

**Reading Urban Palimpsests: Recontextualizing Landscapes of  
Power and Memory in Tashkent, Uzbekistan**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rhetorical landscapes of the city consist of deliberately arranged ensembles of monumental spaces and mnemonic structures, emblematic of power and memory. However, the memory narrative they tell is constructed through selective erasure and replacement of aspects of the past. Variations of such narratives are evident in the urban layers of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, since the beginning of its modern history marked by its siege by the Tsarist Russians. Every change in the ideology of the state was accompanied by an identity crisis resulting in rewriting of the city's historical narrative through the reconstruction of its rhetorical landscapes. By recontextualizing the multiple erased temporalities of the site, this thesis proposes an architectural framework that suggests alternative memory narratives generated through personal engagement and multiple readings - countering the official, univocal version of history. This thesis treats the site as a palimpsest, a multi-layered text - criticizing the *tabula rasa* or the clean slate approach taken by the state.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

To walk in the city is to experience the disjuncture of partial vision/partial consciousness. The narrativity of this walking is belied by a simultaneity we know and yet cannot experience. As we turn a corner, our object disappears around the next corner. The sides of the street conspire against us; each attention suppresses a field of possibilities. The discourse of the city is a syncretic discourse, political in its untranslatability. Hence the language of the state elides. Unable to speak all the city's languages, unable to speak all at once, the state's language becomes monumental. (Stewart 1993, 2)

The rhetorical landscapes of the city, according to Boyer, are deliberately arranged ensembles of monumental spaces and mnemonic structures that are emblematic of power and memory (Boyer 1994, 321). When walking through them, the viewer is expected to experience certain narrativity, a prescribed description of the city and its carefully constructed history that support the ideology of the state, suppressing the parts of the past that do not. This thesis addresses these suppressed temporalities, focusing on the ones from the recent past as they are still part of the collective memory. They suggest simultaneities that are known but not experienced as their physical representations are being erased or replaced, leading to urban amnesia.



New name of a metro station “Amir Temur Square” with the traces of the old name “October Revolution” (“Fotografii Metropolitena-5,” 2003)

Since the beginning of Tashkent's modern history, each state attempted to overcome its identity crisis by rewriting the history, the official version of the memory of the city. These historical narratives are constructed by carefully recomposing the past through transforming the rhetorical landscape of the city, erasing and suppressing the aspects that do not support the state's ideology and magnifying the ones that do. Even though the physical transformation of the old town did not begin until after the Soviet revolution of 1917, the locals were subjected to othering and dehumanization throughout the colonial years, after the city's siege by Tsarist Russia in 1867

(Sahadeo 2007, 85). They saw the image of the old town as something stuck in the past - in contrast to the image of the new town, built on a clean slate, representative of the future and devoid of the aspects of the backward past. After the revolution, denunciation of the local past was taken one step further by its erasure as the transformation of the old town into a structured socialist town meant the destruction of the local urban fabric (Meuser 2016, 25). Soviet's orientalist approach to urban planning and architecture was marked by the erasure of the past to make room for a new future that borrowed aspects from the same past that are worth keeping (Stronski 2010, 227). The Stalinist slogan "national in form and socialist in content" aimed at achieving an illusionary unity of the past (old town) and the future (new town) by prompting the architects to bring light to the progressive aspects of the local past. However, selective preservation resulted in a rupture in history rather than unity. After the fall of the Soviets, the city's transformation has been defined by the same approach of selective erasure, that now includes the demolition of the Soviet artefacts in addition to the ongoing destruction of the old town (Chukhovich 2017a, para. 8). The gaps resultant from the erasure of the recent past are being filled with the aspects of the distant past glorified in the new ideology.

According to Boyer, "return to history most often occurs in moments of crisis" (Boyer 1994, 377). Each state attempted to overcome the identity crisis caused by ideology changes by rewriting the history of the city, the official version of memory that silences the multi-layered and complex narrative of the collective (Boyer 1994, 321). According to decolonialist and post-socialist author Tlostanova, the constant modifications of the past through suppressing and erasure not only left the memories of the past in ruin but is also erasing the future

(Tlostanova 2018, 139). “Therefore, it is crucial to reflect first on our uses of the troubled pasts if we intend to have any future” (Tlostanova 2018, 139). In her book *What Does It Mean to Be Post-soviet?: Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire*, she argues that art, when problematizes the official versions of history, can play a crucial role in decolonizing collective and personal memory by creating an alternative reality that reflects multiple pasts, simultaneously, in return allowing for faith in future (Tlostanova 2018, 140). Similarly, Boyer argues that we must question the official memory narrative by reexamining and recontextualizing memory images of the past “until they awaken within us a new path to the future” (Boyer 1994, 29).

While the transformation of the rhetorical landscapes of Tashkent illustrates the instrumentalization of memory as a mechanism of power to impose a structure over the city, this thesis argues that memory can also be a rejuvenating strategy. According to Boyer, superimposing different layers of historical times on each other “no longer generates a structural form to the city but merely culminates in an experience of diversity” (Boyer 1994, 19). This thesis depicts the site as a palimpsest - a multi-layered text, criticizing the *tabula rasa*, or the clean slate approach of the state. The site of this thesis is a field in the old town that embodies manifestations of the changing ideologies in both urban form, through the erasure of the original fabric, and architectural form through abstraction of national forms. This thesis aims to achieve conceptual simultaneity through formal organization informed by superpositioning historical layers and recontextualization of the landmarks extracted from them. While criticizing the *tabula rasa* approach at the urban scale, the design deploys metaphoric oppositions at the architectural

scale to the original intent of the reimagined landmarks through the deconstruction of their form and meanings, questioning the official history of the city. Instead of prescribing a singular reading, it allows for multiple interpretations of the past. Like the palimpsest that catalyzes the design, the narratives it suggests are unfolded through the sedimentation of multiple meanings derived from multiple readings.





2018



1890

OLD CITY

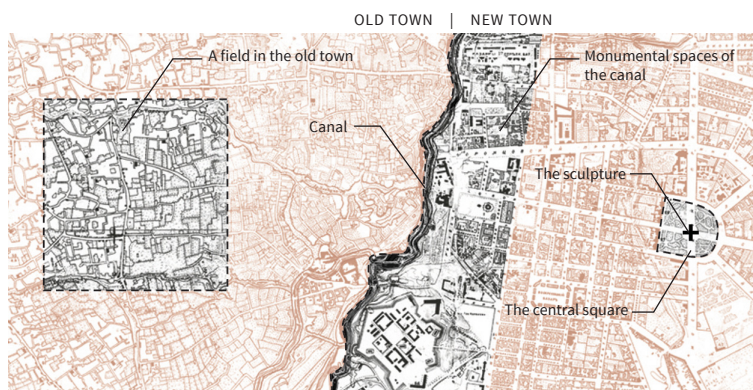
NEW CITY

Comparing the maps of Tashkent, Uzbekistan from 1890 (Turkestanski Voenno - Topografichesky Otdel, 1890, in Meuser 2016, 16-17) and 2018 (Google Earth, 2018)

## CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT

Changes in the ideology of the state are reflected in both urban and architectural forms of the city. But what marks the beginning of a new change in the city? In the case of Tashkent, these changes can be observed through the sculptures of the central square. Termed by Stewart as the “town giant” these sculptures present “instructions for the generation of ideology” (Stewart 1993, 90). This chapter studies how the changing ideologies of the state are reflected in both urban and architectural form of Tashkent throughout three reigns: colonial, socialist and independent. These reflections are situated within the timeline of the changing sculptures to illustrate the relationships between ideology and its manifestation in urban and architectural form.

Along with the sculpture in the central square, two samples are selected for the study. The first sample is the monumental architecture of the canal, the edge of the new town, which is characteristic of the changing architectural form. Another sample is a field in the old town, incorporated into the rhetorical landscape of the city centre during the Soviet years. The field demonstrates the three states’ approach to urban form.



Locating the sculpture within the square and the two samples

INDEPENDENT



1994 Amir Temur

SOVIET RUSSIA



1961 Program of Communism



1930 Obelisk



1918 Hammer and Sickle



1913 Troops of 1865

IMPERIAL RUSSIA



1968 Karl Marx



1948 Stalin



1927 Bust of Lenin



1918 Fighters of the Revolution



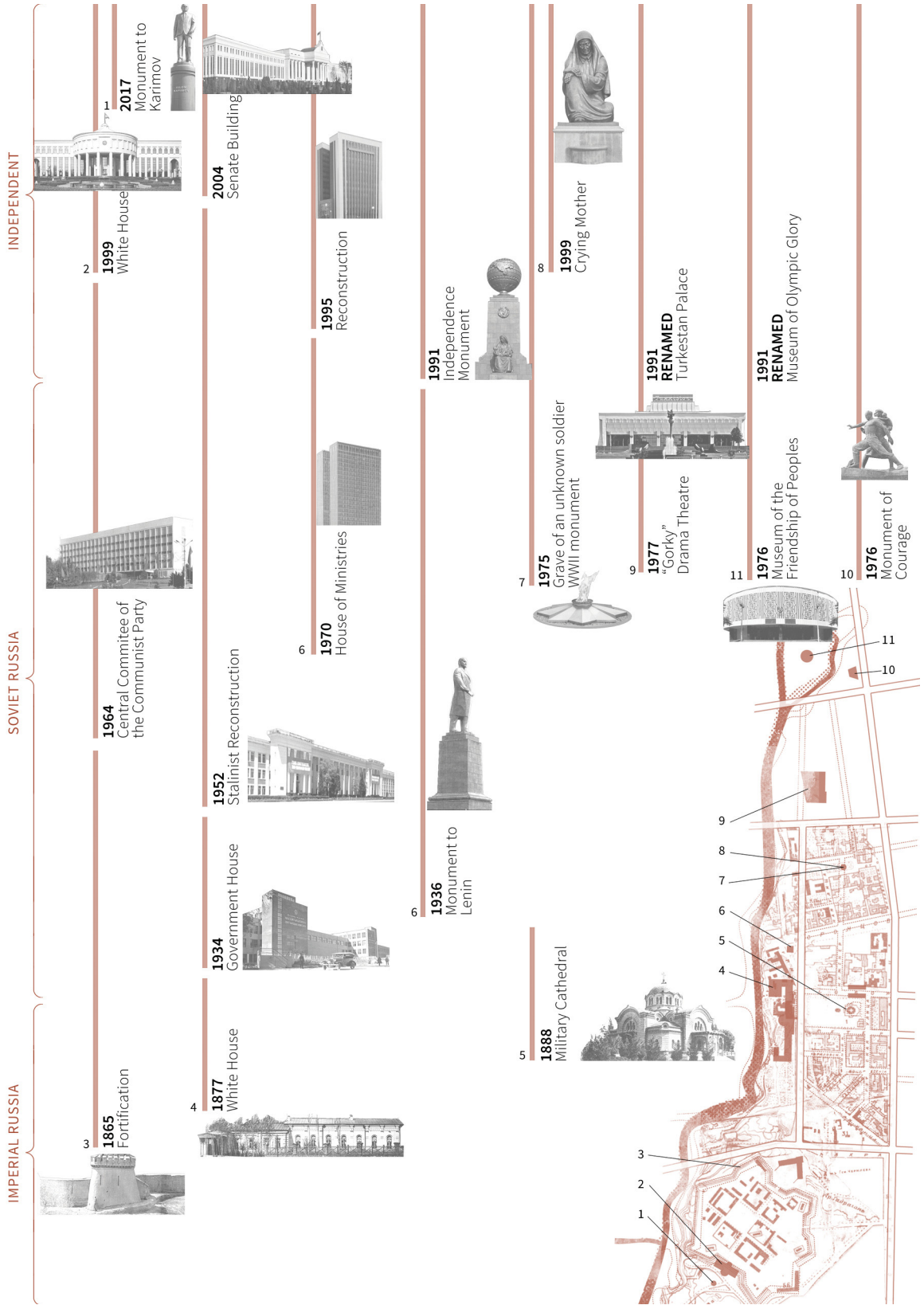
1889 Grave of the General

A timeline of the changing sculptures in the square

## Colonial Tashkent

With the coming of the Russians, the angel of death has breathed on all that was once grandeur of the Orient at Tashkent. Once there were no Russians in the land, and then what is now old Tashkent was the only Tashkent; it was a great Moslem city that could be pointed to geographically as such. But as the fine Russian streets were laid down, and the large shops opened, and the cathedrals were built, and the gardens laid out, the old uphill-and-down-dale labyrinth of the Eastern city slowly changed to a curiosity and anachronism. (Graham 1916, 59)

Tashkent was colonized by Tsarist Russia in 1865 and made the capital of the separate governor-generalship Russian Turkestan established in 1867 (Sahadeo 2007, 1). The urban fabric of the 'oriental' Tashkent prior to its siege was typical of a medieval Islamic town, consisting of neighbourhoods of single storey mud-brick houses accessed through cul-de-sacs, and winding thoroughfares that opened at public spaces such as bazaars and mosques (Meuser 2016, 18). Soon after its siege, Tashkent presented itself as two dichotomous towns, separated by a canal (Meuser 2016, 11). The first governor-general of Russian Turkestan, Konstantin von Kaufman, instead of transforming the old town, decided to display the Russian superiority through the new European town built on the other side of the canal Ankhor (Sahadeo 2007, 33). Transposed against the chaotic fabric of the old town, the new town had a typical for the nineteenth-century radial plan, adapted from the Saint-Petersburg model, which was symbolic of symmetry, regularity, order and civilization (Sahadeo 2007, 36). The separation of the two towns was necessary because the transmission of images of superiority and civilization was more effective through the contrast of the dichotomous towns (Sahadeo 2007, 85). Through this contrast, the 'backward' locals were expected to want to leave their culture and strive towards being civilized (Stronski 2010, 260).



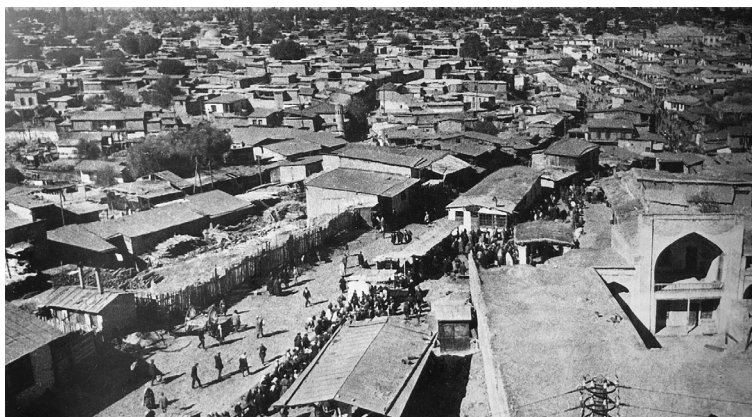
Timeline of the canal monuments

New administrative structures quickly changed the cityscape of the Russian city across the canal, which presented an opportunity to travel in time - from the bright future to the darkness of the past in one day. In building this new town of the future, using traditional local building styles and materials of the damned past were banned. The main Cathedral in the Cathedral square, from which began the main axis of the new plan, was built in the 1880s, utilizing both Russian and ironically, a neo-Islamic style popular in Europe, while banning the local Islamic style (Stronski 2010, 24).

Unaccustomed to the narrow streets of the old Tashkent lined with traditional buildings with walls built right against the streets, Russians constructed wide thoroughfares lined with poplars - a reminder of the homeland in the desert climate of the newly conquered lands (Sahadeo 2007, 38). At the intersection of the two main thoroughfares was the Konstantinovskiy square from which the plan of the city radiated. The square saw its first monument in 1882 - The General von Kaufman's ceremonial burial in the square (Sahadeo 2007, 54). In 1889 the grave was relocated to the grounds of the main Cathedral and was soon replaced by another monument in 1913, dedicated to Kaufman and his army of conquerors only four years before the October Revolution, after which the square saw the most changes in its monuments (Sahadeo 2007, 164).

### **Soviet Tashkent**

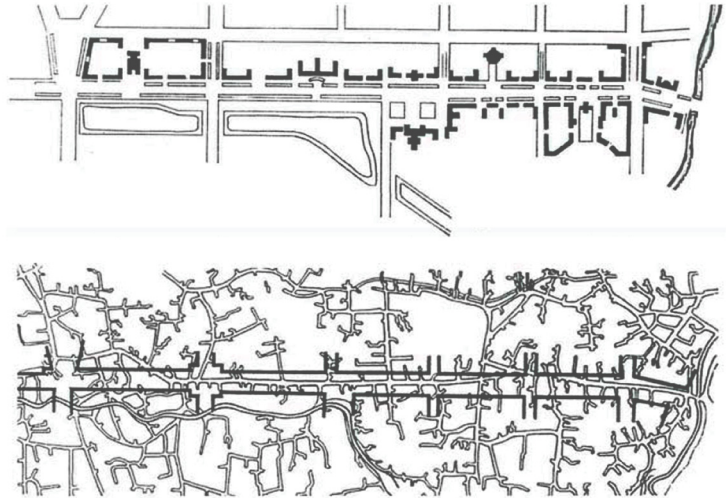
After the revolution, priority was given to creating new urban symbolisms as the monumental spaces of the Tsarist Russian Tashkent in the city became irrelevant. The first public act of such endeavour was the removal of the monument dedicated to Kaufman and the troops that conquered Central Asia from the Konstantinovskiy Square, which was renamed Revolution



View of a street bazaar in the Old City of Tashkent from 1933 (RIA Novosti, 1933, in Meuser 2016, 22)

Square (Stronski 2010, 29). Soon the empty pedestal of the previous monument was replaced with a monument dedicated to the Fighters of the Revolution (Sahadeo 2007, 214). The administrative spaces along the canals also saw transformations. The main cathedral was demolished as it did not fit the new atheist ideology of the Bolsheviks, making room for the Red Square. A statue of Lenin was erected in the Red Square facing the new Government house built in constructivist fashion in 1930, in place of the White House (Stronski 2010, 38).

The first stamp of Sovietness in the old town was Lenin's bust, placed in the bazaar located in the centre of the old town (Stronski 2010, 29). Unlike the Tsarist regime who left the old town almost untouched in hopes that the locals would submit themselves to the better way of living of the 'civilized' Russians, the Soviets did not want to leave anything to chance (Stronski 2010, 260). Several master-plans were developed and proposed to transform the old town in order to structurally and ideologically join the dichotomous towns into a unified socialist city (Meuser 2016, 11). The master plan of 1938 proposed the unification of the old and the new towns,



1943 design of the Navoi Avenue (top) superimposed over the old map (bottom) (Kadyrova, Tulkinoi, 1987, in Meuser 2016, 30)



The first administrative buildings along the Navoi Avenue (1948) (Mansur Shagaev Collection, 1948, in Meuser 2016, 30)





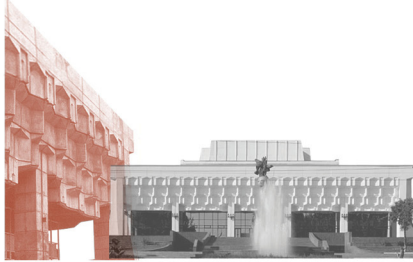
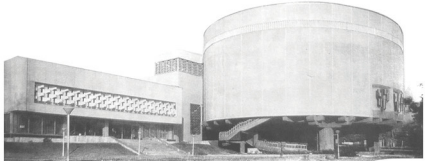


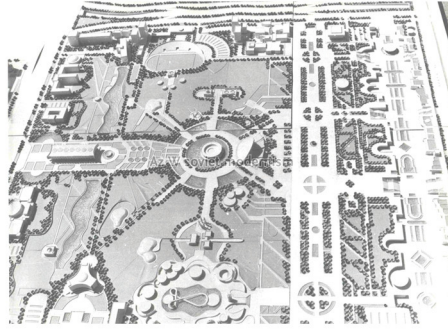
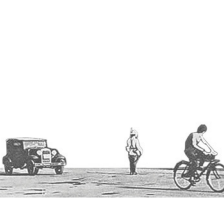


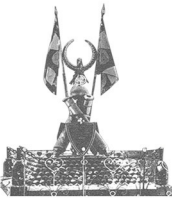


physically through wide monumental thoroughfares, and ideologically by extending the monumental architecture of the centre to the other side of the canal (Meuser 2016, 32). The first attempt at connecting the two towns was the opening of a new Navoi boulevard, the structure of which began in 1942 (Meuser 2016, 25). It was the most important project for the transformation of the old city based on the Soviet ideal, as it connected the two centres - the bazaar and the square with a wide thoroughfare (Meuser 2016, 35). A line of monumental



buildings rose along the avenue demolishing anything in its way.

