

# **Reverse Block Mall**

Collectivization as Strategy Against  
Spatial Monopolization in Toronto

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

Amidst an unprecedented pace of high-rise developments along Toronto's main streets, the issue of homogenization of the urban environment has been approached mainly from the perspective of architectural design. Accordingly, various efforts to preserve and reinvigorate the streetscape have focused on aesthetic features such as attention to human-scale details, retention of historic facades, and varying of building massing to recreate a sense of diversity. Despite this effort, the ubiquity of run-of-the-mill glass towers and generic chain stores that inevitably occupy the 'renewed' streetscape attests to the ineffectiveness of this approach.

This thesis argues that the reliance on design-based solutions as a fix for homogenization is ineffective because it overlooks the underlying monopolization of ownership that occurs as part of the development process. The displacement of existing tenant and owner bodies, and the consolidation of properties homogenizes the range of self-expression and spatial platforms that provides the basis for design authenticity. Therefore, any effort to preserve and reinvigorate the streetscape must begin with an alternative strategy of development that is grounded on the preservation of existing range of buildings, lots, and establishments, and enhancement of economic viability of small-scale ownership as its pre-condition.

The proposed intervention begins by identifying restrictions embodied in urban form, design policy, and development process that degrade the economic and spatial performance of small-scale properties. To mitigate their impact, the collectivization of existing properties on a block of historic Yonge Street is proposed as a central strategy with several corollary outcomes: air-right development, activation of laneway space, and facilitation of internal spatial transactions. The sale of collective air-right enables a parallel process of densification to occur while creating synergies with the existing base-level properties. The earnings from the sale provide the basis for the activation of the rear-laneway and the commercial utilization of the building rear-faces, providing an extension of the public domain and increased autonomy for the tenants and owners. Finally, facilitation of self-guided spatial transactions between the tenants establishes iterative optimization and diversification of space which improves commercial performance and the range of self-expression. The culminating effect of these processes attempts to define a new development typology that not only precludes displacement, but forms an urban 'place' that is architecturally distinct, culturally rich, and economically viable.

## Acknowledgement

Many people describe the thesis as a journey, it seems I have taken a particularly long and winding path. In moments of satisfaction and joy, but more so in disappointments and perseverance, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to those who have helped me make it across.

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## **01/ Introduction**



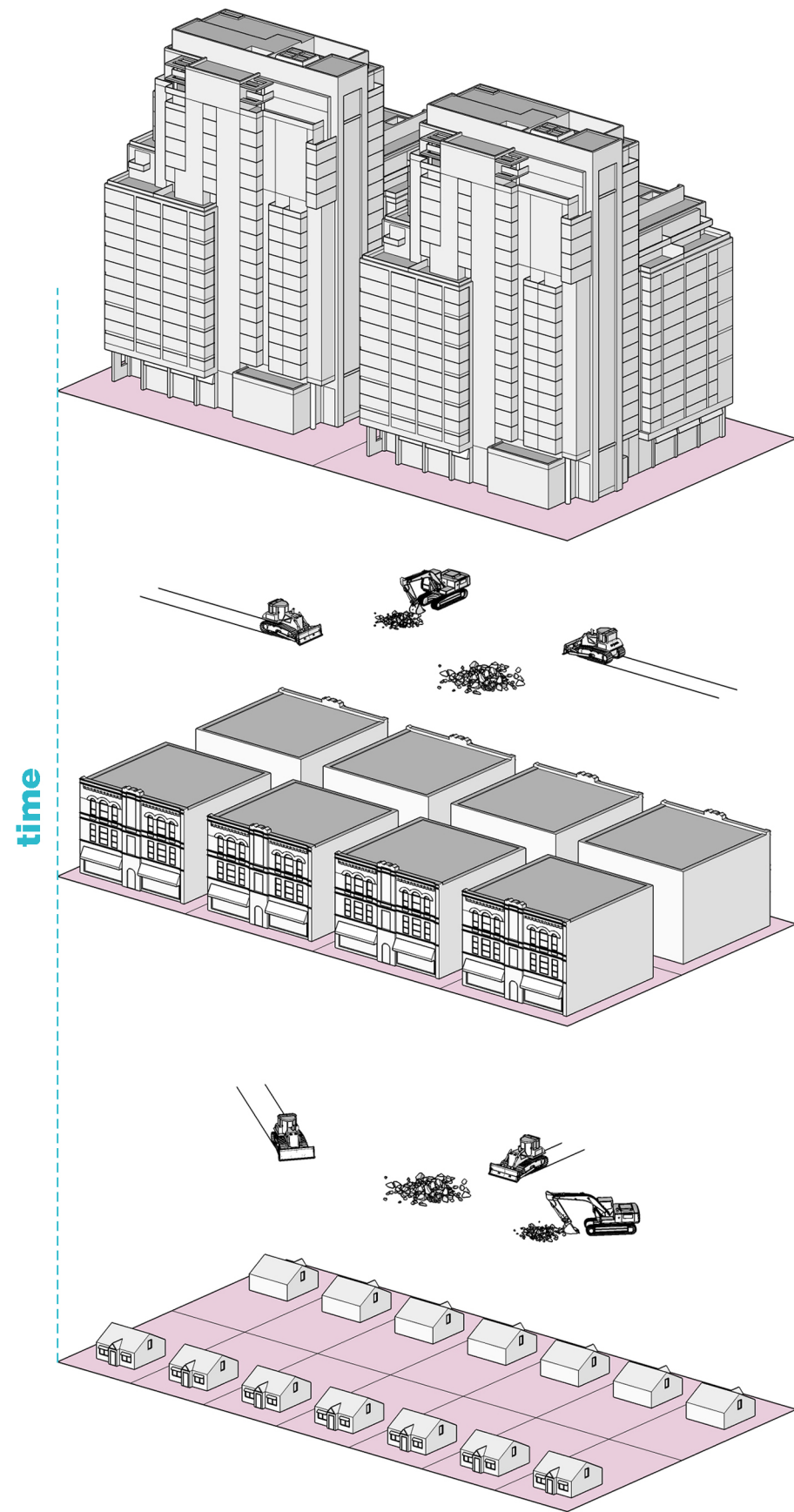


Fig. 1-1  
Temporal Distribution  
in Typical Development

2

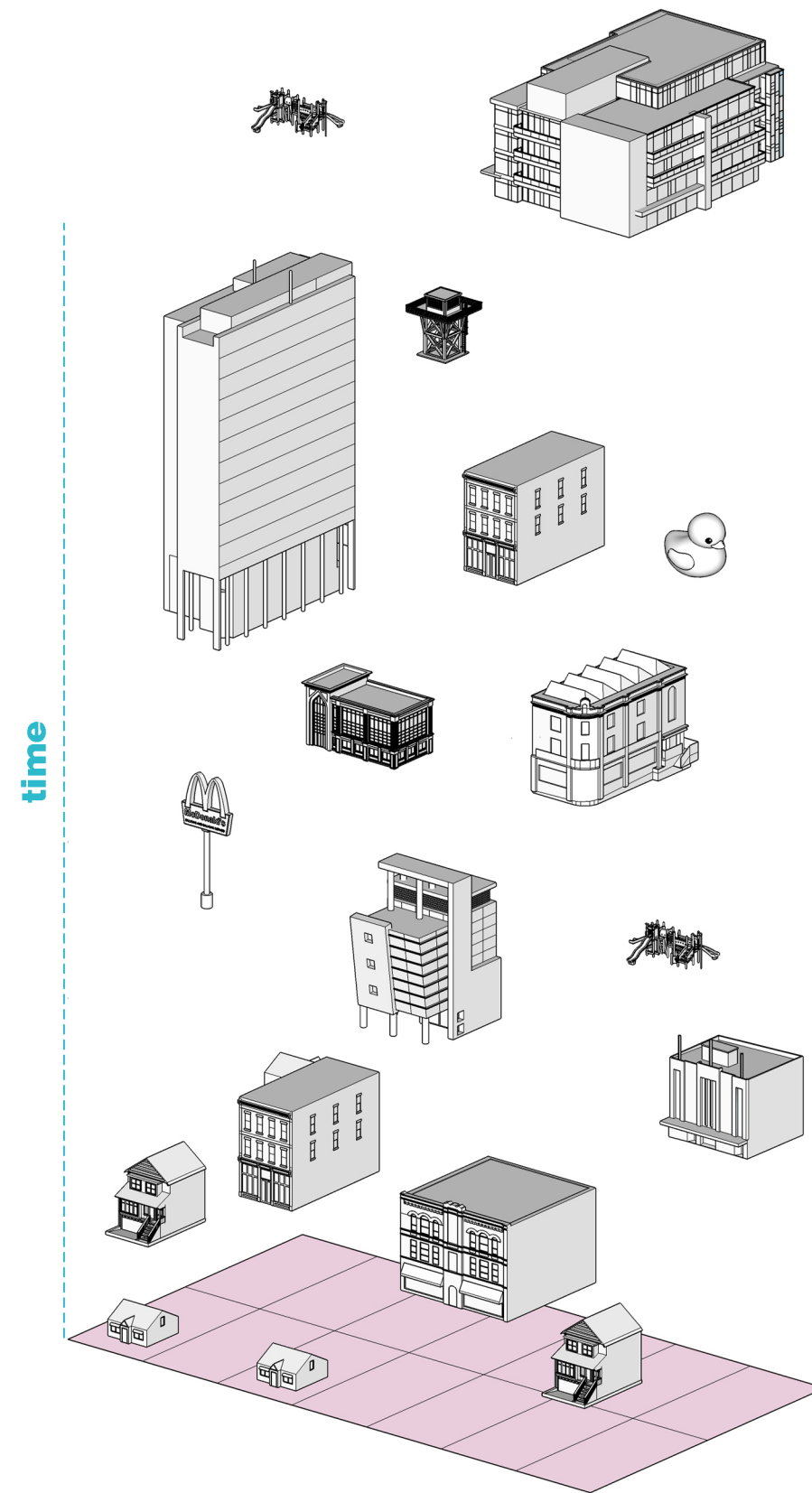



Fig. 1-2  
Temporal Distribution with  
Ownership Preservation

3





During the past two and a half years I worked in a retail architecture firm located at the intersection of Yonge and Bloor. Within this short timeframe, I've witnessed the shifting of the Yonge Street streetscape as more and more properties gave way to new developments. At almost weekly intervals, vacancy signs spread from one store to another like an epidemic until eventually they were collectively fenced in and demolished. Ownerships were relinquished and tenants were displaced, leaving only hoarding to occupy the site for years to come. Such brute force of development was not limited to the dated buildings and tenements which has been a hot subject of the public's call for Yonge Street's renewal. Even Historical properties, designated as being culturally meaningful, survived solely by the single wythe of its precarious brick facade as its guts were demolished, excavated, and rebuilt.

The contested issue of large-scale developments has been debated countless times on countless occasions, and much of what is being said are mere rehashings of past deliberations. The same is quite true for the stance of the architectural community and the design society in general in which the effect on the architectural milieu has been analyzed, diagnosed, and prescribed from the narrow perspective of formal design. Various concerns over homogeneity of architectural language are countered by truisms for improved design solutions: diversify design, engage the human scale, invigorate the sidewalk, reduce curtainwall glazing et cetera. The axiom of design as the remedy has been the ideological backbone of architectural intervention.

What is missing in this approach is an acknowledgment of the transformation in the processes underlying built form. A form is not borne purely out of design conception but embodies various processes that are beyond the drawing board. It embodies desires of the users, the proclivity of trends, fluctuations of the economy, the capacity of technology, and the process of development that are outside the realm of influence of architects and developers. These processes are concomitantly tied to the context of the time and are factors that designers and design processes cannot be independent from.

What makes our current concerns over large-scale developments unique is the pace of development that vastly surpasses any of the past. Until recent times, the historical scale and pace of development allowed buildings to be naturally spread out across the space-time of the urban environment. Current Yonge Street,

for instance, is comprised of buildings that date as far back as the mid-19th century coexisting side-by-side with buildings that span across Toronto's modern history. It is such gradual layering of time and the qualities it embodies that lays the foundation of broad-based architectural diversity and endows character to our streetscape.

By contrast, the current pace of development seeks to transform the urban environment both holistically and concurrently. City blocks that took over a century to be established are being overturned in a matter of years. This is an issue that cannot be alleviated through 'better design' as even the most novel architecture, and the most thoughtful and sensitive of design are inextricably bound by the parameters of the time. Whatever diversity that is emulated through variety in design remains a planar cut in the space-time of architecture milieu, whereas it has thus far existed as stratification.

In this sense, the true nature of diversity at an urban scale cannot be resolved by approaching it as an issue of form. Instead, the issue of diversity should be approached as a matter of platform, a spatial and representational framework for the provision of diversity in time.

Preservation of ownership, especially those of small independent properties, is what I propose constitutes the platform for such temporal diversification. This is grounded in two elements of diversification that are provided by ownership: quantity of agents and preservation of autonomy. Simply put, the more people there are with their own spatial realm to express themselves naturally creates diversity in the broad-based context. The diversity of ownership also spreads out the progress of development over a broader timeframe which mitigates the pressure for homogenization of the urban environment. Through the preservation of ownership, it is possible to transition our development methodology from a transformative event to an iterative process.

An intervention to preserve and invigorate small-scale ownership should not be regarded as philanthropy or social activism that counter-acts the efficiency of the free market. Instead of being an isolated 'case-study' or a 'one-off' project, it must find applicability in the wider context and be made accessible to a greater spectrum of urban stakeholders. I argue that it should and can be an action based on self-interest because the disappearance of small-scale ownership is not purely a product of free market competition but a biased outcome of tilted-playing-field exerting itself in the spatial realm. It is the combinatory effect of Toronto's urban form, policies, and development process that culminates in a systematic disadvantage for small-scale ownership. Hence, any

Fig. 1-3 (opposite)  
Demolition on the  
Site of Eight Cum-  
berland Condos

intervention against the monopolizing and homogenizing force of large-scale development should be understood as an act of leveling this field by reinforcing the viability of small-scale ownership.

So how can the field of competition be leveled between large-scale development and small-scale ownership?

Collectivization has often been the solution against monopolization whether it be through unionization of labor, crowd-funding of capital, or pooling of resources. The same could be applied in the spatial realm, in which multiple properties can collectivize to overcome limitations imposed by its scale and allow for optimization of use. Through cooperation action, the latent potential of capital, which exist in both physical form of buildings and its economic capacity to generate revenue, can be activated.

In this respect, the direction of architectural intervention should diverge away from the process of top-down construction to a new focus on connections; connections that can tie multiple stakeholders together spatially, socially and economically. The design process should look at uncovering spatial moments by establishing new relationships in existing conditions rather than building new forms from scratch. This direction of approach will become increasingly pertinent as fewer open sites are available to build on and architectural involvement in the urban fabric necessitate participation of stakeholders with limited resources.

## **02/ Changing Streetscape**

## Growth

In 2005, the Province of Ontario introduced the Places to Grow Act, which outlined the planning objectives for growth and density for the next 25 years. The “Smart Growth” plan, which looked at distributing the pattern of growth across the Greater Golden Horseshoe, set a density goal of 400 residents and jobs per hectare for the City of Toronto by the year 2031. As of 2011, City of Toronto reached a density of 705 per hectare and is expected to reach 775 per hectare by 2022<sup>1</sup>, nearly doubling the original goal of the plan.

Looking specifically at high-rise developments; between 2011 and 2016, there have been approximately 30 condo towers that were proposed or under construction along the 1.7 kilometer stretch of Yonge Street between Dundas and Bloor. This represents a significant portion of the streetscape, occupying approximately 26 of 54 street corners as well as a major percentage of retail frontage that defines the commercial corridor. At the urban scale, high-rise residential sector experienced a 14.9% growth in the City of Toronto, which represents the largest growth in number since the 1991 census year<sup>2</sup>. Of the 65,055 new dwelling units built within the same timeframe, 64,050 units were comprised of apartments over 5 storeys, accounting for nearly the entire margin of increase.

The driver of this pace of development is clear; the condo market has experienced sales growth of 20.3% in 2016 alone along with 9.7% increase in the average sale price per unit<sup>3</sup>. This bull market in condos will likely continue as 2017 Toronto Real Estate Market Forecast published by ReMax projects that prices will rise another 35 to 50 percent in the next 5 to 10 years.<sup>4</sup>

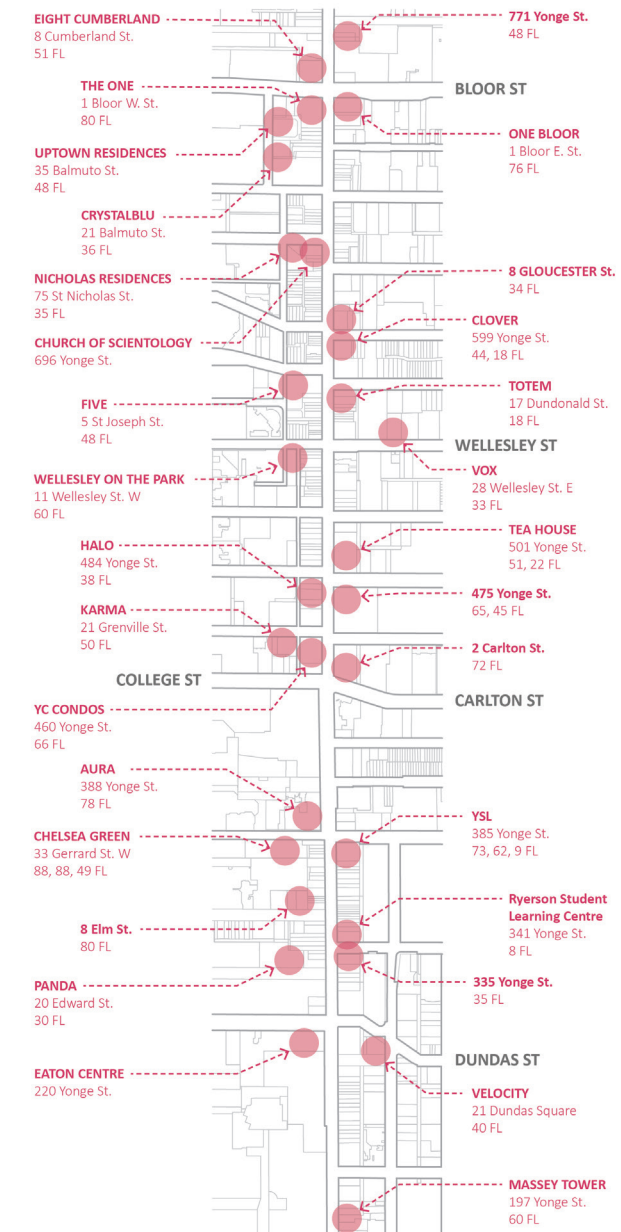


Fig. 2-1  
Development proposal sites on Yonge Street 2011-2016



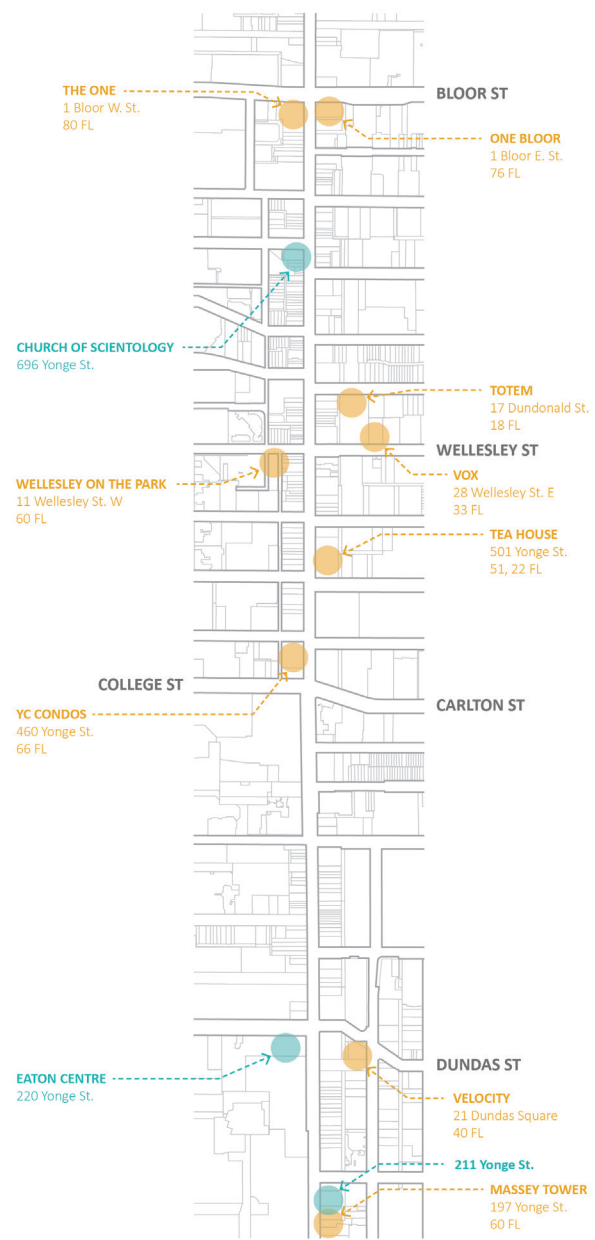


Fig. 2-2  
Developments on Yonge St Under Construction

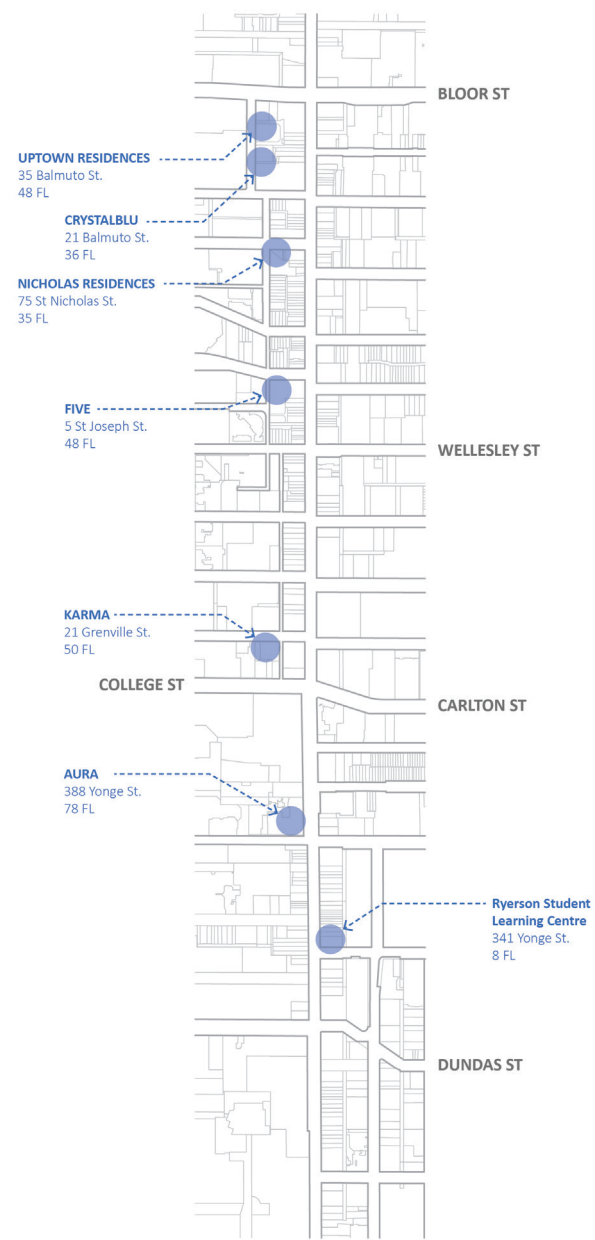
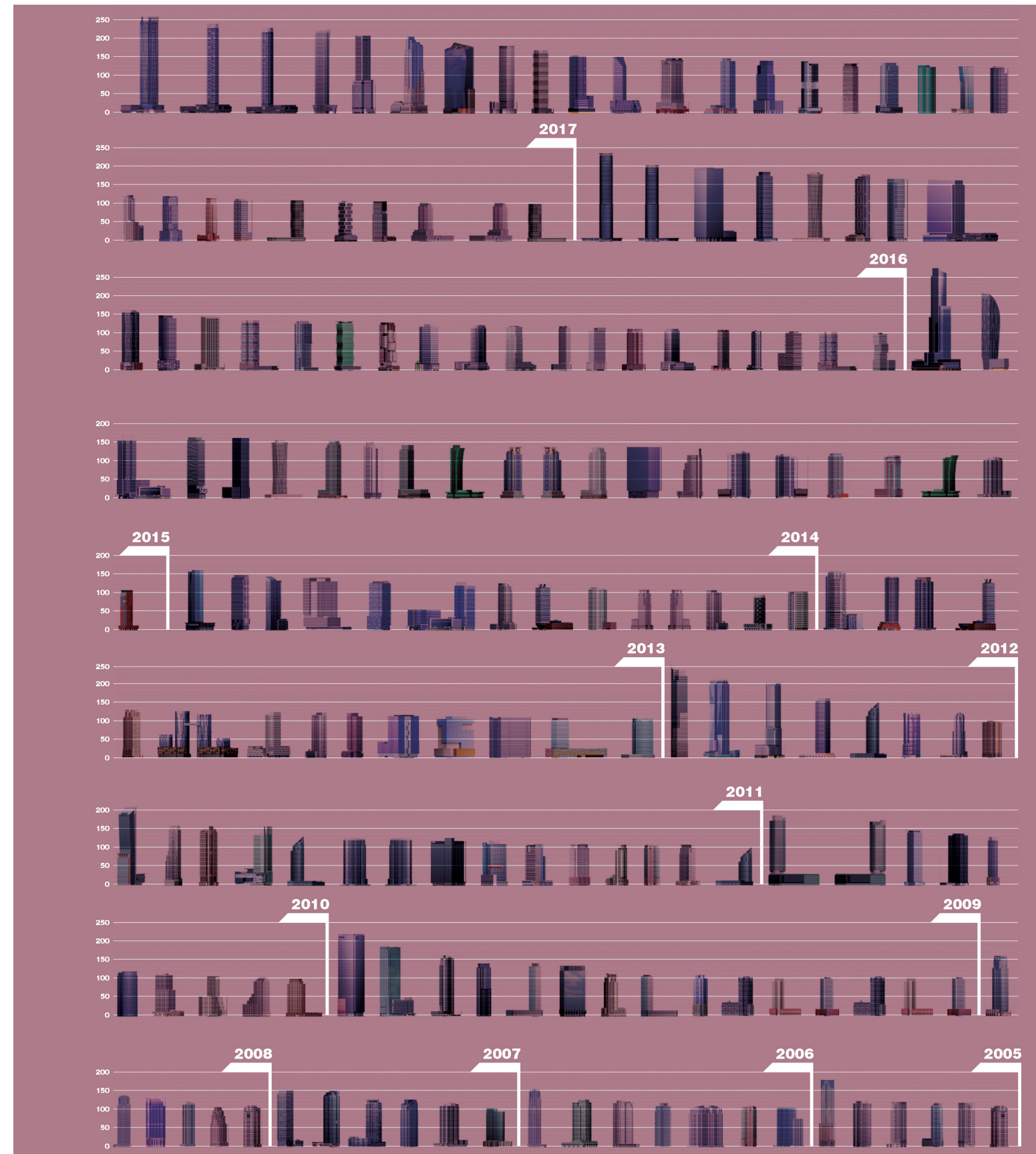


Fig. 2-3  
Developments Completed (2011-2016)

Fig. 2-4 (opposite)  
High-rise Developments  
over 100m (2005-2017):

Note the consistent  
increase in the number  
and height of develop-  
ments projects







## Commercial Streetscape

The gentrification and the increase in density is not the only change observed by the urban dweller. What follows such development is a vivid change in the characteristics of the streetscape, which, in a major commercial corridor such as Yonge Street, occurs most predominantly in the shift of its retail characteristics.

The trend of a handful of franchises dominating the bidding war for the next available street corner has become a common part of Toronto's urban landscape. With every new development there is an innate yet unspoken expectation that is fulfilled by the dominating red signage of Shopper's Drug Mart, ubiquitous green mermaid of Starbucks, or a pick of Canada's Big-Five banks. The purported taking-over of Hard Rock Café at Dundas Square by Shopper's Drug Mart, a brand that has opened more than 300 locations in the past decade, is a testament to the careless and ceaseless proliferation of this trend.

This issue of commercial homogenization has been brought to the political realm where bills are put in motion to restrict the unfettered branching of chain stores. A recent motion put forward by Councillor Mike Layton seeks to restrict retail chains from occupying significant urban areas in likeness to the *Formula Retail Use* policy of San Francisco<sup>5</sup>. He commented in an interview with CBC News,

*"People aren't necessarily driven by large big box stores in Toronto. They come here because they want to walk down a Queen Street, a Yonge Street, a College Street ... and experience the fabric of the neighbourhood",<sup>6</sup>*

Such motions are important in preserving the characteristics of significant urban areas such as Dundas Square but it is nonetheless limited to its effect when it comes to the uncelebrated broad urban scene. For the rest of the city, without the benefit of such specialized measures, homogenization is inevitable.

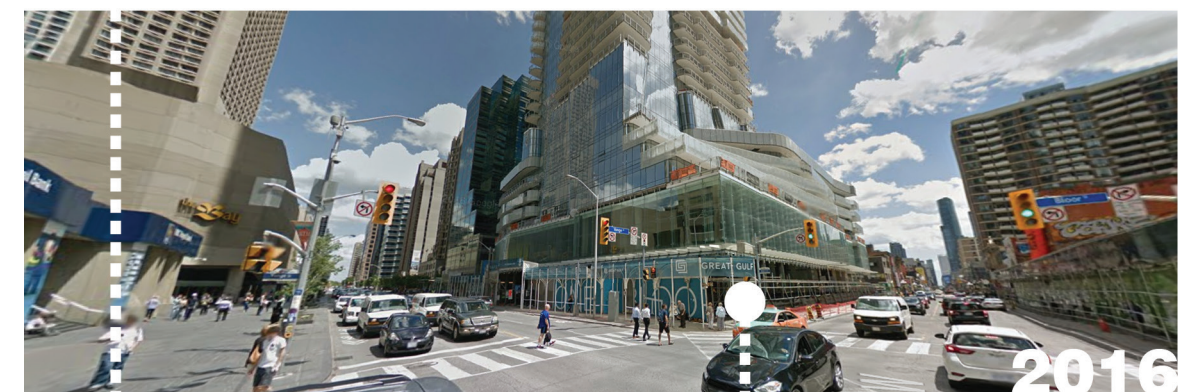
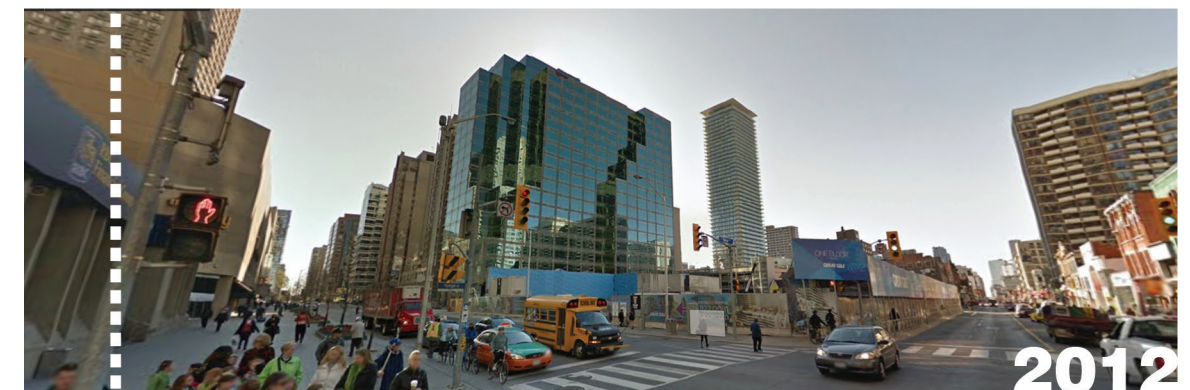
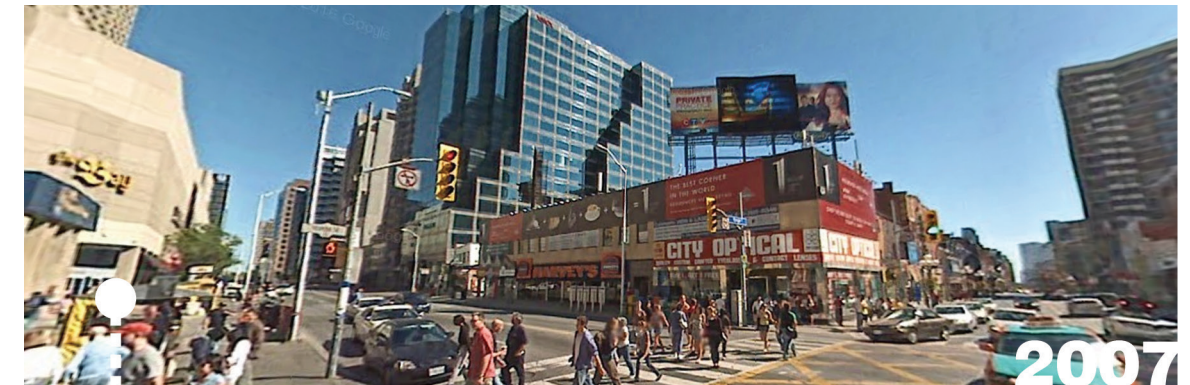
Fig. 2-5 (opposite)  
Marketing Images of  
Proposed Develop-  
ments (2011-2016)



The change in the streetscape lies not only in the generic characteristics of newly implanted retail but also in their sheer physical scale. Despite the fact that new high-rise developments provide substantially larger retail footprints compared to the low-midrise buildings that formerly occupied the sites, it is all too common to find fewer variety of stores offered to the public as these spaces are predominantly leased to chain stores with deeper pockets and appetite for longer leases and larger footprints. Ian Bentley in *Profit and Place* describes the motivation behind this change,

*“Attracted by low management costs, potential investors are therefore drawn towards simple buildings with single tenants, rather intricate ones with large number of small tenants involved in a wide range of different activities. If, through particular economic circumstances, no single tenant can be found to occupy all the space, it may in practice be necessary to let the building to a number of small occupiers. Even if this is known early in the development process, however, there is still an investment attraction in designing it so that it can eventually accommodate a single, larger tenant, should the opportunity arise in the future. The design, therefore, will be substantially the same as if it had been designed for letting as one unit in the first place.”<sup>7</sup>*

This absence of small-scale tenants cannot be reduced to the prognosis that these enterprises have failed in commercially competing with large businesses. For one, the vast majority of the businesses that are displaced by new developments are not in the same commercial category as the stores that come to take their spot. Of the 19 stores that used to occupy the current site of the One Bloor development, not one would be in a competitive category with the proposed Nordstrom Rack. Likewise, Tattoo shops and Korean restaurants do not compete with Shoppers Drug Mart and RBC. Secondly, the displacement of local businesses occurs on an area-wide basis preceding the incoming of new developments through pressures of tax increase, rent raise, and aggressive property acquisitions. In this sense, the forces that drive displacement of small enterprises is not generated by direct commercial competition but is rather the product of a development process which monopolizes the competition for space.



TURNING POINT FITNESS  
SILVER4U  
MR SUB  
PSYCHIC READER  
COFFEE COFFEE  
SMOKE & NEWS STAND  
FELIX & NORTON  
HARVEYS  
CITY OPTICAL  
POPEYES  
FOREIGN EXCHANGE CENTRE  
TJIKI  
CRYSTALBLUE SALES CENTRE  
MUDO  
SUPER DISCOUNT PLUS

REDFOX  
CASH MONEY  
FALAFEL HOUSE  
THE SHOE COMPANY

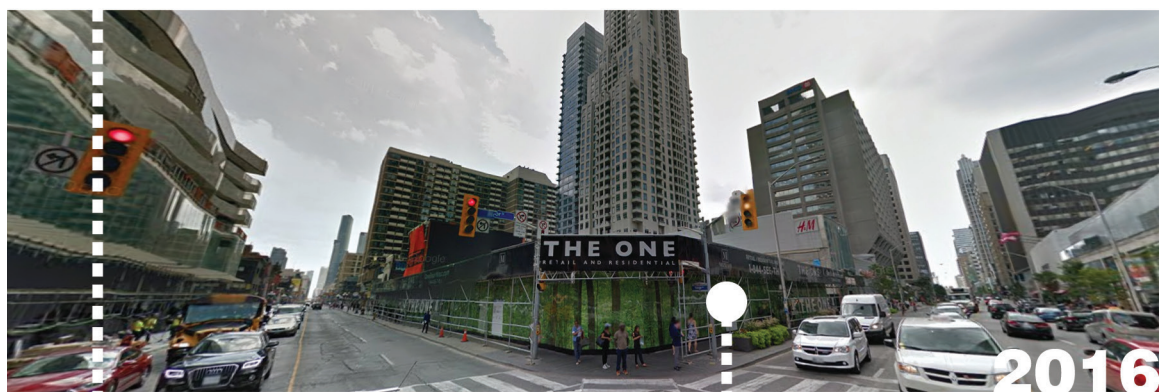
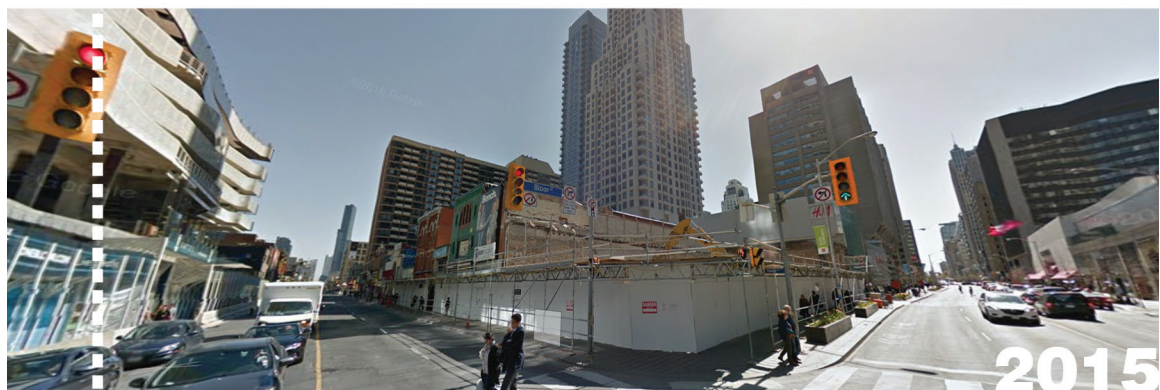
19

NORDSTROM RACK  
McEWAN GROCERY

2

Fig. 2-6  
One Bloor: Street Level Tenancy  
Changes



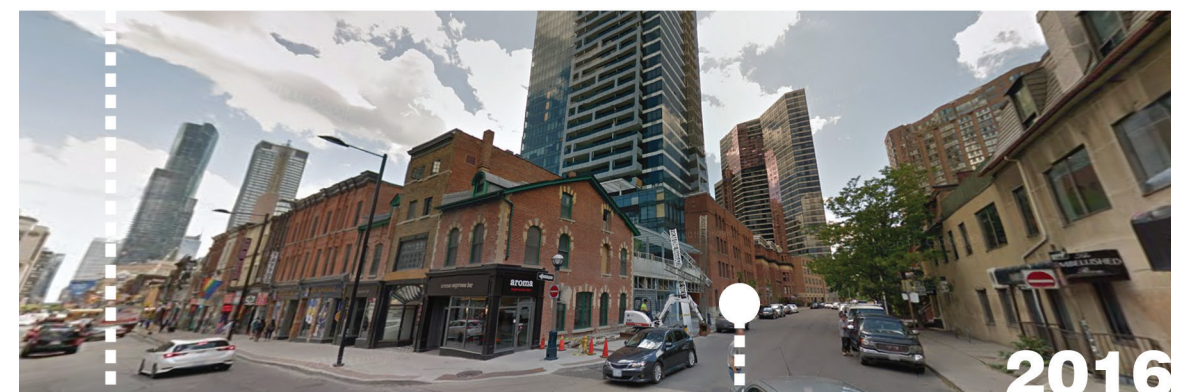


- FRENCH CONNECTION
- LA SWISS
- STOLLERY'S
- SUNRISE RECORDS
- BURGUNDY'S BAR & EATERY
- MONEY MART
- HUE'S KITCHEN
- LE CHATEAU
- TOP TEA

9

-UNKNOWN-  
?

