From City Lines to Life Paths

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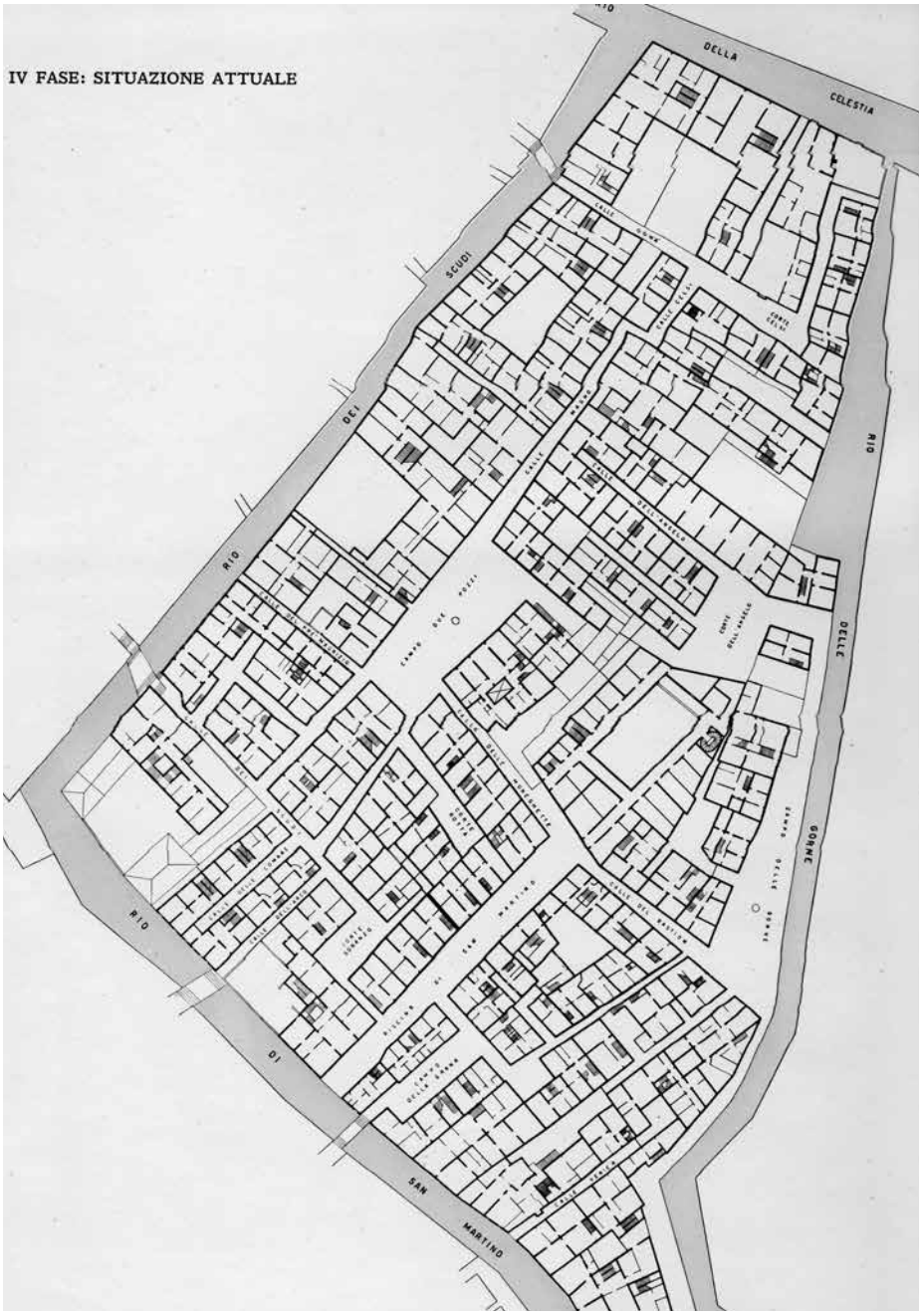
Figure 1.
Saverio Muratori, Quartiere di Campo due Pozzi, Situazione attuale, scala 1:1000, 1959, Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia, copyright : Roma : Instituto poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato



Does the simple architectural and creative gesture of putting a line on white paper conceal the same aggressive character as the lines of borders at various scales? This question, arising in my mind after reading the call for proposals for *Scapegoat* 12, will guide my reflection on the relation between architecture and collective space, and between architecture and what is already there, before us architects, and before our projects. Examining the relationship of architecture to property, I will review some recent historical figures and movements that sought to elucidate the meaning of the property line in architectural theory, as well as the subject of the "existing site" as an inspiration to architectural projects. In this context, I will reflect on the morphological analysis of the city, Melvin Charney's reading of Montreal, and the methods developed by Montreal's Urban Architecture Unit to further evoke my recent architectural explorations of urban and public space beyond barriers.

Land division as a theoretical notion of architecture appears in discourses that emerged in the 1960s associating architecture with urban research. The most common reference in North America remains *L'architettura della città* (1966) by Aldo Rossi. Architecture's dependence on the lines of properties, a notion that emerges strongly from these discourses, is above all a base of broad urban analysis aiming to formulate a new, and at the time critical, approach to architecture. The reaction to the impasse of architecture and urban models of *grands ensembles*, as well as to the politics of suburban developments in Europe and North America, led architects to valorize historic urban fabrics. The discourse was built on the morphological analysis of the city, and a practical method emerged in the Italian circle by Saverio Muratori, Carlo Aymonino, Aldo Rossi, and Gianfranco Caniggia. The method proposes that architecture be studied not as an isolated, functional, constructed, and aesthetic object, but as an element of an urban system, considered across a *longue duree*. The

city—as constituted over centuries, its forms and practices of space, shaped by political, economic, legal and symbolic contexts—then becomes a more expansive object of architectural study. And land division units became the keys to this understanding, though it is also important to look at the parcel as one of several elements of a broad and diverse conceptual field.

It was the work of Saverio Muratori between the late 1950s and early 1970s that made urban research popular in the architectural world. This occurred, specifically, during a competition project for a new residential complex in the Barene di San Giuliano district of Venice-Mestre, launched in 1958—whence emerged the idea of the city as the unique model for "architecture." The city as it is thus became the only model for architecture, a city always active and able to shape its future. Muratori's project considered development in the past actualizing in the present. In this frame, thought thus undergoes a formidable acceleration: one must not look at the abstract models tainted with simplification. "The city, always up-to-date and contemporary, is a historical process that is fulfilled in the present," as Jean Castex will later say.[1] Indeed, Muratori studied the existing city only to think of the future. Very soon his works, *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia* (1959) and *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Roma* (1963), would become the main references for this morphological urban research method.

At the same time, in the 1960s, renovations in which not only monuments, but whole urban quarters, were considered as heritage departed from the principles of the CIAM Athens Charter, providing a rich territory of morphological and typological investigation. Among other things, the Municipality of Bologna and its Technical Office established numerous classification schemes for building typologies in their 1969 downtown conservation plan.[2] The "filling of voids" and renovations of existing fabric for social housing brought the issue of housing closer to the problem of the city, as it had been constituted for centuries. Carlo Aymonino's research is also considered fundamental here because it established the relationship between urban morphology and the typology of buildings.[3] But finally, it was Rossi's typo-morphological analysis in *L'Architettura della città* and Giorgio *Grassi's La costruzione logica dell'architettura* (1967) that laid the theoretical outlines of a project that quickly found its protagonists in several European countries and later in America. In 1973, at the fifteenth Milan Triennale, Rossi gathered a group of Italian and international architects who were immediately seen as a new "tendency" in architecture—*Tendenza*. Rossi's book, although only translated into English in 1982 and French in 1984, became an influential agent of propagation of this new approach to architecture.

It is interesting to note that Rossi and Aymonino saw the study of the city not as an analysis leading to design synthesis, but rather as a contribution to the construction of a theory of architecture; the design project can never be directly deduced from the analytical moment. Vittorio Gregotti held the opposite view: analysis and design cannot be taken separately. It is a question of describing the shape of the landscape and the territory completed by the project's transformation. These opposing understandings of the relation of urban morphology to the design process led to very different relations of a new building to an existing site, producing very different urban models and different architectural aesthetics.

Italy, however, was not the only nucleus providing the conceptual basis for the urban research in question. The geomorphic work of the British-German geographer Michael Robert Günter Conzen, and particularly his monograph *Alnwick, Northumberland: A Study in Townplan Analysis*, published in 1960, formed the basis for understanding the complex systems of morphologies closely examining the plan, fabric, and structure of the use of land and parcel cutting as the key data. In France, a circle of the *Tendenza* movement quickly emerged and a fertile urban research milieu was created, represented by Philippe Panerai, Jean Castex, Bernard Huet, Françoise Boudon, Antoine Grumbach, and Pierre Pinon. The School of Architecture of Versailles—with Castex and Panerai and their research laboratory, as well as the School of Architecture of Paris-Belleville and Huet's laboratory—became the first nuclei of studies and teachings of this new approach to architecture and the city. Soon, many other research centres began to flourish, whose central axis of study became the morphological history of cities. It was also in France that the notion of "urban architecture" was born, popularized by Huet and the journal *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* he directed between 1974 and 1978. Note also that in Belgium during the 1970s, La Cambre, the modern school founded by Henry van de Velde, became the home of the "Reconstruction of the European city" movement, supporting this international revisionist discourse. Catalonia and later Switzerland would also become very strong poles of the urban architecture movement. However, working in continuity with the constructive and urban traditions of their respective environments, these Swiss and Catalan architects did not denounce modern traditions. Finally, in the United States, architect-theorists Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas became protagonists of *Tendenza* in the 1970s. Between 1967 and 1984, the highly influential Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York focused on architectural typology, urban morphology, and the history of architecture more broadly.[4] Anne Vernez-Moudon's morphological research on San Francisco was one of the first works with a wide impact in academic circles,[5] as well as Steven Holl's work on American urban typologies.[6] In Canada in the 1970s, George Baird and Melvin Charney were the central theorists of morphological research. In the 1990s, research on urban form intensified

at the international level, and the International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF) became a federating organization of urban research.

In this rich and diverse landscape, let us first identify some ideological and epistemological constants. First, the movement as a whole introduced a radical change in the relationship between the discipline of architecture and the existing city. Second, the existing city, which was the subject of the modernist avant-garde critique, becomes instead a primary source for architectural creation, ineluctably surpassing the opposition between tradition and innovation. From this point on these two notions would overlap and coexist. Finally, it can be said that the main intention of the above-mentioned research and practice, without underestimating the different lines of inquiry within it, was to question the supremacy of the economic, technological, functional, and technocratic framework of architecture and to associate it instead with culture, while raising the importance of the social sciences and humanities, sociology, linguistics, and history.

