



THEMATIC DESIGN

Skills for contributing
to the everyday
environment

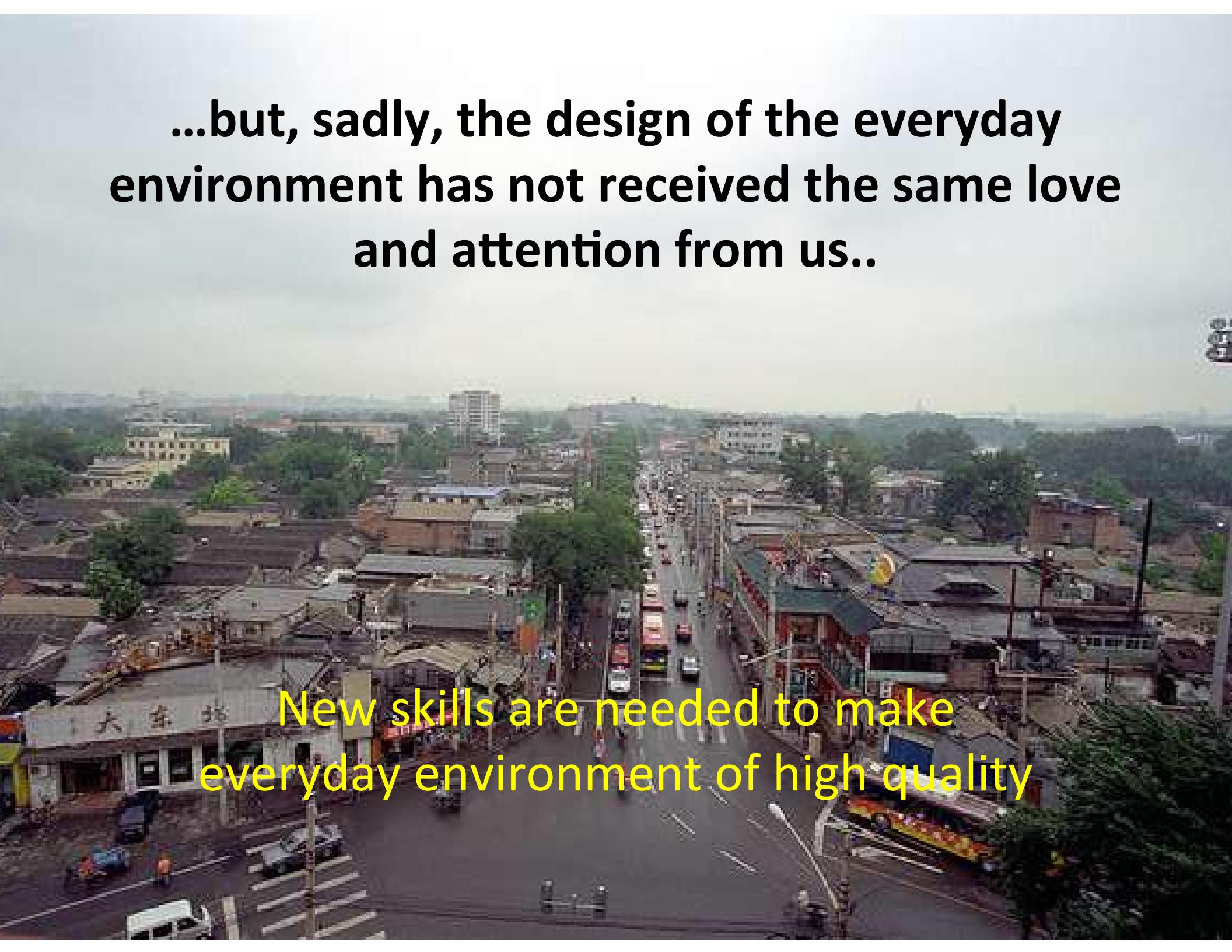
(Notes Based on the work of John
Habraken)

Architects have tended to focus on the special building...

This is a long and great tradition and should not be abandoned



...but, sadly, the design of the everyday environment has not received the same love and attention from us..

An aerial photograph of a cityscape, likely Beijing, showing a mix of traditional and modern architecture. In the foreground, there's a street with a zebra crossing and some vehicles. Behind it, there's a dense cluster of buildings, many with red roofs, typical of traditional Chinese architecture. In the background, several modern skyscrapers rise above the skyline. The overall scene illustrates the contrast between the designed environment and the everyday urban landscape.

New skills are needed to make everyday environment of high quality

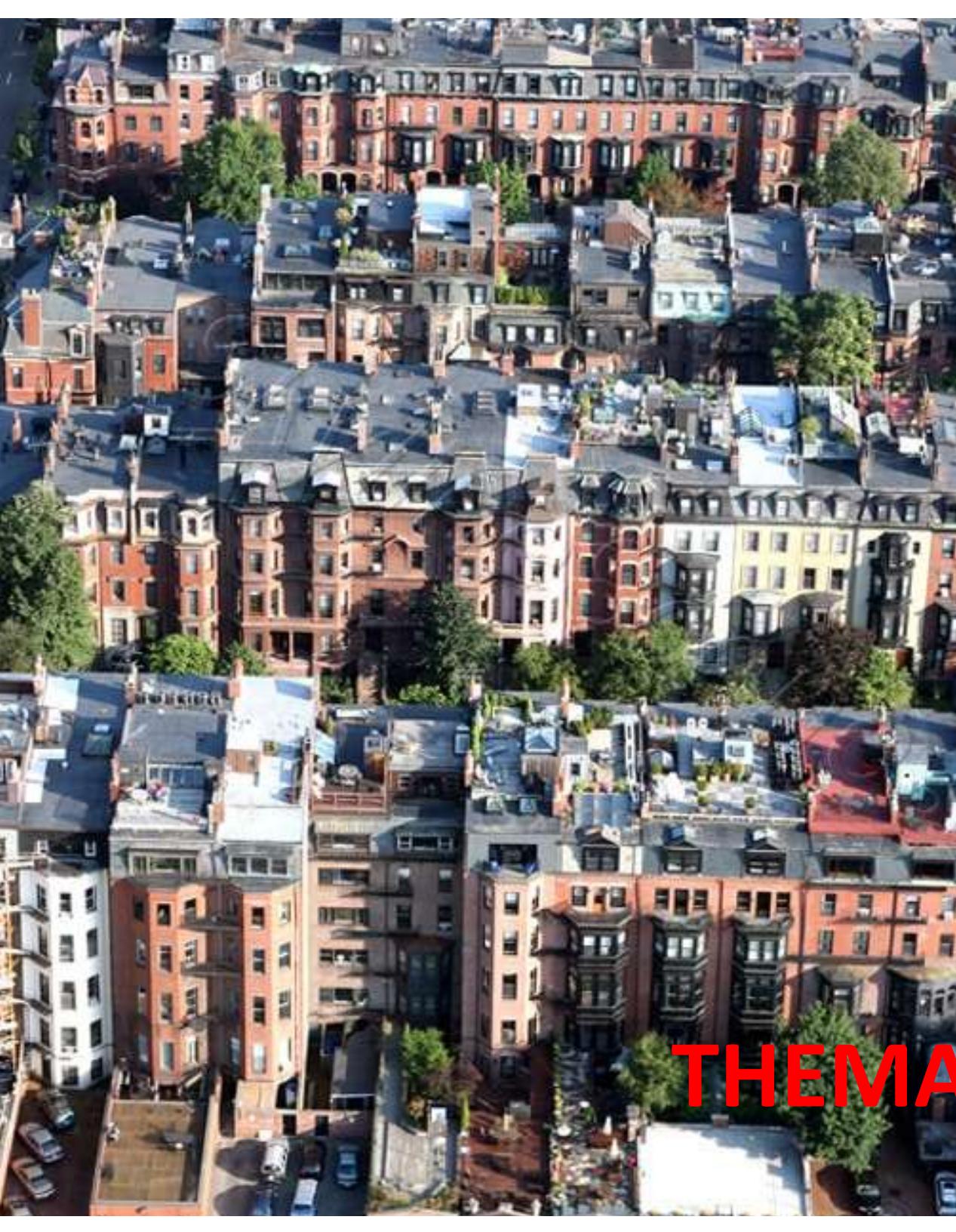
We know that
sustainable everyday
environment renews
itself part by part

老北京小
炸酱面 麻家

...exhibiting a hierarchy of levels of intervention



the urban structure is permanent to the neighborhood, which is permanent to the building, which is permanent to the interior fit-out, which is permanent to the furnishings and finishes



