

I visualize a day where . . .

. . . and all was fine

. . .

Get Back:

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Thesis Book 2011-2012



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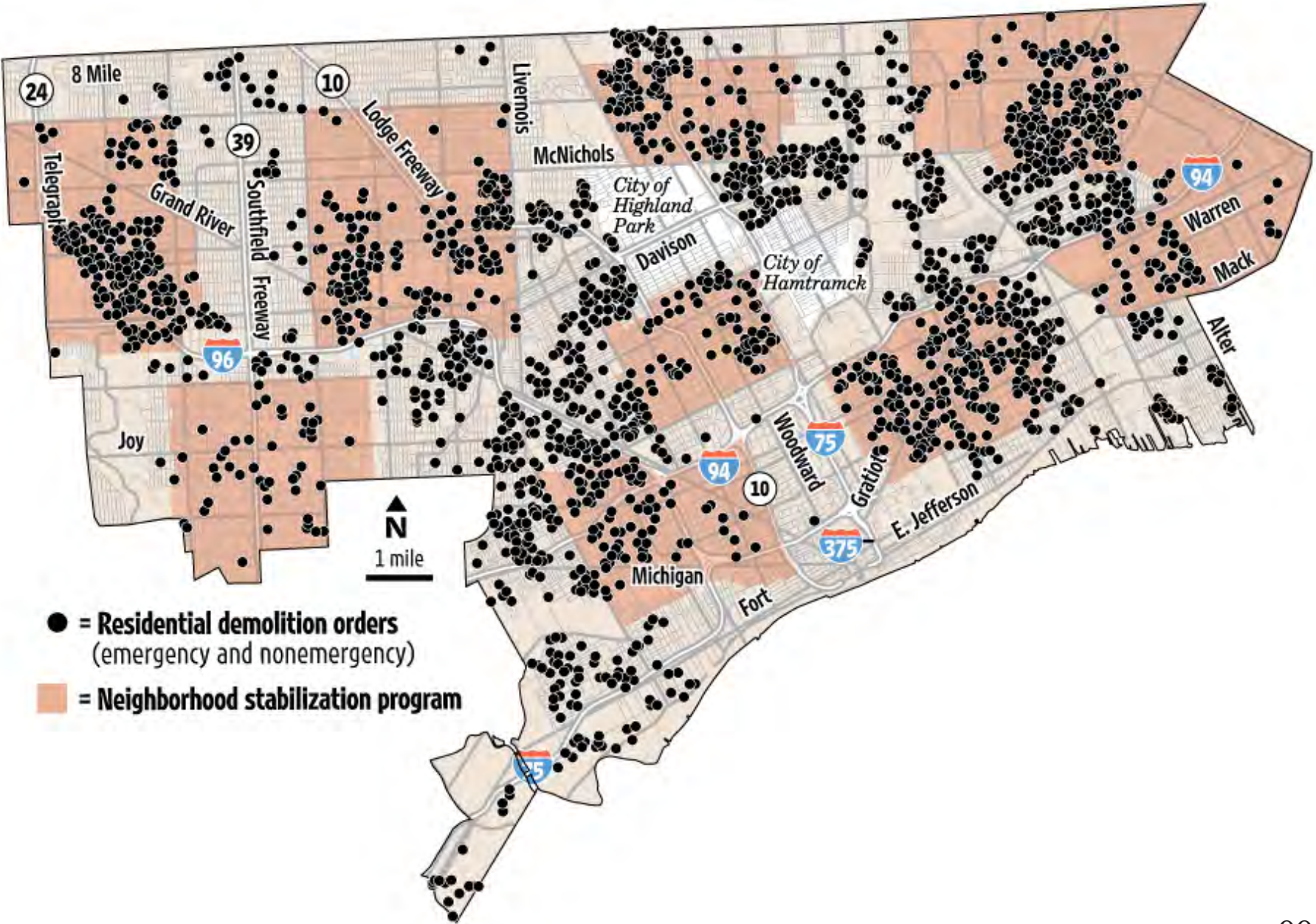
1. Introduction

The current architectural condition in the city of Detroit is without a doubt a unique one. This uniqueness is primarily due to the coexistence of buildings in varying conditions. It is a given that there will always be varying conditions of buildings within the built environment, and Detroit is no exception, but what makes Detroit so different is based on a few key factors.



According to the nonprofit group Data Driven Detroit, the city has an estimated 90,000 abandoned or vacant homes, including some historically significant properties. 3,000 of these homes are already slated to be demolished. Mayor David Bing has also pledged to knock down 10,000 of these homes in his first term. The vast number of vacancies can be attributed to the ever-decreasing population that spawned this abandonment.

Since the 1950's, when Detroit's population peaked at around 2 million, the city has lost nearly 1.3 million of its residents leaving its population now at around 713,777. This data however, only includes residential homes and does not include any factories, warehouses, or apartment buildings that are abandoned or vacant.





Another issue that makes Detroit so different is the nearness of these abandoned and vacant buildings to other thriving buildings. The neighborhoods surrounding the Villages of Detroit are in decaying condition. Indian Village, located just three miles east from downtown, is in a stable and flourishing condition, but literally one block to the east the houses are deteriorating at a consistent rate. This deterioration can also be seen just a few blocks east of Eastern Market, where large factories and warehouses are sitting vacant inevitably becoming home to an endless supply of garbage and rubble.



2. Argument

This unprecedented level of abandonment, brought about by years of neglect, is an issue that needs a solution. The cities plan to demolish these vacant architectural objects (i.e., to bury all the materials of the abandoned structure, usually in the basement if available, or trucked off to a landfill) is a mistreatment of the materials within our built environment. This mistreatment not only applies to architectural materials but also some waste products, which tend to accumulate in and around this abandonment. We as a world culture should be considering alternative uses of these materials in our current state of affairs.



The birth, life, and ultimate death of architectural materials and objects is something that should largely be reconsidered. Any damage to the earth or the built environment, caused by lack of forethought on how these materials affect us and the earth, should be examined. I believe that an architectural solution is the most appropriate approach to this issue, because of its potential for addressing the coexistence of old structures with and made from the new, and for its capacity for solving issues on the reuse of materials.

3. Precedents

For insight as to how to address the potential for the reuse of materials we will look at the works of; Andy Goldsworthy and his organic works within nature, Tadashi Kawamata's reconstitution of meaning towards the rubble that exists in the urban environment, Bernard Rudofsky's book *Architecture Without Architects* focusing on "nonpedigreed architecture", Ettore Sottsass' *Metaphors* in which he builds isolated constructions that commented on the then current architectural condition, and Gordon Matta-Clark's deconstructivist works in abandoned buildings. The death and decomposition process that exists within nature, particularly in old-growth forests, will also be used as an analogy towards the design with reused materials.



Andy Goldsworthy

The organic works of Andy Goldsworthy blur the line between art and natural processes. They are ephemeral in their existence and predominantly deal with the dead and fallen limbs of various plant life. His works can be used as an analogy for the abandoned and leftover buildings in Detroit.







Tadashi Kawamata

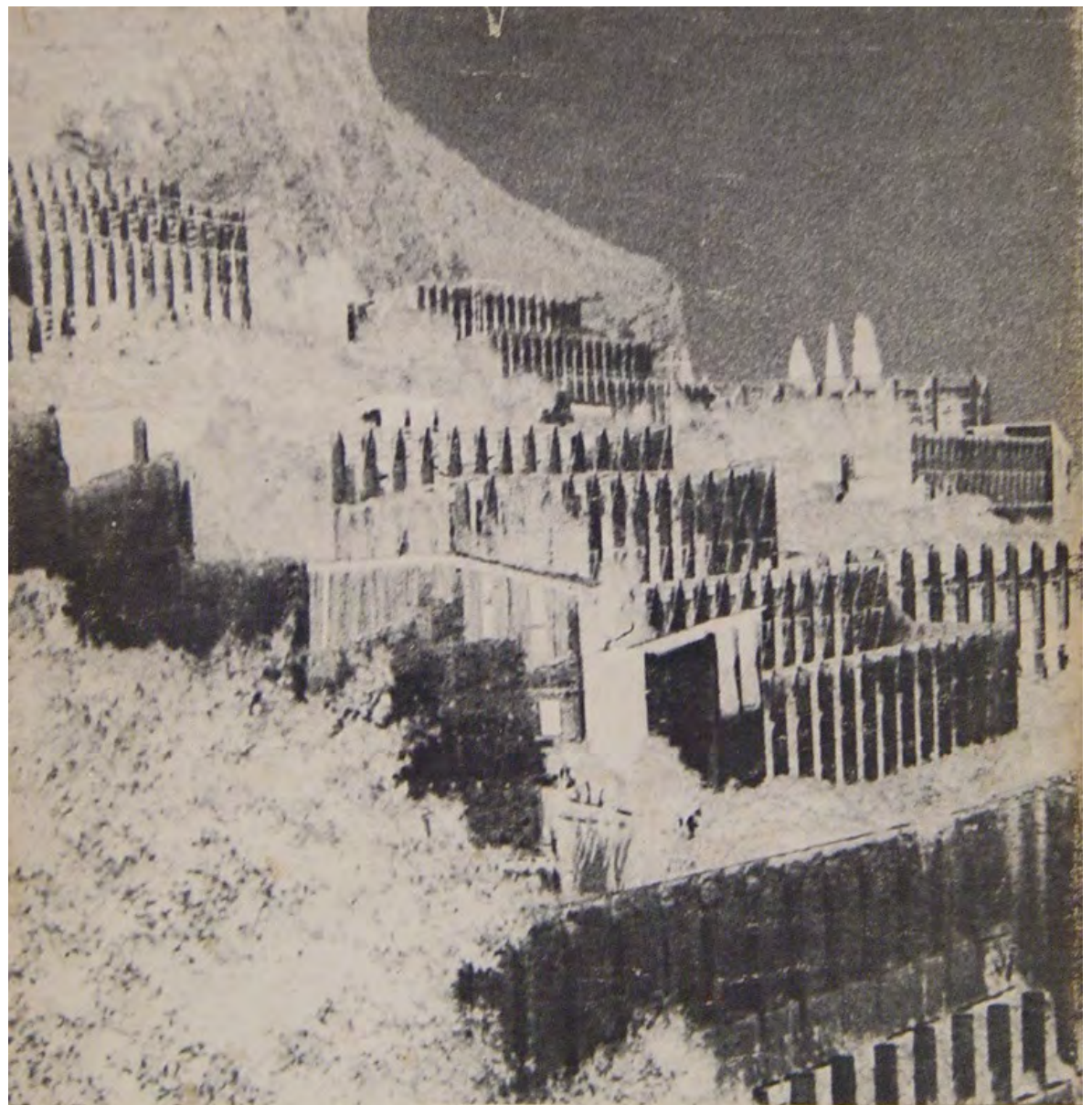
Kawamata uses primitive constructing techniques and scrap material found in urban environments to create structures that blend in effortlessly within the fringes of various cities throughout the world. His work with these materials ranges from folding cardboard boxes so as to create a temporary structure, to stacking wood sheets against the foundation of a bridge resembling a shack of sorts. This level of meaning reconstitution can be directly applied to the 'waste' materials found throughout Detroit.





