

MEDIATING. FROM FENCES TO URBAN SPACES
Diana Ruiz Cendales



Mediating. From fences to urban spaces
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MEDIATING.FROM FENCES TO URBAN SPACES

The Hurricane Katrina irrupted in New Orleans in August 2005, producing serious damages to the inhabitants and to its infrastructures. The flood, that reached 80% of the city, affected severely some basic services such as the electricity and gas systems –which later on became one reason for the belated return of a considerable portion of the evacuated population– and caused over 700 loss of lives. But additionally to these damages, an unknown reality of this city was revealed to the world. The idea of New Orleans as an attractive and colorful place, where good music and tasty food can be found, was contrasted with evidences of a socially segregated city which encloses a shrinking population, a declining economy, and high crime rates. Nevertheless, the Katrina happened to be as well a chance to rethink structural issues of the city that were improperly functioning before the hurricane.

Therefore, apart from the belated and questionable response of the US government, multiple reactions, and alternative solutions were proposed in varied contexts all around the world –such as academic and professional ones, among others–. This, and the invitation made by Princeton and Tulane Universities to look at this situation from an-other perspective, was a strong reason for Spacelab to focus as a group in this city. After the preliminary –and mediated– search for approximating to this city from the farness, an infinite amount of questions emerged. Then, the moment for the real exploration of the city came. In the field, some previously collected images were corroborated and some other reassessed.

During my exploration of New Orleans one significant situation called my attention: the effect of the Pontchartrain Expressway in the central area of the city. This elevated highway functions as an extension of the I-10, a national road that crosses the USA from west to east, towards the center of New Orleans. This big-scale element, the Pontchartrain, broke in the central area of the city during the 1950s, fragmenting the existing



PRE



POST



Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 29, 2005

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Two irrupting events in New Orleans: the Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Pontchartrain Expressway (1950)



The Pontchartrain Expressway in the central area of New Orleans

urban tissue and introducing a new character to the place. It was an event that, the same way as Katrina, irrupted into a pre-existing situation, causing shock, questioning the established systems, and claiming for responses. The analogical image of the paws of a beast that pose into a micro environment is useful to understand what happened in this case. Thus, as the irruption of Katrina in New Orleans gave to the Spacelab a reason for looking at this city, in the same way, the irruption of the Pontchartrain Expressway in the central area of New Orleans gave me a reason for focusing in this zone.

When discovering the present conditions of the area around the Pontchartrain Expressway in the central part of New Orleans –both experiencing it as a pedestrian and learning about it from the analysis– it is noticeable the spatial fragmentation, which can be somehow compared to the social disintegration of the city. The study area is conformed by a series of un-related pieces: activities from different characters and scales that are present but do not interact, while they leave room for *non-active* empty parcels; the urban grids in the medium and local scales which are broken, producing a lack of continuity in the city scale roads; and within this scenario, the Pontchartrain Expressway acts as an obstacle for the surrounding city, its presence in this area expels the human scale. The project that I developed as part of this research takes actions in these aspects for bringing back spatial continuity and reactivating the urban life in the zone.

The action, many years ago, of the Pontchartrain Expressway in New Orleans needs a thought-out reaction. Of course, extemporaneous effects after this irruption have taken place, but a reaction from the local is still missing. The intention of this project is then to establish a bidirectional process as a response to the irruption of this big infrastructure in the urban tissue.

The study of this case leads me to reflect about how

is it possible to react to big infrastructures within the contemporary city, or in other words, which spatial conditions are suitable for allowing the different actors (scales, movements, activities, etc.) to cohabit in a positive and constructive way within the contemporary urban environments. An intervention that is thought in both levels –from small to big and from big to small– can mediate between the parts and can therefore create active urban places of interaction.

The image of a sunken boat helps here to clarify the situation: what happens when a ship sinks in the ocean? When the reef starts to grow over the old metal structure, it establishes a bidirectional relationship; it affects the intruder by making it its home. Many questions were established after Katrina broke into New Orleans: how to react to an environmental disaster as such? Now, after studying this case, other questions can be introduced: how can pre-existing urban tissues react to big-scale infrastructural elements? How to deal with these elements, not denying or hiding them? How to generate interaction –not in a romantic way but from a realistic perspective– between the different scales that are inherent to the contemporary city?

Besides, the case of the Pontchartrain Expressway in New Orleans teaches us about how big-infrastructural elements may be temporarily transformed by the way the people use and appropriate them in certain circumstances. The opportunity we had of experiencing a Second Line Parade –a traditional Sunday celebration that involves numerous popular neighborhoods of New Orleans– revealed a very particular, and probably unique, human-relation with this highway. These spaces are absolutely different during the Second Line Parade than during the rest of the weekdays. The fact that the party amplifies when the procession crosses the spaces underneath the elevated highway gives to these spaces a very special meaning; a chance to talk about “other spaces and heterotopias” –using Foucault’s words–.



HOW TO REACT?



The Second Line Parade amplifies the party under the elevated highways of New Orleans



The area around the Pontchartrain Expressway after the Hurricane Katrina

The city around the Pontchartrain Expressway



The attitude of my research and intervention is to accept and deal with the presence of big-scale infrastructures within the contemporary urban environments. The present events demonstrate that people in New Orleans are already transforming and appropriating some of the spaces under big infrastructures in certain circumstances; as mentioned before, an interesting example are the stops of the Second Line Parade under an elevated highway. Taking this into account, the development of this project uses the ground level as the main urban-continuous-surface where the interactions between the small, medium and large levels are initiated maintaining always the human scale.

The project rebuilds and brings connectivity to the surrounding area of the Pontchartrain Expressway in the central part of New Orleans. Its main purposes are: to recover the urban life in the city; to mediate between the diverse urban scales, by articulating and creating new relations between them; to diminish the negative impact of big-scale infrastructures in the city; and to create a pedestrian-friendly urban space.

The actions are taken in three aspects for dealing with the spatial fragmentation of the study area. First, the urban grids are fixed and optimized. In the small and medium levels, the city scale roads are repaired to create a continuous system that allows smooth and uninterrupted urban movements. In the global level, the unnecessary exists and entrances of the highway are eliminated and optimized.

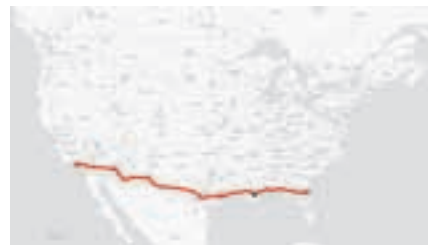
Second, the activities are placed along the public spaces to create new interactions. A study of how different-scale programmes can be intersected leads this organization. New activities are introduced in the area as mediators between the global and the local levels –that is, between the ones who use the upper side of the Pontchartrain as a feeder and the ones who live the ground level underneath it— For the

organization of activities, as well as for the grids, the present gaps are converted into potential places where new functional and motional relations are established.

Third, a new character is given to the Pontchartrain Expressway within the surrounding city. Urban and architectural elements are used for incorporating the highway to the urban life, and for allowing new activities to happen in the spaces beneath it. Consequently, this big-infrastructure turns into a more friendly-human element.

During the evolution of the project, the collective vision for New Orleans that resulted from the group work and discussion within the Spacelab, introduced fresh and motivating conditions to my study area. These basic determinants were incorporated to the project along the design process. We can briefly mention here, among others, the introduction of a new public transportation system that connects the center of New Orleans to a high-speed train of national level; the first stop of this new system, where it transforms from a light-rail to a tram, takes place within the area at issue. Moreover, decisions about displacing the actual Passenger Terminal and the existing railways, as well as the conversion of Clairborne Street as a city road on the ground level and the adjustments of the exists and entrances of the Pontchartrain Expressway for creating an easy node affect my study area.

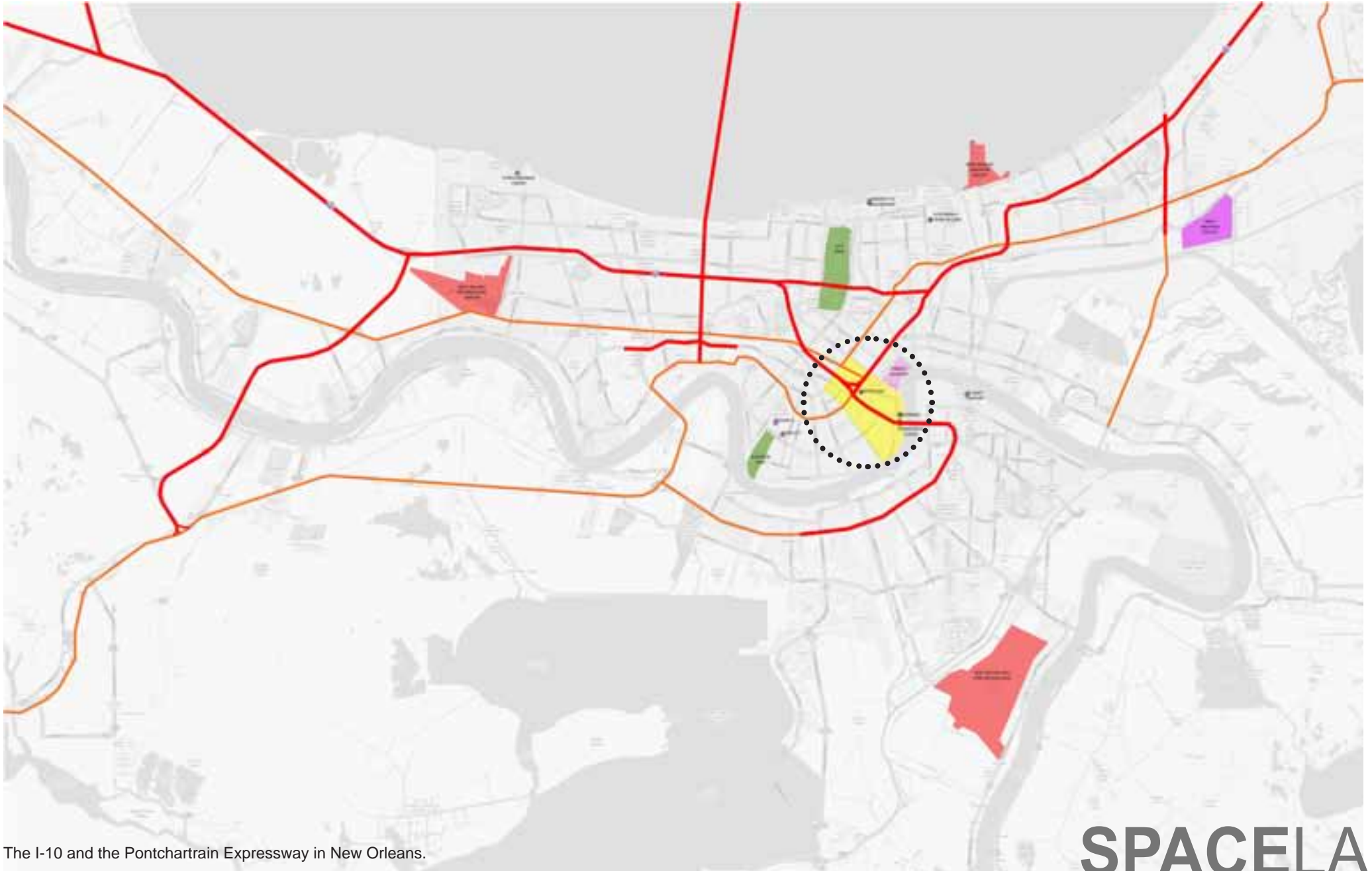
The Strategy that I developed here intends to bring back connectivity to an urban area that was irrupted by a big infrastructure some years ago. It is planned as a reaction –in favour of the human scale and the urban life– that activates interactions between the different scales that are intrinsic to the contemporary city. The principles and reflections that are stated with this study may be repeated in other cases that present the similar conditions: spatial fragmentation of the city caused by the lack of interaction between the parts.



The Pontchartrain Expressway in New Orleans is an extension of the I-10 (a national level that crosses USA from West to East). This highway is a feeder of some big-scale activities within the city but, at the same time, it is an obstacle for the urban life in the ground level.



SPATIAL FRAGMENTATION. UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENA



The I-10 and the Pontchartrain Expressway in New Orleans.



