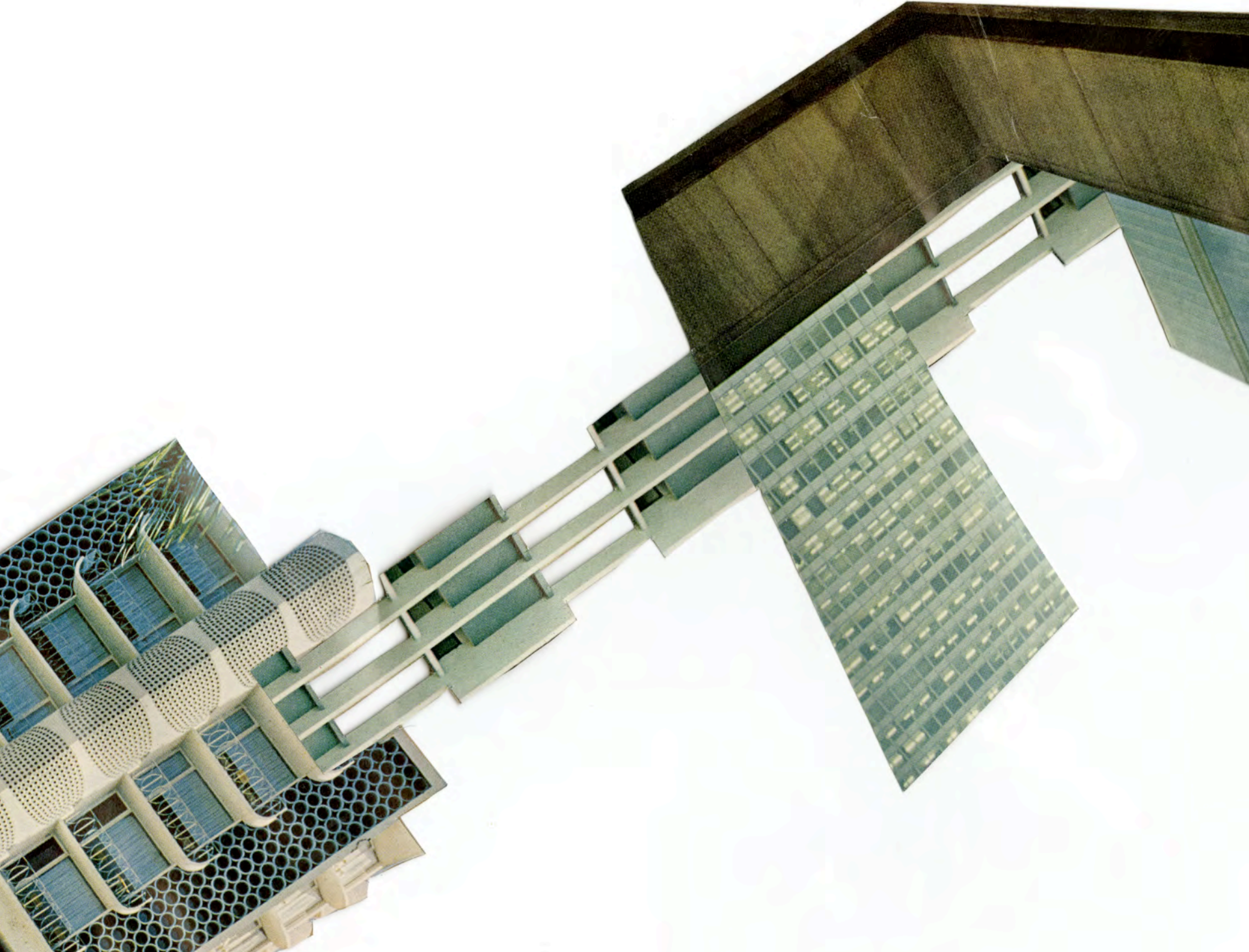


KENDALL BUSTER / DISASSEMBLING UTOPIAS





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KENDALL BUSTER / DISASSEMBLING UTOPIAS

commune.1 / Cape Town / June 22 - July 16, 2016
GUS / Stellenbosch / July 18 - August 4, 2016

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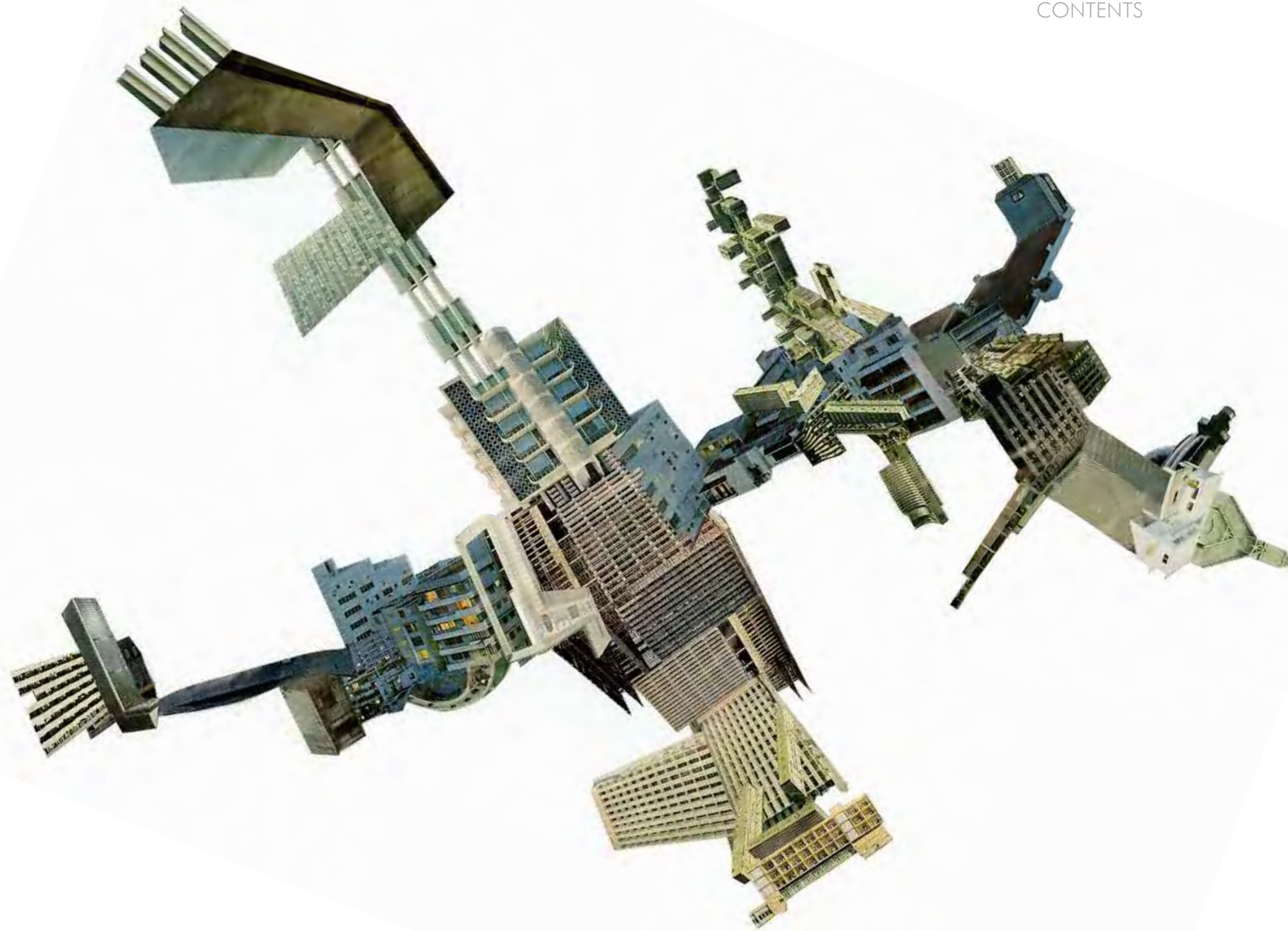
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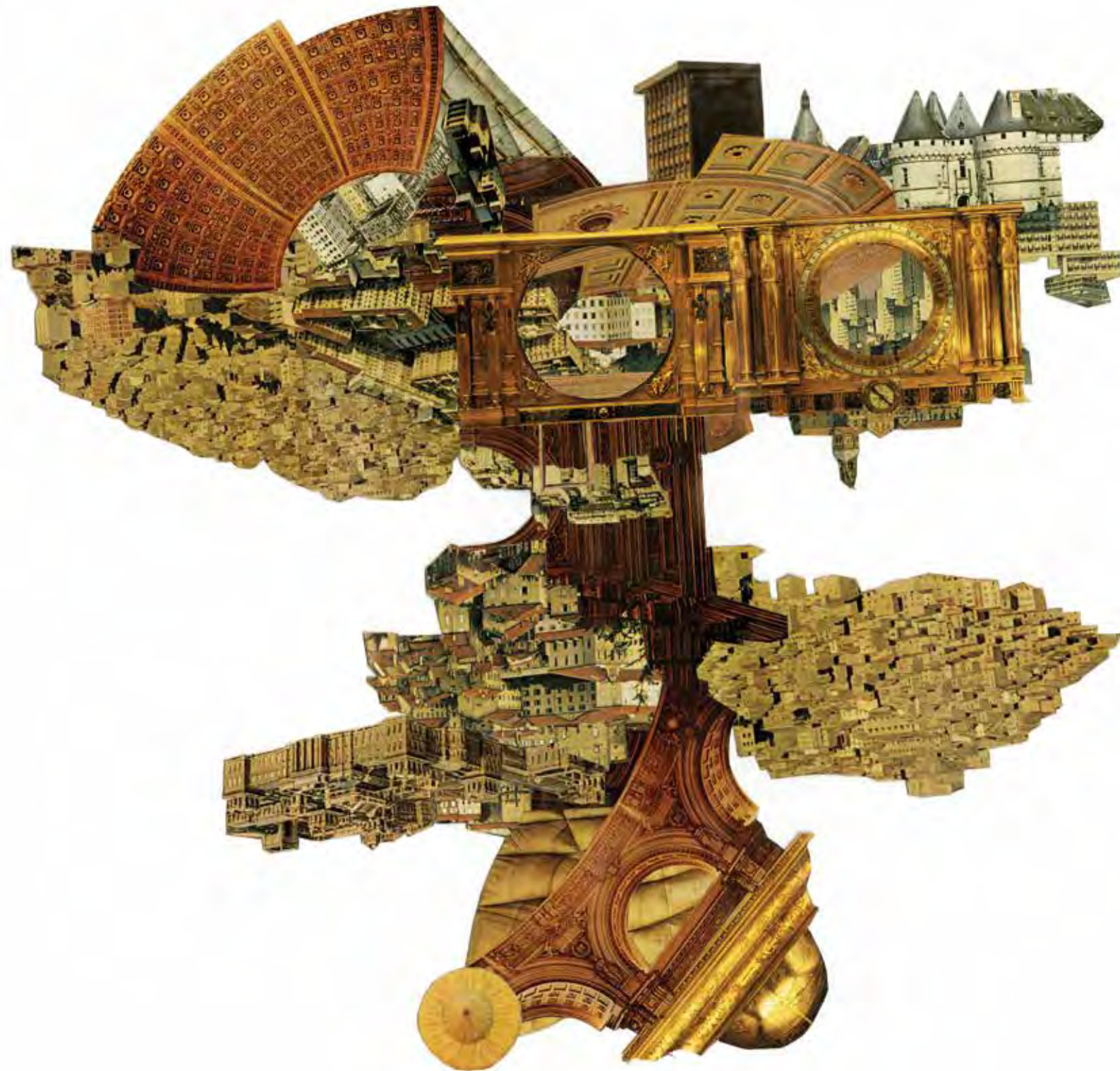
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FRAGMENTS /



Fragments began as small collage works constructed with cut-ups of photographs sourced from National Geographic magazines printed between 1960 and 1980. The images offered a rich palette of color choices particular to a period of mass production printing with what are now discontinued inks. Scanned and translated into large digital prints and mounted on magnetic sheets, they were attached to a gallery wall surfaced with steel-embedded paint. The works contain a series of progressive collage actions, beginning with the original cut-ups from the archival magazines, configured and glued onto paper, reconfigured in the scanning process, and later reconfigured again on the wall. Combined and recombined, they morph and grow.



