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## 46 Disappearance of arable land to make way for new forms of urban speculation

Today almost 60% of the 20 million inhabitants of Cairo live in illegally constructed housing. Since the 1960s, this informal urbanisation has developed on farmland around the city, destroying hundreds of acres of arable land. Self-built housing has gradually turned into a semi-professional business, fuelled by the neo-liberal economy and the inadequacies of the State. The phenomenon, which accelerated after the Arab Spring in 2011, has now reached an almost industrial stage of development, where speculation is rife.

The Advanced Informality study reveals the damage wrought by the system on both people and land: standardised, poor-quality housing, residents owning illegal flats from which they can be evicted at any time, sacrificed farmland, and so on.

[www.angelil.arch.ethz.ch](http://www.angelil.arch.ethz.ch)

MAS Urban Design – ETH Zurich: Marc Angéil, Charlotte Malterre-Barthes and Something Fantastic in collaboration with CLUSTER Cairo and the American University of Cairo  
photos: © Lorenz Bürgi ; © Julian Schubert  
graphic design: Something Fantastic

## Perfecting informal housing

In the light of rampant speculation concerning farmland around Cairo, the ETH Zurich team led by Marc Angéil and Charlotte Malterre-Barthes has worked on transforming the typology of these sets of buildings. By recombining architectural and structural elements, they seek to improve quality of life in the flats and create communal areas that will improve daily life across these districts.

To offer access to a view or to natural light, or to provide better ventilation in the flats, the architects proceed by removing materials from these hyper-dense residential towers. Other proposals for empty plots entail new ways of building under the same conditions: moving the circulation node, spreading out the structure, and so on. The idea is to improve housing quality through tactical interventions.











## Advanced Informality: From Agrarian Land to New Urban Forms in Cairo

MAS Urban Design ETH Zurich

**TABLE 1**

*Pre-1970 / Agrarian land, pre-urban growth*

Property lines and irrigation channels establish the primary territorial division and the base for later urbanisation.

**TABLE 2**

*1970-2011 / Informal construction on arable land*

Housing structures materialise, following an established typology of concrete frames and brick infill, with street patterns registering agrarian subdivisions, generating 'urban canyons'. The Ring Road is built.

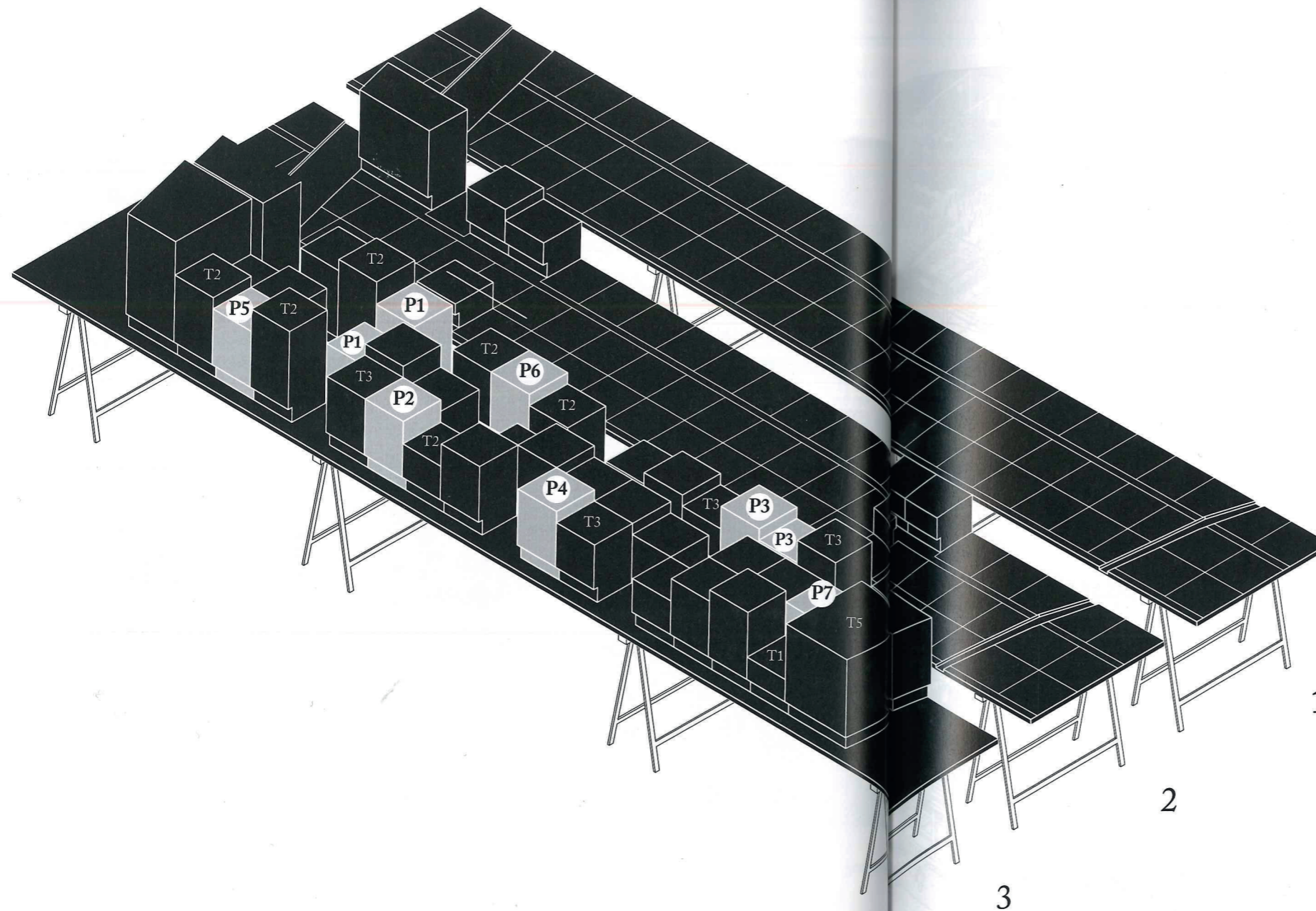
Urban growth is relatively timid and buildings are at a distance from the main road as contractors aim to conceal illegal housing from the authorities' attention.

