

Exploring Toronto's Inner Frontier

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
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my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

It is without ceasing that urban spaces witness the cycle of their birth and death. Like the waves of an ocean repeatedly crashing into and withdrawing from the shoreline, the city's sphere of production and human activity consume our environment, only to abandon it in subsequence, leaving behind, in a state of ruin, vestiges of civilization, waiting to be reinvigorated again by those who deem it useful or those who wish to capitalize by it.

Toronto's inner-city frontier, that is to say its residential laneway network which runs through the historic "park lot" grid system, has experienced its share of public/private use and subsequent abandonment. After having once hosted living units, commercial properties and other public amenities, the laneways gradually saw their abandonment due to by-law adjustment and technological innovation. This partial abandonment has transformed them into a public terrain vague and heterotopia within the "official" city. In their semi-abandoned condition, they host wild plants, street art and semi-anonymous social activity. Today, redevelopment of laneways by means of laneway housing construction and laneway activation for public use is bringing back an informal version of what once existed before.

This thesis explores residential laneways in their current terrain vague state as a way to celebrate their unproductive and "other" condition, it highlights the various characteristics that make it stand out within the urban landscape of Toronto and finally it explores the various forces that are working in transforming residential laneways into a unique urban typology.

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Introduction

Although the official city, along with its familiar routines and maintained image, exists as a façade for the general population to experience, there is a world of urban voids and spaces of potential amongst the city that the architect Ignasi de Sola-Morales called the *terrain vague*. Ignasi de Solà-Morales insists on the value of their state of ruin and lack of productivity and believes that they can manifest themselves as spaces of freedom that are an alternative to the lucrative reality prevailing in the late capitalist city.

Similar to heterotopias, the *terrain vague* can be found in at every corner of the urban world. This is because effectively every city in the world has unproductive outskirts and residual spaces. These undesired sites are often subjected to all manner of unofficial occupation by minority groups, oppressed people and the “other”. For instance, after the eventual abolishment of slavery in Brazil, many folks within the now-free African community were forced to find residence as free citizens of their country. This led them to consider the outskirts of their city as well as other mostly undesirable land as a potential site for developing informal housing. The ex-slaves took to illegally constructing what are known as favelas, which exist till this day, an important urban condition within sphere of informal architecture. *Terrain vague* occupation may also be found in the edges of the Chinese city Chengdu, where residents have, in a very discrete manner, turned vacant land into informal community farms. It is important to note however, that the forms of prolonged land use mentioned above are antithetical to architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales concept of *terrain vague* because according to his definition, *terrain vague* in their purest form are readily available sites. Rather than being the host of any single or multiple permanent programs, they exist as spaces of potential, welcome only to temporary take over.

Toronto’s residential and mixed-use laneway system in its contemporary condition, after it has lost most of its original services, due to gradual evolution in policy and technological innovation, which included hosting various kinds of commercial and residential properties, is an “incomplete” inner-city *terrain vague*. Today, the laneways are generally unproductive, void of commerce, which explains their lack of pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Instead, we find residential laneways occasionally being used as garage access routes, while remaining quite for most of the day. The city’s laneways are also hidden from public view and during their quiet hours, instances of transgressive activity and expression can be expected. And finally, like *terrain vague*, most laneways appear in an abandoned state –unmaintained, acting as a backdrop for graffiti art and wild plant life.

There are many voices, including academics, architects, and the public, who consistently insists on the redevelopment and integration of Toronto’s currently overlooked residential laneways into the productive fabric of the official city. The most well-known of these voices is Bridgette Shim, who along with her students conducted a study on the possibilities of developing housing within laneways as a way to combat the affordable housing crisis in Toronto. Shim’s as well as other

architects’ persistent efforts have helped pave the way to the eventual legalization, as of right, of laneways suite construction on eligible lots in the city. Albeit many restrictions and inconveniences linger still, such as stringent limits on design, the possibility for the transformation of character and use of residential laneways has become a reality. Many other community efforts have been made also to develop unproductive laneways into “usable” and welcoming public space. It is clear, the dream of most involved in the conversation regarding the city’s laneways is to breathe life back into the urban territory which today exists as dead space.

