

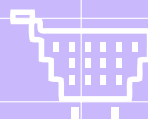
# consumed

carla j gruber

construction and  
transaction of identity  
in the image economy

gp2

2020



**Consumed: Construction and Transaction  
of Identity in The Image Economy**

**by**

**Carla Jean Gruber**

**Bachelor of Arts with Distinction  
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**In The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
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**Committee:**

**Bill Pechet (chair)**

**Tijana Vujosevic**

**Marko Simcic**

**The University of British Columbia  
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abstract /

# thesis



*Mean Girls.* Mark Waters. Paramount Pictures, 2004

**Shopping is one of the most uniting activities in North America—it is ubiquitous, voracious, and most recently, it is closing down. Online shopping has shuttered ‘brick and mortar’ shops, and has led to the merging of e-commerce with social media, giving rise to the ‘influencer’. This has resulted in individual identity being co-opted by brands to the extent that the two have collapsed into one. Shopping has become so engrained in everyday life that people don’t just buy brands anymore—brands also buy people.**

**This thesis presents a satyr in which the users and power dynamics of online shopping and social media are projected into physical space.**

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**note:** all following images  
are created by author.

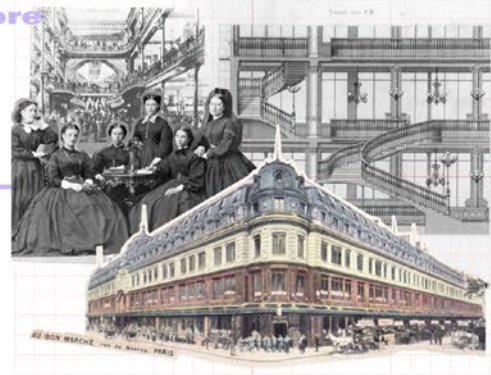


# timeline

Retail architecture has always been designed to entrap the consumer—especially the female consumer.

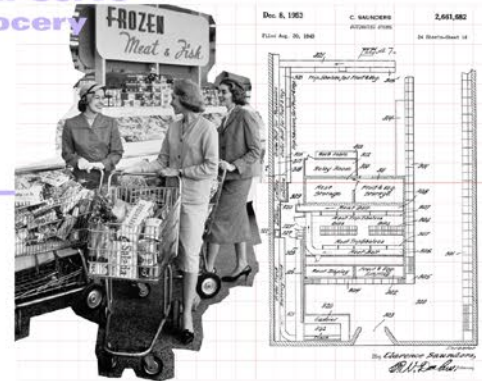
department store

1852



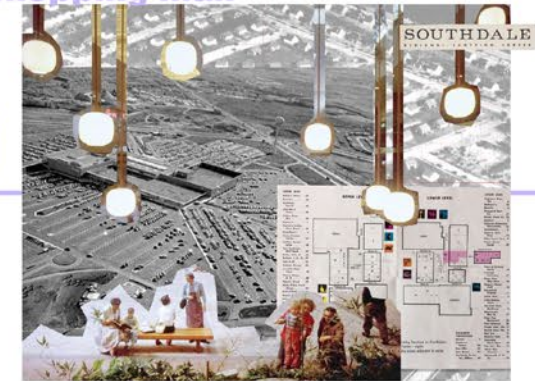
self-serve grocery

1950's



shopping mall

1950's



big box

1960's



destination mall

1980's-90's



buildings as ads

1990's-2000's



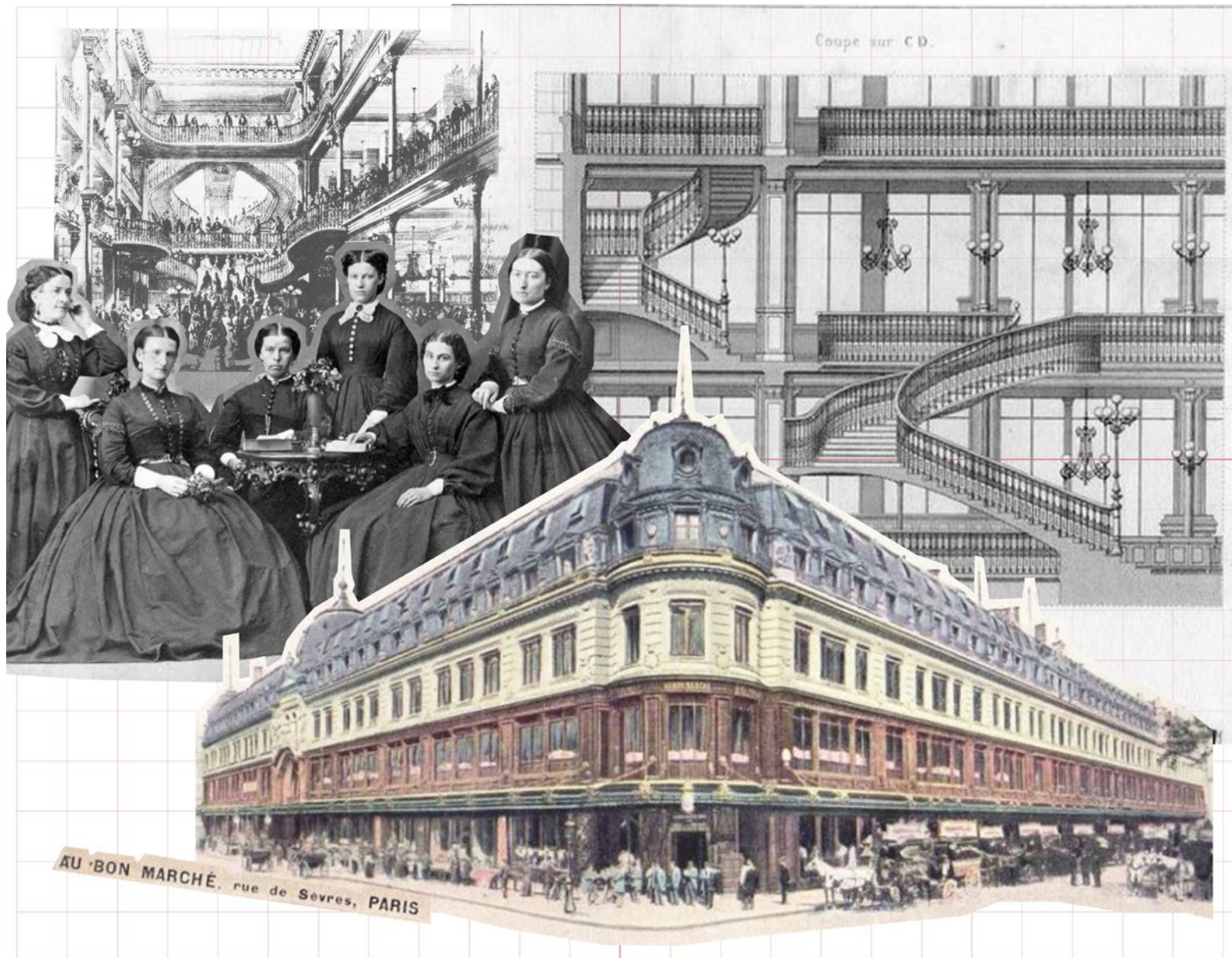
online shopping + ads

2000's-present





## department store



In the early nineteenth century, department stores appeared in the cities of Europe and The United States.

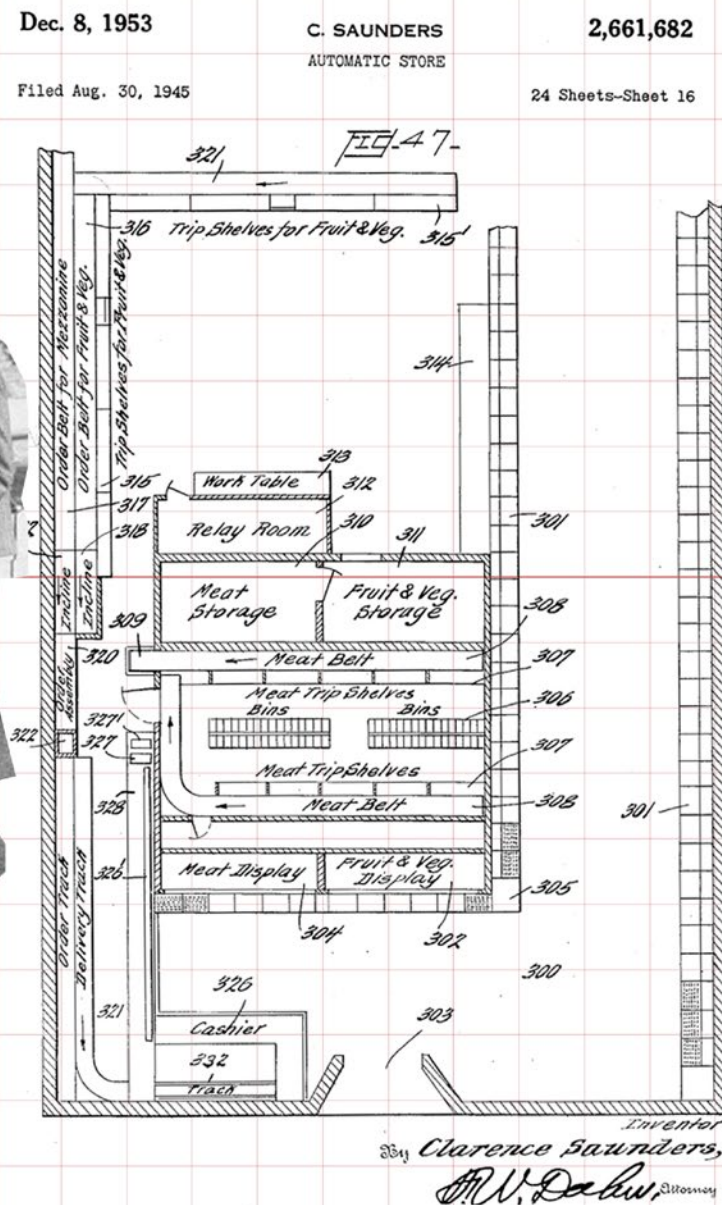
In the gender-segregated urban landscape of the time, Department stores presented the first opportunity for women to be public in an urban centre. This emancipated women from the home, but also made retail their only avenue into public life.

This interaction of women and shopping started a pattern "with the shopping industry devising commercial innovations that claimed to address women's changing public roles but, in actuality, were formulated to encourage more shopping"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chung, Chuihua Judy, *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, 512



## self-serve grocery



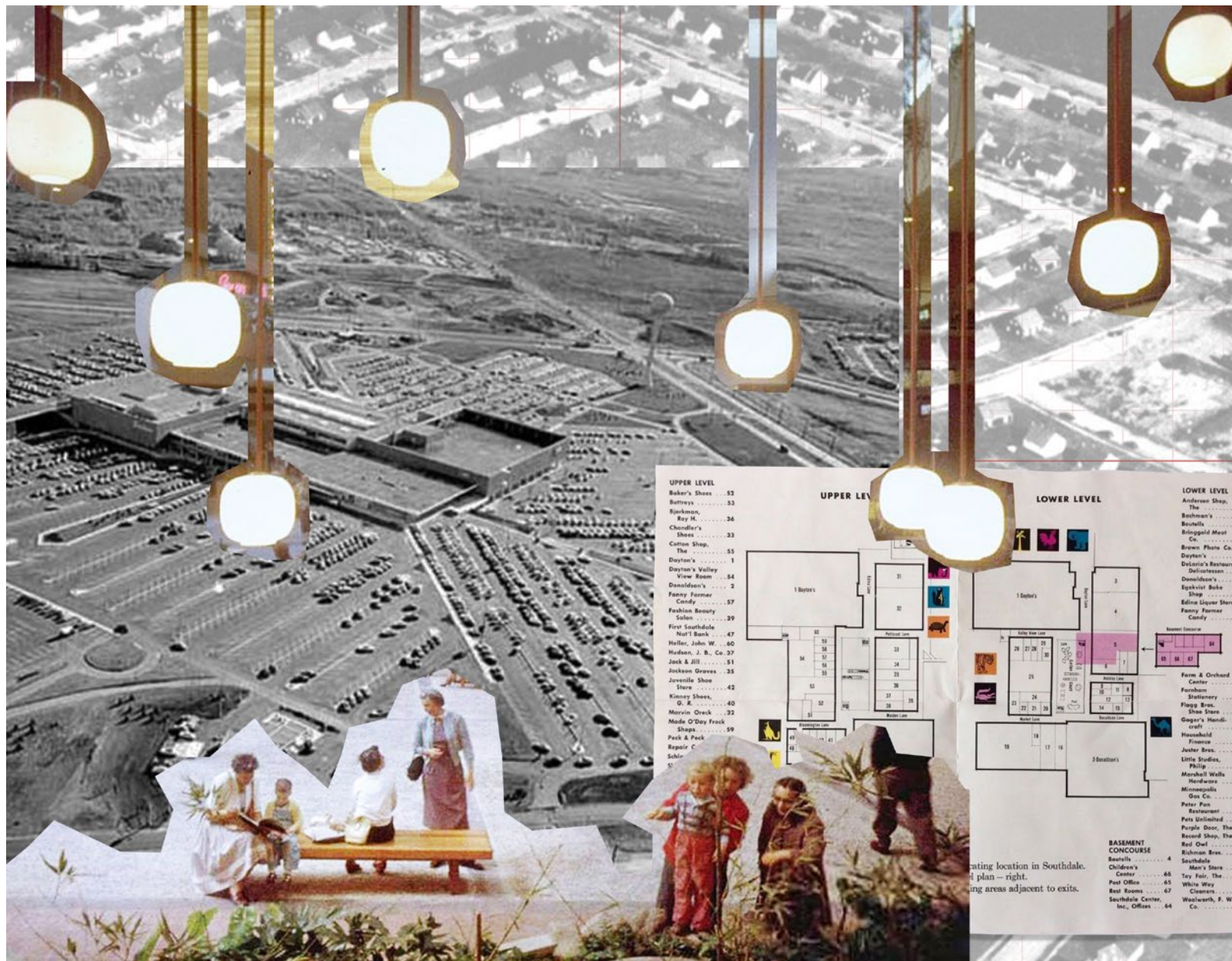
In the post-war period, the public presence of women expanded further, prompting a reconfiguration of the role of shopping in womens' lives.

When soldiers came back from war, women were to retreat from their working roles they had taken up during the war and return to the home. They were thus recast as "professional homemakers" and shopping was reconceived as "an extension of professional housework."<sup>1</sup> This notion saw the advent of self-serve grocery stores, where women would go to do their duty to shop. The store was configured with a specific entrance and exit, to lead the female shopper past all merchandise before exiting.

<sup>1</sup> Chung, Chuihua Judy, Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping, 514



## the shopping mall



The shopping mall emerged in 1956 in Edina, Minnesota. Conceived by Viktor Gruen as a suburban 'town hall,' the shopping centre quickly became the model for retail space in American cities. As suburbs escalated, retailers moved out of the city centre and drained the population with it. Malls also solidified the automobile as the primary transportation in city planning



## big box



With the general success of the feminist movements of the 60's propelling women into public life beyond the confines of shopping, retailers were forced to adapt once again. Protests by feminists, as well as the larger public, fought for regulations to abolish deceptive product packaging, labeling, and advertising. In an atmosphere of expectant openness, this spurred retailers to become "larger, ever-present, and more impersonal"<sup>1</sup>. This saw the rise of the big box store, laid out factory style, with everything on display and sold at a discount. An atmosphere of openness and trust was achieved through architecture falling into the background as no more than a container for merchandise.

<sup>1</sup> Chung, Chuihua Judy, *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, 515



## entertainment/destination mall



As women entered working life more and more, they had less free time to shop and less desire to spend their money on retail goods. Studies showed that women spent more of their income on travel, entertainment, and dining than on shopping. For this reason, malls adapted from being solely retail to 'entertainment destinations.' Here, women could spend their time with their families, and spend their money on the things that appealed to them more. It also kept retail in the path of women, therefore leading to more sales.



## buildings as scaffolding

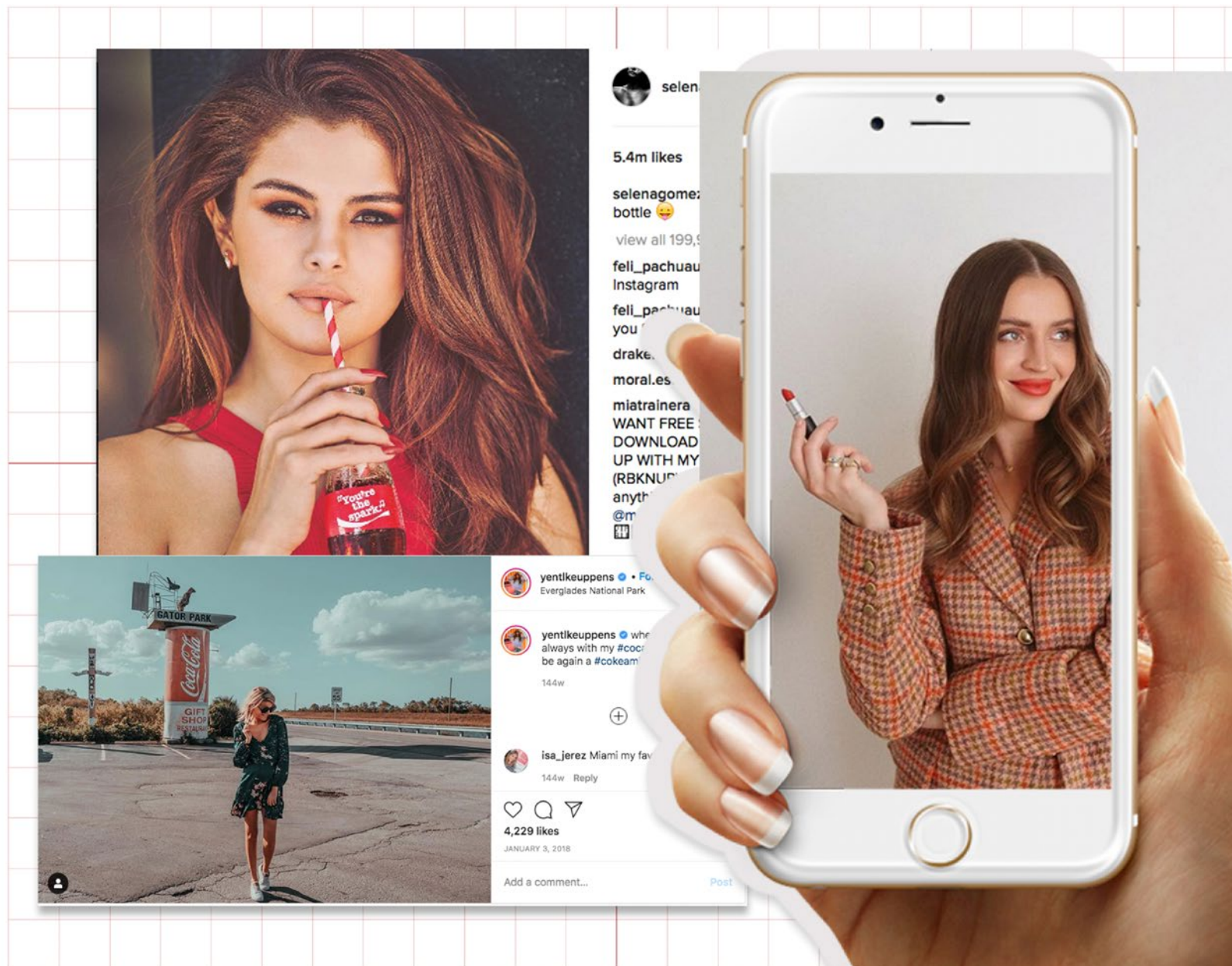


As women became as prominent as men in urban settings, advertisers found the best way to reach them was through outdoor advertising. Previously dominated by tobacco ads, the fashion industry quickly became the largest industry to advertise outdoors. Ads took on urbanistic proportions as they hung from the faces of towers, where "identical images and messages are simultaneously erected on buildings across the United States."<sup>1</sup> This transformative power in the urban environment could act in unison to influence women across the country. A flattening of public space can be seen with this phenomenon, as the city is covered in ads directed at women but not giving space for them to exist.

<sup>1</sup> Chung, Chuihua Judy, *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, 517



## digital flattening



Where urban outdoor ads acted in uniformity and unison, the ads of the internet and social media act independently and simultaneously. While appearing to be various and personal, images on social media have been invaded by global corporations to the extent that they influence content generated by women from celebrities to influencers to teenagers. Female identity is no longer just propagated by retailers, but actually created by them. Women have crossed over from being not just content consumers but content creators. In doing so, corporate branding and female identity have collapsed into one. The conflation of brand identity and personal identity has been so clouded that one does not exist without the other.

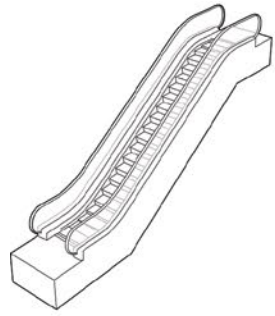
The result has been a swath of abandoned retail space (155 million square feet closed in 2019, according to Business Insider) as well as the "perpetual suspension of women within surface"<sup>1</sup> where identity has been flattened to an advertisement, and brands now buy people rather than people buying brands.

<sup>1</sup> Chung, Chuihua Judy, *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, 518

