

Cairo's

# Patterns

language

للقاهرة

# النمطية

اللغة

a catalogue of patterns extracted from Cairo's built environment, public space and spatial practices

كتالوج للأَمْطَاتِ المُسْتَخْرَجَةِ مِنَ الْبَيْئَةِ الْعِمْرَانِيَّةِ فِي الْقَاهِرَةِ،  
وَالْمَكَانِ الْعَامَّةِ وَالْمُمَارَسَاتِ الْإِنشِطَةِ الْمَكَانِيَّةِ

by  
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**URBAN IDENTITIES IN CRISIS**  
**Redefining Vernacular Architecture in Cairo**

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## INTRODUCTION

This research stems from a critical reflection on the urban processes of growth that trigger the construction of new cities in Egypt, in particular the development of the New Administrative Capital (NAC) that sits 45 km to the East of Cairo.

Over the last 50 years, Cairo's built environment has exploded onto its agricultural land, both formally and informally, within its urban fabric, and into the desert around it, in the shape of desert archipelagoes. This is clearly visible when comparing satellite imagery from 1985 and 2020. Egypt's government promotes the new capital as the key to reducing Cairo's urban load as a result of its explosive metropolitan population, currently at 21.3 million projected to over 40 million by 2050. The NAC is well underway with ongoing construction clearly visible on site and from neighboring cities such as New Cairo.

What is striking about the NAC, besides the scale of the development, is its architectural and urban narrative. The narrative here entails not only the discourse through which the government presents the project to the public, but also the spatial experience, architectural expression and organization of space. The city from scratch departs from its predecessor, Cairo, taking seemingly little to no reference from it. Unfortunately "the words chaotic, overcrowded, cacophonous, disorganized, confusing, polluted, dirty, teeming, sprawling, and so on" are what

## المقدمة

seem to come to the minds of the government and city planners. In an effort to establish legitimacy and a new stronghold to represent the prosperity of the regime, the government seems to have been eager to move away from Cairo altogether and start with a blank canvas in the desert, focusing on gestures of power and grandeur and not on the needs and everyday lives of the population.

The aim of this work is to observe, analyze and reflect on the social, cultural, economic, urban, architectural, (in)formal, and political layers of Cairo to examine the need to return to the vernacular in search for a local identity. The city offers an opportunity to dig deeper into its fabric and extract narratives of how people live their everyday lives and adapt their built environment to their needs, beyond the physical space that exists, from its urban core and historic centers to its desert cities and extensions.

## CAIRO'S PATTERN LANGUAGE

As previously shown in The Glossary, the contested definition of vernacular architecture and the process of redefining it revealed that the focus of the definition has been linked to formalistic and aesthetic expression, process and materiality. There is a gap in the study of vernacular architecture that focuses on the relationship between the built environment and spatial practices, the essence that makes the architecture livable. There is value in understanding how people behave and engage with the built environment, effectively transforming space into place, ultimately making it vernacular through its occupation and appropriation.

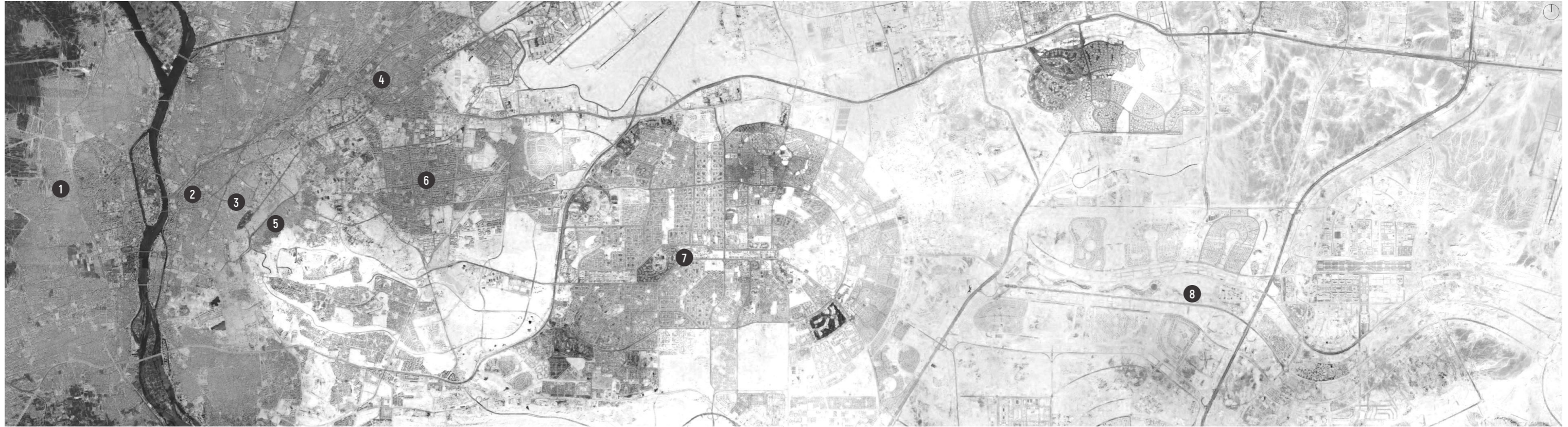
The questions of whether there are lessons to be learnt from Cairo is addressed by looking at the relationship between the urban and architecture fabric and people's spatial practices instead of looking to the Islamic Architecture of Old Cairo or the Colonial and Post-Colonial Architecture of Downtown Cairo or the Neoliberal Architecture of New Cairo. The search for patterns transcends ornamentation and aesthetics but instead focuses on how the Cairenes, people of Cairo, have made space their own to fulfil their needs.

Since the research also investigates the relationship between the Urban Core and the Desert Cities, a series of neighborhoods where chosen to show a spectrum along the cross-section of

## اللغة النمطية للقاهرة

Cairo. The areas chosen for the study were based on the author's access to these neighborhoods as well as support from previous investigation and research conducted on specific neighborhoods in Cairo. The neighborhoods visited by the author during the fieldwork include Islamic Cairo, Downtown Cairo, Heliopolis (Masr Al-Gadida), Nasr City and New Cairo. Other neighborhoods that were studied through second hand research include Ard Al-Liwa and Mansheyet Nasir. The patterns were identified upon recurrence of the pattern in more than one neighborhood in Cairo, across varying socio-economic scales.

The lens used to extract patterns from Cairo's built environment looked at seemingly mundane and inconsequential everyday occurrences that took on more than their intended life as a direct result of people's interference with them. These patterns were then categorized into tangible and intangible patterns. The tangible patterns were further divided into elements, space and transit. The overlaps between the patterns are represented in a matrix that demonstrates the cross-overs between people and place.



- 1 ARD AL-LIWA
- 2 DOWNTOWN CAIRO
- 3 ISLAMIC CAIRO
- 4 HELIOPOLIS
- 5 MANSHIYET NASER
- 6 NASR CITY
- 7 NEW CAIRO
- 8 NEW ADMINISTRATIVE CAPITAL

# B

## BALCONY

AS VIEW POINT  
 AS SOCIAL CORRIDOR  
 AS LAUNDRY  
 AS MARKETPLACE  
 AS EXTENSION  
 AS PRIVACY

## BRIDGE

AS TRANSIT  
 AS CONNECTOR  
 AS SEPARATOR  
 AS BUS/TOKTOK STOP  
 AS JOB HIKING  
 AS BILLBOARD  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS HUB  
 AS PARKING  
 AS PLAYSPACE  
 AS CULTURAL HUB  
 AS STREET VENDORS

# E

## EMPTY PLOT

AS OPPORTUNITY  
 AS INFORMAL TRANSPORT HUB  
 AS MARKETPLACE/VENDORS  
 AS PARKING  
 AS PLAYSPACE  
 AS LIVELIHOOD

# F

## FENCE

AS BOUNDARY  
 AS TERRITORY  
 AS PRESERVATION  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS MARKETPLACE

# I M

## INTERACTIONS

AS SOCIAL PILLARS  
 AS GREETINGS  
 AS MARKETPLACE  
 AS PLACEMAKING

## MARKETPLACE

AS WALL  
 AS FENCE  
 AS SIDEWALK  
 AS STREET  
 AS EVENTS  
 AS HUB  
 AS (IN)FORMAL  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS ECONOMIC NETWORK

## MATERIALITY

AS TEXTURE  
 AS COLOR  
 AS POROSITY  
 AS STRUCTURE  
 AS HISTORY/HERITAGE  
 AS LOCAL AVAILABLE RESOURCES

## MINARET

AS HISTORY/HERITAGE  
 AS ISLAMIC SYMBOL  
 AS STORYTELLING

## MIXED-USE

AS ZONING  
 AS STREET  
 AS TYPOLOGY  
 AS DIVERSITY  
 AS NEED-BASED  
 AS EYES ON THE STREET

## MODULARITY

AS CONSTRUCTION  
 AS LIVING  
 AS STREET VENDORS  
 AS MARKETPLACE

## MONORAIL

AS TRANSIT  
 AS CONNECTOR  
 AS SEPARATOR  
 AS BILLBOARD

# P

## PARK

AS GREEN ISLAND  
 AS (UN)INHABITED  
 AS URBAN OASIS  
 AS BREATHING SPACE  
 AS PLAYSPACE  
 AS PRAYER SPACE

## PASSAGEWAY

AS SHELTER/URBAN OASIS  
 AS HUB  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS TRANSIT  
 AS EVENTS

## PIGEON TOWER

AS LIVELIHOOD  
 AS SPORT  
 AS PLAYSPACE  
 AS VIEWPOINT

# R

## ROOF

AS URBAN LANDSCAPE  
 AS URBAN GARDEN  
 AS SATELLITE CITY  
 AS HISTORY/HERITAGE  
 AS PLAYSPACE  
 AS LAUNDRY  
 AS STORAGE  
 AS HOME EXTENSION  
 AS LIVELIHOOD  
 AS ANIMAL BREEDING

# S

## SIDEWALK

AS SEATING  
 AS MARKETPLACE  
 AS SPILLOVER  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS BICYCLE PARKING  
 AS STREET VENDORS

