A STUDY OF REIMAGINED SPACE: THROUGH OBSERVATION, MEMORY & REISISTANCE.

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SITE WRITING Oxford Street & Surrounding Areas

INITIAL THOUGHTS

05

The project's site is located on Oxford Street - a hectic commercial place of endless activity, bustling with hurried footsteps of locals and tourists alike, and a constant hum of vibrant energy. It is known to be the heartbeat of London, being one of the busiest and most commercial streets.

As I walked along its streets, I came to realize that people seem to already have their days mapped out ahead of time with precision, knowing which is the fastest way to get to their location. Rarely is anyone not in a hurry to slow down to take in the surroundings. Yet, if you take a moment and pause, you'll see that the streets offer a fascinating interplay of architectural styles, the different aesthetics and materials that all speak to its history and evolution.

During the trip, the sheer variety of buildings struck me. Different facades each tell a different story using diverse materials and techniques to capture pedestrians' attention. Turning the corner after Outernet, located directly across from the chaotic Tottenham Court Road Station, a calm area emerges - you're now met with quiet and peace. The buildings line up neatly, facing one another, all tall and commanding still creating a serene atmosphere, almost guiding you along the street and showing the way with a somewhat orderly presence. If you continue the trek down this street, the buildings will lead to a small cafe tucked in the backside of the lined structures.

I enjoyed the individuality of each structure, the fact that each building is different in height, materiality and design, and has its own style. Some are modern and polished, while others show signs of age with older brickwork. If you pay close attention, the bricks have variations, laid out differently for each building, some are red, white or black. The scene is bold yet serene, calm yet playful. Clean sleek white walls with modern windows stand adjacent to rustic bricks, creating a striking yet harmonious juxtaposition.

As you walk towards the end of the street, it's like the buildings' facades protruding and fighting for dominance, creating layers, each trying to take the lead and overlapping one another's edges, conjoined at odd angles while others blend into the background; creating a rhythm that is both chaotic and captivating.

SITE WRITING The Site - 12 Oxford Street, W1D 2EU

THOUGHTS ON THE EXTERIOR

At the site, the atmosphere changes. It is situated on a busy high street, meaning it's easily accessible, Tottenham Court Road Station being a two-minute walk across the road.

Currently occupied by a currency exchange shop, called "Change Money", it's nestled between two retail giants, McDonald's and Primark, the site is easy to miss if you're not looking for it.

A compact, mid-century building, it seems cramped and dwarfed amidst the taller neighbouring structures. Its faded facade, comprised of 5 windows overlooking the busy street, shows signs of wear and tear, its age is shown through the cracks and discolouration of the materials, hinting at years of neglect, especially at the roof. The latter is a mansard roof which appears weathered with a single window. Still, there are small details that stand out, the decorative windowsills with the rondels feature hint at design intentions from its 1950s origins - giving the building a bit of character despite its overall tired appearance. Despite its unfinished, bland look, the building's bright blue signage is surprisingly eye-catching - being the only vibrant element of the structure.

Its undeniably prime location should serve as functional and beneficial however, although charming, the site seems to lack the polish and prominence of its neighbours. When you look at it, you can't help but notice the domesticity of it - seeming like an afterthought in the shuffle of modernization, how it's struggling to hold its ground between two successful companies on a street dominated by high-profile storefronts.

THOUGHTS ON THE INTERIOR

I was unable to enter the site and observe its interior directly as it's a money exchange shop and the upper floors are closed off to the public.

From what I can see on the ground floor, there's ample use of fluorescent light, making the space feel very cold and bright. The shop is also made up of hardwood flooring, unsure if it's laminate or parquet, and cream-coloured walls. The space appears to be narrow and compact, limiting its practicality for retail use due to its unsuitable floor plan. Each floor can only accommodate about 12 people, which could pose a problem in maximising occupancy, especially considering the high rent costs in Oxford Street.

The building consists of high ceilings on each floor except the very last due to the mansard roof. Although there are multiple windows - 5 at the front and 4 at the back, which could provide enough natural light - the narrow structure sandwiched between two much larger buildings might restrict sunlight to reach deeper parts of the interior.

The site offers creative potential with the presence of a backyard: an outdoor integration or a floor extension could provide flexibility for creative zoning solutions. The four leveled building allows for structural use per floor, each floor could be assigned to different purposes and offer versatile dynamic and functional spaces.



PHOTOMONTAGE OF SITE AND SURROUNDINGS



MICRO - MACRO





unnoticed or forgotten presence. There's an apparent juxtaposition with the light, polished, shiny and delicate fork on top of the much larger, heavy, bulky and sharp bench. The more I'm describing it, the more it feels like someone left it behind, in front of a busy London station for a reason. Outernet's gold facade. It's a textured gold reflective surface with a perforated pattern of circular holes, positioned behind it is a black

A type of stone trapezoidal long bench, which is cool

to the touch, rough, raw. Its angled design gives it a

monolithic dominant appearance. But what shockingly

caught my attention, was the delicate golden fork, rest-

ed on its side. As if someone intentionally kept it there, positioned it properly to balance. It also suggests an

reflective surface with a perforated pattern of circular holes, positioned behind it is a black panel. The black panels througout the space are very smooth and also reflective, almost mirror like. I like the bold bright gold agaisnt the black, art deco.

The Swivel installation adds some fun pop of color in a quite ordinary area that is quite busy with people running around. These allow for people to actually stop and admire them and sit. The combination of stacked marble blocks, the top one wit arm rests with clean edges and turns around might not sound comfortable but shockingly is not bad. The boxy shape is bold and loud. There's several of these scattered around, some even hidden out of sight behind columns, but they add some creativity in the street.





Metalic-like finish curved bench in the shape of the letter Y. Positioned inside outernet to sit and watch the big screens displaying music performances or vibrant trippy visuals. There are some yellow stickers on one side of the bench. Someone leaving their mark, or promoting something. Might be part of the bench, although the other one with a different shape did not have these adhesives.

The pavement before stepping into the seating space at Outernet is embedded with small green LED lights, scattered all over the floor. I enjoy how artistic and creative this one little area right outside TCR station is, I didnt expect to see this many pop of colors and displays.

Extra: this huge dog sculpture took me by surprise, its extreme detail and shine are very commendable. People who were in a rush even stopped for a pciture. A mix of materials. Seems like terrazzo flooring is starting to get revealed from underneath the pavement. Either that portion wasnt entirely covered or materials started to detoriate. A lot of gum, mostly stuck on the terrazzo bit.

The gold metal trim makrs the end of the site meaning that small extra sliver of space belongs to site thereforse there's an opportunity to get creative with the facade and extend it slightly or extrude a part of the design / building if desired. Someone mustve dropped their recepit. Caution sticker on the floor for poeple to mind their steps since the entrance has slight step into the shop.

Scratches on both the metal door handle and the glass. Fingerprints can also be seen. You can tell that the inside of the shop is bright thanks to the fluorescent lights. Cold materials

The walls of the site are obviously neglected, showing signs of dirt, cracks, damage, stains. Debris on the floor, this area is clearly not cleaned or looked after too often.

These walls are also often used as little areas for homless people to sit against, on the left of this wall, theres a small clearing in the between the site and primark for a bigger sheltering space.

The site's redeaming quality is the winow detailed mouldings, a nod to when this building was designed. The rondels add a hint of character, some charm to the other very worn, domesticated, detoriating site.











FROM
TORUIN
REBIRTHHOW ARE FORGOTTEN SPACES LATER FOUND
AS ICONS OF RESISTANCE & IDENTITY?



"The ruins are still standing - but what do they stand for?"¹

Ruins. Silent monuments that stand the test of time. They are witnesses of forgotten histories and unspoken memories. In their decay, they hold the passage of culture and progress – preserving and transmitting cultural values and traditions across generations. Ruins represent what was and what will be. The architectural remains are often seen as a physical reflection of society; they help shape the world we live in and are shaped by the world. As they are often seen as relics of a faraway past, they hold the power of resurgence and transformation within them. With all this being said, their continued existence still begs the question of meaning - in terms of their stories, their messages, memories, and symbols. Given their transcendence beyond their original purpose, what do ruins represent in today's fast-developing new world?

Dillon, B. (2014) Ruin lust. London: Tate Publishing.

This essay will focus on the afterlife of architecture - ruins' second chance at life. To do so, I will analyse these spaces in three ways: first, by assessing the structures themselves, then by inspecting how communities appropriate them, and finally by tracing their transformation through time.

