

**PRACTICAL ADHOCISM IN
TBILISI'S SUBURBS**

RESEARCH INTO ADHOCIST
PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

When discussing non-pedigreed architecture, Rudofsky notes, “The humaneness of this architecture ought to bring forth some response in us.” This sentiment resonates strongly with informal architecture as well. Charles Jenks, in his manifesto *Adhocism*, further emphasizes this connection: “By addressing immediate needs and combining ad hoc elements, the individual creates, sustains, and transcends himself. Shaping one’s local environment to fulfil personal desires is essential to mental health; the current environment, blank and unresponsive, fosters idiocy and brainwashing.” While this statement may be provocative, it highlights an important lesson for our field: there is much to be learned from the creativity and adaptability inherent in improvised architecture.

This project examines informal architecture in Tbilisi’s suburbs, shaped by the city’s complex socio-political history. Under Soviet rule, architecture was dictated by centralized planning, enforcing uniformity. After the Soviet Union’s collapse, Georgia’s housing landscape transformed amidst political instability, economic hardship, and weak governance, fuelling a wave of informal architectural practices.

The research is part of the ‘Transient Liquidities along the New Silk Road IV’ graduation studio, organized by the Borders & Territories group. It investigates sites where unconventional spatial conditions emerge—spaces rich in meaning and potential but often overlooked in architectural discourse. By focusing on architecture’s relationship with its socio-political and environmental contexts, the studio aims to challenge traditional narratives and provide tools to critique and enrich the discipline.

Today, 95% of Georgia’s housing is privatized, making it one of the highest rates globally. In Tbilisi, rising family sizes and limited housing options have driven residents to extend or subdivide existing homes, transforming detached houses into dense settlements. These extensions, built ad hoc, often lack formal planning. Over decades, attached individual housing has emerged as a prevalent typology, reflecting both economic necessity and cultural patterns of multi-generational living.¹

1. Singh, Salukvadze, & Budovitch, 2015

The project focuses on the materiality and architectural solutions of this built environment, exploring creative solutions. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as architecture without architects, post-occupancy and the idea of *adhocism*, it examines how these dynamics shape Tbilisi’s suburbs.

ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT ARCHITECTS

In *Architecture Without Architects*², Bernard Rudofsky, writing within the context of his time, challenged the narrowly defined discipline of architectural history and its conventional glorification of power and wealth. He repositions the art of building as a universal phenomenon, emphasizing the often-overlooked contributions of communal and vernacular architecture.

2. Rudofsky, 1964

Conventional architectural history, according to Rudofsky, was profoundly skewed. It serves as little more than an anthology of edifices that celebrate power, privilege, and wealth. The grand temples of gods (true or false), the palaces of monarchs, and the mansions of merchant princes dominate the narrative, leaving the dwellings of common people conspicuously absent. This preoccupation with “noble architecture” once served a purpose; architects of previous generations looked to these ancient relics and ruins for inspiration, drawing from them as models of excellence.

However, in the modern context, this selective history feels increasingly irrelevant. Contemporary structures, whether they are banking headquarters or railway stations, no longer need to mimic historical forms to inspire trust or confidence. The insistence on such self-imposed limitations seems outdated, even absurd, in a time when architectural expression seeks to move beyond pastiche and towards more meaningful innovation.

Rudofsky’s work advocates for a reassessment of architecture as a communal enterprise rather than the product of isolated genius. He cites Pietro Belluschi’s conception of communal architecture as a form of art created not by a select few but through the collective effort of entire communities. This architecture, rooted in shared experiences and common heritage, embodies a profound understanding of human needs and environmental harmony.

The contrast between the architecture of so-called “underdeveloped” countries and the architectural blight of industrialized nations is stark. Where the former displays a serenity and humaneness born of practical wisdom, the latter often prioritizes profit and prestige at the expense of liveability and beauty. Rudofsky contends that even in the context of a “raw civilization,” such as ours, there are invaluable lessons to be drawn from vernacular practices.

One of Rudofsky’s sharpest critiques is aimed at the professionalization of architecture. He challenges the tendency to attribute exceptional insight to architects and specialists, pointing out that many are more preoccupied with business and prestige than with the art of living. In modern society, the art of living—rooted in principles like frugality,

cleanliness, and respect for the environment—is neither taught nor encouraged.

This failure to cultivate an art of living has broader implications. Rudofsky argues that architectural excellence in vernacular traditions arises not from technical contrivances but from a profound sense of human need and practicality. The beauty of vernacular structures, often dismissed as accidental, is in fact the result of careful, intelligent responses to real-world challenges.

Above all, Rudofsky extols the humaneness of vernacular architecture. These structures prioritize the general welfare over the pursuit of profit and progress. Unlike many modern buildings, they reflect an ethos of sustainability and community well-being. Rudofsky aligns this philosophy with the thoughts of historian Johan Huizinga: “The expectation that every new discovery or refinement of existing means must contain the promise of higher values or greater happiness an extremely naive thought. ... It is not in the least paradoxical to say that a culture may founder on real and tangible progress.”

Rudofsky’s insights compel us to reconsider our priorities in architectural practice. The vernacular traditions he champions offer an alternative to the relentless drive for novelty and technological progress that often defines modern architecture. By focusing on communal values, environmental harmony, and practical wisdom, we can create spaces that are not only functional but also deeply humane.

In essence, the architecture of “lesser people” that Rudofsky celebrates is not a relic of the past but a living testament to the power of simplicity, frugality, and respect for creation. It invites us to look beyond aesthetics and prestige, urging us to prioritize human well-being and environmental stewardship in the spaces we design.

POST-OCCUPANCY

3. Brand, 1997

In the book *How Buildings Learn*³, author Stewart Brand introduces the concept of post-occupancy, exploring the relationship between a building’s design and its ongoing transformation over time. Brand, known for creating the *Whole Earth Catalog*—a countercultural magazine—begins by addressing the inherent duality in the word “building.” The term encompasses both the process of building (the verb) and the result of that process (the noun). This duality presents a tension: while architecture aspires to permanence, a building is never truly static. It is a continuous process—always “building” and “rebuilding.” This prompts a provocative question: can our ideas of architecture evolve to align more closely with the reality of a building’s dynamic nature?

Brand points out that while some buildings are designed as complete spatial wholes, none are created as temporal wholes. This idea is encapsulated in Churchill's famous line, "We shape our buildings, and then they shape us." However, Brand argues that this phrase truncates the fuller cycle of reality. We shape buildings, they shape us, and then we reshape them again—endlessly. Function reforms form, perpetually.

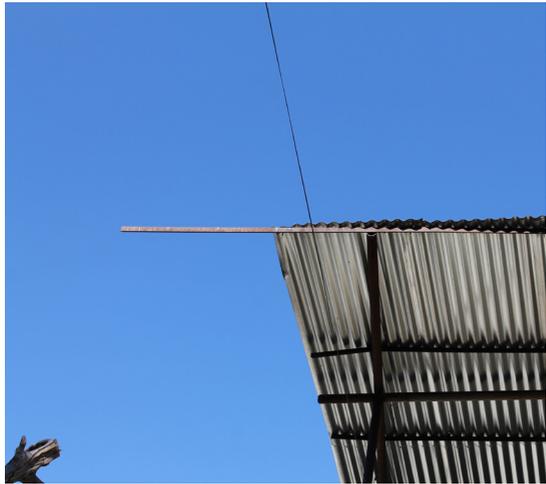
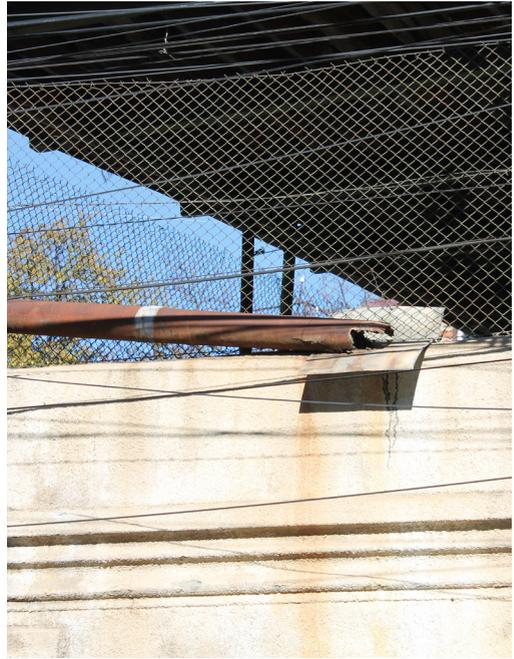
Brand suggests that buildings are more than just structures; they are repositories of stories. However, these stories only emerge when buildings are allowed to evolve rather than remain preserved or concealed. The past of a building—its history, wear, and transformation—can be flaunted as part of its identity. In this way, the building becomes a narrative, its layers of use and adaptation contributing to its ongoing story.

