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Myths of the near future: a Flaneuric remapping of the post modern city

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*MYTHS OF THE NEAR
FUTURE: A FLÂNEURIC
REMAPPING OF THE
POST MODERN CITY*

“S re, j e si u s de l’ati re py s.”¹
-Ivan Chtcheglov, *Fo ml u ary fo a New Urbni sm*

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O Intrda tin

AT THE HEELS of heroic Modernist planning, fully institutionalized by the start of the Second World War, an investigation on the desires of Urban Subject emerges as a critical response to architects' moralistic fixation on composition, function, and programmatic separation. Walter Benjamin's exploration of the subject takes the form of an analysis of the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneur, as celebrated by poet-essayist Charles Baudelaire. *Passagenwerk* discusses architecture's potency in both supporting social rituals and crafting a Subject itself. "Paris," specifically the arcade, "created the Type of the flâneur." (BEN, 416). Continuing in this vein of research, the Situationists develop a framework describing processes of urban alienation and the potential for escape through *dérive*, a voluntary invocation of the flâneur-subject to fragment and reconfigure the geography of the city through the creation of experiential narratives.

Today, Paris can no longer function as a stand-in for the City as an idea. In addition to transforming the physical urban landscape, the driver has replaced the pedestrian as prevailing participant in urban planning. Just as the passage created the subject and engendered the *dérive*, the automobile has shaped the manner in which we understand and experience space.

BACKGROUND

CLAIM

The elevated highway is the locus for this contemporary derive. Inherently divorced from the activities of the streetscape, itself a relic of the past, the highway is the architectural armature which supports rituals of movement across the City. **Myths of the Near Future proposes to remap the postmodern City, a palimpsestic system of speeds and spaces of movement, according to the desires of this “New Urban Subject,” a driving, mechanized flâneur who utilizes the automobile as a mediator with which to experience space. As a methodology, the analysis, spatialization, and close misreading of a textual narrative, here a work of critical science fiction, will provide programming for an urban sequence that targets the highway as a site of potentiality.** An investigation through dual modes of architectural representation, both isometric projection and filmic animations, will provide a means by which these narrational, architectural scenarios may be tested.

CONTEXT: NARRATIVE

The elevated highway is the locus for this contemporary derive. Inherently divorced from the activities of the streetscape, itself a relic of the past, the highway is the architectural armature which supports rituals of movement across the City. Myths of the Near Future proposes to remap the postmodern City, a palimpsestic system of speeds and spaces of movement, according to the desires of this “New Urban Subject,” a driving, mechanized flâneur who utilizes the automobile as a mediator with which to experience space. As a methodology, the analysis, spatialization, and close misreading of a textual narrative, here a work of critical science fiction, will provide programming for an urban sequence that targets the highway as a site of potentiality. An investigation through dual modes of architectural representation, both isometric projection and filmic animations, will provide a means by which these narrational, architectural scenarios may be tested.

Through questioning the role of architecture in crafting urban sequences, I will analyze historical apparitions of the Flâneur and its current manifestation as New Urban Subject, specifically examining how built form acts as a frame for its social function. Utilizing Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* as well as J.G. Ballard's science fiction as springboards, the project will argue that architecture has not only the ability to support social function but influence the behavior of individuals.

The passage of nineteenth-century Paris is built upon ritualistic exchange and transaction. (Crickenberger, *Arcades*). As a device, the vitrines are grouped linearly to capitalize on the unifying characteristic of the urban inhabitant: the moving, surveying eye. The flâneur is able to transcend and subvert the processes of the consumer by utilizing the space for his own pleasure. Rather than engaging with the commodities displayed, the flaneuric subject wanders from storefront to storefront with no intention of buying, projecting his own personal narratives on passerby. In this way, the flâneur quite consciously misuses the space. A similar misuse is able to occur on the highway, though a radical distinction is made in the speeds at which the automotive subjects move.

Long Island City, Queens is a site of potential for the activities of this driving flâneuric subject. By reframing the district as a network of contingent spaces and infrastructures designed to facilitate ease of movement and rapid transit, LIC ceases to behave as the traditional city, but as a machine that supports the functions of Manhattan. Due to its history, Long Island City failed to develop a unique identity that differentiates itself from New York City the way Brooklyn did.

It does not embody the radical dislocation between

MYTHS OF THE NEAR FUTURE

Through analyzing, spatializing, and misreading a rich, short text by British New Wave novelist J.G. Ballard, I will map out the spatial realities of *Crash*, an urban sequence that is not an infrastructure of efficiency, but rather a stage on which the desires of the New Flâneur are played-out. Chapter 21 describes a hallucinogenic passage from a sanitized airport lounge through an amplified landscape of a highway concluding in a derelict wrecking yard. These scenarios for urban experiences will take the form of fantastical architectural representations including isometric drawings, collaged perspectives, and diagrams that propose radical re-mappings and exaggerations of extant urban conditions.

Embodying of the narrative's content through form versus specializing the narrative through immersive film.

Something about film and architecture?

Ballardian Inner Space is very akin to the projected narratives of the flâneur and the reconfigured urban fragments derived from the Situationist *dérive*. It relies on an active participant of urban space deliberately acting to reconceive of the city by the act of moving through it.

Testing these "Myths of the Near Future" in opposition with and needs of the City, these architectural fantasies may find a productive tension between the Real (questions of necessity, efficiency, and program) with the Virtual (the inner-space of the Flâneur—a subject misusing generic spaces for its own pleasure). As a method, the insertion of these Urban Fantasies into the extant city will problematize the Project for "flâneuric space" in the City.

1 Claim

Myths of the Near Future presents a portrait of the modern City, a plastic system of speeds and spaces for movement, according to the desires of this "New Urban Subject," a driving, mechanized flâneur who utilizes the automobile as a mediator with which to experience space. As a methodology, the analysis, spatialization, and close reading of a textual narrative, here a work of critical science fiction, will provide programming for an urban sequence that targets the highway as a site of potentiality.

2 Cont ext

Figure 1: Historical Manifestations of The Flâneur I:
The Baudelaireian / Benjaminian Subject

Figure 2: Historical Manifestations of The Flâneur II:
Dos Passos's Machine-Eye

Figure 3: Historical Manifestations of The Flâneur III:
Inner Space of the Ballardian Highway

Figure 4: Times Square Is Not Public Space I:
Commodification of Bodies

Figure 5: Times Square Is Not Public Space II:
Commodification of Image



Figure 1: Historical Manifestations of The Flâneur I:
The Baudelaireian / Benjaminian Subject

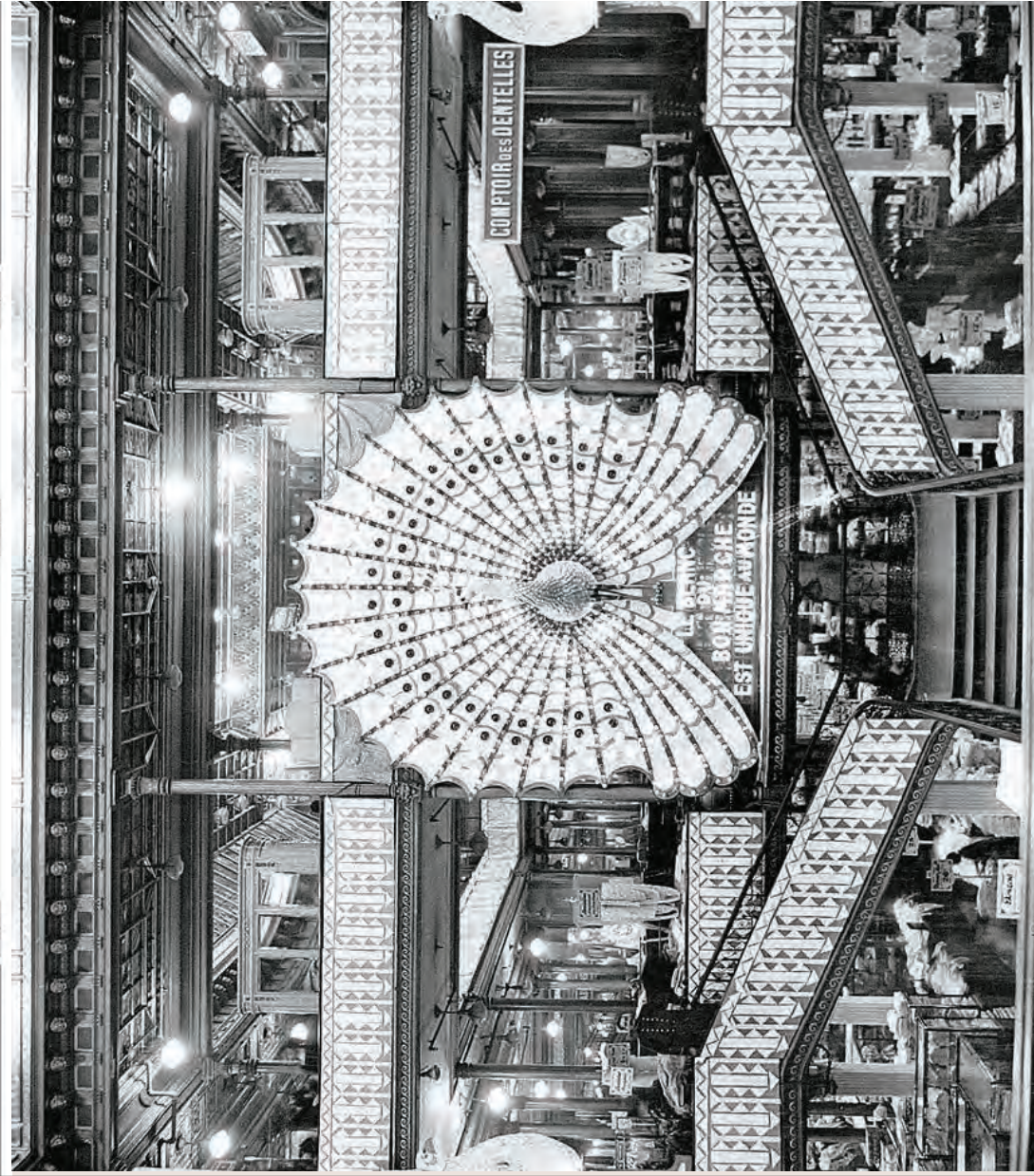
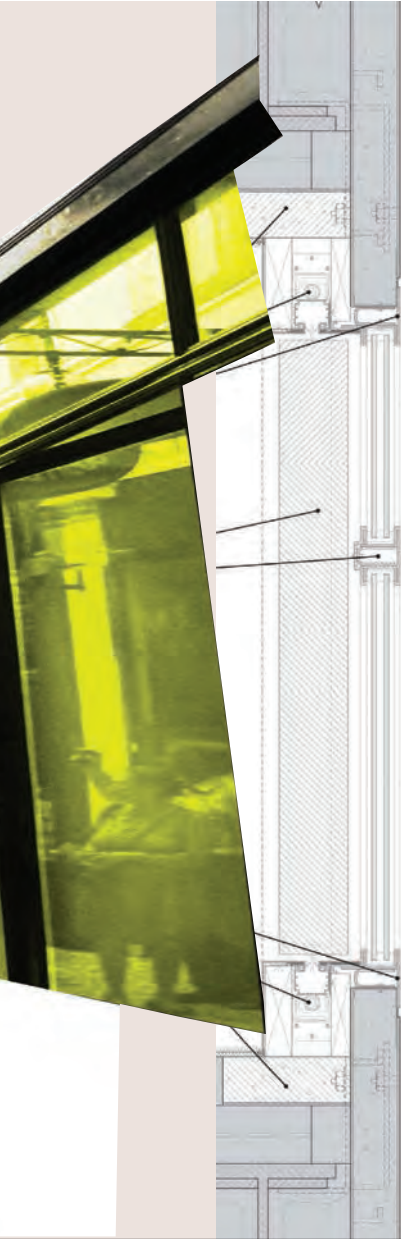




Figure 2: Historical Manifestations of The Flâneur II:
Dos Passos's Machine-Eye



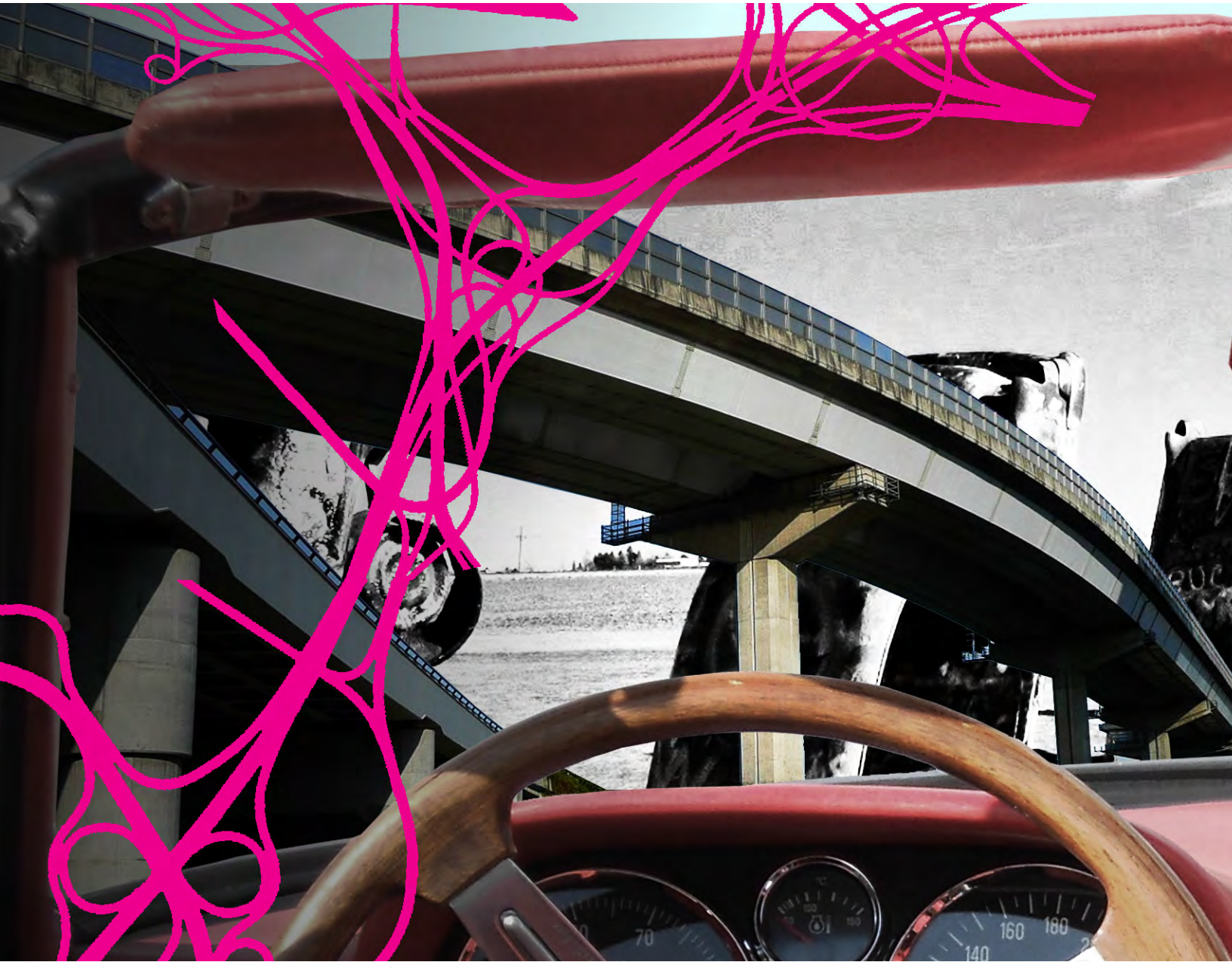


Figure 3: Historical Manifestations of The Flâneur III:
Inner Space of the Ballardian Highway