After the Second World War II, the attention of the city planners turned from the reconstruction of the old town to the political structures once again (Stronski 2010, 262). In 1952 the statue in the Revolution square was replaced with Stalin's statue (Stronski 2010, 56). The Soviet architecture of Tashkent started incorporating the traditional ornamentations of the local architecture. Initially constructivist Government House on the canal bank was made 'more monumental' through "juxtaposition of delicate regional patterns and massive classical elements" (Stronski 2010, 56). Under the Stalinist slogan "national in form and socialist in content" it was acceptable to preserve the progressive aspects of the past while suppressing the rest (Stronski 2010, 227).

The reconstruction of the old town presented a difficult task of demolishing the medieval fabric and was put on hold for a while (Meuser 2016, 11). In 1966, starting on April 26 over a few weeks, Tashkent was hit by 34 earthquakes, with an epicentre close to the centre of the city, the disaster destroyed an immense amount of traditional houses in the old town (Meuser 2016, 63). For urban planners, the disaster presented a tabula rasa - an opportunity to speed up the transformation of the problematic city. The neighbourhoods around the centre were rapidly cleared up making room for new residential blocks with multi-level housing buildings, transforming the image of the old town (Meuser 2016, 63). While this addressed the urgent need for housing, it also led to the destruction of parts of the old town that was unaffected by the earthquake, as well as facing the locals with forced assimilation as the planning of the new districts did not consider the local traditions or

	IDEOLOGY	ARCHITECTURAL FORM	URBAN PLANNING
INDEPENDENT	 <p>1994 Amir Temur</p>	 <p>2004 Senate Building</p>	 <p>2018 Demolition of the Soviet Monuments</p>
SOVIET RUSSIA	 <p>1968 Karl Marx</p>	 <p>1977 "Gorky" Theatre</p>	 <p>1970 - 1980's Expansion of the city center Construction of Soviet cultural / admin buildings in the old town</p>
	 <p>1948 Stalin</p>	 <p>1952 Stalinist Reconstruction</p>	 <p>1966 Proposal to expand the city centre in the old town</p>
	 <p>1935 Roadway</p>	 <p>1934 Government House</p>	 <p>1943 "Navoi Avenue" connecting the two towns</p>
	 <p>1889 Kaufman's grave</p>	 <p>1888 Military Cathedral</p>	 <p>1890 No interventions in the old town</p>

Timeline of how changing ideologies affected architectural form and urban planning

previous urban fabric people were accustomed to. According to Stronski, “cities like Tashkent were envisioned as symbols of the strength of the Soviet polity and were designed for the ease of planning and construction” and in accomplishing this vision, people were seen as malleable actors who could be shaped to fit any new urban environment (Stronski 2010, 268).

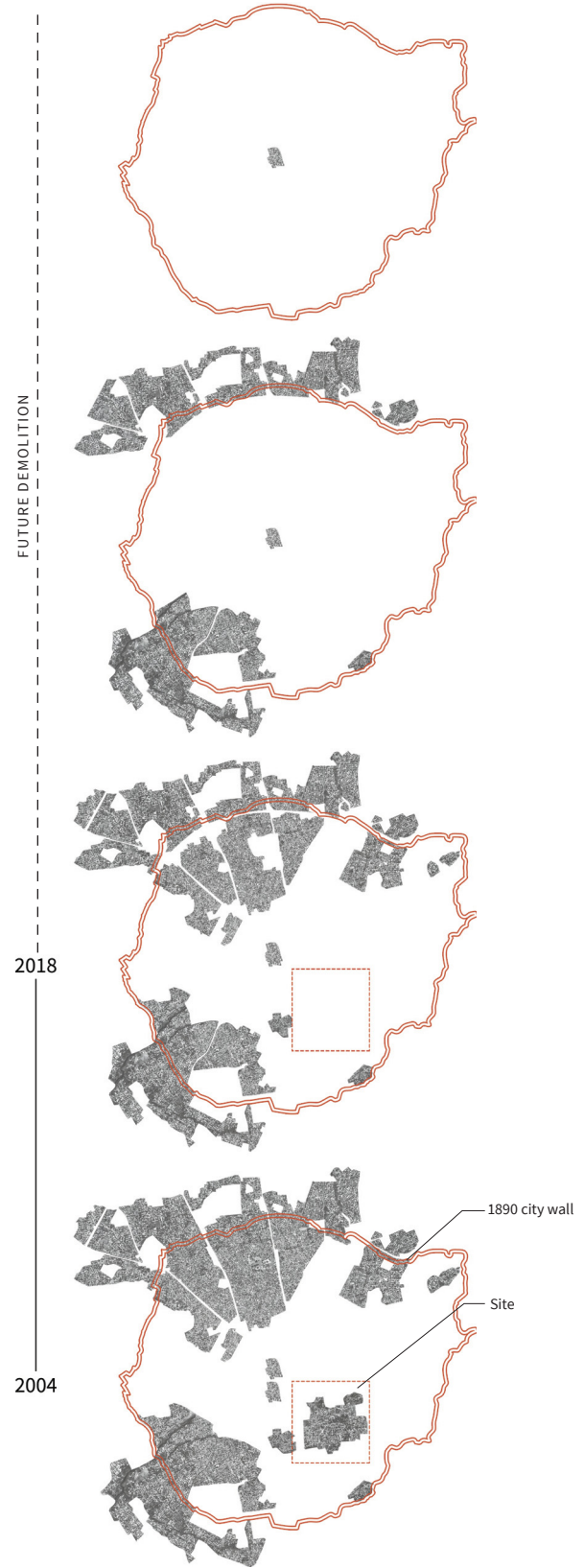
As the new districts rose with the help from volunteers from all over the USSR, a monumental update of the city centre that better represented the courageous Soviet people became necessary. The monument dedicated to the Program of Communism, which incorporated the local language, replaced the statue of Stalin in the square. The new architecture of such heroic spirit such as the Museum of Friendship of Nations and monuments dedicated to the Soviet citizens (The Grave of the Unknown Soldier moved from Moscow to Tashkent and a monument celebrating the courage of Tashkenters after the earthquake) was added to the monumental ensemble of the canal (Stronski 2010, 274-5). The extension of the city centre in the old town also was embellished with Soviet monumentalism of heroic spirit, leaving in between - shrinking islands of the Medieval fabric.

### **Independent Tashkent**

After the sudden fall of the Soviet Union, independent Uzbekistan replaced the Soviet rhetoric with nationalism built upon re-invented traditions while maintaining the same repressive regime (Tlostanova 2018, 27). Tashkent remained a city of political imagery. Long lost original meanings of the rhetorical spaces were replaced again; streets and squares were renamed, the Soviet era monuments replaced. Instead of heralding a great future like the Soviet monuments, the

new national narrative sought to return to its distant past through re-invention of traditions. The statue of Karl Marx in the square was replaced with the sculpture of the new hero of the Uzbek nation - Amir Temur - an emperor from the 14th century, who during the Soviets was depicted as an evil and bloodthirsty leader (Stronski 2010, 258). Lenin Square (previously Red Square) was renamed Independence Square, the administrative buildings were renovated - mostly encased in reflective glass and embellished in revived traditional motives - resembling the grandiose Stalinist architecture of the Soviets (Chukhovich, 2017b).

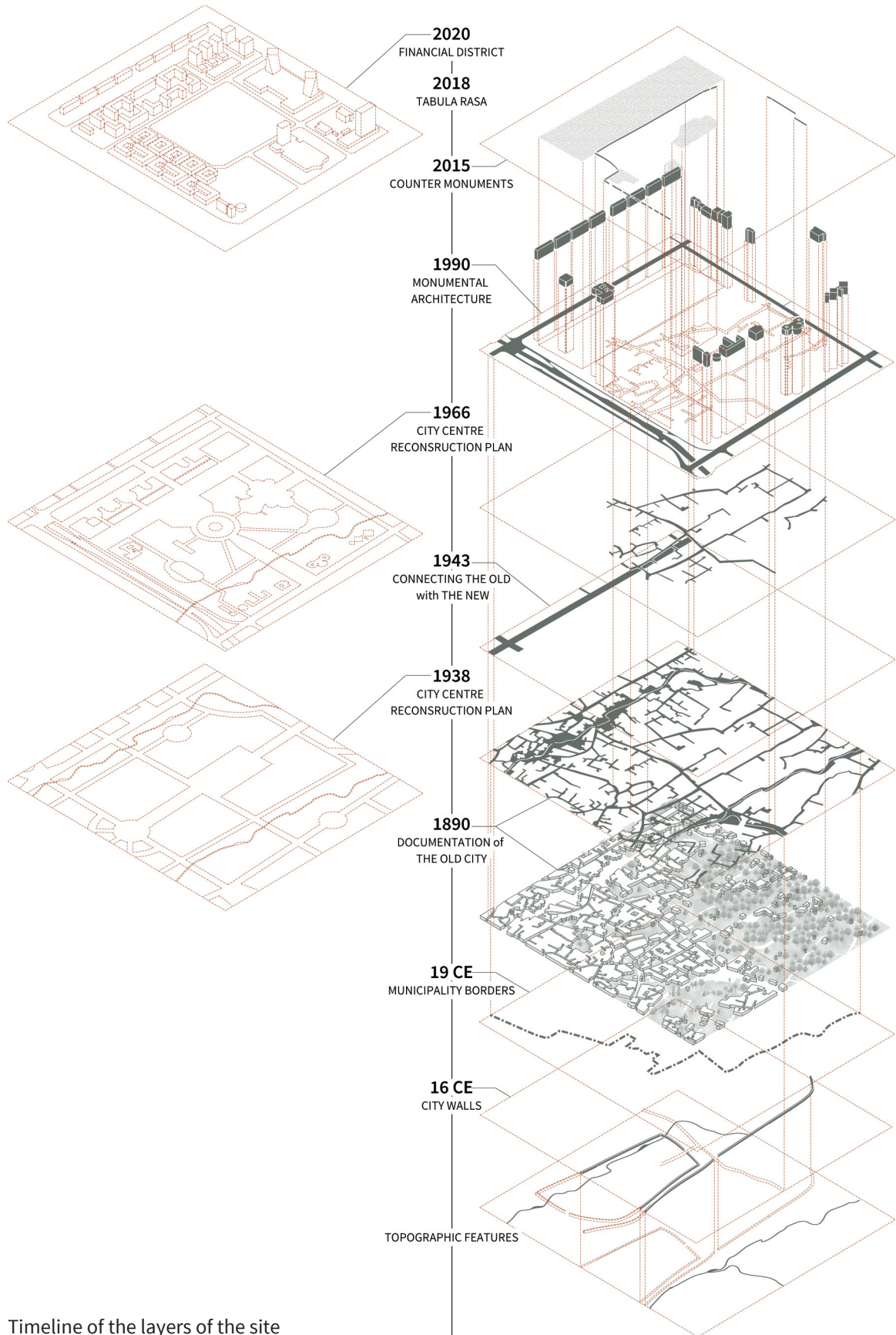
While condemning the Soviets for the destruction of the country's past; the approach of the new state to urban planning relies upon the same destruction. Cursed since the beginning of its modern history, the Old Town is demolished district-by-district. The remaining island of the old town in the extension of the city centre was demolished, as well as the surrounding heroic architecture of the 'traumatic' Soviet past, to make room for a new financial district currently being constructed (Chukhovich, 2017b).



The demolition sequence of the medieval fabric of Tashkent

### CHAPTER 3: SITE

The site of this thesis is a field in the Old Town, incorporated into the rhetorical landscape of the city centre during the Soviet years. Currently a super-block, the field's transformation through time manifests the instrumentalization of memory as a mechanism of power. These manifestations are evident in the layers of the site in both urban form through the erasure of the original fabric and architectural form through the abstraction of national forms. Reading these layers reveal that the site has been subjected to multiple *tabulae rasae*, the most recent one (2018) resulting in a complete destruction of the site's fabric, to be replaced with a new financial district. This chapter analyzes the suppressed temporal layers of the site and its landmarks through layered chronological mapping shown on page 19.



Timeline of the layers of the site

## **Layers**

### ***Topographic Features***

The life in Tashkent for many years relied on the elaborate system of irrigation consisting of canals (Baratov, Holmatov, 10). Two of the canals that intersected the site are *Chorsu* and *Chukurkuprik* (Baratov, & Holmatov 1983, 38). They continued to play an essential role in the life of the area until they were eventually covered up during the Soviets. The sections of the canals that cut across the site are entirely covered today.

### ***Medieval City Walls***

A portion of the 15th-16th-century walls and the citadel fell within the area of the site. The wall followed the *Chukurkuprik* canal, which acted as an additional barrier before the wall. One of the gates of the wall was also positioned in the site (Muhammadkarimov 2009, 108). The walls were built by the descendants of the Timurids dynasty founded by Amir Temur, who is memorialized through the latest sculpture of the central square. Current constructions in the site presented a perfect opportunity to conduct archaeological excavations in the area of the city wall and the citadel. While glorifying the emperor Amir Temur, the Janus-faced state ignored this opportunity proceeding with the constructions.

### ***Municipality Borders***

In the 19th century, the city was annexed to a different khanate, and both the wall and the citadel were destroyed. Internal disagreements between the local leaders resulted in dividing the city of Tashkent into four municipalities, two of which shared a non-physical border in the site mainly marked by the canal *Chukurkuprik* (Muhammadkarimov 2009, 19).



### ***Medieval Fabric***

The next two layers are informed by the map of 1890 - the earliest detailed documentation of the old town by the Tsarist Russians. They illustrate the circulation and the built-up versus the garden areas. The site at the time consisted of multiple residential divisions called *mahallas* with of one or two-storey mud brick courtyard houses and gardens accessed through cul-de-sacs.

### ***1938 Soviet Reconstruction Plan***

Because of its proximity to the new town, the plan proposes to incorporate the site into the rhetorical ensemble of the city centre, proposing a park surrounded by monumental structures. Additionally, in the place of the main street that cuts across the site and the two canals, the plan proposes a straight avenue (Meuser 2016, 33). The plan was not realized as it was replaced by another similar plan in 1966.

### ***Navoi Avenue***

The first attempt at realization of the 1938 reconstruction plan in the old town was the construction of the Navoi avenue. It was also the first attempt at connecting the old town with the new. Constructed through straightening and widening the main street of the city, the avenue allowed for both a physical and a visual connection between the centre of the new town to the centre of the old town (Meuser 2016, 35).

### ***1966 Soviet Reconstruction Plan***

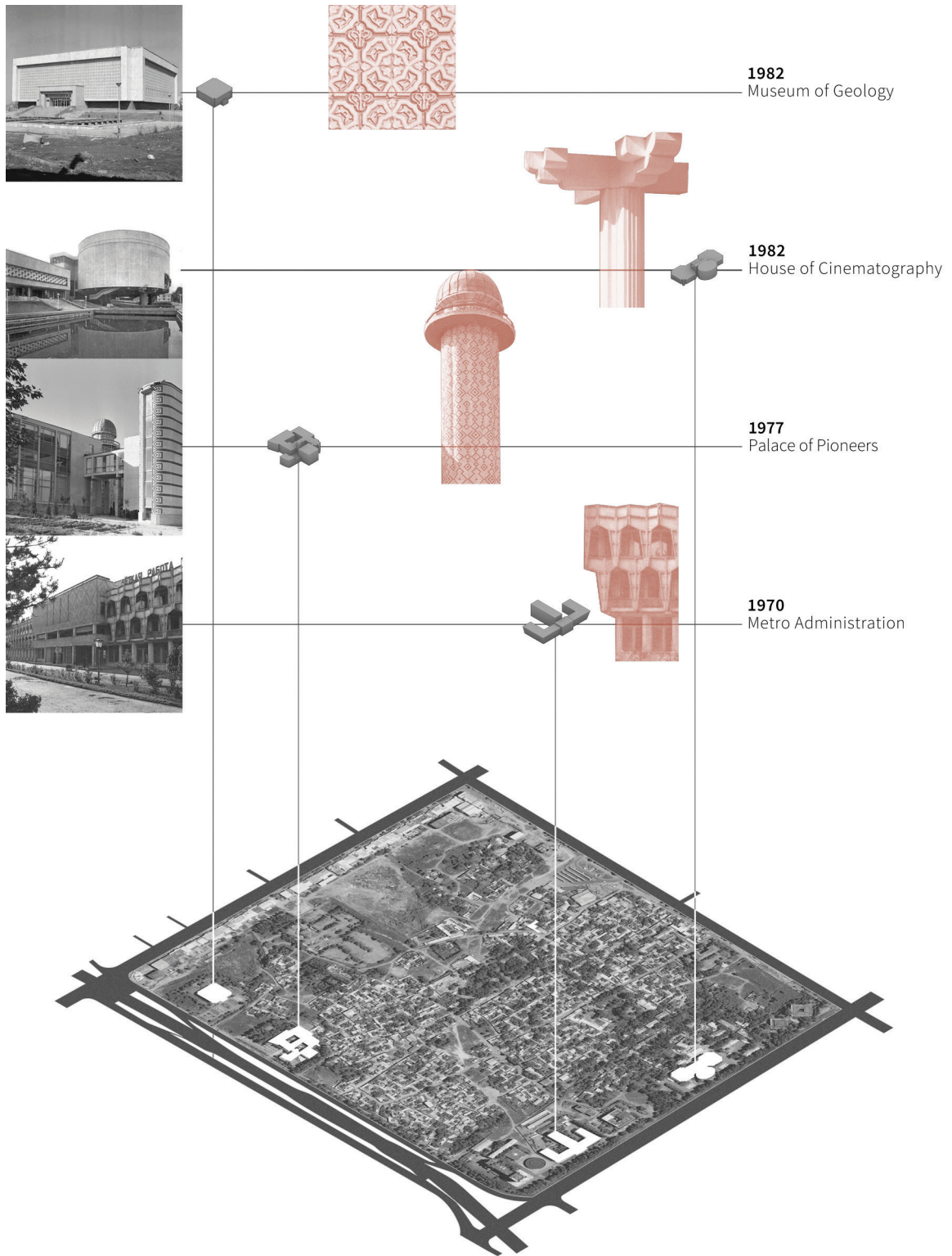
The plan from 1966 is a more elaborated version of the previous plan. It proposes a monumental park surrounded by cultural buildings in place of the neighborhoods in the area (Das

Österreichische Architekturmuseum, under “Soviet Modernism 1955–1991”). The park’s radiating plan with a monumental centre mirrors the radiating plan of the new town. Unlike the previous plan, the realization of this plan became more achievable after the 1966 earthquake destroyed an immense amount of houses in the old town (Meuser 2016, 63).

### ***Soviet Architecture***

The realization of the 1966 reconstruction plan began with the construction of administrative and cultural buildings along the periphery of the area. In comparison to the early monumental Soviet architecture of the city, these buildings were more experimental in their formal vocabulary. Even though the Stalinist era was over, the architects were still incorporating local motives into their designs. Handcrafted during Stalin’s era, these motives now were abstracted and mass-produced (Castillo 1997, 44).

These buildings were built between the 1970’s and the 1990’s, leaving an island of medieval fabric in the middle, to be replaced by a park. This however, was never realized. While most of the neighborhoods in proximity to the centre were replaced by socialist housing buildings after the earthquake, the remaining neighborhoods in the site were not continued their existence until after the independence.