Fig. 2-7  
The One: Street Level Tenancy Changes



- DYNAMIC CONDITIONING CENTRE
- LINUS SALON
- SHRED CENTRAL
- L3 FITNESS
- CARRINGTONS
- WRAP & GRAB
- PIZZAVILLE
- I KCLICK
- CENTRAL SURPLUS
- A.J. LEATHER
- SKY MUSIC ENTERPRISE
- RITZ

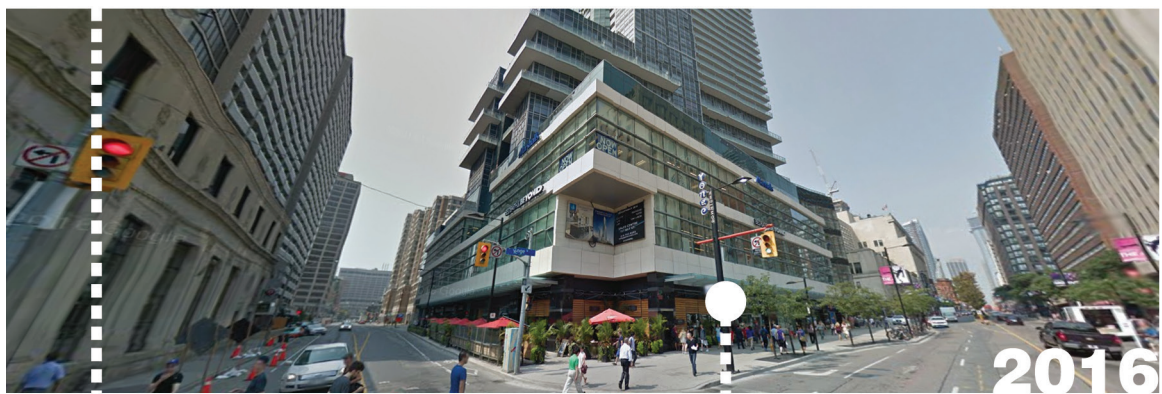
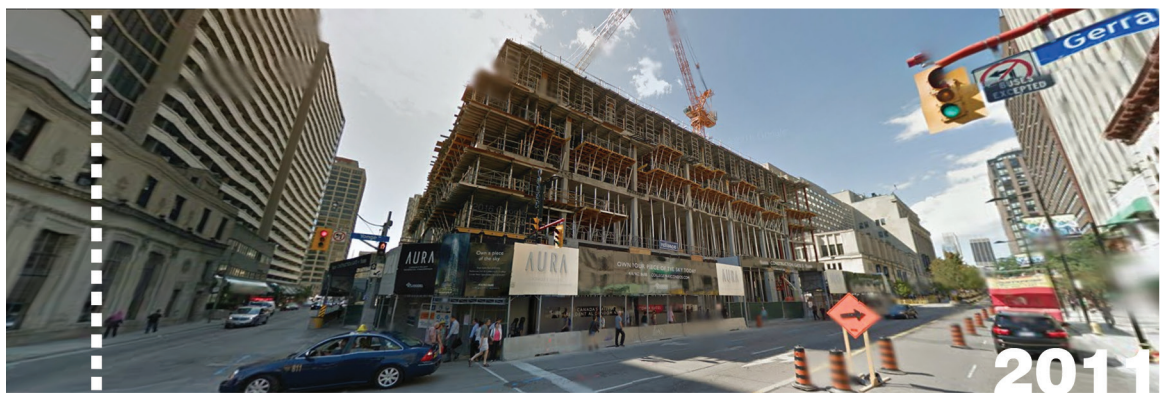
12

- AROMA ESPRESSO BAR
- ROYAL BANK OF CANADA
- THE WICKSON SOCIAL

3

Fig. 2-8  
Five Condos: Street Level Tenancy Changes





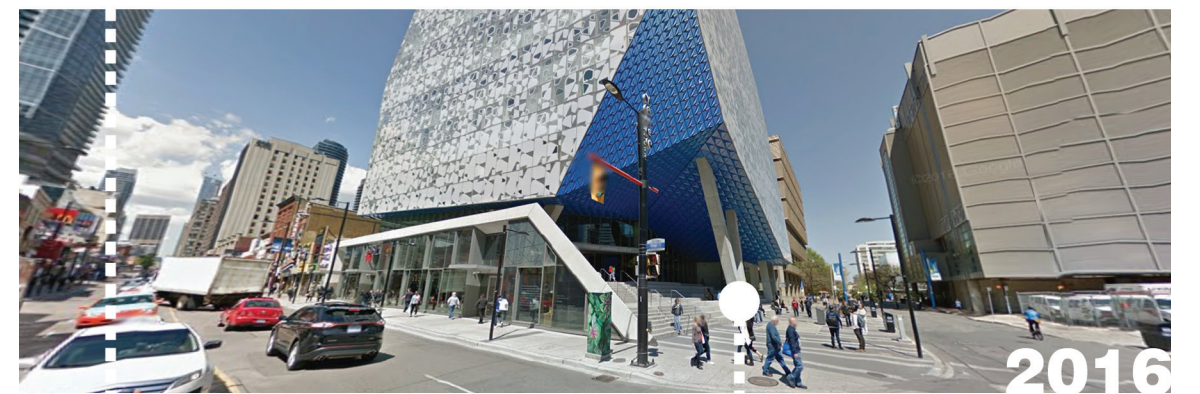
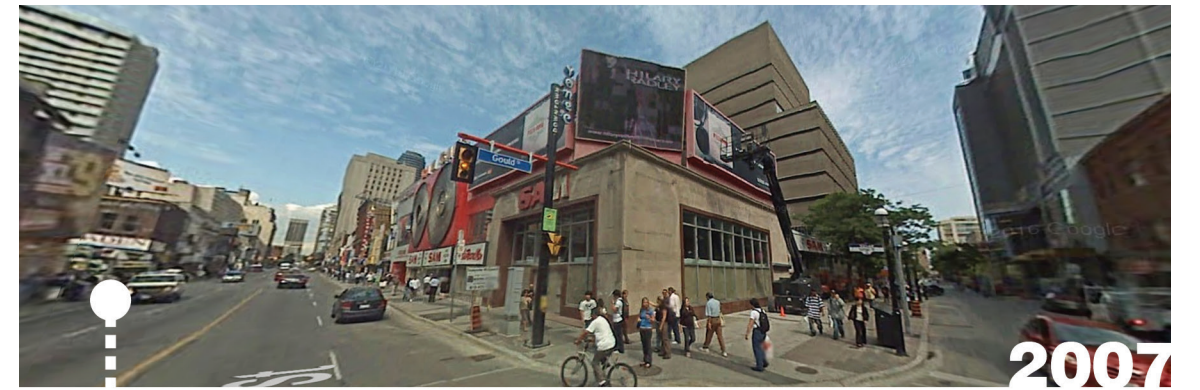
IMPARK

**1**

SCADDABUSH  
 BED BATH & BEYOND  
 REDS WINE TAVERN  
 ROYAL BANK OF CANADA  
 BANK OF MONTREAL  
 ZAVIDA COFFEE

**6**

Fig. 2-9  
 Aura: Street Level Tenancy  
 Changes



WORLD OF POSTERS  
 FUTURES SHOP  
 SAM THE RECORD MAN

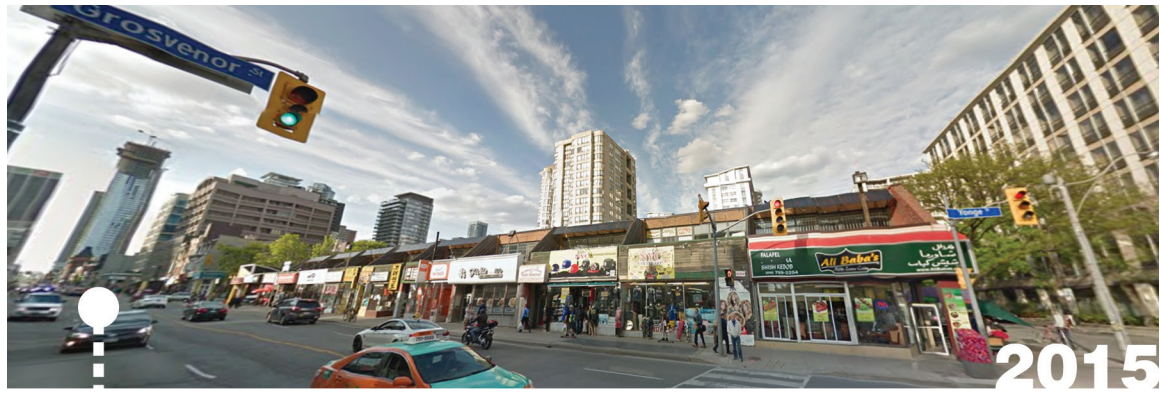
**3**

BASIL BOX

**1**

Fig. 2-10  
 Ryerson Student Learning Centre:  
 Street Level Tenancy Changes



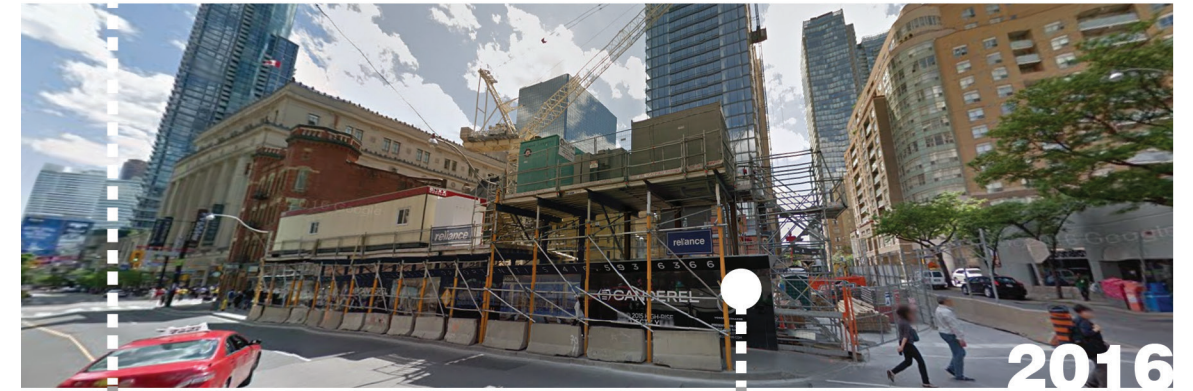
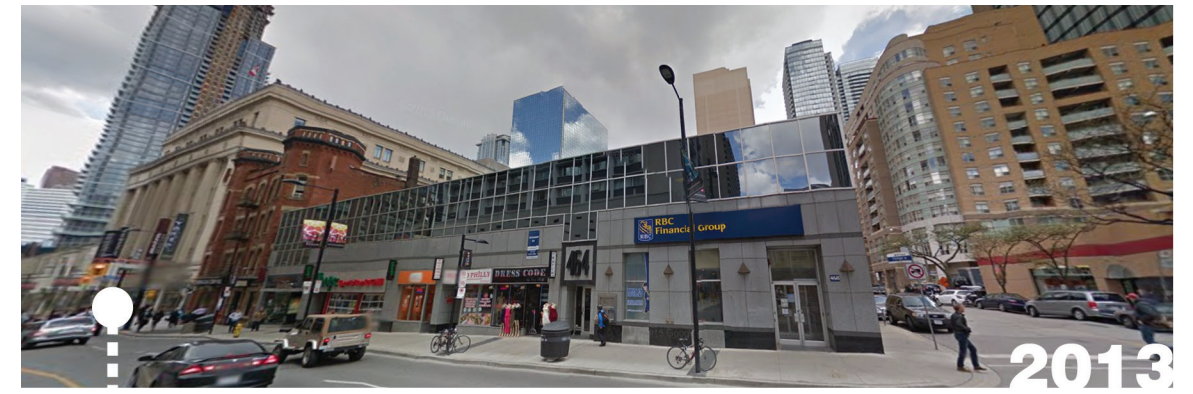


- PI TOM'S
- KOKYO SUSHI
- ALIBABA'S**
- NEW NYC COLLECTION
- MILLENNIUM ACCESSORIES & BODY
- PIERCING
- FICKLE
- LOGINN CAFE
- JONG PARK TAEKWONDO
- CKT SPORTS INC.
- WIRELESS WAREHOUSE
- PAPAYA HUT
- KLEEN AIR SHOES
- KATHMANDU RESTAURANT
- WRAP & ROLL
- CASH STORE
- COCINA LUCERO
- BRAZ 1.L

**18**

-UNKNOWN-  
**?**

Fig. 2-11  
Tea House Condos: Street Level  
Tenancy Changes



- AUTOPARK
- ROYAL BANK OF CANADA
- DRESS CODE
- I WENT TO PHILLY
- WIND MOBILE**
- HOOPS SPORTS BAR & GRILL**
- GRILL TIME

**7**

-UNKNOWN-  
**?**

Fig. 2-12  
YC Condos: Street Level Tenancy  
Changes

*“The diversity, of whatever kind, that is generated by cities rests on the fact that in cities so many people are so close together, and among them contain so many different tastes, skills, needs, supplies, and bees in their bonnets...Smallness and diversity, to be sure, are not synonyms. The diversity of city enterprises includes all degrees of size, but greater variety does mean a high proportion of small elements. A lively scene is lively largely by virtue of its enormous collection of small elements.”*

*- Jane Jacobs*<sup>8</sup>

## **Demand**

According to Jane Jacobs, urban diversity is generated as population and density increases. Such tendency should hold especially true for the Millennial’s aged 15 to 34 who constitute about a quarter of Canada’s population and approximately 1.5 million of Toronto’s downtown demographic.<sup>9</sup> This sector represents a major driver of Toronto’s booming condo market as the prime constituent of renter and buyer pool. The significance lies not only in their number and financial capacity but also in their defining cultural characteristics. Winnie Sun, a financial analyst with Forbes, describes this generation in her article,

*“This generation likes convenience and supporting local, instant shopping gratification and a home-grown ‘giving back’ experience. Not only do Millennials like to feel a connection to the products they buy, they appreciate a personalized shopping experience and customized products.”<sup>10</sup>*

Small-scale enterprises are the key beneficiaries of this consumer tendency, as younger generations are more perceptive to unique consumer experiences, whether in terms of products or services. The stray away from generic multi-national brands to artisan brands and building up of closely knit relationships with local stores has become an important factor of consumer culture aside from mere cost-based evaluations. Echoing this sentiment, the Business Development Bank of Canada study from 2013 identified *“buying local and desire for customized goods”* as one of five key consumer trends that will shape the future of retail. Furthermore, the study has found that 45% of the consumers made an effort to buy locally in the past year, 87% felt buying local was more environmentally responsible, and 97% responded that they have bought products to support the local economy.<sup>11</sup>

## Economic Bridge

Apart from consumer demand, small enterprises act as bridges for many of Toronto's undercapitalized and underqualified demographic to enter economic activity in the broader market. This opportunity allows people with limited resources and education to establish a financial basis for stably integrating into Canadian society. A Statistics Canada study published in March 2016 titled *Immigration, Business Ownership and Employment in Canada*, identified that recent immigrants, after four to seven years, were more likely to have started a business than Canadian-born or more established immigrants<sup>12</sup>. Diane Dyson, research director of WoodGreen Community Services of Toronto reinforces this point in her interview with Global News,

*"We know that immigrants, more and more, are setting up their own businesses...We're worried about why that is happening. We're hearing that they're doing it because they can't find other jobs, so they have to make money somehow."*<sup>13</sup>

The vital connection between small businesses and the livelihood is reflected in the findings from the 2012 StatsCan report which highlights that, for immigrants, the earnings from self-employment tend to be lower in comparison to that of the non-immigrant group. It also draws parallels between the unemployment rate and self-employment rate in the group<sup>14</sup>, suggesting that the barrier in entering the employment market is forcing them to start-up a business. The lack of capital is hinted by the higher likelihood for recent immigrant start-ups to be self-employed or employ fewer people than businesses started by non-recent immigrants.

These facts provide insight into the operation of small independent businesses as an act of financial necessity and the critical impact that displacement can have on the financially precarious demographic group.

## Cultural Bridge

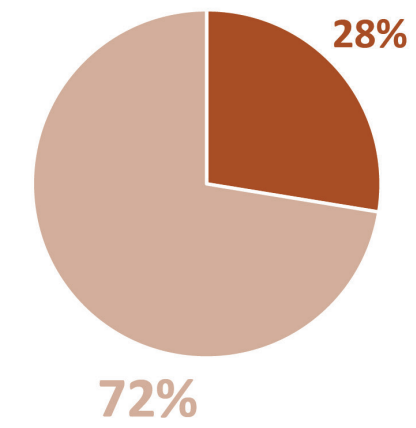
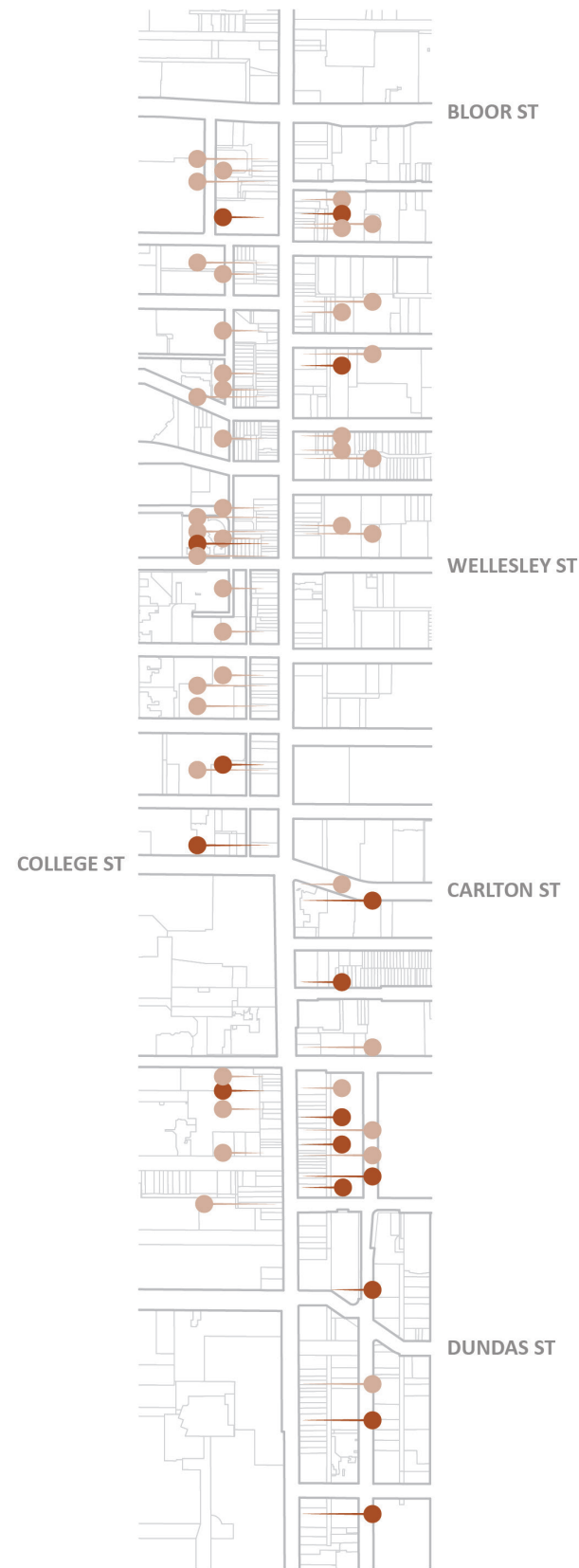
*"The city of difference denotes those municipal policies and discourses that support the integration of 'culture' and an aesthetic of diversity into urban development and strategies of economic competitiveness"*<sup>15</sup>

The significance of small-scale enterprises should also be appreciated as the key player in establishing Toronto's cultural character and competitiveness in the global scene.

The vast range of ethnic backgrounds, social affiliations, and financial statuses of business owners open up products and services that were previously inaccessible or isolated within ethnic enclaves. More importantly, the possibility of being able to operate such businesses directly in the urban core makes it accessible to the broader public.

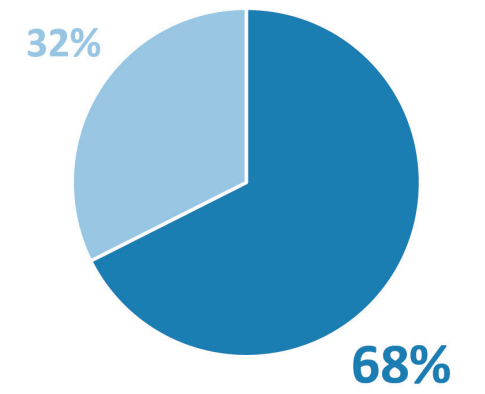
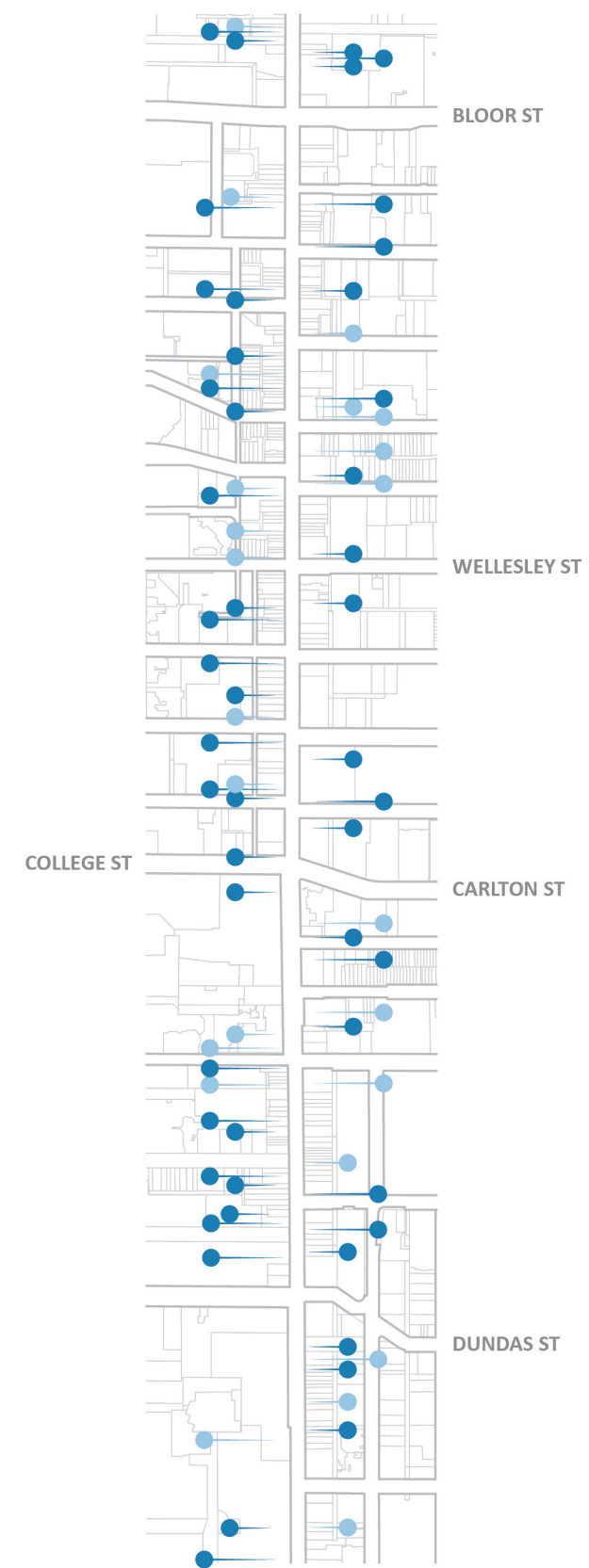
A look at the food industry, which comprises the second largest bracket of business start-up in Canada, elucidates this point most clearly. In Toronto, a person dines out an average of 3.1 times a week which is on par with New York and Los Angeles. It is also home to the third largest food & beverage cluster in North America.<sup>16</sup> An analysis of food establishments along the historic Yonge Street between Queen Street and Bloor Street shows that approximately 45 percent of the establishments are ethnically influenced. An interesting point is that ethnic influenced establishments were more likely to be located in smaller and older properties and independently owned, whereas the opposite was true for non-ethnic food establishments.





- ethnic influenced (franchise)
- ethnic influenced (independent)

Fig. 2-13  
Ethnic Influenced Food Establishments



- non-ethnic (franchise)
- non-ethnic food (independent)

Fig. 2-14  
Non-Ethnic Influenced Food Establishments

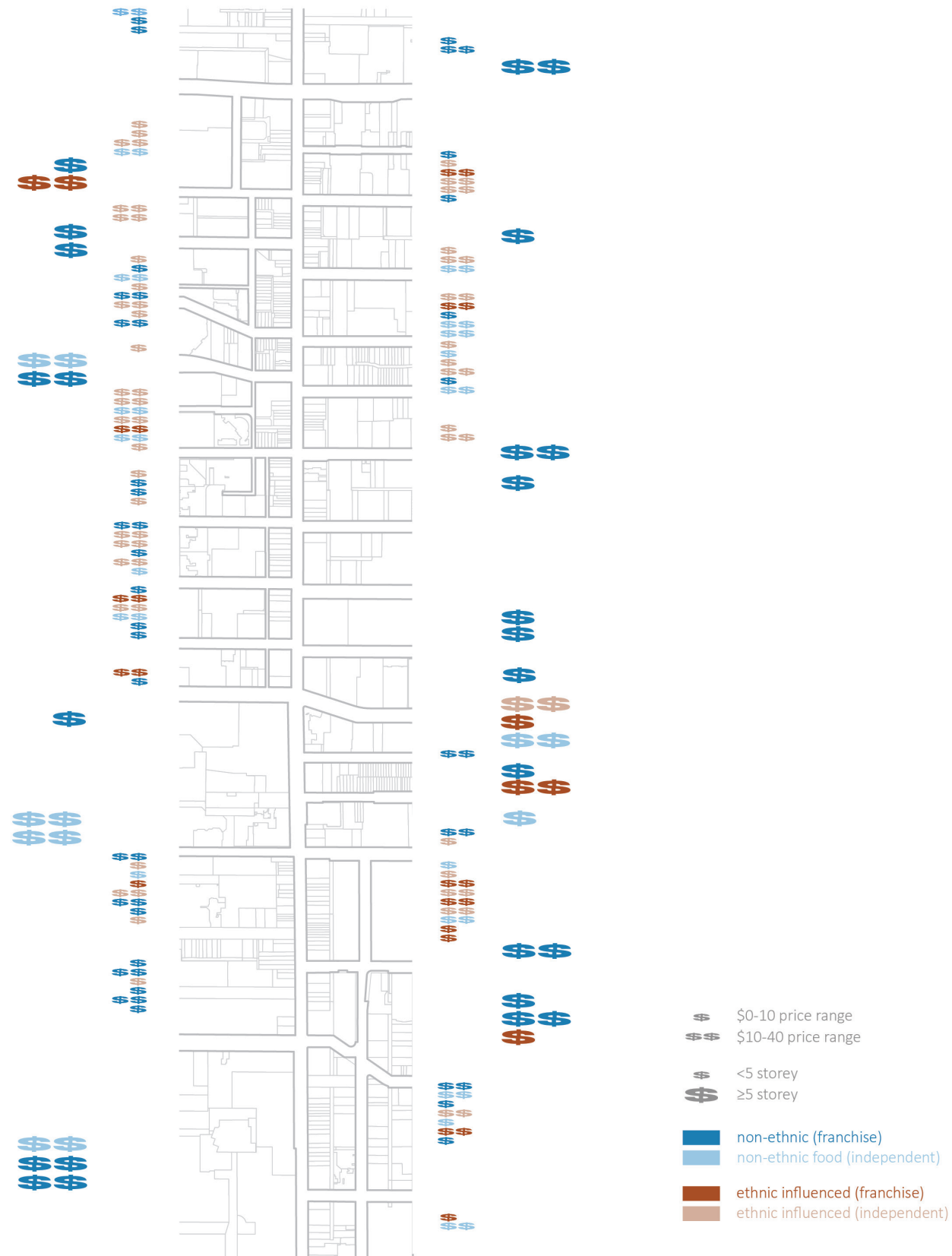


Fig. 2-15  
Food Establishments- Cost, Culture, and Building Height

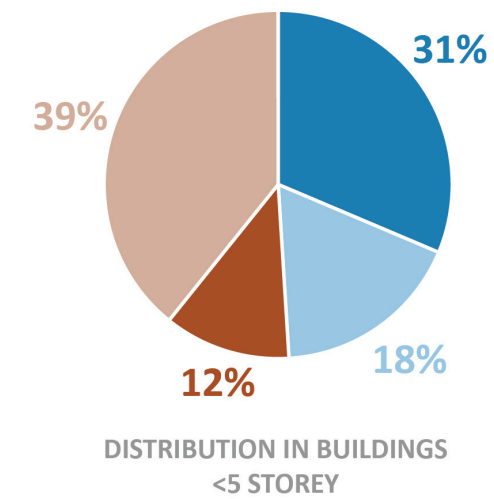
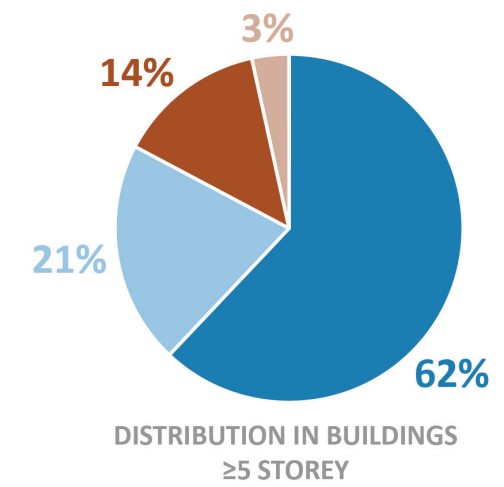


Fig. 2-16  
Distribution of Es-  
tablishment Type by  
Building Height

While cultural diversity is a major selling point of Yonge Street’s character, the data indicates a disproportionate distribution of ethnic-influenced establishments according to the physical characteristics of the buildings. Buildings taller than 5 storeys, which generally belong to newer and larger developments, tended to have less ethnic diversity (17% compared to an overall average of 45%) while having a disproportionately larger share of franchise establishments in comparison to smaller properties (76% compared to 32%).

- 1 Scallan, N. (2012, October 19). Density Toronto: As GTA population rises, so do expectations for denser living. Toronto Star. Retrieved from [https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/10/19/density\\_toronto\\_as\\_gta\\_population\\_rises\\_so\\_do\\_expectations\\_for\\_denser\\_living.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/10/19/density_toronto_as_gta_population_rises_so_do_expectations_for_denser_living.html)
- 2 City of Toronto (2017). 2016 Census: Age and Sex; Type of Dwelling.
- 3 ReMax. (2016). Housing Market Outlook 2017 [Report]. Retrieved from [http://download.remax.ca/PR/HMO2017/Report/REMAX\\_2017HousingMarketOutlookReport.pdf](http://download.remax.ca/PR/HMO2017/Report/REMAX_2017HousingMarketOutlookReport.pdf)
- 4 ibid
- 5 Formula Retail Use Policy in San Francisco, which applies to establishment with more than 11 branches and recognizable "look", limits setup of new locations depending on zoning categories.
- 6 CBC News. (2017, March 27). Think Toronto's streets all look the same? This city councillor wants to limit chain stores. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/think-toronto-s-streets-all-look-the-same-this-city-councillor-wants-to-limit-chain-stores-1.4043302>
- 7 Bentley, I. (1999). Profit and Place: Urban Transformations: Power, People, and Urban Design. Routledge.
- 8 Jacobs, J. (1961). Death and Life of Great American Cities. New York: Vintage Books. 147.
- 9 Pigg, S. (2016, January 2). Millennials set to drive change in real estate market. Toronto Star. Retrieved from [https://www.thestar.com/business/real\\_estate/2016/01/02/millennials-move-up.html](https://www.thestar.com/business/real_estate/2016/01/02/millennials-move-up.html)
- 10 Sun, W. (2015, November 25). Why Small Business Saturday Is Massive Millennial Business. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/winniesun/2015/11/25/small-business-saturday-is-big-millennial-business/#6340866a56e4>
- 11 5 Canadian consumer trends to shape the future of retail. (2013, October 21). Retrieved from CBC News: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/5-canadian-consumer-trends-to-shape-the-future-of-retail-1.2129072>
- 12 Statistics Canada. (2016). Immigration, Business Ownership and Employment in Canada.
- 13 Cain, P. (2016, March 21). Immigrants More Likely to Start Business Than the Canadian-Born: Study. Retrieved from Global News: <http://globalnews.ca/news/2591104/immigrants-more-likely-to-start-business-es-than-the-canadian-born-study/>
- 14 Abada, T., Hou, F., & Lu, Y. (2012). Choice or Necessity: Do Immigrants and Their Children Choose Self-employment for the Same Reasons? (pp. 10-11, Rep.). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
- 15 Kipfer, S., & Keil, R. (2002). Toronto.Inc ? Planning the Competitive City in the New Toronto. Antipode, 227-264
- 16 Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance. (2014). The Restaurant Industry in the Greater Toronto Area.

**03/ 570-618 Yonge Street**

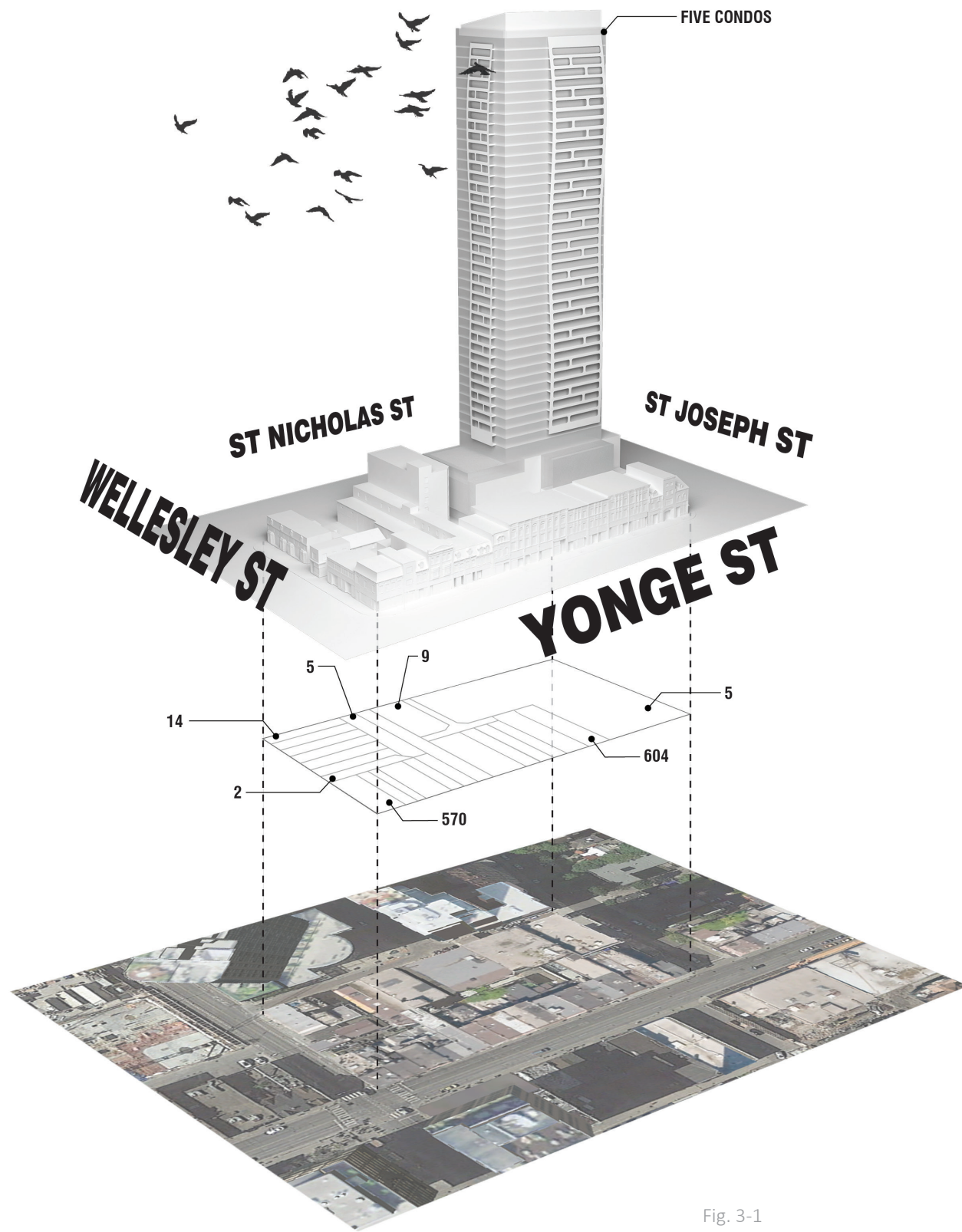
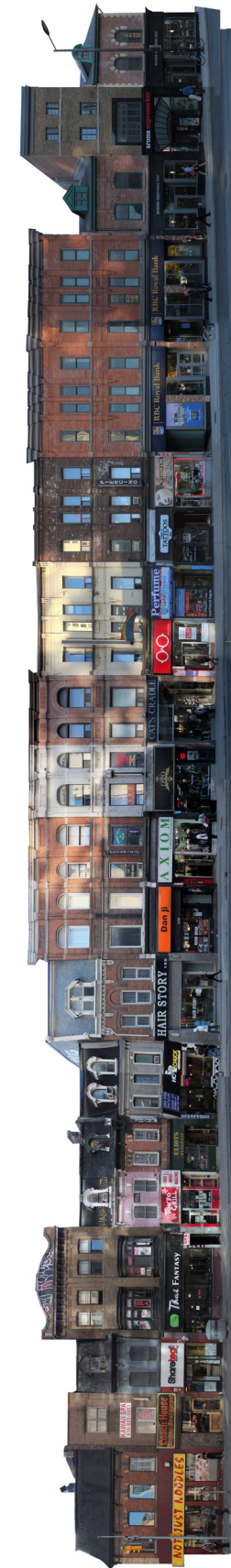


Fig. 3-1  
Site Selection (570-618 Yonge St)



In the Dedication of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes,

*“Those who draw pictures place themselves below in the plain to understand the nature of the mountains and other high places, and in order to understand the plains place themselves upon high mountains.”*<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand the whole, it is sometimes necessary to look at the parts. The rapid development of Yonge Street and the general process of gentrification observed across major streets of Toronto can find its manifestation in a detailed specimen. Likewise, the potential enlightenment brought through the study of such specimen can find application in the greater whole.

The block of Yonge Street between Wellesley Street and St Joseph Street provides an interesting specimen that embodies a diverse range of processes that affect many developmental settings. For one, the block reflects the spatial arrangements and architecture characteristics that are commonly found in commercial main streets. Two to three-storey red brick buildings from late 19th and early 20th century with an eclectic mixture of Italianate and Second Empire ornamentation form a consistent street wall facing the street. The street level frontages, typically ranging from 3 to 7 meters in width, are occupied by a diverse mix of shops and restaurants, many of which can be traced back decades in the same location. The second levels that are more discreet and accessible by inconspicuous stairs from Yonge Street, are occupied by massage parlors, Adult Video Cinema, Psychic Reader, Glad Day Bookstore, and a Korean international language school. The third floors of these buildings, which lack useful commercial exposure and access, are generally comprised of dwelling units for renters who typically access the property by exterior egress stairs located at the rear laneway for privacy and separation from the commercial entrance.

Fig. 3-2  
570-618 Yonge  
Street Elevation



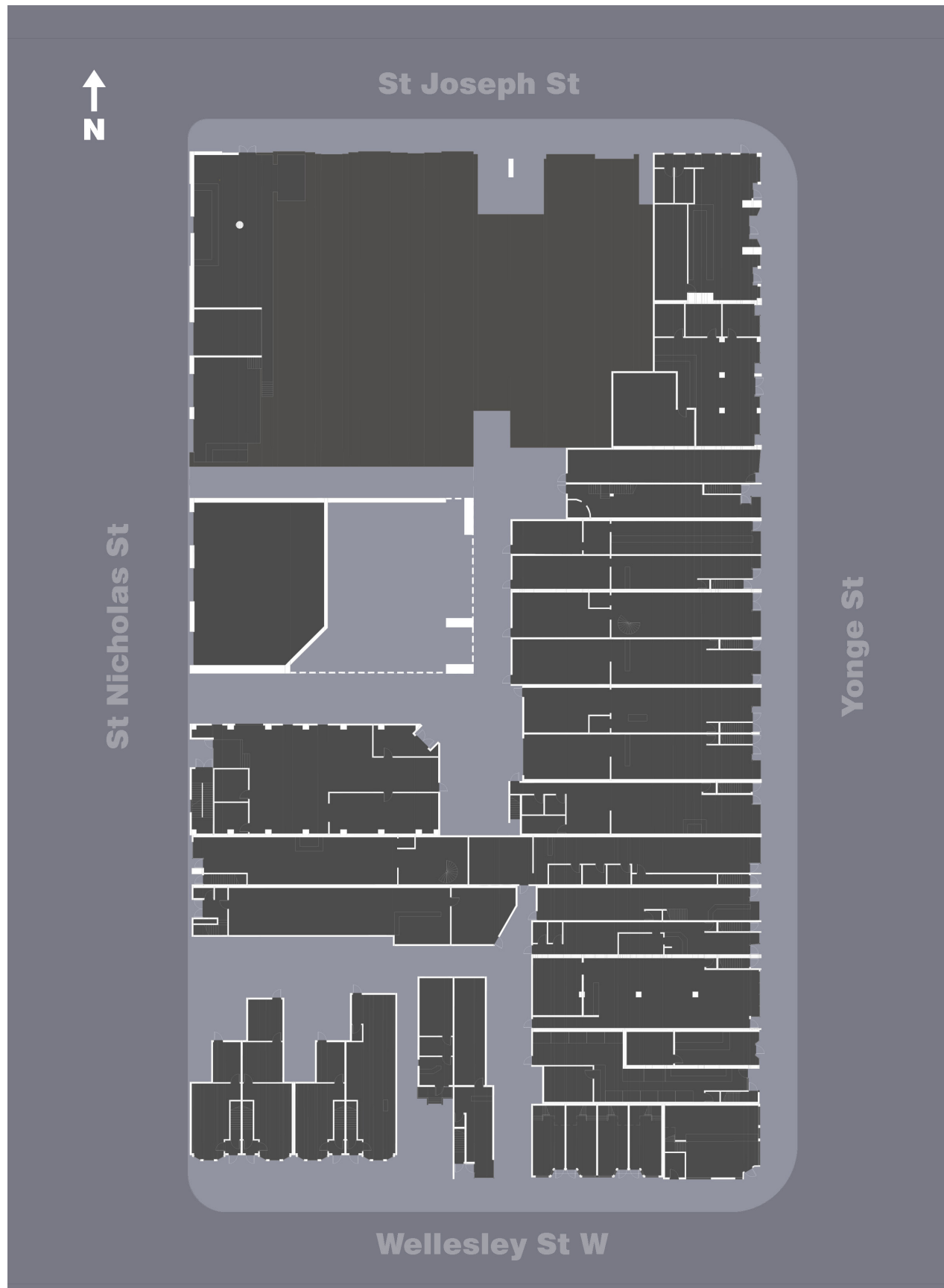


Fig. 3-3 (opposite)  
570-618 Yonge Street Block Site Plan

Fig. 3-4  
Evolution of Block 1880-1924:  
Majority of the current built fabric has  
been established since the mid 1920s with  
only a few modifications.



