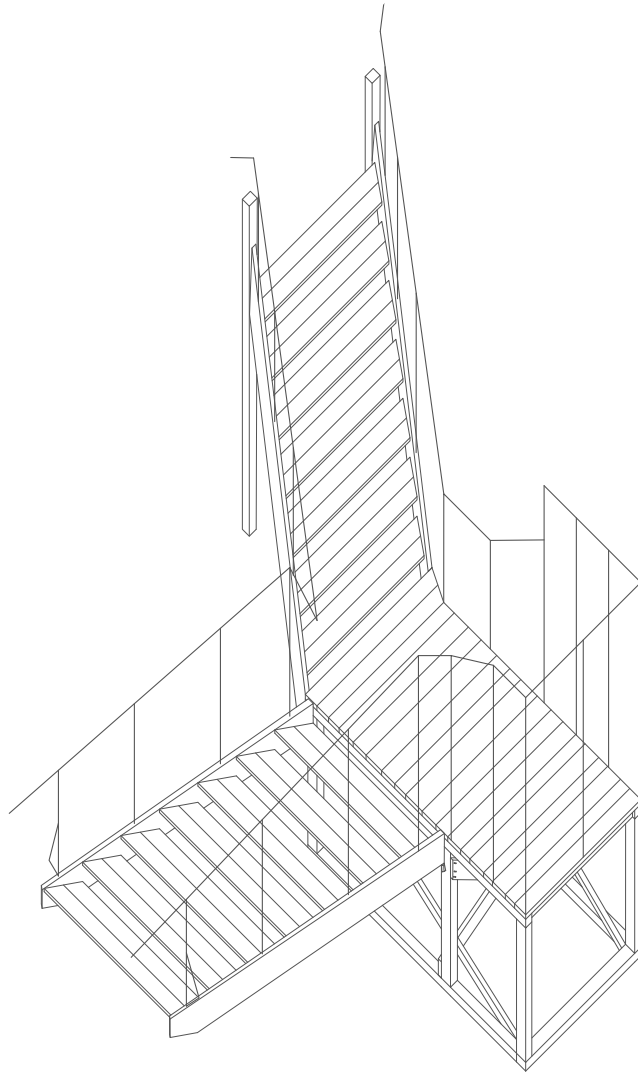


# THE INDUSTRIAL PEDAGOGICAL TECHNICUM



## A Vernacular Appropriation of Modernism

Thomas Ibrahim

2021

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### Acknowledgments

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Written by Thomas Ibrahim (5312566)  
For review by Sabina Tanovic  
TU Delft, 2021.

*For Mishka and Nodar.*

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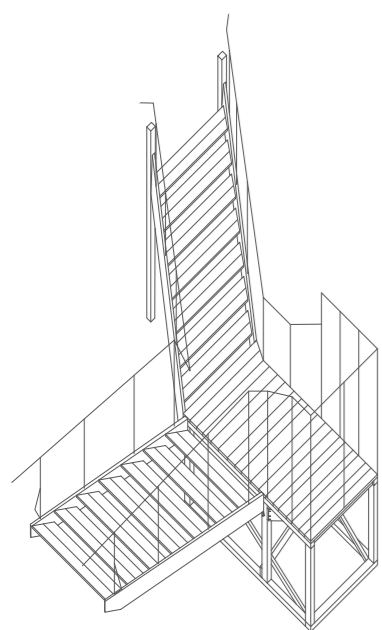
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*“A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space.”*

Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1976



## Introduction

The Industrial Pedagogical Technicum, completed in 1978, has developed a curious status among the large-scale construction projects of the Late-Soviet period in Georgia. The dimensions of curiosity result from the fact that, until 2017, the architect was unknown to most local architects and historians, and that there are few and inconsistent drawings of the building available in the public archives. Additionally, the location of the Technicum is also disconnected from the greater city, and a sculpture which was affixed to the auditorium facade, of unknown inspiration, was the only element that could be seen through the thick vegetation.

During the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Technicum had become obsolete. In the ensuing Georgian Civil War, the Technicum became a place of refuge for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In 2008, the Russo-Georgian war would also lead to a migration in the building and an occupation of the territory by over one-hundred families. Despite attempts of the Georgian government to sell the building, and evict the IDP residents during the Mikheil Saakashvili presidency, the building was never sold and remains in the custody of the Georgian Ministry of Economy's Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL): The National Agency of State Property, which maintains the right to sell the building at any moment there is an interested investor.

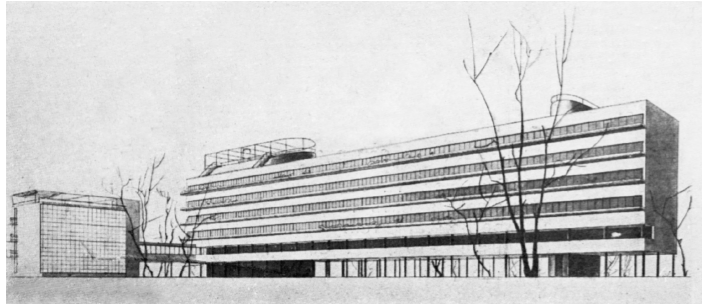
In the summer of 2017, an initiative group began researching the Technicum's history, and started a dialogue with several Georgian governmental entities to find a new public use for the building, and to have it listed as a national landmark. Though there was initial excitement from individuals within the governmental agencies to cooperate, it was not in the interests of higher leadership and communication halted. In February 2018, a piecemeal and mysterious process of the brutal removal of the sculpture began. In response to this destruction, during the inaugural Tbilisi Architecture Biennial an intervention was made on the sculpture to highlight the parts which

had been stolen. This intervention was accompanied by an access stair to the terrace of the auditorium, beneath where the sculpture was affixed. Though these actions did not prevent the removal of the final elements of the sculpture, the staircase remained, and the space became public.

The architectural process of designing and constructing the staircase leading to the Technicum auditorium terrace was based on the urban morphologies, historic vernaculars, and the contemporary vernaculars which are the texture of the city. The design was an attempt to represent the regional heritage of the IDP residents, while adopting the local informal methods of material sourcing and construction. Traces of activity show that the terrace of the building is still in use, as a result of the access staircase, though there have been several attempts by authorities to stymie this activity.

The first chapter of this paper will elaborate the ontology of the Technicum and its sculpture, and examine the contemporary Georgian social and political matrix using past correspondence with governmental entities, active non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and surveys and interviews conducted with Tbilisi residents between 2017 and 2020. The second chapter of this paper will discuss the initiatives taken at the Technicum in response to the site conditions and processes of the sculpture's removal. Finally, the third chapter of this paper will further elaborate the context of the Technicum and sculpture's appropriation, while discussing the processes employed in activating the auditorium terrace as a public space. The third chapter will give definition of the architectural position of the 'vernacular appropriations of Modernist architecture' which result in idiosyncratic and dynamic public space.





**Figure 1\_ Perspective Drawing of the Narkomfin Building**

The Narkomfin Building (1928) is an experimental Constructivist housing building by Mosei Ginsburg. The typology of the building seems to have a major influence on the design of the Technicum.  
Drawing, Ginsburg, M. 1928.



**Figure 2\_ Photograph of Museu de Arte Moderna**

Museu de Arte Moderna building (1970) in Rio de Janeiro by architect Affonso Reidy bears a strong resemblance to the columns envisioned at the Technicum.  
Photo, Poli, F. 2015.



**Figure 3\_ Photograph of Rusakov Workers Club**

Melnikov's Rusakov Workers Club (1928) seems to provide inspiration for the Technicum. The architectural language of Constructivism is revisited in the late- Soviet period.  
Photo, Esakov, D. 2015.

# Chapter 1

## The Dimensions of the Industrial Pedagogical Technicum

The first chapter explains the ontology of the Industrial Pedagogical Technicum, all of the elements which compose the space, and hypothetical origins. The chapter discusses the conditions of the site, the multiple users of the territory, and the complex ecology which has developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### 1.1\_ An Architectural Object

The Industrial Pedagogical Technicum was completed in 1978<sup>1</sup> in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia. (Figure needed) The building complex is located in the capital city, Tbilisi, on the border of the Saburtalo and Dighomi districts on Marshal Archil Gelovani Avenue, the road which leads to the northern and western regions of Georgia. The Technicum is located on a steep hillside and consists of five major parts: 1) the main block which housed classrooms and administrative offices, 2) an auditorium which was conjoined to the main block, 3) a workshop and recreational facility which included a gymnasium, 4) a bridge which connects the main block with the facilities, and 5) a sixteen-story dormitory building. All of the buildings, with the exception of the auditorium and the bridge, were completed with precast concrete elements. The front (eastern) facade of the main block is entirely made of 3 meter precast panels across the full length of its 120 meter facade. The workshops are made of precast concrete columns and beams which were economically infilled with masonry. And the dormitory facade is entirely composed of precast exposed-aggregate concrete panels, with green glass concrete panels on the balconies, a move which was presumably made to camouflage the tallest building in the landscape. (See Fig. 4)

The typology of the Technicum finds its origins in Constructivism and Latin American Modernism.<sup>2</sup> Particularly, the conjoinment of the main block with the auditorium building is found in The Narkomfin Building in Moscow by Mosei Ginzberg, (See Fig. 1) and then later in the work of Affonso Reidy. The reference to Reidy is then reinforced by the remarkable resemblance of the proposed auditorium columns, and the columns which were built at the entrance of the main block, with those of Reidy in the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro. (See Fig. 2) Furthermore, the auditorium clearly references Melnikov's Rusakov Workers Club in both the volumetric expression of interior function on the

exterior of the building, and thin vertical fenestration. (See Fig. 3) Though the buildings which comprise the Technicum Complex are massive, there is an attempt to soften the impact of the scale of the project through the use of the aforementioned green panels, the excavation and placement of the workshop facilities into the hillside, and the planting of dense pine vegetation at the fore of the complex. This move is then immediately contrasted with the placement of a monumental sculpture on the auditorium facade. Through the dense vegetation, the sculpture was the only element of the Technicum which is in the public memory.

