

A Living Monument for a Rootless City

by

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B. S. in Architecture
Washington University in St. Louis, 2014

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Abstract

The Chinese city of Shenzhen has transformed from a small village to a megacity in just three decades due to the nation's economic policies. Despite its economic success, the city struggles with a lack of identity. In this thesis, monumentality is used as an analytical and design tool to address the city's rootlessness. Defining Shenzhen as a city of immigrants, this thesis proposes to build an urban monument for the immigrants. In addition to its symbolic meaning, the monument is an excuse for preserving a preeminent Urban Village in the Shenzhen Central Business District. Urban Village is essentially urban slums that accommodate thousands of low-income migrant workers. It carries much of the immigrants' memories about the city and exhibits a strong life vibrancy. By analyzing the prevailing mode of Urban Renewal in Shenzhen, this thesis focuses on how the new building satisfies the different groups of interest. The design contains a strong Janus-faced nature to respond to different parties' requests and the specific site conditions. As a result, a living monument for thousands of migrant workers is made as the city's true memory.

Thesis Supervisor:

Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture

Acknowledgement

I would like to take this chance to express my gratitude:

To **Mark** -the conversations with you have always been delightful. Your insightful comments have moved this thesis much further than I could imagined.

To **Rafi** - your comments on the architectural design and the argument are always sharp and inspiring. Your suggestion on focusing on only the tower part of my design is crucial to the thesis.

To **Brent** - thank you for sharing your vast knowledge about urban village and related policies. You have always been so patient and clear.

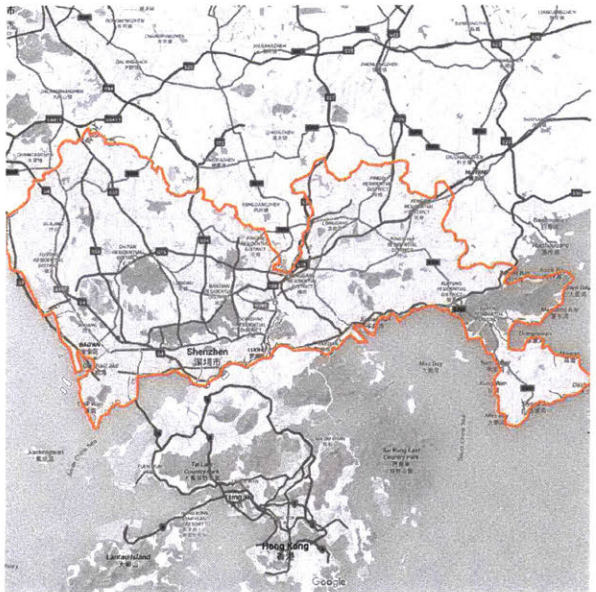
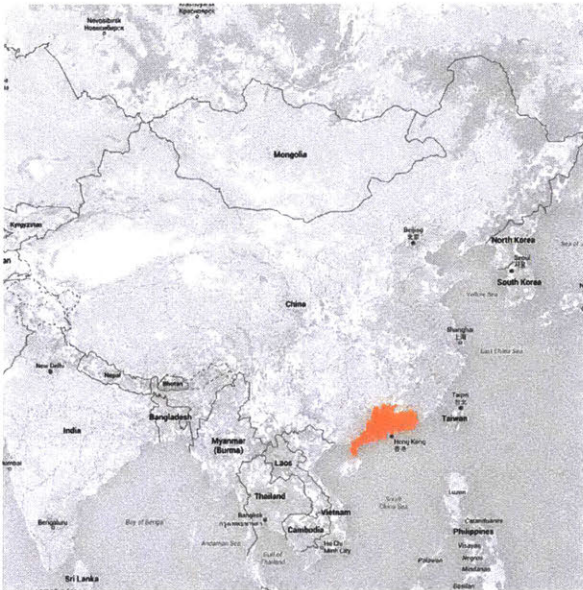
To **Gediminas** - your imagination has given a new perspective to the reading of my thesis. And your references are much helpful. Thank you.

To all my thesis helpers: **Jorge Silen Rivera, Sean Phillips, Meng Sun, Stellar Zhang, Junjiao Gan, Xiang Xu, Xuezhu Tian, Anran Li, Jiajian Tang, Xinyi Xu, Yixi Wang, Shijin Feng, Kew Qiu, Fin Xu, Jessie Zhang, Lucy Lin, Yiyang Huang, Chaoyun Wu, Wenxin Cai.** Thank you all for your time and effort on making models and drawings in the final weeks.

Lastly, special thanks to **Yi Liu** and **Shujie Chen**. Without your unreserved support in the final days, this thesis would not be complete as it is now.

Table of Content

Chapter 1	7
Shenzhen - A Rootless City	
Chapter 2	25
Urban Village - An Emerging Memory	
Chapter 3	35
A Multifaceted Monument	
Bibliography	68



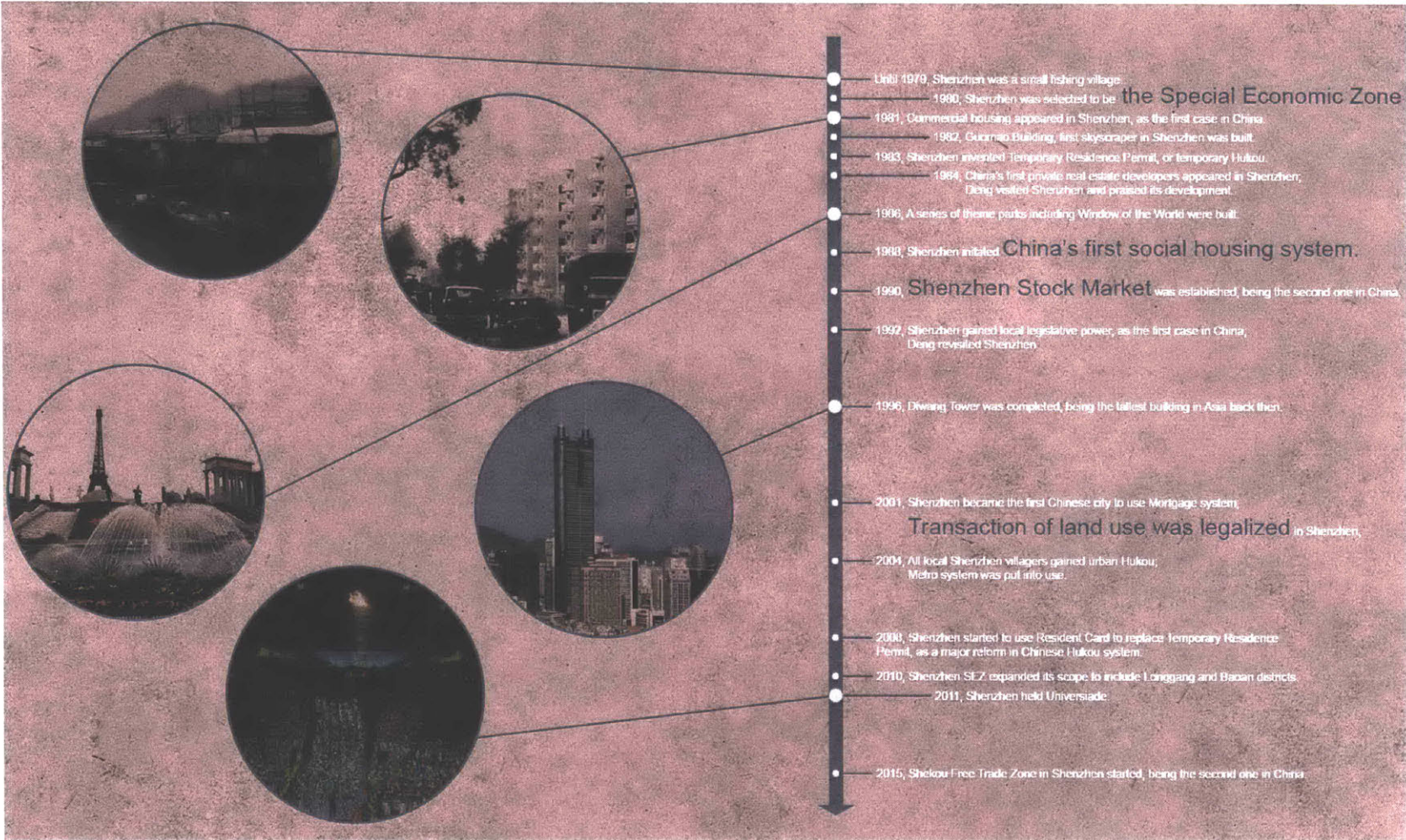
Chapter 1
Shenzhen - A Rootless City

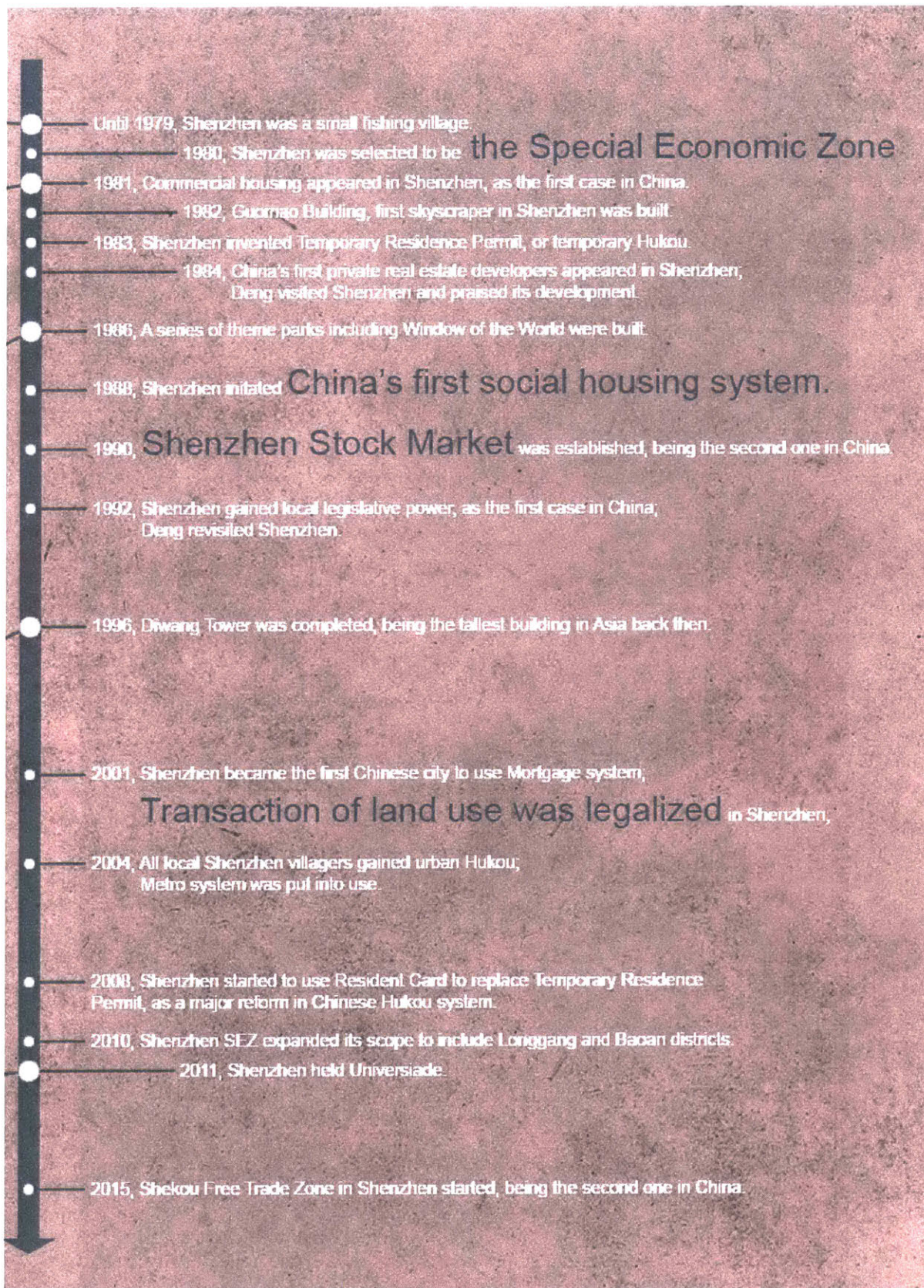
Shenzhen

1980
2010

Shenzhen









<p>您愿意 让北京人 外来人口 继续增加吗?</p>	<p>您愿意 每一年 花费40亿 留住外来人口?</p>	<p>你愿意广州 每三个人里面 就有一个系 外来人员吗?</p>
<p>北京人，不忍了! 北京已经容纳了2000万外来人口 北京已经接纳了47.4万随迁子女</p> <p>但是! 您还破坏北京的文化，扰乱北京的秩序， 抬高北京房价，超生子女参加种鸡竞赛， 吃北京啊北京还把北京骂的一文不值， 麻烦您住事儿，先建设好自己的家乡， 再来建设北京</p> <p>强烈要求 政府修订法案 阻止外来人口无休止涌入北京!</p>	<p>上海宁，切伐消了! 您来沪创业，可以带动城市经济，创造就业岗位， 您来沪消费，可以促进消费，拉动内需，带动上海经济， 您来沪生活，可以丰富生活，增加城市活力，带动上海发展</p> <p>但是! 您来沪生活，可以带动城市经济，创造就业岗位， 您来沪消费，可以促进消费，拉动内需，带动上海经济， 您来沪生活，可以丰富生活，增加城市活力，带动上海发展</p> <p>强烈要求 政府修订法案 阻止外来人口的无休止涌入上海!</p>	<p>广州人，忍够啦! 因为外地打工，所以您每天开车上班 因为外地租房，所以您每月交房租水电 因为外地买房，所以您每月还贷还息 因为外地上学，所以您每月交学费生活费 因为外地看病，所以您每月交医药费 因为外地养老，所以您每月交养老金</p> <p>强烈要求 政府修订法案! 阻止外来人口无休止涌入广州!</p> <p><i>If you are a Cantonese Please do not be a NEP Continuist!</i></p>

"We demand the government to stop immigrant from coming in!"