WHAT IS AN ASSEMBLAGE? Ronald Bogue

Per Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (see their *Anti-Oedipus* [1972], *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* [1975], *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980] and *What Is Philosophy?* [1991]), an assemblage (*agencement* in French) is:

A Multiplicity—Irreducible to the dynamics of the One and the Many, an assemblage changes qualitatively with any change in the number of its constituent elements. It is not like a bag of 82 marbles, which at 81 or 83 remains a bag of marbles, but like a room at 82 degrees, which is qualitatively different from one at 81 or 83. (You can't add 1 degree to 82 to reach 83 degrees.)

A Heterogeneity—An assemblage's elements ignore standard taxonomies, connecting bodies, images, phobias, buildings, machines, plants, bacteria, birds—whatever—in a functioning that resembles a Rube Goldberg machine ("Simple Reducing Machine": peas from the diner's plate shoot in the air and strike a bell; a disoriented boxer answers the bell and falls on a mattress; air compressed from the mattress arouses a rabbit, whose leap activates a phonograph that plays the *Theme of the Volga Boatmen*; a Volga boatman heaves on a rope tied to the diner's wheeled chair, which pulls the diner away from the table).

An Assembling—An assemblage is both noun and verb, the act of assembling as well as the resulting assemblage—or rather, the assemblage is constantly in assemblage, never a completed result, only its own ongoing process of self-assembling. It is an *agencement* (French *agencer* = to arrange, to order, to position, to fit together), an arranging, an ordering, a positioning of elements, a fitting together (of parts of a machine, for example), and also an *agencing*, a processual agency without specified agents.

A Disassembling—Assemblages include their dysfunction within their functioning. They are machines that continue to operate while breaking down and make the breakdown part of their operation. Neither purely chaotic nor absolutely organized, they are mutative processes with varying multilayered degrees of stability and instability. They also are always social and political, connected to circuits of power, in which forces of regulation, discipline and control seek efficiency and homeostasis, while forces of generation, innovation and creation promote disruptions and unforeseeable reconfigurations of elements. But both forces are immanent to the assemblage, not outside it, each a manifestation of the assemblage's powers of assembling and disassembling, the one a repairing of dysfunctions and

channeling of functions into predictable cycles, the other an intensifying of dysfunctions and invention of new functions.

A Rhizome—Assemblages are like crabgrass and bamboo, which have no central roots or hierarchy of elements (like a tree, with tap root and subsidiary roots, trunk, branches, stems and leaves) but instead possess continuously growing horizontal underground stems that put out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals. Assemblages are acentered, distributed networks of forces, but networks of a paralogical topology and temporality. Any element may connect to any other element, regardless of their proximity or distance. Whatever the dimension of an assemblage, wormholes of time-space form its network of pulsations, flows and intensities. The time of the assemblage is at once chronometric and atemporal, possessed of durations of varying possible measure (nanoseconds to light years) and the floating time of the infinitive (“to walk,” as an enfolded co-existence of “I walked,” “you will have walked,” “they might walk,” and so on). Assemblages are polychronotropic.

An Affective Machining—Neither mechanistic nor vitalistic, assemblages are machinic. Their components are machines in the broadest sense—elements that dys/function together. (The social assemblage that created the pyramids was a machining of machines—the Pharaoh, priests, architects, craftsmen, slaves, food, quarters, quarries, stones, barges, sailors, ramps, levers, pulleys, ropes—all so many machines [and each a metamachine when viewed at the molecular, atomic or subatomic level].) Assemblages manifest an anorganic life that passes through the inorganic and organic, the natural and artificial—a machinic vitalism. At the most abstract level, the assemblage’s machines may be defined by their differential velocities, but also by their degrees of intensity, their powers of affecting and being affected. The assemblage’s intensities are characterized as much by their receptivity as their activity, both of which are measures of the assemblage’s metamorphic capacities. An assemblage’s machining is always an affective machining, the machining of an anorganic life.

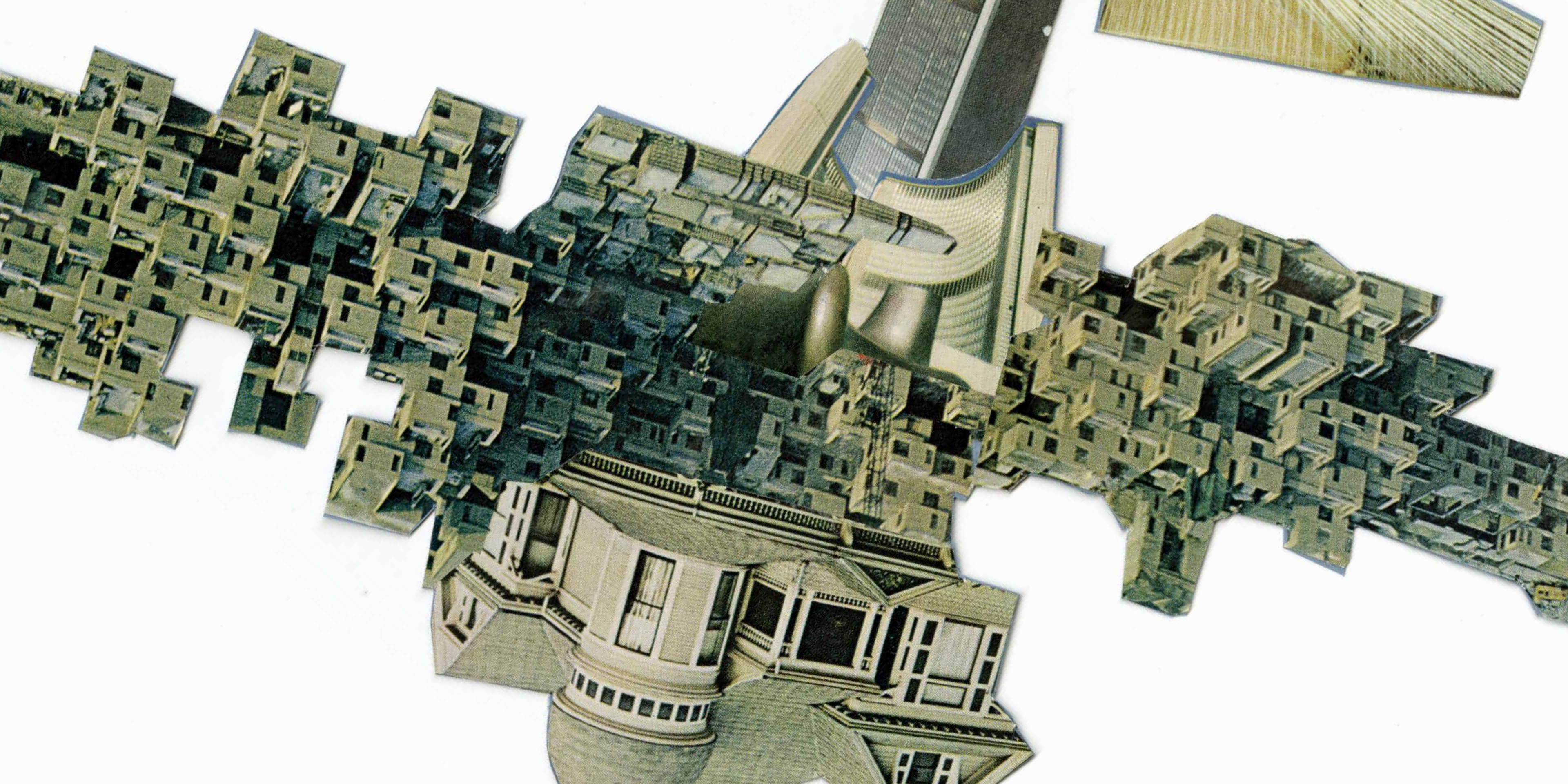
An Actual/Virtual Interface—Assemblages participate at once in both domains of the real—the actual and the virtual. They are concrete, material affective machinings (the actual), but immanent within them are virtual “abstract machines,” composed of unspecified matter and nonformalized functions. (This virtual has nothing to do with the notion of “virtual reality.”) Foucault’s panoptic society is made up of multiple actual assemblages of bodies, institutions, buildings, codifications, regulations, diagnoses and judgments, organized differently at various sites (the prison, the factory, the

