Syracuse University

SURFACE

Imperfect Square: Reconsidering the Dialectical Condition between Fabric and Object in Urban Environments

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IMPERFECT SQUARE

Reconsidering the Dialectical Condition between Fabric and Object in Urban Environments

As a critique to Modernism's insistence upon the primary solid and isolation of building as an object within a void, a series of square blocks are placed into a cleared site in order to reintroduce urban fabric. The new field acts as a spatial matrix creating a new area of density to a blighted portion of the City of Syracuse. The subtraction of each square both emphasizes the object and defines space. Its uniformity as a solid massing differentiates the existing structures as exceptions and the voids each object-building becomes situated in creates a series of open spaces within the City. The concept of Imperfection is implied by the deformation of each square block that is conceived as a "perfect" cubic entity.

The thesis proposes to provide a new urban design approach to improve blighted areas in urban environments. It offers a strategy to patch together the fragmented physical landscape of the Shrinking City into a cohesive urban fabric.

The issue at hand is the need to recapture "lost" space, the underused, deteriorated areas in the City of Syracuse. To the east of Downtown, buildings are dispersed throughout a vast wasteland of parking lots and vacant land. This collection of objects lacks a cohesive, unifying framework. The blighted area is in need of infill, an insertion of urban fabric to stitch the City back together.

In understanding the new structure of the City as an interwoven pattern of variegated levels of density and pockets of open space, the thesis accepts the reality of a less extensively built environment by reconsidering the traditional notion of urban fabric as a solid poche to something that is less dense and more open, but still adhesive. Through an interwoven pattern of solid and void, the thesis aims to show that a grouping of objects can merge into a stretch of fabric that can reunite fragmented portions of the City.

In consideration of the current realities of its post-industrial situation, the thesis asks how under-used land can become an asset, rather than an obstacle, for the future sustainability of the City. Rather than anticipate large-scale re-development to extend the size of the current Downtown core, the City should conceive a long-term strategy for repurposing the open space in its urban center.

The project that emerges is thus a master plan for a "rurban" development that acts as a new institutional campus for the research of urban agriculture. The private institution also supports a public commercial farming complex in an aim to revive the City's struggling economy through a shift towards the food production industry.

The proposed educational research facility is conveniently located within the City's aspiring innovation district, the so-called Connective Corridor, a collaboration between higher education institutions, the public sector and private enterprise to revitalize areas of the City as new knowledge-based industry clusters.
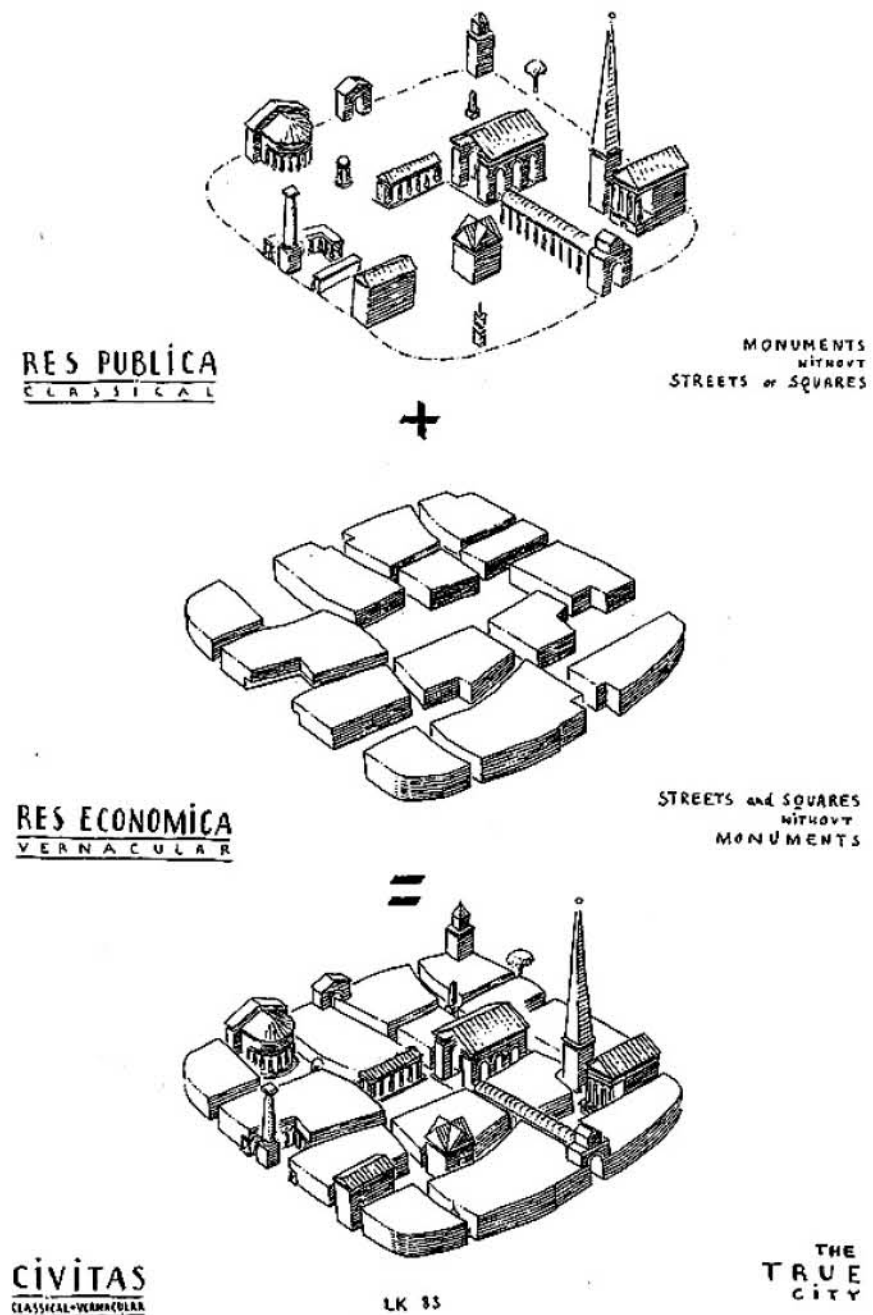
_Richelle Gewertz
_Advisor: Liz Kamell
_Thesis Preparation Fall 2015

The City is an
Architectural Construct...

The Traditional city is dialectical reading between fabric and object, in which monuments or important buildings stand out against a repetition of relatively homogenous facades in the town. As an image of continuity, the urban fabric can be considered a solid mass from which space can be carved. The city is a field of texture composed of streets, squares, and blocks. The object is understood as its own unique entity, an exceptional element that stands out against a background.

Urban Architecture should define space, not occupy it. The traditional city is a series of voids within a dense poché.
But in the past century, the matrix of the city has transformed from continuous solid to continuous void. The Modernist city is composed of isolated buildings in vast open space, where emphasis is placed on the building volumes rather than the spaces that the buildings define or imply.

The Modern Architect reduced the significance of the object by insisting all building types should assume the role as primary solid. They disregarded the traditional method of deforming an ideal model to fit a less than "perfect" site in favor of the pure shape whose perimeter is indestructible. The increased multiplication of buildings as objects has problematically resulted in the neglect of fabric in twentieth-century urbanization.

RES PUBLICA
CLASSICAL

MONUMENTS
WITHOUT
STREETS or SQUARES

+

RES ECONOMICA
VERNACULAR

STREETS and SQUARES
WITHOUT
MONUMENTS

=

CIVITAS
CLASSICAL+VERNACULAR

LK 85

THE
TRUE
CITY

Leon Krier's Components of a True City

"The building fabric gives an image of continuity, of expansiveness stretching to 'infinity,' the object is a closed element, finite, comprehensible, as an entity. Objects concentrate visual attention: they stand out against a background. This concept can be transposed to the town where certain structures appear as objects (object-buildings) because they stand out from the urban fabric."

Pierre Von Meiss

Town & Monument
Fabric & Object

"A **Field** is an area of the city which has distinct, defining characteristics, achieved through clear shaped edge and an inner fabric inscribed with pattern...

Texture is the basic matrix material of the city, characterized by the combined pattern of streets, squares, and blocks whose variations range from gridded to random. The variables of texture are degree of regularity, proportion of solid to void, and density. It has aspects of scale and repetitiveness, grain and directionality....

The **Street** is linear, axial, open and continuous. It is the ordering element, connecting through the city, beyond any local field, as well as the essential constant strand of local texture...

The **Square** is centralized, closed, and discontinuous. It acts as a spatial variable linked by the streets into the field...
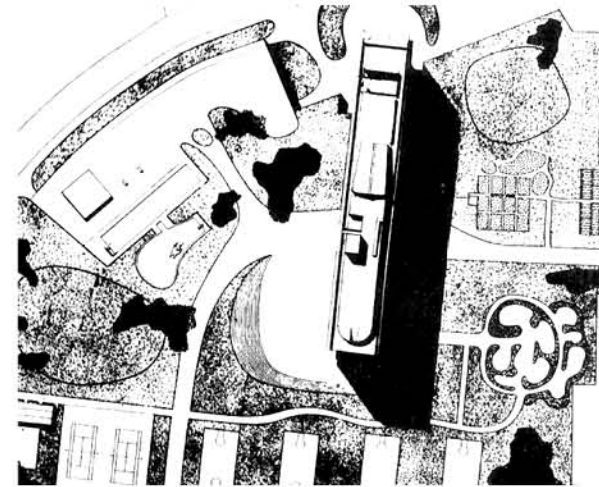
The **Block** is the principal element of the urban field and texture. It is not necessarily a constant, repetitive, modular element, but it is itself a variable requiring flexibility in size, proportion, and perimeter configuration."
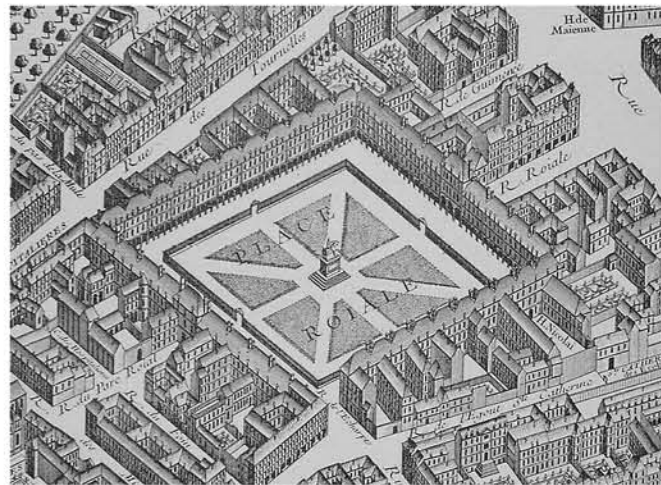
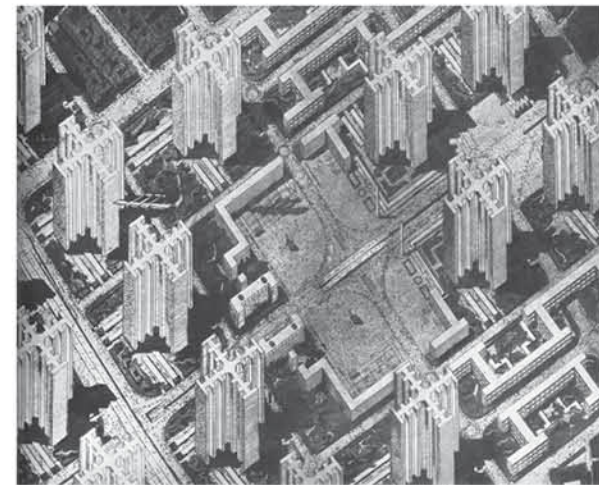**Steven Peterson**

Urban Elements
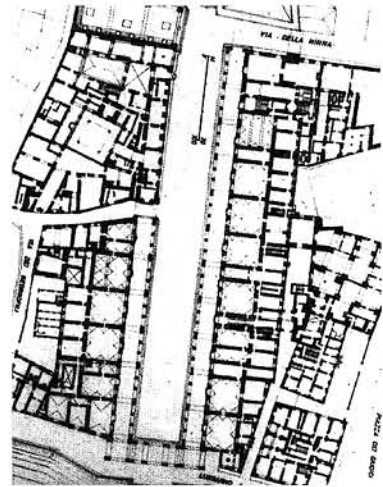
Uffizi in Florence

Le Corbusier, Unite d'Habitation in Marseilles, 1946

Place Royale in Paris
From the Plan Turgot, 1739

Le Corbusier, Plan Voisin in Paris
Aerial Axonometric, 1925

"The traditional city is primarily an experience of spaces defined by continuous walls of building which are arranged in a way that emphasizes the spaces and de-emphasizes the building volumes. It is an experience which can be thought of as resulting from a subtractive process in which spaces have been carved out of solid masses...