## SIGNAGE

AS BILLBOARD  
 AS STOREFRONT  
 AS TIME MAKER  
 AS WAYFINDING  
 AS TRAFFIC POLICE  
 AS TERRITORIALITY

## SPILLOVER

AS TEMPORALITY  
 AS TRANSFORMATIVE  
 AS (IN)FORMAL  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS NEED-BASED

## SQUARE

AS LIBERATION  
 AS PROCESSION  
 AS MEMORIAL  
 AS EVENTS  
 AS TRANSIT

## STREET

AS SOCIAL CORRIDOR  
 AS TRANSIT  
 AS PROCESSION  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS PLAYSPACE  
 AS EVENTS  
 AS COMMON EATING  
 AS SPILLOVER  
 AS PARKING

## STREET ISLAND

AS REFUGE  
 AS BILLBOARD  
 AS SEATING  
 AS MARKETPLACE  
 AS STREET VENDORS

## STREET VENDOR

AS TERRITORIALITY  
 AS MARKETPLACE  
 AS FLEXIBILITY  
 AS PLACEMAKING  
 AS EVENTS  
 AS FAHLAWA OR CREATIVITY

T

## TEMPORALITY

AS DYNAMIC  
AS SCALE  
AS EVENTS  
AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICES  
AS MARKETPLACE  
AS PLACEMAKING

## TREE

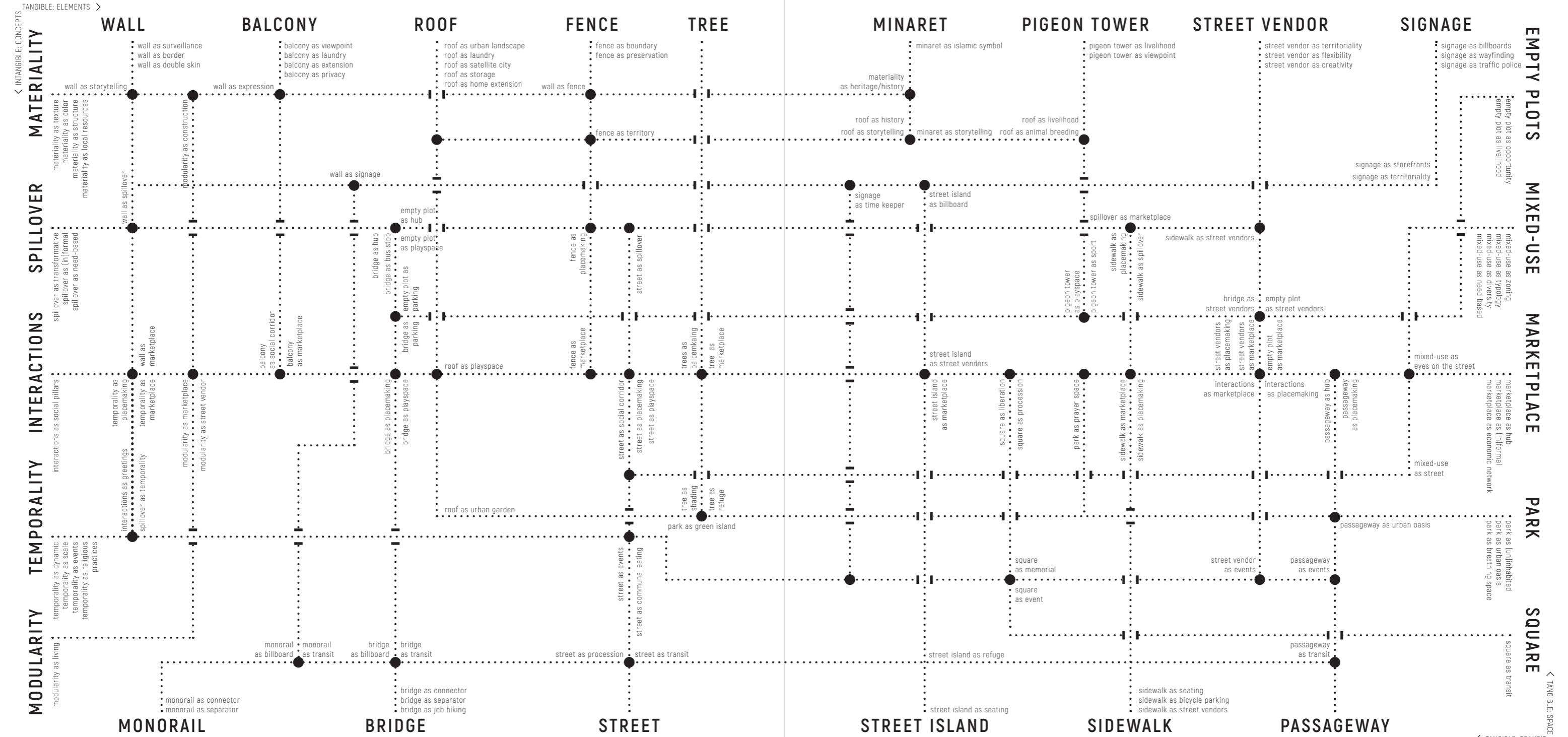
AS REFUGE  
AS SHADING  
AS MARKETPLACE  
AS PLACEMAKING

W

## WALL

AS STORY TELLING  
AS EXPRESSION  
AS SIGNAGE  
AS SURVEILLANCE  
AS BORDER  
AS FENCE  
AS HISTORY  
AS MARKETPLACE  
AS SPILLOVER  
AS DOUBLE SKIN







## BALCONY

The balcony is an intrinsic part of the residential typology in Cairo. As a result of the climatic conditions of the city, balconies provide an inbetweenness to the home, a realm that exists between the home and the street. Across Cairo, these balconies take on many lives and as the eyes are the windows to the soul, balconies reveal hidden stories about how people live their lives.

From how they are treated to how they are used, balconies serve as versatile spaces, offering viewpoints into both the physical surroundings and the lives of residents. Reflecting the sociable nature of Cairenes, balconies transform into hubs for social interactions, facilitating conversations, greetings, and the exchange of news as well as providing eyes on the street. Beyond the social dimension, these spaces also play practical roles, serving as makeshift laundry rooms and even marketplaces where goods are sold directly to residents. In densely populated areas, balconies are optimized as extensions of homes, enclosed with sliding windows. The addition of intricate wooden screens blend interior and exterior experiences.

The balcony serves as an integral component of community life, providing a multifaceted lens into the daily activities and needs of the residents, playing a crucial role in the social, domestic, and commercial aspects of life in Cairo.

- as viewpoint
- as social corridor
- as laundry
- as marketplace (basket-sabat)
- as extension
- as privacy

## الشرفة



### as viewpoint

Balconies act as a viewpoint not only outward onto the street or the view of a courtyard or Nile River, they also offer a viewpoint into the lives of people. How they occupy balconies provides a portal into their needs and reflect how these needs are met. They also act as eyes on the street ensuring the safety of those occupying and moving through the neighborhoods.



### as social corridor

Egyptians are a sociable breed of people, therefore, balconies are an extension of that quality. Conversations, sentiments, greetings, news, congratulations and condolences are all exchanged through these balconies within neighborhoods. This behavior is a direct reflection of the feeling of community.



### as laundry

Most homes in Cairo do not have a laundry room or drier, the former due to limited space,, the latter due to the warm climate. Alternatively, the laundry lines in-front of the balcony are markers or domesticity. They reflect the simplest signs of life and existence. They are a vibrant addition to the facades and streets, giving passersby or neighbors a viewpoint into people's daily lives.



### as marketplace (basket-sabat)

In many busy streets across Cairo, the balcony acts as a marketplace. Karts either hand pulled or pulled by donkeys travel up and down streets selling goods ranging from break to vegetables and fruits. Instead of people leaving the comfort of their homes for daily goods, the seller approaches the building, the basket (locally known as *sabat*) is lowered by the resident, the seller places the product, the basket is pulled up and then the money is lowered back to the seller.



### as extension

The balcony provides ample space and in a densely populated area where floor are is limited, the space allocated to the balcony is optimized by acting as an extension to the home. Sliding aluminum and glass windows are used to enclose the balcony making this exterior space and extension of the home.



### as privacy

The mashrabeyah has acted as a means of blending the interior and exterior experiences with a thin intricate wooden screen. It allowed people to view the street within the privacy of their own home, further allowing natural light and ventilation into enclosed spaces.



## BRIDGE

As part of the efforts of the transit authority, under the current administration, to alleviate traffic within Cairo, with Cairo's traffic being a signature of its experience, bridges have become one of the most frequented urban features of the city. Most, if not all, intersections, traffic lights and roundabouts in New Cairo, 6th of October, Nasr City and Heliopolis (Masr Al-Gadida) have been replaced with bridges. Although bridges that cross the Nile River, such as 6th of October Bridge and the Ring Road, supersede these newer ones, the visual memory of Cairo has been altered by its new assortment of bridges.

And where there is infrastructure that overshadows the city, life is sure to flourish within its crevices as a result of the tenacity of its people. As a result of the already limited space within the city and lack of public space, people have taken to the shelter that bridges provide and have transformed this overlooked void through placemaking into places of commercial, cultural and social opportunity, despite the threat that bridges pose of separating communities.

To take the bridge as an unchallenged structure super imposed over the city, cutting through neighborhoods and seeing it only as a means to an end rather than a destination, is to overlook the power that spatial practices have to convert space into place.

as transit  
 as connector  
 as separator  
 as bus/toktok stop  
 as job hiking  
 as billboard  
 as placemaking  
 as hub (social and commercial)  
 as parking  
 as playspace  
 as street vendors

الكوبري



### as transit

Bridges have been erected across Cairo over the last few years at an exponential rate. They have replaced many roundabouts and intersections in an effort to alleviate traffic and reduce congestion in Nasr City, Heliopolis, New Cairo, 6th of October city among others. They have support smoother transit from one side of the city to the other, but at what cost to their surrounding environment.



### as connector

Bridges act as connectors that stitch Greater Cairo and facilitate swifter movement, supporting vehicular modes of transport as the priority and majority. The most infamous bridge is 6th of October Bridge that starts in Nasr City and ends in Dokki, which covers a distance of approximately 20 km that can take from 45 minutes to 90 minutes to cross, with an average of half a million Cairene people using it daily.



