

A DIFFERENT EXPRESSION OF ORDER:

A Design Process Inspired by African American Art & Culture



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ABSTRACT

In seeking to develop a design approach inspired by African American culture, jazz emerged as a deep source of creativity in art and design. This project looks at the invariable features of jazz—improvisation, syncopation, call-and-response, harmonic structure, and kinetic orality—in relation to the sister disciplines of the visual artwork of Gee’s Bend and the spatial practices of African Americans in the Southern United States. Drawing connections between the media resulted in an interpretation of their commonalities leading to a set of operating and underlying principles that explained the occurring phenomena. These principles were then tested in a research by design experiment with a determined context, at a site chosen for its historical relevance to the African American community in the Lower Albina neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. The objective of the design sought to reestablish the urban fabric that was severed by the elevated transportation infrastructure of the interstate highways. The resulting new approach was discovered through an iterative process of design and reflection that tested the interpretation of constructed principles inspired by African American cultural expression. This new approach consists of a set of guidelines that is transferrable to other sites and is an opportunity for future research.

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INTRODUCTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES, & METHODS OF INQUIRY

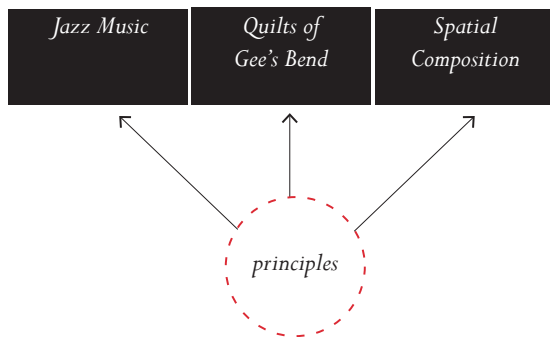
Often in design, the discussion of African American culture revolves solely around issues of social justice—asking questions related to what design has done to African Americans or what can design do for African Americans.

FIGURE 1.1

A principle is a fundamental source or basis for a way of doing something. The discovered connection of the features of jazz coming through in the visual artwork motivated the search to define such underlying principles.

That concept is narrow in scope and has motivated this author's interest in broadening the discussion in the design field, and mine the latent contributions that apply to the field of design by African American culture. This project focused on the value of African American creativity, intellect, and talent, and asked questions such as: what can design research reveal about African American culture? Moreover, how can African American culture spur us to find new approaches to design creativity?

Drawing inspiration from practices of African American cultural expression placed African American history and experience at the center of research. This approach also values the ingenuity of African American artistic expressions, utilizing these expressions as a lens with which to see the world. Simultaneously, it expanded on the prevailing relationship landscape architecture has had with African American culture—a relationship that revolves mainly around issues of social and environmental justice. While it is essential to address design injustice, there is also a need to understand the positive contributions that African American culture can provide as well. Identifying the reality that African American culture has contributed more to society and design than merely constituting a social problem within it can assist in altering the focus beyond the underlying concepts that pin African American culture solely to questions of negativity and struggle.



In seeking to develop a design approach inspired by African American culture, jazz emerged as a deep source of creativity in art and design. Through the process of literature review, it was revealed that the quilts of Gee's Bend, Alabama were constructed by unintentionally employing the operating features of jazz. The discovered unintended connection of the features of jazz coming through in the visual artwork motivated a search to understand the underlying principles that drove such phenomena (Figure 1.1). Further research found a connection between these ideas and African American spatial composition and landscape practices of the American South. By understanding the invariable features of jazz in relation to the sister disciplines of the visual artwork by

Gee's Bend and the spatial practices of African Americans in the Southern United States, the expectation was that the research would produce concepts and ideas that could be articulated, defined, and recognized as a set of operating principles created by culture.

As music, art, and architecture are all vehicles of cultural expression, this project sought to test a process derived from the art form of jazz music and connect its invariable features—improvisation, syncopation, call-and-response, harmonic

structure, and kinetic orality— to significant visual arts and spatial composition originating from the African American community. Defining the principles helped explain how the relationships between sister disciplines could occur, and suggested that there was an existing underlying source of creativity unique to African American culture (Figure 1.2).

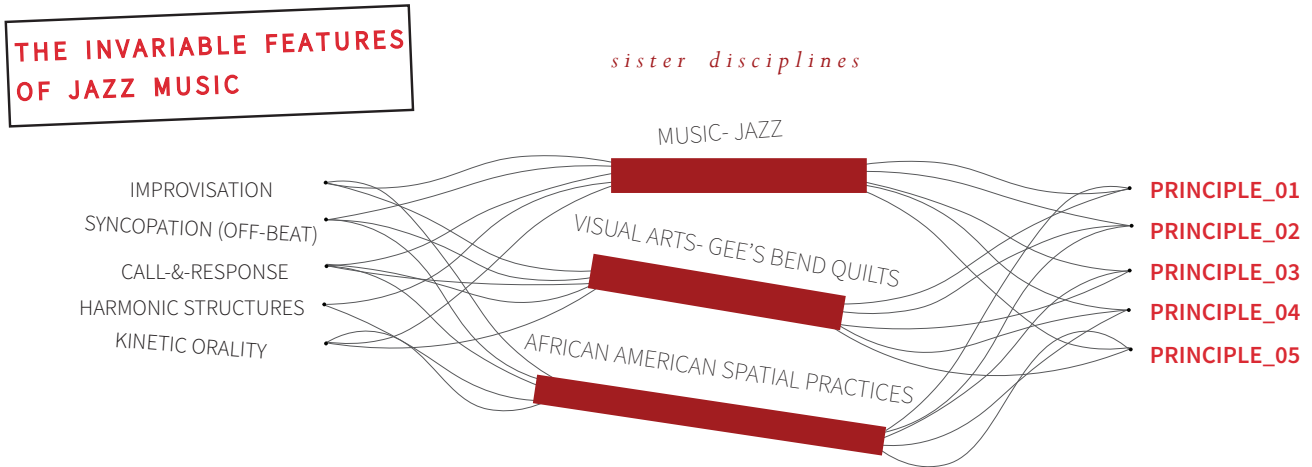


FIGURE 1.2

In order to understand the underlying source required framing the connections by the invariable features of jazz. By understanding the connections of the sister disciplines, I myself, the researcher then interpreted these connections in an attempt to articulate the underlying sources feeding the various art forms, constructing five principles, one for each of the selected features of jazz.

Interpreting each of the five invariable features of jazz in connection to other art forms born from the African American community served to create a loose set of rules that defined the reoccurring concepts used in the different practices. Each of the five invariable features of jazz, identified through a literature review, are examined and explained with examples to assist in the active interpretation of constructing the five principles. The principles are not meant to be exclusive or absolute but instead begin to express the underlying concepts so as to more readily serve as inspiration for design creativity.

The steps taken in this project began with the construction of a research question married to a given context exploring how “new knowledge, values, or priorities might emerge from the creative transformation of familiar design contexts” (Deming and Swafield 2011, 208). The landscape type under investigation created a given context for the design experiment to take place. In this case, the site is the unused urban space created by the construction of elevated transportation infrastructure of the Interstate Highway in the Lower Albina neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. The project presents improvements to the open space, reclaiming this underutilized urban area and reconnecting the fragmented communities. The objective of this project was to test a design strategy, proposing a plan that could be feasibly built, and did not seek to implement the design.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

It is not uncommon to take the principles of one art form and apply them to another. This inquiry asked how the idea of improvisation and other invariable features of jazz could be applied to the medium of landscape architecture. A set of design principles, created by drawing connections across disciplines and then synthesizing those ideas, guided the design experiment and were tested as to their potential and validity for serving as inspiration for a distinct approach to design.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & OBJECTIVES

The research question posed is: *Can a new approach to design emerge by testing a set of principles framed by the invariable features of jazz, with the objective to reestablish the urban fabric of the Lower Albina neighborhood in Portland, Oregon?*

This question encouraged further dissection and investigation, presented as multiple sub-questions:

- What are the invariable features of jazz?
- What are the principles produced by the frame which draws connections between the features and the sister disciplines of art and spatial practices?
- What are the historical, current, and projected expectations of the conditions of the Lower Albina neighborhood in Portland, Oregon?

To begin the research by design experiment requires:

- Interpreting and articulating the connections between the features of jazz and the selected sister disciplines to expose their underlying principles for testing in the medium of landscape architecture.
- Testing the constructed principles through the process of design.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

To situate this research project within a broader context of established approaches to research in landscape architecture, this project relied on the framework provided in *Landscape Architecture Research: Inquiry, Strategy, Design* by M. Elen Deming and Simon Swaffield, 2011 (Figure 1.3). This classification system offered a touchstone for defining the methodological strategies used and assisted in communicating the bounds and bonds of what is accepted as research. This project required three main strategies of inquiry, Classification (literature review), Interpretation (synthesis), and Projective Design (research by design), with the goal to produce a contribution of new knowledge to the field of landscape architecture.

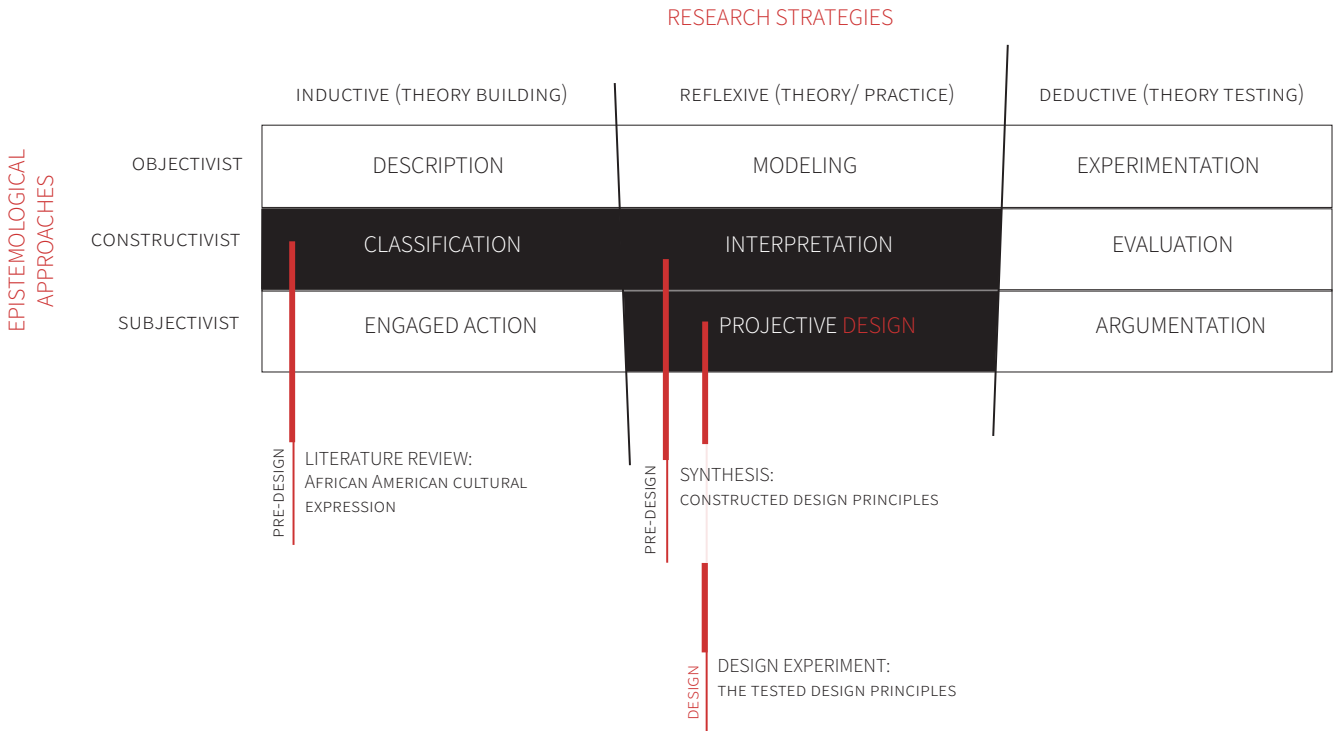


FIGURE 1.3

A classification system that offers a touchstone for defining methodological strategies and approaches to research in landscape architecture (Adapted from Deming and Swaffield 2011, 9).

Classification

Classification is both inductive and constructivist. Inductive (theory building) research is described in general terms as grounded in the world of experience and verifiable observation. Constructivism assumes that “knowledge is generated through the interaction between the investigators (and their society) and a reality (or realities) that exists but that can never be known independently of the presumptions of the investigators” (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 8). Therefore, by collecting, organizing, and processing descriptive data about the phenomena being investigated, knowledge can be produced. A literature review is one of several types of classification research and is used to describe a variety of strategies of investigation. They are typically used to establish a baseline of knowledge about the research topic at hand and are often used in combination with other research methods such as interpretation.

Interpretation

Interpretation recognizes “that the meanings of objects, events, words, actions, and images are not always plain and obvious, and they require the investigator to actively engage in ‘making sense’ of the phenomena they encounter” (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 152). Constructivist, yet reflexive, interpretation requires that the

researcher moves back and forth in response to the observed data and theoretical concepts that are used to make sense of what has been gathered. The researcher then becomes a social actor in the project as they are required to translate the data, exploring new possibilities of understanding and new ways of knowing.

FIGURE 1.4

The project diagram is constructed in a form inspired by the Housetop quilt type of Gee's Bend where there is a call-and-response created between the formation of the research question and the method required to answer such question.

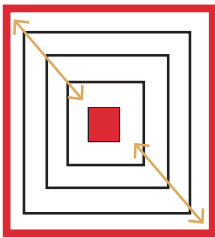
Projective Design

Research by design or research through designing is but one of the multiple types of design as a research strategy. Research through designing is defined as producing new knowledge that revolves around “mental constructs such as theory, interpretation, concepts, meanings or cultural critique” (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh 2013, 123). The research is embedded in a particular physical and social context and uses the site to test a design approach. Therefore, establishing the central role of the specific context as a testing grounds for generating something new proposes that the research questions will “explore how new knowledge, values, or priorities might emerge from creative transformation of familiar design contexts” (Deming and Swaffield 2011, 208). Inherent to research by design is the recognition that the

HOW TO READ THE DIAGRAM

HOUSETOP & BRICKLAYER QUILT

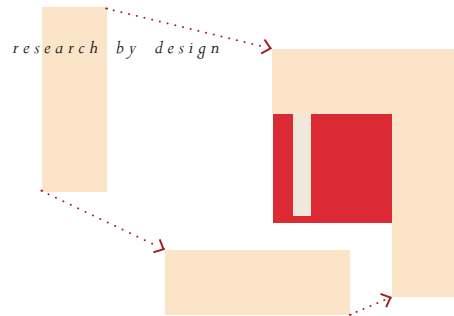
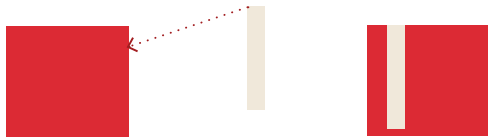
HOUSETOP



From the entire composed piece to its composite elements, the housetop pattern initiates a visual exchange in *call-and-response*, a technique used in jazz music that's formed by a back and forth between members. This design naturally creates an echo of right angles that pushes and pulls among elements forcing a focus on the center medallion, to the borders within the piece while calling back to the work's edges (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006).

THE RESEARCH QUESTION CALLS TO THE METHOD

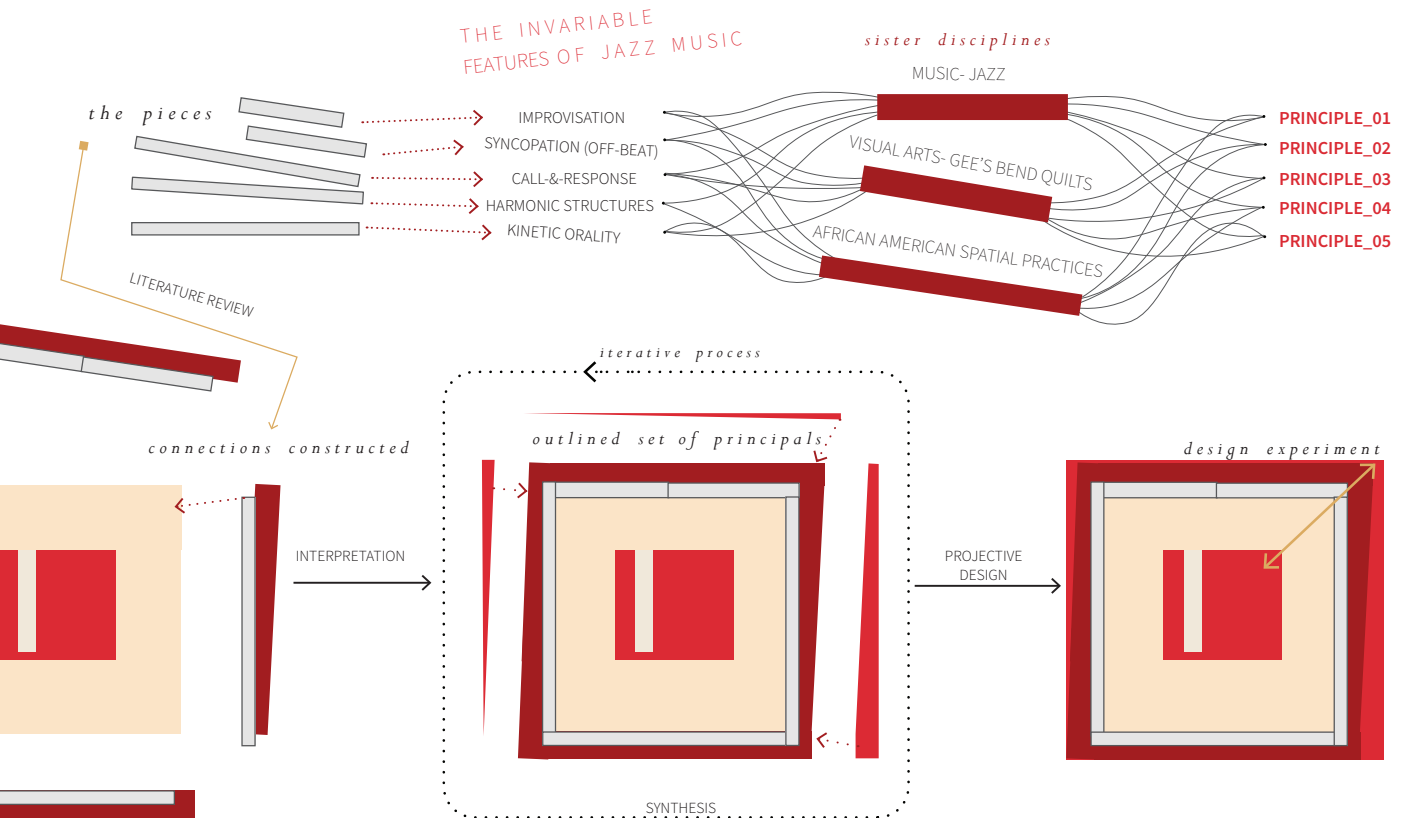
site opportunity + *objective defined* = *context is determined*



researcher is inseparable from the system of creating new knowledge and that the knowledge produced cannot be transferred straightaway to other contexts but that “some parts might be transferable or can be used for further comparative studies” (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh 2013, 123).

PROCESS

In investigating the invariable features of jazz in relation to the sister disciplines of the visual artwork of Gee’s Bend and selected African American spatial practices, the author’s constructed set of principles were tested in a design experiment of a specific context, the fragmented urban landscape of the Lower Albina neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. The process of design showed how African American cultural expression can spur us to find new approaches to design creativity. The research questions require the methods appropriate to answer the questions (Figure 1.4). The methods of inquiry employed are as follows: literature review, interpretation, and research by design strategy. The logical design process was carried out in a three-step plan of pre-design, design, and post-design phasing.



Pre-Design

The literature review is the opportunity to set the context of the project. This project draws from multiple sister disciplines of music, art, and spatial practices and connects factors that have not been previously recognized. The understanding of the invariable features of jazz frames how the visual arts of Gee's Bend and African American spatial land use practices employ a set of principles found in improvisation, syncopation, call-and-response, harmonic structure, and kinetic orality. This phase required defining how these features have been demonstrated and the connections they hold in relation to the other media. The literature review relied on a search that included secondary sourced publications in the form of relevant articles and books and revealed in the field. It relied on knowledge previously accepted in the form of documentation, recordings, analysis, and interpretation. This research identified qualities shared across different media which could be synthesized into a set of principles.

The literature review provided definitions, explanations, and examples that led to an active interpretation of data and the construction of principles. Interpretation allowed for an analysis of the collected information and its digestion to present the underlying principles being called upon by the different fields of expression. The process of understanding began with multiple iterations, drawing connections between like characteristics, qualities, and actions. The synthesis of ideas was meant to provide a conceptual guide to the design and were proposed with the intention that they would be tested and revised through the design process.

Design

The design phase required the same steps taken through the logical design process. As a research by design project intends to produce contributions to knowledge that focus on the process of design, a documentation of the design steps taken was essential in the production of new knowledge. This project did not seek to implement the design, but aimed to propose a design that could be feasibly built in order to test the design strategy put forth.

The site analysis is the research phase of the physical conditions of the site, as well as historical and background studies, and the relationship to the larger context. For this project, there was site inventory, analysis, and interpretation of the site through mapping, site visits, and historic aerial photography (Appendices A, B, & C). As design is an iterative process, the conceptual design phase required the production of a multiplicity of ideas. Through this process, the testing of proposed principles on the site created new understandings allowing for refinement and revisions. The process was repeated until a satisfactory conceptual design driven by the proposed principles, was produced. The next steps produced preliminary design plans and acted as a way of converting the schematic diagrams into forms and spatial compositions. These drawings communicate the application of the formulated design principles of the project. The final phase resulted in the

production of a detailed site plan, perspectives, and presentation sections, all crucial to communicating the design.

Post-Design

This phase aimed to communicate the information, analysis, and design produced during the design experiment. Since the aim here was to create translatable knowledge from the process of design, and due to the largely abstract and theoretical nature of the collected and synthesized design principles, it was necessary to be as transparent as possible. This phase required an evaluation of the project analyzing the design and critiquing it in relation to the research question. A description providing a guide for other designers seeking to execute the design strategy is provided, as well as discussion for further study and exploration.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

Chapter One lays out the project in brief, outlining the methodological approaches taken in response to the research question posed. The research question asks how a new approach to design can emerge through a process of design and in this case by testing a set of principles framed by the invariable features of jazz in a specific context.

Chapter Two is the product of a literature review undertaken with the specific goal to outline the connections between the invariable features of jazz, the quilt work of Gee's Bend, and the spatial compositional practices undertaken in the American South. This chapter is a presentation of research and data that was in depth and required many sources of information.

Chapter Three draws and traces connections in the presented research of the literature review. As the literature review provided information for making the connections, it was only through presenting the actions that have been expressed through the different disciplines in African American culture, that required in depth research on the subjects. Through the act of interpretation, the connections made are used to define deeper and broader concepts, explained through examples of how the underlying source could feed the potential for design creativity in landscape architecture.

Chapter Four tests these concepts for a potential in design in landscape architecture. The process of designing is the process of learning and discovery. It tests the fitness of the principles outlined as well as acts a way of reusing and refining them (Figure 1.5).

Chapter Five discusses the results of the design experiment and the performance of the principles given the particular context.

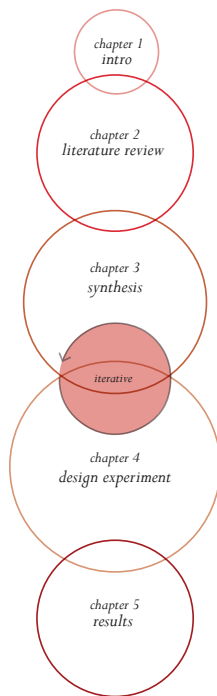


FIGURE 1.5

An iterative process of design and reflection tested the interpretation of constructed principles inspired by African American cultural expression.

2

LITERATURE REVIEW CLASSIFICATION AS A STRATEGY OF INQUIRY

African American cultural expression

Origins of Jazz

Jazz, derived from both African and European musical traditions, is a hybridization that evolved over multiple stages from the cross-fertilization of numerous cultures.

Jazz at its heart, is a unique synthesis, combining European harmonic structure, West African improvisational character and complex rhythms (Alexander and Rucker 2010, 215). Through ethnomusicology, or the ability to analyze and study music from the cultural and social aspects of the people who make it, we can follow the tributaries of the African and European musical sources to its predecessors (Schuller 1986, 4) (Figure 2.1). It is music compounded and created from the distinct historical events of the transatlantic slave trade and the beginnings of the African diaspora in the Americas. Through the process of the Middle Passage, where African people were ripped from their “homeland, deprived of their freedom, and torn from the social fabric that had given structure to their lives,” elements of their culture were the only possessions they could carry with them, one of which was music (Gioia 1997, 7). Over time, the African American community assimilated the European tradition in musical composition and enriched it with their custom in performance, a synergy that is the most striking and powerful evolutionary force in the history of modern music (Gioia 1997, 8).

The New Orleans of the late 19th century was the birthplace of jazz, a place with a diverse mix of French, Spanish, German, Italian, English, Irish, Scottish, Native

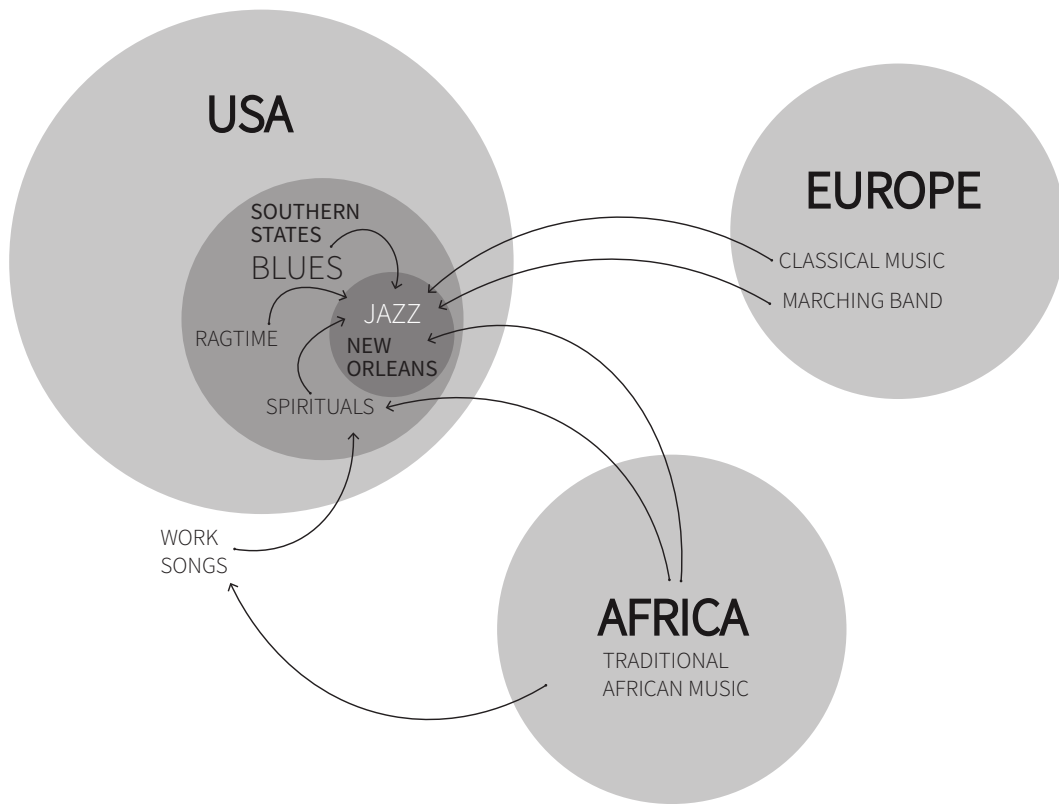


FIGURE 2.1

The geography of New Orleans played a significant role in allowing for the musical influences to accumulate in one place.

American, West Indian, Chinese, and African inhabitants, making Louisiana into the most smoldering melting pot of ethnicities that the nineteenth-century world could produce (Gioia 1997, 6-7). It was the most cosmopolitan city in the country while simultaneously the center of the southern slave trade. Yet, it was the descendants of slaves, those treated as human currency, who would be the source of creating the most original of American art forms.

Beginning in the early 19th century, slaves were allowed to make music and dance in the place known as Congo Square, now known as Louis Armstrong Park. Every Sunday the enslaved people gathered to express their cultural roots through the rituals of music and dance. Many of the slaves had never seen Africa, some had come from the West Indies bringing with them sounds of the Caribbean and others from the interior south brought work songs, spirituals and the call-and-response so prevalent in the Baptist church. For these African descendents, "for whom music and dancing had always been an integral part of everyday life, Congo Square must have offered a precious opportunity to recover at least a little of what they had lost when they were taken from their homes" (Ward and Burns 2000, 10).

New Orleans was also home to a unique group of people who called themselves "Creoles of Color," many were descended from French colonists and their African and Native American wives and mistresses (Ward and Burns 2000, 6). This group identified more with their French ancestry, and many were trained and prided

themselves on playing the classical music of Europeans. Brass marching bands were also popular at the time and became an integral part of the parade culture that still exists today. By 1850, New Orleans had two full symphony orchestras, one white and one Creole, each offering a separate place for whites, Creoles, and slaves to attend. Concurrently, ragtime “the formal outgrowth of the decades-old African American improvisational practice of ‘ragging’ tunes—syncopating and rearranging them to provide livelier, more danceable versions” filled with broken chords and set to upbeat rhythms, caught on like wildfire (Ward and Burns 2000, 11). It became America’s most loved music for a quarter of a century, and nowhere else was it more popular and pervasive than in New Orleans. The city had become a mecca for different cultures, living together side by side with distinctly different kinds of music, all of which would find its way into jazz.

When slavery was abolished after the Civil War, every aspect of daily life for African Americans in the South became segregated under a system of disenfranchisement laws referred to as “Jim Crow” laws. This system was upheld by local government officials and reinforced by acts of terror especially in the rural parts of the Southern United States. At this time the Blues emerged in New Orleans as an influx of African Americans moved away from the Mississippi Delta in search of a better life and the promise of work on the levee. The Blues is a distinctly American form, flexible with infinite variations built on just three chords, most often arranged in 12-bar sequences. It is a basic language through which one can construct all kinds of different innovations. Related to the sacred music of the black Baptist church, and originating from the experience of people who were hard-pressed, it revealed music that was full of feeling. The Blues recognized the honest expression of the human condition, characterized by the pervasiveness of the “blue” note (the sound responsible for its deep-seated impact). In New Orleans, the trumpet players who had customarily played their horns in a more military marching band style began to emulate the way the Blues, and people of the church sang, through their brass instruments (Figure 2.2). Over the years the Blues would become the source of significant influence in American music, including jazz, and beyond.

Eventually, the “Jim Crow” laws caught up to New Orleans with the “separate but equal” status for African Americans, which mandated racial segregation in all public facilities, transportation, and voting in the former Confederate States. By law this impacted the world of the Creole, changing their identity and restricting their rights. The popular Creole orchestras were forced to go into the African American community to perform. The introduction of their high level of technical fluency forever changed the nature of the music played in New Orleans, as the Creole classic virtuosity merged with the blues.

AFRICAN ROOTS

The geography of New Orleans played a significant role in allowing for the musical influences to accumulate in one place. Similarly, the location within the Americas strongly impacted the degree in which West African musical traditions survived.

FIGURE 2.2

Mathews Band of Lockport, Louisiana (about 1904). This is a true brass band—no reed. It is the earliest-known New Orleans brass band photograph showing a slide trombone, along with valve trombones customary at the time.

Rose and Souchon 1967, 195

For instance, the more extensive plantations of the Southeast, with large numbers of slaves who lived together but separate from the European descended owners, increased the possibility for their traditions to survive more intact (Martin and Waters 2006, 4). The sources of musical diversity from West Africa came from many different cultures, yet a few shared characteristics stand out. Through the study of African music and what took root on American soil, we can see the connections of many of these same features reappearing in a new form in jazz. For example, the call-and-response form where a soloist provides a phrase, commonly referred to as the call, often improvised, and the group answers in response. The group's response usually stays the same, often overlapping with the soloist contribution, and is a



repeated process. It infers a musical conversation resembling a pattern in human communication. As act of democratic participation “in its original African form, the call-and-response format is as much a matter of social integration as an issue of musical structure” (Gioia 1997, 9). Another unified feature of West African music, invented from a culture in which the fundamental idea of the separation of a performer and audience does not exist as it does in Western culture, was the integration of performance into the social fabric where music was a part of everyday life with no separate abstract function. This combination of music into social life meant art was not separate from social needs and in fact, in many African cultures there exists no word for art. Furthermore, the African cultures do not separate categories of the arts from one another, therefore, folklore, music, dance, sculpture, and painting all act as single entities serving not only philosophy and religion but all phases of everyday life (Schuller 1986, 4). With that said, another unifying feature referred to by some as *kinetic orality* focuses in part on the unifying aesthetic of music and dance and the recognition of the cognitive role of body motion in music perception and production; that what can be expressed in music, communicated through the body, is understood in dance. Dance music, that which can provoke and sustain dance, carries performative qualities that can be expressed and made tangible through the musical body. Kinetic orality relates to another somewhat predominant feature of West African music, also found in jazz, that identifies no boundaries in the means of communication with music in how a musician uses an instrument to speak or tell a story primarily through the act of improvisation. In all senses of the meaning, it remains consistent with the African oral-tradition aspect of jazz, in that musical bodies tell stories.

Despite the diversity of West African music, there is an emphasis on improvisation and unscripted expression in the moment of the performance, where “it involves acts of spontaneous creation, unique and impermanent, but it is not completely free. It is bounded by strictures of style and by the training, technique, experience,

and habits of a given performer. In this sense, jazz and African music are quite similar” (Locke 1980, 128). Improvisation in West African music is just one of the acting parts of the highly organized and ritualized compositions. West African music is also extremely rich in rhythmic content and a contributing feature of jazz music. For example, the off-beat phrasing of melodic accents, known as *syncopation*, is often described as involving the unexpected accenting of a weaker note within the melody. It displaces the accenting of the steady beat interrupting the regular flow of rhythm. The altered emphasis on the weak beat breaks the pattern creating an irregular metrical flow. Another example of a unique characteristic of West African music is the dominant polyrhythms expressed through percussion, where layers upon layers of rhythmic patterns from different instruments construct an intricate web of sound. Its survival is less forthright, as the suppression of drumming, more widely enforced on American soil, contributing to the expression becoming more ambiguous. However, the syncopated melodies and cross-rhythms, a superimposed rhythm over another, survived and are more clearly connected to its African roots. These features are some of the more distinct features drawn from the rich musical heritage of African Americans, perceptible in their approach to making music, and crucial in understanding jazz music.

EUROPEAN ROOTS

Jazz music is a hybrid, and just like most composites, it was created from many different layers overlapping and combining. It would be an oversimplification to state that all rhythm in jazz music is a result of only African influence. We can only identify the many sources by linking the persistent features of jazz music to cultural expression. As we have recognized West African music as embedded in jazz, the same legitimate conclusion exists with its European musical influences. There are at least three main features understood as contributions from European music to jazz. European music contributed the instruments played in early jazz and the role each took in the makeup of the melody. The trumpet, trombone, and clarinet all came from European marching bands or brass bands. Similarly, the rhythm section, although it had strong African influences, included the snare, bass and cymbals, all from European marching bands. The rhythm section also included other European instruments such as the piano and string instruments like the bass.

In addition to the instruments, form and harmony are the other significant influences, the basic layout of the music and what gives it structure. It can be thought of on a larger scale as rhythm and an indicator in the music, acting as a time marker. Overall multiple rhythms are happening simultaneously in jazz, but there is a form or structure of the piece, balancing at a more refined scale note-to-note rhythm with inflections falling in unexpected places, creating syncopation. At the scale of the meter of phrase, there is harmonic flow, syncopation, cross-rhythms, and call-and-response patterns (Martin and Waters 2006, 6). The European harmonic framework established on the overall practice of creating chords—three or more different notes that sound together in concordance—give the feeling that they fit together. In jazz, intensification of the chords occurs when

dissonant sounds play against a consonant sound creating rich effects balanced between tense and relaxed moments. The dissonance rooted in the music creates a quality and character of the chord that is unique to jazz.

ORIGINS OF THE WORD

With all the complexity found in musical theory and historical study, jazz music remains more than the sum of its parts, and somewhat of a mystery in inventing the phrase. Many scholars and critics have speculated about the origins of the word and its meaning. Once referred to as “hot” music, filled with energy and fire, transforming to be known as “jas,” which later became “jazz”, although no one knows for certain why. Some scholars have connected the word to African origins, reporting that “jas” comes from the language of the Mandinka as meaning “to speed up,” because the thing that struck people early about the music was that it seemed fast paced. An alternative and perhaps related definition was to “act out of the ordinary” or to have “unpredictable behavior” (Alexander and Rucker 2010, 214). The ambiguous word also has been found to have roots in Arabic where it means “to break.” These meanings are logical because they indicate music that is improvisational, spontaneous, and unpredictable while also breaking an ordered rhythm, which is to say it is syncopated, which is also to say it is jazz.

INVARIABLE FEATURES OF JAZZ

Regardless of the speculation surrounding the origin of the word “jazz,” one thing is agreed upon, that the music is more than just music. It was produced out of the human need for freedom and was a means to escape oppression especially through the implementation of improvisation (Hawkins 2008, ix). Jazz’s invariable features in addition to improvisation are syncopated rhythms, call-and-response patterns, harmonic structures, and kinetic orality (Alexander and Rucker 2010, 215).

Improvisation

Improvisation, a key feature in jazz, is an artist’s creative attempt to exceed boundaries, where the musician both improvises outside and inside a harmonic structure. It is both adhering within the parameters defined, as well as acting against it. Jazz is judged on deviation from the original, but is as much about the importance of the collective context as it is about individuality. It represents the recognition of different ideas and expressions of order, whereby the composition breaks as it disrupts a known pattern that then forms a new complex system of indeterminism, imperfection, and unpredictability; characterized by flux and change, rather than permanence and certainty (Brown 2006, xv).

Improvisation requires composing on the spot and is a negotiation between the foreseen and unforeseen circumstance related to tradition and objection. It is an expression of one’s identity and individuality within the group and a chance for

the soloist to “tell” their story. The invention of the melody occurs over the top of a chord progression, the composed harmony. This harmony provides the order necessary, as there is no music without order, but through the countering of a perceived disorder provided by improvisation, “jazz insists that order might not reside where we expect it” (Brown 2006, xiii). The merging of the composed music and improvised music, which may seem to be opposites, forms a unique interaction within the collective.

FIGURE 2.3

Kind of Blue recording session (L to R): John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis and Bill Evans

Everett 2009

Dynamic, open-ended, and ambiguous, these considerations facilitate improvisation and the embrace of opportunities created by the circumstantial and the unforeseen, yielding outcomes that exceed their seeming potential. These underlying structuring considerations within the apparent disorder, which music played by ear—improvised music, such as jazz—has become to represent (Brown 2006, xxvi).

“All Blues,” from *Kind of Blue*, 1959, is a jazz composition by Miles Davis where the musicians improvise outside and inside a twelve-bar blues chord progression (Figure 2.3). The album was recorded with next to no rehearsal and no score where the musicians were told only the following things: the structure, the main melodic idea, and which mode or scale to improvise on. The artists, Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Paul Chambers, and Jimmy Cobb did not have a complete score, just a definition of their parameters for improvisation, and



were not provided with a chord progression. There was more freedom without the provided chords, but it was more of a challenge to see how the melodic innovation could evolve. This album, accepted widely as one of the greatest jazz albums of its time, is based on its ingenuity in approach to improvisation or the concept that the more space provided within the framework, the more possibilities presented for the musicians. This method became known as modal jazz: a structure intended to

bring out the creativity and true spirit of the individual playing. Unconstrained by the complex chord progression that preceded (be-bop era), this instead was built on a single scale that constrained the number of allowable notes, which triggered the musicians to play beyond themselves. Providing a consistent frame permitted musicians to let go, while simultaneously giving balance and granting complete creativity by everyone involved.

Syncopation

Syncopation was an efficient way for early African Americans to transform the European musical framework. It is a logic that shifts the rhythmic stress from the strong beat to the weak beat and can be in some ways unexpected. Syncopation allowed them to express their natural tendency for rhythmic democratization, and to accent against the beat, shifting the normal rhythmic stress (Schuller 1986, 16). Although one can find syncopation used in other musical forms, its use in jazz is entirely unique providing a complex form of rhythm and danceable beats. Placing the notes slightly before or after the beat creates a disturbance or interruption of the regular flow of rhythm. It is the placement of the rhythmic stress of an accent where it would not typically occur making the music off-beat.