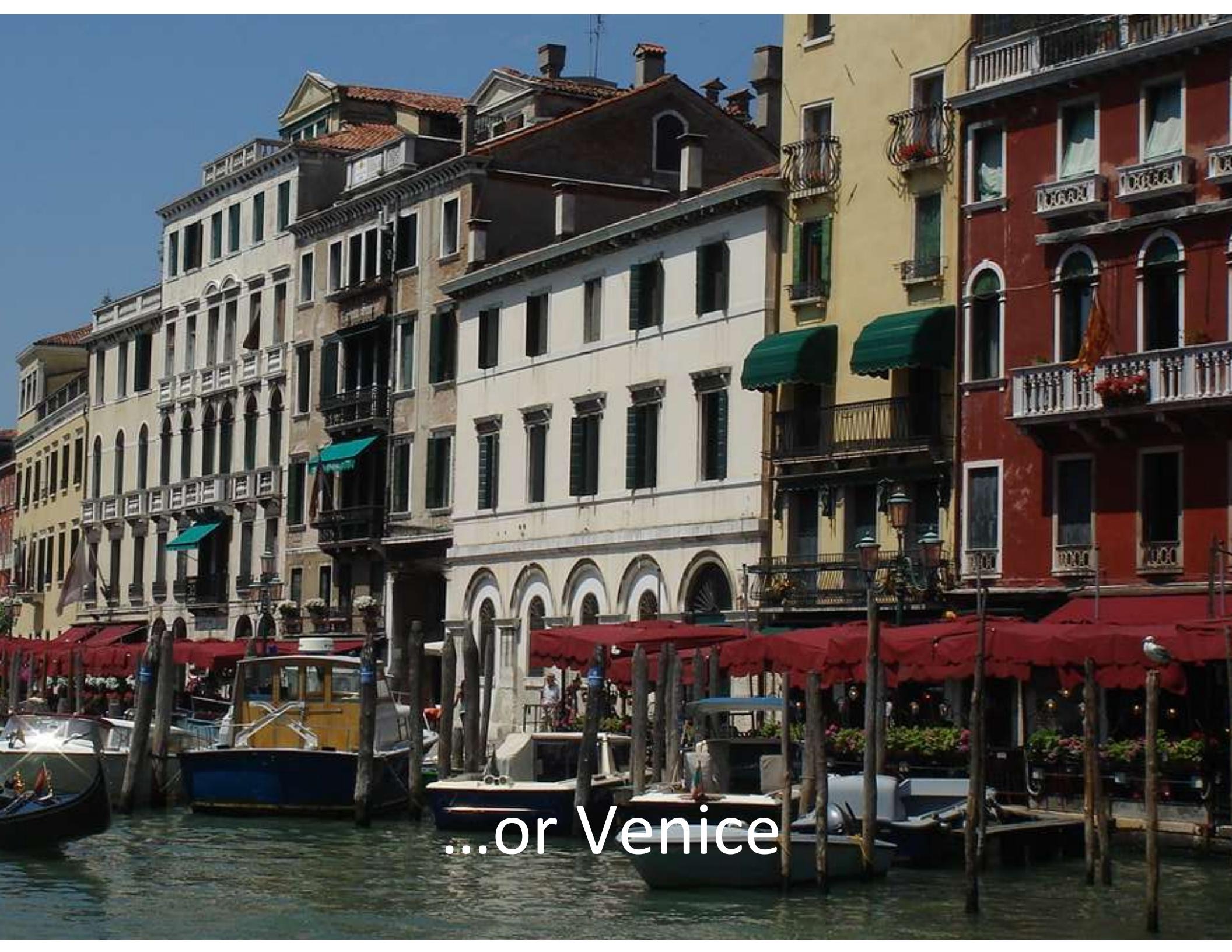
Three distinct characteristics of the every-day:

1. Variations on a common theme
2. Design decisions that transcend short-term uses
3. Is the result of many interventions over time

THEMATIC DESIGN



Coherent and highly thematic built fields are those we like to visit like Paris

A vibrant scene of a canal in Venice, Italy. The image shows a row of historic buildings with multi-story facades, some with arched windows and others with rectangular ones. Colorful awnings in shades of red, green, and yellow hang over the water. Several boats are docked along the canal, including a prominent blue boat in the foreground and a white boat with a red awning further back. The water is a deep teal color. The sky is clear and blue.

...or Venice



...or Delft

A photograph showing a row of modern apartment buildings along a canal. The buildings have dark, angular facades with large windows. In the foreground, a canal with several small boats is visible, and a paved walkway runs alongside it.

Thematic Design calls for a shift in perspective

- Look for what is shared
- Don't only look for what is different or unique



Another shift in perspective: Look for Change

We need to learn to observe and record environmental change over time, looking for

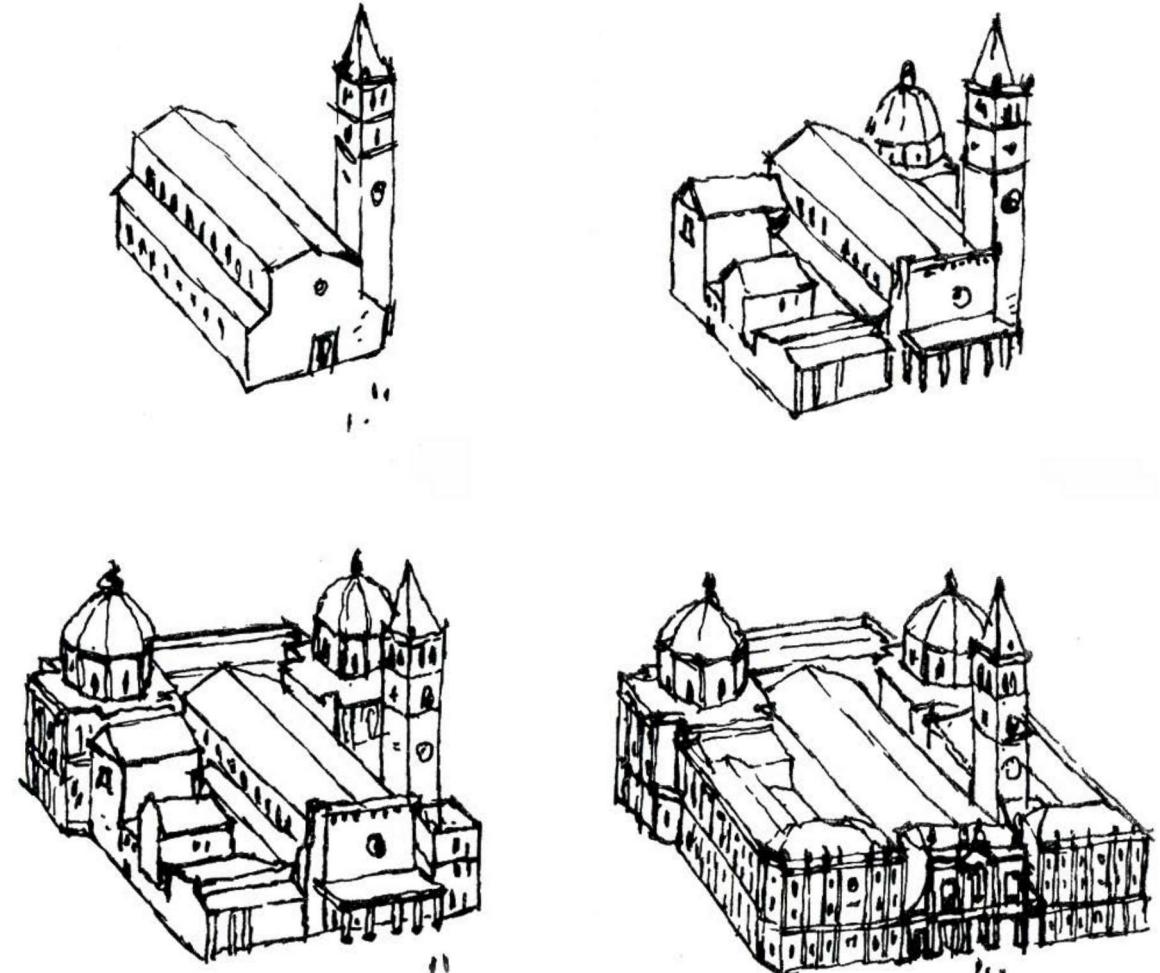
- expansion or contraction
- transformation of parts (like upgrading the kitchen)
- changes to the façade
- changes to interior space



Look for changes on a time line

We would benefit by recording sequences of change, to understand cycles of transformation.

