

The Myth of the City

On broadening public access to the esoteric Square Mile

the City

by
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The book in front of you documents the process of a design project located in the mythicised City of London. The City of London, informally known as the Square Mile or the City, is the financial centre of the United Kingdom and is located in the heart of the capital. The project consists of a research component and a design component, together comprising my master's graduation year at Delft University of Technology.

All images are made by the author unless stated otherwise.

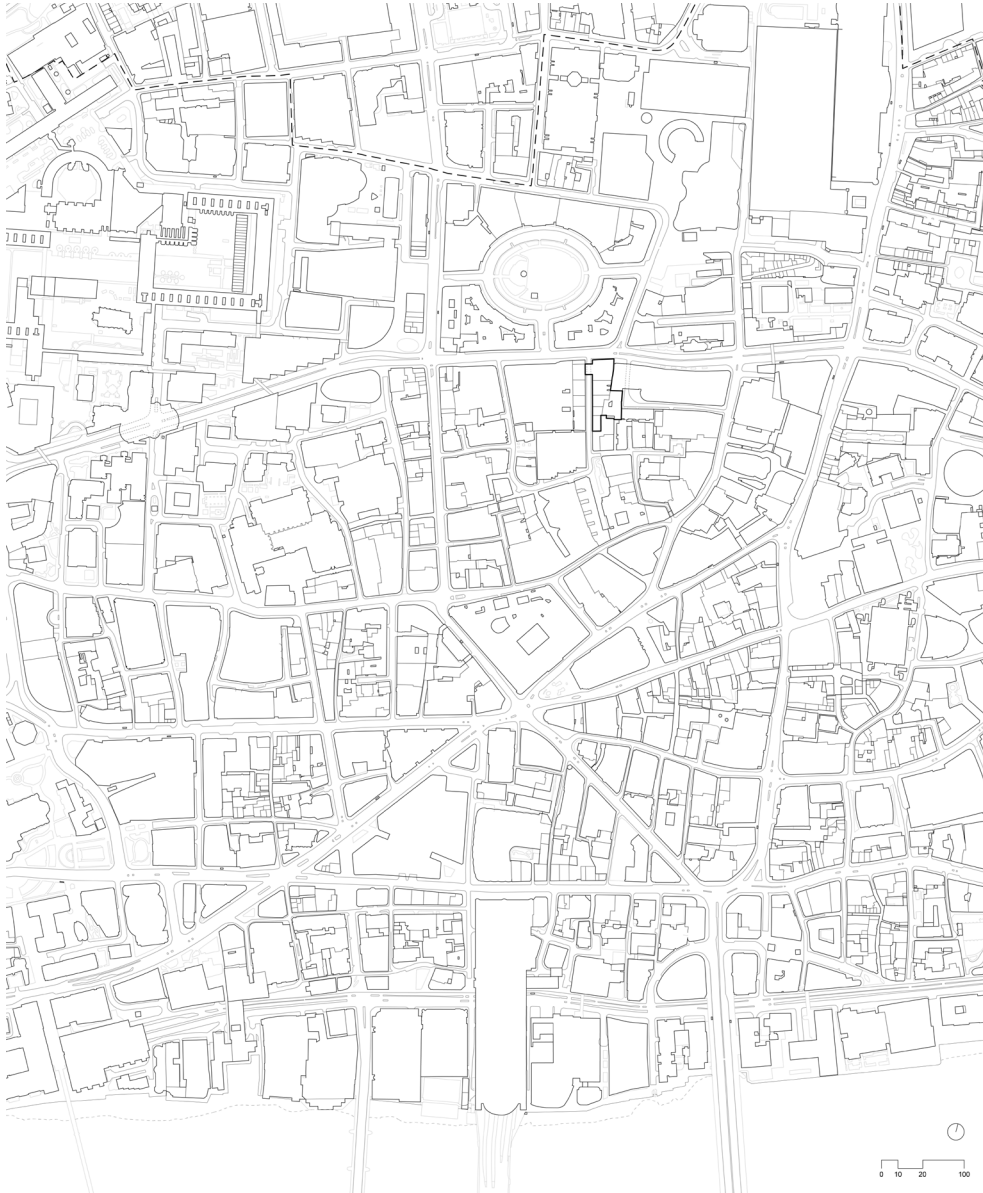
The site

Fiona Williams, a planning officer at the City of London Corporation, kindly gave me a tour of some of the most prominent developments in the City. We walked from the Guildhall towards a new square development in front of Ropemaker Place, then continued past Finsbury Circus Gardens to the Carpenters' Company's proposed redevelopment and ended at the controversial Liverpool Street project. Each of these developments incorporates some form of placemaking to enhance the public realm of the City.

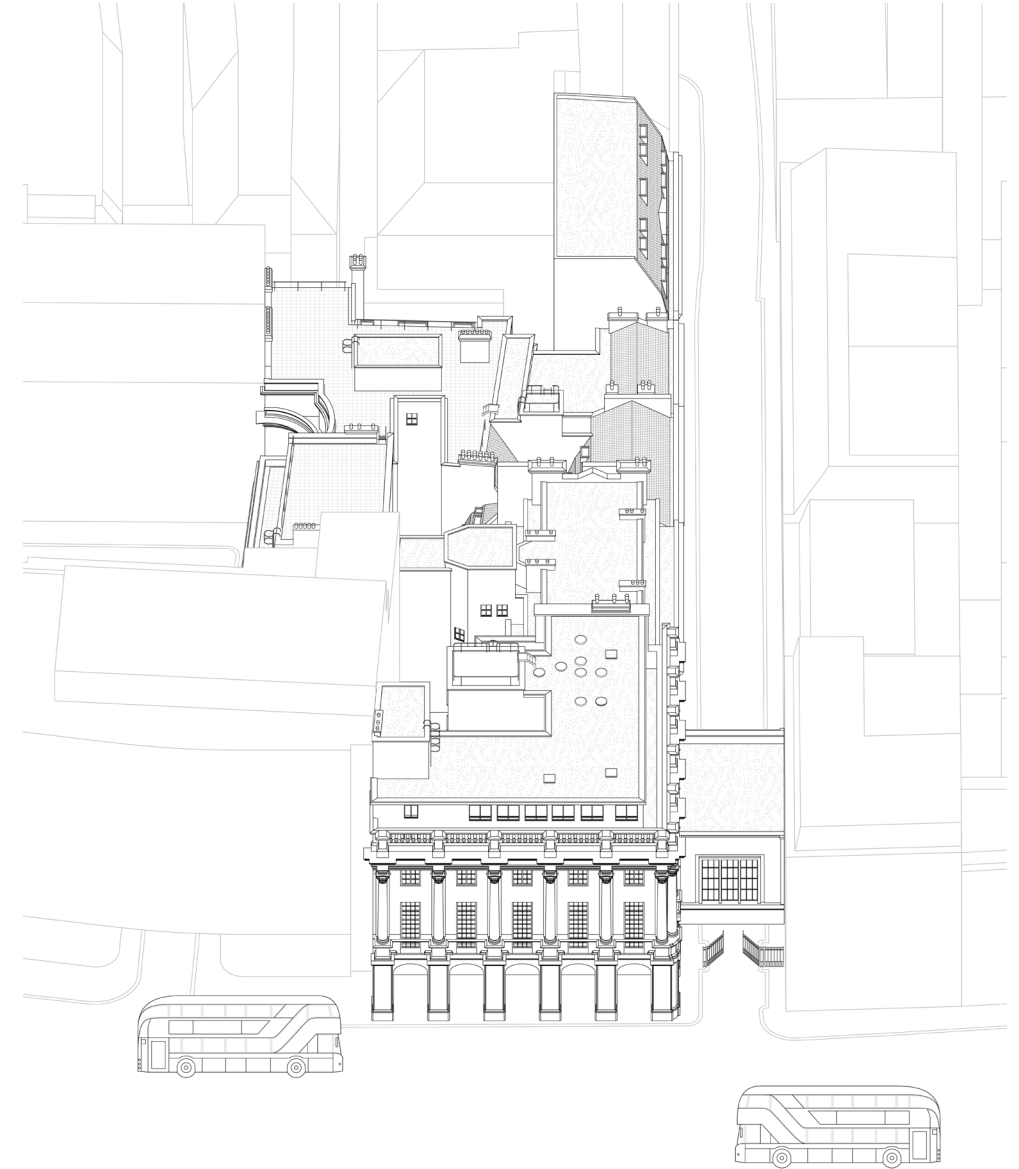
The Carpenters' Company's proposal to redevelop a series of bank buildings along Throgmorton Avenue and Great Winchester Street particularly caught my attention. The plan involves demolishing five bank buildings, retaining only their facades and a few interior rooms, to create new office spaces and a public area adjacent to the Carpenters' Livery Hall. The current design would also add several new floors to the building and extend above the existing facades. The site sits between the major developments along Bishopsgate and London Wall, yet it remains within the designated conservation core of the City that extends towards Bank Junction.

While the proposal has sparked some debate among conservation groups, it remains largely overshadowed by the neighbouring, and far more extensive, Liverpool Street Station and London Wall redevelopment. Rather than focusing on one of the more controversial projects that have already attracted considerable attention, I felt it would be more productive to direct my attention to the Carpenters' Company's proposal. This redevelopment can act as a testing ground for new ideas, offering a way to think about public access, heritage, and the future of the City within an educational setting.

From this point onwards, the site of my project is defined as the area surrounding Throgmorton Avenue, London Wall and Great Winchester Street, with a primary focus on the buildings marked for redevelopment.



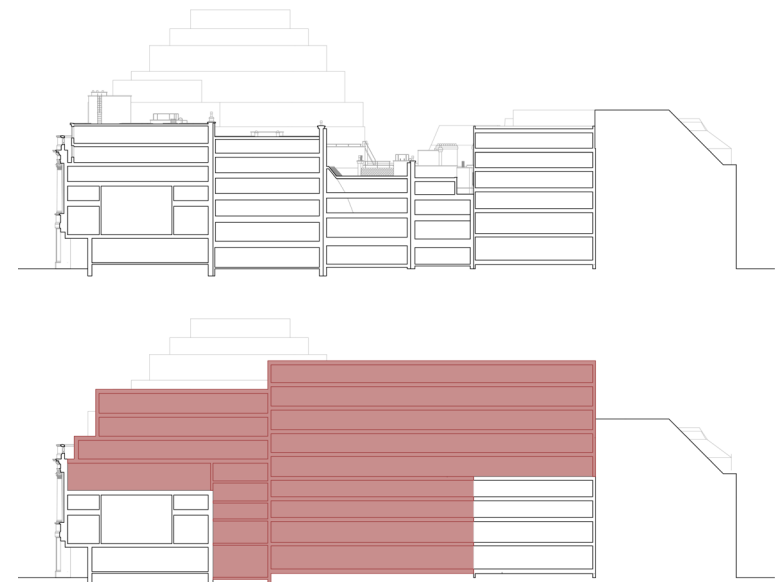
Location of the proposal (source: author)



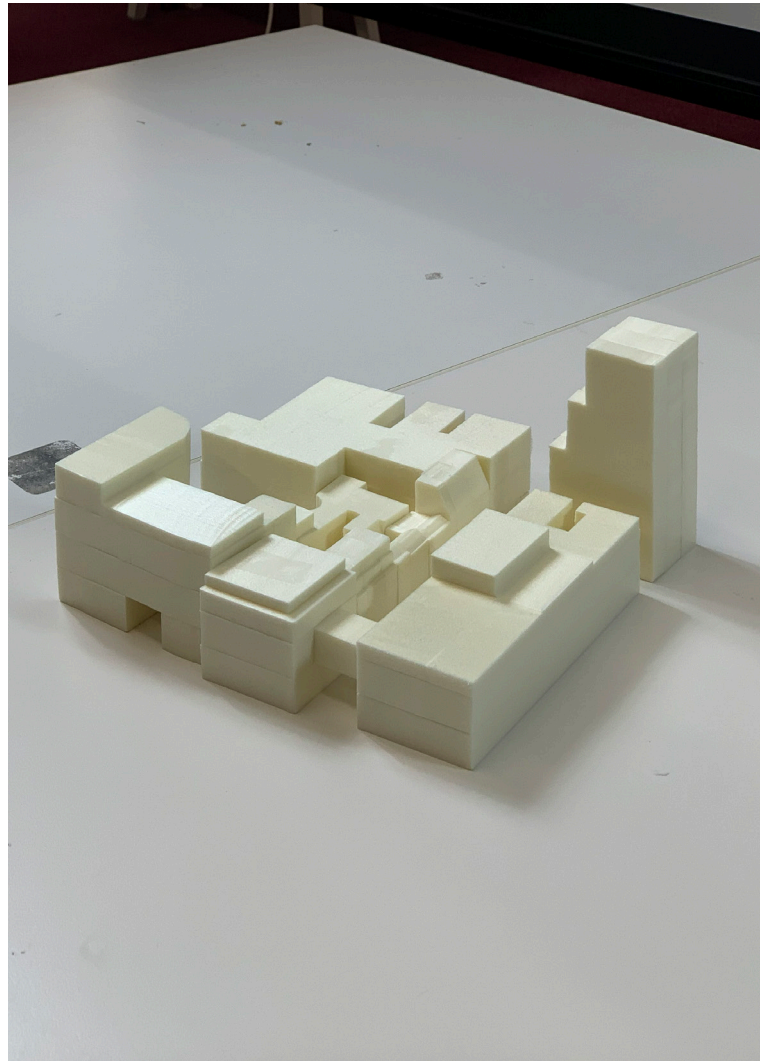
The site (source: author)



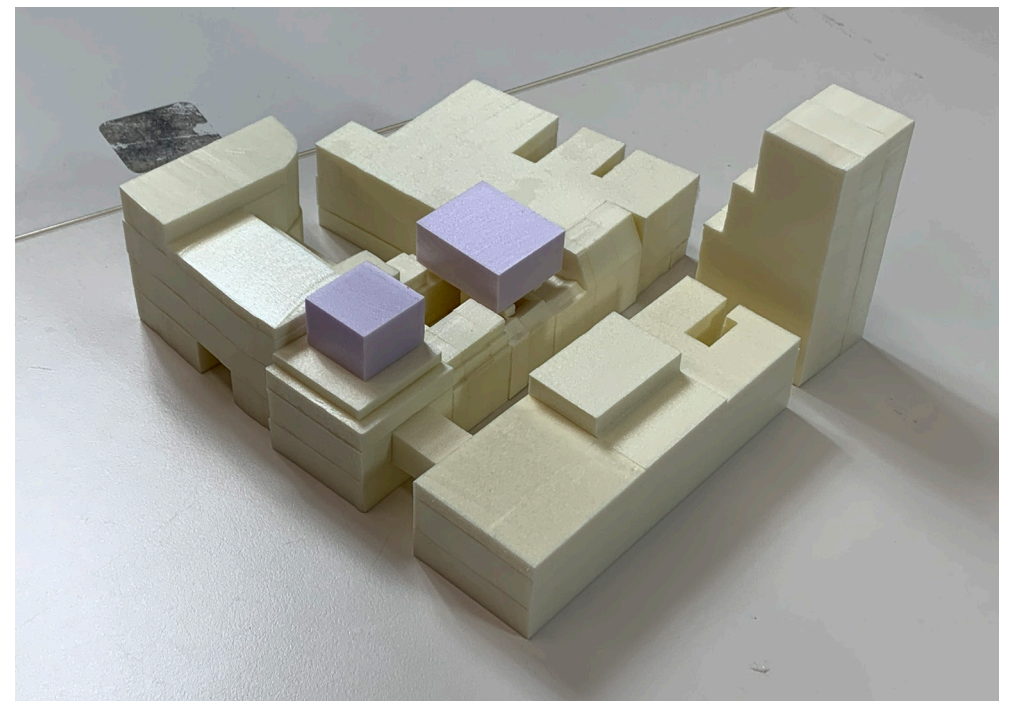
Proposed aerial view looking towards southeast (source: The Carpenters' Company)



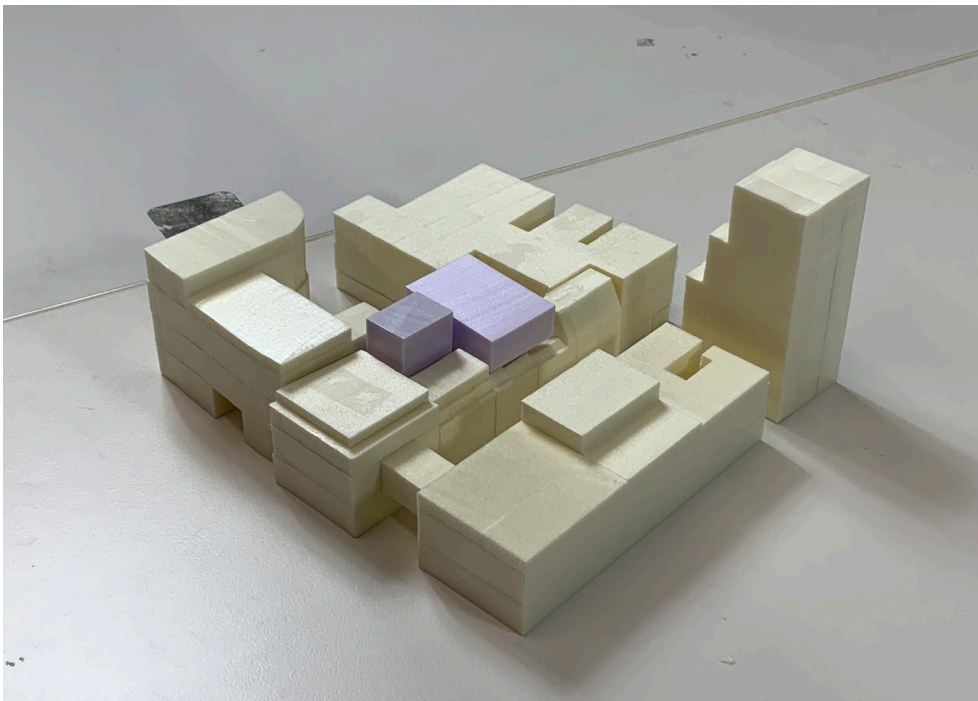
Demolition diagram (source: author)



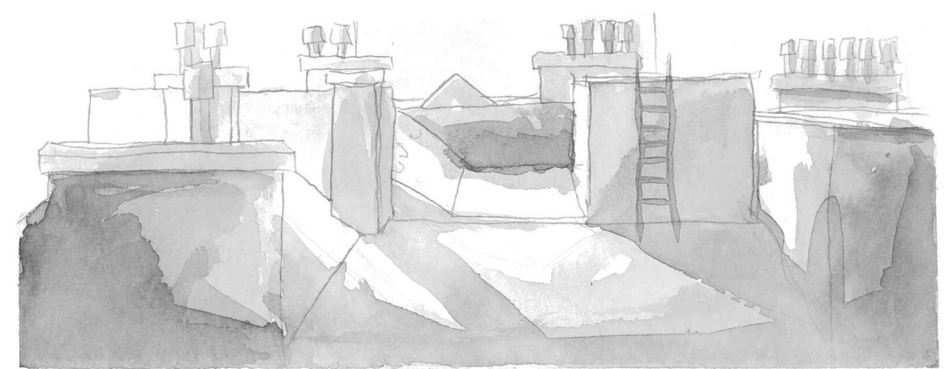
Physical model of the site (source: author)



