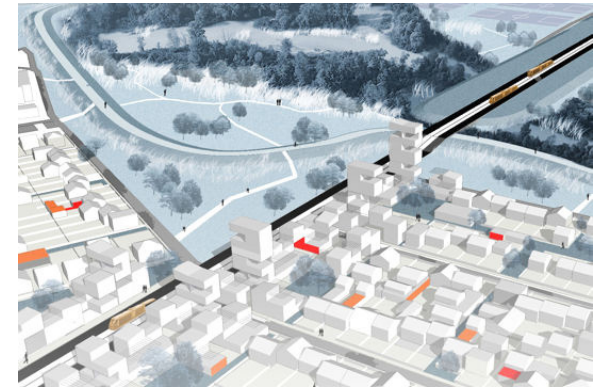
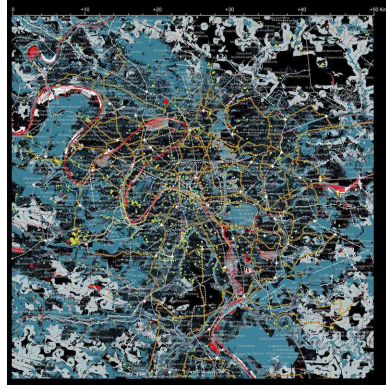


# **The Elementary City**

**Paola Vigano**



**Paola Viganò, architect and urbanist**

In 1990 she founded Studio together with Bernardo Secchi, which has won several international competitions. Among the realized projects are the park Spooroord and Theaterplein in Antwerp, a system of public spaces in Mechelen, the cemetery in Courtrai, and public spaces in La Courrouze, Renne. Studio is today working on different projects throughout Europe. In 2009 and 2012 Secchi and Viganò were one of the 10 teams selected for the “Grand Paris project” and for the “New Moscow.”

### **Main publications**

- Viganò P., 1999, *La città elementare*, Milano: Skira
- Viganò P., 2001, ed. *Territories of a New Modernity*, Napoli: Electa
- Secchi B., Viganò P., 2009, *Antwerp. Territory of a new Modernity*, Amsterdam: SUN
- Secchi B., Viganò P., 2011, *La ville poreuse*, Geneva: MetisPresses
- Viganò P., 2010, *I territori dell'urbanistica – Il progetto come produttore di conoscenza*, Roma: Officina (French translation: *Les Territoires de l'urbanisme*, Geneva: MetisPresses, 2012).

**Full Professor** in Urbanism at Università IUAV of Venice  
**Visiting professor** KU Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve Belgium; EPFL Lausanne, Switzerland; Aarhus, Denmark; and Visiting Assistant Professor at Harvard University GSD.

**Coordinator** of the PhD in Urbanism at IUAV  
**Among the founders** of the European Postgraduate Master in Urbanism EMU

**Received the Grand Prix de l'Urbanisme et de l'Art Urbain.**

## Fragment / Detail

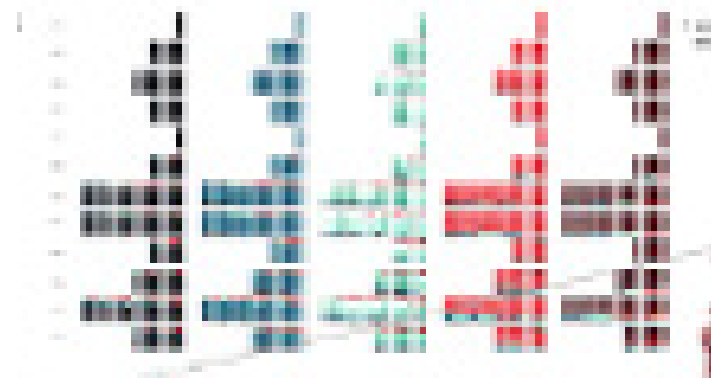
- She points to recent interest in the **image of fragments** or heterogeneity in urban design which imply that a previous equilibrium has been broken
- Poses that actually fragment and detail are states that change depending on time and viewpoint. i.e. it is a result of interpretation or relativistic
- Idea of fragment **allows us to see differences** between different parts of the city resulting in different positions
  
- Reference to Music: Serial music takes a fragment and 'not denying its autonomy but iterating it and ascribing a place to it as part of a sequence'

As in Cities:

**19th century city** is one of details put together in known ways



**Contemporary city** is harder to decode: city of fragments, We also see fragments repeat themselves and organized into various types of sequences (car parks shopping centers, detached housing)



