

THE HOUSE IS NEVER COMPLETE



A Cartography of Idiosyncrasy in Socio-political Maelstrom

Thomas Ibrahim

2022

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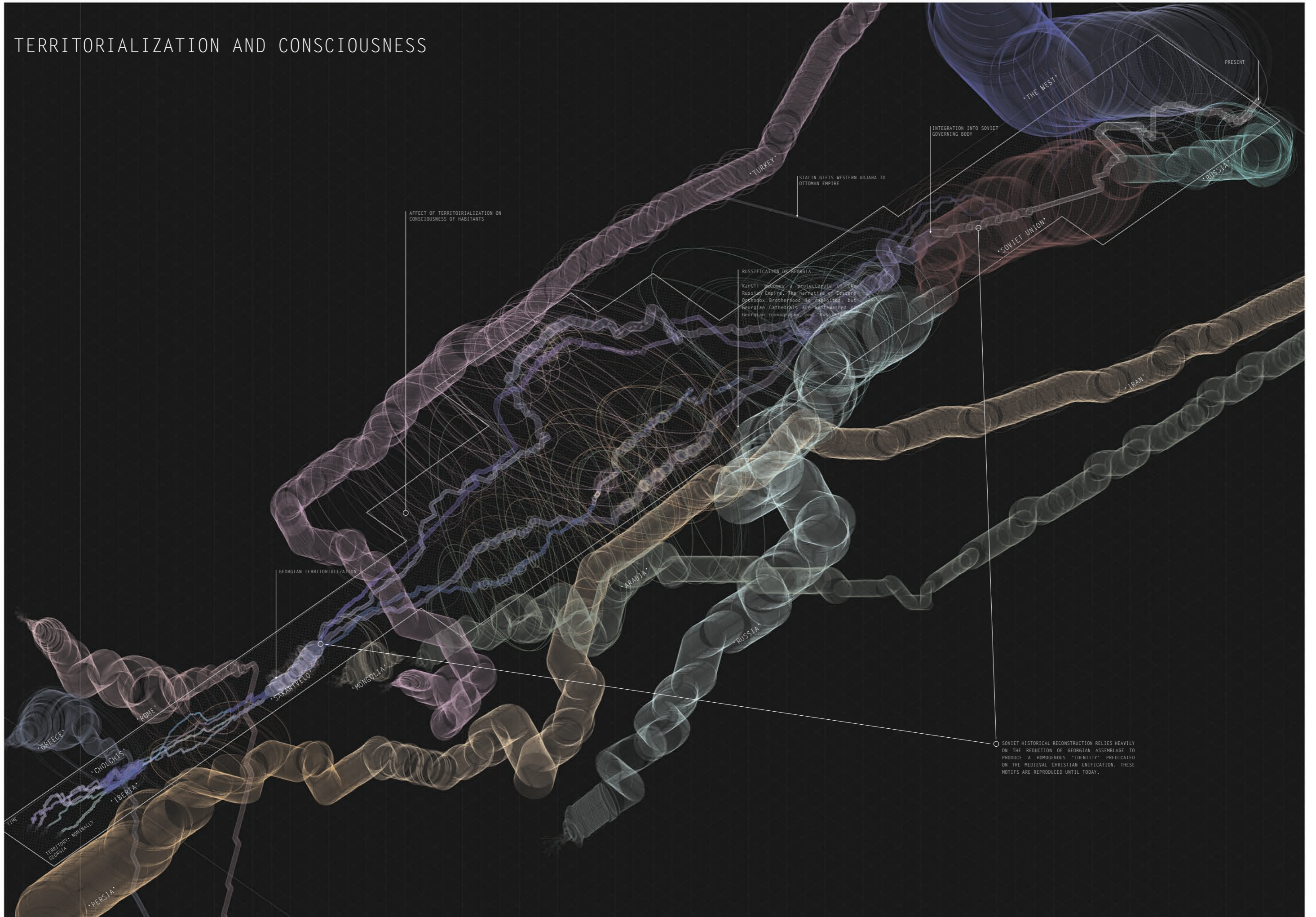
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Acknowledgments

Thank you to Nika Gabiskiria, George Kvezereli, Katja Petrowskaja, and Claudio Vekstein for continued support, curiosity, and energy, and to all members of the Kibe-Projekt team for continued work for the historical and cultural interest of Tbilisi, Georgia.

Explore Lab 33 - Thesis
Written by Thomas Ibrahim (5312566)
Design Mentor: Heidi Sohn
Research Mentor: Stavros Kousoulas
Building Technologies: Hubert van der Meel
TU Delft, 2022.

TERRITORIALIZATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS



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“A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space.”

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1976

“Expression is a phenomenon of interference, a function of technical procedures no less than it is mimetic.”

-Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970)

The following paper will be broken into two main sections: the first section focused on the a brief recent history of Tbilisi, Georgia and the production of architectural and urban interventions as they coincide with larger political processes (i.e. the collapse of the Soviet Union, the shift to neoliberal economic policies, etc.) and social phenomena (i.e. production of ethno-nationalist narratives) and their effects on the production of the city. The second section will be focused on a *modus operandi* which subsumes and responds to the information detailed in the prior section – elaborating them into an architectural process (“technical procedure”) which will glean from the Georgian context of catalysis and expand to more global orientation. The historical section will in-part be informed by data collected over a period of five years through anecdotes, and conversations with local researchers, activists, and significant political actors. The work that I will attempt is the juxtaposition and organization of information, and presentation of a narrative which attempts to lace the many loose ends of a rich but fragmented architectural epoch.

The first section will be further broken into three chapters, 1) Ideological Monuments, Political Subversion, and Topography 2) Imminent Need and the Mechanics behind Granular Appropriations, and 3) Between *Bilbao* and *Banana Republic*. The main paradigmatic change which will be noticed in the first section is the changes in “intentionality” and “effect” from ideologically justified buildings to misguided and erroneous neoliberal investment; from buildings produced as a result of a *technical procedure* and *intellectually rigorous* design processes, to buildings justified by means to the open-ended and elusive goal of profitability. I will try to explain, from the positions of several actors in the Georgian assemblage, an entire trajectory of narratives which result in the phenomena of production of monumental constructions, and the disappearance of entire city blocks, in order to problematize the entire matrix, and make an informed conjecture – an architectural “solution”.

The second section will focus on the production of *technical procedures* informed by the previous chronology, responding to economic implications of previous poor problematizations interlaced with intentional political subversions; the resulting emergent phenomena of which is the perpetual alienation of Georgia in the face of robust Western economies and ever-imperial Russian ambition. This condition of dual exploitation, often becoming mutual exploitation (simultaneously by Western and Russian interests), and leaving the fate of the exploited people of the country, fully aware of their conditions, and without agency or capacity to make positive changes to their living conditions economically, socially, and culturally. The technical procedures which will be delineated, therefore, encompass economic and social factors, and propose the initiatives which have made a difference on multiple fronts with singular small interventions. In this case, I will use the multivalent, local housing typology, the *ezo* (courtyard) house (and its layered appropriations) as a window of opportunity for practical and metaphoric intervention; so as to use an embedded, contextual device to further reproduce the “vernacular,” local tendencies, to counter the naive neoliberal tendencies. Here I will speak from the personal experience of collective initiatives, and their practical effects.

The theoretical project which emerges from this work will be planned for an urban site in Tbilisi that lends itself well to the opportunity for a response to the effects of government-subsidized gentrification. The site of the response is a derelict courtyard house in Sololaki, near to the recently renovated Gudiashvili Square. This site presents the challenges and opportunities in the area which is under threat because of the social, political, and economic mechanisms which are lessening the economic capacity of the city through poor quality development projects, and resulting in urban *uglification*.

PART I

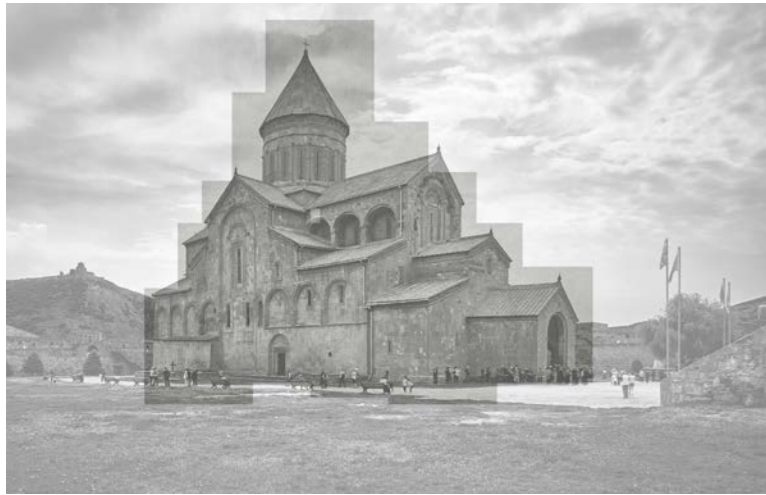


Figure 1.1_ Svetitskhoveli Cathedral
Re-elaboration, Ibrahim, T. 2022.



Figure 1.2_ Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and The
National Academy of Science
Re-elaboration, Ibrahim, T. 2022.



Figure 1.3_ Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and
Sameba Cathedral
Re-elaboration, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

[1] Soviet Architecture has commonly been broken down into four epochs: 1) The avant-garde (1917-1932), 2) Stalinism (1933-1953), 3) Modernism (1953-1975) and, 4) Late-Soviet (1975-1989)

[2] Deda Ena protests in April 14, 1978

[3] Sourced from the Southwestern Georgian region of Bolnisi, the practice is no different than the sourcing of building materials in other Transcaucasian Soviet republics. Yerevan, a city which was predominantly produced in the Soviet Union to supplant the former capital city of Artashat, was built anew and from the local dark red tuff stone, anecdotally becoming black when saturated from the rain.

[4] See Connorton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*

[5] See Starr, Fredrick. 1980. *Le Corbusier and the USSR: New Documentation*.

[6] The Gori Municipal building in Stalin's hometown, which is arguably oversized for the small municipality, is notable, as well as the entire town of Tskaltubo which housed all of the Soviet sanatoriums for the elite nomenclatura and visiting foreign officials. The Kutaisi airport was built in 1967 to welcome Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser to Georgia.

[7] Built by architects V. Kokorin, G. Lezhava, and V. Nasaridze. See Georgian Parliament.