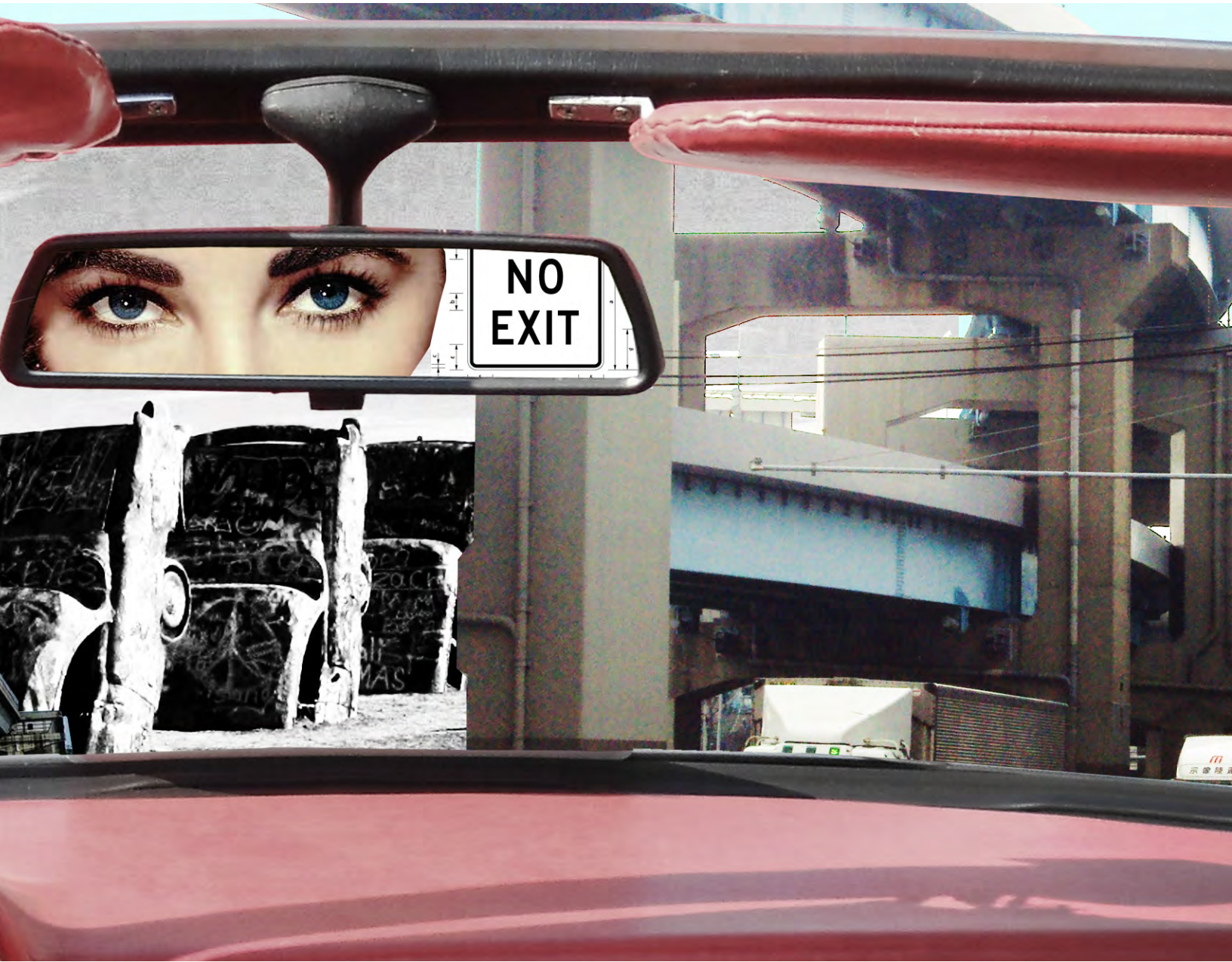




Figure 4: Times Square Is Not Public Space I:
Commodification of Bodies

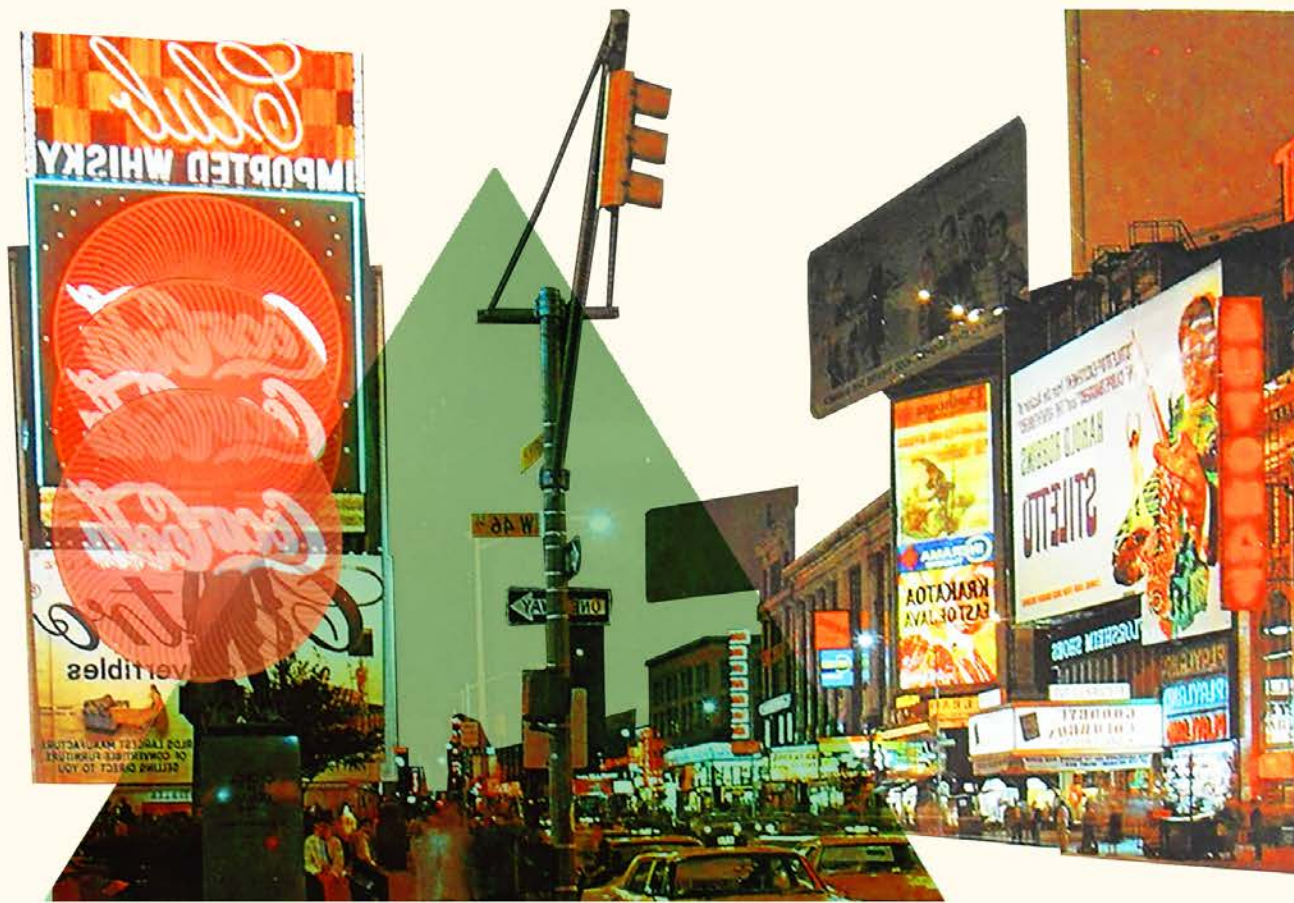
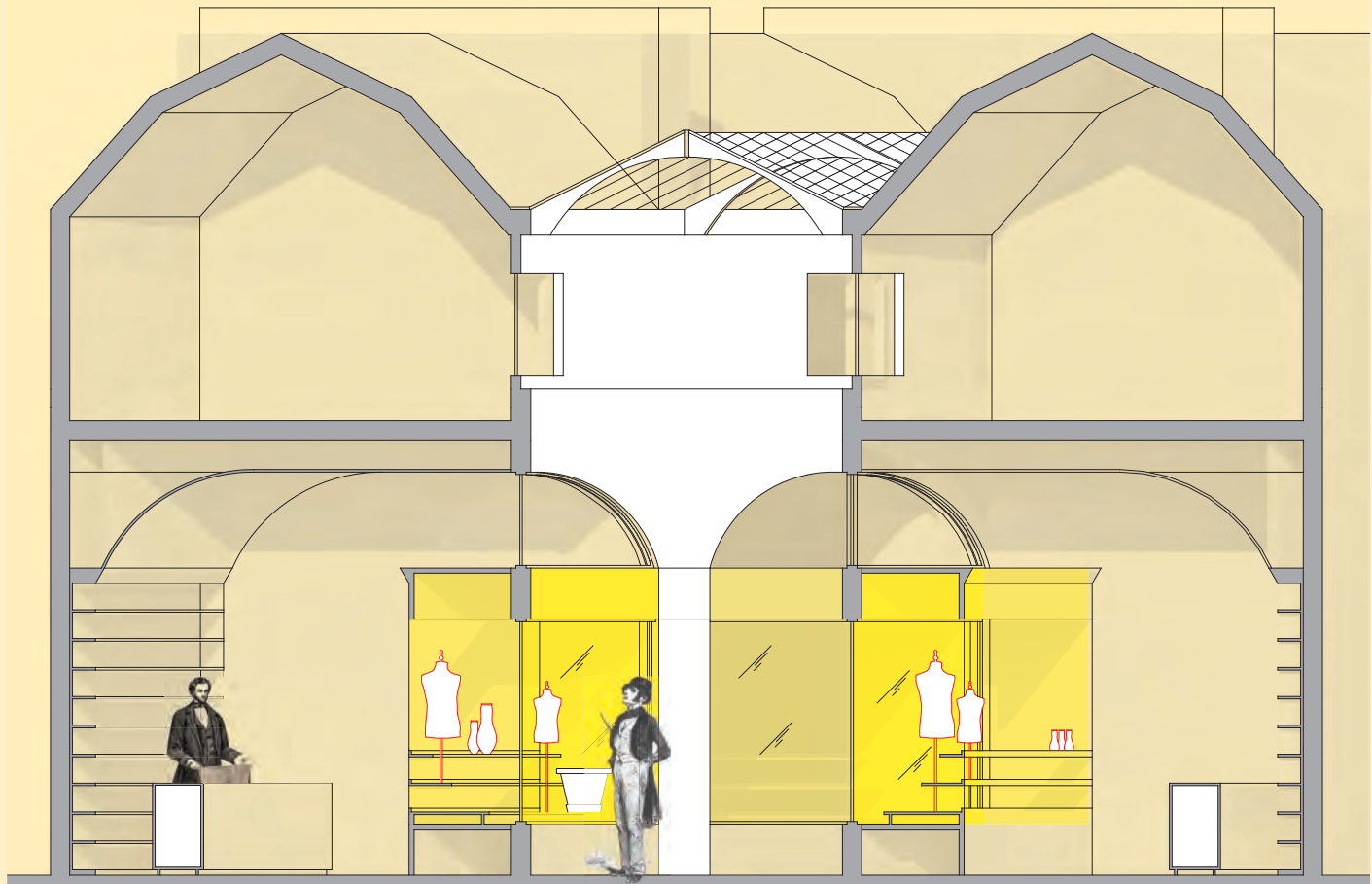


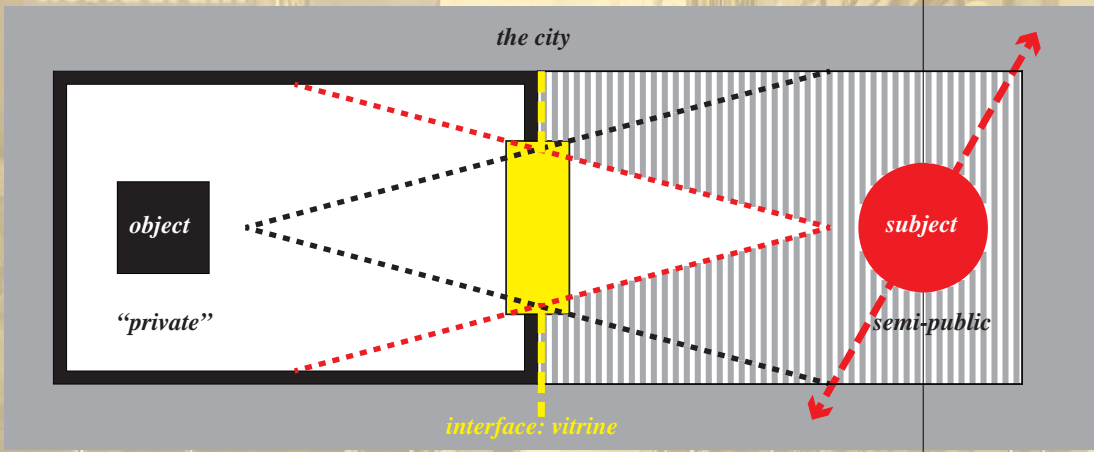
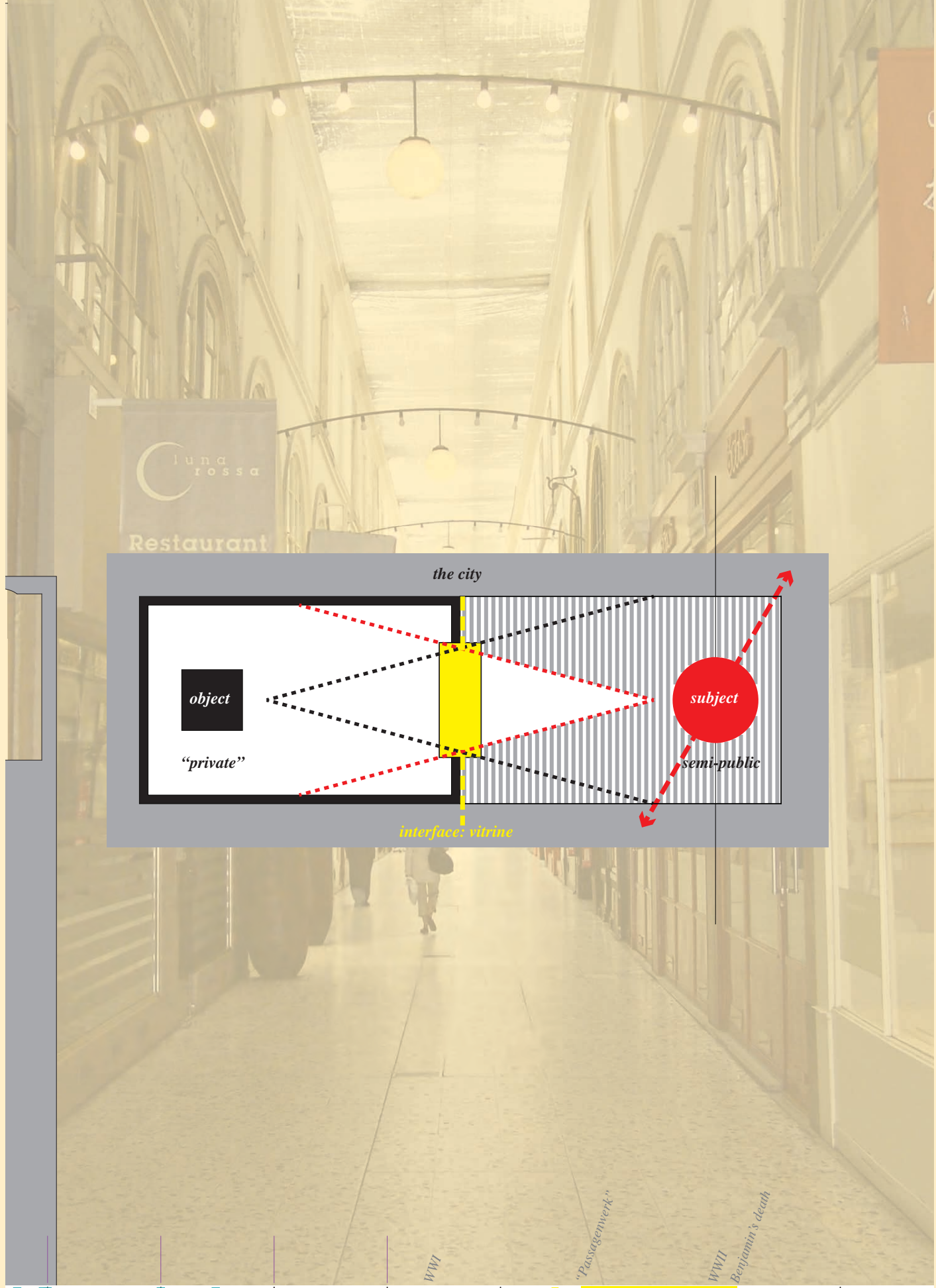
Figure 5: Times Square Is Not Public Space II:
Commodification of Image

