

# **A Threshold of Evanescence for the Women of Bousbir**

Casablanca. 2018-2019

Rebekah Tien



Prior and parallel to the Methods and Analysis graduation studio, I have developed a personal fascination in looking into the social and political structure of religious cults or a religious dystopia. The fascination derived directly from my personal journey of growing up in a strict, religious and extremely sheltered family, and the personally significant and difficult journey of self- exploration and realisation I have experienced when I left home as a teenager. Throughout the years I have not abandoned my faith, but what has changed in me was that I gained the ability to think independently and critically, and no longer restricted by some of the ideas implanted in me. The feeling of escaping the old and entering the new is a process I very much celebrate.

Through re-reading *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, the fascination and curiosity intensified in me, where I developed the idea of one day combining this fascination with architectural research. However, the chance for an opportunity for me to do so seemed very slim.



*Photograph: "Living in a Cult" - National Geographic*

## The book

When I was left behind in the Netherlands because of visa problems while my studio went to Casablanca for fieldwork in the very beginning of the graduation studio, I found myself searching aimlessly for any information about Casablanca that may somehow be useful for me, feeling completely hopeless and contemplating applying for another studio that does not work in such an unfamiliar territory. After countless random literature, journals, and films I could put my hands on that had the slightest thing to do with Casablanca, I stumbled upon this long-forgotten red light district during the French protectorate called Bousbir Quartier Réservé (1924-1955). But still, I treated it as yet another interesting but not so relevant piece of information while putting it aside with the rest of the pile.

The long Moroccan visa battle resulted in my 14-day fieldwork in Casablanca being cut short to 3 days. Where I only managed to visit 3 spots in the city chosen by my groupmates very briefly. Suffering from limited information collected when I came back to the Netherlands, the initial idea of comparing 3 places had to be scrapped, and instead I found myself first going from focusing on one specific collective housing neighbourhood, to diving deep into one single unit to research its transformation. The limitation turned out to be a blessing in disguise as it forced me to go beyond conventional research methods and thinking, resulting in surprisingly profound and fruitful research outcome, and a position for my final project.

With my new position, I yet again struggled to find a way to proceed due to my little contact with Casablanca. This was when I remembered the red light district of Bousbir. Despite the fact that Bousbir no longer operates as a red light district, the position I adopted in the previous phase allowed me to work with specific situations at selected

time; and the choice of working with Bousbir during its most charged/vibrant time allowed me to use Casablanca as a testing medium without having to be accurate or responsible for the current context.

As I looked into Bousbir and tried to go in depth to uncover more layers, I yet again encountered the same obstacle of the lack of hard data that I could access about the place- for it was an ugly past the Moroccan government is keen to erase. However, the nature of Bousbir struck me profoundly as it reminded me of *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and of my own story- a chance I thought would never come to me suddenly displayed itself so nakedly in front of my eyes- and then the story of 3 women: a prostitute, a handmaid, and myself began to weave into a *Threshold of Evanescence*.

This book is a narration, a documentation and personal reflection on each stage of the making and research methods of this very story- my master's thesis project.



*Positioning*

**Morphotypological study  
of Ecochard Grid**

*Context & Methods*

**Bousbir: Quartier Réservé  
1924-1955**

*Intervention*

**Threshold of Evanescence**

*Analysis of the Intervention*

**To be Naked**

*Final Reflection*

**Me as Her**



Bousbir Quartier Réservé (1924-1955) was a highly regulated, and completely walled-off red light district built to satisfy sexual needs of European men during the French Protectorate in Casablanca. It was a projection of a far-east fantasy, an erotic theme park. Yet, for the working women within, Bousbir was a perpetual prison- where time seemed to loop, and the women were stripped of their individuality- resembling the social order of the religious dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

This project is an intervention of two buildings and a gate along the route from the walled-off district to the external medical dispensary. Turning the women's weekly route for the mandatory STI inspection into an extra-thick threshold between the two realities. The project challenges the role of Light, Wall and Opening in Bousbir and works with these modest tools in (re)introducing "temporality" and the sense of "individuality" to the women of Bousbir.

This project is not only an architectural project responding specifically to the condition of Bousbir, but also an architectural representation of my self-exploratory process.



Positioning  
**Morphotypological  
Research of  
Ecochard Grid**

## I. A Typological Shift

Casablanca struck us as a city cladded in layers of adaptation and appropriation. From this, we started looking at Casablanca through the lens of “inherited culture”, and attempted to understand the underlying logics of “mediation “and “adaptation”. We began the investigation by studying the history of the 8x8 housing grid development by Ecochard during the French protectorate in response to the rural exodus, understanding the project in its political, social and economic context. We found that the 8x8 housing grid is a product of negotiation between the booming urbanisation and the Moroccan culture. Having foreseen the rapid densification, the structure proposed was not only Ecochrd’s interpretation of the Islamic courtyard housing, but also a base for future vertical growth of the neighbourhood. In comparison with the original development, we recognised the drastic change in built form, character and atmosphere, and understood that we were in fact witnessing a typological shift of a neighbourhood transforming from Padovan’s introverted “courtyard” to an extroverted “pavilion”<sup>1</sup>.

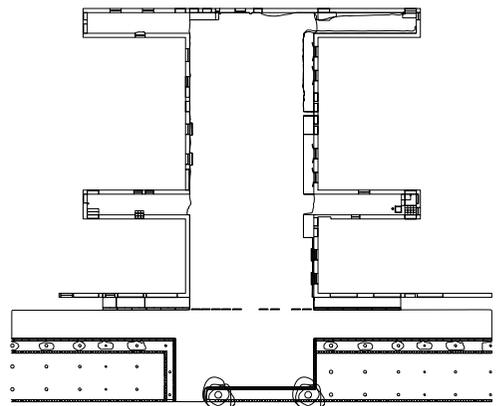
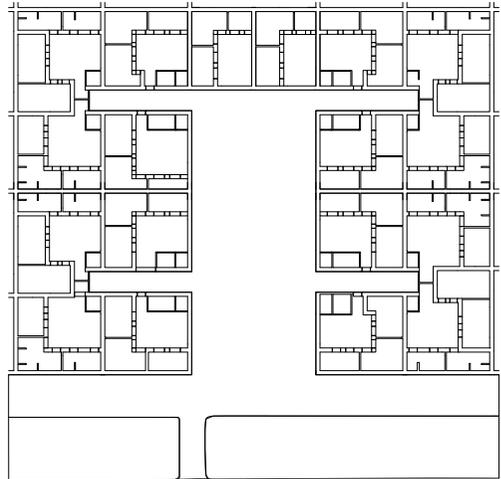
The complexity of this transformation motivated us to look into the rationality behind the change. In overcoming the limitation of my short stay in the city, we decided to carry out in depth plan analysis of one single housing unit of the 8x8 grid in the New Medina in closely studying the transformation of architectural mechanism. During the research we have carried out various exercises which enabled research through different angles and helped achieve multilayer understanding of the unit. Detailed documentation of this research can be found in the research book “*Transformation of Inherited Culture*”.

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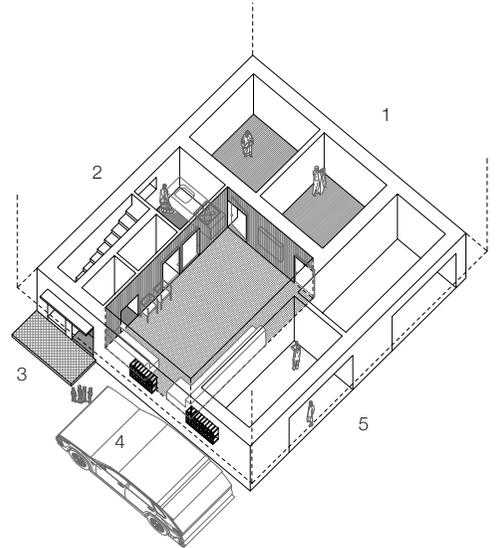
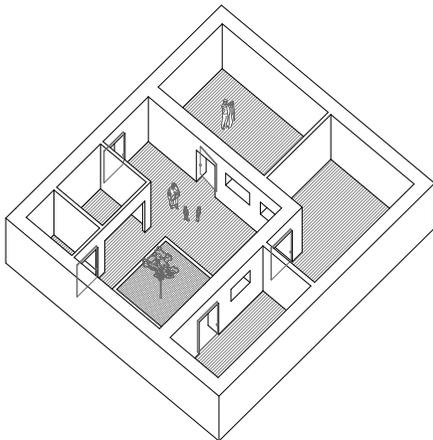
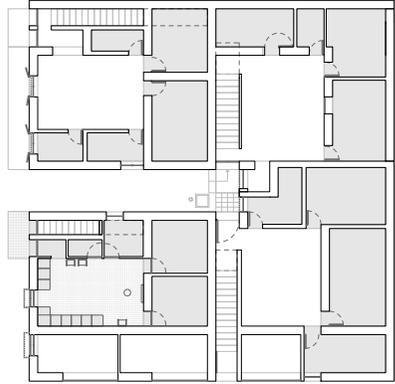
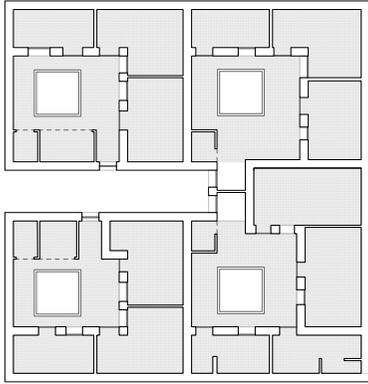
<sup>1</sup> Padovan, Richard. *Towards Universality: Le Corbusier, Mies and De Stijl* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), Chapter 4



Ecochard 8x8 Housing Grid: Hay Mohammadi, New Medina

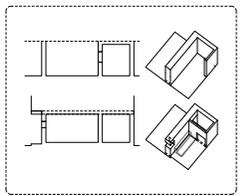
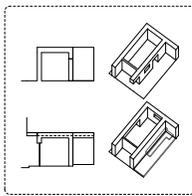
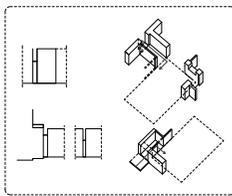
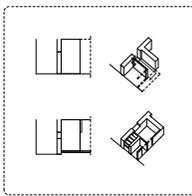
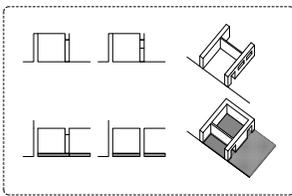


Top Left: Historical aerial photograph of original 8x8 Ecochard grid  
Top Right: Plan of original 8x8 grid (Hay Mohammadi neighbourhood)  
Bottom Left: Photograph of now  
Bottom Right: Preliminary study of threshold transformation  
Next page: Architectural transformation of single unit



Casablanca, Morocco  
July, 1952  
12:00

Casablanca, Morocco  
March, 2018  
15:00



1

2

3

5

4

6

## II. Architectural Transformation in relation to Rituals

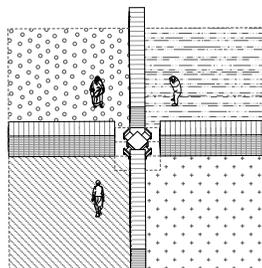
Through our analysis of the transformation in architectural mechanism and articulation of spaces, we realised that in this specific housing unit, the changing layers worked together in sustaining the unchanging layers: the original proportion- especially of the collective spaces- and the base rituals it implies. With this, we started looking into the relationship between architectural transformation and rituals.

We recognised two main reoccurring rituals that were sustained despite the drastic change in form: the ritual of “gathering” and the ritual of “recessing”. The ritual of gathering continues to exist by preserving the centrality of the old family courtyard that generates encounters between individuals, which is essential for sustaining a family life and structure. The ritual of recessing is that of the experience of gradual decrease of the spatial scale from the exterior to interior, as one retreats from common space to personal space.

Taking the two “base rituals” that we have identified, we studied how architectural transformation of the unit affects the nature of these rituals with comparative research of the unit through a series of unrolled sectional analysis, where we aimed to understand and interpret the complex relationship of each architectural mechanism (light, level changes, texture, etc.) and social life (movement, interaction, etc.).



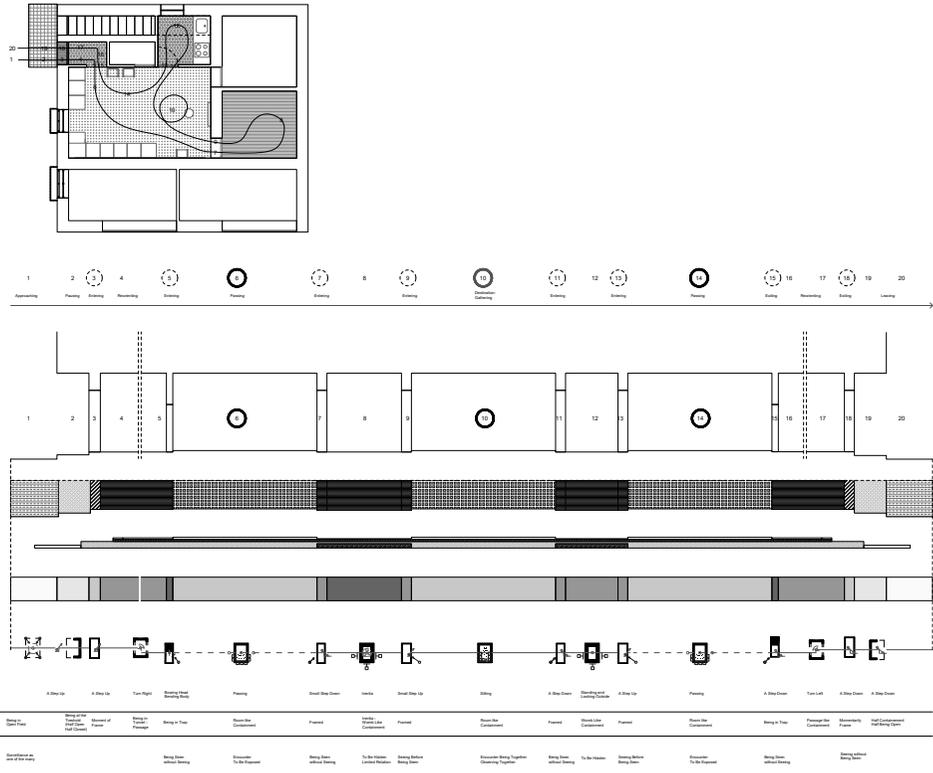
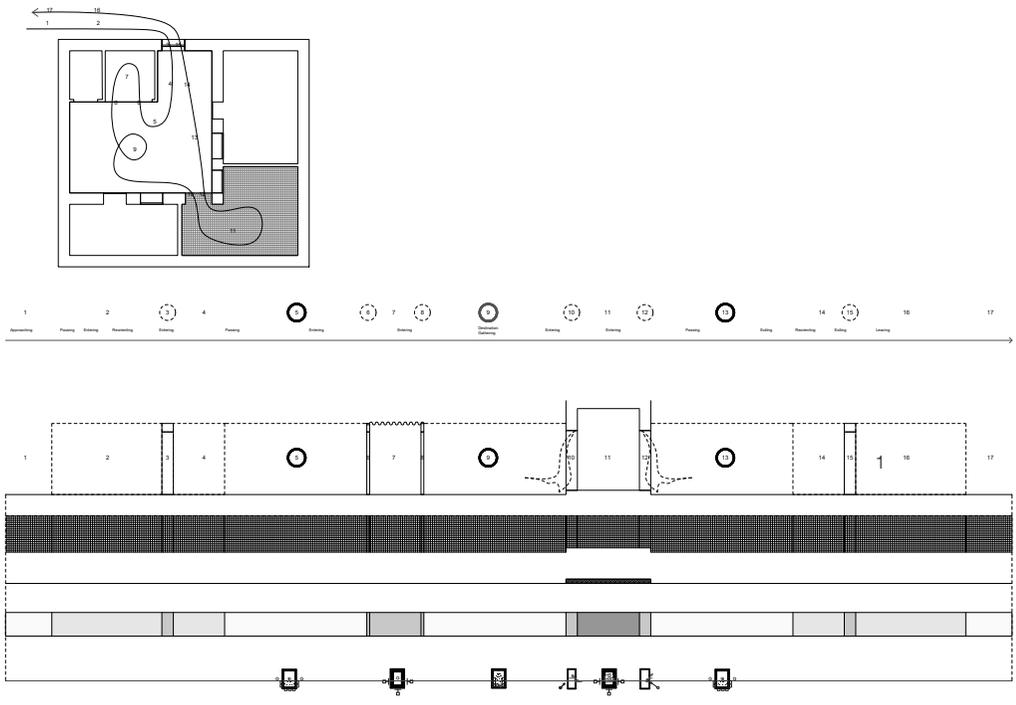
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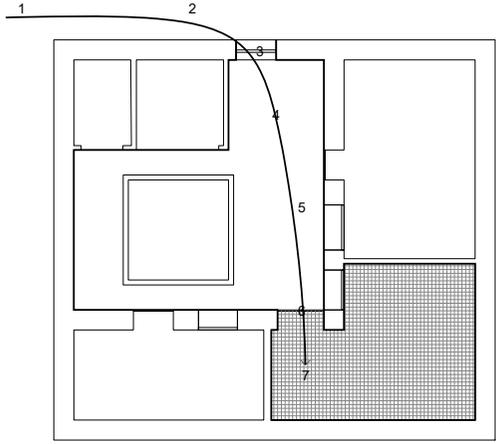


Ritual of Gathering

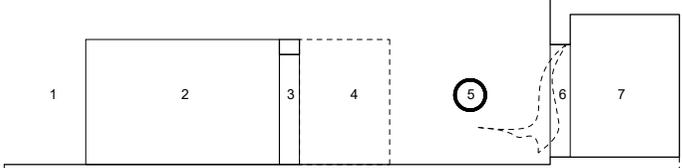


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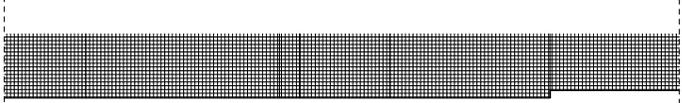