来了
就是深圳人。

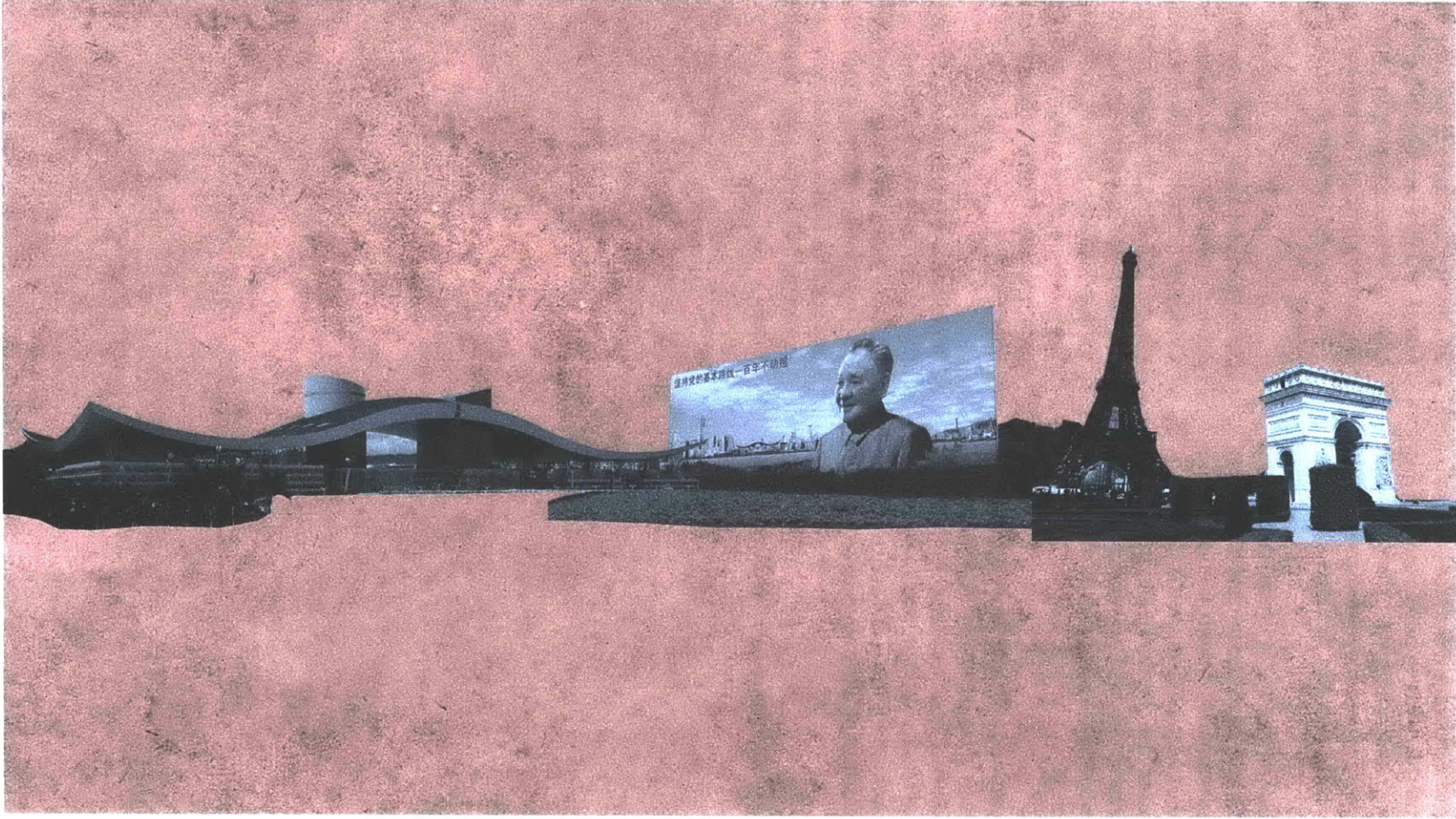
深圳，欢迎您!

因为人家都是离开的家的人，所以我们都愿意
因为这是您奋斗为大家的一个圈，所以我们欢迎您
因为您是深圳发展的动力，所以深圳欢迎您
因为您是深圳建设30年的恩人，所以深圳欢迎您
因为您要告诉世界的人，所以下面用了「英雄力士」
WELCOME TO 「HOMETOWN SHENZHEN」

热烈欢迎 来深奋斗者!
祝所有深圳人新年快乐，万事如意!

"Come to Shenzhen; become Shenzhen."





Oftentimes when people introduce Chinese City Shenzhen, they like to call it a modern miracle of how a small fishing village in Southeast China has been transformed into a megacity within only three decades. And that is true.

Since the founding of PRC, Planned Economy has been the core of the government's policies, and it stifled economic growth. In the late nineteen seventies, Mao passed away, and Deng came to power. The country began to switch over to Market Economy. Deng chose Shenzhen as the Special Economic Zone to test out the new policy.

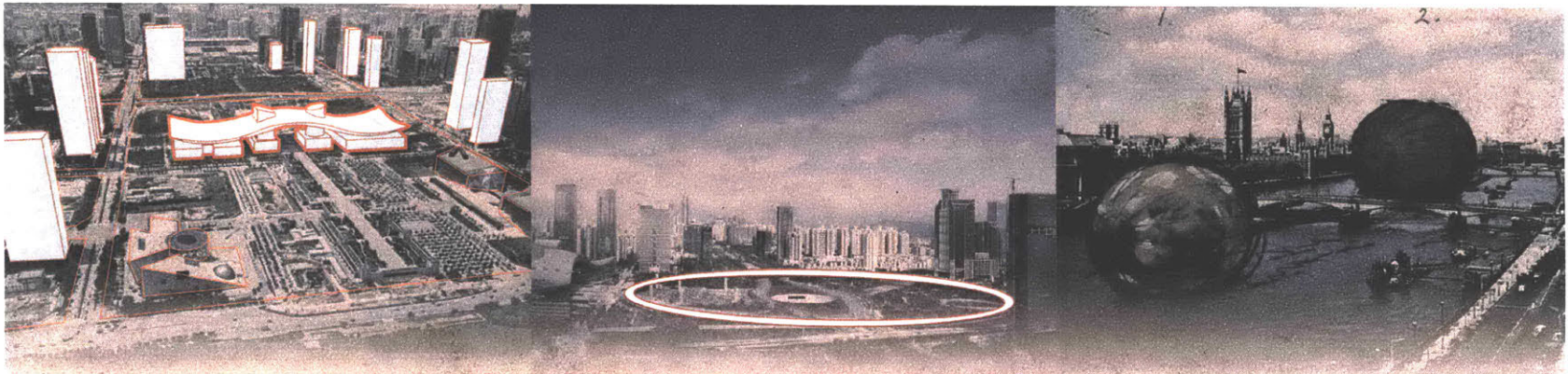
Since then, among much controversy, Shenzhen has been growing up at a rapid pace. Modern high-rise, stock market, commercial housing and MacDonal'd's started to appear in Shenzhen. Behind them are not only the economic success but also the city's adventurous spirit.

The subject of the city's success are the numer

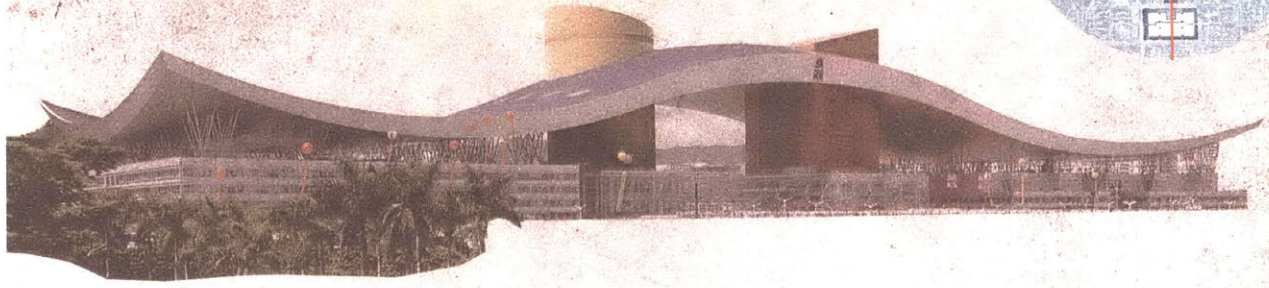
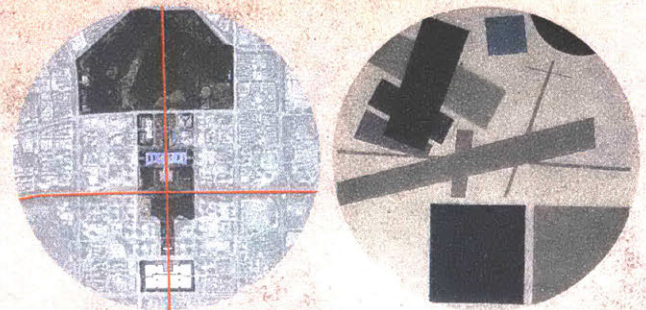
ous immigrant workers. They are from different places in China, working in different industries. Like that America is a nation of immigrants, Shenzhen is a city of immigrants. Today, over 70% of people living in Shenzhen are immigrants.

Such character made Shenzhen different from other Chinese cities. For example, in 2012, Chinese Internet had a brief turmoil. While citizens in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou sent posters against immigrants to their cities for that they take up much public resources, Shenzhen declared a much welcoming attitude to immigrants. "Come to Shenzhen; become Shenzhen".

Behind all these glamorous stories, however, the city has an intrinsic problem of its rootlessness. For a city with little history, Shenzhen has not really found its unique identity culturally and socially. Such rootlessness can be seen from the city's landmarks. Here, let's look at three.