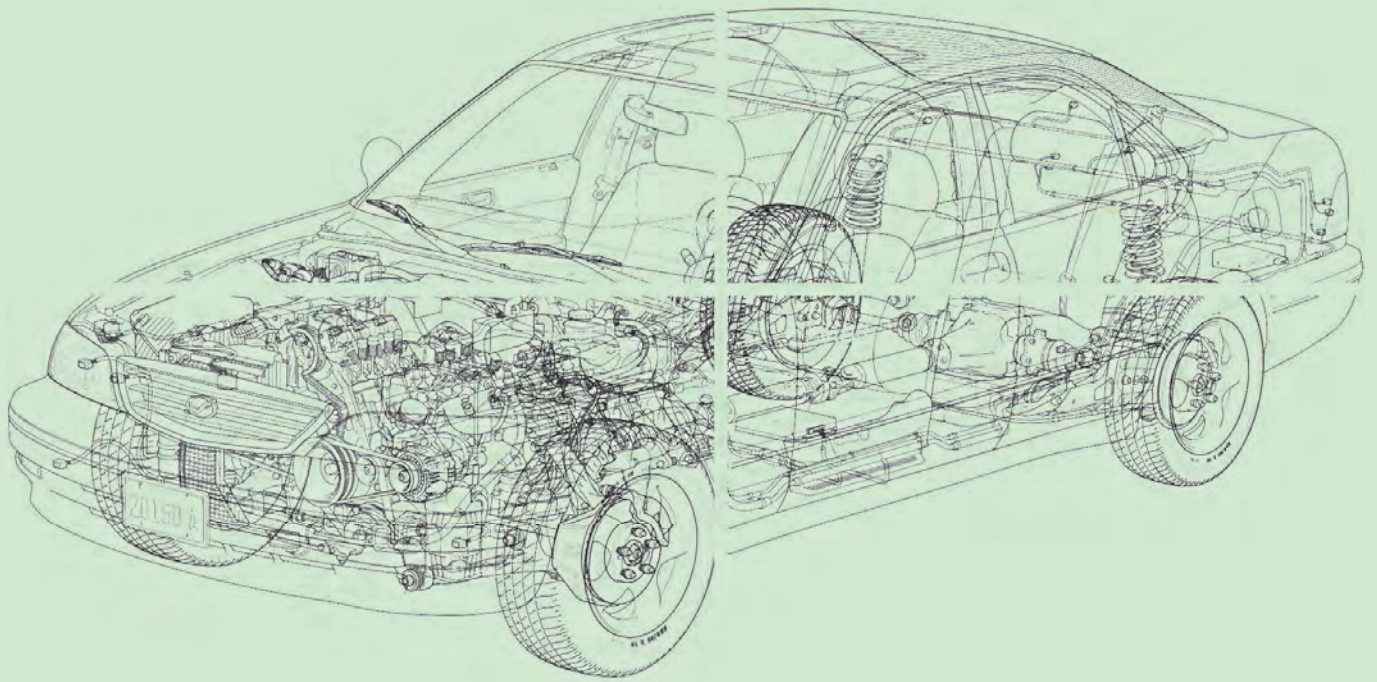
3 Flâneuric Architectures

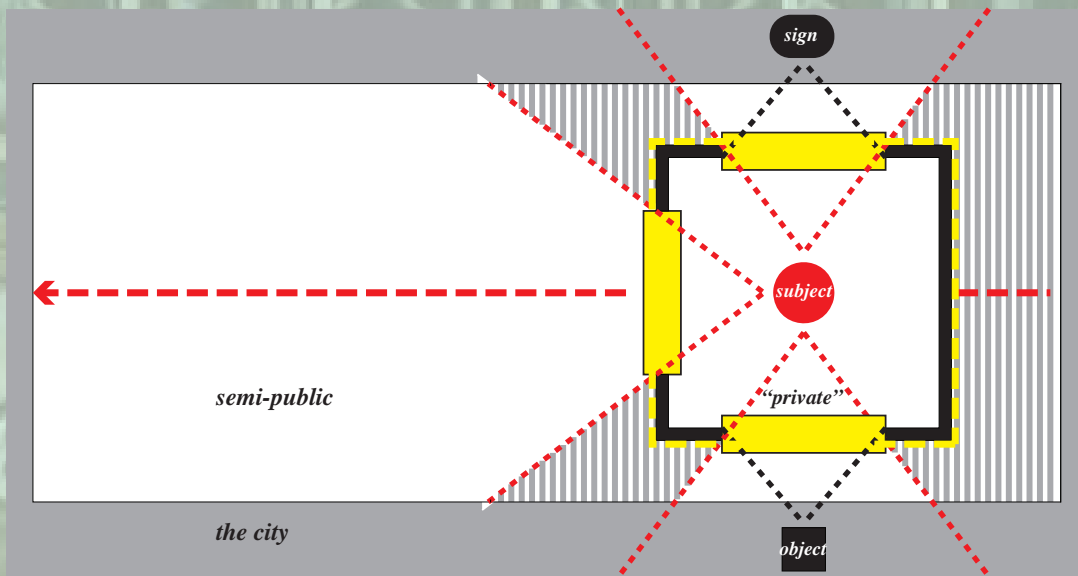
Figure 6: Functions of the Nineteenth-Century Flâneur: Arcade as Social Mediator

Figure 7: Functions of the Contemporary Flâneur: Automobile as Social Mediator









4 Long Island City: Manhattanism's Other

Figure 8: Long Island City, Site, Percieved as System for Movement

Figure 9: Craigslist "Missed Connections" Annotating the Space of
The New York Subway

Figure 10: Long Island City, Fragmented:
An Architectural Provocation I

Figure 11: Long Island City, Fragmented:
An Architectural Provocation I

Figure 12:

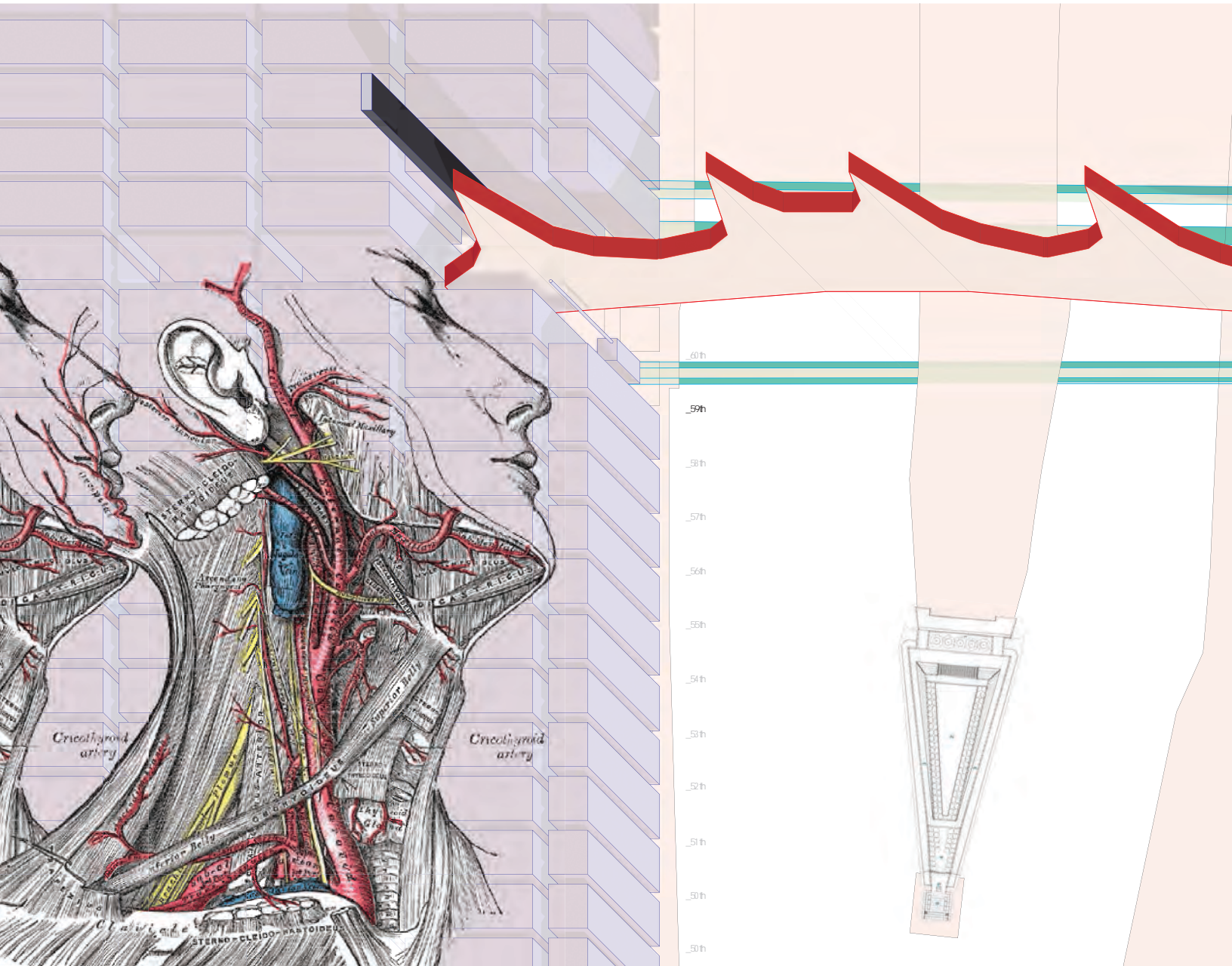
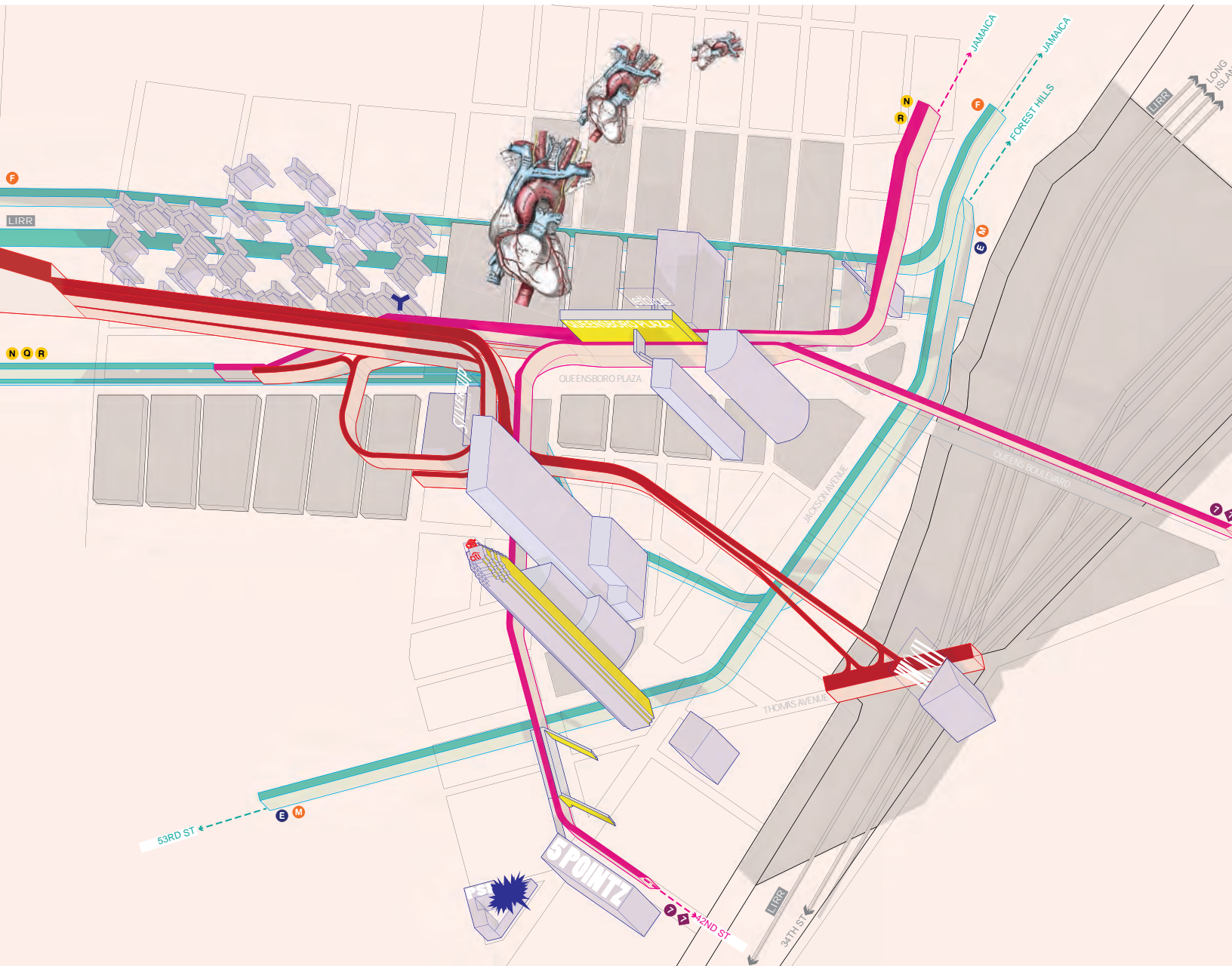


Figure 8: Long Island City, Site, Percieved as System for Movement



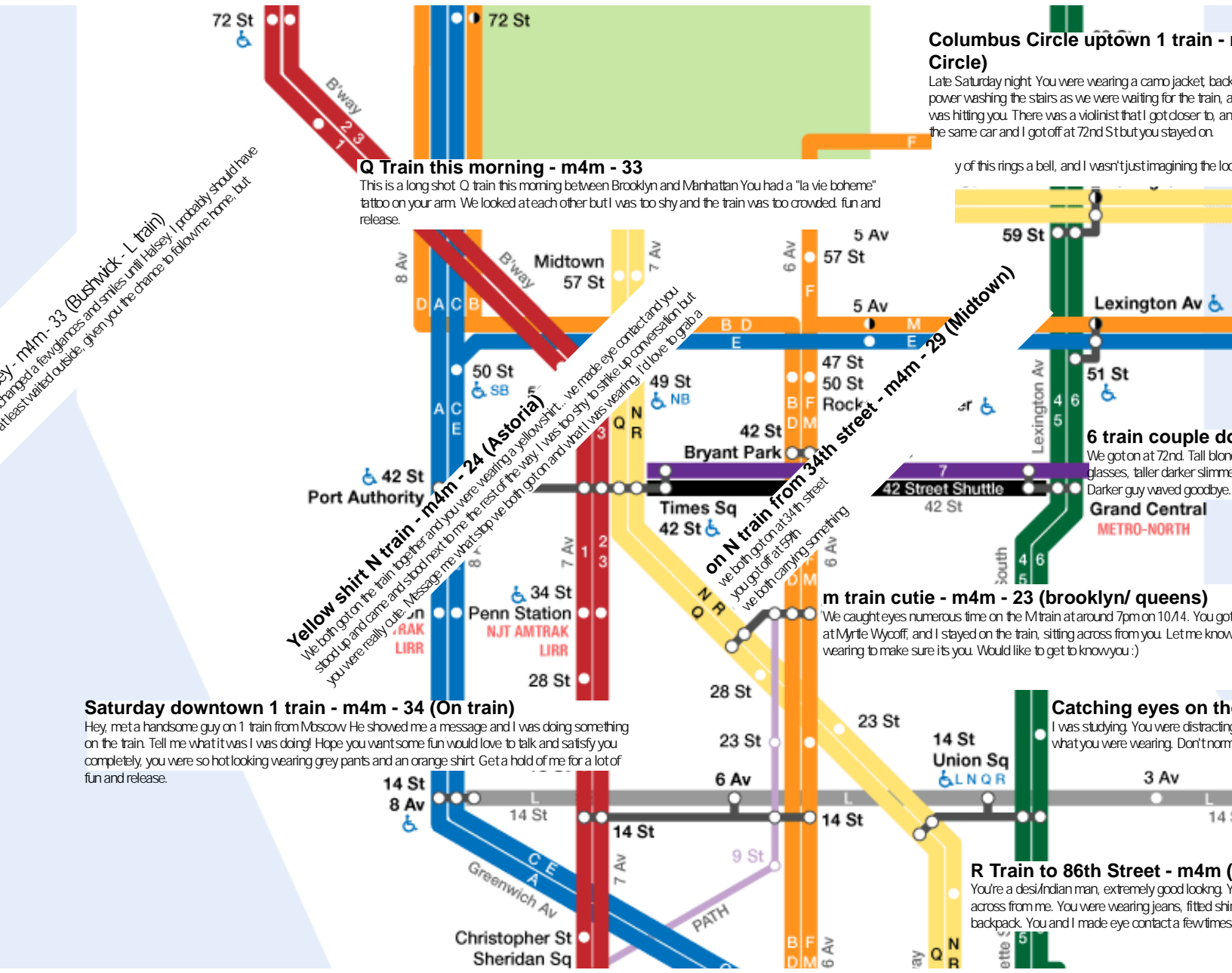


Figure 9: Craigslist "Missed Connections" Annotating the Space of The New York Subway

m4m - 28 (Columbus)

pack and backwards Nike hat. They were and I don't think you even notice that the mist and I noticed you got closer as well. We boarded

cks of mutual interest. let me know

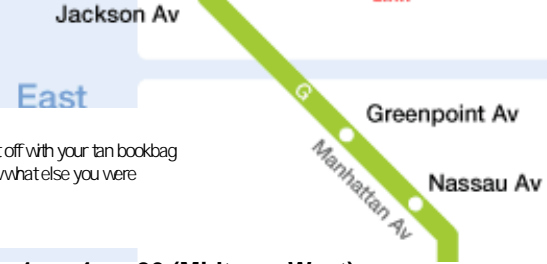


Smart dresser...F to A train this morning 6:45ish - m4m

You were wearing an off-white jacket, brown cuffed trousers, and a very smart flat cap. You got the A train from the F at Jay street and held on to a pole just a few feet from me. You're absolutely adorable and I wish I could say something to you. Today you didn't shave....really cute. I wish I could see you smile....