Yet, this evolution is not entirely under the control of the building's users. There are three powerful forces that continually push buildings in new directions: technology, money, and fashion. These forces shape how buildings are altered and how they evolve. Money, plays the most significant role in shaping the future of buildings.

"Form follows funding," Brand notes. If there is surplus money to spare, it will almost certainly be invested in alterations to their buildings. These changes may range from simple fixes to modifications meant to display wealth. A building, then, is not simply a place where people live or work; it is an asset, a piece of property subject to the whims of the market. In cities, where land value is often measured by the square foot, buildings are treated as fungible commodities, easily traded, transformed, or demolished to meet the economic pressures of a rapidly changing market.

Domestic buildings are often the most dynamic, responding directly to the changing needs of the family. Homes transform through intimate, daily interactions between the occupants and the space. 'The house and its occupants mold to each other twenty-four hours a day, and the building accumulates the record of that intimacy.'

Vernacular architecture, as Brand points out, often lacks formal plans. In fact, the absence of formal plans is not a weakness but a sign of cultural strength. The process of designing and building a house in this context is not governed by rigid architectural principles but by a shared understanding of what a house should be, shaped by the collective experience of those who live within it. The vernacular 'architect' works with what is available in the local context—materials, techniques,



Examples of adhocist solutions in
Tbilisi's suburbs

and traditions that have evolved over time. This approach results in buildings that may appear simple or repetitive but are, in fact, highly individualized solutions to specific challenges. By working within established parameters, the vernacular architect avoids the trap of reinventing forms and instead focuses on solving particular problems with skill and creativity.

ADHOCISM

In *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*⁴, Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver articulate a response to the rigid orthodoxy of Modernist architecture and design. Jencks coined the term “adhocism” in 1968 to describe a design philosophy that embraces the immediate and the improvised. Adhocism advocates for individual creativity through the combination of disparate parts and systems, aiming to create meaning through the act of making. By relying on available resources and adapting existing systems in novel ways, adhocism emerges as both a critique of deterministic ideologies and a celebration of human ingenuity.

4. Jencks en Silver, 1972

Adhocism derives its name from the Latin *ad hoc*, meaning “for this specific purpose.” It involves addressing immediate needs by creatively combining available resources to solve problems quickly and efficiently. This philosophy opposes the homogenizing forces of industrial standardization and bureaucratic delay, emphasizing instead the immediacy of action and the individuality of solutions. Jencks provocatively notes that the word “adhocism” itself is an example of its principles: a linguistic bricolage that highlights its own improvised genesis.

Jencks contrasts adhocism with deterministic ideologies that stifle human freedom. Modern architecture, with its standardized aesthetic and functional rigidity, becomes emblematic of a broader cultural conditioning that denies individuality. In opposition, adhocism restores agency by empowering individuals to shape their environments actively. It rejects the blank, unresponsive spaces of contemporary life, which Jencks identifies as detrimental to mental health and creativity, in favour of environments that encourage participation, flexibility, and a memorialization of past actions.

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss’s concept of bricolage offers a useful lens for understanding adhocism. The bricoleur, like the adhocist, works with what is immediately available, repurposing tools and materials to meet specific needs. Unlike the engineer, who systematically designs new tools to transcend constraints, the bricoleur operates within constraints, relying on ingenuity and adaptability.

Adhocism draws a distinction between the intentionality of the adhocist and the randomness of trial-and-error approaches like behaviourism. While the behaviourist, as epitomized by J.B. Watson, emphasizes accidental discoveries and random manipulations, Jencks critiques this view for neglecting the purposeful mind behind successful creativity. Chance may assist discovery, but it is the prepared mind that discerns meaning and potential. Adhocism therefore situates improvisation within a framework of intentionality, where purpose and adaptability coexist.

Adhocism challenges deterministic philosophies that prioritize long-term planning over immediate action. Jencks warns against the totalitarian implications of ideologies that claim to define humanity's ultimate destiny, arguing instead for a pluralistic, open-ended approach to design and societal development. By embracing the uncertainty of future goals, adhocism reaffirms the importance of individual and collective freedom.

Nathan Silver further refines the concept by distinguishing between practical and intentional adhocism. Practical adhocism involves solving immediate problems using available resources, often in unconventional ways. Intentional adhocism, on the other hand, reflects an aspirational embrace of ambiguity and imperfection. Both modes emphasize adaptability, but intentional adhocism goes further by acknowledging the complexity and plurality of human needs.

Vernacular architecture—shaped by the constraints of local materials and knowledge—embodies practical adhocism. Yet as societies advance technologically, the role of the architect shifts to that of an adhocist mediator, navigating the competing demands of modern building practices. In this context, adhocism becomes a deliberate strategy for reconciling complexity with functional and expressive clarity.

Adhocism also addresses the erosion of meaning in modern design. The growing complexity and abstraction of modern objects render them both visually inarticulate and technically incomprehensible. Adhocism proposes a counter-aesthetic of functional expressiveness, wherein design makes visible the processes and struggles of its creation. This “art of articulated cataclysms,” as Jencks describes it, transforms difficulties into opportunities for expression.

The participatory nature of adhocism extends to the social realm. By empowering individuals to design their local environments, adhocism democratizes creativity. Rather than a city of ten thousand architects, Jencks advocates for a city of ten million architects, each contributing to a dynamic and pluralistic urban fabric.

CONCLUSION

Informal architecture teaches us valuable lessons in creativity, adaptability, and human-centred design. By focusing on communal values, practical wisdom, and environmental harmony, this practice shows that architecture can evolve in response to real-world needs rather than rigid conventions. The continuous cycle of shaping and reshaping buildings highlights the dynamic relationship between people and their environments.

Adhocism further emphasizes the importance of flexibility and individual creativity, challenging the rigid structures of formal design. By empowering communities to design their own spaces, adhocism democratizes creativity and offers a more inclusive approach to architecture.

These theories provide a framework for understanding how informal architecture, especially in places like Tbilisi's suburbs, offers a more adaptive, meaningful alternative to traditional, top-down architectural practices.