I'll explore how even ruins have an opportunity for a resurrection, a potential rebirth. Specifically, I'll examine how decayed structures are reclaimed and repurposed by communities' members through a process known as "spatial appropriation" – where spaces are claimed, formally or informally, and given new purposes beyond their original design, going through modification to suit certain needs as a means of survival or resistance. Christoph Graumann's simple definition of appropriation is "the act or process of taking something as one's own or making something as one's own"². Lilianne Rioux builds it up by referring to appropriation as an "essential mechanism" that people use, by engaging in behavioural changes, in order to "claim ownership of, actively use, and ultimately create meaning in and become attached to the physical environment"³, and to then establishing a sense of home and unity, resulting in a "meaningful space". This process is often triggered by socio-political dynamics: we'll notice how decisions are catalysed by power dynamics, social structures, and cultural narratives, which heavily influence the reasons and ways communities reclaim and repurpose the spaces. This essay will also highlight how various socio-political contexts influence these transformations; how spatial appropriation is frequently the response to an economic fall, social inequality, community empowerment, and further issues. In doing so, this study will additionally trace the journey of these spaces through time. We'll analyse how their roles have evolved from past ambitions to present adaptations and explore their potential futures and possibilities as spaces of identity and renewal. At this moment in time, they are no longer solely historical artefacts but active symbols of resistance, social justice, cultural identity, and safe spaces.

This research will aim to showcase an analysis of architectural spaces that have experienced a "second life". We will first investigate the Torre David, a skyscraper in Venezuela, that was meant to be a luxury hotel but turned into a vertical community for squatters. Then, we turn to Ponte City, an iconic residential tower in South Africa that fell into decay and was eventually restored through urban renewal efforts. Finally, we will examine The Egg, an abandoned cinema that became the face of revolutionary change amidst suffering in Lebanon

As we dive deeper into this essay, we'll have to ask ourselves what these ruins that we continue to reclaim and repurpose truly represent in this evolving world. Will they continue to offer meaning? Or are their new roles and representations destined to shift in time, leaving us to endlessly reinterpret what they might stand for?

² Graumann, C.F., 1976. The concept of appropriation (aneignung) and modes of appropriation of space.

Rioux, L., Scrima, F. and Werner, C.M. (2017) 'Space appropriation and place attachment: University students create places', *Journal of environmental psychology*, 50, pp. 60–68. Available at: https://doi. org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2017.02.003.

FIGURE 1: "BLUE RUINS OF THE PAST", ZLATKO MUSIC

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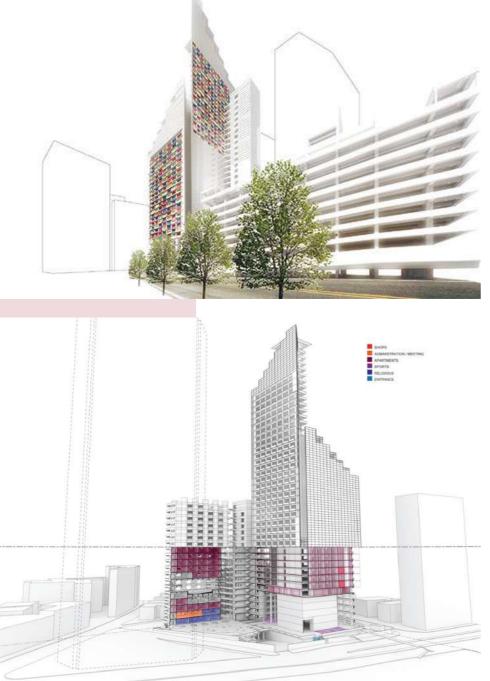


FIGURE 2: CONCEPTUAL RENDER OF TORRE DAVID'S ORIGINAL DESIGN

FIGURE 3: STRUCTURAL BREAKDOWN OF TORRE DAVID'S ORIGINAL DESIGN

When the Torre David began coming to fruition, no one would've thought that over 34 years sioned as something extraordinary. Plus, it just would pass, and it would still be under construc- so happens to be ranked as the country's third tion. You'd expect that a 45-story building would be a luxurious residential skyscraper or a 5-star hotel or perhaps a shining new commercial and financial center – its intended purpose – but it's the contrary: the reality is far from all the glitz and glamour. Instead, the "Tower of David" is the highest slum in the whole world⁴.

In the heart of Caracas, Venezuela, within a previous central business district, stands the Torre David, formally known as the Centro Financiero Confinanzas⁵. The skyscraper cuts a striking silhouette against the sky, its angled jagged top showcasing its unfinished state. When it was first conceived, the architect Enrique Gómez and influential developer / principal investor Jorge David Brillembourg- from whom the project is named⁶- intended for the tower to become a bright symbol of Venezuela's financial ambition. Brillembourg stated that he hoped it would become the "financial nerve of the city"⁷. He dreamed for it to become a shimmering, glass-clad 30m high atrium that embodies the city's aspirations and modernity. The design featured a more modern aesthetic, using a reinforced concrete shell, an extensive parking city. The Tower's scheme consisted of 3 main blocks: The main building, EdificioA, consists of 45 floors surmounted by a helicopter pad with lower floors housing services and a luxury hotel, upper floors for premium offices. The Apartment Building, EdificioB, consists of 16 floors for executive apartments, including a swimming pool. The Elevator Hub, EdificioK, small building in between the 2 others containing 6 elevators⁸.

So, there is no doubt that Torre David was envitallest skyscraper; and could've been the 8th tallest in all Latin America if completed⁹. However, the sudden death of the developer in 1993 sent the project into a rapid downward spiral, derailing the initial dream.

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The year 1994 was not easy. The construction came to a halt while the Venezuelan financial sector collapsed: "structurally sound. financially crippled"¹⁰. In the wake of the banking crisis, after 4 years of building and ongoing progress, the tower stood there, incomplete, abandoned. On more than one occasion, the country's government tried to sell the skyscraper for \$60 million, but to no avail, no one showed interest, not seeing any worth in a building that's 60% finalized. The government continued to show indifference towards the restoration also failing to directly address the impending high rates of homelessness/ the systematic housing issue, leaving a void for people to deal with on their own. It was now viewed as a symbol of financial collapse rather than a worldwide investment. As time went on, what was once a grand-structure became riddled with decay and crime. Its walls bear witness to illicit activities, space, including a striking panoramic view of the from drug use to theft, further cementing its reputation to the ground. As Manuel Gómez puts it, the Torre David "became a reminder of the golden years of the baking industry in Venezuela and also turned into an eyesore in the skyline of an otherwise modern and prosperous city"¹¹.

Silva, J. (2015). The Tower of David. Reuters. [online] 12 Jan. Available at: https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/ the-tower-of-david.

5 Baan, I., Eidgenssische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. and Eidgenssische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. (2013) Torre David : informal vertical communities. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers.

Silva, J. (2015). The Tower of David. Reuters. [online] 12 Jan. Available at: https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/ 6 the-tower-of-david.

7 Baan, I., Eidgenssische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. and Eidgenssische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. (2013) Torre David : informal vertical communities. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers.

Baan, I., Eidgenssische Technische Hochschule Zürich, Chair of Architecture and Urban Design, and Eidgens-8 sische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. (2013) Torre David : informal vertical communities. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers.

9 Manuel A. Gómez, The Tower of David: Social Order in a Vertical Community, 10 FIU L. Rev. 215 (2014). Baan, I., Eidgenssische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. and Eidgens-10 sische Technische Hochschule Zürich. Chair of Architecture and Urban Design. (2013) Torre David : informal vertical communities. Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers.

Manuel A. Gómez, The Tower of David: Social Order in a Vertical Community, 10 FIU L. Rev. 215 (2014). 2011



FIGURE 4: INCOMPLETE TORRE DAVID "ITS ANGLED JAGGED TOP SHOW-CASING ITS UNFINISHED STATE"

With a large wave of economic instability washing over the country, a significant portion of the population was deeply affected, with widespread bank closures and a great loss of public trust in the financial system, resulting in a widespread of Venezuelans struggling and displaced: the housing crisis left many with nowhere to go.

The abandoned Torre David stood there purposeless for over a decade, its empty shell looming over the harrowing city of Caracas as a silent beacon of unfulfilled goals. Over time, it inadvertently had meaning again.

