

THE SPACE OF DYNAMIC INFORMALITY

Chair of Public Building
Seminar 18/19



The Space of Dynamic Informality

Interventions in the Marginal Space Along Baku's Railway

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the 'New Silk Road' involved cities in recent ten years, problems and weird urban scenarios appear in those cities. The relating factors should be taken into considerations including but not limited to politics, economic, social issues, historical backgrounds, transportation, energy, etc., especially in the case of Baku, the urban evolution are under the influence not only of international logistics but also oil energy business and centralized political environment, which lead to even more weird reality of juxtaposed radically different urban textures. These cities provide urban and territorial sites where 'other' spatial conditions have emerged, ones that are teeming with suggestive meanings and unexpected potential but which have hardly been analyzed and discussed within the contemporary architectural discourse.

Today's standard spatial experience of the contemporary city is like one of a continuous sequence of small homogeneous functional enclaves via thresholds and leftover spaces, which can be summarized as the 'margins' - being mostly ignored, but still, have great potentials. My research is mainly focused on the marginal spaces, the spontaneous informal practices they host, and the corresponding effects, considering aspects

including urban structure, human involvement, its spatial quality and characteristic. Dealing the specific case of the marginal spaces in Baku, especially those along the railway infrastructure, my concerns are not only about the analysis of reality itself but also the possible further improving intervention to be made.

The marginal spaces are amorphous and unpredictable. Through the people's occupation and inhabitant, the margins can generate meaningful and unique 'places within the spaces', while outwards expansive and influential. Those margins in a closer relationship will gradually share some similar qualities and even form some linkages. In the meantime, they are probably starting to be in the process of diffusion, gradually taking over the areas in between the others and themselves, setting up physical connections in order to form a bigger whole. Along with the spatial evolution and the diffusion of demarcation, there are new margins emerge on the edge of the former marginal space. And the new marginal spaces will continuously carry out their own evolution process and produce more sub-layers.

My intervention will take place in this kind of diffusion process, the new margins which the process generated are thresholds between the former margins and the urban

fabric. I will try to build up connection and communication in these critical areas, retaining the chrematistics of the former marginal space and giving new interpretations relating to context. The intervention and the structure are also in a dynamic process, in constant change along with the change of the needs of the inhabitants and the influential surroundings.

The research-design process will be conducted in a phenomenological view, carrying out the study of the city's marginal spaces. The process-oriented investigation into the spe-

cific characteristics of contemporary border conditions and the larger, urban and territorial scale, with a special emphasis on the socio-political contexts of architecture. By investigating, tracing and mapping contemporary spatial conditions, through a series of visualization techniques, establish a particular set of spatial narratives and drawings, try to conclude their spatial characteristics as heuristic materials and translate the research results and findings into further architectural construct.

The Space of Dynamic Informality

A Study of the Marginal Space with Autonomous Practice

This essay is about marginal spaces, the informal practices they host, and the corresponding effects. I will study the evolutionary process of the margins, through aspects of urban structure, human involvement, and its spatial quality. In addition, I will relate to the marginal spaces in Baku, especially those along the railway infrastructure, which consist the intended site of my design project.

THE MARGIN OF NO CONTROL

*"The modern city is shaped with a number of independent architectural objects, separate buildings that have lost contact with each other, and generally leave neglected space in between them. This explains today's standard spatial experience of the contemporary city: one of a continuous sequence of small homogeneous enclaves (service spaces, single family houses, allotments, inner city areas) via thresholds and leftover spaces."*¹

-- Kenny Cupers and Markus Miessen

The margin

The definition of the word [margin] in Collins English Dictionary: *1, an edge or rim, and the area immediately adjacent to it; border. 2, the blank space surrounding the text on a page. 3, a vertical line on a page, especial-*

*ly one on the left-hand side, delineating this space. 4, an additional amount or one beyond the minimum necessary. 5, a bound or limit. 6, the amount by which one thing differs from another: a large margin separated the parties.*²

Apart from its most common understanding, which is associated with the blank on the layout of a written page, the margin itself can also be understood spatially. Initially, the margin is the blank space that surrounds the contents on a page, it is the free space beyond the written order of things. In this sense, related to the urban and architectural point of view, the margin exists as a leftover of the attempt to build up things, an additional functionless amount of space apart from the necessary construction areas, in the meantime, a space beyond the predetermined regulations and built structures.

The marginal spaces in the urban fabric appear as the desolate and often inhospitable spaces left in between many buildings and urban enclaves. In the perspective of a larger body of territory, the whole number of marginal spaces chaotically distributed in the urban landscape. They initially do not have any coherence with each other, for they are actually the alongside voids in the figure-ground relationship with the built environment, so that mostly passively produced by the configuration of the built parts.

These spaces generally remain invisible - not physically disappeared, but appears easy to be neglected. They have not obtained any official program or definition. Thus in the view of most random visitors, these spaces are empty and meaningless, as they do not provide clearly defined and highly specific functions for traditional public life. Thus in the sense of those visitors, the marginal space has lost its symbolic value as a place of encounter.

According to their spatial identity, the margins can be subdivided into two main categories: the thresholds and the leftover spaces. The thresholds, broadly categorizing, including also the interstitial spaces, the in-between spaces, the liminal spaces, stress more the situation of the space as a transitional process with a certain volume positioning in between two built structures. These spaces can independently exist in any corner of the city, while not necessarily have any relation to the areas or objects adjacent to them. The category of the leftover spaces stresses the status of being leftover or abandoned. These spaces probably at first within the planed area of official demarcations or attempts. But when the official construction is completed, some dispensable parts of the area, usually along the edge, appear to be unused and then forgotten by the official landowner, while gradually being occupied by whether stacking random stuff or temporary uses, there is still nobody comes out to claim the ownership of this space.

Regarding the case of Baku, typical threshold space exists in between the areas of juxtaposed radically different urban textures, usually being a road, either wide or narrow, a wall or several layers of wall, and a buffer area around the wall, together consisting a linear space with a certain thick-

ness. Accompanied by cluttering plants, human occupation happens everywhere in the thresholds, for instance: sundries, temporary garages, self-built shacks for storage, workshops and small retail stalls. While the most typical leftover spaces appear along the railway line which entrenched deeply from the city edge to the central part of the city as a formidable infrastructural system. The leftovers exist as areas of abandoned rail tracks, unconstructed edge spaces between the rails and the outer formal public functions, unplanned spaces as terrain vague situated in desolation, etc. There are relatively longer-lasting occupations and inhabitations in these spaces: those self-built shacks even turn into temporary housings, abandoned industrial components are parasitized and become supporting structures of playgrounds, semi-outdoor lounges, and even a tiny community.

The marginal free space

The margins are in between those homogeneous wholes, situated alongside built structures and their history and theory. When a marginal space is actually free from any kind of official control, it can also be considered as a free space. As they do not have certain preset typologies or programs, they also have no limitation to plan, act and proceed in whatever the occupants want. They are almost vacant, thus have no dominant determine power over the practices of people.

Using the instance of initial understanding as the blank on the written page, there can be all the possible handy notes, scribbles, comments, little questions and critical remarks on the available blank space alongside the written text. The two essential conditions for these practices are that there

are actually spaces free for reader's use, and there are triggering (con)texts nearby, which are the generator and influencer of reader's further thoughts.

Correspondingly, in the sense of the free space in the contemporary urban context, the uncontrolled and unprogrammed free space offers "*a matrix of materials and social conditions*"³ which arise potentials for occupation. This matrix consists of physical and ideological conditions of both within and surrounding the marginal space, which are critical aspects to take into account when applying practices onto the site. While the matrix only serves as the generator and the toolbox of possible occupation practices, but not as the predefined formula. The possible practices in the free space are eventually carried out by the occupants themselves, thus the configuration of the free space in evolution is always neither predesigned nor predictable.

Although remain easily neglected by the majority of citizens, the marginal free spaces become platforms for temporary and informal expectations. Anyone with an intention can use the margins and whatever available on site to carry out the attempts. The uncontrolled margins do not obtain official functions or programs, while along with "*the matrix*", the actual functions in these spaces become activities, practices and opportunities.

From free spaces to unique (free) places / zones

At first, marginal free spaces seem to be useless and meaningless spaces, while they become useful and acquire different meanings once when they are occupied and in-

habited. Through those spontaneous occupations and practices, whether temporary or longer-lasting, the traces of experiences and achievements are left and accumulated. Through this process, the free space lost its neutrality, and continuously "*colored by their visitors*"⁴. In the meantime, the function, the spatial quality and the meaning of the space are also ever-changing along with the continuous replacement of the inhabitant.

The temporary practice in the marginal space is like the grass described by Deleuze: "*Future and past do not carry a lot of sense, what is important is the becoming-present: geography, not history, the middle not the beginning nor the end, the grass being in the middle of things and growing from the middle (...). Always there is grass in between the pavement. They grow in between - among other things.*"⁵ The temporary occupants make use of whatever they can use: available space, materials on the site, existing structures made by former users, etc., regardless the possible meanings of those things, but take over, deconstruct and reorganize, only to achieve the expectations of the users of present stage.

While regarding in the perspective of a longer period of time, the marginal space in constant change does not have a coherent evolution history of its configuration or spatial quality through the cyclical process of temporary occupation practices. But still, the particular marginal space can be recognized by some of the traces or features from the previous inhabitants. It can be the result of the inherited materials - some characteristics can remain even after the material composition being deconstructed - or the influence of the surrounding context and the similar user groups. Also, due to this situation, each marginal space is unique, and all of the different spatial evolutionary pro-

cesses cannot be repeated again.

Once a marginal free space accumulated enough “colors” (aka. traces and characteristics) and starts to make people, especially the occupants, feel emotionally attached to, it turns from a space into a place or a zone. The “place” involves more than merely the territory. It is a location along with everything that “occupies that location seen as an integrated meaningful phenomenon”⁶, including both natural and artificial conditions, human involvements, and constructional interventions.

THE AUTONOMOUS PRACTICES IN MARGINS

“Probably public space is more likely to be found in the everyday: in the banal omnipresent but invisible - practices, actions and behavior that happens in the contemporary city, everywhere and nowhere.”⁷

-- Margaret Crawford

The temporary tactical practice⁸

According to Michel de Certeau, those widely unified works, acts, lifestyles and popular cultures in the conventional urban space are productions of the unified strategic regulations. Within these daily routines, there are some fragmentary tactical counterattacks of individuals or groups. Behind the obedience, they try to “making do”⁹ their living condition to a more comfortable status, through a series of diversified tiny practices. For participants, these temporary tactical practices are spontaneous, trying to make some changes in their everyday life.

While the formal strategies have exact places to show their powers, the tactical practices

are usually applied in temporary free spaces which can move, replace, and reorganize at any time. People can quickly and agilely change their playgrounds according to their own needs. They are temporary occupations of spaces, with no clear boundaries distinguishing the other as a clear totality. “A place of a tactic belongs to the other.”¹⁰

As for those who occupy free spaces, they are constant guerrillas over spaces in the contemporary city. The marginal spaces are preferable choices for their attempts. Happen short in duration, their practices can be any kinds of temporary neutral activities, such as art performances, moving stalls, gatherings, or some actual marginal activities - which are not acceptable in other formal parts of the city - carried out by the minority groups. Generally, these temporary activities in the margins are quick, flexible and self-effacing, even can be regarded as tactics of disappearance, which make the margins also remain in the phenomenon of ambiguous and unclear.

These tactical practices intervene and transform the space over time. Because it does not have a fixed and exact place, a tactic depends on time - whatever it achieves, it does not keep. It must “constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities”¹¹, thus the configuration of the free space their temporary occupied is also in constant change. The appearance of the space continues evolving, shifts according to the interventions of the temporary inhabitant. The marginal free space, where has been out of use, reverts again to be a common domain through the practices of the occupants, and may keep ever-changeable in the future, along with the renewing of the occupant.

The inhabitation and the informal community

Apart from those temporary users, there are also people who stay or even settle down in these physically difficult spaces of margin. If considering the short-term practices in the margin as occupation, then the actions of relatively long-term can be considered as inhabitation, even colonization - for they are informally taking over spaces for a certain period of time: not hours or days, but weeks, months, even years.