Music is divided into beats, and beats are grouped together in *measures* based on patterns of strong beats and weak beats. These patterns make up what is called the *meter* of a piece of music; they are “metrical patterns.” In regular metrical patterns, or the regular flow of rhythm, the first beat of a measure—the downbeat—is the strongest beat, where the most rhythmic emphasis, of weight, is felt. Syncopation shifts the emphasis, or, to put it another way, it places the *accent* on the wrong *syllable*. A syncopated rhythm is one that places stress on a weak beat, or that creates a strong impulse on a subdivision of a beat, an in-between beat. Weak beats and in-between beats are also known collectively as “offbeats,” and syncopated rhythm may be thought of as “offbeat rhythm” (Hoffman 2005, 239-240).

As the first and third beats are usually the strong ones, the alteration of stressing the second beat creates an interruption in the flow of the rhythm. An integral feature of jazz, there are no limits to the way syncopation is applied, with an infinite variety of rhythms providing interest and energy to the music.

Call-and-Response

In jazz, call-and-response is a pattern performed between two groups: The “call,” played by one or more musicians, followed by a “response” from one instrument or an ensemble. Call-and-response is a musical conversation between two groups where the phrases are distinctly different, and the following phrase heard as a direct remark on, or in response to the first. It is both social, dependent, and a collective where the participants exchange ideas and information through the music of the song. In jazz, the musical exchange resembles a conversation through melodies. An example is found in the song “Blue Train” by John Coltrane, recorded in 1957, right before the song slips into two countermelodies, one structured and the other improvised. Mostly improvised, the song finds complexity in its layers by using

only the most basic blues chords on top of a simple harmonic structure. It begins with the tenor saxophone “calling” with a melody and then the bass, drums, and piano “respond”. After a few bars, the trumpet and trombone jump in to add to what the saxophone was saying creating harmony in the call-and-response.

Harmonic Structure

Jazz inherited much of its formal structure from the European form which goes back centuries. It provides the composer with the scaffolding on which to work while providing the listener with a familiar place from which to absorb something entirely new. The most common form is the 32-bar “AABA” form which was especially prominent as jazz matured in the 1920s (Martin and Waters 2006, 9). This form comprises an eight-bar theme of a section where “A” is played twice, followed by the “B” section, and subsequently returning to the “A” theme. We can see a clear example of this in Miles Davis’ “So What,” from *Kind of Blue*, 1959, where the musicians use an AABA form in which all the A sections built on a single harmony are different from the B sections on a harmony a half step higher. Due to this form being commonly familiar among musicians, it is thought to make improvising easier, releasing some anxiety about the different chords and phrases. Jazz is an open system, participatory, and mediated in its context, but it is the structure that provides the springboard for creative instability.

Kinetic Orality

Kinetic orality represents in part how a transplanted cultural tradition survived in astonishing ways to continue in a new place and as a new expression. In jazz there is not a separation between the mind and body or, said in another way, composing and performing (Brown 2006, 43). Instead of movement being separate from the influences of music patterns, it is understood as inseparable, and that movement influences the musical patterns (Figure 2.4). As an expression of a lived experience within the musical body, dance accompanies the music and is communicated by the body in relationship to music. Defining kinetic orality has not always proven to be widespread, but the role the body plays in African American music-making is critical (Gaunt 2006, 7). To merely define the words themselves lends to understanding the concept: “kinetic,” as defined by relating to or resulting from motion and depending on movement for its effect and “orality,” as defined as the quality of being spoken or communicated. In other words, it is speaking through dance or using the body as a means of expression. It is communication expressed in a tangible and visible form through a musical discourse of the corporeal identifying the body as the locus of experience and creativity.

The roots of jazz performance embedded in African music creates an environment where the notation is improbable due to the inability to separate music in distinction from bodily movement. Jazz music emerged through “playing, aurality, and the body [therefore], it never experienced the need to adhere to the restrictions of

FIGURE 2.4

It is said in Africa that a person who hears music understands it in dance and the influences of music patterns, it is understood as inseparable from bodily movement.

Mutere 2012

notation, or conversely the need to disregard them” (Brown 2006, 43). In relation to notation, the concept of the technique is also different in improvised music versus Western classical music (Brown 2006, 46). For instance, a Western classical musician is trained to have a hidden body, attained by learning the proper way of playing achieved by the “correct” movement of the body conformed to a standardized method. The achievement of the goal to display flawless standardized technique requires, “focusing on the technique that facilitates the repeated production of particular sounds regardless of individual musicians and instruments” (Brown 2006, 46). As a western classical music performer, their relationship to the composer, musical work and audience attempts to remain anonymous to emphasize the musical work, a result of the composer’s intellect. Contrary to what is perceived, improvisation does not abandon discipline but rather is positioned “in relation to the body of the performer, [where] the player must be willing to stretch, must not be fearful of exposure and detection” (Brown 2006, 46). Instead of a seamless interface with the musician and its instrument, the body and the instrument become detectable, become unique, and create their *own* unique sound that is their *own* tone on the instrument. Embedded in that is the concern for a “sound potential available while playing rather than adherence to correct technique” (Brown 2006, 48).



The Western idea of the separation of audience from the performer is transcended through kinetic orality. Jazz dance, which paralleled the birth and spread of jazz itself, originated from African American vernacular dance. Dancing allowed for social cooperation between the enslaved Africans, and was a means to retain their cultural traditions. The dance that came to be known as the Ring Shout, practiced in Congo Square, exhibits how the actual transfer of African traditions was transplanted to the soil of the New World. The Ring Shout, “with its clusters of individuals moving in a circular pattern—the largest less than ten feet in diameter—harkens back to one of the most pervasive ritual ceremonies of Africa” (Gioia 1997, 4). Its appearance in New Orleans is just one of many places this dance was documented where the group shuffles while stomping feet and clapping hands in a counterclockwise circle. The noise created by the slapping thighs, shuffling feet, and patting hands improvised complex rhythms emulating drumming. Another dance that began in the plantation setting was the Cakewalk, a dance that parodied the mannerisms of Southern high society and provided a way for the enslaved to covertly mock their masters, through the expression of dance. These dances became popular and were adopted by minstrel shows, performed by Caucasians in blackface and sometimes in later years African Americans acting as Caucasians in blackface. The minstrels reinforced ugly racial stereotypes yet also celebrated the music and dance of the minority group. Started in the 1840s, minstrel shows were the most popular form of entertainment for about 80 years in the United States, and produced the first body of serious pop songs. Despite the overt racism,

the shows were a blend of lively music, knock-about comedy, and sophisticated elegance, a bizarre and complicated ritual where black and whites would interpret and misinterpret each other for decades (Ward and Burns 2000, 8). The 1920s through the 1940s, the Swing era of jazz, produced a variety of dancing genres and moves such as the Charleston, the Lindy hop, the Jitterbug, and Swing. Dance sprung from the African American community as a pervasive, vital, and distinctive form of expression and has been, along with music, as a performing art one of the most important means of cultural survival.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUILT

Quilts are also a significant expression of African American culture, with roots attached to West African quilt making in cultural tradition and technique. Some African American quilts are understood to be the visual equivalent of jazz with characteristics such as improvisation, multiple patterns, and asymmetry. (Wahlman 2001, 35-36). By understanding the West African textile techniques and symbolism used, we can trace its translation across the Atlantic to the New World and see how it mixed with various other influences of European, Native American, and West Indies cultures. In West Africa, textile art was done by men, but due to European concepts about the division of labor employed on southern plantations, women became the quilt makers and the carriers of cultural traditions. The quilt makers had to learn traditional Anglo-American styles when making items for their masters' households, but they often had African traditions in mind when it came time for producing work for themselves, and freely borrowed from other cultures.

Beginning in the 11th century, most cloth in West Africa was constructed into strips of fabric made through a process called strip-weaving (Figure 2.5). These pieces were the building blocks of many artistic designs, with flexible applications used as a form of currency in banners, wall hangings, and clothing. African American quilts often emphasized the strip and pieced together material to create a larger patchwork textile. The design of the patchwork exhibits the strip as a dominant element as well as the primary construction technique in its making. In West Africa, patterns and bold colors were a form of identification, and it was important for them to be read from a distance. Designs signified status in a community where the more complex the pattern, the higher the social ranking. Contemporary African American quilters who employ these aesthetic preferences in their designs show how “memories of aesthetic preferences outlive memories of African functions” (Wahlman 2001, 45).

Arts can preserve cultural tradition even though the social context of traditions may change, yet the codes are neither simple nor easy to decipher. At least three core traditions—quilt making, charm-making or conjuration, and grave decoration—continue to thrive and to establish a sense of the indigenous rootstocks of African American vernacular art. Sometimes forms endure, while the meanings persist without their original form (Arnett and Arnett 2000, 66).

FIGURE 2.5

Asante kente cloth, 20th century, silk and cotton (Vatican Museums). Kente is woven on a horizontal strip loom, which produces a narrow band of cloth about four inches wide. Several of these strips are carefully arranged and hand-sewn together to create a cloth of the desired size. Most kente weavers are men.

Micots 2018

The aesthetic preference for improvisation and variation on a theme, multiple patterning, unpredictable tensions, and rhythms are found in the African American contemporary quilt. As Euro-American quilts valued symmetrical perfection, the African American quilters operate by a different set of principles—the same principles that emerged as the invariable features of jazz. It is not that jazz was influential in creating their work or that their design strategy intentionally employed its regular features, instead they are both pure expressions of African American culture.

Asymmetry in West African quilts, is an aesthetic that we find in contemporary African American quilts. It occurs when strips sewn together, whether colored or patterned, are staggered in relation to other strips, resulting in a unique pattern, without an attempt for symmetry, although there is a careful matching of the ends. The most robust asymmetrical patterning in textile design has come from the Kongo, Pygmy, and Kuba peoples of Africa. For the Kongo people, pattern breaking had a religious meaning and allowed the space for a connection with ancestors providing a rebirth of power in the living person. It also held protective qualities, as many West Africans believed that evil spirits traveled in a straight line. There were observations made that African slaves were often resistant to plow in a straight line or follow a pattern in a straight line. What may give the



impression of an overall uncalculated asymmetrical design was deliberate and held meaning. The asymmetrical arrangements in the creation of textiles are a form of improvisation creating unique pieces of work. The Kongo people celebrated the talented expression of sound and vision in improvisation expressed in the saying: *veti dikita*, which means “the mind plays the pattern strongly” (Wahlman 2001, 36).

FIGURE 2.6

Like jazz or vernacular dance, quilts rely upon multiple patterns that may have disparate cultural origins. African American quilters often begin their compositions with what we think of as traditional European American quilt patterns, then African Americanize them.

Arnett and Arnett 2000, 68



African American quilters who learned the European quilting pattern often improvised with the structure provided by the pattern, varying its forms in size, arrangement, and color, until an entirely new idea formed.

The exploding-star quilt of Nora Ezell “begins” with a conventional European American design and then insistently undoes or reworks it with African American preferences and pattern breaks. Bursting the star pattern merges traditional cross-cultural quilt form with a specifically African American sign: the shooting star, an omen of coming change, a portent that someone has died or is about to die. Ezell’s technique of shifting between white and black aesthetic norms, sometimes called “code-switching” is a sophisticated yet common African American creative strategy, also seen in varying degrees throughout the African diaspora and among many of the globe’s colonized peoples (Arnett and Arnett 2000, 68), (Figure 2.6).

The quilts are a visual expression of a rich cultural past of a people and a full range of complexities that came together to create the existence of the African American. It is a challenge to attempt to trace cultural roots to their origin, as transmutations occurs, but the quilts provided an understanding and a link across the Atlantic to another time and place.

FIGURE 2.7

The artistic achievement of Gee's Bend's is the result of both geographical isolation and an unusual degree of cultural continuity. These works have been produced by three and sometimes four generations of women in the same family, creating a visual conversation among the community and across lineages.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018

The contemporary quilts of Gee's Bend, produced by one of Alabama's most isolated and most impoverished African American communities are considered some of the most incredible works of modern art in America (Kimmelman 2002). The quilts begin with an act of violence through ripping, tearing, and shredding, just as the African people also experienced being ripped from their homeland. The quilts take what was intact and literally re-stitch the fragmented pieces into a cohesive and comprehensible work of art. This process is in many ways related to the African American mode of existing. They are an exhibition of the African American consciousness, "a visual landscape where the rich interior landscape of its maker and the outer world are integrated into a holistic landscape. Spread out horizontally, the quilts suggest a territory in which a tenuous order has been literally pieced together out of the chaos and rupture brought on by the 'Middle Passage'" (Vasquez 2015, 127).

For generations the African American women of Gee's Bend have been creating these original works of art disconnected from the rest of society; isolation that allowed their African-influenced traditions to survive, flourish, and remain embedded in their work (Figure 2.7). The geography of the place contributed to the isolation, surrounded by the Alabama River on three sides, crossed with creeks and sloughs, and peppered with swamps, the landscape was regularly inundated creating an almost inland island. The governmental center of the county is just 4 miles away,



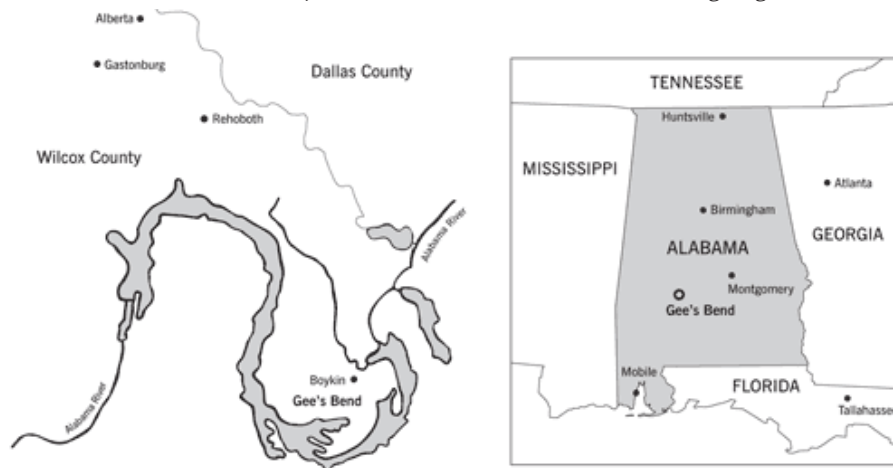
but an hour-long drive. The ferry ceased functioning in the mid-1960's in retaliation for the women attempting to register to vote, leaving the community (with only three cars) utterly cut off. Gee's Bend is a fifteen-mile-long area with a population of primarily African Americans of around 700 people. The African Americans of Gee's Bend are descendants of slaves, some of whom have an oral history that can be traced back to their ancestor's arrival to the New World, which is very rare. The area is named after Joseph Gee who established it as a cotton plantation in 1816. Bought by Mark Pettway in 1845, many of the residents of Gee's Bend are

FIGURE 2.8

Many residents of Gee's Bend are descendants of slaves. A rural community in Alabama, Gee's Bend resembles an inland island, surrounded by three sides by the Alabama River. Named after a cotton plantation owner, Joseph Gee, the name of the shrinking community has recently been changed to Boykin.

Philadelphia Museum of Art 2018

descendants of the Pettway's slaves and still have Pettway as their surname. After slavery became outlawed, the residents became tenant farmers. Under this system, the tenant farmers were loaned an advancement for the sale of an unharvested crop, a system that kept the farmer in debt. With the Great Depression, when the price of cotton fell, the community sank further into extreme poverty. Despite the hardships, the community endured. They replaced mud-mortared homes with one-window log cabins with the help of low-interest loans from the Roosevelt administration. Providing a dwelling with a longer lifespan allowed for the Gee's Benders to become permanent residents in the community. When the hostility created by African Americans demanding equal rights isolated the community, they established the Freedom Quilting Bee, a quilt-making collective. At the time, quilting was only considered a craft and not an art, but even then, the collective sold some of their original works to faraway customers after an article about them ran in the *New York Times* (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 19). The quilting bee soon reoriented to making standardized quilts for department stores like Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale's, and then later pillow-shams for Sears, Roebuck and Company. These jobs provided steady work and an abundant supply of fabric for the community. Most of these contracts ended in the mid- 1980's, and the energy of Gee's Bend lessened. Today the community, also known as Boykin, Alabama, has just a few hundred members remaining (Figure 2.8).



“The Quilts of Gee’s Bend” opened in September 2002 at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and has since traveled all over the United States. Because of this newfound recognition, the Gee’s Bend quilters have intensified their work. The quilts, constructed initially out of a functional need for warmth, with operating principles in composition, were boldly improvisational and broke rhythms by adding syncopation. The quilts are not only connected and inspired by architecture and spatial composition of the landscape but also represent a lived experience, as the material is literally the fabric of their lives. The designs are unusually minimalist and boldly contrasting, and it is as though the African aesthetic influence passed down became more distilled and represented in its essence.

QUILT TYPE

Five types of quilts categorize the work of Gee's Bend and have been identified as: abstraction and improvisation, patterns and geometry quilts, housetop and bricklayer quilts, Sears corduroy quilts, and work clothes quilts. The quilt type refers to technique, patterns, the materials at hand, and process. All the quilts are understood as being in the improvisation and abstraction category, often referred to in the community as "my way" quilts.

Abstraction & Improvisation

Much like jazz improvisation, the quilters express individuality through their medium and embark on an uninhibited personal vision of creating abstract art. These quilts are not seeking a perfect symmetry but rather celebrate risk and exploration. The work is never begun in the same way, and each quilt is something brand new no one has ever seen before. The artist's "culturally constructed aesthetic of improvisation puts the quilt into action, into motion, and introduces the maker's personality and the role of individual performance into the quilt aesthetic" (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 31). Each quilter begins with a standard and basic form and then exerts their innovation creating over time a unique artistic voice. These quilts celebrate individualism and use a visual language of shape, form, color, and line to create a composition that may reference the world around it but exists independently from it.

Block and Strips (2003) (Figure 2.9), and *Strips and Strings (2003)* (Figure 2.10) by Mary Lee Bendolph are both examples of the "my way" quilts in that they are free from the restrictions of a standard pattern. Her quilts begin by tearing cloth, which has been discarded or has become unusable, into strips and blocks of fabric. The creation of the strings begins by sewing small rectangular scraps into strips. Then she joins the pieces creating a complete work from the geometric shapes. Her ingenuity is found in her ability to create endless variations on a theme out of almost nothing and produce works of complex art. Bendolph's highly refined geometric abstractions come from the common practice of strip quilting, a widespread technique used throughout the South. In her creative practice, she has said that her inspiration is usually drawn from the world around her, in color, forms, and patterns. Therefore, her quilts are an abstract snapshot of her visual environment. In this work *Block and Strips, 2003*, Bendolph takes a grid-like form as the organizing element and improvises. The structural framework employed is called the "Housetop" pattern, a conventional and popular quilt design of concentric squares. Bendolph's bold use of colorful strips creates a network of turquoise blue pathways to the focused center of a red, pink, and orange grouping.

FIGURE 2.9

Blocks and Strips. 2003.
Corduroy. 77 x 71 inches
by Mary Lee Bendolph.

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FIGURE 2.10

Strips and Strings.
2003. Cotton and cotton
blends. 74 x 49 inches by
Mary Lee Bendolph.

Souls Grown Deep
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Pattern & Geometry

In the pattern and geometry genre of quilts, the quilts are dominated by a single shape repeatedly expressed in revised and new forms. The pattern changes that occur provide visual energy and lively rhythm sometimes referred to as syncopation. The infused pattern changes encourage the eye to jump around, just as syncopation provides the swing in jazz. Triangles, squares, rectangles, diamonds, and hexagons are the basic shapes used in arranging multiple configurations. By using this simple design language, the quilts, much like the work clothes they are made from, are a metaphor for the lives lived in Gee's Bend where art found a way to emerge from the everyday. From a place of little means, hardship, and strife blossomed unique artwork. The same isolation and burdens that caused pain, also were a breeding ground for creativity. Mary Lee Bendolph's composition: *Blocks, Strips, Strings, and Half Squares* (2005) is one of her most original creations (Figure 2.11). The quilt, filled with African American principles of improvisation and syncopation, is composed of blocks where each section introduces a new design variation. The geometric forms used are the wedge-shaped pieces known as strings, long rectangular pieces known as strips, and triangles. The overall asymmetry of the composition defies predictability and creates a rhythmic surprise. There is forward momentum in this piece that radiates liveliness and at the same time fits comfortably within the coherent aesthetic of Gee's Bend quilts.

Housetop & Bricklayer

There are fundamental building blocks to the Gee's Bend quilts: housetop, log cabin, four-patch, roman stripes, birds in flight, bricklayer, and nine-patch (Figure 2.12). The housetop pattern and its variations are the most favored form within the community, as it offers compositional flexibility. Uncomplicated and transparent, the framework provides space to improvise. Composed around the center of a square, where the rest of the larger offset squares share the same center with that of the larger square surrounding the smaller one. Rectangular strips are placed perpendicular to one another in repetition, so that the end of a strip's long side connects to one short side of a neighboring strip. "Eventually forming a kind of frame surrounding the central patch; increasingly larger frames or borders are added until a block is declared complete" (Souls Grown Deep Foundation 2018).

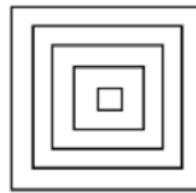
From the entire composed piece to its composite elements, the housetop pattern initiates a visual exchange in the back and forth manner of call-and-response. This design naturally creates an echo of right angles that pushes and pulls among elements forcing a focus on the center medallion, while calling back to the work's edges (Souls Grown Deep Foundation 2018). There are, many variations on the form and Louisiana P. Bendolph's *Housetop Variation* (2003) is one example of a completely unique take on the pattern, a hybrid of both the bricklayer and housetop pattern (Figure 2.13). The squares within squares are present but divided into different quadrants, making it impossible to occupy that space imaginatively. The steps created in the bricklayer pattern call back to each other from separate

FIGURE 2.11

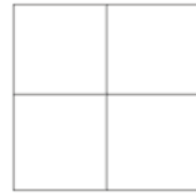
Blocks, Strips, Strings,
and Half Squares. 2005.
Cotton. 84 x 81 inches by
Mary Lee Bendolph.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018

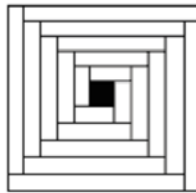




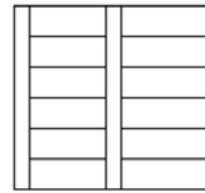
Housetop — also called Pig in a Pen, Hog Pen, or Chicken Coop



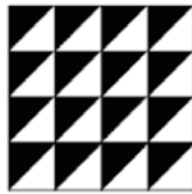
Four-Patch



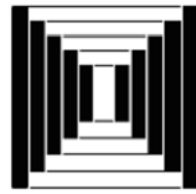
Log Cabin



Roman Stripes



Birds in Flight
(many variations)



Bricklayer — also known as Courthouse Steps



Nine-Patch

FIGURE 2.12

There are fundamental building blocks to the Gee's Bend quilts: housetop, log cabin, four-patch, roman stripes, birds in flight, bricklayer, and nine-patch. The housetop pattern and its variations are the most favored form within the community, as it offers compositional flexibility.

Philadelphia Museum of Art 2018

quadrants, creating a jarring asymmetry where the weight of the black is felt.

Another compelling aspect of quilts found in this genre is the relationship of the abstracted spatial compositions of the quilt to a bird's eye view or architectural construction. For instance, the name "housetop," orients the mind towards an aerial view, while "log cabin" or "bricklayer" is also vocabulary connected to building and forming architectural space. The patterns may be based upon the construction techniques used to build houses by early Americans, as many of the quilt makers connect building a quilt to building a house (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 208). The quilt becomes a rendering of abstracted architectural images, extracting patterns from the surrounding visual world created in shape, idea, and form. The quilt is a vehicle of expression within the built environment, relating to and in some cases part of the architecture itself, serving as a visual space that can be occupied by the mind and altering the space it occupies while adding liveliness and interest. Another shared feature of both the Gee's Bend quilts and architecture are that they are historical markers that hold memories, express ideas, and pose a greater sense of societal desire, with the presence of the designer's signature.

In the quilt, "*Housetop*" Variation (2003) by Louisiana P. Bendolph, there are solid blocks of color that intersect with overlapping lines arranged in a way that recalls map like grids; an aerial view of land, roads, and fields (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 126) (Figure 2.14). Similarly, in another quilt, *Blocks*

and Bars (2003) Sue Willie Seltzer describes her work in relation to the spatial composition in architecture (Figure 2.15). The quilt is an abstracted aerial view “of a main road passing a complex of buildings with room-by-room add-ons” (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 126). The “Roosevelt” or “project” houses built in Gee’s Bend in the late 1930s and early 1940’s were remade in the same way, over time becoming their own by dividing spaces, making alterations, and adding additions. If you divide the quilt down the middle, with one side made up of two red blocks sandwiching a single white block, there is visual symmetry while its other half appears to be that same symmetry exploded and representing dynamic fragments of itself (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 126). Many of the Gee’s Bends quilts seem to be reflective of space: layouts of fields, garden plots, houses, and neighborhoods. Other quilts by Sue Willie Seltzer, *String-pieced Blocks and Bars* (1965) (Figure 2.16) and Louisiana P. Bendolph’s *“Housetop” Variation* (2006) (Figure 2.17) are interpreted as an abstracted bird’s eye view of a landscape patchwork and are compelling in the synthesis of space and place, representative of community, memory, and home (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 126).

The rectangle and square have been the most widely used patterns for the quilters of Gee’s Bend over time. The housetop pattern is based on these shapes. The quilt shape in and of itself is a rectangle, and by applying the housetop pattern, there is a creation of an internal back and forth between the whole object and its internal parts. Inherently producing an echo of right angles, the significance of the focused center and its control of edges are all commonalities of this design (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 31). The definitions of space are created through the overall shape of the entire piece and its elements, also holding a level of transparency of the technique involved in construction. The technique exhibits the quilt maker choosing to introduce another color or fabric for each of the component strips. Many of the quilters are naturally drawn to work in the housetop pattern, in part due to its ability to be widely varying and the opportunities for complexity with what may appear, on the surface, to be simple geometric compositions. Like jazz improvisation, “the vocabulary and grammar of Gee’s Bend ‘Housetop’ quilts exist in a continuing moment of design instability. Each ‘Housetop’ quilt, no matter how loosely organized its composition may seem at first glance, creates a moment that simultaneously preserves and critiques the organizing idea” (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 210).

Sears Corduroy

One of the many astounding characteristics of these quilts is that with very few shapes, the quilters can produce a wide array of diverse and unique compositions, and within the shapes themselves they can find variation. For the quilters, the shapes can bend and move; a rectangle does not have to be symmetrical but can be stretched and distorted while still being representative of itself. The idea of perfection or beauty to the quilters is not found in symmetry or rigid forms but in plasticity. In Nellie Mae Abrams’s, *Housetop Variation (1970s)* (Figure 2.18), there are six dominant shapes, none of which are the same.

FIGURE 2.13

"Housetop" Variation.
2003. Cotton and cotton
blends. 86 x 68 inches by
Louisiana P. Bendolph.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018



FIGURE 2.14

"Housetop" Variation.
2003. Cotton and cotton
blends. 98 x 68 inches by
Louisiana P. Bendolph.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018



FIGURE 2.15

Blocks and Bars. 2003.
Cotton. 80 x 74 inches by
Sue Willie Seltzer.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018



FIGURE 2.16

String-pieced Blocks and Bars. c. 1965. Cotton, denim, flannel. 87 x 76 inches by Sue Willie Seltzer.

Souls Grown Deep
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FIGURE 2.17

"Housetop" Variation.
2006. Cotton and cotton
blends. 87 x 85 inches by
Louisiana P. Bendolph.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018



Using only three colors of corduroy—gold, avocado green, and brown—she expertly silhouetted blocks against blocks to create powerful positive and negative spaces. Two tiny pieces of contrasting color inserted near the “frontier” between the upper and lower halves of the quilt enliven the relationship between the two dominant zones. In contrast to the zipper effect of the small pieces, variations in block edges at the top and bottom of the quilt make for visual forces that pull the quilt’s two large halves apart. Additional revisions of the four outer rectangles introduce diagonal stress into the composition. Several types of movement—centripetal (toward the center axis), centrifugal (away from the central axis), and three-dimensional—seem to be taking place simultaneously, requiring the eye to “remake” the composition each time a new rectangle becomes the object of focus (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 94).

This piece among many others is an example of the incredibly creative works made during the Sears, Roebuck and Company era of quilting in Gee’s Bend. In 1972, the Freedom Quilting Bee received a contract with Sears, Roebuck and Company to make corduroy pillow shams. The work provided an abundance of leftover fabric and income for the community. The wide-wale cotton corduroy was a challenge to work with but its restrictive character offered opportunity and a wonderful palette of gold, avocado leaf, tangerine, and cherry red that contributed to bold designs. The mass production of the shams required a strict design be followed and reproduced for the company. The little room for personal creativity stirred and produced a profound creative response turning the standardized remnants into vibrant and individualized works of art (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 91-92).

Building quilts with strips was another way of building with the restrictive corduroy material. Nettie Jane Kennedy’s *Basket Weave* (1973), is one example of a quilt constructed from a system of corduroy strips (Figure 2.19). The pattern appears visually as a unified whole, however, the pattern breaks as one edge of the composition turns to the use of an eccentric green color in replacement of the prolific tan elements while simultaneously two odd green strips appear on the opposite side of the piece. “This quilt offers another example of the Gee’s Benders’ control of edges and boundaries, so crucial to the success of geometric and, especially, minimalist forms” (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 95). Through this pattern alteration, the quilter can put their individualistic signature on the work by taking a regular, repeating, and seemingly unvarying motif and upset the standardization by even the smallest pattern breaks. The quilters understand the impact created by making slight alterations, especially in the border zone, producing a large-scale effect on the composition. Another example is a quilt by Annie Mae Young, *Strips* (1975) (Figure 2.20), where the outer strips animate and energize the composition juxtaposed with the expansive blue. The corduroy quilts have embedded in them the innate characteristics of the material, and the rigid structure of the material and the demand in technique offered an opportunity for philosophical complexity and unpredictability.

FIGURE 2.18

"Housetop" Variation.
1970s. Corduroy. 87 x
80 inches by Nellie Mae
Abrams.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018



FIGURE 2.19

"Basket Weave", 1973.
Corduroy. 80 x 80 inches
by Nettie Jane Kennedy.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018



FIGURE 2.20

Strips. c. 1975. Corduroy.
95 x 105 inches by Annie
Mae Young.

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Work-Clothes

Like the Sears Corduroy quilts, the material restrictions lent to minimal forms in the work-clothes quilt, a type that came decades before. Similarly, the material used was rarely cut across the grain and had a limited color palette, yet produced compositions that exhibited remarkable variety and individuality, proving that the constraints played a significant role in the compositions. The work-clothes quilts are indeed an example of a creative practice regarding the modalities of an improvisational culture born out of scarcity and resourcefulness transforming useless materials into marvels of textile art. Made from worn-out work clothes, the palette drew from jeans, shirts, aprons, and dress bottoms whose faded denim “patches provided a tangible record of lives marked by the seasons of hard labor in the fields of the rural South” (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 67). The patchwork becomes a physical manifestation of the body and its lived history through the cloth pieces possessing the stains and tears of a hard life.

The process of taking tattered clothes, worn down from hard manual labor, and transforming them into layers of warmth, shielding those under them from the cold, symbolizes the strength of the community. Beyond the utilitarian and practical reasons for making the quilts, they also served as vehicles of creative and cultural expression.

The preference for bold, free-form patterning by the quiltmakers of Gee’s Bend is even more attributable to the aesthetic philosophy that inspires them—a view of creativity which is rooted in the improvisational practices of African American expressive culture that favors visual drama over laborious technique, surprise over painstaking repetition, and originality over predictability. In a purely aesthetic sense, the more simplified constructions of the work-clothes quilts provided a blank canvas for experiments with a range of improvisational strategies, including sudden shifts in patterning, broken borders, irregular shapes, asymmetry, syncopation, and dissonant juxtapositions of prints and colors (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 68).

A work-clothes quilt by Annie Mae Young, created in 1976, is an example of a strip quilt made from denim, corduroy, and britches legs and pockets (Figure 2.21). The values found in the worn material formed by longtime use give this piece a wealth of variation. There is a musical quality found in this composition, in the language of African American improvisational patchwork and structured knowledge passed down from generation to generation. The patterns the material lent itself well to were the strip and string abstractions, although many other patterns were used such as the housetop in its many variations. The quilts evolved out of recycling materials, using what was at hand, and transforming the sturdy leftover pieces. The backs of pant legs were a possible piece of material for salvaging, as the physically hard demands of picking cotton on one’s knees wore the fronts out sooner. The daily attire of the tenant farmers in the South was a muted palette of blues, browns, and grays, the field-frayed and sun-bleached denim was quiet and reserved. The spectrum of the subtleties provided visual textures created by its inflections and irregularities from hems, seams, pockets, and streaks of saturated dye running through the faded blue jeans with stains, patches, and past mending.

FIGURE 2.21

Work-Clothes Quilt with Center Medallion of Strips. 1976. Denim, corduroy, synthetic blend (britches legs with pockets). 108 x 77 inches by Annie Mae Young.

Souls Grown Deep
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One of the quilters talked about the musicality of the work-clothes quilts: “It looks like they have songs to them. You could tell stories about this piece, you could tell stories about that piece....They have songs to them” (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 78). They indeed are made up of a lived experience in the African American body in the rural South, a life of physical labor working the fields. The work-clothes quilts are portraits of the people who wore the clothes as well as of the time and place in which they lived.

SPATIAL COMPOSITION & LANDSCAPE PRACTICES

The process of upcycling used material is embedded in the belief that anything, no matter what it is, holds the potential to be made beautiful by the hands of the artist. The practice of making the “work-clothes quilts belongs to a much larger tradition of salvage within African American cultural history. In part, this tradition was a response to dire social and economic circumstances in which recycling became a primary means of survival” (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 71). The philosophy of taking undesirable leftovers, reclaiming old materials, and creating something new, is identified in many other cultural customs including Southern cuisine and what is known as the African American yard show where everyday objects are made into art (Figure 2.22). Similar themes emerge, evoking, “slavery and of being an outcast; in sad and wise reverie, they seem naturally to relate a life among abandoned things with the sense of being abandoned by society. Yet in the process of recycling or reusing society’s detritus, there is also a sense of tenacious survival, of dogged faith in the possibility of rebirth” (Souls Grown Deep Foundation 2018). They also function as vehicles of memory, recorded history, and cultural objects.



"YARD SHOW"

Music and art are both vehicles of cultural expression, and it is not surprising to see the same principles used in their creation emerging in land use and spatial composition practices. Through analyzing two types of landscapes, the enslaved African’s spaces on Southern plantations and African American yard work, we can see that cultural space was carved out of what was hegemonic, to dwell within it freely. Within the African American art “yard show”, also referred to as the process of “working in the yard” or “dressing the yard,” there is a visual lexicon communicated through a seemingly infinite assortment of materials (Figure 2.23). Its origins lie

FIGURE 2.22

“Yard Show” art work by Lonnie Holley: Dish of the Receiver, 1983 (Photo: William Arnett, 1987, destroyed in 1997).

Souls Grown Deep Foundation 2018

FIGURE 2.23

The “Yard Show” is a highly evolved and complex system of artworks practiced and integrated into the landscape. Its origins are sourced to the time of Slavery, were a secret language developed as a means of practicing culture and commemorating life.

Souls Grown Deep
Foundation 2018

partially in the improvisational creative practice that African American culture has experienced with a scarcity of resources. In the object itself there can be meaning, but the weight of relevance is found in the relationship created between objects. The materials can be wide-ranging and can include: discarded television sets, tires, bottles, mirrors, other reflective objects, abandoned appliances, toys, broken furniture, special plantings, wires and ropes, seats, stones, tools, garments, and automobile parts among numberless other parts. The display is a process of collage and improvisation, often integrated into the surrounding features of the landscape. The emphasis is placed on the choosing and joining of materials in an ongoing process that creates a composition concerned with what came before it, the current possibilities, and how those lay a future of further possibilities. Through the act of assembly and the raw materials, fragmented pieces of the world become sculptural and in some cases spiritual artifacts in the landscape, serving as metaphysical conduits between realms. “The most widespread custom within African American yard art is the use of found objects as a way to commemorate the lives and spirits of loved ones” (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 73). Moreover, there are



many signs and symbols that hold meaning; some are individualistic in association with its maker, while in others reoccurring themes emerge.

Some of the shared vocabulary found in displays are: flashing reflective surfaces, emblems of motion, pipes acting as conduits, objects with human characteristics, tied and wrapped fences, seating that is not necessarily for sitting, things that belonged to the deceased, whitewashed rocks and trees, broken and inverted vessels, non-discursive script, tree roots, and geometric diamonds. Flashing and reflective surfaces, for instance, translate into reminders that the material world is only one realm of existence. They signal the idea of a higher power and memorialize the light within those that are deceased. It is a way for the yard worker to “honor

ancestors whose brilliant lives continue to shine in present memory exhorting those left behind to consciously strive for rightness with God, community, and self” (Gundaker and McWillie 2005, 30). They are also understood to deflect negative energy. The objects used can literally be anything with a reflective surface, from mirrors, to safety reflectors, to chrome objects. Many other examples have a spiritual aspect, can relate to protecting one’s home, honoring those who have passed, and are often symbols of how one should behave in the present.

The open form created by shifting from representation toward abstraction stems from a long history of suppression from the overculture in the United States. The practice was a deliberate deception from a society that had a long tradition of suppressing and destroying African cultural expression (Arnett, Arnett, and Herman, et al. 2006, 72). Objects that were familiar yet absent from their ordinary context became vessels for interpretation for the creator. In this way, the composer was free to create pieces of transformative work in forms made available by the materials. The ambiguity and double meanings embedded in the sculptures allowed for their longevity and undeception. These underlying modes of an improvisational culture expose a small glimpse into the challenges faced by African Americans living in a social environment that did not allow them the liberty of cultural expression, and the only way to live was to make disguised material symbols. Their art thus becomes:

A creation susceptible to countless different interpretations which do not impinge upon its unalterable specificity, a work which offers an unusually high degree of possibilities in the amount of information provided and in the form of ambiguity entailed, and one which makes every reception of it both interpretations of it and a performance of it, because in every reception, the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself. Part of their message then, what they are about, is that these works must be approached in their own terms and in terms that are culturally relevant to them. What they teach us is how to look and hear again (Gundaker and McWillie 2005, 145-146).

These works express a reordering of space, a representation that is adaptable and based on change. In this regard, the performative and interactive dimensions must not go without being a valued aspect of the yard work found in the action and process of the improvisational creations of the works. Through the act of making and the open-ended character of the designs creates and encourages variation within the system and individuality not unlike the act of improvisation in jazz and the quilt making of Gee’s Bend.

"BREAK COMPOSITION"

The Southern plantation was one of the places where African American culture began and grew as the scale of the plantations expanded. The larger the size, the more removed the living quarters and the higher allowance for counter-cultural formulations could emerge. For instance, in places where slaves were allowed to build their quarters and spatially arrange the dwellings, they chose to do so in a manner that was counter to the European definition of order, rooted in its origin



FIGURE 2.24

One of the slave villages at J.J. Smith's cotton plantation near Beaufort, South Carolina where the cabins, although in a row were set at odd, irregular angles to one another.

Joyner 1991

of rows and series. In other words, “some slaves are known to have countered the geometrically circumscribed order imposed by their master’s logic with what seemed like chaos” (Vlach 1993, 14). The records from Muddy Hole Farm, one of five farms that made up the Mount Vernon plantation, where other African Americans were supervisors of slaves, show that slaves chose to build their cabins amongst the trees at the edge of a clearing in what appeared to be random patterns that embraced the fluctuations of the natural world. In contrast, on other farms on the same plantation but overseen by European Americans, dwellings were organized according to an order dictated by European conventions, resulting in cabins set in straight, regularly-placed intervals, in lines along the road.

Documentation of slave villages on a cotton plantation near Beaufort, South Carolina, recorded the slave’s cabins, located at a considerable distance from the central area, as made up of boxed framed buildings and in a row, but set at odd and irregular angles to one another (Figure 2.24).

In an 1833 issue of the *Southern Agriculturist*, a Southern Carolina planter wrote: ‘A plantation might be considered as a piece of machinery; to operate successfully all of its parts should be uniform and exact and the impelling force regular and steady.’ Clearly slave actions went against this advice, countering its suggestions with behavior that

seemed deliberately careless. In the light of what is known about life within various slave communities, the inhabitants' actions were indeed deliberate, for they hoped thereby to carve out a domain of their own and thus, improve, however slightly, the conditions of their captivity (Vlach 1993, 14).

