

traces of place production

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Urban Architecture Graduation Studio
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01
Entrance to Lemmerz Factory (1976)
Heemkundige Kring Hobuechen

research structure

(Post)industrial landscapes, shaped by historical events, economic change and socio-political dynamics, once vibrant centres of activity, are now disconnected from the city and detached from urban life. The process of deindustrialisation has not only affected the physical environment, but has also transformed the social and cultural fabric of the neighbouring communities, resulting in fragmented identities, both physical and symbolic.

However, these places, often seen as decaying, are not mere relics of a bygone era. In fact, they are dynamic, multi-layered spaces which embody memories associated with production and living near these centres, tangible remnants of the past, as well as multiple transformations that have occurred over time. In districts like Hoboken, Antwerp, such landscapes present a unique challenge of how to adapt and revitalize former factory sites, such as those around Lageweg, while preserving their historical and cultural significance.

The problem outlined above naturally leads to a series of issues that need to be considered when approaching the topic. The following research poses key questions about identity, transition and memory in (post)industrial landscapes. They are as follows:

How do past experiences, memories, and remnants shape the identity of a place?

When does production change the character of the landscape?

How does industrial history influence contemporary perceptions and uses of post-industrial sites?

The research employs a mixed-method approach to investigate how post-industrial terrain is understood and valued. With an exploratory mindset the research process focuses on zooming in and out in the shape of the ethnographic landscape over time to collect narratives of different entities, people, materials and nature.

This involves conducting **site visits and fieldwork** in Hoboken, with focus on Lageweg to delve deeper into the characteristics of this location, as well as, in other places affected by deindustrialisation. During these visits, I observed how this place is used to document remnants of industry and their relations with the space through **photographs and field notes**. In addition, **archival research** about Hoboken district informs about values of past production. Without understanding the past, it is hard to interpret current conditions and speculate about future solutions. This research also integrates **interviews** with individuals related to industry on what is/was industry for them and what are their memories related to working and living in the industrial region. Their words would help me understand how production shapes their life and their image of an industrial city. To provide a broader context for the study, I analysed the **representation** of themes related to transition, memory and industrial activity in photography, which deepened my understanding of how processes affect landscape perceptions. Similarly, **literature** offers valuable insights, further enhancing the contextual framework of the study, by providing theoretical and historical perspectives. It enables a deeper understanding of how industrial legacies are represented and valued in various cultural contexts.

The lone figure, leaving the gate to the factory, represents not only the closure of the company, but also reflects broader **narratives** of deindustrialisation, in which workers and residents of the neighbourhood struggle with the void left by the shutdown of industry and the shortage of workplaces in the area.



Last worker of Lummer factory (2008)



Schippers Pottery's atelier

"The aim of Heimatfotografie is to tell the story of the homeland just as it is, to deepen thoughts about it, to multiply the joys of its distinctive charms, to record the qualities and especially the beauty of a given district or region of the country in order to draw general attention to it."

Filip Springer



Entrance to Lummer Factory, Leuven

"What surprised me then was what Hoboken made him for such big German and other carmakers and not for companies like OM who still had a big company in nearby Antwerp at the time."

"Landscape is a cultural construct, a mirror of our mentalities and myths encoded with meanings, which can be read and interpreted."

Simon Schama



Aerial view of former industrial factory on Lageweg (1962)

The image reflects a **transitional phase in urban development**, open fields or undeveloped areas surrounding the industrial complex, indicating the photograph is from a period when the industrial zone was being constructed. Behind the complex, it is possible to see piled construction material, suggesting further expansion. Some land surrounding the factory appears segmented, possibly for agricultural purposes, it was the previous site function. Roads allow access to the facility, cars are parked on the opposite side of the street, indicating its functional period, possibly during working hours. It is likely that Schuubroek provided employment opportunities for the local population.



Schuubroek Tin Factory, Lageweg

"... historical geology, climate, physiography, the water regimen, soils, plants, animals and land use. This is the source from which the interpretation is made although the grain becomes finer. We have developed **poetic** place was 'because' and to explain 'because' will evoke not only natural evolution but cultural evolution as well. To do this we make a distinction between the 'given' and the 'made' forms. The former is the natural landscape identity, the latter is the accumulation of the adaptation to the given form which constitute the present city."

Jan Mohring

At first glance, the contrast is striking with the image of a large block surrounded and juxtaposed with humble-size row houses.



The silent entrance (2023)



Industrial park, Hoboken (1962)

"Having grown up in Hoboken myself, I liked seeing work in Hoboken. I also lived within walking distance of the factory at the time."

space transition

"The identity of a place is not to be seen as inevitably destroyed by new importations... identity is always and always has been, in the process of formation, it is in a sense forever unachieved."

Dorreen Massey



Culture production (2023)

"To play the silhouette of a city in a landscape is to subordinate that landscape to oneself. To make it into an image."

Filip Springer



Proxima to the factories along De Schelde

The image captures the essence of industrialization in Hoboken, with chimneys rising above factories, numerous warehouses defining the contour of the region. The image reflects the industrial activity of the era as the focal point of the district, creating the character and identity of the neighborhood, likely built on the basis of its significant impact on the city's economy.



The edge of industry (2023)

Deindustrialisation doesn't erase production from landscape, observed materials that suggest their decay are actually piling instead of falling apart. Accumulated mounds of rubble form a new strata.



Pillar from the past (2023)



Perforated steel



Transport of material here (2024)



Industrial colour palette (2024)



From rust to roots (2024)



Enclosure (2023)

"Industrial heritage may be constructively understood as a generative domain rather than as just contested terrain, a domain that provides a publicly usable space within which we may work to confront our collective implication in a complex past and an as yet undetermined future."

Michael Frisch



An organised land (2024)

"From the researcher's point of view, the space can act both as an incubator, a transmitter of knowledge and of the very sense of identity within the community, as well as a specific interpretative map of the phenomena occurring within it."

Mateusz Tofis



Echoes of industry (2024)

Although the inside is visually separated from surroundings with high walls, the natural environment permeates the human-made structures. Water in canals and puddles and reflects and obscures elements of the architecture, creating a **dialogue** between different systems. **Micro-landscapes** of nature emerge in unexpected places. This architectural container is filled with fluid-like nature, that penetrates solid structure. The nature study led to discovery of growing plants in gaps, wall crack, openings or rubble mounds.

the conceptual map brings together the core themes that emerged throughout my research: producing, living, space transitions, and industrial remnants; it serves as a visual synthesis of my investigative journey, combining interview quotes from a former Lemmerz factory workers with fragments of literature that shaped my understanding; the assemblage is complemented by collection of photographs and archival documentation that captures the symbols of deindustrialisation

introduction

The identity of a place is rooted in multiple dimensions, including tangible remnants of its industrial past, the memories associated with production and living near these centers, and the transitions that have occurred over time. Landscape is not static; it is shaped by past activities of various entities. These elements interact across different timescales and are presented in current conditions, which include decay, adaptations, and urban development. By studying these aspects, key factors influencing place identity can be interpreted.

Landscape cannot be depicted as a static entity or captured in a single view.¹ A series of sequenced pictures may reveal elements embedded in the land, but they fail to convey the full identity of the place, which is curated by the relationships between these components. This network of interdependencies between natural systems and human activities creates a place's selfhood. Observing a landscape at any given moment highlights that particular time, but the place itself emerges from the accumulation of multiple moments experienced by different generations. These include shared traditions, routines, and memories, which continuously alter the form of the place.² Landscape thus serves as an archive, preserving and transmitting the stories and processes that have shaped it.