downtown 11am - m4m - 44 (Subway 6 Train)

of dark shorter guy. Both muscular carrying gym bags. You, blond scruffy or guy with sunglasses on his head. Blond smiled when we got on train. You are both so hot and cute. Hit us back if you want the four of us to hang



off with your tan bookbag what else you were

e 1 - m4m - 26 (Midtown West)

g. Let me know if you see this. We me know what store you got off and ally do this but what the hell



bay ridge brooklyn)

ou entered the train on Prospect Avenue and sat t, blue/black basketball sneakers and carrying a black , but was not sure if you were interested (either you

on L train late Sun - m4m (On way to Brooklyn)
You were heading from 8 ave on the L train wearing black jacket and red shirt carrying large bag. And u were with three girls. You were very cute and I hope I see this and write back

i met you on the G train - m4m - 23 (G train)
I'll be 4:34am on a Saturday and I've never done one of these before! I was on the subway w/you and we talked about Jennifer Lawrence (the Oscar press junkie), the literary merits of the Hunger Games/fantasy game (with large) and then debated the merits of going out in Williamsburg (we both seemed to have had randomly saw at Lincoln center tonight (at your screening spike Jonze movie "her" which we both made appearances but it was at a screening across the street and up stairs). Your name was Felix. (I think you worked at a photo agency and went to the university of glasgow maybe you were gay or not -clean) but even if you aren't I can always use a new friend who will go see movies at Lincoln

your name is felix!

You were waiting in the station when I got there. Since you were at my station, there's a chance I'll see you again but I wanted to post while it's fresh on our minds. You were tall and bearded, wa nice body. We stood near each other and always faced each other, stealing glances. When the train got packed, we purposely burped into each other and left it linger. Hopefully I'll see you another am. But if not, hit me up. I'd love to grab a drink. Tell me what station we got on, and what kind of piercing I have.



LIRR - I got off Westbury
You were reading first half of trip, we were

just now downtown b train 8:30am - m4m - 28 (Upper Side)
You were waiting in the station when I got there. Since you were at my station, there's a chance I'll see you again but I wanted to post while it's fresh on our minds. You were tall and bearded, wa nice body. We stood near each other and always faced each other, stealing glances. When the train got packed, we purposely burped into each other and left it linger. Hopefully I'll see you another am. But if not, hit me up. I'd love to grab a drink. Tell me what station we got on, and what kind of piercing I have.

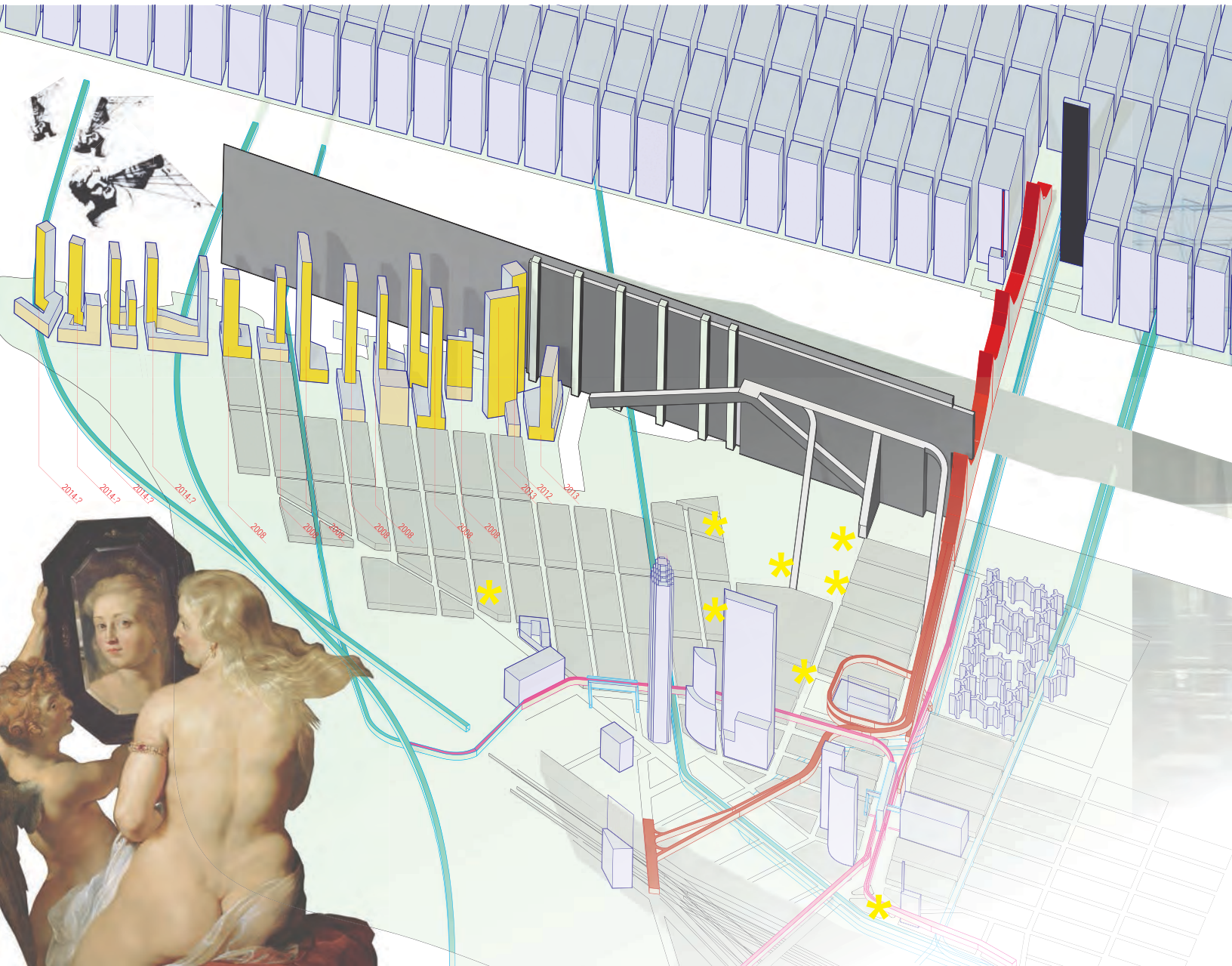
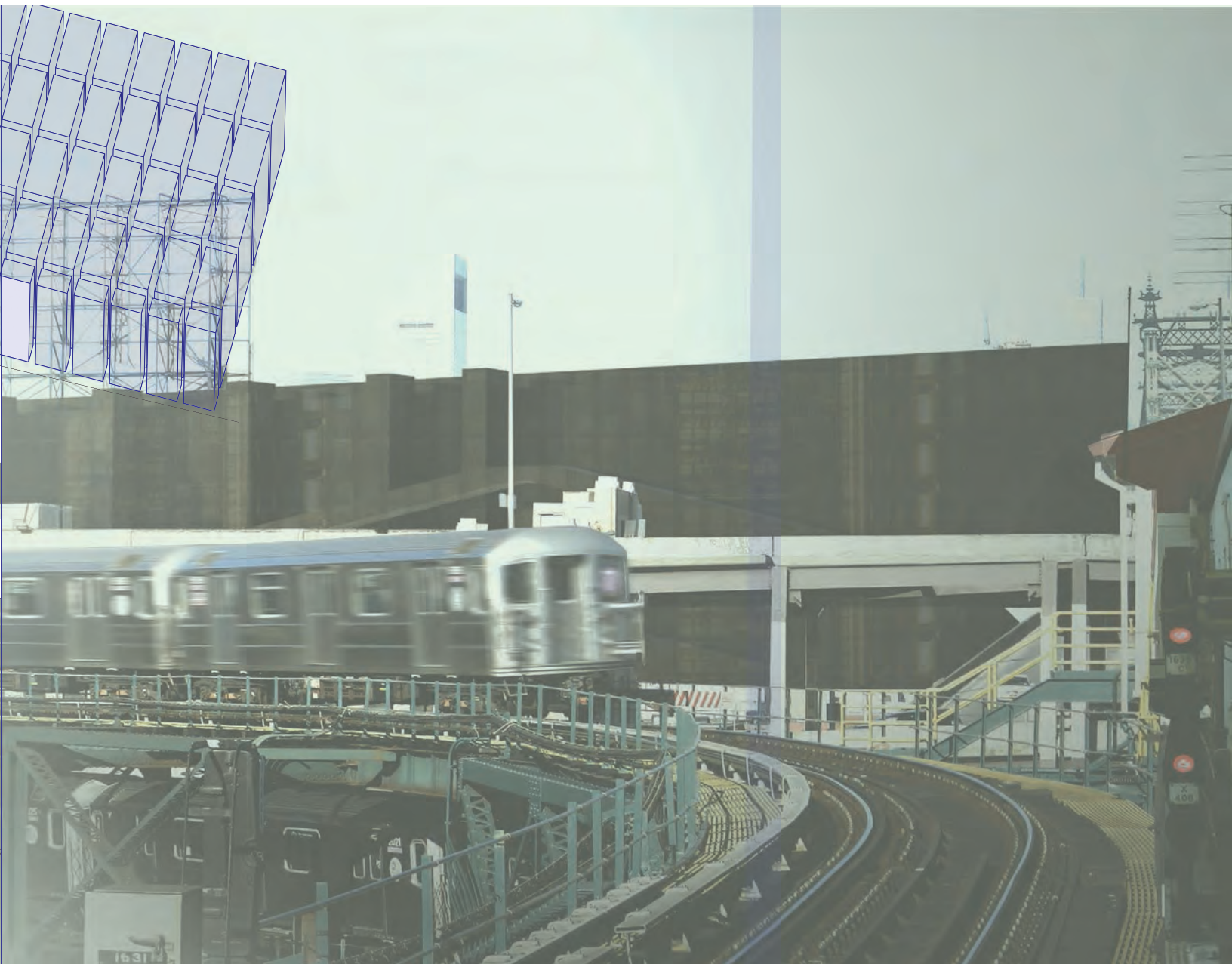



Figure 10: Long Island City, Fragmented:
An Architectural Provocation I





“In a sense life in the high-rise had begun to resemble the world outside - there were the same ruthlessness and aggression concealed within a set of polite conventions.”

Figure 11: Long Island City, Fragmented:
An Architectural Provocation II

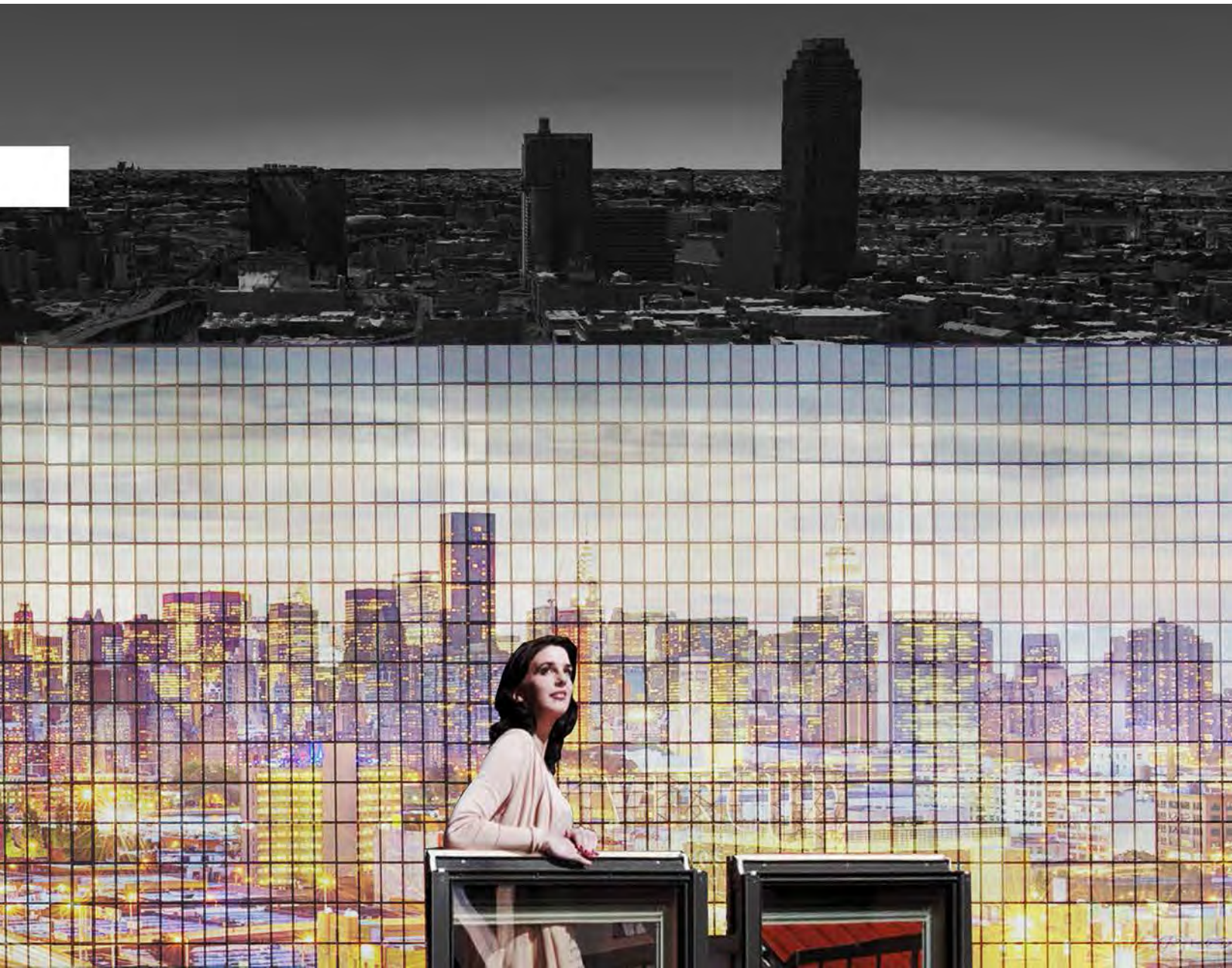


Figure 12: Ritualized Traffic Flow: Hourly Ridership Rates for Two 7-Train Stations in LIC

