

Urban Analysis



Figure 28

Photograph of the appropriation of an unused lot into a make-shift night club, Havana, Cuba

2006, Author

Urban intervention:
an anti-functional
response

“Modernism’s alchemistic promise – to transform quantity into quality through abstraction and repetition – has been a failure, a hoax: magic that didn’t work. Its ideas aesthetics, strategies are finished. Together, all attempts to make a new beginning have only discredited the idea of a new beginning. A collective shame in the wake of this fiasco has left a massive crater in our understanding of modernity and modernization... ..Dissatisfaction with the contemporary city has not led to the development of a credible alternative; it has, on the contrary, inspired only more refined ways of articulating dissatisfaction. A profession persists in its fantasies, its ideology, its pretension, its illusions of involvement and control, and is therefore incapable of conceiving new modesties, partial interventions, strategic realignments, compromised positions that might influence, redirect, succeed in limited terms, regroup, begin from scratch even, but will never reestablish control... ..[architecture] exploits and exhausts the potentials that can be generated finally only by urbanism, and that only the specific imagination of urbanism can invent and renew...”(Koolhaas 1995:959)

While most of what the ‘making of architecture’ constitutes is the addition to an existing fabric, these can usually be viewed as isolated instances of

intervention. As Koolhaas mentions above, the ideal of a better city is not the concern of architecture, but rather that of urbanism, with architecture serving as a tool toward its collective good. However influential or useful it may be, architecture serves only one site. Anything more constitutes urbanism. **It is for this reason that this dissertation will focus in depth on the scale of the urban.** It is this and only this that can contribute to the city on a larger scale. The experimental mapping and urbanism dealt with in this dissertation should not be seen as a ‘master-plan’. The term, tainted by its functionalist connotations has become taboo to the extent of rendering the profession of urbanism questionable. It is precisely the fact that this dissertation’s proposal is in effect a ‘master plan’ without a ‘plan’ that makes it valid.

While most of the high density urban fabric that constitutes Pretoria’s ‘urban-ness’ is commercially based, Sunnyside and Arcadia are predominantly residential suburbs. The simple fact that there are always going to be people in any desired vicinity within the suburb maintains that the potential for urban regeneration is valid. The usual dilemma of a downtown not being able to sustain itself 24 hours a day due to its commercial nature is not applicable. This dissertation

will investigate the possibilities of intervention in the north-south streets within the Sunnyside precinct. The profound Functionalist influence on the development of the area cannot be erased, it can however be enhanced. The depth and complexity vital to any successful urban environment can begin to manifest in the areas which shy away from the high speed motorways which tunnel through its fabric. In so doing, these streets can begin to define a character based on the people that inhabit it, instead of a character rooted in zoning, function and private land use.

The design proposal postulates the possibility of superimposing a Situationist ‘grid of nomadic wondering’

over the existing functionalist grid. This map, reminiscent of Debord’s ‘Psychogeographic Guide to Paris’ can be implemented in the neglected north-south streets and spaces between the buildings of Sunnyside. The urban strategy of a ‘grid of nomadic wondering’ is effective precisely because of its ‘anti-modernness’, working within the existing modernist fabric to provide a synthesis in symbiotic coexistence. The east-west movement corridors will be untouched, left to handle the quantifiable aspects of a city’s functioning, while the north-south streets will begin to embody the qualitative: joy; excitement; encounter; hope.