“Nationalism is always in the background, that is why it is important to ask why it exploded at this moment. One aspect which we should not underestimate, at least in ex-Yugoslavia: nationalism was a way for the ex-communist nomenclatura to survive... you could no longer legitimize yourself as ‘we guarantee we follow the socialist road,’ that was over, so this was the genius of Milošević, I claim. He was the first one to do this step, not implicitly, but openly. His true legitimization was national identity.”

-Slavoj Žižek, *Nationalism is a way for communists to survive in ex-communist European countries* (2017)

In the face of the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union, the Late-Soviet [1] architecture scene in Georgia was rich in ambition steeped in diverse ideological intentionality and over-coded monuments. The cumulonimbus political climate characterized by protest and political resistance, [2] coincided with the production of a dissonant ensemble of civic architectural and art works, united by their cladding in basalt and tuff stone. [3] The civic monuments of this period sharply contrast the repression of Stalinism and the depravity of Khrushchev-era Modernism, which both represent formal ubiquitous stylization in their respective periods of production. The intentionality behind Late-Soviet monuments presents an emergent phenomenon: an accelerated movement towards ethnic-nationalism through *historical reconstruction*, [4] informed by the methods of cultural subversion adopted in the Stalin-era, and further accelerating after Georgian independence. The Soviet-framed Georgian national narrative, mostly predicated on reductive symbolism from the short-lived 11th-Century territorial unity, continues the process of cultural erosion in the contemporary period with mechanisms of neoliberalizing Georgian ‘identity’. Namely, the monuments of the Late-Soviet period are still appreciated by visiting Russian tourists, though several local artists and historians oppose the synthesis of socialist realism with national mythology. It can be asserted that this is a part of a series of micro-coagulations and liquifications in the never-ending ambition of perpetual territorialization by the neighboring imperial power, facilitated through the gossamer sheathing of a “westernizing”, bustling tourism and service industry. Nevertheless, it is the political subversion of the Late-Soviet period which provides the basis of consent in further

territorial and psychological encroachment and the maintenance of power. How do the buildings of a city act on the subconscious, and is there a deeper intentionality that is taken for granted in urban monuments?

As Stalin ascended to the position of *General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union*, the avant-garde architects whose works were originally welcomed and seen as coincident with the political era were discarded for the emerging forms of neoclassicism. The first evidence of this shift towards “Stalinist architecture”, was the selection of Boris Iofan’s proposal in the *Palace of the Soviets* (1932) competition, a move which was sharply denounced by Le Corbusier and the *Congrès international d’architecture moderne* (CIAM), claiming that the design was “a disgrace to the spirit of the Russian Revolution.” [5] Nevertheless, the production of Stalin’s neoclassical architecture would not be stymied by any criticism. Though the Palace of the Soviets would never come to fruition, the design impacted the architectural style of the Soviet Union as presented in the renowned photograph of the Russian pavilion at the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris. As it faced down its German “fascist” counterpart, the Modernist investigations in both countries would be suppressed and supplanted by a unifying and austere symbolism.

In Georgia, there are several such Stalin-era landmarks which stand imposingly in Tbilisi and in towns which saw their development in the period until Stalin’s death. [6] The most notable of these monuments, in Tbilisi, are the *Georgian Parliament* (1952) [7] and *The National Academy*



Figure 1.4_ *Palace of Rituals* by Architect Viktor Djorbenadze
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.



Figure 1.5_ *Chronicles of Georgia Monument* by Zurab Tsereteli
Photo, Unknown. 2017.

[8] Built by architects M. Chkhikvadze, K. Chkheidze. See The National Academy of Science.

[9] Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is one of the most important religious buildings defining the Georgian Orthodox faith and architectural tradition. It was built in the 11th-Century under the Authority of King David Agmashenebeli (often called King David the Builder), and was one of three cathedrals which he built after the unification of Georgia. The cathedral bears several significant myths related to Georgian culture, and is one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites.

[10] Georgian viticulture would suffer in the Soviet Union with industrialization; over 400 varieties of grape were reduced to 12 species for export within the Soviet Union. It is a common anecdote of demoralization within the contemporary Georgian narrative.

[11] For example, this process can be analogous with the production of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul based on the Hagia Sophia.

[12] "The wiring of the Soviet state in Georgia was impressive: it gave Georgia a Supreme Soviet, its own council of ministers, a national budget, a trade union federation, a constitution, elections, local government, even its own foreign ministry." Stephen Jones, 2012.

[13] See *Zurab Tsereteli Monograph*. 1982.

[14] Delisi Metro, Agmashenebeli Avenue.

[15] Technicum Monument, Tbilisi Airport Monument

[16] Ethno-nationalist sentiment was rife in Georgia in the 1980s. Populations from the northern region of Svaneti were brought to the region of Bolnisi to seize the property of the local Azerbaijani population, pushing them to the bordering region of Marneuli. (Arjevanidze, 2019, Interview)

[17] See Yuri Bezmenov: Psychological Warfare Subversion & Control of Western Society (1983) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gnpCqsXE8g&list=PLddfeJXFHp05syja20v5llCKfVnZs3IO7>

[18] Žižek, Slavoj. "Slavoj Žižek: Nationalism Is a Way for Communists to Survive in Ex-Communist European Countries." 10 Dec. 2017.

[19] Another monument which resorts to religious symbolism to emphasize the Russian-Georgian fellowship through Christianity

[20] Right in front of the unfinished Tbilisi Archeology Museum

[21] A sculpture of St. George which supplanted the former Lenin Monument

[22] Saakashvili emphasized ethnogenesis as a part of his discourse to ascend to power, and resorted to the placement of religious monuments around the city.

He continued to pay homage to the Georgian Orthodox Church, to exploit the Orthodox religious imagery for the gain of political power. See *The Patriarch -- the most trusted man of the Caucasus* (2013).

[23] Wheeler, Angela.

of Science (1953), [8] on Rustaveli Avenue, in the city center. The formal quality of both of these buildings as well as the symbolic details are not hellenic neoclassicism, but a neoclassicism inspired by the Georgian religious architectural tradition. The Parliament, which would replace the Neo-Byzantine style Military Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, took from the symbolism of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, [9] as seen in the ornamentation and arches. The grapes and wheat which would be carved out on the facades of Svetitskhoveli, to emphasize the Christian ritual, would be used as symbolism for the industrial agriculture of the Soviet Union. [10] Yet the more explicit reference to religious buildings is found in the *National Academy of Science* building which adopts the exact formal orientation of the cylindrical and conic roof of the Georgian Orthodox architectural tradition, which was introduced under David Agmashenebeli in the 11th-Century. The conic roof, which in the case of Svetitskhoveli is topped with a cross, is topped with a long spire and a Soviet star emblem, an overt and functional renunciation of religion through an act of appropriation of religious architectural form. This attempted divorce of symbolism from ritual, as if an ideological reassignment procedure, is not new or novel in history, [11] but is here the first stage of the Soviet adaptation of methods of political subversion through architecture.

After the death of Stalin, the supposed favor which was afforded to Georgia during his regime is said to have been withdrawn for a short period. The civic and public buildings of this period were much less ornate than those built until the middle of the 1950s. The housing blocks of this period began to be produced with prefabricated concrete panels, a newly introduced construction method to accommodate the growing post-war population. The massive civic palaces of many functions and stylistic variety would come in the following decades with a later reassertion of Georgia's power in the Soviet Union. [12]

In the 1970s, Zurab Tsereteli was a central figure in the Georgian-Soviet Art Scene. His atelier, an "art factory," was responsible for the production of several large monuments across Tbilisi, as well as works which he exported to other Soviet states. [13] The murals that were produced in the 1970s include several abstract mosaics, [14] and later, works like the bas relief of the Industrial Pedagogical Technicum and the Tbilisi Airport Monument. [15] The transition

from *abstract* to *realist* works is easily detectable in the projects of the 1970s; the later works becoming more clear in their imagery and symbolism. The steady transition towards symbolic works doesn't end with Soviet symbolism, however, but culminates in the reintroduction of religious symbolism in the production of the *Chronicles of Georgia Monument*, in 1985. The monument, based on Persepolis (in Iran), and rich with Georgian religious mythology, has been traditionally attributed to signs of imminent Soviet collapse, and the foundations of Georgian national independence. However, this production of a monument whose central theme is ethnogenesis, saturated in religious sentiment, as a foundation for national identity, [16] would serve as a new point of entry of control and political subversion [17] in the imminent post-Soviet reality. [18] It is not the production of a single monument which gives this indication, but the production of several, of which the *Chronicles of Georgia* and the so-called *Russia-Georgia Friendship Monument* (1983) [19] serve as early precedents. The trend of religious monuments continues after Georgia's independence in both the Eduard Shevardnadze (1992- 2003) and Mikheil Saakashvili (2004- 2013) governments, which I will discuss later, with the construction of Tsereteli's *St. Nino Monument* (1994), in Dighomi, [20] and the *Freedom Monument* (2006), in Freedom Square. [21] The exploitation of Eastern Orthodox "tradition" coupled with nationalist mythology, proved an advantageous strategy for expedient political ascent, but then in the case of Saakashvili, it would be exploited for his political demise. [22]

Parallel to Tsereteli, there were other significant architects and artists working with issues of Georgian national identity, and searching for their way to express their speculations into national identity through building. One such figure, often overwhelmingly defined by his affinity for the plastic architecture of Le Corbusier, is architect Viktor Djorbenadze (often called by his nickname *Butza*). Though *Butza's Mukhatgverdi Cemetery* project (1974), is more clearly influenced by Le Corbusier's seminal *Ronchamp Chapel* (1955), his most significant work, *The Palace of Rituals* (1985), is claimed to take deeper influence from a layering of Georgian national mythology, his architectural lexicon informed by Georgian tradition. The building has been categorized as *Soviet Postmodern* [23] by architecture historians because of the few direct references to Georgian vernacular and religious architecture, namely the modified ornamental