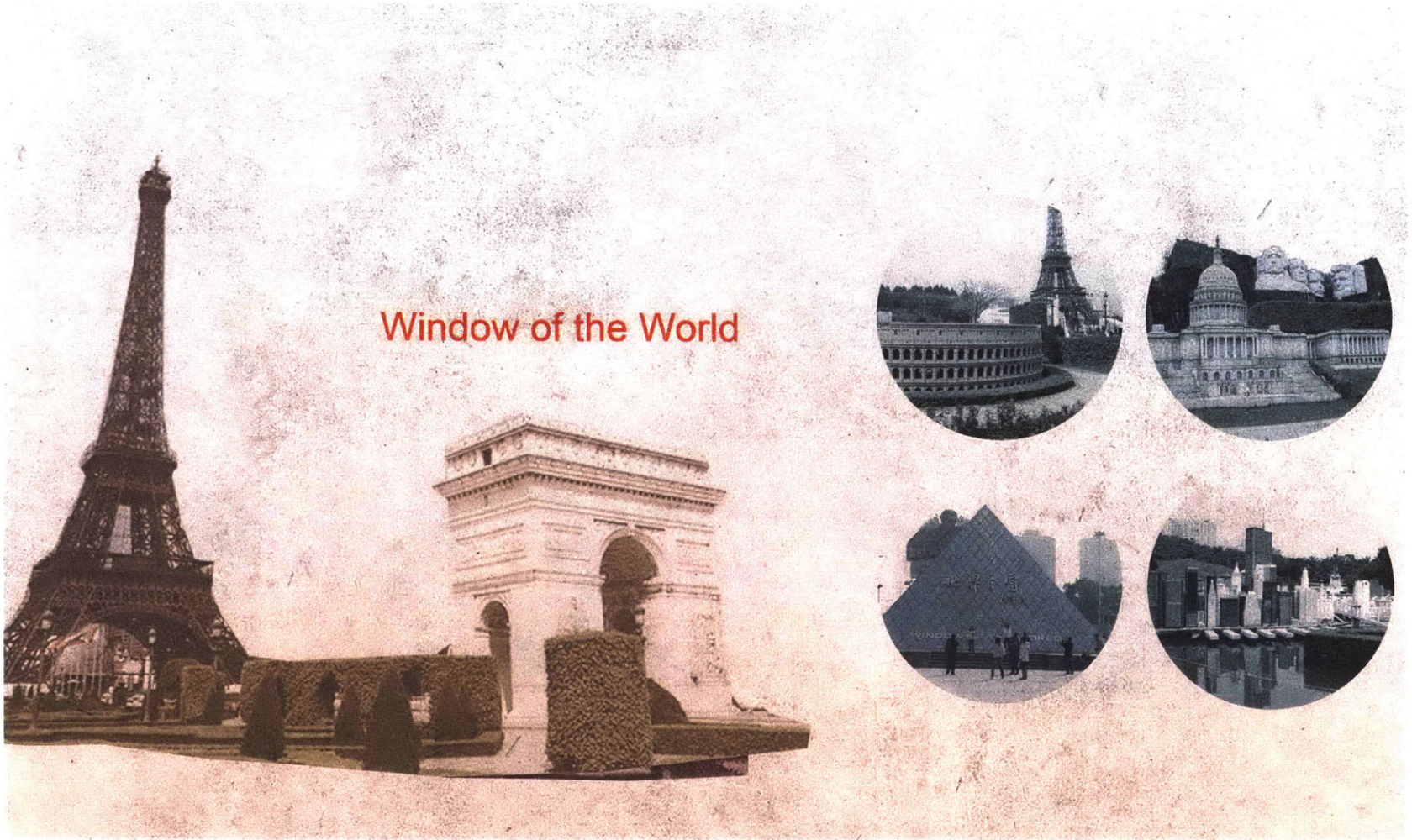


Shenzhen Civic Center





Plaza of Deng's Portrait



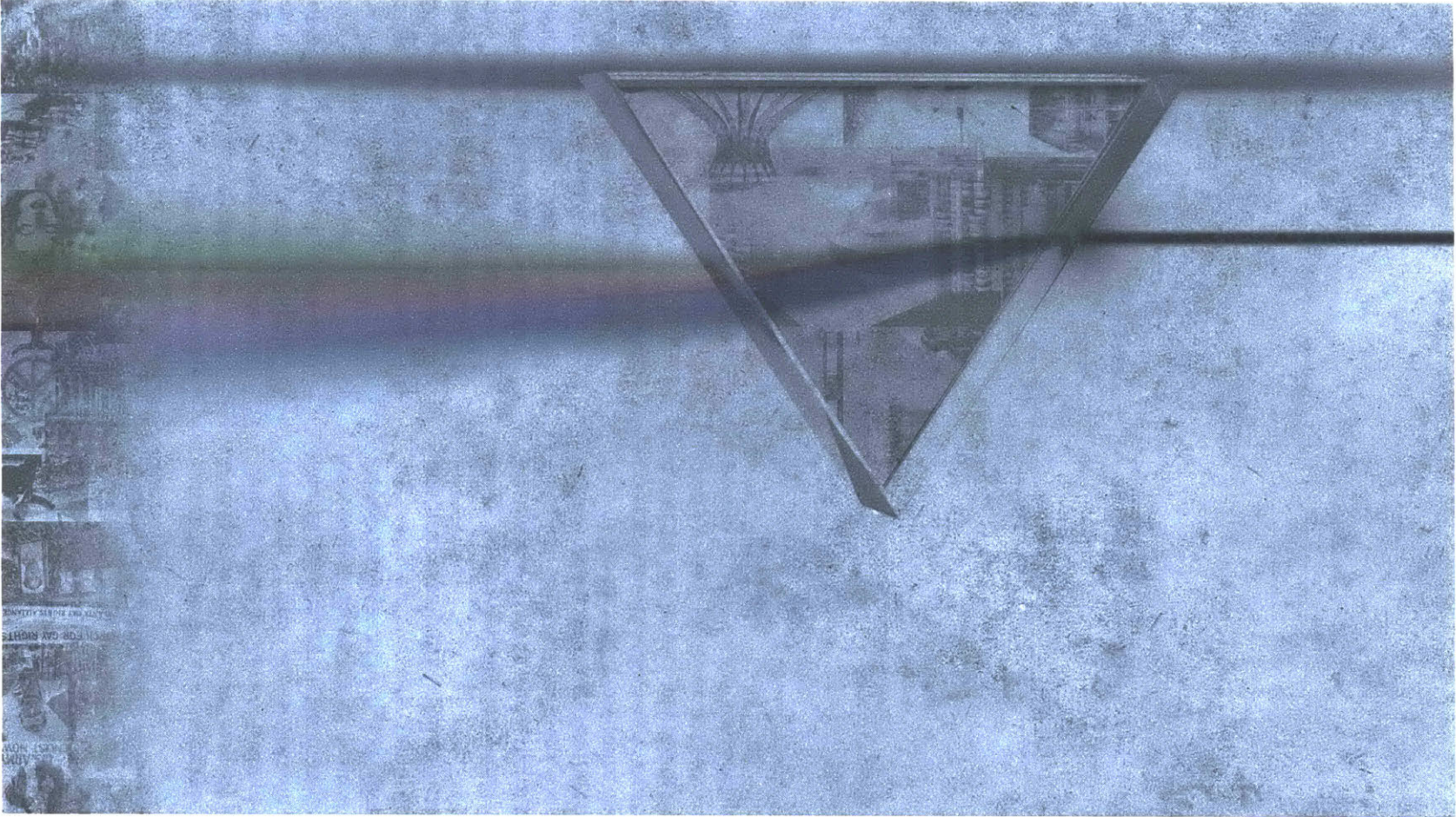
Window of the World



Huaqiangbei

Portofino

Dafen



The first is **Shenzhen Civic Center**, which is essentially the city government. Built in 2002, it is located at the very core of the CBD, at the intersection of two artificial axis. Aiming to be the first un-walled government in China, its monumentality is achieved mostly through its horizontality that contrasts with the surrounding high-rises. It is obviously extravagant. And Unlike Beijing or Shanghai which can use historical references, the building's highly abstract form again reflects the city's lack of history.

The second one is **Plaza of Deng's Portrait**. As mentioned before, Deng became China's actual leader after Mao, and he led the economic reform. Therefore, Shenzhen people always have the gratitude for him. This plaza featuring Deng's billboard is a famous tourist place in Shenzhen. The imagine on the billboard has changed a few times, but has always been Deng's face in front of Shenzhen's updated skyline with his quote.

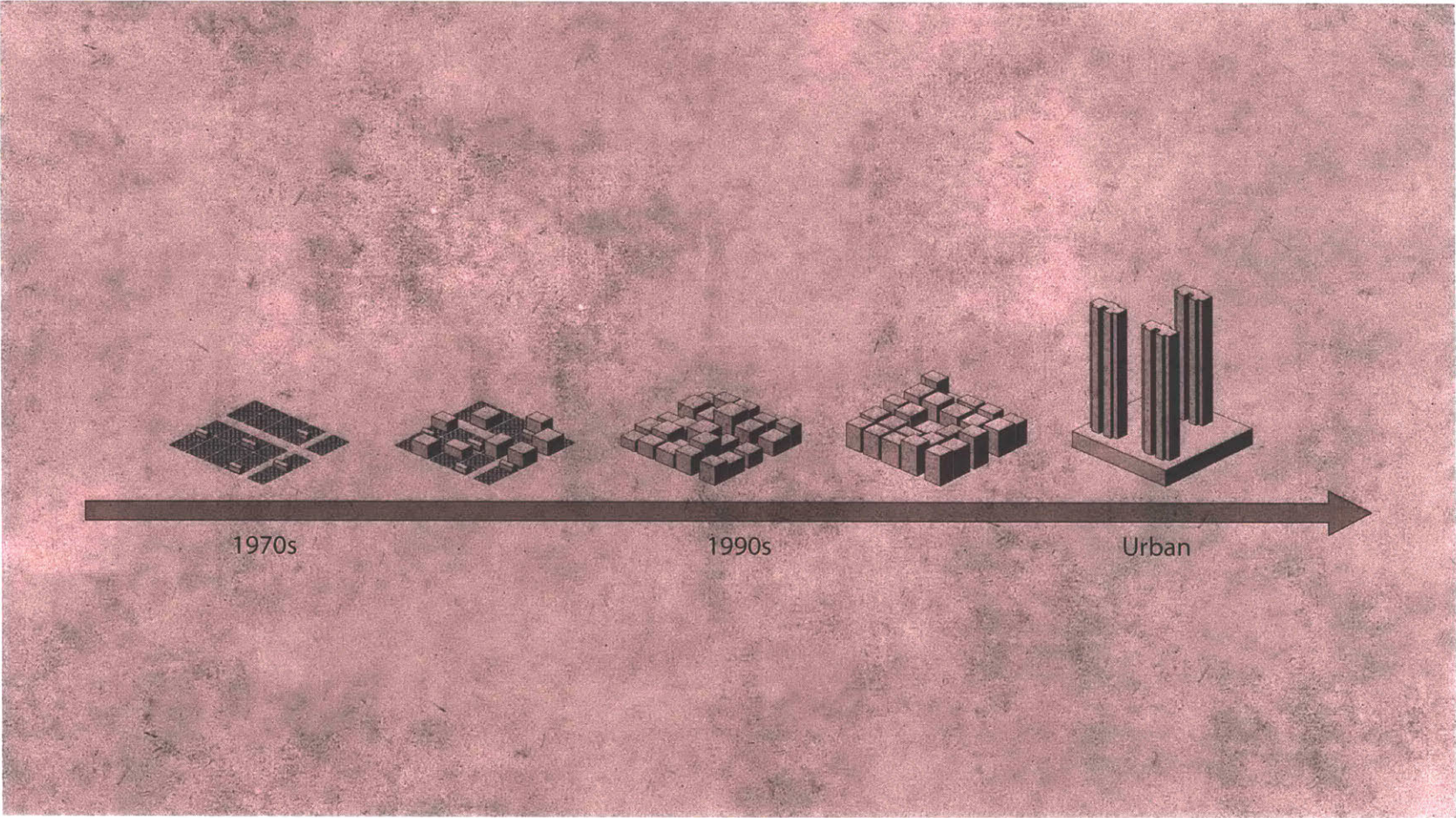
The third one is **Window of the World**, which

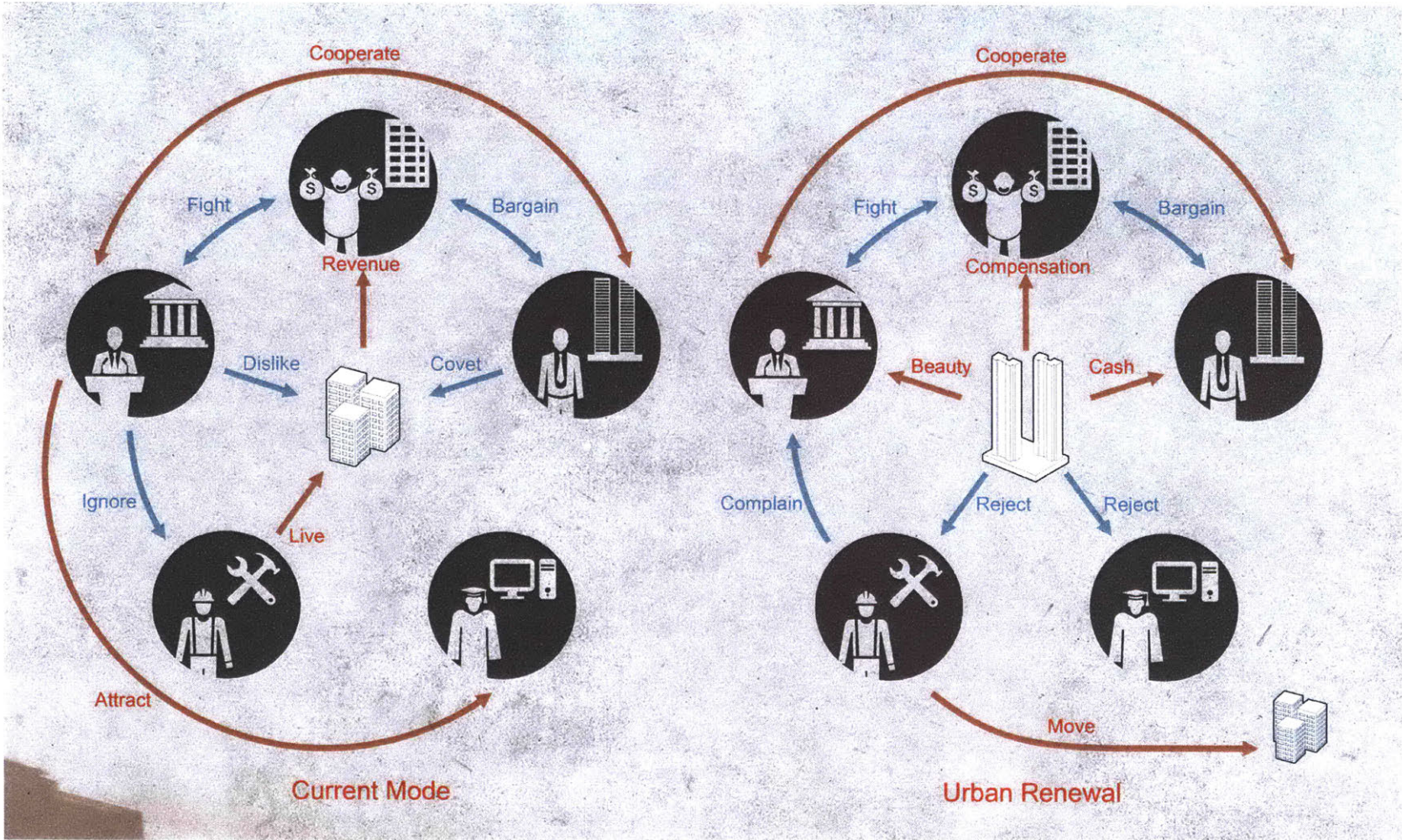
is a theme park that features with copied monumental buildings around the world. Built in the early nineteen nineties, this theme park has over fifty miniaturized monuments, as an ambition for Shenzhen to embrace the world.

In fact, this theme park is a representative of the city's copycat culture in many industries. Dafen, a place in Shenzhen where you can find hundreds of small workshops that produce fake famous paintings; Huaqiangbei, the biggest market of counterfeit electronic products; Portofino, the most high-end real estate in the city that mimics western countryside living, are good examples of such copycat culture.

Here, monumentality is an analytical and design tool I use to understand and address the city's rootlessness. Monumentality is different because it shows the collective idea of the society to memorize and praise one thing. Like Giedion said, "monumentality derives from the eternal need of the people to own symbols which reveal their inner life, their actions and their social conceptions."

Chapter 2
Urban Village - An Emerging Memory

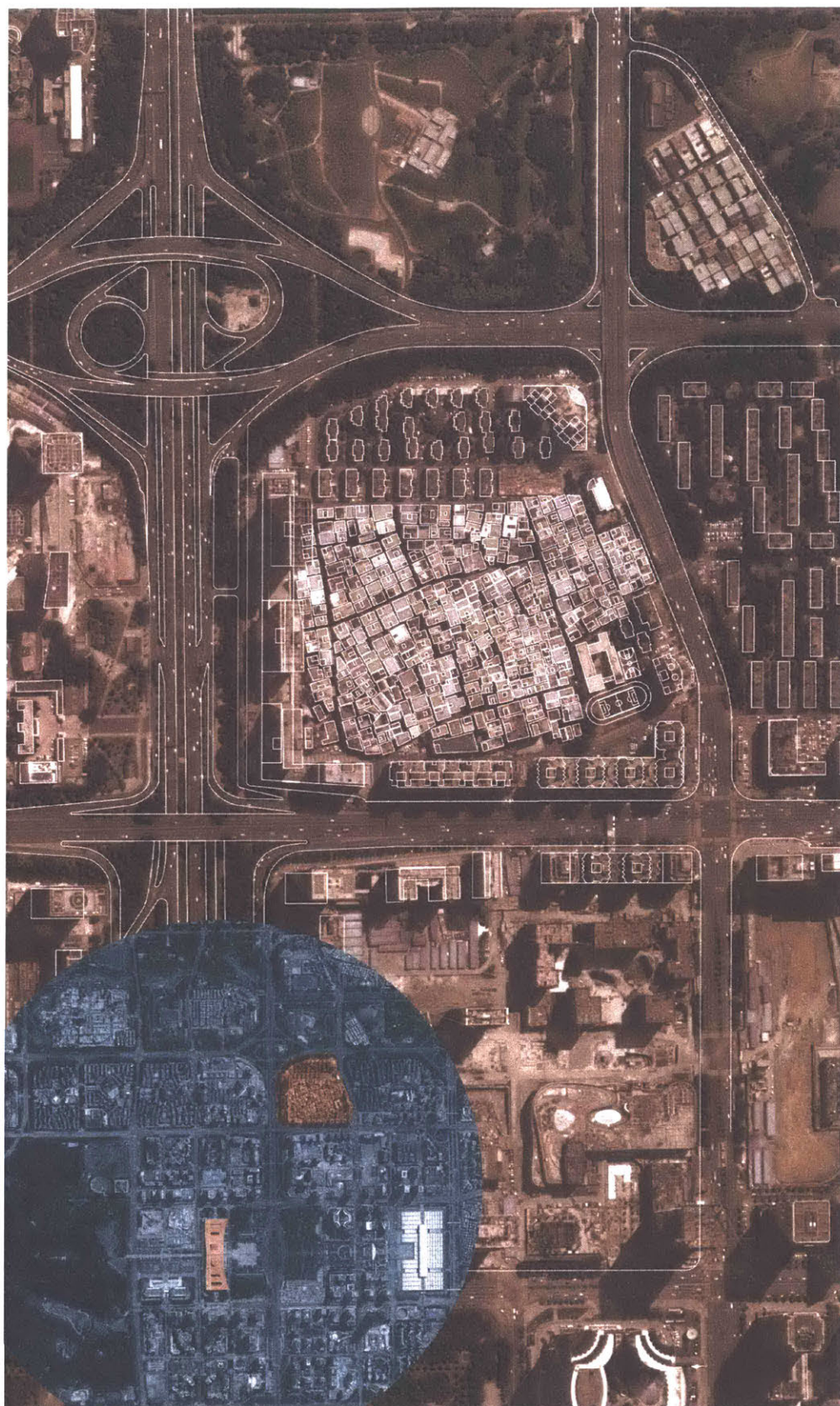












My thesis proposes to build a monument for immigrants in the city of Shenzhen, a monument that memorizes and praises the city's openness to immigrants.