Architecture without Architects

Rudofsky's book focuses on "nonpedigreed architecture", shedding insight as to how primitive cultures viewed and built their surrounding environment. His book shows that studying and understanding primitive ways of building can solve current architectural issues.



ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT ARCHITECTS

by Bernard Rudofsky



The small-capacity granaries with hand prints. What and why are these prints there? For what purpose? What if these prints were placed there to symbolize something? How did these people feel about the granary? This granary might have been viewed as something outside of just a granary. The granaries meaning is transcending beyond the function of the granary.



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Small-capacity granaries

The miniature silos are from Yenegandougou (above), Korhogo (at right), and Diebougou (far right), on the upper reaches of the Volta River (Ivory Coast), about 400 miles from the sea. The fourth picture (opposite page, top) shows a Sudanese type.



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While the leggy substructures of the Iberian stone granaries may have given rise to the popular belief in their nightly escapades, the potbellied type among these African storehouses suggests nothing so much as a propensity for dancing. Their anthropomorphic character is underscored by such decorations as the human face (above).

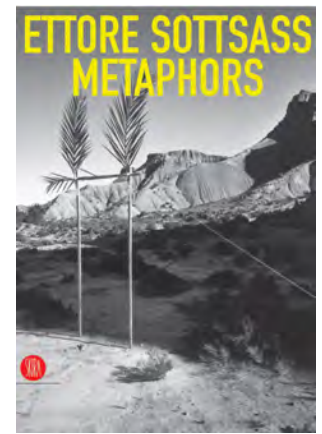


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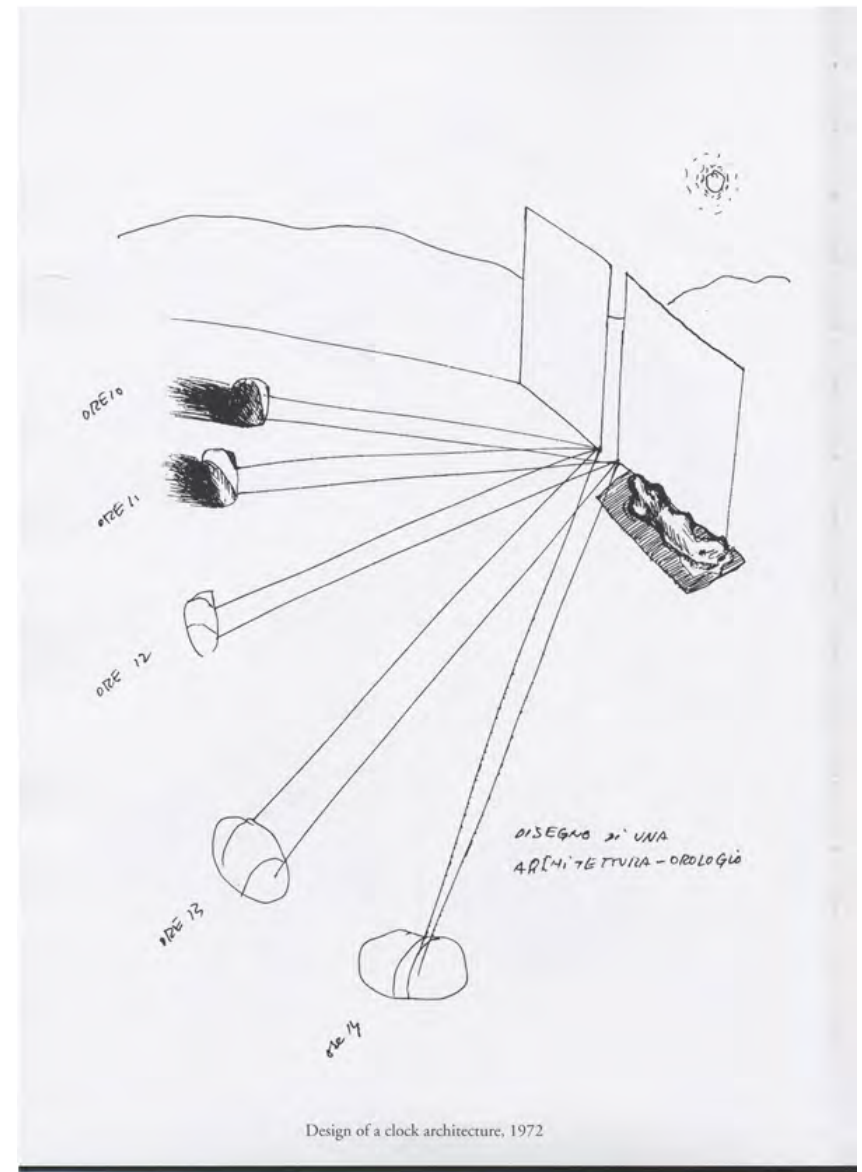


Ettore Sottsass

The constructions made by Ettore Sottsass were addressing one's own engagement with the built environment. He attempted to demonstrate that we as human beings can respond to and impact our surrounding environments. This way of thinking should be used to develop ways of utilizing the neglected materials that exist in the built environment and harness their potential.



C'E' SEMPRE UNA PORTA ATTRAVERSO CUI INCONTRI IL TUO AMORE
1976 (Dolomiti)



Design of a clock architecture, 1972

Gordon Matta Clark

Matta Clark's work consists primarily of deconstructing and dissecting abandoned and vacant buildings. His work as a "guerrilla renovator" was often controversial due to lack of permission to perform these works, which at times caused law officials to intervene. His "renovations" however, acted as a serious commentary in urban abandonment and neglect. He was giving new meaning to these unused structures, causing them to become an event, which Matta Clark viewed as being a positive thing. He gave value to these vacant buildings by causing a spectacle. He once gave a response to a question about traditional art exhibition spaces by saying that he was more interested in "how to extend a real environmental situation into something that's more accessible for people".





Death in Nature

The process of death, decay, and decomposition that exists in nature will serve as a metaphor for the death and decay that exists within many urban environments. Inspiration, through interpretation of the various process' that occur, will become a critical way of thinking about how materials are born and dispersed, and redispersed, in man-made environments.





4. Guerilla Installations

These ephemeral installations were produced during the summer of 2011. They served as devices to uncover innovative processes that can be used to find solutions to today's issues in building and design. They were intended to exploit unseen views of objects in the built environment to show that there is a life behind the facades often taken for granted. A life after death view of waste/discarded products/objects.











5. A brick, is a brick, is not a brick: A phenomenological analysis of Brick

Introduction

Materiality is essential to the human's ability to construct. This ability can manifest itself in different ways: carving into rock, processing trees to create raised dwellings, or simply shaping mud into brick. All of these examples require an individual to see a material in a given state, and envision that material in a new form. This manner of engaging materials, however, has been distorted due to modernity's approach towards architecture.

This new approach towards architecture broke away from traditions because they were outdated in the new economic, social, and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. It is this break from tradition that has changed the principles of constructing with materials, which has distorted these material's qualities and characteristics.

This can be clearly seen through, but is not limited to, modern brick veneers being used throughout the U.S., primarily for their cost efficiency.



Brick veneers are clay tiles, usually $\frac{1}{4}$ " or $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick, applied on the exterior of a building. They are typically used to mimic real brick and cost less



There are various installation methods for brick tiles. These particular installation method includes a metal track for the tiles to rest on.

These brick veneers are changing our understanding of a building. The understanding of a building is brought about by a particular experience, or experiences, of a building within the built environment. If a building is made from artificial materials, such as brick veneers, then the experience of that building will be an artificial experience as well, resulting in an artificial understanding. This raises the question to what effect the materials of a building have on a person? For the purpose of this research paper, a phenomenological analysis of brick will serve as a starting point for the reevaluation of the current architectural condition.

This phenomenological analysis will start with an analysis of any mundane experiences of brick, and it's effect on the human condition. These mundane experiences could be along the lines of remembering an encounter with a building constructed from red brick, or brick that has been glazed giving it a glossy texture. Next will be a critical evaluation of these experiences, which will attempt to bracket the mundane aspects of these experiences (i.e., if the brick was red, brown, or glazed, etc). From this evaluation, refined descriptions will emerge and form at least conditional essences of the phenomena of brick.

These conditional descriptive essences will then be compared with other phenomena, and overlapping essences will be reevaluated. This will reveal the essential aspects of the phenomena of brick. This analysis will make an important contribution to the current architectural dialogue in America, which is on the verge of becoming falsified to the point of no return.

A Phenomenology of Brick

It would be quite hard to think about architecture, or more broadly the built environment, without giving some thought to masonry construction. This construction type can be seen nearly everywhere one looks within the built environment. In many instances, however, this construction is hidden from view. For example, cinder block, or CMU construction is one of the most common types of foundations in residential housing but usually goes unseen because it is in filled with soil.

Masonry construction has a long history within architecture as a profession and as a craft. Its roots can be dated back approximately 10,000 years ago during the Neolithic Revolution where mortar was combined with stone, mud, or straw to build permanent structures. Mudbrick construction specifically was a popular construction technique due to its sustainability and efficiency.

These building blocks may be the oldest but closest relative to modern day clay bricks and have been discovered in South Asian constructions dating between 7000-3300 BCE. Since then this form of construction has remained prominent and shows no signs of being eliminated in contemporary times.

The invention of bricks and their use as a building material isn't all that hard to conceive. Taking something that is all over the earth, i.e., clay or mud, and shaping it into a geometry that can be easily stacked. Their thermal efficiency, strength in compression, and ease of reproduction being the main benefits; it is not hard to envision why they are and have been so important to architecture. From this brief history of brick construction, we should start to recall any mundane experiences of brick.



Mudbrick is a mixture of clay, mud, sand, and water that becomes stiff once mixed with a binding material such as rice husks or straw. These bricks are then either fired in a kiln or left outside and dried by the sun.

There are many different types and styles of brick that are currently used in construction today. They can differ in their composition, dimension, and texture. They can be either solid all the way through, or they can have indentations or holes which allow the mortar to sink into them creating a tighter bond while reducing their weight and the amount of material used.

Bricks can have various colors, which largely depends on the type of clay used and how they are dried (either being fired in a kiln or left to dry out in the sun). Sun dried bricks may result in a more uniform color, whereas kiln fired bricks may have distinct burn marks adding to the textural quality of the brick. Bricks can also have a smooth, glazed surface creating a different textural aesthetic. These glazes can be nearly any color imaginable. There are also different dimensions of bricks as well. For example, a roman brick is typically 4" x 2" x 12", whereas a typical engineering brick is 4" x 3" x 8". These facts about brick however, will remain only as facts and will not uncover any essential aspects of brick.

