01. the death and life
of great urban opacity

02. eyes off the street

03. constructing darkness

01
the death and life of great urban opacity

As climate change bears down on an increasingly temperate Vienna, the proposal of actioning urban darkness for physical respite is gaining traction. An urbanism of sun, light and air through the Red Vienna period (1918-34), and again after World War II, has resulted in a city that is now overexposed and without reprieve from its increasingly oppressive climate. Vienna, though an immediate case study, is not alone in this fight, and will soon be joined by a large portion of the world that will likely seek refuge from sun, perhaps through dark-ness. Though urbanism has historically favored solarization, openness and transparency as solutions to the inherent dangers of a dense urban fabric, an immediate need for urban reprieve suggests a future that

might, instead, encourage darkness. Although the benefits of urban darkness might be supported by its climactic implications, a larger history of opacity within cities must be unpacked to consider a future that could potentially embrace it.

This shift in consideration to urban opacity as something positive is still new, and thereby ripe for debate. Historically, solarization and increased transparency of cities was enacted as a public good, with the intent of regulating health and safety within the city. Jane Jacobs, among others, famously celebrated urban transparency through "the eyes on the street," which favored a clear delineation of public and private space to encourage a self-regulated model of safety. The idea of architecture as regulator of safety is difficult to reconcile when considering a new type of urbanism that might instead embrace an architecture of darkness. The effort requires first an understanding of the history of physical space as a mechanism of regulation to understand its manifestation at the urban-scale, and ultimately, a reconsidering of what, or who, it should regulate.

In his interview with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perot, entitled "The Eye of Power," Michel Foucault makes a convincing argument for Bentham's Panopticon as a prototypical example of politicized space. At its core, the Panopticon is physical space designed to function as an apparatus of power. Foucault acknowledges the provocation of the Panopticon is its precedence as method rather than program, as evidenced in its applicability beyond Bentham's initial proposition as a prison. Foucault himself discovered the Panopticon while studying the organization of hospitals, and further identifies its early application in mid-eighteenth century military schools in Paris. Beyond the bounds of Foucault's interpretation, the method of surveillance championed by the Panopticon is undeniably present and persistent. By acknowledging its inherent universality, Foucault is able to identify the Panopticon as not just an immediate case study of control, but as a precedent for larger-scale structures of power as they manifest in architectural space, both small-scale and urban. The excitement of this revelation is ultimately that it suggests a system that is self-regulating and multi-directional. Surely, the most provocative question is the one on which Foucault ends in "The Eye of Power": "would [it] be better to have the prisoners operating the Panoptic apparatus and sitting in the central tower, instead of the guards?"

In his initial discussion of the subject, Foucault begins by acknowledging the specific methods of control for which the Panopticon was established. He notes that by the end of 18th century, architecture became "involved in problems of population, health and the urban question," to which the idea of surveillance offered a potential solution. Specifically, in the case of hospitals, surveillance became "necessary to avoid undue contact, contagion, physical proximity and overcrowding," and in the military schools it served for "control over sexuality," where the "very walls [of the Panopticon] speak the struggle against homosexuality and masturbation." Foucault notes that in conceptualizing the Panopticon, Bentham "faced the problem of accumulation of men," but instead of addressing the problem in terms of wealth or economic disparity, he "poses the question in terms of power – population as object of relations of domination." In this way, Foucault identifies Bentham's Panopticon as serving a purpose beyond the aforementioned goals to control contact, contagion, or sexuality. At its core, Foucault sees the Panopticon as an opportunity to maintain something much greater, and thereby more elastic: power.

The discussion of power as something other, and perhaps greater, than control is a compelling point of Foucault's argument, as it begins to acknowledge the structures of regulation at play in examples like the Panopticon. Bentham "poses the problem of visibility, but thinks of a visibility organized entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze," which Foucault recognizes as "archaic in the importance it gives to the gaze," but "very modern in the general importance it assigns to techniques of power." Foucault argues that the importance of the gaze in the Panopticon is that "each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself." This model of self-maintenance ultimately provides "power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost."

The blurred line of agency in this process of power-generation is provocative as precedent of politicized architecture that doesn't favor either the watcher or the watched. Foucault refers to it as "a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised," and thereby it becomes "a machinery that no one owns." He notes that in the Panopticon, "each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others," thereby creating "an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point." This lack of absolution is perhaps the most exciting provocation of the Panopticon, as it suggests a model of power-regulation through architecture that has potential to function in equilibrium.