Space



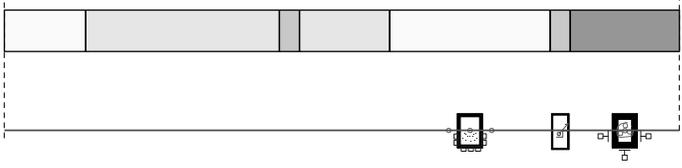
Material

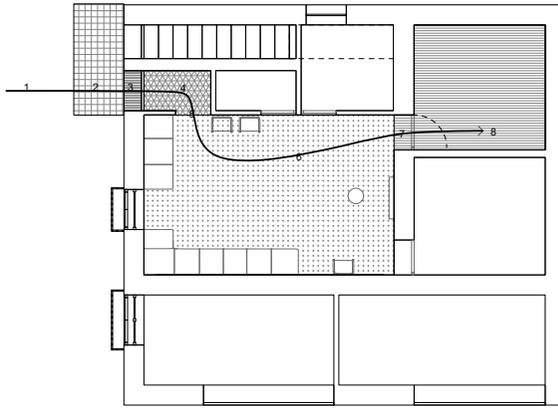


Light

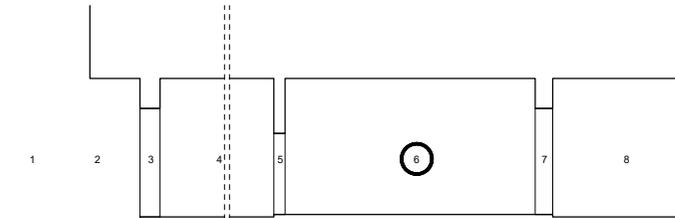


Movement

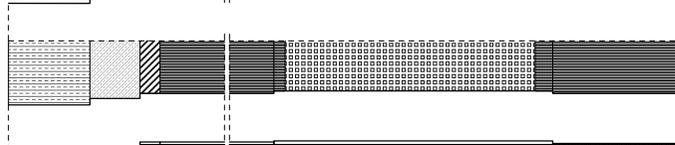




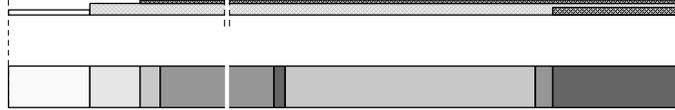
Space



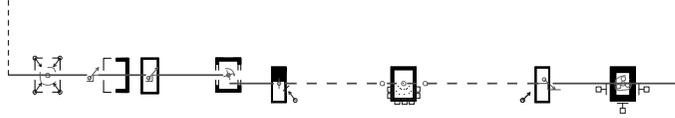
Material



Light



Movement

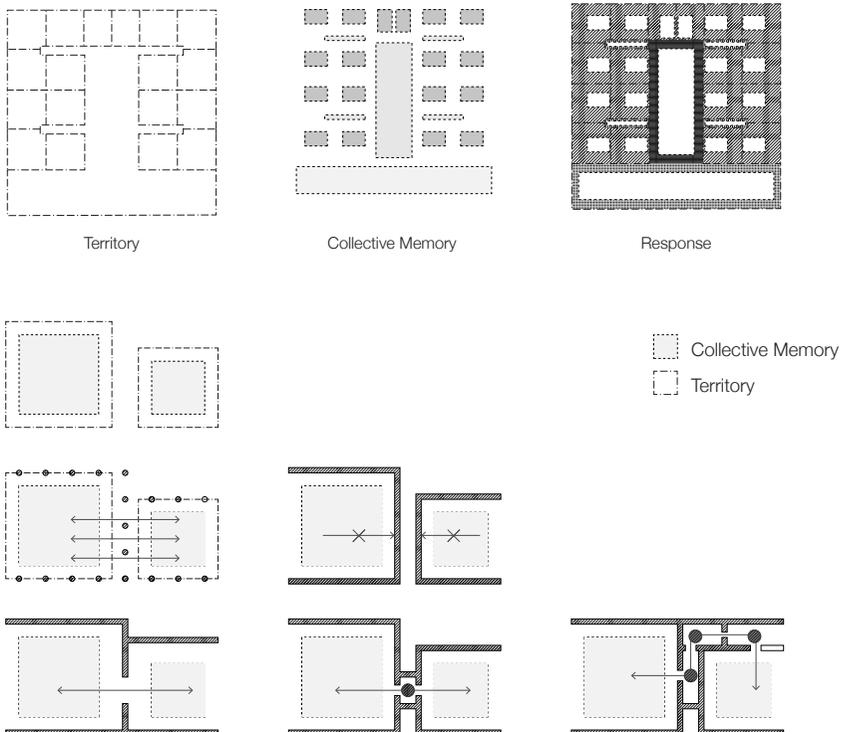


Notation

Body Movement	Following sight	A step up Knock/bell	A step up Open door Close door	Turn right	Bow	A step down Open door Close door	Stop	
Body Status	In open court	shuttled and elevated from collective courtyard	Framed	trapped in small space with limited sight - unknown of what's next	body most restricted	contained in space penetrating through space	Framed	contained in space
Relation with others	Natural + Observed by people inside the buildings	Observed through one-way window	no relation	limited view of the next space and people for both sides - subtle warning of interaction to come	Observed - Be seen yet unable to see	Natural → Observed all facing the same direction as actor leaves	Terminating relation - shutting door	no relation - isolated

### III. Time, Territory, Collective Memory

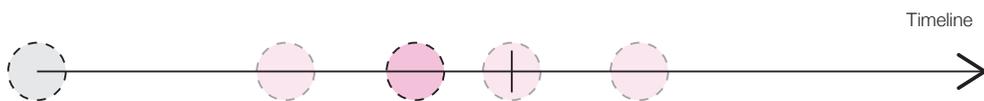
As an abstraction of this research, we concluded that the transformation is actually directly affected by the attitude towards the collective memory. Through the use of architectural mechanism and treatment to the collective, individual, and buffer spaces, one could manipulate and control the relationship (*threshold*) between different territories and collective memories. Specifically in the case of our chosen target, we identified the preservation and enhancement of the collective memory through the transformation. However, in other scenarios where attitude towards the memory was changed, the inherited structure could also face complete destruction, resulting in “memory loss”.



### III. Positioning

Based on the abstraction, we developed two different points where the agency of architect comes into play as two different positions one could adopt, from which I have chosen the latter to further develop my individual project upon:

1. Positioning oneself in the beginning of the timeline and create a frame work that could accommodate many different memories, in avoiding complete destruction and achieving long lifespan of a building. (E.g. designing a ruin)
2. Dealing with the relation between two specific memories (rituals/ settings) and territories of a specific moment on the timeline.



#### Position 1

Creating frame work that could accommodate many different memories, in avoiding complete destruction and achieving long lifespan of a building.

#### Position 2

Dealing with the relation between two specific rituals/settings and territories of a specific moment in the time line.

[Ecochard]



Context+ Methods

**Bousbir: Quartier Réserve  
1924-1955**

## I. Bousbir: Context

As Casablanca experienced significant urban growth, prostitution developed rapidly in response to the growing demand of European males and also as a result of local workers migrating from the countryside. Prostitution was taken as a “necessary evil” that on one hand fulfilled sexual needs of the European men, and the other hand a threat to weaken the colonial armies due to the STI, and that miscegenation could threaten the white race. Thus, Bousbir, the highly regulated and isolated red light district, came into existence as a rational and modern solution to the problem of colonial prostitution.<sup>1</sup> It was also yet another experimental project of the French protectorate showcasing new urban solution (modern hygiene, STI control, etc.). The district opened in 1924 and closed in 1955.

Bousbir was a sex resort and a dreamy, mysterious and picturesque oriental theme park for Western men, where they could freely engage in buying sex along with all the other entertainment the district had in store. Yet, at the same time, it was a prison for the female workers within. The district is now a normal residential neighbourhood with little trace of its past.

Despite the fact that Bousbir no longer operates as a red light district, the position I have adopted in the previous phase of my research allows me to work with specific situations at selected time, which lead me to choosing Bousbir (during its most vibrant years) as my target research field and the site of my project, in which I looked to further explore and test the notion extracted from previous investigation.

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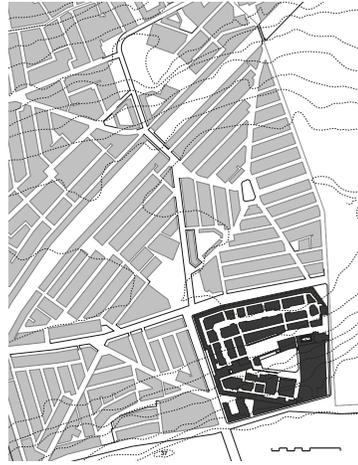
<sup>1</sup> Staszak, Jean-Francoise. “Planning Prostitution in Colonial Morocco: Bousbir, the Quartier Réservé of Casablanca.” In (Sub)Urban Sexscapes: Geographies and Regulations of the “Sex Industry” (London: Routledge, 2014)



Bousbir: Quartier Réservé 1924-1955



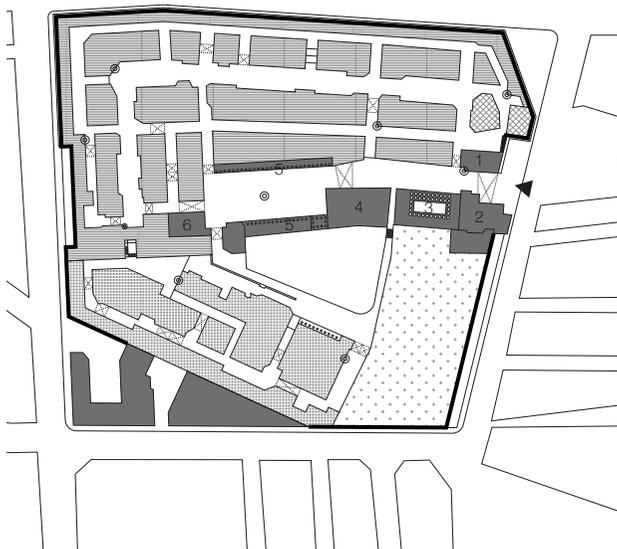
Pre 1925 (Design)



1924-1955 (Realised)



2003 -



- Blind walls
- Public facilities
- Moorish sex workers
- ▨ Jewish sex workers
- ▩ European sex workers brothel
- ▤ European zone (never realised)

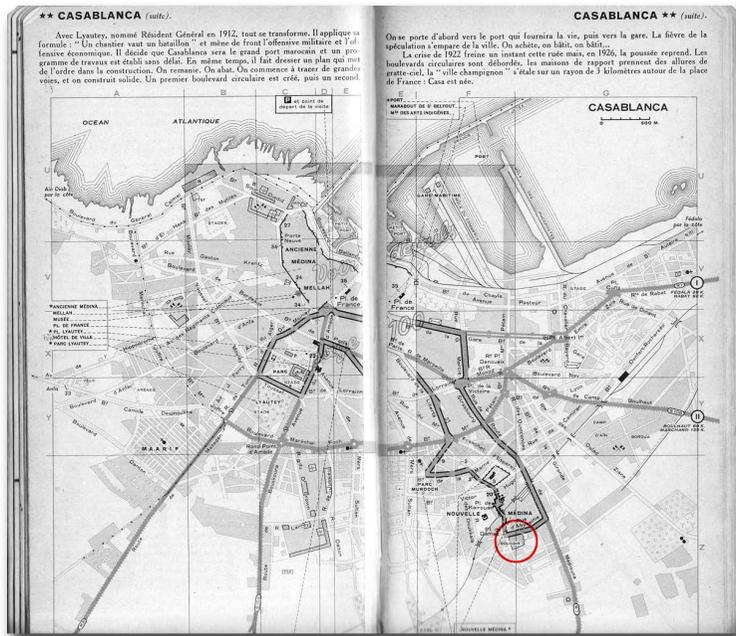
- 1 Police
- 2 Guard house + jail
- 3 Souk
- 4 Cinema
- 5 Shops and Cafes
- 6 Moorish Bath
- 7 Medical dispensary

### Program

As seen in the plan above, the planning of the placement of the public facilities in Bousbir was carefully thought out in creating an experience that unconsciously strip the visitors of their sense of guilt, as they enter deeper into this sin city.

## Isolation

Bousbir was not included in the urban space when it was planned. It was placed five kilometres from the city centre, on the road to Marrakech. It was right to the south of the New Medina (Habous), but separated by railroad tracks. However, dedicated bus lines were made for the 1000- 1500 clients per day. This shows the intention to filter and control the sort of people visiting Bousbir. Moreover, the district was completed enclosed by 9m high blind wall.





Reprod. interd.

36.- CASABLANCA - Au clair de lune, dans le quartier mystérieux.

Reprod. interd.



Reprod. interd.

37.- CASABLANCA - LA NUIT CALME. Dans la cité des amours!.....

Reprod. interd.

## Architectural Strategy

*“... imaginative geographies blur distinctions between the “real” world and the “fictional” world. That is, they are real not because imaginative geographies accurately depict the world but rather because they have reflected and reinforced people’s imagination of the world in tangible and concrete ways.”<sup>1</sup>*

Bousbir was created to project the far-east fantasy through its urban landscape and architecture- the orientalist imagery of the Thousand and One Nights- speaking loudly of the exoticisation and eroticisation imposed. The priority of the district was to please the western clients and respond to the imaginative geographies of the architect and the visitors- it was planned with western rationality while providing the European clients of the sex workers with an exotic experience within a picturesque landscape. As the French writer P.Mac Orlan stated, *“The setting matters more than the actors.”<sup>2</sup>*

The 24,000 square metres (150 x 160 m) district was completely enclosed by 9 metres high blind walls with ornate door (the only public entrance/ exit) that’s closed to car traffic. Within the enclave, the buildings are purposefully designed in Neo-Moorish style, with careful design of different facades (windows, doors, etc.) for each identical unit in creating the illusion of a diverse, old Arabic medina. In terms of streetscape, dead ends are avoided for hygiene (fountains) and drainage purposes. Yet, in order to recreate the experience of walking in an authentic medina, small pockets and narrowing of some points of a street is carefully designed and placed. The natural topography of the district split the whole district in half, which not only achieve an even more picturesque image, but also the racial zoning and segregation.

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1 Hoelscher, S. Imaginative geographies. In B. Warf (Ed.), Encyclopedia of human geography. (pp. 245-247). (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006)

2 Staszak, Jean-Francoise. “Planning Prostitution in Colonial Morocco: Bousbir, the Quartier Réservé of Casablanca.” In (Sub)Urban Sexscapes: Geographies and Regulations of the “Sex Industry” (London: Routledge, 2014)

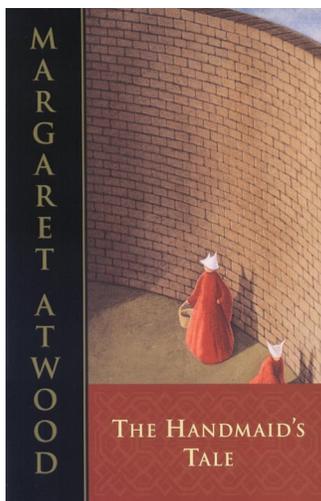
## II. Bousbir Reread through Literary Fictions

Behind the vibrant, fantastical façade, Bousbir was a highly regulated and segregated city. A lot of the women were thrown in to Bousbir after they were arrested from conducting prostitution in the Casablanca. There were 450 to 675 workers, with the average age of 21. Women in the district were mostly highly indebted to their madam, who took their earnings, and abused the workers. The only chance for the women to be on the other side of the blind wall, was during their weekly STI check-ups in the external medical dispensary. The nature of Bousbir made it impossible for the women to escape the district, making it an perpetual prison for most of them.

As mentioned previously, conventional investigation on Bousbir was difficult due to the limited existing studies on the district, and it being an ugly past the Moroccan government is intentionally trying to erase. Therefore, in order to achieve a dynamic and multi-layered “architectural archaeological research” of Bousbir, I composed a way of research where I utilised multiple different tools and methods to further dissect its architecture, social structure and phenomenon. In addition to case studies, analysis of old photographs, and relevant literature and theories, the main methods I used was to reread and analyse Bousbir through the lens of selected literary fictions.

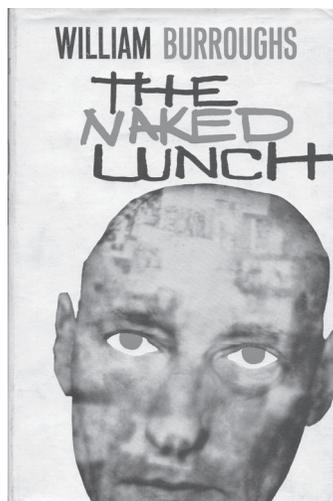
Through the exacerbation of existing scenario through literary fiction, I was able to illustrate the nature of Bousbir more vividly while developing my own theory of the district where I identified aspects on which I further focused and critiqued: the notion of “Potemkin City” and two readings of “Religion”.

**Social Order**



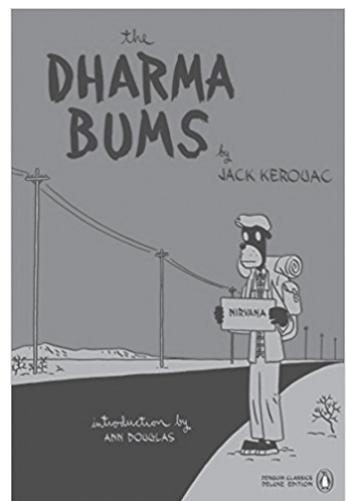
**The Handmaid's Tale**  
Religious Dystopia

**Experience**



**Naked Lunch**  
Hallucination of Extreme Heterotopia

**Purpose + Motivation**



**The Dharma Bums**  
Spiritual illumination through Drugs

## Social Order

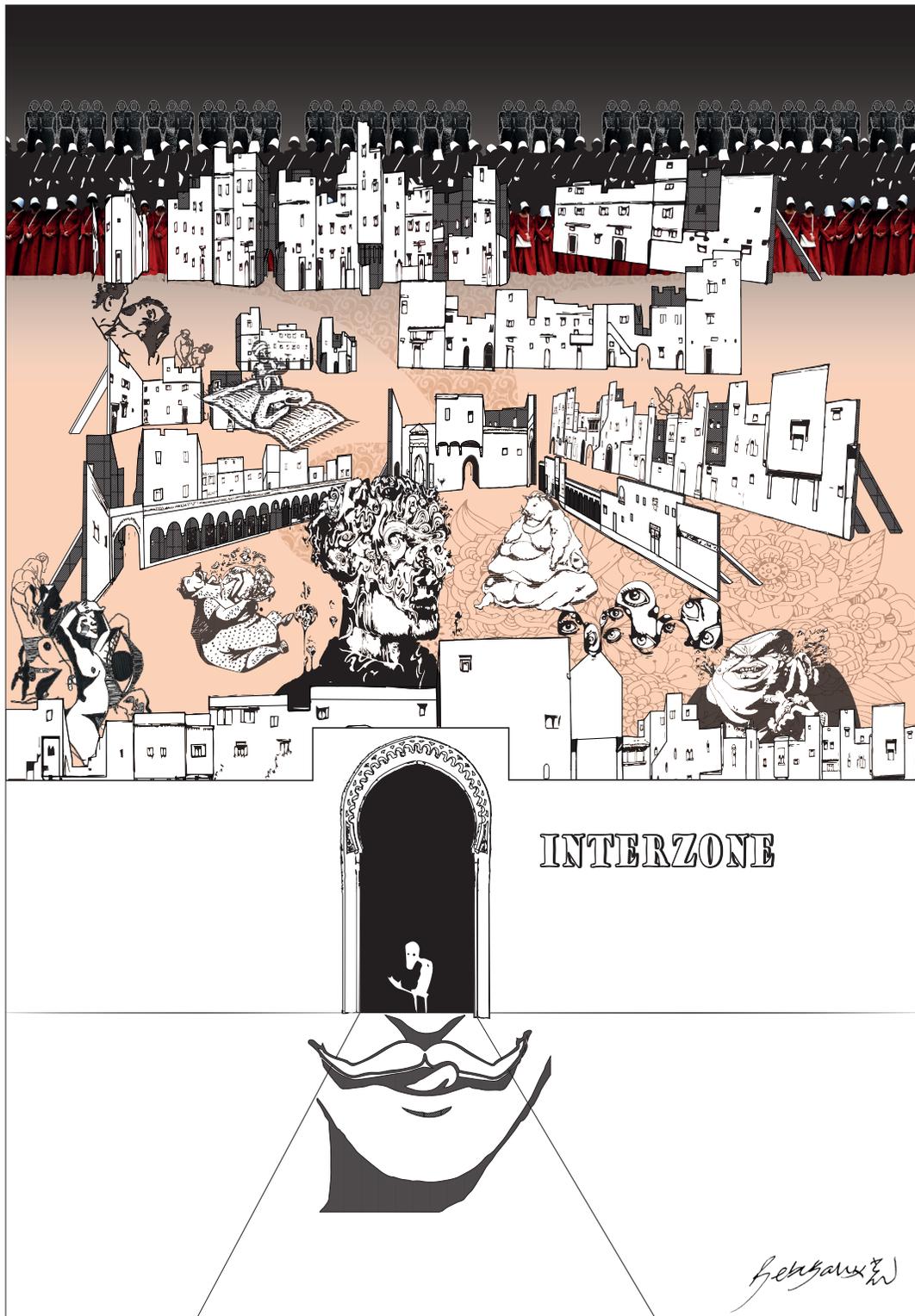
The highly hierarchical social structure, especially the objectified and uniformed sex workers, and the prison-like nature of the Bousbir could be re-imagined as the religious dystopia in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. The Handmaids have little to none freedom, always dressed in uniforms, were not allowed to have names, and their sexuality does not belong to them. Everything were altered in order to prevent them from escaping both physically away from the society, but also from escaping life- a haunting reality.