This disruption of the plantation's explicit ordering system created an off-beat pattern of geometry. It was a collective move counter to the dominant and oppressive culture's idea of order and in many ways a translation of the concept of syncopation. This idea can be understood through the vehicle of jazz music and the visual arts of the specific "Pattern and Geometry" quilts of the Gee's Bend quilters. "The technique known as 'break composition'...is the disruption of pattern and regulation. To create a break in composition is to break from explicit ordering systems like lines, boundaries, and grids using operations such as shifting, skipping, jumping, fragmenting, and repeating elements" (Ruff 2009, 67). It is what gives jazz its jump, swing, and energy, and what provides the quilts of Gee's Bend with the off beat, unpredictable, and asymmetrical patterning. Just as dissonance in jazz, the lack of harmony among musical notes, is manipulated to influence the emotional impact, the concept is also used to strengthen the message. The slaves reinforced their message of resistance by overturning the declared order of the plantation.

BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES

Behind the fundamentals of composition are reasons and choices that must be established and put into action in order to create. The actions taken in constructing African American spatial practices are no different. To see patterns in design methodologies is one way of understanding the principles that lay behind the behavior. The idea of call-and-response in jazz is about creating a social space. In the quilt work of Gee's Bend, the compositions associated with architecture and spatial arrangement form a visual exchange in call-and-response. While some quilts are abstracted maps in themselves, others from this genre naturally create an echo of right angles that push and pull among elements forcing a focus on the center, to the multiple borders within the piece while calling back to the work's edges. This targeted push and pull among elements is intrinsic to call-and-response in jazz. These combined ideas relate to the considerable importance of thresholds and boundaries in African American "yard work".

Borders give texture to surfaces and definition to boundaries. In addition to marking off areas of space within the yard according to their function...they also differentiate wild from cultivated zones within the space. Borders also extend linearly and thus can involve interplay regularities and variations along a single trajectory and alongside other surfaces. A border can have 'off-beat phrasing,' 'high affect' contrast of color and material, and 'staggered entry' (Gundaker and McWillie 2005, 113).

Likened to the characteristic of jazz music but also much like the housetop, bricklayer, and log cabin quilts of Gee's Bend, it was noted by an observer in the South that straight lines were not favored in laying out borders, which again shows a connection between the bias to "bend" geometry when composing the textiles

(Gundaker and McWillie 2005, 113).

FIGURE 2.25

The swept yards of the African Americans, an idea that came directly from Africa acted as the most important “room” of the household, the heart of the home. It was a practical response the conditions of everyday life where multiple activities could occur.

Raver 1993

The surface of the yard is a reference to the swept yards of the African Americans, an idea that came directly from Africa and thought of not as open space but as a place in the state of readiness for activity, a “cool” space that is one of composure and control, in contrast to a “hot” and wild place (Figure 2.25). The idea is that land is not empty and waiting to be claimed but rather must be made by removing wildness and must be maintained through the treatment of the surface. The space it created was an outdoor room that functioned as a place where important work was done and was considered the center of the home. In African American yard work, the swept yard was also a way of defining space from the wild, untended, unmaintained world, creating a constant tension and focus at the edges. The material of the borders varied among the elements used to accentuate the boundaries and thresholds in the African American yard. Layers of borders created in the yard are made of fences, bottles, stones, shells, posts, and plants, as “the primary spatial objective of the traditional African American yard is the development of a compound through the use of multiple boundaries” (Ruff 2009, 68). This is not unlike the creation of the medallion housetop quilt where a frame is constructed around an anchoring center patch; “increasingly larger frames or borders are added until a block is declared complete” (Souls Grown Deep Foundation 2018). The concept of sealing a house from unwanted activity and creating a compound through boundaries and tended



surfaces is an idea present on both sides of the Atlantic. The threshold at the edge is also a place of significance. They are “both a meeting place and a parting of ways, a zone of transition and a potential buffer against intrusion. Because thresholds lead to and from somewhere, they are focal points of action and mediation” (Gundaker and McWillie 2005, 119).

APPROPRIATION OF SPACE

The swept yard is a landscape tradition that was once very common in the deep South of the United States. The ground, maintained with brooms made of twigs, preferably those of dogwood trees, created a hard stone like surface out of the beaten clay soils. Before grass and lawns took hold as a European ideal, the tradition of swept yards from West Africa was adopted by European Americans in the deep South. Almost everyone had swept yards, including the plantations, which were maintained by slaves. Even though the dominant culture adopted the African tradition, much of the African American spatial practices on the plantation were created out of necessity and counter to the prevailing system. The appropriation of space happened far from surveillance, beyond boundary lines, and at the margins of properties. Here, the slaves could create their landscape practices that were either too far in the distance to be noticed or were organized in a way that slave owners did not recognize as significant. The pathway became a central element that existed counter to the plantation's road system. They meandered, followed waterways, cut through woods, and marshland, existing mostly for the ability to rendezvous without detection. The trails were an alternative territorial system that allowed an escape from control.

The loose, ad hoc scheme of preferred paths and gathering places was created incrementally by a series of improvisational responses to the give landscape rules of white masters. Because similar improvisational responses by black people to Anglo-American culture are known to have resulted in the creation of distinctive African-American forms of speech, music, and dance, it is not too farfetched to suggest a parallel development in their responses to their assigned environments (Vlach 1993, 13).

The serpentine pathway system acted as a counter agent to the rigid grid of the plantation plan, a landscape that had competing cultural authors. By looking over these plantations, one can see the European-derived patterns preferred symmetry in the architecture as well as in spatial organization. However, with a closer and expanded view, one can see the African slave community dominated the countryside, critically reading the landscape, and initiating a system in response to the natural world, rather than an imposed order that functioned with greater temporal and flexible qualities.

By relating the descriptions and definitions of harmony and composition practices in jazz music, its structure recalls an association with the idea of the geometry of the plantation system and the African counter geometry in relationship to improvisation. The European model of harmony is what defines much of jazz's form. This form or basic layout is the structural element of the music that sets parameters stated by notation. It is comprised of both vertical and horizontal components, of chords and their movement, creating a sound that is both balanced and resolved. Improvisation takes the space provided within the harmonic framework and begins to fill in space according to a separate set of rules that is not able to be explicitly defined by notation. Based on risk, yet responsive to everything happening around them, the improviser is free to move while adhering within limits defined as well

as acting against it.

Similarly, with the Sears Corduroy quilts of Gee's Bend, the highly structured environment in which the quilters worked imposed on them a specific standard of straight seams with zero tolerance from the deviation of the pattern. Ironically this stimulated a response that transformed the standardized remnants into vibrant and individualized works. The rigidity of the material itself and the imposed ways from the dominant culture's perception in understanding and doing again recall a distant connection to the declared order of the plantation and its sole purpose to function as a highly efficient machine. The production of the pillow shams arranged the quilters into an assembly line format, focused on maximizing outputs and reproducing patterns. In turn, the quilters became mindful and aware that even the smallest break in pattern individualized the work. This became the understood way in which to work with the leftover corduroy pieces producing minimal yet bold designs. The process of taking a regular, repeating, and seemingly unvarying design and upsetting the standardization in the smallest way was all that it took to achieve freedom from form. It is important to recognize that just as a creative response cultivated stimulation within the quilters, the slaves also overturned the plantation order and recognized that it did not take much to oppose the oppressive and forced system, however small the moves may seem.

Out of necessity, the slaves had to appropriate their space from the master's but they could assert themselves anywhere the planter's influence was weak. Through their own strategies of resistance, they created their own version of the plantation system, relying on subtle adjustments rather than blunt upheaval.

Even when the slaves were most persistent in establishing their own landscapes, they attempted few bold gestures. Instead, they prudently relied on subtle adjustments to their dwellings, or they sought spaces where their masters were unlikely to intrude.... Denied the time and resources needed to design and build as they might have wanted, they simply appropriated, as marginalized peoples often do, the environments to which they were assigned (Vlach 1993, 16).

The African American slaves literally and figuratively carved out space for dwelling, practicing, and creating culture. For instance, the kitchen was claimed by those who worked there, and anthropological research has shown that niches were secured within the space to accommodate their own practices and beliefs. Also, field workers, who did not own the land they worked saw the harvest as their achievement, rather than the master's. Their appropriation left less long-term physical remnants of the disruptive acts against the dominant plantation narrative, yet slaves laid claim to the plantation space even though they did not owe it.

BODY AS LOCUS OF COMMUNALITY

The perception the slaves held in regard to claiming territory is strongly linked to the value held in its production by the community. They believed in the notion

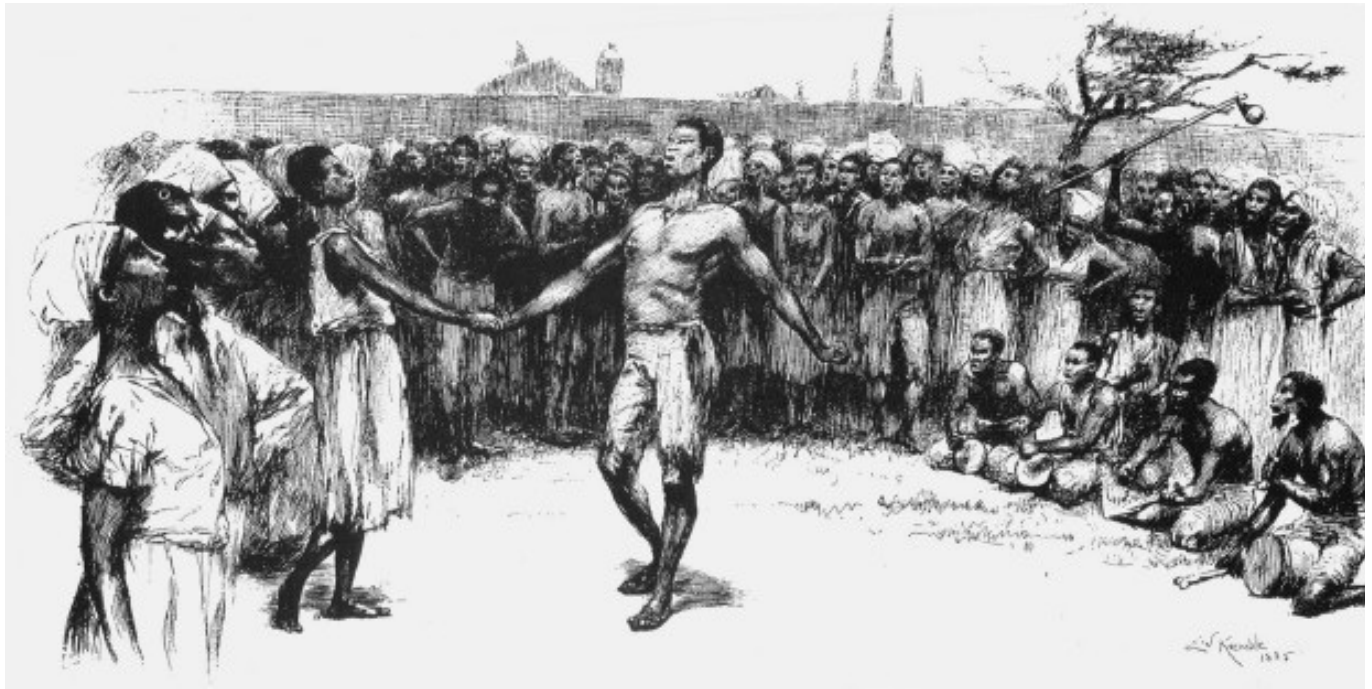


FIGURE 2.26

A depiction of the Ring Shout practiced in Congo Square has its origins in Central and West Africa. The oldest surviving African American performances in which the dancers move in a counter-clockwise circle. Practiced by slaves as a religious activity, the participants moved in a circle, providing rhythm by clapping hands and patting feet.

Goia 1997, 4

that land is never empty, sitting and waiting to be claimed, but rather must be made to create a place of social space. There has been research and recordings of historic West African cities that identified the importance of human relationships as a significant determinant in the creation of that social space. Early Southern plantation architecture from 1619-1793 resembled compositions of traditional African housing made of mud and straw. This was a result of Africans being allowed to build their own dwellings, creating “a tightly clustered asymmetrical village compound” (Sass 1994, 44). This type of building is similar to a type of housing found in Ghana where “the allocation of the spaces within the compound was generally based on family relationships and how those relationships transferred to the planning of the compound” (Sass 1994, 46). “Within the Ghanaian system of building, most compounds had rectangular and cylindrical huts joined together in a compound like fashion. Their tightly packed arrangement of space was based on communal ways of living and working within the compound” (Sass 1994, 48). This way of building and composition was spatially planned by placing human relationships over geometric form, a cultural attitude towards developing space that traveled by way of the Middle Passage.

Even when slaves had less agency over spatial composition, the value of the production of social space persisted. For example, in places like Congo Square a social space was created by the people interacting and manifesting a place of spiritual and religious experience when the slaves gathered on Sundays to dance. The Ring

Shout is known to be one of the oldest surviving African American performance traditions rooted in the ritual dances of West Africa and formed during slavery (Figure 2.26). Through the movement of bodies in a counterclockwise circle where every part of their bodies danced, stamping feet, clapping hands the Ring Shout had no audience but was much more of a religious experience. Through the performance of the Ring Shout song and dance, a social space is produced and articulated by the movement of bodies intersecting, interacting, and reproducing a relationship with one another. This spatial practice is a form of performed communication where the social activities define the space.

CONCLUSION

The whole conception of improvisation is a creative power traced to the “Middle Passage.” The Africans displaced and disoriented found themselves in a completely new landscape, where their only means of survival came from their means to improvise. A distinctly American art form, jazz emerged from the descendants of slaves—human beings who were treated as human currency. Therefore, it is undeniably about freedom, a certain kind of liberation, manifested out of inherently conflicting circumstances. Just as the Quilters of Gee’s Bend or the artists of the “Yard Show” use the “castaway objects... to reaffirm life, as the reinvestment of creative energy in old and worn-out things a metaphor for turning adversity into spiritual triumph and for redeeming the socially dispossessed or human castaways of the world” (75). This approach comes from the vernacular of African American culture, an approach that has proven to be rich in inspiring authentic artistic creativity.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

A principle is a fundamental source or basis for a way of doing something. Drawing connections between music, art, and architecture reveals the underlying principles. Nested within the discussion are ways of interpreting the concepts that serve as prompts in exploring the theoretical ideas in their application. The purpose of the principles is not meant to be rigid, absolute, or exclusive but to begin to translate some of the conceptually interpreted ideas into what could be spatially recognizable in landscape architectural practices. In the search to understand the underlying principles feeding the expressions that emerged in other media, words and diagrams assisted in the understanding and digesting of the ideas.

3

CONSTRUCTED PRINCIPLES INTERPRETATION AS A STRATEGY OF INQUIRY

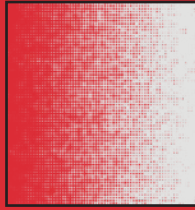
IMPROVISATION

PRINCIPLE NO. 1: EMBRACE UNPREDICTABILITY

The true innovation of jazz is that a group of strangers can come together and create improvised art on the spot using the language of music to negotiate their individual agendas, creating within a framework that allows for foreseen and unforeseen circumstances. It is as much about the collective as it is about the individual, making itself up as it goes along, rewarding individual expression while demanding selfless collaboration. It is an improvisational art with an emphasis on the spirit of discovery in an open system, mediated in its context. At its heart it is unpredictable, teetering on unstable ground with an awareness that the composition could all fall apart or be tremendous. Situated in this risky venture is the importance of the individual and the value in allowing one to “tell” their story, expressing their identity among the group.

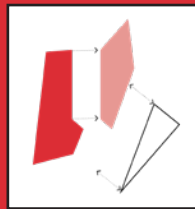
Much like the visual artwork produced by the women of Gee’s Bend, where all the quilts are improvisational and are referred to as “my way” quilts, the value of individual expression and creative exploration is supported. In these quilts, where work is never begun in the same way, the artists seek to create something brand new. The act of improvising occurs during the piecing and joining of the quilt, much like a jazz soloist must pick and choose notes to string together, creating a composition in the moment. Through an ongoing process of choosing, the quilters also create a unified whole from disparate pieces, wherein the act of joining is a freedom in the choice. Among the group of quilters, the work is never evaluated for being right or wrong; just as in jazz, the collective musicians never reject the actions of one another. This creates a notion that there is no wrong note, but rather the importance is shifted to how one chooses to react to the circumstances handed to them. The quilters never seek a perfect symmetry and favor visual drama over laborious technique, surprise over painstaking repetition, and originality over predictability, as even their stitches are individualized, irregular, and free-formed.

The idea of taking something that was old and making it new again by re-working it in a new way is also deeply rooted in the assemblage sculptures of the African American yard show, where the abandoned, overlooked, outcast, everyday objects become the sources of creativity. The process is an act of piecing together materials creating 3D collages integrated into the landscape in an improvisational act made over time, giving the artist the freedom to choose and arrange objects, not as much for what the objects are but for the relationship that is created between them. Through the act of assembly of the raw materials, fragmented pieces of the world become sculptural and, in some cases, spiritual artifacts in the landscape. These works express a reordering of space, a representation that is adaptable and based on change. The act of making and the open-ended character of the designs creates and encourages variation within the system. Improvisation, born from the scarcity of resources, in the spirit of freedom, and through a desire to improve, however slightly, the situation at hand embraces the unpredictability for its possibility.



INSTABILITY

Lack of stability. Which is to say it is likely to give way or overturn. Not firmly fixed.



ASSEMBLAGE

The act of gathering and fitting things together.



CONTOUR (THE SHAPE OF POSSIBILITIES)

An outline of a shape or form that varies in inflection.

INSTABILITY

Instability is based on flux, change, uncertainty, dynamism, and unpredictability. The artwork is mediated in its own context. To some degree it is experimental and celebratory of the deviation from the original while keeping the original intact and recognizable, creating moments that simultaneously preserve and critique the organizing idea. It defies notation and produces ideas that are not overly determinant. Each move creates a range of opportunities for the future, knowing completely that there is no certainty where it will go. Bounded by the past and future is the moment of choice, where one is encouraged and celebrated to take risks and be exploratory.

ASSEMBLAGE

The state of composing on the spot allows for joining pieces to create a cohesion embedded with tension and instability. It is in the joining and choosing where the creativity emerges allowing freedom in a framework. In the quilt work of Gee's Bend and yard work artists, the assemblage of disparate pieces creates an order evolving in response to the nature of the materials at hand. Thinking of what came before, the current possibilities, and how those lay a future of further possibilities realizing it all will change and celebrating the inherent unpredictable nature of improvisation. These African American artists begin with a standard and basic form, working with indeterminacy rather than knowing a preconceived construct, then exert their innovation, creating over time.

CONTOUR (THE SHAPE OF POSSIBILITIES)

Improvisation in jazz is a variation on a melody. It is the melodic line that provides the starting point for the musician. From there they can produce a point of perspective that can be placed within a coherent image. The melody has a shape, or a contour, that goes up or down steeply or gradually depending on the pitch. A melody that remains on the same pitch gets boring quickly, and therefore improvisation in jazz creates boldness and drama by varying and embellishing the existing contour. The quilters from Gee's Bend are fixated with the square and rectangles and how they may be folded, stretched, bent, and manipulated to become a new free form. From using a simple design language, the quilters find endless variations in creating abstract geometric shapes.

SYNCO PATION

PRINCIPLE NO. 2: WELCOME DISTURBANCE

As discussed earlier, syncopation is what provides the danceable beat to music. It breaks up the regular flow of rhythm, by shifting the emphasis to the weak beats or “offbeats” and it is this disturbance or interruption that provides interest and energy in the music. Syncopation is what makes jazz swing, providing lively rhythms and enticing movement. It is a logic and technical feature that shifts rhythmic stress from the repeating pattern of the music and can be in some ways unexpected.

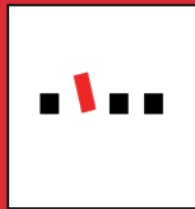
Similarly, the Pattern & Geometry type of quilts from Gee’s Bend provide a visual energy filled with pattern changes, taking a single shape, repeatedly revising, and arranging them, creating multiple configurations and expressing new forms. The pattern change that breaks up regular rhythms adds intensity and an overall asymmetry to the compositions, defying predictability and creating a rhythmic surprise. The forward momentum radiates a liveliness encouraging the eye to move around. It is what gives jazz its jump, swing, and energy, and what provides the quilts of Gee’s Bend with offbeat, unpredictable, and asymmetrical patterning.

The technique known as “break composition” in the quilting is the disruption of pattern and regulation. “To create a break in the composition is to break from explicit ordering systems like lines, boundaries, and grids using operations such as shifting, skipping, jumping, fragmenting, and repeating elements” (Ruff 2009, 67). Translated spatially it is an example of the collective African Americans disrupting the plantation’s explicit ordering system by creating off-beat and counter geometries to what was “uniform and exact and the impelling force regular and steady” (Vlach 1993, 14). Put another way, it is a collective move counter to the dominant and oppressive culture’s idea of order and in many ways a translation of the concept of syncopation.



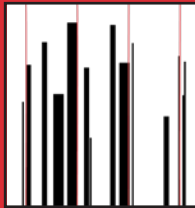
VARIATION & INTEREST

A change in condition that creates excitement.



BREAK FROM ORDER

Interrupts uniformity.



UNIQUE PATTERNS

Distinct intelligible form.

VARIATION & INTEREST

To welcome disturbance is to welcome patterning of the world. Depending on how one sees the world allows for one to see that there can be an opportunity in disturbance. A disturbance is an event that changes patterning in a system and plays a large role in dictating the characteristic of the system. Although the notion of a disturbance tends to be seen negatively, it can provide variation, interest, and greater diversity. Syncopation displaces the regularity associated with a given metered pattern, resulting in a disruption of expectations and arouses within that a forward-driven momentum.

BREAK FROM ORDER

Syncopation breaks from explicit ordering systems seeking to shake things up to provide energy. What is unexpected is exciting, stimulating, and embedded with anticipation for what is to come. The disruption of regularity means that it will not be boring but that it also evokes a sense or desire for re-establishing normality. The deviation from the strict succession of regularity by placing stress on weaker beats or omitting stronger beats adds the spark of interest that jazz could not exist without.

UNIQUE PATTERNS

Without syncopation, there is no irregularity or unique patterns. Syncopation is about shifts, jumps, accents, and energy; it is an opportunity to create unique patterns and endless variations, by means of deviating from the strict and straight. Syncopation is essential to rhythm as dissonance is to a melody and can occur through a multitude of techniques. To syncopate is to either accent normally weak beats, rest on a normally accented beat, or tie a note over to the next measure. To make something offbeat means the stressed note falls between beats, shifting the whole measure and skewing what is to follow. At its heart, syncopation is about creating asymmetry by any means possible.

CALL
-AND-
RESPONSE

PRINCIPLE NO. 3: IN TRANSITION

In Sub-Saharan Africa, call-and-response is a pervasive pattern embedded in the culture, from the democratic participation in the discussion of civic affairs to rituals and musical expression. Its widely present in parts of the Americas touched by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and has emerged through various forms of cultural expression. In jazz, call-and-response is a pattern performed between two groups, creating a musical conversation through melodies forming a social, collective, and dependent space.

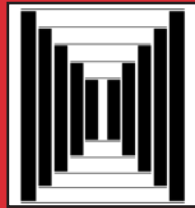
From the entire composed piece to its composite elements, the Husetop quilt pattern initiates a visual exchange in a back and forth manner of call-and-response. The creation of an echo that pushes and pulls among elements, forcing a focus from the center back to the work's edge. The architectural vocabulary used to describe this quilt type is representative of their substance, which are actual abstract renderings of architectural and spatial compositions surrounding the artists.

The combined idea of creating a social space in jazz and the architectural representation of the Husetop and Bricklayer quilt types relates to the considerable importance of thresholds and boundaries in African American yardwork. The swept yard was a way of defining space from the wild, untended, unmaintained world, creating not an open space but a place that is in a state of control, composure, and readiness for action. The creation of the surface made an outdoor room that functioned as a place where important work was done and was considered to be the center of the home. To maintain this space required a continual treatment of the surface, through the action of sweeping the yard, making a constant tension and focus of its edges. For the Gee's Benders' control of edges and boundaries play an important role in their compositions. The significance of a focused center and its control of edges create the target like push and pull among elements so intrinsic to call-and-response in jazz. The concept of sealing a house from unwanted activity and creating a compound through boundaries and tended surfaces, is an idea present on both sides of the Atlantic, defining the threshold at the edge as also a place of significance and a zone of transition—the focal point of action and mediation.



CALM

Tranquil, controlled, and composed.



REFLECTION

A transformation created by repeating or returning back to cause a change in direction.



THRESHOLDS

A point of change in condition.

CALM

Call-and-response is a back and forth between members where the caller improvises, and the response is a direct reaction. In the quilt work of the Gee's Benders, the design and layout of the house-top pattern and its variations create an echo that forces the focus from the center to the edges. This is not only an example of a house-top quilt but also the spatial arrangements created by sweeping the yard, a West African tradition. Making a surface in the wild, a place that is in a state of readiness, in response to the unpredictable and exuberant to carve out and make a calm and cool place where people can gather.

REFLECTION

In the Bricklayer quilt, a single element becomes the entire composition through an echo out from the center medallion. The primary spatial objective of the traditional southern African American yard is to develop a compound using multiple boundaries. This reflection of boundaries is tied to the importance of horizontal thresholds and breaking the edge. There is also the significance of vertical thresholds and reflective material as spiritual portals defining the earth as a passage, not a plane. Flashing and reflective surfaces, for instance, translate into reminders that the material world is only one realm of existence. They signal the idea of a higher power and memorialize the light within those that are deceased. It is a way for the yard worker to “honor ancestors whose brilliant lives continue to shine in present memory exhorting those left behind to consciously strive for rightness with God, community, and self” (Gundaker and McWillie 2005, 30). They are also understood to deflect negative energy. The objects used can be anything with a reflective surface, from mirrors to safety reflectors, to chrome objects. Many other examples have a spiritual aspect, relate to protecting one's home, honoring those who have passed, and are symbols of how one should behave in the present.

THRESHOLDS

An exchange and interplay in the way in which two or more things influence each other is significant. The transition point between the surface and the wild is built over time as the swept leaves and detritus collect to control edges and boundaries. The zone of transition can extend linearly and engage regularities and variations along a single trajectory and alongside other surfaces. The breaking of the edge is significant, as it is the place where two spaces come together in tension and compression. The push and pull of call-and-response puts a force on the joint, and a relationship is created between the parts, putting emphasis on at the juncture.

HARMONIC STRUCTURE

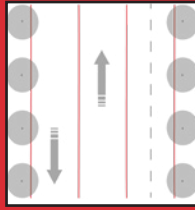
PRINCIPLE NO. 4: CONSTRAINTS FOR CREATIVITY

Jazz inherited much of its formal structure from European music, itself a centuries-old tradition. It provides the composer with the scaffolding on which to work while providing the listener with a familiar place from which to absorb something entirely new. In jazz dissonance, that which causes tension is built into each chord so that it becomes a building block of harmonic language. An oversimplification of music theory suggests that every chord in jazz has a dissonance embedded in it, saturating the sound produced and creating a quality where the harshness becomes the norm. Dissonance is built into the resolve, but its pungency is not lost and ironically what is considered dissonant is part of what makes the harmony.

One of the many astounding characteristics of the Sears Corduroy quilt type was the wide array of diverse and unique compositions that emerged from the restricted color palette and the rigidity of the corduroy material itself. In addition, the contract with Sears required that each pillow sham be identical and follow the same exact pattern for mass production. Although this provided little room for personal creativity, it produced a profound creative response in the quilts produced from the fabric remnants, which became vibrant and individualized works of art. These bold and minimalistic designs adopted and worked with the restrictive qualities, but at the same time made the quilts their own through pattern alterations and upsetting standardization.

The European model of harmony defines much of jazz's form, acting as the basic layout and structural element of the music that sets parameters stated by notation. Improvisation takes the space provided within the harmonic framework and begins to fill in space according to a separate set of rules that is not able to be explicitly defined by notation. Based on risk, yet responsive to everything happening around them, the improviser is free to move adhering within defined limits as well as acting against them.

The same creative response found in jazz musicians and quilters can be seen in how slaves of the American South critically read the plantation order to literally and figuratively carve out space for dwelling, practicing, and creating their cultural rituals. Out of necessity, they had to appropriate their space from the master's, but they could assert themselves anywhere the planter's influence was weak. The improvisational approach allowed for the flexibility to move within and beyond boundary lines, both adhering to the defined parameters as, as well as acting against them.



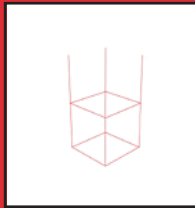
ORDER

A prescribed or established arrangement of things.



STRUCTURE

A system that is constructed to support elements.



FRAMEWORK

A system that is constructed to organize elements.

ORDER

Every jazz musician knows the 12-bar blues—it's the basic language that allows strangers who have never met to come together and make music. It is uncomplicated, familiar, and the way-finding mechanism that provides order and seeks to prevent chaos. Acting as the springboard for improvisation, it provides the space for opportunity to be invented in-between the lines while preserving the organizing ideas.

STRUCTURE

The existing structures provide constraints for creativity but are also supportive of the improvisation. The rigid structure allows or intends to bring out the creativity of the individual, providing a blank canvas for experiments with innovative ideas finding opportunities inside the lines, although sometimes those lines are stretched. The structure is uncomplicated, transparent, and minimal, and does not cultivate laborious technique. In fact, it is in its simplicity where the opportunities for improvisation emerge.

FRAMEWORK

A framework can offer room for flexibility and self-organization to occur. It is a basic underlying system and a common vocabulary. Yet, it is open enough to allow for improvisation, alteration, and competing authors. A framework becomes the guidelines that exist to preserve the organizing idea resting on the belief that the more space provided, the more possibilities presented. They are not meant to be comprehensive but provide a starting point to leverage an objective.

KINETIC ORALITY

PRINCIPLE NO. 5: PERFORMED COMMUNICATION

In Jazz, an improvised solo is a chance for the individual to tell their story. The nature of this exchanged narrative is rendered musically through the body and proposes that what we are hearing is the body. For example, recent neurological studies have affirmed the cognitive role of body motion in music perception and production. “According to these researchers, a perceived rhythmic pulse is literally an imagined movement...hence the act of listening to music involves the same mental processes that generate bodily motion” (O’Meally, Edwards and Griffin 2004, 396). Kinetic orality in jazz is the quality of expression in music, rendered tangible or made visible to communicate meaning.

Interestingly, the Gee’s Bend work-clothes quilt type, made from worn-out work clothes, draw their palette from faded denim patches providing “a tangible record of lives marked by the seasons of hard labor in the fields of the rural South” (Arnett, Arnett and Herman, et al. 2006, 67). The patchwork becomes a physical manifestation of the body and its lived history through the cloth pieces possessing the stains of a hard life. When the quilters talk about these quilts, they often talk about their musical quality or the embedded stories within the worn material. The material, the result of repetitive motion, provided the spectrum of the subtleties in visual textures, creating inflections and irregularities that tell the story of bodies in motion.

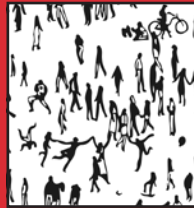
Social space is created by bodies interacting, intersecting, producing, and reproducing relationships. This idea that space is a social production is described best in depth by the 20th-century French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Social space, as defined by Lefebvre, is both the interaction and what is created by the interaction, and can be understood as the social activities that occur in a time and place that constitute—and are specific to—the establishment of a way of life. These social activities—referred to by Lefebvre as the group’s spatial practices—facilitate the production and reproduction of both the place and the characteristics of the spatial relationships of any particularly defined group of people. Lefebvre’s space is reciprocal—it is created by, but also helps to create, social interaction. It is a form of performed communication, a spatial language that can be observed, repeated, and remembered (Wilkins 2016, 5).

From the idea that space is created, experienced, and lived by bodies in motion, Lefebvre argues that social spaces do not come ready-made and are products of interactions. To summarize, “what is vital to understand from Lefebvre’s spatial theory is the notion that space is produced by bodies (people) interacting. This interaction is specific to a time, place, and social formation, but is also historical—it has a memory and a past. Space, like music, cannot be static; it is dynamic, adapted by its users for the communication of specific meaning” and at its very essence, space is performed communication (Wilkins 2016, 74).



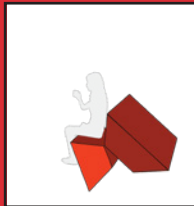
ENGAGEMENT

Concentrates on direct experience of what is lived through and performed.



INTERACTION

Communication or direct involvement with someone or something.



USER DEFINED

Meaning is found and rendered through actions.

ENGAGEMENT

Kinetic orality is defined as creating a narrative with your body. It is rooted in the idea of the individual's lived experience through their body engaging with the world. This strategy privileges the human body in varying capabilities and sensors. The emphasis may be placed on materiality, comfortability, and experience from the first-person point of view in regards to sensory qualities and focuses on embodied movement.

INTERACTION

The performative and interactive dimension is a valued aspect of jazz. Jazz musicians aim to have their own personal sound or tone on their instrument. Unlike European classical music where the goal is for the musician to play the piece so perfect that the body is undetected, in Jazz the opposite is true. Instead of a seamless interface, the body and the instrument become unique by creating their own sound or their own tone on the instrument. Embedded in this is the sound potential over correct technique, but also that "one does not regard the body as an impediment to ideal musical activity, and that instead, many sophisticated musical concepts develop as an extension of physical activities" (O'Meally, Edwards and Griffin 2004, 398). This identifies the crucial role of embodiment in African American cultural expression.

USER DEFINED

Looking to bodies to define space, the user transforms the space into what it is. Kinetic orality is a West African concept that does not separate performer and audience but rather it may be better understood as being a co-creation between participants. Through understanding cultural use of space, the integration of what is communicated by the performance of bodies can be accentuated and built into the social fabric of everyday life.



DESIGN EXPERIMENT
RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGNING
AS A STRATEGY OF INQUIRY

Lower Albina in Portland, Oregon

The Site History & Analysis



Before World War II, most of Portland's African American residents lived in lower Albina, a neighborhood adjacent to the rail yards and docks on the Willamette River—one of the only places in the city where African Americans could find a place to live.

The systemized segregation known as “Redlining”—a standard yet discriminatory practice across the United States in the mid-1930’s where banks denied minorities the permission to acquire loans for purchasing property outside of their neighborhood—resulted in an invisible barrier to moving to other parts of the city. The “Redlining” of Portland followed the more extreme exclusion laws in Oregon in the 1850’s, which denied African Americans access to living in the state and owning property altogether. Although not enforced, the exclusion laws kept many African Americans from settling in the area, resulting in the population remaining very low, with only a few thousand residents until the shipbuilding industry for World War II was established in Portland in the 1940’s. Population increased rapidly as African Americans wanting to move out of the rural South arrived to meet the demand for shipyard laborers. To meet the demand for housing, the industrialist Henry Kaiser funded the building of the city of Vanport to house his shipyard’s workers. Intended as a temporary town in response to Portland’s resistance to allowing the growth of the African American community, its construction was on wetland in the floodplain of the Columbia River, kept dry by a series of dikes

FIGURE 4.1
Portland Jazz Hot Spots c.
1942-1957.
Dietsche 2005, 1

otherwise susceptible to inundation. When the city was flooded and washed away in the spring of 1948, the displaced residents—approximately 40% African American—took up residence in the Albina district.

FIGURE 4.2

Duke Ellington frequented McElroy's where he sat in with a number of local musicians.

Dietsche 2005, 156

Although African Americans were forced to live in one section of the city, the irony of the segregation is that it encouraged a dynamic and robust community that became a center for African American culture. During the shipyard boom of World War II, Albina became a hot spot for jazz (Figure 4.1). Referred to as “Jumptown,” it was a vibrant part of town where one could find jazz playing at all times of the day. The stories tell of a neighborhood that swung:

Action central was Williams Avenue, an entertainment strip lined with hot spots where you could find jazz twenty-four hours a day... You could stand in the middle of the Avenue (where the Blazers play basketball today) and look up Williams past the chili parlors, past the barbecue joints, the beauty salons, all the way to Broadway, and see hundreds of people dressed up as if they were going to a fashion show. It could be four in the morning. It didn't matter; this was one of those 'streets that never slept.' (Dietsche 2005, 1) (Figure 4.2).



This district became the built and cultural center that transformed African American lives. A manifestation of the ‘Great Migration’ driven by economic opportunity while fleeing harsh segregationist laws in the rural South, the African American people found a better life in the city and moved up from working class to middle class. Despite the segregation, the Lower Albina district was where African Americans gained financial strength and community identity.

Albina, once a cultural mecca of the African American community in the Pacific Northwest, has laid fallow and undernourished since its midcentury heyday, resulting from an assault on social equity and the displacement of the community. Before its consolidation with Portland and East Portland in 1891, Albina was an independent city from Portland, but it is now ground zero for gentrification and redevelopment. This area, not unlike many African American communities in the United States, has gone through many unjust changes disguised as progress. Urban renewal projects transformed and destroyed the heart of the African American community in Albina. Labeled as a blighted area by the city of Portland, planners encouraged the construction of the Rose Quarter in the 1960s. Residences and the buildings that constituted the original jazz club scene were torn down. The freeway construction of Interstate 5, also known as the Minnesota Freeway because it replaced the residential street of North Minnesota Avenue, ripped through the heart of the Albina neighborhood and destroyed hundreds of more homes. At that



FIGURE 4.3

North Williams Ave & Russell St was known as the black "Main Street" that was razed in the clearing of 76 acres, including 300 African American owned homes and businesses.

Bodendorfer 2015

time the area, which was nearly 70 percent African American, remained a hub of activity. The expansion of Emanuel Hospital in the early 1970s razed even more homes and businesses and removed what was the commercial center on Russell and Williams, yielding a landscape that is still only partially developed, with the commercial corner currently a vacant lot and underutilized (Figure 4.3).

Gentrification issues plague the lower Albina neighborhood. The African American community continues to be displaced; census data reveals that the population has gone from majority African American to minority African American in two decades. The Portland Development Commission, responsible for this current trend, gave favorable loans to developers outside the community, and revitalization of the area drove up housing prices forcing out the less affluent. However, the African American identity remains tied to the neighborhood, and incorporates the people who live there, those that have experienced displacement, and even those who have never lived there. Evidence in the connection between the African American identity and this part of Portland is present in school demographics, churches, community events, and parks, thereby revealing the critical role that place plays in community and identity. The latest effort by the city is a policy called "Right of Return" that provides people with generational ties to the neighborhood opportunities for housing, as prices continue to rise in the area and the city in general. But the

African American community is still present in the neighborhood and Dawson’s Park is one of the places that continues to be a cultural center and hub. It is one spot where the African American community gathers to play dominoes, listens and dances to music, gathers after church for picnics, and spends time together (Parks and Bagdocimo 2016). The African American community in Lower Albina is still present, with a tradition of parades and jazz festivals still part of the culture of the place.

THE I-405/I-5 FREEWAY INTERCHANGE

According to the Central City Plan, which is part of Portland’s Comprehensive Plan, the Lower Albina area is predicted to have three times more residents while adding approximately 10% more jobs by 2035. The analysis and expected growth is based on the current land use of Lower Albina, which includes a heavy industrial and commercial area with a working harbor and essential freight system that is intended to continue to be a necessary asset to the city providing living wage jobs. The Albina Rail Yard, classified as a freight district, has a character and function that the city intends on retaining and enhancing. Goals beyond preserving the industrial functionality and history of the area include: maintaining historically significant buildings, reestablishing the historic connection between Lower Albina and the Vancouver/Williams Corridor, and creating an overall improved network of connectivity to adjacent areas. The Central City Plan also calls attention to a

potential new open space under the I-405/I-5 freeway interchange (Figure 4.4). Currently operating as a fragmented urban space without public access and primarily serving as parking for city vehicles, the area consists largely of impervious surface and sparse vegetation. This proposed open space is situated among a constellation of parks in the area, with the historic Overlook Park to the northwest, Lillis-Albina Park to the south-east, and Dawson’s Park to the east. While the plan aims to improve overall connectivity in the area, it does not dictate how precisely this can be achieved.

