

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

PERFORMANCE MODELS FOR THE NEW AGE:
AN ARCHITECTURAL ODYSSEY

by
KARIM NOUHAD RIFAI

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to the Department of Architecture and Design
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at the American University of Beirut

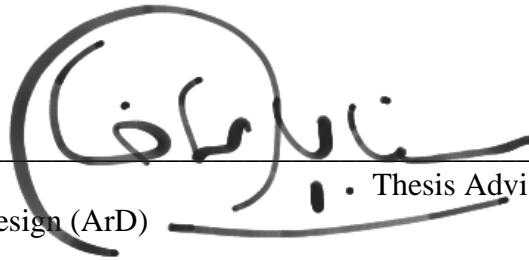
Beirut, Lebanon
May 2021

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, written in Arabic script, which reads 'Sinan Hassan'. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Sinan Hassan, Senior Lecturer
Department of Architecture and Design (ArD)

• Thesis Advisor

Date of project presentation: May 11, 2021

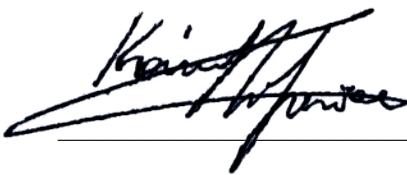
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ABSTRACT

Title: Performance Models for the New Age: An Architectural Odyssey

In an attempt to find a way to perform my EP in an increasingly digital world, and due to issues relating to politics of space and accessibility as well as means and tools available for young artists nowadays, this project looks at different performance models and virtual tools to facilitate that. This project explores the different buildings in Nejmeh Square, using the virtual reality tool designing in a completely virtual environment that is based on the physical one. It uses the different architectural typologies of religious, commercial, political, and historical sites as an infrastructure for performance that informs the design, giving alter-egos to each selected space in a unified virtual experience. The outcome is a series of 9 interventions that combine to create a virtual district for performance through an architectural narrative accompanied with a socio-political commentary.

كَيْةَ أَكُونُ

An audio-visual odyssey

نماذج أداء

PERFORMANCE MODELS
FOR THE NEW AGE

للعصر الجديد

كَيْةَ أَكُونُ

مُلحمة سمعية بصرية

American University of Beirut
2020-2021
Karim Rifai

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حنيني

يوم الليل

بي طويل

لامك

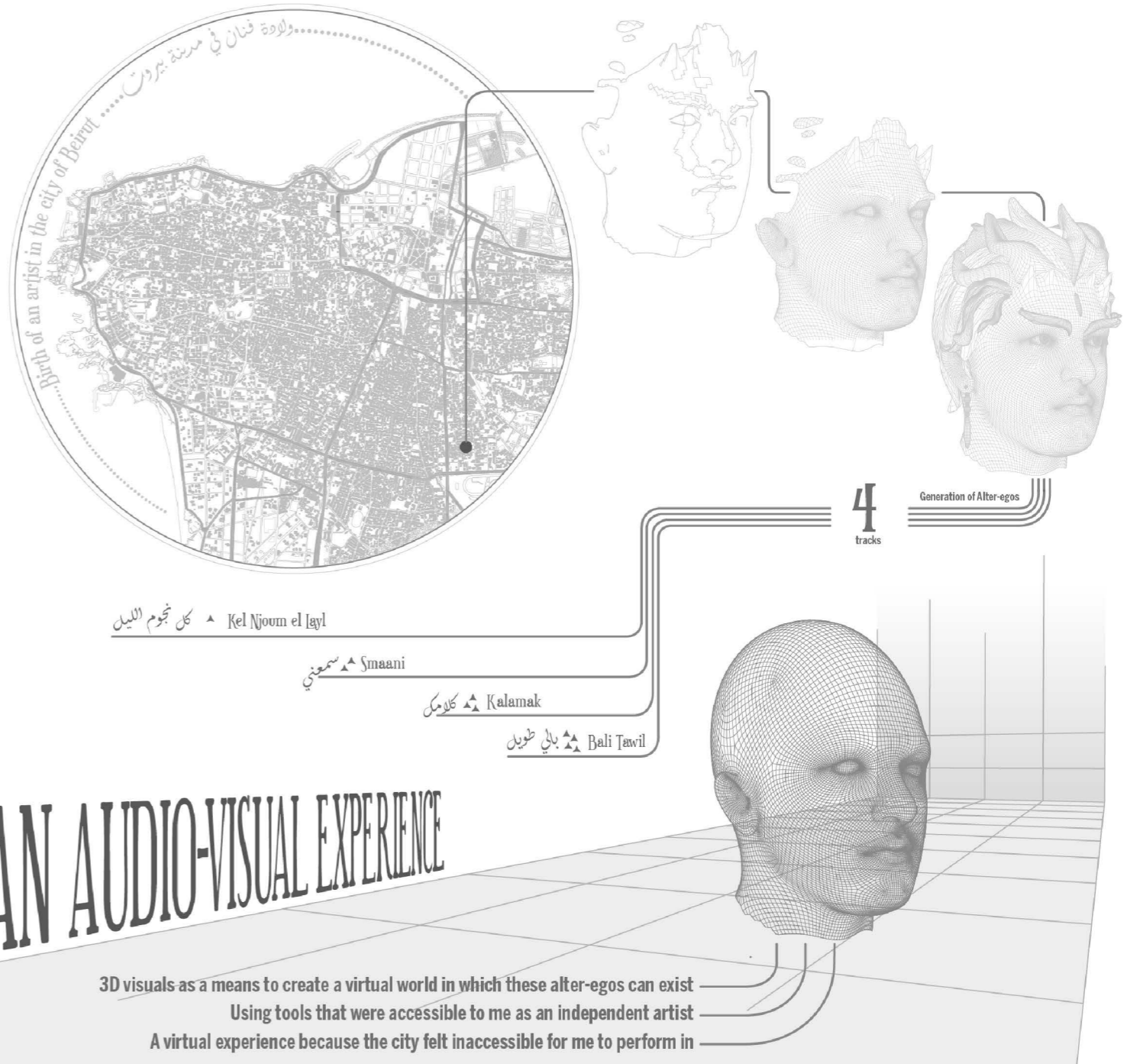
The starting point for this research is an EP (extended-play) I am currently recording as an independent artist. It represents the birth of an artist in the specific context of the city Beirut, a city of contradictions and dichotomy, as well as multiple identities, themes this EP explores.

The EP contains 4 tracks: "Smaani", "Kel njoum el layl", "Bali tawil", and "Kalamak". Each track is meant to represent a different facet of my identity as an artist and an individual, or rather different alter-egos. The EP is not only a musical endeavor, but a visual one too, where the visuals take as much importance as the music in telling the story of the EP.

The visuals produced for this project are created in 3D, in order to seemingly create a virtual environment i can manipulate as an artist where these alter-egos can exist.

3D tools are accessible to me as an independent artist, and allow for me to create virtual sets and visuals when this would not be feasible in real life, or when the city feels inaccessible to perform in.

This thesis aims to explore the marketing and performance of this EP taking into consideration the current context of the city as well as the world of virtual performances.

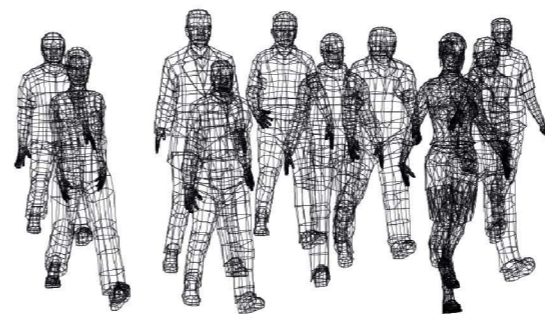


Several studies aim to draw out the characteristics of each generation, Gen Z is no exception and The EP tries to build on that. Gen Zs are known to be skilled at using technology and social media and are almost constantly online. Music is a major part of their daily rituals and their life, as well as video games and pop culture.

Social media platforms by themselves are virtual platforms that promote some sort of alterity to its users. Similar to reality but not quite the same they allow for the creation of online alter-egos. Following that are several examples in pop-culture that display growing tendencies towards alterity, like for example: the music industry with artists like Grimes, Ashnikko, Beyonce... that have alter-egos, as well as drag culture which entered mainstream culture due to the success of "Rupaul's drag race."

We can also see many character tropes, and looks appear on tiktok, with many young people adopting them as their own alter-egos like the E-girl trend or the cottagecore aesthetic.

Finally, we notice this characteristic of alterity in video-games, especially MMORPGs (massively multi-player online role playing games). 91% of Gen Z males play video games which is an astounding number, and 68% of them think it is part of their identity and what defines them. And in-game alterity is nothing new, players chose their characters, build them and often times exhibit different social behavior online and in these games by adopting alter-egos. All in all, we see alterity as a characteristic emerging in this new generation in different levels and it mainly takes a virtual dimension.



GEN Z

- TRAITS 1 Members of Gen Z are in touch with their feelings
- TRAITS 2 They listen to more international music than any other demographic
- TRAITS 3 Gen Z craves discovery, finding new things, ideas, music, hobbies, and experiences
- TRAITS 4 Gen Z wants to be part of the political conversation
- TRAITS 5 They value audio as an escape from visual stimulation overload

TECHNOLOGY
SOCIAL MEDIA

TOOLS

often through music, and specifically via their "bag playlists" of sad songs., listening to these playlists up 45% year over year

Audio isn't just background noise, said 56% of the study respondents; it plays a huge role in their everyday lives

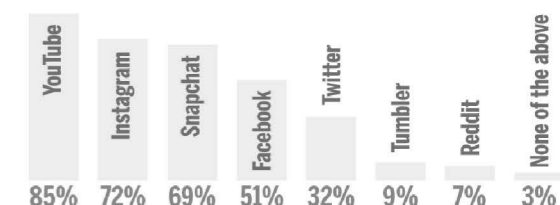
SOCIAL MEDIA

95%

of 13- to 17-year-olds use the internet

Almost constantly Several times a day Less often

45% 44% 11%



POP CULTURE



Music Industry



Drag Culture



TikTok Tropes



Cosplay



Virtual Influencers

VIDEO GAMES

91%

91% of Gen Z males regularly play video games

forming a deepening connection with gaming through community building and social engagement

Popularization of online role playing games

Game Characters as alter-egos and tools for online social interaction

68%

of Gen Z males agree that gaming is an important part of their identity

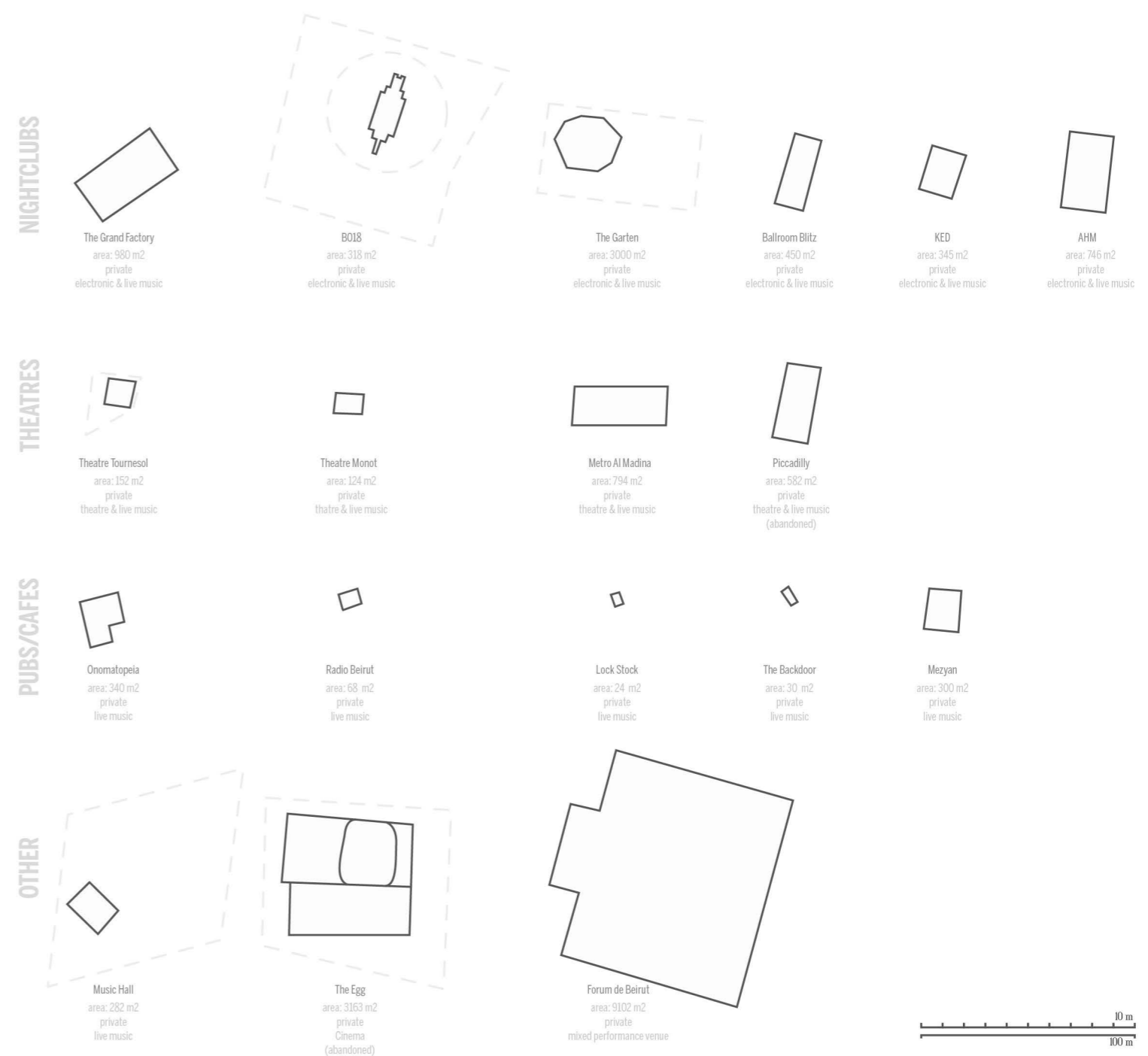


In order to see how the EP should be performed, i first took a look at the performance spaces available in the city of Beirut.

When we look at these spaces we can compare them and their characteristics, like: area or type of music played, which are basically quantifiable stats, but what we might fail to see are the politics of these spaces. Who is allowed to perform there? Who is welcome, and who is not? Is it a question of social and economic status, or artistic exclusivity, or art that belongs to a generation.

Many of these spaces are not simply performance spaces, but spaces that each cater towards a specific demographic and that host a specific profile of artists. Here we see how performance takes a social and political dimension.

In the quest to look for a performance space, i was dissappointed and faced with many obstacles such as those mentioned previously, but also issues pertaining to budget, funds and accessibility to these spaces. These spaces had narratives that i wanted to change.



THE CONDITION OF A YOUNG ARTIST NOW



Access to venues & performance spaces



CURRENT PERFORMANCE MODEL

MISSING LINK
The experience & immersiveness of the performance

ATTENDING A LIVE PERFORMANCE

The current condition of a young independent artist (2020) is that he/she's stuck at home, with issues of funding and high production costs usually covered by record labels, and with issues of access to performance spaces.

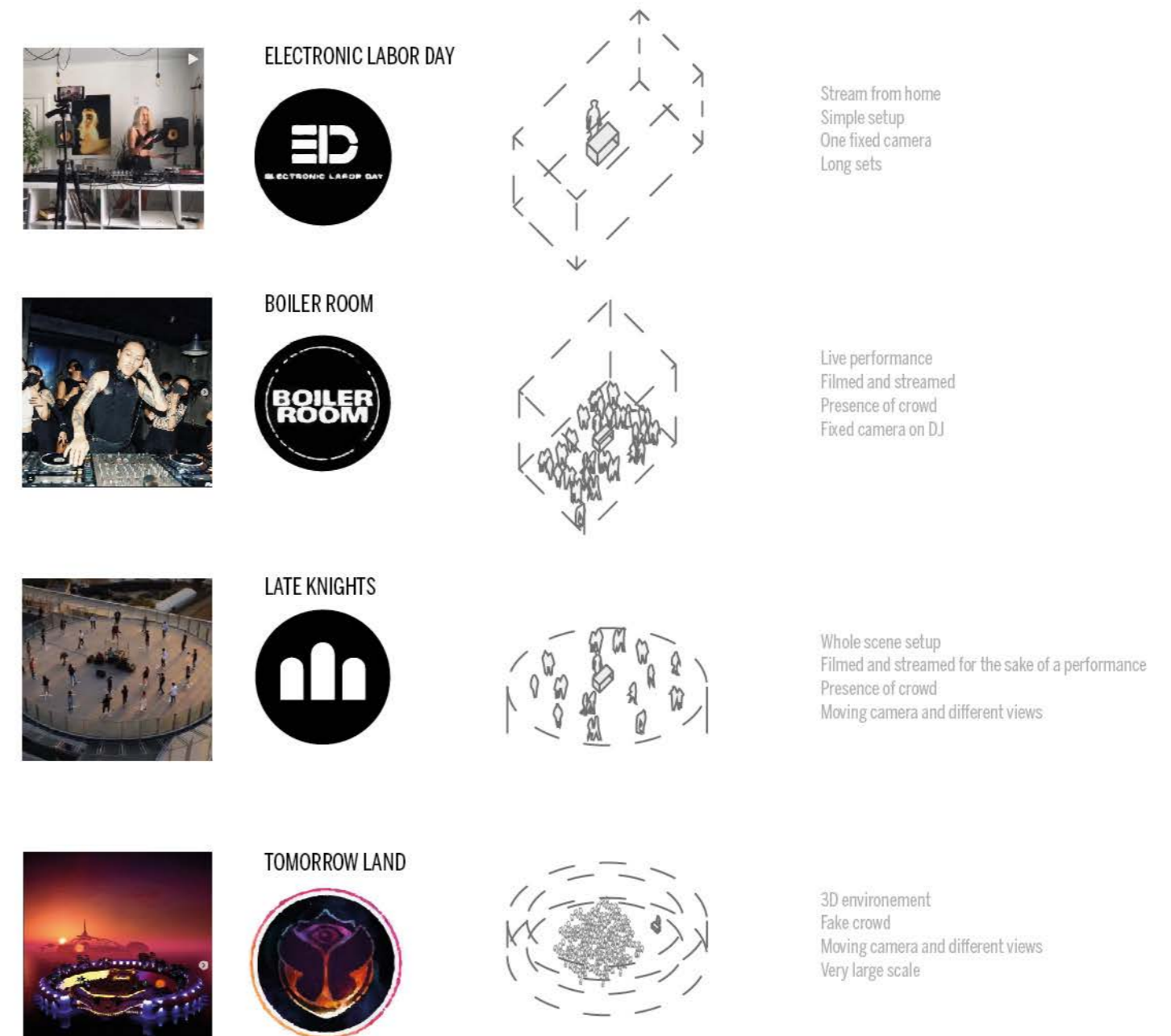
This led several artists to consider new ways to perform, and due to the COVID pandemic, the process to find new standards for performing was expedited.

Many artists and clubs resorted to online streaming. Here we identify 4 online performance models we witnessed during the last year, and that have been growing due to current circumstances.

These performance models range from regular streaming, to complete virtual environments built to accommodate the performances.

Comparing these performance models with attending a live performance, we identify a missing link which I describe as the immersiveness and experience of the performance.

This being said, and based on this premise, this thesis explores ways to fill this gap and propose another performance model that better responds to the need of artists and consumers alike.



أدوات الواقع المعزز والافتراضي

In order to counter the issues raised previously when it came to performing in Beirut, and in these times, i resorted to experiment with augmented reality and virtual reality tools, as well as 3D animation and modeling tools.

If we lay augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) on a scale of reality to virtuality where we place based on the experience they provide, virtual reality is on the far right end closing in on a complete virtual experience, and augmented reality is much closer to how we experience reality.

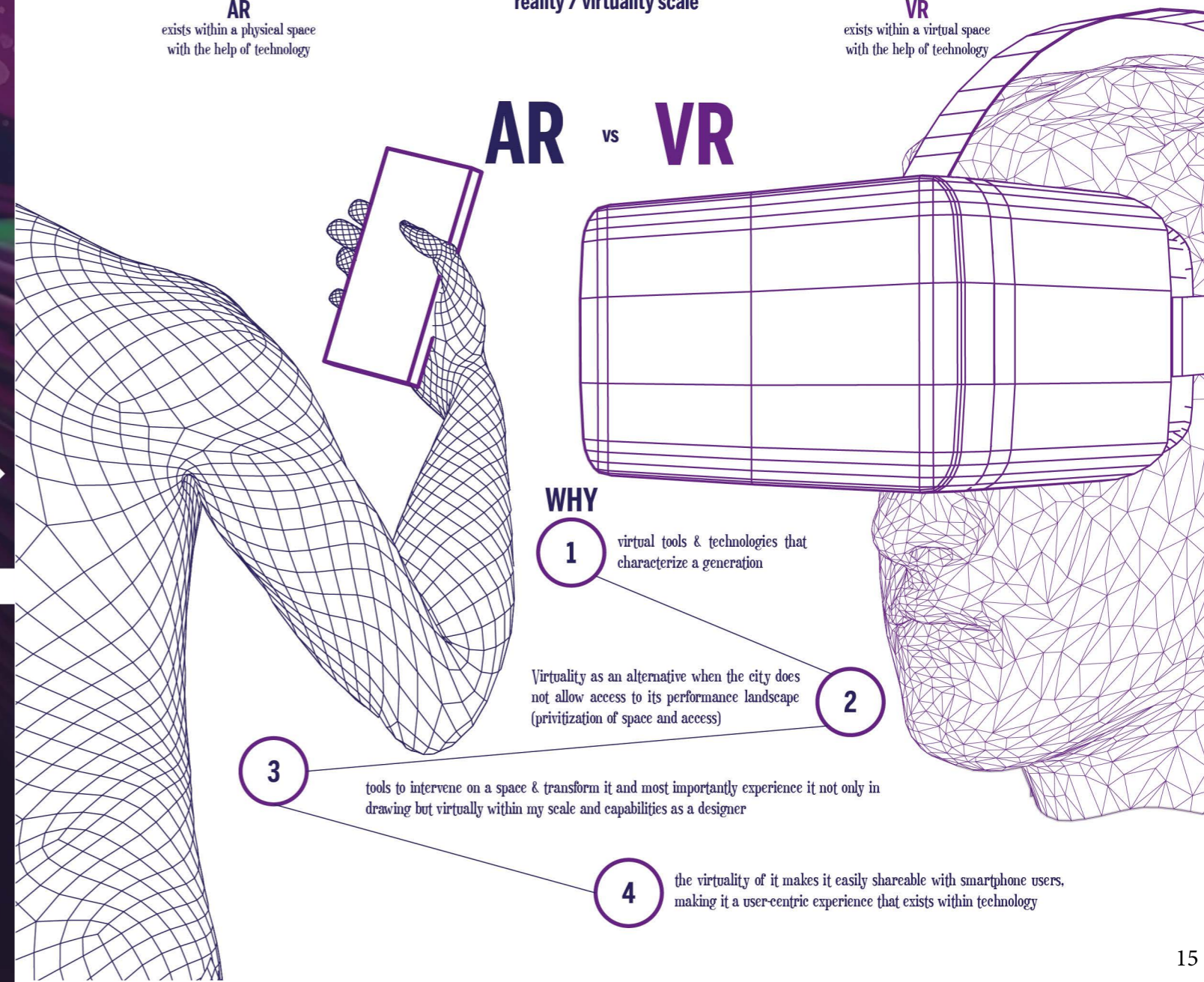
So why use these tools? When there is no access to physical space these tools allow to fill in the blank where reality lacks. They are fastgrowing tools that belong to this new generation, but also allow for a user-centric interactive experience.