The City as a Structure

The idea of the city as a structure of forms, inspired by structural linguistics, is foundational for this approach.[7] It implies an urban analysis that considers urban forms and the relations between them, and not merely the city's functional aspects. The form does not follow its function, but depends on the other forms, on the system in which it participates, following the linguistic principle of the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified within the sign. In each city, the architect-researcher first seeks to define the preponderant rule in the production of forms, including the tissue, organization, and knitting of the streets—orthogonal, longitudinal, rectangular, concentric, radiating, or triangular—and the mode of its growth, such continuous or discontinuous, to name only the most common types. These notions make it possible to read the shape of a city in its totality, to understand the logic of its development and its relation to natural geography.

The Morphological History of Cities

The importance given to the understanding of existing urban forms, their origins and transformations, is reflected in the historical study based on the new method. The morphological history of cities seeks to combine the history of urbanism with historical topography. If the first is interested in highlighting major facts, the second seeks to understand the physical development of a city, by tracking a succession of minor occurrences backward to the origin of a city or neighbourhood.[8] An urban morphological history considers planned developments—large building ensembles, urban projects, squares, embellishments, important renovations—but above everything else, it gives great attention to spontaneous developments unrecorded in the grand narratives of history. Studies of historical cartography, notarial acts, the succession of properties and parcels, etc., are therefore the basis of the method. The morphological history of cities wants to understand the formation of tissues. As such, the comparative graphical analysis of maps of various development moments on the same scale is a widespread research method.

The City as a Figure

The adepts of this method will say that we cannot reinvent the city. Motivated by this conviction, they conceptualize the city as a type of space determined by centuries of its development. Their search for a clear figure of "the city" is an attempt to establish a model of urbanization strong enough to oppose the proliferation of an urbanized territory in and around historical cities in the post-war period, a loose and hardly structured urban fabric, neither city nor countryside, that dominates urban development. However, if we consider the city as historical object and ever transforming system this very idea of "the city as a clear figure" seems uncompromising, if not simplistic. For instance, the opposition between town and country, as Henri Lefebvre explained during the same period,[9] has for centuries been absorbed in the modern urban fabrics conditioned by commercial society.[10] That said, what matters for *Tendenza,* and most adepts of the typo-morphological method, is the idea that place could be appropriated by people thanks to its recognizable appearance. Perceptible and experienced in space, the built forms resulting from geometries of grids and parcels are recognizable and shared collectively; they also appeal to collective memory. This concept—popularized by Aldo Rossi, who was inspired by Maurice Halbwachs[11]—turned into an argument in favour of the symbolic dimension of collective living environments; the city is the place *par excellence* for the insertion of the human into culture. Mixing anthropology, sociology and psychology, Halbwachs demonstrated that this insertion is relative to social links and to the possibilities of identification supported by shared memories.

The Parcel in Duration

We have already suggested that the parcel, central to a reflection on the relationship between architecture and property, contains complex correlations with several other notions and concepts of the typo-morphological method. Returning to the town-country distinction, let us first mention that typo-morphological studies often examine forms of agricultural land and the urban grid, since generally the former precede the latter—the suburbs constituting their most common intermediate state. Next, these studies discover formal continuities between the lines of agricultural properties and the urban parcel. Townsites are located most of the time on rural properties. In this same

dynamic, we observe that the village road causes the development of settings along its path and after it. Urban public space depends on the organization of urban parcels. This network of built lots, streets, and avenues is fundamental to the structuring and functioning of urban public space. To understand it, analyze it, and then consciously design this space, it is necessary to examine a larger fragment of the city by looking at the parcels and their buildings on the ground floor. Both private and public land, with varying degrees of reciprocal permeability and separation, act together.

Drawing, a Conceptual Graphic Representation

At this point we need to emphasize a particular contribution of typo-morphological analysis. This architectural approach develops conceptual tools and invents graphic instruments—architectural representations—corresponding to those concepts. It introduces new conventions of drawing. In the already mentioned study, *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia,* Saverio Muratori (1959) draws in plan large fragments of the city presenting urban blocks bordering canals and streets, and on each block he draws the divisions of parcels and the ground floor of buildings that occupy them. This unusual type of architectural drawing at the urban scale is not new—it has long been practiced by surveyors, the land register of Paris by blocks constituted by Philibert Vasserot between 1810 and 1836 being an eminent example. Reintroduced to the approach of "urban architecture," this figuration becomes a method of analysis and of design, because urban architecture, before any other objective, gives importance to public space. It must then promote the understanding of the links between the street (public domain and urban ground) and the private parcel (the ground floor of the building), this relation considered decisive for the structuring of public space and its social practice. A study undertaken in 1981 and led by Bruno Fortier offers a magnificent testimony to this method: *La métropole imaginaire: Un atlas de Paris* (1990), which first took the form of an exhibition at the French Institute of Architecture in IFA 1989.[12] This monumental project, undertaken by several Parisian architecture schools (UPA, UP), thoroughly explores this form of architectural representation in order to analyze the structure of Paris neighbourhoods and understand the relationship between public space and buildings.

The mediation between urban interiors and exteriors is the key to this approach. In this respect, another, more subtle, representation of space is notorious: the convention recovered from Giambattista Nolli's 1748 Rome plan. Nolli features minor fabrics in uniform dark spots, streets and squares as white voids, but monumental buildings presented in ground-floor plan, thus ensuring their transparency and suggesting that these buildings themselves are public space. This convention was widely practiced by *Tendenza,* showing the continuity between public building and public space, and indicating that their alliance was considered essential. Significantly, the public buildings were called "monuments" not just as a historicizing reference, but also in order to indicate the symbolic and therefore collective dimension of the buildings.

Grid, Street Network, Tissue Production, Urban Block and Its Development, Urban Lot and Building Type

The public building, or monument, invites another notion: the monument as urban landmark, but also as ordering object. In the classical city, it plays a compositional role, closes the main axes, organizes minor ones, creates a "seafront," and sometimes it serves as a fulcrum for the arrangement of smaller fragments. Urban embellishments of the eighteenth century are perfect examples, abundantly cited by the studies of the time.[13] The monument produces a majestic, memorable public space; it can also instantiate and embody collective memory, as well as nourish the idea of the city as theatre.

Major streets and sequences of squares are combined with secondary streets and more spontaneous grid configurations. This totality of a morphological urban reading will be named the "major order" and "minor order" of the city, a hierarchical but interlocking whole that forms the city's particular geometries. To understand this production of the urban fabric, we must grasp the interweaving interaction of several elements: street networks, land divisions, and constructions. These relationships are not examined as functional, but rather morphological, and we can also say constructive.

The study of the urban fabric in transformation—including its successive layers, growths and densifications—makes possible the understanding of great urban mechanics. An urban block is an element that generally undergoes internal growth, as it densifies from within. Until the mid-twentieth century lots were generally subdivided, becoming smaller, while the buildings became higher and higher.[14] However, since the Second World War, a contrary process has emerged—the consolidation of parcels and the rise of the urban hyper block with towers, which has radically densified many contemporary cities. However, some urban models resist change and hold their density over time—here the example of the typical Montreal block is particularly eloquent.

Building regulations change over time, inviting careful study, providing a narrative of the evolving shape of a city.[15] The iconic landscapes of Manhattan and Paris have been greatly shaped by specific municipal building regulations. In an urban parcel, building regulations are generators of constructive typologies. The typo-morphological reading makes transparent the relationship between the building and the land division: the urban building depends on its land use. And the same type of parcel can become denser and be occupied by objects that are different in form,

function, and position in space.[16] But, as George Baird argues, different constructive forms can be substituted on the same plot over time without affecting the morphology of the whole, only if a sufficient number of constructive typological rules are respected.[17]

The Importance of Public Space

The division of land forms the basis of urban morphology, but its study is motivated above all by the importance of public space and its fundamentally architectural character.[18] The main objective of urban architecture is the production of significant public spaces, and the urban form as a whole is considered as a major factor of production of public space—the plot provides a frame for built substance, and the latter gives shape and body to public space, a totality that is closely related to collective perceptions and social practices.

The form of public space is the void, vaguely considered as green space by the Moderns. Architects and typo-morphological researchers scrutinize the shape of the void. Moreover, they use the convention of the plan in figure-ground found in historical cartographies, in which built substance is shown in black, allowing an easy reading of the form of the void. This reading can detect deformations and ruptures. Again, the figure-ground drawing convention is symptomatic of an underlying conceptual framework.

Typo-morphology both confirms the dependence of architecture on land division, and forges a new understanding of urban space which insists that the quality of common and shared space must be the fundamental value for the design of a new neighbourhood—an idea unexpressed by the collectivist models of modern urbanism. Indeed, this quality of common space is absent in the large, rapidly built postwar *grands ensembles.* As summarized by Bernard Huet: "The city of the Athens Charter has no historical thickness. It is conceived as a pseudo-scientific 'model' constituted by the systematic juxtaposition of abstract 'functions,' carefully isolated in an empty space: 'green,' homogeneous, heliotropic and hygienic (the old myth of nature as non-place, ahistorical). In this 'new city' that we know well, spatial segregation exalts social segregation, and the leveling of historical traces by bulldozers retorts exactly to the destruction of the relations of sociability."[19]

This criticism does not lack historical contradictions. It is the model of the *Siedlungen* of the 1920s, based on the collectivization of the lands together with the industrial production of the built environment, which is disputed by *Tendenza* because its public spaces are alienating and, as Huet suggests, are not necessarily socially oriented. This appears paradoxical, because Rossi, Huet, and others (like their predecessors, Ernst May and Martin Wagner) fervently defended left-wing ideals. Indeed, the *sine qua non* of modern urbanism is collective ownership of land. Ernst May, a socialist and urban planner from Frankfurt, realized *Siedlungen* with considerable effort, working on the margins of the capitalist system. But at this point, let us also remember that the founding fathers of modern architecture—who like Peter Behrens had a mystical faith in the power of social liberation through modern technology—also shared the fear that the same forces that should elevate man may defeat him in utter alienation. The writings of Manfredo Tafuri are very enlightening here.[20] Radically machinic projects neglect the most fundamental aspect of industrial society: the alienation of the industrial worker in the assembly line, which is of the same nature as the alienation of the resident of a habitat aligned with the cycle of industrial production. In order to grasp the political issues of the city's conception, it is prudent to avoid any simplification, since this method exposing the association of architecture to land division and propriety is multivalent and its repercussions are numerous.

Repetition as an Ethical and Aesthetic Problem

Given the complexity of *Tendenza*'s criticism of previous architectures, we can better understand the reasoning behind Aldo Rossi's aesthetic of repetition. He sees in the repetitiveness of type its recognizable quality, a fertile soil for collective memory (whereas the proliferation of the modern standardization is merely a factor of social alienation). Repetition comes from urban regulations, which set the rules for the use of collective life. Repetitiveness forges social practices, but also habits; it produces recognizable sets and gives the feeling of belonging, collective inclusion, and identification with a group. George Baird, in the article already cited, highlights the link between the legal and cognitive character of the urban features in question.