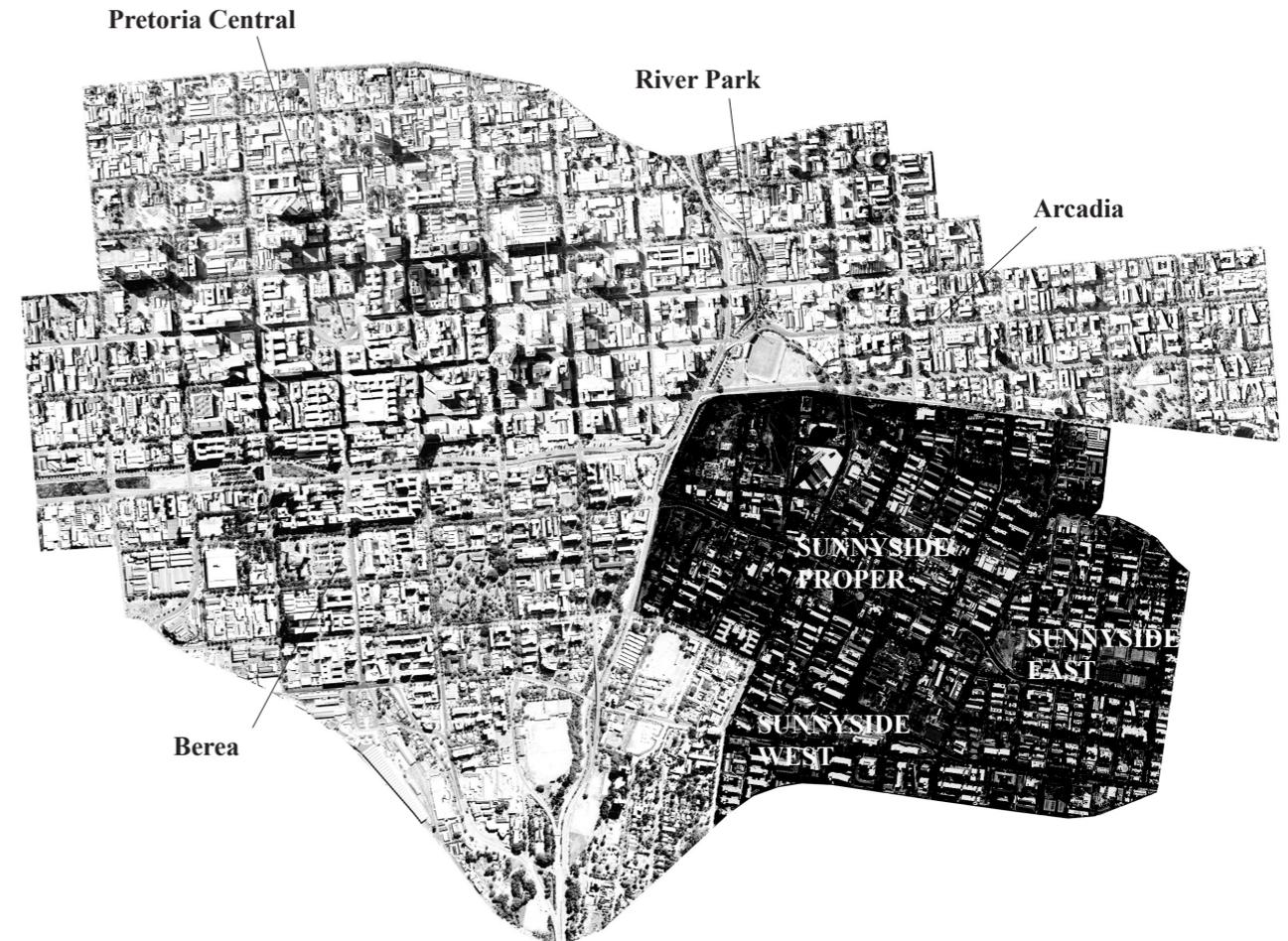


Figure 29

Diagram indicating the precinct (dark) in which the urban intervention will take place. The precinct includes Sunnyside Proper, Sunnyside East and Sunnyside West, the region in which the high density, north-facing residential typology is prevalent. The precinct is flanked by Arcadia to the north, Berea to the west and Pretoria Central to the north-west(light).

2006, Author

Figure 30

Diagram illustrating the east-west road network passing through the Sunnyside precinct. These streets link the Pretoria CBD to the eastern suburbs gaining in prominence as the development of Pretoria continues unhindered to the east. These “tunnels” fissure the urban coherence of the precinct, rendering each city block a separate entity, islands of life in a sea of vehicles.

2006, Author

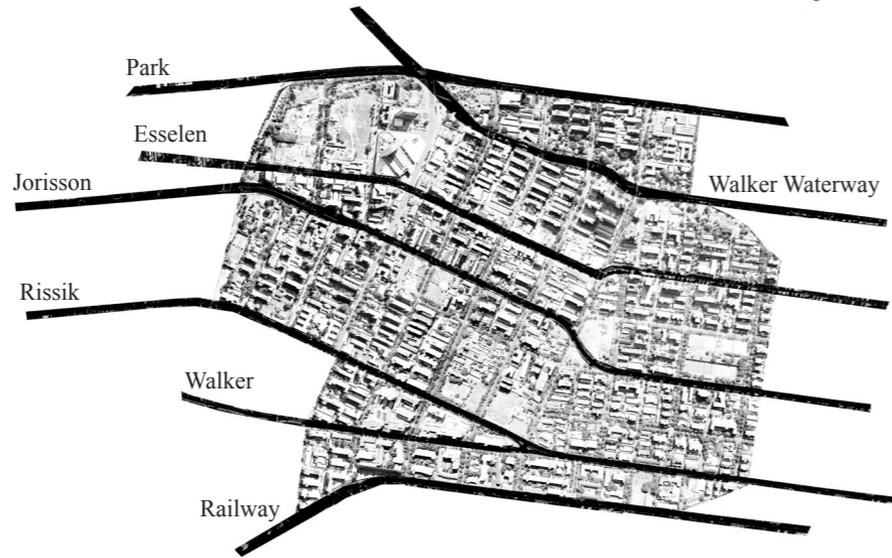


Figure 31

The north-south streets which complete the city grid act merely as links between the east-west arterials. These streets can be seen as dead-zones, firstly as a result of their role in the street grid and secondly, because of the north-facing flat blocks, which throw dead east and west facades onto them.

2006, Author

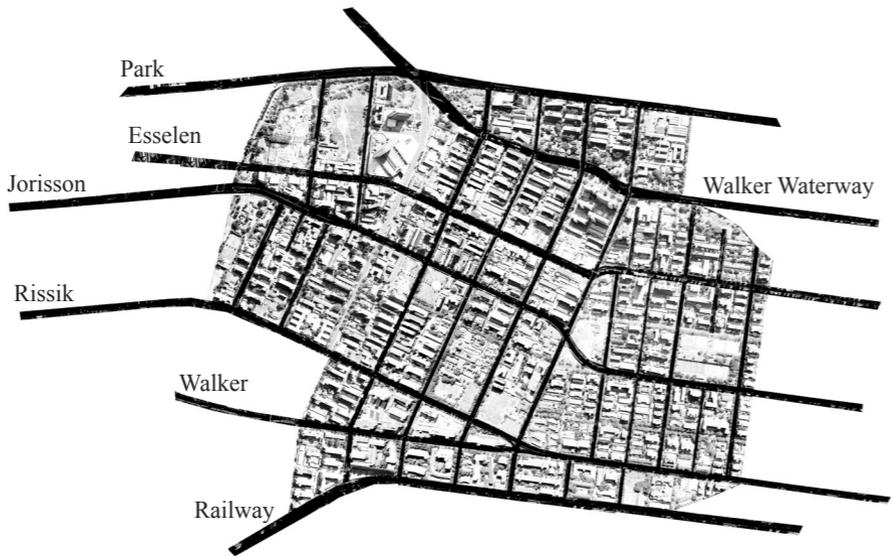


Figure 32

This diagram illustrates the extent of lost spaces in the Sunnyside precinct. While many of these spaces were designed as public space, in accordance to the Modern Movement’s ideal of the free ground plane, they have since been fenced in. These perimeter fences have reduced the precinct’s public space to the streets, further isolating the residents from the urban realm.