The aged and underutilized status of the buildings is reflected in the real estate value of the properties and businesses. Analysis of sales and rent rate on MLS listing shows an average of approximately \$45 to \$60 dollars of gross rent per square foot on the street level. Comparing this to the average rate of \$30 to \$120 for urban streetfronts in Canada, and the rent rate of Bloor Street and Queen Street West, which demands \$325 and \$110 per square foot respectively<sup>2</sup>, demonstrates the undervalued status of the spaces. Another important factor is the rent gap between the ground and the upper floors. The rent rate of the upper levels is significantly lower at approximately \$30 per square foot which is attributed to the lack of visibility and access. Pauline Larsen, economic development manager of DYBIA (Downtown Yonge Street Business Improvement Area) describes,

*“Tenants worry that spaces are too tucked out of the way, pose accessibility challenges, and don’t attract walk-in businesses.”<sup>3</sup>*

This gap is also reflected in the vacancy rate of the upper-level spaces,

*“Vacancies in Downtown Yonge have remained stable at 7%-8% over the past five years,...What has shifted, however, is that vacancies are now on second storeys rather than on the street.”<sup>4</sup>*

Compared to the more dynamic and eclectic mix of small buildings and establishments along Yonge Street, the North and West side of the block is occupied by larger buildings that are more subdued and limited in its use. First, there is the Rawlinson Cartage Building, a 4-storey red brick heritage building that occupies the majority of the street frontage. The former headquarters of Toronto’s oldest moving company formed a complex along with buildings on 11 St Joseph Street and 16 Phipps Street. These buildings, which became defunct in the 1970’s as the company ceased operations, were subsequently repurposed as office spaces which also slowly came to disuse by the 2000’s. During this time, the St Nicholas Street corridor provided a vibrant nightlife scene as series of dance and live music clubs moved into the vacant warehouse spaces. In particular, flourishing of gay venues such as Club David’s, Manatee, and Joy, made this area a hotspot for Toronto’s



RBC



VIP 1 Salon & Spa



Perfume Collection



Cat's Cradle



Eliot's Bookshop



Tokyo Grill

Fig. 3-5 Tenant Interiors





Coach House Tavern



North Bound Leather



Mystic Vision Psychic



K9 Couture



Not Just Noodles



Exposures Photography



Thai Fantasy



Danji



Van Barber Hairstylist



Hair District



Axiom



Holy Chuck

Fig. 3-6 Tenant Interiors

Fig. 3-7 Tenant Interiors



gay nightlife scene.

During the 90's and the 2000's, the buildings on Phipps and the West side of St Nicholas were one-by-one demolished or repurposed for high-rise condominiums which stifled the street level activities. As of 2015, the main Rawlinson Cartage Building on 5 St Joseph survives only by its brick Industrial Gothic Revival façade which has been restored as part of a largest façade retention project in Toronto's history.<sup>5</sup> The renewed façade now serves as a part of the podium of the newly built Five Condos with 'Heritage Lofts' and a single restaurant tenant, The Wickson Social, to address the street.

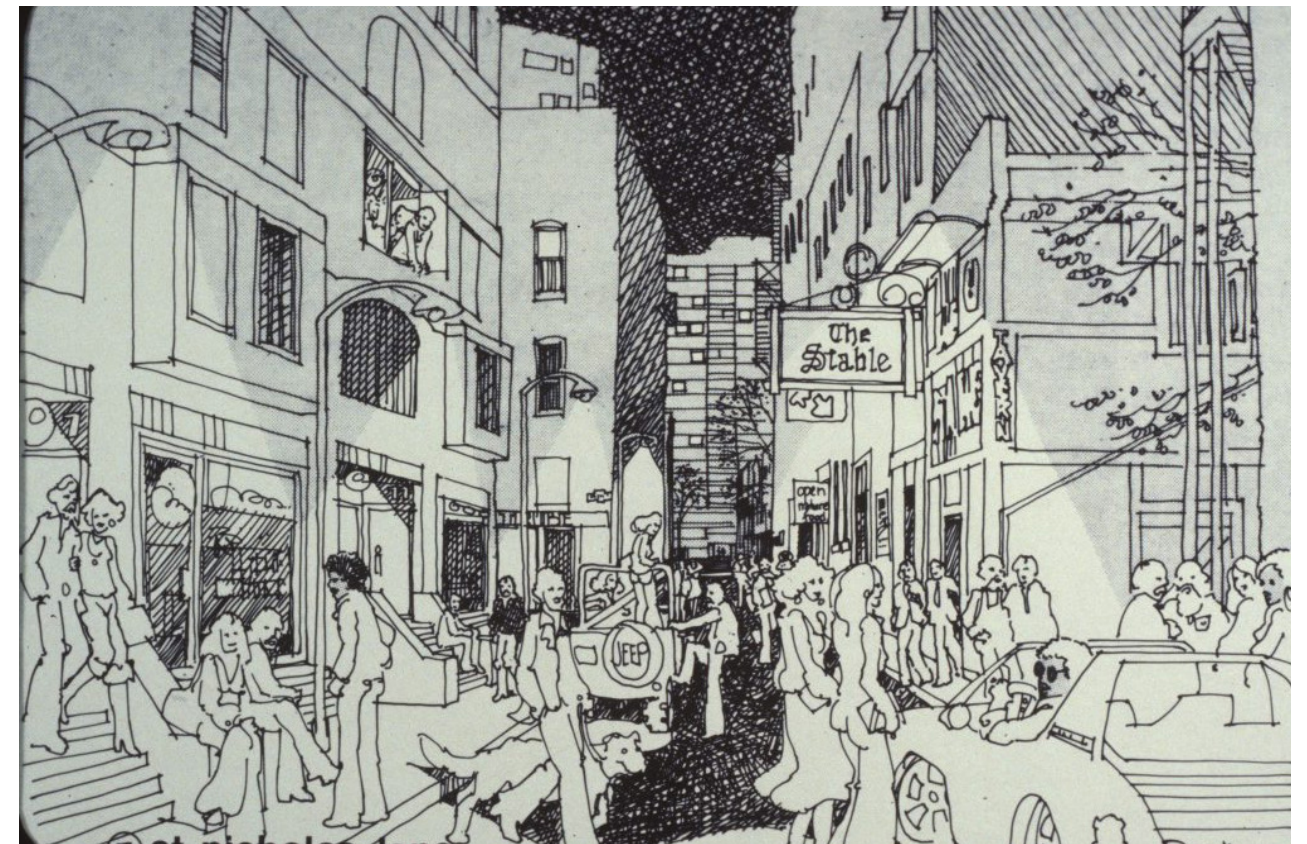


Fig. 3-8 (opposite)  
St Nicholas & Phipps  
Street 1970's

Fig. 3-9  
Sketch of St Nicholas Lane in 1970's:  
The once active public use of the laneway  
has deteriorated over time as commercial  
venues were slowly replaced by residential  
developments





Fig. 3-10  
Rawlinson Cartage Building  
at St Joseph and St Nicholas  
Street 1972



Fig. 3-11  
St Nicholas Lane 1972





Fig. 3-12  
Aerial View of 570-618 Yonge Street 1980's:  
The presence of backyard fences, greenery, and  
rooftop furnitures suggests an intimate use of  
the laneway spaces relative to the deserted  
driveway characteristics of today.



Fig. 3-13  
View from Yonge & St Joseph  
Street 2014:  
The FIVE condo under con-  
struction above

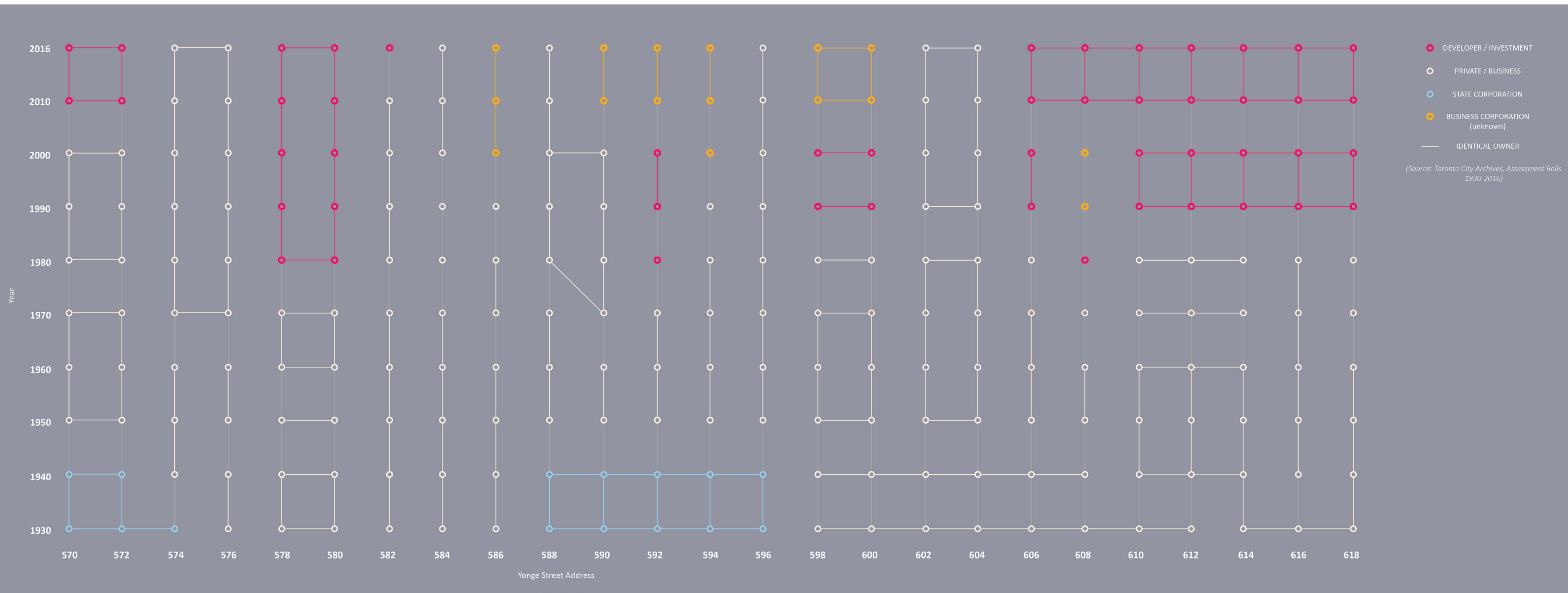


Fig. 3-14  
Ownership Analysis

### Ownership Characteristics

Prior to the 1990's, the general trend indicates a pattern of individual owning a single property for an extended period of time and passing it down through generations. Post-1990's shows an increase in the transfer of ownership and increase in ownership by investors and developers leading into the 2000's. The case of 606 to 618 Yonge Street, the site of Five Condo, shows the steady consolidation of ownerships starting from the 90's long before physical development process takes place.

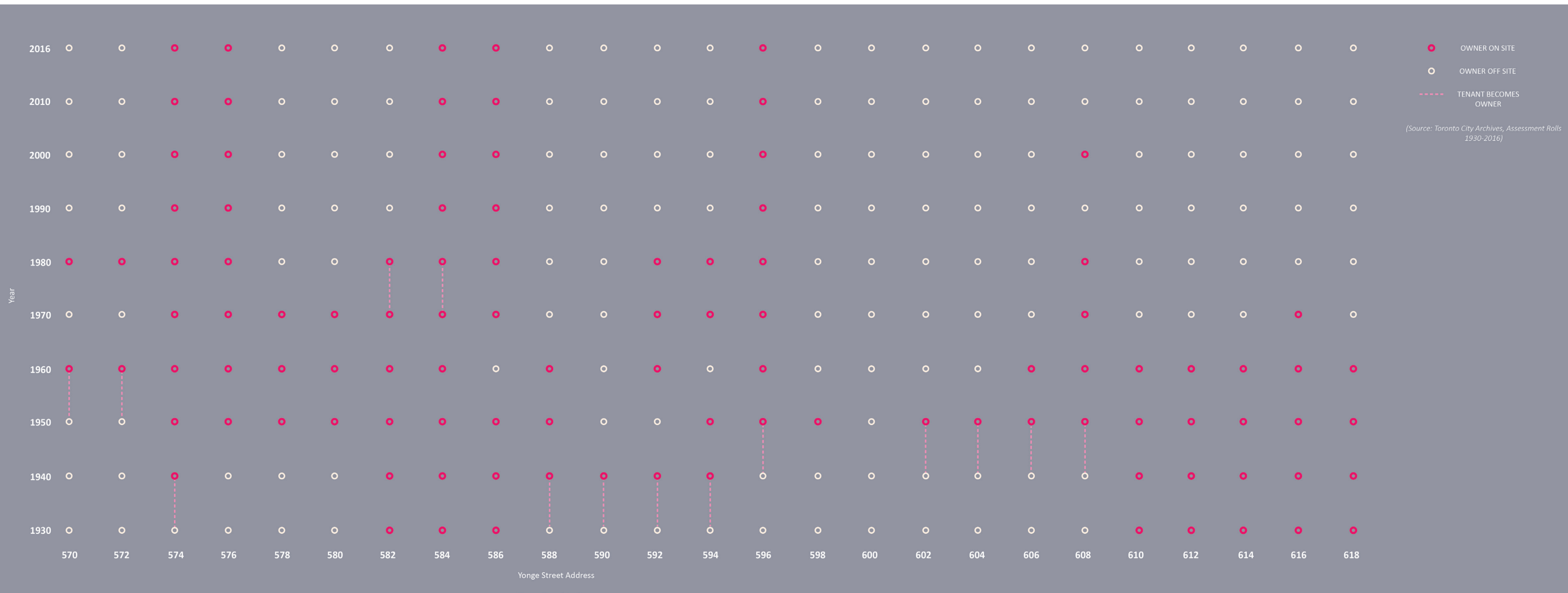
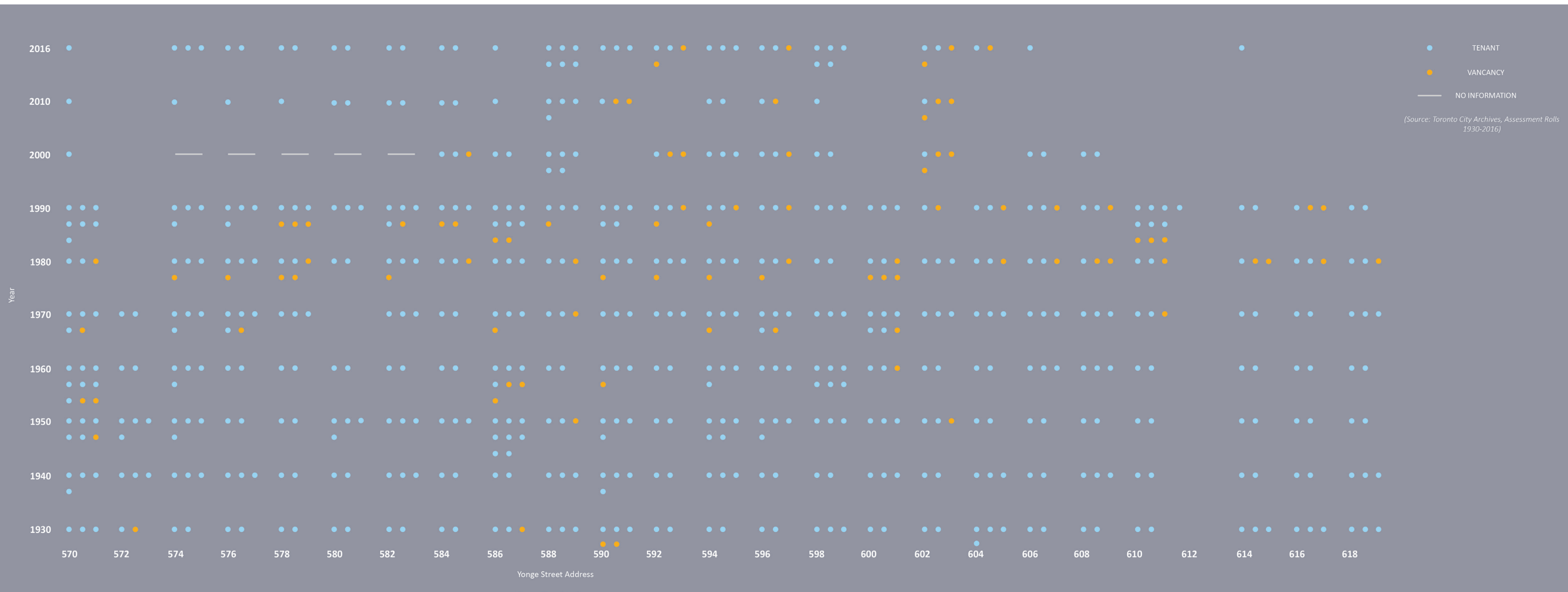


Fig. 3-15  
Ownership Presence  
Analysis

### Ownership Presence

In the past, the owner presence on the physical site of their property was far more frequent. Property owners operated businesses and/or lived in the buildings they owned. Also, the transition from tenantry to ownership, where a tenant acquires the property they occupy, was much more commonly seen. This hints at a higher level of economic accessibility to ownership where the users were not economically alienated from their physical settings. These characteristics quickly diminished post-1980's as ownership became disjoined from physical location and a pattern of financially working towards eventual ownership disappears.





(Source: Toronto City Archives, Assessment Rolls 1930-2016)

Fig. 3-16  
Tenant Diversity  
Analysis

### Tenancy Number

The cultural diversity provided by the buildings and their rootedness in the community can be seen in the number of tenants that occupy them. The data indicate that most buildings were occupied by multiple tenants throughout its history with an increase in vacancies in the 80's and 90's. The number of tenants display a general decrease over time, possibly hinting at conversion from dwelling units to commercial units or conjoining of units.



- 1 Machiavelli, N., & Donno, D. (1966). *The Prince*. NY: Bantam Books. 3.
- 2 Cushman & Wakefield Research Publication. (2015). *Main Streets Across the World*.18.
- 3 YongeLove. (2014, September 10). How Can Vacant Spaces Help Transform Yonge Street? Retrieved from <http://www.yongelove.ca/how-can-vacant-space-can-help-transform-yonge-st/>
- 4 *ibid*
- 5 Longley, R. (2016, May 18). Will facadism ruin Yonge Street? NOW. Retrieved from <https://nowtoronto.com/news/will-facadism-ruin-yonge-street/>

## **04/ Platform for Diversity**

Fostering a platform for broad-based architectural diversity must begin with moving away from the reliance on novelty of design. Instead, the real metric of current and future potential of diversity should be derived from a measure of the number of agents with ownership and the extent of liberties they have to exercise their rights.

## Buildings

*“The character of many cities is not determined by a few monumental buildings. Of course, Paris has the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and much more, but the typical image of the city is a tree-lined boulevard with cream coloured apartment buildings.”*

– Hans Ibeling<sup>1</sup>

When the topic of architectural diversity is addressed, it is most commonly equated to the handful of iconic projects throughout the city. However, these projects most often correspond to a small category of buildings that act as counter-points and accents in the urban fabric - all of which draws their importance from their scarcity and deviation from the norm. Such a limited category should not be taken as a representation of the overall architectural characteristic or a measure of diversity in the city.

Instead, the attention should be directed towards that which occupies the vast spaces inbetween these novelties; the fine-grain fabric of buildings that rarely makes it on the cover of architectural magazines or become subject of media attention. It is these buildings that constitute the broadbase architectural diversity and define the character of the city. For instance, while recent large-scale projects such as the Ryerson Student Centre and The One tower has dominated the architectural discourse of downtown Yonge Street, it still remains that the vast majority (approximately 90%) of its streetscape is comprised of buildings constructed between the period of 1860 and 1954.<sup>2</sup> Without the air of pretentiousness, these buildings display the architectural style of their era, ranging from the Italianate, Gothic, Edwardian, Second Empire, Georgian, and Romanesque with an authenticity that can no longer be reproduced.<sup>3</sup> This is a uniqueness that is not created from a designer’s desk but by the gradual evolution and layering of time.



Fig. 4-1  
Iconic Buildings of  
Toronto

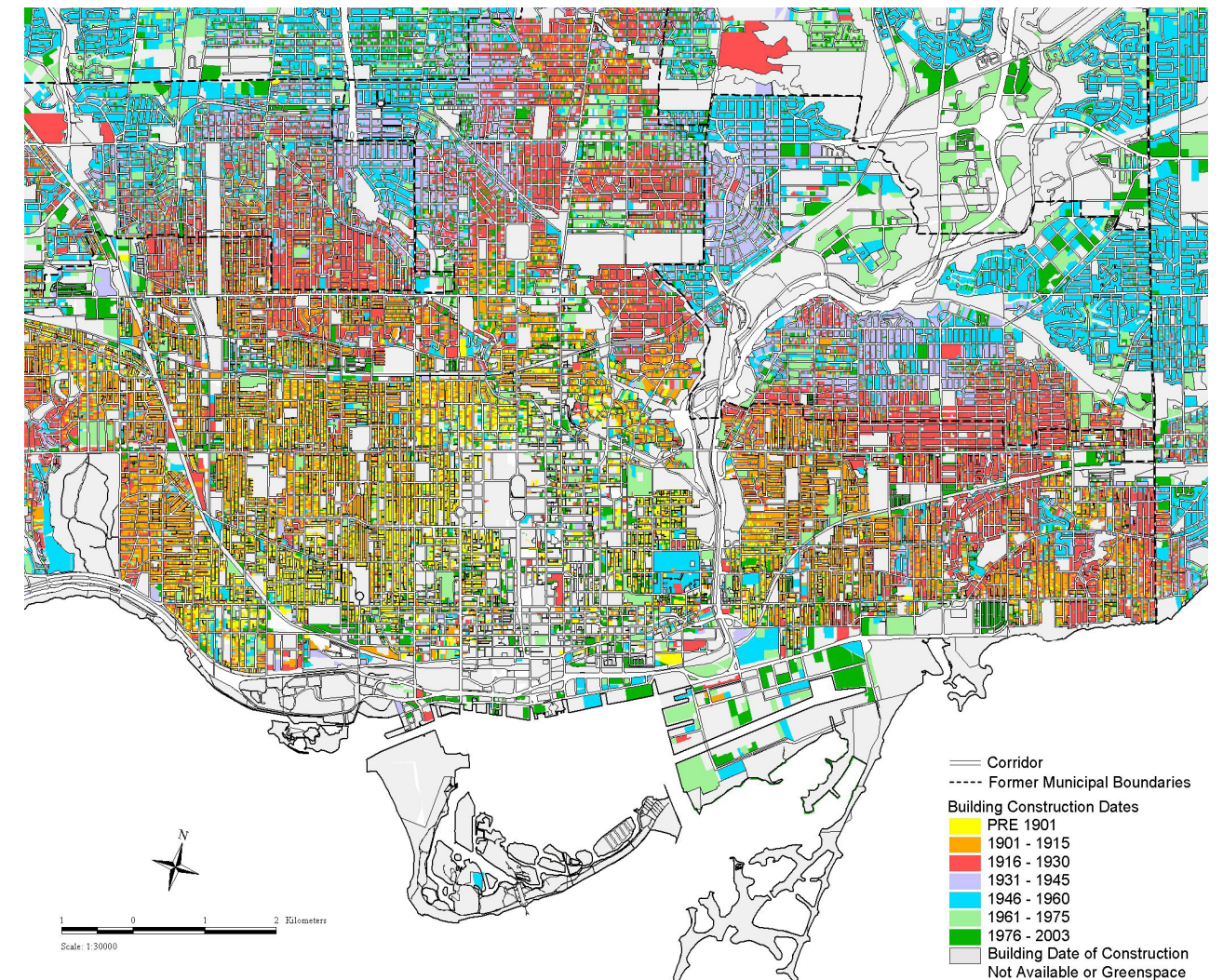


Fig. 4-2  
Partial Enlargement of *Map  
of Construction Dates, City  
of Toronto, 2003*



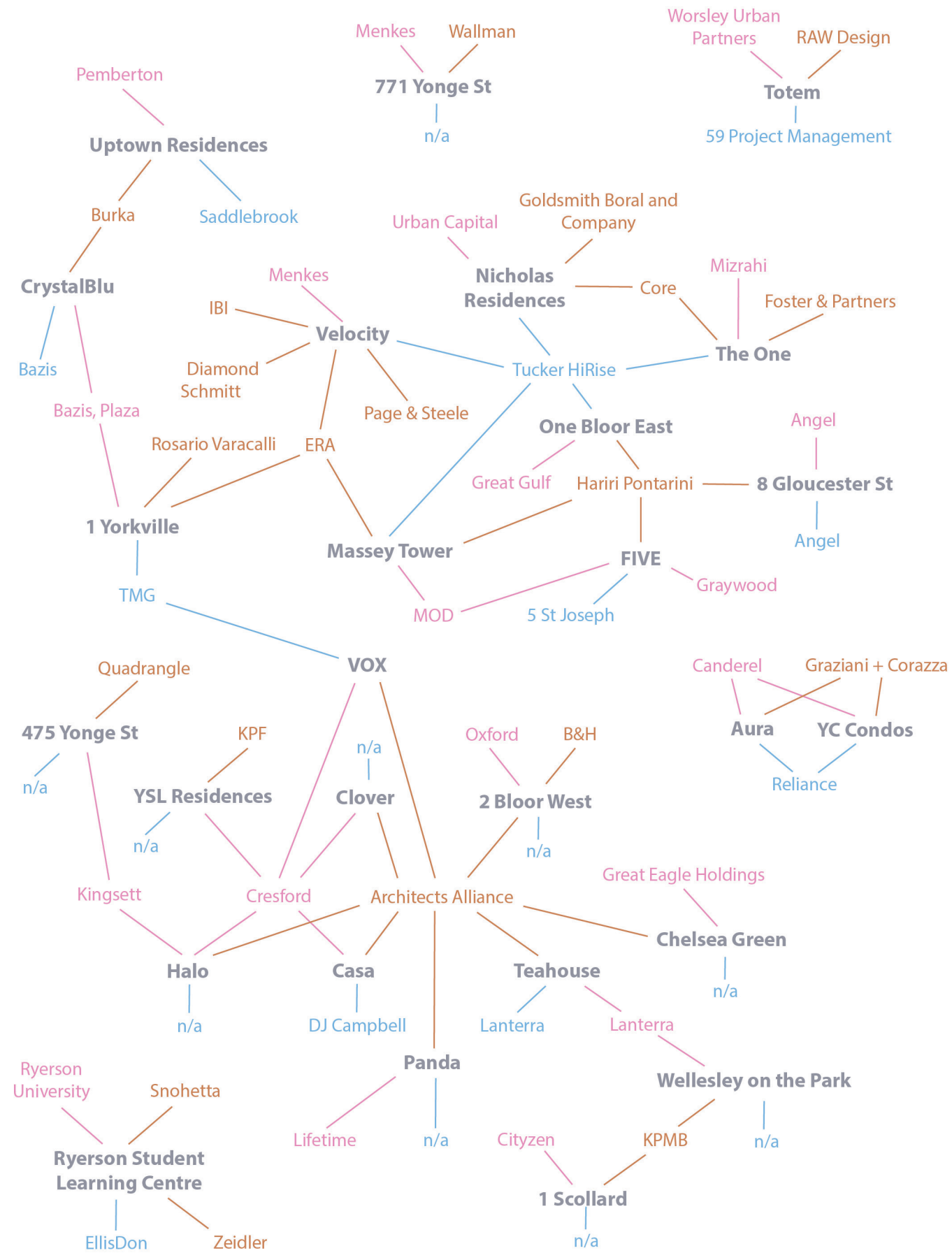


Fig. 4-3 (opposite)  
 Developer-Architect-Contractor Nexus of New Condominium Developments on Yonge Street

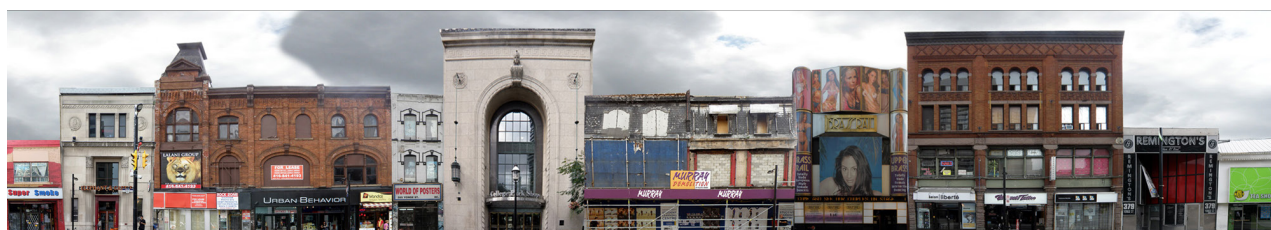
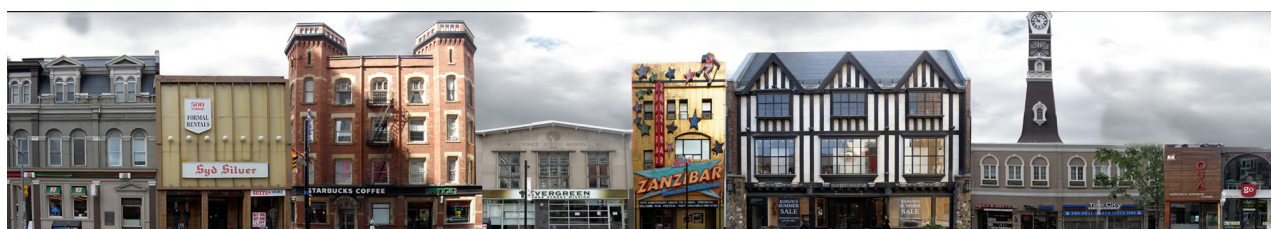
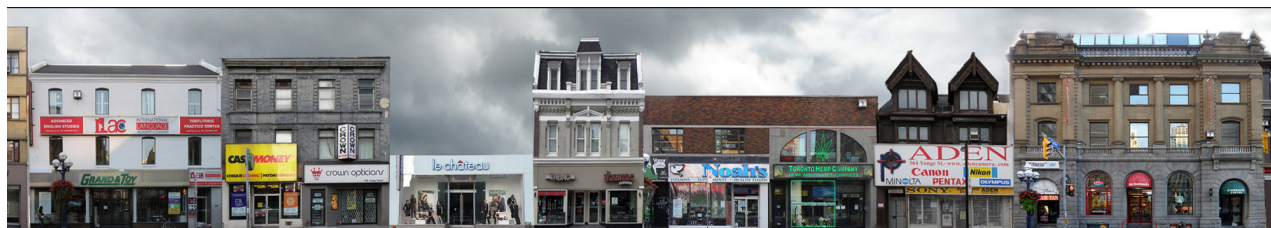
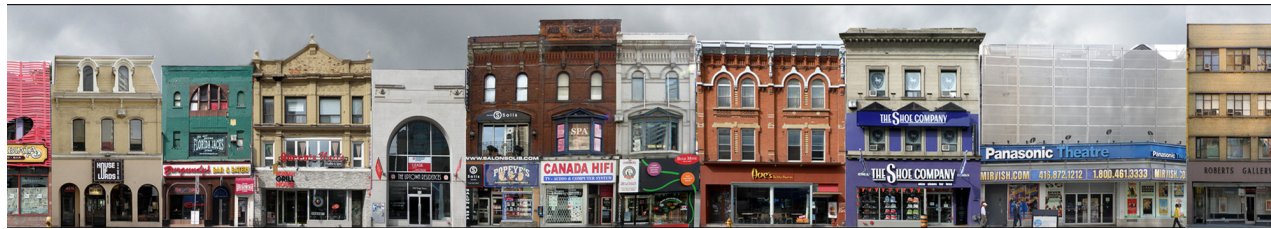
### Developer-Designer-Contractor Enclaves

Various efforts to recreate elements of diversity into the design of new large-scale developments have mostly proven to be null. In most new buildings, the level of detail incorporated in the design are too obtuse and homogeneous in the context of the surrounding streetscape. This is not merely an issue of design capacity but a systematic limitation linked to the process of development. Ian Bentley comments,

*“With cost restrictions on the production of large-scale drawings, it became ever more difficult to focus aesthetic attention on the small details, which therefore became considered effectively as by-products of the whole, relevant largely to the technical rather than the aesthetic sphere. This dynamic fostered an ever-increasing simplification in the vocabulary of detail types, generating designs which require the production of the minimum number of drawings at the smallest feasible scale.”<sup>4</sup>*

In addition, architectural design is also limited by the construction methods of each period. The numerous high-rises built in the last decade are inherently related by the range of products, construction technologies, and design trends.

The inevitable trend towards homogenization of design is exacerbated by the tendency for developers to establish professional enclaves with a limited number of partners. Analysis of new highrise developments along Yonge Street indicates a small closely knit network of developers-architect-contractor cliques that dominate the residential highrise market. This set up, while favourable in establishing optimized processes, reducing conflicts, and communicating expectations; becomes prone to repetition and complacency on all parts.



## Property and Ownership

*Property*

1.3 Law *The right to the possession, use, or disposal of something; ownership.*

- Oxford English Dictionary

*“While the commonsense view of property is that it is objects or corporeal things, the view in law is that property is a bundle of rights.”<sup>5</sup>*

- M. Gordon Brown

No amount of design effort can succeed in reproducing the architectural and cultural diversity that define our streetscape. Therefore, instead of focusing solely on building design, the question should be directed at the issue of platform that precedes development. Before there is novelty of design, there is novelty of ideas, desires, and context. Without the preservation of such fundamental novelties, any attempt at reproducing diversity becomes a gimmick.

The individual rights afforded by the presence of strong ownership is what constitutes the vehicle for preserving such fundamental novelties. Ownership of a property is the protection of such rights while sale of a property is its concomitant forfeiture. Stendhal stated, *“beauty is nothing other than a promise of happiness”*. Just as happiness is a subjective affair of an individual, the perception of beauty and design is also. Hence, the greater the number of small-scale ownership which ensures expression of such subjectivity, the greater the potential for diversity in the built environment. The homogenization of architecture that is being witnessed in the current development trend is the symptom of its monopolization of ownership, to which preservation and diversification of ownership is its natural remedy.

Such concept of ownership is not limited to the status of possession of financial and legal title. The possession of title that is devoid of full rights and the liberty to exercise them, are both partial and incomplete forms of ownership. In this sense, an architectural strategy for preservation of ownership should not only involve the retention of existing conditions but must also include improvements in the way ownership rights are expressed as well as economic means to resist future pressures for monopolization.

Fig. 4-4 (opposite)  
Montage of Buildings on  
Yonge Street

- 1 Ibeling, H., & PARTISANS. (2016). Rise and Sprawl: Tower by Tower. Montreal: The Architecture Observer.
- 2 *DIALOG* (2016). *Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District Plan (p. 15)* (Canada, City of Toronto, Heritage Preservation Services). 10.
- 3 Ibid.17.
- 4 Bentley, I. (1999). Profit and Place: Urban Transformations: Power, People, and Urban Design. Routledge.
- 5 Brown, M. G. (2016). Access, Property and American Urban Space. Routledge. 38.
- 6 Schumpeter, J. (1942). Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy. Harper & Brothers.142

## 05/ Imageability of Buildings

The economic viability of small-scale ownership is contingent upon its capacity to establish a distinct and visible imageability in the urban arena both in terms of its physical form and public meaning. In this sense, the issue of building form extends beyond the discourse of aesthetics and becomes a matter of economic strategy.



Why do small-scale owners opt for forfeiture of ownership which displaces them from their rooted communities?

It is not sufficient to argue that existing owners are selling off their property to realize financial gain. The basis of this argument is grounded on two premises in prospect: that maximum financial return lies in disposal of ownership; and the lack of foreseeable increase in its value. In other words, it is logical to speculate that owners would not be selling off their property if the prospect of financial gain in retaining it far outweighed that of disposing it.

Therefore, a strategy for small-scale owners to overcome the typical monopolizing development practices must begin with opening up possibilities for owners to tap into the prospect for future growth. This strategy can be translated into specific architectural tactics for spatial improvements: increase in public exposure and use, creation of distinct spatial and visual identity in the urban environment, and increased efficiency in the use of space.

These tactics can be described as an act of place-making in the diverse sense of the word. Kevin Lynch, in his seminal *Image of the City*, describes three traits of environmental *imageability*: *identity*, *structure*, and *meaning*. Although Lynch approaches this at the urban scale, the same categories can be applied at a small scale.

- Identity* - *distinction from other things, its recognition as a separable entity*
- Structure* - *spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects*
- Meaning* - *meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional*<sup>1</sup>

The strengthening of these traits is not only a visual-spatial exercise but is directly related to the economic viability and preservation of ownership. What improved *imageability* translates to is an increased competitiveness in the market by establishing a place that has increased utility, value, and attraction in the urban environment.

### Form as Economic Strategy

The Oxford English Dictionary defines capital as “*wealth in any form used to help in producing more wealth.*” In the case of small-scale owners for whom the majority of capital exists in the form of property, design intervention is a way to maximize the potential of their capital. The element of design is not limited to concerns over aesthetics but also becomes a process of calibrating the capital accumulation potential of a commodity. Ian Bentley, in his essay, *Profit and Place*, describes this in more detail.



Fig. 5-1 (opposite)  
Imageability by Intensified Activity

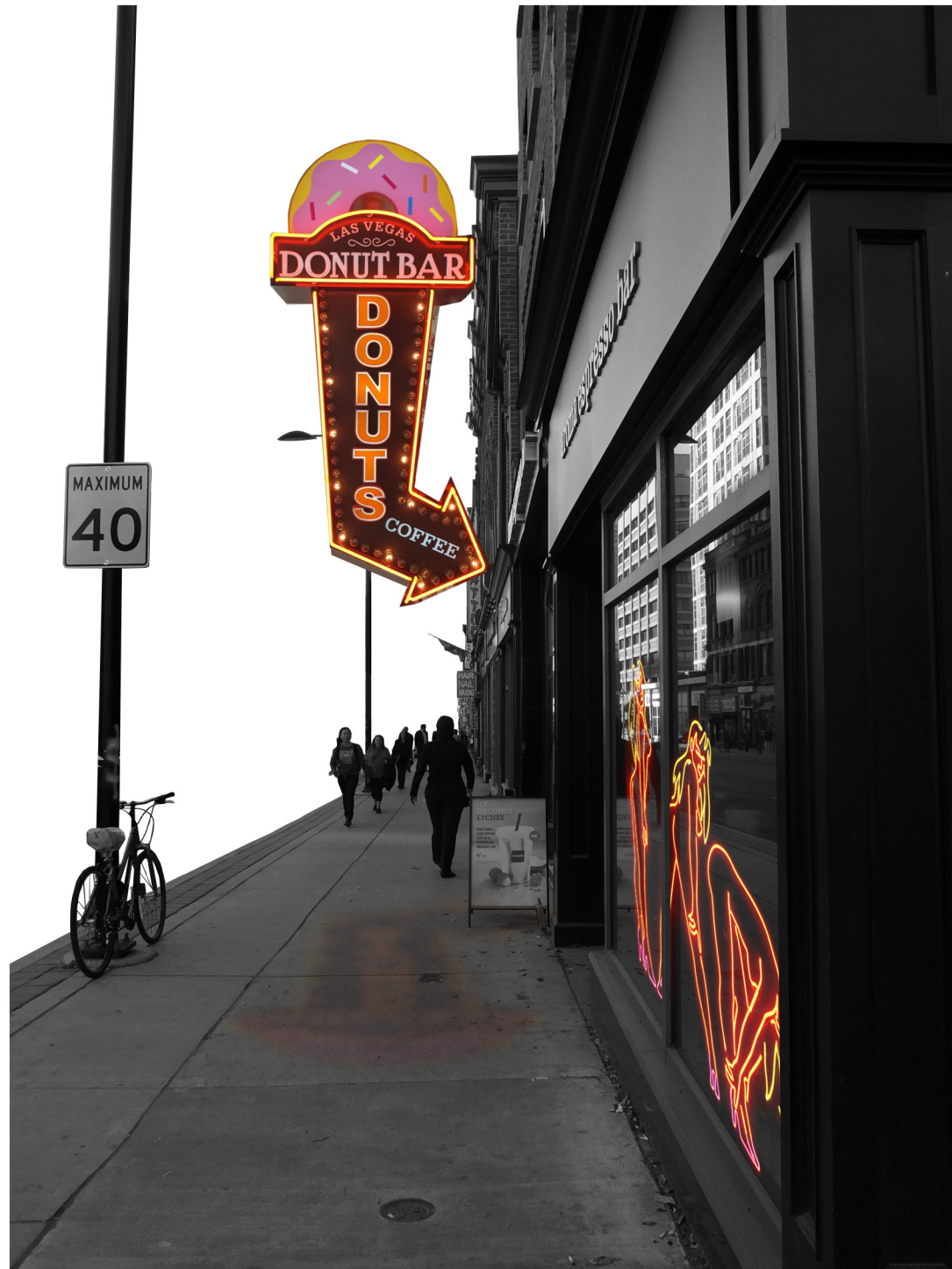


Fig. 5-2  
Imageability by  
Intensified Signage

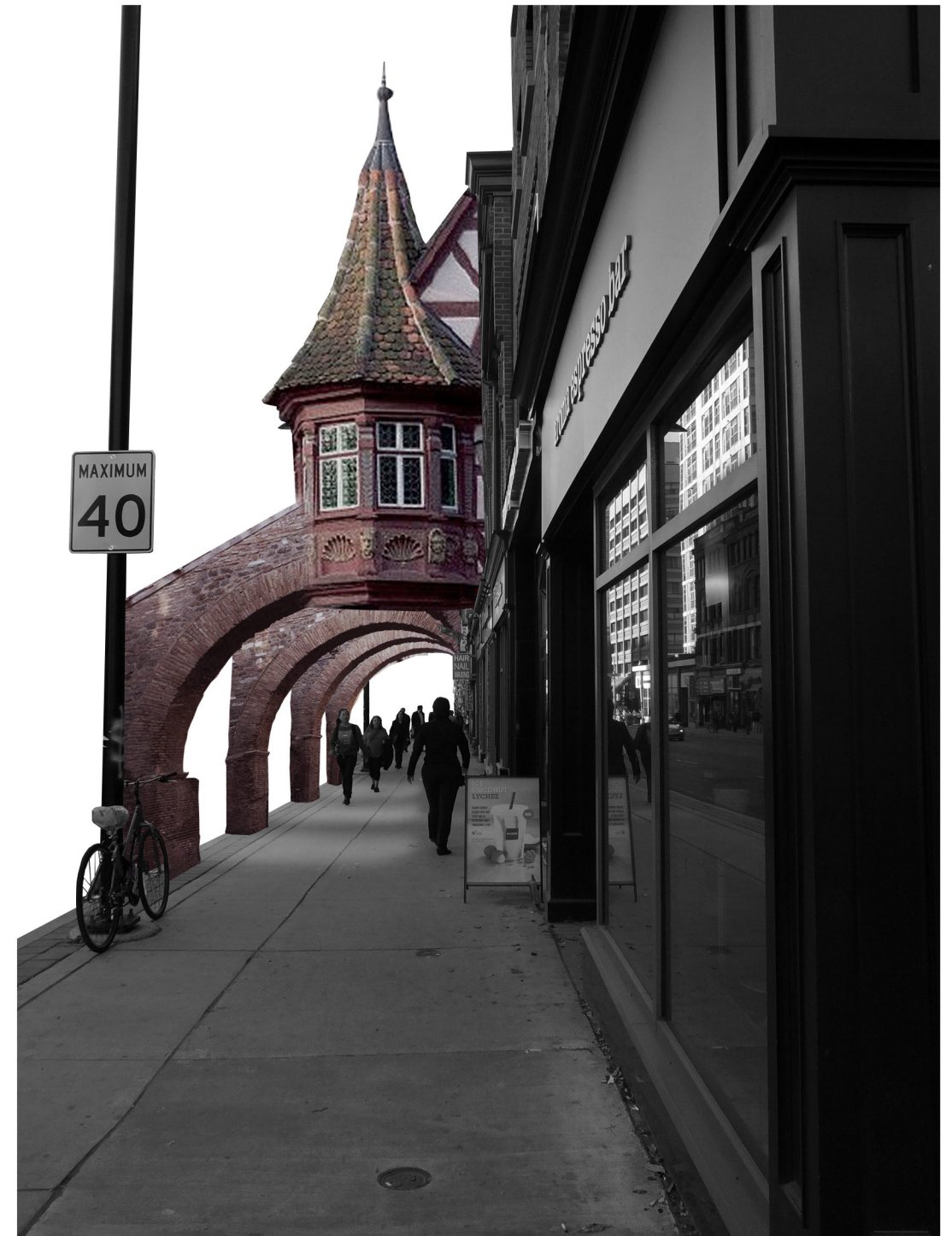


Fig. 5-3  
Imageability by  
Intensified Built Form



*“Built form has direct effects on the speed and cost-effectiveness of the three key transformations in the capital accumulation process at two related levels. First, it forms the physical setting for the production and sale of all sorts of commodities acting as what Henri Lefebvre calls ‘productive apparatus of a giant scale’ This gives built form a potential economic value in the capital accumulation process, which in turn creates the opportunity, at a second level, for producing built form itself as a commodity which can be traded in the marketplace.”<sup>2</sup>*

The strategy of enhancing *imageability* of small-scale properties is effective because while it is driven by self-interest, it can also garner support from the public, government, and even developers in exploiting the characteristic homogeneity of typical large-scale developments.