Although "The Eye of Power" begins its discussion in the context of mid-eighteenth century politics, its greatest provocation also its most scalable. Specifically, the universality of the Panopticon's

power structure is well evidenced in Jane Jacob's magnum opus, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961), in which she proposes a similar method of self-regulating surveillance, which she refers to as "eyes on the street." Although the context of Jacob's critique is two centuries after Bentham's, it precedes Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon by a decade, and as such, may be equally as well tested by Foucault's analysis of broader-scale power dynamics.

To compare the two, their obvious difference must first be acknowledged: Jacob's proposal of surveillance operates without the strict, hierarchical nature of Bentham's Panopticon. That is to say, surveillance of free pedestrians on a city street has significantly different implications than the surveillance of an incarcerated individual within a prison. Surely, in the case of Jacob's street, there is no guard in a watchtower. The surveillance proposed by Jacobs is without obvious hierarchy, and does not explicitly favor one individual over another, but does, similar to the Panopticon, deliberately favor the "watcher" over the "watched." In order to best critique the two in tandem, it is important to first understand the inherent goals of surveillance that inform the formation of these two broad categories.

Foucault recognizes that Bentham's Panopticon responds not only to the immediate need for surveillance in prisons, but more broadly to "a fear [that] haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century: the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths." Foucault calls to memory Gothic novels that develop "a whole fantasy-world of stone walls, darkness, hideouts and dungeons," as containers of "arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance." In their discussion, Barou links this fear to the "areas of darkness in man that the century of Enlightenment wants to make disappear," and agrees that the strength of Bentham's proposal is that it "provided a formula applicable to many domains, the formula of 'power through transparency,' subjection by 'illumination."

Although these arguments are contextually specific, their application is not unique in that they ultimately serve Bentham's greater goal of "eliminating blockages and obstacles," which prevent a self-regulating transparency in both physical and political space. An initial impression of Jacob's argument, despite its more contemporary context, would be that it responds to similar issues as Bentham's, though perhaps now in the context of voluntary, city-scale regulation rather than mandated, building-scale regulation. In Death and Life, Jacobs frequently cites safety as a primary concern of the successful city street, although at times her argument takes broader sweeps to references of "barbarism and fear of barbarism." She speaks of devoid, unoccupied space as threatening menace, similar to the "patches of darkness that blocked the light," and "shadowy areas of society," during the Revolutionary period to which Bentham responded.

Like Bentham, Jacobs gives weight to visibility as the ultimate cure for this wound, citing the eyes of "the passers-by, kibitzers from windows, or shopkeepers," as key regulators of control. Jacobs empowers these individuals as "natural proprietors of the street," who work together as an "intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves," with the ultimate goal to maintain "the public peace." Bentham and Jacobs' proposals are similar in that they both suggest a system of self-regulation that provides no-cost maintenance and participation that is either mandated, in the case of a prison, or implicit, in the case of a city. In this way, Foucault's analysis of Bentham can also be applied to Jacobs: that she "poses the problem of visibility, but thinks of a visibility organized entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze. [She] effects the project of a universal visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power." For Bentham, the meticulous power is that which the guard in the prison tower enacts on the prisoner, and for Jacobs, it is that which the "peaceable and well-meaning stranger," enacts on the "predatory stranger." In this way, Jacobs' suggestion is less centralized and not regulated by the rigidity of incarceration, but the implication of favoring the watcher over the watched opens it to the potential for similar critique.

The implication of Bentham's Panopticon, which can hereby be applied to Jacobs' City, is the implication that these power dynamics are multi-directional. Foucault acknowledges that, in the Panopticon, there is not a "power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over others," but in fact, that there is no ownership of the machinery of surveillance, where all parties are concurrently watchers and watched. Through this lens, Jacob's argument can be viewed as favoring one side's power over another, and therefore may be similarly blind to Michelle Perrot's prediction of "revolts against the gaze." Jacobs, in favoring one particular watcher, forgets what Foucault identifies as the "constraining, subjecting, unbearable character of that surveillance."