Landscapes need to be walked through and experienced to fully appreciate the character and embedded stories. While photographs can capture traces of transformation, activities, and appropriation, the narrative of a man-made landscape remains incomplete without the human element that provides an individual perspective. Sensory experiences—such as the current coldness of factories, the texture of peeling paint, and the noise of machinery from the past—cannot

be conveyed through images alone.³ To care for cultural and natural heritage means not only sustaining its pivotal state and character but also appropriating, developing, and refining it through further developments.

In this context, landscape is understood as a historically shaped relationship between culture and nature. As an interface mediating society, landscape's metamorphosis or alteration can destabilize previous hierarchies and lead to disintegration. This dynamic nature emphasizes the need to recognize both cultural and natural heritage as integral to understanding place identity.

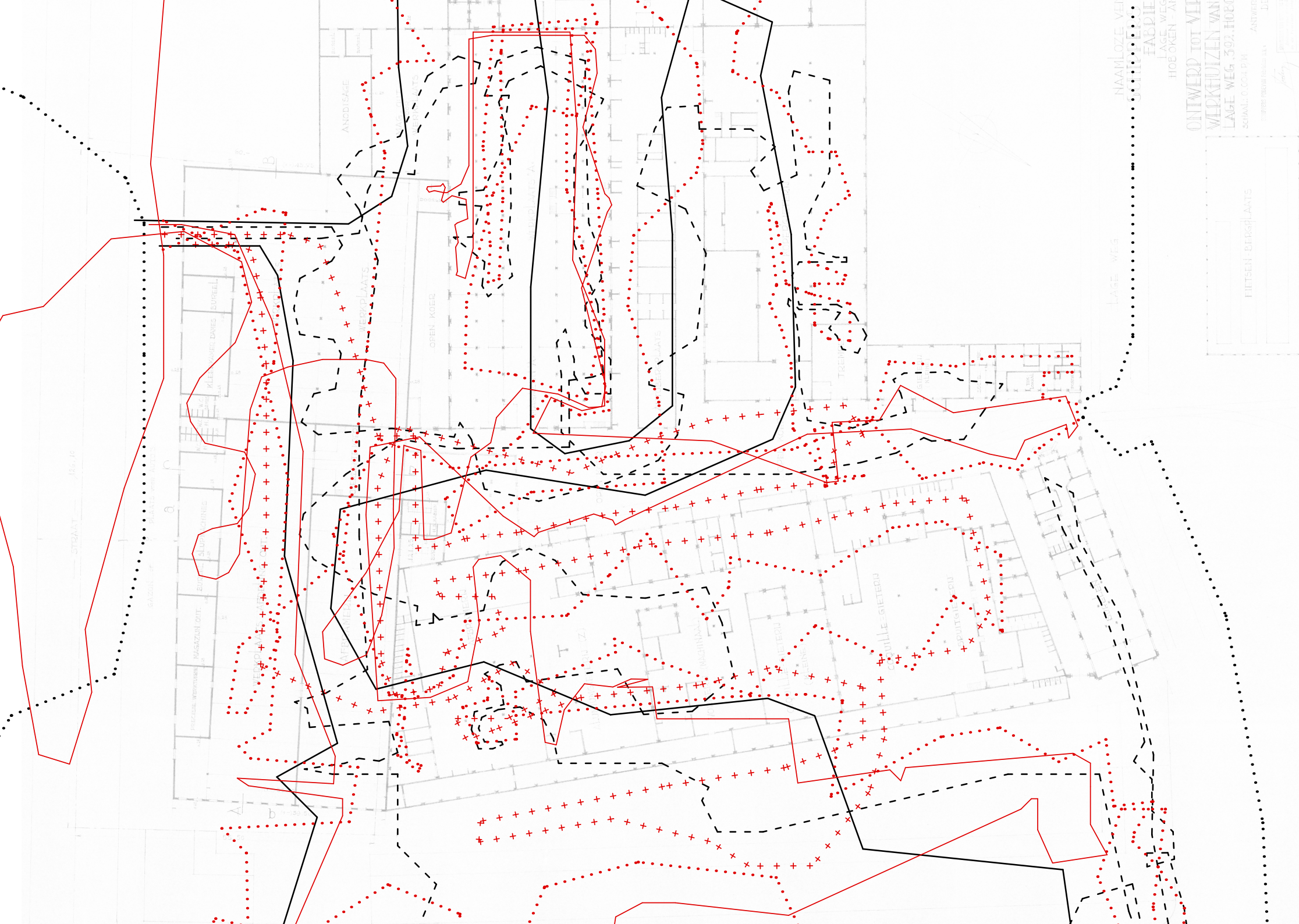
The identity of urban areas evolves dynamically, shaped by ongoing processes that transform landscapes and influence community behaviors. Fixed architectural structures and variable elements such as relations and consumption contribute to the city's identity, whether as a whole or as a composition of smaller localities. Community plays a crucial role in building a place, often on a more local scale, by referring to nearby elements and values, including given, encountered, or appropriated terrain and constructed landscapes.⁴

1 see: Springer F. (2023). *Mein Gott. How Beautiful.*

2 see: Dymnicka, M., & Starosta, P. (2018). *Identity and Belonging to the City in the Era of Globalisation.*

3 see: Springer F. (2023). *Mein Gott. How Beautiful.*

4 see: Tofilski, M. (2017). The influence of spatial forms on local identity of inhabitants living in Upper Silesian settlements Giszowiec and Nikiszowiec.



a series of footsketches capturing a multiple analytical frameworks for site interpretations, each rendered through distinct lenses, approaches, and focal points, ranging from spatial relationships and circulation flows to sensory impressions

space transition

a process of layered transformation, integrating physical change with contextual narrative

territorial scale

In the densely built-up region of southern Antwerp, decades of post-war economic development have left behind a patchwork of landscapes shaped by shifting functions, fragmented infrastructures, and evolving needs. Today, parts of this territory exist in a state in-between, no longer serving their original purpose, yet not entirely abandoned.⁵

This chapter explores the concept of space transition as both a physical and narrative process, one that reflects on the network of imagined and real experiences carried by the landscape itself and the entities that have passed through it. Rather than framing this district as ruins or endpoints, I approach it as not the last state before the last, celebrating an ongoing transformation and holding the potential for renewal. Through a spatial reflection, I investigated the voice to the contexts that have disappeared, echoes of past activities and ambitions. These narratives informed an urban project, making it not only a technical process of re-configuration, but a reflective act on spatial logic. Without imposing a new identity, it guided an informed and sensitive transformation.

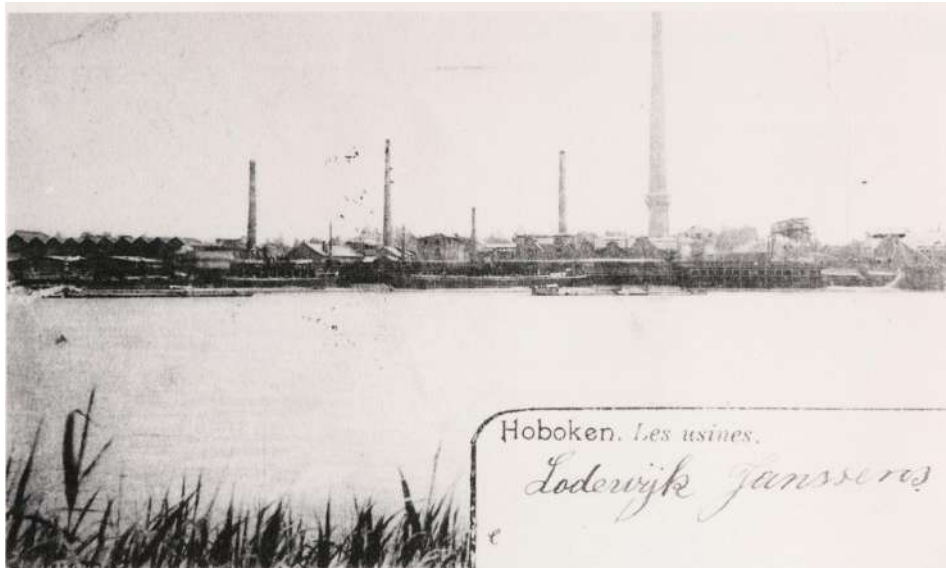
⁵ see: Bole, D., Kumer, P., Gašperic, P., Kozina, J., Pipan, P., & Tiran, J. (2022). Clash of Two Identities: What Happens to Industrial Identity in a Post-Industrial Society?

