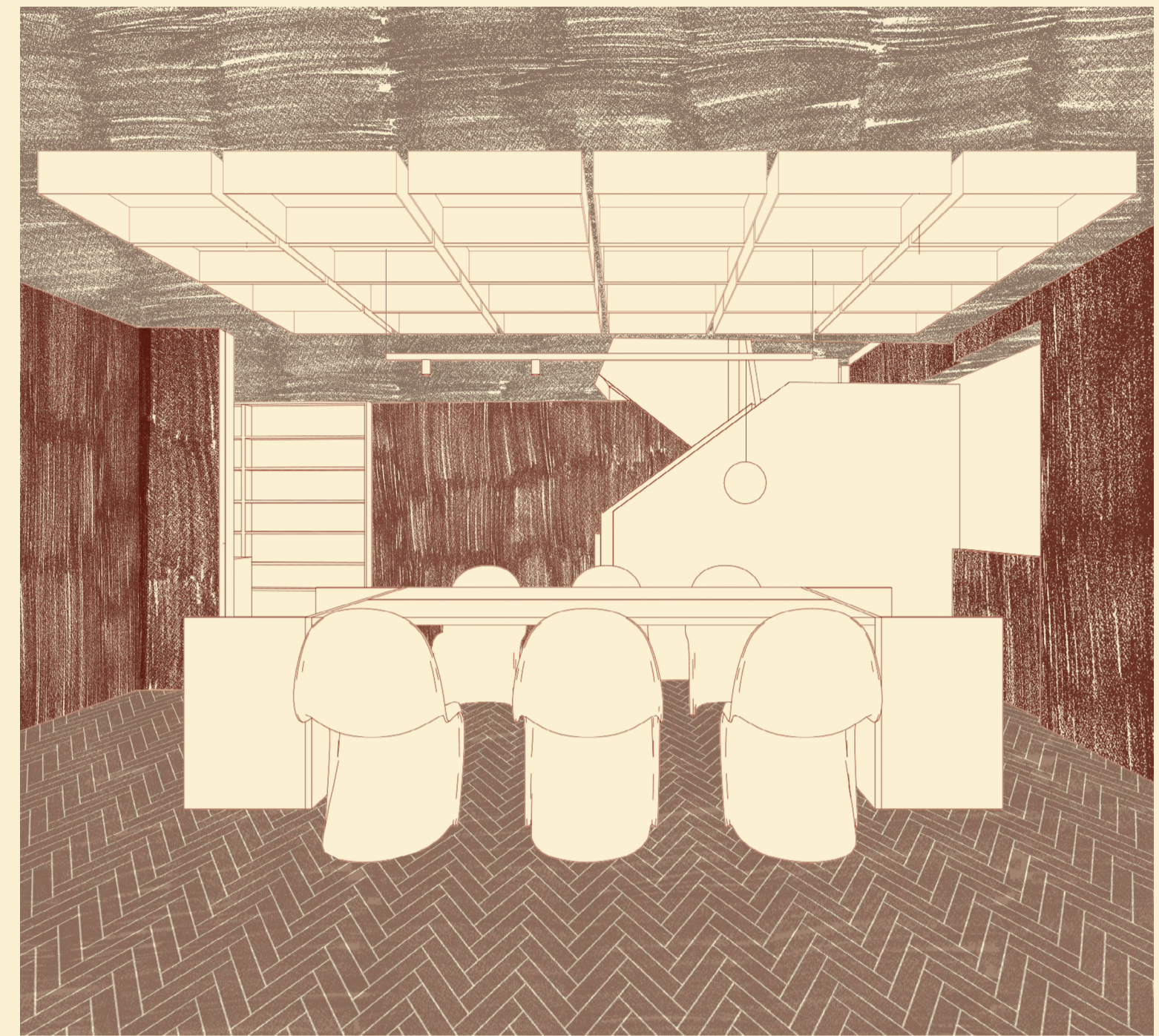
- 01 / Workshop area
- 02 / Machinery station
- 03 / WC
- 04 / Accessible WC
- 05 / Hand wash sink
- 06 / Indoor cycle parking