Inherent in new developments is a policy of strategic homogeneity in their scope of time, use, audience, and construction. This homogeneity improves the developer’s odds at negotiating a favourable sales condition by opening it up to a wider market while reducing the cost and time of development process. Ian Bentley comments,

*“Sales appeal must partly depend on prospective purchaser’s individual preferences. Unlike bespoke producers, however, speculative developers cannot take these directly into account, since they cannot know the particular purchaser in advance. Speculative developers are therefore attracted to innovations which offer a wide and generalized market appeal, and are suspicious of idiosyncratic schemes.”<sup>3</sup>*

This homogeneity, while being an attractive strategy for an individual developer, degrades the overall quality of the built environment from the public’s perspective.

However, while the interest of the public and developers are often perceived as being innately opposing, the interests are often aligned if approached from an extended timeframe. For one, degradation of the urban environment affects the developers by eroding the value of their development and future prospects. Even when driven by financial gains, developers are wary of their projects being perceived as progenitors of neighbourhood decay.

*“If the production of urban form were left entirely to the efforts of particular profit-oriented developers, however, there is every likelihood that their individual impacts would lead to an overall situation whose unplanned nature would have unprofitable disadvantages for them all. From the overall profit-generation point of view, therefore the attempts which central and local governments make to control developers’ individual efforts so as to maintain the competitiveness of the whole settlement in the global marketplace, are also crucial to keeping the capitalist development process going.”<sup>4</sup>*

So while it may be difficult for individual developers to look beyond the immediacy of their perceived benefits in most cases, there is an argument to be made in introducing an alternative mode of development that can work in unison with the interests of the developers, the government, and the public.



- 1 Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press
- 2 Bentley, I. (1999). *Profit and Place: Urban Transformations: Power, People, and Urban Design*. Routledge.
- 3 Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Ltd.
- 4 Bentley, I. (1999). *Profit and Place: Urban Transformations: Power, People, and Urban Design*. Routledge.

## **06/ Tilted Playing Field**

In considering the economic function of spatial form, the commercial under-performance of small-scale ownership can be attributed to several external causes that tilt the competitive field in favour of larger institutionalized developments. First, the nature of Toronto's uniform landscape and urban form discourages natural place-making by restricting the range of spatial moments and human perception. Second, various regulations and bureaucratic processes that govern design inhibit liberties of visual-spatial expression. Thirdly, monopolizing tendencies of development process prevents re-entry of small-scale owners into the market for space.

## Systematic Disadvantage

Preservation of broad-based diversity must start from preservation of small-scale ownership by maximizing the potential for capital accumulation of the associated property. This is made possible by strengthening the spatial *imageability*; a synthesis of visual identity, formal structure, and perceptive meaning embodied in its architecture. This process ties together the three elements: socio-cultural element of ownership and community, aesthetical element of design diversity, and economic element of capital accumulation into a consistent matrix for grounding the architectural intervention.

Despite this, range of spatial self-expression and the potential for capital accumulation is deteriorated through pressures originating from three distinct external factors: urban form, planning policy, and leasing process, which tilt the playing field in favour of larger developments. These three factors correspond to respective processes of monopolization which can be described as Three-D's: Delimit, Deter, and Dominate.

*Delimit - Limits imageability through passive effect of landscape and urban form*

*Deter - Establishes active restrictions and punishments for autonomous place-making through various urban policies*

*Dominate - Subjugates small-scale ownership through lot consolidation and leasing process*

The restrictions imposed by these three factors are directly linked to degradation of autonomy and liberty that is tied to the rights of property ownership. Adolf Reinach comments, as quoted by Smith and Zaibert,

*"If property were a sum or unity of rights, it would be reduced by the alienation of one of these rights, for a sum necessarily disappears with the disappearance of all its parts. But we see that a thing continues to belong to a person in exactly the same sense, however many rights he may want to alienate".<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Brown, M. G. (2016). Access, Property and American Urban Space. Routledge. 110.

## 07/ Delimit

Establishing of buildings' *imageability* begins with the relationship they form with the external environment: how they are placed, organized, approached, and perceived from the outside. The characteristic uniformity in Toronto's landscape and grid-based urban form delimits the range of such relationships to a generic set, making it particularly difficult for small properties in forming distinct identities in the urban environment.

## Landscape and Imageability

*“Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer – with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees.”*

- Kevin Lynch, *Image of the City*<sup>1</sup>

Spatial *imageability* is not always a product of anthropogenic design. More often, external factors such as the surrounding landscape dictate the organization and perception of the built environment. People organize the built environment around landscape features to exploit their characteristics. Even in the absence of physical engagement, the characteristics of the landscape alter the perception of the built environment by providing a spatial framework under which it is interpreted.

Organization of the built environment and the placement of individual buildings are dictated by landscape features such as hills, rivers, and valleys that create natural clusters and edges. Such organization of space imbues distinct identity to buildings regardless of their individual form or function as it establishes meaning in relation to its surroundings. This can be observed commonly as people associate the identity of a building with its neighbourhood or landscape feature: a shop on a hill, a building along a river et cetera. Small buildings that are often indistinct individually can reinforce their imageability through physical association established through such means.

Even in the absence of direct physical interaction, the perception of a building or an urban environment can be altered simply by juxtaposing it against divergent landscapetual contexts. For instance, a straight street in a flat landscape is perceptually different from a straight street that glides over hills and valleys, just as a high-rise tower set in a vast plain differs from a tower that is surrounded by mountains. An extreme demonstration of this can be observed in the cinematic construction. The iconic scene from the movie *Inception* where Ariadne warps the city fabric with her mind is a vivid example



Fig. 7-2 (opposite)  
Shift in Perception: Placing of landscape feature which provides visual closure to the infinite extension of Yonge Streets fabric immediately strengthens it's meaning as 'place' by defining its spatial boundaries and orientation.

Fig. 7-1  
Scene from Inception 2010





of this phenomenon where the change in the context completely alters the understanding of urban arrangement and buildings.

Not only are buildings thrown into diverse perceptual contexts but the observer as well. Landscapetual diversity facilitates a broad spectrum of vantage points from which a built form can be observed. The multiplicity of vantage points diversify the range of urban spatial experience even when the actual built elements remain unchanged. A single building can inspire multiple meanings as the position of observation changes: distant-near, below-above, orthogonal-oblique, and within-without-between.

Through transformations in the landscape, even the most generic feature can be perceived as a novelty and a source of strong imageability.

### Landscape in Toronto

*“Because Toronto’s topography is more subtle, the human-built parts of the city, the parts most visible every day, get more of our attention.”*

*- Toronto’s Dramatic Highs and Lows, Toronto Star<sup>2</sup>*

Most people will acknowledge that Toronto, especially the downtown area, is not known for its dramatic landscape. Whereas landscape is a presence in the everyday life of many cities, for Toronto, the landscape is something to be *“revealed, discovered, and noticed”* as quoted from the same Toronto Star article. This characteristic of evenness that lacks dynamic spatial qualities imposes limitations on the natural reinforcement of *imageability*. For example, a building design is rarely subjected to the pressures of the landscape that require unique site specific solutions. The evenness of the landscape also homogenizes the built environment by limiting the variations of building placement and point-of-view, which erodes the perceptual features of the physical form. Instead, being devoid of external synergies, building design inevitably seeks to become iconic and self-referential.

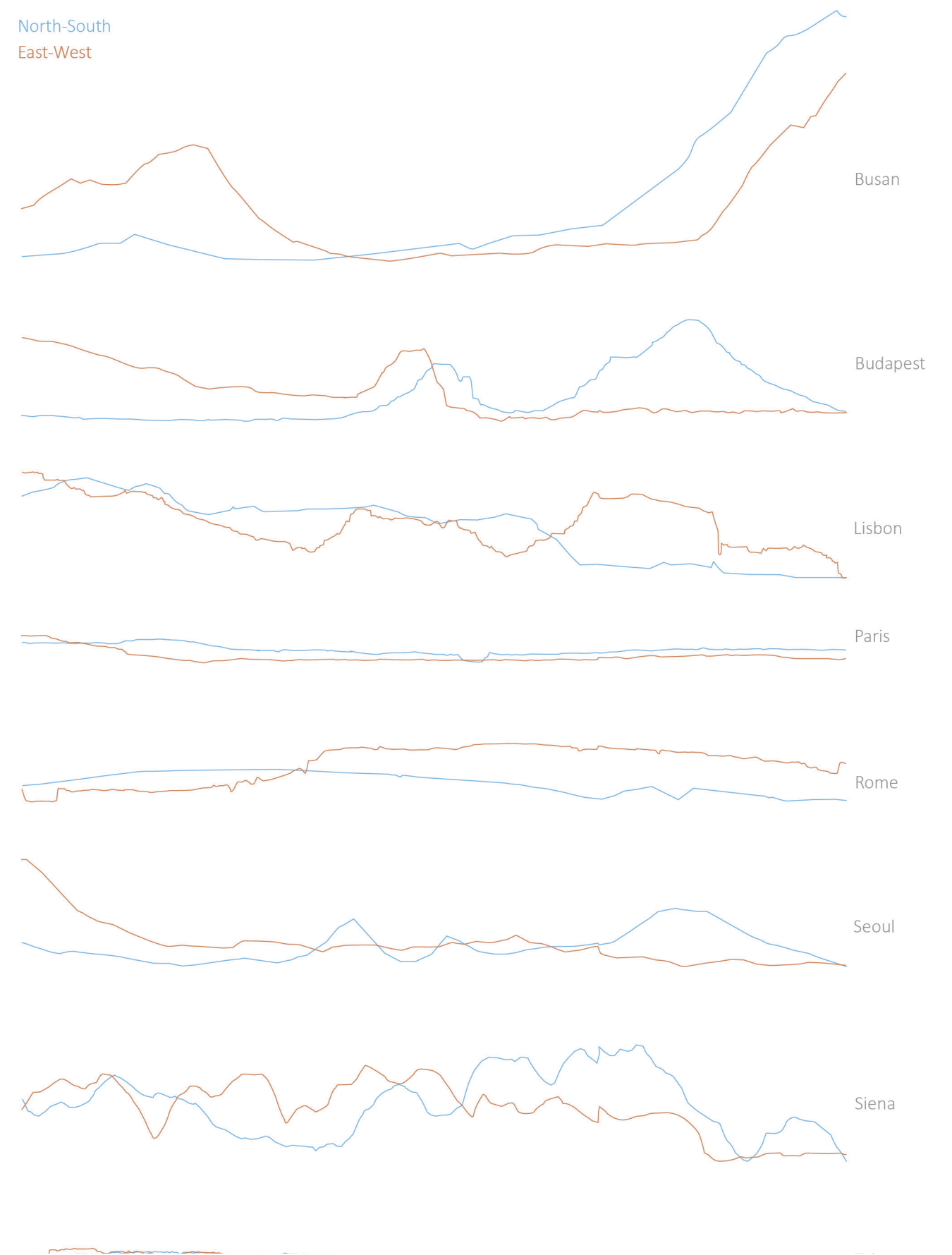


Fig. 7-3 (opposite)  
Topographic Comparison  
by City, 2km Cross-section



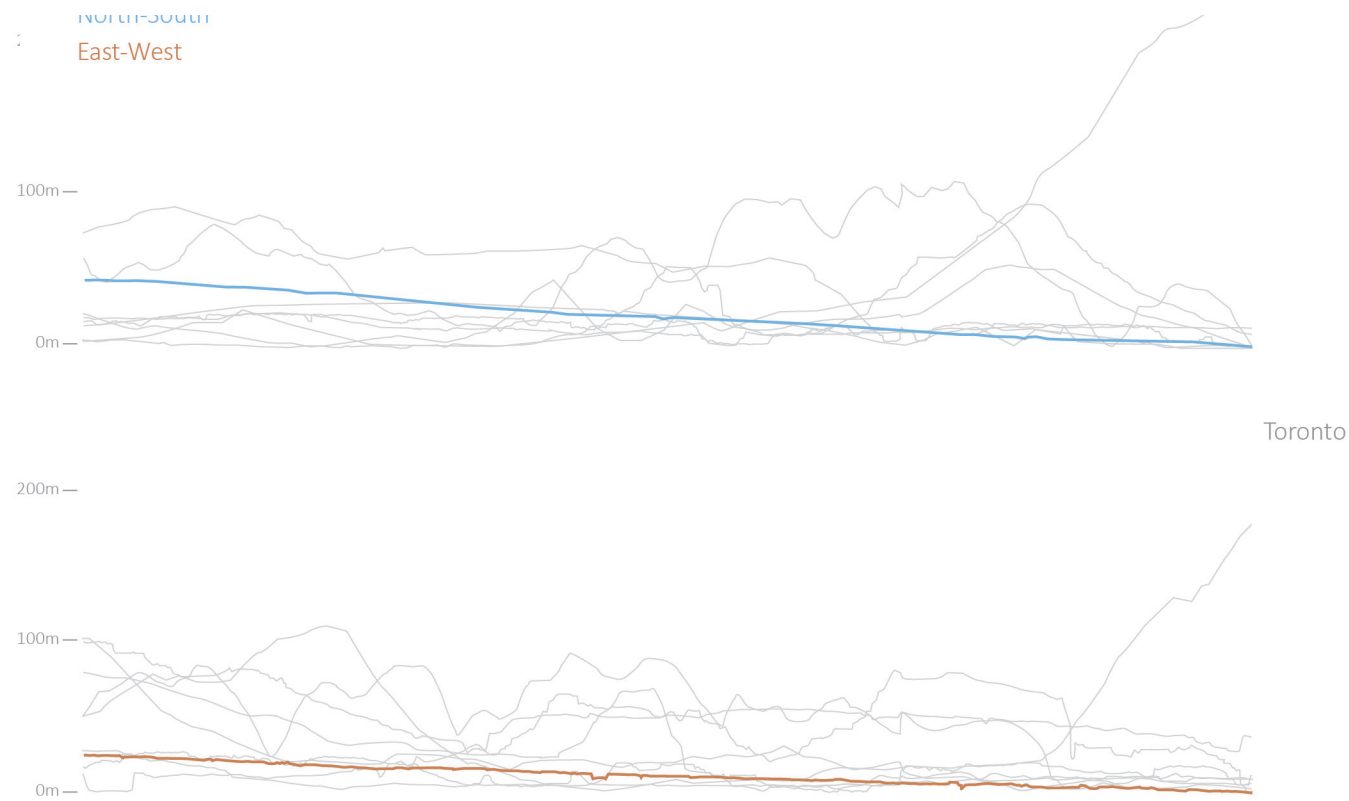


Fig. 7-4  
Topographic Comparison,  
Toronto Cross-Section:

The graph of Toronto's downtown topography is superimposed against the graph of eight major cities from around the world. The relative evenness of the landscape becomes immediately visible through this juxtaposition. From this comparison, it is possible to infer the general lack of natural features that can work in synergy with the artificial features of the built environment.

## Grid as Idea

*"Grid's raison d'être was land speculation and real estate development, a way for developers to prey on 'simple settlers' and pack more houses in a boringly repetitive order manifesting mediocrity."*

– M. Gordon Brown<sup>3</sup>

The evenness of Toronto's topography has also made it particularly receptive to the grid-based planning scheme. The root of Toronto's grid-based plan originates back to an era that predates not only the modern rational planning and automobile transportation, but also the actual occupation of the site. The original Mann Plan of 1788 for the Town of York, the historical name of Toronto, began as a purely conceptual and symbolic exercise where the generic *Model Plan* for British townships, similar to the *Castra* of the Roman army, was plopped onto the landscape near the mouth of the Don River. The plan itself was purely conceptual in nature and was utterly irreverent of the site topography<sup>4</sup>. Although this plan was never implemented, the underlying notion of viewing Toronto's landscape as a de facto *Tabula Rasa* continued in subsequent planning proposals such as the *Aitkin's Town Lot* that adopts the grid-iron plan as the basis of its planning scheme. This urban fabric permeated through history as survey lines were drawn and streets were extended in a consistent manner with the town proper. Military Street (Yonge Street) was drawn on a map by William Chewitt and then cleared through a forest under Lieutenant Simcoe up to the trading posts in Lake Simcoe. Lot Street (Queen Street) established the northern edge of Town of York and served as the baseline of surveys for concession roads and park lots that now constitute the basis of Toronto's major arterial system<sup>5</sup>. These 100 acre lots on undeveloped land, once scribed on paper, were conceded to the Loyalists and principle citizens once they have fulfilled the task of working the land, building a house, and clearing the street.

As evinced by its history, the grid-based fabric of Toronto is a product of an agenda governed by the economy of planning, platting, and development as opposed to ground level human experience. Such agenda can be observed in many early settlements as Gordon Brown writes,

*"Suppose the grid for new settlements was summarily rejected and that the Land Ordinance of 1785 did not become law. Imagine meandering roads reached from waterways, hundreds of villages with medieval street systems and a scattering of commercial and industrial activity, and metes and bounds the only survey system. Development beyond the Eastern Seaboard would have been slow, trade and social interaction would be limited and the time required for cities to become significant commercial and industrial centres would have left the new republic open to the transgressions of a foreign power."*<sup>6</sup>

The lack of consideration for physical context and human use is exacerbated by the fact that streets have acquired an entirely different public meaning

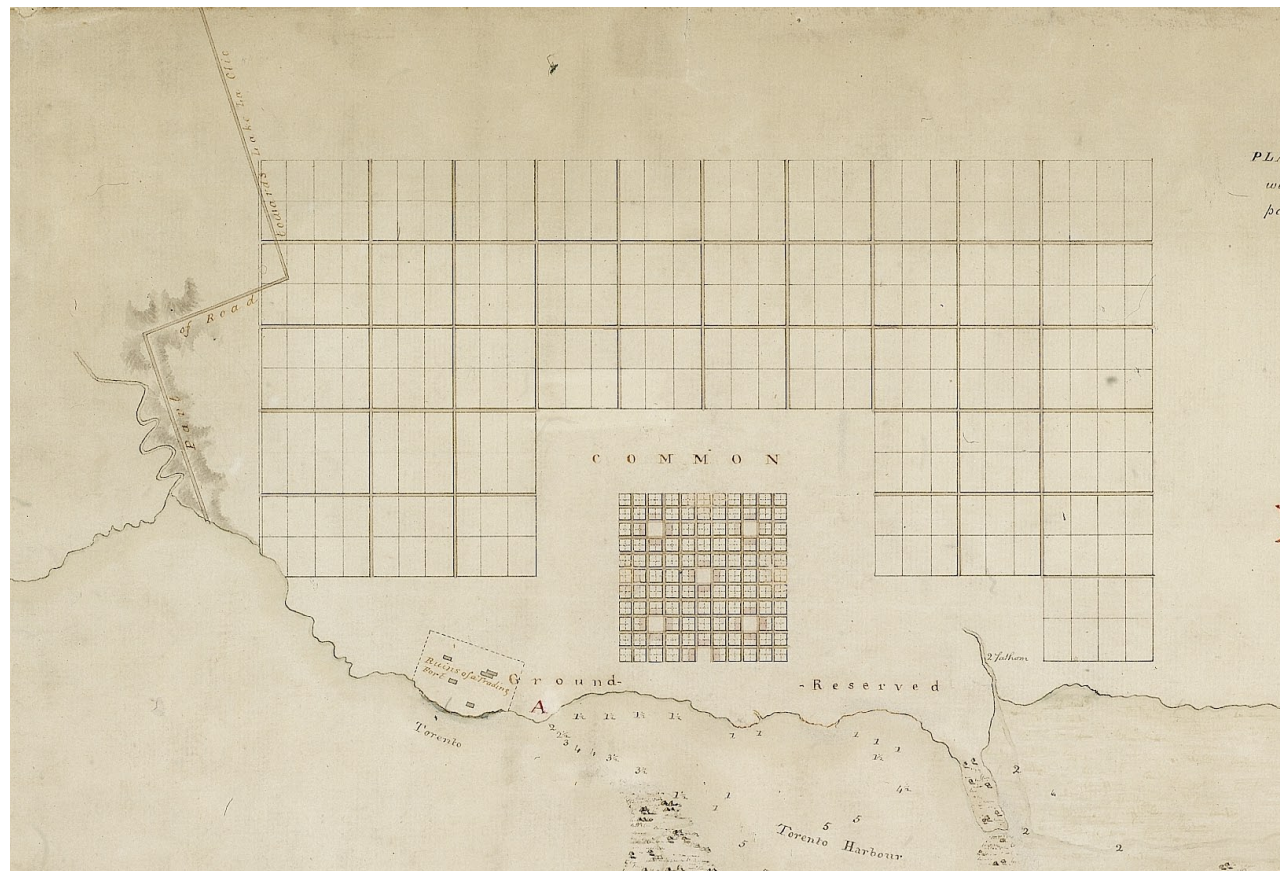


Fig. 7-5 (opposite-top)  
Mann Plan of Toronto  
Harbour, 1788

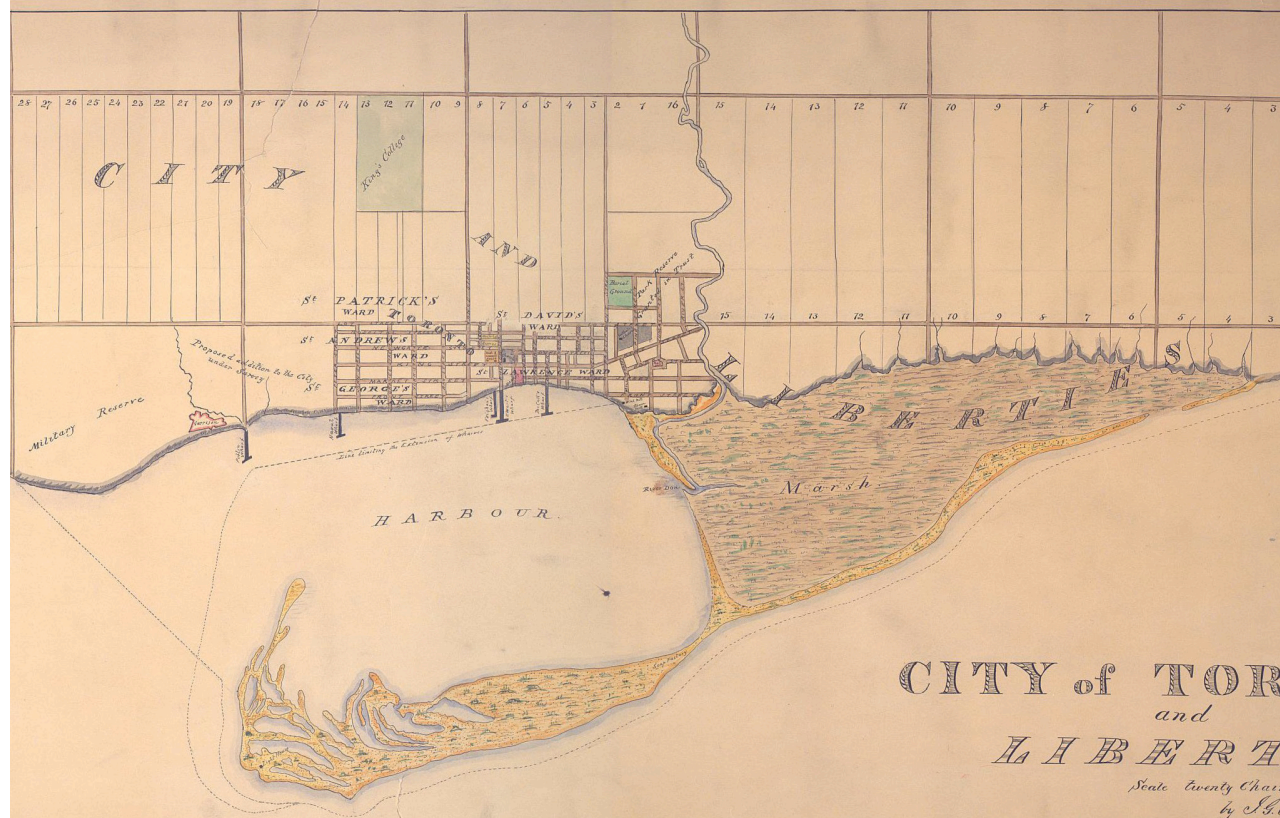


Fig. 7-6  
(opposite-bottom)  
Chewitt Plan of the City  
of Toronto and Liberties,  
1834

and function in relation to the time of their original conception. Whereas, streets historically served as spatial extensions of building activities which naturally imbued it with a function of public place-making<sup>7</sup>, in the contemporary context, it serves as mere space of transit which further reduces any element of human experience .



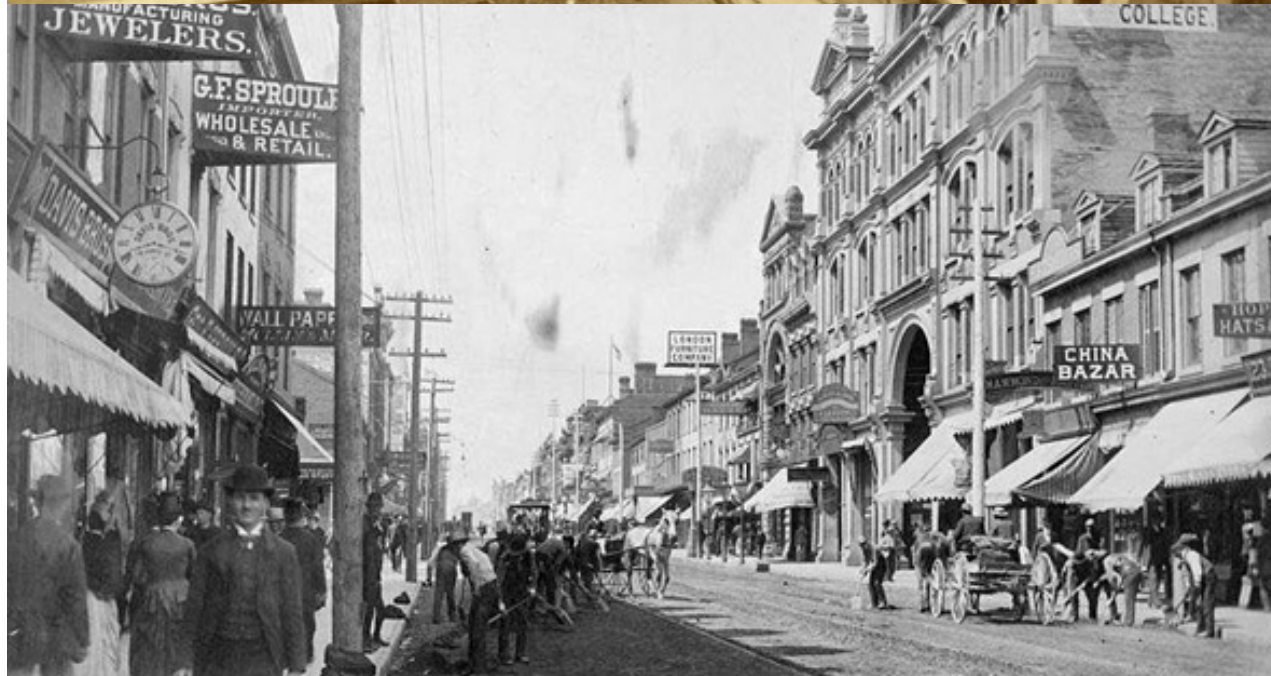


Fig. 7-7 (top)  
Yonge Street from King  
Street Looking North,  
1874

Fig. 7-8 (bottom)  
Yonge Street from Dundas  
Street Looking South,  
1900

## Infinite Exposure

*“Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its actions; that perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it.”*

- Michel Foucault<sup>8</sup>

The grid-based urban form exposes the entire expanse of the physical environment from a single vantage point. In this sense, it is a system of perpetual surveillance that seeks to monitor, gauge, and organize. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline & Punish*, describes the capacity of a grid to act as a disciplining mechanism of power in how it confines movement and discourages concealment.<sup>9</sup> Such interpretation of grid form is also reinforced in the *Prospect-Refuge Theory* as proposed by Appleton and Hildebrand. This theory posits that human beings are influenced by an innate psyche for survival when organizing space. This instinct, consisting of bi-parted desire to position oneself in a place where one can see all (*prospect*) without exposing oneself (*refuge*), is manifested the organization of the grid.

Both theoretical interpretations of the grid outline a common characteristic of constant visibility which negates any anomalies by removing unexpected experiential moments. The suppression of anomaly and unpredictability in urban experience also restricts the ability of small properties to establish *imageability*. The sense of discovery and wonder, and serendipitous surprises in navigating through the urban environment is stifled as spaces and buildings are exposed from a mile away. Larry Ford, in *Space between Buildings*, writes

*“The sense of anticipation associated with wondering what is around the next corner also may heighten the role of architecture in giving character to space. People tend to pay attention to buildings. Where streets are long and straight, however, distant views of clouds and sky can diminish the impact of buildings”<sup>10</sup>*

The lack of unique urban situations causes each buildings to rely on self-referential modes of reinforcing *imageability* which ultimately favours buildings of a grander scale.



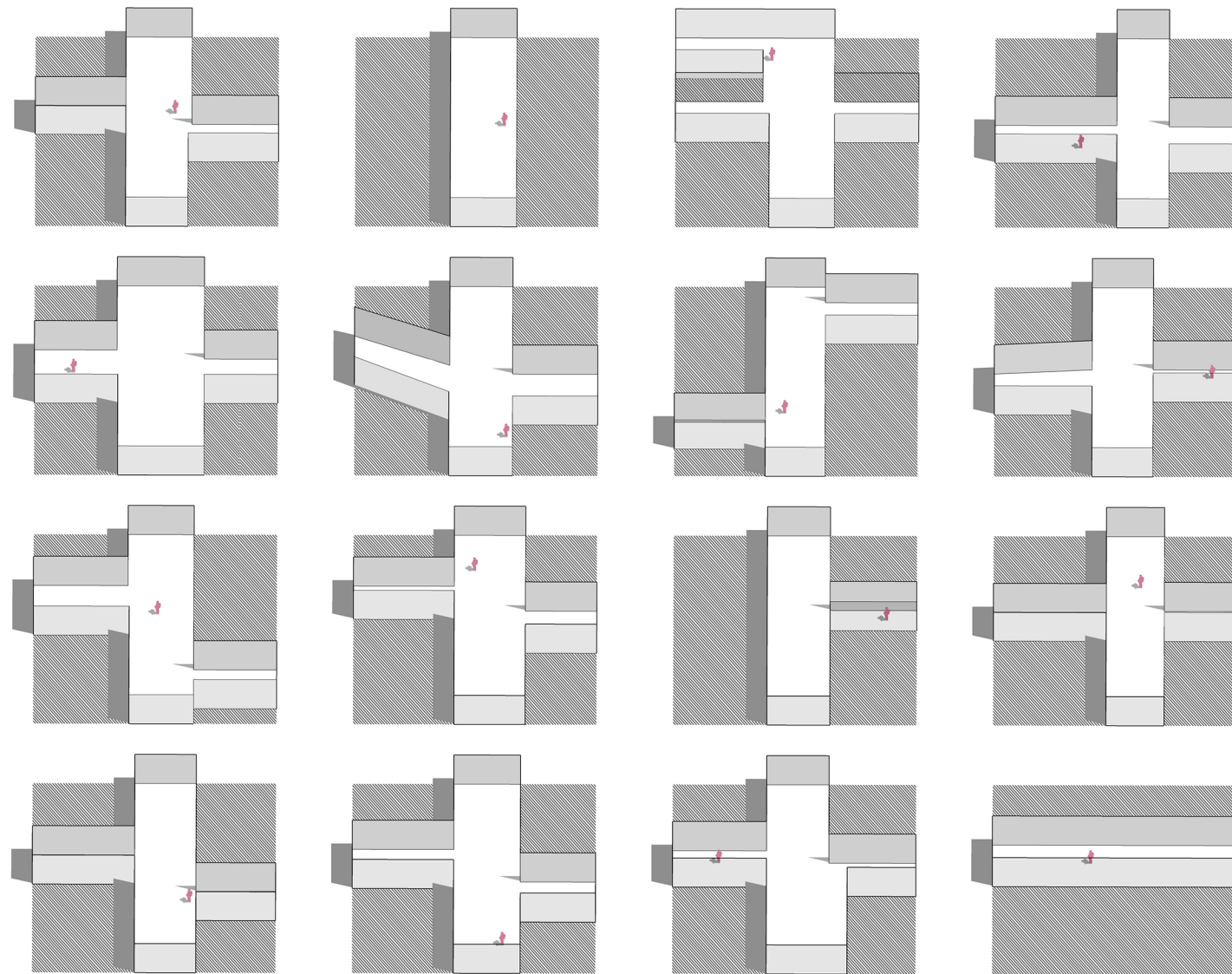


Fig. 7-9  
Intersection Conditions  
on Yonge Street between  
Bloor and Dundas

## Dynamic Views

*"A long straight road has little impact because the initial view is soon digested and becomes monotonous."*

- Gordon Cullen<sup>11</sup>

Related to the grid organization of the urban fabric is the issue of spatial narrative. Gordon Cullen's theory of town planning expounds the importance of *serial vision*, the dynamic range of views revealed through motion, in creating a sense of place. The observer, through changing vistas as one moves through the built environment, relates oneself to the environment and establishes the image of a place. Traditional town plans with winding streets where buildings are constantly hidden and revealed exemplify this process. In *The Concise Townscape*, Cullen writes,

*"By the exercise of vision it became apparent that motion was not one simple, measurable progression useful in planning, it was in fact two things, the Existing and the Revealed view. We discovered that the human being is constantly aware of this position in the environment, that he feels the need for a sense of place and that this sense of identity is coupled with an awareness of elsewhere. Conformity killed, whereas the agreement to differ gave life."*<sup>12</sup>

For small properties, dynamic *serial vision* reinforces the *imageability* of buildings by placing them within the framework of spatial narratives which clarifies formal characteristics and imbues them with meaning. Lynch, echoes this point,

*"...directional shifts may enhance visual clarity by limiting the spatial corridor, and by providing prominent sites for distinctive structure."*<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 7-10  
Reduction of Built Form to  
2-Dimensional Plane



Fig. 7-11 (opposite)  
Serial Vision of Yonge  
Street



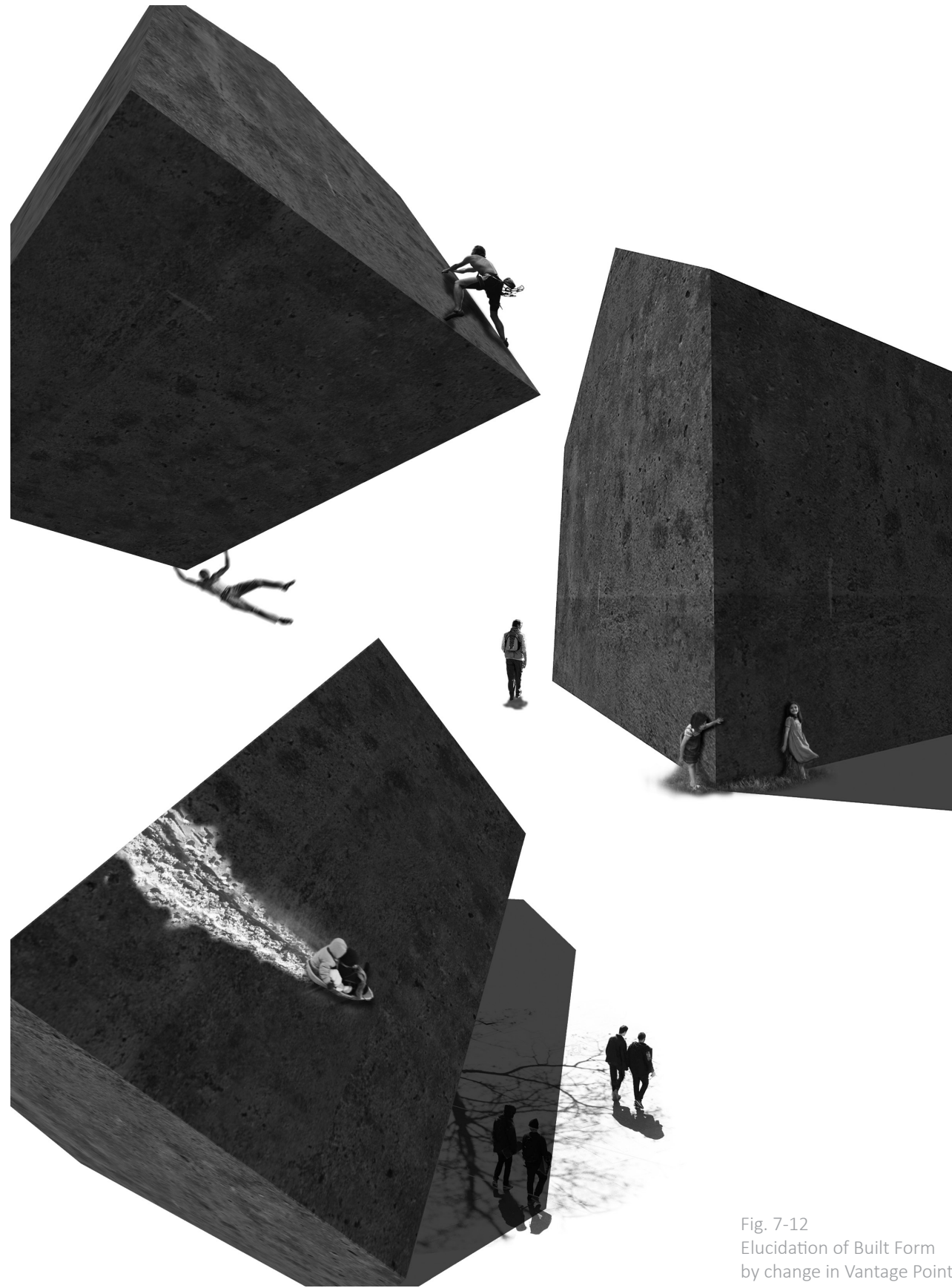


Fig. 7-12  
Elucidation of Built Form  
by change in Vantage Point

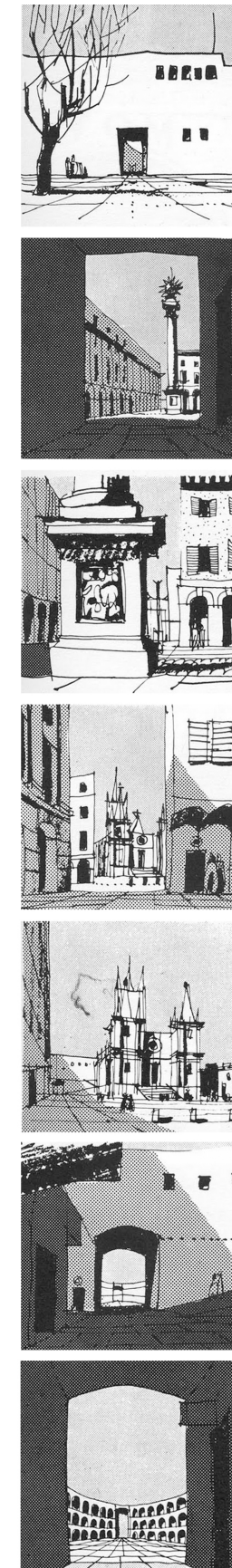


Fig. 7-13  
Serial Vision in Concise  
Townscape

However, such is not the case in the context of Yonge Street. Spatial narratives cannot be created in an environment where people are kept to orthogonal movements, constant speeds, and monotonous views. Individual buildings become perspectively compressed and indistinguishable when a person looks down the street. The act of approaching a building is restricted to a perpendicular relationship to the path of movement. Compared to angled approaches, building exposure is reduced to the bare minimum when buildings are lined up along the path of movement. In the context of the study site, it takes less than one and a half minute to traverse the entire block at walking speed. In a typical four meter wide storefront setting, it takes a mere 3.5 seconds to walk past a property, which does not allow enough time for a person to absorb the visual characteristics of a building and establish an *imageability* of the place.