This makes this experience exist within technology and therefore targets smartphone users as well as people adept at using these technologies, when trying to reclaim the city from the older generation.

"baby you're not even alive if you're not backed up on a drive"
-Grimes-



AR vs VR



WHY

1 virtual tools & technologies that characterize a generation

2 Virtuality as an alternative when the city does not allow access to its performance landscape (privitization of space and access)

3 tools to intervene on a space & transform it and most importantly experience it not only in drawing but virtually within my scale and capabilities as a designer

4 the virtuality of it makes it easily shareable with smartphone users, making it a user-centric experience that exists within technology

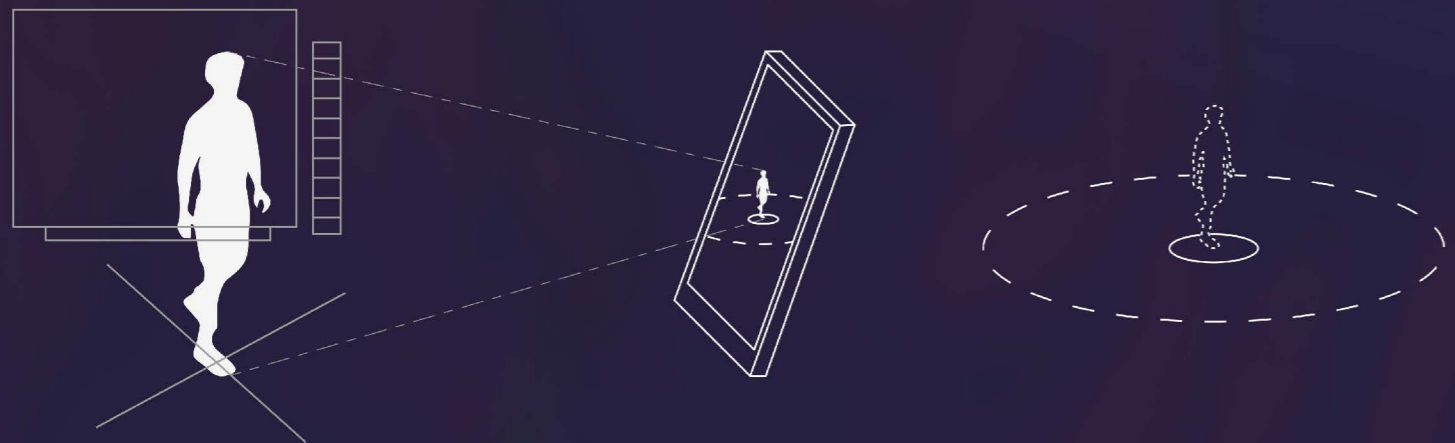
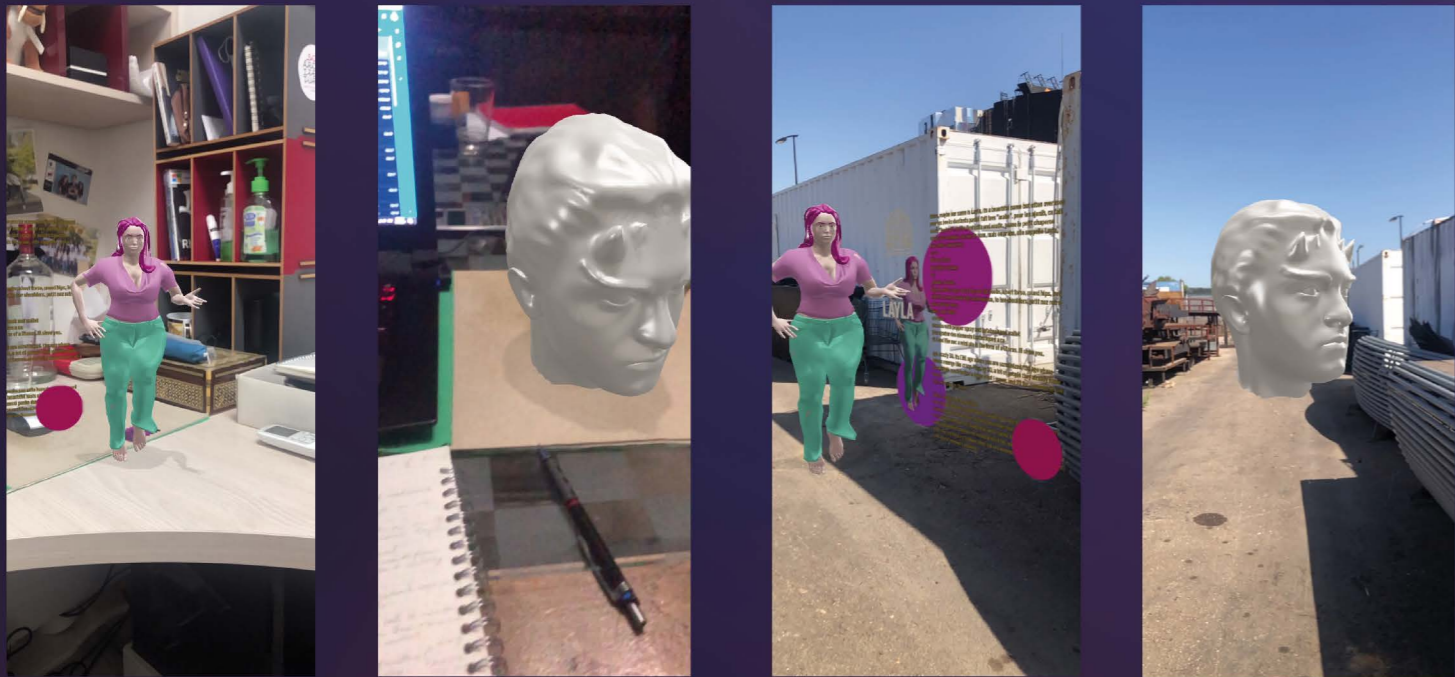
Augmented reality (AR) allows for us to insert a virtual element into reality, through several possible mediums.

The first one is that of an augmented reality app on the phone to which we import 3D assets, it allows to insert them into the city and into spaces through the medium of of the screen.

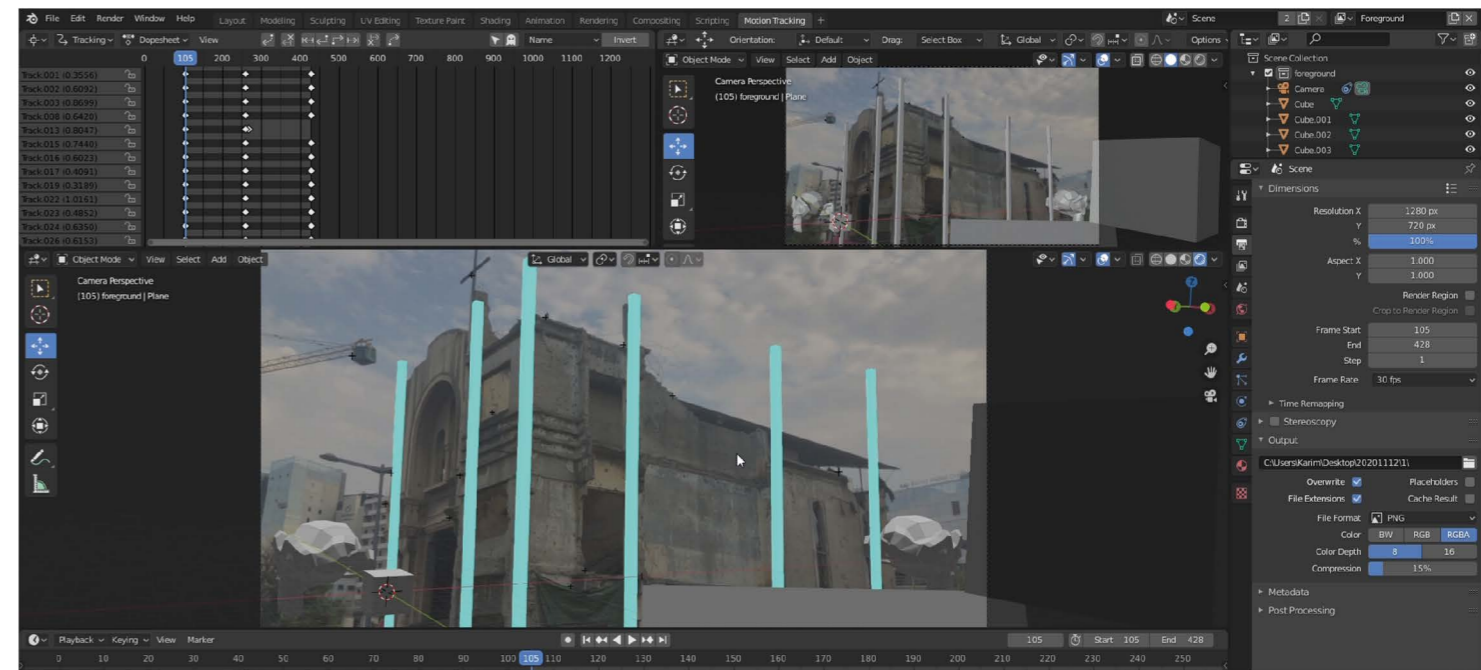
This also gives the possibility to interact with the 3D assets and attach information to them.

The other option is that of 3D tracking over existing footage. It allows for us to build a 3D environment that follows the perspective of a video by tracking fixed points on that video. This is similar to the previous in the way we insert the virtual into the real but it is not as interactive, nonetheless it allows more control with post-production.

This way when transforming the spaces traces of the real and of the virtual will appear.



3D model assets → import them into app → visualize & interact with them





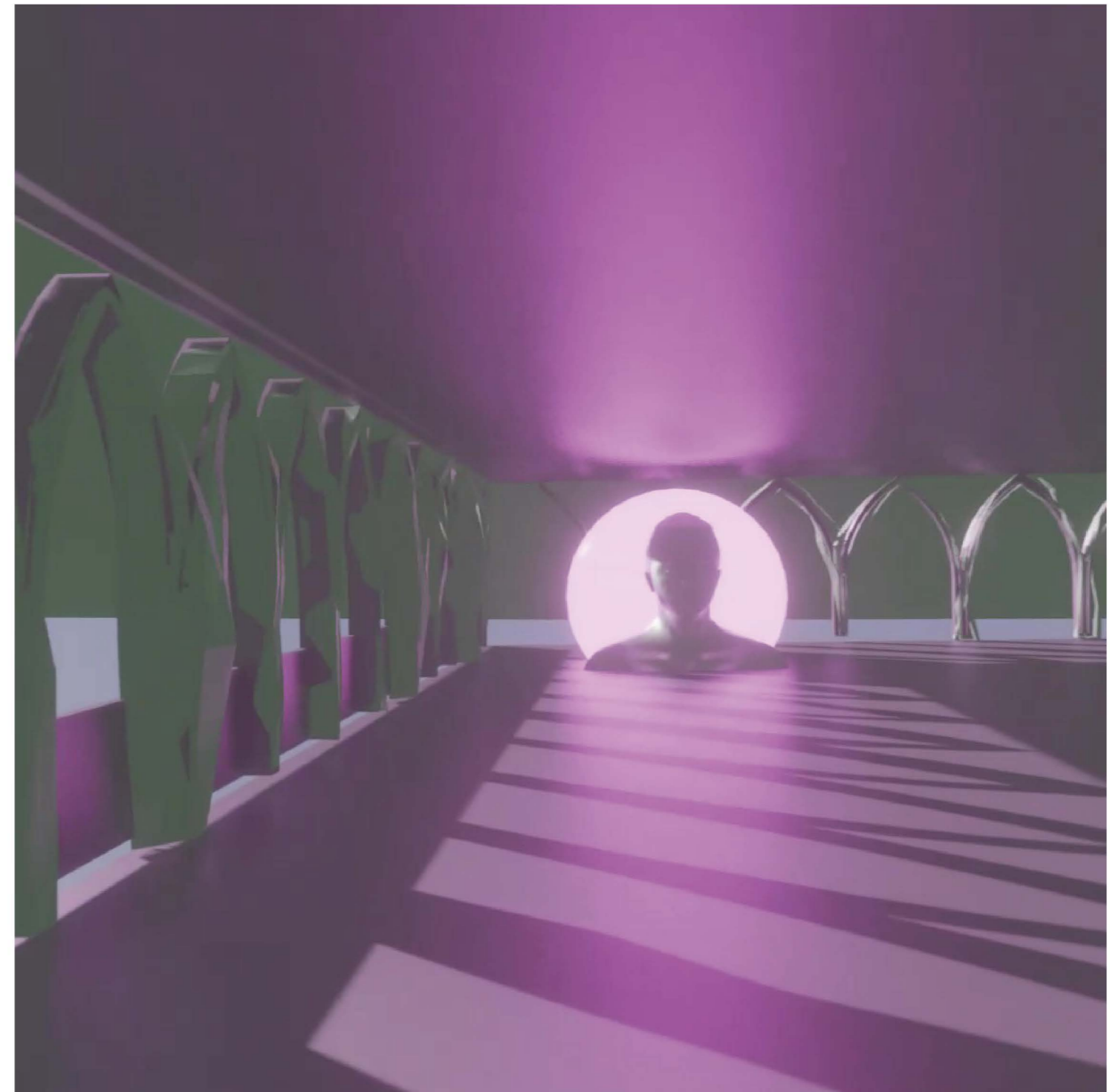
Virtual reality tools allow us to create completely virtual immersive environments where the designer has full control over what happens in this virtual environment.

It involves building the sets or environments and the 3D assets that occupy them. This also allows to transform the space completely and give it an alter ego and have a complete control over the narrative in it.

This also allows for us to create an immersive experience that fills the missing link between a live performance and one streamed through the medium of the screen.

For these reasons, i will proceed with using virtual reality instead of augmented reality and avoid issues of access to space completely, shifting the power from the space to the designer.

When dealing with the politics of space and participation, these tools allow for a reversal in the power dynamic, by changing the space, who's in it and its narrative. And that is one of a younger generation of artists that is trying to reclaim the city and spaces from an older one, but also of a younger generation that was on the outskirts of cultural production.





As previously mentioned due to all the raised issues ranging from the current condition a young independent artist, the inaccessibility and the politics of space and the potential of using virtual reality i will be proceeding with using the VR tool and building a virtual environment based a real physical space. The next step is to try and build the performance by occupying a space and using it to perform. Performance spaces in Beirut where no longer the only option here.

The current condition of independent artists

Inaccessibility & politics of space

Virtual Reality tool

Use VR tool

- to provide immersive experience

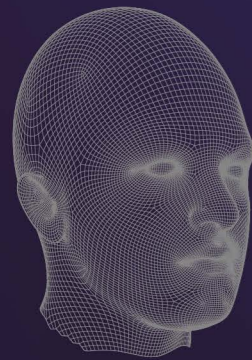
- occupy a space without issues of accessibility

- use it to perform

WHAT SPACE?



POLITICS OF SPACE
A space with boundaries & no access



RELATING TO IDENTITY



MAKE IT CLOSER TO MY IDENTITY
and all those who are underrepresented



GIVE THE SPACE AN AESTHETIC
occupy it with a crowd that does not have access to it

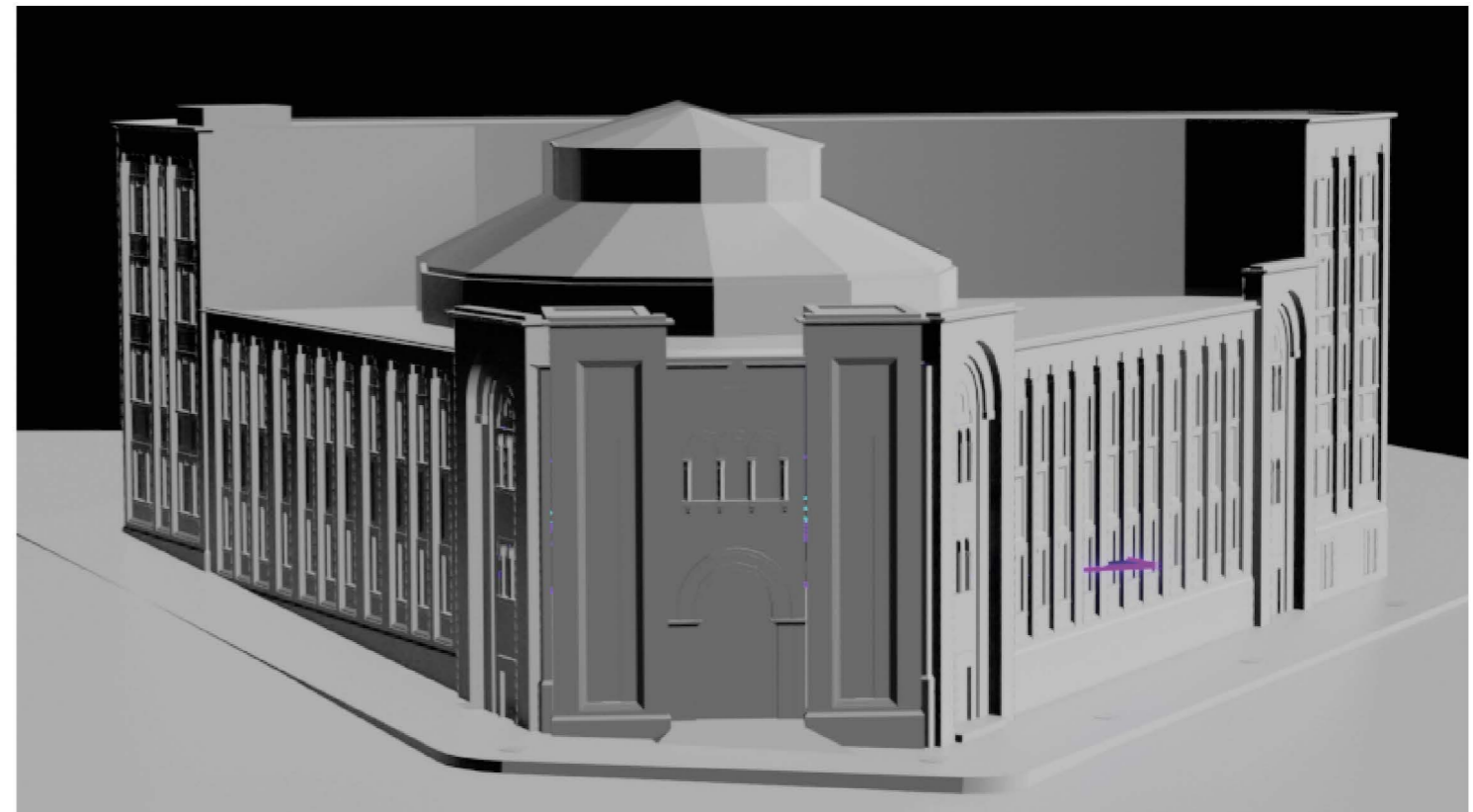
POLITICS OF IMAGE AND PARTICIPATION
Use the space to give political power



SHIFT OF POWER FOR THE DURATION OF THE PERFORMANCE

But then comes to question of what space to choose, and it had to be a space that has issues of accessibility, and that relates to identity, then transform it and make it closer to the EP's identity and aesthetic.

The space chosen is the Lebanese Parliament because it fits this criteria bit also allows to change the narrative of a heteronormative space, the parliament room is also designed to converge towards the head of state so it can be used as a performance space.





In order to transform the space we need to first understand what is an alter-ego, what its components are, and how to create one. An alter-ego has to have a different name, a narrative, personality traits, and different physical traits.

So how does this apply to a space? It's as straightforward as creating an alter-ego for a person, change the physical appearance of the space, and imbue it with a narrative.

Benefits of having an alter-ego

- ▲ Reframing identity
- ▲ The batman effect
- ▲ Psychological distancing
- ▲ Can have an empowering effect

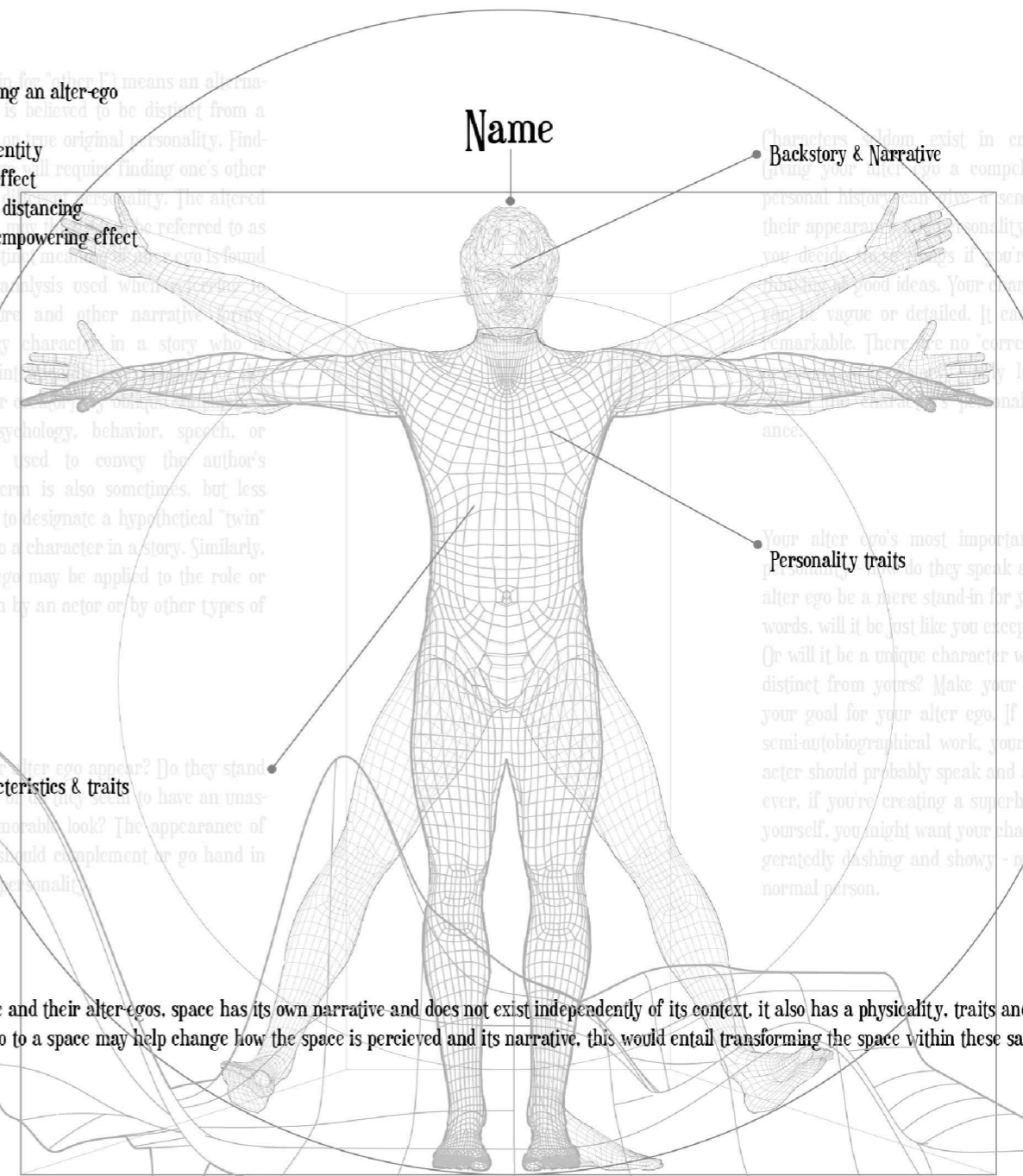
Physical characteristics & traits

So how does your alter ego appear? Do they stand out or do they seem to have an unassuming and memorable look? The appearance of your character should complement or go hand in hand with their personality.