The Pontchartrain Expressway in the central area of New Orleans

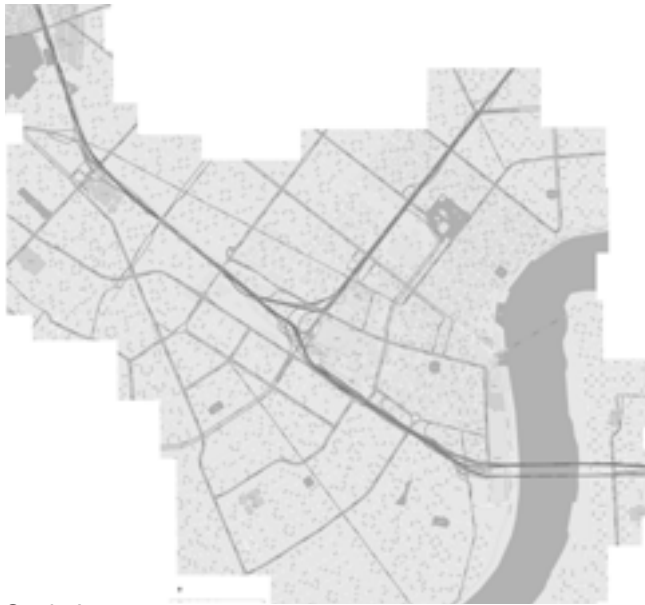


The area around the Pontchartrain Expressway in the center of New Orleans is a case of Spatial Fragmentation



The Fragmentation in the area around the Pontchartrain Expressway is evident by the lack of interaction between Activities and the lack of continuity in the city scale roads (Urban Grids). Moreover, the Pontchartrain Expressway acts as an obstacle for the urban life.

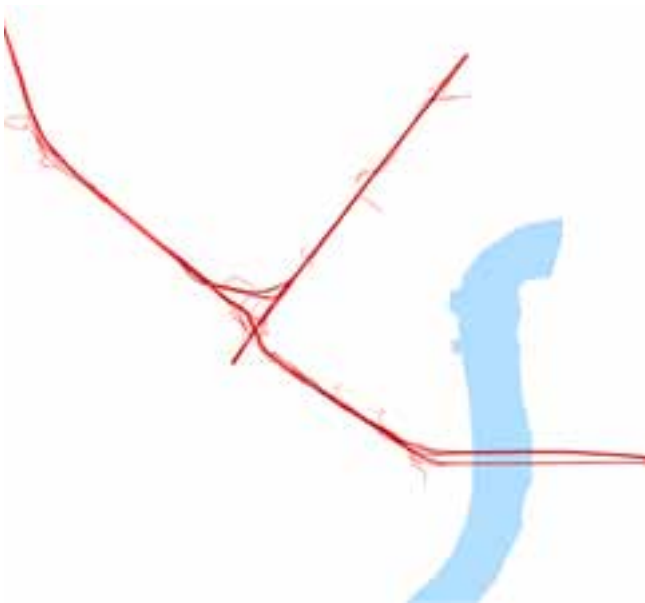
SPATIAL FRAGMENTATION. Grids



Study Area



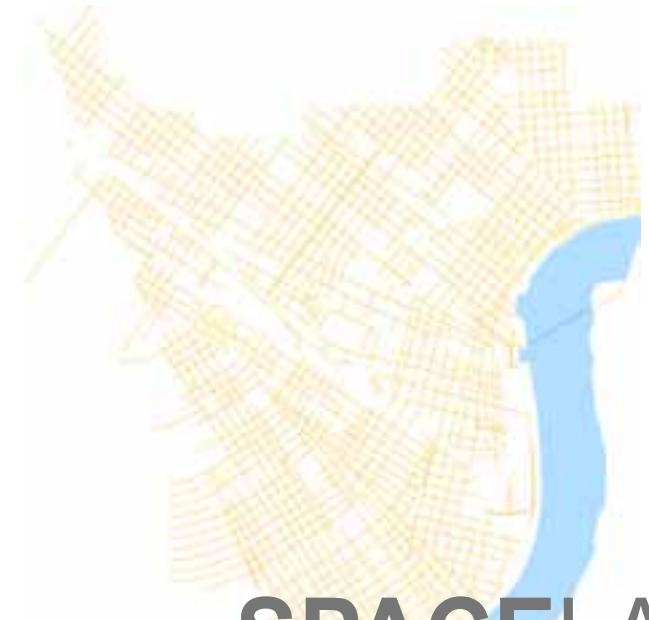
The existing Grids



Present Global Scale Grid (L)



Present Medium Scale Grid (M)



Present Local Scale Grid (H)



Present Urban Grids (M and S)



Gaps in the Urban Grids (M and S)



Gaps in the Urban Grids overlapped with Big Infrastructures



The actual Urban Grids present lack of continuity in the city scale roads. This results in not efficient and easy movements in the ground level, specially in the local life (much more for the pedestrians, this is, the human scale). The big infrastructures that break the Urban Grids in the central area of New Orleans are the Pontchartrain Expressway (elevated) and the railway (ground level). There are also Gaps in the Urban Grids that produced by the existence of big-scale functions, such as the Superdome, the New Orleans Arena, among others.



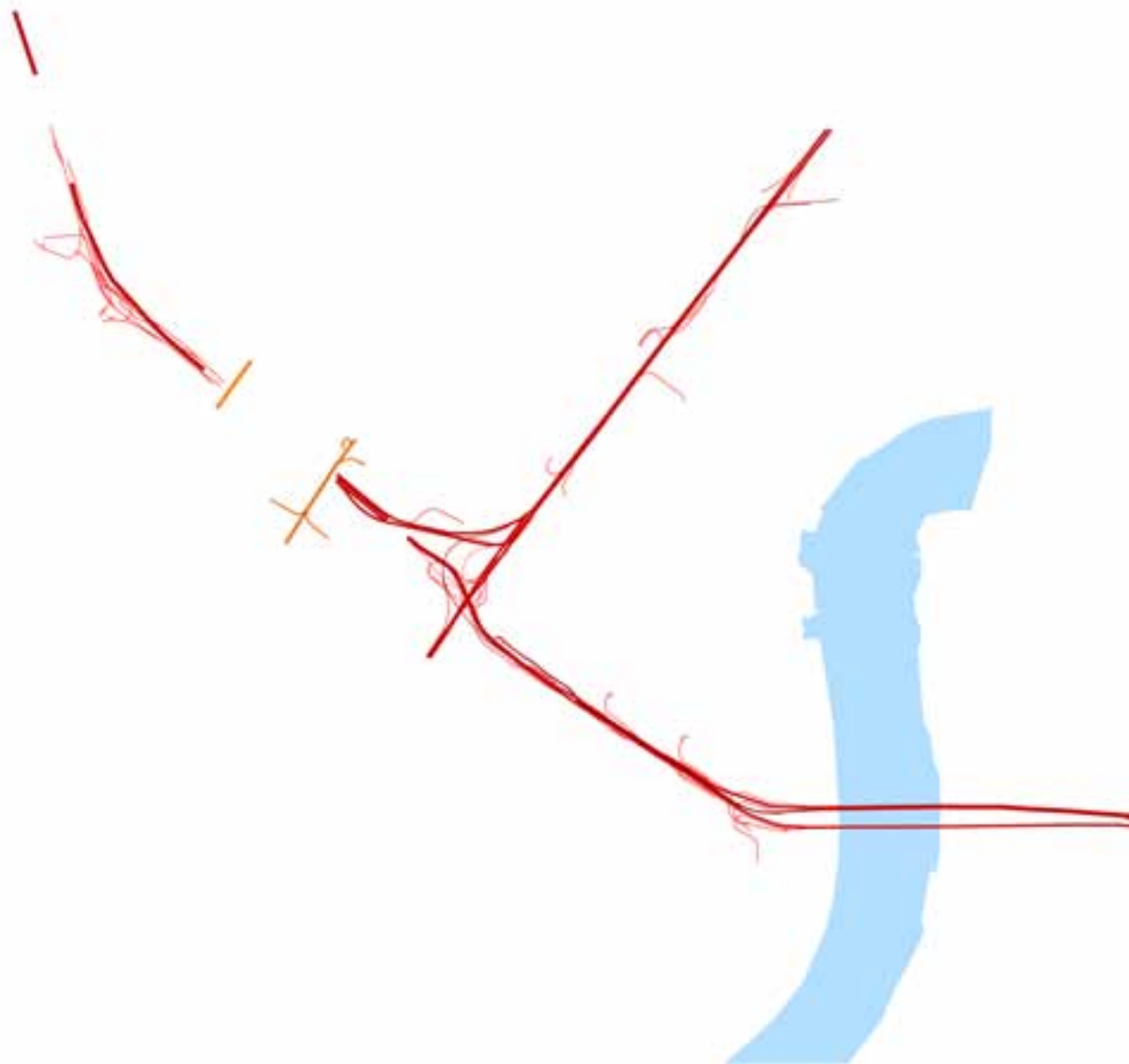
Exits and Entrances of the Elevated Highway Points where it touches the ground level