Practical adhocism at the
Chronicles of Georgia

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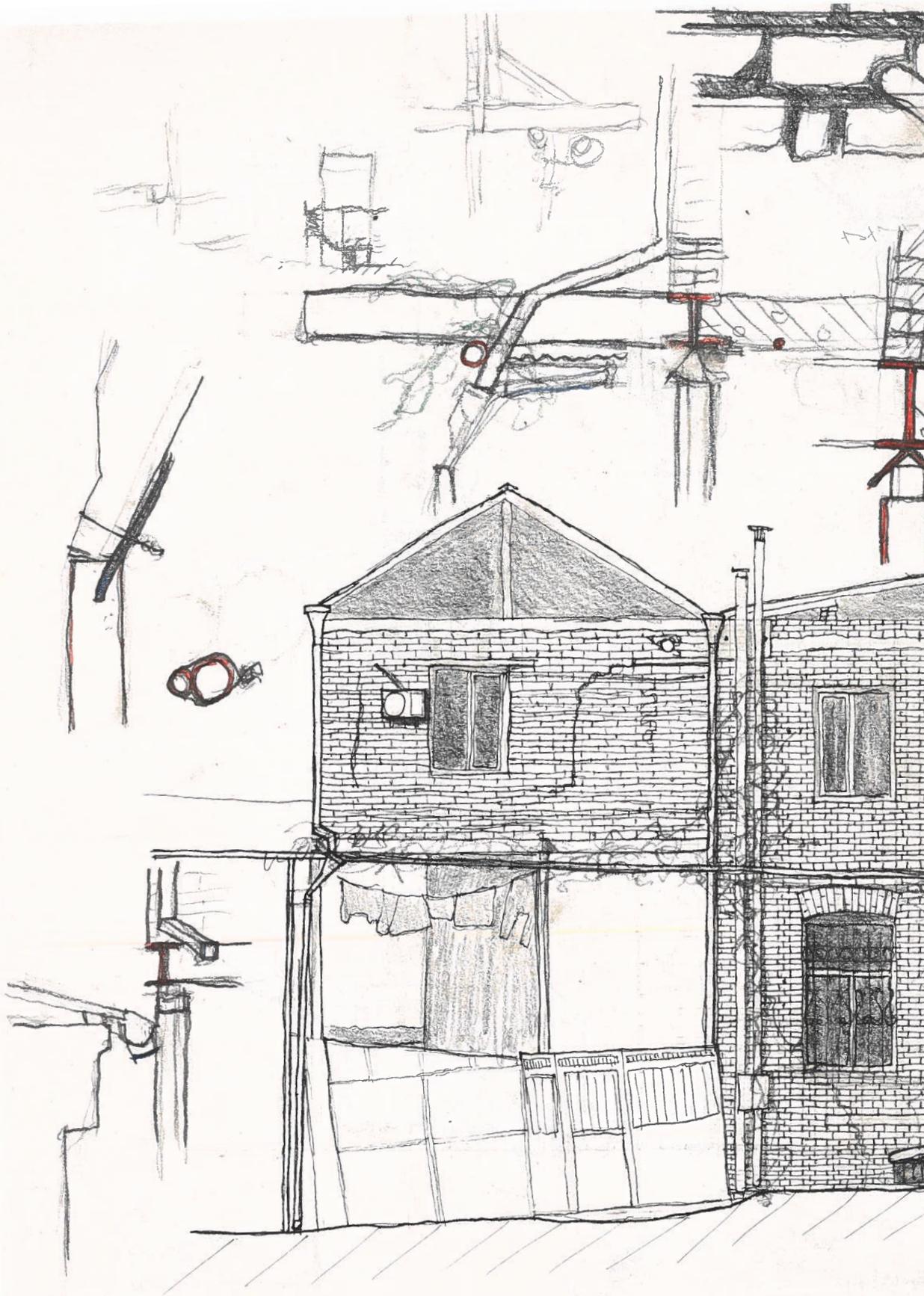
MAPPINGS

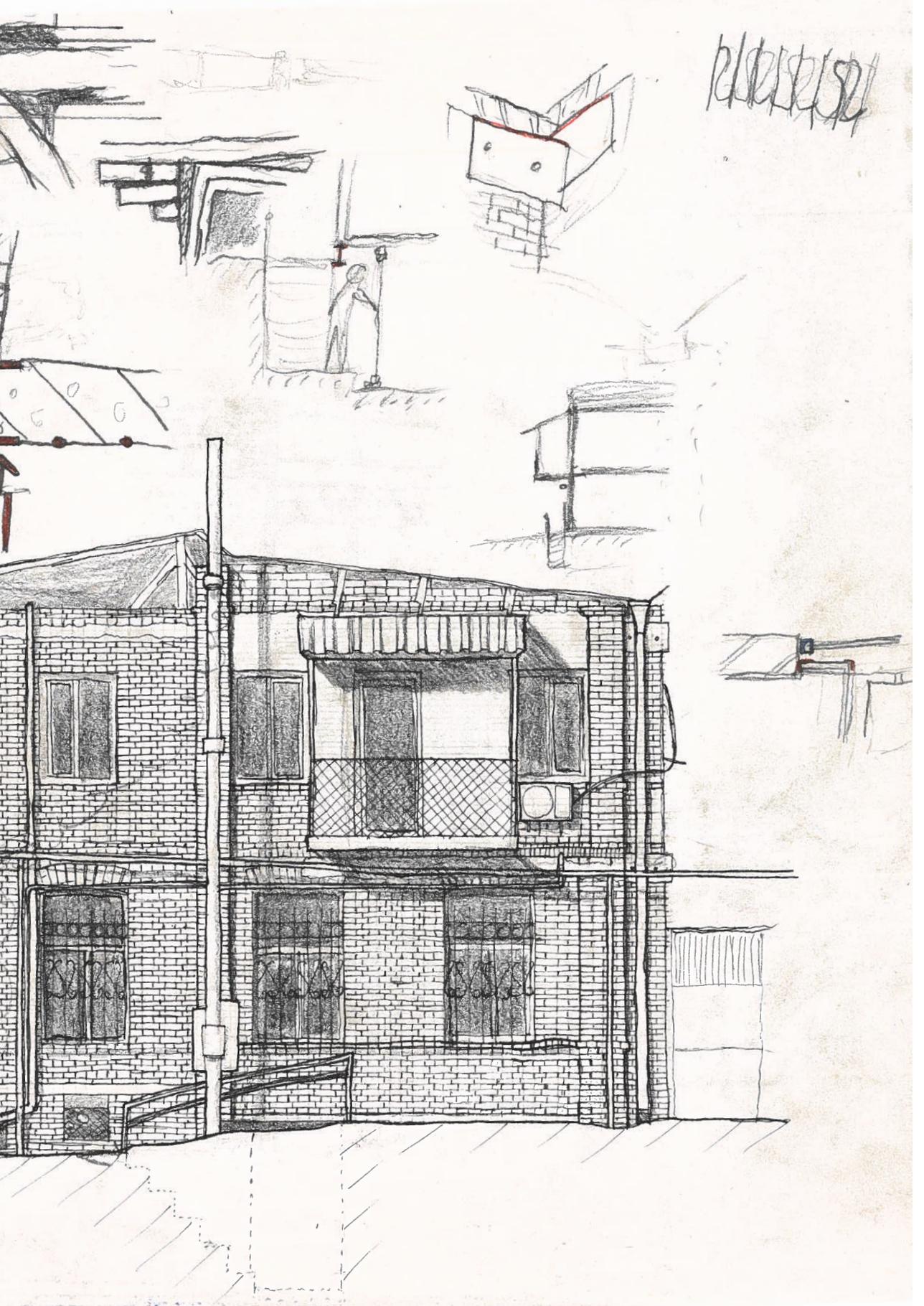
The process began with group-based mapping exercises to establish a starting point for individual projects. This effort produced a comprehensive map of power regimes that have shaped Tbilisi's development over time. A key theme that emerged from this exercise was the phenomenon of unregulated suburban growth, which became a focal point for further investigation.