...By contrast, the city-in-the-park is compositionally the reverse of the traditional city. Composed of isolated buildings set in a park-like landscape, the city-in-the-park presents an experience which emphasizes the building volumes and not the spaces which the buildings define or imply."
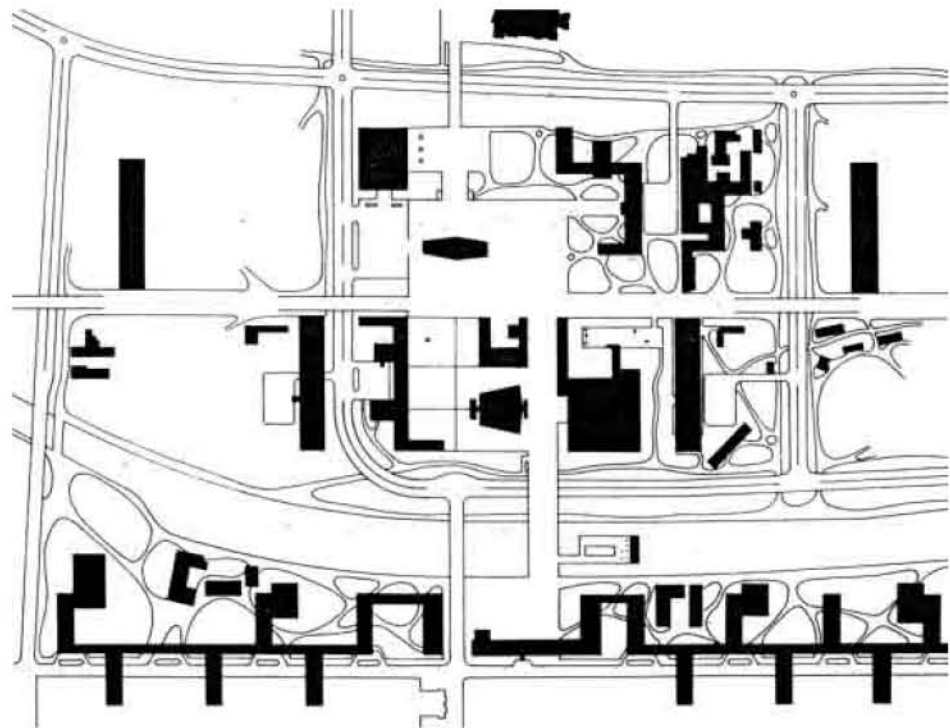
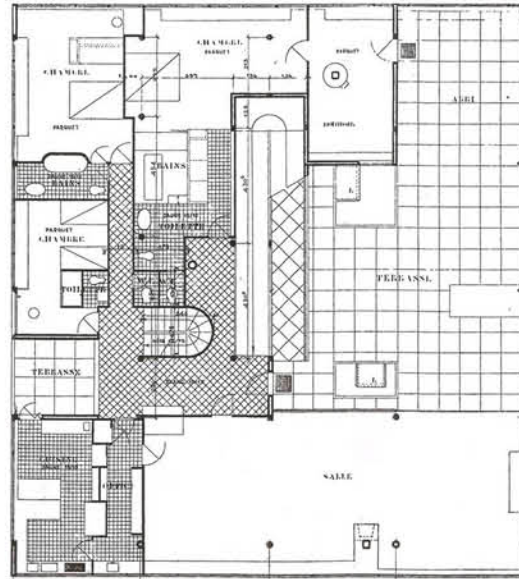Thomas Schumacher

Space Definer vs.
Space Occupier
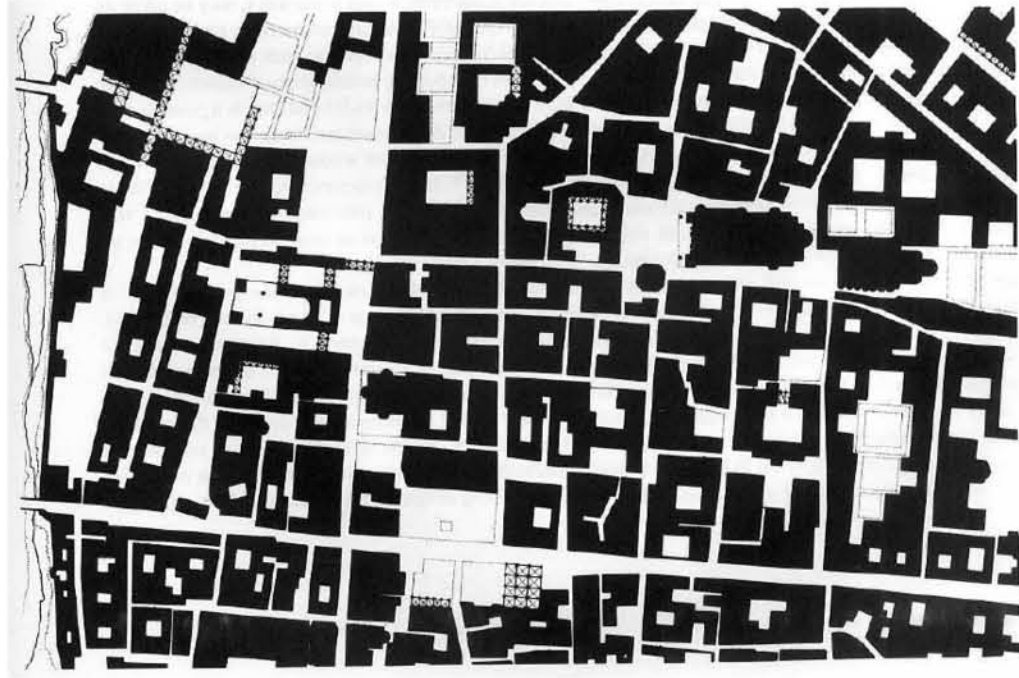
Parma
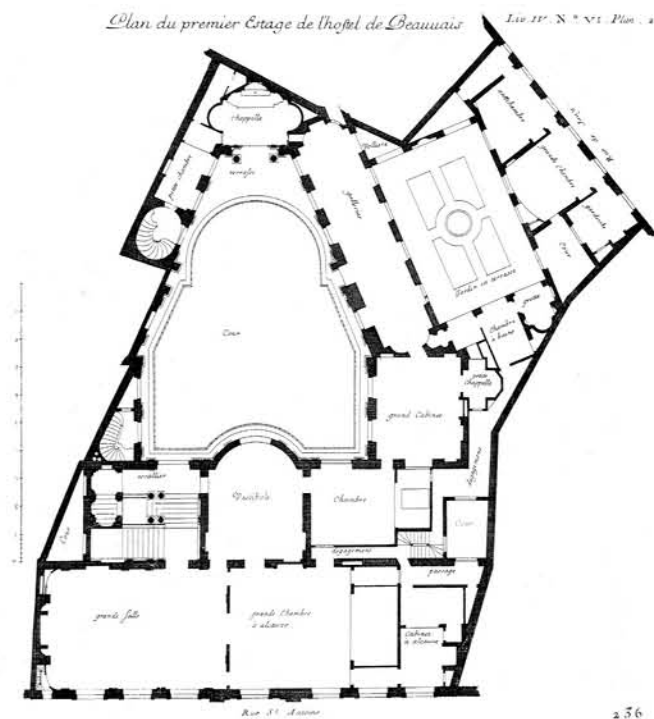Figure-ground from Colin Rowe, *Crisis of the Object*

Le Corbusier, Project for Saint-Die
Figure-ground from Colin Rowe, *Crisis of the Object*

Voids in Solid vs.
Solids in Void

Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye in Poissy, France, 1928

Hotel de Beauvais, Paris

*"The concept that a building should exist as an object in the round, isolated from its neighbors, multi-sided and without preferential faces, is of course not new. What was new for modern architecture was the insistence that this type of configuration be typical for all building types rather than special to particularly important building uses."*

Thomas Schumacher

Ideal vs.
Deformed

"A fundamental problem of twentieth-century urbanization is that it has led to the manipulation of objects and the neglect of fabrics. There are too many buildings which present themselves as "objects," indifferent to the public or hierarchical role they play in the values of our society... As building objects have multiplied they have thus lost their value as exceptions."

Pierre Von Meiss
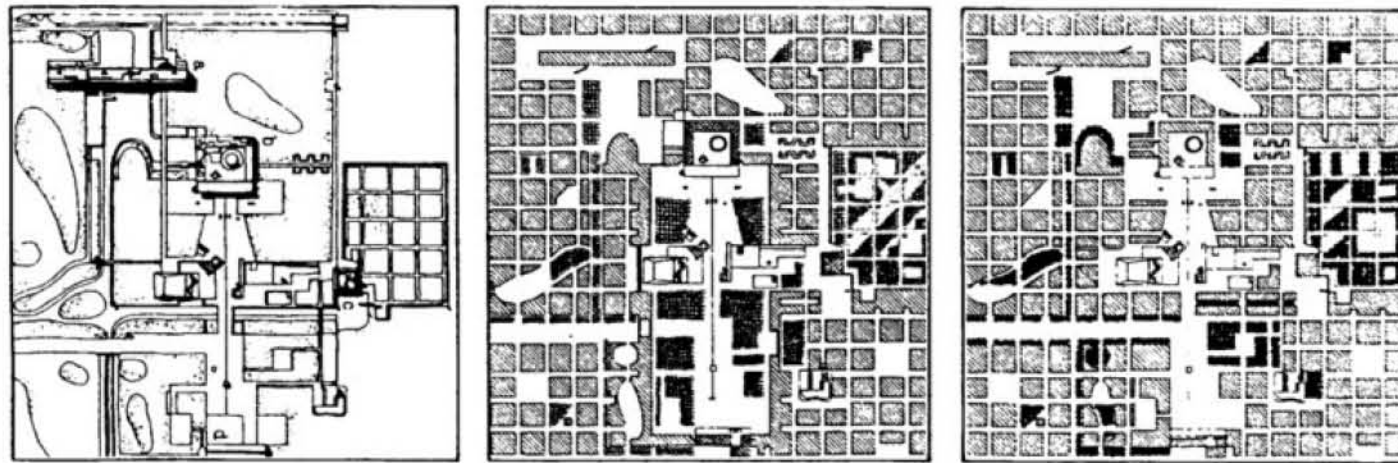
Rodrigo Perez de Arce, Scheme for the Transformation of Chandigarh
Urban Transformations and the Architecture of Additions." Architectural Design, 1978

De Arce's drawings for the additive transformation of Chandigarh demonstrate the possibility of "re-urbanizing" an environment of vast emptiness through the infill of urban poche as a superimposed matrix of square blocks. In this way, fabric and figure are once again able to mutually reinforce one another. In this new city of street and square, the object buildings become exceptional set pieces that emerge from a uniform surface.

A Strategy for Urban Infill

To Recapture
our "Lost" Space...

Syracuse, We have a problem. There is a proliferation of underused, deteriorated areas in the center of the City. To the east of Downtown, in the former 15th Ward Neighborhood, buildings are dispersed throughout a vast wasteland of parking lots and vacant land. This collection of objects lacks a cohesive, unifying framework. The blighted area is in need of infill, an insertion of urban fabric to stitch Syracuse back together. The importance of creating a master plan lies in the desire to avoid the continuation of disperse and piecemeal planning that will not produce connective, well-defined space. We should take hold of the opportunity to recapture our "lost" space to make it valuable urban land.

"Shrinking cities have in their decline shifted toward a
differentiated, if unorganized, pattern of lower
and higher building densities."

Brent D. Ryan, Rightsizing Shrinking Cities
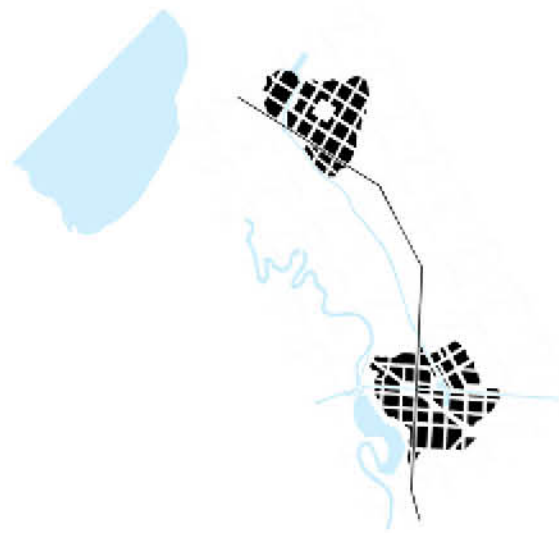
1825
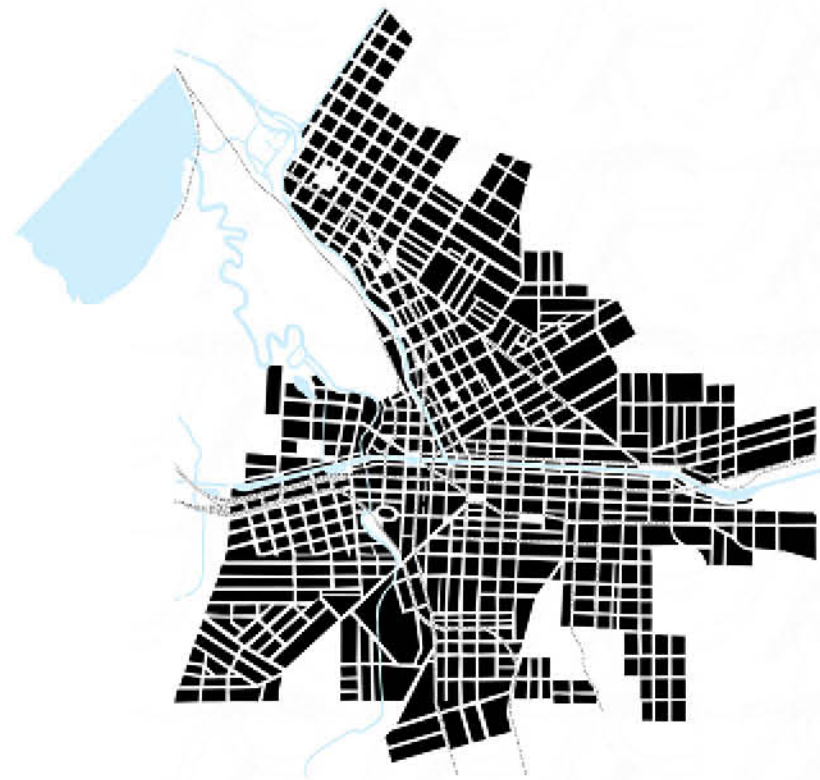
1873
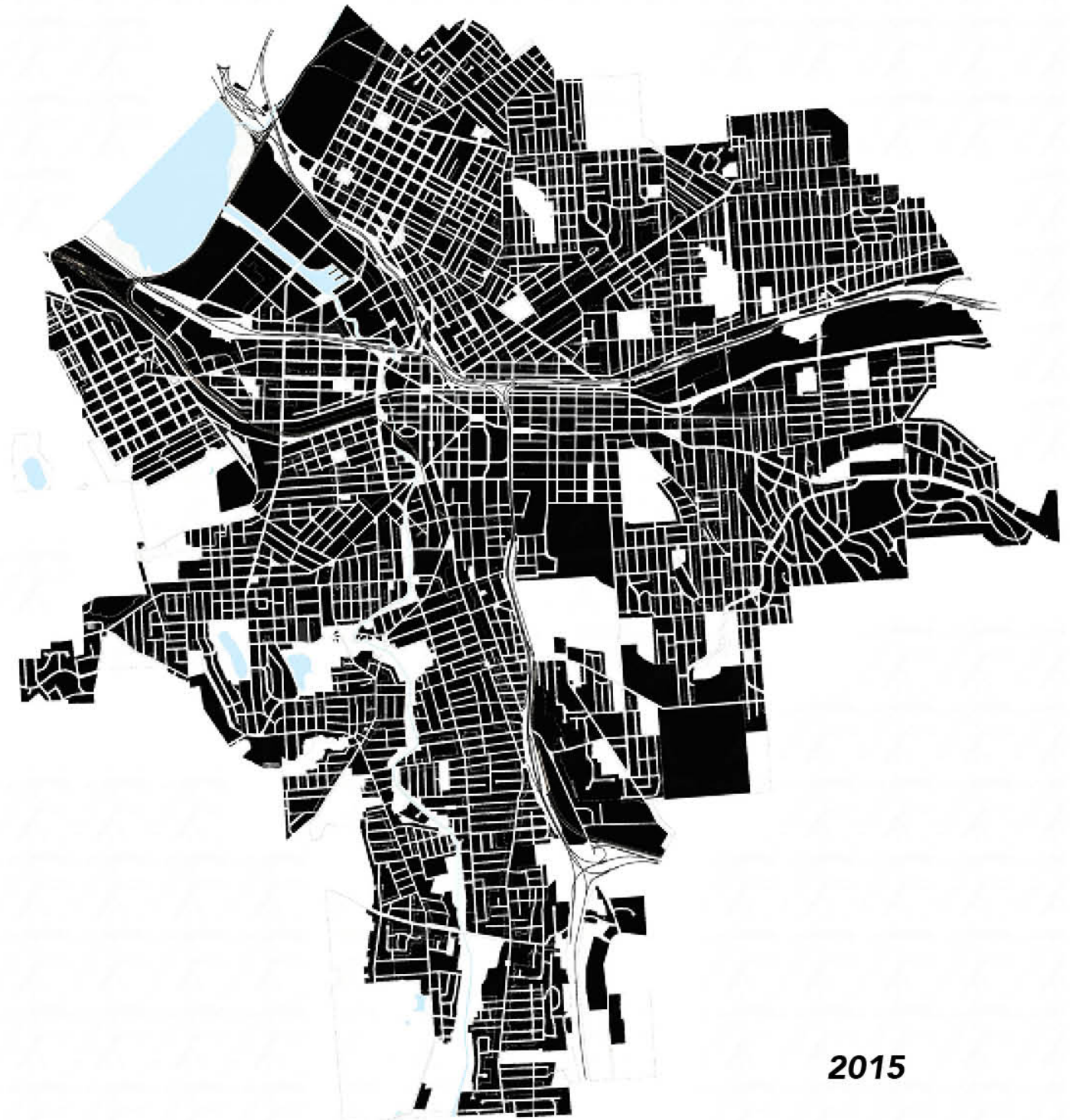
2015