Soviet cultural and administrative buildings in the site that utilize abstraction of traditional forms shown on the 2004 map (Google Earth, 2019) (Das Österreichische Architekturmuseum, under “Soviet Modernism 1955–1991”)

### ***Construction Wall***

The rumours about the demolition of the remaining neighborhoods in the area persisted since the 1966 earthquake. Finally in 2011, the area was surrounded with green corrugated metal walls - typical barriers that mark the construction sites in the city. Initially accessed from all around the periphery of the block, the neighborhoods could only be accessed from certain openings along the wall (Latipov, 2017). The wall also created a visual barrier blocking the “embarrassing” views into the neighborhood condemned for its backwardness since the arrival of the Russians in the 19th century. Regardless of the wall, the demolition of the area remained a rumour as the demolition did not begin for a few more years.

### ***Counter-monuments***

This layer is marked by the panic of the public and the documentation of the site resulting from it. As one of the few areas with the remaining medieval fabric in the city centre, the neighbourhoods were familiar to the majority of the inhabitants of Tashkent. In 2015, as rumours about the demolition started to turn into reality, people in disbelief started documenting their walks through the neighbourhoods and post them in public blogs (Sklyarevskiy 2015, under “Progulka po Almazaru”). In a way, the walks resembled Robert Smithson’s tour of Passaic, New Jersey, where he navigated around an American suburbia through dystopian elements he called “monuments,” and wastelands - “monumental vacancies” (Smithson 1967, 52-57). Similarly, along with the actual monuments of the area, such as the first Russian-Turkic school and the WWII monument, the walkers navigated the decaying neighbourhoods with uniform houses through unexpected landmarks, such as wastelands



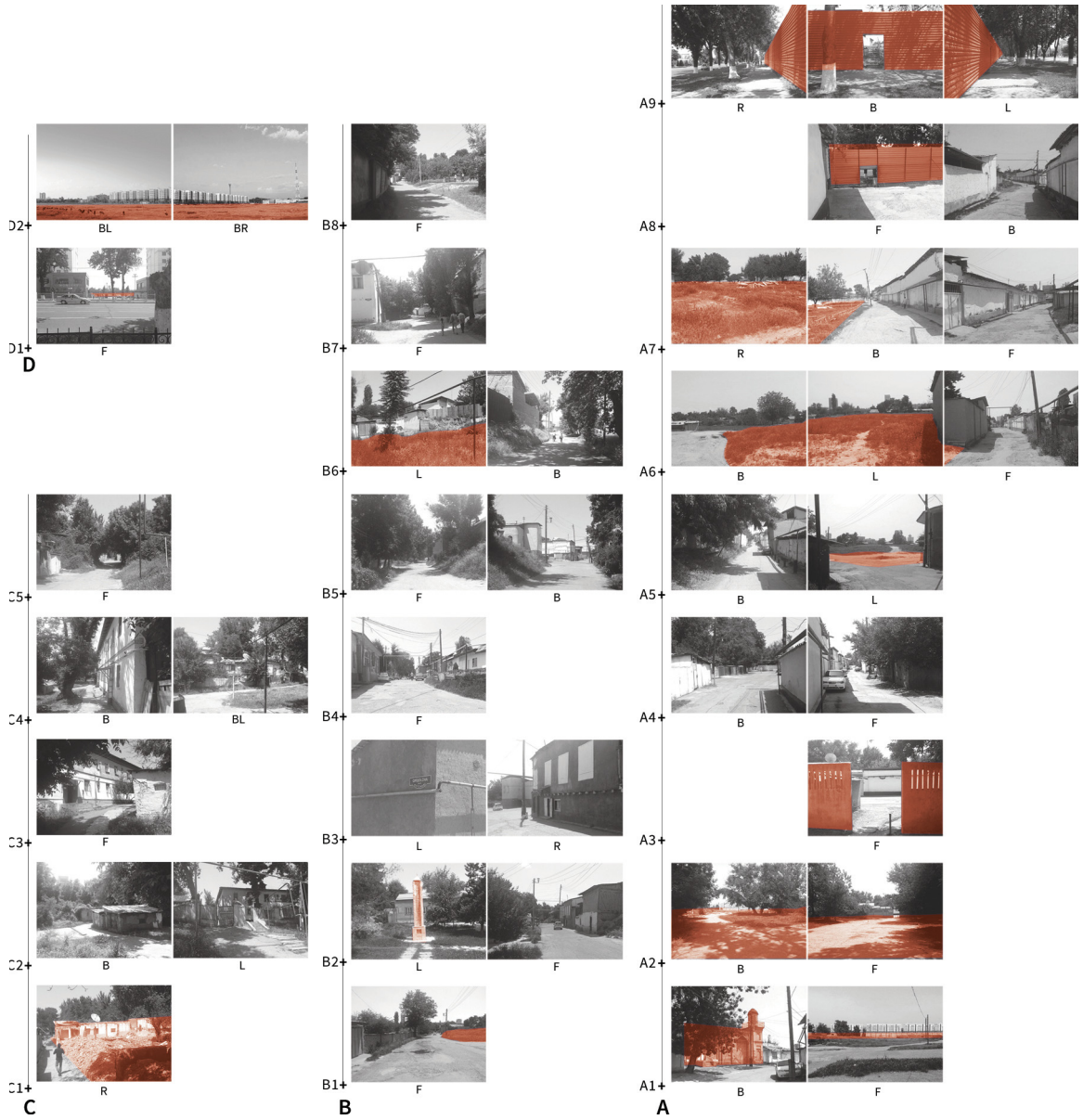
2015 documentation paths (A, B, C, D); landmarks shown in colour (Google Earth, 2019)

and barriers. This wastelands and barriers were used as points of reference, landmarks with accidental monumental qualities, or counter-monuments (Smithson 1967, 55).

The tone of the narratives that accompanied the posted photographs was positively hopeful. One of the posts read:

In this alley on the right, several houses were demolished, maybe that's why the rumor spread that all of the [neighborhood] was urgently being demolished. But it is clear that the work has been suspended, no more houses are being demolished (Sklyarevski, 2015c).

The uncertainty of the public demonstrates that the decisions of the state to dislocate the residents of the areas affected by demolitions, were made without consulting the public, and moreover, were not shared with them in a timely manner.



Documentation of the site; photographs along the four paths shown on the map in the previous page (Sklyarevskiy, 2015)

***Financial District***

The neighbourhood and the Soviet monumental architecture surrounding it was demolished in 2018, creating yet another clean slate for a new urban layer. Defined by its wastelands, or monumental vacancies, the super-block itself became a monumental vacancy within the map of Tashkent.

The current proposal that is being realized on the site is for a financial centre to be completed in 2020, consisting of several high-rise buildings surrounding a monumental park in the middle - resembling the Soviet proposals from both the 30's and the 60's, as seen on pg. 19.

2019



2018



2004



The site in three stages after the independence (Google Earth, 2019)



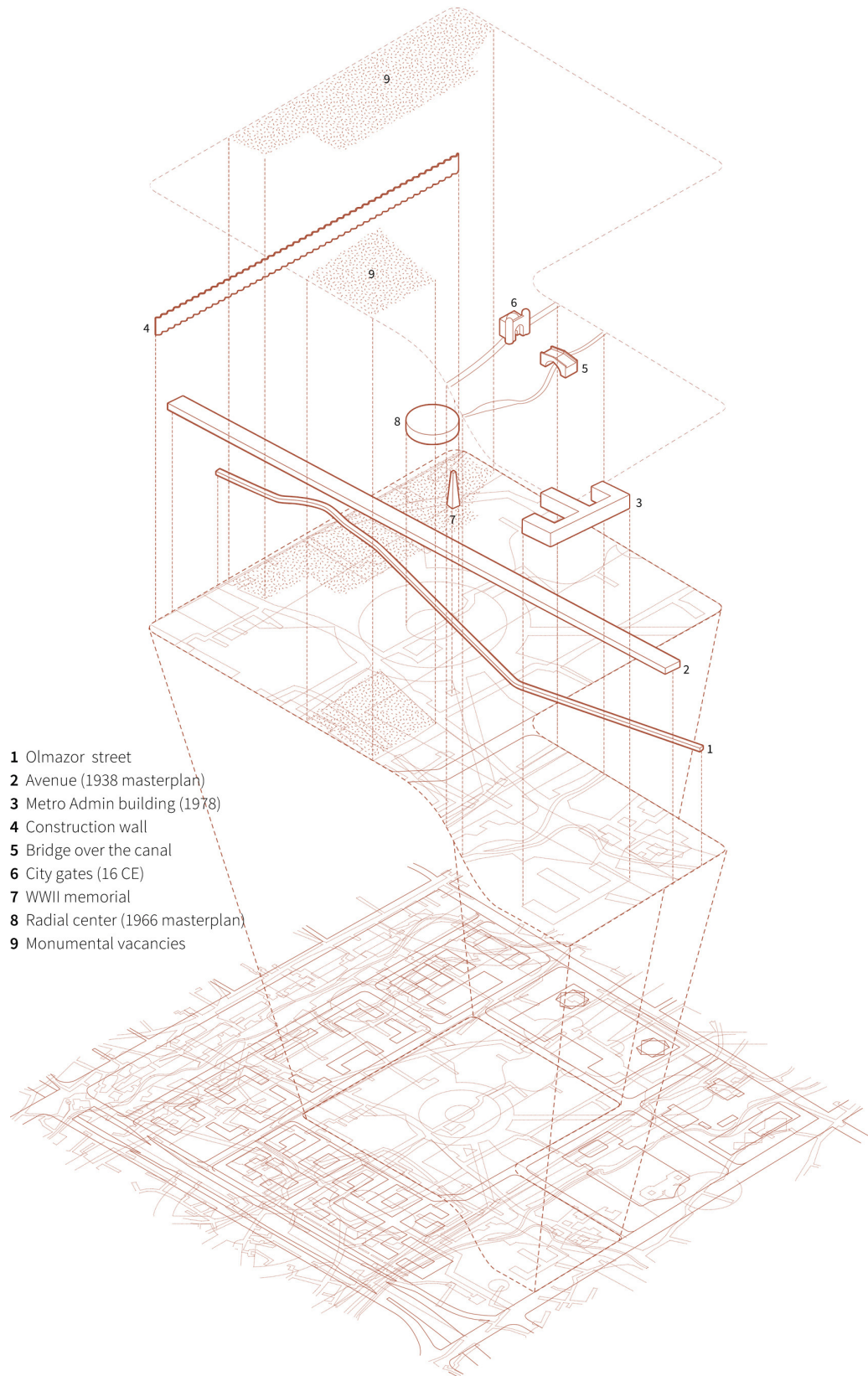
## CHAPTER 4: METHOD

### Palimpsest

According to Freud, the simultaneity of multiple conflicting content is only possible in the mind (Vidler 1992, 201). This thesis aims to achieve this simultaneity in spatial terms through the use of a palimpsestic approach as a method to design. The form-organization of the design is developed through the superposition of layers of the site, imagined as a single plane, a palimpsest. Along with the documentation of physical features of the site, the layers include historical events, mental maps and unrealized projects. From the palimpsest, main paths and landmarks are extracted to be recontextualized within the design. These elements both mark the locations of the elements and inform them formally, as well as conceptually. Hoesli remarks that such method of form-organization “permits to incorporate the heterogeneous elements in a complex architectural or urban tissue, to treat them as essential part of collective memory and not as embarrassment” (Rowe, Slutzky, & Hoesli 1997, 99).

[Simultaneity] exists where a locus of space can be referred to two or several systems of relations - where the assignment remains undetermined and the belonging to one or the other remains a matter of choice. (Rowe, Slutzky, & Hoesli 1997, 85)

The design of each element and their relationships ensure to the conveyance multiple meanings and speak to multiple pasts. These meanings are activated through personal engagement by “focusing on one of the possible readings of form relations that are latent, inherent or implied in the form organization” (Rowe, Slutzky, & Hoesli 1997, 99). This method aims to counter the prescribed linear memory narrative of the rhetorical landscapes, by allowing the user freedom of choice to be involved and interpret the past.



The palimpsest map and the extracted elements

## Recontextualizing the Past

While informed by the previous landmarks, the project does not seek to return to the authentic experiences of the erased pasts. The design of the elements defamiliarizes the original landmarks of the palimpsest offering new ways to interpret the past. According to Tlostanova, such repetition with variation offers a way of “reliving the main elements of erased and distorted indigenous axiological systems while taking into account the temporal lag and the struggles and oppositions, the compromises and the losses that have taken place within it” (Tlostanova 2017, 59). The landmarks are reimagined in reference to their context - the imposed ideologies and the erasures resultant from them. The extracted elements then are defamiliarized by deconstructing and recontextualizing not only the forms but also the intents of the original landmarks. In his essay “The Third Typology,” Vidler remarks that:

When a series of typical forms are selected from the past of a city, they do not come, however dismembered, deprived of their original political and social meaning. The original sense of the form, the layers of accrued implication deposited by time and human experience cannot be lightly brushed away; ... the carried meanings of these types may be used to provide a key to their newly invested meanings. (Vidler 1976, 15)

The defamiliarized meanings of the reimagined elements not only offer freedom of interpretation and heightened readings of the familiar, but also intend to convey metaphoric oppositions to the original intents of the landmarks. According to Vidler, the act of dismembering embodies metaphoric oppositions, or as Stewart describes the notion of the grotesque, it presents the jumbling of the order (Stewart 1993, 105). These oppositions through grotesque are achieved by defamiliarizing the elements of the past using transformation tools (e.g. scaling, inversion, extrusion, shifting, rotating) both formally and conceptually.

## CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF THE ELEMENTS

The area of the project is defined by the most recent layer of the palimpsest - the proposed park area of the current reconstruction plan (see pg. 29). Within those boundaries, landmarks and select paths are extracted from the palimpsest. Kevin Lynch identifies landmarks as one of the urban elements that make up mental maps of a city (Lynch 1964, 46). He defines them as easily identifiable external points of orientation. In addition to the traditionally defined landmark monuments, this project considers the counter-monuments of the site as landmarks as well. In order to represent multiple suppressed temporal layers, the thesis considers speculative landmarks as well. The built landmarks include the Soviet monuments of the site, and the counter-monuments utilized to navigate the site in the online blog posts of 2015, as well as the city gate from the 16th century, representing another erased layer of the site. The unbuilt landmarks include a speculative bridge over the canal *Chukurkuprik*, to act as a device to activate the memories of the canal, and a monumental centre of the unrealized 1966 reconstruction plan that mirrors the centre of the new town into the site.

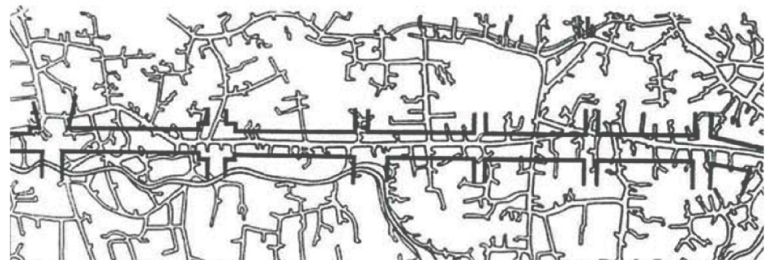
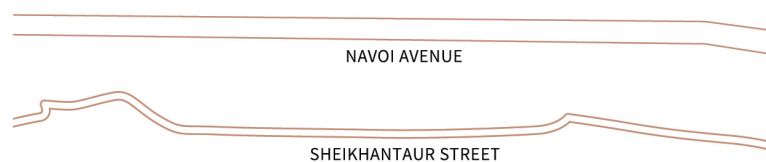
Along with the landmarks, two overlapping paths are extracted from the palimpsest to connect the elements and to offer two different readings of the site. The first path is the winding Medieval street that had a persistent presence through multiple layers of the palimpsest up until the demolition of the area in 2018 (see pg. 32). The second path is an unrealized avenue - a straight version of the first path, extracted from the 1938 reconstruction plan that suggested to straighten and widen the original winding street.

## Paths

The two extracted paths offer contrasting readings of the elements as they are ideologically opposing. The Olmazor street arguably is the most critical path of the site because of its persistence throughout the layers of the palimpsest. The speculated location of the gate from the 16th century suggests that the street marked one of the entrances to the city, highlighting its significance.

Additionally, the name of the street also speaks to its importance. The neighbourhoods in the area carry the same name as the street, rendering it as the main path of the area. The name is also a toponym, a place name derived from the reading of the physical features of the site. The name Olmazor when translated means “apple orchard” and speaks to the function of the area from an unknown period of time. The street’s name then is a metonym for a larger area of the site.

The Soviet’s also recognized the path’s importance in the first proposed reconstruction plan of the old town. The plan’s primary purpose was to end the urban duality of Tashkent by

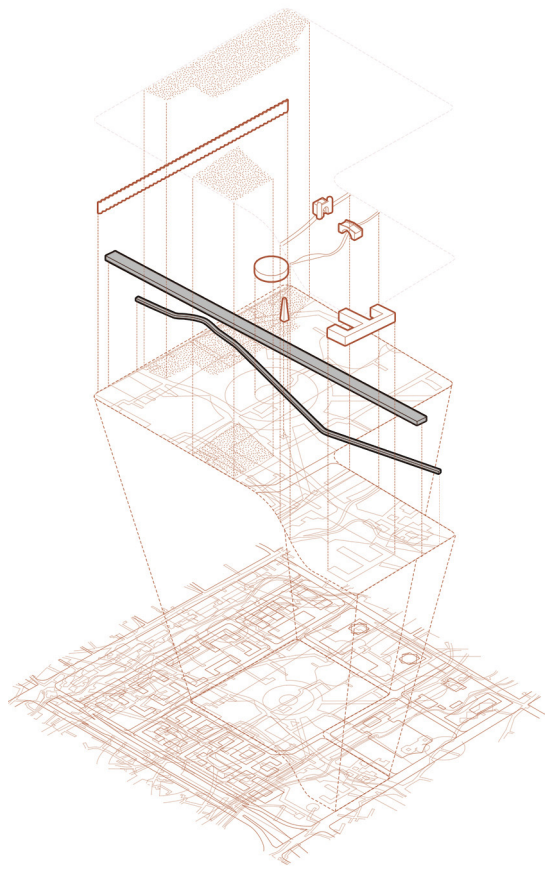


Navoi avenue superimposed over Sheikhan-taur street

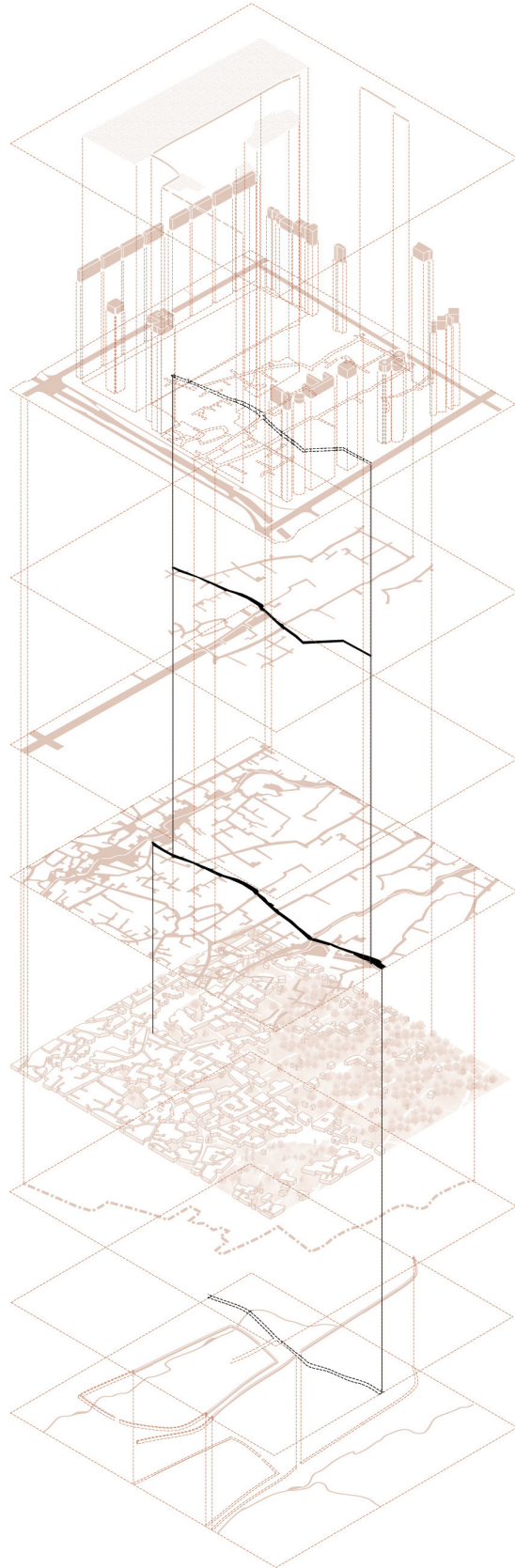


Olmazor avenue superimposed over Olmazor street

joining the old with the new both physically and ideologically as a single Tashkent (Meuser 2017, 25). The new model for this socialist city proposed to replace the Medieval system of winding roads and cul-de-sacs with wide thoroughfares. The first attempt at the plan's realization was the construction of the 66 m wide Navoi avenue in place of the 10 m wide Sheikhan-taur street. Another thoroughfare proposed was the Olmazor avenue to replace the Olmazor street. This imagined, however unrealized avenue is reimagined in this thesis as an alternative path countering the main street, offering another possible reading of the elements.