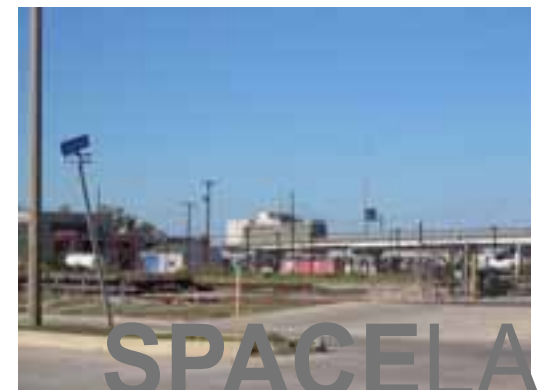
L - M - S



Grids. Ground Level



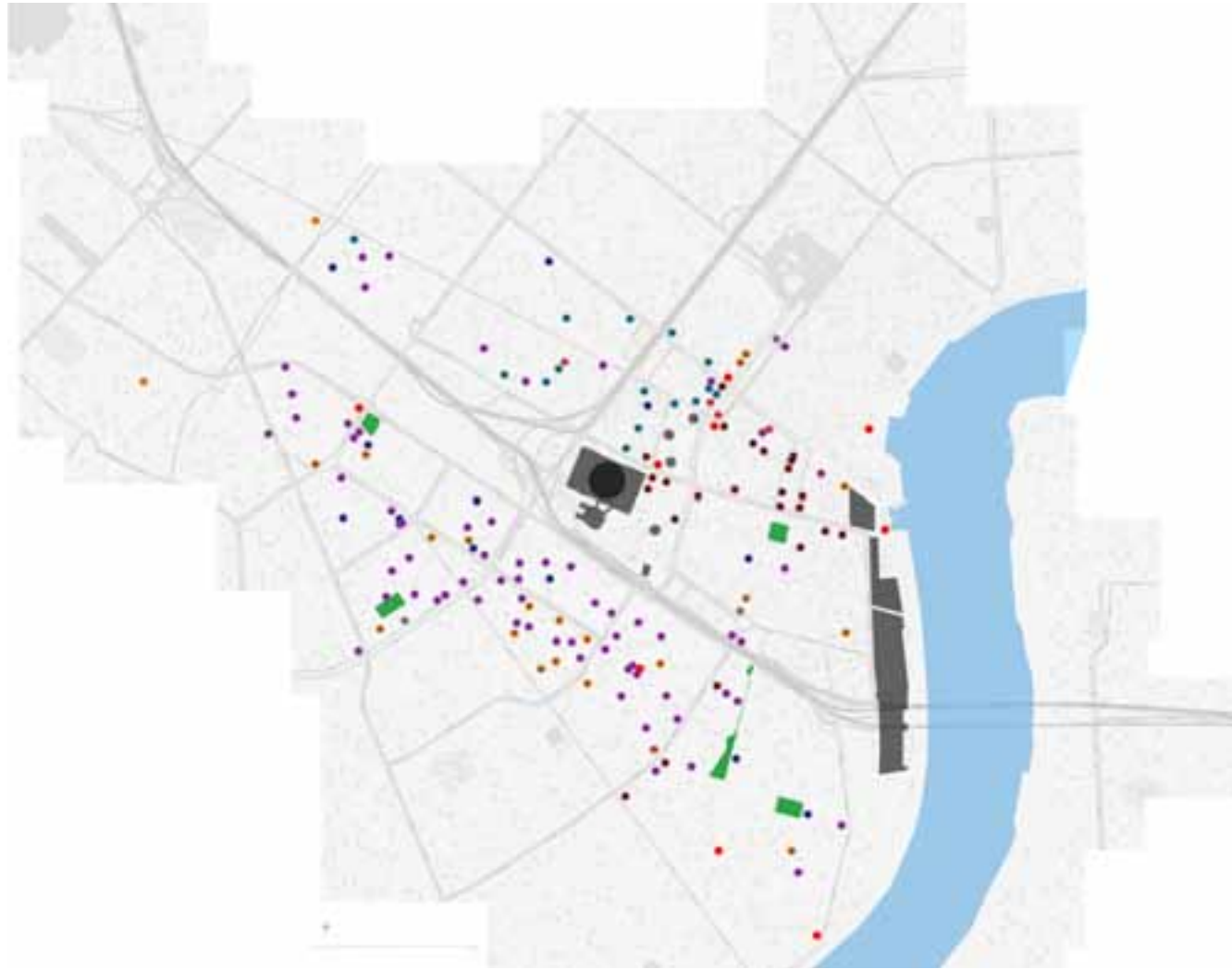
Grids: Level +1



SPATIAL FRAGMENTATION. Activities

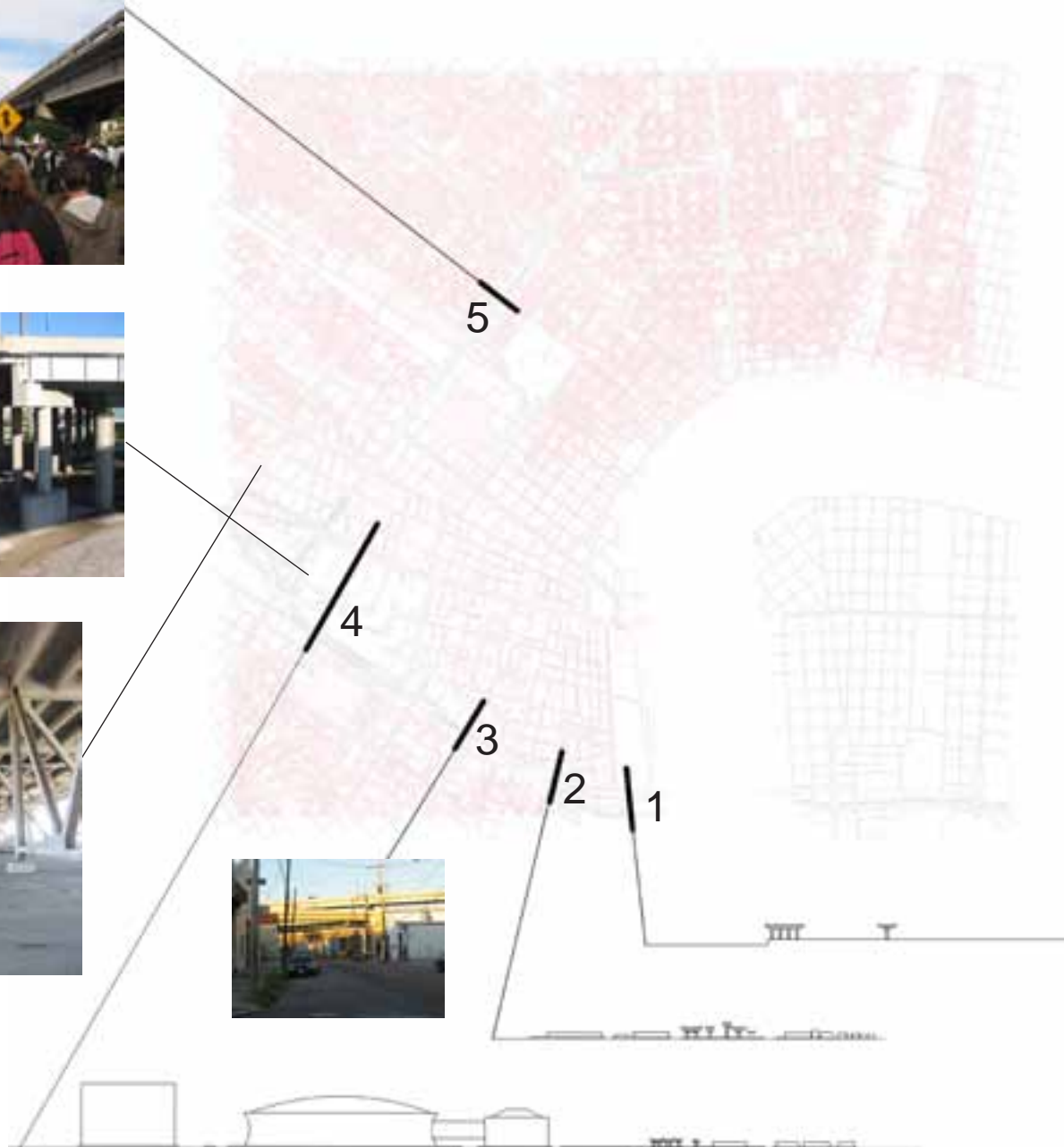


Spatial configuration of the Pontchartrain Expwy in the central Area of New Orleans



Activities of local scale share the space with functions of big scale, but they do not interact

SPATIAL FRAGMENTATION. Elevated Highway



Spatial configuration of the Pontchartrain Expwy in the central Area of New Orleans



SOME CONCLUSIONS FROM THE GROUP ANALYSIS AND VISION FOR 'A NEW' ORLEANS



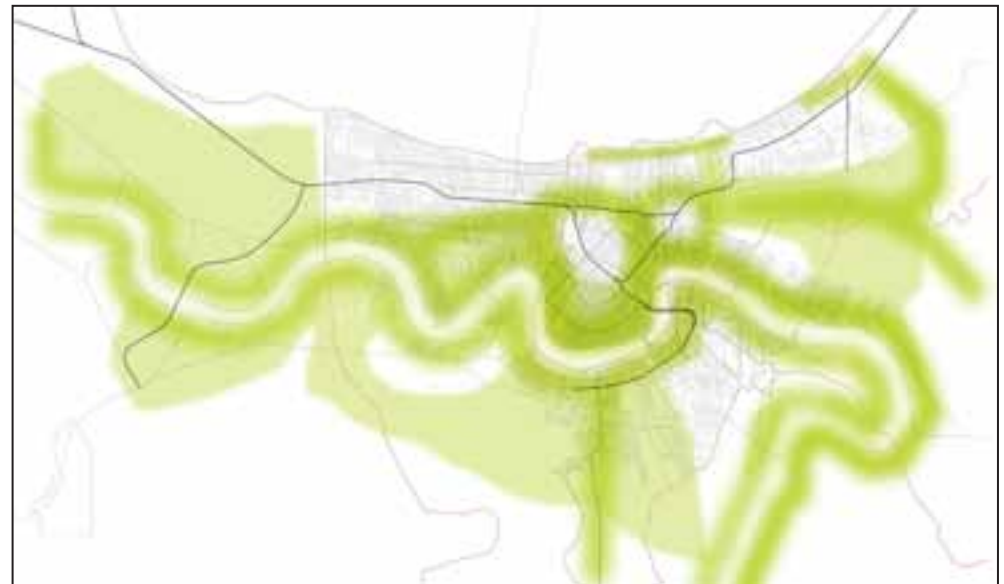
Actual clusters of activities



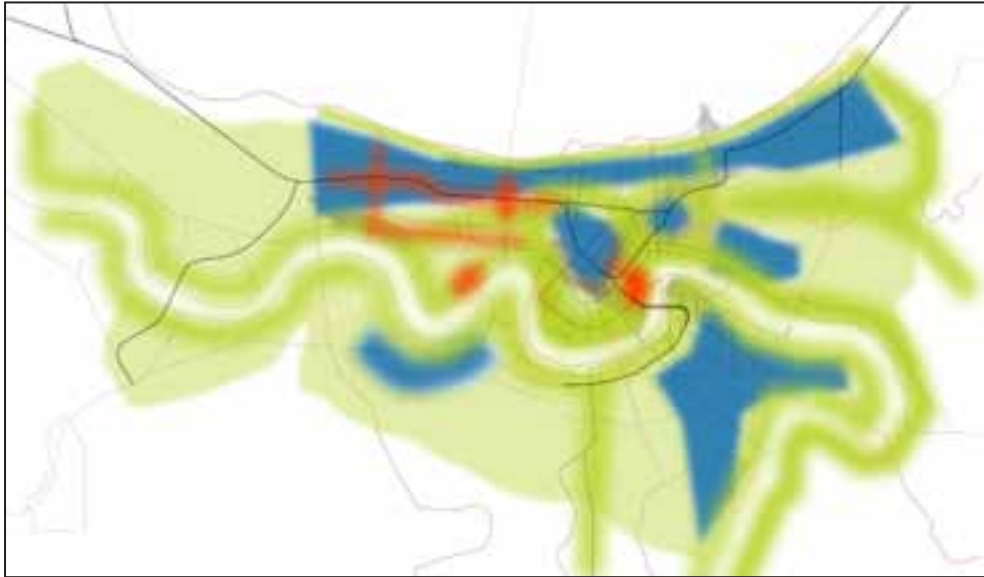
High Marginality around the central area of the city (Parameters: No-college-education population / Poverty / Income per Capita / Owner occupied housing value / Unemployment). The Pontchartrain Expwy acts as a barrier



Areas under sea level: vulnerable / potential to be flooded



Areas above sea level: less vulnerable



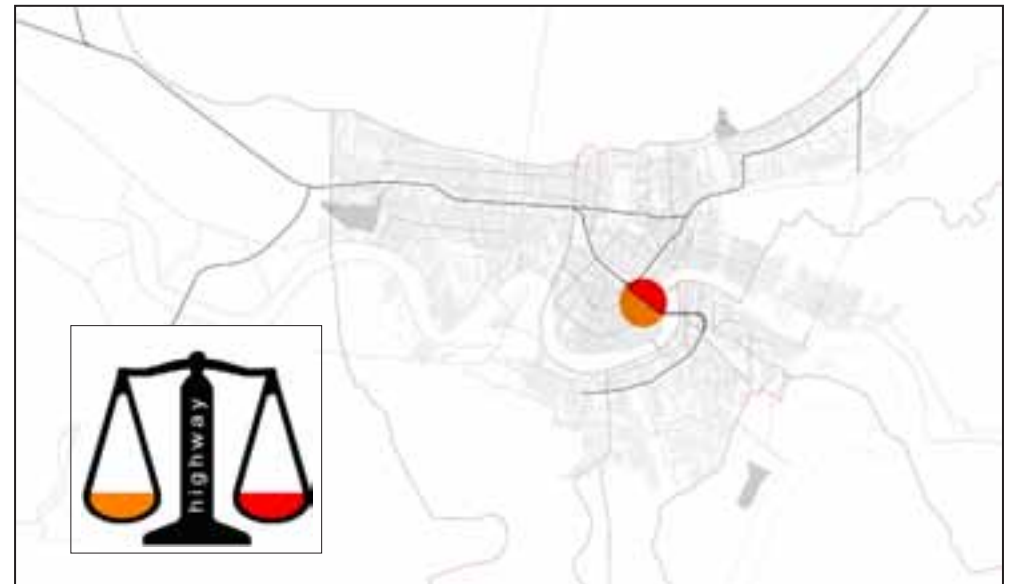
Clusters of activities + Marginality + Vulnerable/Not-Vulnerable areas



Actual concentration of activities in the central area of New Orleans



Group Vision for New Orleans



The study area: new structural center for the city with the Pontchartrain Expy as a balance

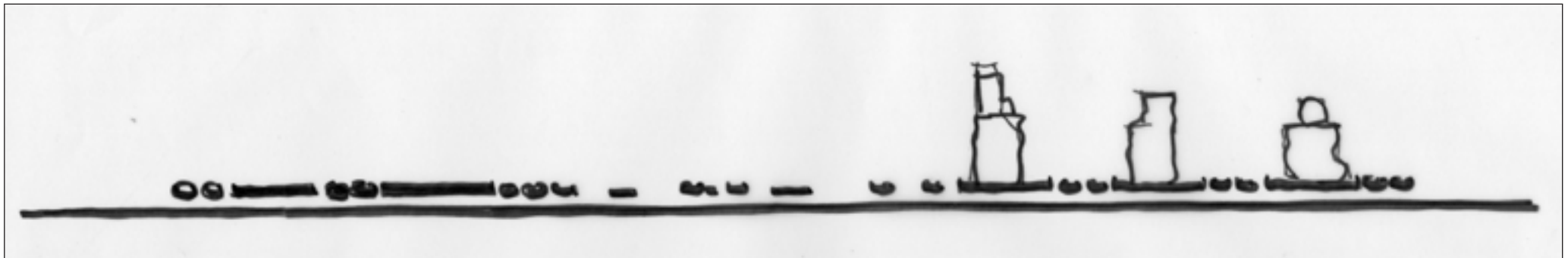
ACTION - REACTION = MEDIATION



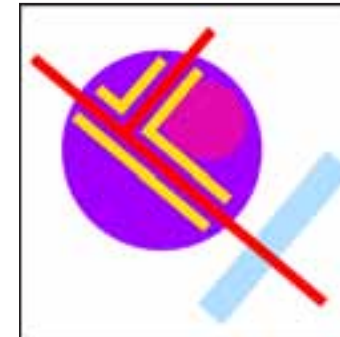
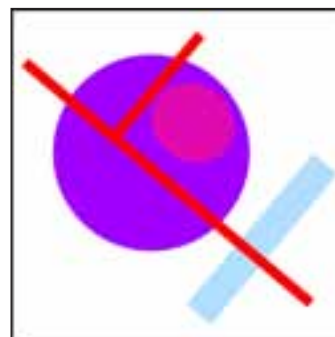
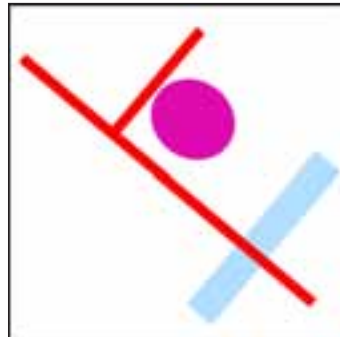
- New Public Transportation System (Train - Tram)
- N.O Passenger Terminal is moved
- Exits and entrances of Pontchartrain Expwy are modified to create an easier node
- Clairbone St. is transformed to a medium-scale road on the ground level