Explaining what bricks are made of, stating how they are used, and why they have been used is not helping in the quest for finding the essence of brick through a phenomenological analysis. To find the essence we should not make any judgments toward brick, or give any explanations of brick. Instead, we should attempt to describe brick strictly based on how brick appears to a purified consciousness. Therefore, these fact based explanations need to be bracketed.



Three, characteristically different, bricks. The type of brick to be used for a particular construction depends largely on their application.

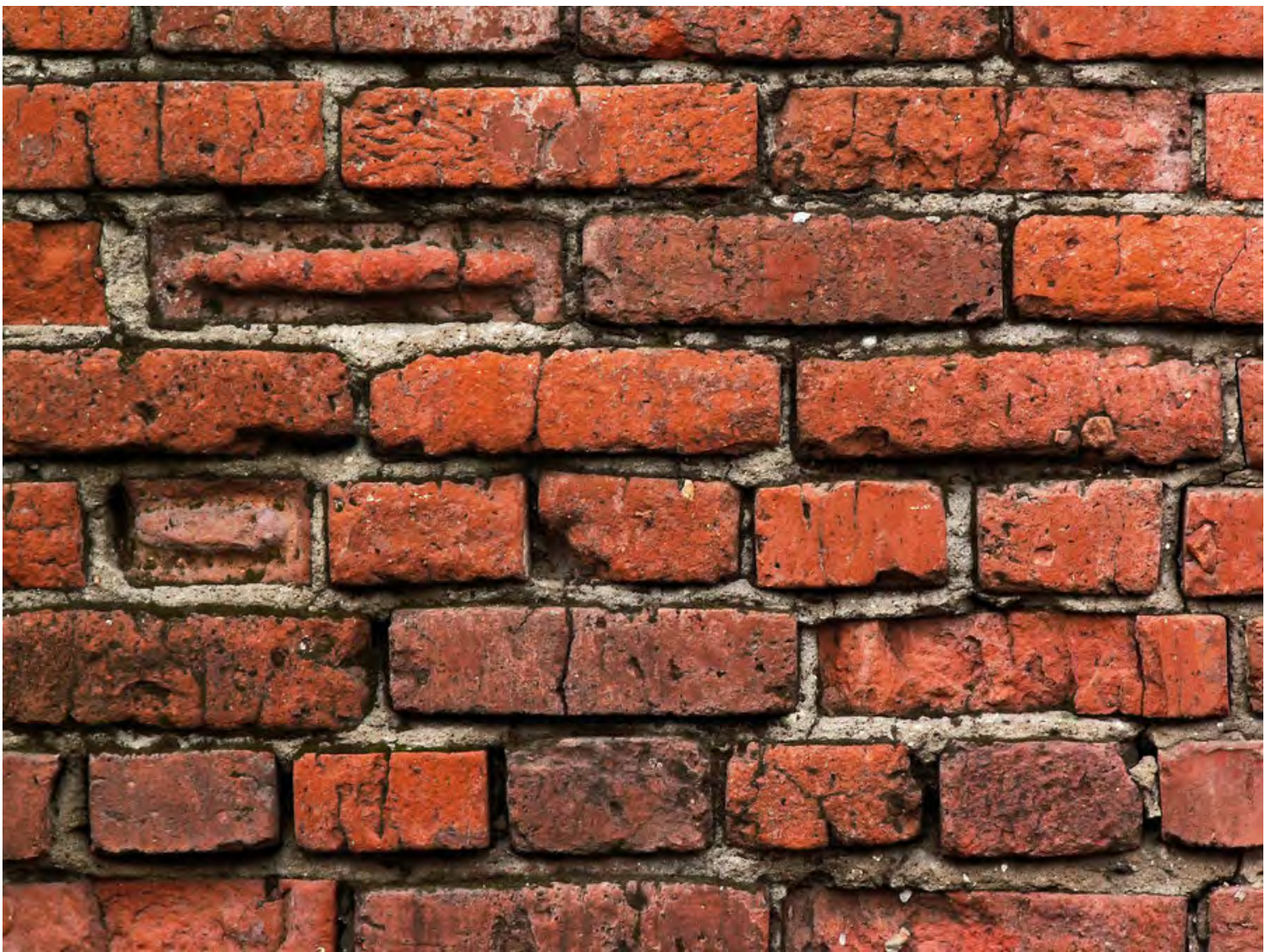
Bracketing these facts about brick will allow brick to appear to an individual purely as the thing itself, or according to Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, "To the things themselves!". This appearance of brick only presents itself through a particular experience of brick. So what is it about the appearance of brick that creates a unique and particular experience that is different than the experience of other architectural materials? To answer this, we should turn to Samuel Mallin's regions of body hermeneutics, which rely heavily on how the experience of a phenomenon affects our personal body.

The first region of body hermeneutics is that of perception. How do we perceive bricks? Surely we can see bricks due to sight being one of our most prominent senses. We usually see them stacked together with mortar, but we sometimes see them in a pile or stacked on a wooden pallet. Most of the time they are used to create the walls of a building or on the ground being used as pavers. When they are laid forming an arch they then become a ceiling material. But what happens when we see them from far away as opposed to up close? Does their appearance change in any way? I would argue that bricks do change in appearance. From far away, the individual bricks are typically indistinguishable, i.e., they appear as an even, uniform plane of material. As a mundane example, try to think of a red brick building viewed from far away.

The individual red bricks do not appear as single red bricks. Instead their appearance becomes blurred, creating a uniform reddish color. It is only upon closer investigation that one realizes that the reddish wall is actually composed of many individual bricks. The scale of the bricks and their composition and relationship to one another allow for this blurring to happen. This blurring of appearance, however, also occurs in other forms of masonry construction, therefore we need to expand and delve deeper into this essence.



This building is constructed from red bricks. In this photograph, taken at this particular distance, the bricks are indistinguishable from one another. Instead they appear as a solid reddish brown surface.



A close up view of a brick wall laid with mortar revealing the singularity of each brick



Two stacked bricks will stay stationary until an outside force acts upon them. Their static behavior is largely due to their modular form.

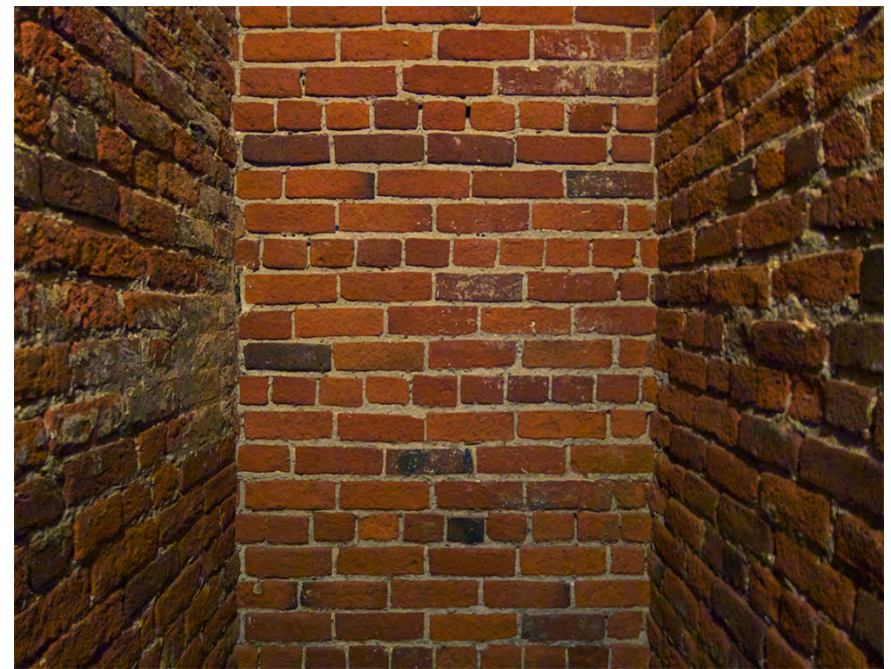
The appearance of a brick, either laid with mortar creating a wall or seen as a pile of brick, reveals that they are modular. A bricks modularity can be discovered not only through sight but also through the sense of touch, which is the second most prominent sense employed in the analysis of the appearance of brick. An experience with a single brick will reveal that it is flat, rectangular, and has a particular substantial weight. A brick is perceivably not round like a disc or a ball. This modularity reveals the notion that bricks are stationary. From this, one could determine that bricks support on some level.

This level of support is directed towards the idea that bricks can be stacked due to their modularity. For example, we can place a brick on top of another brick and have confidence that that brick will not fall unless a force pushes it off. This stacking leads us to conclude that bricks, due to their modularity, can sufficiently support one another. This confidence in knowing that bricks can be stacked also supports the idea that bricks have a stable quality to them.

The supportive and stable nature of brick can be understood through a physical experience of handling a brick. The experience of stacking brick will not only reveal that bricks are supportive of one another, but also that they have a distinguishable solidarity to them. Through the sense of touch, we can comprehend that bricks are not soft like a sponge, or flexible like rubber. We can knock them against other objects and realize that they tend not to reverberate any sound. This indicates to us that they have a certain substantiality to them. It also indicates that they are hard and it would require a relatively great deal of force to break one. It is true however, that this hardness can be measured, and according to Husserl this measurement would fall under the abstract mathematization of the world and should not be considered as a description of brick. But the 'measured' hardness of brick is not what is being described here as essential. It is the 'experience' of hardness that indicates that brick is stable, which supports the understanding of brick as having strength.



A firehouse constructed from brick. Bricks here are used to represent permanence and security. Attributes that people tend to feel comforted by.



A brick cell in this image conveys a level of insecurity and uneasiness

The strength that bricks possess can be considered on two levels. On one level they are strong in resisting forces such as compression when stacked one on top of the other. An example of this appearance of the phenomenon of bricks would be the unaltered form (i.e., non flattened or deformed) of bricks at the bottom of a brick wall. However, a more essential level of strength that bricks possess is in their Social-Affectivity.

Samuel Mallin's region entitled Social-Affectivity plays a significant role in the analysis of brick and adds yet another level of support. Bricks have the ability to support the idea of security and comfort within us. We tend to feel some level of safety towards a building constructed from brick.

A friend of mine grew up in a small town in Wisconsin. He said that out of all the buildings in town, it was the brick butcher shop that grounded people. It was as if the people viewed themselves, and each other, in the unified brick walls. It was the support system for the town, which reveals that bricks exude an aura of permanence. This aura of permanence must be clarified as being contextual.

The security and impenetrability that brick construction represents can be viewed either as comforting or discomforting. It is experienced as comforting when used to construct a home, or an important building within the built environment that we view as a safe haven like the previous example showed.