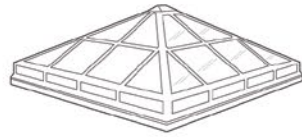


## catalogue of retail devices

escalator



skylight



signs



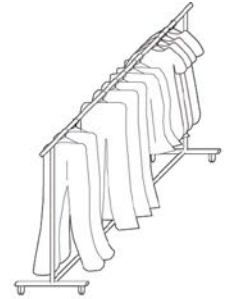
seating



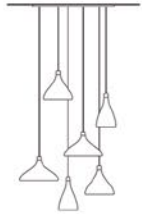
plants



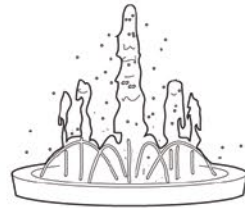
merchandise



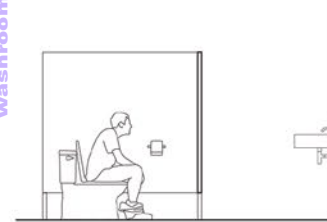
lighting



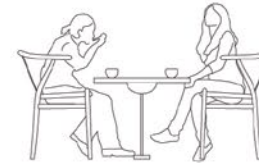
fountain



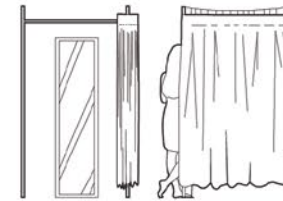
washrooms



food court



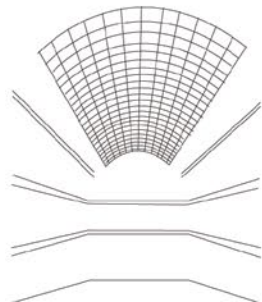
fitting room



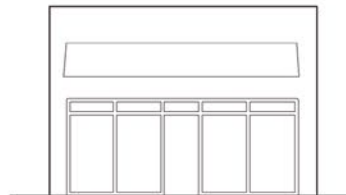
cashier desk



atrium



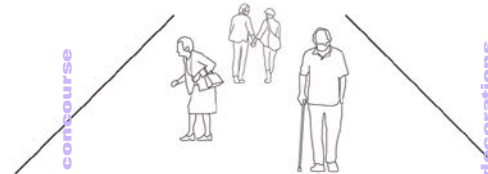
store-front



mannequin



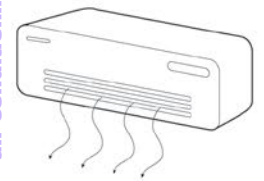
concourse

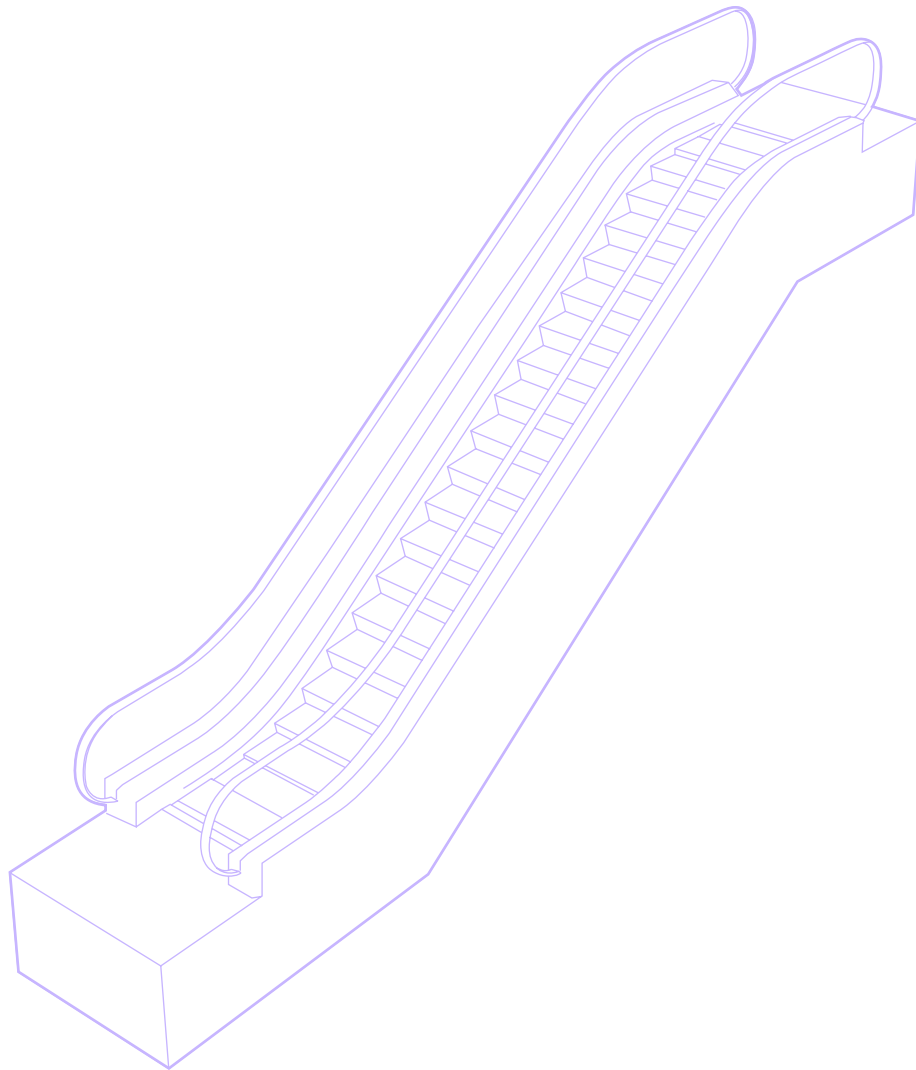


decorations



air conditioning





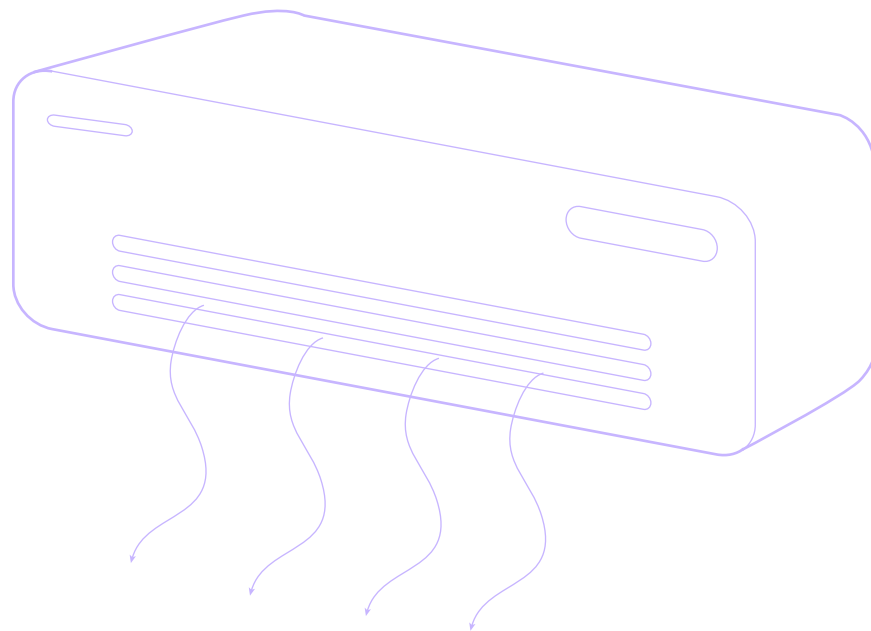
## escalator

The escalator is an immediately recognizable symbol of the shopping mall. It allows for continuous movement between levels without effort or division. Escalators allow for a smooth flow of people to travel seamlessly between vertical spaces. Unlike an elevator, which can only carry a small group of people at a time, and creates a closed off, internal-facing environment, the escalator is open and always in motion and available for use. Escalators can be grand and sweeping like a staircase, while presenting none of the daunting task of climbing them. All one has to do is step on and be carried from floor to floor all while gaining a view to survey an array of shops and people around them. The escalator collapses the division of vertical spaces, allowing the vertical plane to function like the horizontal one—uninterrupted and arrayed with storefronts, signs, sights, smells, sounds.

The escalator first appeared in an 1892 U.S. patent by Jesse W. Reno titled 'Inclined Elevator'<sup>1</sup>. Despite several variations on this design, including pyramidal, spiraled, and seated designs, the simple linear form of the 'Inclined Elevator' has persisted in the same form as the escalators we use today. The success of the escalator was largely due to its direct ability to sell more goods to consumers. In 1900, a formula used to market the elevator was: first-floor-rent x 2 = \$20,000 but first-floor-rent + second-floor-rent + escalator = \$15,000<sup>2</sup>. This shows that the escalator not only pays for itself, but actually saves money. The economy and modern allure of the escalator soon brought it into every major department store in America and Europe. Its enduring success has made it a staple retail device.

<sup>1</sup> Tae-Wook Cha, Rem Koolhaas and Chuihua Judy Chung, *Harvard Design School Guide To Shopping* (repr., Köln: Taschen, 2001), 340.

<sup>2</sup> *Two-Story 5 & 10 Cent Stores: How They Can Be Made Possible and Profitable* (1918), 1.

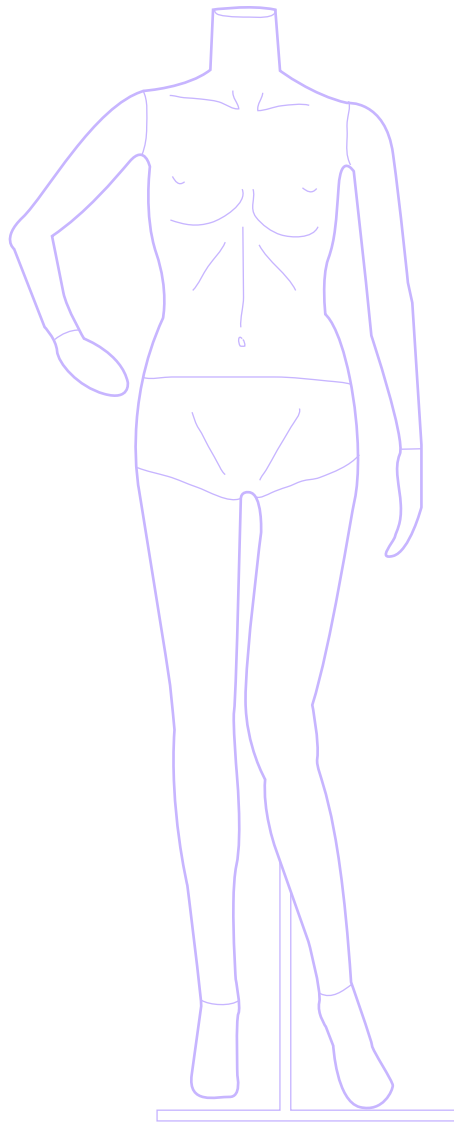


## air conditioning

In its early conception, air conditioning was thought to improve health and wellness, and combat the pollution and unsanitary conditions of rapid urbanization and industrialization in the mid-nineteenth century. Subsequently, hospitals and medical buildings were early adopters of air conditioning. The benefits of a climate controlled environment were not lost on the commercial sector either. In 1902 the New York Stock Exchange was fitted with fan-coil system, cooling the 1.2 million cubic feet of space in the trading room<sup>1</sup>. Air-conditioning made the space usable, despite the heat emanating from crowds of people, lighting, and mechanical equipment. This revelation showed the value of air-conditioning, and it was soon adopted by theatres and retail spaces.

Air conditioning is a crucial enabler of shopping and retail architecture. Vast, windowless, interior-facing spaces are made comfortable and desirable through air conditioning. Department stores and malls became increasingly autonomous from their external environment, allowing for the appealing 'year round springtime atmosphere' that Victor Gruen introduced to his first mall, Southdale Centre. As retail spaces became more comfortable, they could also become larger and more expansive. Activities that were once dispersed—shopping for various merchandise, dining, leisure, attractions, entertainment—could now come together under one roof. Air conditioning allowed for a scaleless internalization of activity. This higher comfort level allowed consumers to spend increasing amounts of time in increasingly vast retail environments, and as a result spend increasing amounts of money.

<sup>1</sup> Tae-Wook Cha, Rem Koolhaas and Chuihua Judy Chung, *Harvard Design School Guide To Shopping* (repr., Köln: Taschen, 2001), 100.



## mannequin

The first known mannequin, made of wood, was found in the tomb of King Tutankhamen, dating back to 1323 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup>

Originally tools for tailors to fit clothing, mannequins have now become tools of commerce and are inextricably associated with malls and department stores. In malls and shops, mannequins sit on platforms and in front of windows adorned in the latest styles and fashion trends. They are a simple instructive device to show people how to dress and what to buy. Sometimes they sit in illuminated glass boxes like giant dolls still in their gleaming packaging. By mimicking the human body, but remaining artificial, they give consumers an impossible goal to continually strive for. The idealized, thin, elongated, blemishless body of the mannequin is not attainable, but the clothes that it's wearing are. Their ever-changing wardrobe keeps shoppers coming back to update their own closets, making life imitate art rather than art imitate life.

Mannequins are not people, but spaces are designed for them as if they are. Bay windows, archways, and pedestals are used to frame and showcase mannequins in retail architecture. Essentially a human-shaped poster, the mannequin has effects on both shoppers and the architecture built to house them.

<sup>1</sup> Tae-Wook Cha, Rem Koolhaas and Chuihua Judy Chung, *Harvard Design School Guide To Shopping* (repr., Köln: Taschen, 2001), 40.



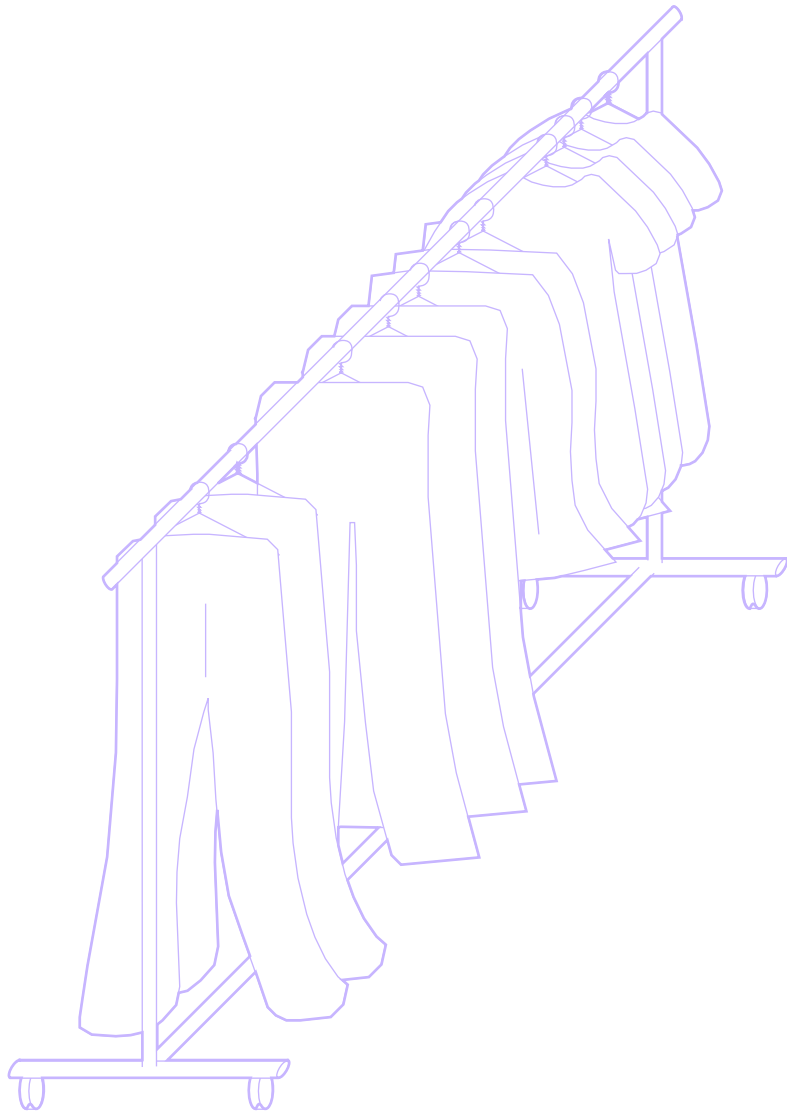
## plants & fountains (oasis)

Plants and flowers pepper the corridors and courts of shopping malls. They often sit at the centre of bench seating, or climb amongst escalators, sitting in teired and tiled containers. Upon closer inspection, the plants are often constructed of silk or plastic, and are not actually living. In West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton, Alberta, carefully constructed palm trees rise from the ground floor past mezzanine spaces to the upper floors. Going up the escalator, shoppers can drift into the tree tops and enter different stores without breaking their stride. Artificial or not, the plants serve to continually construct the oasis-like land of the shopping mall. Coupled with the sounds of water from the fountains, one can escape the harshness of the elements outside, and enjoy a carefully calibrated interior landscape. In *Learning From Las Vegas*, Venturi and Scott Brown describe a similar environment in the motel patios of 1970's Vegas:

“Whether Organic Modern or Neoclassical Baroque, it contains the fundamental elements of the classic oasis: courts, water, greenery, intimate scale, and enclosed space. [...] What gives poignance to the beach umbrellas and chaise lounges is the vivid, recent memory of the hostile cars poised in the asphalt desert beyond.”<sup>1</sup>

This description fits on the shopping mall as well, where the elements of the oasis are “more symbolic than useful”<sup>2</sup> and serve to create an ambiance and exotic interior to captivate consumers.

<sup>1</sup> Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*. 49  
<sup>2</sup> Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*. 50



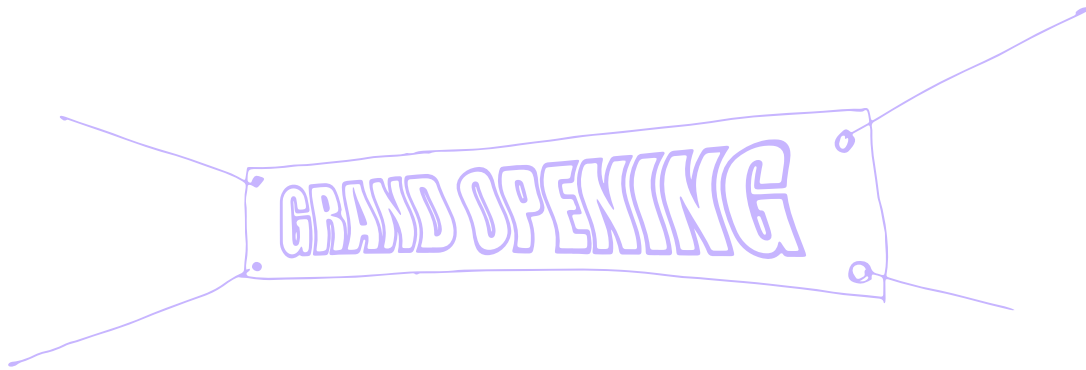
## merchandise

Merchandise acts as soft architecture in malls and shops. Rather than partition walls, the racks of clothes, shelves of books or rows of shoes on tables create division and paths of circulation. They create soft edges at the periphery of stores, blurring the boundaries between what is and isn't the shop, enticing people to accidentally enter and browse. Because the merchandise is soft and ever-changing, it acts as a temporary installation in the space. It can be moved, re-formed, and re-organized to change the way the space is occupied and perceived. In Rem Koolhaas's essay, *Junkspace*, he critiques much of contemporary architecture for having a flippant, malleable quality:

"...it is subsystems only [...] All materialization is provisional: cutting, bending, tearing, coating: construction has acquired a new softness, like tailoring... the joint is no longer a problem, an intellectual issue: transitional moments are defined by stapling and taping, wrinkly brown bands barely maintain the illusion of an unbroken surface; verbs unknown and unthinkable in architectural history—*clamp, stick, fold, dump, glue, shoot, double, fuse*—have become indispensable [...] a transient coupling, waiting to be undone, unscrewed, a temporary embrace with a high probability of separation"<sup>1</sup>

This assessment applies broadly to contemporary retail architecture such as regional shopping malls, but also to the merchandise that fills them, and how it is tailored and edited and changed to create spaces which are continuously similar but never the same.

<sup>1</sup> Koolhaas, Rem. "Junkspace." *October* 100 (2002): 175-190, 178



## signage

Signage is an identifier, branding, and wayfinding device in retail architecture. Signage persuades and informs—It tells people where to go, what to want, and what to buy. Signs adorn the outside of retail buildings, while posters, neon signs, labels, and advertisements pepper the insides of them. Retail employs signs of all scales, from a price tag that you have to hold close to your face to read, to the 50 foot billboard along the highway announcing how much fun you can have at the mall. The signs can be densely packed and overwhelming, serving to draw customers into a state of disorientation and complexity. In Rem Koolhaas's essay "Junkspace," he comments on the labyrinth like formation of commercial spaces:

"The more erratic the path, eccentric the loops, hidden the blueprint, the more efficient the exposure, inevitable the transaction. In this war, graphic designers are the great turncoats: where once signage promised to deliver you to where you wanted to be, it now obfuscates and entangles you in a thicket of cuteness that forces you past unwanted detours, and turns you back when you're lost." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Koolhaas, Rem. "Junkspace." *October* 100 (2002): 175-190, 182



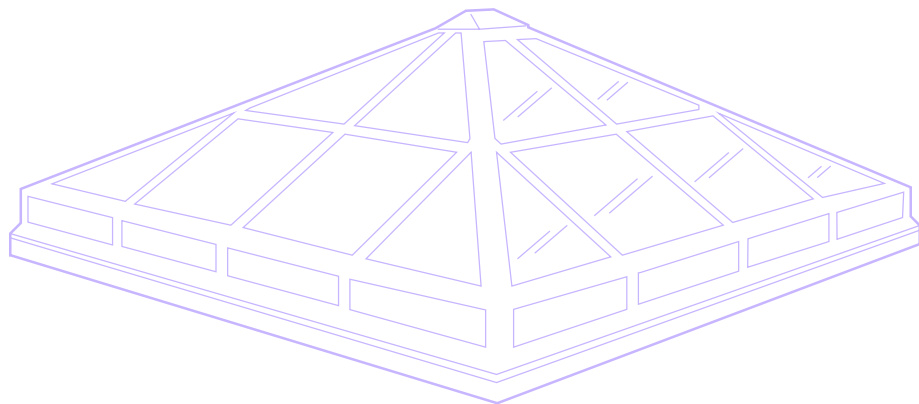
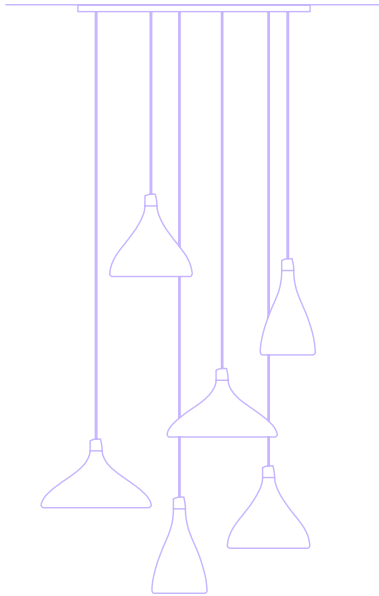
## store front

Since early department stores like the Bon Marche in Paris, store fronts and shop windows have been used as giant display cases, showing off the latest and greatest new products of the season. The shop window brought about window shopping as an activity. Prior to the shop window, one would have to actually enter the store to see any of the merchandise. Before department stores, the model of shopping was not 'self-service' as it is now, where we can go in and pick things off the shelf. The merchandise was kept in the back of the store, and one would ask the clerk or craftsman to fetch their desired merchandise. With the shop window, customers could shop without entering the store, and even if it was closed.

The form of retail architecture today generally falls into the category of the "Decorated Shed" as defined by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown in *Learning From Las Vegas*, which is a conventional, plain (ugly and ordinary) structure with applied symbols (signs)<sup>1</sup>. In the shopping mall, the architecture that houses The Gap is the same as the Architecture that houses Prada. The only difference is applied materials and the signs and symbols.

<sup>1</sup> Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*. 129





## artificial lighting

We can't see what isn't lit, and we can't buy what we can't see. Artificial lighting illuminates and spotlights merchandise and advertisements. Shop windows glow brightly at night for passers-by to ogle at. Lighting also enables surveillance and increased feelings of safety and security. Floodlights illuminate parking lots and giant signs, and billboards that advertising products and retail attractions. At the Edmonton International airport, the road exiting the airport is lined with three consecutive brightly lit billboards declaring what you're going to love about West Edmonton Mall.

Shopping, advertising, and illuminated parking lots would not be possible after the sun goes down without artificial lighting.

## skylight

Retail buildings, especially malls, department stores, and big-box stores are vast and inward facing. The skylight allows for natural light to penetrate the space even in its furthest depths. The skylight adds grandeur and drama to the atriums of shopping centres, where the light filters down into the space, sometimes with the drama of a cathedral, illuminating the plaster Romanesque pilasters on the walls. Skylights keep the elements at bay, but let the light in to sparkle on the mosaic tiled planters and glass railings that line the corridors.



## cashier desk

The cash desk is the last stop in the retail experience. The cashier asks you if you found everything alright, and scans and wraps up your purchase. Sometimes they'll quickly slip in that you have seven days to return or exchange your purchase, as long as you have your original receipt and tags attached. The cash desk is where the fun ends and the bill arrives. It is the ultimate step in the transaction process, after the dance of browsing and service has ended. The desk physically divides the customer and the retailer—at more upscale places, the cashier might walk around the desk and hand the bag containing your \$50 t-shirt directly to you, rather than over the countertop like they do at The Gap, breaking the divide of customer versus retailer and marking the end of the shopping experience. Whatever the store, From Tiffany's to Tim Horton's the cashier desk is an undying constant.



## furniture

Furniture often appears in retail architecture. In American Eagle Outfitters, a large, comfortable, dark brown leather couch sits at the back of the store outside of the changing room area. Half branding—authentic, worn-in, high quality yet casual—and half a place for people to rest—or spend more time (and money) in the store.

In malls, curved benches rest in the middle of the corridors, waiting for people to meet their friends there, or for elderly people to sit down and take a break. On boxing day morning, shoppers fill the benches outside of their favourite stores, waiting for their gates to roll open.

As much as there is furniture for people in retail buildings, there is even more furniture for objects. Tables, shelves, racks, plinths, and cubbies line shops from front to back to display merchandise in the most enticing and visible way they can. In Lululemon, a table top made of a large piece of wood with a live edge says: we're polished, but down to earth. On top of it sit stacks of \$180 sweaters. Across the hall at Urban Outfitters, roughly constructed plywood shelving lets you know you'll be able to find your outfits for Coachella while listening to static and bass.



## decorations

My sister says that to her, it never really feels like Christmas until she walks through the Hudson's Bay department store in December. Plastic spruce boughs and sparkly ornaments hang from the ceiling, red carpets line the floor, and old Christmas music plays over the speakers. While these decorations hang to encourage people to buy more gifts and spend more money, they have come to influence our cultural traditions. What is Christmas without shopping? Of course there's a deeper meaning, but the commercialization of the holidays, from Valentines' Day to Groundhog Day, has influenced our traditions and culture. Retail architecture has been the venue where this norm has been created and reinforced.



## fitting rooms

Fitting rooms are, in my opinion, the one great advantage that retail architecture has over online shopping. You can go in, try on the pants, and see if they actually do make your butt look good. Your friends can wait outside or be in one room over and swap opinions. It's where the sales associate can see you walk out and stand in front of the three panel mirror and tell you that the pants look amazing on you, even if they're six inches too short.

Similar to bathrooms, fitting rooms are one of the only places in public that one can be in a space totally alone with a locked door. This makes it a high theft area where a person can go to try to pry the security tags off the pants they want but don't want to pay for. It is therefore usually a highly monitored and attended space by the retail staff.