MEDIATING:

- Rebuild the central area of New Orleans for repairing the urban life.
- Articulate and create new relations between the different scales.
- Diminish the negative impact of the big-scale infrastructures in the city.
- Create a pedestrian-friendly urban space.
- Keep the ground level as a continuous surface, maintain human scale

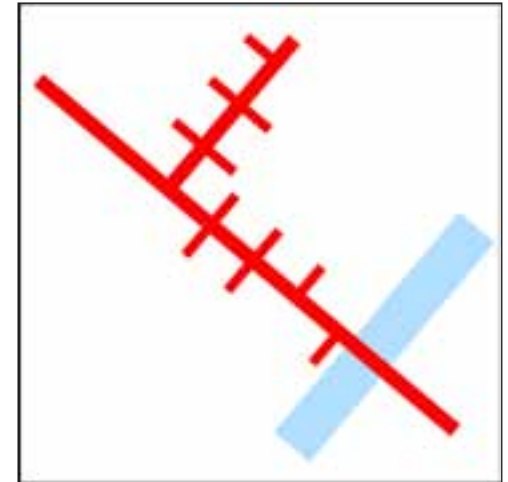


CONFORMATION OF A STRUCTURAL NODE FOR NEW ORLEANS: THE ACTUAL NODE OF ACTIVITIES IS RELATED TO ITS THE NEIGHBOURING AREA, AND THE ELEVATED HIGHWAY IS INVOLVED IN THE TO OF THE SURROUNDING CITY.

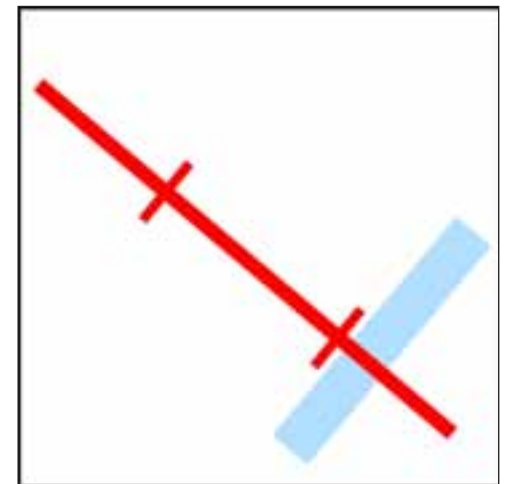


RE - ACTIONS

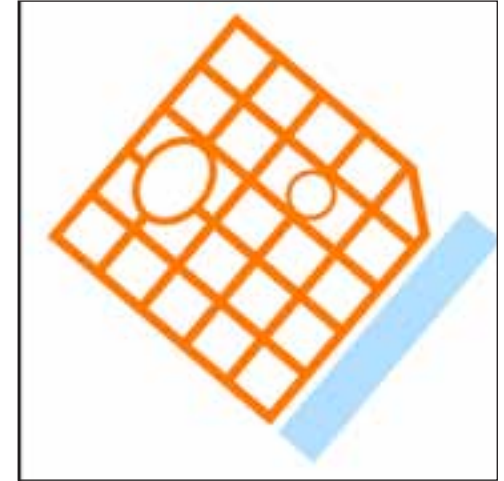
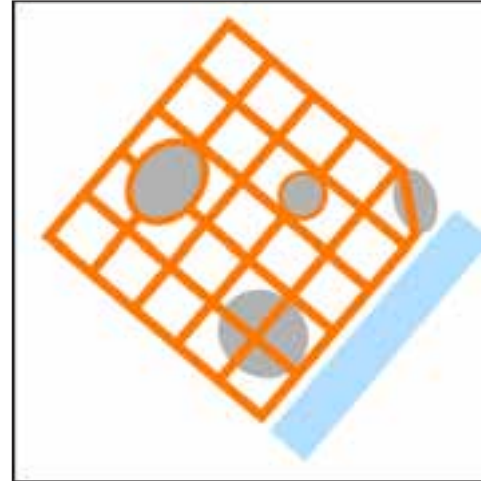
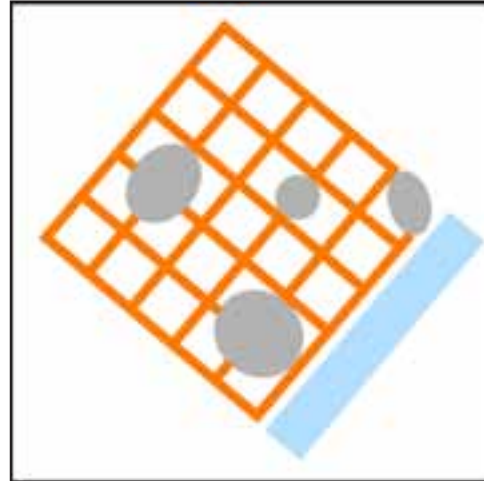
- ORGANIZE THE GRIDS TO CREATE A CONTINUOUS SYSTEM
- ORGANIZE THE ACTIVITIES ALONG THE PUBLIC SPACES TO CREATE NEW INTERACTIONS
- GIVE A NEW ROLE TO THE HIGHWAY WITHIN THE CITY LIFE



L FEEDER
Optimize exits and entrances of the Elevated Highway

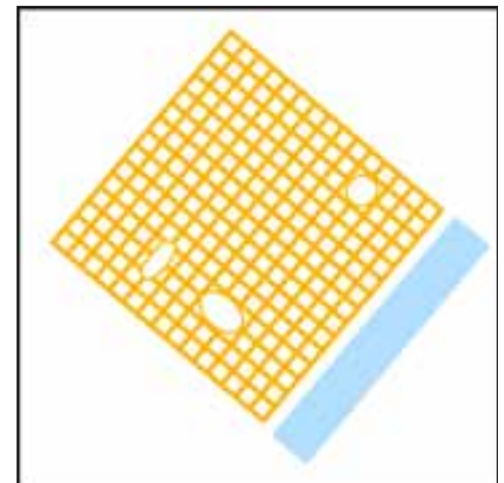
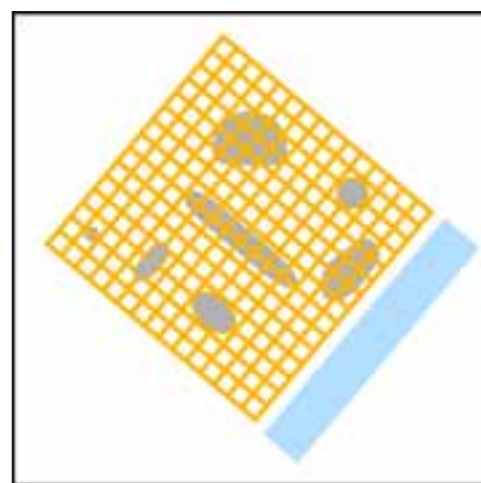
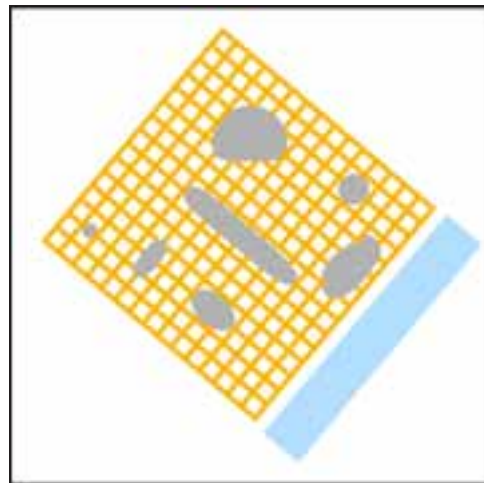
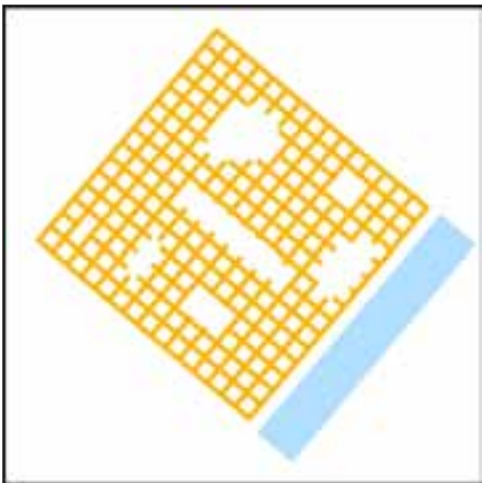


ACTIONS. Grids



M MEDIATOR
Create a continuous system

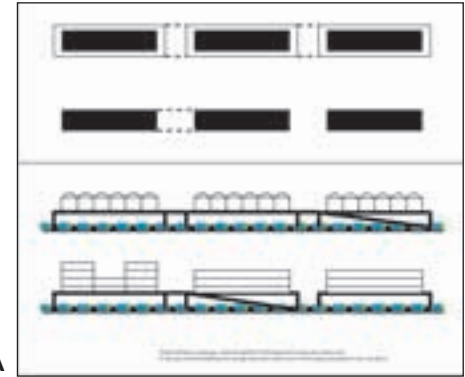
Gaps: from problems to potentials
Exceptions in the grid = possible functional and motional relations