## Architectural Experience

The blurry boundary between reality and fiction the Bousbir creates, and the experience (visual, sexual, etc.) in Bousbir from a visitor's perspective could be related to the state of delirious ecstasy reached by drug use. From his depiction of the "Interzone" - an extremely bizarre, distorted reality- in *the Naked Lunch* by William S. Burroughs, we can experience such delirious experience from using external substances.

## Motivation

The addiction or the purpose of the quest of such an experience, could be understood as a spiritual quest. In Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, we can see the search of spiritual illumination through drug and sex, which very much resembles the motivation behind a visit to Bousbir.



INTERZONE

*Handwritten signature*



The story of two women- a handmaid and a Bousbir prostitute- becomes one.

“... Or I would help Rita to make the bread, sinking my hands into that soft resistant warmth which is so much like flesh. **I hunger to touch something, other than cloth or wood. I hunger to commit the act of touch.** But even if I were to ask, even if I were to violate decorum to that extent, Rita would not allow it. She would be too afraid...”

— Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

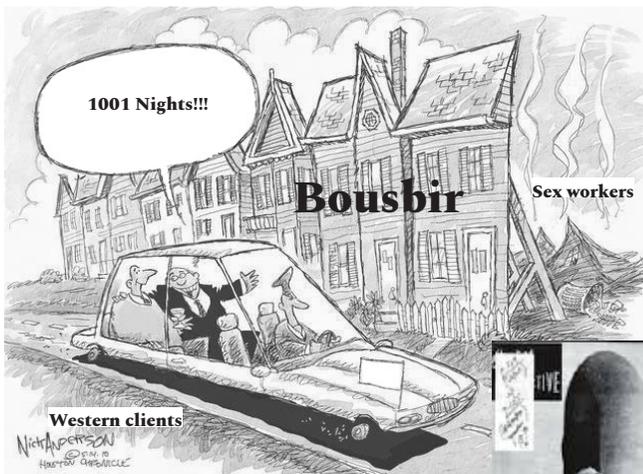
## Potemkin City

The notion of a Potemkin city vividly reveals the distorted nature of Bousbir and how it reflects in its architecture: superficial disguise on the exterior masking the mundane, the rutting and the suffering within. Behind each beautiful and unique façade, were homogeneous housing units, behind each heavy makeup is a lost identity. The extreme sexual and racial inequality, and power imbalance, made this Potemkin city of Bousbir in a sense Casablanca in miniature.

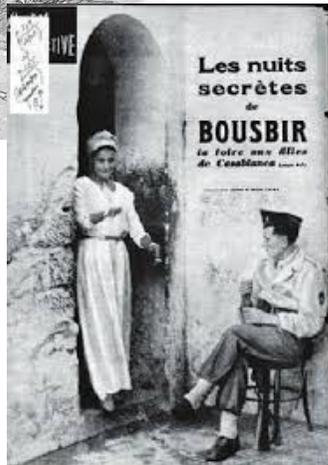
With this notion, I started looking into and critiquing the architectural mechanism used in enabling the effect of a Potemkin City in Bousbir.

**Unique  
Atmosphere  
Cheerfulness  
Architecture  
Makeup**

**Fantasy  
Pleasure  
Beauty**



**Abuse  
Slavery  
Prison  
Identity loss  
Inequality**



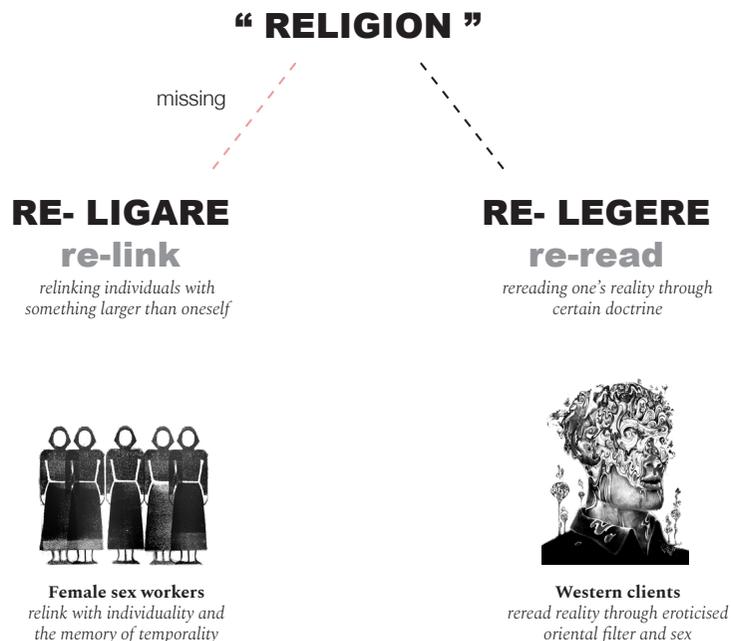
## Religion

To analyse the two main social groups in the Bousbir: the sex workers and the Western patrons, I would like to introduce the notion of “religion”. We can look at religion in two different angles:

1. **Religare:** re-linking. To reconnect oneself with something bigger than yourself.
2. **Relegere:** re-reading. To reread the world through a doctrine.

In the case of the two social groups in Bousbir, the Western patrons enter this other world Bousbir created to forget about the reality, seeking pleasure and ecstasy, which can be understood as “Relegere”- rereading their reality through this eroticised oriental filter and sex. At the same time, the imprisoned sex workers suffer quietly in this very reality beneath the fantastical illusion. What the women seek, in my opinion, is idea of “Religare”- hoping to reconnect with the sense of individuality and temporality in a place where time seems to loop.

Bousbir was clearly a place specifically designed for “Relegere”. And I hope to establish that missing link of “Religare” with my architectural intervention.





Intervention

**Threshold of Evanescence:  
Light, Wall & Opening**

## I. Repositioning: Light, Wall, and Opening

Despite the fruitful research on the nature of Bousbir, I experienced difficulty in translating my findings into a concrete architectural intervention. I found myself critiquing the social structure and injustice, yet struggle to distill down to certain tangible architectural strategy or elements that I could test on. I therefore challenged myself to once again define the position of an architect. Asking myself this question was an important turning point for me- I realised that based on the power of architects alone, despite all my good intentions and ambition of saving the women, I could never single-handedly subvert the social order.

Upon this realisation, I revisited the notions of “Potemkin City” and “Religion” I have developed previously, and developed tools with which I could respond to the situation of Bousbir through the discipline of architecture- **Light, Wall, and Opening** - in order to (re)introduce the sense of temporality and individuality to the women of Bousbir.

The understanding of my position as an architect allows the identification of these tools. The process is something that I have held most valuable throughout the whole project.



Photograph of my room

## **Light**

Temporality

Upon reflecting on the complex reality of Bousbir, I realised that in such a perpetual prison/ dystopia, what I could introduce to the place is a sense of “temporality”- which could be achieved through Light. Light is a resource that is most abundant, present, and cannot be stripped away from the women as their other possessions and freedom. Yet, it is also absent in Bousbir for its entity was not controlled and revealed. The ever changing quality of light in architecture could be captured, manipulated and revealed in transmitting a sense of evanescence, of transience, of change.

## **Wall**

Combat Potemkin

In this Potemkin city, I understood the role of wall as merely a façade or a theatre set, a layer that dress and mask or make unnoticed the darkness behind. I have therefore decided to critique on the role of wall in the Bousbir, and reposition it as an architectural element that delineate spaces and reveals light. In other word, a wall not only separates spaces or controls movement, but also reveals light differently through form, materiality and placement, making it integral to the overall architectural experience.

## **Opening**

Individuality & Collectiveness

When looking through an opening, one develops personal relationship with the object/ view he connects with visually. This connection with the same object can exist for multiple individuals at the same time. I identify this as a tool that could subtly provide a sense of individuality in a collective setting. Therefore, in this wall, aside from the possibility of revealing lights and achieving certain atmosphere, I am going to allow some very controlled openings where multiple perspectives converge in a frame.



NJ-2, Richard Serra: Abundant yet Absent Light



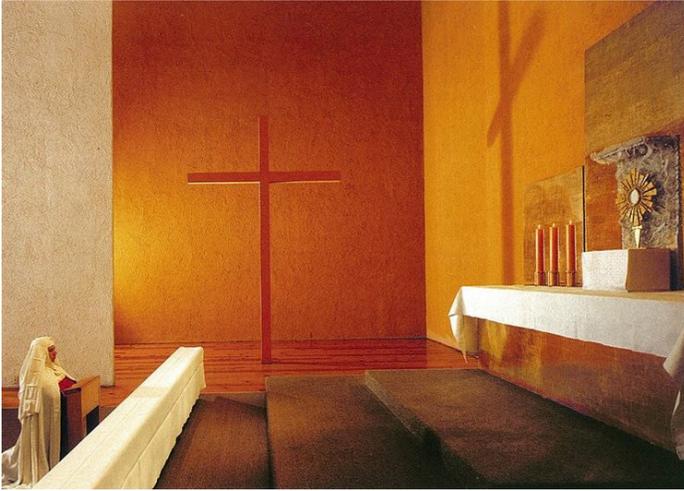
Light: Resource revealed



Tadao Ando Light Sequence: Temporality



Sala Beckett, Flores i Prats: Wall reveals Light



Capilla de las Capuchinas, Luis Barragán: Wall reveals Light

*“When a Japanese person opens a low Fusuma, and sees a tree in fall colour, he feels that it is his own fall-colored tree. A person looking at the same tree from a different window likewise thinks that it represents a piece of nature meant for himself. The bit of nature glimpsed through a slightly open window in a tea room is a piece of nature belonging to the two people in the tea room.”*

- Tadao Ando

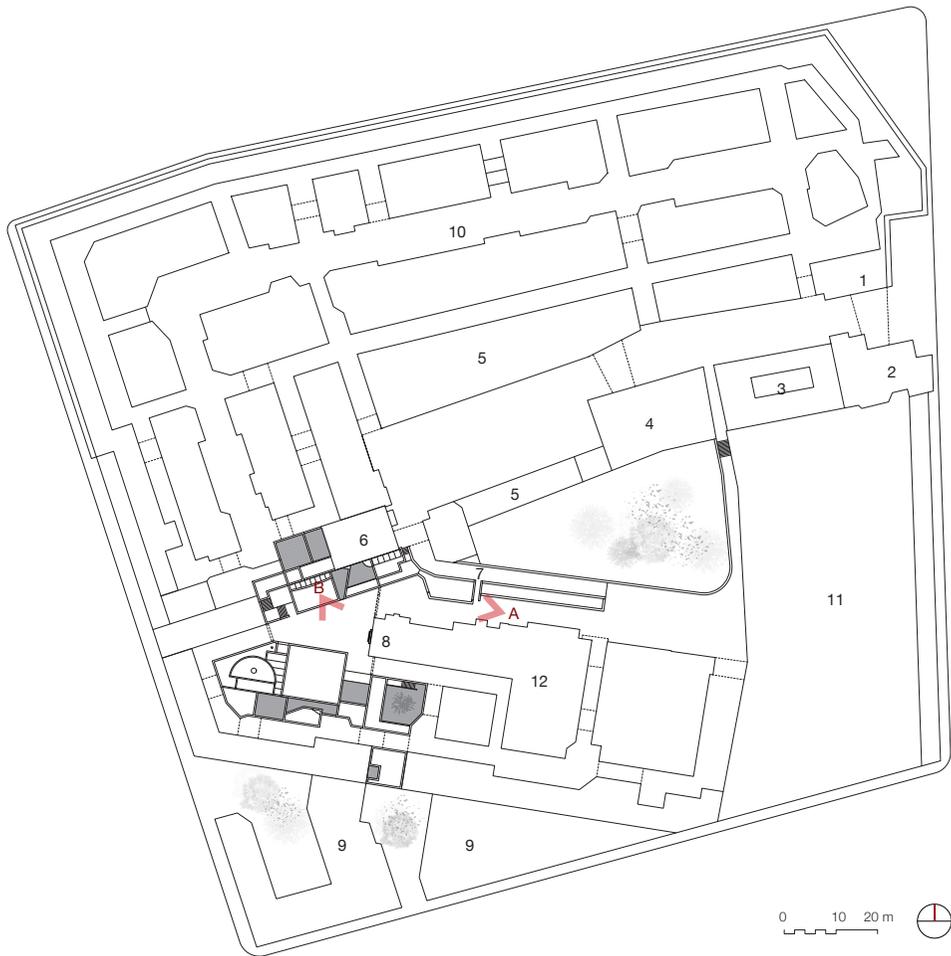
*"I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, **no shadow unless there is also light.**"*

— Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

## II. Intervention: A Threshold

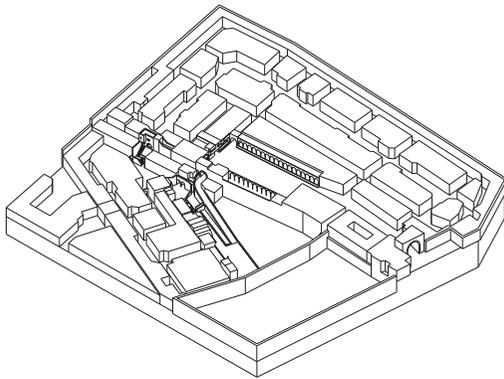
After studying Bousbir in its social context as well as urban morphology, I decided to develop my intervention on **2 buildings and a gate** on the route which all women pass routinely each week from the walled off district to the medical dispensary outside of the wall (but directly adjacent to the district) for mandatory health check and STI control. I look to turn this weekly routinely route that marks the only chance for the women to cross the blind wall into a revelatory spatial sequence- a threshold- between 2 realities with the tools developed.

I was allowed considerably great freedom when it comes to the design process since there is little documentation on the original states of the buildings. Therefore besides the shell, some indication on level changes, and some public functions, it was pretty much a blank canvas. To work with such great freedom, I closely evaluated the choreography of spaces and the logics behind.

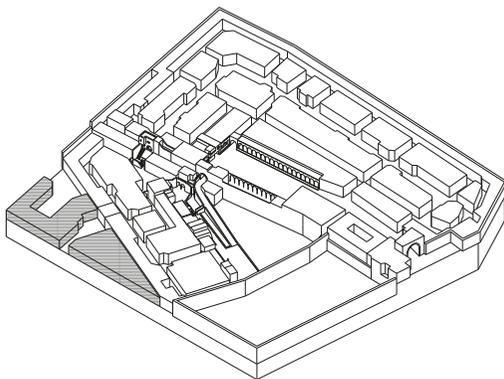


Situation Plan

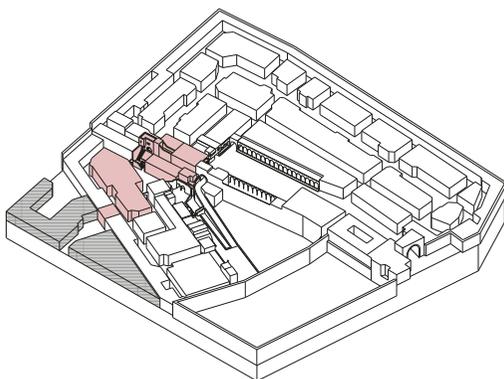
- 1 Police
- 2 Guard house + jail
- 3 Souk
- 4 Cinema
- 5 Shops and cafés
- 6 Hammam
- 7 Slope (6m height difference)
- 8 Fountain (only one in that area)
- 9 Medical Dispensary
- 10 Moorish zone
- 11 European zone (never realised)
- 12 Jewish zone



