

URBAN IMPROVISATION

Research on Residents' Spontaneous
Architectural and Urban Practice in Marseille

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19.01.2022

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

‘Our society does not consist only of human beings. Various animals come into our lives as ‘Pets’, and they are given spaces to live... If decent buildings standing in decent spaces are considered ‘human beings’, small buildings standing with all their might in odd spaces would seem to be like pets in urban spaces.’

—— “*Pet Architecture*” Atelier Bow-Wow

Starting from a port, Marseille was born as the result of improvisation and spontaneous architectures rather than urban planning. Same things happened in the architecture scale. architects are not the only doers of architecture. Long after the building has been made the non-architects continuously do architecture. When non-architects occupy space, they start to ‘do-it-themselves’. In most cases, they do this in an already occupied territory, where the activity of doing architecture has been classified and claimed by architects - the rules have already been established. But there are also some space occupations that are out of the rules, such as squatting, vendors, graffiti, protest. They, like “pet architecture”, do not necessarily create appealing spaces, and some are even illegal, but they can highlight people’s demands and show people’s bottom-up determination to shape the city.

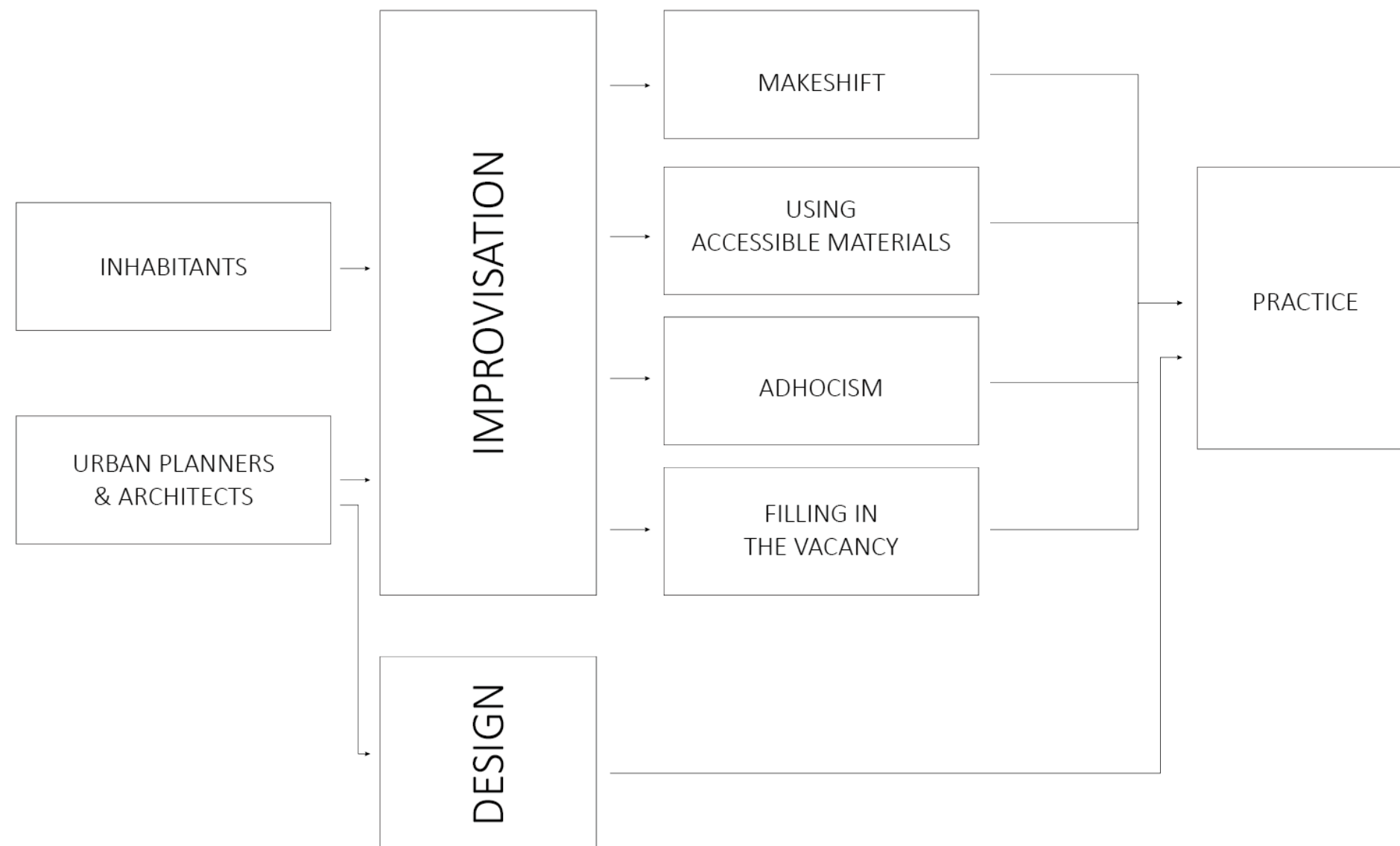
When people do the practice, they mainly based on their own current needs and what material they have instead of considering the building or city as a whole. These practices are spontaneous, unplanned makeshift and ad hoc. They can be seen as improvisational practice. Seen architecture as paintings, in these cases, their improvisational activities are more like a collage rather than fully considered composition. But as Jencks explains, it involves using an available system in a new way to solve a problem quickly and efficiently. By doing so, it offers a way for everyone to shape and discuss the city they live in. And for the public, there should be nothing preventing them, in an agonistic and participatory manner, from devising and debating forms of their shelter and space for daily life. The improvisational practice has itself taken inspiration: Another world is possible.



PART 2. URBAN IMPROVISATION

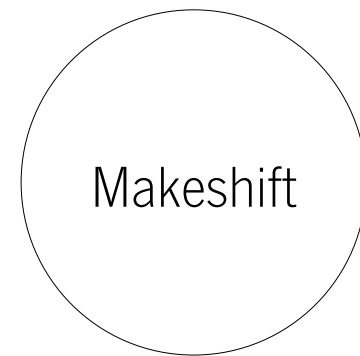
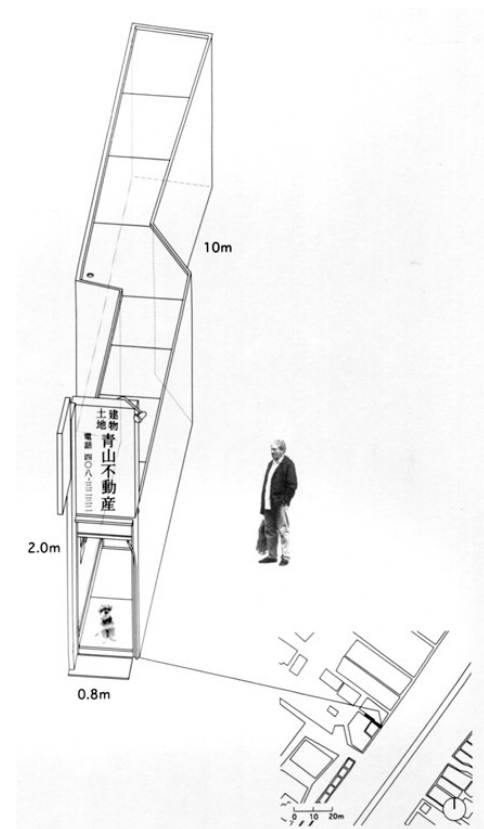
Professional architects and urban planners are not the only persons who have design control over the city. Improvisation is spontaneous and supports everyone in expressing their needs within each period of the development of the cities and buildings. The importance of improvisation shows in the immediacy and rapidity of temporary solutions to the current problems and the potential to create a more distinctive city full of possibility, creativity and vitality. These potentials stem from the temporary and unpredictable nature of the problems to be solved, as well as the constraints of materials and sites. Such limited conditions stimulate people's creativity and the city's possibility, resulting in various unexpected improvisation. It provides a better fit both now and over time between the city and the needs and aspirations of individuals.

Based on previous research, the identities of urban and architectural improvisation above can be summarized into four aspects: makeshift, using accessible materials, Adhocism and filling in. By defining and researching improvisational practice from these four perspectives, it can be seen that how people shape the city spontaneously. The improvisational practice that seldom seems to gain widespread attention or even not appears on the map is an integral part of the city as important as design practice by architects and urban planners.

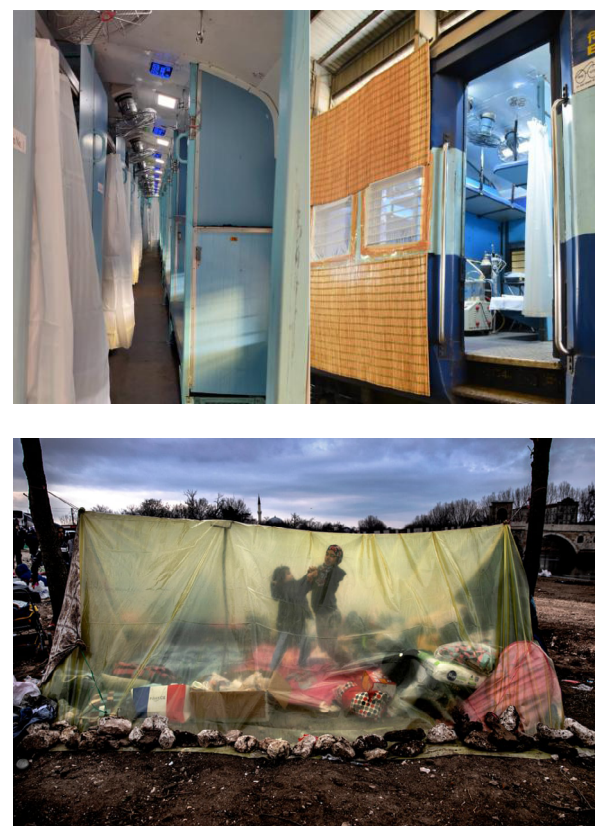




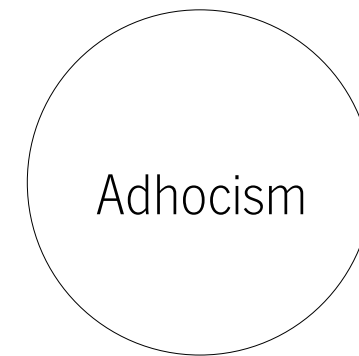
City contains many forgotten pieces of the urban fabric – the dead-end alley, the vacant corner lot, infrastructure’s leftovers. They are always ignored on the typical city map. Utilizing these spaces for improvisation is cheaper and easier for people.



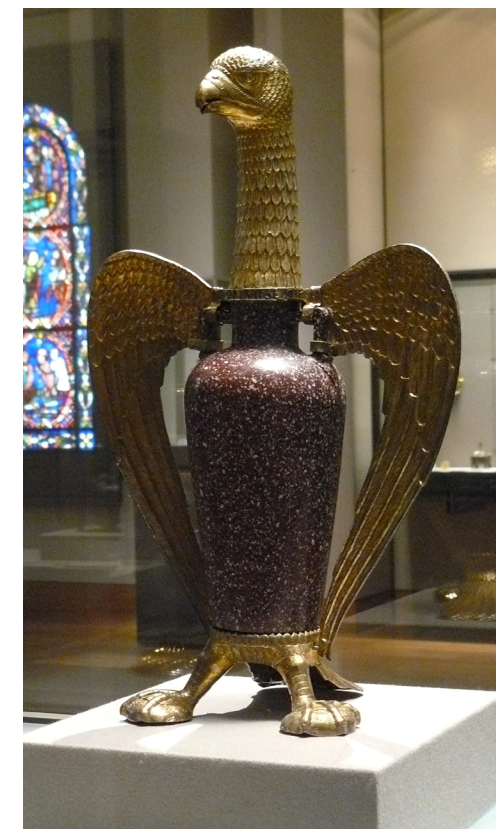
Improvisational practice is makeshift. It's focus on solving current problems by doing some efficiently and quickly makeshift changes based on current useful structure.



Improvisational practice mainly focusing on meeting people's current needs, which are often unpredictable or urgent. So most of the times the improvisational practice is under the situation that normal construction materials are not easy to get or not enough. People have to use whatever they can find for the improvisational practice.



Improvisational practice is ad hoc. People bring together various, immediately-to-hand components and create something that is uncommon in the typical design works, like a collage rather than a fully composed work.



PART 3. IMPROVISATIONAL PRACTICE IN MARSEILLE

Marseille has many problems such as shortage of housing, shortage of space for people’s daily life, narrow street and high crime rate. Several approaches have tackled these problems by the government and architects, but they can’t ensure to solve them. The environment is dynamic, people’s requirements are constantly changing, but architecture cannot always meet people’s immediate needs. Therefore, people are looking for their own ways to solve or alleviate these looming problems and immediate demands from the bottom up.

People shape the city spontaneously. They used their own methods to occupy or reuse buildings and public spaces. There are many examples in Marseille: vendors, graffiti, protest... By practice, people change the environment to meet their current needs better. And as their situation changes, the practice is constantly happening and changing.

Urban Fragment



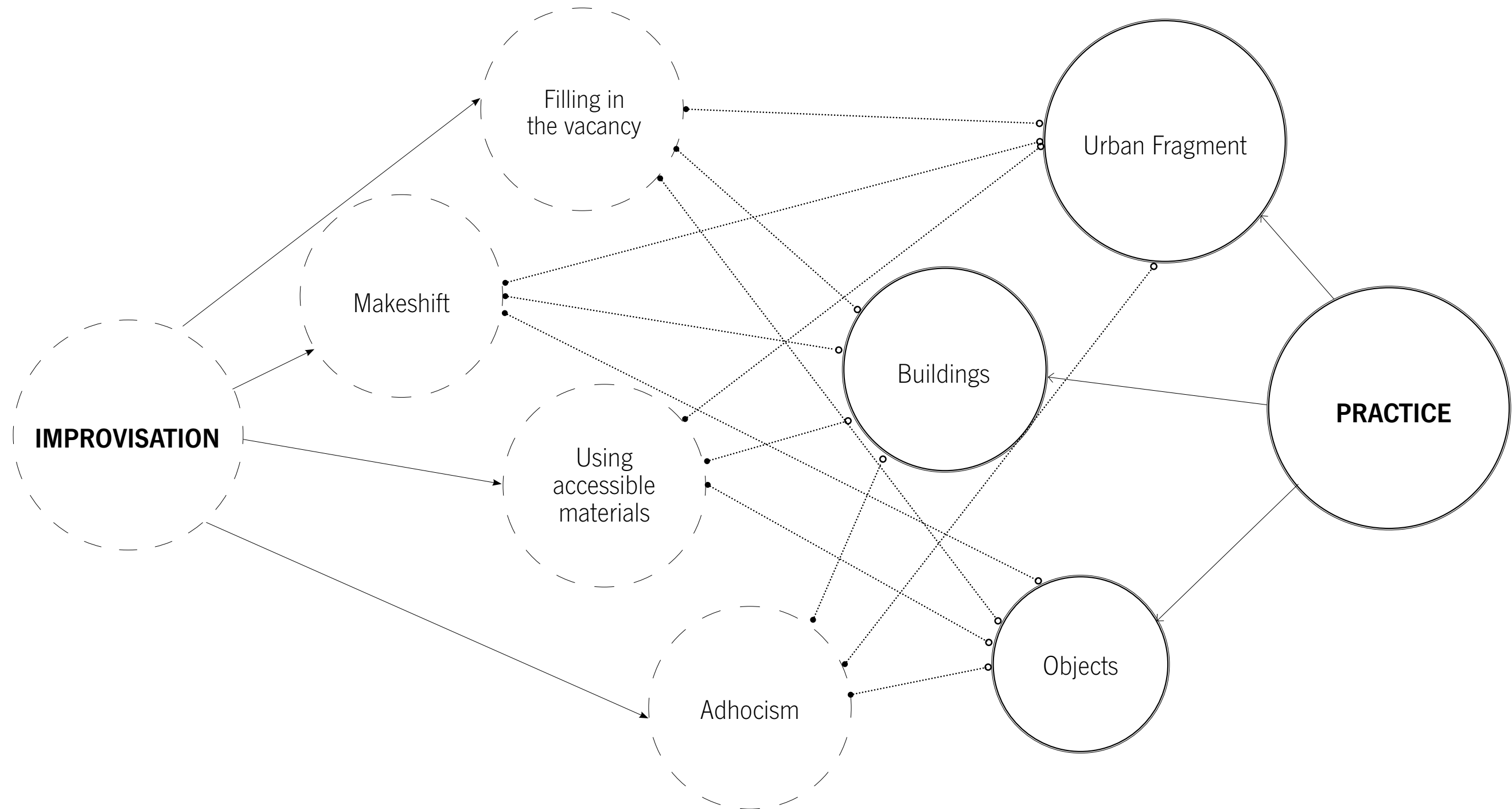
Buildings



Objects



What improvisational practice do people do in Marseille?
Where did they do the practice?
What materials can they use?
How long did the practice last?
What kind of demands and resistance were they expressing to their life or Marseille?
How does the improvisational practice shape Marseille?