Rather than being a project conducted on laneways solely to study the possibilities of redeveloping them into sites of residence or commerce, like Bridgette Shim’s and Donald Chong’s “Site Unseen” study, this thesis instead aims to foster a new appreciation in the unproductivity, the layers of informal expression, the pervasive sub nature, and the eerie otherness of the city’s residential laneways while also recognizing its development into a useful and unique urban typology.



Figure 1: Speculative Laneway Collage, collage

Literature Review

This thesis draws from literature which focuses on Toronto's laneway system, opportunities of laneway housing development as well as the concept of heterotopia and terrain vague. With regards to laneway housing, initial study was conducted by who were commissioned by Affordability and Choice Today (ACT), a program sponsored by CMHC, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) to study how Toronto might expand laneway development at a broader scale. Their report, *A Study of Laneway Housing in Toronto* (2002), concluded that laneways represented: "...an untapped resource of city property, which could be developed for much needed low-cost housing [while] effectively using existing infrastructure." ¹ The authors looked into issues surrounding neighbourhood integration, scale, access, density, privacy and quality of construction but found that the biggest roadblock lay in the 'unevenly rigorous' approvals process - specifically planner's unfamiliarity with the typology: "The recent municipal amalgamation seems to have exacerbated the problem; planners whose background is in the suburban context seem to have difficulty accepting the concept of laneway housing and are unfamiliar with its history and the large number of laneway houses already in existence."² Perhaps the most important aspect of Stinson's study was their calculations which proved both that there was a wealth of unused property in the City's lanes and that one could build on that property for a fraction of the cost of an on-street dwelling. The study demonstrated that in an area where single-detached houses sold for \$300,000 and up, a builder was able to construct a duplex for \$252,000 at a construction cost of only \$120 per square foot.³ The authors felt however that many communities' hesitancy to accept a laneway housing typology stemmed from unfamiliarity with the concept. They argued that this could be reversed with a "Laneway Advocacy Group" which would inform communities about the benefits of laneway housing and a start discussion about relaxing or removing the prohibitive bylaws restricting owners from creating such dwellings.

Further study into the potential of laneway housing was done in 2003, by Brigitte Shim and Donald Chong who led a Masters studio entitled *Site Unseen* at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design. The studio encouraged students to think of laneways as a 'legitimate and potentially vast urban 'resource,' and explored the possibilities for intensification through 'thoughtful' and 'regenerative' insertions in the city fabric. The studio produced a book which provides both a history of Toronto's urban structure and laneway housing's place within it. In addition, the book features a general set of recommendations for adding housing stock in unconventional places. The most interesting aspect of the *Site Unseen* project however are thirteen unique student projects which imagine what alleys might be like if uses such as parks, a food court, a student residence, a hostel, a cemetery, a laundromat, and a hospital visitors' residence were allowed within them.

Another key reference used in this thesis which explored Foucault's concept of heterotopia as well as its relationship to terrain vague or dead zones is *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Post-civil Society* (2008). The book combines theoretical contributions on the notion of heterotopia, with a series of critical case studies that investigate a range of urban transformations, from the 'mall of the agora', through the 'gating of dwelling', to the 'theming of urban renewal'. It gives insight into wastelands and terrains vagues as sites of promise and resistance in a section on urban activism and transgression.

Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron's *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*, an additional reference, clarifies and expands upon architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales's and other writers' related ideas surrounding terrain vague. They argue for defining terrain vague as a collective term for a multitude of subtypes of marginal, leftover land, from "derelict land" and "brownfield" to "void" and "dead zone." The book is a cooperative effort to refine terrain vague as a central concept for urban planning and design, as well as other fields, including architecture, landscape architecture, film studies, cultural geography, literature, photography, and cultural studies. It investigates examples of terrain vague in critical case studies on a range of areas, from Beirut and Berlin to Fresh Kills and Clichy-sous-Bois, suggests new understandings of terrain vague in theoretical, architectural, and artistic applications and presents innovative ways of looking at interstitial space, while focusing on its positive uses and aspects.