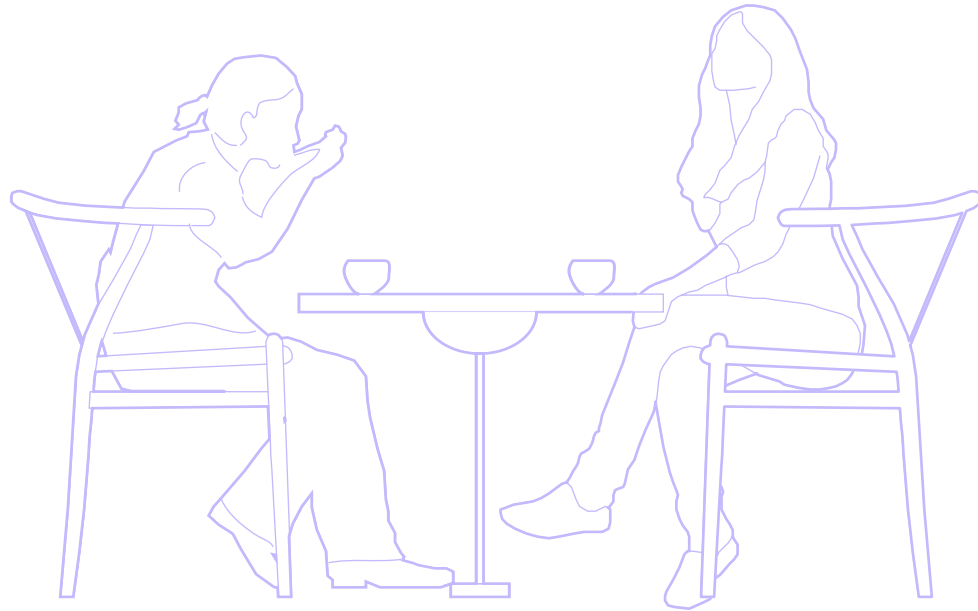


## bathrooms

Public bathrooms are often few and far between. Retail buildings fill the lapse in this amenity. Some places require you to buy something, or to ask for a key to use the washroom. Some places have a sign on the bathroom door declaring “Customers Only,” but might be mercifully unlocked and open to use. Some bathrooms are very well maintained, and some are not. Using a public bathroom always feels like a bit of a gamble, like you don’t know exactly what to expect. One time when I was shopping in West Edmonton Mall with my sister and I had to use the bathroom.

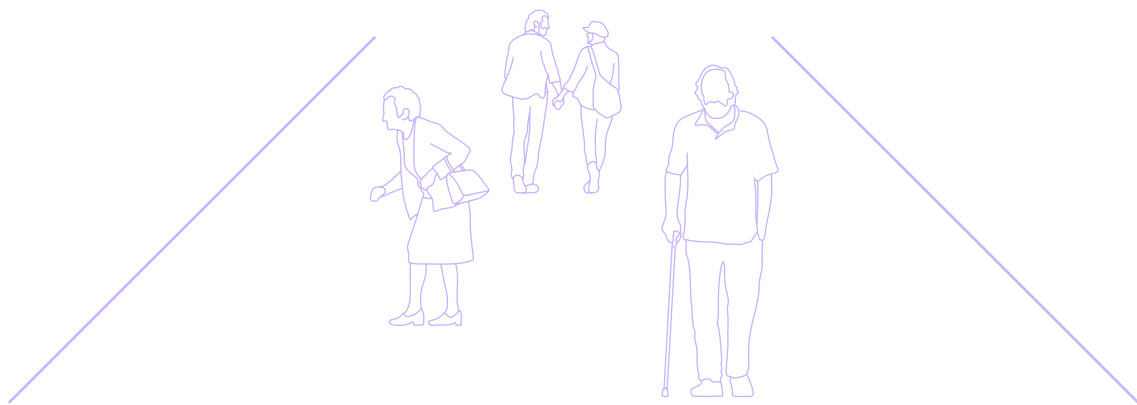
“We have to go to Pottery Barn!” she said, “They have the nicest, cleanest bathroom in the mall. Kinsie told me about it—she never goes anywhere else.”

I was less concerned with the state of the bathroom being pristine, but I agreed to walk the extra distance to the Pottery Barn. The bathroom was unlocked with no inhibiting signage. It was decked head to toe in Pottery Barn products and smelled like potpourri.



## food court

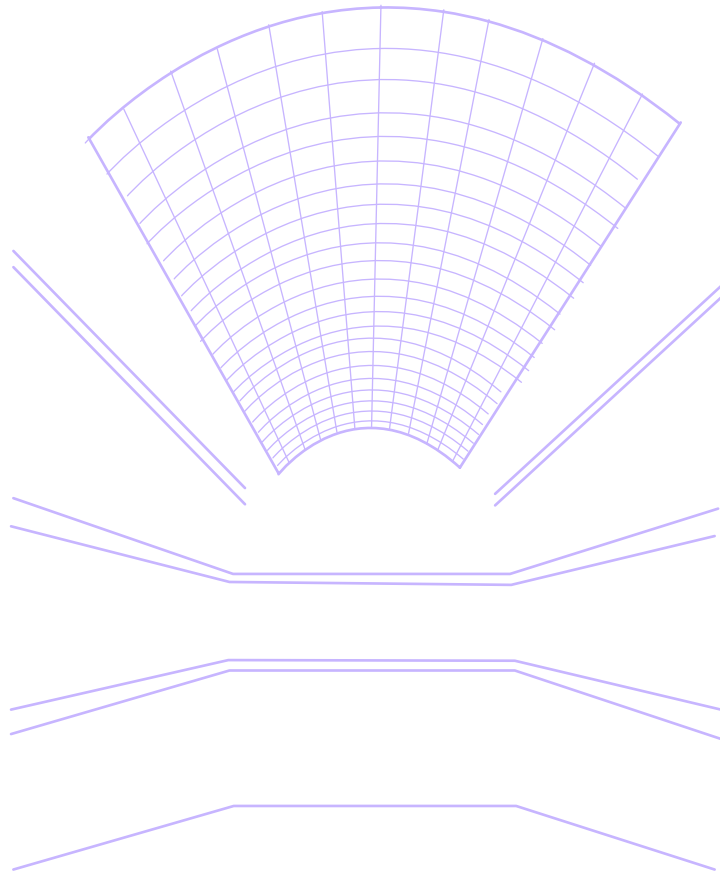
In North America, the food court set up is generally unique to hospitals, airports, and shopping malls. Usually more frequently visited than the former buildings, the mall food court sees more use by the general public. When I was a kid I used to love getting one hard-shell taco from Taco Time and one order of Arby's curly fires at the local mall's food court. The food court is a place where you can sit by yourself or with a group, and all of you can have different meals, no meals, or multiple meals. You can sit and wait for a friend without feeling pressured to leave, as no one in waiting on you or making you feel like you're infringing on their space—it is large, open, and public. It is a place where you can scarf down some tator tots, and walk a few short paces into the Coach store and buy yourself a \$300 bag if you want to.



## corridor

The corridor of a shopping mall is an important public space in the city. A mall is one of the few buildings that anyone can walk into with no pay barrier to entry. Once in a store, one might feel pressured to buy something or not linger for too long, especially in an expensive store. But in the corridor, there is no prescribed activity or program. One can use the space for leisure. Seniors can get their steps in for the day, teens can loiter and hang out with their friends, and kids can have temper tantrums. If nothing else, the mall corridor is place where one can simply be. Of course, for vulnerable members of the population like the homeless, the mall might not be so accommodating. Security guards and expected social norms in the mall make the space public for most, but not for everyone.





## atrium

The atrium space in the shopping mall is similar to the corridor in that it is open for anyone to be in without having to shop or buy anything. The lofty space with views to different levels and a glass ceiling is formally a descendant of the shopping arcades in Paris of the late 19th century. The space is flexible, playing host to various activities. At Southgate Mall in Edmonton near my parents house, my sister once entered a contest to be in a fashion show that took place in the mall's atrium. Along with a handful of other lucky local teens, Kristen got to grace the catwalk. Years later, when I was a teen working at American Eagle in the same mall, I walked past the atrium in the early morning on the way to start my shift, before the stores were open. I was surprised to see a group of elderly people gathered there doing a Tai Chi class.

The atrium of the mall acts as a public community space, where events and classes can take place, or where one can simply meet their friends.

## The Shopping Mall: Changing Urban Landscapes and Public Space

*NOTE: Images have been redacted due to copyright.  
Ignore figure references.*

With the rise of online shopping, malls across America are seeing less and less traffic. More than 8,600 stores are closing in America in 2019 according to Business Insider, fueling the ‘retail apocalypse’ happening across the country. Commercial real-estate firm, CoStar Group, has estimated that 102 million square feet of retail store space closed down in 2017, and another 155 million square feet closed in 2018. This mass of abandoned space has left a hole in both the built environment of cities as well as in the leisure and entertainment space that shopping occupied in society. The once spatial, social, and physical act of shopping is being replaced with the solitary digital act of online shopping. Malls that once housed the thrill, spectacle, therapy, and leisure of shopping are going extinct. These public retail spaces also play host to more than just shopping — they accommodate loitering teenagers who want a place to hang out, seniors who want to get their steps in for the day, and moms who want to get out of the house with their kids. With a mass shut down of this building type, what will fill the void in the public space that housed a beloved American past time? Can the derelict empty malls of America be repurposed into a new type of public space?

In this essay, I seek to examine the relationship of public space and consumerism in the shopping mall, and how this distinct architectural typology has served to construct this

space. By examining the history of retail spaces, and how the shopping mall has employed their characteristics, I will discuss the relationship of design, consumption, and public space, and the important role that malls play within it.

In October 1956, Southdale Shopping Centre opened its glass doors to the public for the first time. Located in Edina, Minnesota — between farms and the suburbs of Minneapolis — Southdale was the first fully enclosed, climate-controlled shopping mall in America (figure 3). This vision by architect Victor Gruen, of a suburban ‘town centre,’ where the public could have a place to gather and socialize was finally realized. Originally from Vienna, Gruen sought to bring the town square and public urban realm of his home city to the isolating, private space of the American suburbs<sup>1</sup>. His intentions were to create a mixed-use centre that housed not only retail, but also daycares, apartments, offices, and more — a place that could function as the public core for the suburban enclaves that were emerging all over the country. While Gruen’s new shopping typology took off with great success, his original programmatic intentions for the space did not. In general, the malls became wholly dedicated to an immersive retail shopping experience, without the mixed-use spaces that Gruen imagined.

Gruen’s mall was the first autonomous, enclosed mall where one would drive, park, and then enter a pedestrian shopping space. While the specifics of the building type are unique to itself, the immersive shopping experience it presents falls into a rich lineage of retail architecture. Beginning with the bazaars

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<sup>1</sup> Smiley, David J. *Pedestrian Modern: Shopping and American Architecture*. 1-3

of the 1500's, to the arcades of Paris in the late 1700's, to the Crystal Palace's Great Exhibition of 1851, and most closely related typology, the department store, which first appeared in Paris in 1838, as Le Bon Marché. From all of these previous manifestations of shopping spaces, the contemporary shopping mall has borrowed architectural elements, forms, and tactics.

The bazaar's many side-by-side stalls provided a sensory shopping experience full of not just sights, but smells, sounds, tastes, and textures. The bazaar was created at the scale of the pedestrian, for one to walk through without direct instruction or wayfinding. One example of this retail typology is The Royal Exchange of London, built in 1566. As seen in the plan (figure 4), a wide corridor encircles a large open space, which would fill with merchant stalls selling goods. This configuration allows for shoppers to circulate freely, and follow their senses to their desired merchandise. Similarly, in the shopping mall, the stores are packed adjacent to one another with their doors open to the corridor, sized for the anticipated volume of customers. Additionally, the mall takes the lateral adjacencies of the bazaar, and arrays them vertically, creating sectional adjacency through open atriums for sightlines and physical connectivity. These adjacencies of shops in plan and section can be seen in the drawings and images of the original design of Southdale Centre (figures 5 and 6).

The arcades of Paris first appeared in the 1780's. These narrow pedestrian streets hosted a plethora of crafts peoples shops, where customers would enter shops off of the street and pick their desired product from a display counter, whereby the shopkeeper would then fetch the item from the storage in the

back, or if the item was not readily available, they would take down the customer's information and make the product to order<sup>2</sup>. The arcades were a unique shopping space at the time, as they "provided a new kind of public space, a street environment, which, by being covered over, allowed the opportunity to promenade and view while being protected from the weather"<sup>3</sup> (figure 7). The simple measure of providing coverage from rain and snow with a glass roof made the shopping experience much more hospitable and therefore desirable to the customer. The glass roof also acted to enclose the existing street life, re-contextualizing the hustle and bustle of the street to an interior environment. The shopping mall employs these same tactics. In 1956 when Southdale Centre opened, air conditioning was uncommon — people were unlikely to have it in their homes, and it was rarely seen in public buildings such as schools or offices. The mall however, had it. Southdale offered a comfortable, 'year-round springtime atmosphere' (figure 8) where one might go simply to escape the heat of summer or the cold of winter. The corridors lined with shops also mimic the street-like quality of the arcades, where rather than a space simply lined with stalls, the mall houses enclosed shops with their own doorways and signage, much like they exist on a streetscape.

The Crystal Palace is another building widely considered to be a genesis of retail architecture. Opened in 1851 to host the Great Exhibition in London, this impressive 990,000 square foot building showcased a splendour of goods, crafts, resources, plants, and animals from around the British Empire, all laid out under one roof (figure 9). Designed by Joseph Paxton, the building was the

<sup>2</sup> Grunenberg, *Shopping*. 82

<sup>3</sup> Fyfe, Rendell, *Images of the Street*. 87

largest glass structure of the day, enabled by recent advancements in iron and prefabrication techniques<sup>4</sup>. Designed to express the reach and the might of the British Empire at the height of its power, the Crystal Palace brought the jewels of every colony together in one place, where one could walk through the single building and feel as though they traveled the world. The spectacle and variety of goods in the palace captivated the attention and imagination of its visitors. The modern-day shopping mall uses the same method of housing a great variety of goods in one space. By placing all kinds of merchandise in one building, from fine jewelry to candy to shoes to appliances to technology, everything becomes accessible and consumable to the customer. Having luxury goods and everyday goods in the same environment has a democratizing effect by which the patron of the mall can feel that everything is available to them, even if in reality they cannot afford it.

Perhaps no building type has fully brought the hypnotizing magic of the shopping experience to life as thoroughly as the department store. One of the first and most notable department stores built in Paris in 1852 is Le Bon Marché. At five storeys tall, the heavy stone façade, complete with “a colossal Roman arch flanked by fluted Corinthian pilasters, and embellished with classical statuary, pediment, and richly carved moldings”<sup>5</sup> called upon the monumental architectural rhetoric of both the church and halls of famed world exhibitions. This appealed to the bourgeoisie by recalling traditional values while simultaneously possessing a fair-like grandeur. The corner of the building featured a rounded glass window that softened one's path on the street, and always

<sup>4</sup> Piggot, *Palace of the People*. 22  
<sup>5</sup> Clausen, *The Department Store: Development Of The Type*. 23

faced and appealed to the passerby. Behind the glass a stage was set with an ever-changing multitude of goods, artfully arranged to capture the imagination of the spectator. Once inside the building, an ever-changing cloak of merchandise allowed the spectacle of the space to change with the seasons. In Emile Zola's novel “The Ladies Paradise,” which was based on the Bon Marché, he offers a description of one of the stores iconic ‘white sales’:

“Nothing but white goods, all the white articles from each department, a riot of white, a white star, the twinkling of which was at first blinding, so that the details could not be distinguished amidst this unique whiteness. But the eye soon became accustomed to it; to the left [...] jutted out the white promontories of cotton and calico, the white rocks formed of sheets, napkins, and handkerchiefs; whilst to the right [...] occupied by the mercery, the hosiery, and the wooden goods, were exposed constructions of mother of pearl buttons, a pretty decoration composed of white socks, one whole room covered with white swanskin, traversed in the distance by a stream of light. But the brightness shone with especial brilliancy in the central gallery, amidst the ribbons and the cravats, the gloves and the silks. The counters disappeared beneath the whiteness of the silks, the ribbons, and the gloves.”<sup>6</sup>

This lavish expanse and display of bountiful goods had an overwhelming effect on the patrons of the store, causing them to participate in the theatre of display and consumption in the department store. For the bourgeois women of Paris, shopping was no longer a chore or an errand, but a thrill and a rush. To bring this experience to life, the architecture of the department store had to act as the medium for customers to view the merchandise seamlessly and expansively. The strongest manifestation of this is the escalator. The Bon Marché's first escalator was installed in 1906,

<sup>6</sup> Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*. 352

facilitating an uninterrupted experience of the space.

“The escalator profoundly modifies architecture—it denies the relevance of both compartments and floors. The success and rapid acceptance of the escalator, which effectively enabled the department store at the beginning of the twentieth century, is due to its effortless transformation of virtual space into retail area.”<sup>7</sup>

There is perhaps no more immediately recognizable icon of the shopping mall than the escalator. Appearing in the malls first iteration of Southdale Centre, and in every mall that I’ve seen or experienced since, the escalator is a key component of an immersive shopping experience, that collapses divisions and serves to move the pedestrian uninterrupted through the space (figure 10).

The escalator, combined with the surrounding multiplicity of stores and merchandise, creates “the manifest presence of surplus, the magical, definitive negation of scarcity, the maternal, luxurious sense of being already in the Land of Cockaigne.”<sup>8</sup> The escalator maintains the feel of a pedestrian walking experience, but heightens the pace and makes it vertical without added effort. It also allows for a continuous — if distorted — experience of the space, in opposition to the disjunctured experience of the elevator. This continuous environment of profusion and luxury entices customers to buy something and take a piece of the space home — or as Baudrillard asserts: “you buy the part for the whole.”<sup>9</sup>

By appropriating and remixing elements of the bazaar, the arcades, the Crystal Palace and the department store, the shopping mall has come to take its own form in retail architecture.

<sup>7</sup> Chung et al. *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*. 337

<sup>8</sup> Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*. 26

<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*. 26

In addition to the elements it has taken from history, the mall has characteristics unique to itself and to the suburban environment where it began. The mall exterior is designed completely to accommodate the car. Southdale Centre’s relatively mute (arguably ugly) exterior, falls within what Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown call the ‘decorated shed’<sup>10</sup>. Unlike its retail predecessors, the Shopping Mall as conceived of by Victor Gruen relies on the sign on or near the building to communicate what it is, not the architecture of the building itself. The bazaar, great exhibition, and department store all employ signifiers embedded in their architectural form which communicate to the viewer what is inside, and how they should relate to it. The exterior appearance of Southdale Centre, however, can be classified as “ugly and ordinary architecture” as it “has a tendency towards urban sprawl,” is “conventional and ordinary” and arguably “looks cheap”<sup>11</sup>. While Gruen was criticized for the Southdale’s outward appearance, the aesthetic and form of the mall is appropriate for its time and use. In the auto-oriented landscape of the suburbs, where one would pass by at high speeds and see the building from the road, a large sign effectively communicated the immediate connotation of what the building was — this is similar to the typology of the casinos of the Las Vegas strip of the 1970’s as observed by Venturi and Scott Brown.

Lastly, Southdale Centre’s cultural significance lies in its legacy as a new typology of public leisure space, as well as marking the first complexes of their size to be dedicated to shopping. This began to change the way cities were planned

<sup>10</sup> Venturi, Brown, Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*. 88

<sup>11</sup> Venturi, Brown, Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*. 102

and developed in the United States. The mall acts as a unique public space because there is no pay barrier to entry, and the environment inside is generally more tolerant than other spaces in the city. For example, where 'no loitering' signs can be found around commercial streets and some plazas, the mall generally accommodates loitering teenagers who want a place to hang out with their friends. There is less pressure to purchase goods at the mall, because one does not have to enter the individual shops themselves, but can rather occupy the corridors and courts. Women and children and seniors also make up a large clientele of the mall. What these demographics have in common is that they are often outside of the labour force. While the mall can be described as a monument to consumerism and capitalism, it is ironically largely occupied by those whose time is not monetized. Teens, moms, children, and seniors freely spend their leisure time here as it is not costing them money to 'waste' their time. Baudrillard defines leisure as "an unproductive consumption of time"<sup>12</sup> — shopping malls give space for leisure to be enacted by individuals who have the freedom or desire to display their consumption — be it of merchandise or unproductive time. Today, as malls are seeing their decline as the dominant conveyor of the shopping experience, we are starting to see shopping becoming fractured and disseminated throughout more spaces, including airports, casinos, museums, concert halls, airplanes, and most significantly, in the palm of our own hands through our smart phones. This is changing our relationship as a society to retail consumption and our architectural expectations of it. Many of the

<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 157

glamorous shopping malls that we once knew now sit derelict and uninhabited. Some ex-malls, however, are seeing adaptive reuse projects give them new life. For example, the Westminster Arcade in Providence, Rhode Island, (figure 11) was built in 1828 and adapted to become a mall in the 1960's. The mall began its decline in the 1990's and fell into disrepair. However, in 2013 the mall was transformed into a mix of micro-loft living space and local businesses, utilizing its two-story layout to combine affordable urban dwellings, boutiques, and coffee shops. Westminster has become a community gathering place, frequently hosting events like craft fairs, food festivals and film screenings. In the malls most current life as a mixed-use public centre, the building typology has now come full-circle to play the role that Victor Gruen originally imagined as the dynamic, mixed use, heart of suburban centres. Although the architectural landscape of shopping is changing rapidly before our eyes, the legacy of the mall lives on through its impact on the spatial and cultural landscapes of American cities, as well as through new adaptive re-use projects.



Hi, I'm Quikstapic.  
You've probably heard of me before.  
In fact, there's a good chance that  
I'm on your phone right now. I'm a  
social media giant who has recently  
merged with e-commerce, to provide  
an integrated social and shopping  
experience. This means the same place  
you see and post selfies is the place  
where you see products and brands to  
purchase. Because I live on your phone,  
I'm very good at showing you exactly  
what you want to see and buy. I listen  
to the words you speak, I read your text  
messages and google searches, I have  
access to your photos, location, and  
have saved your credit card information.  
I pretty much know everything about  
you! Gathering this information is  
essential for me to show you images  
that you want to consume.



# quikstapic



Quikstapic is more than a collection of images, we are (as French theorist Guy Debord asserts in his text, *Society of the Spectacle*) “a social relation among people, mediated by images”. These people include consumers, influencers, and brands.



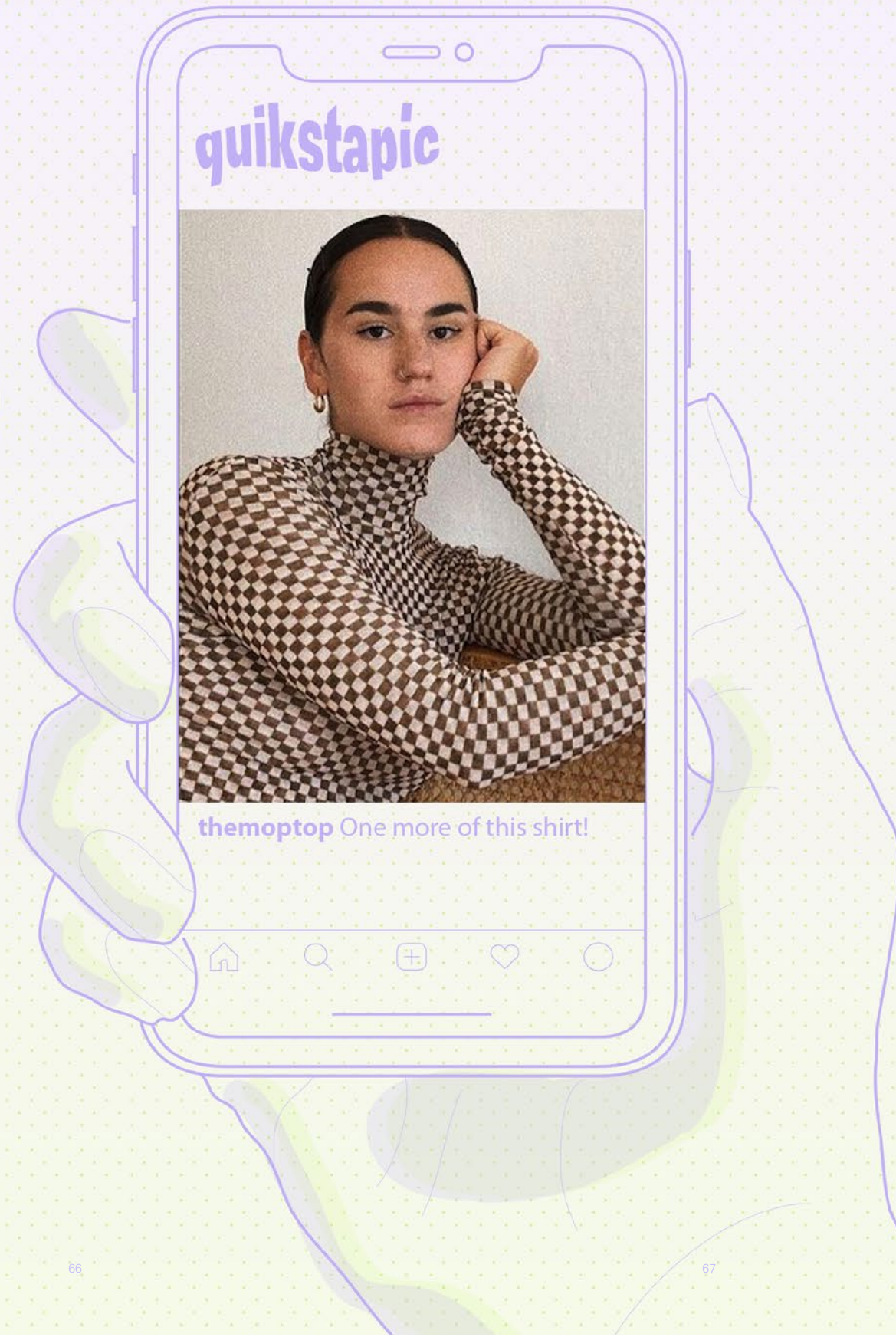
**“4. The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.”**

Guy Debord  
*Society of the Spectacle*



Take Quikstapic user the moptop for example. She is what is known as an 'influencer.' She has 150k followers (consumers who see her posts) and she posts images of herself, mostly in her home, using products that she loves. People follow her because they like her style, her personality, and her stuff. They want to consume her images and they want to be like her. The moptop is an ad who is a person, or a person who is an ad. Either way, cool right?