To maximize the its meaning to the immigrants, the monument will be placed in an urban village. Urban Villages, or called "Villages in City", are a unique phenomenon in Shenzhen. It was originally small houses farmers built on their own farm lands to house the immigrant workers while the city was just opened up in the 80s. After so many years, these houses are surrounded by high-rises and became almost urban slums.

Currently, urban villages house many low-income immigrant workers. Although the living environment is poor, urban villages contains strong vibrance. Oftentimes, urban villages would be torn down to redeveloped into new

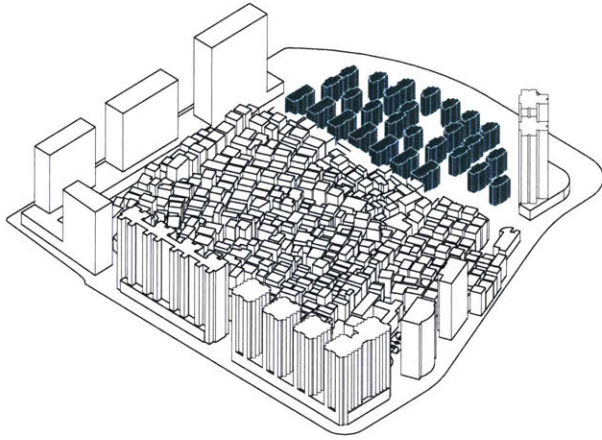
complex. The immigrant workers will be kicked out, and the collective memories about this place will be gone.

I think, urban villages are a special evidence to the city's short history. Its value to the city has not been fully realized and itself should be preserved. The exact site I chose is Gangxia Village, which located right in the CBD, and is called "the last standing urban village in CBD". Without exaggeration, this urban village would be wiped down and redeveloped at any time for its precious land value.

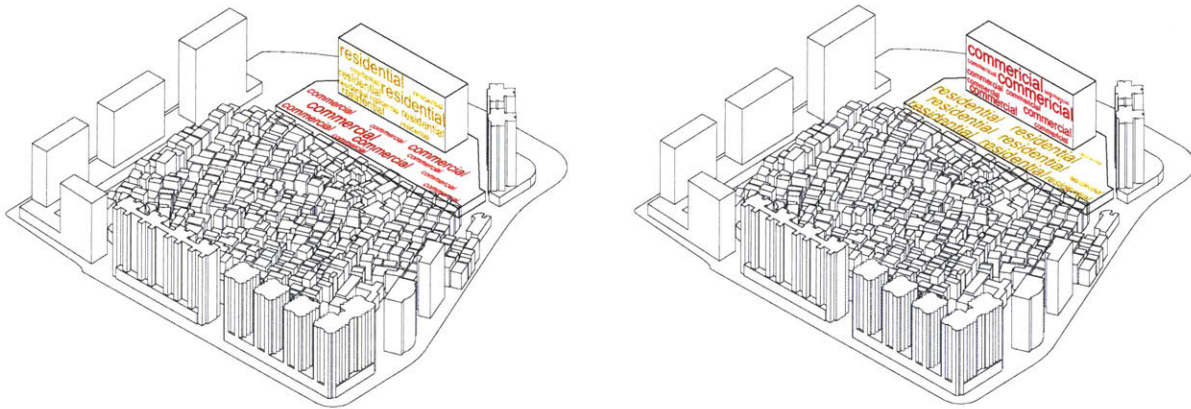
My basic design strategy is to invent a mechanism to use this monument as an excuse to avoid the prevailing financial mode in urban renewal. Therefore, this Urban Village would be kept, and new intervention can serve different groups of people.

Chapter 3
A Multifaceted Monument

Overall Strategy

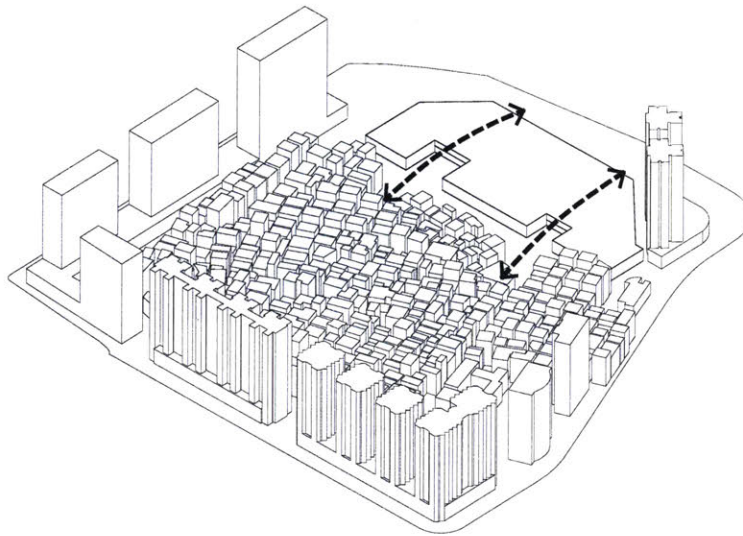


1) Currently, the west side of the site is a gated community of lowrise built in the late 1990s in dilapidated condition. The first step is to demolish these under-utilized buildings.

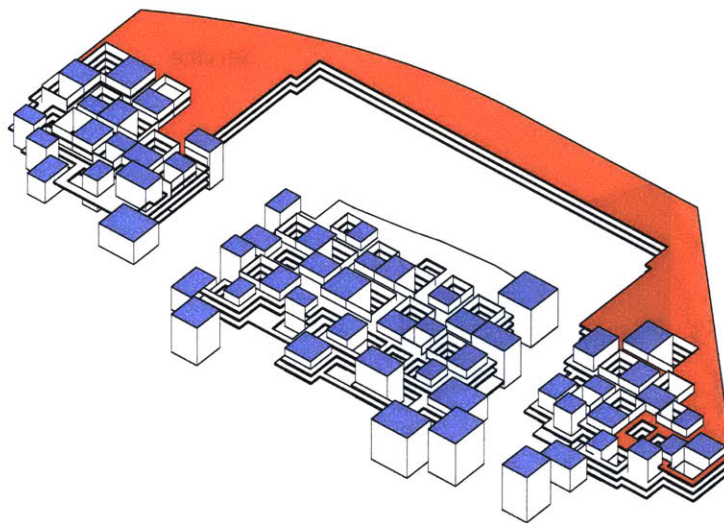


2) Instead of adopting the conventional mode (podium as the commercial and the tower as the residential), the two parts are flipped. By doing so, the new residents will be living on the same ground with the people in the urban village.

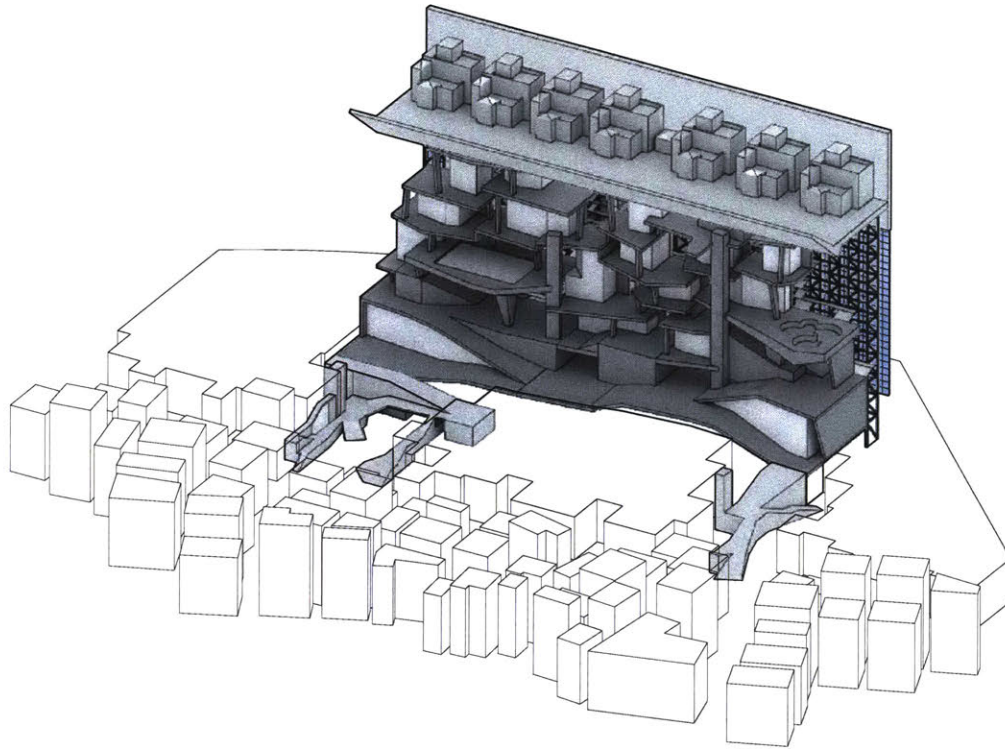
The Podium



1) The podium is cut out at two locations to extend the existing streets in the urban village and to form two plazas.



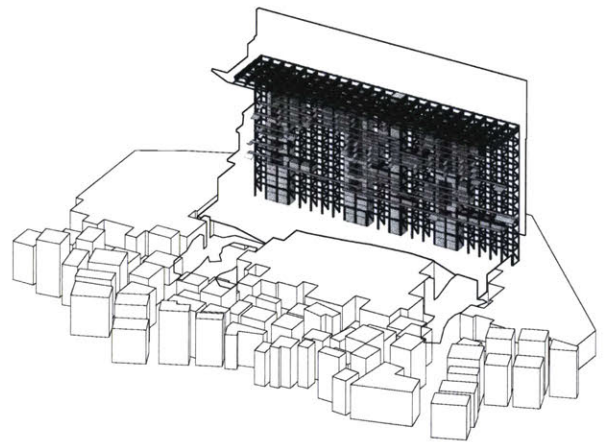
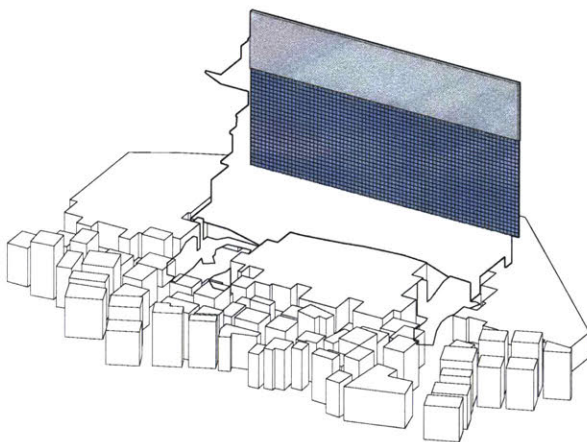
2) The outer part of the podium is a spacious co-work space for mostly start-ups. The inner part is a series of low-rise residential with walled gardens. Currently, Shenzhen government tries to introduce well-educated elites to the city. These residential will be part of the government's social housing project for the elites.



Layers

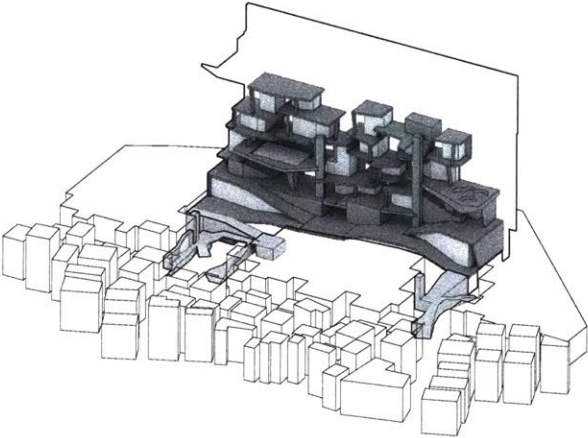
Monument

Service

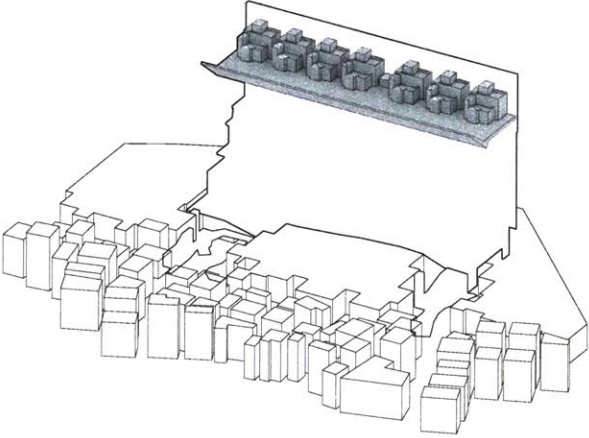


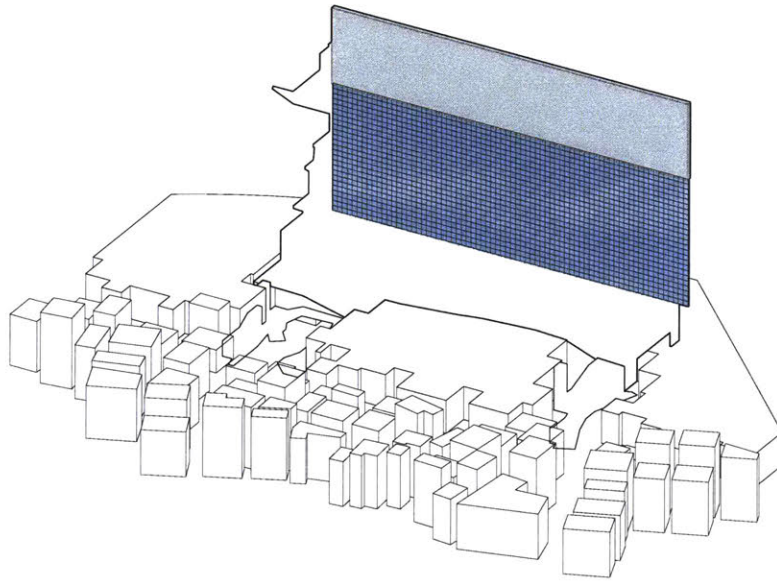
The primary focus of this thesis is given to the slab building, which contains several layers.