The final important reference used in the development of this thesis has been *Learning From Las Vegas* by Denise Scott Brown. This book is an analysis, which came into fruition as a calling for architects to be more receptive to the tastes and values of "common" people and to be more considerate of "everyday architecture", more specifically the architecture of the Las Vegas Commercial Strip. It highlights the discounted value of symbolism over form and addresses the "automotive culture" that influenced the architecture and design of the strip. Similar to this thesis, the analysis is done mostly through mapping, drawing and photography.

The literature surrounding inquiry into laneway activation and laneway housing in Toronto is extensive and dates back to the late eighties. Laneway housing pioneers such as Bridgette Shim along with Jeffery Stinson first explored laneway development as a feasible option for increasing the city's housing supply. Following their studies, a plethora of various propositions have been made by architects, students of architecture and Toronto's residents to transfigure laneways into either pedestrian friendly, affordable residential and commercial neighborhoods, through the introduction of a variety of programs and/or through policy adjustment, or walkable public space. However, the current literature has mostly failed to recognize the value of residential laneways in their abandoned and unproductive state. This thesis will explore a unique perspective on Toronto's laneways and its future development.

Research Methodology

This thesis explores Toronto's laneways through documentation and literature review. It presents laneways recording, and gives insight into their gradual development. It highlights their importance within the urban fabric and underlines the various forces that are causing their evolution. The research methodologies utilized in this thesis are virtually parallel to those used in Learning from Las Vegas. They include photography, mapping, elevation drawing, and section studies and sound recording. The digital drawings prepared for this thesis have been created using Rhinoceros 3d, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe Photoshop. The photographs captured by author were taken on a Canon EOS Rebel T6i camera and digitally altered through Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop. The various forms of field recording were conducted by walking through four select laneways. These four select residential laneways are outlined and discussed in the beginning portion of the thesis. Finally, the sound recordings of laneway soundscapes were captured using an Apple Iphone 11 Pro microphone.

Part 1: On Laneways of Toronto



Figure 2: Teenagers In a Laneway, photo

Historical Context

Toronto's urban landscape has gone through many evolutions in its near-250 year existence. From the early days of Fort York and the Georgian 'ten-square' grid to the 'park-lot' system which replaced it to the current block-and-alley structure, Toronto's urban fabric has been in a constant state of change. In the early nineteenth century, Governor John Graves Simcoe abandoned the Town of York's Georgian, 'ten-square' pattern and began surveying the land into larger 'park lots.' These rectangular lots, each ten times longer on their north and south axis than to the east and west are still the basis for Toronto's present block structure.¹ Park lots were intended to be large, single-family estates for wealthy families and military officers and guidelines were drawn up to instruct owners on how they could develop their property. Most important among these guidelines was a requirement that park lots were to be independent of urban development in an effort to retain their rural character. By the mid-nineteenth century however, owners abandoned these guidelines and began subdividing and selling off their land to accommodate Toronto's rapid growth. Landowners often disagreed on how they thought the city should grow and as a result, most estates developed independently of the others. As time progressed, the original park lots were further subdivided by laying down streets and avenues. Developers were eager to maximize the street frontage of their properties and moved service functions such as the delivery and storage of goods to a system of rear lanes which ran behind their street-facing properties.

They soon realized that this internal laneway network could itself accommodate secondary, laneway-facing housing and commercial properties. This move maximized profits by increasing densities while minimizing wasted land. The small detached cottages and apartments atop garages and stables which began to line the city's lanes housed drivers, servants and other domestic workers along with horses, carriages and later, automobiles. As late as 1937, 'Chapter 33, Dwellings' of Toronto's 'By-law 14852' stated: "dwelling accommodation may be provided in a garage or stable building for the accommodation of a chauffeur or coachman, although such a garage or stable is located at the rear of another building, provided the employer or the chauffeur or coachman is a resident in the front building located upon the premises."² This has turned the back lanes into functional streets, part of the official city, placing it within the city's effective circuits and productive structures. The lanes were no longer unpredictable sites, but rather spaces accompanying everyday use. 1950's onward, a shift took place due to technological innovation and policy adjustment which transformed the back lanes into mostly abandoned spaces used occasionally for maintenance and storage. The author of Site Unseen attributes the current zoning restrictions which led to the abandonment of residential laneways to a consequence of compulsory updates to the regulatory framework because legislation evolved with the cultural decline of the coach house.³ Being void of the functions which kept them active, laneways in their current state present themselves as unmaintained and unproductive spaces of potential.