Testing rooftop structures (source: author)



Testing rooftop structures (source: author)

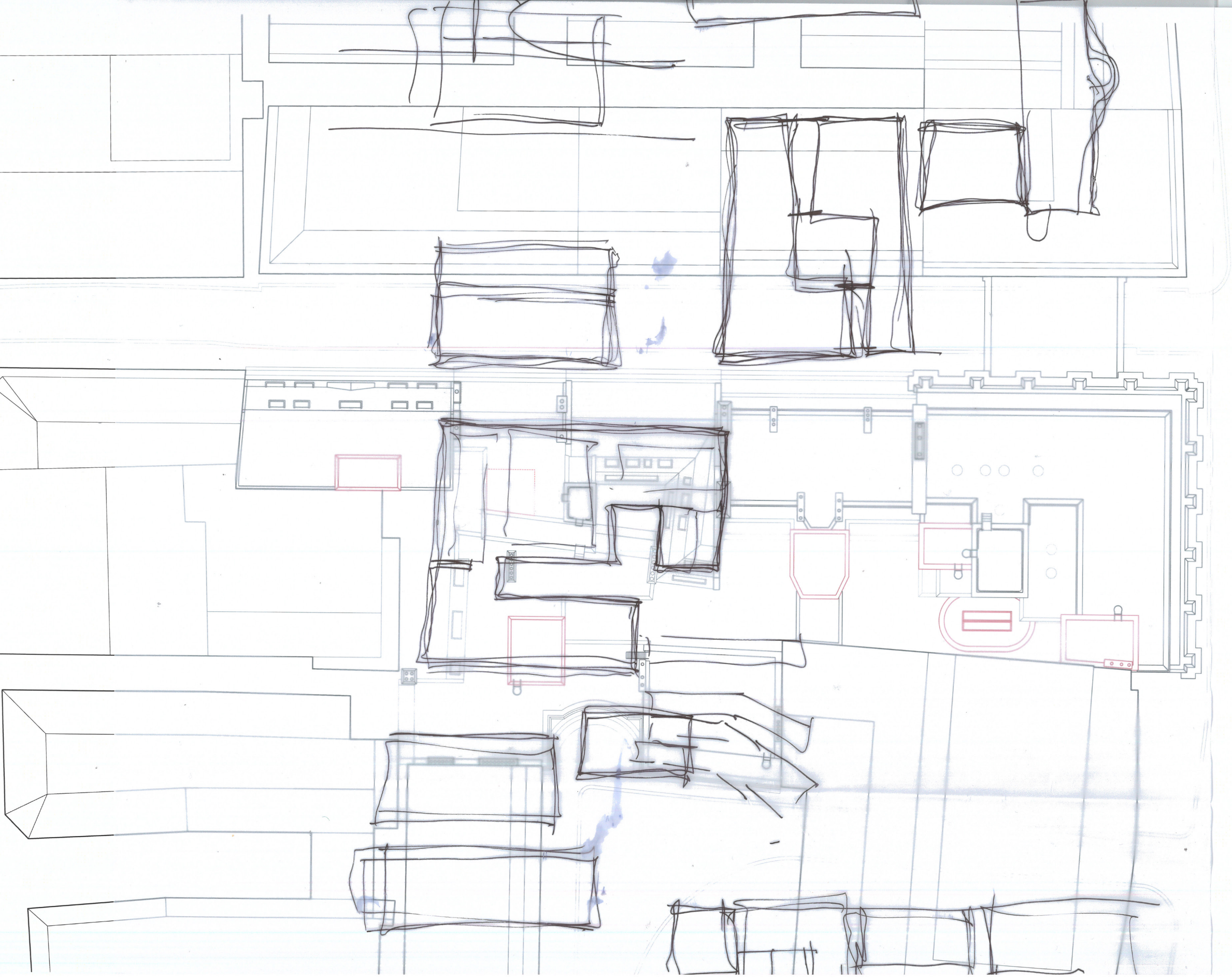


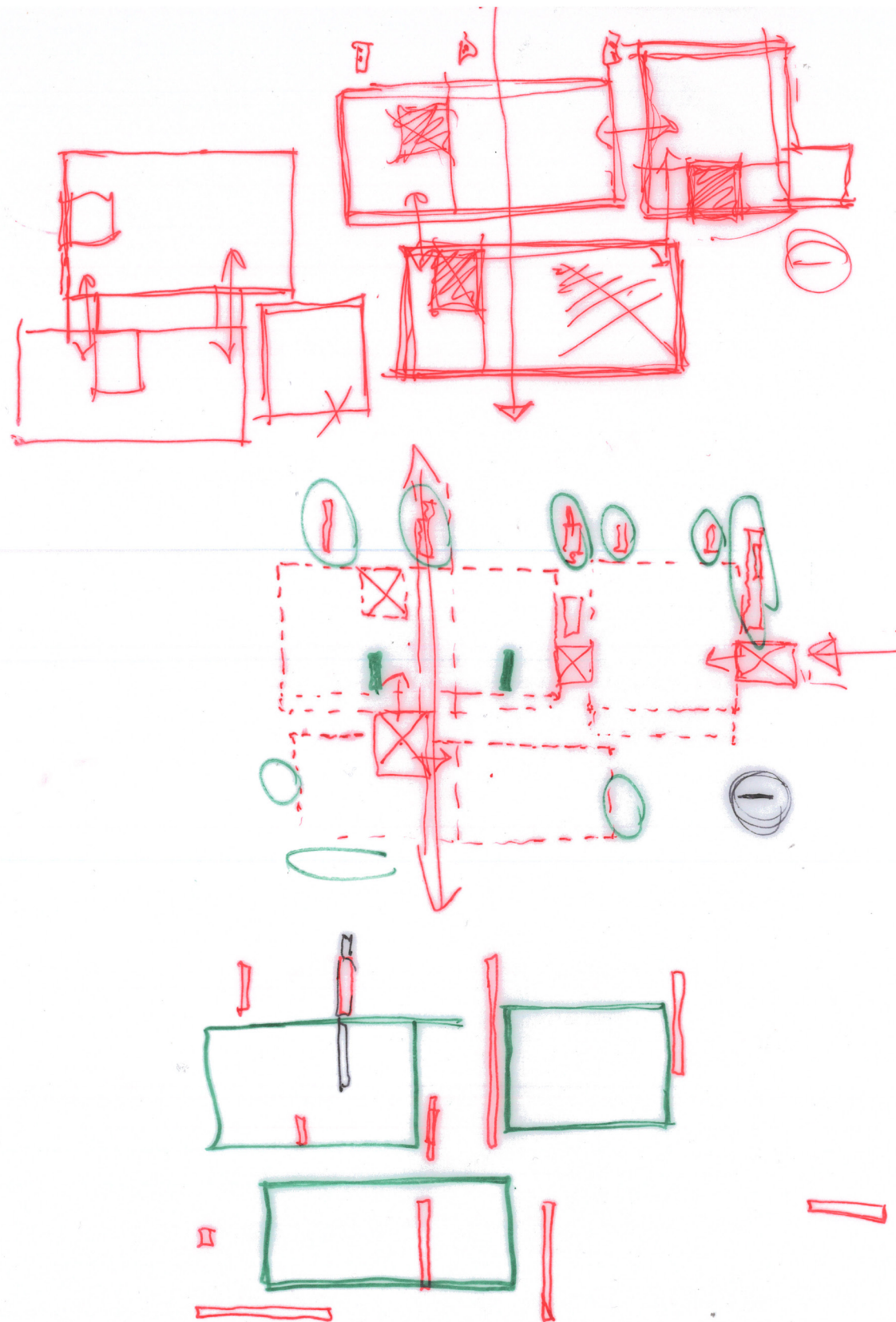
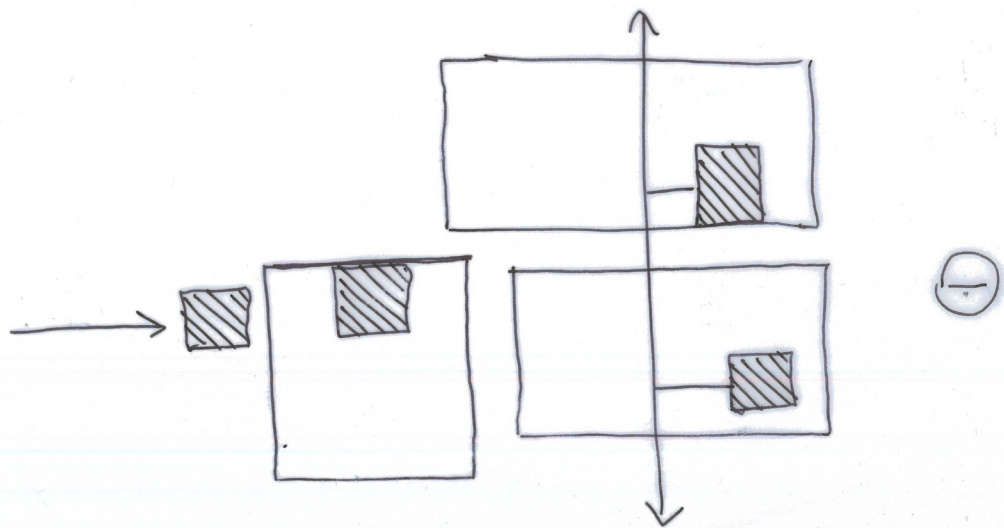
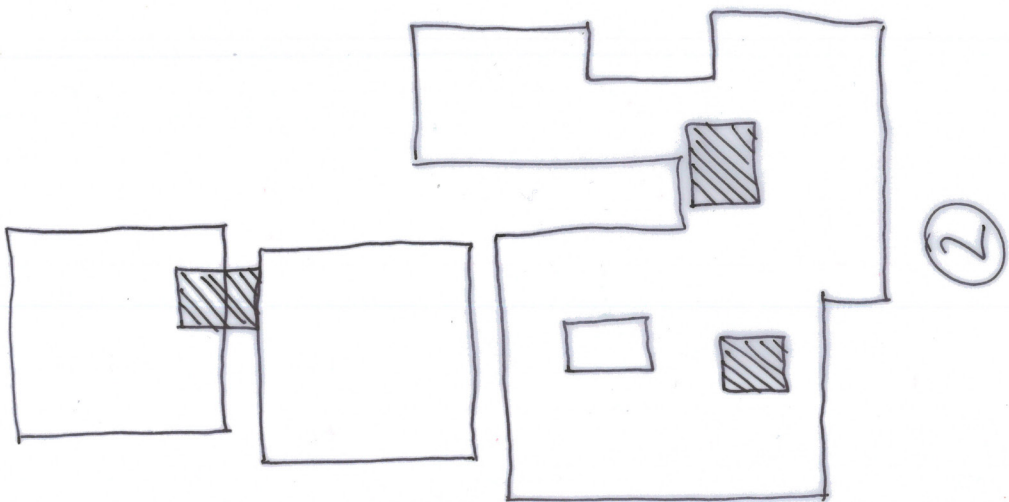
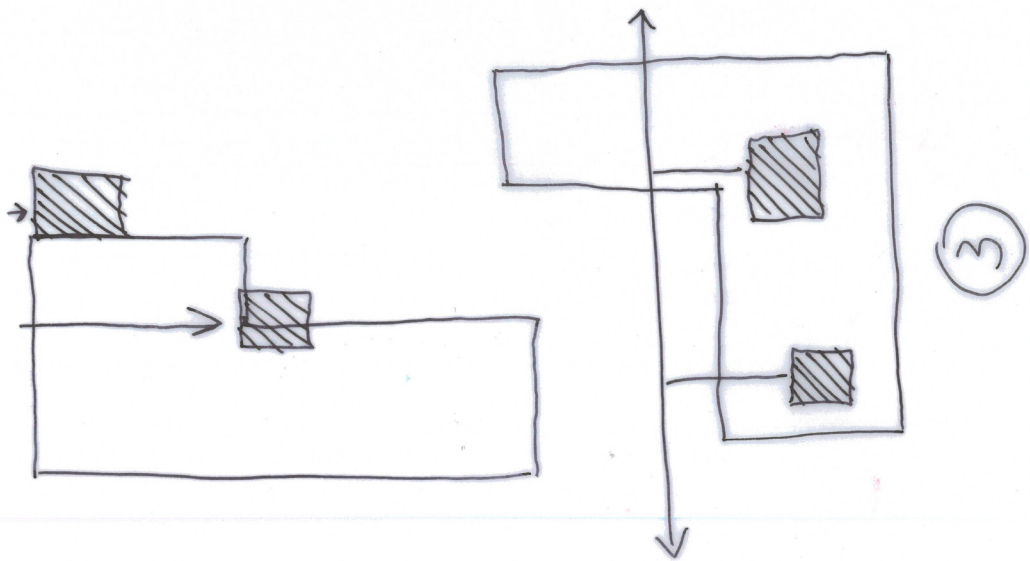
Watercolour of the existing rooftops (source: author)

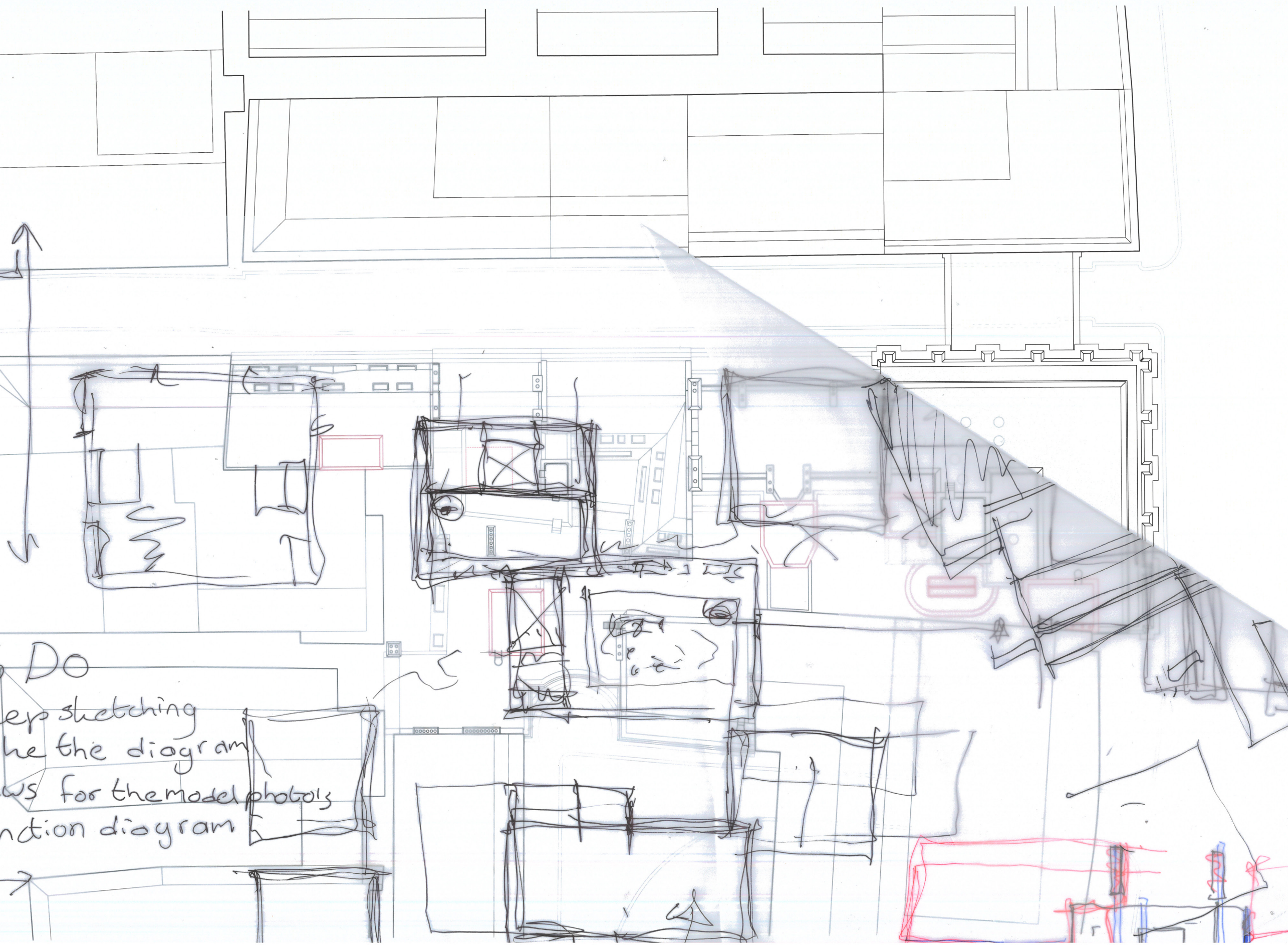
A Jumble of Plots

The series of plots along Throgmorton Avenue, London Wall, and Great Winchester Street fascinated me, not so much because of their ornate façades, but because of everything taking place behind them. Over time, new additions, alterations, and extensions to the existing buildings created a confusing mishmash of structures with irregular floorplans, packed closely together. Amidst this jumble of buildings, some old alleys still remain. Combine this with the rumbling sounds of HVAC machinery, air ducts creeping like vines along the inner façades, and the surrounding charcoaled black-and-yellow London stock bricks, and you get a vivid impression of the unique atmosphere hidden behind the pristine Portland stone façades. However quite many of them were filled in after the Second World War, making them inaccessible. In the trend of finding a hiding aesthetics that reveals the inner workings and rougher side of the City of London, a unique parallel becomes visible between the alleyways, courtyards and rooftops. Recognising their importance to the City's urban character, the City of London Corporation intends to introduce more alleyways, courts and passages, expanding on the existing network.