Urban Architecture and Its Themes

Through this conceptual framework, the approach of urban architecture questions the nature of the urban project, but also privileges some of its themes. Collective housing in this urban vision becomes a main objective: the public building as an object that organizes and nourishes the public space. As early as the 1960s, it seemed crucial to repair disorganized and devastated urban fabrics, to explore how to build in a historic context, how to design the extension of a building with heritage value, and how to build in an urban and rural context marked by strong traditions—and architects began to see these issues as their priorities.

Urban Architecture and Urban Planning

Finally, it is necessary to mention that the morphological approach works in a tradition of professional continuity between urban planning and architecture. This strongly rooted continuity present among architects in Italy—and relatively

strong elsewhere in Europe, including in the experiences of the modern avant-gardes—dissolved under the pressures of increasing specializations in the second half of the twentieth century. And in North America these professions have been strongly separated for most of the twentieth century. It is not a coincidence that it was in Italy and then in Europe that typo-morphological analysis began to be taught in a more generalized way. In North America, this method of analysis has not been widespread.[21] Parallel to the separation of architecture from urbanism, there are other factors here. The dependence of building types on the plot and then their relationship to the morphology of the city asserts itself only in the urban tissues of a certain density. The larger the plot, the more the building floats within it and the relation between them becomes less articulated—or it is simply may be nonexistent.

Melvin Charney and His Reading of Montreal

Montreal, a city characterized by densely urban neighbourhoods in a central position, represents a natural object for a typo-morphological reading. This reading was promoted by Melvin Charney, who was born in Montreal, as well as his collaborators and students. I will give a personal testimony of this collective experiment, but first I will extract from Charney's work, mainly his writings, the elements I find particularly relevant to this discussion. Charney worked on cities large and small in North America and Europe, but it was Montreal that he elected as "the city." In addition to being the site of his major works, he made Montreal the subject of his sustained studies, the object of his insightful observations, and the field of public polemics. This body of thought, conveyed in his writings and artistic creations, may provide the key to a more general understanding of cities for architects.

Charney's first published works, in which the analysis of the city becomes an instrument for reformulating contemporary architecture, date back to the 1960s. In those years, while Montreal incurred the first violent reconfigurations of regional planning, Charney began focussing on architecture in Quebec. These works highlight the long-term basis of his thought and include a series of writings that upset the then current views within the discipline. "The Grain Elevators Revisited," published in 1967 in *Architectural Design*, initiated a controversy surrounding the modernist myth of the machine. Later, he authored two memorable articles defending the social dimension of the practice of architecture: "Pour une définition de l'architecture au Québec," originally a conference text, published in 1971 in *Architecture and Urbanism in Quebec,* and "À qui de droit," published in 1982 in the journal *ARQ*. This social approach was elaborated on in his two most widely read texts: "Saisir Montréal," published in 1975 in *Découvrir Montréal*, a collection of texts in the form of a guide featuring the most important actors in Montreal's urban planning scene in the 1970s, and "The Montrealness of Montreal," an article published in 1980 in *The Architectural Review,* in which these same concepts, broadened by historical analyses, were presented to the international public. This last article is well known and constitutes the original, and still perhaps the best formulated, synthetic text on the morphological history of Montreal.

The first observation: a river, a mountain. A city's identity is above all its geographical location. This landscape is the primary factor in the feeling of belonging to the place—the object of Montrealers' collective memory—but also key considerations in the genesis of urban forms. The urban grid bends against and around Mount Royal; the Port of Montreal and other important urban features were built in direct relation to the St. Lawrence. The second big lesson focuses on the process of urban transformation. Montreal's urban system was built on the rural divisions, the *rangs*, the lands parcelled at the time of French colonization which constitute the urban fabric and greatly explain its current form. To understand this system of built forms, it is necessary to study the practices of space, space being before anything the place where life occurs. Moreover, public space, this urban frame, is the place of its widest fulfilment, and the street is its strongest North American expression, even though the system is enriched by squares. The most important material of the city is collective housing, and Montreal's neighborhoods are the most authentic places for the gestation of urban culture. Individual buildings have value insofar as they belong to the wider system; habitat is urban, and public buildings are part of this same structure.

To access architecture is to study the city. The city is thus partially made by scholarly actions, the great projects noticed by the histories of architecture, but more meaningfully by minor spontaneous actions. The city is then the system of forms and formations, and the discipline of architecture must give these two the same attention.[22] Architecture depends on the resources available and, as an intervention, is necessarily political.

The street, in its collective form of housing organization, provides the primary lesson. This approach is often close to social geography. It is in the street and in the city, not in the great masters' books of architectures, that Charney sees the major themes of the twentieth century: the density of working-class neighbourhoods; the striking simplicity and efficiency of commercial buildings; and the huge industrial structures—all of which are more revealing than any major constructivist or futurist work. It is the reality of Montreal that gives access to the functional machine and makes it possible to grasp the organization of the system. True modernity is North American, and Montreal, like any North American city, has little composition. Charney told his students that if there is a monument at the end of a street, then surely it is a coincidence.

The goal of architect and urban planner, for Charney, should above all be "seizing the city."[23] And this must be the act of the

ordinary citizen, the tourist, etc. This approach, straying far from the elitist conceptions of the professional architect, highlights the social anchoring of the discipline of architecture. It implies that architecture before being the art of building, or even the art of design,[24] is the expression and realization of collective human potential. This position,[25] certainly influenced by contemporaneous countercultural movements, gives power to collective intuition and tacit knowledge. And we can say that in the 1970s, it constituted a new proposal for architectural theory and practice, replacing modern utopianism.[26] The architect must observe the social practices of space and their relationships to physical structures, the relationships among constructions of different scales and the relationships between practices. It is therefore necessary to grasp the complex system which defines the ecology of dwelling. Life is an input that precedes form—and also, use precedes meaning: "the dwelling reflects a way of life. The physical structure of the home, at best, is the support of the content of this way of life."[27]

To overcome all prejudices in his aesthetic appreciation, the architect must proceed with a semantic analysis. Aware of depths, Charney knew that the "real" world is covered up by buildings with too smooth a skin. Authentic architecture is thus one that knows how to connect with reality, emerging from the past by breaking with obsessive and authoritarian formalism. Thus, the famous comparative analysis that Charney conducted between two houses—the first a bourgeois villa in the international style taken from a textbook written by the historian Beaulieu, and the other in the genre of the industrial vernacular—served to denounce the inadequacies of institutional architecture.[28] For Charney, the formalism of the international style is equivalent to that of classicism, and he expressed great distrust towards official, institutional, and academic architecture. Unfortunately, the profession of architecture tends to identify with elites. In "Pour une définition de l'architecture au Québec," the statement is clear. Cut off from realities such as the traditions of urbanization and housing, architecture has moved away from the lives of most Quebecers. For Charney, a true Quebec architecture can only emerge by breaking the schism between the stream of popular architecture and that of the elites. This last architecture is dominated by successions of styles, the modern style being the most recent of its aesthetic exports.

For Charney, architecture must accept that needs are always conditioned by available resources; accordingly, pragmatism and the love of simplicity greatly shaped his artistic approach. He admired rudimentary beauties, and genuine expressions of community interested him in the highest degree. He was touched by the simplicity of Montreal's nineteenth-century commercial buildings, prototypes of modern office buildings, as well as the modest and minimal popular habitat, which he believed is the most accurate expression of architecture—an artistic credo, yes, but above all an ethical position. To understand architecture is to look at it from the point of view of resources and to detect any surplus thereof. Such surplus always hides power and domination, the surplus of resources and the possibility of retaining services; indeed, architecture is the great indicator of this daily existential struggle.

Architecture is for Charney a social practice, which he fought his entire life to put into practice. This is why, in the city's first great realizations of modern architecture, notably Place Ville Marie, Charney saw primarily a new expression of the power of English-Canadian capital and examples of urbanism undermining public space; this was another "elite effort to suppress the social realities of the city."[29] The international style is "mimetic," easily exportable and, above all, betrays the social aspirations of modern architecture. Also, Expo 67 and the 1976 Olympic Games, the pride of many Montrealers, were for Charney merely a series of carnivalesque events orchestrated by an authoritarian mayor. "From outside, Expo 67 and the 1976 Games made Montreal famous. However, for most people here, both are monuments to the glory of what has not been done, and what is still not done in the city. [...] The city's annual housing budget is about half of Terre des Hommes' maintenance deficit."[30]

Architectural design also has exemplary value in Charney's eyes as a marker of the transformation of Quebec society. This is particularly the case for the Complexe Desjardins, built by La Haye and Ouellet, and Charney highlighted the covered gallery receiving natural light as a positive urban aspect. But his critical mind remained ever alert: not only is this urban superblock in many ways similar in nature to those in the western part of the city, but a working-class neighborhood had to be demolished to achieve this "symbol of the integration of Quebec in the North American economy, expressed by the new technocratic class."[31]

Charney sought an authentic path for Quebec modernity and this architectural stance must necessarily be attentive to, and in solidarity with, the tacit knowledge of the people when they produce their own living environment. He dreamt of an architecture that, instead of "mimetic innovations" (his own expression), could emerge from the industrial traditions of North America and carry the social aspirations of the masses, which he considered open and inclusive.

The Urban Architecture Unit of the Université de Montréal's School of Architecture

At that time of renewed discussions on urban issues, French-Canadian academic experience was particularly significant. Constant openness to European theories and attachment to the specificity of the North American city produced an original approach deeply rooted in the architectural culture of Montreal.

In 1968, Charney took an active part in the creation of the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Montreal. He committed to the modernization of architectural education in Quebec

within the university and created and directed the graduate program in Environmental Design from 1968 to 1972. In the early 1970s, a system of vertical teaching and research units was instituted at the School of Architecture, each offering a program of choice open to second-, third- and fourth-year students. Two of these units, the *Unité d'aménagement urbain*, taught by Charney and Denys Marchand, and the *Unité d'environnement bâti*, taught by Alan Knight, merged in 1978 to form the Urban Architecture Unit, a studio commonly called AU. I joined the team of unit teachers in 1984. In 1990, the vertical system was converted into a classical system of one-semester studios. In 1992, Charney left the School to fully devote himself to his artistic practice, but his writings and works continue to greatly influence the program—which also, in the spirit of the AU, began to experiment with different forms and pedagogical formulas.

The AU unit was first and foremost a place of urban creation dedicated to Montreal, and sought to transform an analysis of the wealth of Montreal's built heritage into a disciplinary method. As a vertical studio, it became a school within the School, an architectural approach in its own right, a critical discourse, a methodology. Morphological and typological readings were practiced within it, but they were always performed in particular ways. The specificity of Montreal was both subject and object of this work, in which theoretical, analytical, and aesthetic approaches were not modeled on urban designs deployed in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, but rather developed parallel to them in the same spirit and in a frame of similar ideas. The work was also nourished by the wider North American urban, social, intellectual and artistic context: the traditions of the industrial production of the built environment, the quality of the neighbourhoods, the public spaces of Montreal and the public buildings of the French religious institutions—and particularly the Quiet Revolution, its repercussions in art, and Direct Cinema in Quebec, all of which provided many contexts that framed and inspired this research and creation. But the reading and interpretation of the city, and the fine observation of the existing space and place, remained its basis.