**TABLE 3**

*2011-today / Post-revolution development*

Contractors grow confident and engaged in speculative illegal construction, detectable via the change in building height. This phase shows the penetration of market forces operating in a neoliberal mode.

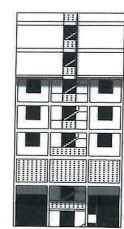
In this model, alternative projects developed by MAS Urban Design for innovative architecture are positioned on site.



1

2

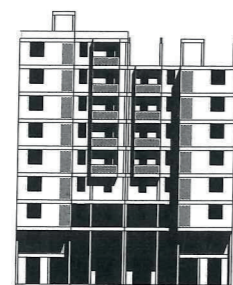
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P1



P2



P3



P4



P5

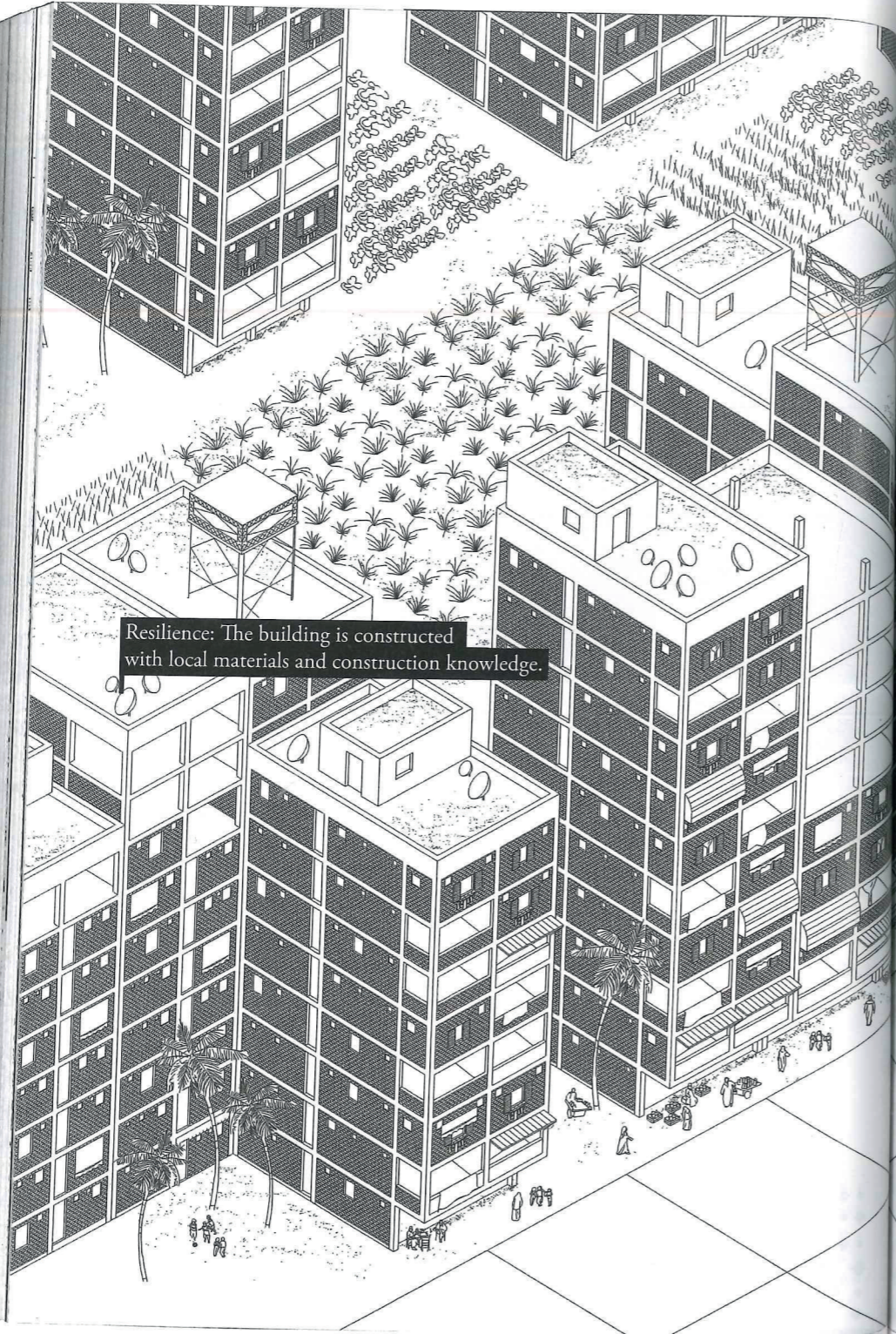