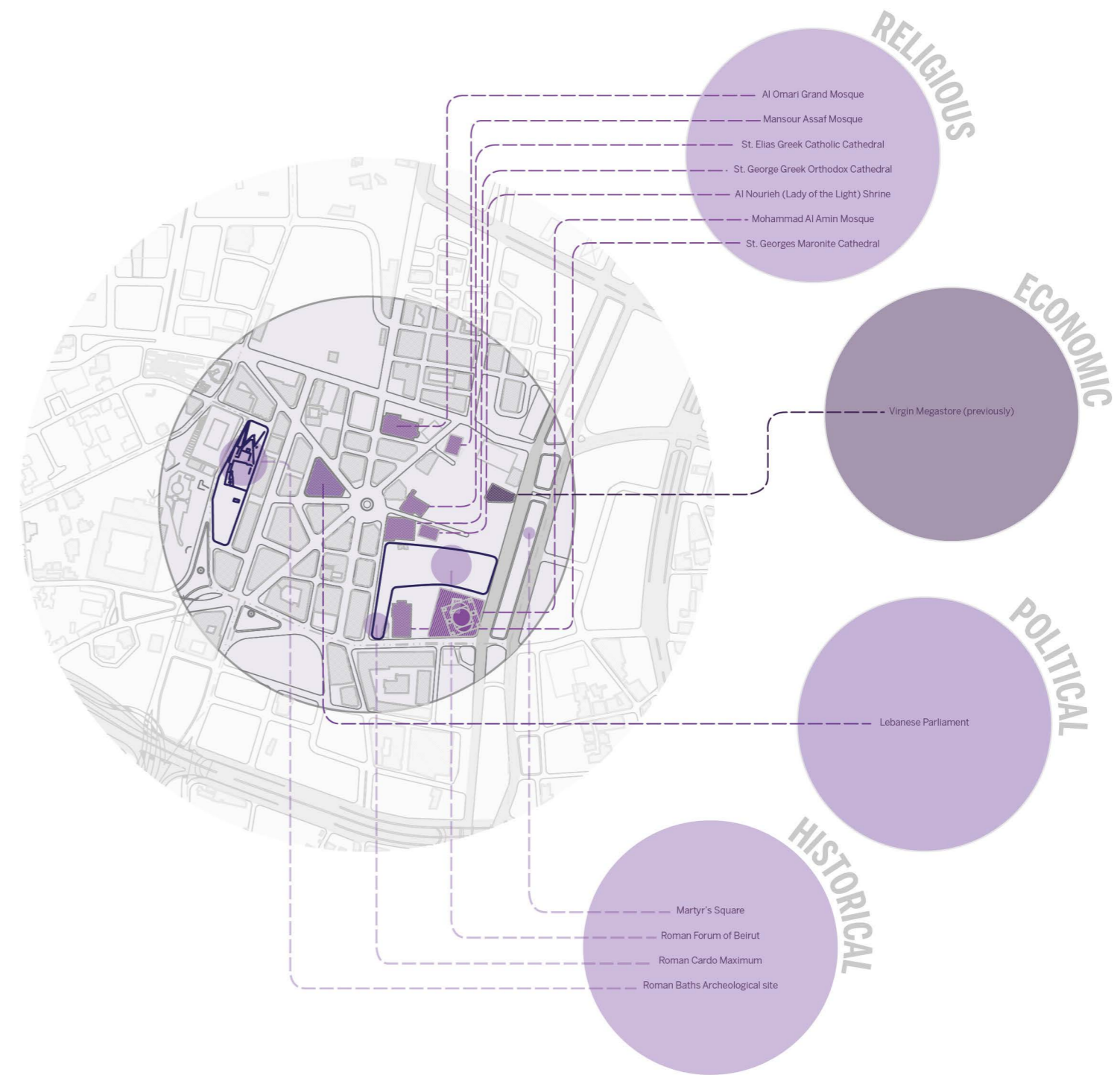
Name

Backstory & Narrative

Personality traits



Similarly to people and their alter-egos, space has its own narrative and does not exist independently of its context, it also has a physicality, traits and characteristics. Giving an alter-ego to a space may help change how the space is perceived and its narrative, this would entail transforming the space within these same parameters.



After looking at the Parliament and its typology i started getting interested in the district surrounding it extending its radius till martyr's square.

The buildings selected all have typologies relating to performance, and have different programs, religious, commercial, political and economic.

All of these buildings in some are designed in a way to allow for some kind of performance that is architectural or urban, looking at the city as a theatre with the intention to use this underlying performance infrastrucutre to inform the design.

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS TYPOLOGIES

MOSQUES

volumetry

4 minarets mosque

2 minarets mosque

1 minaret mosque

Mass plan

typology

- Minaret: tower from which muslim sheikhs call people to prayer
- Prayer Hall: center hall dedicated to prayer.
- Qibla wall: directed towards Mecca

central plan mosque

- Minaret: tower from which muslim sheikhs call people to prayer
- Open Courtyard
- Prayer Hall

The hypostyle mosque

- Prayer Hall: center hall dedicated to prayer.
- Minaret: tower from which muslim sheikhs call people to prayer

central plan mosque

- Prayer Hall: center hall dedicated to prayer.
- Minaret: tower from which muslim sheikhs call people to prayer

CHURCHES

CATHEDRALS

SHRINE

Mass plan

typology

- Apse
- Crossing
- Nave: stretching from the main entrance or rear wall
- Narthex: the entrance or lobby area

ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE

The religious buildings typologies include Mosques, Churches and Shrines. Each one with a varying typology and a set experience, each differing in size and scale.

COMMERCIAL BUILDING TYPOLOGY

typology

- Entrance
- Central circulation
- Shopping space

volumetry

- Shopping space: double height, central staircase
- ground floor

Arch/Roman decorative facade elements

Grandiosity of scale

Store logs on all facades

The commercial building typology consists of a central circulation and plays on notions of scale as well as the use of facade elements to add to the overall spectacle.

PARLIAMENT BUILDING TYPOLOGY

Looking at the parliament building we notice mainly the parliament room typology, reminiscent of an amphitheatre typology by excellence able to host a performance.

parliament plan & typology

- convergent plan (dynamic stage)
- Parliament room
- Entrance

parliament room

- balcony raised floor
- plan converges to one point
- semi-circular plan

ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES TYPOLOGY

Roman Baths Archeological site

- lower than street height
- the site on display
- path to gallery
- observer remains outside

Roman Forum of Beirut

- lower than street height
- the site on display
- path to gallery
- observer remains outside

Martyr's Square

- Statue on a pedestal
- Open to all orientations

The archeological sites are all recessed from the floor downwards, making the relics look like they are on display: the past on display.

ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE

28

29

THE PERFORMITIVITY OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS



SINGING



PREACHING



PRAYING



PILGRIMAGE

URBAN IMPLICATIONS

religious imagery
architecture
banners
shrines
text and imagery on cars
symbolism



IDEOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE

THE CAPITALIST SPECTACLE



CONSUMERISM

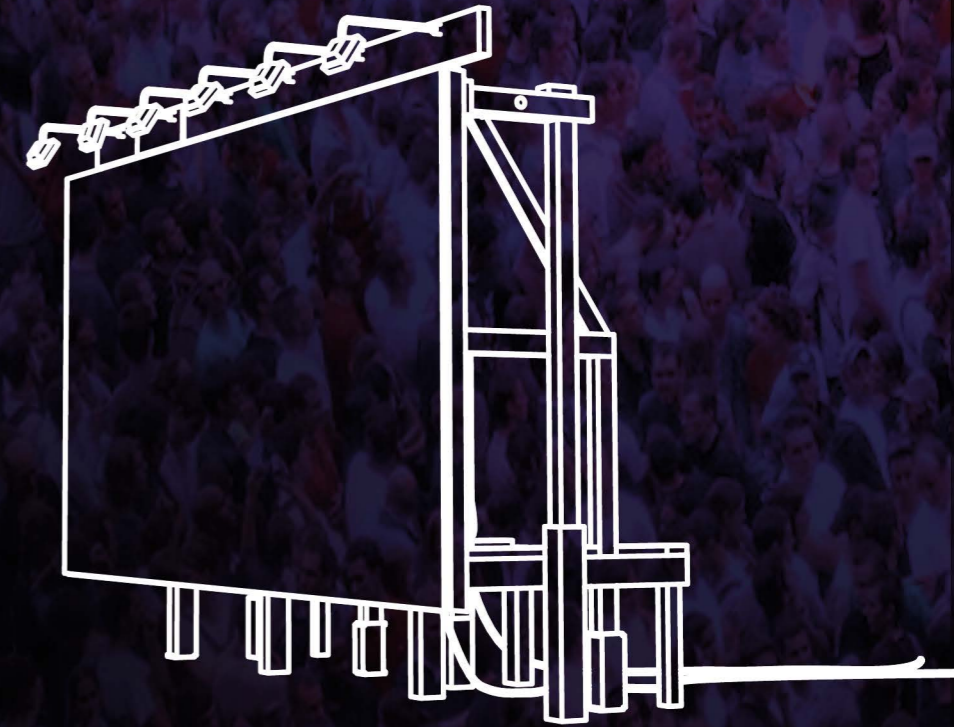


TACTICS OF DISPLAY



GENTRIFICATION

URBAN IMPLICATIONS
media and advertisement
storefronts
malls



IDEOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE

THE PERFORMITIVITY OF POLITICS



THE CULT OF THE LEADER



POLITICAL PREACHING



POLITICS OF IMAGE

URBAN IMPLICATIONS

posters
banners/slogans
flags
security



IDEOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE

THE PAST PERFORMING



LANDMARKS



LAYERS



RENEWAL

URBAN IMPLICATIONS

resisting the spread of buildings
urban museum
layers and social renewal

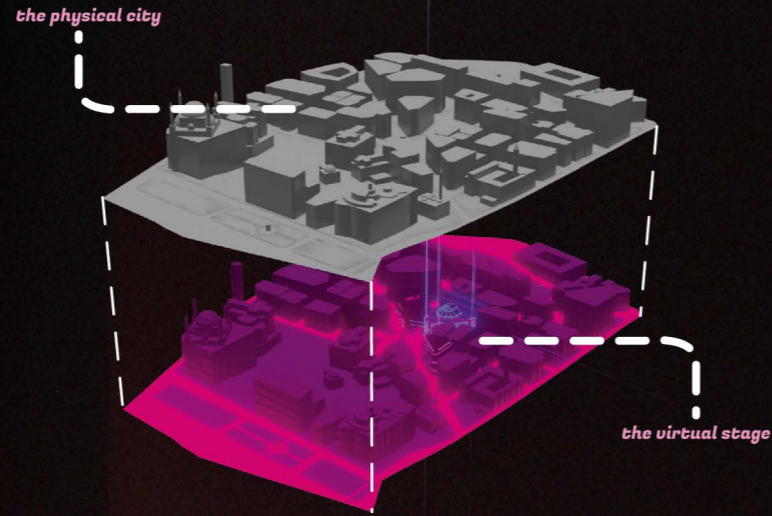


IDEOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES OF PERFORMANCE

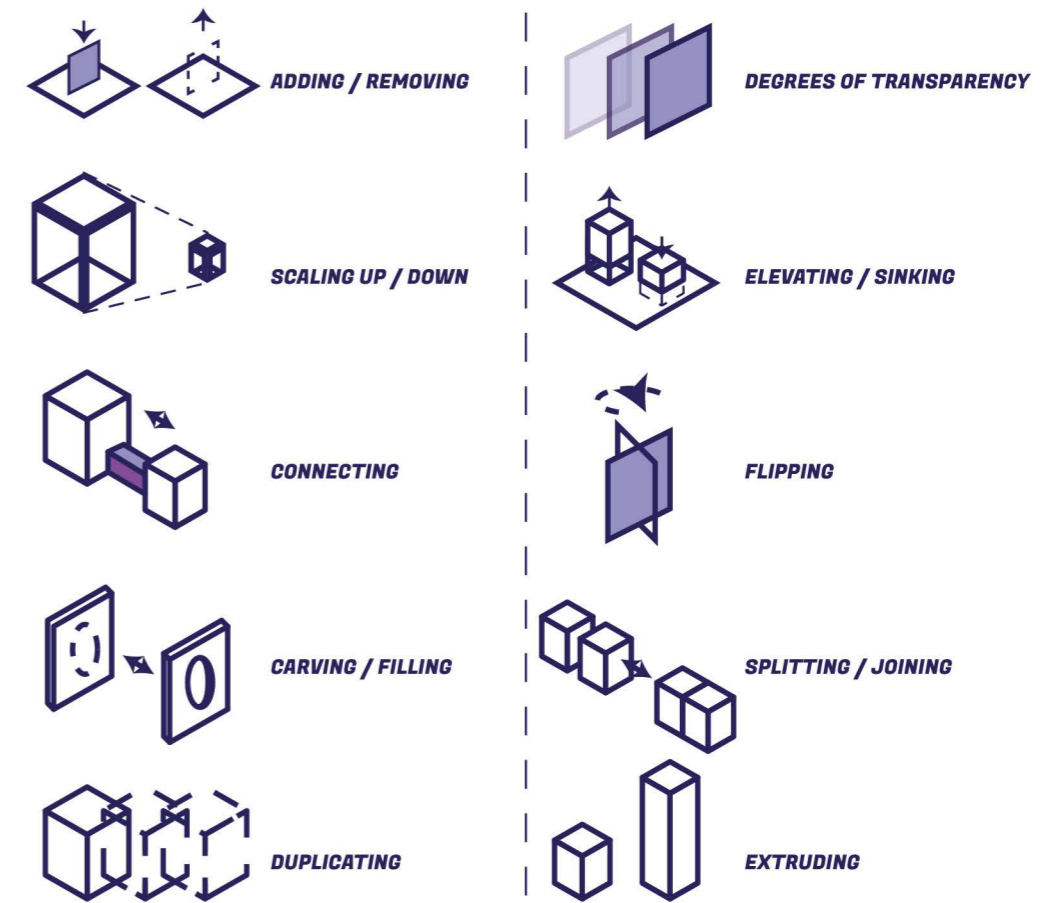
This leads us to the concept, based on these architectural and ideological typologies a digital district inspired by the real one begins to appear.

Linking all buildings in one virtual space and giving them alter-egos, shifting their narrative, doing so by using basic architectural methods of alteration as well as added elements.

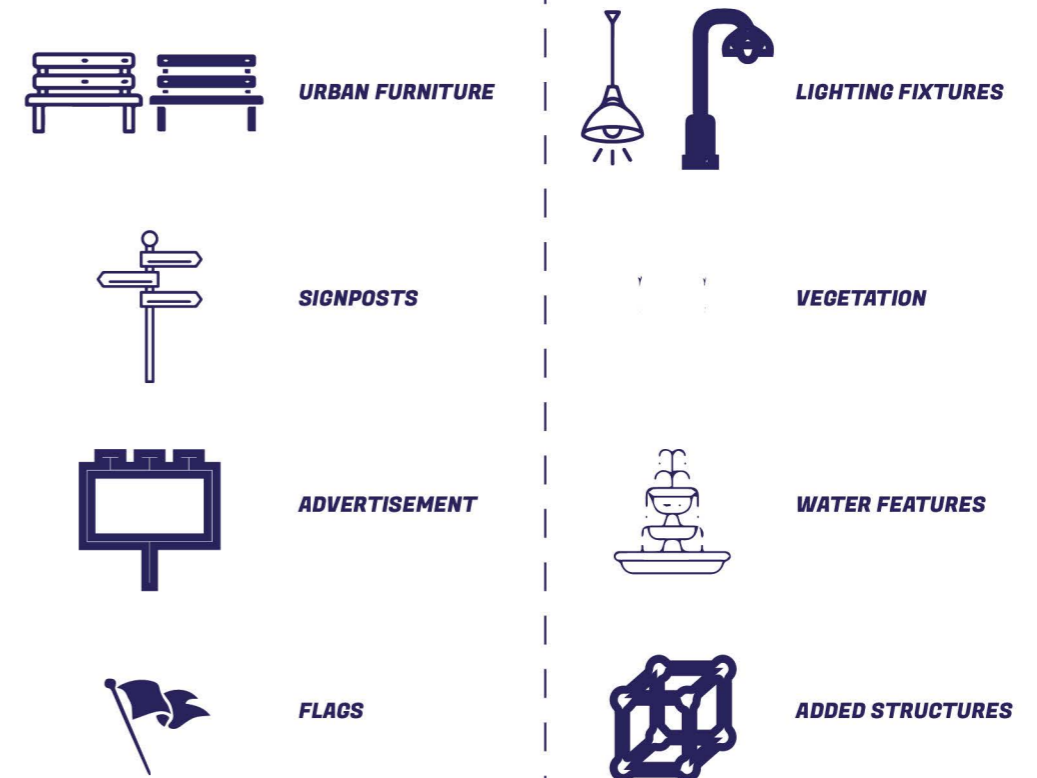
AN UNDERLYING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PERFORMANCE THAT IS INFORMED BY THE CITY: THE CITY AS A STAGE

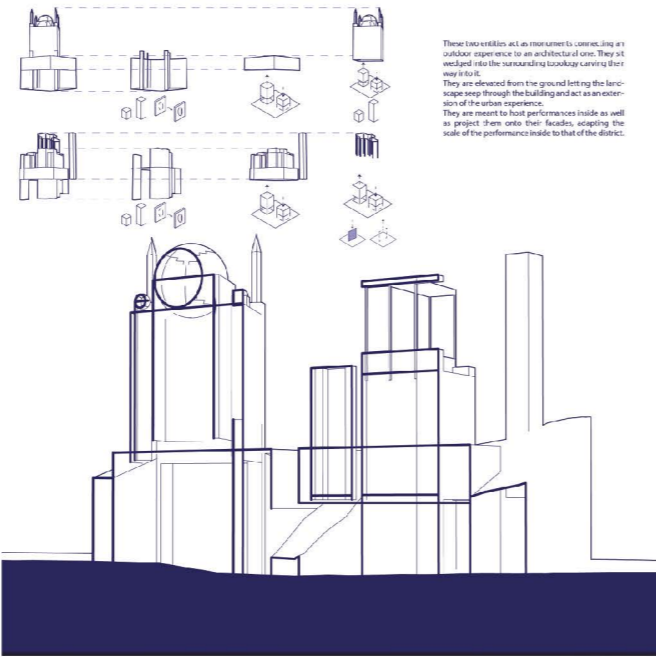


METHODS OF ALTERATION



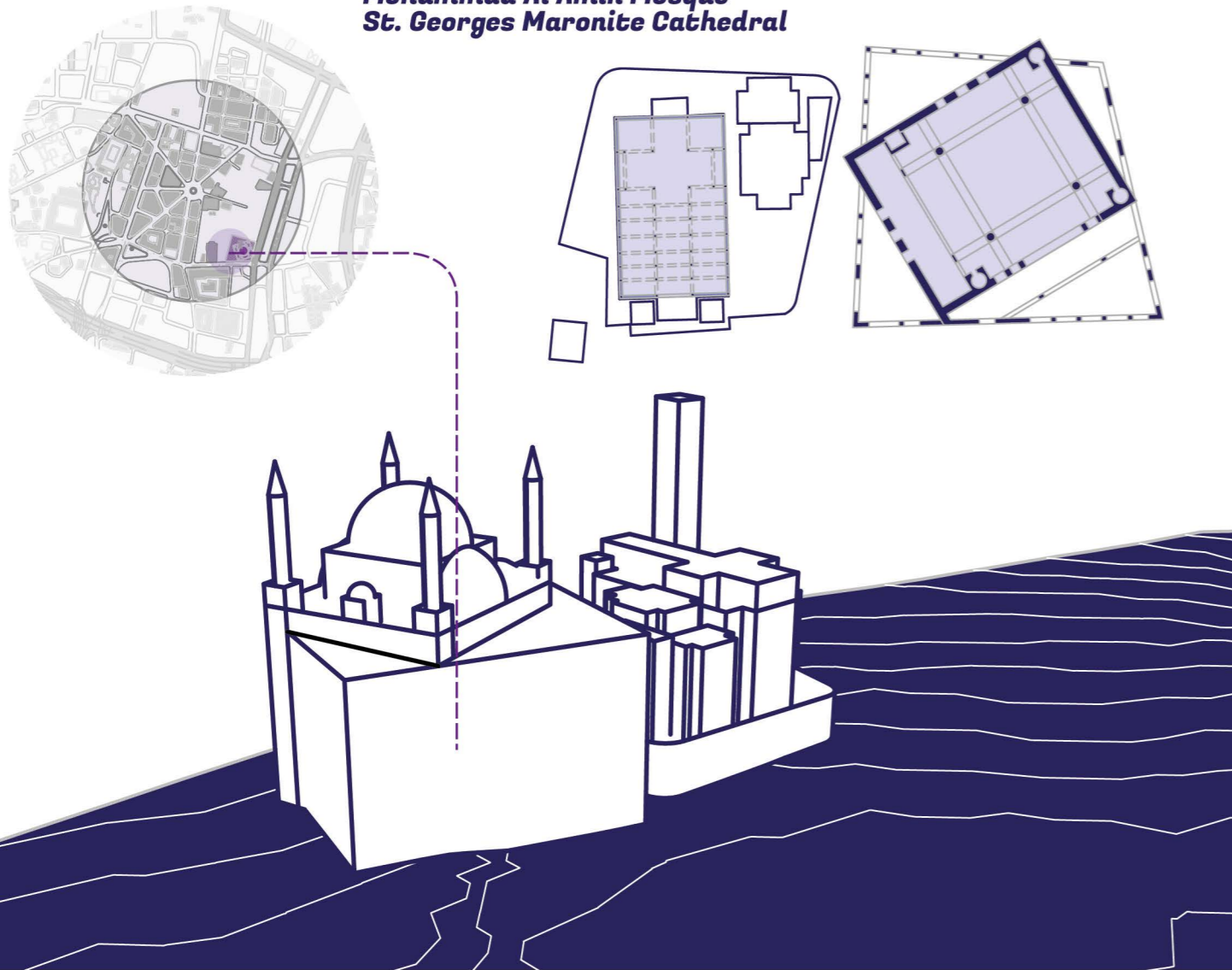
ADDED ELEMENTS





These two entities act as markers to connect an outdoor experience to an architectural one. They sit and stand into the surrounding landscape leaving their way to it. They are elevated from the ground letting the landscape step through the building and act as an extension of the urban experience. They are meant to host performances inside as well as project them onto their facades, adapting the scale of the performance inside to that of the district.