In the early years, the work focused on the notion of urban reconstruction through investigations of the city's significant fragments, which were often in crisis: devastated lands, remnants of land speculation, demolition areas converted into parking lots, all of which constituted the theatre of deterritorialization made by capitalism during the economic crisis of the 1980s. The notion of reconstruction and the way it confronts contemporaneous preoccupations such as post-industrial rehabilitation, public space, cohabitation with infrastructures and urban housing, have remained current for Montreal for a long time, continuing up to the present.

At the same time, this approach has always been critical of current practices and their settings. The teachings of AU combined an interest in the city with artistic practices of the modern avant-garde and contemporary art. As a result, the AU's pedagogy developed unconventional instruments, and drawing had a strongly conceptual dimension molded by the intentions of the design in question. Typo-morphological analyses were often profoundly influenced by students' personal interpretations; together with conceptual drawings, even the more constructive ones, they are poetic readings of sites. Projects were thus often nurtured by narrative themes and experimented with architectural representation. Public space, of primary importance, is articulated by familiar figures: the parcel, for example, is expressed by party walls, which are allegorical and emblematic of urban housing. The projects show an enthusiasm for the aesthetics of everyday life, and minor architectures were sublimated through drawing. The city, already in existence, thus became material for metaphors.

Despite its polemical dimension, much of the work entered the urban public domain during the 1990s through studies done first by Charney and Knight, for the City of Montreal Urban Planning Division, and then by architects, former students of the Urban Architecture Unit. The AU's work was frequently made public through meetings with the press, exhibitions in galleries and arts centres, first in Montreal and then, from the 1990s onwards, at the international level. A 1980–1990 retrospective of AU projects and studies was presented first at the UQAM Design Center in 1992, then in 1995 at New York's Galeria Frau and in Paris at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal. The book *Ville, métaphore, projet: Architecture urbain à Montréal* (1992) traces the work and research of those years, and AU drawings have entered into the collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

On my side, I continued to explore what critical architectural practice could be, and how we can combine it with experimental architectural representation, drawing, and more. I continued to observe urban life by transposing the act of drawing to the digital media arts and by borrowing from the techniques of cinema. In the mediaLabAU and in the School's studios, we studied the form of space given by life, and by moving bodies marked by emotion and memory, which are understood more openly as expressing shifting subjectivity. These materials and forces—the energy already embodied in the environment—could be considered as dynamic natural resources for architectural projects. With these tools, we observe the possibilities for transgressing notions of property, for encouraging broad public usage, for sharing and hybridizing spaces. Our attachment to the sensory and cultural dimensions of the built environment translates into an interest in landscapes, forms and materials, in the sustainable as well as the ephemeral dimensions of space, its events and movements; it also translates into a sensitivity to natural, daily, and seasonal rhythms. This observation, reading, and interpreting of the city, enhanced by video technology, gives access to hidden realities and can reveal an urban unconsciousness. This extremely

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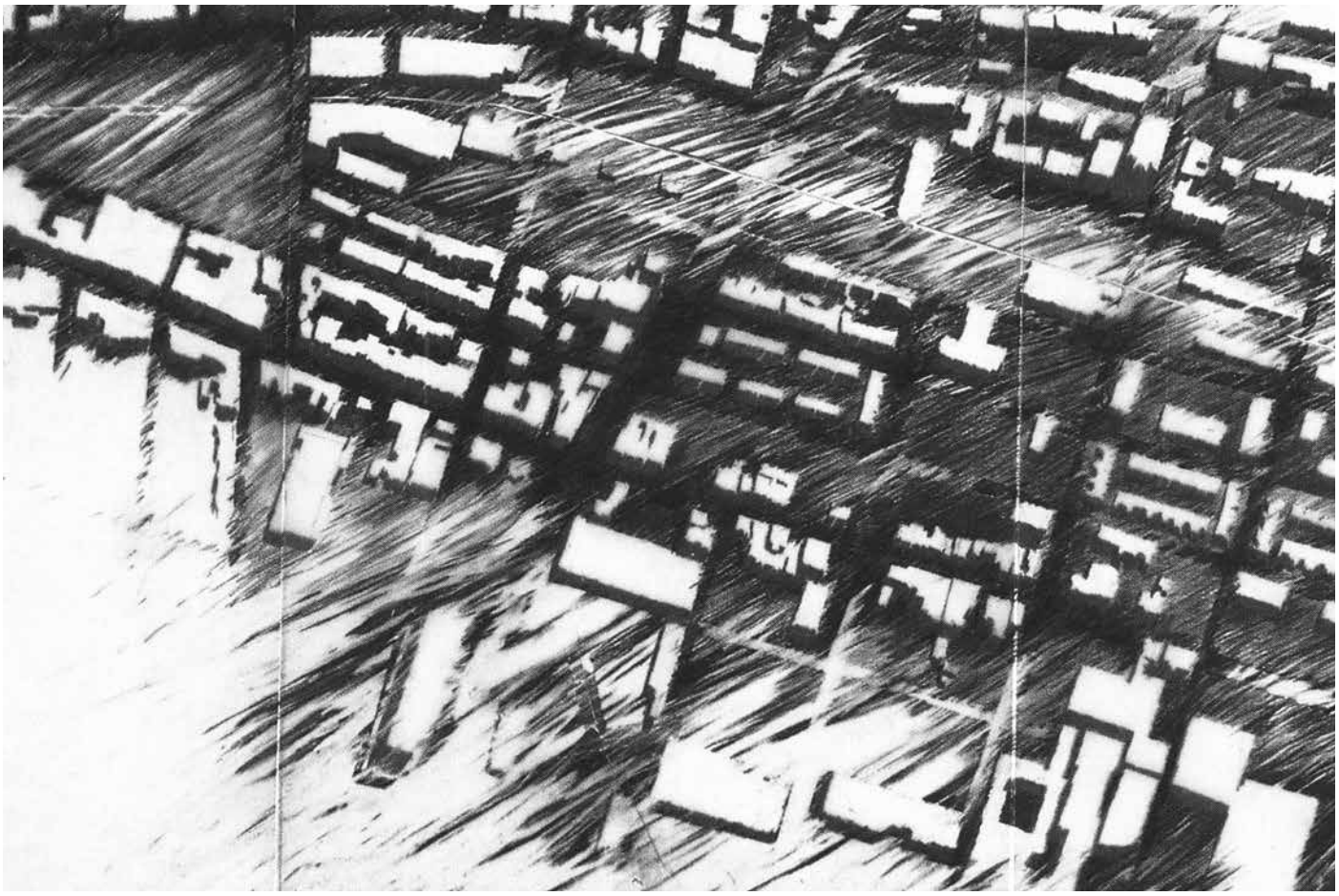

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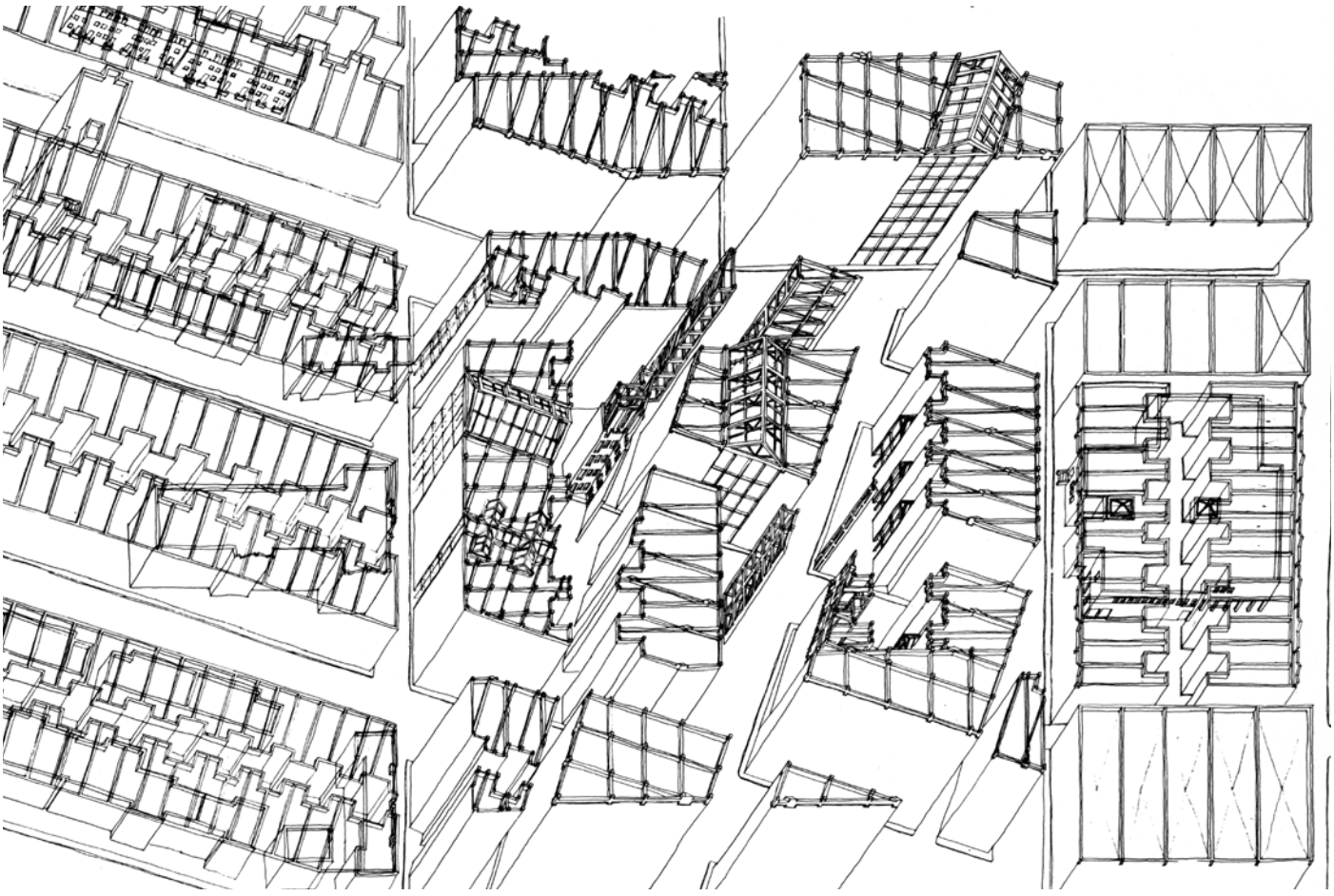