On the other hand, when brick is used for a prison, then this impenetrability is viewed as discomforting. It is in this contextual application that brick causes a sense of uneasiness within the inmates, who know all too well that it would be quite the challenge in trying to get through a brick wall. Even still, the brick wall is a physical manifestation that supports permanence and security, which in some way or another causes us to relate to it

This phenomenological analysis of brick is intended to shed light on the current architectural condition. The condition in particular being that of the radical distortion that is happening to the materials we use to construct. Brick veneers/tiles, being the primary example of this distortion, should be questioned due to their transformation of the qualities and characteristics of actual load bearing brick. Therefore, a phenomenological analysis and reconsideration of brick should be the necessary starting point for understanding it and its application. So what next?

From this analysis, we should think deeply about how we view bricks. Bricks represent permanence and security, but it was clarified that these qualities can be contextual. It was also shown that bricks have a visual disconnect between viewing it from a far as opposed to viewing it up close. This up close and personal view of bricks reveals their suitability to the human hand. The modularity of brick, its relative hardness, and its ability to be stacked reveal the innate strength and support that brick possesses. This level of support also leads to bricks stability and ability to ground us, which can be attributed to their comforting essence.

The use of brick as a material for the buildings we occupy is a form of construction that doesn't seem to be retreating anytime soon. What about other alternatives for this material? What if brick became more artistically expressive? With the essence of brick being a material that conveys strength and permanence, then it seems to be a suitable material of choice for means of sculpture. What better way to represent the permanence and stability of a town, city, or a culture than by creating an everlasting and timeless sculptural piece made from brick? An interactive piece, in which people could experience and occupy brick in a new way, creating an event that would bring people physically and emotionally closer to the material and what the material represents. A quote by architect Louis Kahn, whose brickwork is second to none, may serve as insight to the innate artistic and sculptural qualities that brick possesses...

*“And if you think of Brick, for instance, and you say to Brick, ‘What do you want Brick?’ And Brick says to you ‘I like an Arch.’ And if you say to Brick ‘Look, arches are expensive, and I can use a concrete lentil over you. What do you think of that?’ ‘Brick?’
Brick says: ‘... I like an Arch’”*

-Louis Kahn

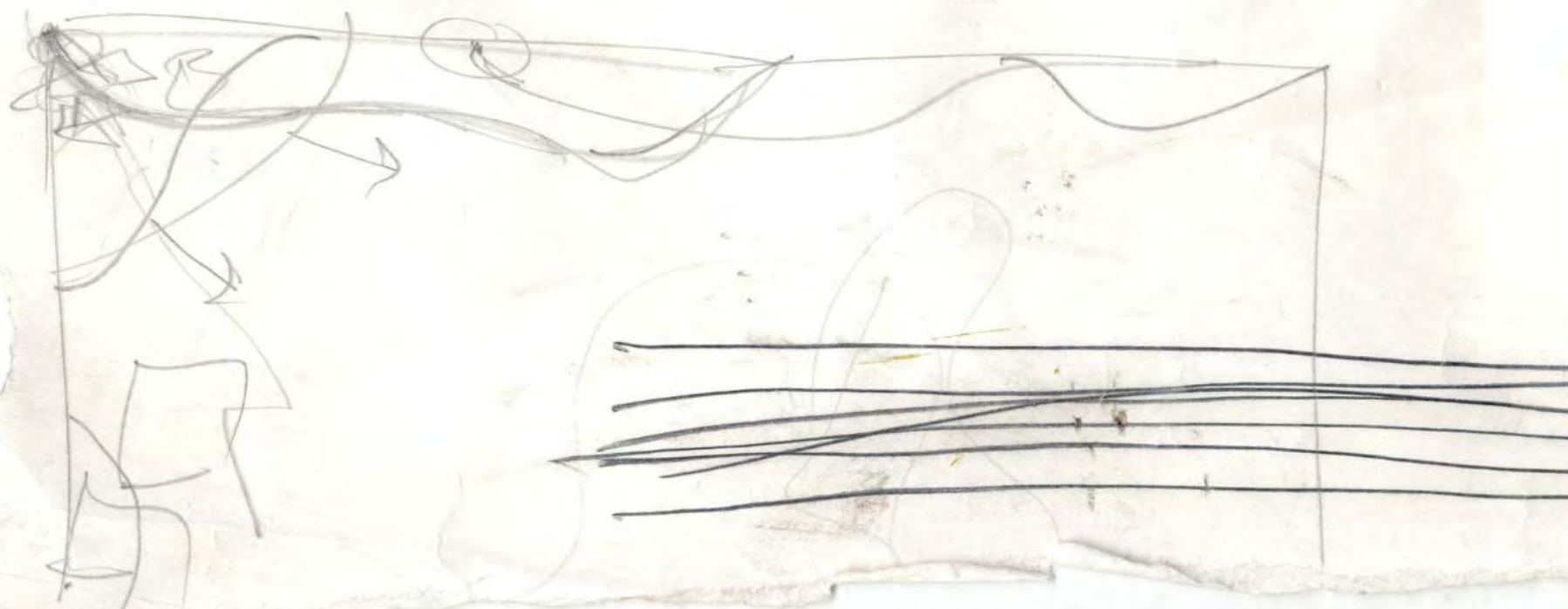
6. Constructions/Prototypes

The following projects are experiments in building that show care and consideration towards the reconditioning of various materials. They are to be considered case studies in this thesis exploration. These projects exist not as final outcomes, but as transfiguring thought-objects that should be interpreted contextually and not universally.





Please do not



touch any of this
material in
this corner

T.J.A.
Ben Butler
KTM wing ok? concrete
telling

I. Brick Blanket



Practice in the beautification of an environment. A brick mesh intened to hug or drape over existing infrastructure in hopes of creating a new, more pleasing environment than what currently exists. Displaying innate capabilities of brick in new ways while still staying true to bricks warm and comforting nature. The bricks could be processed and erected on-site. Contextual deployment.

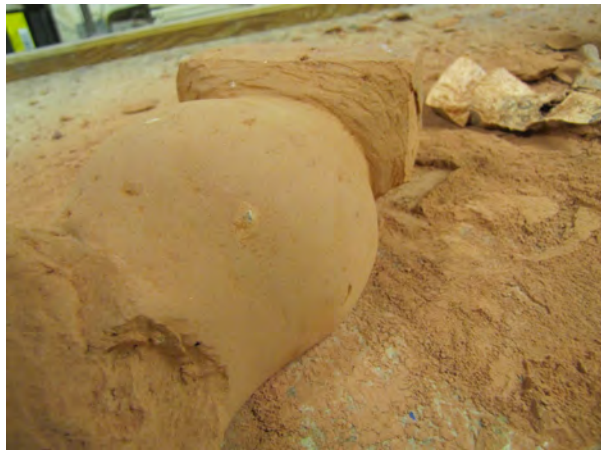
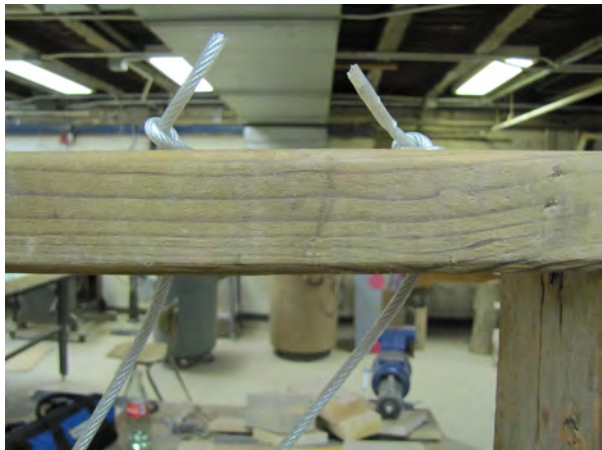
















WARREN L ORANGER
ARCHITECTURE



II. Attic Retreat

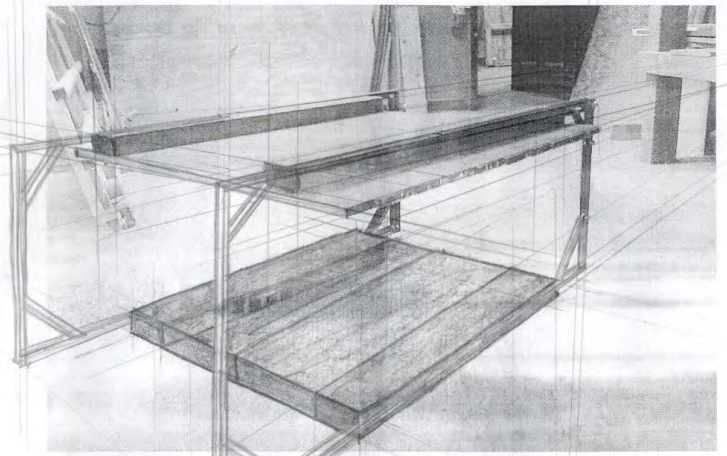
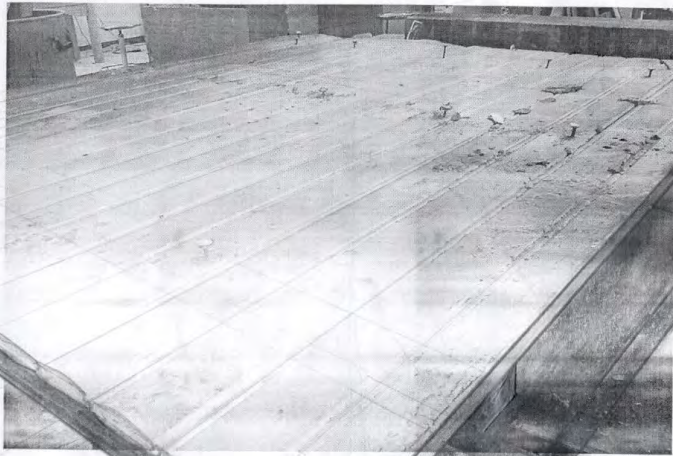
II. Attic Retreat



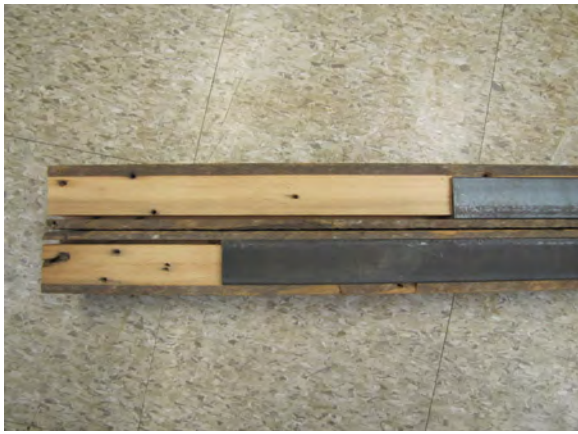


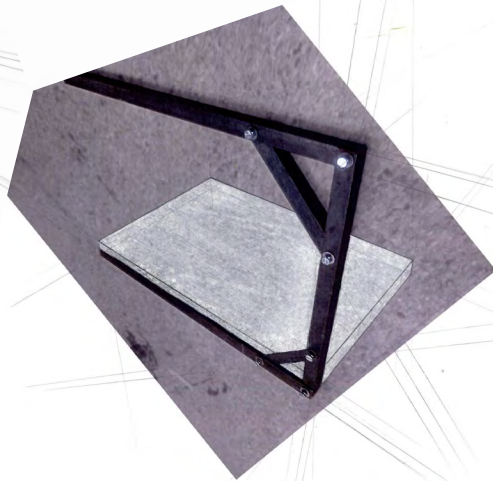
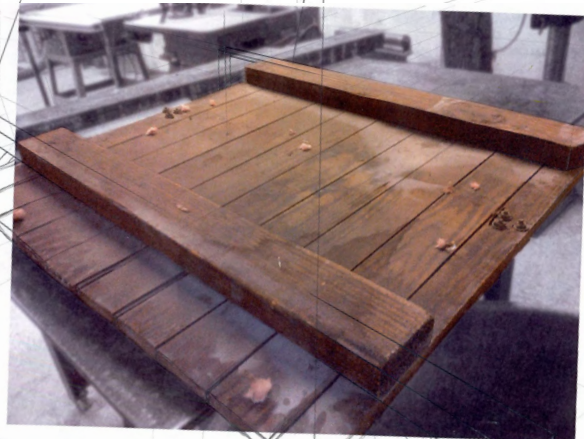
An old attic door. Reminded me of a very fond childhood memory of hanging out in the attic of my friend's garage. Our clubhouse. Our hangout. We knew this space very intimately. I began to think of the meaning that that attic door could if it was still a part of my life.