**Mohammad Al Amin Mosque
St. Georges Maronite Cathedral**



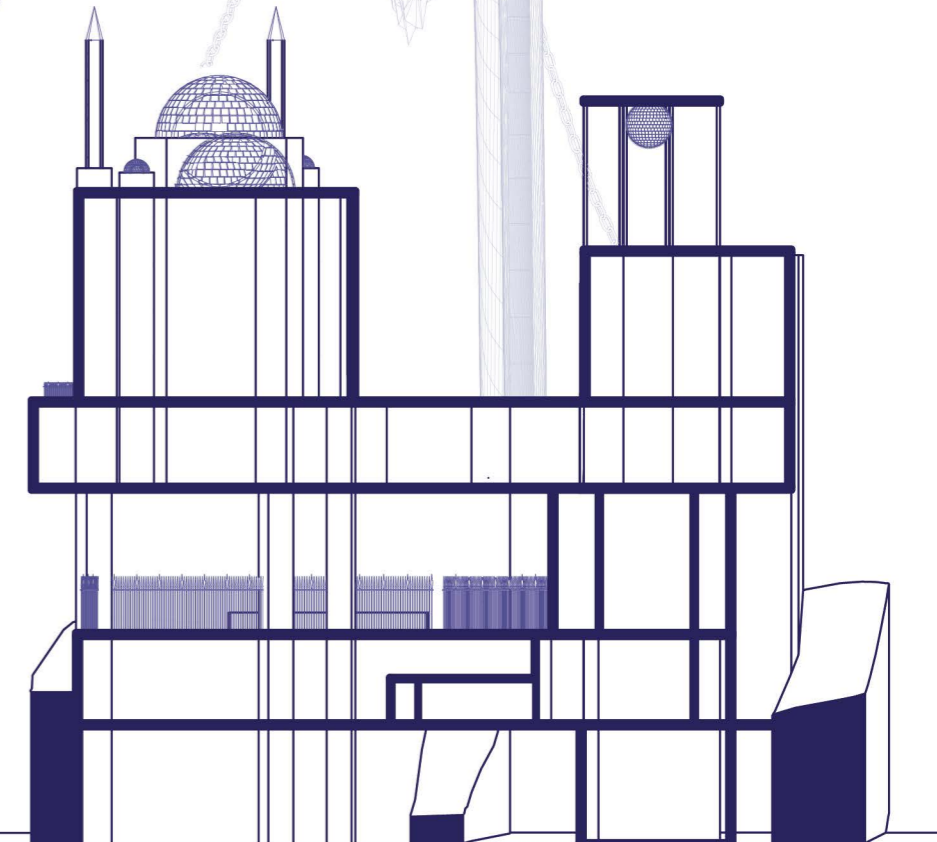
BABYLON REVISITED

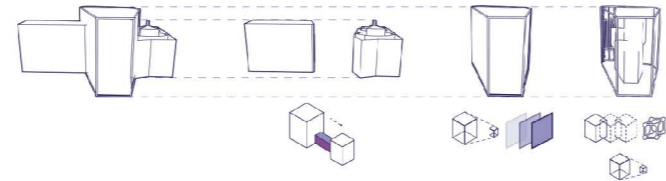


The first intervention on the site involves the Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque and the St. George Maronite Church.

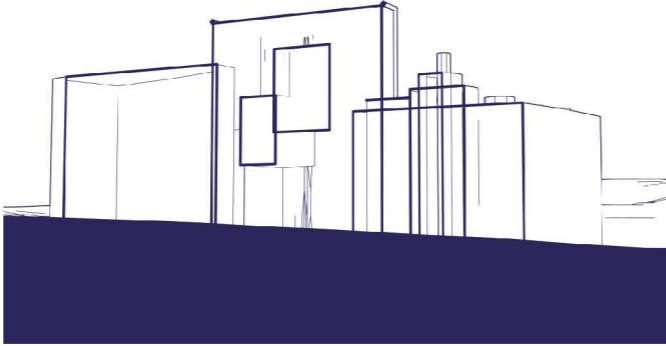
It attempts to merge the two buildings into one tower reminiscing myth in an architecturally unifying motion.

The two typologies are revealed throughout the different floors, at time concealed, other times connected...





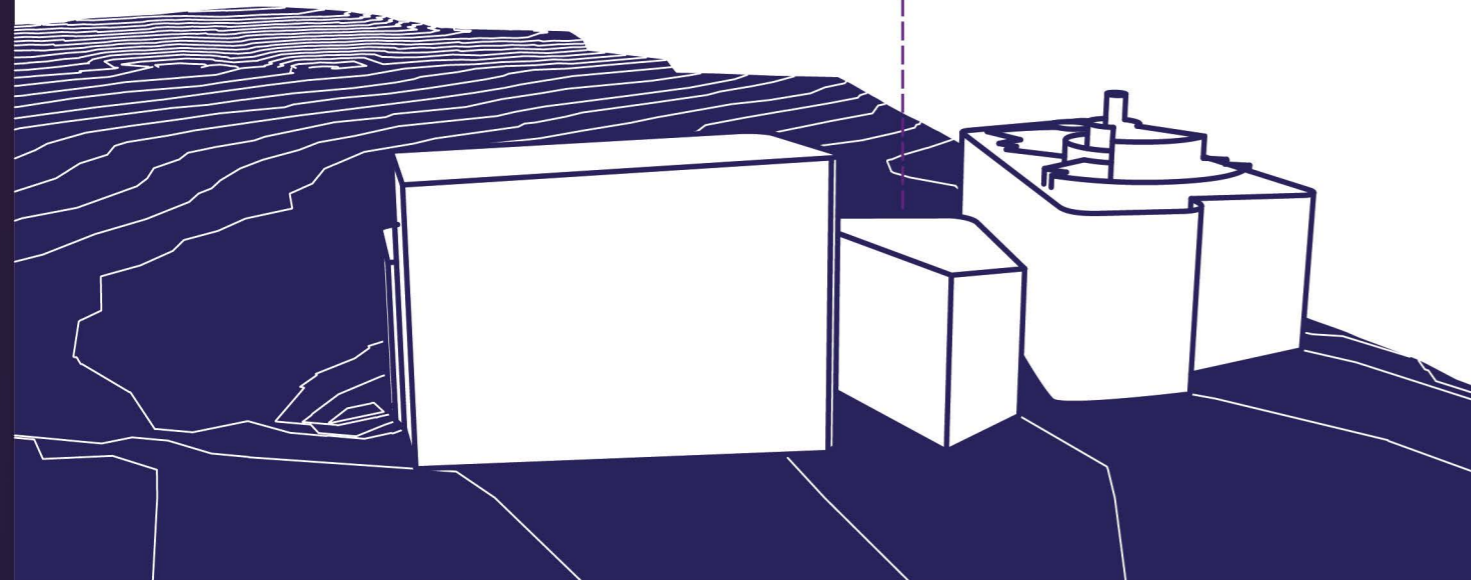
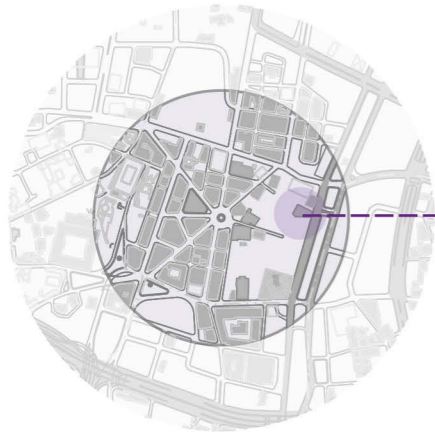
This building acts as a caricature of the capitalist spectacle. The main volume is scaled up engulfing the surrounding urban areas and adding them to its own. The main volume at the center is transparent transforming the whole building into a vitrine; the building itself becomes the marketing tool. With the circulation being at the center you experience the shop windows from outside and inside the building. It plays on tactics of display exaggerating how we experience them.



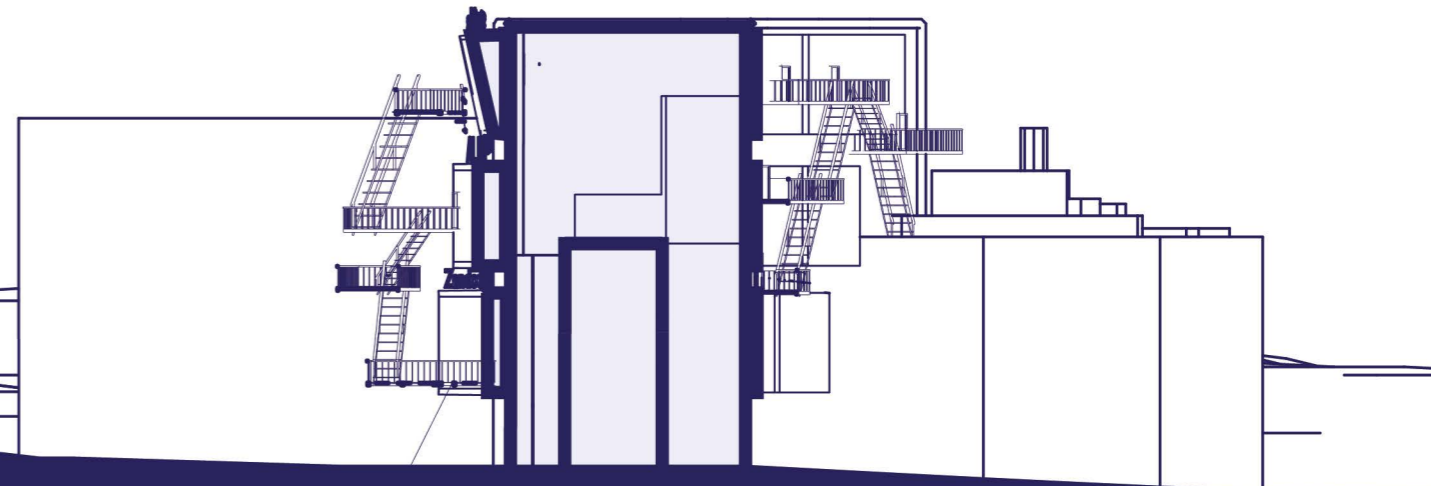
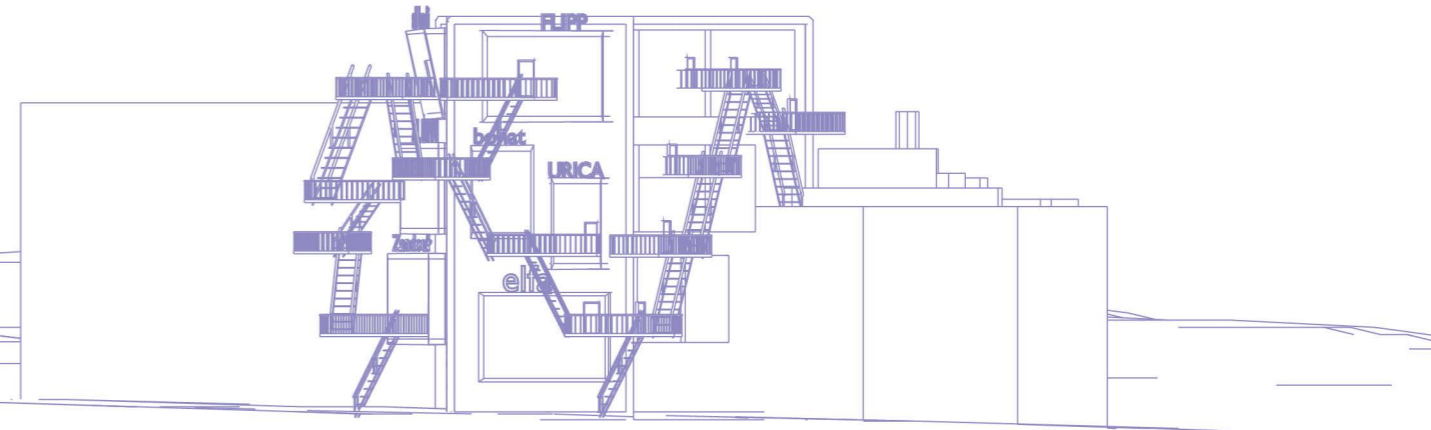
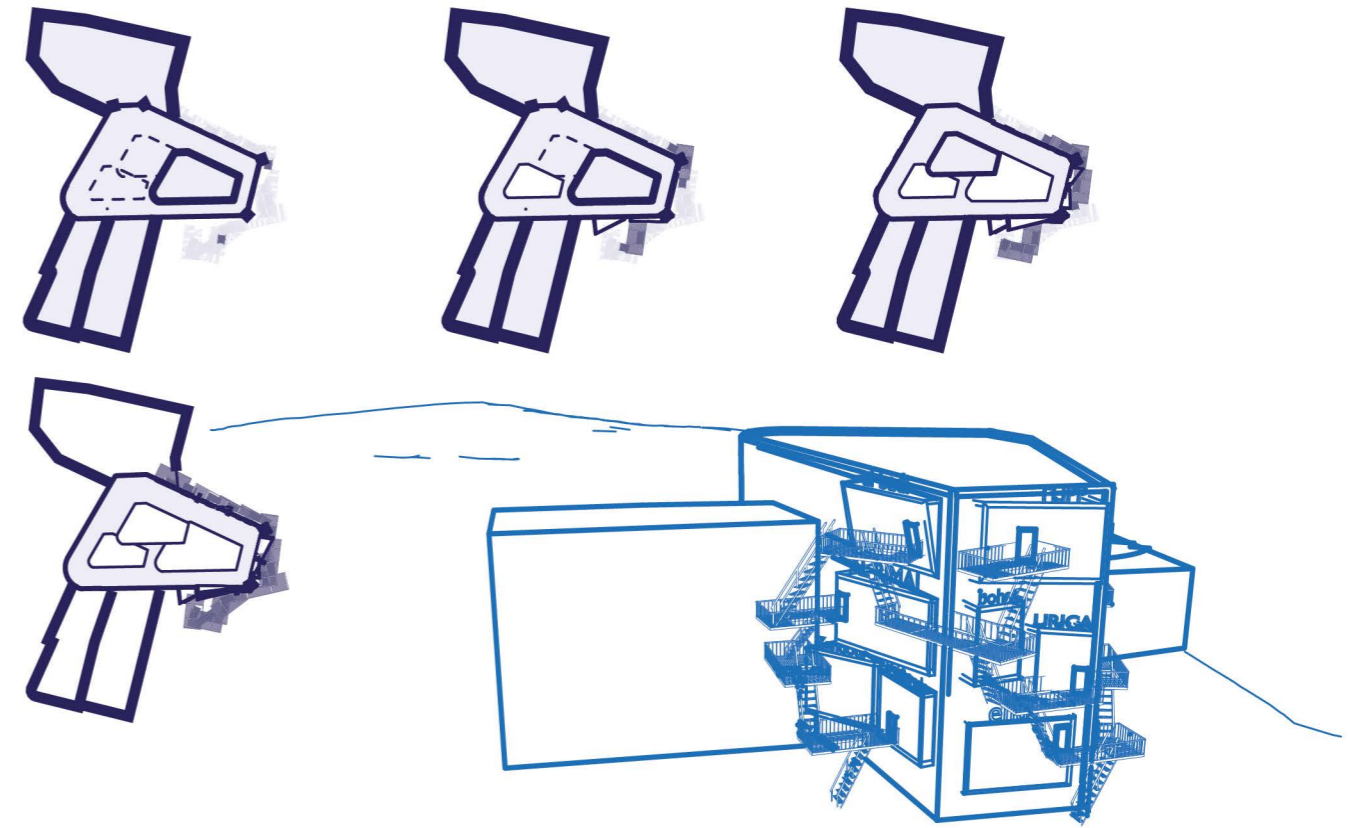
What once was the Virgin Megastore transforms into this larger scaled up volume engulfing those nearby which turn into giant ads and billboards, glorifying capitalism and consumer culture but also riffing off of them ironically in this spectacle.

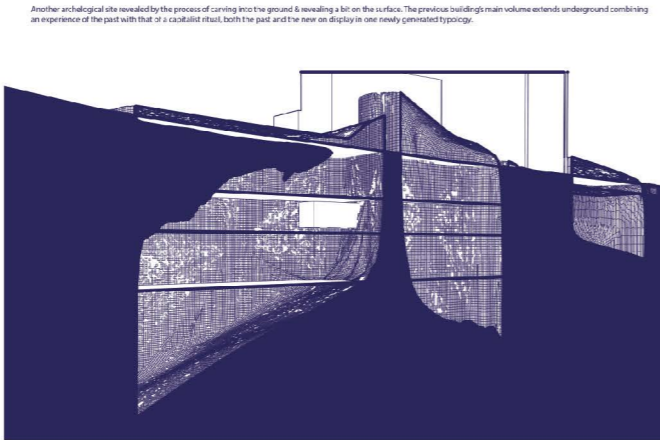
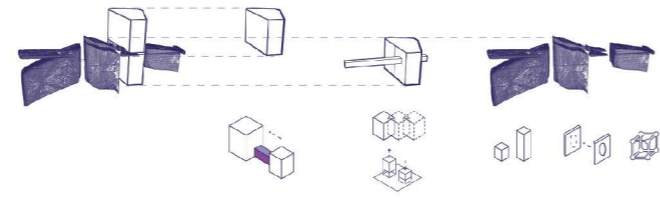
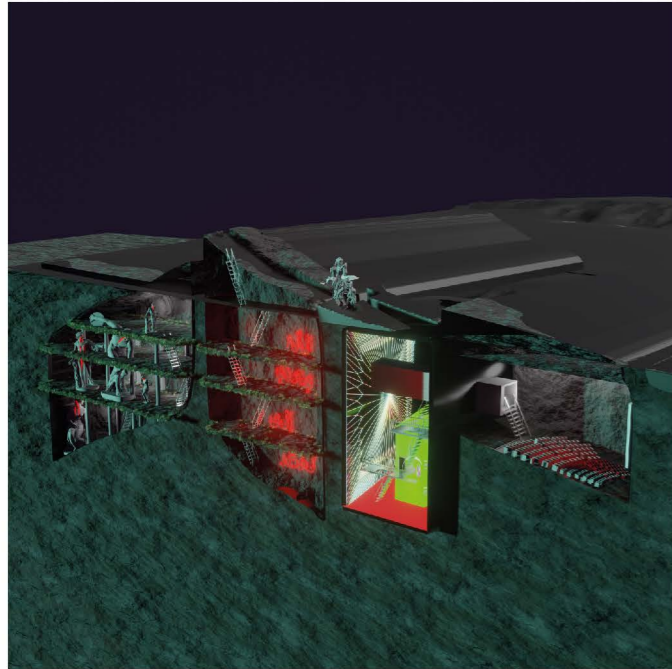
This intervention proposes a new urban shopping experience: "the building as a vitrine" where the facade becomes host for the performance and the capitalist spectacle.

Virgin Megastore



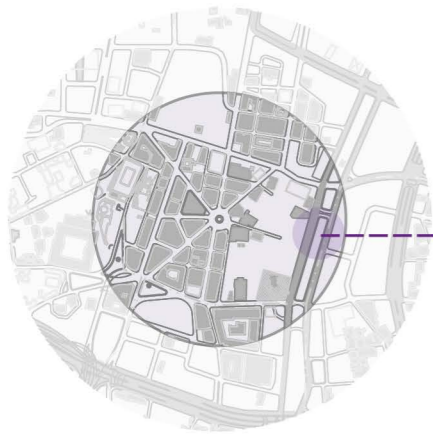
THE CAPITALIST SPECTACLE POLITICS OF DISPLAY



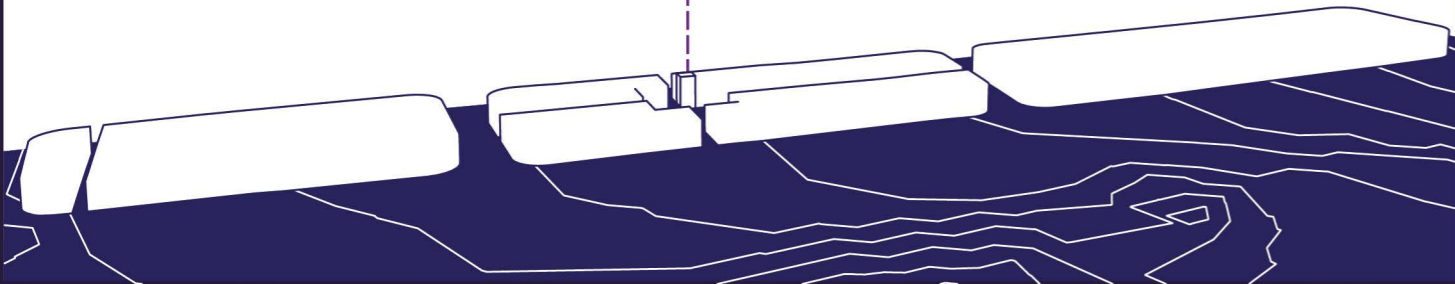
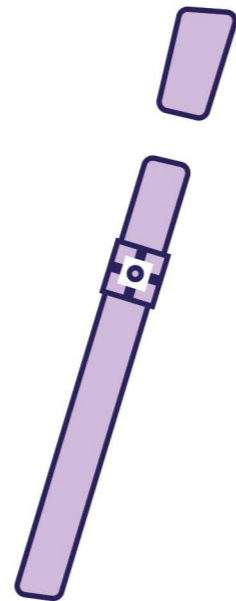


The Capitalist Spectacle seeps underground invasively taking up space from the past, contaminating it with its ways and tactics of display, hinting at the destruction of relics due to the post-war reconstruction of Beirut.