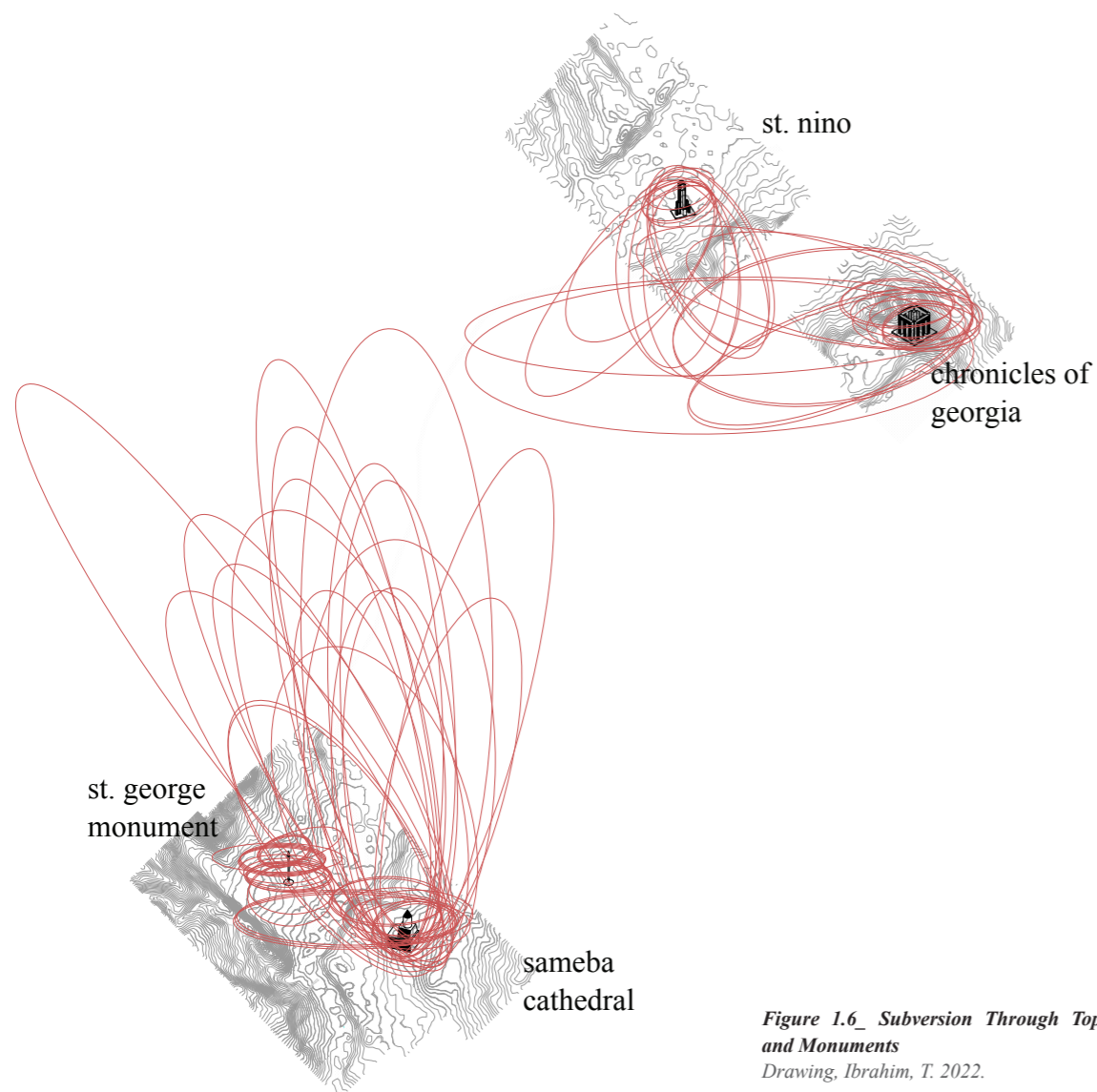


Figure 1.6_ Subversion Through Topography and Monuments
Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

[24] The darbazi structure is typical of Eastern Georgian vernacular houses.

[25] See Svetitskhoveli Cathedral

[26] Detailed by Shota Bostanishvili and David Bostanishvili in their GTU Publication about Viktor Djorbenadze in 2012.

[27] As is typical with the work of Mosei Ginzburg, they are attributed to Le Corbusier after Le Corbusier's visit to the USSR in 1931. This can be exhibited in the case of the Narkomfin Building and its direct influence on *unité d'habitation*. Here the association of Butza with Le Corbusier is especially ironic, because the seeming Western influence originates in Russia, and is furthermore absurd because of the fact that the building is associated with Georgian nationalism and myth.

[28] Aslan Abashidze in Adjara, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze between Tbilisi and Abkhazia.

[29] Russian paramilitary troops sent to Abkhazia, Russian occupation of Abkhazia and promotion of the idea that Abkhazia has a unique ethnic identity to that of the rest of Georgians. This regional division is exploited to maintain security of the Russian Federation by preventing the eligibility of Georgia's entry into NATO and the European Union.

[30] Badri Patarkatsishvili

[31] Kura-Araxes, Iberian, and Kartvelian

darbazi [24] found at the entrance of the building, and the approximate height which matches that of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. [25] There are also several abstracted layers of reference to Georgian mythology which are said to have been symbolically woven into the structure. [26] There is something of a puzzling absurdity, however, in the details of this building which are said to have been an extraction of Georgian mythology: the multifariously ironic [27] semblance to Mosei Ginzburg's *Palace of Labor* (1923). The curved plan, fenestration, high arches, and placement of two central towers with a light steel structure in the middle are all adopted in the construction, undermining the narrative behind the design of the monument. Though this phenomenon is almost the exact inverse of the aforementioned appropriations of Stalinist architecture of religious symbolism, the anecdote behind the construction of the building reveal the deeper intentionality of Butza.

After the completion of the *Mukhatgverdi Cemetery*, Butza is said to have begun the drawings of *the Palace of Rituals*. After spending nearly a decade on the drawings, he used his favor with Eduard Shevardnadze (at the time, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union) to propose the initiative of building wedding palaces in each of the Soviet republics. Upon the positive approval, construction began on the building necessitated by the synthesis of religious repudiation and the need for ritualistic function. Was the oxymoronic function of this building a demonstration of a sublime sense of irony and humor, or was it the portending of the inevitable Soviet collapse? Perhaps it is more likely that it was an attempt to create a new typology of building for ritualistic purposes without succumbing to religious symbolism found in previous forms of Orthodoxy, thus broadening the definition of Georgian *identity*. This further complexification provoked the assembly of many parts of Georgian culture which would have been overlooked with the production of a conventional religious building. And it is with this attitude, Butza continued speculating about the future of Georgian religious buildings, particularly in the production of the *Sameba Cathedral* proposal in the 1990s. This final project proposal would demonstrate the good will (and *good intention*) of the architect for the future of his newly independent country. The proposal was the symbolic reconstruction of the four significant domes of all of the cathedrals of the country under one massive glass dome which would represent the

skydome – a project clearly alluding to national unification despite regional differences. These good intentions would be shattered by the sobering reality of civil war, and regional divisions based on economic interests of regional political actors, [28] as well as Russian interests [29] which were still present despite the incapacity to maintain an overt and firm grip on power. Nevertheless, the case of Djorbenadze's obscure speculation is a window into the attitude of Late-Soviet Georgian architects, and the prominence which is placed on idealistic (or ideological) thought, regardless of intention. The palace ultimately ended up as the house of a Georgian oligarch, [30] and some parts of the interior which are used as a wedding reception hall have been filled with religious portraits, including those of the Georgian Patriarch, Ilia II.

It was not only architects and artists who had undertaken initiatives for the production of monuments which they believed were integral to the futurity of Georgian cultural identity. The Tbilisi Archeology Museum project was initiated by the archeologist Rostom Abramishvili in the middle of the 1980s. The project was intended as an adaptive reuse for three water reservoirs constructed in the 1930s, but which had fallen into obsolescence because of a flood which had occurred in the following decades. The reservoirs caught the attention of Abramishvili because of their location on the second hill of the ancient *Tréligorebi settlement*; and he saw there the opportunity to make relevant the adjacent (150-meter-away) archeological site which had been "carelessly" razed over in the previous decades. The significance of this historical settlement to the origins of Georgian [31] culture was made apparent in discussion with the archeologist Mikheil Abramishvili, who has continued researching the *Tréligorebi* site, after his father. He has documented artifacts which date back to the third millennium BCE, and even believes that there is evidence of Pompey's bombardment of the settlement during his Eastern campaign through the Caucasus in the first century CE. With the site of the museum chosen, Rostom Abramishvili approached the famous municipal architect Shota Kavlashvili for help with the design.

The original design for the Tbilisi Archeology Museum included the full use of each of the three water reservoirs for exhibition halls, auditoriums, and other amenities, and even proposed the construction of a new block for laboratory facilities connected by bridges. Construction began on the



Figure 1.7_ Tbilisi Archeological Museum by Architect Shota Kavlashvili
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2019.



Figure 1.8_ St. Nino Monument by Zurab Tsereteli
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2019.



Figure 1.9_ Russia-Georgia Friendship Monument
Photo, Fischer, R. 2022.

[32] A monument which has its duplicate in the United States, the Happiness for the Children of the World Monument, and was also gifted by Tsereteli. Source: Nini Palavandishvili.

[33] Interestingly, a relative of through marriage of Nikoloz Lasareishvili, the architect of the Industrial Pedagogical Technicum.

[34] The relationship between Georgians and Armenians is often subverted to prevent the objective of "Caucasian Unity". Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, all significant Armenian landmarks in Tbilisi have been left unmaintained to the point of destruction to facilitate the production of the Georgian ethno-nationalist narrative.

museum in 1987, but was halted the following year because neither Rostom Abramishvili nor Shota Kavlashvili had gotten the approval for the project in Moscow. The only part of the building which would open in 1988, would be the first water reservoir, as a single exhibition hall. The monumental facade of the building, crowned by a massive concrete relief sculpture bears a distinctive iconography rooted in the ancient burial rights of the Kura-Araxes culture: a woman in fetal position. The placement of the museum, and sculpture, overlooking the Dighomi district was perhaps a move which was detested by the Soviet and even post-Soviet authorities, because just six years later, a new religious monument appeared, which would de-emphasize the pagan Kura-Araxes woman – the aforementioned *St. Nino Monument* (1994), by Zurab Tsereteli. This monument would replace, the much smaller, *Friendship of Nations Monument* (c. 1980), [32] also designed by the artist. The peculiarity of the *St. Nino Monument* is that it goes against the Orthodox tradition of iconographic production, as three-dimensional representations are strictly prohibited. But here, to deny the importance of the saint, or to be in opposition to the monument, would be alienating in the religious, nationalistic climate. Therefore an artwork which would broaden the definition of Georgian identity would be deemphasized, and in the shadow of the more suitable female character – and a broadening definition of Georgian identity would be reduced to one that was medieval.