I attempted to recondition this attic door into a functional story-telling object. A coffee table in which conversations would organically arise but with an overarching meaning from my childhood.

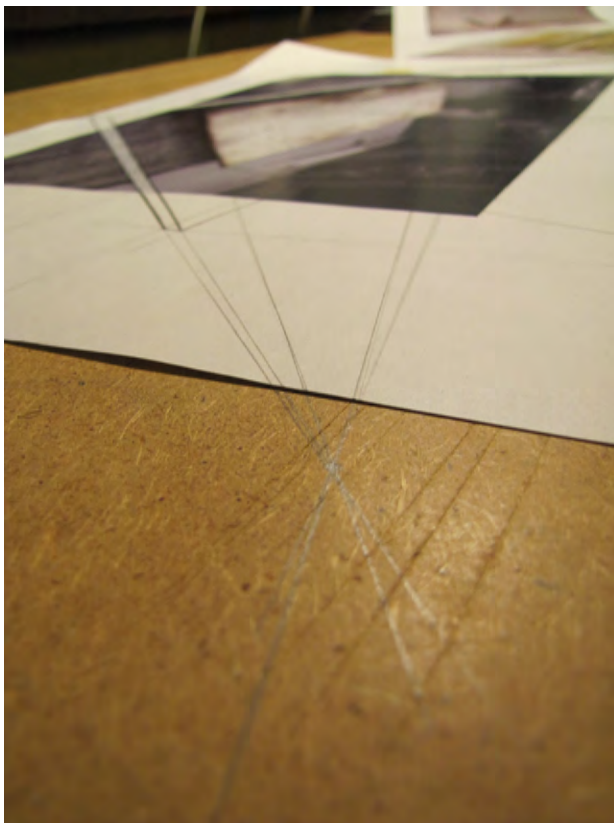


Black & White printed image, pencil.





Color printed images, black & white printed images, pencil, exacto blade to scratch off printed ink.









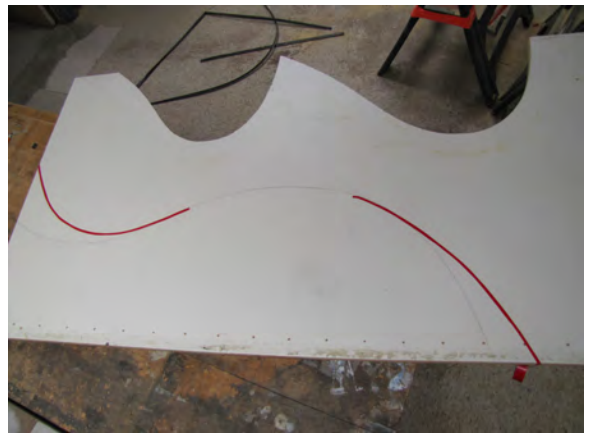
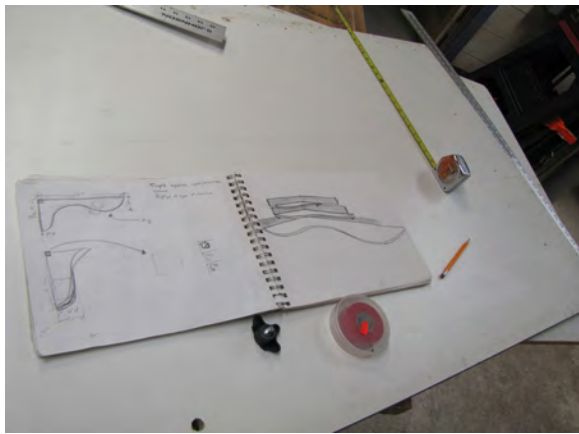
III. M.A.L. Desk

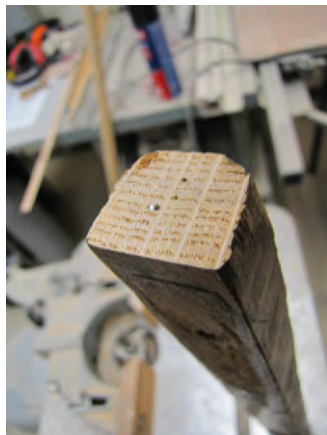
A Desk and Stool that precipitates inspiration due to its material assemblage. An old disassembled and unrecognized desk from a school of architecture. One could think back on a time when this desk was used by another student. Further, one could contemplate what sort of ideas were worked over on this desk, which is evident based on the

residue from artistic experiments that can be still be seen on the desktop. What sort of work and designs were produced on this desk? And is there any way I could tap into these past processes. Drawings/ paintings? The initials M.A.L. marked on the top, but why? What did this object mean to this person? And why did they feel the need to mark their name on it?

Corkscrew Stool

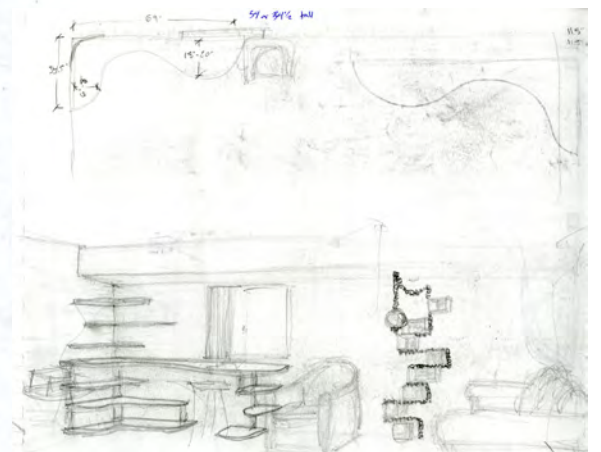
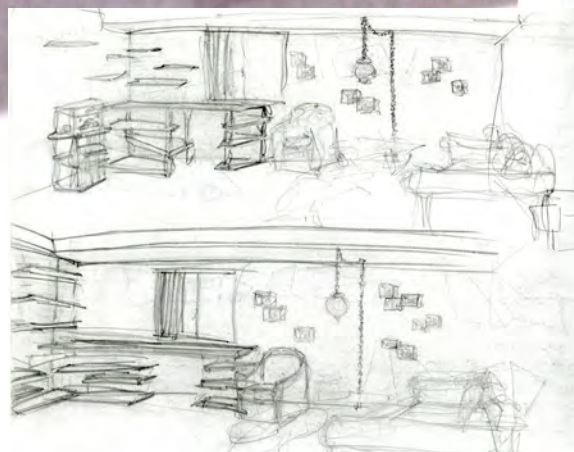






