

The Parkdale Public Library is for Us

by

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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfilment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2019
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Author's Declaration

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

Abstract

The Parkdale Public Library in Toronto is an illustration of what remains of democracy today. While the government is deeming libraries irrelevant with their funding cuts, and privatized cafes are taking over as 'public' social spaces for the middle-class, the Parkdale Public Library still exists as a needed free resource for everyone. In this library, away from the rest of the city, two unsuspecting individuals from different walks of life meet in line while waiting for the computers, and a senior woman is reading her poetry aloud to a crowd of friends, community, and strangers.

This thesis investigates public neighborhood libraries as an opportunity for the democratic engagement of individuals at a time when we hardly look a stranger in the eye. It observes the relations between library patrons in order to question the current limits of our civil interactions. New design possibilities are then explored in an attempt to find a building form to better reflect public life within Parkdale Public Library.

The research culminates in a design proposal for a re-imagined neighbourhood library in Parkdale, Toronto and takes a stand for libraries as vital interior public spaces that are currently going unnoticed. A critical analysis of Toronto Public Libraries, successful library precedents, and the site context of Parkdale help to inform the design. Derived from these analyses is a proposal of a new library that would signal a world of humanity inside- one which is free, expressive and empathetic. The new proposal makes known the vitality of library spaces relative to everyone's lives.

The central design method draws on observations made at Parkdale Public Library as a means for creating an environment that better encourages self-expression and engagement with others. The design will fulfill the functional requirements of the library with crucial design elements that respond to the particular characteristics of Parkdale and its people. It proposes the utilization of additional programming, spatial framing and spatial anchors to influence and highlight moments of connection between people of blatant or intimidating difference. Ultimately, the architecture is positing that a new material aesthetic reality is needed to invite the public in, so that they may come to know the important reality of tolerance, solidarity and genuine self-expression happening inside our libraries.

Acknowledgements

To my supervisor Dereck Revington, thank you for your friendship, critical insights, encouragement and belief in the matters of this thesis. I'm grateful to be able to take what I learned from this experience with you and carry it with me into all my architectural endeavors in the future. It's been memorable. To my committee member Anne Bordeleau, thank you for your enthusiastic support and thoughtful comments. It was a burst of encouragement that came when I needed it most, as I was running the last stretch of this thesis-marathon. To Don McKay, thank you for always making sure I was having fun with the work and for all the golden nuggets of wisdoms you gave me during our conversations. To Adrian Blackwell, my TRD1 coordinator, thank you for your teaching and mentoring, which I found to be always invaluable and insightful.

To the staff of Toronto Public Library, thank you for your patience and diligence in answering all my curiosities and requests.

To my friends and colleagues who are very much a part of this thesis, thank you. To Emmeily, Liyang, Hayley, for being there since day one in university. I don't think I could have made it this far without you guys. To Joanne, Nathan, Victoria, Fion, Rui, Jonas, Daniel, Ammar, Meesh, Elaine, Logan, Victor, Jim, Fiona, Val, small group and fellowship friends, amongst so many others friends who I treasure, thank you for all the conversations, laughs, adventures, help, and for just being there.

To my family and soon to be family: mom, dad, mah-mah, poh-poh, Annisa, Tim, Auntie Kitty, Uncle Dan, Jon, Mary, Steve, and Elaine, thank you for supporting me unconditionally throughout this journey in every way possible. Great big thanks to Tim, Fion, and my sister Annisa for their generosity too in helping me edit the writing so many times when I needed it.

It was so special to have so much company in this journey, to have friends and family to discuss ideas with me, cheering me on when things looked doubtful, and even lending helping hands all throughout and at the end—thank you for your love and care. I feel like it was all overwhelmingly undeserved and I can only say with all my heart that I am really thankful.

With all the struggles and hurdles of this thesis, I often forgot to work in a way that would be dedicated to Him. Yet while I failed, He never failed me. Thank you, Jesus, for carrying me through when I couldn't.

Dedication

To all those participating in this thing called life.

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A public library is an organisation established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organisation. It provides access to knowledge, information, lifelong learning, and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment.

- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions¹

¹ Christie Koontz, IFLA Public Library Service Guidelines, 2., compl. rev. ed. ed., Vol. 147 (Berlin [u.a.]: De Gruyter Saur, 2010).

Wanderings and Wonderings

Anecdotes and Explorations

Public libraries are of and for the people. Fundamentally democratic, they usually do not ask visitors to justify their presence or pay an entry fee. Fewer and fewer such nondiscriminatory and noncommercial spaces exist in our towns and cities today.

- Stuart Kells, *The Strange Magic of Libraries*²

I arrived at the Parkdale Public Library at 8:45am, 15 minutes before the library opened, and I was surprised to find a lineup of people standing outside, waiting for the librarian to open the doors.

When the doors opened, everyone walked in with a sense of urgency, trying to be courteous but also making sure no one beats them to what they were trying to do, or where they were trying to get to.

When I got inside, I saw that the space was just a single large room, and was nothing remarkable. But the space freely provided patrons with what they needed and welcomed them to go about their business- whether that be the business of reading, sleeping or simply existing in a place of shelter. The library allowed them to be.

- *an anecdote from a first time visit to the Parkdale Public Library*



fig. 1 Gargoyles to Scare Developers, by Dina Bursztyn.



fig. 2 Senior woman using Seattle Public Library's computer.

Introduction: Pondering Libraries & Potentials

3 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Critical Vehicles* (Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: MIT Press, 1999).

The library is a unique program that welcomes everyone in, unlike most other spaces in the city. Most spaces of the city tend to segregate demographics, being built by the so-called “victor” and suppressing the voice of the “nameless” as the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko puts it.³ This is largely due to a tendency for power to take over, influencing the city to be a place that celebrates the strong and hides the weak. We can see this in the way the city re-develops and privatizes downtown areas at the expense of pushing out the marginalized, the poor, and the mentally ill.

In contrast to this, the library is open to all as a free resource. It offers opportunities for public learning and lounging, thus allowing for people to exercise their sense of self, and their relations to others. The thesis is particularly interested in how Toronto libraries offer these kinds of opportunities. Toronto, being a largely pluralistic society, is in need of more ways of encouraging civic engagement amongst its population. This matter is urgent in today’s day and age, as technology and capitalism’s reign are taking away our chances and courage to engage with people face to face, and with people who are different from us.

As an architectural question, the thesis would like to ask how the program of the library with its chances for engagement could be a design opportunity for space to respond to. Simply put, the thesis would like to interrogate: are there ways for architecture to be more humane in parallel with the humane operations of the public library?

Sitting in front of a public computer at my local community's library, I searched for a book online. Beside me, a man was also searching for a book on his computer while speaking to another man next to him. They seemed to be friends. They talked about how, at the shelter, someone took out their knife last night and tried to threaten people with it.

Here, we were sharing the same territory of space with the same rights, and yet very different life stories. Perhaps this is how the design of new relations could begin: within a shared territory that provides free and equal services for all. People are allowed to be themselves while being given the opportunity to see eye to eye with everyone else around them. The library was observed to be an interesting place that was allowing for this.

- an anecdote that first brought curiosity to the topic of libraries





fig. 4 Campaign card for the free public library, 1882.

The Story of the First Free Public Library, Toronto Edition

A review of the history of Toronto's public libraries reveals that the principle of public access is at the core of the public library's stable identity.

4 Toronto Public Library, "History of Toronto Public Library," <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/about-the-library/library-history/> (accessed Feb 21, 2019).

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

While libraries have already been conceived around the world for centuries, the first Toronto library came into conception in 1810 as a small, private, subscription-based library solely for the elite.⁴ Two decades later, the York Mechanic's Institute was established as a new larger library that focused on being more accessible to the working class.⁵ "Mechanics' Institutes" were common in numerous cities at the time stemming from a need to educate workers for emerging industries in growing cities. And while this progressive library was intentionally founded by the "exertions of a few public-spirited individuals," access was still only granted to labourers by a paid membership.⁶ Considering this early history, the notion of the free public library did not emerge out of nowhere, with no intention. It is nothing to be taken for granted. A slow but steady progression of eras and people had to ensue before Toronto acquired its free library system.

7 John P., "Remembering Toronto Public Library and its First Central Library," <https://torontopubliclibrary.typepad.com/local-history-genealogy/2018/03/remembering-toronto-public-library-and-its-first-central-library-march-6-snapshots-in-history.html> (accessed Feb 21, 2019).

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

In 1882, the Ontario government passed the Free Libraries Act, following a number of library movements in the states that advocated for free public access to education.⁷ This was what finally gave municipalities the framework to establish free public libraries. The principles enacted were that all citizens were to have free admission, that the library was to be financially supported by public funds, and that municipal councils were allowed to raise the property tax to finance the creation of these libraries.⁸ This power to raise funds through taxation was to be granted by popular assent only if enough qualified municipal voters petitioned for it. It was only due to Municipal Councillor John Hallam's gathering of a large majority of voters that the local bylaw was passed.⁹ Passing the bylaw allowed the subscription-based York Mechanics' Institute to become the first free Toronto Public Library.

10 Toronto Public Library, "About the Library," <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/about-the-library/> (accessed Feb 21, 2019).

Today, Toronto's public library system has grown to become the largest neighbourhood-based library system in North America, with 100 branches and 17.3 million visits in the year of 2017.¹⁰ The numbers prove the public library to be a greatly used institution, and its free access is undeniably contributive to this fact. Understanding the efforts that were required to realize the public library as we know it today, the thesis examines how architecture might be able to materialize this important aspect of the library as a free space in order to emphasize it.

fig. 5 Toronto Public Library, 1884.





PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHURCH ST. CORNER

THE BRITISH
CANADIAN

Small figure of a person standing on the sidewalk.

Two figures of people standing near the corner of the building.

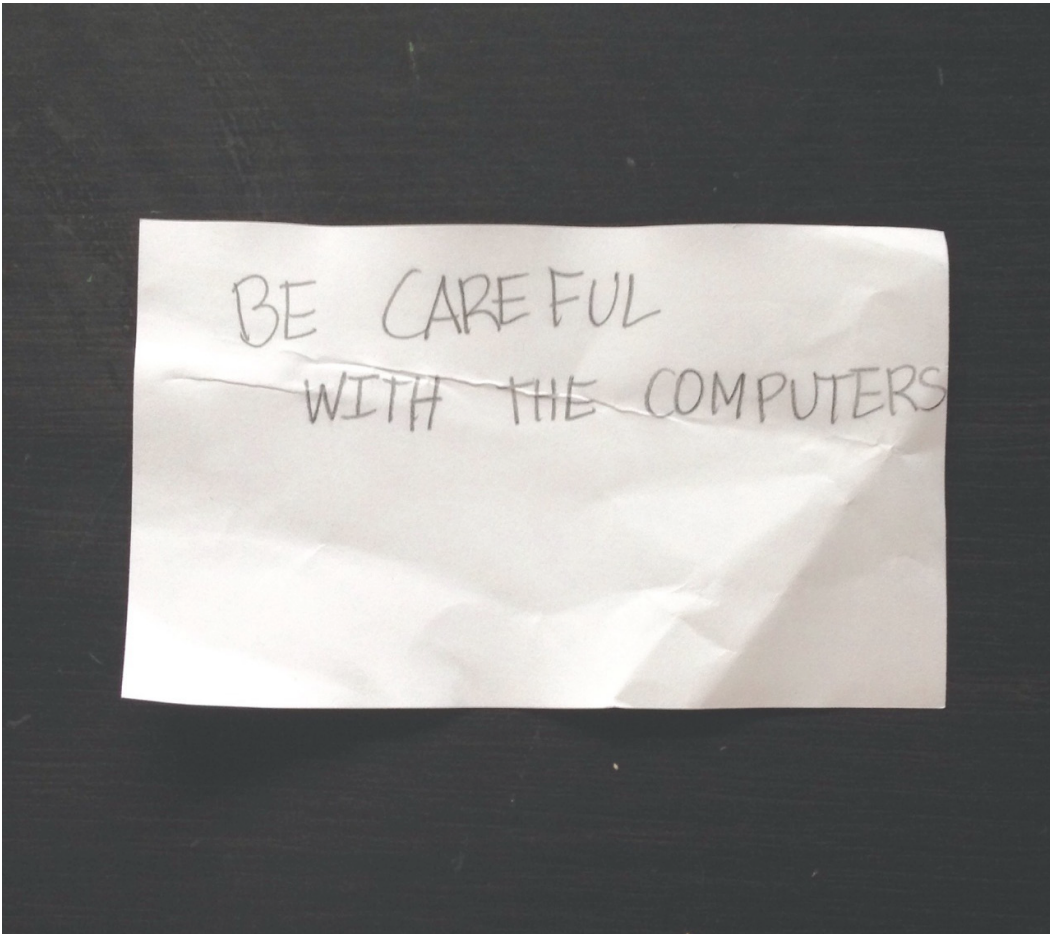


fig. 6 A library patron's note left behind.

The Public Library's Identity: Free, Strange, and Nourishing

Given the public library has a strong identity in being a free resource, it should be noted that this point is crucial in giving way to all other unique qualities of the library. Amy Lavender Harris, author of *Imagining Toronto*, notes how free access to the library is what brings it success as a beloved place in many ways.

11 Amy Lavender Harris, *Imagining Toronto* (Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2010).

12 Terry Reith and Andrea Huncar, "Homeless Find Hope, Refuge and Community at Public Libraries," *The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)* Nov 20, 2014.

It firstly allows for the institution to be a safe haven for the dispossessed, without stigmatizing them or isolating them. Libraries are so welcoming that Harris contrasts them to churches and charities which have all begun to limit their access by implementing closed doors policy and banker's hours.¹¹ As a result, libraries have become, as Harris calls them, daytime shelters for the city's dispossessed. Their non-isolating character makes them welcoming and desirable to go to for anyone, which is uncommon in the city. A CBC article profiles Colin Mulholland, a frequent library patron who would make his way to the public library on the most dismal days. He has shared his strong sentiment about libraries, saying that "it is a natural place, because you can come in and sit. You can read books, and I'd pretend to read books, because mostly you don't get enough sleep in the missions."¹²

13 Amy Lavender Harris, *Imagining Toronto* (Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2010).

14 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Nachdr. ed. (New York [u.a.]: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994).

Secondly, because it is free, the library allows for people to be themselves, which includes allowing patrons to be strange at times. Harris highlights how libraries are a non-judgemental space allowing for harmless oddities like "tucking religious tracts in books, hiding beer cans in places they aren't supposed to, or delivering silent orations to invisible audiences." So long as it doesn't cause a huge disturbance, you could probably get away with it.¹³ Psychologist Julia Kristeva further highlights the importance of this aspect of the library, noting that these seemingly foreign concepts of the marginalized and the strange are in actuality something shared amongst everyone that often go unnoticed.¹⁴ She asserts that individuals only have to accept their own identity as someone different in order to fearlessly meet other outsiders for whom they are as well. In this perspective, the characteristics of people that may feel out of place and divide us actually brings us together within the setting of the library.



fig.7 Atmosphere of libraries.

15 Harris, *Imagining Toronto* (Toronto: Mansfield Press, 2010).

16 Kells, "The Strange Magic of Libraries," *The Paris Review*, Apr 9, 2018.

17 The Reading Agency, "Reading, Health and Public Libraries," *European Union News* May 30, 2014.

18 Nathan J. Robinson, "Why Public Libraries are Amazing," <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2018/07/why-libraries-are-amazing> (accessed Feb 20, 2019).

19 Ibid.

20 Thu-Huong Ha, "Forbes Deleted a Deeply Misinformed Op-Ed Arguing Amazon should Replace Libraries," <https://qz.com/1334123/forbes-deleted-an-op-ed-arguing-that-amazon-should-replace-libraries/> (accessed Feb 21, 2019).

At the end of her commentary on libraries, Harris also points out that, 'if books are magical worlds of their own, then libraries are warehouses of the fantastic, waystations between the familiar city and the surreal streets so many Torontonians inhabit.'¹⁵ In simpler words, the library's provision of books is an often overlooked privilege, but its contents are what draws in so many people, illustrating that 'an intrinsic part of how libraries are experienced is in the magic of libraries, which is personal, subjective, and multifaceted.'¹⁶ As a fantastical-natured resource then, the library offers nourishment for the soul in the form of reading, group-reading, and other library programs that encourage creative imagination and expression.

"There can be no doubt of the need for support when it comes to mental health. Libraries are part of the solution, offering early intervention community health services. Reading gives you access to a range of book-based therapy, from formal self-help books to stress-busting novels and poetry that take you off to another world, and to supportive social reading communities. Getting involved in a reading group brings people together, builds social connections that are vital to well-being and enables you to explore difficult life experiences through a fictional lens - you live many lives through reading, including your own."¹⁷ - The Reading Agency

However good the many qualities of the library are though, privatization in our contemporary time is still continuing to attempt to override all public life, thus threatening the identity of public libraries. Sociology student Nathan J. Robinson argues for the importance of free libraries in his *Current Affairs Magazine* article, which was written in response to a *Forbes Magazine* article titled, "Amazon Should Replace Local Libraries to Save Taxpayers Money." Robinson highlights the public library's uniqueness in maintaining insulation from the economic consensus, and points out that if libraries were an idea to be suggested today, they would be counter-offered with a tax credit for book purchases instead.¹⁸ Robinson asserts that it's only because we're so used to the beloved notion of public libraries that privatization of the library seems such a radical and horrifying notion.¹⁹ And indeed, the *Forbes* article's argument for the privatization of libraries brought outcry and was quickly taken down after many readers complained about how monstrous it'd be to take away public libraries from people.²⁰

fig. 8 Map of current Toronto Public Libraries within the Greater Toronto Area.