### as separator

As bridges prioritize vehicular modes of transport and often newer ones cut through neighborhoods, on the ground level they become separators. Usually built along major axes with heavy traffic flow, they limit people's ability to cross the road on foot (albeit a dangerous endeavor, however not uncommon) as well as a visual separator between two sides of the same neighborhood, at times obstructing views and lowering the value of the apartments around them.



### as bus/toktok stop

With vacant space existing under bridges in a somewhat hidden capacity, informal transportation hubs emerge for buses, micro-buses and toktoks. Depending on the available space and the traffic on the street, the size and capacity of the informal transportation hubs varies.



### as job hiking

The shading below bridges provides shelter and seating for workers that are hired on an hourly or daily basis. This also takes place for smaller vehicles such as mini-trucks, karts and tractors.



### as billboard

Every surface available on a bridge in Cairo may be repurposed to act as a billboard. These include the columns as seen from traffic below the bridge, the side of the bridge as seen from perpendicular traffic and the light posts along the side if the bridge as seen from oncoming traffic.



### as placemaking

As a consequence of the shaded unplanned space beneath bridges, spatial practices emerge. These take shape in informal marketplaces that recur on a regular basis. People have established a sense of belonging and have generated activities to reflect their spatial needs below the bridge. These activities extend fingers into neighboring communities, such as Al-Attaba market that is below Al-Azhar Bridge.



### as hub (social and commercial)

In a more formal and planned capacity, mimicking the patterns in central Cairo, hubs are being built by the entities responsible for new bridges in Nasr City and New Cairo that cater to recreational needs such as cafes, restaurants and even super markets.



### as parking

Due to the limited areas to park in areas such as Zamalek, the area below 15th of May Bridge and 26th of July Bridge is used as a parking lot, supporting the high demand for parking along these high traffic axes with many business, offices, shops, restaurants and cafes along them. The same pattern was utilized below more recent bridges in Nasr City such as Al-Fangary Bridge.



### as playspace

Studio Cairo's 'Malaab El Kobri' or Bridge Stadium acts as a precedent for initiatives to revitalize the area under the bridge in Dahab Island. The program provides a football field with the necessary facilities and playspaces for children to play and for communities to hold workshops.



### as culture hub

Located underneath 15th of May Bridge in Zamalek, Al-Sawy Culture Wheel is a cultural center that acts as a hub of culture, art, cinema and performance as well as workshops for members of the community.



### as street vendors

Taking advantage of the otherwise unutilized space underneath bridges and the flow of traffic and people crossing underneath on foot, street vendors set up in the shade at times acting as a destination or a stop along people's journey below the bridge.



## EMPTY PLOT

Although Cairo has a high urban density with very few empty plots within its urban core, its outer limits share this feature among them. However, there are some exceptions in the city's center where neglected or overlooked spots transform into empty plots.

Empty plots in Cairo serve as versatile spaces, providing opportunities for various spatial practices to unfold. In the absence of formal planning, these plots facilitate informal economies that facilitate parking lots, transportation hubs and marketplaces, both occupied by street vendors who seize the opportunity of a flow. These plots are at times converted into safe playspaces for children and become an opportunity for placemaking.

- as opportunity
- as informal transport hubs
- as marketplace/street vendors
- as parking
- as play space
- as livelihood

## ساحة فارغة



### as opportunity

Empty plots that have not been developed offer opportunities for spatial practices to take place. They are a blank canvas that the community can appropriate to satisfy their unmet needs.



### as informal transport hubs

As a result of lack of formal planning for transportation hubs in new cities, buses and micro-buses occupy empty plots along major axes and transform them into informal transport hubs, mostly likely until the piece of land is sold or developed by the owner.



### as marketplace/street vendors

Street vendors take advantage of unutilized space to set up their business and over time a few street vendors transform into a full-fledged marketplace in empty plots within neighborhoods.



### as parking

Due to limited space throughout the city to accommodate the car capacity, many empty plots are transformed into parking lots. Some are left unattended while others become informally managed by a 'sayes' and require payment to park, on an hourly, daily or monthly basis.



### as playspace

Children are constantly looking for a place to play and empty plots offer a safer alternative to playing in the streets. They utilize the empty plots for football games and games of catch.



### as livelihood

Workers who work on a daily or hourly commission use empty plots to wait and are picked up there for work. Others can set up small businesses such as air-refill and car wash in empty plots to earn a living.





## FENCE

In essence, a fence is a barrier that prevents or controls access to an area by enclosing it. Associated with a sense of safety and security, the fence has emerged as a recurring element with multiple intended and unintended consequences. Although the 2011 Revolution may have played an integral role in the construction of fences in particular around public spaces and government institutions, however, gated communities predated these events. The further the move from the city's core, the greater the need for separation that has now become heavily embedded in the elite Cairene psyche. However, the people of the city have responded to these structures in creative makeshift practices.

Fences have a direct influence on social dynamics and perceptions of safety. They influence the way people move and navigate the city as well as play a role in the growing city's pursuit of safety. Although hostile in nature, they can at times provide the necessary conditions for vibrant and dynamic social scenes to flourish.

as boundary  
as territory  
as preservation  
as marketplace  
as placemaking

السور



#### as boundary

Fences that are erected in the middle of the street as boundaries, force people either to maneuver around them or result in the people forcing their way through them to satisfy their needs of flow between places.



#### as territory

Gated communities are trademarked by a solid wall and gate that give a clear declaration of territoriality. Although they aim to exclude the many from the life within, they provide the illusion of a sense of safety for those within them, encouraging them to navigate the streets, pathways and green spaces provided within. This seldom happens unfortunately as those who choose to live in gated communities rarely choose to engage with others or appropriate the environment around them. This may be a choice or an unspoken agreement with the developers who are responsible for manufacturing these moments.



#### as preservation

Historic sites and monuments are sometimes fenced, depending on their location. These fences act as a means to preserve the monument as well as order in the form of buying an entrance ticket. These fences rarely encourage any spatial practices and deter people from engaging with them as they may be under surveillance.



#### as marketplace

Other fences, such as the corrugated sheets that surround construction sites and that are erected on a temporary yet elongated basis offer the perfect backdrop for marketplaces to emerge and street vendors to use them to display their goods in the most visible way.



#### as placemaking

Some fences offer a sense of a backdrop for social scenes to unfold. With the emergence of markets along these fences in the form of street vendors, a natural reaction is for people to linger and for social interaction to erupt with food vendors emerging to support this activity, creating a vibrant scene along an otherwise overlooked fence. During events such as Ramadan, Christmas and Easter, these fences become a part of the celebration, they may be covered with decorations or act as hosts for street vendors to sell their seasonal products.



## INTERACTIONS

The most innately human thing is interaction between people. Cairenes, although seemingly independent, rely heavily on social engagement in their daily lives. In the simplest of ways, greetings are exchanged in an almost mechanical fashion upon crossing paths with a stranger or entering a local supermarket.

Interactions are seen everywhere. However, within markets and around street vendors, their intensity is greatly experienced. They are the byproduct of all spatial practices and are Cairo's lifeline.

as social pillars  
as greetings  
as marketplace  
as placemaking

## التفاعلات



### as social pillars

Interactions act as the social pillar of the Egyptian community. People enjoy engaging in social interactions as part of living in a city like Cairo where there is ample opportunity for these interactions to occur.



### as greetings

Cairenes by nature are highly social and greetings are constantly exchanged between friends, acquaintance and strangers alike. 'Al-salam alaykom' or peace on you, an Islamic greeting used by all as part of the colloquial language, is the most frequently heard greeting as well as the variations of good morning 'sabah al-kheir' and good evening 'masaa' al-kheir' as strangers cross paths.



### as marketplace

Interactions are the backbone of the marketplace. Vendors are actively trying to encourage buyers to engage with them to purchase their goods and buyers are ready to bargain the lowest price possible. It is the essence of the marketplace and are what encourage people to return in addition to the quality and price of the goods.



### as placemaking

Interactions are both the catalyst as well as the byproduct of placemaking. They are the spark that encourage people to return to the place in which they occurred as they feel welcome in that place. And when people return frequently to a single place, placemaking occurs where people feel a connection to the place and a sense of ownership and belonging.



## MARKETPLACE

The marketplace, locally known as 'al-souq', is among the oldest typologies in Cairo's urban Islamic culture. Beyond its apparent role, the marketplace is also an economic and communication network of exchange. It is also the ultimate expression of people's use of public space. Although formal markets exist within the city, even in modern day malls, informal marketplaces continue to be the backbone of communities.

Marketplaces, known for offering a wide range of goods, thrive throughout Cairo. They utilize various spaces such as walls, fences, sidewalks, and streets to facilitate a diverse array of spatial practices. These marketplaces, formal or informal in nature, act as melting pots, attracting people from all over Cairo seeking bargains and fostering social interactions, contributing to a sense of belonging for all participants, including vendors, shoppers, and passersby.

as wall  
 as fence  
 as sidewalk  
 as street  
 as events  
 as hub (social & commercial)  
 as (in)formal  
 as placemaking  
 as economic network

السوق



#### as wall

Marketplaces blossom across of all of Cairo's crevices. Whether of formal or informal nature, walls tend to act as hosts for this form of spatial practices. They become the backdrop for the marketplace to blossom and give a sense of proximity and support the display of vendors' goods.



#### as fence

Other fences, such as the corrugated sheets that surround construction sites and that are erected on a temporary yet elongated basis offer the perfect backdrop for marketplaces to emerge and street vendors to use them to display their goods in the most visible way.



#### as sidewalk

The sidewalk offers a protected zone away from the intensity of oncoming traffic for markets to emerge. The market utilizes the element of the sidewalk curb and possible fences and vegetation on the sidewalk to establish the territory of the market. Since the sidewalk is always available, a market may be completely removed at the end of the day and return the next day as if it has always been there.



#### as street

In less high traffic neighborhoods, street vendors set up along the street where they are visible and easily accessible, transforming the street into a marketplace. These include food trucks making fool (fava beans), ta'meyah (falafel) and eggs in areas where there are bus stops and heavy traffic to attract the most customers. In areas such as Al-Abakeyah Garden, the street was completely closed and was later transformed into one of the busiest markets in the area, extending into the neighboring streets around it.