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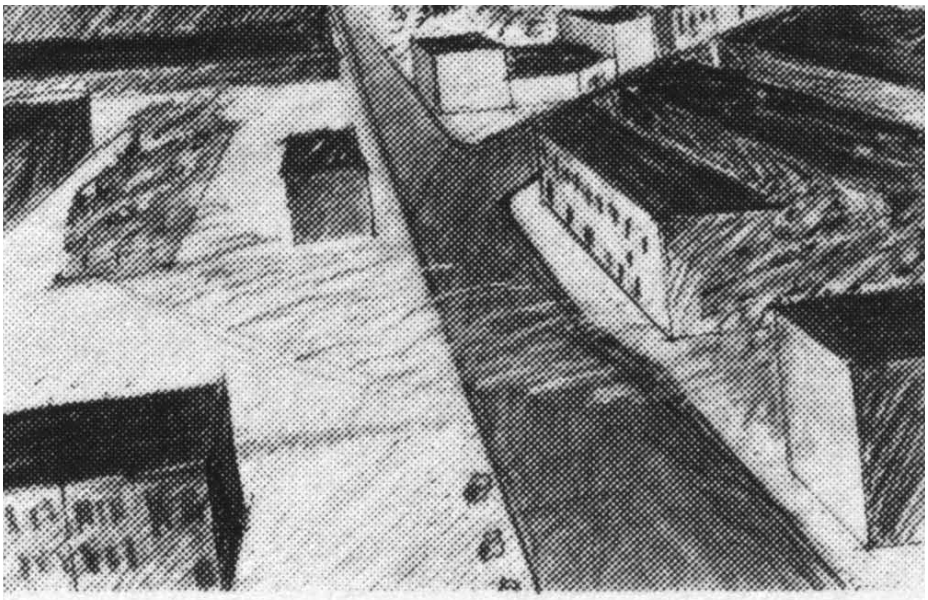
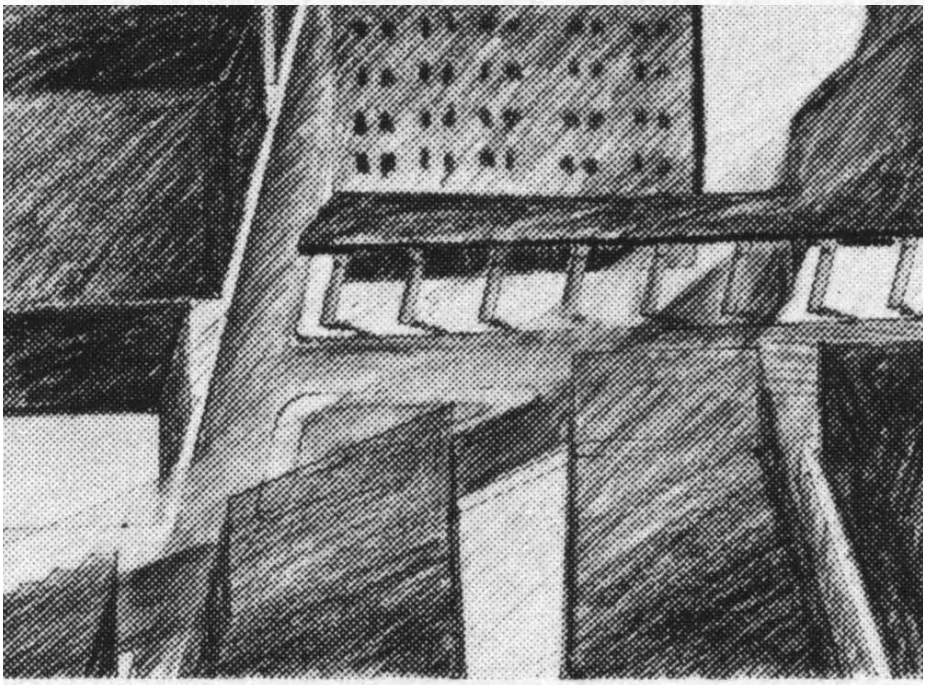




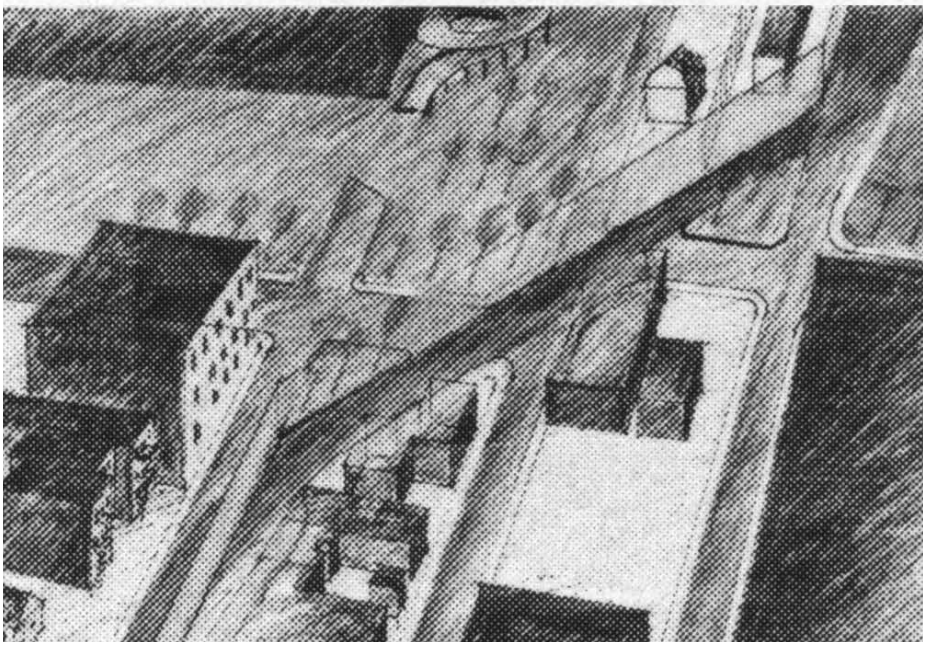


Figure 2 (opposite page, above).
François Rioux, Lieux et non lieux, (fragment), 1983 — student project, "Lieux et non lieux, The Representation of Little Burgundy", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Figure 3 (opposite page, below).
Denis R. Ouimette, Juxtaposition, 1983 — studenta project, "Manifesto, La petite Bourgogne", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Figure 4.
Joanne Godin, Tree places belonging to the linear village, 1988 — student project, "Gilford or Chemin des Carrières", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

ephemeral universe paradoxically constitutes material for sustainable development, in the sense of Félix Guattari's concept of "ecosophy." This work seeks to translate Guattari's ecosophy and heterogenesis[32] into an ethico-aesthetic practiced by architecture, seeking sustainability within the condition of non-growth (non-development). Ecosophy, according to Guattari, reframes the goal of emancipatory struggle, and heterogenesis allows us to experience architecture as a situational and performative dispositif—as well as a mixing of various and multiple natures such as interior/exterior, envelope/soil, mineral/vegetable, human/animal, etc.—thus turning architecture into an anti-object.

Public-Private, Again

Today the third territory, neither city nor countryside, dominates. The so-called traditional city is home to a tiny part of the Earth's population. Global space-time has produced one significant fact: the city is no longer a clear form. It is rather an organism that cannot be modeled, nor be made amenable to planning. It is this diffuse figure that has demonstrated the limits of the typo-morphological method. Additionally, North American and European architects today realize that the concentration of research on the western city renders the method of urban morphology and typology simply one specific interpretation, in which the cultural object and the thinking subject are part of this same culture.