2015

pre-1950

The formerly homogenous pattern has become a frayed and tattered urban fabric.

"...Generally speaking, **lost spaces** are the undesirable urban areas that are in need of re-design—anti-spaces, making no positive contribution to the surroundings or users. They are ill defined, without measurable boundaries and fail to connect elements in a coherent way..."

Roger Trancik

Hypothesis

1

The project aims to elicit new meaning and form from, and establish new connections between the urban fragments at Syracuse.

2 Theories of fabric and object are to be applied to a highly, undeveloped portion of the City as a strategy for infill.

3 I propose an additive modular system that can be applied anywhere, but have chosen to use downtown Syracuse as an urban laboratory to test my claims.

4 The architecture that is produced will act as a critique on the current condition of the American City and present a possible solution for blighted areas that were devastated by Urban Renewal.

Let's Put this into Context...

Facing the Reality of a Shrinking City

While there is a global trend of urbanization, the city of Syracuse, like many rust-belt cities of the Northeast, is classified as a "shrinking," third-tier city. Massive new development is highly unlikely in this neglected and disinvested post-industrial landscape. The traditional "build it and they will come" approach is not going to work if there is no market to support it.

NEW YORK

Global City

the spine of the international economy, with a huge multicultural population, housing the international headquarters of corporations and diverse modes of production and consumption

BOSTON

Second Tier City

smaller in size, nationally important, has both economic and social potential

SYRACUSE

Third Tier City

signified by depopulation, disinvestment, economic decline and a reduction in public services

Syracuse is Insignificant

Sudbury

Montreal

Toronto

Springfield
Cambridge

Saint Paul
Minneapolis

Rochester

Flint Syracuse

Worcester

Detroit Albany
Warren Buffalo Providence
Milwaukee Cleveland Erie Bridgeport New Haven Hartford
Chicago Jersey City
Gary Toledo Akron Newark
South Bend Wilmington
Peoria

Dayton Pittsburgh
Kansas City Evansville Cincinnati Arlington Baltimore
Richmond
Saint Louis Norfolk
Louisville

Portsmouth

Chattanooga

Columbia
Atlanta
Birmingham Macon
Savannah

New Orleans

Shrinking City:
a phenomenon

the decline of the urban
population & economic acitivity

-34%

↓
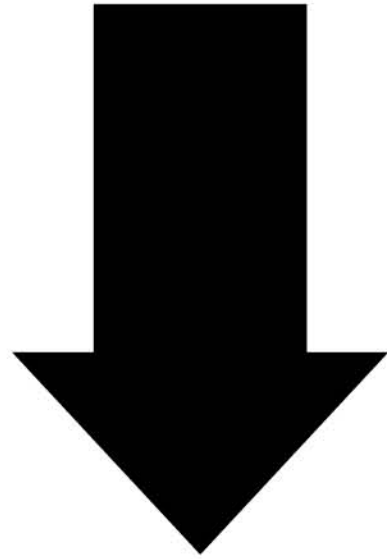
population drop
since 1950

Syracuse
shrank...

"Jobs vacate these small cities, along with population. Downtowns stuggle. The tax base reduces. The difficulty in retaining young people and attracting new residents in profound. Facililties and infrastructure follow the population."

Tara Brabazon, Rethinking Third-Tier Cities

Dissolving City...

Understanding Today's Urban Environment

The post-industrial city has become a scrambled mixture, a de-concentrated cityscape spreading indefinitely into the periphery. This new urban structure lacks a traditional urban core, instead existing as a polycentric and weblike sprawl. The city's boundaries are no longer perceivable as it dissolves into one whole metropolitan region.

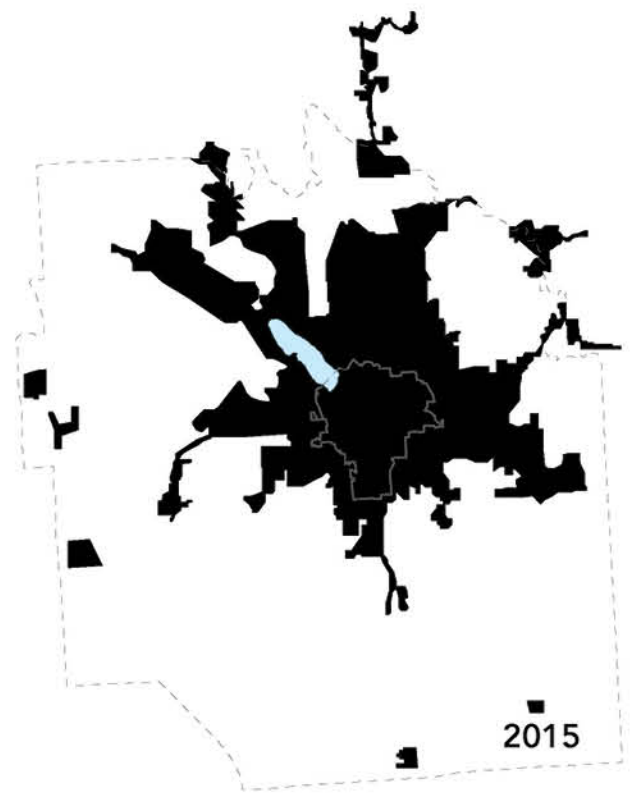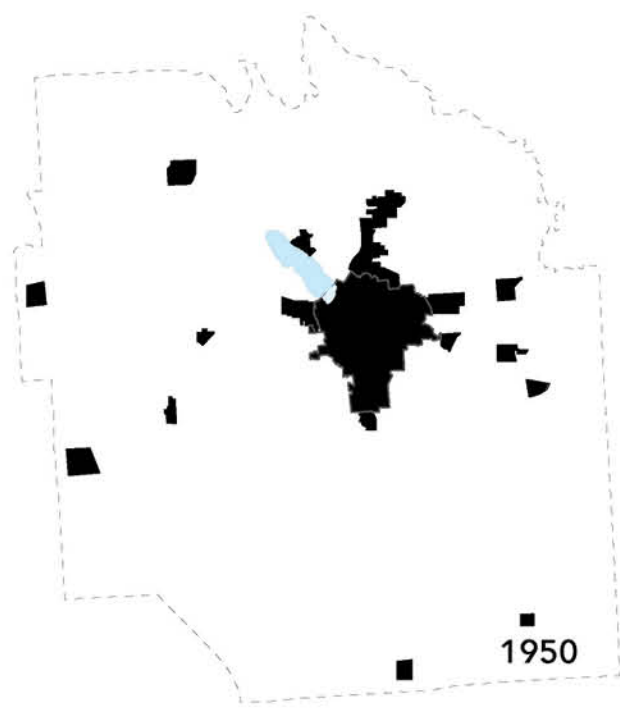# 10%

of the word's population lived in cities in 1900

50%

live in cities today

75%

is an estimate for the year 2050

The World is Rapidly Urbanizing...

1840

1900

1950

2015
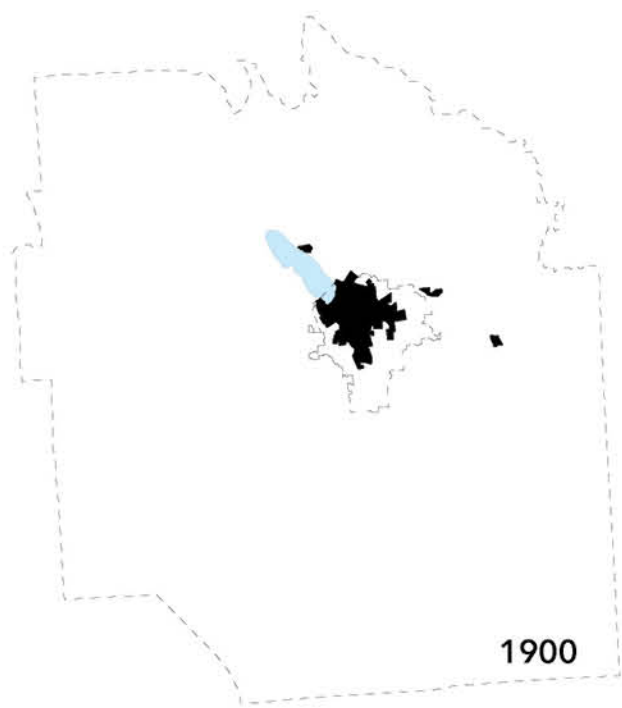
65%

of Onondaga County's population lived in the City of Syarcuse in 1950

3%

live in the City today

Deconcentration in an Urban Age

"Shrinkage in one place feeds growth in another"
Philip Oswalt
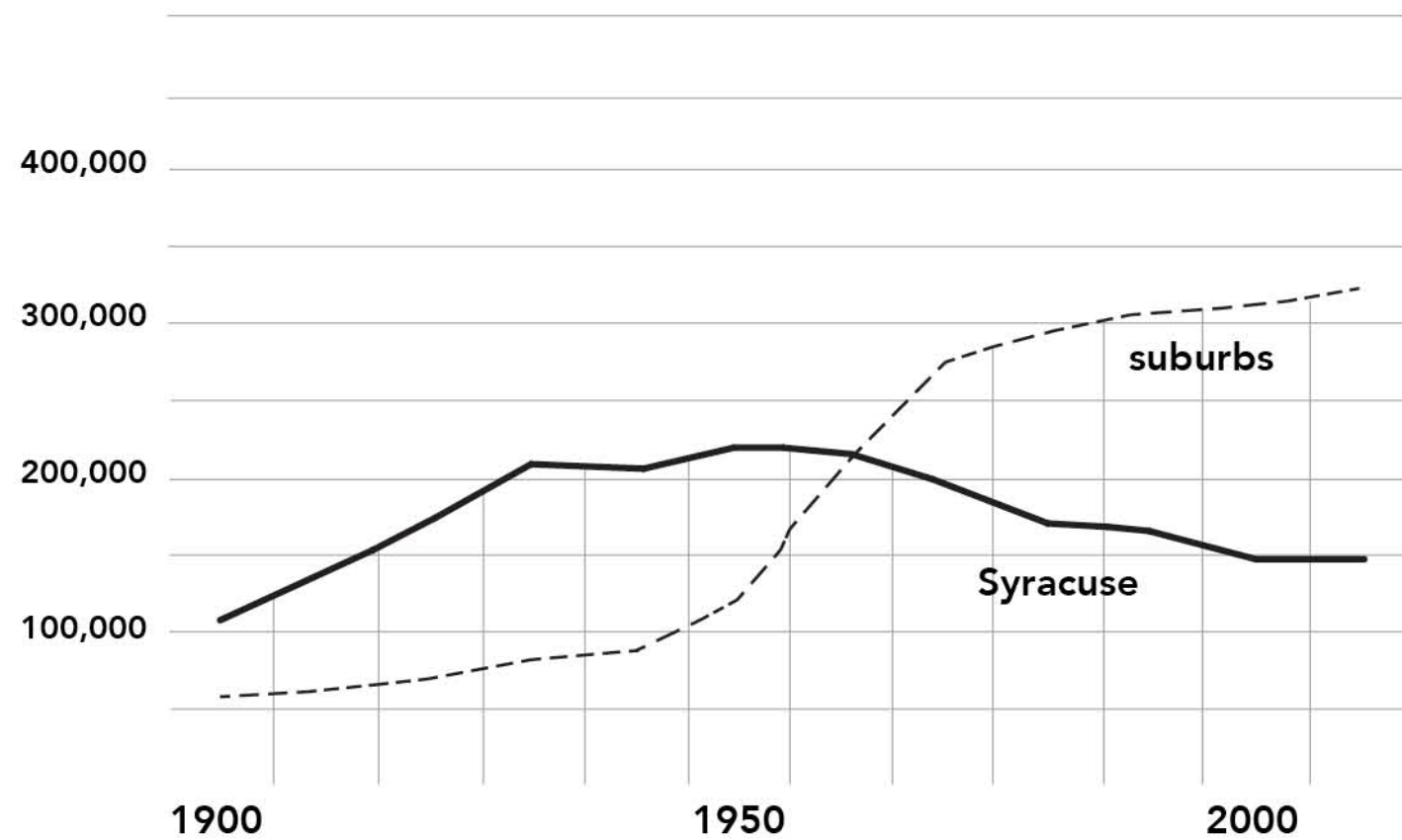
"The Doughnut Effect"

the downtown or city center of a city being abandoned as people and activities shift out to the suburbs thereby leaving a hole in the middle like that of a doughnut