#### as events

Small events such as Friday prayers in larger community mosques attract street vendors which then transform the area around the mosque into a Friday market. Larger events such as Ramadan, Easter and Christmas, transform markets themselves to reflect the change in seasons selling lanterns and sweets, transforming the feeling of the marketplace completely.



#### as hub (social & commercial)

The marketplace is the melting pot for people from all over Cairo, everyone looking for the best bargain. They offer goods and services at a much lower price than traditional stores and supermarkets. They encourage people to get what they need but also to catch up on the latest news.



### as (in)formal

There are both formal and informal markets across Cairo. The distinction comes from the nature in which they were planned and organized. Formal markets are set up within certain zones such as Al-Rehab market in New Cairo. Informal markets emerge out of the need of the people and a search for livelihood and tend to occupy urban voids such as empty plots, streets and sidewalks.



### as placemaking

The marketplace gives the feeling of belonging to everyone who uses it, the vendors, the shoppers and those who pass through. It provides ample opportunity to shop, bargain, socialize and catch up on the latest news in the community.



### as economic network

There is an inherent structure to the operation of these markets, the chief vendor, the arrangement of the vendors and the flexibility of the market. Although in informal markets vendors do not legally own the land, they perceive it as their own. Different markets are known for different types of goods, such as fresh food, garments and shoes, books, wholesale raw materials, wholesale packaged food, pets, and handicraft production.



## MATERIALITY

Materiality plays a vital role in the perception of space. Although it may be undistinguishable to the people who occupy the space, the materials in that space influence how people engage with it. These materials narrate the stories of the city through texture, color and porosity. They hold the stories of the past as well as the stories of everyday lives.

Materiality is a direct reflection of the socio-economic archetype of the city. Modern day Cairo is nothing if not a concrete and brick jungle. If the ornaments, cornices and crenellations of the new cities are stripped away, it reveals that the essence remains the same, from large scale construction of building blocks to small scale street vendors.

as texture  
as color  
as porosity  
as structure  
as history/heritage  
as local available resources

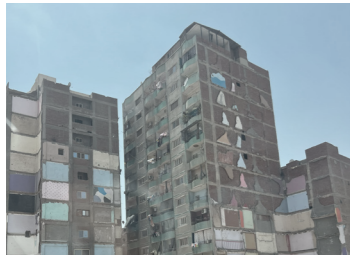
## المادية





### as texture

Texture plays an interesting role in the emergence of spatial practices. Rough materials although may appear as deterring attract more activity as they provide a backdrop for these activities to take place. The solid stone walls of Al-Moez Street encourage more interaction than the glass walls of storefronts in Korba or New Cairo. The level of visibility between the interior and exterior deters spatial practices.



### as color

Color is a reflection of the personalization of space. Personalized space is one that is touched by those who use it and claim ownership over it. Bridges and walls covered with graffiti express the presence of people in space. Colored balconies along the ring road reflect the people's desire to make space their own and be seen.



### as porosity

The choice of materials and patterns influences the level of porosity and interaction between the interior and exterior realms. The 'mashrabeyah' or wooden screen used in the old city allows natural light and ventilation into the space while allowing the resident to view the street without being seen.



### as structure

Informal areas are marked by the concrete and brick modular structures. They are an expression of people's resourcefulness to satisfy their own needs outside of what the government failed to provide.



### as history/heritage

The heavy load bearing stone walls of Old Cairo with their ornamentation and inscription hold the stories of the city and narrate them to all those who travel through the city.



### as local available resources

The common denominator between structures built in new urban developments and informal settlements is that they all use concrete and red brick. Red brick is local to Nile River region as it is made out of the river bank mud. Cement factories across Cairo have made concrete highly accessible. The pigeon towers recognizable along Cairo's skyline utilize wood construction. These towers use wood as it is light weight and is easily constructed atop residential blocks in high density neighborhoods. On a smaller scale, street vendors utilize scrap and flexible materials to set up in markets, such as wood scaffolding, tarps and tents, blankets and crates.



## MINARET

A minaret is a tower that is built either on top of or adjacent to a mosque. It is used to make 'athan' or the Muslim call to prayer and has come to symbolize the presence of Islam in the built environment.

Known as the city of a thousand minarets, the minaret is synonymous with Cairo's identity. Evident in every neighborhood, it represents not only a religion but the community that comes with it.

as history/heritage  
as islamic symbol  
as stroytelling

## المئذنة



### **as history/heritage**

Cairo is known as the city of a thousand minarets. Minarets are an intrinsic part of Cairo's history and heritage. They act as markers of time, especially in Old Cairo where the dynasties from the Fatimid to the Mamluk to the Ottoman.



### **as islamic symbol**

The minaret is the most iconic symbol for the Islamic faith and its manifestation in the built environment. They are seen across the city and are used for the call to prayer, signaling to all Muslims that it is time to head to the mosque, a sacred space of prayer, peace, congregation and social engagement.



### **as stroytelling**

The details of each of the minarets tells a story about the influences during each dynasty. The height, the width and the inscriptions narrate the rich the history of the city.



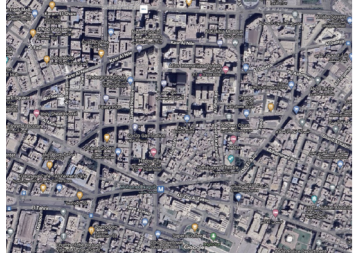
## MIXED-USE

As highly advocated by Jane Jacobs, the distribution of uses is integral to the vitality of the fabric of the city. When functions are separated, they result in isolated urban islands that promote vehicular transit over pedestrian encounters. In stark contrast, mixed-use offers a diverse existence that fosters engagement and encourages social as well as economic opportunities for a livelier city.

Mixed-use is a notion that is applicable on a gradient of scales, allowing for a diverse range of user groups to coexist and generate various spatial practices. From mixed-use zoning to streets to typologies, this pattern ensures a dynamic mix of activities and users, promoting a sense of belonging, encouraging diverse spatial practices and ensuring eyes on the street.

as zoning  
as street  
as typology  
as diversity  
as need-based  
as eyes on the street

## الاستخدام المختلط



**as zoning**

In areas where mixed-use zoning occurs, spatial practices occur due to the variety of user groups present simultaneously as well as the presence of people across all hours of the day such as in Downtown Cairo.



**as street**

Streets that offer a variety of uses tend to encourage people to prolong their stay and this generates spatial practices such as street vendors and spillover from the shops and cafés along these streets.



**as typology**

Mixed-use buildings attract a diverse user group to the street and neighborhood that they are located in. the interactions in the interior realm are translated into the exterior realm as well.



**as diversity**

The mixed-use pattern ensure a diverse set of functions as well as a diverse set of users. This encourages a diverse set of practices to take place within.



**as need-based**

The mixed-use pattern stems from the notion of complementary activities and users that allow an area to encourage a sense of belonging and as a result the occurrence of spatial practices.



**as eyes on the street**

With a diverse group of people present within a neighborhood, street or plaza during all hours of the day and into the night, the practice of eyes on the street is always activated. This enacts a sense of safety and security for all those who use the space.



## MODULARITY

In a city as seemingly chaotic as Cairo, all signs of logic may appear to have been lost. However, modularity can be found in the most unexpected places. Modularity provides the key to the consistent production of space, whether on the scale of an urban block or a street vendor. It is an embedded logic and an inherent skill within Cairenes that takes materializes in an informal settlement and a luxury urban development alike.

Modularity sustains the generation and sustenance of spatial practices. When unutilized space is occupied and appropriated by one, the rest follow suite adopting modularity to rapidly make the most out of the opportunity at hand and the shortest amount of time possible. Modularity holds the possibility for the efficient use of both materials and space.

## النمطية المتكررة

as construction  
as living  
as street vendors  
as marketplace



### as construction

Limited by the available and commonly used materials, concrete and brick, builders have perfected the construction module to minimize waste and produce the most efficient use of space in high density neighborhoods. Structures in informal settlements are left open ended with steel reinforcement sticking out of concrete columns for future expansion when needed.



### as living

Living spaces are divided based on modules, ones for sleeping, living, eating and utilities. The larger units are then repeated in a modular way to generate residential blocks. This is applicable to informal housing where the people determine their own modules and in planned urban development's where the developer determines these modules based on market trends and cost per square meter.



### as street vendors

Street vendors use modules that are available to them to demarcate their territory. Street vendors that set up on the sidewalk can use the number of stones or pavement to mark their space. Others that are more permanent such as kiosks use crates and cardboard boxes to set up their kiosk and determine the amount of space they need.



### as marketplace

Marketplaces across Cairo utilize modularity as a way to structure the available space. Each vendor is allocated a certain amount of space and certain number of modules to occupy. The module used in Al-Atabba Market is a flexible one as this is not a permanent market. It includes a table metal on wheels with an attachable vertical component for additional display space and a foldable wood table. Additional metal structure is available to set up an enclosed module with a cloth as a roof. Another example is the module in Al Wekalah which is the clothing rack.



## MONORAIL

The monorail is the national project that is promoted by the current government as the longest monorail in the world, in an effort to improve the mobility of the city and reduce traffic congestion and environmental impacts. It is divided into two lines, one that connects the New Administrative Capital to the East of the Nile and the other connects the West of the Nile to 6th of October City, with emphasis on the connection to the new capital, another national project spearheaded by the current government.

Although valiant in its effort, and its presence undoubtedly felt from East to West, the monorail poses some dichotomies. It is intended as a connector, however, its physical presence becomes a separator. It is meant to lower traffic congestion, yet acts alone without supporting public transport for further commuting. It is promoted as a vessel for the people of Cairo, yet undeniably will require a costly ticket to sustain its operation. This leaves only the question of who this structure was in reality intended for.

## المونوريل

as tranist  
as connector  
as separator  
as billboard





### as transit

The monorail is a model of transportation to add to the public transportation network of Cairo. With tickets starting at 50 LE, it begs the question of who would indeed use this model of transit in their daily life.



### as connector

The monorail is intended as a connector between East and West Cairo by connecting to the existing metro system in central Cairo. The stations have started to materialize along its length.



### as separator

The physical existence of the monorail along major axes in New Cairo and 6th of October city has hindered people's ability to cross the road on foot (albeit a dangerous endeavor, however not uncommon) as well as a visual separator between two sides of the same community.