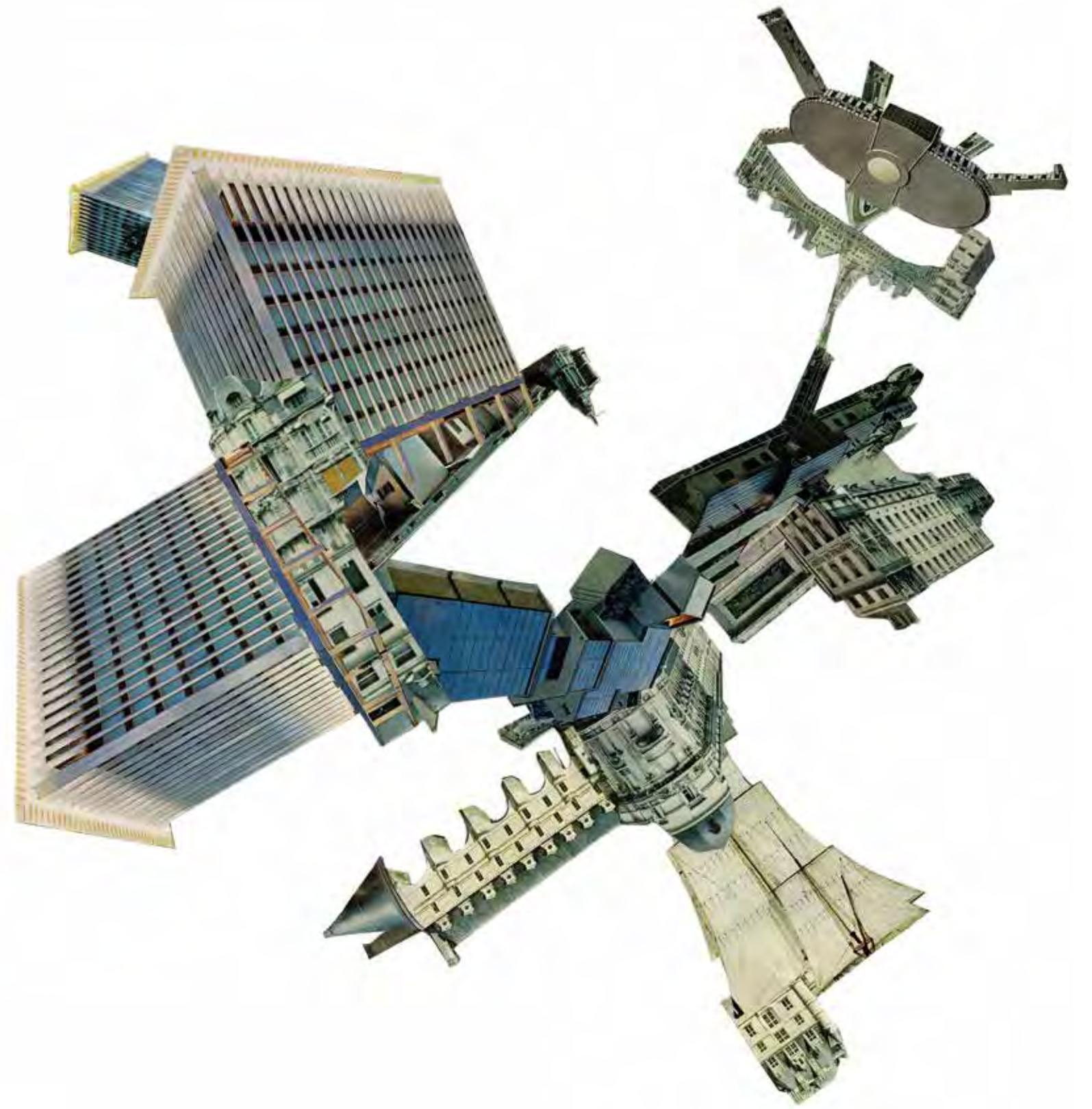
school, the hospital), but immanent within them all is an abstract machine of surveillance—an unspecified prison-factory-school-hospital matter and a nonformalized function of seeing without being seen. The panoptic society’s virtual abstract machine is a diagram of power, a differentiator inseparable from its differentiations, immanent within the actual assemblages it diagrams.

A Dys/Utopian Converter—As rhizomic assembling/disassembling actual/virtual interfaces, assemblages may coalesce as components of dystopian megamachines, such as the panoptic society, but immanent within any such regime of power is a counter-power of mutation that opens assemblages toward new, unspecified and unpredictable configurations. These configurations are nowhere—*ou + topos*—“not-places” that cannot be mapped in advance. It is only as processes, not products, that assemblages may be utopian, as acts of invention and creation. Their elements are always assembling and disassembling, and each element is a potential point of conversion from one configuration to another. Within any dystopian assemblage are utopian metamorphic elements that can induce new configurations. But conversely, such utopian elements are always open to reappropriation by other dystopian formations. There are no guarantees in creation, no assemblages that necessarily lead to a better future. Only tendencies, points of conversion, processes of experimentation that test the real and its virtual possibilities.

Ronald Bogue is a Distinguished Research Professor and a Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Georgia. His research includes literary theory and the comparative study of the arts, and he has written widely on the work of Deleuze and Guattari.