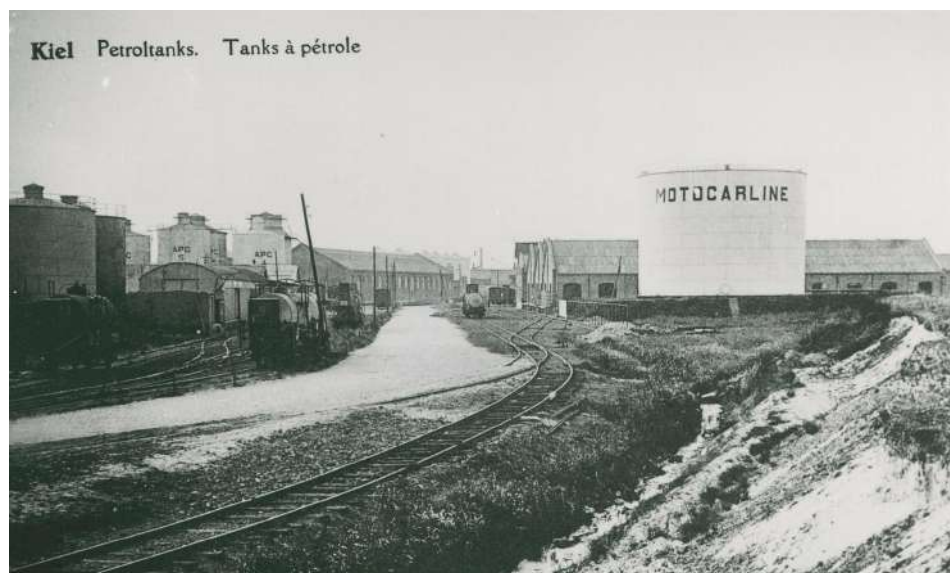
The roots of Hoboken's identity can be traced back to the industrial revolution, which marked the beginning of its transformation. Economic shifts accompanying industrial revolutions have shaped the city's character over the last centuries, driven by processes focused on efficiency and development. This era introduced novelties that reshaped the scenery, making the place subservient to speed and rationality. However, the post-industrial crisis blurred the meaning of production sites, leaving monumental forms as landmarks of failure and abandonment due to economic or technological advancements.

Hoboken gives the impression of an undefined, transitional space where past traditions and values clash with ongoing transformations. This has led to a lack of recognition of the needs of current users. The city's identity reflects the tensions between historical roots and contemporary demands, resulting in a space that struggles to reconcile its past with its future.

In Hoboken, communities build places on a local scale by connecting with nearby elements and values. These connections often involve integrating given, encountered, or appropriated parts of the terrain into the constructed landscape. The interplay between tradition and transformation highlights the importance of community efforts in shaping Hoboken's evolving identity.

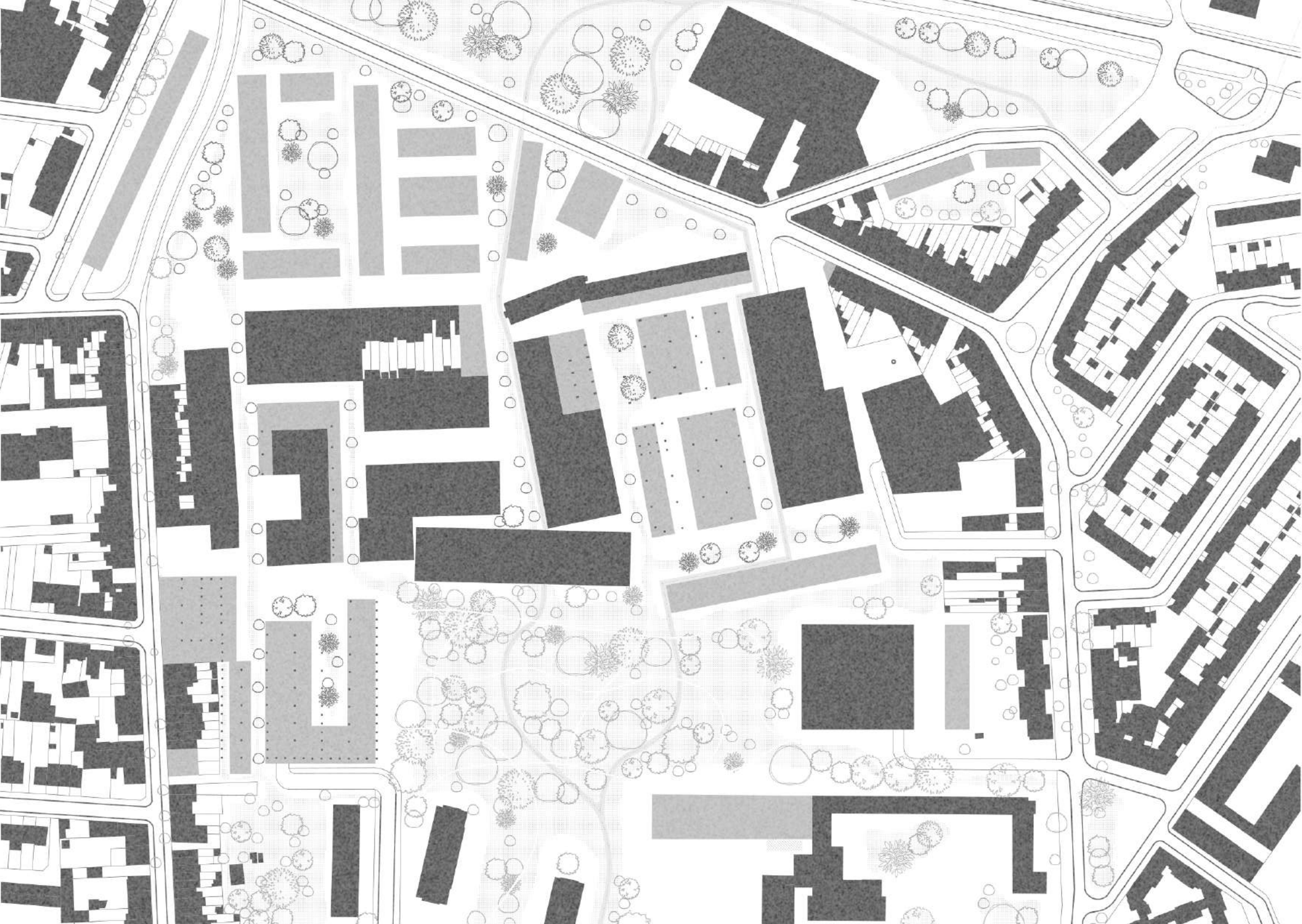






Kiel Petroltanks. Tanks à pétrole





the masterplan proposal blends modernity with locality to create a fresh identity for the site, it is based on the site's distinct qualities, incorporating patterns and fabric morphology found in warehouses, resulting in a network of long axes and avenues; drawing inspiration from the layouts of the Blikfabriek and Lemmerz Factory, the design introduces micro-centralities that integrate housing, local facilities, businesses, and industries; the masterplan comprises 4 main stages of development allowing for organic adaptation, ecological regeneration and possible reuse of materials from demolition

producing and inhabiting

spatial and social integration of production and dwelling in (post)industrial urban peripheries