Situating the paths



Persistence of the *Olmazor* street throughout the palimpsest layers

## **Metro Administration Building**

The Metro Administration building was one of the first large-scale buildings built in the area in the '70s. The building is a latter-day manifestation of the oriental approach to architecture initiated before the Second World War. As architects gained more freedom of experimentation after the “thaw” period, initially preferred hand-crafted traditional motifs became more abstracted and mass-produced (Castillo 1997, 44).

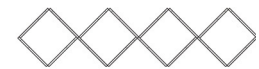
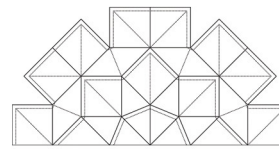
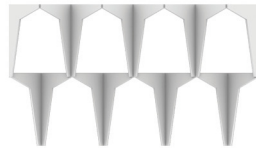
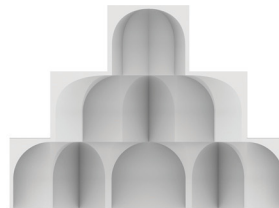
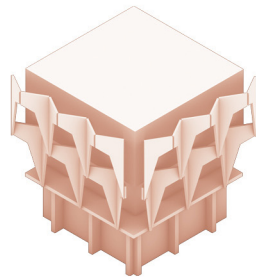
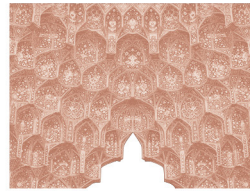
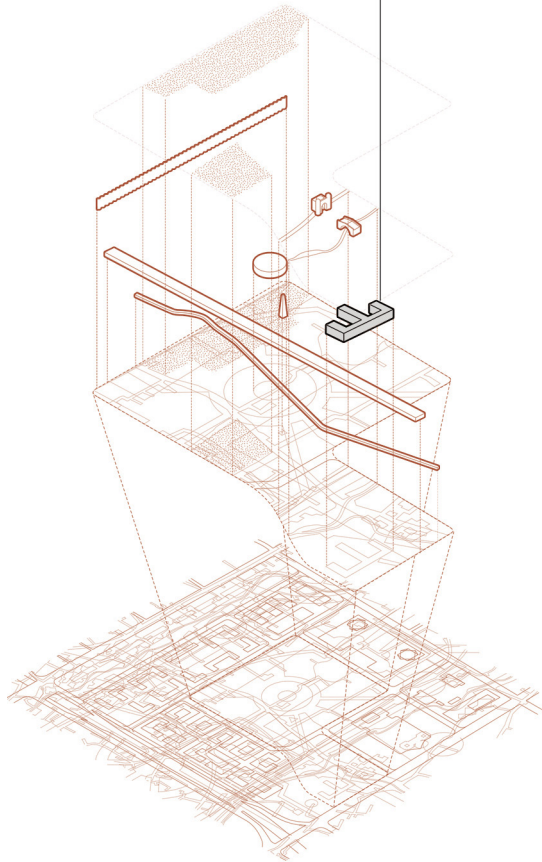
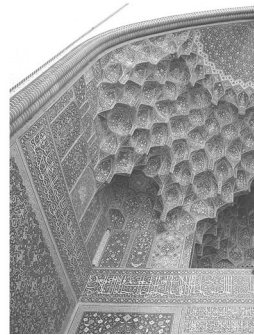
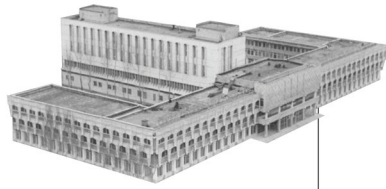
The facade element of the Metro building presents another abstracted iteration of muqarnas - a popular element of Islamic architecture to reinterpret in the predominantly Muslim Soviet republics. Originally, muqarnas are used to transition from a rectangular structure to a dome, and are made in various complexities. The facade of the Metro building is a repetition of one unit, mirrored and stacked. The oversimplified muqarnas of the facade acts as a screen, changing the original intent of the element, separating the form from function.

The building is extracted for two reasons: as a manifestation abstraction of traditional forms and as a representation of the urban ideals of another suppressed temporality - a city centre with prestigious architecture at exposed locations, while the remaining old fabric was left to decay (Meuser 2016, 25). The building was reconstructed after the independence and continued to function until the demolitions in the site began. The building was demolished in 2018 along with the other Soviet cultural and administrative buildings that surrounded the super-block.

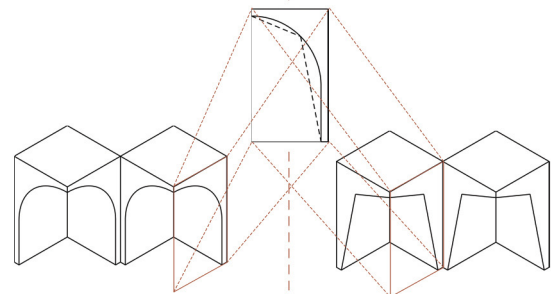


MUQARNAS

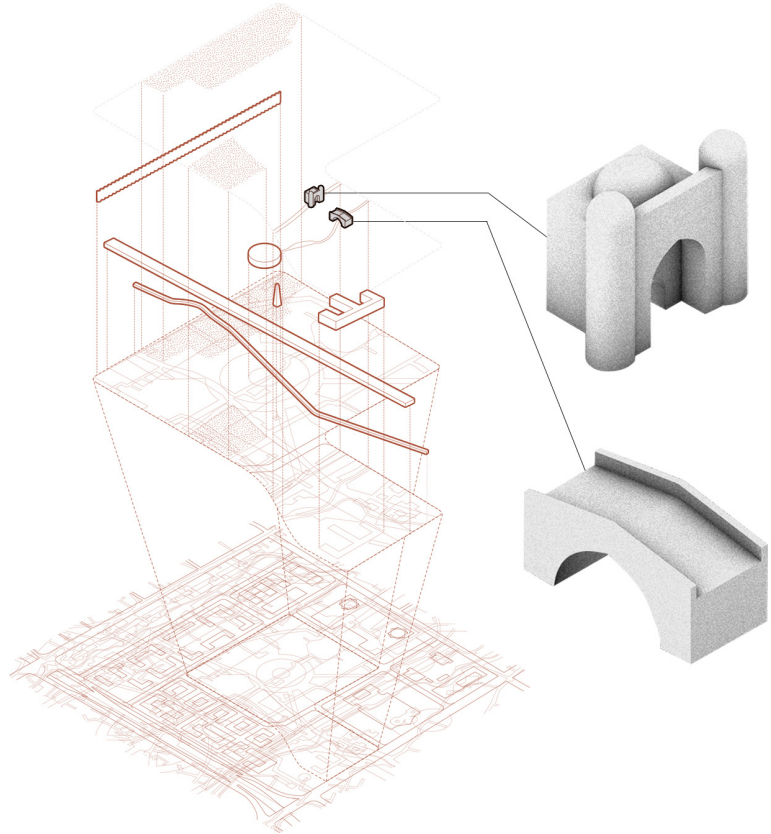
ABSTRACTION



Situating the Metro Administration Building



Abstraction of *muqarnas* as a facade element



Situating the bridge and the gate

## Bridge

A speculative bridge is extracted in order to mark the location of the once present canal *Chukurkuprik*. A bridge is selected as a structure to represent the canal, not only for obvious reasons, but also because of the name of the canal. The toponym *Chukurkuprik*, when translated from Uzbek, means “a deep bridge.” Additionally, the bridge represents both a link between the two municipalities from the 19th century and a boundary, as the canal once was, achieving a simultaneity of two contrasting ideas.

## Gate

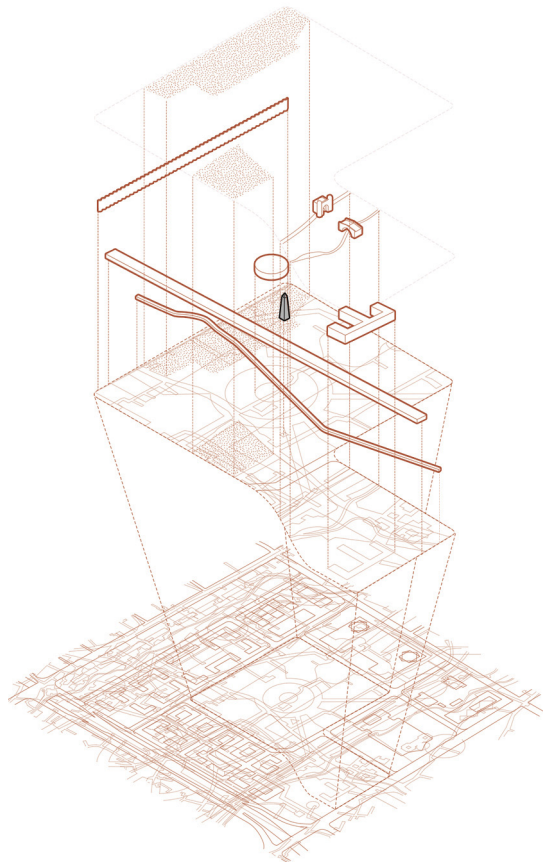
The city gate is extracted to represent another erasure - the demolition of the 16th-century city walls. The form of the

gate is not documented; therefore, this thesis references a typical Islamic city gate structure with a grand opening and two minarets on each side. Even though the gate speaks to another erased temporality, it is the only structure extracted from a distant past. Unlike the other landmarks, it remains within the realm of history. Therefore the reimagined gate presents a design opportunity to differentiate between history (as a constructed artifice) and memory (as a lived expression) (Boyer 1994, 69).

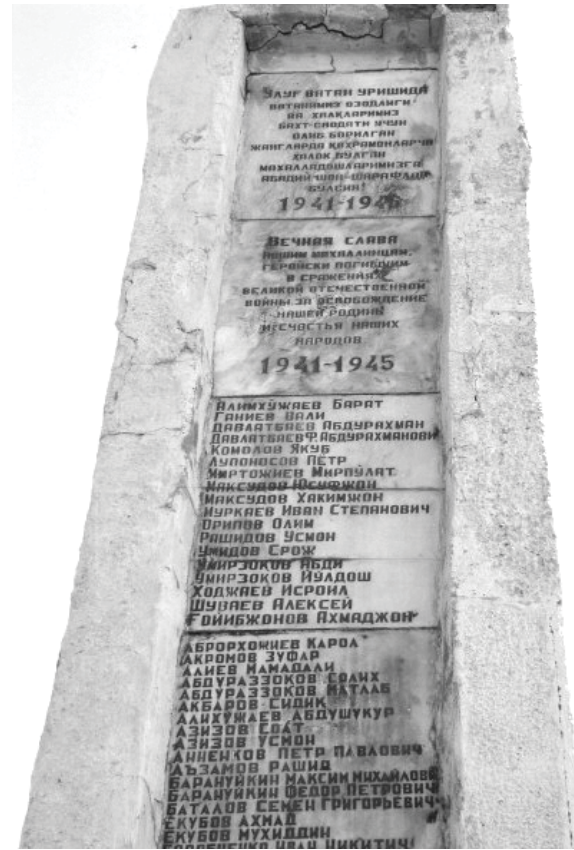
### **WWII Memorial**

The WWII memorial was installed in the neighbourhood in 1967. It memorializes the two hundred fallen residents of the neighbourhoods during the Second World War by listing their names on slabs of marble tiles laid on a concrete obelisk. The memorial is selected as one of the elements for its intentionality as a landmark, and its representation of the residents of the area.

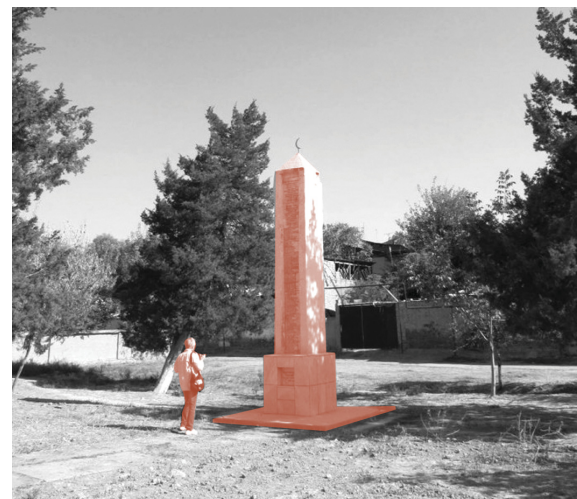
Formally a foreign concept, an obelisk, as a vertical, solid, and free-standing structure, can be contrasted with another familiar vertical structure, a minaret - a hollow and non-autonomous building element. The form of the reimagined landmark speaks to this contrast by reimagining the obelisk as a minaret. It references another landmark in the super-block - the minaret of the Pioneer's Palace (1977). The form of the minaret of the Pioneer's Palace is an abstraction of a traditional minaret. Additionally, the location of the minaret within the building complex speaks to the displacement of traditions through the severance of the structure from its context. The reimagined memorial presents an opportunity to reflect on these cultural erasures through abstractions.



Situating the WWII memorial



The names of the war victims listed on the obelisk (Sklyarevski, 2013)



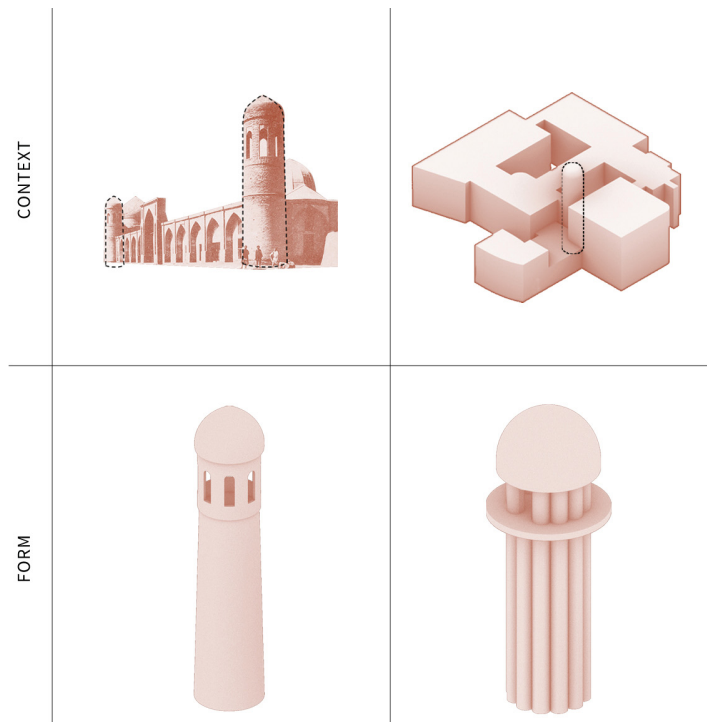
Scale comparison (Sklyarevski, 2013)



Situating the obelisk and the minaret on the 2004 map (Google Earth, 2019)



The Pioneer's Palace (1977)  
 (Das Österreichische  
 Architekturmuseum, under  
 "Soviet Modernism 1955-1991")

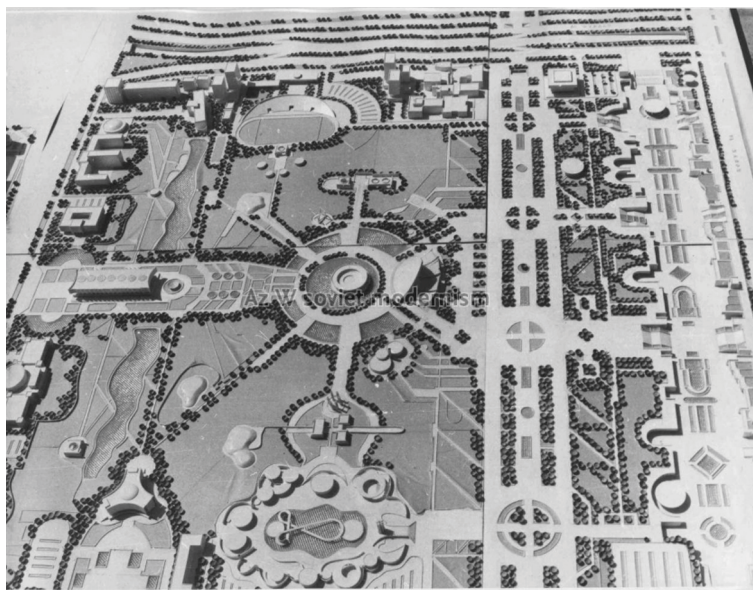


Changing context and form of the minaret

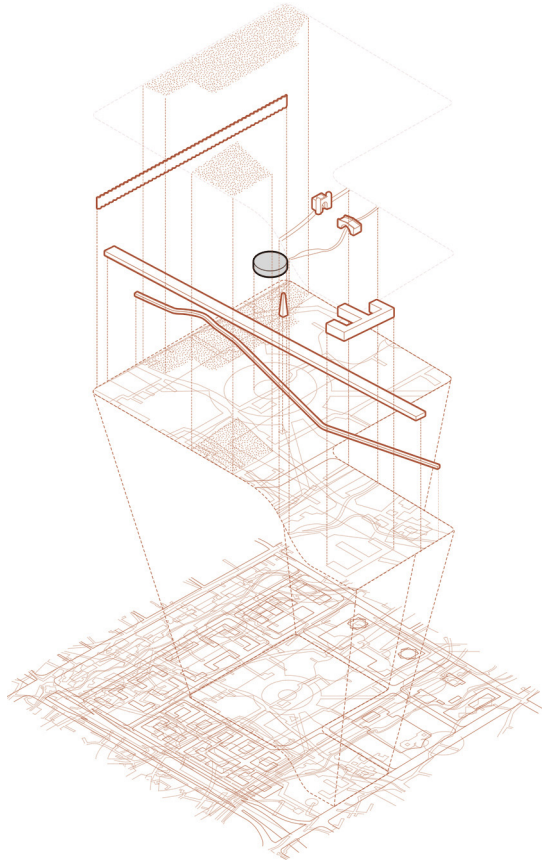
## Monumental Centre of the Park

The 1966 reconstruction plan is very similar to the previous one from 1938, as its vision for the block is typical of ideal socialist building blocks defined by “wide thoroughfares, central squares for mass events and prestigious large scale buildings for the Party and cultural life at exposed locations” (Meuser 2016, 25). It proposes a monumental centre that appears to be speaking to the radial centre of the new town across the canal. When pictured with the context of the new town, the location of the proposed centre mirrors the central square of the new town (see pg. 43).