The flaw in this argument becomes critical when considering those to whom Jacob's "eyes on the street"

may self-regulate under misguided definitions of “predatory,” or undesirable. Jacobs celebrates the city’s diversity, but fails to acknowledge greater structures of oppression that systematically isolate along the margins of a diverse population. In this way, Jacob’s “eyes” are tethered to the biases of their community at large, which may result in the self-regulation of not only a system of surveillance but also one of isolation. In this way, there is room to be critical of radical urban transparency. Again Foucault’s question provokes: what might be suggested by the prisoners sitting in the central tower instead of the guards?

The “eyes on the street,” though named by Jacobs, is a prototypical case study for urban surveillance that has persisted both before and since the publication of Life and Death. In New York city alone, the 1901 dumbbell tenement prototype, which predated Jacobs’ writing by several decades, was a clear first attempt at clearly delineating public and private space within the Lower East Side under the guise of urban sanitation and solarization. The prototype, though favoring an attempt at equitable distribution of open space, ultimately encouraged full perimeter block build-outs and clearly defined public and private zones between the street, façade, and mid-block condition. By promising equitable freedom from urban darkness, the resultant delineation further promoted dense, urban order through surveillance.

The dumbbell tenement proposal is a well-documented prototype which provides useful reference for a similar attempt at urban reform happening concurrently in Vienna. After World War I, when the Social Democrats took majority to usher in Red Vienna, a similar emphasis was placed on urban reform to promote sanitation and solarization within the city. Within the tenement blocks, great emphasis was placed on the facade as an imagistic facilitator of order and control. As Eva Blau notes in The Architecture of Red Vienna, the deception of “the grand facades” of Viennese tenements “served not only to disguise the true character of the dwellings within, but also to marginalize, by hiding from view, an entire social class.” She describes this as an example of the “Potempkin City,” or façade architecture, which was both defined and heavily criticized by Adolf Loos. It is an architecture that favors not only physical façade, but façade of the social order Jacobs champions.

Unlike the dumbbell tenement prototype, which failed to manifest at a broad scale beyond the Lower East Side, the grand Viennese façade remains a pervasive typology within a city that is increasingly struggling to balance its difficulties within a changing environment. The result is an urban condition which favors full block build-outs and no shelter, physical or experiential, from the relentless facades that line the street grid. Although Jacobs would inarguably resent the Viennese street condition for its oppressive, inaccessible and Life-less state, it does, perhaps, succeed on her measure of delineating public space by the watchful eyes of clear delineation.

This is predominantly true outside of the city center, where the strong façade masks not only the built interior, but the ambiguous, semi-public courtyards at the mid-block zone. These strange, unclaimed open spaces are reminiscent of the pre-dumbbell era Lower East Side tenements, spatially formed by an aggregate perimeter and simultaneously belonging to no one and everyone. Though these courtyards are often accessible through large gates at the street and thereby are open to public access, the liminality of their existence beyond the relentless eyes on the street result in a spatial typology that discourages both passage and inhabitation. The result is a courtyard that is safe and protected by a watchful gaze, but ultimately non-functional in its ambiguous ownership and right to access.

To rupture the grand Viennese façade and provide truly public access to these liminal courtyards would undoubtedly shock Foucault and Jacobs alike, for it would rupture the delicate system of self-regulation that is facilitated by the definitive border of the eyes on the street. Opacity is often equally as rejected in contemporary urban planning as it was in the late 17th century era of Enlightenment, though less for reason of shelter, but more for reason of surveillance. That is to say, urban navigation through an opaque network, be it underground tunnels, narrow alleyways, or even strange, mid-block courtyards, would undoubtedly help to alleviate the byproducts of urban heat-gain through passive cooling and shelter. In a city that is currently faced with the byproducts of climate change, finding shelter at the street is of critical concern. However, the unrelenting counterpoint to the positives of opacity is safety, as is best regulated by Jacobs’ “eyes.”

To argue, then, for urban opacity is to argue against safety. Though challenging, perhaps the provocations of the Panopticon could provide support to this argument. To consider mechanisms of surveillance as one-sided and free of resistance is, as discussed, short-sighted. The Panoptic model is surely most prime for subversion at the urban scale, where the balance of power is no longer bounded by the walls of an institution, but free to be bolstered by urban anonymity. It is important to consider, instead of who Jacobs finds victim in the opacity of urban anonymity, those who might benefit from it.