OBJECTS

- MAKESHIFT/ USING ACCESSIBALE MATERIALS/
ADHOCISIM/ FILLING IN THE VACANCY

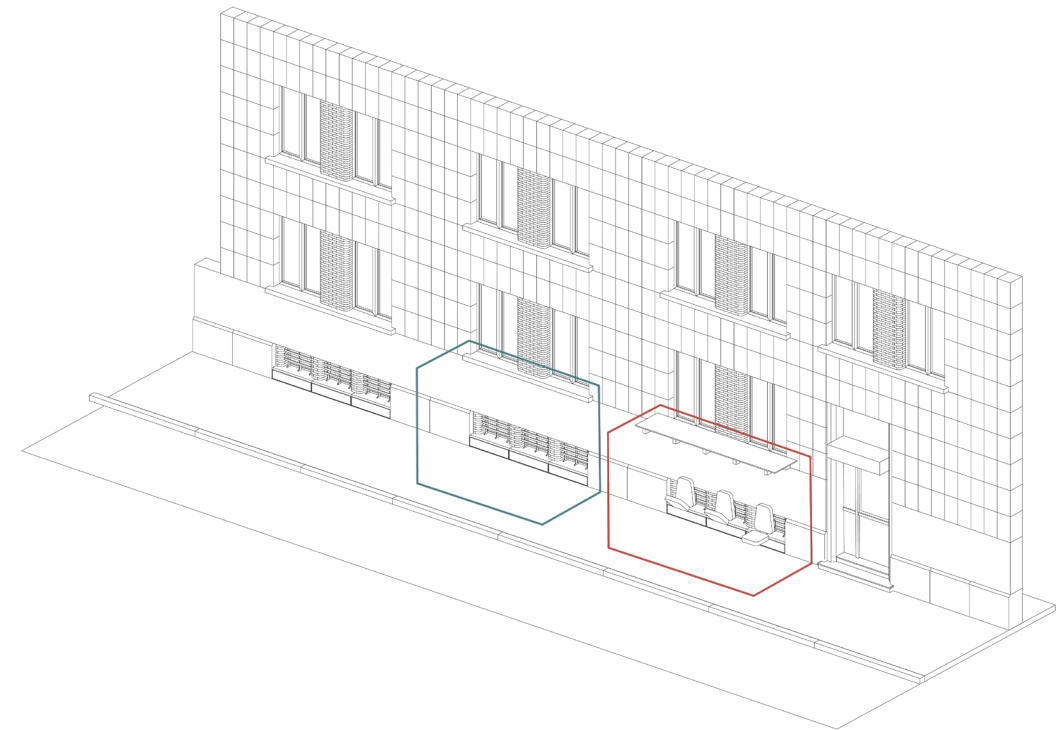


Fill in vacancy: sidewalk

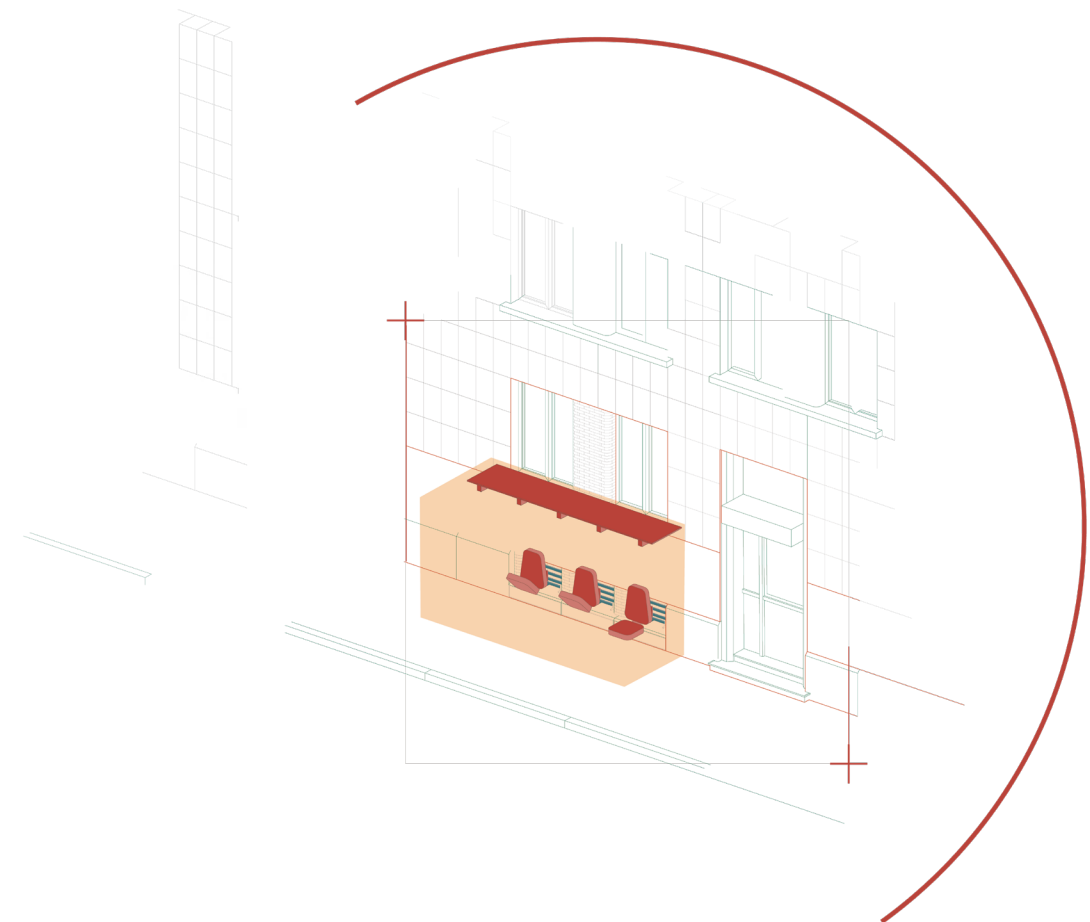
Makeshift: windowsill, windowframe

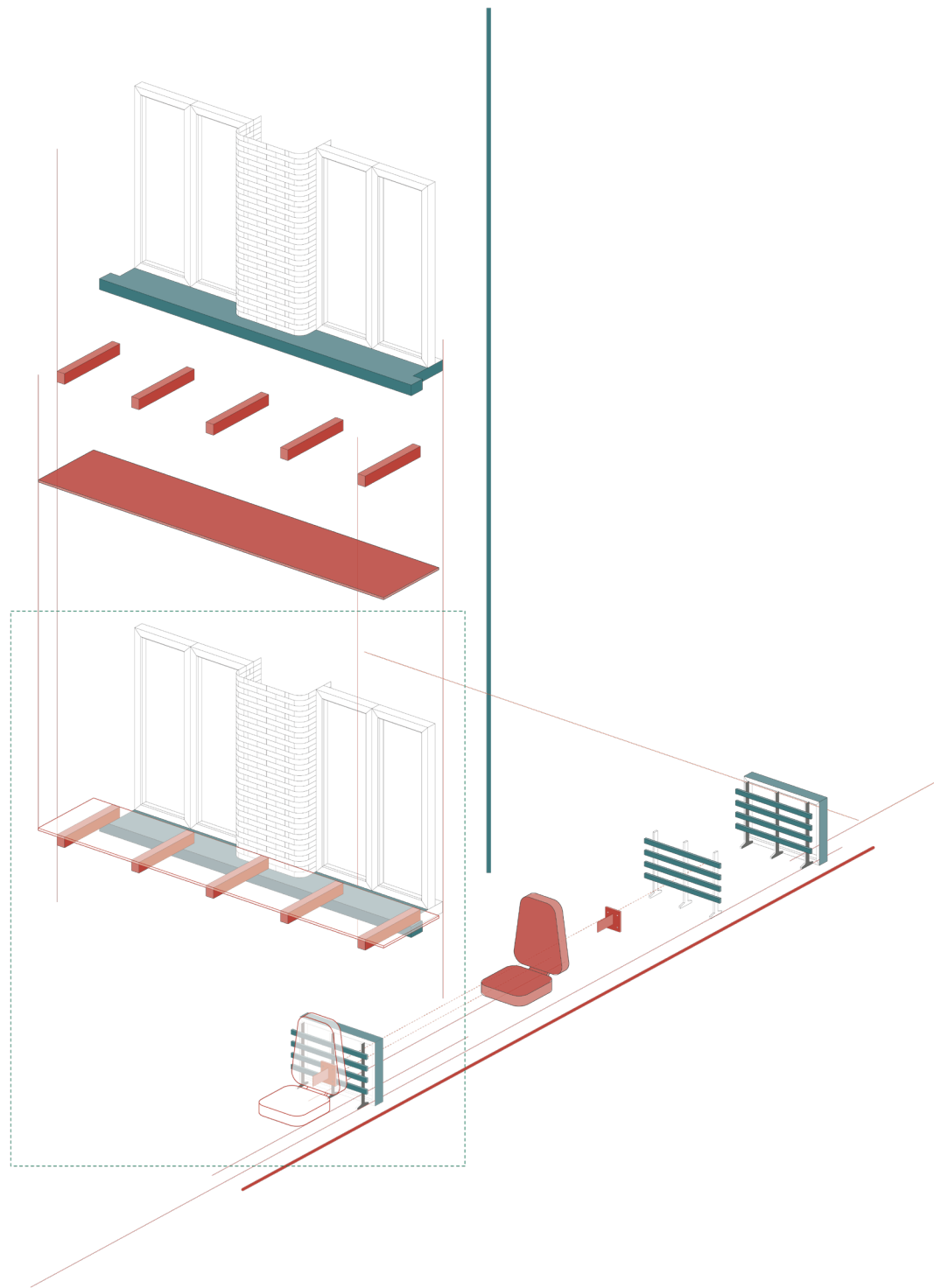
Material: chair; wood; plastic board

Ad-hoc: create a tempary outdoor waiting room