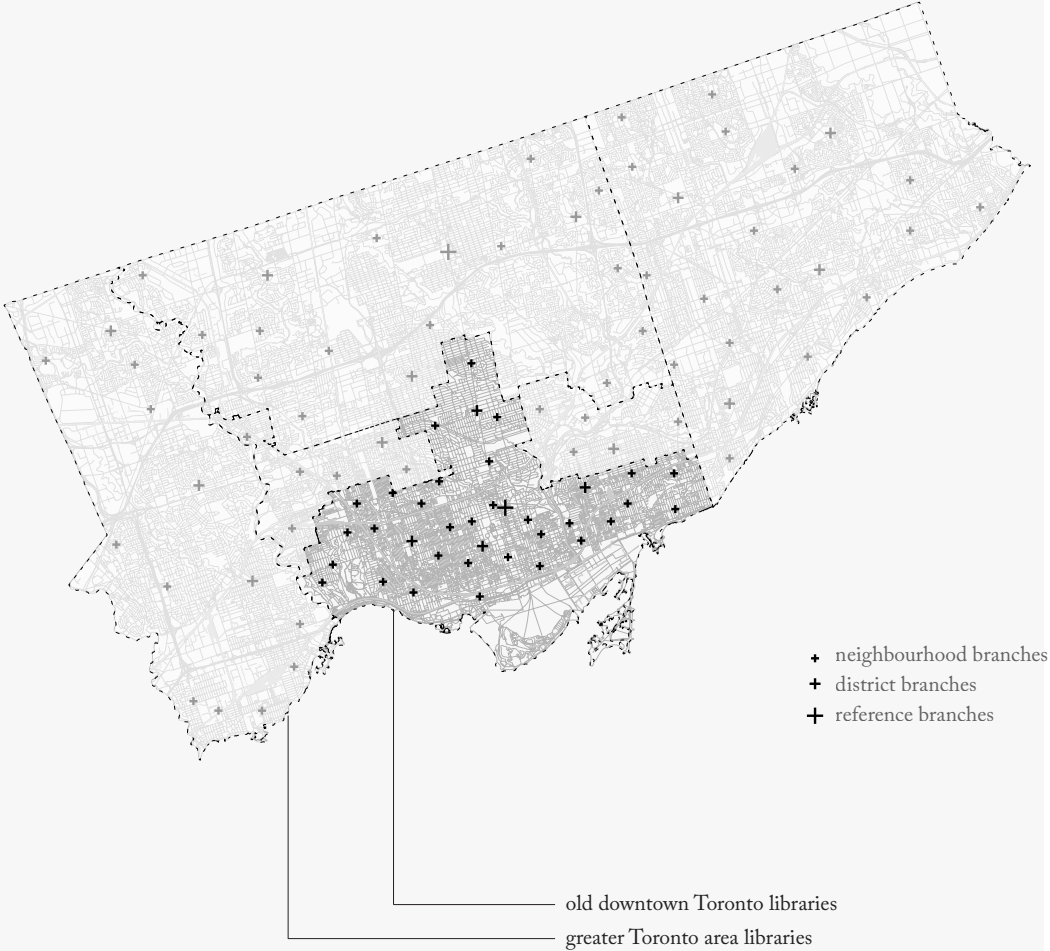


fig. 9 Different library patrons using the various resources and programmes at the library.



21 Robinson, "Why Public Libraries are Amazing," <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2018/07/why-libraries-are-amazing> (accessed Feb 20, 2019).

22 Toronto Sun, "Province Cuts Ontario Library Services Funding in Half," Postmedia Network Inc, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2211361594> (accessed Apr 19, 2019).

23 Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (Los Angeles, Calif. [u.a.]: Sage, 2005).

If libraries were to become privatized Amazon bookstores, all the life-giving aspects the library stands for would perish. One doesn't need to imagine too hard what this would look like, as questions like the following have crossed through minds many times over already: 'Do I want to sit down so badly that it's worth a \$5 purchase?' and 'Is this resource so valuable that I am willing to pay X amount for it?'²¹ These kinds of questions are being made more applicable to every aspect of public life. Combined with this threat is the reality of the government's choice to withdraw funding for libraries. As of currently, provincial government has moved forward on the decision to halve the funding for Ontario's two public library services in order to alleviate the province's \$11.7-billion deficit.²² It demonstrates that knowledge and basic human rights will continue on their route to total privatization with the government's support, by way of cutting library funds. These factors highlight the urgency of preserving libraries for us all.

In supporting the freedom that the library stands for, there is also no doubt that some frightening possibilities are brought along too. Unfortunate events like a robbery, or an attack of some sort, could happen since anyone is allowed to enter. Yet this does not take away the fact that the library provides good and important possibilities for vital living. Doreen Massey, in her essay 'Thrown together,' explicates that when there are no spaces for chances and risks, there is simultaneously no need for negotiations, democracy, or politics.²³

Being free, in the end, has not always been an intrinsic part of libraries, as discussed before. It comes from a history of events, and did not happen without no effort or thought. There comes a real threat these days in how they can be totally privatized as well, should we begin to forget their beauty and use. If that were the case, libraries will no longer be subject to the diverse interpretations of use of its public inhabitants, but only the limited interpretations of whoever can afford it.



fig. 10 Seattle Public Library's entrance foyer.



fig. 11 Calgary Public Library's main atrium.

Humane Programming, Humane Architecture

24 Yael Friedman, "Carnegie's Gift: The Progressive Era Roots of Today's Branch Library," <https://urbanomnibus.net/2014/10/carnegies-gift-the-progressive-era-roots-of-todays-branch-library/> (accessed Jul 15, 2017).

25 Alex Bozickovic, "How Libraries are Getting Bright, Loud and Friendly," *The Globe and Mail*, Jun 12, 2015.

26 Archdaily, "Seattle Central Library / OMA + LMN," <https://www.archdaily.com/11651/seattle-central-library-oma-lmn> (accessed May 5, 2019).

27 Dan Howarth, "Snøhetta and Dialog's New Central Library for Calgary Features Vast Wood-Lined Atrium," <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/11/05/snøhetta-dialog-new-central-library-calgary-wood-atrium-crystalline-exterior/> (accessed Mar 5, 2019).

Currently libraries have begun transforming into social spaces. They are pooling in additional programs ranging from social work to other avenues of learning like makerspace programmes.²⁴ Not just a container for books anymore, libraries are expanding on the notion of being an important resource in all types of different ways with zeal.²⁵ At the same time, their core mandate is still maintained, thankfully, for being first and foremost a space that welcomes everyone. The question is whether the material environment is making known these pressing-qualities of the library.

The strong architecture of OMA's Seattle Public Library and Snøhetta's Calgary Public Library are examples of making known the importance of libraries to people. By being large sculptural masses that respond to their city context, they become understandable signals for welcoming people in. Each is different in architectural style and this also gives each library a strengthened identity. Seattle Public library is a large shifting tower of programs engulfed within a glass frame.²⁶ The aesthetic of the environment is city-like, made largely out of synthetic ingredients such as glass, steel, and colorful plastics which stand relationally alongside its city-people. On the other hand, Calgary Public Library was inspired by its regional motifs like the canoe, and the chinook clouds for its architectural massing.²⁷ Materially, it relies on the warmth of wood cladding and flooring to create a sense of welcome to its spaces. Each library has its own means of welcoming patrons in, with dynamic spatial circulation included, making each library distinct and memorable for anyone visiting.



fig. 12 Parkdale Public Library's storyroom.



fig. 13 Parkdale Public Library's main living room.

28 Toronto Public Library, "History of Toronto Public Library," <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/about-the-library/library-history/> (accessed Feb 21, 2019).

A comparison is drawn between the strong identities for large city-scale public libraries and the lack of identity in medium and smaller-scale neighbourhood public libraries. In Toronto, old mundane neighbourhood public libraries are acting as important support centers for their local area, although they may not look the part. Such neighbourhood libraries were established from the 1900s – 1960s,²⁸ with the mere intention of providing bare minimum rooms for containing books and study areas. Comparing the lively events within these smaller libraries today to their spatial environment makes a case for the mismatch of the library's importance with its materiality that lacks a true reflection of what happens inside. Parkdale Public Library is thus the site of investigation for looking at the potential role of architecture in materializing the notion of the library as a valuable place for everyone's humanity.



Gardiner Expressway

Jameson Avenue

Parkdale Public Library



Parkdale as Site for a Humane Library

The Parkdale Public Library is already a great place of humanity. This is noticeable from observing how library patrons are able to engage with others freely, and express themselves freely, all in an easy manner. These events, as an experience, creates an affect: an impression of openness and freedom that is not idealistic, but grounded in reality which is imperfect.

This affect, or this feeling, is questioned for its possibility to translate into architecture. Can architecture be intentionally designed in a way that encourages the frequency of relational human-moments and our appreciation for them?

Using the Parkdale Public Library as a testing ground for what architecture can do, the thesis would like to remain self-aware that the design does not necessarily suggest the complete demolition of the existing library building, but is simply suggesting an alternative scenario for what architecture's potential can be when relying on Parkdale Library's site-specificity.

The Parkdale Public Library of West Toronto is situated within a community of wide-ranging demographics due largely to a multi-layered history. Waves of people have moved in and out of Parkdale over the years. This includes the well-to-do who established the neighbourhood in the beginning of the 20th century, to the immigrants and destitute that came in after the Gardiner Expressway devalued the area in 1955.²⁹ In turn, the emerging pluralistic nature of Parkdale attracted artists starting from the 1970s and following behind them was the rise of the real estate industry, which brought in the young working class.³⁰

Seeing this variety of different groups of people in Parkdale makes it an exemplar location to study and investigate how connections between differences could be encouraged.

29 Tom Slater, *Toronto's South Parkdale Neighbourhood: A Brief History of Development, Disinvestment, and Gentrification* University of Toronto, [2005].

30 Ibid.

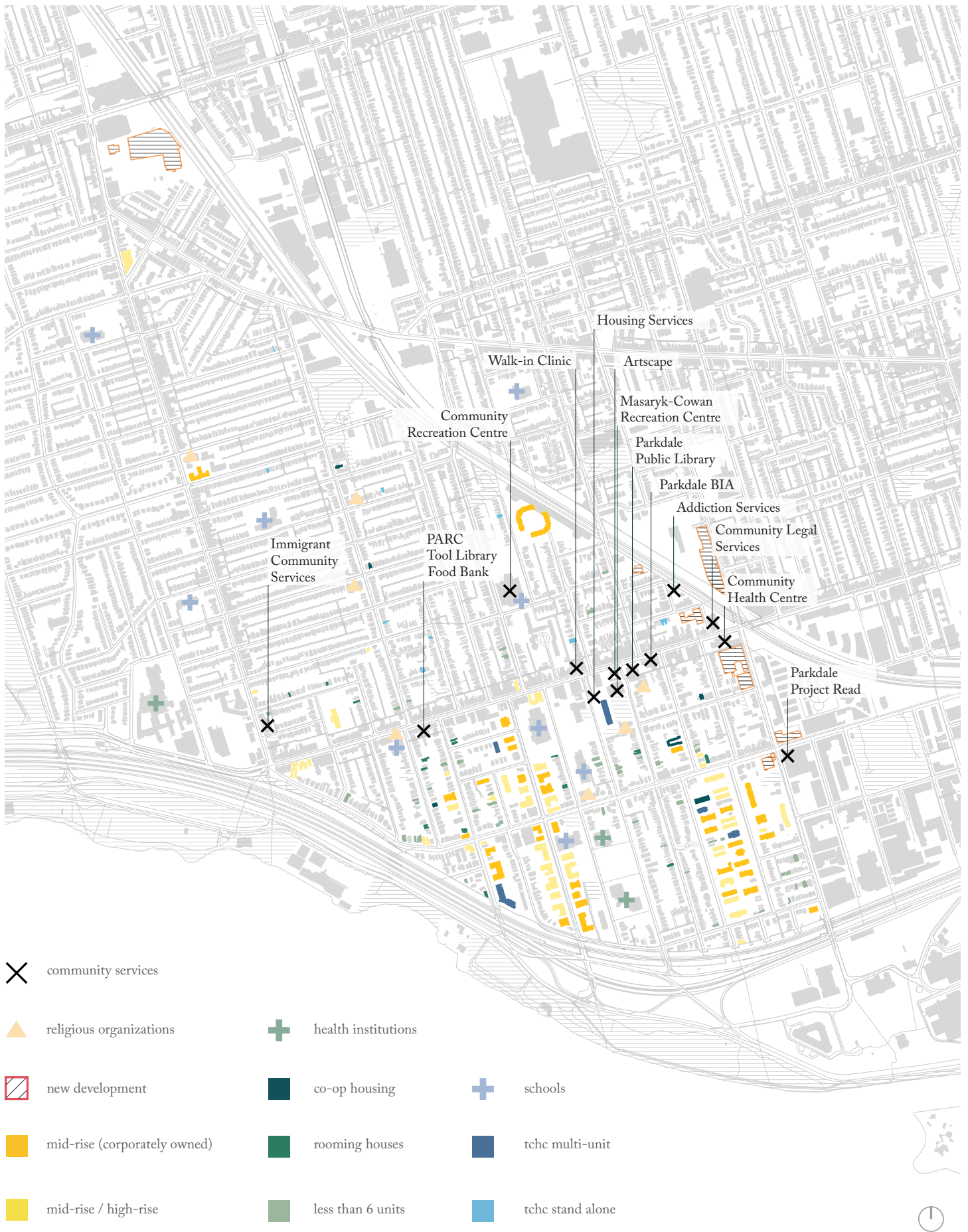


fig. 15 Map of Parkdale's public programmes & residential types.



North street elevation



South street elevation

fig. 16 North and South street elevations of Parkdale from Lansdowne to Dufferin.



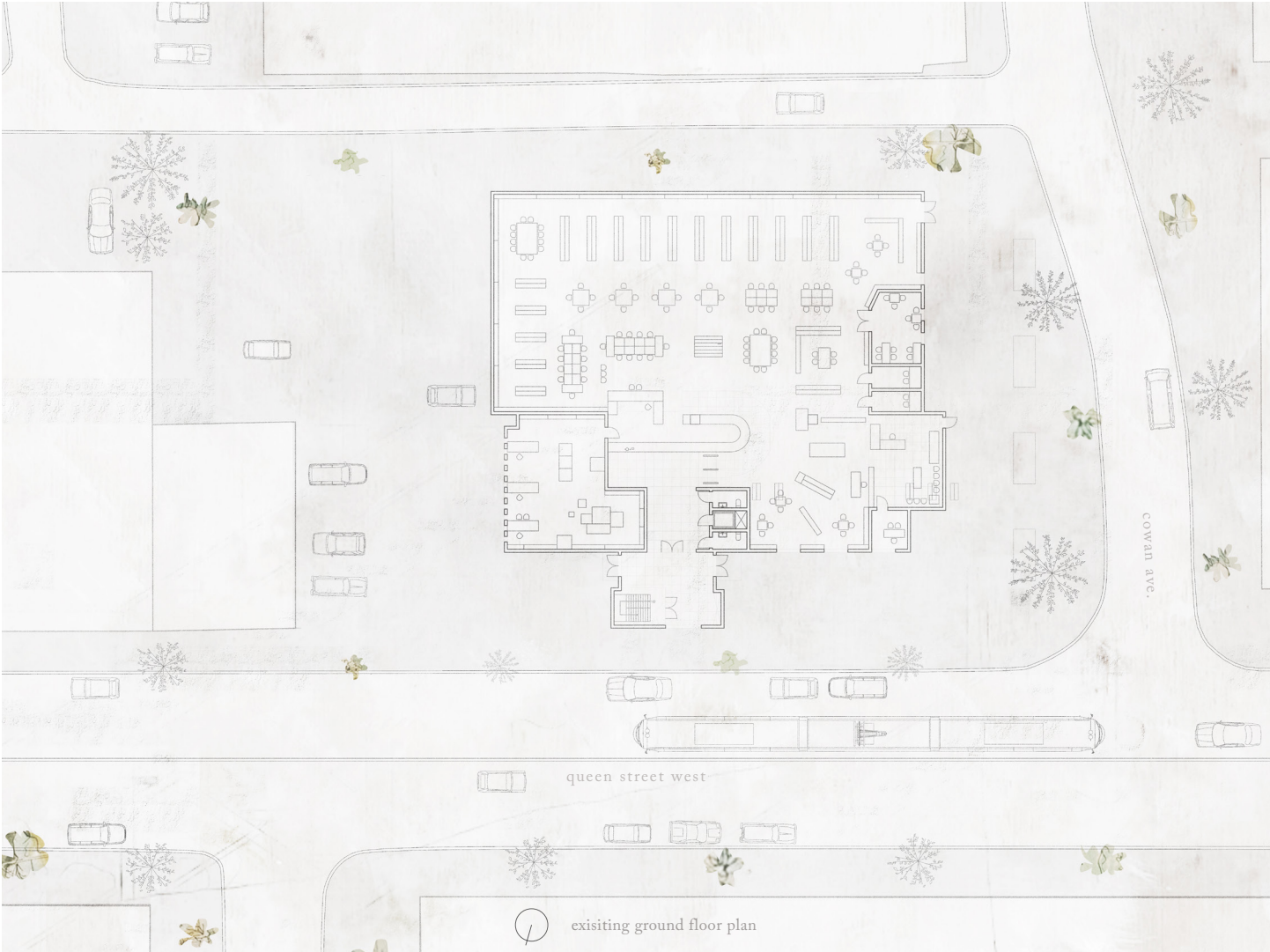
fig. 17 Queen Street West's south elevation from Elm Grove Ave. to Cowan Ave.