Figure 3: Cabbagetown Laneway Gathering, photo



Figure 4: Toronto Laneway With Living Units, photo

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Cross Section of Typical Contemporary Residential Laneway



Figure 7: Typical Residential Laneway Cross Section, diagram

Toronto's Coach Houses

The historic residential laneway coach houses in Toronto, which over time served a variety of functions and accommodated the growing population, were essential to the development of the city. Originally built to hold horse-drawn carriages and provide lodging for the coachman who looked after them, these modest homes are usually located at the back of bigger buildings.

In the late 1800s, when Toronto was expanding quickly and there was a larger need for storage and transportation facilities, the first laneway coach houses were built. These single-story dwellings, which were often constructed of wood or brick, had peaked roofs that offered ventilation and storage space. They were connected to the main house and other surrounding coach houses by a narrow alley or hallway.

Coach buildings were initially mostly used to store horses and carriages, along with other things like hay, feed, and equipment. Usually, the coachman who looked after the horses and carriages resided in the coach house with his family in the cramped quarters allotted. These accommodations, which consisted of a single room with a small kitchen and a bed area, were frequently small and unimpressive.

Several coach houses were converted to various purposes as the usage of horses and carriages fell out in the early 1900s. Many of them were turned into garages, supplying the city with much-needed parking space for the increasing number of cars. Others were utilised as workshops or storage areas, providing areas for people to work on projects or keep their tools and equipment.

Coach houses were transformed into rental homes in the years following World War II, giving low-income families and young individuals access to affordable housing. Typically, these homes included one or two bedrooms, a tiny kitchen, and a tiny bathroom. These were frequently rented out by owners of the main property, giving those owners a source of income and renters a much-needed supply of affordable housing.