### as billboard

It is as if the motto of such infrastructure in Cairo is to leave no surface unused, the columns of the monorail have been transformed into vertical cylindrical billboards. The intensity and repetition of the columns replaces the same occurrence of street lamps on bridges and highways used as billboards for advertising products, resulting in profit.



## PARK

Although parks are not typically what comes to mind when thinking about Cairo, these pockets of green are quintessential to its urban survival. Their variance in scale facilitates contact with people and encourages a connection to nature away from the smog of the city.

Parks are unfortunately not always viewed with such high regard and at times their abundance, or even proximity to certain institutions, may lead to their neglect and disappearance. However, the ones that do withstand the test of time take on many lives for the people who frequent them. From mere breathing spaces to playspace and prayer spaces, parks offer the opportunity for daily life to flourish within and around them.

as green island  
as (un)inhabited  
as urban oasis  
as breathing space  
as playspace  
as prayer space

## الحديقة



### as green island

Although limited in number and typically fenced, parks across Cairo act as green islands that break up the dense urban fabric of the city.



### as (un)inhabited

Many parks across Cairo have become uninhabited. They have either fallen victim to lack of maintenance, are fenced and ticketed rendering them unaffordable to the masses, or lack features that encourage people to use them. Many such green spaces across New Cairo are open grass blocks in the heart of a residential cluster with a few small trees and are missing pathways, seating or shading to encourage use or prolonged stay.



### as urban oasis

A park acts as an urban oasis in areas of high urban density, offering spaces away from the noise and congestion of the busy streets. They can also provide seating, shading, food outlets and an escape from the hectic pace of the city.



### as breathing space

Parks such as Al-Azhar Park elevate the experience of the urban oasis up above the city, offering space for solitude and reflection. It offers a breathing space, away from the congested and fume ridden streets of Cairo, with uninterrupted views of the city, from the Citadel and the City of the Dead to the Tower of Cairo and the high-rise towers along the Nile River.



### as playspace

Being a safe haven, parks provide playspaces for children of all ages. More recently, initiatives taken by youth, such as the wood, clay and painting workshop set up in the Children's Park in Heliopolis, have attracted a wider range of user groups to these parks.



### as prayer space

Gardeners and workers use the open green spaces throughout the city to perform their prayers when access to a mosque or enclosed space is not available.



## PASSAGeways

Passageways are narrow passages between buildings, typically connecting two streets. This typology is mainly associated with Downtown Cairo. It was studied in depth by CLUSTER in their publication titled Cairo Downtown Passageways: Walking Tour in 2015, which may have influenced its emergence in more recent developments in New Cairo. The passageway's linear geometry that is tucked away from the traffic flowing along main streets serves as a host for a substantial array of activities and spatial practices.

The passageway lends itself as a shelter and urban oasis to those escaping the bustling streets of Cairo and the heat of the city for those who flow through it. Through its inviting nature, it promotes placemaking through spillover and hosting events.

- as shelter/urban oasis
- as hubs (social and commercial)
- as placemaking
- as transit
- as events

## الممرات



#### as shelter/urban oasis

In search for a quiet moment, passageways offer shelter from the busy streets of Cairo. They are pedestrian friendly, are lined with trees and vegetation and offer public seating areas.



#### as hubs (social and commercial)

The passageway offers access to restaurants and cultural activities in Downtown Cairo. This typology has been adopted by developers and recreated in New Cairo offering commercial and retail activities as well as public seating areas.



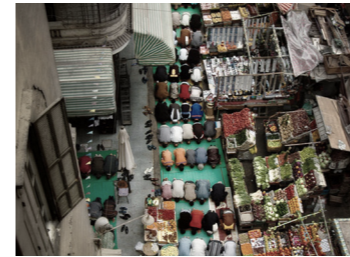
#### as placemaking

The nature of passageways with their intimacy and easy usability generate opportunities for placemaking and help people feel welcome to prolong their stay and engage with others in the space if they choose.



#### as transit

Passageways can also be a means to an end rather than a destination. They act as pedestrian friendly connectors between streets that go through residential or commercial urban blocks.



#### as events

As many places across Cairo, passageways transform during events and take on the spatial practices associated with these events. During Friday prayer, they may be transformed into an outdoor mosque as an extension to a nearby mosque. During Ramadan and Christmas, decorations and festivities take place within the negative volume between the dense city urban fabric.



## PIGEON TOWER

The pigeon tower is a wooden structure built on top of residential neighborhoods in Cairo and is used as a shelter and breeding space for pigeons.

Pigeons are not only considered a delicacy in Egyptian cuisine, they are also bred for sports. As such, these pigeon towers are unique to Cairo's skyline. They are found across low-income neighborhoods and informal settlements where they are manifestations of both a livelihood and passion.

as livelihood  
as sport  
as playspace  
as viewpoint

برج الحمام



### as livelihood

Pigeon towers are a source of livelihood for many within the dense urban fabric of central Cairo. Pigeons are considered a delicacy among Egyptians both rich and poor and as such they are an integral part of the culture. The activity takes over the rooftop of the building including the wooden scaffolding like structure. Many pigeon fanciers either inherit their flocks from older generations or start with it as a hobby and start their own, noting that the main passion comes from seeing the birds flying and returning to the tower again.



### as sport

As part of human nature, keeping animals often transforms into sport. Pigeons are bred for sport and competitions are held between different pigeon fanciers where the goal is to entrap pigeons from other flocks.



### as playspace

Children of pigeon fanciers transform the pigeon tower into their own playspace, playing with the birds. This is also the space where many youngsters take up the hobby and develop the passion for pigeon raising.



### as viewpoint

There are few points in the city that elevate one above the city and provide unparalleled and uninterrupted views of the city as pigeon towers do providing a moment of serenity and solitude away from the hustle and bustle of the city. They are inseparable to Cairo's skyline.



## ROOF

To every structure built in the city, there is a roof. The possibilities for what that roof can be is binary, nothing or everything. The potential for what a roof can become is left to the imagination of those who occupy it. In the hands of the Cairene, the roof provides the canvas to opportunity.

The roof plays a diverse role in shaping Cairo's built environment. As a storyteller, the roof reveals the city's layered history, with juxtaposed minarets, domes, and wooden structures, as well as priorities, with scattered satellite dishes. In addition to serving practical purposes, such as laundry and storage spaces as well as home extensions, roofs take on economic, social and environmental purposes serving as income generators, playspaces and urban gardens. In essence, the roof provides a worthy alternative to the conditions of the street. It encapsulates the complex interplay between tradition, necessity and innovation in Cairo's urban fabric.

as urban landscape  
as urban garden  
as satellite city  
as history/heritage  
as playspace  
as laundry  
as storage  
as home extension  
as animal breeding  
as livelihood

السطح





### as urban landscape

The composition of varying heights, materials and use creates a dynamic urban landscape that is unique to Cairo.



### as urban garden

The utilization of urban gardens throughout the dense urban fabric of the city provide a moment to breathe in the concrete jungle. Clay pots and local vegetation are integrated to create a softer experience to the harsh texture of unfinished brick walls and concrete skeletons.



### as satellite city

The roof scape offers a clear surface area to generate the satellite city, composed of what is locally referred to as 'dish', which refers to the satellite dishes, scattered across Cairo's roofs. These also act as indicators of the density of each of the residential building blocks, where at least every satellite dish represents one family unit.



### as history/heritage

The roof provides a historic timeline of the city, revealing layers as the city progresses. Old and new come together and generate the skyline of the city. A juxtaposition of minarets and domes against the wood structure built on top of roofs offer a lense into the layered history of Cairo.



### as playspace

Craving public space in an overly dense and highly populated city, roofs transform into playspaces for children across the city. The roof offers a safe haven away from the dangers of ongoing street traffic that ultimately endanger children who would otherwise resort to playing in the streets.



### as laundry

In some informal areas, the proximity between buildings is extremely limited that it is not possible to hang laundry outside of the window as it will not see any sun. Alternatively, roofs act as hosts for the simple domestic act of laundry where ample sun light is accessible.



#### as storage

Roofs offer the opportunity to store excess. Depending on the neighborhood, this can range from food to equipment to materials and whether it is inside a built structure such as a shed or exposed on the roof, perhaps gathering the city's dust.



#### as home extension

Limited space in Cairo results in creative solutions, such as using roofs as home extensions. These can be small rooms built on top of a residential building for the 'bawab' or an older son and his wife or gate keeper and his family or whole floor additions that require municipality approval in villas built on private properties or within gated communities.



#### as livelihood (bread making)

Roofs may also be used to generate income for low-income households by utilizing the available area on the roof for bread making. An oven made out of clay is set up on the roof along with the necessary equipment for making 'aish balady' or local bread.



#### as animal breeding (pigeons)

Animal breeding, although predominantly present in rural Egypt, finds its way in the dense urban fabric of Cairo. This takes shape in pigeon towers that are built on top of roofs in the heart of Cairo. These pigeons are then bred for sport and consumption. Another example is during Eid Al-Adha, which is a Muslim celebration aligning with the pilgrimage, many sheep are kept and bred on the streets and on the roofs of buildings ready for the Eid proceedings.



## SIDEWALK

The sidewalk is recognized as the space between the street and the edge of a building or property. While sometimes seeming impossible to locate along the bustling streets of Cairo, and typically abandoned by pedestrians for the street itself, the sidewalk bears more to the city than its role of transit. It encourages placemaking both social and commercial.

The sidewalk lends itself as an urban element open for interpretation along Cairo's streets. It can be a seating area for some, and a marketplace for others. It can support both vehicular as well as alternative modes of transport. It is transformative in nature when not neglected and left unattended.

as seating  
as marketplace  
as spillover  
as placemaking  
as bicycle parking  
as street vendors

الرصيف



#### as seating

Due to the lack of street furniture in Cairo, sidewalks are frequently used as seating, a moment to rest. This can be during transit as one waits for the bus to arrive or for street cleaners to rest or for beggars.



#### as marketplace

The sidewalk offers a protected zone away from the intensity of oncoming traffic for markets to emerge. The market utilizes the element of the sidewalk curb and possible fences and vegetation on the sidewalk to establish the territory of the market. Since the sidewalk is always available, a market may be completely removed at the end of the day and return the next day as if it has always been there.



