Learning from the Commonplace:

Designing Diversity

by
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

The commonplace is the realm that directly exists within the ordinary user's reach and is the everyday lived in experience of the city. Margaret Crawford, the author of *Everyday Urbanism*, expresses that "an amazing number of social, spatial and aesthetic meanings can be found in the repeated activities and conditions that constitute our daily, weekly and yearly routines. The utterly ordinary reveals a fabric of space and time defined by a complex realm of social practices- a conjuncture of accident, desire and habit"[1]. Similarly the study of the spatial qualities of the everyday urban fabric have been studied through diagrams and mapping in Robert Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* and Atelier Bow Wow's *Pet Architecture*. Both address bringing awareness to an informal urban landscape that is not conventionally considered beautiful or is an aesthetic that practices aspire to achieve. Venturi and Atelier Bow Wow chose to take on a light hearted view of the phenomenon by drawing on popular culture so that it may be more easily accepted. This is hinted in the terminology that they have coined such as "the duck", "the decorated shed" and "pet architecture". However, in doing so they have diminished its significance to current architectural practice. In Koolhas' vision of the *Metropolitan Condition* he acknowledges that informal urban conditions such as the commonplace remains "largely outside the field of vision of official architecture and criticism"[2].

This thesis asserts that an informal bottom-up urban setting has substantial value to formal architecture. In reality, top-down and bottom-up phenomena are not two distinct systems but a weighted system with opposing levels of control and freedom influencing the same elements. This thesis seeks to extract the genetic code of the commonplace as a design instrument. It aims to uncover the underlying design principles within the urban environment and redeploy them as operative design strategies. Although a systematic design approach that inherently suggests regularity and order seems like the antithesis of the bottom-up driven commonplace, the generic rules implied by top-down design are nevertheless part of the same spectrum which emphasizes the properties of the commonplace by becoming the key counterpoint.

Drawing from precedents, research begins from pure documentation and analysis of the existing but goes one step further to discover the genetic armature of the commonplace. Analysis must therefore shift from the singular element to understanding multiple elements that act as interconnected layers so that one may discover the overall quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the commonplace. The genetics of the commonplace are comprised of complex layers of building fabric, signage, occupation and culture.

The design portion of the thesis envisions the potential to merge the properties of top-down and bottom-up as a design strategy. In particular, the thesis embraces a new methodology of design through scripting. Parametric coding creates an active rule set that is able to work through complex iterations at a global and local scale. By coding flexibility into a system with defined spatial, programmatic and other context specific limits, the results will push opposing characteristics to their full capacity to discover the unrealized power of architecture to embody both emergent and hierarchical relationships.

1 Mehrotra, Rahul. Everyday Urbanism: Margaret Crawford vs. Michael Speaks. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan, Taubman College of Architecture, 2005.
2 Koolhaas, Rem. Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan. New ed. New York: Monacelli Press, 1994.

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Author's Original Watercolour, Chinatown, Toronto

EVERYDAY URBANISM

Everyday Urbanism "emphasizes the primacy of human experience as the fundamental aspect of any definition of urbanism"[1]. It mainly refers to the temporary transformation of the city through participatory acts and events such as garage sales and street vendors (fig.1.2). Advocates of everyday urbanism urge architects to design in anticipation or accommodate such instances of local improvisation. *Everyday Urbanism* "claims space, solves site and program constraints with smart -if sometimes temporary- solutions, aspires for a better present, and works within a framework of given conditions and histories. It has an energy that architects, landscape architects, planners and urban designers repeatedly try to capture"[2].

1 Mehrotra, Rahul. Everyday Urbanism: Margaret Crawford vs. Michael Speaks. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan, Taubman College of Architecture, 2005.
2 Mehrotra, Rahul. Everyday Urbanism: Margaret Crawford vs. Michael Speaks. Ann Arbor,

CLUTTER AS PERSONAL MUSUEMS

The everyday city is synonymous with consumerism. Consumerism is integral to our daily lives and produces items which we selectively choose to fabricate our living environment. From the clothing we wear, the food we eat and appliances we use, consumerism is at the forefront of both essential needs and leisure. Personal museums are the smallest scale in which intense consumerism operates. It is the personalization of space through objects and furniture. It is also a fascinating expression of culture that was extensively studied in *My Desk is My Castle (fig. 1.1)*. Hundreds of small objects become the tools of customization and territorialization of an otherwise generic setting. Particularly evident at the micro-scale of a display, clutter is comprised of many small parts that are strategically and meaningfully placed to form a collective presence.

fig. 1.1: Excerpt from My Desk is My Castle , 2011

fig. 1.2: Roppongi Flea Market, Tokyo
(photo credit: Style Natura)

CLUTTER AS URBAN ARTIFACTS

Signs of consumerism dominate the commonplace. In extreme cases, the product itself becomes architecture. Vending machines and signage overwhelm the physical building or street and become the primary definition of space. In these instances, the presence of clutter replaces architecture and has its own logic and autonomy. The urban fabric changes to accommodate these artifacts such as the creation of concrete steps to serve as platforms for the vending machines (fig. 1.3). Clutter does not merely populate the urban fabric it grows into it as well. Urbanism becomes a kind of responsive product design. It generates urban showcases to display urban artifacts. Although clutter may be overlooked and deemed insubstantial, it does have a tangible impact on the built environment.

fig. 1.3: Vending Machines Line the Streets of Tokyo, (photo credit: acouplevagabonds)

CLUTTER AS CULTURAL SKINS

At the scale of a street or community, clutter begins to influence the overall appearance of the building fabric. High density signage overtakes the facade of buildings and becomes the primary element that demarcates space (fig.1.4). The visual layering and gestalt principles at play prompt us to read the many signs as a collective whole. The shift from a singular to an overall field condition draws out many interrelated relationships that are woven together to create a distinct character and atmosphere of a place. Clutter at this large urban scale significantly creates a new kind of architectural language and becomes a layer of cultural skin.

fig. 1.4: September 28, 2014. Chinatown, Toronto

COMMONPLACE

The commonplace is the everyday lived in experience of the diverse urban landscape. In contrast to everyday urbanism, the commonplace has more permanent and larger footprint in the city which can often be traced back to its historical roots. The commonplace is comparable to a stage that sustains a variety of activities whereas everyday urbanism describes singular events which may not be context specific. The aesthetics of the commonplace are heavily influenced by the characteristic textures of daily life identified as the bottom-up customization of space marked by signs of occupation. It is a humble yet vibrant atmosphere (fig.1.5). This is particularly prevalent in areas that are highly charged by consumerism culture where the concentration of user erected signage and goods overwhelm the facade of buildings and become a second skin or thickened dynamic threshold. Despite the chaotic appearance and constant flux of the commonplace, underlying rules and hierarchies keep the system in balance. The genetic armature of the commonplace can be defined as three orders: building fabric, signage and occupation.

fig. 1.6: June 12, 2015. Chinatown, Toronto

COMMONPLACE OF BUILDING FABRIC

The building serves as the backdrop for the commonplace (fig.1.6). The building occupies the largest percentage of the visual field and, therefore, is critical to shaping the overall appearance of the commonplace. Variations in building height, volume, setback, fenestration and materiality contribute to bringing visual and experiential diversity to the street. The fixed building fabric determines the underlying order as to where free floating objects such as signage, canopies, and products are placed. The various alignment points of these temporal objects to its context shape the entire flow of activity across the street. As a result of this nested relationship, generic buildings with little variations can be detrimental to producing a successful commonplace.

fig. 1.5: September 28, 2014. The Annex, Toronto

COMMONPLACE OF SIGNAGE

Globalization and consumerism are intrinsic to our daily life. The socio-spatial interactions of everyday life are sustained by the commonplace which is the centralization of our essential needs and leisurely pursuits. Signage is the physical abstraction of the products and services that we consume. The commonplace recognizes that signage is becoming the dominant visual phenomenon of the globalized city (fig. 1.7). High density signage is able to create a second skin or thickened threshold with as much or more visual prominence as the building fabric. Although the city implements signage bylaws it is very much a user generated aesthetic. Signage closely reflects the chronology and hierarchy of the street. It exists on a relatively temporal layer, routinely transforming the atmosphere of the commonplace as it shifts from day to night and the removal or addition of signs occurs every few years. As architects, it is important to acknowledge signage as the new aesthetic of the city. Understanding the perceptual threshold between signage that is generic and overlooked versus signage as generators of atmosphere will be of value to designers.

fig. 1.7: September 28, 2014. Chinatown, Toronto

COMMONPLACE OF OCCUPATION

The temporal display of goods and products change the experience of the commonplace on a seasonal, daily and even hourly basis. As elements akin to street furniture, the commonplace of occupation is at the forefront of our encounter of the commonplace. These are tactile or visually stimulating objects that invite our participation and engage our senses (fig.1.8). Although the commonplace of occupation is the most unpredictable and dynamic layer of the commonplace, products are generally arranged contextually so as to frame the entrance of the store or placed at intervals according to the building footprint it is associated with. This subdivides and gives the street rhythm.

fig. 1.8: September 28, 2014. Wellseley and Parliament, Toronto

DIFFERENTIATION / VARIATION / DIVERSITY

Architectural diversity is comparable to the various breeds of dogs. Atelier Bow Wow uses this analogy to describe the mix of differentiation and variation that divide and unify the canine family (fig.1.8). Although dogs have developed into diverse types and breeds they still all belong to the same biological classification of canines. The constant factor between the breeds is its basic anatomy but variations allow new capacities which are often related to genetic differences as a result of context-specific conditions. Similarly, architectural diversity as a key component of the commonplace must consist of components that can strike the fine balance between individual uniqueness and coherence to the larger urban fabric.

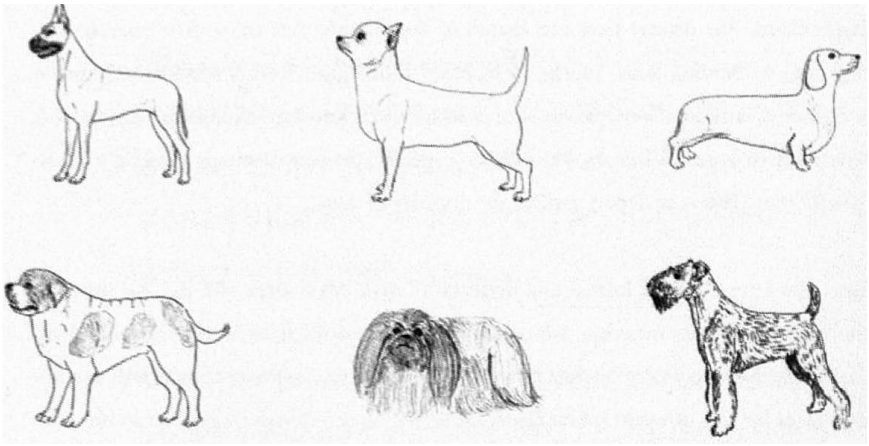


fig. 1.8: Excerpt from Space of Echo, Echo of Space by Atelier Bow Wow, 2009

EXTREME COMMONPLACE

A paradox in a sense that the banalest aspects of living is manifested to the extreme and becomes a noticeable unique phenomenon that shapes cultural identity. The overwhelming signage of the extreme commonplace acts as urban gestures that define the flow of the city in the wrapping of entire buildings with large-scale signage (fig.1.9).

fig. 1.9: April 4, 2013, Shinjuku, Tokyo

fig. 2.1: Swarming Starlings, (photo credit: analogue forever)

COMMONPLACE MANIFESTO

The characteristics of the commonplace cannot be understood without first defining it against similar and existing architectural conditions. In contrast to informal and everyday urbanism, the commonplace is the condition that returns value to the observer and does not simply facilitate their needs. Rather than act as an urban backdrop, the commonplace is a higher order that inspires. The reciprocal power between the commonplace and the observer is called agency. In philosophy, there is an "intuitive distinction between the things that merely happen to people — the events they undergo — and the various things they genuinely do. The latter events, the doings, are the acts or actions of the agent"[1]. Similarly, architecture that merely happens out of necessity is passive. The commonplace is an active agent of architecture which allows the observer to have a certain degree of awareness towards the set of communicated values that the built object conveys. The commonplace is not just about how the user is able to manipulate space to suit their everyday needs, it also addressees how the built environment can implement "a kind of direct control or guidance"[2] over the behaviour of the city. Architecture that has an embodied behaviour generates culture. Commonplaces, therefore, have a level of intensity that transcends the built form and has more similarities with emergent phenomena such as swarms which have raw atmospheric qualities (fig.2.1). This thesis analyzes what constitutes the agents within the commonplace and how architects can begin to devise a new kind of design methodology. By utilizing architectural "agents" as the unit of design, it may be possible to "build" culture.

The notion of informal urbanism has been widely studied in architecture, urban planning, and cultural studies. The general consensus towards informal urbanism is that it is distinctly "a state of exception and ambiguity"[3] which may result in relaxed regulations and a deviation from, or degradation of, a certain standard of urban planning. For the most part, informal urbanism is associated with a kind of underlying tension and issues of territory. Slums are the main associations made with informal urban spaces (fig.2.2). The built fabric in a slum is generated out of necessity regardless of whether or not it brings pleasure to the user.

fig. 2.2: Slums, Mumbai. (photo credit: Sajad Hussain)

1 Wilson, George. "Action." Stanford University. March 18, 2002. Accessed December 9, 2015. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/action/#NatActAge.
2 Wilson, George. "Action." Stanford University. March 18, 2002
3 A. Roy, Urban Informality. Toward an Epistemology of Planning, «Journal of the American Planning Association», vol. 71, n. 2, 2005, pp. 147-158.

Another popular field of study in architecture is *Everyday Urbanism* coined by Margaret Crawford. Her book describes the conditions for social gatherings as the merging of public and private realms through material culture. There are written observations of daily life activities and several photographic essays documenting how the public asserts their identity into the everyday urban fabric in an impromptu manner. Individuals occupy ambiguous space by marking their presence with their goods (fig.2.3). She draws parallels to garage sales and street vendors as a kind of guerrilla transformation of the city. *Everyday Urbanism* "claims space, solves site and program constraints with smart- if sometimes temporary- solutions, aspires for a better present, and works within a framework of given conditions and histories"[4]. *Everyday Urbanism* is a highly palpable space but it is still bounded by the existing conditions. It has its own distinct logic but only develops its own character in the leftover spaces of the city. However, the phenomenon is so dispersed and evident throughout the city that it fails to generate any distinct form of culture. Although essential to our experience of the everyday city, *Everyday Urbanism* remains passive and fleeting.

Pet Architecture is a term coined by Atelier Bow Wow and describes "amazingly small buildings between streets, along widened roads and spaces between tracks and roads. Most of those buildings are cheaply built, and therefore they are not spectacular in design and they do not use the forefront of technology"[5]. Unlike the temporal events that characterize *Everyday Urbanism, Pet Architecture* has a more permanent physical presence that evokes attraction. Atelier Bow Wow suggests this affinity "may be because their [humble] presence produces a relaxed atmosphere…Their shapes and forms that do not conform to styles and pretensions are quite refreshing to our eyes. They illustrate unique ideas with elements of fun without yielding to their unfavourable conditions…Their laudable presence…are like pets"[6]. Atelier Bow Wow created a guidebook documenting these various "pets" (fig.2.4). Each case study includes a photograph, map and simple diagram highlighting the key features of an individual building. Pet Architecture is the bridge between *Everyday Urbanism* and the commonplace. It is not quite at the large atmospheric scale of the commonplace street but the deliberate customization of space elevates clutter to have cultural implications.

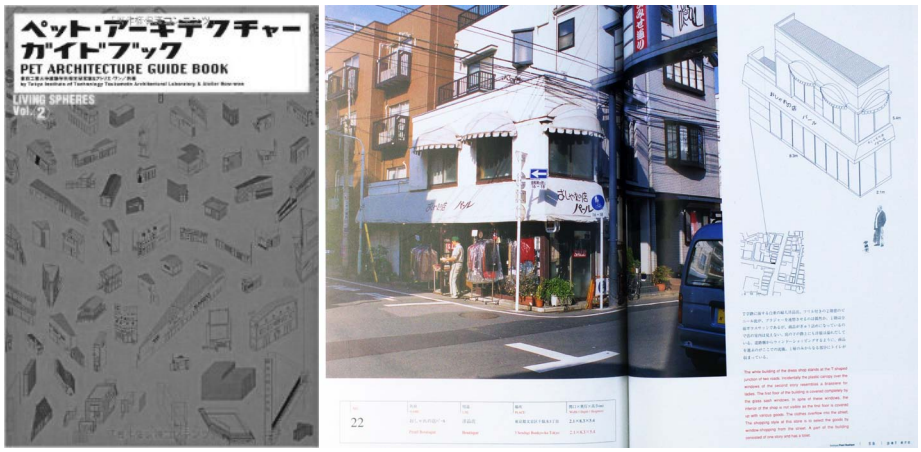


fig. 2.4: Excerpt from Pet Architecture, Atelier Bow Wow

4 Crawford, Margaret, Michael Speaks, and Rahul Mehrotra. 2005. Everyday urbanism : Margaret crawford vs. michael speaks. Ann Arbor, Mich. : New York: Ann Arbor, Mich. : University of Michigan, A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture ; New York : Distributed Arts Press.
5 Shinada,Kyoichi. Pet Architecture Guide Book. Tokyo: World Photo Pr., 2002.
6 Shinada,Kyoichi. Pet Architecture Guide Book. Tokyo: World Photo Pr., 2002.

fig. 2.3: Aerial Photograph of Beach, Miami, (photo credit: Antoine Rose)

The analysis of highly consumer driven urban fabric in *Learning from Las Vegas* by Venturi and Brown also paves the way for research of the commonplace. The written and diagrammatic analysis of commercial phenomena such as signage are highly valuable resources (fig.2.5). Las Vegas serves as an example of the extreme show of consumption and entertainment acting as agents to stimulate the visitor to participate in the idea of leisure and luxury. Although the aesthetics of Las Vegas is certainly debatable- as is the commonplace, the importance is understanding the qualities that allow the environment to have affect. The unit of design is based not on sizes of brick but on pure experiences. Culture is built upon these architectural agents. Venturi and Brown advocate architects to be more receptive to the tastes and values of common people and less about the aspirations to create iconic architecture reflective of the designer's ideals. Perhaps the most distinct marker of the values of common people is through signage.

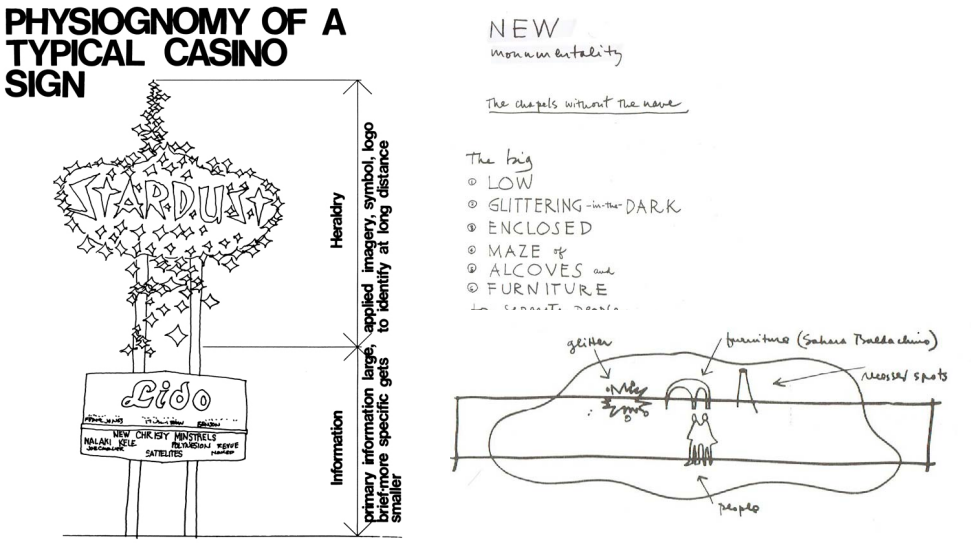


fig. 2.5: Diagrams from Learning From Las Vegas, Venturi and Brown

Signs are prime examples of agents because they visually communicate the values and objectives of the community. Commonplaces with a high density of signs reverse the presence of conventional architecture. The moment the number of signs overpowers its passive backdrop of standardized brick clad buildings, architecture shifts from being the primary (agent) to secondary (passive). The cities of today are increasingly marked by consumerism. Architects must discover a new way of coming to terms with the commonplace. There must be an affirmation that fields of signs and objects of consumption are now becoming a dominant visual phenomenon in the city. The mainstream critique towards the consumer driven areas of the city has been to simply create a noticeable pause amidst the "noise". Designs purposely work against the energy of the commonplace. Many companies are now branding themselves with minimal and blank architecture such as the Apple Store in New York (fig.2.6) -designed by Bohlin Cywinski Jackson Architects where the entire retail portion is hidden underground. It is a paradox that the non-contextual generic design becomes a contextual response to the commonplace. It is precisely the lack of character that gives it character. While this approach works well for single incisions in the city such as flagship stores, designs that work in harmony with the commonplace are able to integrate with the multi-faceted layers of the commonplace and capture an entire field of experiences.

fig. 2.6: Apple Store, New York, Bohlin Cywinski Jackson Architects, (photo credit: BCJ Architects)

The design portion of the thesis seeks to utilize the abstract qualities of the commonplace that transcend built form as the basis of design. It explores how to reconstruct the commonplace not from generic dimensions or building codes but from more abstract characteristics such as differentiation, variation, gestalt, chaos, networks and field conditions that are able to generate an atmosphere of agency. This is discovered through three major layers of the commonplace: building fabric, signage and occupation. Perhaps this study of the genetic make-up of the commonplace can produce a transformative relationship with current practices of architecture, shifting design methodology from a material to phenomenological approach and finding value in a typically bottom-up aesthetic.

DOCUMENTATING THE COMMONPLACE

Invisible Logic by Zhang Wei Ping documents the underlying rules that create Hong Kong's "culture of congestion. The book's documentation format draws inspiration from Atelier Bow Wow's *Pet Architecture* but goes one step further to extract urban strategies under umbrella topics such as spatial solutions for high density, co-existing program and ambiguity in the public realm to name a few. The inclusion of parti diagrams that break down the elements to individual components greatly increases comprehension (fig.2.7).

Invisible Logic captures the spirit of local globalization. Hong Kong is a city that is in constant pursuit of the qualifications of a global city such as world class infrastructure, communication, services and goods. However, it is able to maintain some sense of autonomy against the generic globalized world with a unique sense of locality and irreplaceable identity. This begins through the study of existing commonplace patterns. The commonplace coexisting or overlapping with the generic city- the merging of national and local aims can be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat.

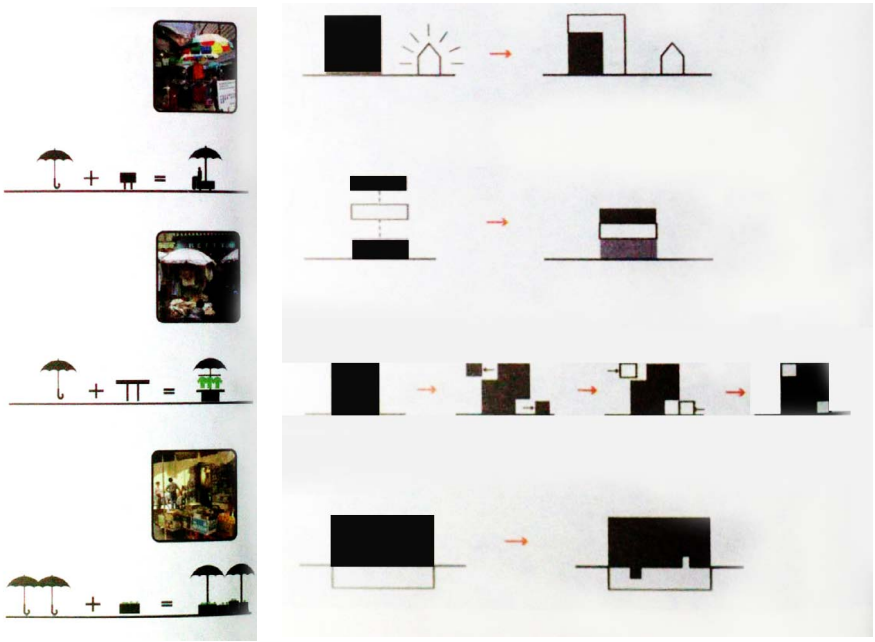
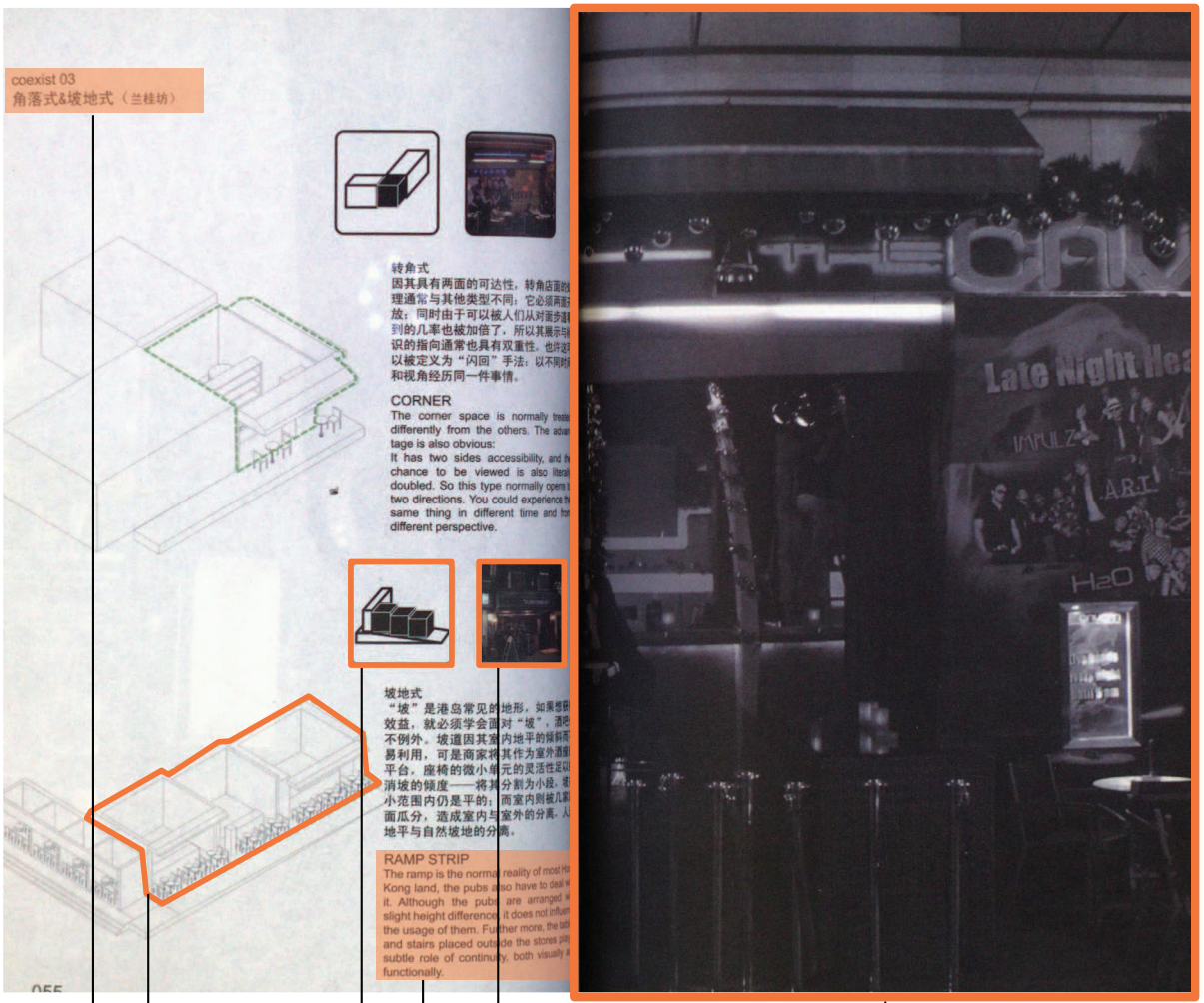


fig. 2.7: Partis, Excerpt from Invisible Logic, 1991, Zhang Wei Ping

INITIAL RESEARCH

Initial analysis of the commonplace begins with documentation using the guidebook format (fig.2.8). These are quick case studies of existing buildings or small scale city blocks. The guidebook introduces the key phenomena of the commonplace: the diverse underlying building fabric, the highly influential role of signage in our perception of the city and the spatial implications of temporary occupation.

GUIDEBOOK FORMAT



Colour thumbnail

Text description

Full page b&w photo

Parti icon

Simple axonometric drawing
with accent colour importance

Phenomenon

fig. 2.8: Excerpt from Invisible Logic, 1991, Zhang Wei Ping,

fig. 3.1: A Window Whimsically Integrated with the New, September 28, 2014. , Berkeley Church, Toronto

CH. 3.01 COMMONPLACE OF BUILDING FABRIC - MATERIALITY

The commonplace fabric of the city is an eclectic mix of historic and new buildings. A tabula rasa approach to development is neither economically feasible nor desired for the most part. People are eager to preserve some aspects of the past in order to maintain a certain cultural character that has come to define the city. However, the historic fabric is often times structurally and spatially insufficient to meet today's programatic needs. A new kind of vitality can be achieved by combining several small historic buildings and thoughtfully knitting them together with interventions that focus on unity through materiality.

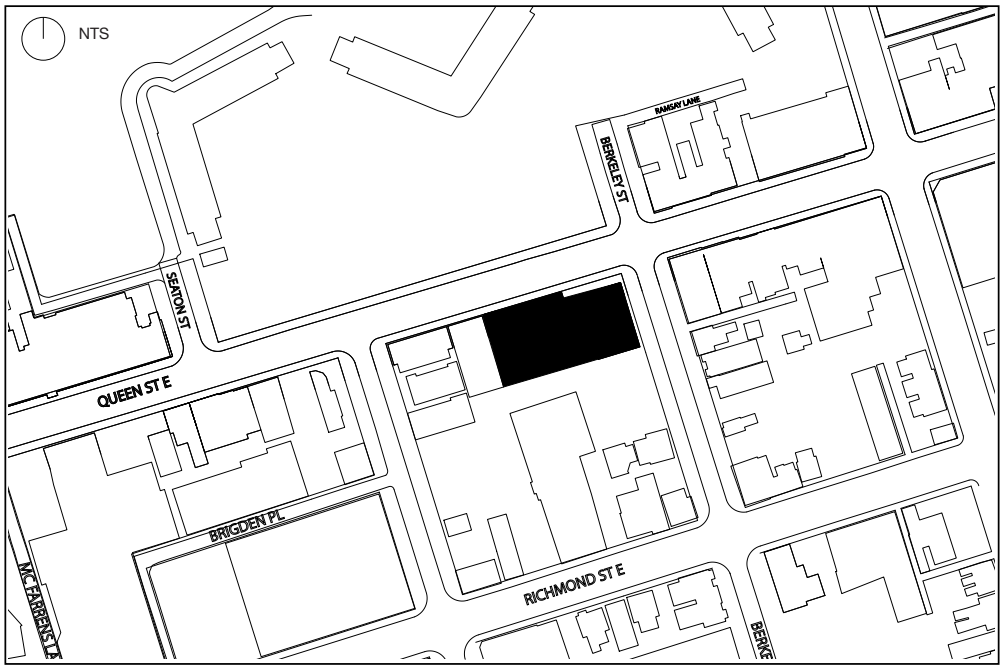


fig. 3.2: Key Plan

NAME/LOCATION: BERKELEY EVENTS, 311 QUEEN ST. EAST (1650 sq.m)

The Berkeley Field House (fig.3.2) is defined by an interweaving of historic indoor spaces and outdoor areas. It repurposes an older existing building by adding a third floor and bridges the gap between the adjacent building by introducing a patio, garden, water feature and pavilion (fig.3.3). The extents of the property are boldly marked by a red lattice fence that runs along Queen St. East (fig.3.4) (fig3.5). It is a strong visual element that ties together the building on the left. On the right, a small courtyard connects the Field House with Berkeley Church next door - another event space owned by the same company (fig.3.6).

CLASSIFICATION: TYPES OF PROGRAM

Original Historic Hardwood Flooring

Outdoor Wood Deck

Concrete Paving

Stone Hardscaping

Accent Colour Wooden Slat Fence

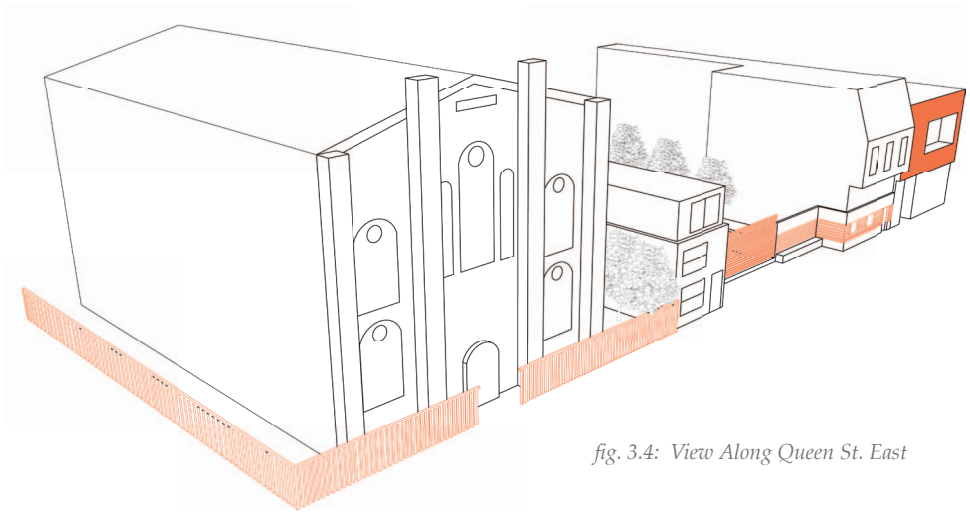


fig. 3.4: View Along Queen St. East

church entrance

event space entrance

original brick

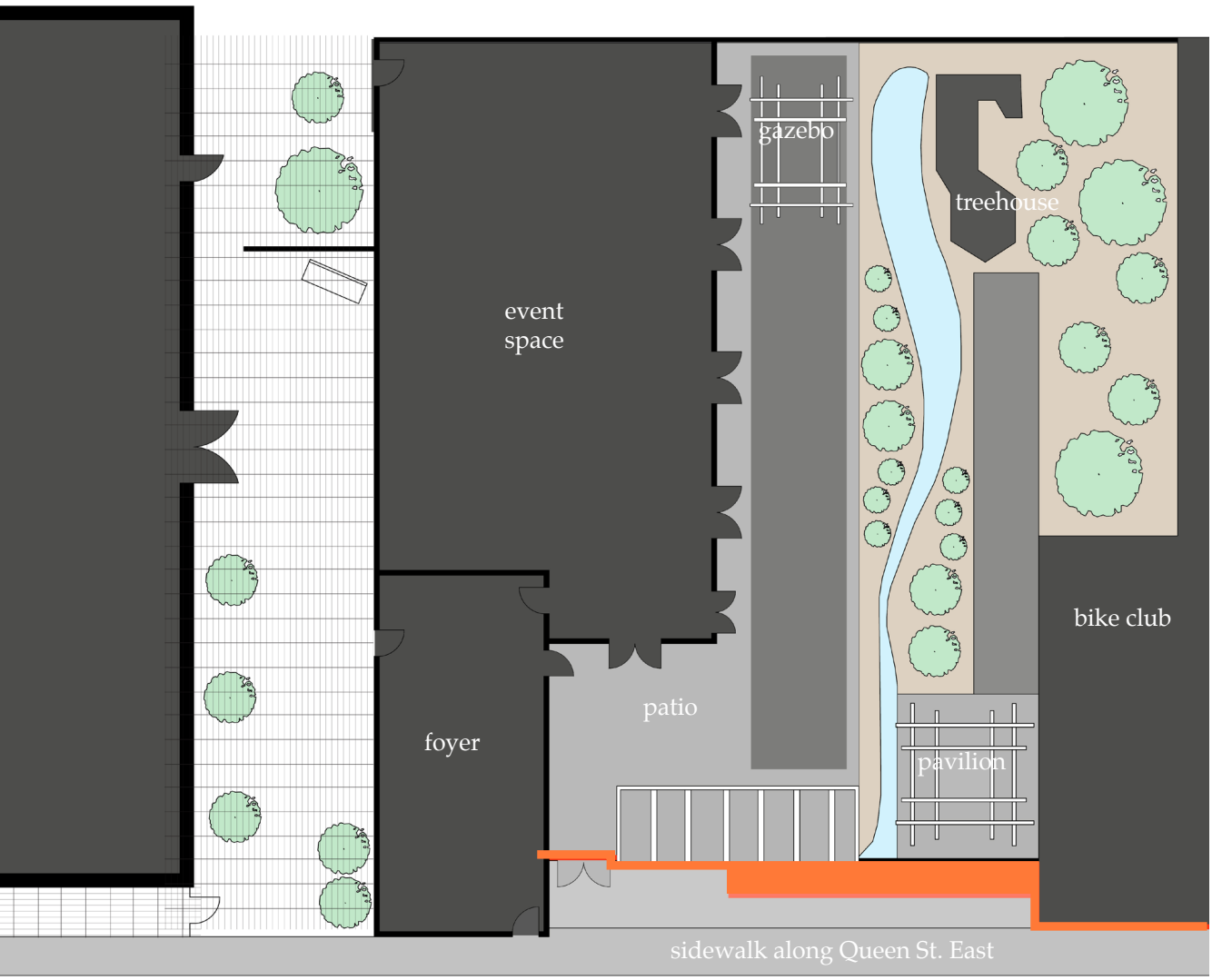


fig. 3.3: Blending Thresholds through Material, Material Plan

concrete and wood

stones and water

fig.3.5: Wood Slat Fence

CLASSIFICATION: TYPES OF PROGRAM

fig. 3.6: Street Connectivity through Material and Colour

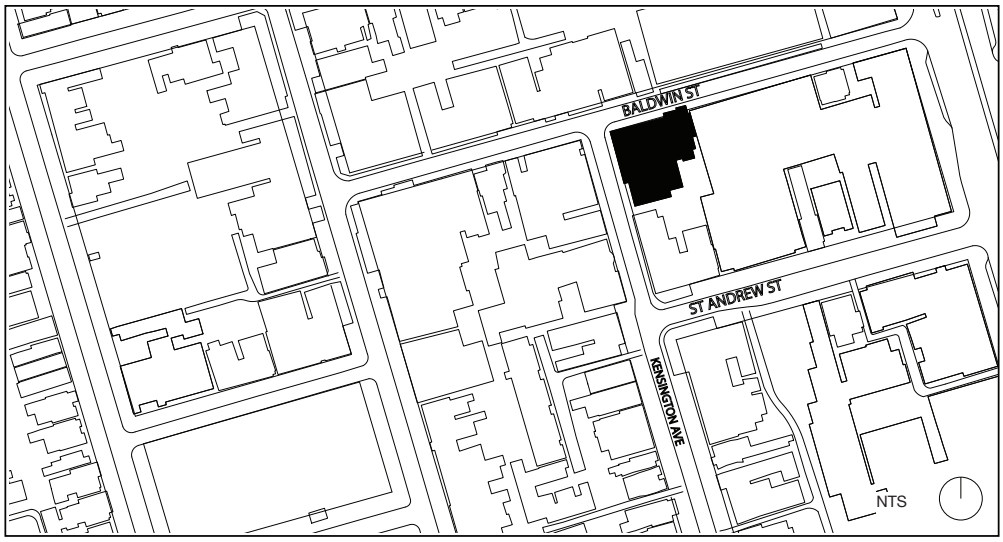


fig. 3.7: Key Plan,

NAME/LOCATION: KENSINGTON MARKET CAFE (870 sq.m)

This eclectic mix of buildings located in Kensington Market (fig.3.7), does not try to integrate the old. A newer storefront is wedged between two historic victorian houses which are blatantly cut in half (fig.3.8). Despite the chaotic clutter of buildings, the threshold between the street and building is sensitively planned. A wooden slat planter meets the sidewalk to create a small patio space. The wooden slats then wrap around the opening of the storefront and transitions into a long counter receding to the back of the cafe (fig.3.9). The continuous material effectively bridges between interior and exterior transitioning between a public and private experience.

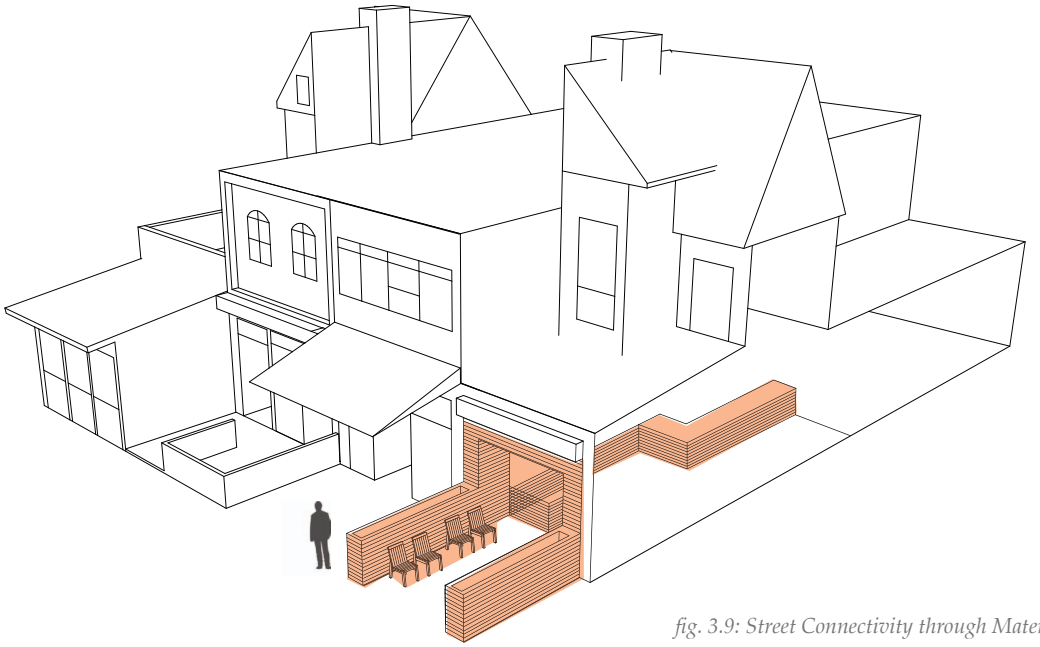


fig. 3.9: Street Connectivity through Material

fig.3.8: A Collage of Historic and New Buildings, September 28, 2014., Kensington Market, Toronto

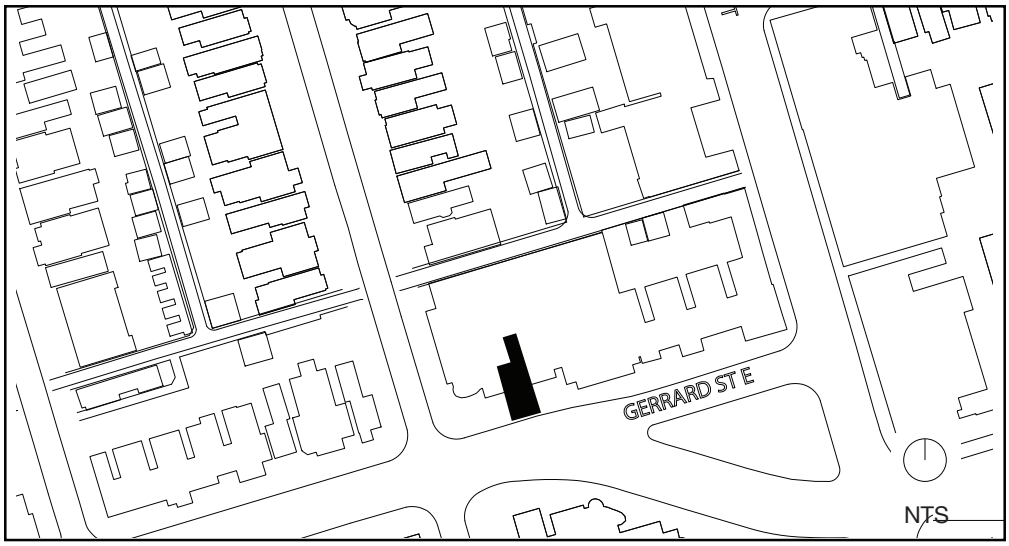


fig.3.10: Key Plan,

NAME/LOCATION: VACANCY AT PARLIAMENT & GERRAD (320 sq.m)

The restaurant (fig.3.10) climbs three floors stretching back to the patio of the connected storefront which physically links the two separate buildings. Connectivity to street and interior is established through materiality which creates a consistent visual language that clearly emphasizes the extents of the restaurant (fig.3.11). In this example, the distinct material of the facade is able to reveal the complex spatial configurations of the commonplace (fig.3.12).

