Reflection by Ted van Duin

Practical Adhocism in Tbilisi's Suburbs

1. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)? My graduation project aligns with the MSc AUBS program's emphasis on an interdisciplinary way of working. Within the Architecture track, it bridges architectural design with broader urban, socio-political, and cultural contexts. The studio's focus on iterative research and reflective practice resonates with my investigation into the unregulated suburban expansion of Tbilisi—a condition rooted in complex socio-political histories and informal architectural processes.

By engaging with theoretical frameworks such as adhocism and *architecture without architects*, the project challenges conventional architectural narratives, emphasizing adaptability, resourcefulness, and human-centred design. This aligns with the AUBS program's ambition to foster critical thinking and prepare architects to address multifaceted spatial challenges. The integration of architectural design, technical elaboration, and urban strategy in my work underscores the program's multidisciplinary foundation, situating architecture within broader environmental, societal, and ethical systems.

2. How did your research influence your design/recommendations, and how did the design/recommendations influence your research? The design emerged directly from the research; one would not exist without the other. My process sought to collapse the perceived gap between architectural theory and practice. The design became a spatial response to the research, while the research continuously evolved in dialogue with design decisions. This reciprocal dynamic allowed for a more integrated and coherent outcome, where each informed and refined the other.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your methods, your methodology)? My approach was both reflective and project-specific. In many ways, the working method mirrored the subject matter—characterized by improvisation, adaptability, and intuitive decisions. This 'loose' mode of working was balanced by a highly rigorous and self-critical design process. At times, I was uncompromising, even discarding large portions of the design to maintain clarity and integrity. This tension between spontaneity and precision ultimately defined the project's character. The limitations of the building system highlight that deterministic architecture isn't always the optimal approach.

I was also highly selective with feedback, often spending considerable time evaluating whether suggestions aligned with my project's vision. This process, though sometimes laborious, deepened my understanding of the project's intent and reinforced my ability to justify design

choices. Rather than showcasing previously acquired skills, the project became an exploration of my boundaries as a designer and researcher.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope, and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects? The project contributes to both academic and societal discourse on informal urbanism and architectural agency. While it does not claim to introduce novel concepts, it offers a critical lens through which to view informal development, particularly in historically rich contexts like Tbilisi. These urban conditions are often excluded from formal planning discussions, yet they reveal essential insights into resilience, adaptation, and community agency.

Ethically, the project challenges the notion of top-down architectural intervention by foregrounding local practices and bottom-up spatial negotiations. It advocates for a more context-aware and inclusive architectural practice—one that acknowledges and learns from informal systems rather than disregarding them.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results? While the project produces very site-specific outcomes, it proposes a transferable methodology. Its core value lies in its approach—analysing informal growth through a critical, interdisciplinary lens and responding with context-driven design strategies. This framework can be adapted to other regions experiencing unregulated urban development, making the project relevant across a wide range of socio-political and geographic settings.

6. After completing the project, how did your perception of deterministic architecture evolve? Throughout the project, I found myself grappling with more questions than answers. This uncertainty shaped a design approach that deliberately resisted over-definition. What may initially seem like a lack of necessity in the design is, in fact, an intentional stance—a reflection on when, how, and even whether architecture should intervene at all. The project evolved into a critique of deterministic thinking, instead advocating for an architecture that is adaptive, responsive, and open-ended.

7. How did the personal experience with the site visit impact the design? Although the site visit was brief, it had a profound impact on my understanding of the dynamics at play. The physical experience of navigating these spaces revealed nuances that remote research could not fully convey. This underscored the importance of embedded observation and direct engagement, influencing both my methodology and my commitment to a design that supports rather than overrides the existing context.