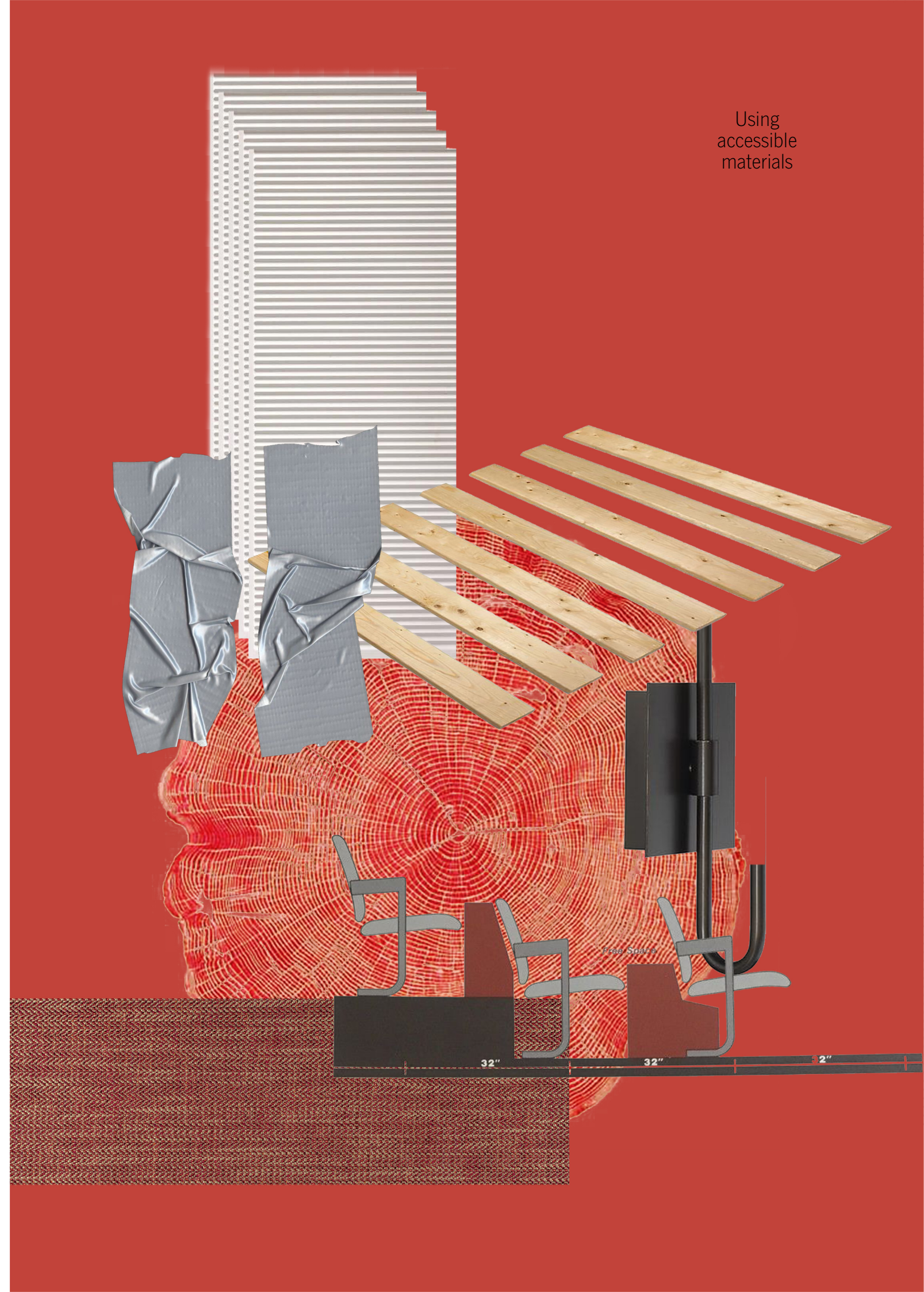


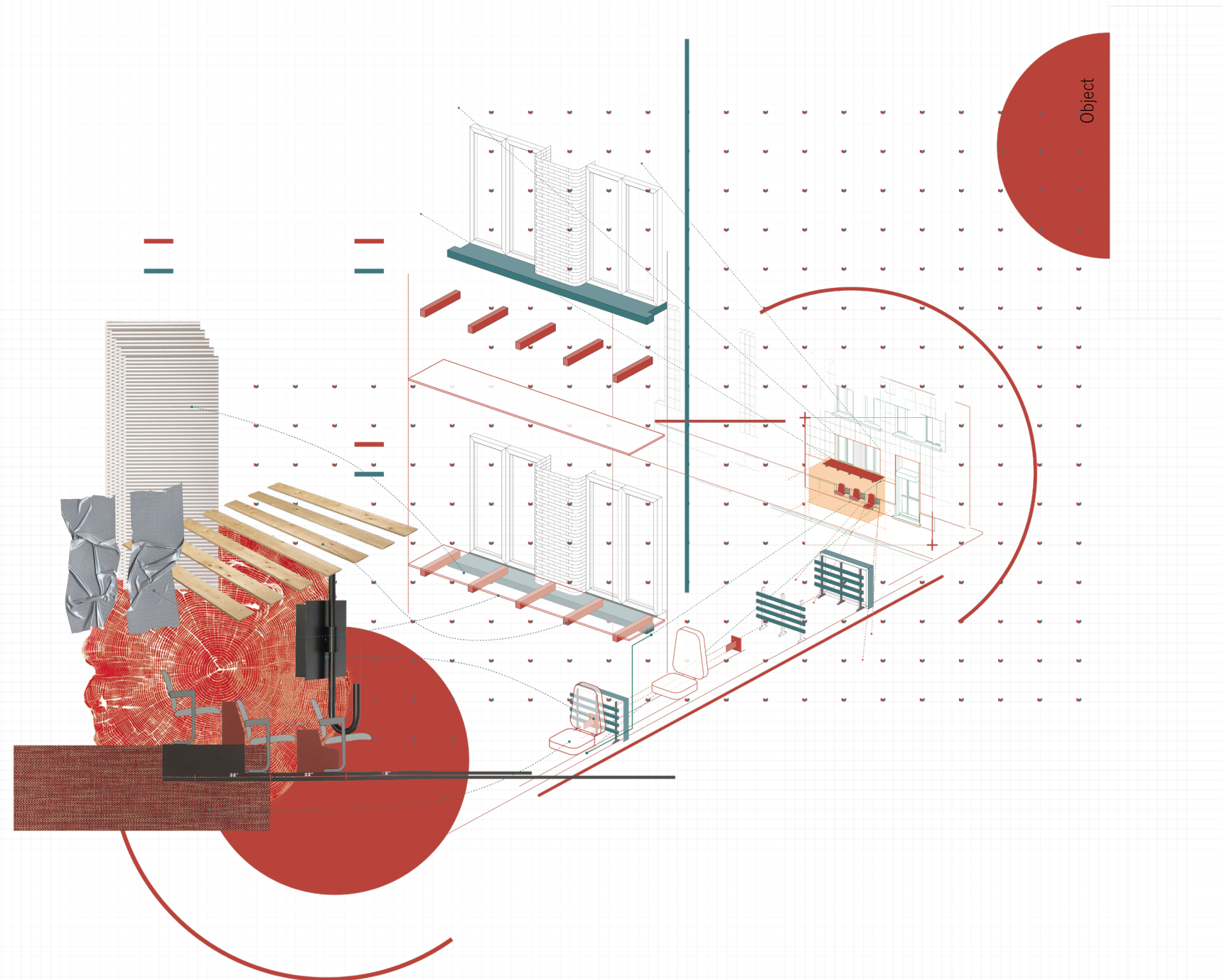
Filling in
the vacancy





Makeshift

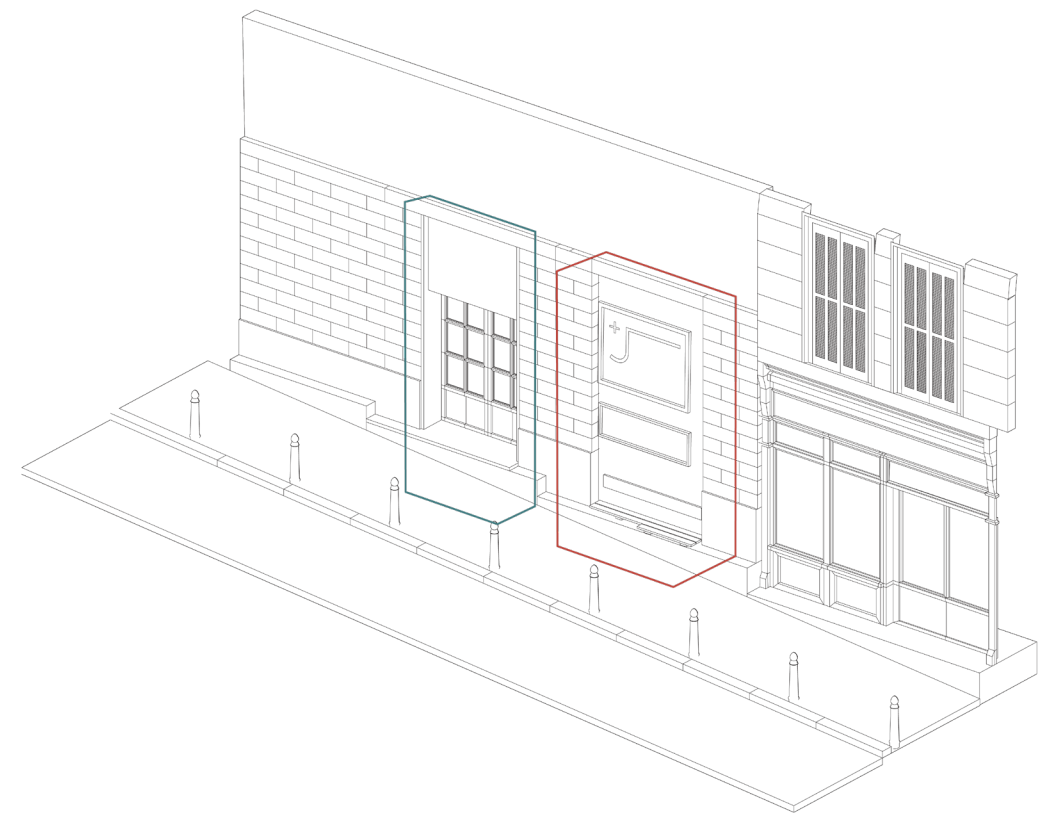




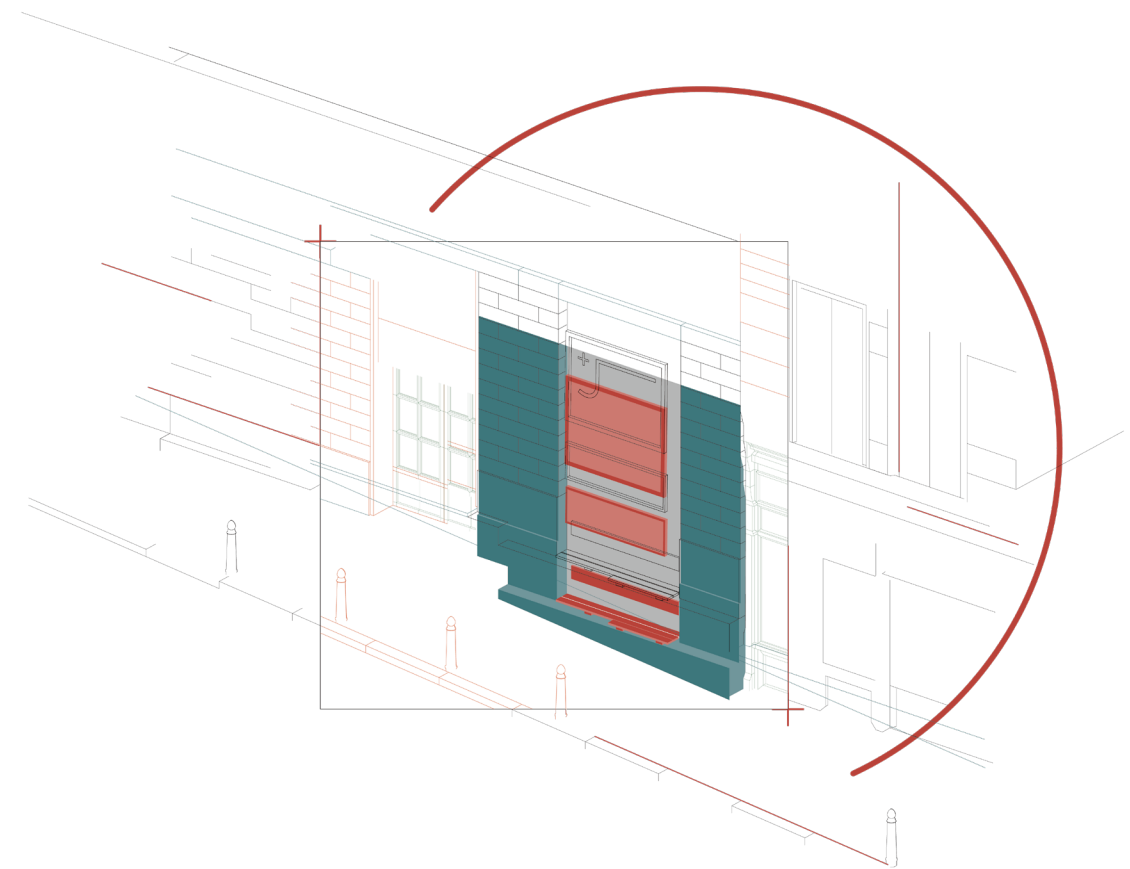
Adhocism

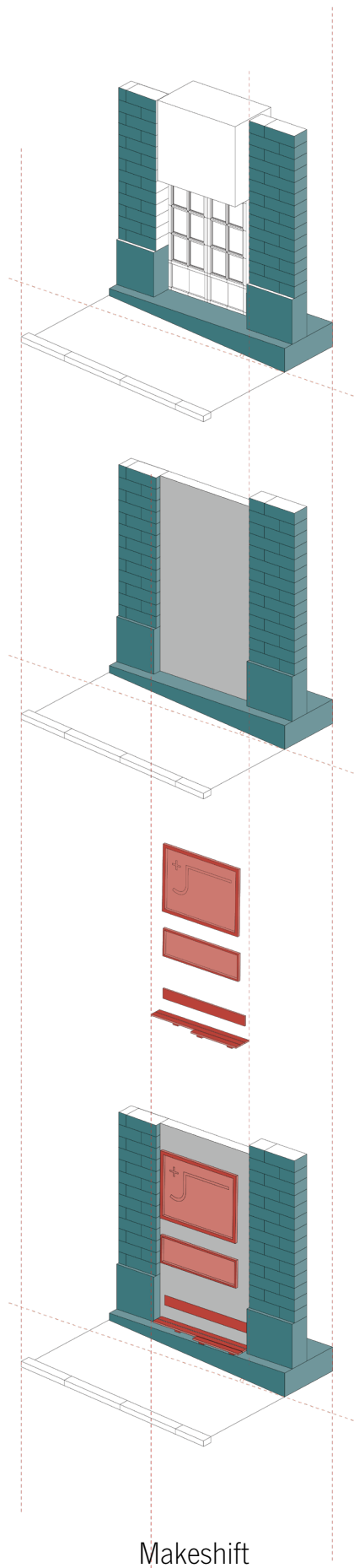


Fill in vacancy: sidewalk
Makeshift: height difference
Material: wood
Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor bench