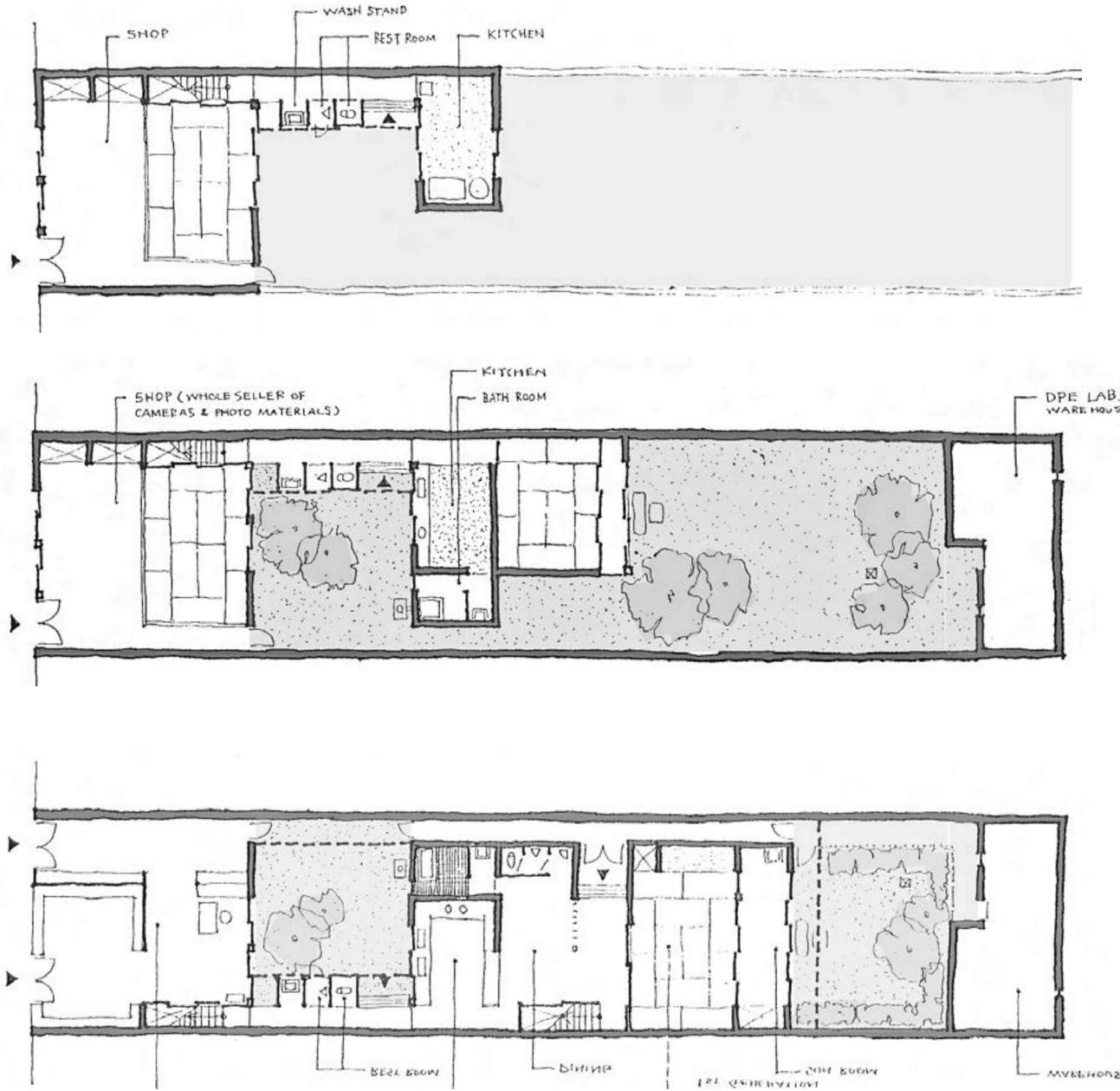
This helps us see built environment as a living organism, changing slowly but inevitably.



(Courtesy of John Habraken)

We can make diagrams of transformations

(Courtesy Professor Kazunobu Minami)



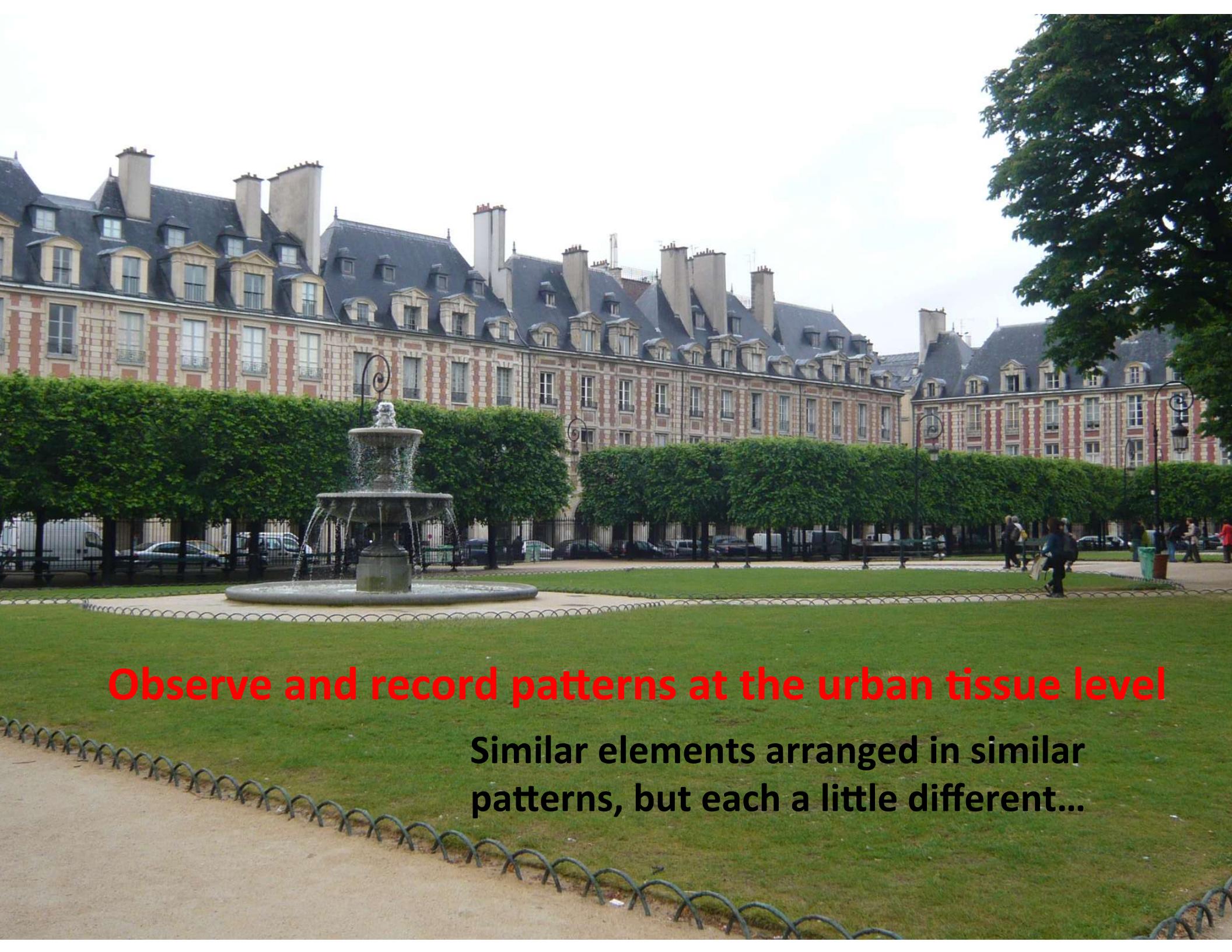
We can take photos of interior transformations



And observe change (and stability) of the urban tissue



(Two bottom images courtesy of Andres Mignucci)