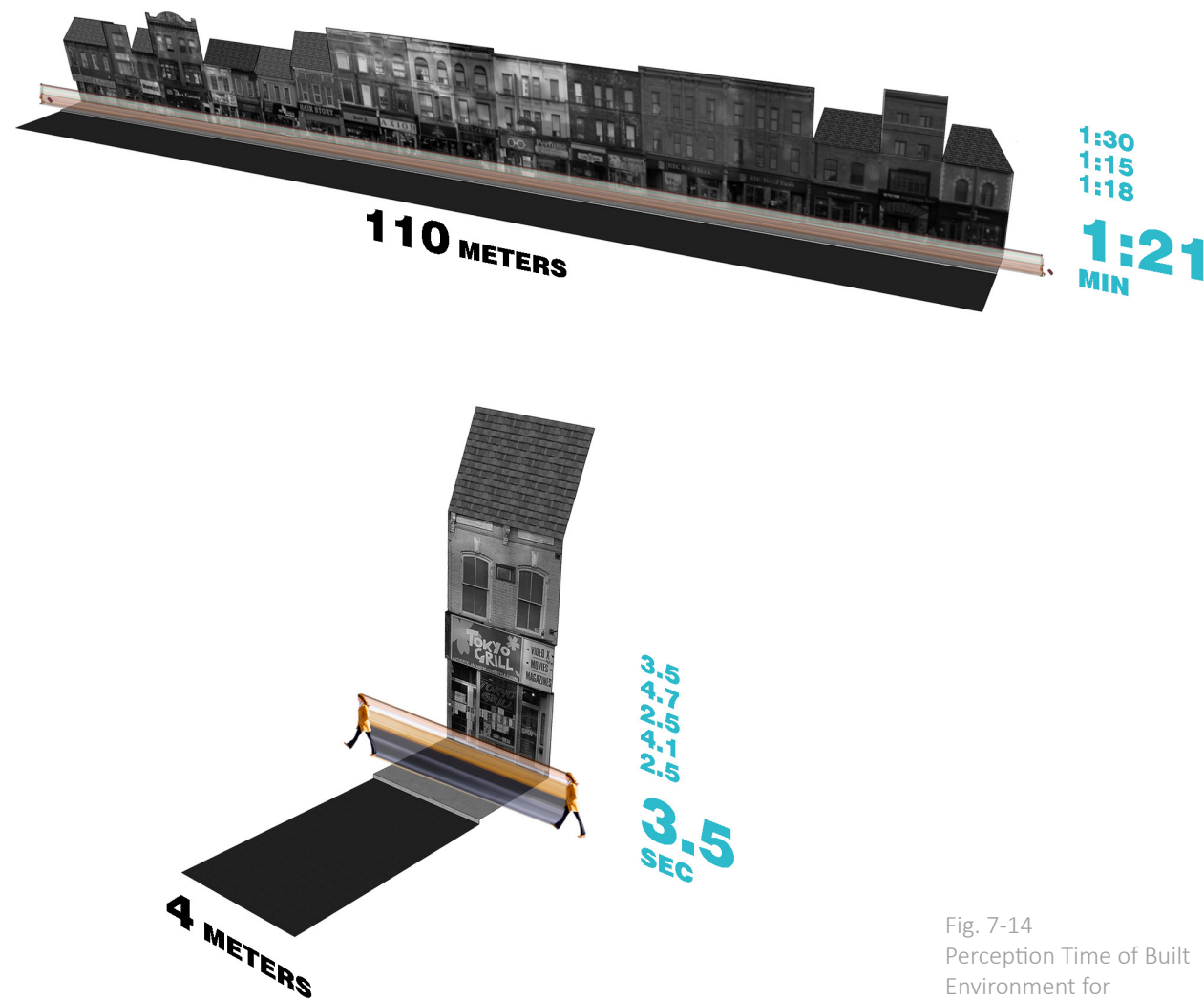


Fig. 7-14  
Perception Time of Built  
Environment for  
Yonge Street Pedestrians,  
570-618 Yonge Street

## Scalar Advantages

Large-scale developments are subject to the same limitations imposed by external spatial conditions. Nonetheless, what differentiates larger buildings from smaller properties is the fact that they are capable of establishing self-referential imageability by their sheer scale, independent of landscape or urban form. Such process of establishing self-referential imageability occurs in one of two ways: the construction of iconic structures through exaggerated form, and the appropriation of public activity through internalization.

The first method can be commonly witnessed in the advertisements of skyscrapers that boast their image as urban icons that can be seen from anywhere. Although these buildings are devoid of any public function or meaning, their form implies symbolic significance by the nature of its scale. Monikers such as “landmark”, “monument”, “symbol”, “vision”, “celebrated” are commonly strewn in marketing pitches, albeit the authenticity of their claims remains obscure. Nonetheless, even in the absence of real public meaning, the mere visibility in the broad context of an urban setting imbues it with identity in the public consciousness.

The second method is most prominent in the typology of shopping malls where public circulation is hijacked and internalized within a private domain. Once inside, spatial characteristics that are absent in the public domain are emulated within. Circulation paths are split-vertically and looped to increase the duration of stay and generate various vantage points. Storefronts are offset and paths wrap around stores to create a sense of volume. Signages are used both strategically and liberally placed to stimulate the senses.

The scalar requirement of the two methods, contingent on access to large plots of land and massive capital, is accessible only to large-scale developers. Therefore, the capacity to establish *imageability* becomes intrinsically correlated and subservient to a mode of development.





Fig. 7-15  
Imageability through  
Iconic Form: Aura

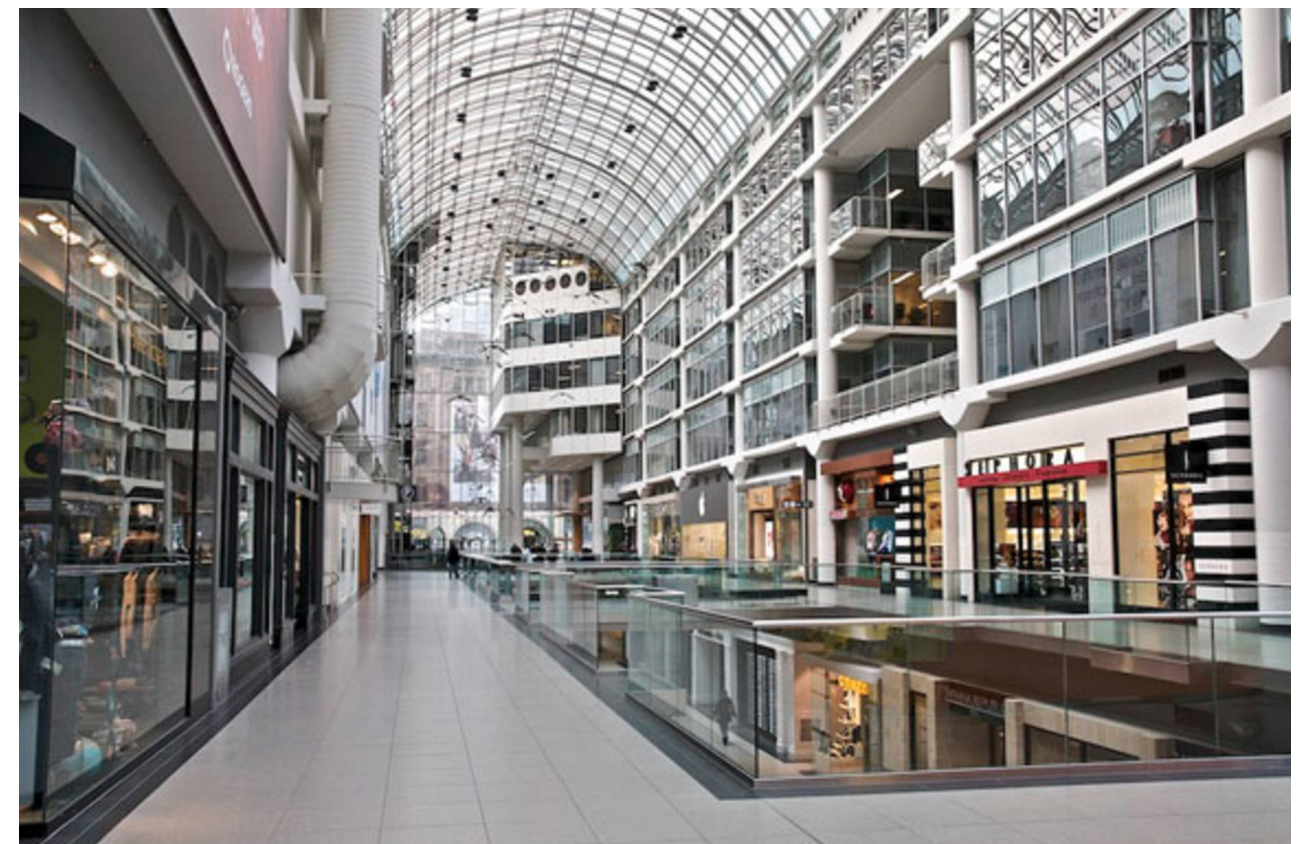


Fig. 7-16  
Imageability through  
Interiorization: Eaton  
Centre

- 1 Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press. 6.
- 2 Micallef, S. (2014, November 21). Toronto's dramatic highs and lows. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from [https://www.thestar.com/life/2014/11/21/the\\_hills\\_and\\_dales\\_we\\_dont\\_see\\_micallef.html](https://www.thestar.com/life/2014/11/21/the_hills_and_dales_we_dont_see_micallef.html)
- 3 Brown, M. G. (2016). *Access, Property and American Urban Space*. Routledge.
- 4 Osbaldeston, M. (2008). *Unbuilt Toronto*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- 5 Armstrong, F. H. (1988). *City in the Making*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- 6 Brown, M. G. (2016). *Access, Property and American Urban Space*. Routledge. 170.
- 7 Ford, L. R. (2000). *The Spaces Between Buildings*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 6.
- 8 Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline & Punish* (Trans. Alan Sheridan). New York: Random House. 201.
- 9 Felluga, D. (2011, Jan 13). *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory, Modules on Foucault: On Panoptic and Carceral Society*. Retrieved from Purdue University: <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/newhistoricism/modules/foucaultcarceral.html>
- 10 Ford, L. R. (2000). *The Spaces Between Buildings*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 26.
- 11 Cullen, G. (1961). *The Concise Townscape*. London: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- 12 *ibid*
- 13 Lynch, K. (1960). *The Image of the City*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press. 56.

## 08/ Deter

Without the benefit of a synergistic relationships with the external environment, small-scale properties must rely on self-referential modes of increasing imageability, namely through building modifications and signage. Such desire for identifiability is often the primary target for regulations and guidelines that impose measures to root out idiosyncrasies in the built environment. Such restrictions impose the greatest repercussions for small properties that lack spatial means, financial resources, and branding power.



Whereas individual properties pursue novelty, public policies pursue consistency and stability. These policies actively enforce restrictions in how individuals can modify and use their spaces, thereby limiting the liberty to exercise their rights of ownership. The suppressive nature of such policies is amplified in the context of historical Yonge Street, where buildings are subjected to multiple layers of enforcement that affect their architectural qualities.

While limitations imposed by the landscape and urban form can be described as passive because they do not actively intervene in actions of individuals, limitations imposed by policy is entirely different in that it requires compliance through a system of rules and punishments. The ramification of such system of policies is much more acute and pronounced in smaller properties that lacks the spatial and capital means to comply with, and at the same time, alleviate its impact.

## Design Guideline

In 2013, historic Yonge Street that stretches from Bloor Street to College Street was nominated as a candidate for *Part V: Heritage Conservation District* status of the *Ontario Heritage Act* by the Bay Cloverhill Community Association and the Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association. In following, *Historic Yonge Heritage Conservation District (HYHCD) Plan* was prepared by DIALOG for the City of Toronto Heritage Preservation Services to assess the cultural characteristics and outline policies and planning tools for the district.

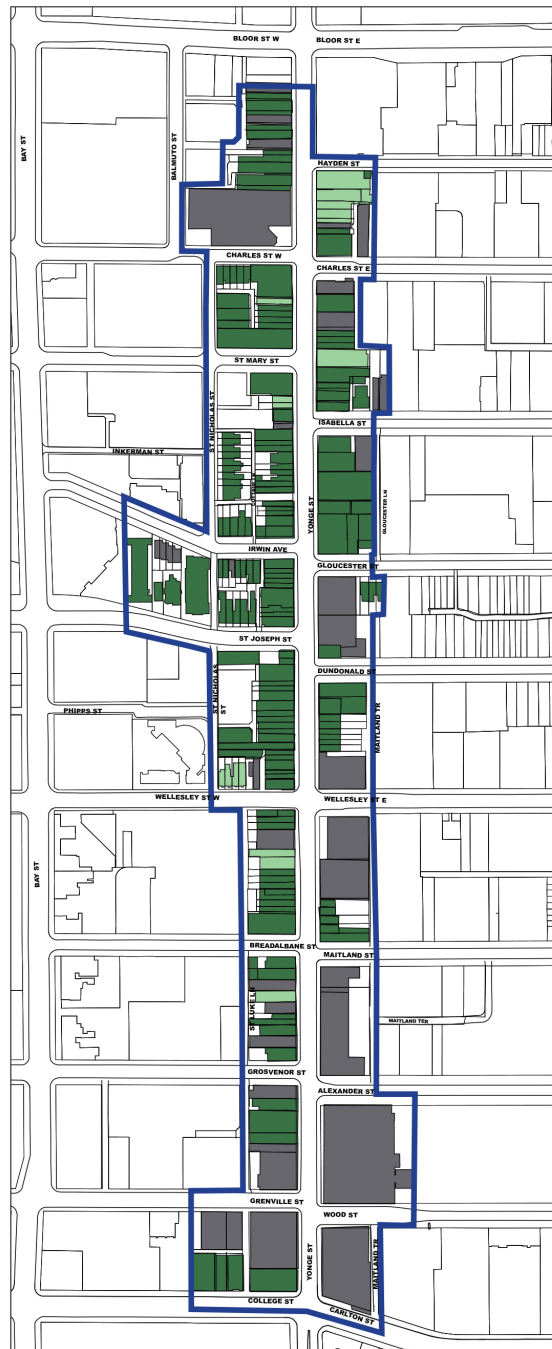
While there are numerous documents that affect the planning and architectural design in the historic Yonge Street area: Ontario Building Code, City of Toronto Official Plan, North Downtown Yonge Street Design Guideline, Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, et cetera, *HYHCD Plan* provides the most detailed guideline for the area while preserving the spirit of other documents. In other words, the *HYHCD Plan* places the most calibrated system of spatial restrictions upon the properties on the site.

The basic premise of the *HYHCD Plan* can be briefly summarized in the preface of the document,

*“policies and guidelines that are designed to conserve the district’s unique cultural heritage values and resources”<sup>1</sup>*

Our site, consisting in large by registered and listed heritage properties under *Part IV & V* of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, is subject to its guidelines.

The intent of the document is quite noble in its effort to preserve the historical characteristics of the street that are most heavily under threat of disappearing. There is little doubt in the benefit that considerate practice of preservation, maintenance, and modification of historical buildings brings to the society as a whole. At the same time, we must also recognize that what is good for society may not be in the best interest of the individual. This statement resounds most true in the case of small-scale ownership where the repercussion of the restrictions is felt most deeply. It is most critical for small-scale properties because it directly restricts the few methods of establishing identity accessible to them, namely architectural modification and signage.



Contributing, Non-contributing, and Over-clad Properties  
 ■ Contributing Properties ■ Over-clad Properties ■ Non-contributing Properties

Fig. 8-1 (left)  
 HYCD: Contributing Properties Under Part V of Ontario Heritage Act.

While all properties within the *Historical Conservation District* are designated under Part V of Ontario Heritage Act, HYHCD identifies properties that contribute to the historical characteristics of the district.



Part IV Designations within HYHCD  
 ■ Part IV Designated Properties

Fig. 8-2 (right)  
 HYHCD: Properties Designated Under Part IV of Ontario Heritage Act.

Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* identifies individual properties with significant historical and cultural value. The requirements of Part IV takes precedence over the district based Part V requirements.

## Massing

The most effective measure for visual identity in the urban fabric is the use of geometric form. In the context of architecture, this implies changes made through addition or modification of buildings. It is here that the imbalance in the interests between the public body and the individual becomes most vivid.

In the context of Yonge Street where most buildings are abutting adjacent properties, most changes occur through either façade modifications or vertical expansions. At the same time, the implication of disrupting the continuous and consistent built environment in such actions requires the assertion of the *HYHCD Plan*.

Documents including the *HYHCD Plan* and *Toronto Urban Design Guideline* identifies the prevailing streetwall condition created by two-to-three storey mixed-use buildings along the lot line as one of the defining architectural characteristics of the area. The stated guideline carries through with this notion in the policy clause,

*5.8.3 Do not relocate or set back building façades on contributing properties that conform to a streetwall condition”<sup>2</sup>*

This implies that buildings cannot be modified so that they deviate from the planar characteristics of the street wall. The reduction of an autonomous building to a mere patch in a homogenous plane amplifies the visually diminishing quality of the grid-based urban form. Such suppression of form limits self-expression by imposing an adherence to an idealized and genericized language to which Margaret Crawford comments in *Everyday Urbanism*,

*“negates all differences, those that come from nature and history as well as those that come from the body, ages, sexes, and ethnicities.”<sup>3</sup>*

The tendency to negate differences and normalize the built environment is an intrinsic part of policy-making in the way imposes itself indiscriminately. Other guidelines apply themselves in a similar way,

*5.8.1 Design vertical additions or alterations to a contributing property to step back a minimum of 10m from the elevation of the building on the contributing property that is fronting the street, for the entirety of the façade of the vertical addition, including any balconies.*

*5.8.2 Design vertical additions or alterations to a contributing property so they do not breach a 75 de-*



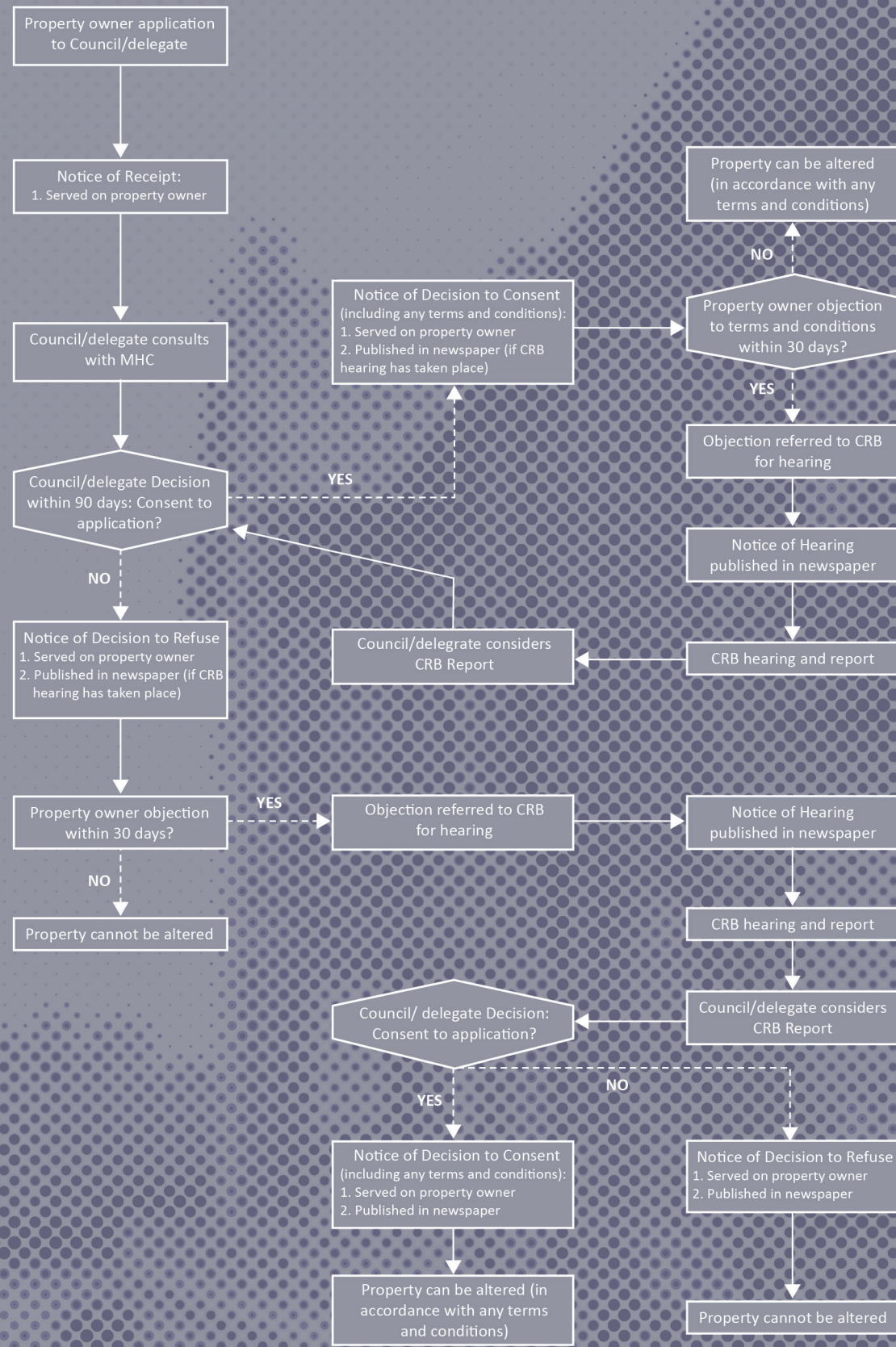
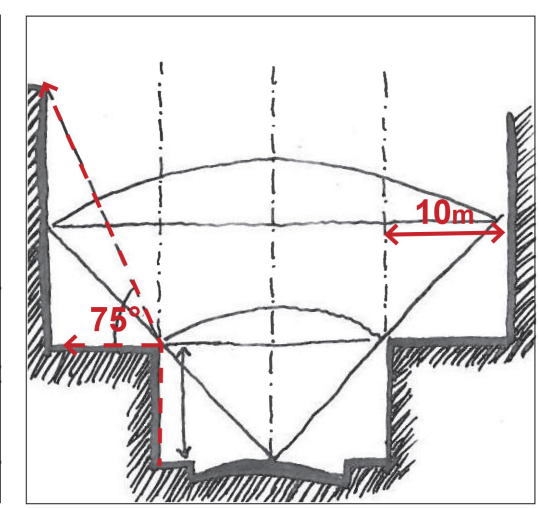
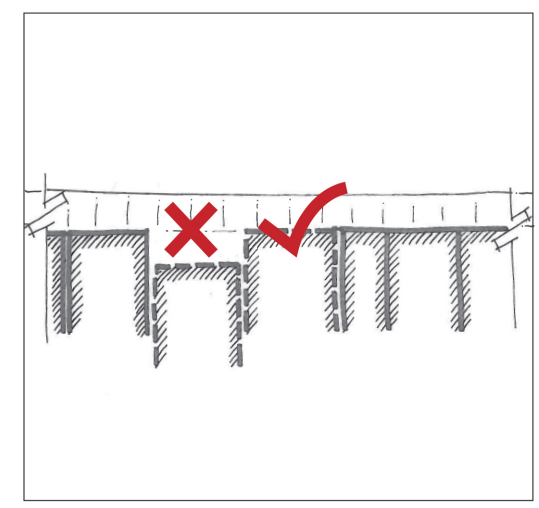


Fig. 8-3 (opposite)  
Approval Process for  
Alterations to Heritage  
Property

gree angular plane measured at the height specified below for each Character Area and measured from each elevation of a building adjacent to and parallel with a street within HYHCD. <sup>4</sup>

These clauses, in addition to the established zoning height at 18 meters on the study site, make vertical expansion a practical impossibility for smaller properties. Whereas, larger developments with deeper footprints can position vertical expansion to comply with the 20-meter setback and angular plane restrictions, smaller properties with shallower 16 meter lots are unable to do so within reasonable means.

Fig. 8-4  
HYHCD- Offset, Setback, and Angular Plane Requirement for Consistent Street Wall





## Signage

In addition to altering the physical form of the building, the use of signage is the most prevalent and ubiquitous method of establishing identity in the urban environment. Marketing research shows that 50% percent of new customers for business startups are drawn by on-premise signage, and 35% percent of passers-by become cognizant of the establishment through signage<sup>5</sup>. The research also suggests that the quality and the prominence of the signage has a direct correlation with business performance, where the increase in number, size, and visibility of the signage leads to increase in sales. Furthermore, signage requires relatively little capital expenditure in comparison to other modes of advertising. The same research stipulates an average cost of \$0.02 per thousand views for signage, compared to \$2.81 for newspaper and \$9.82 for TV ads<sup>6</sup>. These are crucial factors for small businesses in that they tend to be undercapitalized and lack established brand image.

In the case of the HYHCD area, the use of signage is strictly regulated in terms of its size, location, and design, thereby restricting its full potential. Therefore, because the use of signage is directly translatable to economic performance, the restrictions imposed by the policy has direct repercussions on financial viability and preservation of ownership.

**5.15.1 Design signage for contributing properties to be physically and visually compatible with the heritage attributes and cultural heritage value of HYHCD including the scale and rhythm of building frontages.**

- *Locate and design signage so that it does not detract from or obscure the heritage attributes of a contributing property, including features of exterior walls, roofs, windows, storefronts, and the scale and rhythm of building frontages.*
- *Signage must not cover windows.*
- *Signage should be limited to the first floor façade and should not extend to upper floors.*

**5.15.3 The following signage types may be permitted on the first floor of contributing properties:**

**Fascia signs:** attached to or supported by a fascia board which projects no more than 0.5m from the wall.

- *Locate fascia signs on storefront fascias only.*
- *Back-lit signs of single letters may be per*

*mitted.*

- *Neon signs may be permitted.*

**- Projecting signs:** signage attached to or supported by the wall of a building which projects more than 0.5m from the wall.

- *Locate projecting signs in proximity to entrances.*
- *Design projecting signs to be higher than entrances to a property.*
- *Design projecting signs so that they do not project more than 1.25m from the exterior wall of a building.*
- *Mount projecting signs so they cover a minimal amount of the exterior wall. A sign's base should not be wider than the sign itself. Back-lit signs of single letters may be permitted.*
- *Neon signs may be permitted.* <sup>7</sup>

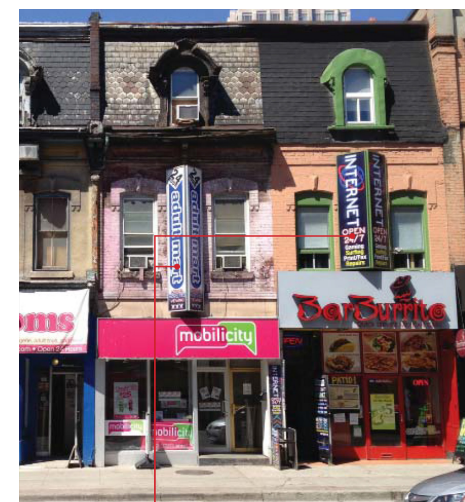
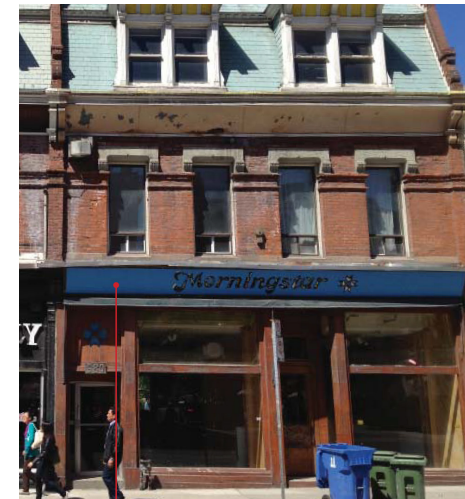


Fig. 8-5  
HYHCD- Example of Appropriate (above) and Non-Permitted Signage (below). While appropriate standard for signage maintains a consistent streetface aesthetic, non-permitted signage are more identifiable. Note the absence of commercial visibility of upper level tenants in the "Appropriate" example.

Real life application of this clause runs into practical problems for tenants and property owners when the physical characteristics of existing buildings and their current uses are considered. Primarily, there is an issue of available surface space to place the signage. According to the design guideline, signage should be limited to the first floor, away from windows and wall features. Projecting signage, which is the most visible and effective type of signage in the context of a linear streetscape, should be located close to and above the height of the entrances. Considering the narrow width of an average storefront, its low floor-to-ceiling height, and the large amount of glazing, it is not hard to ascertain the inadequacy of allowable space to place signage.

The restrictions on signage use puts the most pressure on the upper-level tenants who are unable to place signage in direct adjacency to their occupied space. Historically, commercial activity occurred mostly on street level with residential tenants occupying the upper floors. Even when there were commercial tenants on the upper levels, they were most often extensions of the street level businesses. The architecture of the buildings reflects this by assigning space for signage to the traditional street-level fascia board.

This characteristic is no longer valid in the contemporary context where the upper levels tend to be occupied by businesses independently from street level units. This necessitates that they require commercial exposure at a distinct and equal level to that of the street level tenants. In practice, the signages of upper-level tenants are forced to be reduced in size and relegated to inferior spaces such as narrow strips adjacent to doors or placed behind windows. This disadvantage forces tenants to employ visual strat-





Fig. 8-6  
Signage Locations



Fig. 8-7  
Exposure of Interior  
Activity Through  
Glazing



Fig. 8-8  
Representation of Upper-level Tenant  
on Street Level

egies such as bold-contrasting colours, cluttering, and provocative graphics despite being considered to be in poor-taste in the public's eye.

In addition, the guidelines impose designs that does not detract from the heritage characteristics of façade. What this translates to in practice is the consistent regime of understated signage that conforms to the existing conditions in terms of their design and materiality. This runs contradictory to the purpose of signage to distinguish the identity of the establishment by making itself more visible in the competition for public attention.

In contrast to smaller properties, larger developments are not as critically impacted under the same restrictions. Firstly, larger developments are far less likely to be bound by heritage requirements which tend to be the most restrictive. Even when a new development incorporates heritage elements, the reduction in the number of tenants, the increase in store footprint, and established brand characteristics of the tenants create a surplus of available signage space. Also, through the process of internalizing the commercial program, large-properties can override the restrictions imposed by the guideline.



Fig. 8-9  
Podium of Flve Condo Development:

Culmination of reduction in the number of tenants from 10 to 2, the resultant surplus of facade space, and the pre-established branding of tenants, makes commercial visibility a relative non-issue for this large-scale developments.





Fig. 8-10  
Historic Signag-  
escape on Yonge  
Street

Fig. 8-11 (top)  
Dotonbori, Osaka  
Signagescape



Fig. 8-12 (bottom)  
Broadway, Nashville  
Signagescape



The repression of signage to establish aesthetic consistency overlooks many of the successes that have been achieved by its more liberal use, particularly by small independent establishments. There are many instances in cities such as Nashville and Osaka where the use of signage has itself become a defining point of the urban experience. Even here in Toronto, iconic signages of Honest Ed's, Zanzibar, and Sam the Record Man reside in the collective memory, and a retrospect of its streetscape reveal a rich history of signage culture that has largely disappeared.



- 1 *DIALOG (2016). Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District Plan (p. 15) (Canada, City of Toronto, Heritage Preservation Services). vi.*
- 2 *ibid.* 25.
- 3 Margaret Crawford. (1999). *Everyday Urbanism*. Monacelli Press.
- 4 *DIALOG (2016). Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District Plan (p. 15) (Canada, City of Toronto, Heritage Preservation Services). 25.*
- 5 Gaille, B. (2013, July 29). 27 Striking Statistics on Effective Outdoor Signage. Retrieved from brandongaille.com: <http://brandongaille.com/27-striking-statistics-on-effective-outdoor-signage/>
- 6 *ibid*
- 7 *DIALOG (2016). Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District Plan (p. 15) (Canada, City of Toronto, Heritage Preservation Services). 35.*

## 09/ Dominate

The process of development embodies systems of monopolization and censorship that ‘kicks away the ladder’ for a state of permanent subjugation. Firstly, consolidation of lots removes the spatial grounds for re-entry of small-scale ownership, making access to ownership an exclusive activity of large-scale players. Secondly, tenant selection and internal design review processes effectively censor out idiosyncrasies, normalizing and restricting the liberties of the tenants.

## Plottage

*“Plottage is an increment of value that results when two of more sites are combined to produce a larger site with greater utility”*

*- Appraisal Institute of Canada<sup>1</sup>*

Consolidation of lots is one of the ways in which the development process monopolizes the spatial realm and deters the reintegration of small properties. Essentially all large-scale developments in the urban context involve some form of zoning amendment for consolidation of lots. In the context of Yonge Street between Queen and Bloor, projects completed or under-construction in the past five years consolidated approximately 69 individual lots into 14 lots. The logic of the process is simple, the increase in lot size increases its plottage value by allowing a larger density of development while reducing the cost of construction and operation. It also optimizes land use by amalgamating odd shaped lots into a more regularized rectilinear shape which better conforms to typical building programming and typology. Simply put, a larger lot equates to lower development cost per unit.<sup>2</sup>

The size of the lot also plays a factor in negotiating for greater built density in the zoning amendment process. In the case of FIVE condo, the preceding zoning by-law designation was *CR T4.0 C1.0 R4* for west-facing properties on St Nicholas Street and *CR T3.0 C2.0 R3.0* for east facing properties on Yonge Street, allowing for a maximum density of 4 and 3 times the lot size respectively. Post-development, this limit was increased to a density of 14.4 times the lot area. Drastic amendments in allowed density are quite common. The zoning amendment for 1 Bloor West condo on Yonge Street, the tallest tower in Canada at just over 300 meters, achieved an FSR increase from 3 and 7.8 to 28.3 times the lot area. Such an outcome would be impossible to attain if it was proposed by a small-scale property even if it sat in the same location that the tower sits now.

In contrast to the incentives received by large-scale development for increasing its footprint, once the lots are consolidated, the chances of obtaining autonomous ownership in the same space are practically removed for small-scale actors.

## Tenantship & Censorship

Without the opportunity for autonomous ownership in the urban arena, small-scale actors are limited to the status of tenantry which inherently involves some form of censorship that seeks to normalize idiosyncrasies in their cultural and spatial characteristics.

While tenantry occurs ubiquitously in all types of buildings, the institutionalized ownership of large-scale developments generally impose the most stringent criteria for tenant selection that are often based on socio-cultural motives and biases. In many cases, the leasing process is a highly exclusive affair amongst pre-screened candidates who cater to a specific public image and socio-economic target group. In an article titled, *What Should You Look for in a Commercial Tenant?* Commercial leasing consultant, John Highman, outlines the following criteria:

1. *The tenant that can show business success and stability*
2. *A tenant that has a good rental history and record from previous lease occupation.*
3. *A tenant that brings a good business profile to the property*
4. *A tenant that comprehensively benefits and integrates into the existing tenant mix*
5. *A lease that complements the investment profile and plans of the landlord for the coming lease term*
6. *A permitted use in the lease that suits the property*
7. *A lease that improves the rental return from the property in balance with market rental expectations<sup>3</sup>*

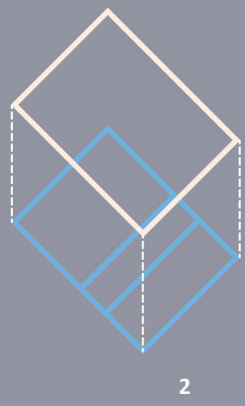
The demand for established public image and extensive track record ultimately favours large franchises while creating a de facto impasse for small-scale niche market businesses. As such, it is hard to imagine the Brass-rail or Kawaii Massage taking tenancy in a new development no matter how lucrative their business may be.

Even when a business acquires tenantry, they are further imposed with highly calibrated measures for spatial design control. Tenants are subjected to a myriad of requirements enforced by Schedule C (owner-tenant agreement), design guidelines, and design approval processes that place limitations on practically all forms of architectural expression including access, material, spatial configuration, signage, and lighting.

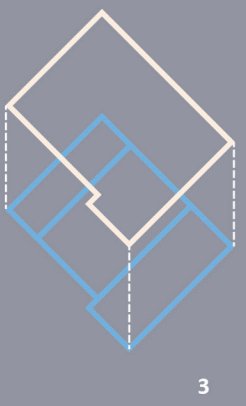




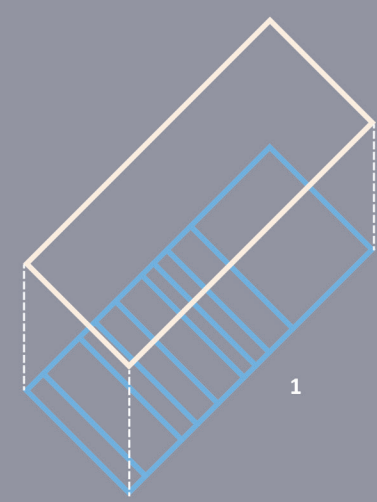
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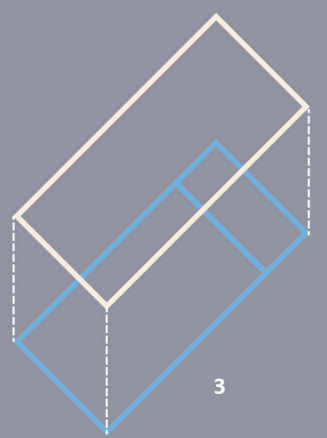
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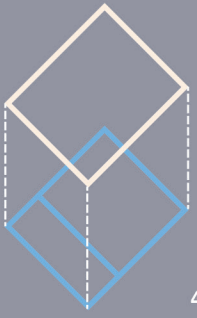
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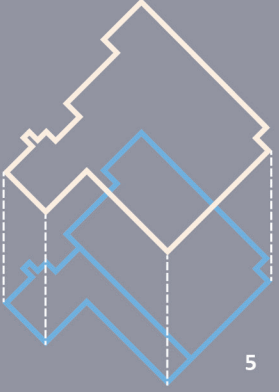
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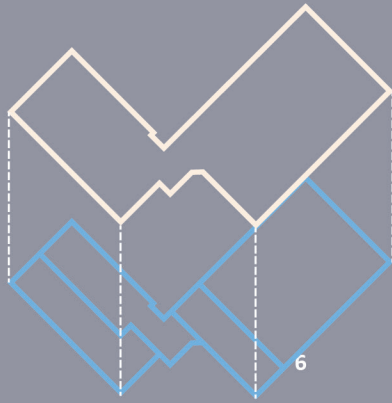
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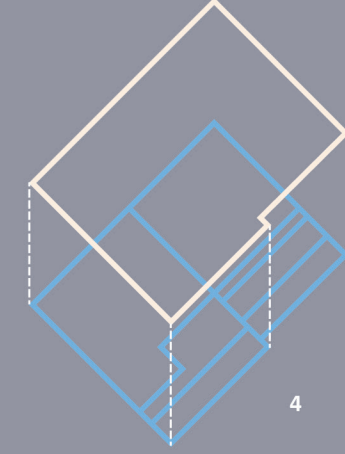
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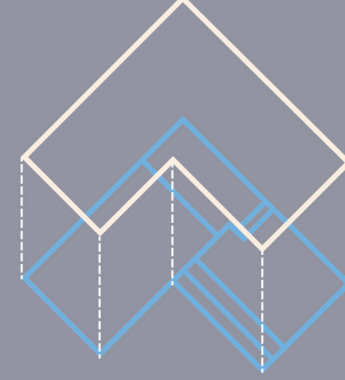
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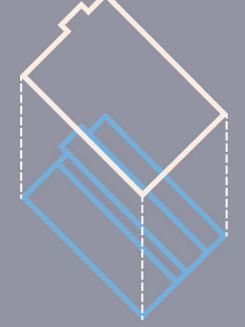
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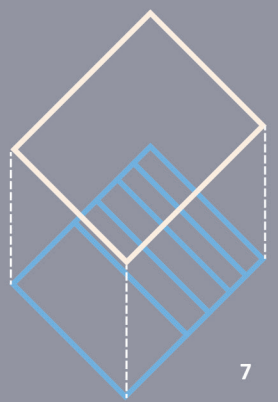
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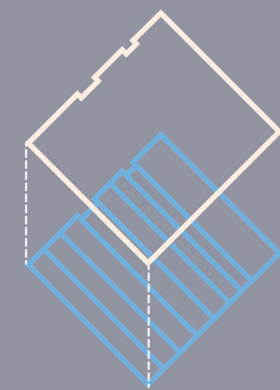


6



7

1. 1-11 Bloor Street West, 768-784 Yonge Street
2. 2,6 & 8 Gloucester Street and 601-613 Yonge Street
3. 9-21 Grenville Street
4. 19-21 Dundas Square and 252-258 Victoria Street
5. 33 Gerrard Street West and 22 Elm Street
6. 197-201 Yonge Street and 178-180 Victoria Street
7. 341-355 Yonge Street



7

1. 363-391 Yonge Street
2. 480-494 Yonge Street
3. 501-521 Yonge Street
4. 587-599 Yonge Street, 2-4 Dundonald Street, and 7-9 Gloucester Street
5. 606-618 Yonge Street, 5-9 St. Joseph Street, and 11-19 & 25 St. Nicholas Street
6. 826-834 Yonge Street and 2-8 Cumberland Street
7. 836-850 Yonge Street and 1-9A Yorkville Avenue

Fig. 9-1  
Consolidation of Lots: Developments on Yonge Street

- 1 *Appraisal Institute of Canada and the Appraisal Institute. (2010). Appraisal of Real Estate, 3rd Canadian Edition. Vancouver: UBC Real Estate Division. 10.10.*
- 2 *ibid*
- 3 Highman, J. (2011, 11 19). What Should You Look for in a Commercial Tenant? Retrieved from Commercial Property Global: <https://comproglobal.com/2011/11/19/what-should-you-look-for-in-a-commercialtenant/>

## **10/ Intervention - Reverse Block Mall**

The design intervention proposes the collectivization of existing properties on the site as means to overcome the limitations imposed by the three-Ds. The primary tactics involve the activation of the rear laneway for use as a public corridor, the consequent commercial utilization of building rear-face, free spatial-transactions amongst tenants, and air-right sale for density development. The typological characteristics of multiple buildings and tenants tied together by a circulatory element is encapsulated in the title, *Reverse Block Mall*. This proposal is described in three stages that outline the organizational, the spatial, and the financial arguments in respective order.



## Collectivization

The economic viability of small properties is hampered by the inability to use space to its maximum potential, whether it is through limitations imposed on the productive use of space or by the inaccessibility to increase in scale in traditional development methods.

This thesis proposal argues that the strategy to increase the economic viability of small-scale ownership must begin with expanding the territory of space where they can exercise their liberties. Such expansion of territory not only includes the physical increase in space but the holistic capacity to transform, use, and profit from it. The question then becomes, how to achieve this within the context of defined boundaries and limited resources of existing site condition all while preserving the continuity of ownership.

Throughout history, limitations of resources and scale were overcome through cooperative action. These extend from pioneering Rochdale Society to labour unions and housing coops to more recent forms of crowd-funding and collective intelligence.<sup>1</sup> The combination of social-organization and pooling of resources allows for an increase in efficiency and leveraging power while opening up of new opportunities in the absence of concentrated resource investment. The same principle of cooperation can be applied to spatial resources where individuals can collectivize their spatial resources to achieve such benefits. In practice, collectivization provides two key benefits that directly engages the objective of increasing the spatial territory.