7

7 train frequency

court sq station, weekday

hunters point ave, weekday

hunters point ave, weekend

eastbound

westbound

hour

riders

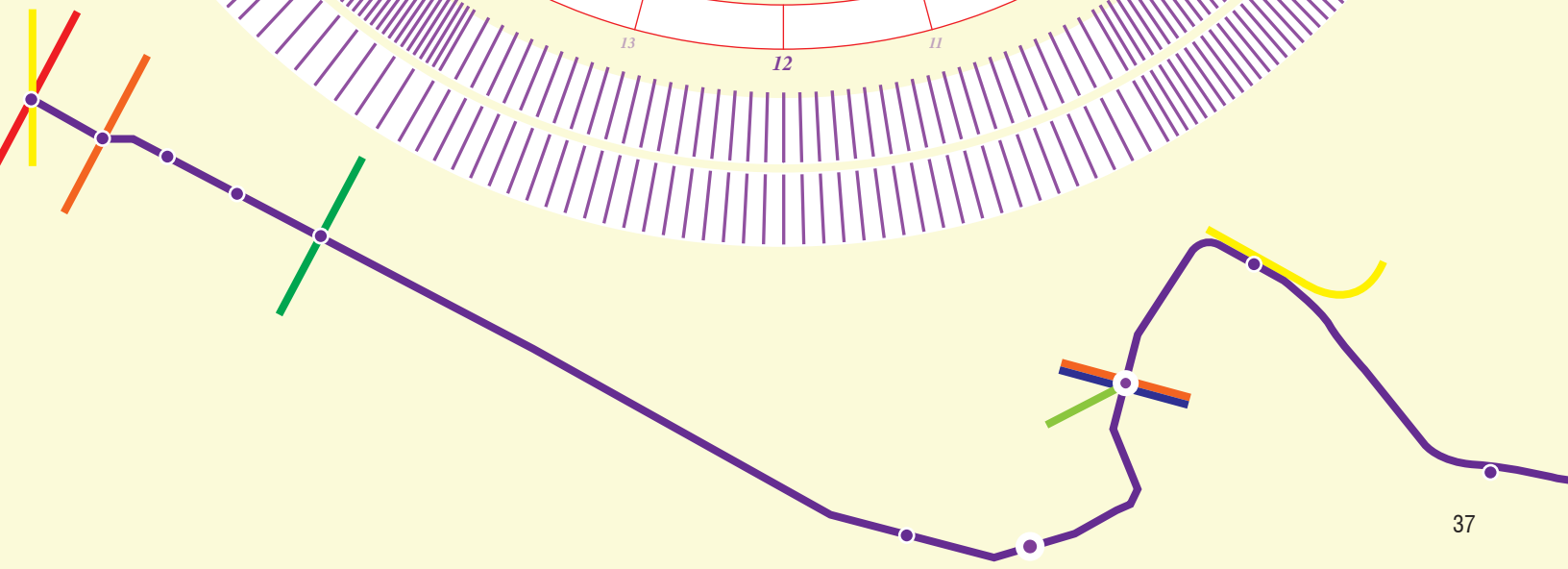
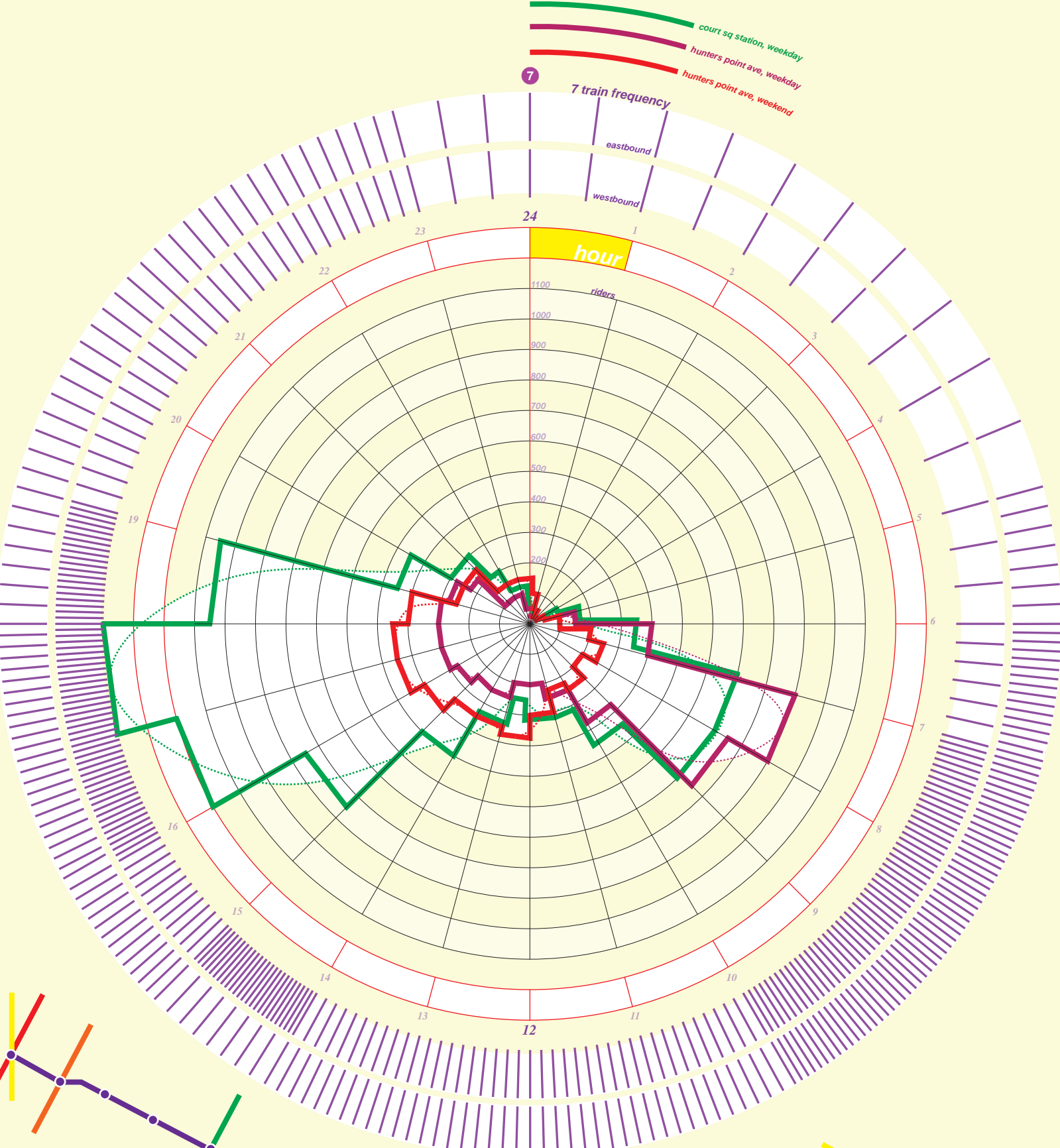


Figure 12: Ritualized Traffic Flow: Hourly Ridership Rates for the Queensboro Bridge

queensbound traffic
manhattanbound traffic
total traffic volume
bus frequency

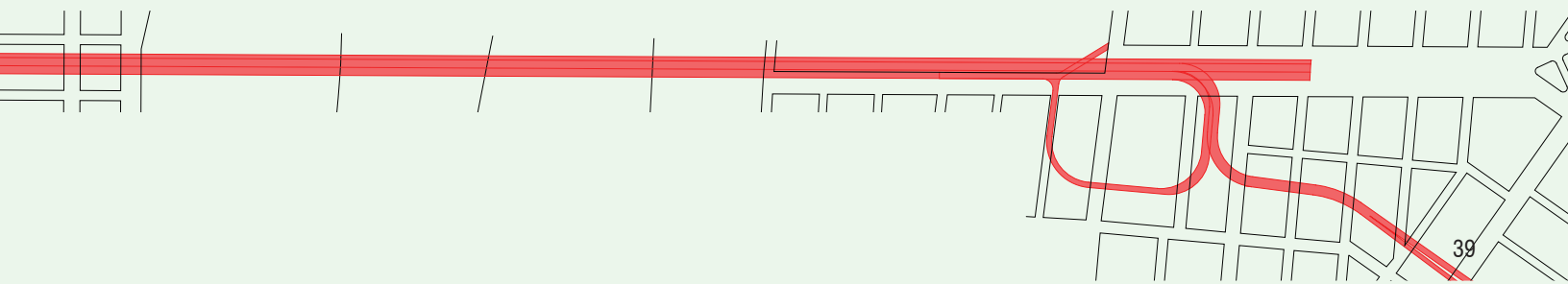
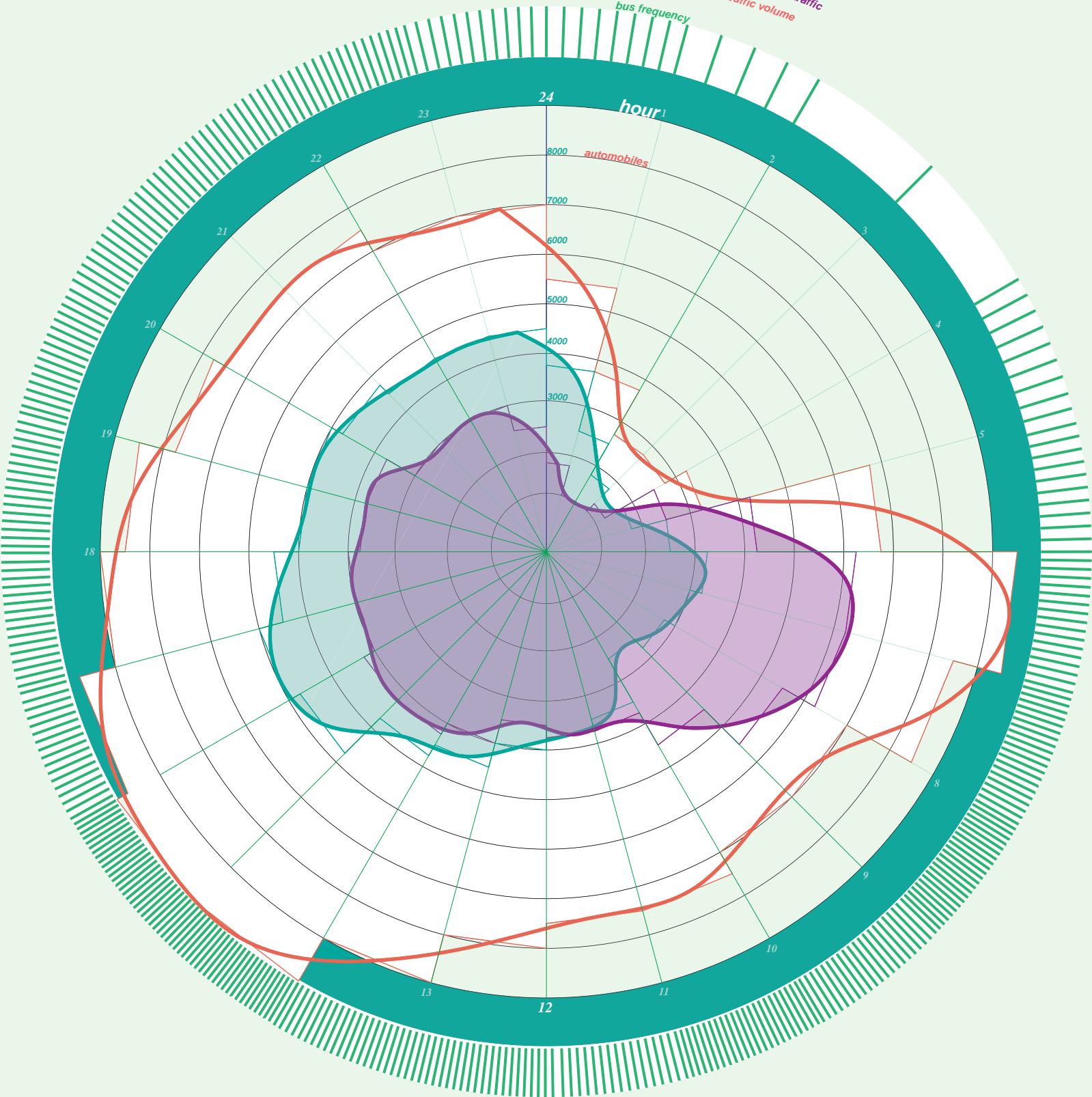


Figure 12: Ritualized Traffic Flow: Hourly Ridership Rates for the Queens-Midtown Tunnel (DOT)