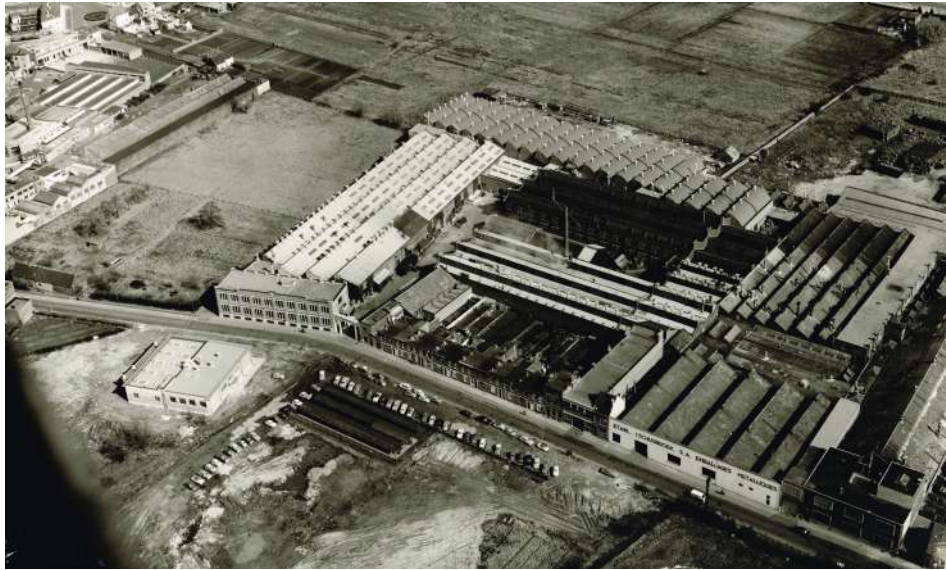
neighbourhood scale

In many contemporary cities, urban life in peripheries has long been shaped by the interplay between spaces of production and spaces of dwelling. Such environments foster unique forms of community, where shared spaces and collective rhythms allow for both economic activity and everyday domestic life to thrive side by side.

This chapter explores the integrated development of industrial and residential functions, emphasizing the diversity of urban life that arises when working and living are not spatially or socially divided.⁶ By considering both collective and individual experiences related to the introduction of factories and subsequent deindustrialisation process, I reflected on how producing and living are not opposing forces, but complementing parts of an industrial neighbourhood.⁷ Building from a model that already exists, the former and current productive legacy of the site was preserved to support local employment in a new form of functions reintegration.

⁶ see: DOGMA, (2022). Living and Working.

⁷ see: Lane, R. N., & Rappaport, N. (Eds.). (2020). The design of urban manufacturing.



"What surprised me then was that Hobken made rims for such big German and other carmakers and not for companies like GM who still had a big company in nearby Antwerp at the time."

"The atmosphere seemed fine to me at the time and there was plenty of work."





"About the production halls where the ovens were, I can be brief. I wouldn't want to work there... With some exaggeration, I would call it the vestibule of hell."

"Having grown up in Hoboken myself, I liked having work in Hoboken. I also lived within walking distance of the factory at the time (...) Most of the workers did come from Hoboken. Also many people from Antwerp's Kiel district. This district borders Hoboken."



echoes between Hoboken and Silesia

Visiting Silesia during my research on Hoboken allowed me to gain a deeper, more personal understanding of life in industrial and (post)industrial districts. My impression of Hoboken that I had arrived too late to fully grasp its identity as a once vivid place shaped by industrial activity. This evoked a sense of *déjà-vu*, reminding me of my home region, Silesia, Poland's most industrialized area, where the decline of industries like coal mining has significantly transformed both the landscape and community life.

By speaking with former industrial workers and current residents of (post)industrial districts, I aimed to explore how memories, experiences, and the remnants of production shape people's connection to the place. This comparative perspective helped me reflect on the human element that was missing in my research on Hoboken's and informed my interpretation of how industrial history influences the identity and use of such (post)industrial sites today.

"The mine was shut down, but you can see it everywhere here, look at the red window frames. In the past they were painted with paint from the mine, but as is the case here, perpetually dirty from the smog, I have painted them myself several times."



"We are very connected with this place. I am a Silesian. I had a dangerous profession, I risked my health and my life, but thanks to our patron, Saint Barbara, I am here. I always gave thanks for each day after I finished my 'shift' (work). It wasn't just praying, because sometimes we would go for a pint of beer or sing with my colleagues, we still do it."



"In three words I would describe Silesia as industry, work and stability. By stability I mean a belief in stability built up over generations. The certainty that you will find a job. I liked my job and I was proud of it, because I saw the sense in what I was doing."

interview with former mine workers and residents of the (post)industrial district of Nikiszowiec
Silesia, Poland



industrial remnants

unique characteristics, spatial potential, and contextual meaning of
(post)industrial architecture

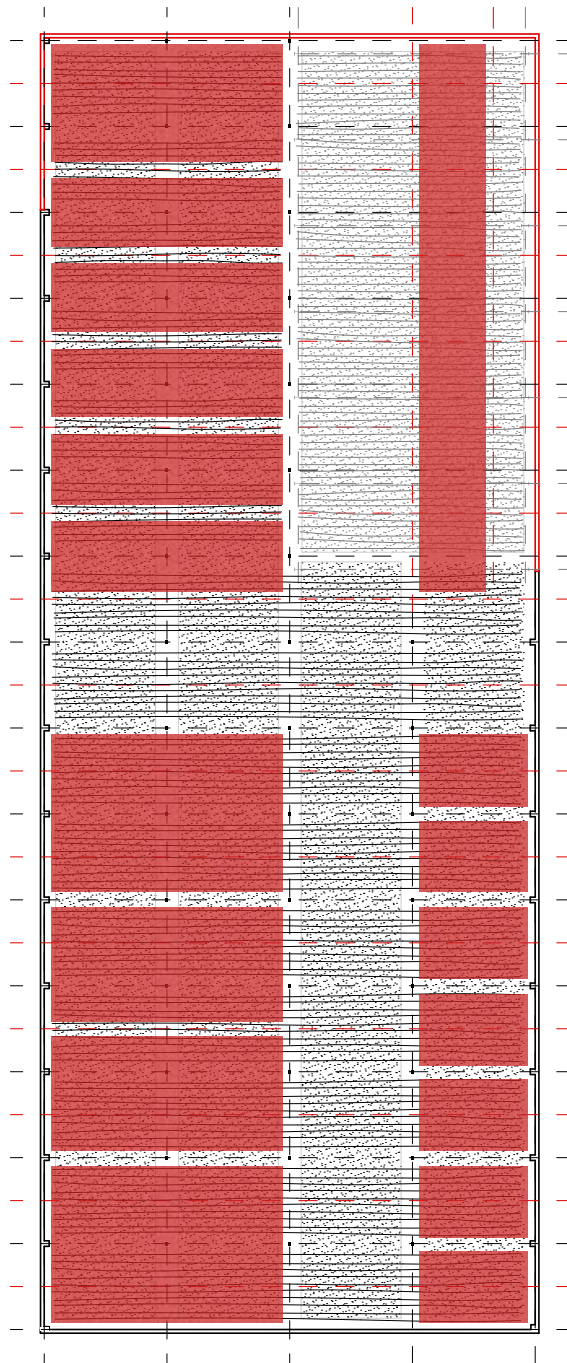
building scale

Scattered across the urban landscape of Lageweg, industrial remnants form a montage of functional voids, spaces marked by the absence of use. These volumes hold a spatial quality that resists simple classification.