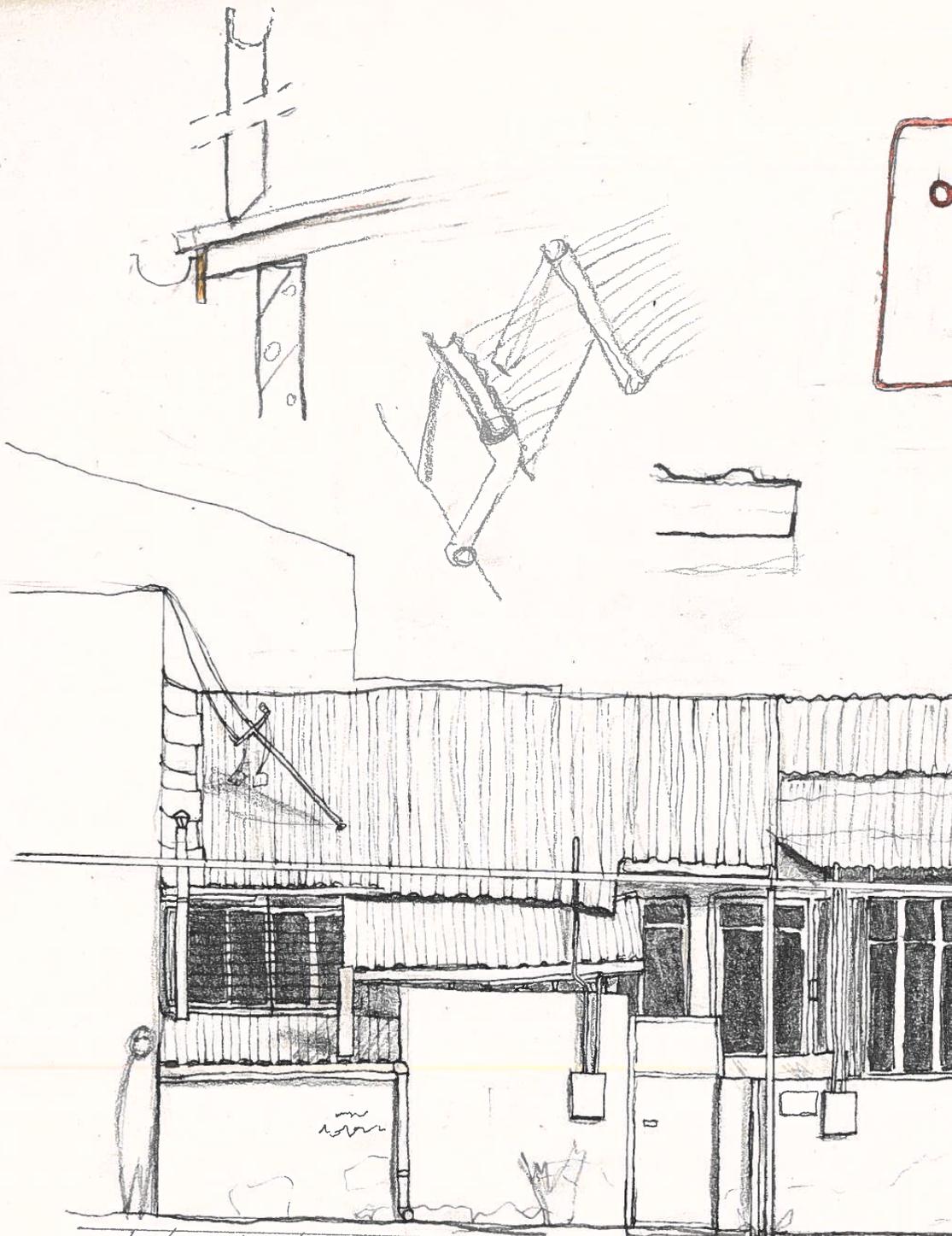
As the search for specific project sites began, a challenge arose: limited coverage on Google Street View made it difficult to identify an "optimal" location. However, discussions with local cityscape researchers revealed a recurring pattern in Tbilisi's urban growth. Generally, developments become less prestigious as they extend farther from the Kura River and rise higher in elevation. While this observation is a generalization, it provided a valuable starting point.

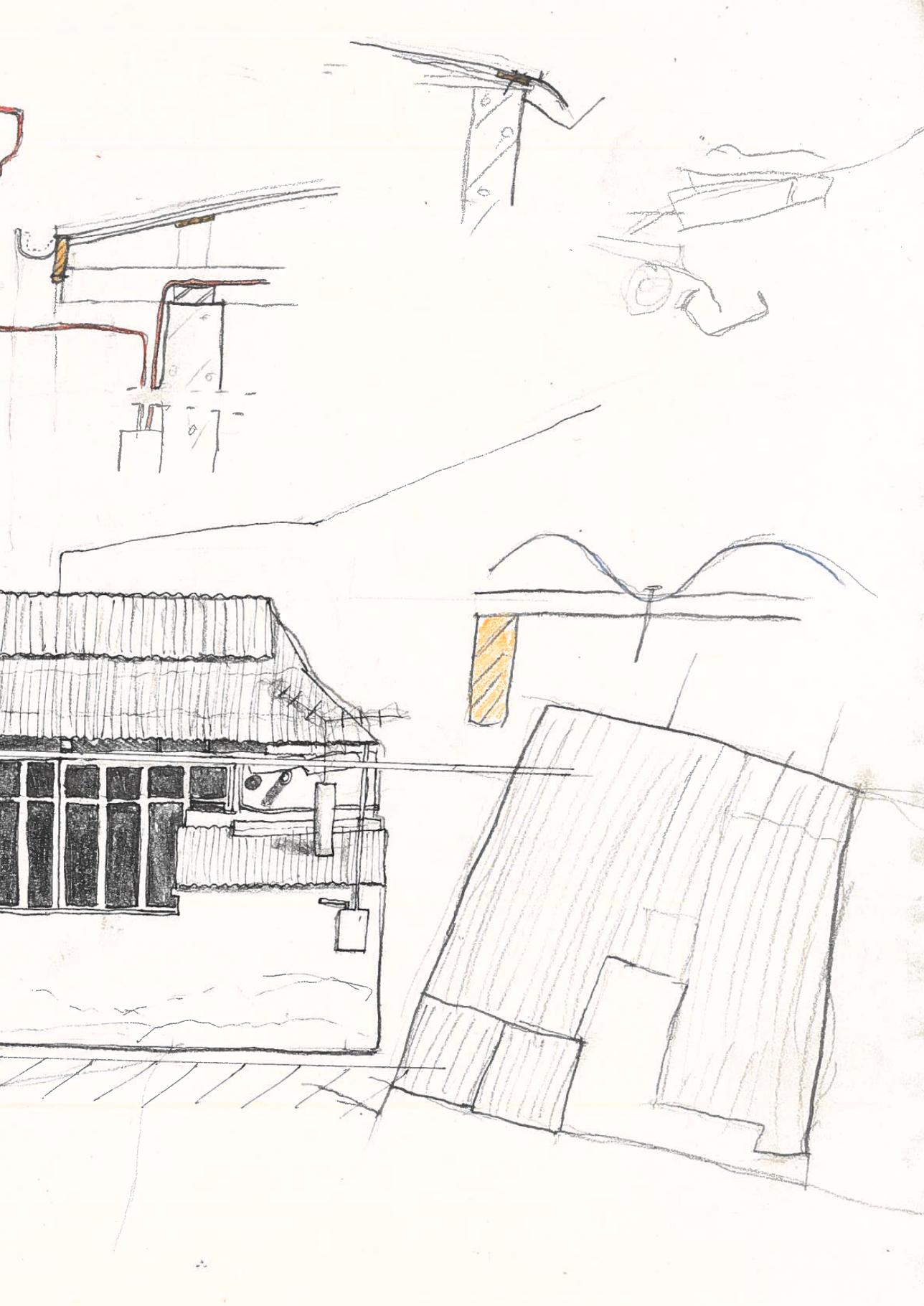
To address the lack of site specificity, one street was selected as a basis for fieldwork and on-site observations. Individual mapping exercises focused on analyzing and documenting the spatial and architectural conditions observed. Drawing inspiration from the works of Carlo Scarpa, Mario Ridolfi and Juliaan Lampens, detailed representations of informal and ad-hoc practices were created. These drawings (see following pages) emphasized technical solutions, materiality, and architectural transformations.