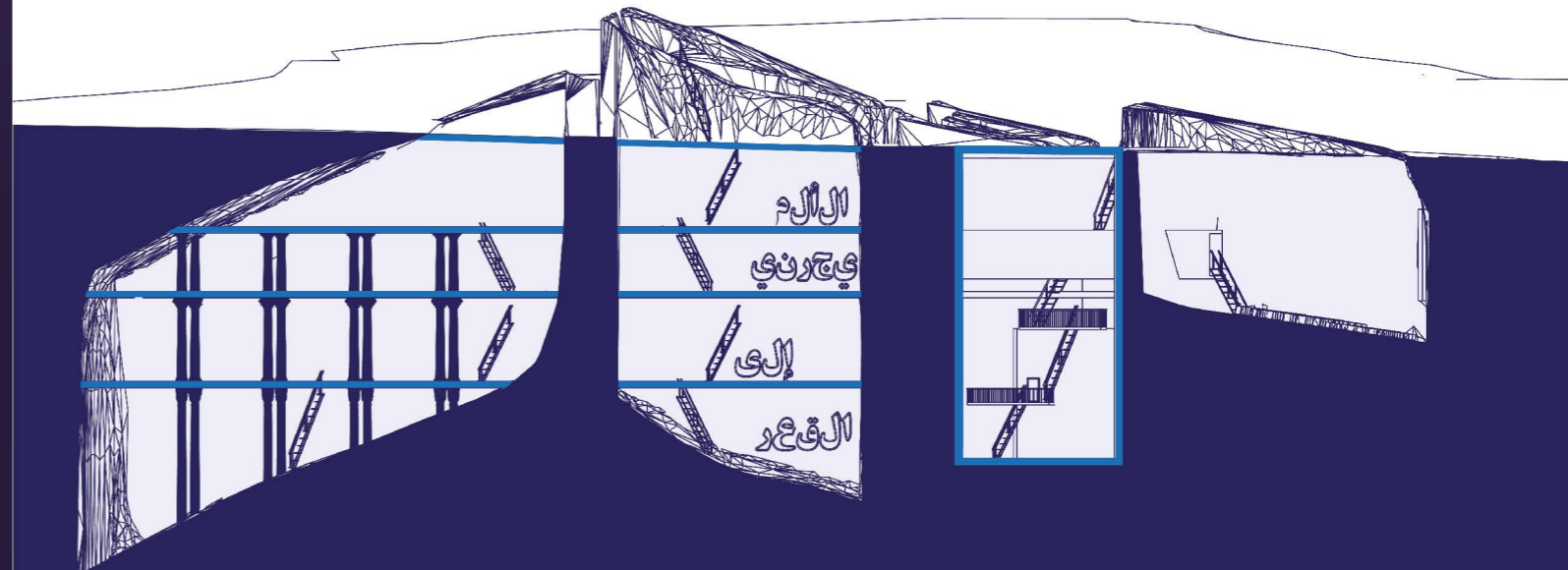
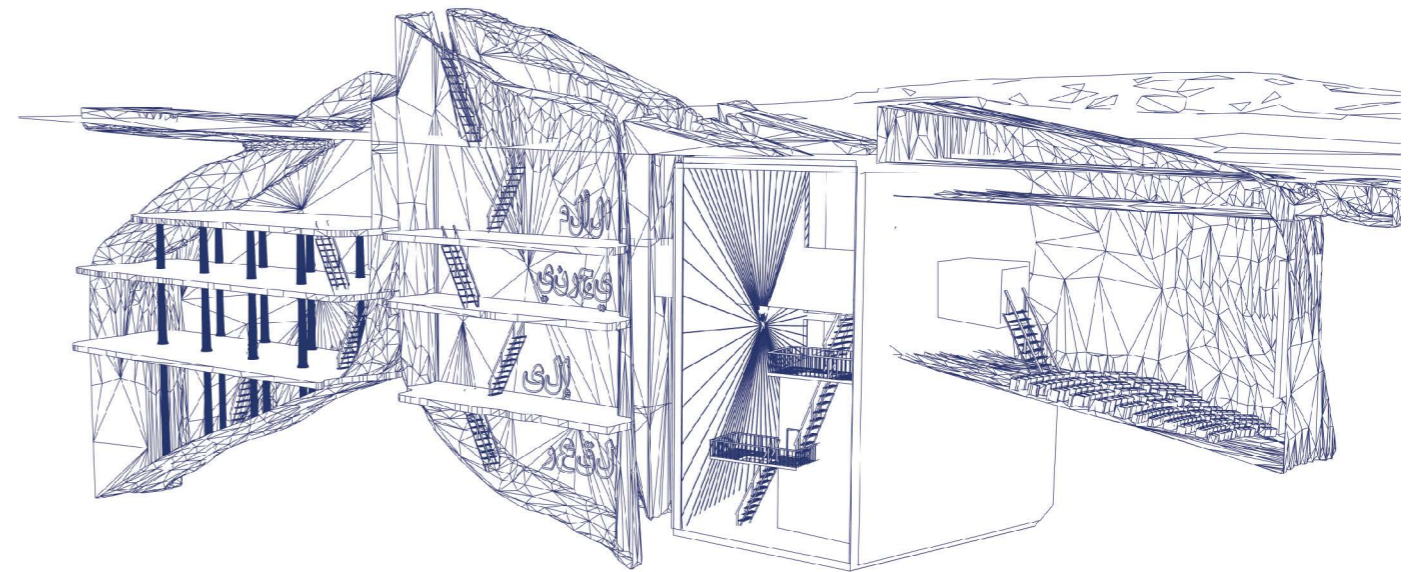
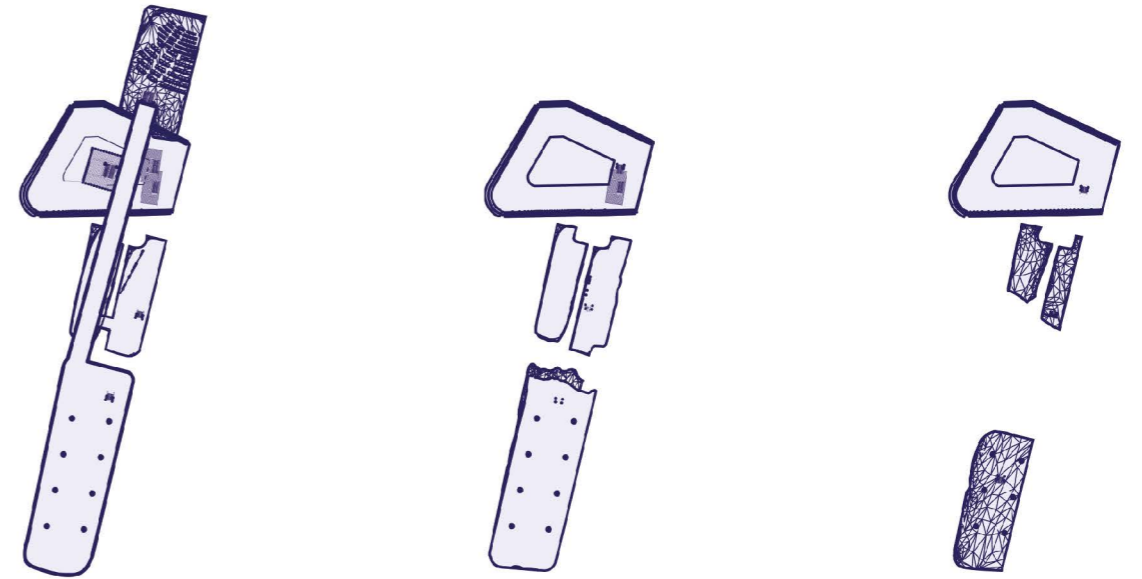
From left to right, an urban museum, an installation space and an amphitheatre connected through the underground volume of the capitalist spectacle through a horizontal tunnel.

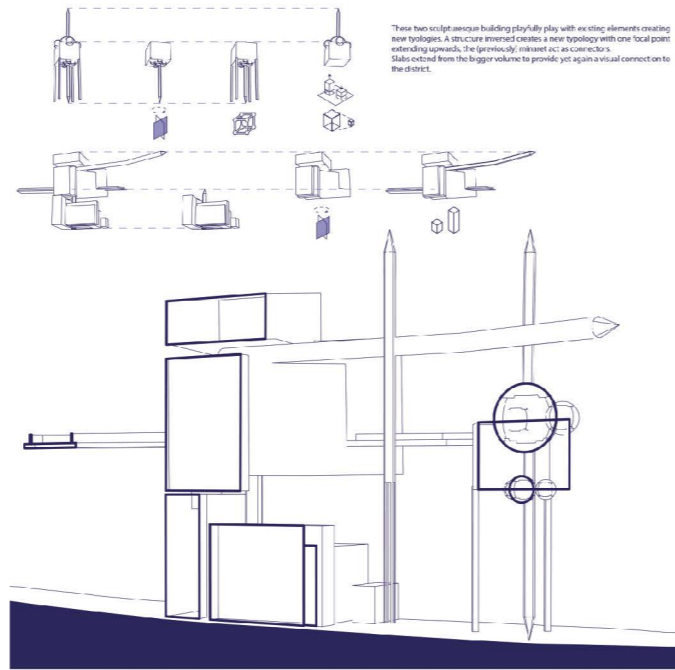
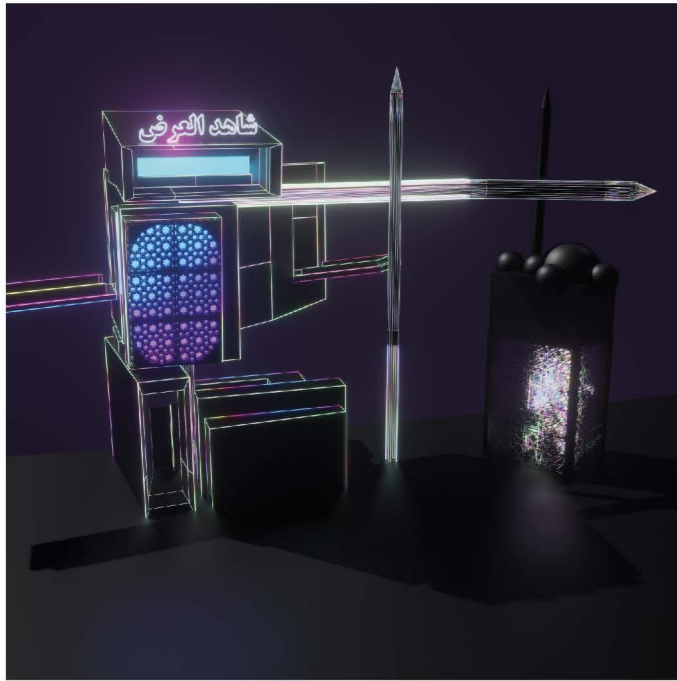


Martyr's Square



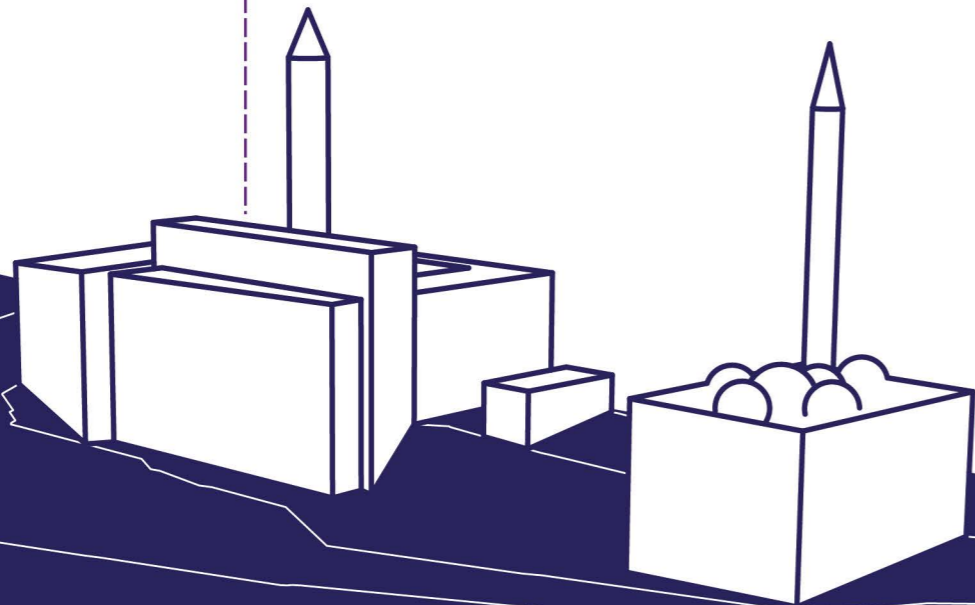
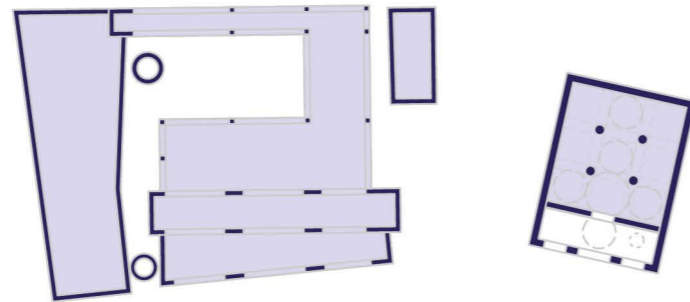
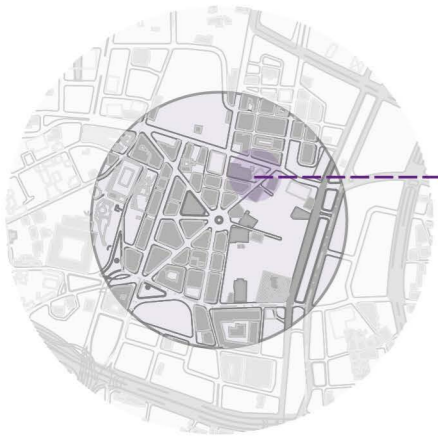
PAST RELICS VS INVASIVE CAPITALISM



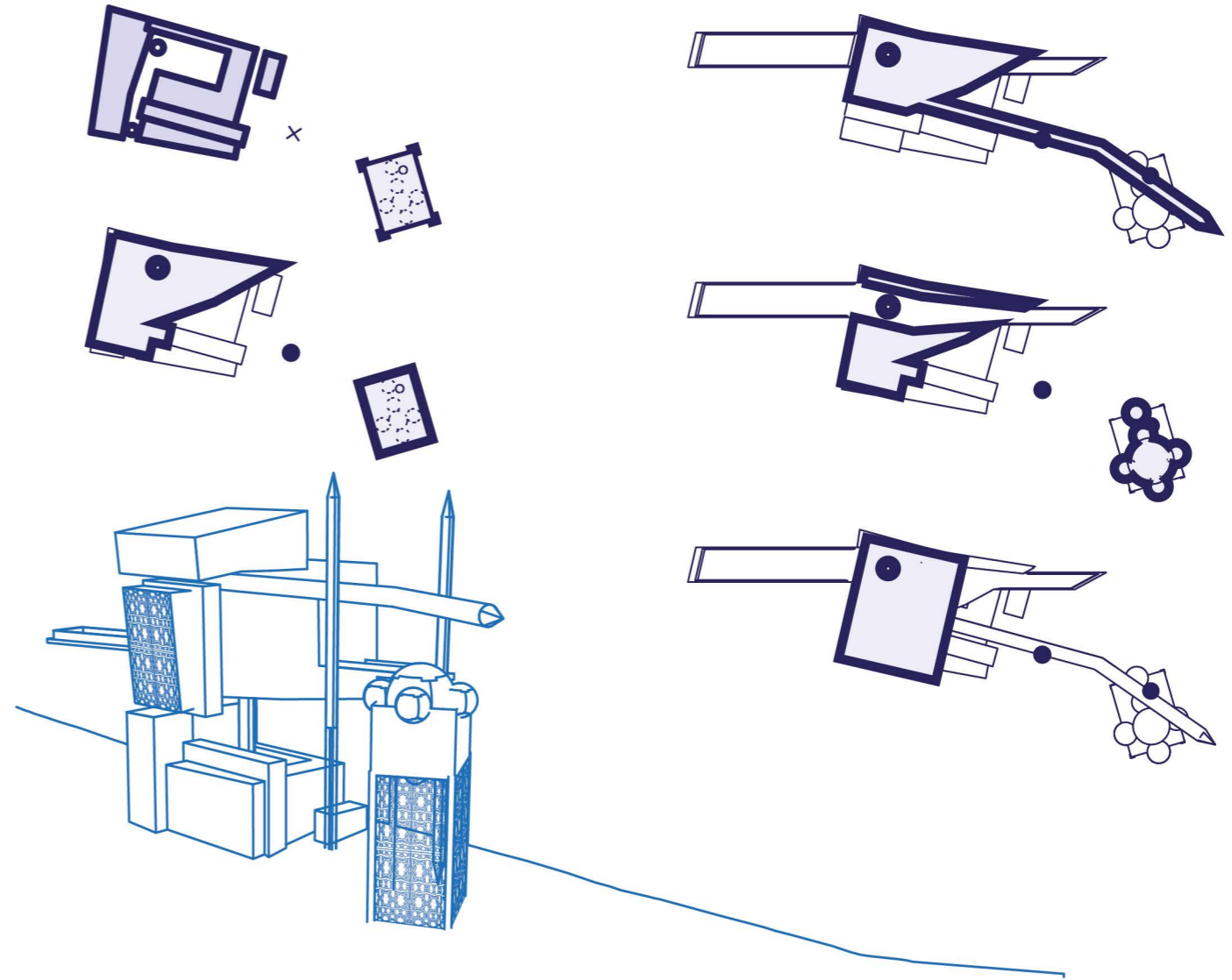


These two existing buildings playfully play with existing elements creating new typologies. A structure inserted creates a new typology with one focal point extending upwards. The (previously) minaret acts as a connector. Slabs extend from the bigger volume to provide yet again a visual connection to the district.

**Al Omari Grand Mosque
Mansour Assaf Mosque**



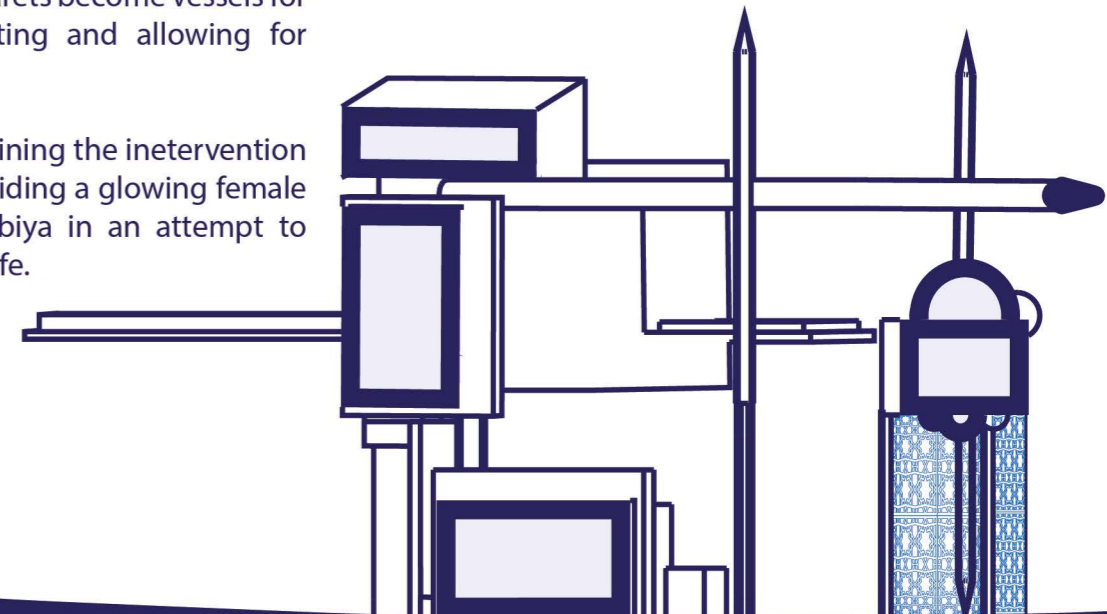
ON THE FUTURE OF PRACTICE LGBTQ+ & FEMINISM

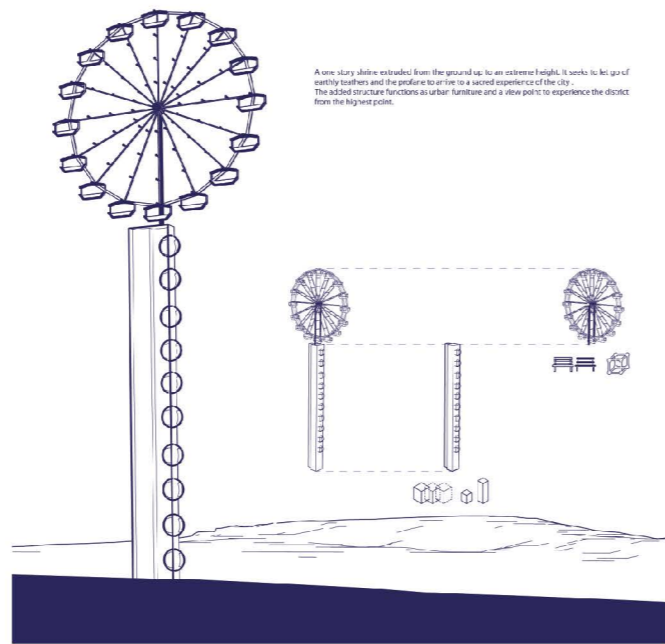
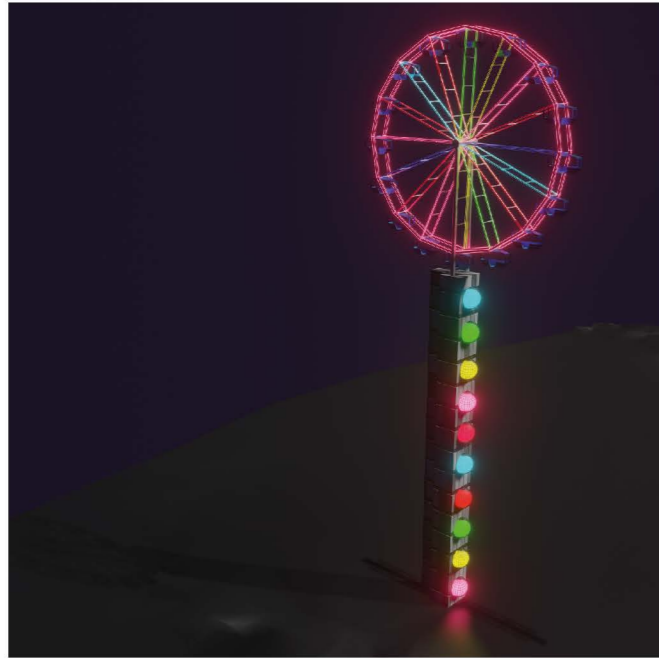


Rather than reusing typologies, this intervention attempts to manipulate characteristic architectural elements in a playful manner.

The musharrabiya & the minarets become vessels for circulation, or screens hosting and allowing for performance.

In the same playful manner lining the intervention with neon ornaments, and hiding a glowing female body behind the musharrabiya in an attempt to reconcile faith and modern life.