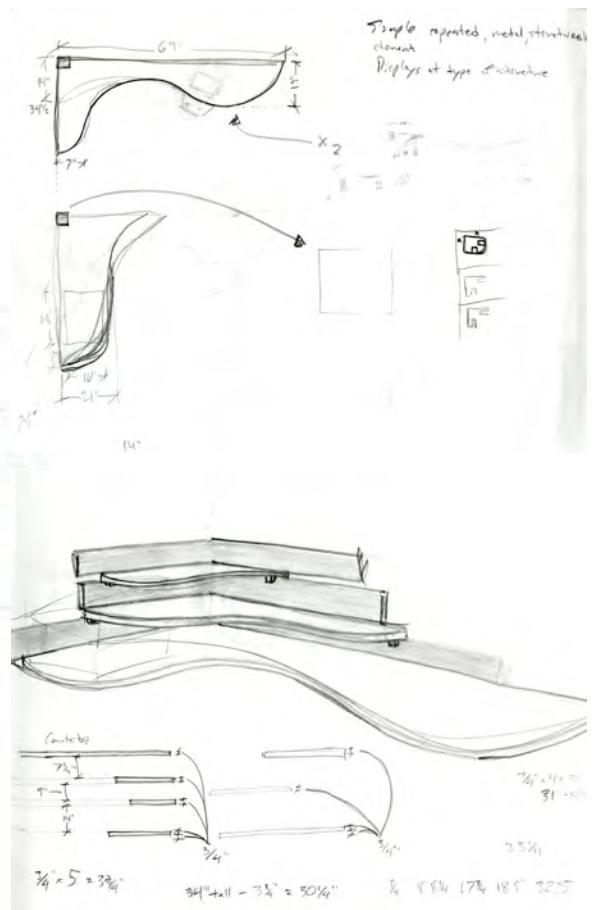


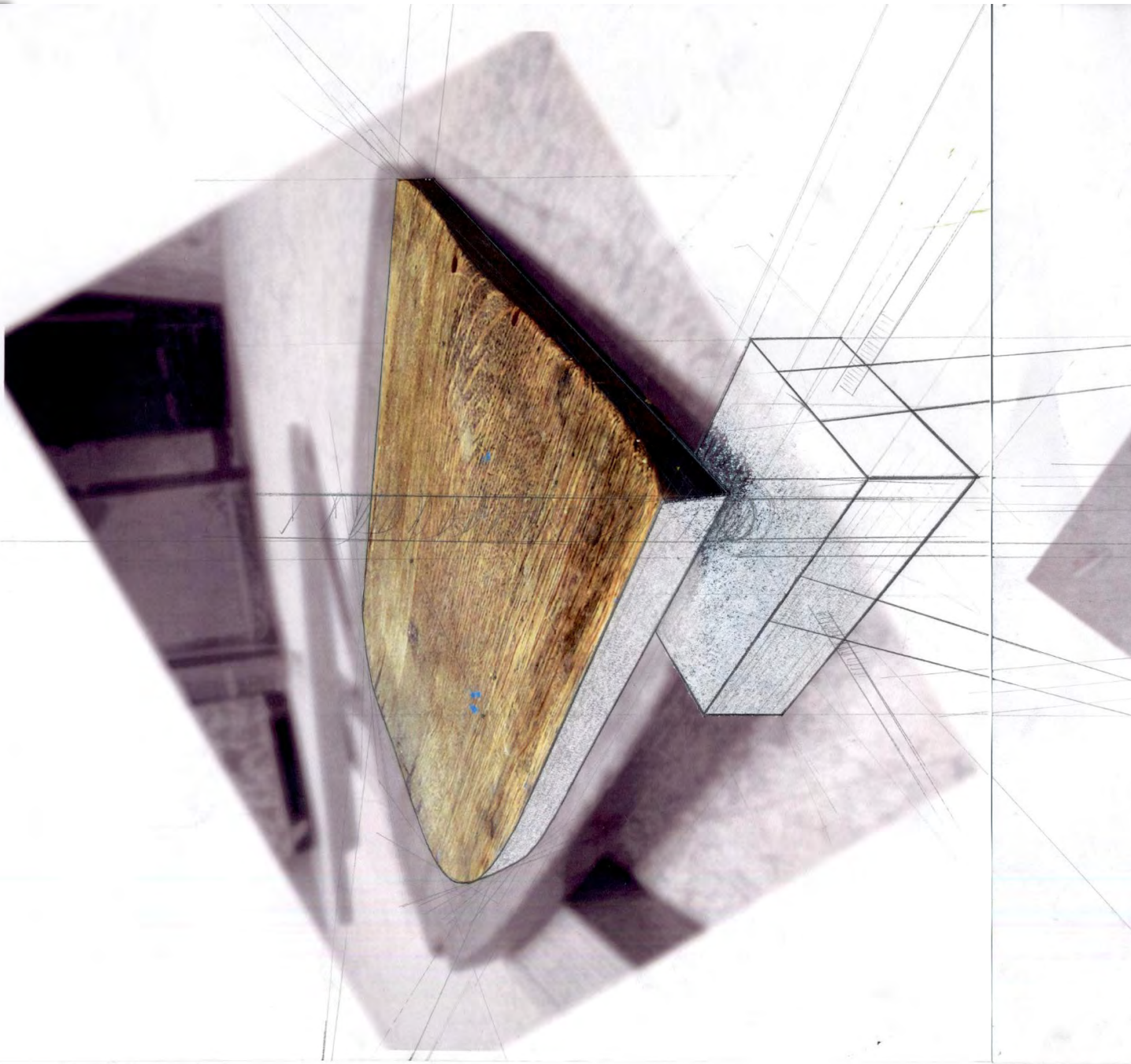
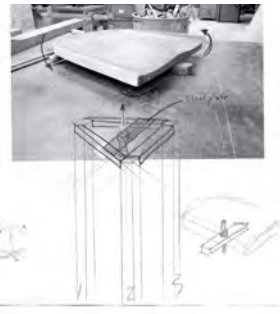
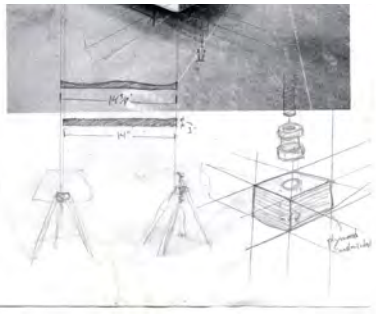
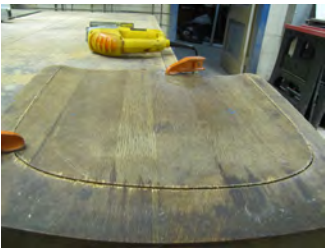
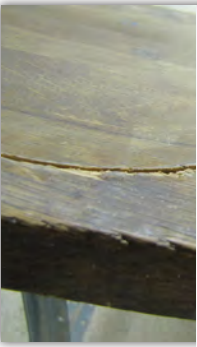
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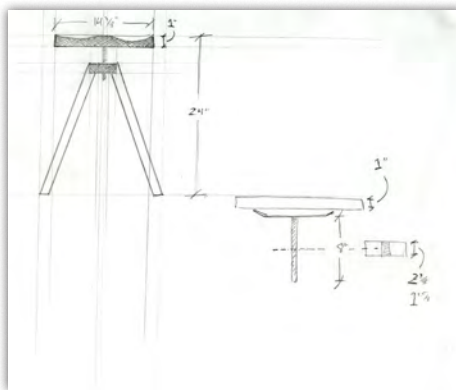


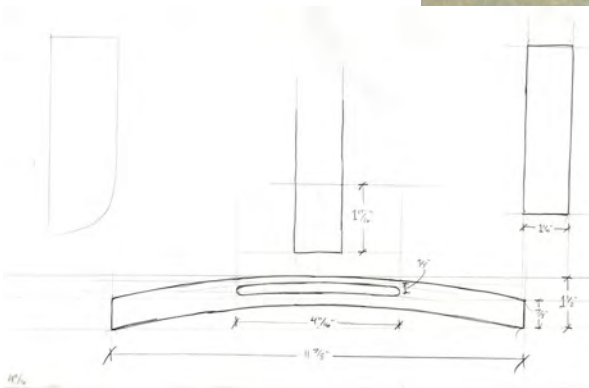
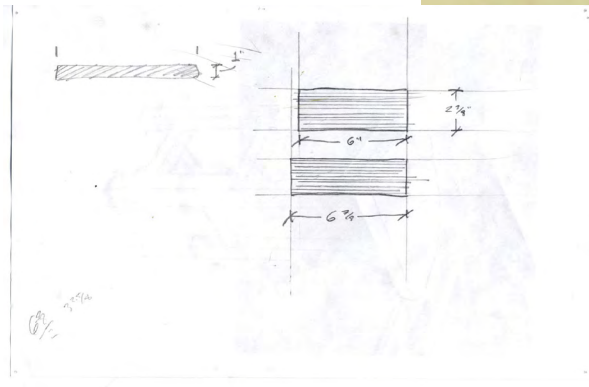


Color printed image, pencil, exacto blade to scratch off printed ink.