In the beginning, the squatters are unconscious, without the attempt of conquering, even just randomly pick up a piece of marginal space with acceptable conditions, and start to make use of available existing materials and spatial structures. However, as these occupations last for a long time, the situations are inevitable that the first-comers will coexist with the latecomers simultaneously in the same piece of marginal space, so that having impacts on the latecomers' behavior and practice. Moreover, as the characteristics of the first practices are likely to attract similar groups of people, to some extent, there have been already potentially filtered the later inhabitants.

For example, some artists who have been unable to pay the high rents inside the city Amsterdam started to move into the leftover spaces of the bankrupted NDSM shipyard since 1996 and use them without rent as venues for their creations or performances. The continuous accumulation of these settlements gradually made this area a bottom-up artist community. Also in the case of Baku's railway area, the informal settlements distributed discretely along the margins of infrastructure, gradually formed several informal communities.

They all start from spontaneous random inhabitation with simple attempts, such as living or creative work. As the duration of their inhabitation gets longer, there gradually accumulated inhabitants with similar attempts, forming even a small autonomous community of their own. They do not fit exactly into the initial voids of the margins, but exist as places within spaces. Lebbeus Woods described this kind of informal community in his conceptual manifesto project Underground Berlin as "*a hidden autonomous world, exist as a secret community of resistance to the occupying political and economic powers*"¹².

These spaces are also in the process of constant change according to the changes of needs and conditions. There are no final or permanent configurations. And even as the temporary stage, outcomes are not known in advance before the constructions are actually done. The difference is that: the evolution of the marginal space being frequently temporary used is shaped by a bunch of random people with various attempts, while the evolution of the longer-inhabited margin is shaped by an individual or a group with probably some similarities. Therefore, although the outcome of evolution - depends on individual activities and practices, which are unpredictable - is still not fixed and undetermined, there will be more self-consistent traces and characteristics.

DIFFUSION OF THE DEMARCA-TION, AND THE NEW MARGINS

Cupers and Miessen describe the typical spatial experience of the contemporary city as "*a continuous sequence of small homogeneous enclaves*"¹³ via the margins. Actually previously, Ungers and Koolhaas made a

further proposal under the assumed premise of urban decay. In Berlin: A Green Archipelago, they planned to identify and emphasize Berlin's "*urban islands*" - those areas that had remained vital and vibrant - "*liberate them from the falsity of unified urbanism*"¹⁴, in order to ensure that cities retained their most essential metropolitan qualities, while allowing the rest of the city to go general and anonymous, pasture as a "*natural lagoon*"¹⁵. The urban islands are isolated, developing inwards as "*cities within the city*", in order to maximize their own individual traits.

Contrarily, in the sense of the marginal spaces, they are actually at first being the non-valued leftover parts of "*the vibrant metropolitan*" - they are parts of the so-called "*lagoon*". However, through the people's occupation and inhabitant, the margins can generate meaningful and unique "places within the spaces". While the difference is that the marginal spaces are outwards expansive and influential.

The margins are amorphous and unpredictable. They initially do not have any coherence or relation with each other, while becoming interactive and inter-influential along with the development. Those margins in a closer relationship will gradually share some similar qualities and even form some linkages. In the meantime, they are probably starting to be in the process of diffusion, gradually taking over the areas - which even can be within formal spaces - in between the others and themselves, setting up physical connections in order to form a bigger whole and keep expanding outwards.

Along with the spatial evolution and the diffusion of demarcation, there are new margins emerge on the edge of the former marginal space. And the new marginal spaces

will continuously carry out their own evolution process and produce more sub-layers.

In most cases, the marginal spaces which have developed to a certain scale usually cannot always exist. Pushed by the power of capital, they are whether completely demolished to make room for newly planned construction projects, such as the Trump City, or formalized, probably retaining the former characteristics and main structures, but introducing popular culture and commercial elements, such as the NDSM wharf. While in the meantime, at the edge of these rectified marginal spaces, there are also new margins generated.

CONCLUSION

There are several characteristics of the marginal space that I found being critical, and making the margins meaningful spaces.

Heterogeneity and uniqueness

Physically generated by the surrounding formal urban fabric, the margins are spaces determined mainly by the behavior of its visitors. While initially seemingly without meaning, they continually obtain fluid meanings - socially, aesthetically, politically, economically - when their users occupy and organize them. The meanings they obtain are always diverse and changing. The practices in each marginal space are unique and complex forms and compositions, which cannot again ever be the same. Yet they share a common logic: they are all resulted from the unpredictable interactions of the human practice dealing with particular space condition.

Inclusive and inventive

The margins are available for everyone. For

the temporary occupants, especially those squatters, it is better to respect them. Like everyone, their way of life is tactically to make themselves comfortable within the larger limited structure. While they are all inventors of their own lives. To inhabit the space of margin is “*neither a matter of creating entirely new knowledge, nor discarding existing systems of living and knowing, but rather a matter of expanding them at their limits*”¹⁶. “*The matrix*” of practical conditions provides enough uncertainty and ambiguity of what they can achieve, calling upon them to invent their functions and materialize them into physical structures. They live an ever-changing experimental life, full of new possibilities. The new human landscapes created at the boundaries, also expand the diversity of future choices among those urban dwellers who stay away from the boundaries.

Unstable and diffusing dynamics

The uncontrolled margins are autonomous spaces, repeatedly changing the occupants, being deconstructed and being organized again. Thus the evolution of marginal space is always dynamic and unstable, with a kind of indeterminacy or openness. Also, the shapes of the margins are not certainly defined or stably retained. Along with evolution, the margins tend to diffuse outwards and produce new margins in the transition areas.

Fragments in the bigger whole

The margins are not simply outlaw-spaces feeding on themselves, but the critical edges of urban life and culture. The margins are neither completely vacant nor meaningless. Instead, vivid things are informally generated from these officially abandoned spaces. The margins are a collection of fragments of experiences and achievements, which are

elusive, ephemeral, isolated, and unique. These fragments within the margins, together with the formal part of the urban, form the city as a whole.

ENDNOTES

1 Cupers, K.; Miessen, M., *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Wuppertal: Müller und Busmann, 2002), p107

2 *Collins English Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2018)

3 Woods, L., *Radical Reconstruction* (New York: Princeton Archit. Press, 1997), p16

4 Cupers, K.; Miessen, M., *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Wuppertal: Müller und Busmann, 2002), p92

5 Deleuze, G.; Parnet, C., *Dialogen* (Kog Agora, 1991), p45

6 Relph, E., *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), p3

7 Crawford, M., 'Blurring the boundaries: Public space and private life', in: Chase, J.; Crawford, M.; Kaliski, J. (eds.), *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), p22

8 The concept of Tactics and Strategies, see: De Certeau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p17

9 Ibid, p47

10 Ibid, p.xix

11 Ibid

12 Woods, L., *One Five Four* (New York: Princeton Archit. Press, 1989), p4

13 Cupers, K.; Miessen, M., *Spaces of Uncertainty* (Wuppertal: Müller und Busmann, 2002), p107

14 Ungers, O.M.; Koolhaas, R.; Riemann, P.; Kollhoff, H.; Ovaska, A., *The City in the City - Berlin: A Green Archipelago* (Zürich : Lars Müller Publishers, 2013), p36

15 Ibid

16 Woods, L., *Radical Reconstruction* (New York: Princeton Archit. Press, 1997), p13

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Inventory Categorization

INTRODUCTION

The margin - initially from the dictionary - means the blank space that surrounds the contents on a page, a free space beyond the written order of thing. Related to the urban and architectural point of view, the marginal space exists as a leftover of the building attempt, an additional functionless amount of space, a space beyond predetermined regulations and built structures. It is a "hidden" layer of urban fabric, unnoticed by mostly urban dwellers living in the so-called formal space. It hosts informal practices from temporary occupation to longer inhabitation, thus space is also in constant change.

My investigation is all about the marginal spaces, the informal practices they host, and the corresponding effects. I studied following the evolutionary process of the margins, namely about scale/density/frequency of which they've been occupied and used, through aspects of urban structure, human involvement, and its spatial quality.

In this stage, I basically studied into the realities which I've found during my field trip of the marginal spaces along the selected part of the railway line, as well as did categorize works according to their different types and evolution processes.



1.

2.



FORMAL URBAN FABRIC

The map (fig.2) shows the formal urban fabric of this area, which basically consists of the infrastructures of railway, industrial plants and collective residential buildings. The most iconic scenery (fig.1) is the modern skyscrapers planned by the government as a kind of show-off just located nearby.

THE BACK SIDE

Actually, there is (a) hidden layer(s) on the “back side”. Apart from the formal city, there are margins at edges and abandoned areas. The margins appear to be existing / performing like parasites along formal objects, using available interstitials and vacant lands, filling them with all the informal practices. Shown on the map (fig.4), the margins have already developed to a relatively large scale, which led to several informal communities - there is even a community on the back side around the iconic skyscraper (fig.3) which is totally another world.

HUMAN PRACTICES

The human practices in these margins are usually informal things. There are tempo-

rary occupations and also inhabitations which last for longer periods. The practices are spontaneous actions. People with certain attempts come to the margins, try to make use of existing conditions, materials, structures and any other thing they can make use of, in order to fulfill their attempts / desires / intends, which can be temporarily use the site to have a rest, a short friends-gather, a stall selling homemade goods (fig.5.1-5.4), or can be settling down from a shack to a house made of bricks and timber panels (fig.6.1-6.4).

SPATIAL CHANGES

Human practices leave effects and traces in the margins they occupied. The margins with more temporary uses stay almost the original status (fig.7.1-7.2) without solid construction. While those with longer-lasting informal settlements are changed a lot (fig.8.1-8.2), built things gradually grow within the available areas, until taking over the whole area. Also, once evolves to a relatively developed level (e.g. area fully occupied or frequently used), the margins will tend to expand outwards, whether set up linkage with neighbors or diffuse their demarcations.(fig.7.2, 8.2)



3.

4.



HUMAN PRACTICES

TEMPORARY USE / OCCUPATION

5.1



5.2



5.3



5.4



INHABITATION

6.1



6.2



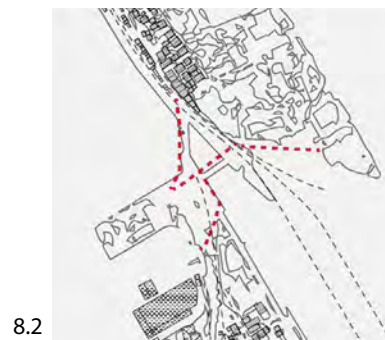
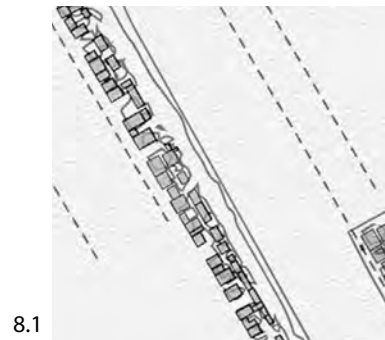
6.3



6.4



SPATIAL CHANGES LED BY HUMAN PRACTICES



INVENTORY CATALOG

According to the characteristics of then margins, I concluded them into different types and made a catalogue. And there are two main categories: the threshold and the left-over space.

THRESHOLDS

“Thresholds”, broadly categorizing, also the interstitial spaces, the in-between spaces, the liminal spaces, which more stress the situation that “the space as a transitional process with a certain volume positioning in between two built structures”.

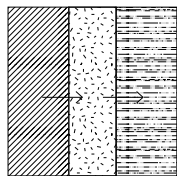
LEFT-OVER SPACES

“Leftover space” stresses the status of being leftover or abandoned, such as the urban void, terrain vague, vacuum of non-place, edge space, etc. These spaces probably at first within the planed area of official demarcations or attempts. But when the official construction is completed, some dispensable parts of the area, usually along the edge, appear to be unused and then forgotten by the official landowner, while gradually being occupied by whether stacking random stuff or temporary uses, there is still nobody comes out to claim the ownership of this space.

INVENTORY CATALOGUE - THRESHOLDS

Threshold

Thresholds are transitional spaces. They are the waiting areas between one point in time and space and the next, not the destination but a intermediate state.