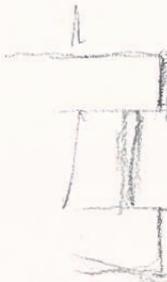
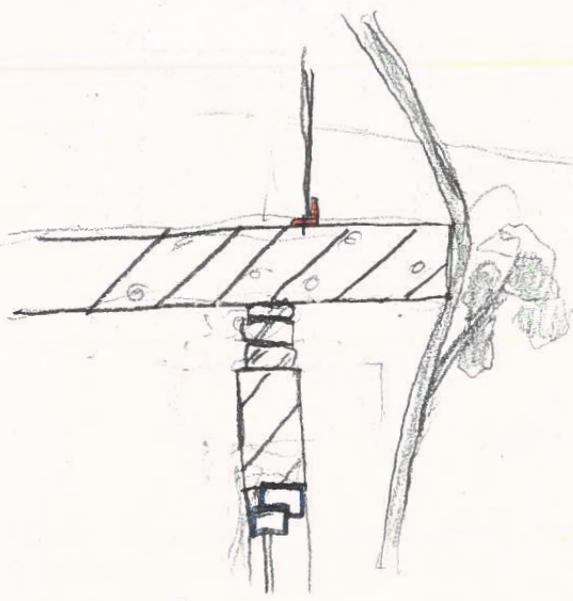
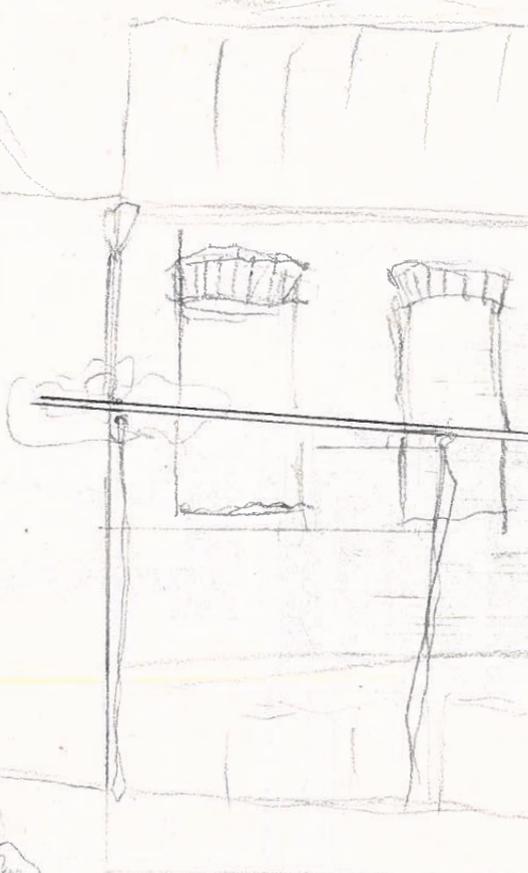
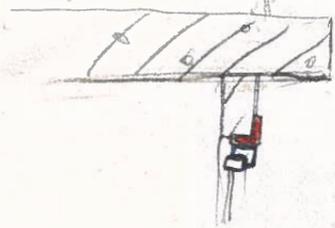
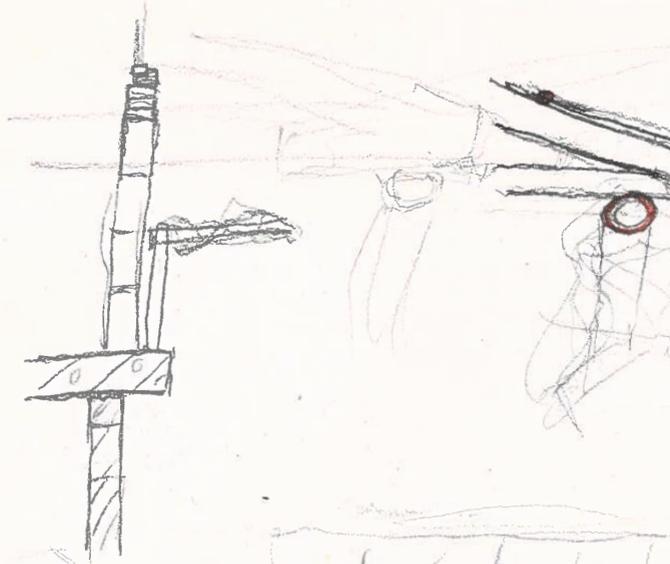
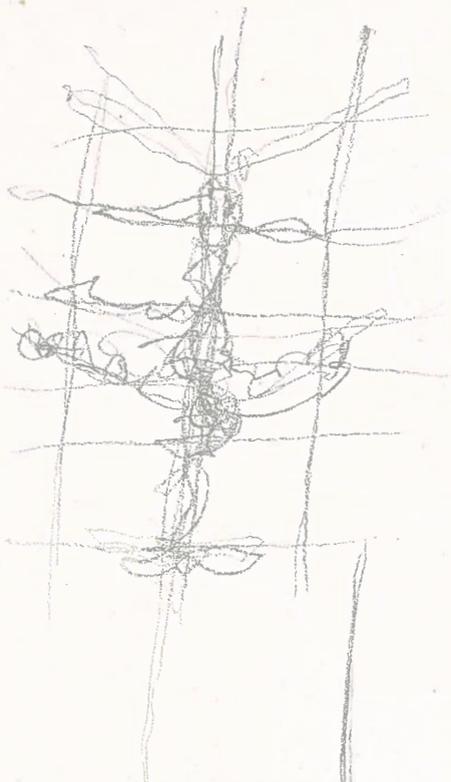