“The highest art of warfare is not to fight at all, but to subvert anything of value in the country of your enemy, until such time that the perception of reality of your enemy is screwed up to such an extent that he does not perceive you as an enemy... it takes about 15-20 years to demoralize a society – the time to educate one generation.”

-Yuri Bezmenov, *Psychological Warfare Subversion & Control of Western Society* (1983)

In the sixth-century CE, Bishop Abibus of Nekresi provoked the Zoroastrians by extinguishing the flame in the Temple of Nekresi, adjacent to his recently founded monastery. When he was executed by the Persians who had occupied that territory, the Kakhetian (Georgian) Christians destroyed the

centuries old Nekresi Fire Temple.

After Russia's bilateral agreement with the Eastern regions of Georgia, in 1783, Kartli and Kakheti, to become a protectorate of Russia, the Russians began a process of whitewashing Georgian Orthodox Churches to align with the religious mythology established in Russia. As previously mentioned, Svetitskhoveli Cathedral was whitewashed by the Russians, only one fragment of an icon remaining. The most effective way to control a people is by psychological cultural subversion.

The introduction of religious monuments to Tbilisi, is consonant with the Soviet methods of producing monuments in the Soviet Union. Though both Viktor Djorbenadze and Shota Kavlashvili were among the participants in the competition for the Sameba Cathedral in 1989, neither of their proposals were chosen by the Georgian Patriarchate. The winning proposal by Archil Mindiashvili [33] superseded the orthodoxy and orthodox tradition, through the proposal of bigness. The new cathedral, completed in 2004, which has replaced the traditional Georgian Cathedrals of Sioni, in Tbilisi, and Svetitskhoveli, in Mtskheta, in importance as the new seat of the patriarch, is perhaps not a gesture of political folly, poor taste, or naivete. The building, a caricature of the Georgian Orthodox tradition, becomes especially curious when discussing its site in the historic district of Avlabari, which was known to have been settled by Armenians who identify as Oriental Orthodox, and not in communion with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Ethnic fundamentalism becomes more evident with the claim that the new cathedral is intentionally built on the location of a historic Armenian cemetery. [34]

Not long after the completion of Sameba Cathedral, soon after Saakashvili's ascent to power, Zurab Tsereteli would unveil a gift to the Georgian nation, the Freedom Monument (2006). The 30-meter tall pillar topped with a 5.6-meter gold-plated sculpture of St. George slaying the dragon, would fill the void space where Lenin had once stood with his outstretching arm. Again, as with the sculpture of St. Nino, this sculpture goes against the Orthodox tradition, creating a caricature of historical Christian mythology. And the imposing height of the



Figure 1.10_ Subversion Through Monuments:
Mother of Georgia
Collage, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

new monument, overlooking the districts of Sololaki and Mtatsminda, would be a further limitation in the broadening of Georgian identity in the main public square of the nation—effectively reducing the country to a symbol of a “patron saint,” and populistically emphasizing the nation’s name as “Georgia”, when in-fact the local name is *Sakartvelo*. [35] The move of gifting this monument is particularly poignant, because the refusal of such a gift would result in Saakashvili’s political undoing. In many ways, this technique is inherited from a Soviet political handbook, and is analogous with Stalin’s gifting of *The Palace of Culture* to Poland, in 1952. [36]

If there is a major underlying principle of consistency for all of the previously mentioned monuments, it is topography. Each of the monuments produced from the Late-Soviet period onwards makes use of the topography of Tbilisi to impose political authority. *The Chronicles of Georgia* overlooks the Dighomi and Gldani districts, and can be perceived from nearly every point of the city despite its distance. The Sameba Cathedral, standing on a tall artificial pedestal, can also be spotted from nearly every angle in the city. *The Palace of Rituals* stands on an artificial precipice, more modestly overlooking the district of Isani. The *Tbilisi Archeology Museum* and *St. Nino Monument* stands on the Treligorebi hill (the former by coincidence, the latter by order) overlooking the Dighomi district and monopolizing the view from Evgeni Mikeladze St. which forms an artificial canyon between housing blocks. And the *Freedom Monument* stands on a tall column so as to be seen from every position in the historic districts of Sololaki and Mtatsminda. It is this manipulation of the natural landscape, by the placement of these monumental landmarks that serves as a primary influence on the nationalist narrative at a subconscious individual level, making it easy for political exploitation of nationalist sentiment. Though there may be a generation that rejects these forms of nationalism, if nationalism is kindled at any moment because of a deteriorating economy, the monument becomes the first reference for the national myth and identity to be exploited by power structures.

The mechanism for exploitation here is elaborate, and the subversion is centuries deep. As KGB defector Yuri Bezmenov points out, in a lecture on KGB subversion, direct resistance against

an *enemy* requires more energy, therefore it is better to follow the principles of martial arts and use the enemy’s momentum to dismantle them. If the enemy (or subordinate nation), has a national myth, or a source of *cultural* or *traditional* pride, [37] it should be studied thoroughly and used to create for them the chains of *cultural identity*, which will be their further subordination to the aggressor’s power. The production of over-coded monuments which exploit the natural topography is therefore producing psychological encroachment without resistance.

To those who may be critical of the efficacy of subversion through monuments, and the use of urban topography, there is clear perceivable evidence. The effect of this psychological encroachment is exhibited in a micro-impulsive phenomenon which may have been an integral part of local culture before: the signing-of-the-cross when passing a church. Though it is common practice in several Christian denominations to pay homage to the church as you pass by through the act of signing the cross, this has been further amplified with the placement of the *Sameba Cathedral* in its strategic location. This phenomenon can be perceived in front of the Rustaveli metro (approximately 3 kilometers away), and in even further distances, whereas before it would have only occurred when immediately passing a church. This reformation of habits, an amplification of the previous tendencies, can then be triggered at any time for political control and the perpetuation of ethnic prejudices, furthering regional divisions. This multivalent subversion of *identity* leaves fertile ground for exploitation.

[35] Sakartvelo translates to “where the kartvelians live”

[36] See *The Palace Complex*. Murawski, Michał. 2019.

[37] “[Mr. Ioseliani] represents something in the Georgian character -- macho, knight in shining armor, someone who cares little about democratic principles, who cares little about compromise.” Raymond Bonner, 1993.



Figure 2.1_ Georgian Civil War
Photo, Georgian National Archive

“You don’t understand, the country was so poor that people used to collect cigarette butts from the street in a jar and sell them at the bazaar.”

-Conversations, Tbilisi (2019)

“The basis of invention is science, and science is almost wholly the outgrowth of pleasurable intellectual curiosity... Necessity is the mother of futile dodges.”

-Alfred North Whitehead (1917)

When the USSR collapsed, and Georgia became independent, the country was overtaken by a thug-in-law government, the *Mkhedrioni*, and had fallen into extreme poverty. Stories of electrical shortages, and harnessing energy from adjacent power lines with coat hangers are common. Police and gangsters could not be differentiated, [1] as both used their power to collect petty, but frequent, bribes. When children were asked in classrooms what they wanted to be when they grew up, the overwhelming response was “a thug.” Kidnappings were an everyday occurrence, and nearly all ethnic minorities fled from Georgia en masse. [2] The whole generation which grew up in that period has been traumatized by the anxieties and fears which accompany civil war, as well as the excessive drug use and violence which persisted in everyday life – the effects of which have not fully subsided until today. Though this period is certainly the most difficult in Georgia’s independent history, there is still something of an absurd nostalgia for it. Perhaps it was because it was a period of passionate political optimism and belief in larger-than-life charismatic figures – a period of determination despite new and accelerating hardship. Perhaps it is because the period of “prosocial behavior in the aftermath of disasters” [3] produced a stronger sense of *community* which has since been undermined by further capsularization of individuals in the ensuing and rapid neoliberalization. And perhaps because the deterioration of the existing city would be the last period before its total aesthetic transformation.

The *Mkhedrioni*, or horsemen (knights), was an organization formed by Jaba Ioseliani in 1989, to fight for Georgia’s independence from Russia. The organization, a militia composed of

loosely associated individuals, [4] accelerated in power because of the *cult of personality* formed around the intellectual [5] and charismatic thief-in-law. Though Zviad Gamsakhurdia had been the first democratically elected president of Georgia in a landslide election, he had no *real power*, [6] and resorted to political suppression of opposition while trying to maintain control of the nation in transition. Nevertheless, Georgia was taken in a *coup d’etat* by an amalgamation of forces composed of Ioseliani’s *Mkhedrioni*, disenchanted members of the national guard, and other political opposition. With Gamsakhurdia on the run, trying to legitimize his power through unrealized peace agreements with the slowly seceding Abkhazia, Ioseliani formed an alliance with the former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze, in an attempt to legitimize his own power. Shevardnadze who berated Gamsakhurdia as a “provincial fascist,” [7] returned to Georgia from Moscow and joined Ioseliani to form the toxic symbiosis which would define the next decade of Georgian politics. The new alliance would see to the assassination and disposal of Gamsakhurdia, and the suppression of his supporters, the “Zviadists”. Though Shevardnadze was dealing with external political affairs, Ioseliani maintained control over the country through the loyalty he had earned from his militiamen. Ioseliani’s power came, in great part, from the *image of power* that he created for himself, and Tbilisi’s urban landscape would become the playset for theatricality and cinematographic assassinations materialized in real life. He would even make attempts on the life of his political ally, Shevardnadze, multiple times before the *Mkhedrioni* would be completely disbanded in 2003; the same year that Ioseliani, then 76, would die of a heart attack. The same year Shevardnadze would resign to

[1] See Bonner, Raymond. 1993. *Georgian Fighter Wields Guns, Money and Charm*.

[2] Statistics show that the percentage of the population that was ethnically Georgian prior to independence was 70%, now 93%

[3] See Protevi, John. 2019. *Edges of State*, Chapter 1: Breakdowns of the State: Prosocial Behavior in Disasters.

[4] Open membership

[5] Ioseliani was a criminal, screenplay writer, professor, and militia leader, embodying several aspects still revered in Georgian street and intellectual culture today.

[6] Control over the police, military and national guard internally, and international diplomatic connections externally. This would be demonstrated in the secession of South Ossetia and Gamsakhurdia’s weak political response.

[7] Shevardnadze had Gamsakhurdia arrested in the past for political dissidence



Figure 2.2_ Kamikaze Loggia Type 1

Documentation of Kamikaze Loggias by Gio Sumbadze.