Parkdale Public Library





^ fig. 18 Corner view of existing Parkdale Public Library.
> fig. 19 Existing Parkdale Public Library's ground floor plan.



Throughout visits to Parkdale Library, various scenes within the space stood out. They held potential as opportune backdrops for narratives of connection and expression to take place between people who would not likely cross paths otherwise.



fig. 20 West entrance to Parkdale Public Library, 9am.



The first of such scenes is a lineup of people every morning, waiting for the doors to open at 9am, or 1pm if it's a Sunday.

Then upon entering into the library, there's a water jug at the front desk that welcomes everyone.



fig. 21 Circulation desk.

The computer station is usually filled up quickly soon after the library opens. All sorts of people come here to use the computers.



fig. 22 Library computers.



There are chairs for those waiting in line to use the computers. People sometimes chat with one another while waiting.

fig. 23 Waiting area for computers.

There's a book club
where people meet on
a continual basis.



fig. 24 Book club at back corner
of library.

There's story time for children.



fig. 25 Children's reading area.



fig.26 Parkdale Community Information Centre.

There's an information area which provides help with a focus on job applications.

There's someone who is grooving to music, almost dancing in his motor chair, while browsing the stacks.



fig. 27 Browsing library stacks.

There's a woman who is reading her poetry to a crowd.



fig. 28 Library's poetry circle.

In the basement, large events are held, such as an annual community ‘repair event.’



fig. 29 Parkdale Public Library basement.



fig. 30 Parkdale Public Library's information centre reappropriated as a performance area.

And there's a music performance program that happens every week.

Then there are some more specific scenes which are thought of as useful for shifting perspectives when connecting to others, like when:

A strong-smelling man wearing a strange dolphin on his vest goes around to each table and talks to people, and everyone takes the time to respond to him.

And when a person comes in to use the computers while glaring at everyone, but everybody gives him the benefit of the doubt, even the security guard.

.....

All these moments matter in showing what it is like to have free relations with each other. This freedom might lead one to talk to someone different in passing, or strike up a longer conversation in sharing interest in the same book, or groove along to one's own music. These moments are used to navigate through a way of designing that could encompass these moods, feelings, and needs. Learning from this, the architecture proposed hopes to be in line with and encourage these sentiments: of being free to engage with all kinds of people, and being free to express the self too. It attempts to do so by providing room for different needs, drawing in all different people, providing anchors that draw people together - whether for a second or an hour, and atmospheres that would imbue comfort and ease for people to be themselves.

A Library for Us

Reimagining Parkdale Public Library

fig. 31 The Parkdale Public Library is part of a network of public services for Parkdale.

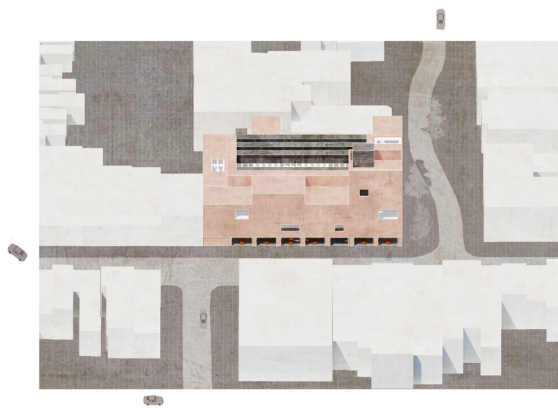
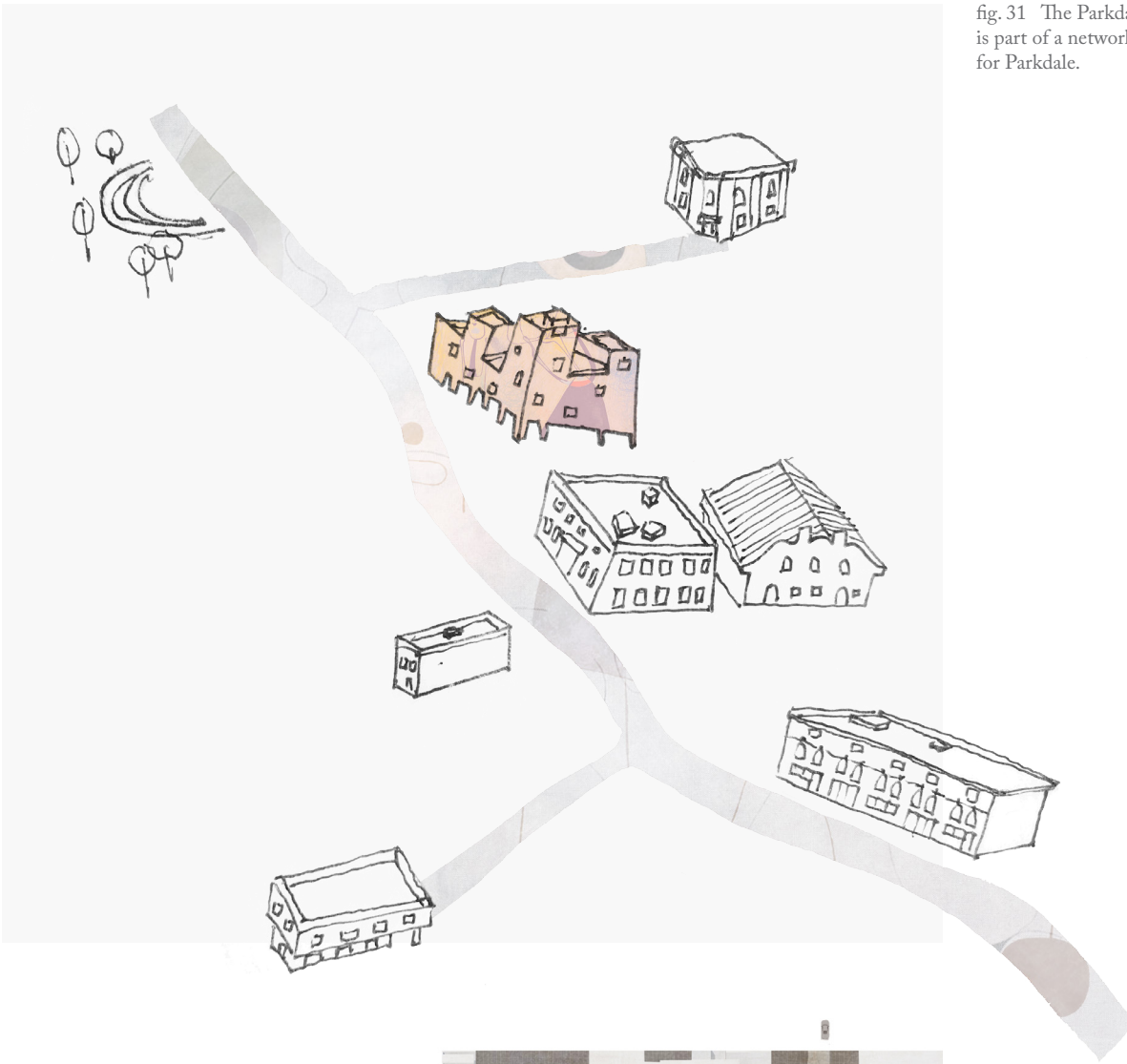


fig. 32 Front axonometric view of library building and site.

Designing the Parkdale Public Library for Us

31 Toronto Public Library,
“Parkdale Public Library: History,”
[https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/
parkdale/](https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/parkdale/) (accessed Mar 9, 2019).

The existing Parkdale Public Library does not reflect the life-filled events happening inside. The building was built in 1964, with its interiors renovated once in 1993, and again in 1998.³¹ Being so well used, it is in a bad state of disrepair constantly. In the current year of 2019, the building stands in the background as a small one-storey structure. With small windows and old brown brick-cladding, its exterior demeanor is underwhelming. One would pass by without ever needing to give it regard.

The thesis investigates and explores new design possibilities to better reflect Parkdale Public Library’s important inner life. A critical analysis of Toronto Public Libraries, successful library precedents, and the site context of Parkdale helped to inform the design of a reimagined library for Parkdale. Derived from these analyses is a proposal of a new library that would signal a world of humanity inside, one which is free, expressive and empathetic.

By proposing additional programming, a more generous spatial configuration, and curated finishes and furnishings within the spaces, the library enriches and expands its services to its users. This is lacking in the one-storey existing building as the library patrons currently demonstrate a need for the library, but the library responds back only with the bare minimum amenities. The new proposal makes known the vitality of library spaces relative to everyone’s lives. The design will fulfill the functional requirements of the library with crucial design elements that respond to the particular characteristics of Parkdale and its people.

In making a case for architecture’s role in enhancing public library institutions, James J. Gibson and Elaine Scarry are referenced for their environmental theories on the agency environments have on impacting us. Their theories will be expanded upon in the following sections that detail the main components of the new design proposal. In the end, the design of a reimagined library building for Parkdale will act as an emblem for what an open-access public building should look like- robust and safe, yet welcoming to all.



elm grove ave

conant ave

dunn ave

queen street west

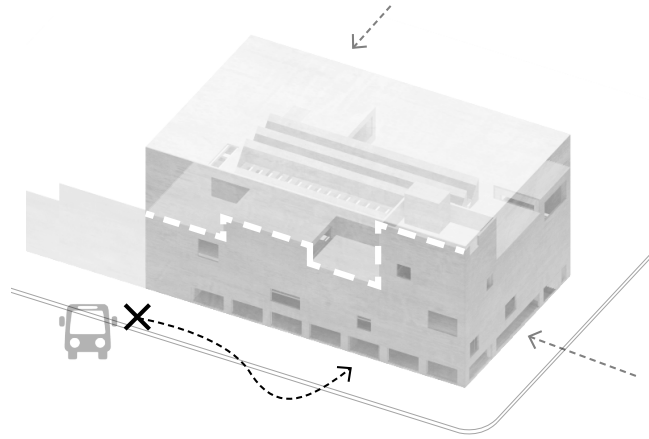
brock ave

o'hara ave

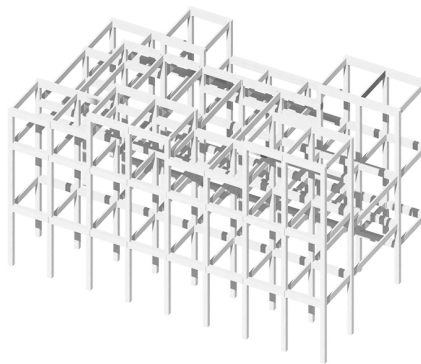


site plan

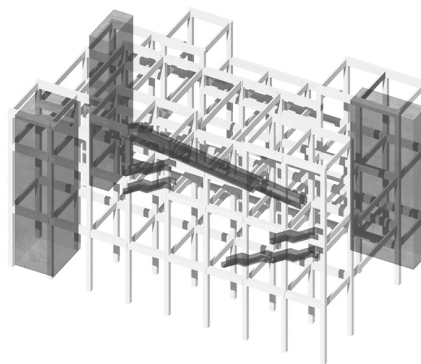
< fig. 33 Site plan.
> fig. 34 Design strategy diagrams.



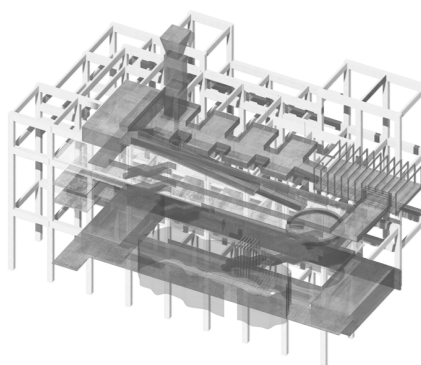
massing:
provides street presence
+ additional library space



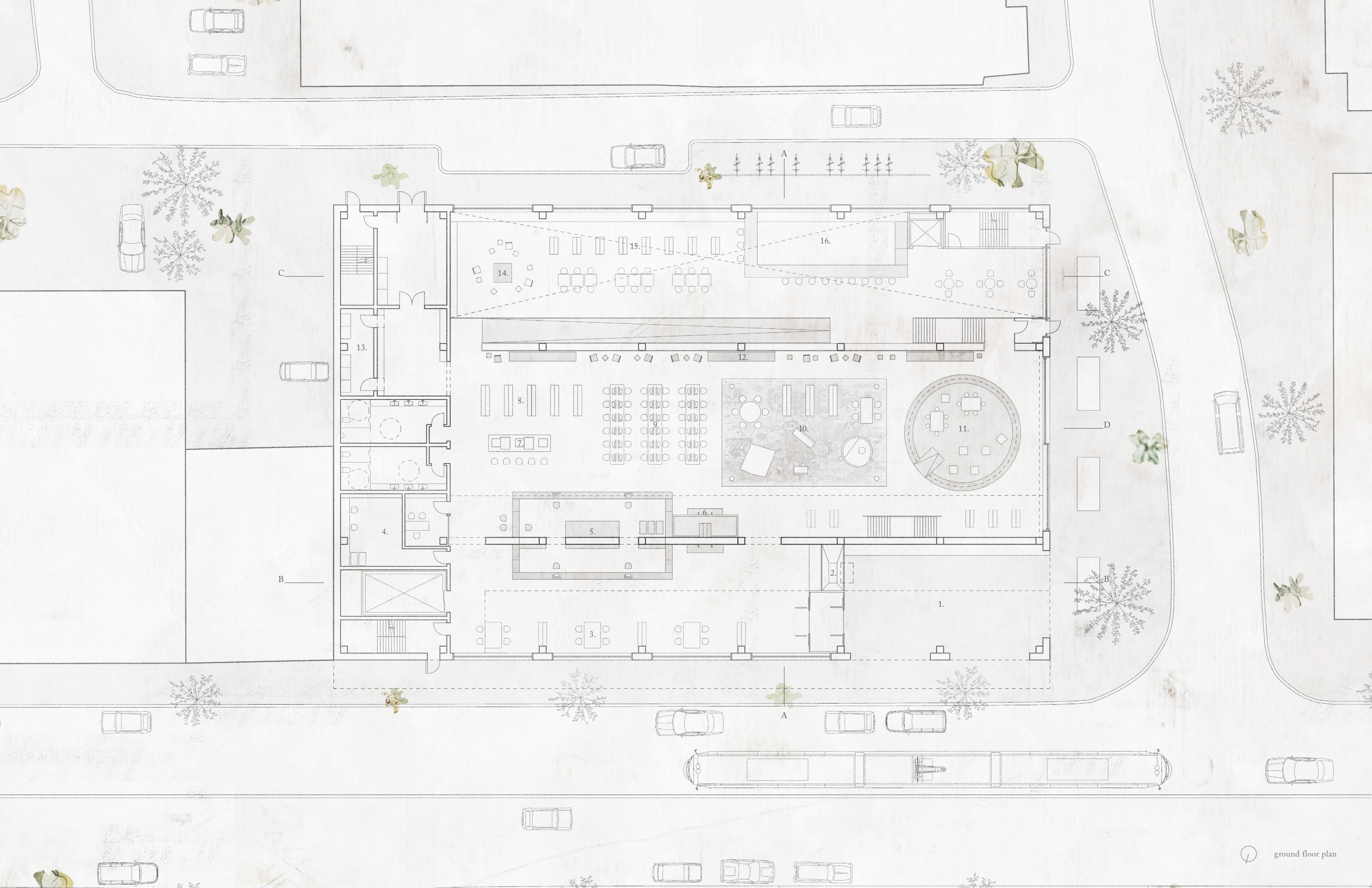
structure:
accommodates a variety of spaces



circulation:
scattered but apparent for easy
discovery



anchoring elements
+ mezzanine levels:
supports each space's functions
and atmosphere



C

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1



Additional Programming: Libraries Nowadays

32 David Hains, "Reference Library Unveils 3D Printers," <https://torontoist.com/2014/02/reference-library-unveils-3d-printers-is-cooler-than-indigo/> (accessed Mar 9, 2019).

33 Dereck Flack, "Condo Creep Finally Arrives in Parkdale," https://www.blogto.com/city/2016/10/condo_creep_finally_arrives_in_parkdale/ (accessed Mar 12, 2019).

The current library programming in Parkdale caters to many groups of people who frequent the library already: the elderly, the children, the dispossessed, the lonely and the poor. However, certain people don't come into the library as often, such as the working class and young adults. This is not because they cannot enter, but because they have fewer incentives to do so. For these groups of people, they have other optional social spaces like the café, the mall, or at home on the computer. But these realms are clearly exclusive to those without money or means to participate.