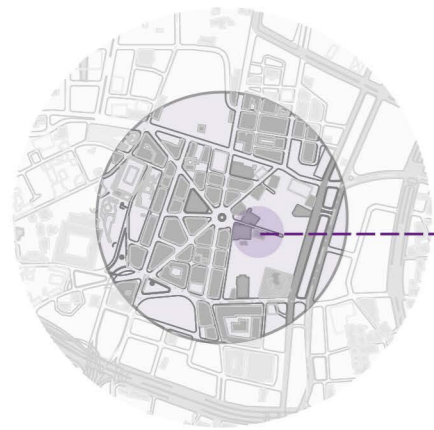




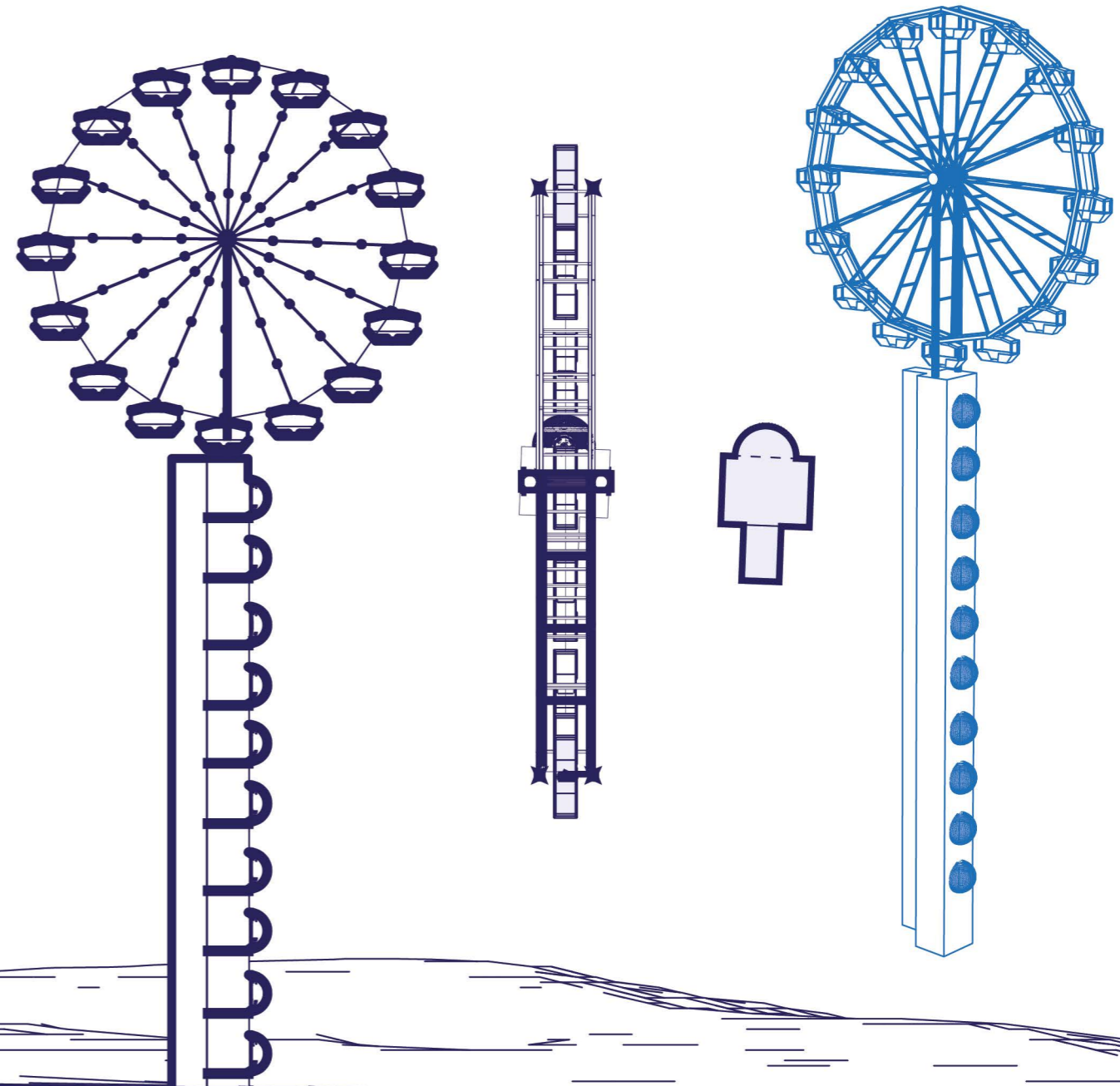
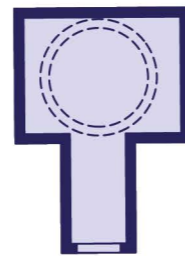
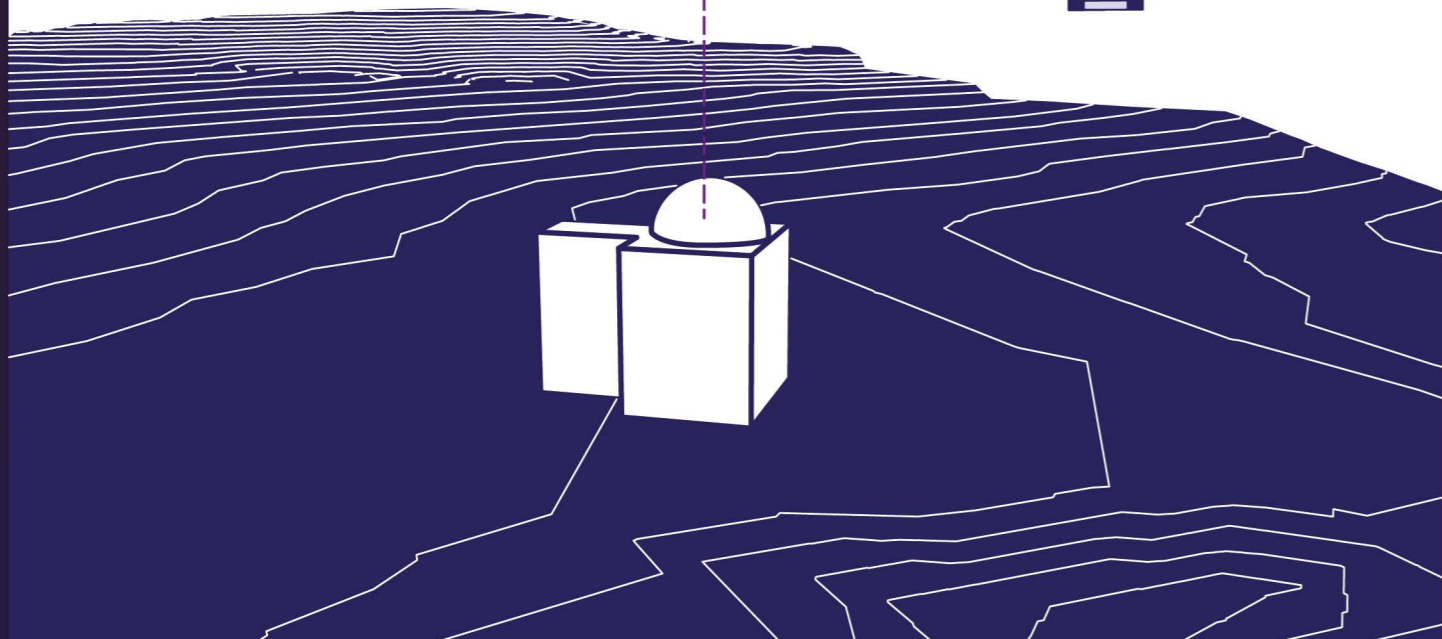
OUROBOROS THE SHOW MUST GO ON

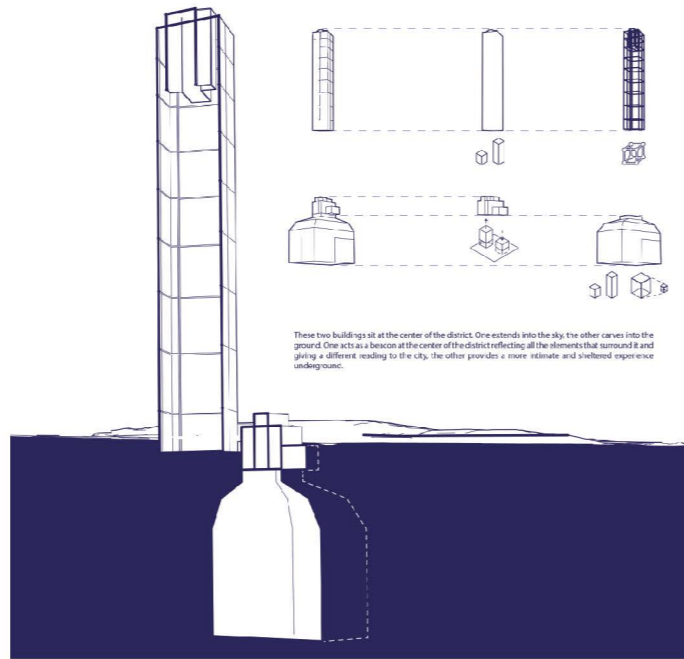
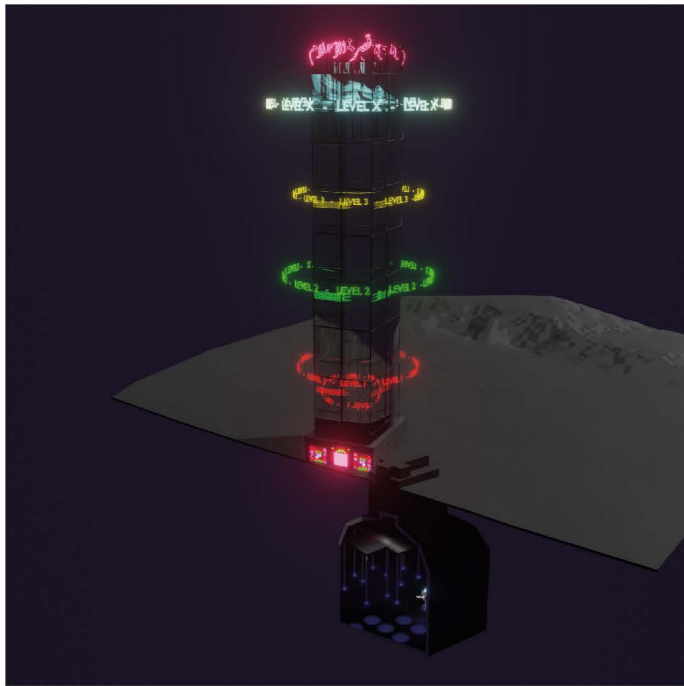
Once a shrine of light, remains so but differently, extruding the existing building and repurposing its dome as panoramic viewing booths.

It carries a ferris wheel on top, relentlessly turning, offering the highest viewpoint for the district, from this transcending structure.



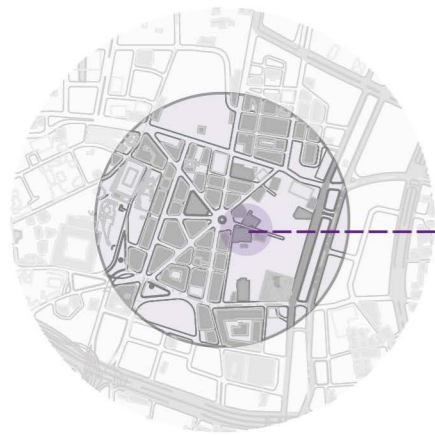
Al Nourieh (Lady of the Light) Shrine



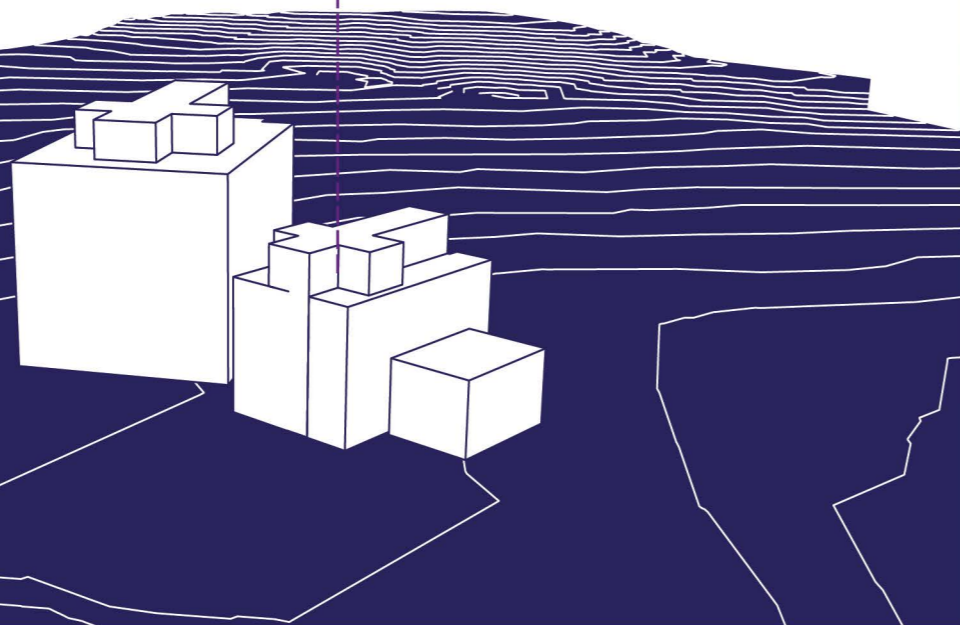


One an refracting monolith, the other an underground structure, they represent two sides of the same coin: one towering like a sky scraper, the other a black box theatre.

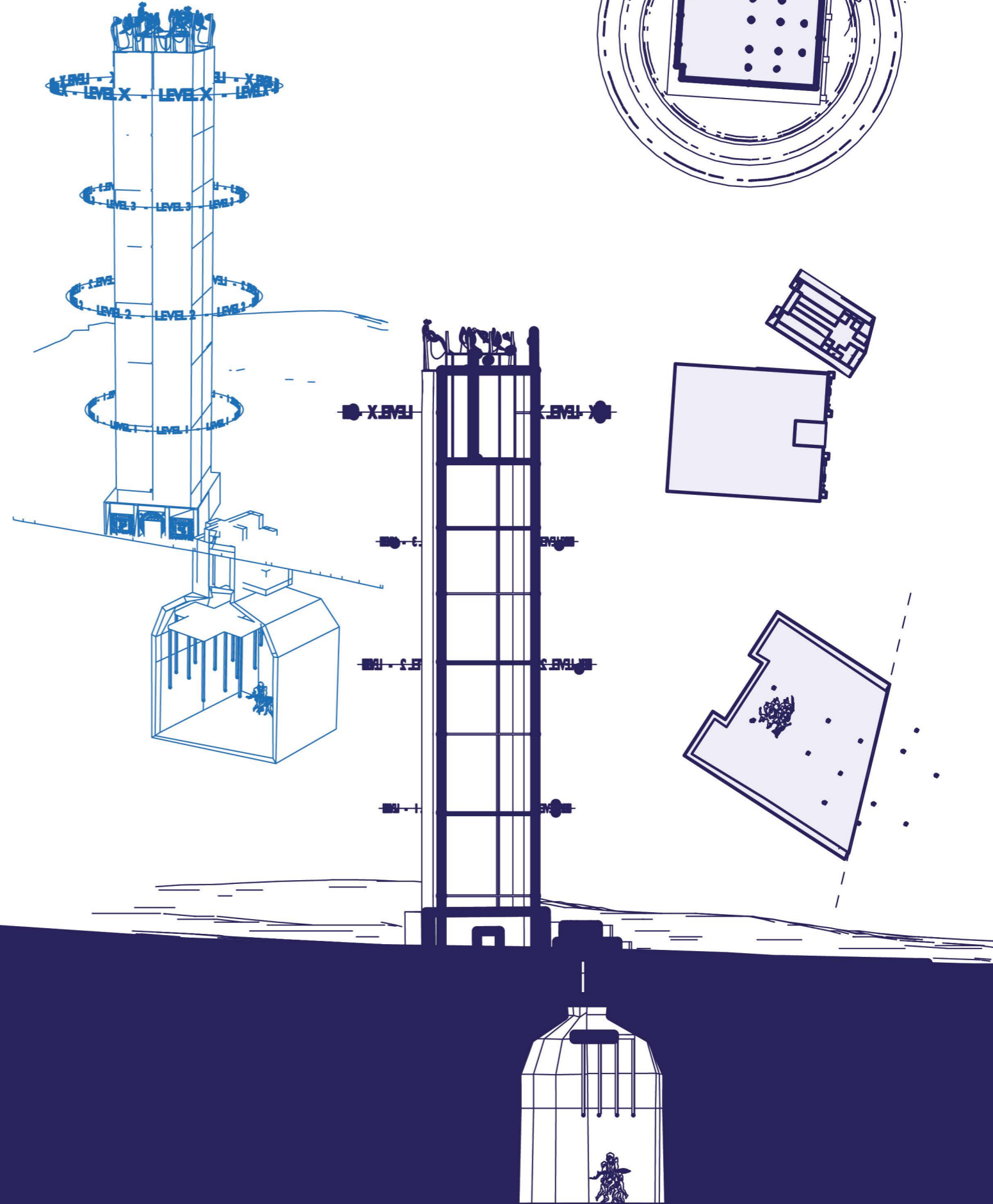
The latter loses any partition on the ground & instead light marks the typology, maintaining the axes and the focal point of the typology in the dark volume.



St. Elias Greek Catholic Cathedral
St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral

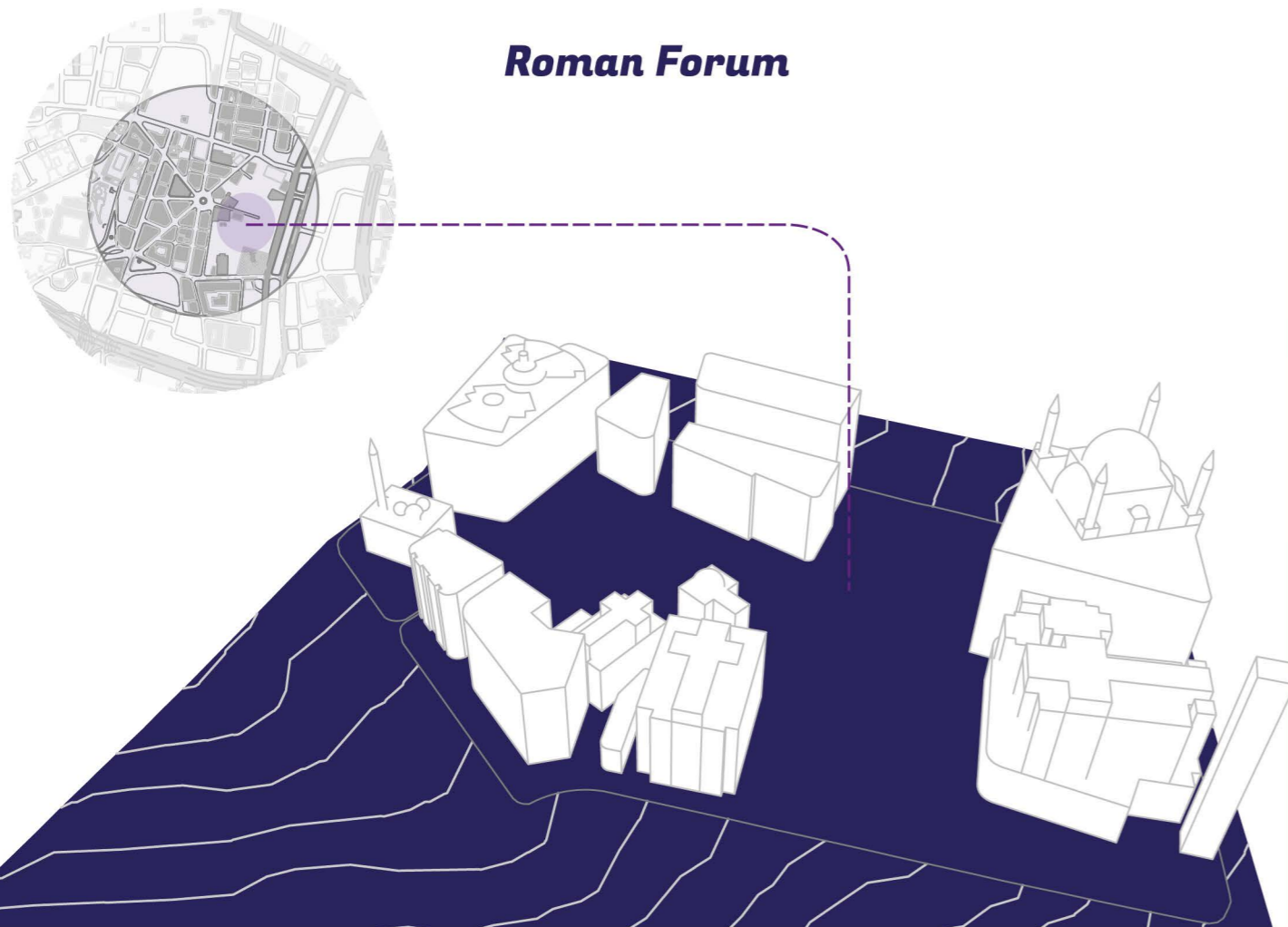


THE COMMODIFICATION OF RITUALS AND RELIGIOUS OBSCURANTISM



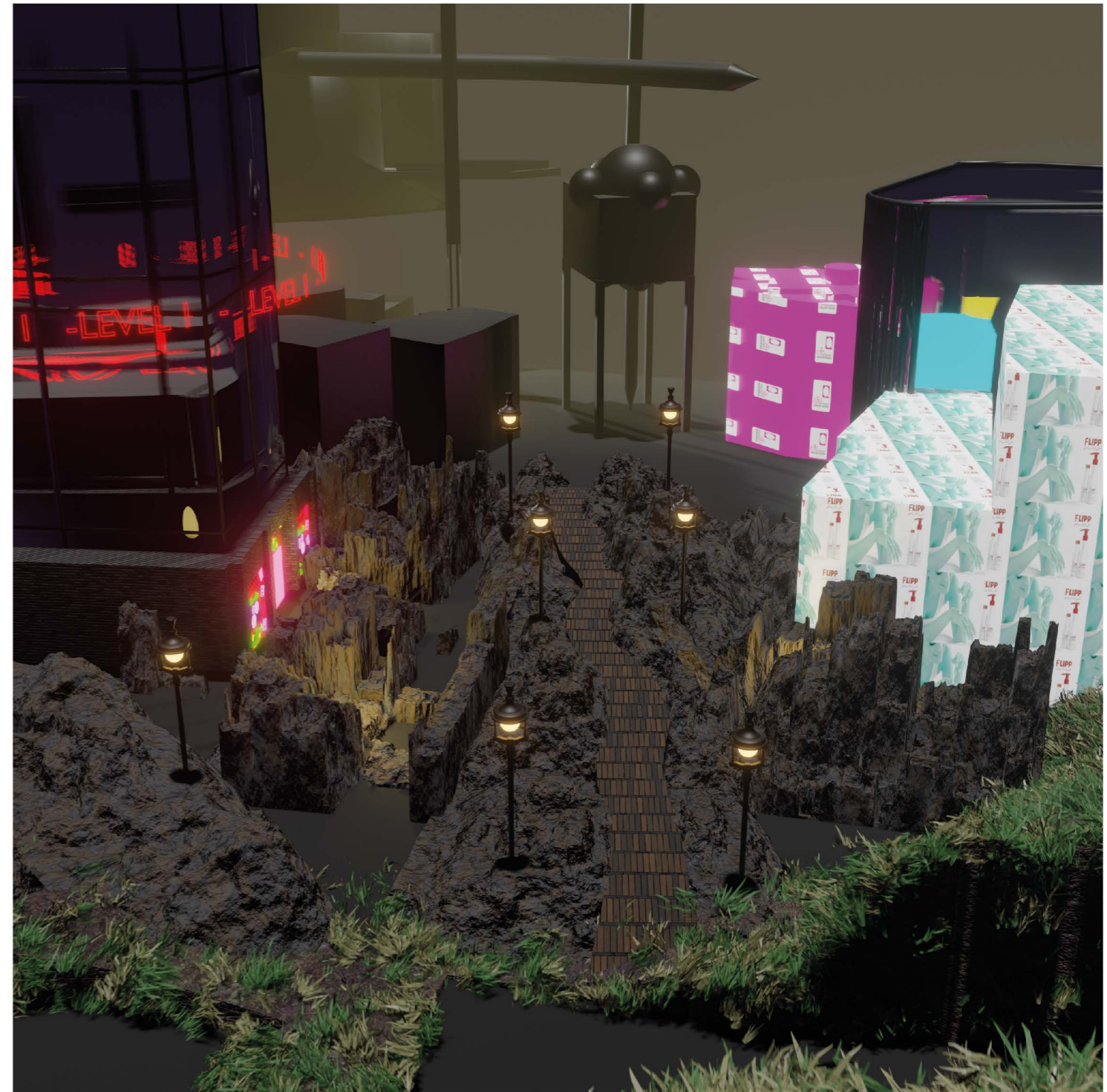


Roman Forum



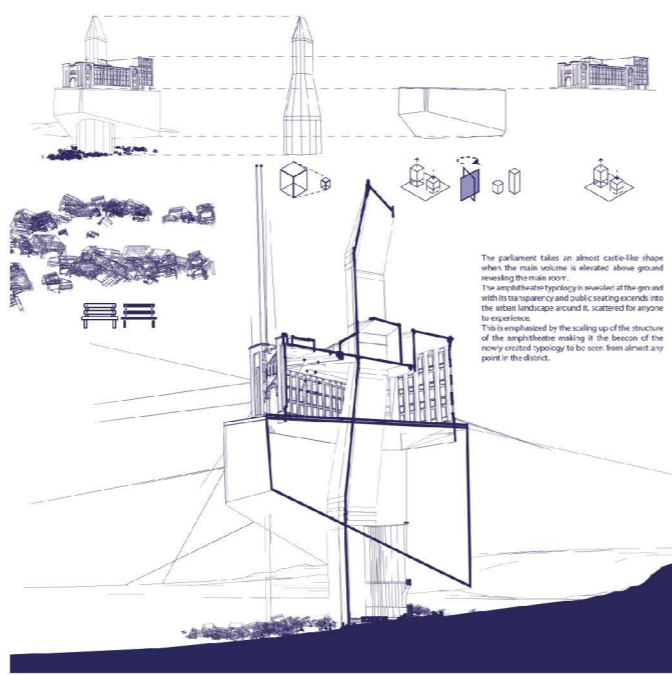
THE GOLDEN PATH(SSS)

ON THE NOTION OF ENLIGHTENMENT



One path in between 3 diverging experiences where true enlightenment becomes choice. The path carving itself through the topology.