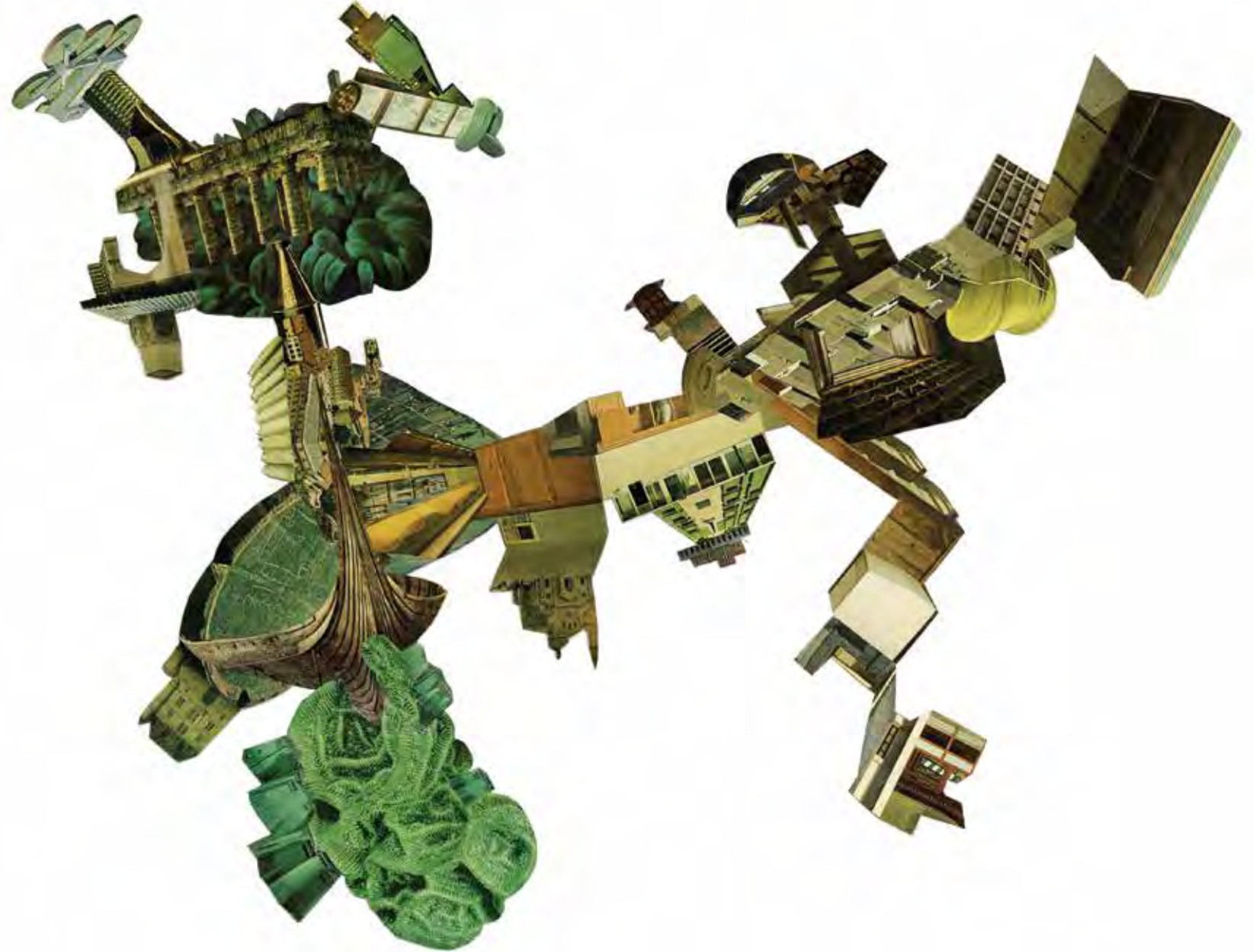




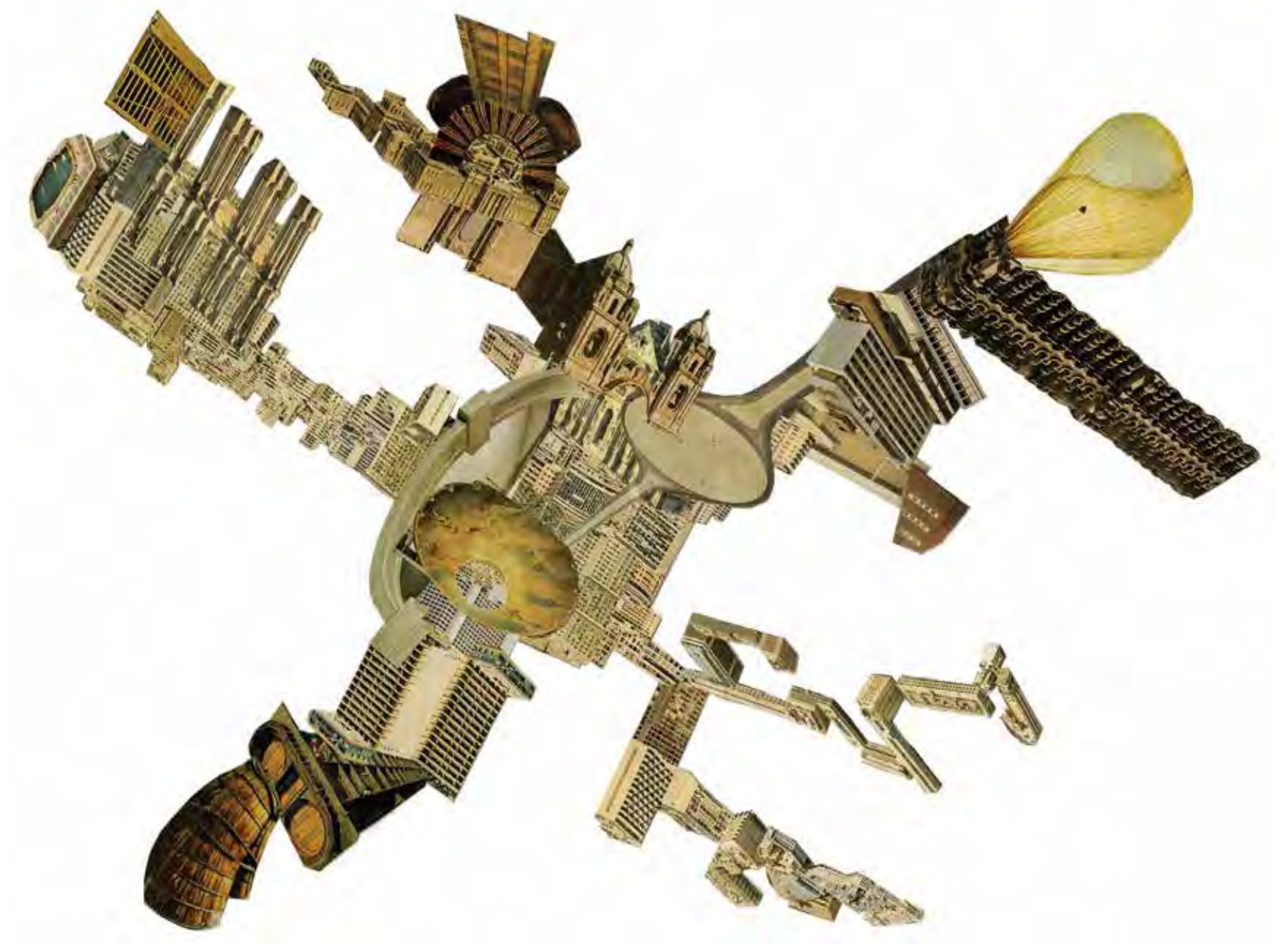








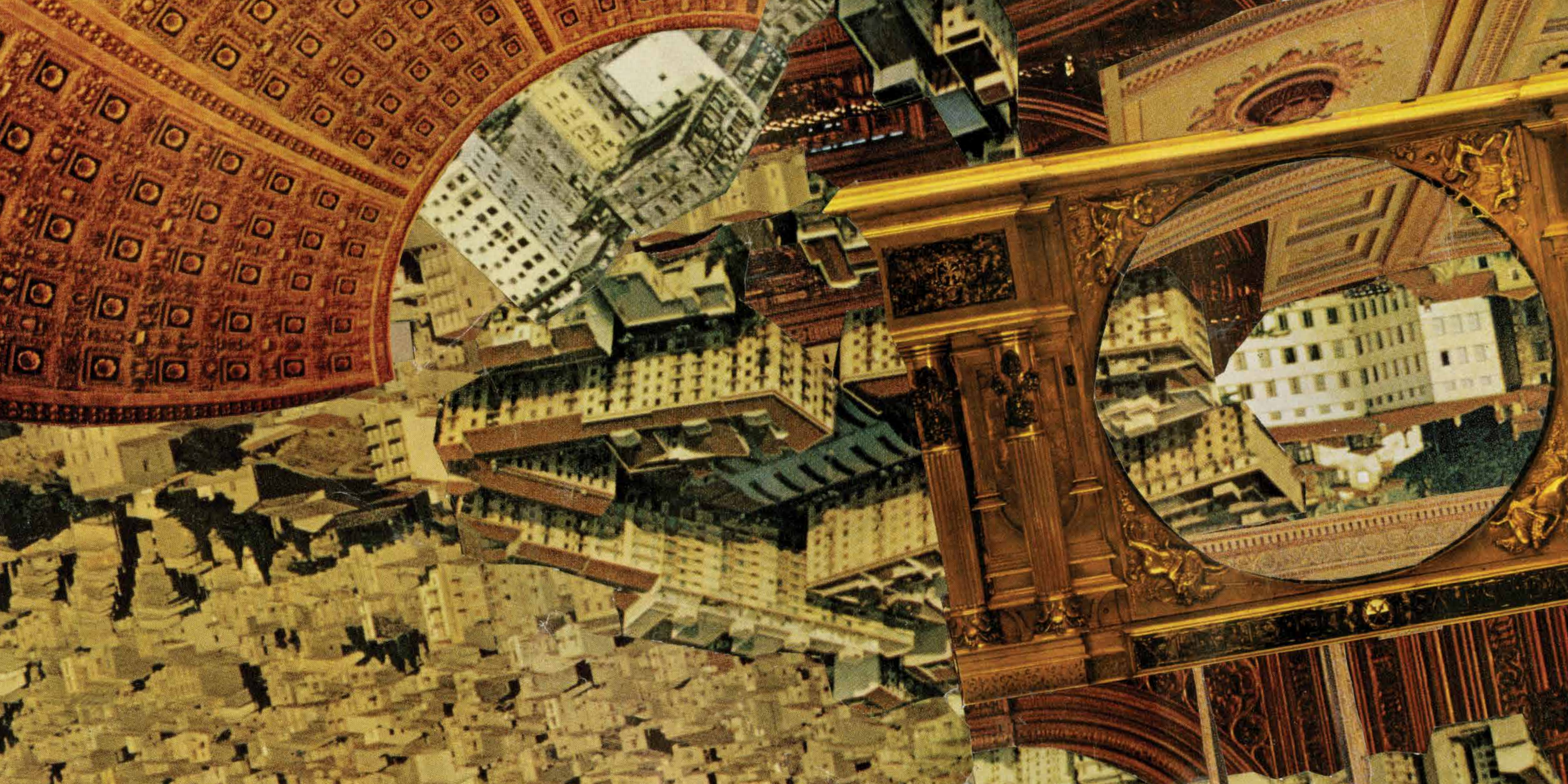


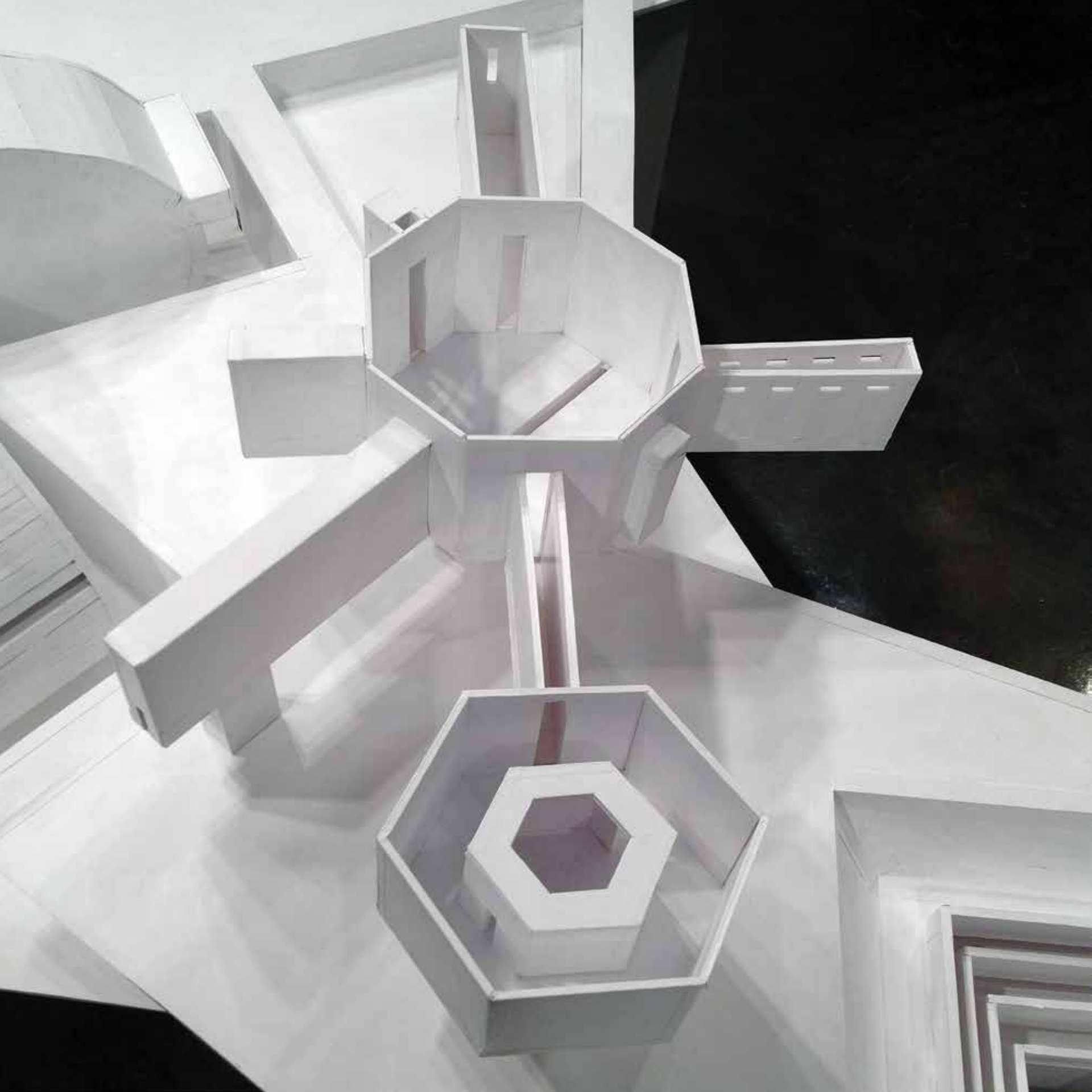












MODEL CITY /

Constructed out of cardboard and paper, *Model City (Constraint)* suggests a landscape of brute forms, referencing both geometric abstraction and modernist architecture. This configuration of models is part of an ongoing production, an ever-growing inventory, of architectural phenotypes realized by way of simple planar constructions. Something sinister is revealed in the cool language. Angled models suggest observation towers, enclosures without exits, windows for hidden eyes, and coliseum-style pits. Their fortress-like construction speaks of how enclosures offer at once protection and entrapment. Directly referencing the ways architecture can frame or control the dynamics of looking and being looked at, they reflect the power relationships inherent in all architectural spaces.



MODERN ARCHITECTURE
AS HEGEMONY
Massa Lemu

What connects Great Zimbabwe, intergalactic space stations, the pyramids of Mesoamerica and Egypt, with the industrial and post-industrial cities of the West? Utopian ideals, embodied as geometric forms. Eulogistically implanted in ancient and futurist architectures, this ideal is preserved, in the modern project, as a failed ideal. Urbanization created the city as a product of surplus value.¹ Capital accumulation conjures railways, highways, parks, and skyscrapers; urbanization summons alienation, dispossession, and displacement. For every gated community there is a slum. For every metropolis a colony.