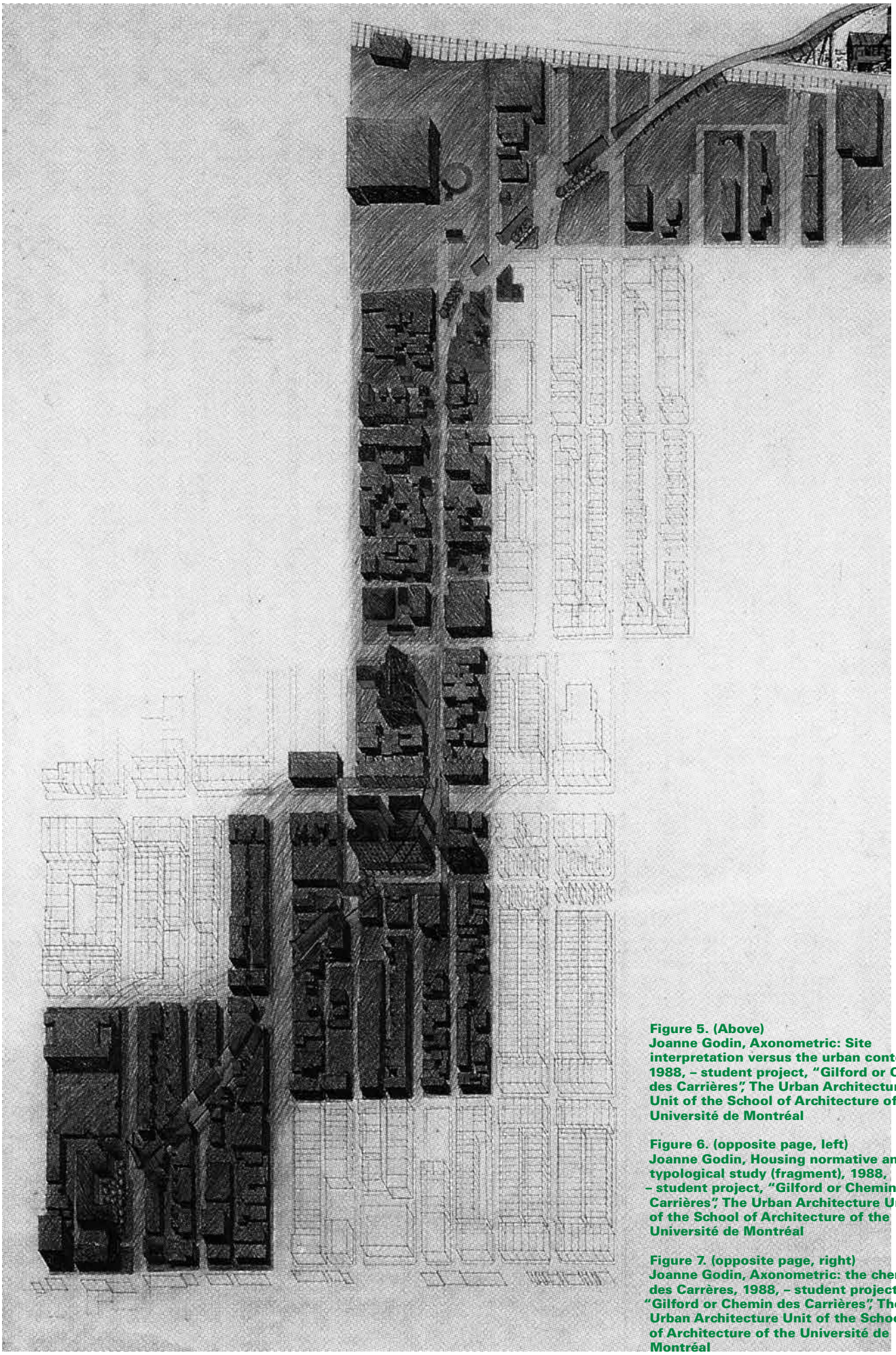
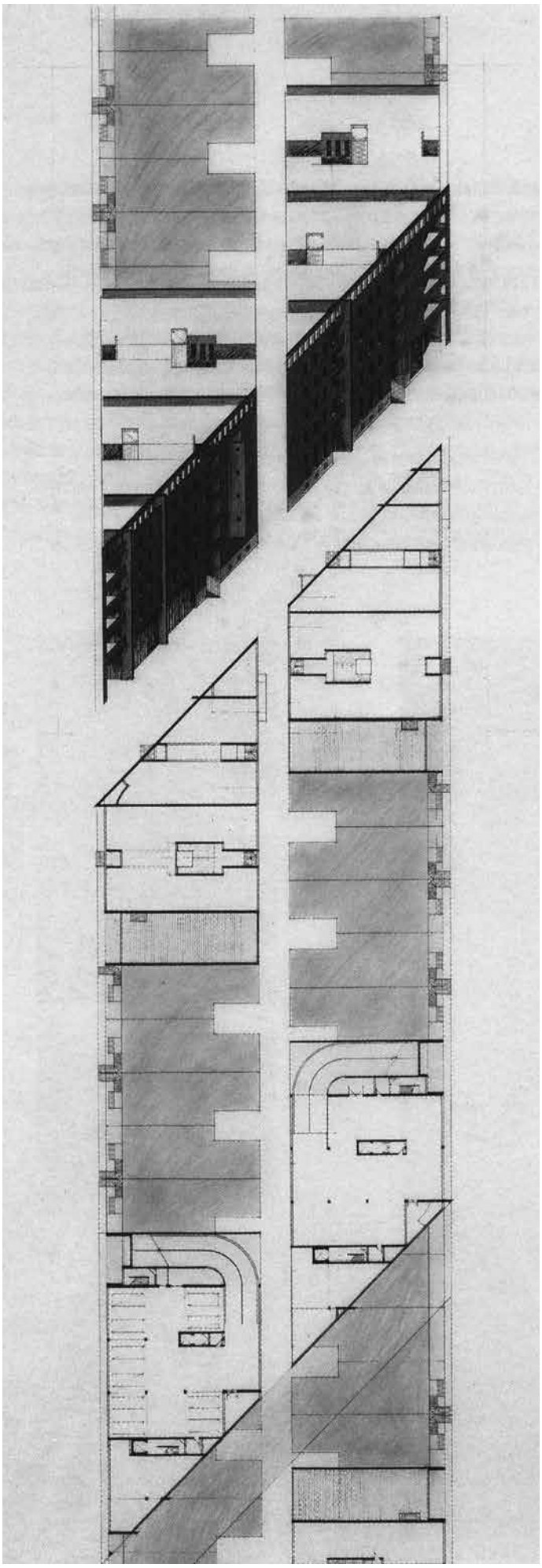
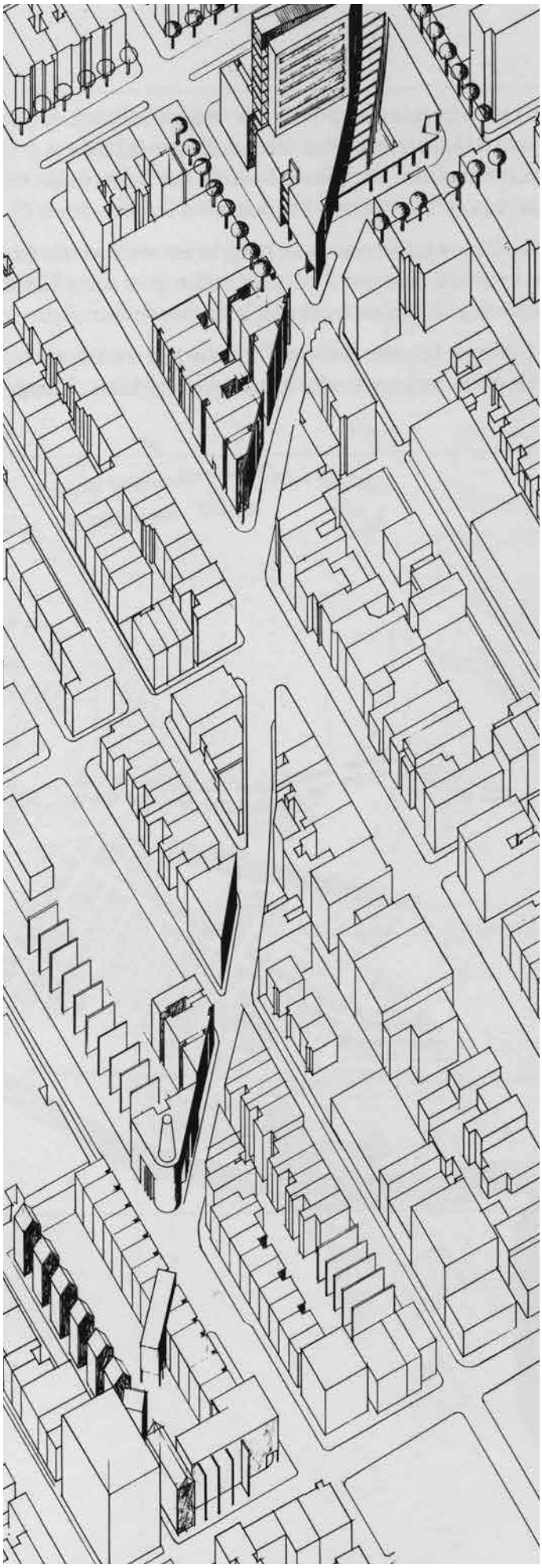


Figure 5. (Above)
Joanne Godin, Axonometric: Site interpretation versus the urban context, 1988, – student project, "Gilford or Chemin des Carrières", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Figure 6. (opposite page, left)
Joanne Godin, Housing normative and typological study (fragment), 1988, – student project, "Gilford or Chemin des Carrières", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Figure 7. (opposite page, right)
Joanne Godin, Axonometric: the chemin des Carrères, 1988, – student project, "Gilford or Chemin des Carrières", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal





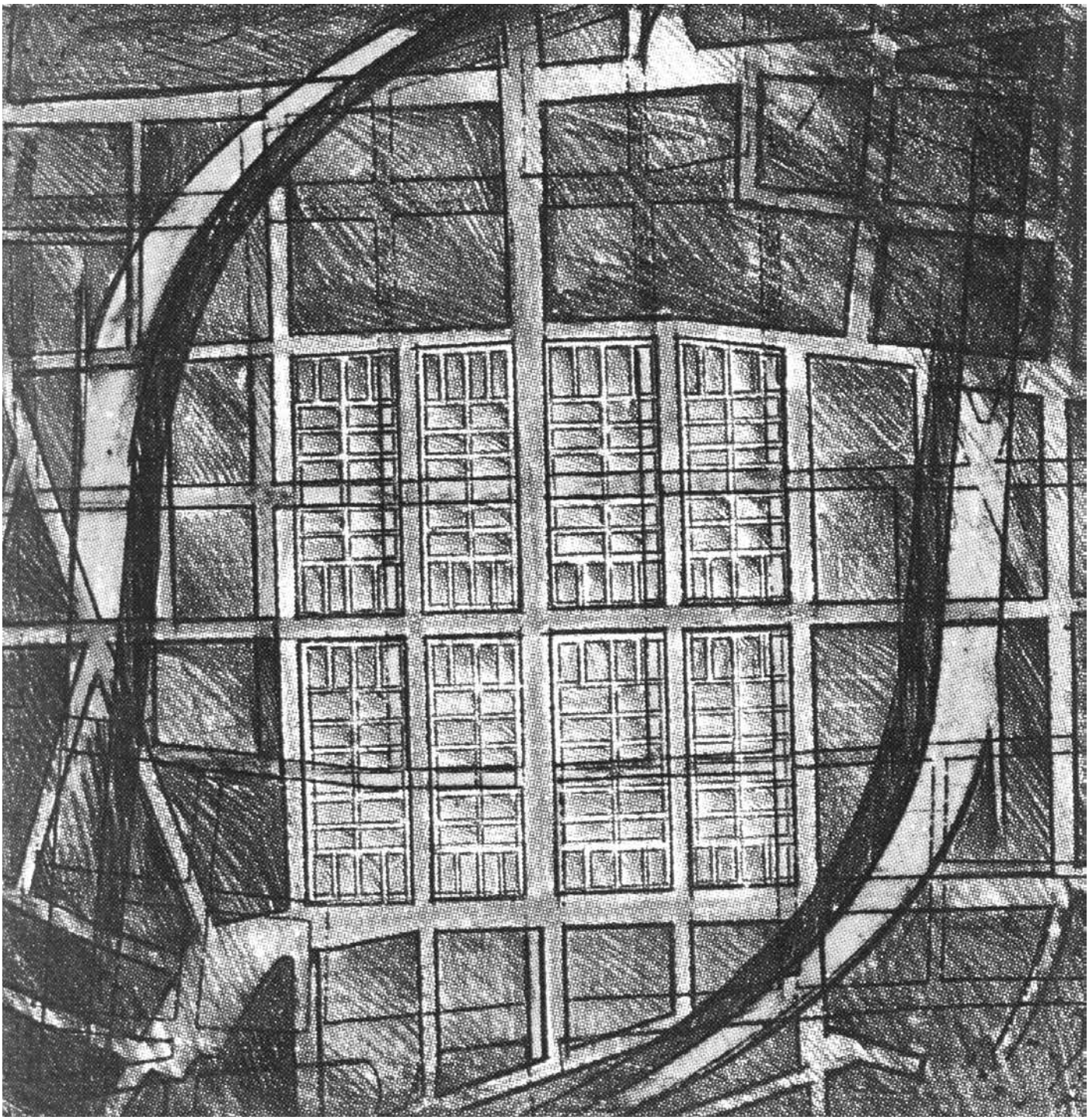


Figure 8.
Denyse Gauthier, The fortified neighborhood, 1988–1989 – student project, "An industrial neighborhood – from the railroad viaduct to the inhabited wall", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Still, typo-morphology has proved to be resilient tool. Albert Pope has recently argued that the grid, particularly the orthogonal grid, is the most permeable and accessible urban spatial organization to produce open subjectivities. And Joan Busquets has similarly demonstrated that such a frame is particularly flexible.[33] On the other hand, the radical change that the typo-morphological method introduced to the architect's relationship to the existing site, the larger territory, the urban fact, and the public space, remains its particularly contemporary aspect. Faced with ecological and social crises, the blank sheet of the architect-author, as a design tool, appears singularly incompatible with the necessity to understand environmental complexity, human diversity and coexistence in high-density spaces.