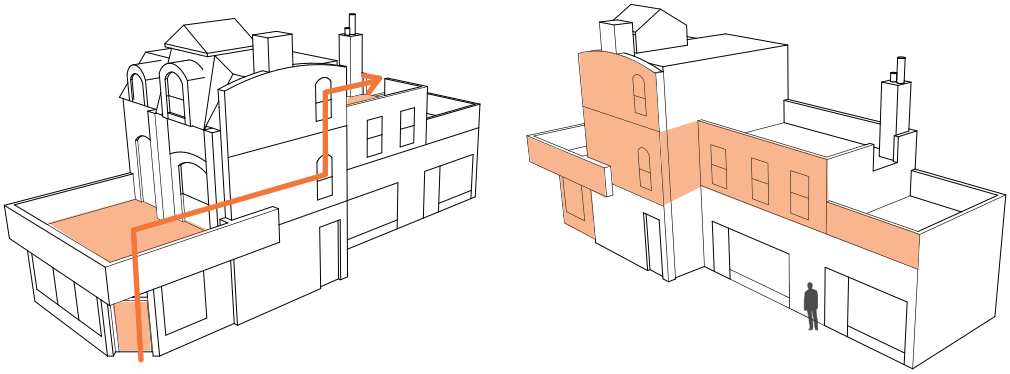


fig. 3.12: Key Plan,

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW:

A certain level of connectivity and coherence amidst a diverse mix of building fabric is key to creating the commonplace. Although variations create visual interest, overarching similarities can unify the street and create distinct groupings of experience. Materiality plays a large role in shaping the perception of the commonplace. It can visually and spatially knit together many irrelevant buildings and direct the nature of the encounter. It is also an aspect of the commonplace that can be built up over time through a layering of textures. Unlike the more permanent structure of the building, materiality offers more potential for temporary or ongoing transformation. In the investigation of the commonplace, it is vital to analyze materiality as a key strategy to manipulate the fine boundary between order and chaos.

fig. 3.11: Vacant Former Restaurant, September 28, 2014. , Parliament & Gerrad, Toronto

fig. 3.13: September 28, 2014. , Cabbagetown, Toronto

The commonplace is often comprised of many eras of buildings, mixed typologies, and stylistic differences. The chronology of the commonplace is continually overlapping as consumerism propels the commonplace to be in constant development. The push for expansion increases the density of the already mature fabric. There is little room for new interventions. As a result, the commonplace is an assemblage of adapted buildings. Renovations and additions strategically use setbacks and layers of program to create several distinct thresholds of experience (fig.3.13). In the study of the commonplace, it is important to analyze the role of setbacks and layers of program in dividing space and establishing presence.

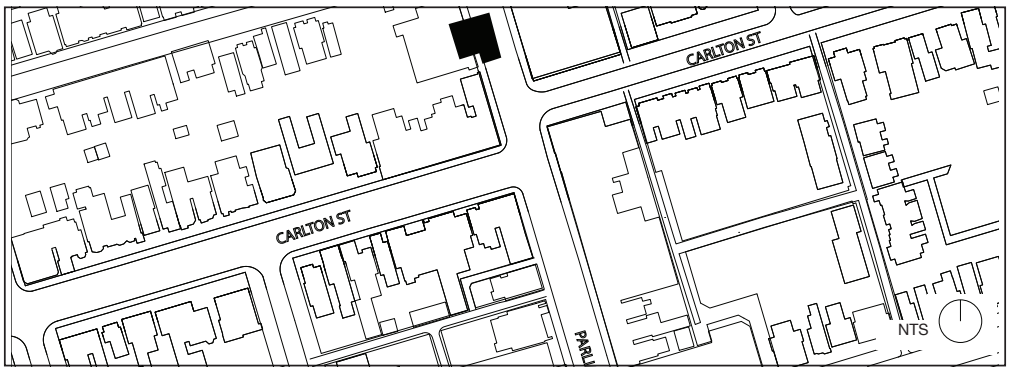


fig. 3.14: Key Plan,

NAME/LOCATION: 239 CARLTON ST. (345 sq.m)

It is common to find storefronts occupying the lower level of what used to be the front porch of old victorian houses in Toronto's Cabbagetown (fig.3.14). Retail and residential program coexist with clearly defined "front and back yards" and have varying degrees of thresholds to meet public/ private circulation needs (fig.3.15). This collage of new storefronts and old victorian houses is located in Cabbagetown where this urban phenomenon is quite common. The contrasting materiality and aesthetic style are key to creating the diverse commonplace. The interlocking volumes and overlapping program also add spatial complexity. and introduces degrees of thresholds. It is interesting to analyze the commonplace that is at the foreground (store) and background (private residence).

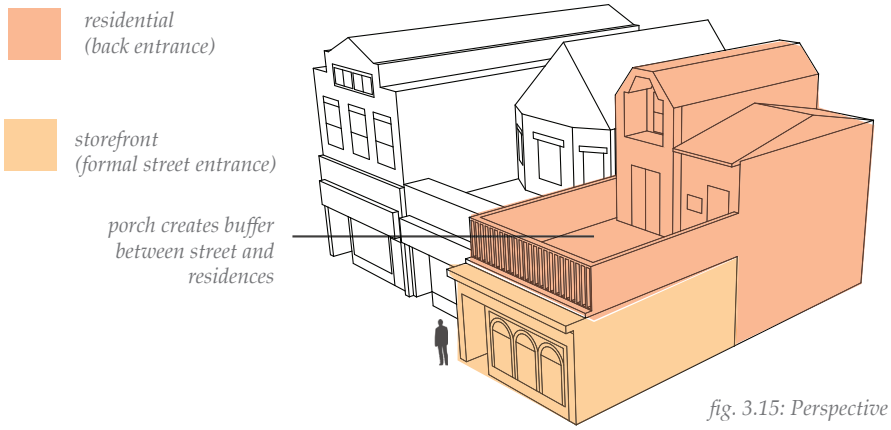


fig. 3.15: Perspective

fig. 3.16: Key Plan,

NAME/LOCATION: 540 PARLIAMENT (135 sq.m)

Located in Cabbagetown (fig.3.16), this converted historic housing has two commercial storefronts and residential units located at the back (fig.3.17). The coffee shop and gelato parlour meet the street by creating layers of thresholds through street furniture, planters, stairs and a canopy (fig.3.18). Access to the residential units via Parliament is through a narrow stair in the alleyway between the adjacent building. It leads to the back door with stairs leading to the second floor.

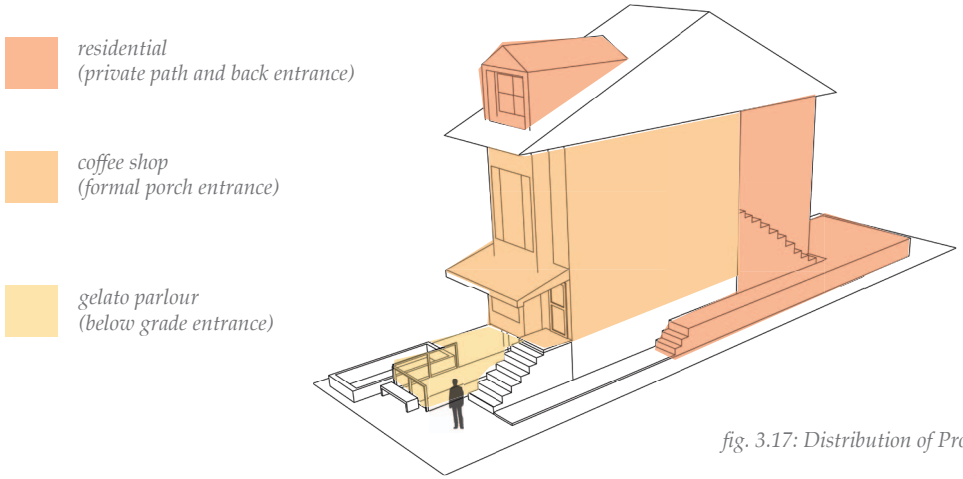


fig. 3.17: Distribution of Program

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW:

The commonplace of building fabric is defined by a complex weaving of overlapping setbacks, and thresholds. A single building can accommodate a range of public to private programs. Behind the facade, a maze-like interior connects several isolated spaces. The commonplace of building fabric is able to sustain a fine balance of unified and distinct programs. This is achieved through the careful assortment of generic and particular elements that define the thresholds of each building.

fig. 3.18: Coffee Shop and Gelato Parlour, September 28, 2014. , Cabbagetown, Toronto

fig. 3.19: September 28, 2014. Chinatown, Toronto

The commonplace is inextricably linked and sustained by consumerism (fig.3.19). The proliferation of goods is relentless and constant, yet vital to the survival of the commonplace community. It attracts attention with blinking signs and overstimulation of the senses. The product itself becomes the basis of urbanism and the store is merely a container for product distribution. Signage overwhelms the physical presence of the store and becomes the primary definition of space. In contrast to the generic interior of the stores, the various exterior signs are placed more fluidly over the building fabric. The realm of architecture exists on this dynamic plane where each intervention aims for distinction from the rest. This is the plane where ultimately the commonplace is able to break free from the generic and bring character and vitality to the city. Architects should realize the potential of signage to serves as an atmospheric proponent.

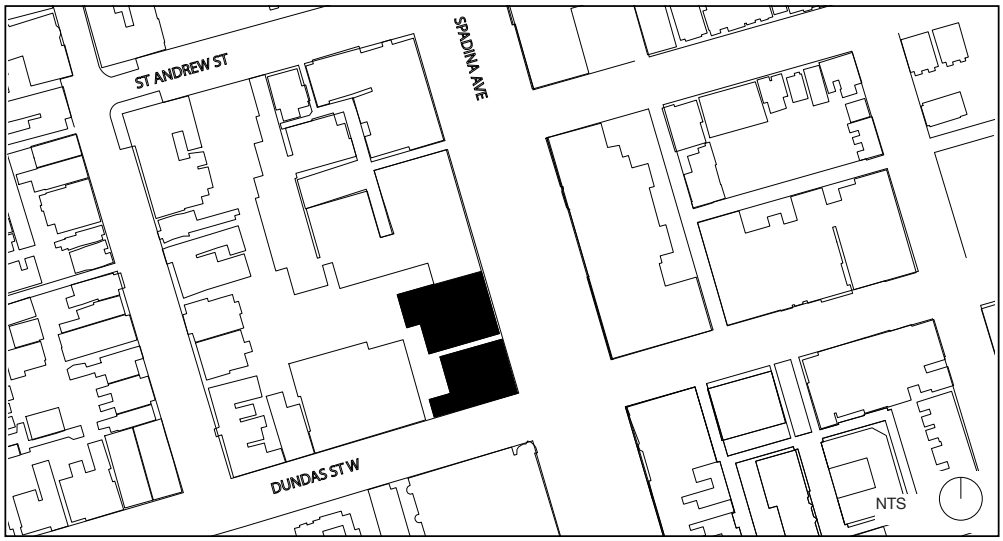


fig. 3.20: Key Plan,

NAME/LOCATION: CORNER OF SPADINA AND DUNDAS ST. W (1535 sq.m)

Toronto's Chinatown (fig.3.2) is an eclectic mix of asian restaurants, cheap household and fashion goods, tourist-oriented souvenirs, grocery stalls, traditional Chinese herbs/clinics store and various local Chinese associations and services (fig.3.22). A high concentration of residents and businesses extend from the relatively short length of Dundas Street West and Spadina Avenue. It is a messy yet vibrant sprawl that spills out onto the sidewalk and reaches beyond the building to compete for the attention of the consumer. Signage differs in size and illumination intensity based on the importance of program (fig.3.21). This expression of hierarchy allows for easier navigation of the commonplace. Overstimulation is reflective of the dense metropolis back in Asia while giving a level of reassurance to the Chinese immigrants and unique alternate cultural experience to Canadians.

CLASSIFICATION: TYPES OF SIGNAGE

most effective

Projected Lightbox
Location: Extends beyond building
Illumination: Yes
Visibility / Effectiveness: Highly visible, multi-directional address

Lightbox
Location: On the facade of the building
Illumination: Yes
Visibility / Effectiveness: Visible, pedestrians walking down the street will not see the sign until standing in front of the storefront

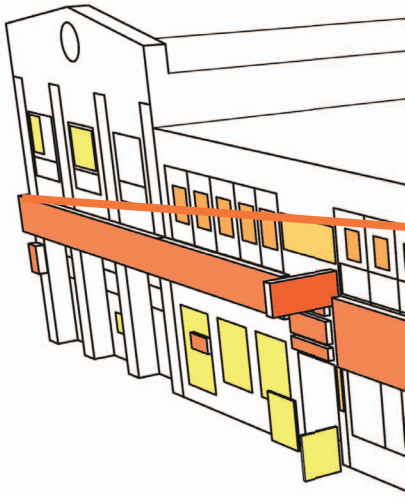
Neon Letters
Location: Behind the windows of buildings
Illumination: Yes
Visibility / Effectiveness: Overlooked during the day as lettering is thin, highly visbile at night due to bright neon colour temperature

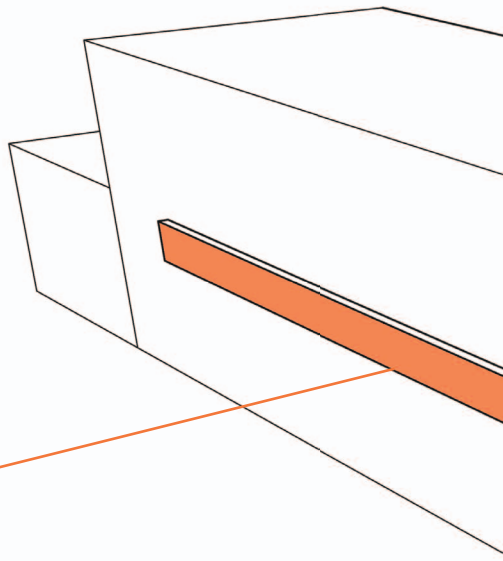
Exterior Signage
Location: On the facade of the building
Illumination: No
Visibility / Effectiveness: Visible but overlooked at night

Cardboard signs
Location: Interior of building or behind protective case
Illumination: No
Visibility / Effectiveness: Visible but overlooked at night

Handwritten
Location: Price and info for products
Illumination: No
Visibility / Effectiveness: Not very visbile, the attraction is the product and not the price

least effective





Wrapping of lightboxes unify several small buildings and defines the upper strata of storefronts.

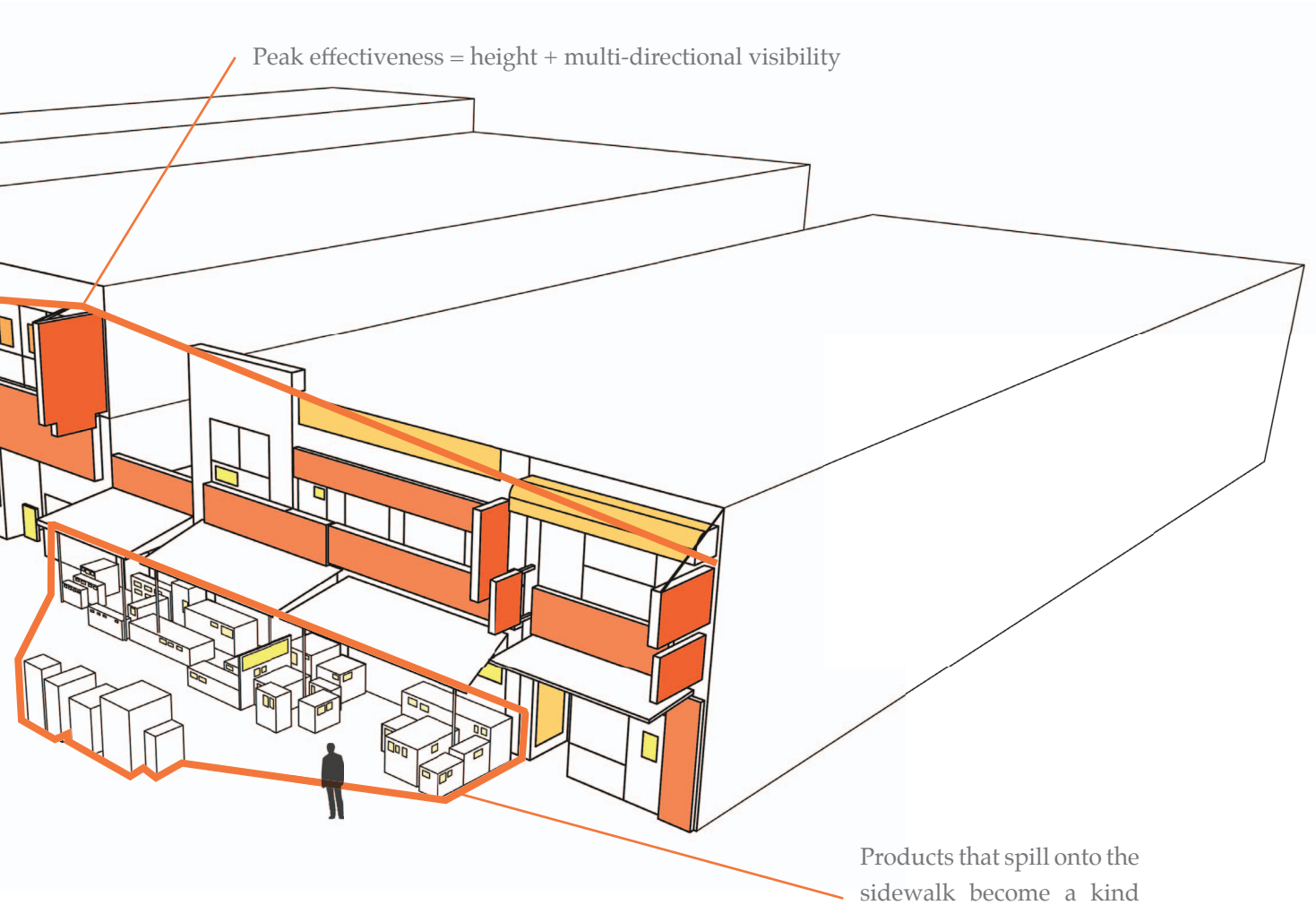
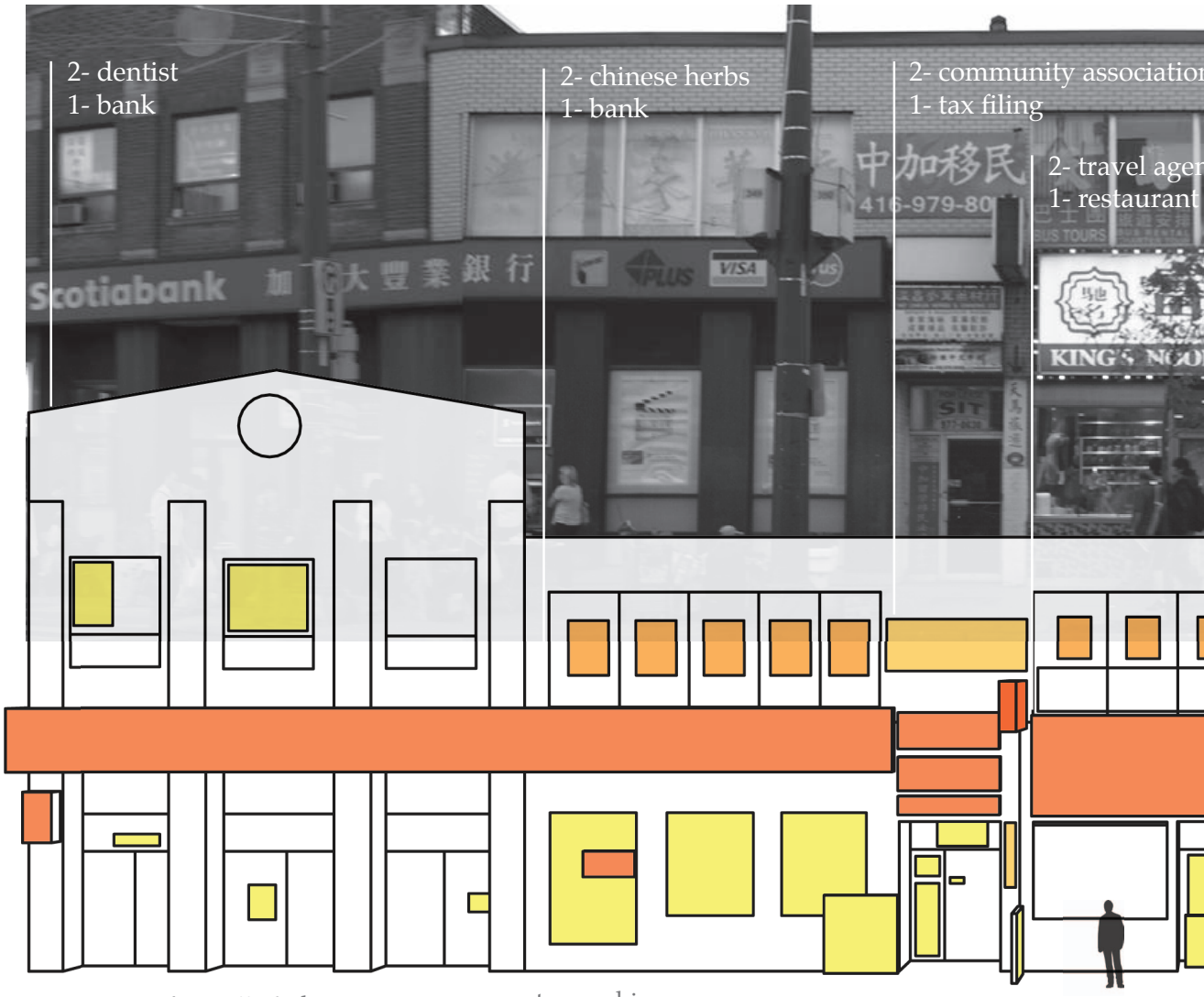


fig. 3.21: Axonometric Drawing, Chinatown, Toronto

CLASSIFICATION: TYPES OF PROGRAM



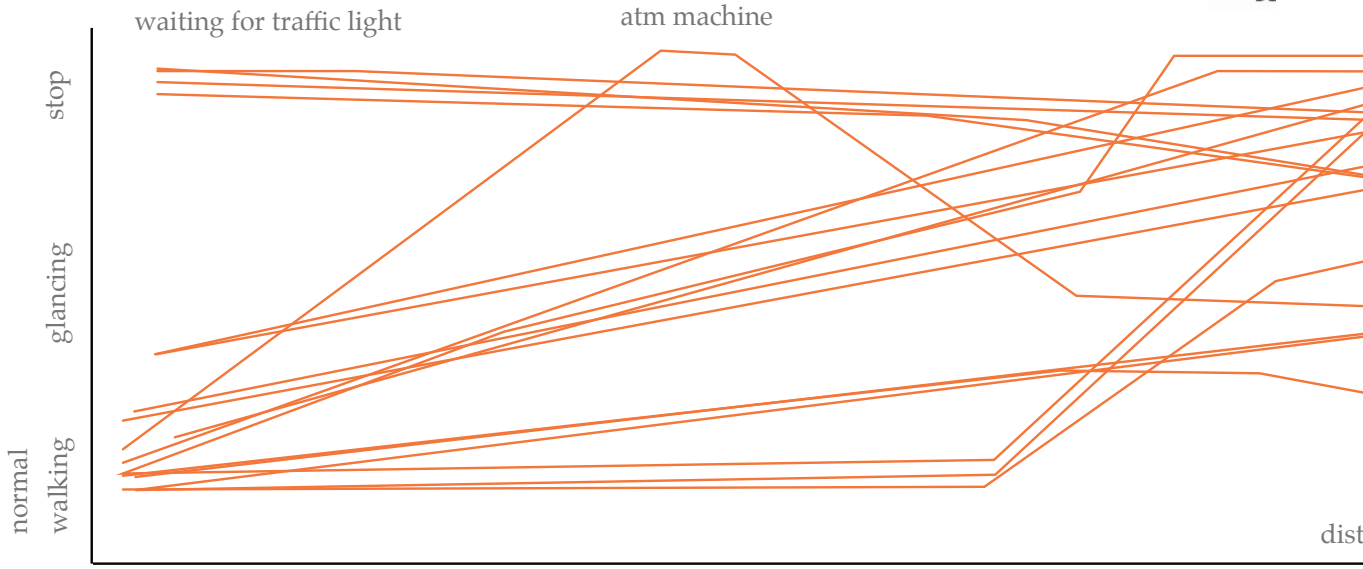
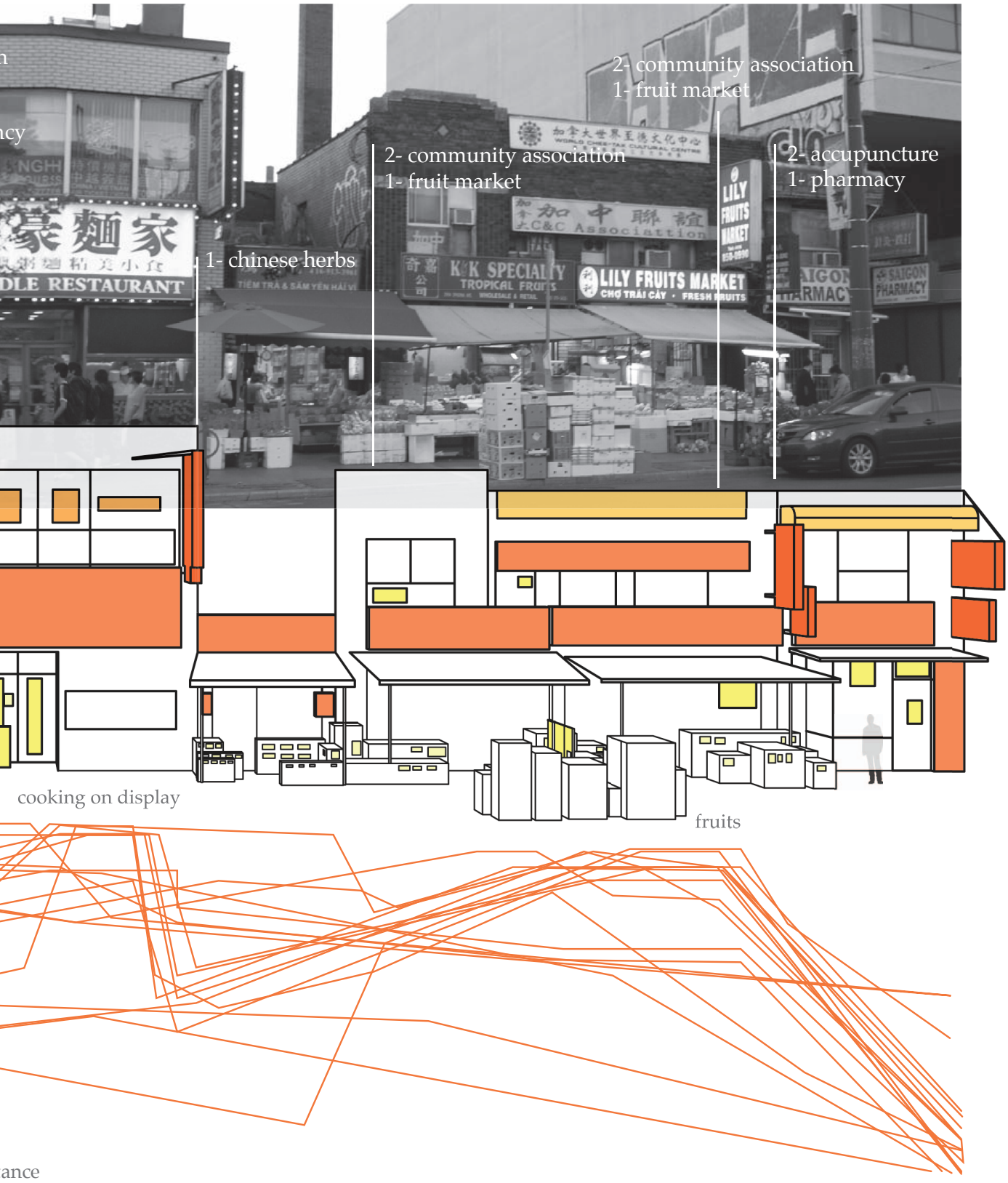
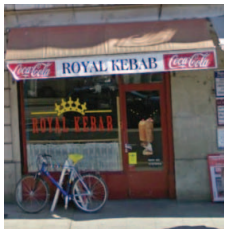


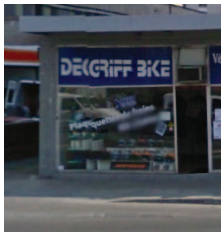
fig. 3.22: Program Breakdown, Chinatown, Toronto

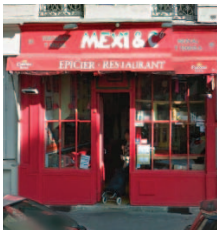


SIGNAGE AS GENERIC GLOBAL IMAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

Toronto | Switzerland | Vietnam | Tokyo | Paris | Ne





w York | London | San Franciso | Hong Kong

Signage is an integral part of the everyday city. Despite linguistic, colour, dimensional and orientational differences, the typology of small storefronts defined by signage is consistent globally (fig.3.23). Signage is the generic global image infrastructure that unifies worldwide consumption. However, it is by no means banal. The nature of commonplace signage full of irregularities and varying intensities create an aesthetic that is entirely driven by the needs of the owner. Unlike big box stores, the commonplace of signs is able to create a personal narrative.

fig. 3.23: Various Storefronts Around the World, Google Earth Screenshots

ISLANDS OF SIGNS AS A DISTINCT URBAN PHENOMENA

In extreme commonplaces, signage becomes the second skin of the building (fig.3.24). The large scale signs are given spatial priority over the building it is attached to as massive billboards completely cover the building's windows and obscure any glimpses of its interior. Furthermore, the program that occurs in the building and the sign that defines its facade may have no relation at all. Despite the disjunction between exterior and interior, the sheer size of the signage creates large urban gestures such as the wrapping of an entire block in signage (fig.3.25) that bring coherence to the chaotic landscape. Signage leads the pedestrians into the narrower alleyways between blocks (fig.3.26). The extreme commonplace is comprised of a series of anonymous boxes that are unified through signage that spatially communicates as one. The affect or semiotics of the signage creates an experiential landscape marked by information and attraction (fig3.27). It is interesting for urban planners to study this heavily bottom-up phenomenon as the dominant factor for creating visual unity. In addition, analysis of the role of signage during the day and night (fig.3.29) will give insight on the frequency of usage of a building (fig.3.28). Perhaps urban planner can take these observations into consideration and begin to design based on time and flux.

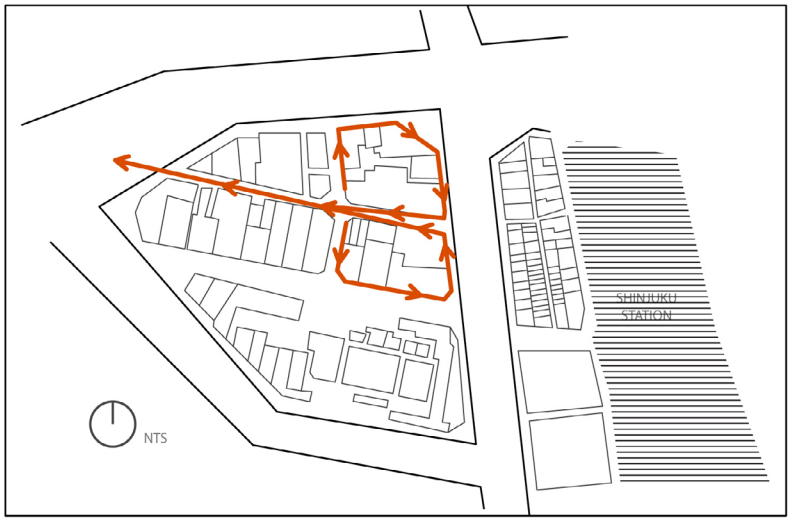


fig. 3.25: Key Plan

fig. 3.26: Narrow Blocks, Shinjuku, Tokyo

fig. 3.24: Shinjuku, Tokyo, 2009, (photo credit: mockmoon)

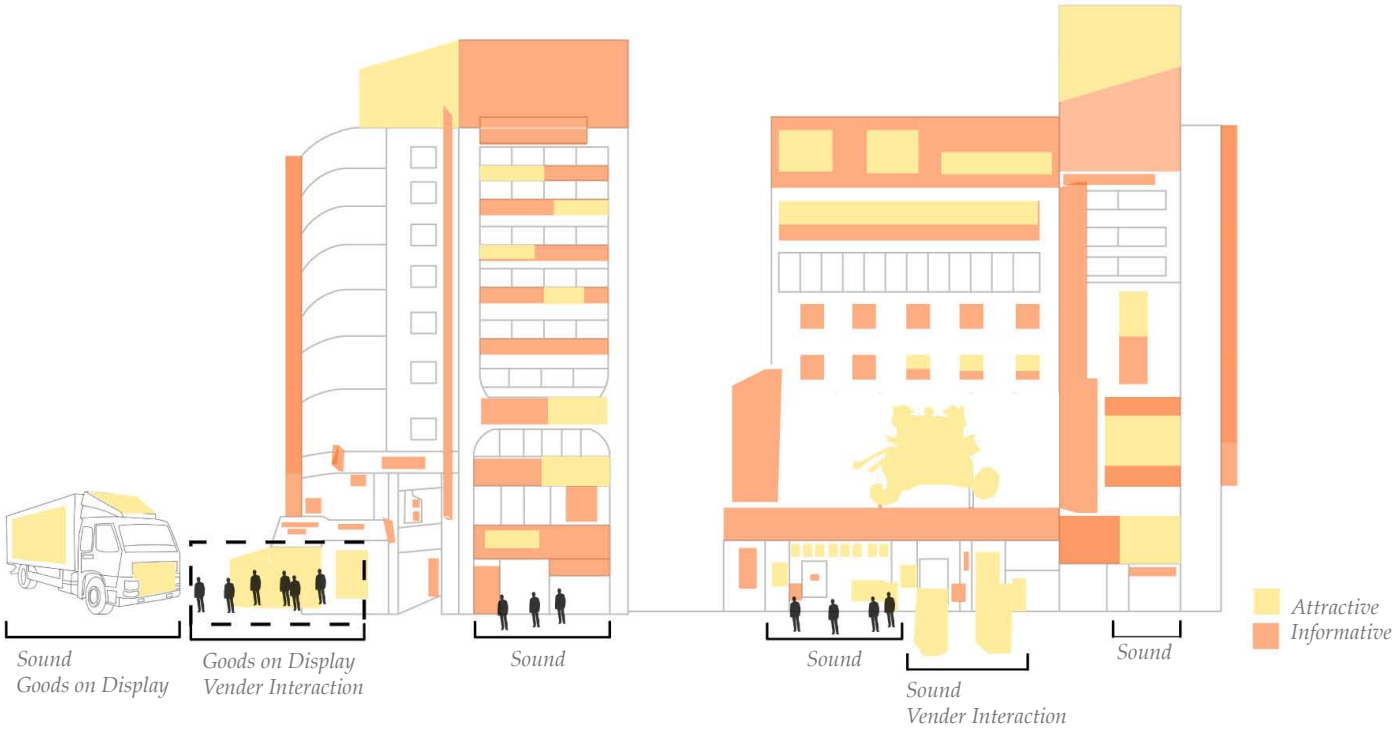


fig. 3.27: Semiotics of Signs, Shinjuku, Tokyo

fig. 3.28: Hours of Operations, Shinjuku, Tokyo

fig. 3.29: Shinjuku at Night, Tokyo, (photo credit: Temporarily Lost)

CURATED SIGNAGE BECOMES ICONIC

Signage is the generic global image infrastructure. When signage overpowers the building fabric to the point that it becomes a primary "building block" rather than a secondary object that is attached to the main facade, it drastically changes the rhythm of the city, particularly at night. The extreme commonplace is heavily saturated by signage to the extent that the building fabric is overlooked or hidden. Las Vegas (fig.3.30), Shinjuku (fig.3.31), Times Square (fig.3.32) and Mong Kok (fig.3.33) are examples of the extreme commonplace.

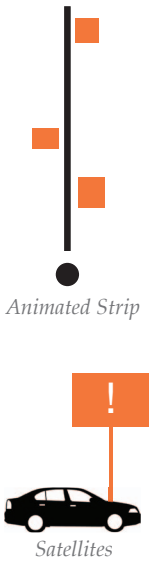


fig. 3.30: Las Vegas Strip, Nevada, (photo credit: U.S. Department of Transportation)

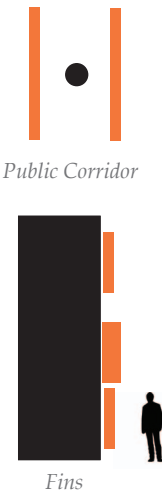


fig. 3.31: Shinjuku, Tokyo, (photo credit: Asia Web Direct)

fig. 3.32: Times Square, New York, (photo credit: Wikipedia)

fig.3.33 : Mong Kok, Hong Kong, (photo credit: Trip Advisor)

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW:

Signage is able to convey a lot of information about the nature of the street. It reveals the program of the storefronts at one glance. The location, size, and text also reveals hierarchies. The varying intensity and duration of illumination transform the depth of the commonplace. At night, the illuminated signage is brought to the foreground of our vision.

Commonplaces begin from small communities through a gathering of common interests or cultural similarities. The founding of the commonplace differs from *Everyday Urbanism* as there is a collective pursuit for a more permanent presence in the city. Specialization of goods and services are developed and a unique economy is established. Commonplaces are susceptible to change and flux. Throughout its development, critical setbacks may result in the near extinction.

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Las Vegas (fig.3.34) began as a fort for travelers and later developed water infrastructure as a water stop destination. The construction of a major water dam brought an influx of male workers and the entertainment industry began to take hold. After the completion of the dam, depopulation and bankruptcy prompted the city to reorient their industries to intensively promote tourism. The casino and entertainment culture began to take hold in the 1950s. Architecture began to emulate the idea of leisure and paradise.

fig. 3.34: Las Vegas Strip, Nevada, (photo credit: The Telegraph)

MONG KOK, HONG KONG

Mong Kok (fig.3.35) used to be an old fishing village port. The 1910 introduction of a ferry pier and railway connected to central Hong Kong island and increased the flow of goods. By 1930, Mong Kok experienced a commercial development boom creating an intense concentration of business and housing for mainland Chinese immigrants.

fig. 3.35: December 29 2015. Mong Kok Street Market, Hong Kong.

fig. 3.36: April 11, 2013, Shinjuku, Tokyo

SHINJUKU, TOKYO

At the end of 1945, most of the buildings located in Shinjuku (fig.3.36) were destroyed due to war. In order to rejuvenate the area, the district merged three small wards together and began to concentrate rebuilding efforts to create a new centre for Tokyo. A major railway was constructed which further strengthen economic growth. Services, shops, and entertainment began to cluster around the station which naturally attracted visitors from other parts of Tokyo. The increased urbanization eventually established Shinjuku as the downtown district of Tokyo.

TIMES SQUARE, NEW YORK

Downtown development pushed homes, theatres, and the red light district to relocate to the Times Square area. The introduction of the subway and iconic buildings to the area made Times Square a cultural hub and place of celebration. At one point it was extremely crime ridden and abandoned. Upscale redevelopment revitalized the area. Current zoning ordinances require building owners to display illuminated signs.

fig. 3.37: Times Square, New York, (photo credit: Red Bubble)

Shopping and commerce play a large role in the grounding of culture as the exchange of goods and services have the capacity to attract crowds which facilitate social interaction. "Its architecture promotes a state of congestion on all possible levels, and exploits this congestion to inspire and support particular forms of social intercourse that together form a unique culture of congestion"[1]. The commonplace is synonymous with consumption culture. Consumerism is integral to our daily lives and produces items which we selectively choose to fabricate our living environment. From the clothing we wear, the food we eat and appliances we use, consumerism is at the forefront of both essential needs and leisure. Consumerism and the physical appearance of the city are inversely related (fig.3.38). Concentrated areas of shopping will naturally manifest dense clutter. Signs of consumerism dominate the commonplace. In extreme cases, the product itself becomes architecture. Products and signage overwhelm the physical building or street and become the primary definition of space. In these instances, the presence of clutter replaces architecture and has its own logic and autonomy. The urban fabric changes to accommodate these artifacts such as the creation of concrete steps to serve as platforms for the vending machines. Clutter does not merely populate the urban fabric, it grows into it as well. Urbanism becomes a kind of responsive product design. It generates urban showcases to display urban artifacts. Although the clutter of everyday life may be overlooked and deemed insubstantial, it does have a tangible impact on the built environment.