#### as spillover

Most shops that are along streets have a considerable sidewalk in front of their storefront. The sidewalk acts as an extension for shops, cafes and restaurants in formal and informal capacities alike. For cafes and restaurants, tables, chairs and umbrellas are set up on the sidewalk as an extension of the limited space to increase their income. For shops and stores, products are displayed on tables and racks outside the shop on the sidewalk enticing ongoing passersby to stop and buy their products.



#### as placemaking

The sidewalk can become a very vibrant scene in the heart of the city, in areas that have a homogenous sidewalk that is not interrupted by damage, a garage entrance, a parked car or garbage bins. With street vendors and spillover, people are invited to linger and spend time on the sidewalk and engage in interactions both social and economic.



#### as bicycle parking

An initiative has emerged in Downtown Cairo with rentable bicycles located at a few stations located on the sidewalks. The bright orange color attracts people's attention. This encourages people to reduce their vehicular transport and opt for alternative modes of transport that have a lower carbon footprint.



#### as street vendors

The sidewalk offers an opportunity for mobile street vendors to set up parallel to the street. This provides easy access both to the cars in the street as well as passersby on the sidewalk. Shading provided by trees provides great conditions for prolonged stay during the day. It also provides similar conditions for more permanent street vendors such as kiosks that are common on most street corners throughout Cairo.



## SIGNAGE

With the purpose of monitoring public opinion and debate, signage has become one of the most noticeable elements in the foreground and background of Cairo's built environment.

As a result of such a pervasive presence, diverse manifestations have emerged all over the city. The real estate and the TV industries alike constantly compete for the people's attention through a bombardment of billboards throughout the city. Signage influences perception of place through way-finding, surveillance, passage of time, social status and territoriality.

as billboards  
 as storefronts  
 as time marker  
 as wayfinding  
 as traffic police  
 as territoriality

## اللافتات



### as billboards

With real estate developers competing to gain people's appeal and therefore their investment in their projects, the billboard has become one of the most recognizable elements in Cairo's built environment. These billboards are a trademark of Cairo with advertisements for real estate developments from East to West of Cairo and to the North Coast as the summer months approach. During Ramadan, they campaign for the latest TV series and movies for Eid Al-Fitr and Ramadan offers. Others are used for promotional election campaigns. They dictate what the people should focus their attention on, whether they are a reflection of people's needs is another story.



### as storefronts

Storefront signage plays a huge role in how the store is perceived, which neighborhood it is in or what product it sells. The language used as well to describe the storefront changes from the urban core to the desert cities, shifting from Arabic to English signaling perhaps the social class gap and target audience.



### as time marker

Signage acts as a means of keeping time in parts of the city that are not documented. However, initiatives such as the one to restore Downtown Cairo opted for the unification of all of the signage on all major axes that there is no way now to distinguish the old from the new unless there is a high degree of familiarity in the area.



### as wayfinding

Although not always visible, signage for street names is embedded within the streets of Cairo either as plates attached to the facades of buildings, signage posts or on street lamps. On a larger scale, on major roads, highways and bridges signage is essential, although it is mostly available in Arabic.



### as traffic police

Traffic police are an integral part of Cairo's streets. This particular symbol is seen all across Cairo and is a constant reminder that the streets are watched.



### as territoriality

Signs are used to establish territoriality in particular when it comes to institutions, public and private. Certain signs provoke certain behavior, which can include avoiding walking in this area or taking pictures, influencing people's behavior and deterring spatial practices.



## SPILLOVER

Struggling to contain the contents of its blocks, Cairo in a very literal way spills its interiors over onto its public realm. Although this act may reflect the densely packed city's lack for space within it, it also exposes people's creativity in using the accessible public space in their vicinity to their advantage.

Spillover is a temporal phenomenon that ebbs and flows with the passage of time and reflects the heartbeat of the city. It may be categorized as the silver lining between the formal and the informal, however, the way in which it has been adopted all of the city questions which side it truly belongs to. Spillover as a spatial practice has the power to transform not only streets but entire neighborhoods engaging both the social and the economic layers of the city.

as temporality  
as transormative  
as (in)formal  
as placemkaing  
as need-based

## الامتداد والانتشار



#### as temporality

The flux of spillover is directly linked to the influence of time. Shops spill out during peak hours of traffic to attract as many people as possible to look at their goods. Restaurants and Cafes are affected by the flow of people on weekdays after working hours and on weekends as well in the hours after the Friday prayer as well as later at night for the night owls looking for their casual meeting spot.



#### as transformative

Spillover transforms the feeling of the city. Suddenly, the streets are not quite and empty, they become vibrant, full of color and life.



#### as (in)formal

Dependent on the location, spillover can take place at both a formal as well as informal capacity. Restaurants along certain streets have the required permits to extend their seating areas onto the sidewalk. While shops tend to spillover at a more informal capacity, spreading their goods along the exterior wall of their storefront.



#### as placemaking

Spillover is one of the most genuine forms of placemaking. People feel that the public realm is an extension of their private one. It gives a sense of belonging to those who occupy the space as well as those who pass through out. The vibrancy emitted in this scene gives a sense of ownership to all users and control over how to shape their built environment



#### as need-based

As a result of limited space in the dense city center or the high cost of land in the outskirts of Cairo, spillover attempts to balance the needs of the people by utilizing the public realm. Spatial practices in this public realm in the form of spillover are a reflection of people fulfilling their needs.





## SQUARE

The most infamous public space embedded within the Cairene psyche is the square. The square holds such immense significance to all Egyptians as a direct relation to the events of January 25th, 2011.

Although, as a result of these events, people are no longer encouraged or even allowed to linger in or occupy squares, they have come to serve more than their assigned purpose of transit. They stand as a symbol of resistance and liberation as well as a cause for celebration.

as liberation  
as procession  
as memorial  
as event  
as transit

الميدان



#### as liberation

Tahrir Square or Liberation Square is forever intertwined with the 25th of January revolution and the liberation of Egyptians from 30 year ruling regime of former President Hosni Mubarak. To this day, the weight of the significance of the events of the protests echo in the square and throughout the neighboring streets. Heavy policing and traffic control is always present to ensure the safety and surveillance of the city.



#### as processioion

Tahrir Square has been host to many events over time. The most famous event is the 25th of January revolution. Another in more recent years, 2021, the square has witnessed the moving of the mummies parade from the old Egyptian Museum to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. This saw renovations, restoration and revival of the entire downtown area. Another square of reference for Cairenes is Roxy square in Heliopolis and Mountain View Square in New Cairo.



#### as memroial

Many squares across Cairo are named after characters of significance in Cairo's history and culture. These include a copper statute and engraved stone plinth dedicated to the figure. They keep the memory alive in every day interactions such as giving directions.



#### as event

There are other squares across Cairo that are of reference for Cairenes such as Roxy square in Heliopolis and Mountain View Square in New Cairo. Mountain View Square is managed by the real estate developer Mountain View and are responsible for personalizing the square to reflect different events such as Ramada, Eid, Easter and Christmas. People can be seen crossing the street to reach the square to take family or individual pictures with the set up as a mark of their celebration.



#### as transit

The square or 'midan' was part of the Parisian inspired urban planning of Cairo during the time of Baron Empain. It is embedded in Cairo's transit system in downtown Cairo and also repeated in newer cities' urban planning like New Cairo and the New Administrative Capital. Now, however, many of these squares have been replaced by bridges flying over the squares.



## STREET

The street is a public urban element that belongs to everyone and people have exercised their right to occupy it. Streets range in scale from highways to alleyways which results in variations in how they are used, occupied and appropriated.

The street, although primarily designed for vehicular transport, holds the capacity for the outburst of life around it to flow through it. In Cairo, perhaps as a result of the limited public space designed and made accessible in the city, the street becomes a vessel for placemaking through playspaces, spillover and marketplaces that elevate the transit experience. It embodies events, becoming one with the festivities that its inhabitants celebrate. It transforms into a tool of resistance when occupied by protestors in procession. It emulates the Egyptian instinct of social interaction and engagement.

- as social corridor
- as transit
- as procession
- as placemaking
- as playspace
- as events
- as communal eating
- as spillover

## الشارع



### as social corridor

With their social nature, people are often seen greeting each other on the streets, the 'salam alaikum' exchanged to friends, acquaintances and strangers alike. The presence of varying user groups encourages this social interaction. The width of the street and the height of the buildings influence the intensity of this pattern of behavior.



### as transit

Greater Cairo stretches almost 75 km from East (New Cairo) to West (6th of October City), therefore, its streets carry an immensely heavy load on a daily basis as vehicular transport is the most common method of transport. This includes private cars, taxis, motorcycles, scooters, toktoks, micro-buses and buses. Another layer of transit is walking, as sidewalks are commonly interrupted by construction work, neglected conditions, garage entrances, street vendors among others, people find themselves walking on the street next to ongoing traffic rather than on the sidewalk.



### as procession

During the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the streets acted as the host for people demanding their needs and procession took place between Tahrir Square in Downtown Cairo and the Presidential Palace in Heliopolis, known as 'March of the Millions'. Processions also take place during 'moulids' or saint's festivals, a popular and long lasting tradition across Egypt. 'Moulid Al-Nabi' (Birth of Prophet Muhammed PBUH) towards Al-Hussein Mosque in Old Islamic Cairo. Chants and drums are heard as people occupy the streets in celebration of the Prophet's birth. There are other popular ones such as Moulid Al-Hussein and Moulid Al-Sayyida Zaynab.



### as placemaking

The street acts as a host for placemaking activities thorough out the city. This can vary from street vendors setting up in the street or shops extending their seating areas into the street or cars being used as mobile coffee shops where people park and gather around them, a phenomenon that emerged during covid-19 when business were closed or practiced a curfew.



### as playspace

As a result of limited public space within the city, children often transform the street-scape into playspace, whether its in the form of a friendly game of hide and seek or a game of football, the local go to sport for young boys, with bricks or stones as goal posts.



### as events

Decorations fill the streets as events blossom into the urban fabric of the city. During major events such as Ramadan and Christmas, the streets transform to reflect the vibrancy of these events.