Observe and record patterns at the urban tissue level

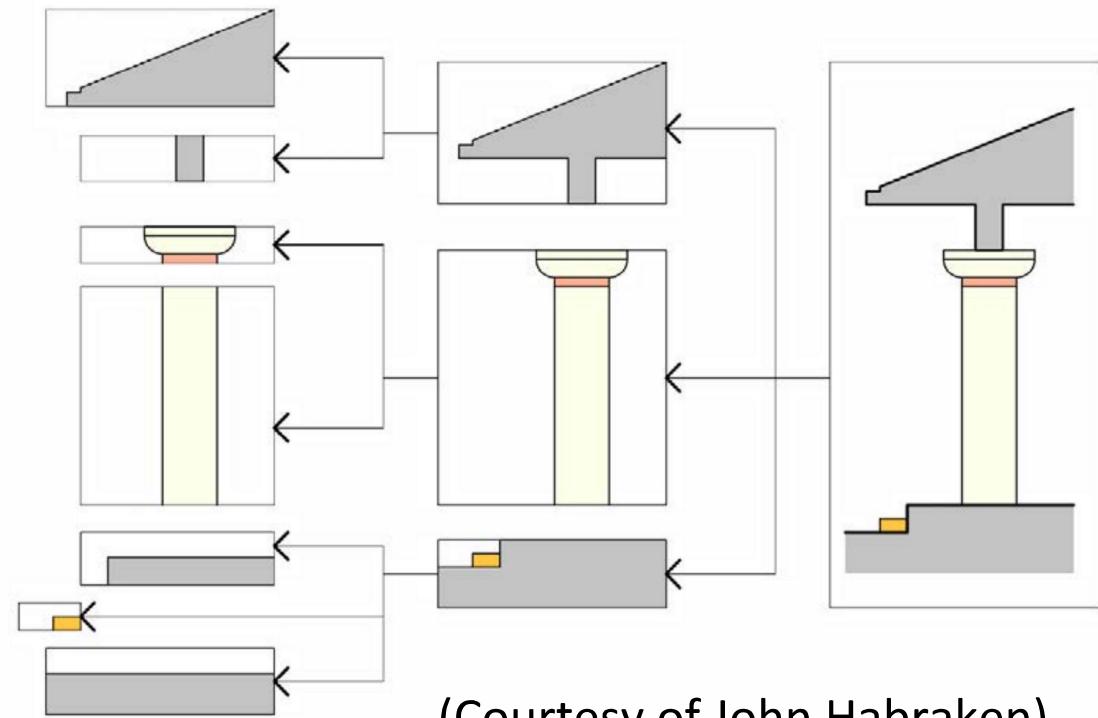
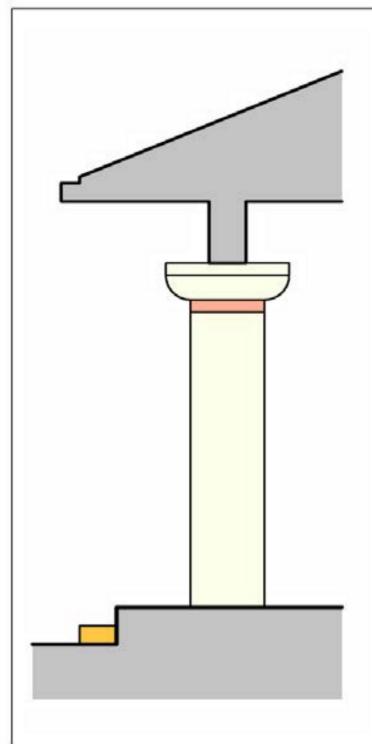
Similar elements arranged in similar patterns, but each a little different...

..or like these
patterns...



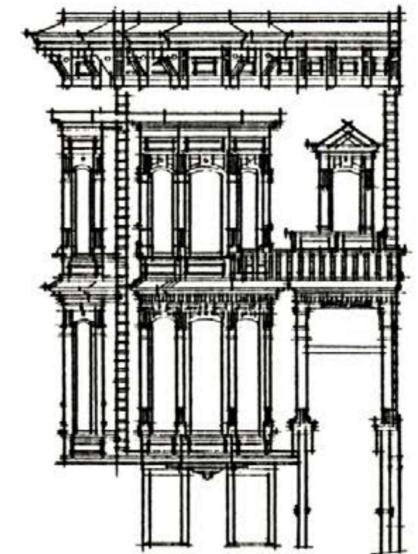
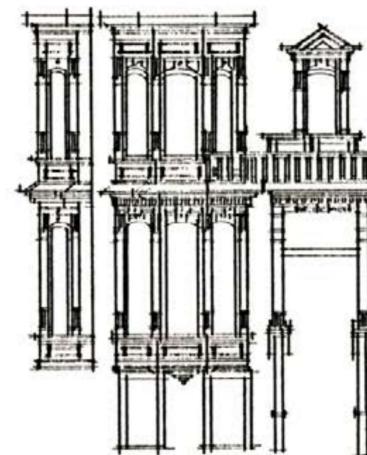
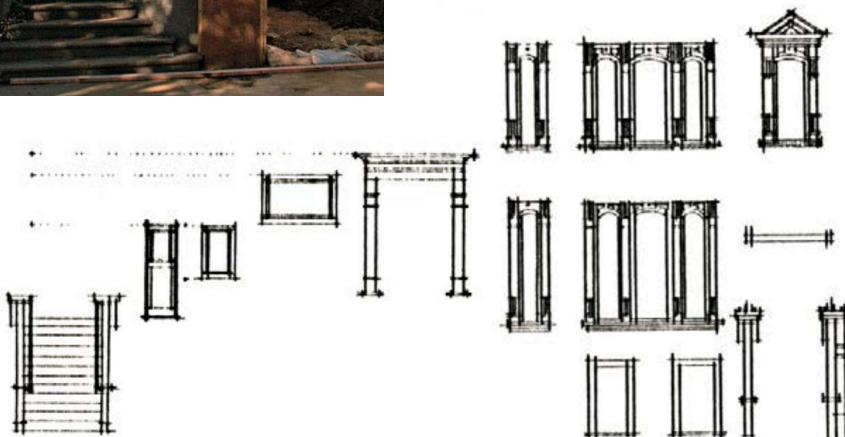
Look for Part/Whole relations

To design, we have to see complex form as having a part/whole organization. We must be able to combine or abstract compositions of parts into unitary configurations or wholes.



(Courtesy of John Habraken)

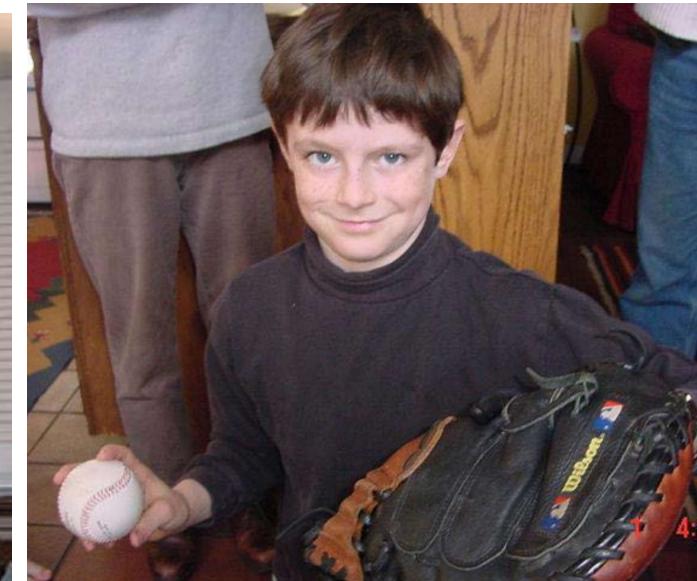
**...such as this...(you can find
many such examples if you look around)**



(Courtesy of John Habraken)

Thematic Design needs exercise

In every discipline having to do with form – be it music, sculpture, drama, dance or writing – skills are developed through series of progressive exercises.



Architectural design is no exception.

Campus in its Town Context

Figure Ground

Examples of teaching based on the idea of thematic design



Figure-Geographic information compiled from
all those university, dept. of urban planning, neighborhood studies
of eastern county dat
Source: the author

Section A

Westside Neighborhood



Riverside Normal City

Section B

Westridge Neighborhood



Riverside Normal City

Section C

Christy Woods



Educazione - Milano City

Figure/Ground Studies

Campus Studies

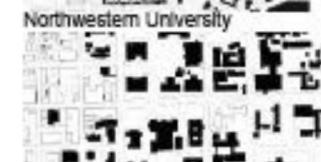
A black and white map of the Ball State University campus area. The map shows a grid of streets and several buildings, including the university's main administrative building. The map is oriented vertically, with the top pointing towards the bottom-left corner of the page.



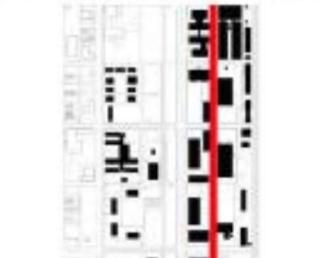
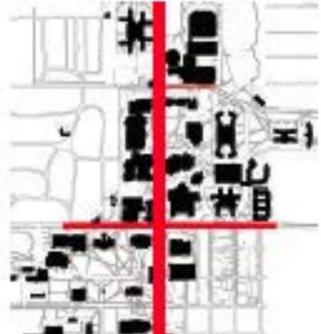
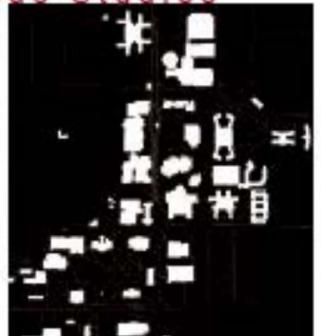
Ball State University
Boston University