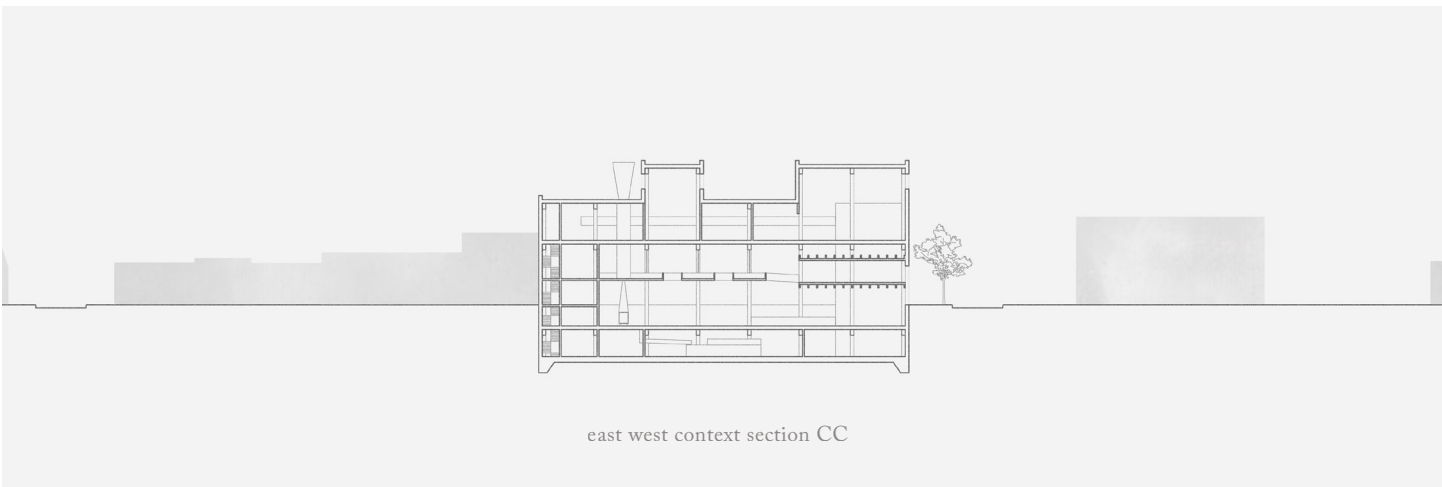
Maintaining that the library is the most welcoming interior public realm, additional programs of a café, a makerspace, and a permanent quiet reading room are added to draw in additional library patrons. These types of programs are not uncommon to libraries nowadays. The Toronto Reference Library has already successfully implemented a café near its library entrance, and makerspaces have been included in many new libraries within Toronto in response to the benefits they provide for conjuring curiosity in children and allow for new opportunities of learning amongst adults.³¹

In addition to the programs, an increased amount of study rooms and community rooms have been implemented to serve a greater amount of incoming library patrons, based on the projected growth of the neighbourhood.³²

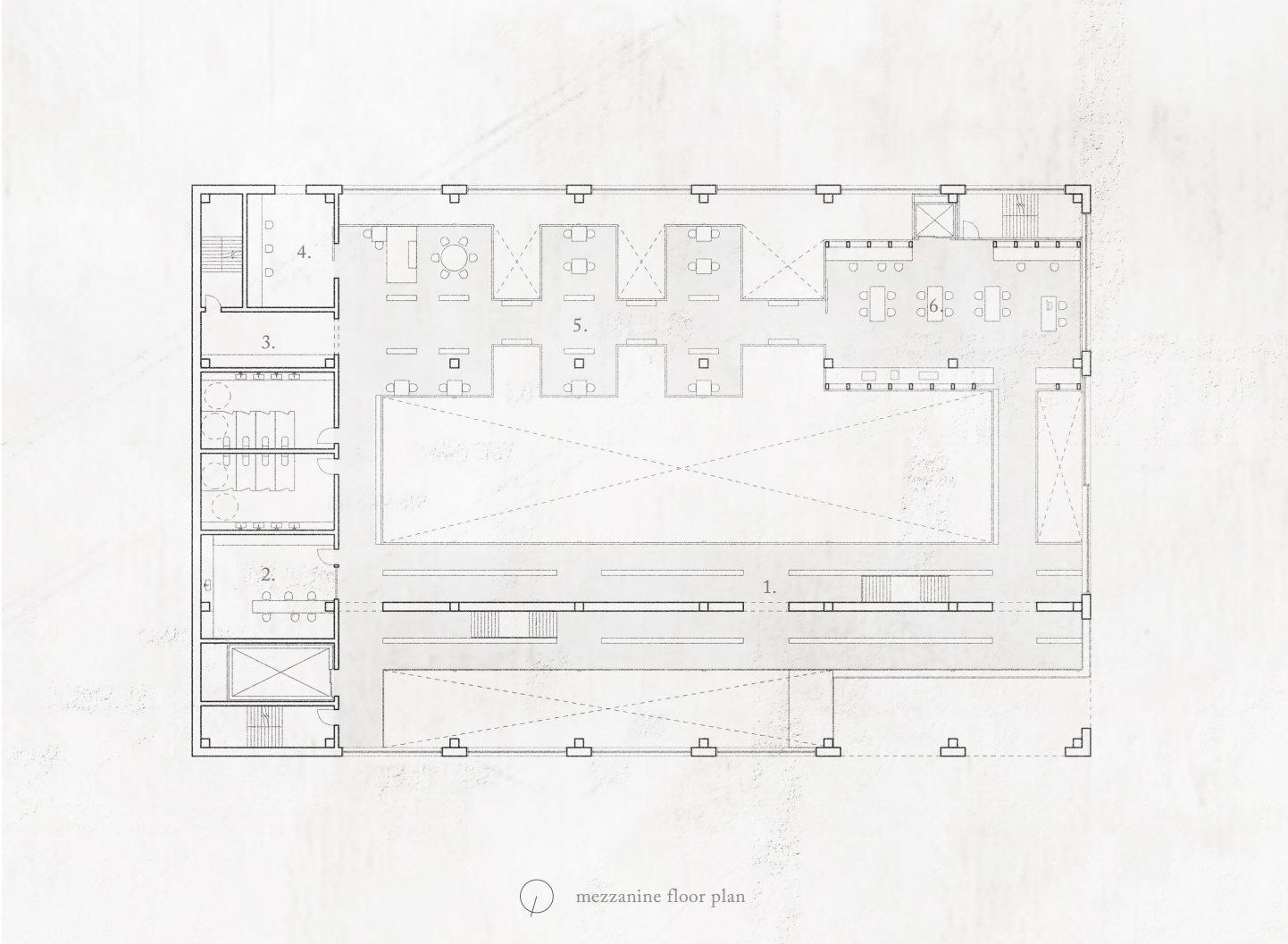
fig. 35 Ground floor plan.

ground floor legend:

1. exterior waiting area
2. book drop off
3. quick computer stations
4. staff office
5. staff front desk
6. fountain
7. print & scan station
8. newspaper periodicals
9. main computer station
10. main living room area
11. kids area
12. heated concrete benches
13. waste management
14. fireplace
15. multimedia collection
16. cafe

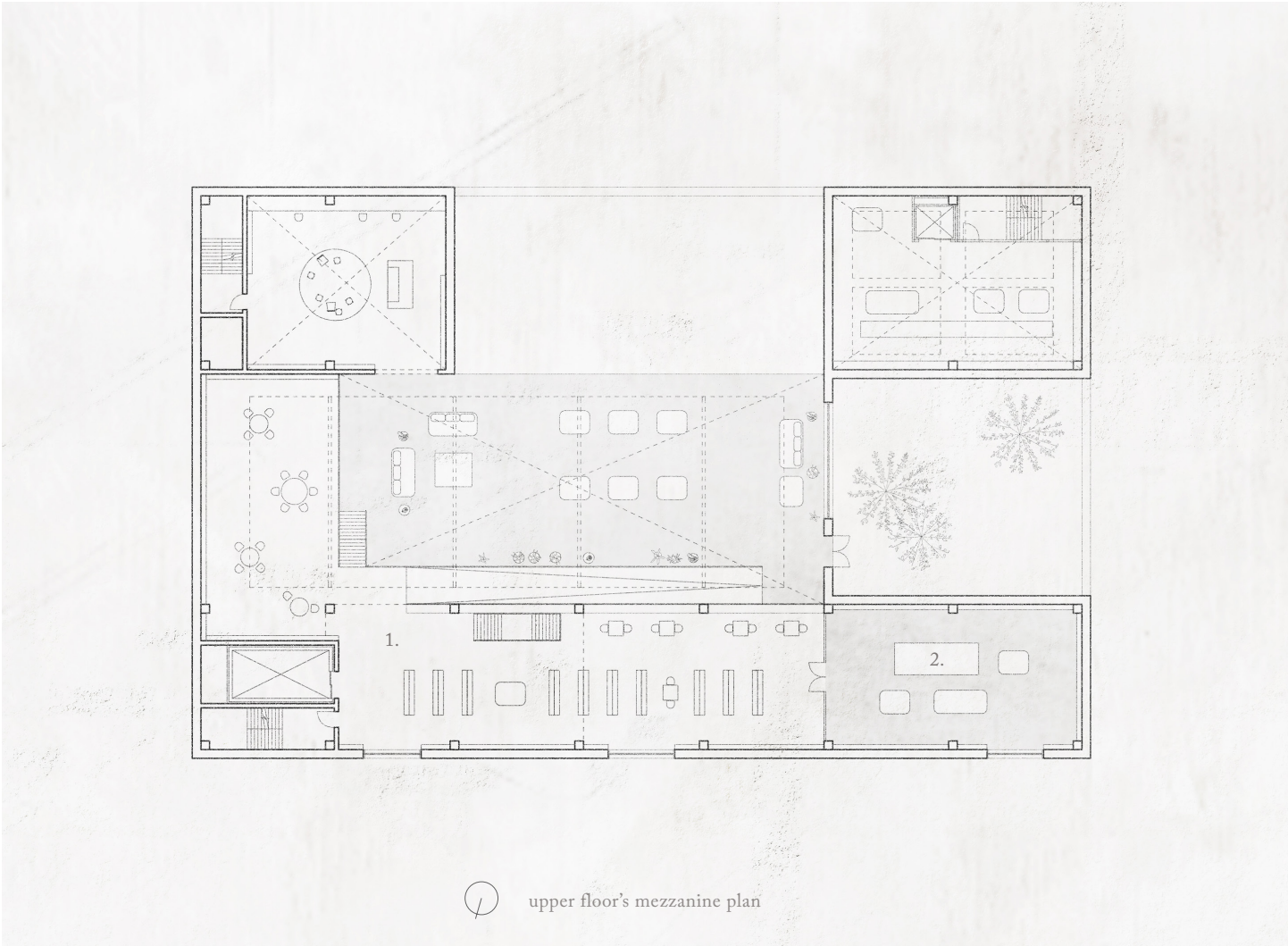


- ^ fig. 36 East westcontext section BB.
- ^ fig. 37 East west context section CC.
- > fig. 38 Mezzanine floor plan.



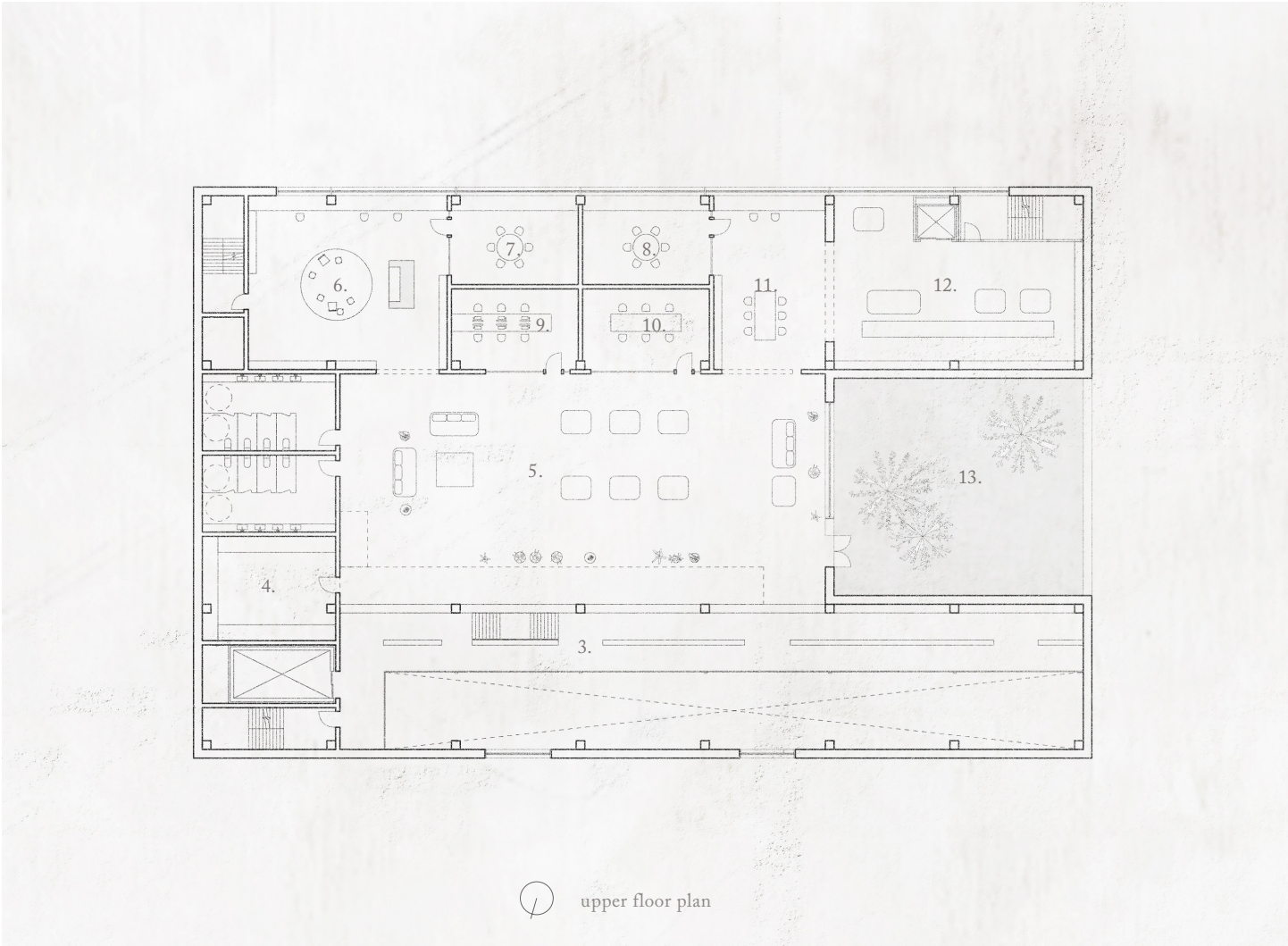
mezzanine legend

- 1. stacks
- 2. staff kitchen
- 3. public storage hall
- 4. study room
- 5. study / work area
- 6. makerspace



^ fig. 39 Upper floor's mezzanine plan.

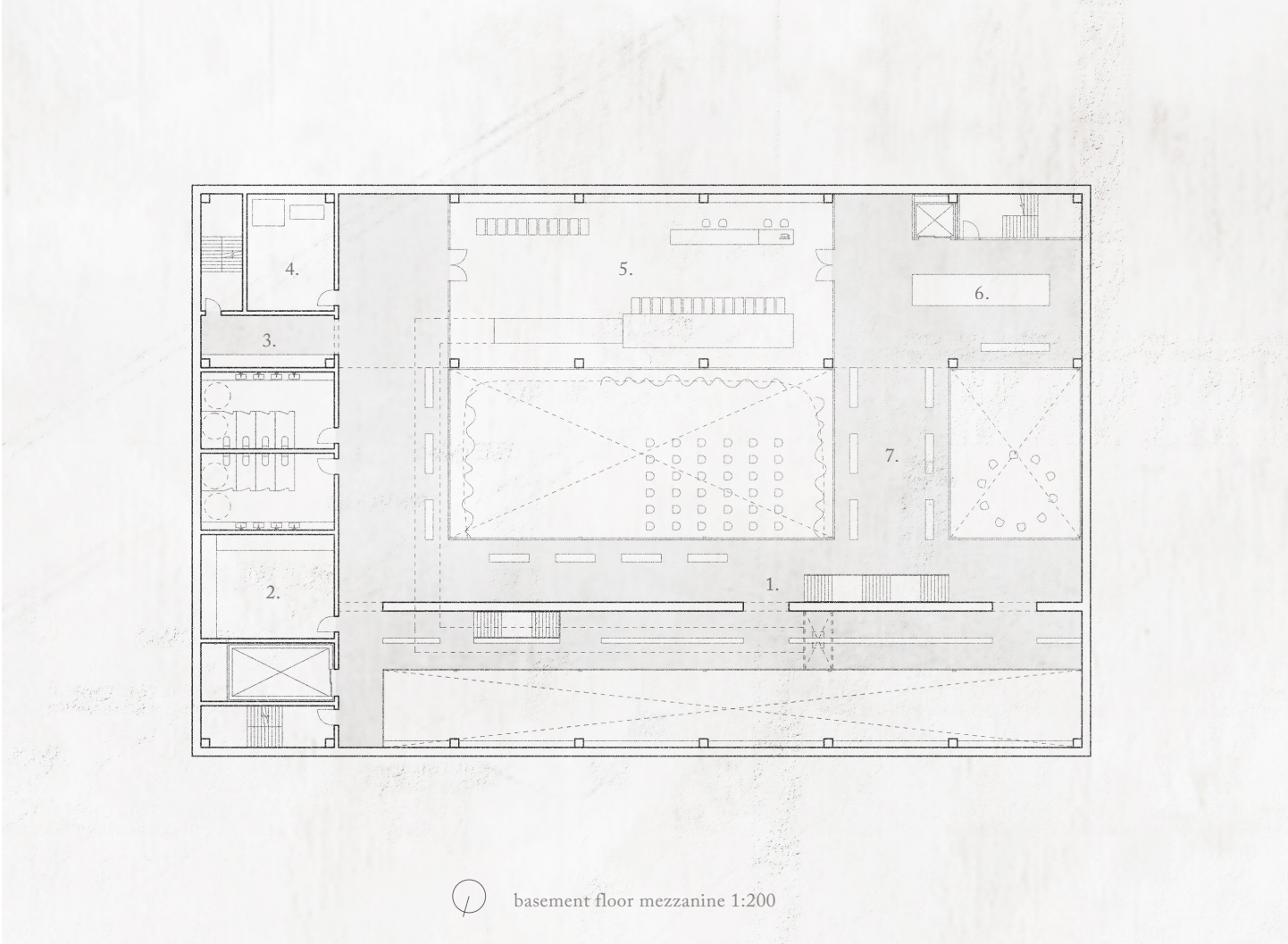
> fig. 40 Upper floor plan.