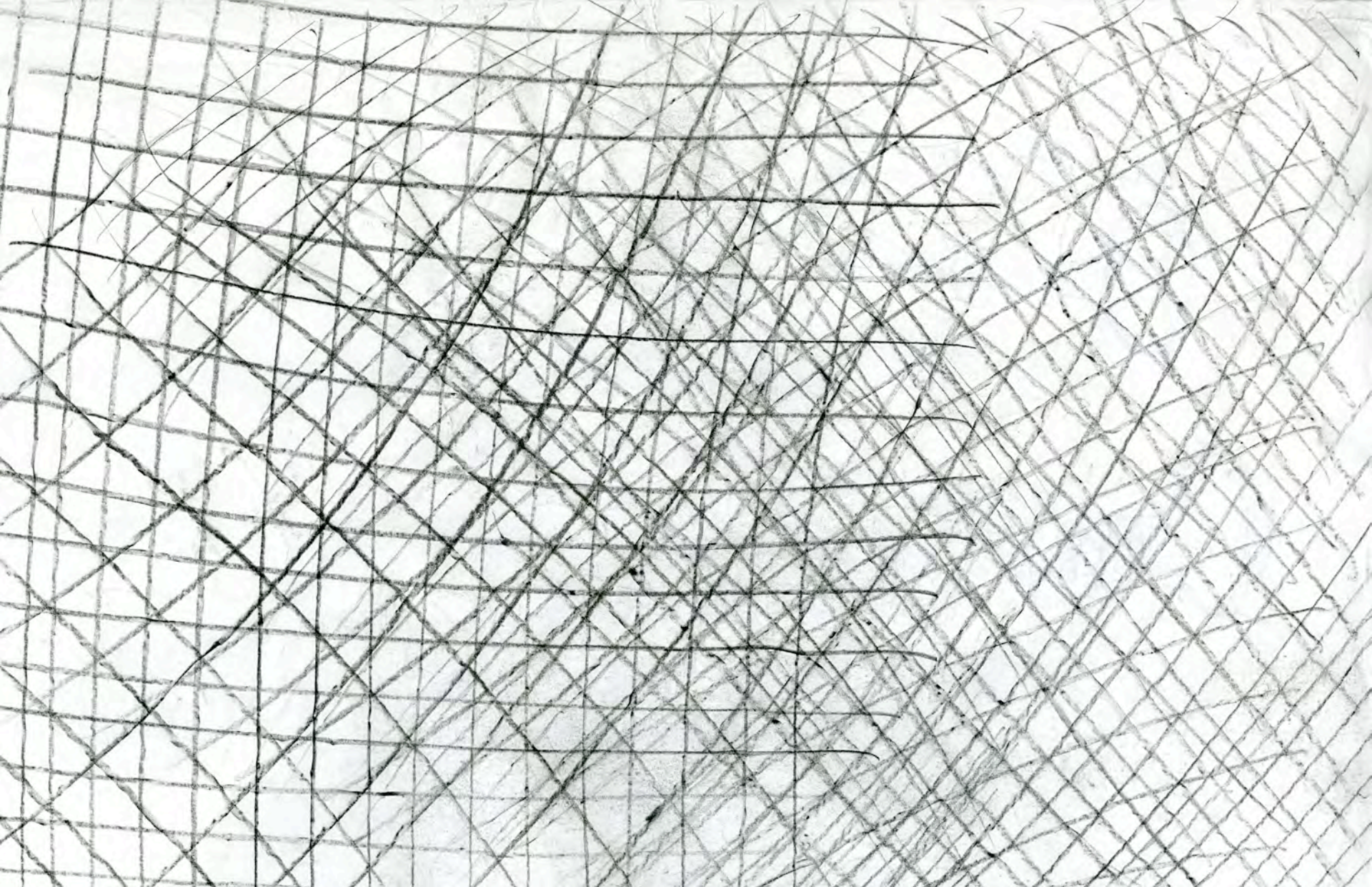


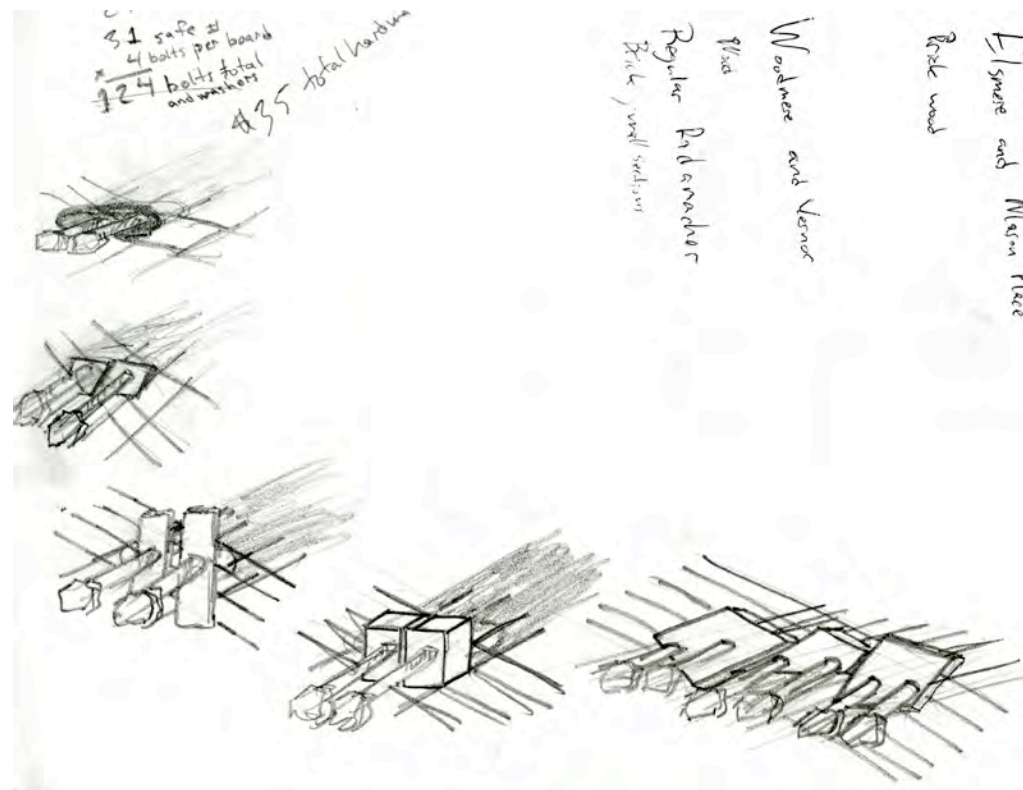
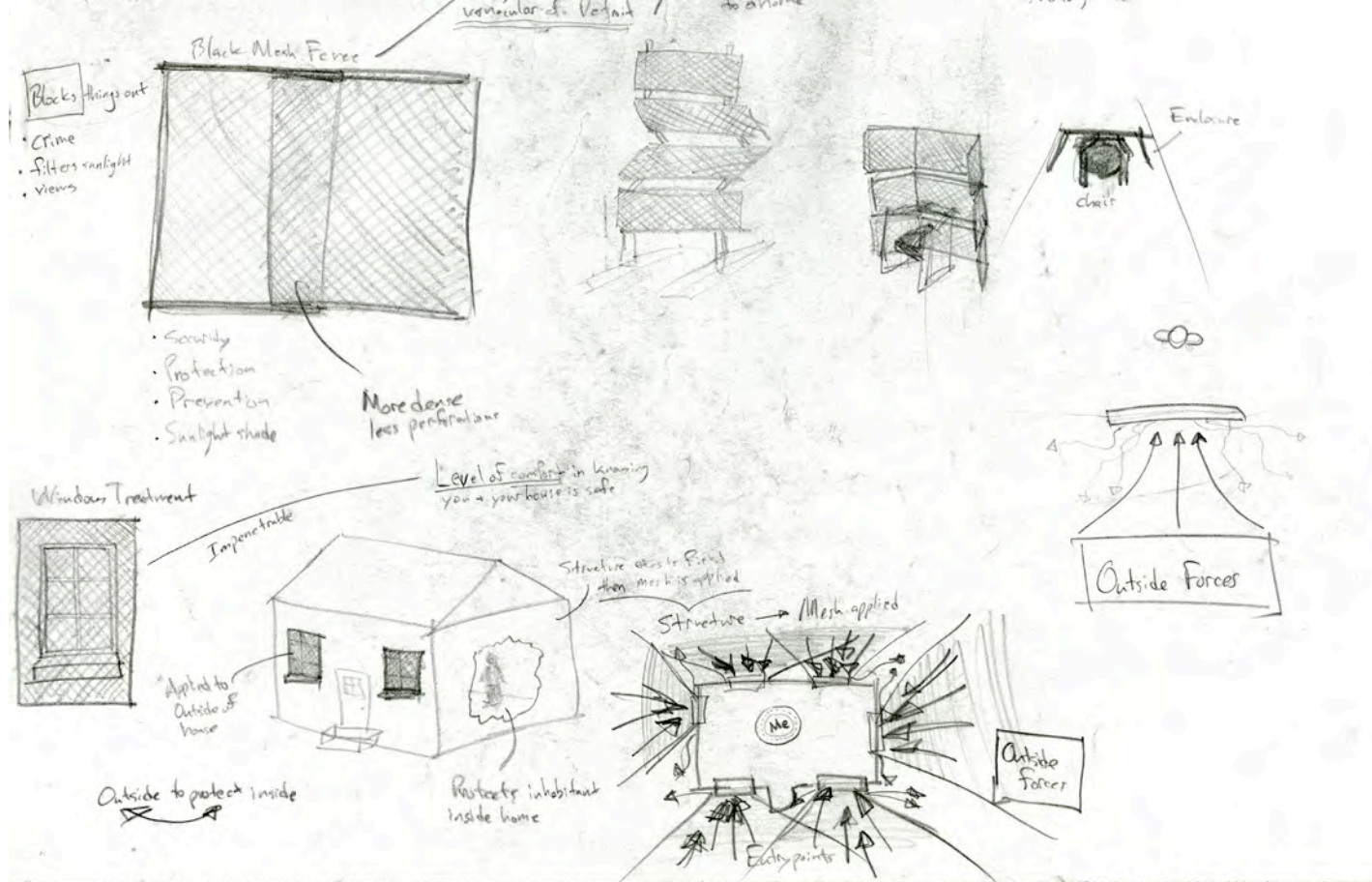


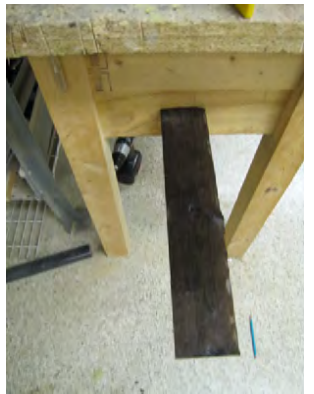
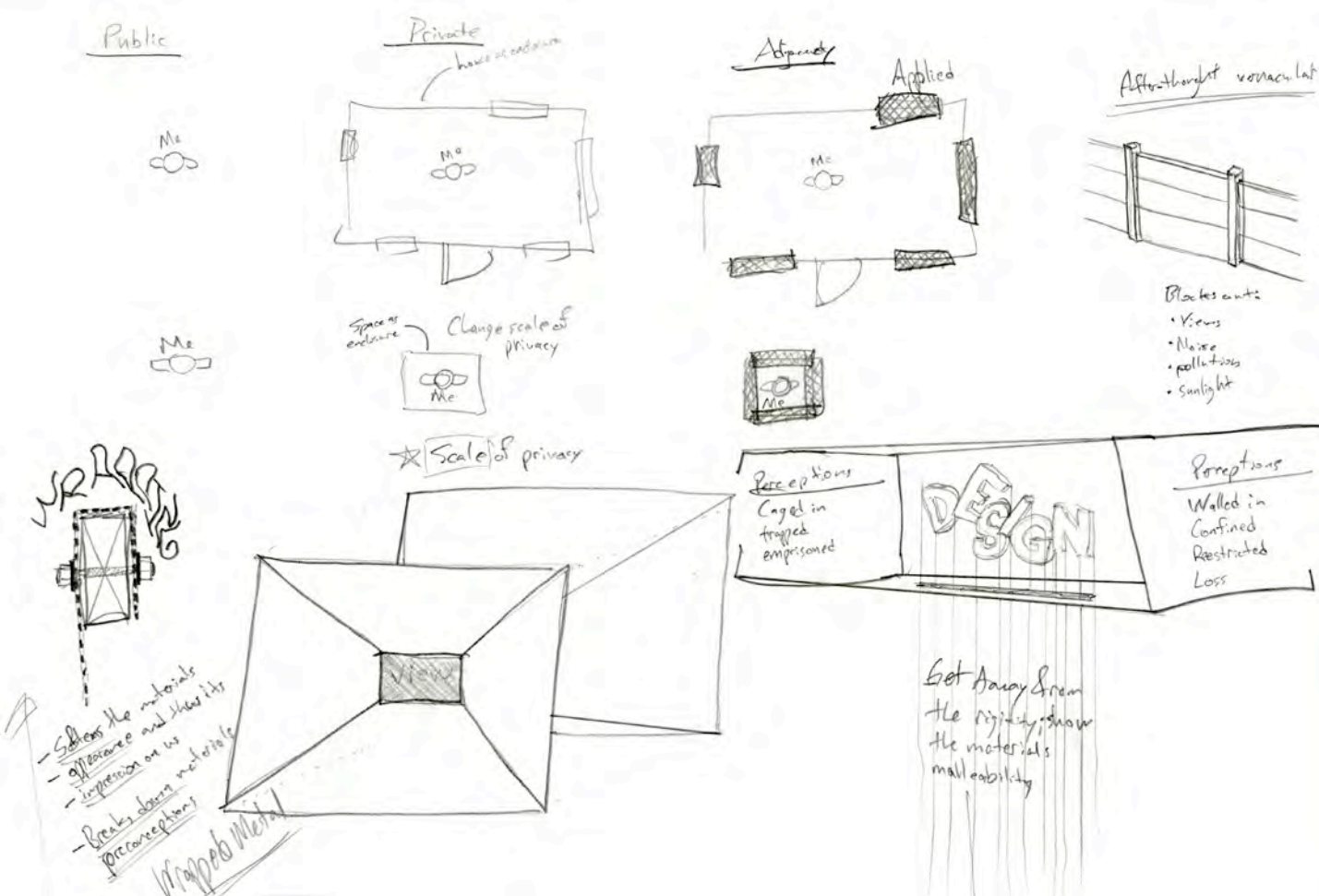


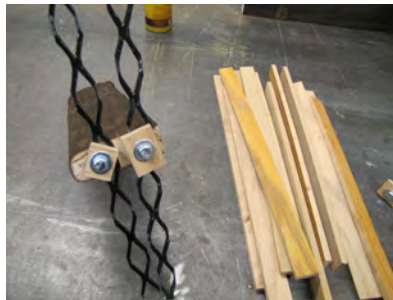
IV. Burnt Throne or The Isolation of the After Vernacular