It all started on the 17th of September, 2007, when a group of what they call "caraqueños" - little boys native to Caracas, were evicted from a squat and with nowhere else to go they turned to face the uninhabited skyscraper. Ever since, the Tower of David became a "magnet"¹² for over 3000 squatters, around 750 families swarming the structure and improvising a home¹³. With the financial and housing crisis only worsening, it was only a matter of time before this grand destitute space was informally taken over and became a place of refuge for the thousands of civilians seeking shelter. Then-president, Hugo Chávez implemented policies that allowed those in need and fighting through poverty to seek housing in isolated areas. The occupation of abandoned places was influenced by said policies - but it would only be a short-term solution for a problem that's been affecting Venezuela for a decade¹⁴.

The adaptation of the Torre David by local communities exemplifies spatial appropriation to a tee. The people completely transformed it and made it their own. The tower's residents took the role of architects and designers. Together, they cleaned, restored, painted, evaluated. They created their own system. They broke down walls to create new paths within the buildings, included plumbing and electricity, modified materials, organised community meetings in dedicated spaces, and even housed a church, gym and barbershop. They've distributed the floors to suit their individual and collective needs more evenly – forgoing the whole original hotel suites and adjusting to suit their lifestyles¹⁵.

All associations to its original luxury-oriented purpose subverted, its now a symbol of resilience and grassroots ingenuity. This "metamorphosis" wasn't just a means of survival, but it was also a direct act of defiance. With its new residents taking ownership, the tower's narrative is rewritten.

To some, they still see the Torre David as a slum. In his book, Mike Davis states that in the 19th century slums were "envisioned as a place where an incorrigible and feral social "residuum" rots in immoral splendour [...] a slum is an area of dirty back streets, especially when inhabited by squalid and criminal population".¹⁶ But that's not the reality of Torre David. Its people transformed it into a space of renewal, it became a testament to resourcefulness, solidarity and the ability to redefine spaces.

So while Torre David is labelled as a "vertical slum" to outsiders, its residents calls it home: a safe haven- both the structure and the communities getting a second chance at rebuilding their lives¹⁷.

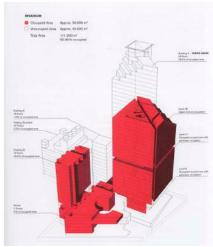


FIGURE 4: SPATIAL OCCUPATION OF TORRE DAVID COMPLEX

12 Brillembourg, A. et al. (2013) 'Social Science: Stalled Skyscraper Reborn as Informal Vertical Community', CTBUH journal, (1), pp. 32–37.

13 Frearson, A. (2012). Movie: Justin McGuirk on Torre David at Venice Architecture Biennale. [online] Dezeen. Available at: https://www.dezeen.com/2012/09/01/why-should-the-poor-live-in-the-slums-if-there-areempty-office-towers-in-the-city-asks-justin-mcguirk/.

14 Anonymous (2013). Torre David Organization. [online] BlogSpot. Available at: https://torredavid-organization.blogspot.com/2013/04/torre-david-organization.html.

15 Vocativ (2013). The world's tallest slum: Caracas' notorious Tower of David. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1p9jlQUW0k

- 16 Davis, M. (2007) Planet of slums. London: Verso.
- 17 torredavid.com. (n.d.). Torre David. [online] Available at: https://torredavid.com/.

FIGURE 5: TOP SECTION OF TORRE DAVID



FIGURE 7: BLUE CONCRETE STAIRS



FIGURE 9: UNFINISHED FACADE SIDE OF TD

FIGURE 11: VIEW FROM BELOW THE CORE OF TD



FIGURE 6: INTERIOR OF TD "THEY BROKE DOWN WALLS TO CREATE NEW PATHS"



FIGURE 8: IMPROVISED WINDOWS WITH CEMENT BLOCKS



FIGURE 10: INTERIOR OF TD LOBBY



FIGURE 12: INTERIOR OF TD CORE/ LOBBY



In 2014, the government forcibly took the initiative to have hundreds of families evicted from Torre David, and had its residents relocated in housing projects outside Caracas: "The eviction of residents from the unfinished Torre de David is emblematic of the deteriorating relationship between design and unconventional forms of dwelling."18 This disrupted the fragile society of the community and raised questions about the principles of slum clearance and urban redevelopment in the country.

This eviction risks tainting the transformative history of Torre David, but its legacy will always last. We can see how urban ruins can serve new functions as sites of identity, culture, resistance and innovation.

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¹⁸ Fulcher, M. (2014). Some like it squat: Residents evicted from the world's tallest squat. [online] Architectural Review. Available at: https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/some-like-it-squat-residents-evictedfrom-the-worlds-tallest-squat.

FIGURE 13: PONTE CITY - ELEVATION





FIGURE 14: ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF PENTHOUSE FLAT IN PC

Ponte City, located in Johannesburg, South-Africa, was apparently once "a tower of dreams"¹⁹ according to Michael Subotzky. Of all the 3 case studies I look at in this essay, Ponte City is the only one that's completed.

This 173m high cylindrical residential skyscraper, built in 1975 in the Hillbrow district, is the tallest building in all of Africa. It was extremely popular and a desired area at the time of its completion, considered to be a symbol of luxury. It consisted of 54 stories featuring 464 high-end apartments²⁰, swimming pools, recreational facilities, tennis courts, and a hollow core to let ample natural light in; all targeting a certain demographic: Johannesburg's white elite during the apartheid.

However, with the end of the apartheid regime and "white flight" occurring, with crowds settling in the suburbs in the 1980s²¹, Ponte City came face to face with a declining reputation. Hillbrow became gradually poorer due to the withdrawal of investments and ineffective governance. Ponte, hijacked by gangsters, guickly became notorious, with its once-innovative centrepiece, "The Core" no longer seeming impressive but instead transforming into a vertical slum, "the tower's trash dump"22 - filled with garbage piling up, reaching all levels and spreading throughout. The name "Suicide City" was dubbed to describe all the rampant illicit activities enduring in the tower, from drug dealing to prostitution, and the obvious reason – the grim reality of those who allegedly jumped to their deaths, falling along the length of the core and their bodies left there to decay²³.

James Mangunza said "Ponte was built to house no more than 3500 people. When it was hijacked it was estimated over 10,000 people were living within its walls"²⁴. What was once an exclusive utopia and dream to many, now symbolized urban decay.

19 LensCulture, M.S. | (2017). Ponte City: A Portrait of Johannesburg - Photographs by Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse. [online] LensCulture. Available at: https://www.lensculture.com/articles/mikhael-subotzky-ponte-city-a-portrait-of-johannesburg.

Suzanne Whitby (2018). Ponte: tower of dreams - Johannesburg, South Africa Suzanne Whitby. [on-line] Suzanne Whitby live, learn, laugh, love. Available at: https://suzannewhitby.com/ponte-tower-of-dreams/.
Wiggins, C. (2023). How to visit Johannesburg's most notorious towerblock. [online] The Inde-

pendent. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/africa/south-africa/ponte-city-johannesburg-trav-el-guide-b2256619.html.

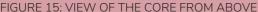
22 LensCulture, M.S. | (2017). Ponte City: A Portrait of Johannesburg - Photographs by Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse. [online] LensCulture. Available at: https://www.lensculture.com/articles/mikhael-subotzky-ponte-city-a-portrait-of-johannesburg.

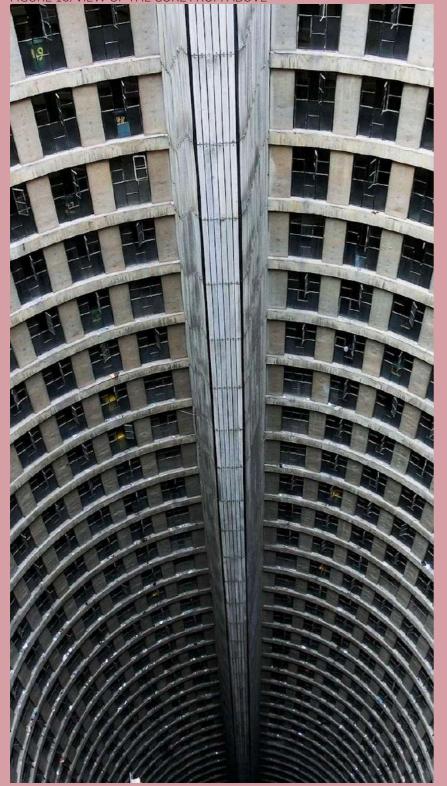
23 Henderson, R. (2023). Ponte City - The Urban Slum. [online] Architect Russell. Available at: https:// www.architectrussell.com/ponte-city-the-urban-slum/.