upper floor plan

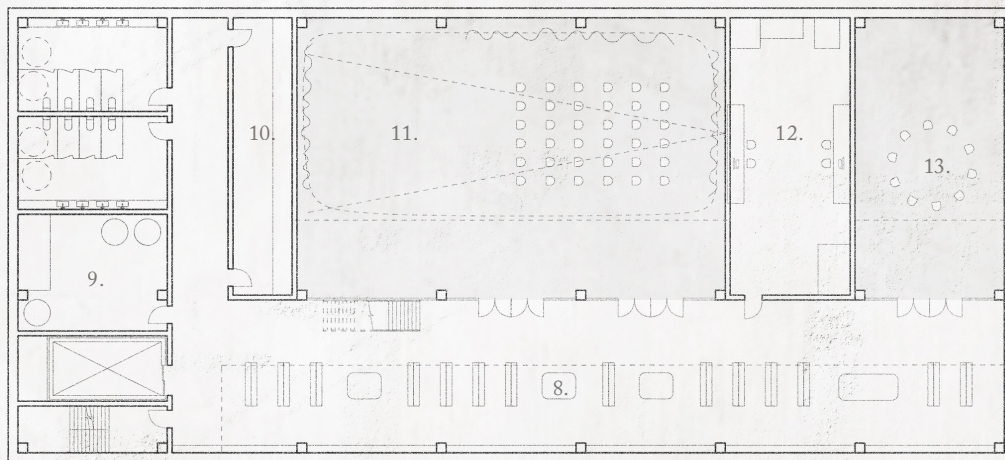
upper floor mezzanine
& upper floor legend

- 1. reading terrace
- 2. rare books
- 3. stacks continued
- 4. storage
- 5. silent reading area
- 6. fireplace room
- 7. classroom 1
- 8. classroom 2
- 9. staff workroom
- 10. classroom 3
- 11. study nook
- 12. lounge nook
- 13. terrace



^ fig. 41 Basement floor's mezzanine plan.

> fig. 42 Basement floor plan.



basement floor 1:200

basement mezzanine
& basement floor legend

- 1. stacks continued
- 2. lost and found
- 3. public storage hall
- 4. meter room
- 5. books sorting / repair
- 6. magazine table
- 7. observation area
- 8. reception hall / stacks
- 9. mechanical room
- 10. storage
- 11. flex room 1
- 12. media room
- 13. flex room 2



Spatial Framing: Rooms for Every Need

Looking at how the existing Parkdale Public Library is just one room supporting all the needs of the community, the design takes this as the center point for spatializing the new proposal.

The new building is a sturdy concrete frame that is needed to connect the rooms to one another and the shifting of spaces is done in response to the context. The space facing the back lane is sunken. The shifting of space upstairs was both a response to providing different community reading rooms and providing a facade that was contextual to the jogging street face of Queen Street West.

A new main living room will remain as the very center of the building, and is expanded upon in every direction to serve each degree of need for the varying library patrons. The main living room is for lounging which reflects the existing library as an open room for all, the threshold space is for quick in and out errands, and the sunken area behind is a secondary support space to the main living room, being connected to it while visually disconnected at times. Programmatic events like book club and poetry reading can play out in tandem at the carpeted main living room and at the fireplace in the sunken area below.

The mezzanine for working and reading is a degree away from the noises of the ground floor programme, while still being connected. The upstairs reading room is concealed for quiet sleeping, studying, and reading. The basement auditorium is for concealed loud events, like PPL's movie screening program, and the basement mezzanine is for leisurely observation.

The new proposal consolidates the books at the edge of the threshold space between the foyer and the living room, extending the stacks vertically along that datum to all levels with a main circulation stair and elevator. Anticipating expansion, the proposed library has space for double the amount of current books.



fig. 44 A few spatial anchors embedded in a detailed east west section.

Spatial Anchors: Affording Relations

34 James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York, NY [u.a.]: Psychology Press, 2015).

35 Ibid.

Psychologist James J. Gibson coins the term ‘affordances’ to describe the intrinsic complementarity relationship between the environment and the user.³⁴ He describes affordances as relative to each *unique* user.³⁵ Thus affordances are equally a fact of the environment and of user behavior. An example of this would be the ground surface which affords a person support. The surface has physical properties and yet in order to describe the surface as affording support, it must be described relative to the user.

Borrowing from this way of thinking, the proposed library imagines how stronger affordances can be created with an environment catered towards the specific and unique people of PPL.

The design offers anchoring objects that afford long and short moments of coinciding, and expression. The objects are a response to what was observed at PPL. This includes:

1. A fireplace in the sunken area which affords informal and formal gatherings like that of PPL’s poetry programme.
2. A fountain in the living room alludes to the welcoming jug of water found at the existing PPL. The new fountain has two spouts, affording a chance moment of engagement between two people drinking water and for those waiting in line.
3. A bright red carpet in the middle of the living room anchors the living room as a place of communal gathering, affording various interpretations of sitting.
4. A series of curved concrete benches with radiant heating at the southern edge of the living room and in the front exterior waiting area affords comfortable sitting, laying down, and idling. This is drawn from how people sit informally at the existing PPL.
5. A large window in the living room with a sound/barrier screen that affords air, connection to outside, and a sense of freedom in an often closed interior.
6. A floating makerspace room in the mezzanine above the ground floor affords an encapsulated space that is programmed for practical learning and this is taken from the annual repair event happening at PPL.
7. A group of planters scattered within the upper floor reading room affords a soft atmosphere for people sleeping and studying in the space.
8. A curtain in the basement auditorium affords a covering. It creates a moment of togetherness and requires a collaborative effort to move.

In providing anchoring objects that afford social engagement and expression, the library attempts to be responsive to library patrons not only through large scale architectural moves, but also through detailed moments in which architectural spaces are curated.

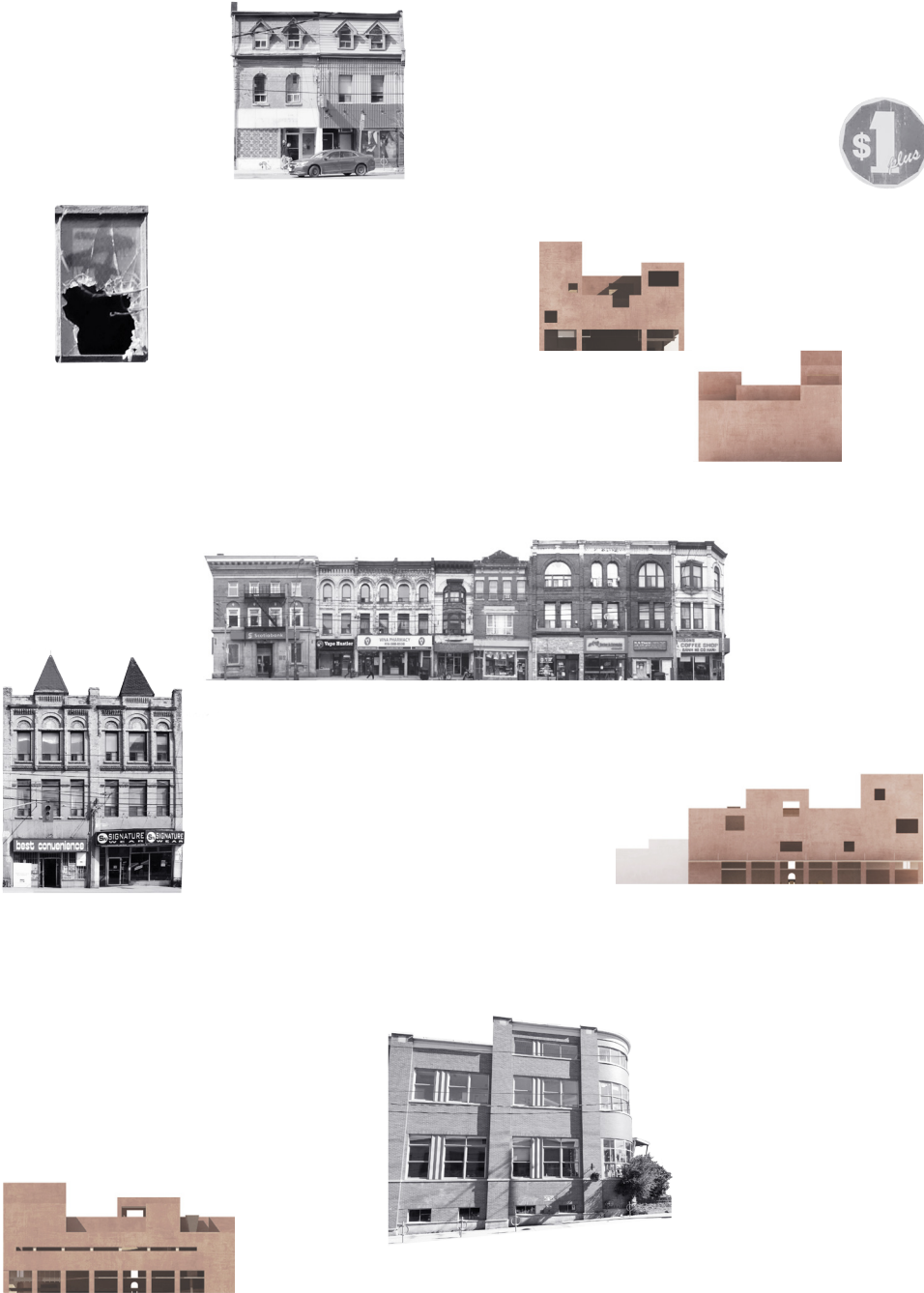
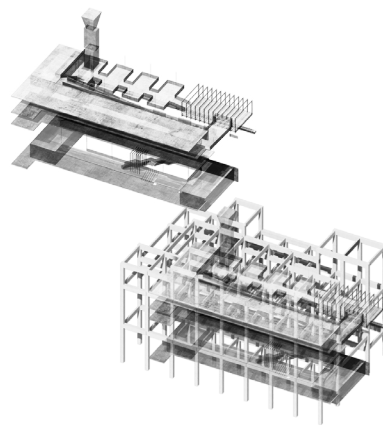


fig. 45 New library's elevations fitting into Parkdale's context.



An Aesthetic that Doesn't Exclude

The material aesthetic of the library attempts to not be neutral and pristine. Drawing from American essayist Elaine Scarry's assertion that aesthetic can better reflect human relations, the library attempts to be something real and resonating to us- which includes our shared wayward and imperfect reality. Scarry's imperative argument for aesthetics is that "an ethical fairness which requires 'a symmetry of everyone's relation' would be greatly assisted by an aesthetic fairness that creates in all participants a state of delight in their own lateralness."³⁶

36 Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and being Just*, 5th print., and 1st paperback print. ed. (Princeton [u.a.]: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001).

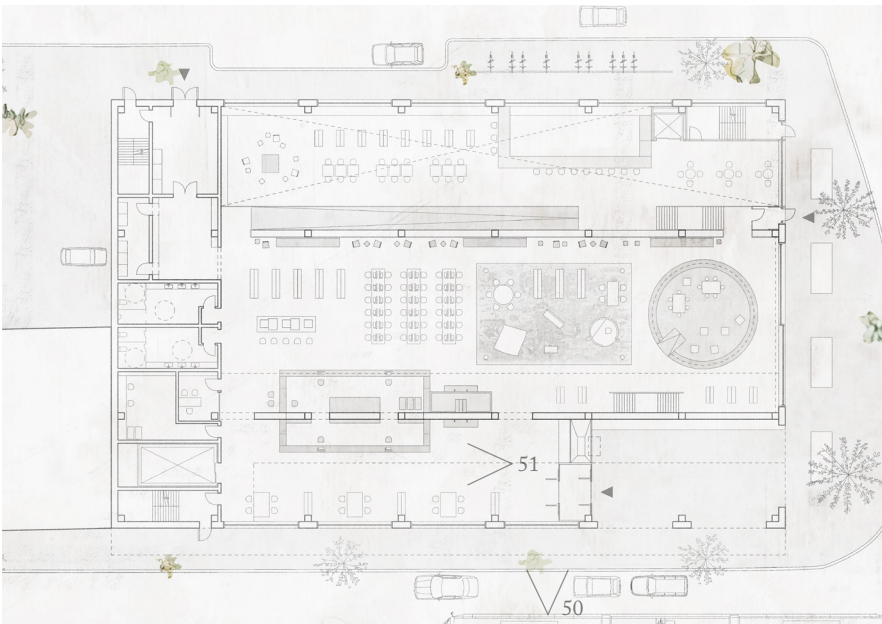
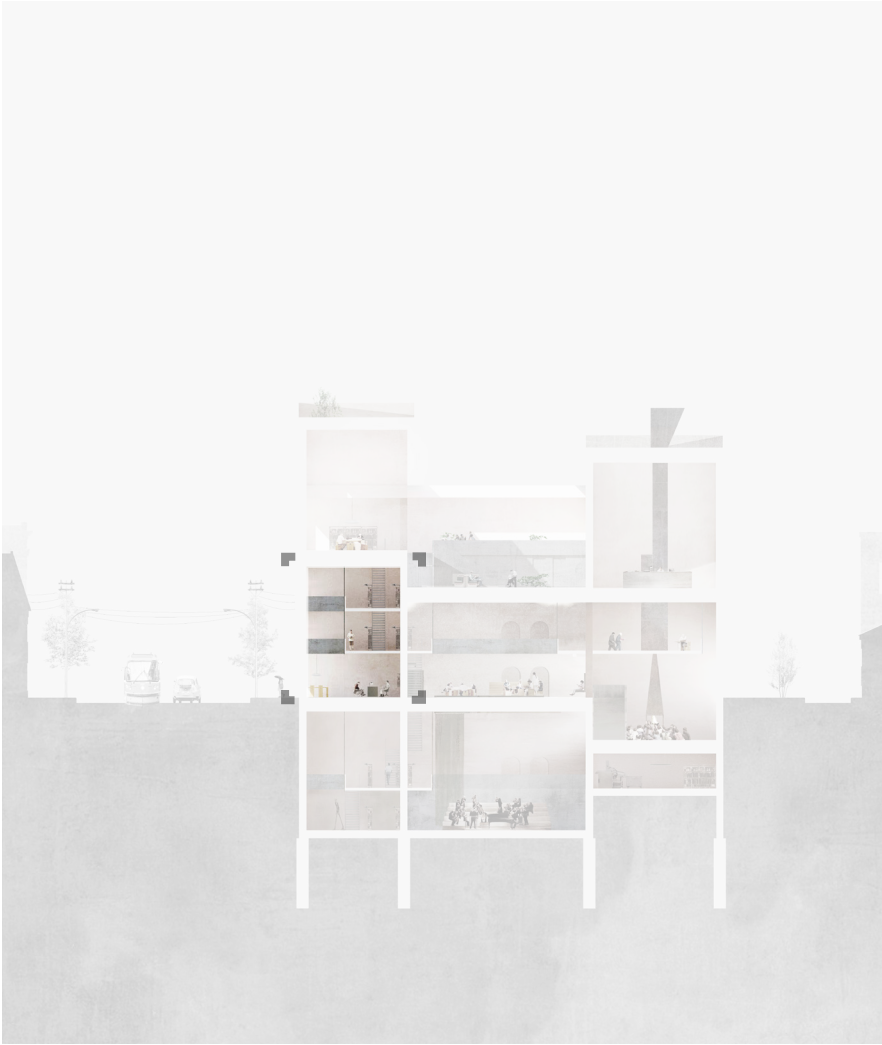
Thus the red concrete facade is meant to stand out slightly sorely, and the interior structure is like a skeletal frame. These elements connote a humaneness about them, something more natural than glass and white cladding but also more compelling than standard brick. They stand in for something resembling our shared bodily attributes. The dark concrete circulation elements surrounding each space act as a wayfinding tool and the interior walls are a lighter red-orange concrete, responding to the red-orange brick facades of Parkdale. These pigmented concrete surfaces give weight to the space.

The overall library massing is like a quiet giant, standing on the ground with strong stability, and a robust presence that will wear gracefully in the background, while allowing for endless possibilities of expected and unexpected library events to be a complimentary foreground.

The following are a new index of moments the reimagined Parkdale Public Library offers. Each proposed moment derives from existing context and events, and is designed and curated to serve both foreseeable and unforeseeable events at the library. Each library scene embraces the programs, space, affordances and atmospheres aimed to highlight and make known the life-filled moments happening inside the library.