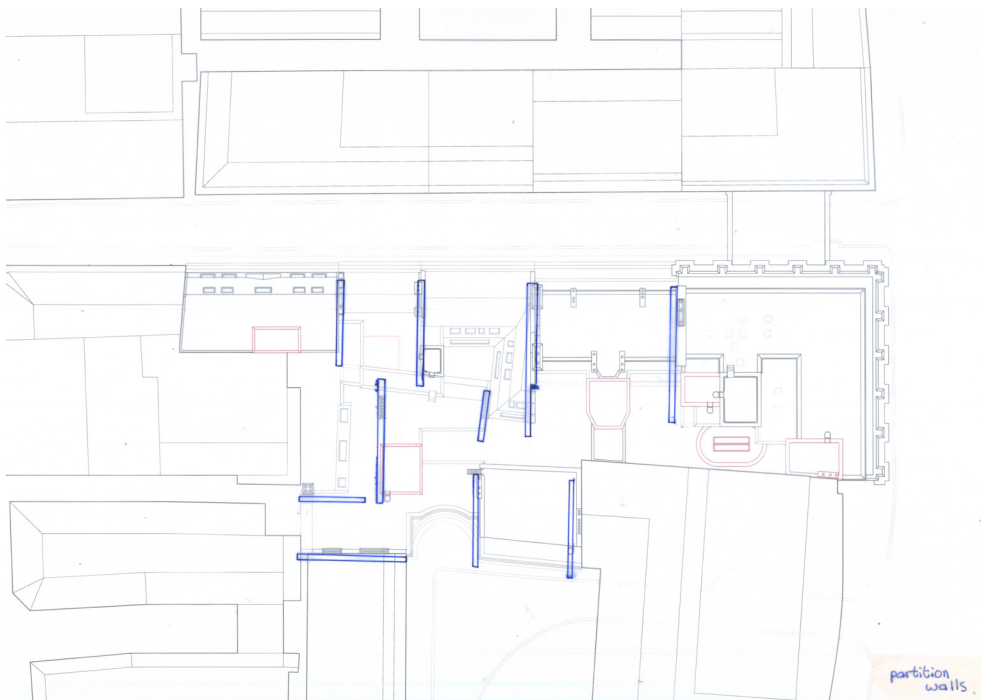
The Carpenters' Company's current proposal places significant emphasis on the value of the existing façades, an example of the ongoing trend of façadism in the City. However, to make way for the new development, much of what lies behind these façades is set to be demolished. In response, my exploration deliberately shifts attention away from the buildings' frontages, which the proposal has already addressed. Instead, I focus on what is typically concealed, the overlooked spaces and the value found in the undervalued.



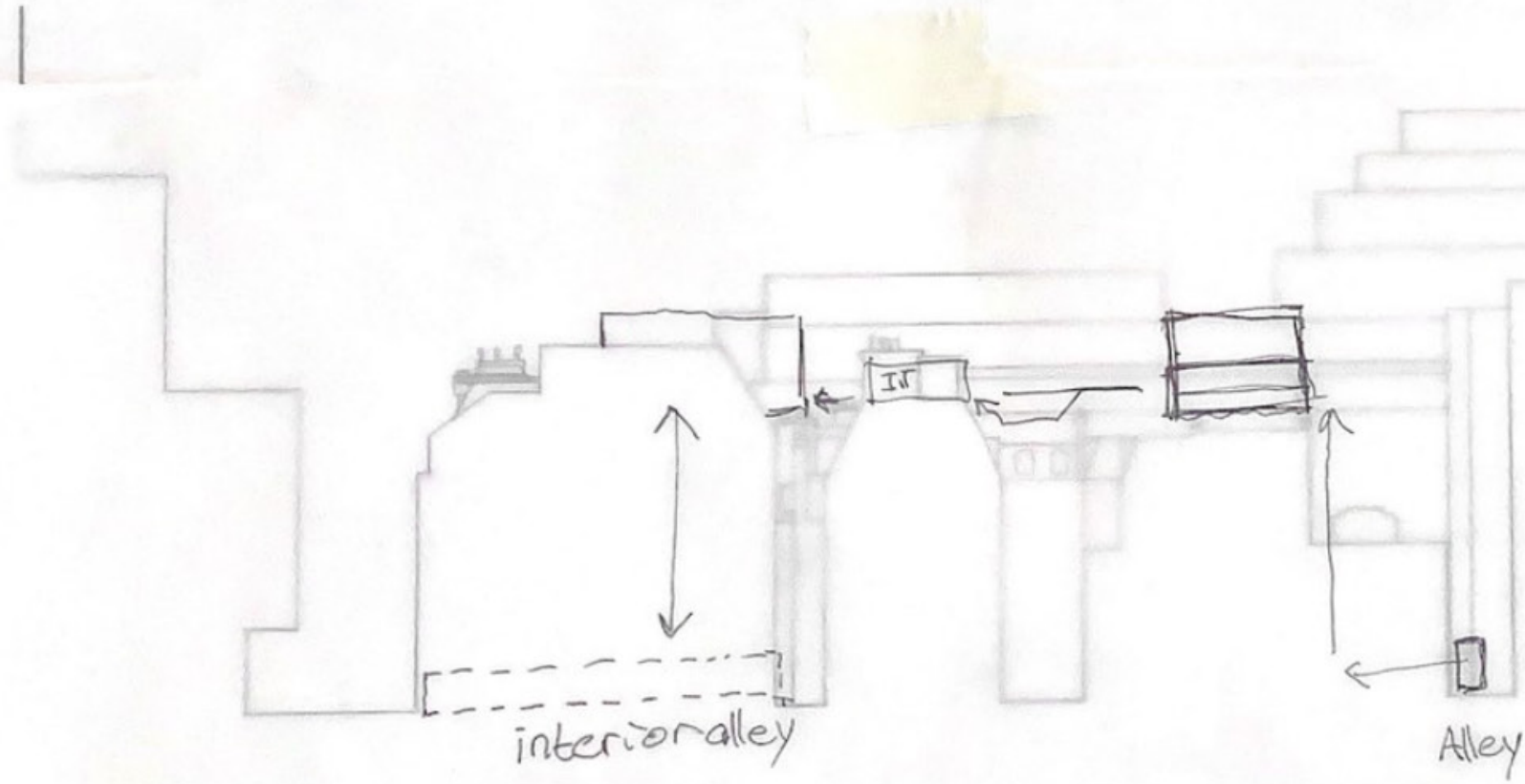


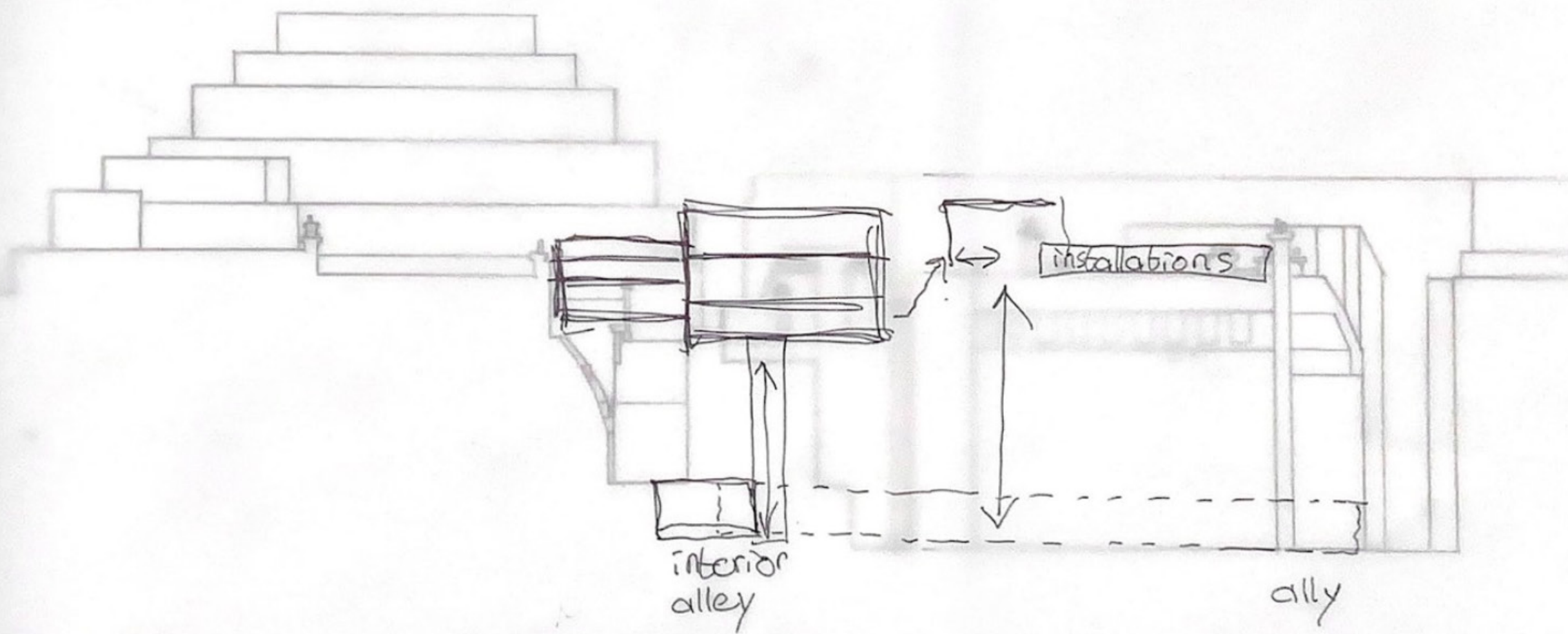
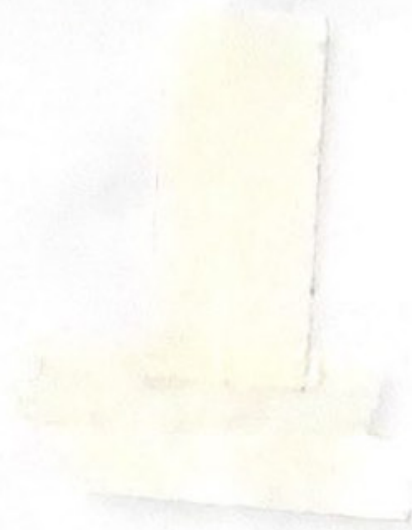


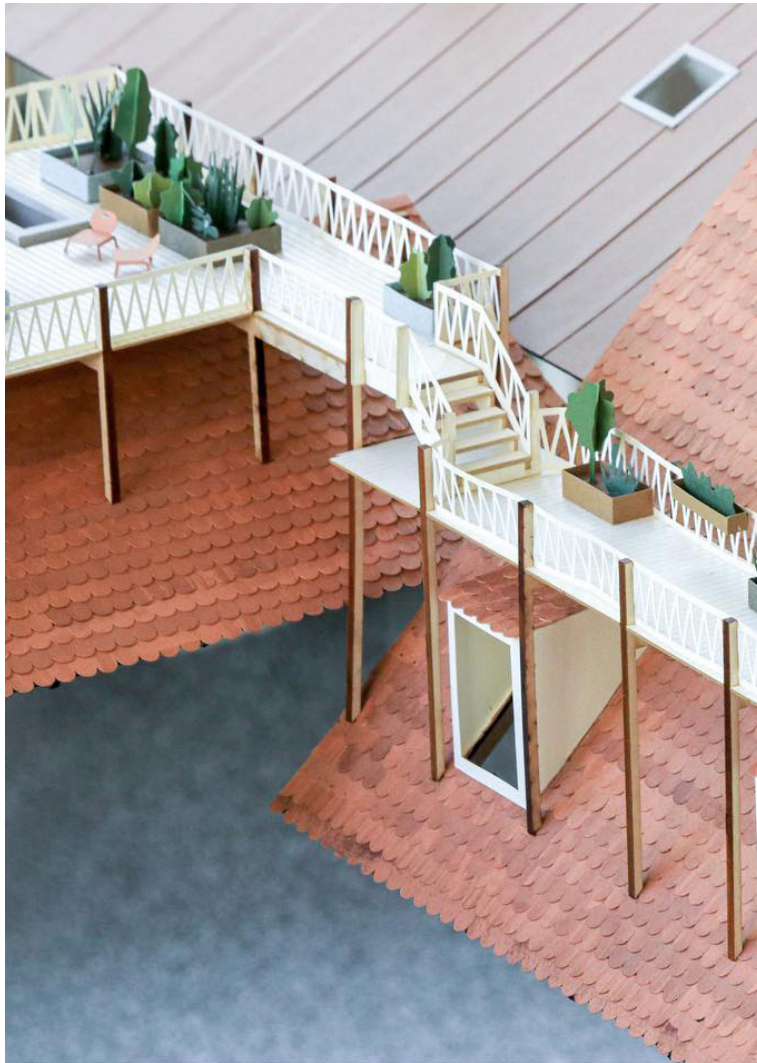
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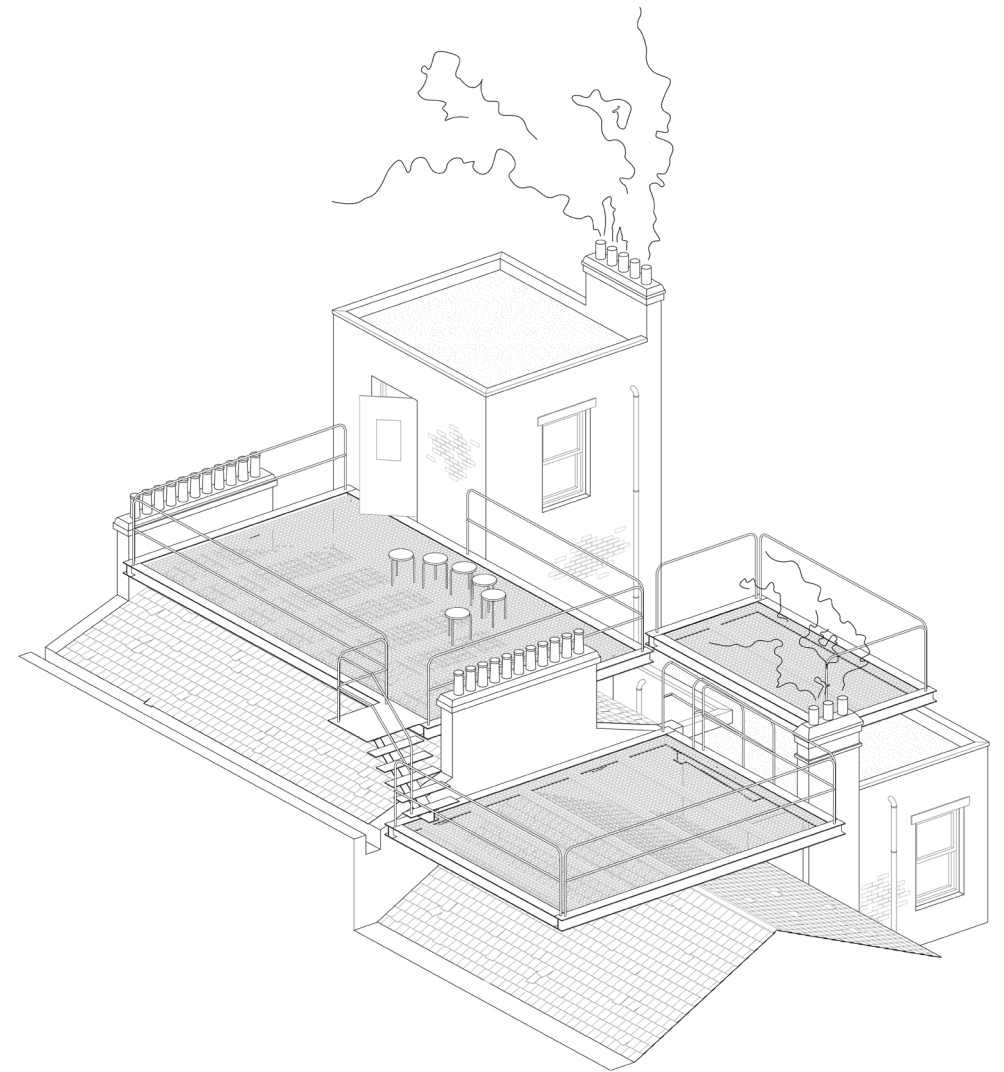






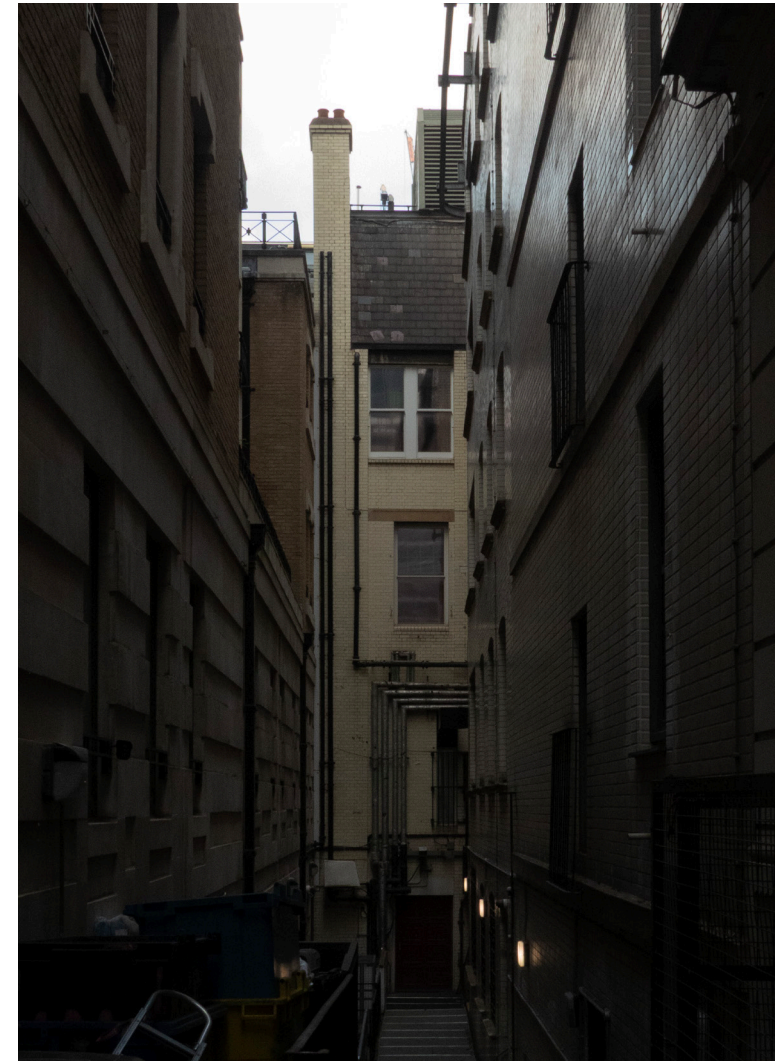


Roofscapes Paris pathway (source: <https://www.roofscapes.studio/home-english>)



The new alleyway

Michael Morrison OBE, an architect and member of the Carpenters' Company, kindly gave me a tour of the hall on London Wall and took the time to discuss my project with me. Our conversation had one particularly important takeaway; my initial proposal sought to break through the existing bank buildings to expose the cores as a public route to the rooftops, yet this was not the best solution. The bank hall on Great Winchester Street, for starters, holds considerable historical significance, something both Michael Morrison and Fiona Williams stressed during my second visit to the City. Both, however, also noted the presence of lost alleyways near my proposed structure, suggesting that these could be opened up again to create the passages and prevent any unnecessary demolition. Until now the presence of the lost alleyways had eluded me. That said, upon closer examination of the Ordnance Survey maps from 1875 to 1960, alongside my own drawings, it became clear that their traces remain very much visible, their entrances merely filled in and no longer accessible. Three distinct alleyways were identified, each offering the potential to be restored and used as an entrance to the rooftops.