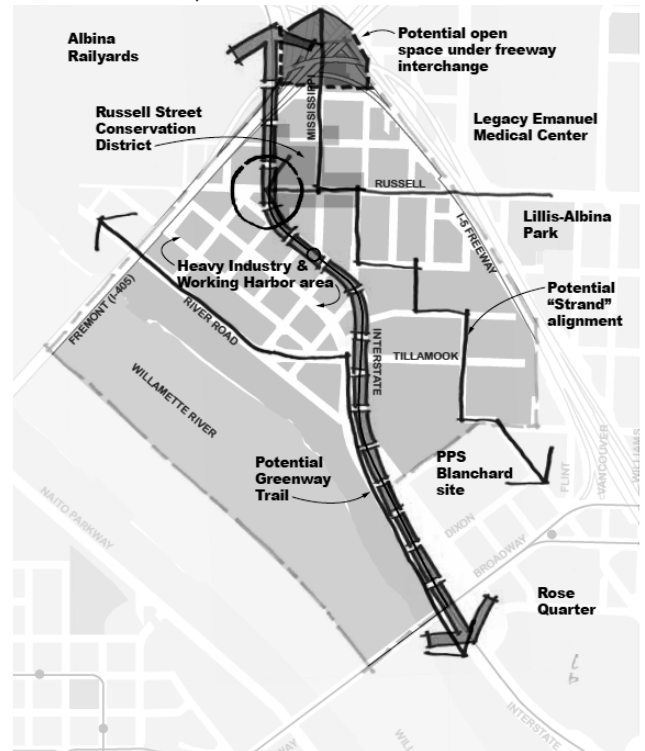


FIGURE 4.4

Portland’s Central City Plan for 2035 identifies a potential open space under the I-405/I-5 freeway interchange.

City of Portland, Oregon
2017

THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM



The Interstate Highway System was established by a publicly funded project signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower as the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Its creation signaled a shift in U.S. postwar culture, marked by a growing economy and shifts in ways of dwelling in the landscape. An unforeseen repercussion of this new pattern of living brought on by a period of prosperity was the ubiquitousness of the automobile. The solution to the unfamiliar experience of traffic was the modern highway. Simultaneously, a large-scale migration of European Americans to the suburbs coincided with a period of substantial African American movement out of the rural South to settle in industrial cities in the North and West. As African Americans were moving to the city centers, the United States' wealthier middle class was leaving the crowded city heart for suburbia, in what has been termed 'white flight'.

A consequence the Interstate Highway System was that the highways were disproportionately routed through low-income communities, many of which were people of color. City block after city block was razed to make way for the new urban infrastructure (Figure 4.5). The primary purpose of the highway network—to connect and cohere a rapidly developing nation—made large rifts through neighborhoods, creating barriers at the human scale. At the time city planners saw the demolition as an opportunity to remove what they saw as slums, not recognizing that decades of segregation had encouraged the establishment of communities that shared cultural identity, commerce, and community.

Ironically, in many cases, highway alignments in African American communities caused blight by displacing businesses and households. Only recently government officials and planners have spoken out on the injustice. In March 2016, the Secretary of Transportation, Anthony Foxx, acknowledged that it was time that America addressed the role that the Interstate Highway system played in displacing and tearing apart African American communities that were deemed blighted and in need of removal (Berg 2017, 75). Acknowledging the history of the Interstate Highway System, and recognizing the damage done by the divisive federally-funded public works project, is the first step in addressing the long-lasting consequences. The violent act and destructive pattern of destroying African American communities is still a scar with an indeterminate resolution. However, a growing awareness and understanding of these landscapes is leading to a new way of thinking about these spaces (Figure 4.6). Several projects around the United States are seeking ways to

FIGURE 4.5

Construction of Interstate 5 highway c. 1962 depicting the amputation of Lillis-Albina park.

Bodendorfer 2015

re-stitch the torn urban fabric and to reconnect communities in these overlooked and underutilized areas.

FIGURE 4.6

Under the Elevated: Reclaiming Space, Connecting Communities presents research for how, and why, the residual space of the elevated transit infrastructure should be reimagined.

Bauer, et al. 2015

Currently, there is an influx of population back into the urban core; as cities are becoming more and more populated, there is also a higher need for public urban space. Planners and designers are finding opportunities in the previously overlooked, fragmented landscape, recasting the freeway landscape to meet the city’s needs, to connect public space and heal the disjointed landscape.

DESIGN GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The urban fabric of the site was torn apart incrementally and over time this violent act resulted in “leftover” urban space, that largely serves the fast-paced movement of the automobile and the storing of unused city vehicles, both of which result in space that is largely impervious and uninhabited (Figure 4.7). Periodically a homeless camp will emerge but only as impermanent occupants as the city of Portland routinely patrols the lots. A desolate place of noise, air pollution, and towering infrastructure, the current conditions of the landscape are less seen for its possibilities and more for its unpalatable qualities. The goal of the design seeks to reclaim and re-stitch this leftover urban landscape.

ELEVATED TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE SPATIAL ASSETS- TOGETHER, THE SPACE, LAND, STRUCTURES, AND LOCATIONS OF THESE SITES CAN BE HARNESSSED TO CAPTURE AND CREATE VALUE FOR COMMUNITIES

SPACE	LAND	STRUCTURES	LOCATIONS
Physical attributes of sites beneath elevated infrastructure offer potential public space resources to neighborhoods	The most obvious feature of these parcels is the usable land they contain.	Overhead assemblages offer varying degrees of shelter from the rain and sun while the ground plane—frequently a roadway, sidewalk, or parking lot—forms a level surface for various activities.	Many of the parcels are well connected to other modes of transit and can serve as alternate travel routes
Elevated transit network generates three-dimensional spaces that provide a sense of enclosure	In wake of the High Line—the elevated park developed from an abandoned railroad right-of-way— has seen a rise in development and displacement of residents.	Providing spaces for recreation, cultural events, and concessions. In some cases columns, trusses, tracks, and overhead roadbeds even offer an armature for temporary lighting or the display of art.	The contiguous land can create connected linear systems of public space or strengthen commercial and pedestrian corridors
Some of these spaces have qualities such as low clearances that give a human scale to the infrastructure, while others are more removed from intimate experience: lofty, massive, and awe-inspiring	Sites associated with elevated infrastructure in the city are primarily within the public right-of-way under multiple jurisdictions. The varied circumstances pose numerous challenges		Opportunity to address persistent environmental challenges related to air quality and combined sewer overflows

Through the process of site visits to document the physical conditions of the site (Appendix A), as well as historical and background research in the relationship to the larger context explored through the making of a series of maps (Appendix B), and a review of aerial photography of the neighborhood (Appendix C), this author identified three main objectives of the design: to reveal the hidden history, repair connections in the landscape, and create a more human scaled environment. While these objectives are quite commonplace for landscape architects to seek through design, they played a directive role through which the constructed principles could be applied.

FIGURE 4.7
Eight city blocks are
outlined as the site
boundary in Lower
Albina, Portland Oregon.
Metro 2016





CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

Designing the unused public urban space created by the construction of the elevated Interstate Highway in the Lower Albina neighborhood is the provocateur of this project. The aim was to present improvements reclaiming the underutilized urban space and reconnecting the communities that were fragmented by the highway. Seeking to address the problem in a culturally relevant way, the specific design strategy employed in solving this design problem is inspired directly by African American creative practice regarding the modalities of an improvisational culture. This approach embodied the principle of improvisation which required taking something that exists and making it do something entirely new.

The site design, just like a jazz song, was new every time it was attempted. The goal was to produce unique ideas that work within the system, but also to push the boundaries defined. It is judged on the deviation from the original—both adhering to the parameters, as well as acting against them. It is as much about the importance of the collective context as well as the expression of the designer. It is nearly always rooted in dealing with a site's difficulties, from an intuitive and emotional way, but more importantly overcoming those difficulties. It allows for a representation and recognition of different ideas and expressions of order, whereby the composition breaks as it disrupts a known pattern that then forms a new system. A design based in jazz attempts to understand that there are no mistakes that came before it and that the site does not require “fixing”. It rather identifies what came before as an action that was done at the time. This removes judgment, initiates acceptance, while allowing the freedom of the designer to initiate what they see as a way forward understanding that what they put forth is also inherently unresolved.

THE SITE AS A FRACTURED NARRATIVE

It is often repeated and discussed that a jazz musician can tell their story through the act of improvisation (Figure 4.8), just as the “my way” quilts of Gee's Bend are individualistic expressions of themselves, and the assemblage artwork of the American South communicates a story that can be interpreted freely embedded with meaning. Within the African American art ‘yard show’, there is a visual lexicon communicated through a seemingly infinite assortment of materials integrated into the landscape. Some are individualistic in association with its maker, while in others reoccurring themes emerge. Overall, the emphasis is placed on the choosing and joining of materials in an ongoing process that creates a composition concerned with what came before it, the current possibilities, and how those inform a future of further possibilities. Through the act of assembly and the raw materials, fragmented pieces of the world are gathered to piece together a fractured narrative. This non-linear structuring of time allows for the past to be inhabitable in the present where the past is brought forward, not for living in or dwelling on, but for its potential. The quilters of Gee's Bend begin their work by ripping and tearing the leftover pieces

FIGURE 4.8

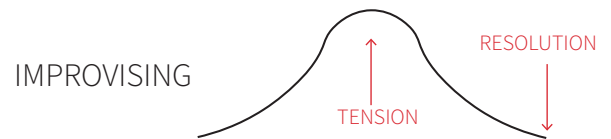
It is often repeated and discussed that a jazz musician can tell their story through the act of improvisation .

of cloth. The fragmented re-assemblages are held together by a tenuous order, one that seeks to make a collage into a compressible and cohesive whole. Organized by fragments coming together, this site is about healing and uniting a traumatized community. The narrative represents the fragmented stories and memories of this site that become whole through improvisation and possibility.



PROCESS

The design process is iterative, non-linear, and developed through the act of creating a design, critiquing it, and then going back to revising it.



Embedded in this process were numerous dead-ends undertaken, until the author began to seek specific inspiration for the delineation of forms. By cross referencing the site with the design objectives and the constructed principles, a series of sketches was created, and through this process of conceptual design, pieces were fashioned that could join together in an act of collage, where the design made from assembling different forms created a new and unpredictable whole.

Just as jazz improvisers string together a series of notes, and the quilters of Gee's Bend choose and join pieces of fabric creating a potentially infinite field, I myself as the designer, collaged a multitude of drawings. Fifteen of the conceptual sketches were produced, delineated in multiple fashions, and kept simple and abstract in form. Each drawing, inspired by the depiction of either a series, line, or field, emerged from designer's approach to the site: line lent itself nicely to the act of connection, a field was relatable to approaching the subject of a hidden history, while the freeway structure marched through creating a series of what appeared at the human scale to go on infinitely. Each process sketch was drawn first and then recorded in the framework (Figure 4.9-4.23). As the activity of creating variations on a theme could have gone on without a determinant end, the production of the sketches was fruitful to a certain point. They served as a warm-up activity in thinking about how delineation could be influenced by looking through a lens framed by the constructed principles.

FIGURE 4.9

Sketch No. 1

Line, Performed communication, Connection

Focused on looking to how the community periodically defines the street as the place to celebrate, dance, and play music. This drawing proposes that this space could become a place for performance arts, as an oval delineates a space for gathering, while the line provides a way to continue in motion, recalling the rhythm of the jazz parade. The path follows of the elevated highway infrastructure appropriating the overhead shelter for its acoustic qualities.

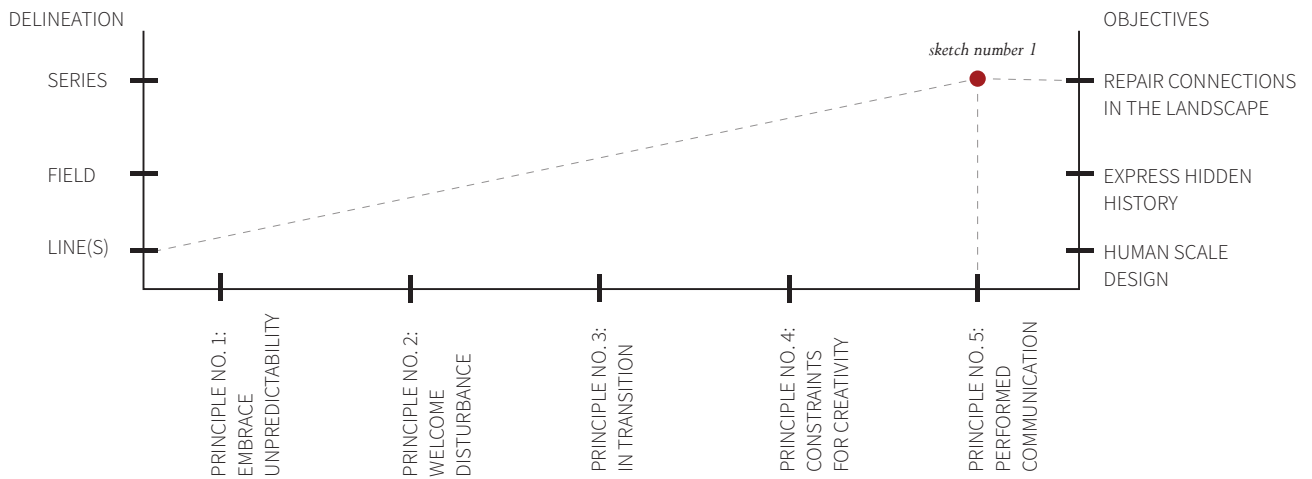
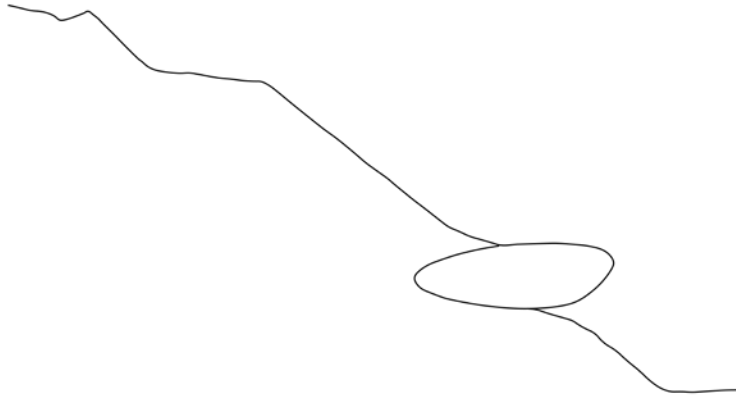


FIGURE 4.10

Sketch No. 2

*Field, In transition,
Connections*

In this drawing a single pattern becomes the entire composition, just like call-and-response, with a continuous focus on the edge with zones of transitions drawing inspiration from the importance of borders, edges, and thresholds.

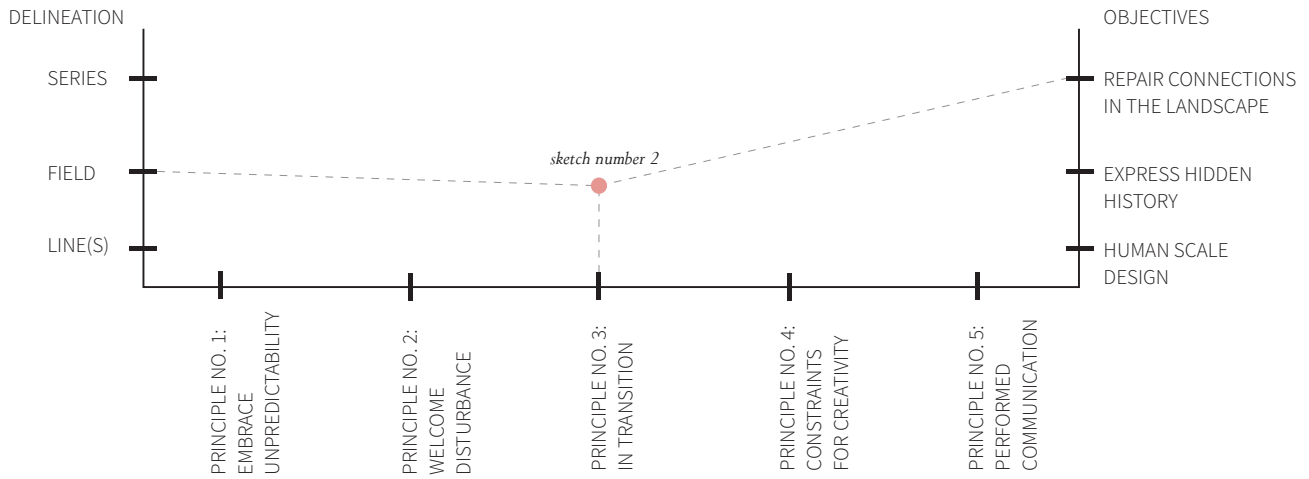
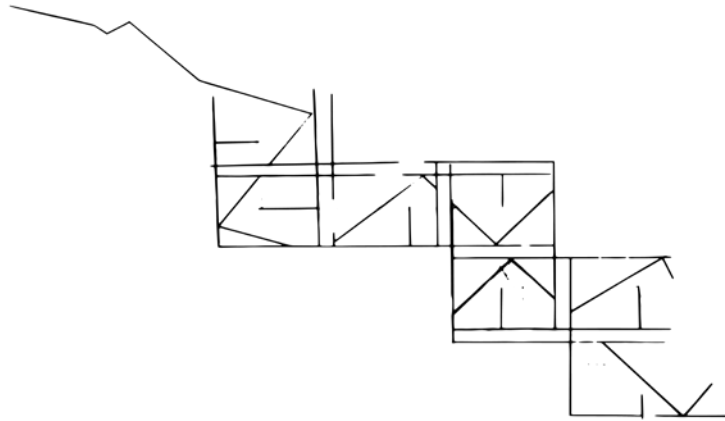


FIGURE 4.11

Sketch No. 3

Field, In transition, Reveal history

A single pattern becomes the composition by outlining the footprints of the once established neighborhood. This focuses on the spaces where people gathered and is the outline of the housetops.

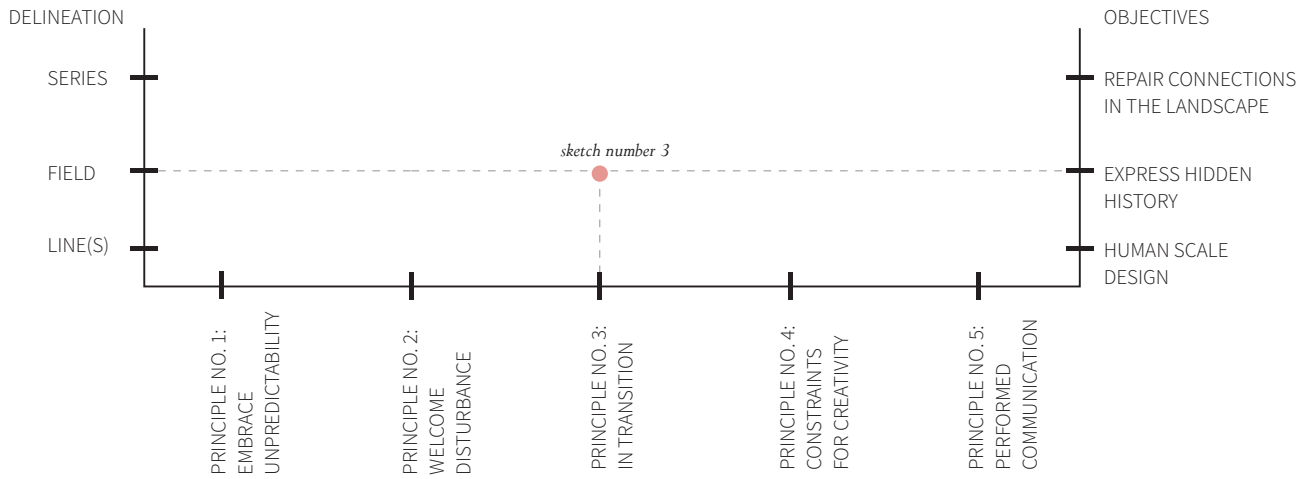


FIGURE 4.12

Sketch No. 4

Field, Constraints for creativity, Human scale

Here the columns of the overhead structure march out from under the infrastructure creating the pattern to be appropriated at the human scale. The tension caused and represented with the dissonant pattern creates interesting spaces between the lines.

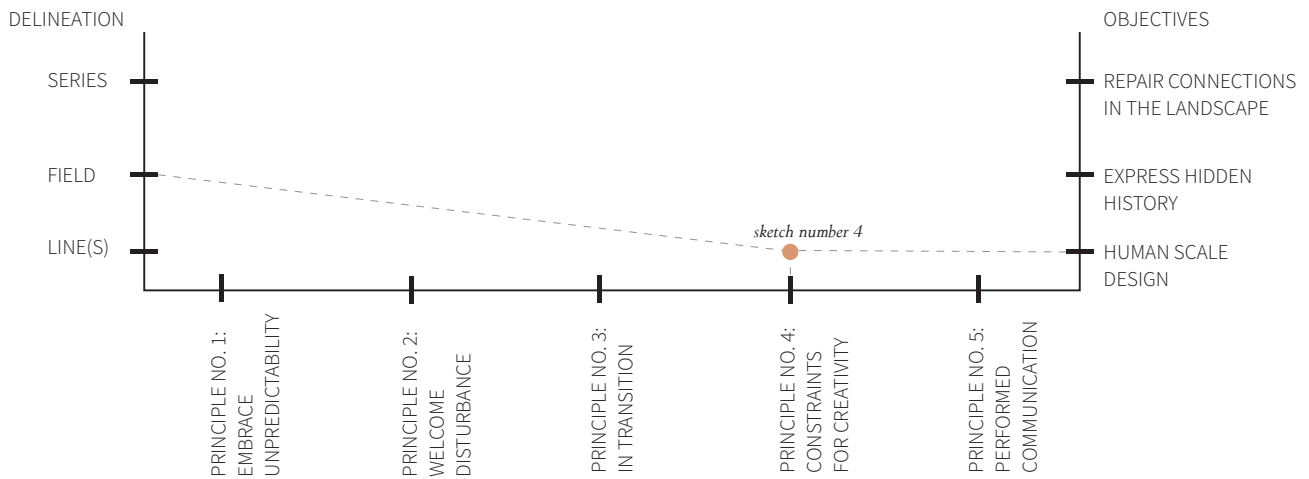
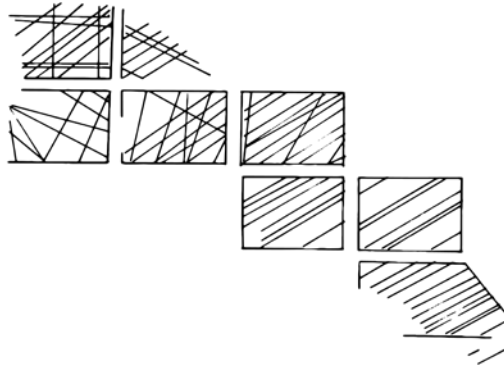


FIGURE 4.13

Sketch No. 5

Lines, Embrace unpredictability, Connection

The reclamation and reuse of the existing sidewalks of the eight city blocks were assembled to recreate a pathway that leads through the entire site. This assemblage work creates a pathway that takes what is at hand and re-organizes the material to create something new while still preserving the idea of a pathway. By assembling the cut-up paper the outcome was more unpredictable than drawing.

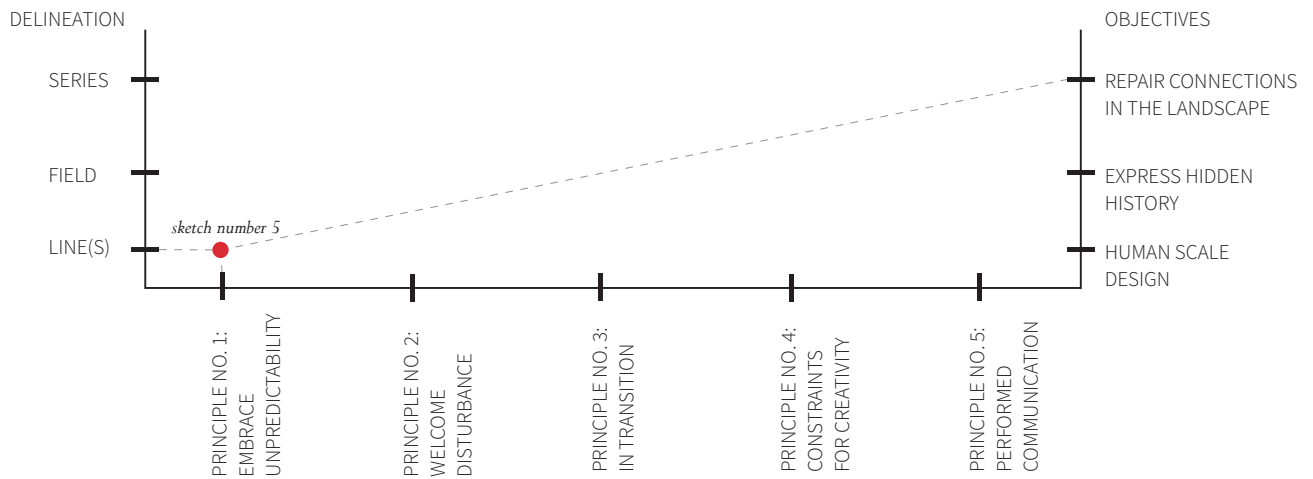
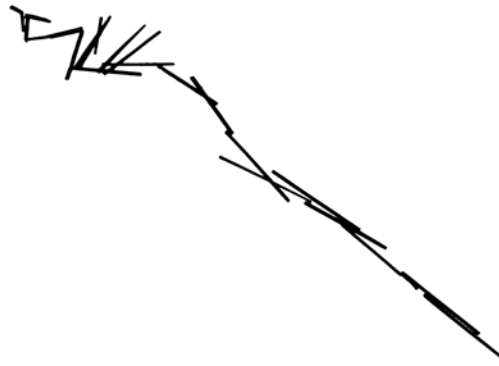


FIGURE 4.14

Sketch No. 6

Line, Welcome disturbance, Connection

The pathway created is a counter geometry of curves that meander through the forest-like landscape. A rhythmic shift occurs, as the line intersects with the structure, weaving through the columns, in an irregular pattern creating an overall asymmetrical pattern that oscillates with energy.

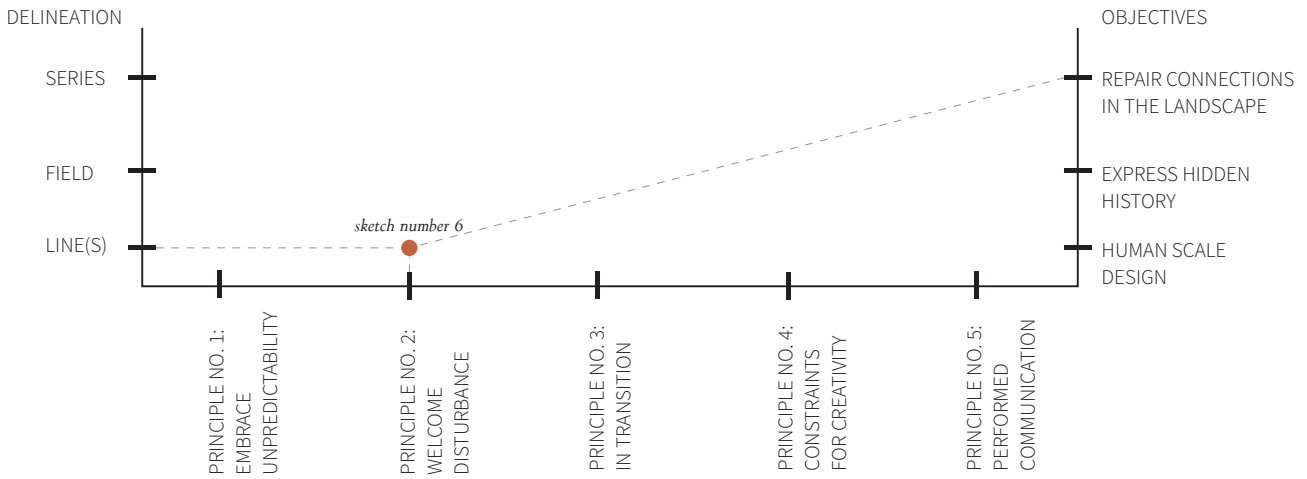
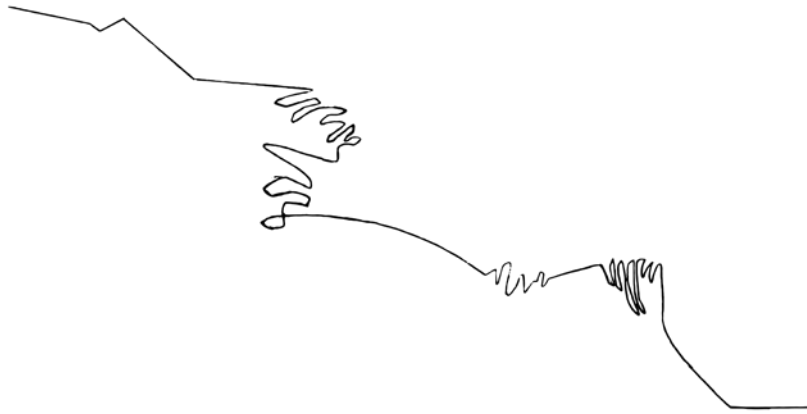


FIGURE 4.15

Sketch No. 7

Field, In transition, Reveal history

Seeks to represent the reality that the footprints of the dwellings are now gone. The dwellings which are now largely missing from the urban fabric are what held this place together. In carving out voids a space is defined.

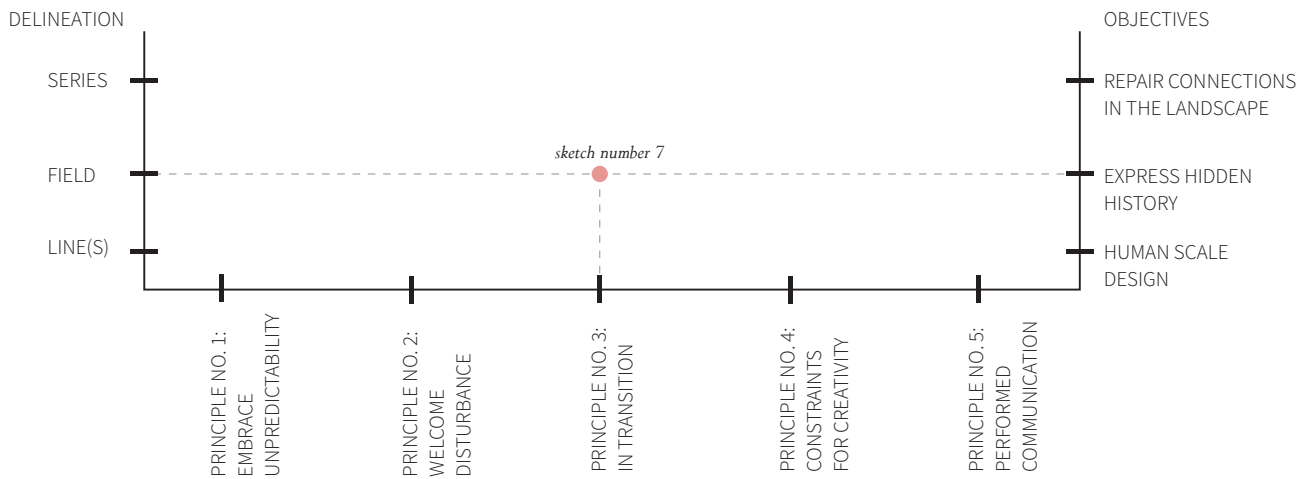
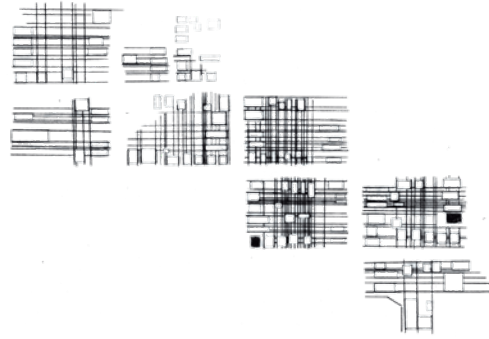


FIGURE 4.16

Sketch No. 8

Lines/ Field, Embrace unpredictability/ Constraints for creativity, Connection/ Reveal history

This landscape was once a riparian habitat made of streams making their way to the Willamette River. Water is inherently unstable and in a continuous state of flux and change in contradiction to the settlement pattern of the Jefferson grid, a field created for notation, survey, and way-finding.

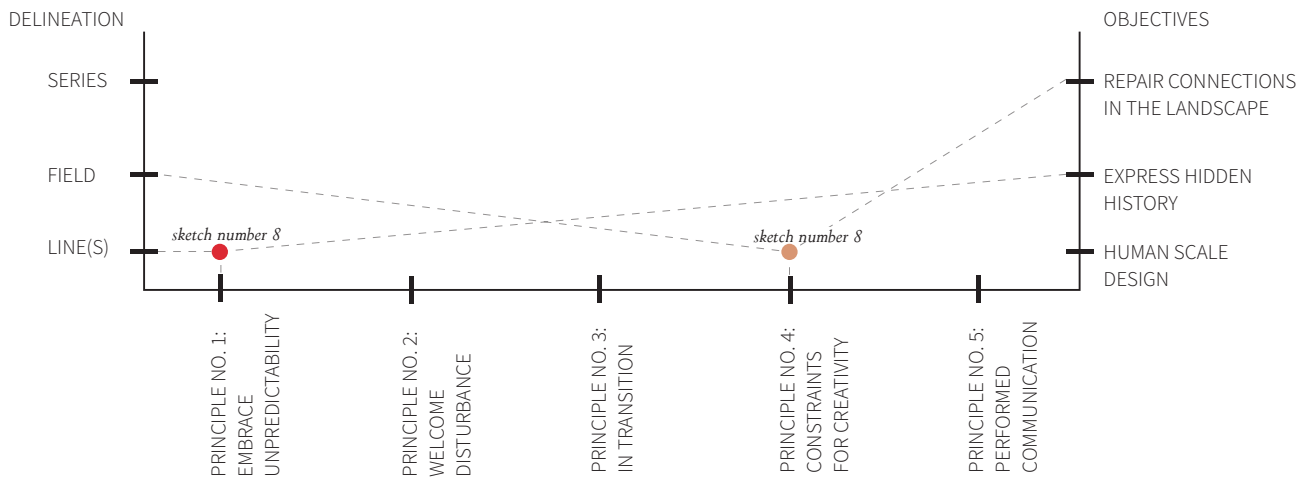
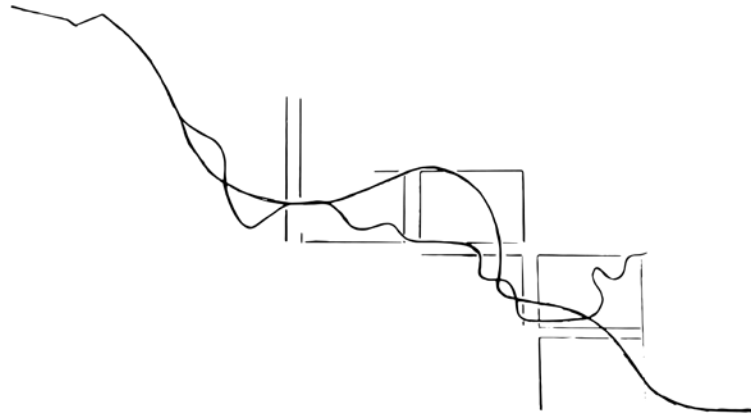


FIGURE 4.17

Sketch No. 9

Line, Performed communication, Connection

After reviewing historic aerial photographs, I recognized there were patterns in the landscape of worn paths through vacant fields where people would cut across them to, one can only assume, get to their destination in the most convenient and efficient way. This connection is therefore the most direct route through the site and representative of previous patterns created in the landscape by bodies in motion.

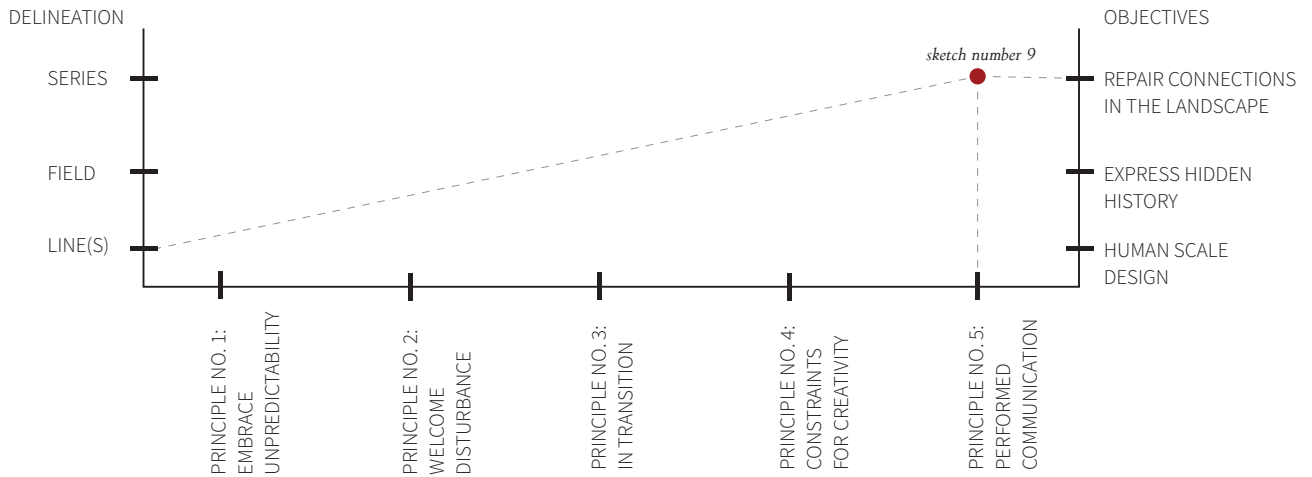
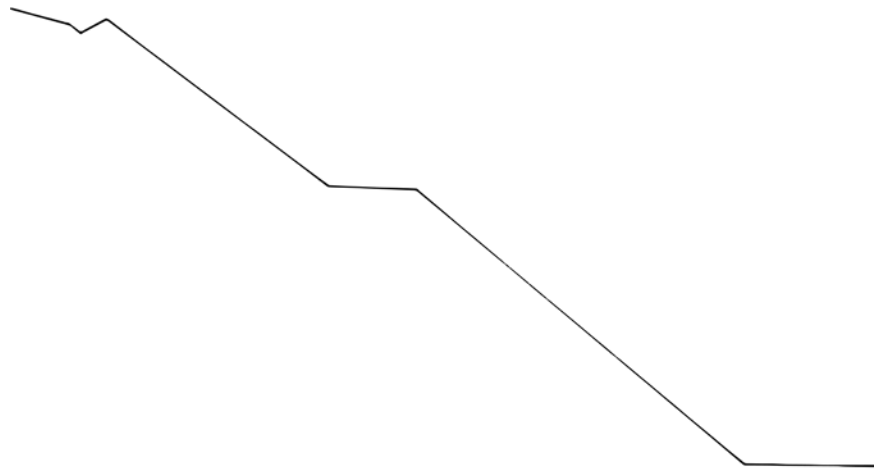


FIGURE 4.18

Sketch No. 10

Lines, Embrace unpredictability, Connection

Appearing as stitches holding this landscape together this sketch critiques the primary purpose of the highway network, as one of its original goals was to connect people and places as it made huge gashes through minority and low-income neighborhoods, creating barriers at the human scale.