First, the process of collectivization enables the overcoming of physical boundaries by facilitating increased freedom and flexibility in the use of space. It does so by emancipating the use of space from the confines of isolated buildings or property lots and transforms it into a product of agreements within the collective. Under such framework, spaces and building systems can be strategically combined or distributed across multiple properties with the convenience of rearranging space in a single building while simultaneously loosening external regulations such as building codes or design guidelines that discourage inter-property modifications.

Secondly, pooling of spatial resources enables utilization of spaces that were previously neglected due to their fragmented and isolated nature. Within the context of the site, this occurs around two main spatial arenas: the rear laneway and the air-space above. The activation of the rear laneway space provides an alternative pedestrian corridor for the public while simultaneously increasing the level of economic performance by drastically increasing commercial exposure and level of architectural freedom. Similarly, an amalgamation of air-rights over individual properties opens spatial opportunities for large-scale densification projects while circumventing monopolizing characteristics of property acquisition and consolidation.

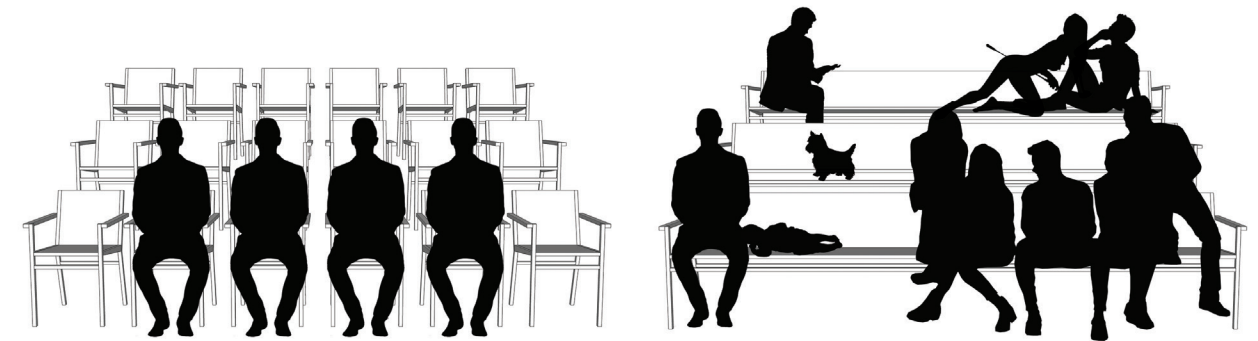


Fig. 10-1  
Loosening of Boundaries by Collectivization:  
While strict adherence to ownership boundary maintains order, it does not respond to varying needs of the users. By relaxing physical boundaries, usage of space can respond more efficiently to diverse range of activities without increasing expenditure of resources

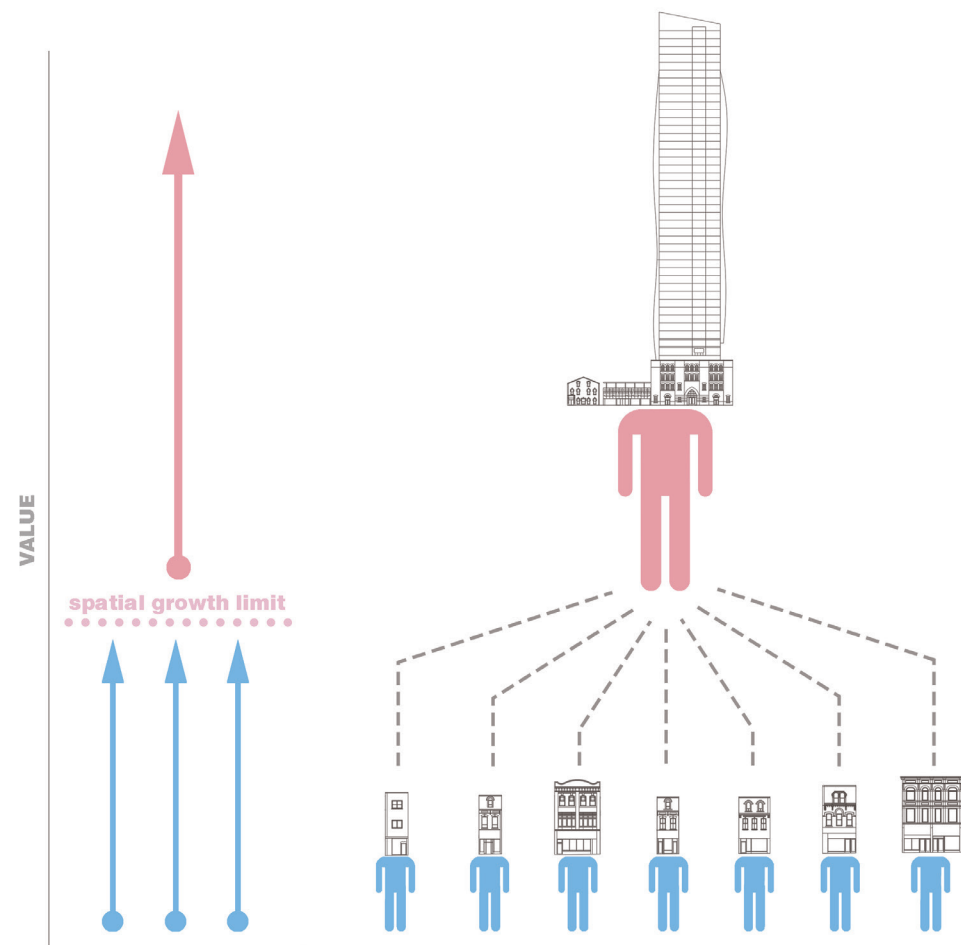


Fig. 10-2  
Transfer of Ownership in a Typical  
Development Process

## The Prospect of Return

The main criticism of the collectivization process lies in the question of motivation- what persuades individual owners to participate in a cooperative process that can be bogged with conflicts, restrictions, and risks? Although there is an aspect of personal values, the comparison between the current mode of development and that of collectivization becomes most lucid in evaluating the payoff for the owners. By rationalizing the prospect for a higher payoff and ownership preservation in the act of collectivizing, it can provide sufficient motivation for participating in the process.

Currently, the payoff for owners exists in one of two possibilities: income through rent and commercial operation, or sale of the property. Considering the underutilization of the existing spaces, especially on the upper levels, as well as the fact that maximum value necessitates a densification process, there is an explicit limitation in the prospect of growth in the first approach.

In reality, the prospect of greatest return exists in the second path where the owner's assessment of profit becomes a function of 'highest-and-best use' not yet realized but made possible through the sale. However, there are two main issues in this process that work in disfavor of the existing owner. For one, for a typical development project which involves multiple properties, it becomes difficult for a single property which does not represent a substantial development potential in itself to have leverage in the negotiation process. The valuation of a property is inevitably depreciated as the developer accounts for current state of building use and various costs and risks associated with development. For instance, risk in acquiring properties, entitlement, and zoning changes; cost of demolition and restoration are all built into the offer as buffered discounts. Secondly, once ownership is relinquished through sale, existing owners and tenants are permanently disassociated with any future potential of the site and the relevant growth in value of their property.

In essence, the dissociation of the existing owners from the development process forces them to compromise for a financial pay-off that is not to their greatest benefit. If owners were provided with an option that allowed densification without having to relinquish their ownership, it would be difficult to imagine owners choosing to sell their property outright.



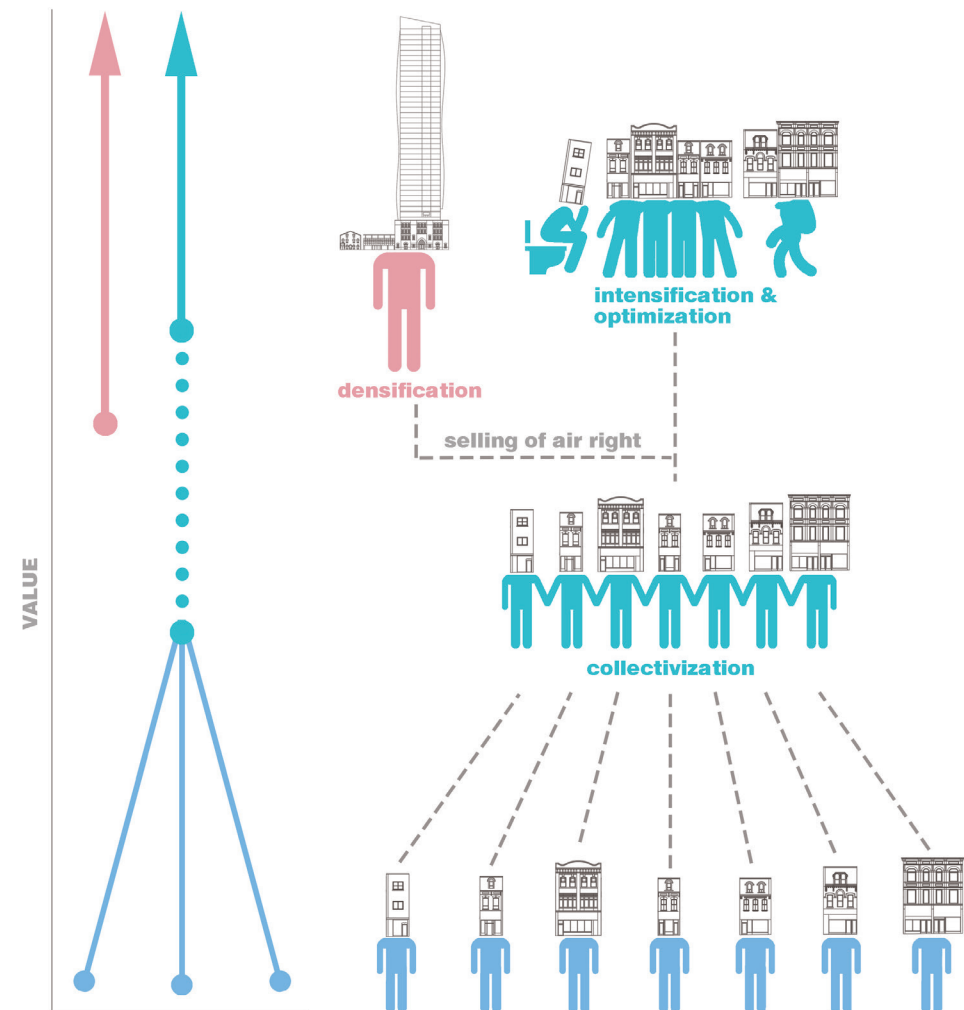


Fig. 10-3  
Proposed Development Process  
Through Collectivization

## Alternative Mode of Development

Formation of the collective opens up alternative possibilities for densification that does not require forfeiture of ownership. In this process, collective air-rights over the properties can be sold to a developer to construct a high-rise over the existing properties with pre-established agreement on location and construction of structural supports.

The selling of collective air-rights creates a win-win situation for the individual owners, the developer, as well as the city. For the existing owners, the threat of displacement is avoided as the process of development does not involve relinquishment of ownership. As such, owners can continue to benefit from the growth in property value, commercial productivity, reduction in taxes, and improved site condition throughout an extended timeframe. Also, the revenue generated from air-right sale as well as the contribution from the developer for site improvements can be directly reinvested in improving the immediate environment through building renovations, construction of common facilities, laneway revitalization, and façade modifications. For individual owners with limited capital, this can prove crucial in improving their economic viability.

For the developers, this process opens the doors to development opportunities that were previously unfeasible as the lengthy process of acquiring properties individually is by-passed, and the cost of podium design and construction, as well as the risks associated with its operation is greatly reduced. Furthermore, having a vibrant collective space that acts as a de facto podium with a diversity of establishments, active public use, and unique architectural language establishes a distinct identity to the tower development which leads to improved value and sales appeal.

The city also stands to benefit from this process as it opens up opportunities for densification of the urban fabric without the typical repercussion of displacement and architectural homogenization. Such increase in developments provides financial returns for the city in the form of an expanded tax base, contributions, and land transfer taxes that capture the growth in land value and utility.

### Existing Ownership

- Avoids displacement as consequence of densification
- Reduction in property taxes as 'highest and best use' assessment is co-shared with air-right development
- Retains surplus value created from densification
- Improved spatial quality and amenities in the immediate surrounding

### Developers

- Avoids complex property acquisition and assemblage process
- Creates opportunities for large scale development in heavily built-up city core
- Reduced community backlash against development
- Removes development and operation cost of podium
- Contributions to the city is more likely to be invested on immediate site as podium level has POPS characteristics
- Vibrant podium level condition

### Government

- Increase in tax base and land value capture through development
- Densification within existing city domain and infrastructure
- Expansion of dedicated pedestrian network
- Preservation of existing urban & architectural characteristics
- Diversification of development methodology

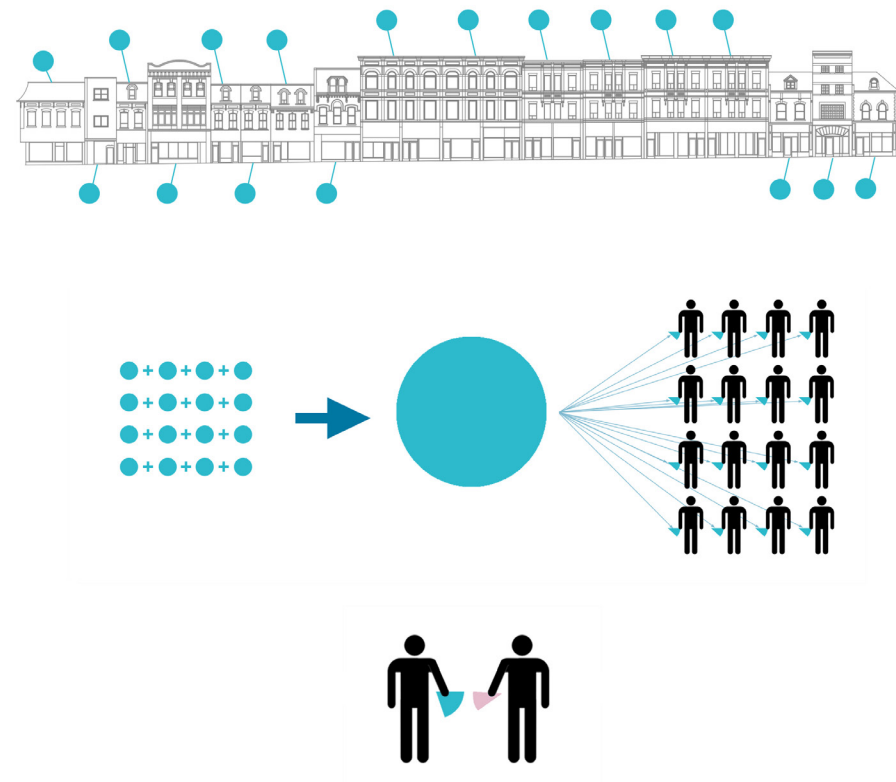


Fig. 10-4  
Collectivization Process

### Collectivization Process

The collective is formed in likeness to a housing co-op, except that it is formed by a group of pre-existing buildings with their respective owners and tenants. In this process, a group of owners and tenants enter into an agreement that amalgamates their rights of ownership into a single body. The consolidated ownership right is then redistributed as shares that grant them the right to use their respective existing space as well as voting rights in the collective decisions. The benefit of transitioning individual ownership rights into a form of shares is that it increases fungibility of space and makes it conducive to transaction processes within the amiable framework of the collective. Spaces can be bought, sold, exchanged, joined, or subdivided across multiple properties with the convenience of rearranging space in a single building.

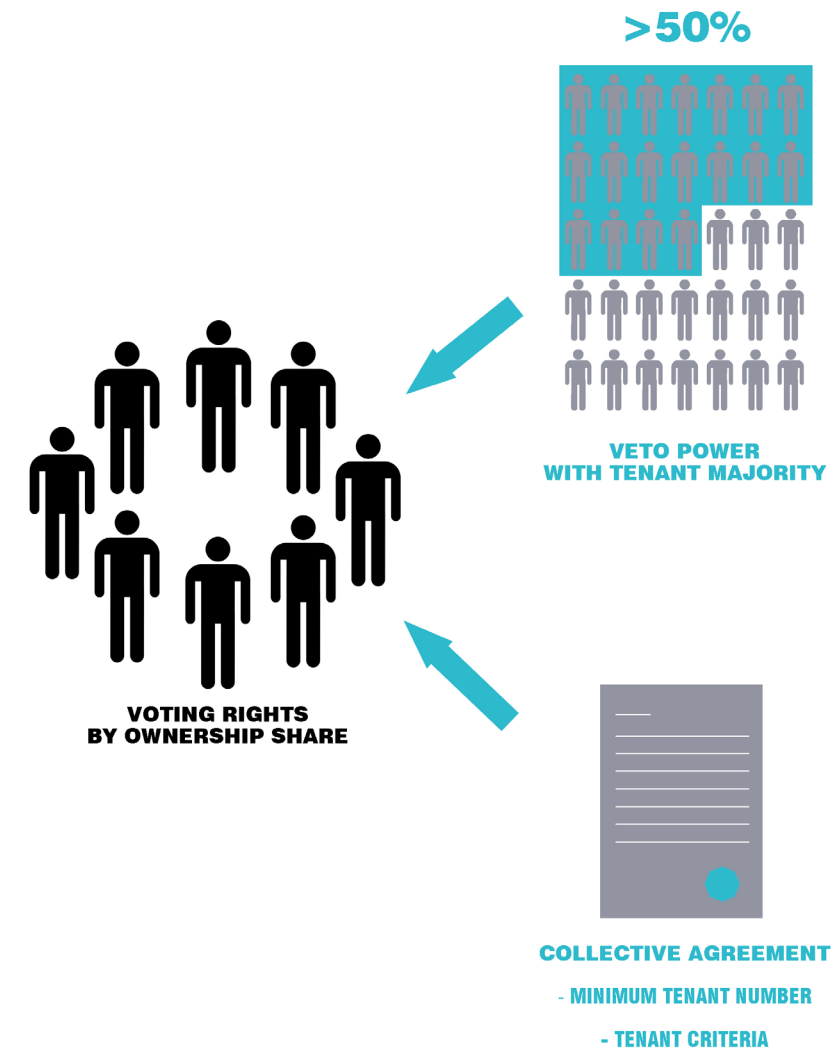


Fig. 10-5  
Protecting the Interest of Tenants

### Mechanisms for Protection of Tenant Interests

Decisions within the collective are made by the board of owners who exercise their voting rights according to the shares they own. With this process there remains the concern that the owners will simply repeat the gentrification process, opting to homogenize the building space and lease to large-scale corporate tenants as the property value rises. To mitigate this concern, the collective endows tenants with veto power if a majority is reached within the board of tenants. While tenants do not participate in the typical decision-making process of the collective, they retain the power to prevent actions they deem as critical infringements of their rights and characteristic of the collective.

In addition to this mechanism, a clause of tenant criteria and a minimum number of tenants is established in the collective agreement. This acts as to discourage the entrance of franchise tenants and indiscriminate consolidation of spaces. When consolidation of space does occur within the collective, this clause offsets its impact by requiring additional small-scale tenants, thereby maintaining an overall balance in tenant diversity.



The objective of the collective is to alleviate the impact of the Three-D's in the following ways:

### **Delimit- Urban form and Landscape**

1. *Uniformity of motion and perception is alleviated by creating an alternative urban public thoroughfare that diversifies the range of movement, vantage points, and uses.*
2. *Creates a distinct 'place' with defined physical boundaries, closures, and intensified experience that breaks away from the perpetual extension of grid based spaces.*
3. *Mimics the experiential intensity of interiorized spaces such as shopping malls while retaining the diversity and autonomy of existing tenant body.*

### **Deter – Regulations**

1. *Expands the domain of spatial expression from the heavily regulated street faces to the rear lane way space where more liberties are afforded in terms of spatial expression and accommodated activities.*
2. *Loosens regulatory elements by approaching the collective of buildings like a single building; for instance, parti-walls between property boundaries become more akin to simple spatial separations*

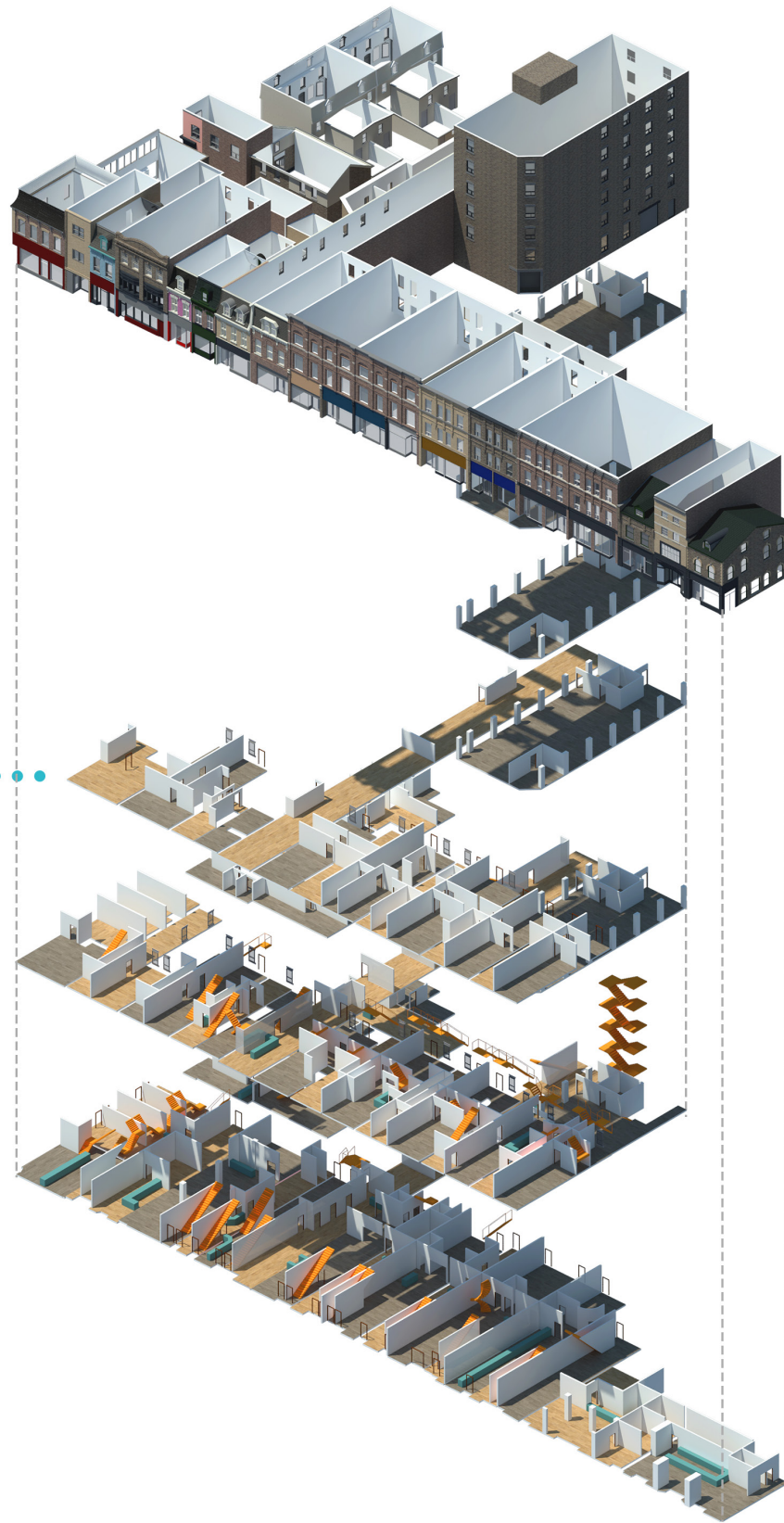
### **Dominate – Subjugation of Ownership**

1. *Urban fabric avoids monopolization of space through land assembly and retains the current mixture of small size lots and ownerships.*
2. *Demolition and displacement of existing buildings and ownership is avoided as densification can occur concurrently with preservation of existing low-rise buildings*
3. *Owners and tenants are directly involved in the decision making process of the collective.*
4. *Economic potential of individual properties are increased through opportunities created by additional scale and cooperative actions.*

## **11.1/ Spatial Argument**

The spatial benefit of collectivization occurs as a two part process: optimization of existing space use, and activation of neglected spaces. The process of optimization ensures that currently available space is used to its full capacity while maintaining minimum resource expenditure. The subsequent process of activation involves architectural transformation and utilization of latent spaces to create surplus economic productivity.

building envelope .....



3rd floor .....

2nd floor .....

ground floor .....

Fig. 10-6  
Exploded Axonometric  
View of Existing Build-  
ings.

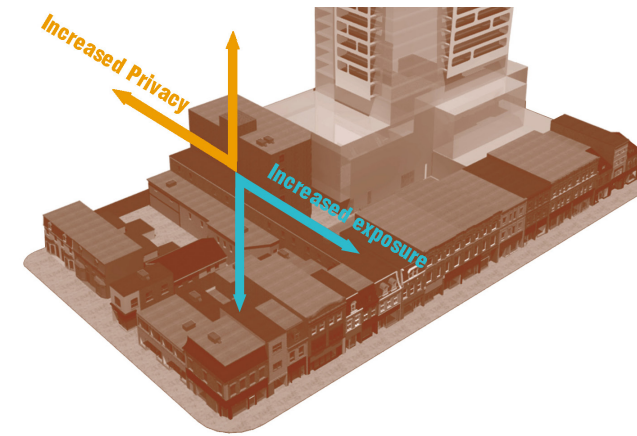
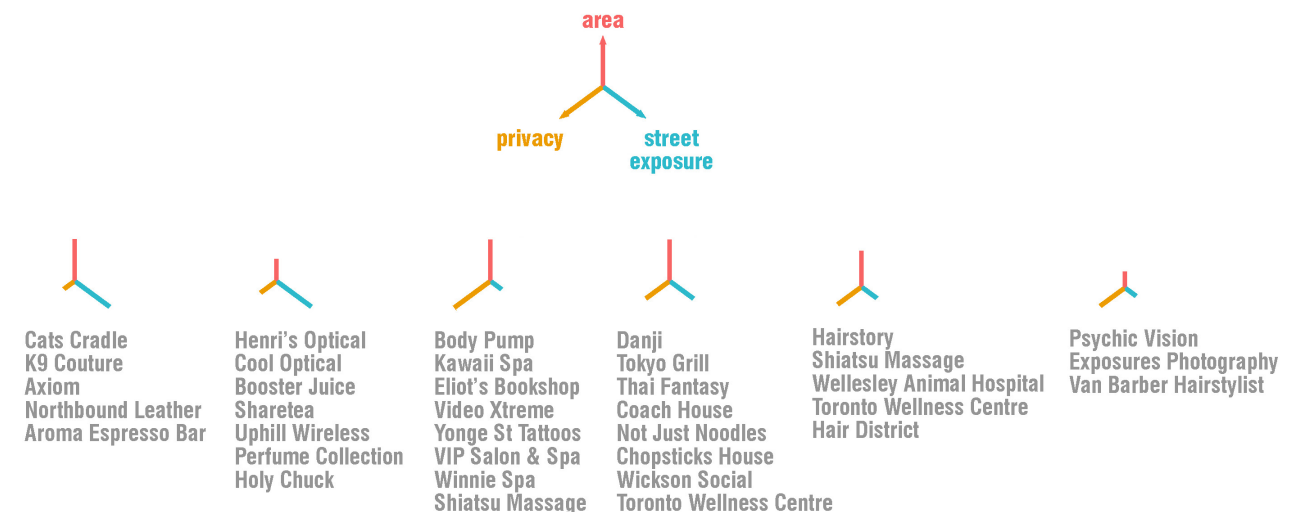


Fig. 10-7  
Evaluation of Spatial  
Needs By Tenant



### Diversity of Spatial Arrangements

The existing provision of space is primarily determined by building form, which in turn is governed by the form factor of the property boundary. The standard arrangement of deep and narrow lots ultimately produces building and tenant spaces that are generic, irrespective of their current and potential use. The spatial and economic inefficiency caused by the inability to respond to the diverse spatial needs of the tenant severely detracts from the ability to establish *imageability*.

To illustrate the inefficiency of generic spatial provision, evaluation of spatial needs of the existing tenants were hypothesized against the metrics of privacy, floor area, and direct street exposure. Several assumptions were made in organizing the tenants. Full retail programs are more likely to seek increased floor area and street exposure. Light retail, food, and service tenants such as optical or take-out beverage stores prefer street exposure but does not require as much space as full retail. Office space and service programs such as fitness centre, massage parlours, and adult media can sacrifice street exposure for increased privacy and floor area. On top of these basic assumptions, additional calibrations were made to compensate for the specificity of each tenant. For instance, Van Barber Hairstylist and Hair Story, while both being hair salons, are very different in their needs due to the scale of their operations.

While the analysis is based on limited criteria and assumptions, the key intention is to identify the diversity of needs and characteristics of the tenants and juxtapose it against the homogenized provision of space.



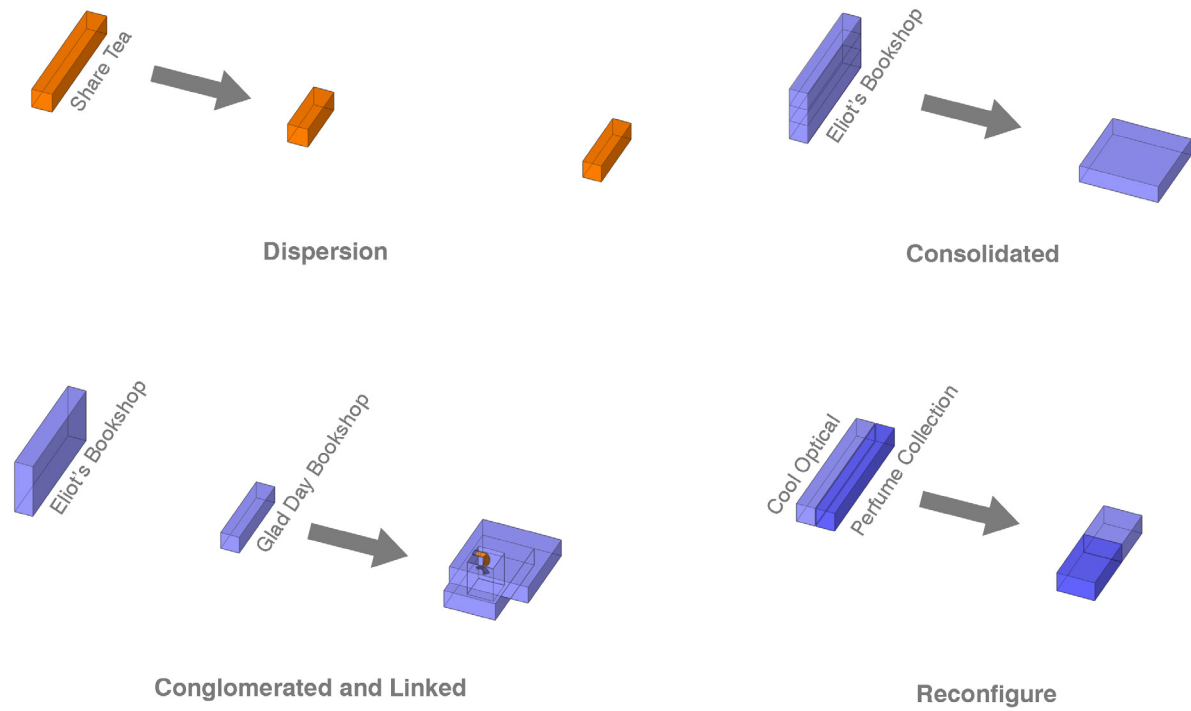


Fig. 10-8  
Optimization of Spatial Form Through  
Transaction of Usage Rights

### Optimization: Self-Guided Rearrangements

Spatial transactions and cooperation within the collective can respond to the current generic provision of space through an iterative process of optimization. Several outcomes can be hypothesized that both increases spatial diversity while increasing economic performance:

1. Light retail tenants that do not require as much space but seeks maximum street exposure may opt to subdivide into multiple locations with reduced footprint.
2. Existing tenants spread across multiple levels can consolidate into a single level floor space allowing for more efficient layout.
3. Synergistic programs can relocate to be in proximity to one another, creating opportunities for connection and complementary activities.
4. Programs restricted by deep and narrow form factor can rearrange their spaces to establish a more suitable floor space, optimizing use and opening opportunities for other types of programs.
5. Tenants can form conglomerates which strengthens collective identity and increases convenience of choice and access.

The product of such processes can ultimately diversify the form and use of space in the absence of central design body and concentrated resource expenditure.

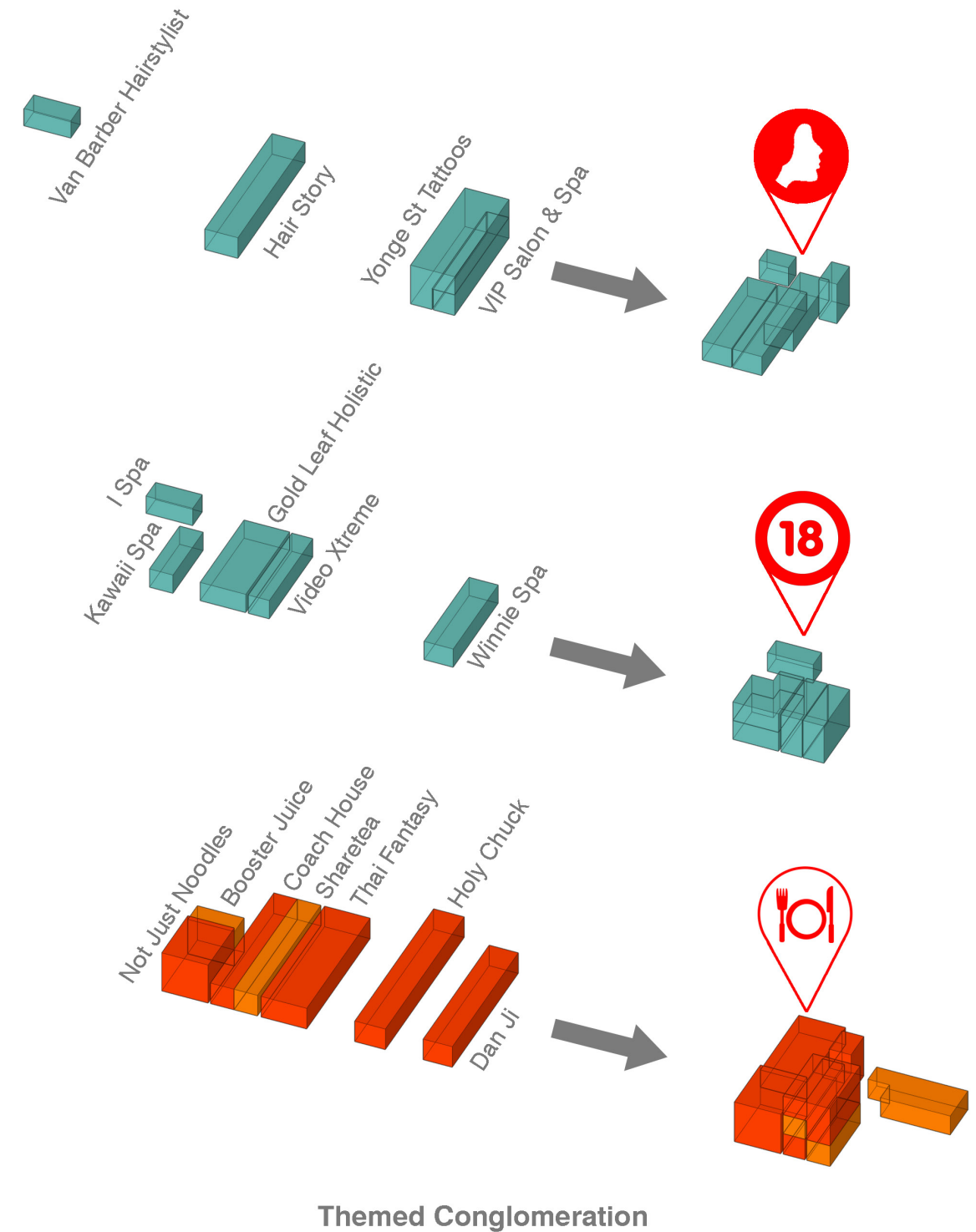


Fig. 10-9  
Formation of Tenant  
Conglomerates

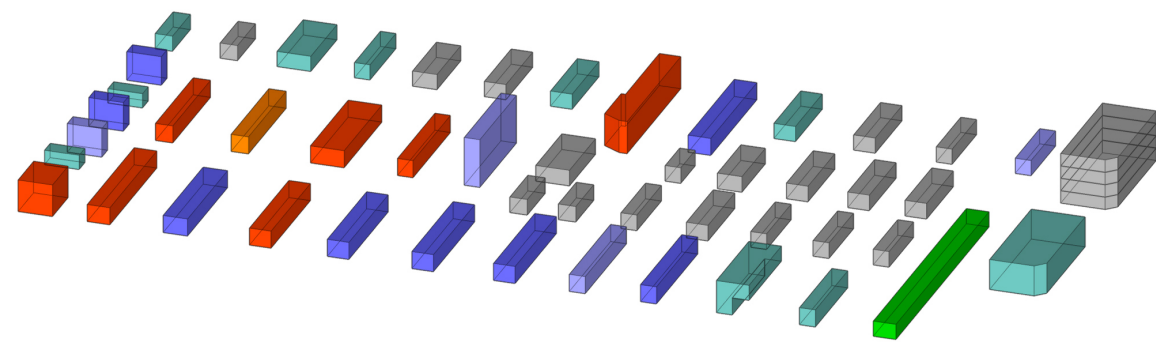
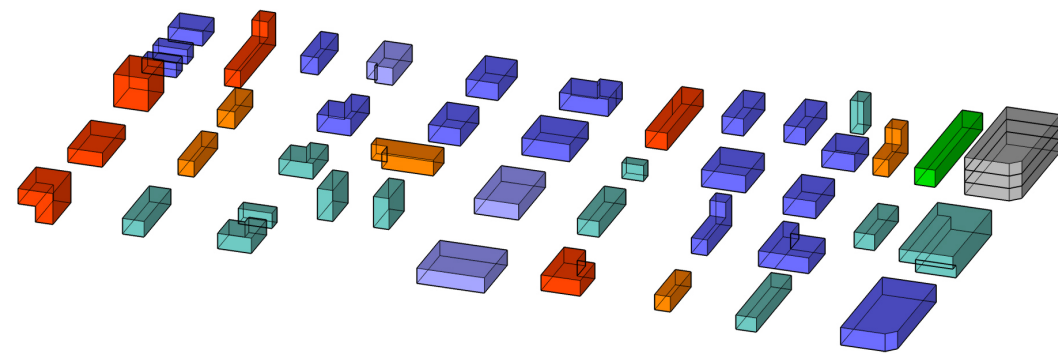


Fig. 10-10  
Existing Condition of  
Generic Tenant Spaces



- Food Services
- Light Food Services
- Retail
- Light Retail
- Service
- Office

Fig. 10-11  
Diversification of Tenant  
Spaces Resulting from  
Optimization Process

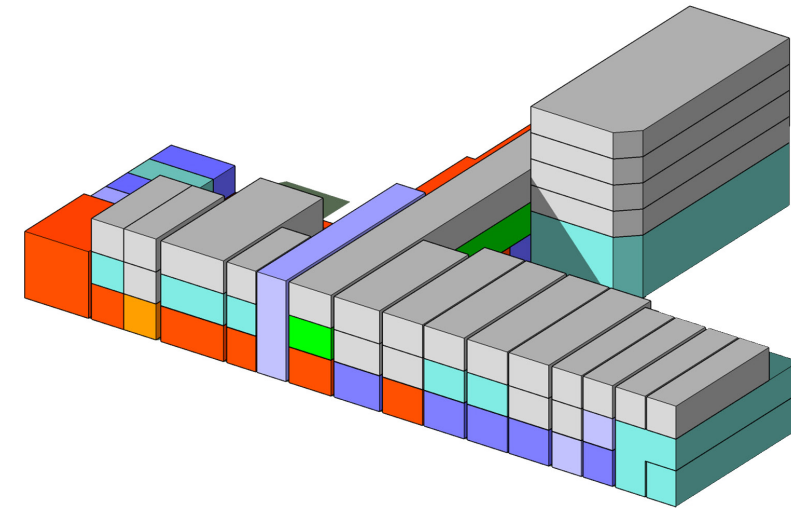


Fig. 10-12  
Existing Arrangement of  
Tenant Spaces

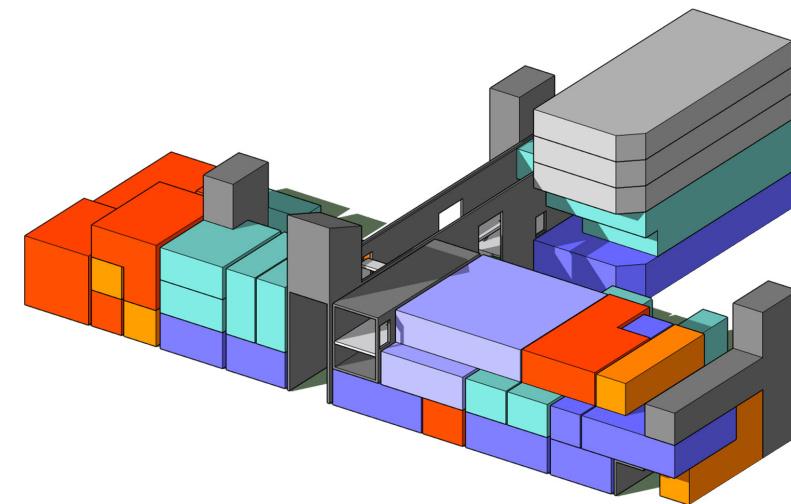


Fig. 10-13  
Post Optimization  
Arrangement of Tenant  
Spaces

While the exterior envelope of the buildings, especially the heritage facade facing Yonge, remains mostly intact, the internal use of space is drastically improved and optimised. Compared to the ubiquitous rectilinear spaces of the existing condition, the floor plate of each tenant now responds to the individual programmatic needs and offers variety of spatial conditions; conglomerates of establishments are formed by programmatic synergies, retailers obtain larger storefronts and better proportioned footprints, adult services are centralized and made more private, and the upper levels are made more accessible which improves their commercial viability and leads to drastic increase in the number of tenants.