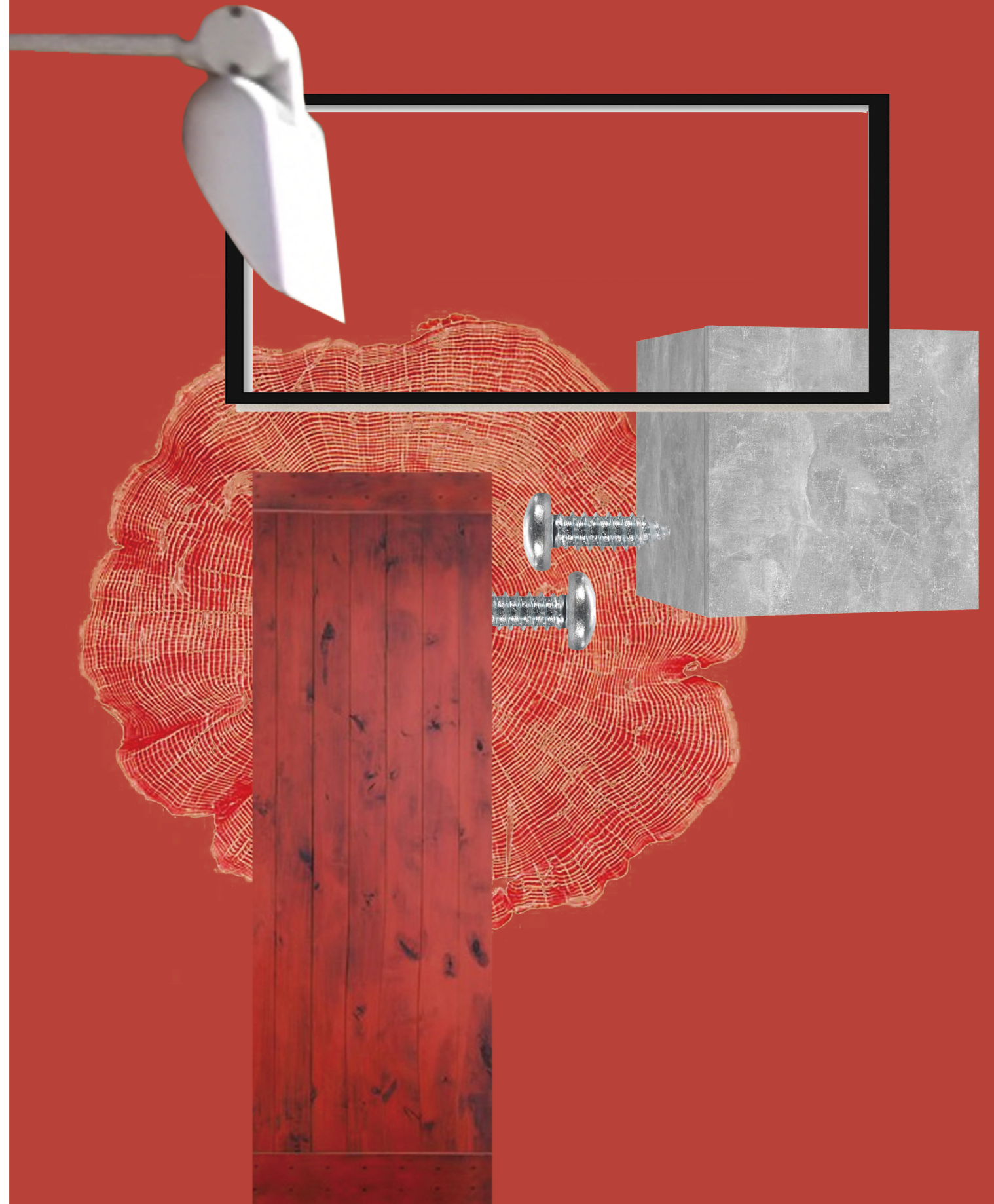
Filling in
the vacancy

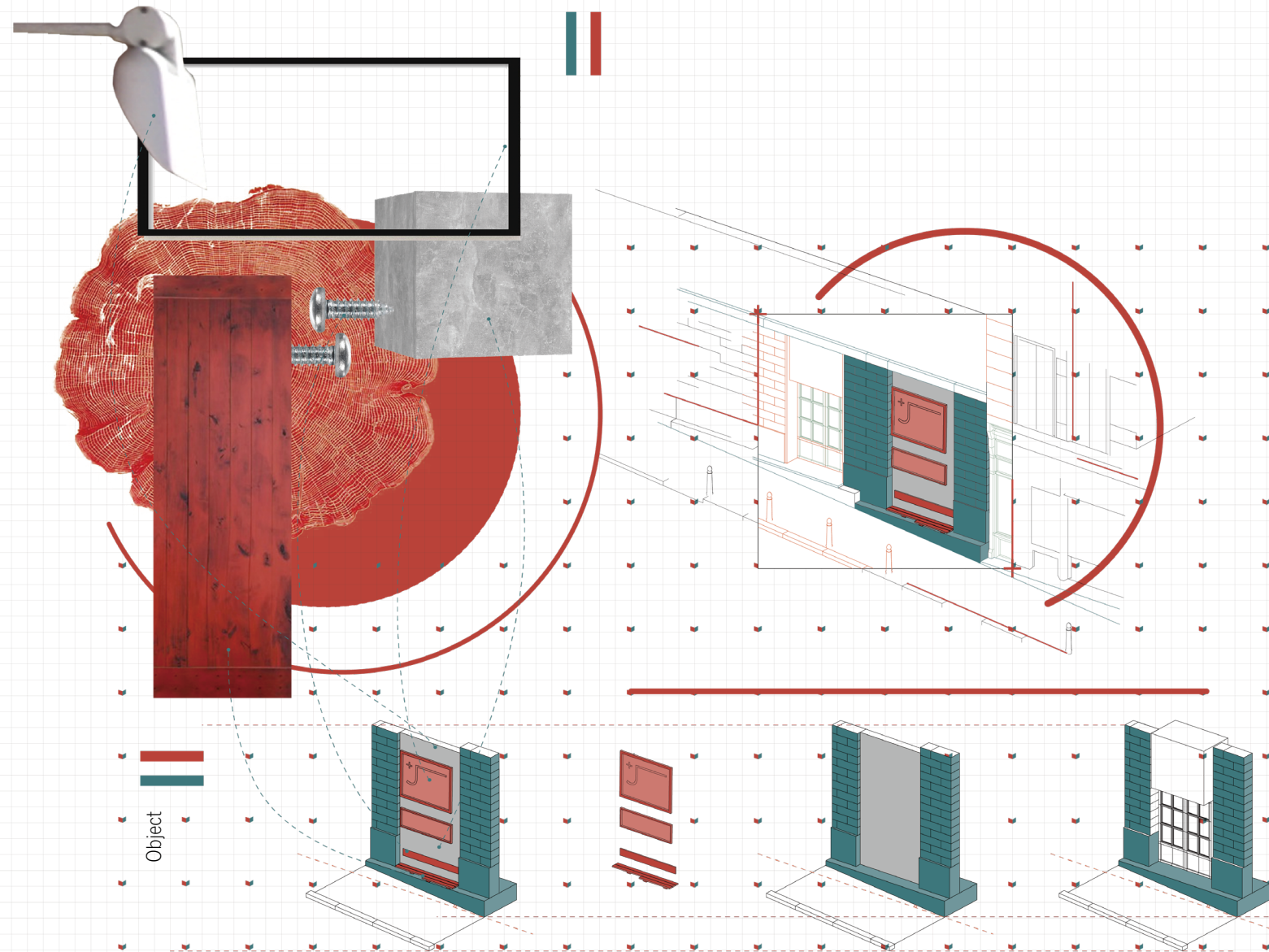




Makeshift

Using
accessible
materials





Adhocism

OBJECTS

- MAKESHIFT/ USING ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS/
ADHOCISIM/ FILLING IN THE VACANCY



Fill in vacancy: sidewalk
Makeshift: windowsill, windowframe
Material: chair; wood; plastic board
Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor waiting room



Fill in vacancy: balcony
Makeshift: fence
Material: beer box; bucket
Ad-hoc: create flowerpots for balcony

Fill in vacancy: sidewalk
Makeshift: height difference
Material: wood
Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor bench



Fill in vacancy: sidewalk
Makeshift: railing
Material: wooden box; flowerpot
Ad-hoc: create a temporary plant fence



BUILDINGS

- MAKESHIFT/ USING ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS/
- ADHOCISIM/ FILLING IN THE VACANCY



Fill in vacancy: garage, threshold

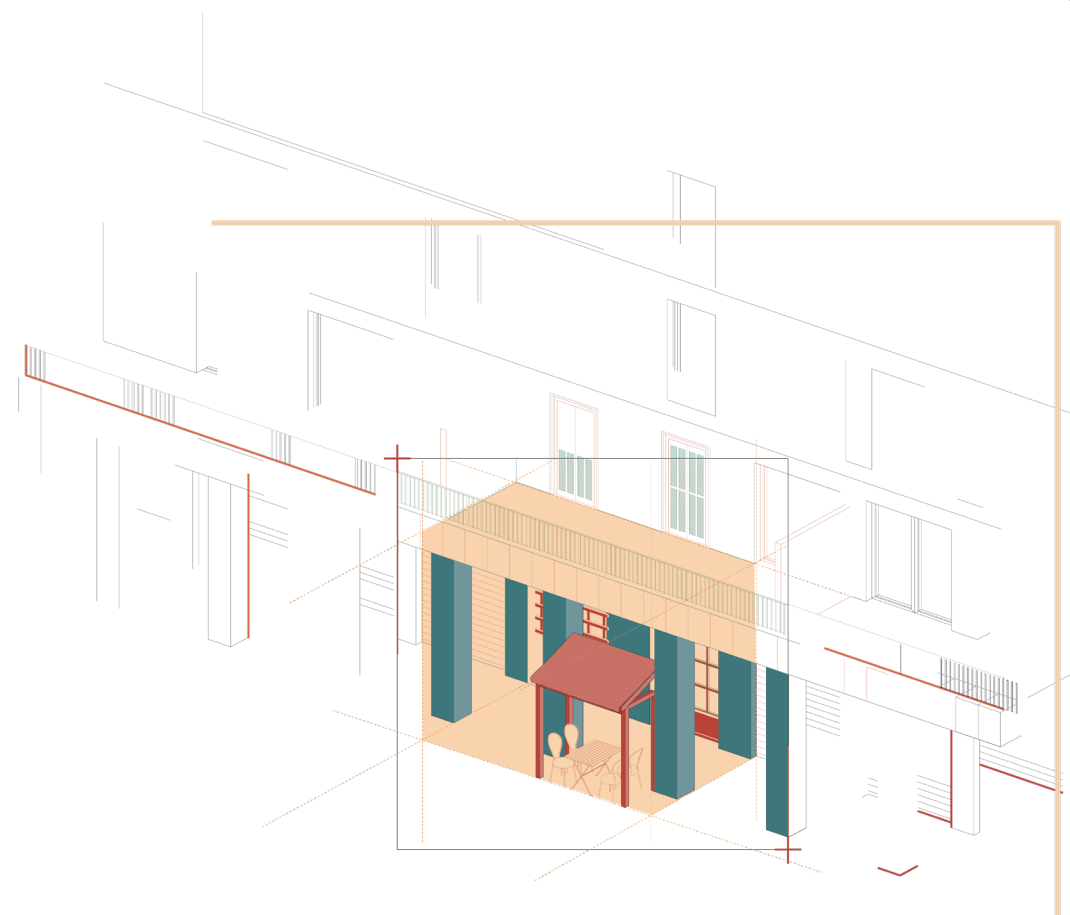
Makeshift: column, garage

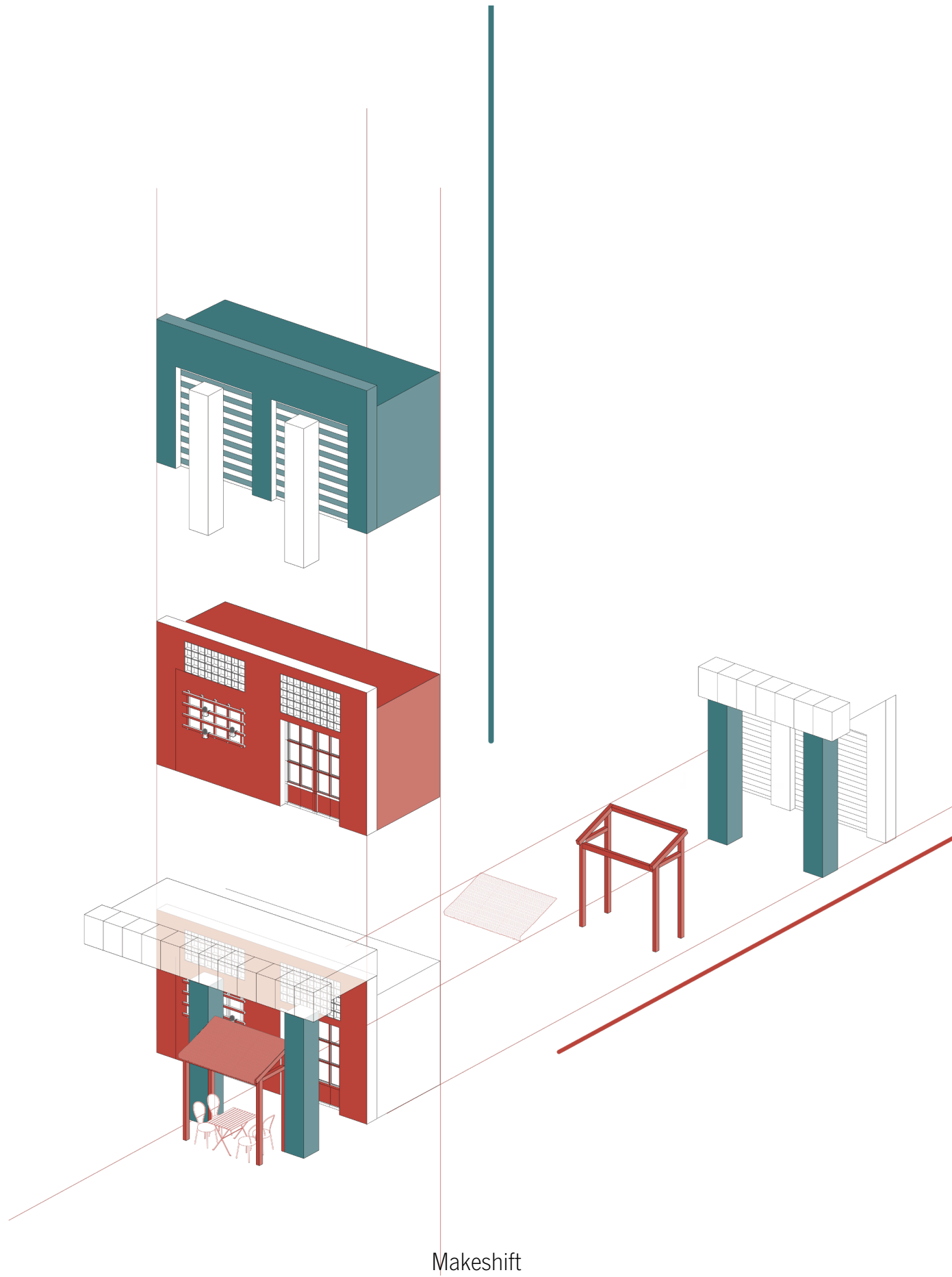
Material: wood; straw curtain; glass brick

Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor eating space

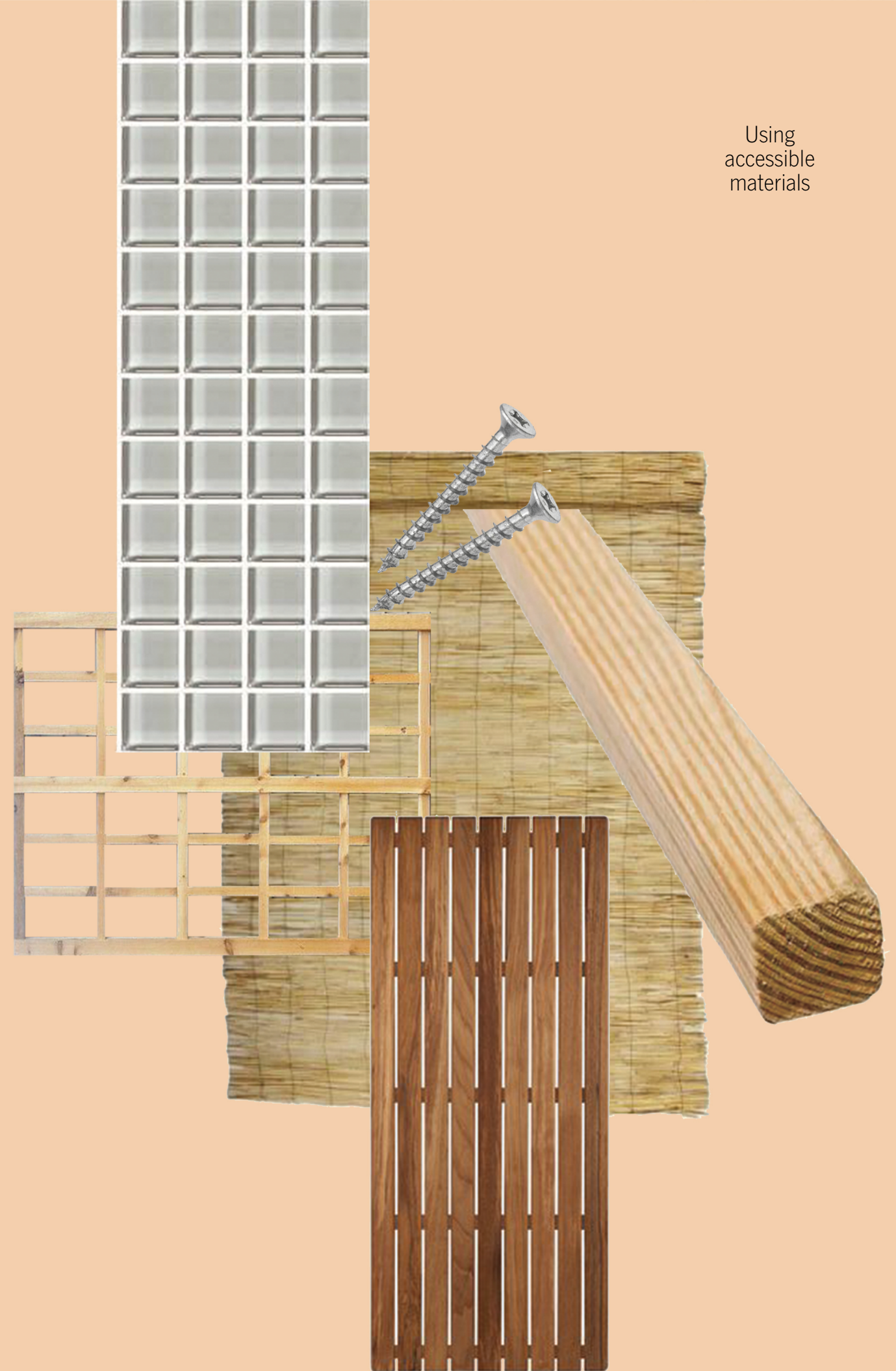


Filling in
the vacancy

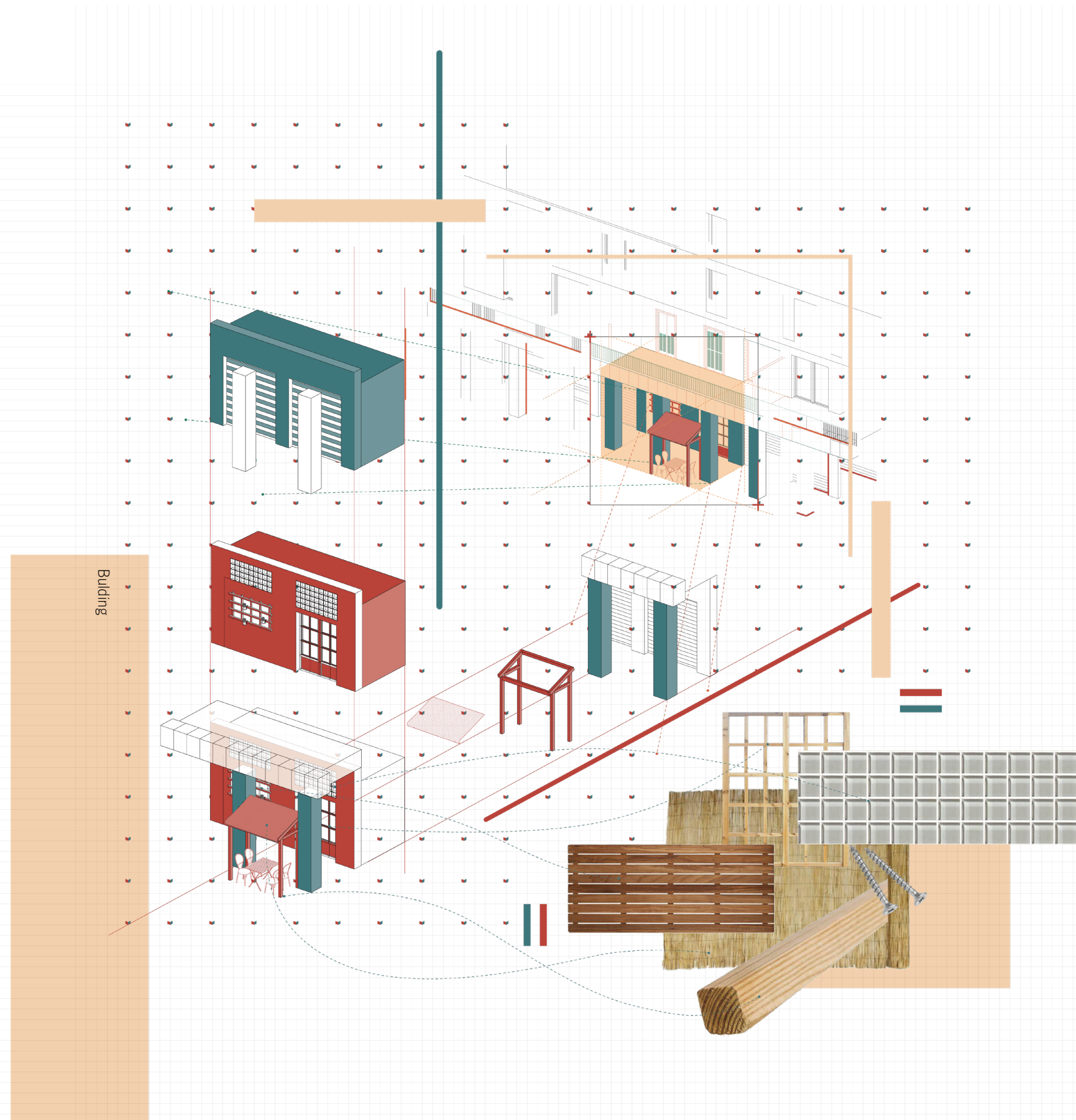




Makeshift



Using
accessible
materials



Adhocism

BUILDINGS

- MAKESHIFT/ USING ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS/
ADHOCISIM/ FILLING IN THE VACANCY



Fill in vacancy: garage, threshold
Makeshift: column, garage
Material: wood; straw curtain; glass brick
Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor eating space



Fill in vacancy: gap between buildings
Makeshift: facade
Material: bricks, metal
Ad-hoc: create a temporary shelter

Fill in vacancy: sidewalk
Makeshift: parking lot
Material: wood, branches
Ad-hoc: create an outdoor eating space



Fill in vacancy: roof
Makeshift: windowsill
Material: rope; metal
Ad-hoc: create a temporary space for drying clothes

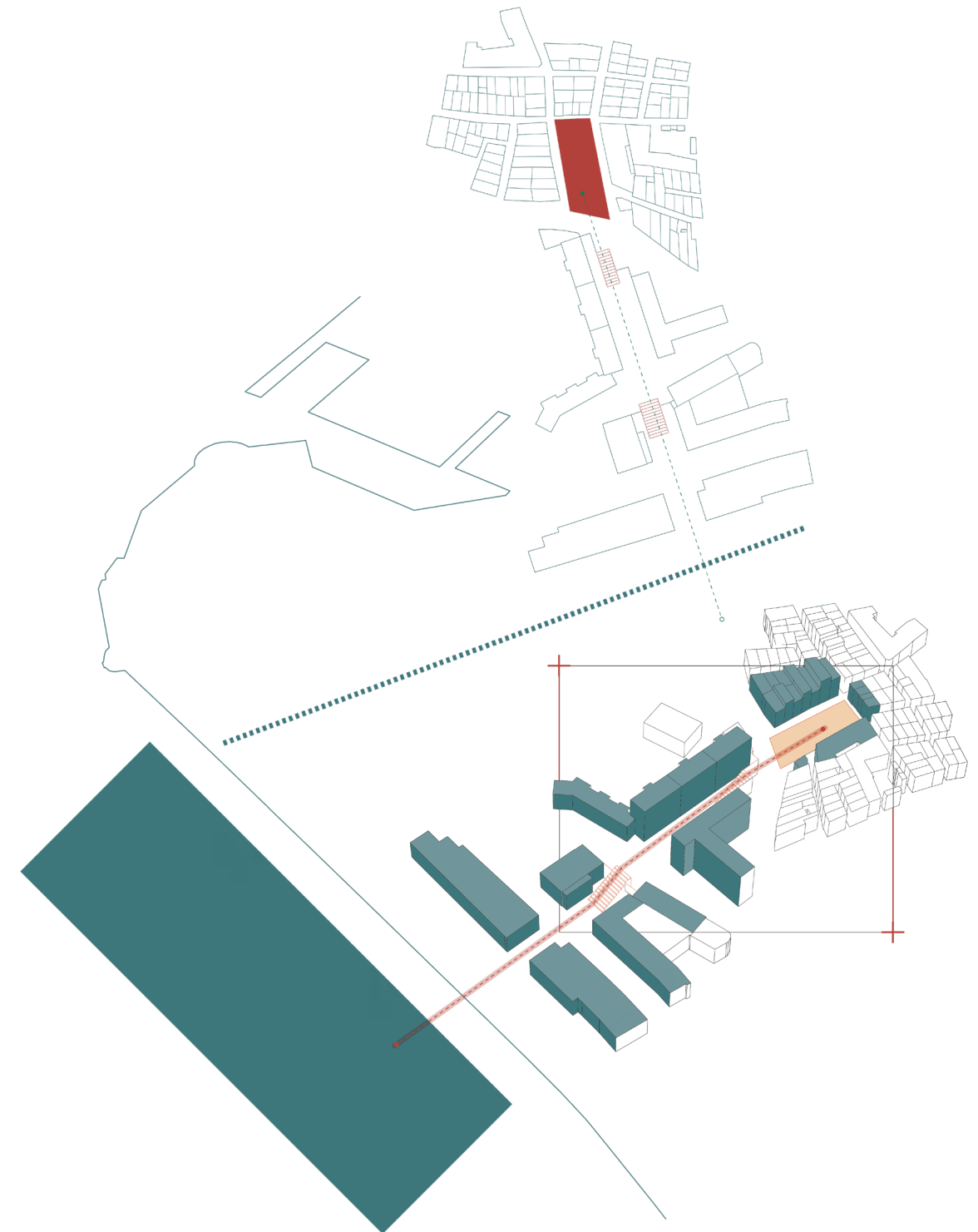


URBAN FRAGMENT

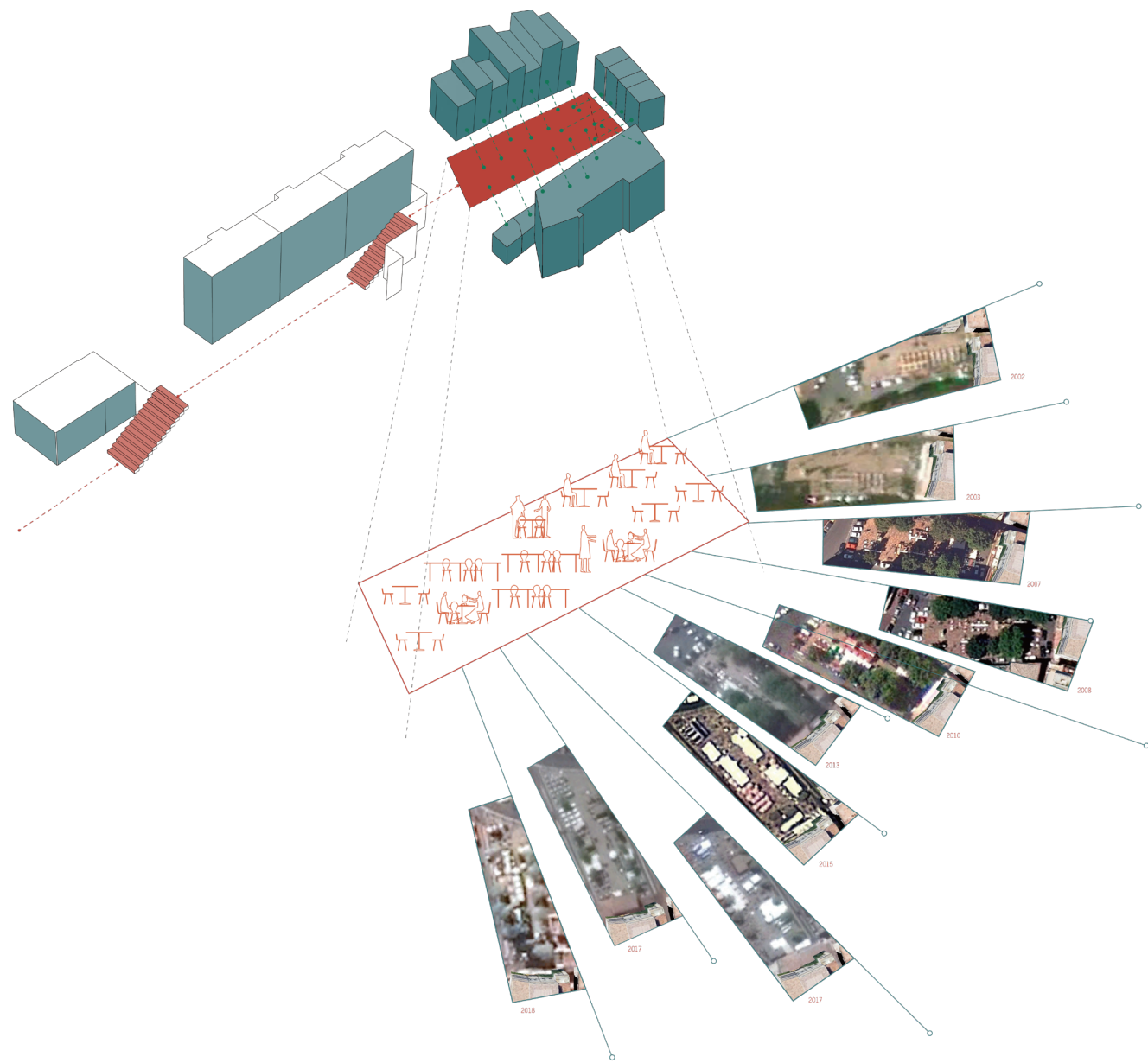
- MAKESHIFT/ USING ACCESSIBALE MATERIALS/
ADHOCISIM/ FILLING IN THE VACANCY



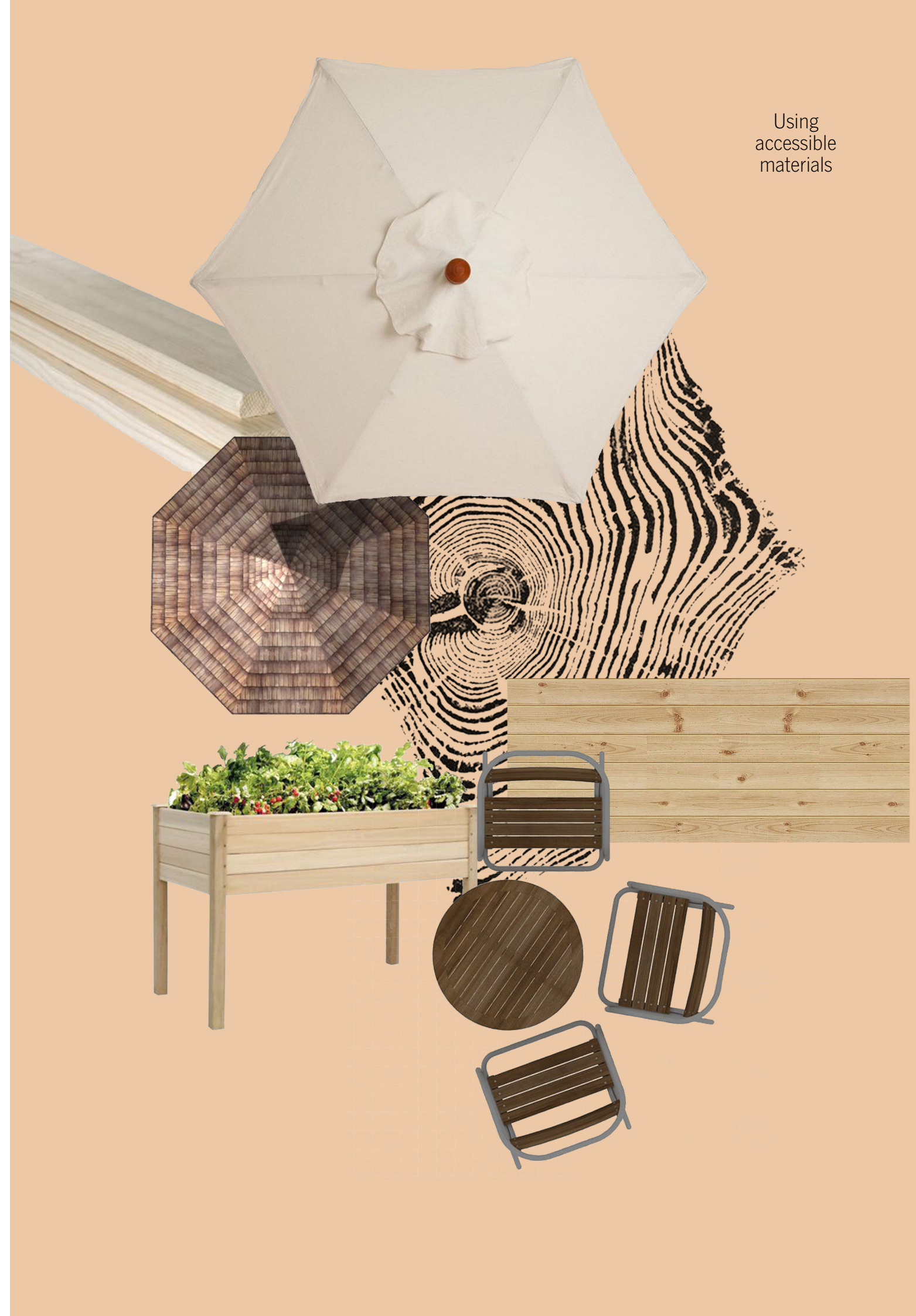
Fill in vacancy: piece of vacant space
Makeshift: time, road, surrounding restaurant
Material: wood, chair, table, umbrella
Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor eating space