Following ‘as found’⁸ strategy, this chapter explores these remnants not as blank pages, but as complex volumes rich in various contextual meanings. Through both subjective perception and objective classification, I confront how current systems define and categorize such spaces, and how spatial qualities can inform adaptation processes. Perceiving textures, forms, and atmospheres left behind as a gift, passed on for future considerations, allows for overwriting its character. By turning around the initial functions of these spaces and celebrating their unique characteristics, the project resists the urge for total reinvention.

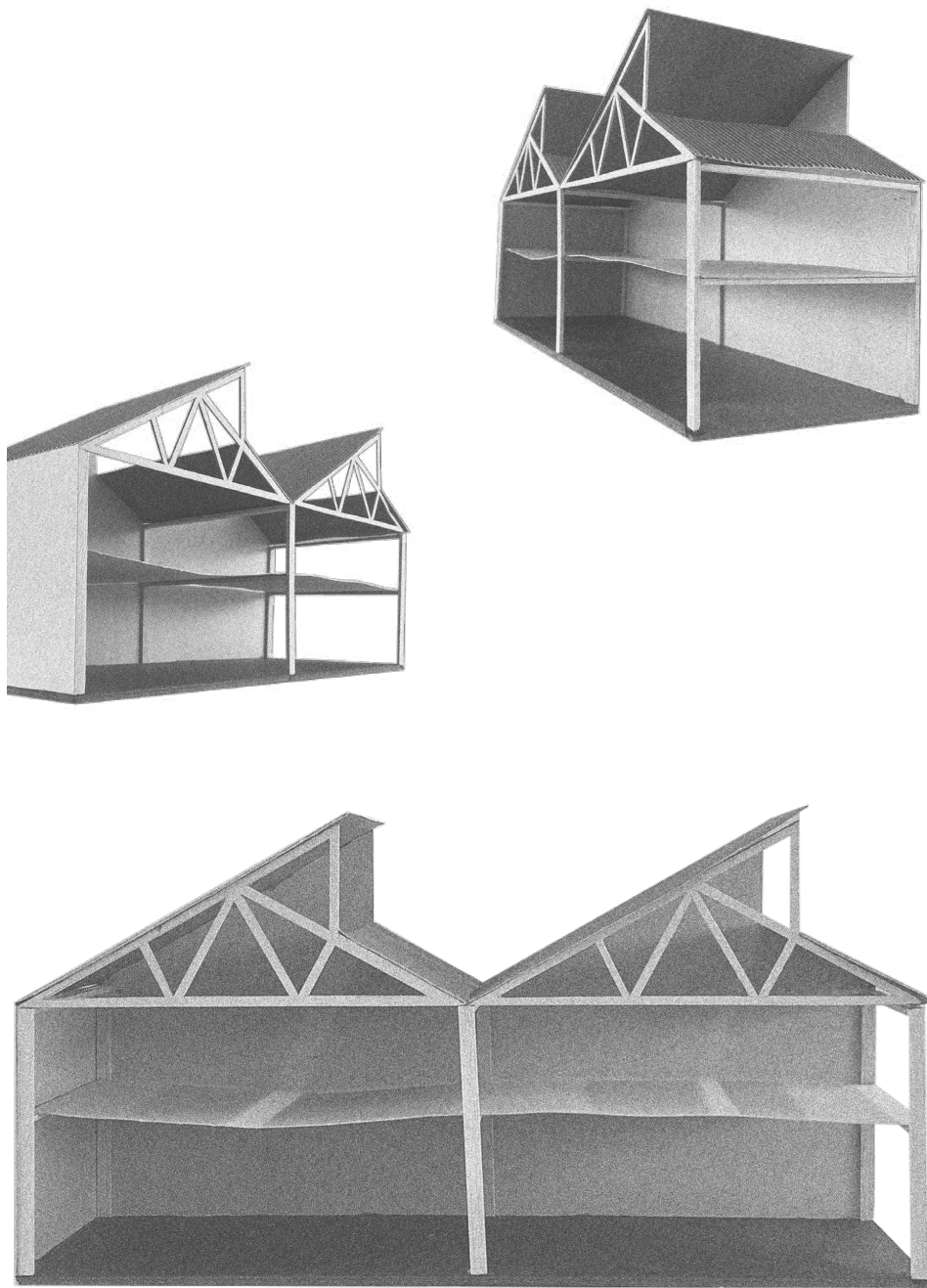
a study of rewilding of industrial halls, tracking the spread of plant life across the fractured surfaces and forgotten corners of warehouses interior and complex perimeter











14
a working model exploring the volumetric characteristics and atmospheric potential of the hall,
capturing the interplay of light, shadow, and proportion to test the spatial qualities envisioned for
future living units