### 1.2\_ Oral Histories

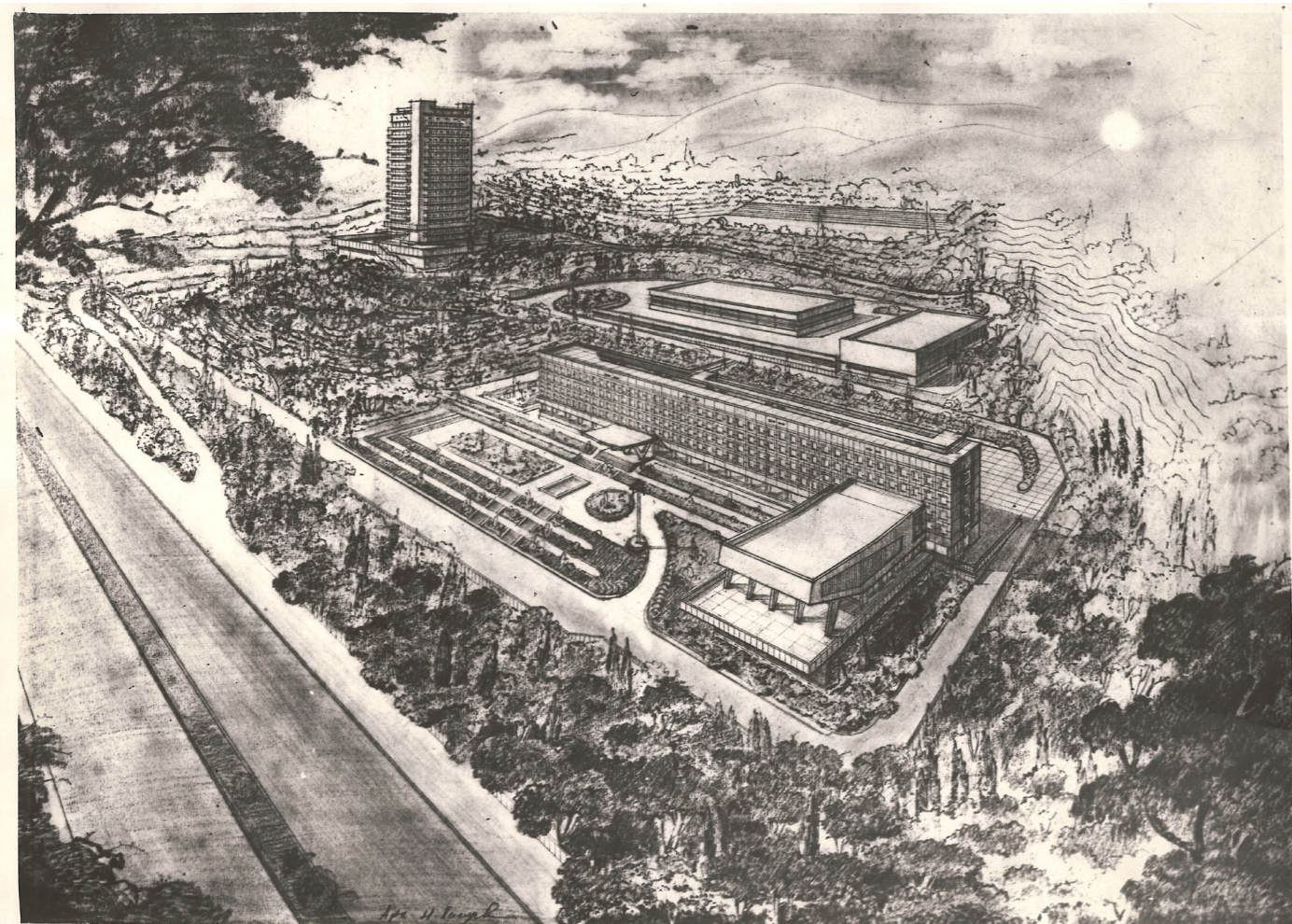
In 2017, on a visit to Georgia, I took initiative to research the history of the Industrial Technicum. Though it is one of the largest building complexes constructed in Tbilisi in the 20th century, my visit to the Georgian National Archive in Saburtalo revealed nothing about the building's history or the identity of the architect. In the Faculty of Architecture at the Georgian Technical University, however, the answer would be found. According to the dean of the faculty, Nino Imnadze, the Technicum was considered insignificant among the Soviet landmarks in the city. After nearly an hour, with ten architecture professors who actively made phone calls, the names of several architects emerged, including George Chakhava, the architect of the former Ministry of Highways. Finally, the identity was revealed and confirmed: Nikoloz Lasareishvili. (See Fig. 5)

Upon meeting Lasha Mindiashvili, a filmmaker and grandson of Lasareishvili, I received early site plan and perspective drawings of the project, a final birds-eye-view perspective, and photos of the project's completion, as the sculpture was being hoisted to position. The site plan was the only drawing entitled Gruzgiprogorstroi - Design Institute of the Republic of Georgia and Giprogor - State Institute of

[1] The date of the Technicum's completion is disputed, and there has been no exact verification of the completion date. It is certain to have been completed between the years of 1977 and 1980. The year 1978 was a year that was first indicated by the family of the architect, but has not been verified in public archives, as information about the building has likely been lost.

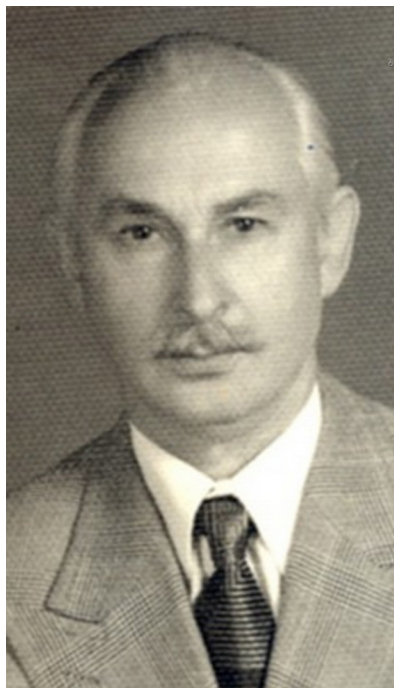
[2] Latin American Modernism was heavily influenced by the work of Le Corbusier, and Le Corbusier was heavily influenced by the Constructivists. From the architect there is a clear knowledge of Constructivism, and a clear understanding of the revisions to Constructivist ideas in Latin American Modernism.





**Figure 4\_ Final Bird's-Eye-View Perspective of the Industrial Pedagogical Technicum**

This final birds-eye-view perspective of the Technicum (c. 1978) represents the final conditions which were actualized in the built project. There are only minor cosmetic landscape elements which remained unrealized. *Image courtesy of the Lasareishvili family.*  
*Drawing, Lasareishvili, N. 1978.*



**Figure 5\_ Portrait of Nikoloz Lasareishvili**  
*Image courtesy of the Lasareishvili family.*  
*Photo, Unknown Date.*



**Figure 6\_ Portrait of sculptor Zurab Tsereteli with Putin sculpture**  
 This image of Zurab Tsereteli, originally published in 2018, demonstrates one of the reasons the sculptor remains controversial in Georgia despite his ethnic Georgian background.



**Figure 7\_ Photographs of The Chronicles of Georgia Monument and ruins at Persipolis**  
 The reference to ancient cultures seems a recurrent theme in Zurab Tsereteli's work from the late-Soviet period. The image to the left is a photo from The Chronicles of Georgia monument, completed in 1985.

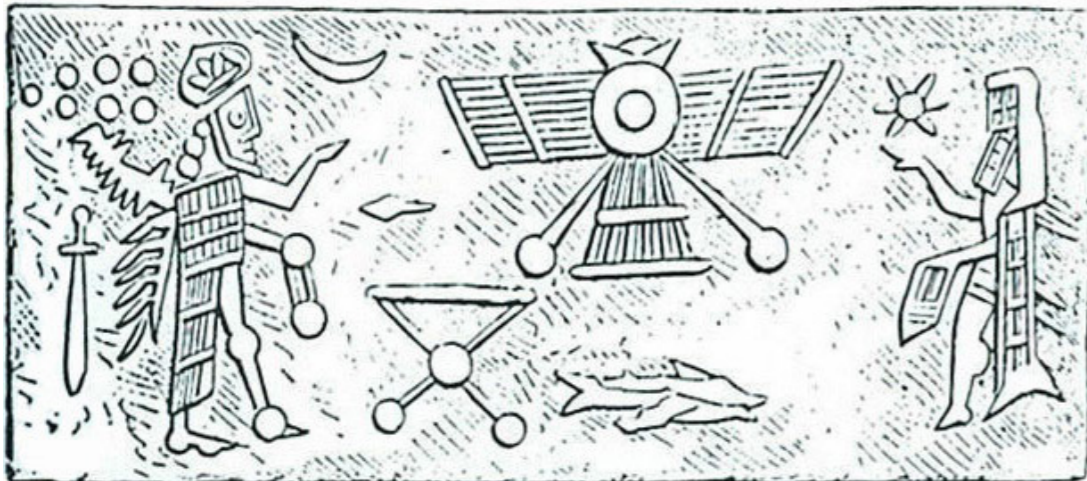




**Figure 8\_ Photograph of the Technicum from Marshal Gelovani Avenue**

This photograph of the sculpture was taken in May of 2016, and was my first encounter with the Technicum. It is important to note the number of orbs on the left and right of the composition as they relate to *Figure 8*. Though the compositional similarities are evident, the reason for this reference remains a mystery.

*Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2016.*



**Figure 9\_ Sumerian Seal Referenced by Zecharia Sitchin**

Though it is uncertain whether the seal exists or is a forgery, it is certain that it is the first layer of the Technicum sculpture. The compositional similarity, and use of the same symbols, and use of Sitchin's interpretation of the sculpture in the replacement of Pisces, a signifier of time, with the numbers 852126, seem to substantiate this hypothesis.

*Clay Seal, (c. 2500 BCE)*

[3] Lasareishvili built five projects in his career. The other projects included additions to apartment buildings, and minor new construction projects.

[4] This verbal confirmation, and the confirmation from the family of the architect, are the only evidence that links the sculpture to Zurab Tsereteli's atelier in Georgia. Later I will discuss correspondence with the Tsereteli family and the lost documentation in their archives.

[5] This is a common problem for Georgian scholars and researchers. Local archives are said to have been partially destroyed during the Georgian Civil War, and are disorganized. Significant documents and maps are in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Institutions like the National Scientific Library and the National Archives are impermeable because of Soviet laws that have carried over into this period of independence.

[6] And widely discredited. Correspondence with the Hermitage Museum has been difficult because of the fact of even discussing Sitchin.

[7] "We see the moon, and we see the Earth symbolized by the seven dots which indicated the position of the Earth from the outer limits of the solar system counting [or coming] inwards by someone flying inwards from outer space." (*Are We Alone in the Universe?*, 1978)

[8] "An unusual drawing on a cylinder seal suggests that, passing Mars, an incoming spacecraft of the Nephilim established constant communication with "Mission Control" on Earth. The central object in this ancient drawing simulates the symbol of the Twelfth Planet, the Winged Globe. Yet it looks different: It is more mechanical, more manufactured than natural. Its "wings" look almost exactly like the solar panels with which American spacecraft are provided to convert the Sun's energy to electricity. The two antennas cannot be mistaken. The circular craft, with its crownlike top and extended wings and antennas, is located in the heavens, between Mars (the six-pointed star) and Earth and its Moon. On Earth, a deity extends his hand in greeting to an astronaut still out in the heavens, near Mars. The astronaut is shown wearing a helmet with a visor and a breastplate. The lower part of his suit is like that of a "fish-man" - a requirement, perhaps, in case of an emergency splashdown in the ocean. In one hand he holds an instrument; the other hand reciprocates the greeting from Earth." (p.103)

[9] According to Eugene Ivanovich Kononenko, a Russian specialist on Mesopotamian glyptics the image is clearly from the Late Babylonian period, however, the depiction of the sword next to the figure on the right is likely an indication that the image is likely a forgery.

[10] This point is stated by Zecharia Sitchin himself, but it remains unconfirmed if the seal actually exists. No confirmation of the seal's existence from Natalia Koslova, vice director of the Hermitage Museum.

Surveying and Planning of Cities and Design of Civil Structures. According to his family, Lasareishvili was working in Gruzgiprogorstroi when he built the Technicum. Along with the drawings, I was told romantic and nostalgic stories of the Technicum as remembered by Mindiashvili. His grandmother, the wife of the architect, was the Technicum librarian, and he had spent some moments of his childhood there. Later research at the archive revealed that the Technicum was the largest and most notable project of Lasareishvili's career.<sup>3</sup> The final detail which was given by Mindiashvili was the author of the Technicum's sculpture, he confirmed that it was done by renowned and controversial Georgian-Russian sculptor Zurab Tsereteli.<sup>4</sup> (*See Fig. 6*)

The Technicum's history was only preserved through oral history and the private, and limited, family archive. Without systematic fumbling there would be no way to find out about the buildings relying on the national and municipal archives.<sup>5</sup> Information is transmitted informally.

### 1.3\_ The Sculpture: Icarus, The Vitruvian Man, The Sumerians

Through the vegetation a massive sculpture emerges, protruding from the hillside. A central male figure with golden bat-like wings, encircled in a golden ring, looks upwards and outwards at the passing traffic. Between the encircled figure's legs, beneath the frame of his body, are the numbers: "854126". On the central figure's left, a muscular nude male holds an orb with overlapping elliptical forms signifying an atomic, or galactic, representation in the background. And to the right a muscular nude female holds a larger orb which radiates light. Scattered across the composition are a series of orbs, a wrench, a hammer, a blot, gears, a book, and a ladder. The bat-like wings earned the bare relief the colloquial reputation of the Tbilisi Batman; most passersby not knowing the extent of the territory behind. In 2005, a non-governmental, subsidized educational institution found a new home in the building. Inspired by the central figure of the sculpture, they named their institution "Icarus Tourism College". The central figure acquired two additional identities: Batman and Icarus with disregard to the context, and his counterparts. (*See Fig. 8*)

As the sculpture was meant for an industrial technical college, it is no surprise to find the obvious symbolism and clear reference to industrial machinery and modern

tools. Evidently, the central figure is a clear reference to the Vitruvian Man, seen in his hair, the extension of his arms and legs, and the ring which encircles the farthest extension of his limbs. Symbols like the ladder and book are obviously about education and 'self-elevation', however, the orbs scattered across the composition, the nude male and female figures, and the number 854126 remain a mystery when emphasizing the Vitruvian figure and more apparent symbols. The mysterious, and seemingly tertiary objects and figures in the background, however, are the primary and significant layer in the composition.

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In 1976, Zecharia Sitchin, an Azerbaijani-American "ancient alien" and extraterrestrial theorist, published his first book: *The Twelfth Planet*. Two years later, in 1978, the documentary *Are We Alone in the Universe?* accompanied the book. Sitchin's fascination with ancient cultures and Modern space exploration, led to his fantastically imaginative<sup>6</sup> interpretation of Sumerian texts, reliefs, and seals. The interpretation of Sumerian semiotics is consistent across his writings and films; for example, his interpretation of seven dots signifying the Earth is consistent across his interpretations of Sumerian artifacts.<sup>7</sup> Though his work is discredited by most scholars, it seems to have been embraced by the sculptor of the Technicum's relief. One particular Sumerian depiction layered with Sitchin's interpretation<sup>8</sup> bears a strong resemblance to the Technicum's sculpture.<sup>9</sup> The original seal, which Sitchin claimed<sup>10</sup> is held at The Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, may in-fact be a forgery. Again in the case of this seal, we find Sitchin's recurrent interpretation of the seven dots of Earth:

*The seven dots of Earth and its crescent moon and the six pointed star of Mars are revealing clues in this 4500 year-old Sumerian depiction. It shows two figures standing on either side of a craft, a spaceman of Earth on the left greeting a spaceman of Mars.*

The relationship between the seal and the sculpture become more apparent in another of Sitchin's descriptions where he emphasizes the importance of pisces as a signifier of the dating of the depiction to the third millennium BCE. This is consonant with the placement of the number 854126 at the bottom of the composition, meaning that the number should be a signifier of time, but the significance of the number has yet to be determined. (*See Fig. 9*)





October 2017



February 2018



April 2018



July 2018

**Figure 10\_ Stages of Theft**

The Technicum sculpture was stolen between February 2018 and February 2019.  
Photos, Ibrahim, T. 2017-2018.

[11] Vassily Tsereteli is a Russian-Georgian artist, executive director of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, and the Vice President of the Russian Academy of Arts.

[12] A museum which boasts an immense collection of Zurab Tsereteli's paintings and sculptures.

[13] The Late-Soviet period as it is recognized now, is the period between 1970-1989; the last two decades of the Soviet Union. This period is characterized by architectural experimentations and references to ethno-national cultures and vernaculars, which are now seen as evidence of the beginnings of Soviet dissolution.

[14] Colloquially, Tsereteli's atelier is often described as a factory.

[15] And as previously mentioned, it remains unconfirmed if it is real or a forgery.

#### 1.4\_ Sculpture Disappearance and Authorship

Early 2018, the sculpture began disappearing from the Technicum auditorium facade. In February, the wings of the central Vitruvian man and parts of the golden ring were first to go, and by July about half of the sculpture had disappeared from the facade. Upon my arrival in Tbilisi, and because of my frequent site visits, the theft of the sculpture paused from July until December. Between January and February of 2019 the remainder of the sculpture had been stolen, and the identity (or identities) of the culprit is unknown, though there has been speculation that the process was carried out by the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who reside in the building. (See Fig. 10)

The sculpture which was once on the Technicum auditorium facade, and has now completely disappeared, has been attributed to Zurab Tsereteli. It is colloquially understood that he was the sculptor, and as previously mentioned, this was confirmed by Lasha Mindiashvili. When the sculpture began disappearing in 2018, I was in contact with the family of Zurab Tsereteli, namely his grandson Vassily Tsereteli.<sup>11</sup> At a meeting in the Tbilisi Museum of Modern Art,<sup>12</sup> he stated that the Tsereteli family had contacted the Tbilisi mayor, Kakha Kaladze, and had a meeting with him regarding the protection of the remaining parts of the sculpture. According to him, his meeting with the mayor was ultimately inconsequential, as there was no interest from the municipal authorities to protect the disappearing sculpture. Though I asked for some context about the sculpture or any documentation linking Tsereteli to the sculpture, the family could not provide anything from their archive after searching both in the museum in Tbilisi, and in their family archive in Moscow.