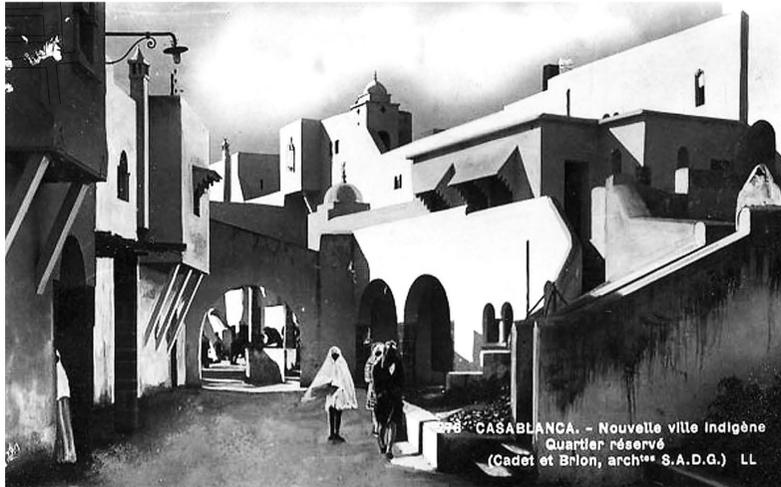
Context: Bousbir



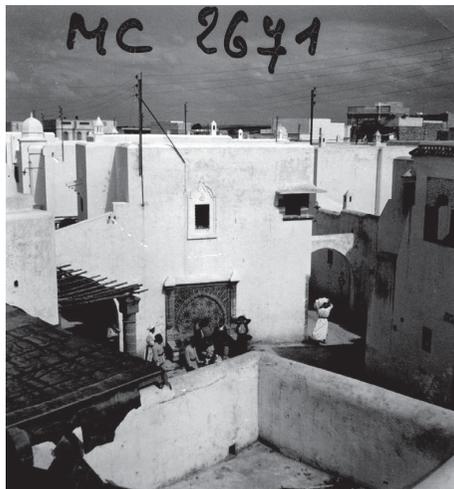
Routine: Dispensary



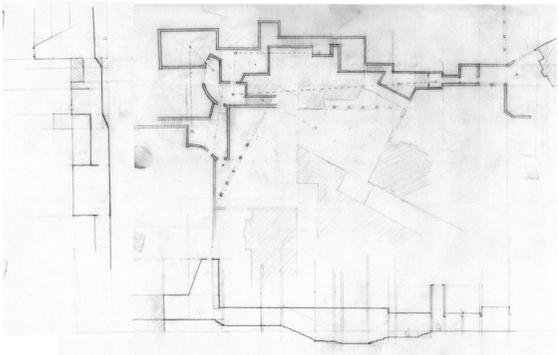
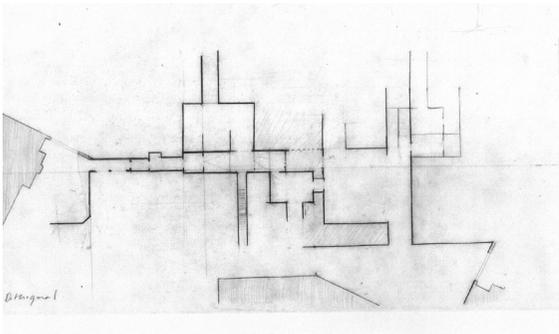
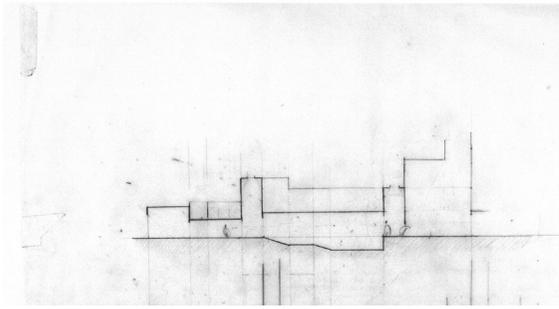
Site: En Route



A



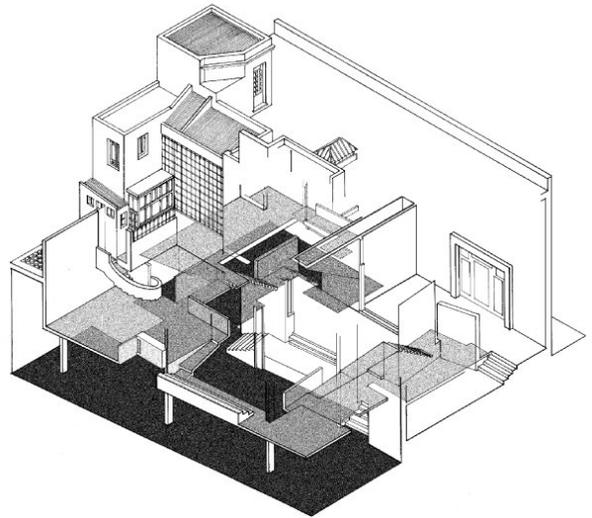
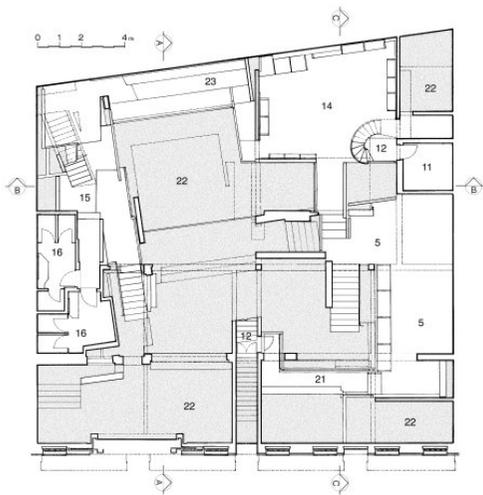
B

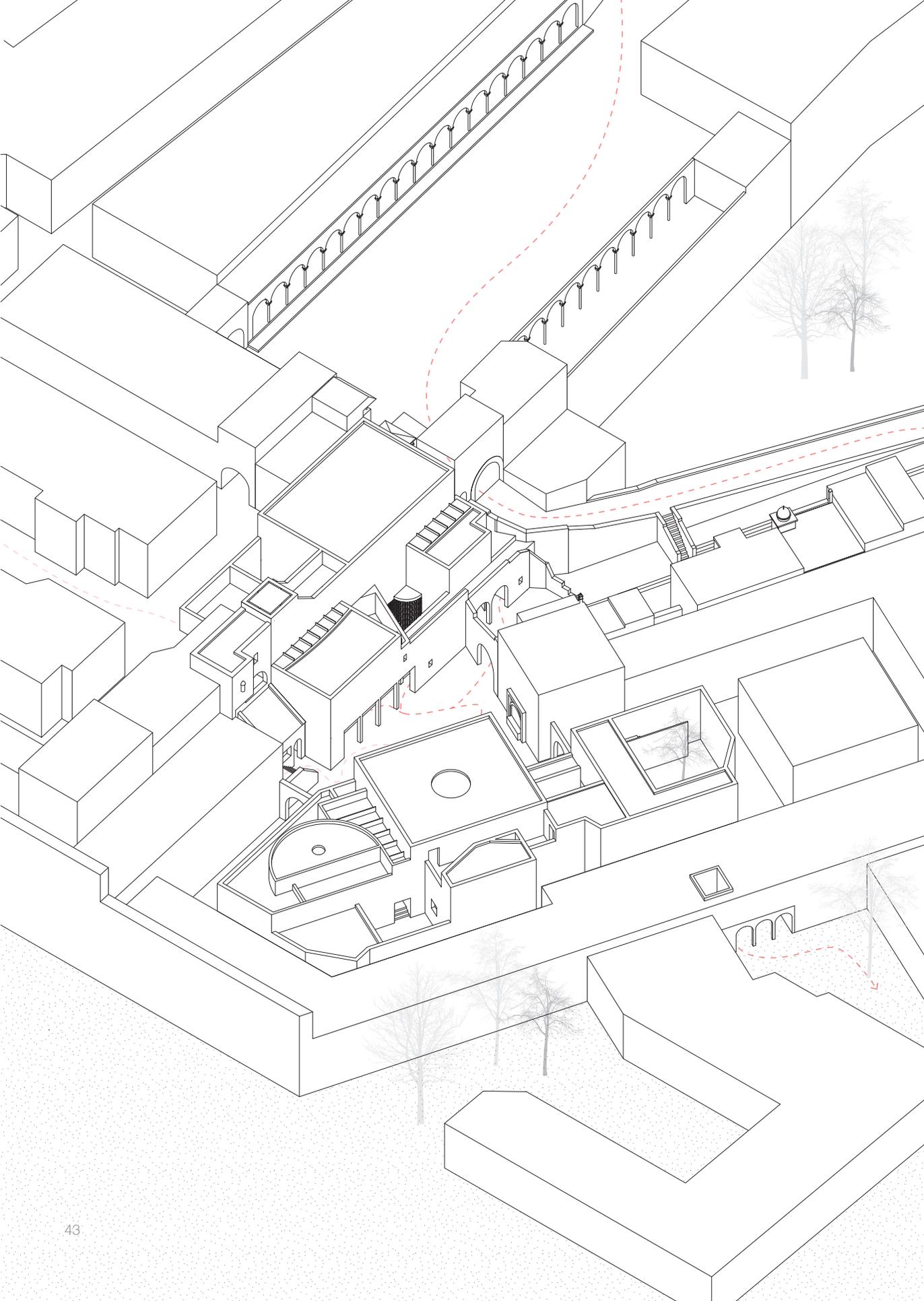


Preliminary Experiment Sketches:  
Testing the complex relation  
between light and wall and  
choreographing them into an  
architectural sequence

### **Case Study + Preliminary Experiment: Weaving Journey with Light and Walls**

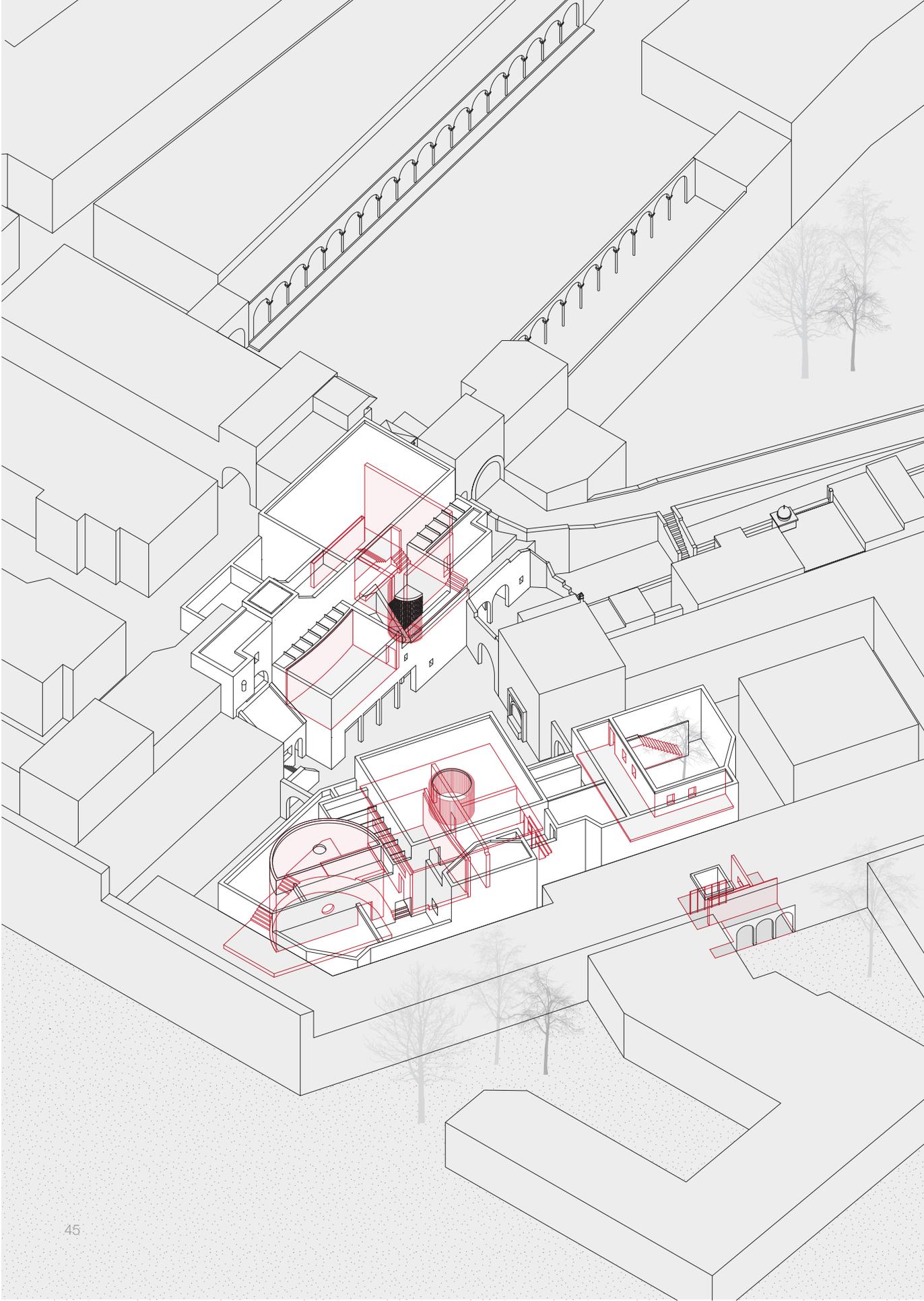
In understanding how to control the relation between light and wall in a sequence of spatial experience- weaving a journey instead of a static moment- I closely studied the Xul Solar Museum by Pablo Beitia. Understanding the rationality behind each angle of walls on the plan and its effect when encountering light as well as its role in the overall journey, I carried out various preliminary experiments as a design-led research on the making of my intervention.

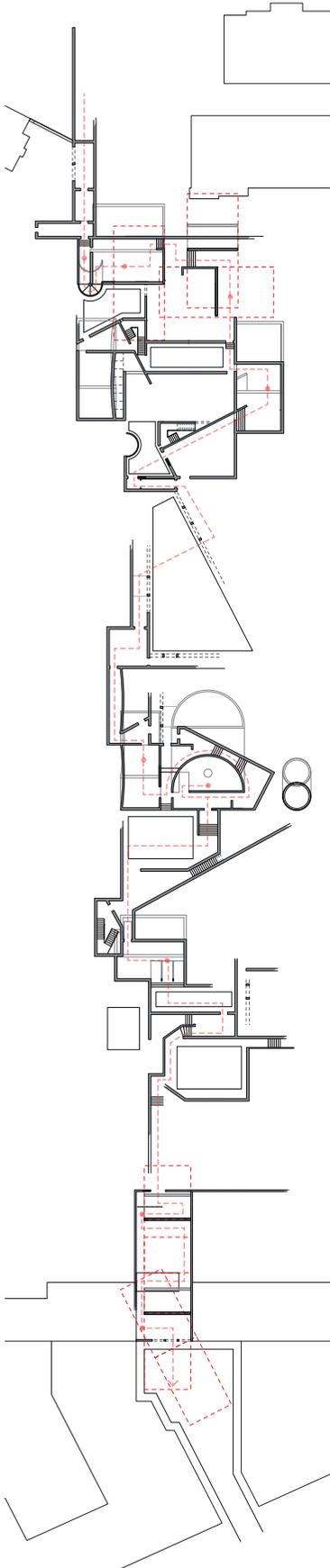




### **Intervention En Route**

Intervention on 2 buildings and a gate sits on the route from the inner district to the outer medical dispensary which the women are obliged to take twice a week.

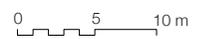
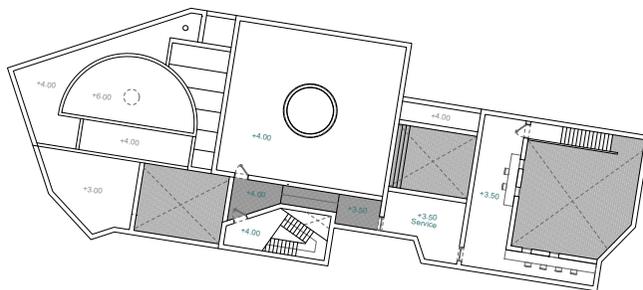
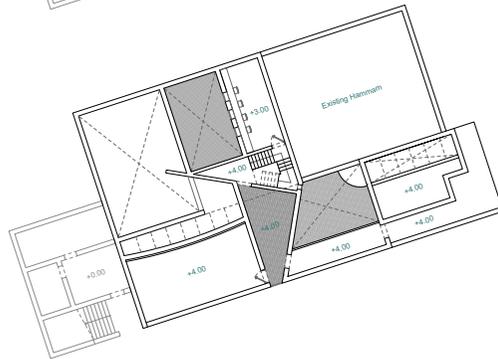
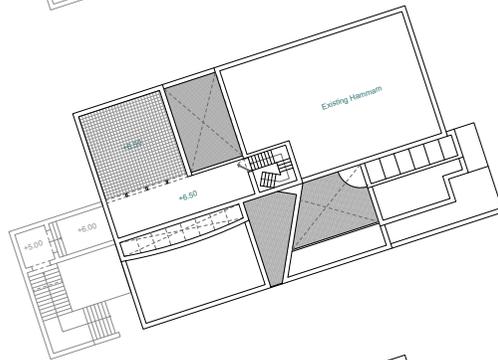
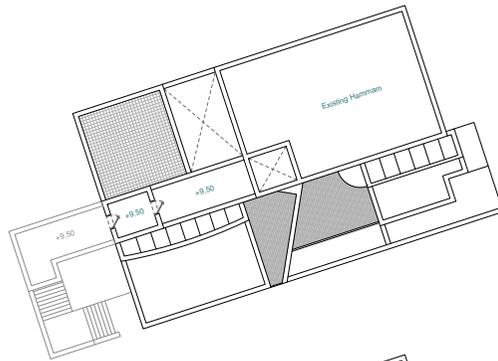