Example can be found, again in New York City, with queer appropriation of public space during the early and mid-20th century. As George Chauncey notes in Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Street, “there is no queer space; there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use. Space has no natural character, no inherent meaning, no intrinsic status as public or private.” Chauncey identifies how public space, particularly parks, became centers for queer refuge in New York City predominately due to the fact that they were challenging to regulate. The anonymity afforded by urban opacity resulted in a new kind of safety that was no longer regulated by light, but rather darkness. This darkness was found in both the physical sense of densely shaded space, such as the Ramble in Central Park, but also in the experiential sense of public anonymity, such as in Times Square. By opening up the city and blurring Jacobs’ clear definitions of public and private space, those oppressed by the urban gaze can find safety in shadows, both literal and figurative.

Perhaps, then, the argument for urban opacity first requires a reassessment of “safety” and who the term includes in its definition. Though time has shifted towards cisgender queer acceptance in cities, it is important to continually question the definition of safety through this lens, as social waves undoubtedly sink certain groups as they raise others. For a city like Vienna to fully embrace the respite that urban darkness could provide, it must first tackle this consideration. Surely, the Panopticon is, by Foucault’s analysis, a powerful and oppressive force. Why, then, are Jacobs’ “eyes” not considered as such? A new Vienna might need to reconsider these assumptions.

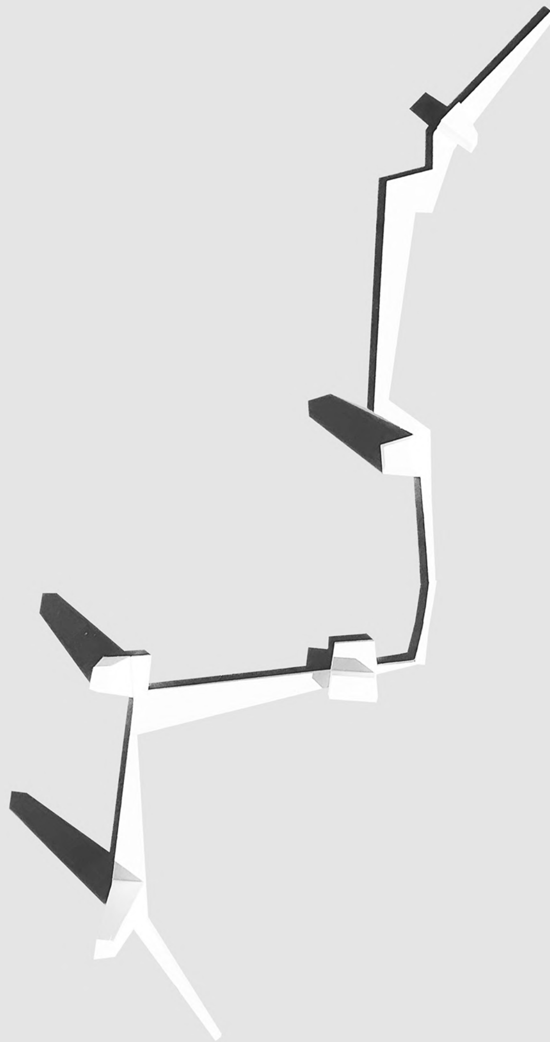
Works Cited:

Eva Blau, The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934. Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999.

George Chauncey, “Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of The Street (1995)” in The People, Place and Space Reader. Routledge, 2014.

Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power," in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).