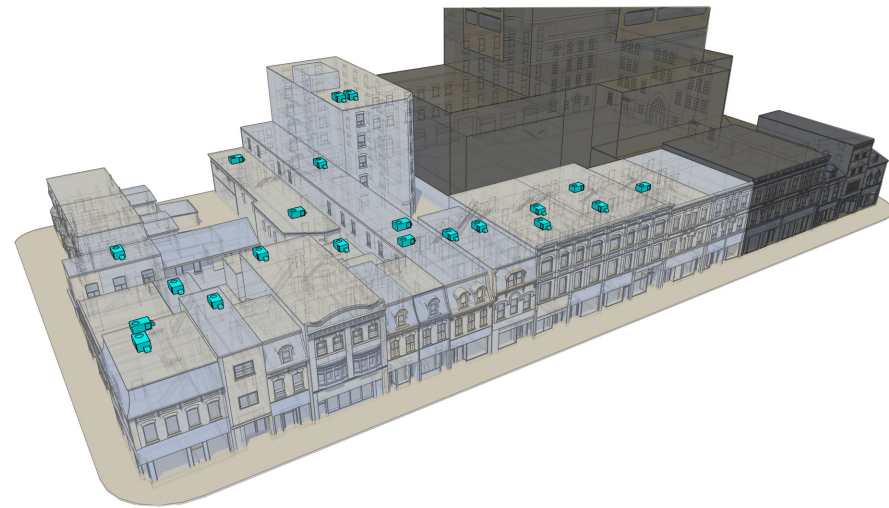


Fig. 10-14  
Existing and Proposed  
Location of RTUs

### Consolidation of RTU

Currently, only street-level spaces are serviced by HVAC units that are located at the rear of the building. The second and third level of the building rely on natural ventilation and window mounted AC units to meet their HVAC needs which diminishes their usability and appeal as leasable space. Consolidation of existing as well as provision of additional HVAC units into centralized locations frees up the rooftop area as well as rear facing walls for modification while also providing enough capacity to service the upper levels for an active commercial program.



Fig. 10-15  
Existing and Proposed  
Location of Refuse  
Storage

### Refuse Storage

The existing refuse storage and collection is located at the rear of each building facing the service laneway. Not only does this occupy space within the building, but the continuous presence of collection bins and the concomitant odour makes the laneway a place of neglect and disuse. Instead, refuse storage can be consolidated into a single location that is shared with the FIVE condo building. While the collective benefits from having the refuse stored off the immediate site, the FIVE condo also benefits from improved site conditions as it frees up the laneway spaces for active use and improvements.

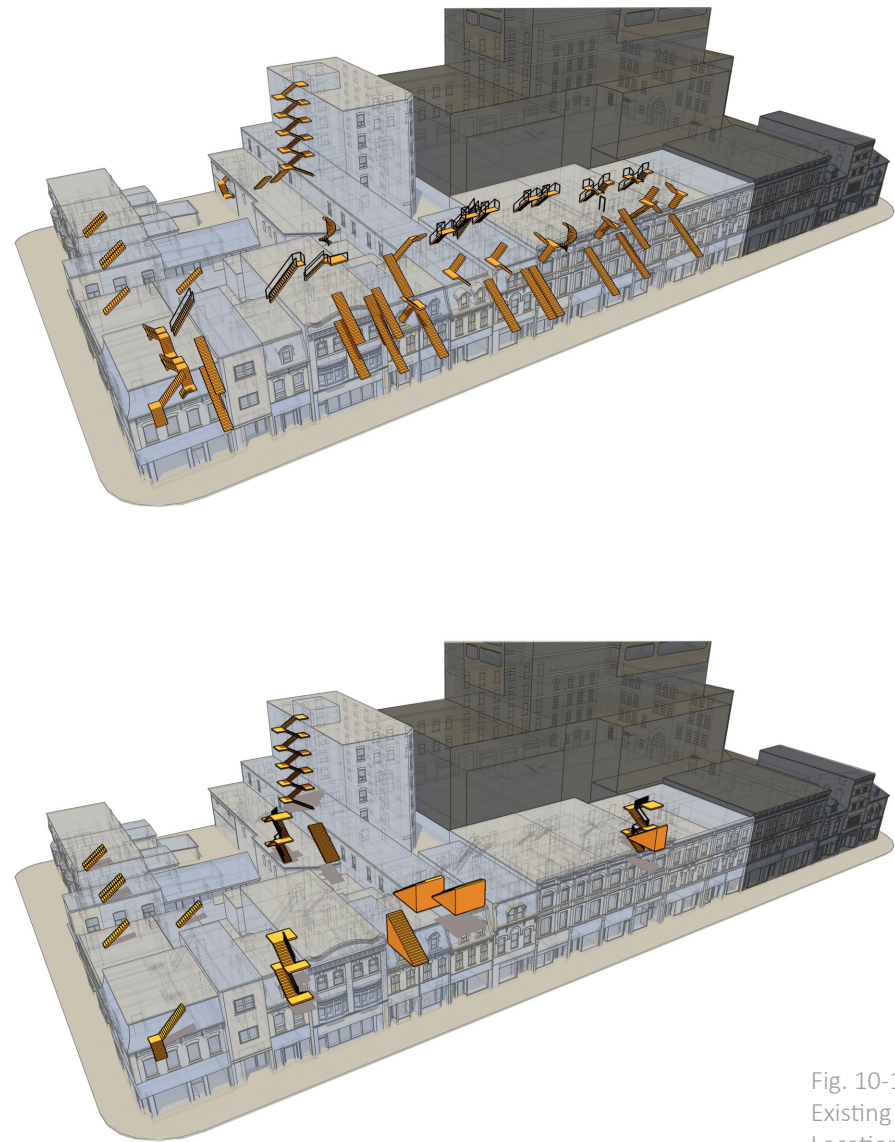


Fig. 10-16  
Existing and Proposed  
Location of Stairs

### Consolidation of Stairs

The presence of over 40 staircases distributed throughout the site along with respective corridors that connect them, account for a vast percentage of the floor space and building facade that cannot be used productively. A typical building on site with 3 to 7-meter wide street frontage dedicates at least 1.2 meters of its facade for stair access, which greatly diminishes the amount of street level commercial exposure.

Despite the massive number of available stairs, the minimum exiting requirement based on retail occupant load of existing building floor area requires only a total of 3.5 meters of stair width on the second level and 3.2 meters of stair width on the third level to fulfil its requirements. This signifies an enormous reduction from the 25.3 meters and 22 meters of combined stair width that is currently provided in the buildings. Consolidation of exit stairs to three locations based on code regulated travel distance of 45 meters satisfies exiting capacity while freeing up floor space and rear building face that are dedicated to stairs and related circulation paths.

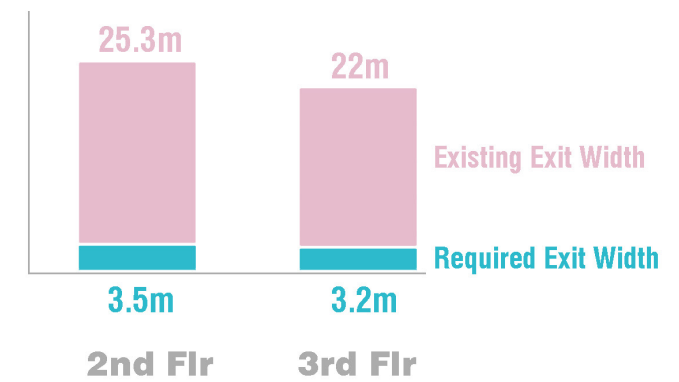
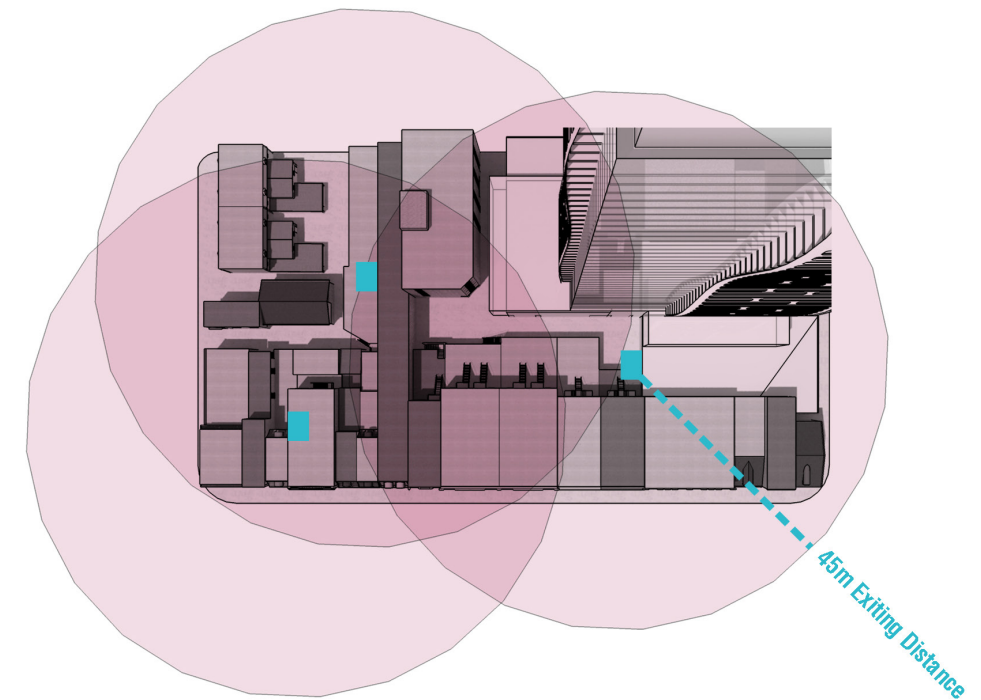


Fig. 10-17  
Travel Distance and Exit  
Load Capacity Analysis



**Activation:  
Freeing up the Laneway**

Spatial optimization through consolidating stairs, RTUs, and refuse storage lays the groundwork for the second stage of intervention by freeing up the rear laneway for improvements. The activation of the laneway space is vital in that it serves several functions in improving the spatial *imageability* of the collective.

First, it provides an alternative urban corridor with spatial qualities that are more receptive to pedestrian use. Unlike the limited width of existing sidewalk that does not allow people to linger, the rear laneway provides a dedicated pedestrians corridor with varying widths, enclosures, and pocket spaces to accommodate a much wider range of activities. This is also in line with Toronto’s urban design objectives that seek to enhance mid-block pedestrian circulation paths and reduce the pedestrian load on the existing sidewalk systems.

Spatially, the break from the grid-based organization diversifies the range of urban experience as the narrowness of the laneway, and the proximity of buildings on all sides amplifies the feeling of intimacy and shelteredness that is absent in the broad linear space of Yonge Street. Also, the culmination of irregularity of the path, presence of multiple access points, diversity of vantage points, and niche spaces promote a wide range of movements and perceptions which improve the imageability of individual properties by varying how people experience buildings and their context. Larry Ford describes in *The Spaces Between Buildings*,

*“The sense of anticipation associated with wondering what is around the next corner also may heighten the role of architecture in giving character to space. People tend to pay attention to buildings. Where streets are long and straight, however, distant views of clouds and sky can diminish the impact of buildings”*<sup>2</sup>

For the individual properties, the public use of the laneway drastically increases exposure of establishments by extending the duration of stay and making the rear face of building commercially viable. At the same time, it allows increased spatial interactions by facilitating spill-overs between interior and exterior spaces which is more genuine to the traditional function of streets,

*“In most traditional cities, before the common use of vehicles, the street was an extension of the buildings that faced it. People sat in chairs in front of their homes, and businesses displayed goods on rugs and tables in the street. With the rise of horse-drawn and then motorized vehicles, the street became less a part of the community and more of a place for transient strangers, people passing through.”*<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 10-18  
Extent of Activated Laneway and  
Connections to Yonge Street

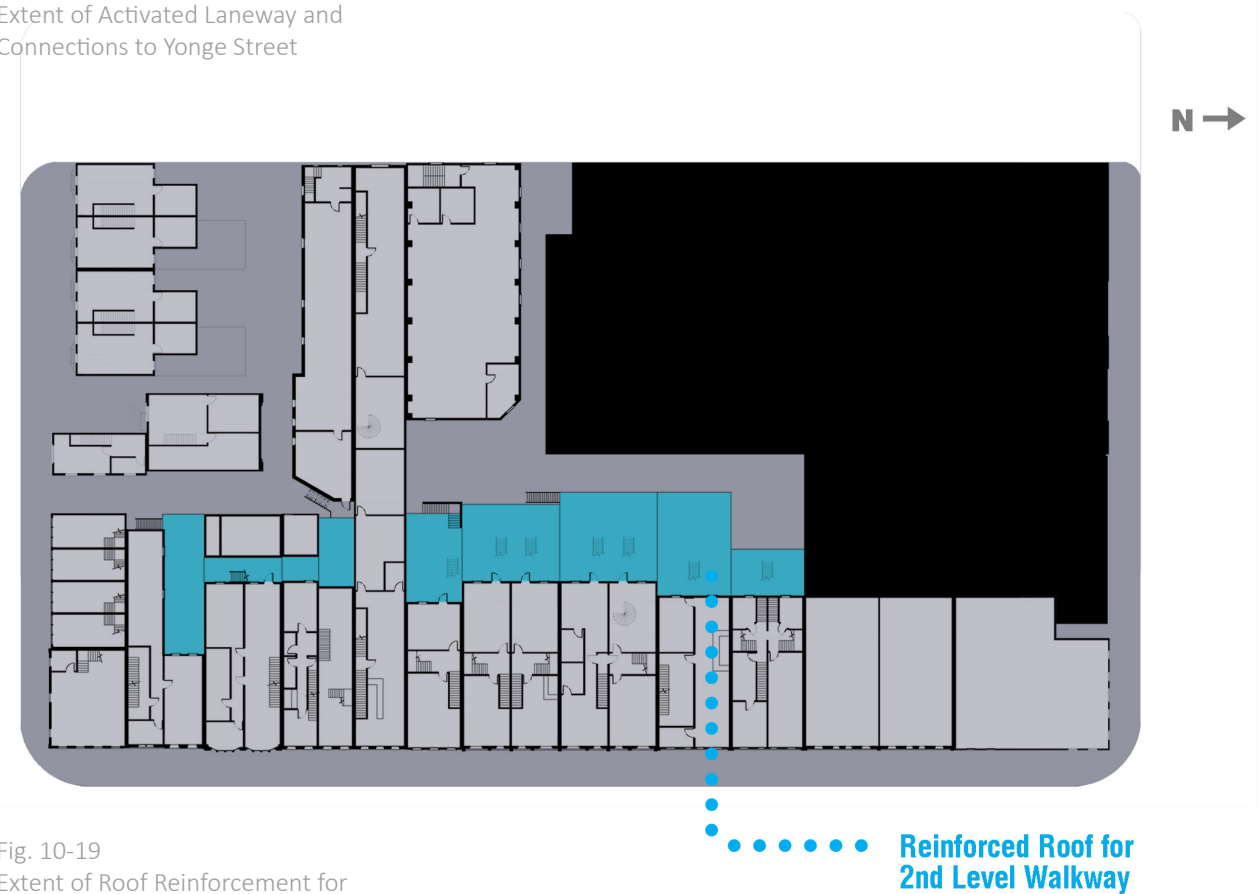


Fig. 10-19  
Extent of Roof Reinforcement for  
2nd Level Walkway





Fig. 10-20  
North West Laneway  
Access Through Service  
Tunnel

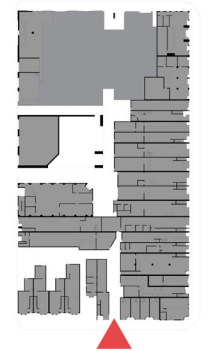


Fig. 10-22  
South Laneway Access  
From Wellesley Street

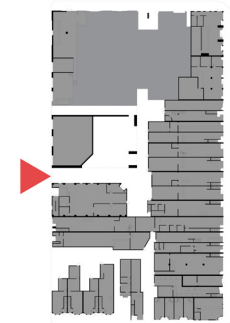


Fig. 10-21  
South West Laneway  
Access

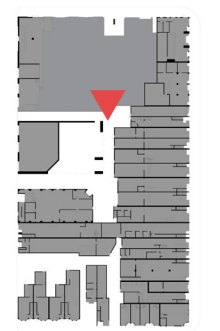


Fig. 10-23  
View of Laneway from  
North End



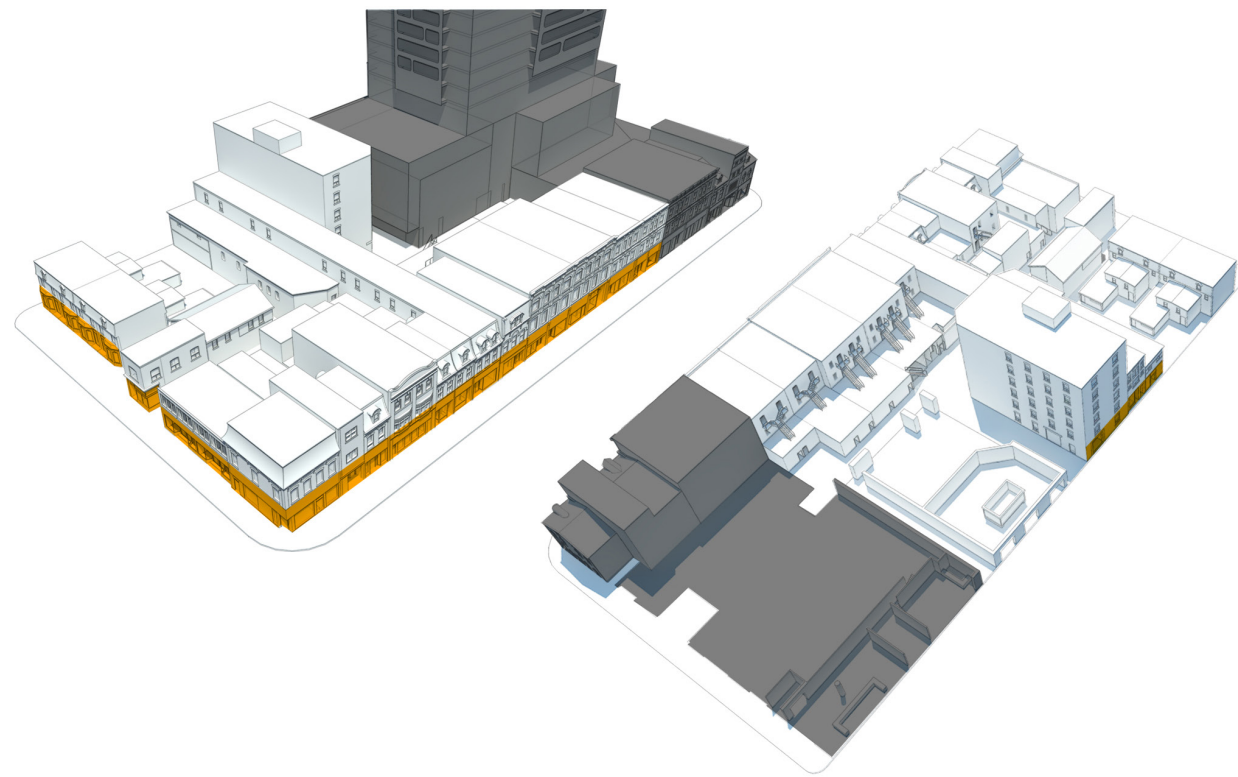


Fig. 10-24  
Existing Extent of  
Commercially Viable  
Frontage

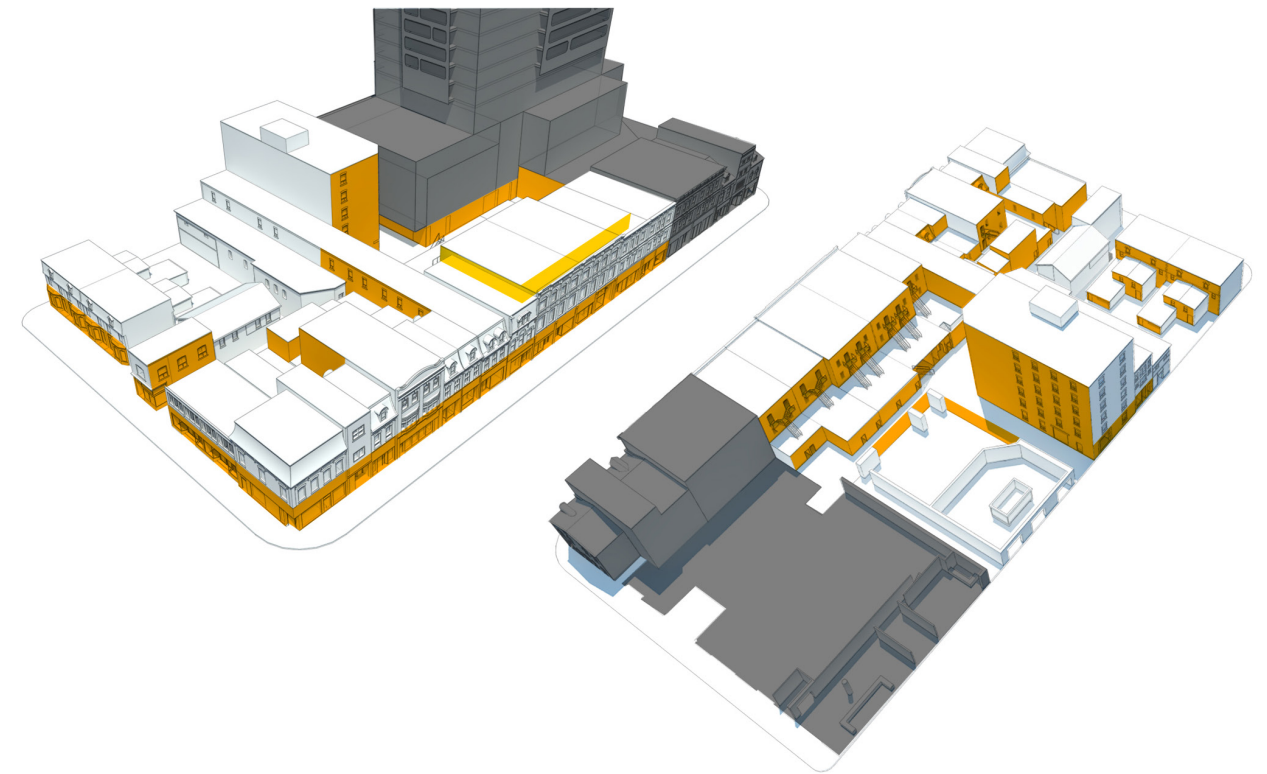


Fig. 10-25  
Activated Commercially  
viable Frontage

## Viable Commercial Frontage

Economic performance of a commercial property is largely dependent on its level of exposure and accessibility from a public thoroughfare. In the case of our site, which is absent of substantial parking or direct access to public-transit, 173 meters of sidewalk that runs along Wellesley Street and Yonge Street corridor define the extent of commercial frontage. Even when space exists in the immediate vicinity of the site, if it does not have access to these public thoroughfares, its utility and value are immediately diminished. Considering the tremendous pedestrian traffic in the area, which ranges from approximately 90,000 to 160,000 people per week, the lack of commercial frontage and means of access acts as the primary bottleneck in realizing the full economic potential of available space. To put the level of underutilization into perspective, a typical three-storey property on a 4.5 meter wide and 25-meter deep lot, utilizes only about 3 percent of its vertical surface area for active commercial use, whether it is through storefronts or signage.

By activating the laneway and the second level roof space as an extension of the pedestrian thoroughfare, the amount of commercial exposure is greatly increased. The rear faces of buildings, on all levels, that were previously neglected can now become the focal point of commercial activity as it is made visible and directly accessible. This potential is enhanced by the fact that the rear faces of the buildings are not under the stringent architectural restrictions that are imposed on the heritage facade facing Yonge Street. Hence, owners have increased freedom to modify the building face and add signage as means of self-expression.

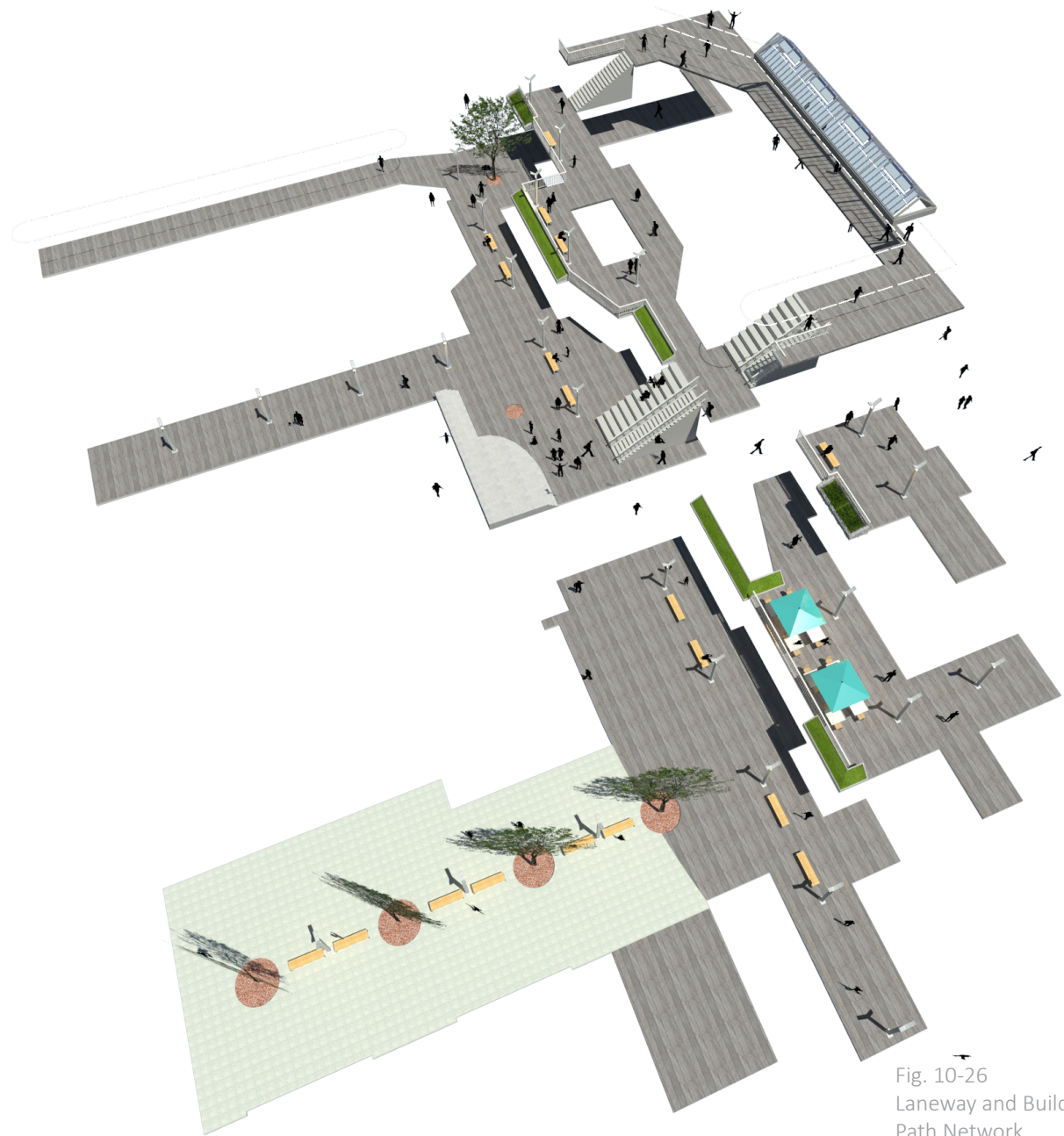


Fig. 10-26  
Laneway and Building  
Path Network

The isolated view of the proposed pathway system illustrates the quality of streetscape that can be achieved, even with minimal improvements in pavers, planters, and street furnitures. Despite the simplicity of the improvements, the spatial features of varying widths, hidden turns, and vertical positions inherent in the path affords a diverse range of perceptive experiences that is scarcely found in the typical sidewalk system of Toronto. In addition, the strategic placement of stairs establishes loops and cul-de-sacs in likeness to the design of shopping malls to provide people with the option to linger within the space without having to stop or retrace one's path. The variety of spatial moments, approaches, and vantage points means that pedestrians can begin to appreciate the volumetric qualities of the space and form spatial narratives as they walk along the path.

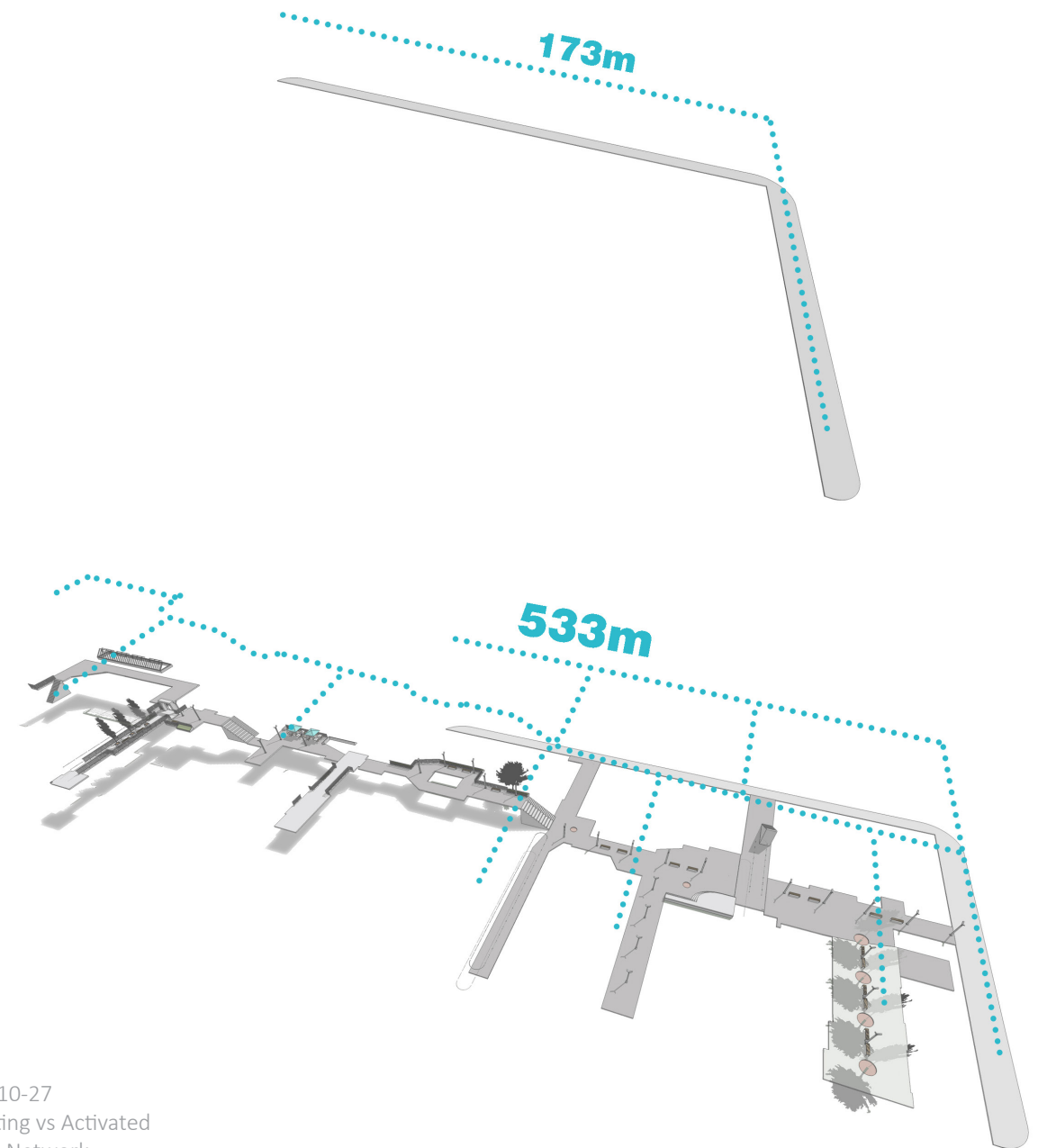


Fig. 10-27  
Existing vs Activated  
Path Network

When the proposed path is unravelled and juxtaposed against the extent of existing pedestrian path along Yonge Street and Wellesley Street, it is easy to perceive not only the drastic scalar increase in the commercial frontage but also the qualitative improvement in the walking experience.



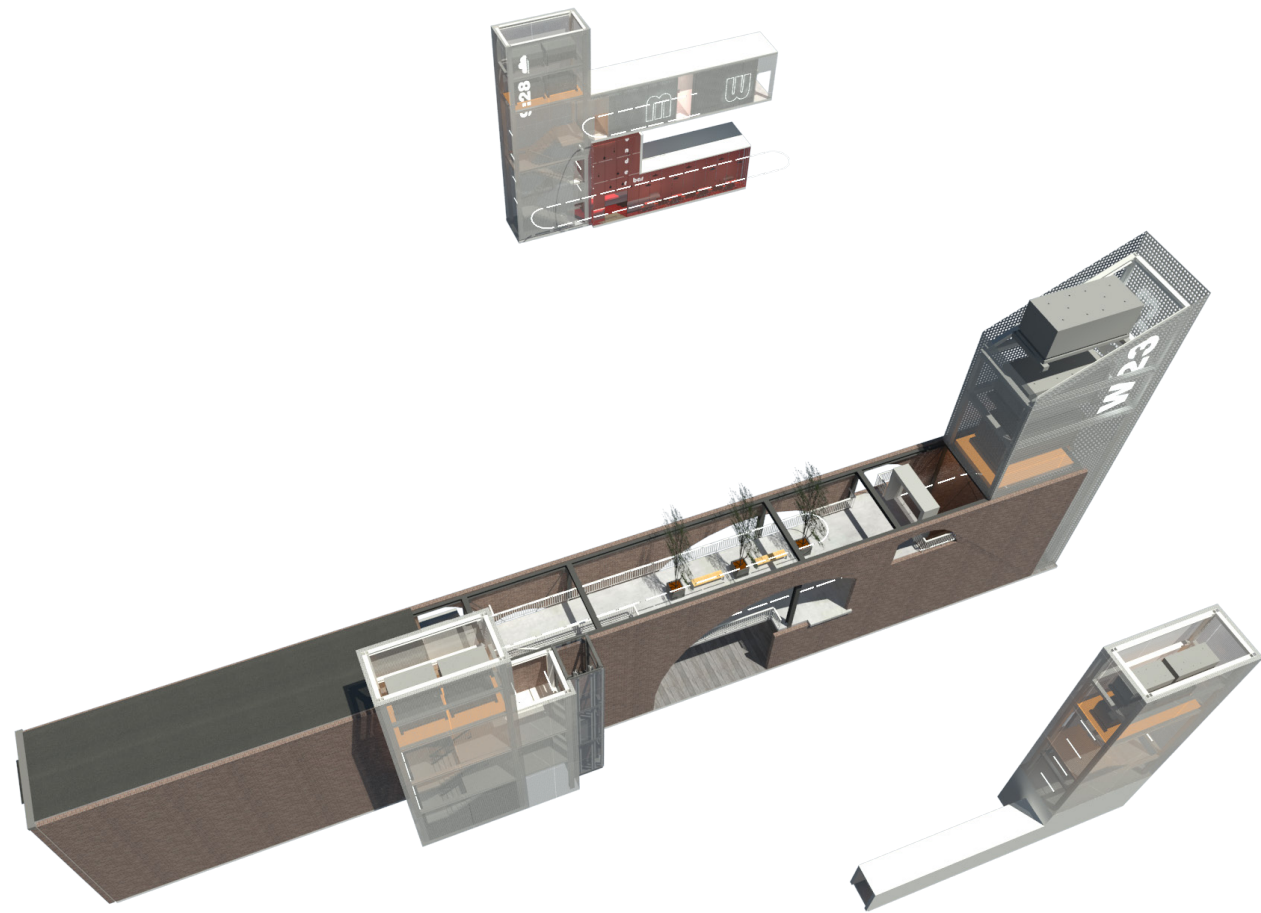


Fig. 10-28  
New Access/Exit Structures with RTUs

The four exit & mechanical service tower structures are the only new architectural elements built by the collective. The consistent architectural language of these towers adds an element of design coherence to the collective space while also identifying locations of major public facilities such as fire-exits, entrances, elevators, and washrooms. The largest and the most important of these towers is located at the centre, providing access from Yonge street in an East-West axis that cuts perpendicularly across the dominant North-South orientation of the block and the laneway. This is achieved by integrating an existing building to facilitate pedestrian traffic via wall & roof openings, stair connections, new floor structure, and street furnitures that carry-over the language of the exterior pathway into the semi-interior. The tower element protrudes above the adjacent roof-line with a contrasting industrial aesthetic and bold signage, serving as a visible landmark from Yonge street and signals the presence of a distinct 'place' hidden within.

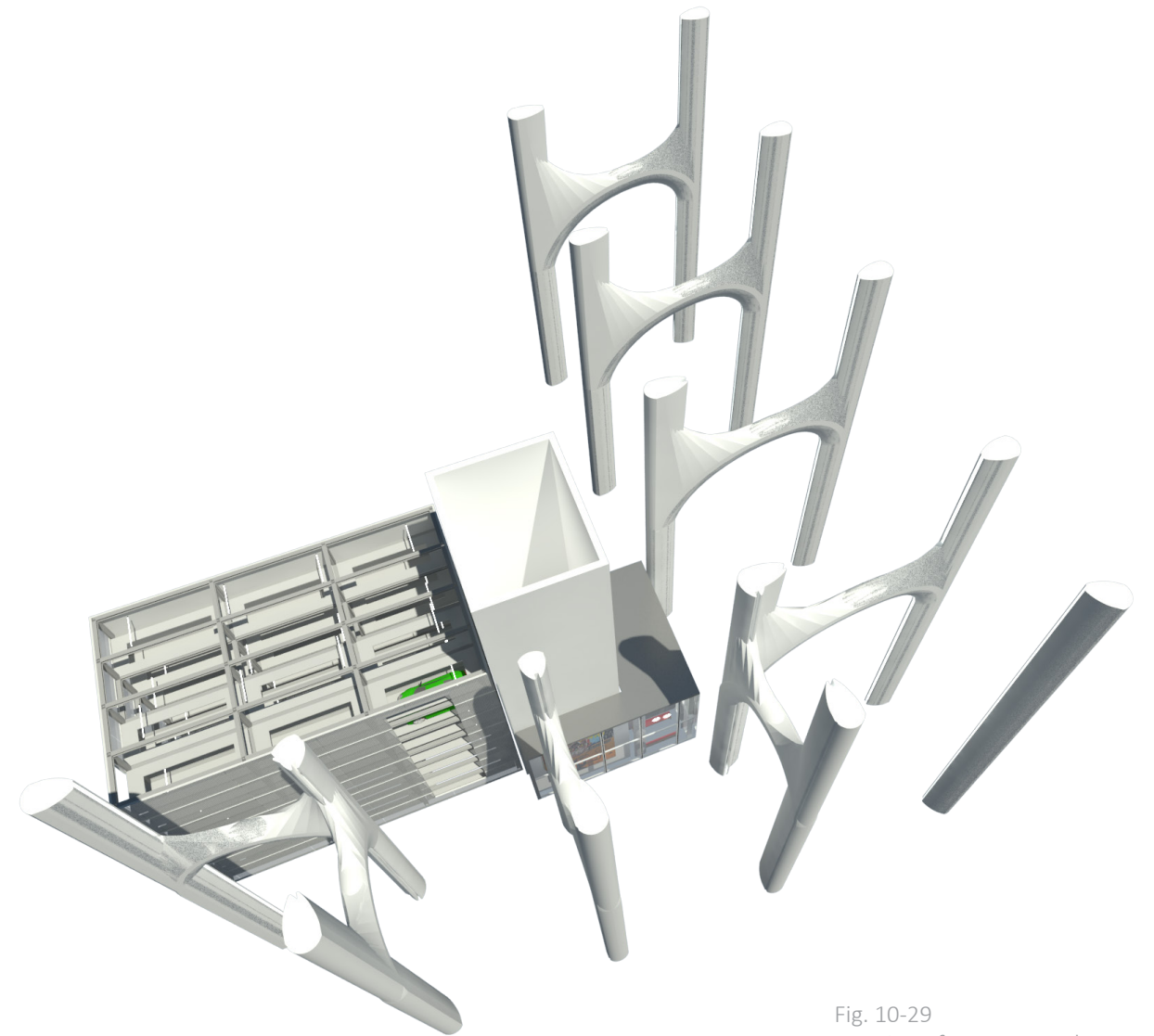


Fig. 10-29  
Location of Structure Columns, Parking Garage, and Entrance Lobby for Highrise Development

The air-right developer is responsible for the coordination and construction of three elements on the ground level: entrance core, parking structure, and structural columns. To minimize the impact on the existing properties, these elements are kept as far back as possible so that the required demolition is isolated to two buildings at the rear of the block facing St Nicholas Street and single storey extensions on the back of buildings facing Yonge Street. Because the columns run along the laneway path to create an arcade like condition, their design is coordinated with the collective so that they can serve as an integral part of the architectural language of the site.

## Parking Space

A major point of difficulty in air-right development is the provision for parking spaces, which in a typical development is accommodated through underground parking. Nonetheless, the recent trend towards a decreased demand for parking can argue in favour of a significant reduction in parking requirement for urban core developments.

The provision of parking spots in new developments has been steadily decreasing in Toronto. Whereas the zoning by-law would require a unit to parking ratio of approximately 0.6, a study by Canadian Parking Association in 2015 indicates that an average unit-to-parking ratio of 0.21 to 0.37 is sufficient to satisfy the current needs of the residents. According to this study, approvals for new condo developments in Toronto between 2010 and 2015 were successful in reducing the requirement down to a ratio of 0.20 to 0.45.<sup>4</sup> Also, the average cost of a parking spot in a downtown condo has increased dramatically from \$27,500 in 2007 to \$51,376 in 2015<sup>5</sup>, increasing at a rate much faster than the cost of a dwelling unit and making the prospect of owning a parking spot that much more unattractive.

The decrease in demand for parking spots will likely accelerate in the near future in accordance with declining car ownership in millennials and adoption of car-share programs and autonomous vehicles. To estimate the level of change, a report by independent research group RethinkX predicts that car ownership in the US will decline by 80% by 2030, reducing the number of vehicles from 247 million to 44 million.<sup>6</sup>

Several development projects in Canada have already paved the way for the major reduction and even total elimination of parking. The RCMI Residence on 426 University Avenue provides zero parking spots for 315 units, opting to provide nine car-share stalls instead. Likewise, N3 condo in Calgary also provides no parking for its 168 units.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of our site, its location along a major urban corridor and its proximity to Wellesley Subway Station can act as leverage in reducing the parking requirement. Even in status quo, a hypothetical 300 unit condo with a minimum ratio of 0.34 for 6-to-4 mixture of bachelor and 1 bedroom units, it would only require 102 parking stalls. Furthermore, tandem application of Policy Area 1 (PA1) Parking Space Reduction for Bicycle Parking Spaces section of the by-law can reduce the requirement by another 20% in exchange for five bicycle stalls per parking reduced, bringing the total down to 82.