Living



Villas

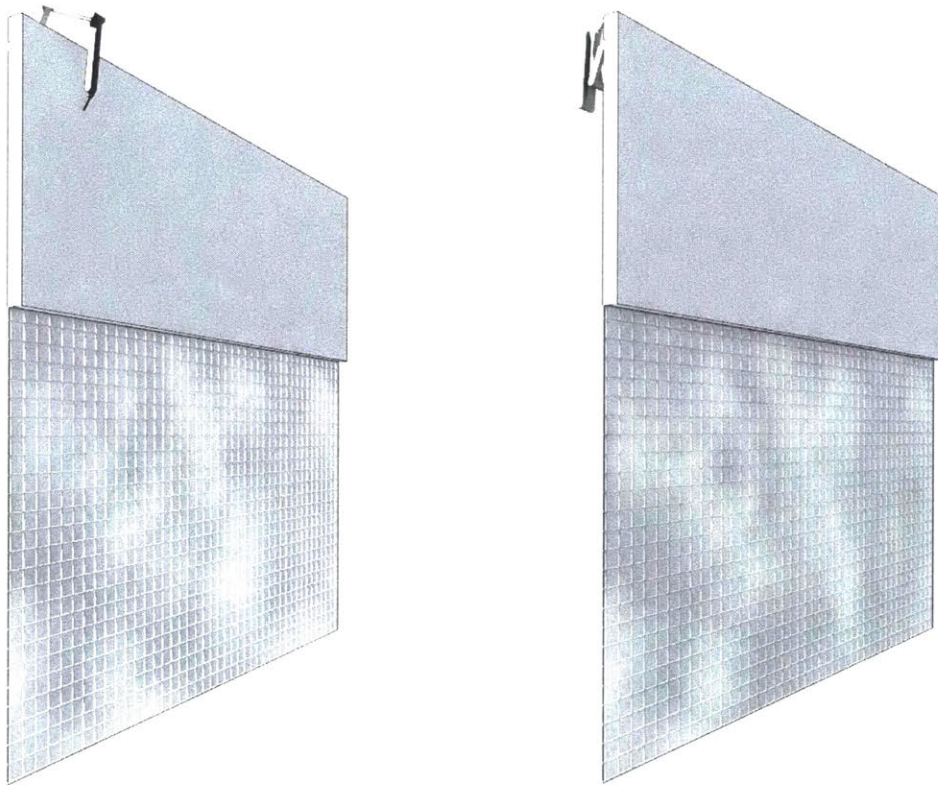




The Monument

The actual monument is at the most outer side facing an urban park. Being at a highly visible location, the monument is a pure white marble billboard. It blocks the views looking into the chaotic urban village. To emphasize its purity, the bottom part is the glass facade reflecting the blue sky, which makes the white billboard almost a mirage.

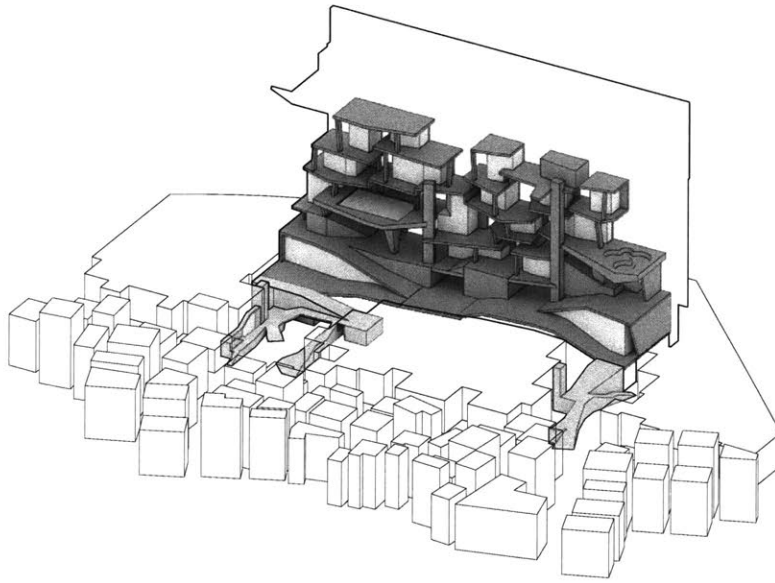




Behind the monument hides a gigantic retractable robotic arm. Every month, the robotic arm will swing to the front side, and engrave the names of ten outstanding immigrant workers selected by the city government.

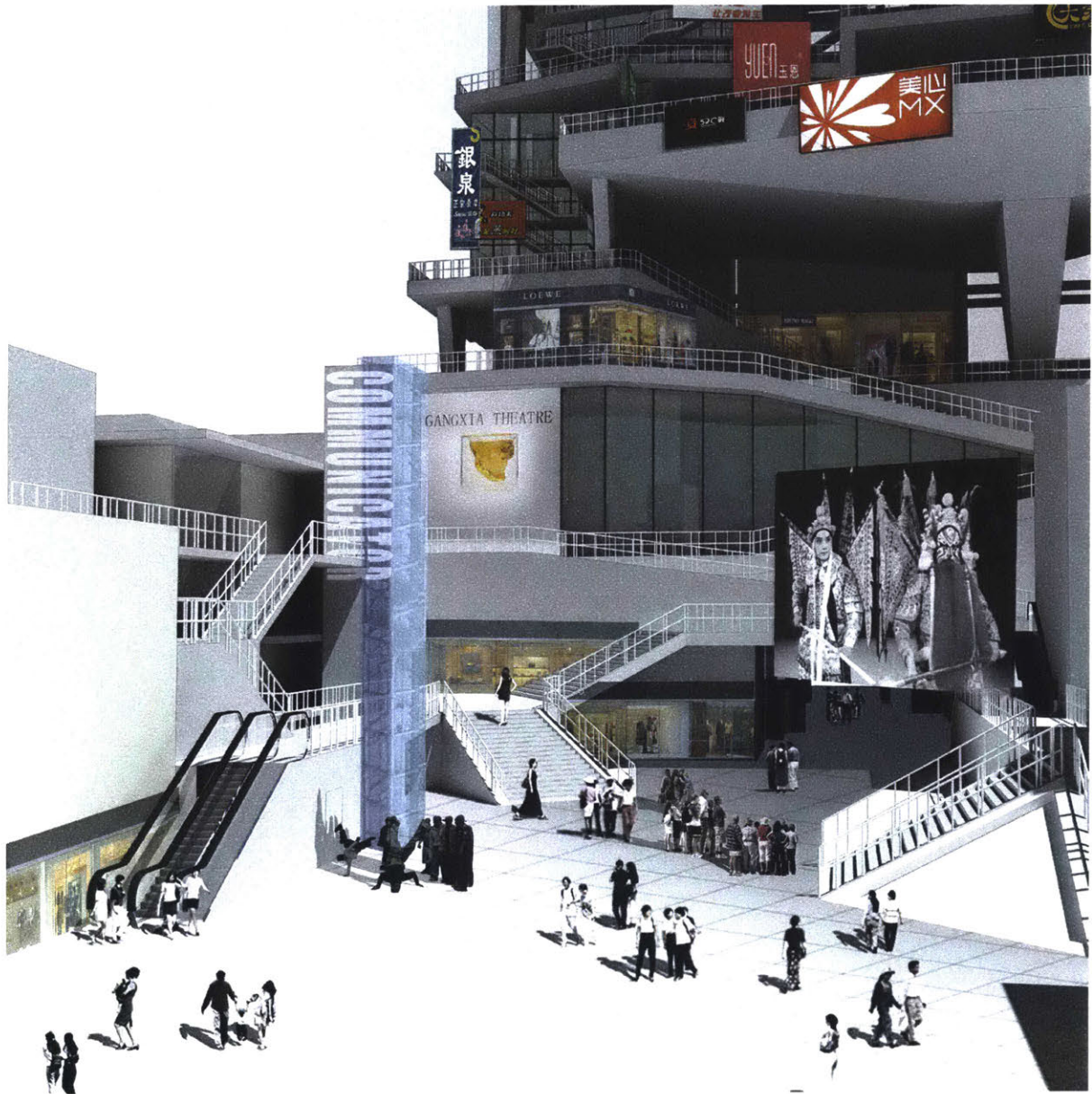
孙骏骄 刘轶 李
 Sun Junjiao Liu Yi Li
 孙梦 汤嘉健 李
 Sun Meng Tang Jiajian Li
 李 李 李 李 李 李

Since each of the names is very small, from far distance they will not affect the overall reading of the monument's purity. The billboard has enough space for 12,000 names, or for one hundred years.



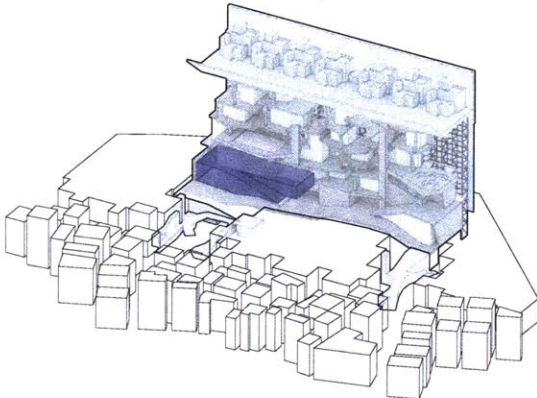
Living

The inner side of the building are a series of different public programs serving mostly the residents in the urban village. The bottom parts are large programs like cinemas and theaters; and the upper parts are commercial. By exposing the circulations of people and the billboards to the urban village, this side exhibits the chaotic and vibrant living atmosphere.