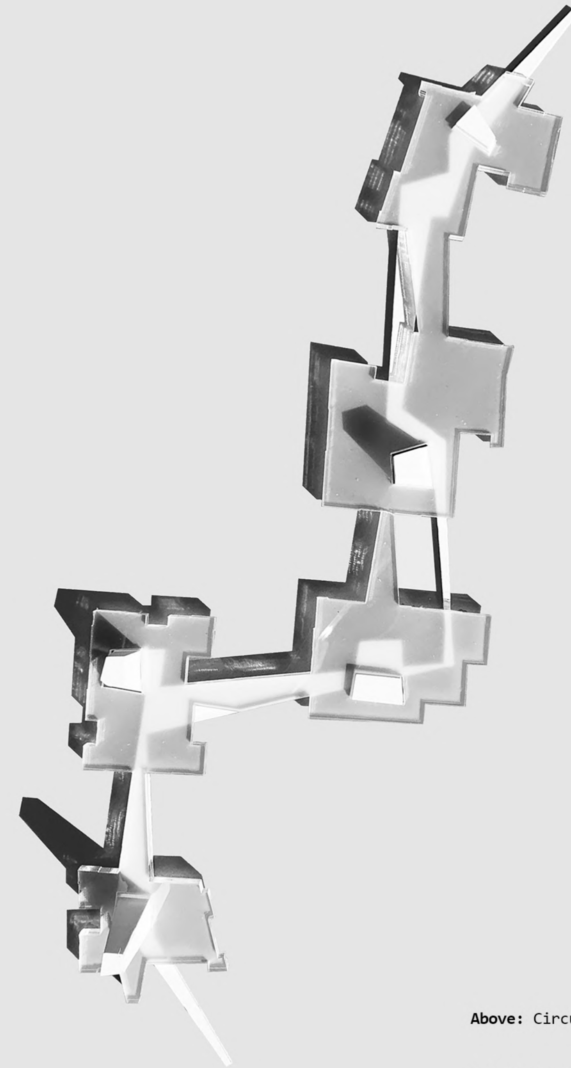
02
eyes off the street

How can digital space challenge and subvert urban space? How can the unfamliar object encourage this new subversive urbanism?

Large-scale public installation in Wahring district of Vienna which challenges the pervasive courtyard housing prototype and its implications of street surveillance. The proposal embraces the new digital method of urban navigation through Google Maps by proposing a series of monumental spaces for “meeting and being met” within the liminal courtyard spaces of the neighborhood, connected by unexpected ruptures in the continuous street facades. The monuments subvert the Kevin Lynch model of landmarks within public space by creating sites of intrigue within the once semi-private areas of the neighborhood, and creating an alternate path of navigation between landmarks which rejects the watchful eye of the city grid.

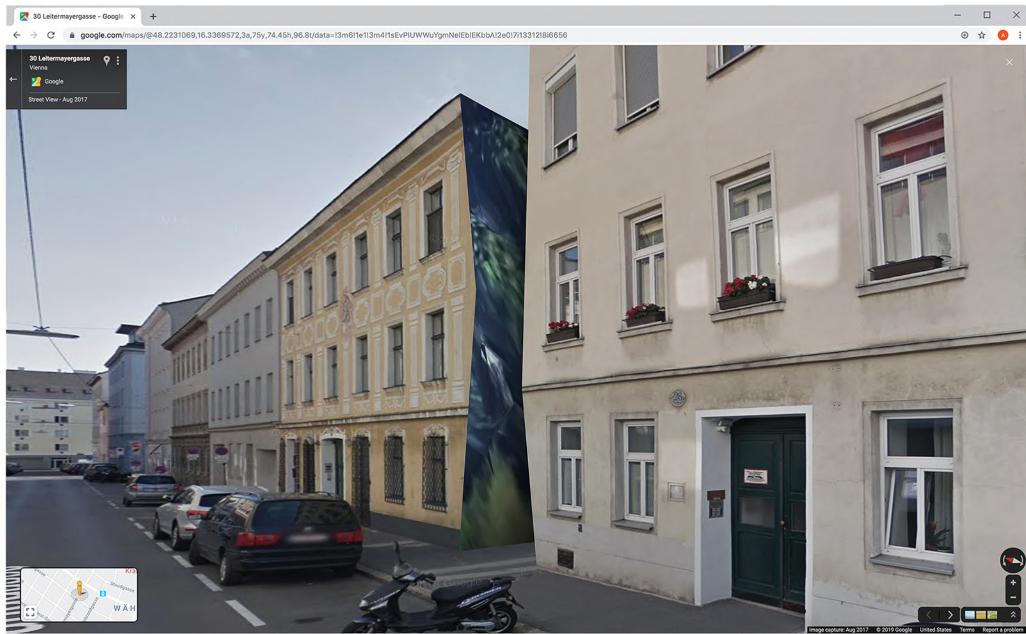
Below: Figure-ground model

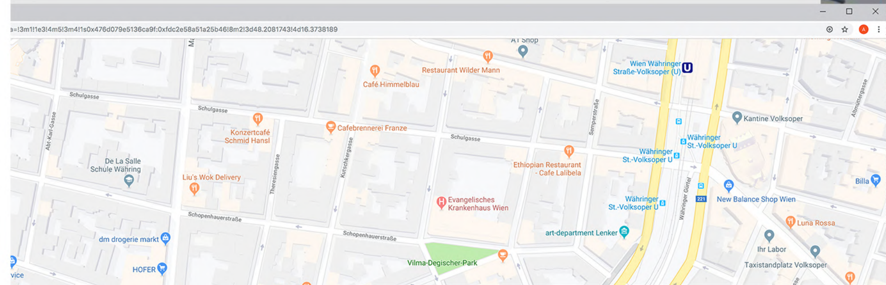
The monuments exist as formally-distinct, foreign objects within the existing mid-block courtyards as moments of uncanny, out-of-scale intervention.