Photo, Sumbadze, G. c. 2000.



Figure 2.3_ Kamikaze Loggia Type 2

This documentation focused on typological differences between loggias.

Photo, Sumbadze, G. c. 2000.

make way for the emerging Saakashvili. [8]

Privatization of property had begun with Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1991, with the registration of apartments by their residents. This process would accelerate under Shevardnadze and Ioseliani with the consumption of several state assets; every valuable piece of civic infrastructure, from public parks to industrial and academic buildings, were rapidly privatized to high ranking Mkhedrioni members and ex-Communist *nomenclatura*. [9] Members of criminal organizations would then go overseas to establish legitimate businesses, and return to Georgia under the pretense that they were actually legitimate businessmen. The introduction of neoliberalism, coupled with criminality, also allowed for any lucrative investments in real estate development to be realized, even if it meant the production of zones that would hardly even have alleyways as streets or any formal infrastructure. Everyone was trying to grab what they could, and by whatever means necessary. It was in this period of political chaos, when the government did not have formal control over the urban development processes, that the granularization of the city with endless micro-scalar appropriations, based on a set of new needs, emerged.

The constructions and appropriations that were produced in this period are the works of evolutionary transformation to Modern housing blocks, [10] historic *ezo* (courtyard) houses from the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, and the alterations and appropriations of rigid Soviet masterplanning. There are three typical tactics that were employed by individuals in the expansion, privatization, or modification of their spaces in this period: the construction of a protruding extension from a housing block (*kamikadze loggia*), [11] the construction of new entrances to housing blocks, and the construction of garages. The kamikadze loggias were additions which mostly pertained to residential spaces, whereas the latter two additions were predominantly functions of producing commercial space.

Kamikadze loggias, were a phenomenon which emerged out of the desire of apartment owners, who recently had their houses privatized, to either encroach upon and absorb their existing balcony, bringing it into the interior of their house, or expand their existing house with a new protrusion for space. The latter was usually achieved as a collective

process through neighborhood negotiations, and the pooled financial resources would provide that everyone was accommodated. [12] The final product is additional space that could be either partially enclosed or left open as a balcony, or outdoor living area. Furthermore, there is an immense variety of types of these housing extensions based on material availability; the often overwhelming monotony of the Modernist housing facades would be altered with a series of different claddings with a variety of colors and textures. These additions can also be found protruding from the buildings in the historic districts of Tbilisi. It is the granularity of these appropriations, and the idiosyncratic character of each decision, which leaves too many variables under the control of individuals, produces an immense volume of solutions. Though these phenomena can be broken down typologically and categorized, it is the immensity of variation of these eclectic details that make the spaces a phenomenological overload. It is the undeterred micro-scalar appropriations of individuals in the public and semi-public domains (to effect personal or communal space), regulated by interpersonal neighborhood negotiations, that enables the endless permutations of variance. It is the incapacity, or disinterest, of governmental authorities to regulate these processes, or intervene with formal infrastructure, which is the enabler of individual agency in the micro-territorialization of space, thus allowing the production of unique structural and aesthetic solutions. [13] This resulted in a palimpsest, rich in random juxtapositions, and energized by strong gestural movements, further animating the city.

Garages, a misnomer for sheds, were built between housing blocks, and are hardly ever used for parking, but are more often used as storage spaces. Sometimes in more populous districts, with more pedestrian traffic across avenues between housing blocks, [14] they are used as commercial spaces: typically as bakeries [15] and produce vendors. On some avenues where there was commercial opportunity along the streets, new sheds and single-story buildings were built. In cases where there was commercial opportunity on the first levels of Modernist housing blocks, entrances were made to enable new commercial functions. These modifications are somehow the synthesis of the commercial garages and the extensions of the kamikadze loggias to produce collections of unique entrances to buildings. In larger urban expanses privatized to Mkhedrioni members, there was the

[8] Shavtvaladze, Misha. 2022. Interview.

[9] All of the lucrative industries relating to infrastructure were taken in the same way

[10] Though there are special cases of civic and educational buildings squatted by IDPs, which I will discuss later with the former Industrial Pedagogical Technicum.

[11] This phenomena was kamikadze loggia as a combination of the words kamikaze and the “-adze” ending of Georgian surnames

[12] For example, the neighbors on a higher floor would financially assist the neighbors of the lower level to make an extension so they could have their own.

[13] And here I will emphasize that several of the solutions are purposefully aesthetic. As a local artist would say: “it isn’t about money, it’s about vision.” as he helped me to get attuned to the decision making processes of residents.

[14] For example, in Saburtalo district between Pekini and Kostava Avenues.

[15] Usually bread bakeries (or a *tonei*) with a traditional oven, where traditional Georgian bread (*shotis puri*) is baked



Figure 2.4_ Staircase Addition to 19th-Century House
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2019.



Figure 2.5_ Eliava Bazaar Connected Sheds forming the Market
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2021.



Figure 2.6_ Eliava Bazaar Commercial Conditions
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2021.



Figure 2.7_ Eliava Bazaar Gathering Space
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2021.

[16] See Bakhradze, Lasha. 2021. *Adolf Derr*.

[17] And still is today

[18] As well as significant embezzlement

[19] Saakashvili would crack down on all of this when he ascended to power, in order to strengthen the central government's control over the regions, and for the sake of so-called territorial integrity.

opportunity to build several sheds together in the formation of massive, fine-grained commercial centers: the bazaars (or market place). These markets were formed by the quasi-legal organizations and in cooperation with a population which would very quickly transition from formal systematized work, to informal commerce; the shift from a reality where power structures were pacified by order, to one where individual agency and competition was fundamental for basic survival.

Though the formation of bazaars was a byproduct of the rapid economic and political deterioration, and systemic change, they bear a striking similarity to pre-Soviet commerce in Georgia. [16] The commerce characteristic of these markets is open-ended, [17] ranging from the sale of gray market goods and contraband, to the scavenged remnants of Soviet civic buildings and monuments, and produce and food stocks produced in villages. The bazaars, which would begin as quasi-legal marketplaces under the Mkhedrioni, would later be legitimized into a standard landlord-tenant relationship. The supply to the bazaars which were coming to Tbilisi from Turkey via the Adjara region, were taxed by the so-called Chairman of the Government of Adjara, Aslan Abashidze, which he was using to fund his own regional militia. [18] The supply which was coming from Russia via the North Caucasus was being procured by Tbilisian vendors in the South Ossetian *Ergneti* market, which only materialized in petty corruption by local police. [19] Depending on their location in the city, the bazaars would be formed for different needs. The Samgori (Navtlughi) bazaar, for example, is located in a densely populated part of the city and provides everything from textiles and secondhand furniture to car parts and building materials. This is different from the production of the Eliava bazaar, which emerged in a former industrial district and was more oriented towards building materials and tools. Again, in the case of Eliava, most of the material availability likely began with gray market commerce, and secondhand tools, machinery and equipment. Most of this supply chain, despite its continued “illegitimacy” would later be “legitimized”.

As it pertains to the alterations to these buildings, the adaptations may have been the result of an imminent need, and resulted in a process of improvisation based on that need, but it is also a matter of the aesthetic vision of the individuals who are producing the modifications and space. Perhaps

Whitehead's claim that “the basis of invention is science” and that “necessity is the mother of futile dodges” is valid, but requires more malleability in its interpretation. What are the limits of speculation and curiosity, and to what degree can a creative work be scientific, even if it is emerging from necessity? Whether it is the formation of the bazaar or the production of kamikadze loggias, the social and technical mechanisms and ecosystem which produce the effects on the city are open to a much wider range of human and non-human agents than in formalized societies. This produces the obvious effect of having a wide range of idiosyncratic, non-standard details, predicated but not defined by immanent need, but rather by the individual intuition informed by the confrontation of assemblages that produce the contemporary independent Georgia.



Figure 3.1_ Saakashvili's New Georgia
Collage, Ibrahim, T. 2021.

[1] And with the narrative that the Georgian government was moving towards Moscow's orbit. The creation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline is often cited by Shevardnadze loyalists as disproving loyalty to Moscow.

[2] Legvold, Robert. 2005. *Statehood and Security*.

[3] This action would make an Abkhazian minority weary of the new government.

[4] Civil Georgia. Closure of Ergneti Black Market Boosted Customs Revenues. <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7734>

[5] See *Saakashvili Eats His Tie*, 2008. BBC. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syKMsDS2OzE>

[6] See *Glenn Beck interviews Pres. Saakashvili*, 2008. CNN. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FmxqoDNQtI>

[7] The only wind turbines in Georgia to date

[8] Pasha-Robinson, Lucy. 2017. *Russia quietly moves border hundreds of yards into occupied Georgia*

Chapter 3 | BETWEEN BILBAO AND BANANA REPUBLIC

"All of the sudden we have revolutionary committees... they had the power of execution, the power of legislation, and judicial power combined in one person. Usually a half-baked intellectual, sometimes graduated from Harvard University or Berkeley. He comes back to his country and thinks he knows all of the answers to the social-economic problems."

-Yuri Bezmenov, Psychological Warfare Subversion & Control of Western Society (1983)

"Georgia is no banana republic! I'll be a son of a [sic] if I don't say [sic] your president! (laughter)"

-Conversations, Tbilisi (2018-2021)

Mikheil (Misha) Saakashvili's ascent to power was predicated on the ambition of creating a new Georgia: one that would forget about the dreary Soviet past and the traumas of the recent civil wars, and begin on the path to liberal democracy subsidized by the development of the tourism and service industries. As a charismatic former member of parliament and then Minister of Justice in the Shevardnadze government, he and his revolutionary counterpart Zurab Zhvania staged a bloodless coup with the support of several actors from the United States: the so-called *Rose Revolution*. After the ouster of Shevardnadze on the basis of election fraud, [1] the prospects for a rapid transformation of Georgia were welcomed by an enervated citizenry. [2] Progress would require new national myths, and the rewriting of recent post-Soviet history. This process would begin with the symbolic return of the body of Zviad Gamsakhurdia from Chechnya, and honoring him as the first democratically elected president of Georgia, a gesture made to undermine the legitimacy of the Shevardnadze government while rekindling the nationalist sentiment that Gamsakhurdia represented. [3] Inflamed nationalism would be vital in garnering support to strengthen the central government through the systematic destabilization of regional governments which emerged and gained influence in the 1990s. The legitimization of a central government would further enable revenue collection on imports from Turkey, Russia, and Iran, but would require broader support for facilitation than the revenue-starved central government could afford.