The design of the new landmark reimagines the monumental centre of the new town, the changing sculpture of the heroes that marked the changes in ideologies of the state (Stewart 1993, 90). According to Stewart, “in the representation of the gigantic within public space, it is important that the gigantic be situated above and over, that the transcended position be denied to the viewer” (Stewart 1993, 89). The reimagined



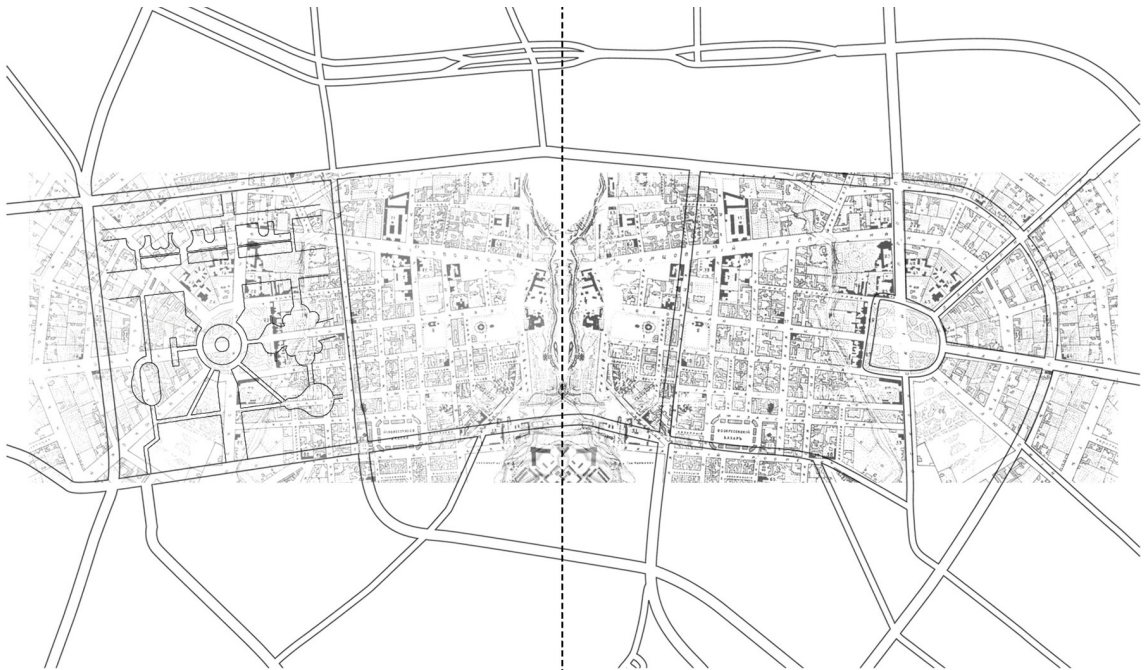
1966 Reconstruction plan (Das Österreichische Architekturmuseum, under “Soviet Modernism 1955–1991”)



Situating the monumental centre



Current and past “town giants”



Abstract map suggesting the mirroring of the central square into the old town along the axis of the canal in the 1966 reconstruction map

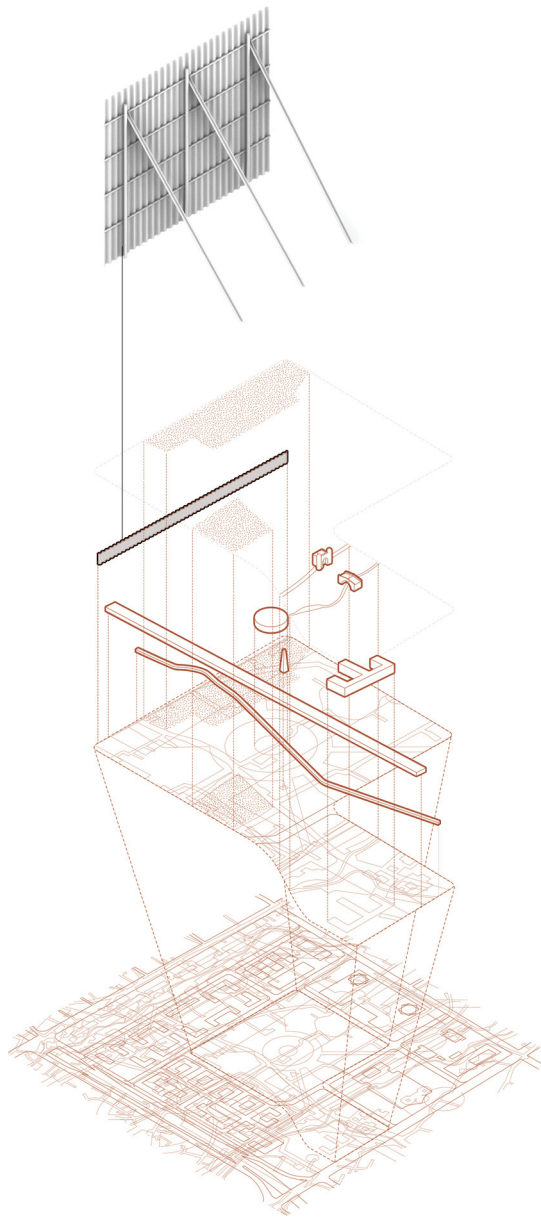
monumental centre presents an opportunity to oppose the imposing position of the town giant within a public space through the method of inversion.

### **Construction Wall**

The demolition of the fabric of the old town by the Soviets demonstrates the state's unrestricted access to the property, both public and private (Meuser 2016, 66). This entitlement of the state has carried forward after the fall of the Soviets. The erection of the construction walls around the neighbourhoods in 2011 was an indication of this entitlement.

The wall obstructed the views into the decaying neighbourhoods, images unfit for the new shiny city. Suddenly the access to the neighbourhoods was limited to specific openings along the walls. All of these changes, in addition to the uncertainty about the futures of their homes, led to the estrangement of the residents who lived in the neighbourhoods for many generations. Their homes were no longer homely. The reimagined wall reflects on these unhomely qualities of the original construction wall.

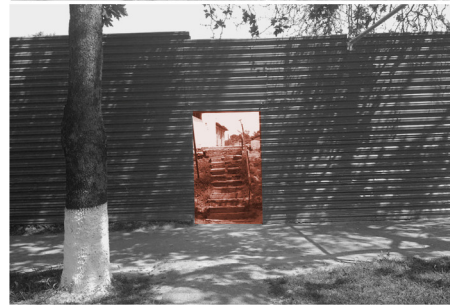




Situating the construction wall



Limited access points to the neighbourhoods along the construction walls

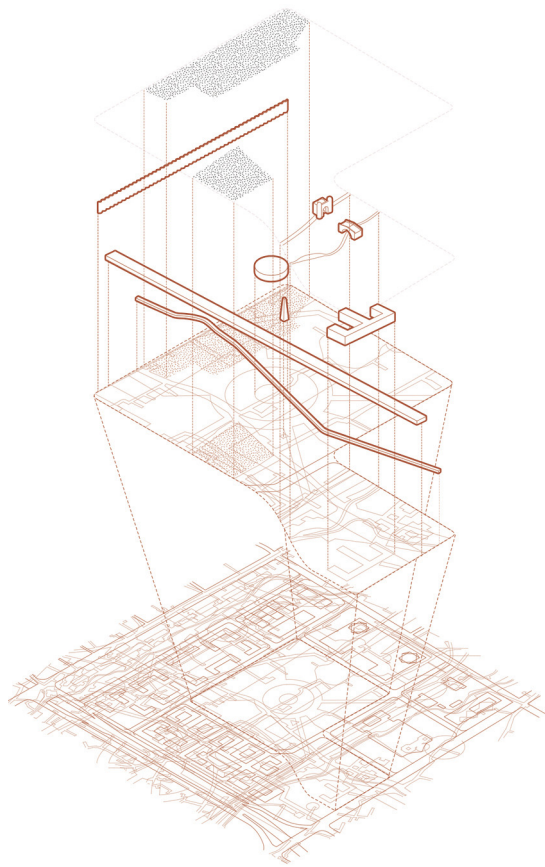


Access openings on the construction walls  
(Sklyarevski, 2015a) (Benua, 2012)

## **Monumental Vacancies**

In the tour of Passaic, Smithson refers to wastelands as “monumental vacancies” that define “without trying, the memory-traced of an abandoned set of futures” (Smithson 1967, 55). In the 2015 walking documentations of the site, such vacancies were given careful attention. Accompanying the photos of these wastelands, the narrator describes their past, which also defines a set of denied futures. These vacancies were opened with unknown projects in mind. However, they were abandoned and remained as wastelands for multiple years, becoming significant features of the area.

These absences within the site are reimagined as presences in the design, enhancing the perception of the new absences - the once built-up areas of the neighborhoods. Additionally, through this inversion, the design attempts to reassign purpose to the abandoned wastelands.



Situating the vacancies



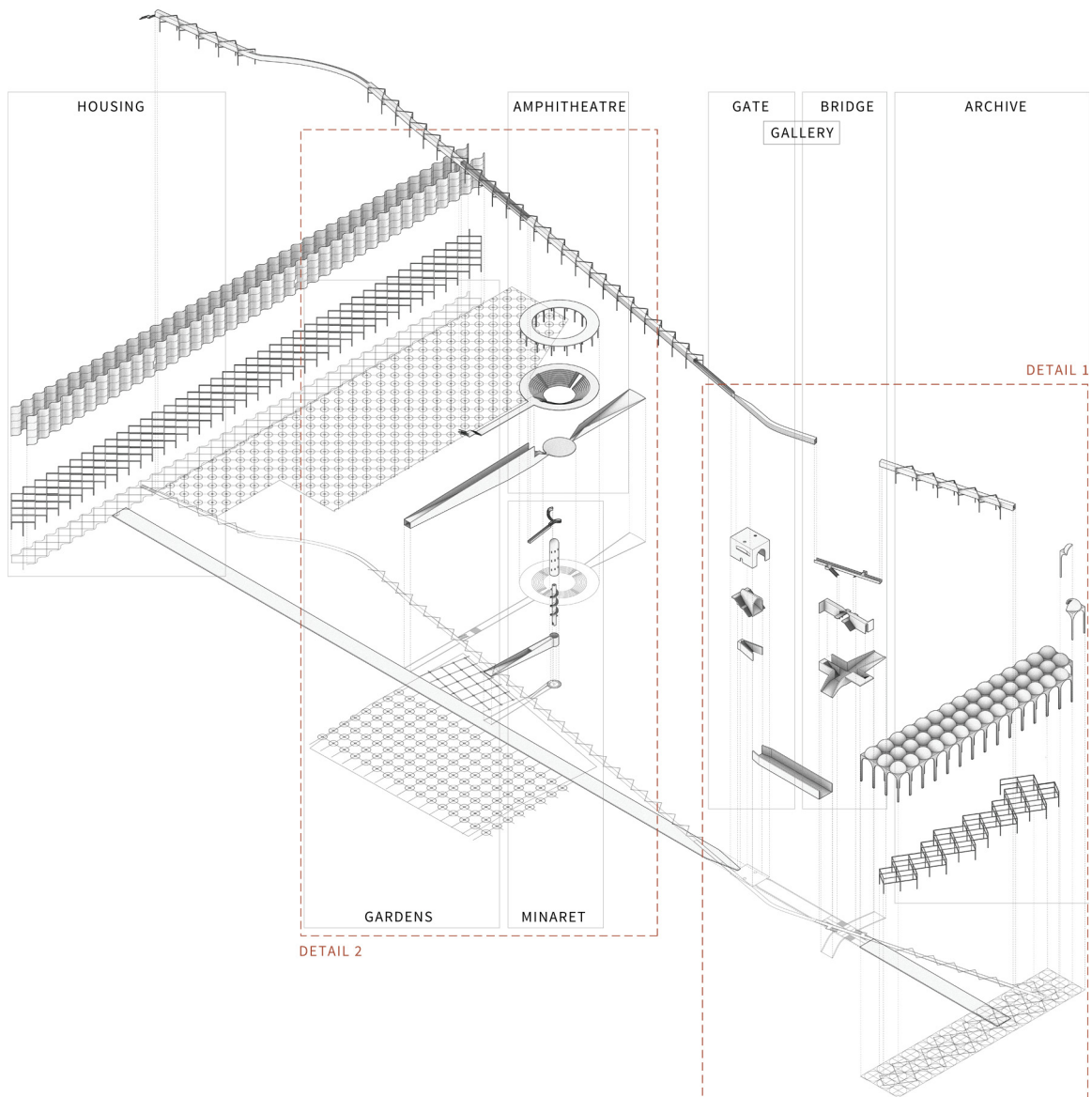
Documentation of the vacancies (Sklyarevski, 2015a)  
(Sklyarevski, 2015b)

## CHAPTER 6: DESIGN RESPONSES

### Paths

The two reimagined paths in the design act as connections between the reimagined landmarks and offer conflicting readings of the design. The first path, the street is extruded and shifted up as a raised walkway above the reimagined avenue on the ground level. The height of the walkway attempts to resist the idea of the wall as a visual barrier. The pathway is mostly covered and only open at specific locations. This design decision speaks to the element of surprise and anticipation inherent in the disappearing old alleys of the old town.

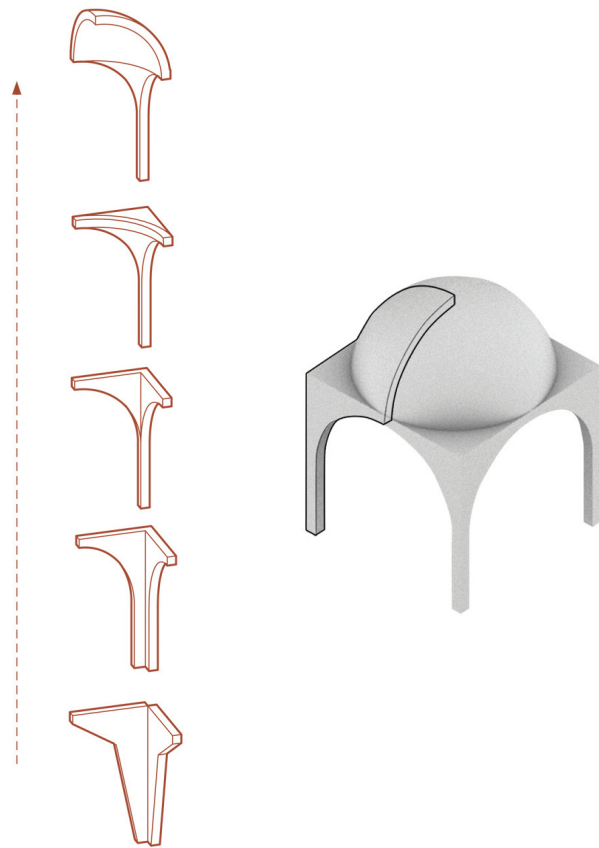
While access to the path is only possible from specific points, the path ensures access to the other elements of the design. In contrast, situated on the ground level, the avenue has unlimited access to it; however, access from it to the landmarks are limited. These limitations are not evident at once, as the visual connections of the avenue suggest false physical connections to the landmarks. These seen but physically impossible connections attempt to oppose the idea of the wide thoroughfares imposed by the Soviets to replace the winding alleys of the old town in order to establish both physical and visual connections.



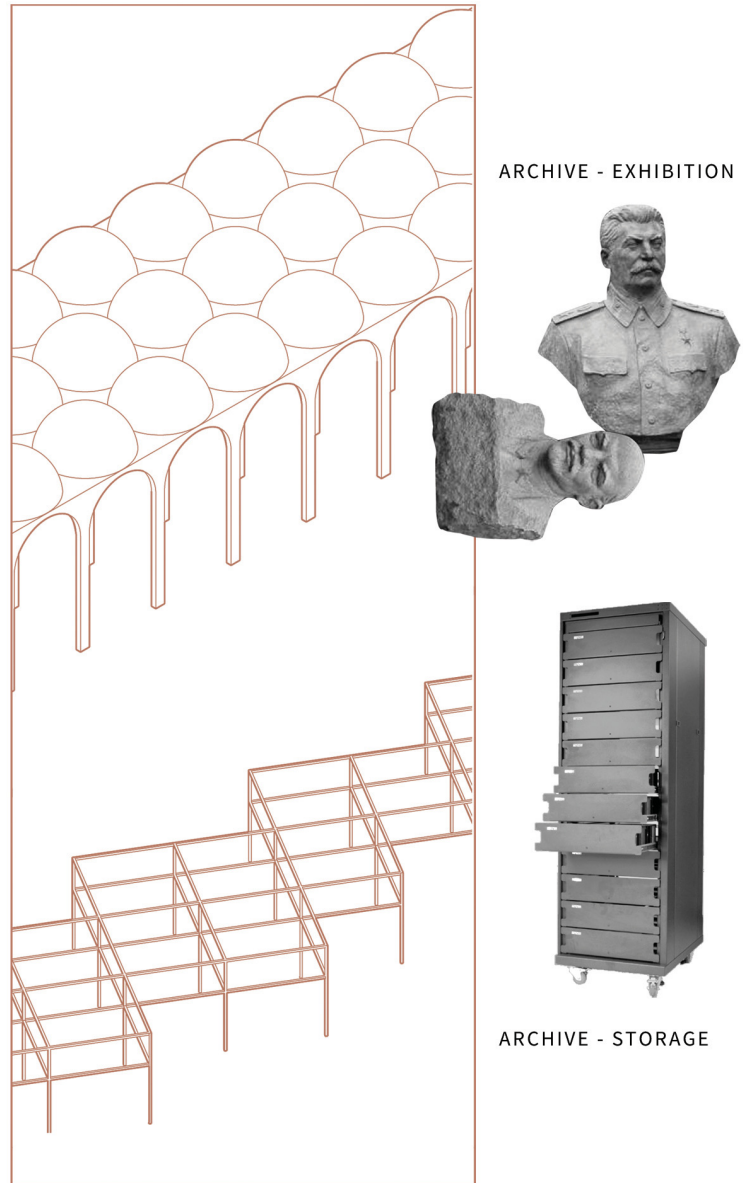
Exploded axonometric of the reimagined elements of the palimpsest; see pages 74-75 for details

## Archive

The Metro Administration building is reimagined as an archive and consists of a repetition of two contrasting structural units. The first type of structural unit is informed by the facade element of the original landmark. The facade element of the landmark is an abstraction of muqarnas, which originally function as structural elements and act as a transition between a rectangular form to a dome. By reattaching this function to the form through reverse-abstraction, the design critiques the orientalist architecture of the Soviets marked with selective preservation and abstraction of traditions. The grid of the resultant dome units is countered with another structural grid - steel scaffolding oriented at an angle of the raised walkway.



Reverse-abstraction of the facade element of the Metro Administration building



Program distribution in the archive: exhibition vs. storage spaces

Programmatically, as an archive, the building opposes the idea of erasure of the past without adequately documenting and archiving it, leading to urban amnesia. Within the archive, there are two sub-programs: storage and exhibition spaces - defined by the contrasting structural systems. The grandiose dome structure houses the exhibit spaces while the scaffolding grid independent of it houses storage spaces, differentiating history from the lived memory.