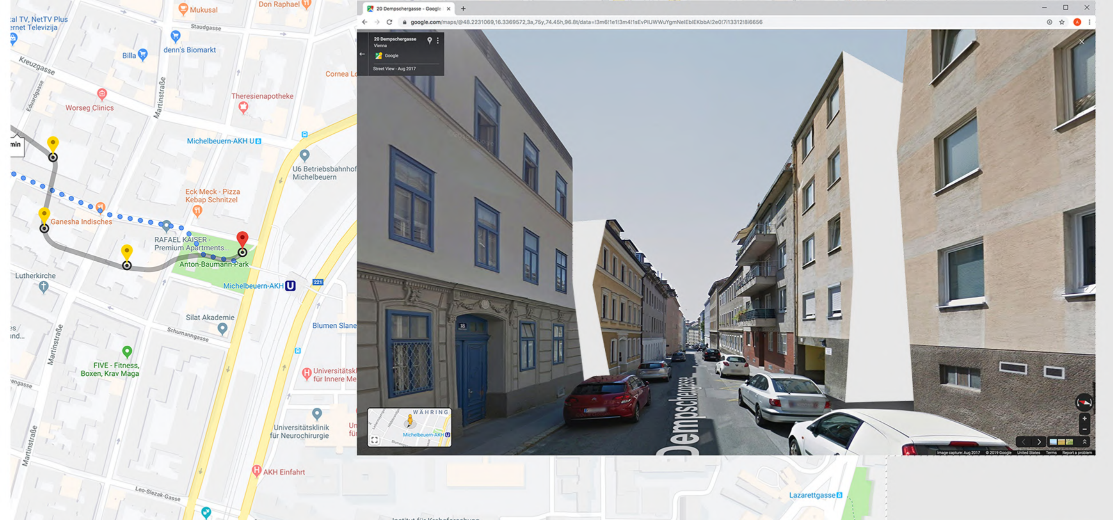


Above: Circulation model

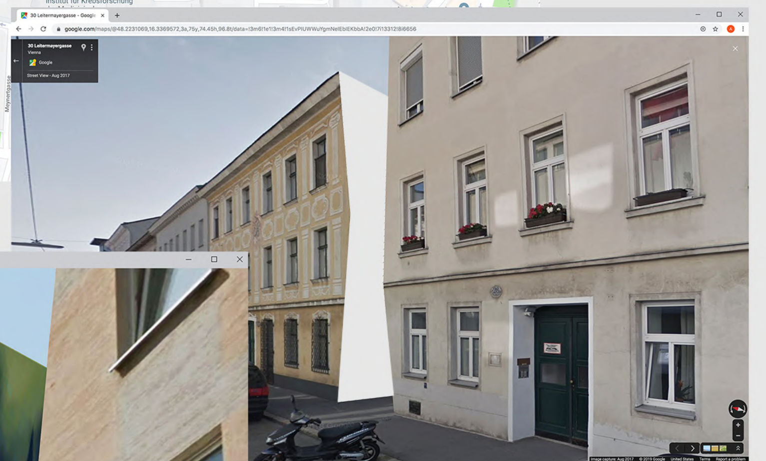
Pedestrians are able to reject of the street grid, moving instead between the mid-block courtyards (clear) or through an alternate, underground pathway (white) connecting the monuemnts.


30 Leitermayergasse - Google
google.com/maps/@48.2231069,16.3369572,3a,75y,74.45h,96.8t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sEvPlUWWuYgmNelEblEKbbA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656
30 Leitermayergasse
Vienna
Google
Street View - Aug 2017
Image capture: Aug 2017 © 2019 Google United States Terms Report a problem