In a continuously globalizing economy, the quest for the most updated and efficient products constantly replaces the old. For example, the lifespan of electronics has an increasingly diminishing period of use. We are now living in a culture of excess and leisurely pursuits that generate many variations of products in order to satisfy our needs. This ubiquitous consumption of goods and in particular internationally renowned brands are so widespread throughout the globalized world that commerce as a medium of communication fails to achieve any kind of specificity. This is physically translated to generic architecture and signage becoming part of the global image infrastructure. While the banality of the daily activities and generic appearance of the urban fabric dilutes the identity of the society it nevertheless serves as the necessary contrast to highlight the cultural value of commonplaces.

The commonplace is a demographically targeted realm of consumerism whereas *Everyday Urbanism* is much more broad and may not be consumption related. In the commonplace, the tendency to pursue certain goods and services reflect the distinct preferences of the people. The specificity of program is what attracts crowds to cultural enclaves and specialty streets. Naturally, the aesthetic of the commonplace is different from that of the generic urban fabric. Architectural hierarchies are established based on cultural premises. Visual emphasis is placed on what the particular community values. Times Square as the entertainment capital of New York places advertisements of products, broadway shows, and leisure services at the forefront. Times Square is a deliberate spectacle aiming to establish its presence as the vibrant heart of the city.

1 Koolhaas, Rem. Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan. New ed. New York: Monacelli Press, 1994.

fig. 3.38: Times Square, New York, (photo credit: Wikipedia)

Although the seed of the commonplace can begin with any concentration of commerce, it occurs more often in cultures that have founded major ethnic practices based on a tradition of using signage which is also a key aesthetic of the commonplace. East Asian cultures have a tradition of using text for religious ceremonies such as written prayers that are displayed in vast quantities in order to take effect. Large text-based signs also mark entrances to popular secular buildings that have a social emphasis such as theatres and markets. These practices are reflected in the abundant and oftentimes redundant usage of signage in commercial areas. The saturation of text parallels their cultural beliefs that signage is able to elevate its context to embody a kind of participatory event. In addition, logographic text-pictographic languages such as Chinese are visually denser than phonologic languages such as English and require a more visual prominence in order to comprehend the complex written characters. The top to bottom writing system also dictates the dominant orientation of signage thus creating many thin vertical elements. Cultural practices can affect the spatiality of the built environment.

fig. 3.39: E-ma Written Prayer Plaques at Temple Shrine, Japan, (photo credit: Introvert Japan)

fig. 3.40: Lantern Gate at the Entrance of Temple displaying Festival Sponsor's Names, Japan, (photo credit: Travel Japan Blog)

fig. 3.41: Traditional Commercial Signage used to Celebrate Grand Openings, Hong Kong, (photo credit: Seewide)

Products Changing Building Footprint

g. 3.42: September 28, 2014. Wellseley and Parliament, Toronto

In our high consumer demand culture, the production of goods continuously expands to meet our desires. Commodity turnover occurs at such a fast rate that consumption outgrows the anticipated storage space of stores. Products begin to spill out from the store lining the entrance, sidewalks and streets (fig.3.42) to the extent that the original bare building is no longer recognizable. Products become the primary elements that define the presence of the building and shape its building footprint. Often times the products on display are seasonal or ephemeral, thus, the space is always undergoing a transformation. Although quite informal and makeshift these product-driven spaces can be quite interactive with their surrounding context.

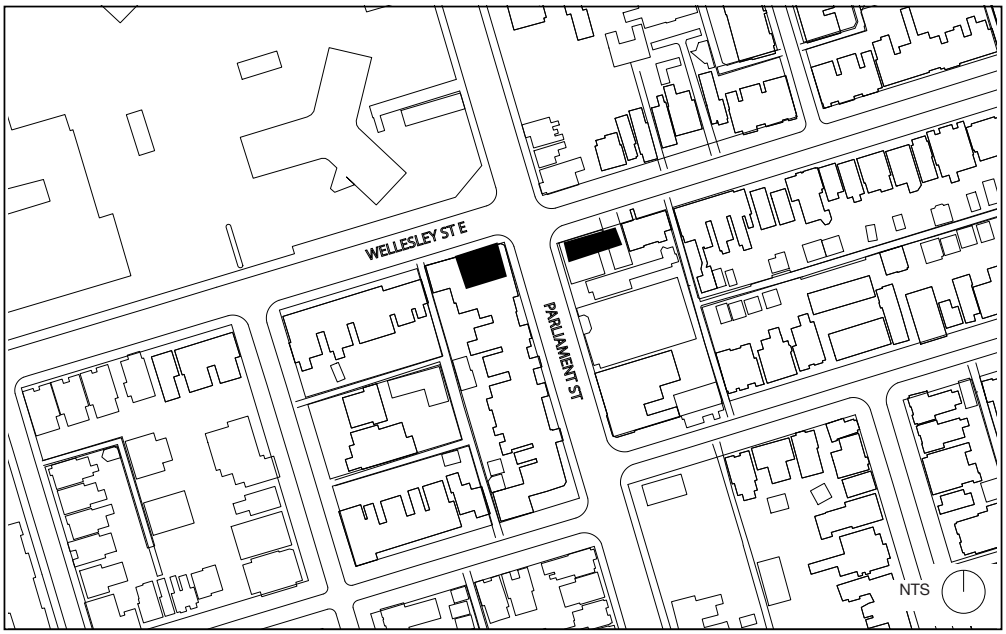


fig. 3.43: Key Plan

NAME/LOCATION: CONVENIENCE STORES AT CORNER OF WELLSELEY & PARLIAMENT (101sq.m)

Often times convenience stores become a mini nursery during spring to early autumn selling a variety of potted plants and cut flowers. The Kit Kat and Crunch convenience stores (fig.3.43) create an interesting "green corner" (fig.3.44). The redundancy of two convenience stores exactly across the street from each other, even both named after chocolate matches the excess of plants on display, yet there is something charming and pleasant about the cluttered look and near symmetry. The corner condition frames the sidewalk and acts as an entrance/capstone to the street using a soft boundary defined by flora (fig.3.45). In addition, seasonal differences change the spatiality and nature of the encounter (fig.3.46).

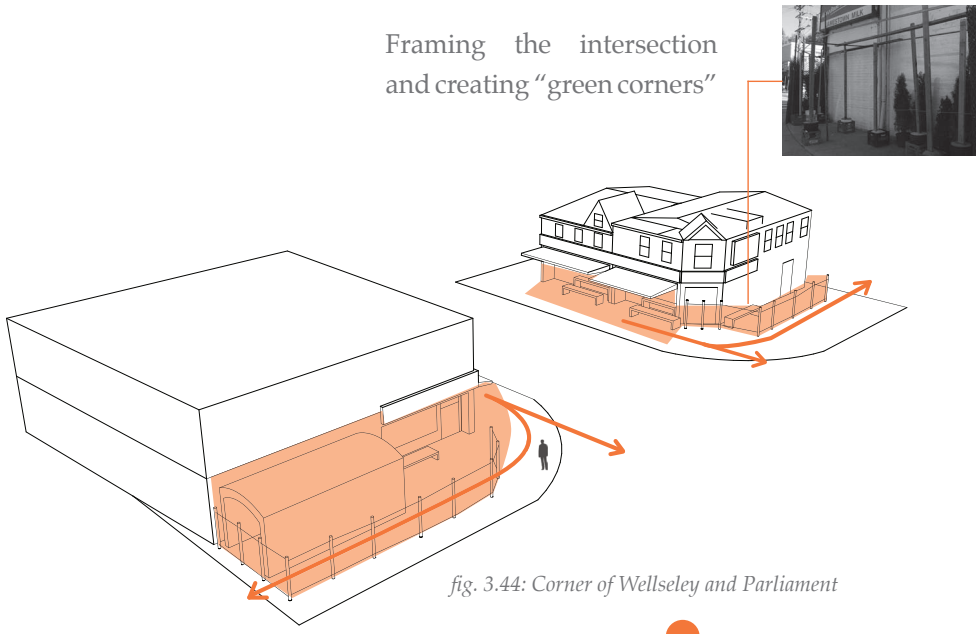
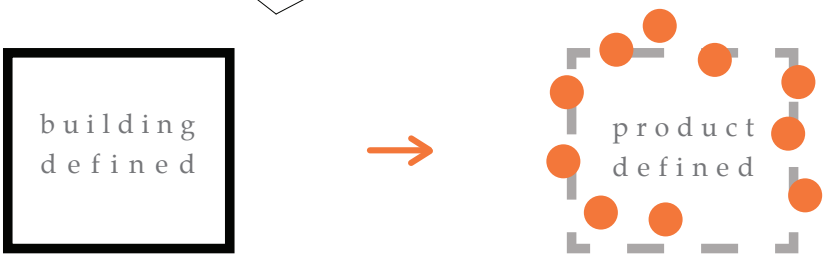


fig. 3.44: Corner of Wellseley and Parliament



Various plant heights create a new kind of urban topography that acts at the scale of urban furniture. The hanging planters replace the role of an overhang and provide shade during the summer.

fig. 3.45: Convenience Store on Parliament St, during Summer, Toronto

PRODUCTS CONSTANTLY REDEFINE THE FOOTPRINT OF THE STOREFRONT

Crunch Store

Kit Kat Store

Seasonal Topography of Plants: Peak Usage

April

May

June

July

October

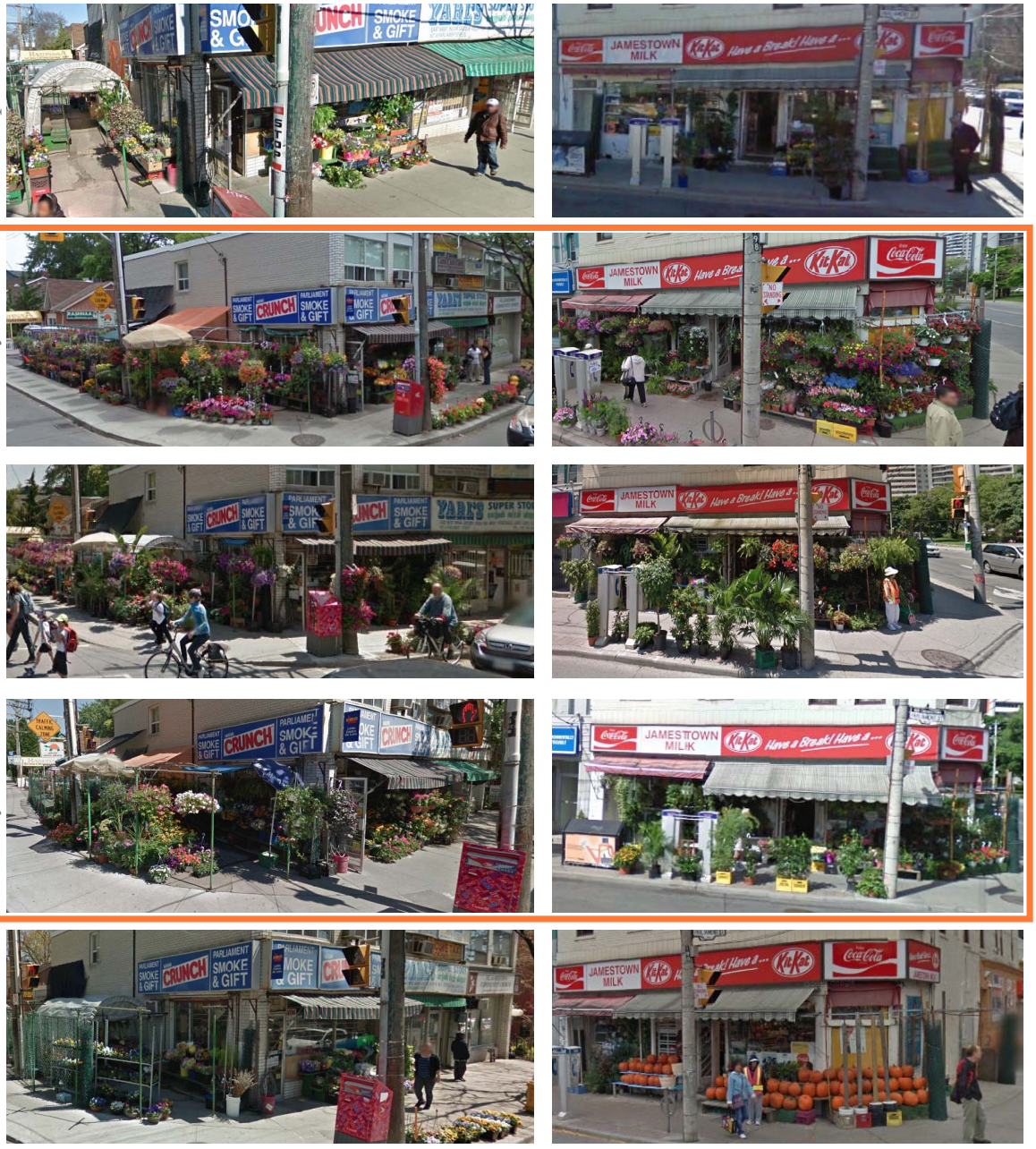


fig. 3.46: Convenience Stores on Parliament St. throughout the Year, Toronto

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW:

Goods and products that spill out from storefronts or line the sidewalk are the most ephemeral elements of the commonplace. These elements undergo constant change each day, but routines and patterns can be observed. Oftentimes the commonplace of occupation is relative to the building fabric. Objects frame entrances, mark thresholds or define the extents of the building footprint. These temporal elements play an important role in shaping our interaction and truly characterizing the commonplace as the lived-in experience of the city.

fig. 4.1: Toronto's City Hall looms over Chinese restaurants on Elizabeth Street., Toronto, 1965, (photo credit: The Globe and Mail)

This thesis focuses on Toronto's Chinatown which is one of the most prime examples of the commonplace city. The abundance of buildings due to a narrow historical parcelization is critical to creating the sufficient amount of visual density that characterizes the vibrancy of commonplaces. The cultural practice of using heavily text-based signage as a means of communication can be traced back to ancient religious roots. Logographic text (read from top to bottom) is also unique to the Chinese language. As a result, many elements are positioned vertically. The overall aesthetics of Chinatown can be attributed to the historical layout, cultural roots, the Chinese attitude of resilience and competition to attract as much business as possible.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

fig. 4.2: Elizabeth St., Toronto, 1920, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.3: Dundas St. East, Toronto, 1950, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.4: Elizabeth St.,Toronto, 1970, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

1900
Influx of Chinese immigrants to Toronto after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

1920
Chinatown established on Elizabeth and Chestnut St. with small businesses, associations, churches, schools, theatres and opera house. (fig.4.1), (fig.4.2). Stores were ransacked as a gesture against Chinese in Toronto.

1950
Talk of plans to demolish Chinatown in order to make room for Nathan Philips Sqare and new city hall. (fig.4,3)

Spadina Ave. has a mainly Jewish population.

1960
Two thirds of Chinatown demolished

1967
Recommendation put forward to the city to relocate the remaining Chinatown to make space for a new civic square. Land prices soar in the wake of this speculation.

Universal immigration policy encourages an influx of Chinese immigrants to Toronto

fig. 4.5: Dundas St., Toronto, 1970, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.6: Spadina Ave., Toronto, 1980, (photo credit: Chuck Man)

fig. 4.7: Dundas St. West., Toronto, 2014, (photo credit: Wikipedia)

1970

Old Chinatown slowly fades and relocates to Spadina Ave. (fig.4.4), (fig.4.5)

Planning Board recommends lows density residential and commercial structures along Spadina to be replaced by high density development. This was opposed by the community as it would drastically change the characteristics of the neighbourhood.

1979

Chinatown along Spadina Ave. is deemed as a special identity area. Development should be compatible with the Chinese community. Chinese motifs and architectural details are encouraged (fig.4.9). There is an intensification of signage and ornamentation. (fig.4.6)

2007

Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA) is established. The community driven committee provides funding for renovations and works on enhancing the coherence of the overall street.

2010

Formally the end of the Old Chinatown along Elizabeth St.

2012

Chinatown BIA has 403 members. (fig.4.7) (fig.4.7)

fig. 4.8: September 28, 2014, Spadina Ave., Toronto

fig. 4.9: A Series of Chinese Sculptures Line the TTC Route Emphasizing Spadina Ave. as a Cultural Artery 2012. Chinatown, Toronto (photo credit: Occasional Toronto)

HISTORICAL FOOTPRINT

fig.4.10: Historical Footprint of Chinatown, Toronto

fig. 4.11: Looking West Across Spadina, Toronto, 1966, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.12: Looking West Across Spadina, Toronto, 2014, (photo credit: Lost Toronto)

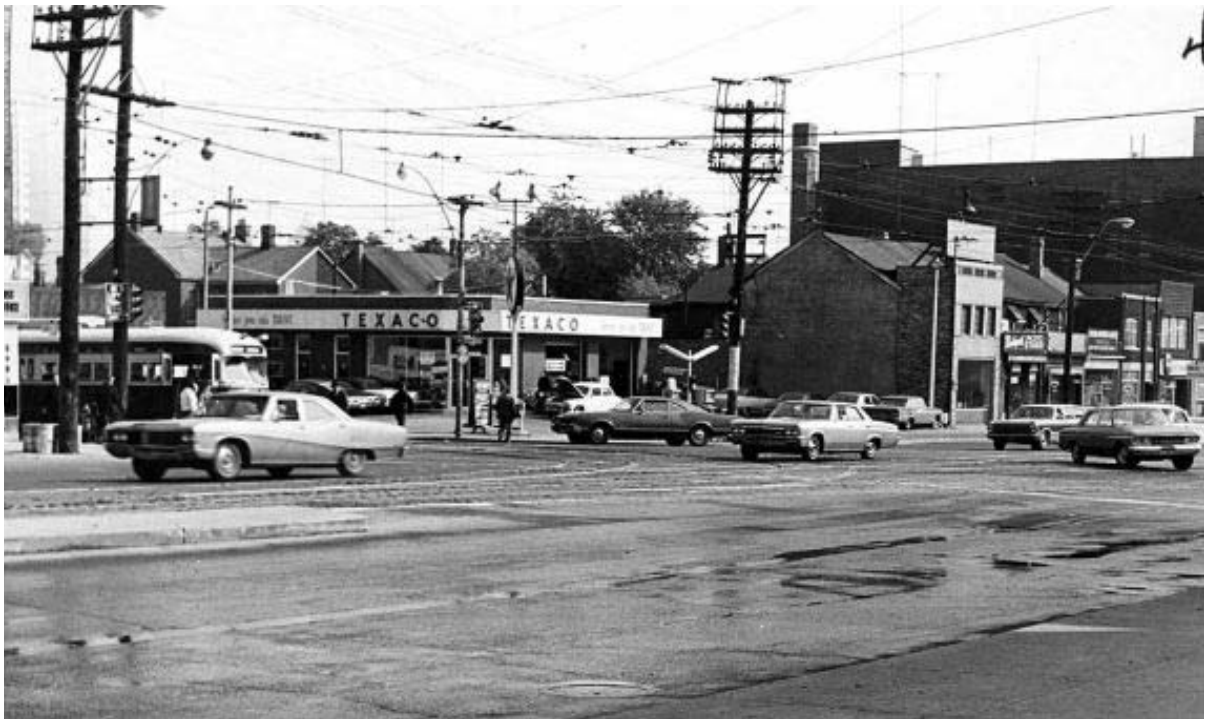


fig. 4.13: Spadina and Dundas, Toronto, 1960, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.14: Spadina and Dundas, Toronto, 2014, (photo credit: Lost Toronto)

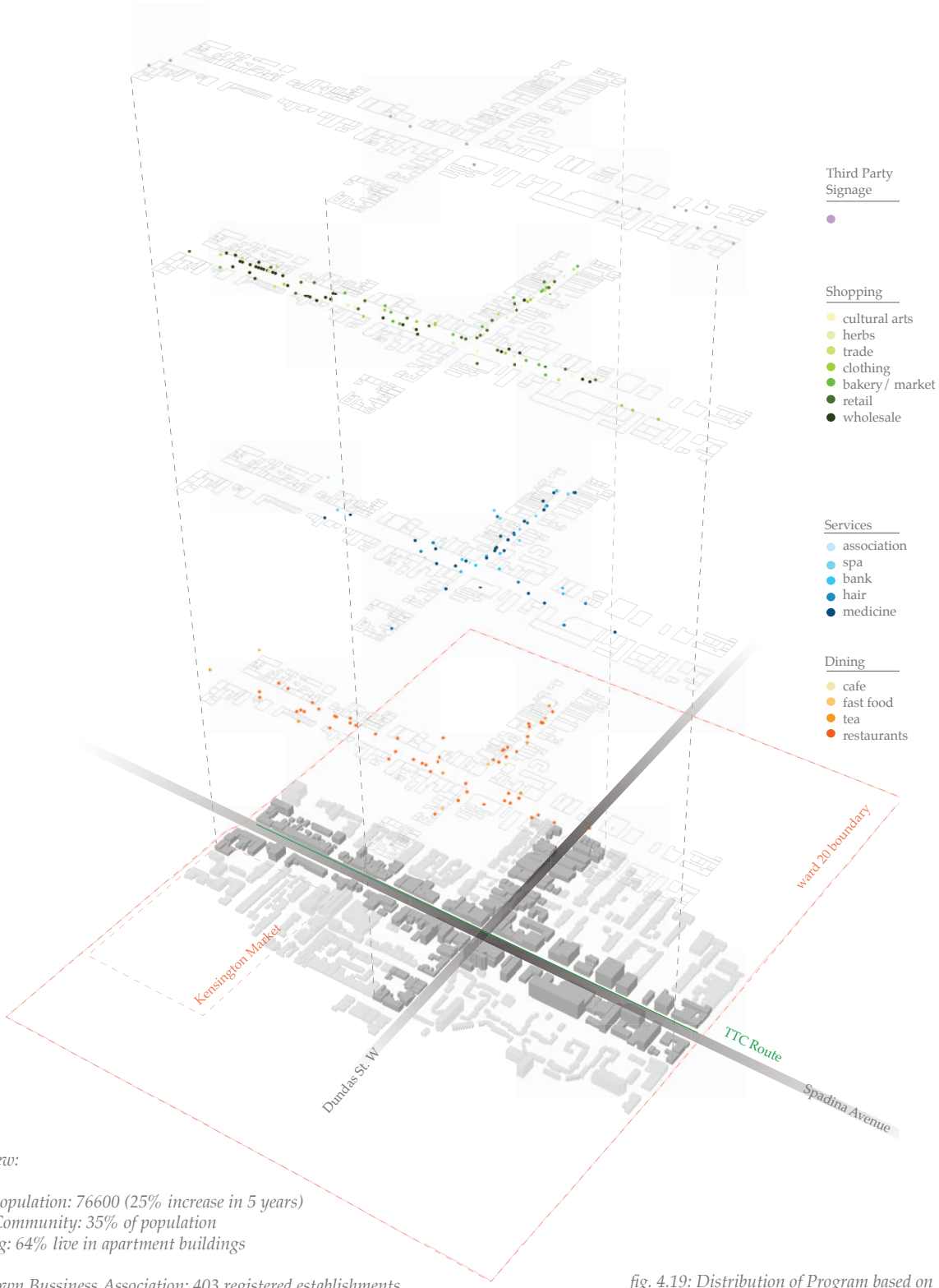
fig. 4.15: Spadina and Dundas, Toronto, 1960, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.16: Spadina and Dundas, Toronto, 2014, (photo credit: Lost Toronto)

fig. 4.17: Spadina and Dundas, Toronto, 1911, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 4.18: Spadina and Dundas, Toronto, 2014, (photo credit: Lost Toronto)

DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAM



Overview:

Ward Population: 76600 (25% increase in 5 years)
Asian Community: 35% of population
Housing: 64% live in apartment buildings

Chinatown Bussiness Association: 403 registered establishments
Spadina Avenue Parking Capacity: 35 on grade parking spots

fig. 4.19: Distribution of Program based on Chinatown BIA Directory, Toronto

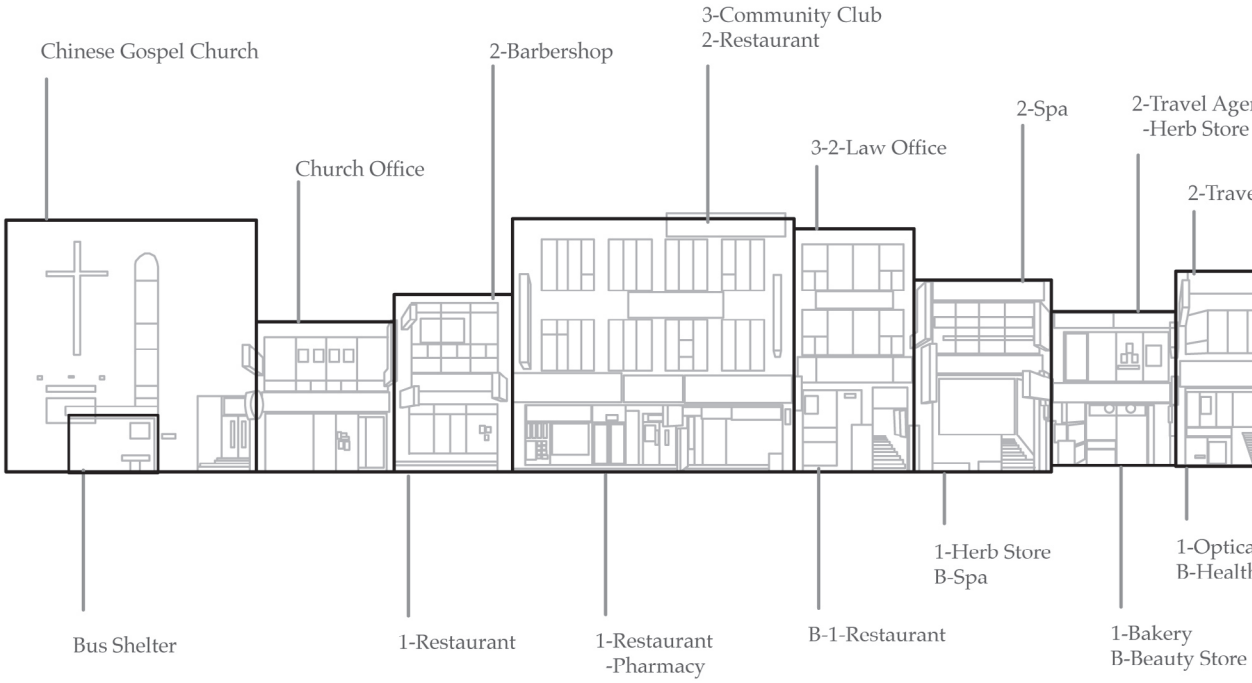
NAME/LOCATION: DUNDAS ST. WEST (2700 sq.m)

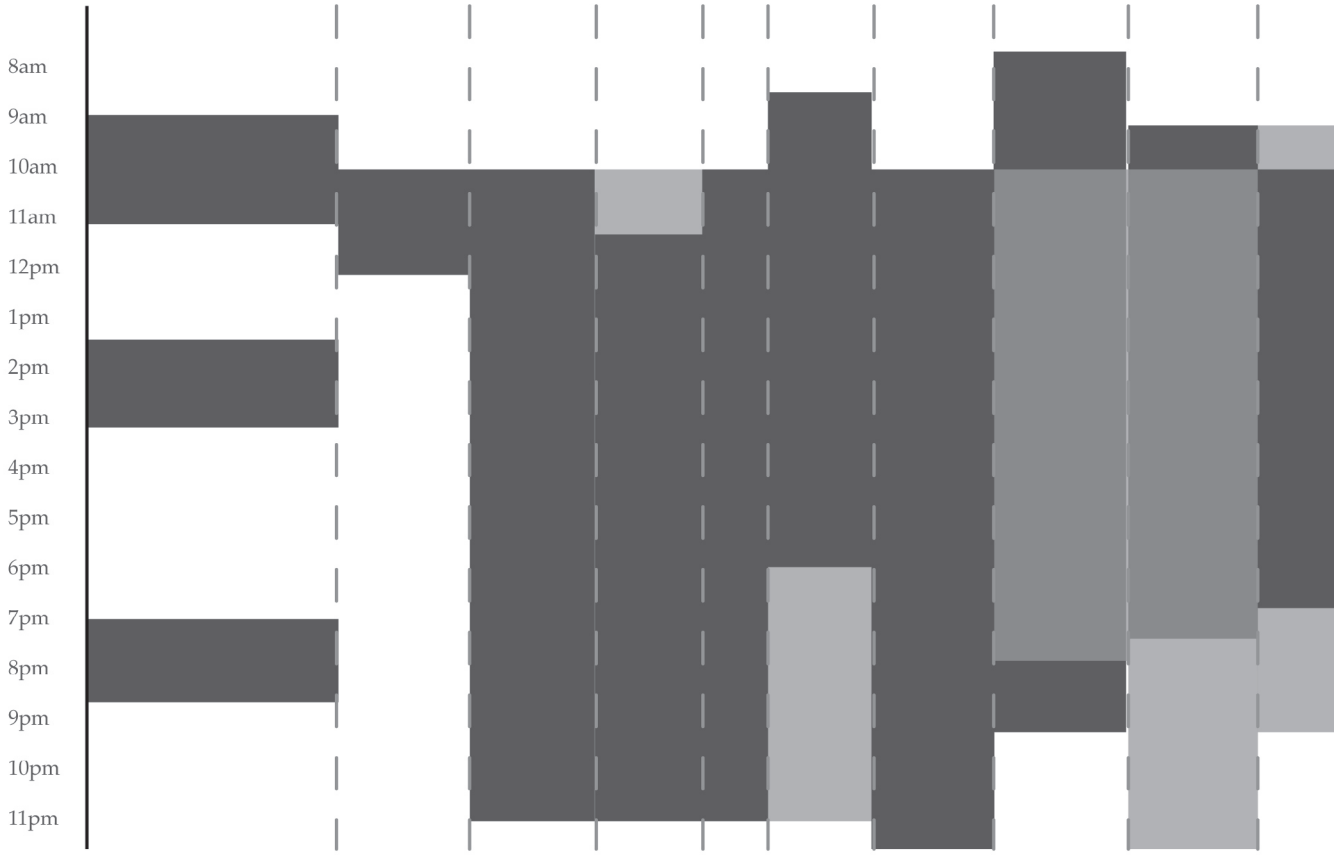
Chinatown is concentrated around two major streets. Spadina Avenue is the primary and longest stretch of Chinatown with the streetcar route running parallel to the street. Larger establishments such as a major mall and courtyard create a noticeable void in the dense urban fabric. On the other hand, Dundas St. West maintains a small scale that has historic roots in the parcelization of the city (fig.4.20). The street intersects Spadina Avenue and has historically connected to the old Chinatown along Dundas St. East. The particular block of Chinatown chosen for analysis has a particularly dense parcelization with storefronts spaced every 5 to 6m. As a result, this stretch of the street has an abundance of signage and products on display making it one of the most vibrant areas of Chinatown (fig.4.21).

fig. 4.20: Key Plan

fig. 4.21: September 28, 2014. Dundas St. West, Toronto

PROGRAM OVERVIEW





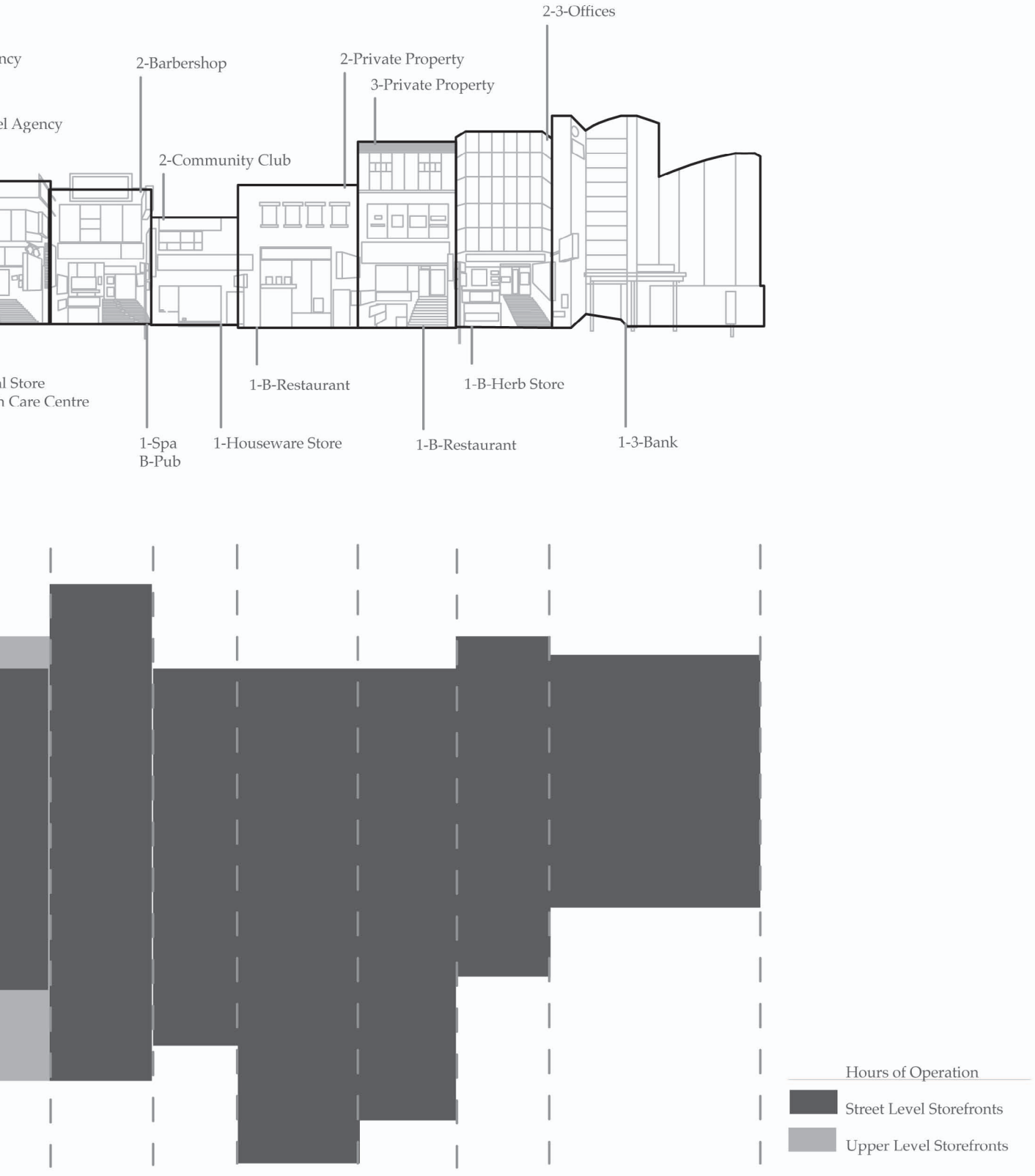


fig. 4.22: Program Overview, Spadina and Dundas,Toronto

COMMONPLACE OF FABRIC / SIGNAGE / OCCUPATION

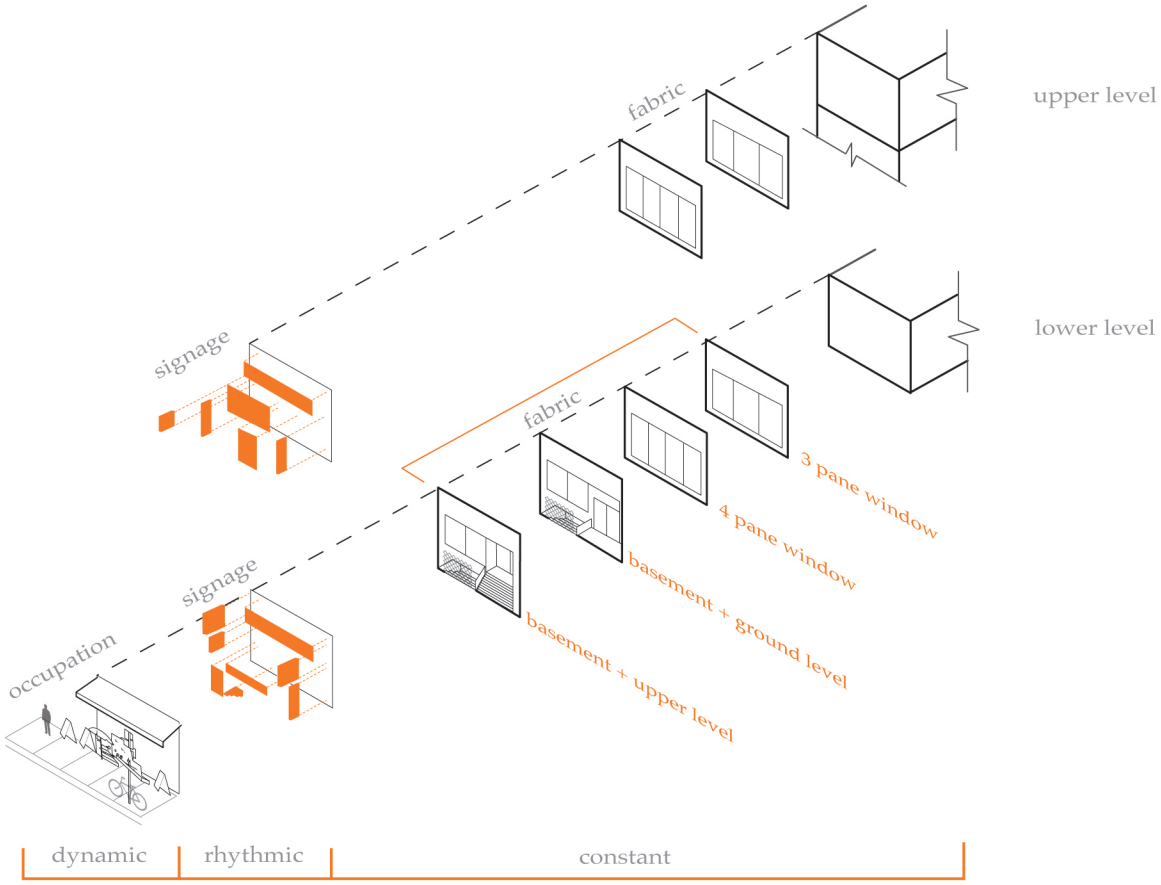


fig. 5.1: Layers of the Commonplace

The commonplace consists of bundled layers (fig.5.1) that consist of the building fabric (material of the facade, window configuration and variations of thresholds), signage (projecting and wall signage) and the dynamic occupation of space (products, displays, flow of pedestrians). These connected layers create the genetic armature of the commonplace.

The commonplace embodies dynamic (changing occupation of space), rhythmic (the daily illumination of signs) and constant elements (the building as backdrop).

fig. 5.2: September 28, 2014. Chinatown, Toronto

The analysis of the commonplace is a series of investigations that focuses on quantitative, qualitative and several visual perception theories. There are a total of six investigation categories. Documentation and diagrams of existing conditions and speculative simulations are the main tools of analysis.

GESTALT

Examines which layers of the commonplace unify or stratify the visual field. Analysis tries to identify objects that are perceived as a whole versus stand alone elements. The rich layering of gestalt brings complexity to the commonplace. The multiple "interplay between whole and part" is key to bringing coherence yet preserving a certain amount of autonomous character to the commonplace.

SEMIOTICS AND QUALITATIVE EXPERIENCE

Examines the most haptic qualities of the commonplace such as materiality and legibility of text. Analysis focuses on the pedestrian experience and the type of response the commonplace evokes.

SPATIALITY (QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS)

Documents the metrics of the commonplace such as the distance between signage or the depth of a typical threshold in order to discover the general range of dimensions that are key to creating the commonplace typology.

FIELD CONDITIONS

Captures the fluctuations of the commonplace by documenting the active elements (objects or conditions that temporarily change the spatiality or perception of the street) for a duration of fourteen hours. The overlaid timeline of transformations reveals a hierarchy of dynamic change so that the overall rhythm of the street is understood. The study of field conditions emphasizes observations on atmospheres and broad patterns.

NESTED LAYERS and INTERDEPENDENT NETWORKS

Examines how the commonplace of building fabric, signage and occupation are interrelated. The sequential order of the layers of the commonplace is diagramed. In particular, the general interface of objects to building is explained.

CHAOS and the UNDERLYING ORDER

Observing generic patterns in the commonplace. Analysis simplifies dimensions to a range as defined by the bylaw and historic parcel. The configurations of signage are simplified to modules with varying densities.

DIFFERENTIATION AND VARIATION

Simulates streetscapes with a mix of constant and random elements to create scenarios that test the boundary between the generic and the commonplace. The models generated serve as a direct correlation to the specified ratio of control and freedom. Analysis reveals how different the spatiality and atmosphere of the street can change due to the number of regulations implemented. This analysis has potential to touch base on the broader question on how to code spatial, visual and programatic diversity into architecture.

VISUAL PERCEPTION OF THE COMMONPLACE

Gestalt is a psychology term which means unified whole. It is a series of visual perception theories developed by German psychologists in the 1920s that describe the natural tendency to organized visual elements into groups. The specific elements of visual perception are as follows: proximity, similarity, enclosure, symmetry, closure, continuity, connection and figure/ground. The key ideas behind gestalt theory are the mind's desire to identify the whole before the parts, fill in the gaps and perceive elements as simple as possible so as to avoid uncertainty (fig.5.3).