Rendering of the view of the park from the archive building

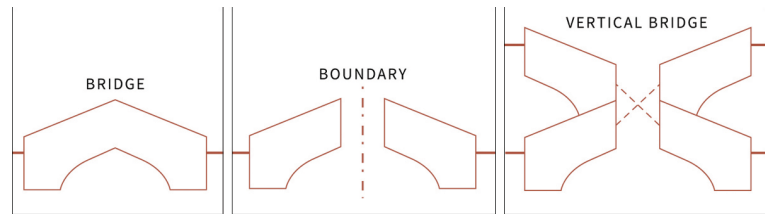




A photograph of the model; view of the park from the archive building emphasizing the raised walkway



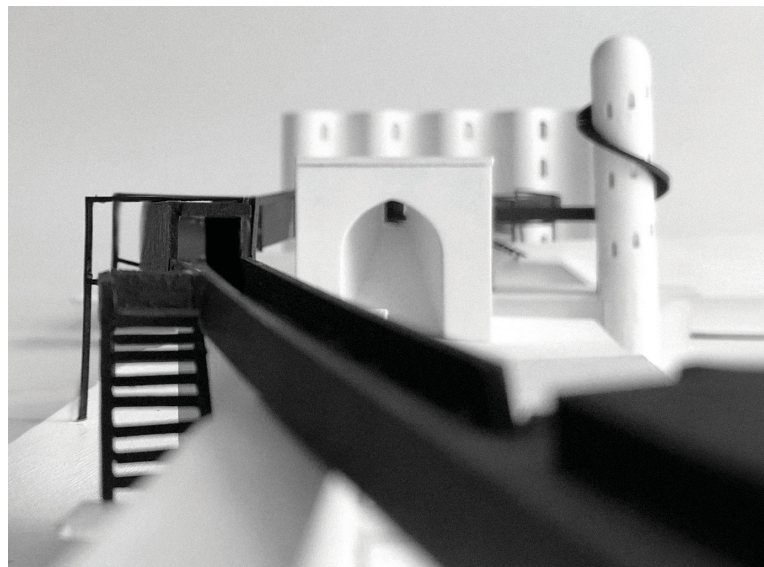
Photographs of the model emphasizing the linear visual connection of the avenue, from the second floor (left) and from the ground level (right)



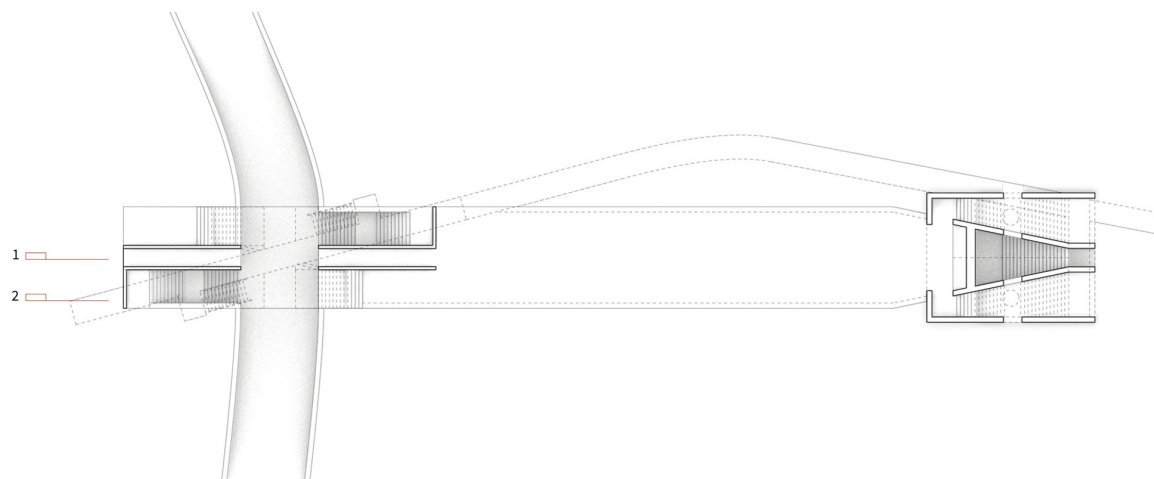
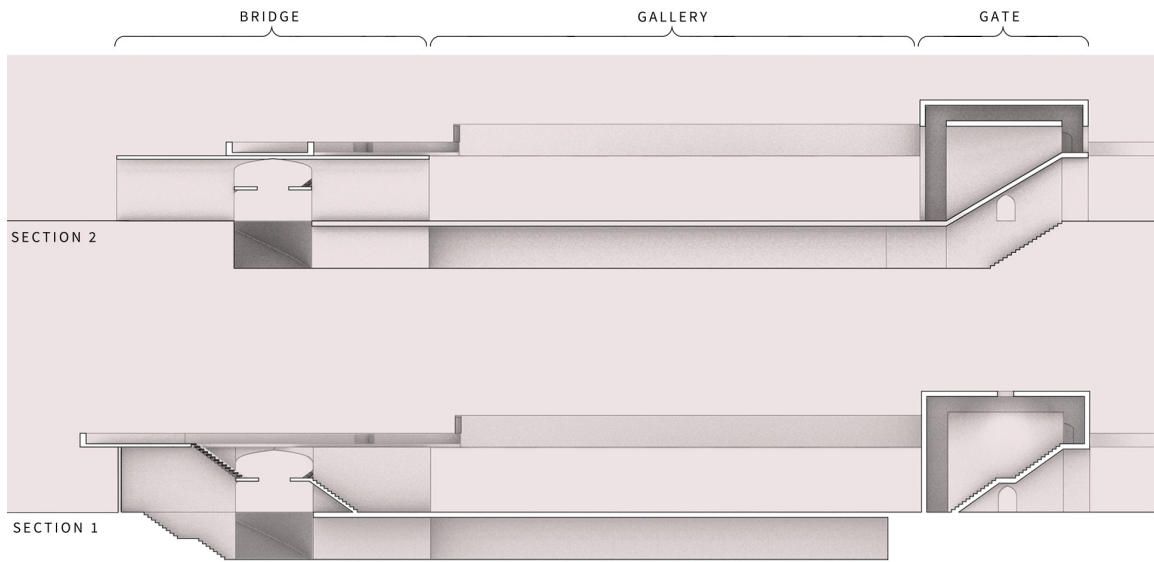
Transformation diagram of the bridge

## Bridge

Part of the avenue, the bridge, when approached from both sides, appears as a connection to the raised walkway on the other side of the canal. However, at the landing of the stairs, the promised connection is interrupted. This interruption speaks to the idea of the canal as a barrier, as it once was between two municipalities. The connection can be made after the participant climbs up another set of stairs, remaining on the same side of the canal. The portion of the walkway above the bridge then is read as a bridge, emphasizing the connectivity ensured by the elevated walkway throughout the design. The interruption of the bridge while referencing the boundary between two municipalities, emphasizes the disruptions caused by the construction of the wide thoroughfares.



View from the elevated walkway above the bridge



Plan and section drawings of the bridge and the gate connected by the underground gallery



Approaching the bridge; suggestion of a connection with the raised walkway



Approaching the landing; revealing the reading of the bridge as a boundary



Reading of the raised walkway above the bridge as a bridge between two interior spaces



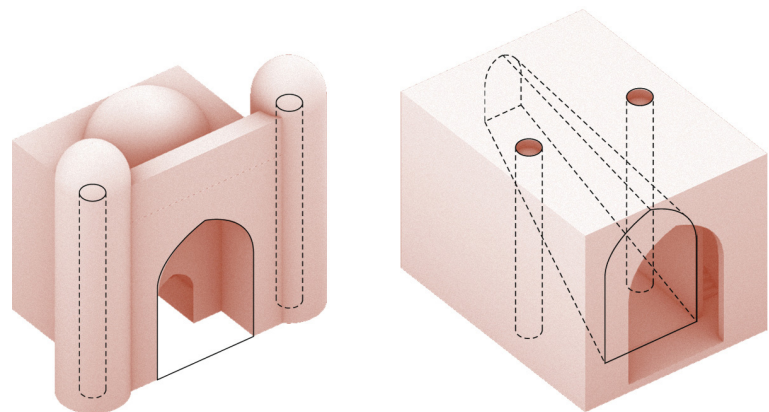
Descending to the underground gallery between the bridge and the gate

Another way to cross the canal is to climb down the descending stairs of the bridge and walk across the floor of the canal. At the bottom of the canal another connection is revealed: an underground gallery that connects the bridge with the next structure.

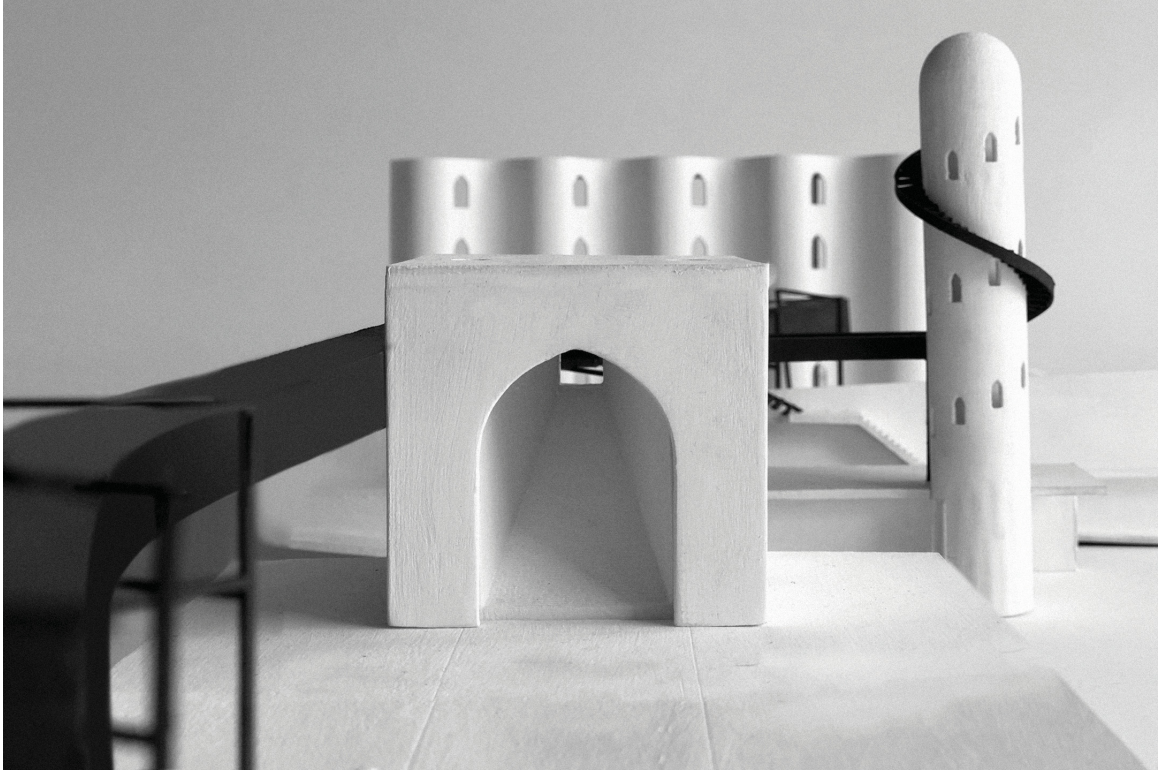
## Gate

The gate is also located along the avenue as the bridge. The giant opening of the gate on one side is shifted up and scaled down to a human scale on the other side, from where the neighbourhood began during the Soviet years. This transformation speaks to the idea of magnification of the aspects of the past while miniaturizing the rest. In this case, the neighbourhood on one side of the bridge represents memory, and the monumental architecture of the Soviets on the other side - history. The opening of the gate denies access to the other side, marking another interruption along the avenue.

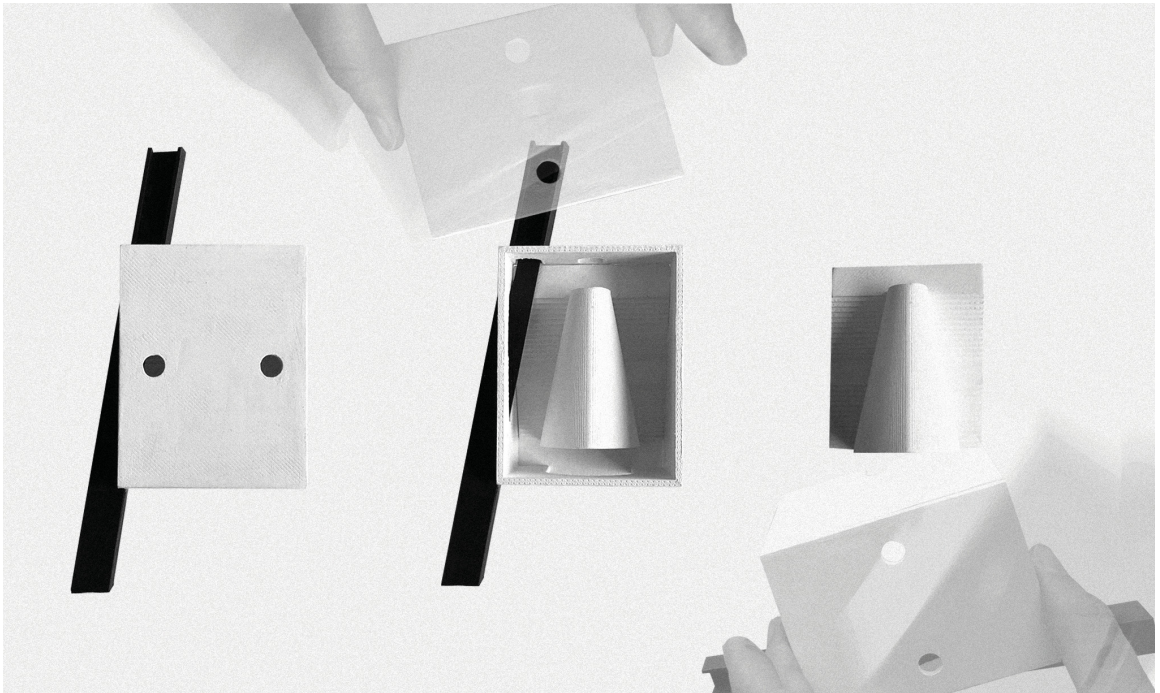
The minarets that are usually located on both sides of the gate are inverted into voids and translated as skylights. Under the skylights, the spiral stairs of the minarets are deconstructed as regular stairs that connect to the elevated path, finally, allowing for transcendence.



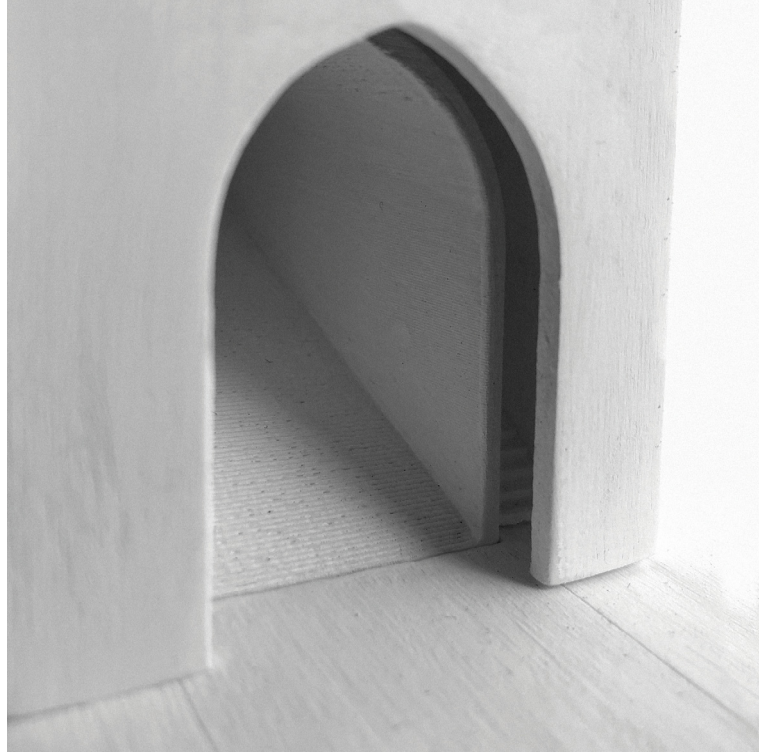
Transformation of the gate



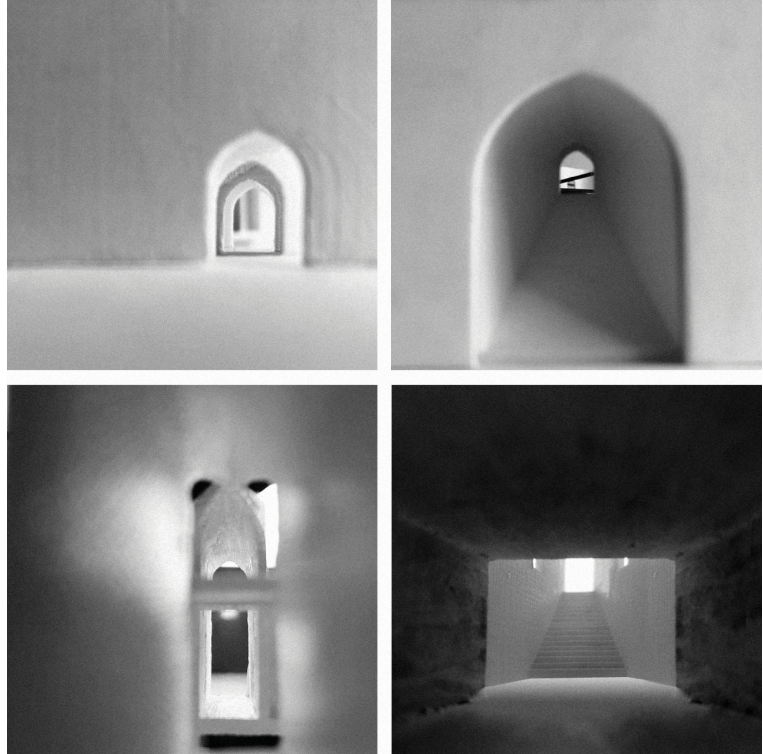
Photograph of the model from the avenue past the bridge



Photographs of the layered model of the gate



View into the stairway in the gate structure



Visual connections across the bridge (bottom left), the gallery (bottom right), across the gate (top left), through the gate (top right)





Rendering of the gate illustrating other possible readings in lines



Rendering of the reading of the gate from the raised walkway that cuts through it

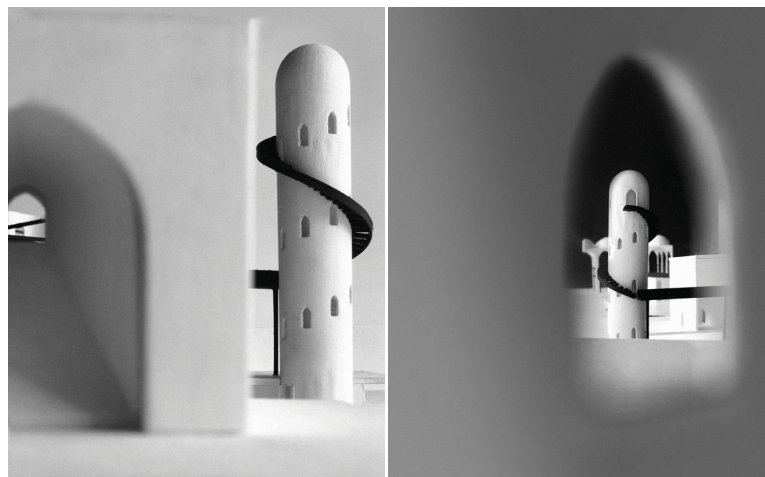
## Minaret

The WWII memorial is reimagined as a minaret. The translation of the originally-unfamiliar structure (obelisk) into a defamiliarized familiar structure (minaret) speaks to the erasure and replacement of traditions during the Soviets. This perception of erasure is heightened by removing the minaret from its context - referencing the minaret of the demolished Pioneer's Palace.