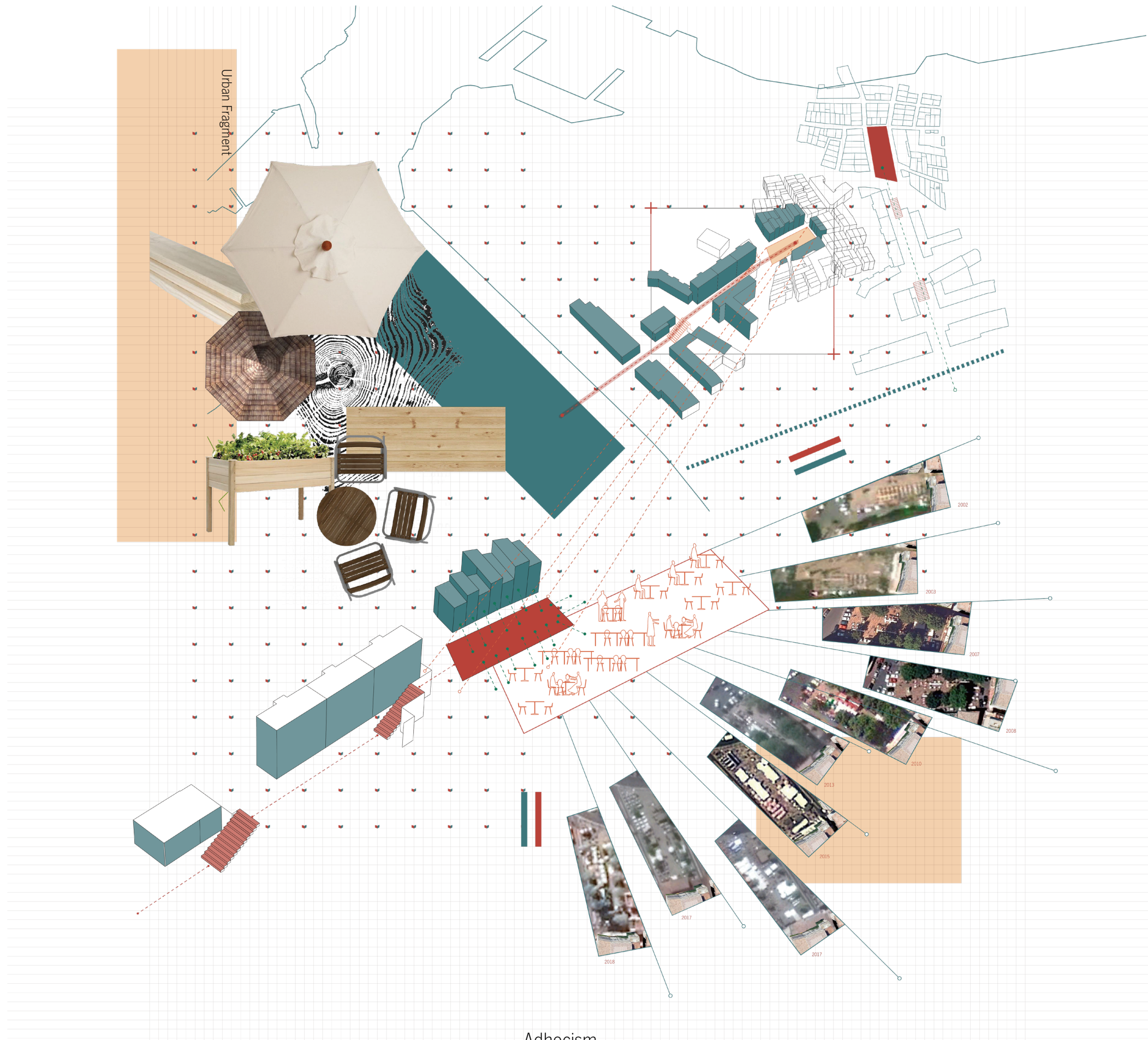


Filling in
the vacancy



Makeshift





Adhocism

URBAN FRAGMENT

- MAKESHIFT/ USING ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS/
ADHOCISIM/ FILLING IN THE VACANCY



Fill in vacancy: street
Makeshift: column, garage
Material: wood; straw curtain;
glass brick
Ad-hoc: create a temporary
outdoor eating space



Fill in vacancy: street
Makeshift: facade
Material: bricks, metal
Ad-hoc: spread the market

Fill in vacancy: piece of vacant space
Makeshift: time, road, surrounding restaurant
Material: wood, chair, table, umbrella
Ad-hoc: create a temporary outdoor eating space



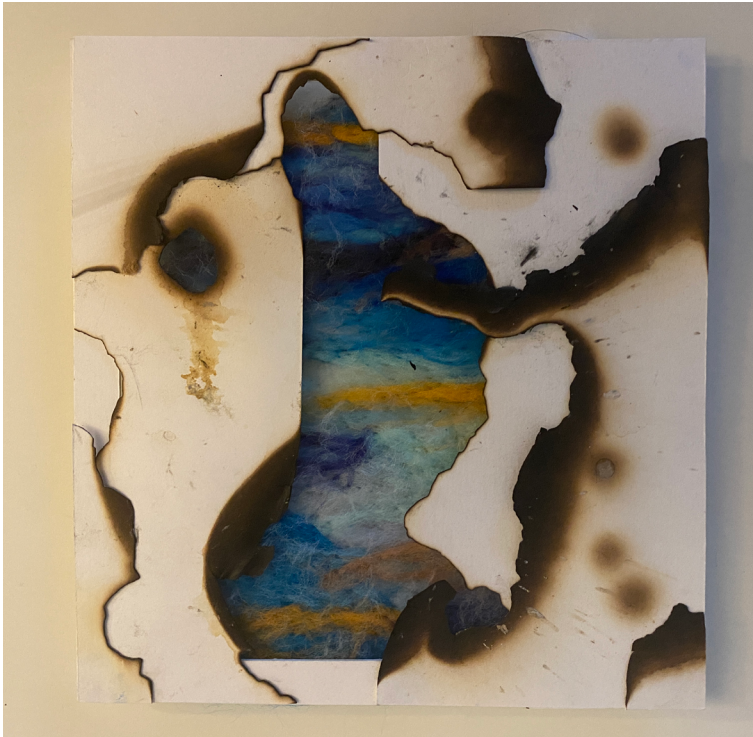
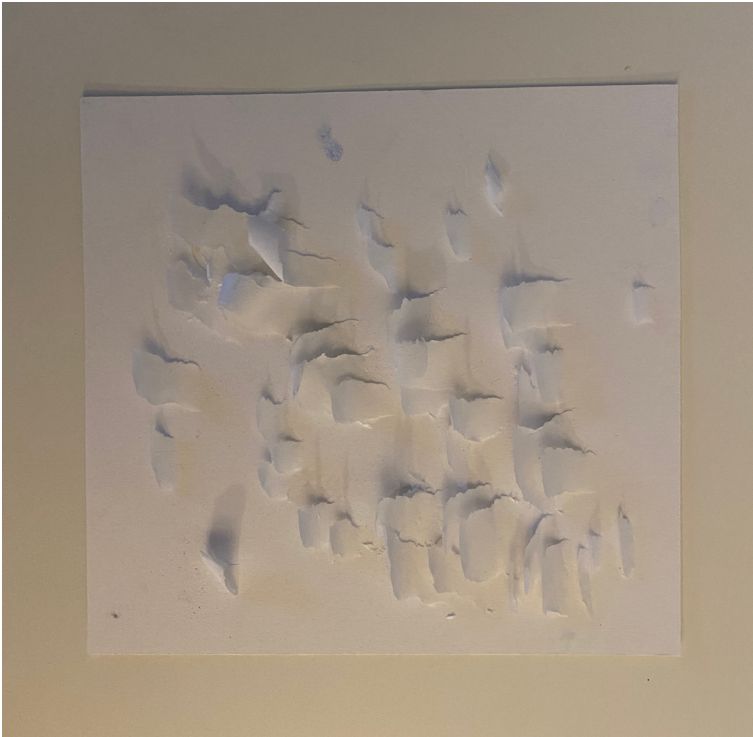
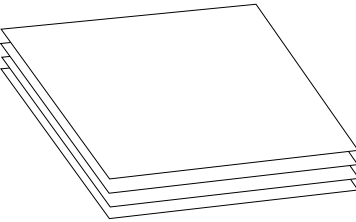
Fill in vacancy: piece of vacant space
Makeshift: time, road, surrounding shops
Material: vendors staff
Ad-hoc: spread the market



PART 4. THE MODI OPERANDI WORKSHOP

WEEK 1: SITE

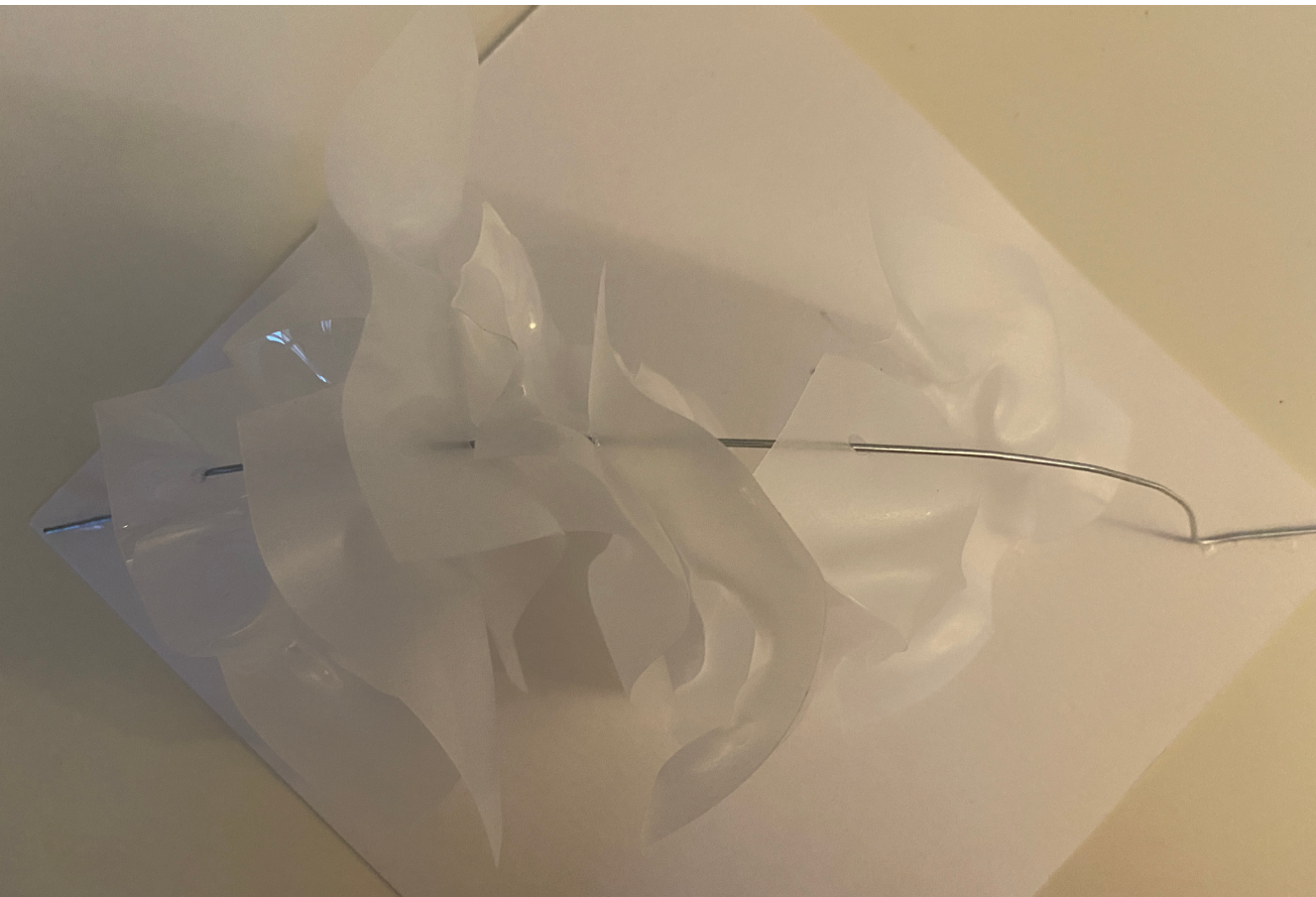
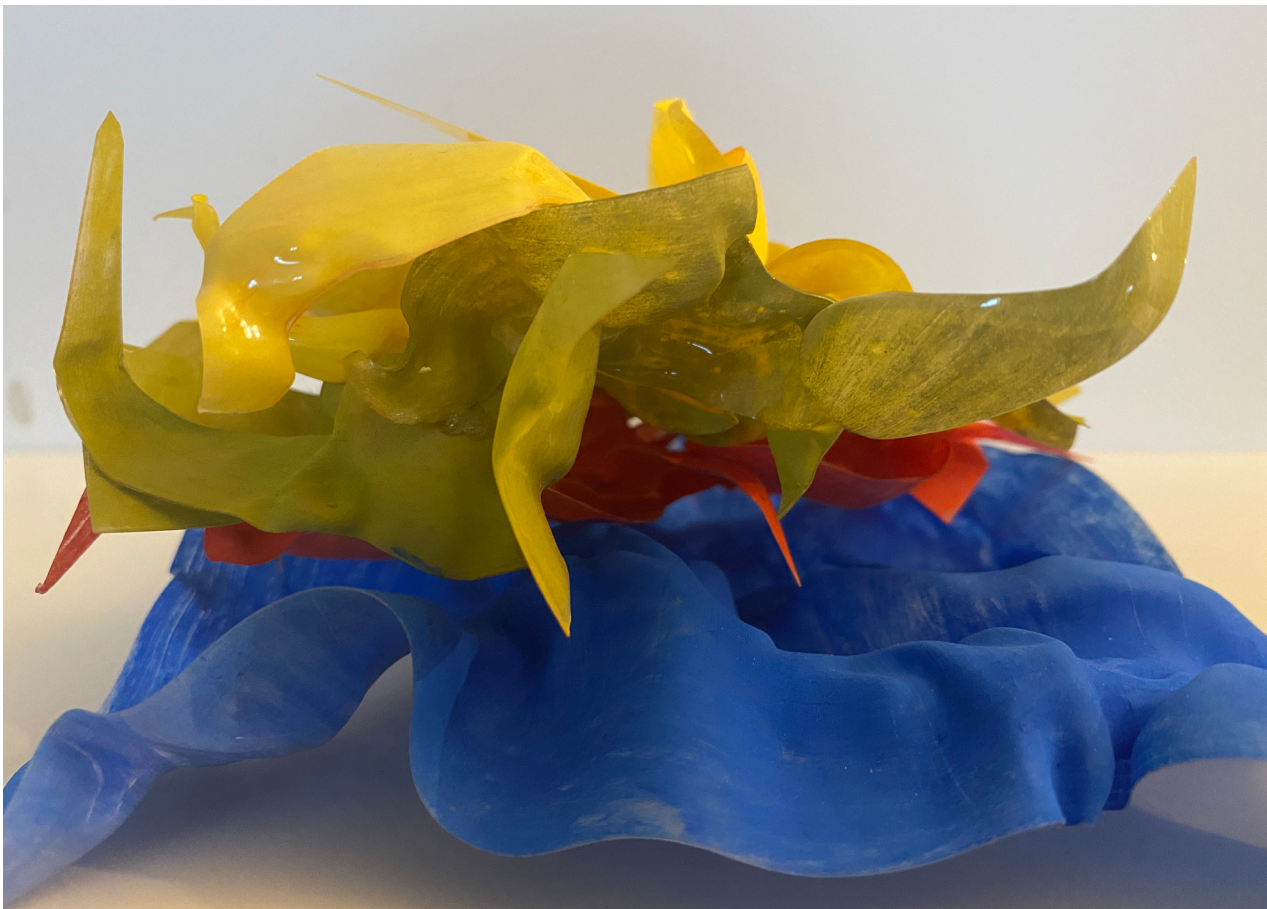
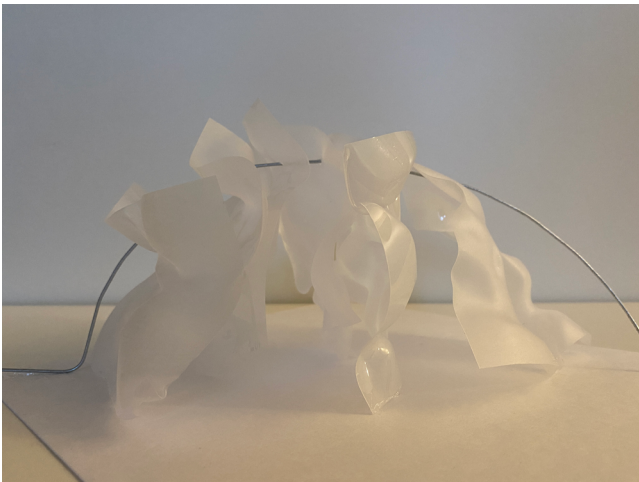
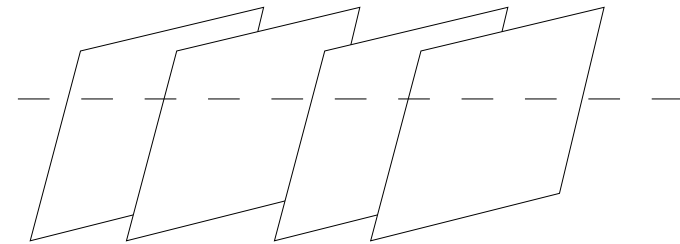
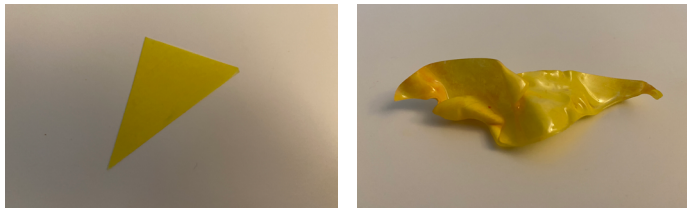
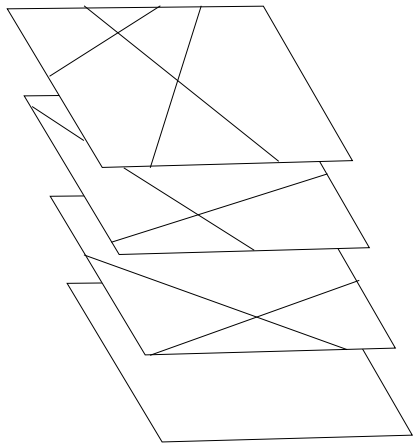
- UESING
- ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS
- OVERLAPPING
- AD HOC
- IMPROVISATION