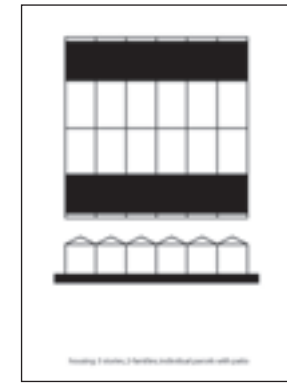
S CARPET
Create a continuous system



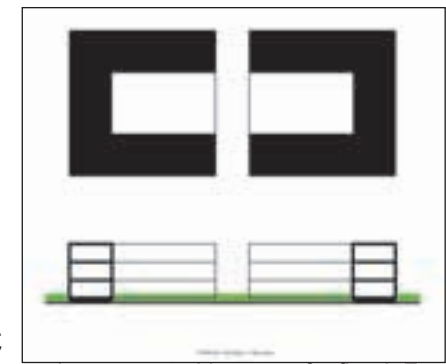
New System of Urban roads



A



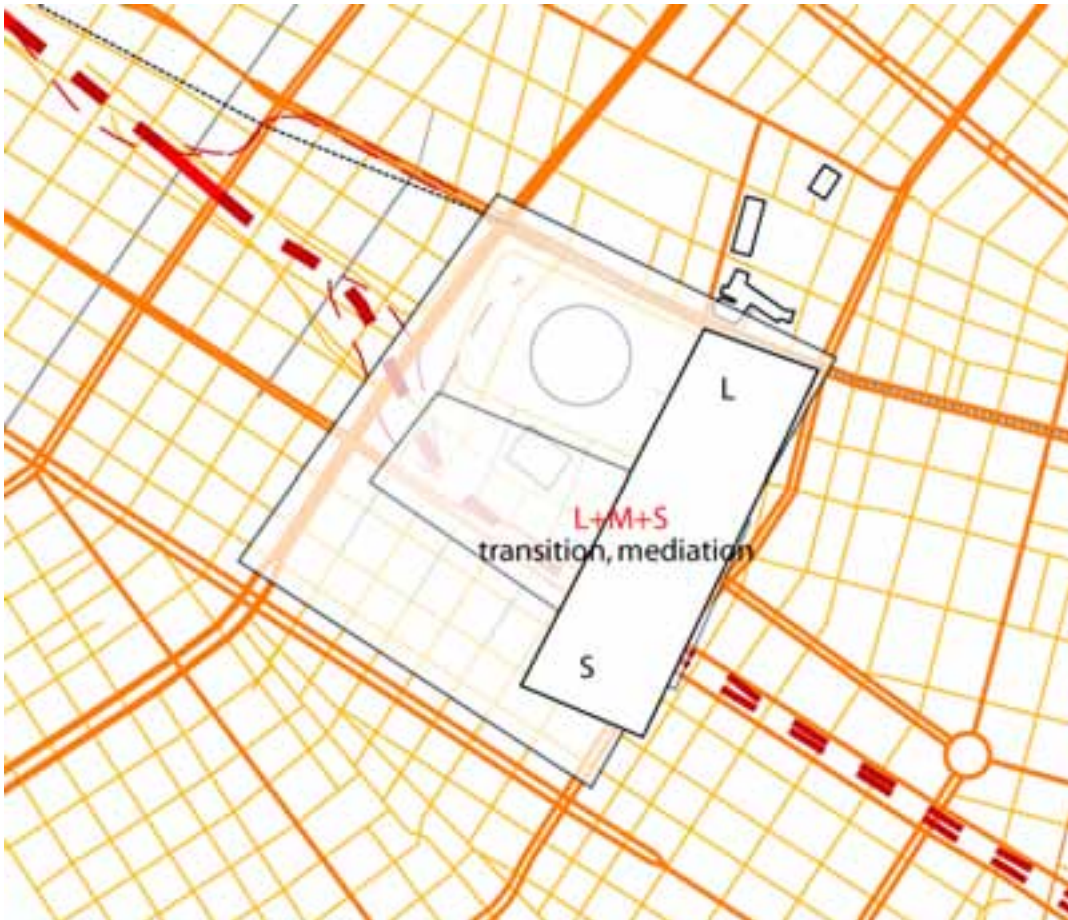
B



C

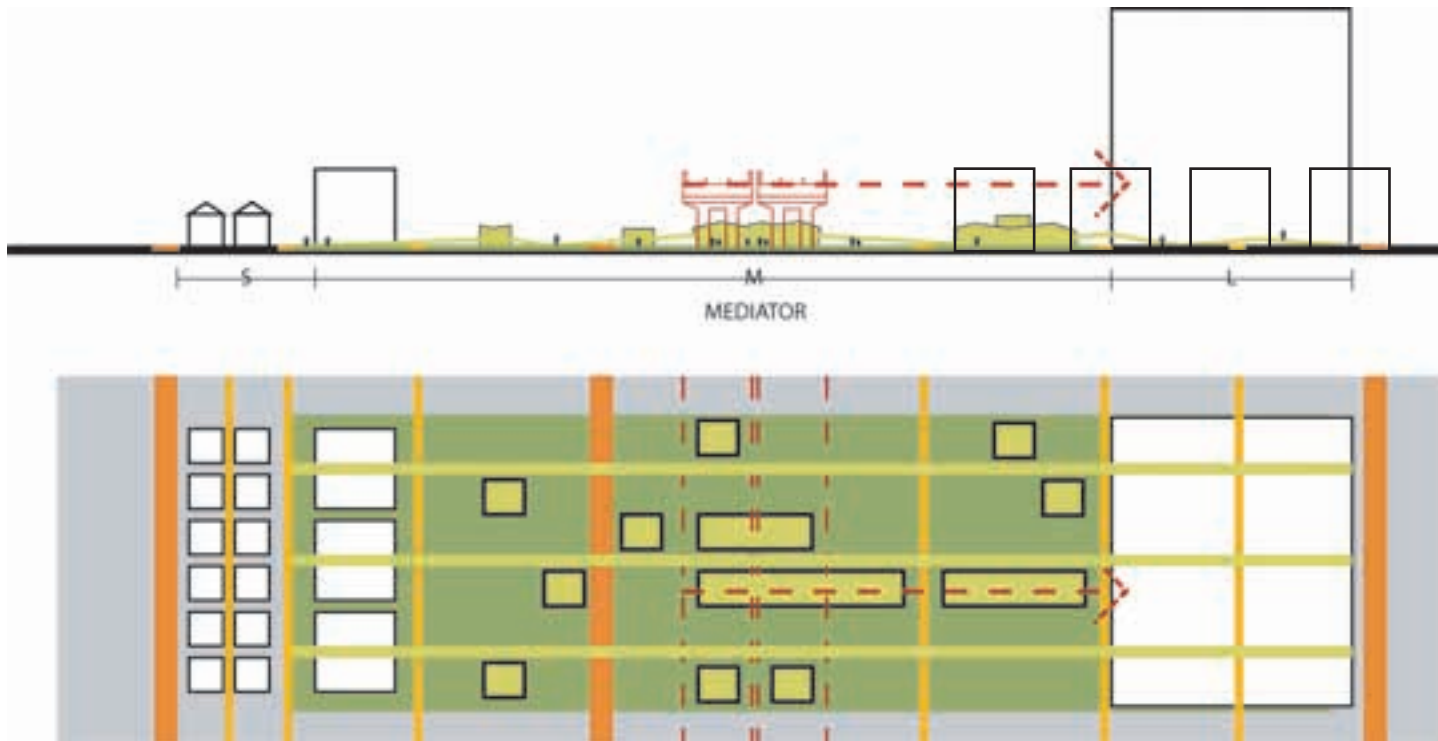
- A: Flood-Resistant Typology: based on platforms that support housing and other uses. In the ground level parking and storage take place, these uses can be evacuated in case of a flood. For late future develop of NO
- B: Housing: 3 stories, 2 families. Individual parcels with patio
- C: U-block: housing + mix uses

ACTIONS. Mediation of Scales



Social Condenser:
*“Programatic layering
upon vacant terrain to
encourage dynamic
coexistence of ac-
tivities and to generate
through their inter-
ference, unprecedented
events.”*

By OMA in: McGetrick, Brendan;
Koolhaas, Rem, Ed. (2004).
“Content”, pp. 73. Taschen,
2004)z

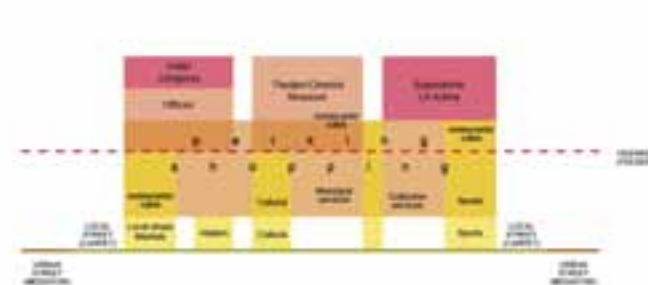
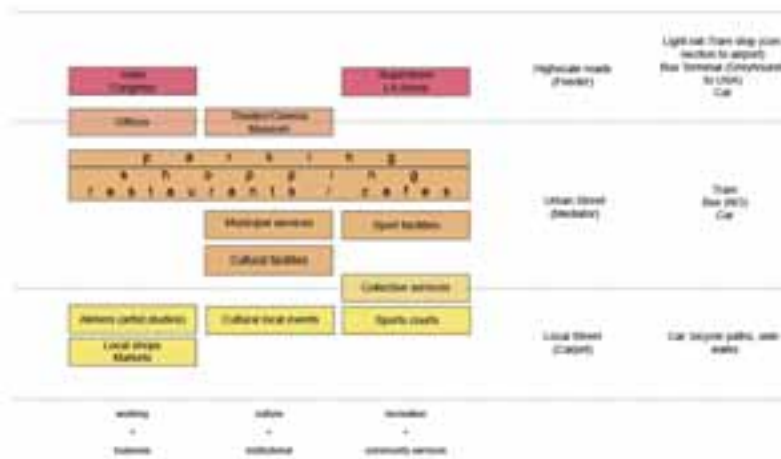
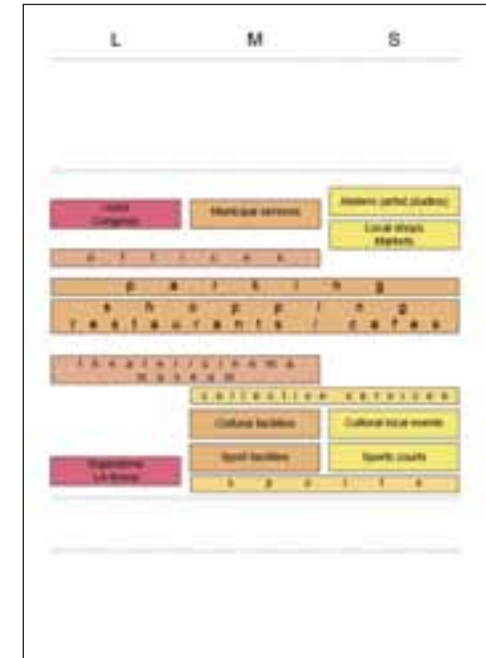


The Elevated Highway is involved in the urban life of the surrounding area. A series of urban and architectural elements are introduced to mediate between the different scales and to create a continuous human space on the ground level

ACTIONS. Organization of Activities

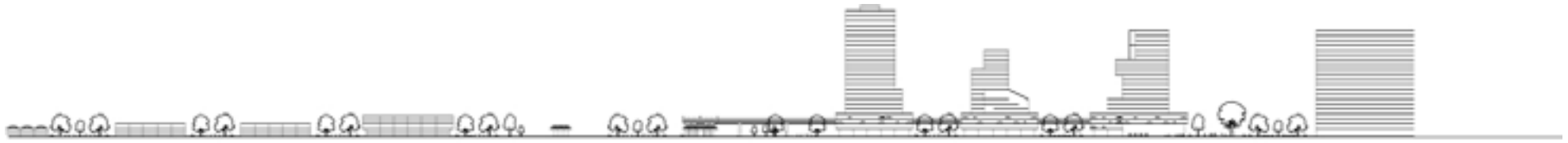
L	M	S
Connection to US and the world (airport and national road network)	Connection to NO	Connection to local life
Connections to roads: highway (car), light rail and Greyhound bus (PT)	Connections to roads: medium and "superior" (car, train and NO bus (PT))	Connections to roads: local and (car), bicycle, pedestrian
Intensity: very high / occasional	Intensity: medium / regular	Intensity: medium to regular
Congress Hotel Offices (headquarters)	Offices Municipal services	Artists (artist studios) Local shops Markets
Shopping	Shopping	Shopping
Restaurants, cafes	Restaurants, cafes	Restaurants, cafes
Parking	Parking	Parking
Theater/Cinema Museum	Theater/Cinema Museum Cultural facilities Collective services	Cultural local events Collective services
Superior LA Arena	Sport facilities	Sports courts
Highway roads (Feeders)	Urban Street (Mediator)	Local Street (Capit)
Light rail/Train stop (connection to airport) Bus Terminal (Greyhound to USA) Car	Train Bus (NO) Car	Car, bicycle paths, sidewalks

L	M	S
Connection to US and the world (airport and national road network)	Connection to NO	Connection to local life
Connections to roads: highway (car), light rail and Greyhound bus (PT)	Connections to roads: medium and "superior" (car, train and NO bus (PT))	Connections to roads: local and (car), bicycle, pedestrian
Intensity: very high / occasional	Intensity: medium / regular	Intensity: medium to regular
Hotel Congress	Municipal services	Artists (artist studios) Local shops Markets
o f f i c e s		
s h o p p i n g		
r e s t a u r a n t s / c a f e s		
p a r k i n g		
T H E A T E R / C I N E M A M U S E U M		
C O L L E C T I V E S E R V I C E S		
Cultural facilities Cultural local events		
S P O R T S		
Sport facilities Sports courts		
Superior LA Arena		
Highway roads (Feeders)	Urban Street (Mediator)	Local Street (Capit)
Light rail/Train stop (connection to airport) Bus Terminal (Greyhound to USA) Car	Train Bus (NO) Car	Car, bicycle paths, sidewalks









GLOBAL

A-A'



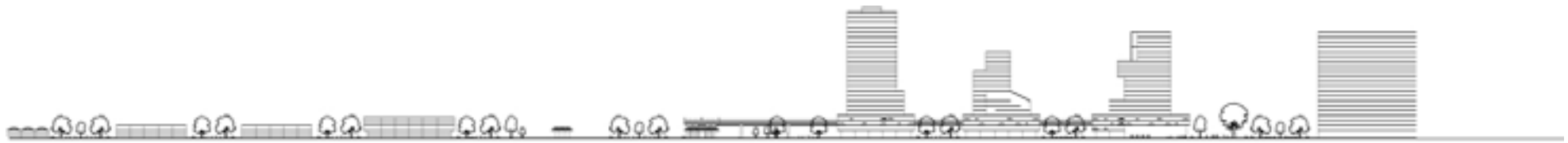
RECREATIONAL

B-B'