24 Suzanne Whitby (2018). Ponte: tower of dreams - Johannesburg, South Africa Suzanne Whitby. [online] Suzanne Whitby live, learn, laugh, love. Available at: https://suzannewhitby.com/ponte-tower-of-dreams/. П

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PON N N





As years went by the worst it got, nicknamed the "Tower of Terror". Then, magic and fixed up Ponte City. It has in 2001, efforts to revitalize Ponte City began. Just two years earlier, mentions of possibly turning it into a prison circled²⁵, which would've aligned with the number of criminals who lingered between its walls.

The building's owner since the 1990s, private British property developers called the Kempston Group, decided to start making changes and hired a married couple, Elma and Danie Celliers, a management team who were core that'd reach the 13th floor. Ponte adamant about reinstating Ponte and making it their home. The objective was eration within Johannesburg's skyline. to regenerate the tower with a major clean-up and full refurbishment projects to restore most of the building's original infrastructure.

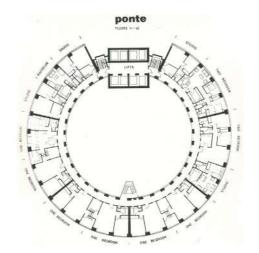


FIGURE 16: PLAN DRAWING OF PONTE CITY

25 Smith, D. (2015). Johannesburg's Ponte City: 'the tallest and grandest urban slum in the world' – a history of cities in 50 buildings, day 33. The Guardian. [online] 11 May. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/ cities/2015/may/11/johannesburgs-ponte-city-the-tallest-and-grandest-urban-slum-in-the-world-a-history-ofcities-in-50-buildings-day-33.

Wiggins, C. (2023). How to visit Johannesburg's most notorious towerblock. [online] The Inde-26 pendent. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/africa/south-africa/ponte-city-johannesburg-travel-guide-b2256619.html.

By 2007, the group worked its

now been more developed with strict

24-hour security and even hosts tours

which aim to address (primarily white)

gagement and reshaped perceptions of

has a mix of residents, housing middle-

and low-income civilians. Long gone

are the days of the trash-filled hollow

City now stands as a symbol of regen-

From urban decay to urban renewal.

curiosity about the building's current state and lingering paranoia²⁶. This

guided by initiatives like Dlala Nje,

FIGURE 17: TOP PART OF PONTE CITY

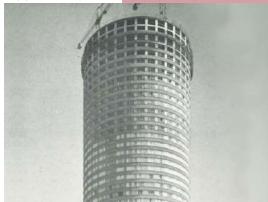


FIGURE 19: TURNSTILES- ENTRANCE TO APTS



FIGURE 21: BELOW VIEW IN CORE



FIGURE 22: "THE TOWER'S TRASH DUMP"



FIGURE 18: FACADE OF PONTE CITY



FIGURE 20: SHOP ON GROUND FLOOR ON PC





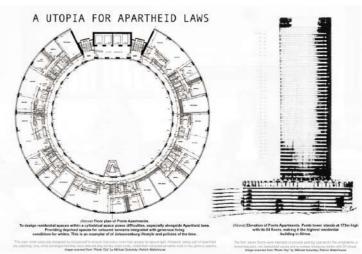
FIGURE 23: WARM & COOL LIGHTS IN PC



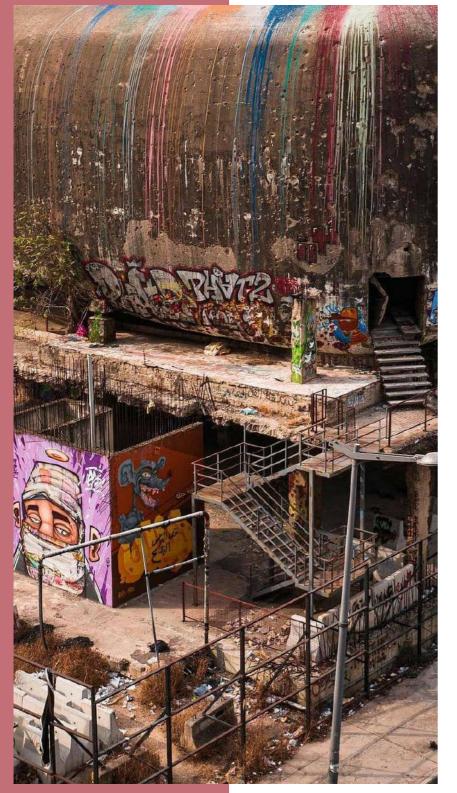
Ponte City continues to be a great example of how a neglected space can be reimagined and then transformed into a safe space for inclusivity. While the surrounding neighbourhood continues to be unsafe, the building's rebirth serves as a blueprint for urban regeneration that is fair to all.

However, Ponte's strides as a symbol of regeneration continue to be challenging and is a work in progress, its journey towards realizing its full potential as a beacon of social justice is still ongoing.

FIGURE 24: INITIAL SKETCHES OF PONTE CITY







The Egg has piqued my interest for as long as I can remember. Growing up outside my homeland, my family and I took annual summer trips to Lebanon. There was this unspoken rule I told myself, a kind of "rule of thumb" I had followed secretly since my childhood: every year, as we drove home from the airport -usually arriving late at night when the surroundings were quite dark, with only a few streetlights illuminating our path -I'd get impatient fairly quickly during the 40-minute ride. However, that impatience would quickly fade the second I noticed what I was looking for outside my window: the iconic oval-shaped silhouette was spotted. I found that its distinctive form always seemed out of place against all the other buildings, yet it marked the moment I knew exactly where I was: home. I'd think to myself, "Summer has officially begun!". My personal ties to the space anchor the broad exploration of the Egg as a site of both individual and collective memory. As my connection to it inspired me, The Egg is what ultimately led me to explore the theme of spatial appropriation of ruins.