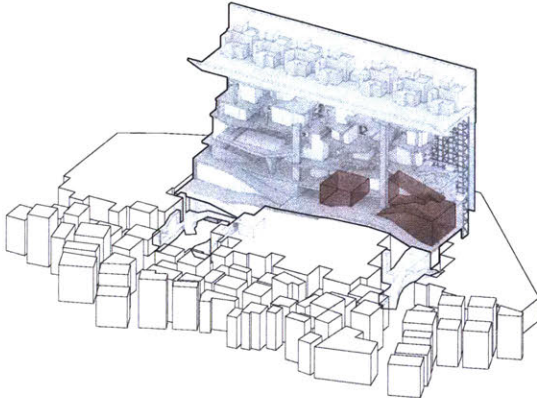


Public programs

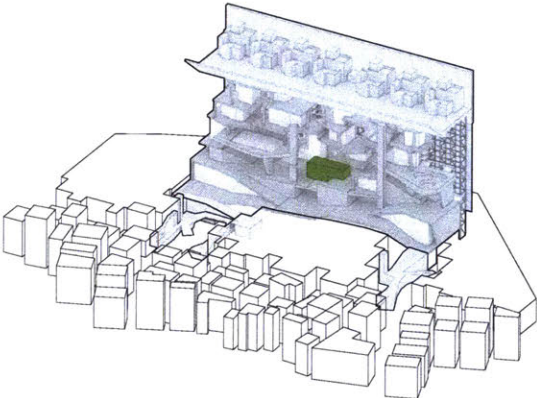
Theater



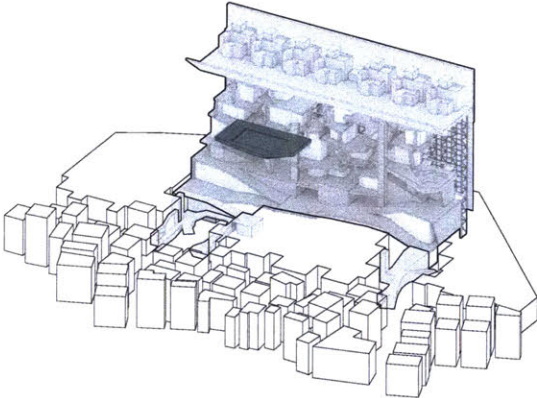
Movie Cinema



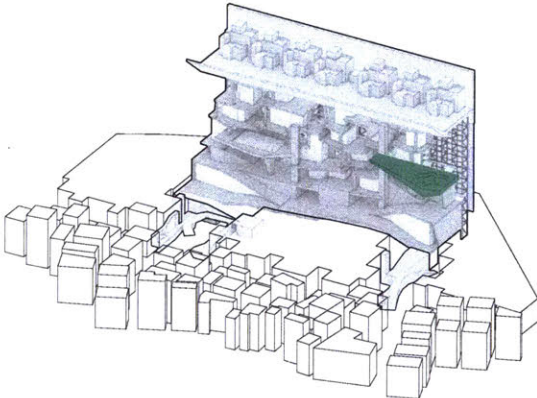
Art Museum



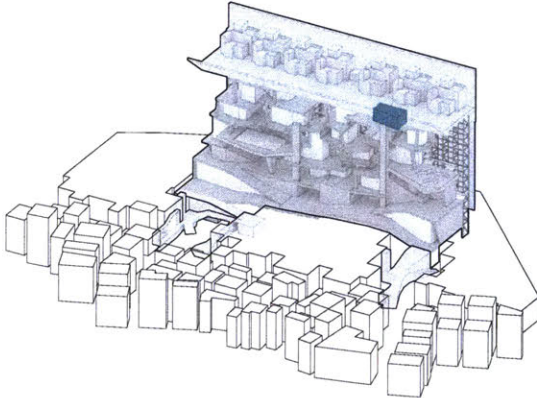
Swimming Pool



Skate Park

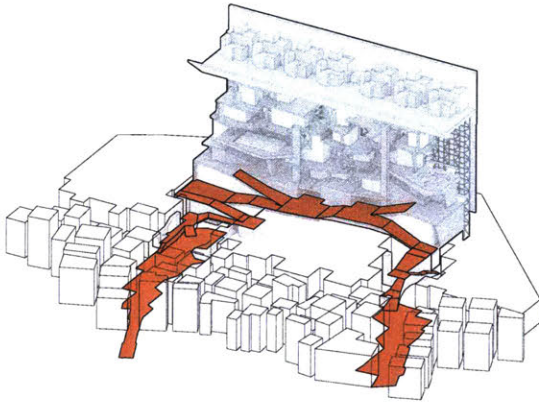


Museum of Immigrants

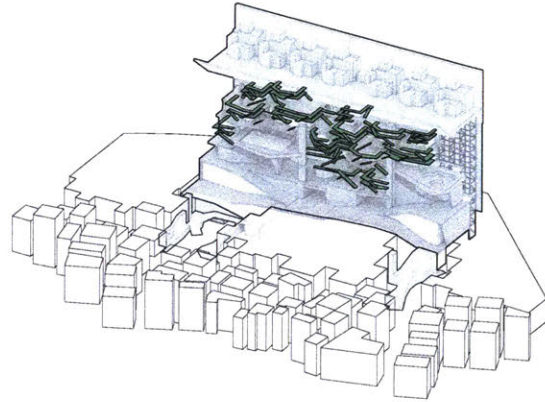


Circulation

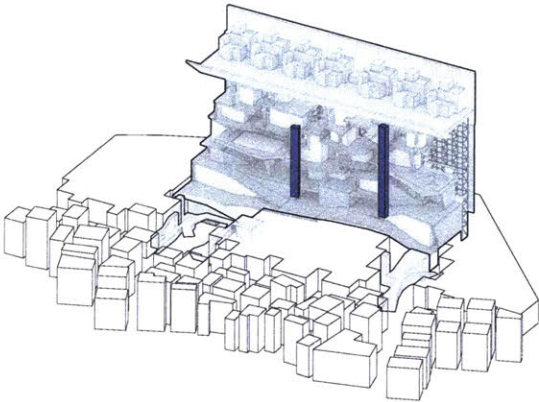
Vertical Streets



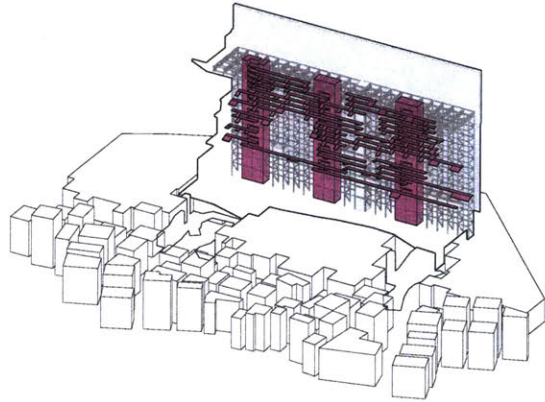
Stairs and Corridors



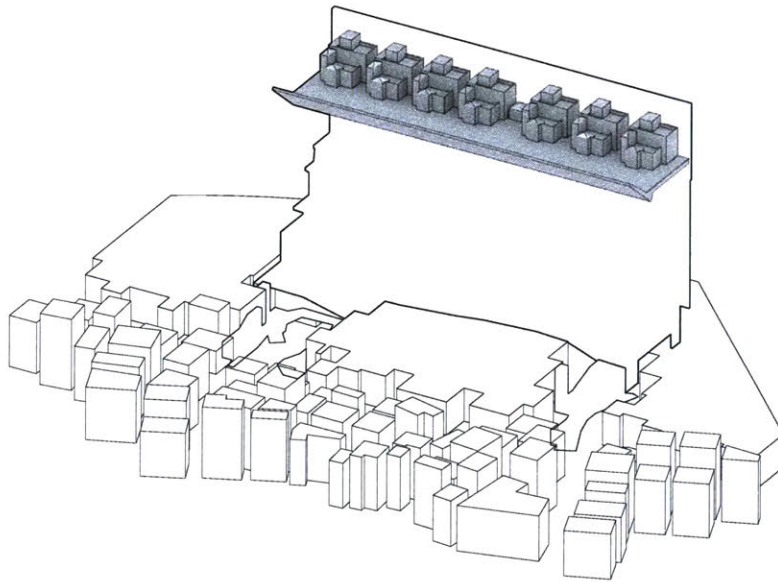
Primary Elevators



Service

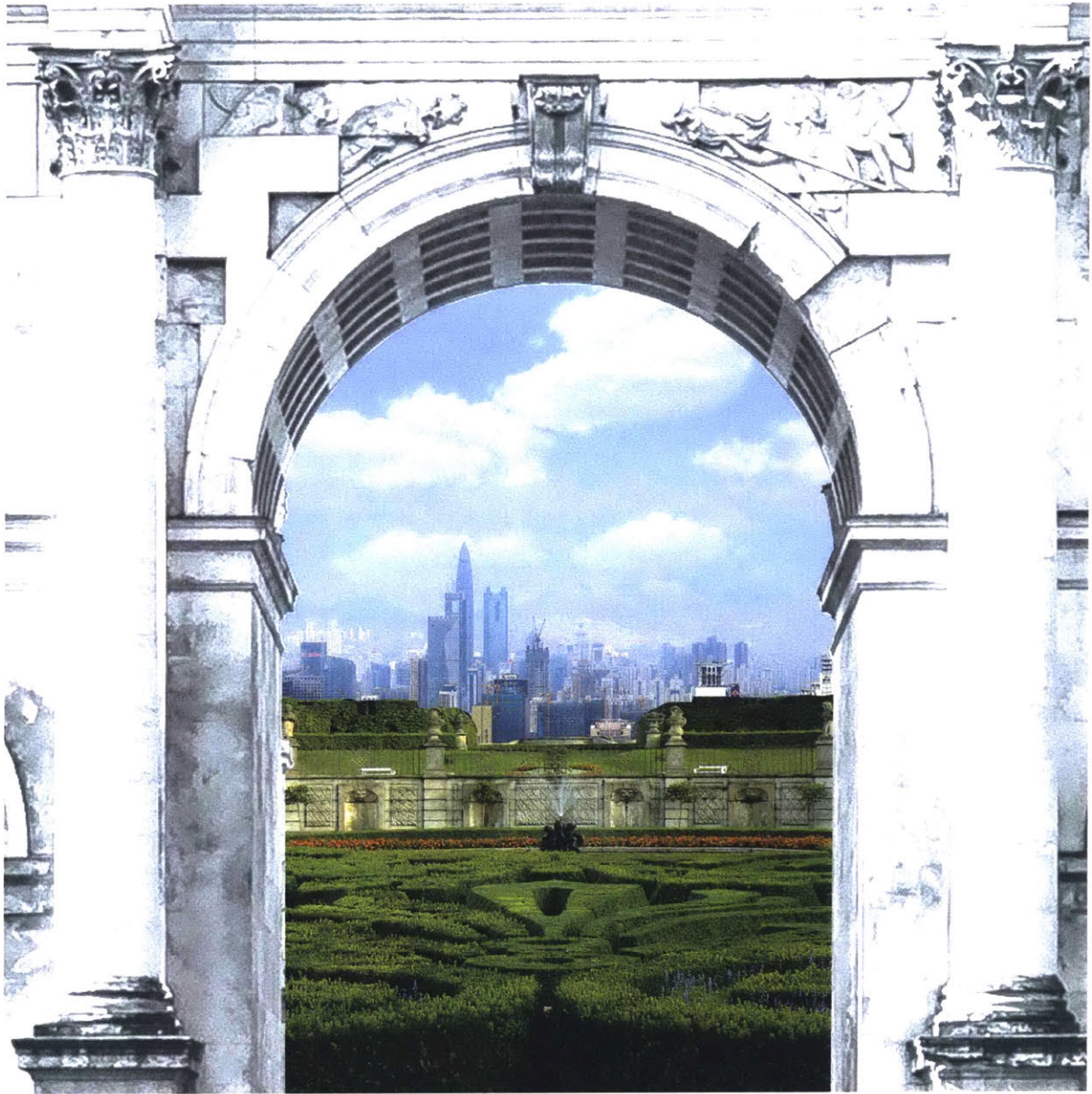


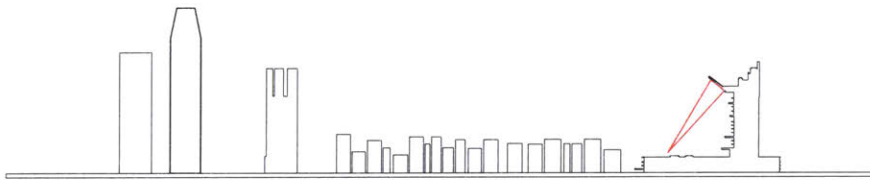
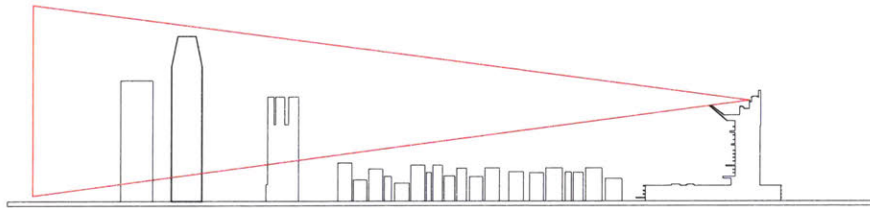




The Villas

Currently, Shenzhen has a huge housing bubble. It has the highest housing price among all Chinese cities. At the same time, real estate developers are reluctant to take on social housing projects for its low profits. In this project, a series of villas mimicing western living style with a tilted park is added on top of the building to motivate the developers to participate.

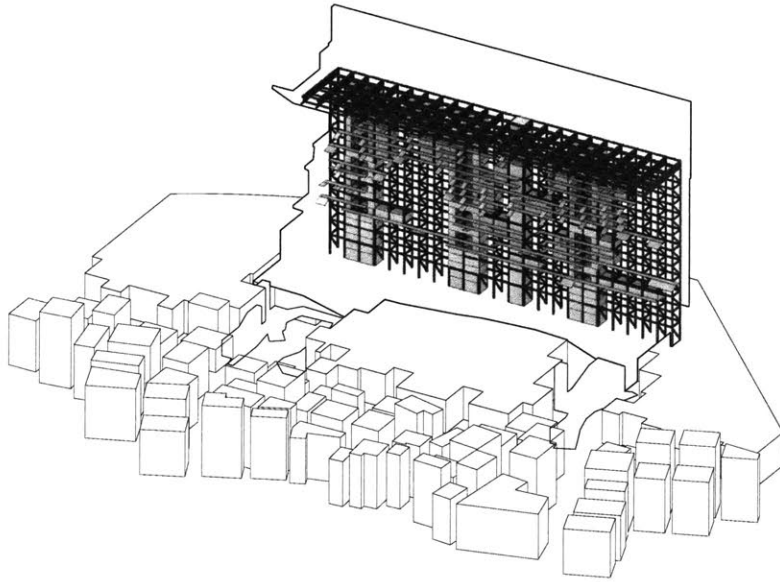




The Tilted Park

While the tilted park blocks the residents' views into the urban village, the backside of it is a large LED display. At night, the LED will play TV programs for the urban village residents, which fits their living style. In this way, the rich people's western villas and tilted park become the poor people's entertainment.



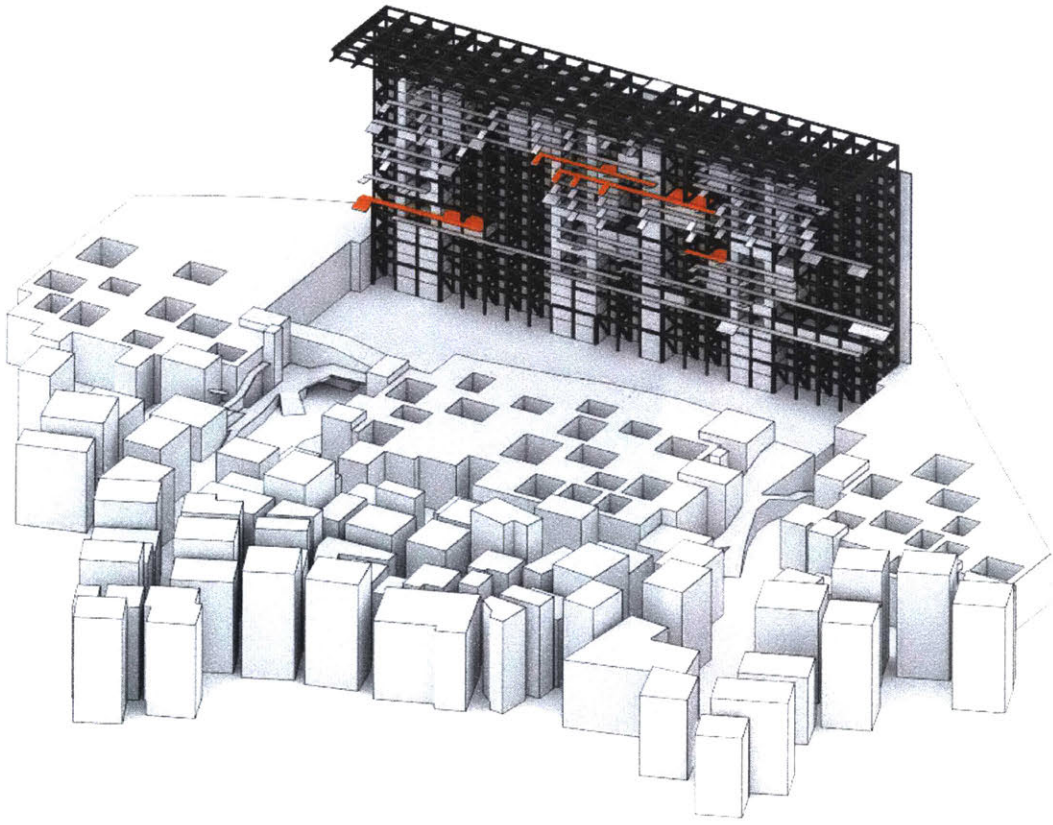


The Service Cores

Between the monument side and the living side is massive steel frame structure. Within the structure are a series of cores and service space (restrooms and storage). Some of the service spaces have an accessible rooftop, and they could easily be occupied by the urban villagers for casual activities like group dancing or playing poker.

At night, while the marble billboard is being used to project propaganda images, the lower part of the facade becomes the poor people's playground and stage.