The strategy for unification would begin with the prompt shutdown of Aslan Abashidze's regional government and paramilitary forces in the autonomous region of Adjara, by cutting off essential

trade-routes to other Georgian regions. Abashidze was forced into resignation and fled to Moscow, and the resolution was made without conflict. The success of this operation would lead a then-confident Saakashvili to close the *Ergneti* Market in South Ossetia, effectively blocking the sale of gray and black market goods from Russia – compromising Russian, Ossetian and Georgian distributors. Though this closure would lead to higher revenue collection [4] through the Kazbegi border checkpoint, it would not come without negative repercussions for the Saakashvili government; and would be one of the contributing causes to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. A then-anxious Saakashvili, [5] dependent on broader international support from the United States and European Union, was met with the reality that Western governments would not risk a war with Russia over Georgian territorial integrity. [6] The war with Russia would perpetuate the fragmentation of Georgia indefinitely, and impede any future attempts at unification with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Frustrated with his diplomatic and military inefficacy in the reinstatement of the disputed regions under the central government's authority, Saakashvili would highlight his failure with an intense infrastructural buildup on the borders of these territories with the fervor of a fascist autocrat. On a mountaintop in Kartli overlooking South Ossetia, six wind turbines [7] would emerge by the end of his tenure as a demonstration of rapid progress for onlookers beyond the creeping border. [8] Greater intensity was reserved for the border of the crown jewel of contemporary Georgian political ambition: Abkhazia, the once famous subtropical resort destination in the Soviet Union. The historic former port town of Anaklia, directly on the border



Figure 3.2_ Saakashvili Eats Tie in 2008
Collage, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

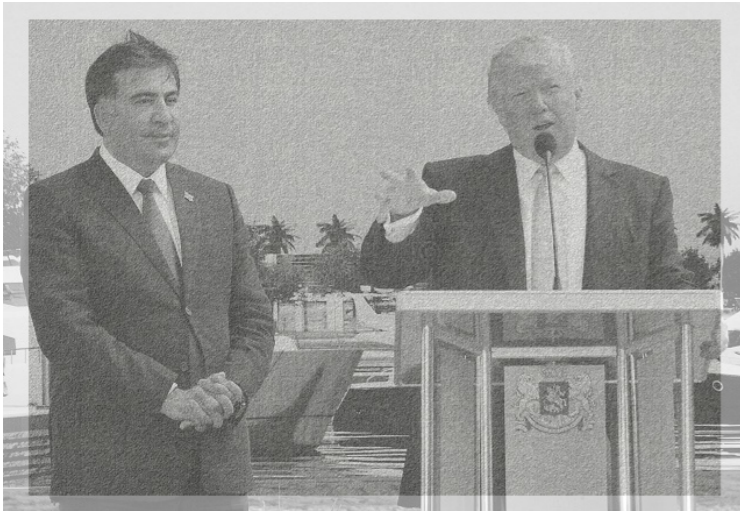


Figure 3.3_ Saakashvili and Trump in Batumi
Collage, Ibrahim, T. 2022.



Figure 3.4_ New Agmashenebeli Street
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2019.

with Abkhazia, saw significant infrastructural development following the war. Though the town had lost relevance with the Modern development of the port cities of Poti and Batumi and has a population of approximately 1,300 people, it would now serve as the most strategic location for a resort town and outdoor venue for international music festivals. The town now hosts several decaying futuristic sculptures, an abandoned Chinese-stylized restaurant, a pedestrian bridge, a single hotel, and the territory for music festivals which ends meters away from a chain link fence with a warning sign to prevent guests from mistakenly crossing into hostile territory. The annual music festivals are held in the summer, just a couple months before the celebration of Abkhazia's independence, and the commemoration of the loss of Abkhazia for Georgians, on August 25th.

Only three kilometers away from Anaklia, the municipality of Lazika, a city which consists only of a sculptural municipal office built by the contemporary Georgian architect Nikoloz Japaridze, stands abandoned. Despite the economic and cultural impossibility of establishing a new city on the border with Abkhazia, Saakashvili continued the nationalist track of his personally-legitimized predecessor Gamsakhurdia with a neoliberal overtone. This provocative demonstration of progress, prosperity, and cultural development have only served to exacerbate Georgian-Abkhazian governmental relations, and serve to substantiate the narrative of the Georgian central government being an aggressor towards the Abkhaz ethnic minority. Though this strategy was to the political advantage of Russia, [9] advancing the narrative of ethnic tension and promoting their rationale for regional presence, Saakashvili's naively unwavering confidence in Western support would provide all the legitimacy he needed.

The legitimacy provided by the West for Saakashvili's regime required further legitimation from Western actors. In 2012, Donald Trump made his first and only visit to Batumi, Georgia to promise the construction of the Trump Tower Batumi. On his visit he made the prediction that "in five years, Batumi [would] be one of the greatest cities in the world," [10] a statement which Saakashvili desperately needed to attract foreign direct investment for real estate development the new regime was envisioning. Saakashvili's economic strategy for Batumi was the production of the "Las Vegas of the Black

Sea," seeing a cultural opportunity to attract Arabic clientele because of religious and legal restrictions prohibiting the industry. This policy was advanced through incentives like tax-exemptions for casinos opened in hotels. This policy, coupled with the quasi-legal intimidation of local investors for portfolio diversification facilitated rapid economic growth, an unimaginable feat just one decade before. Several oligarchs and businessmen with a criminal history were informally exonerated of previous offenses if they would diversify their portfolios.

The new Georgia had no space for a colonial past, acknowledgement of any other ethnic presence on Georgian soil, or even space for a local historical cultural presence. The late-Nineteenth Century buildings which composed the historic centers of Batumi and Tbilisi, were subject to extreme commercializing historical revisionism. The construction practices which emerged with the production of government-subsidized projects, led to the devaluation of heritage monuments with newly introduced substandard materials, the use of an unqualified labor force, and the exclusion of conservation architects from project supervisory roles during the construction process. Aesthetically, several buildings lost their character because they have been stripped of their original details, which are replaced with new polystyrene moldings – the original details totally discarded. Though the buildings lost real value with the renovations, the speculative value of commercial leasing has increased to the extent that tenants cannot afford rents, effectively preventing the development of small businesses in the urban centers. The process can be concisely defined as government-produced gentrification, and the peculiarity here is that these projects stymie economic growth, because newly reconstructed zones are considered "kitsch" and untasteful.

In Tbilisi, the historic districts of Sololaki and Chugureti were the first to be affected by poor conservation practices. And the resultant diminishment of economic efficacy of renovated places limits the future economic viability of the streets. One of the main reasons for this loss of economic potential is that the renovation process catalyzes an absurd gentrification phenomenon: the production of mono-functional, aesthetically-homogenized commercial streets without any variety in services. These streets become socially alienating for residents because of the ubiquity of

[9] enabling the presence of peacekeeping outposts in Georgian regions while keeping the Abkhazia divided through propaganda campaigns
[10] *New Georgia*. 2012.

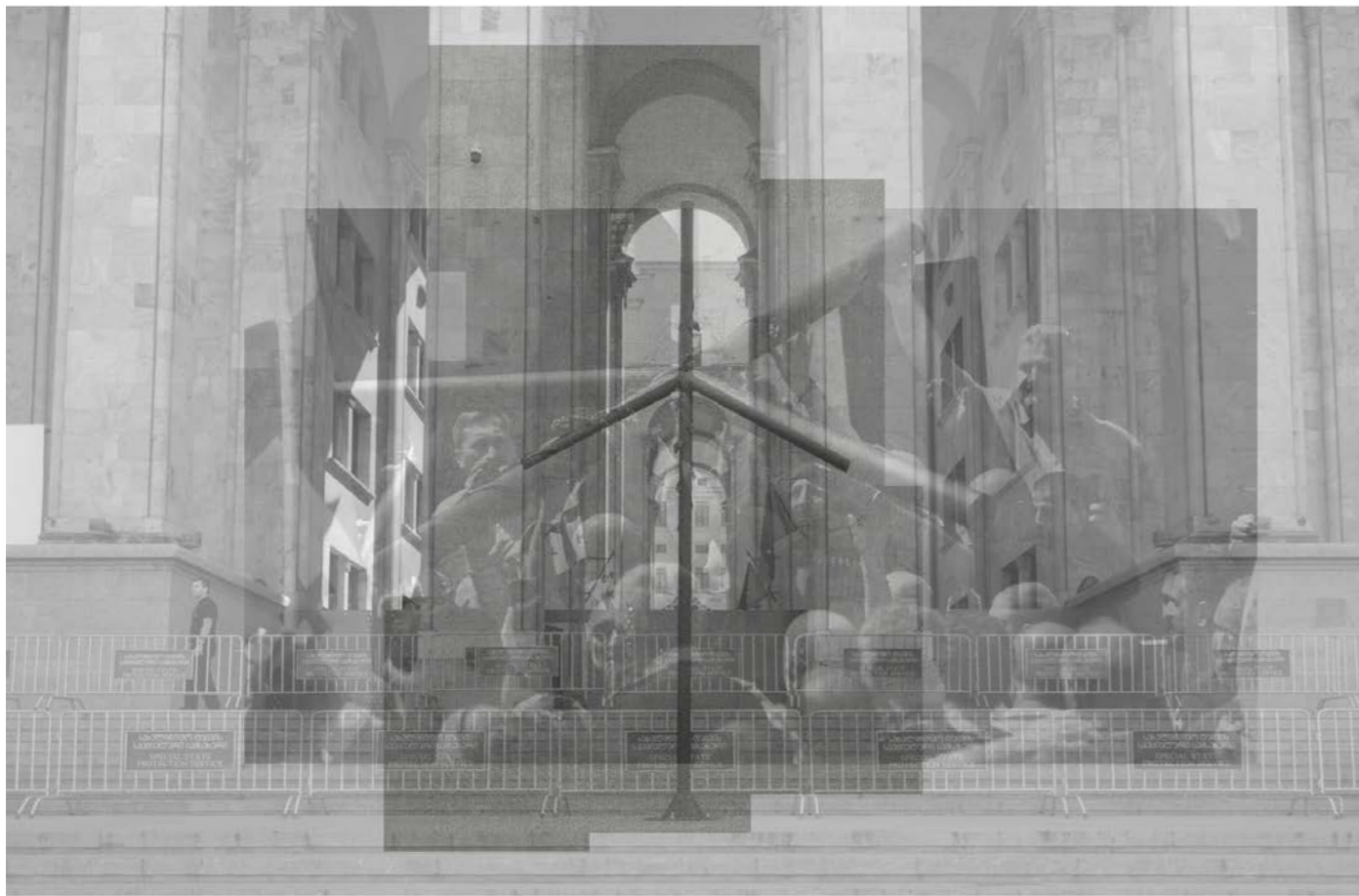


Figure 3.5_ New Waves of Nationalism
Collage, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

[11] Locally nicknamed “[sic]s us”.