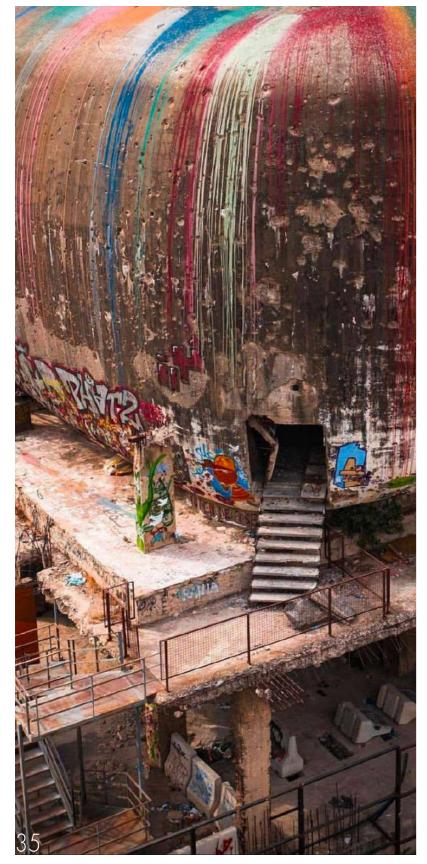
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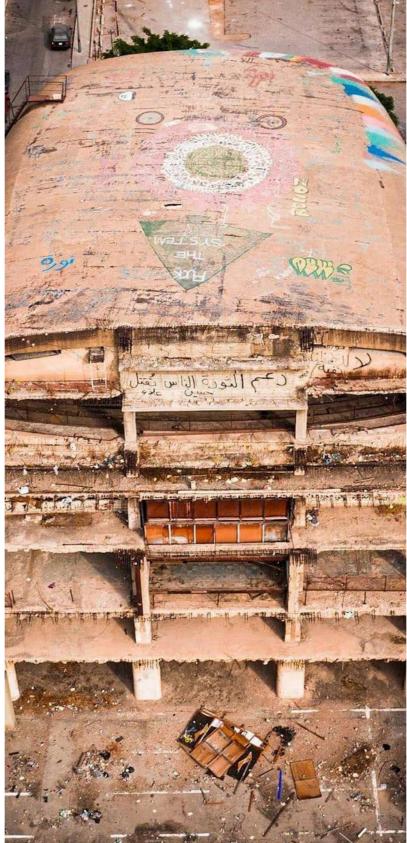
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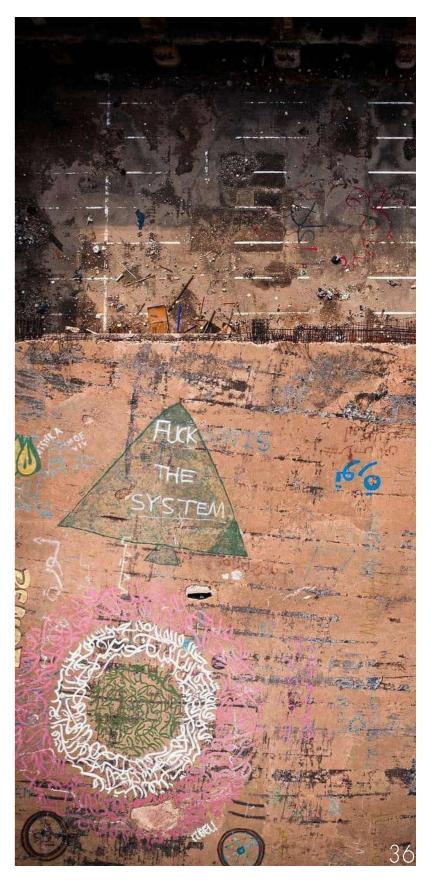
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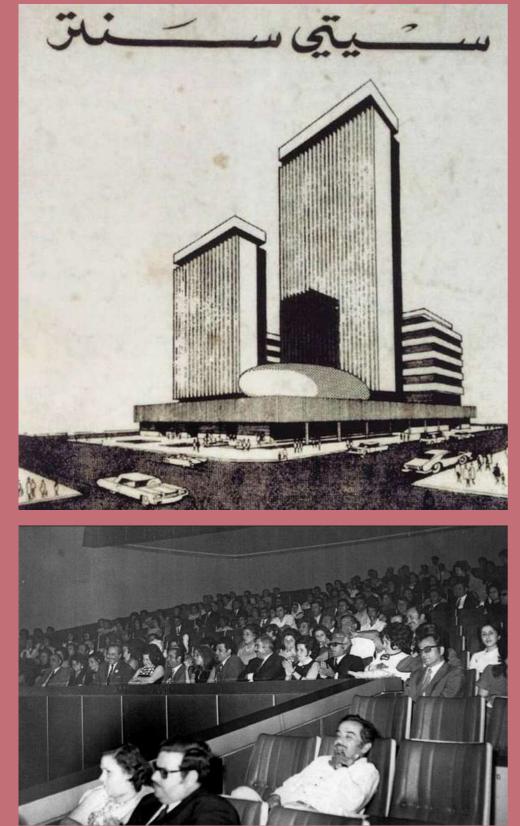
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FIGURES 27-29:THE EGG, PHTOGRAPHED BY PAUL RAFIH









FIGURES 31: THE EGG DURING A MOVIE SCREENING, 1970S

The Egg was not always the battered shell you see today, pierced with bullet holes: it was once envisioned as a landmark of modern and radical archi- meant to reflect Lebanon's embrace of tecture. Designed by modernist architect Joseph Philippe Karam²⁷, one of the tural boundaries and experimenting leading figures of Lebanon's golden age era, the Egg - also referred to as "the Dome" and colloquially coined "Sabouneh"²⁸ among the Lebanese, (slang for soap bar) - was part of "Beirut City Centre", a commercial complex project intending to be the Middle East's first mall. Its construction began in 1965.

Nestled in vibrant downtown Beirut, Lebanon, alongside Martyrs' Square²⁹ - a location many considered picturesque, it actually graced countless postcards – homes an unusual structure. Through Karam's vision, this relic, so peculiar, aimed to sit between two tall towers to compose a multi-use complex, the Beirut City Centre, conceived as an economic and cultural project symbolising the nation's optimism during a period of prosperity and rapid growth. The ambitious project aspired to host retail stores. offices. residential spaces, restaurants, and, at its heart, the iconic cinema hall³⁰: enter the Egg.

The Egg's construction was envisioned as a bold statement at the time due to its distinct curvilinear form progress, pushing traditional architecwith new materials - "a modernist jewel of a bustling downtown"³¹. Only one of the two planned towers was completed before the war erupted, and it ultimately didn't survive. The Egg, however, still stands after years of struggle, bearing the scars to prove it.

Though it remained unfinished, the cinema is a concrete shell structure elevated on pilotis above a parking lot, its bold mass took inspiration from Brutalist architecture. It held 1000 seats and spanned 34 meters in length, 24 meters in width and 11 meters in height³². The architect's goal was to "build utopia in concrete"³³. Since the cinema and shopping centre were open for a few years, it occasionally hosted screenings - when all it took was single lira / Lebanese pound coin to see a movie³⁴,- while one of the towers began to take shape. People gathered in masses, filling the Dome with endless laughter. However, that laughter soon faded, later replaced by enduring tears.

Joseph-philippe-karam.com. (2024). His Life and Works (1923-1976). [online] Available at: http://www. joseph-philippe-karam.com/2008/01/joseph-philippe-karam-1923-1976.html

28 Hovsepian-Guides, G. (2018). The Egg: a war-beaten ruin in Downtown Beirut. [online] 961. Available at: https://www.the961.com/the-egg-war-beaten-ruin-downtown-beirut/.

29 Khoury, M.P. (2017) 'The Egg: Memory and Visual Structures Within Representations of an Iconic Lebanese Ruin', Visual communication guarterly, 24(1), pp. 3–14. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2016.1272417. 30 Hovsepian-Guides, G. (2018). The Egg: a war-beaten ruin in Downtown Beirut. [online] 961. Available at: https://www.the961.com/the-egg-war-beaten-ruin-downtown-beirut/.

31 Atlas Obscura. (n.d.). The Egg. [online] Available at: https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-egg-beirut.

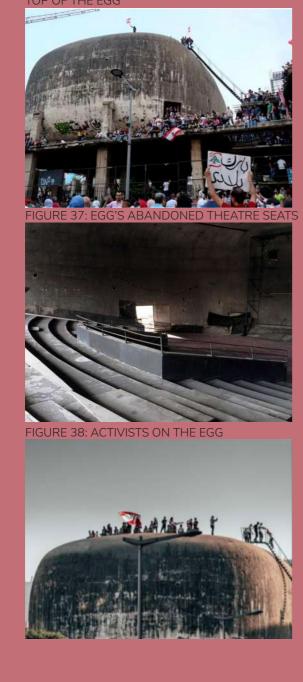
32 Arbid, G. (2018) Modern architecture in Lebanon: City center movie theater (the egg), Banque Libano-Française. Available at: https://blfheadquarters.com/?p=1493

33 Higginbottom, J. (2020). How an Abandoned Modernist Cinema Became a Revolutionary Symbol in Lebanon. [online] Atlas Obscura. Available at: https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/beirut-egg-lebanon-protests

34 Higginbottom, J. (2020). How an Abandoned Modernist Cinema Became a Revolutionary Symbol in Lebanon. [online] Atlas Obscura. Available at: https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/beirut-egg-lebanon-protests.



FIGURE 36: PROTESTERS CHANTING ON TOP OF THE EGG



Sune, H. (2011). The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war | Sciences Po Violence de masse et Résistance - Réseau de recherche. [online] Sciencespo.fr. Available at: https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/historiography-and-memory-lebanese-civil-war. html. I

36 SlideShare. (2024). Executive magazine article about the egg. [online] Available at: https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/executive-magazine-article-about-the-egg/1596208#2

37 Rasmi, A. (2019). Photos: This is how the Lebanese protest inequality. [online] Quartz. Available at: https://qz.com/1732199/photos-this-is-how-the-lebanese-protest-inequality

38 Amnesty International (2021). Lebanon's October 2019 protests weren't just about the 'WhatsApp tax'. [online] Amnesty International. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/lebanons-october-2019-protests-werent-just-about-the-whatsapp-tax/.

As previously mentioned, the construction of the Beirut City Centre came to a halt once the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 broke out. Escalating tensions drew a deep divide among Lebanese communities, with disagreements over political power-sharing and the country's alliances – particularly regarding supporting the rights of the Palestinian resistancedriving the conflict to last 15 years³⁵. It formed a great separation between Christian East Beirut and Muslim West Beirut. The Egg continues to stand resilient amidst Beirut's changing landscape. Sitting on the "Green-Line", a no-man's land between the Maronite Cathedral of Saint George and the Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque, the Dome symbolizes the divisions of the Civil War. Its location later became a poignant metaphor for unity during the 2019 revolution, as people from all background reclaim the space together.