fragments ensemble

juxtaposition and interrelation of spatial, material, and conceptual pieces

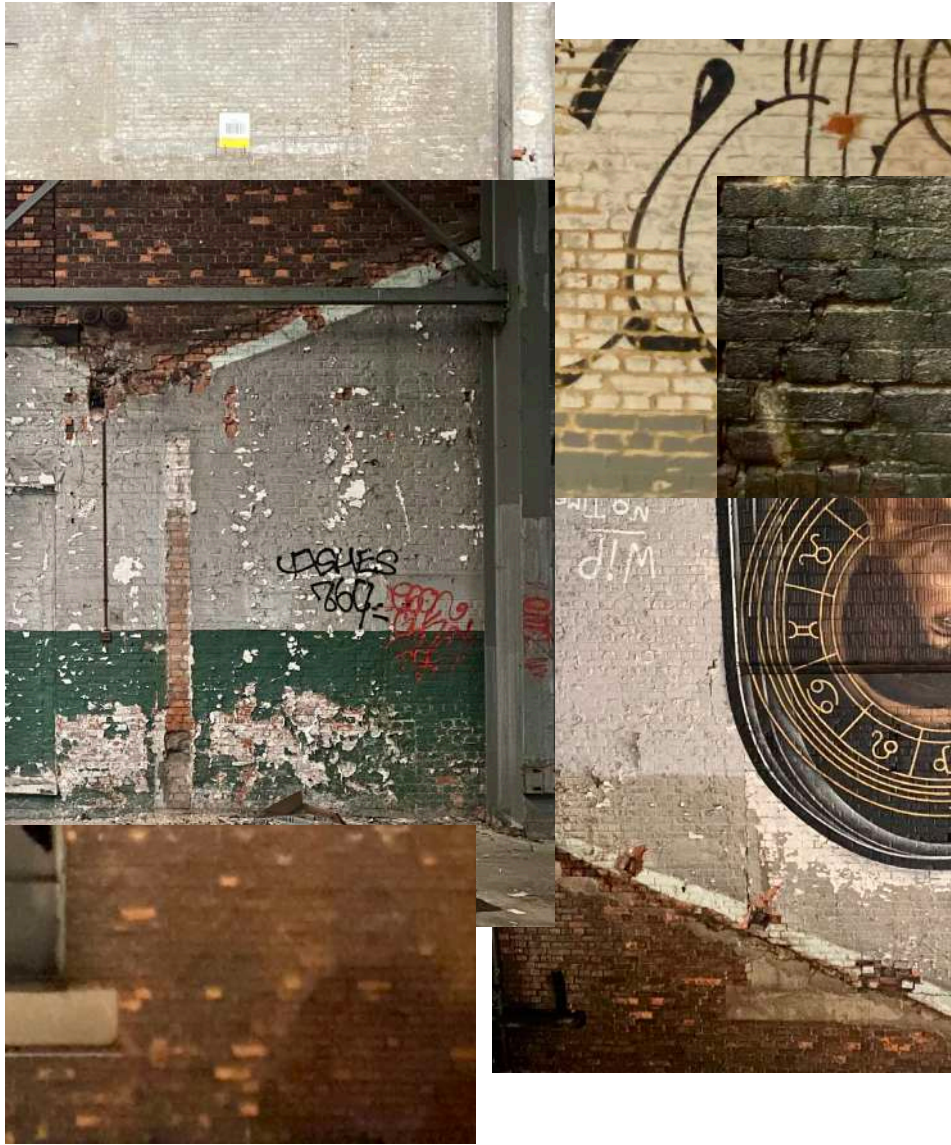
detail scale

This chapter unfolds as a critical inventory of spatial, material, and conceptual fragments that, while seemingly disparate, begin to form a meaningful ensemble through attentive analysis and synthesis. These fragments, drawn from different times, scales, and locations, are not isolated remnants, but citations from a larger narrative.⁹ Each carries its own history and significance, yet gains new relevance when placed in relation to others.

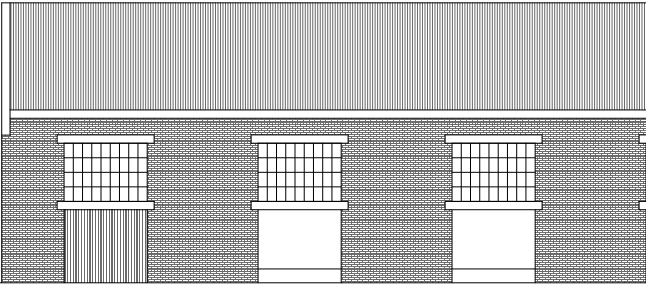
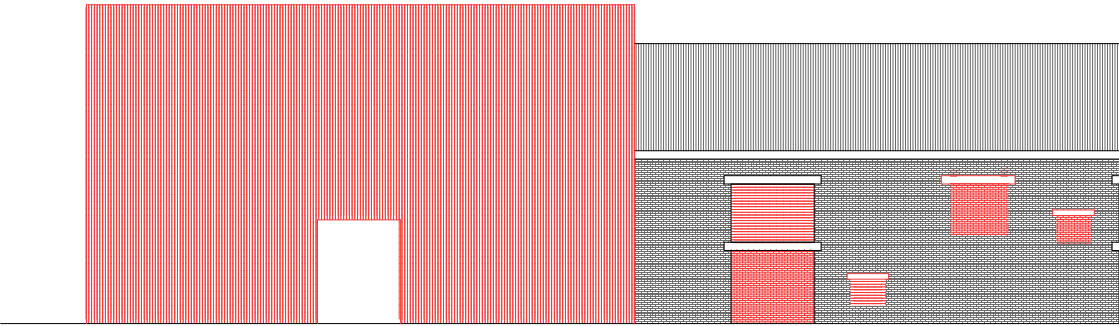
Through a process of critical reflection, I explore how specific systems of elements, such as architectural details, spatial patterns or material compositions, can be woven into a cohesive dialogue. This grammar is not imposed, but discovered through the careful act of assembling, celebrating the intersections, frictions, and resonances that emerge between fragments.¹⁰ The ensemble they create speaks not only to what was, but to what can be imagined when we embrace multiplicity as a mode of architectural thinking

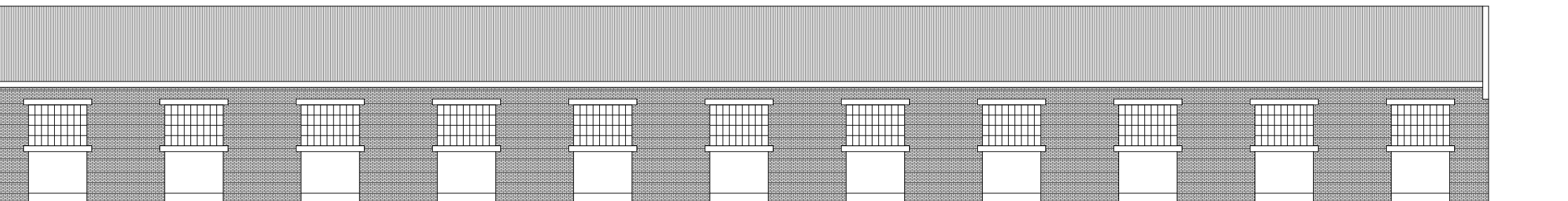
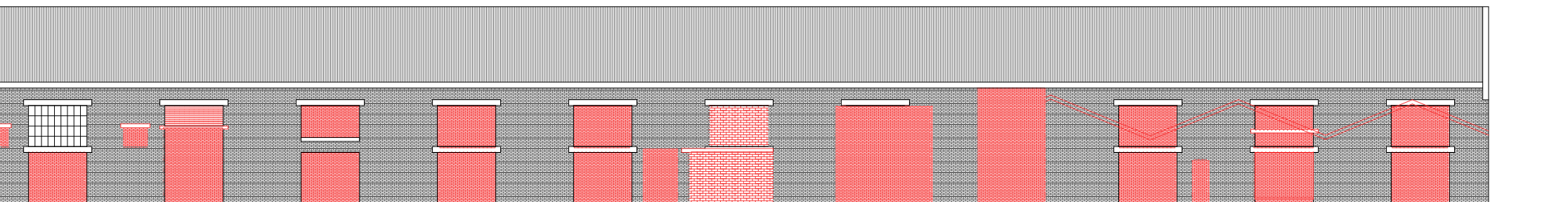
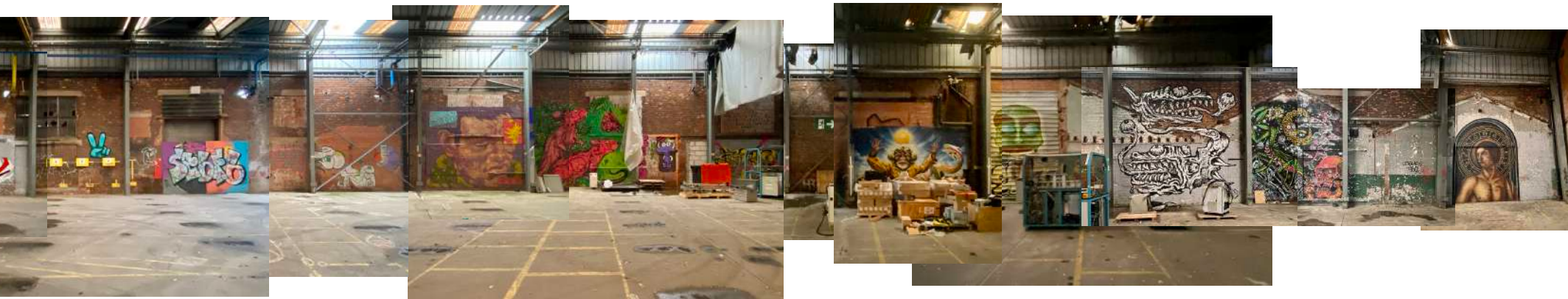
⁹ see: Meier, H. R. (2021). *Spolien: phänomene der Wiederverwendung in der Architektur*.