#### as communal eating

During Ramadan, a holy month for the Muslim community, the spirit of giving and sharing is high. This manifests in the streets in the shape of 'ma'edat al-rahman' which is a table that is set up either by individuals, communities or non-profit organizations a few hours before 'iftar' where anyone who does not have a meal to break their fast can join in.



#### as spillover

Due to the limited indoor capacity within shops and cafes, spillover in the form of seating areas outside of these shops and cafes takes place. This is responsible for transforming an otherwise empty street into a bustling lively scene with people sharing tea, shisha, and laughs.



#### as parking

Parking is one of the most challenging tasks in Cairo and so it is common for all streets to transform into parking spaces, with at least double parking lining the sidewalk to accommodate the needs of the residents of neighborhoods as well as visitors.



## STREET ISLAND

Typically an overlooked feature of the street, the street island seldom offers more than vegetation and street lights in most cities. In contrast, the street island in Cairo offers refuge to those who dare to cross the street.

Thanks to their creative nature, the Cairenes have utilized the space provided by street islands in the middle of wider streets as a means of compensation for what the city has failed to provide through its planning or as the physical expression of their needs. In addition to being a green spine and host to light posts and billboard signs, it is reimagined by the people as a seating area as well as a marketplace.

as refuge  
as billboard  
as seating  
as marketplace  
as street vendors

## جزيرة الشارع



#### as refuge

Many major streets in Cairo do not have traffic lights that facilitate people crossing the street. Instead, people risk crossing the street onto oncoming traffic. With some streets having up to six lanes per direction, the street island offers a moment of refuge as people cross from one side to the other.



#### as billboard

The empty space provided in the middle of the street by the street island leaves room for billboard to be set up as freestanding or on light posts to advertise real estate, political campaigns products, good and services.



#### as seating

The street island is typically vegetated with grass and some local trees and shrubs. At times this island may be used as a seating area for gardeners and maintenance workers during their long shift.



#### as marketplace

Typically on Fridays, after the Friday prayer, spontaneous marketplaces are set up on the street island across from mosques within local communities. They are attracted by the crowds that are present at the end of the prayer who are looking to get some basic goods on their way back from the mosque. The products include bread, fruits, vegetables, and slippers among other household products. They typically are set up on the ground of the street island using crates or old newspapers or from open back of mini-trucks.



#### as street vendors

In less high traffic neighborhoods, street vendors set up on street islands where they are visible and easily accessible from both sides of the street. These include food trucks making fool (fava beans), ta'meyah (falafel) and eggs.



## STREET VENDOR

Street vendors are a result of the physical occurrence of the informal economy into Cairo's built environment, occupying the boundary between public and private space. Their contested presence offers perspective on the growing gap between formal and informal infrastructures and gumption needed to fill that gap. Street vendors offer a window into the extent to which if people are given the capacity to address their own challenges, communities have the capacity to "self-organize, develop semi-formal structures, and engage in daily fluid spatial practices" (Cluster, Street Vendors Initiative).

Street vendors exist on a gradient from standalone vendors that create their own microcosm to full blown markets that transform their entire vicinity. Evolving from mobile stations to stationary kiosks, street vendors become community landmarks and contribute to the transformation of regular areas into lively spaces. Recognized for their flexibility, they use wheeled carts to adapt to changing demands and traffic flows. Their presence not only fosters social interaction but also instills a sense of ownership over the space they occupy. Prominent during events like Friday prayer, street vendors strategically set up in crowded areas, turning streets and sidewalks into vibrant marketplaces.

## البائع المتجول

as territoriality  
 as marketplace  
 as flexibility  
 as placemaking  
 as events  
 as 'fahlawa' or creativity





### as territoriality

Street vendors have an unspoken agreement with regards to location and setup amongst each other. It is a matter of territoriality. Street vendors that are no longer mobile transform into the concept of a 'koshk' or kiosk. These are markers of every community and are commonly referred to when describing directions.



### as marketplace

When multiple street vendors come together on a regular basis and with enough volume, the area in which they set up transforms into a market place overtime as more vendors join and they claim that space as theirs.



### as flexibility

Street vendors are recognized by their flexible nature. Their karts have wheels and either a motorized or non-motorized system to ensure its movability. They are able to change location based on traffic flows and adapt to changing demands over time.



### as placemaking

The occurrence of street vendors provides people with the capacity to engage with others, interact, socialize and prolong their stay, giving them a feeling of the right to the space they occupy.



### as events / friday prayer

Street vendors emerge during recurring events, such as Friday Prayer. They are dynamic and flexible, setting up where there is a crowd or flow of people. The streets and sidewalks become their domain and people gather to shop for their vegetable and fruits before heading home after the prayer.



### as 'fahlawa' or creativity

Street vendors utilize creative solutions to showcase their products in an efficient and cost effective way. Some use the front or back trunk of cars to display their products, using a white sheet as the backdrop, and easily packing everything at the end of the day.



## TEMPORALITY

Time, as intangible as can be, has one of the most substantial influences on the perception and therefore use of space. The dynamics and flow of time shape the public realm, from day to night, with Cairo being a city that never sleeps, the experience of a city changes drastically, let alone the variations that occur during different hours in the day.

From religious practices to market operations and events like Ramadan, time dictates the frequency, intensity, and nature of activities in public space. The amount of time spent in a space is central to placemaking and activating a sense of ownership. In essence, temporality is the underlying force that defines and orchestrates the rhythm of urban life.

as dynamic  
as scale  
as events  
as religious practices (prayer)  
as marketplace  
as placemaking

## الزمنية



### as dynamic

Time is a dynamic and fluid notion in relation to spatial practices. It witness the transition and flow of people through space and how they engage with it. The transition from day to night charges the air and is felt in many areas of the city.



### as scale

Temporality acts as a scale for monitoring and measuring spatial practices. Depending on when the observation takes place, the spatial practices change in frequency, intensity and type.



### as events

Events reveal the influence of time on space. Events such as Ramadan in Cairo witness a city in flux. The streets, sidewalks, passageways, marketplaces, mosques change not only in physical form to reflect the event but also in the spirit of the people and the time they spend in the public realm. Between 'iftar' which is at sunset and 'sohour' which is before sunrise, the public realm is vibrant with people moving through and resting within it.



### as religious practices (prayer)

The five prayers occur at a set time during the day and night. They lead people within the Muslim community to leave their homes and places of work and travel, usually by foot, towards their nearest mosque, in particular the congregation of people in larger mosques during the Friday prayer on a weekly basis. A similar occurrence takes place on Sundays within the Christian community where many head to the church on Sunday morning before work for mass. These religious practices trigger a series of spatial practices that are dependent on the temporality of these events.



### as marketplace

Marketplaces are highly influence by time. Many markets operate within the day and need to close up by the end of the working day and on Mondays, like the ones in Downtown Cairo. Others transform during the major events of the year selling products that are relevant to the season such as lanterns in Ramadan.



### as placemaking

Placemaking is a direct reflection of the length of time spent by people in a certain space and how they in turn occupy it. The sense of ownership comes from the ability to prolong the stay over extended period of time, whether as an active or passive actor in it.



## TREE

The tree is a representation of nature's perseverance in the face of urban development. It also reiterates the need for people in urban contexts to connect to nature and the positive impact that this interaction has on people's spirit and wellbeing.

In Cairo's dense urban environment, trees serve as havens and shade providers, offering refuge from the region's climatic conditions and the stress of constant traffic. As a result, they encourage placemaking to occur beneath their branches, inviting people to sit beneath the trees, generating social interactions, and nurturing a temporary sense of ownership to the space, allowing individuals to extend their stay.

as refuge  
as shading  
as marketplace  
as placemaking

## الشجرة



### as refuge

Within Cairo's high urban density, trees give off a sense of refuge and protection, whether it's from the region's climatic condition or from the stress of city's constant traffic and congestion.



### as shading

Trees offer protection from the hot weather conditions in Cairo, providing a gentle breeze and perfect conditions for people to sit beneath it.



### as marketplace

Within the shading of the trees that line Cairo's street, spatial practices blossom underneath. Street vendors set up below their shade to sell their goods and enough trees line a certain street or sidewalk, a marketplace emerges.



### as placemaking

Encouraged by the shade they provide, trees offer opportunities of placemaking. Encouraged to sit down beneath the shade and freshness of the air around it, social interactions take place encouraging people to prolong their stay and have a temporary sense of ownership to the place.



## WALL

The most fundamental architectural element, the wall, is the essence of space generation. It has the power to create clear distinctions between the interior and exterior, private and public. What is interesting about the wall in Cairo lies beyond the extent of its inherent purpose of existence.

The walls of Cairo reveal layers of people's lives and stories. Acting as story tellers, they safeguard Cairo's history reflecting its growth and the empires that have shaped it, while also telling the stories of the people living within it today. They serve as canvases for expression, from flamboyant color changes to graffiti of personal advertisements. On the other hand, walls can also harbor negative feelings of hostility and territoriality, depending on surveillance tools, signage, materiality and permeability. Walls can also take on lives of their own whether through their own depth as livable spaces or through the marketplaces that flourish against them.

as storytelling  
as expression  
as signage  
as surveillance  
as border  
as fence  
as history  
as marketplace  
as spillover  
as double skin

## الحائط



### as storytelling

Driving along the Ring Road, the cross section of what remains of the informal settlements that were removed to accommodate the expansion of the Ring Road reveal a layer of people's lives. The walls become book keepers of the stories of the vibrant lives lived within these personalized walls.



### as expression

Facade walls in brick and concrete blocks can act as blank canvases for expression. Sometimes it can be in subtle act of changing the color of the walls or in the color of the rope used to hang laundry.



### as signage

Walls that are left unfinished or those that lie at the boundaries between communities, unattended, become hosts to personalization. The form that takes shape is that of signage, where people use these walls as their personal billboards to advertise about the services that they offer, leaving their name and phone number for passersby to contact.



### as surveillance

In areas of high security or government entities, walls become a means of surveillance with cameras pointed at the street monitoring activity along the wall. The same holds true for gated communities where cameras are placed on the home walls as surveillance and protection. This fosters a feeling of hostility and does not encourage anyone to linger.