## Fragment / Detail

Reflecting on Urban Elementarism requires moving between these two extremes,  
fragment and detail

*'Where hierarchy is no longer based on transposition but on localized variable  
deductions'*

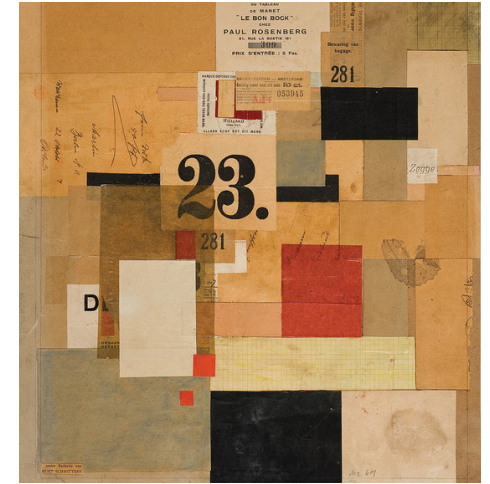
# Elementarism, Deconstruction / Composition

- Elementarism used in the 20s and 30s di stijl
- It draws from Neo-Plasticism, Constructivism, dadaism
- Aimed at reducing complexity and decodifying its forms, techniques, and means of expression
- Ultimately deconstructs in order to reconstruct in a way that '**would not negate dissonance** and could take upon itself the **condition of complexity** and chaos of the modern world.'

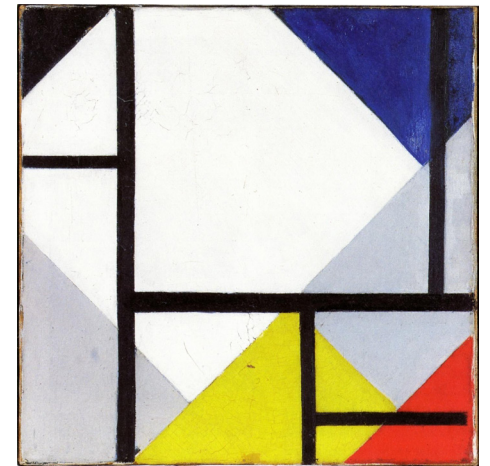
*Elementarism opposes to the balanced relationship composition of Neoplasticism: non-balanced counter-composition as a phenomenon of a time-space tension of color, line or plane, always in opposition to the natural and architectural structure.*

- Theo Van Doesburg, De Stijl

Tone on Tone compositions enable contrasting elements to be put together without adjustments made to them



Schitter juxtaposed heterogeneous material collages



Doesburg's counter-compositions



Van Esteren urban plans

# Elementarism, Deconstruction / Composition

- These ideas of Elementarism develop into the 1970s and are taken most prominently in philosophy and art - Specifically Heidegger via Derrida
- Deconstruction - destroying the history of ontology - dissection and critical appraisal, reading attentively Refrain from inventing and focus on textual structure
- These ideas taken to the city - procedures to describe the city and survey seen as close reading - **meticulous deconstruction of the everyday** (fences pavement, unpaved paths) while suppressing judgment of aesthetic value

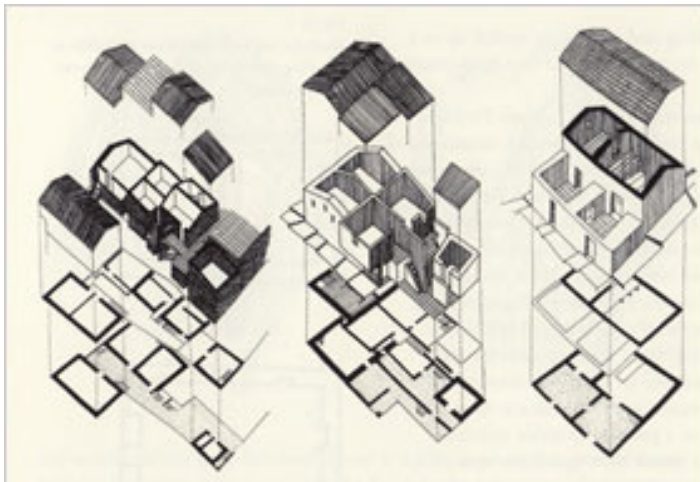
*“Exercises like these used to describe the city show that it is not only a place of difference, but also of repetition. They bring light to the two-sided, ambiguous nature of repetition: its potency, which can **reinforce the sense and meaning of the context** in which it occurs”*