9.1

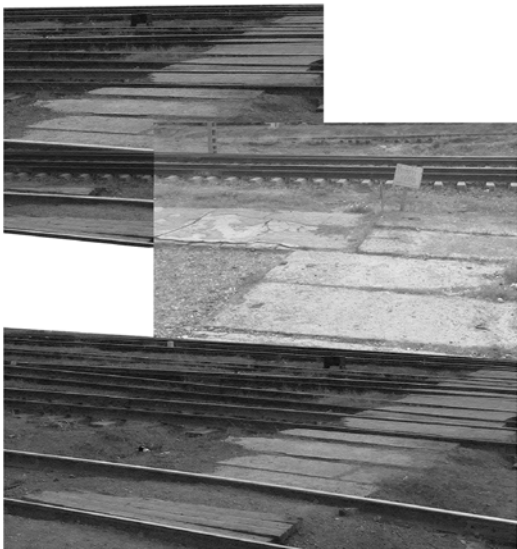
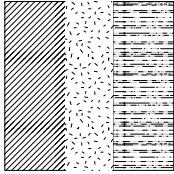


image: a passage through the railway, made by folks

In-between Space

A transition zone, from one independent area / object to another.



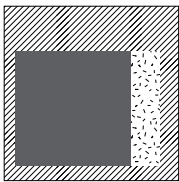
9.2



image: railway being a passway in-between two fenced communities without direct connection.

Interstitial Space

A semi-private space within/ around the public area, usually in an unnoticable corner and been informally occupied.



9.3

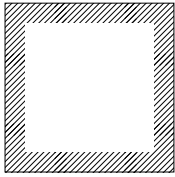


image: informal housing enclaves in-between railways

INVENTORY CATALOGUE - LEFT-OVER SPACES

Vacant land / Void

Land which is now vacant and could be redeveloped without treatment.



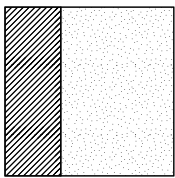
9.4



image: a land to-be-built

Terrain Vague

An unused area of land, waste ground, not built.



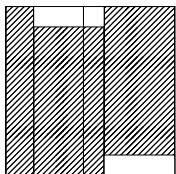
9.5



image: a grassland in between the railway tracks and factory&self-built housing area

Non-place & its Vacuum

The non-place acts purely functional, where people just passing by. Vacuum emerges when some kind of barrier seals what otherwise be accessible.



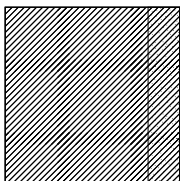
9.6



image: under a viaduct highway

Left-over Space

Initially being a part of the construction plan, but in the actual process, a spared part is left-over.



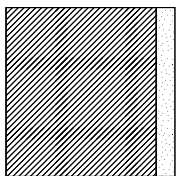
9.7



image: left-over spaces of the railway

Edge Space

Space at the edge of (formal)
urban space / construction.



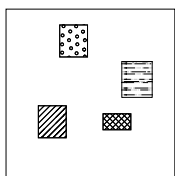
9.8



image: a semi-fenced wasteland in between the railway
and a linear self-built residential area

Temporary Place

A vacant / unused land been
temporarily occupied.



9.9

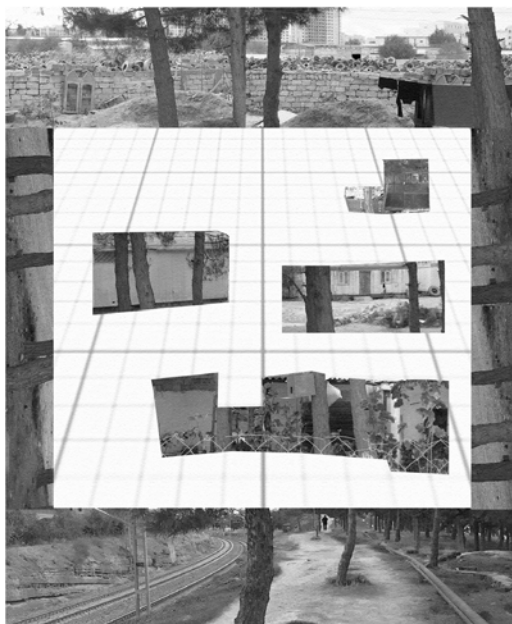
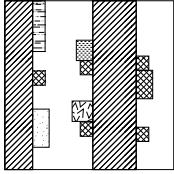


image: a camp yard, in a vacant ground inside the
woods along the railway

Free Zone

Space where nobody claims its ownership and then spontaneous occupation starts to take place, forming an autonomous micro-community outside the formal world.



9.10

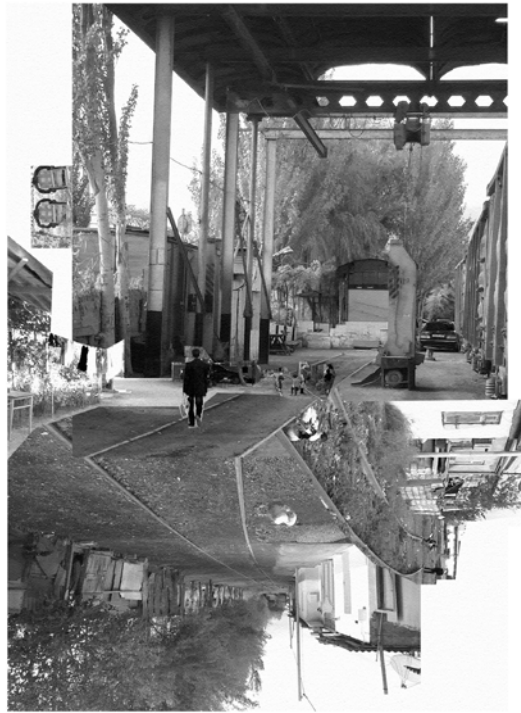


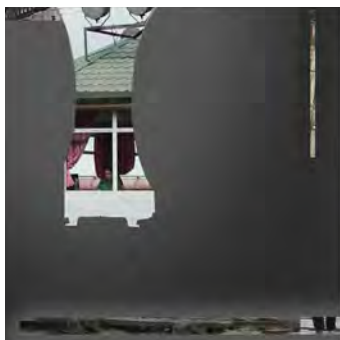
image: a parasitic self-built housing area using the wasteland of former industrial structure

CONFIGURATION COLLECTION

In addition, I made a collection of interesting figures and configurations I've encountered along my walk (fig.10). They are either informal practices or certain conditions or appearances took place in coincidence, which can be taken into consideration as useful references for my further intervention there.

REFLECTION OF FIELD TRIP

There are a lot of marginal spaces if you pay attention and go into back sides and corners. The impressive thing is that even in this "hidden layer" - marginal spaces along the railway, people are living a colorful vibrant life in their way, which can be informal or different, but also creative and full of possibilities.



10.

PHASE II

Experiment - Generation 1

INTRODUCTION

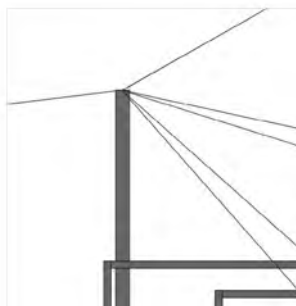
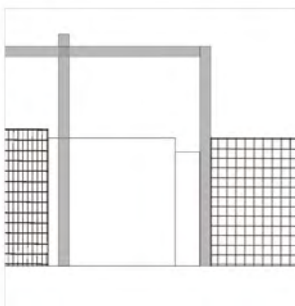
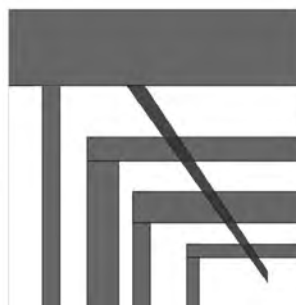
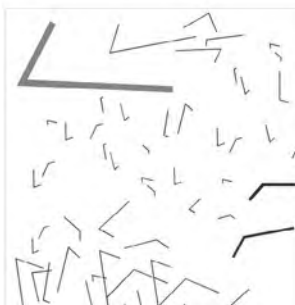
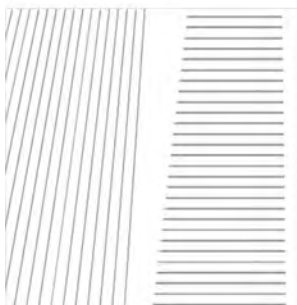
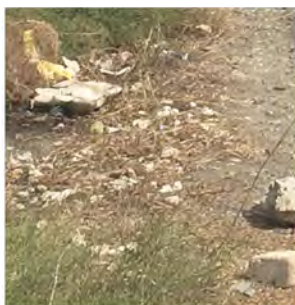
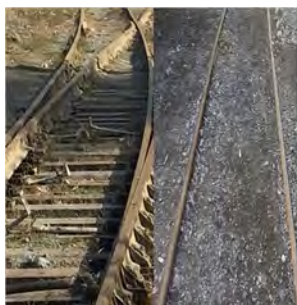
In this stage, I started to experiment, using the inventory catalog I've previously made, namely play with images and see what potentials can emerge apart from traditional site analysis.

In order to carry out the experiment systematically, I introduced a notation system (fig.11) to translate objects of real world in photo collages into abstract drawings. The basic rule is to draw notations as simplified abstractions of original things, leading to six main notations - rail, natural or waste

object, formal structure, natural or informal structure, informal self-built object, linear object - while the darker color stands for the formal object and lighter color stands for informal one. The rail's status of whether in use or not is also distinguished.

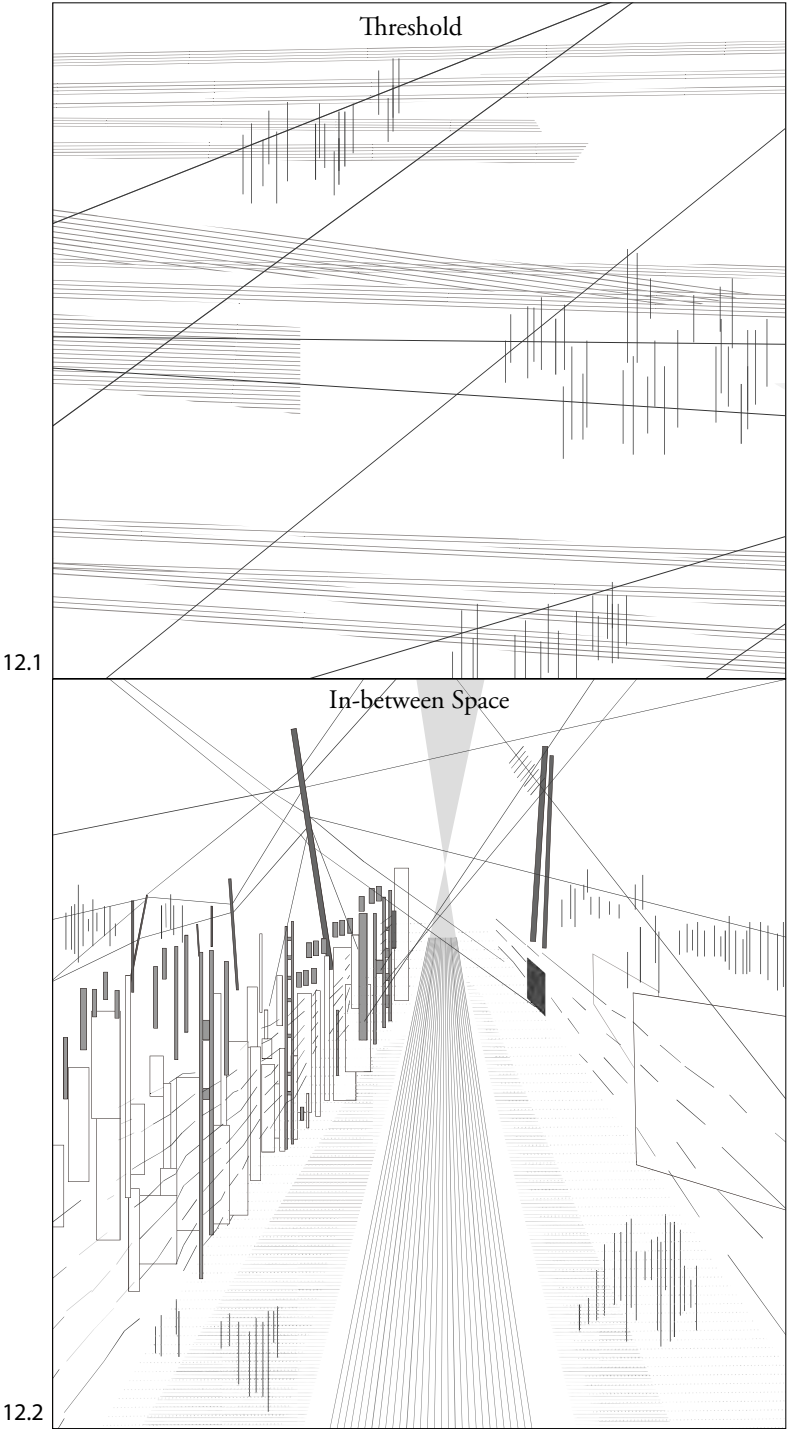
With the notation system, I made the first generation of experimental drawings, based on the ten different types of marginal spaces in my inventory catalogue. The outcomes are basically abstract version of things, which can still be traced back to the original photo collage.