2006, Author

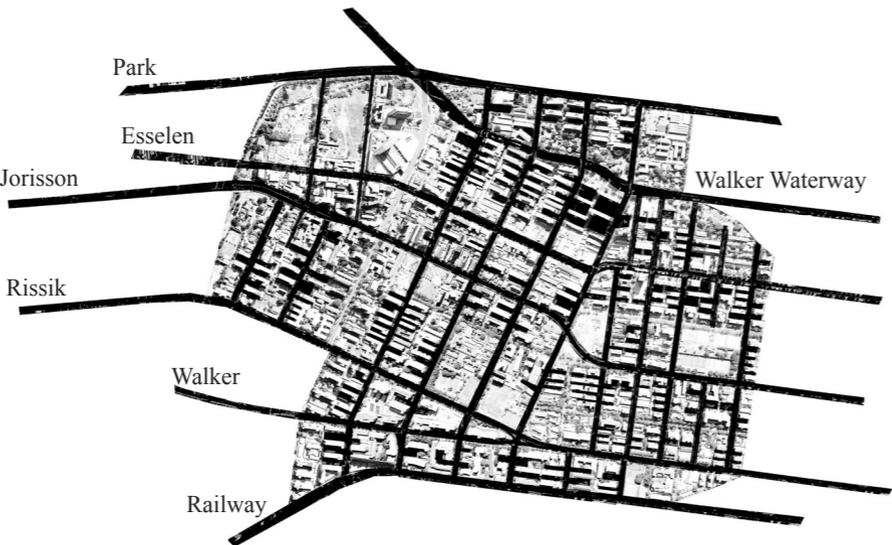


Figure 33

3D Rendering showing the north-south streets with adjoining potential public space elevated above the aerial map of Sunnyside. Note how the potential public spaces correspond to the prevalent building typology below.

2006, Author

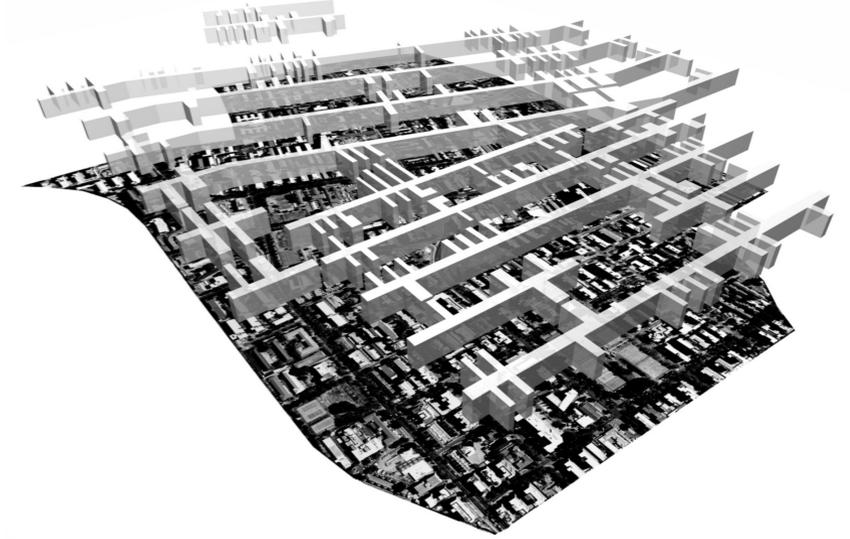


Figure 34

3D Rendering illustrating the concept of potential links between the newly established public spaces.

2006, Author

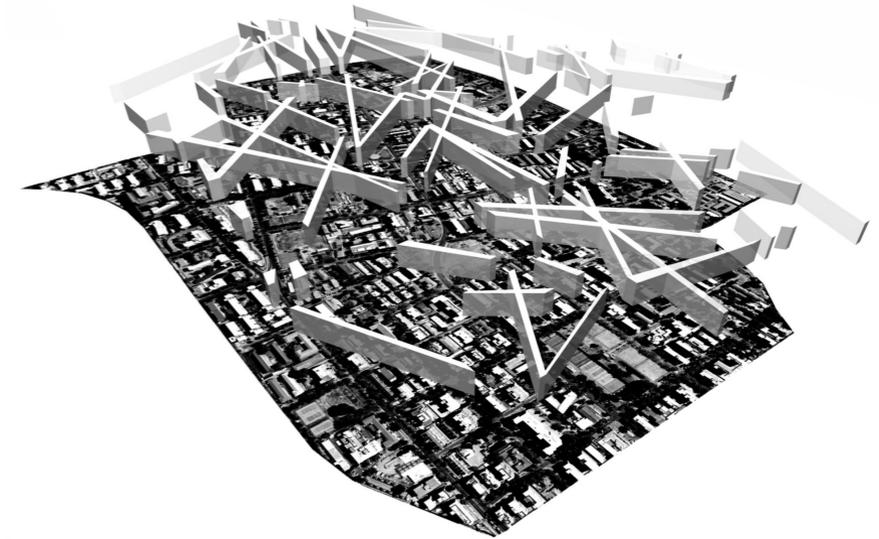


Figure 35

3D Rendering of potential links superimposed onto the north-south streets and adjoining public spaces. The potential public space network offers infinite possibilities regarding pedestrian route choice.