This war devastated countless lives and left the country in a state of great loss, grappling with the terms of a fractured governmental system. Amidst this turmoil, this abrupt "interruption" quickly diminished the "avant-garde symbol of Lebanese modernism"³⁶ and destroyed all its intended vision, overshadowed by the surrounding tragedies. The cinema hall became what could be referred to as a "ruin in reverse" - a structure that's been abandoned before ever fully realising its intended purpose – unlike traditional ruins, the Egg decayed without years of use. The Civil War left the country mourning in its wake; the people were left to bathe in a corrupted political system and economic instability with no hope in sight. Over a decade later, the structure remained abandoned, now a victim of the Civil War, surviving it by becoming a haunting ghost, damaged beyond repair, left stranded by most.

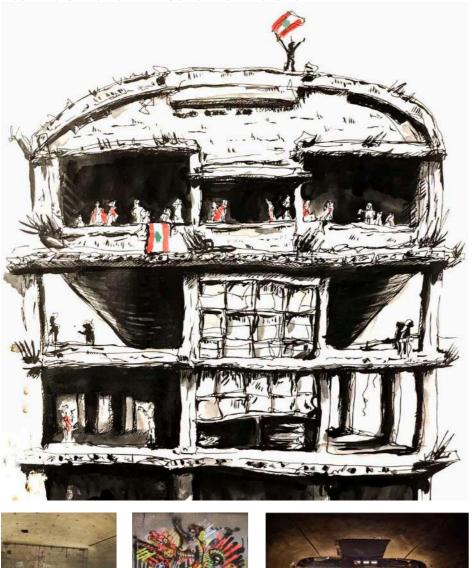
After all these years the Egg remains frozen in time, its concrete shell still bearing the war's imprints. While much of Beirut and direct surrounding areas were rebuilt after the conflict, the Egg stood at a standstill, incomplete, the connecting tower – who once bore witness to the struggles alongside the cinema – left destroyed. All that remained was a stark reminder of all the devastation, untouched amidst a city that desired to move forward.

Ever since, it remained off-limits to the public until 2019 – when the population decided to take matters into their own hands.

The 17th of October, 2019, marks a pivotal day in Lebanese history. On this day, when civilians, both within Lebanon and abroad, decided enough was enough. They flocked to the streets and demanded accountability and sweeping reforms to a political system that they had felt failed them³⁷. What began as a silent frustration that everyone had to endure personally, now finally found its voice and erupted into a collective call to action.

While protests didn't stop within Lebanon's borders; with a major Lebanese diaspora worldwide staging demonstrations of solidarity with their homeland by joining the movement and taking to the streets – back in the country's capital, activists reclaimed the Egg as a centre of dialogue – a symbol of their pressing demands.

The massive protests swept the country for about 5 months, its people imploring for change, an end to corruption and relief from the financial crisis – which they stated would only happen with the downfall of the entire political cabinet³⁸. FIGURE 39: SKETCH OF THE EGG DURING REVOLUTION



39 www.al-monitor.com. (2019). 'Eggupation' breeds revolutionary thinking in Beirut - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East. [online] Available at: https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/11/lebanese-protesters-eggupy-old-cinema.html

40 sahas and Bureau, E. (2024). This Egg-shaped Underconstruction Cinema Hall In Lebanon's Beirut Has A Rich History. [online] News18. Available at: https://www.news18.com/movies/this-egg-shaped-underconstruction-cinema-hall-in-lebanons-beirut-has-a-rich-history-9086517.

41 Mackenzie, L. (2019). Beirut's The Egg: Lebanon's abandoned cinema building comes back to life amid protests. [online] The National. Available at: https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/beirut-s-the-egg-lebanon-s-abandoned-cinema-building-comes-back-to-life-amid-protests-1.936270.

42 Higginbottom, J. (2020). How an Abandoned Modernist Cinema Became a Revolutionary Symbol in Lebanon. [online] Atlas Obscura. Available at: https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/beirut-egg-lebanon-pro-tests.

The Egg was born again. Thanks to its prime location, crowds began to gather at the Egg, allowing them to have a bird's eye view overlooking the city while chanting for justice. They broke down its barriers and transformed the once-abandoned structure into a space of free-speech and liberated expression. As Rania Khoury stated: "the occupation of the egg symbolizes the revolution itself: if they don't want to act, then we will"³⁹. Now a safe space for debates, lectures, raves, screenings, artists, and students, the Lebanese coined the term "Eggupation"⁴⁰. This humorous name encapsulates the people's determination to reclaim this neglected space and turn it into a hub of cultural and political engagement. Sometimes, during teach-ins, there'd be screenings - allowing the decayed cinema to revert back to its original purpose, if only temporarily⁴¹. The Egg's torn shell, still marked by bullet holes, became a refuge- a safety net capturing all the anger, hope and resilience of a people who never backed down and always found courage in the face of adversity.

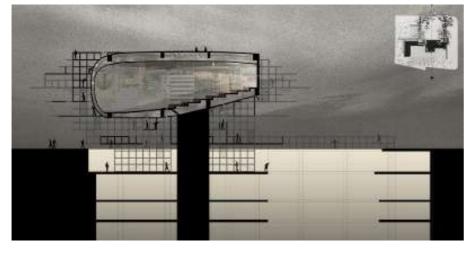
As you approach the Dome, its entrance is situated along the rounded width of the structure; its sight captures its abandonment and subsequent repurposing. The rusted makeshift cement stairs lead up through a dark space. The gaping doorway is uneven, revealing the skeletal framework of its construction, the destroyed concrete exposes the metal grid reinforcement. Inside, the curved ceiling is vast and marked by a grid of circular indentations - evidence of the construction process. Justin Higginbottom describes it as a "post-apocalyptic planetarium"⁴². There are larger holes throughout the space- indications of an incomplete and

damaged state. On the far wall, its evident where the cinema screen was once displayed – all that's left is its structural frame, a faint echo of past purposes. That wall, once the focal point for showcasing iconic movies, now serves as a blank canvas, reclaimed by people with important messages to share. The deteriorated and raw materials still speak to Brutalism, but now with a twist. The building's walls are alive and filled with vibrant graffiti and murals, images depicting symbols of resistance, political statements criticizing those in charge, cultural pride. Among the artwork is a modernised version of the painting "Liberty Leading the People", alongside quotes painted in large lettering such as "Power to the People", "Fall of the Regime", and "The Blind Leading the Blind". One word stands out though, mainly because it has become a sort of motif, the one word that was seen and heard repeatedly, chanted with a determined tone: "ثورة" – pronounced "Thawrah", meaning Revolutions.

Once a cinema projecting pictures crafted by industry giants, the Egg now hosts a very different kind of art. Raw, authentic, collective, honest and deeply personal. The art medium has shifted from polished and edited cinematic projections to unfiltered street art that doesn't shy away from the cold truth- transforming the building into a public gallery, a place where anyone is welcome and feels heard. The evolution of the Egg mirrors a greater democratization of art, where expression is no longer limited to a select few but available to all. Through the act of spatial-appropriation, the Dome has become a testament to resistance and unity, bridging its cinematic past with its revolutionary present.

PROPOSAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE EGG'S RENOVATION





Lebanese photographer, Anthony Saroufim envisions transforming the Egg into a camera obscura. He aims to transform the bullet holes scattered everywhere into optical devices by inserting lenses in the voids in order to reflect the exterior landscape inside – bringing in nature⁴³. This innovative proposal suggests turning war scars into artistic tools for reflection while preserving history. This would give the Egg another renewed purpose as a space for art and memory.

Ultimately, while it may not be the toughest Egg and certainly has its cracks, it's an eye-sore tom some, but safe space for others.

⁴³ Hovsepian-Guides-, G. (2018). The Egg: a war-beaten ruin in Downtown Beirut. [online] 961. Available at: https://www.the961.com/the-egg-war-beaten-ruin-downtown-beirut/.