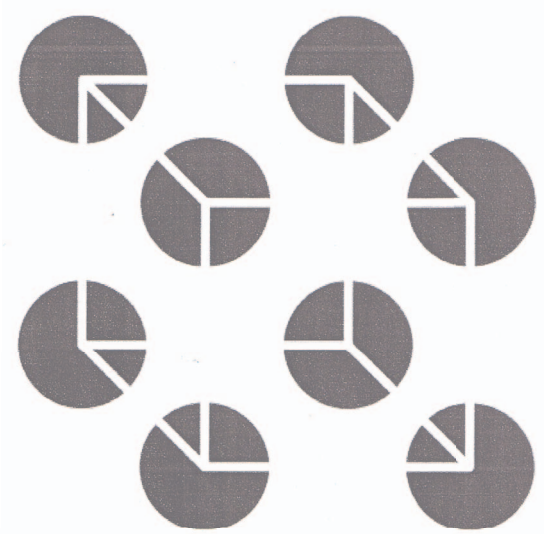


fig. 5.3: The Perception of Gestalt Allows us to Make Inferred Conclusions. We are able to see the Implied Cube that Connects to the Solids rather than Percieve the Image as a Collection of Individual Shapes (photo credit: Patterns that Connext)

fig. 5.4: September 24, 2014, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

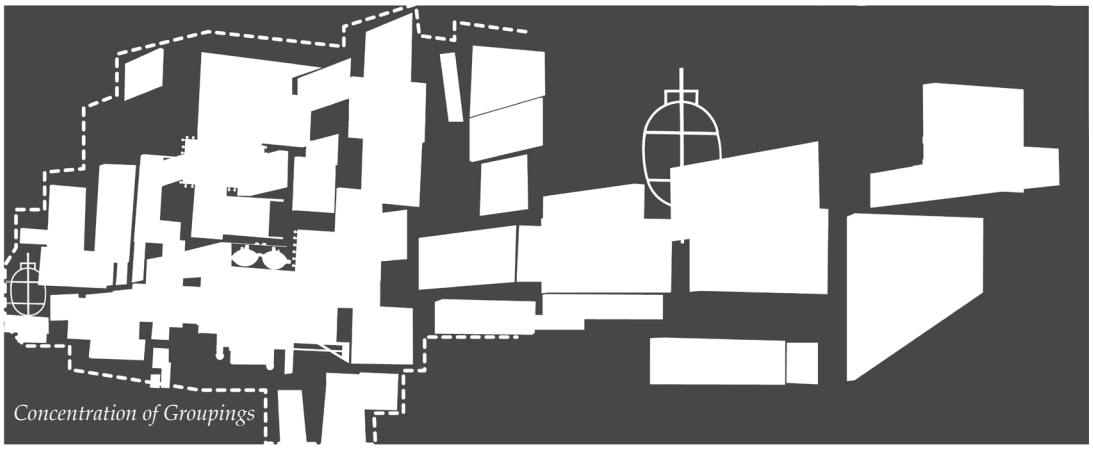


fig. 5.5: Figure/Ground Study Reveals Areas that are Percieved as Groupings

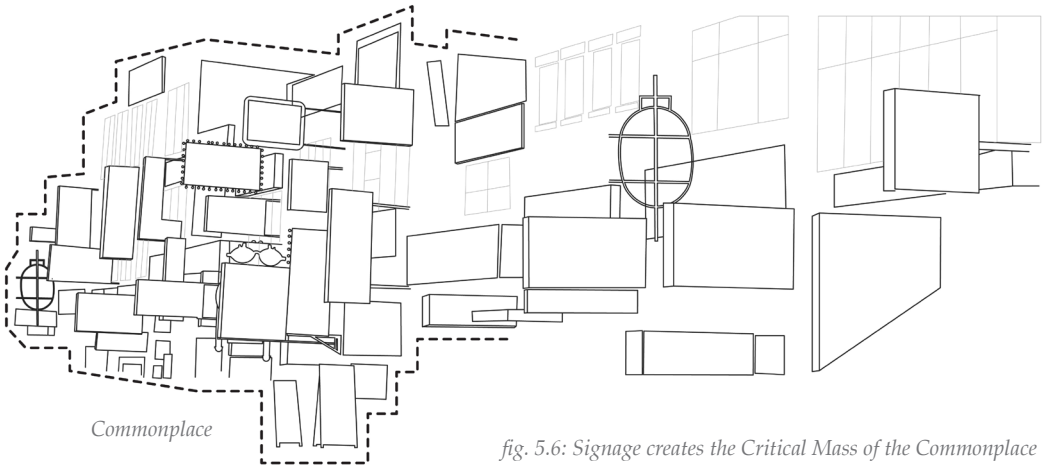


fig. 5.6: Signage creates the Critical Mass of the Commonplace

fig. 5.7: Fenestration is the next Visual Order Percieved

fig. 5.8: The Building Fabric is the Last Visual Order Percieved

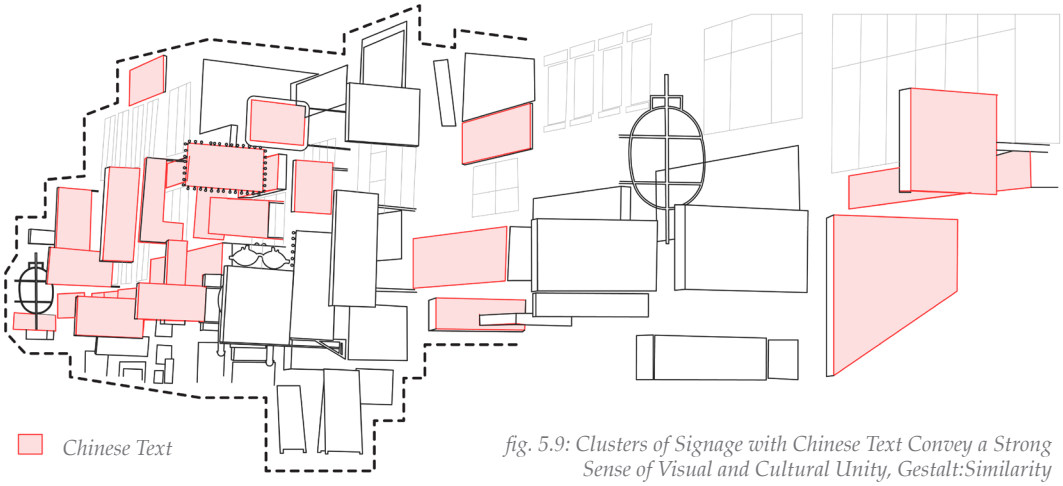


fig. 5.9: Clusters of Signage with Chinese Text Convey a Strong Sense of Visual and Cultural Unity, Gestalt:Similarity

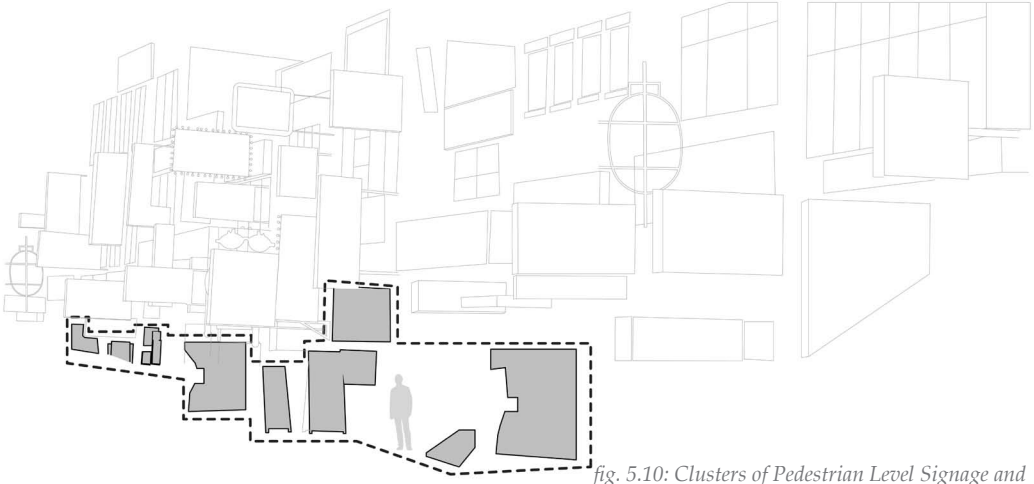


fig. 5.10: Clusters of Pedestrian Level Signage and Goods Bring Visual Unity Spanning Across Several Storefronts, Gestalt: Connection

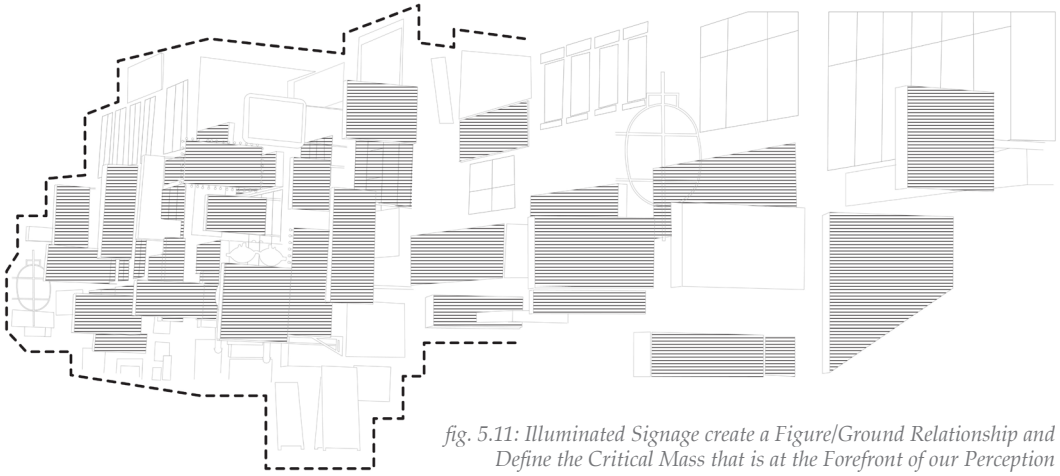


fig. 5.11: Illuminated Signage create a Figure/Ground Relationship and Define the Critical Mass that is at the Forefront of our Perception

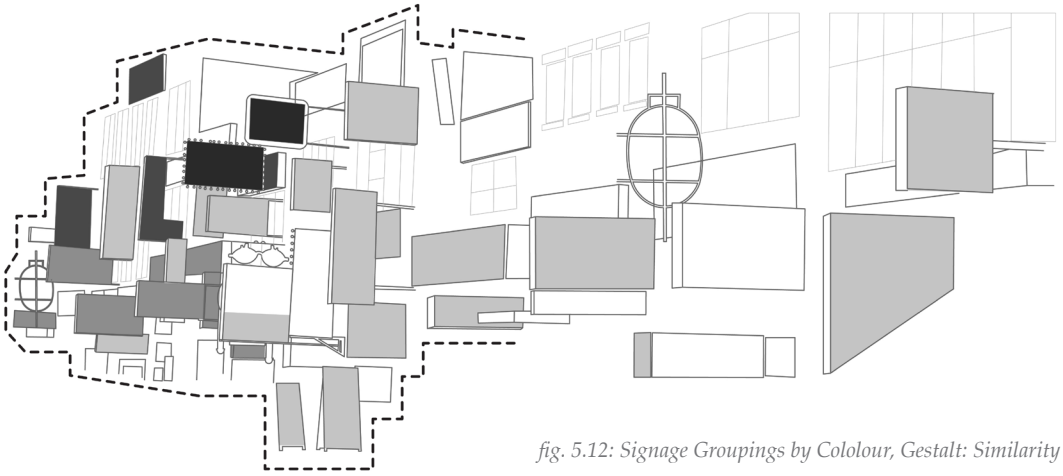


fig. 5.12: Signage Groupings by Cololour, Gestalt: Similarity

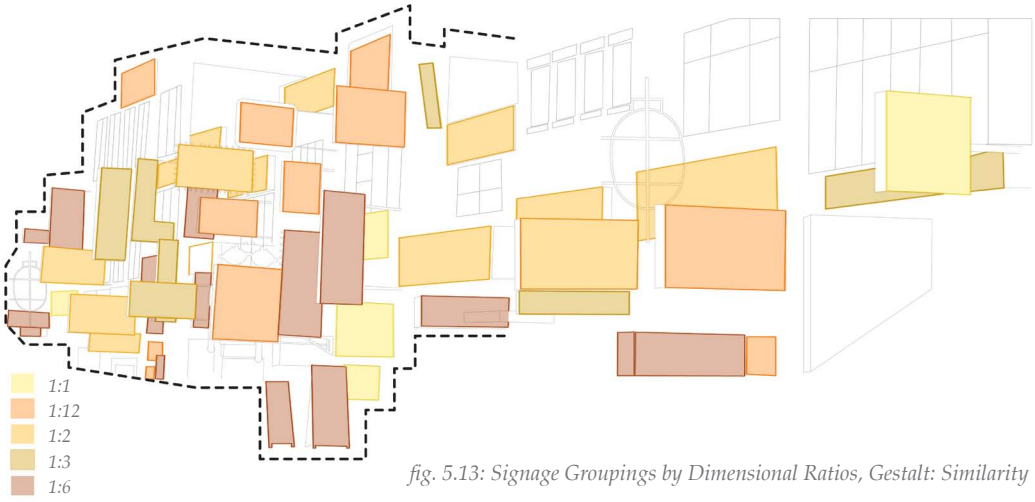


fig. 5.13: Signage Groupings by Dimensional Ratios, Gestalt: Similarity

Ambiently Lit Space

Illuminated Signage/ Light

At Night the Illuminated Elements change the Overall Visual Gestalt. The Continuo

fig. 5.16: June 20, 2015, An Abundance of Illuminated Signage in Chinatou
Dundas St. W

fig. 5.14: June 20, 2015, Chinatown at Night, Dundas St. West, Toronto

fig. 5.15: Illuminated Elements

us Band of Lit Storefronts Unify the Entire Street, Gestalt: Continuation

wn at Night,
est, Toronto

Rudolph Arnheim, an expert on visual theory claims that light is the most significant factor of gestalt. Our eyes can immediately distinguish between various levels of light before comprehending form. "The boundaries determining the shape of objects derive from the eye's capacity to distinguish between areas of different brightness and colour"[1]. "Light creates space -all gradients have the power to create depth and gradients of brightness are among the most efficient. Gradient introduces asymmetry which is key to creating diversity"[2]. The gestalt perception of light is definitely prominent in the commonplace that is heavily marked by illuminated signage. "Grouping by similarity of brightness indirectly produces a grouping by similarity of spatial orientation. Parallel [signs] are knitted together by the eye at whatever place in the relief they may occur, and this network of relations is a powerful means of creating spatial order and unity"[3].

1 Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. New Version, Expanded and Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.
2 Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. 1974.
3 Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. 1974.


多倫多華人福音堂
CHINESE GOSPEL CHURCH OF TORONTO
GOLDEN SHIATSU
THERAPEUTIC REFLEXOLOGY

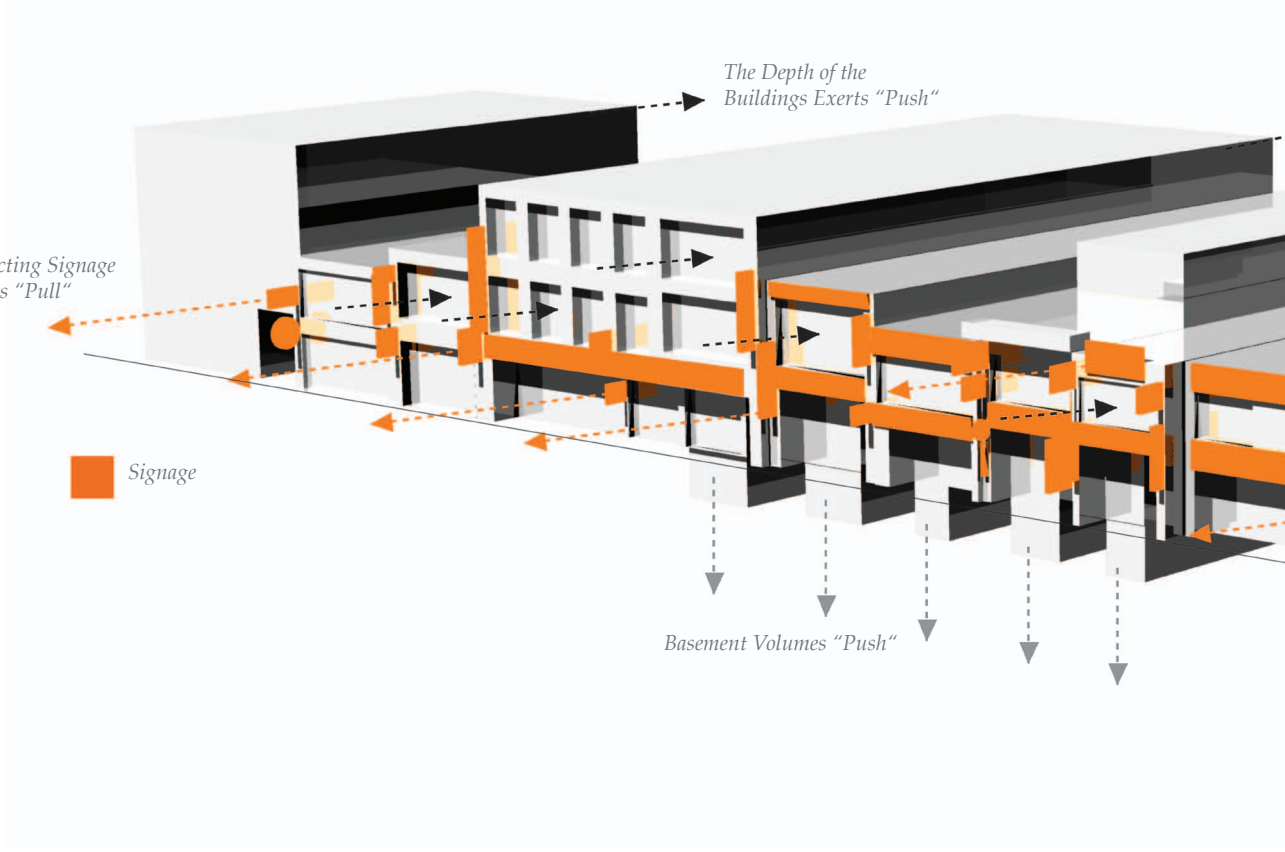

The Depth of the
Buildings Exerts "Push"
Projecting Signage
Exerts "Pull"
Signage
Basement Volumes "Push"

fig. 5.17: June 20,2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

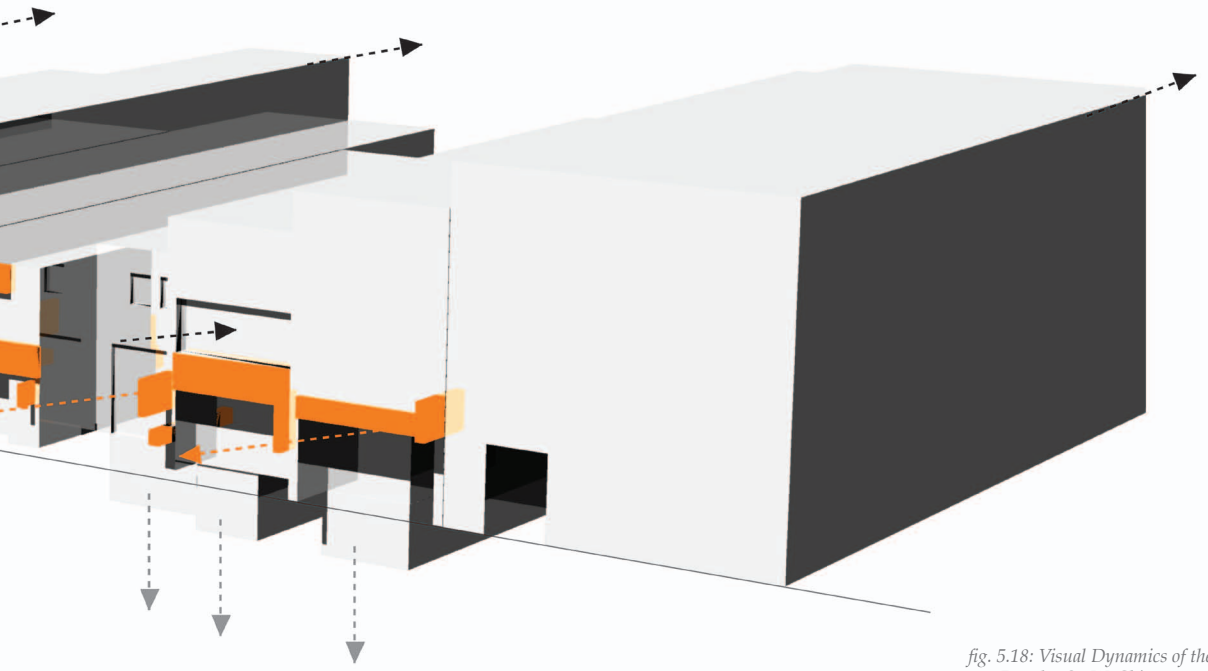
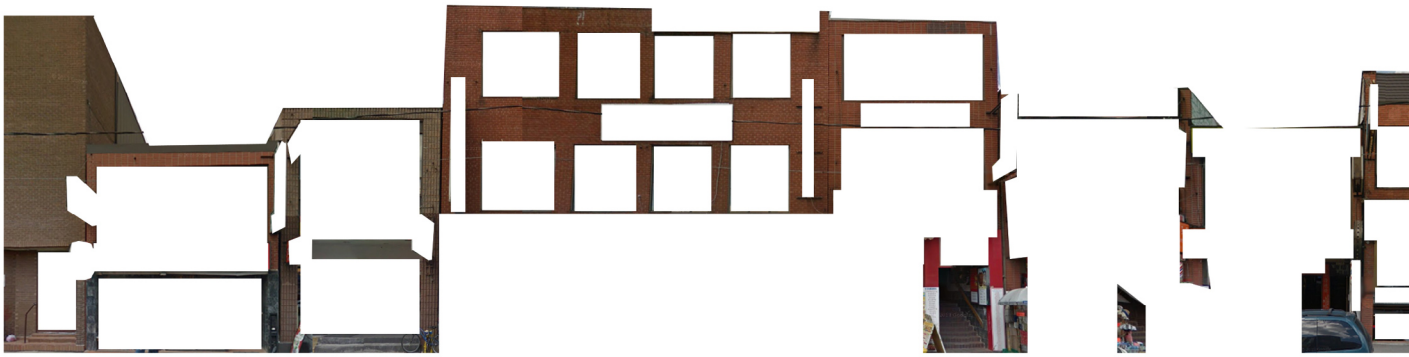


fig. 5.18: Visual Dynamics of the Street, Dundas St. W, Chinatown, Toronto

MATERIALITY



Legibility - Large

fig. 5.19: The Commonplace Encounter is Defined by Signage
Dundas St. W., Chinatown, Toronto

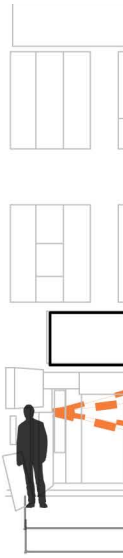
fig. 5.20: Texture and Material of the Commonplace Fabric
Dundas St. W., Chinatown, Toronto

Legibility - Small

fig. 5.21: September 20, 2014, The Commonplace Percieved at Eye Level, Photographs taken every 6m.
Dundas St. W. , Chinatown, Toronto

SEMIOTICS OF SIGNAGE

Semiotics is the study of signs and how they communicate and influence our behaviour. Semiotics is not restricted to the study of commercial signage, it also "includes words, sounds and body language"[1]. These are all forms of linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure who founded the study of semiotics states that it is "a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life"[2]. The commonplace as a territory that is heavily marked by text becomes signifiers for action. Signage, products and the gathering of other people can either attract our attention to consuming or convey information. The pragmatics of the commonplace- "the relation of signs to interpreters"[3] is simplified as two categories that either inspires participation or enlightenment. Semiotics is simultaneously universal and specific. Language or cultural differences may influence the level of comprehension but the sensation of the commonplace is similar across all cities.



1 "Semiotics for Beginners by Daniel Chandler." Semiotics for Beginners by Daniel Chandler. Accessed December 11, 2015. http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/.

2 "Semiotics for Beginners by Daniel Chandler." Semiotics for Beginners by Daniel Chandler.

3 "Semiotics for Beginners by Daniel Chandler." Semiotics for Beginners by Daniel Chandler.

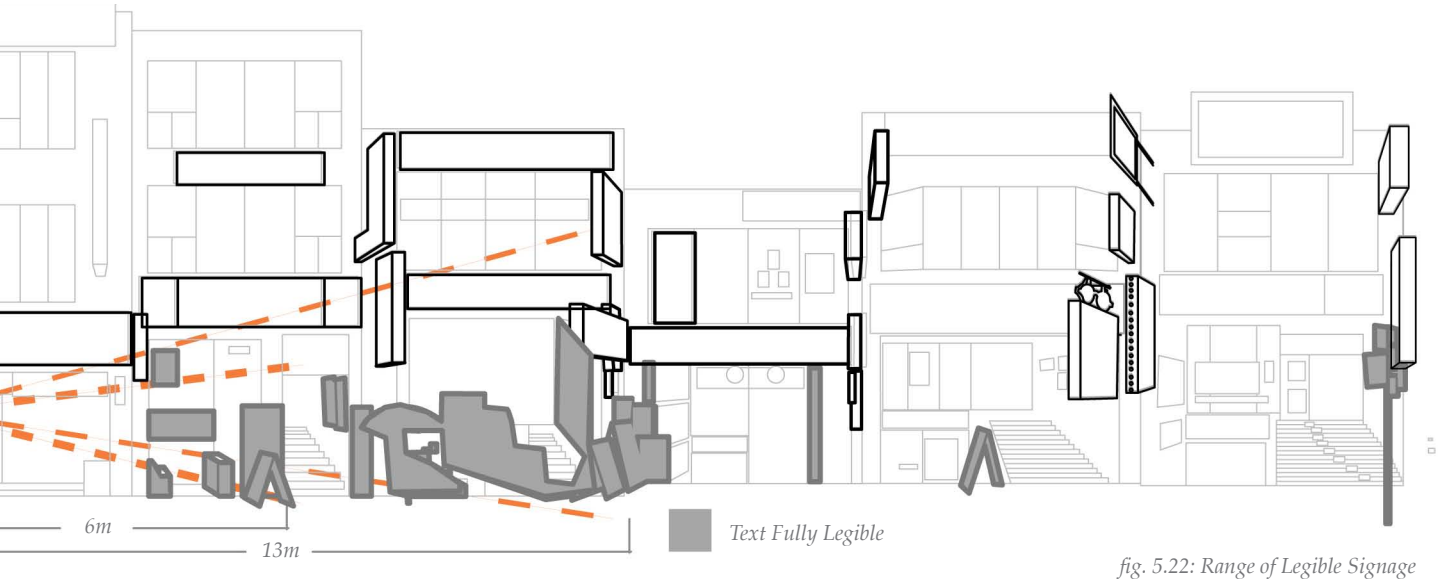
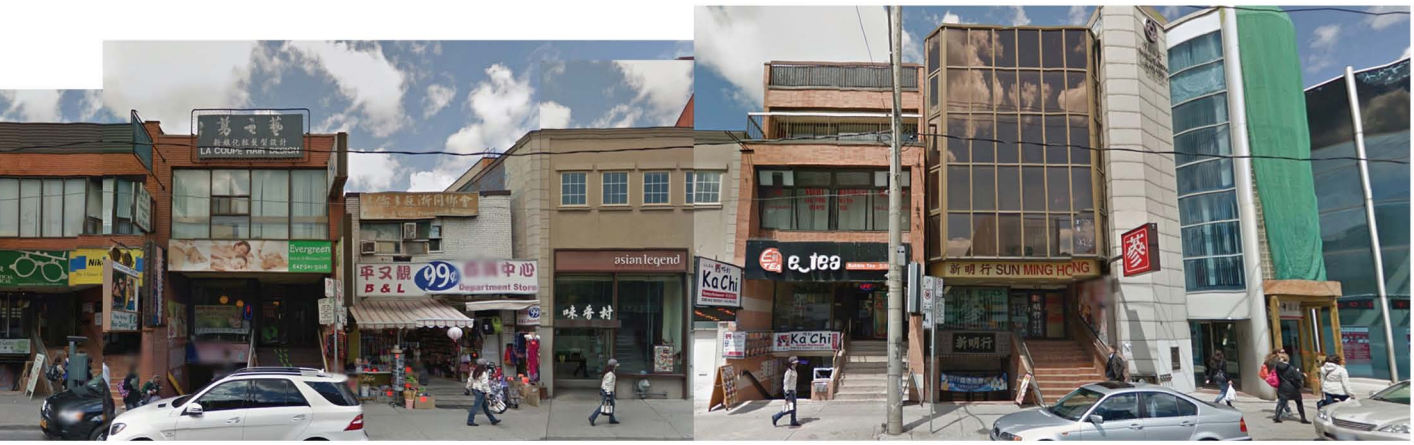


fig. 5.22: Range of Legible Signage
Dundas St. W. , Chinatown, Toronto



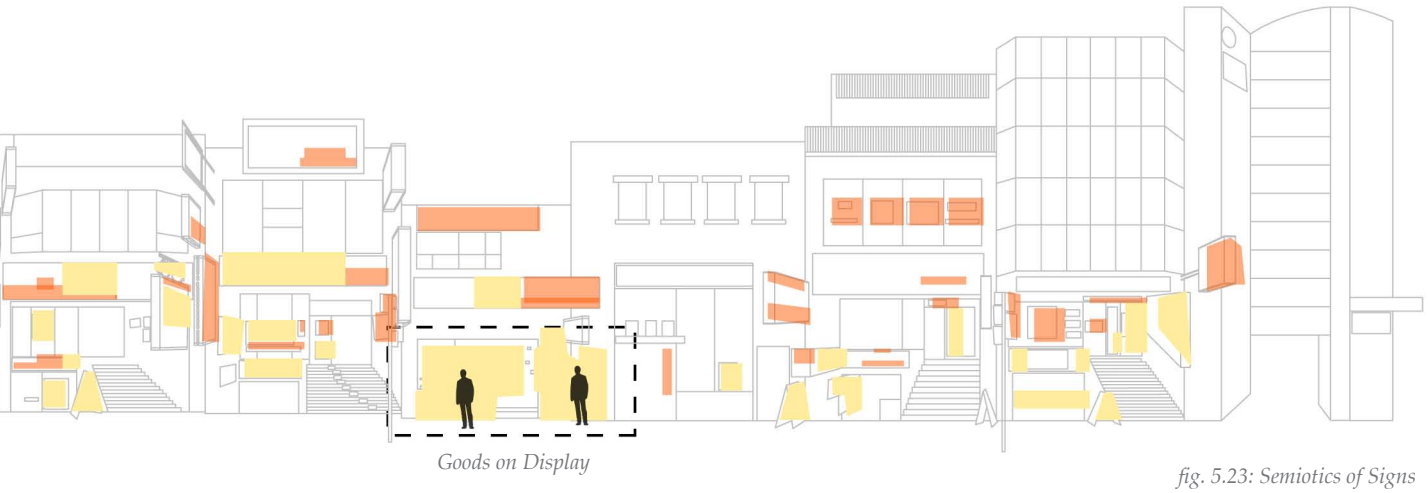


fig. 5.23: Semiotics of Signs
Dundas St. W. , Chinatown, Toronto

VERTICAL TOPOGRAPHY / VARIOUS THRESHOLDS

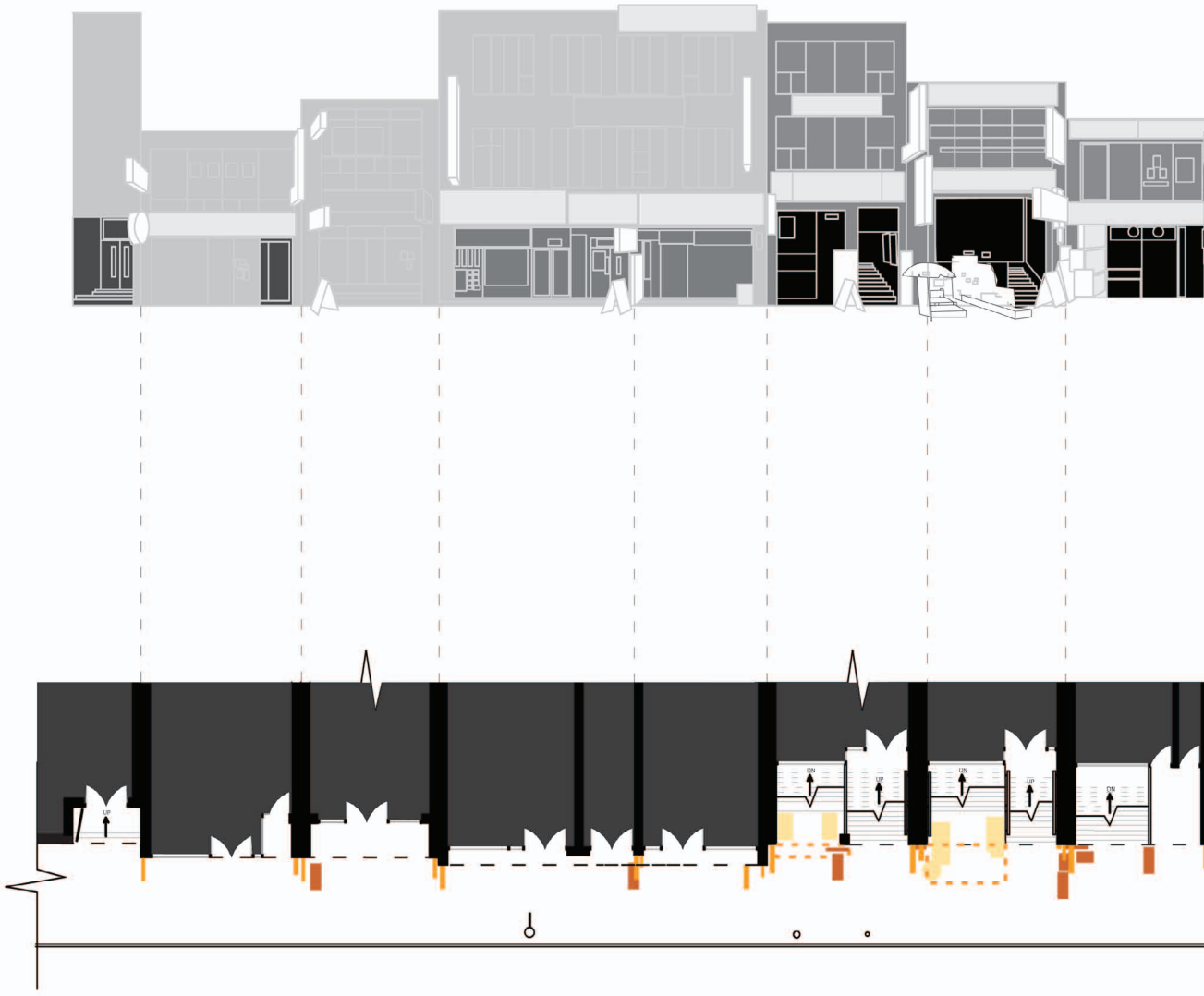


fig. 5.24: Facade Topography, Dundas St. W, Chinatown, Toronto

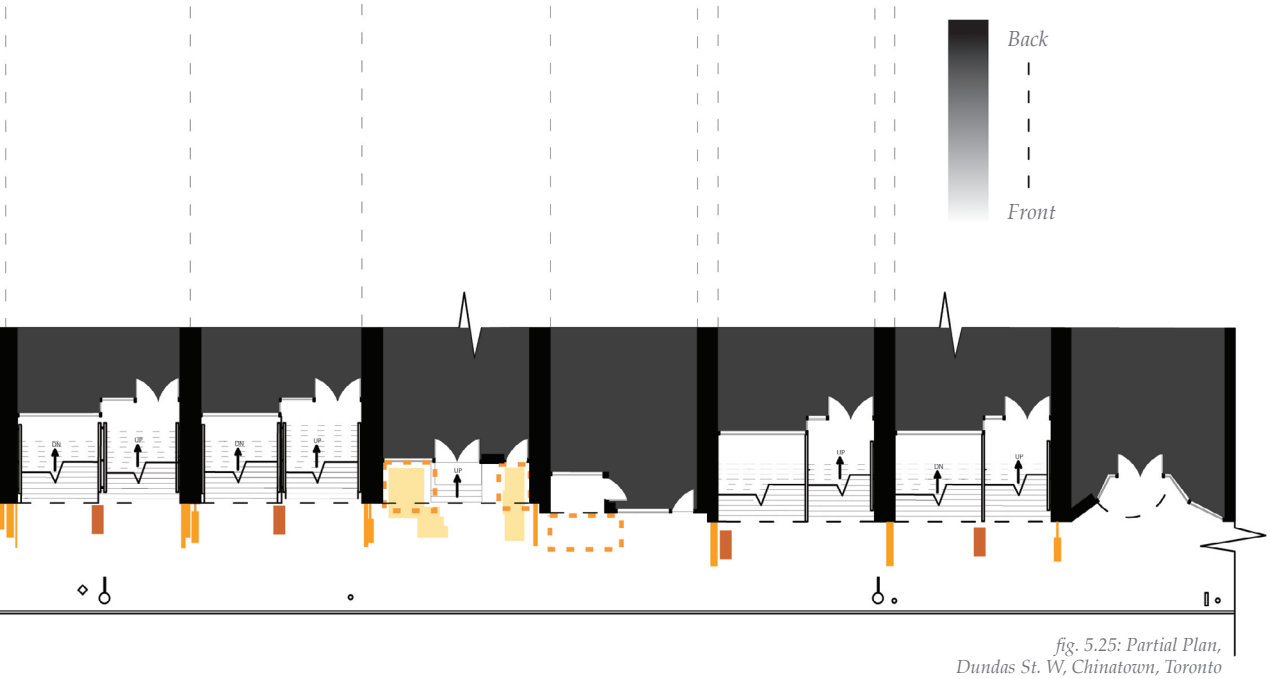
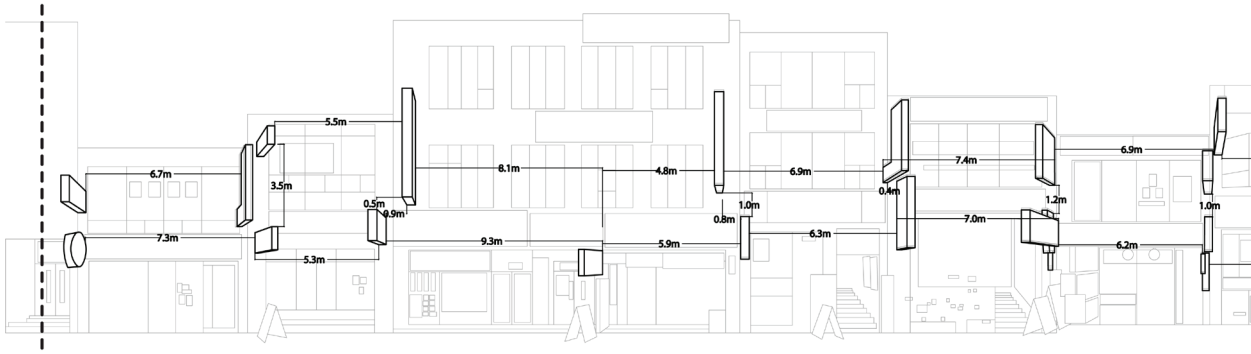


fig. 5.25: Partial Plan, Dundas St. W, Chinatown, Toronto

Projecting Signage
Overhangs and Canopies
"A" Frame Temporary Signage
Products and Goods

Commonplace

Same Materiality groups Buildings as Anonymous Collective, Gestalt : Similarity



Two Tiers of Projecting Signage are Placed in Close Proximity and Create Visual Unity , Gestalt: Continuation

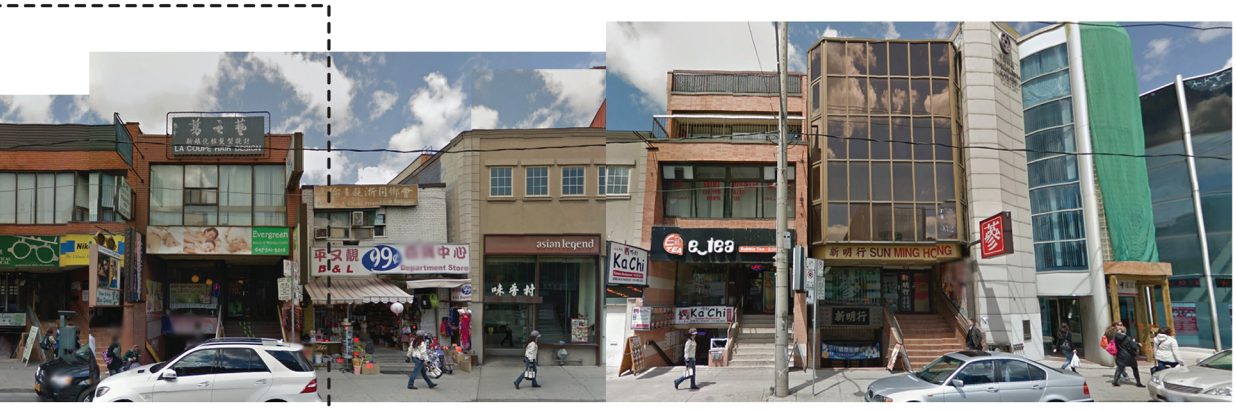


fig. 5.26: June 20, 2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

fig. 5.27: Facade Surface Area

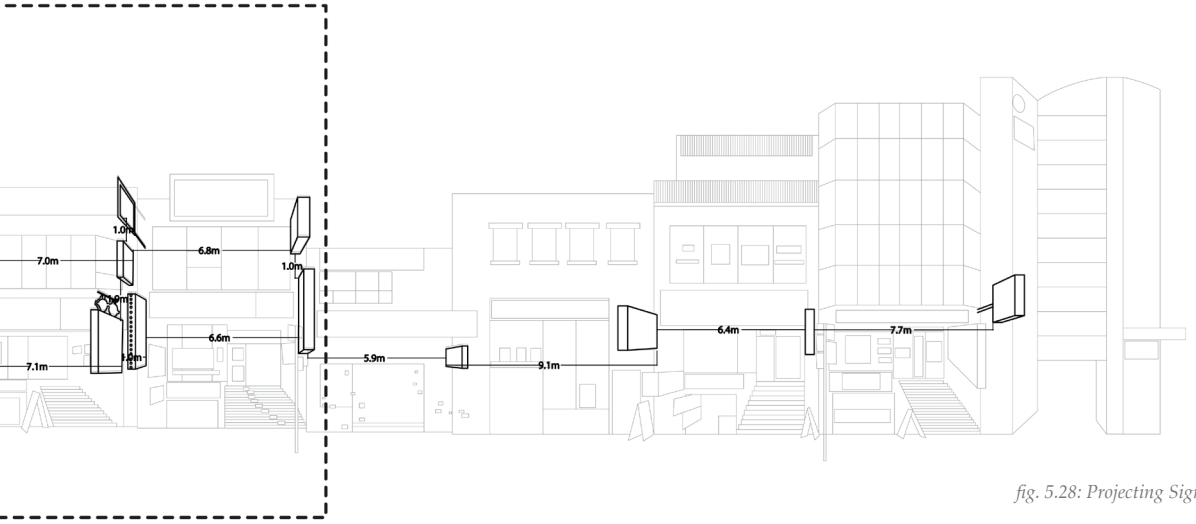
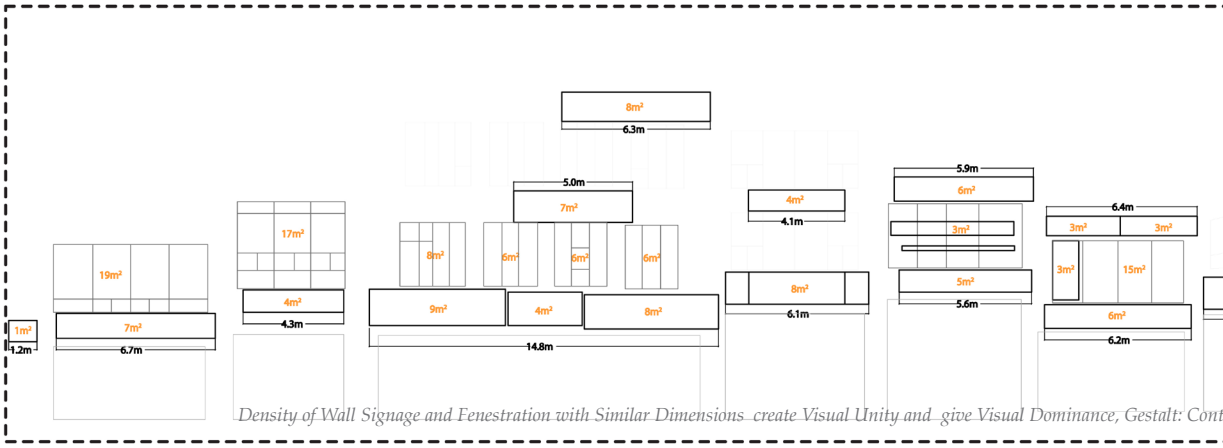
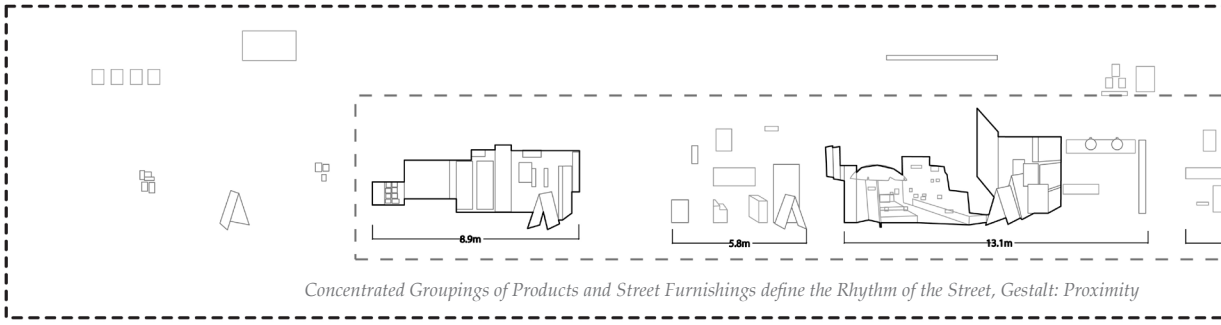


fig. 5.28: Projecting Signage



Density of Wall Signage and Fenestration with Similar Dimensions create Visual Unity and give Visual Dominance, Gestalt: Cont



Concentrated Groupings of Products and Street Furnishings define the Rhythm of the Street, Gestalt: Proximity

fig. 5.29: Wall Signage and Fenestration Surface Area

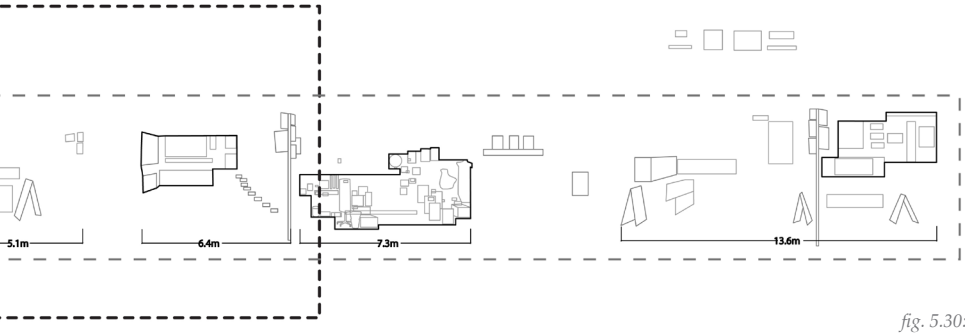


fig. 5.30: Products and Street Furnishings

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

The commonplace is a "bottom-up phenomena, defined bot by overarching geometrical schemes but by intricate local connections, interval, repetition, and seriality are key concepts"[1]. The perception of the commonplace is more dependent on the relationships established between elements rather than the shape of the individual object. As a result, we are able to conceive of elements relative to one another. The multiple relationships between forms build up the critical density required to create the commonplace.