Inaccessible passage (source: author)



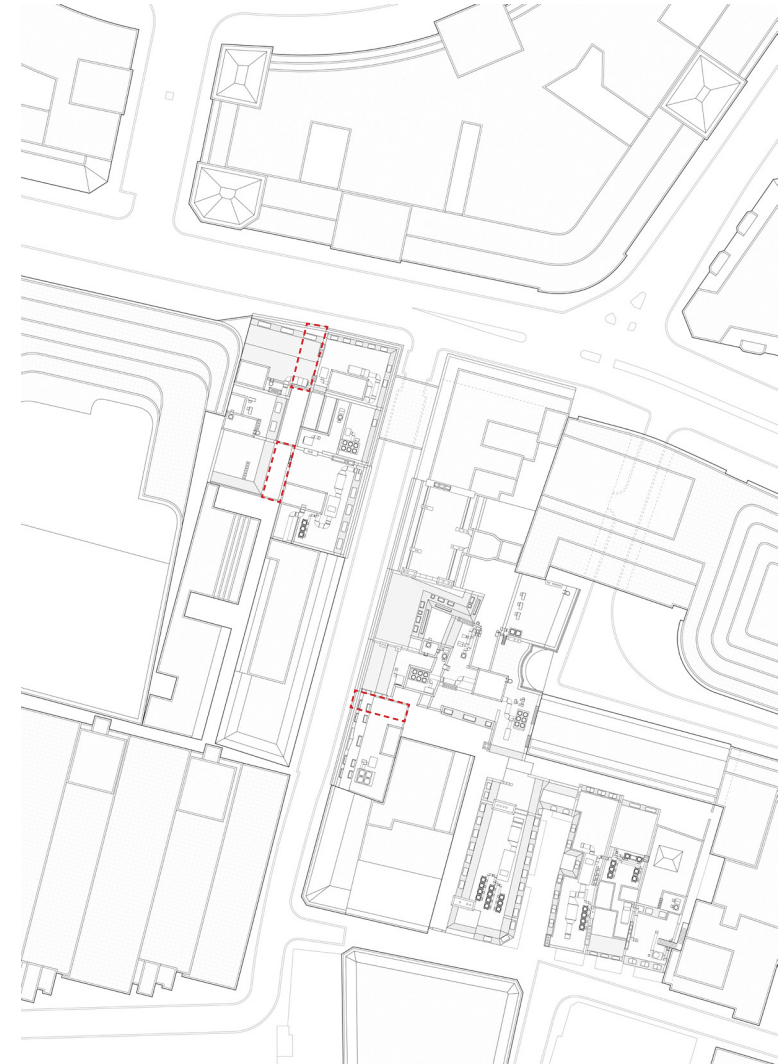
1875 Ordnance Survey map (source: <https://maps.nls.uk>)



1894-96 Ordnance Survey map (source: <https://maps.nls.uk>)



1894-96 Ordnance Survey map (source: <https://maps.nls.uk>)



2025 existing site drawing, lost alleys in red (source: author)

London Wall

Throgmorton Avenue

Great Winchester Street

1

2

3





Change Alley entrance (source: author)



Change Alley interior (source: author)

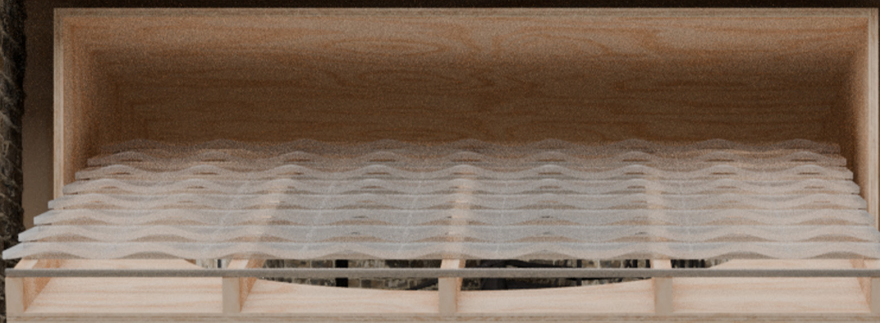
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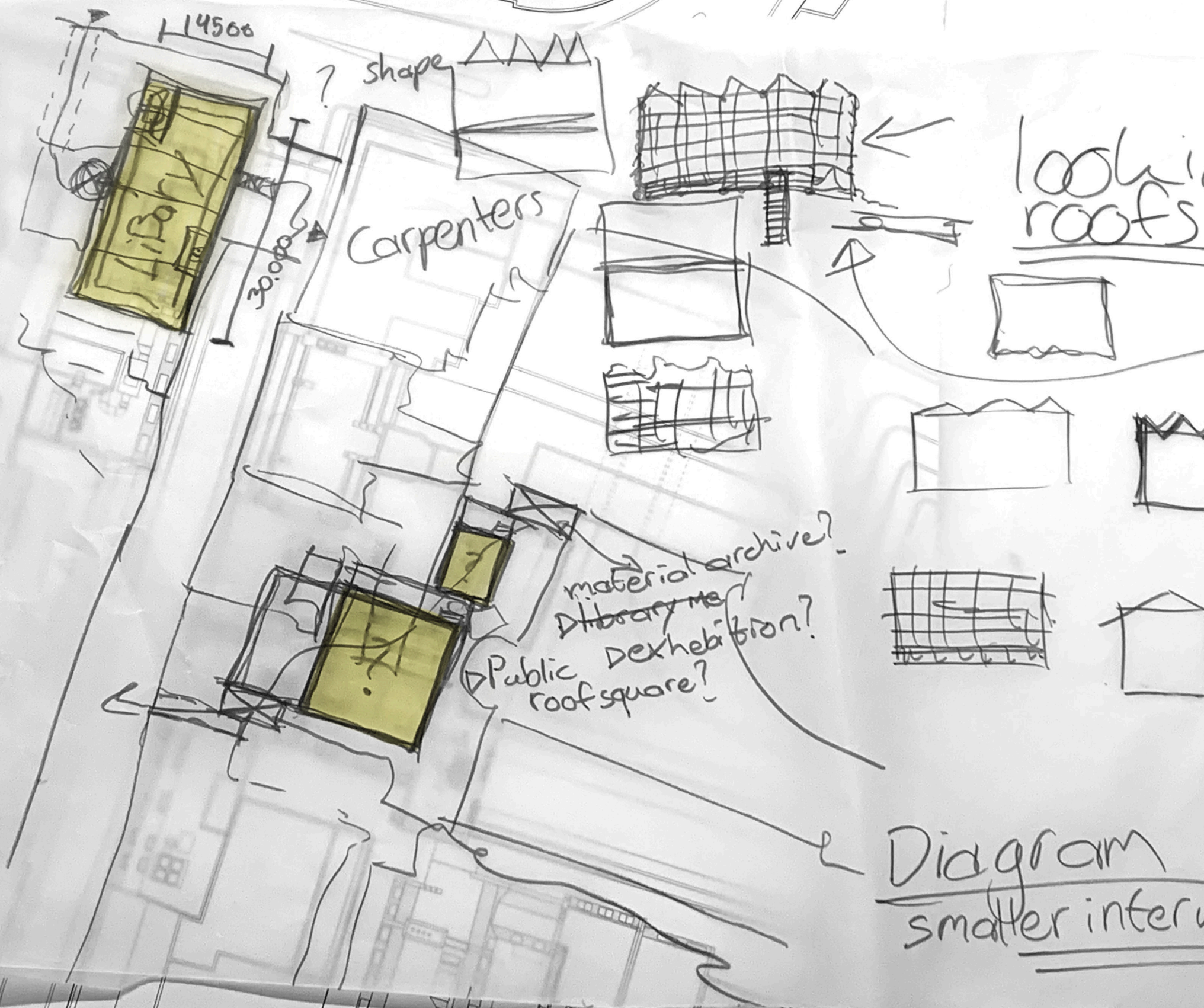
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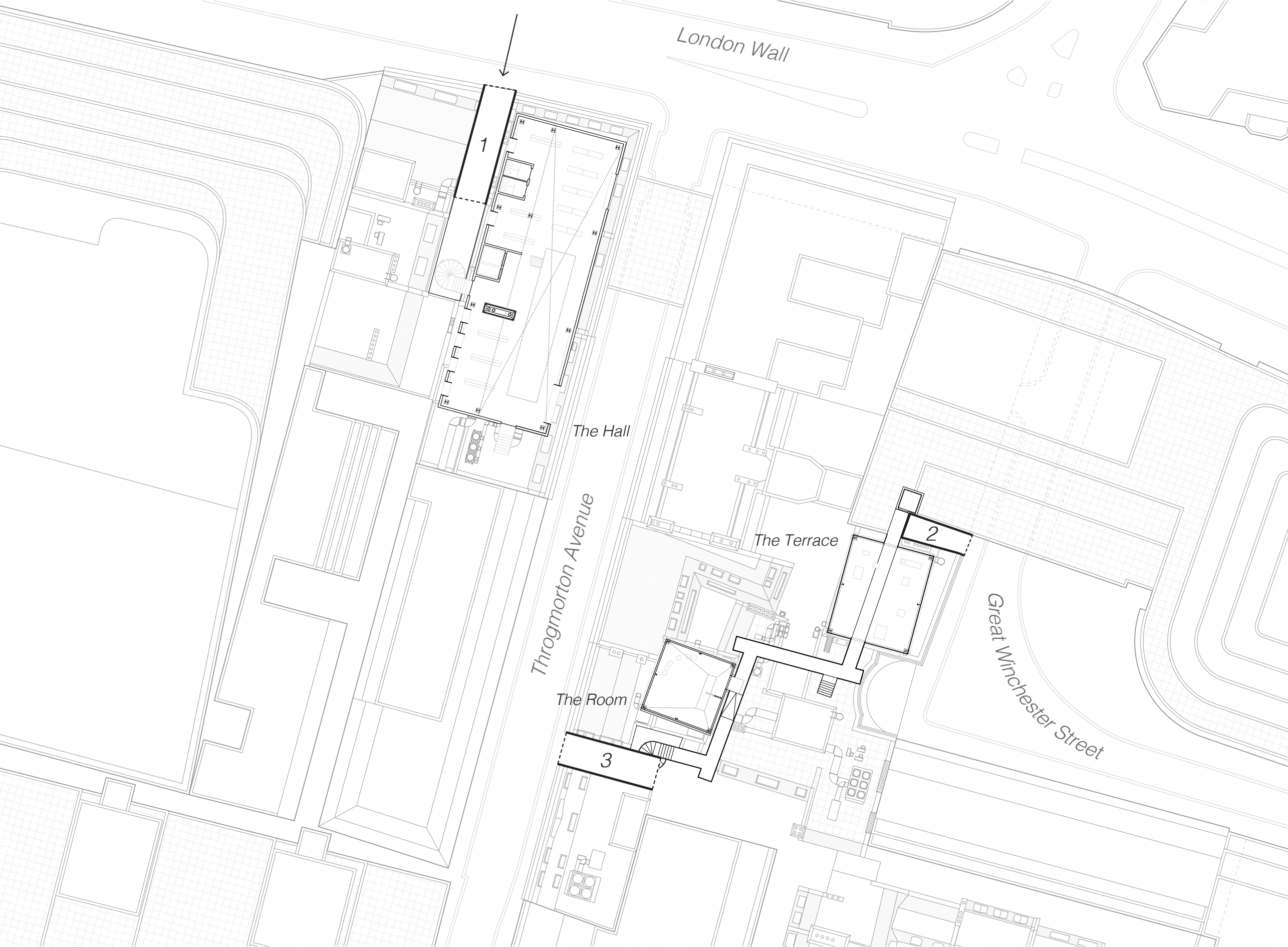
? shape

Carpenters

looking roofs

material archive?
Library me
Public Dexhibition?
roof square?

Diagram smaller interv



London Wall

1

The Hall

Throgmorton Avenue

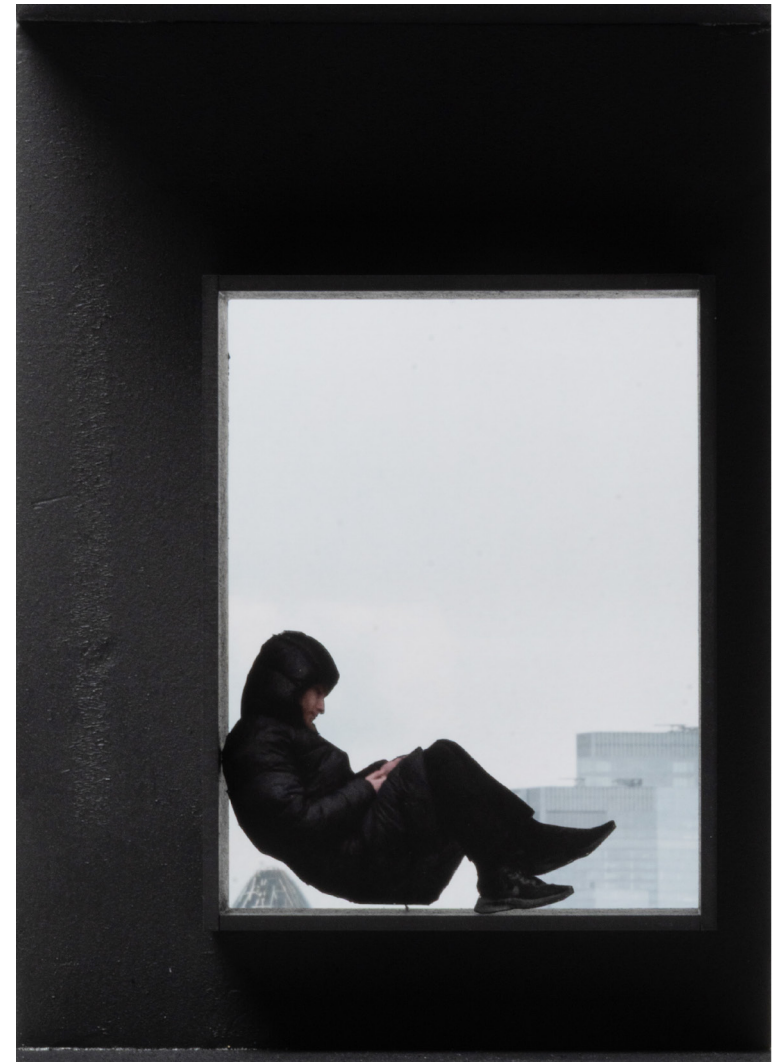
The Room

3

The Terrace

2

Great Winchester Street



The god-like view from the interior (source: author)



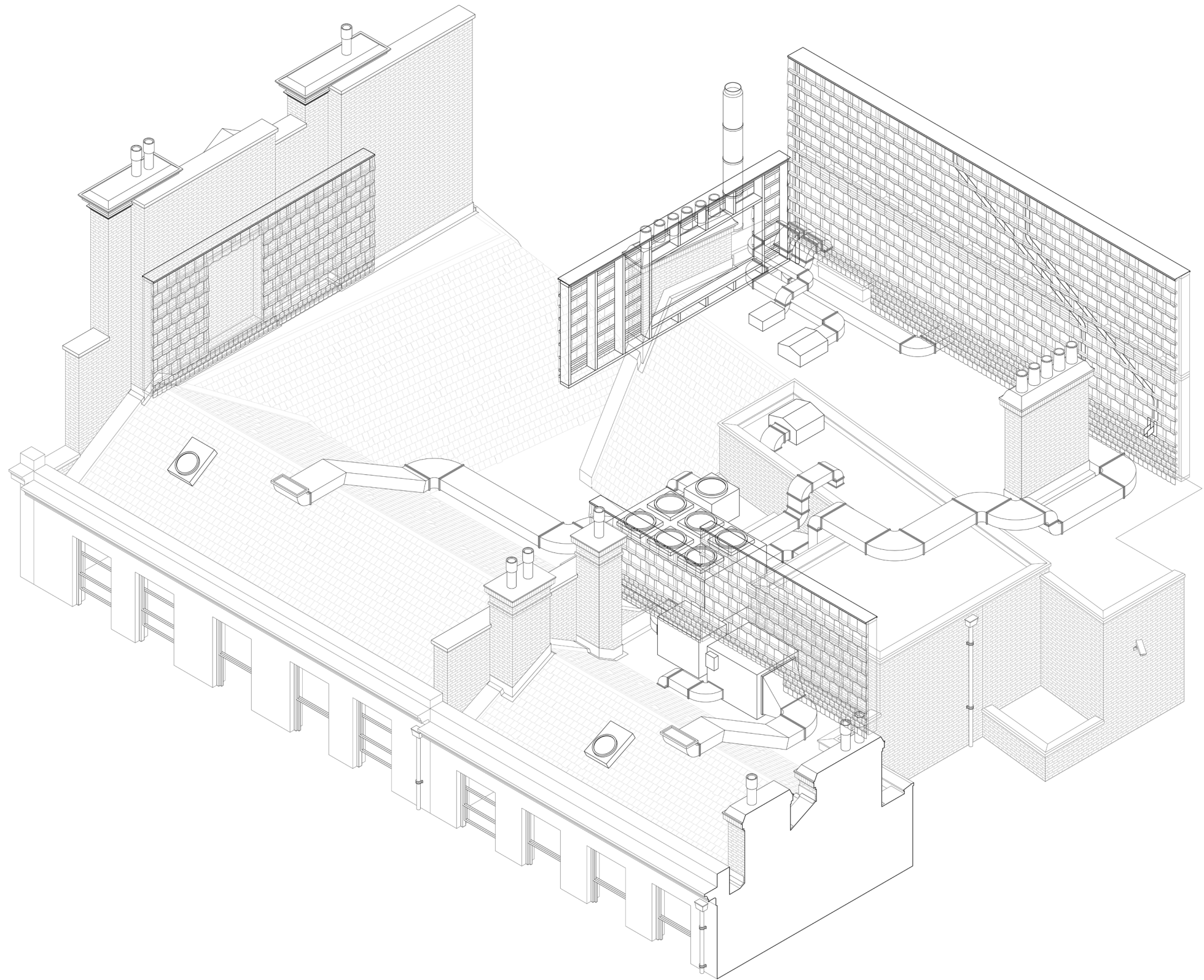
The Bakehouse (source: Ivo Carew Architects)