# the moptop





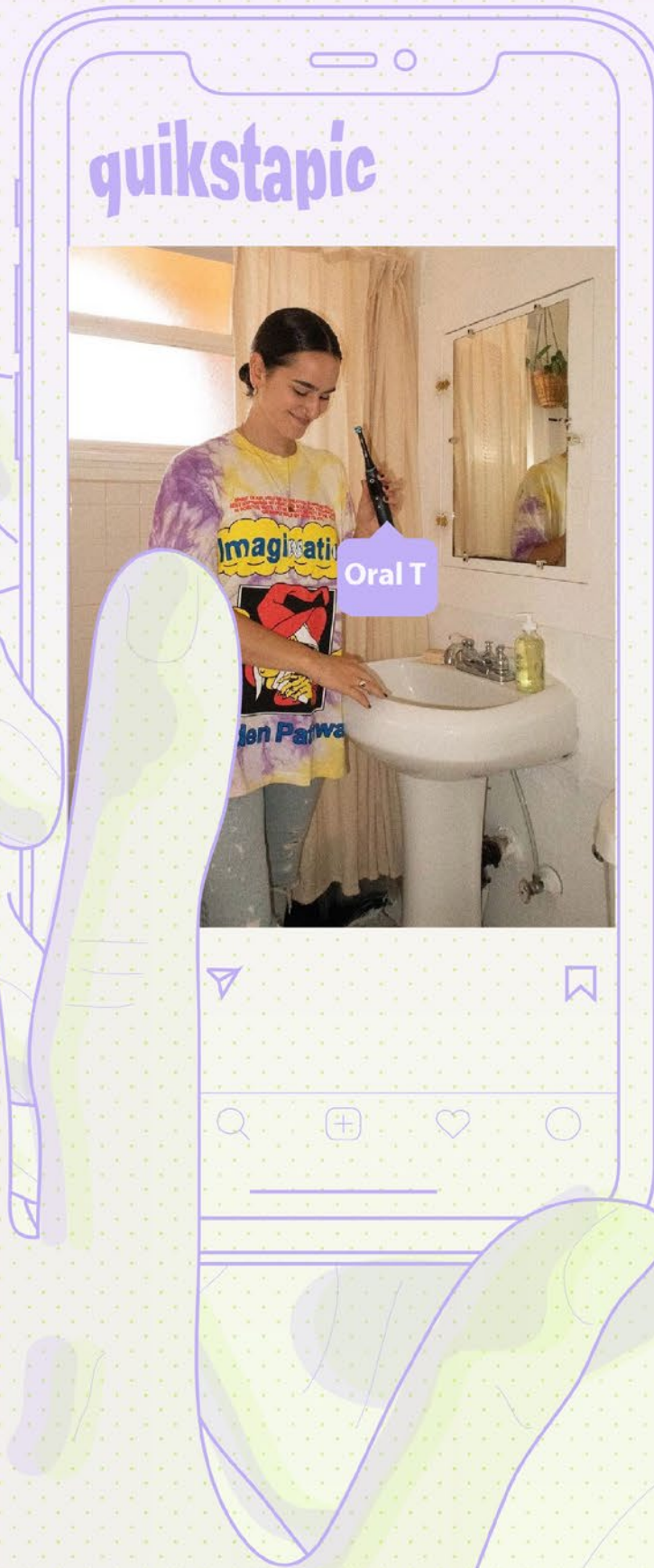
Almost everything in her photos is for sale. She is being paid by brands to promote their products.





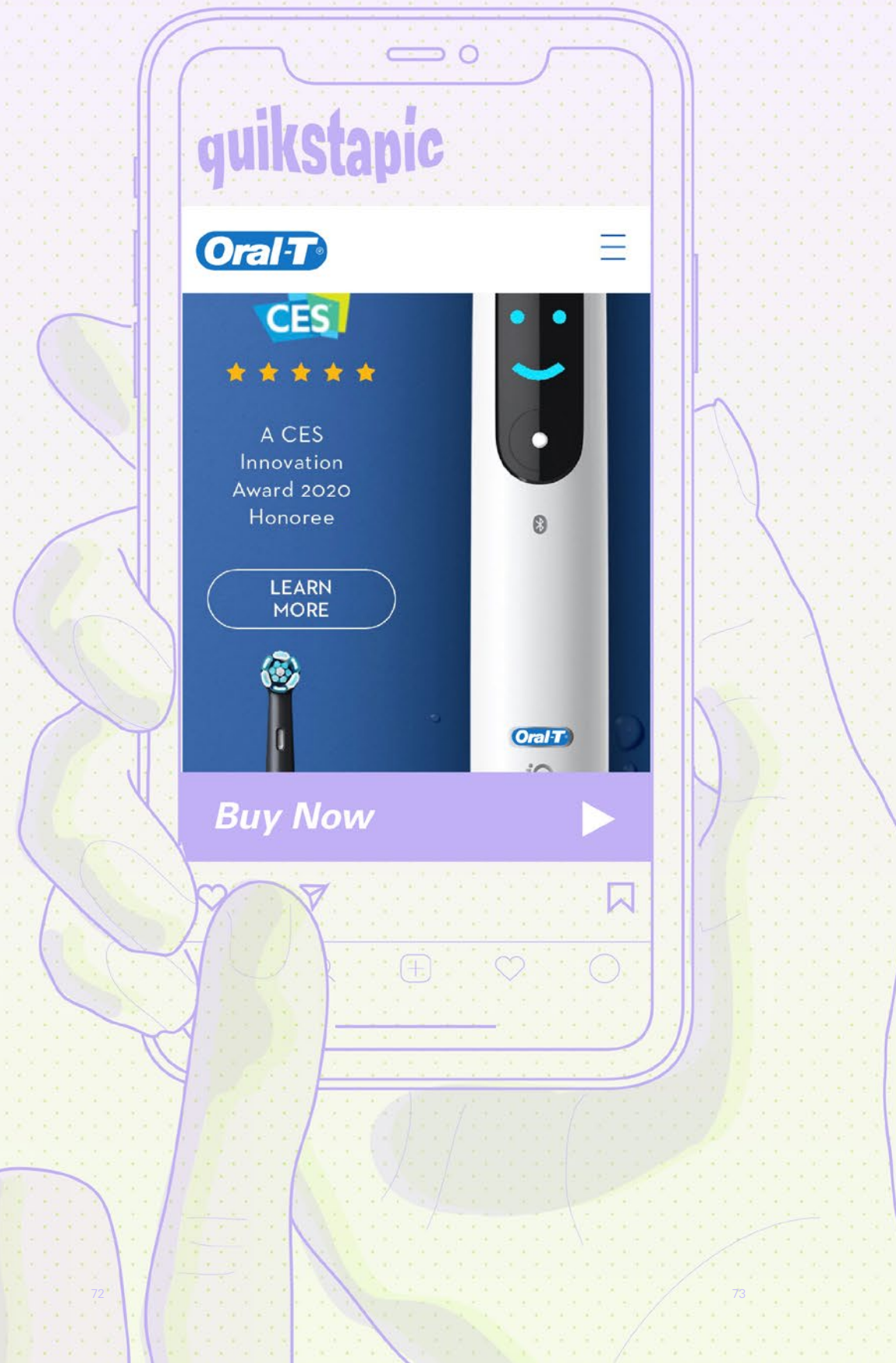
Here she is using her Oral-T toothbrush in her bathroom. When a user touches the image, this tag appears on the screen.

the moptop

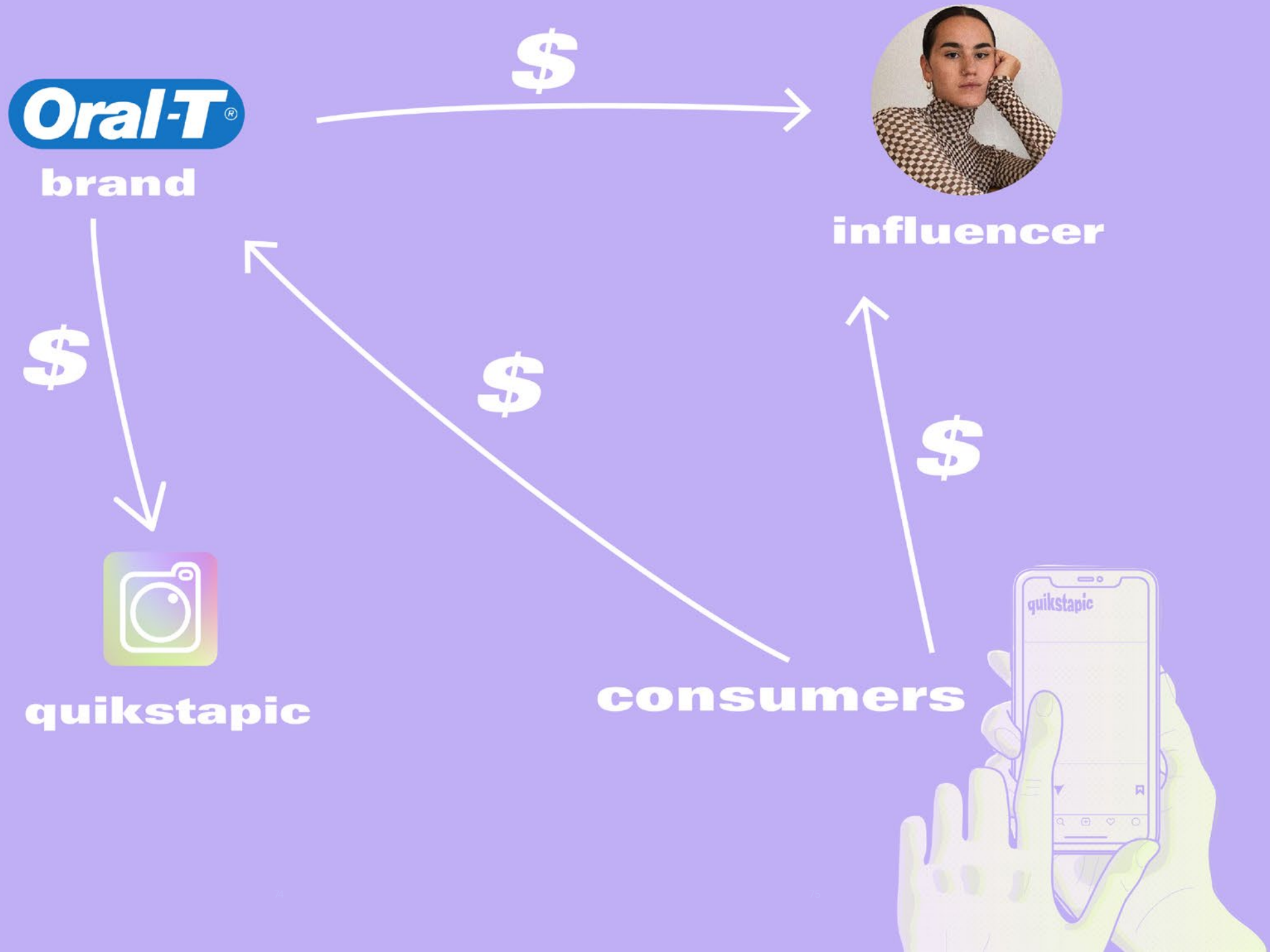




When they touch the tag, they are taken to the Oral-T page where they can buy the same toothbrush as the moptop, who they have grown to trust and admire. The moptop was paid about \$10,000 by Oral-T to post this. Oral-T pays me, Quikstapic, to host their e-commerce shop. And of course, the consumers paid money to buy the toothbrush, and a cut of their money went to both the moptop and Oral-T. So as you can see, there is an entire economy and set of power dynamics on Quikstapic, mediated entirely through images.

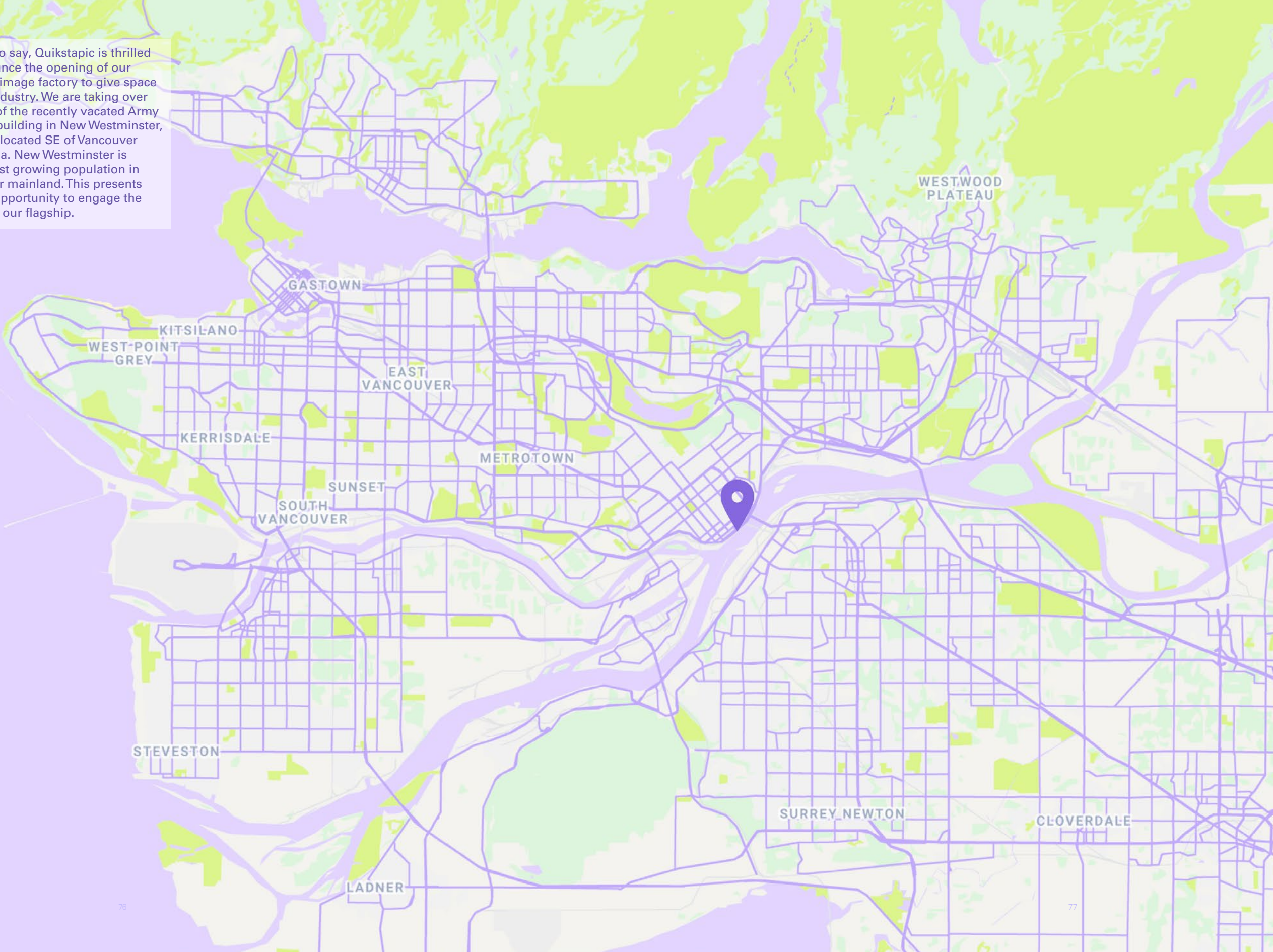


The influencer marketing industry is quickly accelerating, according to Business Insider it is on track to be worth \$15 Billion dollars by 2022. What makes it so effective is that influencers use their personality and identity to help brands sell products. The influencers identity is the true commodity that the consumer is buying. Another point about influencers is that anyone can be one—they just need to build an audience and online identity that is valuable to brands. This means, for the first time, content consumers can monetize themselves and cross over to being content creators, all enabled by Quikstapic's platform of social media mixed with e-commerce. We have engrained shopping into everyday life so much that people don't just buy brands anymore, brands also buy people.



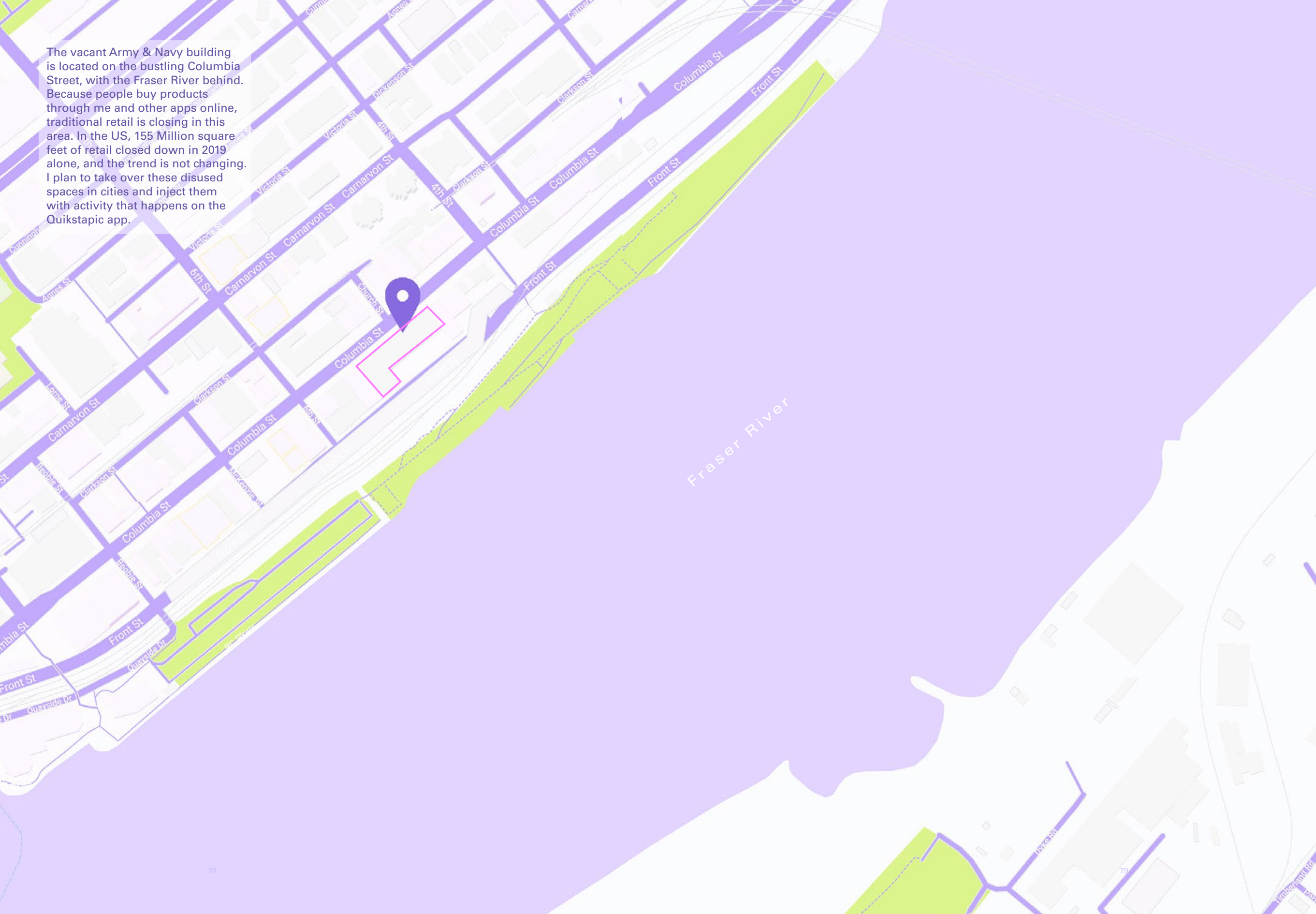


All that to say, Quikstapic is thrilled to announce the opening of our flagship image factory to give space to this industry. We are taking over the site of the recently vacated Army & Navy building in New Westminster, which is located SE of Vancouver in Canada. New Westminster is the fastest growing population in the lower mainland. This presents a great opportunity to engage the public in our flagship.



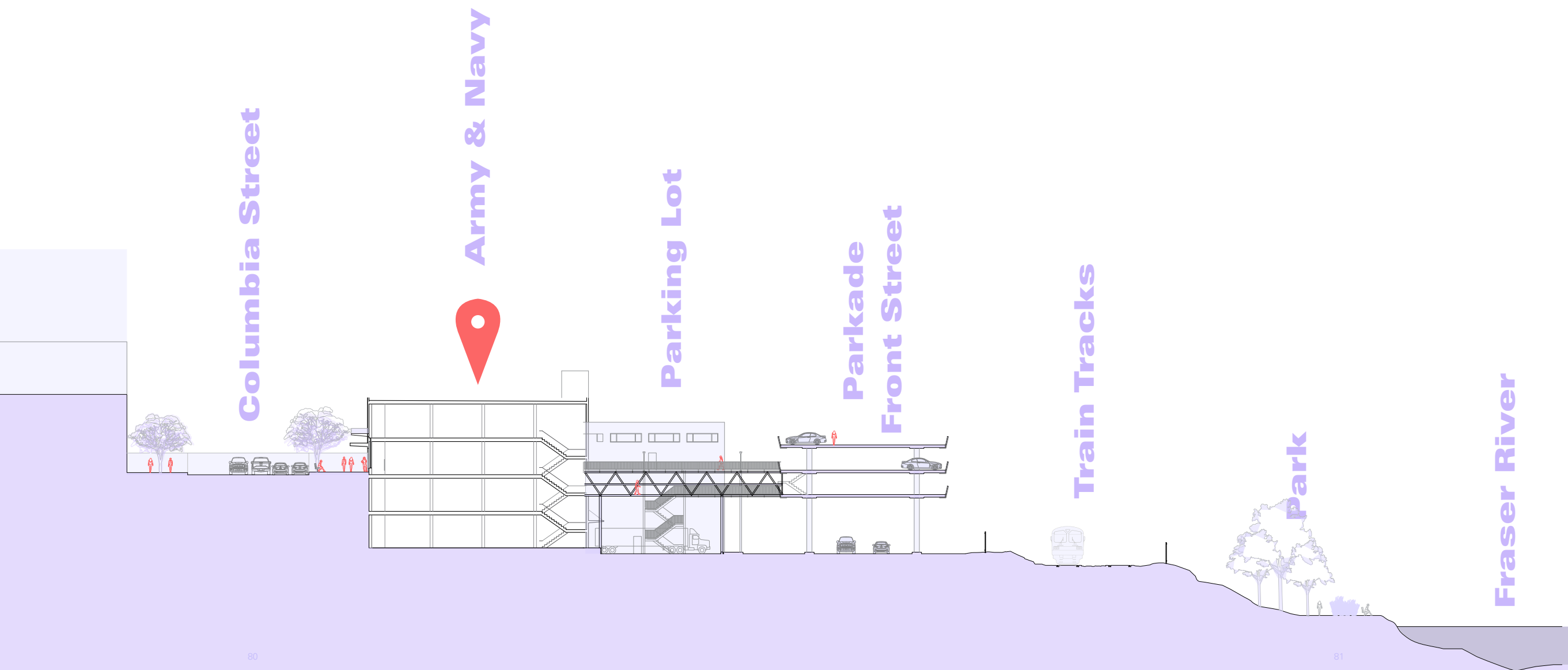


The vacant Army & Navy building is located on the bustling Columbia Street, with the Fraser River behind. Because people buy products through me and other apps online, traditional retail is closing in this area. In the US, 155 Million square feet of retail closed down in 2019 alone, and the trend is not changing. I plan to take over these disused spaces in cities and inject them with activity that happens on the Quikstapic app.