Tsereteli's major public works are ubiquitous in Georgia, particularly in Tbilisi. His massive mosaics and bas reliefs can be found in nearly every district in the city. During the Late-Soviet period,<sup>13</sup> he had become increasingly popular and influential, attracting several talented artists and craftsmen to his factory-like atelier<sup>14</sup> and producing several massive public works. One of the most notable works of Tsereteli from the Late-Soviet period in relation to the Technicum sculpture is *The Chronicles of Georgia*, completed in 1985. As with the case of the Technicum sculpture's accumulation of different meanings, the *Chronicles of Georgia* is often contemporarily (and colloquially) described as the "Tbilisi Stonehenge," however, it seems that the first layer which the artist is referencing

are the ruins of the Stairs of All Nations and the Gate of All Nations in the ancient city of Persepolis, in Iran. (See Fig. 7) This reference to ancient cultures in Tsereteli's work becomes increasingly important in analysing the Technicum sculpture, as it is one of the few other cases in which there is a reference by the artist to ancient cultures. This appropriation of the ruins at Persepolis differs from the case of the Technicum, however, both because the Sumerian seal is not nearly as significant,<sup>15</sup> and because the reference to the seal is a compositional reference to image rather than space.

#### 1.5\_ Ownership

As with several former civic buildings in Georgia, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Technicum has been inhabited by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. More than half of the inhabitants who are still living on the territory migrated there between the years of 1991 and 1999, yet only those residents who are living in the dormitory building have been granted privatization of their makeshift apartments. The Technicum's main block, auditorium, workshop and recreational facilities, and bridge (the spaces which have not been privatized for IDP housing) are all under the ownership and jurisdiction of the Georgian Ministry of Economy's Law Enforcement Professional Liability (LEPL), The National Agency of State Property, and being leased by Icarus Tourism College since 2005. However, the Technicum's main block houses IDPs from initial migrations and migrants from the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which leads to some minor conflicts between the College and residents. The building also houses an elementary school, called Abkhazian School #2, and kindergarten which serves residents and the students from the Dighomi Village district. Since 2012, there has been a promise to relocate residents to new housing blocks in the city. In August of 2019, some residents were again promised relocation, and those who were longest on the waiting list were accommodated in new apartments in the Samgori district.

#### 1.6\_ Building Conditions

The buildings on the Technicum territory show signs of decay and appropriation in varying degrees, as some parts of the territory have fallen out of use. The main block has seen its main entrance blocked up with





**Figure 11\_ Charred Facade of Main Block**

The facade of the main block indicates the various different inhabitations in the building's interior. The aluminum rotating windows remain in the IDP living quarters while the tourism college has replaced the original windows.  
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.



**Figure 12\_ Facade of the Dormitory Building**

The typology of the dormitory building allowed for more suitable living conditions, and the building has been privatized for the residents.  
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.

concrete masonry with a single metal-plastic entry door being the portal into the space. Poor renovations carried out by the tourism college are resonant because of the low standard of construction, lack of funds, and availability of building materials. The territory which has been carved out by the college is visible on the front and back facades of the main block through the white metal-plastic windows inserted into the ill-maintained concrete. The IDP quarters often have the original aluminum rotating windows on the front facade, and original wooden windows on the back facade. The residents have made informal entrances in the building which did not previously exist, have created wastewater systems punched through holes in the back facade, and have run the interior hallways of their settlement with plumbing and electrical systems connected to the urban grid. Though there are IDP residents in the building whose squat predates the lease of the Tourism College, they have had few rights in gaining agency and making more robust infrastructure in their settlement, including gas heating. Residents in the main block still resort to burning wood in stoves to keep warm in the winter, evidenced by charred concrete facade panels and piled up wood stores in hallways and storage rooms. (See Fig. 11)

According to accounts by residents, the auditorium building was one of the first places inhabited by IDPs migrating to Tbilisi, but was abandoned for places in the conjoined main block. After years of disuse, the auditorium building has suffered from significant water damage to its concrete panels, secondary structural elements, cladding, and infilled masonry walls; though the primary concrete structure is still in relatively good condition. Original wooden window frames were likely taken for use as firewood, while steel railings and other elements were stripped from the building and sold second-hand by scavengers coming from other parts of the city.<sup>16</sup> The basement level of the building has been used as a public toilet, and is filled with several syringes. The first level, the underbelly of the auditorium is filled with debris, while the auditorium is filled with heaps of damp rubbish.

The bridge, workshops and recreational facility are in similar condition to the auditorium building. The primary precast concrete elements are in good condition, and the secondary elements have collapsed or have been scavenged, leaving behind heaps of debris. The dormitory building has been informally adapted by IDP residents, and the character of the

building has remained largely the same on the exterior, but with more vibrant colors from the draped laundry and varying building materials creating enclosures on balconies. (See Fig. 12) The space around the base of the building has been claimed by some residents who use the space for subsistence farming. There are also small houses which have emerged on the territory, enveloped by the building and landscape. Early in 2019, we asked the Tbilisi City Hall to perform a survey of the Technicum and they found that all of the buildings are structurally sound and in usable condition.<sup>17</sup> This was the end of formal discussions with the municipality about a future for the Technicum.

### 1.7\_ Who are the residents?

Between March and April of 2019, with Mariam Naderishvili,<sup>18</sup> Eugene Slominerov,<sup>19</sup> and Nargiza Arjevanidze,<sup>20</sup> we carried out a survey of Technicum residents to find information about the migration and settlement to the building complex, as well as information about needs and potentials for engagement in public space. In order to recruit participants, targeted sampling<sup>21</sup> and snowball sampling were applied, and respondents were interviewed face-to-face. The questionnaire included closed and open questions concerning their demographic profile, living conditions, social relations among neighbors (and with the administration of Icarus Tourism College), and prospective development of the territory.<sup>22</sup> The development of infrastructure based on needs of the residents and in support of the ecological networks which have formed since the initial migrations to the building in the 1990s was the aim of this survey. From this research we were able to confirm some previous hypotheses about the inhabitations of the building which were only previously understood anecdotally.<sup>23</sup> For instance, mostly IDPs from Abkhazia who migrated between 1990 and 1999 were inhabiting the dormitory building and a part of the main block with a separate entrance from IDPs who would migrate after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. Residents who migrated to the building later also had much more severe living conditions, in many instances not having private toilets or kitchens. (See Fig. 13-14)

From the survey we also discovered the overwhelmingly low-incomes which residents depended on. Over seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents were unemployed. Over half of respondents were dependent on governmental aid, and

[16] I have been an eye-witness of this scavenging process in September of 2017.

[17] This survey was provided by the Head of the Building Department in the Tbilisi City Hall, Temor Bolotashvili, in February 2019.

[18] Mariam Naderishvili is a Georgian Psychological Anthropologist.

[19] Eugene Slominerov is a Professor of Sociology at Tbilisi State University.

[20] Nargiza Arjevanidze is a Professor of Sociology at San Diego State University (in Tbilisi), Tbilisi State University, and GIPA. Nargiza is an Internally Displaced Person from Abkhazia with several insights on massive migrations in the Late-Soviet period and the beginning of Georgian Independence. She was formerly working with UNHCR.

[21] Snowball Sampling and Targeted Sampling are methods of recruiting participants in sociological surveys. Our survey was non-random (focused on Technicum residents), and we relied on gaining trust in the interview process to get in contact with more interviewees.

[22] This survey of Technicum inhabitants is unpublished, and was intended to provide the quantitative and qualitative information needed to make a case for our activities in the Technicum.

[23] See Ibrahim, Vekstein. *Appropriate, Adapt, Inhabit: The Recreation of Public Space in the Republic of Georgia*, 2018. Though the figures presented there are not accurate to the number of families living in the Technicum complex, the contextual information about separations in the building based on migrational origins are outlined there.





**Figure 13\_ Plumbing in a Shared Bathroom in the Main Block**

This shared bathroom was originally a public restroom in the Technicum main block which was later retrofitted. The water lines visible here are likely also the source to water systems in the private residences. *Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2018.*



**Figure 14\_ Hallway of the Main Block**

Infrastructure and storage has been exteriorized in the hallways. The conditions of the second floor of the main block have not changed considerably since this photo was taken in August of 2017. *Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.*





**Figure 15\_ State Security at Terrace**

Two security boxes and additional security vehicles were protecting the auditorium terrace and the workshop building after evicting the recently migrated Abkhazian man, and a confrontation with our initiative group. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.



**Figure 16\_ The Abkhazian School**

The elementary school located on the northern side of the Technicum. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.



**Figure 17\_ New Infrastructure Projects**

The access road to the Technicum has disappeared as of March 2021. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2021.

[24] and who was living in the South Ossetian quarter of the main block.

[25] These gas pipes were only in use by Icarus Tourism College.

[26] Lisi Lake is an artificial lake located above the Saburtalo district.

[27] See Civil. *Massive Landslide Threatens Tbilisi, 2021.*

thirty-seven (37%) of respondents who were eligible for governmental aid but did not receive government assistance. In one instance a family of five was living in a room that was approximately 20 square meters with hardly any privacy, save ephemeral privacy curtains.

It wasn't the surveys and figures which provided the most substantial information about the residents of the Technicum, however; it was the anecdotes and personal encounters with the community which best express the ecology of the place. There was one resident who migrated to the building from Abkhazia,<sup>24</sup> who I had become familiar with during the frequent site visits. He was often walking uphill with a beaten black leather briefcase, intoxicated, and ready to share his writing with anyone with whom he engaged. A poet, a polyglot, and the backgammon champion of Batumi before the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was open and receptive to any interventions which we had envisioned in the Technicum. He often invited me to drink unrefined chacha with him from reused coca-cola bottles, while sitting on a makeshift bench that spanned between two tree stumps (from trees which were cut to be used as firewood). In the background some younger residents, approximately twenty-five years-old, would burn the synthetic rubber from copper cables to sell the raw copper, while children climbed and swung from gas pipes<sup>25</sup> which were standing two-and-a-half meters above the ground.