CONCLUSION

In Buildings Must Die, the authors suggest that "buildings, although inanimate, are often assumed to have "life." And it is the architect, through the art of design, who is the authorized conceiver and creator of that life. As a profession and discipline, architecture's identity is grounded in this creative act." However, in this case, we saw how the "true" traditional role of the architect has been replaced. Community members have taken the role of architect, not in terms of redesigning the aesthetics or alternating the structure of the space but in redefining the purpose. They have now become the new authors, rewriting the stories of buildings that, while constructed, were left unfinished or abandoned – like incomplete manuscripts. The narrative has been changed from forgotten dreams to chapters dedicated to survival, resistance, and renewal. Today, these buildings are no longer things of the past but vessels for new stories narrated by the people who inhabited them.

As discussed through the 3 cases studies, it's clear to say that ruins arent just renmants of the past - there's more to them that meets the eye. Ruins are spaces where histories linger, identities evolve, resistance takes shape, and hints at a certain future . Through the process of spatial appropriation, forgotten structures like Torre David, Ponte City, and The Egg have been reclaimed and repurposed by local communities. They've been transformed into symbols of resilience and social justice. These sites, only one of them actually completed, all once abandoned, now stand as powerful reminders of how marginalized groups can redefine and reimagine spaces to meet their needs and assert their identities, fulfilling intentions that were set in the past and almost overlooked. These ruins have had a chance at a rebirth - a second chance at life to fulfill their potential.

As we continue to revisit and reinterpret these ruins, their evolving narratives challenge us to consider the role of architecture not only as a creation of the past but as an active participant in shaping the future of equity and belonging.



Will today's treasures be tomorrow's ruins? What will they stand for? In an era where we continually restore and transform ruins, giving them new life, we must ask: as technology and society continue to evolve endlessly, will the structures we cherish today, embodying history that reflects our current time, be worth saving in the future? Will later generations even look back at what we currently consider as treasures and iconic landmarks? Will they deem them worth preserving? Or will they too, become forgotten relics of a bygone era and be simply replaced?

ORIGINAL ESSAY PLAN

Introduction:

Prompt - exploring the afterlife of buildings, focus on how forgotten, ruined, abandoned spaces are given another life, resurrected + repurposed, forgotten to found, power of people.

Provide context: overview of rebirth concept: political, social, cultural, heritage, economic, etc resuraence.

Introduce concept of "spatial appropriation", define it ref. The Unknown City = Spatial appropriation refers to how spaces are claimed, formally or infomrally, and repurposed by communities or individuals. reflects resitance, survival, transformation.

How the past influences the present, potential of existing spaces.

Set up idea of "ruins in reverse" = buildings that have not been completed but given new life through reclamation, reactivated after decay = become symbol of resistance, culture.. Roadmap, set the scene of past, present, future.

(?) Small section pre-case studies:

Define "afterlife of buildings" in social/political dimensions= discuss spaces evolving and being given new meaning / purpose.

Themes of preservation, restoration, transformation, repurposing, cultural significance of abandoned structures.

How do spaces recliam meaning? Main factors that drive transformation?

Momento Mori theme? = the art of dying, symbols of death turned to piece of art.

Case Study 1: The Egg Cinema - Beirut, Lebanon: Social and Cultural Resurgence.

Context: construction brought to a halt due to cicvil war, left abandoned. During 2019 revolution, it became a safe space for protesters, symbol of destruction and rebirth. "Cracked Open" during revolution. Talk about persnal experince: looking at the silhouette of the space on my way home from the airport late at night, very dark but am able to identify it then realize that im in beirut, summer starts now.

Past: Abandoned During Civil War. City Center + The Egg cinema. Modern Architecture. Project then abandoned due to civil war. Left as urban ruin in Beirut.

Describe unfinished state, intended purpose, construction methods, graffiti.

Martyrs Square, most building either completely destroyed or mildly ruined but they were all reconstructed / restrored except for the Egg. one of the only things left untouched - memory of war.

Present: Reclaimed as Symbol Of Revolution. Analyze the Egg during 2019 protests. Given new meaning by all lebanese people. Look at how space was found again after being abandoned. Safe space for people - everyone coming together in this space to fight fot the same thing = uniting citizens across political and sectarian divides. Reclaiming a failed space as a public political site. Symbol of resistance.

Political resurgence: calls to preserve building.

Cultural significance: role of the Egg in terms of lebanon's ongoing conversation about identity and capacity for renewal.

Analyze how architectural state reflect political landscape / narrates social suffering.

Future: Memorial. Its potential? Memorial for the revolution. What does its current condition represent for Beirut's future?

Will it be preserved as a monument or continue evolving based on the people's needs?

Case Study 2: The Torre David - Caracas, Venezuela: Community Survival & Vertical Living

Past: Abandoned Due to Financial Collapse. Building was intended to be a luxury office skyscraper but was abandonned mid-construction after the 1994 financial crisis.

Discuss its original purpose, intended look.

Discuss the symbolism of unifinished tower and how it represents venezuela's financial and political instability. Decribe current state.

Present: Reclaimed as Informal Housing. Analyze current use of the space = appropriated by thousands for informal living, squatters.

Describe the tower's transfomation into a vertical slum, luxury turned squalid.

Community improvised and subverted original purpose of building.

Define how it is in use now? how did residents repurpose the space for work and shelter? Focus on how people adapted the shell of unifinsihed building for survival (adapted by group of people who were far from being the tower's initial target audience)

Future: Vacated with Uncertain Prospects. Its potential?

What does the eviction of residents in 2014 mean for the future of the torre david? will it remain a symbol of economical collapse? or be redevelopped? could it still be worth saving? Was it a wake up call?

Case Study 3: Ponte City - Johannesburg, South Africa: Decline and Urban Revival

Past: Luxury Tower Fell Into Ruin and Crime During Apartheid. Built in the 1970s as luxury apartments. Only one of the three thats actually been completed. During the apartheid era in Johannesburg, building fell into decay due to economic and social decline.

Describe one of the tallest skyscrapers in the country. Describe interior and materials. Describe tower's descent into ruin and crime. Stands out in city's skyline yet abandoned / decayed. New reputation as symbol of urban decay.

Present: Partially Recliamed and Rehabiliated. Partially reclaimed due to urban renewal projects. Now focused on turining it again into a liveable space, restoration.

Now houses mixed-income residents, signifying a transformation from initial luxury intentions to crime-ridden ruin to a symbol of urban regeneration.

Describe how once neglected now given new purpose by both private developers and its residents.

Future: Model for Urban Regeneration? Discuss if its possible for ponte city to reclaim its original reputation. Will it be able to fully rehabilitate? What does its transformation mean for Johannesburg's future urban landscape? does it stand as a model for urban renewal in other declining cities?

Comparative Analysis:

Highlight key commons areas that have risen in the three cases / themes of spatial appropriation: Resistance and survival (how communities and individuals reclaim space as act of defiance) Social justice (how abandoned spaces become symbols of inequality + resilience) Cultural identity (how people shape the identity of these spaces, reflecting their values and struggles) Differences in Rebirth:

How does each structure's transformation reflect its specific socio-political context Lebanon = civil unrest, Venezuela = financial collapse, South Africa = post-apartheid recovery How does the physical structure of each ruin lend itself to spatial appropriation?

Conclusion:

What do ruins represent today? Are some worth saving? Will these reclaimed spaces hold lasting significance? 52

Ruins in reverse continue to shape our understanding of architecture's potential for rebirth.



Necklace (noun)

A decorative chain worn around the neck.

A piece of jewelry worn around the neck, often made of metal, beads, gemstones, or other materials. It serves decorative, cultural, or symbolic purposes.

Etymology:

Neck: from Old English hnecca ("neck") Lace: From Old French las ("string","cord")

DESCRIPTION

Since the day I received it, this necklace has rarely left my neck.

The necklace is simple but striking— a contemporary design which is delicate and minimalist. Made of stainless steel, its shimmering gold flat chain comprises hundreds of intertwined links, twisting and turning, giving the chain a textured and more reflective quality – glinting and catching the light with every motion. The chain holds a single pendant: a silhouette of Lebanon's map. The adornment captures the intricate outline of the country with its sharp edges, smooth curves, and distinctive corners, tracing its unmistakable and distinctive topography in gleaming gold.

As I scan the object with my eyes and run my fingers along its edges, I mentally map familiar towns and cities – Beirut's urban bustle in the west; Tripoli's charm in the far north; Tyre's coastal serenity in the southwest, home to ancient Phoenician ruins; Baalbek's monumental Roman temples standing proudly in the far east – every detail conjures a sense of place, history, and belonging.