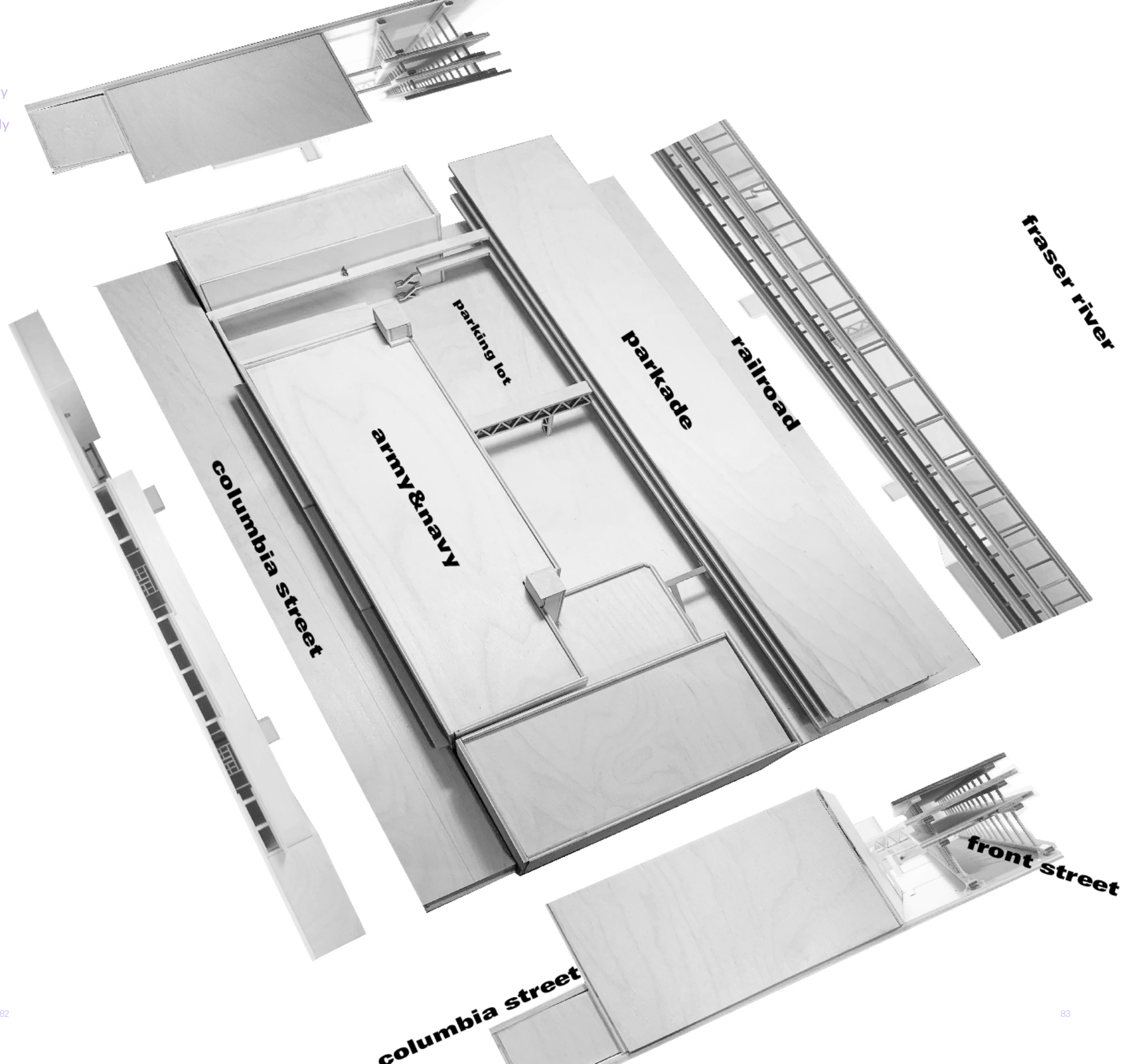




Let's take a look at the existing site and building: from left to right there is Columbia street, the army and navy building, parking lot behind, the elevated parkade with front street beneath it, train tracks, public park, and the river.



In this model we can see that Columbia street connects to the parkade at the back by way of this foot bridge allowing pedestrians can circulate freely around the site.





The building has large storefront windows all along the façade facing Columbia street. This presents an exciting opportunity for displays in the windows.





At the back there is this large façade facing the parkade, with lots of potential for views. The large parking lot provides an excellent area for the flagships more utilitarian and requirements like truck access and loading zone.





Before getting to the proposed renovation, let's look at the users. These include resident influencers, influencers, consumers (general public), and Quikstapic employees.

# Users



**resident influencers**



**influencer**



**consumer**



**quikstapic worker**



Resident influencers are sponsored by brands to live at the flagship, use all of the brands products and educate consumers about them. Here for example is OKEH family. They are sponsored by OKEH furniture warehouse, and live in the OKEH showrooms at quikstapic.





Influencers don't live in the building but they come here to take photos for their quikstapic account on our selfie stages, and partner with various brands. Here is Abibas boy, wearing a full Abibas outfit and ready to pose.





Consumers are members of the general public who come to quikstapic flagship to meet influencers and look at products, have a coffee in our café, and browse selfie stages where they might want to take do a photoshoot themselves! Consumers can become influencers too, after all.



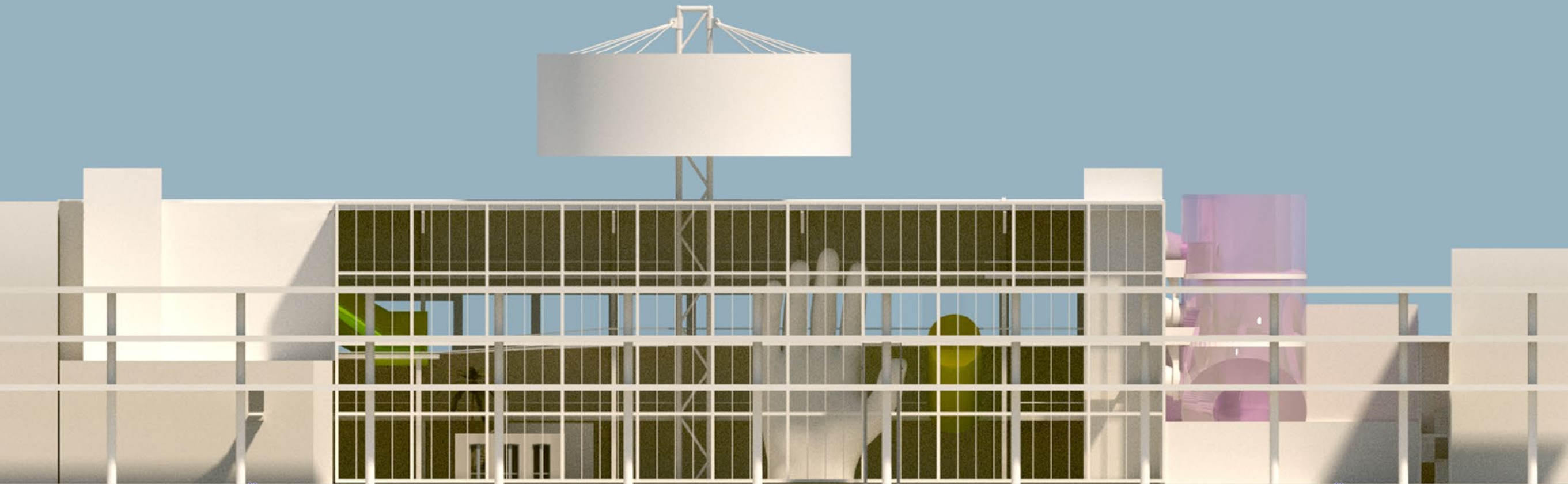


Quikstapik employees keep the flagship running. They set up new products and scenes daily, to make sure everything is ahead of trend.



Here is the proposal for Quikstapic flagship! As viewed from the south side. The solid wall at the back has been replaced with a window wall to reveal the activity inside. The floors have been cut back to create variable height spaces where selfie stages and influencer residences can be built. On the top of the building we have inserted our jumbotron billboard, and on the right is our trash shoot café.

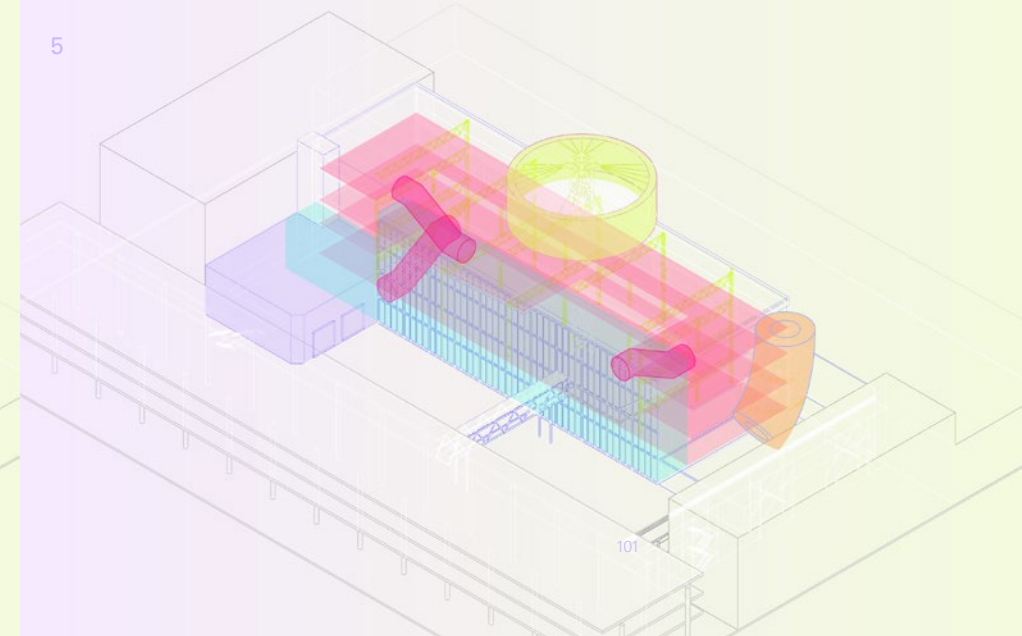
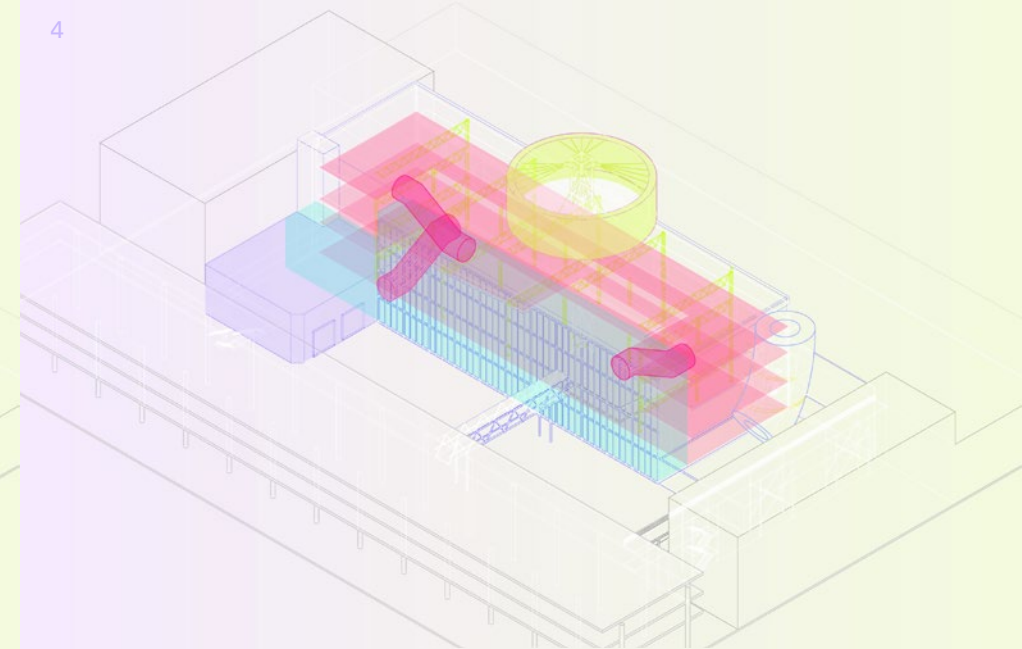
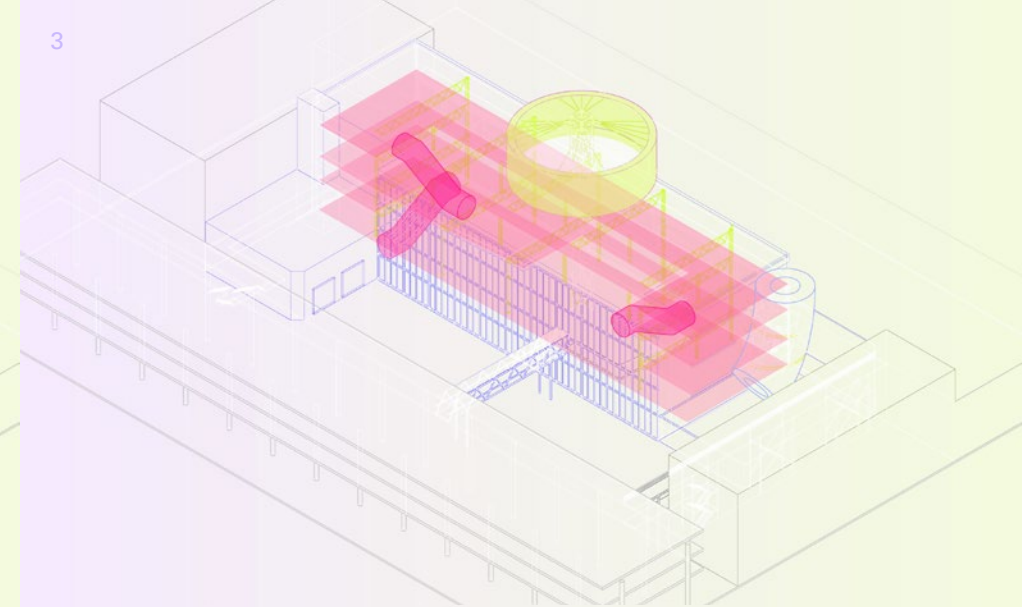
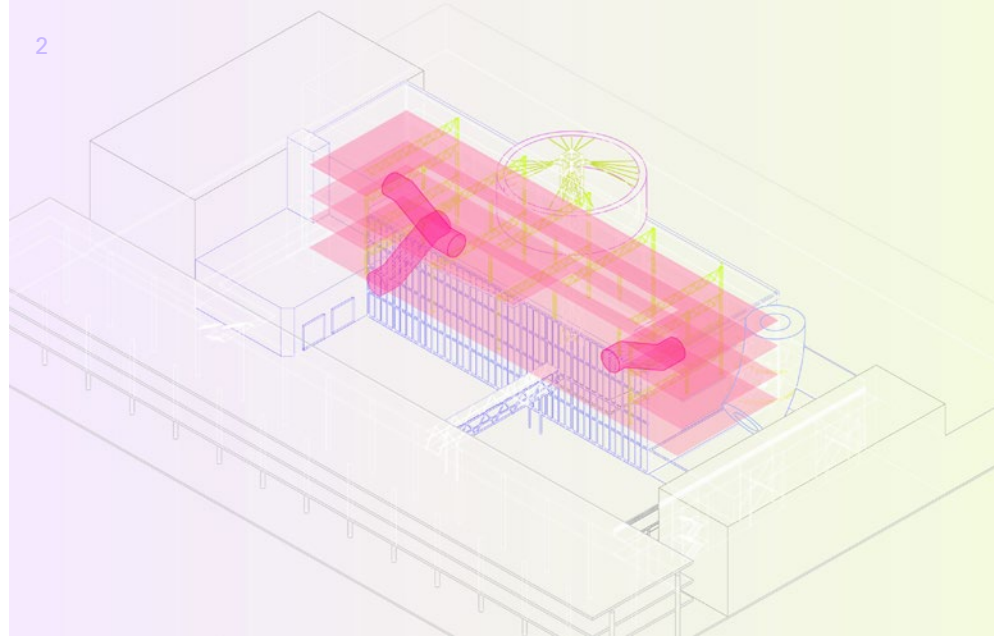
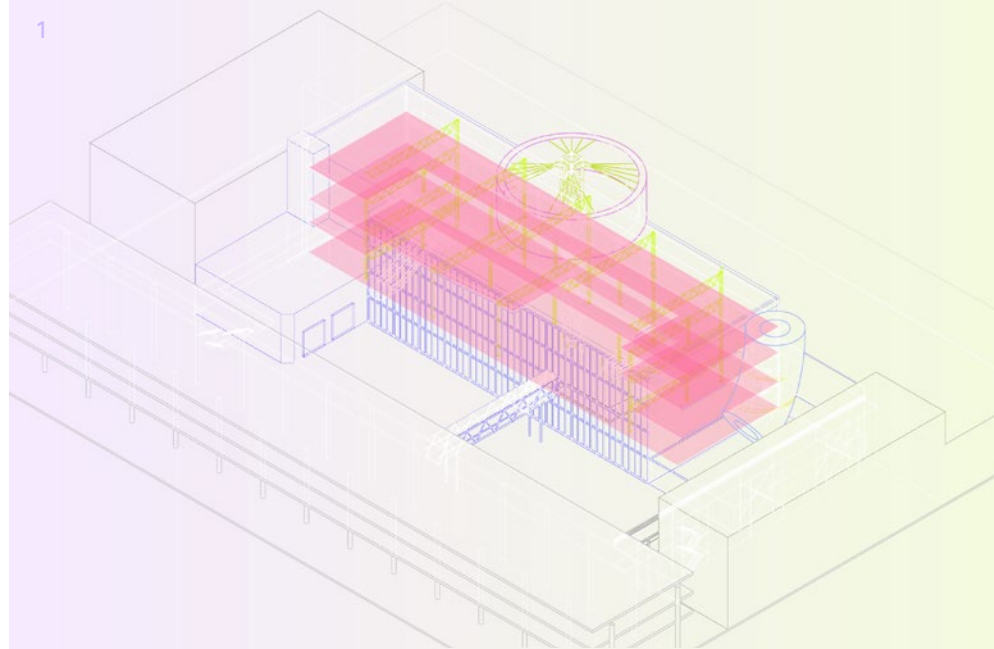
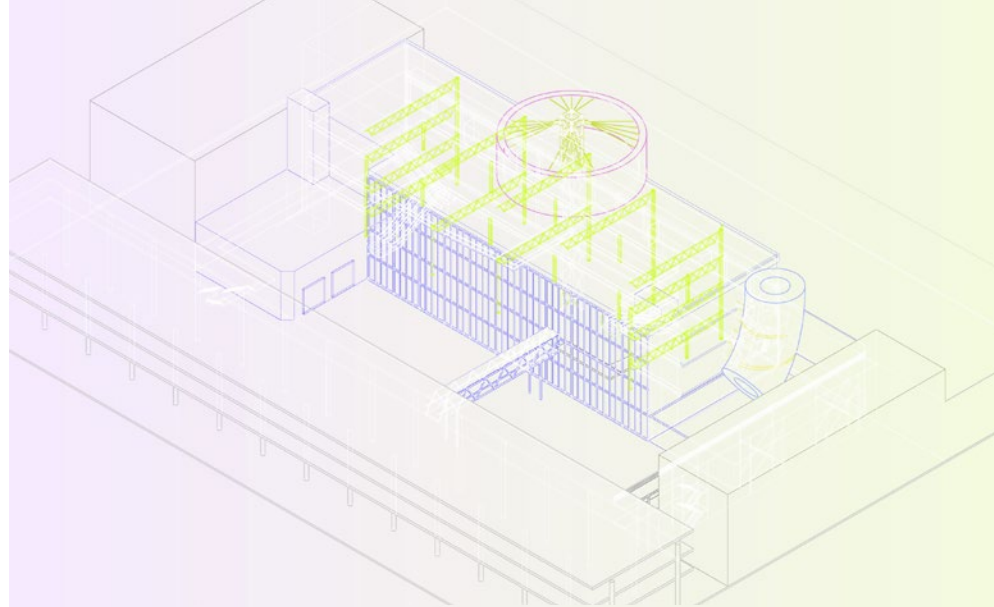
# quikstapic flagship



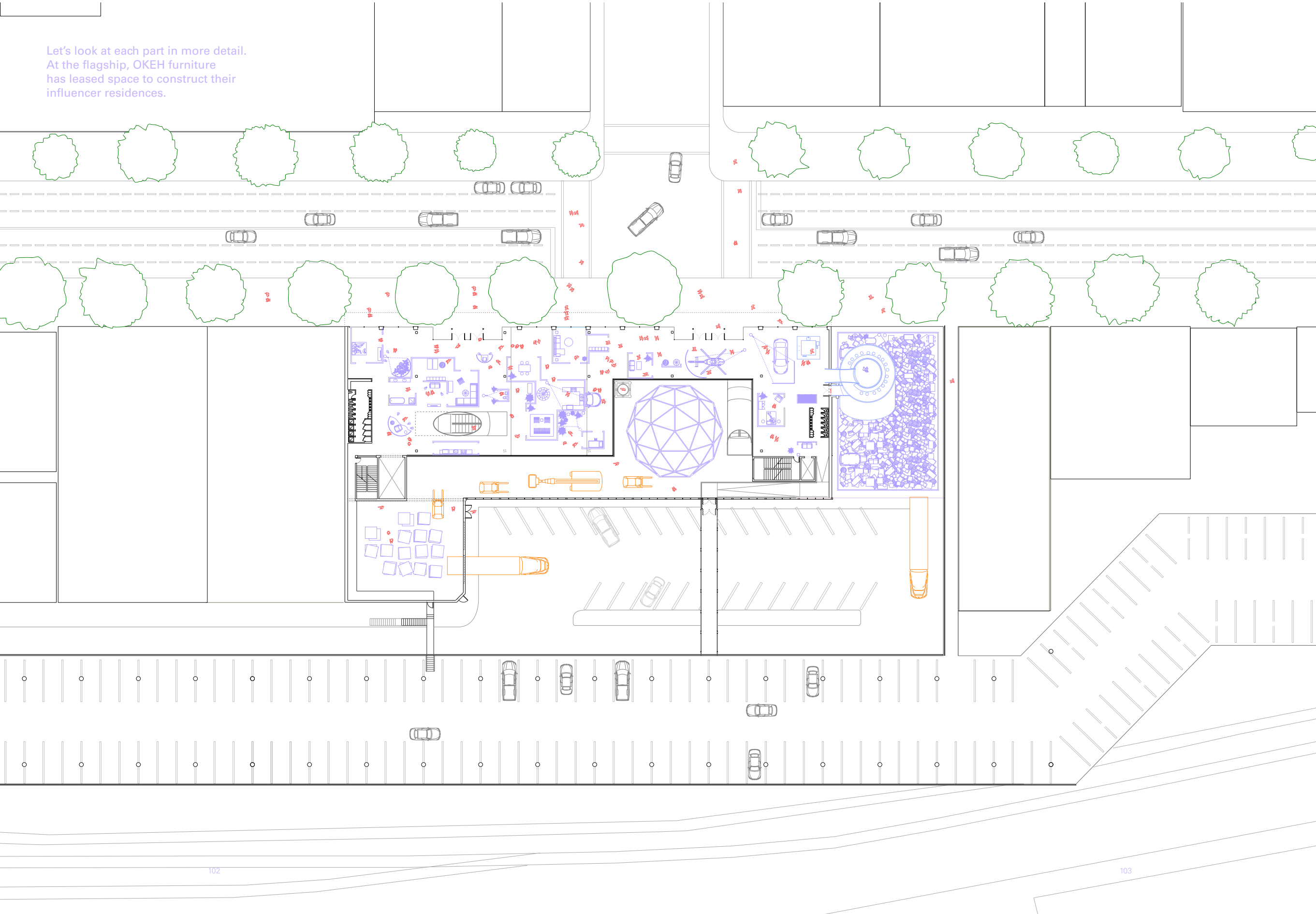


Let's look at each part in this axonometric diagram. Here we highlight the major building elements.

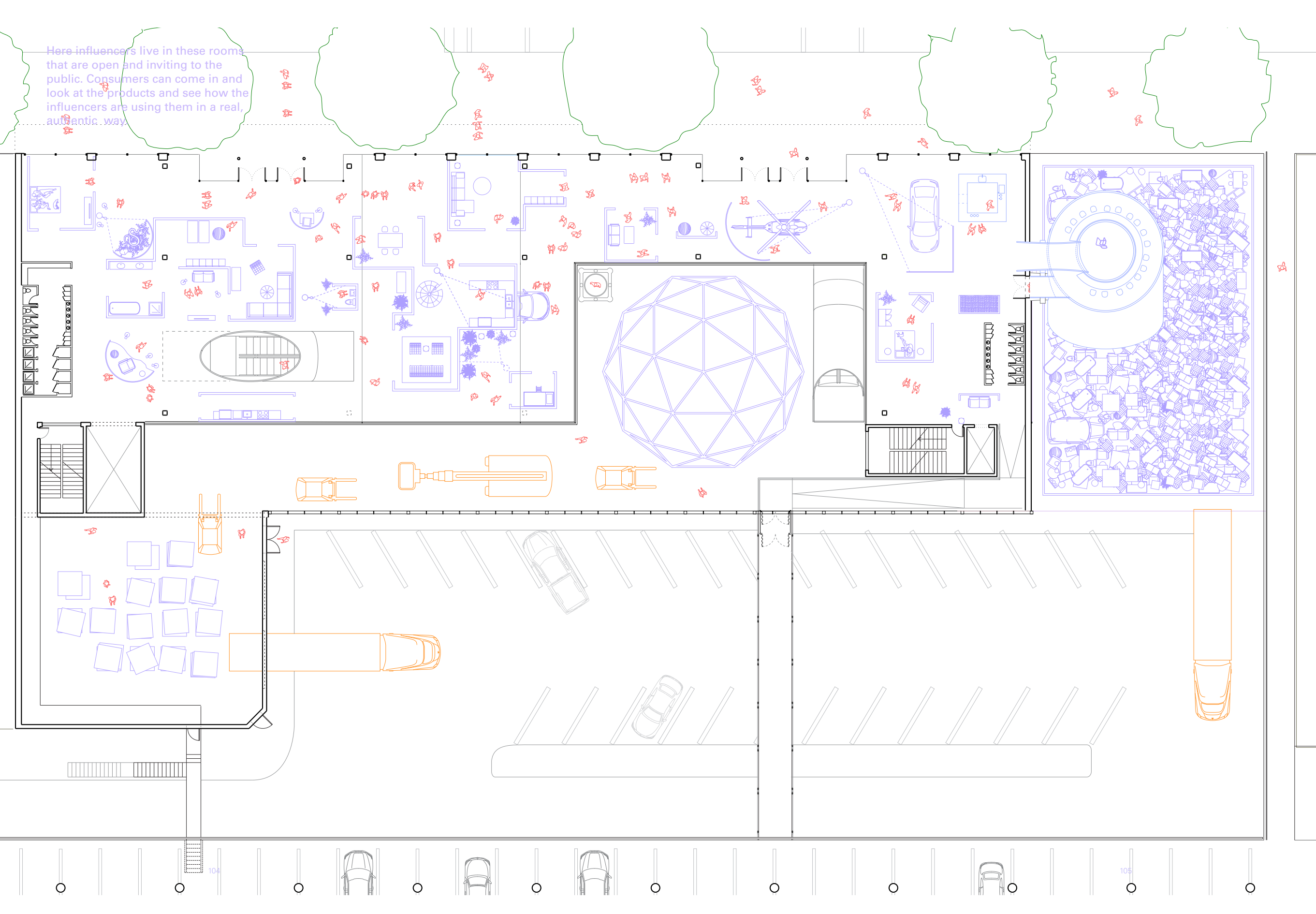
- 1 The existing floor plates are accessible to all users.
- 2 Escalators provide the main vertical circulation through the flagship.
- 3 The jumbotron billboard on the top of the building displays our users quikstapik images taken inside the flagship.
- 4 This full height space at the back of the building acts as a machine alley, and the adjacent garage is the loading bay.
- 5 This translucent tube on the north-east side of the building is a permanent construction shoot. When set and showroom pieces have been used, they can be thrown out by way of the shoot. Within the double walls is café seating where, visitors can enjoy a coffee and the view.