[12] Locally nicknamed “Sandra’s maxi-pad” after Saakashvili’s wife.

[13] This has been confirmed by a wide spectrum of citizens that I have communicated with over the years who had personally received checks, or whose family members received financial aid.

[14] Pertaia, Luka. 2017. How and why a piece of central Tbilisi was sold for GEL1

[15] Sergei Gavrilov voted in favor for the independence of Abkhazia, and has been an opponent to Georgian sovereignty

[16] Shartava, Lasha. 2018-2021. Conversations with several conservation architects connected with ICOMOS and UNESCO.

the bar/café business typology, undermine the pre-existing economic networks in renovated zones, attracting a singular target touristic clientele. Though reconstructions were met with wide disapproval for their urbanistic shortcomings, and lack of substantial development for the tourism sector, *status quo* conservation practices continue until today.

Parallel to the destruction of the historical urban centers, was the production of hyper-contemporary public buildings by European architecture and design studios, such as Massimiliano Fuksas [11] with the *Public Service Hall* and *Rikhe Concert Hall* and Michele De Lucchi with the *Bridge of Peace*. [12] Again, the point of these projects was legitimation of the government, and the desired production of the so-called Bilbao-effect. Constructed at a public cost, and with damning loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Saakashvili would unilaterally forge the Georgian identity – using nationalist sentiment and energy for the production of a future-oriented society.

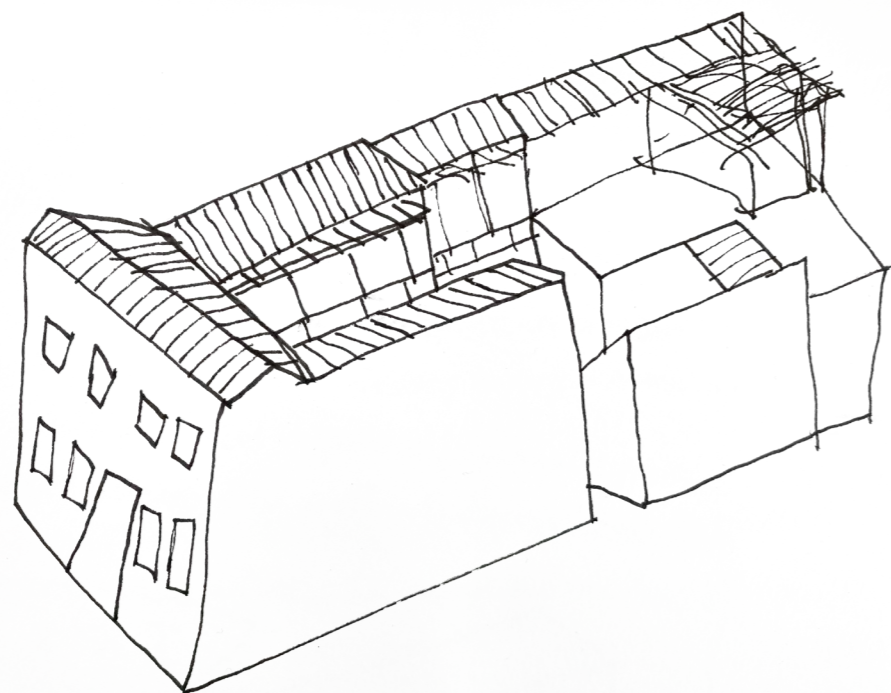
Saakashvili’s ensembles of steel-and-glass clad buildings are mostly in disuse until today, as most of the buildings have no connection to the urban landscape, and were disruptive of urban flows. The continued use of nationalism and progress-oriented rhetoric to justify projects led to the narrowing of the concept of Georgian identity to an absurd level. Though Saakashvili’s regime was effective in recreating the crumbled Soviet infrastructure in the capital cities of each region, establishing the semblance of an economy from naught, and centralizing the government, the effects of his planning and aesthetics are still tangible, and being reproduced.

Bidzina Ivanishvili would replace the draconian Saakashvili in 2012, swaying the country from Western-backed tyranny to a nebulous Russian-backed tyranny under the name the Georgian Dream Party (simply known as *Otsneba* - “dream” in Georgian). Ivanishvili had been politically active during Saakashvili’s presidency, giving arbitrary cash payouts over the course of Saakashvili’s tenure to secure name-recognition. [13] Though he was previously anonymous to the public, except for the fact of his immense metal-and-glass clad mansion that stands above the district of Sololaki, Ivanishvili emerged and gained power through the use of a political scandal that would be the undoing of Misha. The thugs-in-law which would be imprisoned under

Misha were exonerated under the Georgian Dream, and became a part of the political apparatus. The first four years of the Georgian Dream’s ruling were marked by economic stagnation – the Georgian lari (GEL) steadily losing its value. Significantly valued lands in the center of Tbilisi were also symbolically gifted to Ivanishvili for his service to the state. [14] In more recent years the party has been working on strengthening ties with Russia, as evidenced with the invitation of Russian MP Sergei Gavrilov [15] to address the Georgian Parliament for the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy. The protests over this invitation lasted from the summer of 2019 and continued until the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which was politically advantageous for the Georgian Dream. In July 2021, after the covid restrictions were lifted, there was a second resurgence of subverted nationalism sheathed under anti-LGBTQ sentiment. The anti-Western nationalist protesters removed the European Union flag placed in front of the Georgian Parliament, and bolted a steel “Cross of St. Nino” into the ground. The cross is still standing before the building and is now behind a fence, protected by the state – the dubious use of Eastern Orthodox “brotherhood” being subverted in favor of Russian hegemony.

In the background of these larger political processes, the same low-quality construction projects continued to be carried out in the same intensity as with the Saakashvili government. Misha had set the precedent for rapidly completing projects for the sake of having results before elections, and the Dream Party has followed this precedent with the contracting companies which serve their interest. Architects who are working in conservation do not supervise the projects or even submit detailed drawings, as all of the detailing is left up to the contractors who are ordered to complete the job summarily. [16] The most recently completed projects are finished with an overwhelming amount of LED lamps showcasing the polished stucco facades and an equally overwhelming amount of CCTV surveillance cameras. The oscillation from European to Russian backed governments has provided no stability for the development of a local architecture and aesthetics in the post-Soviet period.

PART II



This is not an *ezo* house.

Figure 4.1_ This is not an *ezo* house
Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

The Art Nouveau façades of Tbilisi, built from the middle of the 19th-Century under the rule of the Russian Empire bear a strong resemblance to the buildings in St. Petersburg. However the façades of Tbilisi were built sheathing extensive internal loggias and balconies – totally unexpected from the exterior. Each courtyard is finished with unique wooden ornamental details which are a synthesis of vernacular Georgian and Armenian [1] ornamental details and slavic motifs. The now-decadent thresholds are the beginning of dynamic interior configurations and idiosyncratic details produced since the introduction of *kommunalka laws* (communal housing laws) which came at the inception of the Soviet Union. The collective houses, which produce a distinctive relationship between public and private space are uniquely resolved in each particular case with a variety of radical constructive solutions. Corridors become bridges, staircases bifurcate multiple times to arrive at different apartments, a vertical staircase leads to a spiral stair because there was no space to continue. This unique and rapidly disappearing housing typology: the Italiuri *ezo* (courtyard) House has become characteristic of Tbilisi exclusively because of the way that the buildings were initially constructed, but because of the way that they have been appropriated in the 20th-Century.

Though the *ezo* house can be defined as a typology, the basis for this is not predicated on an overall compositional similarity of buildings but rather the similarity of particular elements (i.e. loggias, balconies, staircases) which are composed uniquely in each case, as well as the similarity of construction methods which produced the buildings. The initial program of the houses (i.e. commercial/residential division) varied depending on the location in the

city and the owner. For instance a contemporary *ezo* could have been a “profit house” rented by landlords who lived at the top levels to serfs or travelers at the lower levels, or it could have been a bourgeois house owned by a merchant. The historical layering of *ezo* houses holds the intensities of political evolution in Tbilisi which unite the typology: additions and adaptations made over the course of the lifetime of houses are pervasive throughout the city, and evidence a socio-political morphology. For instance, the arbitrary partitioning of houses in the 1920s as a result of the aforementioned *kommunalka laws* evidence rapid social-economic transition. The recurrence of tuff stone blocks in post-WWII 1940s additions throughout the city because of a scarcity of brick evidence a depleted domestic market. And the construction of kamikadze loggias in the 1990s from roughly welded steel profiles and brutally cast concrete are a testimony to anarchy in the wake of Soviet collapse. Furthermore, the typology cannot be understood through the experience of an individual house, or even a sample of disconnected houses, but by movement through the continuous network of houses.

As much as the contemporary form of *ezo* houses are a product of morpho-political evolutionary processes, they are produced by the individual intuition and collective negotiations of habitants. The house molds social dynamics around a shared center, a network of exterior corridors and staircases, producing an opposite effect from the later capsular Modern housing blocks. Corridors often become an extension of interior dwellings, and serve multiple functions as storage spaces, an outdoor living room, a balcony-level (elevated) garden, or even a kitchen. A courtyard can be quickly activated as a space of

[1] Armenians were largely responsible for the reconstruction of Tbilisi in the 19th-Century. The central districts of Sololaki and Avlabari were largely composed of an Armenian bourgeois.



Figure 4.2_ The Ezo Typology
Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2022.



Figure 4.3_ Ezo House Staircases
Photos, Ibrahim, T. 2021.

[2] The degree to which the solution is collective is instantly perceivable.