Chart labels:

400,000
300,000
200,000
100,000

1900   1950   2000

suburbs

Syracuse

| 5 | 50 | 200 | **500** | 1000 | 3000 | **5000** | 7000 | 9000 | **15000** |

| 5 | 50 | 200 | **500** | 1000 | 3000 | **5000** | 7000 | 9000 | **15000** |

| 5 | 50 | 200 | **500** | 1000 | 3000 | **5000** | 7000 | 9000 | **15000** |

| 5 | 50 | 200 | **500** | 1000 | 3000 | **5000** | 7000 | 9000 | **15000** |

1950

1970

1990

2015

THE CITY AS AN EGG

boiled — ANCIENT

fried — 17-19 CENT.

scrambled — MODERN
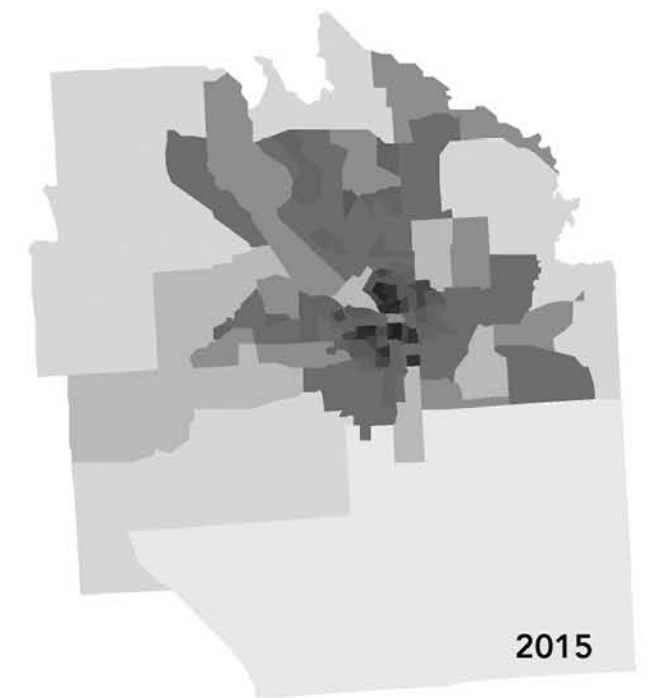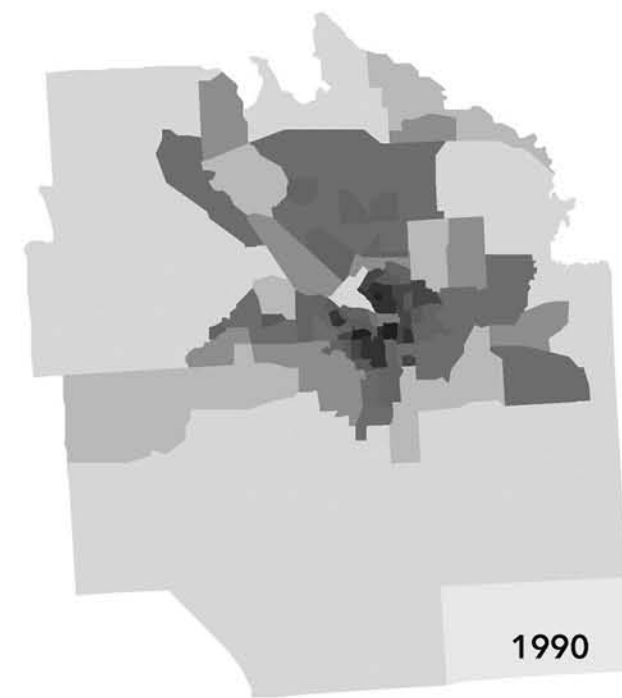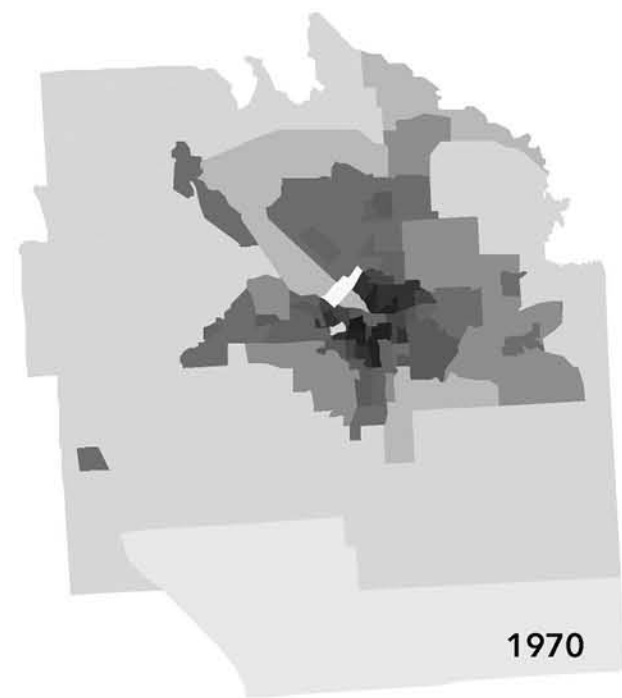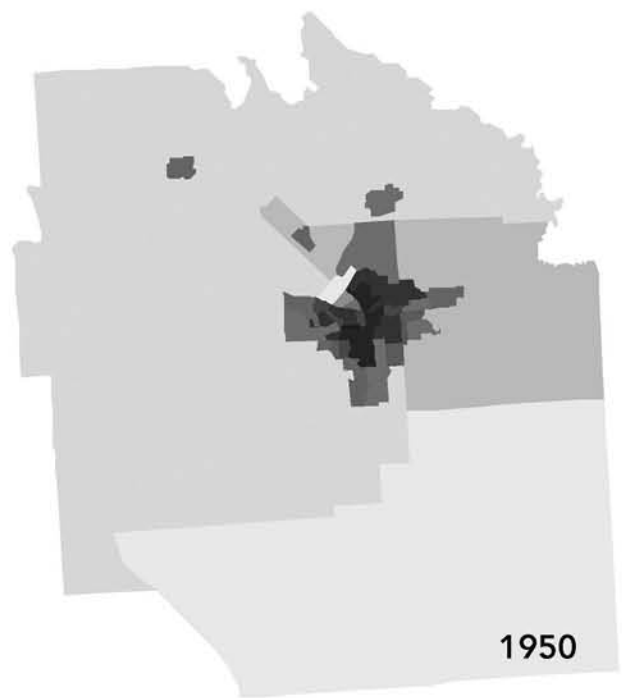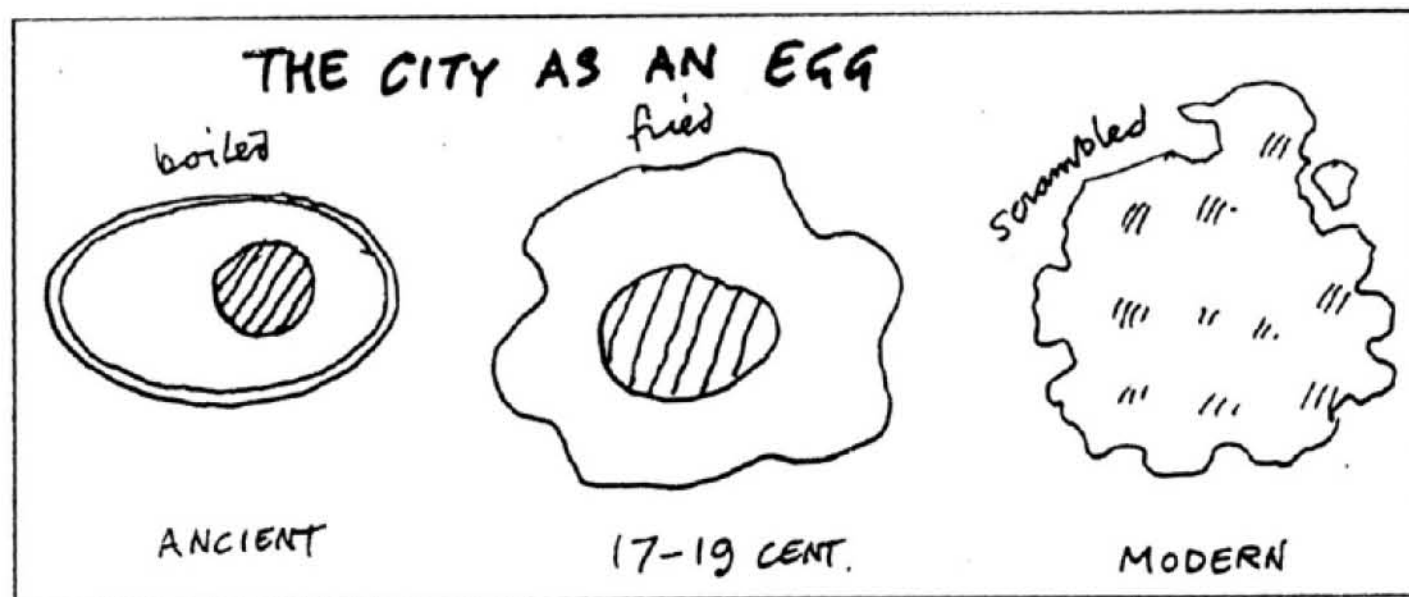
Cedric Price, City as an Egg

A "traditional, dense, 'hard-boiled egg' city fixed in concentric rings of development... the 'fried egg' city, where railways stretched the city's perimeter in accelerated linear space-time corridors out into the landscape, resulting in a star shape... and the postmodern 'scrambled egg city,' where everything is distributed evenly in small granules or pavilions across the landscape in a continuous network."

The Modern City as a Scrambled Egg
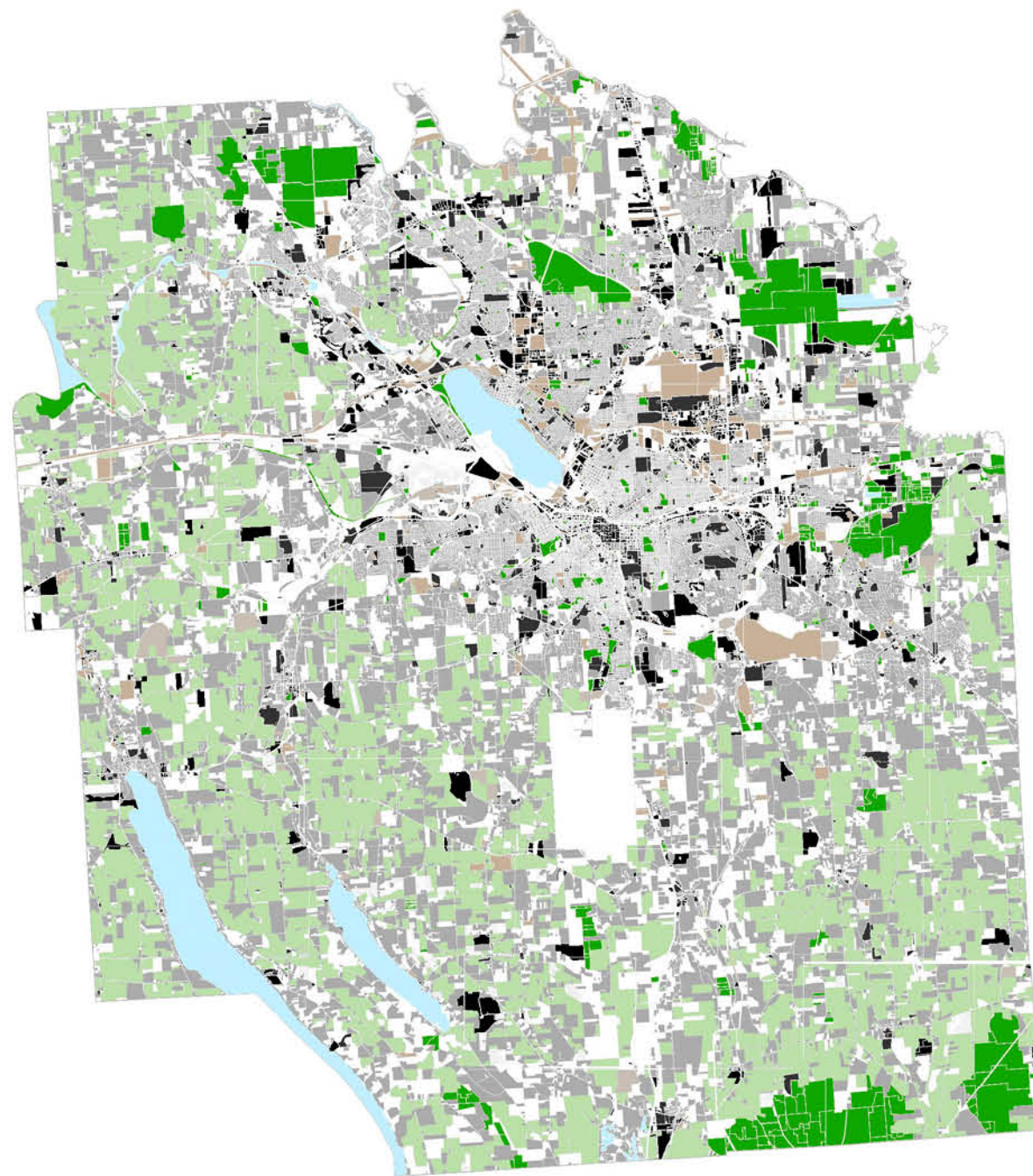
"The traditional notion of the city as a historical and institutional core surrounded by postwar suburbs and then open countryside: has been largely replaced by a more polycentric and weblike sprawl: the regional metropolis."

Alex Wall

*What if Syracuse
is NOT a City?*

It's a Metro-Area!

Rethinking Urban Structure
for the Post-Industrial City...
What should the city become after Decline?