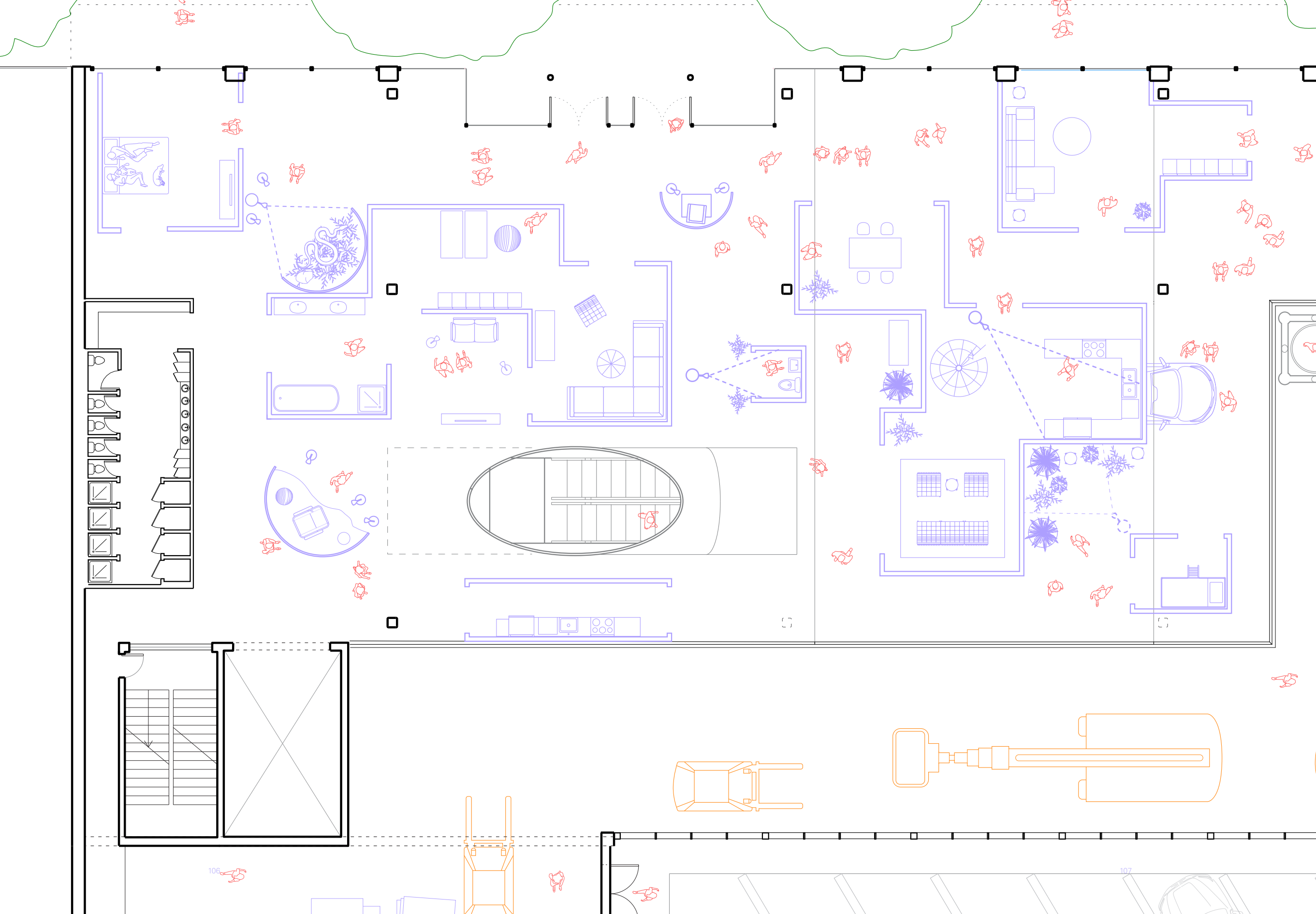


Let's look at each part in more detail.  
At the flagship, OKEH furniture  
has leased space to construct their  
influencer residences.



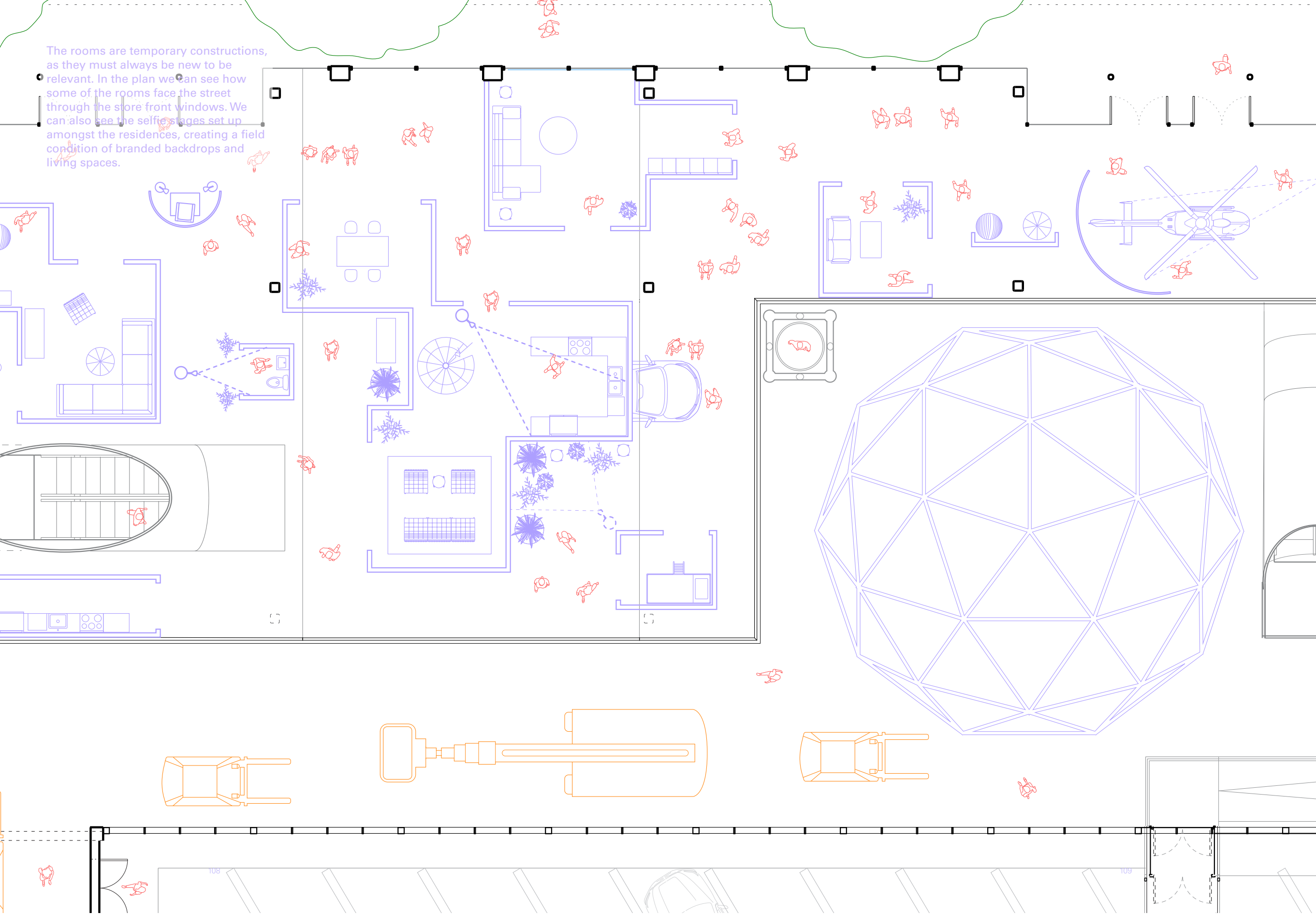
Here influencers live in these rooms that are open and inviting to the public. Consumers can come in and look at the products and see how the influencers are using them in a real, authentic way.

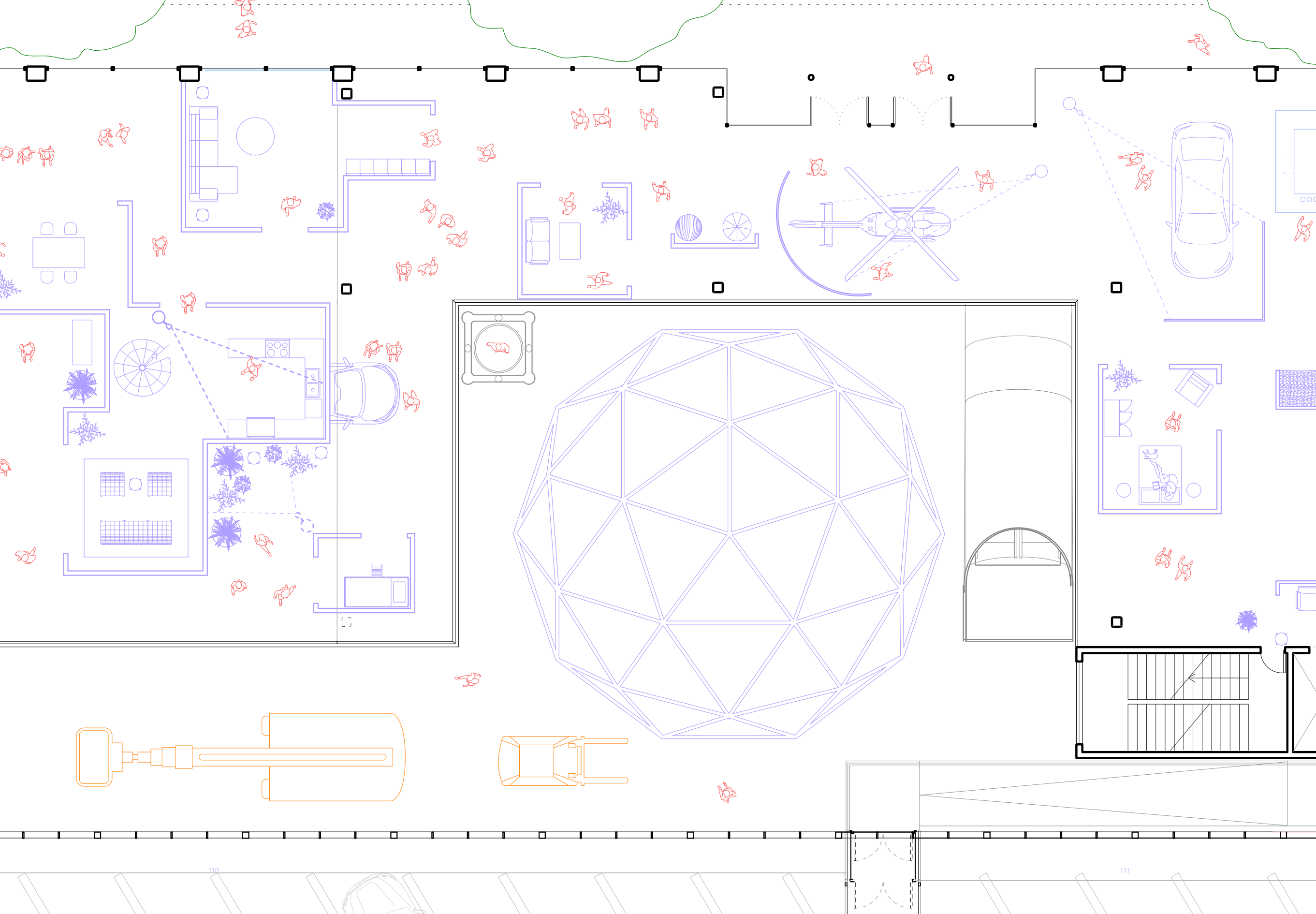






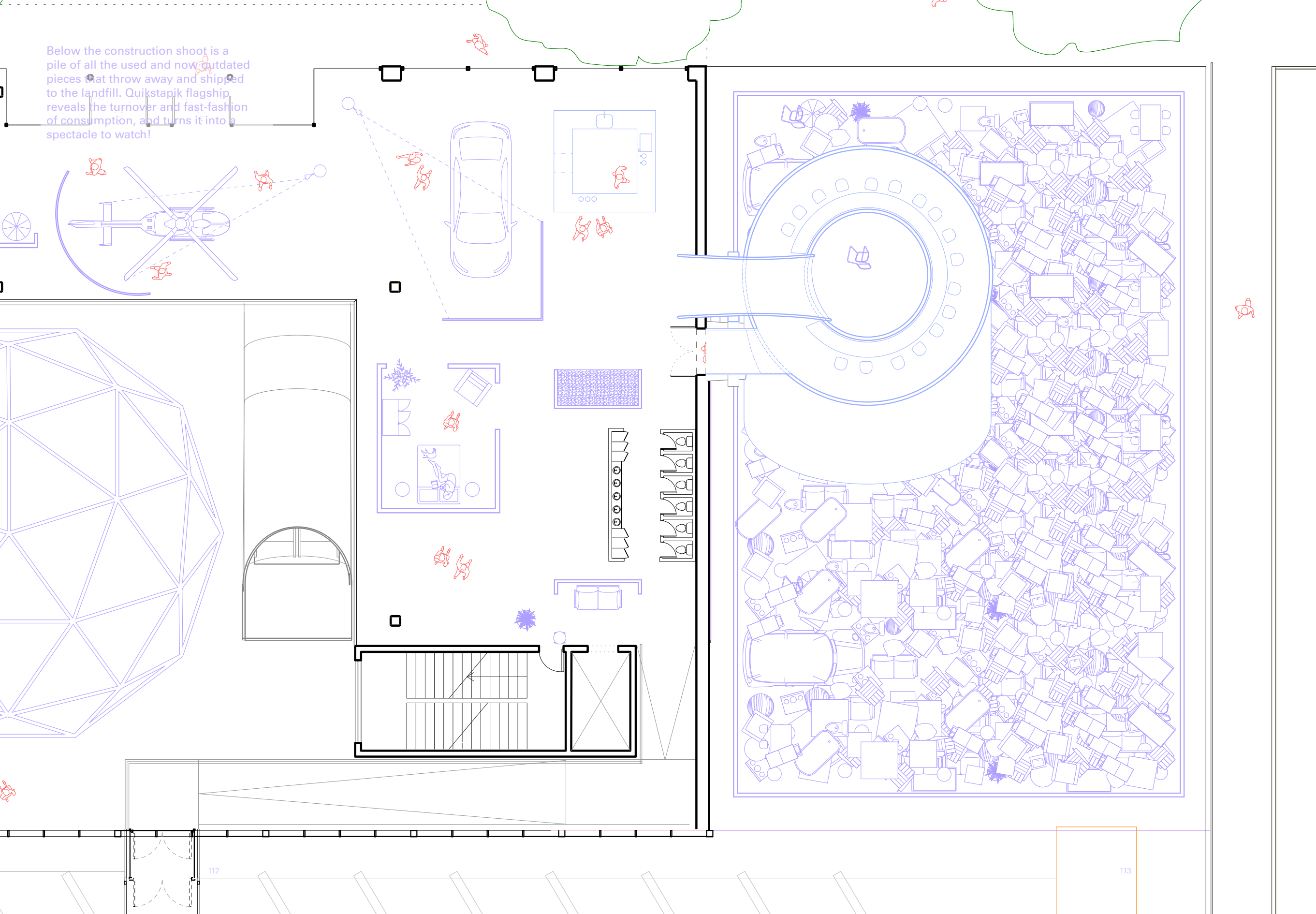
The rooms are temporary constructions, as they must always be new to be relevant. In the plan we can see how some of the rooms face the street through the store front windows. We can also see the selfie stages set up amongst the residences, creating a field condition of branded backdrops and living spaces.







Below the construction shoot is a pile of all the used and now outdated pieces that throw away and shipped to the landfill. Quikstapik flagship reveals the turnover and fast-fashion of consumption, and turns it into a spectacle to watch!





In this rendering we can see the view of the influencers bedroom from Columbia Street. The public can also pass through the inside, looking at products and interacting with the influencer.

These spaces are what theorist Jean Baudrillard refers to as simulacrum, or "models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal".<sup>1</sup> Or in our words, perfectly on trend homes and sets to create the ideal appearance online!

1

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*.





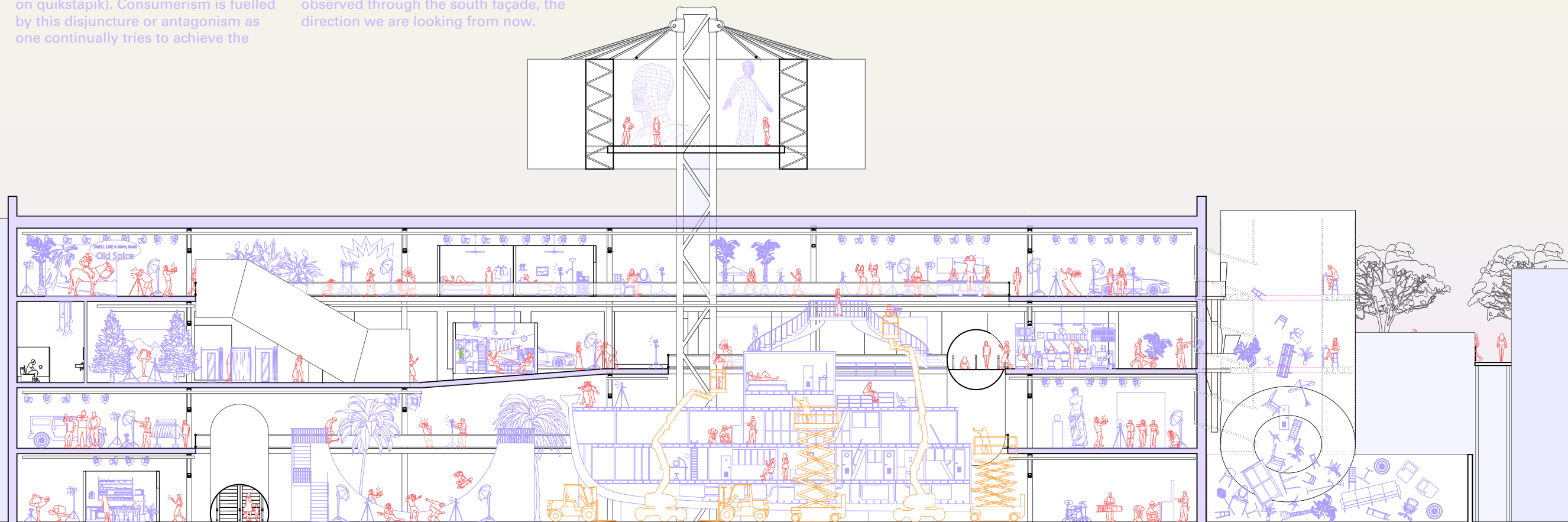
If a consumer wishes to purchase any of the products that the influencer is using, they can simply tap the bar code with their quikstachip and it will be sent to their address. Quikstachip is a micro-chip embedded under the skin that not only allows users to shop, but also tracks their age, gender, location, speech, and heart rate. This helps quikstapic consistently create exactly what users want to see.