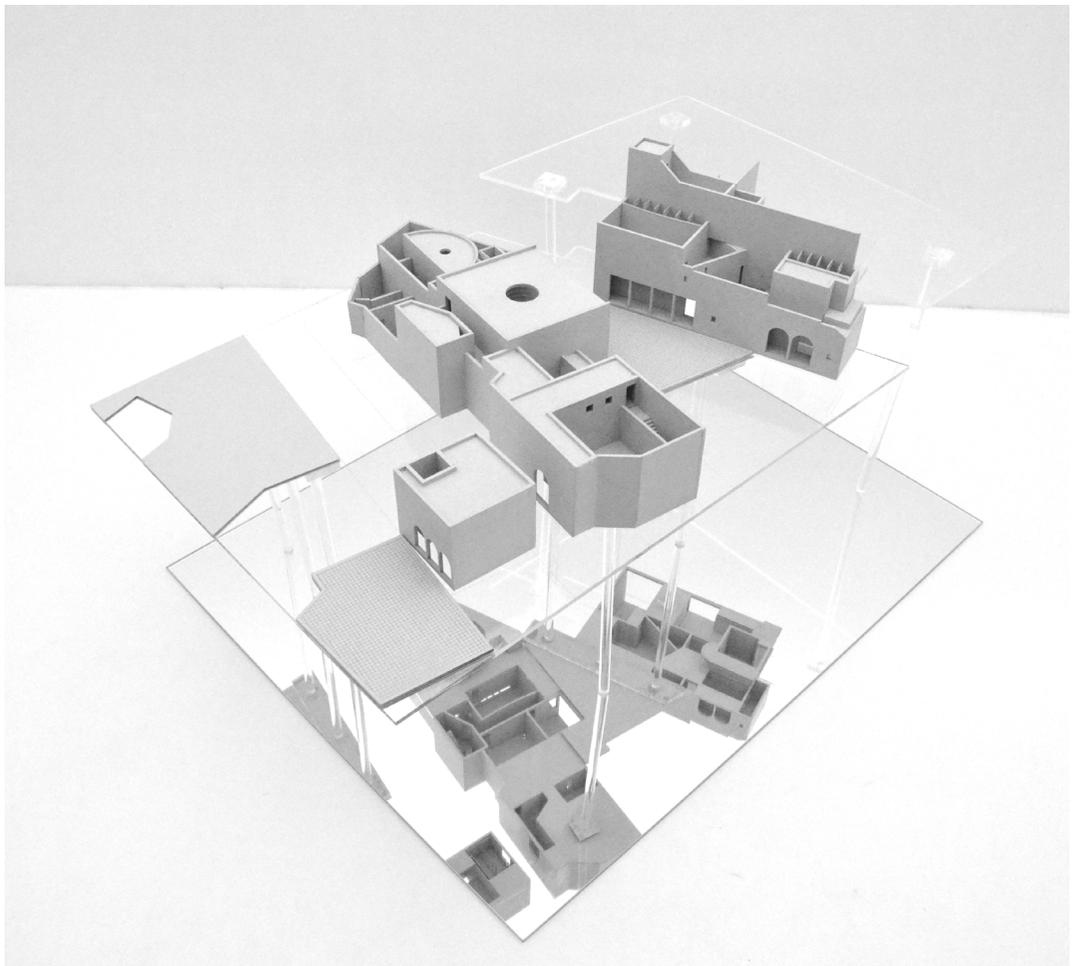


### Threshold Unfolded

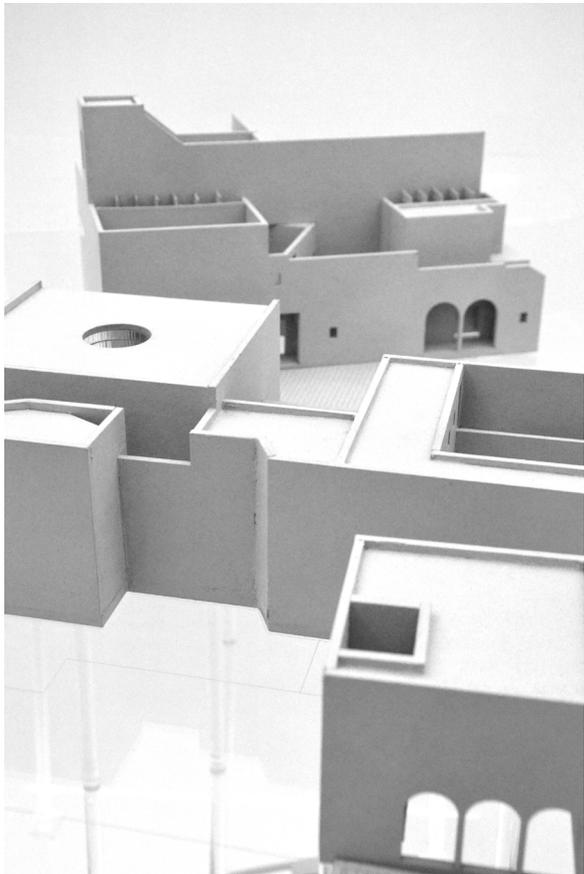
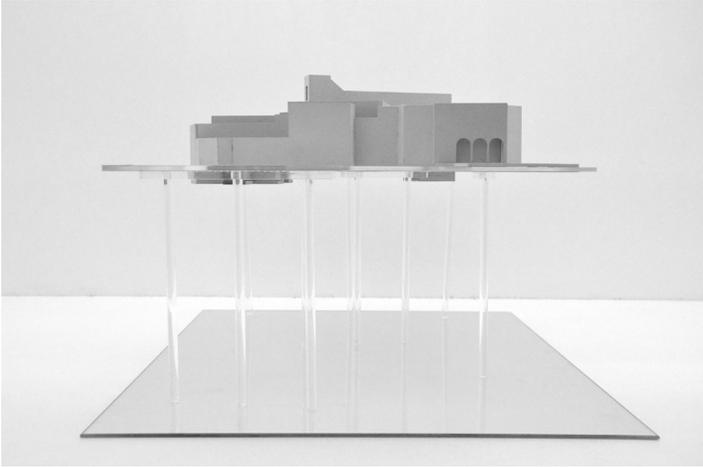
The intervention transformed this weekly routine into an extra-thick threshold between the two realities. The threshold is woven with careful choreography of light, walls and openings, revealing to the women sense of temporality and individuality.







1:100 Physical Model



### III. Materialisation

Throughout the design process, I discovered the constant shift in tension between walls and light as one moves through different spaces along the route. I first started reading spaces with different light-wall relation in categories based on the absence and relative abstraction of their entity in a space. For example: “absence of light and wall” (outdoor, uncontrolled/ uncontained light and space), “abstraction of wall” (strong sculptural light given form as it encounters wall), “abstraction of light” (indirect light revealing materiality of walls). The two photographs on the right illustrate the latter two light-wall relation.

Through further analysis of the different categories of spaces and their mechanisms, I composed 3 types of spatial systems, and further developed 3 types of walls accordingly on both theoretical and technical levels as design tools for my intervention.

Finally, with the tools I developed through the reading of the relation between light and wall and its spatial translation, I was then able to materialise the intervention on various layers, as well as clearly indicate and control the design of this threshold and the experience within.

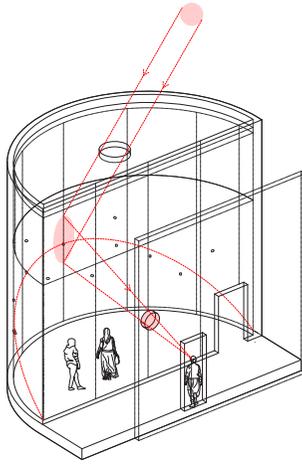


Abstraction of Light: Emergence of materiality

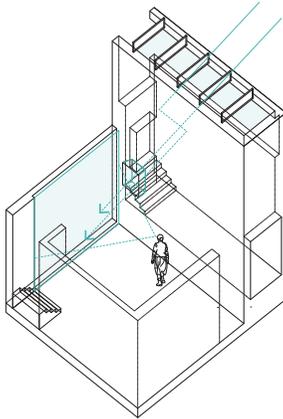


Abstraction of Wall: Light given form

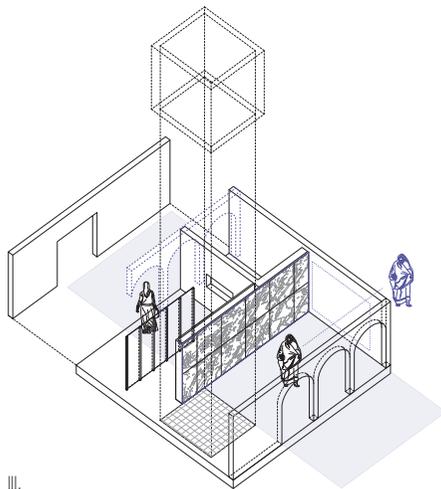
Rolex Learning Centre, SANAA



I.



II.



III.

## Readings of Light + Wall

Bousbir is a “Potemkin city” where beautiful façades masked the ugliness within. By challenging the role of Light, Wall and Opening in Bousbir, I looked to work with these modest tools in (re)introducing/ re-linking “temporality” and sense of “individuality” to the women. Through the design led research, I developed 3 spatial systems based on the relation between wall and light, with which the threshold was woven:

- I. Abstraction of Wall
- II. Abstraction of Light
- III. Abstraction of Wall + Light

## 3 Types of Wall

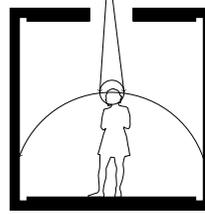
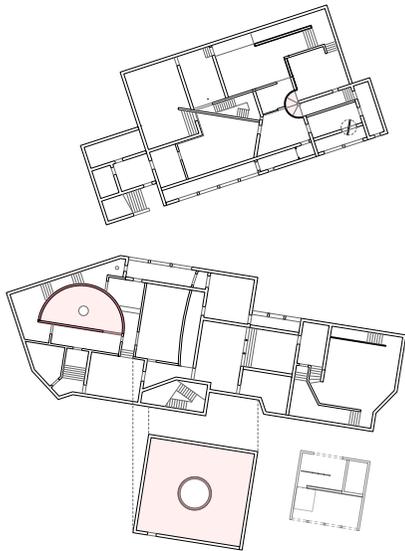
3 types of wall systems were then developed corresponding to the 3 spatial systems. Each wall system were developed with specific detailing demonstrating material property, daylight performance, hierarchy of elements within the space, reflection, acoustics, as well as artificial (secondary) light.

**Type 1**  
**Abstraction of Wall**

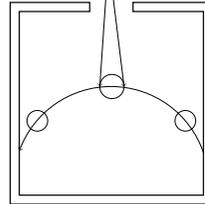
When strong direct *light is given form* and revealed by wall.

In this system, walls are abstracted on the material level as the light plays a visually dominant role. The sculptural form of the wall plays important part on how the light performs. Examples in the design that belong to this system are half circular in-situ concrete wall on which the skylight runs across throughout the day (axo on the right), half circular stairwell wrapped in glass bricks (axo on the next spread), and the glass cylinder wrapped in translucent curtains.

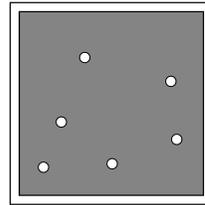
In this system shown in the axo diagram, besides strong sculptural light, the strategic placement of openings in this element allows the light (sun) to belong to multiple people at the same time.



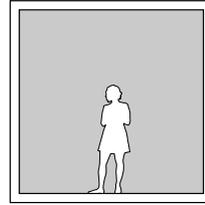
**Overview**



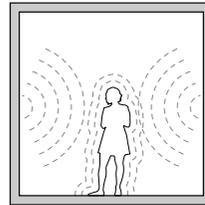
**Daylight**  
 Light given form,  
 strong direct  
 sculptural light



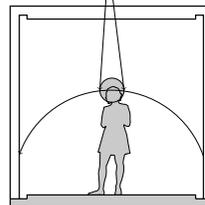
**Artificial Light**  
 Light given form,  
 one with the wall



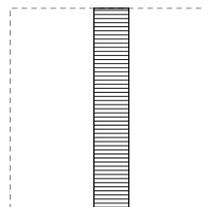
**Reflection**  
 Polished in situ  
 concrete, reflective  
 for smooth light  
 movement



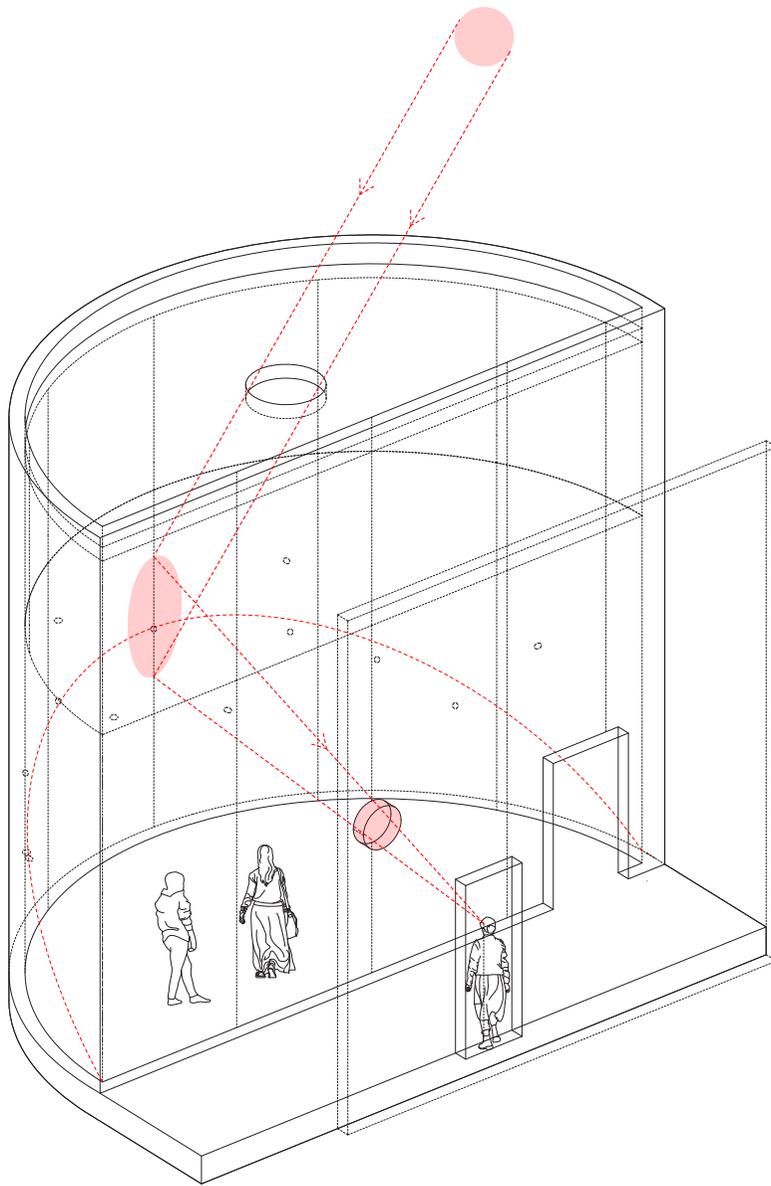
**Acoustics**  
 Long reverberation  
 time caused by  
 form and materiality,  
 increasing self  
 consciousness



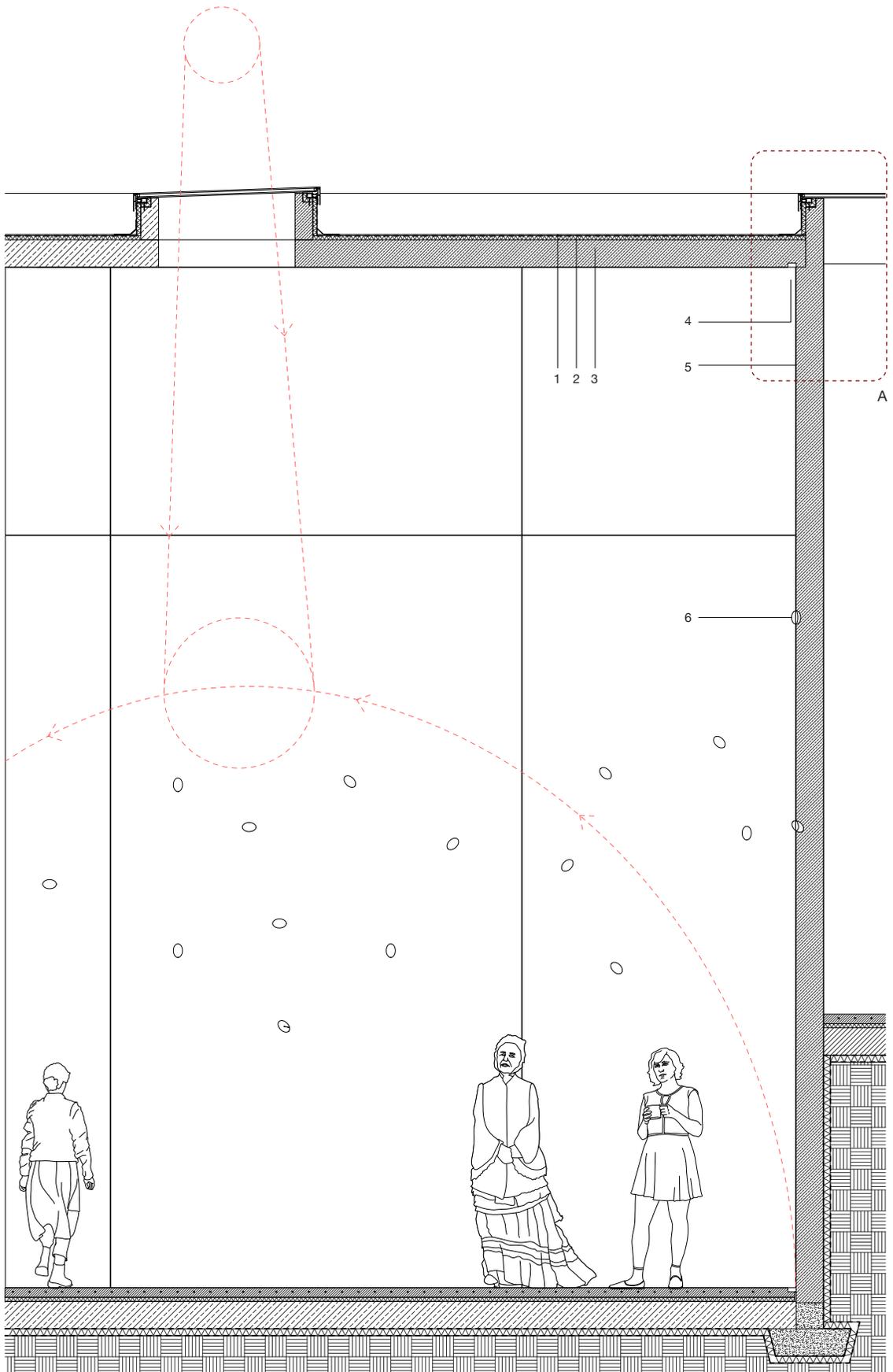
**Hierarchy**  
 Abstraction of wall  
 on material level,  
 enhancing light and  
 self consciousness

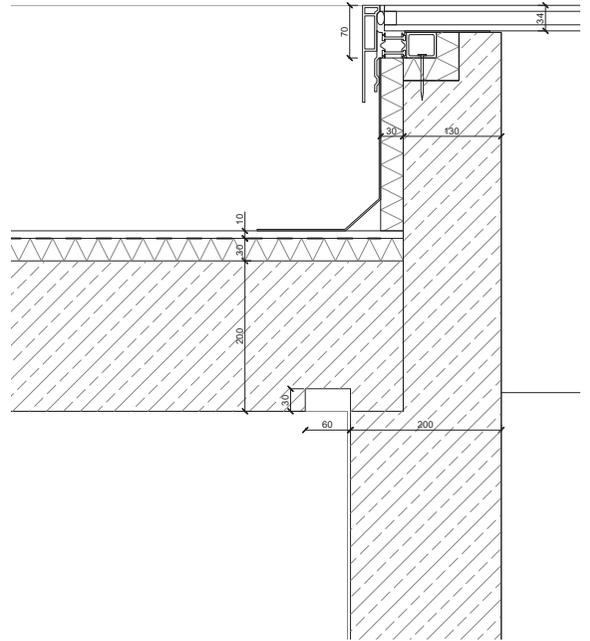
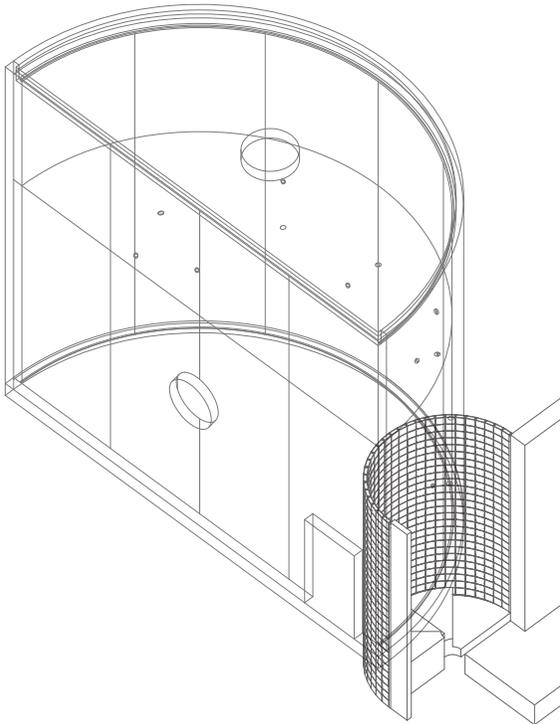