This notion of the contemporary metropolitan region as a polycentered network is a helpful spatial concept to apply to the Shrinking City. In their decline, these cities have shifted from an undifferentiated urban pattern to a patchwork of lower and higher densities. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the condition of a traditional urban core, we should accept the new structure of city as a large-scale pattern of interwoven levels of variegated density and open space.
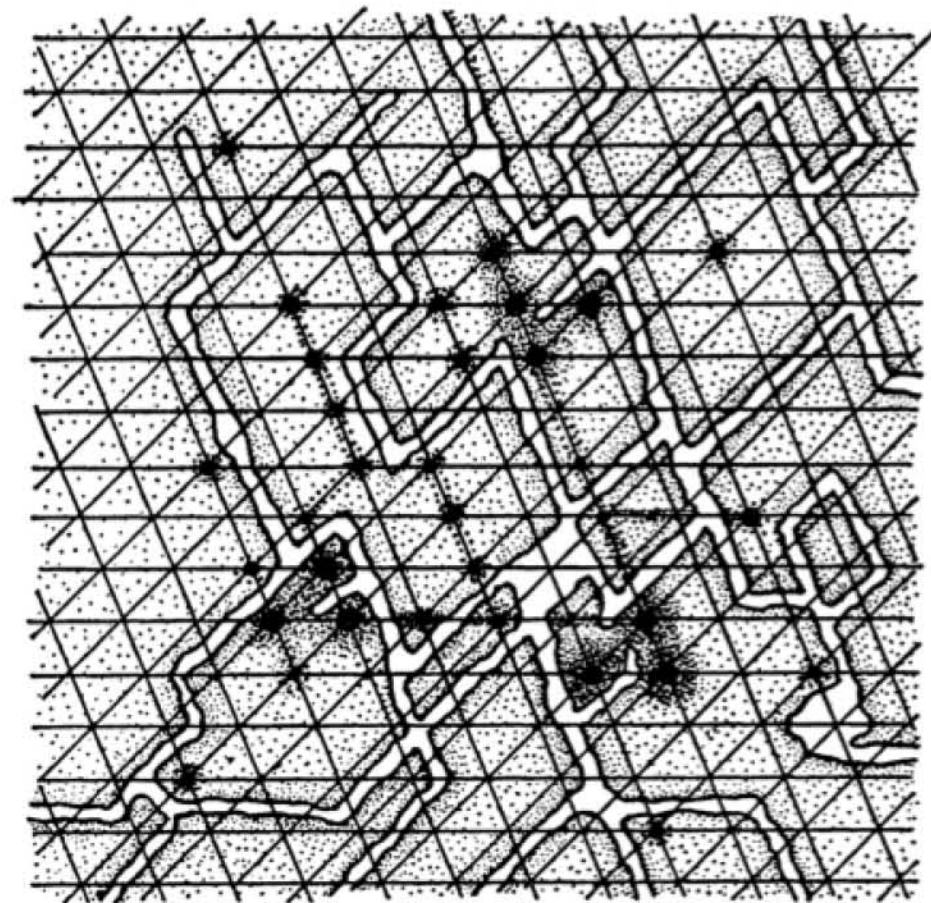
Kevin Lynch, the Polycentered Net
"The Pattern of the Metropolis," *Daedalus*, 1960

the Polycentered Net
patterns of desnity and openness

He describes the modern metropolis as a net that possesses both "intensive peaks" of density and "extensive regions of low density" within a "dispersed urban sheet" or urban grid.

Städte in der Stadt
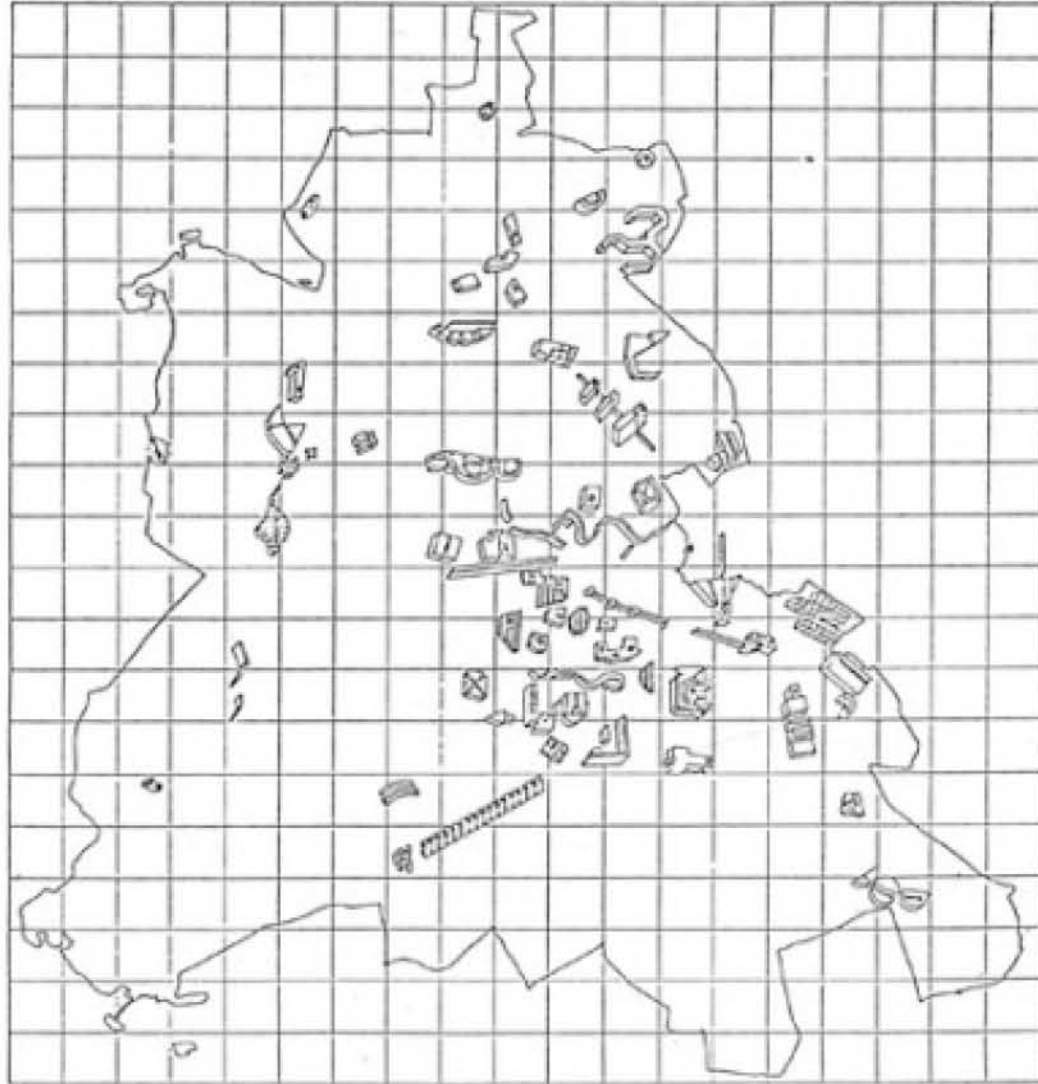
OM Ungers and Rem Koolhaas, Berlin as a Green Archipelago, 1977

an Archipelago
a city as a group of islands

Instead of reconstructing the traditional European city, they argued for creating a polycentric urban landscape. By simply subtracting, rather than rebuilding, blighted areas from the urban fabric, they reduced the city's size to a series of concentrated points, or isolated islands, situated within the vast open, green field of the metropolis.

"The future shrinking city should be a patchwork of differentiated areas containing settlements of multiple densities and form, interspersed with open areas of various sizes, programs, and levels of use."
Brent D. Ryan, Rightsizing Shrinking Cities

Patchwork Urbanism

Design after Decline...

How can we rebuild a situation of urban abandonment?

The thesis proposes to provide a new urban design approach to improve blighted areas in urban environments. It offers a strategy to patch together the fragmented physical landscape of the Shrinking City into a cohesive urban fabric.

In understanding the new structure of the City as an interwoven pattern of variegated levels of density and pockets of open space, I reconsider the traditional notion of urban fabric as a solid poche to something that is less dense and more open, but still adhesive. Can fabric be porous?

In adjusting to the reality of the Shrinking City as a less extensively built environment, I seek a low-density urbanism, where there is a proportionate ratio between built space and open space. I reconsider the original strategy of urban infill with a new aim to preserve the void.

Is this concept of porosity the answer to achieving a middle ground between the two models of the City: the voids in the solid and the solids in the void? Through an interwoven pattern of solid and void, I aim to show that a grouping of objects can merge into a stretch of fabric that can reunite fragmented portions of the City.
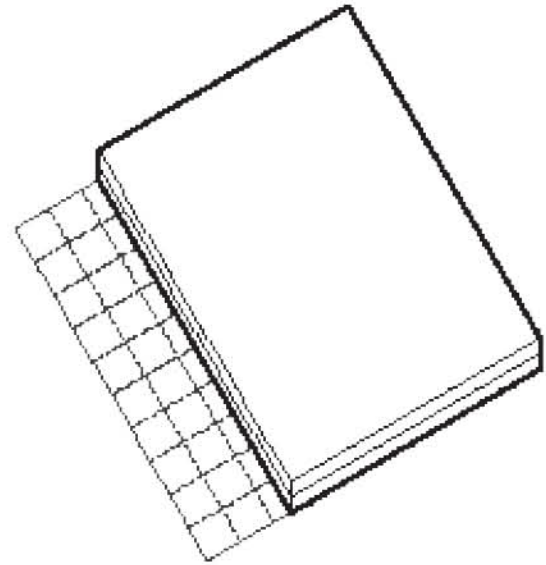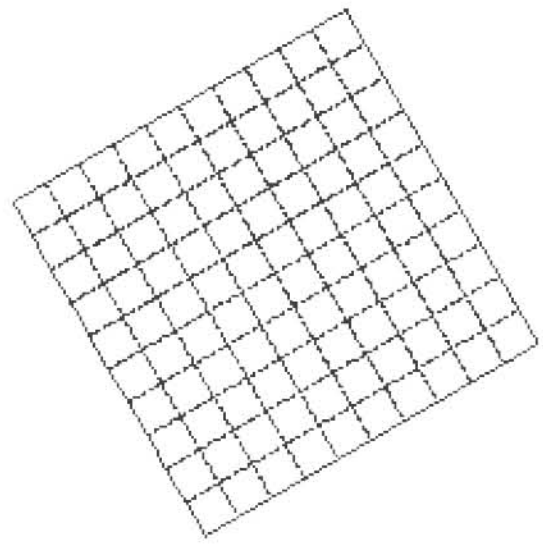
2 stories
75% coverage
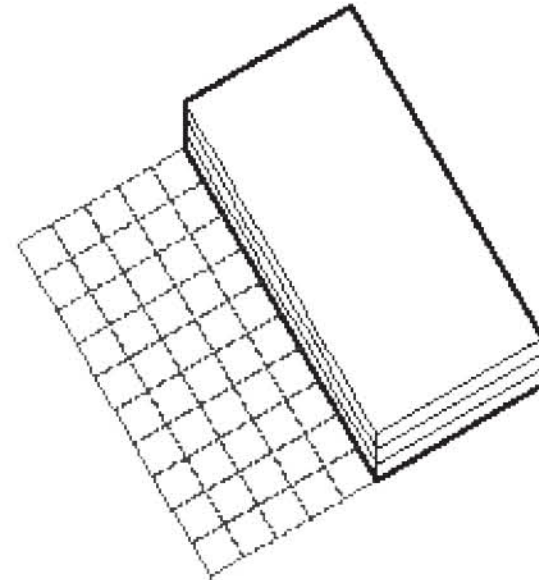
3 stories
50% coverage
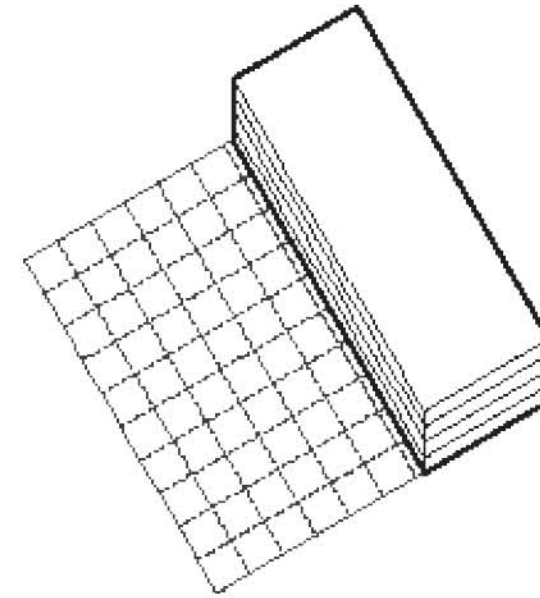
4 stories
37.5% coverage
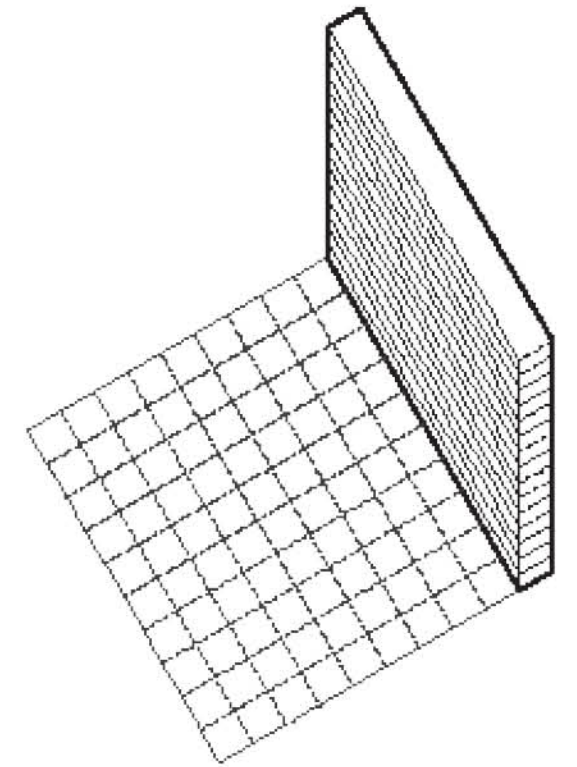
15 stories
10% coverage