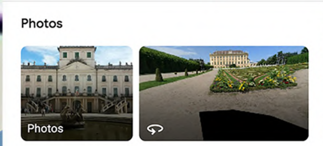

Restaurant Wilder Mann
Café Himmelblau
Wien Währinger Straße-Volksoper (U)
Cafebrennerei Franze
Konzertcafé Schmid Hansl
De La Salle Schule Währing
Kantine Volksoper
Währinger St.-Volksoper
Ethiopian Restaurant - Cafe Lalibela
Liu's Wok Delivery
Evangelisches Krankenhaus Wien
New Balance Shop Wien
Billa
Luna Rossa
dm drogerie markt
art-department Lenker
Ihr Labor
Vilma-Degischer-Park
Taxistandplatz Volksoper
HOFER
Mukusal
Don Raphael
denn's Biomarkt
Billa
Theresienapotheke
Worseg Clinics
Michelbeuern-AKH
U6 Rettungsbahnhof Michelbeuern
Eck Meck - Pizza Kebap Schnitzel
Ganesha Indisches
RAFAEL KAISER Premium Apartments
Anton-Baumann-Park
Lutherkirche
Michelbeuern-AKH
Silat Akademie
Blumen Slane
FIVE - Fitness, Boxen, Krav Maga
Universitätsklinik für Neurochirurgie
AKH Einfahrt
Venster 99
Pyro x pert Feuerwerk
Centimeter VII Restaurant bei den Stadtbahnbögen
Institut für Krebsforschung
Lazarettgasse
Heinz-Heger-Park

20 Dempschergasse - Google
google.com/maps/@48.2231069,16.3369572,3a,75y,74.45h,96.8t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sEvPlUWWuYgmNelEblEKbbA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656
20 Dempschergasse
Vienna
Google
Street View - Aug 2017
WÄHRING
Michelbeuern-AKH
Dempschergasse
Image capture: Aug 2017 © 2019 Google United States Terms Report a problem