**Wall Structure**  
 Single material (e.g.  
 in- situ concrete/  
 glass brick/ curtain)  
 confronting light  
 directly



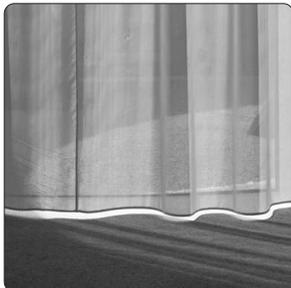
Abstraction of Wall  
Light given form





**Detail A**

<i>Roof</i>		
1	Finishing layer	10mm
2	dpc, EPS, vapour barrier	30mm
3	Reinforced concrete slab	200mm
4	Profile detail	
		<i>total: 240 mm</i>
<i>In-situ load bearing wall</i>		
5	In-situ polished concrete wall	200 mm
6	Cast in wall artificial lighting	-
		<i>total: 200mm</i>



Curtain  
SANAA



Glass brick  
Tadao Ando

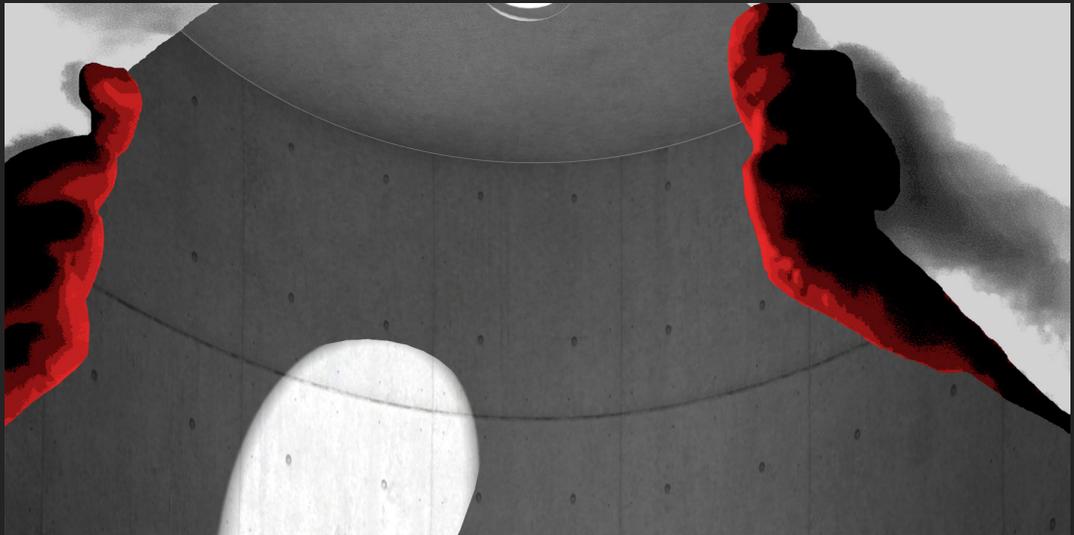


Lights cast in concrete wall  
Peter Salter







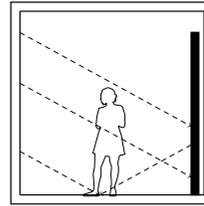
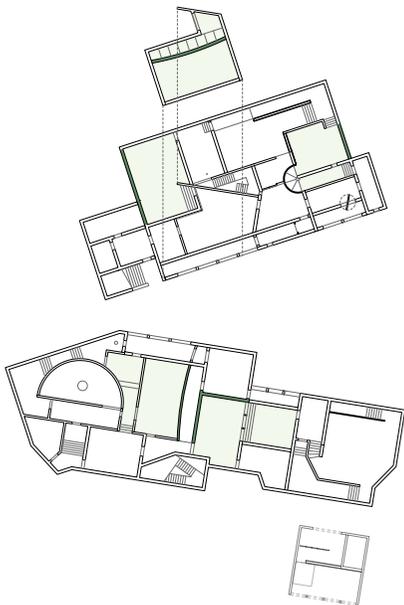


**Type 2**  
**Abstraction of Light**

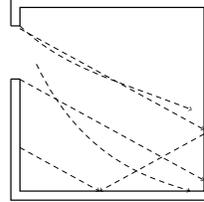
When walls are revealed by light, *emergence of materiality*.

In this system, light filtered through an adjacent space in order to reveal materiality. Softer, diffused, indirect light hit the walls, revealing in more detail the material quality of the walls. Depending on the specific space, the cladding (material) of the wall varies.

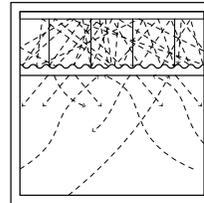
The form of the wall also depends on how the material wishes to be revealed. Some examples being the slightly curved aluminium clad wall taking in light from adjacent space, and water running down a wall that shimmers in a dark room when light comes in and hits the surface from adjacent bright space (axo diagram).



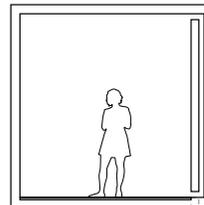
**Overview**



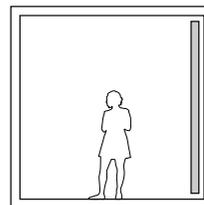
**Daylight**  
 Indirect, diffused, filtered daylight. Soft, allowing emergence of materiality



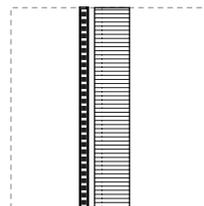
**Artificial Light**  
 Filtered through corrugated glass-light is broken up through refraction and reflection



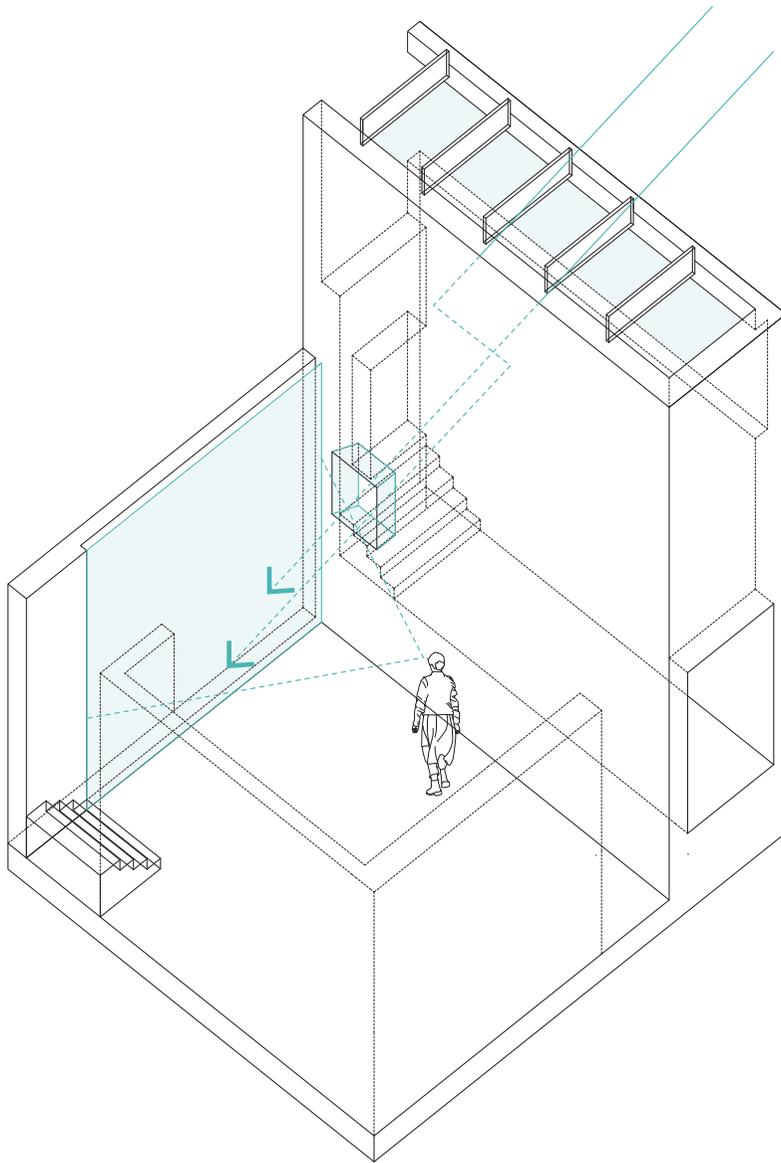
**Reflection**  
 Polished screed floor allowing slight reflection (extension) of the materialised wall



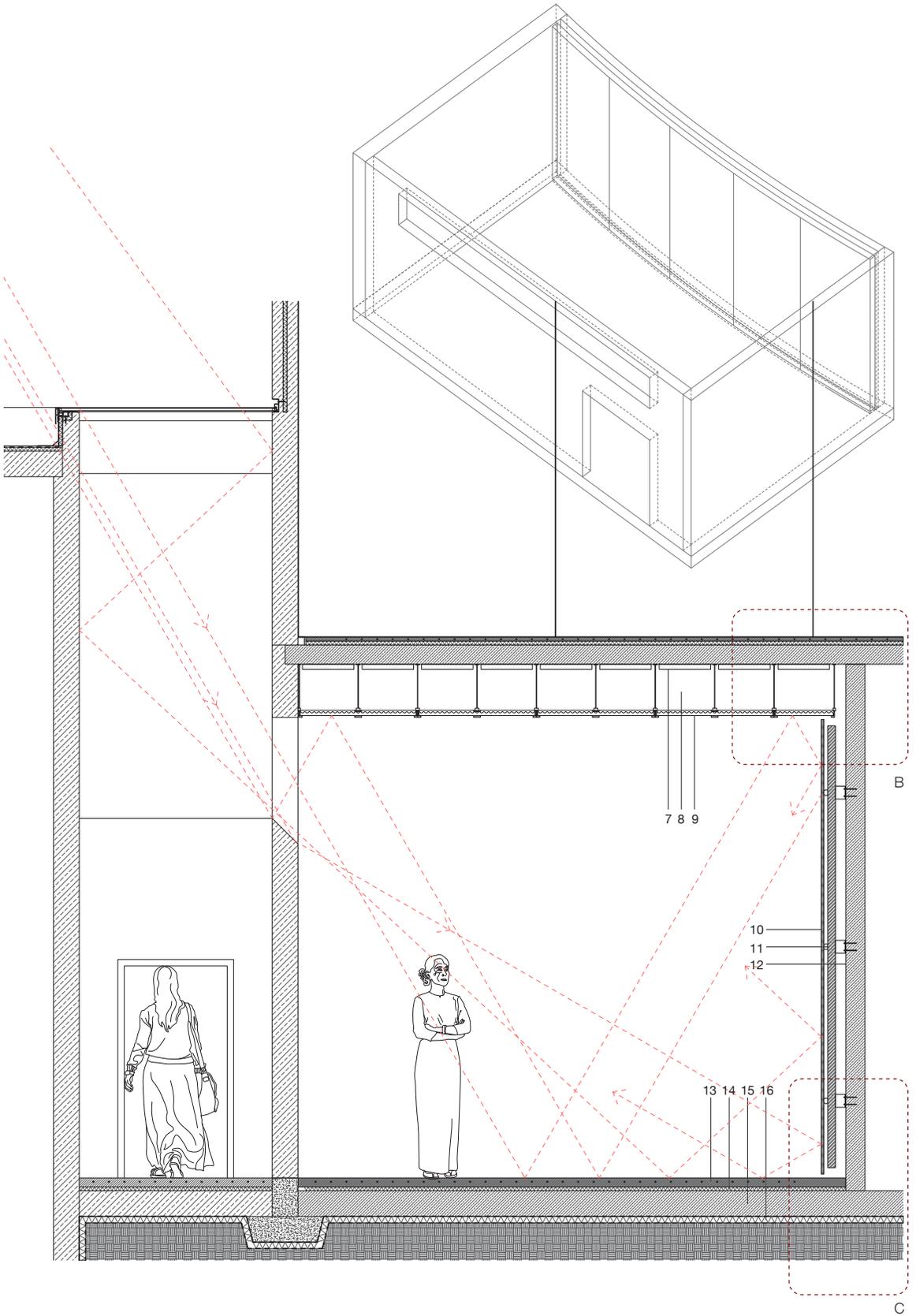
**Hierarchy**  
 Abstraction of light, enhancing wall and emergence of materiality



**Wall Structure**  
 Structural element with cladding layer (material)

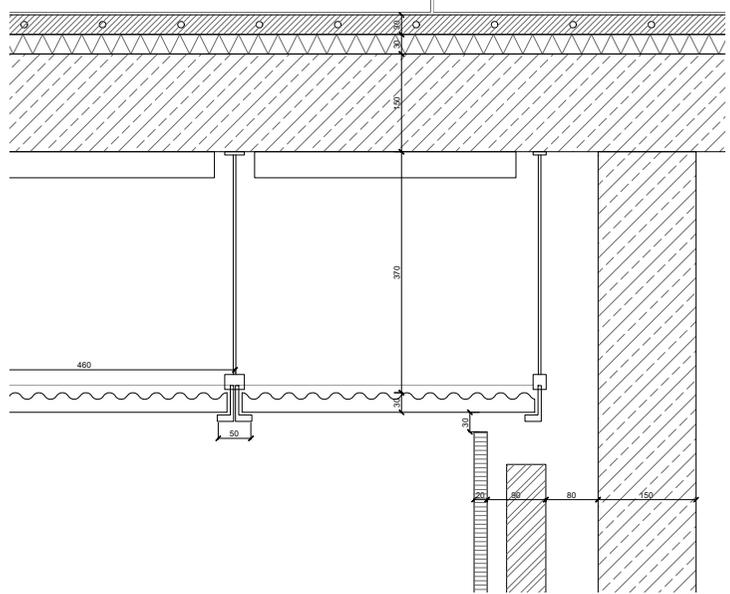


**Abstraction of Light**  
Emergence of materiality





Aluminium cladding  
SANAA

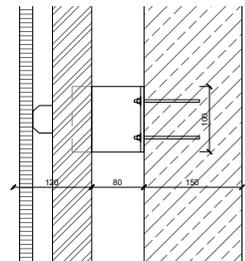


**Detail B**

Suspended ceiling system

- 7 Artificial lighting
- 8 Void (space for light to bounce)
- 9 450/450 Single sided corrugated etched glass panels 30mm

total: 400



**Detail C**

Curved interior wall

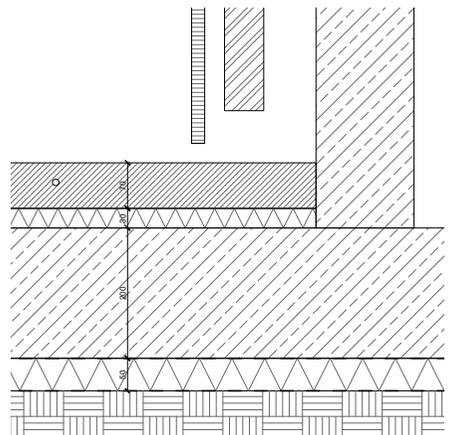
- 10 3500/1500 sandwich element: 20mm  
aluminium sheet, aluminium honeycomb core, aluminium sheet (1+18+1)
- 11 Supporting framework system 170mm
- 12 Non load bearing concrete 150mm

total: 340 mm

Ground floor slab system

- 13 Polished screed with underfloor heating 70mm
- 14 Acoustic insulation 30mm
- 15 Reinforced concrete slab 200mm
- 16 dpc, insulation (EPS), vapour barrier 50mm

total: 350 mm







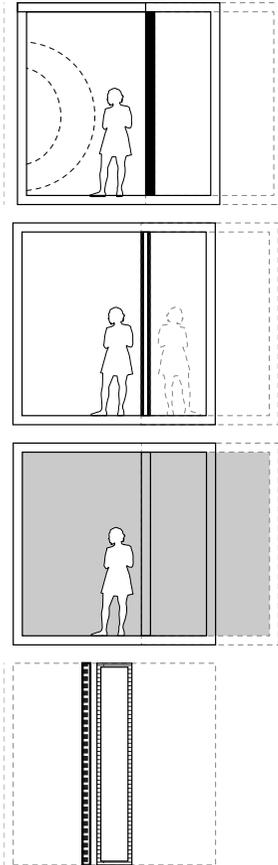
Type 3

### Abstraction of Wall and Light

This is when wall and indirect light work together in creating an **optical illusion of another dimension- extended reality**- an emergence of space.

The walls in twhis case are of highly reflective materials, and the construction of the wall is hollow, denying access to the solid beneath. The walls are flat, relatively small, and light weight.

This system is only applied in the beginning and the end of the threshold. The gate between the dispensary and Bousbir (axo diagram) explores this revealing of space most fully, where two realities overlap.