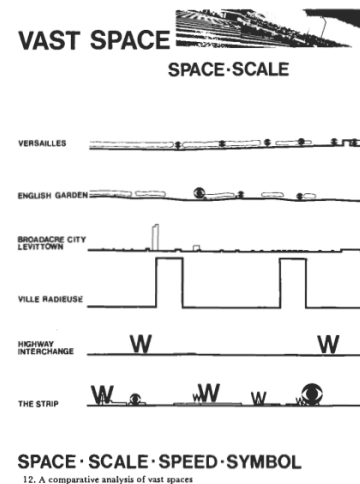
# Surveying, Naming

- Looking to examples of **tools to understand** 'the territory of the contemporary' in literature, cinema, and photography that predated urbanism and architecture
- Surveying as a tool used since the Renaissance to revisit previously consolidated theories or practices
- Surveying and walking seen as tools to decipher the territory of the contemporary and as form of deconstructing: naming and reporting what is seen at different levels of abstraction, breaking down city into its elements

Saverio Murati's survey of minor buildings of Venice to understand evolutionary process of Venice as an urban organism



Venturi, Scott-Brown, Izenour survey of Vegas to learn from forgotten symbolism of architectural form



Rem Koolhaas retroactive survey to rethink urban congestion and density



# Surveying, Naming

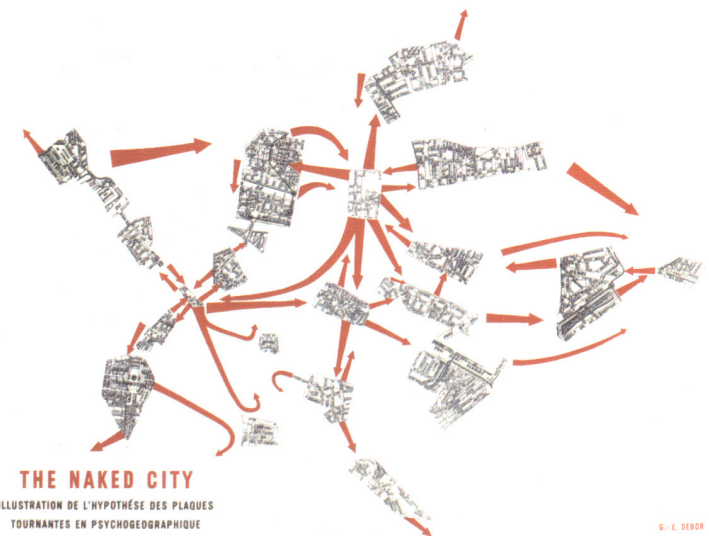
- Main thrust of these works is to describe the city and its different ways of life beginning from the forms of their urban places, to construct reading of urban spaces that overlays rhythms of use, practices and physical qualities in non-deterministic ways, **carefully studying individual parts of cities** and the possible ways of inhabiting, using, renewing, deforming, and modifying them without separating works from things

- ‘Fragmentary’ nature of Modern life:  
“Everyday life requires the perpetual translation, into ordinary language, of this system of signs that consists of the objects used for living, for dressing, for feeding oneself.’ Dwelling, finally, ‘is expressed in an ensemble of works, products, and things that constitute a partial system”

“our perceptions and feelings cannot reproduce an ordered picture that shows correspondences between their various strata; man and his things can no longer be made to fit snugly together.”

- Perec le Chose - a novel focusing on the things that the characters interact with as the main focus
- Baudrillard - meaning derived from what it is not - systems of meaning

- Nouveau roman - subordinating plot and character to the details of the world rather than enlisting the world in their service
- de Certeau - wrote the practices of everyday life - about the unconscious and repetitive of everyday