Another man who I had met in the building who had just migrated from Abkhazia in the Spring of 2019, seeking medical help in Tbilisi, was ousted from the former workshop building which he was trying to squat. When the police came at the request of the administration of the tourism college to remove this man from the collapsing, unused, and abandoned space, they didn't permit him to collect his belongings. Unable to find a place to squat, unable to take his things, and with his pre-existing conditions, he died a week later. (See Fig. 15)

A medical student from the Abkhazian side of the main block who I had met on several visits provided context into the lives of the generation which had grown in the building. He had grown up in the building, attended school at the aforementioned Abkhazian School #2, and it is the only home that he knew. He told an account of the school life saying that the teachers of the school would repeat to the children, "you will be the generation that brings back Abkhazia," and mentioned that this is still said to the

children of the school today. (See Fig. 16)

### 1.8\_ Most Recent Conditions

In April of 2021, on the last site visit to the Technicum, I documented the most remarkable changes to the landscape of the site: the complete cutting of the hillside for an infrastructural project. (See Fig. 17) The road which was used to arrive on the Technicum territory was completely removed, cutting one of the main access roads of residents to their home, and removing the only bus stop towards the city center. The new infrastructural project seems to be including a new road up the hillside to the luxury, "ecological" housing developments near Lisi Lake,<sup>26</sup> which have become popular in the last several years as the city center has become more densely populated. In order to alleviate traffic to the Lisi development, which is only currently flowing through the Saburtalo district and causing traffic congestion, this new road would promote further access to Lisi. Most recently, the eco-friendly mountain developments have prompted a 500 meter-long fissure in March of 2021, making the area a high-risk landslide zone.<sup>27</sup>





**Figure 18\_ UNDETERMINED symposium**

The UNDETERMINED symposium held in the National Scientific Library in Tbilisi in October 2017. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.



**Figure 19\_ UNDETERMINED discussion**

Discussions with urbanists, activists, historians, architects, and artists about what should be done with Soviet heritage. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2017.

[28] Natalia Nebieridze is a co-founder of Campus Advocacy Center for the Arts and Art Education. Campus was unsuccessful in negotiating with the Ministry of Economy about the use of an abandoned building for a library in the Saburtalo district. The space they were negotiating for was sold to a private investor who later reached out to their organization asking for \$10,000/ month in rent for their library.

[29] Ana Chorgolashvili is a co-editor of the Georgian Danarti magazine, an art and architecture publication.

[30] Mariam Shergelashvili is an exhibition curator at the Silk State Museum in Tbilisi.

[31] South Ossetia is a Russian occupied territory of Georgia which comprises territories of several Georgian regions, predominantly Shida Kartli.

[32] The Technicum, as all former unused civic buildings in Georgia, falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy's LEPL: The National Agency of State Property.

[33] Every time I visited the Public Service Hall I was prompted with the question of whether I would be interested in buying the building. The process of purchasing state property is much simpler than trying to find a public use.

[34] The Agency was predominantly focused on preservation of religious architecture, and mainly Georgian Orthodox Churches, and 19th Century houses in Tbilisi. It is also worth noting that their organization does not emphasize the importance of wooden mosques of Adjara or Armenian Orthodox Churches in Tbilisi, as they do not fit the contemporary national narrative.

[35] Before the second meeting, we were given the wrong address for the meeting and did not have a chance to attend and make a second presentation. The jury decided against having any part of the building, including the sculpture, listed as heritage.

[36] See The former building of Tbilisi Technical College is, in fact, demolished - the bas-relief of Zurab Tsereteli has been looted. 2018.

<https://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/114182>

## Chapter 2

### Initiatives at the Industrial Technicum

*This chapter discusses the initiatives taken between the years 2017 and 2019, the implications of the introduction of the staircase, and the effects that it had after the inaugural Tbilisi Architecture Biennial. The chapter also discusses the responses of governmental entities and the administration of Icarus Tourism College, one of the main stakeholders in the Technicum.*

#### 2.1\_ UNDETERMINED

In 2017, with Natalia Nebieridze,<sup>28</sup> Ana Chorgolashvili,<sup>29</sup> and Mariam Shergelashvili,<sup>30</sup> we formed an initiative group with the goal of preservation and adaptive reuse of the Technicum auditorium and workshop spaces. The idea was to make use of these dilapidated and unused parts of the Technicum to make a case for re-development of Soviet Modern buildings for public use. We understood that the main block of the building was occupied by IDPs from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>31</sup> We planned to start the process by holding an exhibition in the auditorium building to demonstrate the potentials of the space. As the building falls under the ownership and jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economy,<sup>32</sup> I began a long chain of contact with them to receive permissions.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneous with the effort to get permissions to hold an event in the Technicum, we were applying to have the building complex and sculpture listed as in the national registry via the Ministry of Culture's LEPL, The National Agency of Cultural Heritage Preservation.

Our initial contact with the National Agency of Cultural Heritage Preservation's director and deputies were overwhelmingly positive, as the prospect of focusing on 20th-Century cultural heritage presented a new dimension of opportunity to their organization's operations.<sup>34</sup> They went to the extent of providing financial support for the UNDETERMINED symposium (*See Fig. 18-19*) and workshop which we held in the National Scientific Library. However, the nomination process of the building and the sculpture ended negatively after a council meeting decision.<sup>35</sup>

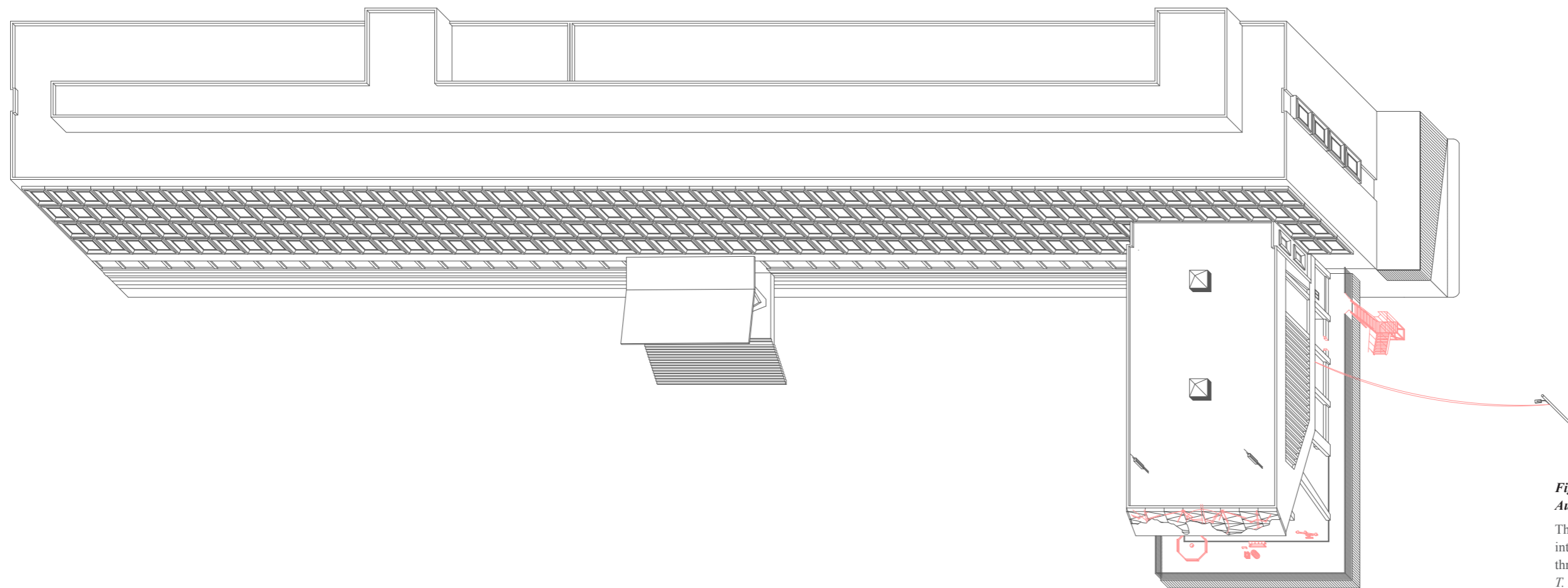
#### 2.2\_ INHABIT and The Tbilisi Architecture Biennial

Early in 2018, the sculpture began to disappear from the building's facade, and by July more than half of

it had been brutally removed. Since the sculpture was never listed, it was out of the jurisdiction and interest of the Ministry of Culture and Agency of Heritage Preservation. The Agency of State Property also had no interest in addressing the loss of the sculpture despite pressure from our initiative team, community members, and foreign researchers, there was never an investigation into the theft of the sculpture. With Givi Machavariani, we addressed the issue on Rustavi 2 TV and the Agency of State Property claimed that they had no responsibility to maintain property under their jurisdiction, and that the responsibility was to the leasing entity of the building, Icarus Tourism College.<sup>36</sup>