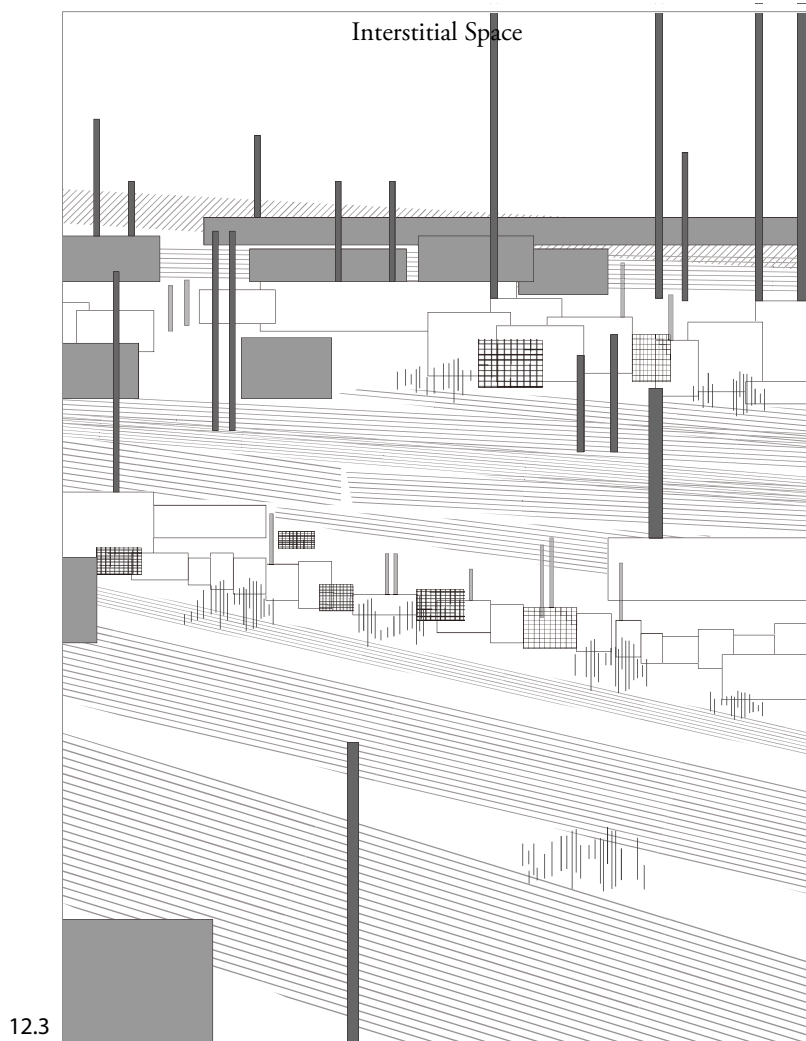
NOTATION SYSTEM

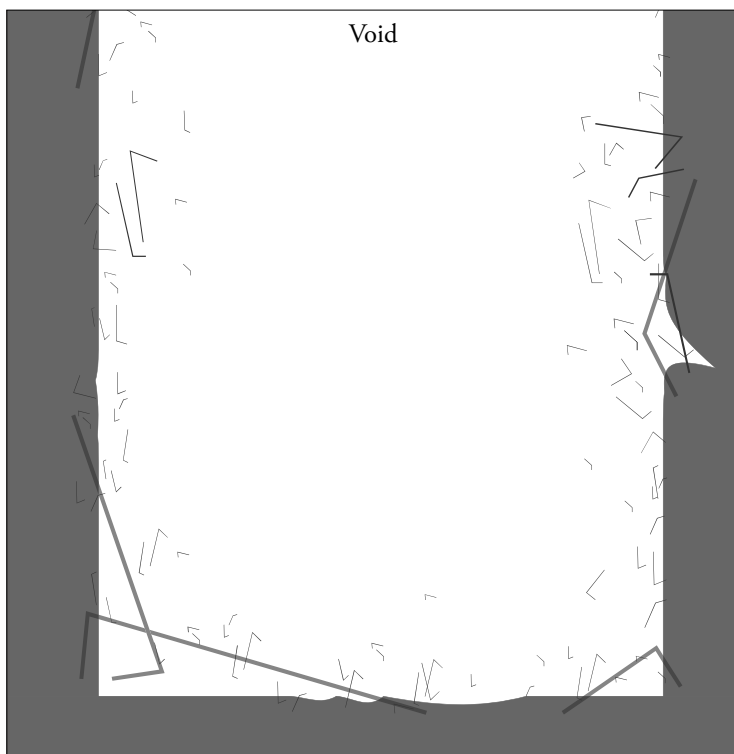


11.