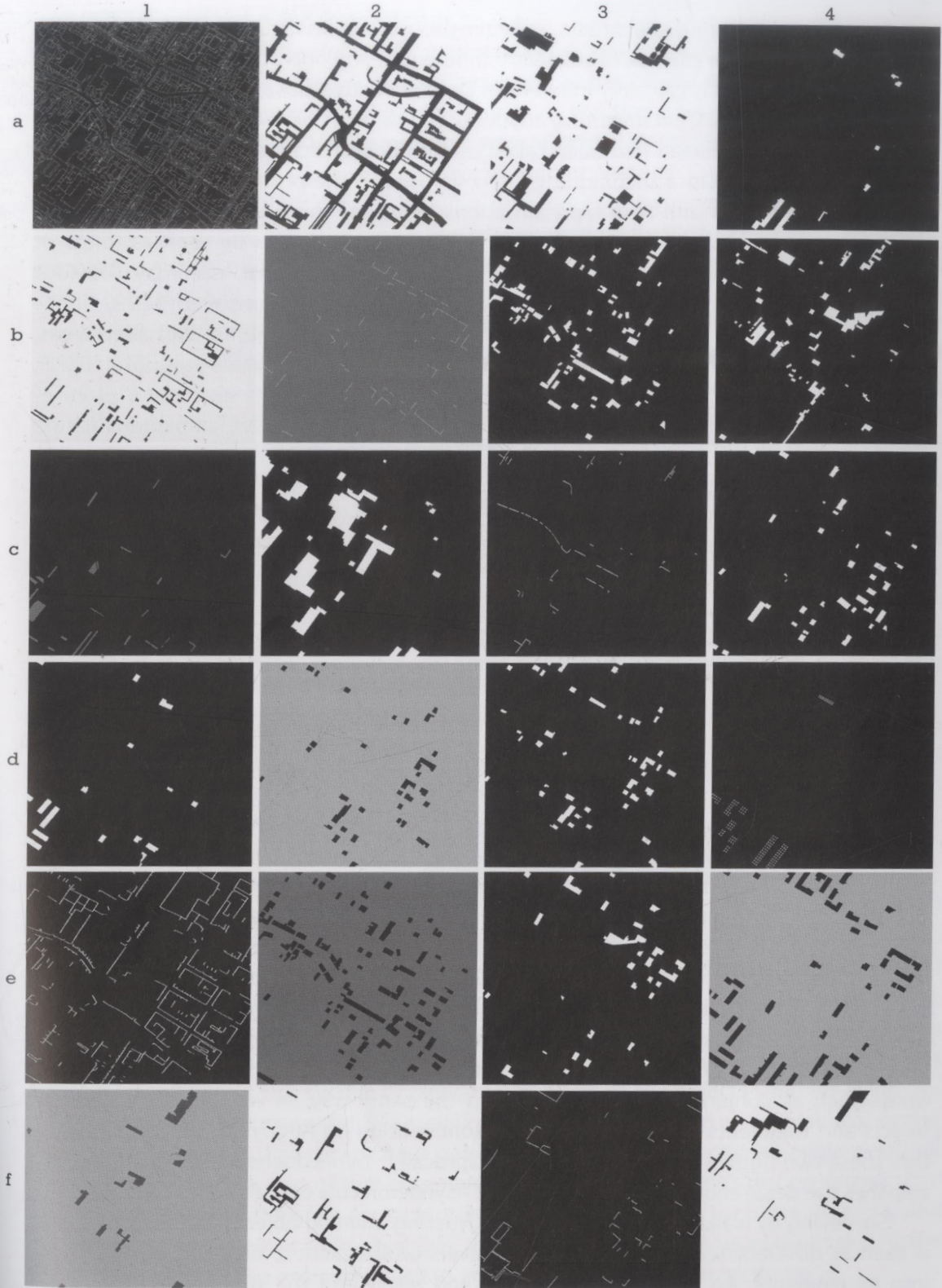
# Urban Materials, Strata, Traces

- Author attempts to *develop an 'analytical and design based tool'* to understand the fragmentary city without imposing on it