Figure 5: Coach House on bpNichol Lane, photo



Figure 6: Repurposed Coach House in Ossington Avenue, Toronto

Typical Laneway Structures

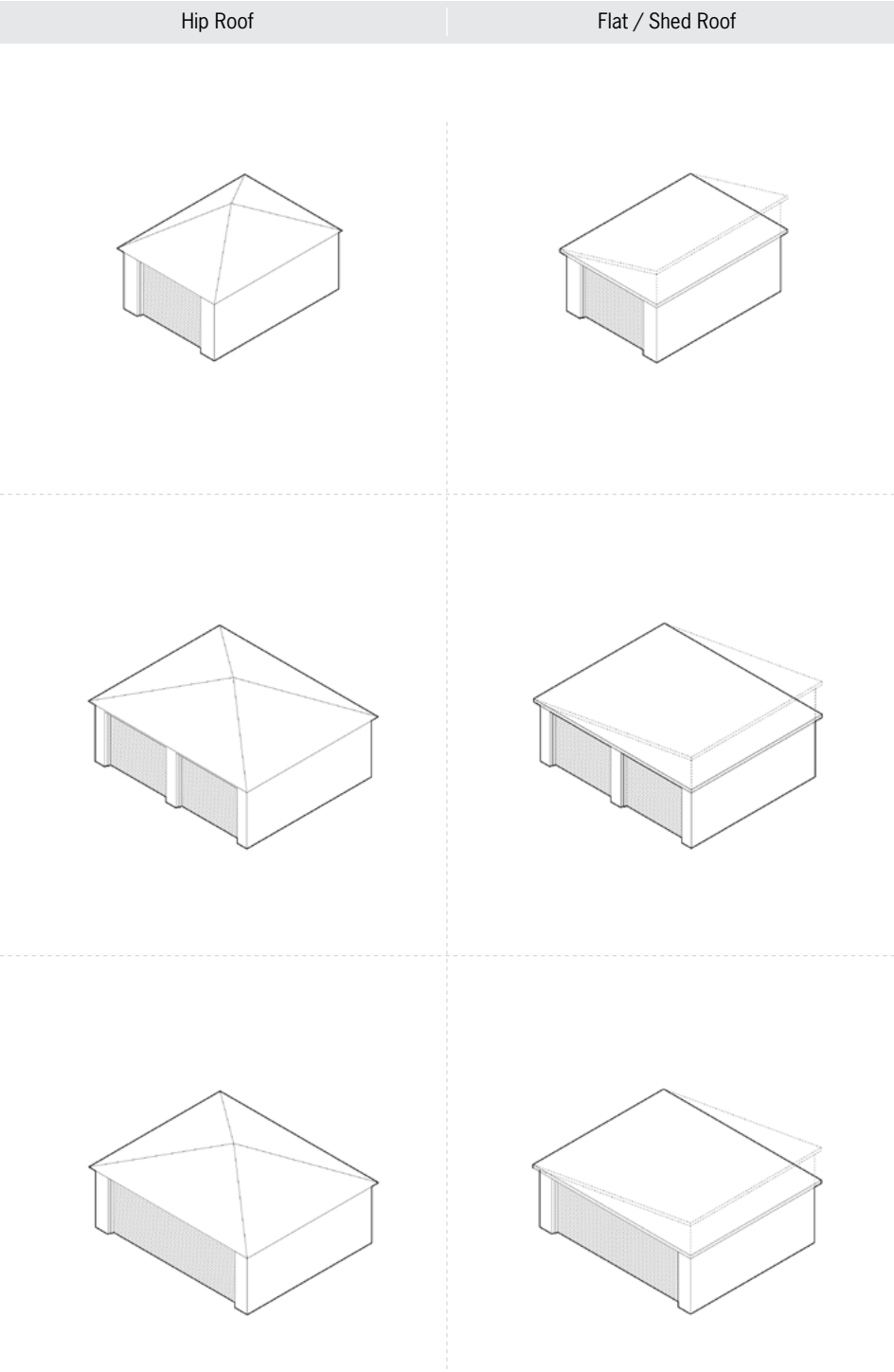
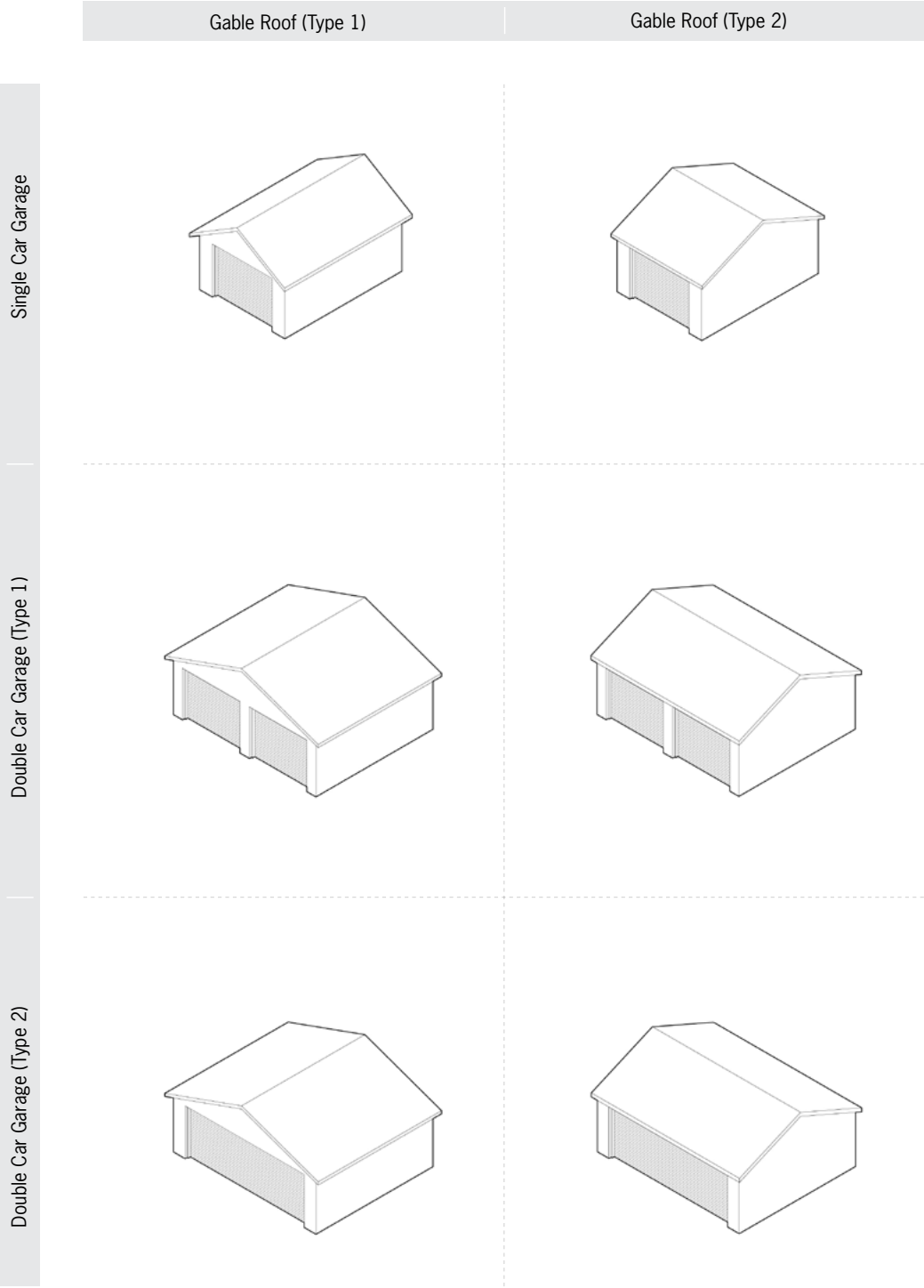