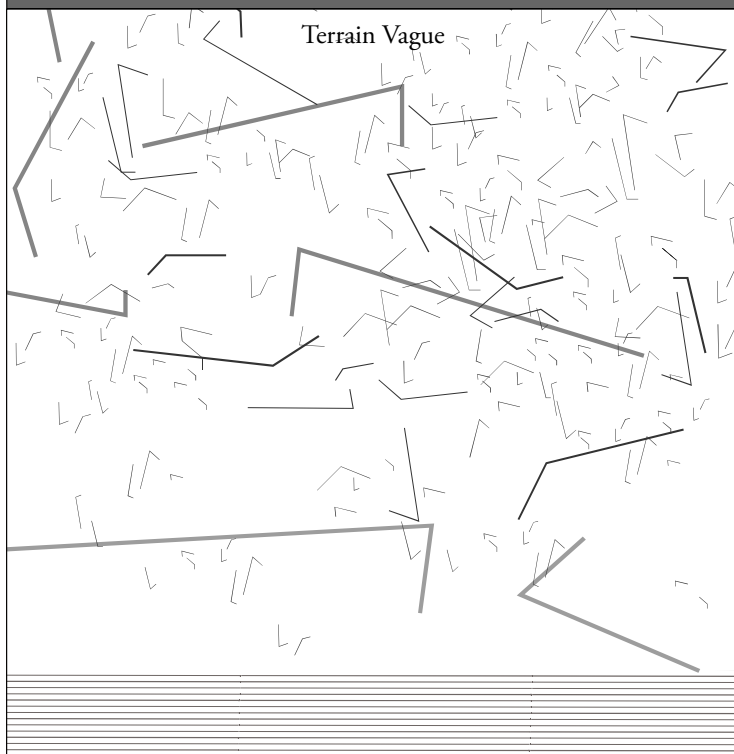
EXPERIMENT - GENERATION 1



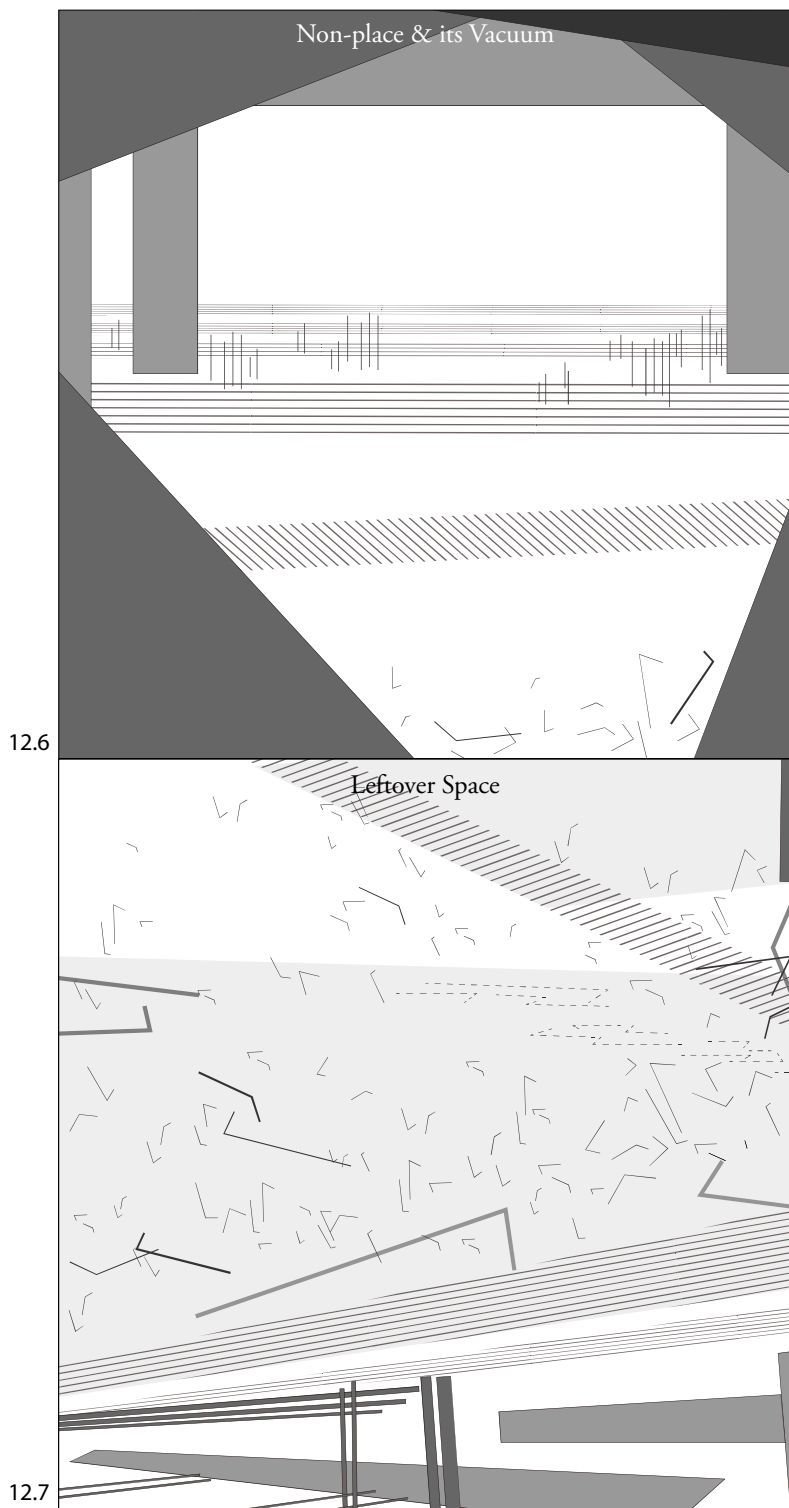


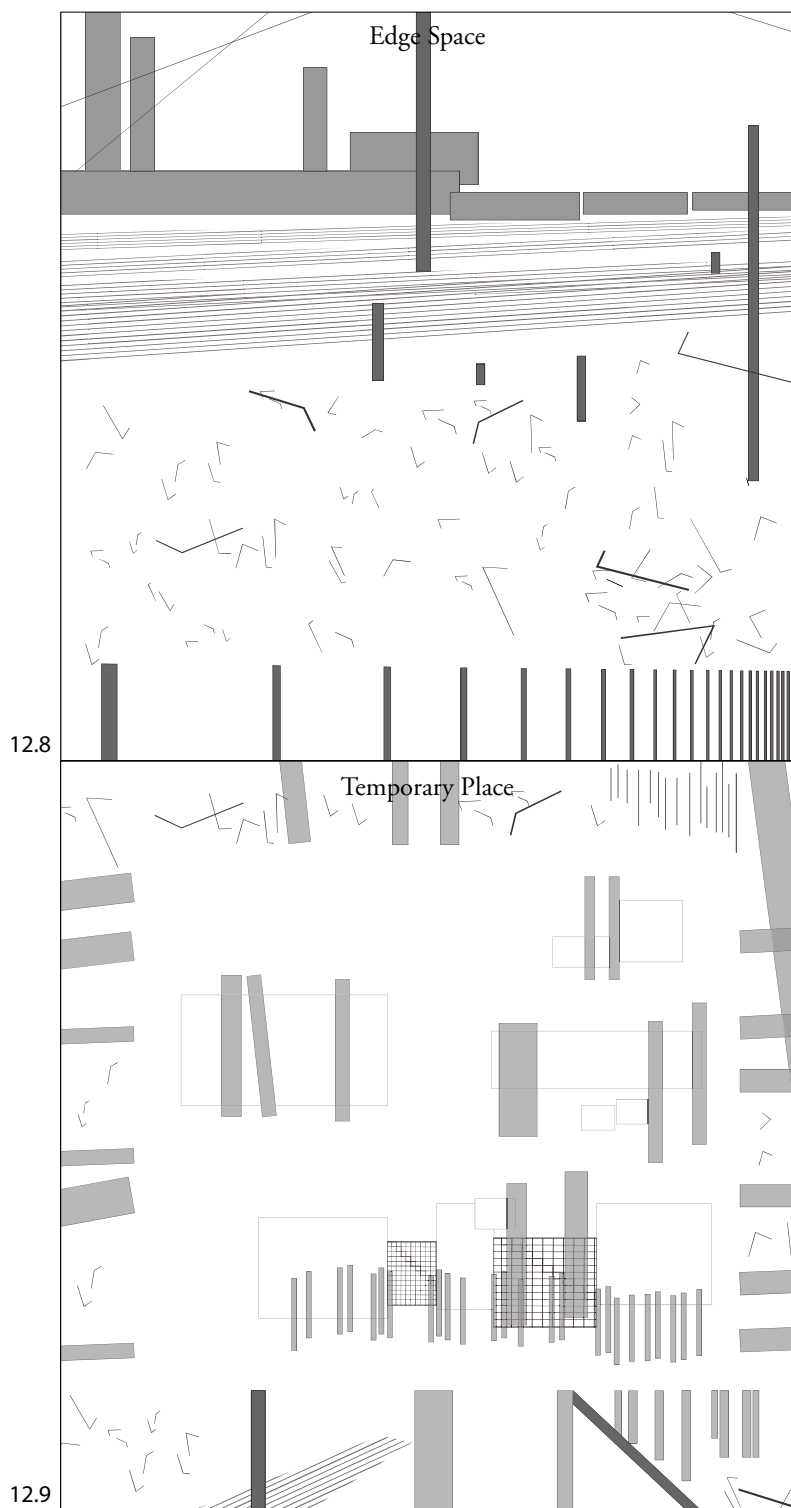


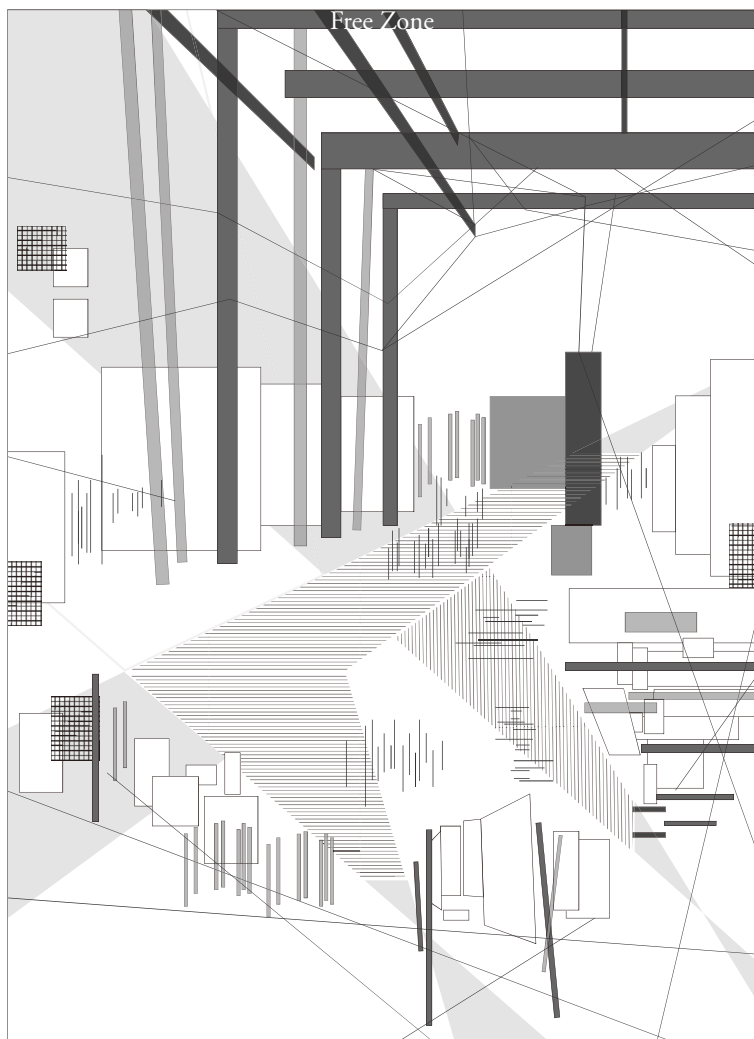
12.4



12.5







Experiment - Generation 2

INTRODUCTION

After the first experiment, I tried to make the second generation of this experimental drawing, which performs as a reinterpretation of those abstract realities, jumping out of the configurations and meanings of the first generation and see "what they possibly could be".

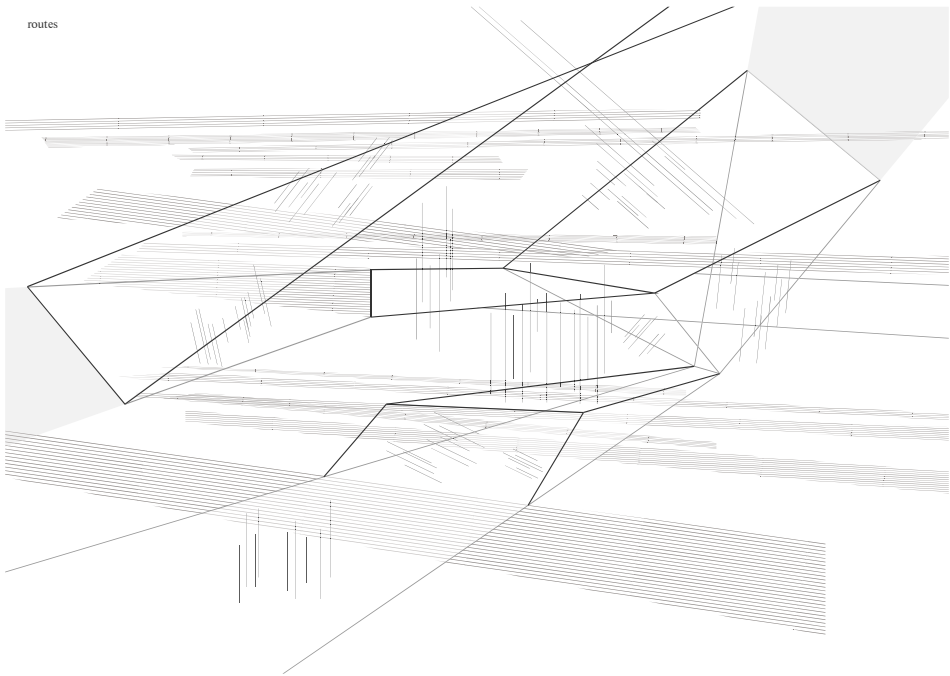
Thus the second generation of experimental drawing each has a theme of reinterpretation or misread, which not necessarily has relation with the first set of drawing or the original photo.

The technique and principle of this set of drawing is multipoint perspective, which produces a certain depth with an additional dimension, makes a spatial sensation within the 2D drawing.

The drawings are transformed from the original photos but have less relation now. While new things and possibilities also generated through interpretation and reinterpretation. Through this set of drawing, more spatial and architectural readings can be found, provided for further design.