Illinois Institute of Technology

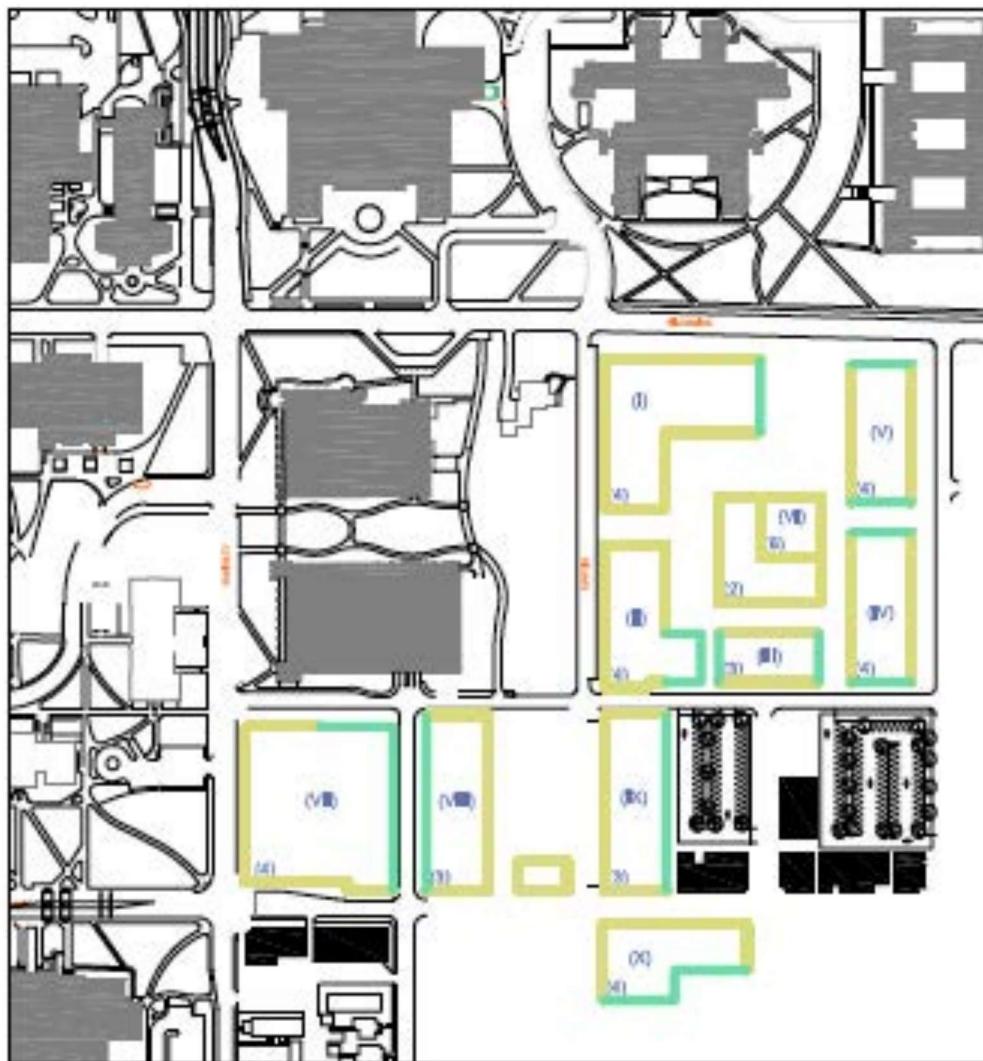


University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



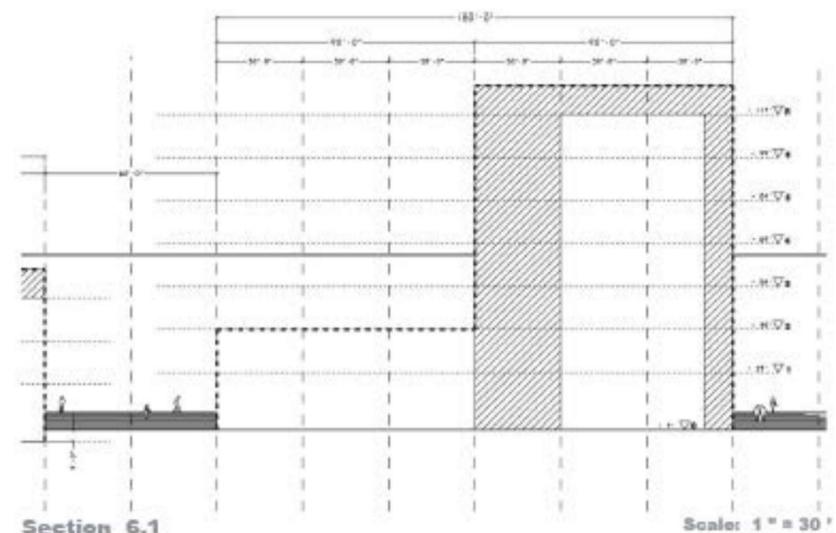
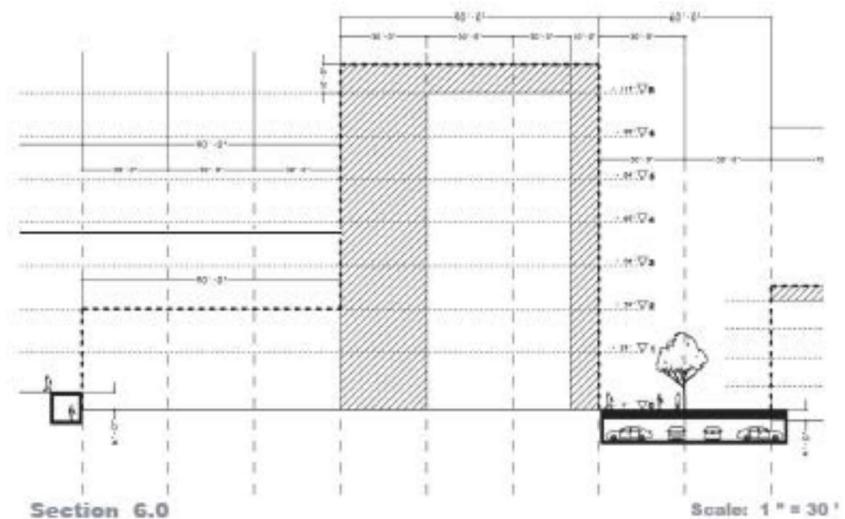
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**Themes can be agreements – or can be dictated...but
in any case are shared by those who use them...**



Building front

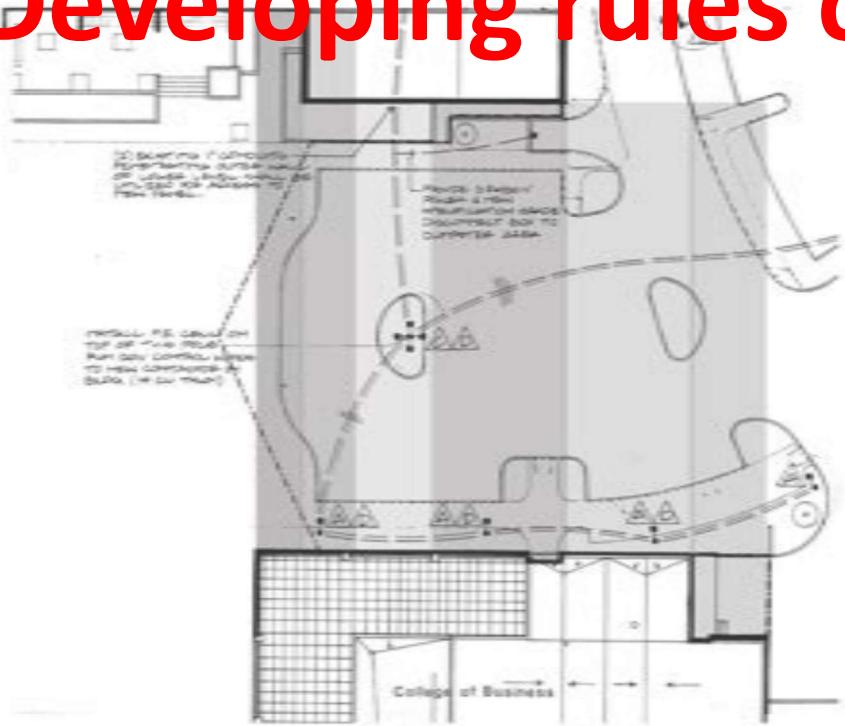
Building back



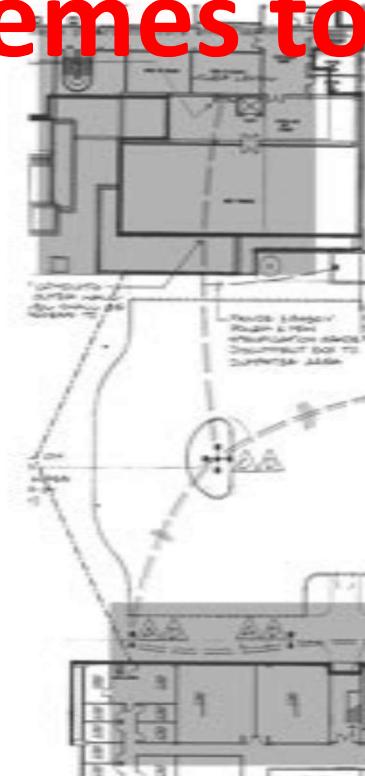
Seven interventions sharing a set of themes