To the reader: It is my hope that as you flip through the index, you may take your time to explore your own interpretations of use within each space. The new library scenes are offered as opportunities to imagine encounters with strangers with more acceptance and curiosity than regularly given.

fig. 46 View of exterior terrace programmed for music practice.
fig. 47 Concept diagram of library's architectonics.



^ fig. 48 Key section.
< fig. 49 Ground floor key plan.

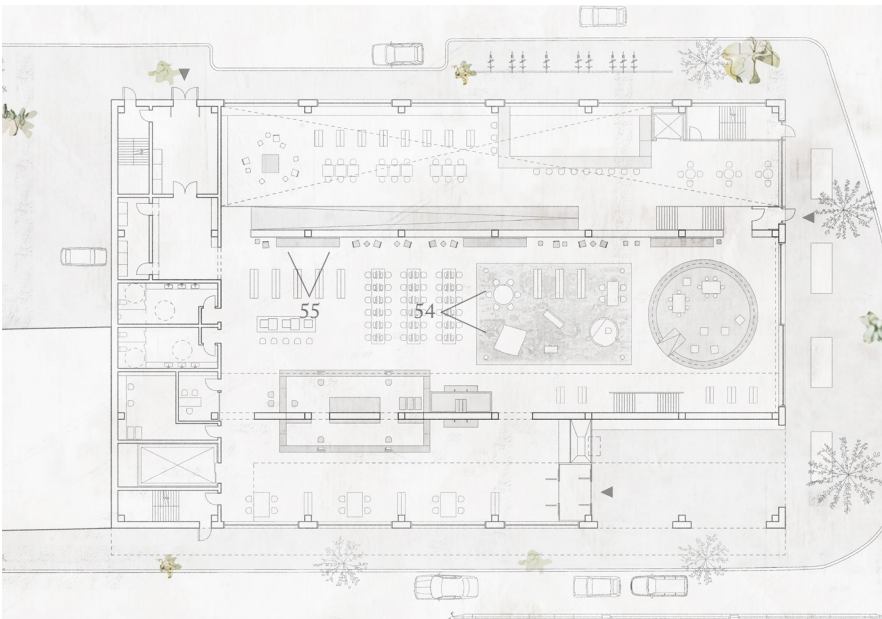
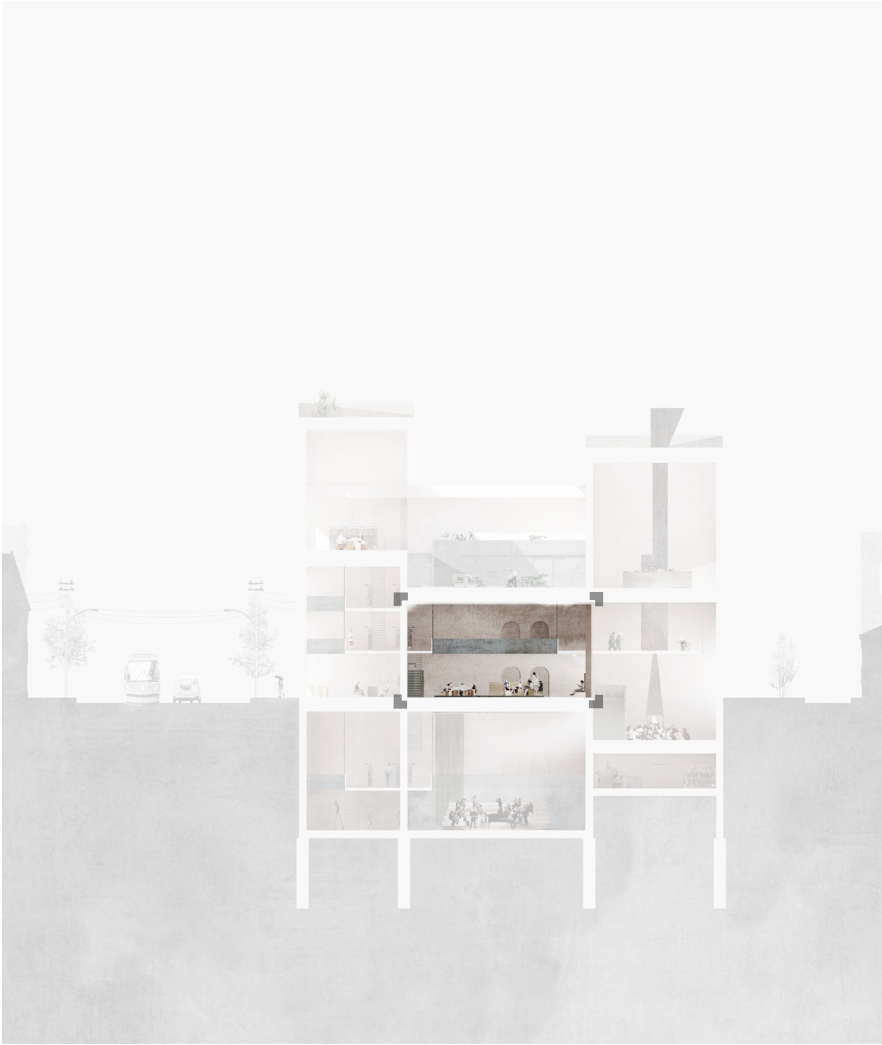


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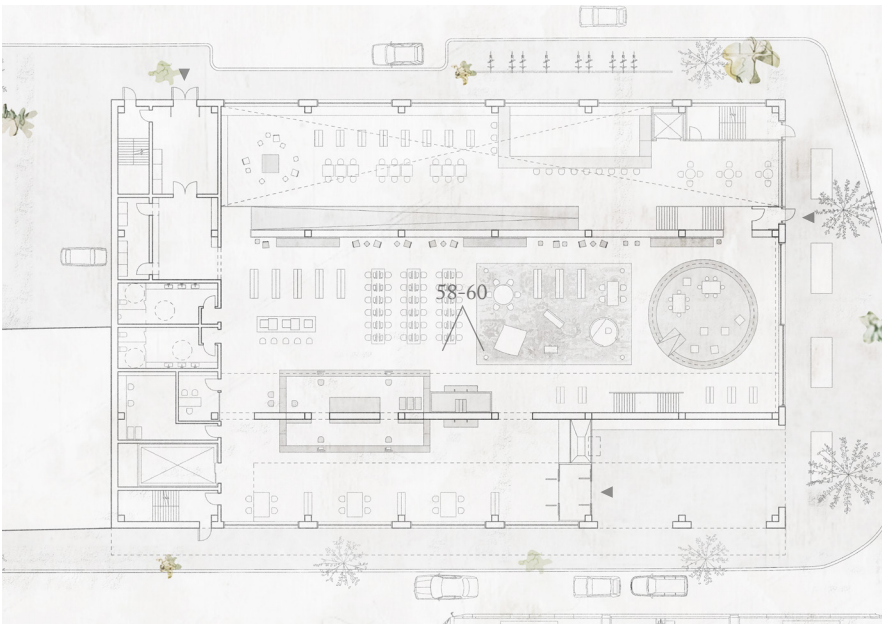
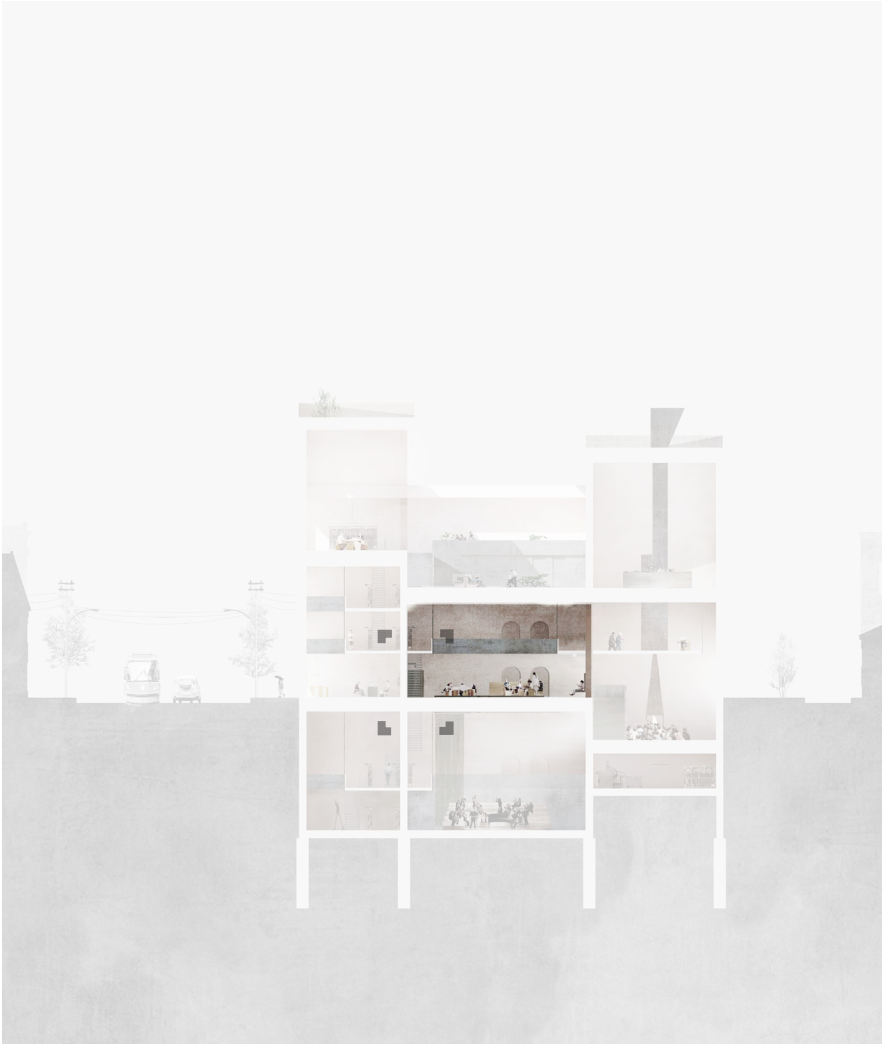
fig. 50 Library exterior view at dawn.
fig. 51 Interior entrance area.



^ fig. 52 Key section.
< fig. 53 Ground floor key plan.



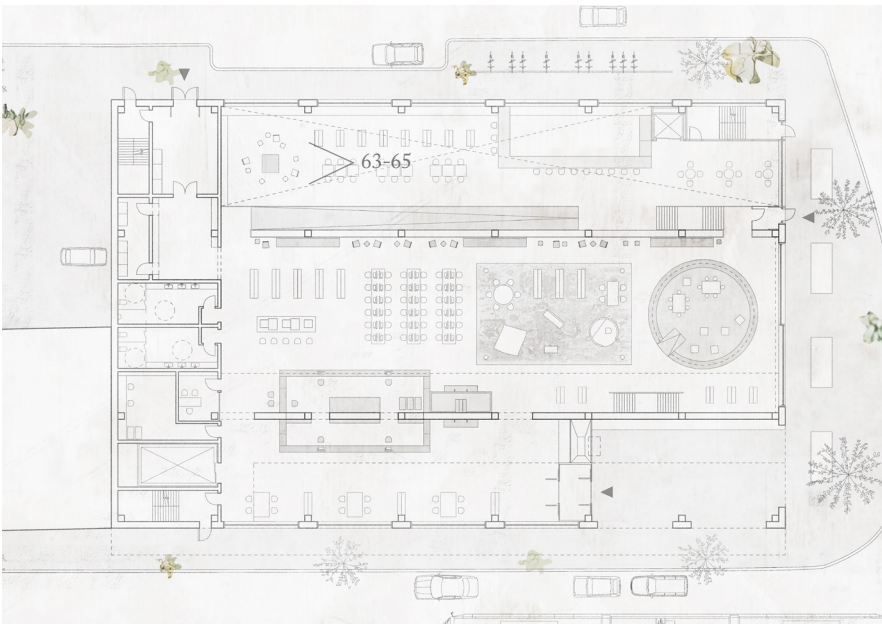
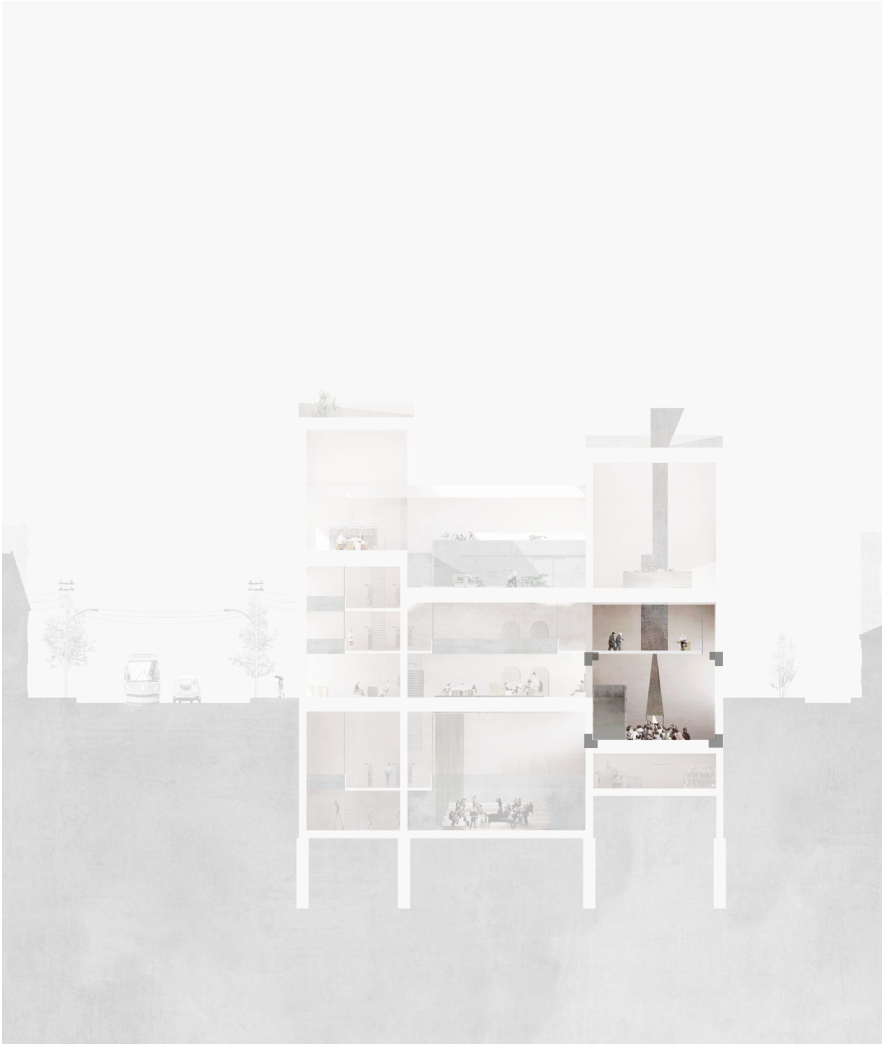
fig. 54 Main living room.
fig. 55 Radiant heated concrete bench.



^ fig. 56 Key section.
< fig. 57 Ground floor key plan.



fig. 58 Fountain scene 1.
fig. 59 Fountain scene 2.
fig. 60 Fountain scene 3.

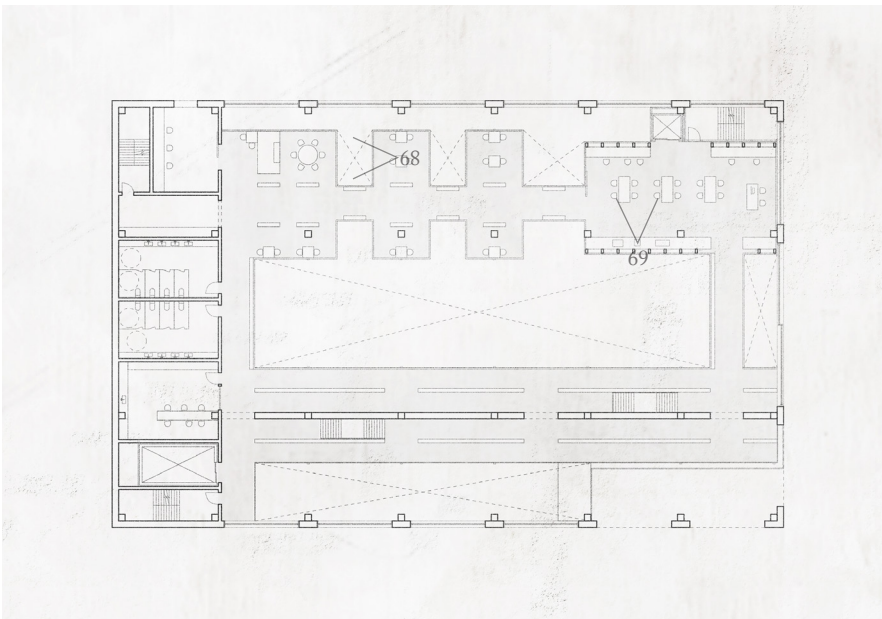


^ fig. 61 Key section.

< fig. 62 Ground floor key plan.



fig. 63 Fireplace at daytime.
fig. 64 Ledge adjacent to fireplace.
fig. 65 Fireplace at night time.



^ fig. 66 Key section.
< fig. 67 Mezzanine floor key plan.