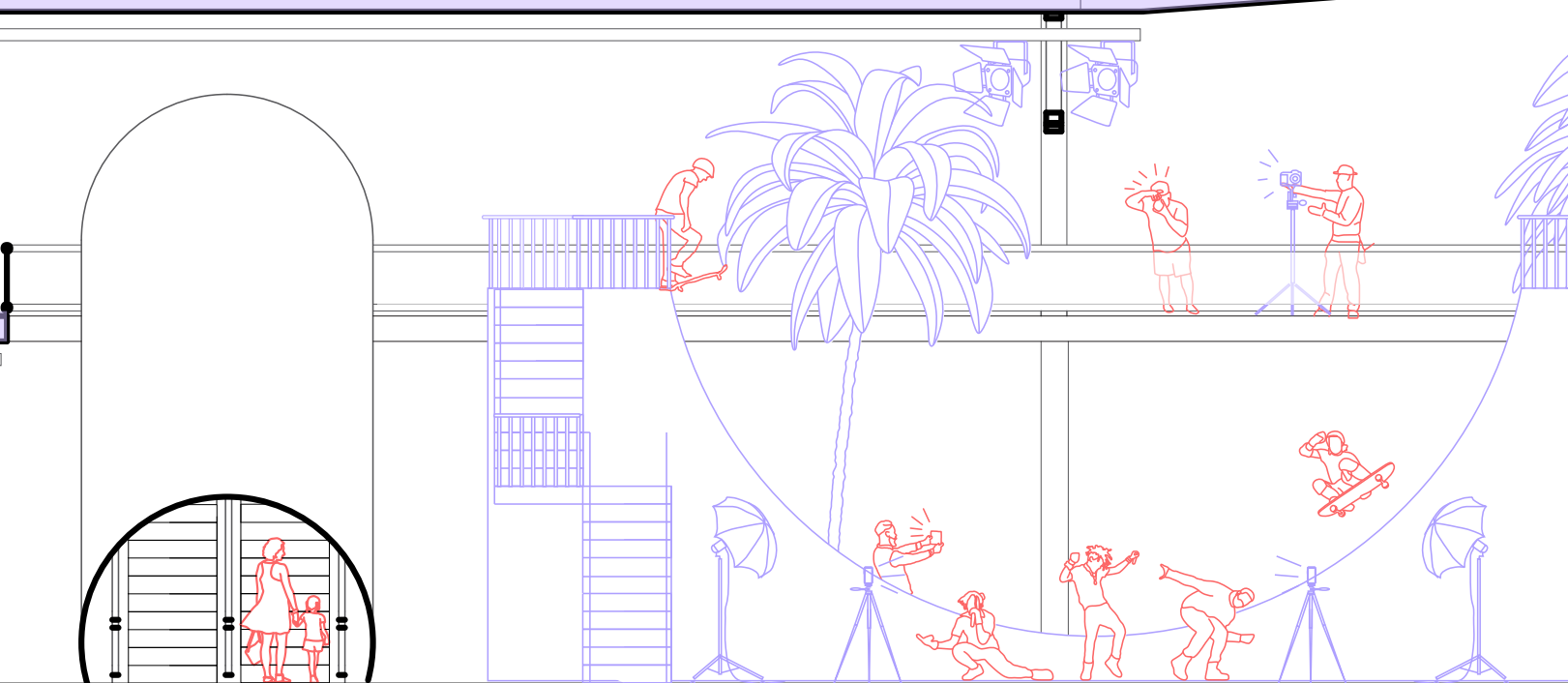
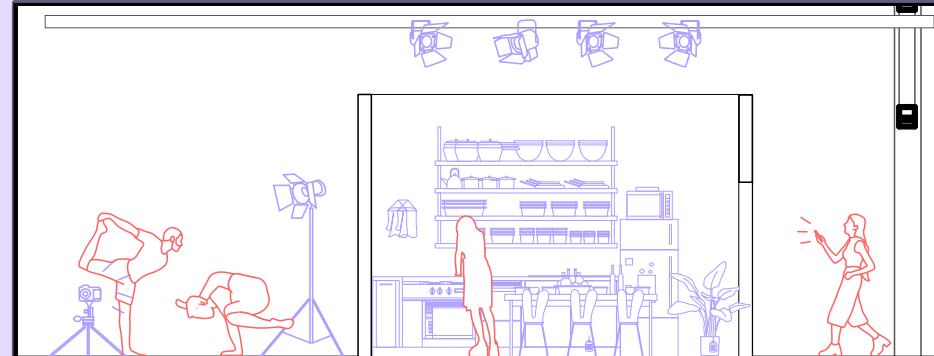
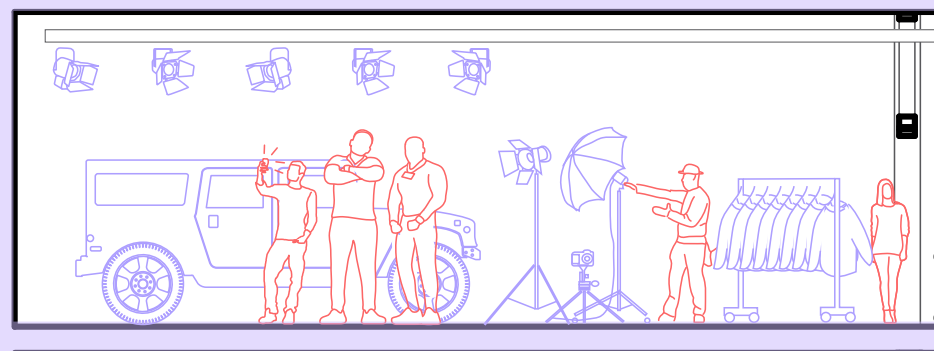
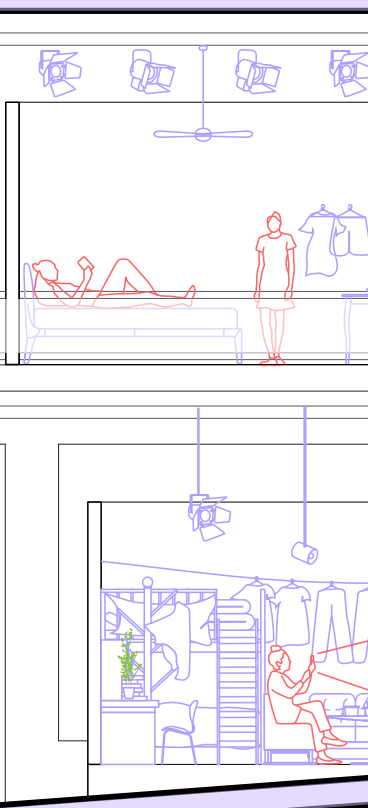
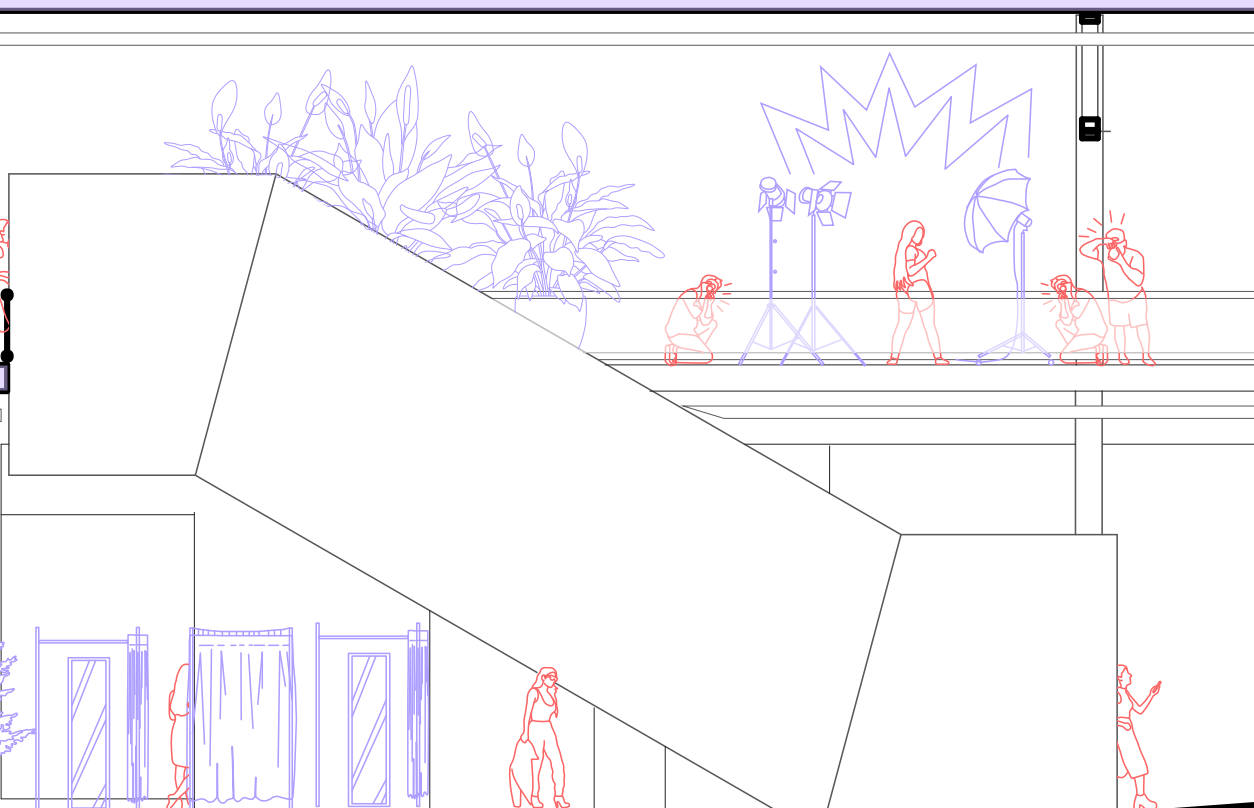
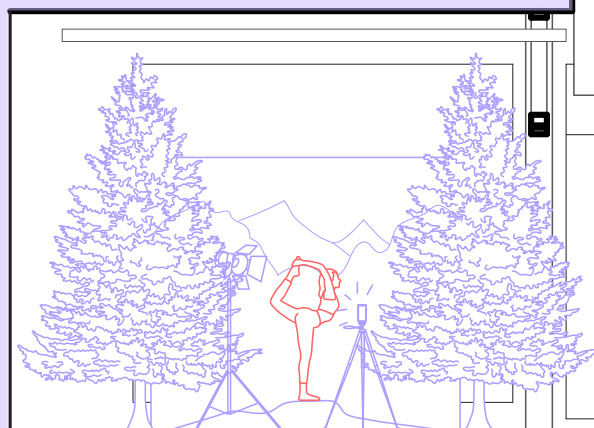
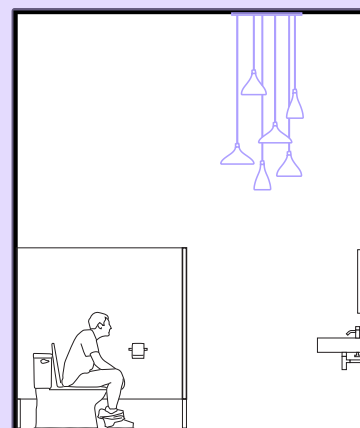
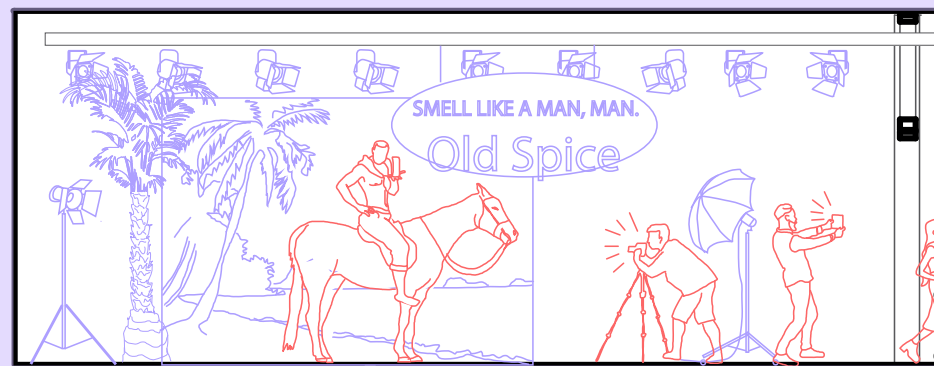


Amidst the influencer residences are also selfie-stages as I mentioned. Let's take a look using the transverse section. Selfie stages are scenes and backdrops where consumers and influencers can go to get the perfect shot, and post it on quikstapic to construct their desired identity. For example, in front of a hummer. It might not be a real hummer (it's not), but it looks like a hummer, and that's all that matters for an image. These spaces let users have the lived experience behind the Quikstapik post. This reveals the disjuncture between what philosopher Henri Lefebvre refers to as spatial practice (or the lived experience) and representations of space (the images on quikstapik). Consumerism is fuelled by this disjuncture or antagonism as one continually tries to achieve the

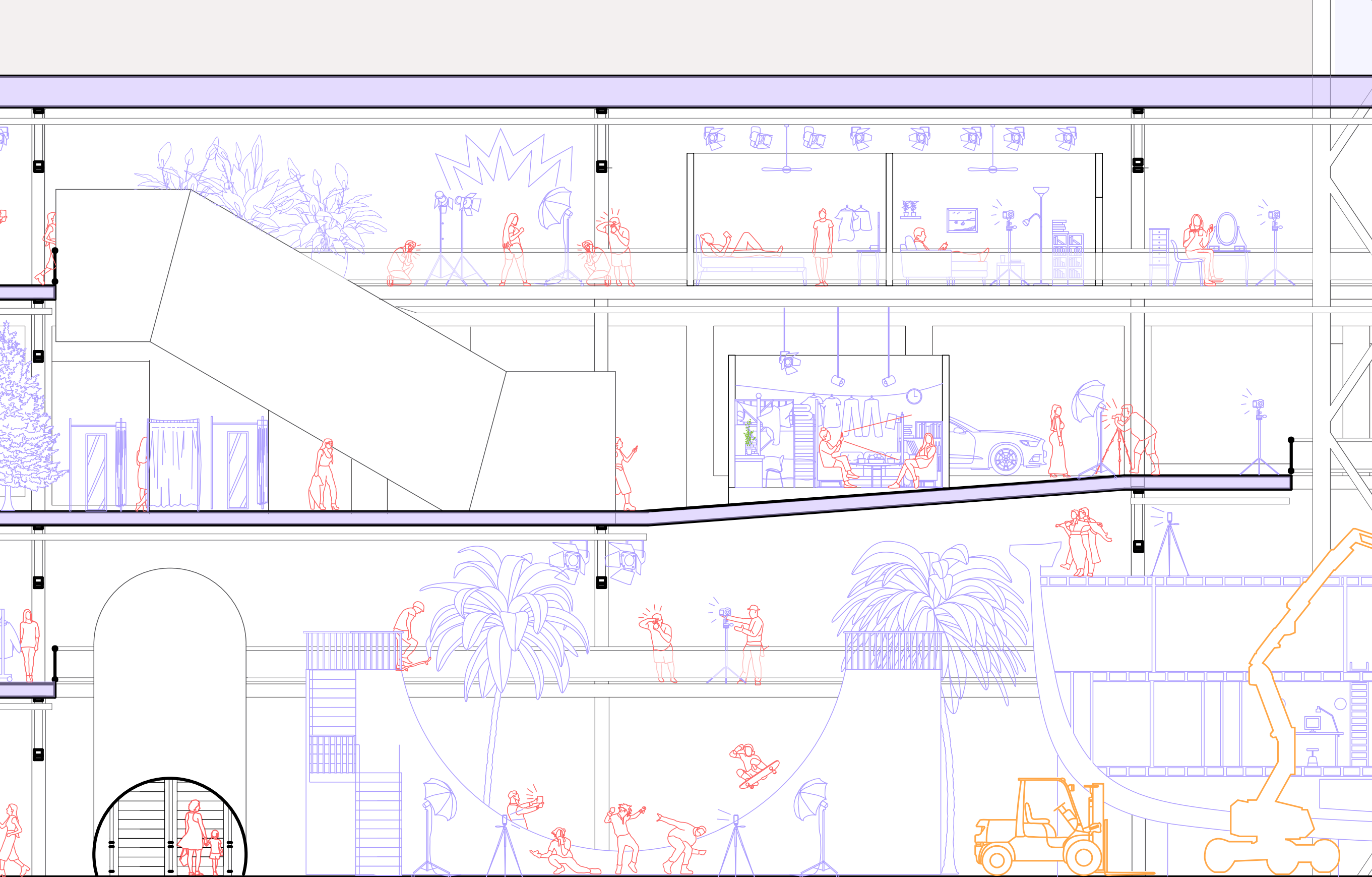
representation but is always left with the mismatching lived experience. The influencer's represented identity on Quikstapic is the desired commodity, but it is unattainable because it only exists as a representation—meaning it is unattainable even to the influencer themselves.

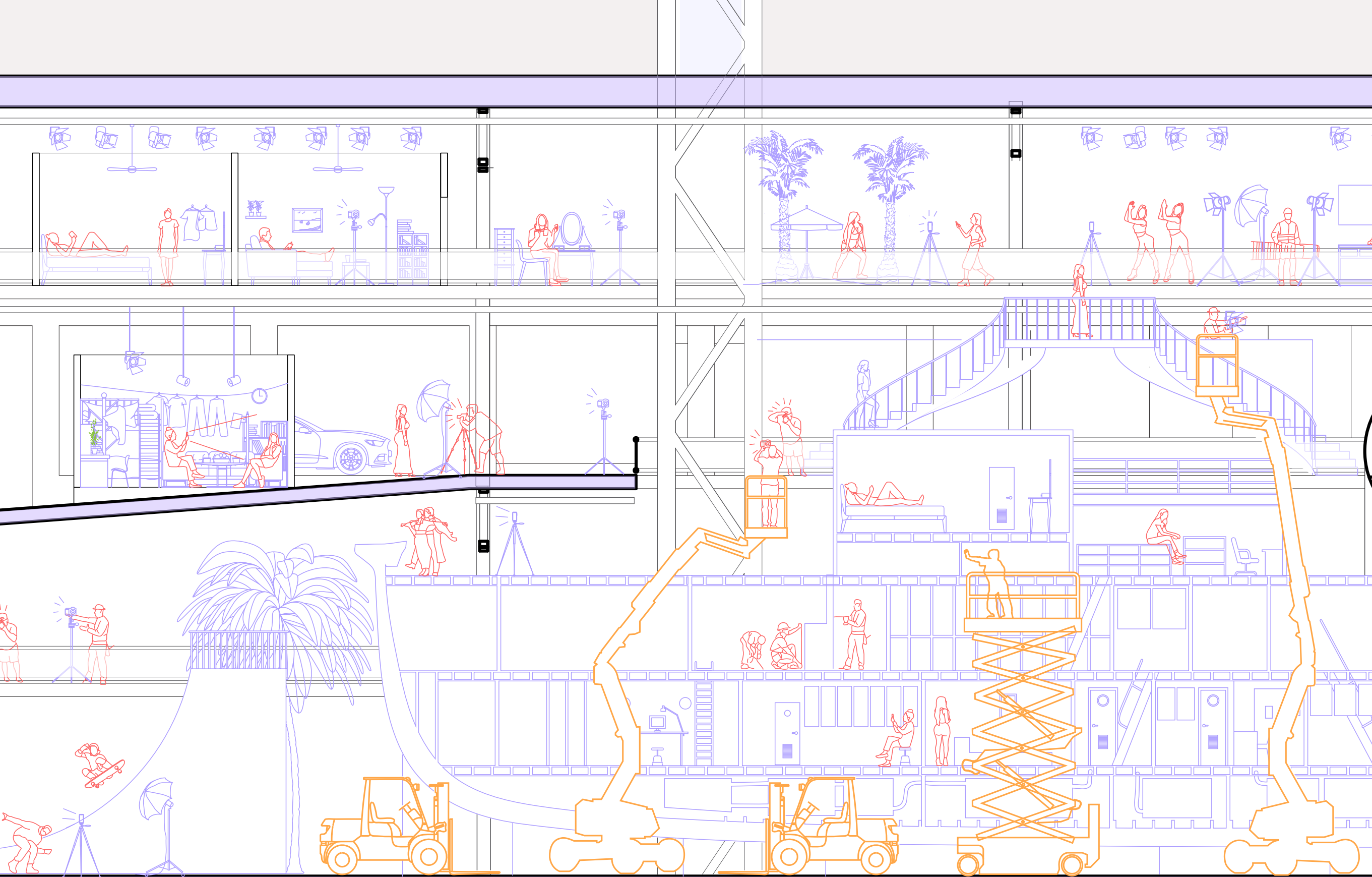
This unattainability drives the need for constantly having new contents to placate consumers. That's why we have a 24/7 construction and demolition crew working around the clock to create residences and selfie stages with new products and backdrops. Whatever is viral at the moment is what will be here! This theater of construction can be observed through the south façade, the direction we are looking from now.



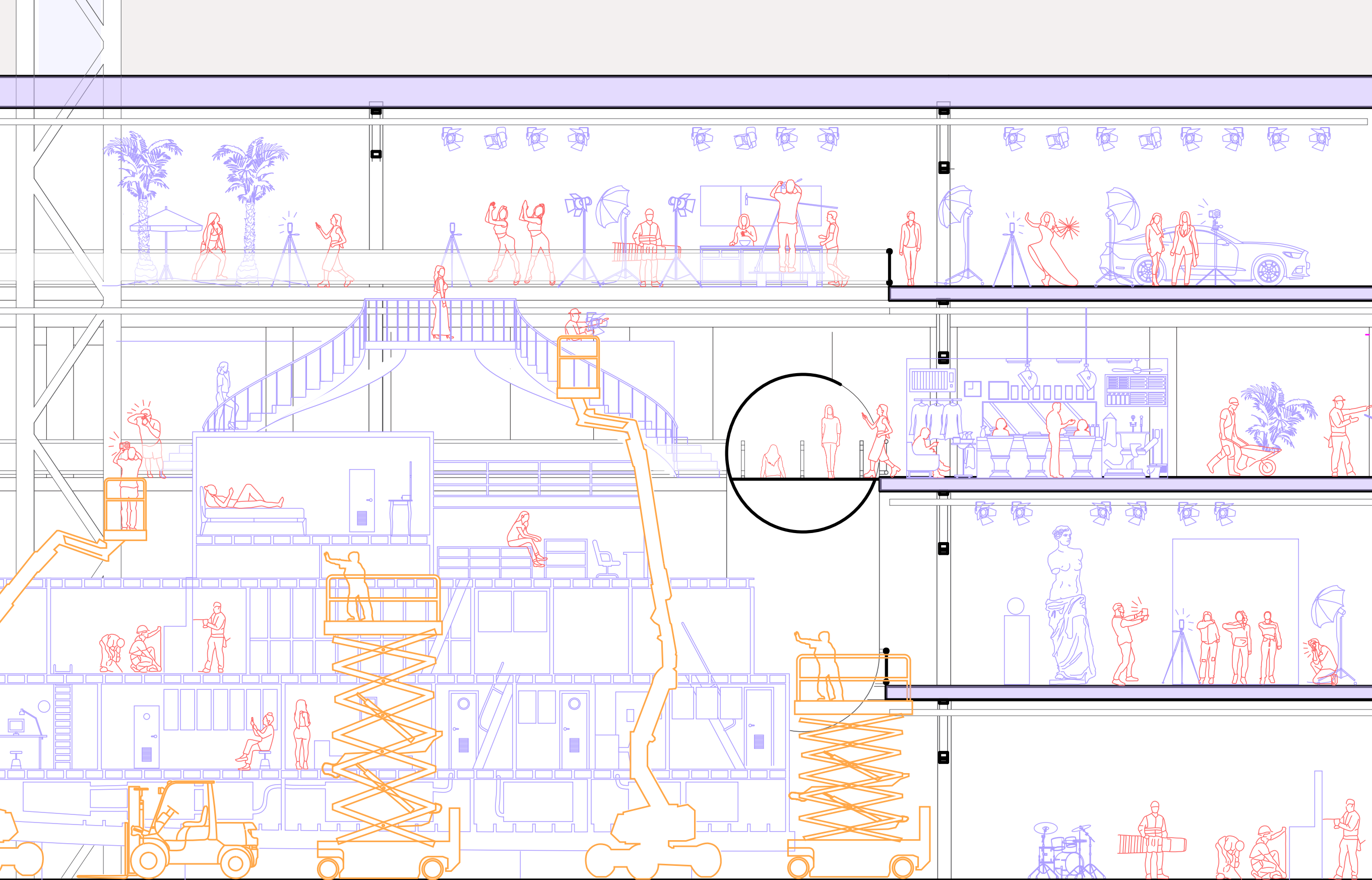


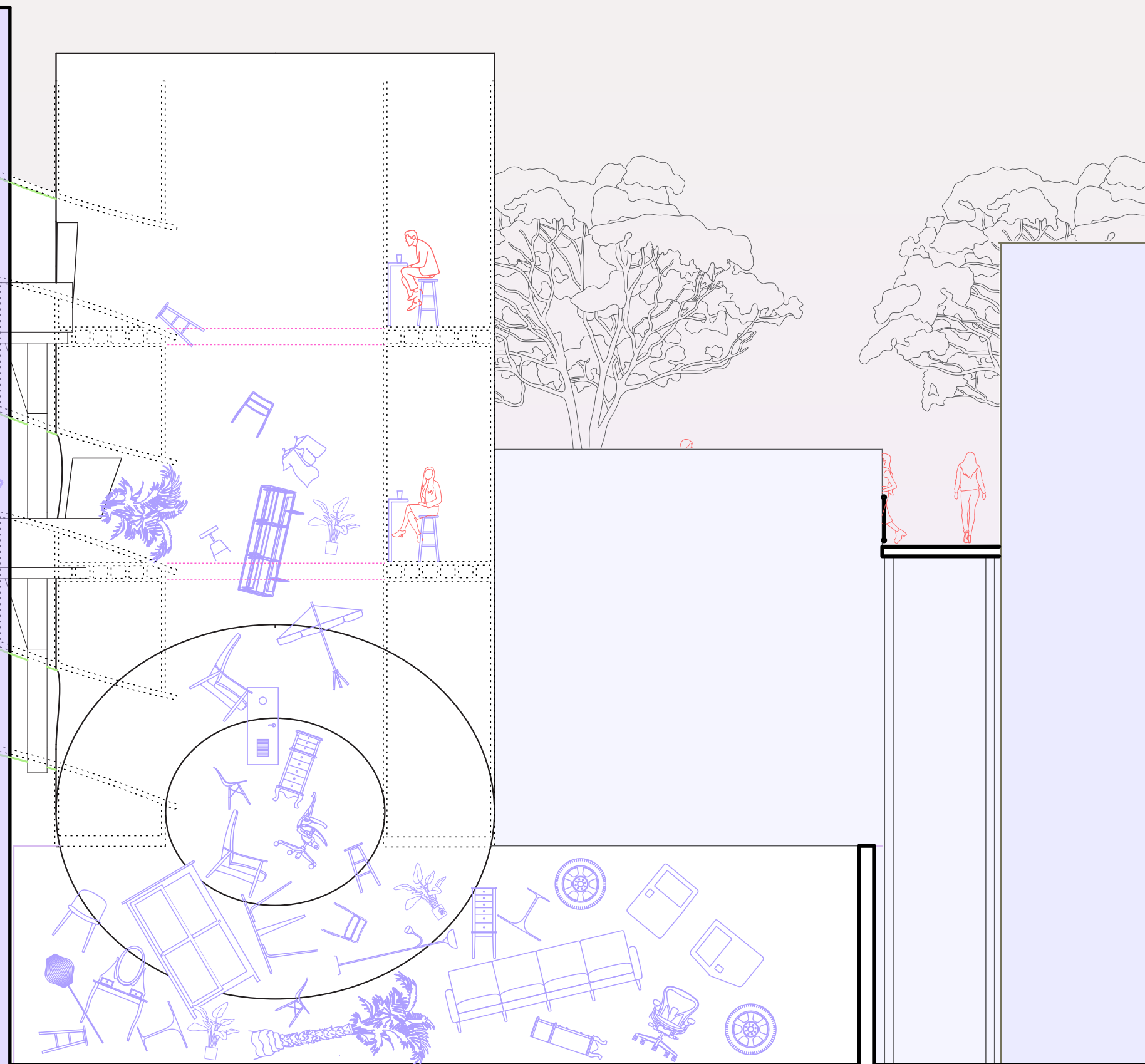














When products and props have been used and no longer have value, they're disposed of through the trash shoot on the North East end of the building, into the trash heap below and taken to landfill.

Here is an exterior view of it from the pedway connecting Columbia street and the parkade.





Visitors can enjoy a coffee in the trash shoot café as they watch pieces fall past them. This cycle of parts and pieces is essential to keep Quikstapic running. As Baudrillard asserts the consumer “buys the part for the whole”<sup>1</sup>—or in our words consumes something for the identity, which is the true desired commodity. The secret to good commodities is to make them unattainable. Therefore, here at the flagship, the identity doesn’t really exist. The building never accumulates to a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts—there is no whole, only an endless flow of parts.