### as border

Walls are clear markers or borders and territories. Depending on the material, porosity and signage, it becomes clear whether a wall is a border or not. This does not encourage spatial practices along it.



### as fence

A wall transforms into a fence once it surrounds a certain structure or entity and there is a degree of visibility into it. It sets clear boundaries and once again signals that spatial practices along it are not advised.



### as history

Walls hold so much history within them. As the city of Cairo grew, the reference for the empires that have come to pass is left within the walls of the structures of the city. The juxtaposition of materials and textures reveals the layers of the history of the city.



### as marketplace

Marketplaces blossom across of all of Cairo's crevices. Whether of formal or informal nature, walls tend to act as hosts for this form of spatial practices. They become the backdrop for the marketplace to blossom and give a sense of proximity and support the display of vendors' goods.



### as spillover

Walls across Cairo seldom have the capacity to hold functions within them. The interiors tend to explode out of the extents of their enclosure out onto the exterior, such as sidewalks and streets.



### as double skin

Arcades, such as those in Heliopolis's Korba, transform walls into livable spaces. The result is a double skin that acts as a shelter, a shaded passage, a space for street vendors or a venue for spill over from shop keeps to encourage people to buy their goods.



## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>BALCONY</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>EMPTY PLOT</b>	AUTHOR	2023
AS VIEW POINT	AUTHOR	2023	AS OPPORTUNITY	AUTHOR	2023
AS SOCIAL CORRIDOR	AMANDA MUSTARD	2015	AS INFORMAL TRANSPORT HUB	AUTHOR	2023
AS LAUNDRY	PETR SVARC	2009	AS MARKETPLACE/VENDORS	MARWA MONTASER	2023
AS MARKETPLACE	AZZA SEDKY, 2014	2014	AS PARKING	AUTHOR	2023
AS EXTENSION	AUTHOR	2023	AS PLAYSPACE	NADA NAFAH	2015
AS PRIVACY	AUTHOR	2023	AS LIVELIHOOD	NADA NAFAH	2015
<b>BRIDGE</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>FENCE</b>	AUTHOR	2023
			AS BOUNDARY	AUTHOR	2023
			AS TERRITORY	AUTHOR	2023
AS TRANSIT	AUTHOR	2023	AS PRESERVATION	AUTHOR	2023
AS CONNECTOR	AUTHOR	2023	AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023
AS SEPARATOR	NERMIN DESSOUKY	2020	AS MARKETPLACE	AUTHOR	2023
AS BUS/TOKTOK STOP	NERMIN DESSOUKY	2020			
AS JOB HIKING	NERMIN DESSOUKY	2020	<b>INTERACTIONS</b>	AUTHOR	2023
AS BILLBOARD	AUTHOR	2023			
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023			
AS HUB	AUTHOR	2023			
AS PARKING	NERMIN DESSOUKY	2020	AS SOCIAL PILLARS	AUTHOR	2016
AS PLAYSPACE	DESIGNBUILD STUDIO CAIRO	2016	AS GREETINGS	AUTHOR	2023
AS CULTURAL HUB	NERMIN DESSOUKY	2020	AS MARKTEPLACE	AUTHOR	2023
AS STREET VENDORS	NERMIN DESSOUKY	2020	AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023

<b>MARKETPLACE</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>MINARET</b>	AUTHOR	2023
			AS HISTORY/HERITAGE	AUTHOR	2023
			AS ISLAMIC SYMBOL	AUTHOR	2023
			AS STORYTELLING	AUTHOR	2023
AS WALL	AUTHOR	2016			
AS FENCE	AUTHOR	2023	<b>MIXED-USE</b>	AUTHOR	2023
AS SIDEWALK	AUTHOR	2023			
AS STREET	AUTHOR	2017	AS ZONING	GOOGLE MAPS	2023
AS EVENTS	DAVID LAZAR	-	AS STREET	AUTHOR	2023
AS HUB	AUTHOR	2023	AS TYPOLOGY	AUTHOR	2023
AS (IN)FORMAL	AUTHOR	2023	AS DIVERSITY	AUTHOR	2023
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023	AS NEED-BASED	AUTHOR	2023
AS ECONOMIC NETWORK	AUTHOR	2023	AS EYES ON THE STREET	AUTHOR	2023
<b>MATERIALITY</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>MODULARITY</b>	CHRISTIAN SCHAFFER	2020
AS TEXTURE	AUTHOR	2023			
AS COLOR	AUTHOR	2023			
AS POROSITY	AUTHOR	2023	AS CONSTRUCTION	CHRISTIAN SCHAFFER	2020
AS STRUCTURE	CHRISTIAN SCHAFFER	2020	AS LIVING	AUTHOR	2023
AS HISTORY/HERITAGE	AUTHOR	2023	AS STREET VENDORS	AUTHOR	2023
AS LOCAL AVAILABLE RESOURCES	AUTHOR	2023	AS MARKETPALCE	AUTHOR	2023

<b>MONORAIL</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>PIGEON TOWER</b>	AUTHOR	2023
AS TRANSIT	AUTHOR	2023	AS LIVELIHOOD	NADA NAFEH	2015
AS CONNECTOR	AUTHOR	2023	AS SPORT	AHMED GOMAA	2023
AS SEPARATPR	AUTHOR	2023	AS PLAYSPACE	AMANDA MUSTARD	2015
AS BILLBOARD	AUTHOR	2023	AS VIEWPOINT	AUTHOR	2023
<b>PARK</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>ROOF</b>	AUTHOR	2023
AS GREEN ISLAND	AUTHOR	2023			
AS (UN)INHABITED	AUTHOR	2023			
AS URBAN OASIS	AUTHOR	2023			
AS BREATHING SPACE	AUTHOR	2023			
AS PLAYSPACE	AUTHOR	2023			
AS PRAYER SPACE	AUTHOR	2023	AS URBAN LANDSCAPE	AUTHOR	2023
			AS URBAN GARDEN	NADA NAFEH	2015
<b>PASSAGEWAY</b>	AUTHOR	2023	AS SATELLITE CITY	AUTHOR	2023
			AS HISTORY/HERTIAGE	AUTHOR	2023
			AS PLAYSPACE	NADA NAFEH	2015
AS SHELTER/URBAN OASIS	AUTHOR	2023	AS LAUNDRY	NADA NAFEH	2015
AS HUB	AUTHOR	2023	AS STORAGE	NADA NAFEH	2015
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023	AS HOME EXTENSION	NADA NAFEH	2015
AS TRANSIT	AUTHOR	2023	AS LIVELIHOOD	NADA NAFEH	2015
AS EVENTS	CHRISTIAN SCHAFFER	2020	AS ANIMAL BREEDING	AHMED GOMAA	2023

<b>SIDEWALK</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>SQUARE</b>	TAYLOR WOODY	2020
AS SEATING	AUTHOR	2023			
AS MARKETPLACE	AUTHOR	2023	AS LIBERATION	PEDRO UGARTE	2011
AS SPILLOVER	AUTHOR	2023	AS PROCESSION	MAHMOUD KHALED	2021
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023	AS MEMORIAL	YOUSEF SALHAMOUD	2020
AS BICYCLE PARKING	AUTHOR	2023	AS EVENTS	ABNG WORLD	2021
AS STREET VENDORS	AUTHOR	2023	AS TRANSIT	AUTHOR	2023
<b>SIGNAGE</b>	AUTHOR	2023	<b>STREET</b>	AUTHOR	2023
AS BILLBOARD	AUTHOR	2023			
AS STOREFRONT	ANDREW SHENOUDA	2017			
AS TIME MAKER	ANDREW SHENOUDA	2017			
AS WAYFINDING	AUTHOR	2023			
AS TRAFFIC POLICE	AUTHOR	2023			
AS TERRITORIALITY	AUTHOR	2023			
<b>SPILLOVER</b>	AUTHOR	2023	AS SOCIAL CORRIDOR	AUTHOR	2023
			AS TRANSIT	AUTHOR	2023
			AS PROCESSION	PEDRO UGARTE	2011
			AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR	2023
AS TEMPORALITY	AUTHOR	2023	AS PLAYSPACE	AUTHOR	2023
AS TRANSFORMATIVE	AUTHOR	2023	AS EVENTS	AUTHOR	2023
AS (IN)FORMAL	AUTHOR	2023	AS COMMON EATING	SIUFAN ADEY	2021
AS PLACEMAKING	CLUSTER	2016	AS SPILLOVER	AUTHOR	2023
AS NEED-BASED	AUTHOR	2023	AS PARKING	AUTHOR	2023

## STREET ISLAND

AUTHOR	2023
AS REFUGE	AUTHOR 2023
AS BILLBOARD	AUTHOR 2023
AS SEATING	AUTHOR 2023
AS MARKETPLACE	AUTHOR 2023
AS STREET VENDORS	AUTHOR 2023

## STREET VENDOR

AUTHOR	2023
AS TERRITORIALITY	AUTHOR 2023
AS MARKETPLACE	AUTHOR 2023
AS FLEXIBILITY	AUTHOR 2023
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR 2023
AS EVENTS	AUTHOR 2023
AS FAHLAWA OR CREATIVITY	AUTHOR 2023

## TEMPORALITY

AUTHOR	2023
AS DYNAMIC	AUTHOR 2023
AS SCALE	AUTHOR 2023
AS EVENTS	AUTHOR 2023
AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICES	AUTHOR 2023
AS MARKETPLACE	SIMA DIAB/NEW YORK TIMES 2020
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR 2023

## TREE

AUTHOR	2023
AS REFUGE	AUTHOR 2023
AS SHADING	AUTHOR 2023
AS MARKETPLACE	AUTHOR 2023
AS PLACEMAKING	AUTHOR 2023

## WALL

AUTHOR	2023
AS STORY TELLING	AUTHOR 2023
AS EXPRESSION	PETR SVARC 2009
AS SIGNAGE	AUTHOR 2023
AS SURVEILLANCE	AUTHOR 2023
AS BORDER	AUTHOR 2023
AS FENCE	AUTHOR 2023
AS HISTORY	AUTHOR 2023
AS MARKETPLACE	AUTHOR 2023
AS SPILLOVER	AUTHOR 2023
AS DOUBLE SKIN	AUTHOR 2023

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