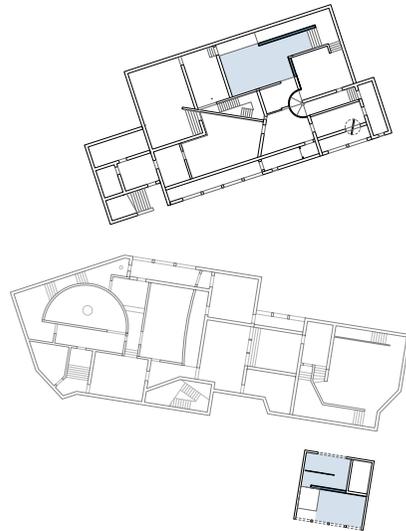


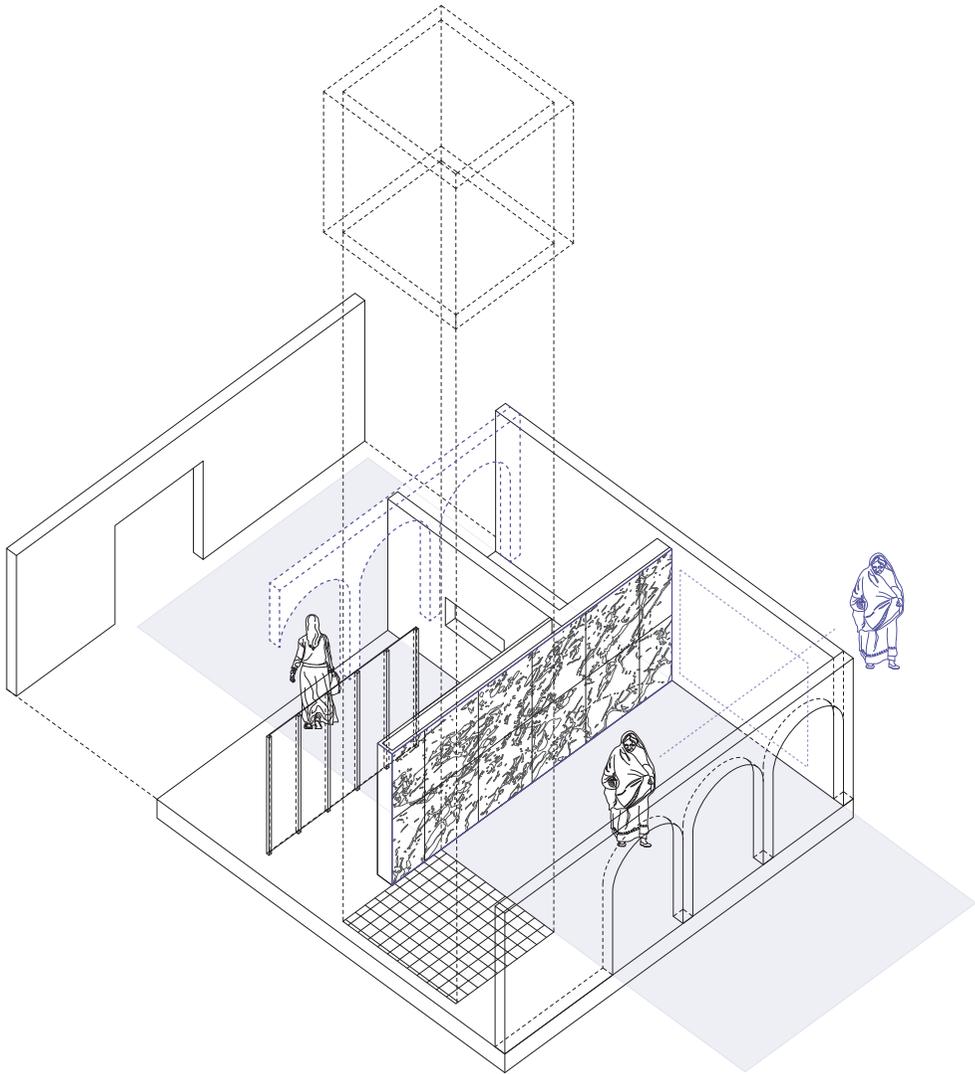
Overview

**Reflection**  
The wall is of very polished natural stone material, working together with light in revealing another dimension

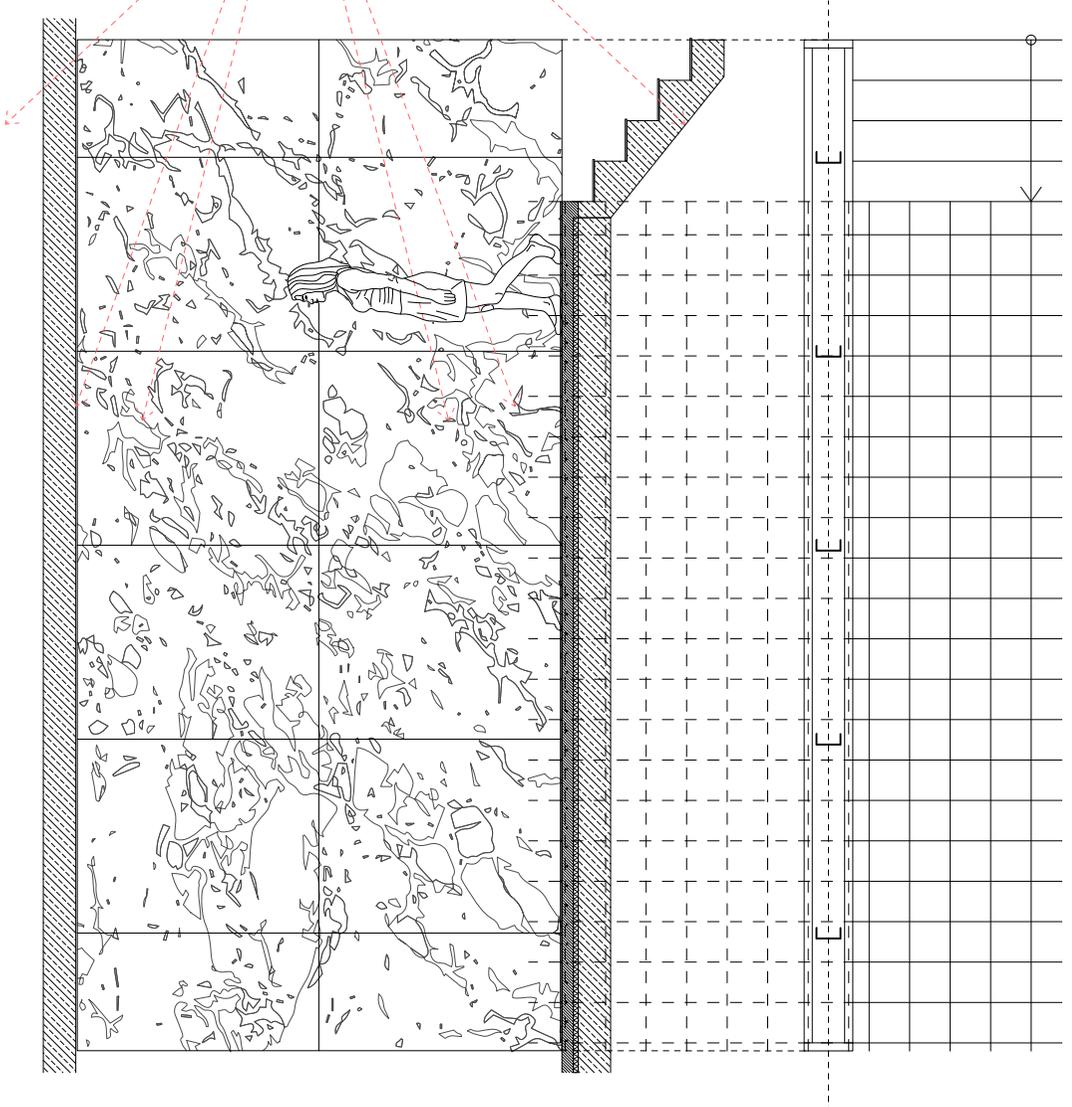
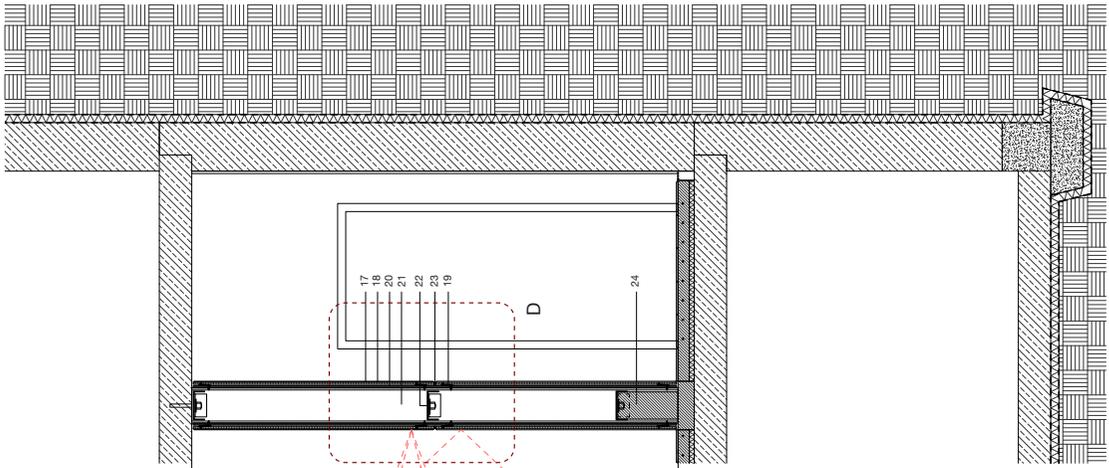
**Hierarchy**  
Abstraction of light and wall, enhancing space

**Wall Structure**  
Hollow steel structure with reflective (natural stone) cladding





**Abstraction of Wall + Light**  
Optical illusion of extended reality



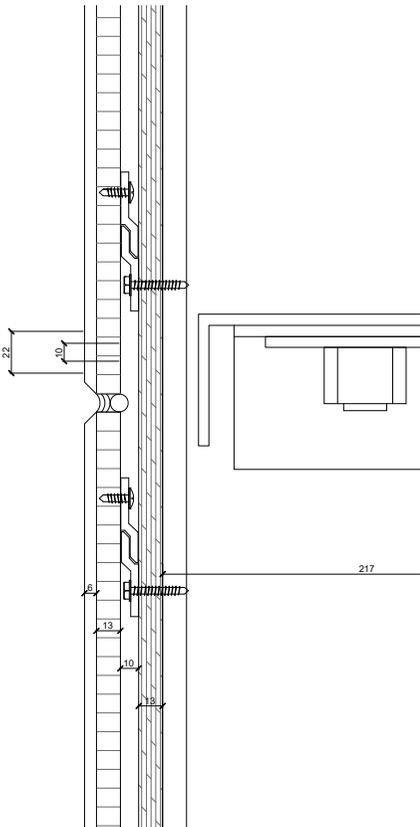
**Detail D**

Hollow wall

17	1500/1200 Polished natural stone panels (marble)	6mm
18	Aluminium Honeycomb	13mm
19	Z clip attached to aluminium facing, Field attach Z clip at stud framing	10mm
20	Exterior sheeting	13mm
21	Stud framing	217mm

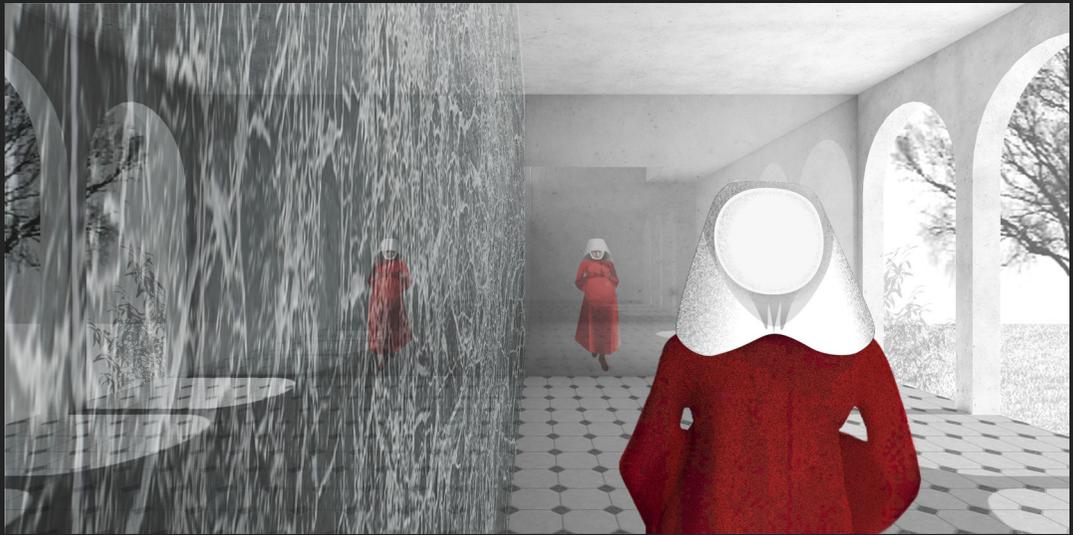
*total: 300 mm*

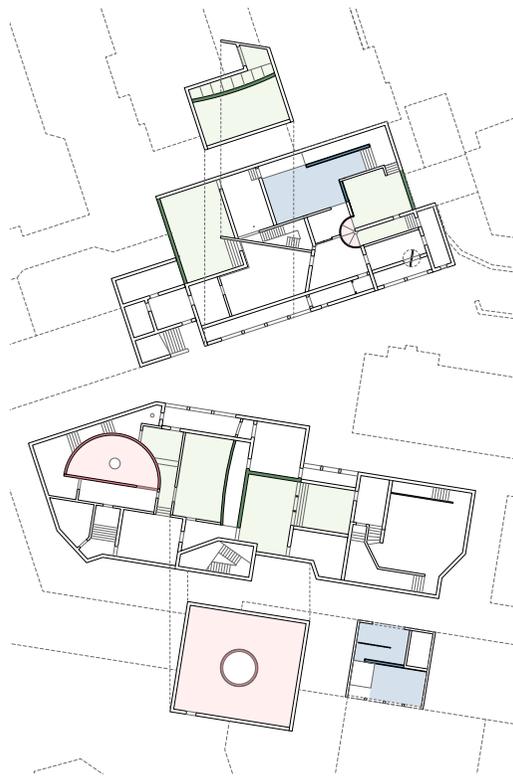
22	C beam	
23	Backer rod and sealant	10mm
24	Concrete footing	



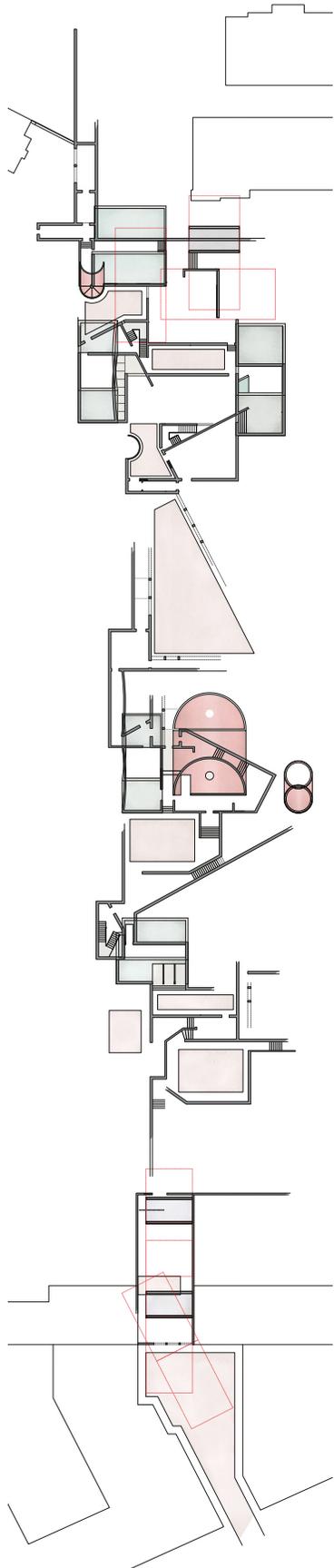
Materiality: Marble cladding (polished, reflective)

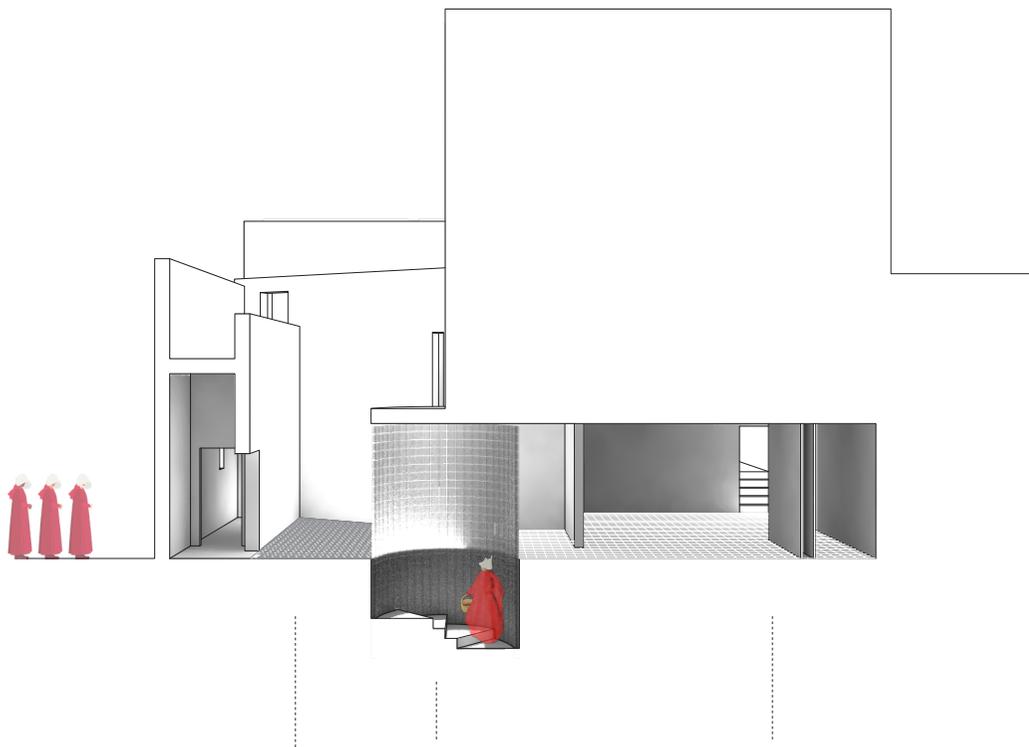






- Type 1
- Type 2
- Type 3





Absence of  
Light and wall

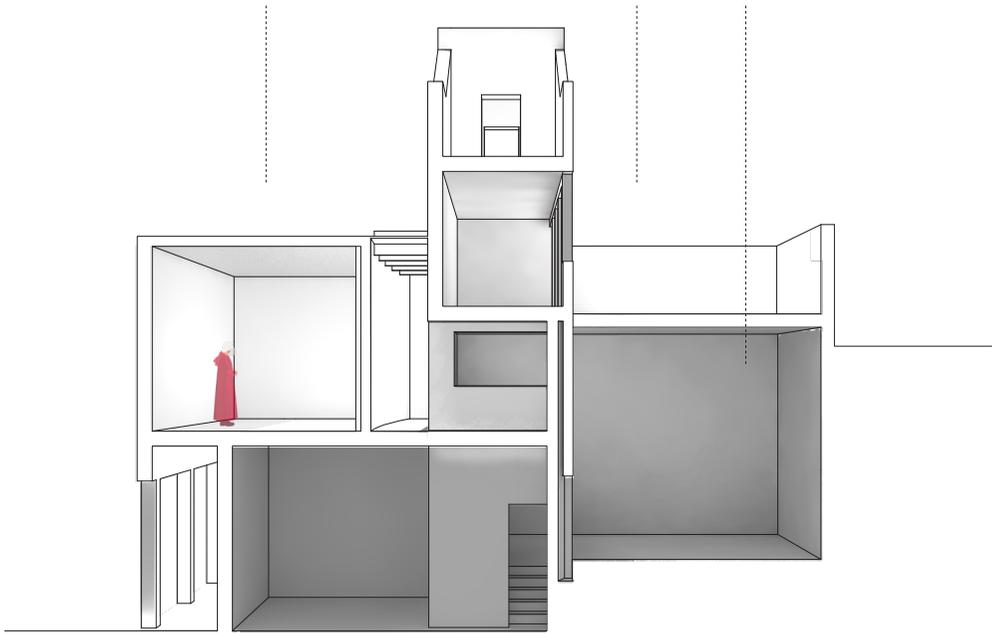
Abstraction of  
Wall

Abstraction of  
Wall and Light

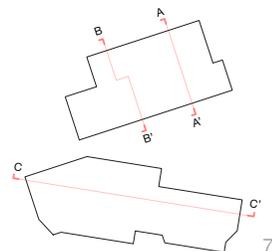
A-A'