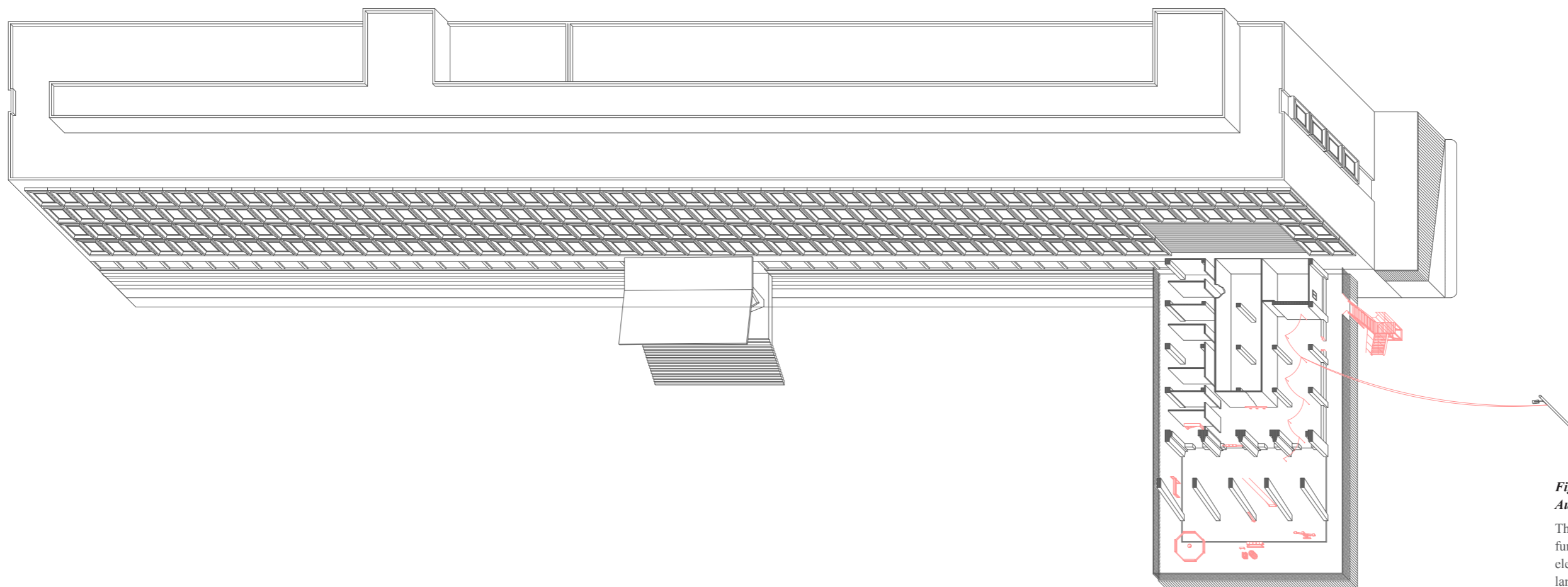
Since Georgian independence civic buildings and space are under threat of privatization and developer's interests, and the common argument for the loss of public space is that the buildings are out-of-date and a reminder of the previous Soviet epoch, and therefore Russian-Soviet imperialism. However, there has been little effort to create a contemporary Georgian civic or public space and architecture to replace those formerly public structures. The purpose of the subsequent INHABIT initiative, which was spearheaded in collaboration with Givi Machavariani, Gio Sumbadze, and Claudio Vekstein, was to begin the discourse around the re-creation of public space in Georgia and the adaptation of Soviet buildings for contemporary use. The discussions in the 2017 symposium brought us to the conclusion that the Technicum and other Soviet buildings needed to be critically appropriated, adapted, and inhabited with the contemporary and vernacular culture to suit the contemporary needs and functions. Since the Technicum no longer has its original function, and has since been in use by a Tourism College, as IDP Housing, as an elementary school and kindergarten, then the approach to the building should be considering the complex and contemporary urban ecology which has formed. The solidification, and improvement of





**Figure 20\_ Axonometric of the Technicum Auditorium Interventions on the sculpture**

This axonometric is a documentation of the interventions made in the Technicum in October through December of 2018. *Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2018.*



**Figure 21\_ Axonometric of the Technicum Auditorium Interventions on the terrace**

The interventions on the terrace include the furniture made during the workshop, and electricity which was connected to from a street lamp by the Tbilisi municipality. *Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2018.*



**Figure 22\_ Technicum Exhibition Opening**

The Technicum Exhibition opening during the inaugural Tbilisi Architecture Biennial in October 2018. Photo, Brown, A. 2018.



**Figure 23\_ Staircase Construction**

Construction of the staircase on the day of the exhibition. After a series of complications, we managed to build the staircase right before the opening. Photo, Brown, A. 2018.

the current conditions with aesthetic sensibility to the historical layers and hardships are integral in the effort to reconstruct.

In response to the destruction of the sculpture, and in an attempt to demonstrate the re-creation of public space with a local spirit, in October 2018 we inhabited the terrace of the Technicum auditorium with a squatted exhibition for the inaugural Tbilisi Architecture Biennial. (See Fig. 22) The construction of the staircase to the terrace made the space accessible, (See Fig. 23) and for the first time in decades the space was lit. After the opening, we revisited the site regularly and continued communication with neighbors who were reinvigorated by the initiative. With Nika Gabiskiria,<sup>37</sup> students from the Georgian Technical University,<sup>38</sup> and residents, we organized a furniture building workshop and began discussions about the creation of a playground. With the leftover wooden materials, we furnished the terrace, built a large swingset suspended from the top of the diagonal columns, revitalizing the space with new activity. The space and the shared activities of inhabiting the space became a social connection point between members of the IDP community and those visiting from the other parts of the city. With the new furniture, the space was furnished with new rituals of inhabitation, inspiring a new collective hope which would prove to be ephemeral. (See Fig. 24-26)

### 2.3\_ The End

In response to our efforts, from April of 2019 the building was patrolled by government funded security, evidenced by the 125 security patrol boxes placed around the building. (See Fig. 15) The security patrol did not allow access to the terrace and the workshops until the beginning of 2020, a service which was denied during the period of the sculpture's theft. Though the building is under patrol, there are still traces of life and activity in the space. (See Fig. 27) For the present moment, public architecture in Tbilisi is a makeshift and illegal inhabitation under a ruined sculpture.

In an interview with Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty published in April 2021, the case was reopened. The reporting journalist, Tea Topuria, asked for commentary from both me and the director of the Icarus Tourism College, Rusudan Chartolani. When asked about the theft of the sculpture, Chartolani responded that their obligation was first to protect their students, and then alluded to the fact that the

sculpture was likely stolen by the unmonitored IDPs living on the premises.<sup>39</sup> This statement contradicts actions which were taken by the college against our initiative throughout the process (as well as other activists who were trying to prevent further destruction of the sculpture), and is disproved by the fact that security only appeared after the sculpture was totally dismantled.<sup>40</sup> The conditions and reasons for the sculpture's disappearance remain a mystery, and no governmental entity on the municipal level or central governmental level has taken initiative to investigate the matter thoroughly. The Agency of State Property which are technically the legal owners of the Technicum direct the blame to the leasing entity, and the college administration claims that it is not their responsibility, and the municipal authorities and police are idle. It is clear that there is no political will from any of these three entities to take action. It is also clear, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that there are private developers interests which intersect within the Technicum's vicinity. Perhaps nothing has changed since the naming of the 2017 symposium, and the future of the Technicum remains undetermined.

[37] Nika Gabiskiria is a Georgian architect and the national representative of the European Architecture Students Assembly (EASA) from Georgia.

[38] One of the attendants of our workshop was actually the great-grandson of the architect, Nikoloz Lasareishvili.

[39] See Topuria, Tea. *Flying Batman - Should We Defend Soviet Brutalism?* 2021. <https://bit.ly/32ZvHAy>

[40] A comical anecdote about what was happening in the background: During the time of the architecture biennial, one of the deputy mayors of Tbilisi contacted the director of the tourism college on my behalf. He asked the director to allow our initiative group use of the territory for the project, to which she replied: "I don't want that Arab on our property." He lightheartedly relayed the message, but urged me not to proceed until permission was formally granted. When we began construction, I sent a photo and we were assisted in gaining temporary (or rather, indefinite) permissions. While the electricity was being connected by the municipality, the municipal inspectors and police were arriving to fine us.





**Figure 24\_ Workshop and Ritual**

The shape that the terrace took during the furniture workshop was ritual. The inhabitation of the space was based on consensus and collective production of space.  
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2018.



**Figure 25\_ After the Furniture Workshop**

The true inhabitation of the space began with the furniture workshop which was held after the staircase was built. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2018.



**Figure 26\_ A New Swing**

The children who reside in the building, and their parents wanted to build a playground at the back of the building. Though we did not get that far, this was the start. On a visit in March 2021, a basketball hoop appeared in the space. Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2018.



**Figure 27\_ A Year after the Inauguration of the Space**

This photo taken in the summer of 2020 demonstrated the use of the space continued despite the fact security was present at some times of the day.  
Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2019.





**Figure 28\_ Kamikaze Loggia Type 1**  
Documentation of Kamikaze Loggias by Gio Sumbadze.  
Photo, Sumbadze, G. c. 2000.



**Figure 29\_ Kamikaze Loggia Type 2**  
This documentation focused on typological differences between loggias.  
Photo, Sumbadze, G. c. 2000.

[41] See Nodia, Ghia. "Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity." *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution*, edited by Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, MIT Press, 2005, pp. 39-82.

[42] The first and second master plans of Tbilisi needed approval from Moscow. The third master plan, the first to be produced by the independent Georgia, was in process in the 1990s. The loggias were built in the period of the "absent master plan". (Interview with Gio Sumbadze on February 24, 2021) Ironically, every year since I have arrived in Tbilisi in 2016, they mention the municipality promises a new master plan for Tbilisi - it is never approved. Even if it is approved, according to an interview with Irakli Zhvania in 2019, there is legislation in place to allow developers to circumvent restrictions by claiming their project will positively affect the Georgian economy.