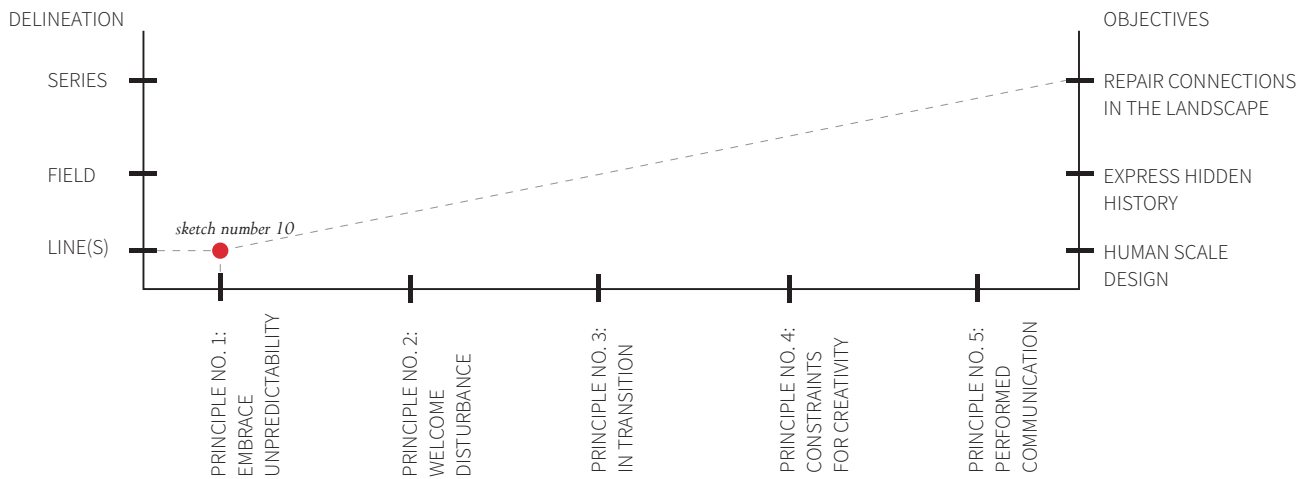
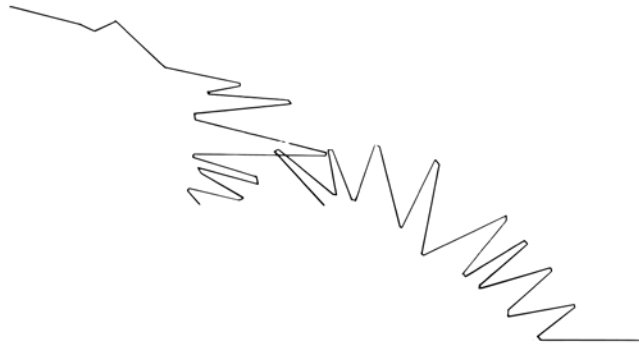


FIGURE 4.19

Sketch No. 11

Field, Constraints for creativity, Human scale

The grid is uncomplicated, transparent, minimal, and rigid in its structure. The order created by the grid allows for improvisation to happen between and outside the lines. Without the structure there is no order, and simultaneously no grounds to base a disorder.

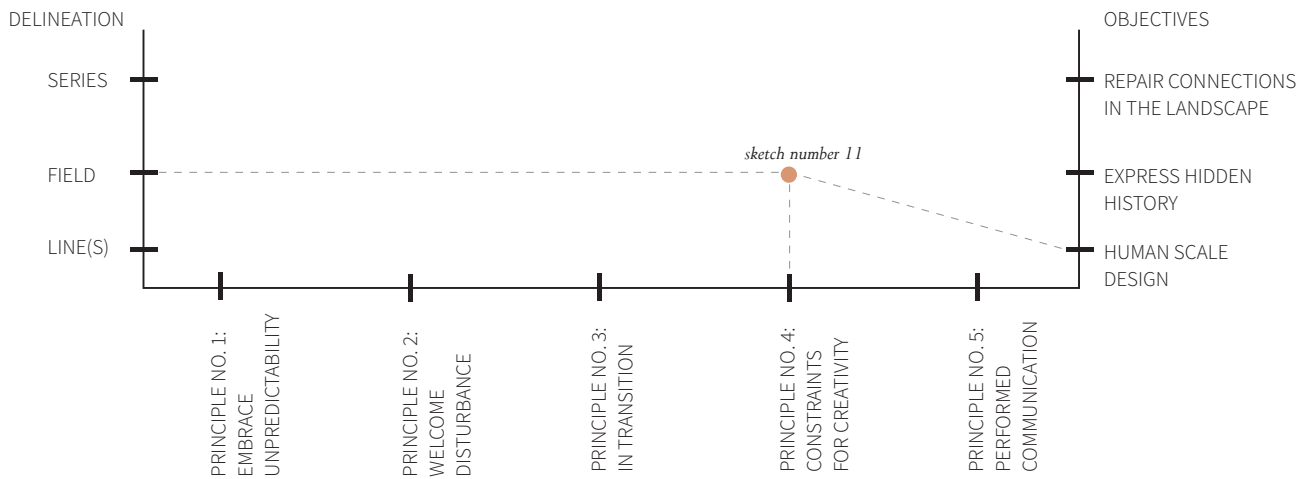
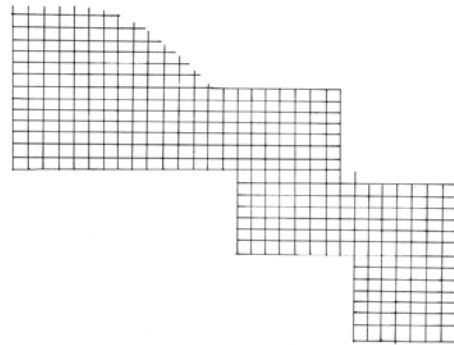


FIGURE 4.20

Sketch No. 12

Field, In transition, Reveal history

Tracing some of the walls from the aerial photograph represents the disjointed feeling of the site. There are only two homes that were missed in the razing that appear seemingly out of place in a landscape dedicated to the elevated infrastructure. The homes now sit disconnected to the site that surrounds it.

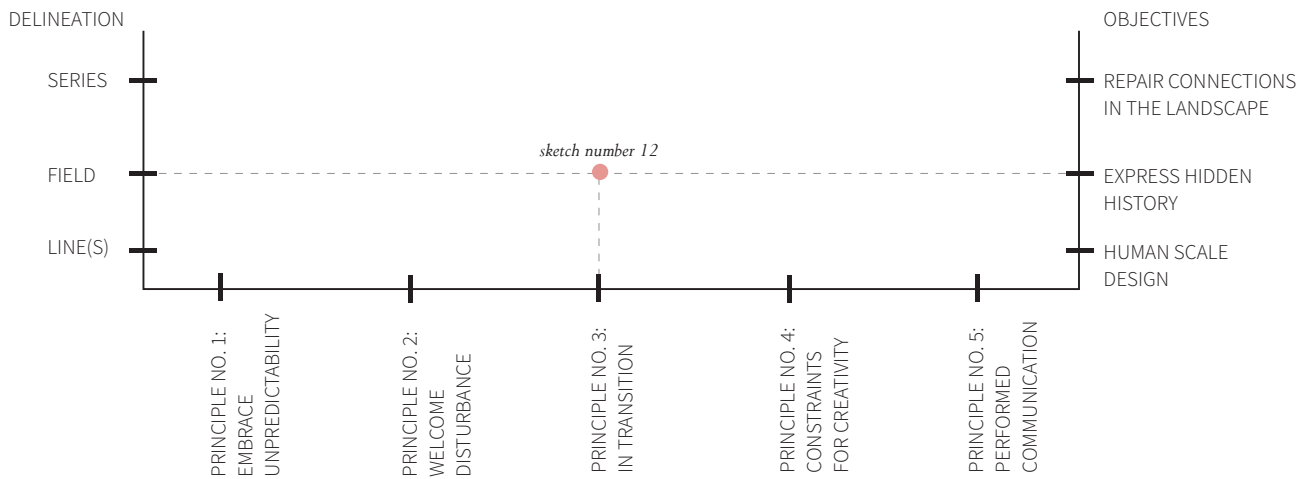


FIGURE 4.21

Sketch No. 13

*Series, In transition,
Human scale*

Highlighting the juncture of streets crossing each other creates a grid of right angles identified as zones of transition, emphasizing them as a focal point. Embedded in this drawing is the value for this type of space, as it is both a meeting place and a place of parting ways.

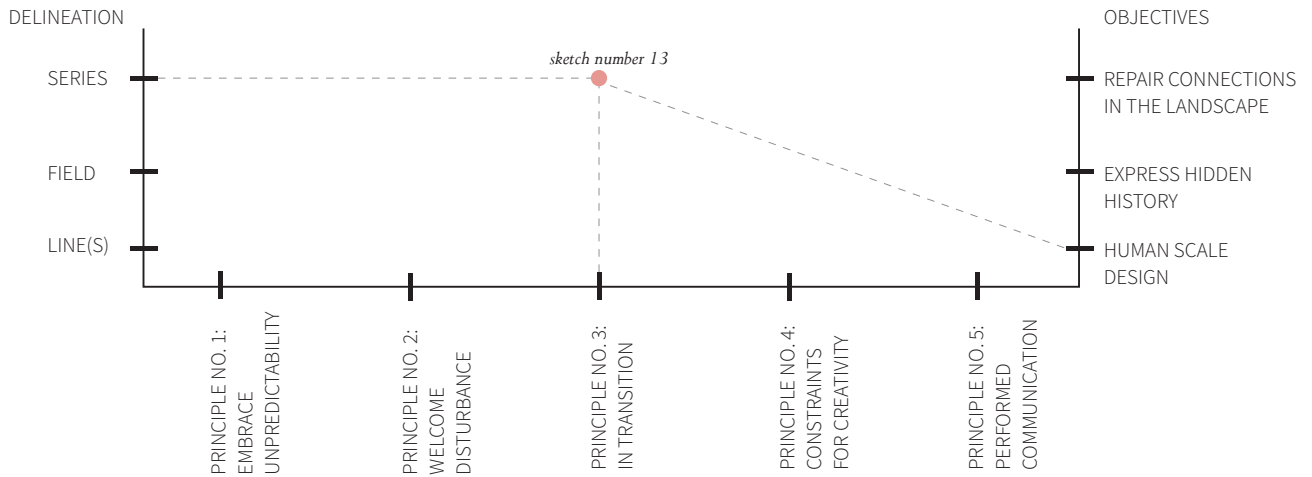


FIGURE 4.22

Sketch No. 14

Lines, In transition, Reveal history/ Connections

After reviewing the "Redlining" map which resulted in the installation of an invisible barrier for those who tried to move to other parts of the city, I wanted to render that line in the place where it runs through this site. Marking the line in the landscape recalls the historical roots of the neighborhood.

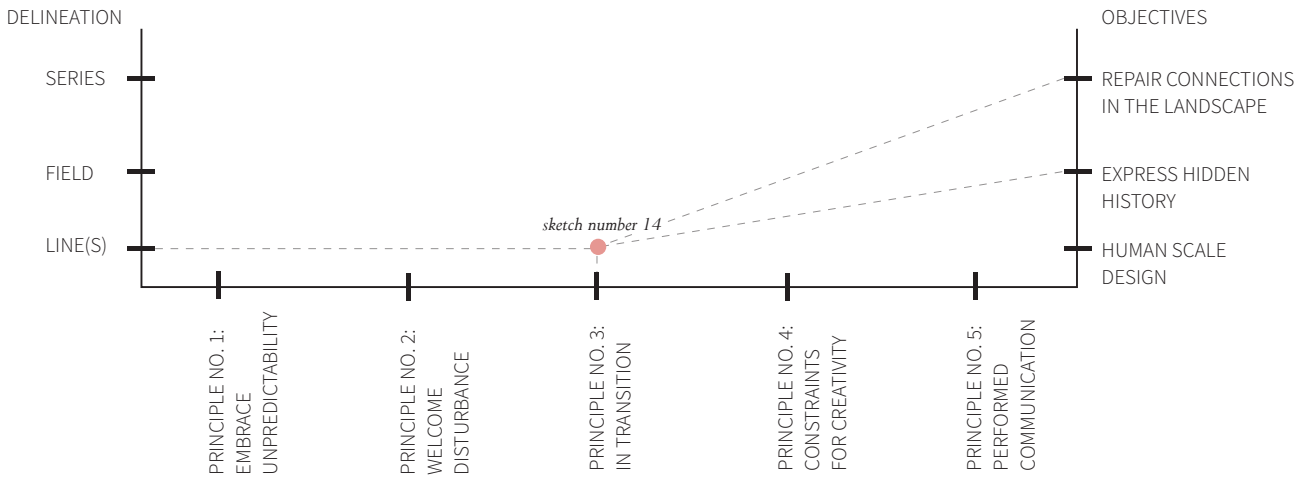
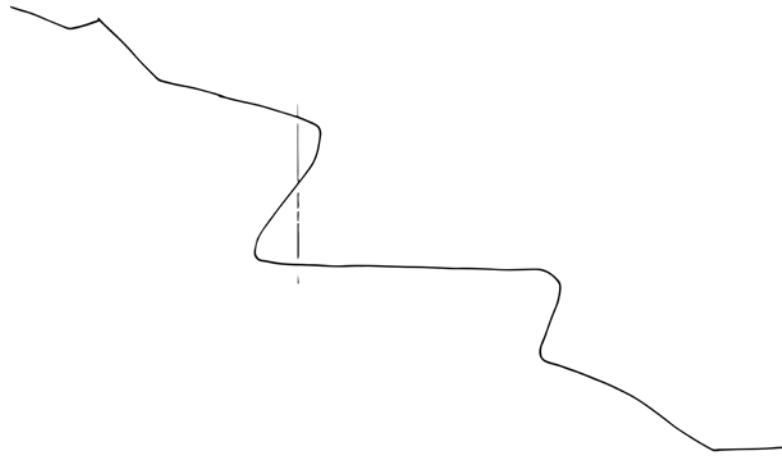


FIGURE 4.23

Sketch No. 15

Field, Performed communication, Human scale

Due to "Redlining" the community relied on itself for services and needs. The irony of segregation is that although it comes from discriminating against minority groups, it also results in community building. Therefore, this sketch highlights the porch area of all the dwellings, inside the "redline" to mark the place where neighbors gathered to socialize.

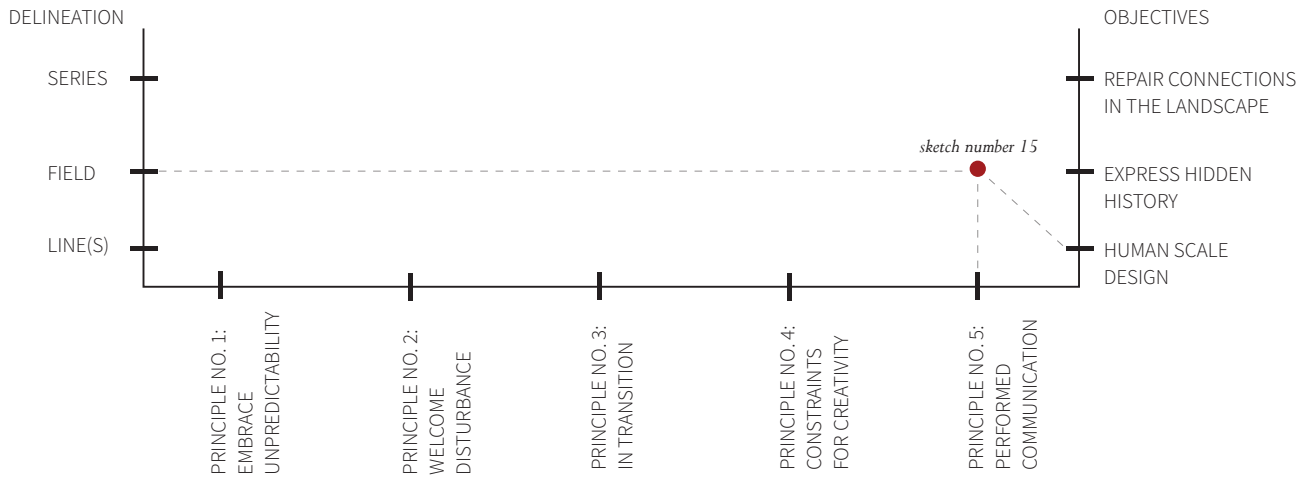


FIGURE 4.24

These drawings then became the pieces for collaging the design. Overlaying all the sketches resulted in drawings that resembled 'Free Jazz', an approach that is characterized by having no rules or order. This resulting aesthetic was not my desired outcome, so I decided I would first begin by join contrasting pieces one at a time, to build an overall dissonant structure and to make an aesthetic choice as to what would serve as the building blocks of the design.

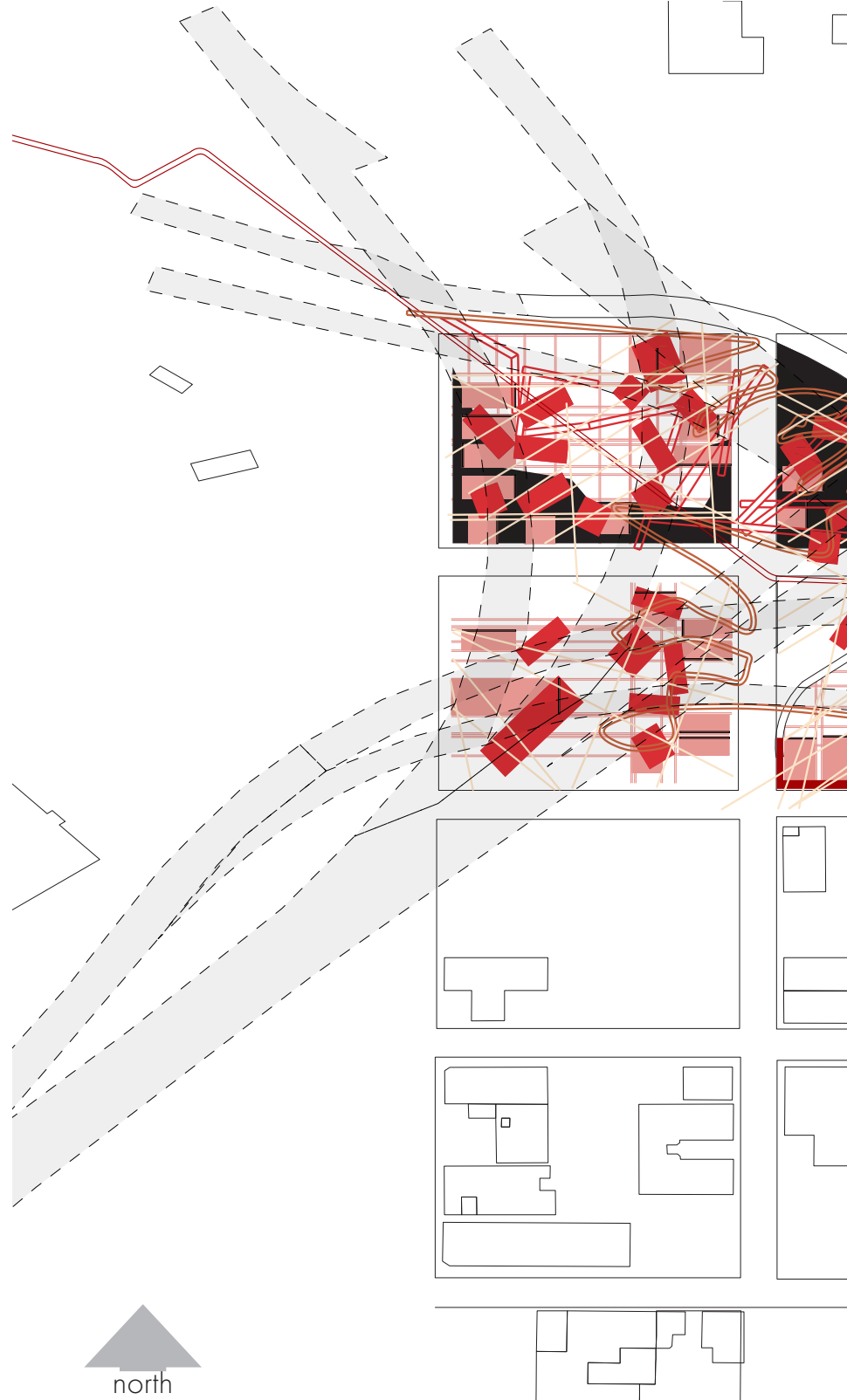


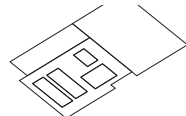
FIGURE 4.25

This design suggests a territory in which a tenuous order has been pieced together out of chaos. The pieces chosen that became the basis of spatial representation were sketch numbers: 4, 15, 12, 7, 3, 5, 9, & 6. These forms were then assigned a role and given a form that responded to the site's conditions.

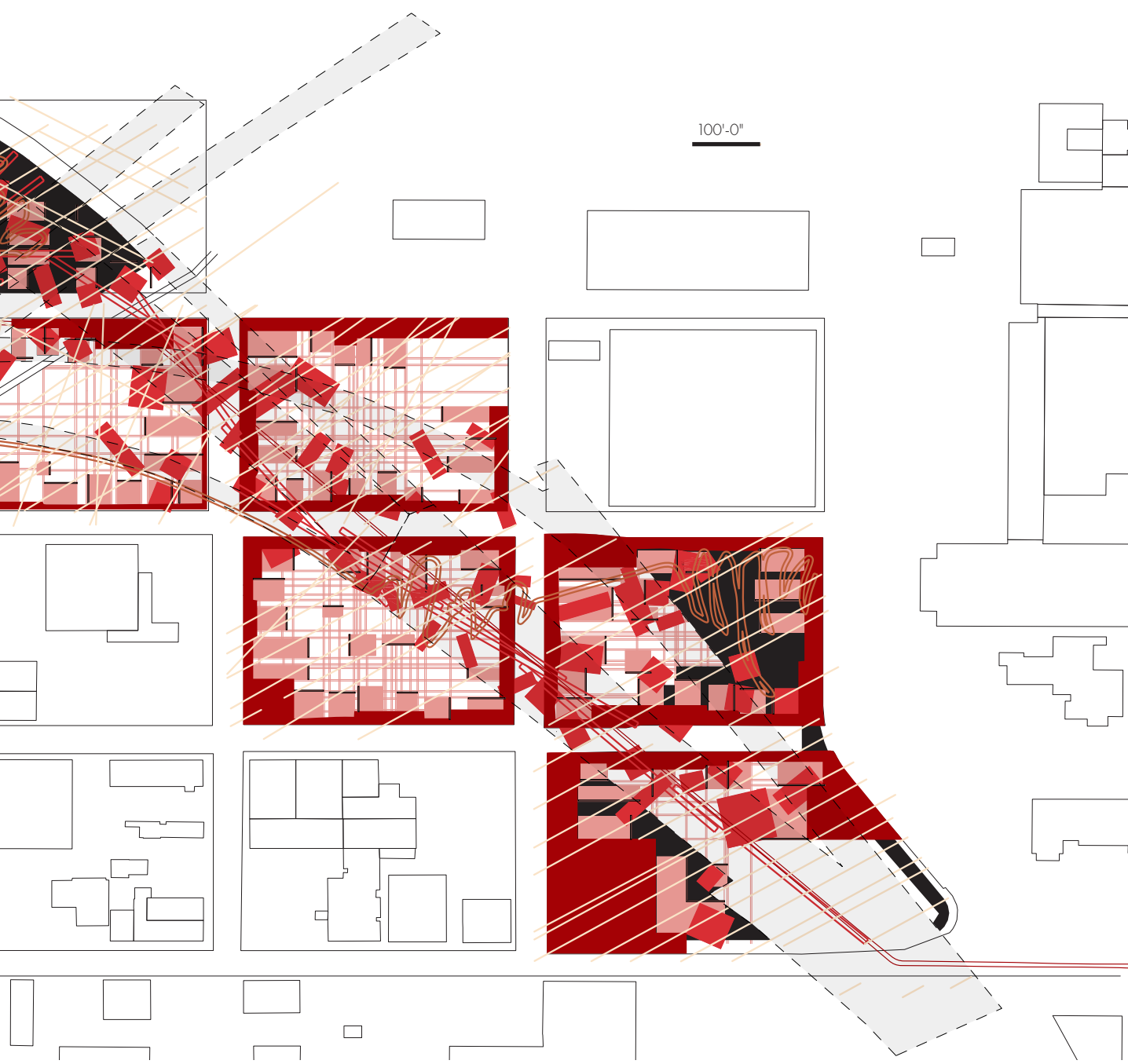
LEGEND:

- PRINCIPLE NO. 1:
EMBRACE
UNPREDICTABILITY
- PRINCIPLE NO. 2:
WELCOME
DISTURBANCE
- PRINCIPLE NO. 3:
IN TRANSITION
- PRINCIPLE NO. 4:
CONSTRAINTS
FOR CREATIVITY
- PRINCIPLE NO. 5:
PERFORMED
COMMUNICATION





FROM LINE TO FORM



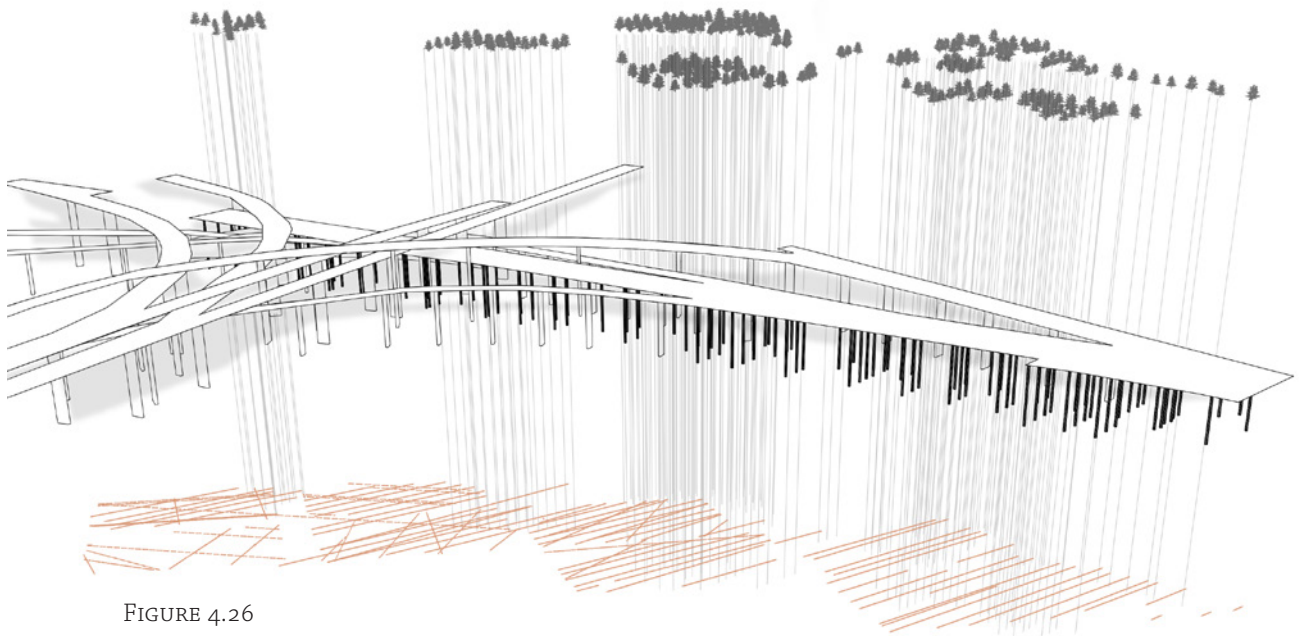


FIGURE 4.26

Sketch number 4 became a 'cut through', as I appropriated the elevated infrastructure's structural pattern and assigned them a role of becoming a large tree on the site.

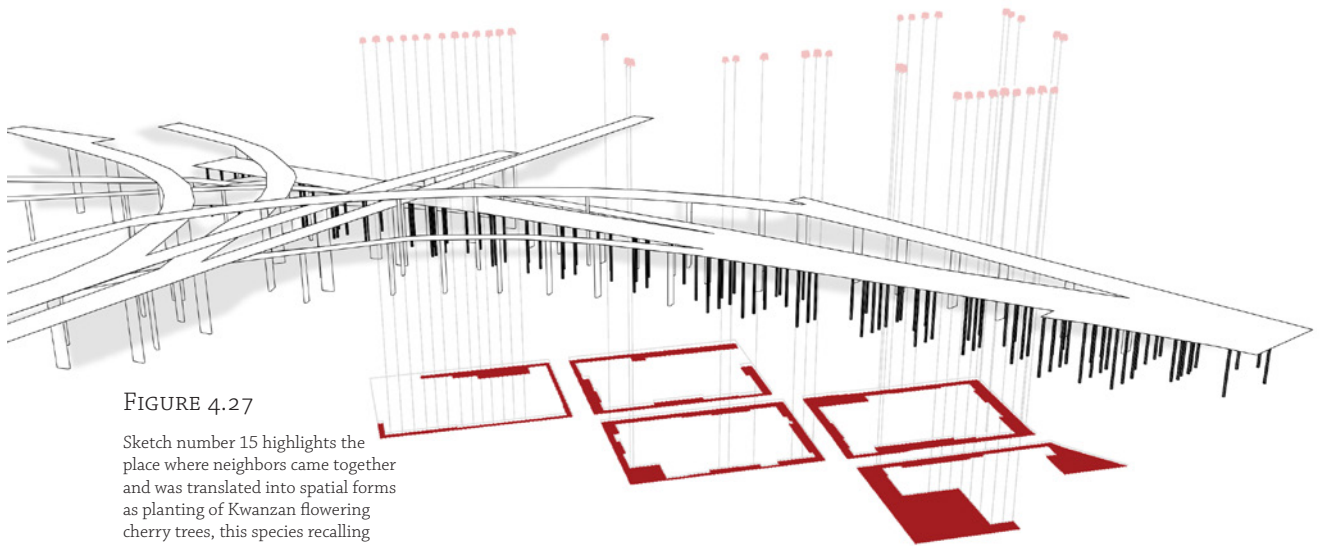


FIGURE 4.27

Sketch number 15 highlights the place where neighbors came together and was translated into spatial forms as planting of Kwanzan flowering cherry trees, this species recalling Albina's community tree planting program from the sixties.

FIGURE 4.28

A plan view that begins to exhibit the combining of sketches 4, 15, & 12.

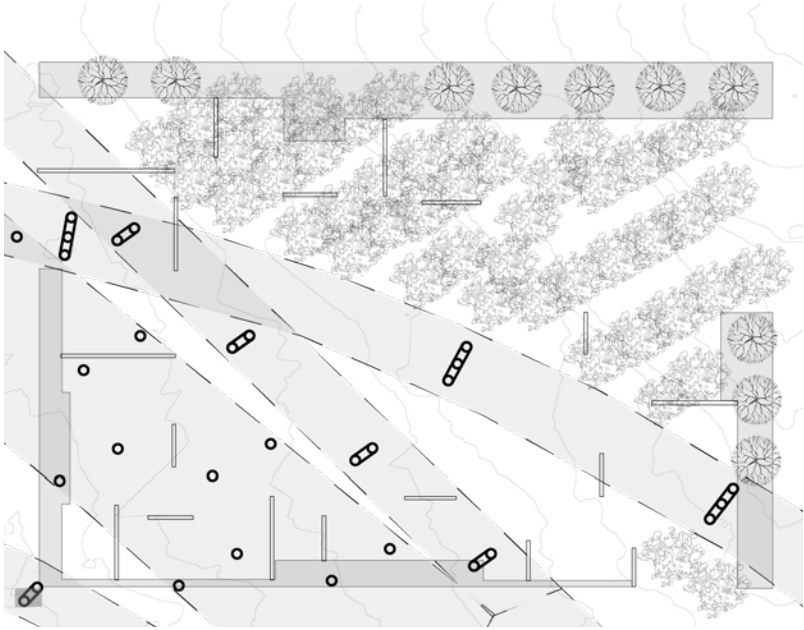


FIGURE 4.29

Sketch number 12 recalled chosen walls from the razed dwellings, which translated into a scheme for lighting.

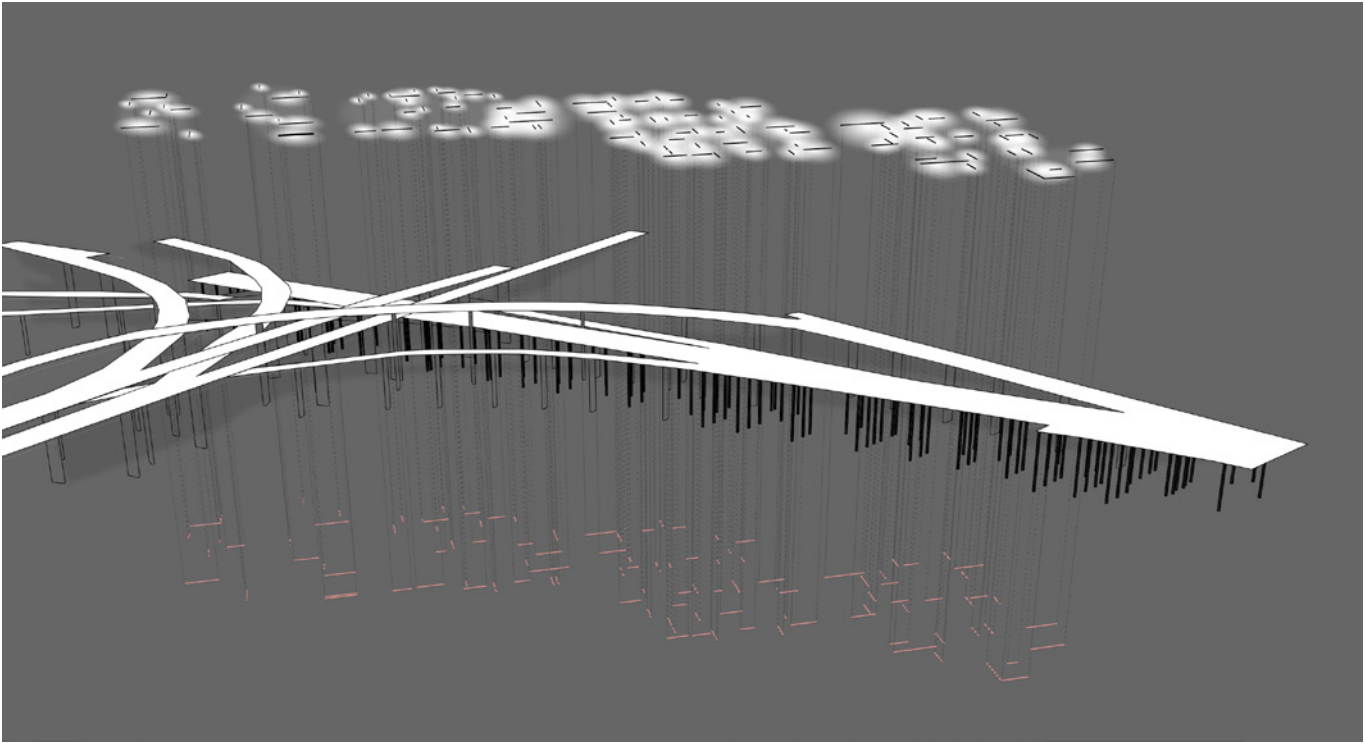


FIGURE 4.30

Sketch 7 stimulated a response to the layers of history in this site that are covered now by asphalt. In the places where asphalt exists the lines become starting points of removing the impervious material and is carved away in response to the site's conditions. The ground in this case becomes unfinished and, in some places, unstable.

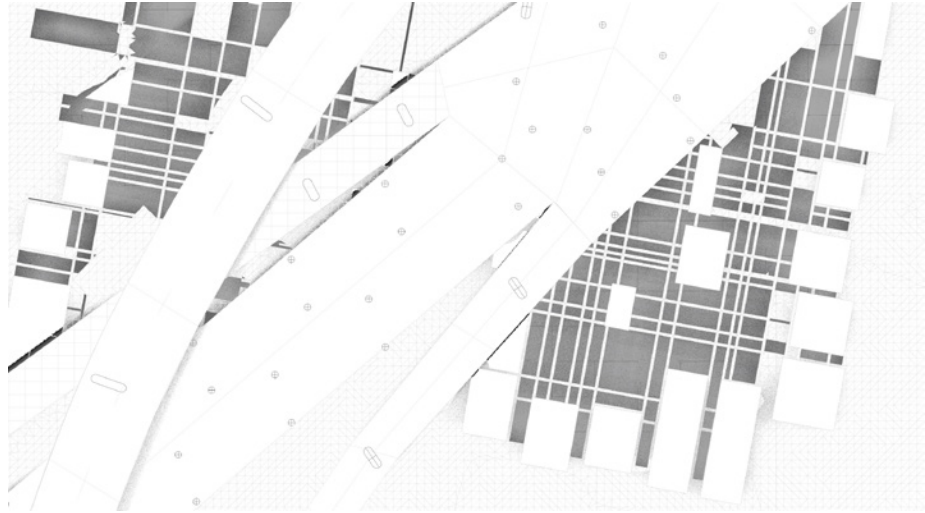


FIGURE 4.31

Sketch 3 outlines the footprints of the once established neighborhood, focusing on the spaces where people gathered. This space was translated into a place filled with either poplar trees or rock-filled surfaces, depending on the microclimate of the site. An improvised move was made to symbolize the amount of disorder that was created with the construction of Interstate 5. By rotating the footprints, representing a shift that took place, the orderly rock footprint is shaken into a jumble and becomes relatively instable.