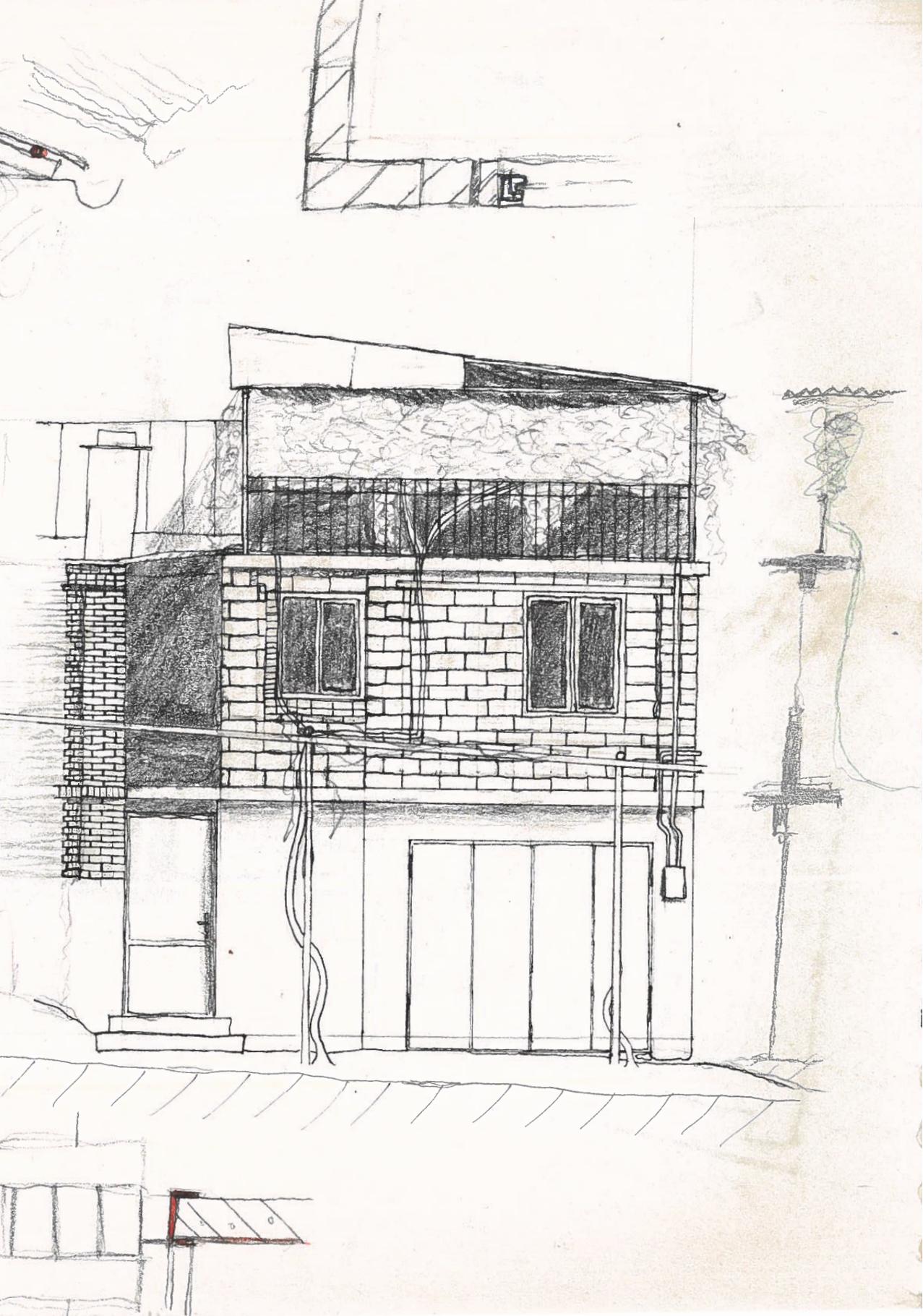


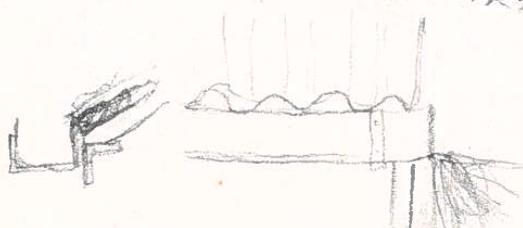
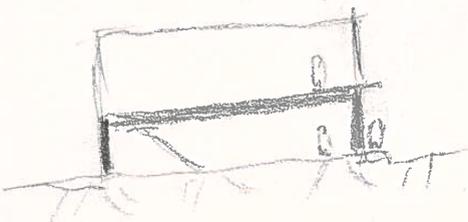
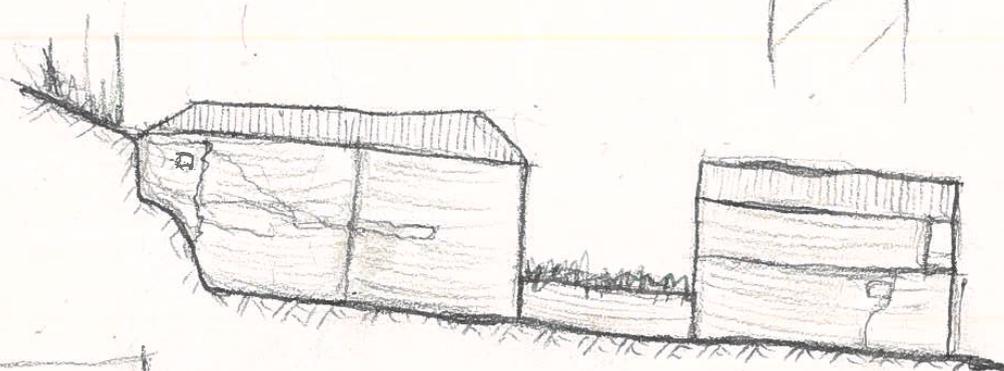
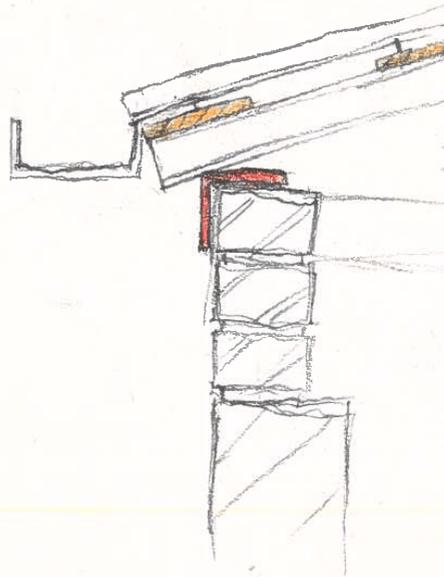
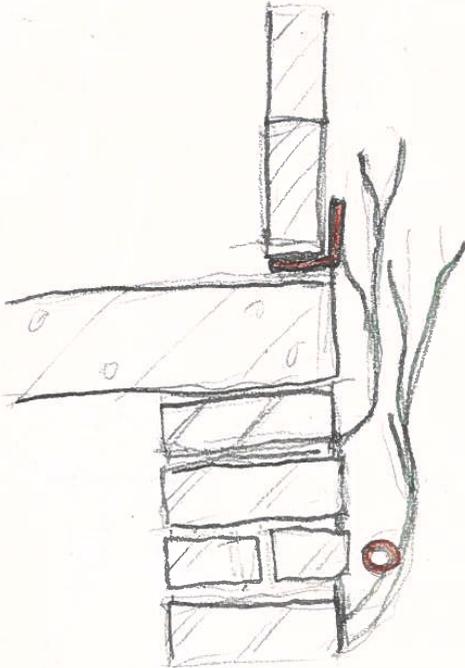
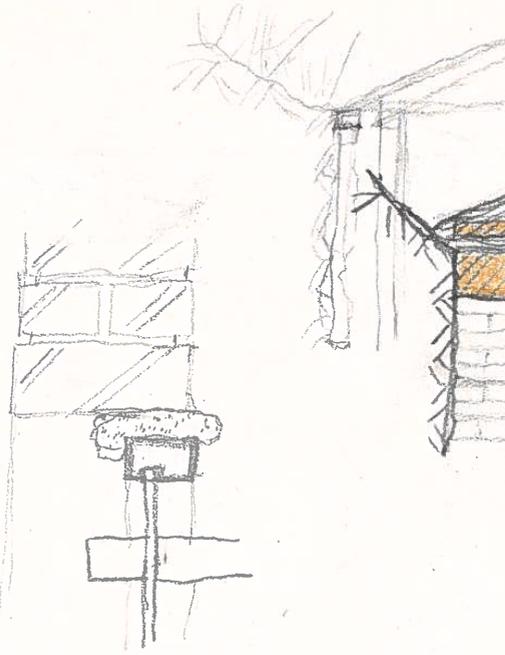
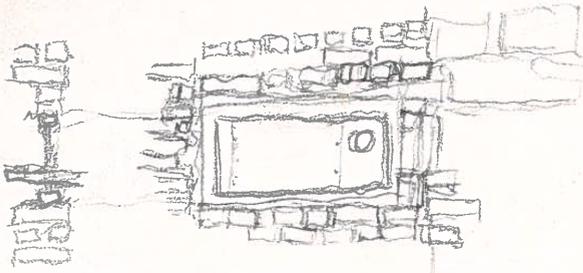