1 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

MAPPING ACTIVE FIELDS

MORNING

During the morning hours the stores open by pulling back their curtains and security gates which adds depth to the field. The expanded thresholds increases the porosity of the field. Change takes place most significantly on the lower levels as owners display their goods and signage along the sidewalk. Illuminated signs are used even during daylight hours.

9 am

9:30 am

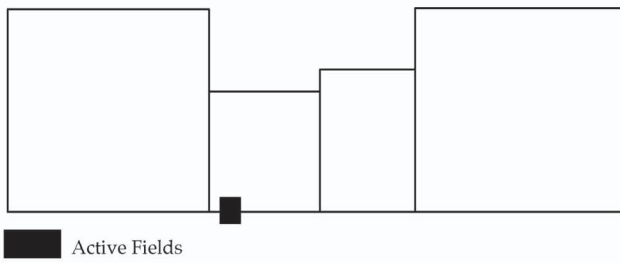
10 am

10:30 am

11 am

11:30 am

fig. 5.31: June 20, 2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

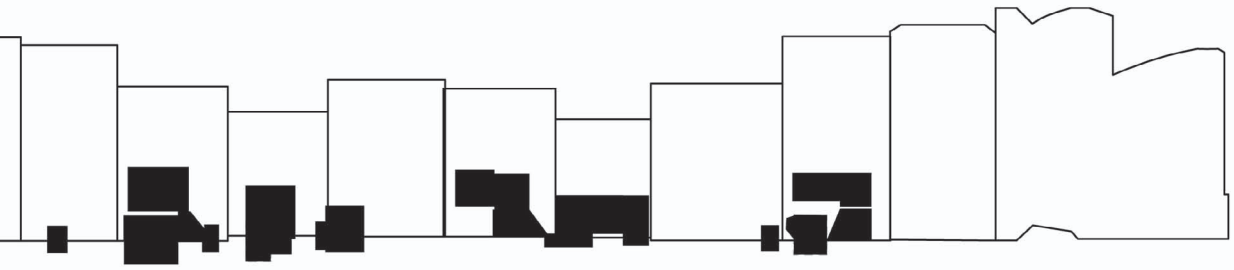


8 am

9 am

10 am

11 am



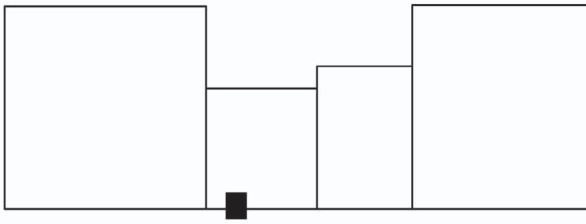
12 pm

12:30 pm

AFTERNOON

During the afternoon, the field remains relatively constant with the influence of more dynamic elements such as a flux in pedestrians and vehicles.

1 pm

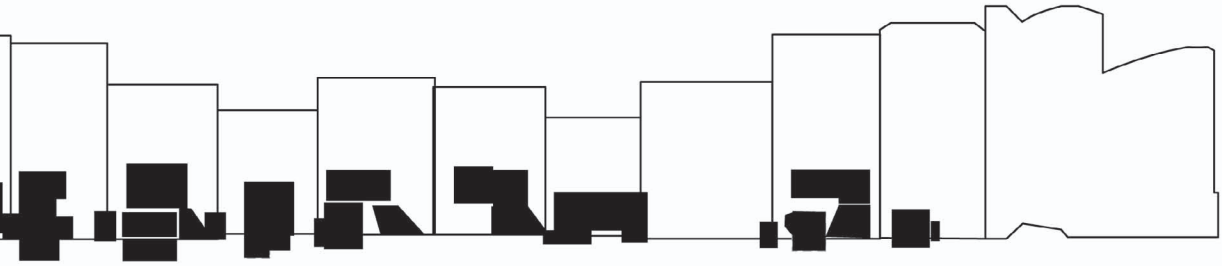


1:30 pm

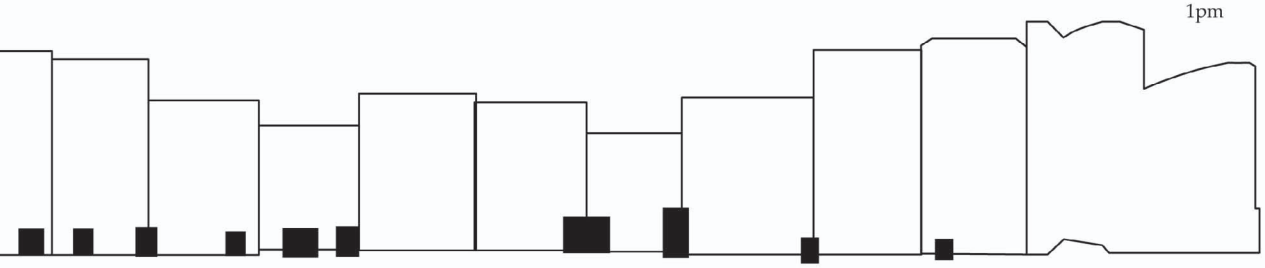
2 pm

2:30 pm

12 pm



1pm



2 pm

fig. 5.32: June 20, 2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

3 pm

3:30 pm

4 pm

4:30 pm

5 pm

5:30 pm

6 pm

6:30 pm

EVENING

7pm

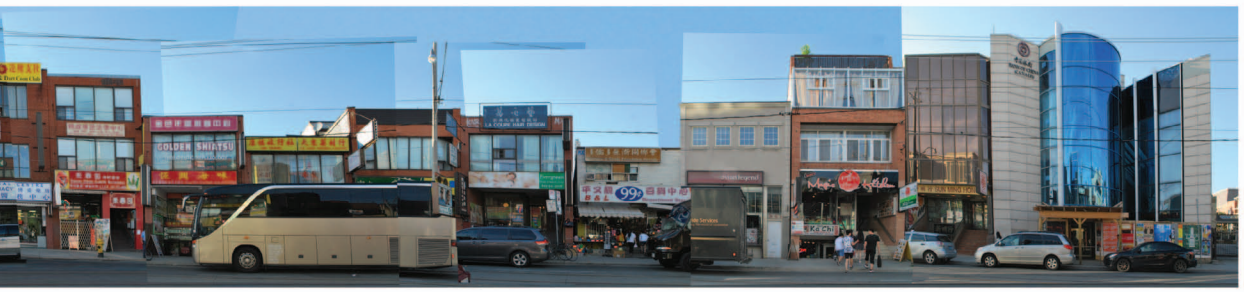
7:30 pm

3 pm

4 pm

5 pm

6 pm

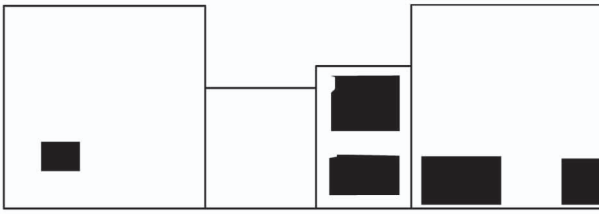


7 pm

fig. 5.33: June 20, 2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

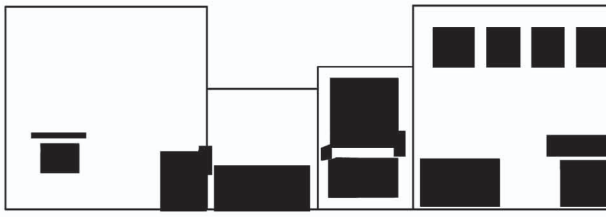
8 pm

8:30 pm



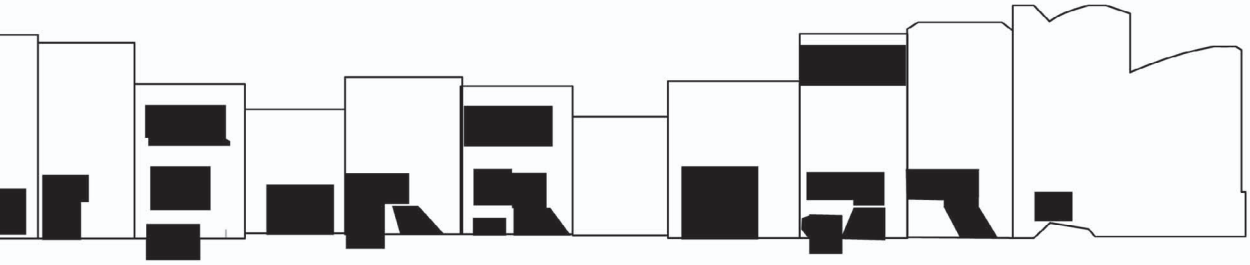
9 pm

9:30 pm

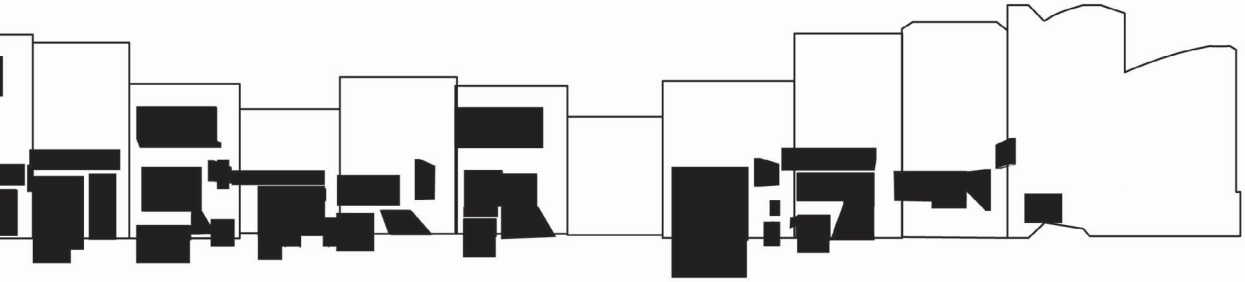


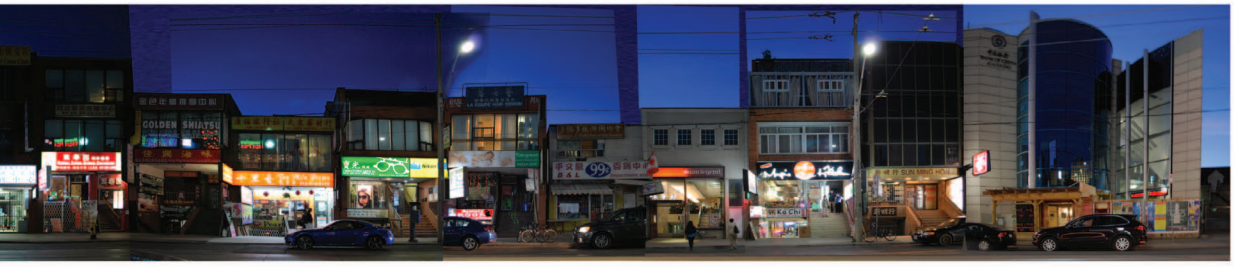
During the evening the illuminated interiors of the storefronts are visible against the darkened sky. The field is pushed back beyond the facade and into the depths of the building. Thresholds gradually become more inaccessible as the stores close up for the night pulling security gates over their entrances. Products and temporary signage retreat from the sidewalk and are stored away for the night.

8 pm



9 pm



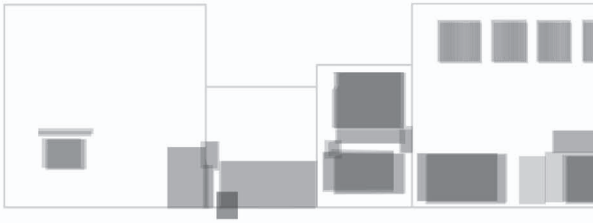


9:30 pm

fig. 5.34: June 20, 2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

10 pm

10:30 pm



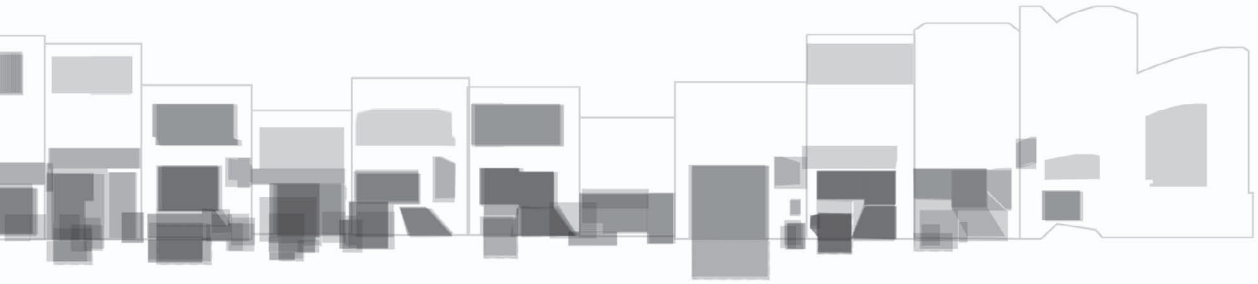
ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

"Field conditions moves from the one toward the many, from individuals to collectives, from objects to fields"[1]. "To generalize, a field condition could be any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each. Field configurations are loosely bound aggregates characterized by porosity and local interconnectivity"[2]. A field is the overall assembly of several smaller groupings. Gestalt theory is integral to our perception of these groupings.

The diagrams capture areas of change throughout the day. These transformations of space can be as simple as products set out for display, a bike parked against a post or the illumination of a sign. All these temporal variations create "local relations of difference"[3] which are then overlaid as layers revealing the underlying behaviour of the street. The superposition of these temporal layers reveals the "coexistence of a regular field and emergent figure." In the commonplace, field conditions represent an "intensification of experience at specified moments within the extended field of the city"[4]. The everyday experience of the commonplace happens for the most part around these dynamic fragments. When activated by these fields, the perception of the framework (building) is inverted and recedes into the background. The commonplace is not marked "by demarcating lines but by thickened surfaces"[5].

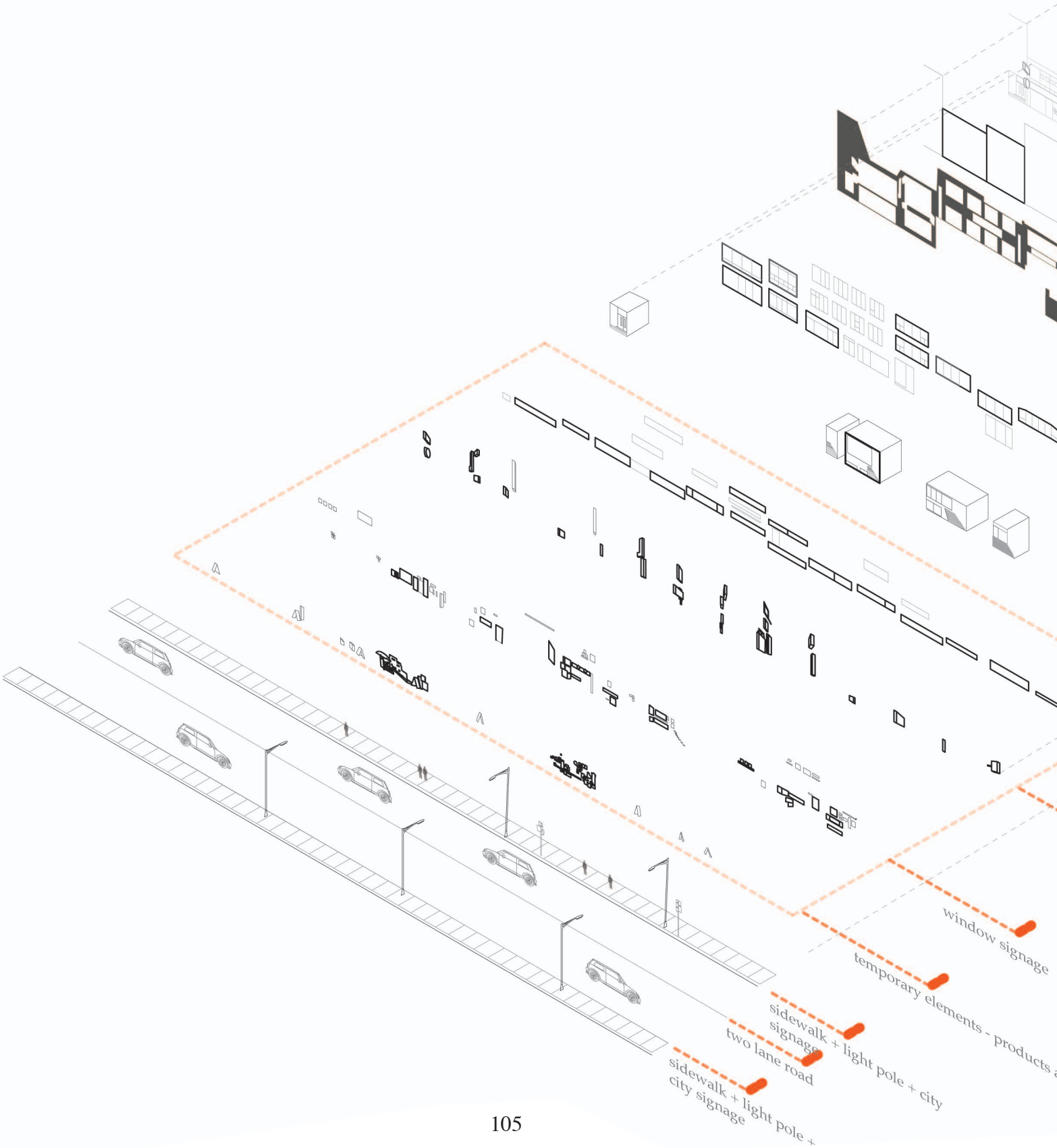
1 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.
2 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. 1999.
3 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. 1999.
4 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. 1999.
5 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. 1999.

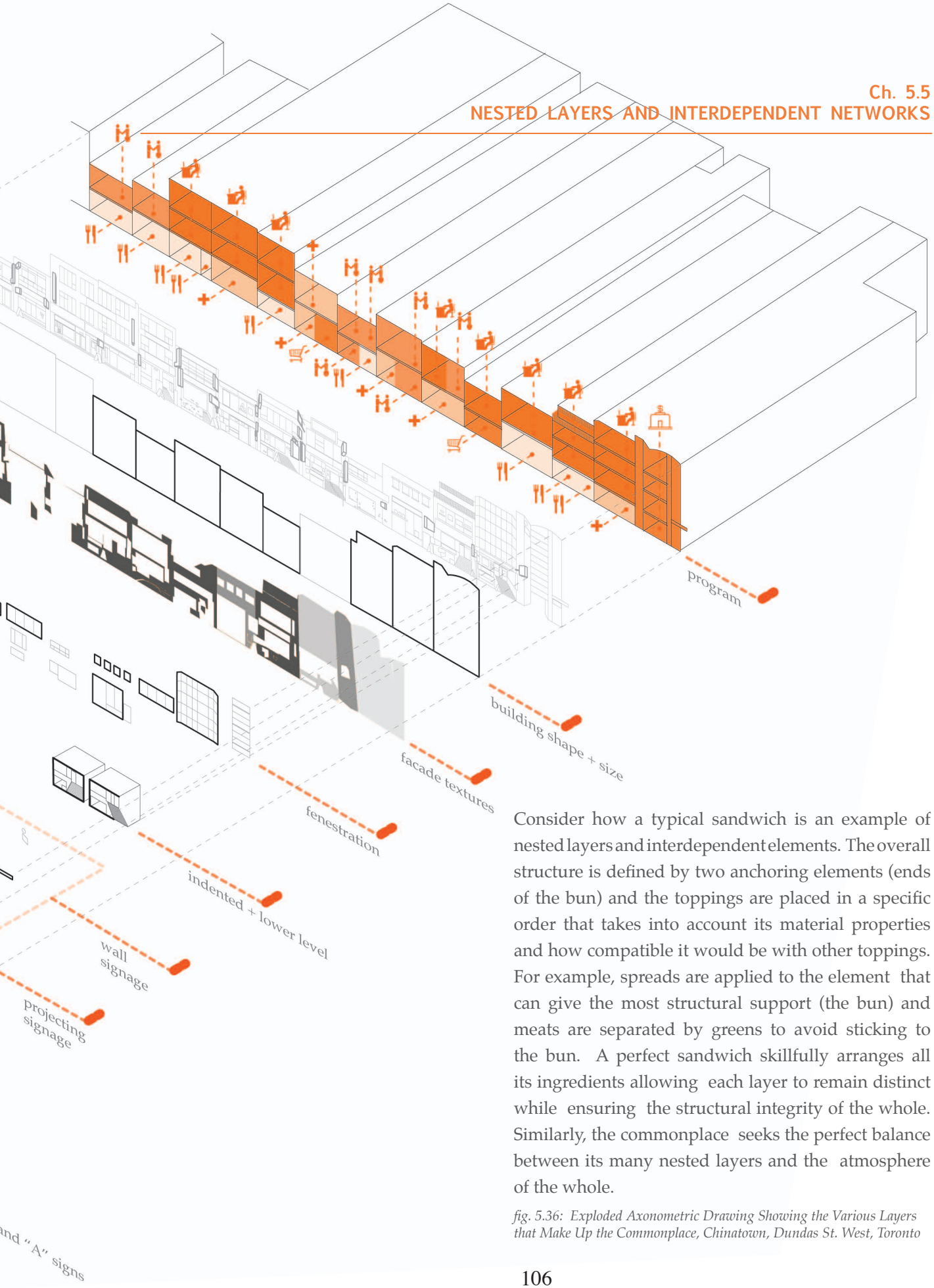
10 pm



Overlaid Active Fields

fig. 5.35: June 20, 2015, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto


window signage
temporary elements - products
sidewalk + light pole + city signage
two lane road
sidewalk + light pole + city signage

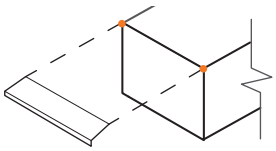


Consider how a typical sandwich is an example of nested layers and interdependent elements. The overall structure is defined by two anchoring elements (ends of the bun) and the toppings are placed in a specific order that takes into account its material properties and how compatible it would be with other toppings. For example, spreads are applied to the element that can give the most structural support (the bun) and meats are separated by greens to avoid sticking to the bun. A perfect sandwich skillfully arranges all its ingredients allowing each layer to remain distinct while ensuring the structural integrity of the whole. Similarly, the commonplace seeks the perfect balance between its many nested layers and the atmosphere of the whole.

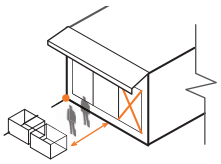
fig. 5.36: Exploded Axonometric Drawing Showing the Various Layers that Make Up the Commonplace, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

fig. 5.37: Commonplace of Occupation, September 28, 2014. Bloor, Toronto

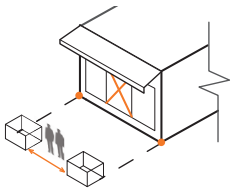
The commonplace of occupation is the most dynamic and unpredictable layer of the commonplace yet it always occurs relative to its context. The specific alignment to the facade roughly defines the boundary of products and signage set out for display. Elements are placed in intervals that reference the window bays or displays so as to frame the entrance. The layer of occupation is, therefore, an extension of the underlying building fabric. The rhythm of the context is translated to the realm of occupation at the scale of the pedestrian experience.



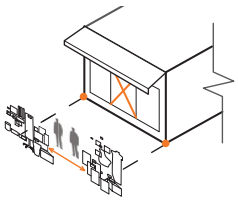
Canopy to corners



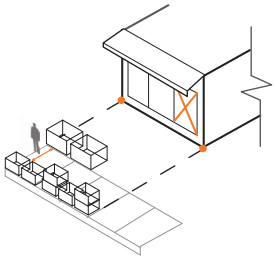
Products align opposite of door and allow walking width



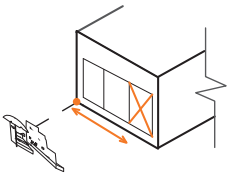
Products align on either side of door and allow walking width



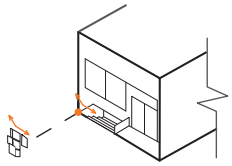
Products align on either side of door and allow walking width



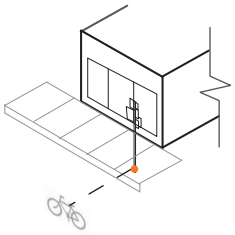
Products align opposite of door, line the sidewalk and allow walking width



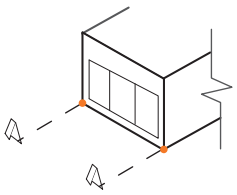
Products align opposite of door



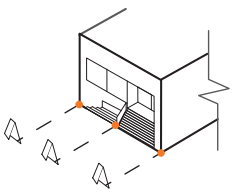
Products wrap around stair niche



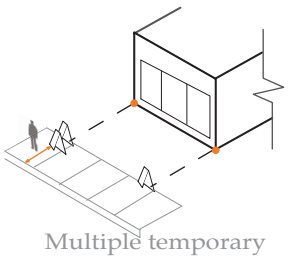
Bikes secured to post



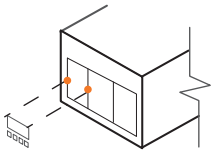
Temporary signs align to the corners



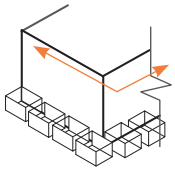
Temporary signs mark the divisions between upper and lower levels



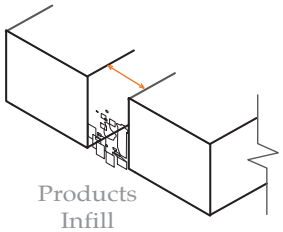
Multiple temporary signs need to maintain walkable width



Signs or posters attached to the windows are relative to window dimensions



Products hug the corner



Products Infill

fig. 5.38: Typical Street Furniture / Goods Configurations

GENERIC DIVERSITY

Modular furniture is comprised of a multitude of single generic parts yet it allows an incredibly flexible assembly full of interdependent connections within the constraints of the structural framework. The various configurations test the limits of customization and exemplify diverse spatial possibilities (fig.5.39) (fig.5.40).

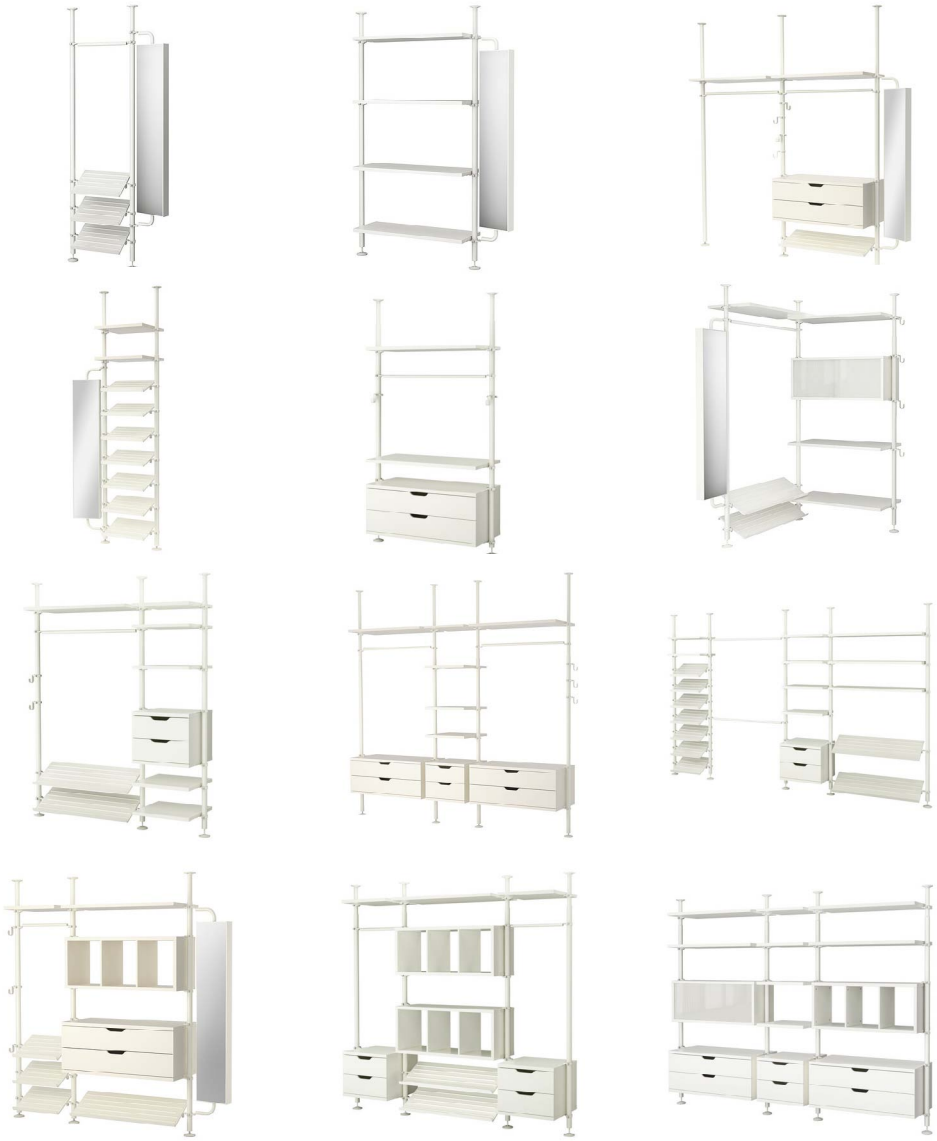


fig. 5.39: Generic Shelving Units can be put into a Diverse Array of Configurations but has an Underlying Degree of Generic-ness and Repetition, IKEA Shelving Units, (photo credit: IKEA)

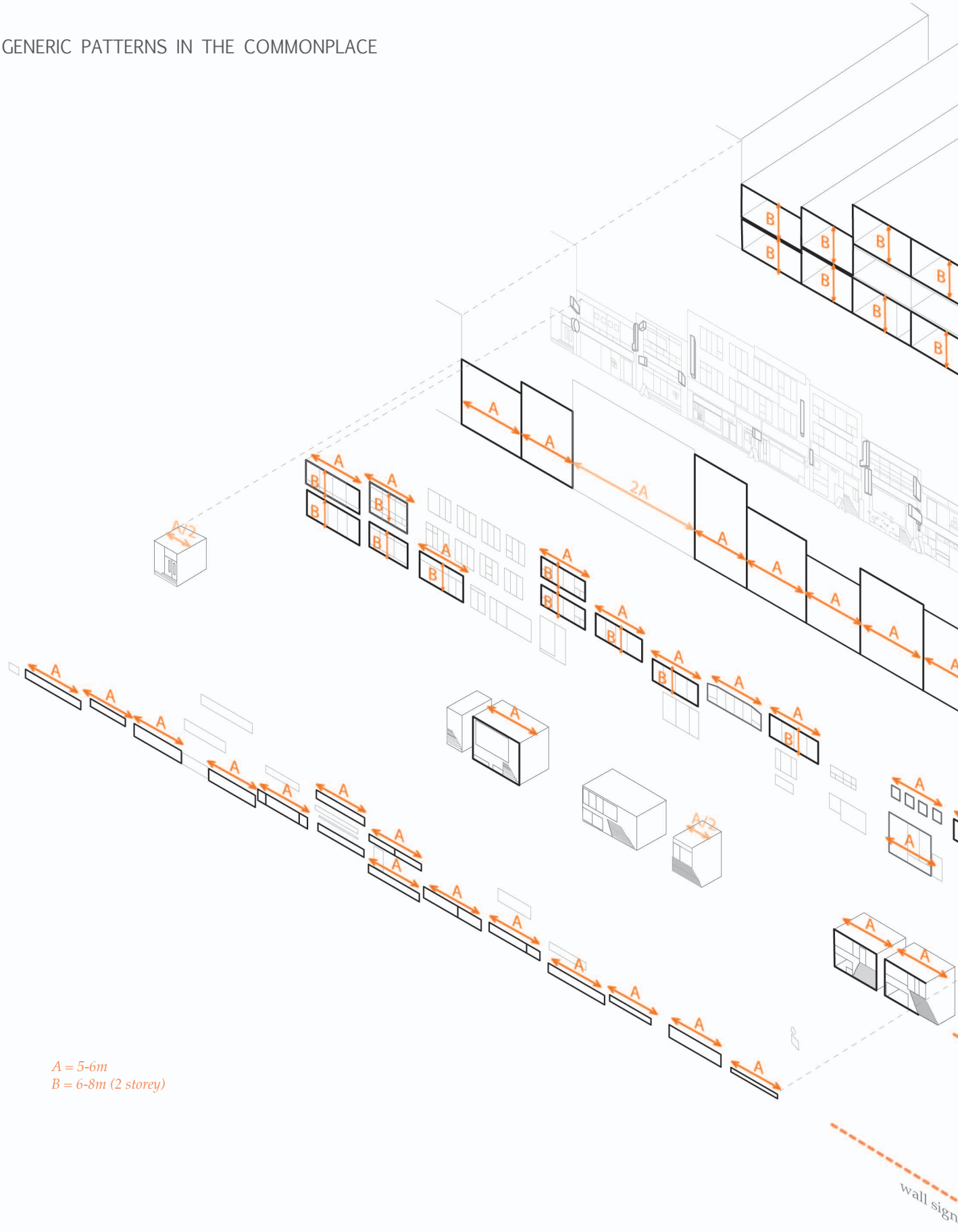
fig. 5.40: Elements begin to populate the framework and take on a Different Spatial Presence. The shelving unit becomes a Inhabited Wall, IKEA Shelving Unit, (photo credit: IKEA)

GENERIC PATTERNS IN THE COMMONPLACE

Despite the apparent unpredictability and instability of the chaotic commonplace, it has an underlying generic geometrical structure- "order masquerading as randomness"[1]. Chaotic elements in the built environment are restrained by broader hierarchies such as social conventions, cultural practices and more implicitly through physical limitations imposed by the building code and bylaw. Micro hierarchies exist between adjacencies as the placement of each individual element is a mediated response to its immediate surroundings. As a result "the degrees of freedom can be few"[2] but the cumulative transformations produce a complex diversely rich system where "unstable new motions simply accumulate, one on top of another, creating rhythms with overlapping speeds and sizes"[3].

The modular shelf analogy to the commonplace is able to simply put into perspective the interplay between generic structure and diversity of random contents. Much like how a furniture designer will prototype and test his designs to uncover the full potentials of his product, the commonplace will be tested in a similar manner through scripting to extract all possible configurations. In doing so, one can begin to gauge which characteristics create the optimal setup and which are satisfactory. However, it is important to note that scripting is only able to capture key principles of the commonplace. The degree of articulation required for the script to be manageable and functional limits the script's ability to truly represent reality- the phenomenon of the commonplace. In the same way, that pristine generic staging of shelving units (fig.5.40) may be deceptive to the cluttered condition of real life usage, the script should be understood in more conceptual terms.

1 Gleick, James. Chaos: Making a New Science. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
2 Gleick, James. Chaos: Making a New Science.
3 Gleick, James. Chaos: Making a New Science.



A = 5-6m
B = 6-8m (2 storey)

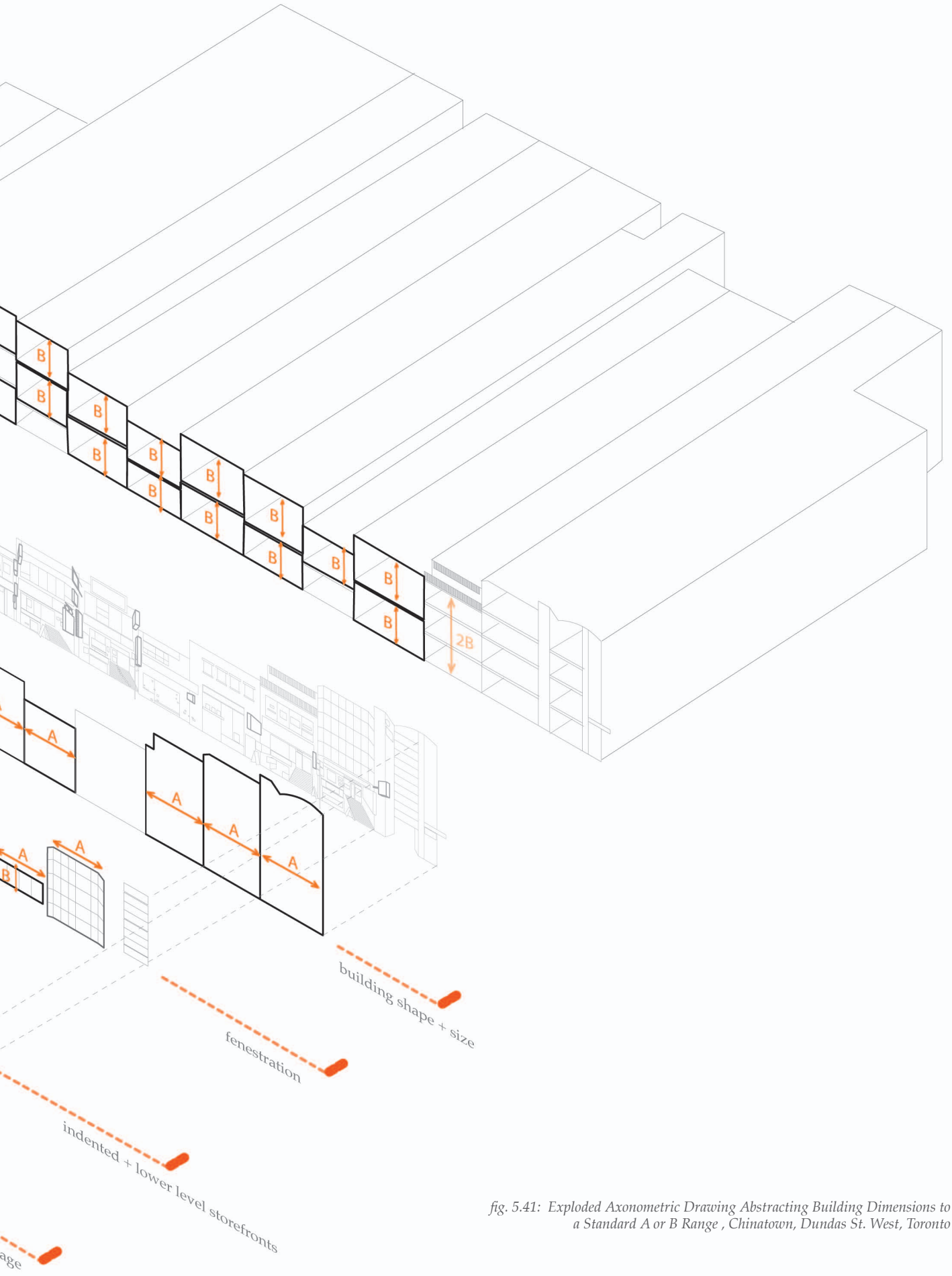


fig. 5.41: Exploded Axonometric Drawing Abstracting Building Dimensions to a Standard A or B Range , Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

CHINATOWN'S HISTORIC PARCELIZATION

One of the key traits of the commonplace is spatial/programmatic differentiation and variation. The commonplace of building fabric is more apparent in dense building parcelization which allows the most amount of tenants per building footprint. Qualitative differences such as architectural style and materiality also produce the eclectic mix of visuals characteristic of commonplaces (fig.5.42).

fig. 5.42: A Typical Street in Toronto is Comprised of Various Building Sizes and Stylistic Differences. To Account for Variation, A and B Dimensions are Specified as Ranges

The narrow width of the storefronts along Dundas St. West (fig.5.43) maximizes the number of diverse elements within a single block. This visual density is key to establishing the commonplace. The storefronts are all within 5 to 6 metres in width. Historically, the building lot was spaced this distance apart. "At ground level, numerous jogs, kinks and gentle curves in the road [gave] the street a crooked, doglegged feel not found in the ruler-straight Bloor or Queen streets. The main reason for Dundas' odd route is its origin as several unconnected streets through the centre of the city"[1]. "Dundas Street was cobbled together in about 1920 from half a dozen short streets laid out by the owners of the narrow 100 acres Park Lots that stretched between Queen and Bloor Streets. Each owner had his own vision of how his lot should be developed, and there appears to have been little coordination between neighbours"[2].