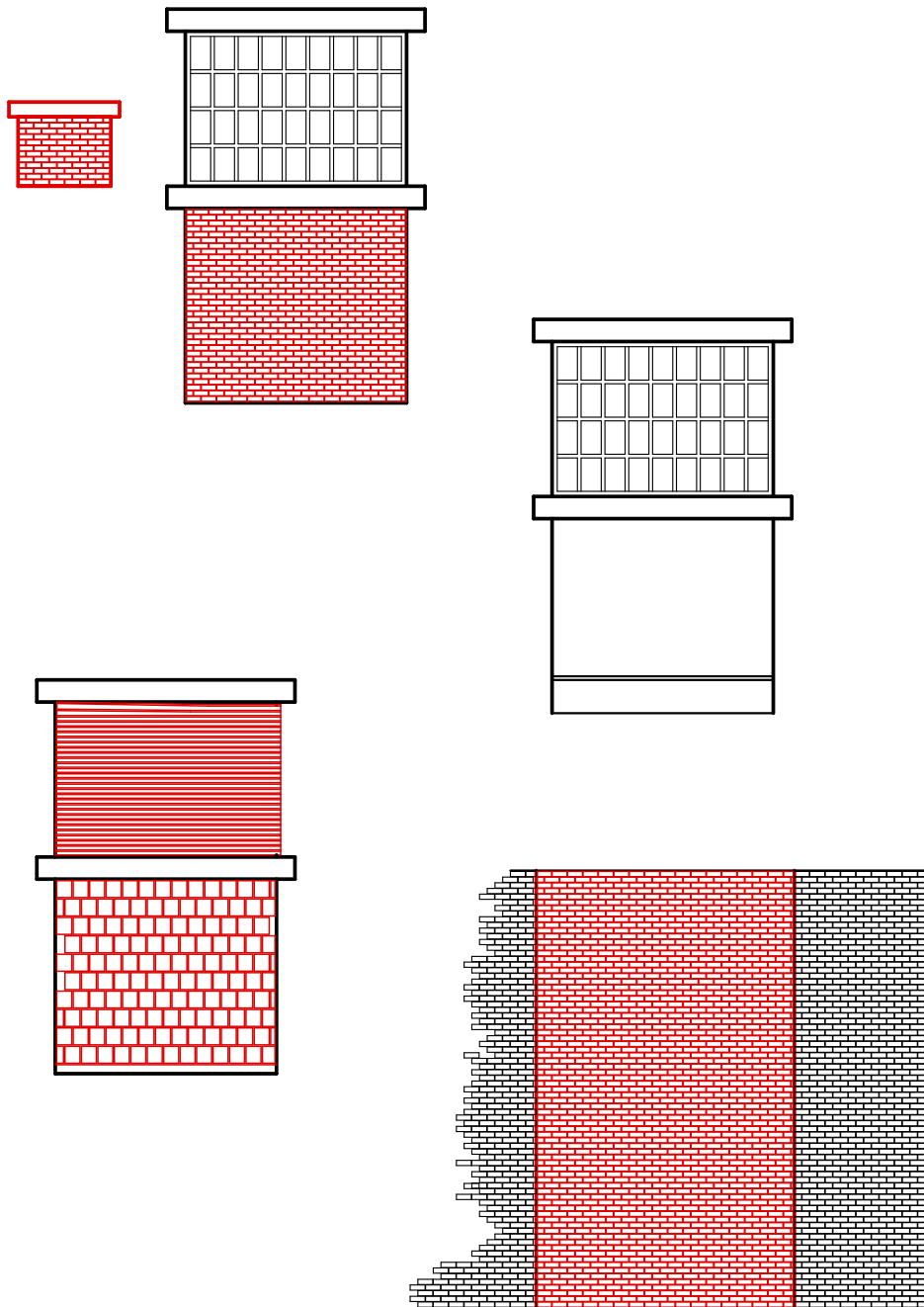
¹⁰ see: De Caigny, S., Ertas, H., Plevoets B. (Eds.). (2023). *As Found. Experiments in Preservation*.



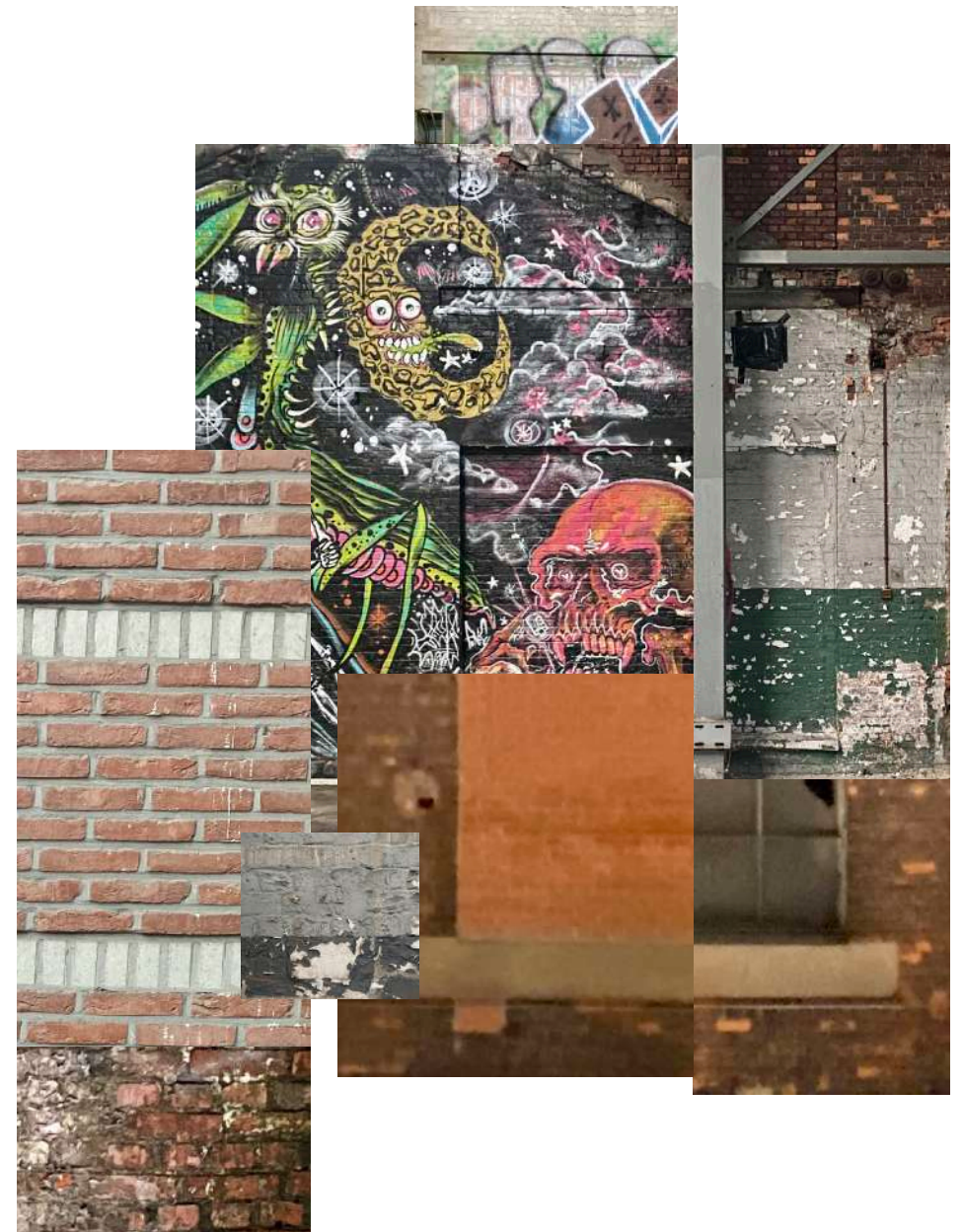
15
a vibrant collage of bricks, each with its own unique shade, texture, and size, showcasing a rich tapestry of materials and finishes