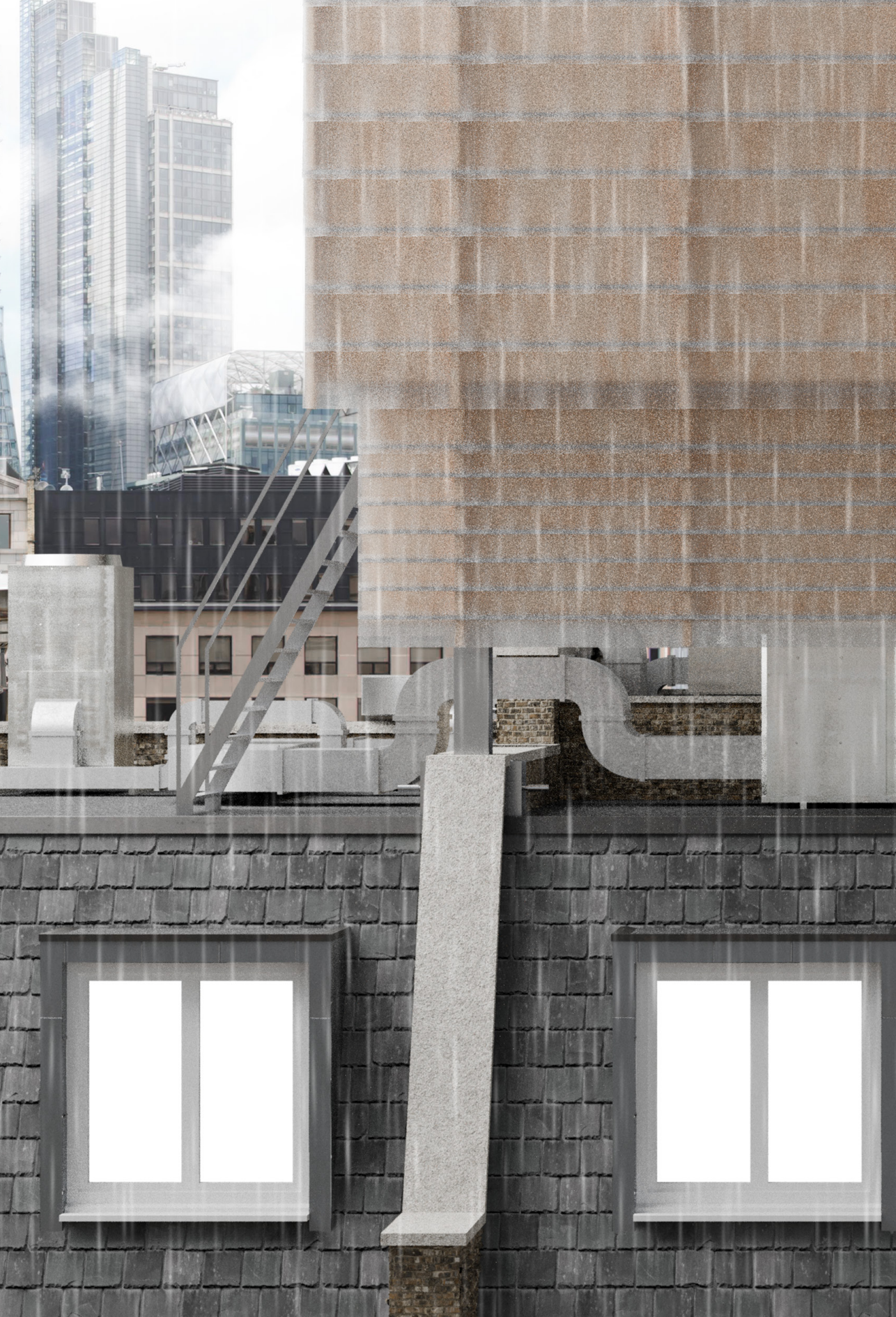


Water tower by Rachel Whiteread (source: Michelle Aldredge, no date)

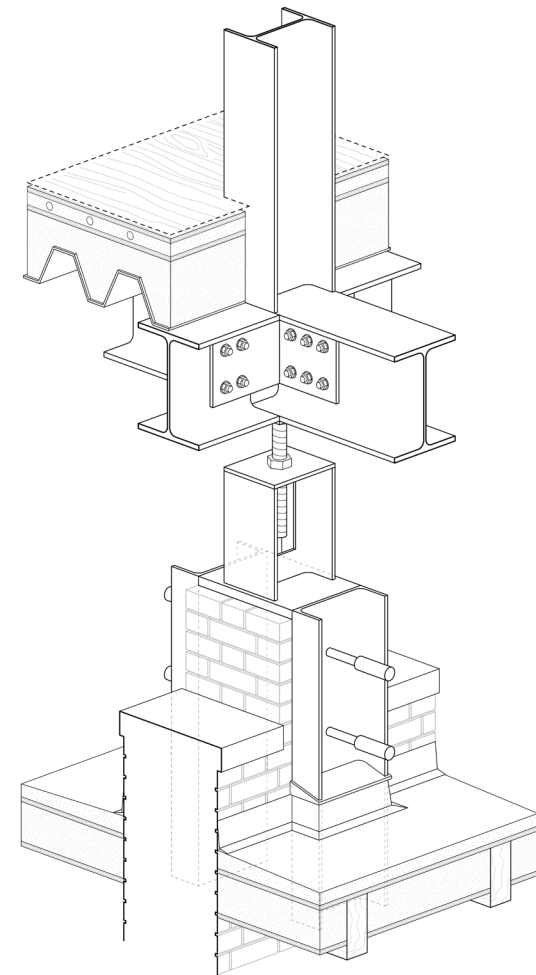


Drawing for Water Tower IV by Rachel Whiteread (source: Moma, 1997)





2024-2025



Intimacy in a public interior

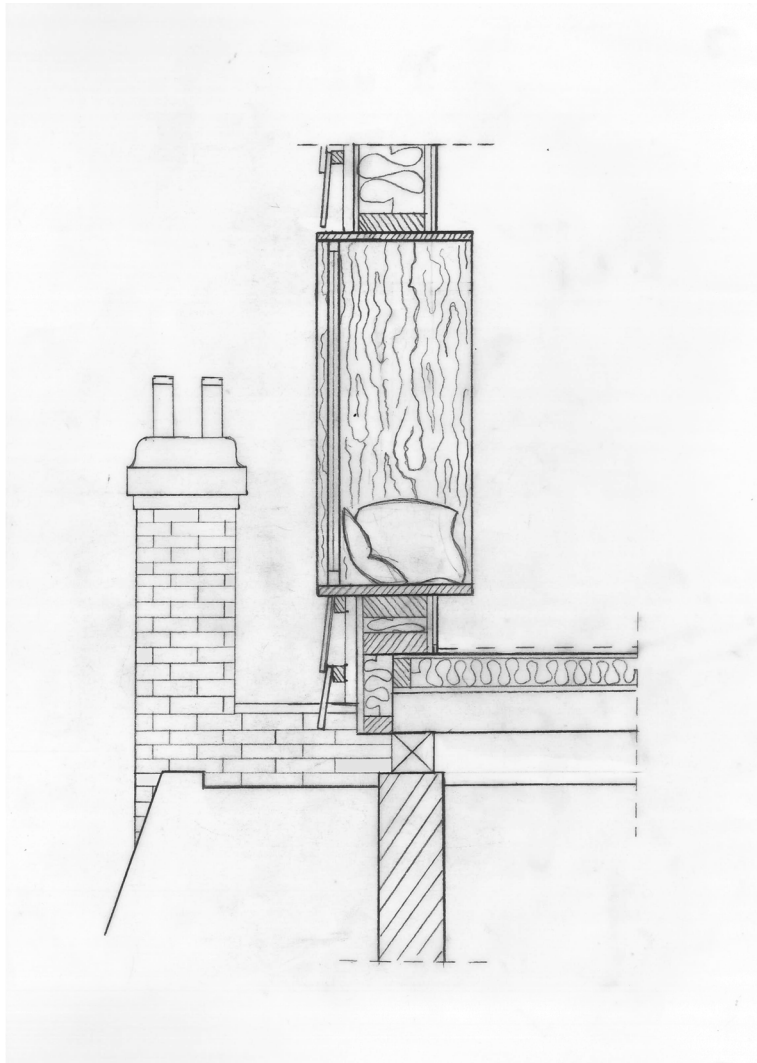
By this stage in my graduation year, I had visited the City of London numerous times, becoming well acquainted with its rhythm and the challenges regarding public access. One of my personal experiences involves the challenge of finding a place away from home; somewhere to work for the day, meet friends or simply let my thoughts drift away. These are the kinds of spaces one typically encounters in a private setting, think of the bench inside a waiting room, an empty and quiet museum hall or a table at a library. What matters most about these spaces, defined as the public interior by Mark Pimlott, is the creation of an impression that one temporarily owns the space around them, even if it is privately owned.⁵ The person sitting on the windowsill is a good example of this; for a moment, he claimed ownership of that particular space.

The ability for individuals to appropriate space at various scales within the City of London is becoming increasingly vital, as the City has grown internalised overtime. Developments such as Broadgate, along with other early public-private initiatives, frequently employed public spaces and placemaking

strategies to foster public interaction on the surface, while subtly reinforcing security measures beneath. In doing so, they meticulously planned and controlled spaces originally intended for open-ended programmatic use.⁶ This control extends from small architectural interventions to urban ones. Yet it's not the scale that matters; a public interior can range from a windowsill to a room to a street, but rather its visibility, as Mark Pimlott made clear in conversation. Moreover, the space can differentiate in intimacy. For example, compare a quiet study corner in a library with the bustling hall of Liverpool Street Station. Both are public interiors, yet they differ significantly in character and atmosphere.

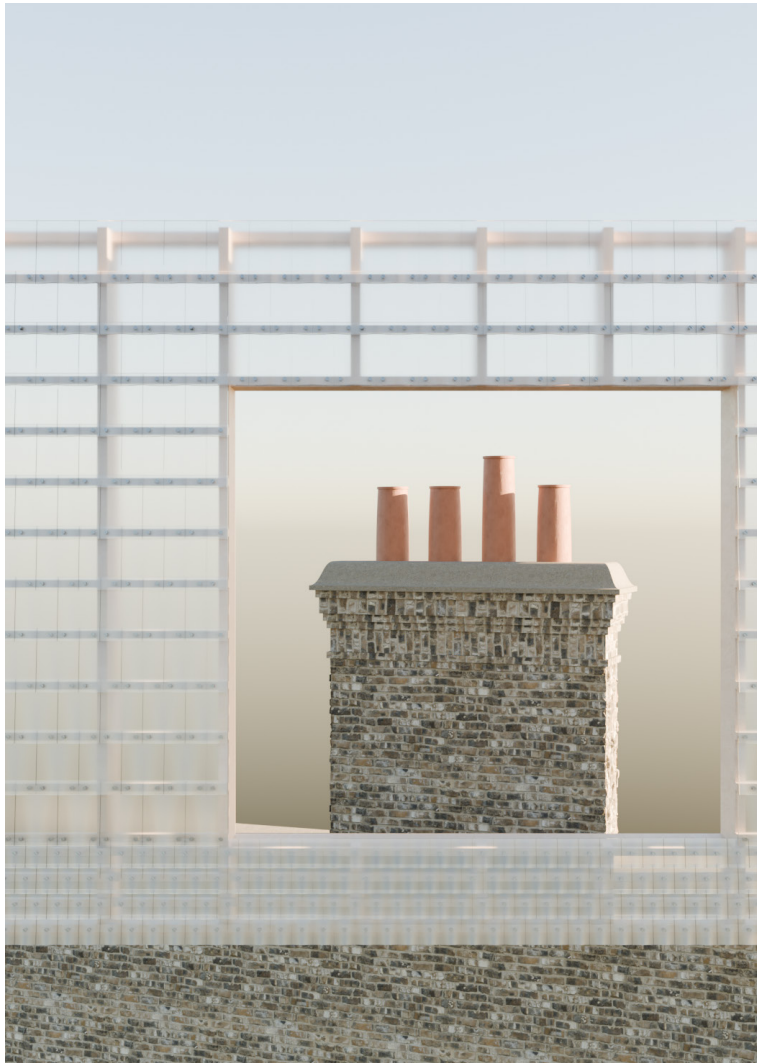
5. Pimlott, Mark. *The Public Interior as Idea and Project*. Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2016. 10.

6. Thomas, Amy. *The City in the City: Architecture and Change in London's Financial District*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2023. 135-136.



The window sill as an accessible space (source: author)

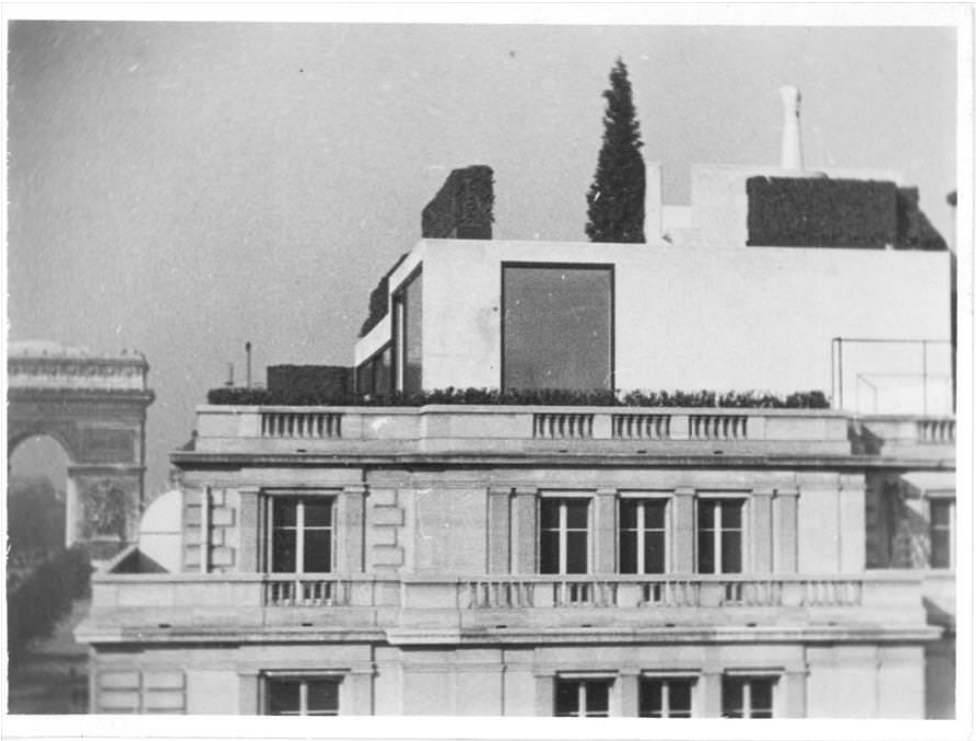




Framing of the rooftop landscape (source: author)



A view from the garden of Villa Le Lac by Le Corbusier (source: Storp Weber, 2013)



Appartement de M. Charles de Beistegui penthouse (source: Lucien Hervé, no date)



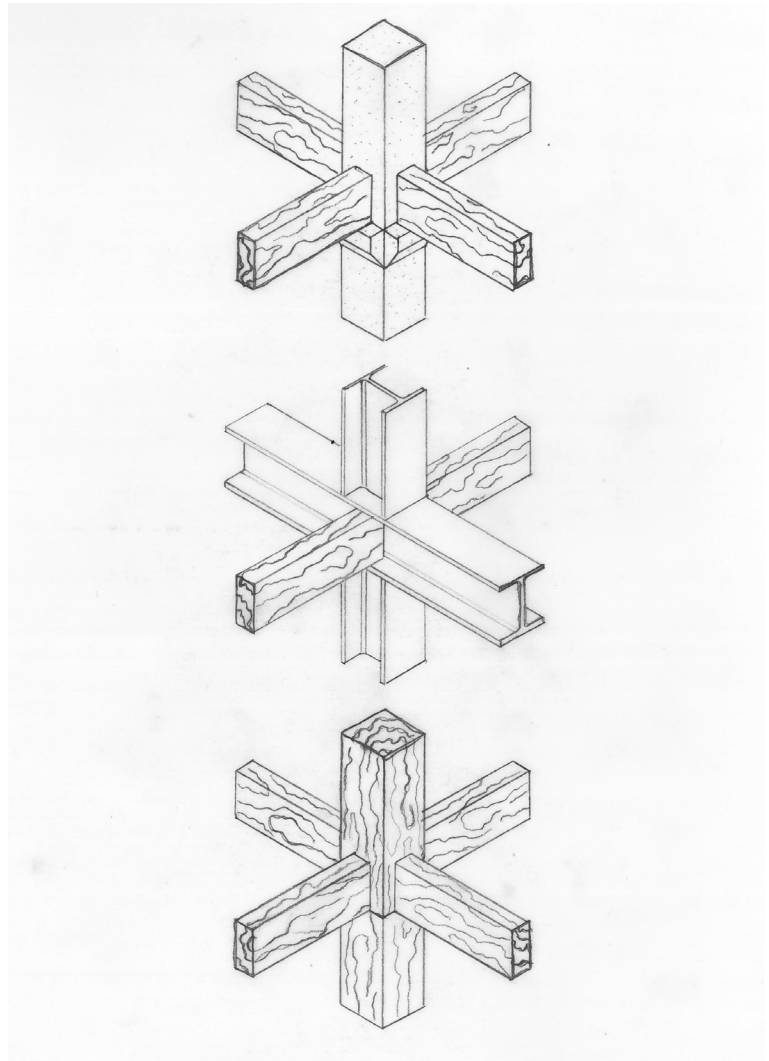
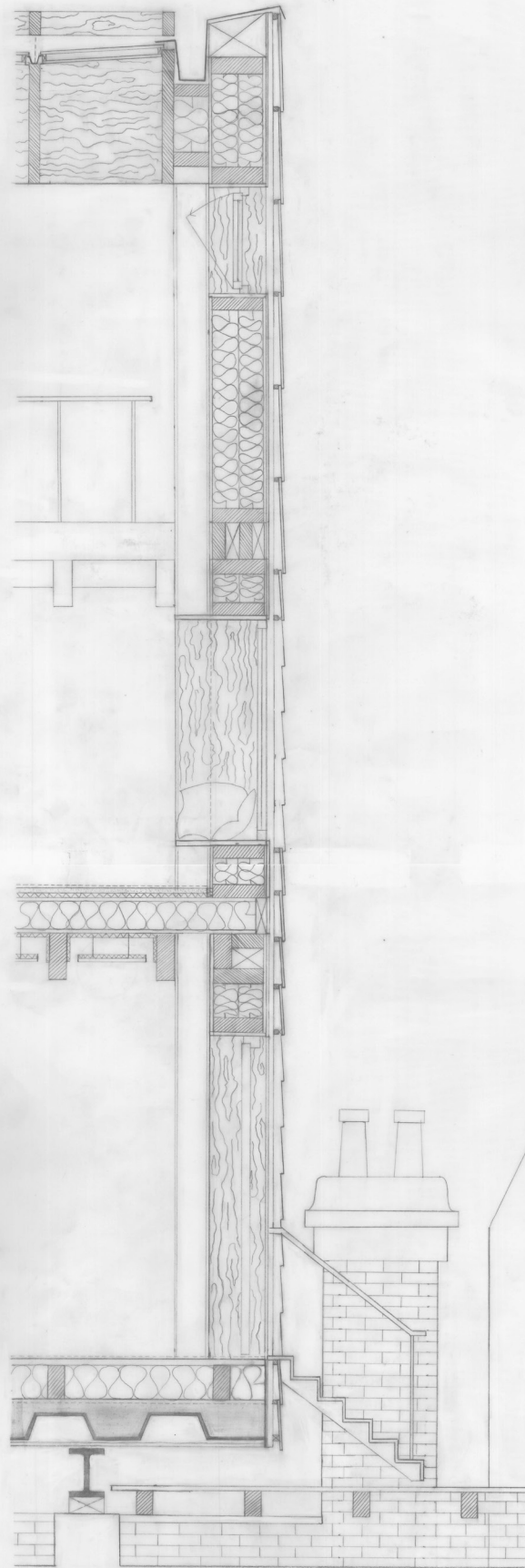
Appartement de M. Charles de Beistegui surrealist roof garden (source: Lucien Hervé, no date)