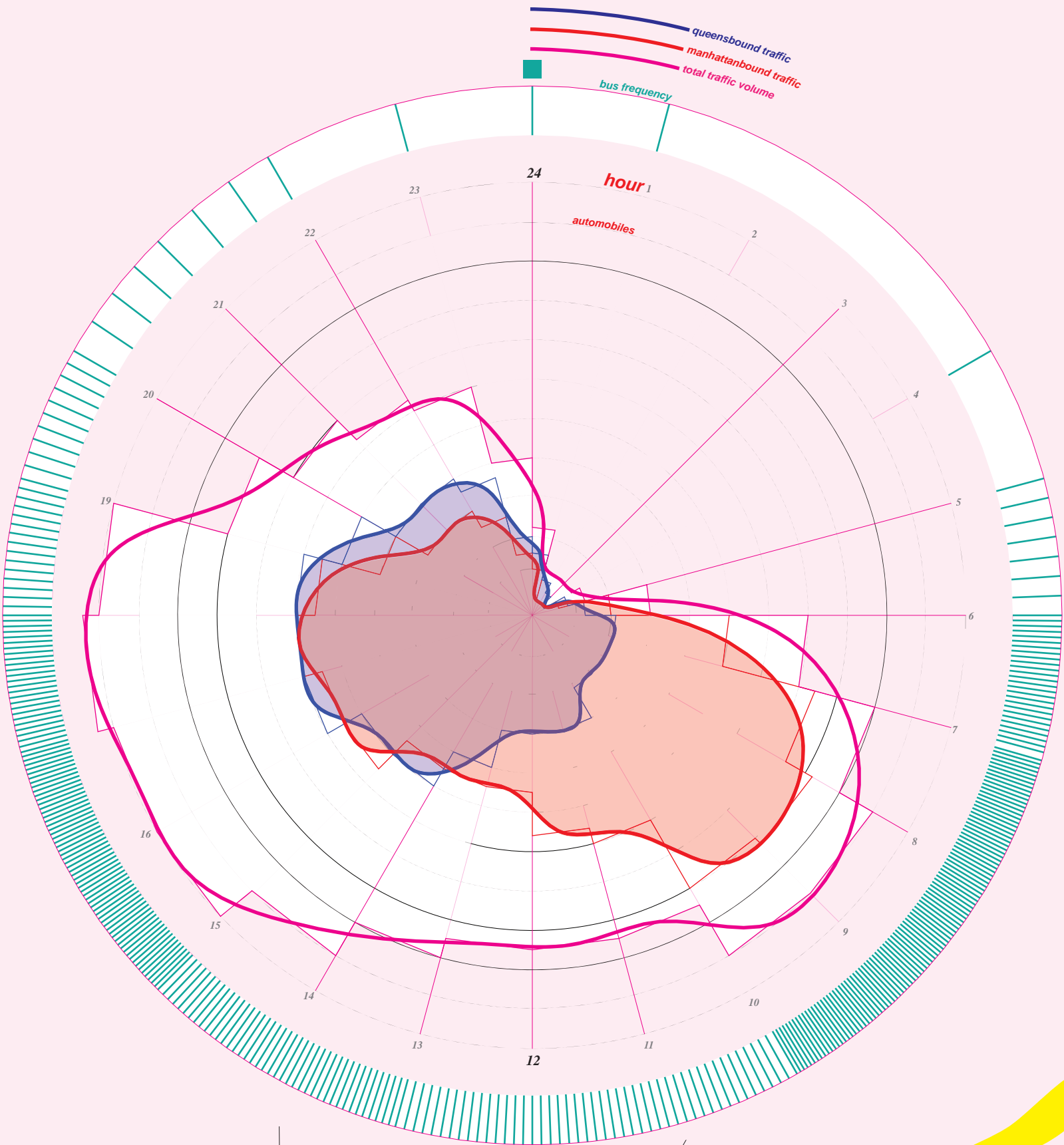




Figure 13: Historical Context: Long Island City in 1924





Figure 13: Context: Long Island City in 2013

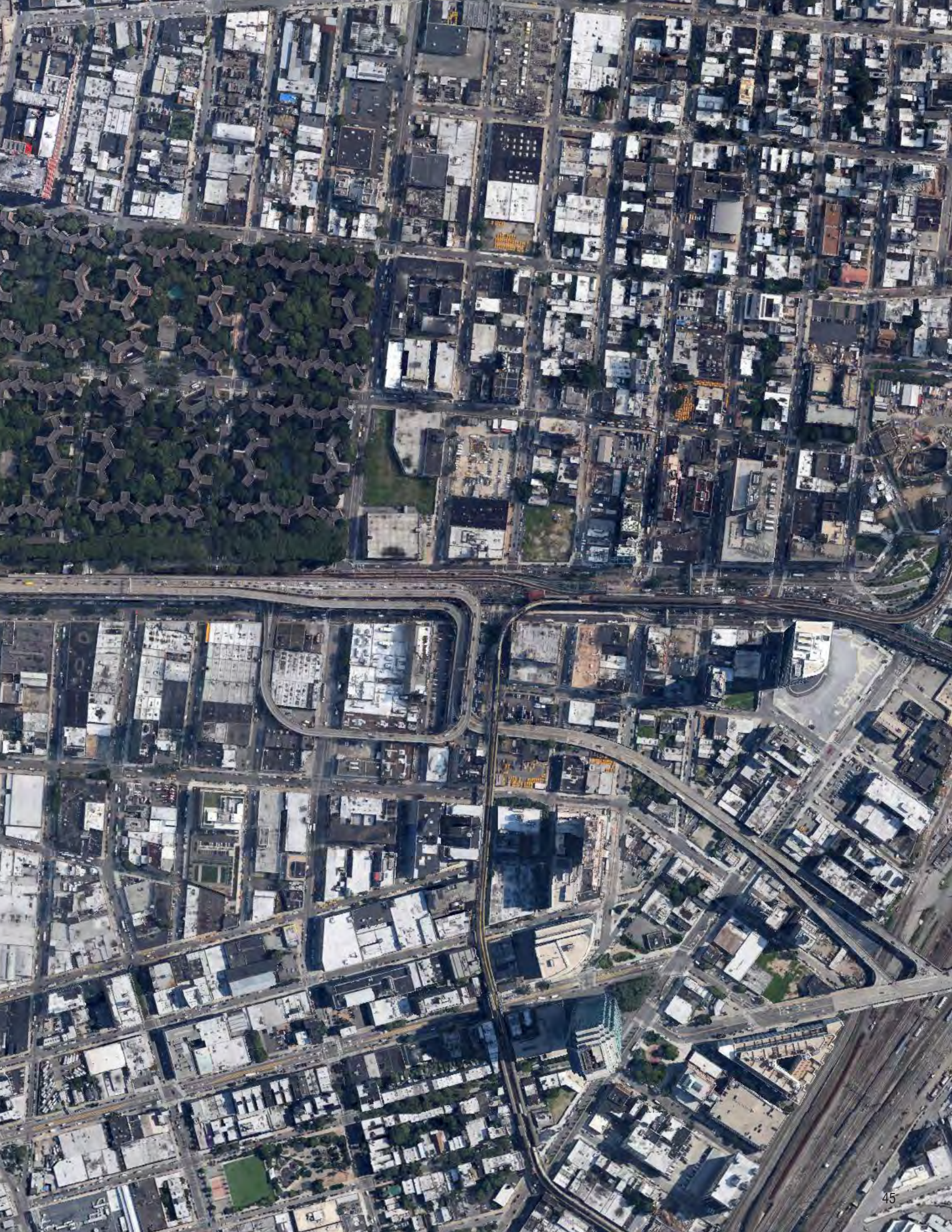




Figure 19: Land-Use Isometric
48



5M yths p the Near Ft u e

hanging from her arm, begging her not to leave me as my body shrank to a naked membrane.

With Vaughan, by contrast, I felt at ease, confident of his affection for me, as if he were deliberately guiding me along this expressway which he had created for me alone. The other cars passing us were present through an enormous act of courtesy on his part. At the same time, I was sure that everything around me, the growing extension of the LSD through my body, was part of some ironic intention of Vaughan's, as if the excitement suffusing my mind hovered between hostility and affection, emotions which had become interchangeable.

We joined the fast westward sweep of the outer circular motorway. I moved the car into the slow lane as we turned around the central drum of the interchange, accelerating when we gained the open deck of the motorway, traffic speeding past us. Everywhere the perspectives had changed. The concrete walls of the slip road reared over us like luminous cliffs. The marker lines diving and turning formed a maze of white snakes, writhing as they carried the wheels of the cars crossing their backs, as delighted as dolphins. The overhead route signs loomed above us like generous dive-bombers. I pressed my palms against the rim of the steering wheel, pushing the car unaided through the golden air. Two airport coaches and a truck overtook us, their revolving wheels almost motionless, as if these vehicles were pieces of stage scenery suspended from the sky. Looking around, I had the impression that all the cars on the highway were stationary, the spinning earth racing beneath them to create an illusion of movement. The bones of my forearms formed a solid coupling with the shift of the steering column, and I felt the smallest tremors of the road-wheels magnified a hundred times, so that we traversed

each grain of gravel or cement like the surface of a small asteroid. The murmur of the transmission system reverberated through my legs and spine, echoing off the plates of my skull as if I myself were lying in the transmission tunnel of the car, my hands taking the torque of the crankshaft, my legs spinning to propel the vehicle forwards.

The daylight above the motorway grew brighter, an intense desert air. The white concrete became a curving bone. Waves of anxiety enveloped the car like pools of heat off summer macadam. Looking down at Vaughan, I tried to master this nervous spasm. The cars overtaking us were now being superheated by the sunlight, and I was sure that their metal bodies were only a fraction of a degree below their melting points, held together by the force of my own vision, and that the slightest shift of my attention to the steering wheel would burst the metal films that held them together and break these blocks of boiling steel across our path. By contrast, the oncoming cars were carrying huge cargoes of cool light, floats loaded with electric flowers being transported to a festival. As their speeds increased I found myself drawn into the fast lane, so that the oncoming vehicles were moving almost straight towards us, enormous carousels of accelerating light. Their radiator grilles formed mysterious emblems, racing alphabets that unravelled at high speed across the road surface.

Exhausted by the effort of concentrating on the traffic and holding the cars around us in their lanes, I took my hands off the wheel and let the car press on. In a long and elegant swerve the Lincoln crossed the fast lane. The tyres roared against the concrete verge, lashing the windshield with a storm of dust. I lay back helplessly, my body exhausted. In front of me I saw Vaughan's hand on

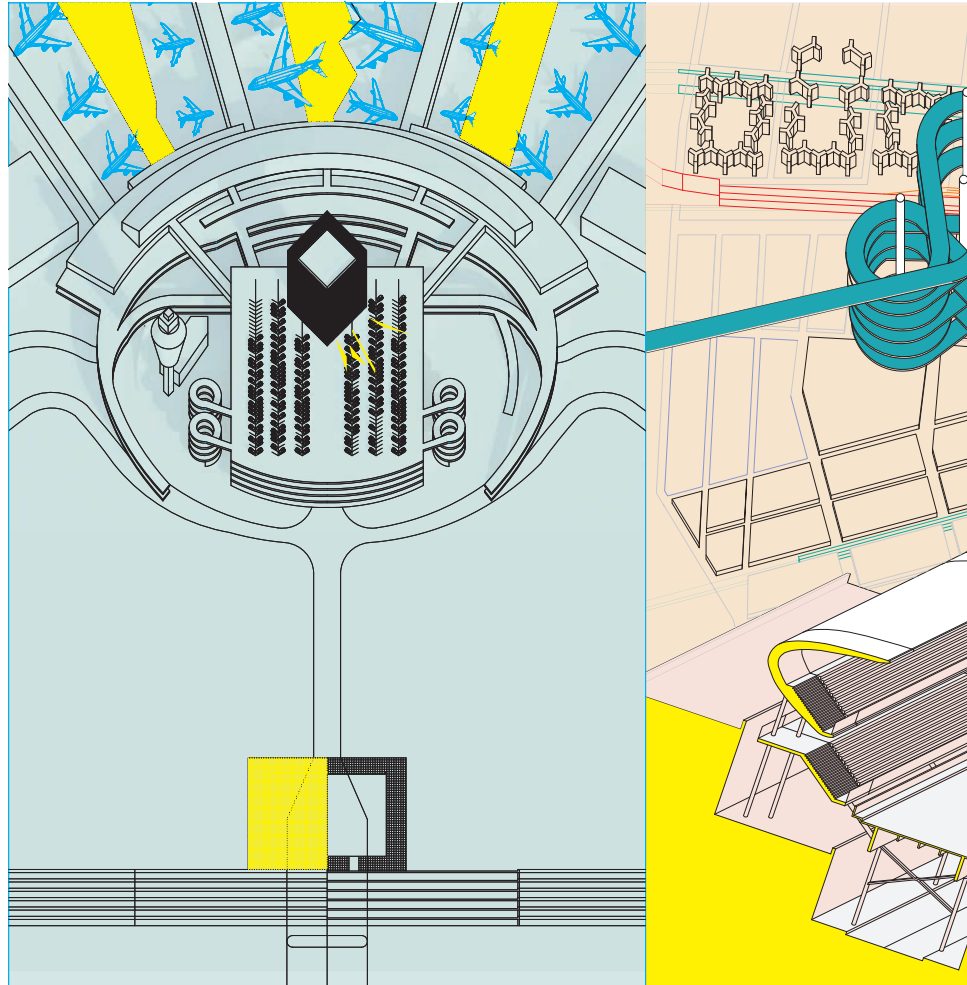
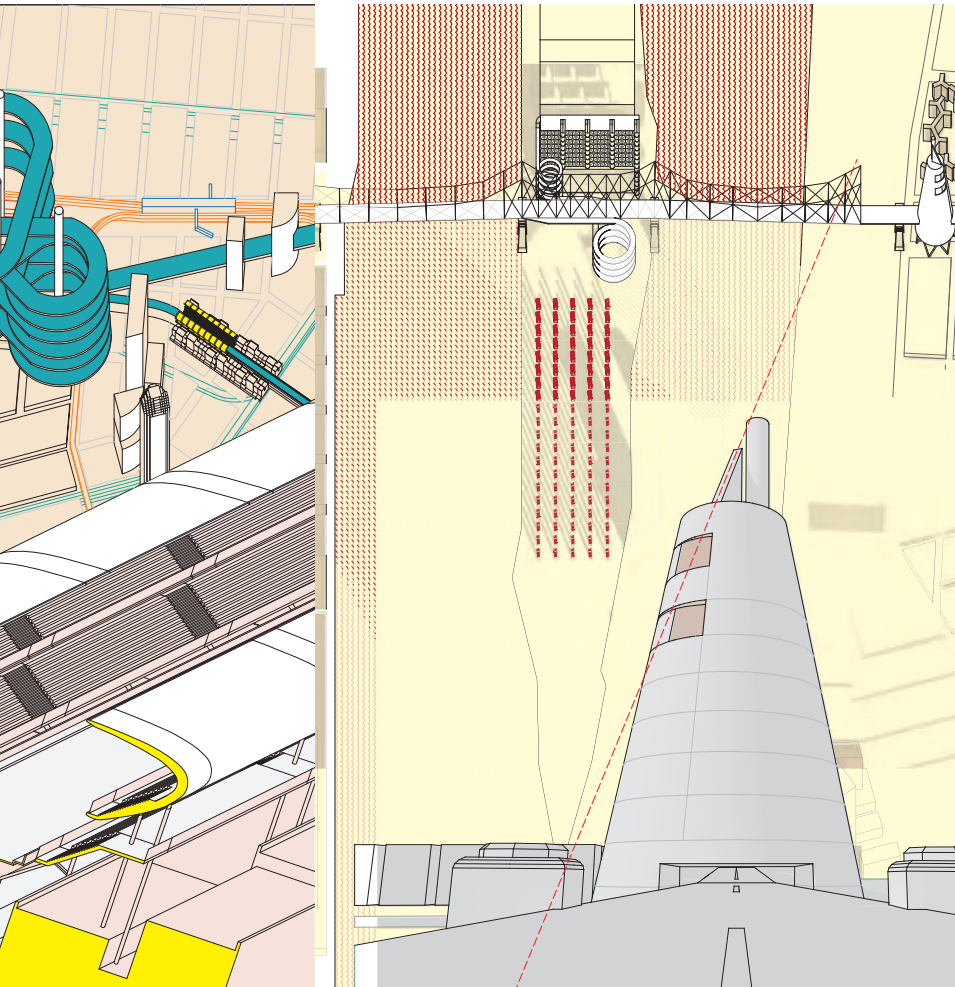


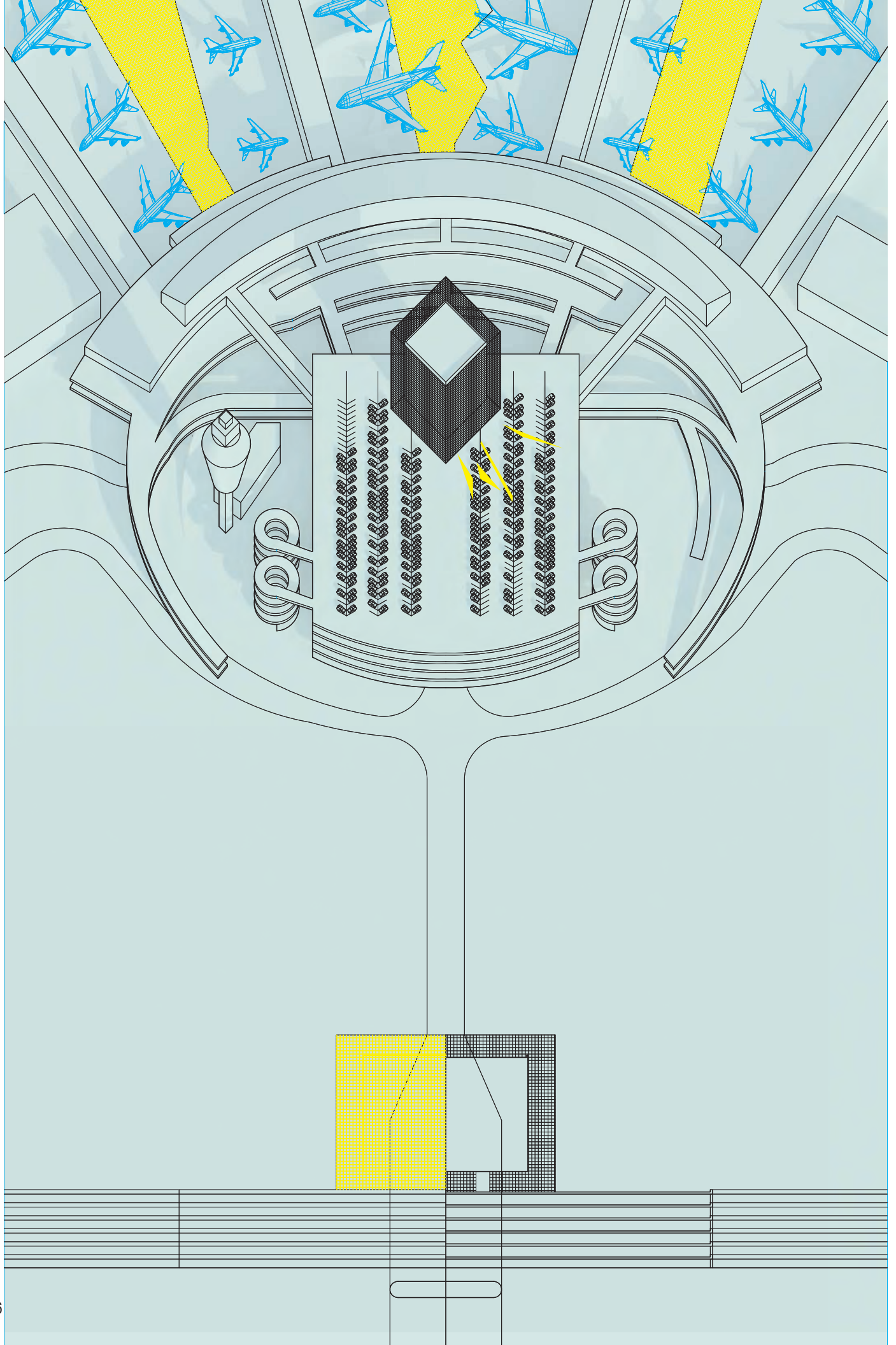
Figure 18: Triptych: Spatialization of *Crash*, Chapter 21 upon the fabric of Queens, New York.