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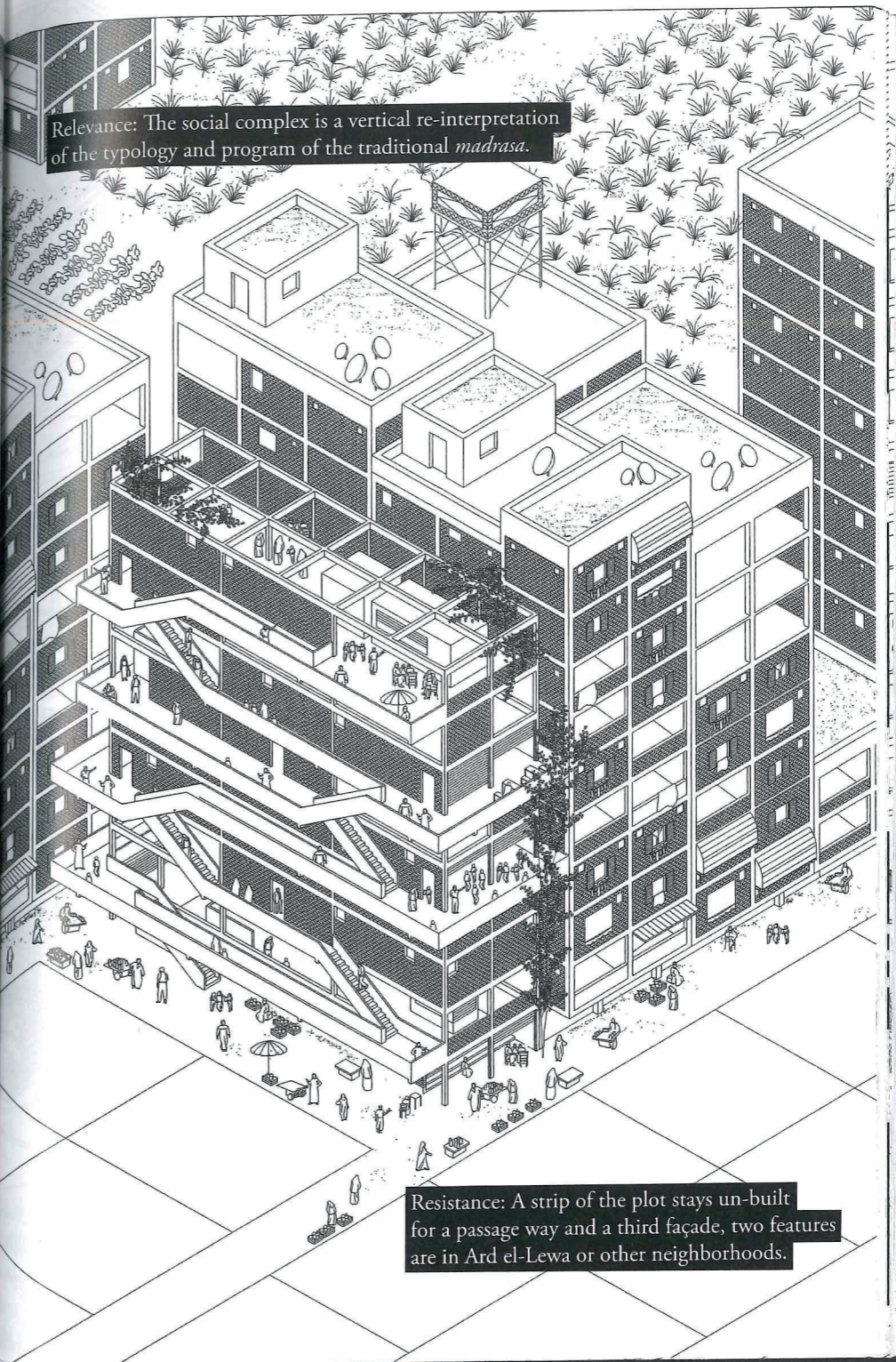


P7





Resilience: The building is constructed with local materials and construction knowledge.



Relevance: The social complex is a vertical re-interpretation of the typology and program of the traditional *madrassa*.

Resistance: A strip of the plot stays un-built for a passage way and a third façade, two features are in Ard el-Lewa or other neighborhoods.

From: Marc Angéilil and Charlotte Malterre-Barthes in collaboration with Something Fantastic and CLUSTER, *Housing Cairo – The Informal Response*, Ruby Press, 2016