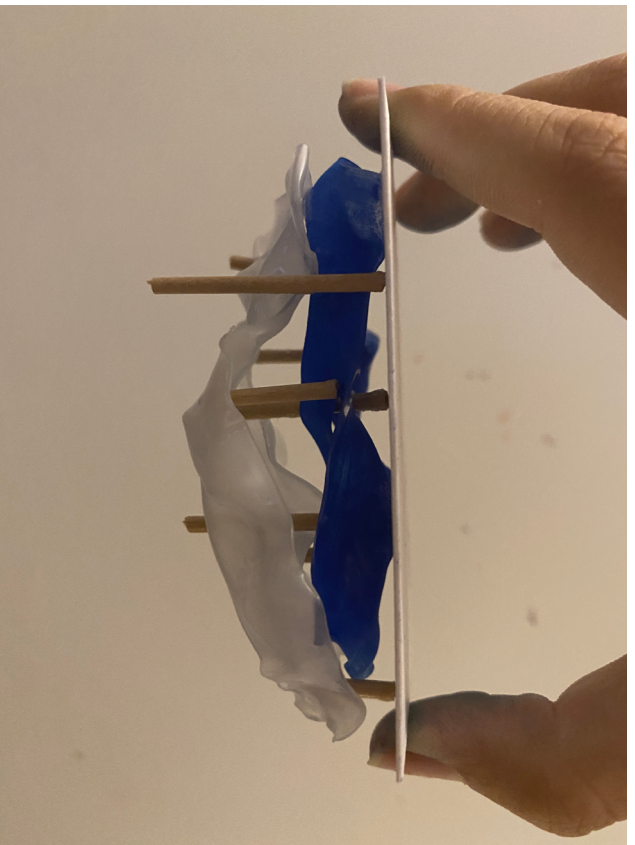
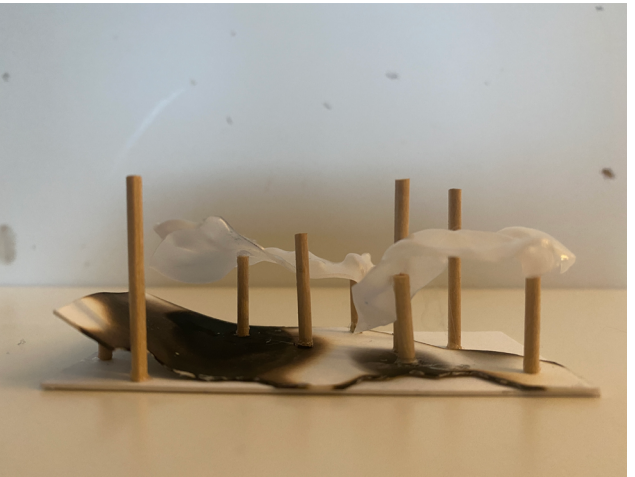
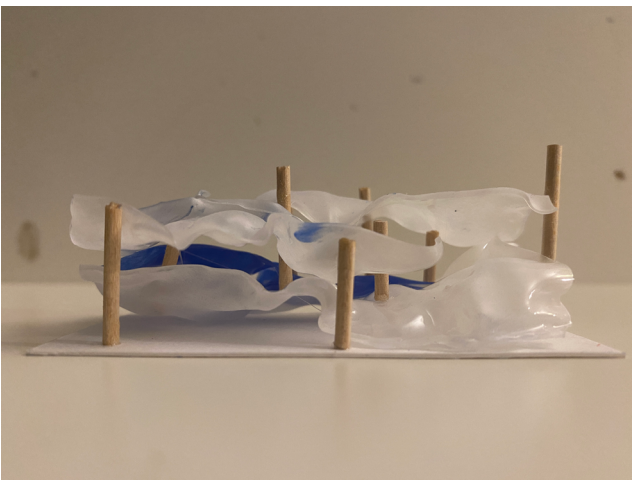
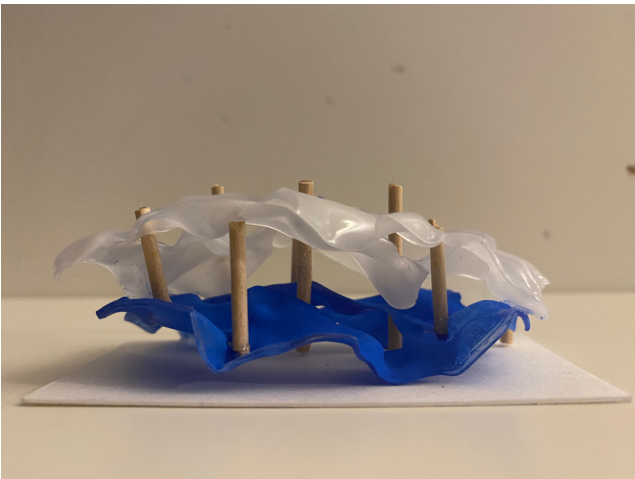
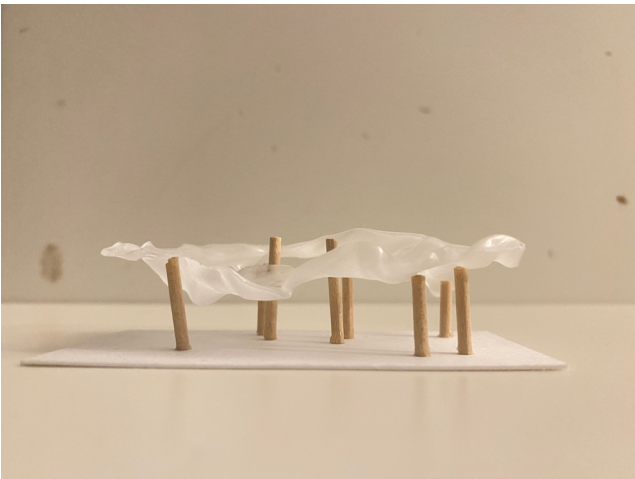
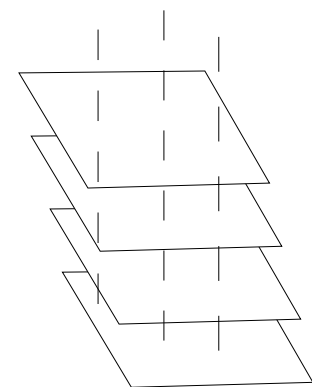
WEEK 2: ASSEMBLAGE

- OVERLAPPING
- 2.5D
- TIME
- IMPROVISATION
- COLOUR & TRANSPARENCY

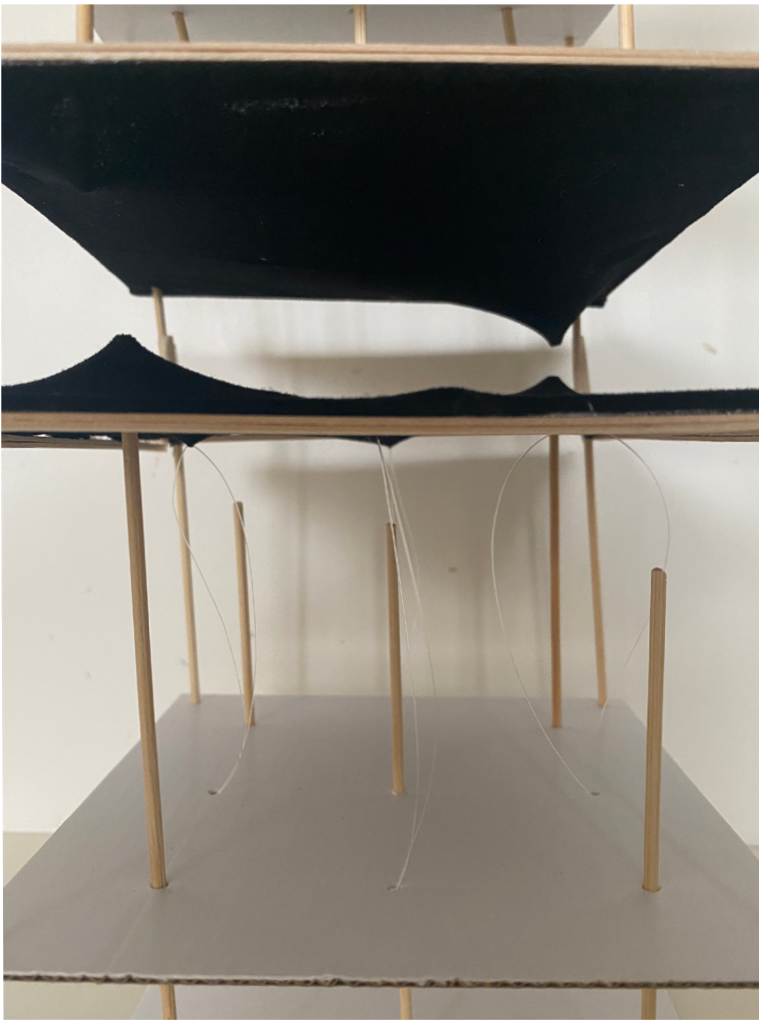
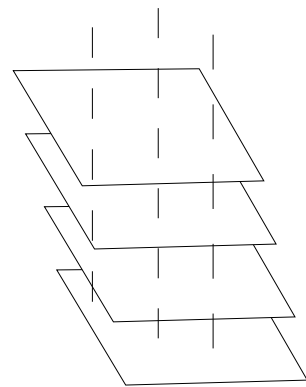