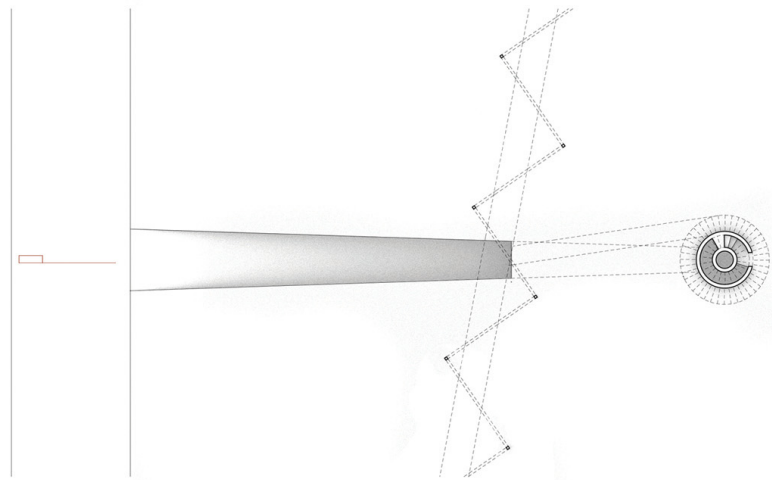
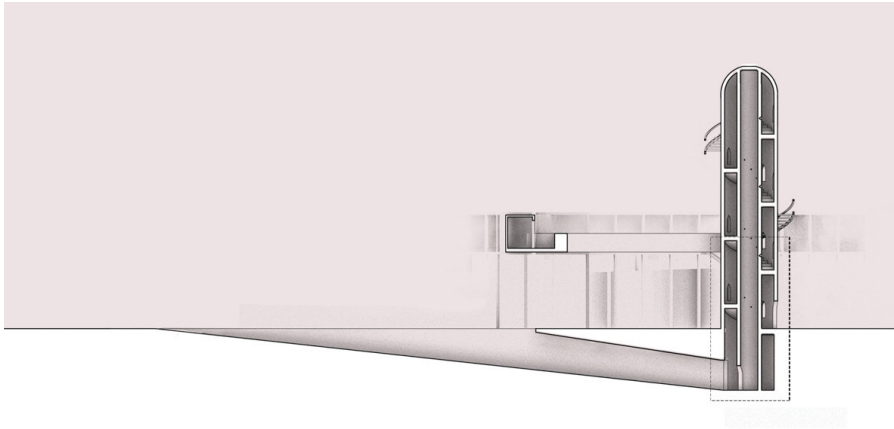


Translation of an obelisk into a free-standing minaret

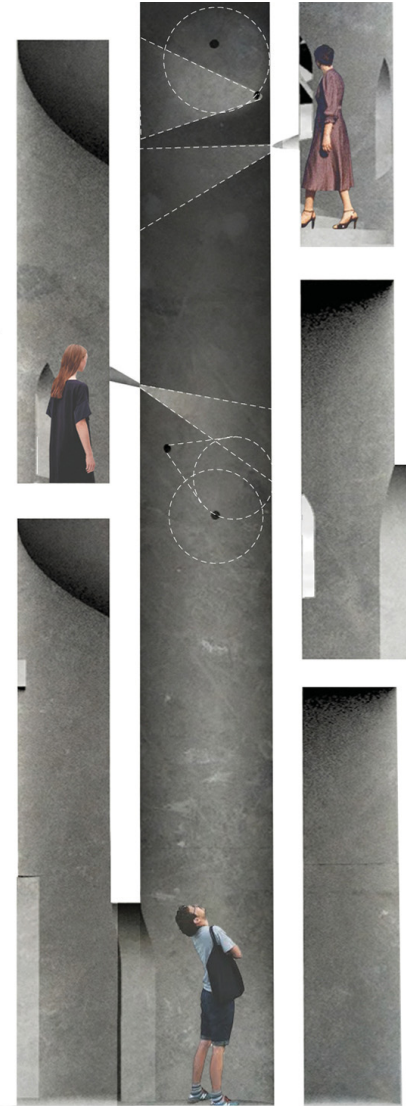
The minaret conveys multiple readings - from the outside spiral stairs, accessed through the elevated path, from the internal stairs, and the reading of its core - accessed through the avenue. When approached from the avenue, the participant comes across a ramp descending underground, appearing to be leading into the minaret. When reached the bottom of the minaret, the participant is denied access to the primary function of the minaret - ascending up and down, instead allowed access to the core of the minaret - a camera obscura, capturing ambiguous images of people climbing up and down the stairs around the core that the viewer denied accessed to. The images suggest absences - speaking to the function of the original landmark - to memorialize the war victims.



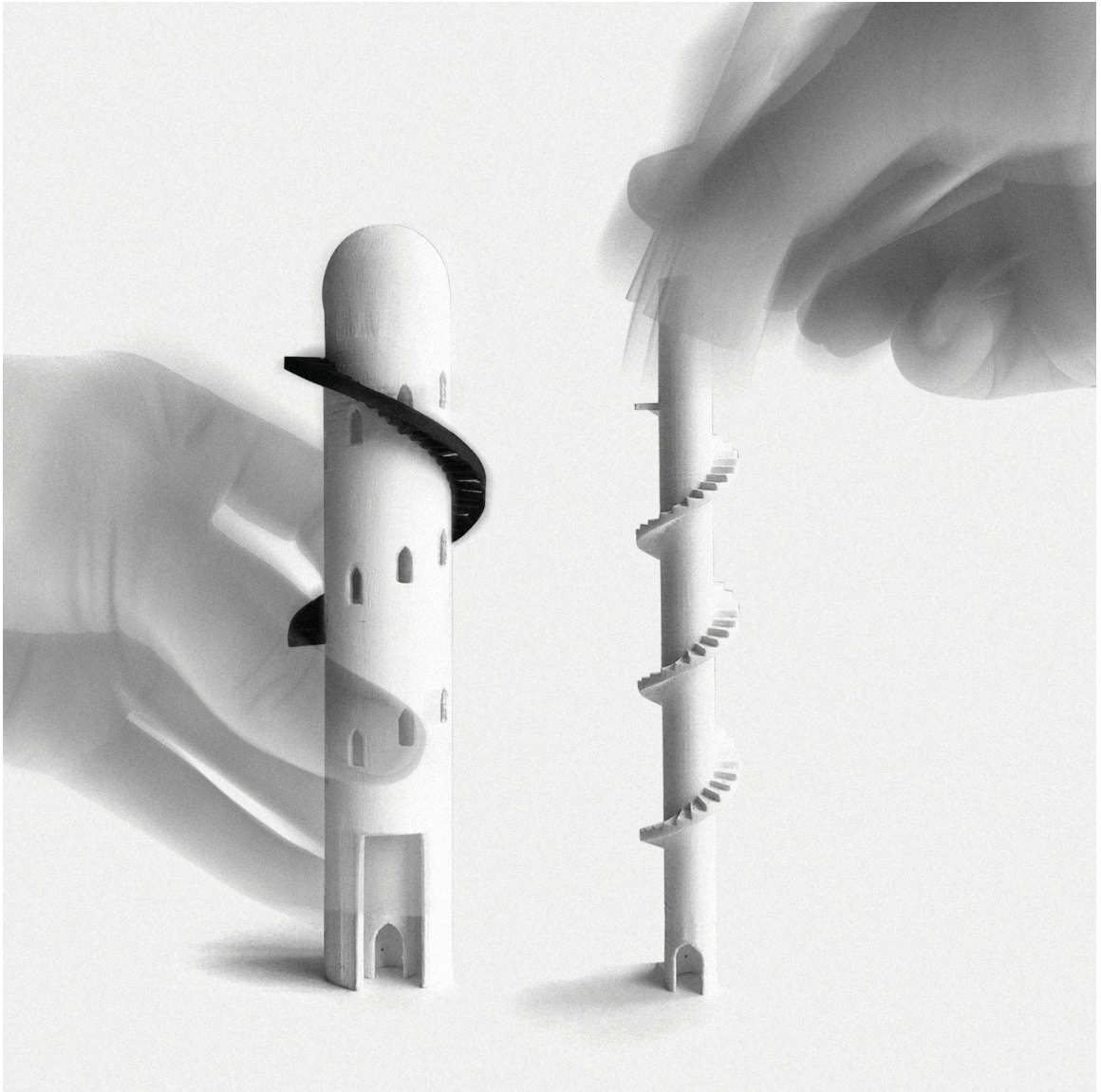
Photographs of the model viewing the minaret from different points: past the bridge (left), from one of the housing units (right)



Plan and section drawings of the minaret



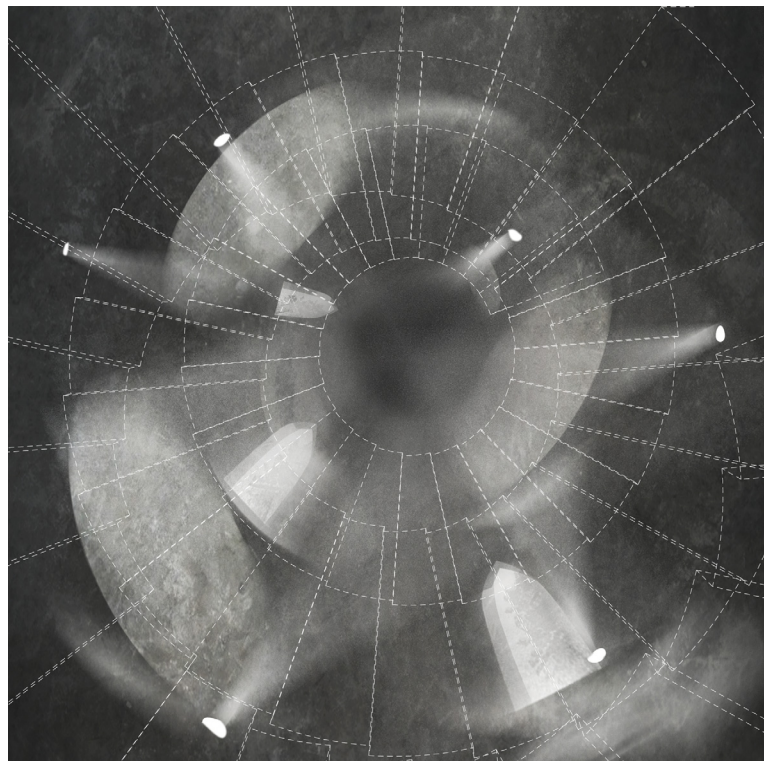
Sectional detail rendering



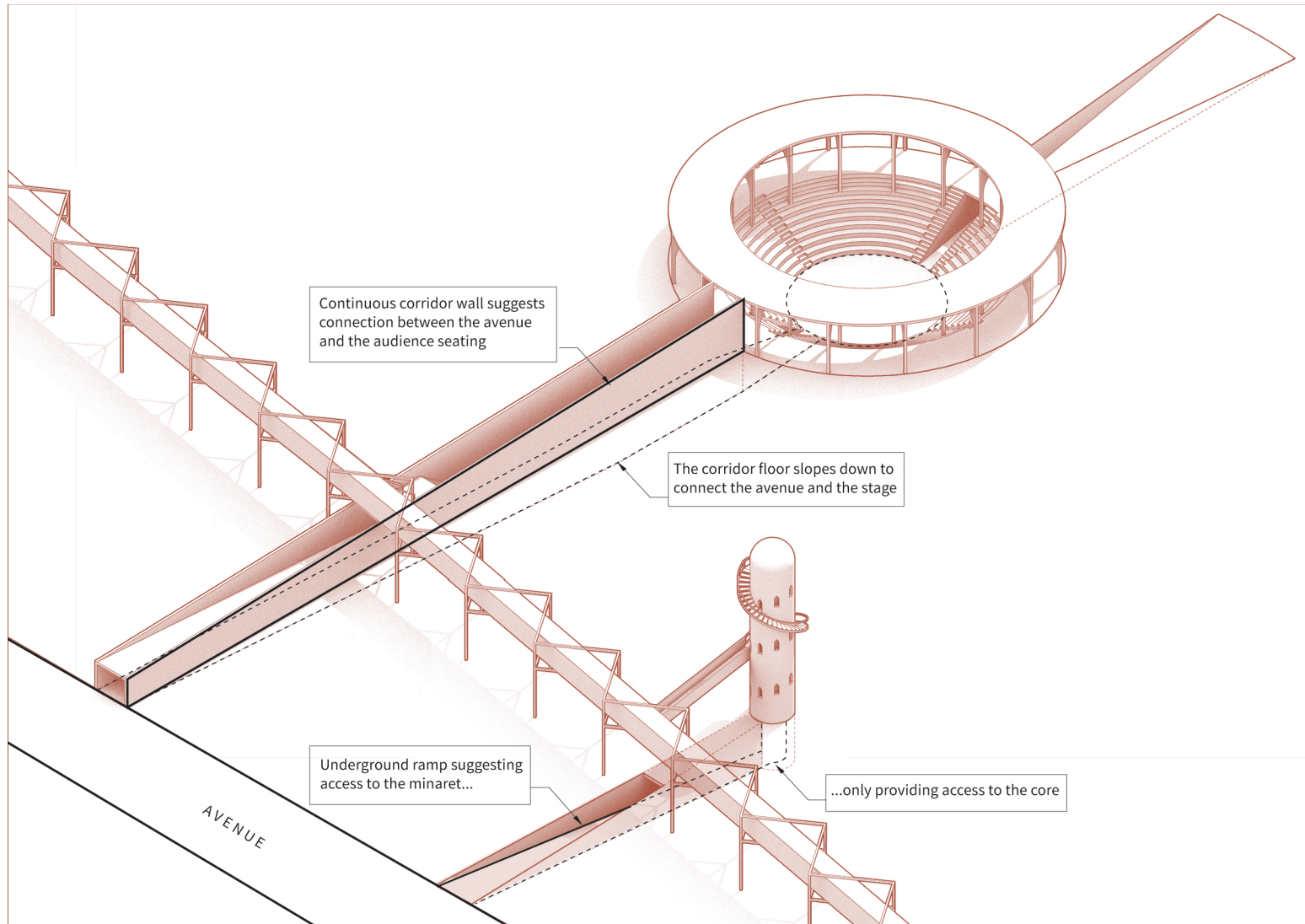
Photographs of the layered model of the minaret



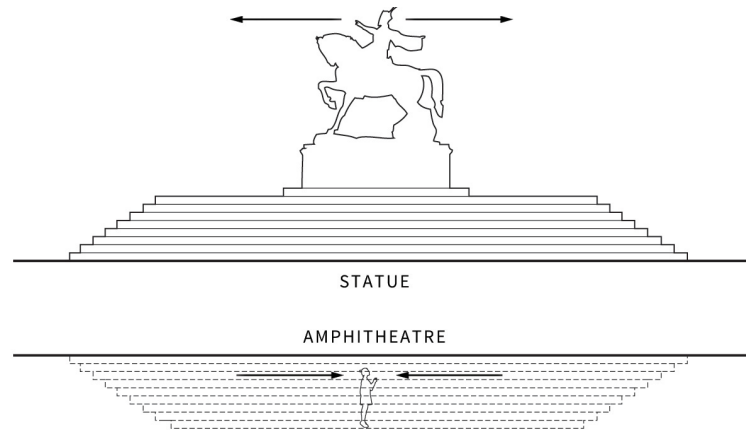
Approaching the exterior stairs from the raised walkway; the interior stairs shown in lines



The camera obscura core of the minaret



False visual cues of connection along the avenue

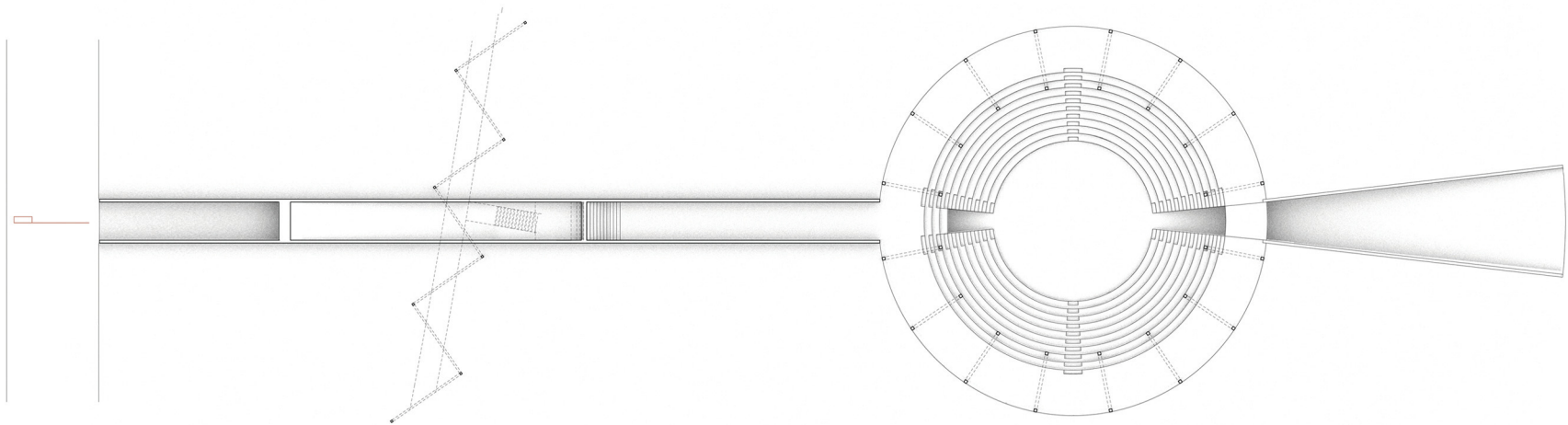
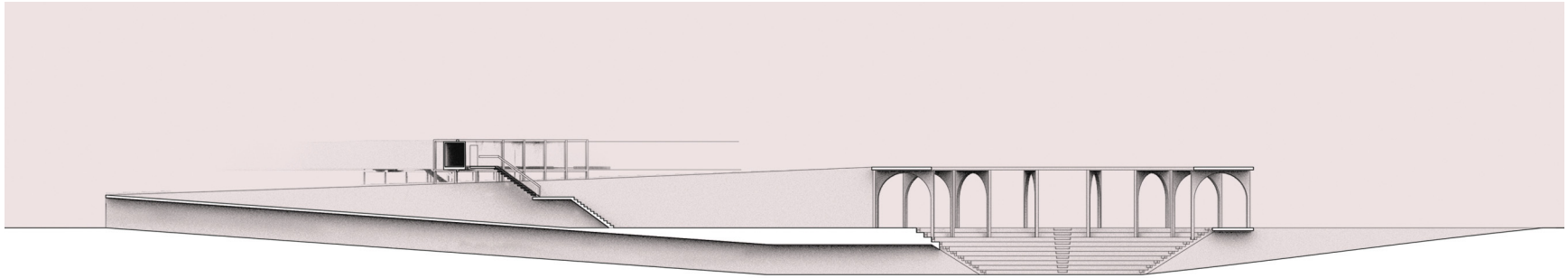


Pedestal (extroverted) vs. amphitheatre (introverted)

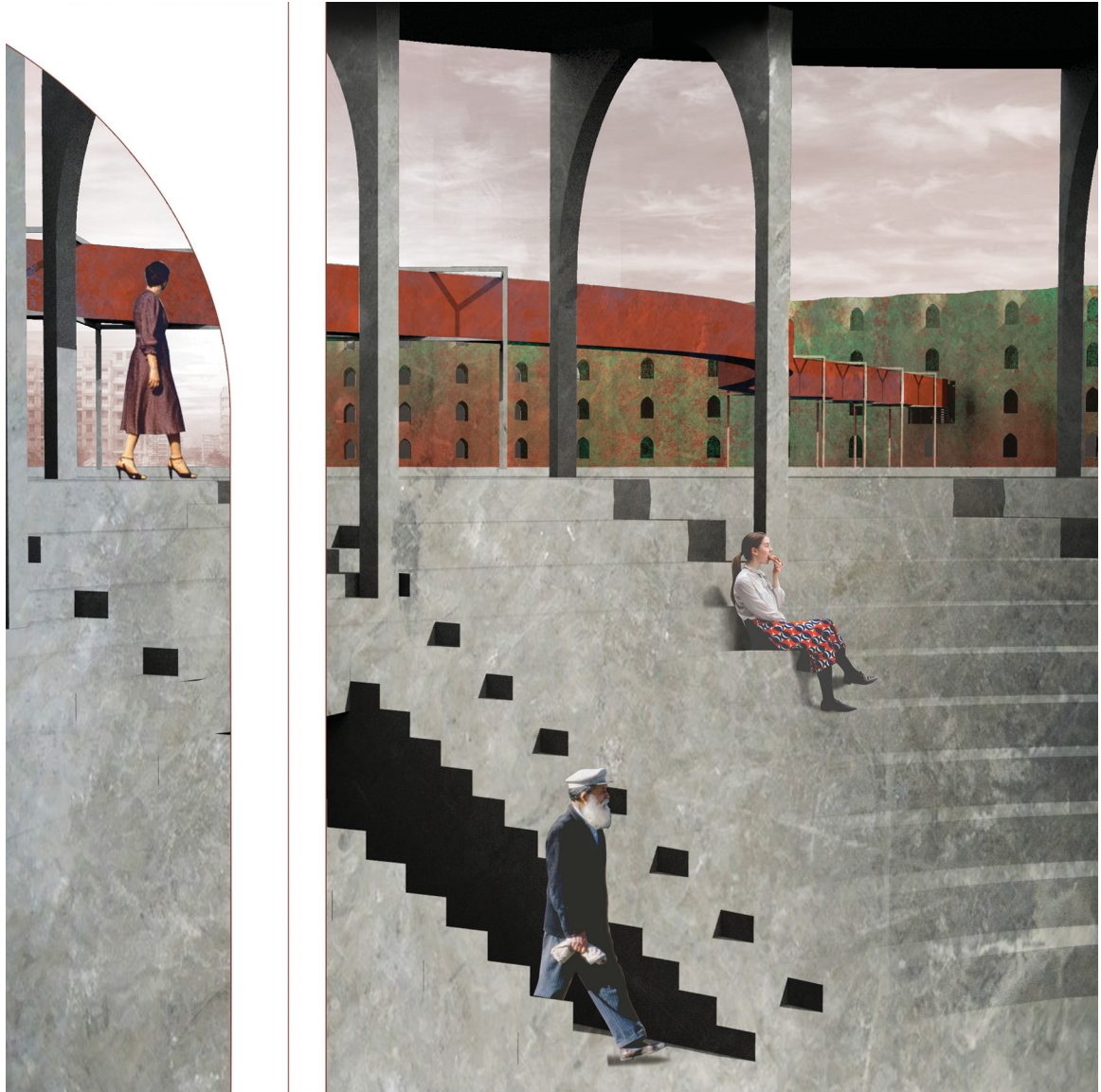
## Amphitheatre

The form of the amphitheatre is informed by the inversion of the steps leading up to the statue into seating, and the pedestal into a stage. The connecting tunnel between the avenue and the amphitheatre appears to connect the avenue with the audience seating; however, when crossed, the visual cue proves false. The participant arrives on the stage - becoming an accidental hero of the spectacle. The idea of changing heroes of the stage speaks to the changing statues of the square. This inversion of the form allows for the inversion of perspective lines as well. The town hero (the statue) that appears to be watching over the town becomes the centre of attention of the public. The public (or heroes) are given the opportunity to walk across the stage - regaining the transcendence denied by the statue on a pedestal (Stewart 1984, 89).