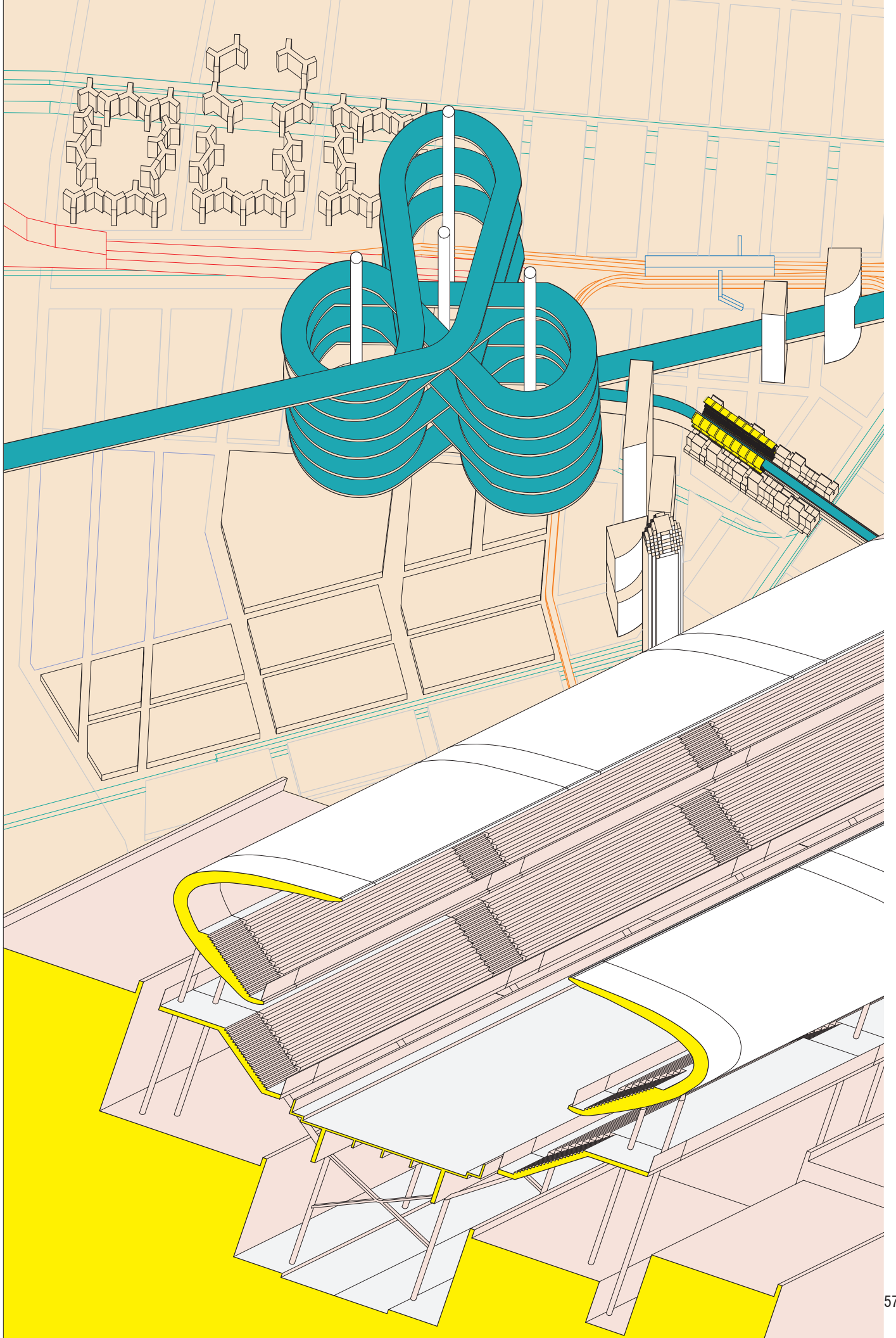
Figure 18a: Airport and Hotel

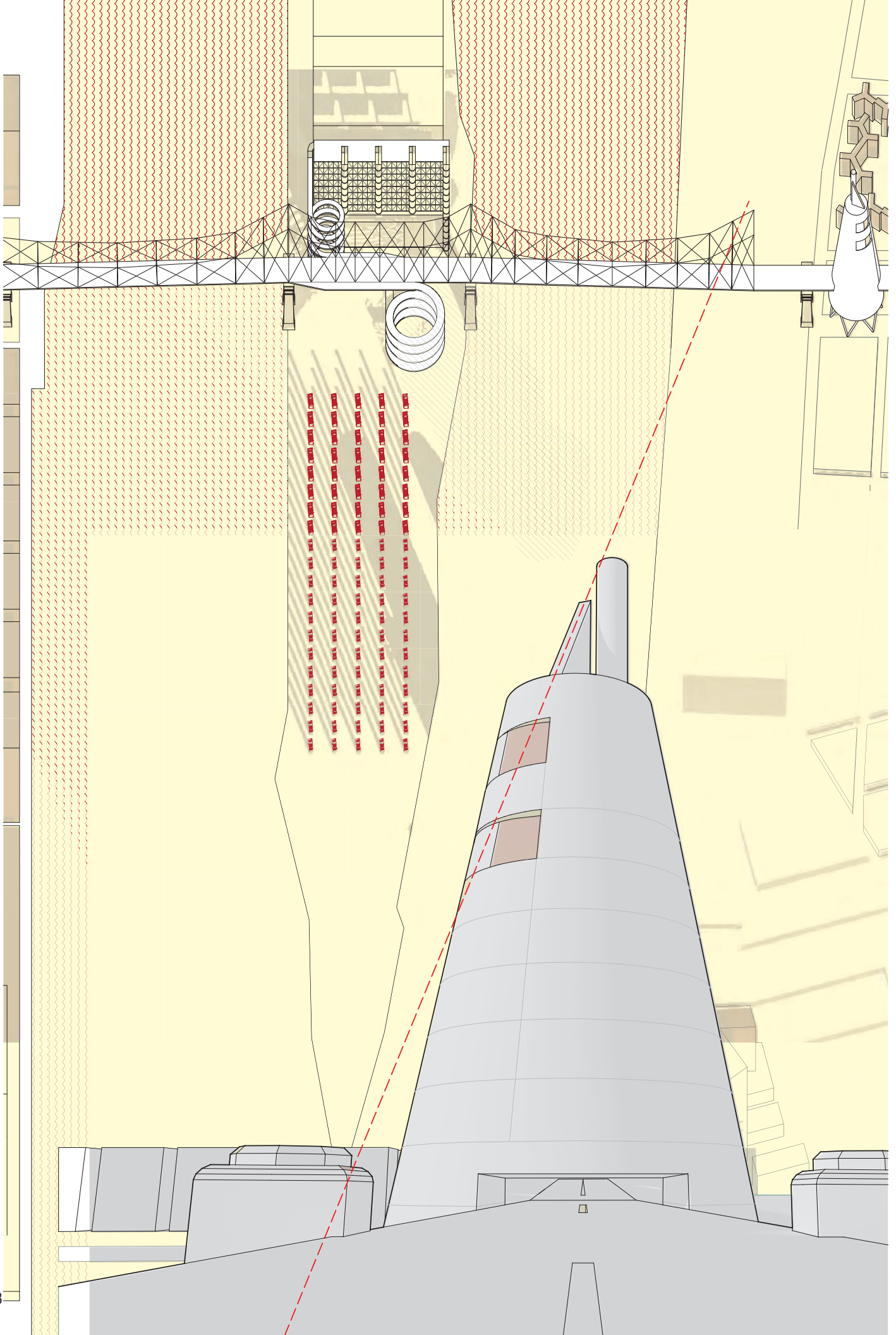
Figure 18b: Spectacle and Interchange

Figure 18c: Columbarium and Wrecking Yard









MYTHS OF THE NEAR FUTURE: A FLÂNEURIC REMAPPING OF LONG ISLAND CITY, QUEENS

Myths of the Near Future strategically and theatrically remaps the urban landscape of Northern Queens (itself a palimpsestic system of speed and movement) according to the desires of the New Urban Subject. A moving, mechanized flâneur, this subject actively misuses the non-spaces associated with contemporary transit and transportation infrastructure in much the same manner as his or her nineteenth-century incarnation.

Through a series of discreet architectural transformations, the latent potential for flâneuric behavior in Long Island City is revealed. In much the same way Baroque festivals conceptually remapped cities through series of disparate, yet networked interventions, Myths of the Near Future proposes to deploy seven devices, architectural episodes exploring possibilities of theater and ritual within actions of commuting, traveling, moving, and driving. Narrative rather than program, as a generative strategy for design, is employed to inform and proscribe flâneuric ritual embedded within these interventions.

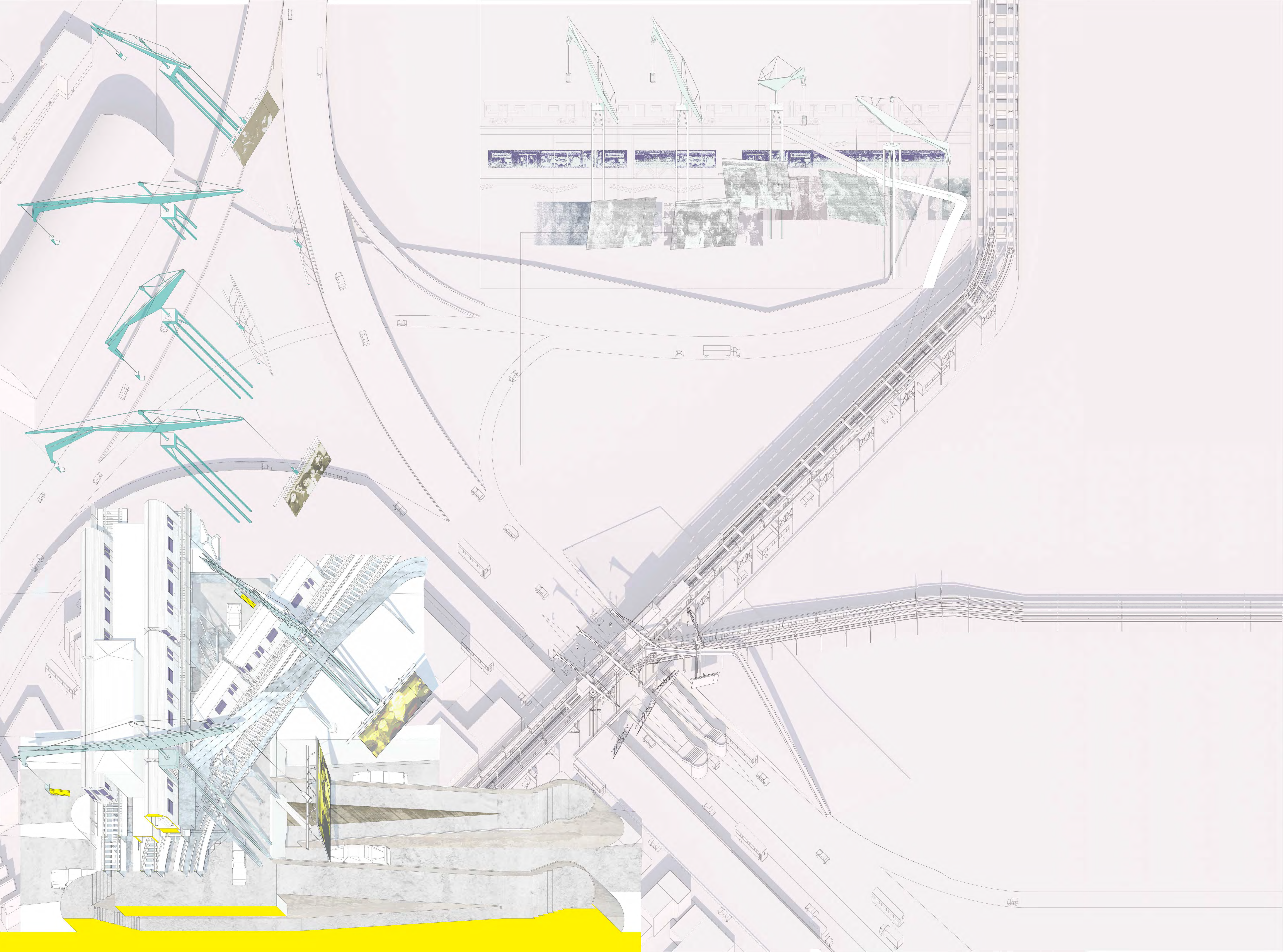
Each of these architectural devices amplify, distort, celebrate and reveal episodically the latent potentials of extant conditions within Queens through the systematic misuse of infrastructural forms. Much like the subjects themselves, the architecture becomes flâneuric in nature, actively roaming the landscape of the city.

I

THE SCANNER

Borrowing from the unique history of New York's *Miss Subways* beauty pageants, the Scanner acts to exhibit subway riders as objects of affection, enlarging the visages of travelers through dynamic jumbotrons. These forms are affixed to the armature of a triple-decker train trestle for the observation of those driving on the Grand Central Parkway.

Narrative: Historic *Miss Subways* adverts, spliced with voyeuristic *Missed Connection* adverts.

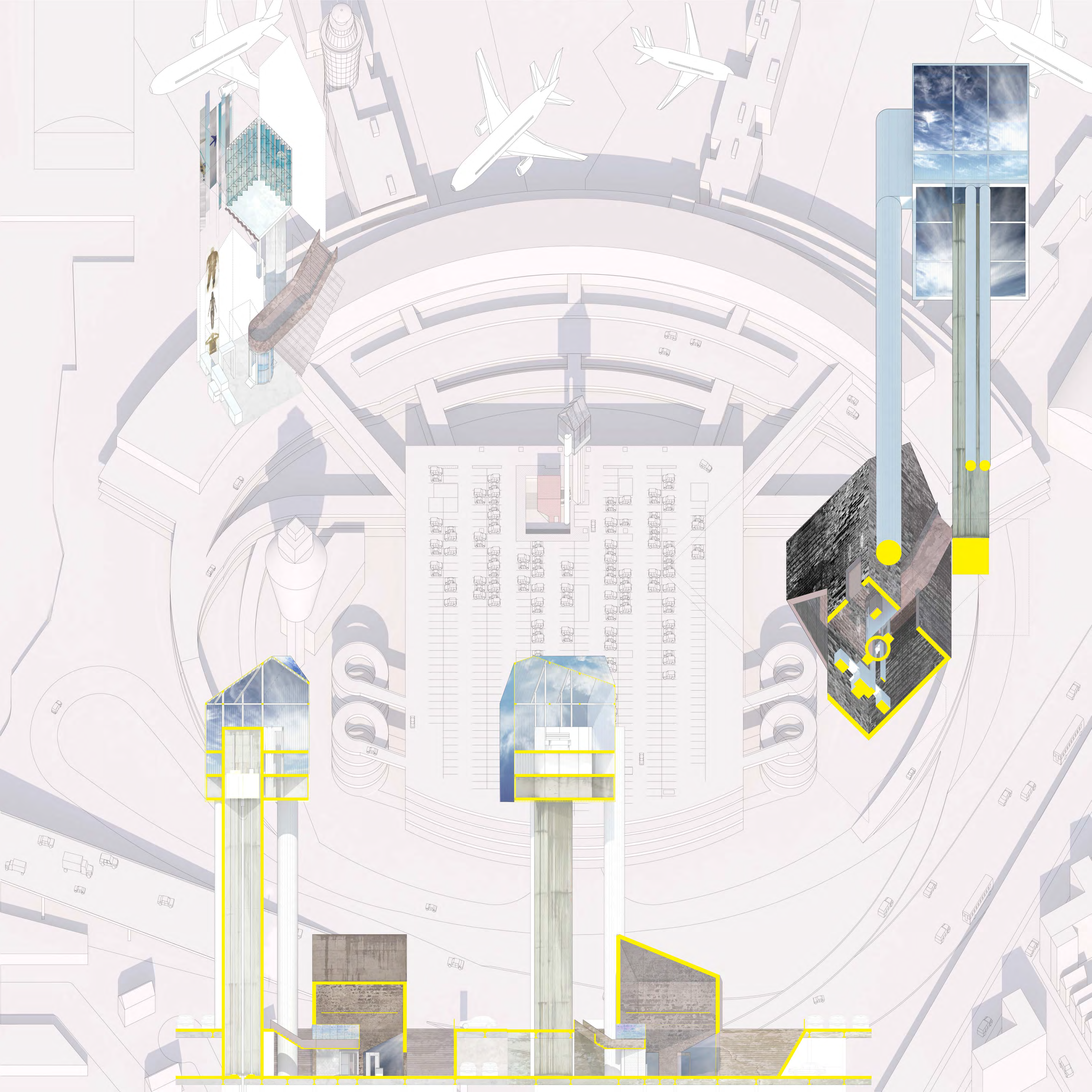


II

HOUSE OF GLASS, HOUSE OF BRICK

The form of this intervention parodies the forms of air traffic control towers and the residential urban/suburban fabric closely adjoining La Guardia Airport. The tower proscribes the display of airport activities and the elevation of parking, airport security, and waiting to the status of theater.

Narrative: An excerpt from JG Ballard's *Crash*.