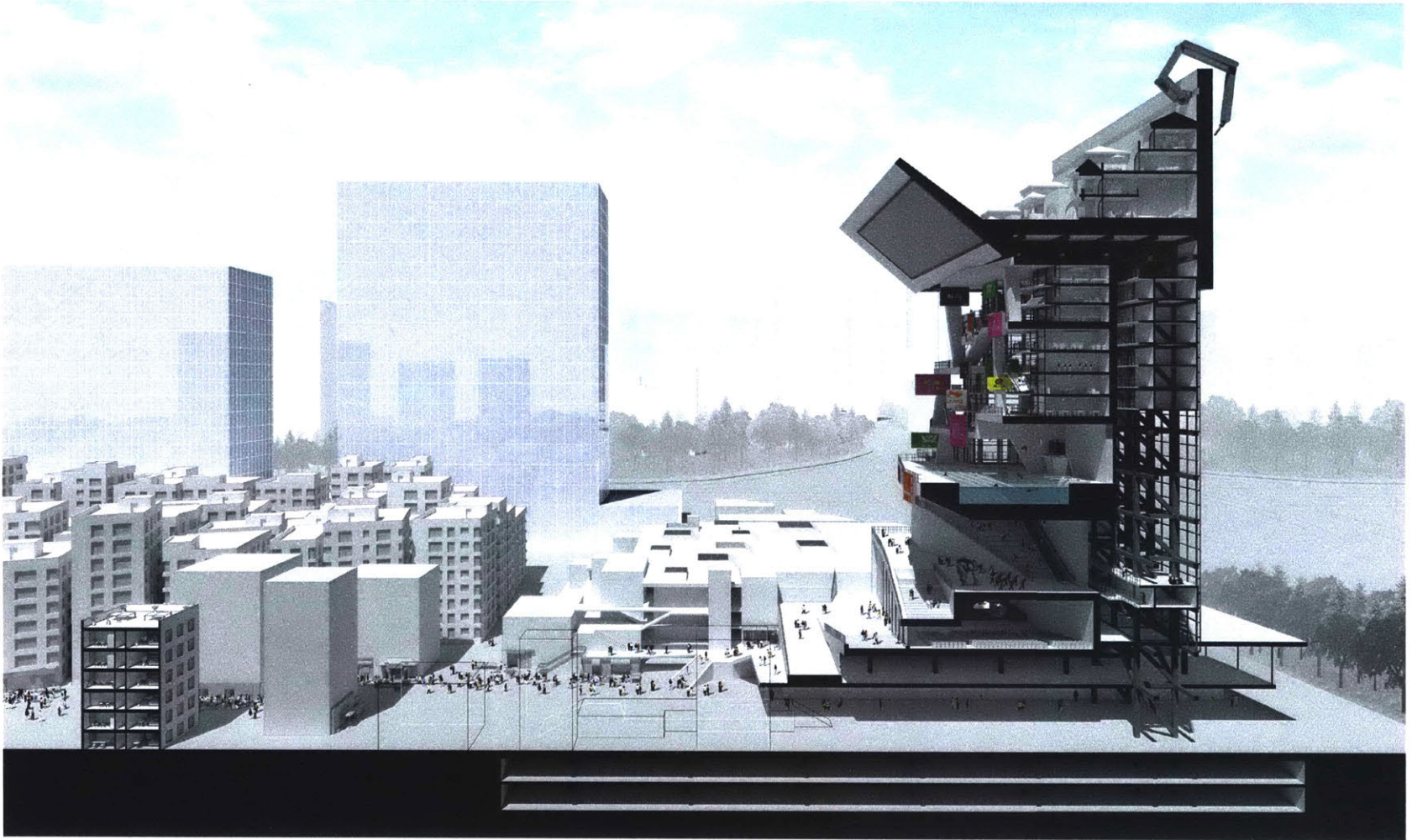




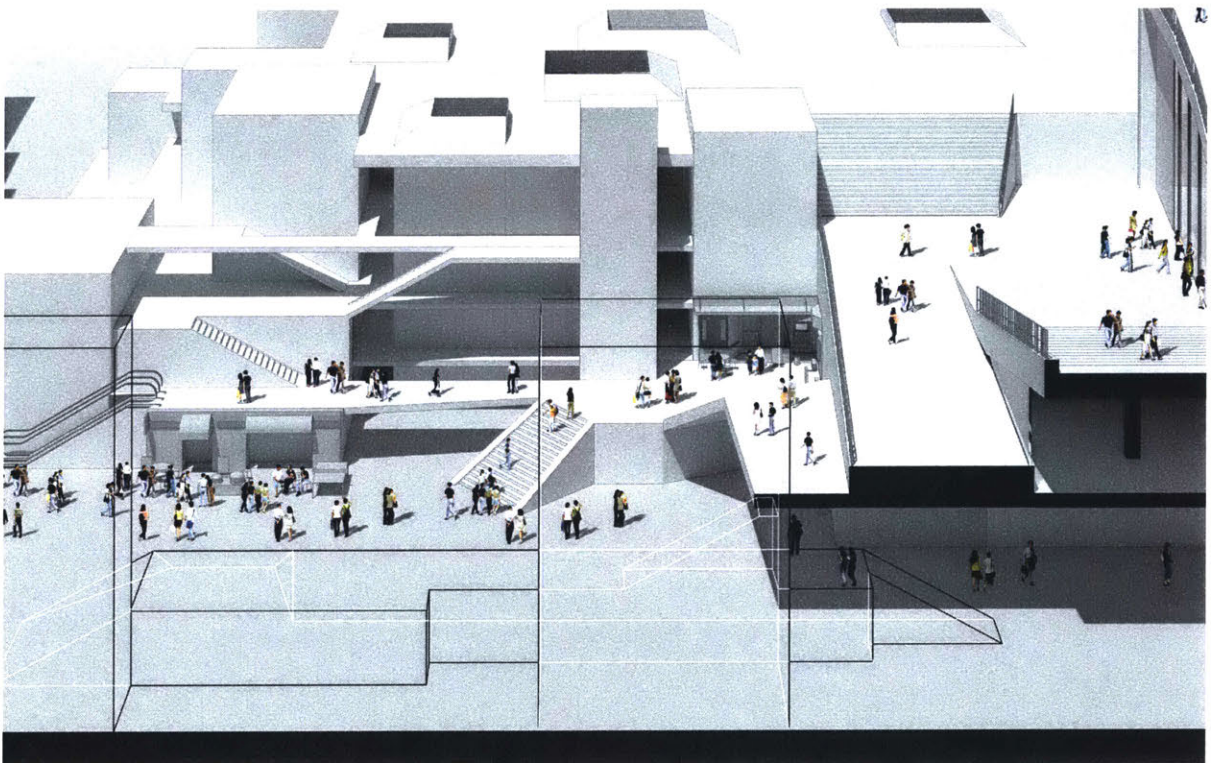
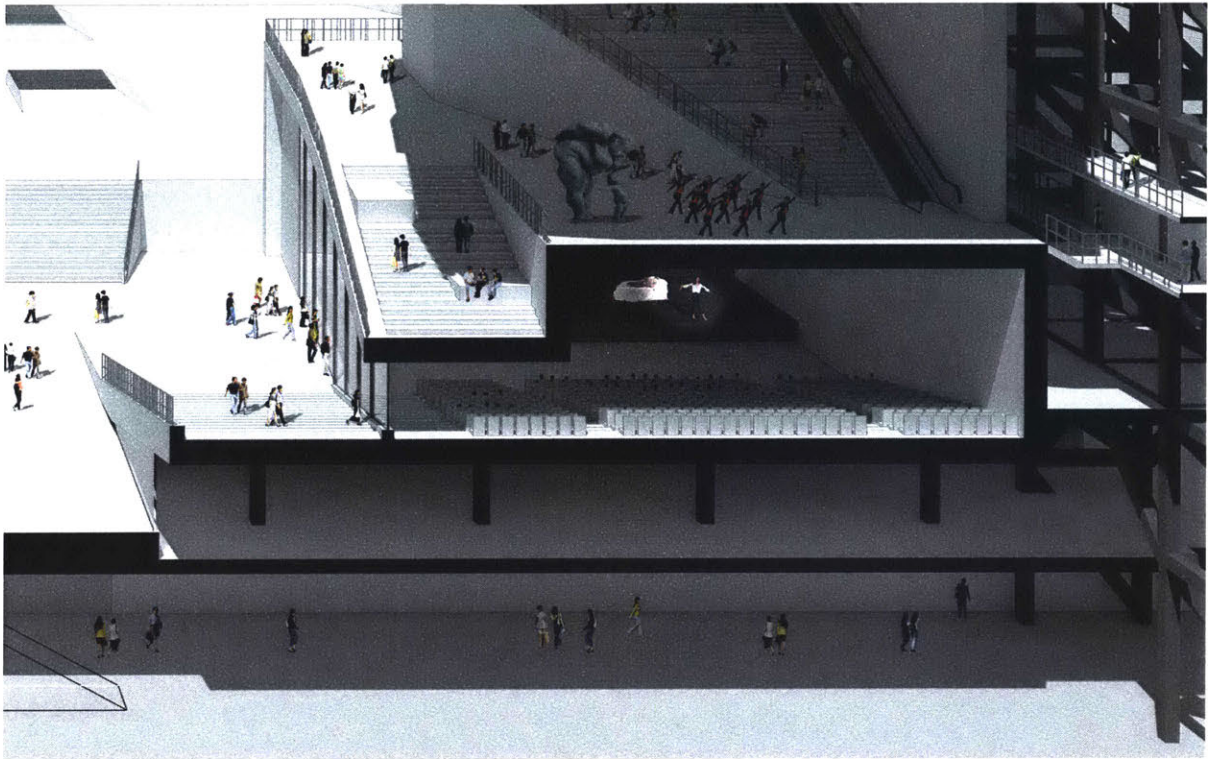
The accessible roof top of service spaces

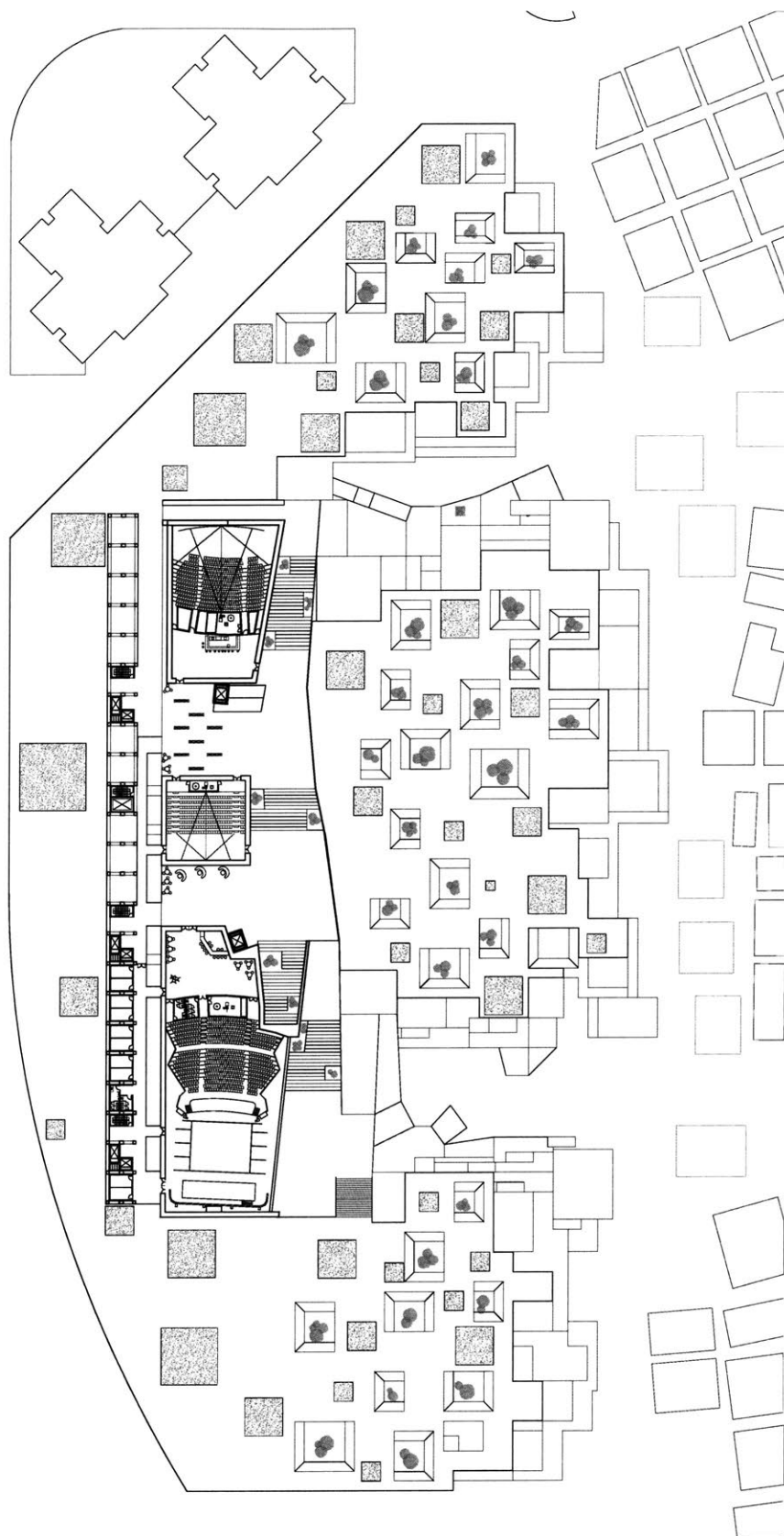


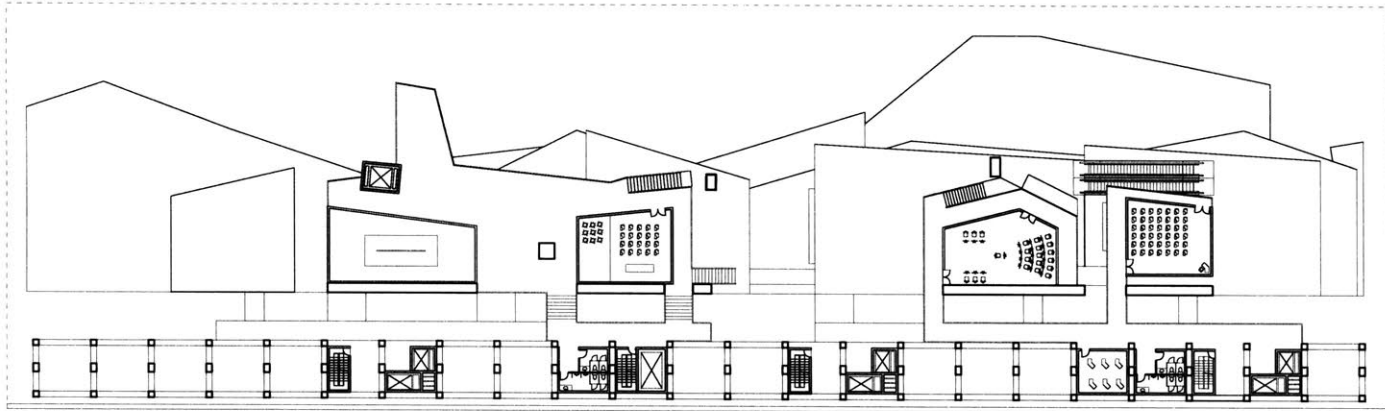
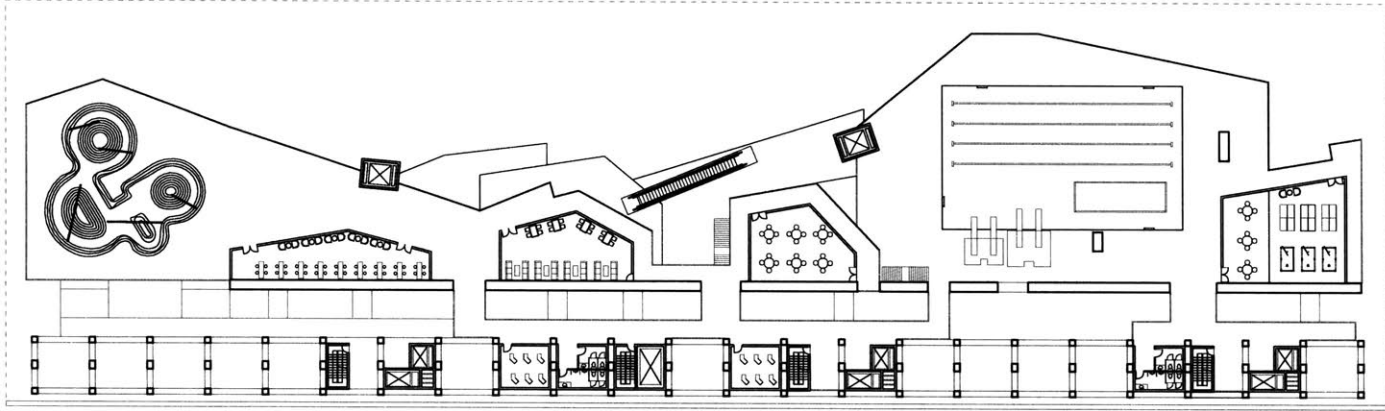
People's casual activity happening in these hidden spaces