Appartement de M. Charles de Beistegui plateau (source: Lucien Hervé, no date)



Appartement de M. Charles de Beistegui roof garden (source: Lucien Hervé, no date)



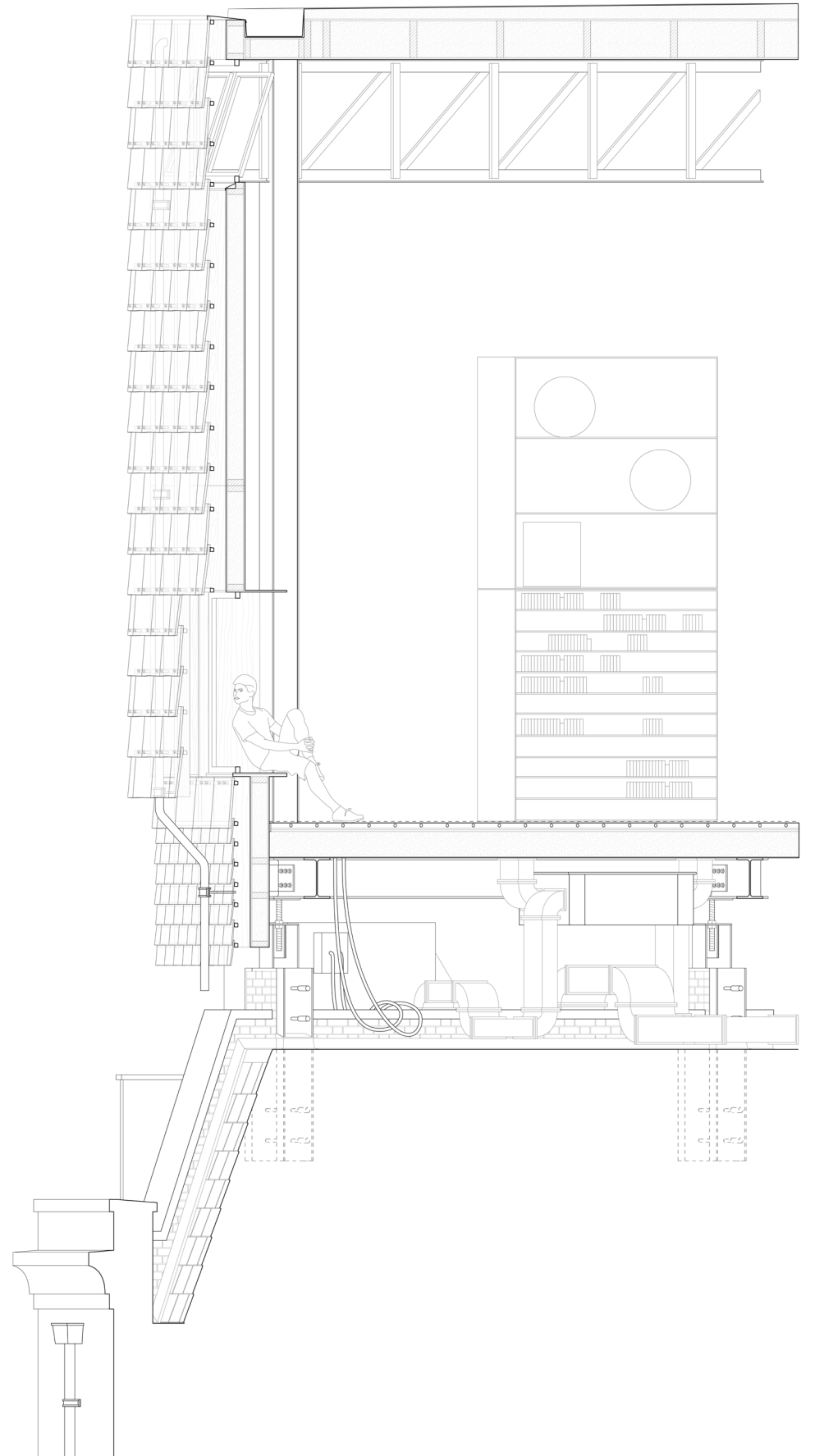
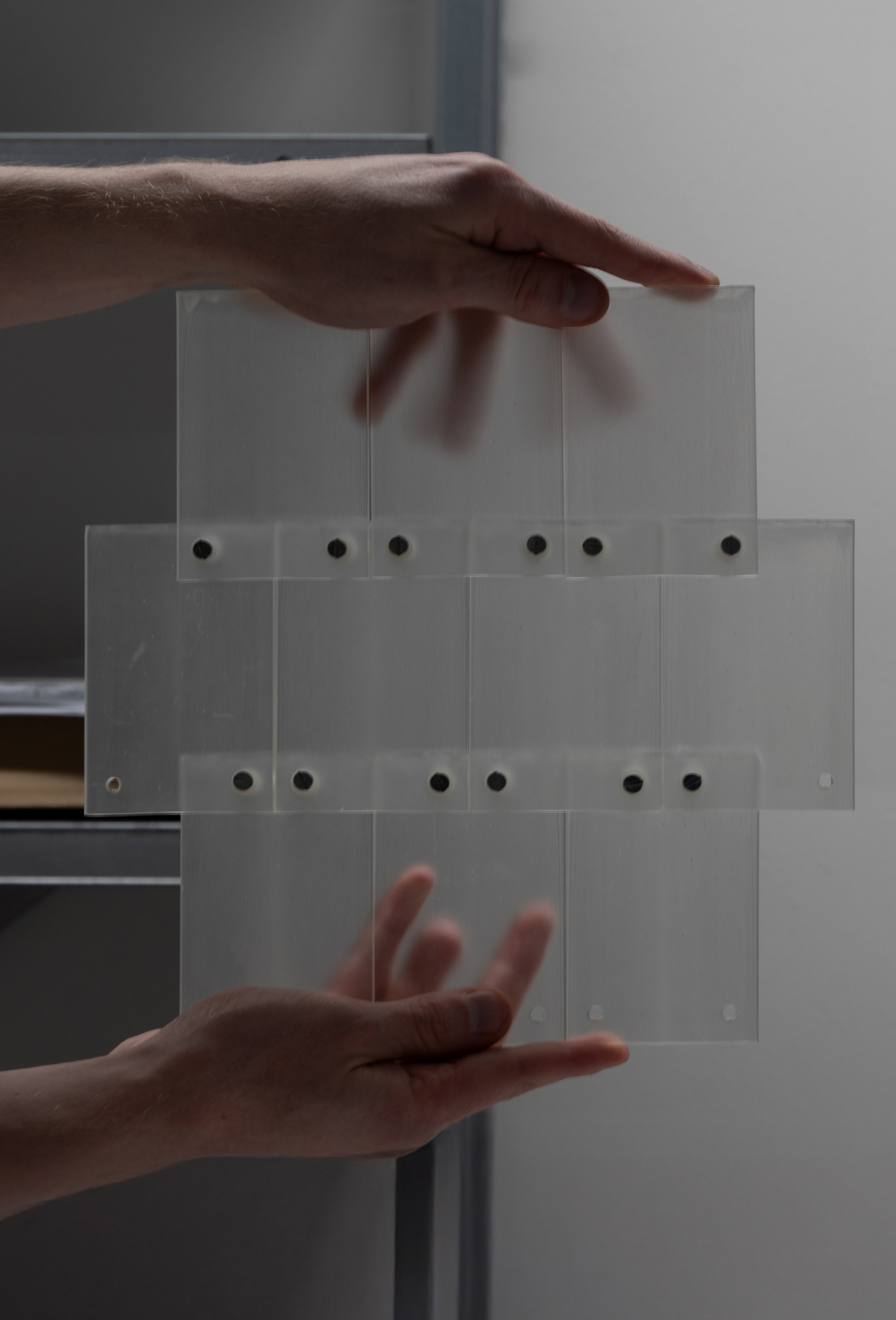
Construction variants (source: author)

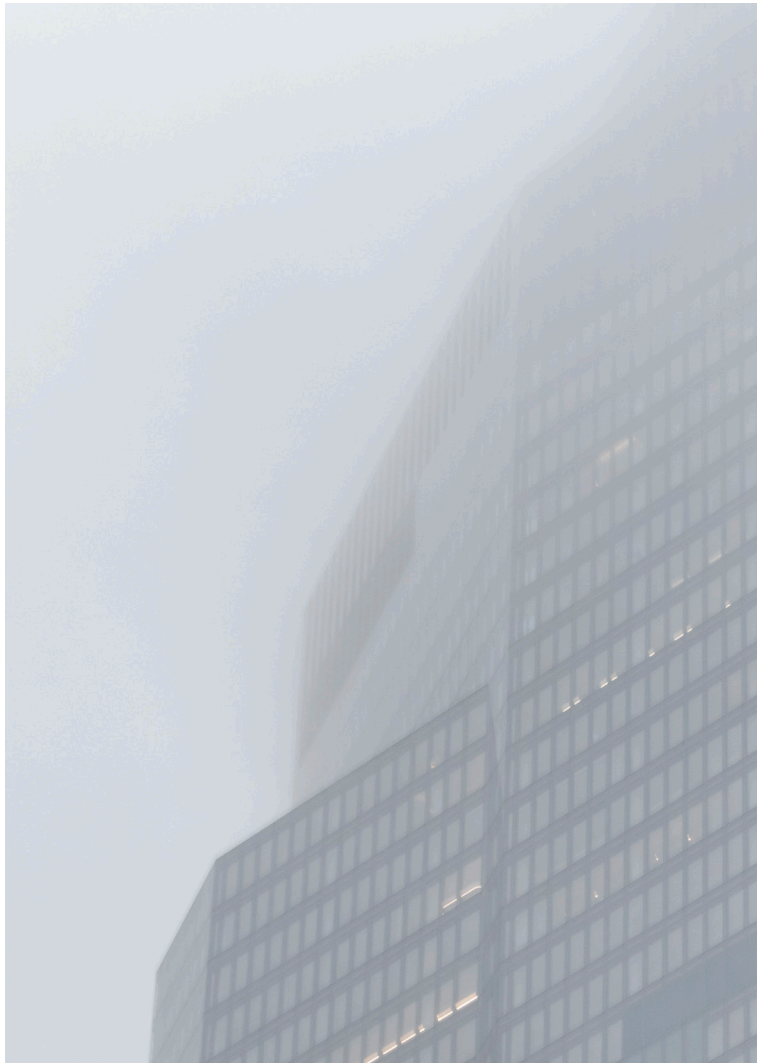


Fourth plinth made by Rachel Whiteread (source: Gazelliart House, 1999)



Fourth plinth construction (source: Mike Smith Studio, 2001)

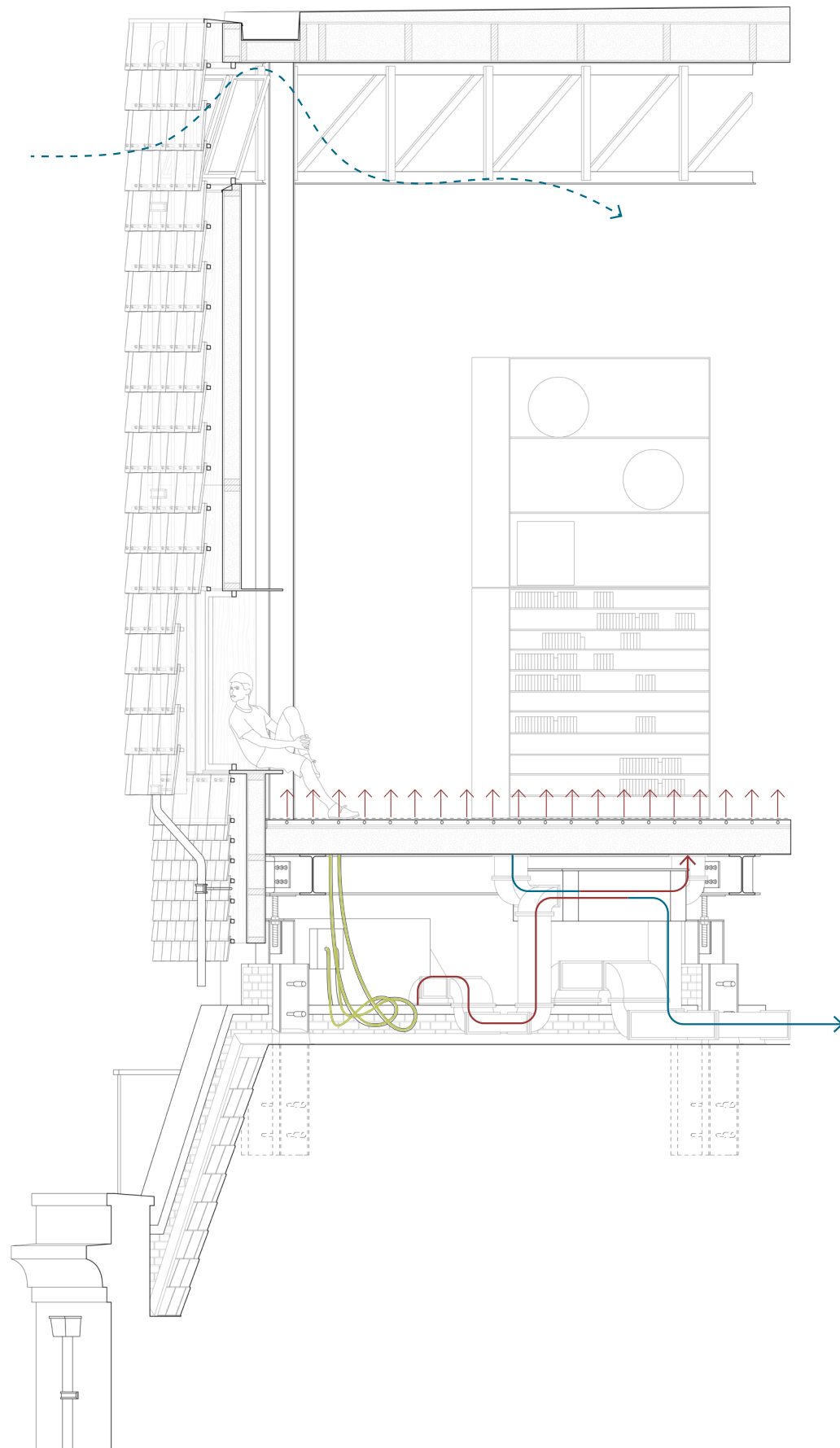
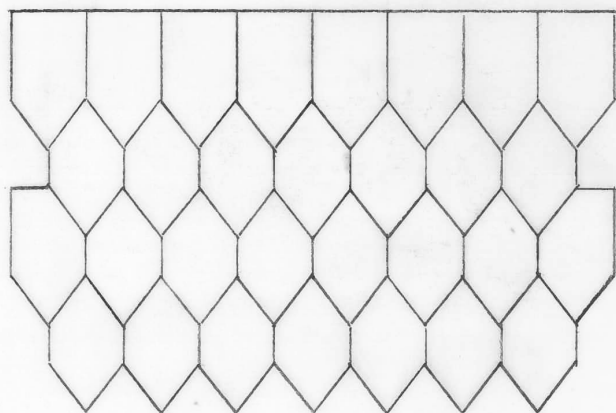
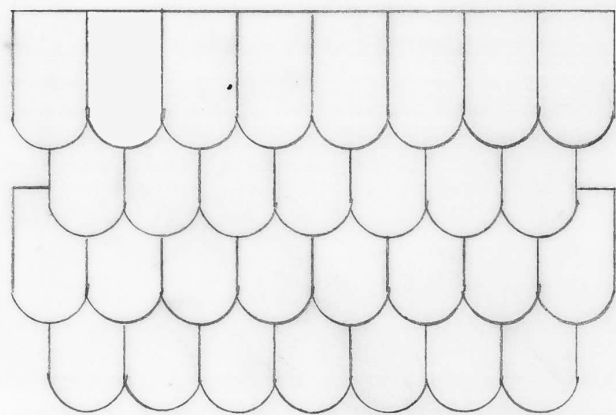
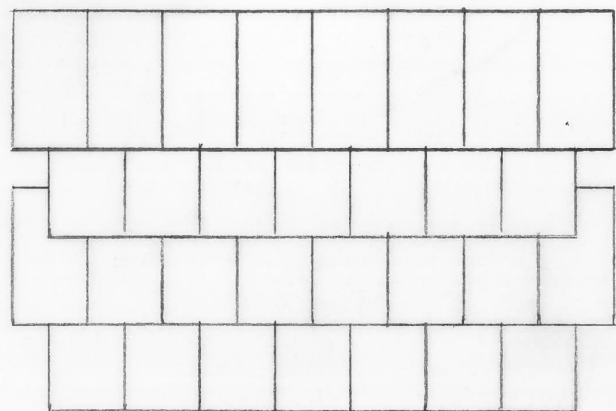