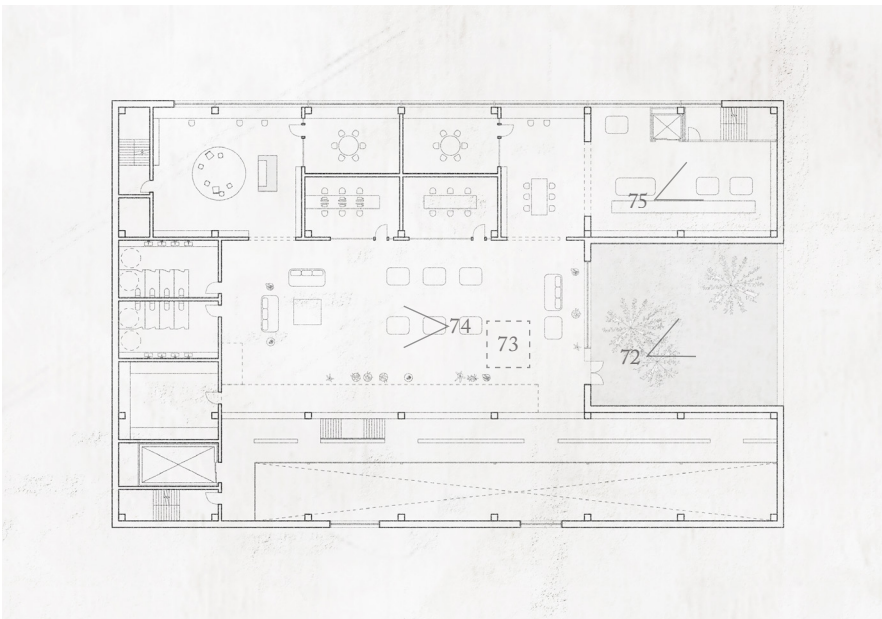
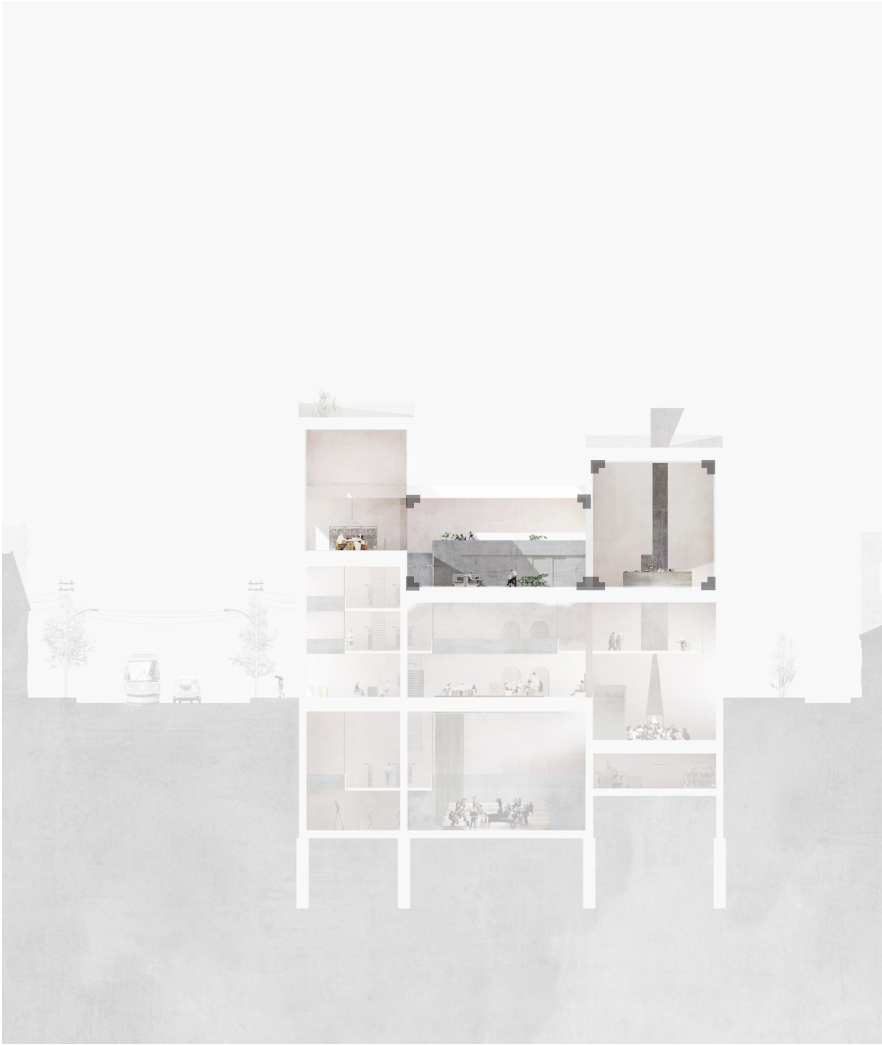


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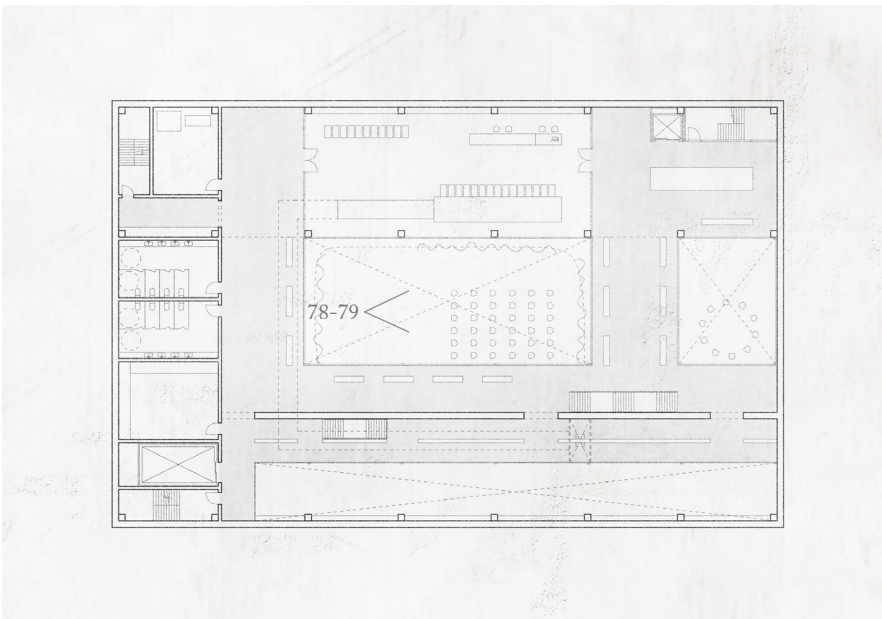
fig. 68 Mezzanine level.
fig. 69 Makerspace.



^ fig. 70 Key section.
< fig. 71 Upper floor key plan.



fig. 72 Exterior terrace garden.
 fig. 73 Skylights.
 fig. 74 Quiet reading room.
 fig. 75 Study room.



^ fig. 76 Key section.
< fig. 77 Basement's mezzanine floor key plan.



fig. 78 Basement auditorium scene 1.
fig. 79 Basement auditorium scene 2.

End Thoughts

About Architecture's Capacities

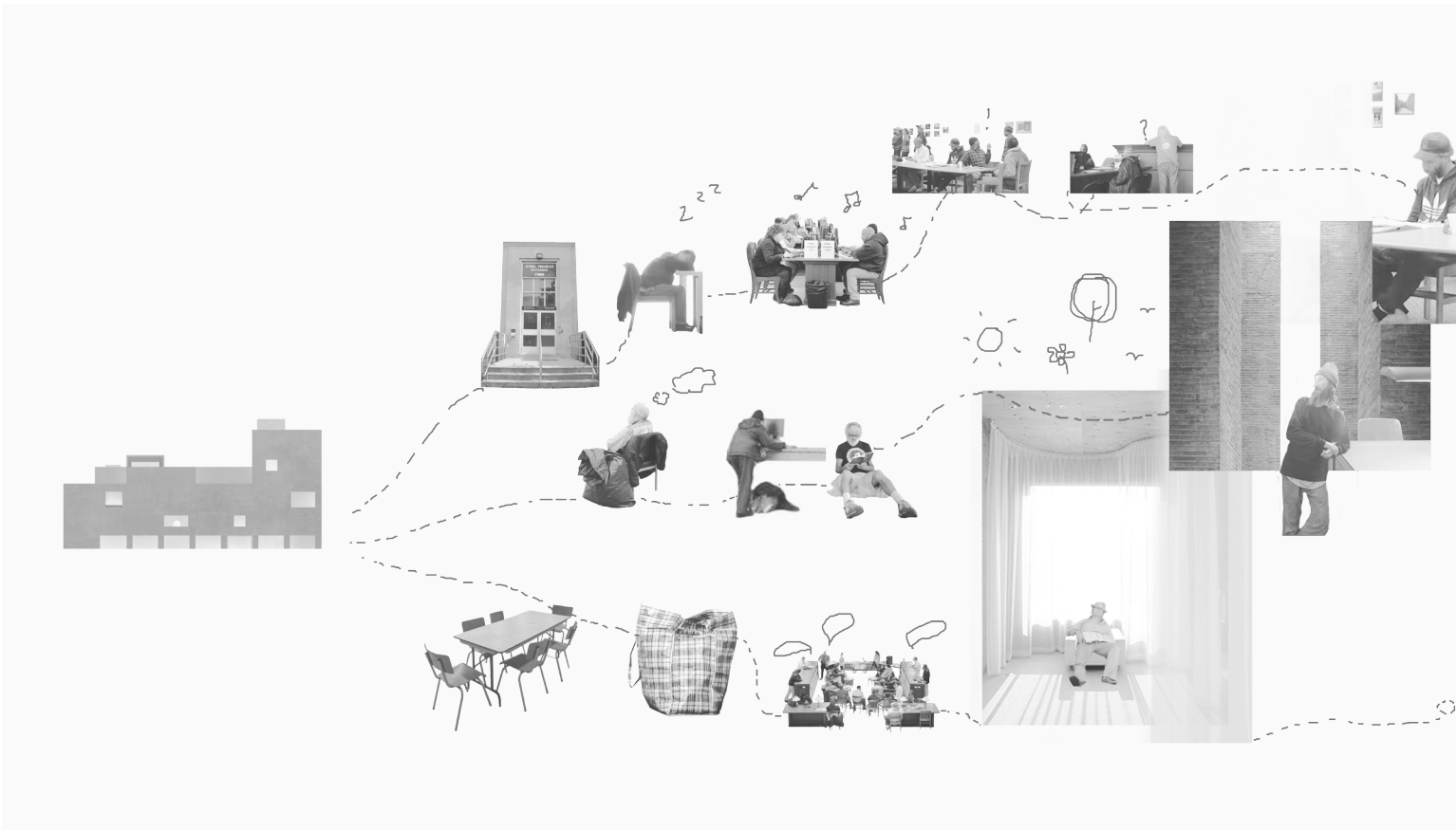


fig. 80 Concept diagram of the library and its functions highlighted.

Concluding on Architecture's Capacities

In conclusion, this thesis has challenged architecture to better respond to our humanity.

The proposed architecture for the existing Parkdale Public Library drew its materiality from the patrons and events happening inside. In observing how patrons engaged with each other, and expressed themselves freely, the proposed design attempts to intensify these traits in a manner that brings it all into greater consciousness. The expanded rooms and programs provide for different needs, the anchors provide for moments of engagement, and the atmosphere provides for ease of expression- all of which are learned from and created from the existing moments within the library. It is the things, events and connections that are fleeting within the library which the architecture would like to hold onto. In this way, the architecture addresses our need for encountering meaningful moments in life to extend our empathy, and make our lives rich with experience.

It should be noted that the importance of architecture's capacity to create meaningful aesthetic realities is to support realities often overlooked. For Parkdale Public Library, while it is one of the few places in its neighbourhood that truly welcomes everyone, it still lacks a material background to support the notion. The current existing building testifies to this as it stands in the background as a muted box, failing to signal the greater public to come in and failing to provide a welcoming interior for both new comers and old timers to enjoy staying in.

Ultimately, the design encourages us to think more critically about architecture's relevance to us and to neighbourhood public libraries. Imagine what a library can do when it has the physical capacity to foster a stronger sense of humanity amongst its patrons.



On my last co-operative work term of my undergraduate studies, I remembered this moment the most:

Walking to the sprinkling pulse of rain, carrying bags of groceries down East Houston Street in New York, I was on my way home, just five blocks away.

I had my rain jacket on so it wasn't that terrible, but an umbrella suddenly covered over me.

A black, middle-aged woman -who had a bit of an old world charm that contrasted with this new world bustle- was walking in the same direction as me, and had begun sharing her umbrella. Though I wanted to say thank you and chat with her while we walked, I couldn't, because she only spoke Spanish and I only spoke English.

This exchange was a creative moment in life worth noticing.

It was worth noticing because it was questionable whether the exchange ever happened at all. Was I dreaming it? It felt like something from a story or a movie because such strange circumstances don't happen often in this world.

But the matter of the fact is that it did happen: this unexpected encounter had occurred in which a certain amount of intimacy and vulnerability was stirred up.

It makes me want to ask: how can I replicate this? How can I encounter such a moment again?

It's stayed with me for a while now, this moment that's become a memory I keep drawing in my head.

- a reflection on the importance of public engagements within the city

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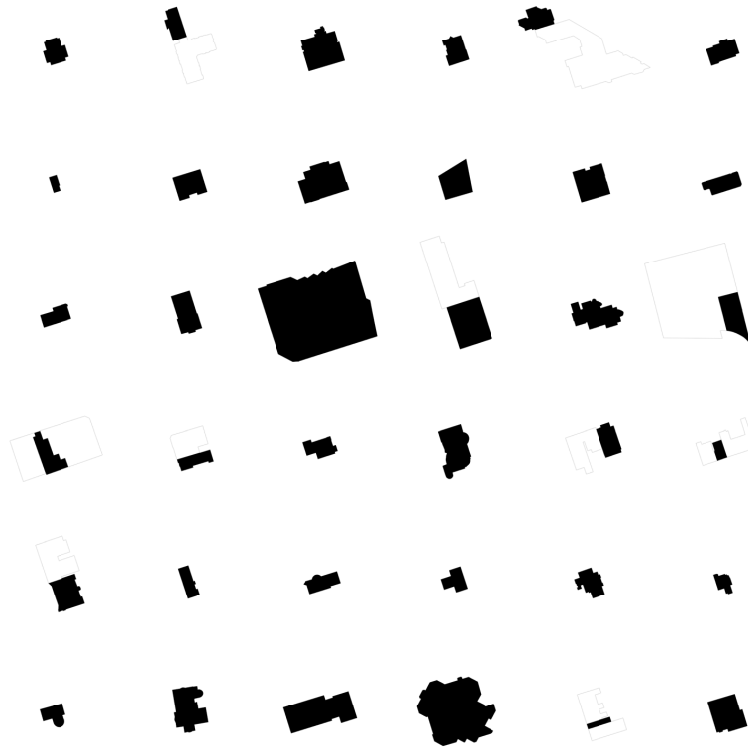
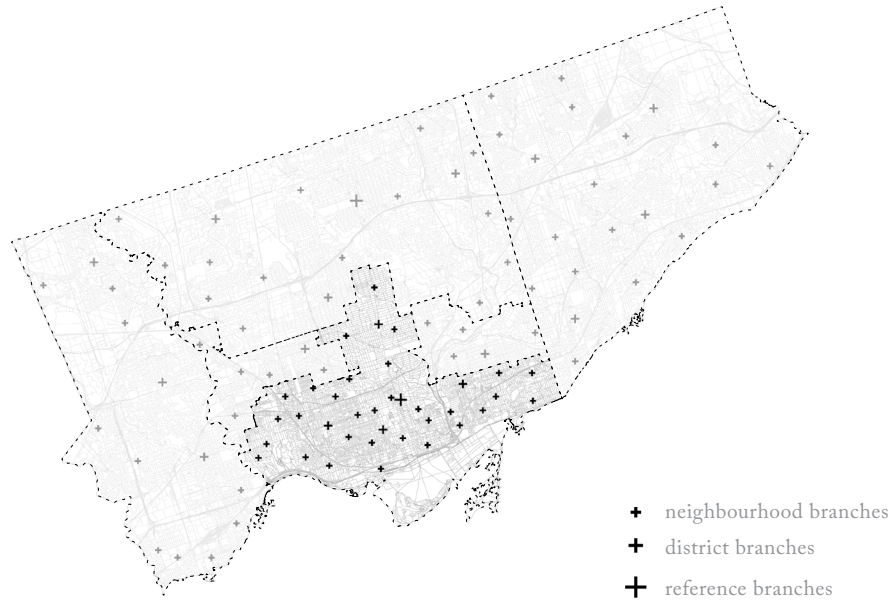
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

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Appendix

Background Studies and Design Tests

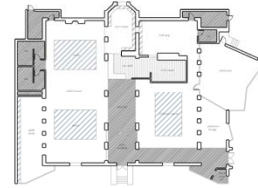


mapping out toronto's libraries and their urban massing to understand the flexible typology of libraries

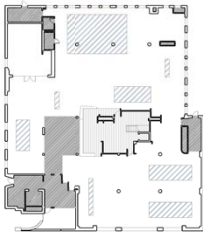
-  circulation/service
-  administration
-  stacks