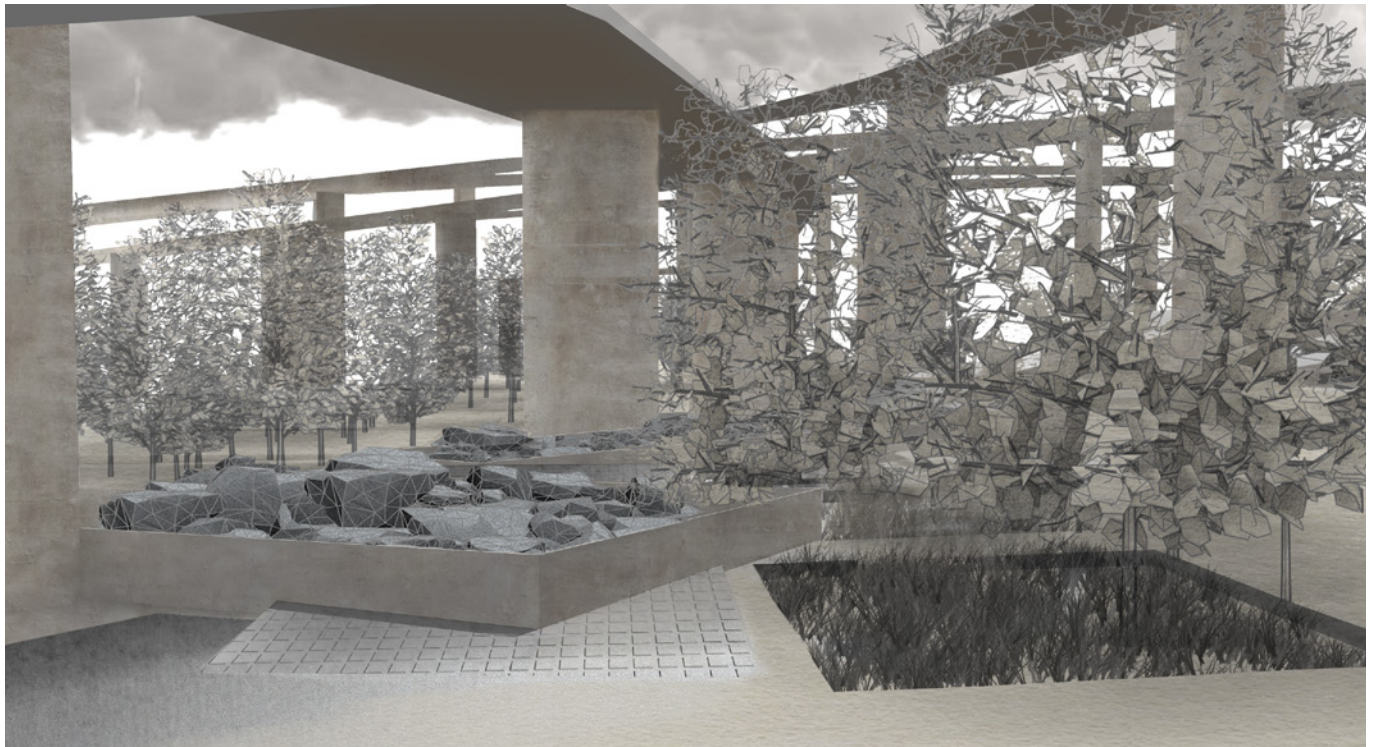
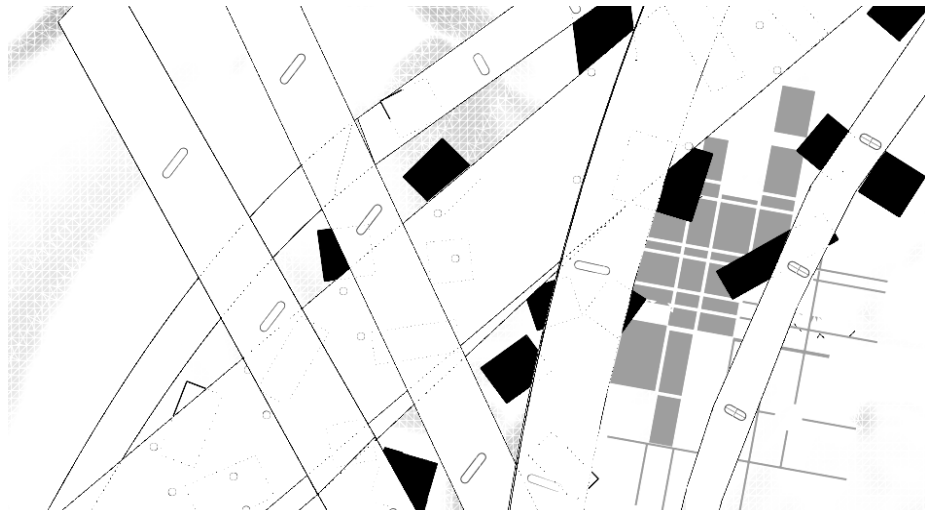
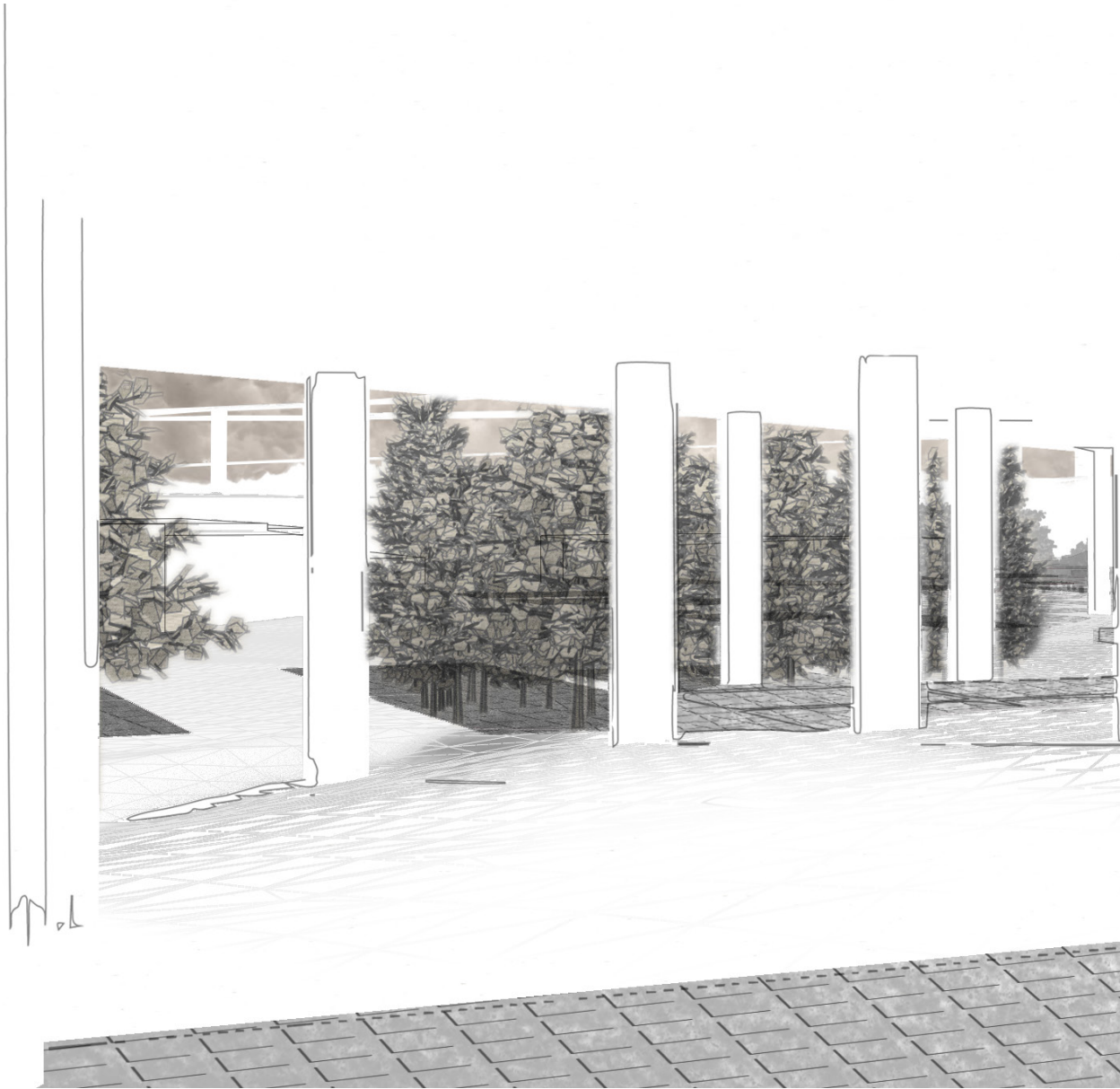


FIGURE 4.32

Under the elevated infrastructure, sketch 3 translated into a place filled with orderly stone creating a patchwork of hardscaped surfaces.



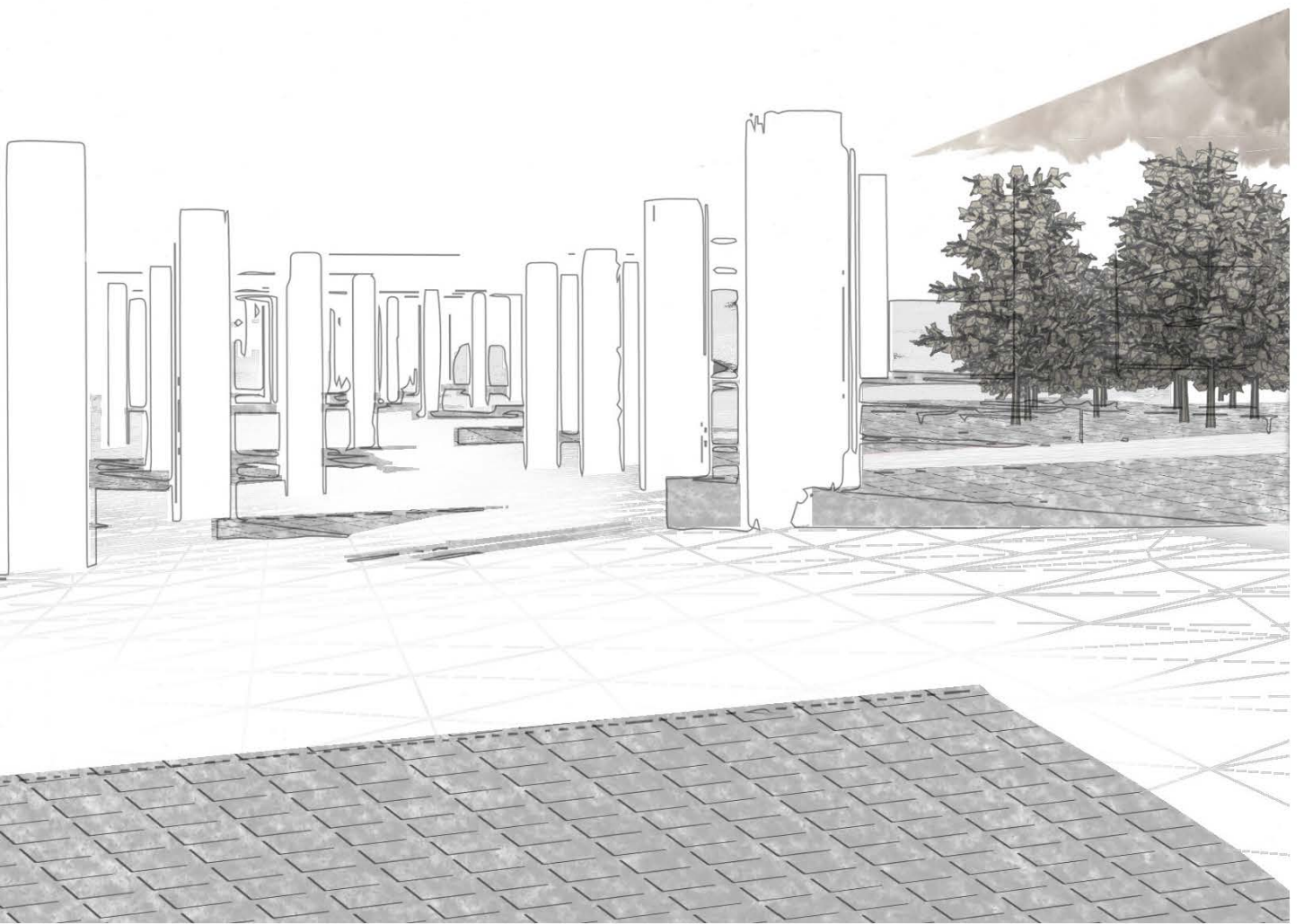


FIGURE 4.33

Sketch number 9 is the most direct route through the site and recognized as an important through fare.

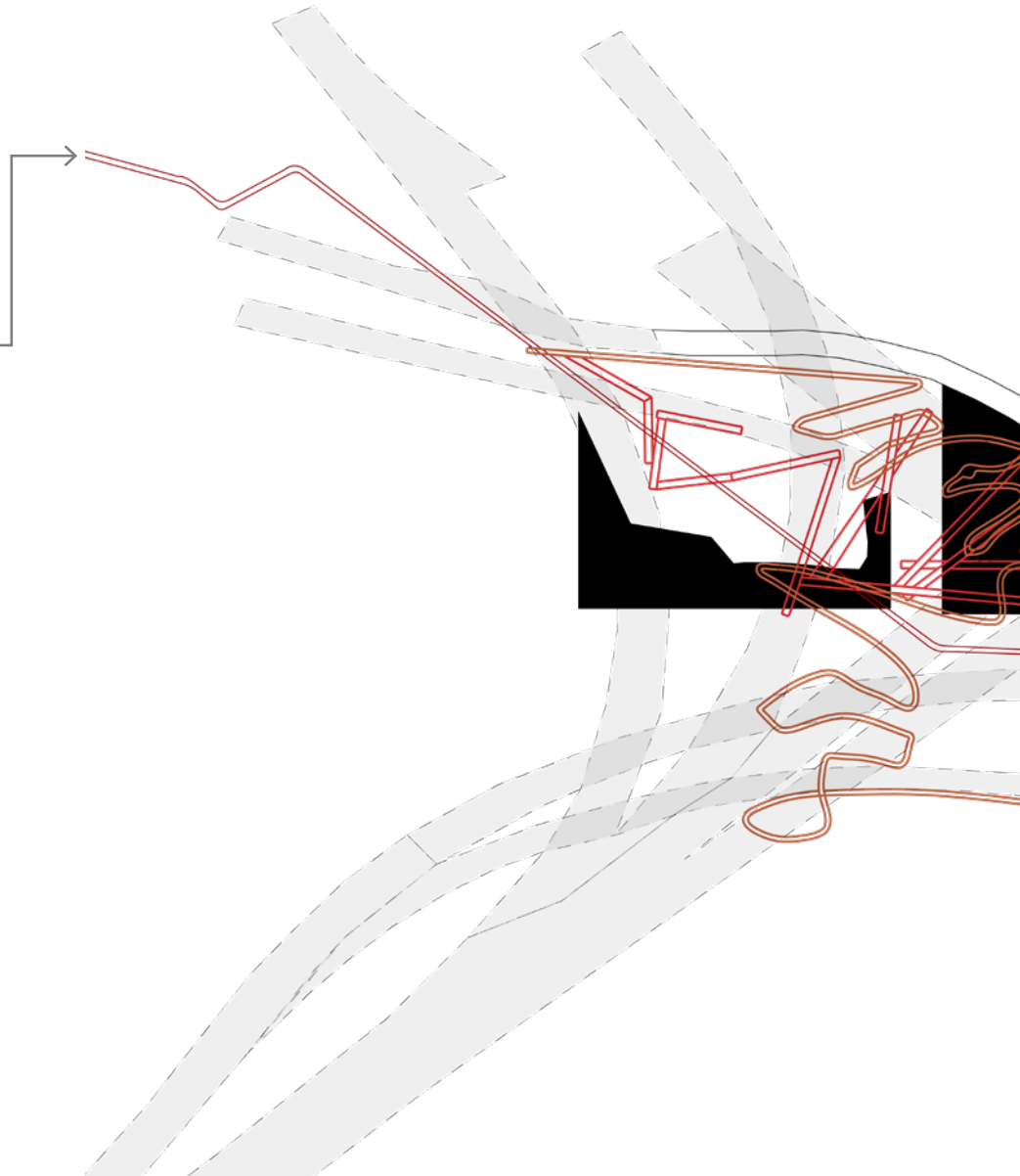
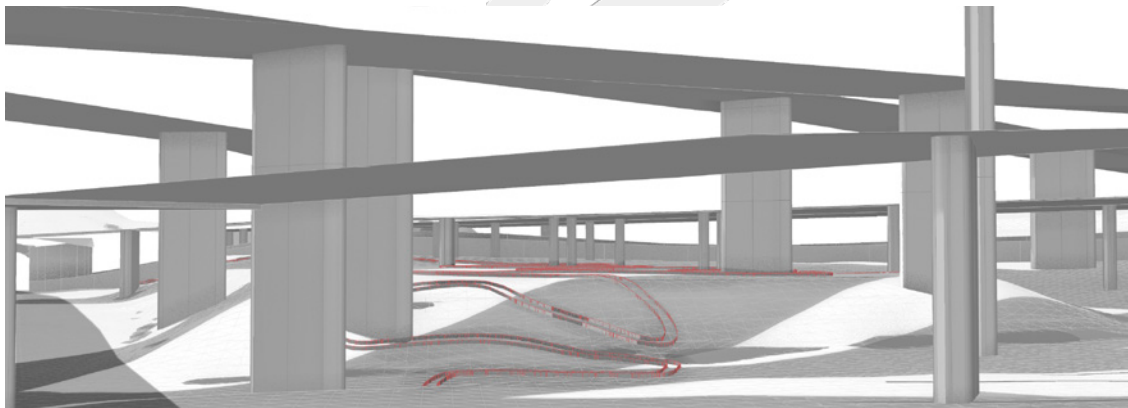


FIGURE 4.34

Sketch number 6 is a pathway created as a counter geometry of curves that meander through the wild landscape made by the elevated infrastructure. The pathway becomes an interesting feature in the landscape.



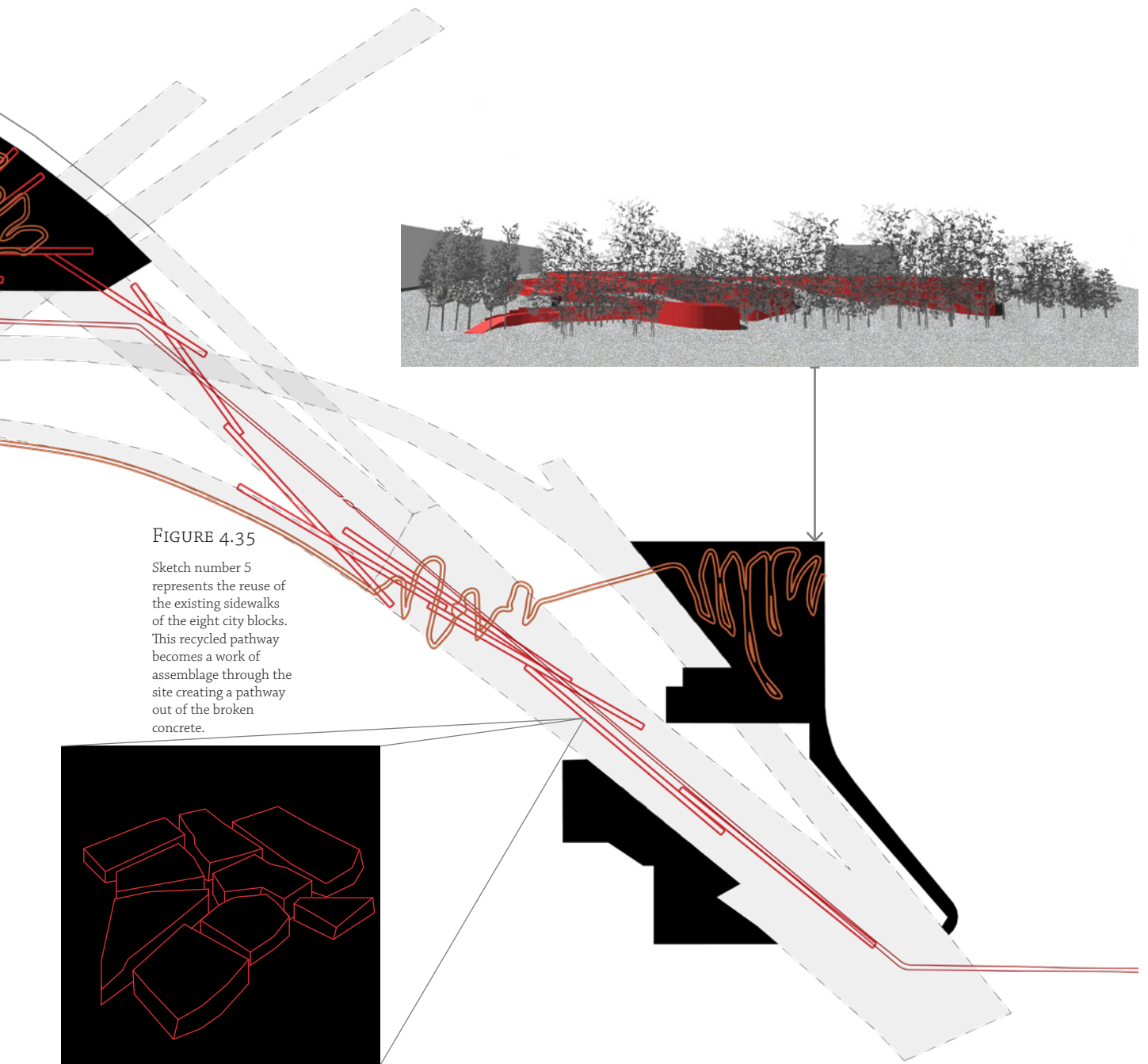


FIGURE 4.35

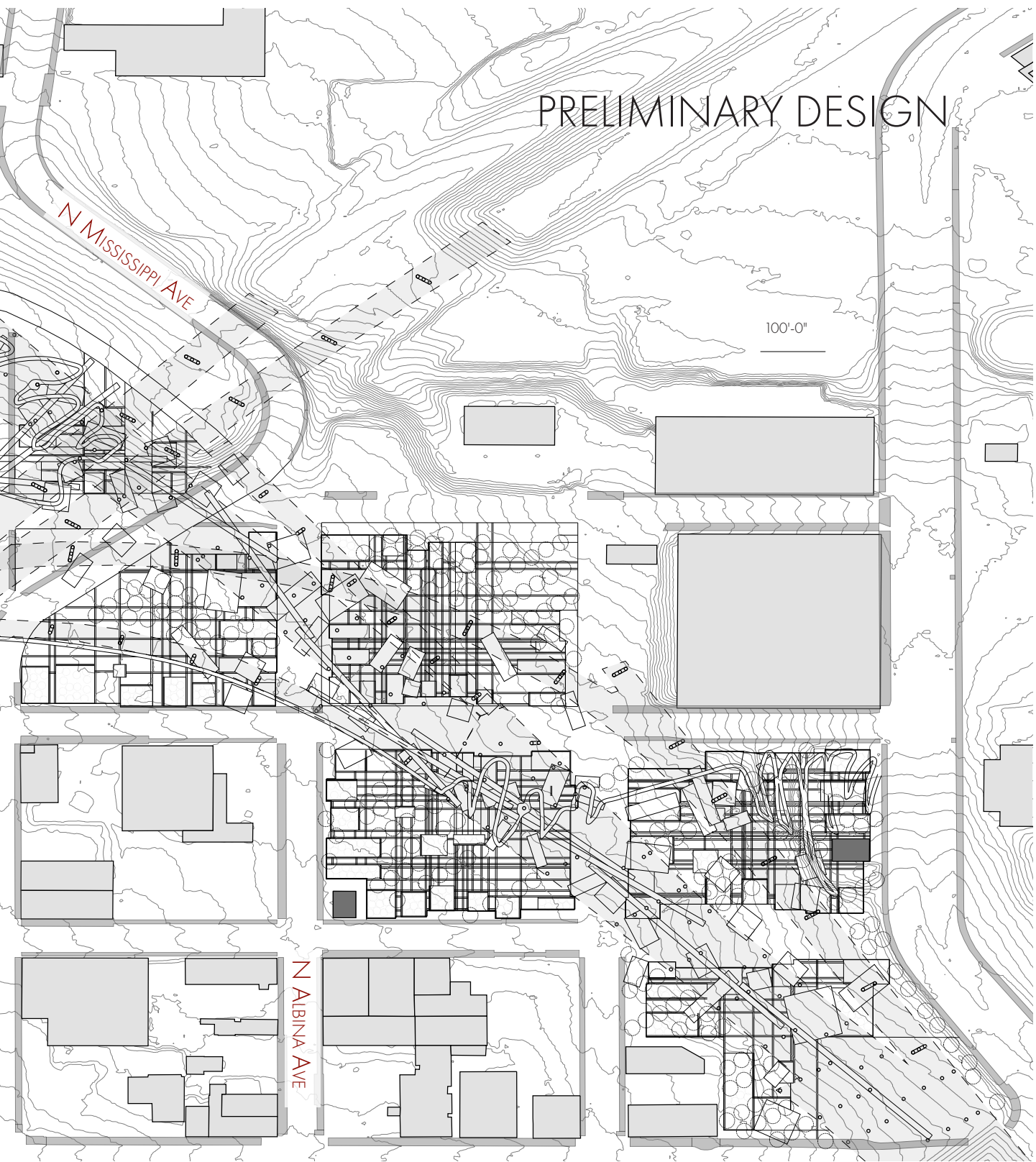
Sketch number 5 represents the reuse of the existing sidewalks of the eight city blocks. This recycled pathway becomes a work of assemblage through the site creating a pathway out of the broken concrete.

FIGURE 4.36

Following the creation of several conceptual sketches, this plan sought to achieve an objective of repairing connections in the landscape, revealing history, and creating a more human scale environment.



PRELIMINARY DESIGN



REFLECTION

Interstate 5, also referred to by residents as Minnesota or East Bank Freeway due to it being built over North Minnesota Avenue, cut through the heart of the Albina neighborhood. During this time hundreds of families were displaced as a result of construction of the highway lanes and ramps, as the elevated transportation infrastructure physically divided the existing community resulting in an inhospitable place within the urban environment. This design seeks to tell a new story, a story that is filled with syncopation, shifting the strong beat to the weak beat. Through the process of assemblage, change was instigated in the landscape by creating a connective public space for pedestrian and human scaled experience (Figure 4.24-4.36). By fostering a dialogue with the site, space is carved out of this wild place that allows people and life to occupy the place once again.

As mentioned earlier, the design process is iterative and the final design was developed through the act of creating a design, critiquing it, and then going back and revising it. Through a series of critiques, the design was analyzed to find out if it was doing what it set out to do—telling a new story, one that returns to the emphasis of the weak beat in the landscape—focusing on the human scale and experience, and re-stitching the urban fabric. While repairing connections in the landscape, and the return of access and life to the place was there, the freeway still overpowered and overwhelmed the landscape. The site lacked the dissonant resolve the song needed.

In the rehearsal of “Giant Steps”, John Coltrane was recorded discussing a particularly extreme piece with his colleagues:

“I don’t think I’m gonna improve this, you know... I ain’t goin be sayin nothin, (I goin do) tryin just, makin the ‘changes’, I ain’t goin be, tellin no ‘story’... Like...tellin them ‘black’ stories.” Amidst the confounded mumbles of assent from his band-mates, one colleague rejoins, “Shoot. Really, you make the changes, ‘that’ll tell ‘em a story.” Surprised by this idea, Coltrane responds, “You think the changes’re the story!” Overlapping him, a second bandmate riffs, “(Right)... that’ll change ‘all’ the stories (up).” His voice crackling with laughter, Coltrane admits, “I don’t want to tell no lies (on ‘em).” After a group laugh, the second colleague trails off in a sort of denouement, “(The) changes ‘themselves’ is ‘some’ kind of story (man I’m telling you) (O’Meally, Edwards and Griffin 2004, 394).

This abstract conversation is pertinent because much like Coltrane, this author felt that the design was not quite telling a new story. There were changes made in seeking to repair connections and bring back life (both with human and non-human species) to the place but to tell a new story required flipping the script. A new story requires what was old, but only as a spring board for creating something new. Improvisation, the heart of jazz music is the act of taking what existed and making it do something completely different while in the moment bringing with it the potentials from the past to the future. Seeking the design goal of truly reclaiming and re-stitching the urban fabric required this author to zoom out and explore the possibility of really making those changes.

A RETURN TO CONTEXT

The so-called Minnesota or EastBank Freeway that divided the established neighborhoods of North Portland is just a little over half a century old. The aging elevated infrastructure is predicted to certainly collapse during the predicted Cascadia earthquake because the supporting columns lack structural integrity. Currently there is not a plan in place to address these issues as Interstate 205, a freeway that runs on the outside of the inner city, has been designated the region's 'lifeline route' and is the city's number one priority as far as addressing resiliency in the face of a catastrophic event (Figure 4.37).

Currently just south of this site there is a proposal to expand I-5 by the Rose Quarter, between I-84 and I-405 (Figure 4.38). This quarter-mile section of highway suffers the highest crash rate of any other in the state and experiences some of the highest traffic volumes in the state. Unfortunately, traffic experts are reporting that the addition of the lanes will not relieve this congestion due to the principles of "induced demand". Traffic engineers have found that cities cannot build their way out of congestion because it is the roads themselves that cause traffic. Though some traffic engineers began to be aware of this phenomenon decades ago, it is only recently that enough research has been done to prove that when we increase the capacity of roads, more people are drawn to use them, creating a never-ending cycle. The proposed \$450 million expansion at the end of the day will bring more cars to the area, cause more air pollution and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, and continue to ignore the role interstate freeways play in the "structured inequality" of our country.

For many years transportation advocates have studied how Portland could change the Eastbank section of I-5 by either submerging it in a tunnel or eliminating it and allowing I-405, I-84, and I-205 to carry the load. While studies have shown that freeways create traffic and increase carbon emission, if cars are able to navigate a permeable grid than it reduces congestion. Removing this quarter-mile section of highway would change traffic patterns in the city, re-assigning freeways to their original role as ways to enter or leave a city, rather than traverse it from within (Figure 4.39 & 4.40).

Looking at the age of the infrastructure, its structural integrity, and potential for redevelopment and community improvement, removing the quarter mile section of I-5 is a progressive approach that can allow for a safer, healthier, and a more enjoyable urban environment. More and more cities around the world are working towards putting people and other modes of transportation first over the automobile. With a rising awareness that building more lanes is not the answer, urban highway removal is gaining popularity as an alternative to costly repairs. The Embarcadero Freeway in San Francisco is one example where a massive double-decker freeway was taken down after being damaged by an earthquake. Now it is a place with a beautiful scenic view of the Bay, a thriving economy, and miles of public space dedicated to other modes of transit such as biking and public transportation.

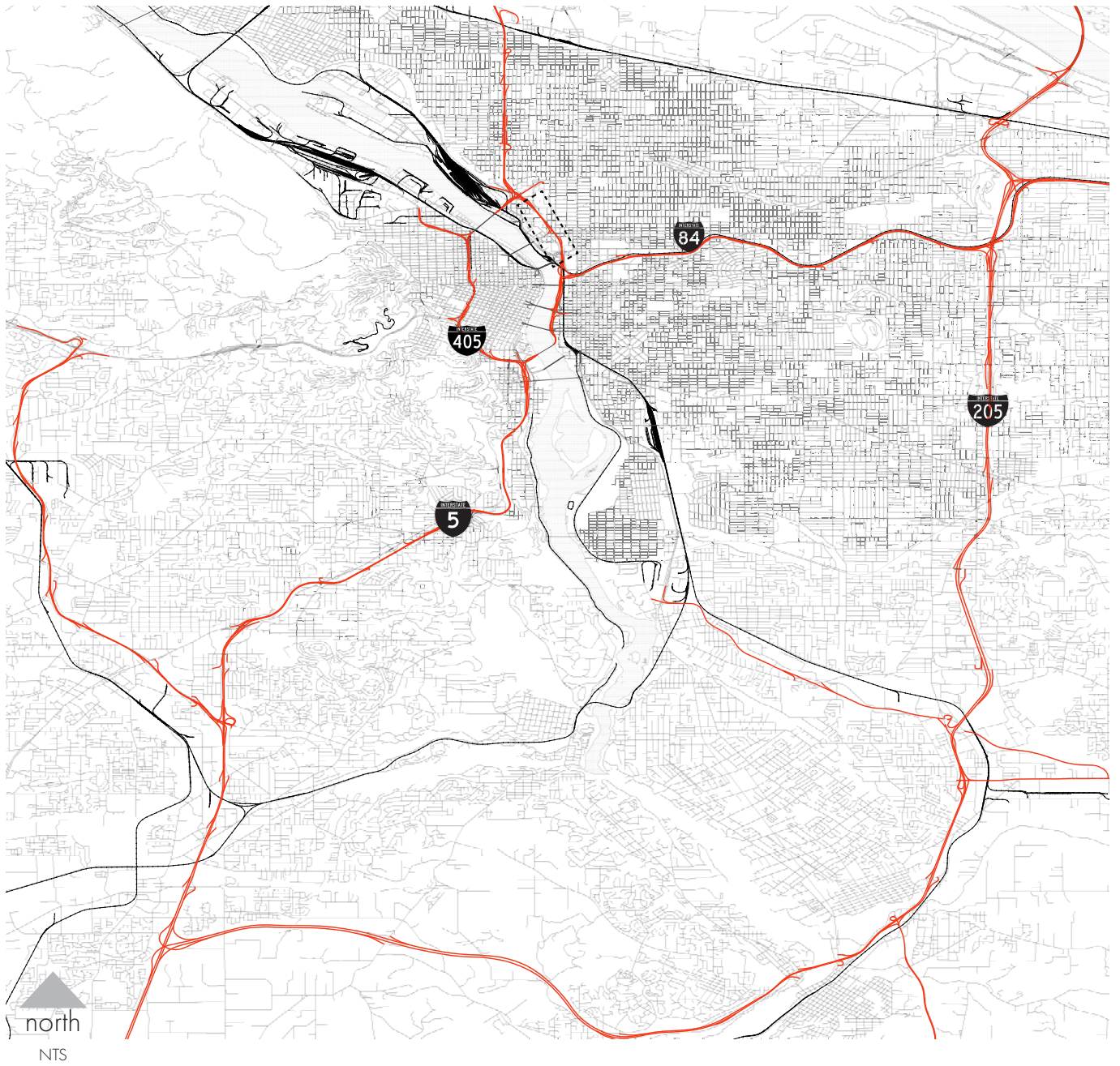


FIGURE 4.37

Portland Metro's
network of Interstate
Highways: 5, 405, 84,
and 205.

GIS Data: City of Portland



FIGURE 4.38

Area of proposed expansion by the city of Portland due to its high rate of collisions and congestion.

GIS Data: City of Portland



FIGURE 4.39

Proposed removal of
the quarter mile section
of I-5.

GIS Data: City of Portland

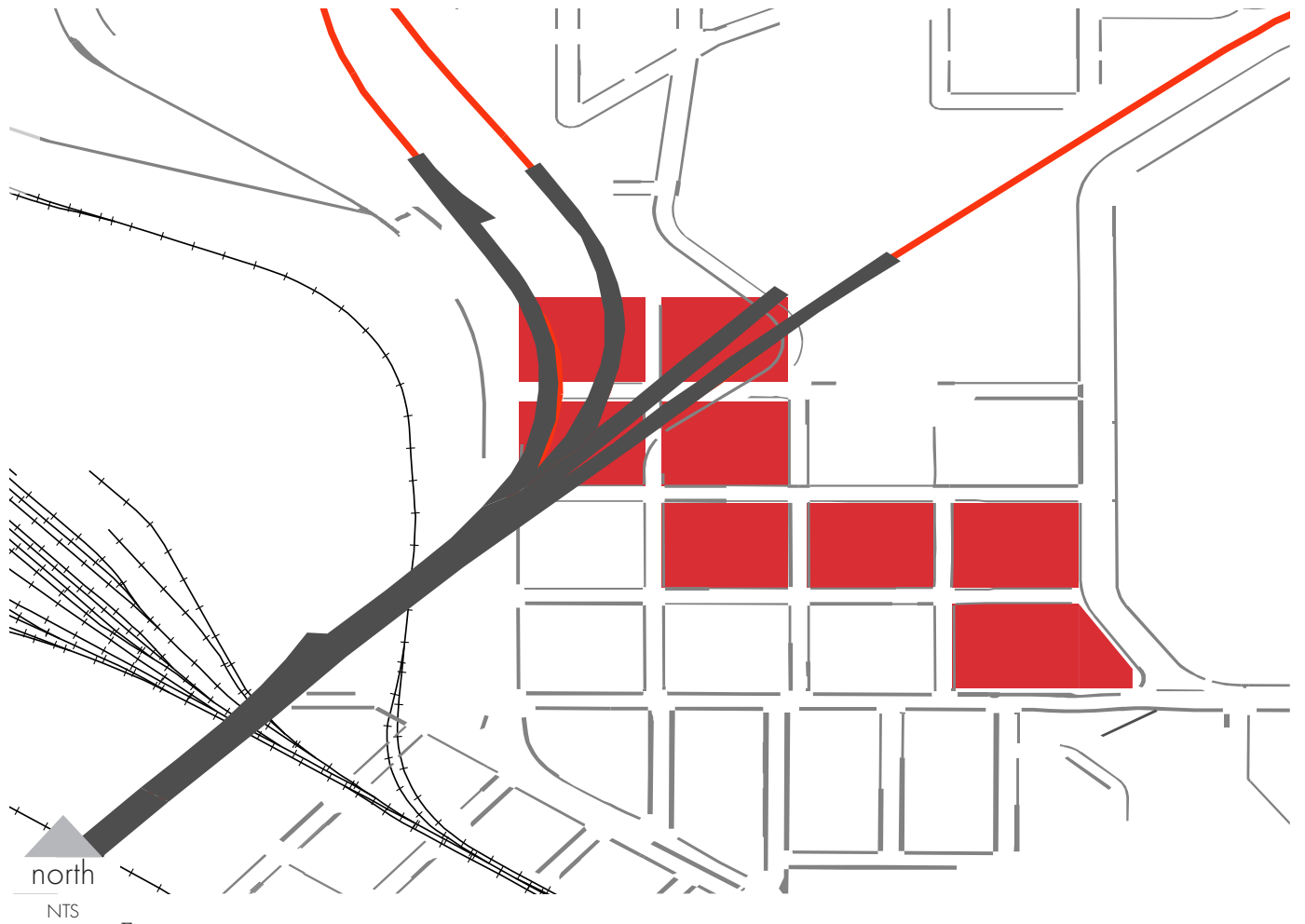


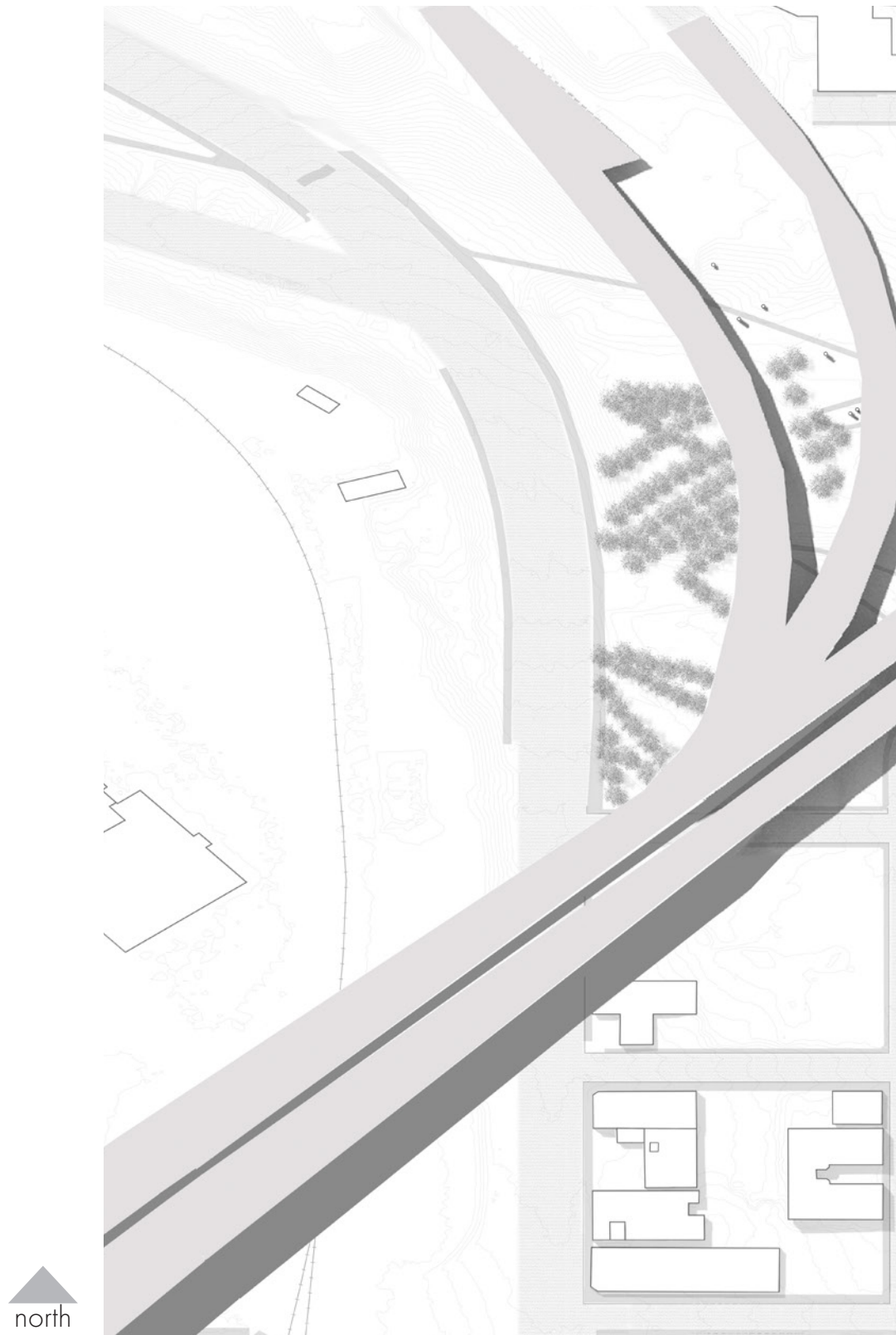
FIGURE 4.40

Revised site conditions
after partial removal of
the elevated highway
infrastructure.

GIS Data: City of Portland

FIGURE 4.41

SITE PLAN: a design approach framed by the invariable features of jazz.



SITE PLAN

100'-0"



SITE PLAN *(A design framed by the invariable features of jazz)*

Zooming out and exploring the context gave a view of how a design process framed by the invariable features of jazz could be informative in approaching this site design. This assisted in the formulation of a method that made sense in implementing a design process. During the process of the conceptual and preliminary design phase the author sought forms influenced by the five principles. Through the collage process—an improvisational act—design choices were made to bring forth certain forms and spatial compositions. Testing the design process once more allowed for a way forward in articulating the process (Figure 4.41).

Principle no. 2: Welcome Disturbance

The first step was to identify what was weak on the site, choosing to emphasize those qualities and concretize them, increasing their status in the urban environment. The urban fabric around the site consisted of miles and miles of homes in the north, while the eight city blocks under investigation had only two lonely dwellings orphaned from their community and context (4.42). By referencing the historic aerial photographs and approximately locating the footprints of the razed homes we can see where homes once stood (Appendix C). Choosing to highlight and recall their footprints, not for the past trauma but for their potential, was important in seeking to create an emotional feeling of inclusion, and at the same time, operating in parallel, with a more abstract strategy which always drives this author's vision. Removing part of the freeway overpass allows for the building of new dwellings while utilizing the geometric artifact of the old dwellings, preserving their footprint. In this way the rhythm of the place shifts as the pattern of movement flips from one that was primarily of high speed motion experienced via a motorized vehicle, to a slower pace inherent to dwelling in a place. To welcome this disturbance is to welcome a change, to break from the ordering system of the past, one which prioritized the interstate highway over neighborhoods. To syncopate, or to make something offbeat, shifts the whole measure and skews what is to follow. Change is the natural pattern of the world, and understanding and accepting this idea welcomes the opportunity of this landscape to once again alter its trajectory. Shifting the emphasis to the weak beat changes the rhythm of the place, while increasing their status in the composition of the urban environment. This anchors

FIGURE 4.42

The urban fabric around the site consists of miles and miles of homes in the north, while in the eight city blocks under investigation have only two lonely dwellings orphaned from their community and context.

GIS Data: City of Portland



the project in its setting, preparing for a new story to be told through improvisation.