- 07 / Reception
- 08 / Atrium
- 09 / Lounge
- 10 / Cafeteria

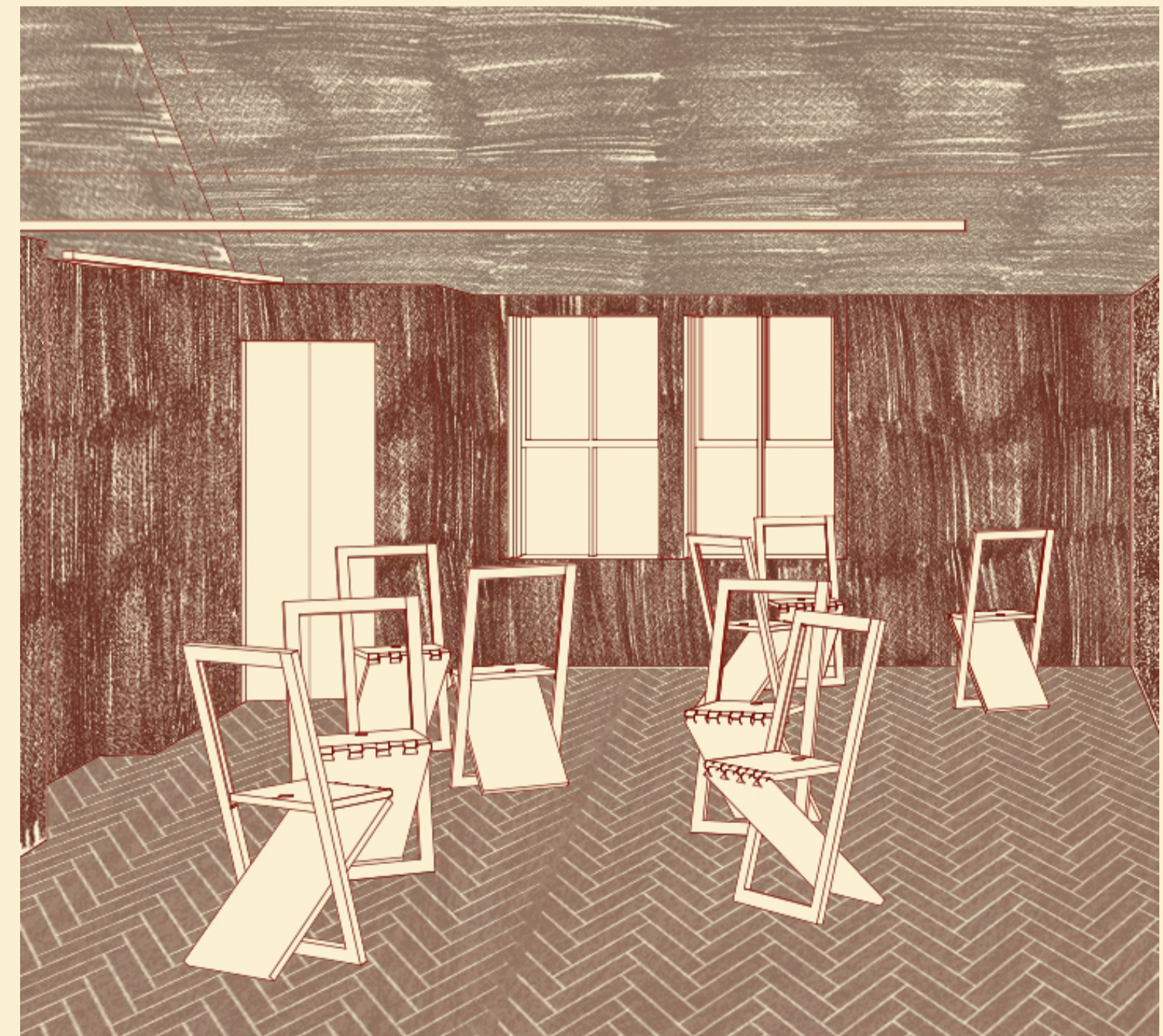
- 11 / Library
- 12 / Co-working space
- 13 / Accessible WC

- 14 / Projection room
- 15 / Polyvalent space

NOT TO SCALE



LIBRARY AND CO-WORKING SPACE



POLYVALENT SPACE