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As much as the contemporary form of *ezo* houses are a product of morpho-political evolutionary processes, they are produced by the individual intuition and collective negotiations of habitants. The house molds social dynamics around a shared center, a network of exterior corridors and staircases, producing an opposite effect from the later capsular Modern housing blocks. Corridors often become an extension of interior dwellings, and serve multiple functions as storage spaces, an outdoor living room, a balcony-level (elevated) garden, or even a kitchen. A courtyard can be quickly activated as a space of collective activity and habit: it can become a place for washing rugs and kilim in the Spring, or drinking and preparing a supra in the Summer. The formal orientation of the house towards the center forces neighbors to communicate, and adaptations to the house which may affect the collective must first be negotiated. In the case that a negotiation isn't reached, and the effects to the yard are adverse for one or more neighbors, an argument is inevitable. The barriers of public and private can be observed most thoroughly in the placement of the laundry lines in each yard. [2] Limitations of privacy and space are often the subject of discontentment among some *ezo* communities, evidenced in the slow erosion of those respective houses. The lack of barriers and formal partitioning for privacy leaves boundaries to be determined by social behaviors. The general maintenance of a house is indicative of the ties of community more than the economic factors.



Figure 5.1_ Kibe-Projekt
Collage, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

“Once when a man wanted to build a house, he would launch into some of the most complex and prolonged decision making of his life... this continuous interest of the owner in his house would continue indefinitely for there was a superstition to the effect that once the house was quite finished, the owner would die; so the prudent house-holder would go on forever altering and adding to the structure and putting off the laying of the fatal last brick.”

- Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor* (1969)

The adaptations which are made to *ezo* houses makes the architectural typology unique and worth mentioning. The fact that the buildings are oftentimes profanely dealt with by habitants, who were not initially intended to be the residents, makes the houses dynamic. The layered appropriations of the houses and the visibly continuous metabolic process make the houses alive, and that vitality is precisely stemming from the lack of resolution or completeness of the house. Adaptations are often improvised works based on the intuitions of the individual apartment owner, and are produced with limits in material availability, which often result in simultaneous ingenuity and absurdity. No possibility is left off the table; a space can be resolved and changed thereafter in a myriad of ways. The continuous unpredictability, which can be a phenomenological overload, is a reality where agency is expressed through the creation of habitat. These processes are more about the manipulation of materials than the consumption of market-ready modules, and their arrangement in predetermined space. The freedom afforded by the nonexistence of a robust contemporary Western market is the control of millimetric differences of elements which compose the dwelling – both a source and outlet for libidinal energy.

Perhaps you need to make a staircase to your apartment and your friend happened to find elements of an escalator, or you need to build a wall and your other friend noticed a large cut stone from the adjacent church has been dislodged, or you need to build a partition and there are 3-meter long hardwood doors thrown on the street of a recently renovated house. Materials are circulating and maintaining the metabolism of the city through

commercial and non-commercial transactions, scavenging, or blatant theft of seemingly unwanted materials. The solutions which these materials are employed for may totally undermine the aesthetic overture of a building: windows can be blocked off by masonry walls, polycarbonate sheets can cover wooden balconies, an addition can be punched through an existing wall, walls can be painted in several different vibrating colors, and plumbing lines and electrical cables can converge to form a dense net in the sky. Every intervention which can be confronted is an unpredictable and seemingly unreasonable solution, until you observe the matrix which produces the individual awareness in space, and guides the individual to problematize and arrive at peculiar solutions.

The process of *becoming* for an individual in an *ezo* house in Tbilisi is directly linked to the production of the house and the habits of reproducing the house thereafter. As Hassan Fathy’s retelling of the Egyptian superstition elucidates, determinacy of the house means the death of the owner – the constant construction and reconstruction of the house is the link to individual vitality. In the particular case of the *ezo* houses this is exponential because the interrelation of individuals in space, and consensus, is required to produce an effect. A commercial example of this phenomenon can be observed in the *Carpe Diem Cafe* in the Sololaki district. The unique quality of this space is that it is always changing based on the transformations and life experiences of the owner. The space is always subject to change based on “new information” and is an assemblage of artifacts gifted for the sake of the space and the owner. Many people comment that the space is the owner, and that the owner is the



Figure 5.2_ Industrial Technicum Spatial Activation

Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2018.

space – and it is precisely the capacity of personal expression which makes the space exist in perpetual transience. The expression of the space is changing also based on whoever is frequenting the space, and coming into close encounters with the owner and his personal life. This “unconventional business model” is an adequate representation of the transformations which affect the whole city.

In 2020, *Kibe-Projekt* was initiated with the goal of conserving a 19th-Century spiral wooden staircase which was near collapse. The project was initiated because of my personal connection to the territory after having lived there. After the recent completion of the staircase through a collective action by a team of local and international architects and artists, the communal desire and interest of the neighbors living in the courtyard has increased; residents have begun to take a deeper interest in the maintenance of their home. Our team has observed that neighbors who formerly would have maintained limited communications have been deeply involved in extended dialogue as they work together to make renovations of other parts of their yard. The scope of the works that are currently being carried out include adjustments and substitutions to other staircases and balustrades in the yard (with some of our leftover materials), and plastering and painting of walls and wooden balconies. The process of rehabilitation of the staircase catalyzed other processes and further interest in the overall maintenance of the yard.

This is not the first instance where space has been activated by an initial focal intervention and construction. In the former Industrial Pedagogical Technicum, a similarly initiated project had similar effects for the further collective production of space. The construction of a single access staircase opened the opportunity for residents of a refugee squat to appropriate the space with furniture, graffiti art, and a playground. Though the staircase in that case was destroyed by local authorities, the residents recently returned one of the existing beams and placed it against the wall of the building to enable their access to the space. Though this case is not occurring in an *ezo* house, it is worth mentioning because of the effect produced in the collective – enabling further production of space.

The consciousness of the individuals which produce space and the relationality between all agents

which compose the ecology of the continuum of *ezo* houses has become the interest. The problematization of the individual and collective consciousness is a part of a process of understanding what needs to be responded to in a given context, and the effect which should be produced. To overcome the cultural and political subversion of assemblages as they have affected the local assemblage and territory of “Georgia” is the point of interventions which are made to energize parts of the consciousness which may be currently unactivated. Consciousness is never complete. Awareness is never complete. Territorialization is never complete. Communities are never complete. Individuals are never complete. Markets are never complete. Ecologies are never complete. Houses are never complete.

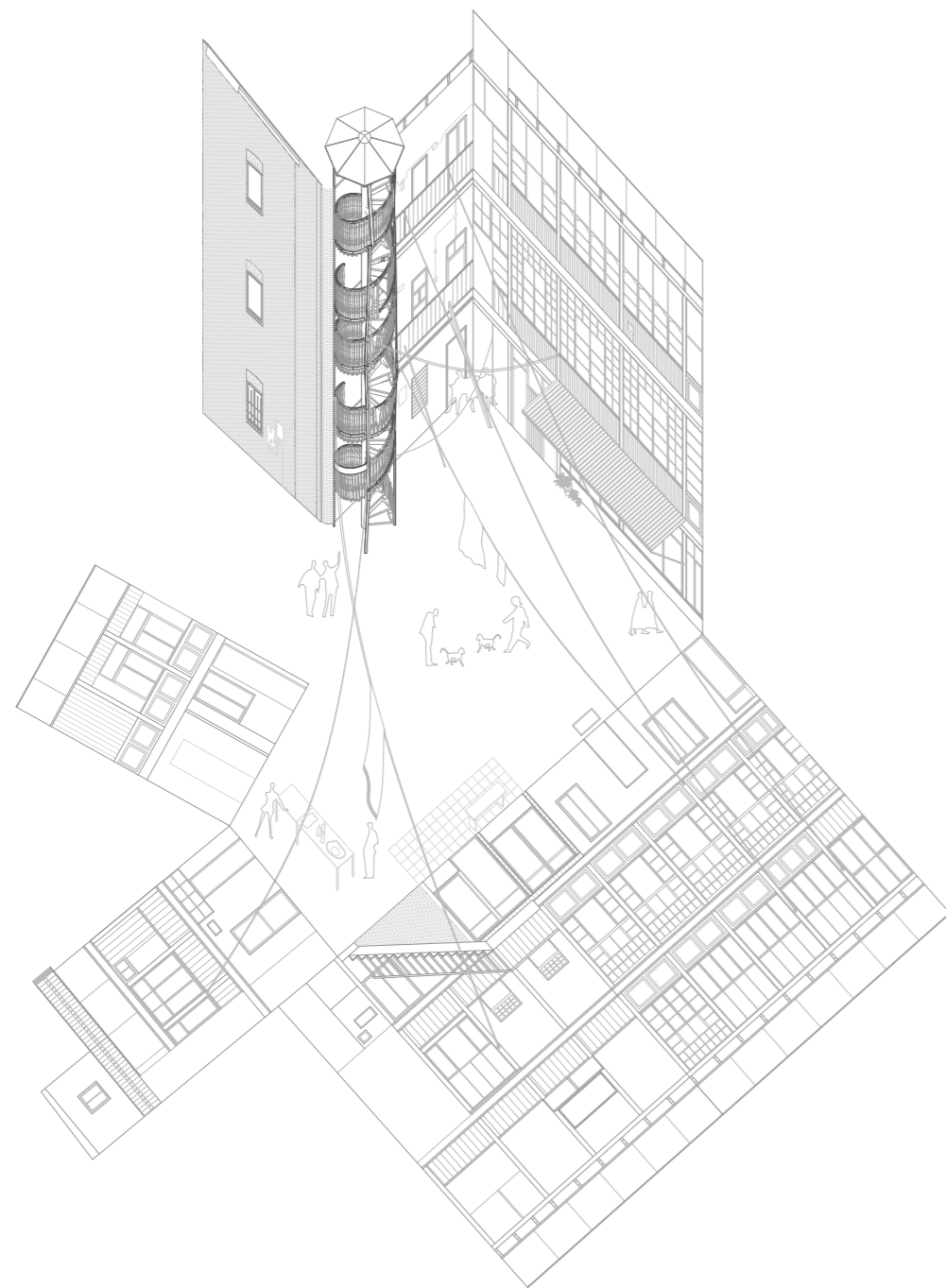


Figure 5.3_7 Kakabadzebi Ezo - Kibe-Projekt
 Drawing, Ibrahim, T. Crotti, F. Ziaiemehr, T. 2021.



Figure 5.4_ Completed Kibe-Projekt
 Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2022.

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THE HOUSE IS NEVER COMPLETE

A Cartography of Idiosyncrasy in Socio-political Maelstrom