It guides the urban experience and sits amidst these surreal performance spaces, manipulating the ground for that purpose.

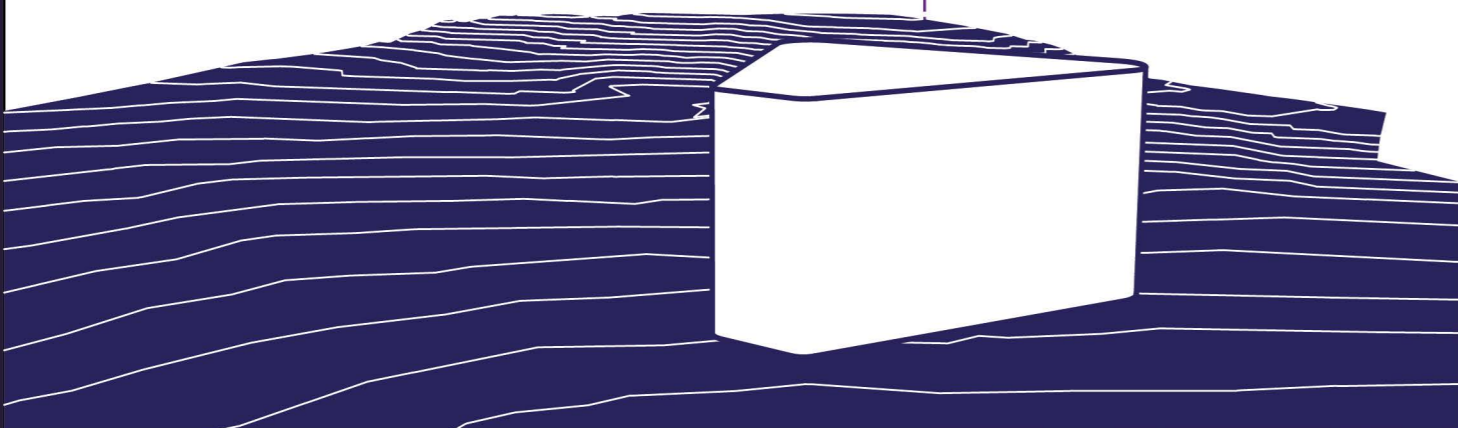


The main volume is elevated above ground revealing the theatre at the center which is surrounded by scattered urban furniture.

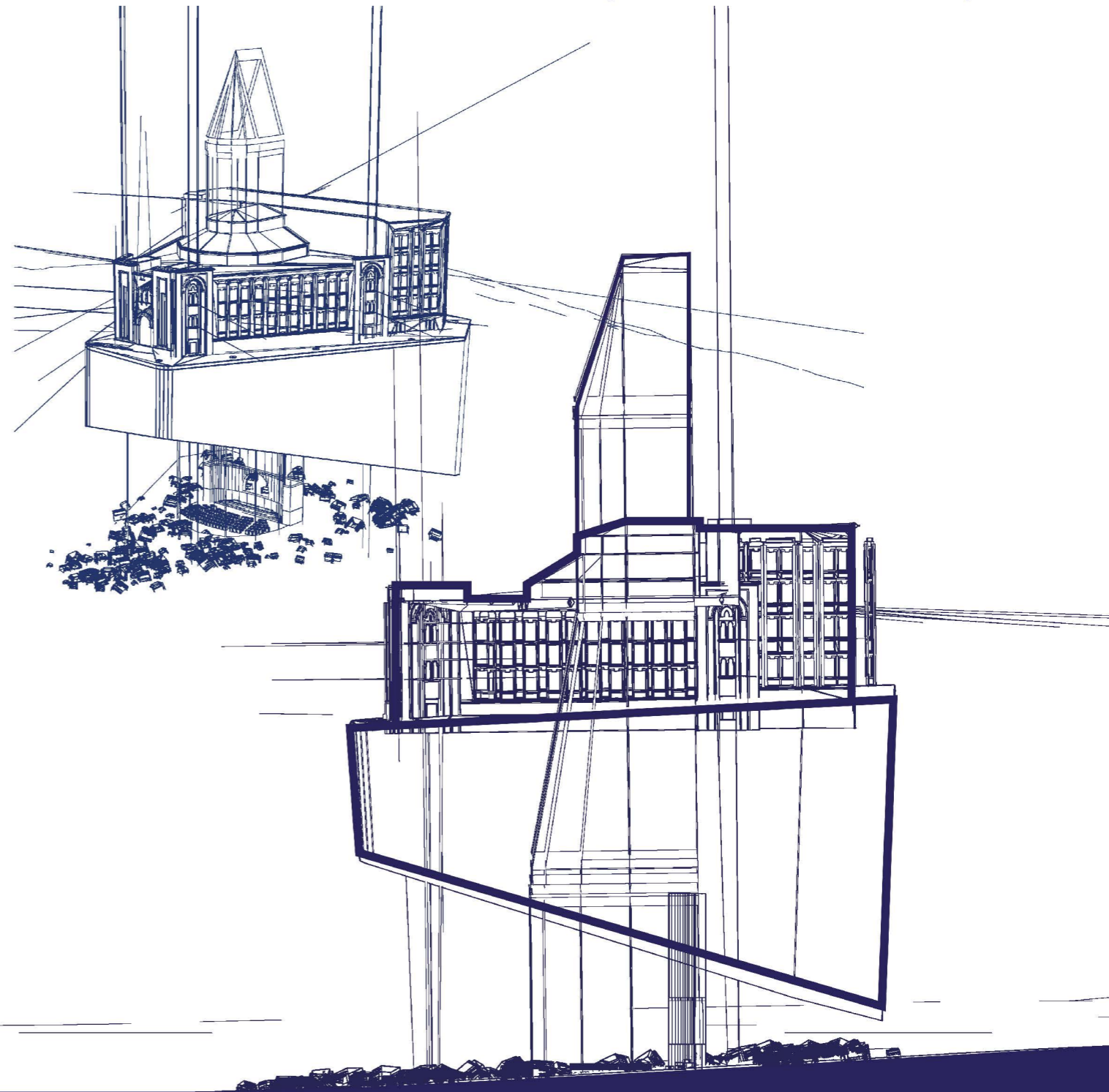
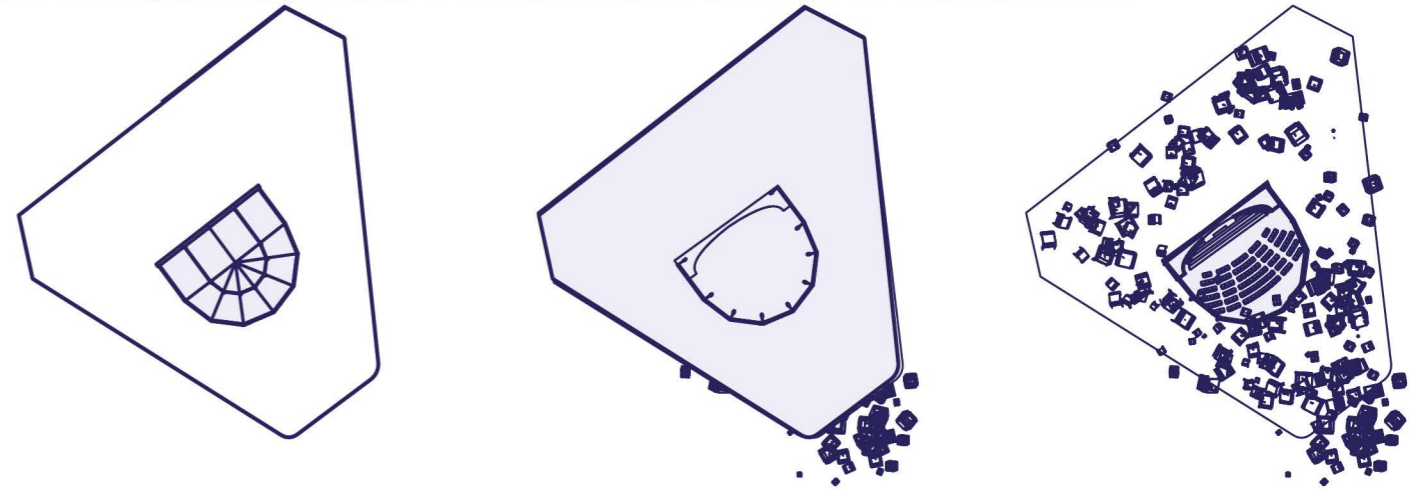
The volume sitting on top becomes no more than a center piece, a pageant queen leaving space for performance beneath it.

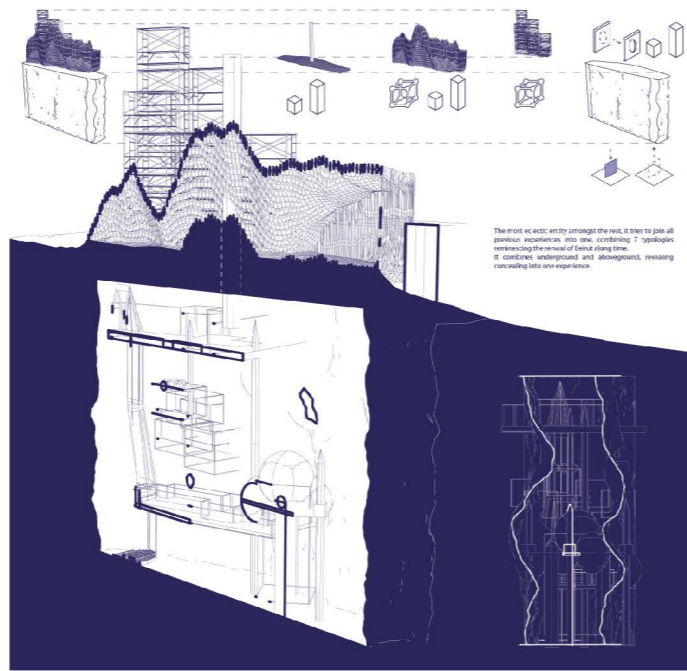
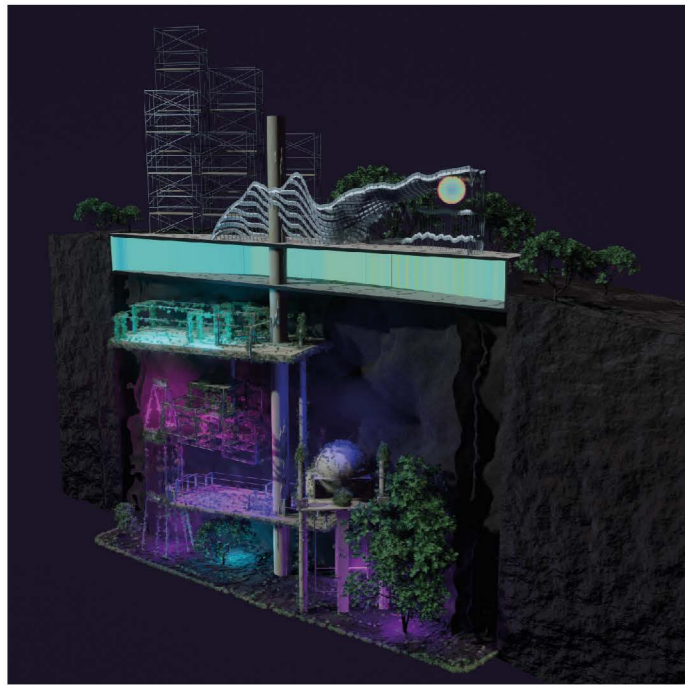


Parliament



SHE'S A PAGEANT QUEEN ON TRESSPASSING & THE CARICATURE OF A MONUMENT



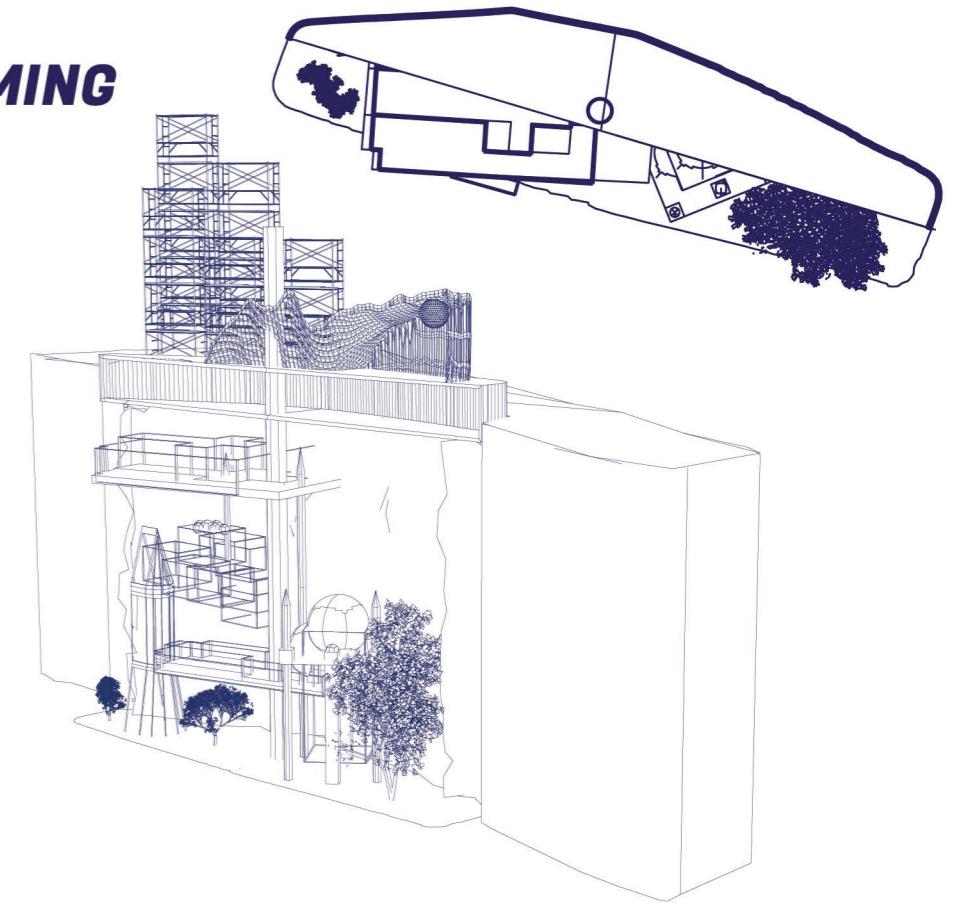


MEMENTO MORI THE PAST PERFORMING

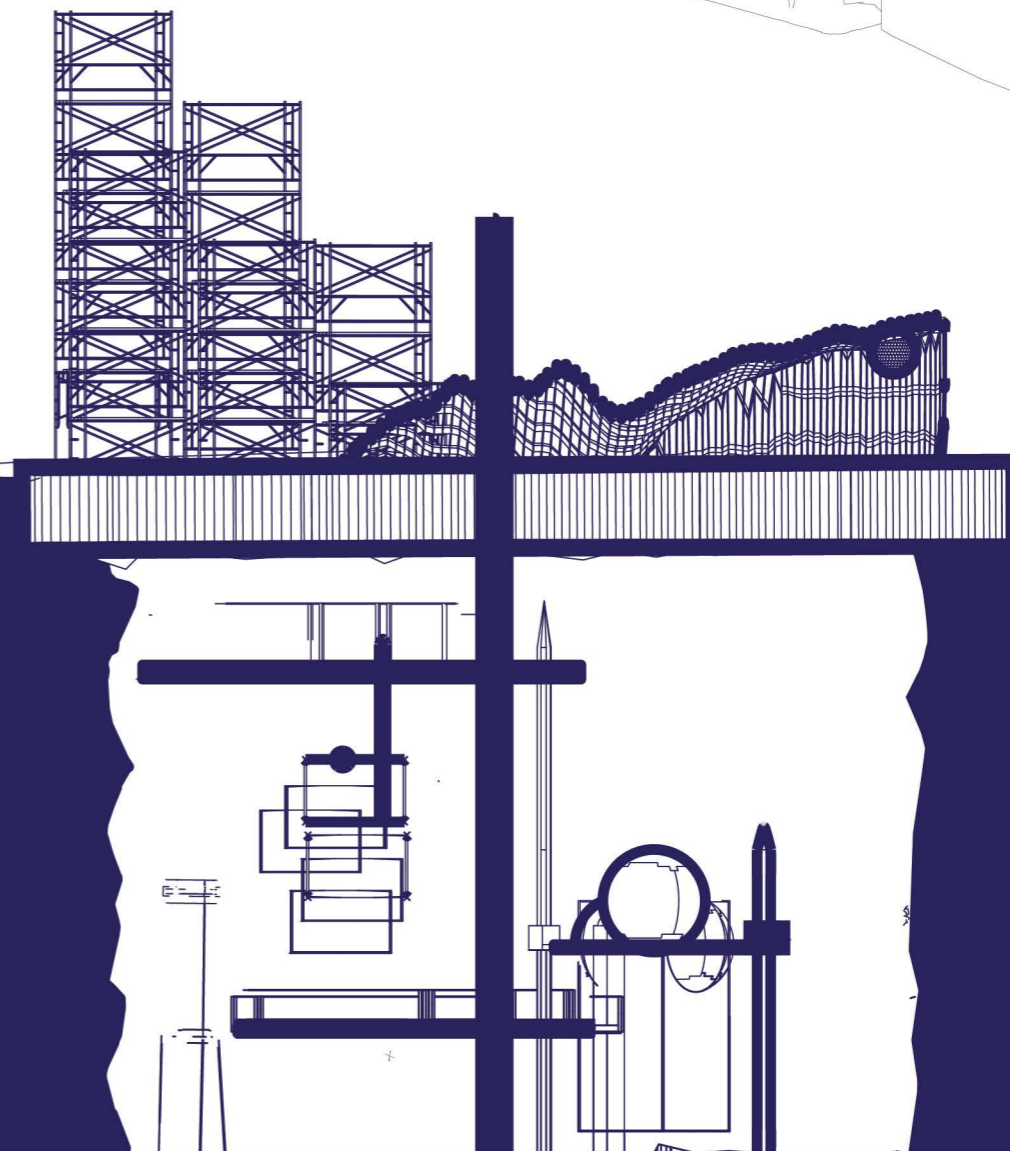
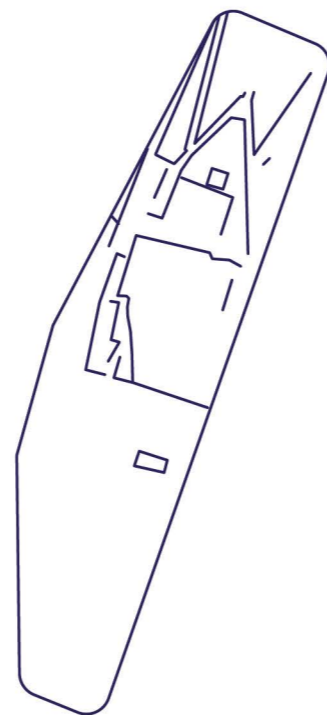
The last intervention is one that combines all structures and typologies previously found on site.

A structure acting as public seating sits atop, with a manipulated skin extruded from the topology.