The sphere of public/private ambiguity is now increasing in virtual space and social media, with all the market abuses perpetrated by the monopolies that control them. And many other factors seem to be putting the notion of private property in crisis. Ecology pushes the programmatic, formal, and functional against the tendency towards compartmentalization. The circular economy and the mutualisation of spaces will necessarily change the apprehensions of property. But what seems most important is the third ecology—the mental and existential—that Guattari posed as the front line of the counterforce to unlimited

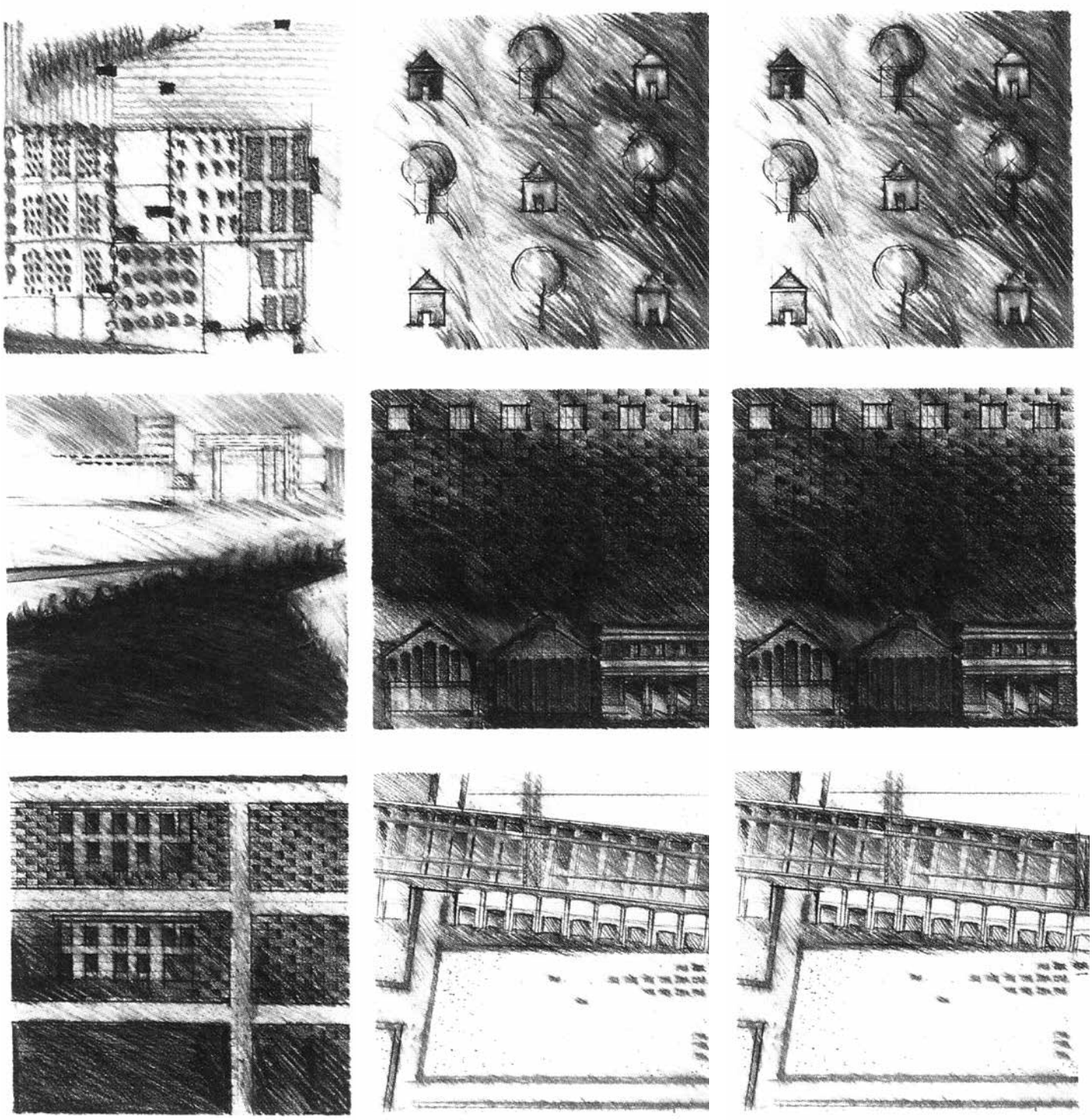
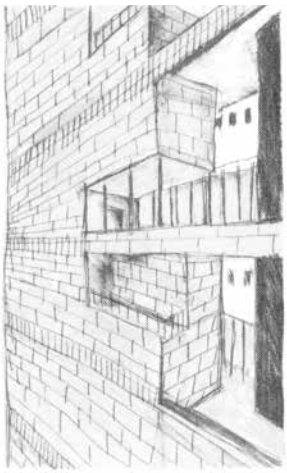
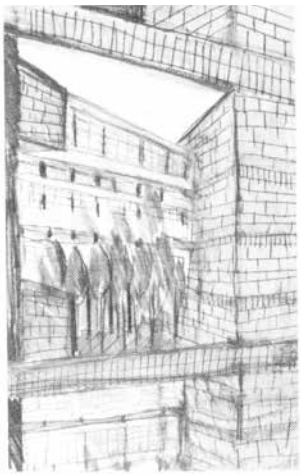


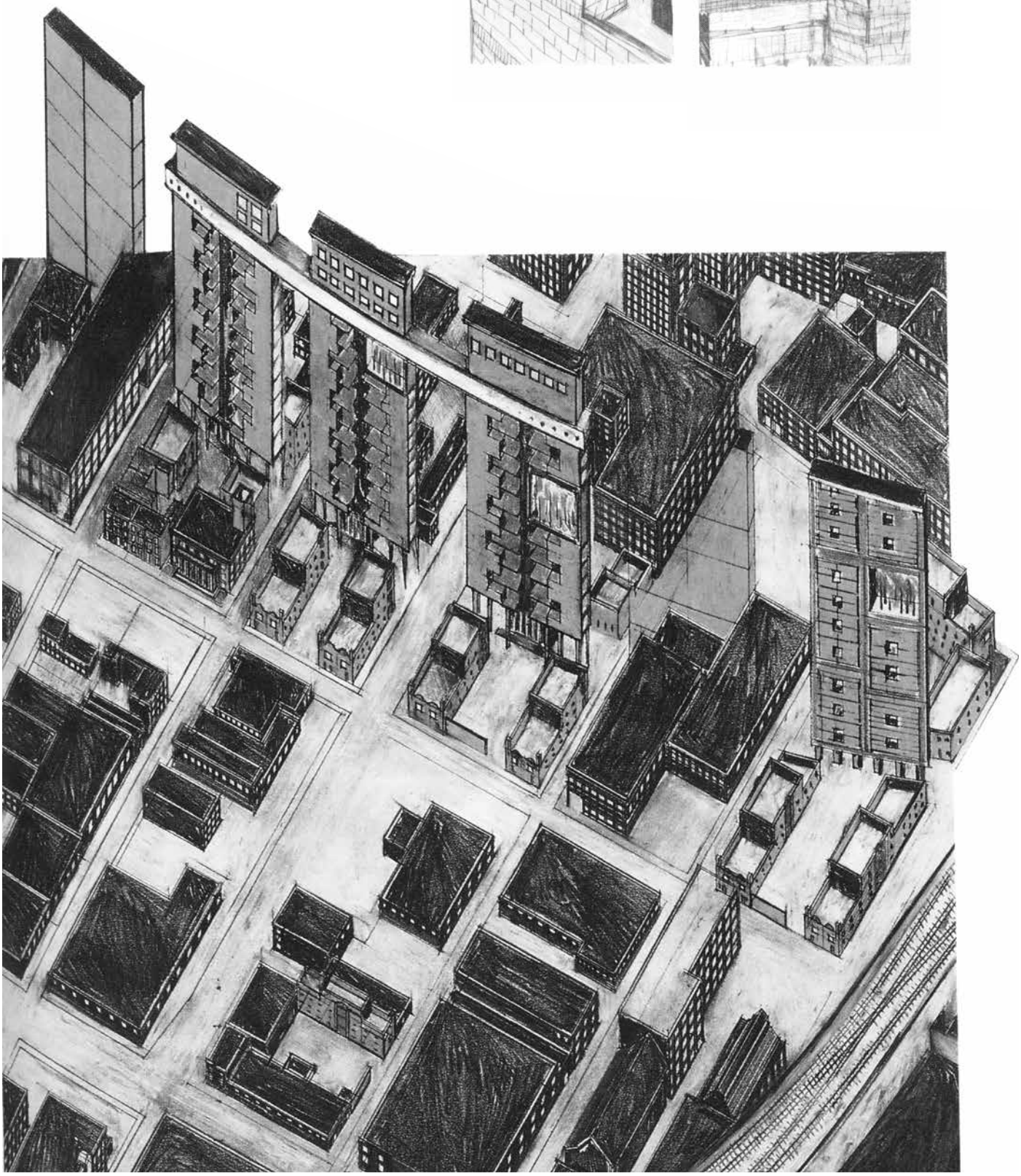
Figure 9.
Denyse Gauthier, Narrative, 1988–1989, 1983 – student project, "An industrial neighborhood – from the railroad viaduct to the inhabited wall", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