2006, Author

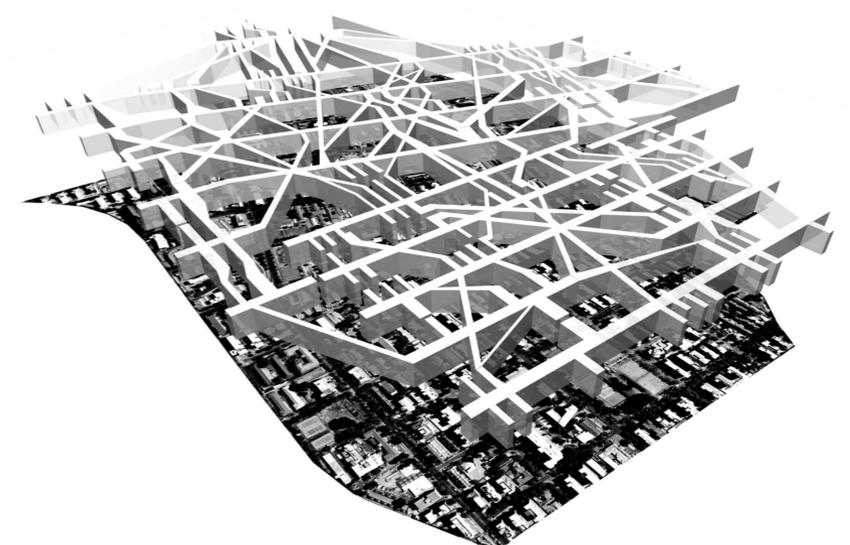


Figure 36

These diagrams are a continuation of the investigation into the lost spaces between the flat blocks which border on the north-south streets of Sunnyside. The shaded spaces in Figure XXXXX have been taken out of the aerial photo context and have been linked to photographs taken from the north-south streets. The images convey the lack of interaction between the built environment and the public space as the pedestrian wanders the streets of Sunnyside. (Continued overleaf)