1 Bateman, Chris. „A Brief History of What Is Now Known as Dundas Street." Accessed December 11, 2015. http://www.blogto.com/city/2012/09/a_brief_history_of_what_is_now_known_as_dundas_street/.

2 "Why Is Dundas Street so Crooked?" Simcoes Gentry Torontos Park Lots RSS. Accessed December 11, 2015. http://torontofamilyhistory.org/simcoesgentry/introduction/dundas-street.

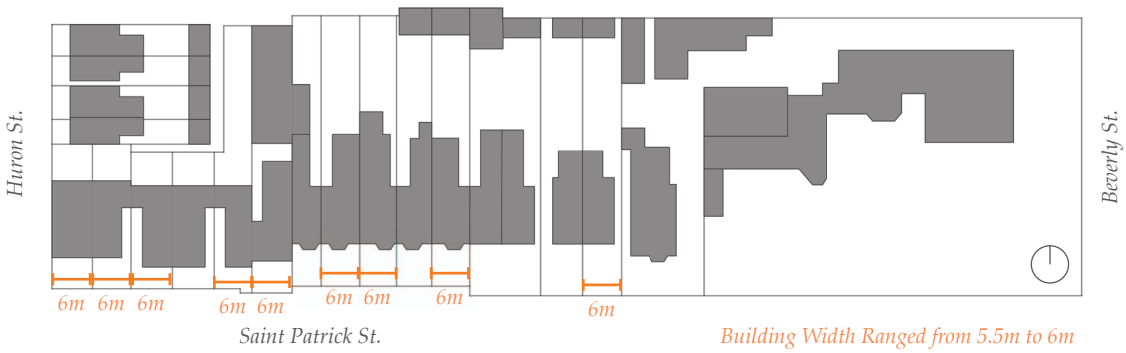


fig. 5.43: Goads Fire Insurance Plan, 1913, Dundas St. West (Formerly Saint Patrick St.), Toronto

fig. 5.44: Scattered Houses and Open Land, Spadina Ave. and Dundas St. West, 1864, Toronto, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

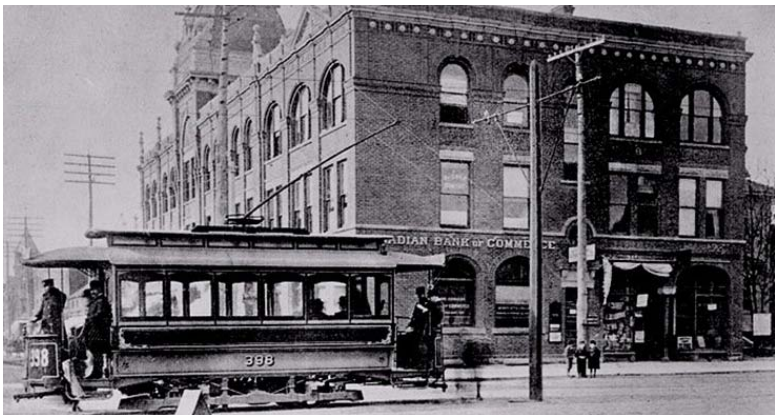


fig. 5.45: Commercial Buildings and High End Residences are Built and Streetcar Service is Established, Spadina Ave., 1895, Toronto, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 5.46: Route Correction to Intersect with Dundas. St, McCaul St., 1915 Toronto, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

fig. 5.47: Commercial Buildings Fill in the Gaps Next to Historic Residences, 187-191 Spadina Ave., 1940, Toronto, (photo credit: City of Toronto Archives)

The contents drastically change the spatiality and function of the shelving units. Similarly, signage populates the building framework and produces many types of spatial variations that begin to shape a range of thresholds bridging between the building facade and active sidewalk.

fig. 5.48: Headboard, IKEA Shelving Units, (photo credit: IKEA)

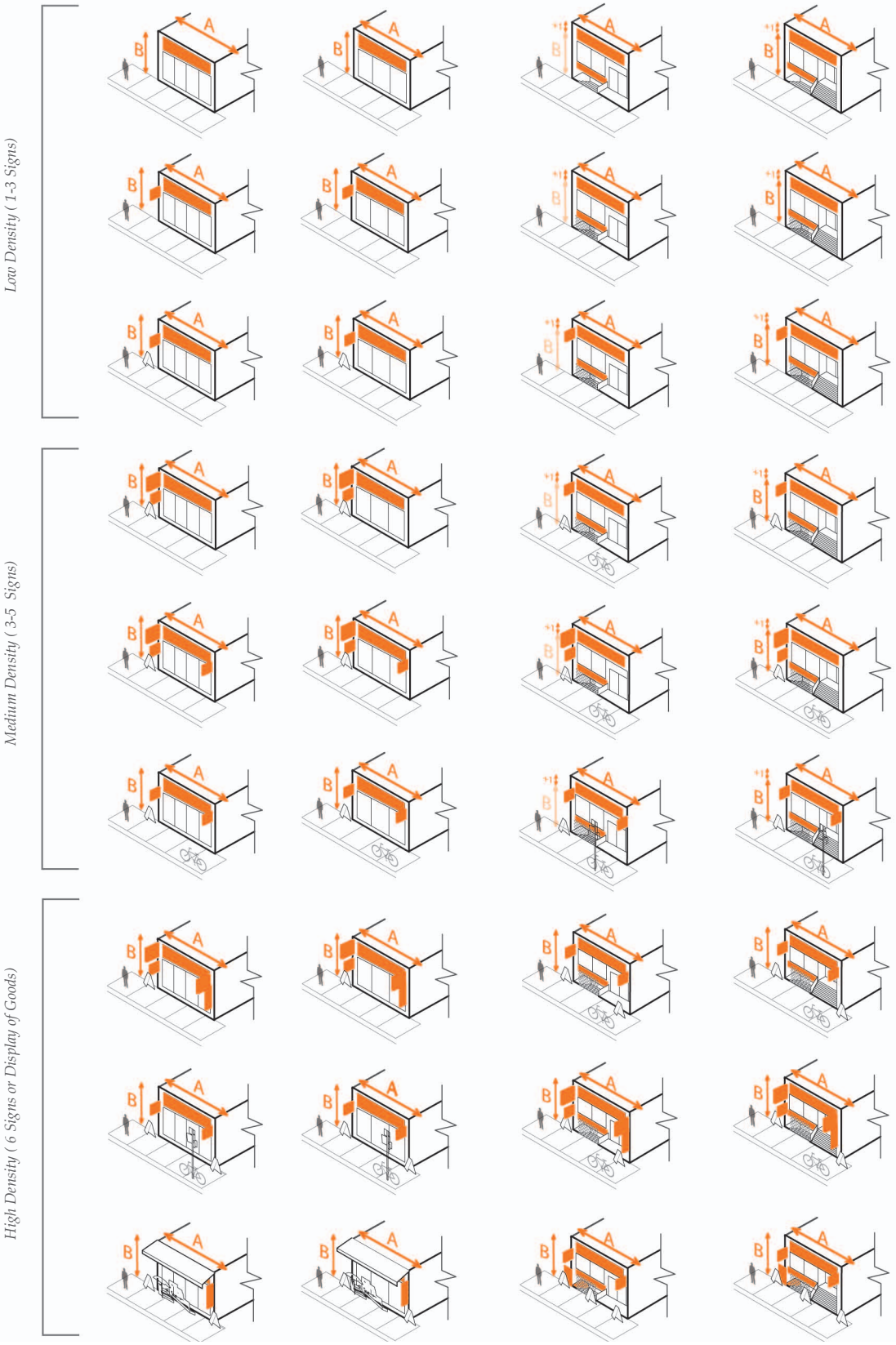
fig. 5.49: Workstation and Room Divider, IKEA Shelving Units, (photo credit: Instructables)

fig. 5.50: Bicycle Rack, IKEA Shelving Units, (photo credit: IKEA Hackers)

fig. 5.51: Retail Counter, IKEA Shelving Units, (photo credit: Gretas Lilla Moln)

fig.5.52: The Contents of the Commonplace (Signage) is a Major Factor in Determining the Spatial Characteristics of the Street, September 28, 2014. Chinatown, Toronto

fig. 5.53: Typical Signage Configurations



UPPER LEVEL MODULES

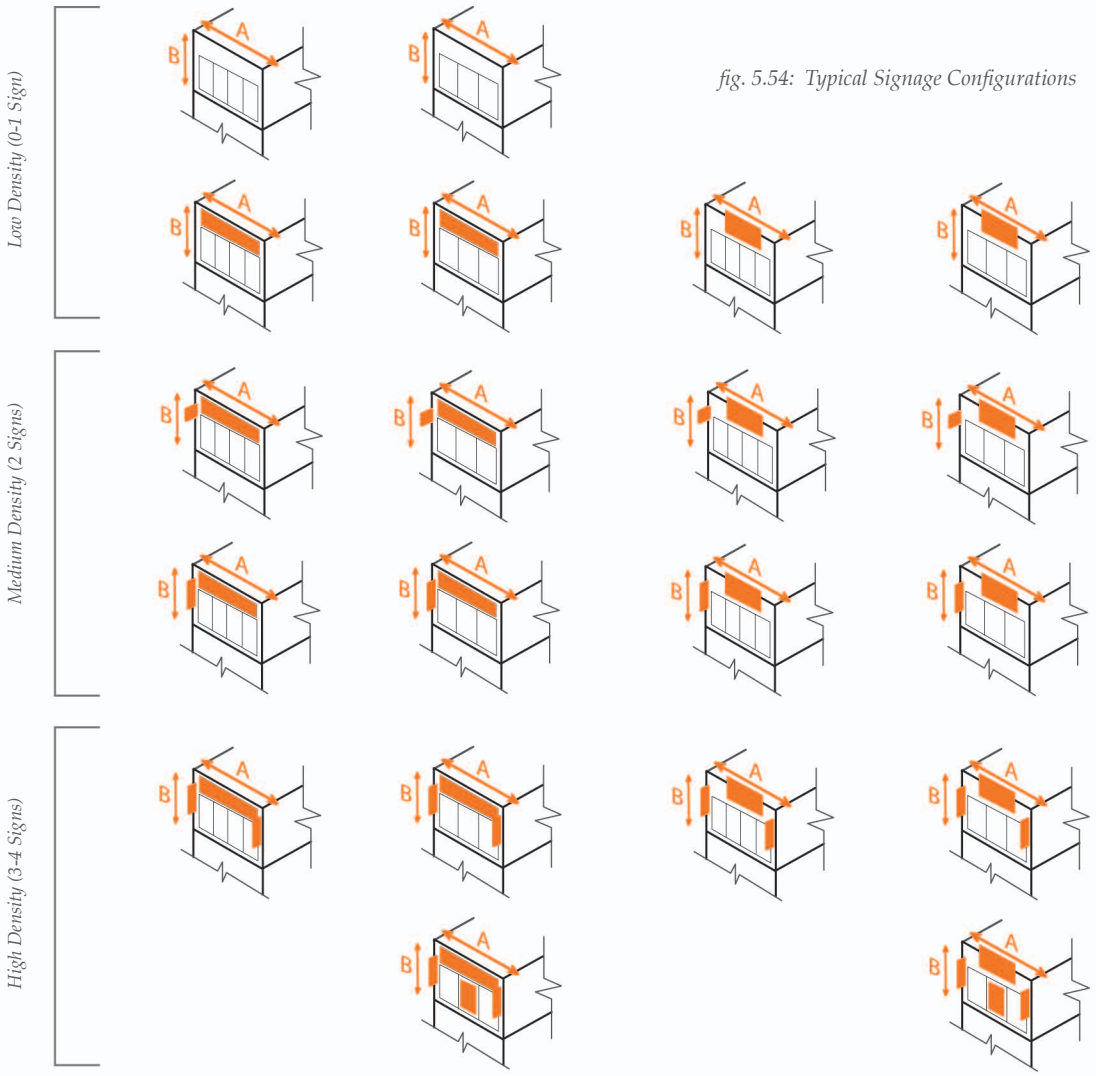


fig. 5.54: Typical Signage Configurations

SIGNAGE DENSITY

While it is possible to abstract the typical signage configurations of a single storefront (fig.5.53) (fig.5.54), it is difficult to predict the layout of signage for an entire street. It is insufficient to abstract the commonplace to one level of signage density and one size of building (fig.5.55). The analysis must now shift from a modular to a matrix that can reflect a greater degree of variation.

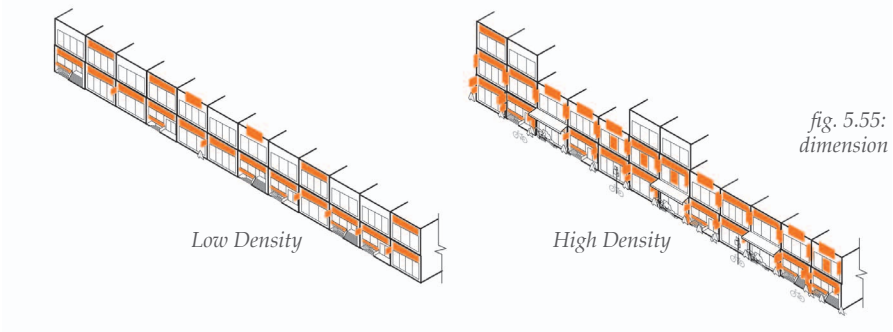


fig. 5.55: Modules with a standardized A and B dimension and single density type will not reflect the diversity of a true commonplace

CH. 6.01 INTRODUCTION TO DIFFERENTIATION AND VARIATION

Urban fabric that arises out of emergence -typically a bottom-up phenomenon- consists of a collage of various typologies, architectural styles and spatial conditions. As emerging urban fabric is propelled by many individuals, the overall aesthetic of the commonplace can be sporadic and unstructured, yet sparks interest and gives the street unique character. The key factors that contribute to creating the atmosphere of the commonplace are the concept of differentiation (number of elements) and the difference in degree (intensity of variation). Although the commonplace is distinguished from the generic by a higher ratio of differentiation and variation, generic characteristics such as repetition are also vital.

Differentiation and variation express the overall condition of the urban fabric - the sum of the multitude of parts that shape the commonplace. These parts exist in interconnected layers which Deleuze describes as a milieu. More specifically, the layers or milieu of the commonplace are the nested elements pertaining to the building fabric, signage and occupation. Deleuze states that "every milieu is coded, a code being defined by periodic repetition, but each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction. Transcoding or transduction is the manner in which one milieu serves as the basis for another, or conversely is established atop another milieu, dissipates in it or is constituted in it"[1]. There are specific relational nodes that knit the layers together and reference each other's presence. This relationship is linear and specific to the single building. For example, the placement of signage is relative to the spatial conditions of the facade it is affixed to. "The milieus are open to chaos, which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos"[2].

"A milieu does, in fact, exist by virtue of a periodic repetition [in other words it follows a generic pattern], but one whose only effect is to produce a difference by which the milieu passes into another milieu [it creates dimensional relationships that span across layers]. It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition"[3]. "Similarity can emerge out of difference and difference can emerge out of similarity. We are moving away from an understanding of the discrete, which in recent history has meant the unique, toward the continuous"[4]. Differentiation creates rhythm by introducing global changes but "repetition within a single model is necessary to register differentiation"[5]. Differentiation is a "series constituting a progression"[6] and shifts our perception to an overall field condition. A musical analogy is repetition establishes regular intervals for each bar giving the overall composition structure whereas differentiation (rhythm) colours the piece with melody.

1 Deleuze, Gilles, and Fe Guattari. A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
2 A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
3 A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
4 Reiser, Jesse, and Nanako Umemoto. Atlas of Novel Tectonics. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.
5 A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
6 A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Variation is the intensity of differentiation. Differentiation categorizes by typology whereas variation occurs within the same family of elements. However, variation affects how easily differentiation is perceived. Again using a musical analogy, certain variations of notes or lack of variation affect how easily differentiation (rhythm) is perceived.

Finally, the collective aggregation of differentiation and variation of many elements define territory. Territory is a "determined margin"[7] defined by the underlying top-down framework that governs the milieu or by the dominant tendency of the collective. Parcels, wards and setbacks are examples of determined margins. These permanent boundaries give the city structure and clarity for ease of legislation but they lack fluidity for accommodating the true dynamic lived-in occupation of the city. In contrast, the territory of the commonplace is unstable and in constant flux. "Each element has no intrinsic and stable meaning outside its contextual relationships"[8]. This creates a more atmospheric definition of territory such as the cultural boundaries established by the extent of Chinese signage in Toronto's Chinatown. The commonplace requires a critical density or concentration of related elements to establish multi-layered relationships which ultimately elevates the urban fabric to be perceived as a field condition. Deleuze describes the formation of territory "precisely when milieu components cease to be directional, becoming dimensional instead, when they cease to be functional to become expressive. There is territory when the rhythm has expressiveness. What defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression"[9]. Reiser and Umoto particularly capture the essence of the phenomenon by asserting "mere quantity allows only for the quality of mere quantity. But intensive quantity [through differentiation and variation] generates a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts"[10]. The commonplace becomes a qualitative experience.

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7 A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
8 Atlas of Novel Tectonics. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.
9 A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
10 Atlas of Novel Tectonics. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006

"From the general scheme to the particular detail, the modernist project deals methodologically and architecturally almost exclusively with top-down hierarchy"[1]. Emerging practices such as Reiser and Umemoto are now envisioning the potential to merge the properties of top-down and bottom-up as a design strategy. They are "using organizational principles that promote communication across the scales, in which the particular is able to affect the general and vice versa. This requires a methodology that involves both top-down and bottom-up logistics operating in a feedback loop"[2]. This real-time responsiveness ensures that "successive generations of assemblies are developed as positive mutation of what are considered to be the result of successful coding"[3]. Scripting and parametric coding that is able to simulate and optimize various schemes are now becoming the platform for design. Emerging practices are finding value in responsive and iterative methods that continually layer complexity to the system. "Systems that produce complexity consist of diverse rule-following entities whose behaviours are interdependent. Those entities interact over a contact structure or network. In addition, the entities often adapt"[4]. "This methodology, in contrast to the reductive models of modernism, enables the emergence of new organizations and new architectural effects out of wholes that are not reducible to their parts"[5]. In other words, it represents a shift to designing atmospheres, experiences or field conditions.

In order to make complex systems viable for practices to implement, modular assemblages that work in conjunction with parametric scripting "emerge not from the arbitrary placement of components, but rather from an optimization of the intersection of programmatic, tectonic, and aesthetic parameters"[6]. The efficiency of fabrication is also coded into the script to maximize material usage which streamlines the construction process. *Porter House* by SHoP Architects (fig.6.1) is a modern addition on top of a historic warehouse located in Manhattan, New York. Its most striking feature is the varied window

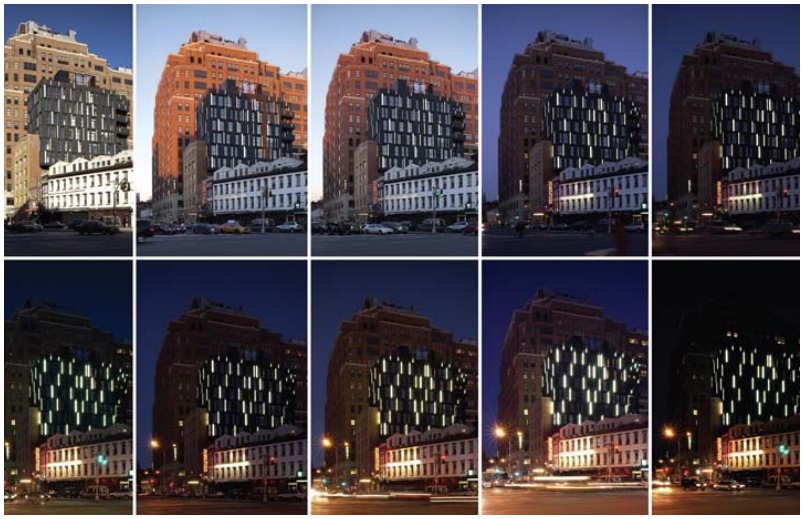

fig. 6.1: Porter House, SHoP Architects, (photo credit: SHoP Architects)

1 Reiser, Jesse, and Nanako Umemoto. Atlas of Novel Tectonics. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.
2 Atlas of Novel Tectonics. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.
3 Berman, Ila and Andrew Kudless. FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.
4 Page, Scott E. Diversity and Complexity. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.
5 Atlas of Novel Tectonics. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006.
6 FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.

dimensions which wrap the building like a barcode. The project was conceived through coding "which cross-pollinates the dimensions of three different module widths and heights with three differentiated panel types- glazed, translucent (back-lit) and solid- is used to generate a variegated rhythmic surface pattern that transforms the facade"[7] (fig. 6.2). This sharply juxtaposes with the regularity of the historic fabric and brings a new dynamism to the area.

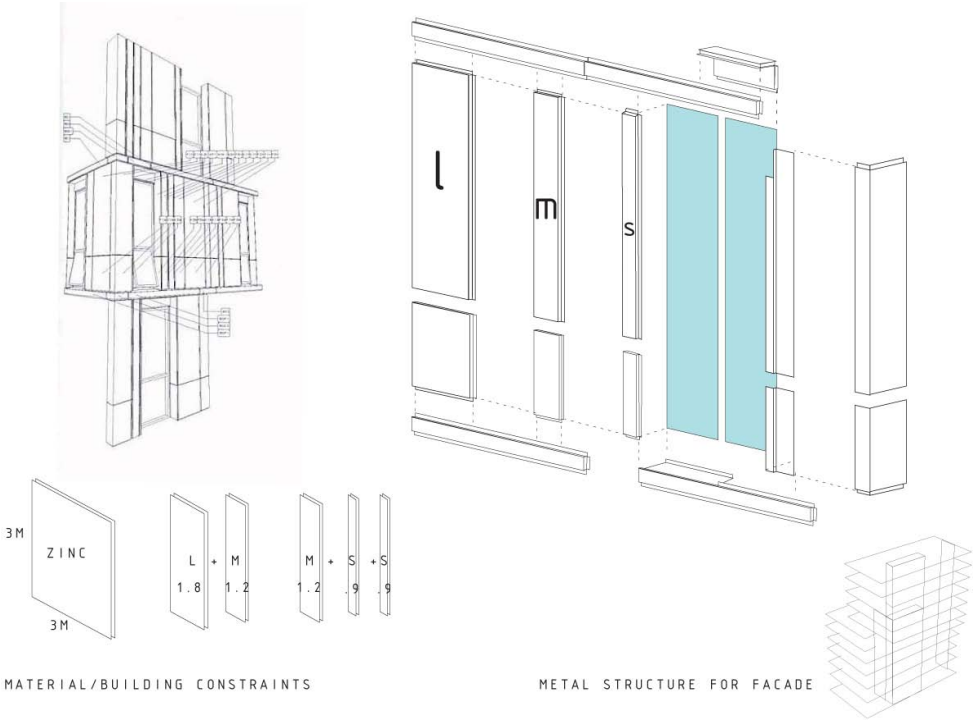

fig. 6.2: Porter House, SHoP Architects, (photo credit: Super Studio Marion)

Modular assemblies that embody difference and variation are suitable for any type of urban condition. The spatial flexibility of the modules gives the system "a greater capacity to respond to changes in the environment. Adaption occurs at the level of individuals or types"[8]. In other words, at the level of variation and differentiation respectively. "The system itself doesn't adapt. The parts do; they alter their behaviours leading to system level adaptation"[9]. This widespread ability to sustain change and support creative spatial opportunities within a larger framework is particularly desirable for city planning. Delft Housing Study by MVRDV, "generates a modular system promoting differentiation that evolves from the initial spatial parameters and dimensional restrictions governing housing development"[10]. The programmatic elements are specified as the percentage of space relative to the overall scope of each house so that all resulting modules all share a scalar relationship. The modules are then "differentially aggregated so that their combinatorial possibilities are expanded to generate a

7 FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.
8 Diversity and Complexity. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.
9 Diversity and Complexity. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.
10 FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.

greater diversity within the whole"[11]. The strategy to manipulate both scale and configuration create the critical amount of differentiation and variation which satisfies the need for individuality within a top-down system. Delft Housing Study signifies the value of differentiation and variation as a key design method because it shows that there is more achieved than just an interesting aesthetic. The strategy can extend to coding programs which creates atmospheric modules thus enriching design to take on a more experiential perspective. New modes of representation focus on the quality of the field and detail becomes pixelations that form a meaningful composite (fig. 6.3). These diagrams and studies from emerging practices mark a new language and mentality of architecture.

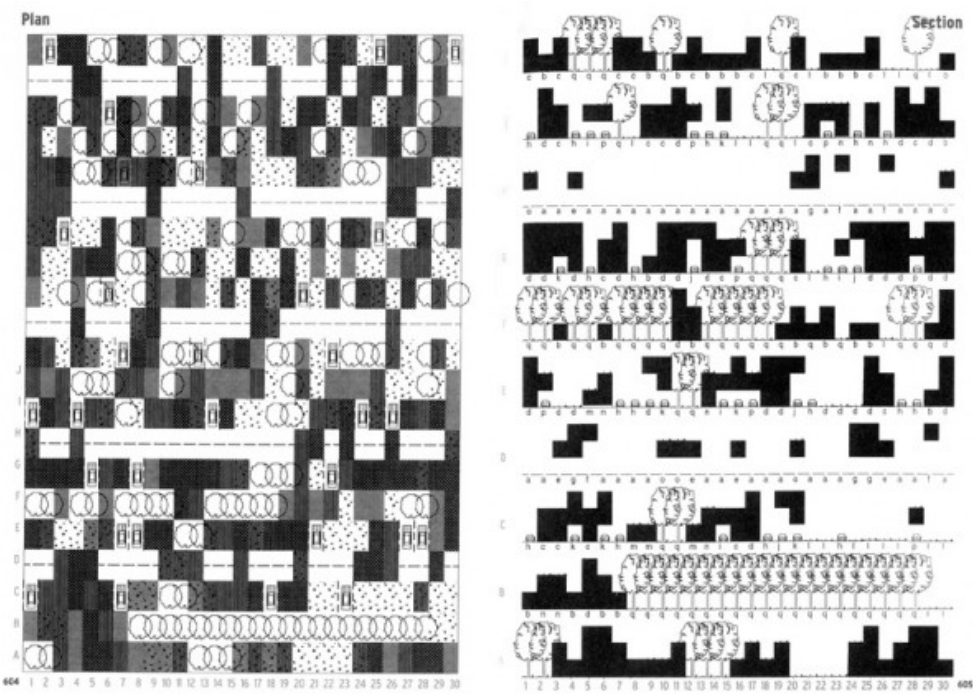

fig. 6.3: Delft Housing Study, MVRDV, (photo credit: MVRDV)

This thesis seeks to extract the genetic code of the commonplace which operates through differentiation and variation as a design instrument. Similar to emerging practices, coding using software like Grasshopper plays a dominant role in testing the success of commonplace systems. Generic modules with standard dimensions and configurations of the three key layers of the commonplace (building fabric, signage and occupation) are manipulated by algorithms which introduce a degree of randomness to shake the consistency of the overall fabric. The unknown variables simulate the level of differentiation and variation in a real world scenario. Although the complexity of the algorithm is limited, a simple matrix of all possible outcomes effectively documents the threshold between the generic city and the commonplace. From the findings, one can attribute which qualities and level of control/freedom best generate the commonplace atmosphere. Drawing from emerging practices that use algorithms to design at the scale of a building to the larger urban context, the investigation shifts from the broad perception of the commonplace as a whole block of buildings to the focused pedestrian experience. This duality in the investigation is critical to understanding the scalar relationships inherent in emerging landscapes.

11 FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.

The commonplace is "essentially [an] incremental bottom-up phenomena operating step by step whose degrees of internal figuration is ultimately dependent on the scale relationship of part to whole"[12].

12 FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.

A street with varying signage, building volume, fenestration, and materiality is generated through grasshopper scripting. Randomized variables are key to creating the small variations that create the commonplace. The degrees of constant and randomized variables are manipulated in order to test the threshold between the commonplace and the generic. These simulations are systematically tested in a matrix format.

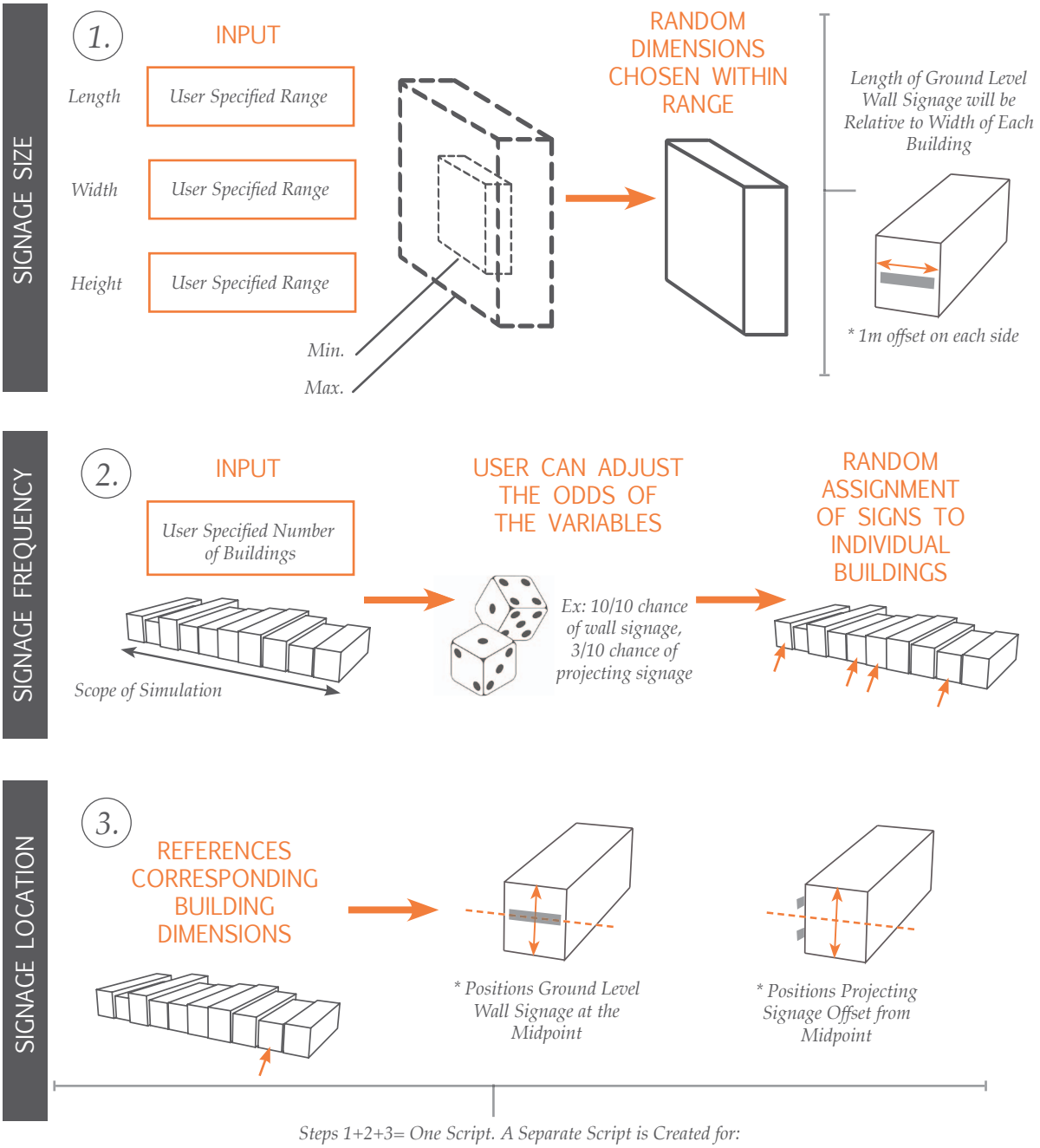

fig. 6.4: Grasshopper Script for Signage

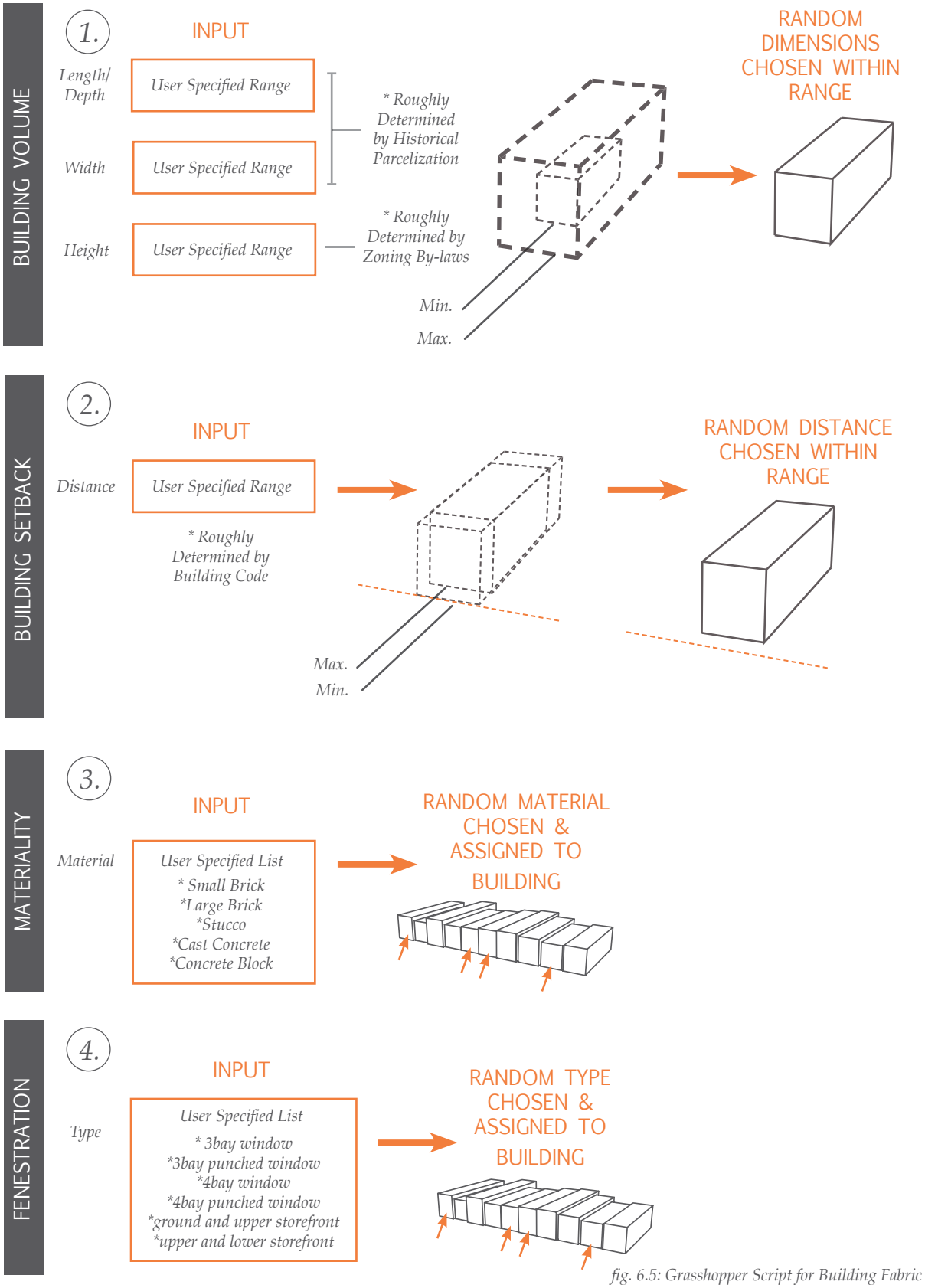

fig. 6.5: Grasshopper Script for Building Fabric

CH. 6.2 SCRIPTING THE COMMONPLACE OF BUILDING FABRIC

The commonplace is comprised of three main differentiated layers - building fabric, signage and occupation. Within each layer, there may be temporal and permanent variations.

Permanent variations of the building fabric are elements that create a strong spatial presence such as building height, width, facade, property line and setback. These physical discrepancies are variations that occur within a generic framework that has regulated standards through bylaws and building codes. In addition, permanent variations often have historical or cultural roots. In the development of Toronto's Chinatown, the width of each storefront remained relatively small due to the historic parcelization of the city that can be traced back to Goads Fire Insurance Plan of 1890. To maximize occupancy on a small footprint, the owners may choose to setback their storefronts for a deeper threshold, create below grade storefronts or extend canopies to extend their usable space. The choice to either stretch, push or recede their usable space is flexible to store owner's individual needs but it is informed by the underlying generic armature. These variations remain within a tolerable range of values defined by generic rules.

Temporal variations are elements that occur on the surface such as temporary signage, goods and street furnishings. Although these variations have some degree of consistency they generally are in constant flux and are the most dynamic parts of the street.

A grasshopper script is created to simulate the differences and variations of the commonplace. The script manipulates the permanent building fabric and temporal signage of the commonplace. It is able to randomly generate the building, fenestration, setback, signage size and location based on a range of dimensions specified by the user (building code). Many iterations of the script are tested to define the exact qualities of the commonplace. Each test run changes the number of constant and random variables resulting in a gradation of schemes reflecting the diverse commonplace to the generic. By systematically outputting possible variation in a matrix, one can observe the thresholds that define the commonplace.