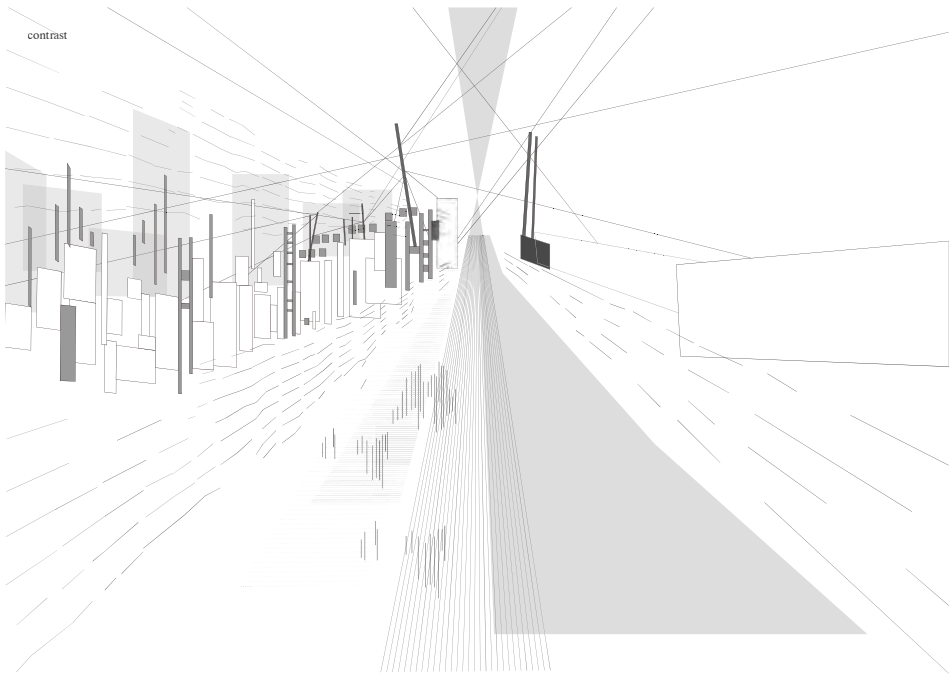
EXPERIMENT - GENERATION 2

routes

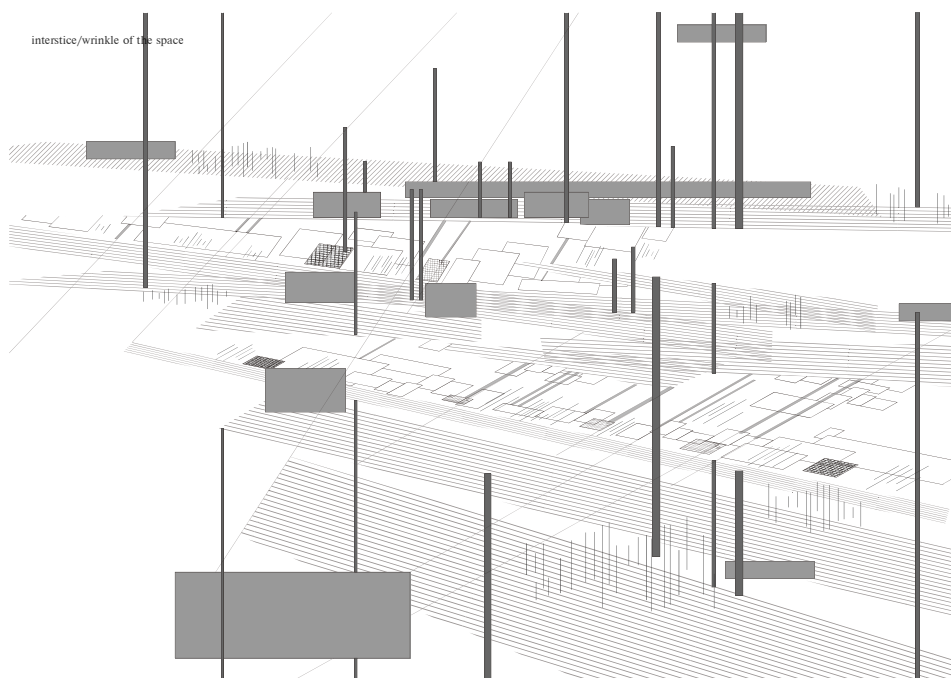


13.1

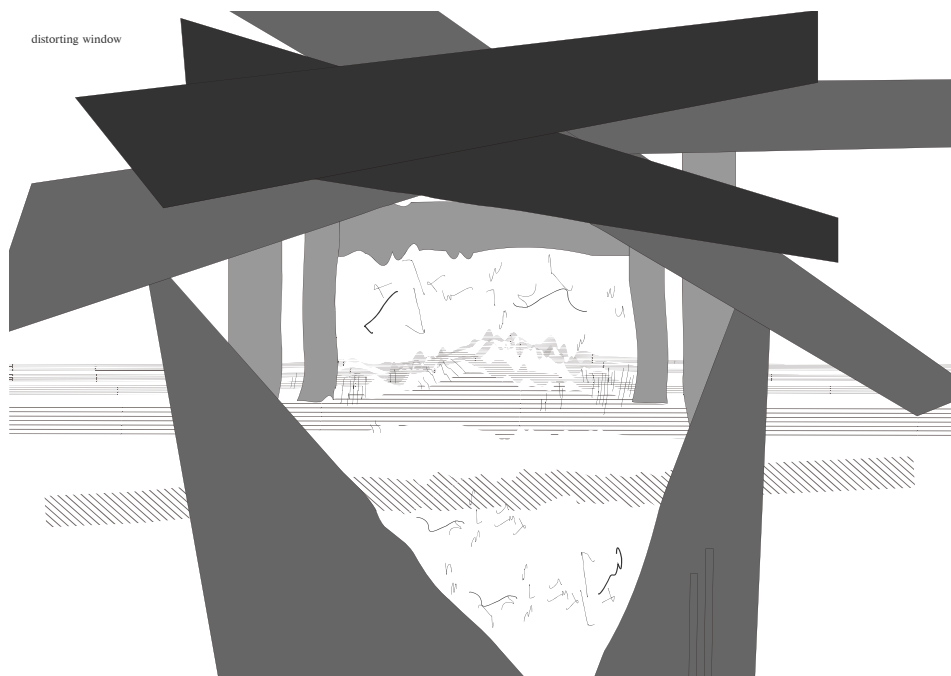
contrast



13.2

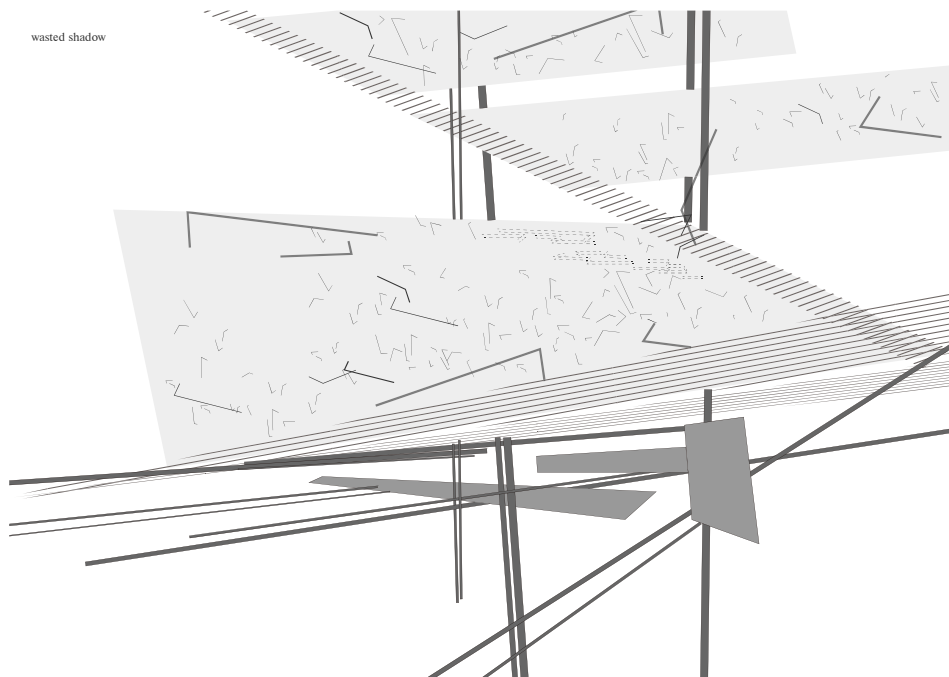


13.3



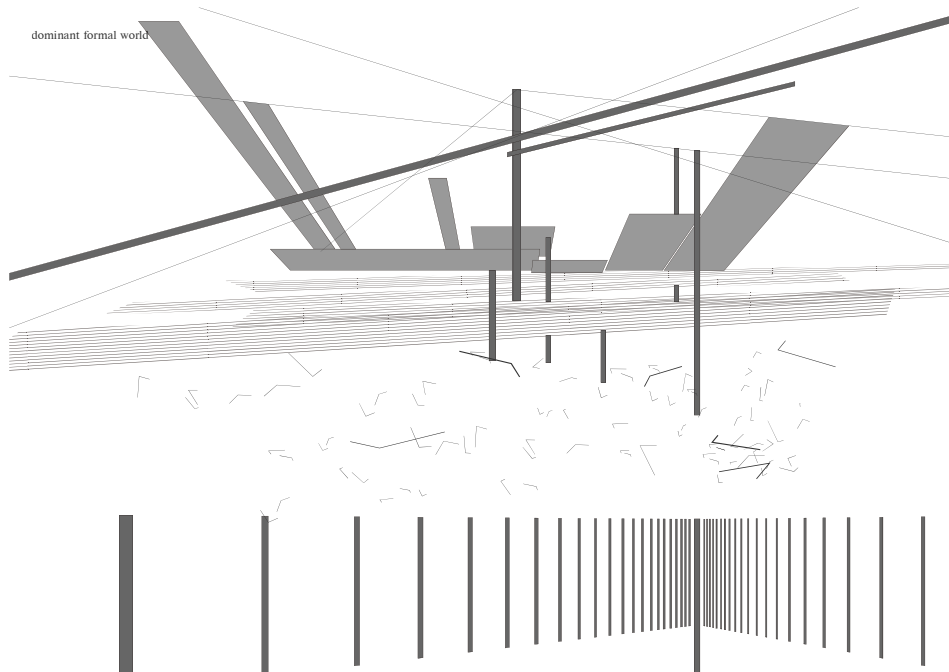
13.4

wasted shadow



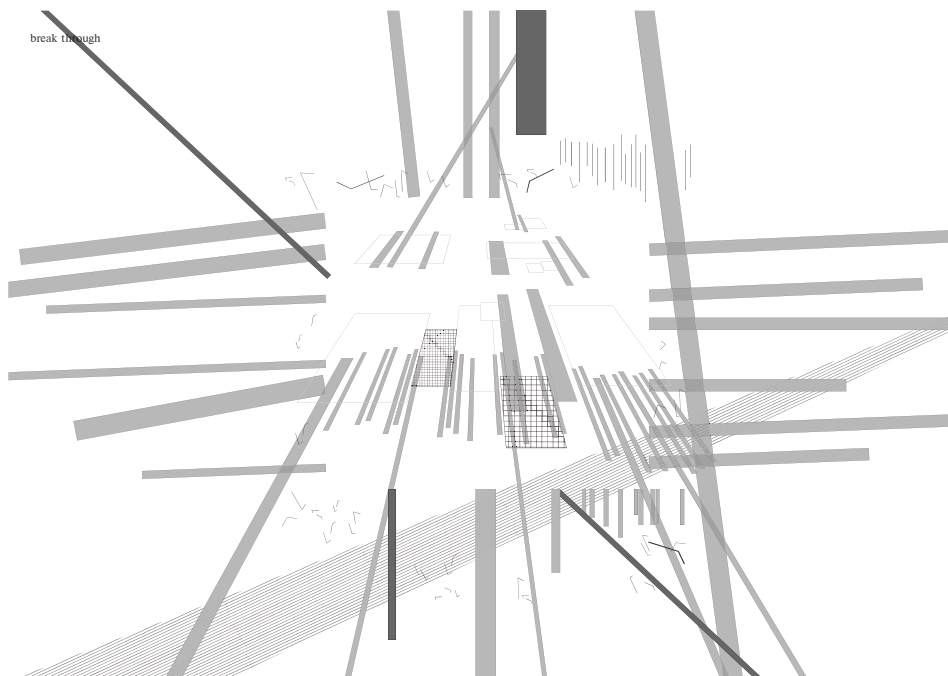
13.5

dominant formal world



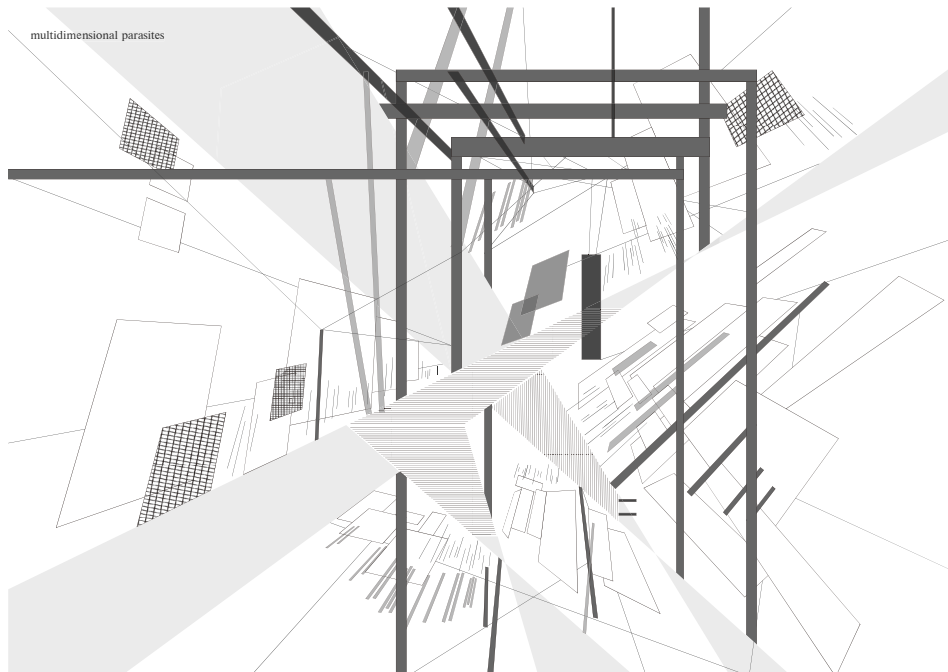
13.6

break through

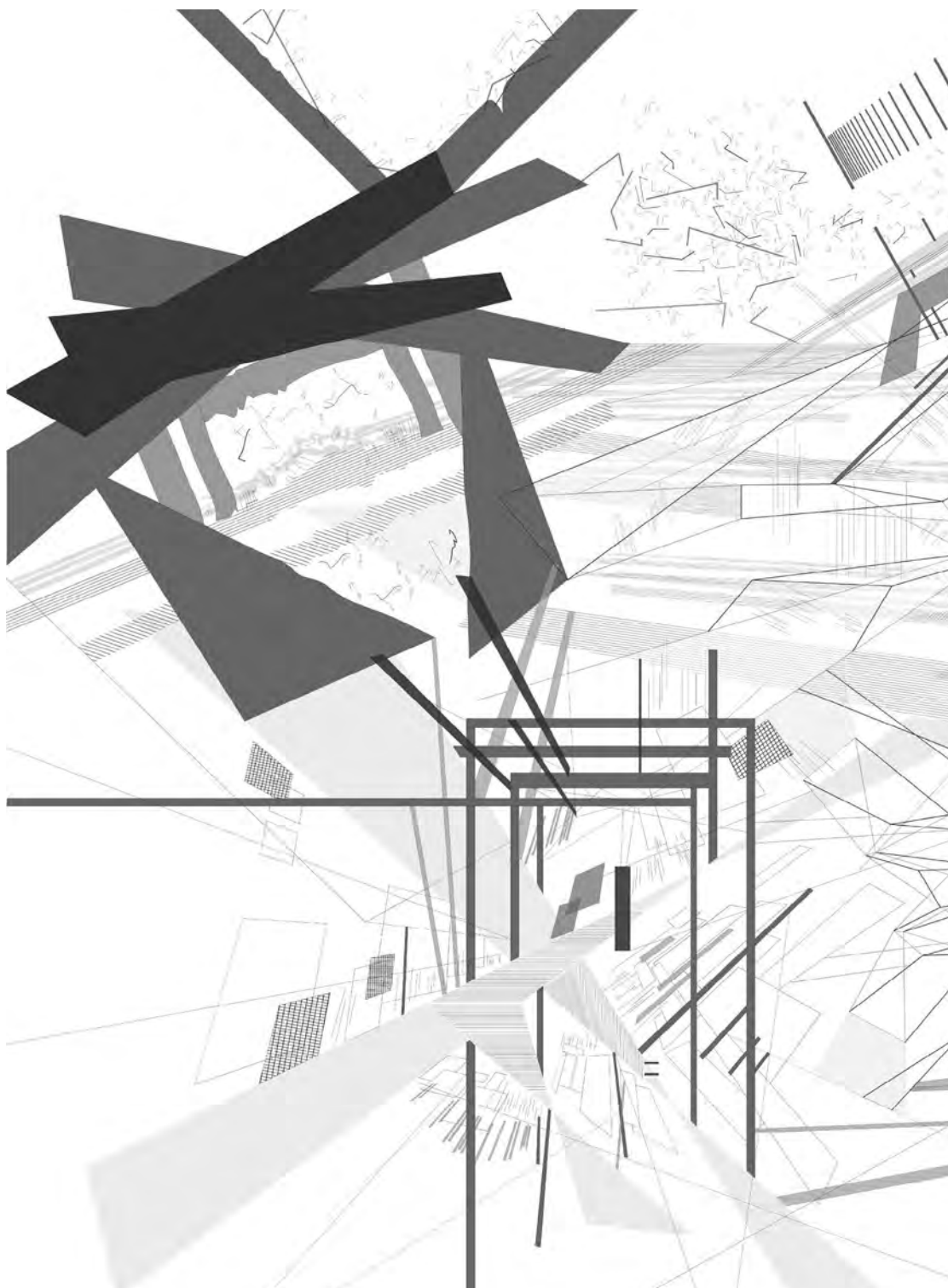


13.7

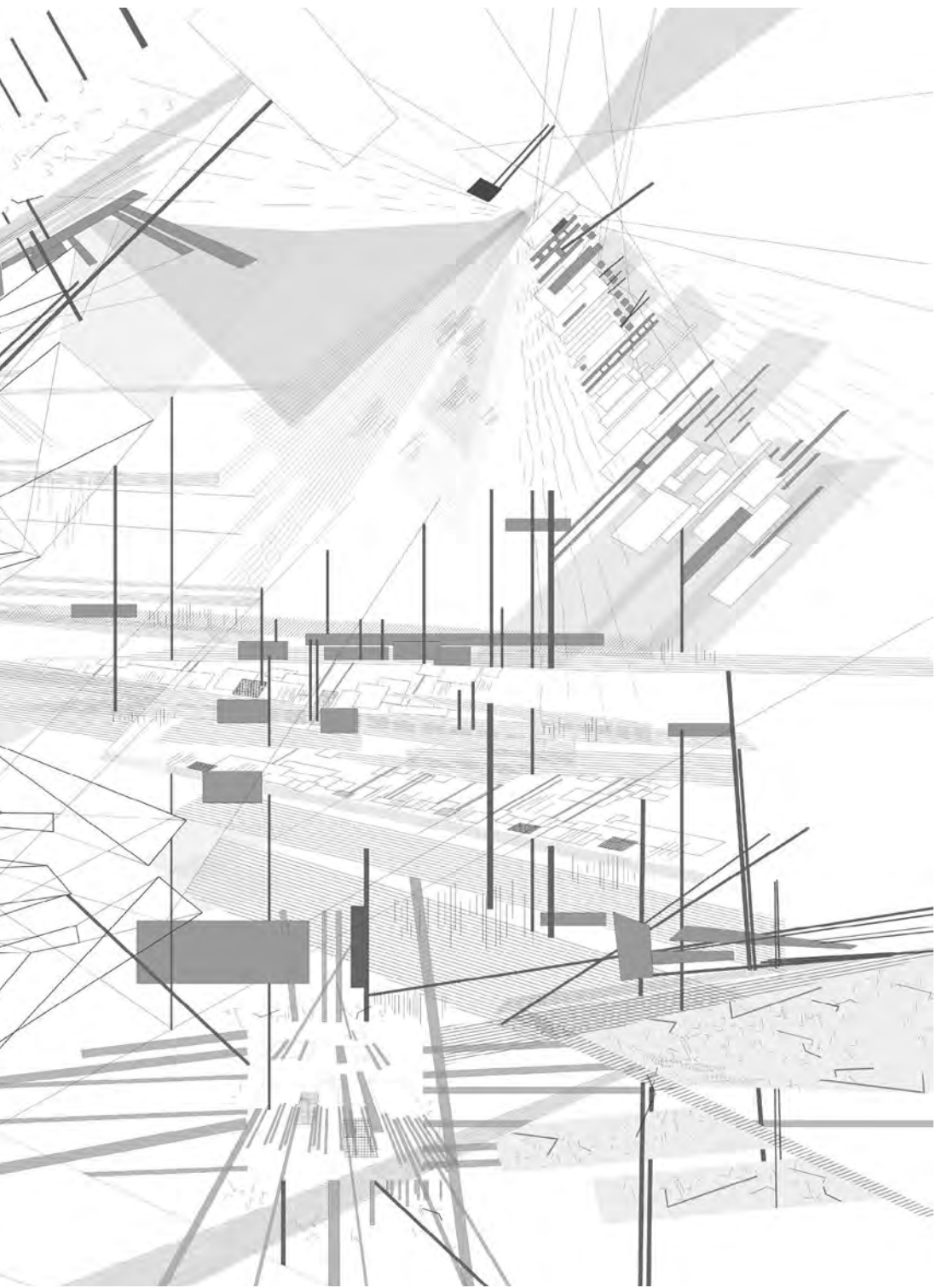
multidimensional parasites



13.8



14.



Architectural Understandings of the Diffusion Area

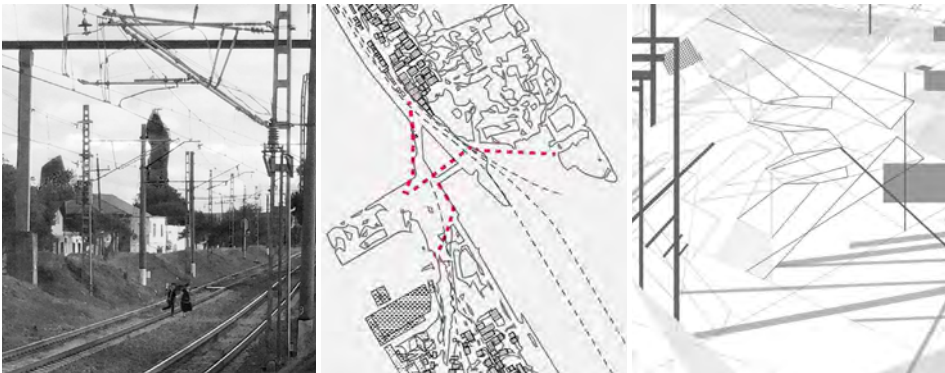
INTRODUCTION

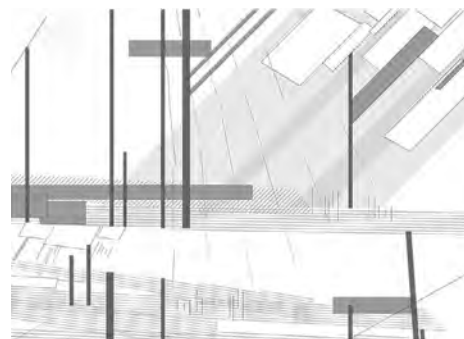
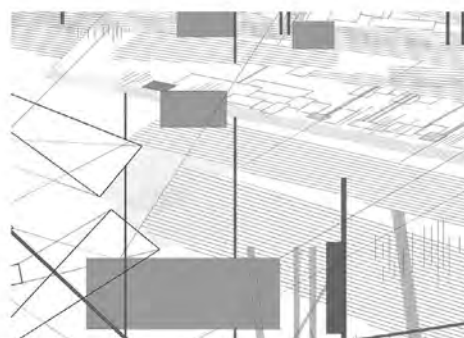
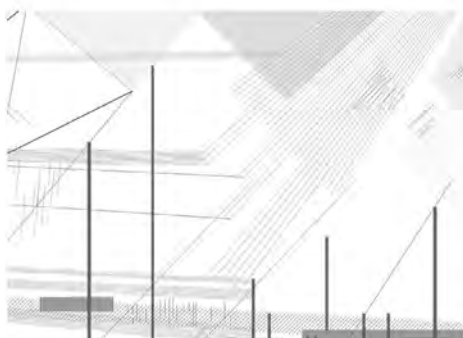
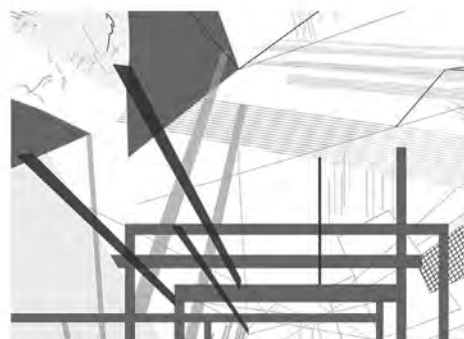