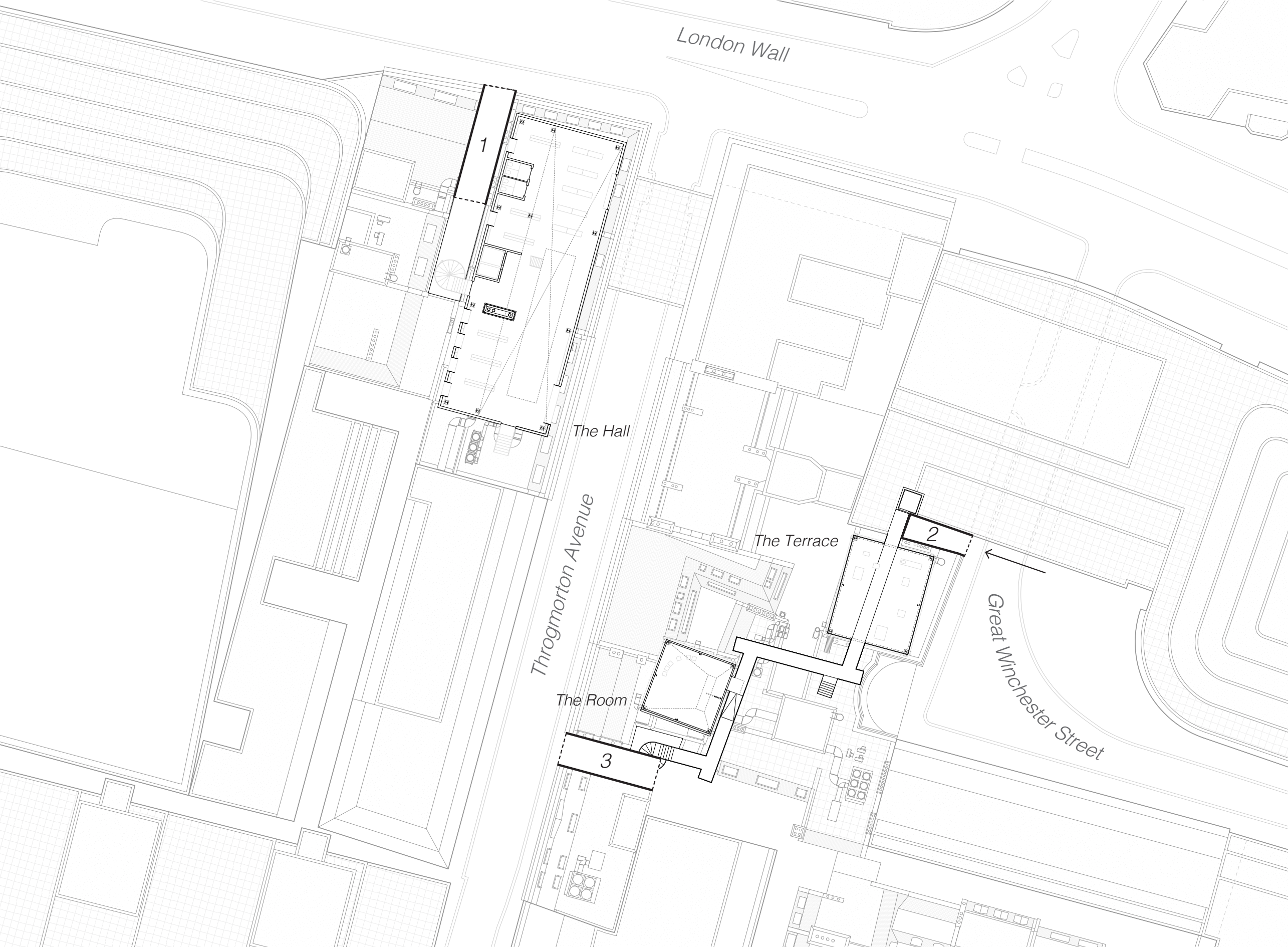


Structures in the City of London (source: author)



Demolition in the City of London (source: author)





London Wall

1

The Hall

Throgmorton Avenue

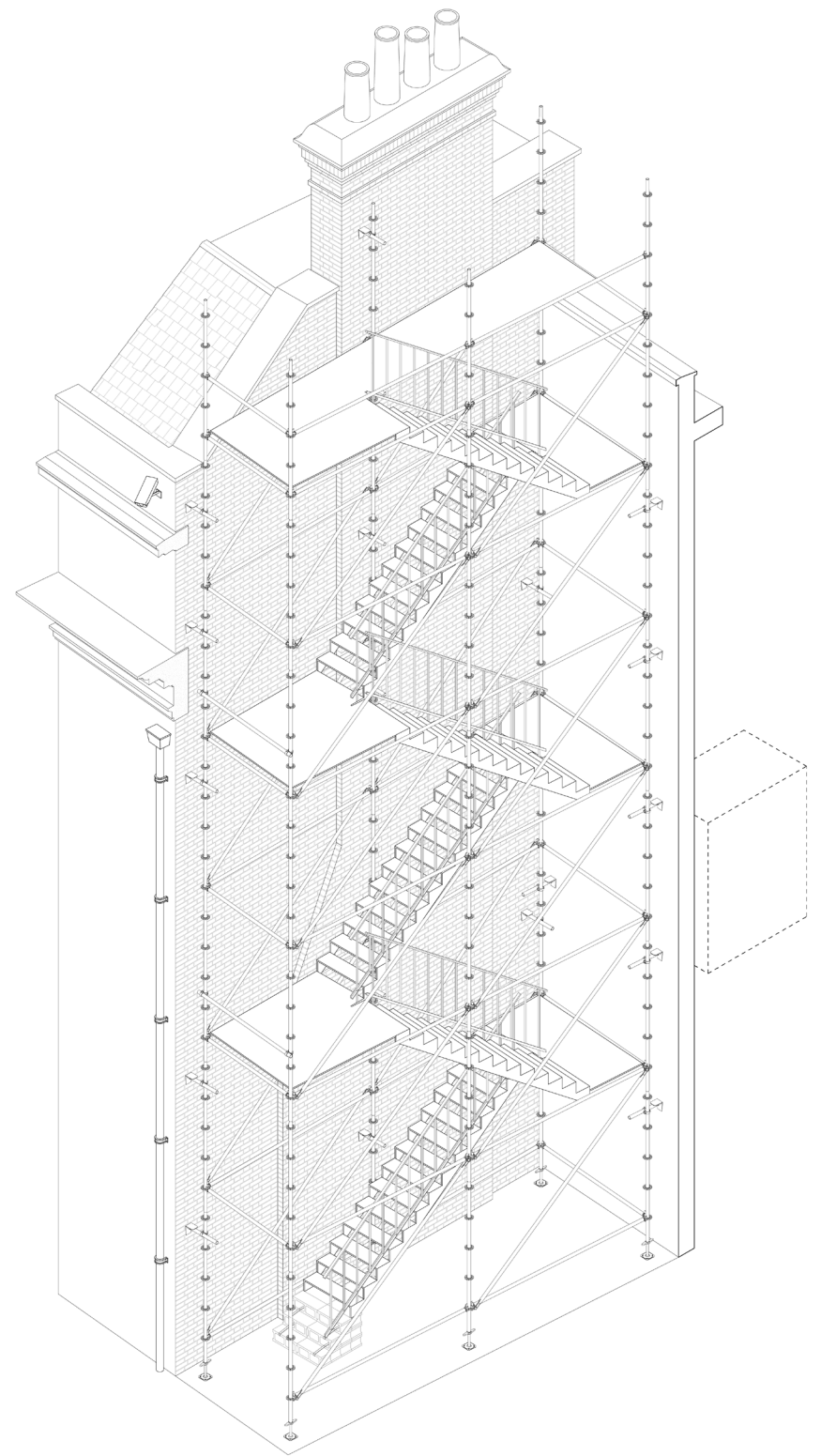
The Room

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The Terrace

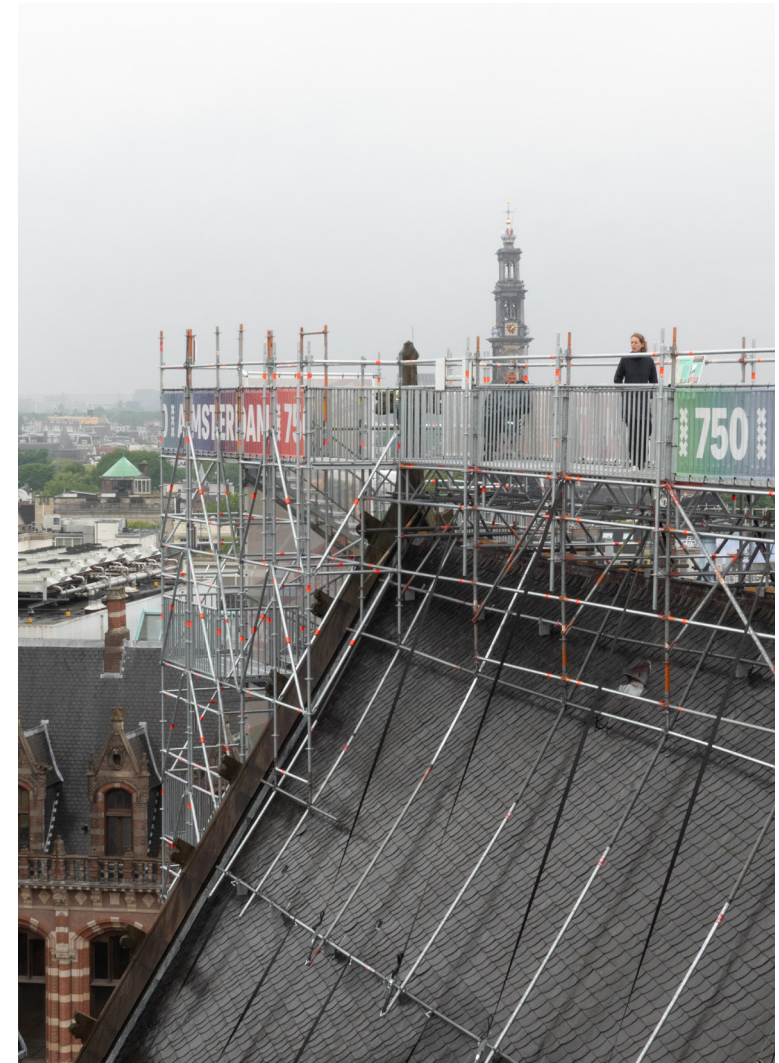
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Great Winchester Street

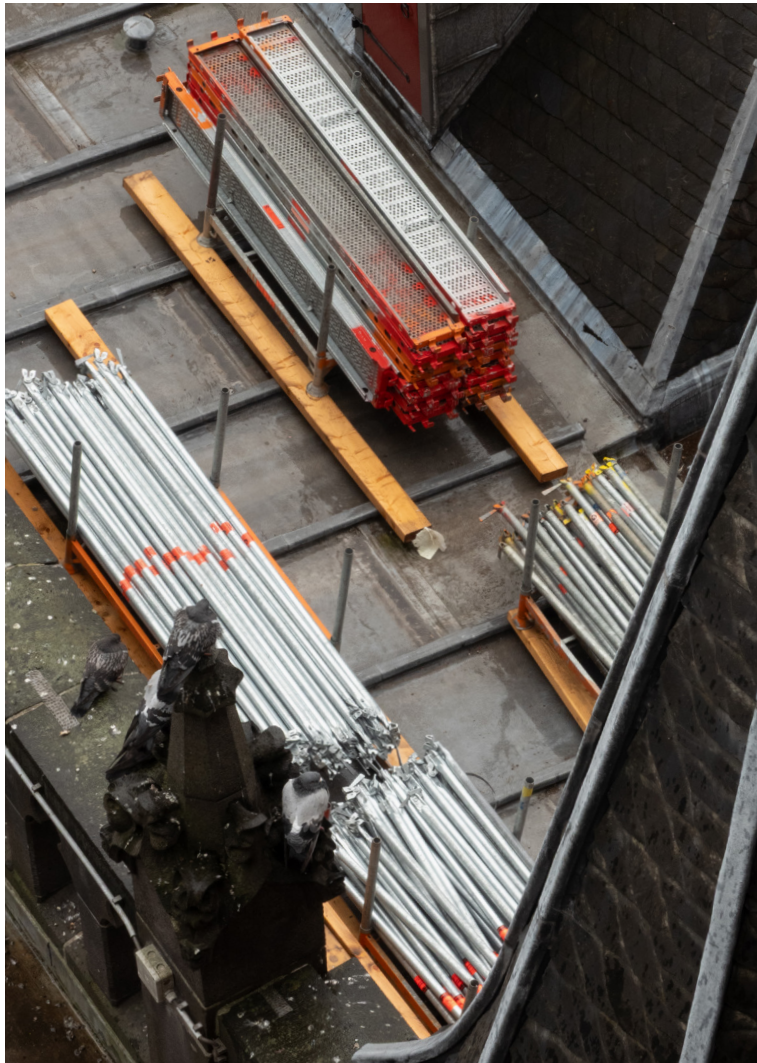




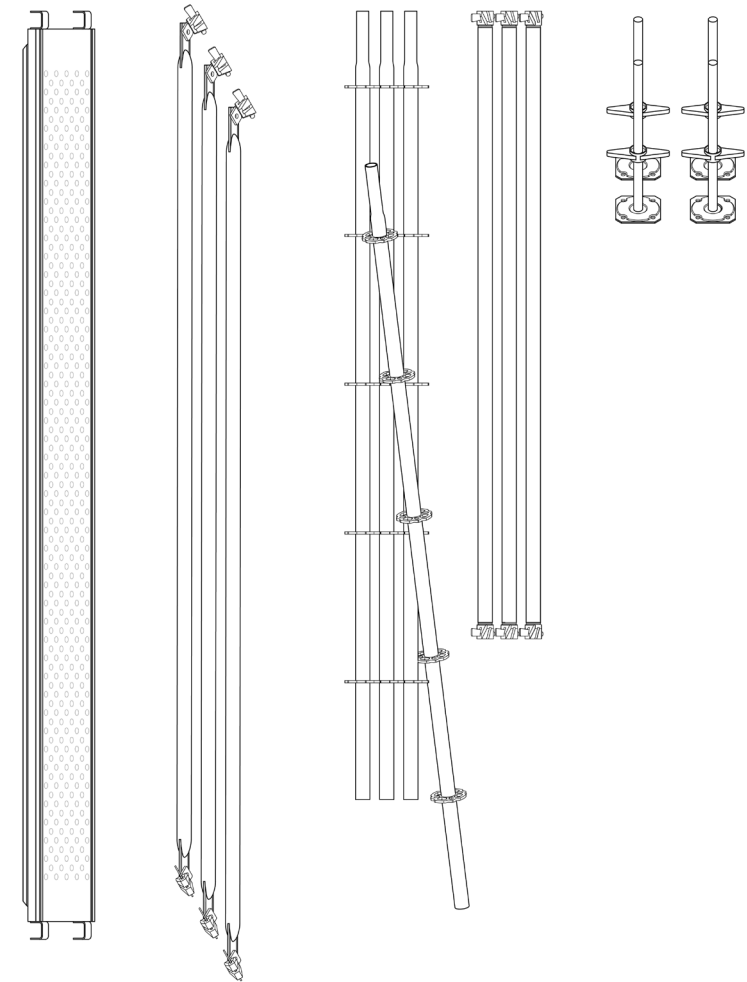
De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam spiral (source: author)



De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam dakconstructie (source: author)

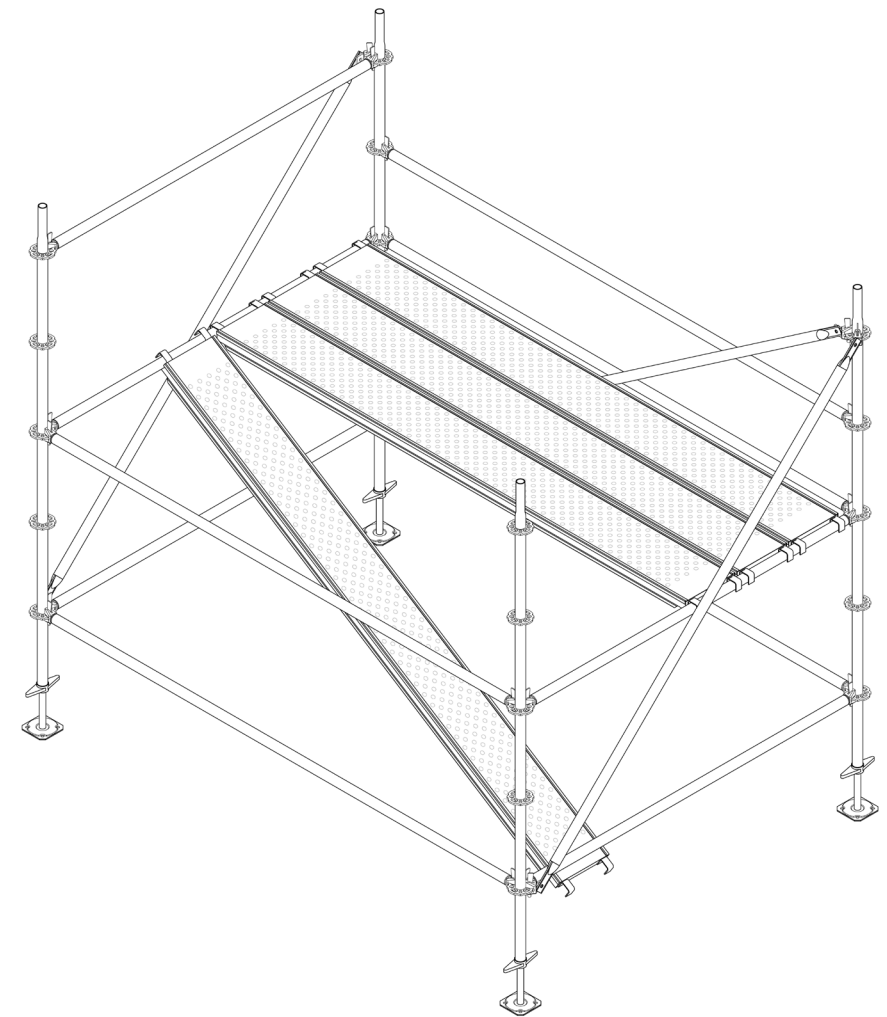


De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam MJ-Gerust combi system elements (source: author)



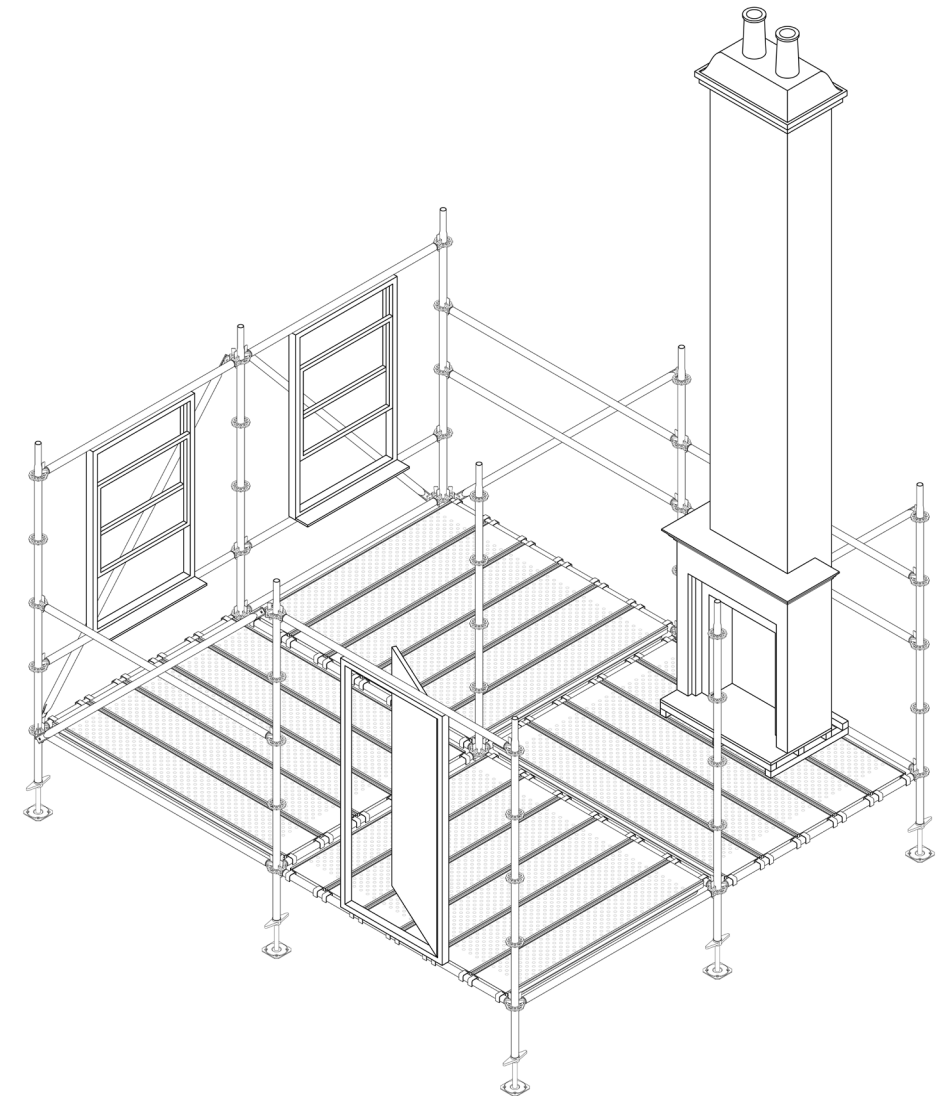


De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam staircase (source: author)