0 CONSTANTS - DATA SET 1

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant						
Random	●	●	●	●	●	●

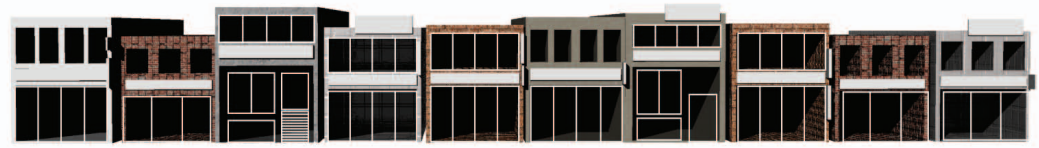

fig.6.6: front elevation

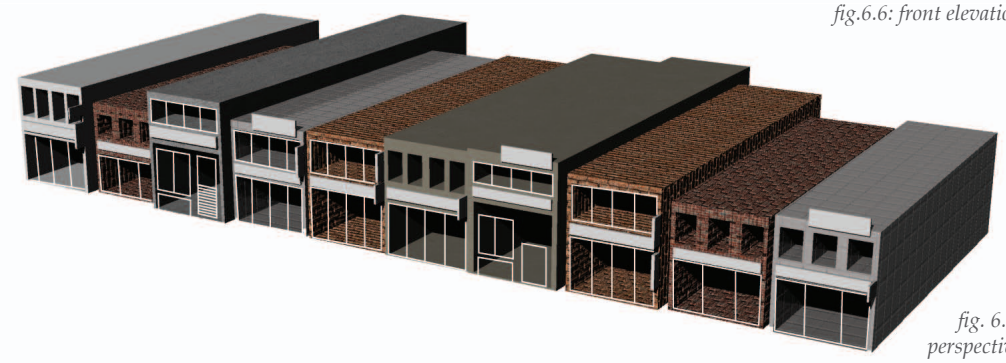

fig. 6.7: perspective

1 CONSTANT

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●					
Random		●	●	●	●	●

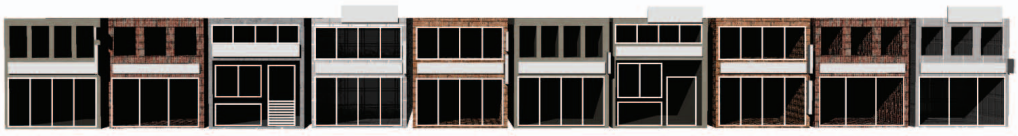

fig.6.8: front elevation

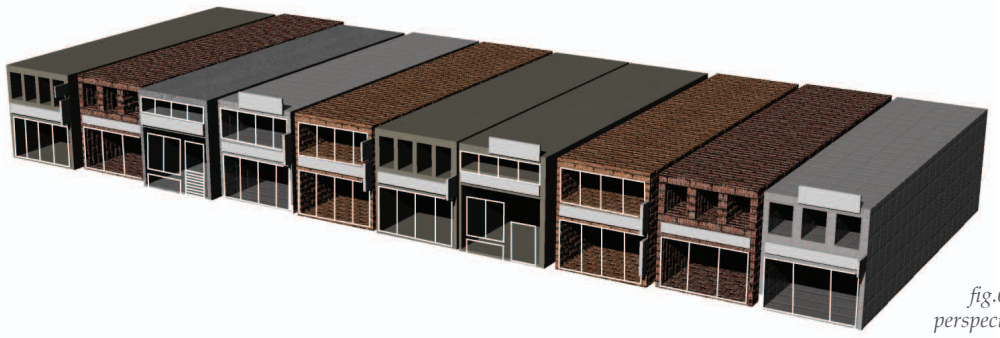

fig.6.9: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant		●				
Random	●		●	●	●	●

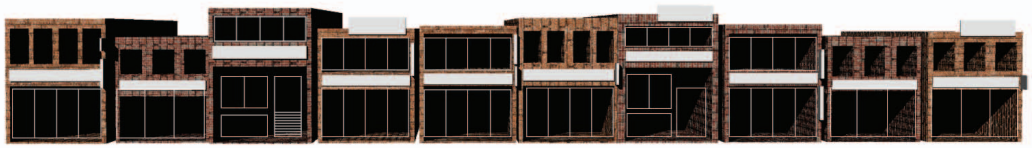

fig. 6.10: front elevation

fig. 6.11: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant			●			
Random	●	●		●	●	●

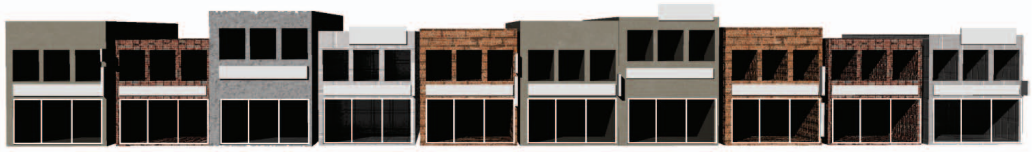

fig. 6.12: front elevation

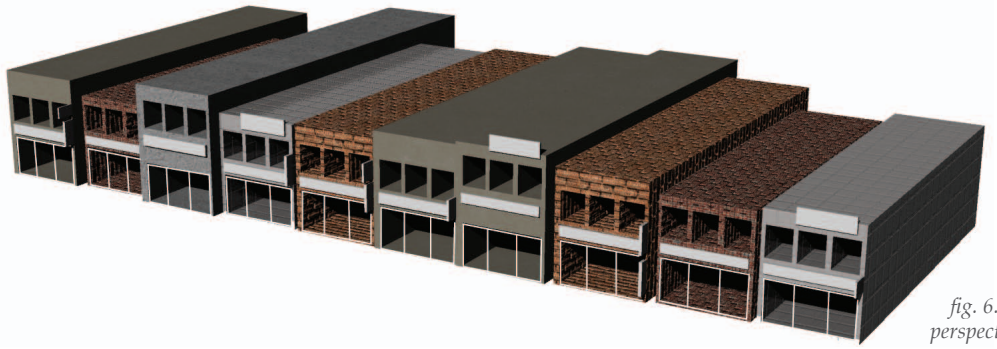

fig. 6.13: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant				●		
Random	●	●	●		●	●

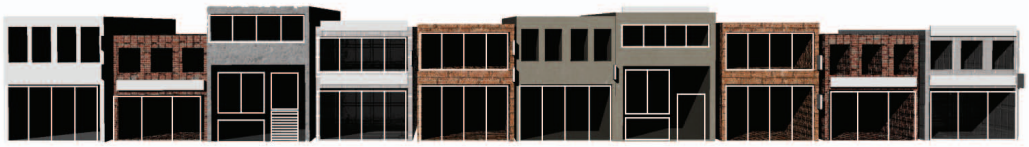

fig. 6.14: front elevation

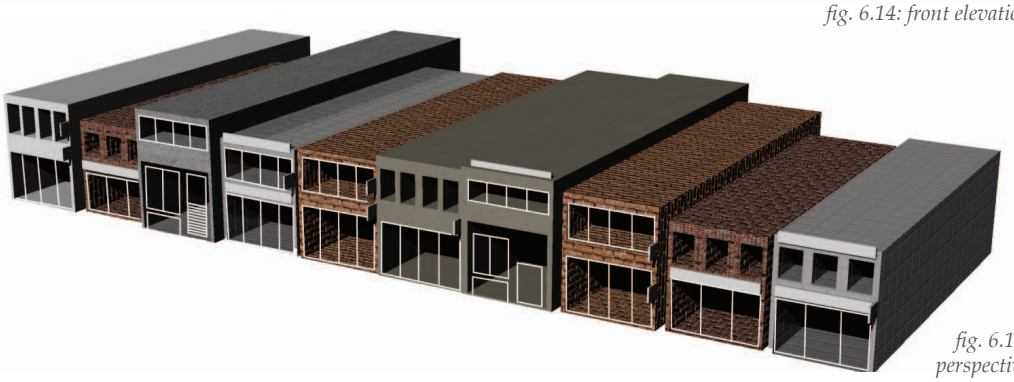

fig. 6.15: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant					●	
Random	●	●	●	●		●

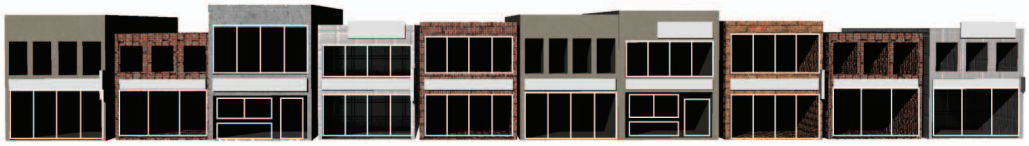

fig. 6.16: front elevation

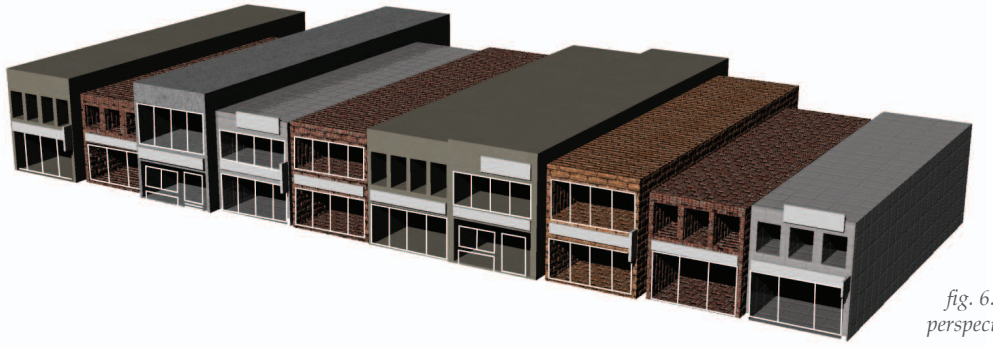

fig. 6.17: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant						●
Random	●	●	●	●	●	

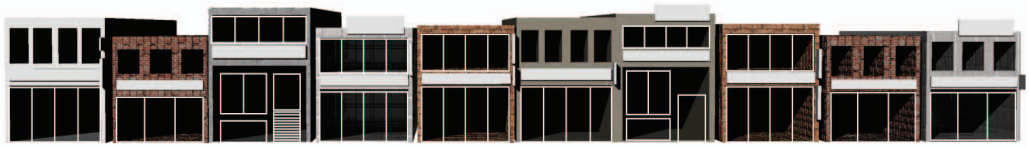

fig. 6.18: front elevation

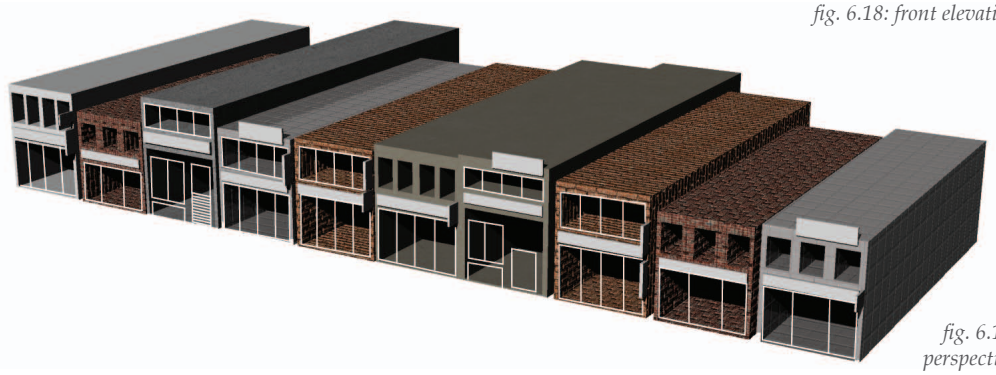

fig. 6.19: perspective

2 CONSTANTS

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●	●				
Random			●	●	●	●

fig. 6.20: front elevation

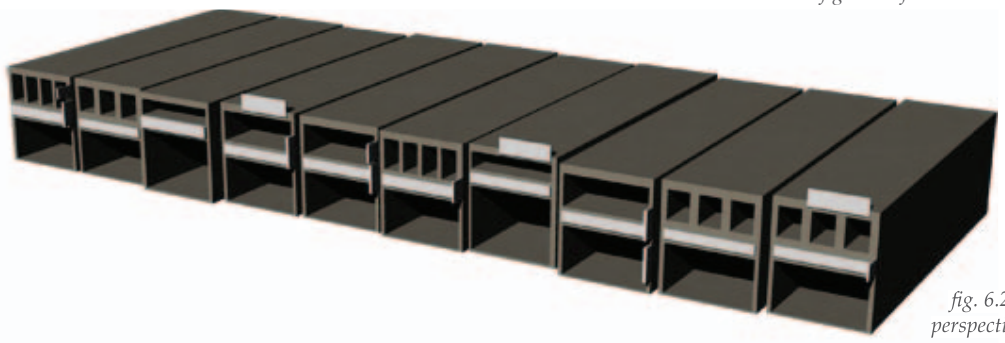

fig. 6.21: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●					●
Random		●	●	●	●	

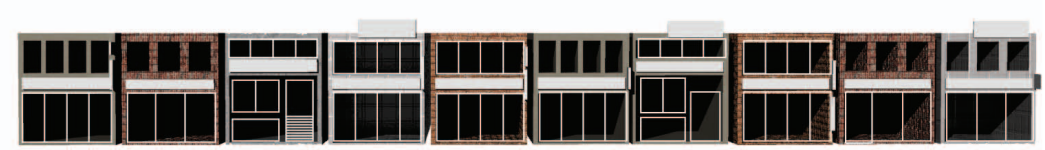

fig. 6.22: front elevation

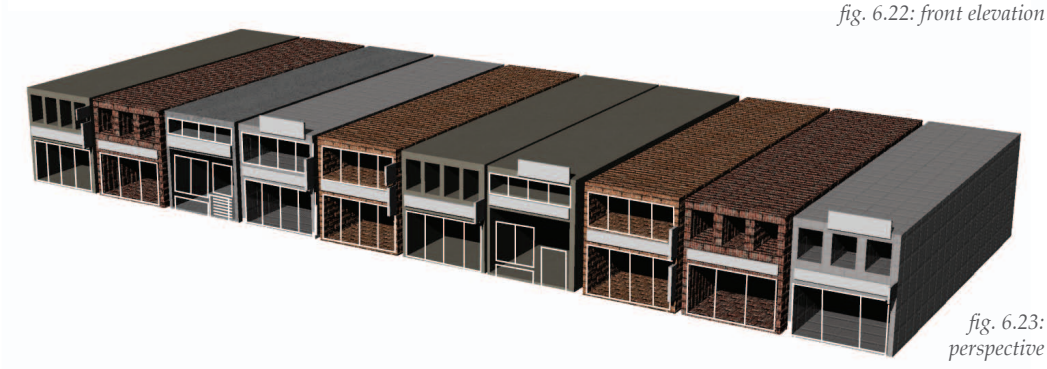

fig. 6.23: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●		●			
Random		●		●	●	●

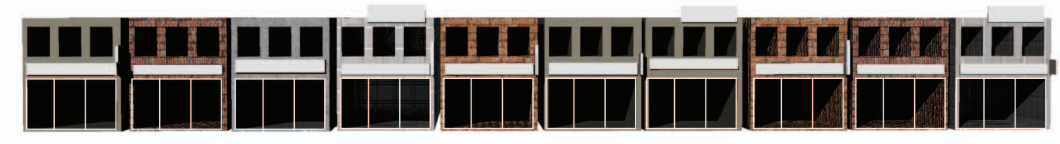

fig. 6.24: front elevation

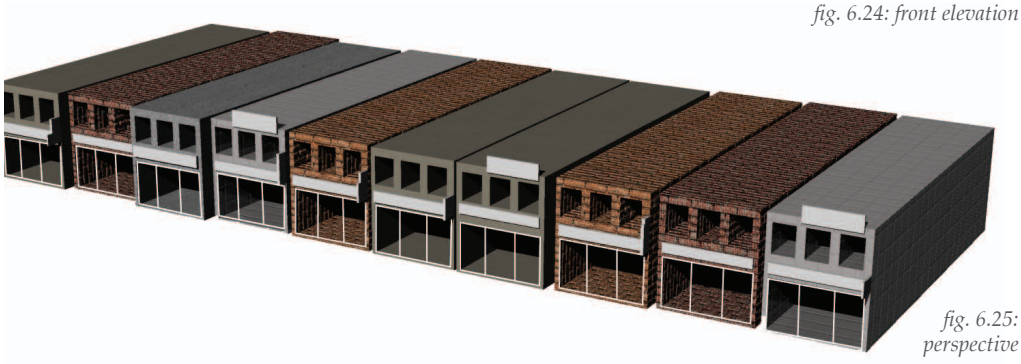

fig. 6.25: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant		●	●			
Random	●			●	●	●

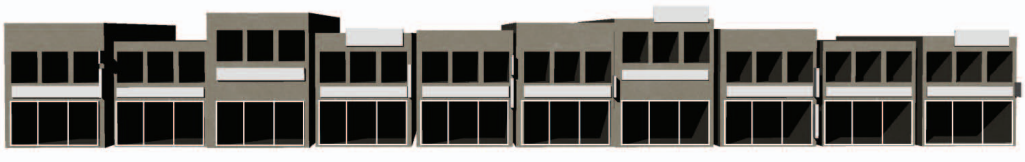

fig. 6.26: front elevation

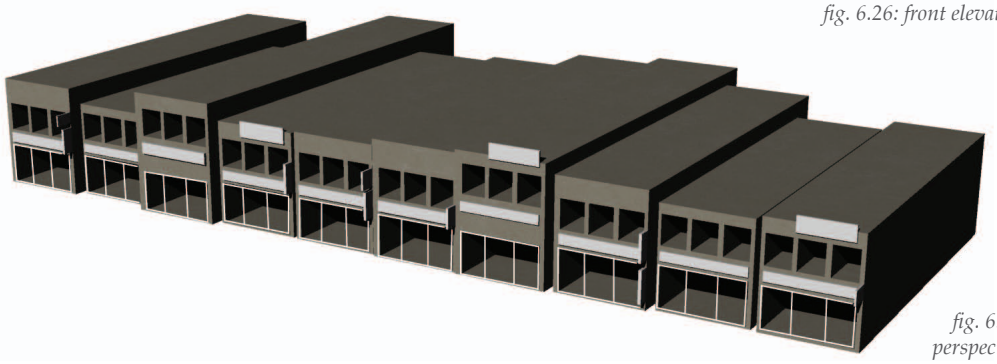

fig. 6.27: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant				●	●	
Random	●	●	●			●

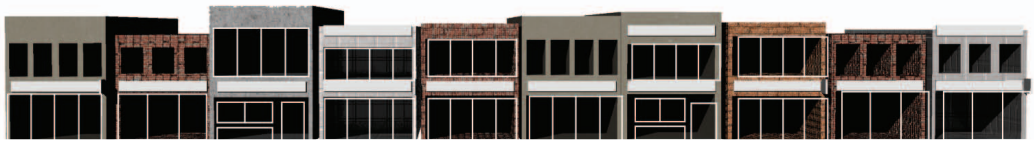

fig. 6.28: front elevation

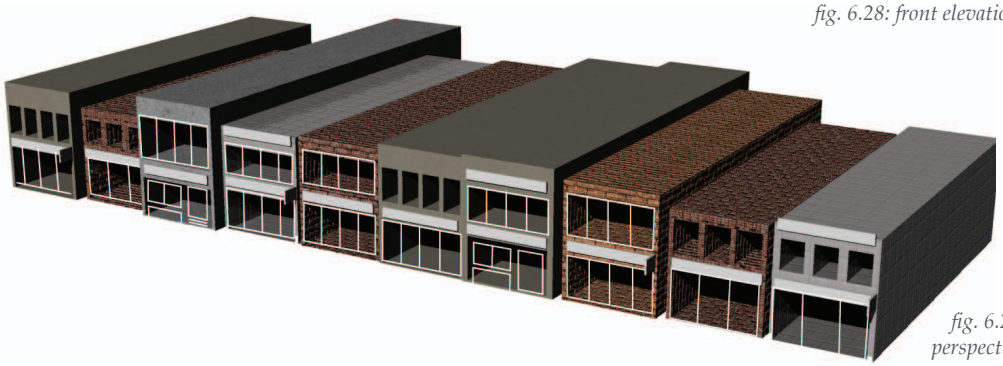

fig. 6.29: perspective

3 CONSTANTS

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●	●	●			
Random				●	●	●

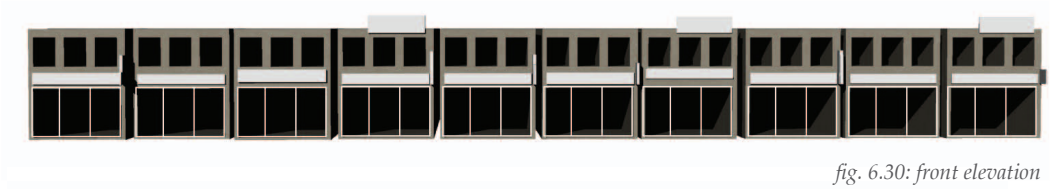

fig. 6.30: front elevation

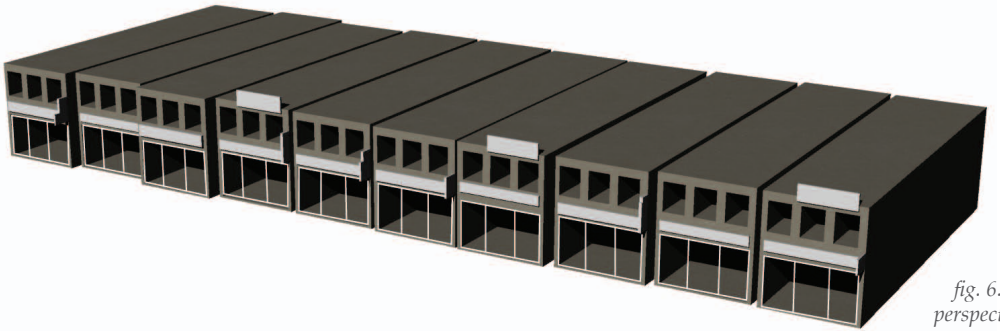

fig. 6.31: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●			●	●	
Random		●	●			●

fig. 6.32: front elevation

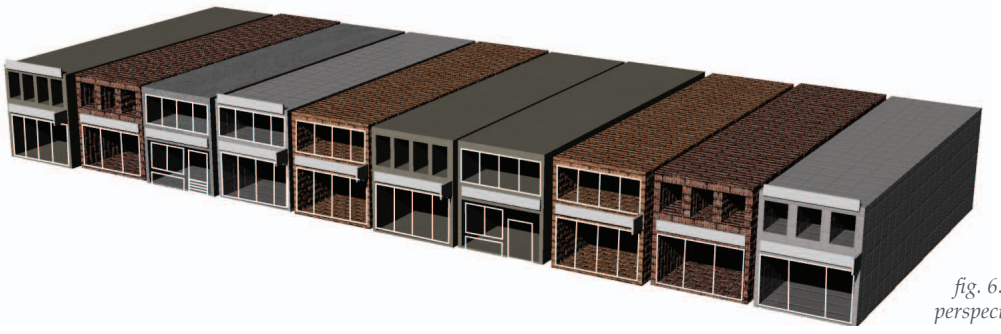

fig. 6.33: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant			●	●	●	
Random	●	●				●

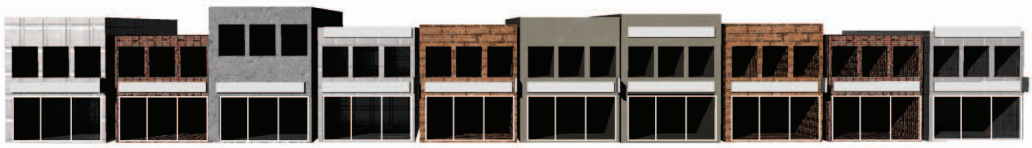

fig. 6.34: front elevation

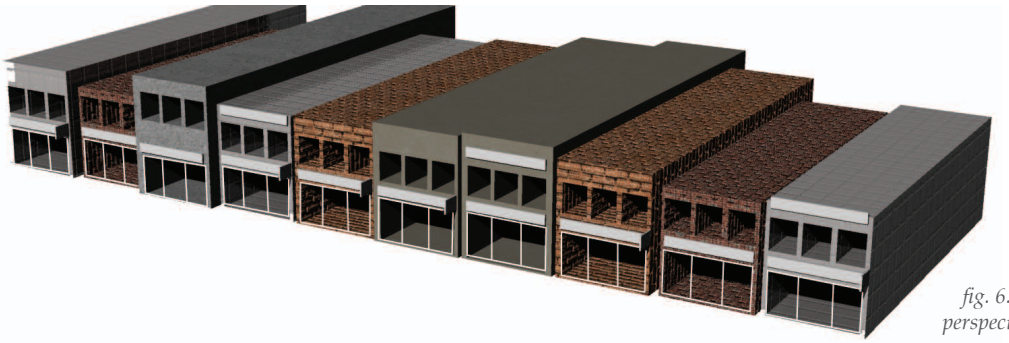

fig. 6.35: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●		●			●
Random		●		●	●	

fig. 6.36: front elevation

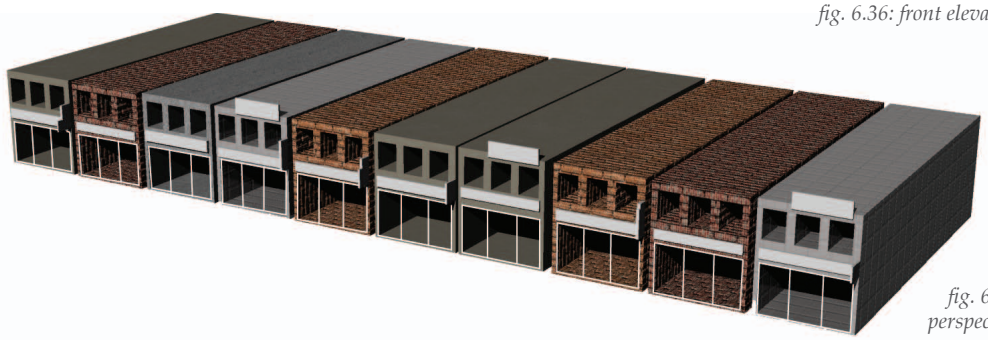

fig. 6.37: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant				●	●	●
Random	●	●	●			

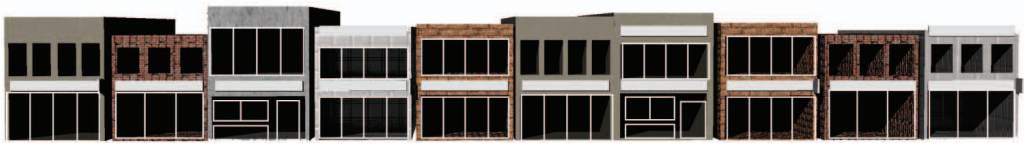

fig. 6.38: front elevation

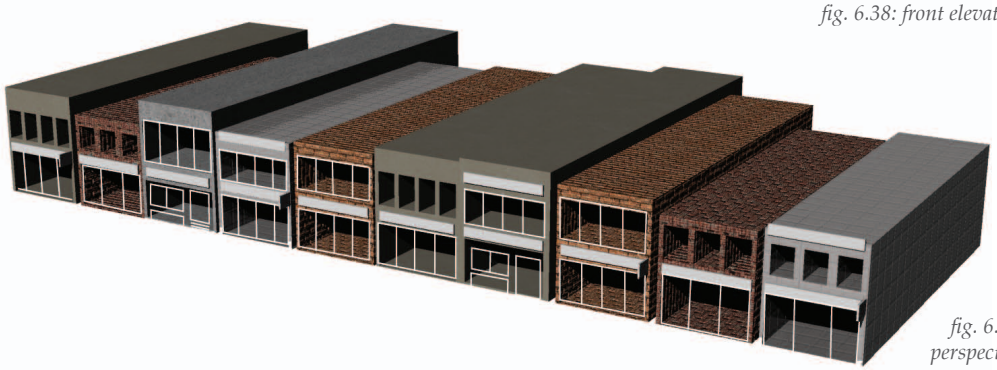

fig. 6.39: perspective

4 CONSTANTS

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●	●	●			●
Random				●	●	

fig. 6.40: front elevation

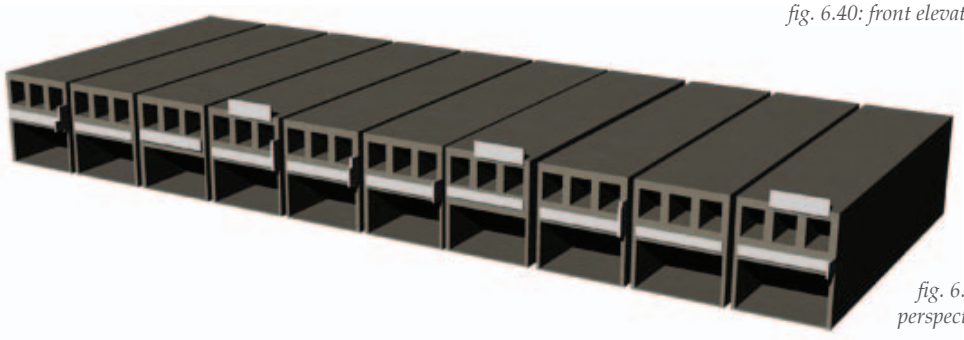

fig. 6.41: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●	●		●	●	
Random			●			●

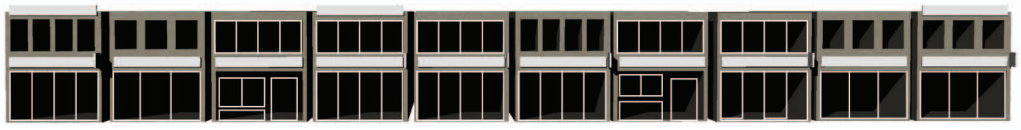

fig. 6.42: front elevation

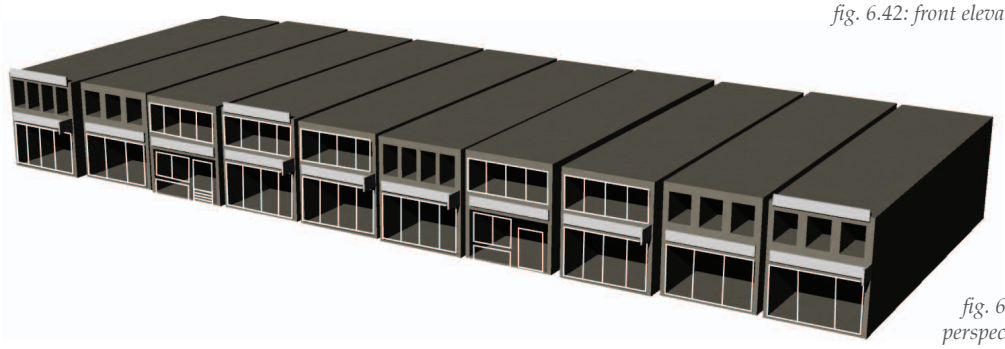

fig. 6.43: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant		●	●	●	●	
Random	●					●

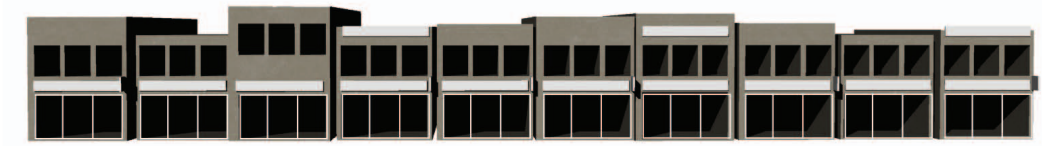

fig. 6.44: front elevation

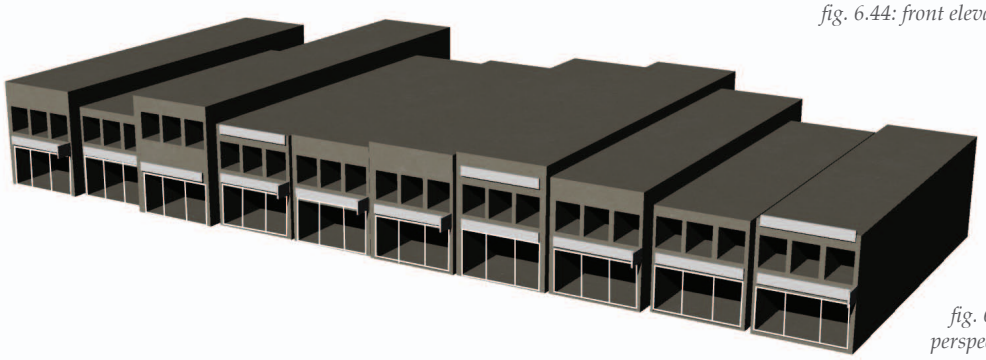

fig. 6.45: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant		●		●	●	●
Random	●		●			

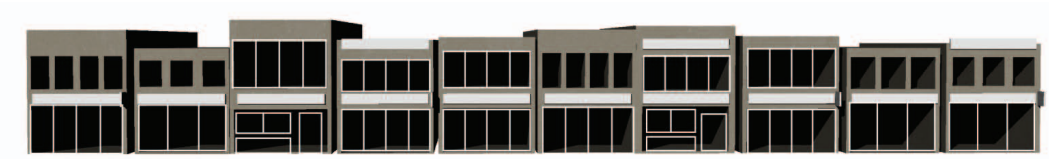

fig. 6.46: front elevation

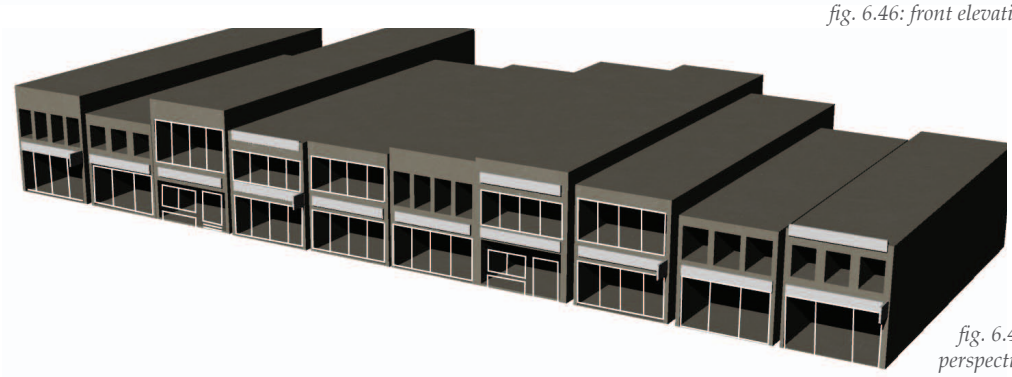

fig. 6.47: perspective

5 CONSTANTS

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●	●	●	●	●	
Random						●

fig. 6.48: front elevation

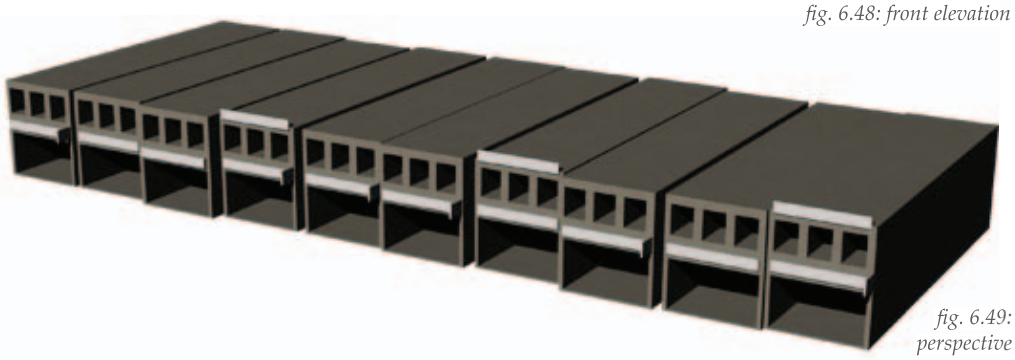

fig. 6.49: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●	●		●	●	●
Random			●			

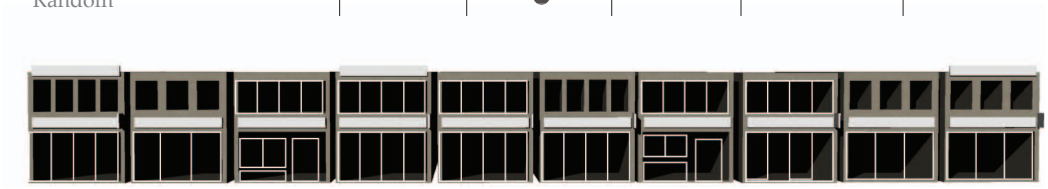

fig. 6.50: front elevation

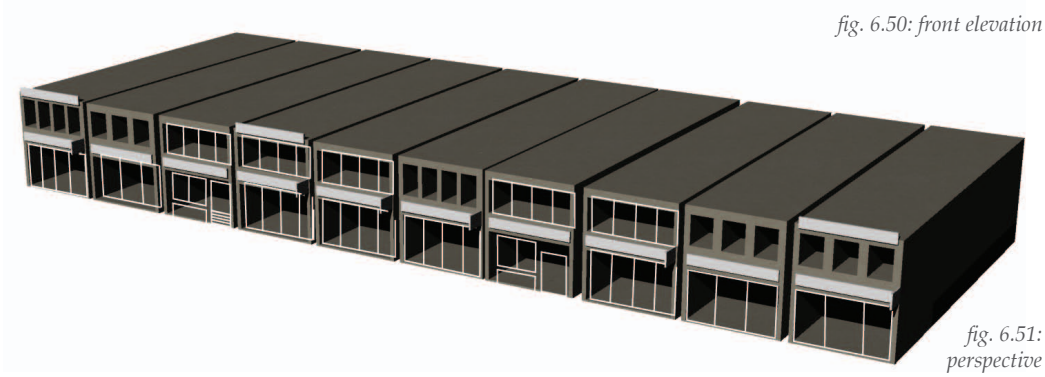

fig. 6.51: perspective

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant	●		●	●	●	●
Random		●				

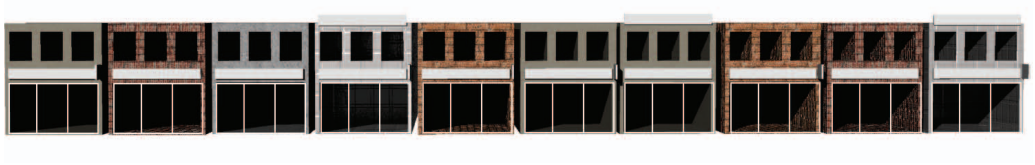

fig. 6.52: front elevation

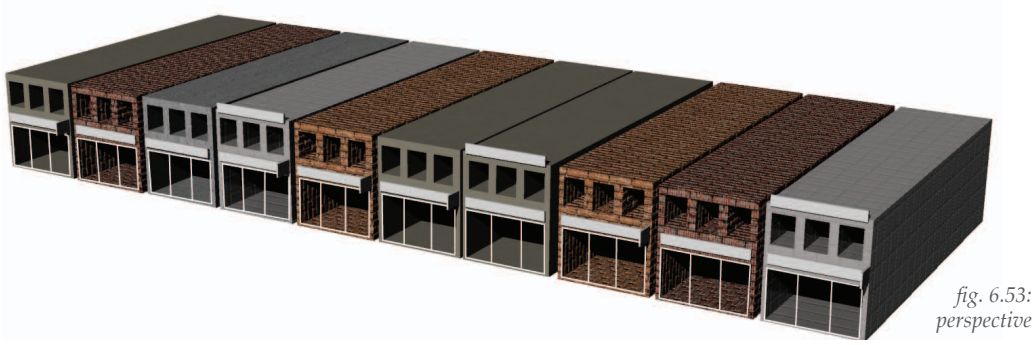

fig. 6.53: perspective

RANGE OF VARIATION 50%

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant						
Random	●	●	●	●	●	●

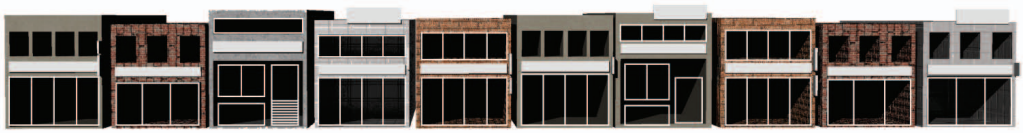

fig. 6.54: front elevation

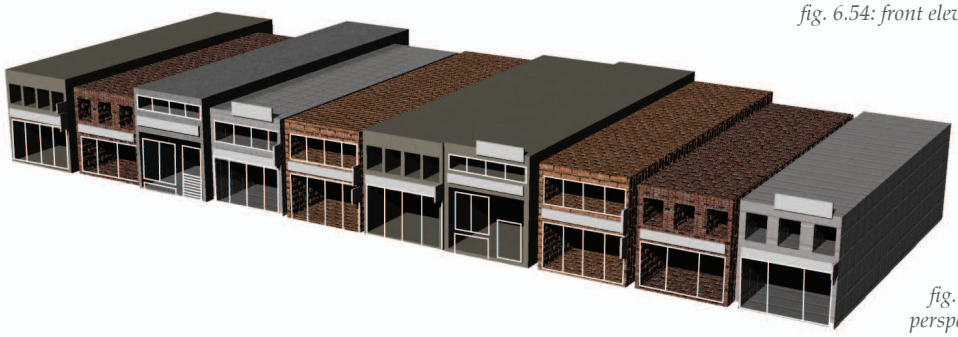

fig. 6.55: perspective

RANGE OF VARIATION 200%

Strong Visual Perception ---------- *Weak Visual Perception*

Variables:	Building Height	Material	Fenestration	Sign Size	Sign Location	Setback
Constant						
Random	●	●	●	●	●	●

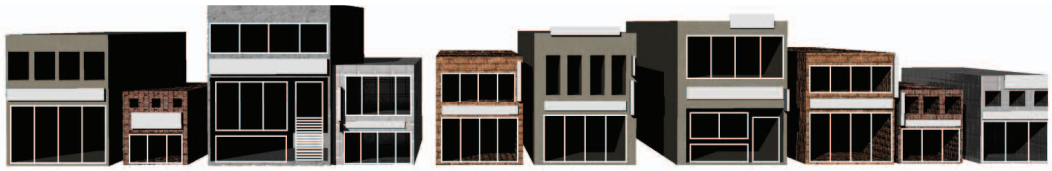

fig. 6.56: front elevation

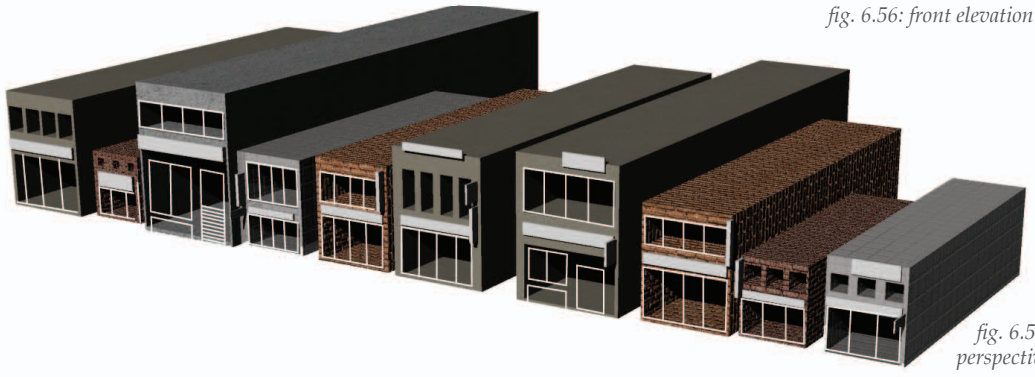

fig. 6.57: perspective

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW:

The threshold between the commonplace and the generic has no definite boundary as the multitude of parts, minute differences, variations and mixture of top-down bottom-up traits give such complexity to the system that it is difficult to simplify our perception to quantifying each scheme as purely commonplace or generic. In addition, perception is a unique phenomenon that differs between individuals so a baseline standard of the perception of the commonplace is not realistic. However, the study can draw out more apparent traits that aThe threshold between the commonplace and the generic has no definite boundary as the multitude of parts, minute differences, variations and mixture of top-down bottom-up traits give such complexity to the system that it is difficult to simplify our perception to quantifying each scheme as purely commonplace or generic. In addition, perception is a unique phenomenon that differs between individuals so a baseline standard of the perception of the commonplace is not realistic. However, the study can draw out more apparent traits that are universally recognized through gestalt theory.

The main principle of gestalt theory is the tendency for our eyes to group similar elements and generalize its characteristics. "The things we see behave as wholes. On the one hand, what is seen in a particular area of the visual field depends strongly on its place and function in the total context"[1]. The variables that are tested in the commonplace matrix are arranged from strong to weak visual perception. Urban gestures such as building height and large urban swatches of material or fenestration dominate our field of vision due to its scale or abundance. It is important to note that our dominant field of vision may not correlate to our dominate object of attention because our eyes behave discriminately. In addition, the encounter with the commonplace is almost always seen in perspective and at eye-level. However, an architectural analysis carried out indiscriminately is of value to understand the quantifiable formal qualities of the commonplace. An orthographic and overall perspective of each scheme is able to bring clarity to this type of analysis.

Rules that govern the total context (global variables) create the most recognizable tectonic qualities of the commonplace because it specifies spatial characteristics that contribute to the overall system. For example, the script defines the base conditions -the maximum and minimum dimensions which create an underlying allowable building footprint. This, in turn, creates boundaries that volume and setback must conform to. Local variables such as signage is then placed relative to the facade. The script is, therefore, a series of nested relationships so that "the structure of the whole may be modified by local changes"[2]. Even though the macro conditions (building volume, setback) have varied dimensions creating spatial diversity, generic local conditions such as material and fenestration can overpower the commonplace qualities and create a generic street. Unique to the commonplace, smaller elements such as signage have the ability to shift from the secondary to primary focus when the multitude of signage overpowers the visual intensity of its context. Signage is able to overpower our dominate field of vision and become the dominating object of attention due to its dynamic properties and inherent semiotics which directly communicates to us on a conscious level. This experiential phenomenon of the commonplace is explored in the subsequent study.

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1 Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. New Version, Expanded and Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

2 Arnheim, Rudolf. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye. 1974.

CH. 6.3 SCRIPTING THE COMMONPLACE OF SIGNAGE

Consumerism is integral to the commonplace. Small businesses thrive and propel the commonplace because they constantly change the experience of the city as they competitively import the latest goods and services. The small size of each storefront and multitude of competitors force small businesses to advocate their products much more fiercely than a big box store would. Signage is the most visible form of advertising and is able to instantly convey the nature of the store. The signage bylaws governing Chinatown are given special exemptions on the maximum allowable signage density. The typology of Chinatown -small multi-storey buildings with basement storefronts heavily rely on signage to distinguish their ownership.

A grasshopper script is created to manipulate the frequency, size, location and colour variation of signage. It attempts to generate scenarios that will test the boundary between signage that introduces hierarchy and distinction to the commonplace versus signage that masks or confuses. An eye-level rendering of the street is essential to understand the experiential impact of signage on the pedestrian.