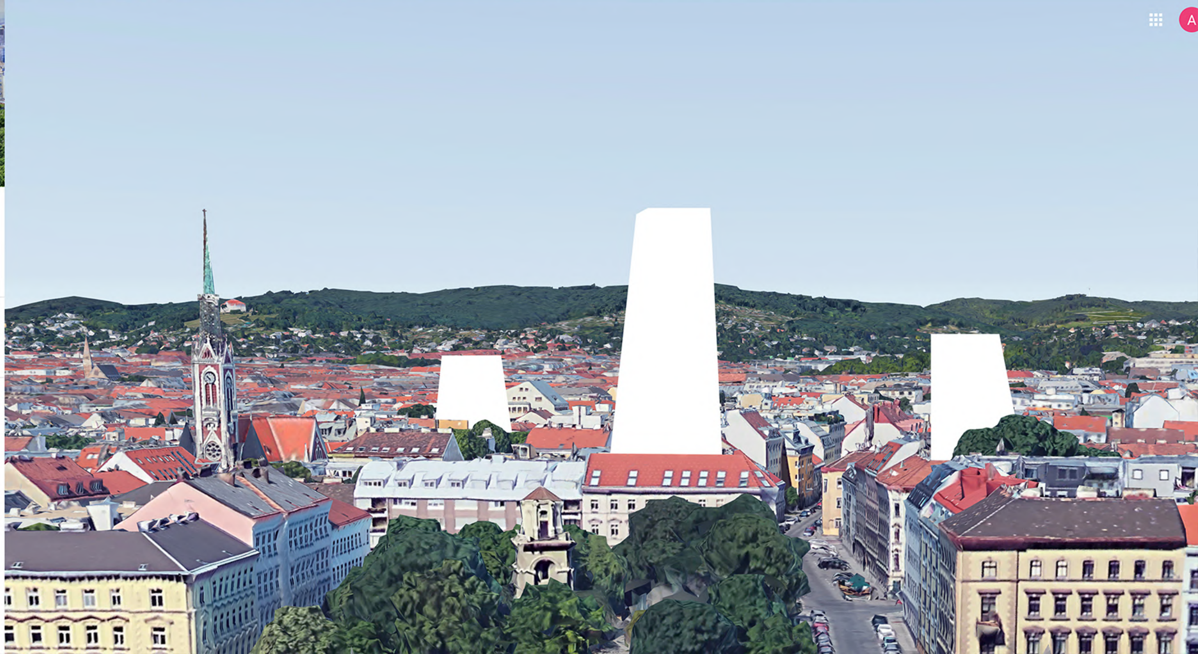


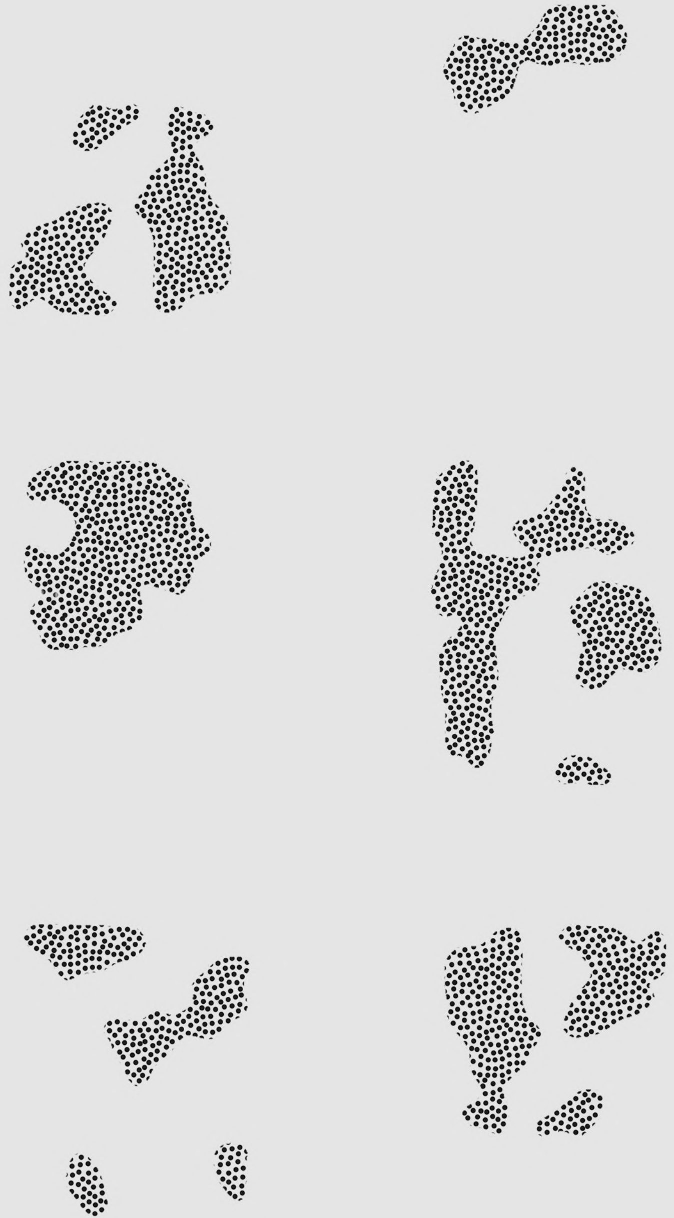
Vienna - Google Maps
google.com/maps/place/Vienna,+Austria/@48.219883,16.3447989,47a,35y,310.27h,79t/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x476d079e5136ca9f:0xfdc2e58a51a25b46!8m2!3d48.2081743!4d16.3738189
Vienna, Austria

Vienna
Wien
Austria
Cloudy · 55°F
10:13 PM
Directions
Save
Nearby
Send to your phone
Share
Photos



Photos
Quick facts
Vienna, Austria's capital, lies in the country's east on the Danube River. Its artistic and intellectual legacy was shaped by residents including Mozart, Beethoven and Sigmund Freud. The city is also known for its Imperial palaces, including Schönbrunn, the Habsburgs' summer residence. In the





03
constructing darkness

When the wanderer rejects the sidewalk, what darkness manifests along its path? How can this darkness facilitate a new urban opacity?

Architectural-scale development of *eyes off the street*, proposing urban-scale monuments that celebrate urban opacity and refuge along the new anti-street. The monuments are constructed of the rubble from the perimeter buildings which were demolished to rupture the city grid in *eyes off the street*, and connect the this new path to existing tunnels beneath the city. Digital satelite imagery is projected onto the exterior of the monuments to camoflauge them in digital space, but their interiors are hollow and materially raw, acting as wind shafts to cool the underground and provide shelter for activity which was previously surveilled by the Red Vienna facade. The result is a series of cenotaphs to the sidewalk: rejections of street surveillance and celebrations of a new urban darkness.

Below/right: Material studies using plaster, rubble and projection.

Digital images of surrounding satellite data are projected onto the outside of the cenotaphs to create a shell that simultaneously shelters through camouflage and attracts visitors through its monumental uncanniness.