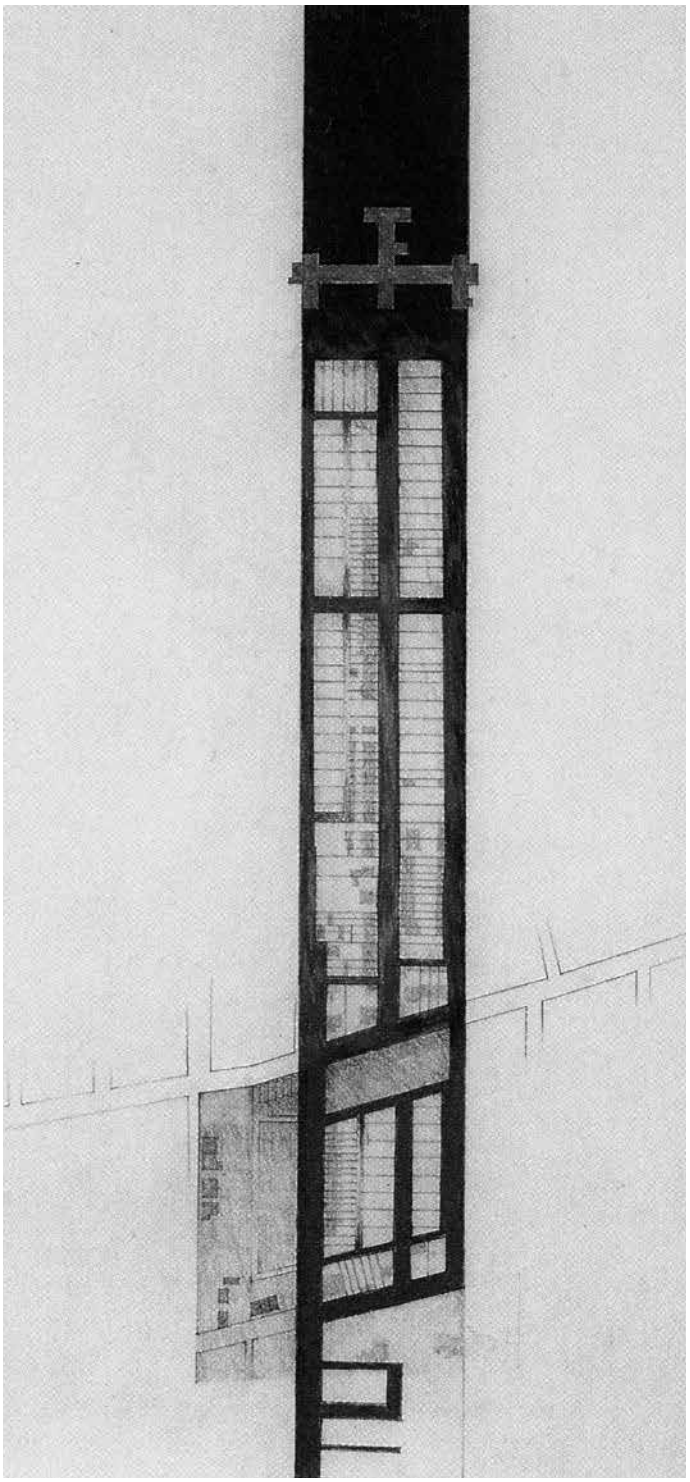
growth. These considerations could make us more modest, less productivist, and more attentive to what is already there; but this also permits us to tame the environmental and social monsters we ourselves created. On the one hand, space is not a void comparable to a blank sheet, but a living and material landscape filled with memories (clearly not fixed, but fleeting), mediations, and trajectories. On the other, the parcel is a result of contractual action—and as Julius Grey argues, the contract is a defensive instrument of capitalism. In this action, the two parts are rarely equal.

Figure 10.
Denyse Gauthier, Interpretation of the block: the inhabited wall and the courtyards, 1988-1989 – student project, "An industrial neighborhood – from the railroad viaduct to the inhabited wall", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal









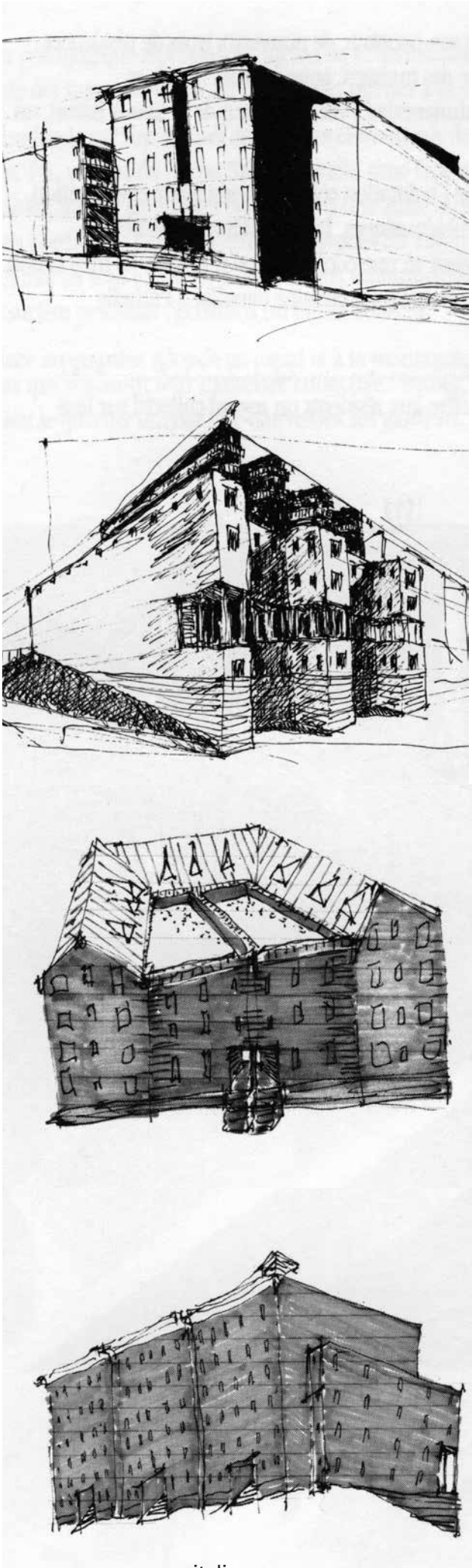


Figure 11. (above)
Peter Soland, The Territory of the Institution, 1989 – student project, "Collective Housing on Sherbrooke street", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Figure 12. (right)
Peter Soland, Four conceptual sketches, 1989 – student project, "Collective Housing on Sherbrooke street", The Urban Architecture Unit of the School of Architecture of the Université de Montréal

Endnotes

1 Jean Castex, "Saverio Muratori (1910–1973)," *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale et urbaine* 29 (2014): 13–35.

2 See Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal, "Urbanistic Administration and Building Policies After World War II," in *Modern Architecture* (New York: Abrams, 1979).

3 We refer to Carlo Aymonino's course, *Aspetti e problemi della typologia edilizia* at l'Institut d'Architecture de Venise, 1964–1966, commented on by Philippe in *Éléments d'analyse urbaine* (Bruxelles, Archives d'Architecture Moderne, 1980). See also Panerai's article "L'étude pratique des plans de ville," *Villes en parallèle* 12–13 (November 1988).

4 Some exemplary articles from *Oppositions* include: Anthony Vidler, "The Third Typology," *Oppositions* 7 (Winter 1976); Raphael Moneo, "On Typology," *Oppositions* 12 (Summer 1978); and Giorgio Grassi, "Avant-Garde and Continuity," *Oppositions* 21 (Summer 1980).

5 Anne Vernez-Moudon, Built for Change: *Neighborhood Architecture in San Francisco* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

6 Steven Hall, *Pamphlet Architecture #5:The Alphabetical City* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

7 Structural Linguistics, a scientific method for the study of language, rose to great importance in the humanities in the 1960s in France, and in the 1970s in other countries including the United States and Canada. It was introduced to architects in English-speaking countries by George Baird's writings of the late 1960s. See George Baird, "'La Dimension Amoureuse' in Architecture," in *Meaning in Architecture,* ed. Charles Jencks and George Baird (London: Barrie and Rockliff, The Cresset Press, 1969).

8 Michaël Darin, *Introduction à l'histoire Morphologique des Villes* (École d'architecture de Nantes, Bureau de recherche architecturale, 1994).

9 Henri Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain,* ed. Mario Gaviria (Paris, Anthropos, 1979).

10 In addition to these remarks, we note different postures of researchers with regard to the city's figure as a model of urban design. If the Italian circle identified a point of rupture between the trad-itional city and the advent of the modern *Siedlungen,* concentrating these typo-morphological studies on the first, the French school included the city of modern urbanism by adopting the same conceptual and instrumental framework. See Jean Castex et al., *Formes urbaines: De l'îlot à la barre* (Paris: Dunod, 1977).

11 Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: PUF, 1968 [1950]).

12 Bruno Fortier, *La métropole imaginaire: Un atlas de Paris* (Liège: Madraga, 1989).

13 An example of this would be the subdivision of the Odeon district in Paris with a theatre. See, among others works, Daniel Rabreau, "The Theatre-monument: A century of 'French' typology," *Zodiac* 2 (1988).

14 Philippe Panerai et al., *Éléments d'analyse urbaine* (Brussels: Archives d'Architecture Moderne, 1980).

15 See *Paris Projet* 13/14, Les règlements du P.O.S. et le paysage de Paris (APUR, 1975).

16 Panerai et al., *Éléments d'analyse urbaine.*

17 George Baird, "La parcelle constitue la base de la morphologie urbaine," in *Morphologie urbaine et parcellaire: Colloque d'Arc-et-Senans* (28 et 29 octobre 1985), ed. Pierre Merlin, et al. (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1988).

18 Philippe Panarai, "L'étude pratique des plans de ville," *Villes en parallèle* 12–13 (November 1988).

19 Bernard Huet, "Conversation autour de l'architecture urbaine," in *Architectures en France, modernité/post modernité* (Paris: Centre Georges-Pompidou/C.C.I., 1981), 48 (our translation).

20 We refer to: Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, Modern architecture, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1986 [1976]), and Manfredo Tafuri, *Projet et utopie* (Paris: Dunod, 1979).

21 However, it should be noted that morphological studies of American cities emerged in the 1970s as part of *urban design* programs.

22 The typo-morphological system of Montreal is described in "The Montrealness of Montréal," *The Architectural Review* 999 (May 1980), an article whose first translation into French of the revised version by the author appeared in *Ville Métaphore Projet: City Metaphors, Urban Constructs,* ed. Irena Latek (Montréal, Méridien, 1992).

23 We are referring to the expression "Saisir Montréal," the title of the theoretical text that Melvin Charney published in a guide for the Société d'architecture de Montréal: *Découvrir Montréal* (Montréal, Éditions du Jour, 1975).

24 Two definitions commonly cited and opposed in the works of the 1970s and 1980s (that of Vitruvius and Étienne-Louis Boullée).

25 Charney proposed the term "architecture as human potential" in "Saisir Montréal."

26 The ideality (and radicality) of the proposal is comparable to that of the proposals of the modern avant-garde. Our idea parallels Tafuri's interpretation of the concepts of modern architecture in *Projet et utopie,* 1979.

27 Melvin Charney, "*Pour une définition de l'architecture au Québec*," in *Architecture et urbanisme au Québec* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1971), 36 (our translation).

28 Ibid.

29 See Charney, "Saisir Montréal," 23.

30 Ibid., 28 (our translation).

31 Ibid., 33 (our translation).

32 Félix Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1989.)

33 See Albert Pope, "Terminal Distribution," Architectural Design (Jan–Feb 2008); Joan Busquets, Dingliang Yang, and Michael Keller, *Urban Grids: Handbook for Regular City Design* (New York, Oro Editions, 2018).

34 By "mutualization" I mean the permanent or temporary pooling of resources of various kinds, knowledge, goods, premises, use of land. A perfect example is the vacant lot made available for use by different communities, an example of this in Montreal is Aire commune. https://www.airecommune.com

35 This is the thesis that lawyer, law professor and left-wing intellectual Julius Gray advances in his latest book *Capitalism and the Alternatives* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).


From City Lines
to Life Paths
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state
capitalism