2006, Author

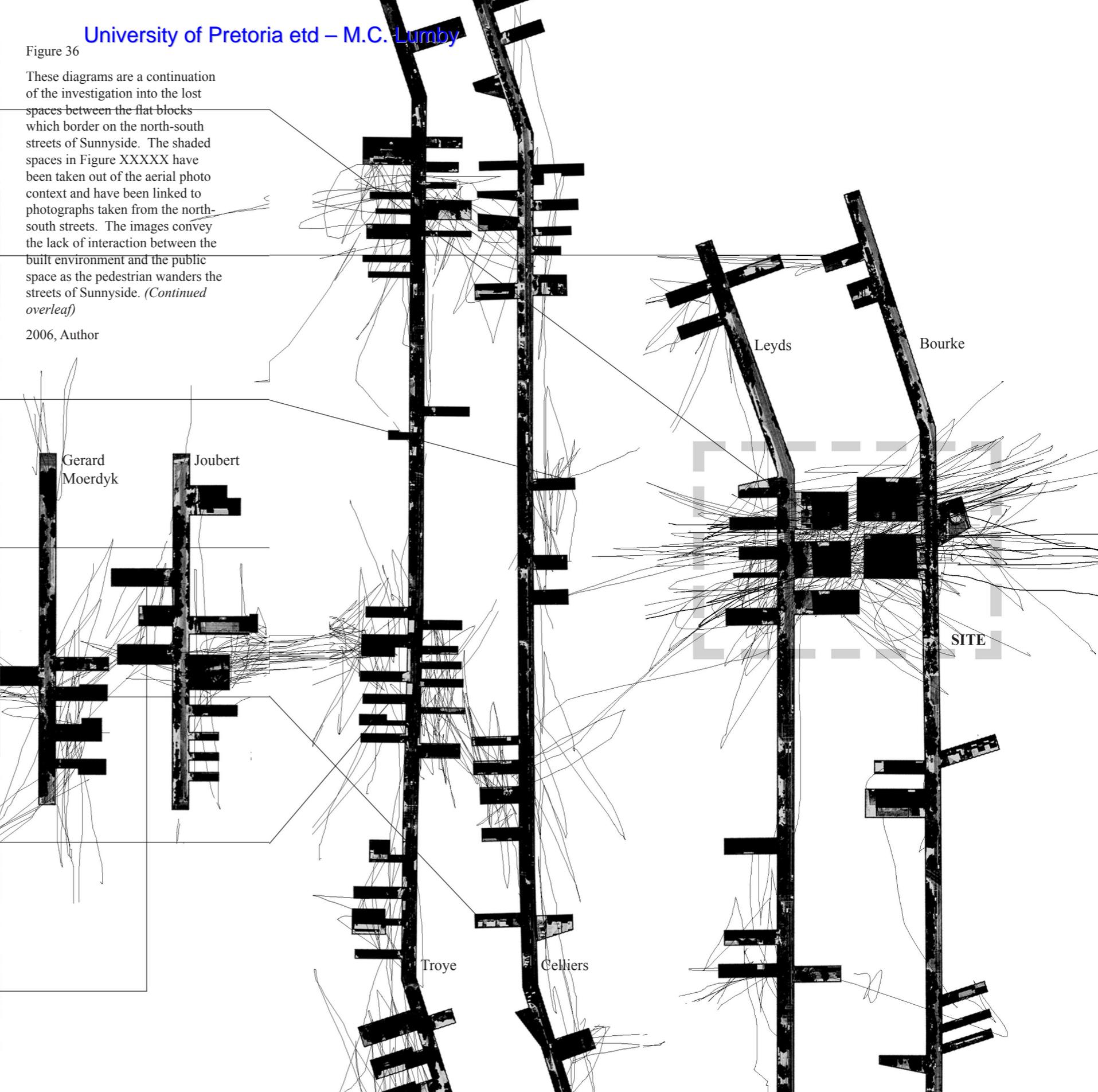
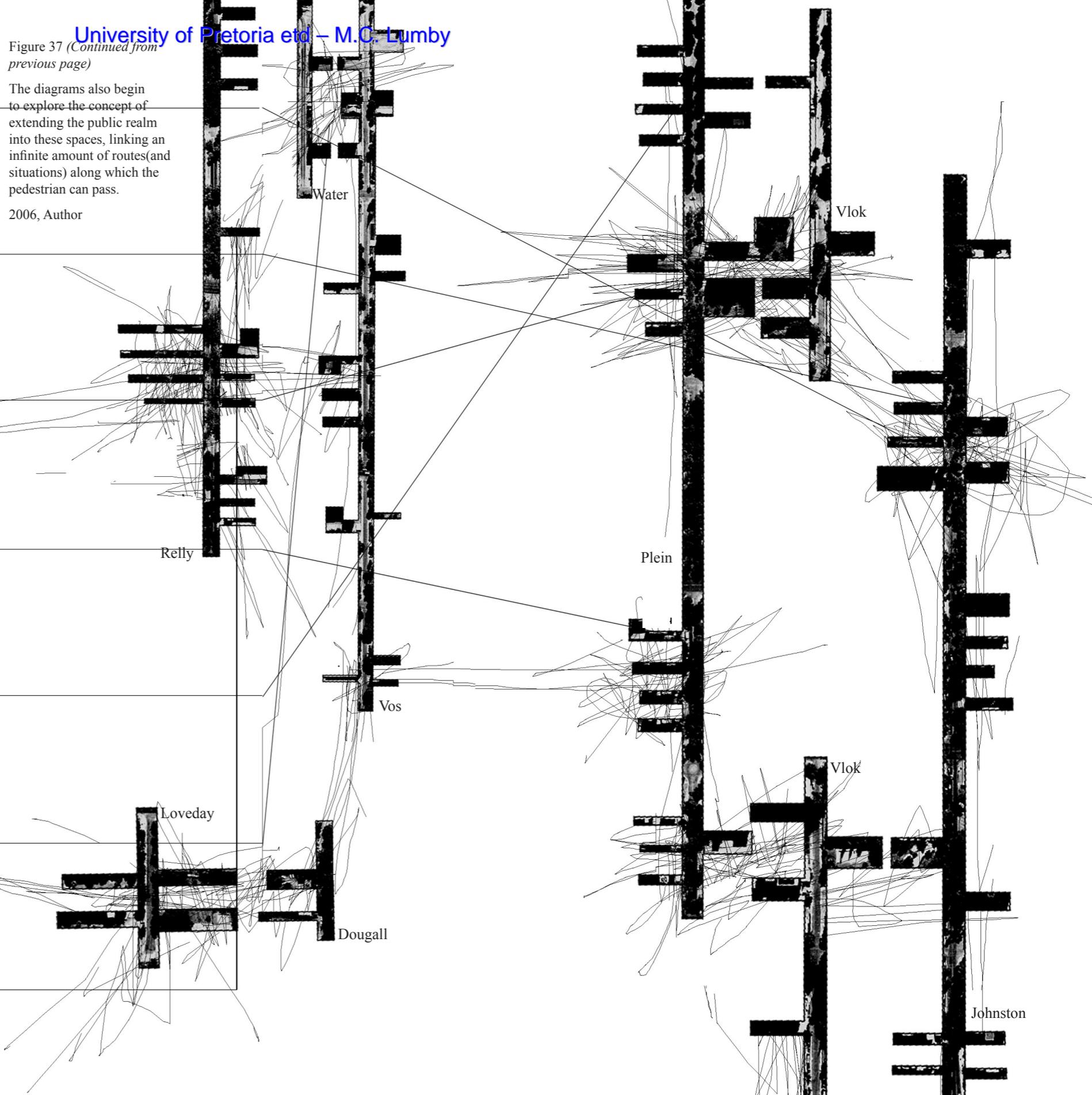


Figure 37 (Continued from previous page)

The diagrams also begin to explore the concept of extending the public realm into these spaces, linking an infinite amount of routes (and situations) along which the pedestrian can pass.