Low Density
Urbanism

f.a.r. 1.5

f.a.r. 1.5
60% cov.
2-3 floors

Oglethorpe Plan

f.a.r. 1.5
37.5% cov.
4 floors

Cerda Block

f.a.r. 1.5
10% cov.
15 floors

Ville Radieuse
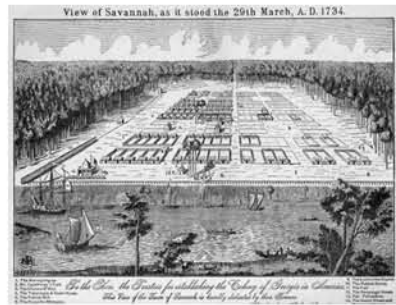
Can Fabric be Porous?
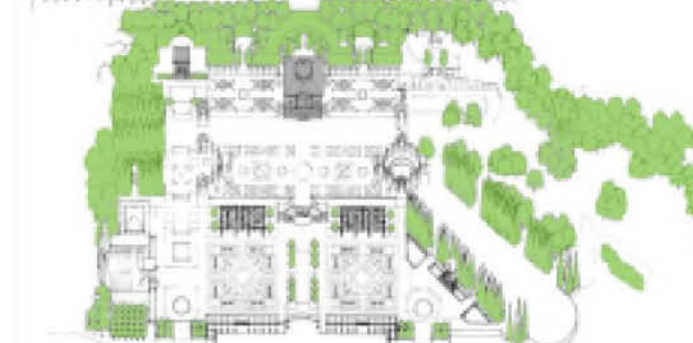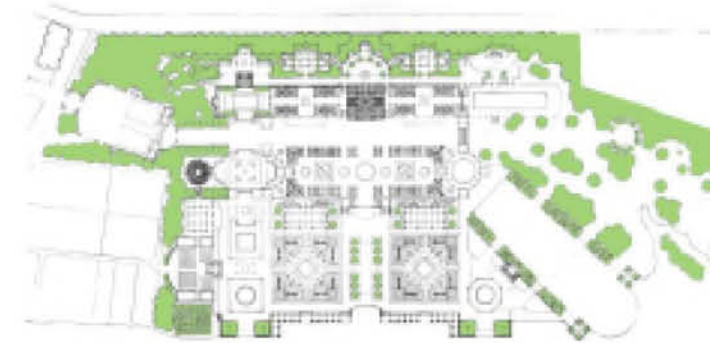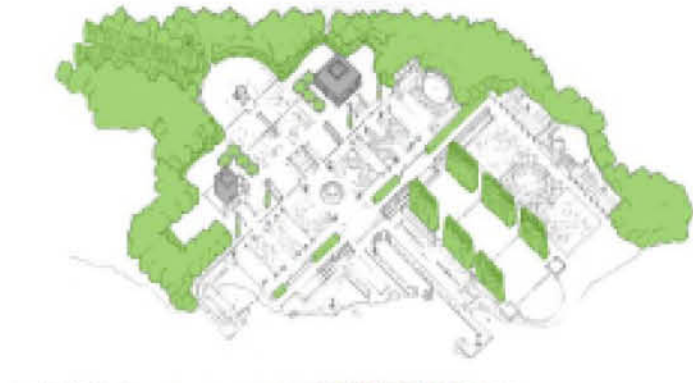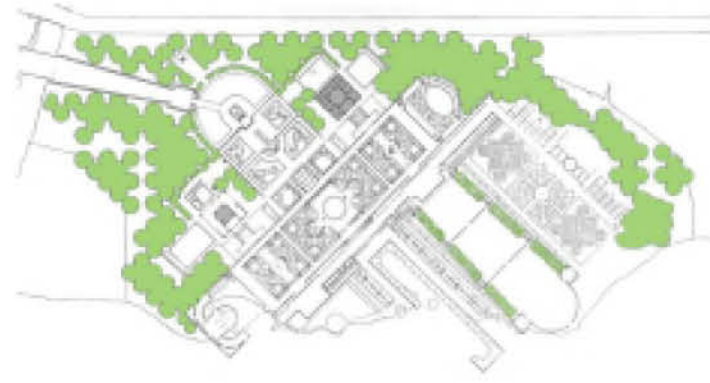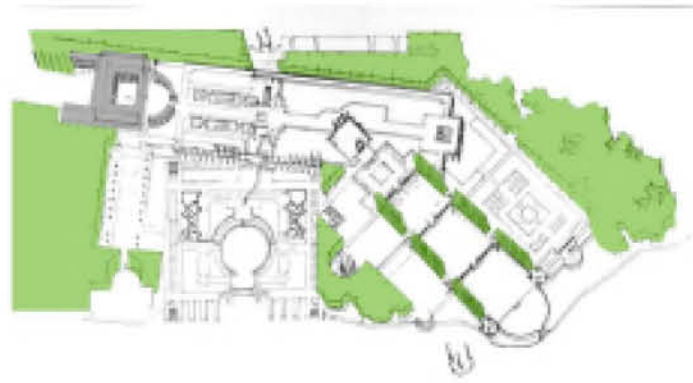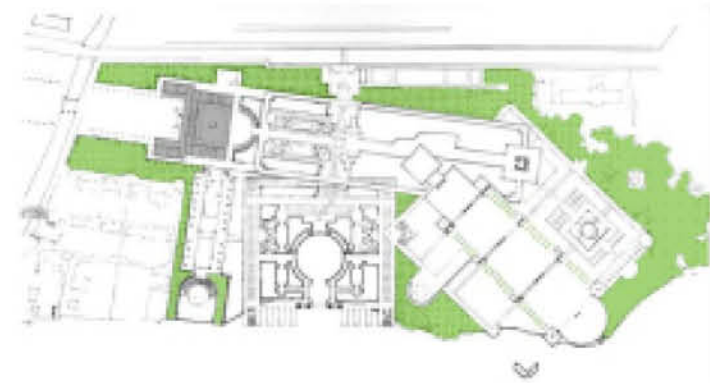
"If one cannot afford to
create space by built elements..."
-Lee Hodgen, Formal Garden,
Cornell Journal of Architecture

Mies van der Rohe, IIT Campus

"To create the most density with the least mass."

The Urban Campus
a city within the city

Toward a "Rurban" City...

In consideration of the current realities, the City of Syracuse should accept that it will remain a smaller urban environment rather than envision a future where it could be bigger and better. We need to stop thinking of the reuse of vacant land as the equivalent to the construction of new buildings. Rather than anticipate large-scale re-development to extend the size of the current Downtown core, the City should conceive a long-term strategy for repurposing the open space in its urban center. How can the under-used land become an asset, rather than an obstacle, for the future sustainability of the City?

Perhaps Syracuse "grows" through the transformation of its open space into a productive landscape, by introducing bucolic farmlands into the city's urban fabric. It is a reinterpretation of Ebeneezer Howard's merger of town and country by appropriating his polycentric web of garden cities at a smaller scale as a series of concentrated areas of density separated by tracts of open farmland within the City itself.
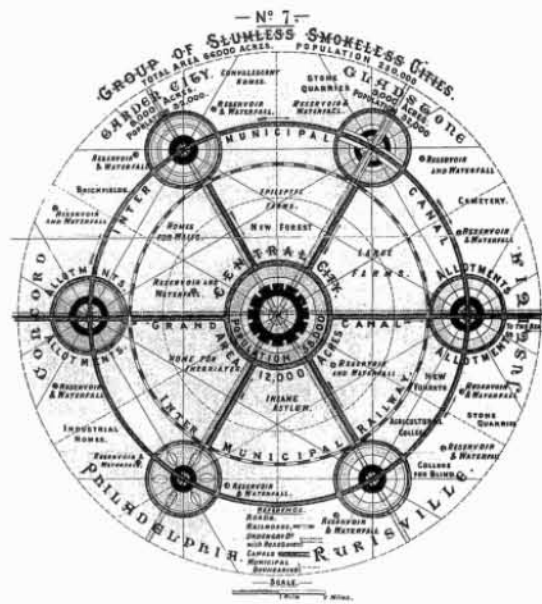
Ebeneezer Howard, Garden City
Garden Cities of To-morrow, 1898

Broadacre City, 1932
Frank Lloyd Wright

Farmadelphia, 2006
a competition entry by Front Studio Architects

Rurbanity

"when the countryside enters the city"
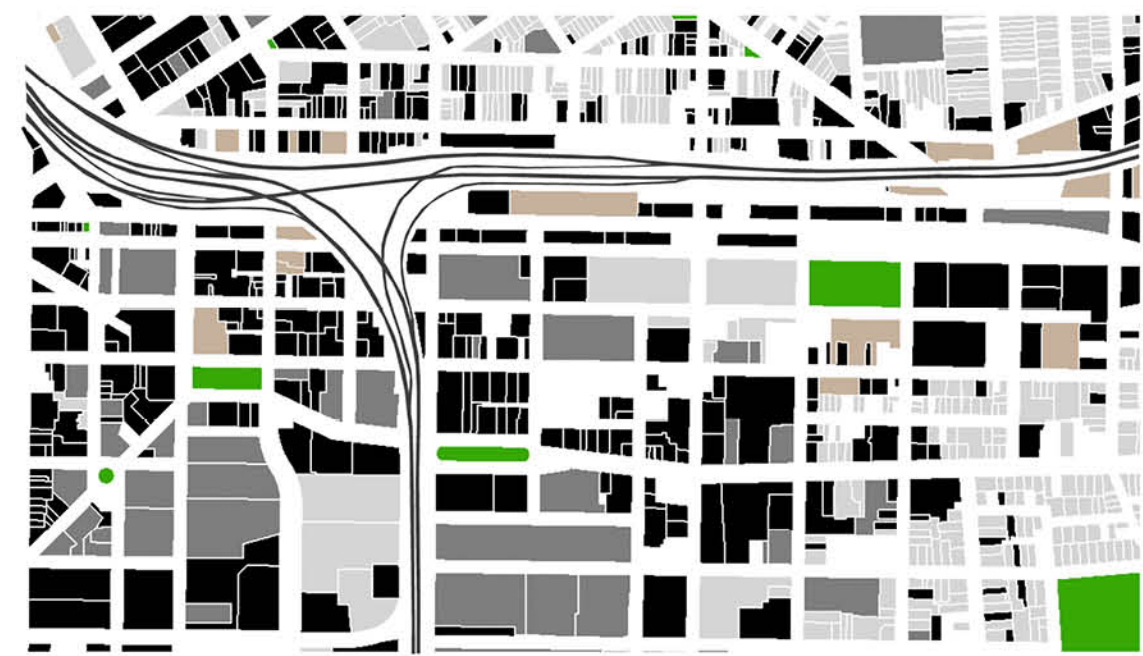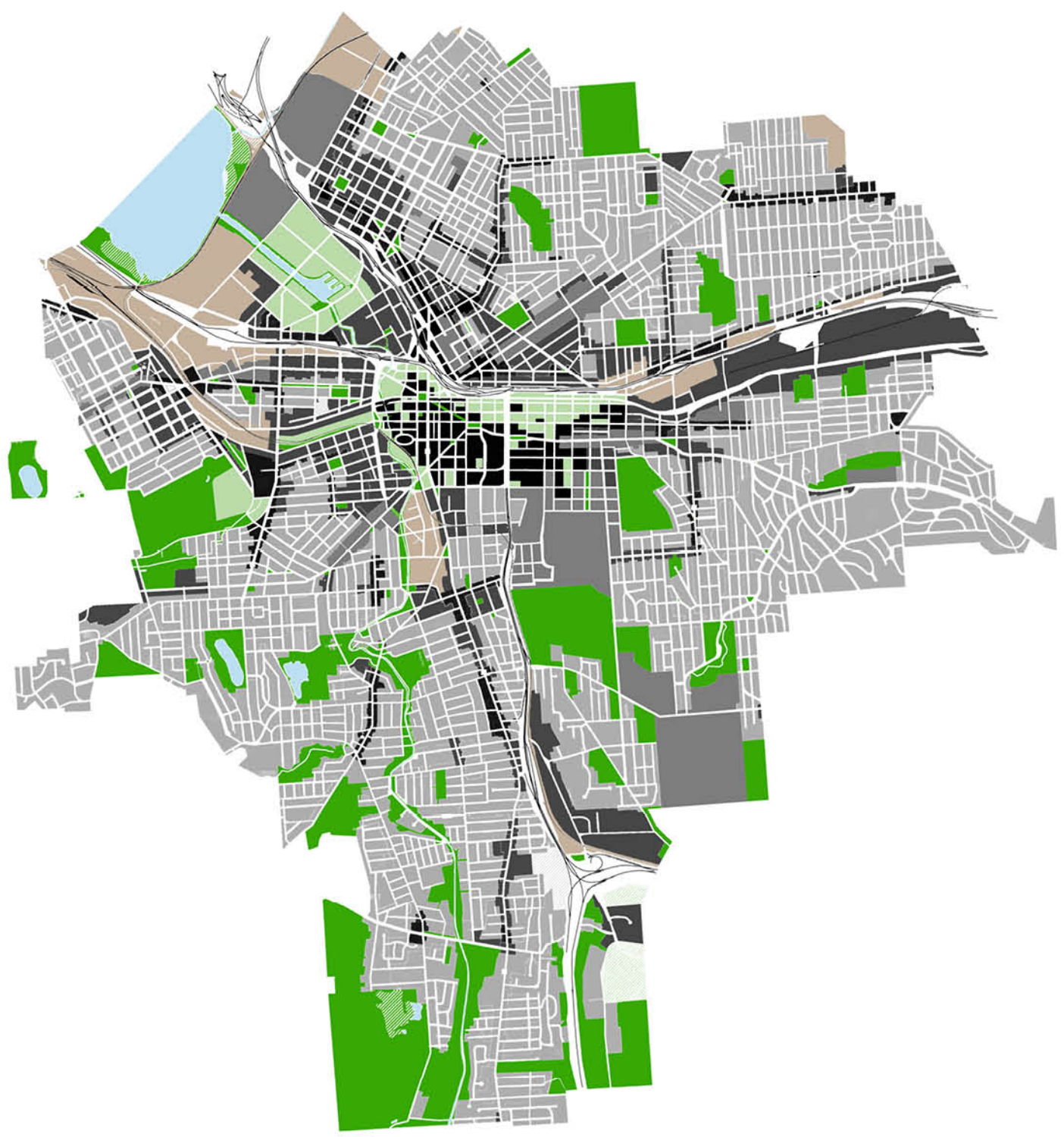
Parcel Land Use