1

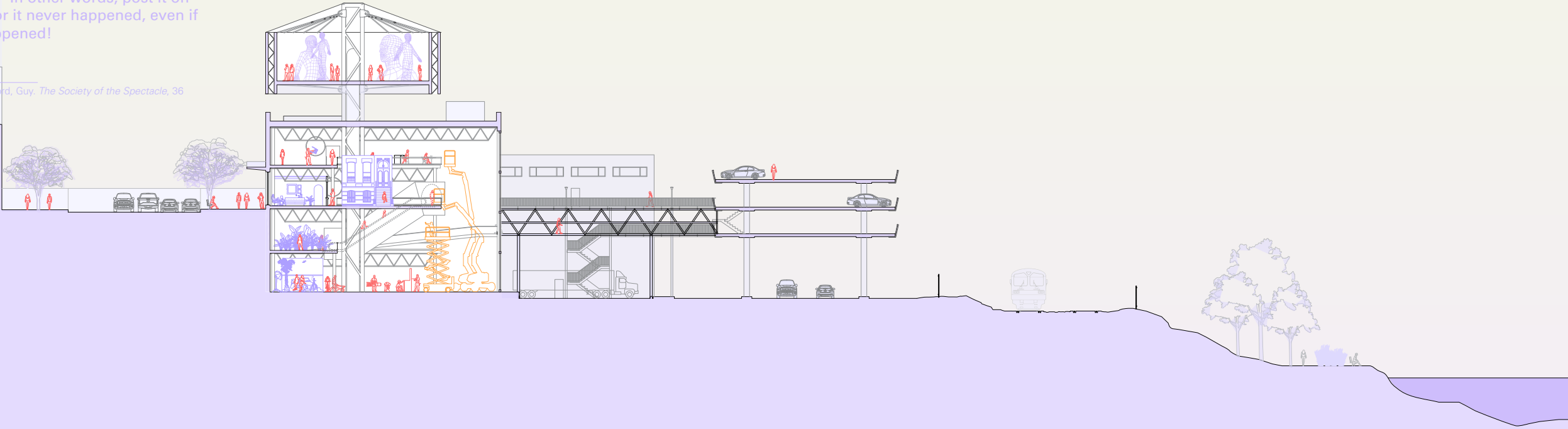
Baudrillard, Jean, *The Consumer Society*, 26

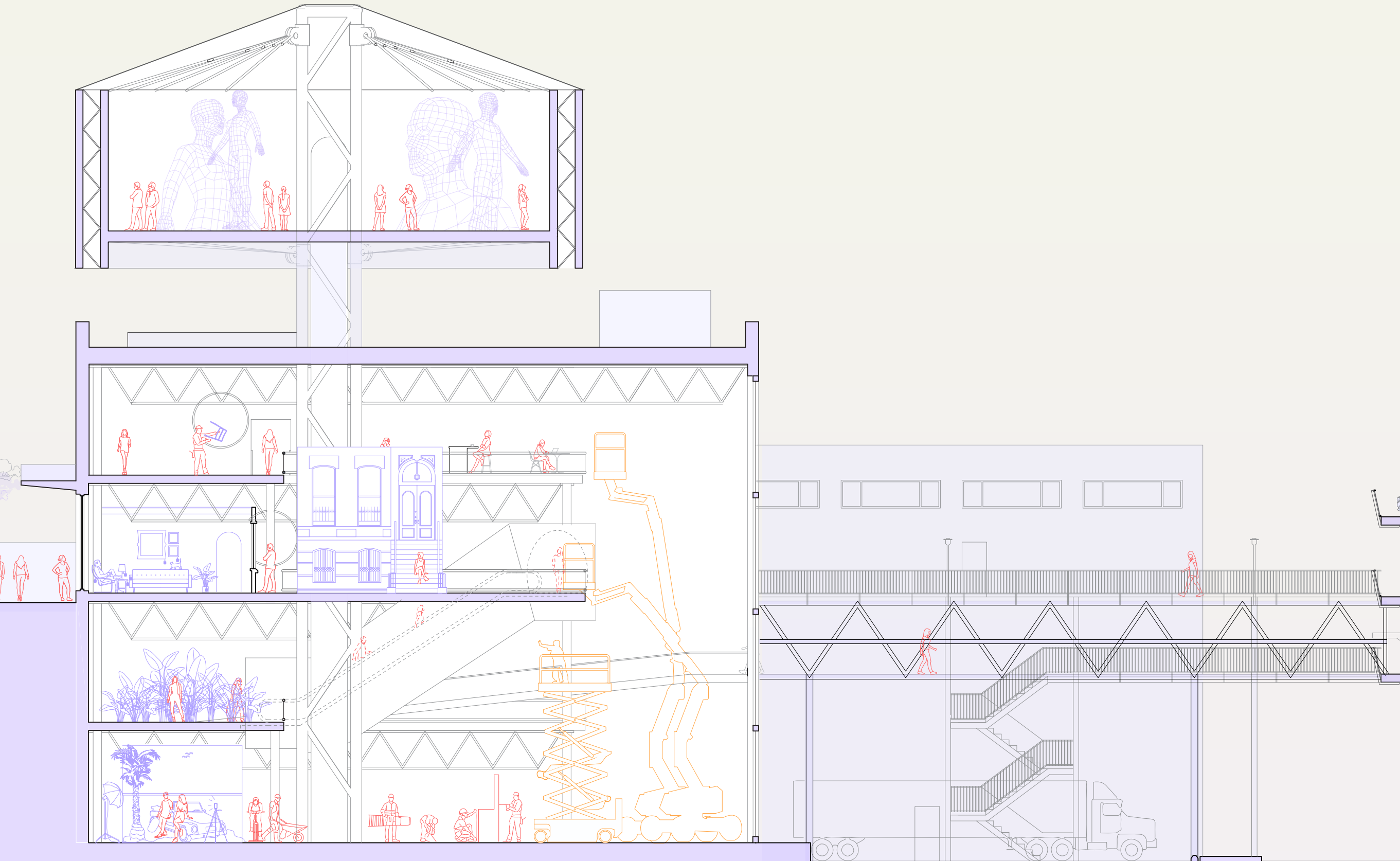


Let's take a look at the jumbotron, we can see it here, in the North-South Section. The inside accommodates our research team who examines the surveillance images of everyone in the building, to serve them better! The outside of the jumbotron displays our final product—images!

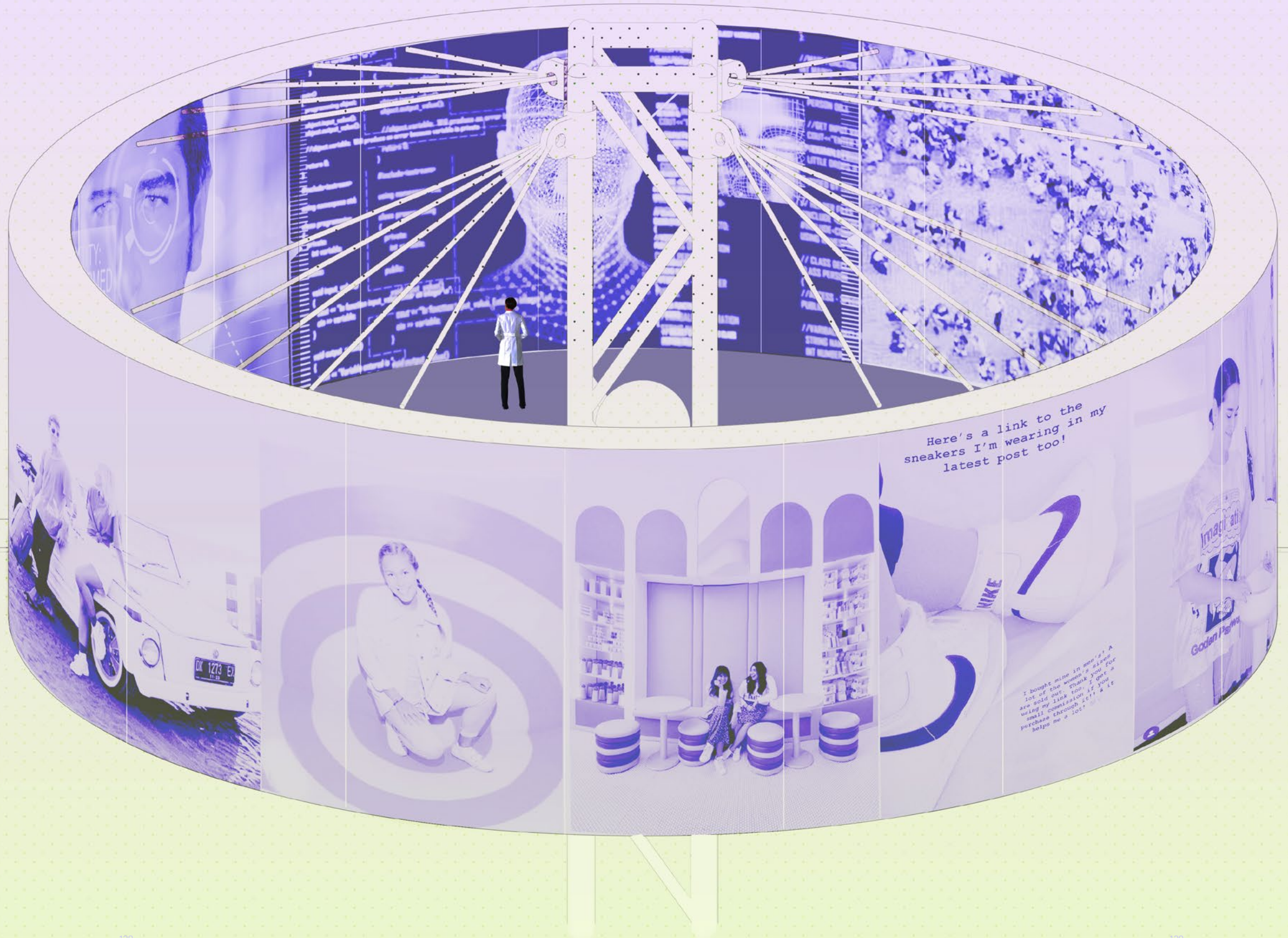
The jumbotron is a manifestation of Guy Debord's apt description of commodity fetishism, which is "the domination of society by intangible as well as tangible things, which reaches its absolute fulfillment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible par excellence."<sup>1</sup> In other words, post it on quikstapic or it never happened, even if it never happened!

1 Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*, 36











Take Abibas Boi for example. This selfie-stage and his outfit are sponsored by Abibas. Here at quikstapic flagship they can create their desired image and share it to Abibas Boi's thousands of followers. The followers will probably buy the outfit in an attempt to be like him. Behind him, Jenni26 is taking a photo on this beach scene where it looks like she's on vacation in Bali. This helps build the represented identity she wants to project online, hopefully her followers think it's cool. Maybe some travel companies will think it's cool too and she can start to sell her identity and get paid! Next to these sets is a resident influencers kitchen. This kitchen can be used to prepare food, but its most productive function is to produce images of food. None of these people really have the life they are representing, but Quikstapic is pushing for the domination of the economy over social life, which is brought to fruition by the "obvious degradation of being to having"<sup>1</sup> which then slides from having to appearing. The only value of having things is to be seen with them.

These spaces at quikstapic are inventing a new 'real' without origin. Through the voracity of representations of space and identity our hyperreal spaces begin to take over the real, or as Baudrillard says, begin "to threaten the distinction between the true, the false, the real, and the imaginary."<sup>2</sup> As the importance of representations begin to overtake that of lived experience.

The quikstapic flagship is the reflection of our contemporary retail condition. We know the value of individual identity and how to construct and monetize it for consumption. The flagship gives a unique opportunity for the economic, social, and power dynamics of quikstapic to exist in physical space. In doing so, it reveals the discrepancy between lived experience and the representations of it, illuminating the machine that fuels the construction and consumption of representations of space and the people flattened within them.

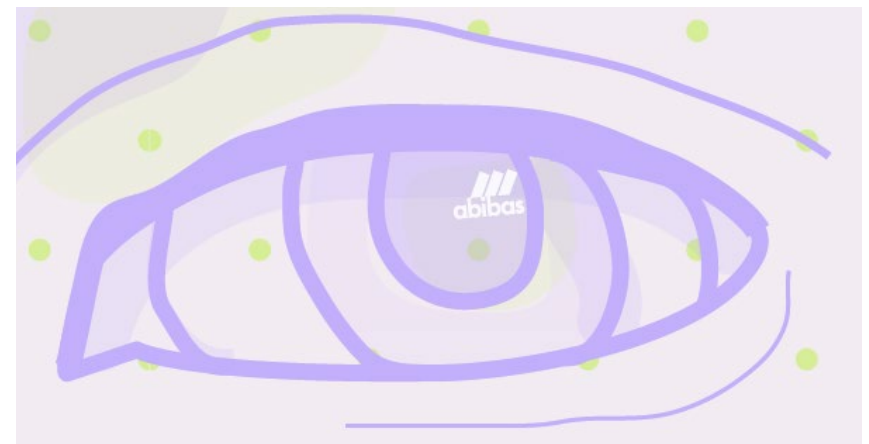
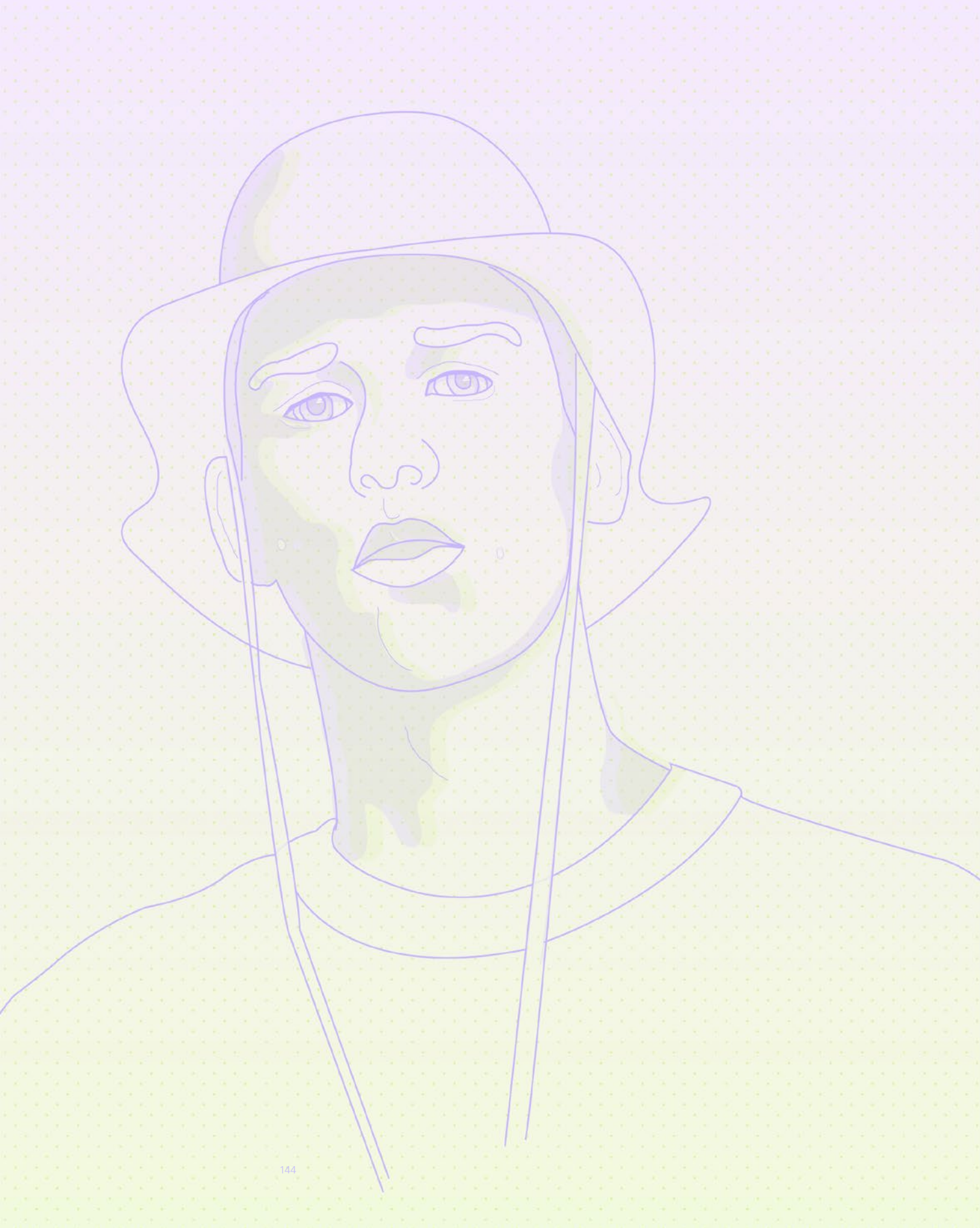
We can't wait to see you at the grand opening!!



<sup>1</sup> Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*, 17  
<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3

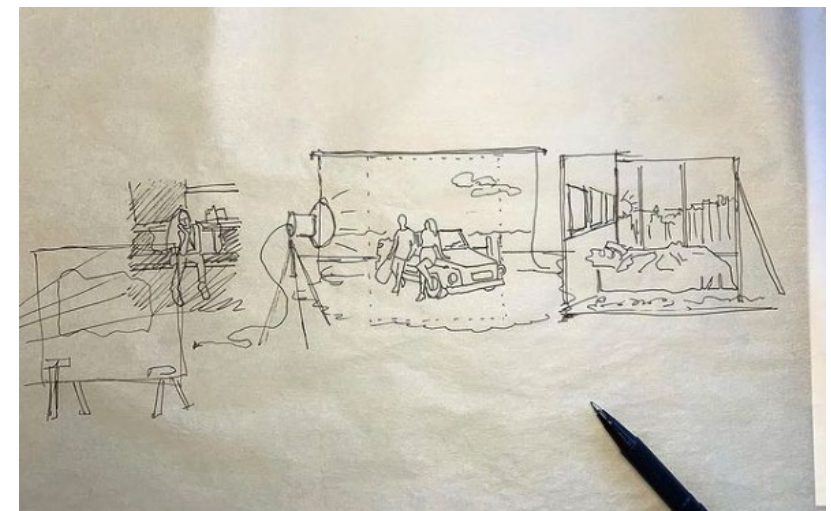
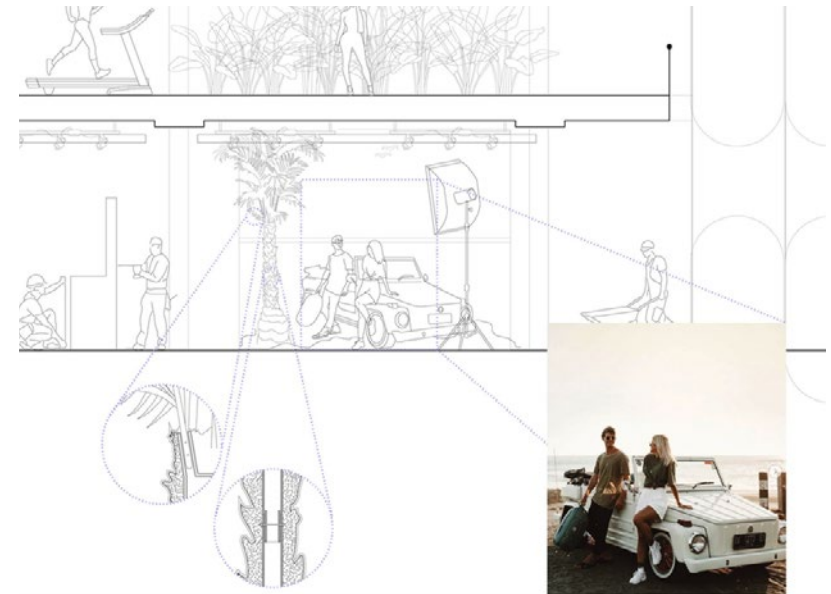
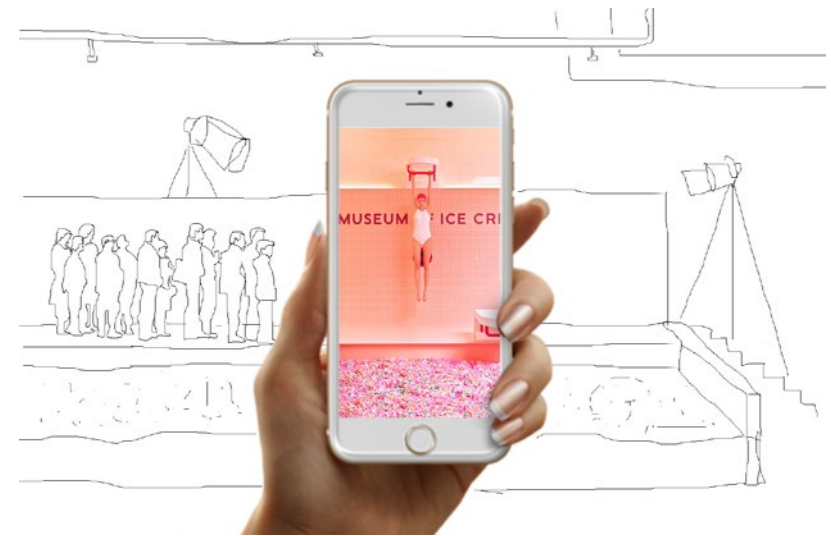
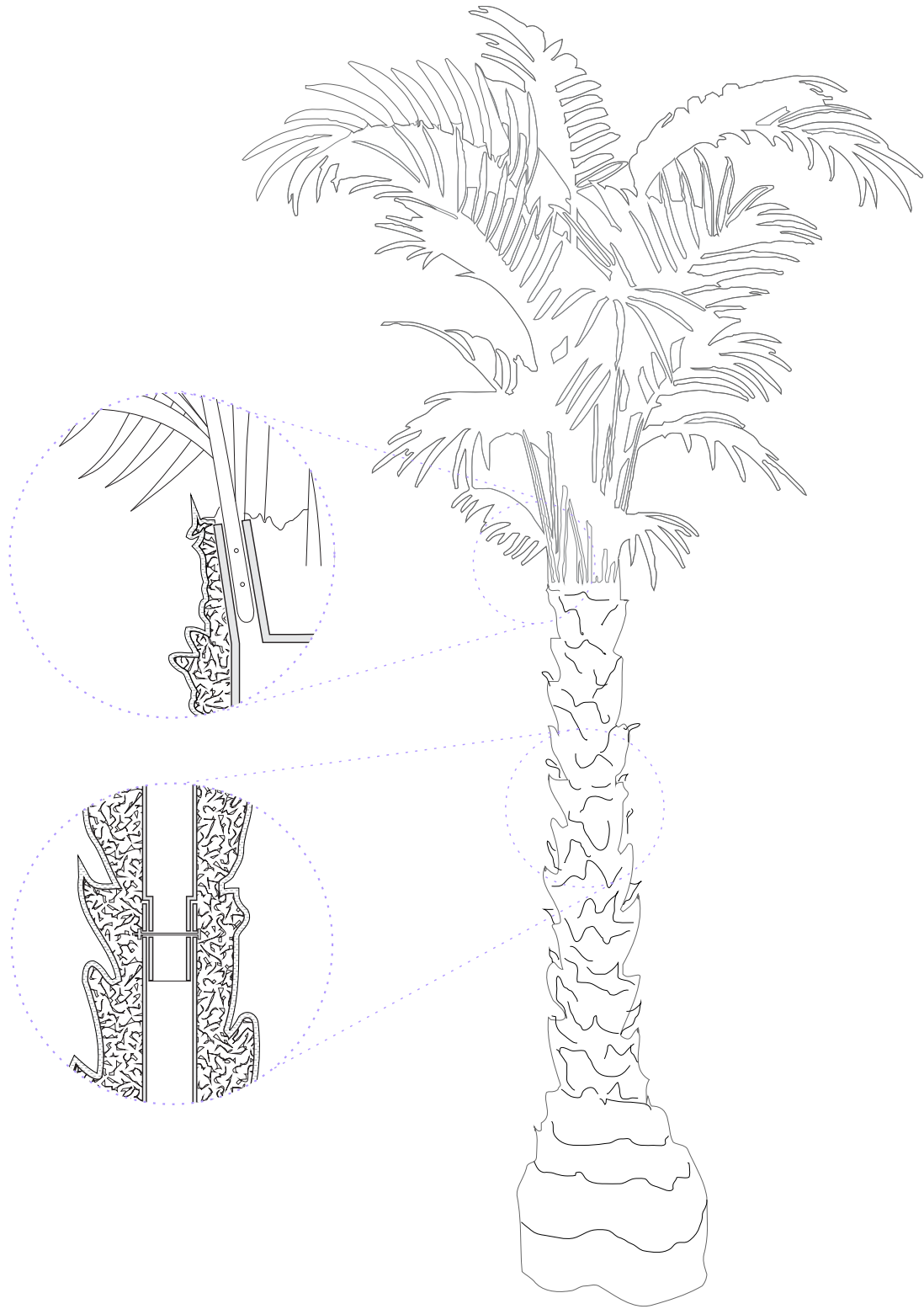














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