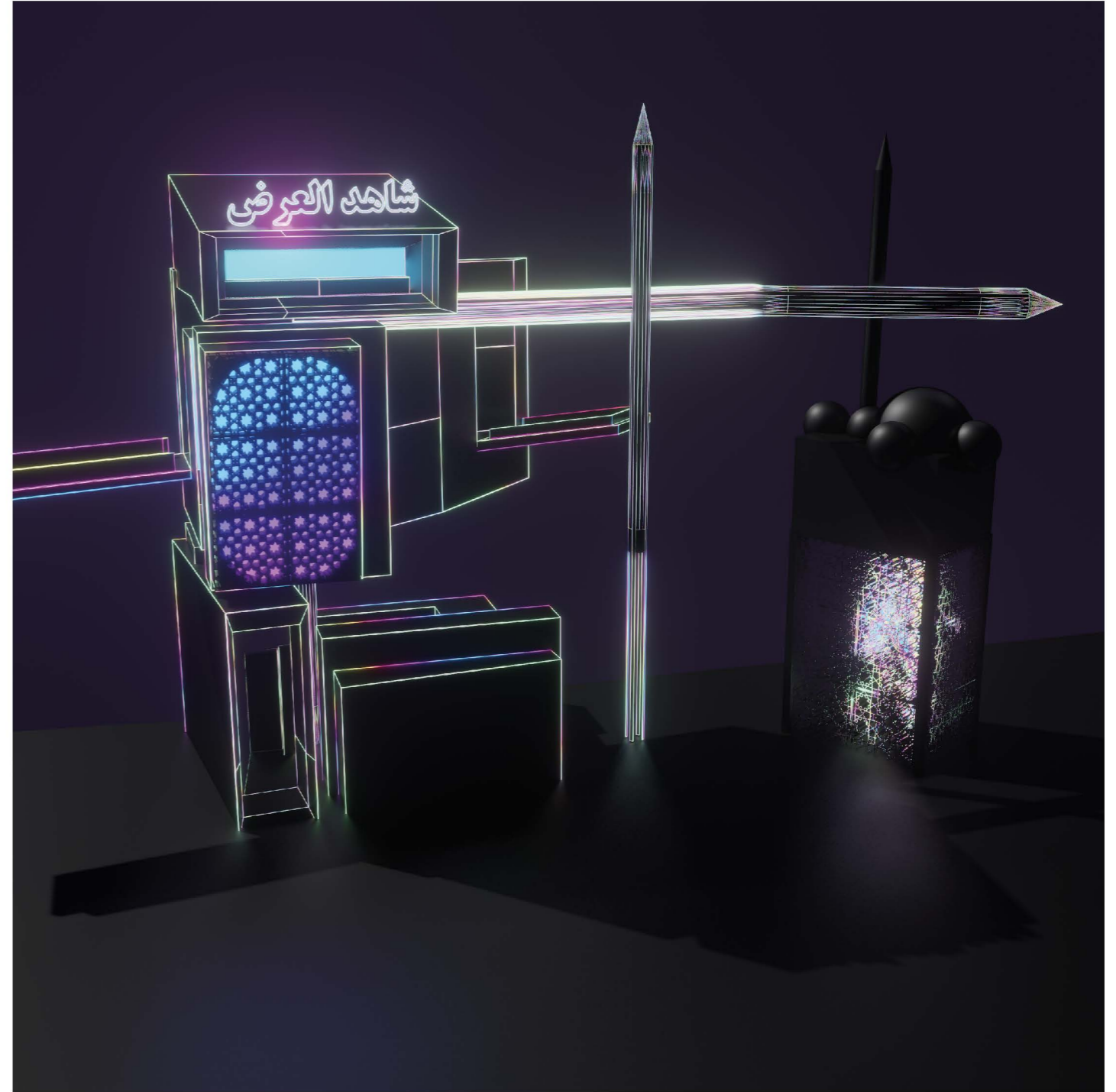
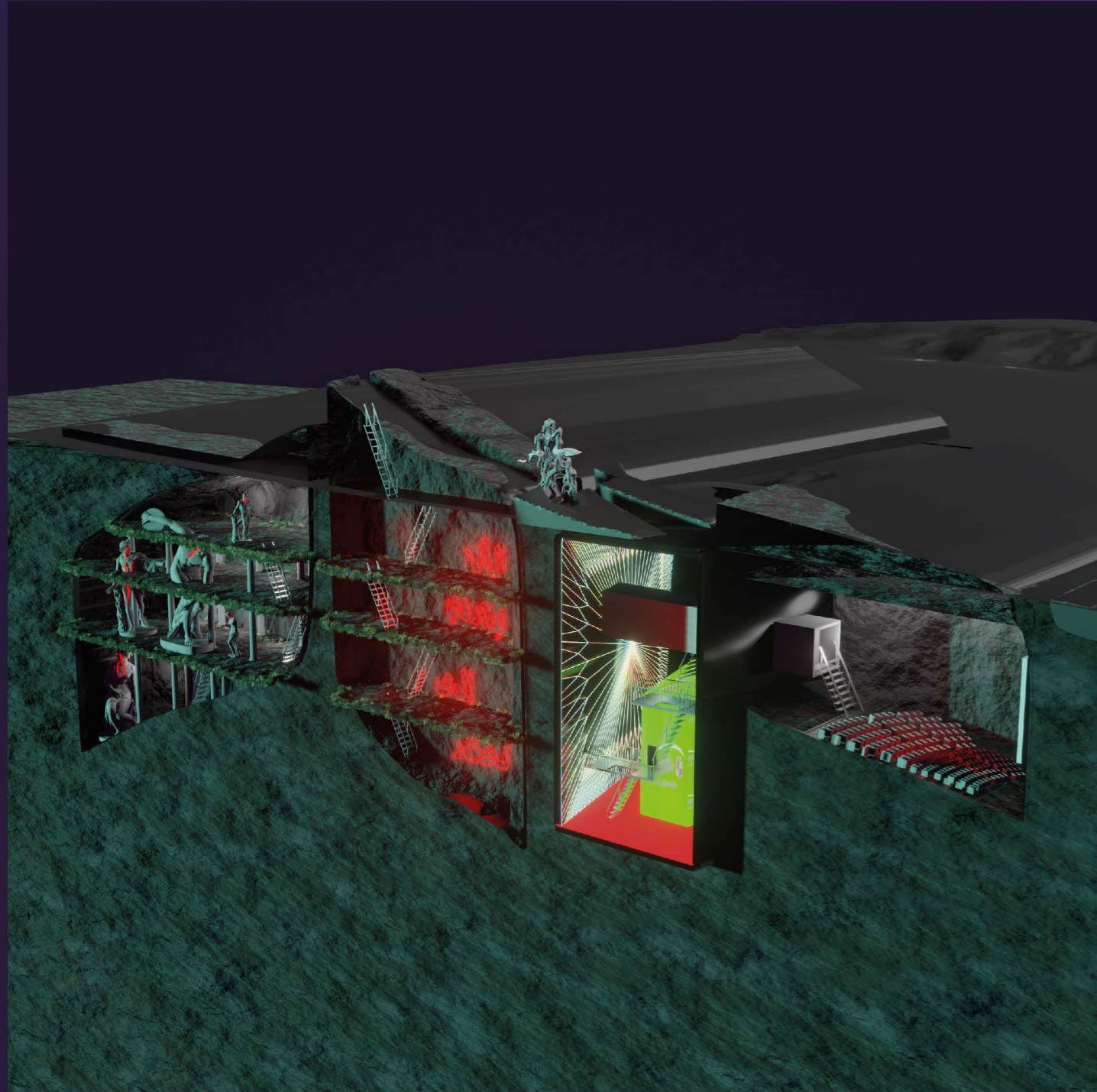
Memento Mori is a reminder that nothing is forever, architecture fades away, so do ideologies and people.

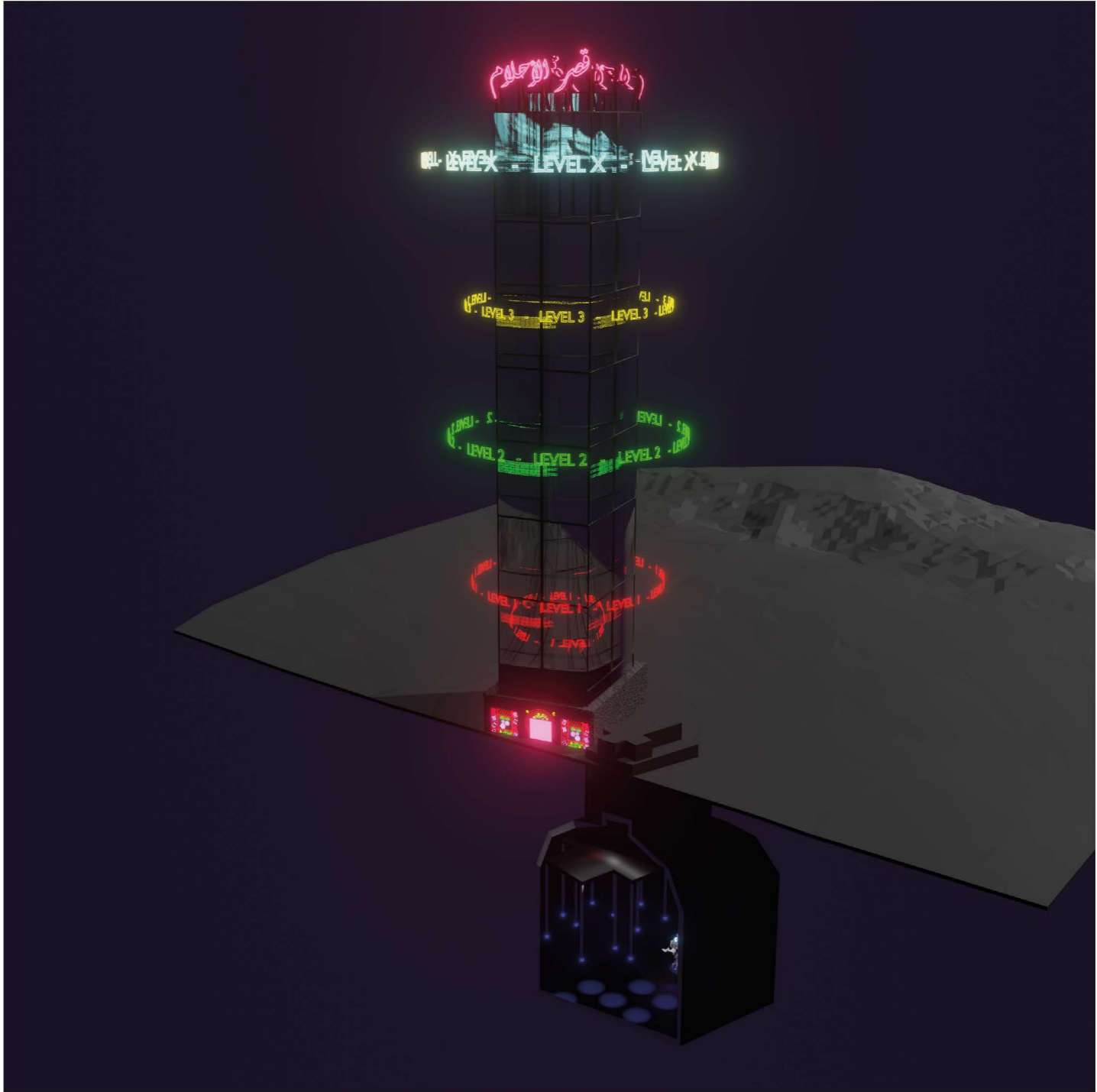
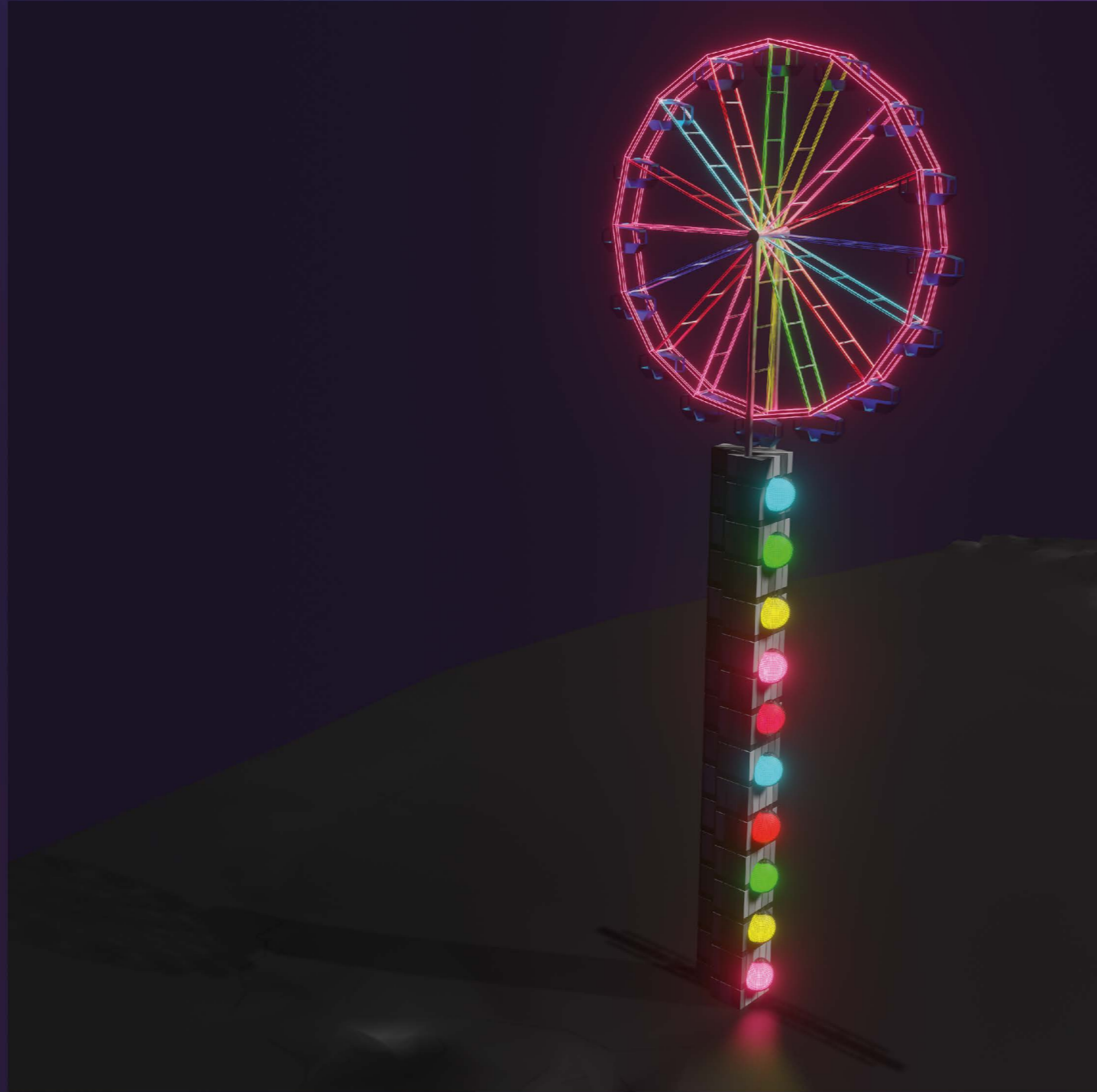


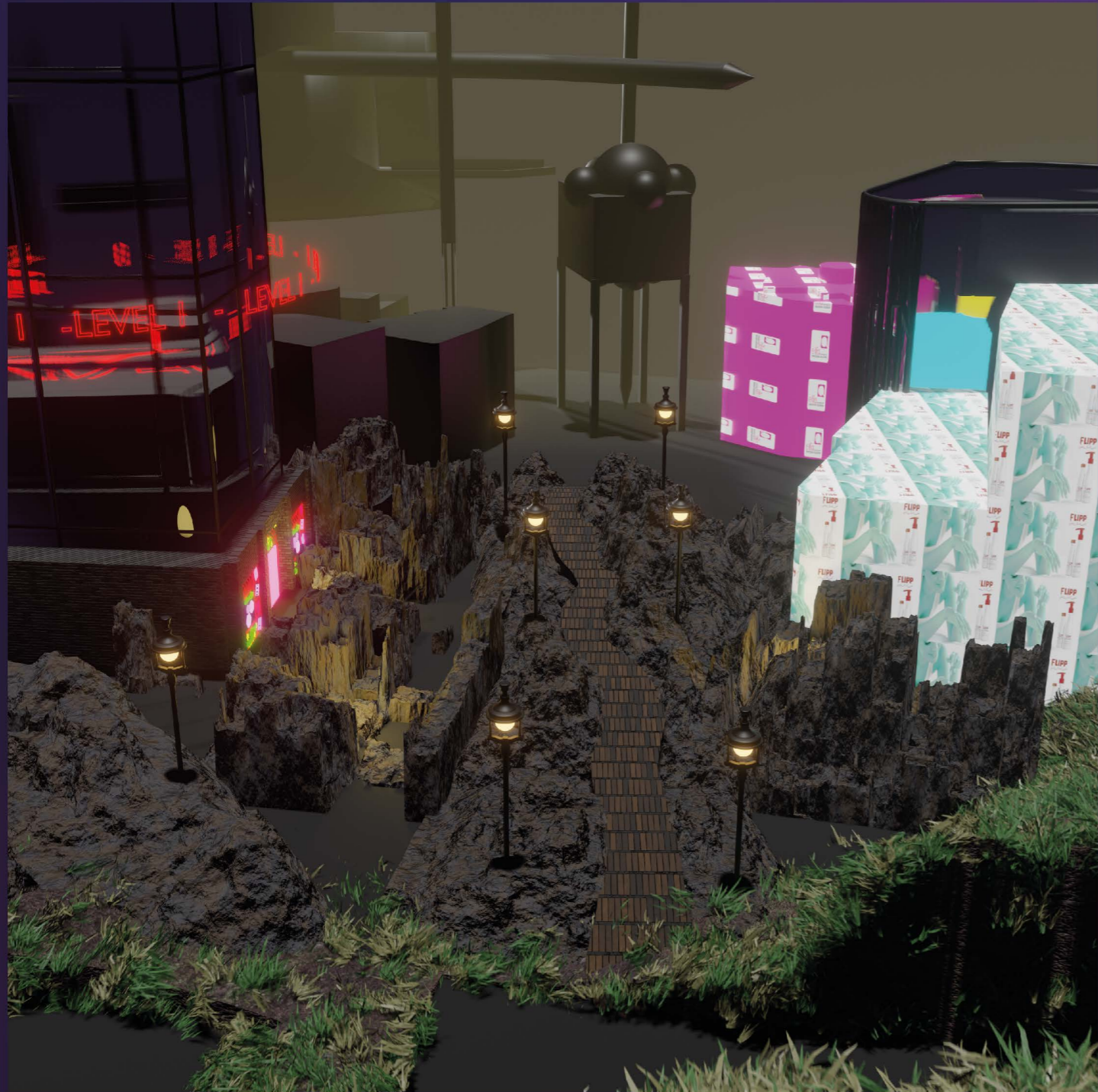
Roman Baths

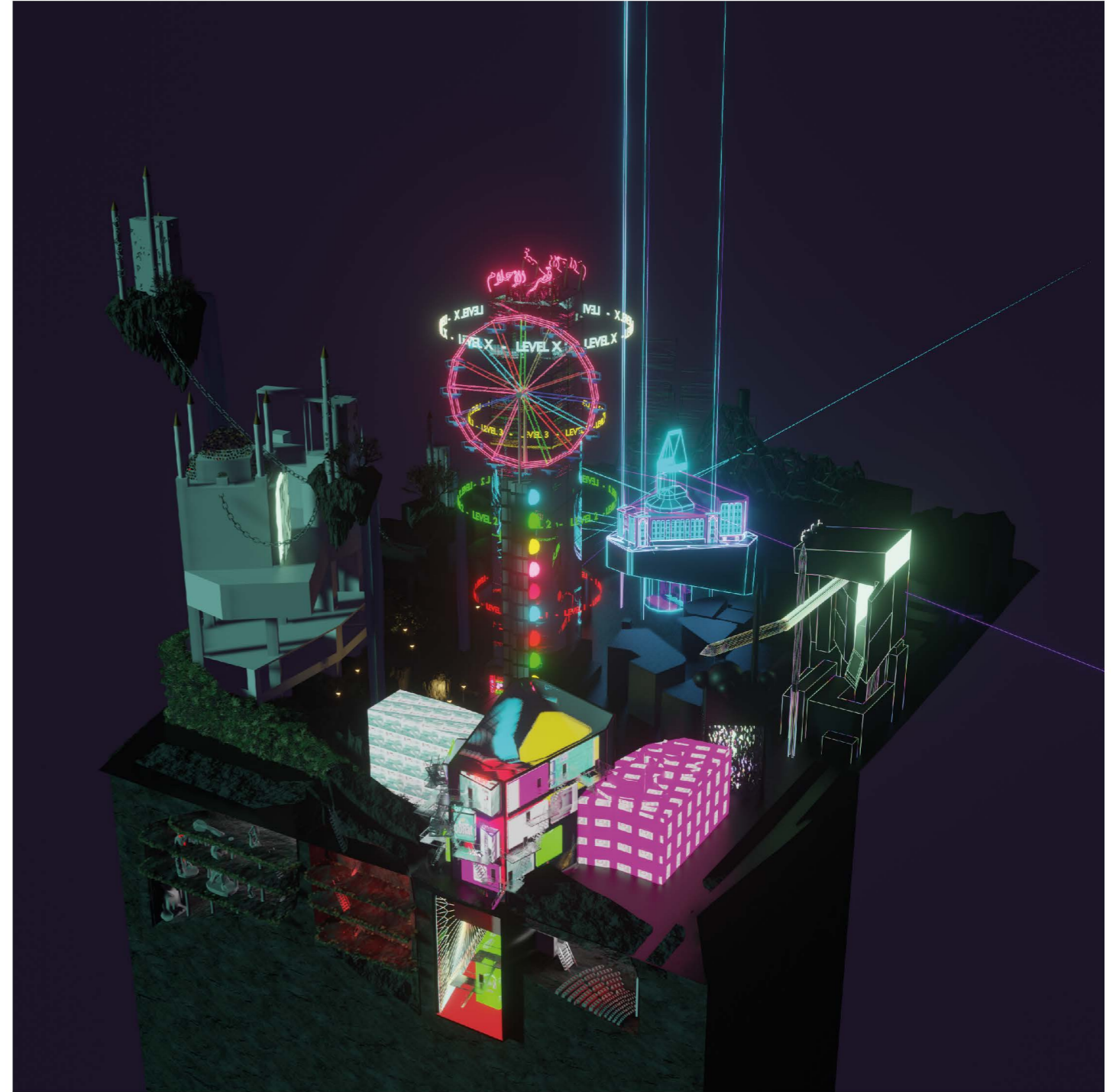
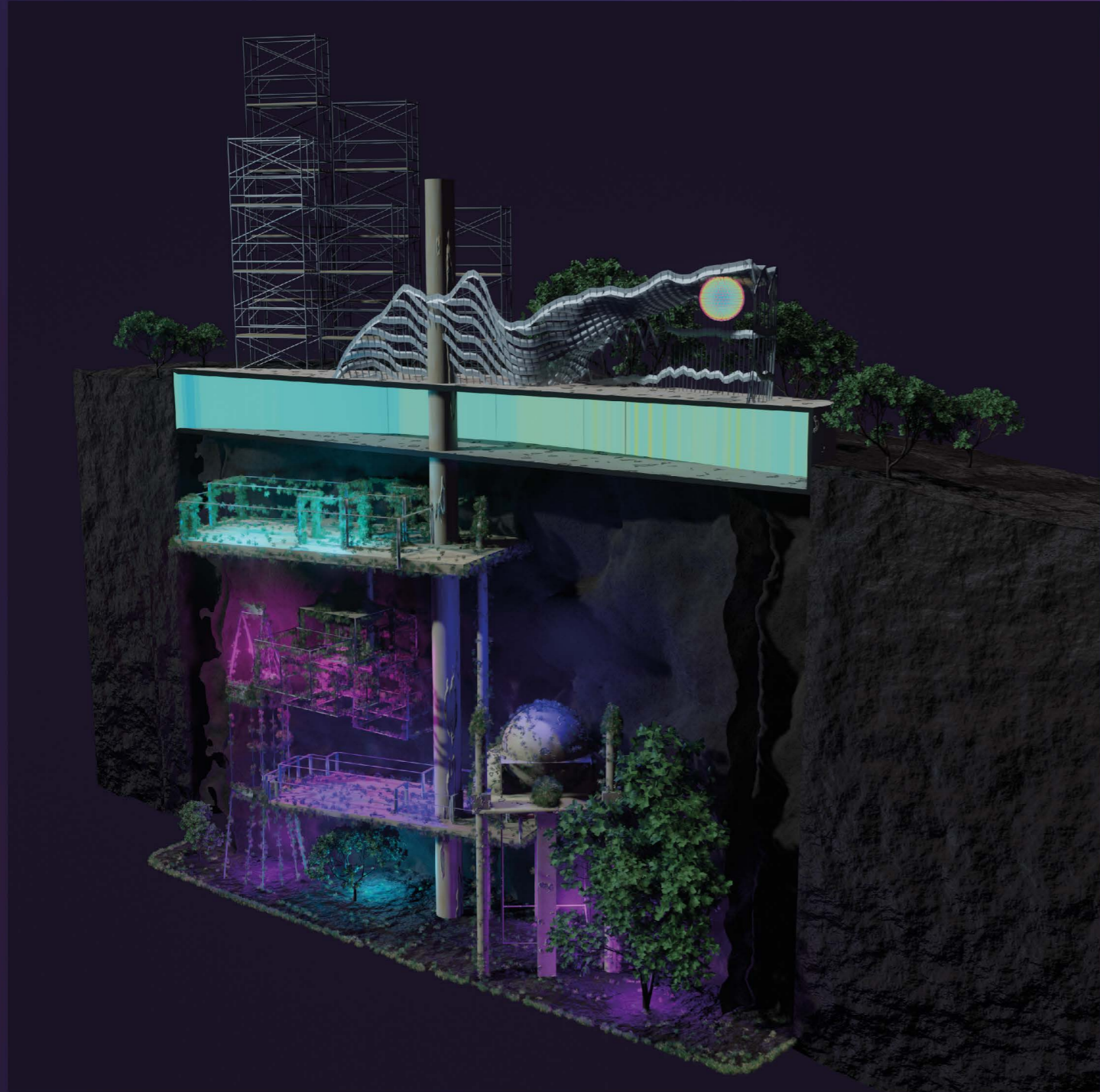












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