Principle no. 1: Embrace Unpredictability

Jazz improvisation is risky, bold, and dramatic. Proposing the removal of the elevated infrastructure, in the spirit of discovery, allows for a new story to be told. The proposal uses the footprint and structural elements of the elevated infrastructure as the spring board for this improvisation asking what if in this place homes were brought back again. By re-shaping the melodic contour, the form in section, turns the straight line of the elevated interstate highway into a varying melodic line of roof tops and terraces, providing variation on a theme that goes up and down. This improvised contour seeks to tell a new story of possibility by manipulating squares and rectangles, creating a free form for dwelling. A melody that stays on the same pitch gets boring quickly, and the highway is just that, a flat monotonous sound. Improvisation in jazz requires boldness and drama by varying and embellishing the existing contour, proposing a new place for new and unknown experiences to unfold.

Improvisation uses what was old to make something new again by taking an old song, or one that has already been composed and creating a new version of that song in the present. This principle inspired a look at what came before, seeking to bring that forward and in a new way. Historically this site was an alluvial floodplain, and although little is known of the native tribe that inhabited the Albina area, it is known that this area, near the tribal grounds of the Clackamas, is vastly different than what it was at that time. This landscape was shaped by water, once full of riparian plants and wildlife before homes were built. Through telling in the form of a fractured narrative, jumping back in time allows for the past to be brought forward for its potential.

By making the footprints of the razed homes permeable using crushed gravel, they are planted with poplars, a relative of the native riparian tree species known for its ability in phytoremediation. In this way the places where people once dwelled are filled with life again and can also become a refuge to the new inhabitants on a hot day (Figure 4.43 & 4.44). The lifespan of this tree choice is relatively short, living for approximately 50 years. The purpose of selecting a tree that will be somewhat temporary allows for these spaces to transform overtime and be open to becoming something new again. By retaining and repurposing the structural elements of the elevated infrastructure, the memory remains by keeping what was originally intact and recognizable, allowing for its critique and celebration from its deviation from the original organizing elements (Figure 4.45).

Principle no. 4: Constraints for creativity

By re-appropriating the place where the elevated infrastructure once was, for siting the architecture and repurposing the highway's columns, retrofitting them to bear

the structural load of the ground floors, the staggered floor plates or platforms of the buildings allow for flexibility in the framework. It creates a basic organizing and vocabulary, that an architect can use to begin to improvise with and alter. The building outlines are not meant to be comprehensive but merely provide a starting point to leverage an objective.

The architecture is meant to remain uncomplicated, transparent, and minimal with room for the inhabitants to make the place their own. The supports lift the platforms off the ground allowing for the ground to remain free and open. The roof can support a garden, while the horizontal platforms allow for light and air to move through them and the façade is free to be designed as desired as it is not a structural element. The architecture is meant to be the support system for everyday life and to accommodate the needs of the users while providing space for improvisation.

This basic layout provides the scaffolding to resolve in some manner the overly dissonant aspect of the freeway system. In jazz dissonance, that which causes tension, is built into each chord to such a degree that it becomes the building block of the harmonic language. Therefore, using the structural elements that replaced the original homes as the support for the new dwellings is a dissonant resolve for this site.

Principle no. 3: In Transition

In a constant dialogue with the site, this author was continually attempting a response to the wild landscape of the freeway, seeking to carve a calm place from the noise and pollution. Before the removal of the freeway, the focus of the design was getting through this wild and intense landscape to land in a calm place. In this revised design defining spaces are proposed specifically for people, giving the place the opportunity to become a social space.

The urban fabric is re-stitched, although it looks nothing like its neighboring neighbors. Here the symmetry is exploded and represents dynamic fragments, but it provides in these places a spatial composition made up of bosques, reflective water pools, patio spaces, and a variety of surfaces open for social gathering. Embedded in this principle is that the surfaces maintain a state of readiness to transition into a place for multiple activities. Representing a dissonant resolve within the landscape, water mirrors and hardscaped paving patterns are held in a skewed footprint of the dwellings that were demolished in the building of the interstate highway. (Figure 4.46 & 4.47).

The transition of building this proposed design will not happen all at once, rather it is built over time involving an interplay of stakeholders. The designer recognizes the importance of community involvement in decision making in the City of Portland and further realizes the sensitive implications inherent in any site development with a history of displacement and inequity.

Additionally, difficult issues arise as we move toward more alternative modes of transportation. Decisions are being made now by local government officials that will form the transportation system of Portland's future. Deeply rooted in that decision making is the tension between planning for an alternative future and the continuing impact of the automobile.

Principle no. 5: Performed Communication

People transform space into public space by their behavior. Understanding the design of space is a co-creation with the designer and users. A curved pathway is open to being defined. It could act as an alternative seating for a performance space providing space for people to interact and create a plethora of new experiences. These interactions are to some degree unpredictable but play a large role in shaping space. The presence of bodies and their actions communicate in describing what a space will become (Figure 4.48).

A recent City of Portland effort is the “Right to Return”, a pathway for displaced community family members to return to the neighborhoods they were previously forced from. In the same vein, a program for bringing back Black-owned businesses could allow for the city of Portland to begin to address the tearing down of the African American community's business district just east of this site, razed for a “Model City” urban renewal project that was never built. What would be communicated by African American bodies occupying these places once again is the city's prioritization of social equity in the future building of a healthy city.

It is not necessarily easy to interpret the complex feelings associated with the decades of urban renewal in African American communities. But in today's world, designers have a role in repairing our broken built environment. As this project seeks viable solutions to a reclaimed landscape, it also aims to explore pluralism in response to the lack of cultural reflectivity we have seen in the past in design in the United States. Places are transformed not only by the people and bureaucracies that seek to control them but also by the people who perform in them, speaking through actions, experiences, and in the way people live. This design seeks to provide a place for people to express themselves through their everyday activities and experiences.

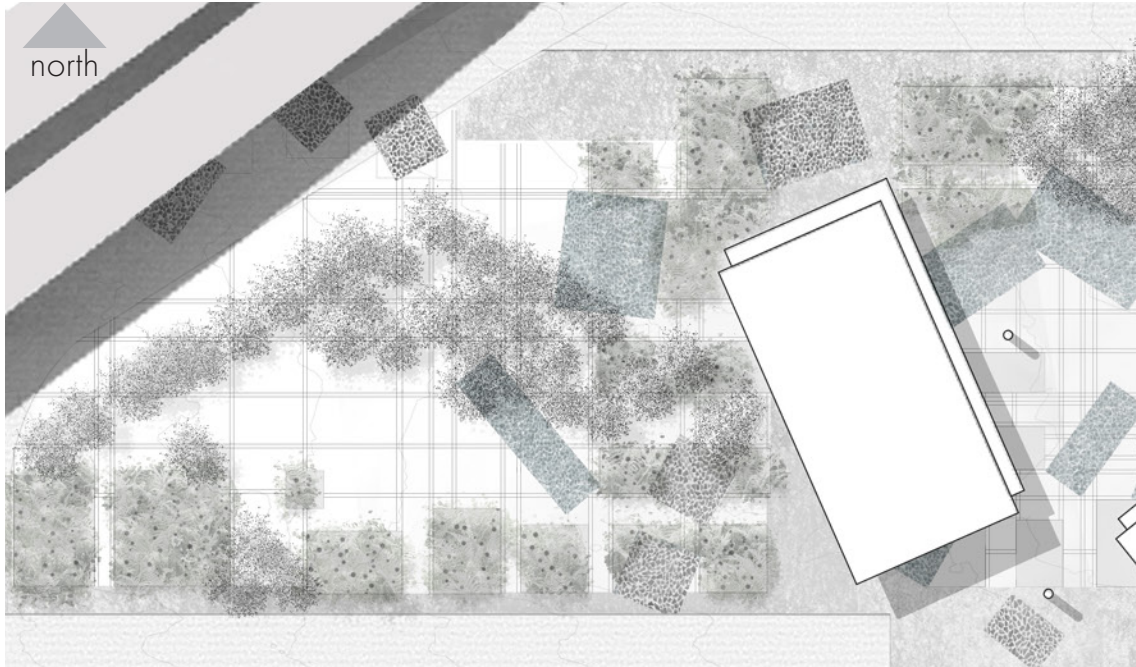
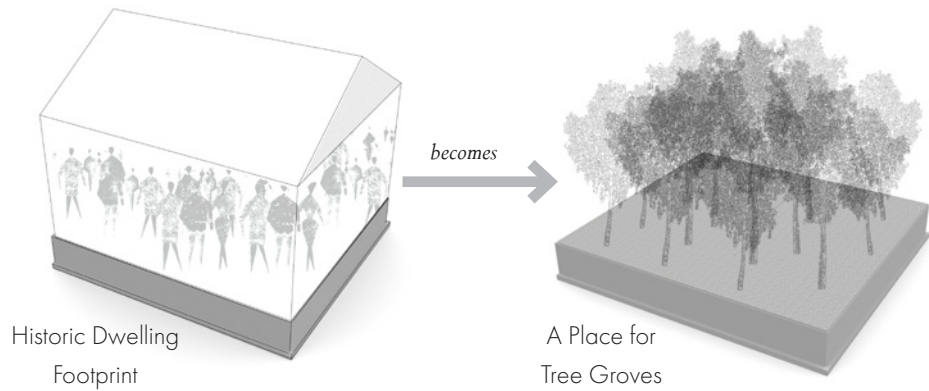


FIGURE 4.43

By making the footprints of the razed homes permeable using crushed gravel, they are planted with poplars. In this way the places where people once dwelled are filled with life again and can also become a refuge to the new inhabitants on a hot day.



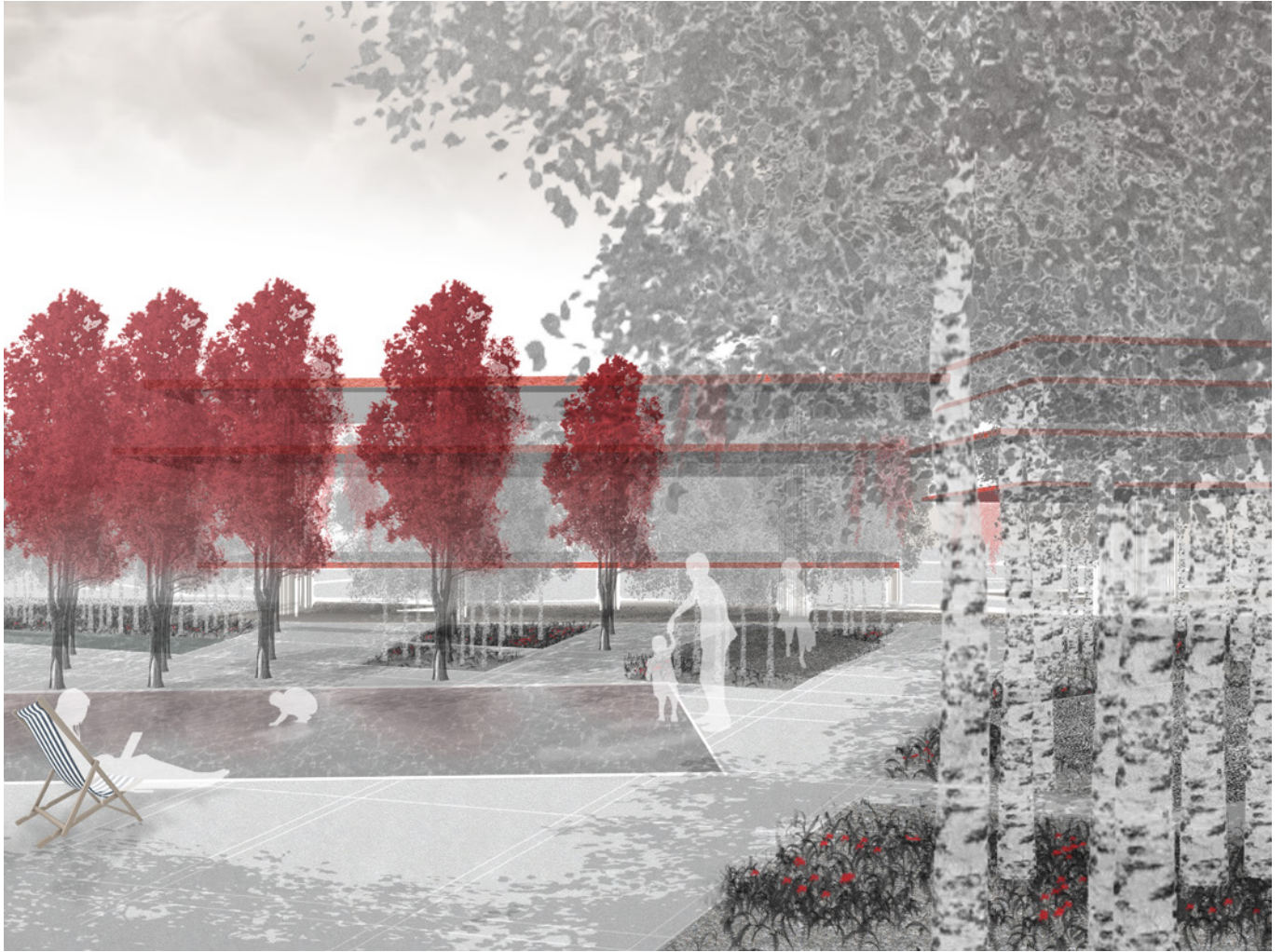
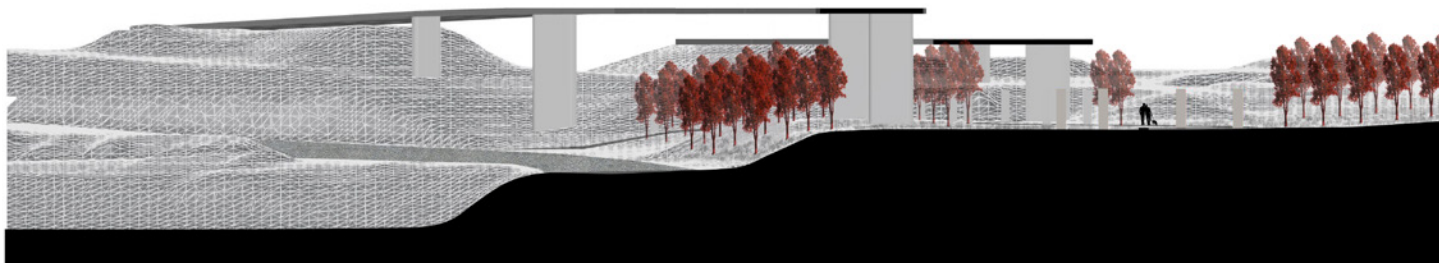
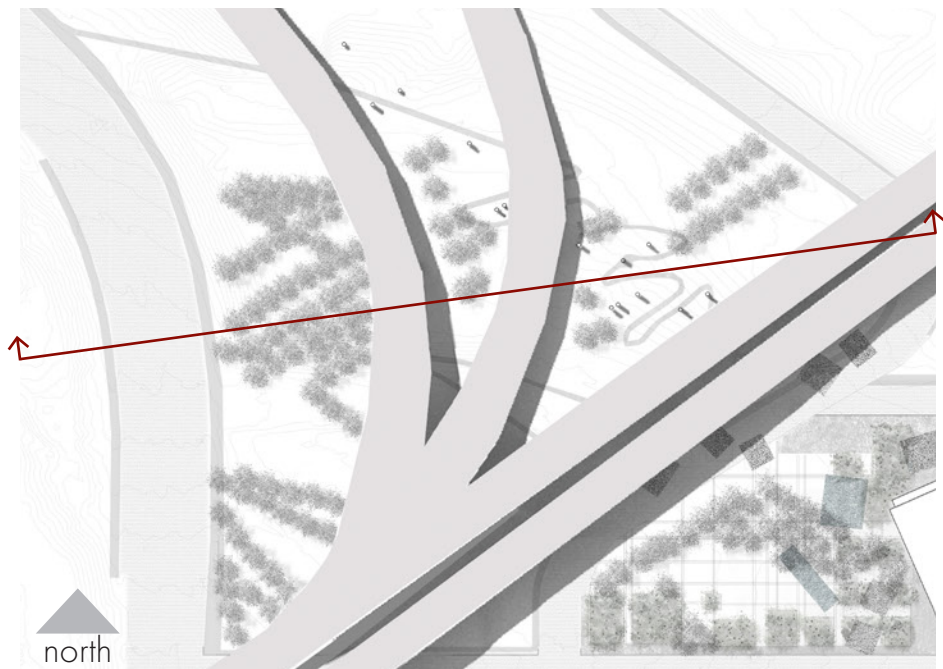
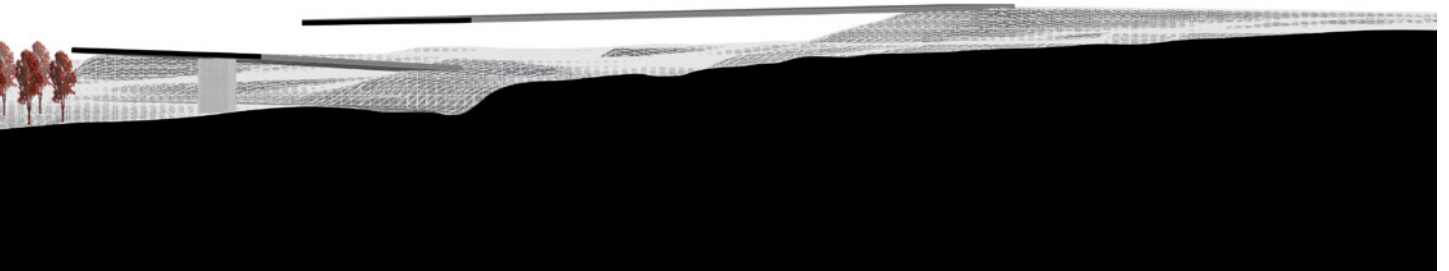
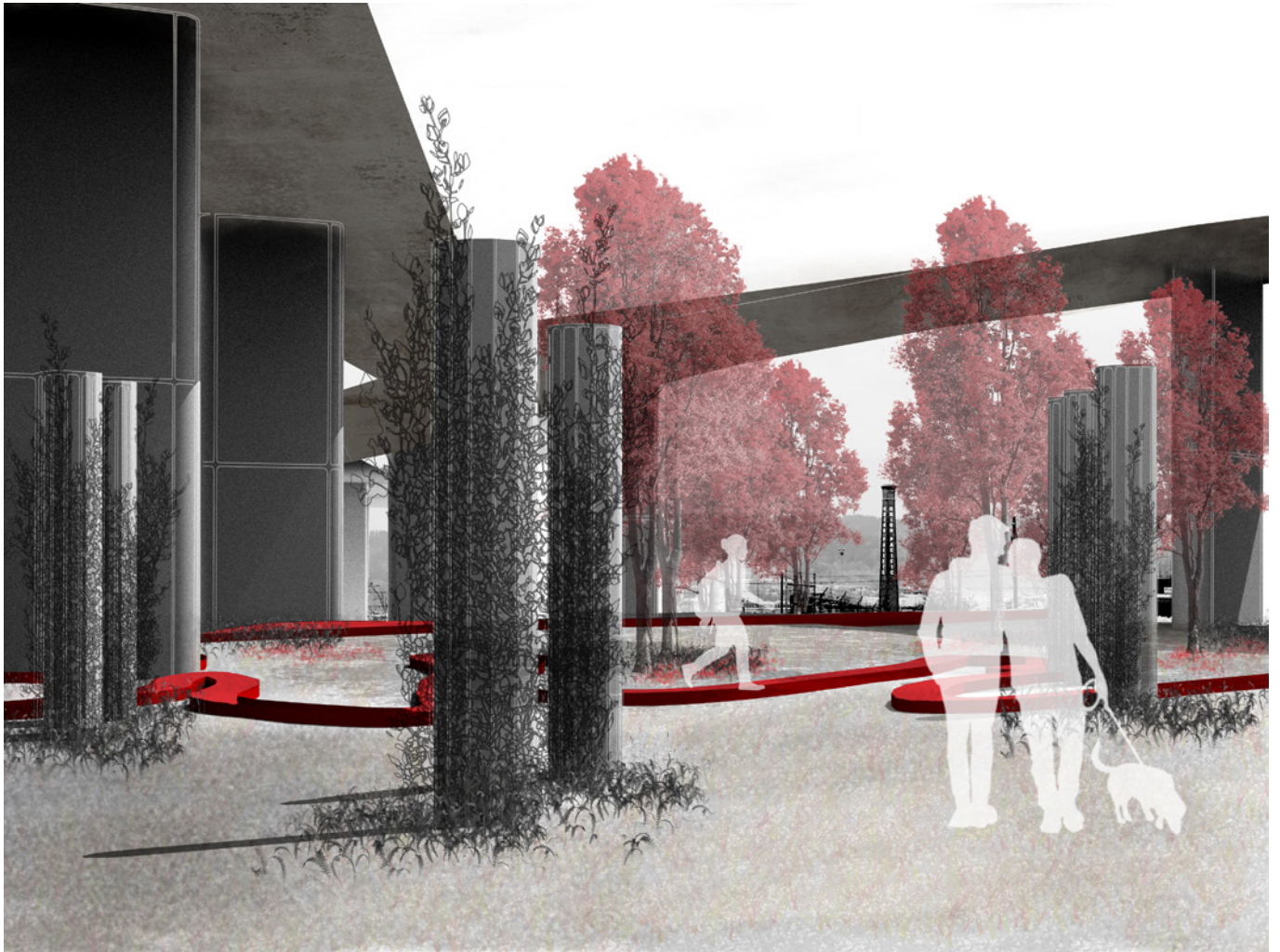


FIGURE 4.44
Point of perspective
looking east.

FIGURE 4.45

Retaining the structural elements of the elevated infrastructure, the memory remains by keeping what was originally intact and recognizable.





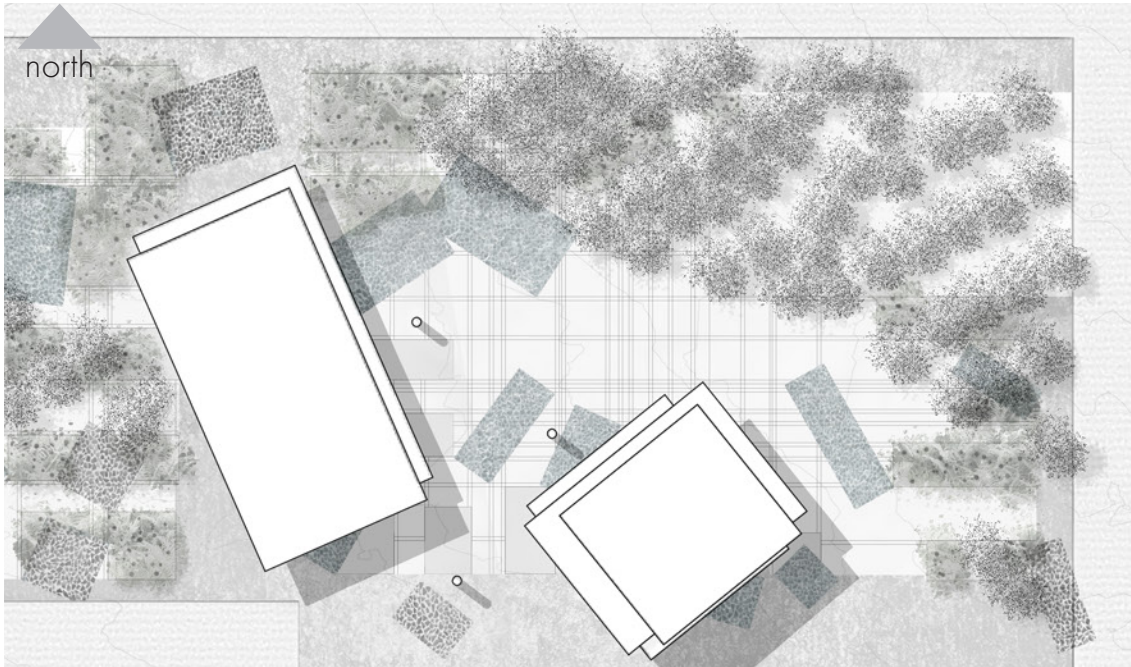
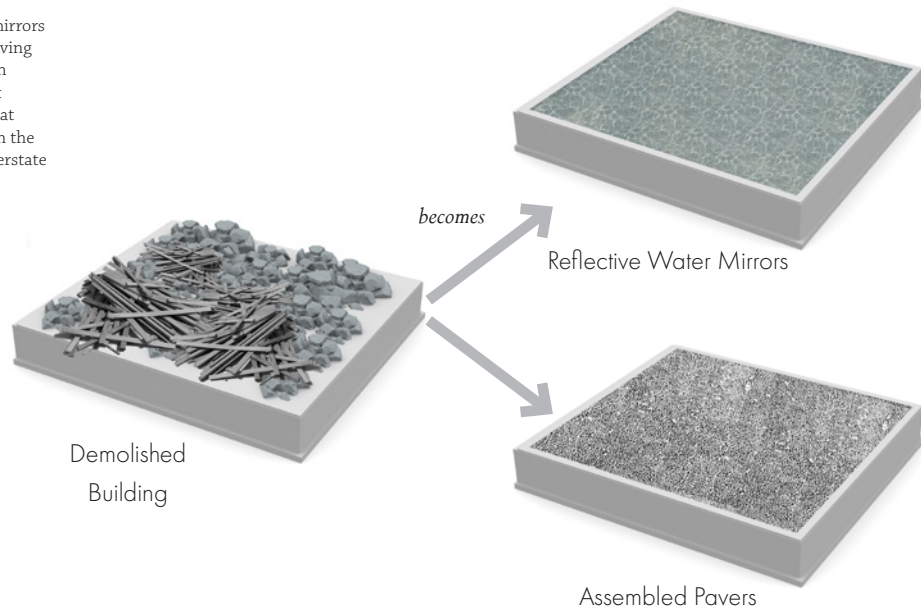


FIGURE 4.46

Representing a dissonant resolve within the landscape, water mirrors and hardscaped paving patterns are held in a skewed footprint of the dwellings that were demolished in the building of the interstate highway.



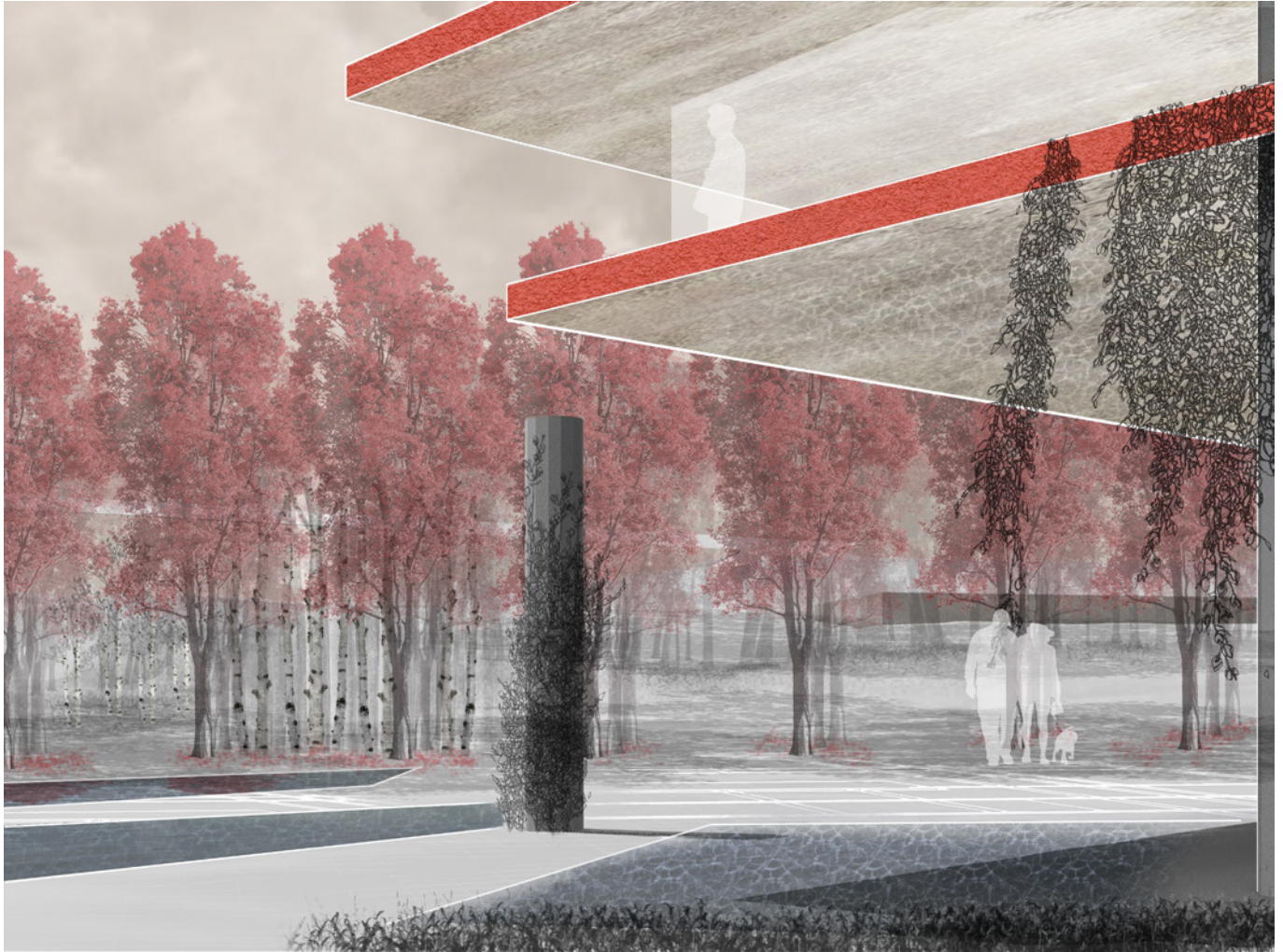


FIGURE 4.47
Point of perspective
looking northeast.

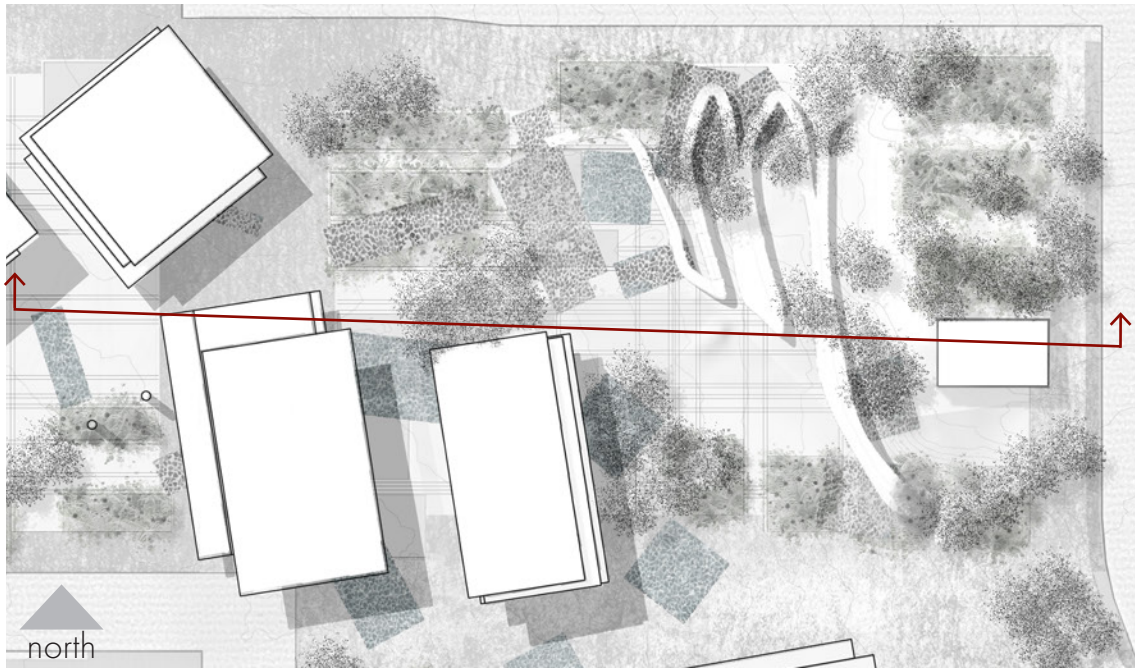
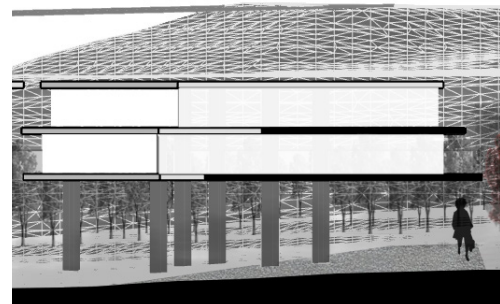
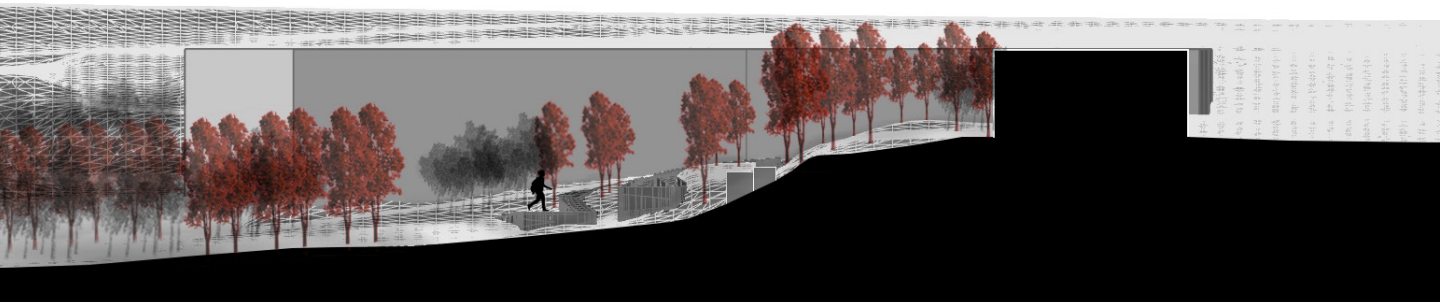
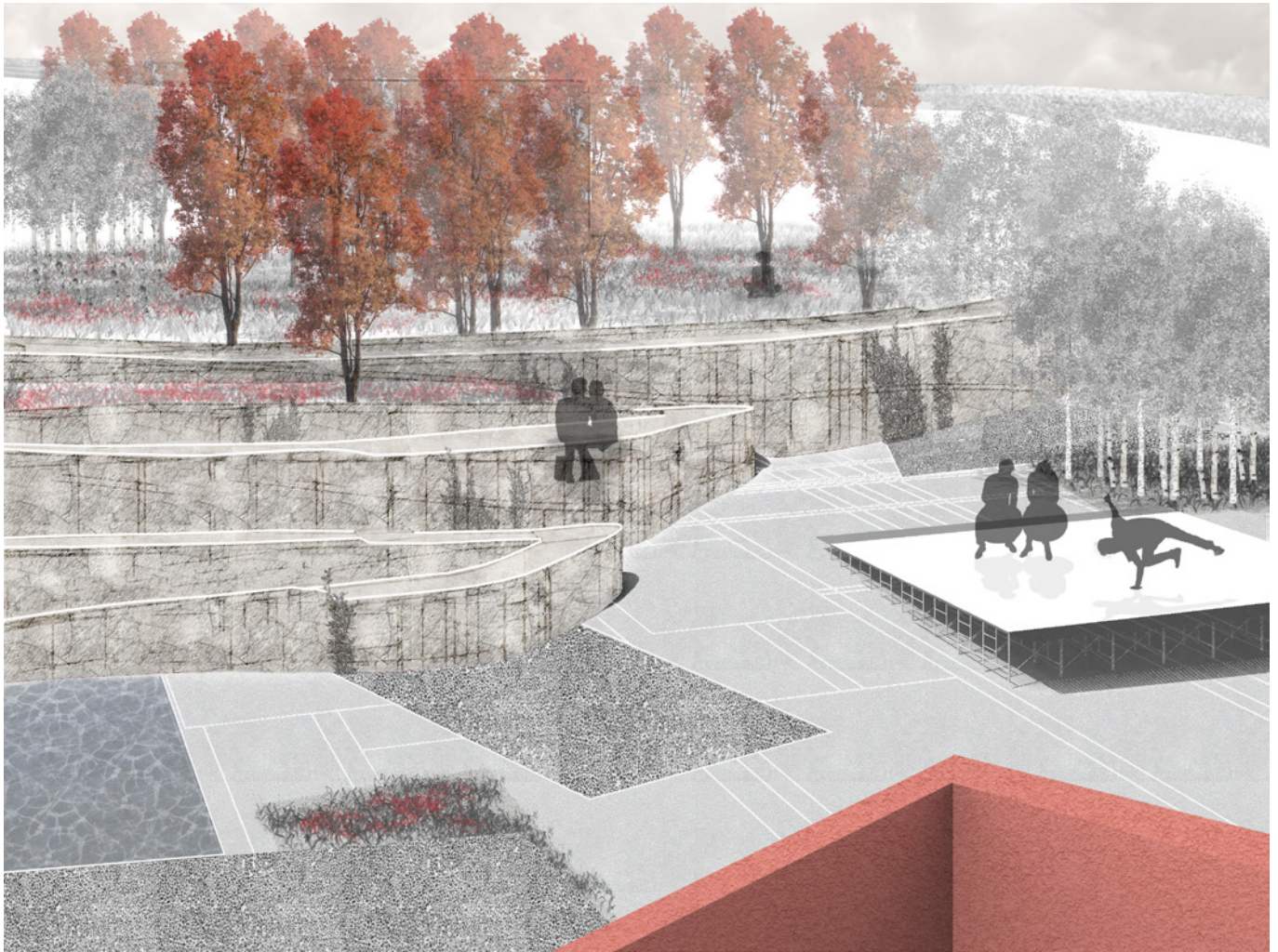


FIGURE 4.48

A curved pathway is open to being defined. It could act as an alternative seating for a performance space providing space for people to interact and create a plethora of new experiences. These interactions are to some degree unpredictable but play a large role in shaping space.





5

DESIGN GUIDELINES RESULTS & EVALUATION

A design process framed by the invariable features of jazz emerged through an iterative process of design, reflection, and discussion.

The research question initially constructed asked what new approach to design would emerge by testing a set of principles framed by the invariable features of jazz, with the objective to reestablish the urban fabric of the Lower Albina neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. To discuss the approach taken requires re-visiting the principles in relation to the design themselves. The first design or preliminary design was constructed with the primary goal of finding forms through delineation inspired by both the design objectives and the principles. The forms were then collaged in an act inspired by the first principle, of embracing unpredictability framed by improvisation, one of the invariable features of jazz. This process accepted the fact that the design outcome was initially going to be unknown until through the act of choosing and joining, the composition would be created over time. The second design was the result of reflection and discussion and was birthed through the design process resulting in a distinctly new approach to designing a connective public space for the Lower Albina neighborhood.

Initially, forms were sought inspired by the principles. This was productive because it helped to revise the constructed principles and interpret them more clearly. For instance, sketch number 6 is a connection made through the site that acts as a counter geometry of curves that meander through the landscape. As a rhythmic shift occurs when the line intersects with the structure, it weaves through the columns in an irregular pattern creating asymmetry and a pattern with overall energy. This sketch, inspired by principle no. 2: welcome disturbance, seeks to embody syncopation through creating a unique pattern, providing variation and interest, and to break from an explicit ordering system. By seeking to deviate from the strict and straight producing asymmetrical patterns, the line breaks from the strict succession of regularity and is embedded with anticipation. The type of forms that come from this principle are asymmetrical, break up the regular order, and make irregular patterns. Although the principle informs what kind or sort of form to make, it does not inform the exact delineation of what that form should be. By creating a framework organized by the design objective(s), the delineation of choice, and the principles created a way for forms to be realized while embedding them with the ideas and concepts of an underlying principle.