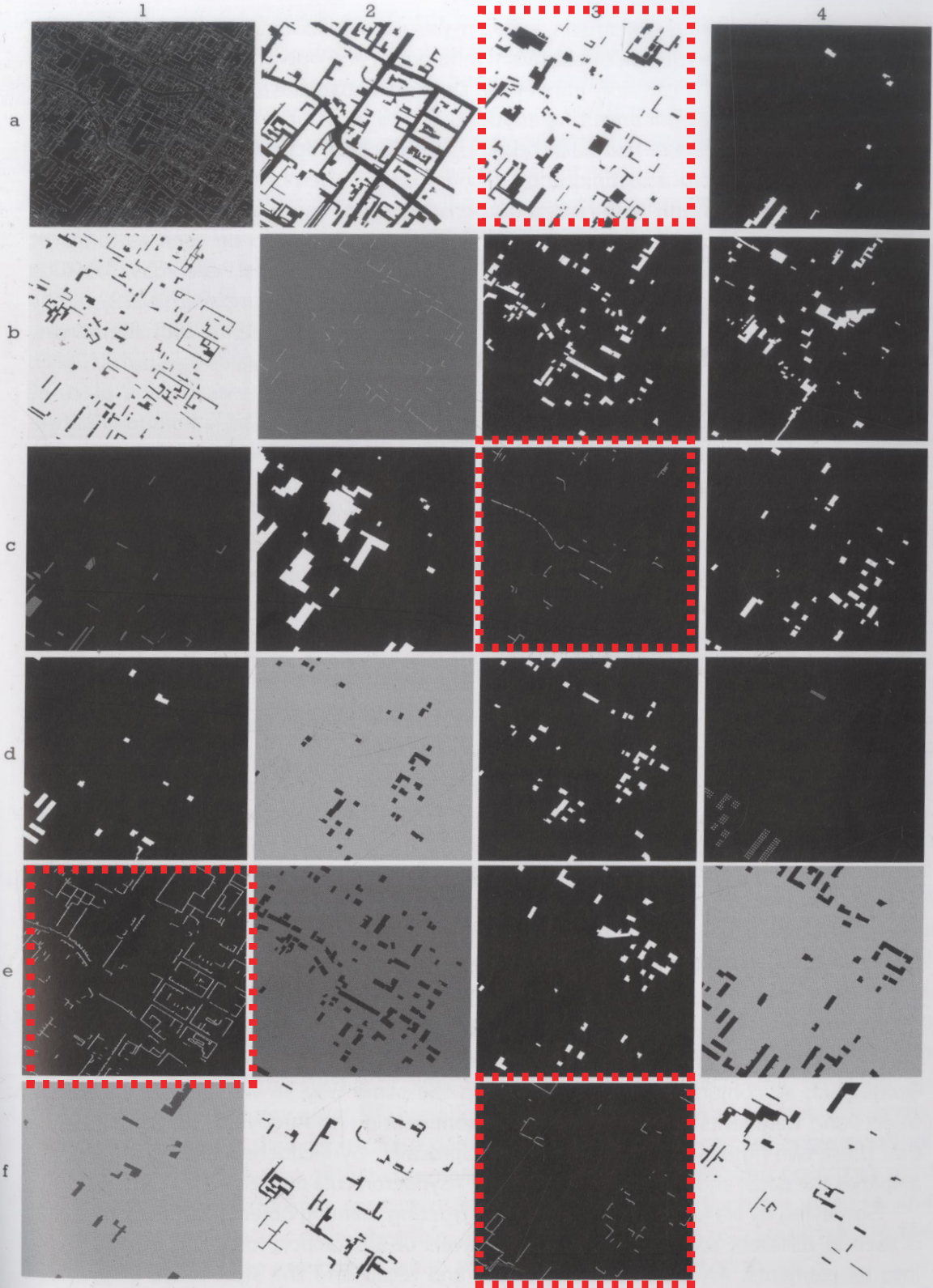
Urban Material: specific components of a city

Strata: single layer or category of materials

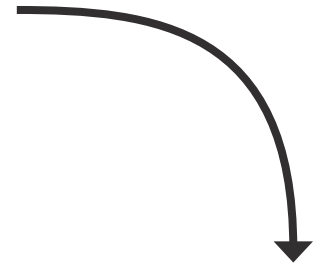
- **Not an oversimplification** - rather attempts to identify urban ensembles that retain a degree of generality, that can be examined from different viewpoints, *relate to one another in various ways bringing to light relationships* between them that are not initially evident
- Layering Process makes it possible to reorganize complex relationships within an ordered series of simple relationships
- This process allows us to read and analyze -by stratifying urban places we can read them... they form a surface that can be subjected to analysis