PROJECTING SIGNAGE FREQUENCY - 25%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	25% frequency	25% frequency	varied	standard

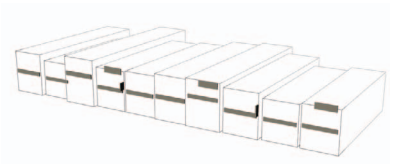


fig. 6.58: key drawing

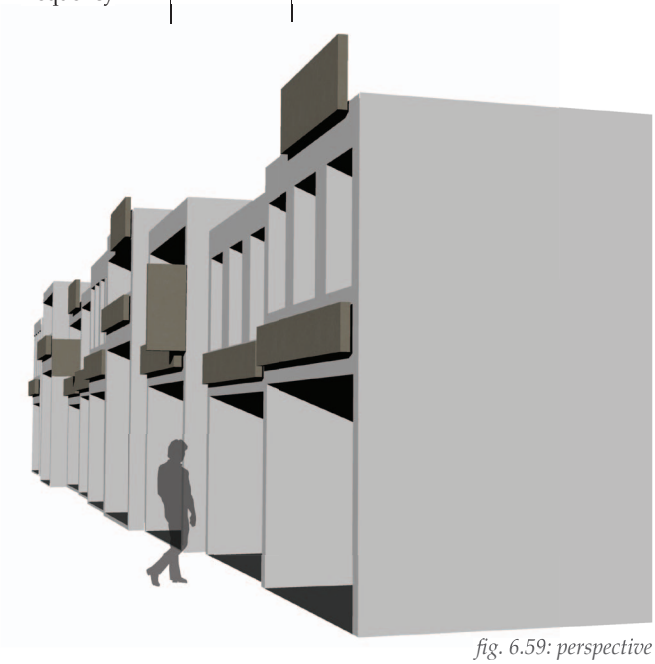


fig. 6.59: perspective

PROJECTING SIGNAGE FREQUENCY - 50%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	50% frequency	50% frequency	varied	standard

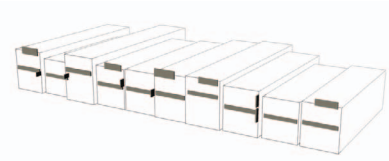


fig. 6.60: key drawing

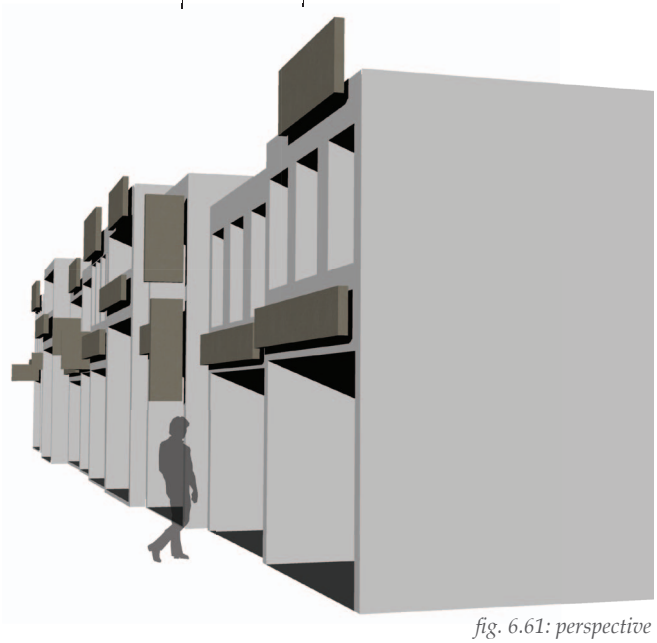


fig. 6.61: perspective

PROJECTING SIGNAGE FREQUENCY - 75%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	varied	standard

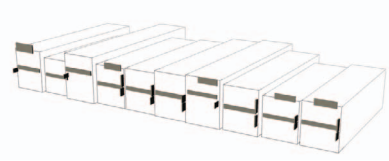


fig. 6.62: key drawing

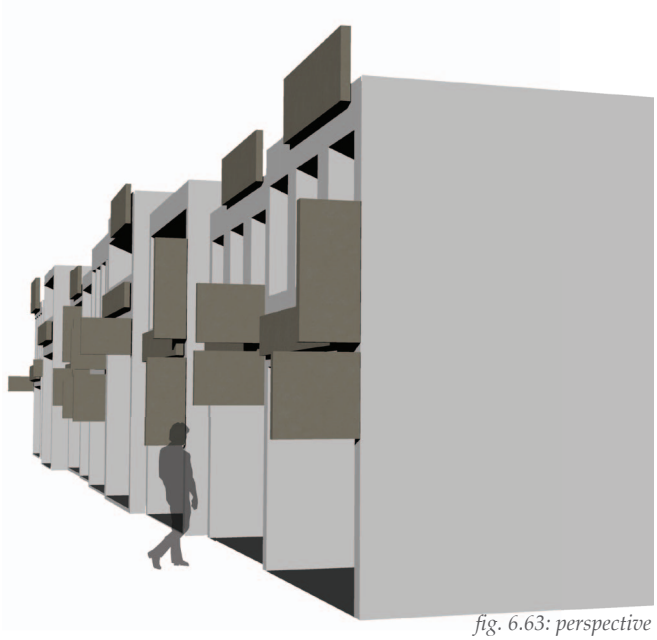


fig. 6.63: perspective

PROJECTING SIGNAGE FREQUENCY - 100%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	100% frequency	100% frequency	varied	standard

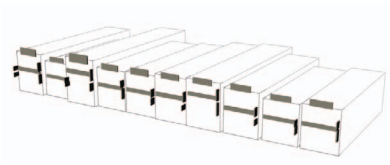


fig. 6.64: key drawing

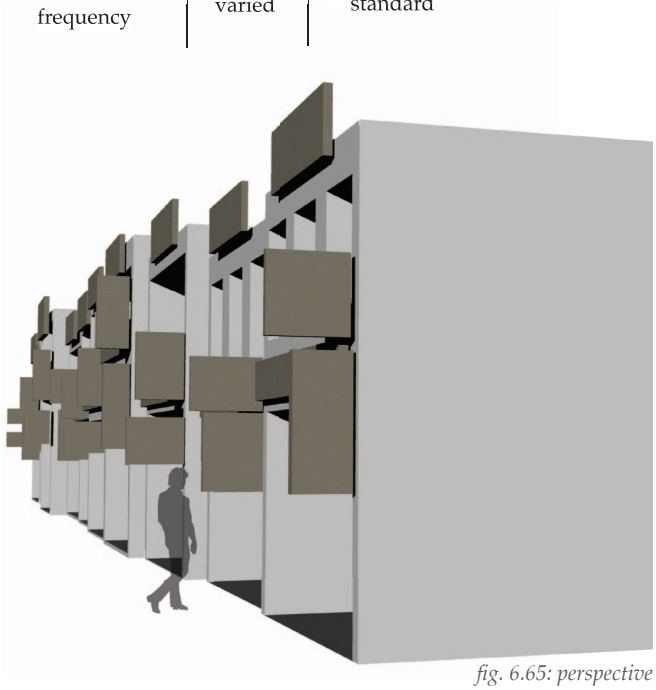


fig. 6.65: perspective

OVERALL SIGNAGE SIZE - 50% REDUCTION

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	100% frequency	100% frequency	varied	50% reduction

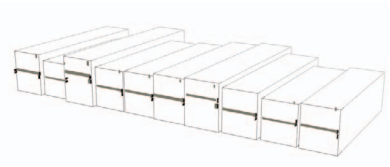


fig. 6.66: key drawing

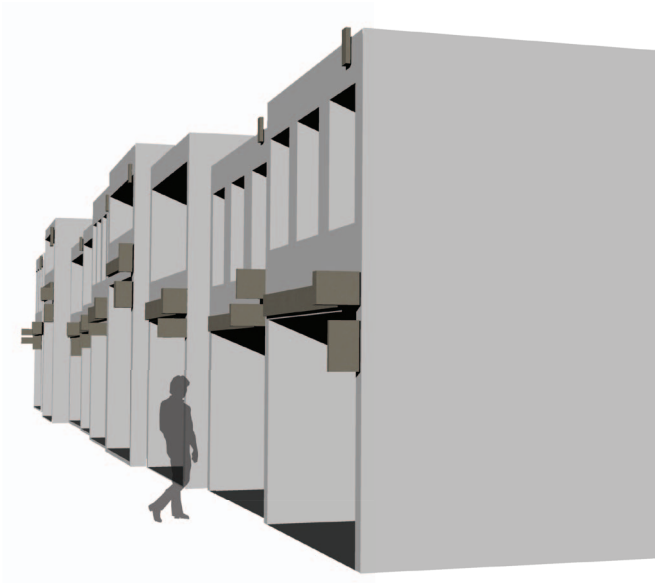


fig. 6.67: perspective

OVERALL SIGNAGE SIZE - 200% ENLARGEMENT

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	100% frequency	100% frequency	varied	200% enlargement

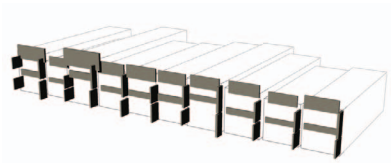


fig. 6.68: key drawing

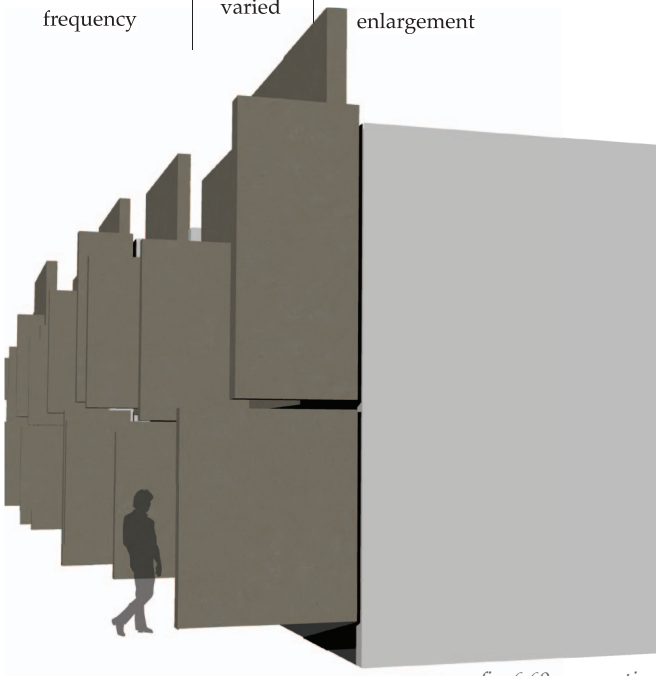


fig. 6.69: perspective

SIGNAGE COLOUR VARIATION 25%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	varied	standard

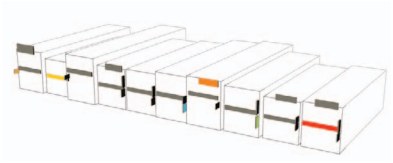


fig. 6.70: key drawing

fig. 6.71: perspective

SIGNAGE COLOUR VARIATION 50%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	varied	standard

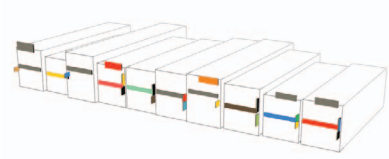


fig. 6.72: key drawing

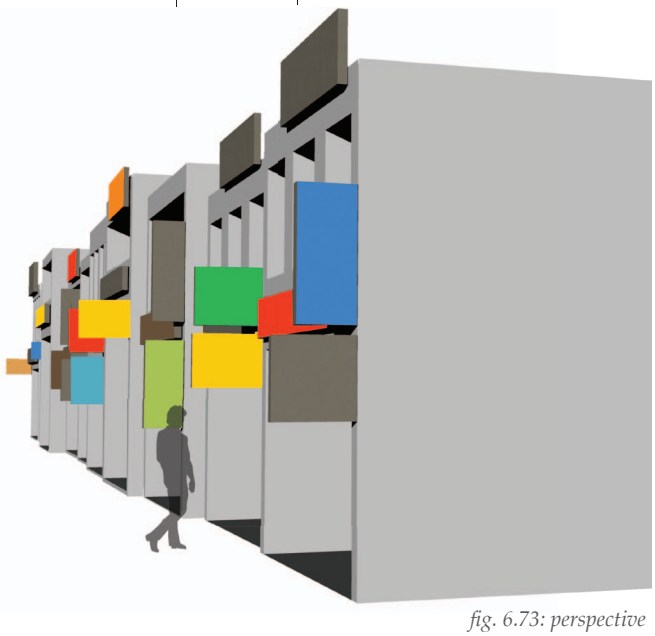


fig. 6.73: perspective

SIGNAGE COLOUR VARIATION 75%

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	varied	standard

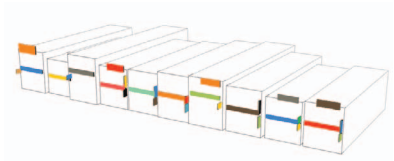


fig. 6.74: key drawing

fig. 6.75: perspective

CONSTANT LOCATION

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	constant	standard

fig. 6.76: key drawing

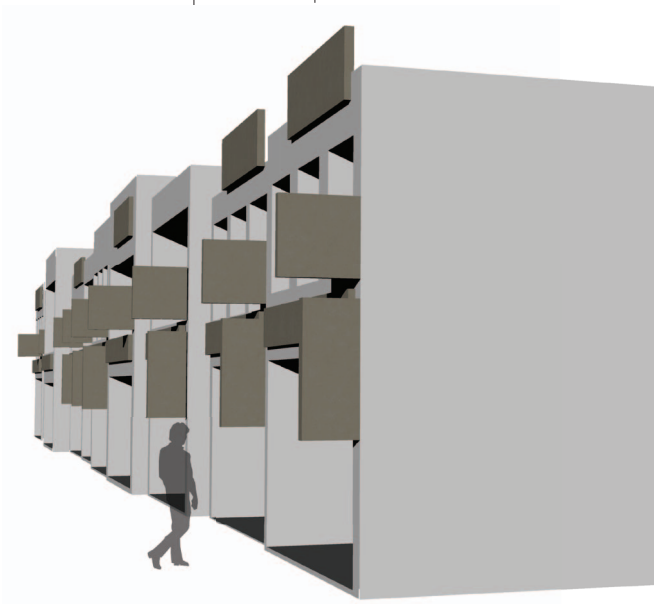


fig. 6.77: perspective

CONSTANT SIZE OF SIGNAGE

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	varied	constant

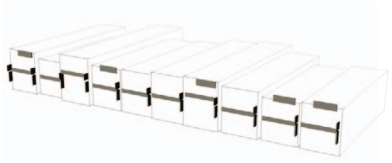


fig. 6.78: key drawing

fig. 6.79: perspective

CONSTANT SIZE AND LOCATION OF SIGNAGE

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	75% frequency	75% frequency	constant	constant

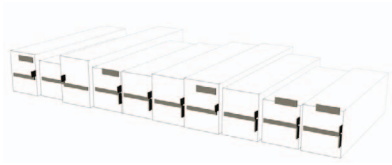


fig. 6.80: key drawing

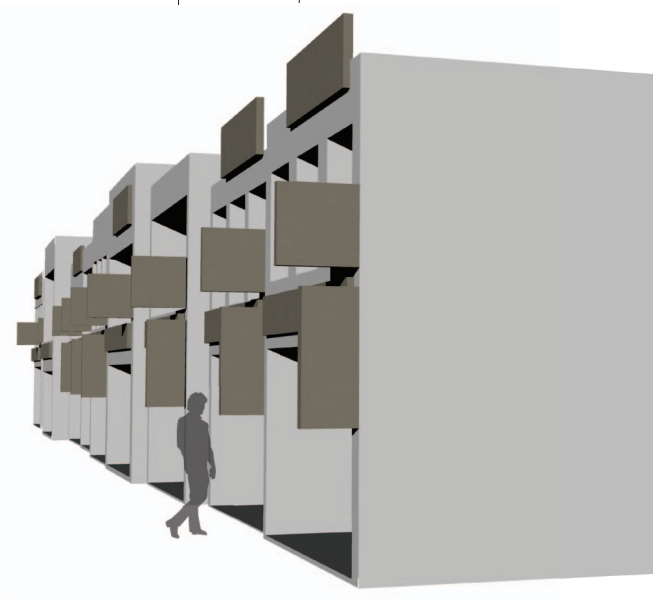


fig. 6.81: perspective

ONLY WALL SIGNAGE

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	100% frequency	100% frequency	n/a	constant	constant

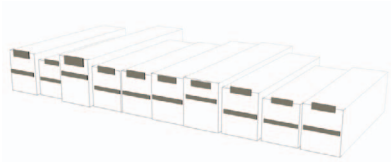


fig. 6.82: key drawing

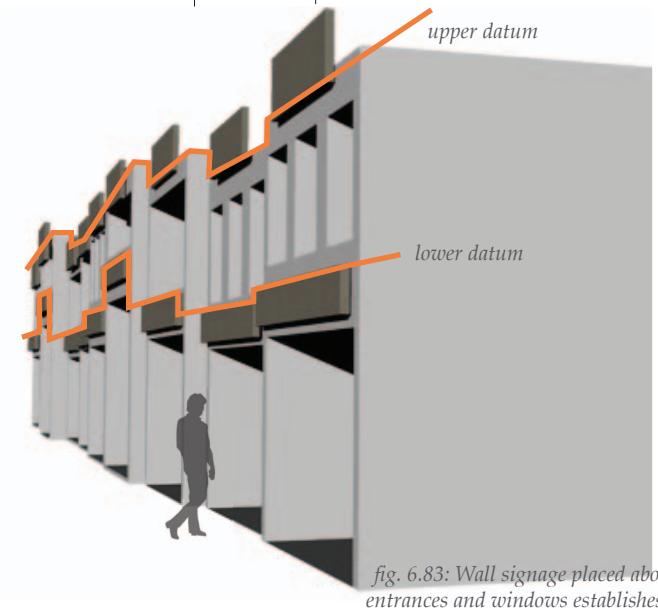


fig. 6.83: Wall signage placed above entrances and windows establishes a datum for our field of vision

ONLY PROJECTING SIGNAGE

Variables:	Wall Signage	2nd Storey Wall Signage	Projecting Signage	Location of Signage	Size of Signage
	n/a	n/a	100% frequency	constant	constant

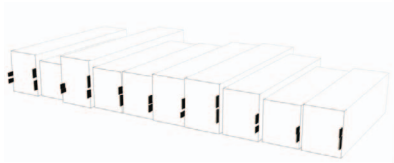


fig. 6.84: key drawing

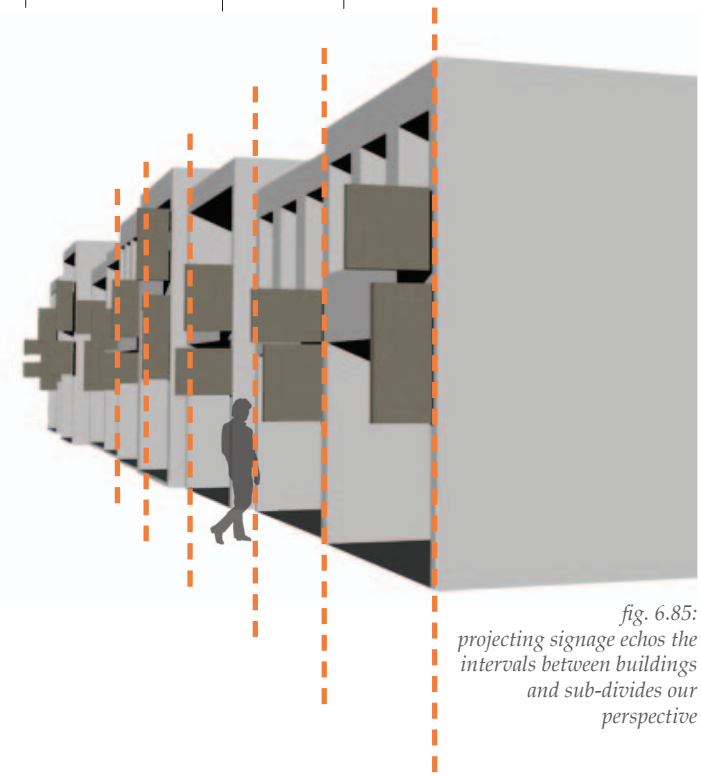


fig. 6.85: projecting signage echos the intervals between buildings and sub-divides our perspective

CH. 6.31 TEXT ANALYSIS

fig. 6.86: Existing 100% Signage Variation, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

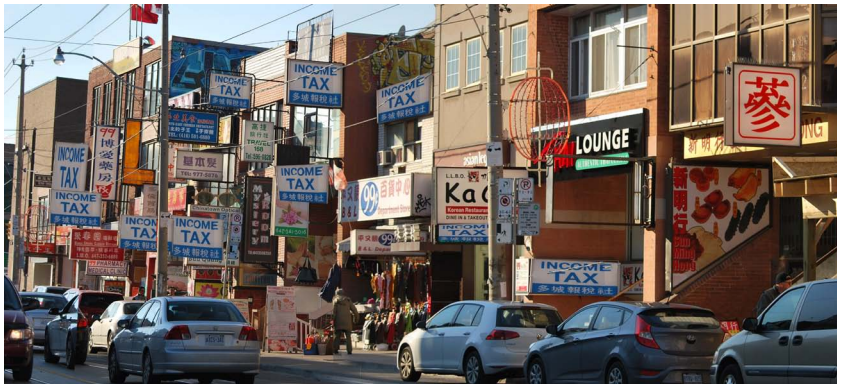


fig. 6.87: Manipulated 75% Signage Variation, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

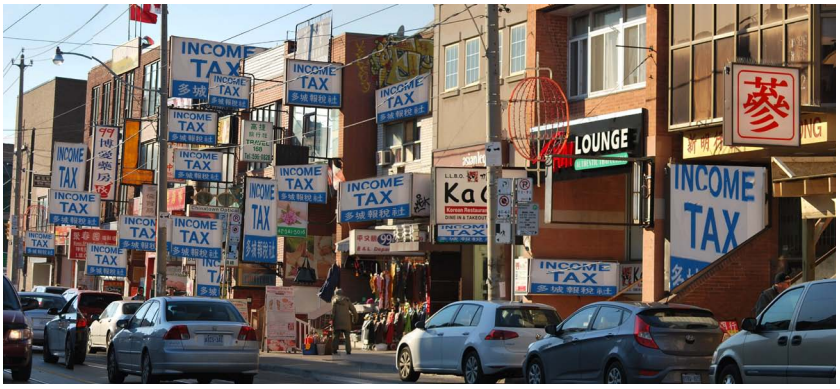


fig. 6.88: Manipulated 50% Signage Variation, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

fig. 6.89: Manipulated 25% Signage Variation, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

fig. 6.90: Manipulated 0% Signage Variation, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto


GOLDEN SHIATSU


GOLDEN SHIATSU


GOLDEN SHIATSU

fig. 6.91: Existing Illumination Levels, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

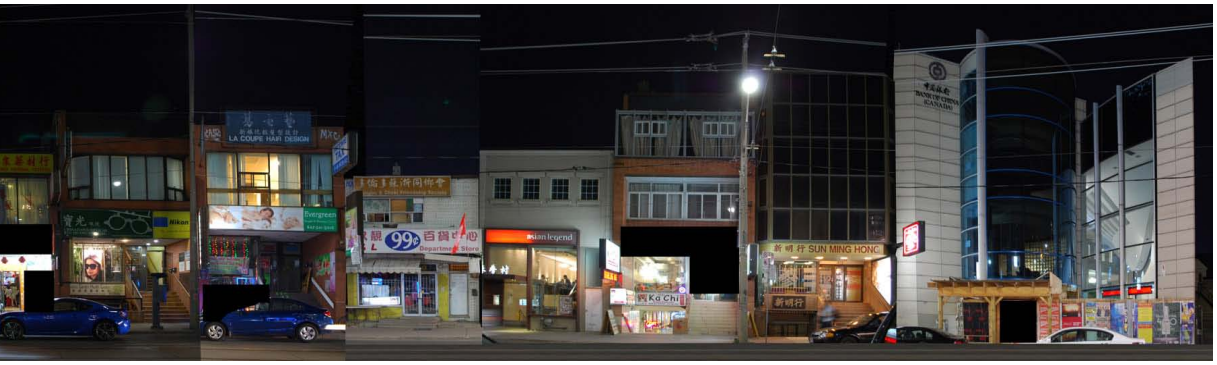


fig. 6.92: 25% Reduced Illumination Levels, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

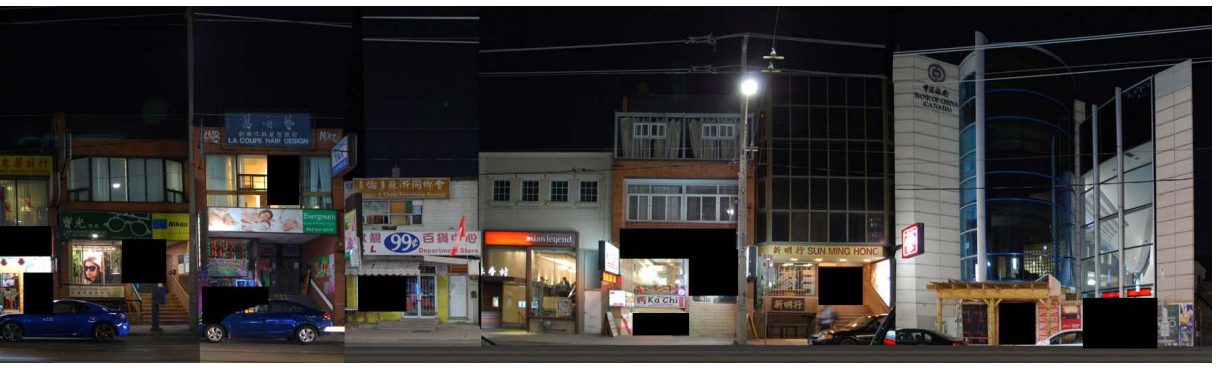


fig. 6.93: 50% Reduced Illumination Levels, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto


多倫多華人福音堂
GOLDEN SHIATSU

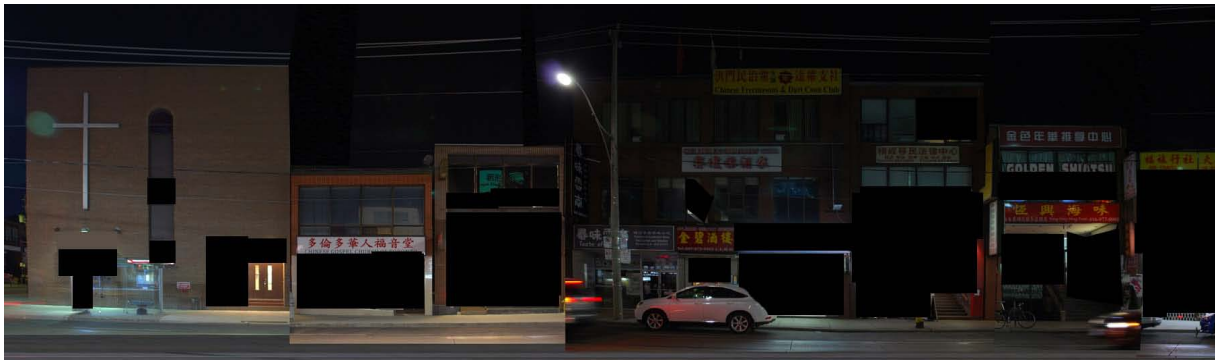

多倫多華人福音堂

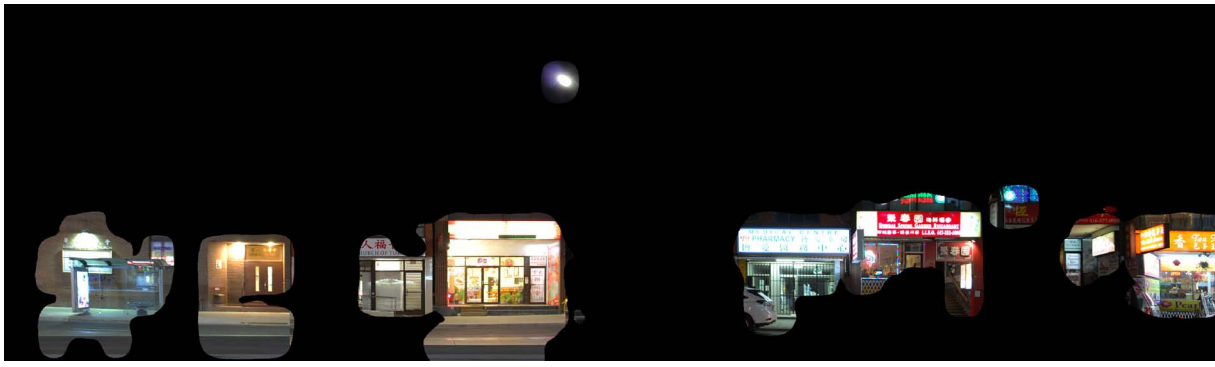
fig. 6.94: 75% Reduced Illumination Levels, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

fig. 6.95: 100% Reduced Illumination Levels, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

By adjusting the illumination levels of the street, one can observe the key role in which signage and lit spaces play in bringing dynamism and vibrancy to the commonplace.

CH. 6.33 ILLUMINATION INTENSITY



ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

A photographic analysis through pixelation clarifies the scope of the field. The increased contrast als
incrementally reduces the resolution of a stretch of Toronto's Chinatown. The atmospheric quality and
to the size of the smallest module of signage. The construction of the commonplace thus becomes si
intelligent distribution and joining of different module sizes can resolve the conflict between the aesthet
resolution which allows the most] efficient fabrication process"[1]. This investigation reveals the "hot spo
and variation embodied within these areas are what brings interest to an otherwise blank field.

1 Berman, Ila and Andrew Kudless. FLUX: Architecture in a Parametric Landscape. San Francisco/New York: ORO Editions: AR+D Publishing, 2015.

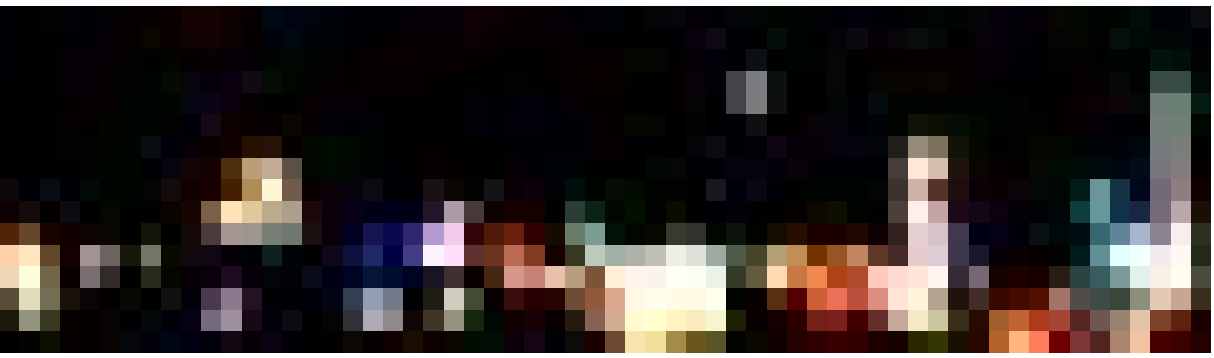


fig. 6.96: The Size of One Pixel is Approximately the Size of the Smallest Module of Signage, 4px Resolution with Reduced Colour, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

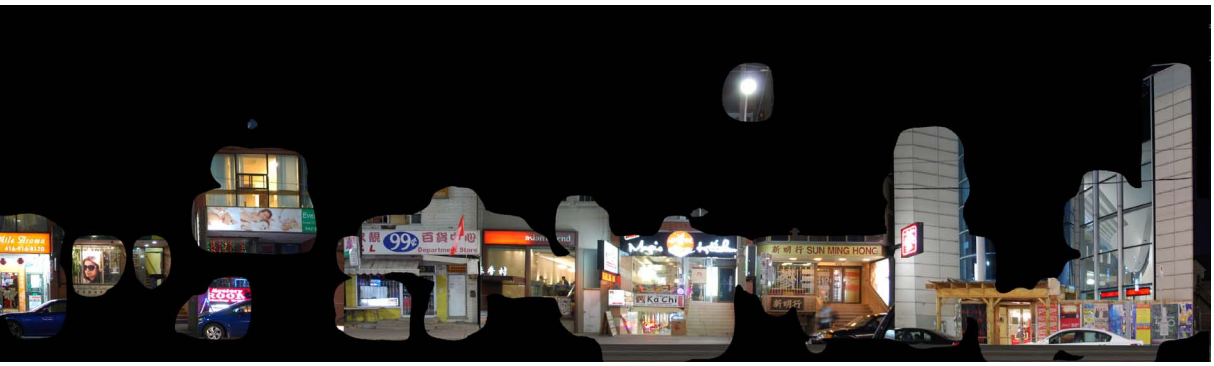


fig. 6.97: Isolation of Active Elements, Chinatown, Dundas St. West, Toronto

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so defines territory and extracts the essence of each element. A series of photographic investigations d intensity of light become quantifiable. The lowest resolution is scaled so that a single pixel is relative mplified to a modular assemblage. Analysis that shifts from different scales allow insight on how "an ic and functional advantages of the finest resolution, and the economic necessity of the most [simplified ts" of the commonplace which are registered as the most vibrant and diverse areas. The differentiation

ANALYSIS OVERVIEW:

Signage plays a large role in shaping the experiential encounter with the commonplace. It physically bridges over the building fabric and sidewalk. The relatively small size of signage engages at the scale of the pedestrian.

In general, signage makes more apparent the spatial characteristics of the underlying context. The placement of signage is a direct translation of the building fabric. Projecting signage perpendicular to the facade articulates our perspective by subdividing our field of vision. The rhythm of the projecting signage reflect the intervals between each building. Wall signage placed above entrances and windows establishes a datum for our field of vision. The bands of wall signage reflects the height variations of the buildings. The ratio of projecting to wall signage, therefore, influences the degree of awareness of intervals versus datum.

When signage is designed independent of its context (location or size of signage is unsuited to the building's facade) it may mask the true condition of its context. An example of this discrepancy is (fig.6.77) where the constant location of signage creates a contradicting datum to the varied building heights. The application of signage is therefore perceived as forceful and irrelevant to its context. Rather than act as a continuous extension of the facade- part of a field condition, the generic placement of signs stratifies the commonplace.

In addition to the spatial implications of signage, the ability of signage to engage us on a conscious intellectual level through text adds depth to the commonplace. Text and graphics convey the program and services of each building. In some instances, signage may be the only feature that brings specificity to a building. Signage allows one to grasp the overall types of consumption at a glance. Repetition of signage is very apparent when the text or icon used is easily comprehended. Branding capitalizes on our ability to perceive similarities in signage.

Finally, signage plays a pivotal role in defining the commonplace at night. Illumination brings signage to the forefront of our perception while the building fabric recedes into the darkness of the night. The illuminated signs hint at the underlying spatiality of the context. Animated signage also increases the dynamism of the street.

fig.6.98: June 12, 2015, Dundas St. West, Chinatown, Toronto

fig. 7.1: June 20, 2015, Dundas Street West, Chinatown, Toronto

REFLECTIONS

The overall thesis explored the commonplace through many perspectives that varied from comparison with related precedents, pure documentation, history, visual perception theory, scientific principles and finally generative design. The content of the thesis aimed to transition from understanding the phenomenon of the commonplace to extracting a possible methodology for designing environments with commonplace characteristics. While acknowledging the existing scholarly discussions surrounding the commonplace, the generative design strategy in the later portion of the thesis critically distinguished its position from precedents by taking a more proactive approach beyond pure observation in hopes of striking a balance between top-down and bottom-up systems.

The thesis began with the documentation of the commonplace using a simple guidebook format inspired by Atelier Bow Wow's *Pet Architecture*. Using a series of simple maps, diagrams, and photographs, examples of the commonplace of building fabric, signage and occupation in Toronto were documented. This graphic introduction gave readers a good sense of the characteristics and type of atmosphere that is typical of the commonplace. It was also important to make parallels to larger well-known commonplaces such as New York, Las Vegas, Hong Kong and Tokyo to stress that the commonplace is a global phenomenon. In addition, the commonplace operating in varying scales and nested hierarchies could be observed by comparing the micro condition of a single block to the macro condition of an entire district thus shifting from an architectural to urban perspective and from singular to field.

The documentation of the commonplace in Atelier Bow Wow's and Venturi's research is richly detailed and highly regarded as the comprehensive guide to their case study city. Their research provided valuable insight in understanding the specificity of the commonplace operating in a particular context as bottom-up driven environments that are primarily defined by the local flavour of its people. However, Atelier Bow Wow's and Venturi's analysis remains rooted in the context in which they conducted their investigations. While an entire thesis that follows their footsteps in creating a commonplace guidebook for Toronto would have been interesting, the findings would only add to a library of local observations which limits the potential for a broader global perspective. This thesis recognized consumerism as the key proponent that fuels the commonplace as a global phenomenon, yet the commonplace is able to sustain unique small businesses as well. The commonplace is, therefore, a kind of global locality that is distinct to its context yet establishes reoccurring similarities throughout the world. The thesis aimed to understand this duality by going one step further to uncover both the local and universal traits of the commonplace- essentially extracting the quantitative and qualitative framework of the commonplace.

Toronto's Chinatown was chosen as a case study site for its level of commonplace intensity not found elsewhere in Toronto. The relaxed bylaws, narrow parcelizations and cultural preferences unique to Chinatown allow for a higher density of signage and products set out on display. The ability to conduct site documentation and measurements greatly helped to extract the spatial qualities of the commonplace. These dimensions served as the framework for the development of a script that would reflect the

differences and variations found in a typical commonplace. The development of the genetic armature of the commonplace was a new way of looking at architecture beyond a conventional orthographic analysis. It emphasized understanding the commonplace through the lens of other disciplines utilizing methods that have roots in arts and sciences. Using visual dynamics, semiotics, field conditions, chaos, and emergence theory, the thesis decoded the commonplace as a multi-faceted phenomenon.

The gestalt theory of the commonplace was the most effective of all investigations and served as the bridge between analysis and design. It was an adaptation of the 1920s visual perception theory which explains the tendency of humans to direct their eyes towards groups/clusters of elements. In a similar manner, the gestalt theory of the commonplace highlighted similarities and patterns that formed recognizable groupings- the critical perceptual mass of the commonplace. The level of representational abstraction required to clearly highlight these groupings required me to devise a baseline of what information was included or dropped. This deliberation informed by the gestalt theory standards formed the basis of designing a system that could adequately capture the physical and experiential likeness of the commonplace using only the most critical elements. In other words, it helped me to extract the key parameters of the commonplace.

The design portion of the thesis envisioned the potential to merge the properties of top-down and bottom-up as a design strategy. Parametric design through Grasshopper scripting was able to simulate the commonplace of building fabric and signage. It is important to note that Grasshopper was merely a computational platform. The rule-based software required me to manually design every component and thus heavily relied on ability to discern which aspects were critical to creating the commonplace. The script generated many scenarios that tested the threshold between generic architectural design and the commonplace through both orthographic and experiential renderings. The defined parameters systematically manipulated the ratio of prescribed components and randomly generated variations. The resultant matrix revealed a range of systems that had coherence to the collective while being able to satisfy unique spatial, programmatic and fabrication needs in varying degrees. The scope of the script was simultaneously at the scale of a single object and overall street, thus capturing both local and global conditions. Parametric design allowed the system to work through multiplicities but remained connected through broader generic patterns. This active rule set with critical parameters embodied the cumulative findings of the thesis.

If architects and urban planners are able to set up conditions that would encourage more physical diversity they would by extension be creating the conditions necessary to support a complex, dynamic and self-sustaining urban system. Characteristic neighbourhoods such as cultural enclaves are more dominantly shaped by unique individuals rather than by the master planner. “Systems that produce complexity consist of diverse rule-following entities whose behaviours are interdependent. Those entities interact over a contact structure or network. In addition, the entities often adapt”[1]. The commonplace blurs the line of leadership and focuses on the dynamics of the collective. The bottom-up understanding of the creation of urban atmospheres by the individual inhabitant- the key players in the system -is extremely valuable to understanding the life of the urban system. Similar to the opinions

1 Page, Scott E. Diversity and Complexity. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.

of Venturi, Atelier Bow Wow and the advocates for Everyday Urbanism, this thesis believes the role of the architect should value the "natural" emergence of urban spaces by the people. The architect should be engaged in designing the commonplace but rather than inserting foreign objects into the field she should devise only the overall framework. In other words, she "programs" the variables and adjusts the distribution of orderly and chaotic layers of the commonplace matrix. The overarching intent aligned with Stan Allen's call for architects to shift design practices from the object to the field. The field condition advocates the study of systems networked by commonalities and stretched apart by differences. The thesis followed Allen's proposal that the new monuments of the city be "marked not by demarcating lines but by thickened surfaces"[2] building upon the already inherent bottom-up systems connecting the everyday city. The increasing emergence of the consumer driven commonplace is reflective of the Metropolitan Condition that Rem Koolhaas has referred to- "an architecture with its own theorems, laws, methods, breakthroughs and achievements that have remained largely outside the field of vision of official architecture and criticism, both unable to admit a fundamental rupture that would make their own existence precarious"[3]. The thesis realized the need for confronting the reserved and exclusive nature of current practices in their willingness or lack of sensitivity to the commonplace. It suggested translating the commonplace phenomenon into a viable methodology as the first step to merge top-down and bottom-up systems.

Although the thesis was cautious to assert whether or not each simulation in the matrix was successfully deemed commonplace or inadequately generic due to the theoretical nature of the investigation, emerging practices have found justification for choosing a particular iteration over another. In SHoP Architect's Porter House, generative design became more than a stand alone script and acted as an integrated strategy that conformed to budget, constructability, program, aesthetics, other practical, and cultural preferences. SHoP architects were able to maximize the potential of architectural design while working strategically from given parameters. They extracted conditions of the real but pushed them to the limits and allowed versatile architecture to emerge from the generic. The complexity of the script immediately magnifies once it is associated with these contextual parameters but no doubt enriches its capacity as well. The script developed in the thesis gave an introductory glimpse into the potentials for generative design to incorporate commonplace principles.

The thesis moved through different scales of the urban environment. It tried to identify the nuances of the commonplace through case study analysis of specific buildings to broader urban landscapes. It aimed to expand beyond the scope and methodologies suggested by Atelier Bow Wow and Venturi that first captivated me. The progression of the thesis worked through precedents, distinguished the commonplace against similar existing conditions, carried out site documentation, analyzed the commonplace through related fields and finally advanced current discourse by speculating the potentials for translating the commonplace phenomenon to a viable strategy. It is my wish that in reading the thesis, the reader will better appreciate and see the commonplace is a new light.

2 Allen, Stan. Points Lines: Diagrams and Projects for the City. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.
3 Koolhaas, Rem. Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan. New ed. New York: Monacelli Press, 1994.

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