In the colonies, an invasive species of modern architecture was a weapon of cultural imperialism and colonial hegemony. The logic of accumulation-by-dispossession did not end with the demise of industrial capitalism and colonialism, and so new global post-industrial megalopolises bloom in the same asymmetrical modes of production. If the modern city is a space of alienation, the postmodern city is a space of precarization. Viewing modern geography through Marxist thought, David Harvey observes that “every urban area in the world has its building boom in full swing in the midst of a flood of impoverished migrants that is simultaneously creating a planet of slums.”²

An intricate maze of boulevards and cul-de-sacs, inverted ziggurats and pyramids, sunken temples and palaces, stadia and coliseums constitute Kendall Buster’s geometric, cardboard and paper model cities in *Model City (Constraint)* (2016). These retro-futuristic mini cities share structural affinities with earthworks, such as Michael Heizer’s *City* (1972-ongoing) and James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* (1977-ongoing), but their most defining feature is an ubiquity of watchtowers reminiscent of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon—a calculated carceral technology designed for prisoner surveillance and the internalization of discipline. Drawing on Bentham, Michel Foucault defines panopticism as a technique for the governing of bodies that emerged in the 19th century in the West and facilitated the growth of capitalism. The symbiosis of surveillance and control spills beyond the bounds of institutional incarceration, permeating the social fabric with a mandate to maximize the body’s productivity. Panoptic regimes deploy social tools, such as architecture, exemplified by the International Style, to shape individual action within the capitalist space of the city. The skyscraper asserts the capitalist’s phallic and hegemonic presence; the city grid exemplifies a logic of order and control. The zoning and partitioning of space through boundaries and demarcations predetermine the behaviors of the disciplined body. City shapes subjectivity. In other words, the city-dweller is made in its image:

1 David Harvey, “The Right to the City.” *New Left Review*, vol. 53, Sept. - Oct., 2008.

2 Ibid.

We do not, after all, experience the city blankly and much of what we do absorb from that daily experience (be it the long drag of the commute, the jostle of subway crowds, the blandness of the shopping mall, the elegance or grandeur of certain forms of urban architecture, the panhandlers on the sidewalk or the peace and beauty of an urban park) surely has some kind of influence upon how we are situated in the world and think and act politically accordingly.³

The city is undemocratic. Through a multiplicity of architectonic technologies, urban space empowers the capitalist elite, while marginalizing the working class majority and people of color. Urban design perpetrates racial and socioeconomic divisions and puts each in their place. Imagine living in Houston, a city shaped by the oil industry, without a car. Brutal bureaucratic edifices, alongside miles of anonymous concrete, glass, and steel ‘non-places’ imprison the wandering imagination of the worker.⁴ Where color and images disrupt the grey monotony of concrete and steel, it is as spectacle, to entice, distract and disempower.

Thus the hegemony of modern architecture operates through multiple, diffuse, and pervasive psychogeographical technologies. But panopticism is the overarching governmentality of bodies. Foucault describes panopticism as “a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law.”⁵ Zigmunt Bauman and David Lyon called our post-industrial era “post-panoptical” in reference to the digitization of surveillance. However, one can argue that this scopic regime⁶ is alive and well.⁷ Even the Deleuzian society of control which succeeds the disciplinary society of the panopticon is defined by the Foucauldian panopticism.⁸ Nevertheless, while alienation and precarization in the oppressive spaces of modern and postmodern cities is intense, it is not absolute. In resistance, the marginalized and the dispossessed resort to a variety of tactics of survival and self-redemption.⁹

The control towers hovering above Buster’s sanitized model cities, with their glaring whiteness, allude to scopic regimes and fracture the idea of the modern city as utopia. High walls and deep ditches limit free movement. In South African cities, during apartheid, freeways and railway lines demarcated racially segregated areas. Now, in the post-apartheid, neoliberal dispensation of economic segregation—which compounds problems of racial segregation—these borderlines divide public from private, and extreme wealth from extreme poverty. Highways, high rises, ghettos,

- 3 David Harvey, “The Political Economy of Public Space.” *The Politics of Public Space*, edited by S. Low & N. Smith, New York: Routledge, 2005.
- 4 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, New York: Verso, 2009.
- 5 Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rainbow, New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- 6 Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity.” *Vision and Visuality (Discussions in Contemporary Culture)*, edited by Hal Foster, Seattle: Bay Press, 1999.
- 7 Zygmunt Bauman & David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance: a Conversation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” *October*, vol. 59, 1992, pp. 3-7.
- 9 See Michel deCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

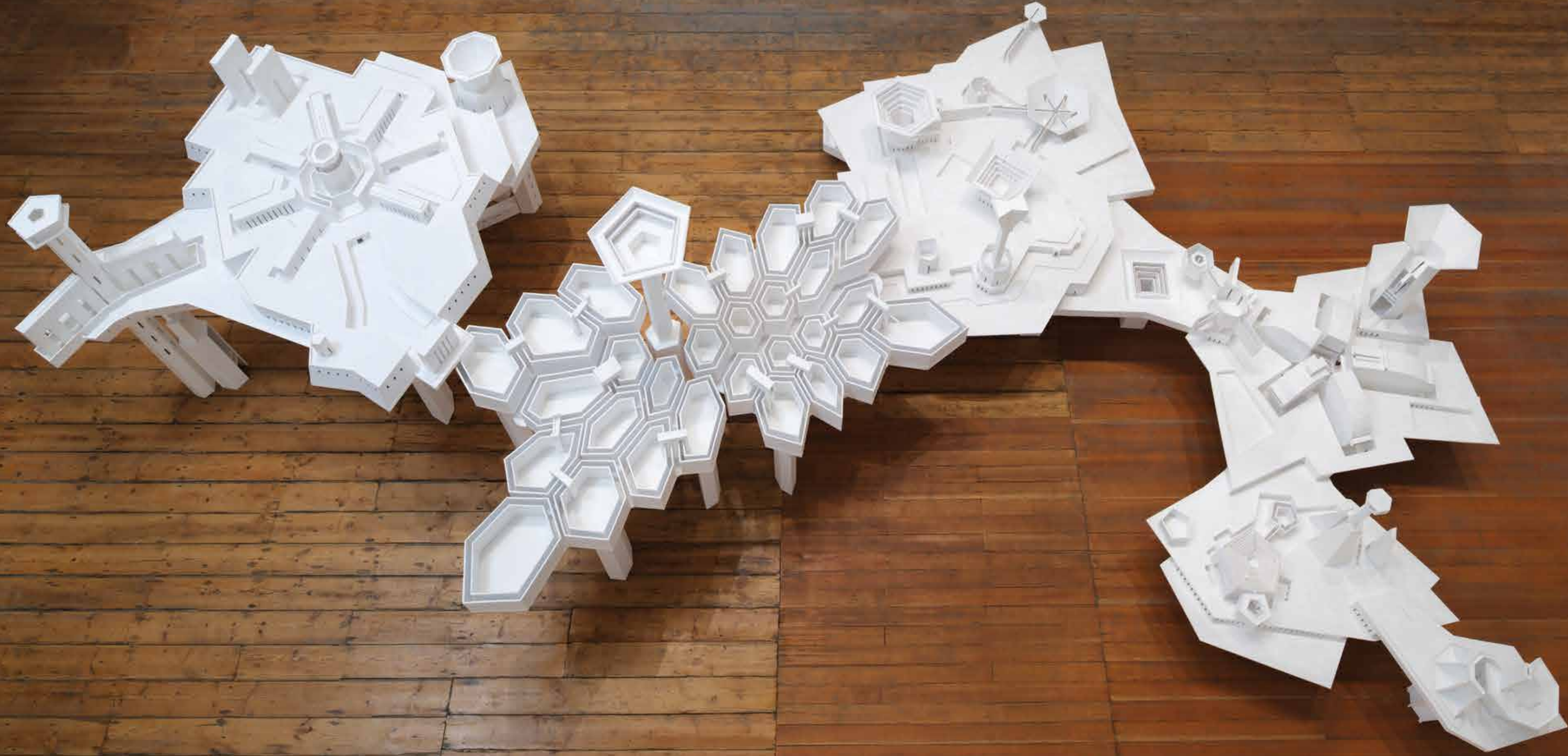
- 10 I borrow the term ‘police’ from Jacques Rancière who defines it as “an organization of bodies based on communal distribution of the sensible, i.e. a system of coordinates defining modes of being, doing, making, and communicating that establishes the borders between the visible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable.” According to Rancière, this term should not be confused with the low-level police force that the word commonly refers to in English. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004, p. 93.
- 11 See AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