[43] Though it remains largely unrecognized, Gio Sumbadze is the proto-documentarian of Kamikaze Loggias before completing the Kamikaze Loggia pavilion at the Venice Biennale. See *Kamikaze Loggia, Pavilion of Georgia*, 2014.

[44] According to Joanna Warsza the term was coined by a Russian journalist. See *Techniques of improvisation: Joanna Warsza on art and urbanism in Georgia*.

[45] particularly in the historic districts of Mtatsminda, Sololaki, Vera, and Chugureti

[46] See Salukvadze, Joseph, and Oleg Golubchikov. "City as a Geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia - A Globalizing Metropolis in a Turbulent Region." 2015.

[47] At the kind suggestion of President Saakashvili, investors who had earned money during the 1990s from casino business were asked to diversify their portfolios by purchasing state property and converting former civic into hotels. One of the most successful entrepreneurs has been Temur Ugulava, the owner of Adjara Group. Though this attitude of "sell everything but our souls" was good to prime the pump of the Georgian economy, the tendency has not ceased until today. The quote "sell everything but our souls" comes from the Georgian Statesman Kakha Bendukidze with regard to the sale of state property.

[48] See [fabrikatbilisi.com](http://fabrikatbilisi.com)

## Chapter 3

### Methodology of Appropriation: Modernism Metabolized by New Vernaculars

*This final chapter discusses the architectural approach taken in producing the staircase at the Technicum, based on the context given in the previous chapters. This chapter opens with additional context about historic and contemporary urban morphologies in Tbilisi, and their relation to regional vernaculars. These layers are all needed to contextualize the formal response of the staircase.*

#### 3.1\_ Kamikaze Loggias and Urban Morphologies

The metabolism of formal and structural values was the backdrop of the Georgian Civil War. In a reality of thug-in-law militias, massive migrations of refugees, and equally massive exoduses of nonethnic Georgians,<sup>41</sup> a phenomenon of parasitic building extensions became commonplace in Tbilisi. The uniformity, homogeneity, and purity of the Soviet city would be disrupted by the granularity of anarchic constructions.<sup>42</sup> The variance of building materials, depth of protrusions, and ingenuitive structural solutions characteristic of these extensions were typologically categorized by Gio Sumbadze beginning in 1999.<sup>43</sup> (See Fig. 28-29) The name *Kamikaze Loggia*<sup>44</sup> has been coined to describe this phenomenon in Tbilisi. Though loggias are common among the architectural elements of the nineteenth-century architecture of Tbilisi, Sumbadze asserts that the loggias are not at all in reference to architectural notions that are present in vernaculars predating the Soviet Union. For him the loggias are the result of a logical and economical operation for the extension of existing buildings. The motivation and result of which are simple enough to understand. Nevertheless, there are qualities of these extensions which are *de facto* akin to nineteenth-century Tbilisian architecture and regional vernaculars.

The fabric of Tbilisi, as every city, is multi-layered. The particularities arise when observing the collisions of the fabrics of the historic city,<sup>45</sup> with the Soviet-introduced, Modern adaptations. There is a clear difference between the sinuous streets of vibrant courtyard houses, each with their respective idiosyncratic elements (ie. vegetation, staircases, hand-carved railings), and the austerity of the Communist housing blocks. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the metabolism of the housing blocks with the most basic and available materials resembles the granularity of the historic districts of the city. And

perhaps the methods and approaches in appropriation of Modernist buildings is culturally and linguistically ingrained. This phenomena is not exclusive to the appropriation of Modernist blocks, renovations have also been made to 19th-century buildings in the same vein. It is not uncommon to see once open balconies, enclosed to provide additional interior living space, or parasitic additions growing from a stereotomic mass of walls. (See Fig. 30) Though these adaptations are associated with the anarchic 1990s, post Soviet collapse, photographs from the late nineteenth-century demonstrate a resonance in the production of the city.

#### 3.2\_ Neoliberal Tendencies

The Georgian government has relied on the development of tourism as the basis of their economy since Saakashvili's presidency, in 2005. There has been little development in other economic sectors, save building development, which is arguably also linked to tourism.<sup>46</sup> In the case of the Technicum, the only interest in developing the space would come from the private sector, and the only imagination about adaptive reuse of the space would be for hospitalities and entertainment.<sup>47</sup> The model which was most often discussed, in reference to future visions of the Technicum, was that of *Fabrika Hostel* in the Chugureti district: a former factory converted to a hostel with a large courtyard housing commercial spaces rented out by stylish small cafes and businesses.<sup>48</sup> The conversion of the Technicum to such a space would require the removal and reaccommodation of the IDP inhabitants, something that has been done in the past to make way for other hotels in the city. Since there is a large number of families living in the main block, and because the tourism college has their interests in maintaining their lease of the complex, no investment of this kind was further considered.





**Figure 30\_ Extension from a nineteenth-century building in Sololaki**

An extension typical of the 1990s in Tbilisi. The historic districts of Sololaki, Mtatsminda, Vera, and Chugureti have many such adaptations. The kamikaze loggias are not specific to Modernist housing blocks.

*Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2021.*

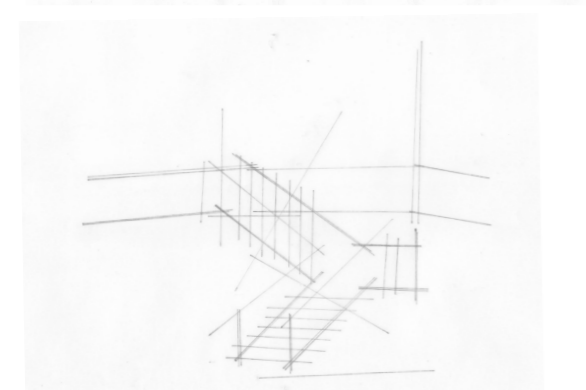
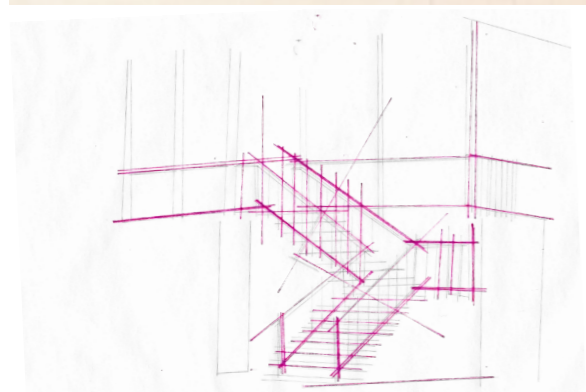


**Figure 31\_ Staircase in Mtatsminda District**

Each staircase in the old city has its particularities whether it was built in the nineteenth-century or in the 1990s. This is one a minor exampmle of a courtyard staircase; in the background a loggia is visible with fenestration characteristic of nineteenth-century Tbilisi.

*Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2020.*





**Figure 32\_ Staircase Architectural Process**

The houses of western Georgia typically have their access to the first floor, this allowed for the production of a metaphor linking the creation of the architectural object with vernacular house architecture.

Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2018.

[49] In June through October of 2017, every time I would visit the National Agency of State Property office in the Public Service Hall, I was met with the opportunity to buy the Technicum. Perhaps it would have been easier to purchase the complex, than to hold an exhibition and conference.

[50] The 1959 Georgian Soviet film *First Day, Last Day* highlights the several significant staircases in Tbilisi.

[51] Unlike the regions of central and eastern Georgia, these region's vernacular houses were typically elevated above the ground, and the main access to these houses were the exterior staircases directly leading to the first level. See M. Garakanidze, *Georgian Wooden Architecture*, 1959.

[52] Pertaining to form

[53] Here I relied on the *Abkhazian Virtual Archive*

[54] This idea is based on the works of Architect Claudio Vekstein in a Montessori school project which he had completed in Argentina, but is not limited to these conversations. The concretization of metaphor relating the private with the public, and the domestic with the exterior also have a strong resonance in the historical urban context of Tbilisi.

At the recommendation of a former collaborator, a meeting was arranged with the marketing director of Adjara Group in September of 2017, where I presented the case of the Technicum and asked if they would be interested in a development process different from their existing projects. We discussed potential co-investment with the governmental agencies to create public space in the auditorium building, better accommodate the IDPs in the main block, and recreating the workshop spaces to accommodate small-scale production and commercial activities. The response to this proposal was that “good architecture belongs to whoever can afford it.” In the meeting, I was introduced to the *modus operandi* of the private sector in Georgia, and their freedom and capacity to do whatever they desired in the country.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.3\_ Focal Interventions

As there were no solutions available in communication with the governmental agencies or the private sector about investing in public space, and the sculpture was disappearing from the auditorium facade without explanation, the need for an intervention became urgent. Retracing the elements of the sculpture which had disappeared, and projecting light on the remaining parts was necessary to draw attention to the theft, but it was not the only solution needed. The solution to making the Technicum auditorium active was building a focal intervention that would enable people to use the terrace: a staircase. When the building was completed, there was no exterior access to the terrace, and the only way to enter the space was through interior corridors accessible from the main block. With the introduction of the elementary school, the two entrances to the terrace were blocked off and the space became completely out of use. As it stood, the entire auditorium building was a decomposing limb, long overdue for amputation. The loss of the sculpture further depleted the conditions of the space.