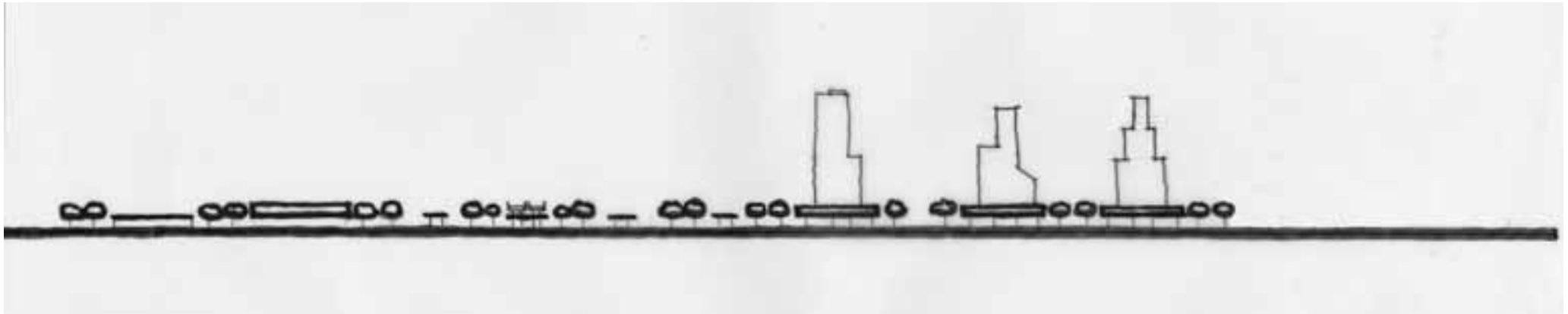
LOCAL

C-C'



GLOBAL

A-A'

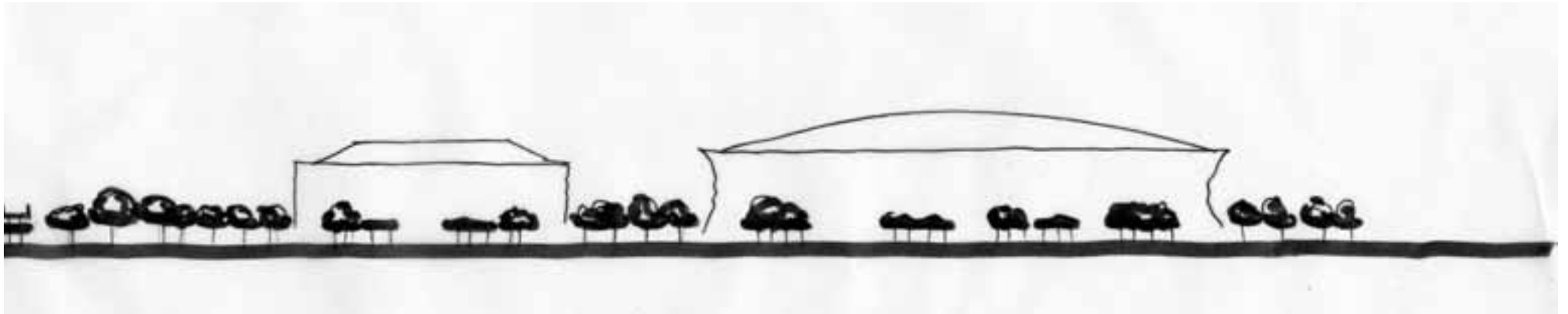


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RECREATIONAL

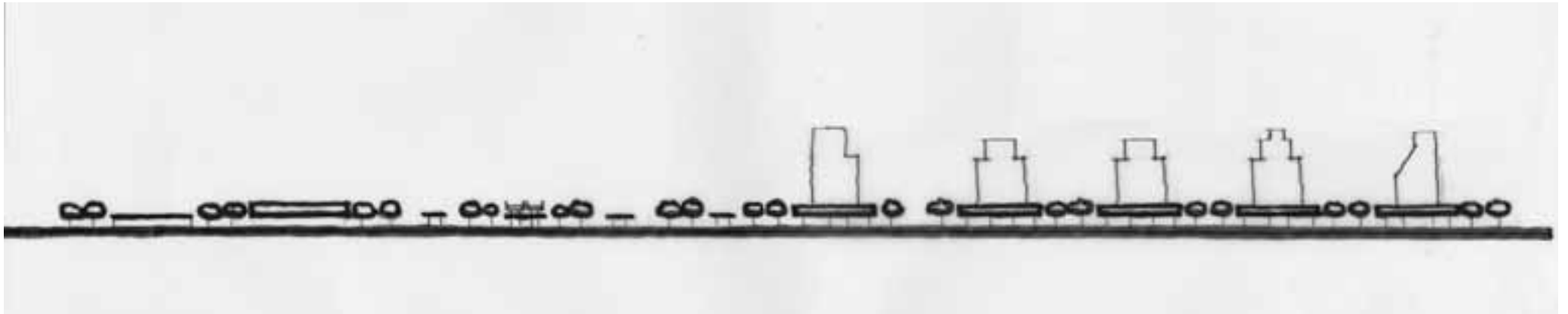
B-B'





LOCAL

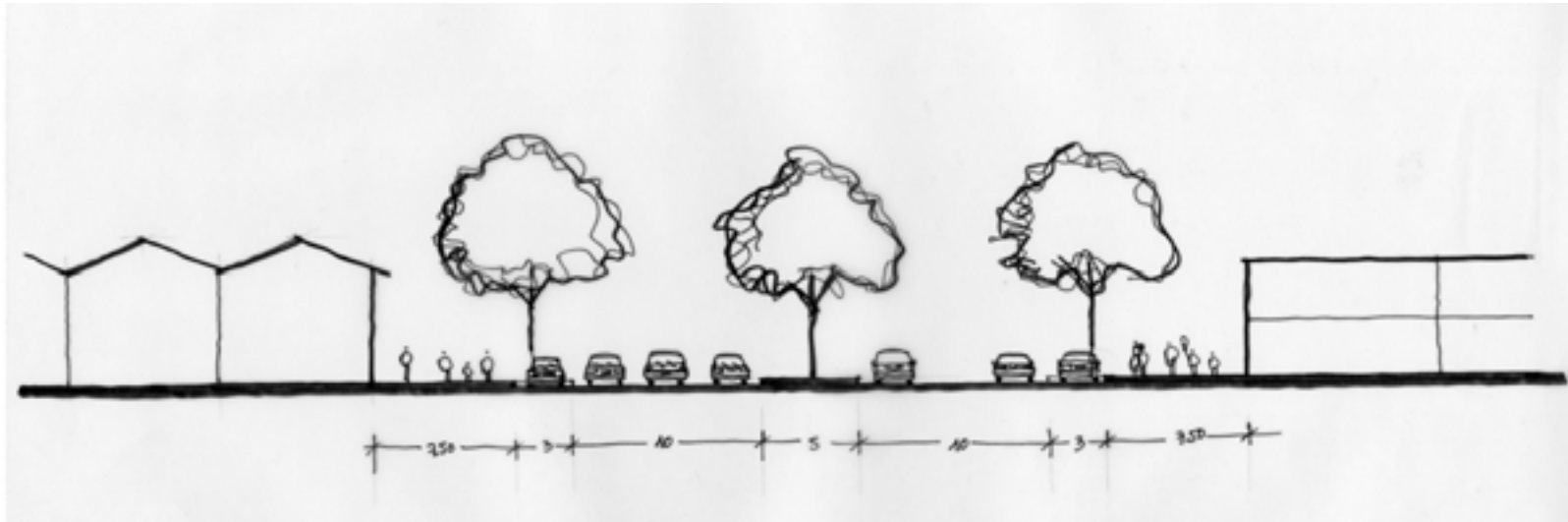
C-C'



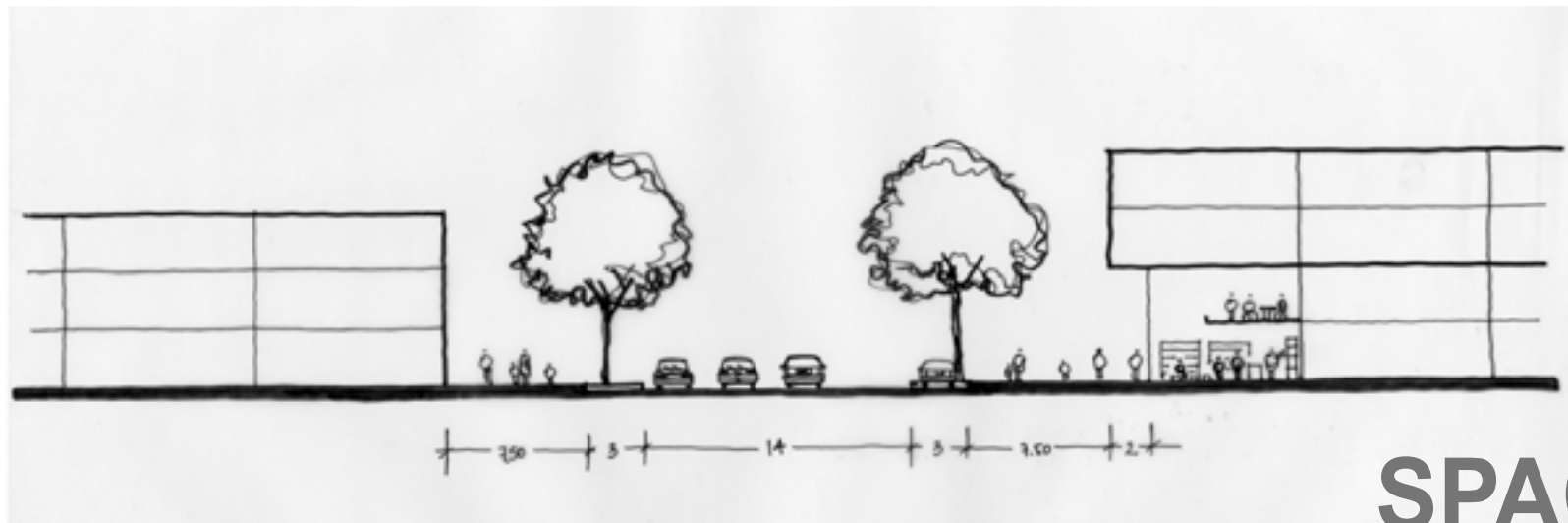


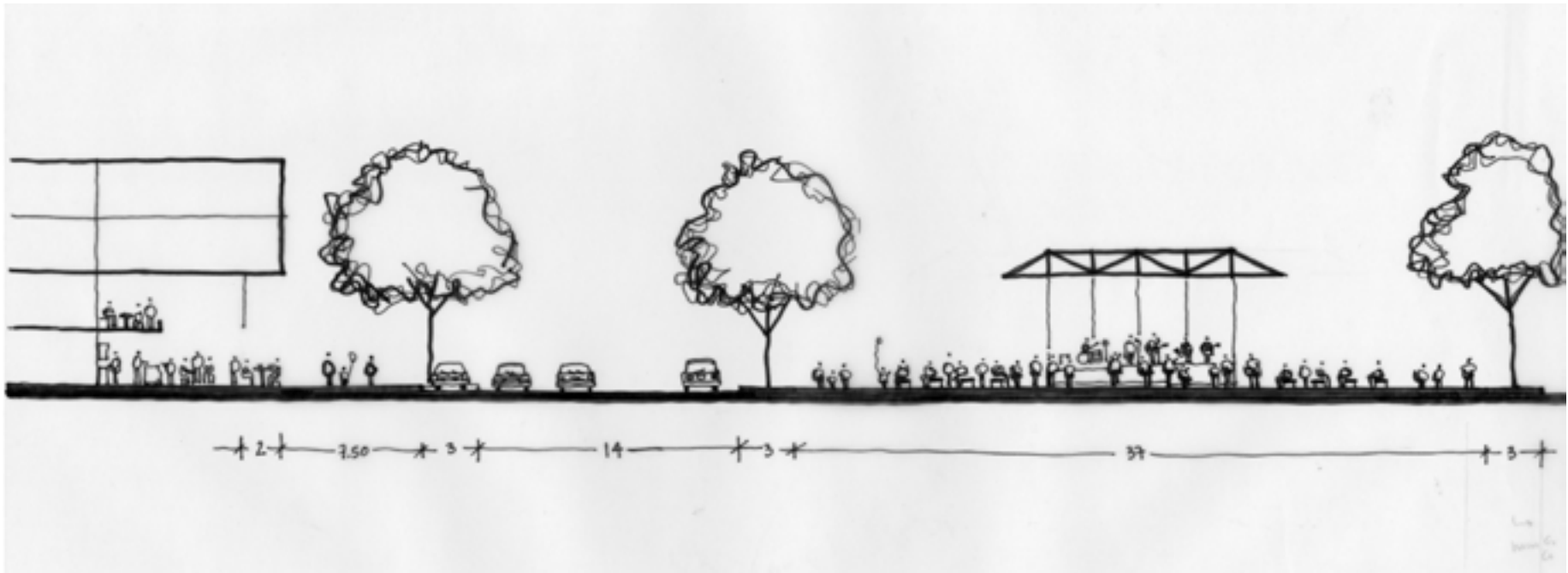
C-C'