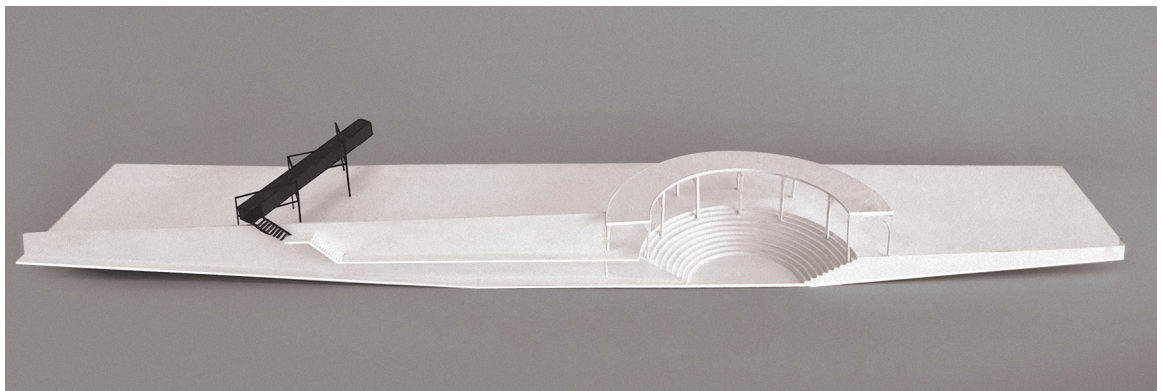




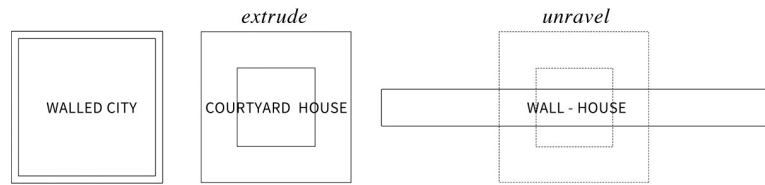
Plan and section drawings of the amphitheatre



Rendering of the view looking towards the housing from the amphitheatre seating



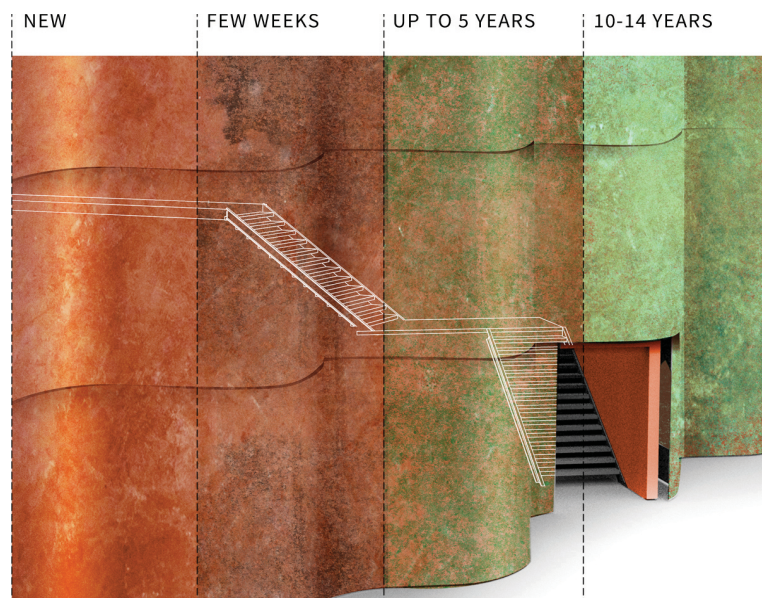
Sectional model of the amphitheatre



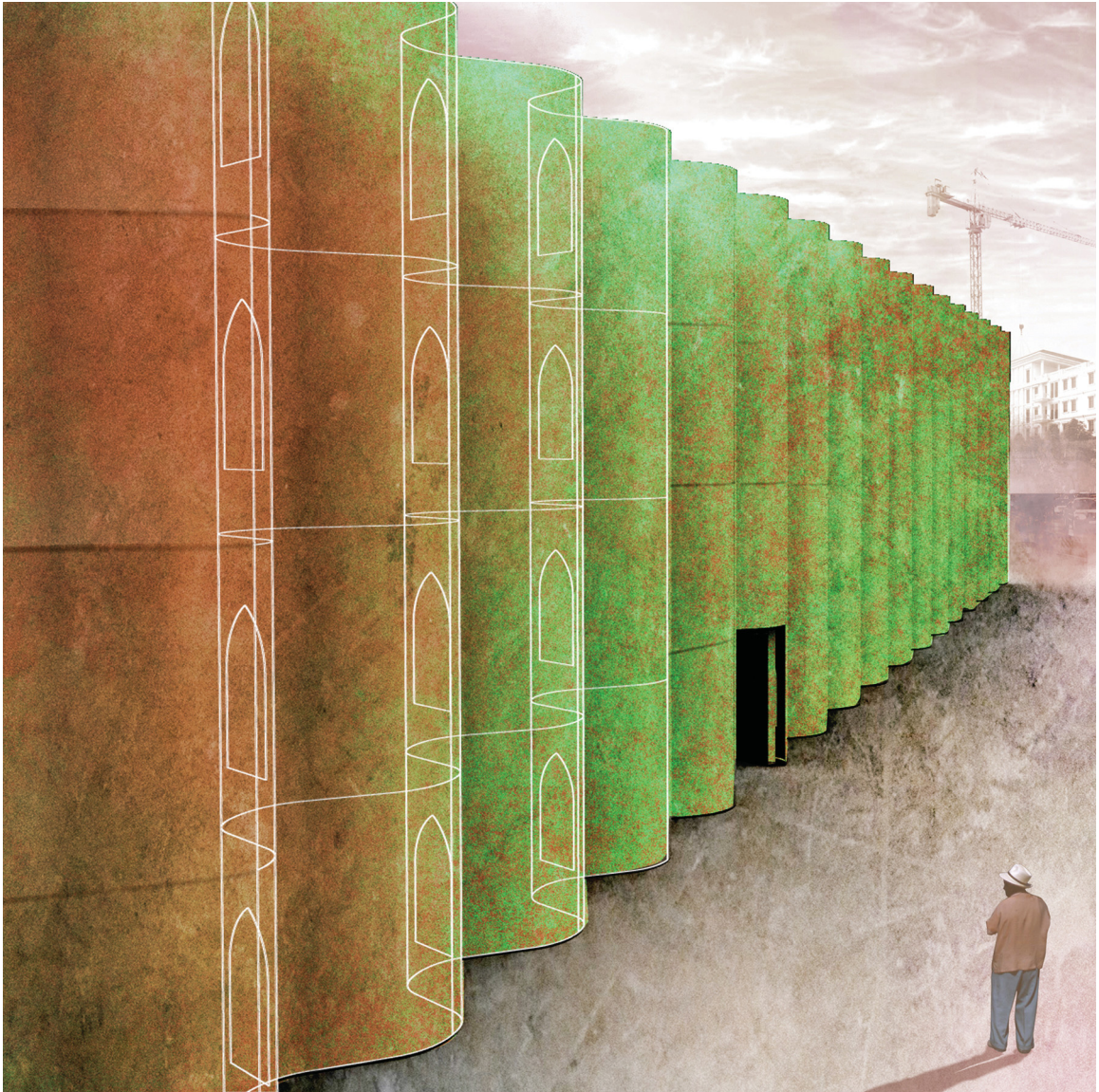
Inhabitable wall: transformation of the wall-house

## Housing

Programmatically, the housing reflects on the estranging and unhomely qualities of the construction wall, by reimagining it as an inhabitable wall. The corrugated wall is scaled up and extruded to accommodate housing units. The idea of an inhabitable wall also speaks to the courtyard houses as inhabitable walls. The openings on the facade are situated uniformly on one side of the corrugations. Therefore, they are only visible when approached from one side, and are absent when approached from the other evoking the images of the past - rendering the building as a wall. The facade consists of copper sheets, and when read through time, the patina of the copper takes on the green colour of the once existing construction walls.



Weathering of the housing facade

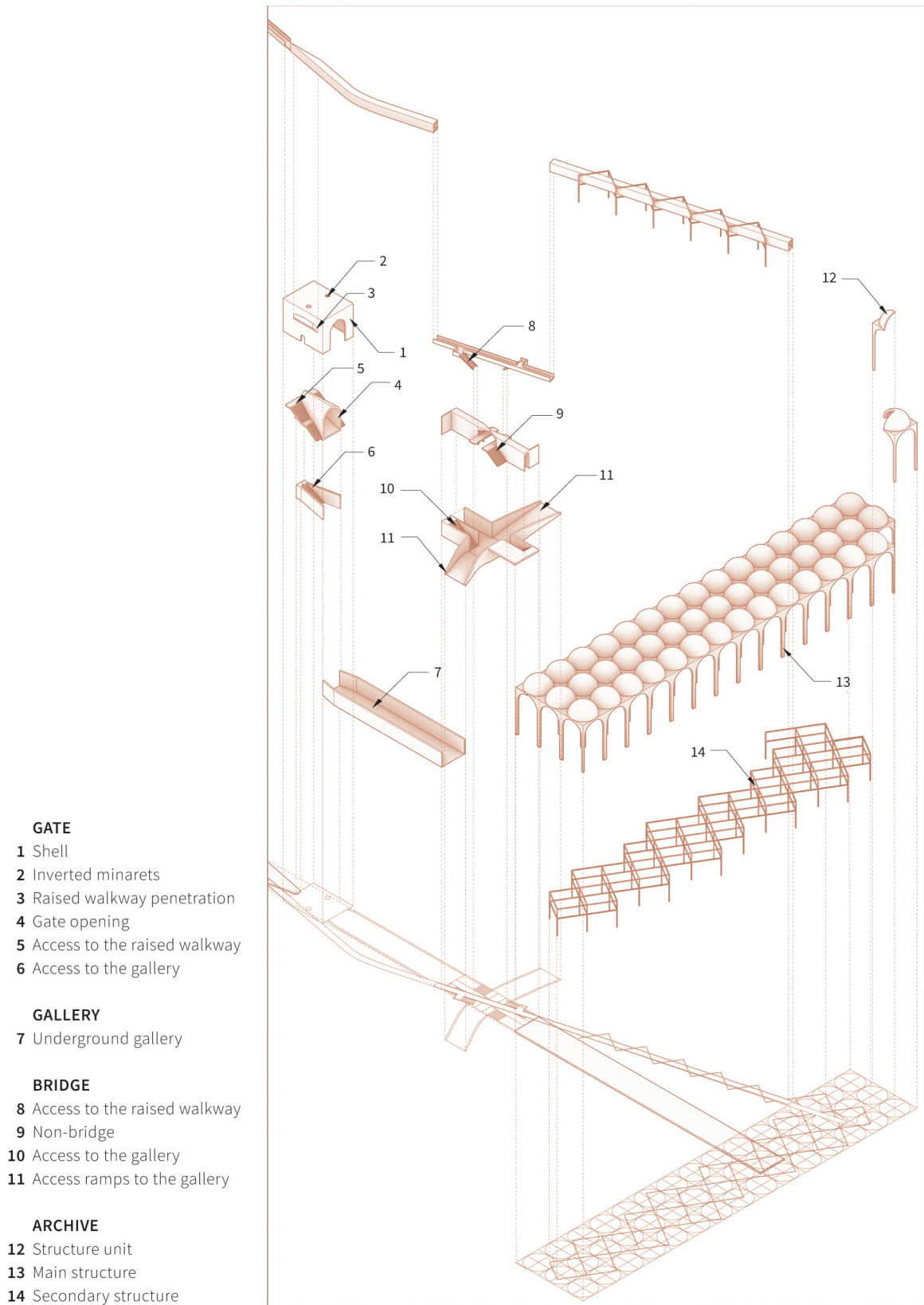


Reading of the housing as a wall; invisible openings shown in lines

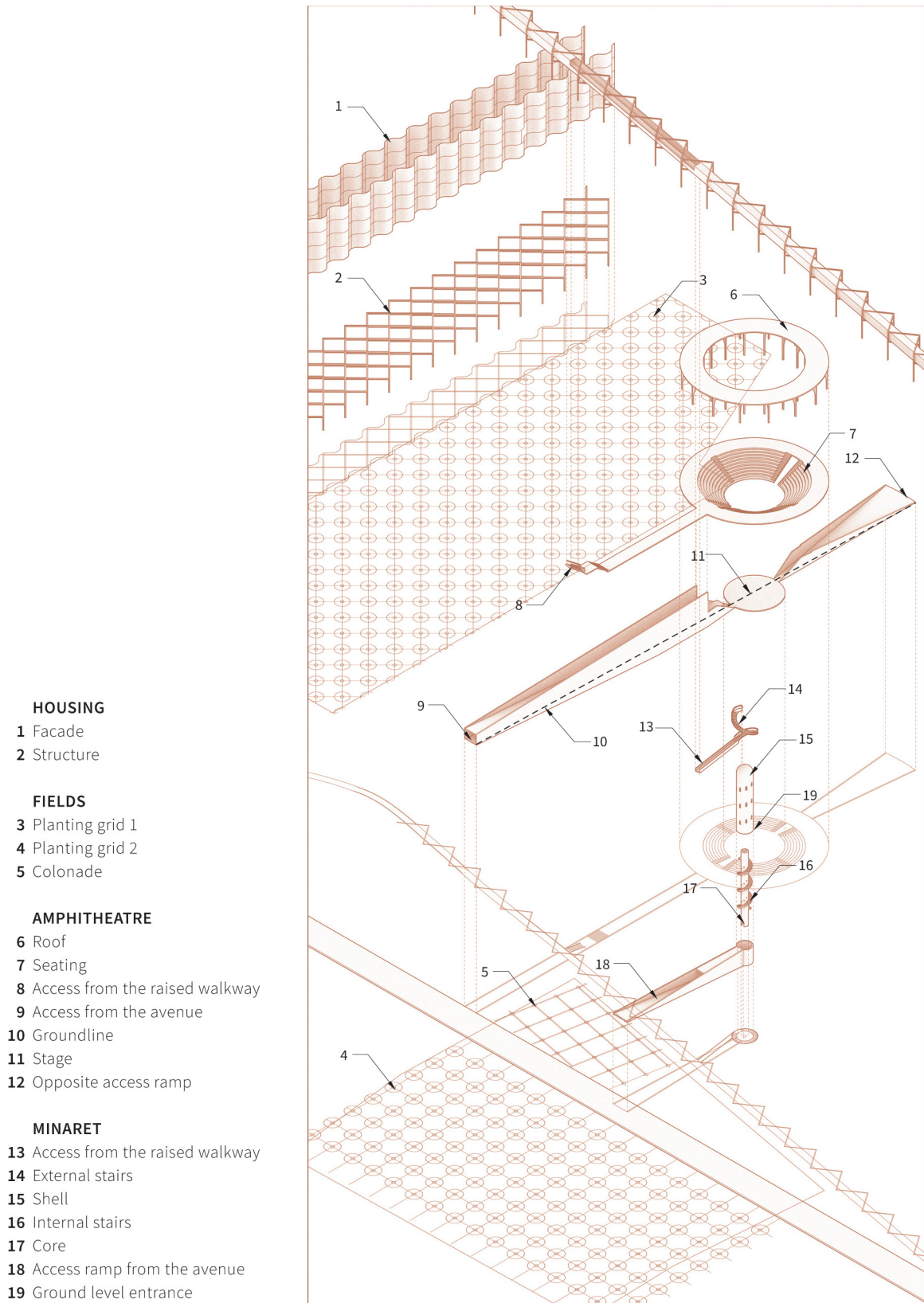
## **The Presence of Absence**

The absences of the site, the monumental vacancies are reimagined as the presences in the design (see pg. 75). The grids of the structure of the adjacent elements (the elevated walkway, housing) are carried to the area of the vacancies and expressed through tree plantings and columns. The planted trees are fruit trees - references the toponym of the area "apple orchard." The change of grids within the same vacancy is emphasized through changing the trees (see #4 on pg. 75) with columns (see #5 on pg. 75) offering a plural experience of the once vacancies.

The reimagined vacancies not only speak to the wastelands of the site but also speak to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Through the inversion of the absences into presences, the design aims to heighten the perception of the absent - the built-up areas of the neighbourhoods. Eisenman calls this method "anti-memory," in which memory is activated through erasures (Eisenman, Bédard, & Balfour 1994, 76).



Exploded axonometric of the reimagined elements of the palimpsest: Detail 1



Exploded axonometric of the reimagined elements of the palimpsest: Detail 2

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Our memory crisis seems to be based on our need to establish counter-memories, resisting the dominant coding of images and representations and recovering differences that official memory has erased (Boyer 1994, 28)

By depicting the site as a palimpsest, a multi-layered text, this thesis aims to achieve simultaneity of multiple suppressed temporalities. The design deploys metaphoric oppositions to the original intent of the reimagined landmarks from different architectural strata and suggests alternative memory narratives unfolded through multiple readings, countering the univocal, official version of the history.

The extracted former elements are defamiliarized through deconstruction and recontextualization of their forms and meanings in relation to the ideologies they were built to support. The design decisions were made with several rules in mind: the new meanings of the elements need to oppose the original design intents of the original landmarks; the new design has to reflect on the erased differences or traditions without any revivalist intentions; the new elements have to express simultaneity of different contents. While these simultaneities are inherent in the design in spatial terms, they are not evident at once. The design requires multiple engagements with the same elements, from different paths or points of view, in order to unfold these simultaneities.

This thesis aims to achieve conceptual simultaneity through formal organization informed by superpositioning historical layers and recontextualization of the landmarks extracted from them. At the urban scale, palimpsestic approach to the site counters the tabula rasa approach of the state. At the architectural scale, the design of the elements



deploys metaphoric oppositions to the original intents of the reimagined landmarks through the deconstruction of their form and meanings. Approaches to both urban and architectural form, question the dominant coding of images of rhetorical landscapes that tell the official version of the historical narrative. Instead of prescribing a singular reading, it gives the participants freedom of interpretation of the past through repeated engagements. Like the palimpsest that catalyzes the design, the narrative it tells is multi-layered and accumulated through the sedimentation of multiple meanings.

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