### 3.4\_ Staircase - Architectural Process and Vernacular Appropriations of Modernism

One of the most notable architectural elements in the nineteenth-century Tbilisi houses is the staircases, each distinctive in its own right: wooden, steel, iron, spirals, angles, bridges, and ingenuitive vertical and horizontal connections.<sup>50</sup> (See Fig. 31) The language of staircases extends beyond the urban architecture, and likely originates from the craftsmanship in

village houses from the regions of Samegrelo, Racha, and Abkhazia.<sup>51</sup> It was important then to take the architectonics of these Georgian residential staircases as a formal<sup>52</sup> first layer of the public staircase at the Technicum. Since the residents of the Technicum were originally from Samegrelo and Abkhazia, I began a search for images of staircases from these regions.<sup>53</sup> One of the recurring qualities of these outdoor staircases was the ninety degree (90°) turn in the middle, at a landing, and the outward projection of the entry of the staircases away from the house. The first layer of the Technicum staircase would be the staircase of an Abkhazian home. As it is difficult to find pre-Soviet (or pre-modern) examples of public spaces in the Georgian context, the house seemed the most appropriate and necessary metaphor in the inauguration of public space.<sup>54</sup>

Given the urban processes and metabolism of the city with the aforementioned granular architectural interventions, the recreation of a staircase from Abkhazia, or greater western Georgia, would be reductive to the context of the Technicum as a newly introduced architectural object. Nevertheless, the need to appropriate the massive Modernist Technicum auditorium with this reference to adaptations made by individuals in their houses was needed to bring the object into the context of urban morphologies. Following the methodology which I had learned from Argentinian architect Claudio Vekstein, who was also consulting during the design process, the structure was produced based on the tracing and extraction from the image of the Abkhazian staircase. This architectural process generated a new architectural object while maintaining the qualities of the initial object. A perspective photograph would become the plan of the new staircase, while maintaining the vertical spatial configurations. The staircase would become a parasitic extension to the Technicum auditorium terrace with the ambition of giving new life to the space. (See Fig. 32) Ironically, however, the validation of the architectural process, and the resultant product, would be given by an eighty-eight year-old IDP man from Abkhazia, who shared a painting of his house during one of our survey visits in the Spring of 2019. (See Fig. 33)

### 3.5\_ Public Works and Identity

The public art works of Zurab Tsereteli mentioned in the previous chapters demonstrate the strong disconnection of people and the production of public space in the Soviet context. The aforementioned

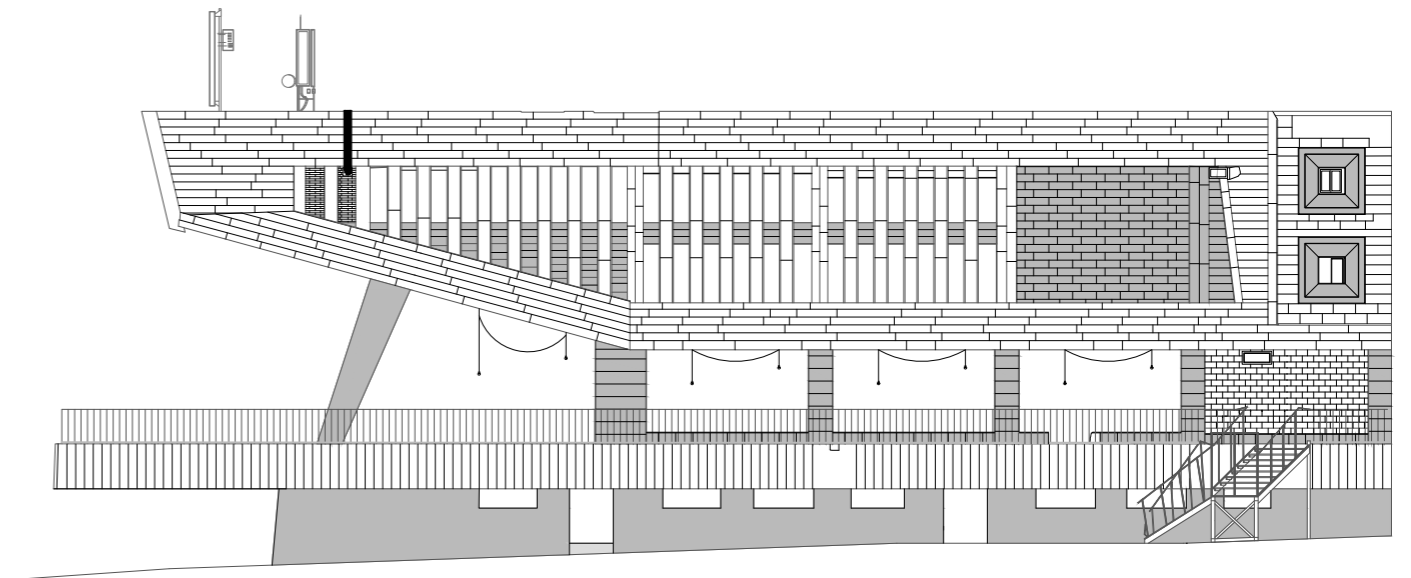




**Figure 33\_ A resident of the Technicum dormitory building shows a painting of home**

The perspective of the staircase in the drawing resonate with the staircase that was produced to enter the auditorium terrace space. I had seen this painting after the staircase was built, and it seemed to validate the architectural approach.

*Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2019.*



**Figure 34\_ Elevation of the Technicum Auditorium after interventions**

This elevation of the Technicum Auditorium was drawn after the staircase was completed to document the intervention. *Drawing, Ibrahim, T. 2018.*





**Figure 35\_ The Palace of Ceremonies**

The Palace of Ceremonies is the most significant building of Victor Djorbenadze's career, it embodies all of his architectural and artistic values. He had been working on the drawings of the building for nearly two decades before he would have the opportunity to build it. According to Prof. David Bostanashvili, it was Djorbenadze who had envisioned the whole program for wedding palaces in each Soviet state so that he would have the opportunity to create the structure.

Photo, Ibrahim, T. 2016.

[55] Soviet propaganda about the liberation of Georgia by the Soviets is present in several books published in Soviet publishing houses, regardless of topic. The reason that Tsereteli remains a controversial artist, particularly in Georgia, is because of his strong ties to Moscow. In 2018, a photo was published of him with a newly completed, imposing sculpture of President Vladimir Putin, possibly further demonstrating his allegiances.

[56] The Palace of Ceremonies is a wedding house built in 1985. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union it was purchased by the Georgian oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili to be used as a private residence. More recently, the first floor of the building is in use as a private events venue.

[57] See D. Bostanashvili and S. Bostanashvili, *Butza: Architect Victor Djorbenadze*, pp. 128–129, 167-169. Tbilisi, 2012.

[58] Ibid, 2012.

[59] The competition for the creation of the Sameba Cathedral took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the newly independent Georgia.

Chronicles of Georgia, which is a project which is arguably in the interest of a Georgian ethnic and national identity, have nothing to do with the customs of the context in which the work was produced. If Tsereteli was referencing ancient civilizations in his public art works with the superimposition of Georgian ethnic history and folklore, it was likely only serving to further solidify the Soviet propagandist position of Georgian prosperity within the Soviet system.<sup>55</sup> However, it was not only the work of Tsereteli which was disconnected from the vernacular and pre-Soviet Georgian conditions, but the works of architects like Victor Djorbenadze, the architect of the Palace of Ceremonies, located in the Isani district of Tbilisi.<sup>56</sup> (See Fig. 35) Though the work of Djorbenadze was clearly referencing Georgian mythology,<sup>57</sup> and there was an ambition to produce a building which represented Georgian culture through a series of references, the product deviates from qualities that are essential to ethnic identity because they were too far abstracted. This abstraction is further explicated in Djorbenadze's competition entry for the *Sameba Cathedral*,<sup>58</sup> where he proposed the recreation of the domes of churches across the regions of Georgia under a larger single dome of unification. The well-intentioned, unbuilt project carries with it a grandeur that was not sufficiently sensitive to the context of the newly independent country.<sup>59</sup> A project with the ambition of unification must necessarily create and uphold the conditions of unity, rather than resorting to symbolic representations of unity predicated on ideology.

Within the ideological context in which Tsereteli's sculpture at the Technicum was produced, the sculpture may have been relevant, however, this relevance would disappear with the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the sculpture's accumulated meaning as an object in the city, as all of the mentioned structures, have their relevance as layers that produce an urban history. Though these structures and public art works have not been fully appropriated, they have been assimilated through the contemporary mythologies that are formed around their existence, adding value to the urban context. Furthermore, if these ideologically-charged objects cease to exist in the city, the reference points to a more thorough understanding of local identity can not be catalyzed. Though the Sumerians and the Vitruvian Man may not be integral to Georgian identity, these concretized informational layers provide contextual information. Bearing this in mind, the process of building a staircase and appropriating the Technicum auditorium

terrace was not meant to supplant an imposing foreign object, but rather contrarily to embrace it.

### 3.6\_ Idiosyncrasy and Public Spirit

Arguably the Tbilisian courtyard houses contained public space within the shared center of each individual yard. The idiosyncrasies of each yard, and the relationship of each family to the interior of it, is based on consensus among neighbors. This consensus and the formation of public spaces which was essential to the urban ecology of the city was certainly not considered in the urban planning propositions in the Soviet period or after the Soviet Union collapsed. The consideration of the idiosyncratic has been lost when translated to the production of public space in the city. A staircase is not sufficient to produce the conditions of public space, though it was the catalyst for further activity. More important than the time that was spent in deliberation and construction of the staircase was the period after. The rituals which were formed in the place around building, cooking, and sharing dinner were the most significant events in making the space public.

The project at the Technicum was ultimately unsuccessful because of its unsustainability and for the total loss of the sculpture, nevertheless, for a brief moment the auditorium terrace was home to a public spirit.



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