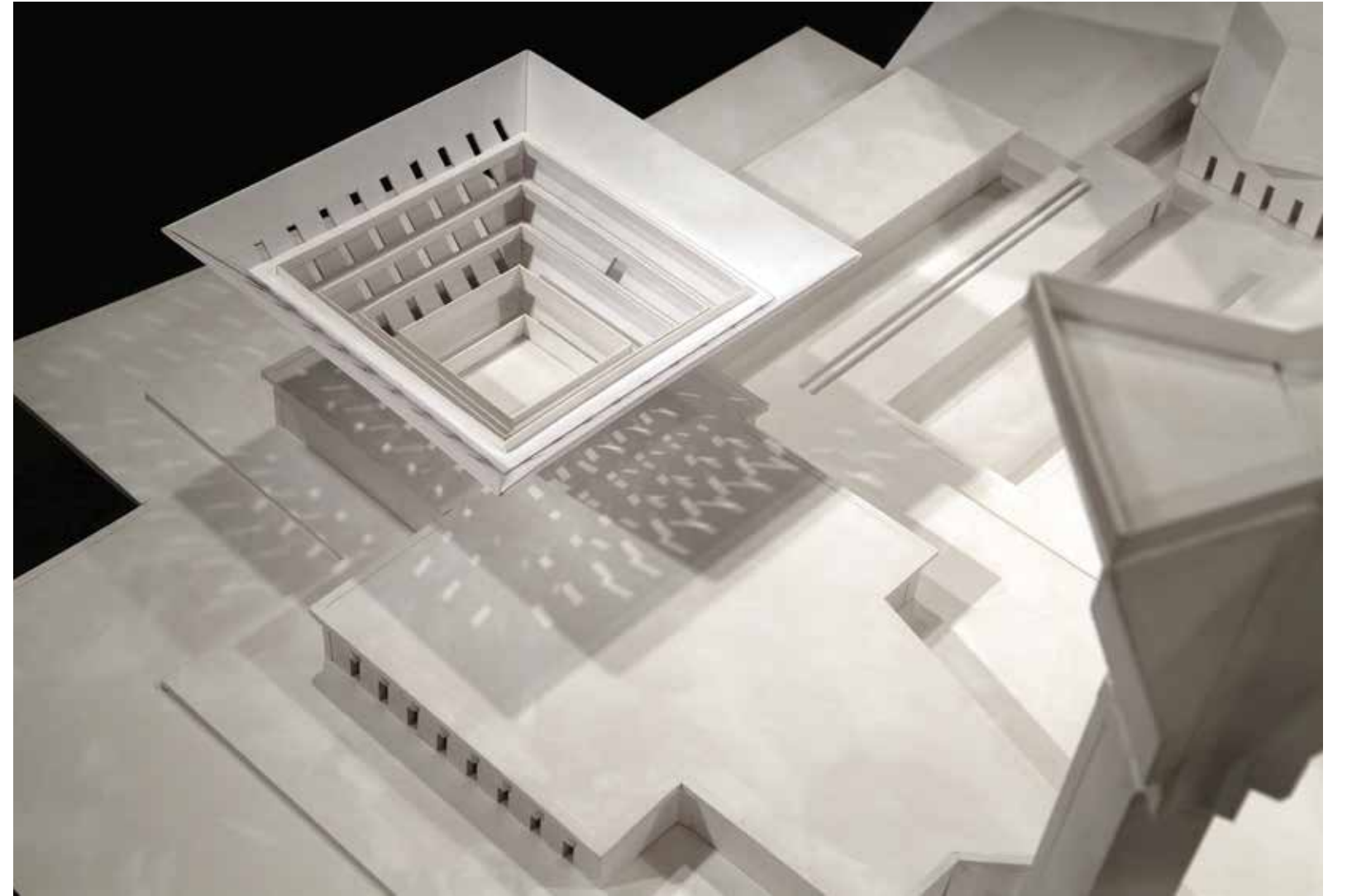
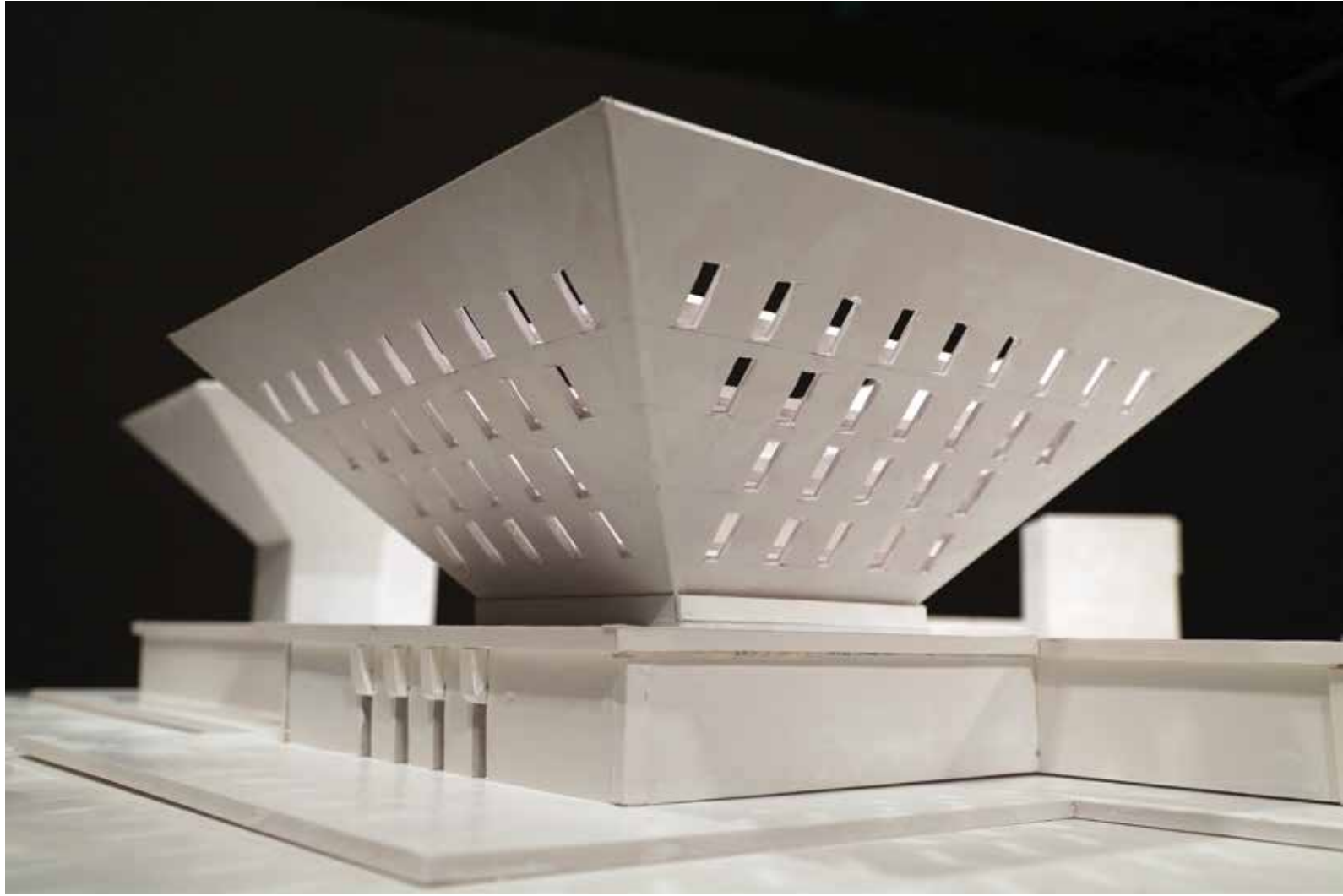
suburbs, and gated communities function as structures of segregation, limitation and control. Police order is brutal in metropolitan epicenters of capitalism.¹⁰ Yet, technologies of control are not as total and efficient in the cities of the Global South, as in the cities of the Global North. That is why, thankfully, life spills beyond the bounds of governmentality in postcolonial cities, such as Blantyre and Nairobi.¹¹

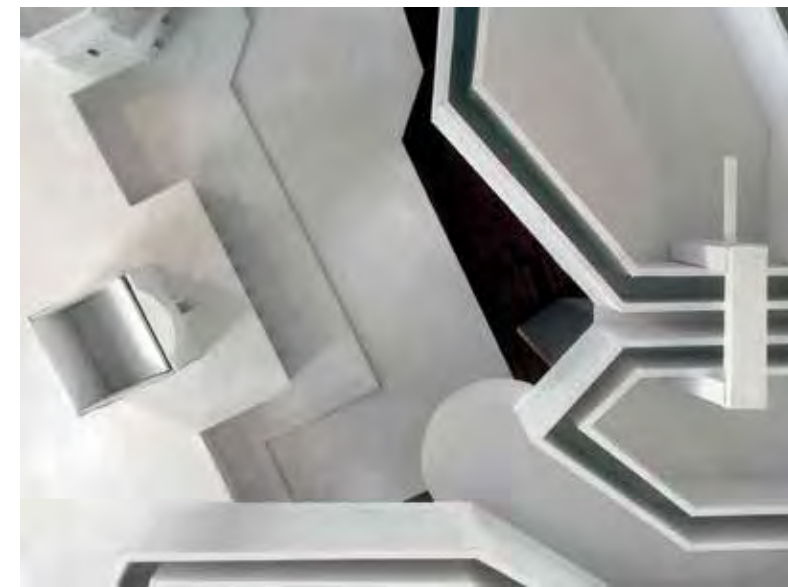
In Buster’s metropolis, chambers and enclaves have no doors, and staircases and passageways lead to nowhere. One can almost locate the densely populated slums and expansive palaces in these imagined miniature cityscapes. Seemingly beautiful, *Model City (Constraint)* catalogues and condenses a collective history of architectural forms, teasing out aspirational geometries and latent power dynamics in each. Insidious regimes of control permeate the modern metropolis: a dystopia that continually reveals itself, even as the next promise of utopia is renewed.

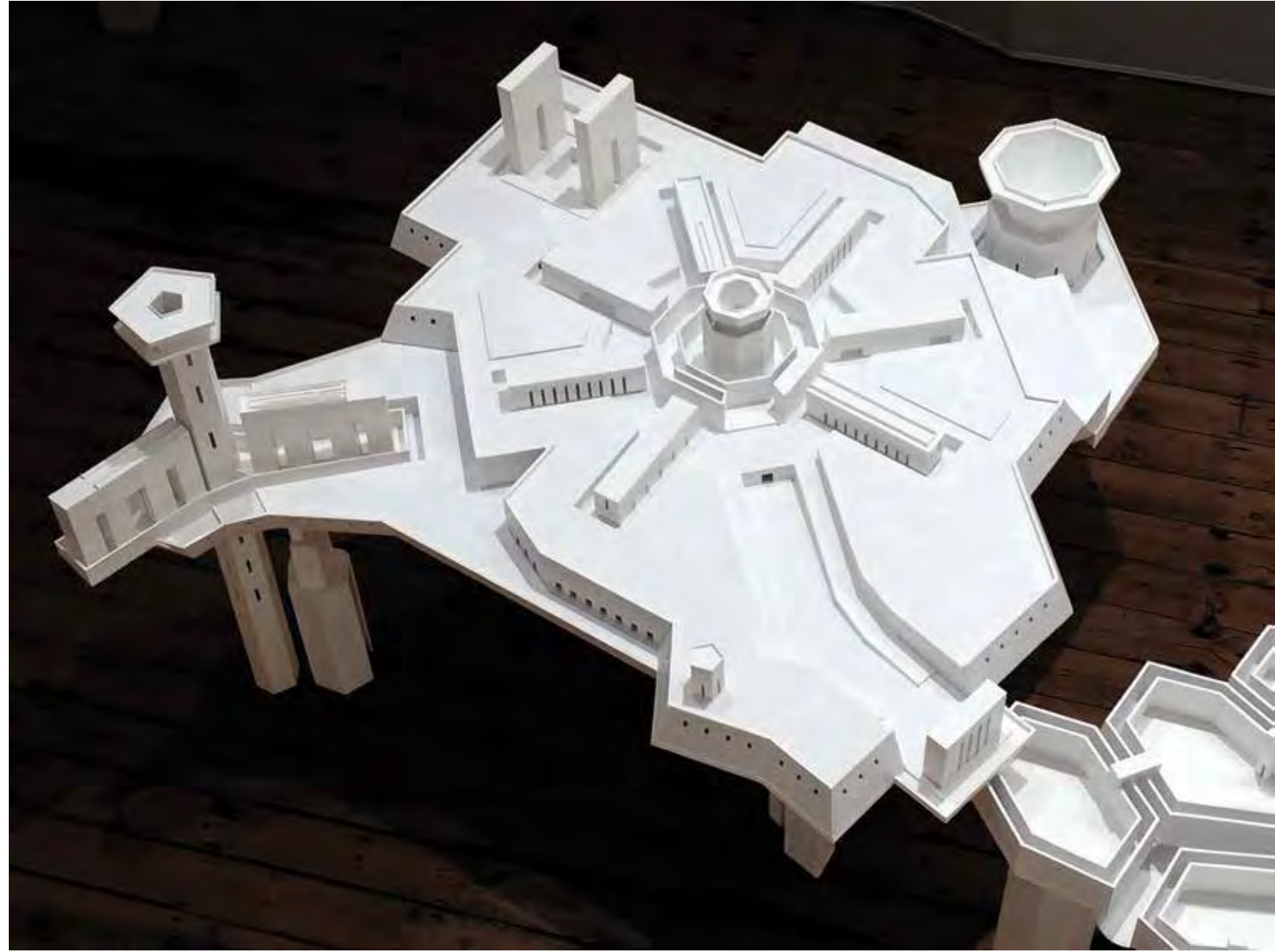
Massa Lemu is a visual artist whose studio practice is concerned with the contradictions of migration within globalization and the effects of an increasingly immaterialized, flexible and mobile capitalism on the post-colonial subject. Lemu’s scholarly interests lie in what he calls a biopolitical collectivism in contemporary African art.