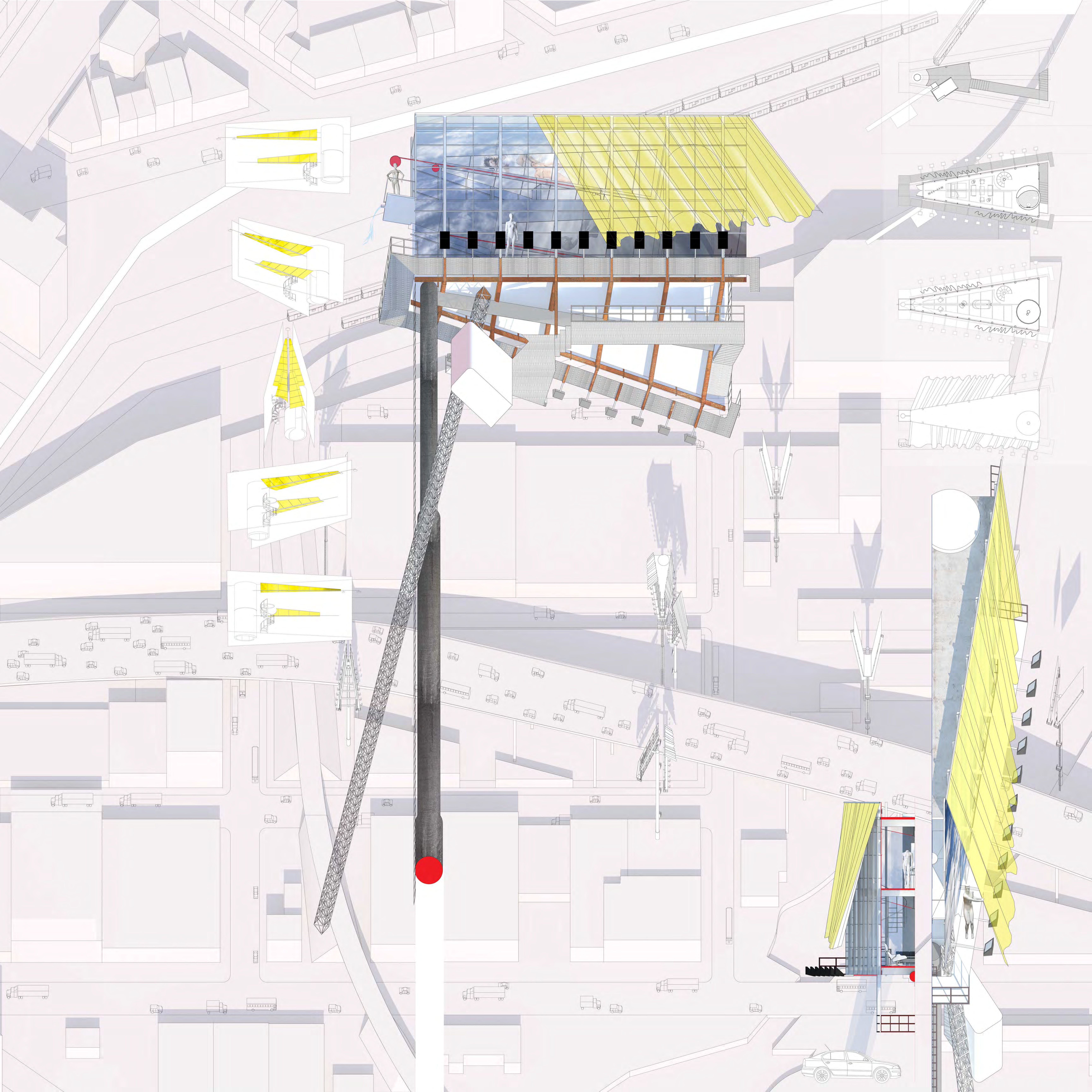


III

HOTEL FOR EXHIBITIONISTS

The billboard acts as an erotic advertisement for Long Island City's growing hotel industry (itself a misuse of urban land use due to a loophole in code ordinance) through the staging and exhibiting of intimate acts of domesticity by actors. The architectural device mimics forms of twenty-degree billboards which proliferate along the Grand Central Parkway and optically enhance the theater within.

Narrative: A craigslist advertisement from a modeling agency.

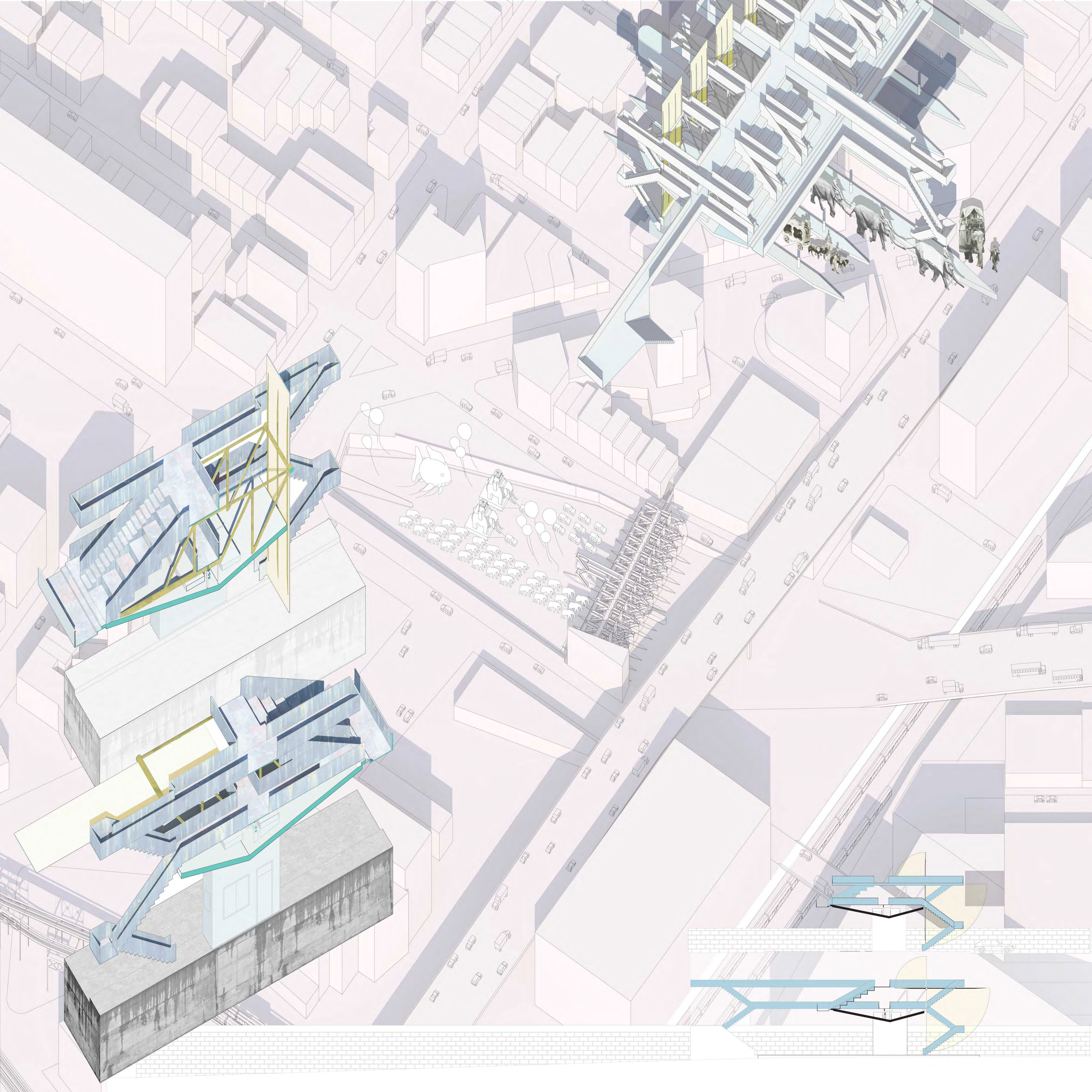


IV

[TOLL] PLAZA

A strategic graft, this form stages transient events of public gathering, ceremonial procession, and voyeurism in the Queens Midtown Tunnel Toll Plaza by reconfiguring the line of toll booths and its canopy to act as a grandstand. This seating, borrowing from material cues of the booths and rhythms of the urban fabric, facilitates a ritual of procession.

Narrative: A calendar of events for the QMT Plaza Venue, seen stapled to a telephone pole.

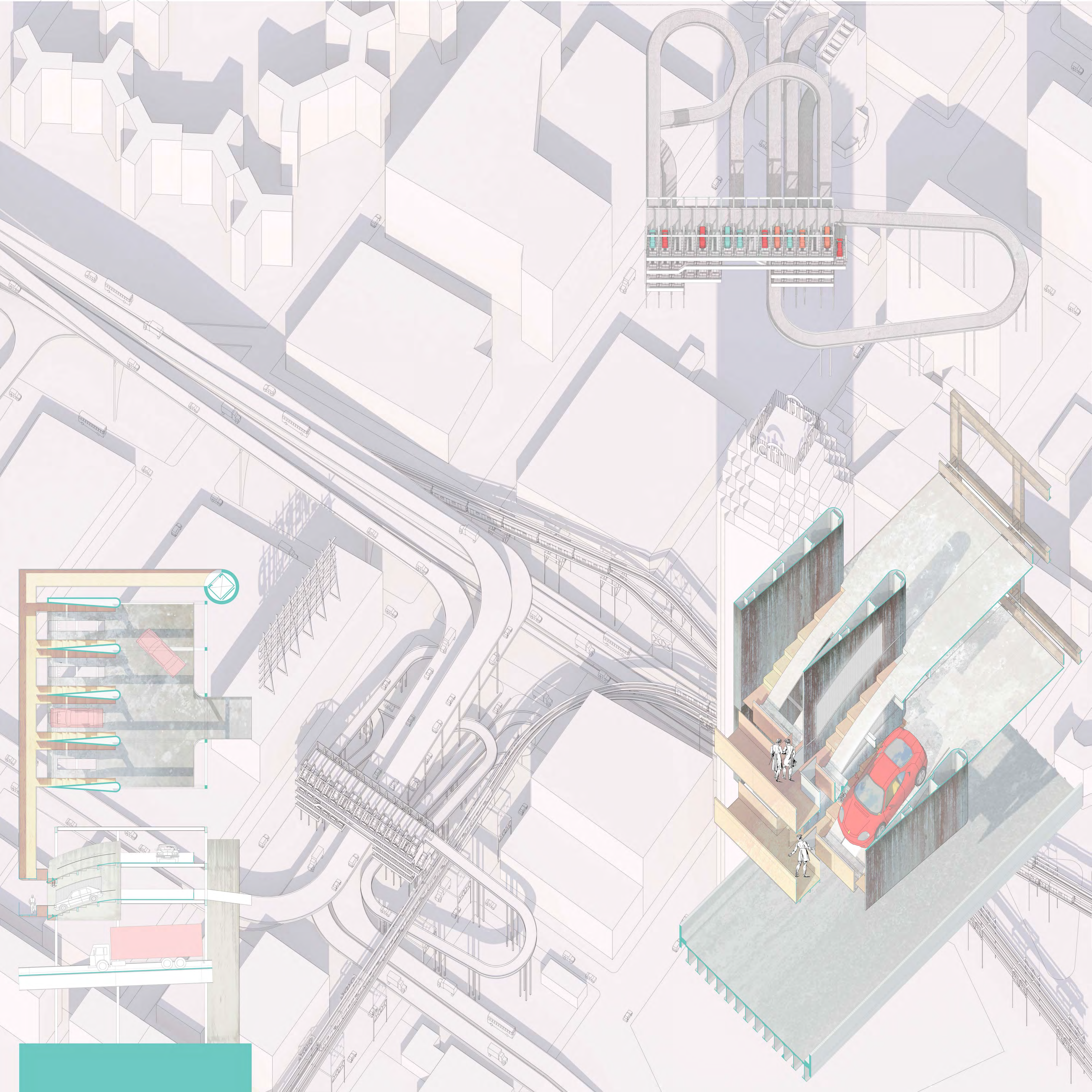


V

PARK & RIDE

This intervention displays as cherished artifacts the parked automobiles left behind by those transferring from their cars to the 7 train. Amplifying the inherent qualities of the site—a multi-layered palimpsest of parking, elevated highways and subway tracks, the form of the parking garage is borrowed from the steel structure of parking lifts and the on-ramps of the Queensboro Bridge.

Narrative: An excerpt from JG Ballard's *Crash*.

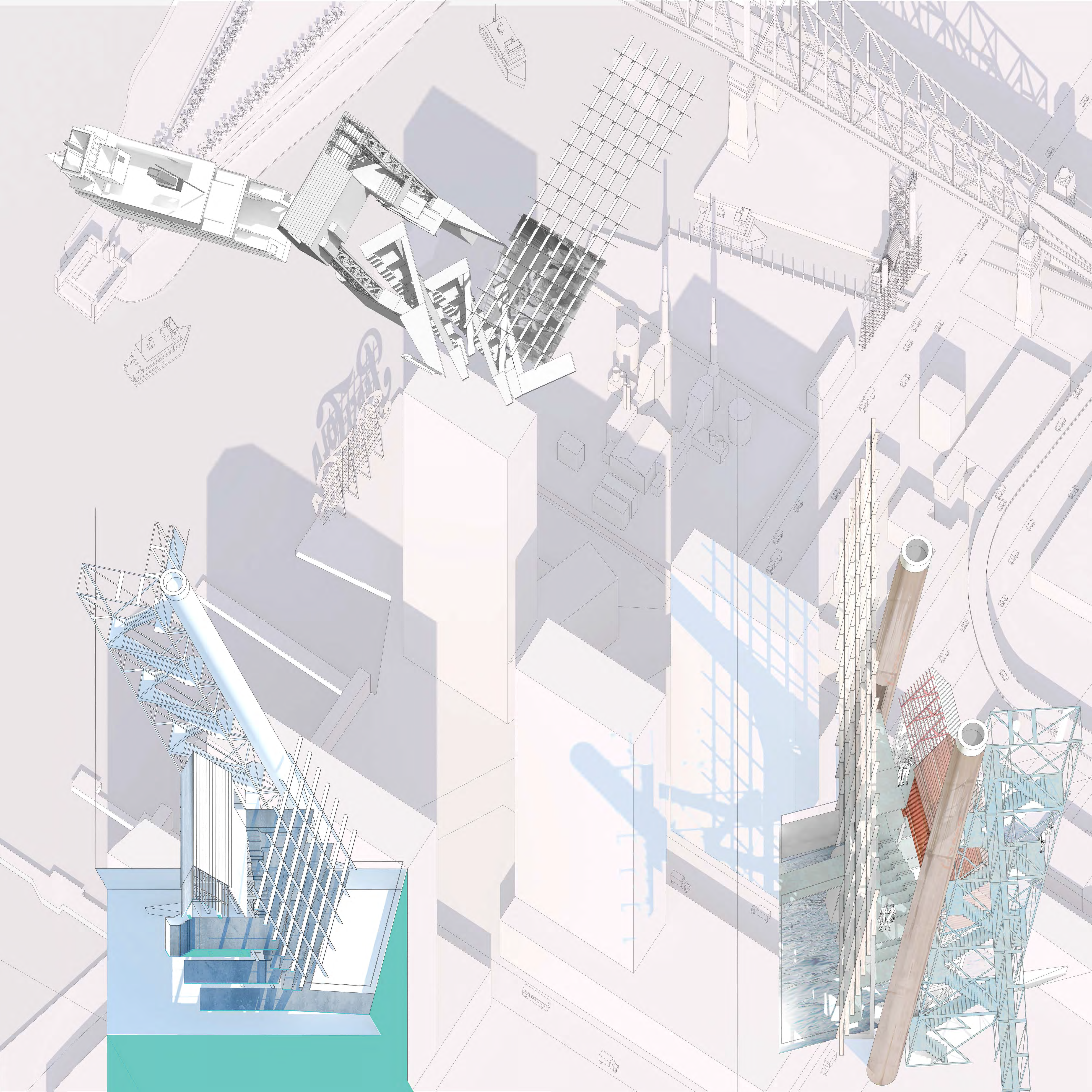


VI

FERRY TERMINAL

The proposed ferry station on Vernon Avenue, underneath the Queensboro Bridge, stages the boarding and disembarking of passengers from the East River Ferry as a theatrical act. Through collaging elements extant along Long Island City's waterfront (the inlet, the curtain wall, the gantry crane, the sign), postindustrial forms are elevated to the status of icon.

Narrative: An article from a promotional newsletter, *NYWaterway*, found as litter on a partially submerged dock.



VII

U THANT ISLAND

This intervention, a gash into the East River, reveals the curious history of U Thant Island née Belmont Island née Steinway Tunnel Shaft née Man'o'War Reef. Its form expresses the potential of the islet's poetic and symbolic potential as artificial island by referencing its past use as bird sanctuary, meditative ground, sovereign nation, and tunnel shaft.

Narrative: An unwritten history, torn from the pages of the yet unwritten *Encyclopedia Noveboracensis*.