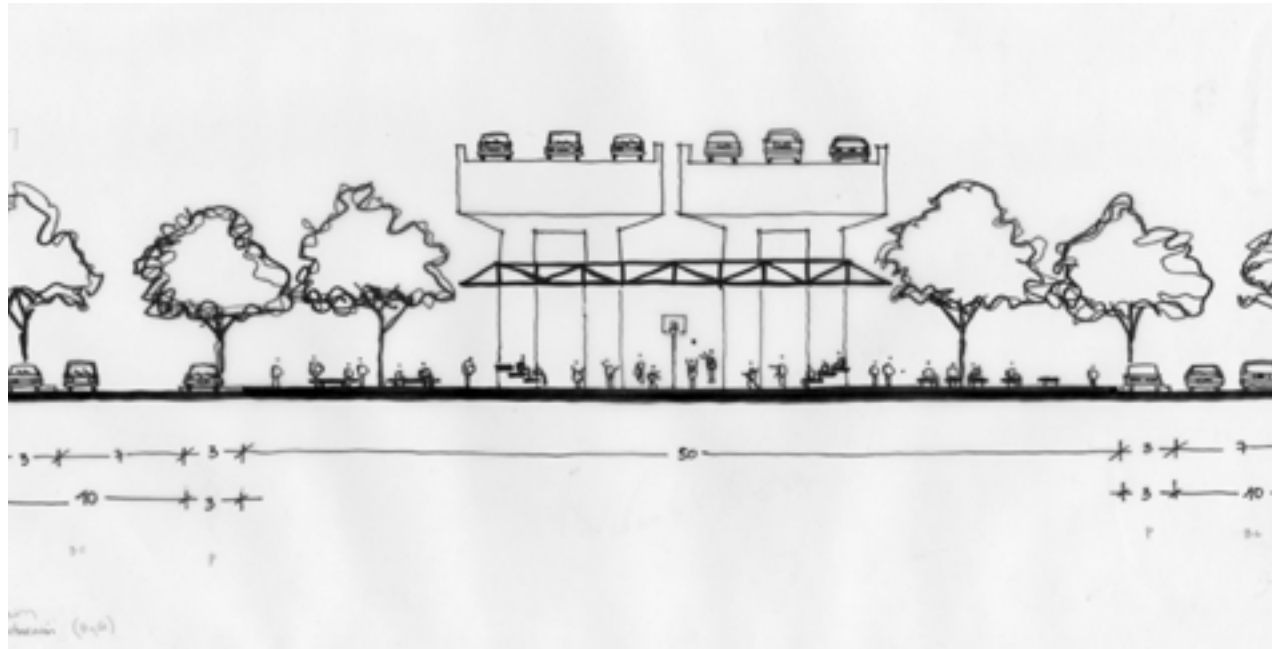
1



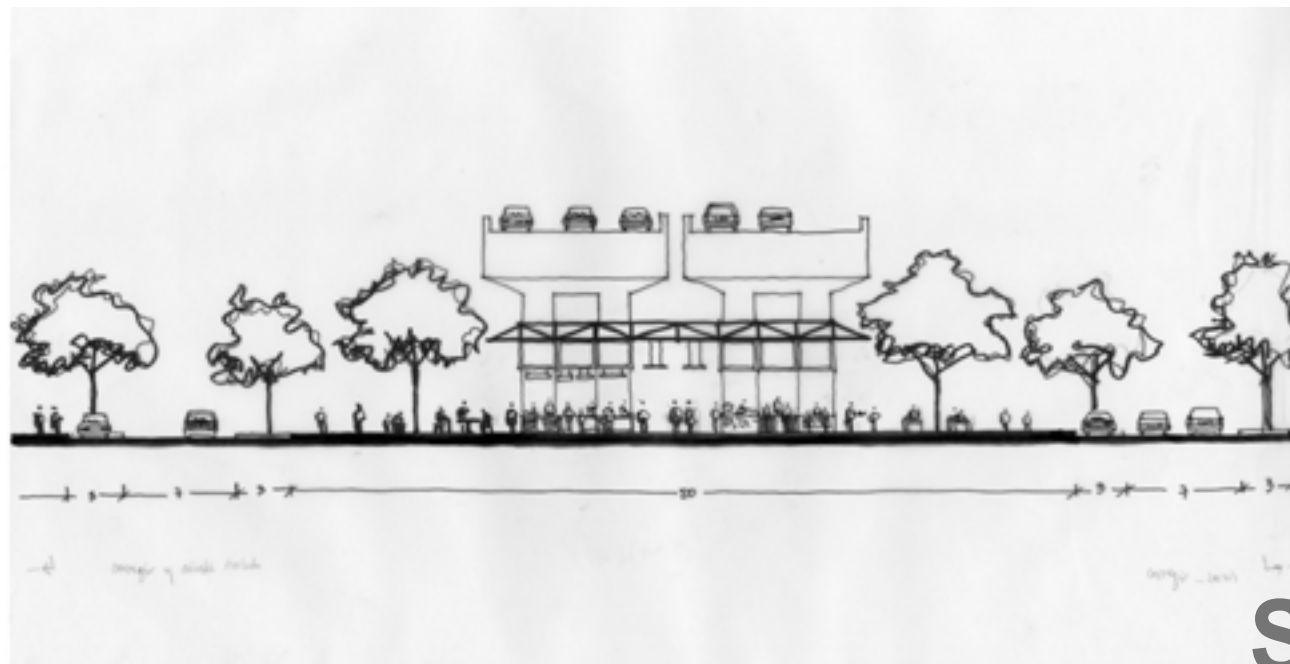
2







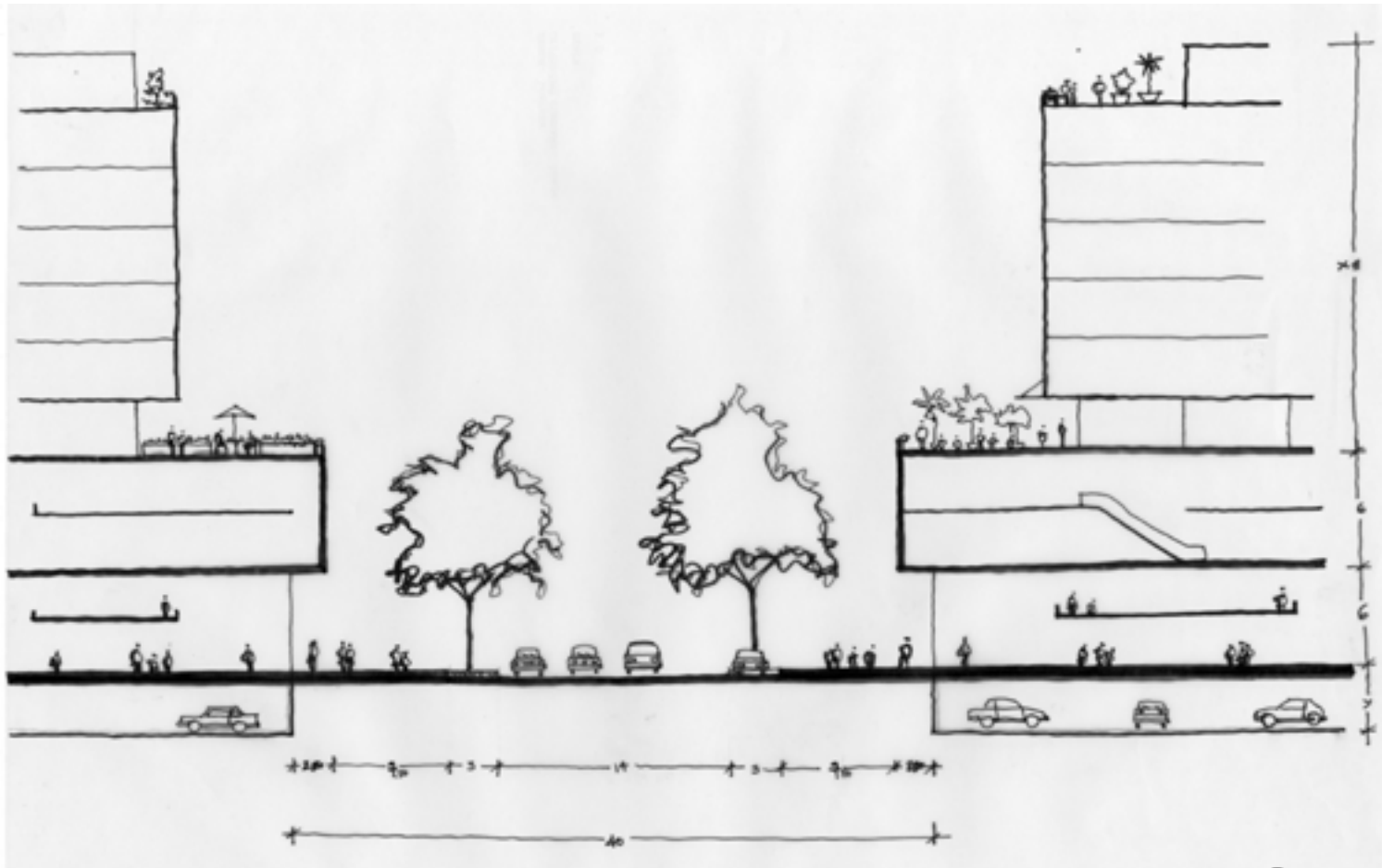
4a



4b

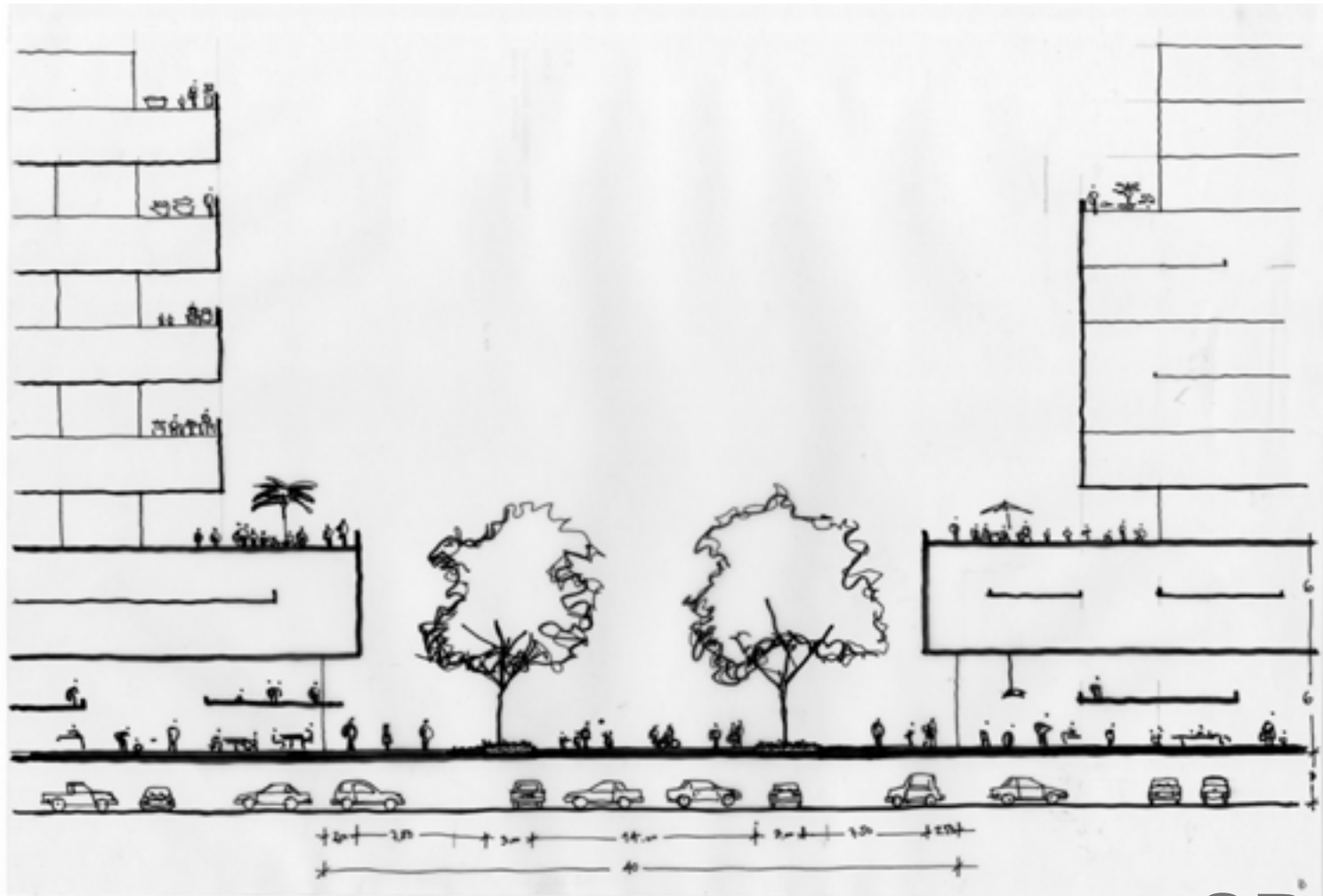


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THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE URBAN

We choose what to see

In the act of drifting along the city –either following paths or just observing still from one certain point– the dynamic nature of the urban environment is marvelously shown to us by a collection of events that impress our senses in many creative ways. So it is in “the urban” –or the spaces of the collectivity–, where we find the meeting, and sometimes collision, of multiple realities. Various worlds share the scenarios of their simultaneous events. In some cases they interact in a consciously way but some other times they just coexist.