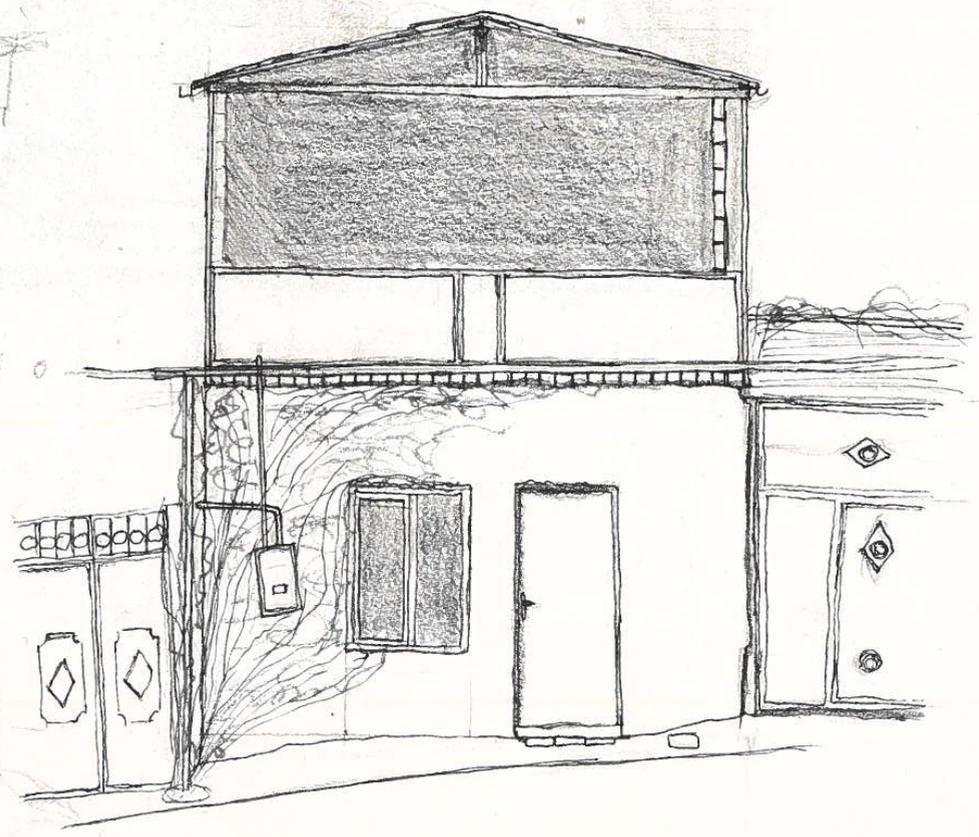
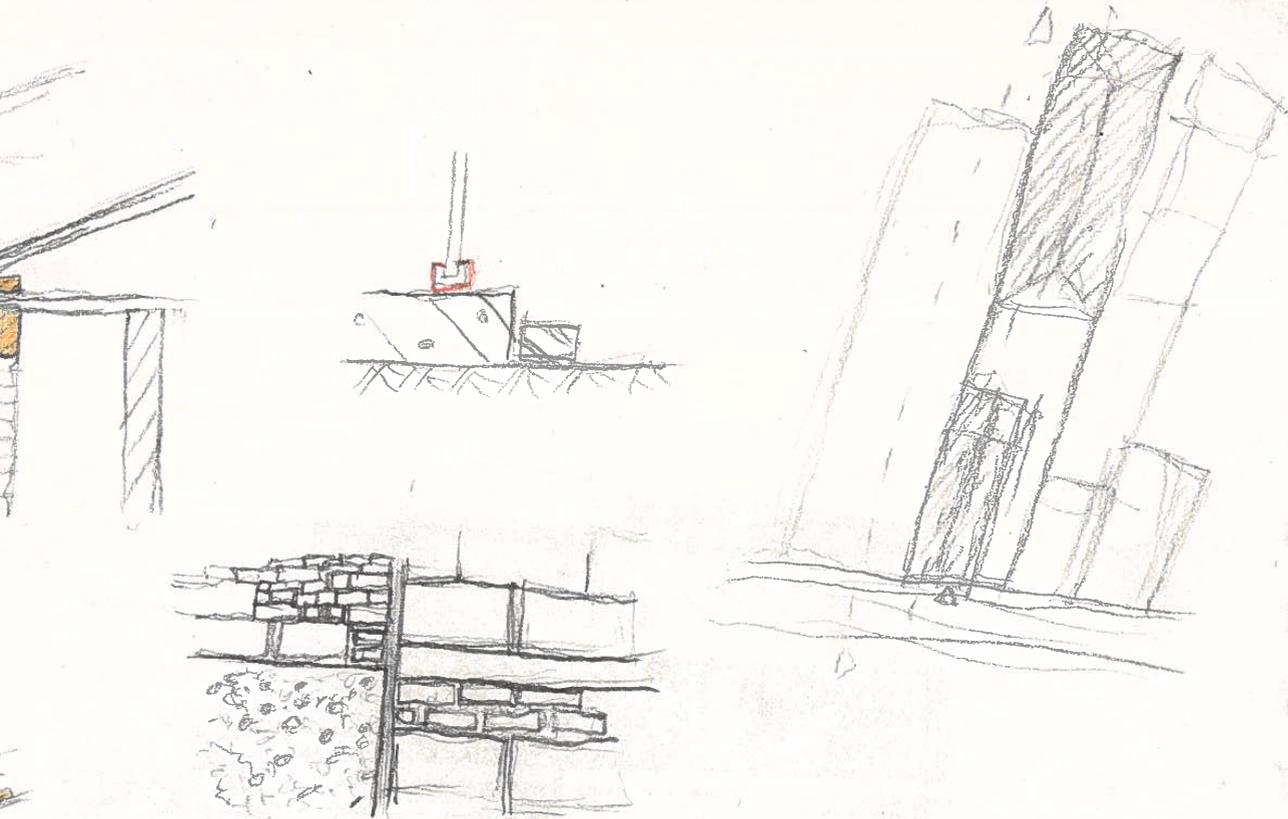