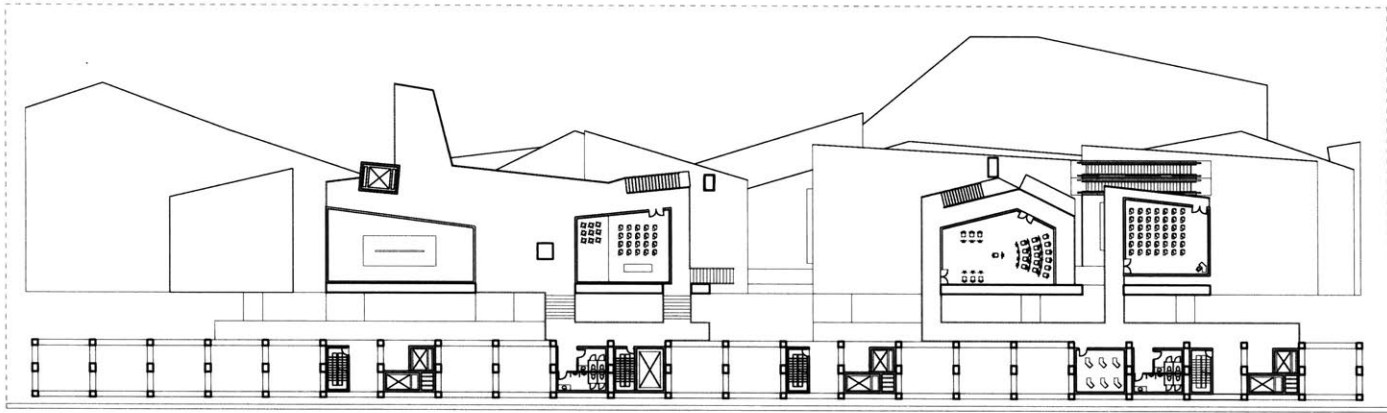


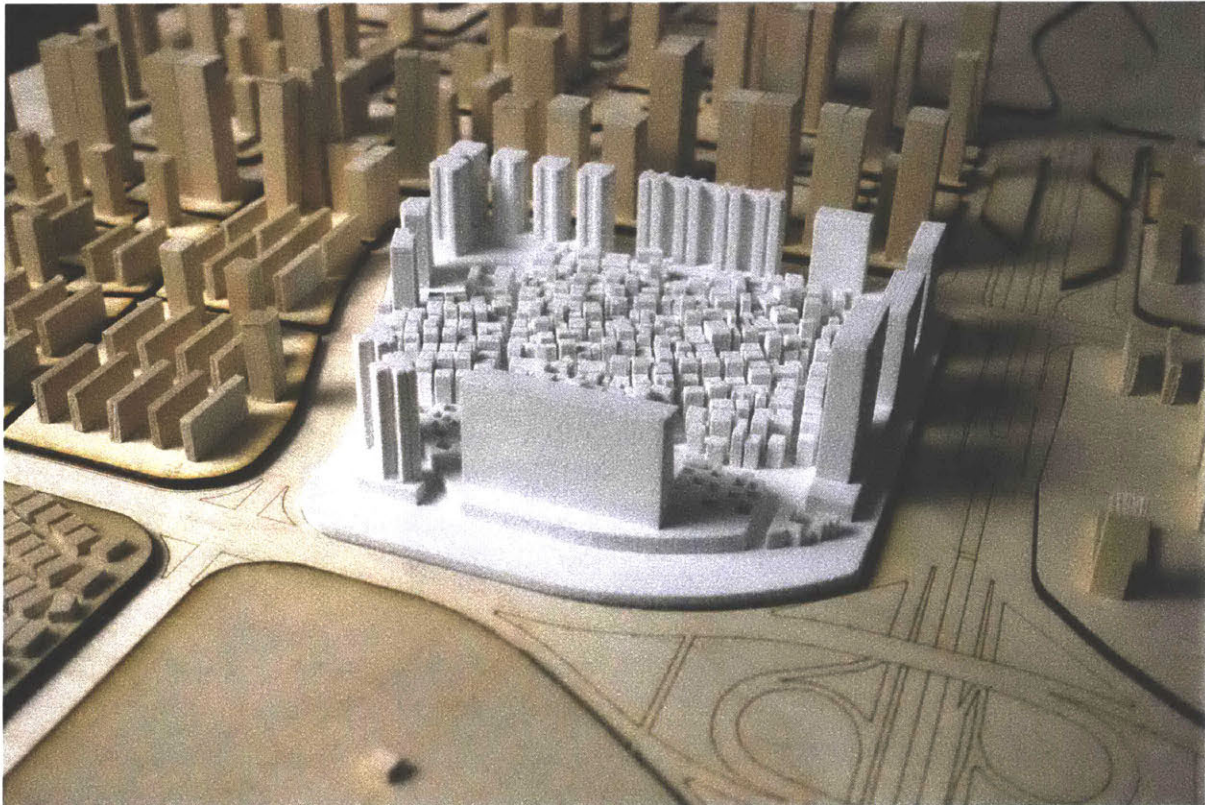
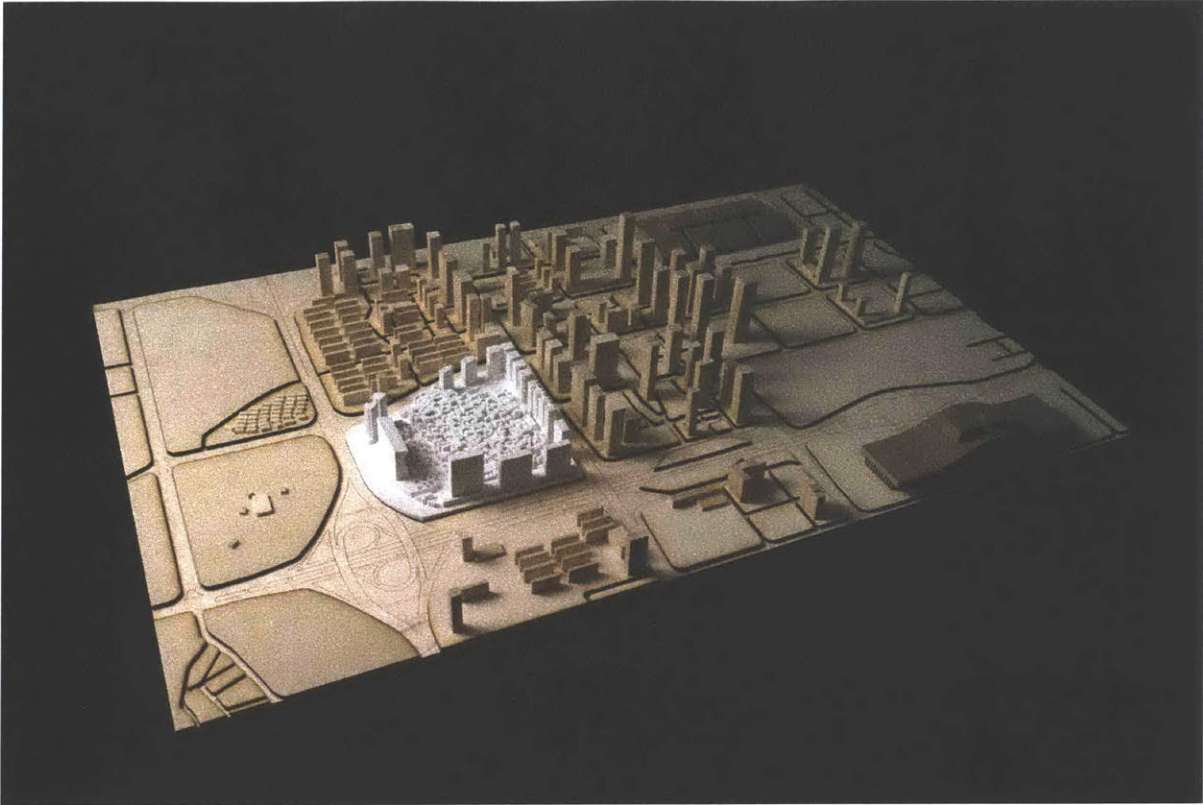




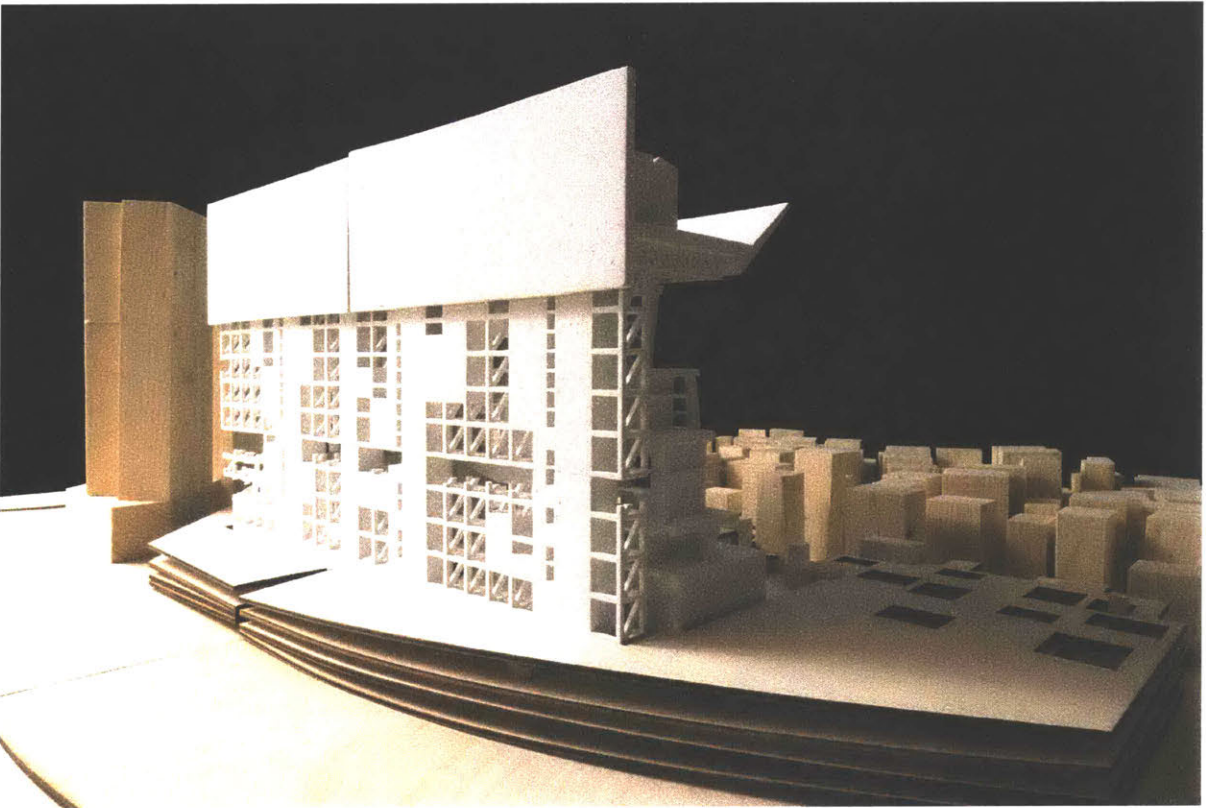


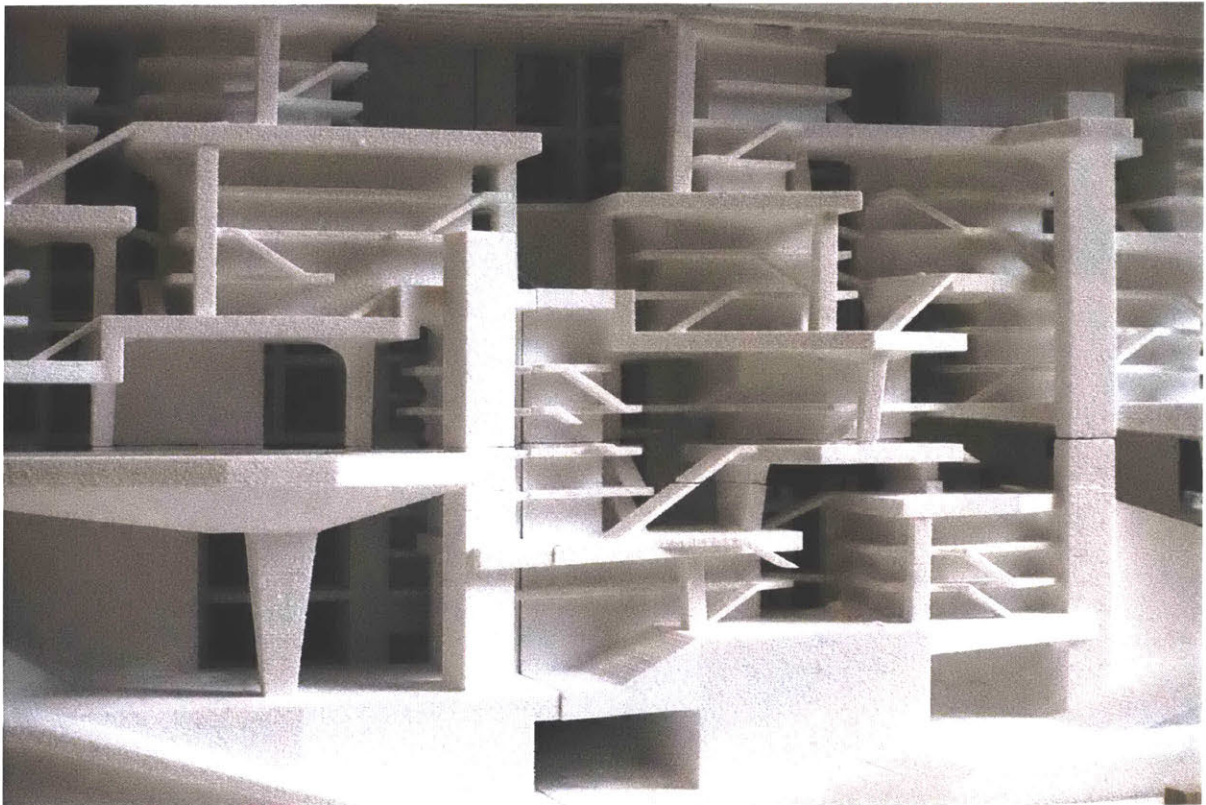












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