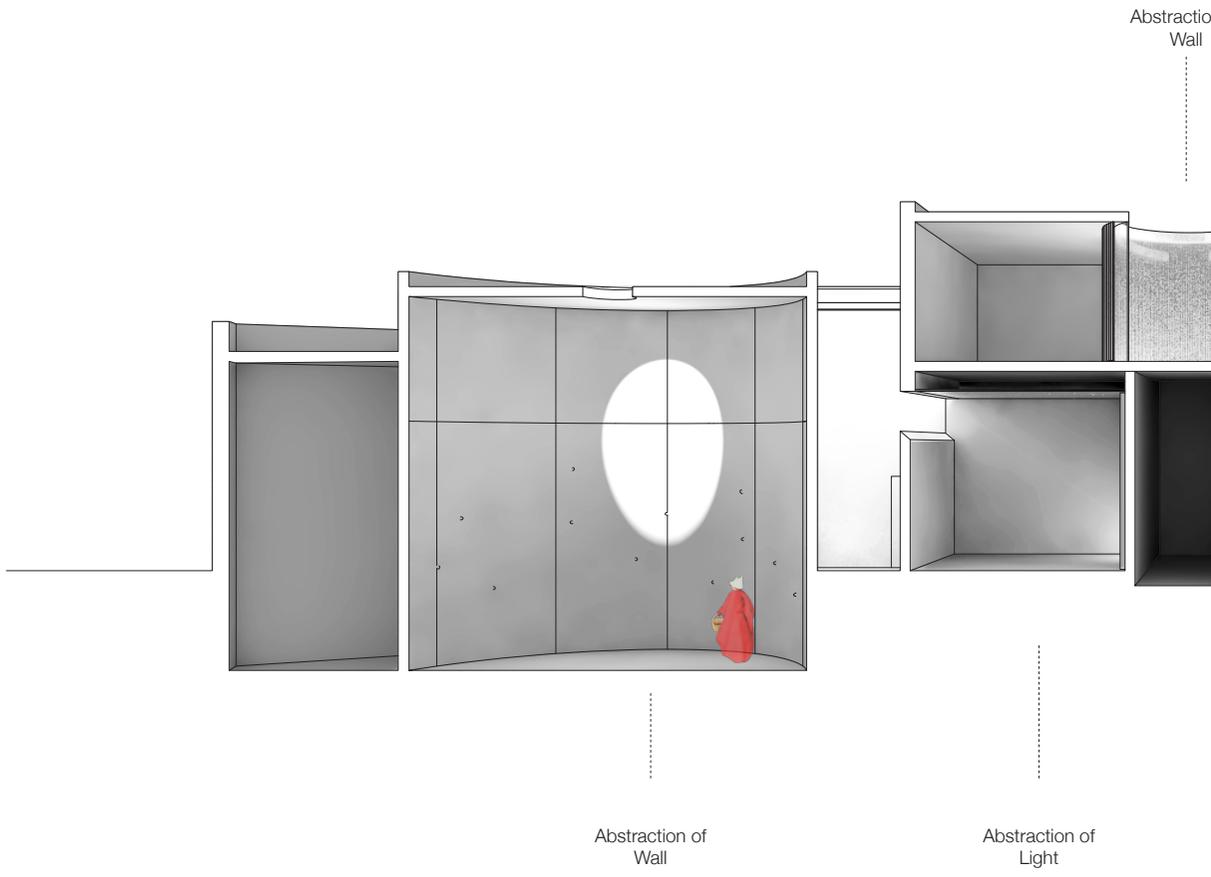
Abstraction  
of Light

Absence of  
Wall and  
Light



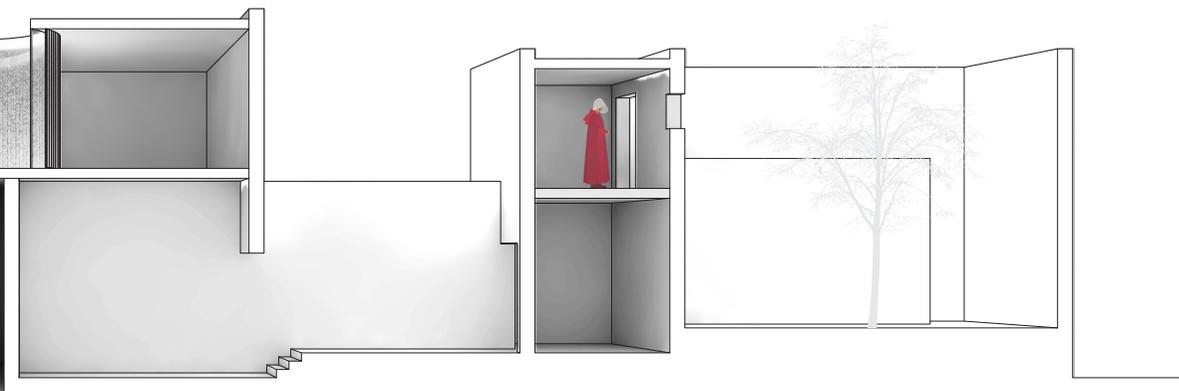
B-B'





C-C'

n of



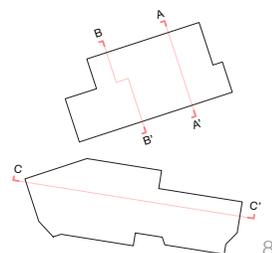
Abstraction of  
Light



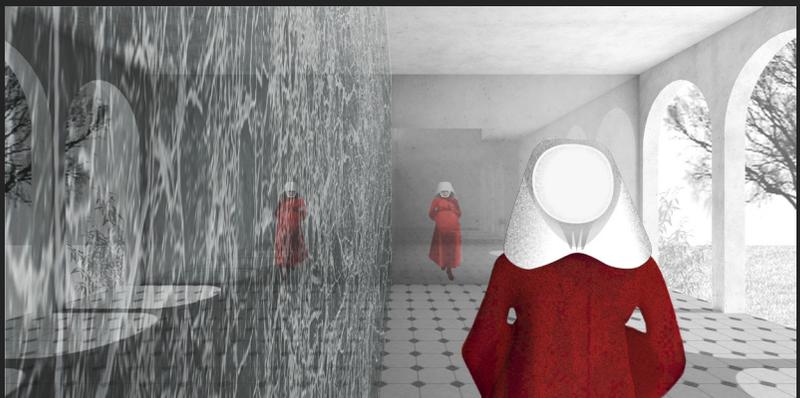
Absence of Wall  
and Light



Absence of Wall  
and Light







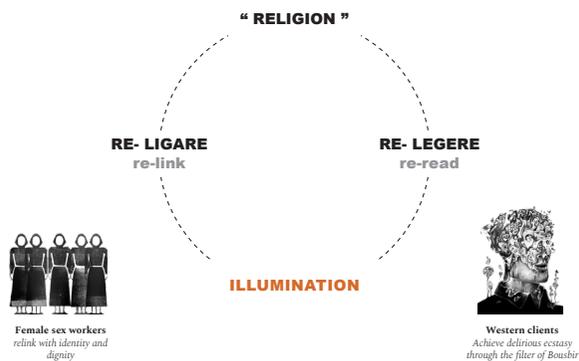


Analysis of the Intervention  
**To be Naked**

## I. Two Thresholds

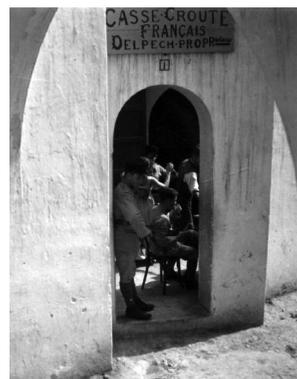
The Bousbir now consists of two thresholds linking the two realities, which correspond to the two readings of “Religion” previously developed (see p.28):

1. **Re-reading (Relegere):** The first one is that of the main touristic route designed for men- from the main gate through the markets, the cafes, shops and big square. The sceneries were designed in responding to the imaginative geography of Morocco, and the programs (also a part of the scenes) designed to strip the visitors of guilt as they walk through this threshold from outside to Bousbir.
2. **Re-linking (Religare):** The second threshold, *Threshold of Evanescence*, is the route between the medical dispensary (situated outside of the blind wall) and the Bousbir district. The intervention converted the route the women of Bousbir take on regular basis for STI check-up to a threshold through which one connect with the sense of individuality and find solace.



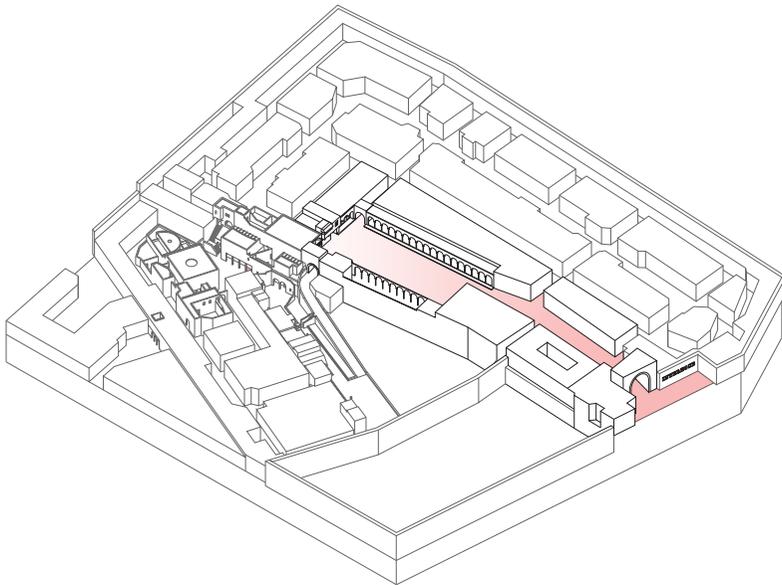
The first threshold was designed in order to construct a filter through which visitors could re-read the reality, and the main strategy of achieving this in multiple layers is the act of “**dressing**”. On the contrary, the second threshold can be understood as an act of “**undressing**”.

The act of dressing and undressing can be understood through the initial morphotypological research of the 8x8 Ecochard grid housing units. In the Ecochard grid, we saw that the original state was being “cladded” in many layers of different architectural responses, and in order to understand the logic behind, we carried out a series of investigation “unveiling” the layers and found the core value that influenced the transformation of the housing complex - the collective memory of gathering. It was through this act of “undressing the dressed” that we could connect the Ecochard grid complex of the now with the “soul” of the Ecochard grid and the people living within. In other words, it was not until we stripped the Ecochard grid naked, that we understood its honest self.



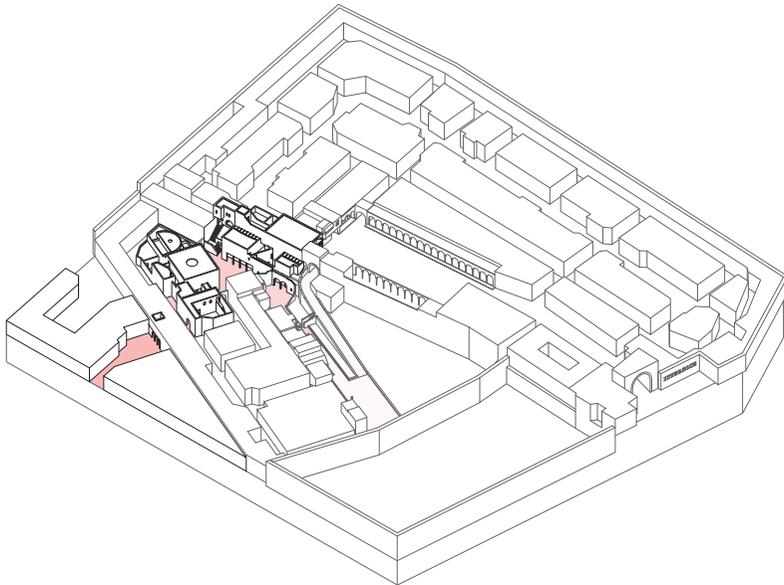
Dressing

## Dressing



Re-reading (Relegere)

## Undressing



Re-linking (Religare)

## II. To Be Naked

I understood the act of undressing, of becoming naked, as a necessary step towards truly coming face to face with the true and honest self of things. Nakedness, however, does not literally mean a completely bare, rough infrastructure. In the *Threshold of Evanescence*, this nakedness of architecture is reached through specific configuration of elements that allows the essence (soul) of resources, material, and form to be revealed in multitude of layers and not be masked and lose their entity in the complexity.

When the filter of Bousbir constructed to enable the re-reading of reality disintegrates, the re-linking of this distant memory of temporality and individuality is made possible. The naked architecture allows one to be in contact of, become aware of the soul of each element (in the case of the Threshold of Evanescence: light and walls), and the overall configuration of the nakedness also “undresses” the visitors, where they become conscious and aware of their “self” as they become naked. The enlightenment of Religare (re-linking) for the women, is in the process of coming face to face to the nakedness of self and the nakedness of their reality.

In Atwood’s book, there is a shop called “Soul Scrolls” where prayers were rolled out from machines while being read out loud in a shop with no working staff, behind large shatterproof windows. Once when Offred, the protagonist, was on shopping duty with another handmaid (their only chance to leave the house), they stood in front of Soul Scrolls and caught each other’s eyes for the first time through the reflection of the shatterproof glass as they watched the prayers rolled out. This very moment displayed to them nakedly their reality: “*Do you think God listens... to these prayers?*” “No.”

The *Threshold of Evanescence* is indeed that piece of shatterproof glass for the women of Bousbir.

*At the corner is the store known as Soul Scrolls. It's a franchise: there are Soul Scrolls in every city centre, in every suburb, or so they say. It must make a lot of profit. The window of Soul Scrolls is shatterproof. Behind it are print-out machines, row on row of them; these machines are known as the Holly Rollers, but only among us, it's a disrespectful nickname. What the machines print is prayers, roll upon roll, prayers going out endlessly... Ordering prayers from Soul Scrolls is supposed to be a sign of piety and faithfulness to the regime... There are five different prayers: for health, wealth, a death, a birth, a sin... The machines talk as they print out the prayers; if you like, you can go inside and listen to them, the toneless metallic voices repeating the same thing over and over. Once the prayers have been printed out and said, the paper rolls back through another slot and is recycled into fresh paper again...*

*Ofglen and I stand outside Soul Scrolls, **looking through the shatterproof windows**, watching the prayers well out from the machines and disappear again through the slot, back to the realm of the unsaid. **Now I shift my gaze. What I see is not the machines, but Ofglen... We can see into each other's eyes...***

*At last Ofglen speaks. **"Do you think God listens,"** she says, **"to these prayers?"***

*In the past this would have been a trivial enough remark, a kind of scholarly speculation. Right now it's treason. I could scream. I could run away. I could turn from her silently, to show her I won't tolerate this kind of talk in my presence. Subversion, sedition, blasphemy, heresy, all rolled into one.*

*I steel myself. **"No,"** I say.*

— Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*



Final Reflection  
**Me as Her**

This thesis project, ***A Threshold of Evanescence for the Women of Bousbir***, is an architectural representation, as well as further exploration, of my own journey. I learnt that to be honest with myself, I first have to learn to be naked. The process of stripping myself of some deeply planted ideas and filters was a very difficult yet significant experience, and it was not until I started doing so, looking at the world through naked eyes, and feeling vulnerable of my naked self, that I reached true understanding of and connect with God, and above all, with myself.

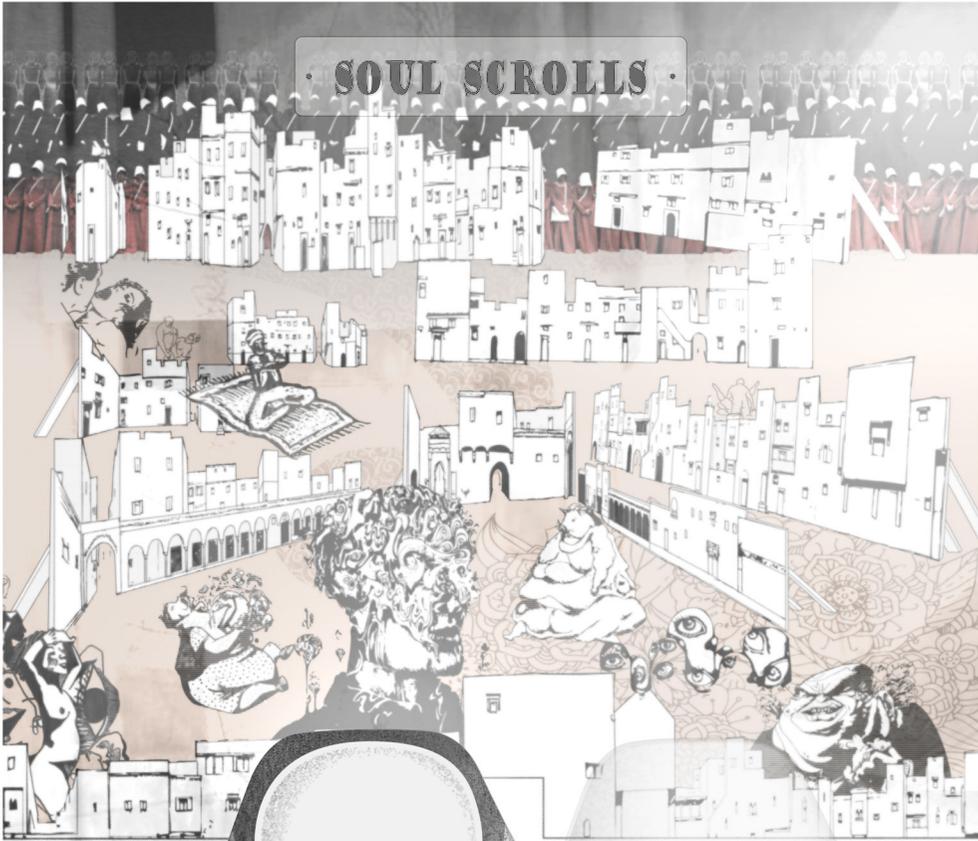
*I am a handmaid, and the Threshold that piece  
of shatterproof glass of the Soul Scrolls.*

*I am a handmaid, and Bousbir the gloves I am  
obliged to wear at all time.*

*I am a handmaid, I walk through the Threshold.  
I see myself reflected in the glass, I take off my  
gloves, I can finally touch, and I can finally feel.*

— Rebekah Tien

· SOUL SCROLLS ·



*Handwritten signature*





Генералъ

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- p. 7 Original courtyard [Photograph]. from <https://http://www.arquiscopio.com/pensamiento/la-trama-eco-chard-en-marruecos/?lang=en>.
- p. 7 Courtyard became living room [Photograph]. from <http://www.studio-basel.com/projects/casablanca-05/>
- p. 7 Bousbir situation map [Book Scan]. "Le Quartier réservé de Bousbir à Casablanca"
- p. 7 Bousbir postcard [Photograph]. "Le Quartier réservé de Bousbir à Casablanca"
- p. 19 Bousbir postcards collection [Photograph]. "Le Quartier réservé de Bousbir à Casablanca"
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- p.27 Potemkin village cartoon [Drawing]. By Nick Anderson
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