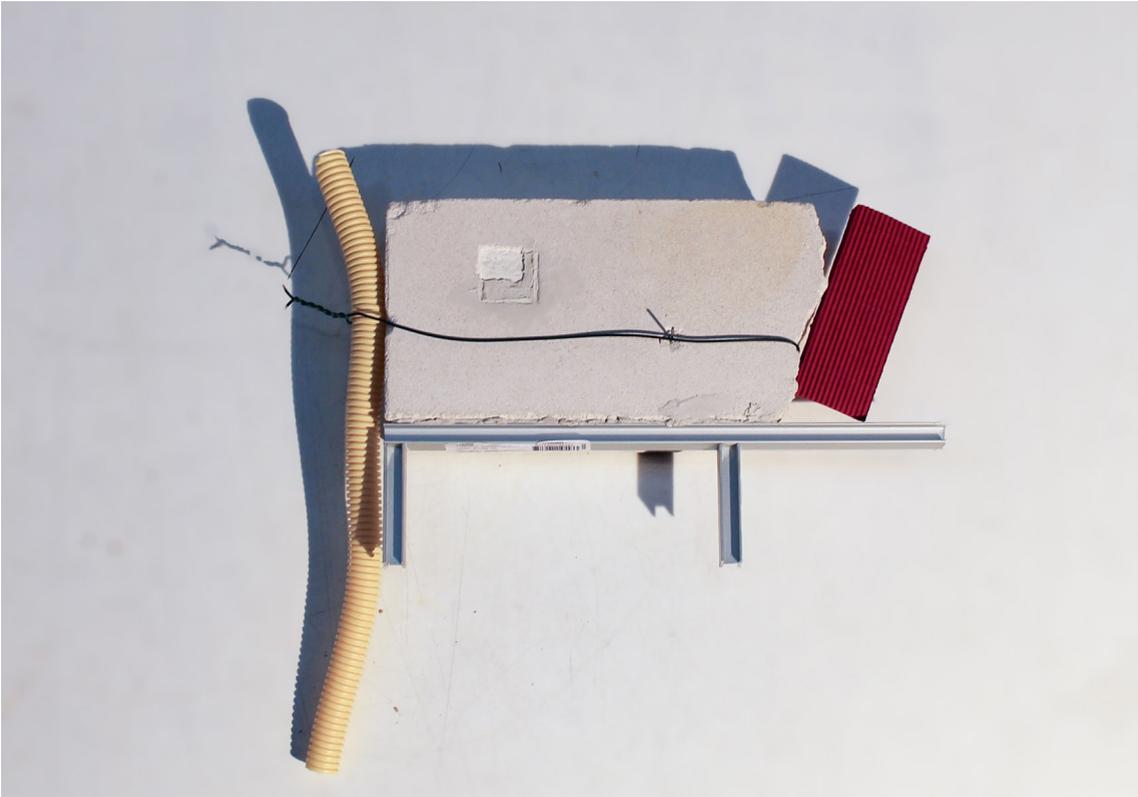
HETEROGENEITY

MO1 Site

Defining the site presents a challenge, as there is no 'specific site'.

This model reveals the inherent logic of the street—how it operates, evolves, and adapts. This process involves negotiating priorities, considering appropriation, and understanding the fluid relationship between formal and informal structures. In many ways, it alludes to themes explored in MO2, questioning boundaries and interactions. Initially, the focus became too material-driven, centering on tangible elements rather than broader dynamics. However, by wrapping and reframing the approach, the emphasis shifted, allowing for a deeper exploration of spatial contexts.

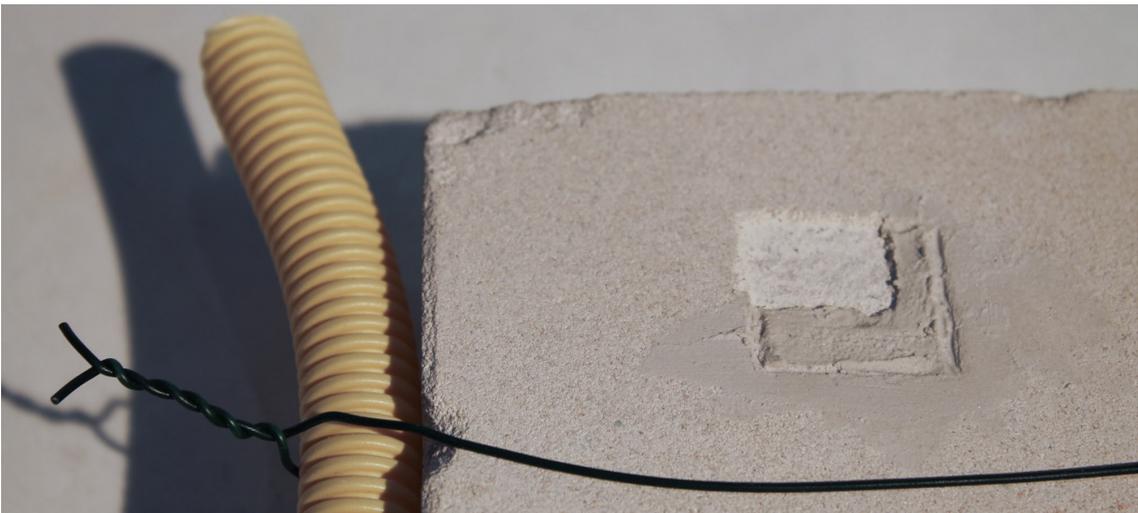




TENSIONS

MO2 Assemblage

The model operates in a scaleless manner, mirroring the mapping drawings. Since the site is already assembled in its own way, the model shifts focus to how elements come together—how materials, structures, and spaces interact. What may seem random at first glance is, in reality, highly deliberate, capturing the underlying tensions and frictions that emerge in an ad-hoc fashion. This approach takes inspiration from Richard Wentworth, whose work highlights the unintended yet purposeful nature of urban assemblages. However, the model became pastiche, slipping into an overly appropriative mode.



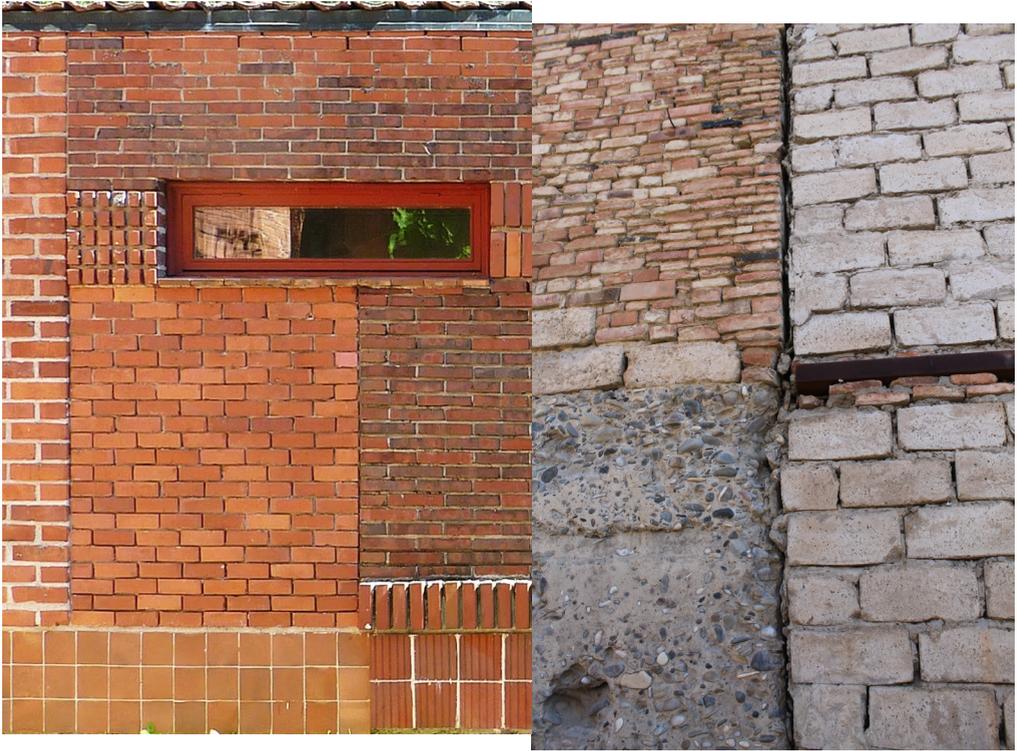


DEMOCRATIZATION

MO3 Program

The model exists in an ambiguous scale, where the hunger for space drives its formation. To me, there is no difference in scales when it comes to the beauty of the phenomenon, each element contributes equally to the experience. There is no permanence, only constant flux, adaptation, and reassembly. It remains interactable, inviting engagement rather than dictating form. Creativity is democratized, allowing for multiple interpretations and interventions, yet always constrained by technical and physical limits that shape its evolution.







No need to recreate it; it already exists.

PROGRAM PROPOSAL

The concept is a dynamic celebration, yet also a polemic in the architectural discourse, engaging with both joy and critique. It emphasizes that building is not just a set of instructions, but a process in itself. In this context, architecture becomes a strategic tool, a means of navigating and negotiating between ideas, spaces, and people. There should be a symbiotic relationship between all elements, where each part supports and enhances the others. However, this process is always framed by technical and physical limits, which shape the possibilities and constraints within which the architecture must exist. Finally, contrast plays a key role, highlighting the tension and dialogue between opposing forces, perspectives, and elements, enriching the overall experience.