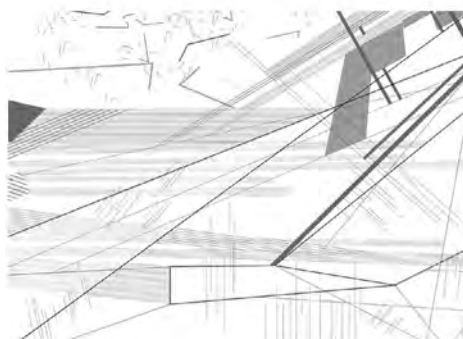
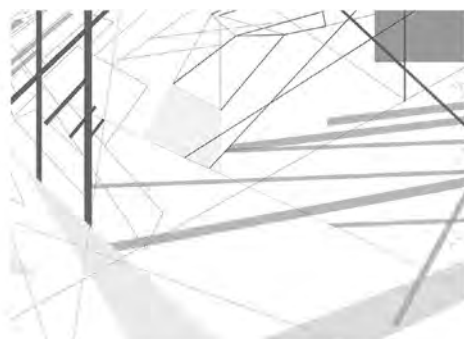
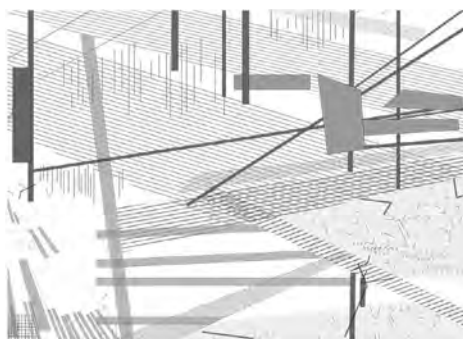
Margins are not enclaves. Even when they become places/mini-cities within space/city, the margins still expand outwards, build connections, form a bigger whole (fig.15). I am much interested in this expansion/diffusion process, which physically comes up with intersections and joint areas in the new margins. As for my interventions, I want to focus on these diffusion areas and improve human experience, while keeping the spatial characteristics of the margins, which are dynamic and flexible. Tangibly, my intervention could be the structures for crossing the railway, with changeable construction method, light materials, and temporary uses - stalls, places for gathering, temporary residential units, self-determined renting areas, etc.