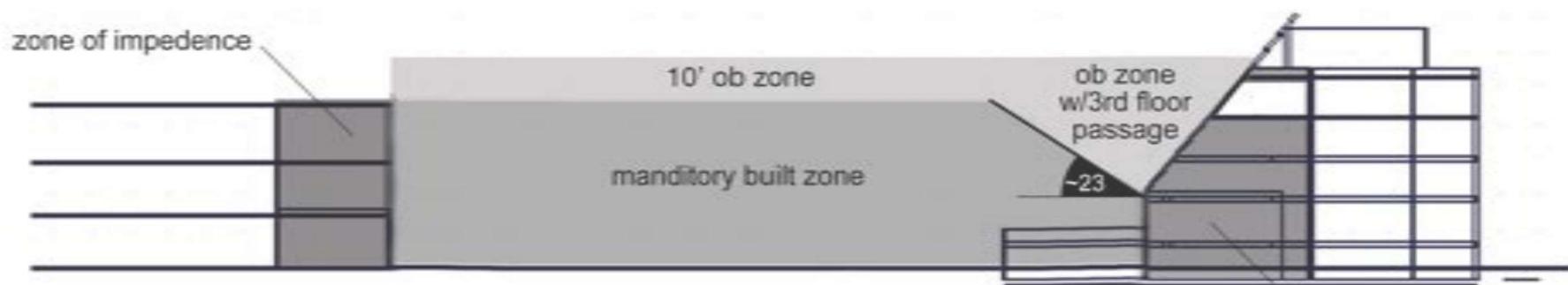
Developing rules or themes to follow



A-1_ increments of massing should correspond to existing adjacent massing



A-2_ maximum impedance on existing buildings



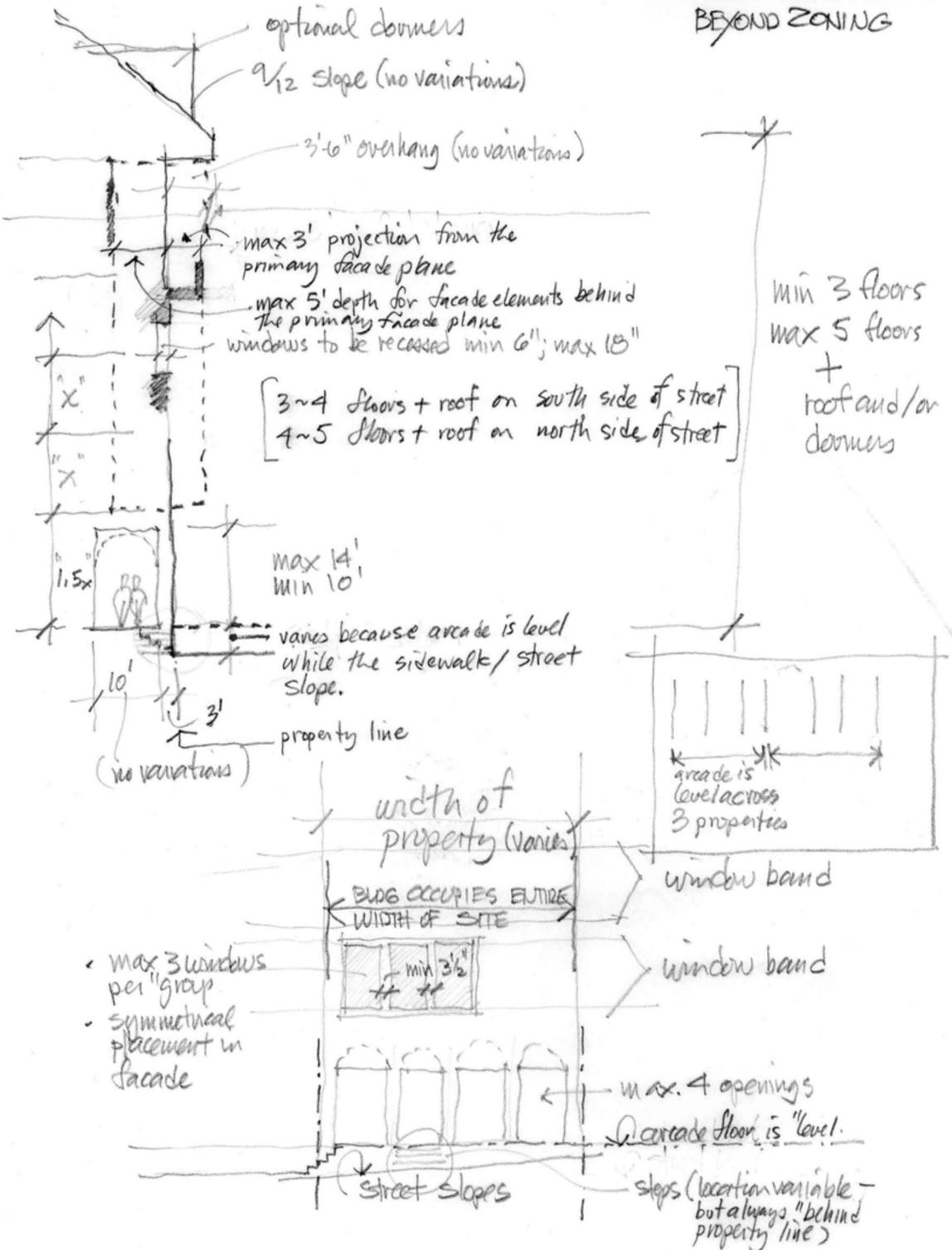
Students together developed the rules of form – themes – that each proposal would use...

Another Thematic Design exercise



302: BERN RULES

Beyond Zoning



**My hand
sketch of the
“thematic
properties” to
be shared...**





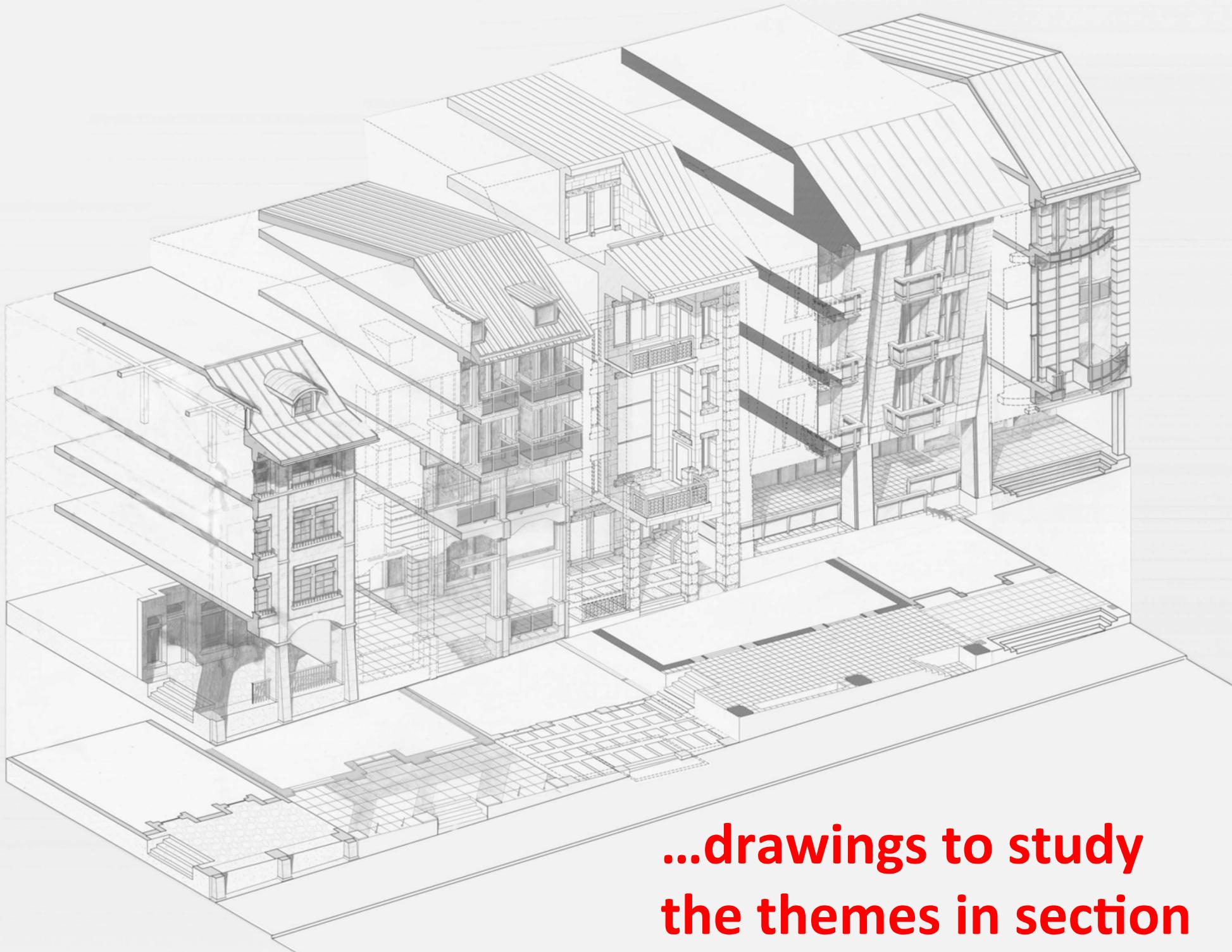
Each student had a site, side by side, in which to explore variations on the theme...