De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam staircase (source: author)





Rooftop landscape of the City (source: fragment of the movie Mary Poppins, 1964)

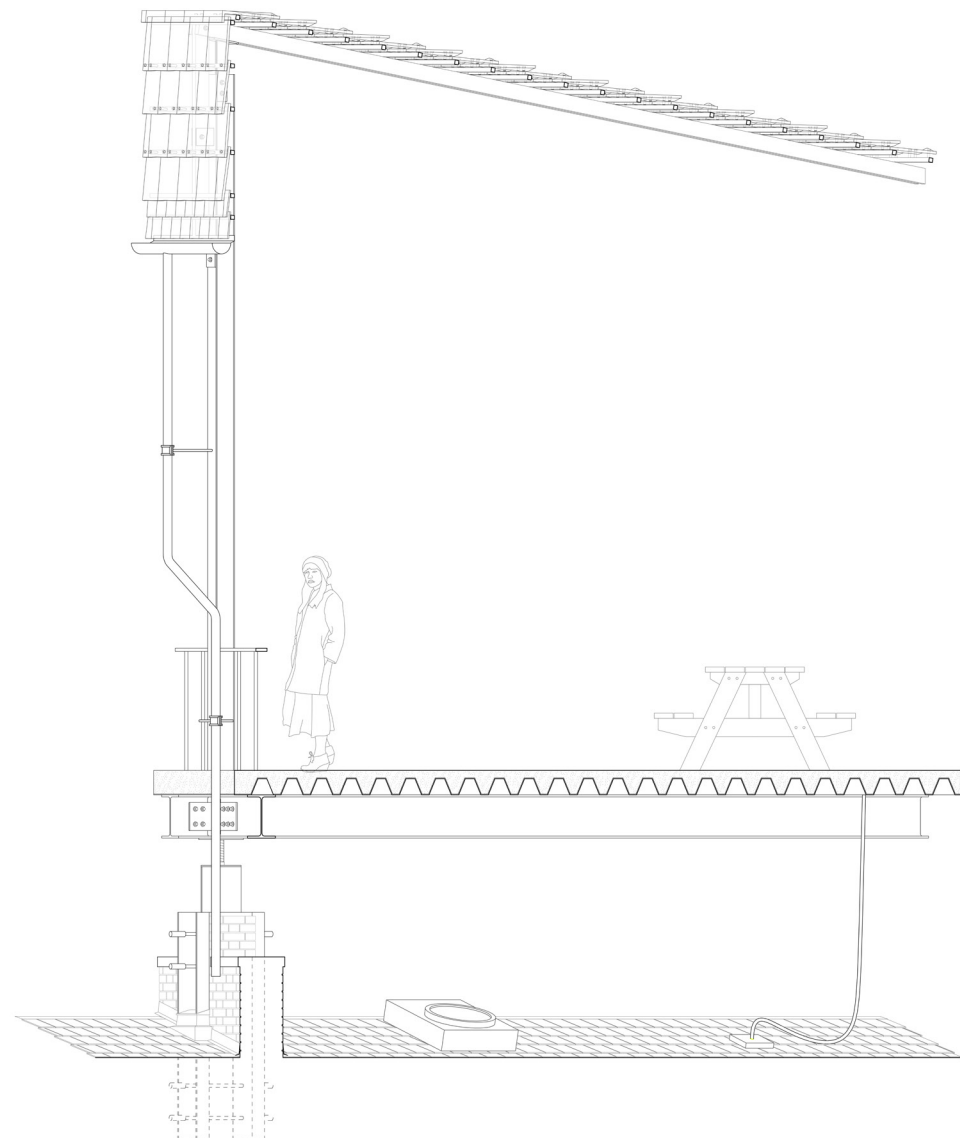
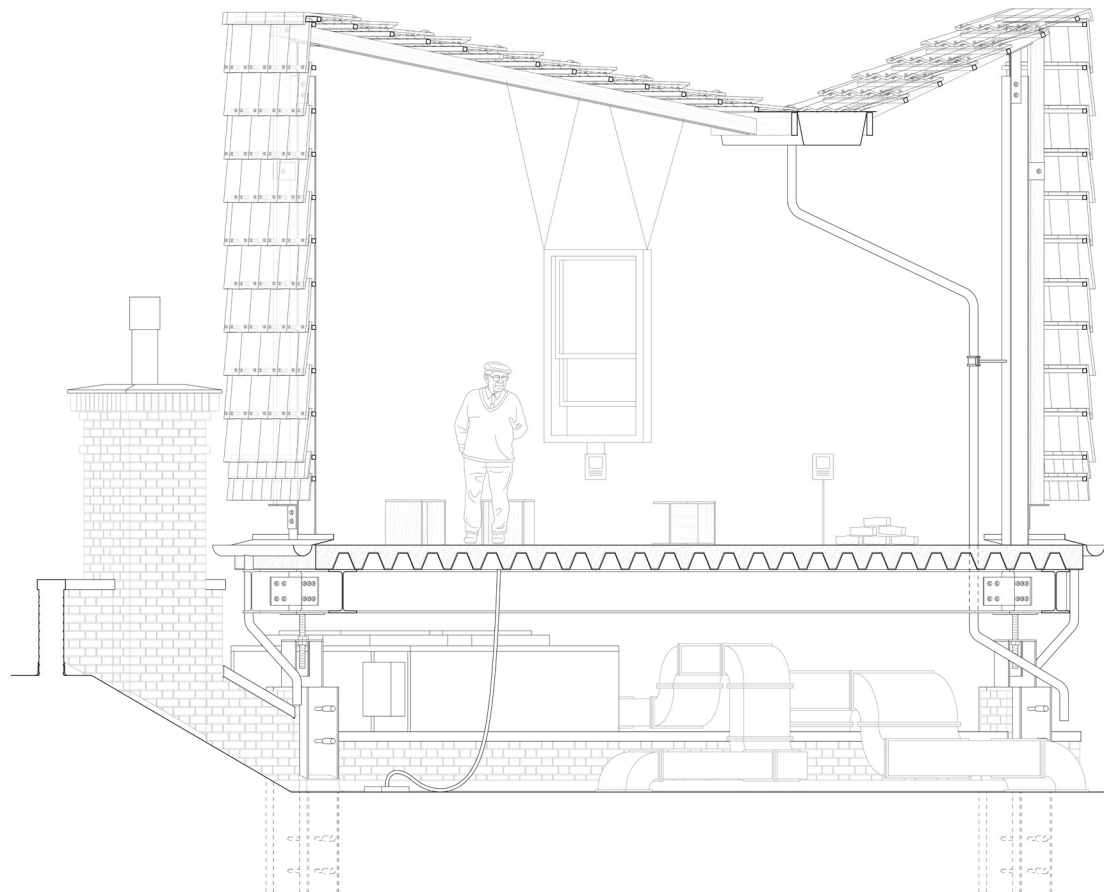




Borrowed scenery at the Entsū-ji Temple (source: 663highland, 2010)



Borrowed scenery at the Shōden-ji Temple (source: Kyoto Greenery Association, no date)

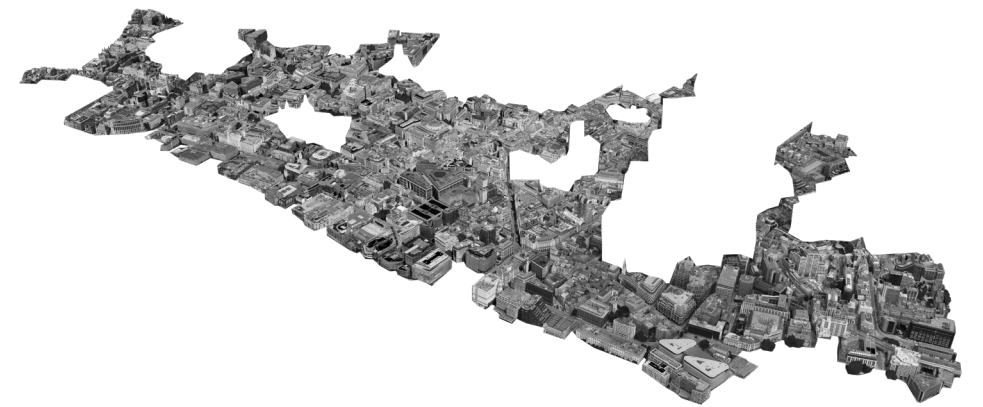
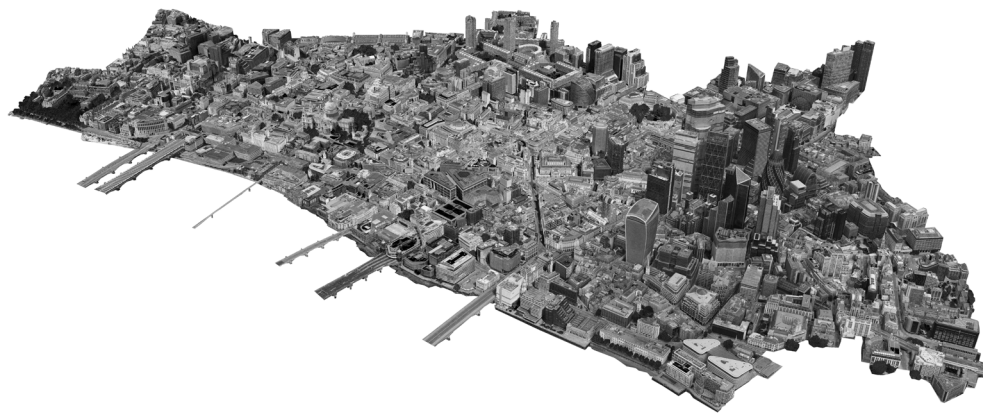


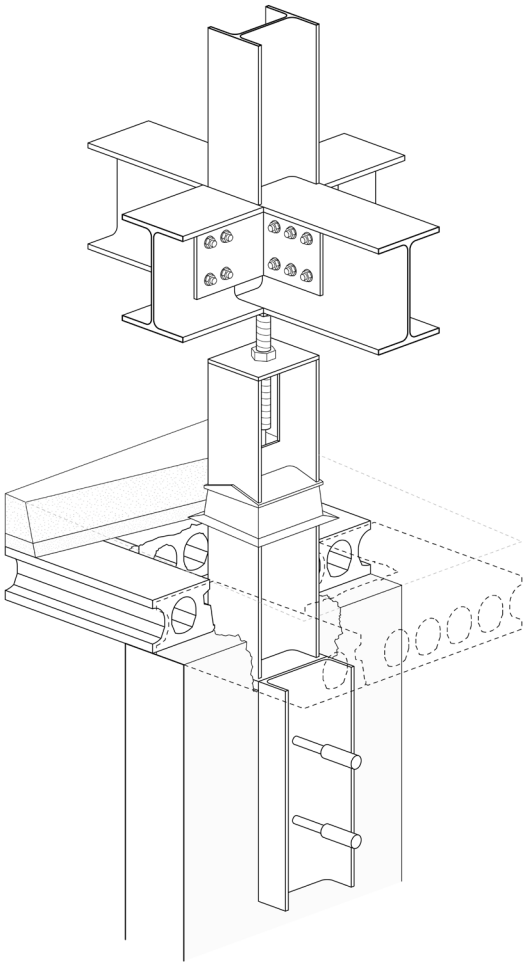
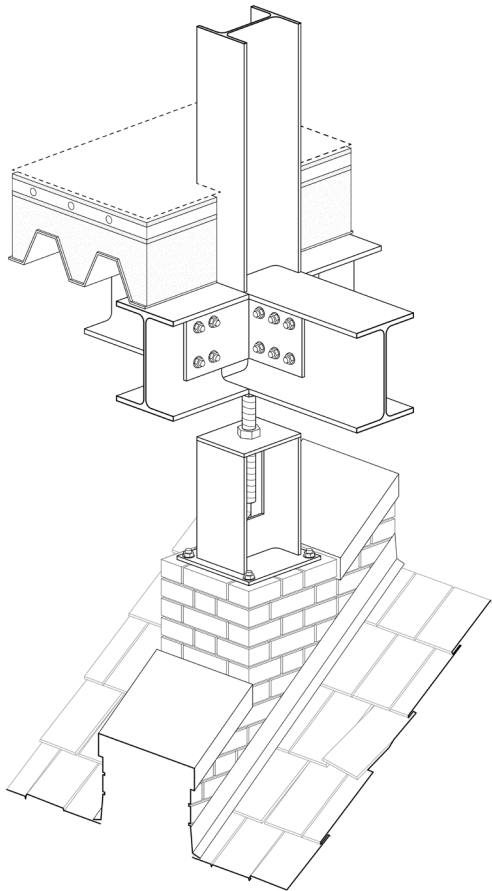
To conclude

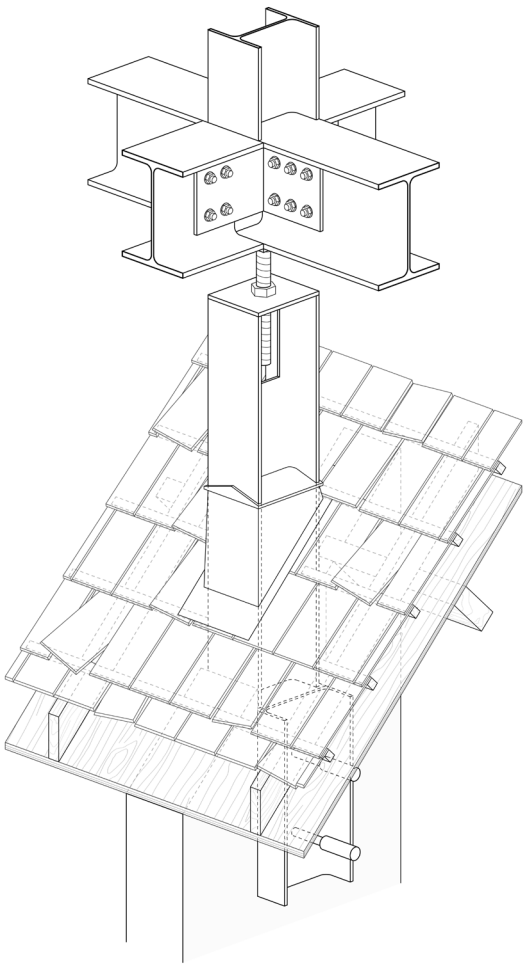
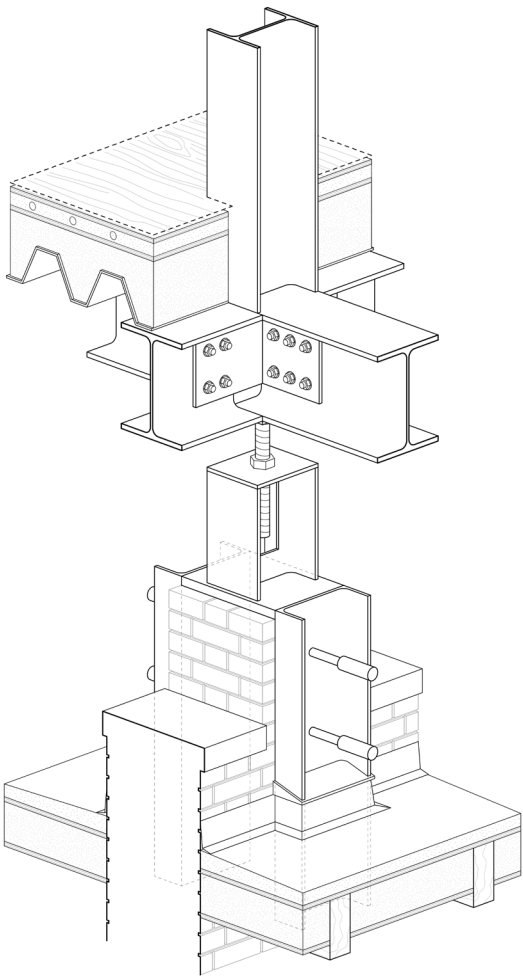
Please allow me to take a step back and consider the City of London as a whole. The City's drive to expand its financial ambitions is constrained by its historic boundary and dense urban fabric. Prioritising offices and commercial development often comes at the expense of public space. Rather than choosing one over the other, I wish to challenge the current perspective on how new space is conceived and created within the Square Mile.

The older parts of the City are in many cases protected for conservation and may seem the least likely to change. Yet, when viewed from another perspective, the potential of the rooftop landscape appears boundless. I am by no means naïve and am fully aware of the challenges that arise, whether they concern fire safety regulations, financial limitations, or the protected views of St Paul's Cathedral, which restrict vertical growth in many areas of the City. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to introduce adaptable small to medium additions to rooftops at this level. The clamping system employed for the site surrounding the Carpenters' Company redevelopment is highly adaptable and can be applied to any

roof; sloping or flat, on load-bearing party or concrete walls and regardless of their composition. Additionally the use of alleyways as entrances to this new public layer aligns with the City of London Corporation's objective to increase the number of alleys throughout the City. To conclude, I am not suggesting the creation of further office space on the lower roofs of the City, which would be problematic given their need for far more room, but rather the reservation of this area for a new public layer within the Square Mile.









The Square Mile in gray-scale altered with public rooftop volumes (source: Carl Laubin, 1997)

I would like to thank my mentors at Delft University of Technology, *Amy Thomas*, *Roel van de Pas* and *Rufus van den Ban*, who guided me throughout the year and with whom I have enjoyed countless insightful conversations. Their support helped me navigate challenges and moments of doubt, without them, this project and research would not have been possible.

Regarding my visits to England, I must express my gratitude to *Fiona Williams*, planning officer at the City of London Corporation and *OBE Michael Morrison*, member of the Car-penters' Company at London Wall. Both were kind enough to welcome me to the City, engage in discussions about my project and assist me in becoming acquainted with the different stakeholders in the Square Mile.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the support and help of the academics, former mentors, fellow students and friends listed below.

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Veronica Danesin
Anke van de Rijdt