16
nuanced variations in the wall intervention with build-up openings; the brick façade of the production hall becomes a layered narrative, each cut marking a point of transformation, framing new relationships between interior activity and the exterior image



17
uncovering the façade's story, a comparative study of how the building's openings and brickwork typology have evolved from the initial design to their present-day form



RAL 1016



RAL 1036



RAL 7047



RAL 6005



RAL 090 80 70



RAL 1017



RAL 5001



RAL 5012



RAL 6021



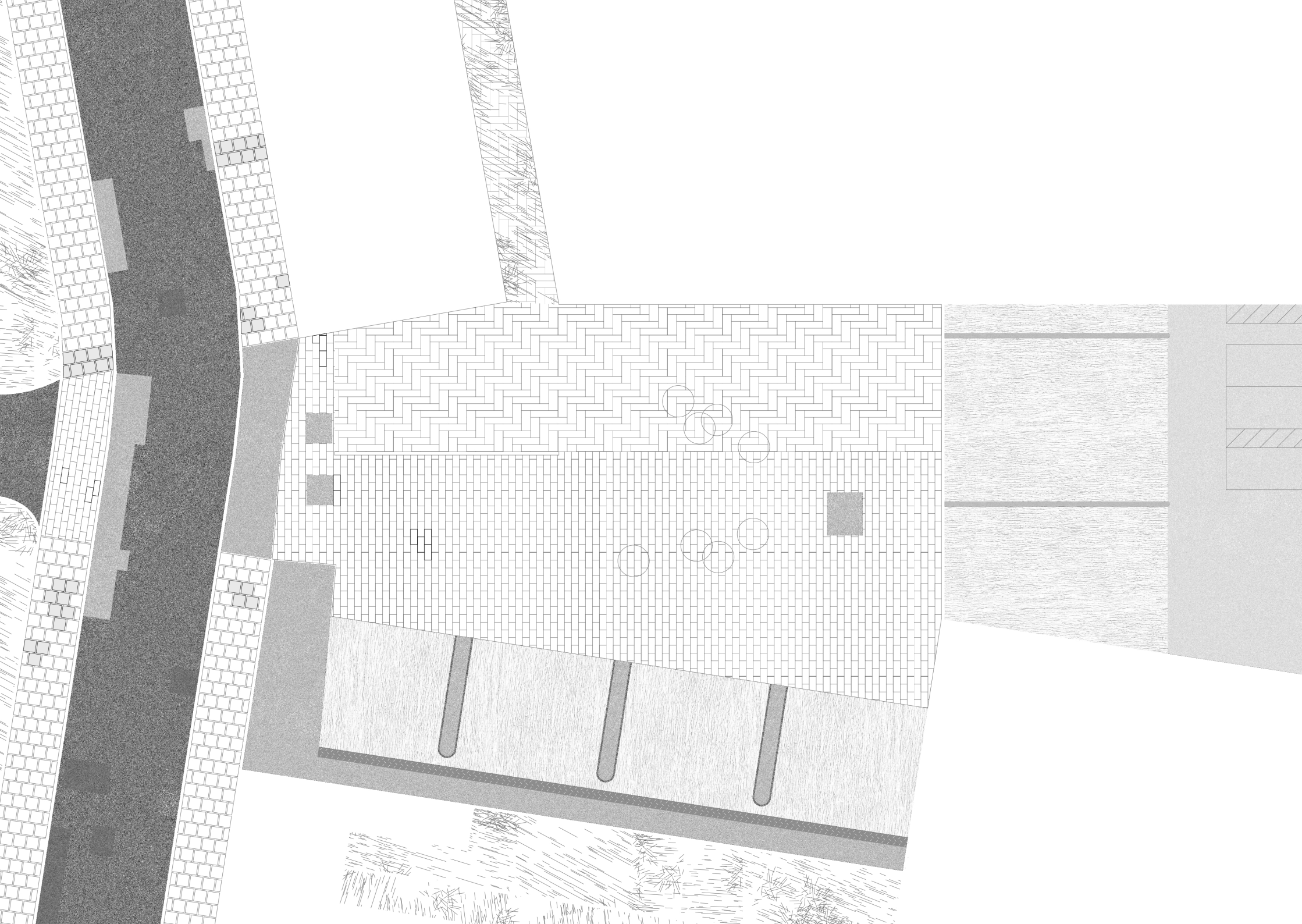
RAL 6025



RAL 8008



RAL 6003



mapping of surface patterns at the Lemmerz factory entrance, where decades of layering, from utilitarian concrete grids to ad-hoc repair patches, reveal the evolving logic and memory embedded in the site's industrial groundscape



reflection

This graduation project emerged from the complex and layered reality of post-industrial landscapes, using Hoboken's former factory sites as both subject and setting. The relationship between research and design was not linear but cyclical, constantly evolving. Research shaped the conceptual and material dimensions of the proposal, while the act of designing raised new questions that looped back into further investigation. This reciprocal process allowed the project to remain open, responsive, and critically engaged throughout.

Methodologically, the project embraced an interdisciplinary and site-specific approach. By zooming in and out, both in space and in time, I was able to trace the socio-cultural evolution of the landscape. This allowed me to explore the connections between architecture, memory, materiality, and social dynamics. The integration of interviews, archival material, photography, and field notes made the research deeply contextual and personal. It also blurred the boundary between research and design, allowing each to inform and challenge the other. This approach taught me that architectural work in such contexts is not just a creative act but a form of cultural translation, negotiation, and care.

Through site visits, archival research, interviews, and mapping, I developed an understanding of how production once structured not only the physical fabric of the area but also its social and cultural identity. These layers of memory and meaning, embedded in buildings, materials, and spatial patterns, became central to the design process. Observations made on site, traces of occupation, decay, overgrowth, and abandonment, helped reframe the site not as an empty terrain, but as a living vault. Fieldwork in the Lageweg area offered critical insights into how the site is currently used and experienced. These observations shaped spatial layouts, circulation strategies, and material decisions, grounding abstract ideas in real conditions. A key takeaway was the importance of designing with the existing identity of the site.

Engaging with Hoboken's post-industrial landscape expanded my understanding of architecture's role. I came to see the discipline not only as a practice of form-making, but as a means of engaging with history, identity, and continuity. Architecture, in this context, becomes a tool for reactivating neglected urban fragments, not through replacement, but through reinterpretation. It requires listening as much as designing, and treating what exists not as a problem to be solved, but as a resource for future transformation.

Ethically, the project confronted the tensions between preservation and development, asking what should be kept, transformed, or removed, and with what consequences. The act of working within such a contested landscape required constant reflection on the social, cultural, and ecological impact of design decisions. These ethical concerns remained central to my process and reinforced the importance of architectural sensitivity.

Academically, the project contributes to ongoing discussions on adaptive reuse, urban regeneration, and the afterlife of industrial spaces. Societally, it responds to real conditions in areas affected by deindustrialisation, addressing spatial segregation, ecological disconnection, and cultural erosion. Rather than viewing such sites as obsolete, the project argues for their potential as active agents in urban renewal. By imagining production not as an isolated function but as one that can coexist with housing and public life, the work offers a vision for a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient city.

Finally, the framework developed in this project is transferable beyond Hoboken. Its value lies not only in the specific design outcome but in the methodology itself—a flexible, reflective process that engages deeply with context, where careful attention to past and place can open up new possibilities for future urban life.

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