With consideration for the pilot-project nature of the proposed development and minimum unit-to-parking ratio of 0.2, the design will assume the provision of 60 parking stalls. These stalls will be facilitated by an above-ground automated parking carousels in order to reduce footprint, cost, and construction time.

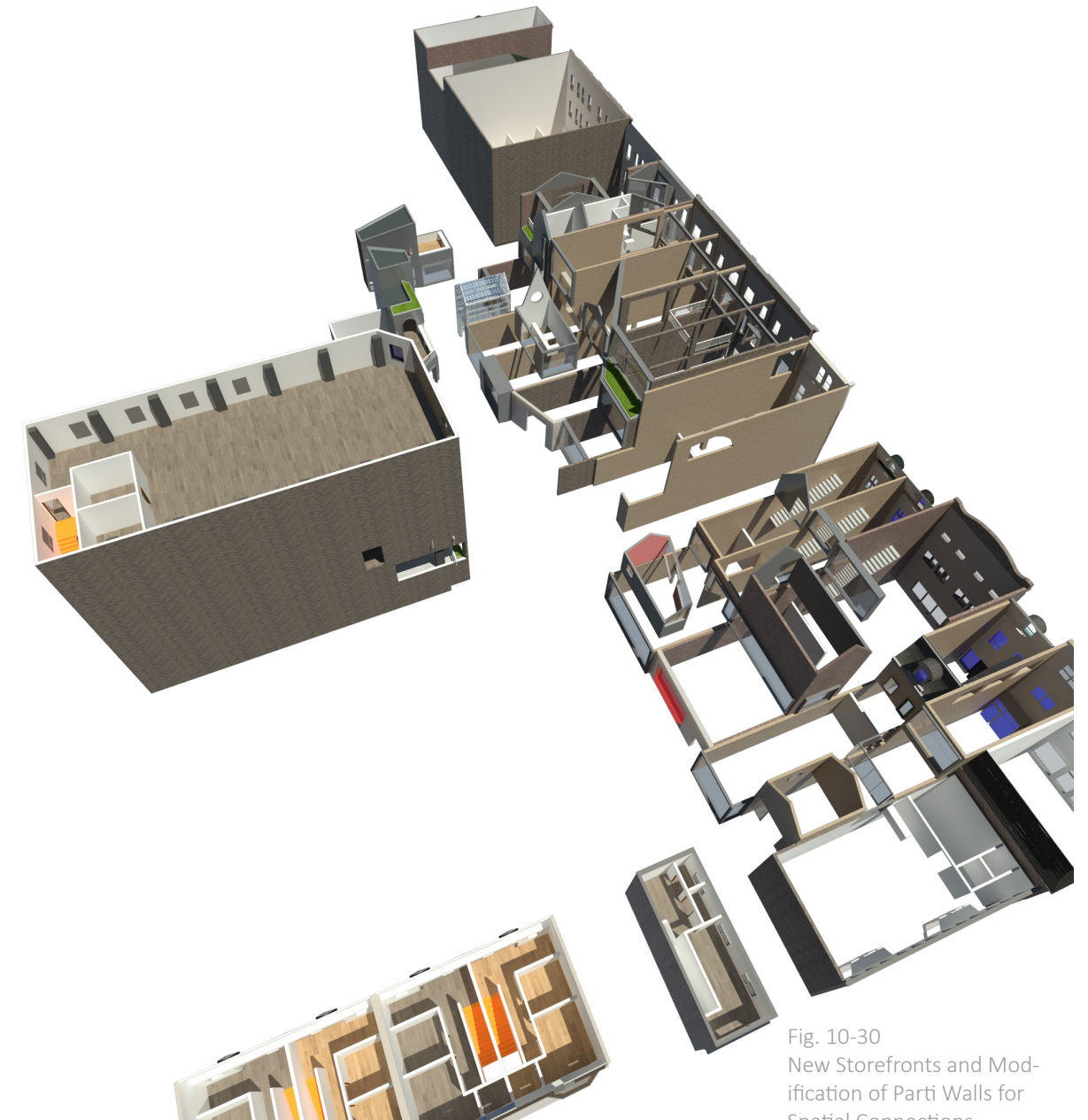


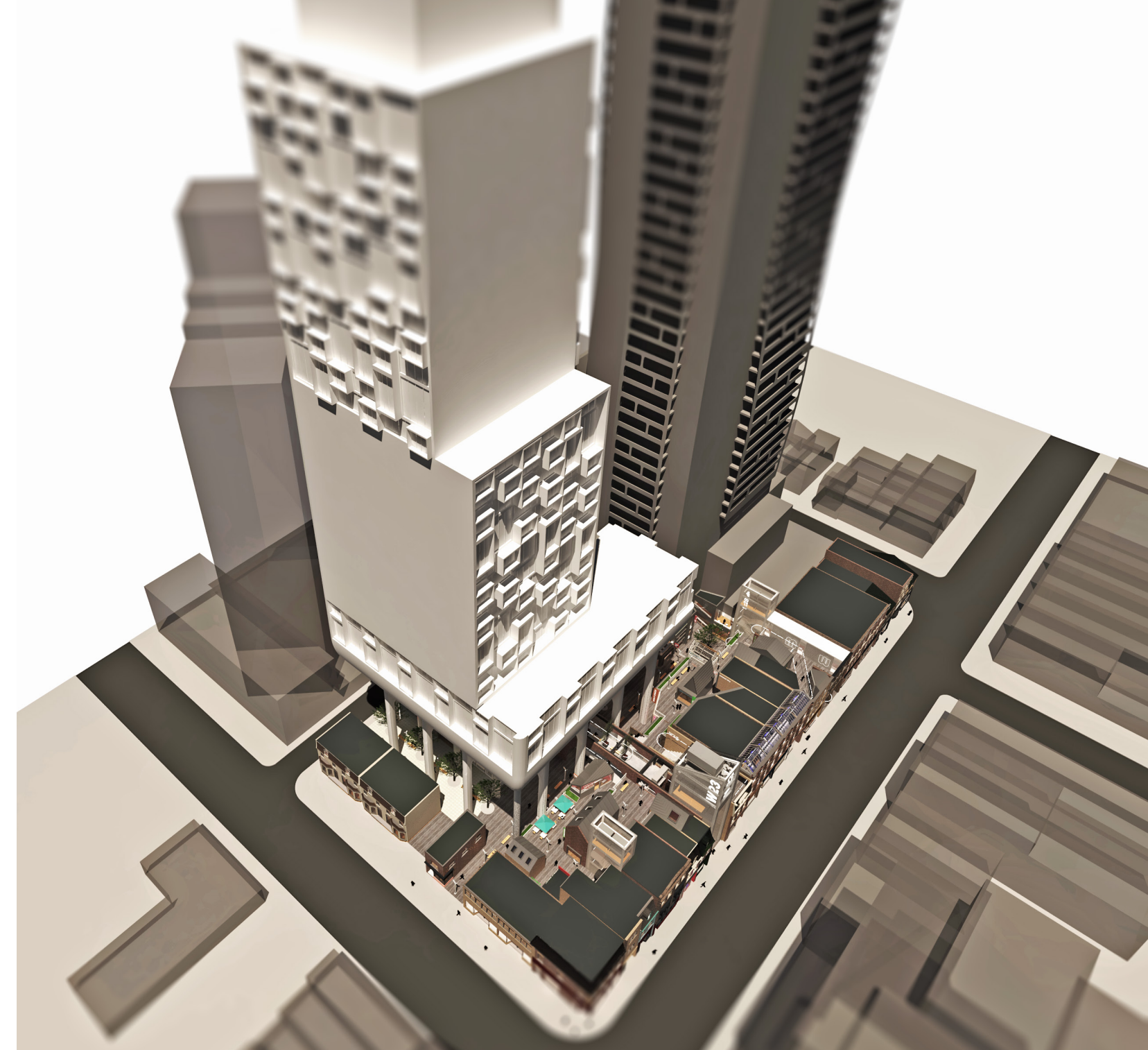
Fig. 10-30  
New Storefronts and Modification of Parti Walls for Spatial Connections

Any changes made to the interior of existing buildings resulting from tenant rearrangements and the addition of storefronts at the back of the buildings are left to the building owners and tenants. This comes from recognizing the iterative nature of these processes as well as allowing the freedom to work within individual financial means. The glass storefronts used in the illustration is meant as a generic placeholder for the multitude of changes and decisions to be made in the future. Over time, one can imagine beginning with simple shop doors and awnings, then moving on to full shopfronts, and finally even modifying the building face itself volumetrically, gradually intensifying the level architectural expression.





Fig. 10-31  
Proposed Street  
Level Plan



The hypothesized air-right development reflect several design decisions that must be coordinated with the collective. For one, because the building sits directly above the properties and the laneway, it is elevated beyond the surrounding roofline to maximize natural light penetration. The underside of the tower is curved and reflective so that light from low sitting sun during morning and winter months is diffused into the space below.

Fig. 10-32  
Aerial View of Reconstituted  
Block Collective



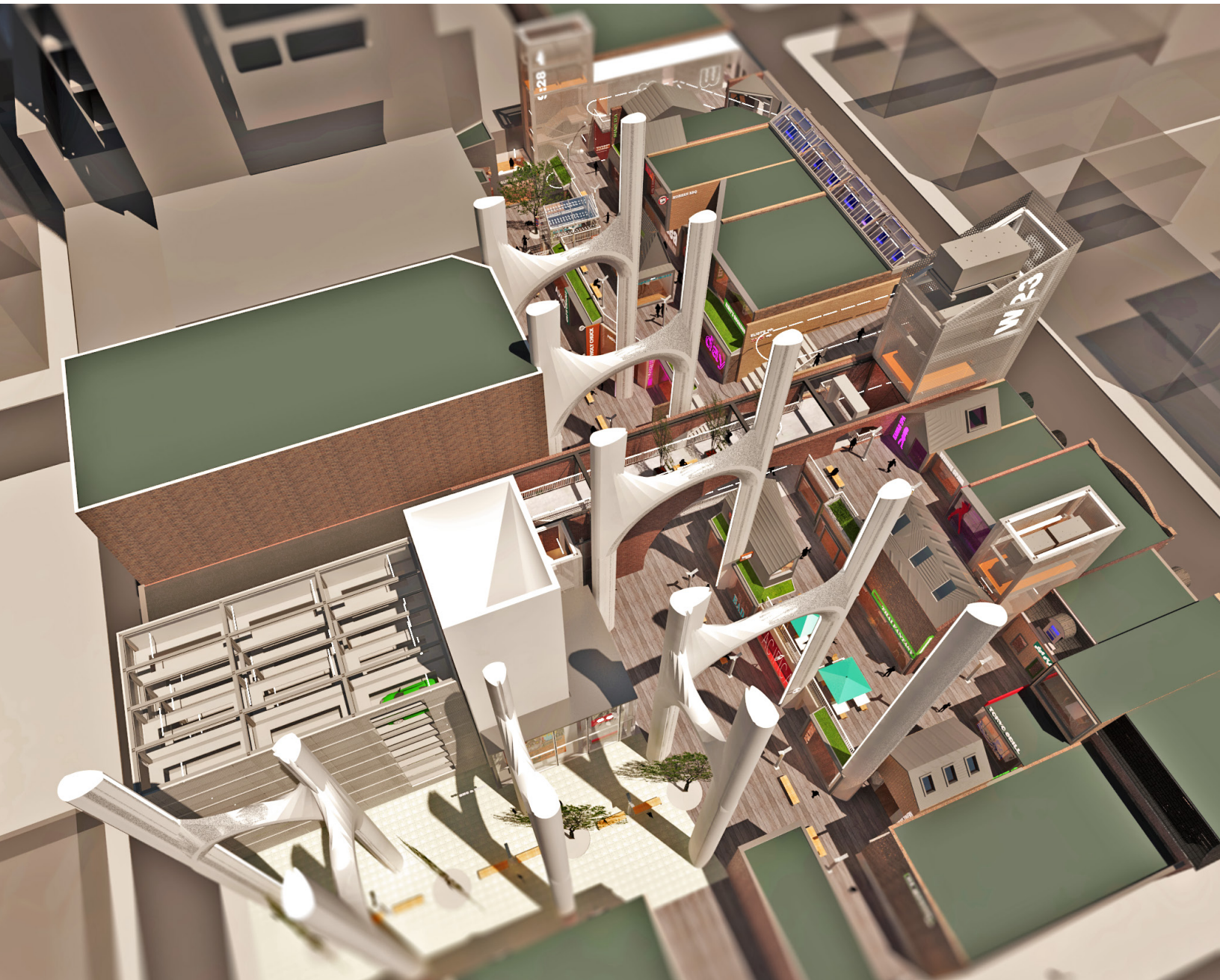
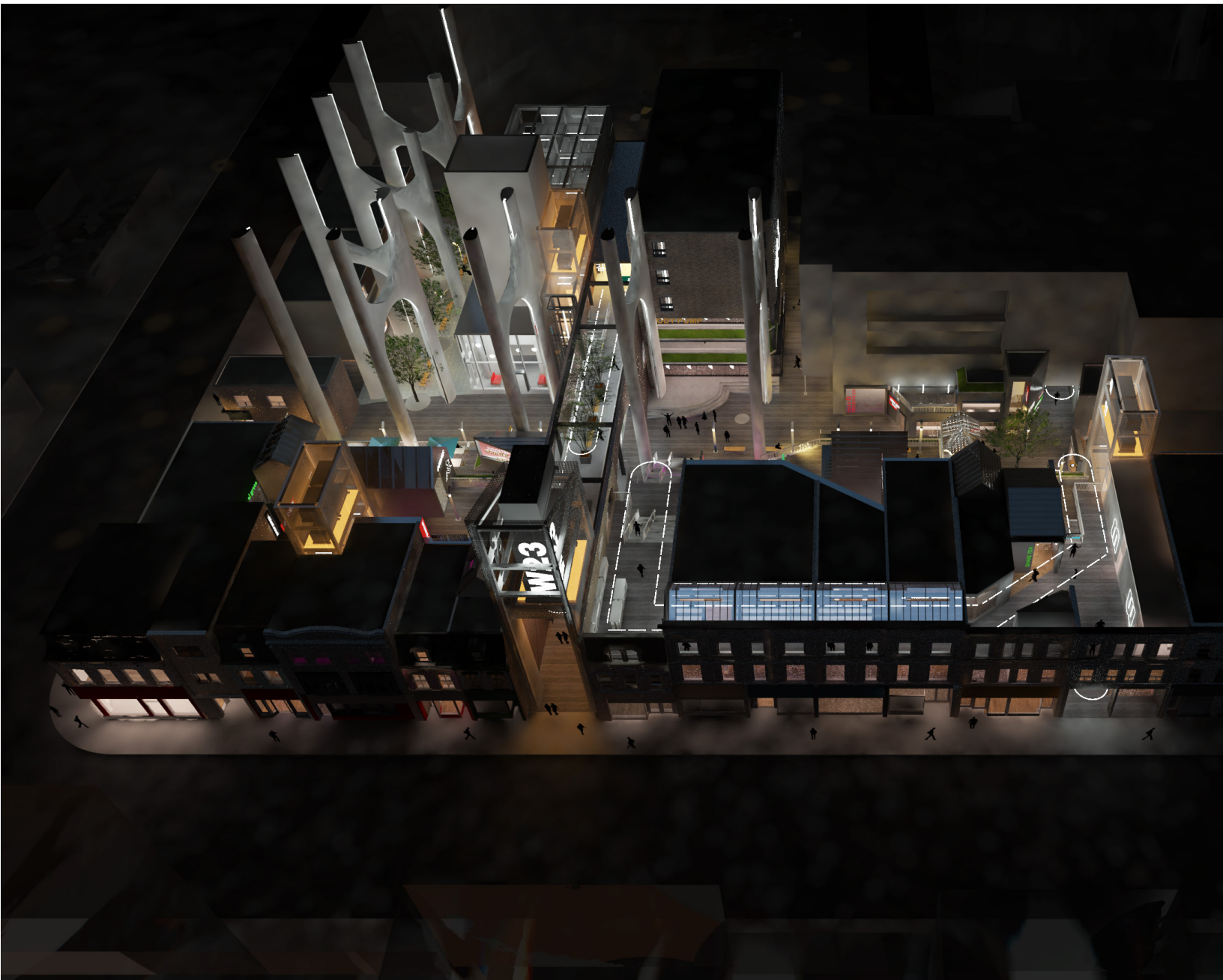


Fig. 10-33  
South Aerial View of Reconstituted Block Collective



Fig. 10-34  
East Aerial View of Reconstituted Block Collective





Lighting elements are used not only as sources of illumination but also as visual markers that connect the various elements of the collective together. The general principle in the use of lighting is that neutral white light signifies horizontal path while orange light signifies vertical movement. Neutral white is selected because it needs to be visually distinct from the vibrant colours of surrounding store signages. There are three places in which white light is used: exterior street lamps, LED linear lights, and integrated lights in the tower columns.

Fig. 10-35  
East Aerial View of Reconstituted Block Collective- Night

The linear LED tube lights that run along the ceiling acts as a guide that signifies the presence of a public path within buildings. When a person see this light they become aware of public presence within and can deduce the spatial connections that exist between multiple buildings. Similarly, the orange illumination in the service towers accentuates its volumetric qualities while acting as a visual cue for identifying vertical circulation points.

Fig. 10-36  
West Aerial View of Reconstituted Block Collective- Night





Fig. 10-37  
Section Perspective  
North End



Fig. 10-38  
Section Perspective  
Centre Plaza







Fig. 10-39  
Section Perspective  
Main Entrance

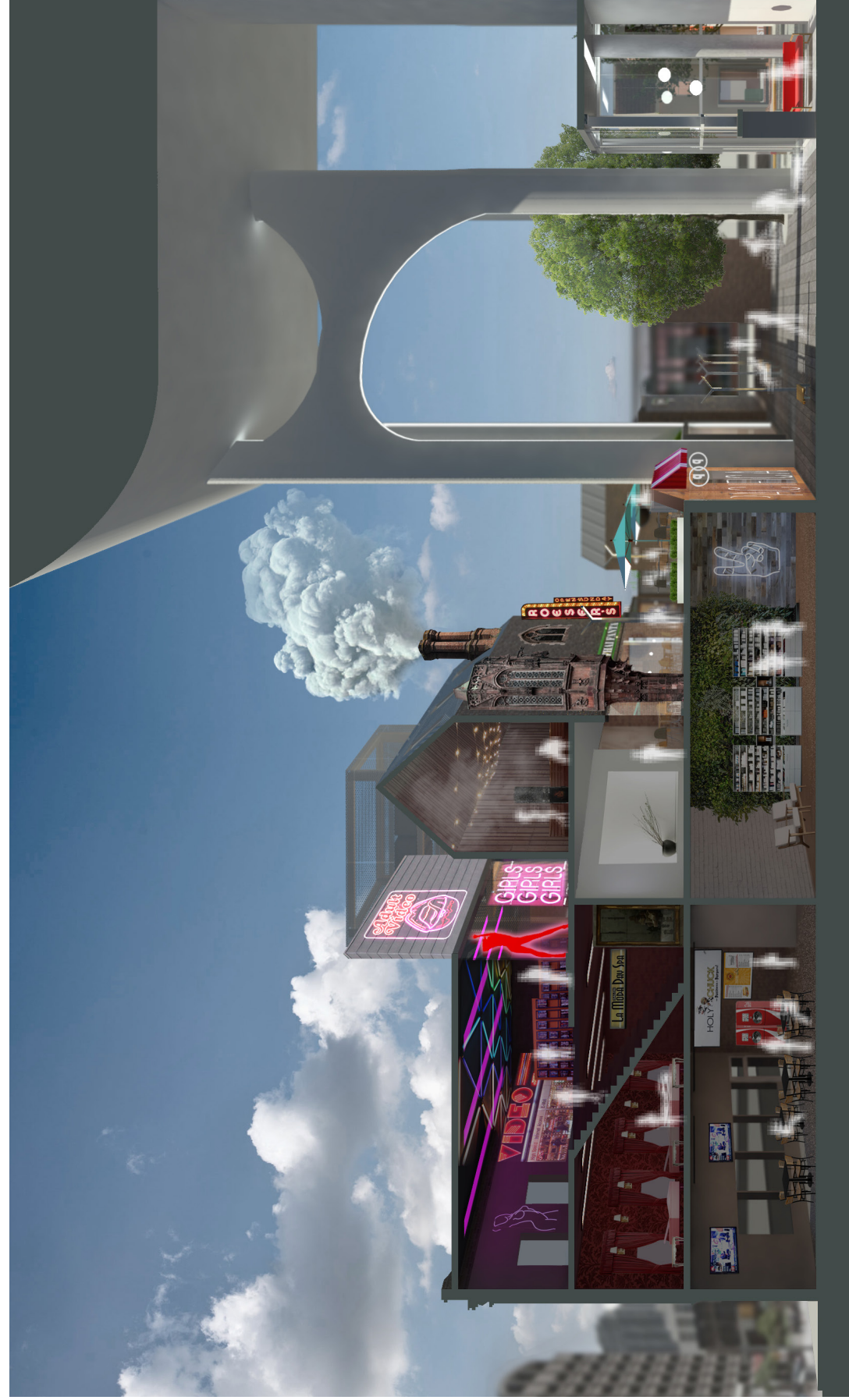
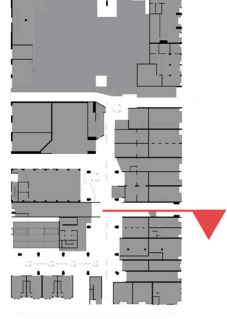
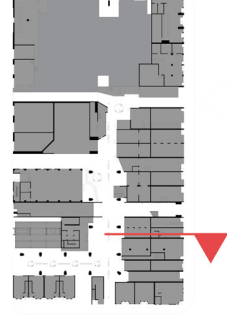
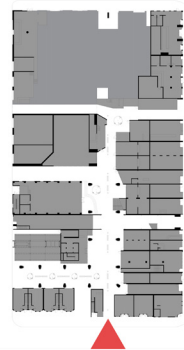


Fig. 10-40  
Section Perspective  
South End







Amidst the continuous wall of dim brick buildings, you see an opening. The interior is lofty and bright, sheltered from the falling rain by the vast hull of the building above. The arches are reminiscent of the great cathedrals; its curves accentuated as the light glides on its surface. Past the busy traffic, you can see people spilling out into the street and with them the muffled noise of restaurants and conversations that invite you in.

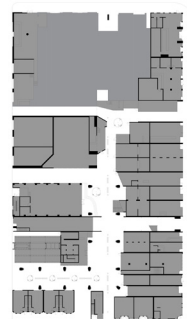
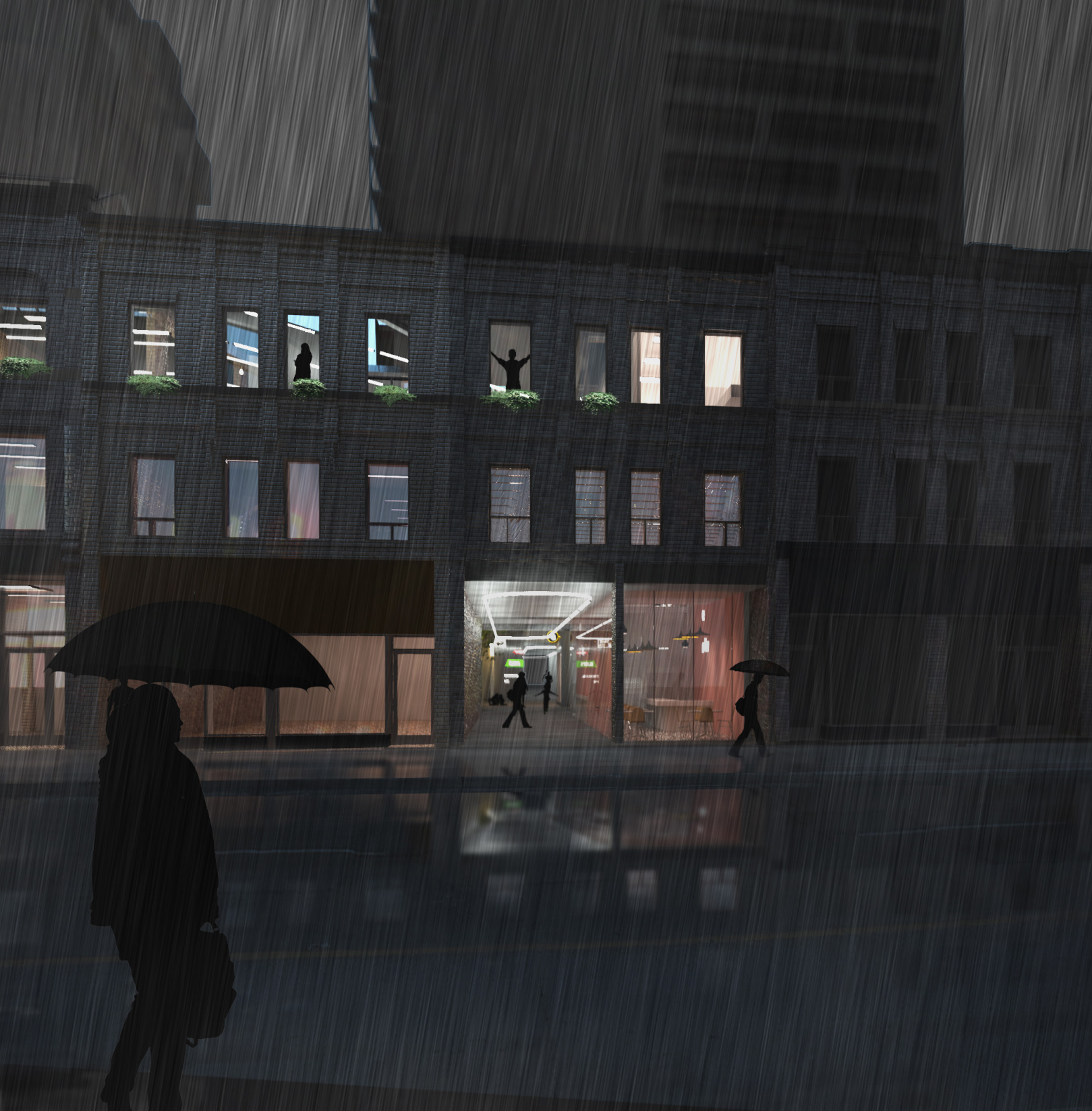
Fig. 10-41  
South Entrance from  
Wellesley Street



The entrance sits like a halo over a fissure of light. The tower stands tall, emanating a warm glow over its skeletal structure as plumes of steam drift from the machines inside. Deep within its interior, people walk above and below, crisscrossing past one another. Above all this, you see a person sit beneath the trees looking at the sky with a sense of pause as the world outside hurries in the rain.

Fig. 10-42  
South East Entrance  
from Yonge Street





It is as if there was a sidewalk within the buildings, lifted above the messiness of the street below. To see people strolling inside is a strange sight- when does anything ever happen on the third floor? Beneath them, the passage remains subdued, with only the stretch of light directed at the distant signs guiding people to the other side. Inside the cafe, people watch passers-by like well-lit specimens as they wait out the rain.

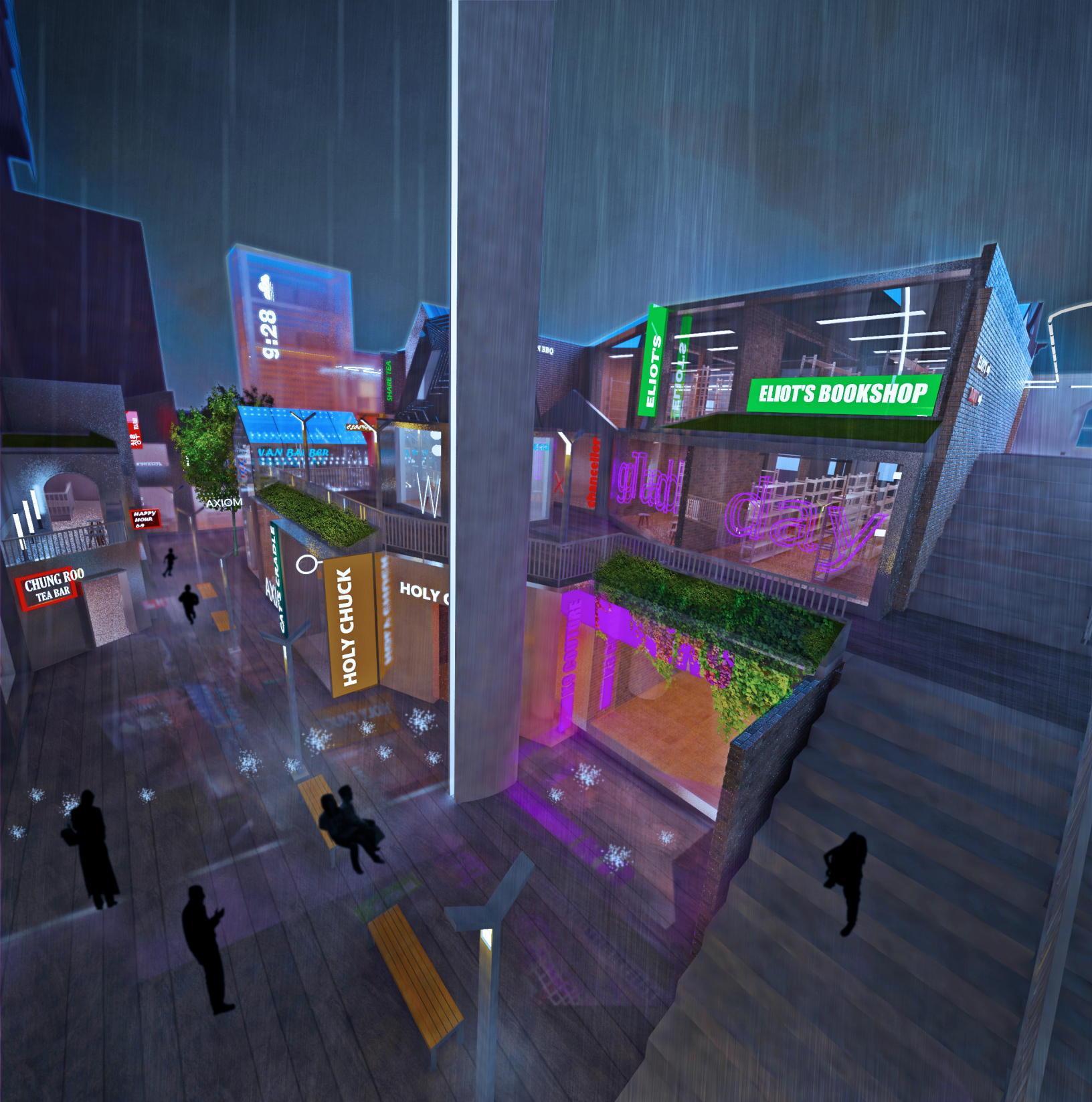
Fig. 10-43  
North East Entrance  
from Yonge Street



The noise of the traffic turns down, and the sound of people becomes more apparent as you move further in. A constant presence of commuters, diners, and shoppers occupy each corner of the site, eager to see what is happening around them. The air glows as lights from the shops and signs spill out and stain the walls with colour. Amongst this, the old brick wall stands like a gateway, beyond which lies the heart of the path.

Fig. 10-44  
Interior View from  
South Entrance





## 11.2/ Financial Argument



At the heart of the path is a small plaza surrounded by three storeys of balconies, look-outs, and stair-seating, creating a space that is reminiscent of an outdoor theatre. Appropriately, buskers regularly perform here, filling it with music that resonates between the walls. Other times, it also serves as a spill-over area for various tenants in the collective; hosting sidewalk book sales or an outdoor patio for restaurants.

Fig. 10-45  
Interior View from  
Centre Court



## Cost Reduction:

### Spreading out of Initial Cost

A key benefit of collectivization is the extension of the timeframe in which owners have to modify their properties. The traditional development process requires comprehensive design and extensive capital investment from the onset which effectively excludes small-scale stakeholders from participating in the process. On the contrary, the iterative nature of spatial transformation in a collective reduces initial development costs and allows individual owners and tenants to modify their space according to their financial means and schedule. Whereas growth in value must be preceded by concentrated capital investment in a typical process of development, this process allows growth and investment to occur simultaneously albeit across a more extended time period.

### Minimal Built Elements

A significant portion of spatial optimization and intensification of economic viability occurs through processes that do necessitate major physical modification or construction. Spatial transactions, for instance, can be carried out mostly in the absence of physical intervention to the building aside from partition walls and wall openings. The design attempts to utilize as much existing building elements as possible while isolating central interventions to the back façade and laneway space to minimize interruptions to the main building.

### Bare-Bone Multi-Use

The entrance/exit towers, which are the only major newly built elements in the collective, minimize cost by the simplicity of architectural and structural design that is repeated on all four locations. The tower also serves multiple functions within the single form factor such as housing the relocated RTU units, providing vertical access/exit points, and visible area for signage, which further reduces the amount of capital required.

### Design of Structural Elements

Location and design characteristics of structural elements for the tower development are negotiated with the developer to serve the collective aesthetic. Even with minor coordination of these elements can help define the spatial and architectural language without incurring a major cost to the developer or the existing collective.

## Source of Funding:

### Sale of Air-Rights and Developer Contributions

A major cause for undervaluation of the existing properties and their incapacity to improve their space and establish *imageability* can be attributed to the lack of capital of individual owners. In this sense, diversifying the source of funds becomes pertinent in maximizing the utility of the existing buildings and spaces. In the collectivization scenario, the funds are sourced from a combination of profit generated from the air-right sale, developer contributions to the city (Section 37, Site Plan Requirements), development related site improvements, and investment by the member of the collective. The symbiotic relationship between properties, as well as between the collective and the air-right development, ensures that investments made into individual and collective spaces benefit the whole. This includes construction of significant line items such as common facilities (access/exit, RTU consolidation), site improvements (landscaping, street lighting, signage, paving) and building modifications (structural reinforcement, façade modification).

### Valuation of Air-Right

Because the collective development process tries to minimize capital input from existing body of owners, the revenue from the air-right sale is crucial in initiating site improvement items. However, the exact valuation of air-right is difficult to determine due to diverse nature of existing conditions as well as lack of precedents in the context of Toronto. Due to this difficulty, in many instances, the valuation of air-right is left up to the market decision through competitive biddings process. Despite this, several methods for a rough valuation of air-rights can be found in academic literature and precedent projects abroad.

One method of general estimation used by New Jersey's Turnpike Authority places the value at 10% of the total development cost<sup>8</sup>. Based on similar high-rise development nearby as well as a general estimate of development costs per square foot, a rough estimate of the air-right can be achieved. The second method estimates the value at no more than 50% of the adjacent land value based on the footprint required for the development.<sup>9</sup> It is useful to note that the average price-per-square foot of residential unit in Wellesley Station area in 2017 is \$897 – the pre-sale price of FIVE condo which started construction in 2010 and completed in 2016, sold for an average PSF of \$550 with a construction budget of 120 million dollars.

While the circumstances vary depending on the specificity of the site and fluctuations in the market, the average cost of high-rise condo development in downtown Toronto is estimated at \$600 per square foot<sup>10</sup>. Assuming a tower of 35 storeys at 8,500 square feet floor plate per level in accordance with adjacent FIVE condo, this brings the development cost to 178.5 million dollars. Based on the first method, this would appraise the value of the air-

right at 17.85 million dollars.

The second method, a land value of \$130 per buildable square foot (BSF) can be used as a benchmark based on the MCAP report of residential value of downtown Toronto<sup>11</sup>. Again, 35-storey tower at 8500 square feet per level would produce a total land value of 38.675 million dollars which would put the valuation of the air-right at 19.34 million dollars.

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- 6 Arbib, J., & Seba, T. (2017). *Rethinking Transportation 2020-2030*. RethinkX.
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- 8 Bunio, N. (2016). *Air Rights Development and Public Assets: An Implementation Handbook For Public Entities (Unpublished master's thesis)*. Ryerson University. 60.
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 Lamb, B. (2014, Jan 02). *Look for more growth in price, volume of real estate*. Retrieved from *The Bulletin, Journal of Downtown Toronto*: <https://thebulletin.ca/look-for-more-growth-in-price-volume-of-real-estate/>
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## **11/ Conclusion**

## Intervention

This thesis argues that without diversity of representation there can be no diversity in the broad-based urban fabric. Therefore, the root cause of homogenization in Toronto's urban environment lies not in the process of architectural design but in the underlying process of monopolization of ownership which reduces the number of urban actors and suppresses self-expression. This assessment shifts the typical notion of viewing displacement as a post-condition of development into a primary factor of causation.

In accordance, the strategy for intervention is not designed around a sentimental motive for maintaining the current streetscape against the forces of development, nor to make facile conciliations by preserving architecture in its parts. Instead, the intervention strategy seeks to open up new prospects for co-existence and synergies in the future through maximizing the economic potential of existing buildings and providing an alternative mode for densification that precludes consolidation of lots.

The potential for capital accumulation is increased through overcoming the barriers imposed by the elements of the three-D's. Delimit- the monotony of urban form which homogenizes spatial organization and limits the range of human experiences of the built environment. Deter- regulations that restrict the liberties of owners in fully utilizing their spatial resources for self-expression and economic performance. Dominate- development processes that inherently involves monopolization of space and censorship of idiosyncrasies.

In response, the collectivization of existing properties is utilized as the central strategy of the intervention as it engages these three elements simultaneously. In regards to the first element, it mitigates the monotony of the exterior condition by creating an alternative extension of the public domain that facilitates a wider range of perceptual moments and programmatic uses. This has the effect of reinforcing the individual characteristics of architecture as people can experience them for a longer period of time and from various vantage points. Instead of just walking past a storefront, people can occupy the spaces around it, turn around its corners, and look up-and-down to it to appreciate it as a distinct element.

The activation of the existing laneway space also leads to the by-passing of restrictions imposed by policy, the second element of the three. The increased liberties afforded by this domain in comparison to the main Yonge Street face enables owners and tenants to intensify the modes of self-expression, whether it is through architectural modifications or vibrant use of signages. Furthermore, the iterative spatial rearrangements facilitated by the collective fosters natural variations in the interior spaces by responding to the needs of the users.

Lastly, the sale of collective air-rights to allow a parallel process of high-rise development above the existing properties provides an alternative mode of development that removes the need for monopolization of the spatial do-

main. Instead of one excluding the existence of another, a synergy between the existing properties and the air-right development is formed from their co-existence. The air-right development contributes funds and resources for site improvements while responding to the external pressures for densification. On the other hand, the collective opens up spatial opportunities for development, as well as a providing a vibrant street level condition that functions as a de facto podium for the development above.

## Role of Architecture and Architects

The strategy implemented in the intervention raises questions and perhaps curious eyebrows in the way it approaches improvements in the built environment. The illustration of post-intervention space with the seemingly haphazard array of storefronts, a bombardment of signage, and a conscious disregard for cohesive aesthetic defies the typical conception of comprehensive architectural design and can even be seen as just another form of deterioration from the status quo. Can such strategy, which lacks a consistent design language even be considered an integral part of architecture? Does a strategy that does not define the outcome but rather relegates many aspects of spatial transformation to the liberties of the user negate and diminish the role of an architect?

Unlike a distinct building project with defined parameters and limited clientele, built environment at an urban or block scale cannot assume such solidarity of interests and capacity. Under these circumstances, a typical design solution that occurs as a part of an established development process and architectural practice would be facile at best. A more appropriate form of architectural intervention must take into account the divergent and often conflicting interests of multiple stakeholders in proceeding with design and extend the praxis of architecture in the process. The underpinning of this thesis attempts to engage this issue by diverging away from a comprehensive design solution and focusing on two spatial elements that are crucial in the preservation of ownership: increasing spatial liberties in lieu of defined form, and maximizing the commercial performance of space to provide the economic means to preserve and exercise such liberties.

Beyond aesthetics, construction, typology, and theorization, architecture at its core serves the betterment of people's lives through manipulation of space. The collectivization process, which in itself does not assume a traditional role of architecture, enables tactics that allow people to overcome these external factors. It does so by establishing a framework for defining new spatial relationships within the bounds of an existing built environment. Opening up new possibilities within the confines of limited resources. The provision of an alternate public corridor via activation of the alleyway, iterative spatial re-arrangement by owners and tenants, and densification through air-right sales are all tangible solutions realized through intangible modifications in spatial relationships. These solutions serve to fulfil the fundamental objective of preserving the existing body of small-scale ownership and restoring autonomy they have over their resources to foster diversity



of architecture, streetscape, and urban experience. In this sense, despite not having a major built element or cohesive aesthetic, the strategy in its efficaciousness can be considered not only as belonging within the realm of architecture but as a good practice of it.

Likewise, just as the realm of architecture is extended beyond physical buildings and into the practice of defining spatial relationships, the role of an architect can be reimagined as well. Specifically, the iterative process of spatial improvement and continuation of ownership opens up several areas in which this can occur. One of the greatest shortcomings in architectural service is the intrinsic disconnect between the architect and the user group. This is largely because typical development process involves the transition of ownership and holistic reconstruction before physical occupation take place. This inevitably forces architects to substitute the needs of real users for the interest of developers and hypothesized buyers. In addition, this method of servicing architecture isolates the involvement of the architect to a very narrow timeframe that terminates at the point of project delivery, which strains the quality of design and eliminates the potential for feedback.

Within the collectivization model, the architect can establish a direct and long-term relationship with the actual user group, obtaining real-life feedback on the impact of their intervention and thus increasing the overall quality of their design. Also, instead of delivering a building as a completed product, the range of architectural service will expand to require a new emphasis on mediation, consultation, coordination, and planning that is necessitated by the iterative process of spatial modification and development. This fundamental change in the relationship with the architect, from an alienated designer to a continuous service provider who engages the user at a personal level, will not only enhance the architectural outcome but also the architectural profession as a whole by opening up stable long-term markets that stabilizes the relative volatility of the industry.

In consideration of these factors, the participatory nature that underlies the intervention strategy, rather than diminishing the role of the architect, enriches the practice of architecture, makes it accessible to a broader public, and diversifies the physical and experiential landscape of our city.

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