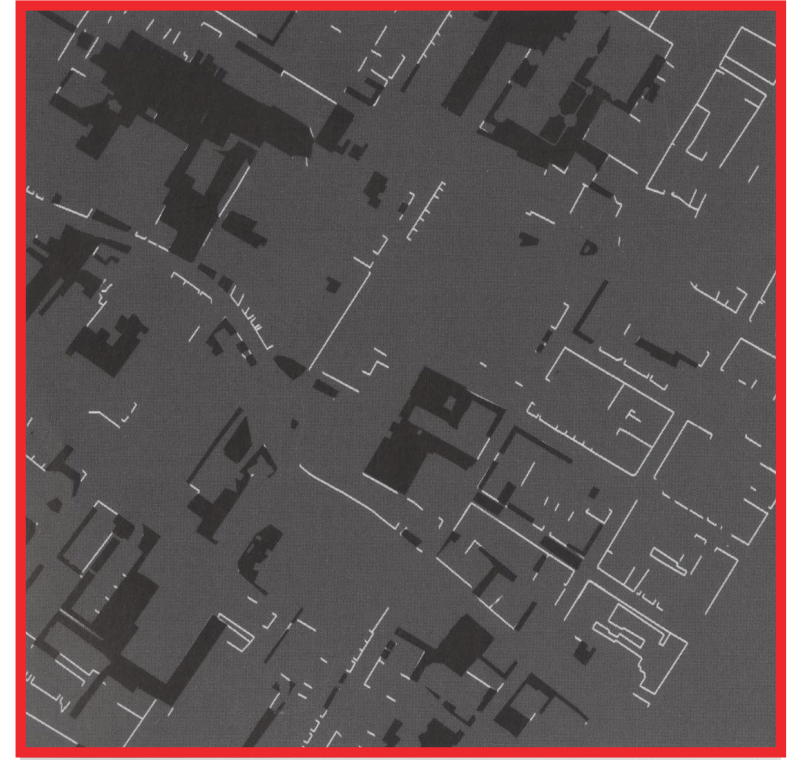




- Gardens and towers
- Walls or retaining walls
- Fences
- Enclosures with greenery or hedges