2006, Author



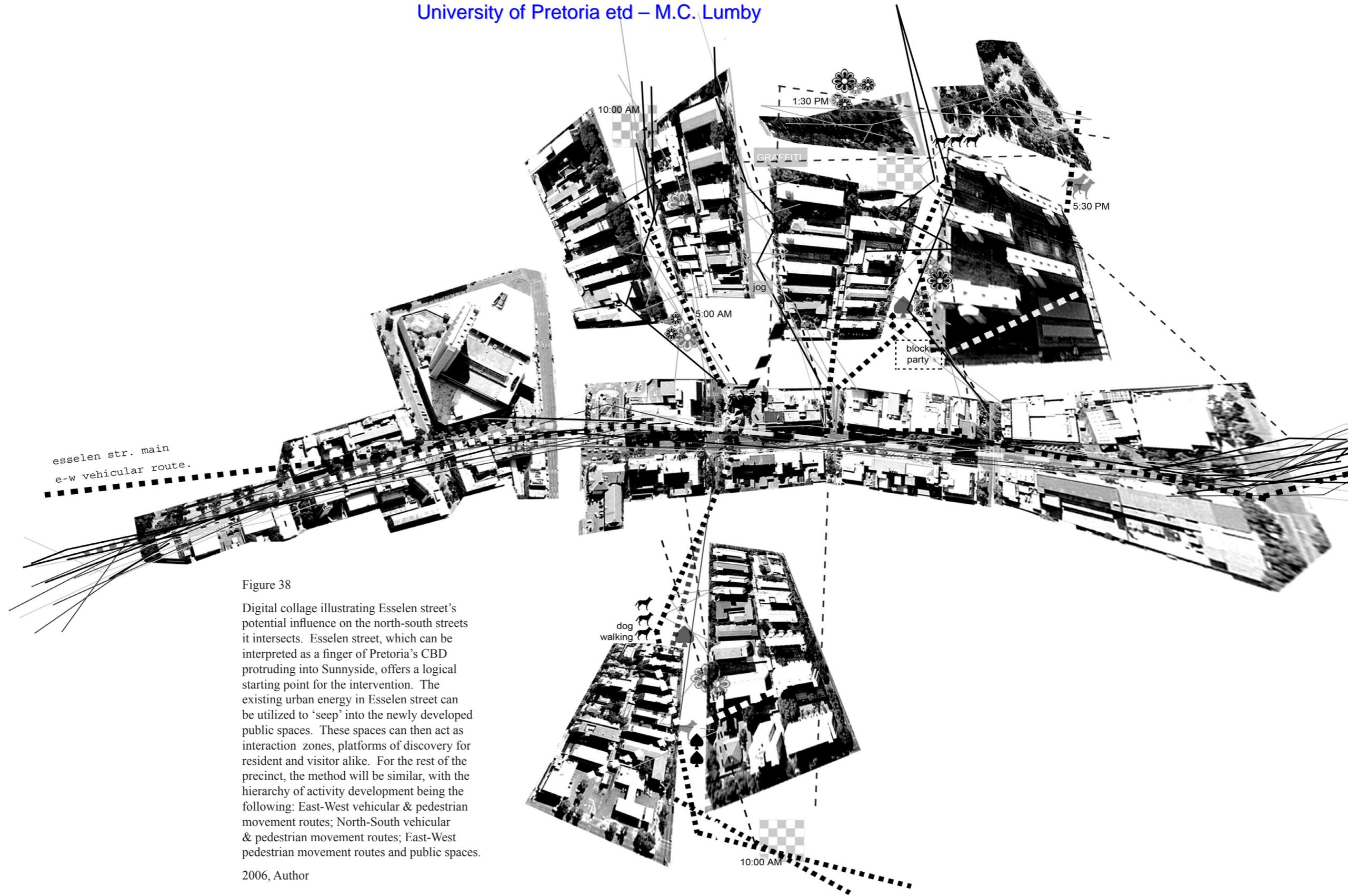


Figure 38

Digital collage illustrating Esselen street's potential influence on the north-south streets it intersects. Esselen street, which can be interpreted as a finger of Pretoria's CBD protruding into Sunnyside, offers a logical starting point for the intervention. The existing urban energy in Esselen street can be utilized to 'seep' into the newly developed public spaces. These spaces can then act as interaction zones, platforms of discovery for resident and visitor alike. For the rest of the precinct, the method will be similar, with the hierarchy of activity development being the following: East-West vehicular & pedestrian movement routes; North-South vehicular & pedestrian movement routes; East-West pedestrian movement routes and public spaces.