The heterogeneous condition of the city is therefore certainly present; this is an element to operate with when we pretend to transform our living environment. But then, a question would be how to grab these realities and what for? Which is the responsibility of both architects and urbanists –let’s call them the space-modelers of the collectivities– when facing the heterogeneity of the city? Which is their assignment when finding in the physical environment multiple realities, collective imaginaries, ways and speeds of movement, and so on?

It is here where the concept of Heterotopias, which was introduced by Michel Foucault in 1967 (1), comes into the debate as a relevant issue to be considered when observing our contemporary human environment –which is mainly urban–. When Foucault affirms that “we are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” he arguments that our experience of the present world

is “less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein”.(2)

The juxtaposition of realities, that characterizes our contemporary world, is hosted by heterotopic spaces, which are places in constant change that bring together situations that may seem to be incompatible if they are observed with a narrow scope. Foucault says that “our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites”(3), then dynamic interactions might take place in unexpected places of the city, and the interchange of very different scales of movement or relation may happen. The challenge then for the spatial-modelers is how to read these places and how to mediate in a creative way between the multiplicities.

Different from the utopias, which are “imaginary places considered to be perfect or ideal”(4) or, in the words of Foucault, they “are sites with no real place”(5), the heterotopias are real and active places of societies that can be located in the world and that bring to scene more than one place. We may say that they are like collages, which pieces are other places –or reference to other places– that transform along the passing of time. As mirrors, they reveal something else that what they are, they speak about what they are not. I want to quote here Foucault’s definition of them:

“There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places –places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society– which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively

1 Foucault, Michel. “Of other spaces, Heterotopias” (1967) <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

4 Definition Webster’s Online Dictionary <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/>
5 Ibid. 1

enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.”(6)

These spaces are widely present in our societies; they are issues that contain a considerable potential when we draw our attention on them. They exist within the contemporary cities, according to Foucault, in relation to all the space that remains(7). They manifest the juxtaposition of movements, of speeds, of scales, of sizes, of times, of worlds that characterize the contemporary life. Their nature is very varied, so not always a cause-effect process can explain their location within the urban tissues.

Therefore, performing with the heterotopias is a permanent challenge for those who deal with “the urban”. Numerous examples of these types of spaces are widely present in our contemporary cities. The architect, urbanist, or any other who deals with the human space nowadays, may choose which lens he uses for examining the city. But the contemporary city requires the optimistic view of an amplifier lens rather than a restricting one. The heterogeneity is a potential to play with, the heterotopias exist to open new interactions and our task is to allow the natural dynamics of the city to happen.

Many examples of heterotropic spaces can be pointed out in our actual urban setting. I will refer to one particular case that at the moment is calling my attention: the Pontchartrain Expressway in the urban tissue of New Orleans (USA). This example serves to illustrate the existence of heterotopias within an urban environment, and it is one of the main motivations of this research.

First I will briefly introduce New Orleans, a North American city with very unique conditions. In August of 2005 the hurricane Katrina turned the world’s attention into this city, but apart from hard images of destruction and vast damage that were widely exposed, this event made visible to the world “other” realities present as well in this city. This episode revealed the New Orleans’ improper living conditions that were necessary to work on, and in this sense this catastrophe turned into a chance to re-think the city.

The situation around the Pontchartrain Expressway appears then as an interesting study-case. During the middle past century, this metropolitan high-speed way settled in the pre-existing urban tissue of New Orleans. Its presence impressed the area with a new global scale but it didn’t establish any dialogue with the local dynamics. Of course an instinctive reaction followed the irruption, though a conflict between these two scales is still latent in the area, and a mediator between the guest –or intruder– and the host is still lacking. Sort of very diverse organisms are now hanging on both sides of the expressway; there is certainly juxtaposition, we find here heterotopias

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.





to perform with. Which is the effect when the paws of a beast irrupt into a micro environment? Or what happens when a ship sinks in the ocean? When the reef starts to grow over the old metal structure, it establishes a bidirectional relationship; it affects the intruder by making it its home.

Hence the presence of heterotopias in our civilizations demands a fresh attitude for facing the multiple and simultaneous realities and for opening the opportunity of multidirectional relationships. It is then when De Landa's call to an open-ended future comes to scene. I want to cite here one of his statements about the need of allowing topological forms to become as many geometrical forms as possible; this is an issue of our contemporary urban environments, and it refers to the fact that with a limited amount of cell types existing on Earth we can create an vast number of organisms; our products depend on the boundless modes we can use to combine our materials(8).

"Deleuze calls this ability of topological forms to give rise to many different physical instantiations, a process of 'divergent actualization', taking the idea from French philosopher Henri Bergson who, at the turn of the century, wrote a series of texts where he criticized the inability of the science of his time to think the new, the truly novel. The first obstacle was, according to Bergson, a mechanical and linear view of causality and the rigid determinism that it implied. Clearly, if all the future is already given in the past, if the future is merely that modality of time where previously determined possibilities become realized, then true

innovation is impossible. To avoid this mistake, he thought, we must struggle to model the future as truly open ended, and the past and the present as pregnant not only with possibilities which become real, but with virtualities which become actual."(9)

De Landa's request for an innovative way to approach the reality is absolutely relevant for architects and urbanists; he says "we must struggle", and within these who deal with human and social issues the space-modelers should be included. A positive and constructive view is fundamental if our intention is to affect the physical environment of the societies. Only a not predetermined view will permit us to understand the urban context for playing with the flow of urban transformations. Allowing becomes a clue word for bringing the potential to actual, and for opening possibilities of interaction when intervening in the urban context. An open and creative view is fundamental when shuffling the urban-cells for developing the topological to geometrical forms.

Thus the juxtaposition of the present is there, and we can choose to see it as a valuable working material in the contemporary world. Play with the differences, express the multiplicity can be a choice. We can make attempts to find in what Koolhaas defines as the Junkspace(10), the positive pieces to re-compose our cities according to the current situations. We should not keep on complaining about the aesthetical multiple-intersection of elements in the contemporary city, but try to understand its dynamic and work with it. We don't need doctors to analyze the already extipated dead parts of the body(11), but we need sharp observers of

8 De Landa, Manuel. "Deleuze and the open-ended becoming of the world" <http://essays.powerfoundation.org/dobw.pdf>

9 Ibid.

10 Koolhaas, Rem. "Junkspace". In: "Mutations". Barcelona : Actar, 2000

11 Koolhaas, Rem "What ever happened to urbanism". In: "S,M,L,XL". Rotterdam : 010 Publishers, 1995

the urban body capable of establishing new relations for the spaces of the collectivities.

And it is then when the magnifying glass of Sherlock Holmes seems a useful tool for sharpening our vision and other senses when studying the city(12). Carlo Ginzburg recalls the method of the art critic Giovanni Morelli, of the private investigator Sherlock Holmes, and of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud as enlightening ways to uncover traces from the apparently most insignificant factors. In an analogical way, this method can be used for analyzing the particularities of the contemporary city so as to find out potentials there where the chaos seems to rule. This means a transformation of the problems into potentials, and – making reference to De Landa– of the potentials into realities(13).

But what to do with the diversities found out in the city? The term ‘consistency’, introduced by Deleuze and Guatari’s, takes now relevance as a non deterministic way of proceeding. De Landa refers to it as “the spontaneous formation of ‘machinic assemblages’ of diverse elements” for “keeping the world from closing” by “this morphogenetic process which generates new structures without homogenizing the components and without submitting them to hierarchical control, or in other words, without imposing on them a hylomorphic model.”(14)

I want to mention here Deleuze and Guatari’s definition of consistency, which is used by De Landa to develop his open-ended future idea: “Consistency necessarily

occurs between heterogeneities, not because it is the birth of a differentiation, but because heterogeneities that were formerly content to coexist or succeed one another become bound up with one another through the ‘consolidation’ of their coexistence or succession... What we term machinic is precisely this synthesis of heterogeneities as such.”(15)

Then, the understanding of the urban realities from an open-minded viewpoint may allow the space-modelers to materialize the virtual form of the dynamic multilayered human-spaces, in the same way the sculptor shapes the rock or the blacksmith forges the metal. As De Landa states “his task is less that of realizing previously defined possibilities than actualizing virtualities along divergent lines.”(16)

As a catalyst, which is “a substance capable of accelerating or decelerating a chemical reaction”(17), the city spaces can provoke or restrain social interactions. Then, the conditions outlined by architects and urbanists may direct innovative ways to experience the urban environments: they can allow the unpredictable –that may also be unimagined but desired– to happen. Here resides the social responsibility of the space-modelers.

Now that the city is communicating to us in such varied ways, we may ask ourselves about its expectations as a living organism. The multilayered actual contexts carry a series of significances to decipher and to translate. And there is also here a chance to play with the vagueness. As stated by Francesco Careri,

12 Ginzburg, Carlo. “Señales. Raíces de un paradigma indiciario” (1983) In: “Mitos, Emblemas e Indicios: Morfología e historia” (Miti emblematici, 1986)

13 Ibid. 8

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

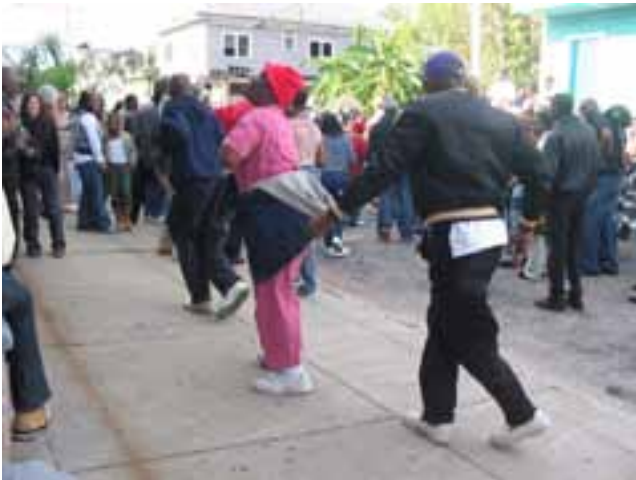


18 Careri, Francesco. "Walkscapes, Walking as an aesthetic practice". Barcelona. Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002

19 Ibid. 8

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid. 18



the voids in the contemporary urban context may be better carried with new significances rather than filled up(18). In this way in the emptiness, in the ambiguity, in the heterotropic spaces, in the open-ended possibilities we –the space-modelers– can find our basic materials for shaping the urban context.

The way we look at the things may alter the things themselves. The voids in the city are not “empty” of significance but full of potential interpretation; the apparent chaos is a different order to play with. The lens we choose for reading the reality –De Landa talks about the framing of true problems– is a vital issue. “Given this objectivity of problems and their conditions, what may be peculiarly human is not problem-solving, but problem-posing, an activity that involves distinguishing in reality the distributions of the special and the ordinary, and grasping the objective problems that these distributions condition.”(19)

So when the urbanist dares to sharpen his look to touch to the layer that hides under the aerial view, and when he allows himself to complement the abstract look of the 1:100.000 scale maps, he will enrich his job with a sort of valuable tools. Likewise, when the architect challenges to relate the individual elements to the collective landscape, he may play with new vivid issues. When we all consent to look and re-act within different scales we will move toward a crucial dialogue of multiple actors: between the individual and the collective, the global and the local, and so on.

The comprehension of the diversities welcomes

innovative actions. As De Landa writes “Any kind of learning, even physical, sensual learning, involves an engagement with material assemblages which embody problems and their defining singularities”(20). The act of walking shows up as a creative method to read and simultaneously transform the urban. Francesco Careri’s study and publication –which emerged in a European context– has then an especial value for the actual city(21). I wonder now what can become if this theory is used in the context of a North American city as New Orleans, a city with a vast full of paradoxical potentials to exploit.



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From Fences to Urban Spaces Diana Ruiz Cendales

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Different moments under an elevated highway in New Orleans 1. Weekday, 2. Sunday during the Second Line Parade



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