As previous experiments give a possible imposition of different marginal spaces (fig.14), there are intersections and joints can be found (fig.16) - some appear to be juxtaposed, some overlap each other, some build extra expanding linkages. The experimental drawings serve as try-outs of what can happen in these diffusion areas.

I carried on the experiment, intuitively reviewed these intersection drawings, tried to understand them in an architectural view - namely possible spatial qualities, atmosphere, program and architecture elements. Allowing plenty of freedom to misread. The outcomes are conceptual scenarios translated from the intersection drawings.(fig.17,18) This can also contribute as a method of spatialization, which can be further applied to the real context. (fig.19)

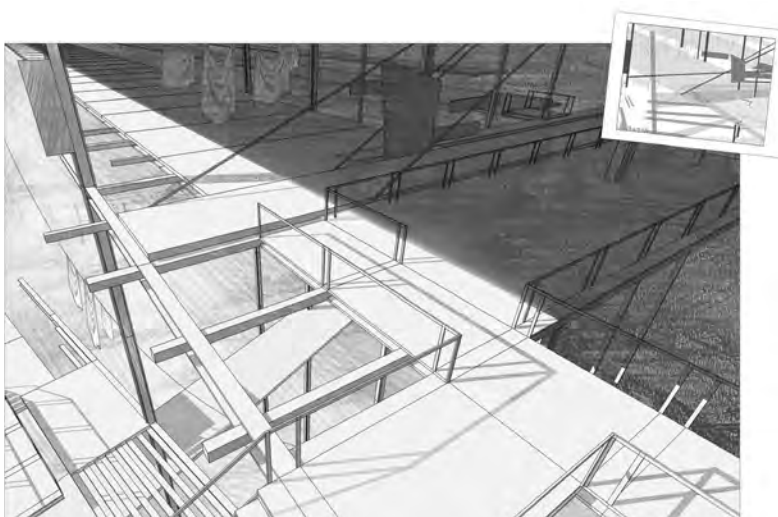
15.





16.

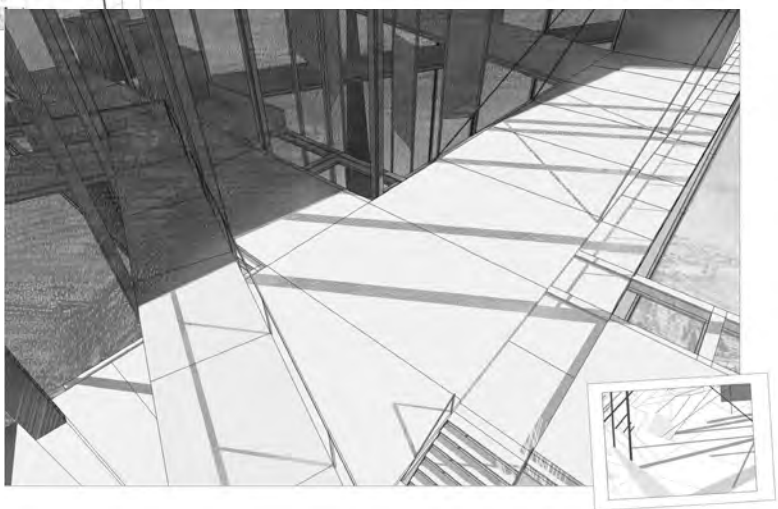
17.1



17.2



17.3





18.



19.

Spatial Translation

INTRODUCTION

The 2-week Modi Operandi Workshop gave me chance to make a transition from 2D drawings to 2.5D flat models, along with new insights emerging from the transformation of surface and space. It is an operation of materialization, but not limited in loyal translation. Actually, it can be regarded as a try of reinterpretation of the drawings, just like my several generations of experiment after the initial abstract drawing. New possibilities generated from the evolution.

The first model is about the 'site'. I started with materializing one drawing from my first generation experiment, first flat and then intuitively made certain heights, finding that there was actually another perspective of the model - the back side. The constructions and additions on the surface possibly result in traces on the back side - some (with deeper foundation) have and some (built on the surface) do not. This situation also happens in reality.

The theme of the second model is 'assemblage'. I use it to indicate as well as simulate the autonomous human practice in the marginal space. There is initially a plastic sheet - translucent, soft, with uncertain edge and shape - as the unclear "boundary" of the margin. Various materials are added and somehow constructed in interstitials and wrinkles. The addition objects have relations with each other and with the plastic sheet, in order to anchor into space.

The third try is supposed to be the first attempt of architectural "program and phenomena". I tried to build up an ecological model of the marginal space. There are several sublayers within this "hidden layer of the city", the boundary and location of these sublayers are in constant change following human practices. The principle is, as reality, some structures which can go through all the sublayers perform as the supporting object, while manmade additions and sublayers perform as parasites along the main structures, together form an "underground" (informal) community.

MO1 SITE
THE MARGIN, UNDER THE SURFACE



20.1



20.2



20.3

MO2 ASSEMBLAGE
THE AUTONOMOUS PRACTICE



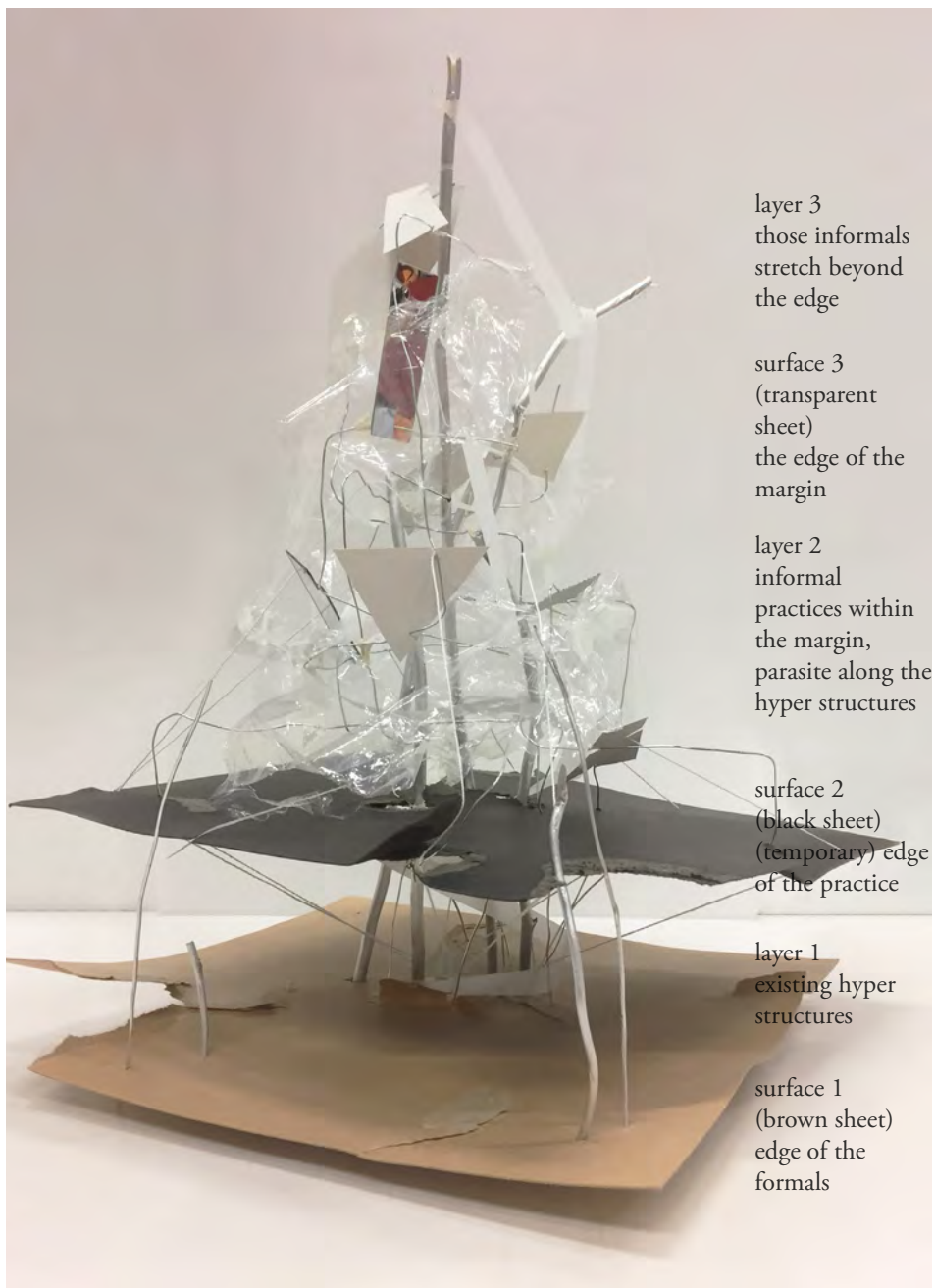
21.1



21.2



MO3 PROGRAM / PHENOMENA
THE UNDERGROUND COMMUNITY



22.

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

The topic of the city's marginal space has always been a meaningful target for research and design. As the world's contemporary reality, there are a huge amount of marginal spaces along with informal practices existing almost everywhere, not only in those 'underdeveloped' areas but also in those developed countries. The background situations and issues of this topic are the conflict and contrast of the rich and the poor, the lack of freedom in standard cities, the side effects of the superpowers and infrastructures to the existing city, etc. It is not only architecture or urban topic but also a social concern. There are already many pieces of research and proposals about this topic, for instance, researches of Urban Think Tank in Havana, conceptual projects of Lebbeus Woods. But the situation happens, and that is the reason why the research and design of the marginal space should keep carrying on.

My investigation is mainly based on image study and interpretation. Started from photos of the marginal spaces, I established several sets of spatial narratives and drawings, tried to conclude their spatial characteristics as heuristic materials, and translated them into architectural qualities.

There are indeed risks that whether I have already "experimented too much with the image" rather than the real site and space. Through several generations of abstraction, interpretation, and reinterpretation, there are unavoidably certain losses of the initial

quality in photo or reality during the evolutionary process. And it can be difficult to translate back from the latest generation of drawing to the original photo - although there are still some clues of the notation system, the configuration and meaning are totally changed. If not be careful, the experiment can gradually become a play with image and notation.

But I should still say that certain misreads and new insights are actually what I want to attain during the experiment. After the first phase of site analysis and mapping, It should be allowed that in some period I have to jump out of the original meaning and configuration in the photo, in order to find something new - potentials inspired from these spaces, which can be reflected in the architectural view.

After this phase, with plenty of findings and inspirations that I got from the experiment, I will return to the context, apply previous works and methodology onto the site - the diffusion area of marginal spaces along the Baku's railway. (I've already tried one in the latest experiment, see fig.19) I will further carry out architectural configurations using the abstract heuristic materials as well as qualities and characteristics of marginal space I've found in my experiment.

FIGURES

- 1 photo took along Baku's railway
- 2 map of Baku's formal urban fabric along the railway
- 3 photo took in an informal community along Baku's railway
- 4 map of Baku's marginal spaces along the railway
- 5.1-5.4 photos of temporary occupation
- 6.1-6.4 photos of longer-lasting inhabitation
- 7.1-7.2 map of marginal spaces being temporary occupied
- 8.1-8.2 map of marginal spaces being longer-lasting inhabited
- 9.1-9.10 catalogue of different types of marginal spaces
- 10 a collection of interesting configurations
- 11 notation system
- 12.1-12.10 the first generation of experimental drawing
- 13.1-13.8 the second generation of experimental drawing
- 14 a blended drawing of 13.1-13.8 as a whole
- 15 photo, mapping and drawing about the margin's diffusion area
- 16 intersections of the blended whole
- 17.1-17.3 conceptual architectural translations of the selected intersections
- 18 an architectural translation putted into the context
- 19 intersections putted into the context
- 20.1-20.3 photos of MO1 model
- 21.1-21.2 photos of MO2 model
22. photo of MO3 model