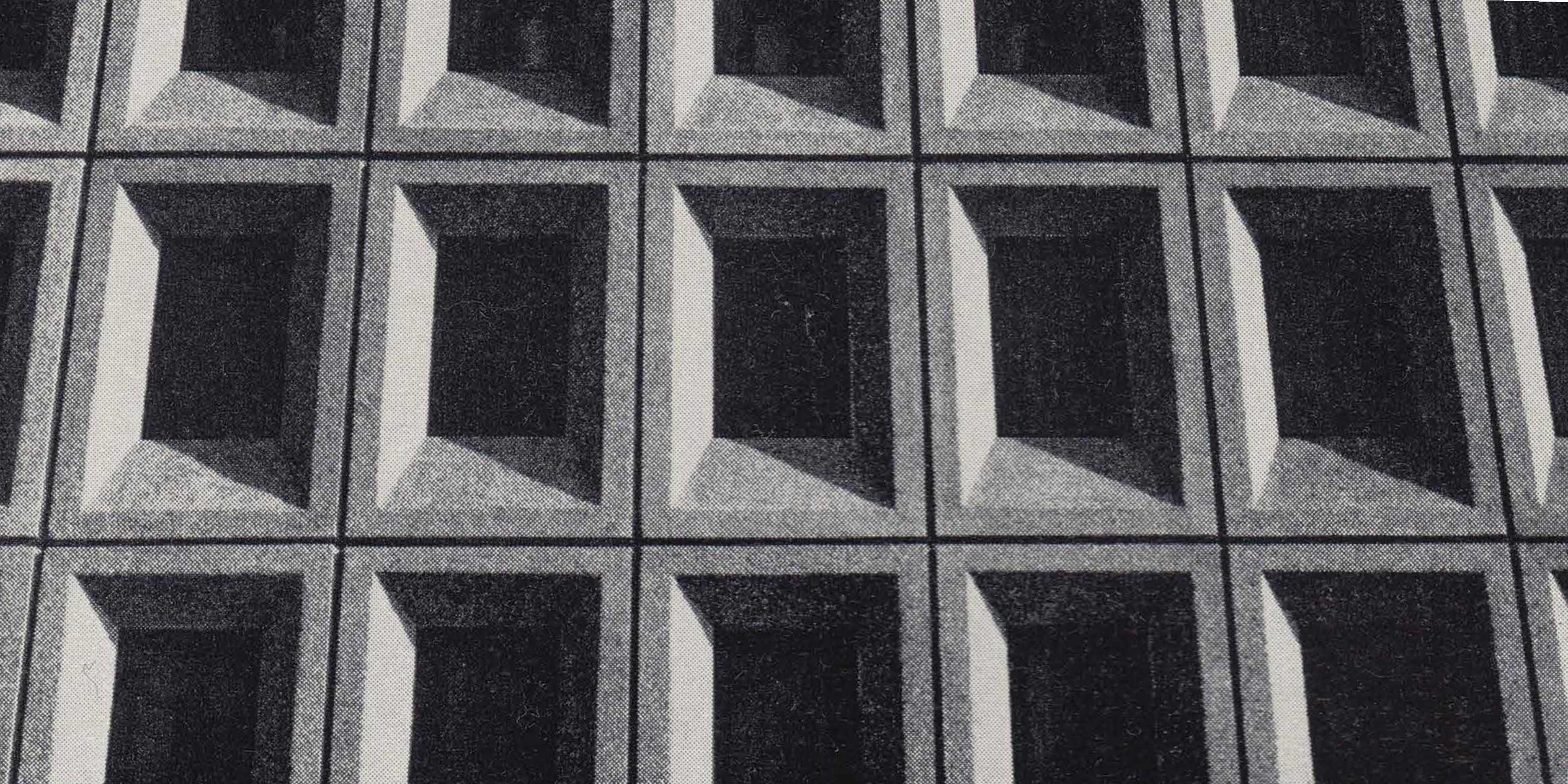














MODERN WORLD /



Modern World is a video constructed of scanned archival photographs, sourced from 1950s-1970s architectural periodicals housed in the Built Environment Library at the University of Cape Town. The montage of stark black and white images of modernist architecture in Southern Africa and iconic examples from other parts of the globe, was composed in several iterations, each scored to samples of various drumming tracks. As the rhythm slows and picks up pace, the images accelerate in tandem, from slow single beats to an aggressive rapid flashing, with the buildings perceivable only as abstract shapes. In these images architectural form asserts itself as object, its geometry unyielding.



A DOORKNOB ON THE LANDSCAPE Gordon Hall

When architects design new buildings, they, I suppose logically, design the biggest elements first—the building's footprint on the earth (as seen from above), the building's height, shape, and interior divisions. At the end of this process the small things get decided—all the things we touch when we use the space—the floors, windows and doors, buttons, and handrails. I can't help but wonder what would emerge from reversing this. I'd like to know if it is possible to design an entire building around a single doorknob.

This is a section of a text I wrote recently in conjunction with the production of a series of small table-top sculptures.¹ I was trying to understand more about the ways we experience architecture with our bodies, focusing in particular on the many odd and overlooked intimacies of these relations—living inside the body of the building, wrapping my hands around the architectural details and pressing my feet against the floors. All of these instances of tenderness with this built structure, and disquieting moments too—the loose doorknob comes off in your hand like the house losing a tooth. Like tripping, or forgetting a word you know you know. I am living inside buildings as a body inside other bodies.

My observations about the ordering of the architectural design process come from an unlikely series of events that led to my participation in designing a large-scale residential building during the years I was in graduate school. My father, an academic philosopher and SDS leader turned global warming activist turned real estate developer, spent the first decade of the 2000s working with a series of architects to design a Passive House apartment building. I drifted in and out of this process over these years, and as a non-designer I was struck by the top-down movement of the design process—biggest to smallest, from the outside to the inside. Past a certain point of scale, the architects were generally no longer concerned with the decisions—they became known as “architectural details” and thus became the purview of the feminized role of “interior decorators,” or, barring that, the decisions of the contractors or developers perusing the finishes in big box hardware stores like Home Depot.² Meanwhile, the architects looked at renderings of the building from above and far away, impossible or nearly impossible vantage points from which to view the building. In these God's eye view AutoCAD renderings, tiny people regularly appear, doing typical human things in neat contemporary outfits—sitting on benches, walking down the sidewalk, easily navigating a ramp in a wheelchair—a rainbow of races and ages. These figures exist in a world of efficient yet leisurely mobility, without pain, disease, homelessness, gender ambiguity, red-lining, or segregation. These renderings are perfect examples of Michel Foucault's “heterotopias of compensation,” spaces which are “as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill

¹ Written in conjunction with Gordon Hall, *U*, joint compound, plaster, balsa wood, acrylic paint, colored pencil, aluminum, tile mosaic, paper, denim, 2017. Made for Mene Mene Tekel Parsin curated by Jesse Darling at the Wysing Arts Center, Cambridge, UK, 2017.

² For a compelling account of the detail as a gendered concept, see: Monique Roelofs, “A Pearl's Perils and Pleasures: The Detail at the Foundation of Taste.” “The Lure of the Detail: Critical Reading Today.” Special Issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3, 2003, pp. 57-88.

constructed, and jumbled.”³ They are fantasy spaces offered as comfort for the ways human life unfolds in the actual built environment.

Kendall Buster originally encountered the archive of 1950s to 1970s photographs of International Style buildings in Southern Africa by accident. She had gone to the Built Environment Library at the University of Cape Town on a research trip in search of additional source material for her miniature model city sculptures, and inquired in person about past decades of architecture periodicals. She was led to a locked room of floor-to-ceiling architecture magazines, the images from which Buster found to be compelling in a way that bordered on obsessive, and she returned with a scanner to capture hundreds of these magazine pages that came to comprise *Modern World*. This video slide show confronts us relentlessly and increasingly rapidly with these black and white photographs of the geometric shapes of Modernist buildings against the backdrop of the Southern African landscape, interspersed with a smattering of International Style structures from other parts of the globe. In these photographs, the cement and steel and glass buildings seem to exist in a world without people, their scale and form dwarfing all surrounding life. The buildings sit on the landscape like objects that fell from the sky fully formed, stark white against the complexity of the muddled world around them. It is hard not to feel that these buildings were designed to be photographed, and that it is these magazine images, and not the buildings themselves as used by the inhabitants of their landscapes, that is their truest form. They are buildings that are made to look like their picture.

As these images build momentum and cycle in front of us at a disorienting pace, Buster aesthetically builds a convincing case for the symbolic violence of these buildings. They feel not intended for human life, built at a scale most moving bodies can't comprehend, disrespectful of the already existing design language of the local structures, ecologically misplaced, and intended for audiences of design professionals and international onlookers in a way that renders their development stained with the logic of colonialism. The way they so perfectly replicate the architectural renderings from which they were built in turn produces these images of them from distant disembodied vantage points, turning the buildings into photographic objects. *Modern World* posits this damning interpretation of these buildings, but to analyze the piece in terms of that critique alone does not feel to me to thoroughly account for Buster's connection to these images or her handling of them in the work. These photographs of Modernist buildings are also beautiful, and Buster's position in relation to them is marked by the ambivalence of a viewer who is both drawn to and critical of the object of their vision. I don't think it is wrong to say that Buster, in a way, loves these

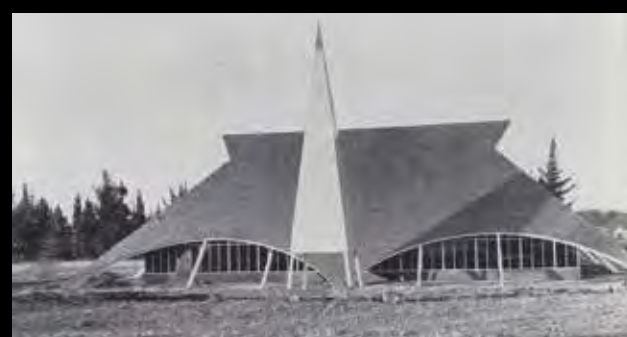
3 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 22-27.

images, and loves them despite the many real problems that the buildings pictured in them pose. What is the nature of this attraction to these images?

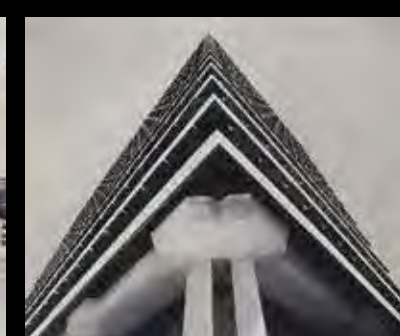
The answer to this question lies in what might be an incompatible yet coexisting underside of the God's eye view of these photographs. From these distant vantage points, the Modernist buildings appear as objects visible in their entirety. As mentioned previously, this arguably produces feelings of mastery and ownership, a way of understanding the world without inhabiting it. These photographs embody the luxury, or misogyny, of existing on the outside—privy to a big picture analysis not accessible to those within, the gaze of eyes without a body. However, this distance simultaneously produces an inversion of scale between my body and the buildings. The way these structures appear on the landscape as abstract forms, I can hold the whole of these structures in my eyes at one time. The buildings become smaller than my body, objects I could wrap myself around, sit on, or cup in my hands. This is no longer the realm of the architect, and I am not a tiny CAD figure living a sanitized life in someone else's creation. In this reversal of scale, the buildings have entered the feminized realm of the decorative—they appear like doorknobs, furniture, bookends, and cakes. An entire building reduced to a shape I could grab with one hand. Feelings of mastery get replaced by corporeal companionship and the potential for touch—I am of the same species as the building in the distance. In some sense we are both abstract shapes.