The principles served to creatively influence the delineations of form, lending themselves conceptually to spatial composition. For instance, syncopated rhythms are somewhat unexpected, embedded with a forward-driving momentum. So the principle could inform the creation of spaces that draw a person forward on a journey full of anticipation through the experience of the landscape to find something unexpected that breaks from the regular order of experience. In this way, the principle addresses how spaces could unfold. The same could be said for principle number 3: in transition, which translates to composition by highlighting the importance of creating thresholds, borders, and boundaries, and surfaces

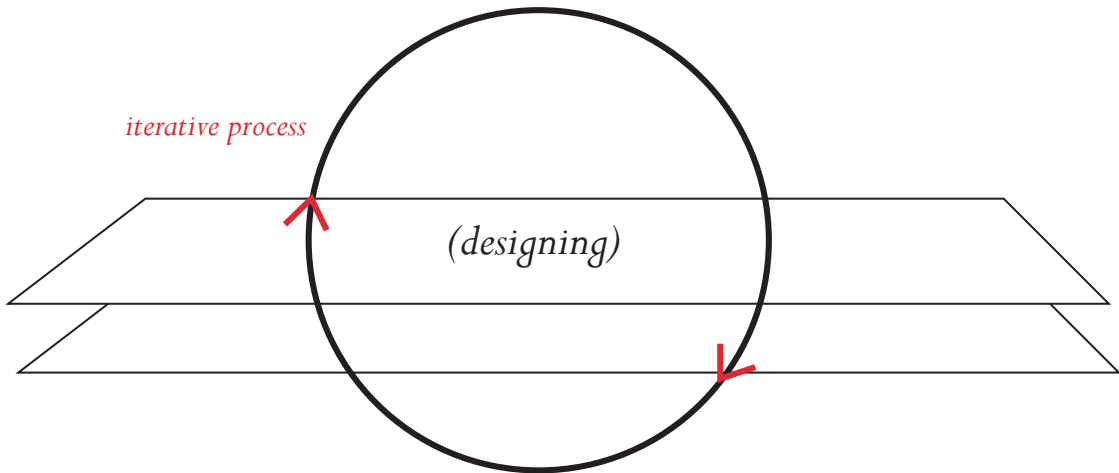
within the landscape, seeking to carve and make a place that is open and ready for action to occur there. Similarly, the interpretation of improvisation and kinetic orality leads to a design strategy for places that are un-programmed but not under designed to allow for the appropriation of space in a collective performance of the users. Harmonic structure lends itself very well to the organizing and efficient grid that keeps with the explicit ordering system of a landscape and is uncomplicated, familiar, and provides a way-finding mechanism that everyone understands.

This realization that the principles lean toward a conceptual direction in what to value when designing a space emerged while doing the preliminary design. The notion provoked this author to zoom out just enough to realize the design was mostly focused on the rhythmic experience of syncopation and a passage through this wild landscape to land in the open park space. It became apparent that this new approach was not about the forms that were produced, nor necessarily about spatial arrangements but more about a lens in which to see a landscape and make design choices.

The approach or set of guidelines was discovered through a research by design experiment that tested the interpretation of constructed principles inspired by African American culture and cultural expression. The design approach is as follows:



PRINCIPLES



GUIDELINES



1. *Identify the weak beat on the site and emphasize those qualities, increasing their status in the environment. This requires looking beyond the bounds of the site to its context. It can be subtle or bold, but it must anchor the project to its setting.*
2. *Retrieve the past and bring it forward to the future not for what it was but for its possibilities, seeking to tell a new story of the site in the form of a fractured narrative. With that information present a bold and dramatic design move that celebrates deviation from the current situation.*
3. *Use the existing organizing structural elements to leverage the design, revising their role and repurposing their use. They will eventually take on the characteristics of the new design while representing a moment in history, taking what was old and making it new again.*
4. *Respond to the physical conditions of a site— from the noise, to the climate, and light— not just for its practical response but for how it shapes the culture of a place and how people relate to one another. Creating places that have a sense of rest and repose with a sense of climatic comfort is a response to place.*
5. *Enrich the performance of everyday public life to provide places that are stimulating for people to interact with and engage each other. Create places that are somewhat un-programmed but not undersigned to allow for culture to fill and make space, understanding that the design of space is a co-creation between the designer and users.*

These guidelines were drawn from the principles put forward as a way to approach a design problem and opportunity. It is not form-informing, although it does lend itself to be spatially-informing and requires site and historical analysis. After the site analysis is complete, the approach asks that specific actions be taken with the information obtained. It demands bold action, with the williness to step out and be seen, just like the spirit of risk and discovery of a jazz improviser. The general design approach is broad, meant for its possible application to other sites yet requires testing in order to insure its value.

TRANSFERABILITY

The principles were meant to articulate and theorize an underlying source for developing a design approach inspired by African American cultural expression. Because the design approach emerged through a research by design process where the context was determined, the guidelines are inherently tied to the site. In contemplating the transferability of this approach several things should be considered. First, the guidelines were derived from an urban condition in the United States and the scale of an average urban design project. Secondly, the nature of the site and its current conditions are extreme, which most assuredly affected the outcome of the design, as the more extreme a current narrative, the more jolting it appears in changing the storyline. It is likely that the method has the potential to be transferable, but should be tested at multiple scales, and at a variety of sites with multiple conditions.

As the research by design process was iterative and productive in revising the principles that were constructed, the designer and researcher cannot remove oneself from the results. It was through this author's interpretation of a process of literature review, that found connections between the invariable features jazz, the quilt work of Gee's Bend, and African American spatial composition and landscape practices of the American South. The discovered unintended connection of the features of jazz coming through in the visual artwork motivated the search to understand the underlying principles that drove such phenomena. Understanding the invariable features of jazz in relation to the sister disciplines of the visual artwork by Gee's Bend and the spatial practices of African Americans in the Southern United States allowed an articulation and explanation of the underlying source feeding the expressions that emerged in the different media. The purpose of the principles are not meant to be rigid, absolute, or exclusive and are only the beginnings to explaining and teasing out concepts from them. Discussion of such sources prompted exploration of the application of these theoretical ideas. The result produced a lens for a designer to approach a site and while both principles and process emerged by looking to African American cultural expression as a source in design creativity, there is not an aesthetic, or instead, there is not a direct form-producing aspect.

The performance of these principles produced a forward-thinking design. It is radical to propose shifting an entire site's trajectory, although it is not interested in erasing the past, but rather reinstating it in a contemporary manner. Either way, the designs produced by this method value change and a deviation from the existing conditions.

This process can be seen as productive in regards to producing ideas during the conceptual design phase. This author is comfortable in suggesting that the method is a means to be generative.. The concepts produced may lend well to visionary architecture because they have the potential to produce idealistic or impractical outcomes. Although everything is, in fact, buildable, there may be social, economic, or cultural restrictions that do not support such a project at the time. There is value in unrealized designs as they still aid in the creative process and development by aiming to be progressive and avant-garde. These types of designs push boundaries and are experimental, qualities inherent in jazz.

Improvisation is an artist's creative attempt to exceed boundaries, where the musician both improvises outside and inside a harmonic structure, both adhering to the parameters defined, as well as acting against it. The revised site design does precisely that, in that identifying and justifying the removal of the freeway in a logical way provides common ground to discuss safety and the current dilemmas of the transportation system in relation to an ethical responsibility the city owes the African American community. Informed by our understanding of an aging infrastructure and supporting the reduction of green-house gas emissions, the design advocates for removal and against trying to fix a design that has not functioned as originally intended. In proposing to create a healthier city and seek design justice for perfectly logical reasons and prospects, the proposal puts the idea out into the world while also understanding its controversy.

CONCLUSION

As the title of this project suggests, the intention was to express and articulate a different expression of order by recognizing that culture plays a role in design. In jazz music dissonance is built into the harmonic structure, and we can also think of syncopation in virtually the same way as it relates to a regular rhythm. Dissonance plays such a significant role in jazz at multiple levels There is no wrong note. It is only the perception or decision in identifying a wrong note that alters how we may react to what is being played. Miles Davis was once quoted saying "It's not the note you play that is the wrong note – it is the note you play afterward that makes it right or wrong." This idea comes from the Blues, jazz's primary shared language that allows strangers to come together and improvise. It is the source of African American creative power; a genius manifested out of inherently conflicting circumstances. Jazz music was the reply to oppression, taking what is ugly and turning it into works of art.

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APPENDIX A: SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

MARCH 25, 2018



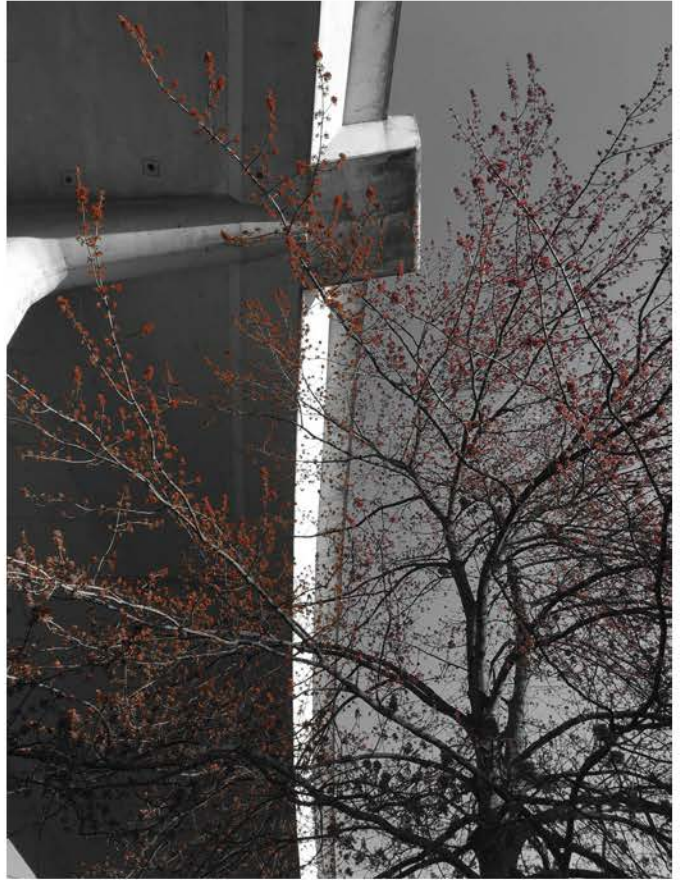






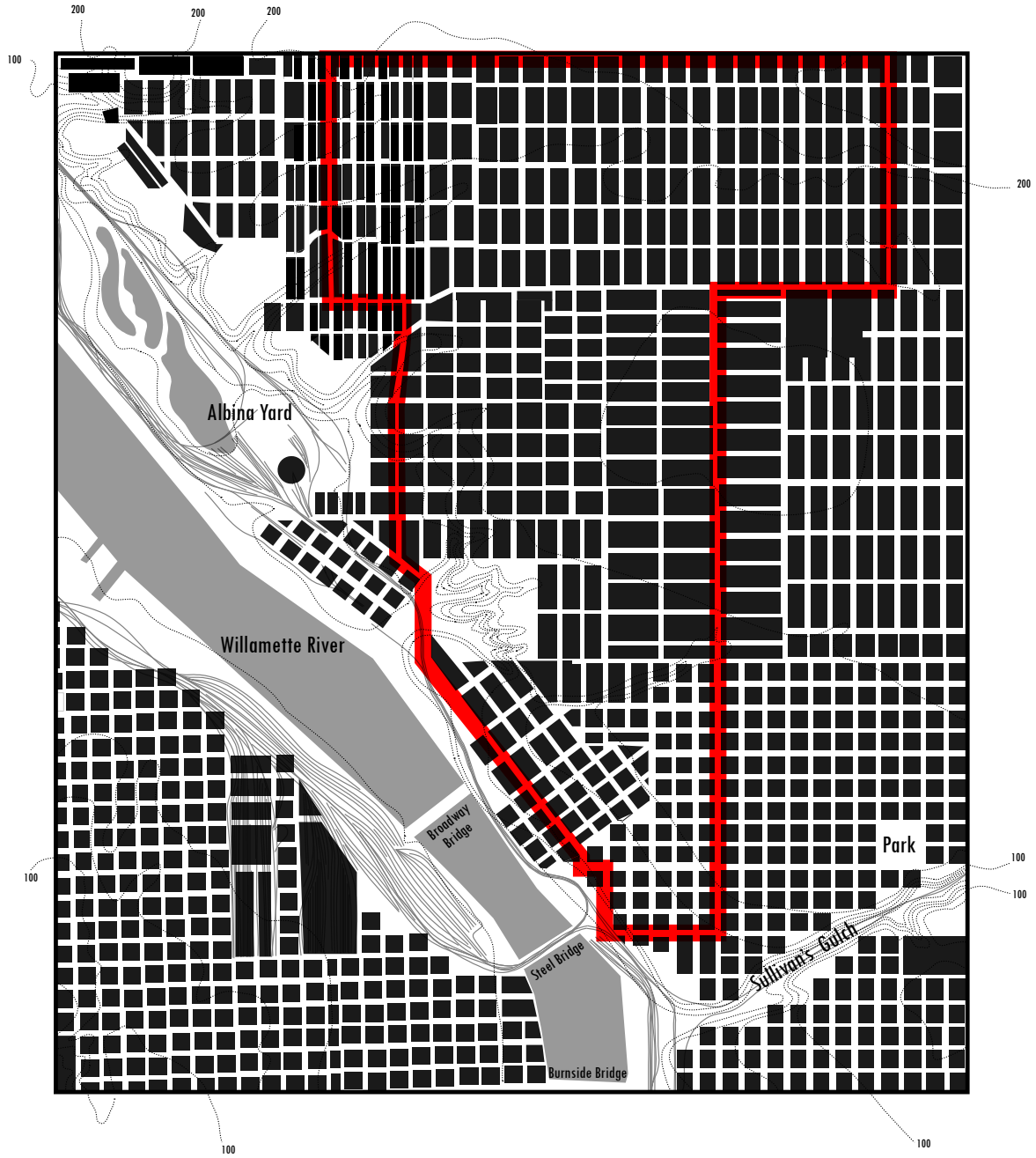






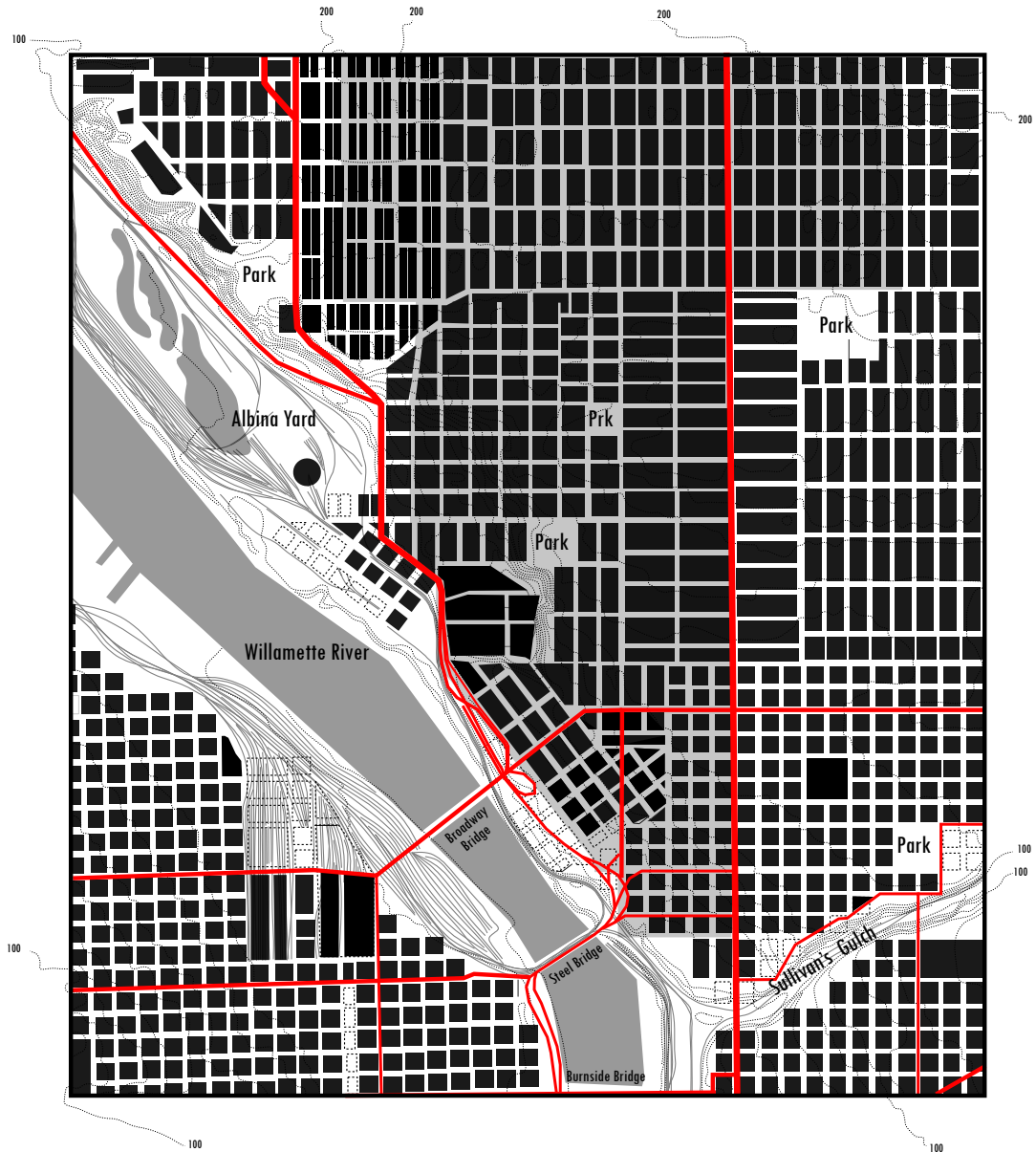


APPENDIX B: HISTORICAL MAPPING



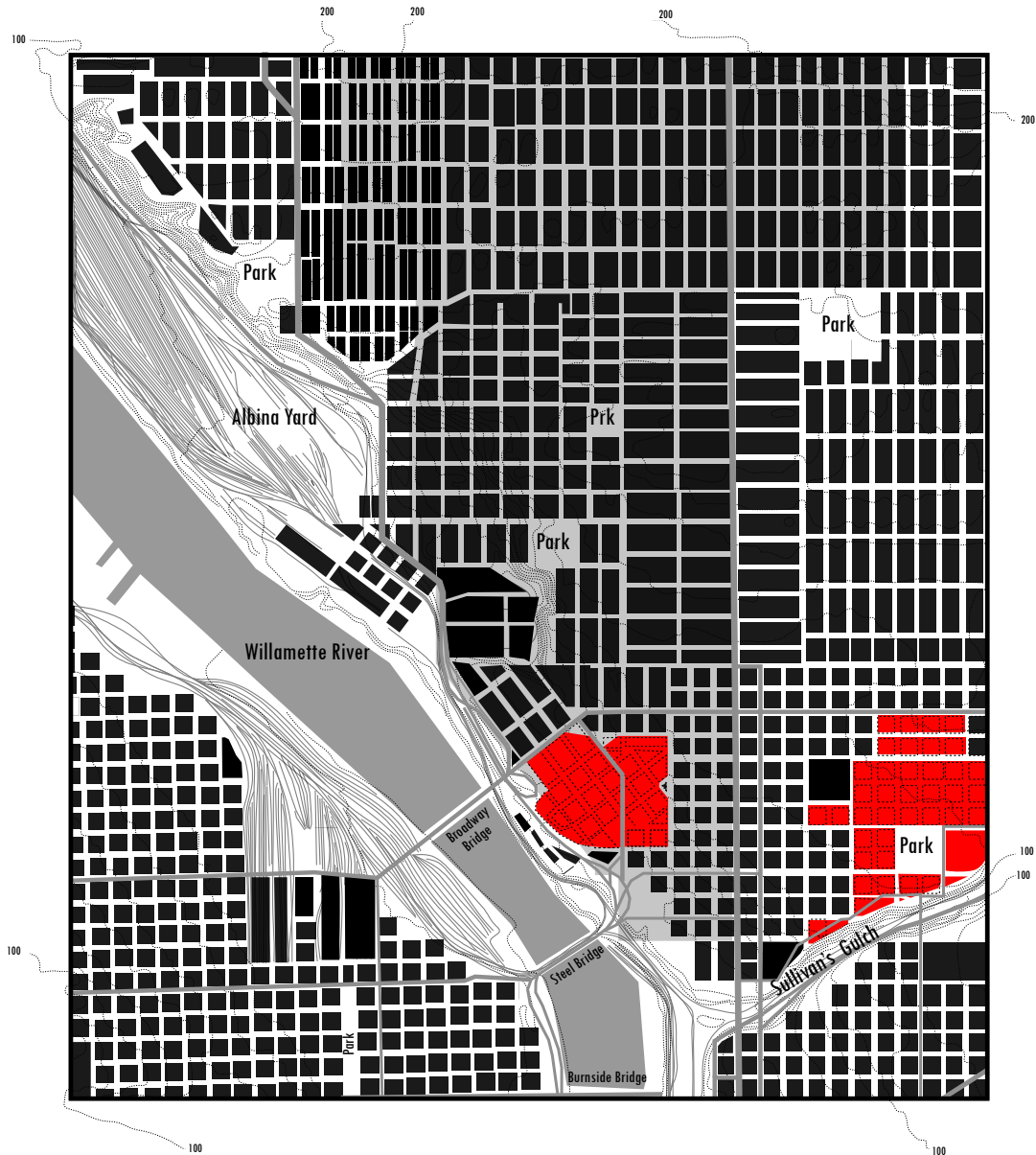
EXCERPT FROM THE RESIDENTIAL SECURITY MAP OF PORTLAND, ORE.

1954



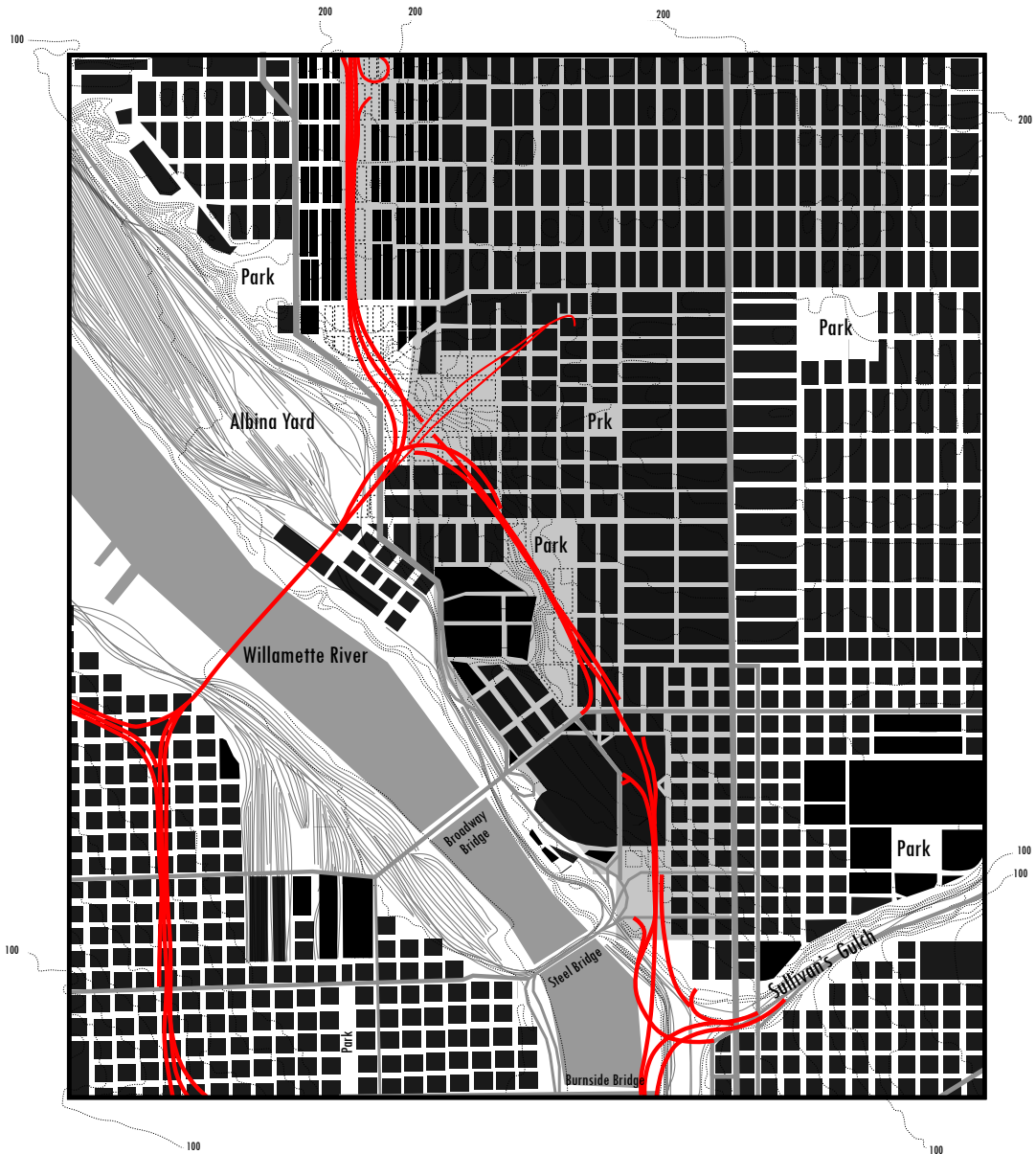
CONSTRUCTION OF 4-LANE FREEWAYS US 99 & 30

1961



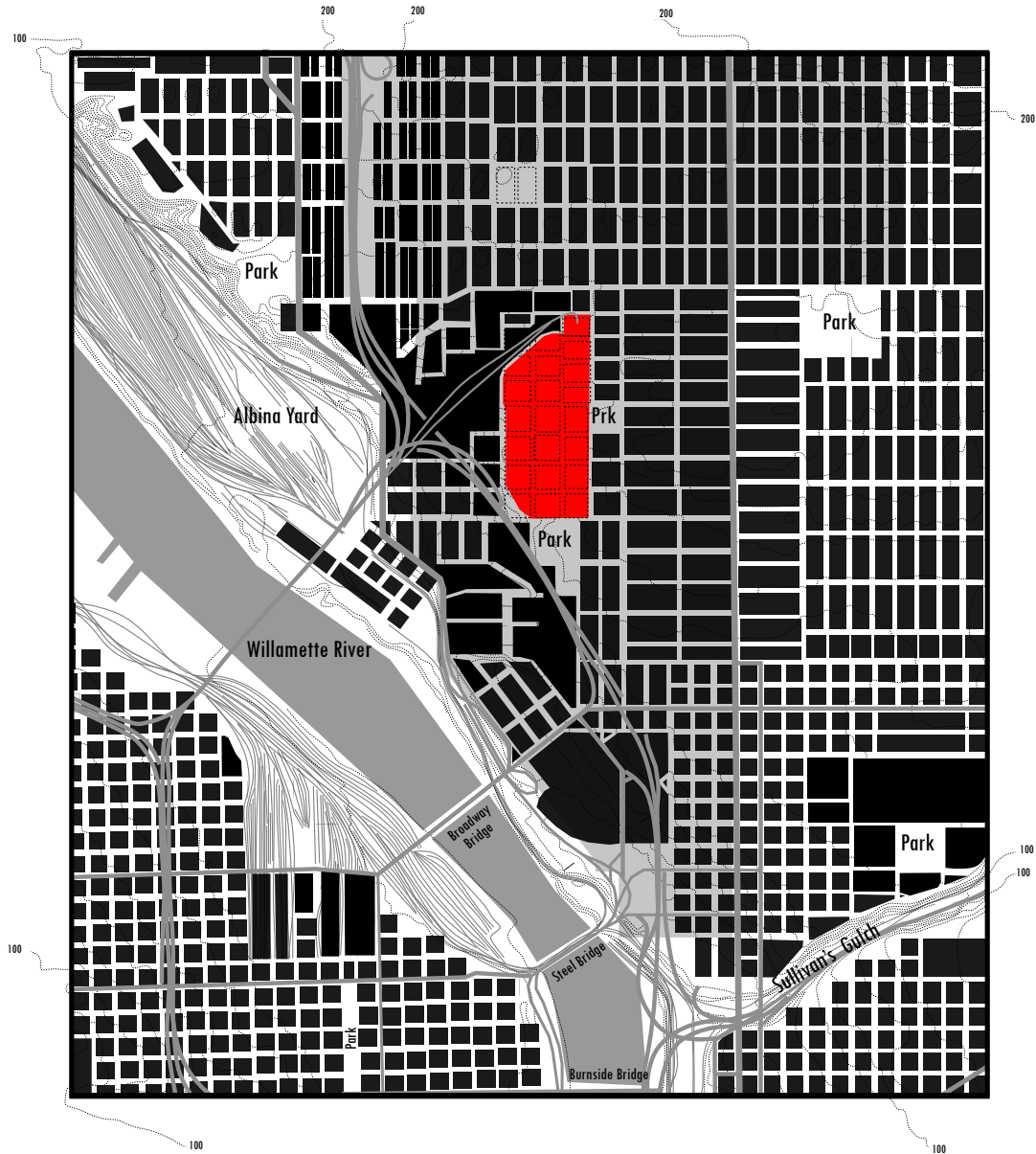
MEMORIAL COLISEUM & LLOYD CENTER

1978

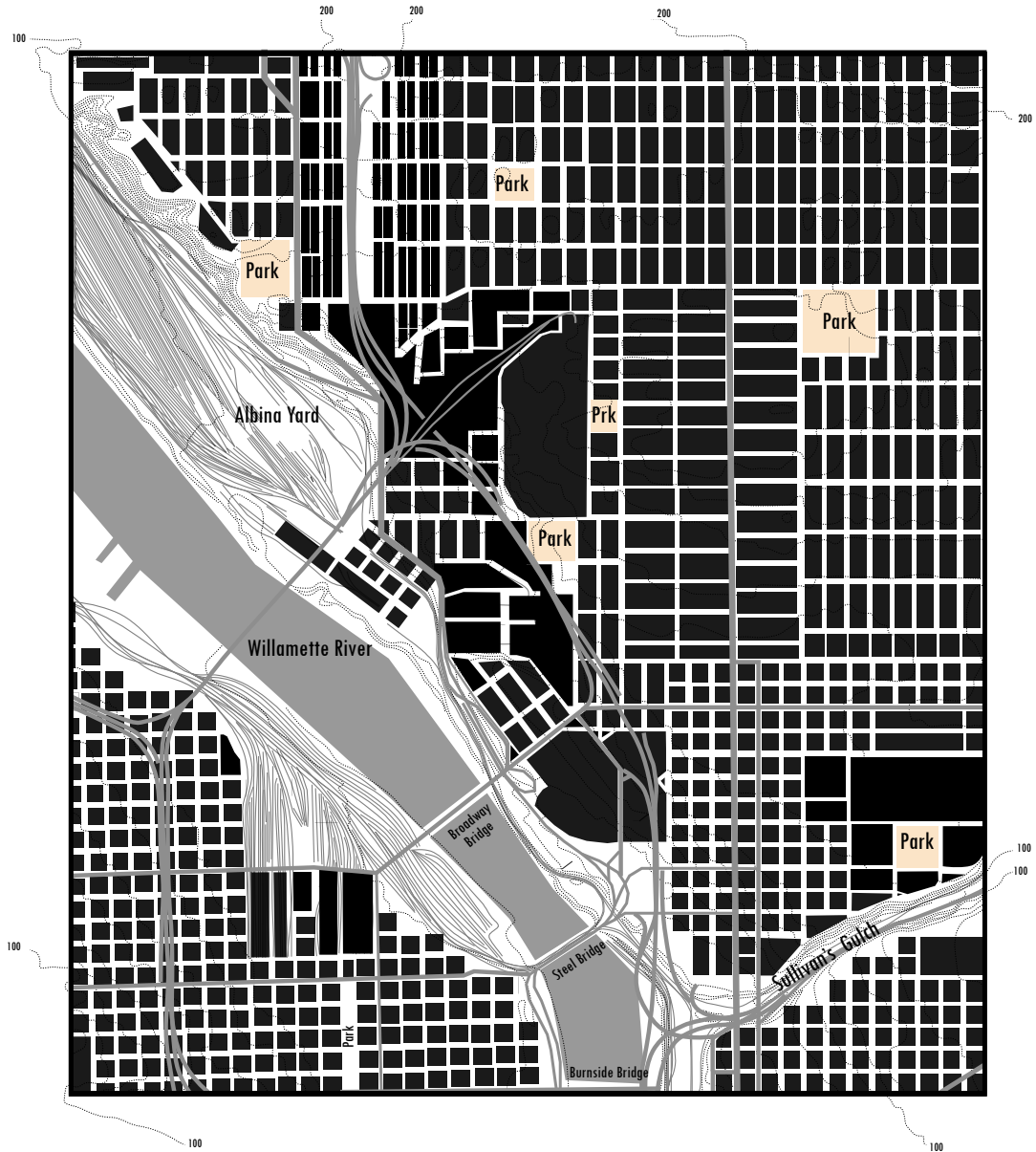


CONSTRUCTION OF INTERSTATE 5

1990



EXPANSION OF EMANUEL HOSPITAL



PARKS THAT HAS SURVIVED AS CULTURAL CENTERS

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1961__WATERWAYS, RAILROAD & CITY BLOCKS: U.S. Geological Survey. Portland, Or. 1961 ed. Scale: 1:24,000. 7.5 Minute Series. Portland, Or.: USGS, 1962. Accessed October 19, 2017. <https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#15/45.5460/-122.6773>

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1978__CONTOURS & HIGHWAYS: U.S. Geological Survey. Portland, Or. 1954 ed. Scale: 1:24,000. 7.5 Minute Series. Portland, Or.: USGS, 1956. Accessed October 19, 2017. <https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#15/45.5460/-122.6773>

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APPENDIX C: HISTORIC AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Source: Aerial Photograph Collection, University of Oregon Library



1936



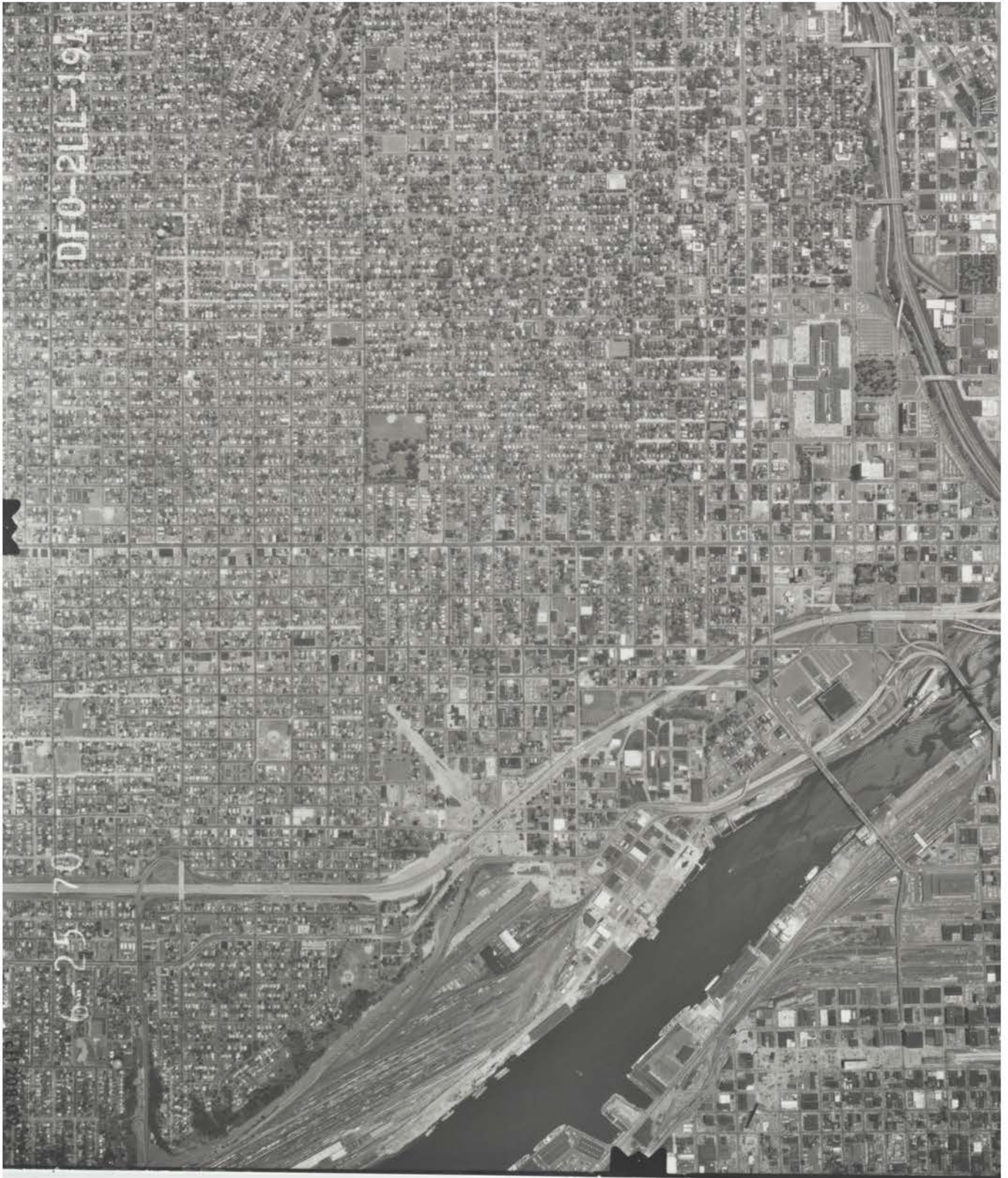
1944



1956



1964



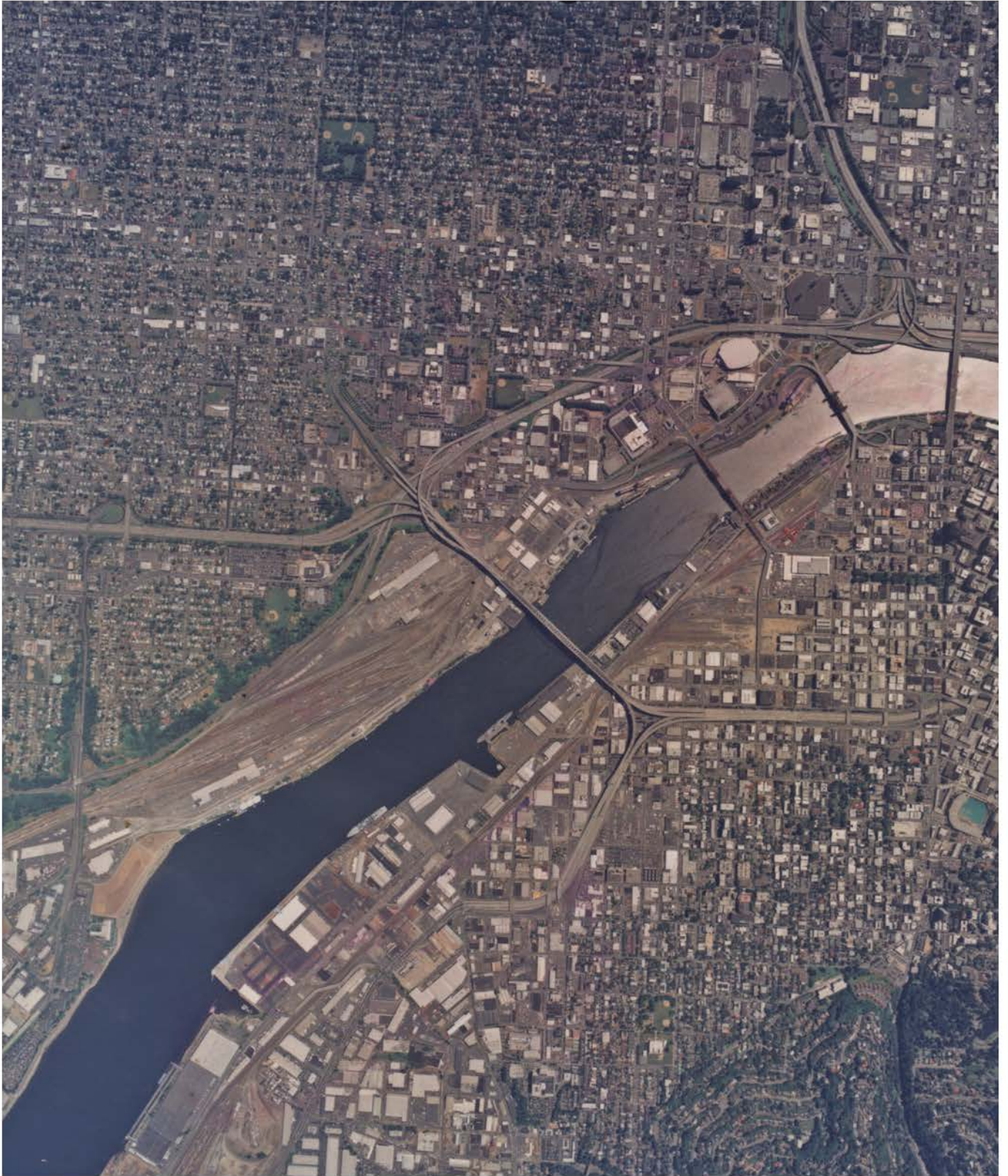
1970



1980



1990



1998