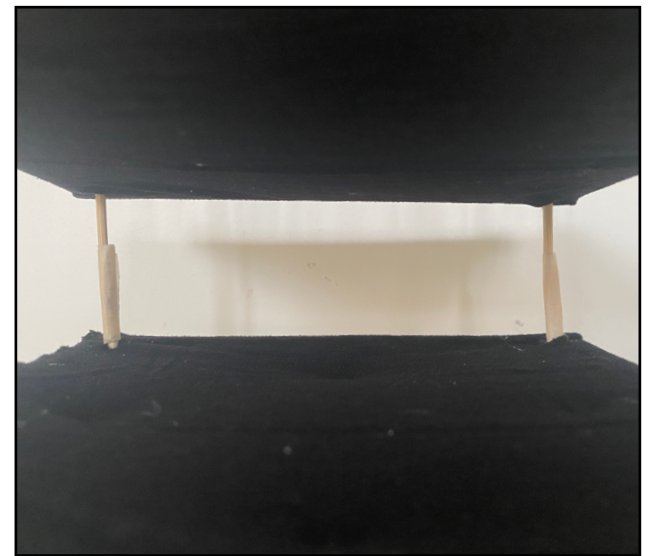
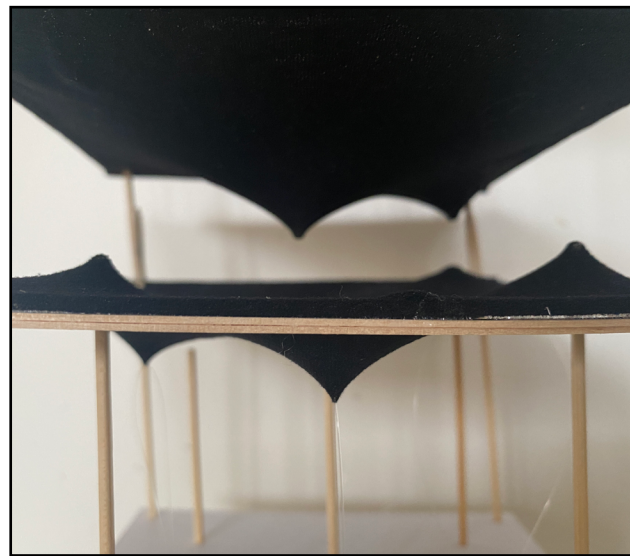
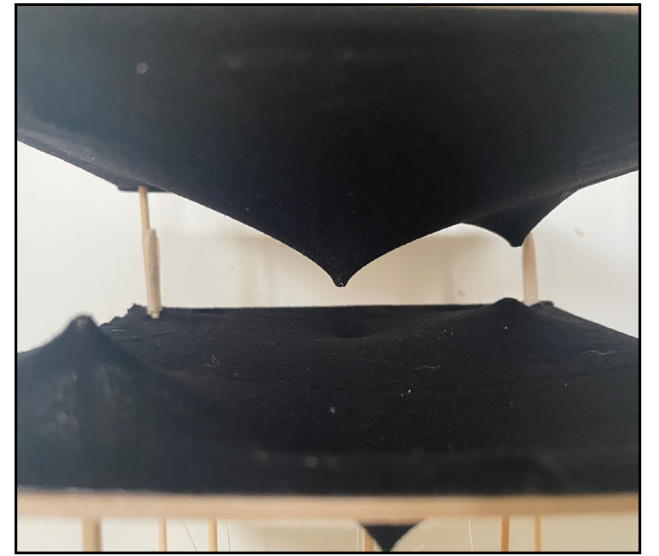
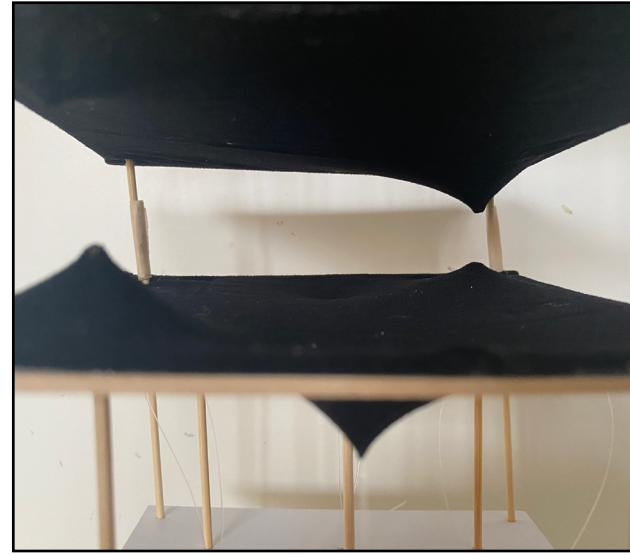
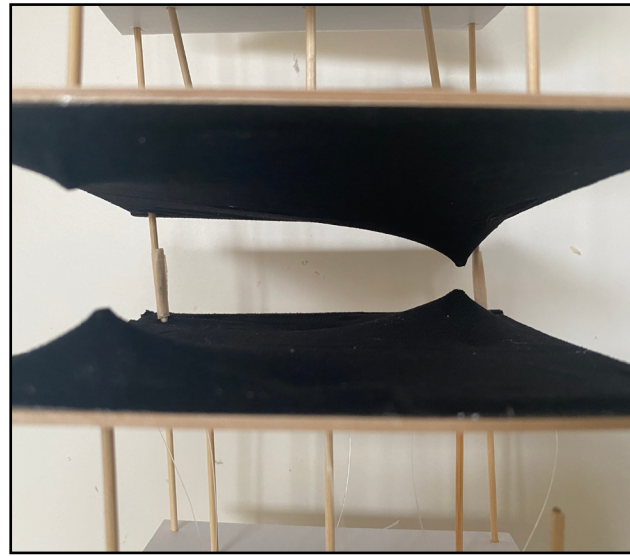
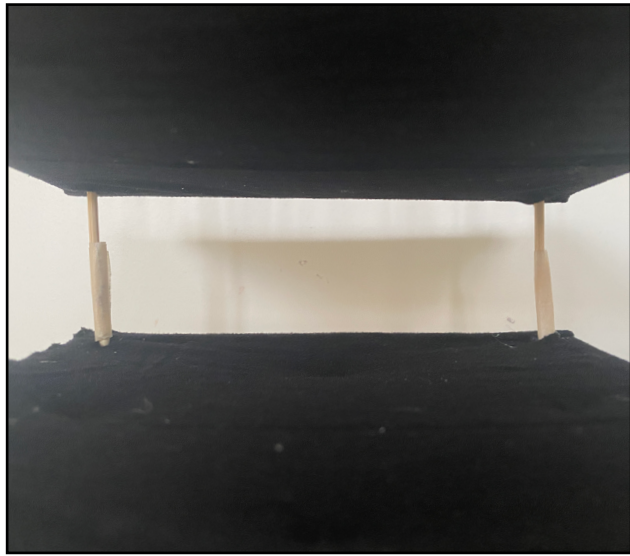
WEEK 3: ATMOSPHERE

- DESIGN & IMPROVISATION
- FRAMEWORK
- FLEXIBILIY
- TRANSPARENCY
- ACCESSIBILITY



WEEK 3: ATMOSPHERE



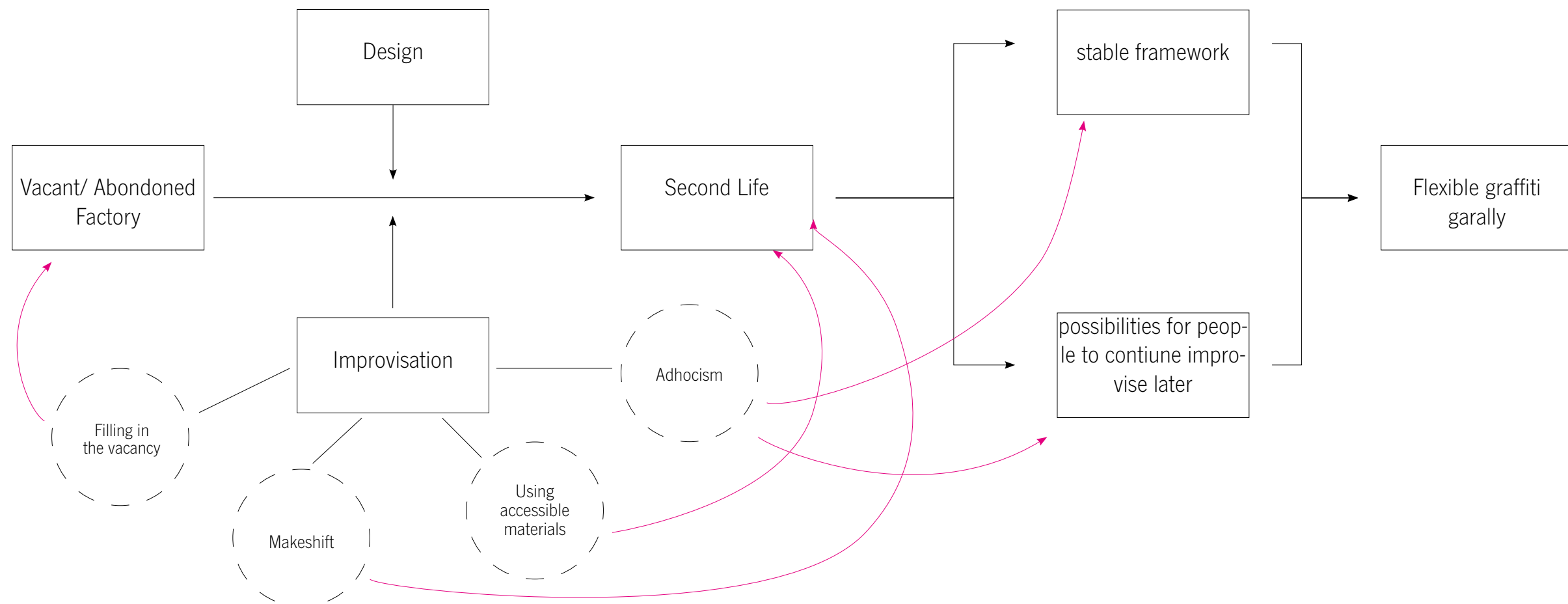


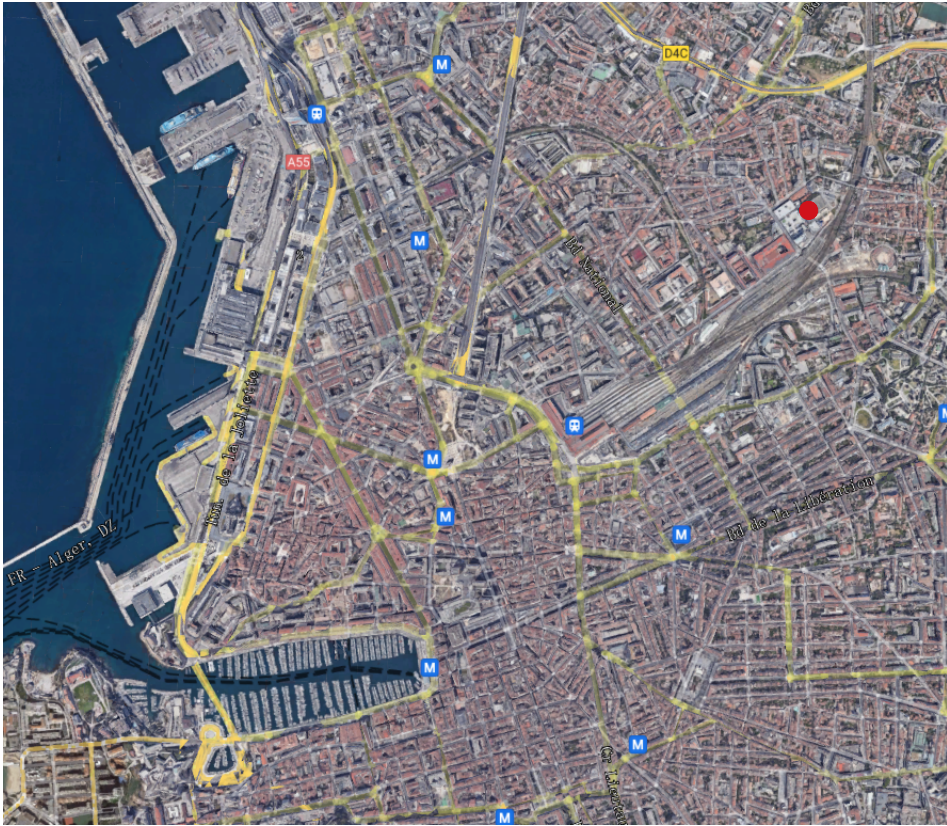
PART 5. STATEMENT OF INTENT

Improvisation is a more ad hoc, spontaneous and bottom-up response, which is more precise than typical architectural and urban design to respond to the dynamic changes of the environment and problems. It has no long-term plan, and the results are temporary, but the advantage is that it can quickly respond to the current situation. This is a critical quality, and I hope my project is a combination of design and improvisation: after my design process, preserving the possibilities for people to continuous DIY on the project. So the project is not a one time work, nor am I the only designer.

As an architect, what I can design for both Marseille and Marseilliers? In the design project, I want to tackle the urgent questions of people's lives in Marseille in relation to architecture and urban space, such as housing and the market. I plan to use leftover space and vacant corner lot to develop a 'bridge' to connect Marseille and Marseilliers better. I plan to squeeze a stable architectural framework that does not affect the existing buildings much in marseille to offer more usable space for people. And giving residents space to improvise within the framework to make it more in line with their actual needs.

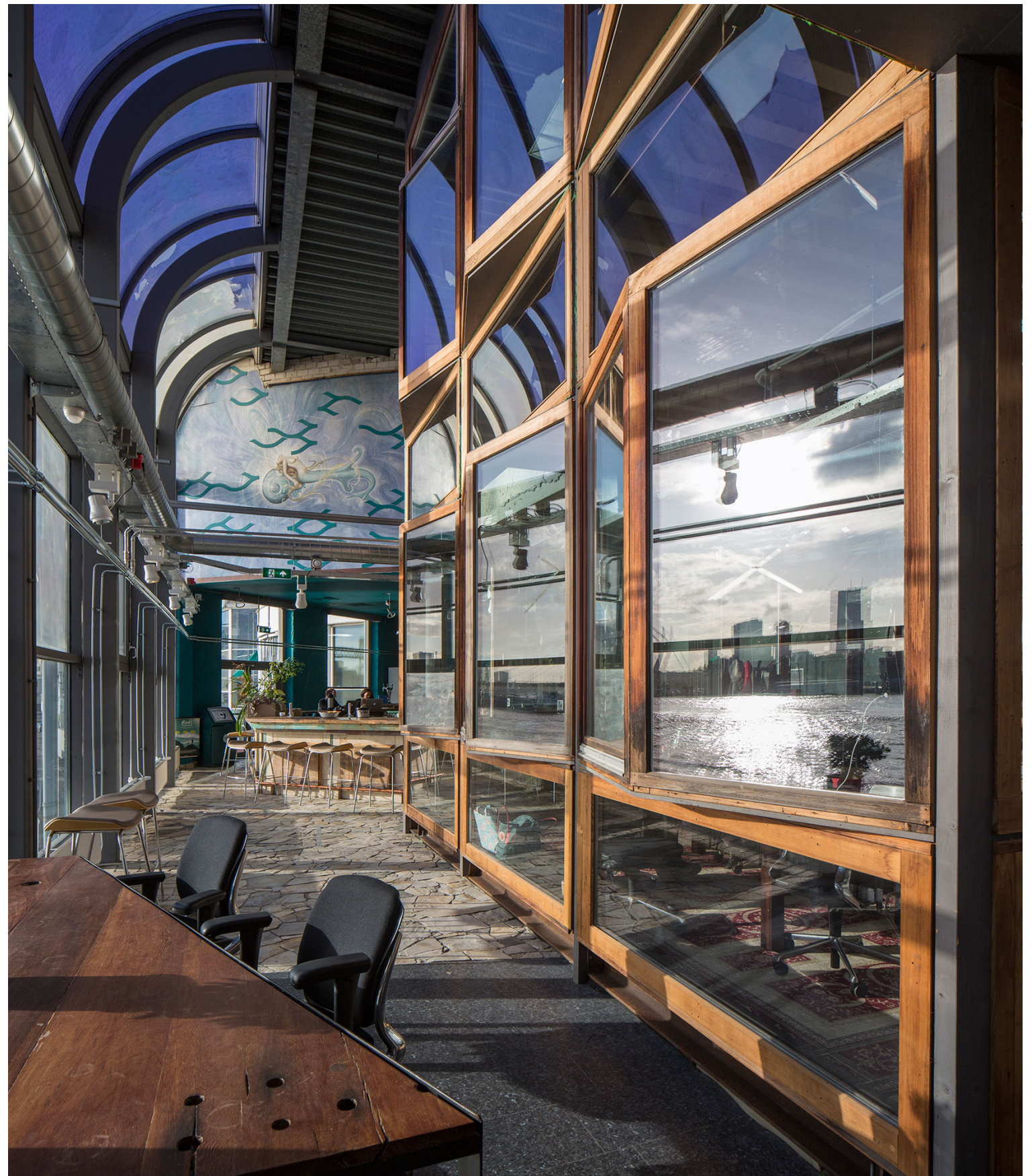
I want to explore how to create a belt between city and inhabitants and let the project react more quickly to urban and people's constantly changing requirements. I don't want to define all the space at one time, but only to create a stable architectural framework for the city, and focus on leaving materials, space and possibilities for users to do future improvise. I will research how to establish the rules for giving people the freedom to improvisational practice to meet their current needs and at the same time take things under control. I try to make the project a combination of my design and people's improvisation. It is constantly evolving throughout its life cycle, and its vitality comes from continuous adjustment to dynamically adapt to people's needs at all times.





BLUECITY OFFICES

- transformed the former discotheque into 100 circular workplaces, varying from shared to private offices and fixed or flexible workplaces.
- reused window frames as partition walls; reused steel



OFFICE Q-DANCE

- an open structure with concentration work units
- Optimal use of the qualities of the location, the existing buildings and the materials;
- A minimal ecological footprint and a positive impact on the user experience and the environment.