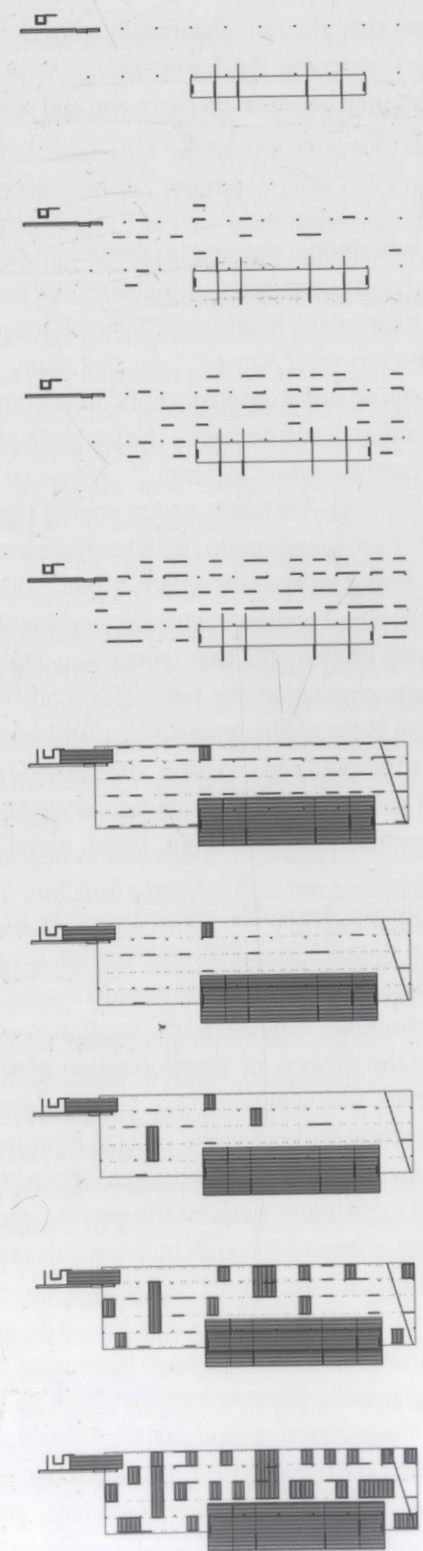
Privacy



# Urban Materials, Strata, Traces

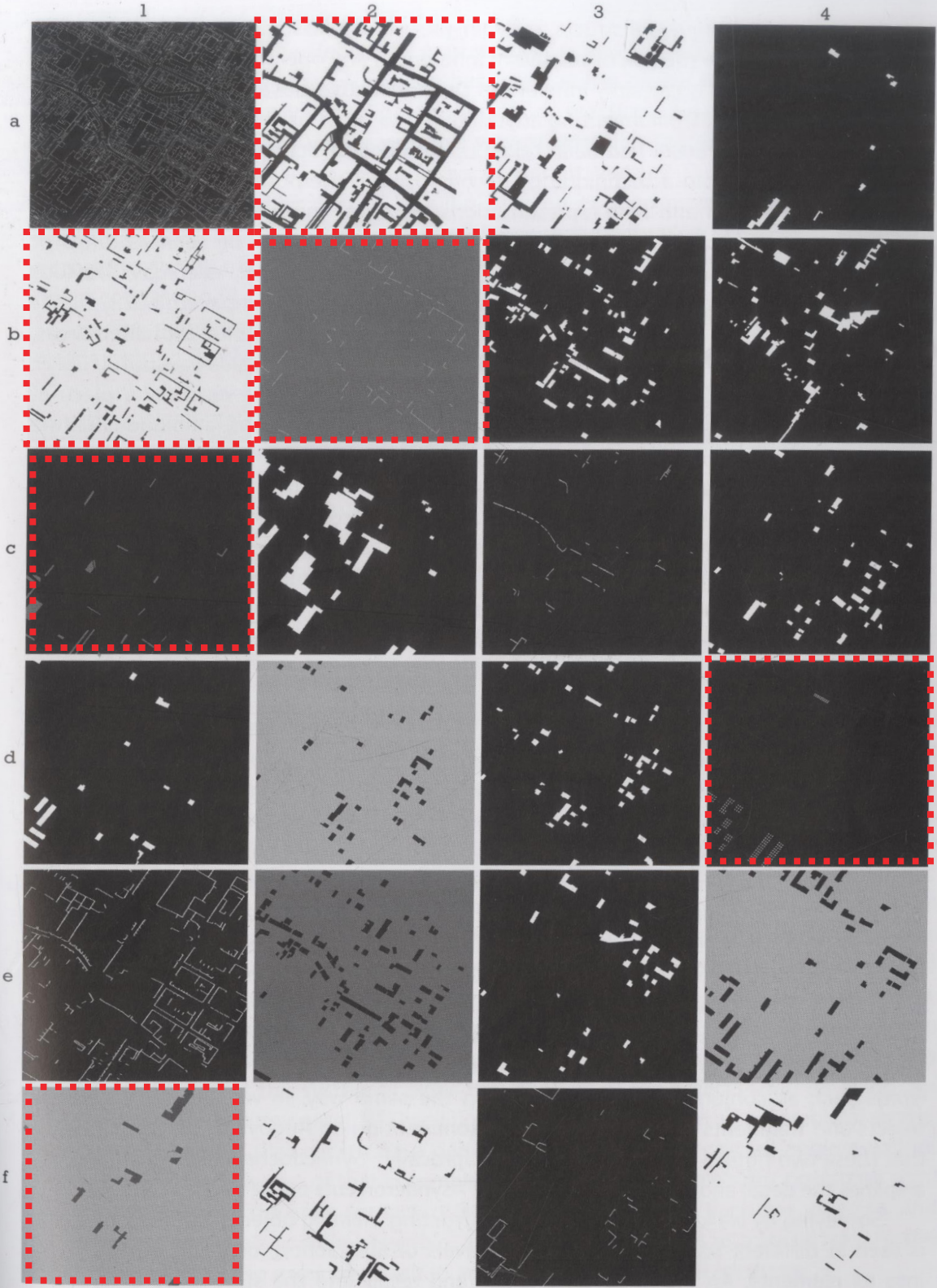
- Designing by Layers is a search for **consistencies that are not global**, but are **capable of structuring an ensemble** of fragments locally and in successive steps.
- In this way designing by layers can **underline the fragmentary character of the city** and its territory... Consistency between its parts and whole are only revealed insofar as they are taken apart

*“Just as the archaeologist attempts to interpret each excavated trace and associate it with the movement that produced it, the traces we uncover in urban places are clues that densely interact with the other traces of the deconstructed real world.” ... It does not deny the fragment but deals with it as a detail of one stratum*

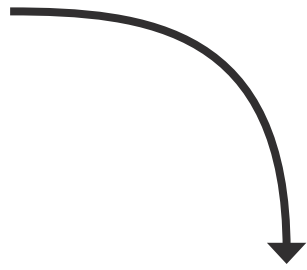


Design Layers:  
Place du Theatre  
Courtrai, 1999





- Asphalt
- Paved areas
- Retail activities
- Car parking
- Pilotis
- Services (culture, religion, entertainment, social and recreation, hospital, healthcare, sports, administrative)