AGRICULTURAL

COMMERCIAL

INDUSTRIAL/UTILITY

PARKS/OPEN SPACE

PUBLIC SERVICE
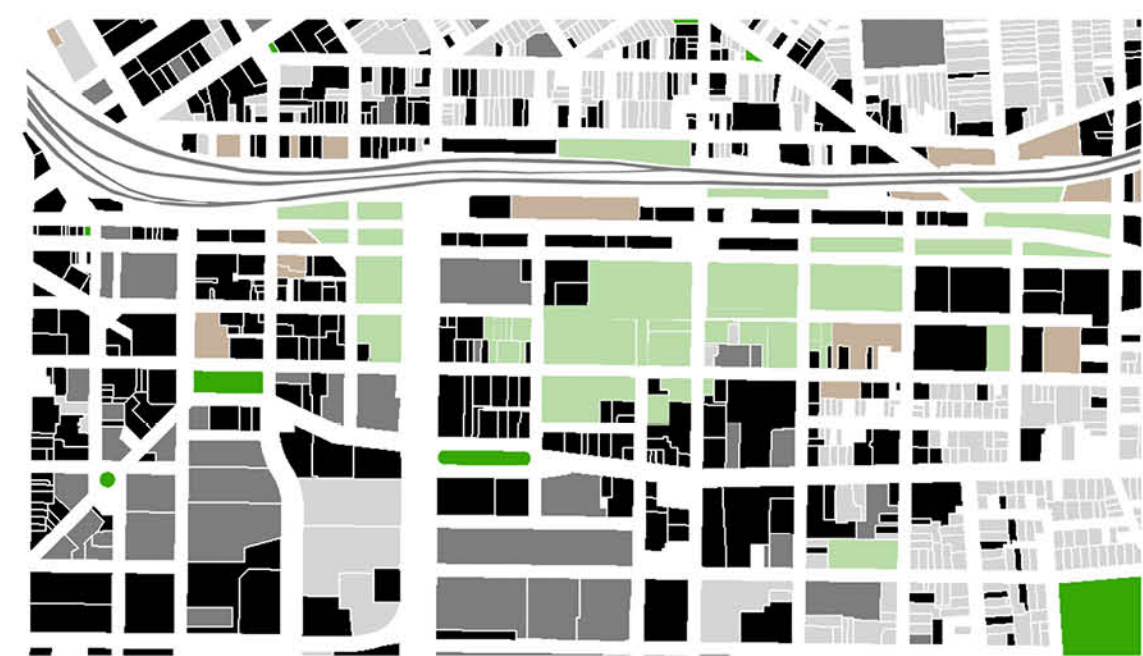
RESIDENTIAL

Parcel Land Use

AGRICULTURAL

COMMERCIAL

INDUSTRIAL/UTILITY

PARKS/OPEN SPACE

PUBLIC SERVICE

RESIDENTIAL

CityFarm Syracuse:

A Research Institute for Urban Agriculture

The project that emerges is a master plan for a "rurban" development that acts as a new institutional campus for the research of urban agriculture and food sciences. The private institution also supports a public commercial farming complex in an aim to revive the City's struggling economy through a shift towards the food production industry.

The proposed educational research facility is conveniently located within the City's aspiring innovation district, the so-called Connective Corridor, a collaboration between higher education institutions, the public sector and private enterprise to revitalize areas of the City as new knowledge-based industry clusters.

Town & Gown

total 232,305 SQFT

reception

forum

research

education

services

greenhouse
-research + teaching units
-seed sorting, potting shed
-tel/data
-office

exhibition

-pre-function
-seating area
-stage platform
-prep room
-projection
-rear projection
-storage

workshop
rooms

maintenance
-storage
-loading docks
-receiving
 office

mechanical

circulation

plant growth
chambers + computers

instrutors'
offices

auditorium

faculty
offices

labs

teaching labs

toilets

electrical

admin

event space

-pre-function
-hall
-pantry
-storage

multi-use rooms
conference rooms
break rooms

stud. lounge
mtg. rooms
classrooms
lecture hall
comp. lab
library

lab support

shafts

8-person
lab

12-person
lab

20-person
lab

-instruction rooms
-prep rooms
-cold room
-warm room
-storage

lab support
-instruction rooms
-tel/data
-media prep
-const. temp. room
-cold room
-tissue culture
  chambers
-microarray
-genome
-sequencer room
-image center
-dark room
-maintenance shop
-storage

cafeteria
-dining
-food service
-kitchen
-storage
-employee
  areas
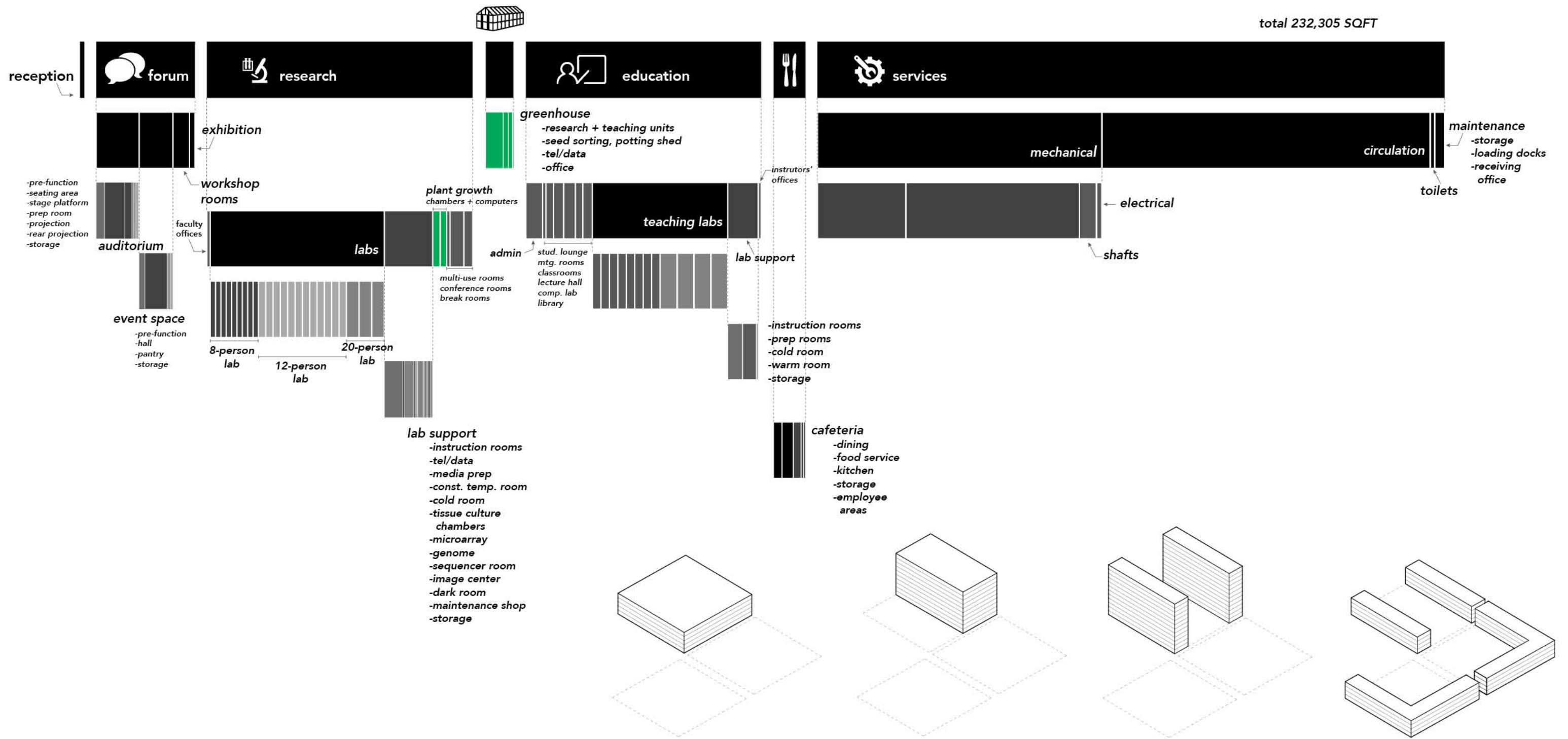
CityFarm Syracuse:
A Research Institute for Urban Agriculture

Total 232,305 SQFT

Reception..800 SQFT
        Entry 500
        Coat Room 300

Public Forum..17,550 SQFT
        Auditorium (total) 7,625
                seating area 3,600
                stage platform 1,200
                prep room 300
                projection/control room 500
                rear projection 400
                equipment storage 125
                pre-function 1500
        Event Space (total) 6000
                hall 4000
                pre-function 1000
                pantry 500
                storage 500
        Public Workshop Rooms (total) 2,925
                room @ 750 each x 3 (2,250)
                pre-function @ 225 each x 3 (675)
        Exhibition Space 1,000

Research..50,390 SQFT
        Faculty Offices (total) 600
                office @150 each x 44
        24 Labs (total) 30,900
                8 person labs x 9 (total = 8,550)
                      700 each
                      service area @ 250 each
                12 person labs x 12 (total = 15,600)
                      1050 each
                      service area @ 250 each

                20 person labs x 3 (total = 6,750)
                      2000 each
                      service area @ 250 each
        Lab Support (total) 8,575
                instruction rooms (total 3,225)
                      large 575 x 3 (1725)
                      medium 375 x 4 (1500)
                tel/data (total 375)
                      125 each x 3
                media prep (total 1575)
                      525 each x 3
                constant temperature room (total 400)
                      100 each x 4
                cold room (total 300)
                      100 each x 3
                tissue culture chambers (total 1000)
                      250 each x 4
                microarray (225)
                genome (125)
                sequencer room (225)
                image center (225)
                dark room (125)

dark room (125)
maintenance shop (325)
storage (total 450)
225 each x 2
Plant Growth (total) 2,465
small chamber 550
large chamber 775
standard food computer (total 1140)
380 each x 3
Multi-Use Rooms (total) 600
150 each x 4
Conference Rooms (total) 2450
large rooms 450 each x 4 (1800)
small rooms 325 each x 2 (650)
Break Room (total) 1575
525 each x 3

Green House...4,925 SQFT
Research Units (total) 3,100
large units (1800)
600 each x 3
small units (1300)
325 each x 4
Teaching Units (total) 925
large unit 600
small unit 325
Support (total) 715
seed sorting 140
potting shed 450
tel/data 125
Office 175

Education...41,745 SQFT
Administration (total) 2,975
Reception 250
Clerical Support 450
Marketing 150
Event Planning 175
Administrator 175
Department Head 250
Assistant 150
Associate Chair 200
Assistant 150
Conference Room 250
Filing 375
Copy Room 225
Kitchen/Staff Room 175
Student Lounge 600
Meetings Rooms (total) 1,350
Large seminar room 525
Small meeting room 275 each x 3 (825)
Classrooms (total) 1,800
450 each x 4
Lecture Hall (total) 2,050
seating 950
stage platform 300
prep room 300
projection/control room 500
Computer Clusters (total)1,325
Large lab 625
Small cluster 350 each x 2 (700)

Library (total) 1720
    reading and book stack area 1200
    office 120
    photocopying/printing 150
    storage 250

16 teaching labs (total) 24000
    8 small labs
        1500 each x 8 (12000)
    4 large labs
        3000 each x 4 (12000)
Teaching Lab Support (total) 5400
    instruction rooms (2650)
        large 575 x 2 (1150)
        small 375 x 4 (1500)
    prep rooms (2400)
        large 700 x 2 (1400)
        small 250 x 4 (1000)
    cold room 100
    warm room 100
    storage 150
Instructor's Offices (total) 525
    175 each x 3

Cafeteria...5,675 SQFT
Customer Area (total) 3,500
    dining (seating for 75) 1,500
    food service 2,000
Kitchen 1,000
Storage (total) 450
    receiving 50
    dry 250
    cold 150
Cleaning Area 375
Employee Areas (total) 350
    manager office 125
    lockers 100
    break room 125

Services..111,300 SQFT
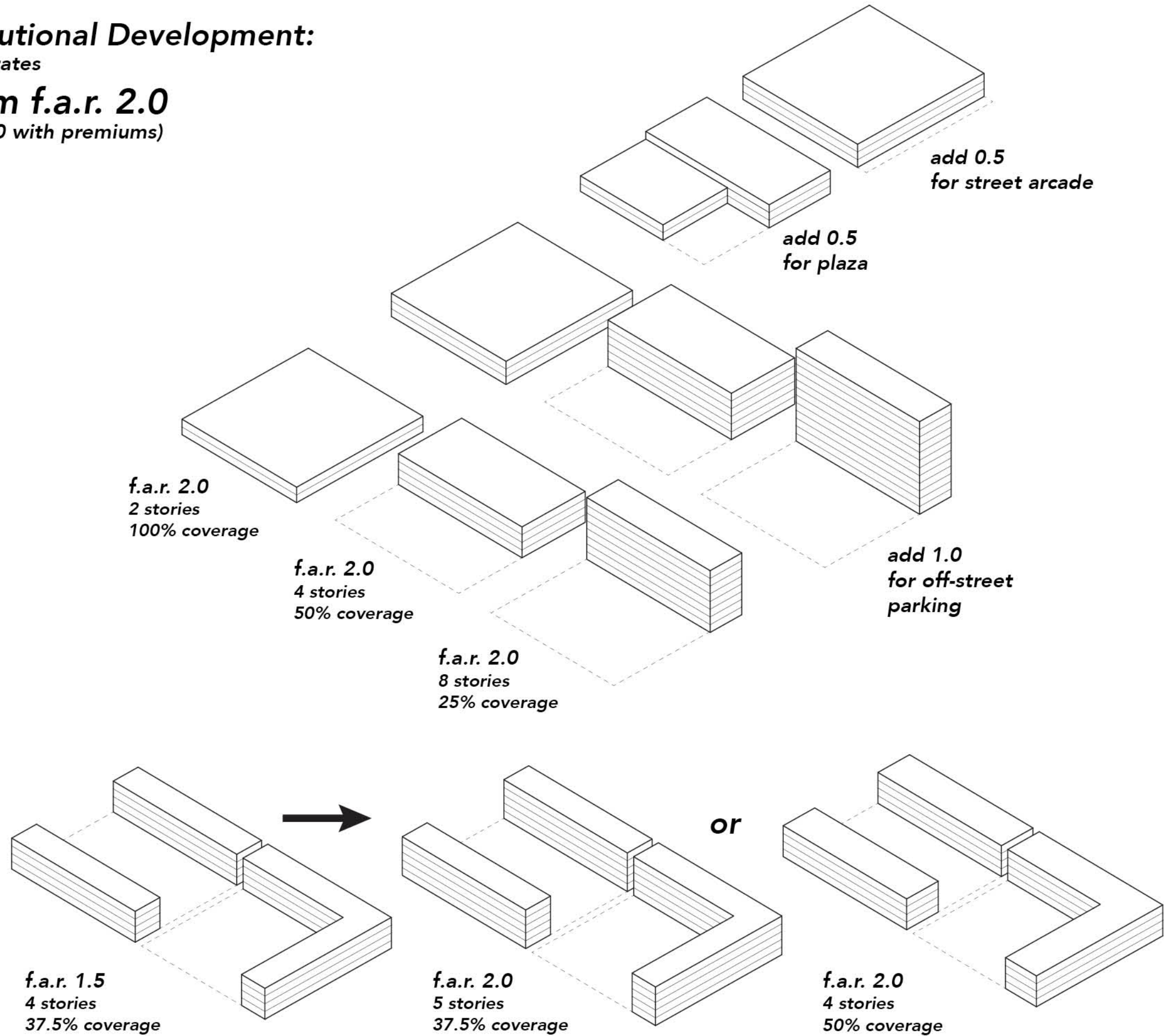Mechanical (total) 50,500
    electrical cabinets 1,000
    basement mechanical 15,700
    mech penthouse 30,800
    large shafts 3,000
Circualtion 55,000
Toilets 4,000
Maintenance (total) 1,800)
    storage room 500 each x 3
    loading dock 120 each x 2
    loading receiving office 100

additional programming possibility:
Parking at 290,000 SQFT
(500 car capacity)