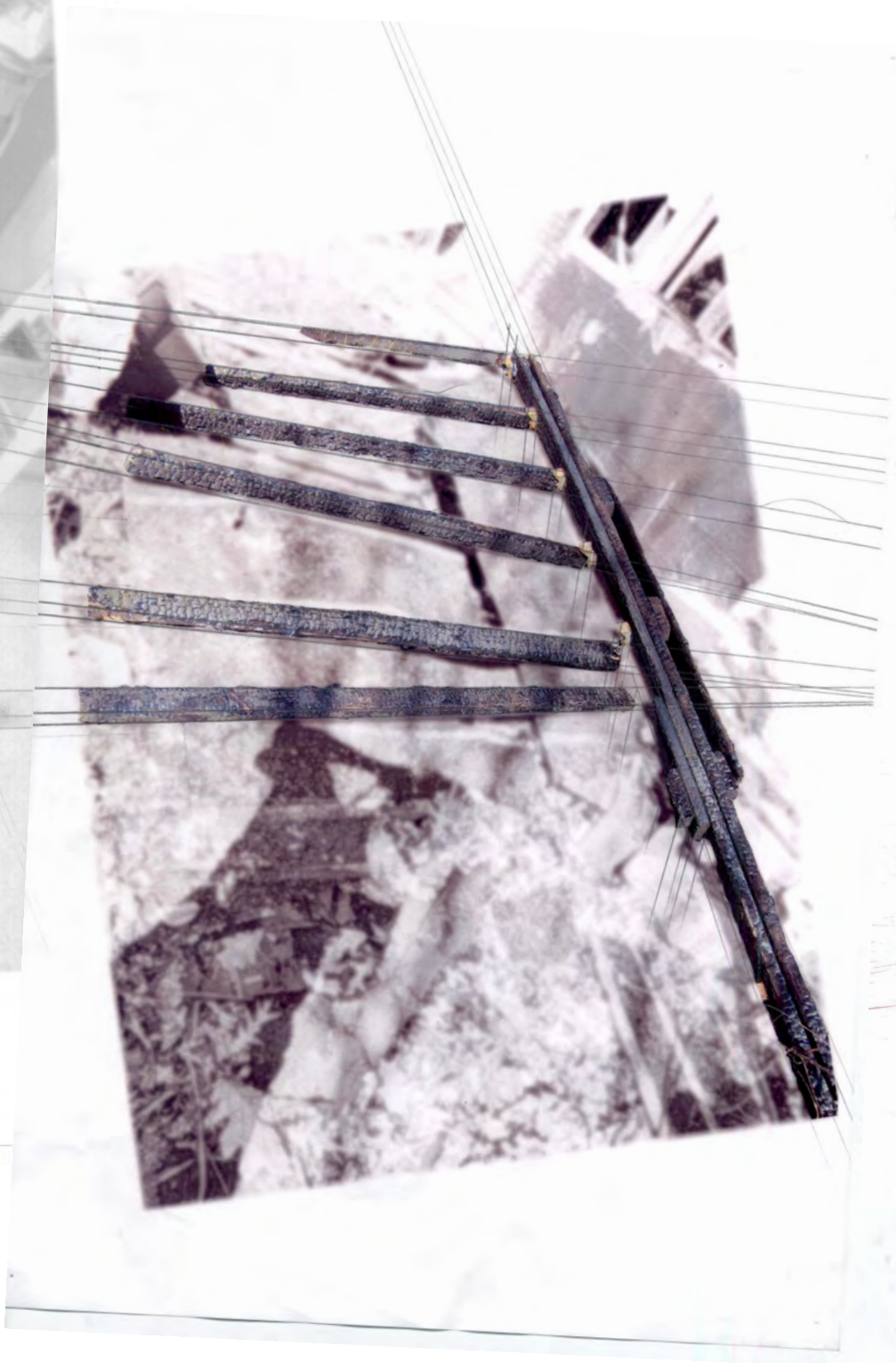
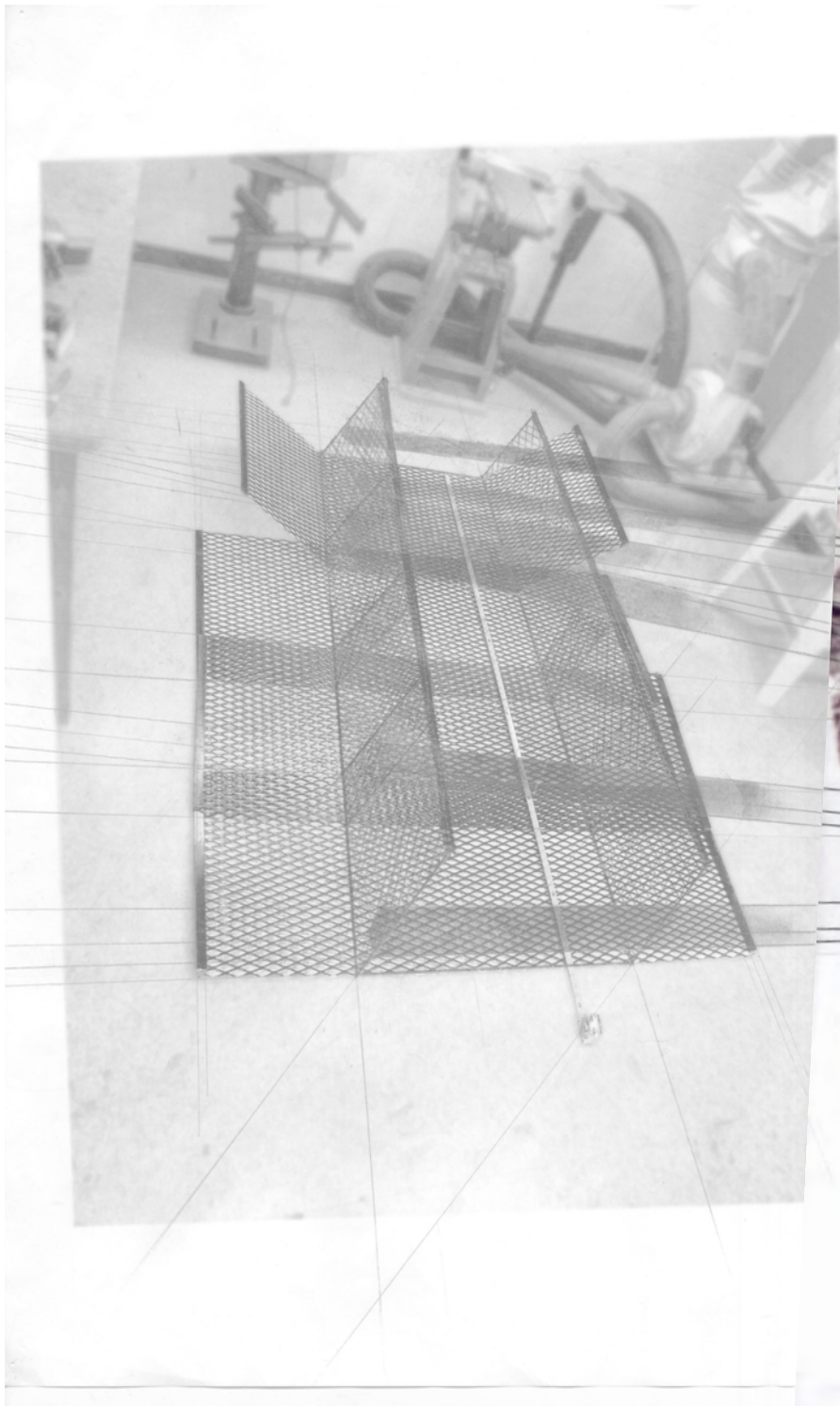


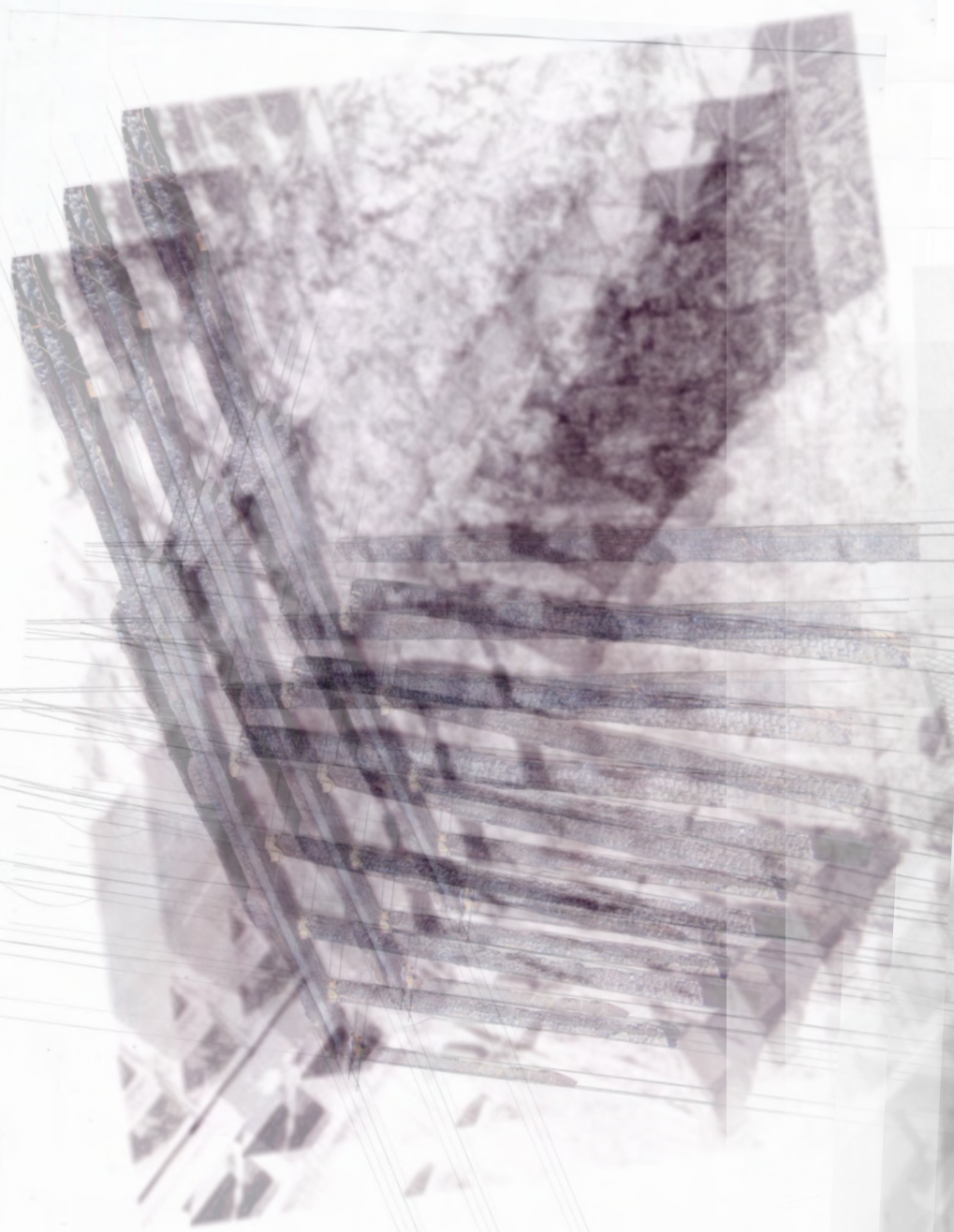












6. Warehouse District Intervention



Casino Blues