The finished model



... at night!



**...drawings to study
the themes in section**

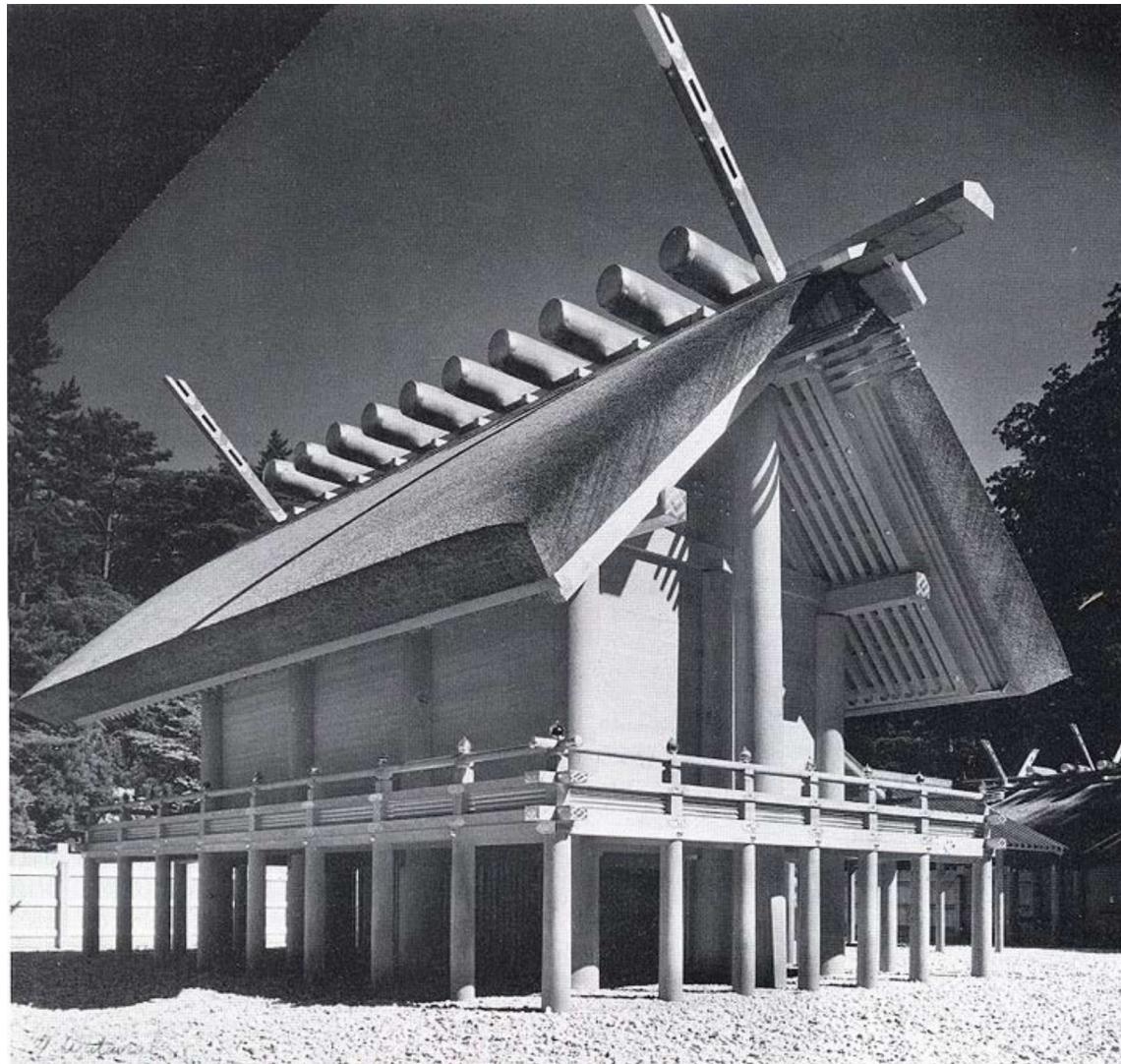
FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN

- CHANGE AND CONTROL
- LEVELS
- THEMATIC FORM
- TYPE
- SYSTEMS
- TERRITORY
- FIELDS

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN

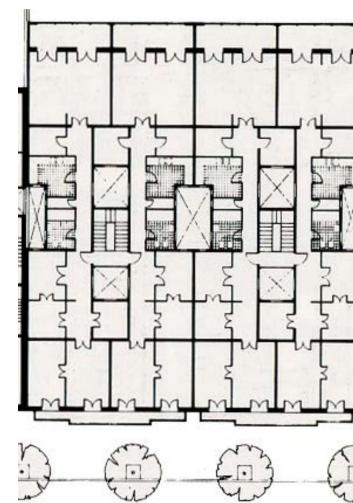
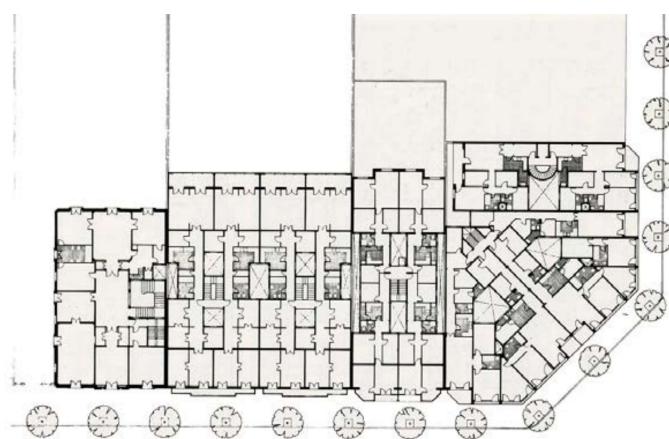
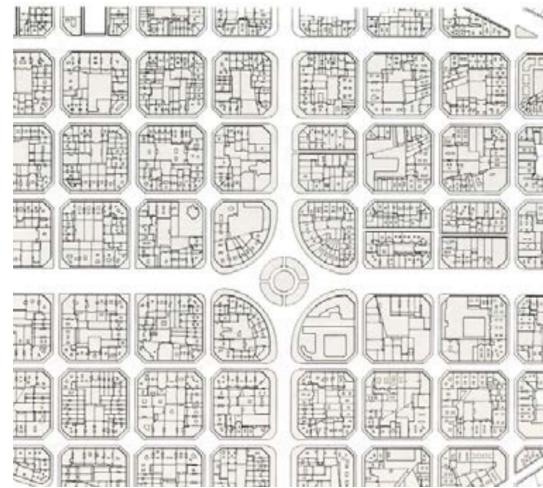
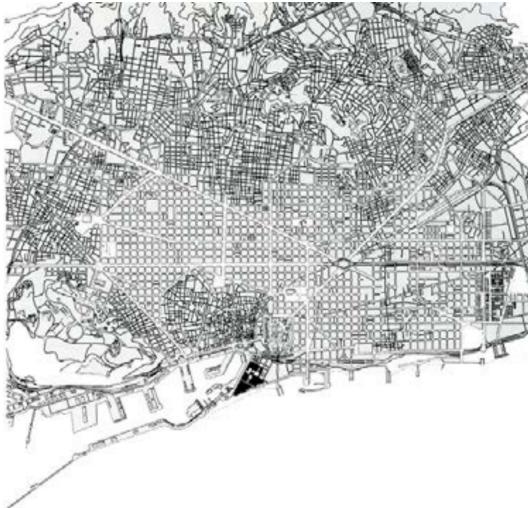
(Courtesy of John Habraken)

CHANGE AND CONTROL



FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN

LEVELS



City Structure
Urban Tissue
Urban Block
Base Building
Fit-out or Infill
Furnishings
Objects

(Images Courtesy of John Habraken)