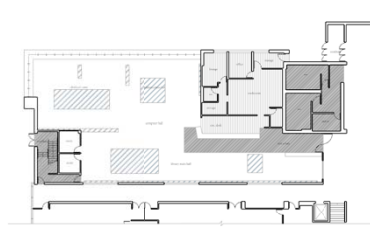
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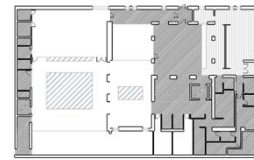
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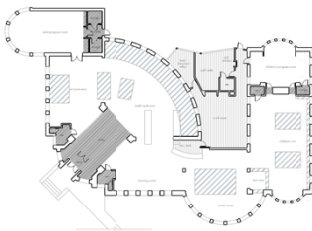
Deer Park



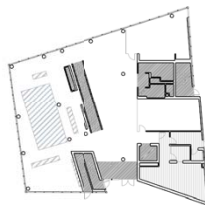
St. James Town



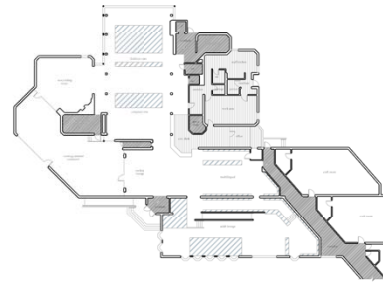
Bloor Gladstone



Riverdale



Fort York




Sanderson

March 2018

PARKDALE LIBRARY PROGRAMS

Program descriptions on back of this page

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
 <p>Children & Teen Book Sale Starts March 10th Don't miss out on great teen and children's books!</p>				1	2	3
					Baby Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-18 months Drop in Live in the Library Presents: Polky Village Band 7pm All ages Drop in.	Family Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-5 Drop in Paws 4 Reading 11am-12pm All ages Drop in
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mini Makers 2:30-3:30pm Ages 4-8 with parent Drop in.		Makers Club 4-5pm Ages 5-12 Drop in	Creative Expressions 1-3pm Adult Drop in SoundMakers: Creating Sounds with Water 1-2pm All Ages Drop in Homework Help for Teens 4:30-7:30pm Gr. 7-12 Drop in Toronto Poetry Circle 7-8pm Drop in		Baby Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-18 months Drop in Movie Night Bambi 5:30pm All ages Drop in	Family Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-5 Drop in
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Swallowing Clouds: A Physical Arts Workshop 10am-12pm Mon-Fri Ages 9-12 REGISTER						
Musical Instrument Library Petting Zoo 1:00-1:45 pm Mon-Fri All ages Drop in.						
Mini Makers 2:30-3:30pm Ages 4-8 with parent Drop in.	BINGO 2-3pm Ages 5-12	Puppet Show: The 3 Bears 2-3pm Ages 0-7 Drop in	Magic Show 2-3pm All ages Drop in Creative Expressions 1-3pm Adult Drop in Make Paper & Help the Environment 4-6pm Teens 13-18 Drop in	Paper Airplane Races 2-3pm Ages 5-12 Drop in	Baby Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-18 months Drop in Jewelry Making for Tweens 2-3pm Ages 11-18 Register Movie Night Storks 5:30pm All ages Drop in	Green Day Story Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-5 Drop in Paws 4 Reading 11am-12pm All ages Drop in
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Mini Makers 2:30-3:30pm Ages 4-8 with parent Drop in.		Makers Club 4-5pm Ages: 5-12 Drop in	Creative Expressions 1-3pm Adult Drop in Homework Help for Teens 4:30-7:30pm Gr. 7-12 Drop in		Baby Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-18 months Drop in Movie Night Like Mike 5:30 All ages Drop in	Family Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-5 Drop in
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Mini Makers 2:30-3:30pm Ages 4-8 with parent Drop in.		Makers Club 4-5pm Ages: 5-12 Drop in LGBTQ+ Book Club 6:30-8	Creative Expressions 1-3pm Adult Drop in Homework Help for Teens 4:30-7:30pm Gr. 7-12 Drop in		Library Closed	Family Time 10:30-11am Ages 0-5 Drop in Paws 4 Reading 11am-12pm All ages Drop in

Parkdale Library | 1303 Queen Street West | 416-393-7686



Proposed Programme:

	m2	
Foyer Area		110
Vestibule	10	
Staff Desk	10	
Quick Computers	60	
Holdings Shelves	20	
Instrument Library	10	
Living Room		530
Computers	70	
Printing Station	10	
Lounge Area	250	
<u>Cafe</u>	200	
Mezzanine		350
Work Area	200	
<u>Maker Space</u>	150	
Reading Room		885
Study Room 1	75	
Study Room 2	130	
Study Room 3	20	
<u>Quiet Open Area</u>	550	
Nooks	110	
Basement		915
Reception Hall	345	
Community Room 1	400	
Community Room 2	150	
Media Control Room	50	
Stacks Area		830
Main Stacks	600	
Storage Stacks	300	
Books Dropoff	10	
Books Sorting Room	20	
Administration		50
Staff Storage	20	
Community Information	30	
Services		400
Library Storage	80	
Lost and Found	10	
Washrooms	250	
Kitchen	25	
Building Services	85	
Circulation		145
Stairs	80	
Elevator	15	
<u>Ramp</u>	50	
TOTAL m2		4395

fig. 84 Proposed Programme for a new Parkdale Public Library

Parkdale Branch – Potential Redevelopment at Queen Street West and Cowan Avenue

Date:	April 18, 2017
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to inform the Toronto Public Library Board that City Council approved the creation of an inter-divisional agency group to assess the potential for redevelopment at Queen Street West and Cowan Avenue, which involves the Parkdale Branch site as well as other City sites.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact arising from this report.

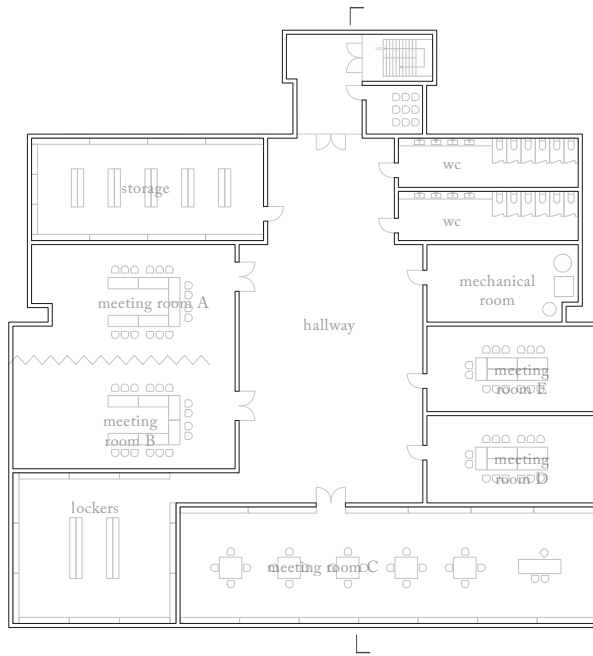
The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

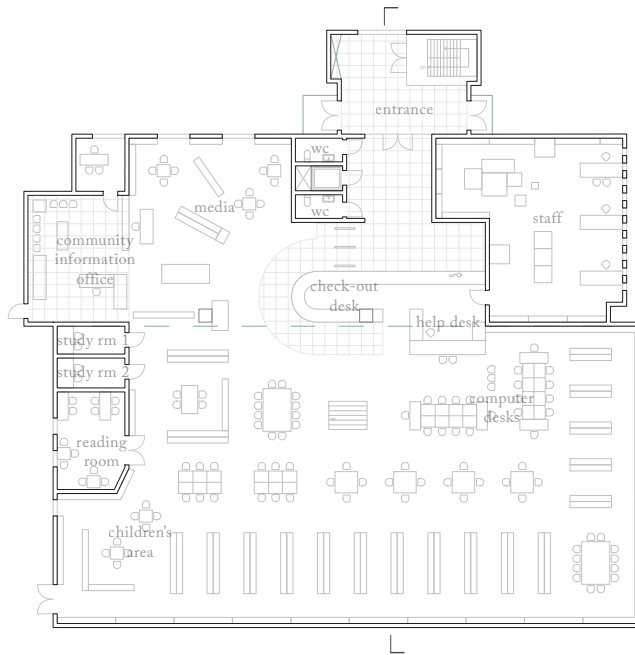
At the meeting on September 16, 2016, the Library Board considered the [City Wide Real Estate Review](#) and endorsed Toronto Public Library's (TPL) participation in the City's Centralized Service Delivery for real estate, with the objective of ensuring that the City is effectively positioned to strategically leverage its real estate portfolio and maximize operating efficiencies.

BACKGROUND

Parkdale Branch is located at 1303 Queen Street West, on the south-east corner of Queen Street West and Cowan Avenue. The branch is a 24,083 sq. ft. neighbourhood library and is in a poor state of good repair. As part of the 2017-26 capital budget and plan submission, TPL requested funding for a branch renovation project with a value of \$17.1 million to start in 2022; funding was not included in the approved plan.



existing basement floor plan



existing ground floor plan



existing north-south section

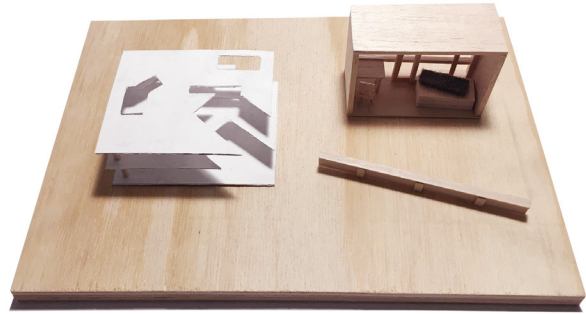
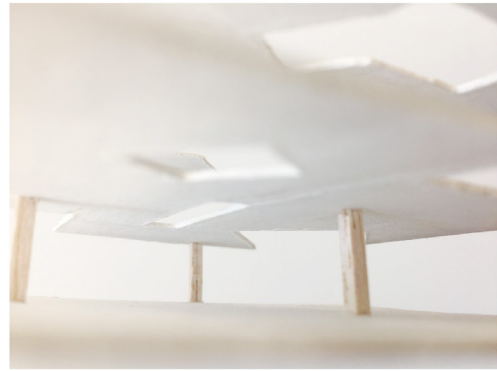
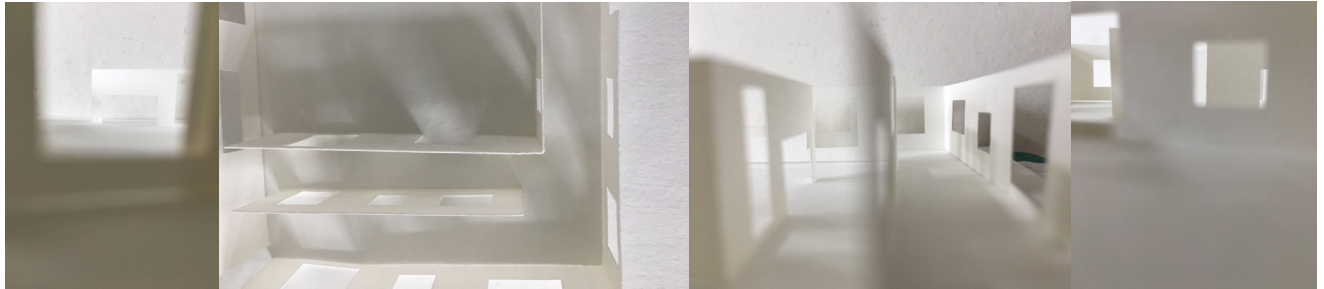


fig. 87 Massing study and spatial explorations.



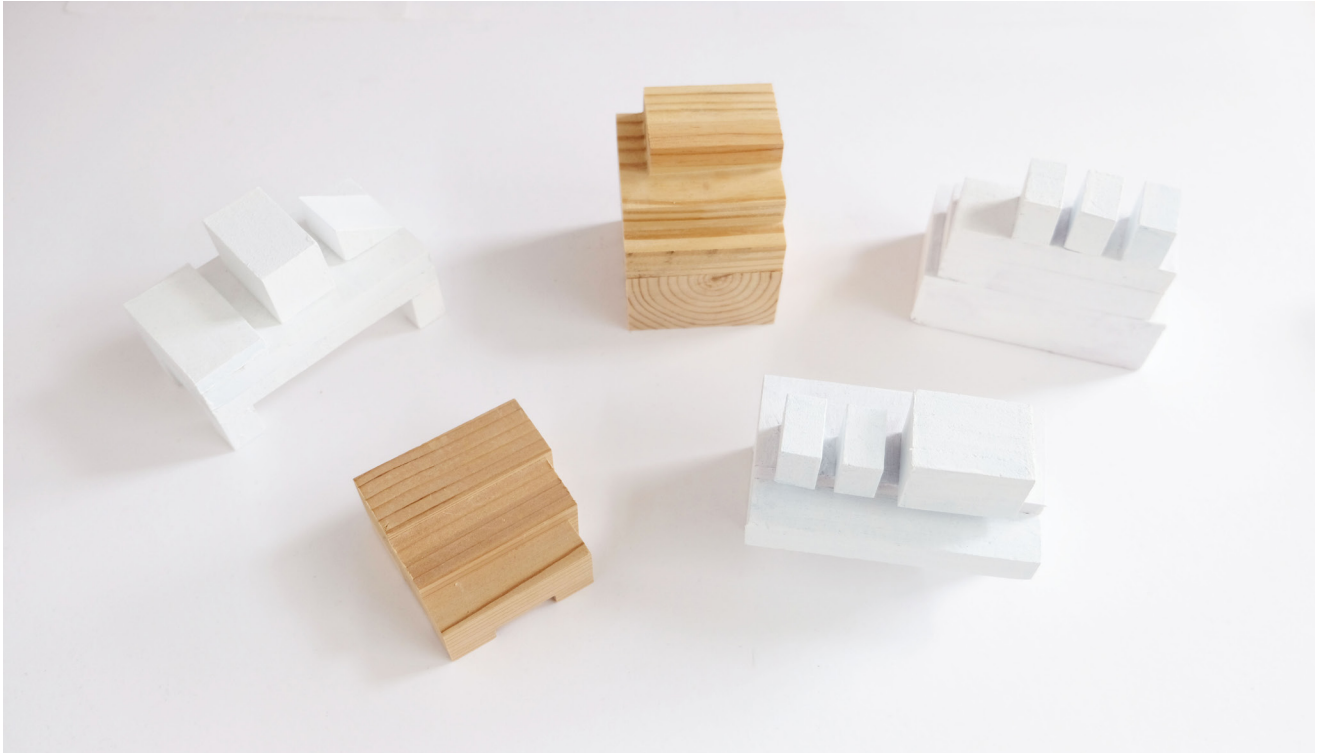


fig. 89 Massing iterations and spatial interior exploration model.



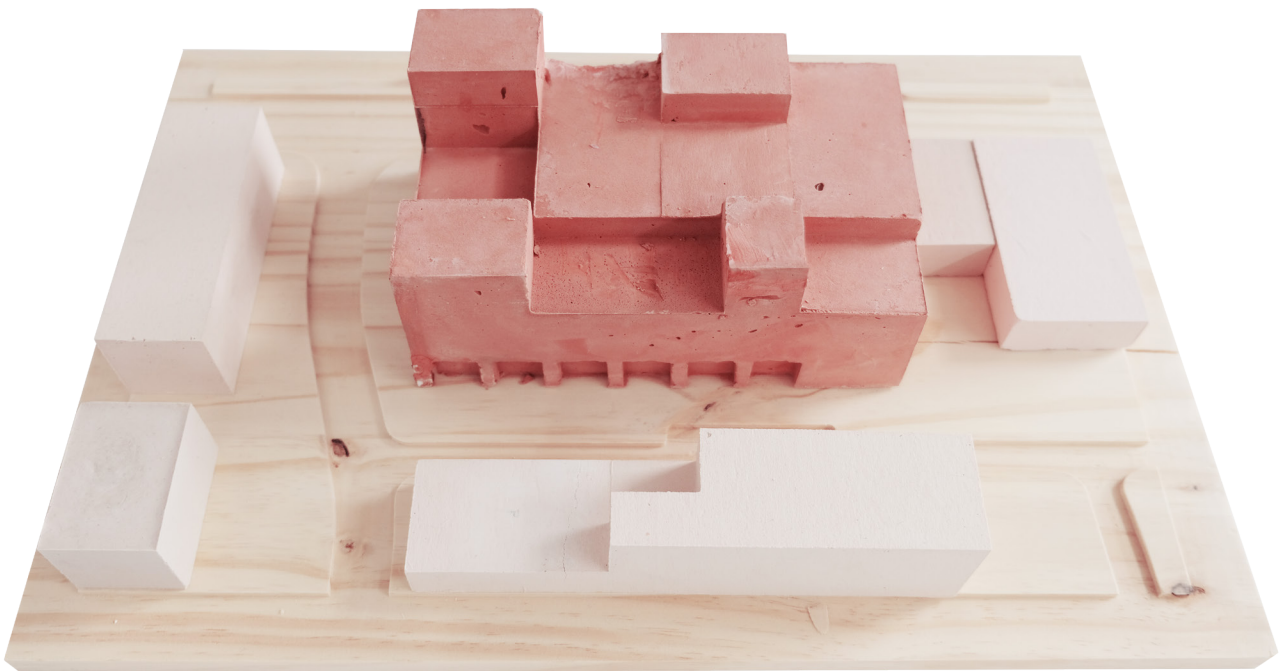


fig. 91 Final massing proposal.