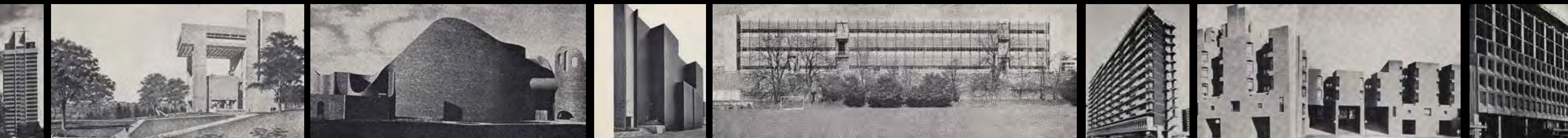
Is it a contradiction that distance can produce feelings of intimacy, turning buildings into hand-held objects? And is it possible for the pleasure of this kind of pictorial intimacy with buildings to coexist with the dehumanization of the architectural rendering of from-afar magazine photographs? In *Modern World*, Kendall Buster gives herself permission to inhabit both of these positions simultaneously, in a disidentificatory recuperation of these troublingly compelling photographs. Buster followed her attraction to this accidentally discovered trove of images, and in doing so produced an artwork that embodies this ambivalence about what feelings are possible when we look at buildings from afar. This ability to find new ways into old tyrannies is, in Kendall Buster's world, a tool for sustaining ourselves. She gives us permission to find unconventional intimacies in places that don't welcome us, to hold that which we cannot even reach.

Gordon Hall is a New York-based artist and writer who layers sculpture, language, and movement in performances and exhibitions. Driven by an interest in our bodies' physical and social relationship to objects, Hall engages with the possibilities inherent in corporeal dynamics.













COLOPHON

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Disassembling Utopias* by Kendall Buster, at *commune.1* from June 22 - July 16, 2016; and GUS Gallery from July 18 - August 4, 2016.

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64 Wale Street
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Photo credits:

Pages 13, 43, 44-45, 48: Michael Hall.

Pages 64-85: images sourced from architectural periodicals housed in the Built Environment Library at the University of Cape Town.

All other images: Kendall Buster & Siemon Allen.

Copyediting by Kate Scherer.

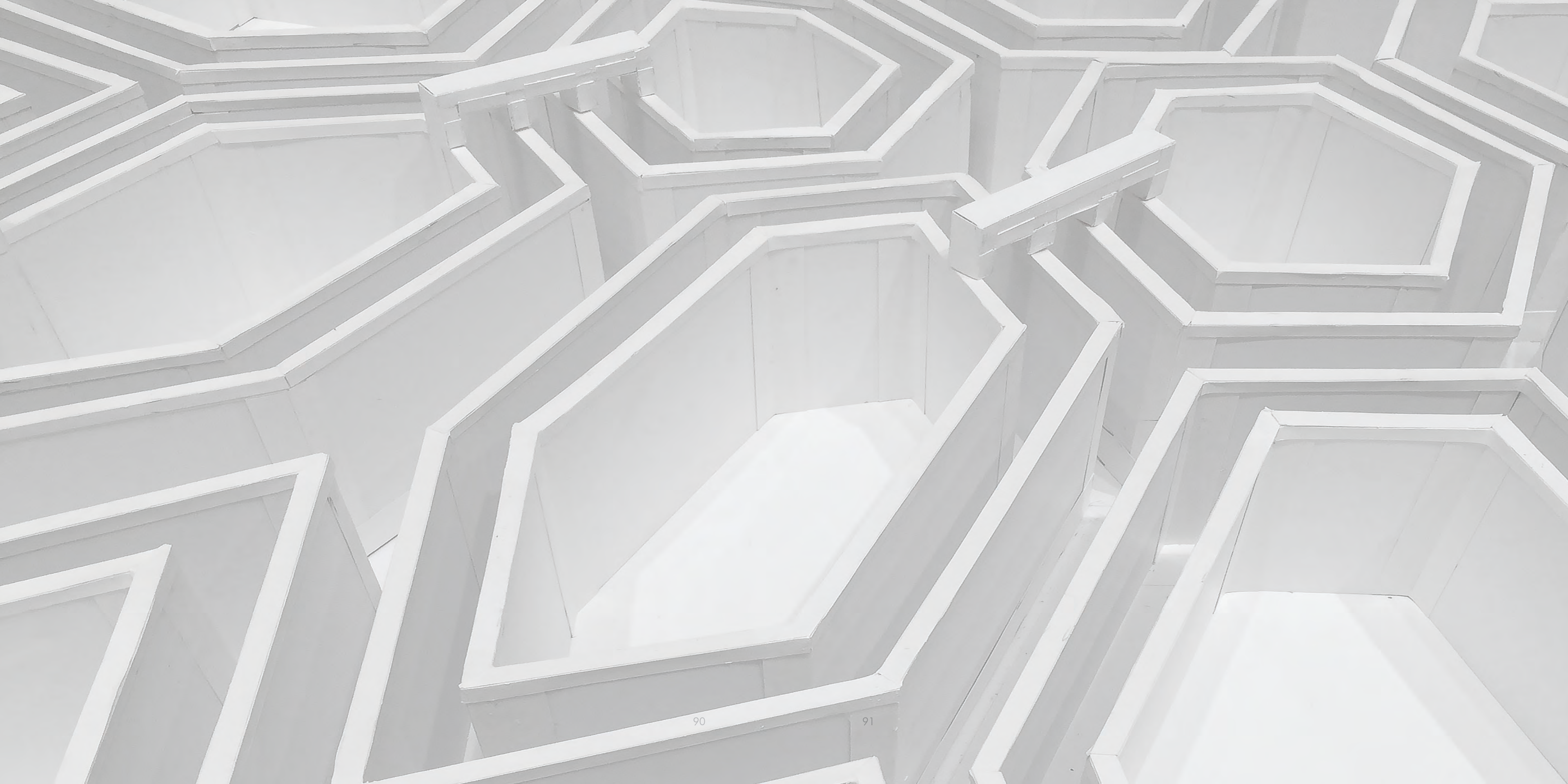
Printing by Permanent Printing Ltd., Hong Kong.

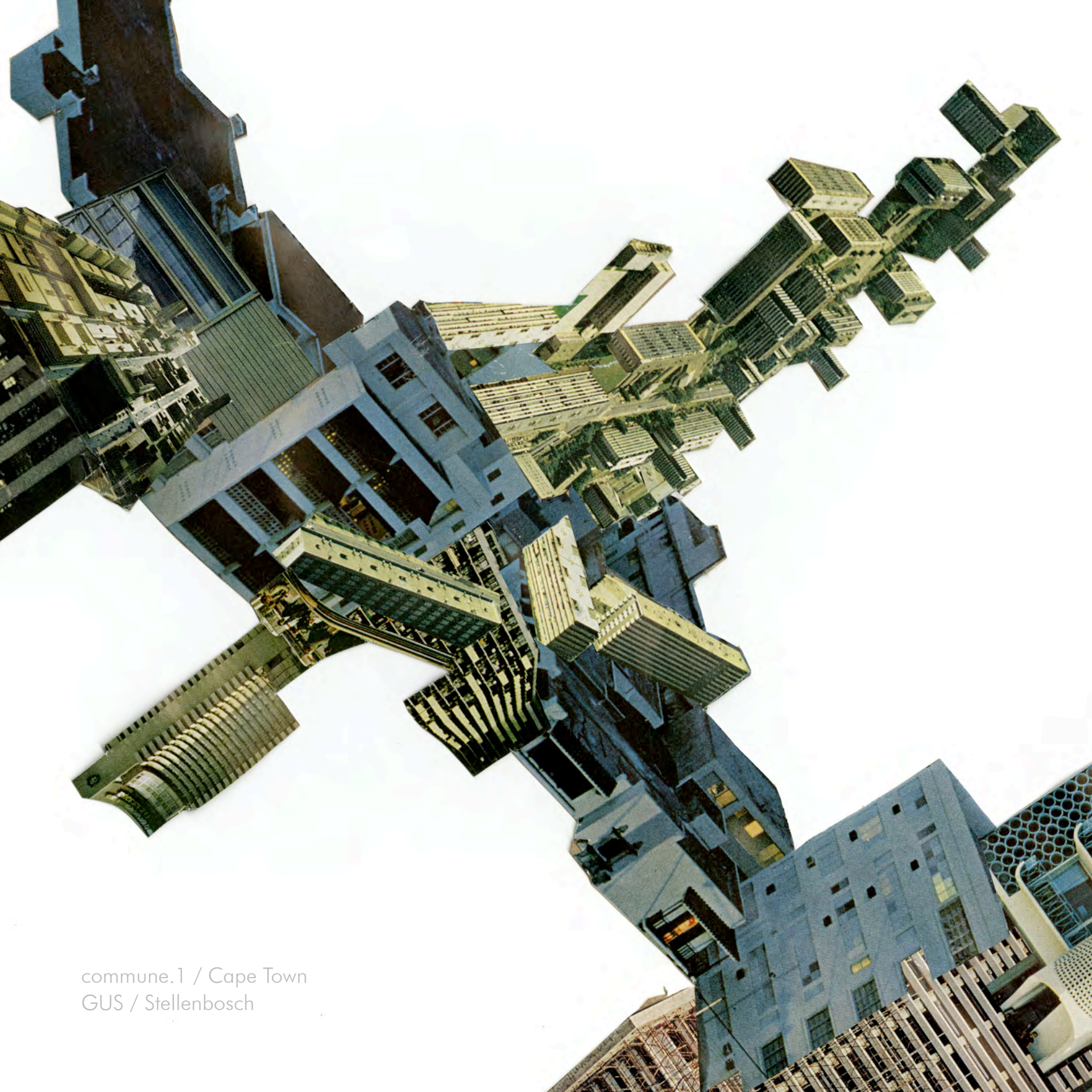
Special thanks to Leigh-Anne and Greg Dale for the opportunity to exhibit at *commune.1*; Greer Valley for her insightful curatorial support at GUS Stellenbosch; Ledelle Moe for her steadfast encouragement and heartfelt insights; Diane Steel at the Built Environment Library at the University of Cape Town for her enormous help in accessing architectural periodicals; and Ronald Bogue, Massa Lemu and Gordon Hall for generously contributing their words to this publication.

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ISBN 978-0-9993397-0-1







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