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN

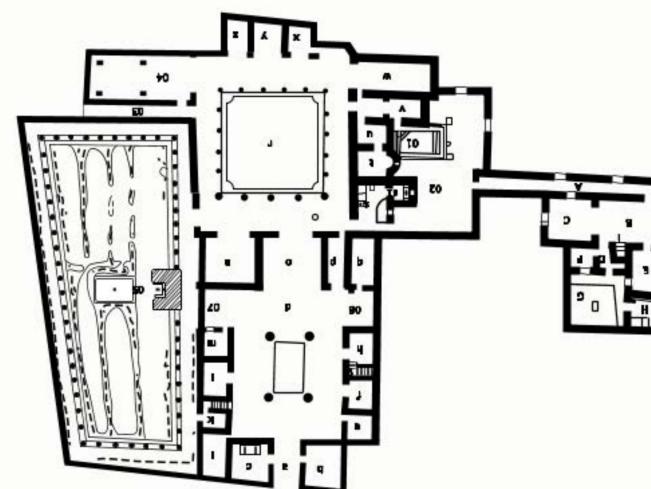
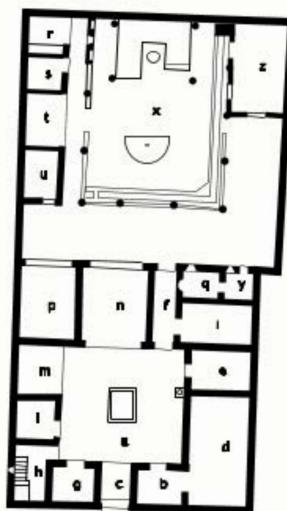
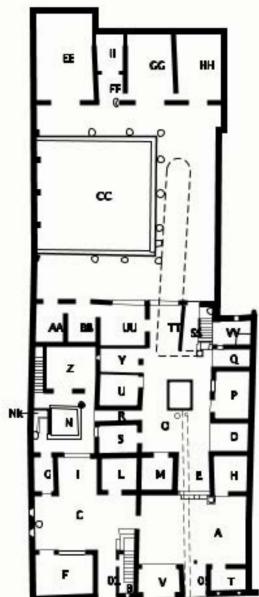
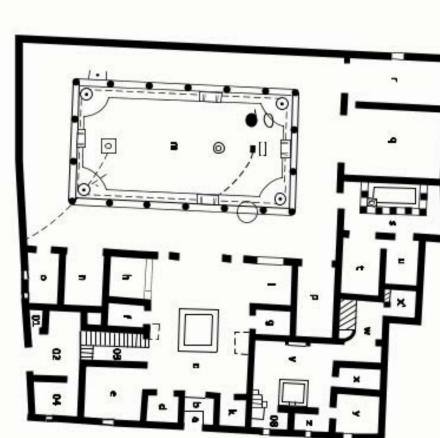
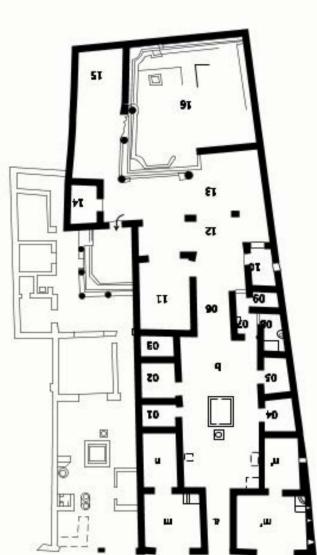
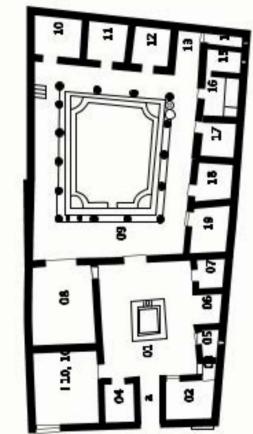
THEMATIC FORM



(Images Courtesy of
John Habraken)

Even the
Gaudi Casa
Mila is a good
example of
thematic form

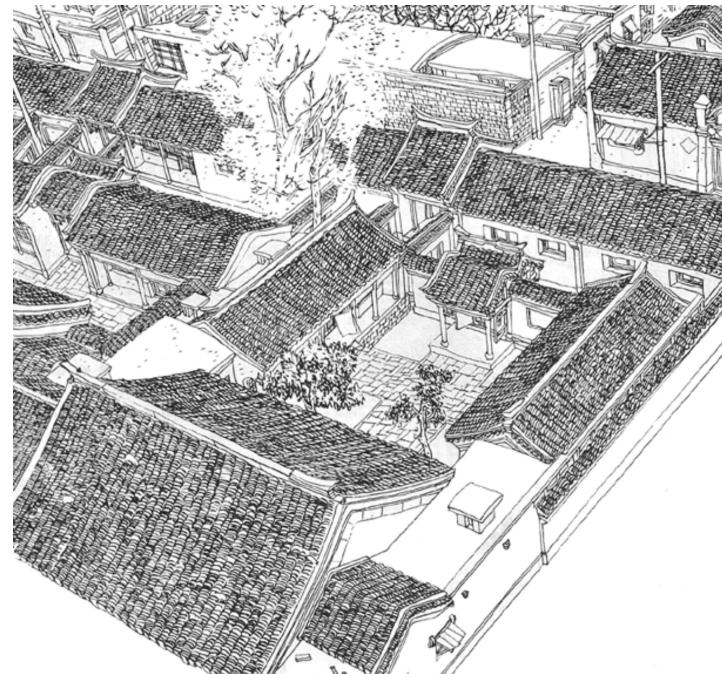
FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATI TYPE



(Images Courtesy of John Habraken)

Types are a good example of themes used again and again with no two alike

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN SYSTEMS



Systems constitute a set of inter-related elements or parts forming a complex whole.

A system allows many variations.

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN

TERRITORY

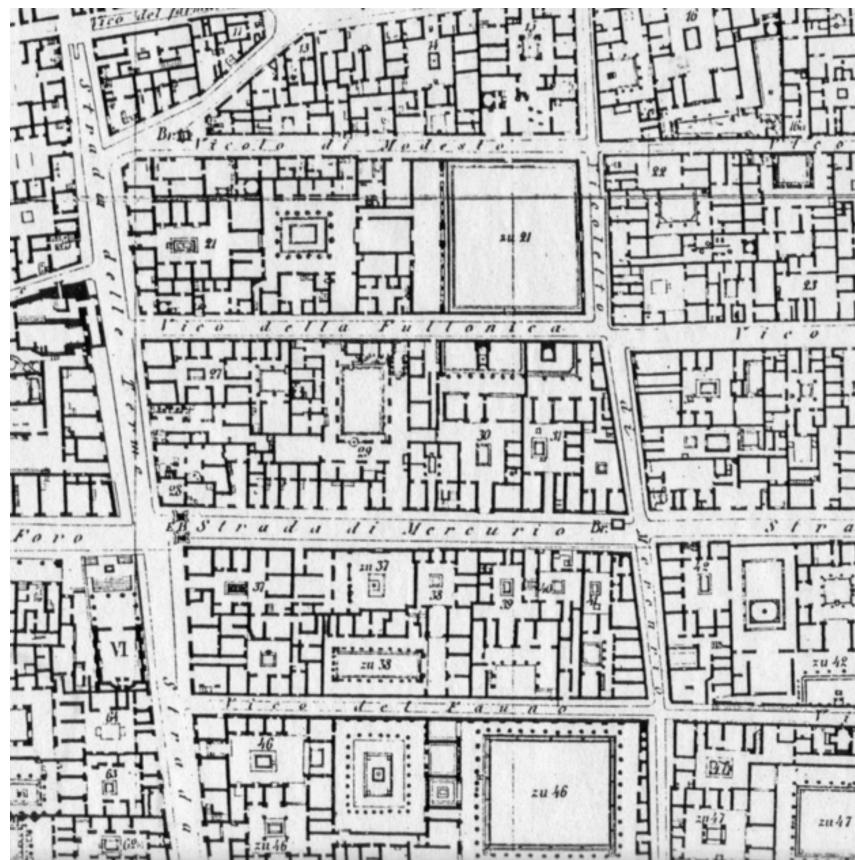


Image Courtesy of
Andres Mignucci



Territory is about control...a human instinct to mark what is ours...to set boundaries...

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF THEMATIC DESIGN FIELDS



Pompeii

(Image Courtesy of John Habraken)



Beijing

REGULATING THEMATICS

Form-Based Codes

Form-based codes use physical form, rather than separation of land uses, as their organizing principle. They foster predictable results in the built environment and a high quality public realm.

They are regulations, not mere guidelines, adopted into city or county law.

<http://www.formbasedcodes.org/>

A Tool to make Thematic Design real

- Form-based codes address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words and clearly drawn diagrams and other visuals.
- They try to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism.



The built field is highly thematic

Its individual interventions have many shared properties and characteristics

It's the result of many actors and is never finished

www.thematicdesign.org



Teaching thematic design does not contradict our old traditions of designing the special building...

It adds to our tool kits...to help us handle with confidence and skill the design of the everyday environment that makes up 90% of the built world!