For Planned Insitutional Development:
SYR Zoning Ordinace dictates

maximum f.a.r. 2.0
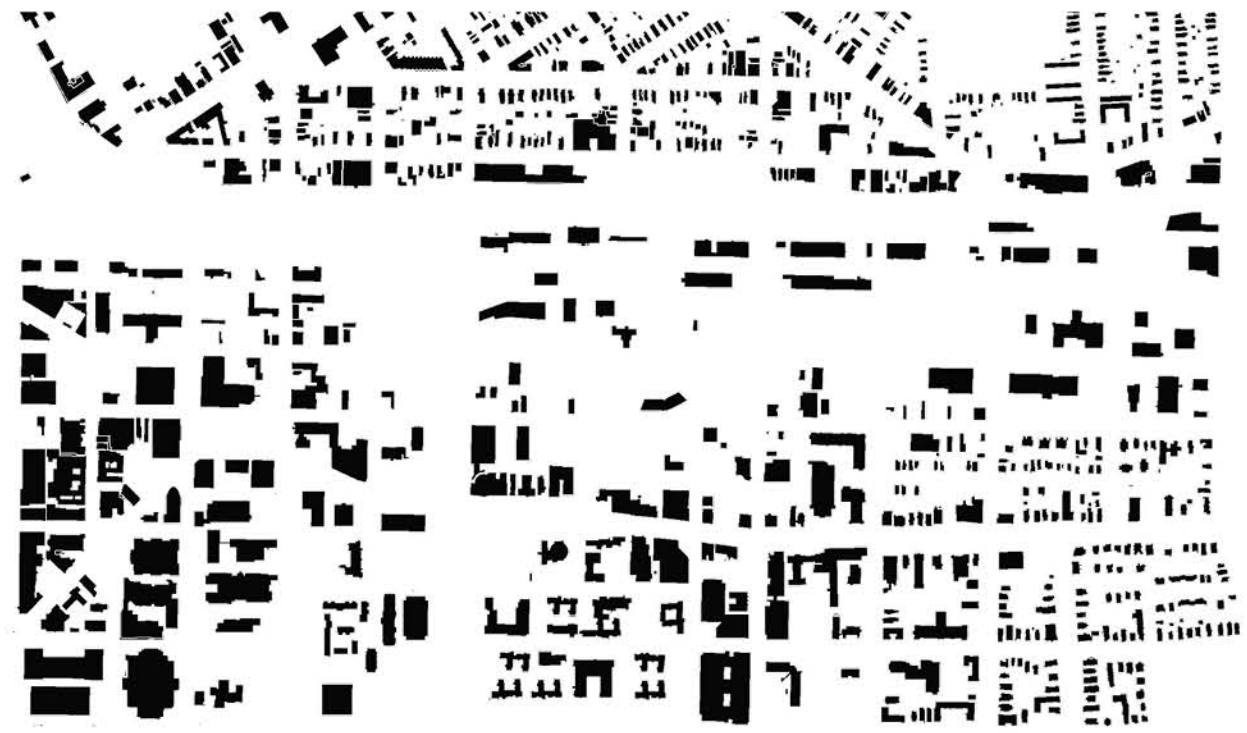(up to 4.0 with premiums)

add 0.5
for street arcade

add 0.5
for plaza

add 1.0
for off-street
parking

f.a.r. 2.0
2 stories
100% coverage

f.a.r. 2.0
4 stories
50% coverage

f.a.r. 2.0
8 stories
25% coverage

f.a.r. 1.5
4 stories
37.5% coverage

f.a.r. 2.0
5 stories
37.5% coverage

or

f.a.r. 2.0
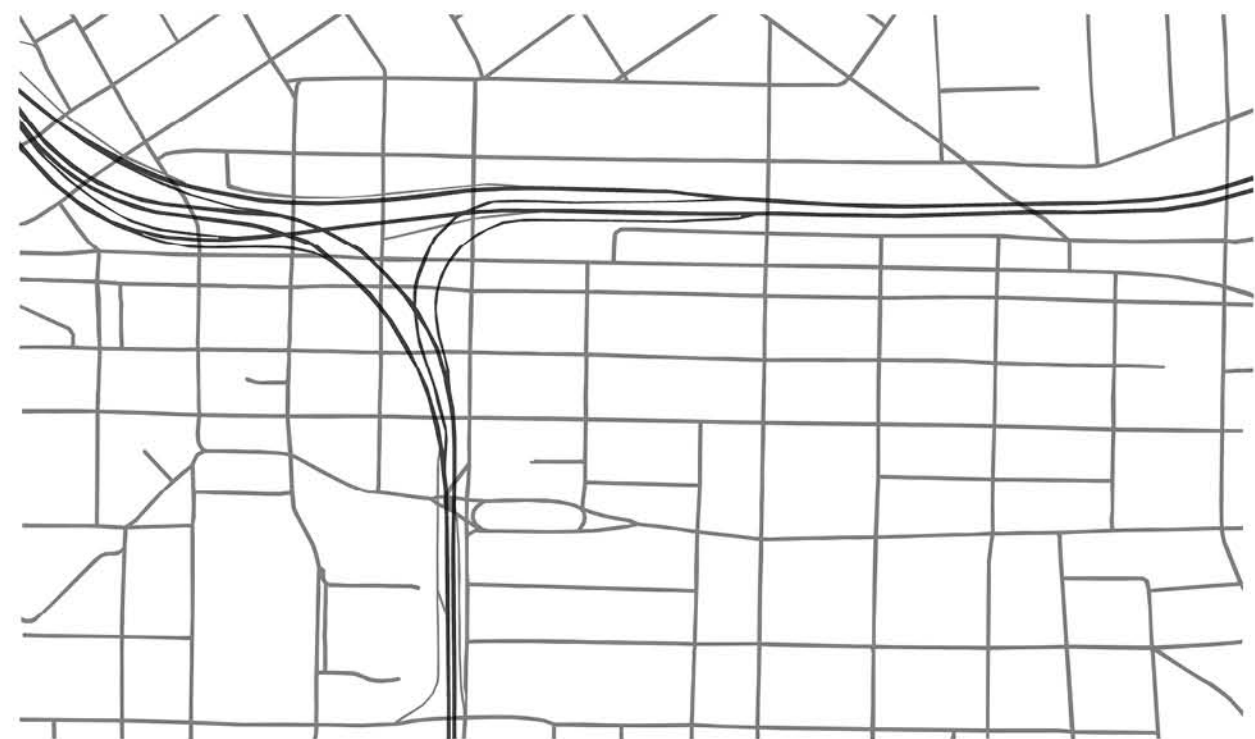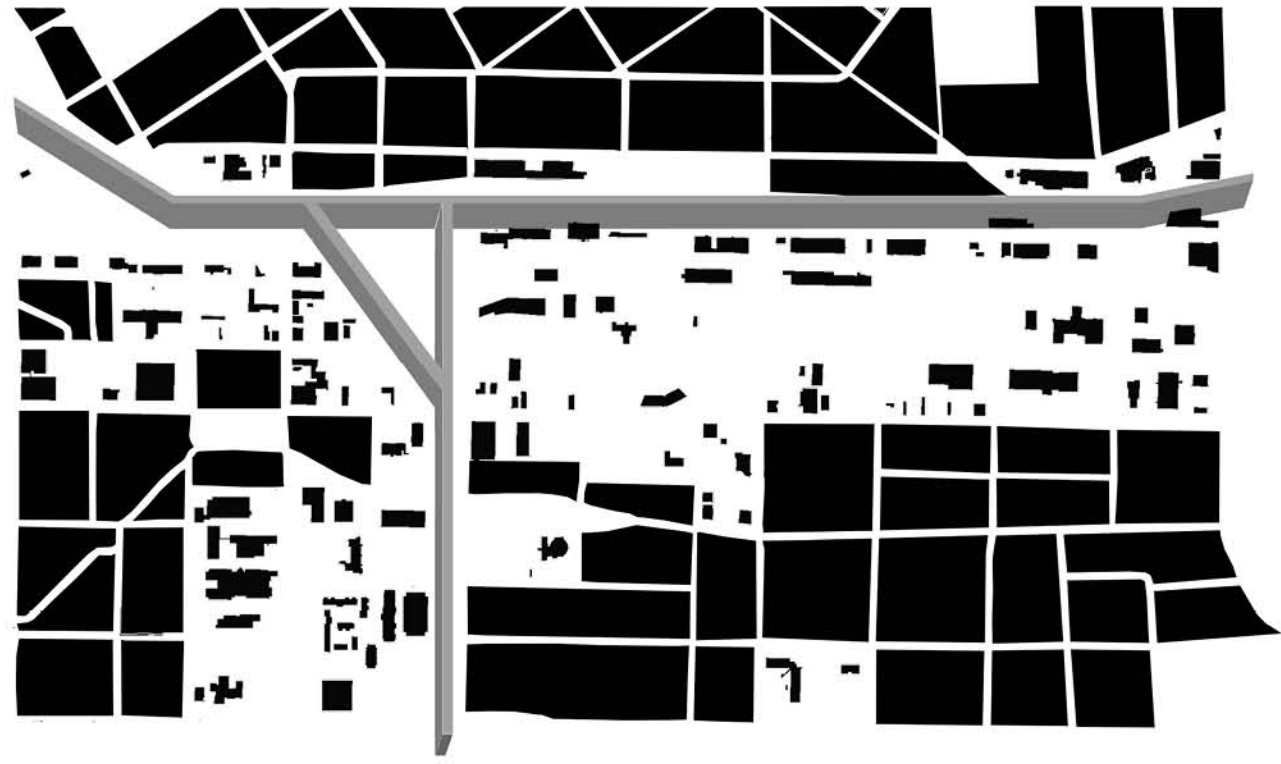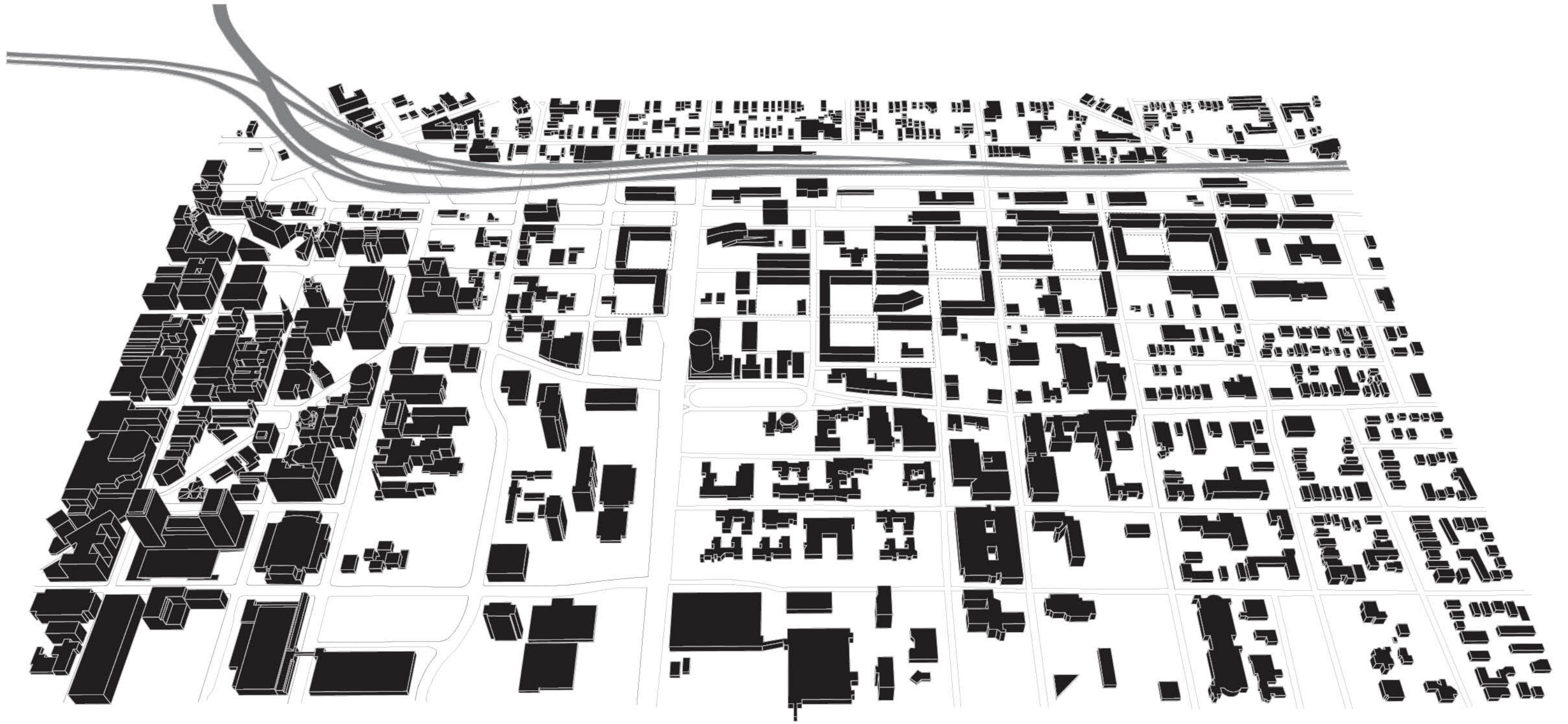4 stories
50% coverage

figure-ground

road network

an issue of
fragmentation

a master plan...

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