The pendant has two different sides. One is smooth, brushed gold with a muted shine. I can identify how its texture subtly reveals fine streaks of the brushed finish. Though polished to perfection, the surface quietly carries a tiny scratch, etched from daily wear – a testament to how long it's been resting steadfastly around my neck. I prefer wearing this side out, drawn to its minimal purity that effortlessly matches with everything. The other side is vibrant, portraying the Lebanese flag rendered in enamel —vivid red, white and green bordered by the same gold outline. The bright green cedar tree is featured at the center, small but alive, a powerful symbol referencing nature, prosperity, steadiness, and eternity.

The necklace carries a serene elegance within its simplicity: no excessive embellishment beyond essentials. It holds a

tiny world in it - a tiny Lebanon close to me, illustrating a connection to home.

PERSONAL ANECDOTE

This necklace was a gift from my friend and classmate, Amina, for my 21st birthday. It was a gesture that I completely didn't anticipate. One ordinary day in class, she quietly slipped next to me and handed me the box, saying, "It's not much, but it's for when you miss home; a little piece of Lebanon you'll always have with you."

It was an unexpected act that immediately felt significant. I opened the light blue box to reveal the necklace. Inside was the delicate gold pendant in the shape of Lebanon. As soon as I saw it, I understood what she meant – it wasn't just any necklace; it was a reminder of where I came from. I was incredibly touched since I wasn't expecting a gift, least of all something deeply meaningful. Her words and act were thoughtful, especially considering everything that's been happening in Lebanon – the attacks, the killings, the non-stop chaos. "With all the struggles and uncertainties happening there right now, you'll have a reminder of all the beautiful things your country has to offer, even during hard times.", said Amina. I felt a sense of ease knowing I had a friend who acknowledged the hardships and horrors that my people were facing and wanted to respect them. Her handing me this gift was a gesture of solidarity from someone who understood what Lebanon means to me.

I was particularly touched because, just a few weeks prior, my brother and I had talked about getting matching necklaces representing Lebanon, personalizing it some way. Now, one found its way to me - a similar one to what we imagined - through the unpredicted generosity of a friend who sought to honor my heritage.

Every morning when I clasp the necklace around my neck, Lebanon is one of my first thoughts of the day. I think of my family and loved ones that I can't embrace. I think of my town's streets I can't walk. I remember the cedar trees and mountain breeze, the winding roads towards a bustling city. Usually, it's a given that our summers are spent in Lebanon. But now, with every news report of suffering and tragedies coming out of the country, the distance between me and my homeland grows heavier. Though I don't know when I'll visit again – that uncertainty weighing on me- the necklace feels like an anchor, tethering me to my roots even when I'm far away. I was gifted a tribute, a symbol not of Lebanon's pain but of its strength and beauty. This necklace is more than mere jewelry – it's a container of memory, a transporter

of identity. PROJECT LINK

When I think of my design project, the first connection that comes to mind is the use of the same material: stainless steal. Steal is synonymous with strength, its a durable material. This necklace uses that metal to create a piece of art, something that I wear everyday and I enjoy, makes me feel nice. Steel Warriors uses that material to make gym equipment, that anyone has the freedom to use to strenghten themselves and feel better in their own body. There's a link in terms of taking something and transforming it - a metamorphosis - and ending up with something that makes one feel better. It's positive. It speaks to the power of objects. My necklace is a representation of Lebanon, my country where I always feel like I belong, and the Steel Warriors gym is a place to encourage eberyone and empower them so that they can feel like they belong too. Reminder of belonging and connection to community.

It symbolizes how strength can be reclaimed and how roots can anchor us, even amidst upheaval. Both the gym and the necklace pay tribute to resilience, turning what was once destructive into something good.

When I think of my essay about the spatial appropriation of ruins, this necklace becomes a metaphor. Just as the Egg in Beirut- a space reclaimed by the people-serves as a canvas for identity and resistance, so does this necklace serve as a personal monument. It symbolizes the transformation of what is lost or fractured into something meaningful and enduring.

Lebanon, like steel, has constantly endured cycles of transformation, tested, reformed, and reshaped by time and turmoil over many years. The necklace embodies this duality: the toughness of steel and the capacity to create something meaningful and beautiful from adversity.



CRITICAL REFLECTION

I found this term to be probably the most challenging one so far in my opinion, but it was also the most exciting. When I first read the briefs for both projects, I was genuinely looking forward to creating and designing. I feel like I've reached a point where I'm starting to feel comfortable with the tools and processes. I now navigate SketchUp with more ease, although I'm still relatively slow and occasionally run into issues with Thea. Similarly, my workflow in Vectorworks has improved, I've become quicker at drawing on it.

However, I did notice some challenges with both briefs, particularly when it came to narrowing down my ideas. I had so many ideas swirling in my head from the get-go, it became difficult to make a decision. This indecision caused delays and setbacks, as I often doubted my choices midway through the project. For instance, in the design project, I debated between creating a luxurious dental practice for cosmetic purposes or a dental practice for children versus designing a gym. While I loved the idea of creating a joyful educational experience for kids eith no fear, I then chose to design a gym as a way to push myself out of my comfort zone. Reflecting on this, I realize that while trying something new and different was valuable, I need to work on committing to an idea earlier and trusting my creative instincts.

The research project presented its own unique challenges. Initially, I struggled to find an overarching theme and felt lost among the various case studies and specific segements I found interesting. What led me to the topic I've chosen is the Egg. As someone from Lebanon, I was surprised at how little I knew about it even though I've seen it very often, this curiosity motivated me to dig deeper. I challenged myself to choose a less-documented topic rather than defaulting to something popular, or easy to research. This was a big departure from my previous approach, where I often opted for well-documented subjects to avoid risk. This shift has helped me grow as a designer and researcher, and it's a practice I want to continue in future projects.

Looking back, there are areas where I know I can improve. I have 2 main goals for next year. First, time management is a critical weakness. I often underestimate how long tasks will take, and my ADHD, combined with a tendency to keep my laptop disorganized, exacerbates the problem. I've lost documents and had to start over due to keeping tabs open for references or poor organization, or had my laptop crash. To avoid any further unnecessary delays at the most inconvenient times, I need to adopt a more stream-lined and efficient workflow, starting by organizing my files and setting realistic deadlines for each phase of a project. I have to push myself to work faster! Not necessarily more, just do things quicker, I need to stop dwelling too long on individual details and focus on working faster without compromising quality. I try to work on my projects most days of the week, I go to the library to focus and I do spend the day studying but it feels like I never leave with a task fully complete.

Another area for improvement is my approach to visuals and renders. I tend to leave these elements until the last few days, which means I don't have enough time to experiment with lighting, textures, and overall composition. Moving forward, I plan to prioritize renders earlier in the process so I can have time to play around, refine them and elevate the quality of my presentations.

For the next term, I have two key goals. First, I want to explore more organic, curved design schemes. This will be a significant challenge, but it's a direction I've been wanting to pursue, and I believe it will push me creatively. Second, I want to ensure I manage my time effectively, tackling projects with a clear plan and starting strong from day one. I want my final project to be the best thing I've ever produced—a culmination of everything I've learned so far.

I need to also stop over!writing.

Reflecting on the semester, I'm proud of how I adapted the gym project to make it my own. By adding personal touches and slightly reinterpreting the brief, I was reminded of how much more invested I feel when I create something meaningful to me. This is a lesson I'll carry into my final project: designing something I'm excited about is key to producing work I'm proud of.

This semester has been a turning point in my growth as a designer. While there were moments of doubt and frustration, I've learned to embrace challenges and step out of my comfort zone. By improving my time management, refining my visuals earlier, and exploring new design approaches, I'm confident that my next project will be a reflection of how far I've come.



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QUOTES

"Buildings, although inanimate, are often assumed to have "life." And it is the architect, through the art of design, who is the authorized conceiver and creator of that life. As a profession and discipline, architecture's identity is grounded in this creative act." (buildings must die)

"Buildings threatened with death must be "reanimated," "reborn" so that they might enjoy a "new life."" (buildings must die)

"The unfinished and unclaimed city spaces provide opportunities for appropriation, where communities write their own narratives onto the built environement." (the unknown city)

"Spatial practices of resistance reshape the city's geography, making the invisible visible." (the unknown city)

"The future is but the obsolete in reverse" (ruin lust)

"The ruins are still standing - but what do they stand for?" (ruin lust)