Permeability of Space

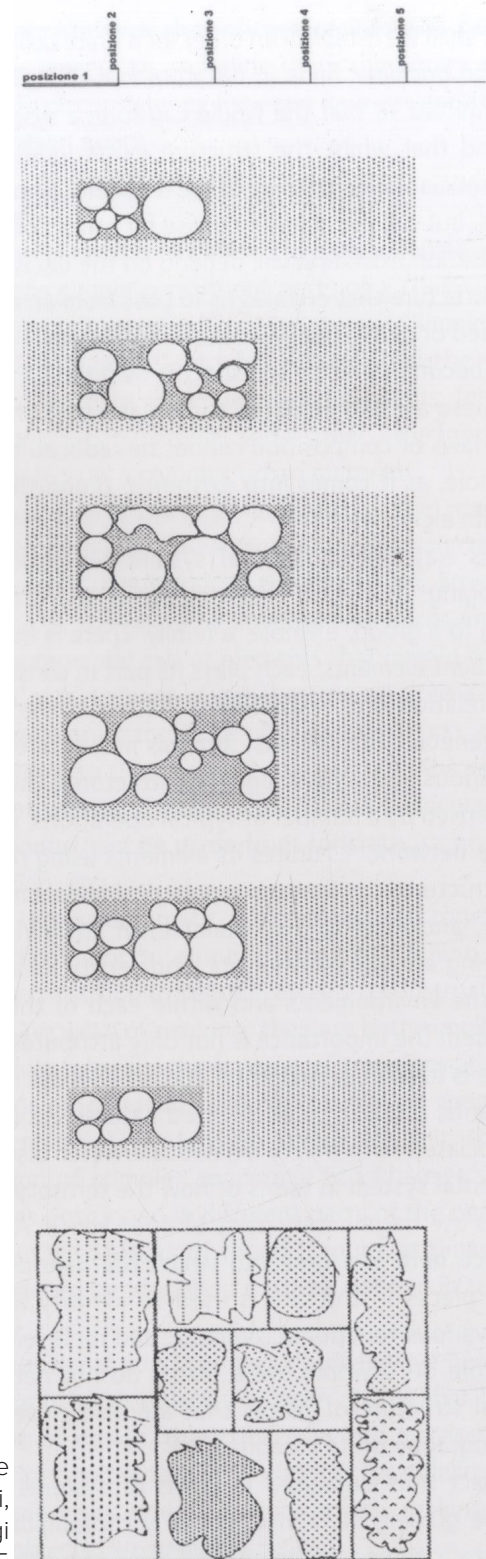


# Simple Materials, Complex Materials

- What is the simplest constituent part?

A material; and a complex material is a composite (i.e. a street is made of foot path, hedge, row of trees, road...)

- In order to analyze these simple materials in technically pertinent ways, we need rules
  - Urban grammar and syntax leading to some formalization
- From this idea of system comes the idea of each element as recognizable as belonging to a group or family or whole.  
There is **no opposition between the system and its constituent elements**, each plays its part in constructing the project



Grid for designing open space  
Santoro, Vigano, Rizzotti,  
Caravaggi  
Plan for Bergamo, 1992-95



# Simple Materials, Complex Materials

- A project thus organizes in terms of systems forces, or collage - city as composition of fragments
- The point of designing with systems is to define some levels of consistency that relate to the attainment of an ***articulated ensemble of performances***
- Example of 'Ordering Rules,' or Mother structures
  - Algebraic = ordering structures = grid or network
  - Topological = closeness continuity, limit = environmental system

# Compositional Modalities, Images

- Considers various metaphors for city -
  - as human body or harmonious (well proportioned whole)
  - images of mechanization, and new (Van Doesburg circulation city and Corbusier's machine metaphors)
  - 60s environments focusing on the infinite and transient (walking city or Super studio)
- Tschumi refuses to use the term composition - but prefers montage and assembly like in cinema to accurately convey how a project develops
- She poses 'mixage' as how the contemporary operates
- Often you see images such as collage city, patchwork metropolis, domino, jigsaw puzzle. These focus on a process of assembling **individual pieces and defining loose criteria to position them in relation** to one another
- Mixage or assembly alludes to **compositional operation that makes use of existing urban material**

***New composition attributes new meaning*** to [them] old fragments