2006, Author

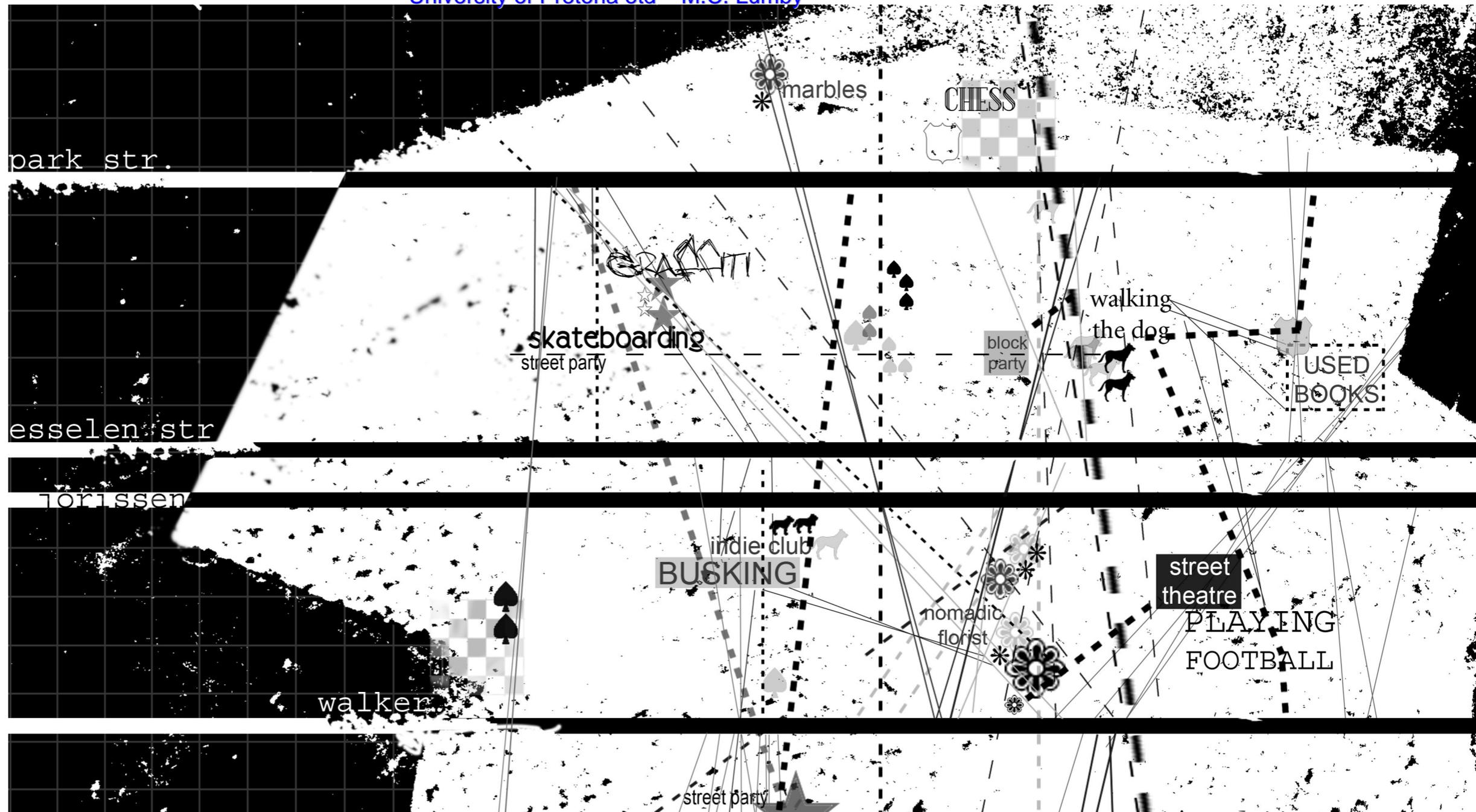


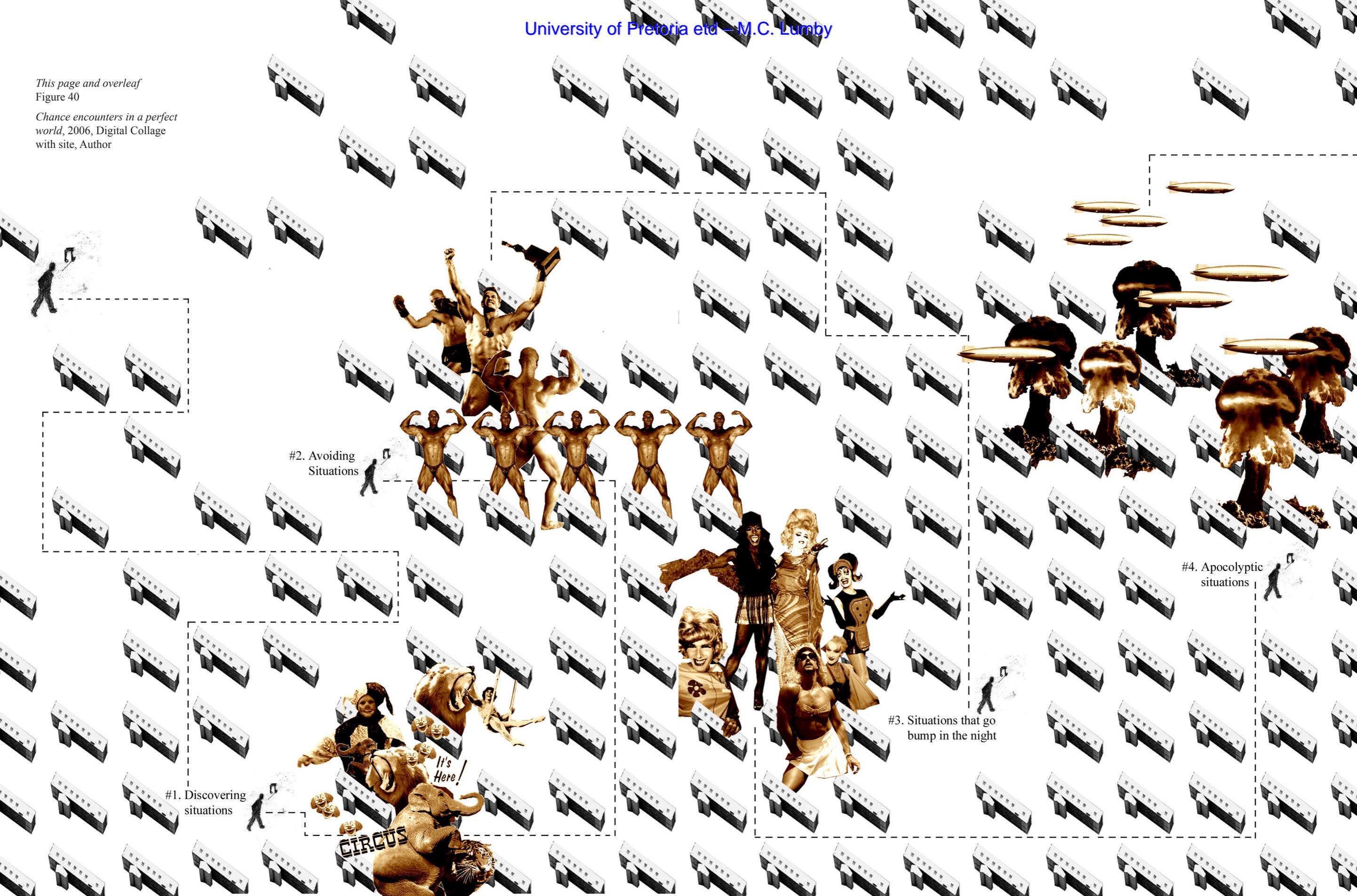
Figure 39

Digital datascape illustrating possible activities which can begin to develop in the newly created public space within the Sunnyside precinct. The horizontal bands represent the four vehicular arterials in the region. The activities occur away from the main roads within the residential realm, hidden from the daily commuter.

2006, Author

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Figure 40

Chance encounters in a perfect
world, 2006, Digital Collage
with site, Author

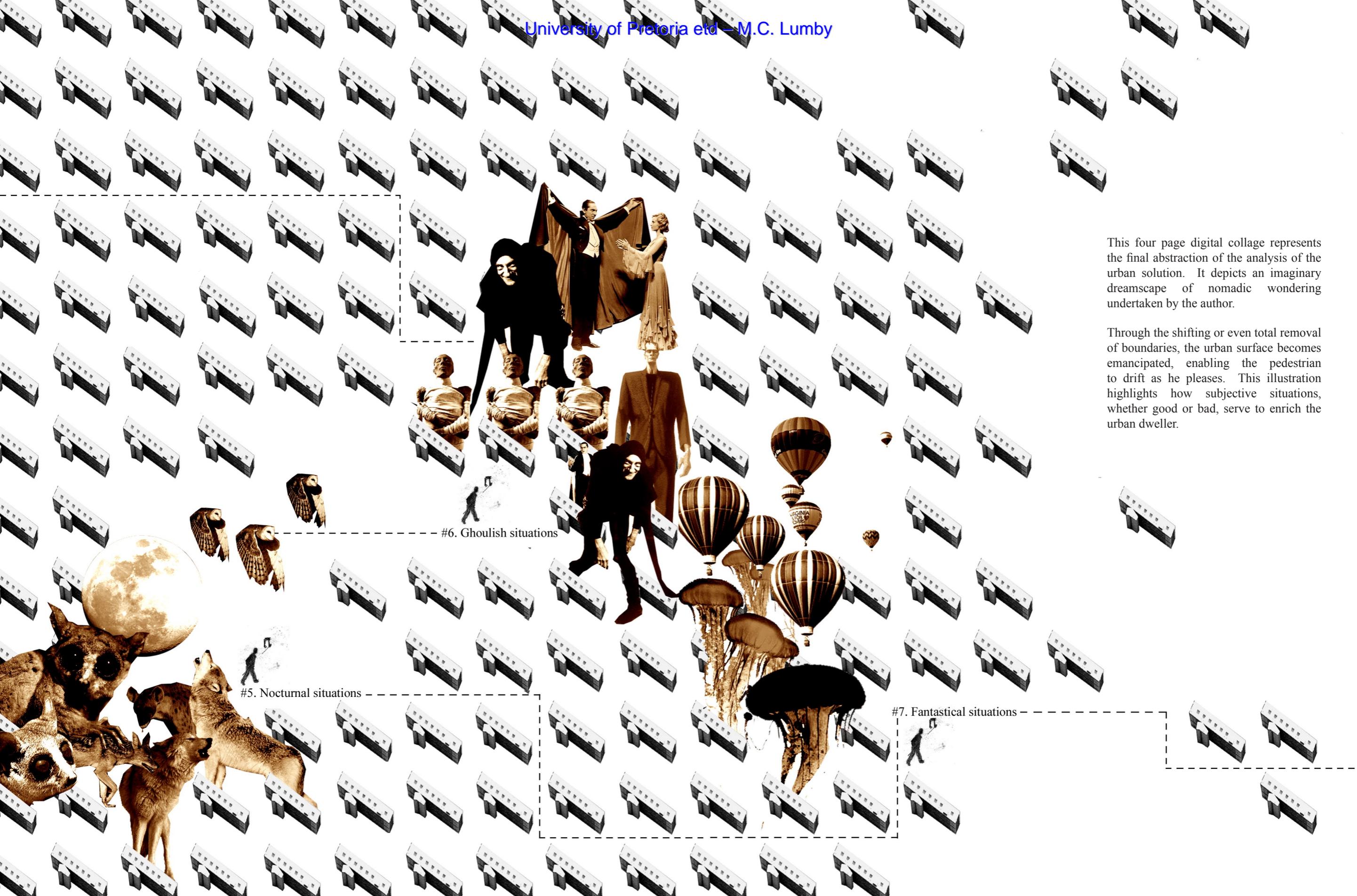


#2. Avoiding
Situations

#1. Discovering
situations

#3. Situations that go
bump in the night

#4. Apocalyptic
situations



This four page digital collage represents the final abstraction of the analysis of the urban solution. It depicts an imaginary dreamscape of nomadic wondering undertaken by the author.

Through the shifting or even total removal of boundaries, the urban surface becomes emancipated, enabling the pedestrian to drift as he pleases. This illustration highlights how subjective situations, whether good or bad, serve to enrich the urban dweller.

#6. Ghoulish situations

#5. Nocturnal situations

#7. Fantastical situations