Figure 8: Typical Laneway Structures, diagram

1: "A hot summer day in bygone decades on Toronto's Huron Street" <https://taylorhistory.com/2012/08/03/a-hot-summer-day-in-bygone-decades-on-torontos-huron-street/>



Figure 9: Orphanage Mews, May 28th, 2022, 1:18 PM, photo

This laneway in Chinatown got its name to recognize The Protestant Orphans' Home, which was once located on Sullivan Street, and backed onto the lane. This historic laneway was once used by children to play rough children's games like "British Bulldog".¹



Figure 10: Orphanage Mews, May 28th, 2022, 1:34 PM, photo

Several residents use the back end of their property which looks onto Orphanage Mews as storage space.



Figure 11: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Palmerston Ave., June 15th, 2022, 4:35 PM, photo

This ostensibly old garage found in a laneway adjacent to Palmerston Avenue in Little Italy is relatively unique for being covered in a bright blue exterior and featuring an interesting gable roof. Its presence in an unkept laneway made it a target for vandals to tag its garage door; creating a visual conversation between the artists for the public to observe.



Figure 12: bpNichol Lane, June 3th, 2022, 1:46 PM, photo

This coach house was once used to house horse draw carriages but has been transformed into a boutique publishing shop called Coach House Press. It is found on bpNichol Lane, which was named in honour of a famous Canadian poet Barrie Phillip Nichol.



Figure 13: Laneway E. West Lodge N. Seaforth, June 21st, 2022, 9:21 PM, photo

A garage structure in a laneway with a peculiar relief and aging metal cladding.



Figure 14: Morley Safer Lane, August 9th, 2022, 4:52 PM, photo

A complementary brick building backing onto Morley Safer Lane.

Select Laneways

The city of Toronto hosts about 2400 public laneways, which span a great 300 kilometers.¹ Four of these distinct laneways will be repeatedly referenced and analyzed in the remaining portion of this research document. The laneways in question are Morley Safer Lane, sitting at the intersection of College Street and Manning Avenue, Jefferys Lane, found at the crossing of Parliament Street and Wellesley Street East, the laneway at the intersection of Dundas Street West and Palmerston Avenue and finally the laneway at Dundas Street West and Manning Avenue. While possessing unique attributes, for example their area of coverage, the select laneways are for the most part typical in their character and stand as a representation of the typical residential laneway within Toronto. Morley Safer Lane, which took on its name as a homage to a well-known Canadian TV journalist², is the shortest of the laneways mentioned. Its structures are ostensibly maintained by adjacent residents as only a portion of garage doors display graffiti art – however, it may be the case that the structures have never seen vandalism in the first place. Like most residential laneways in the city, a variety of invasive plants can be found in clusters, spread evenly across its length. Although Morley Safer Lane has been witnessed hosting small scale social situations and activities, such as ait nonetheless remains a quiet retreat from the major roads in its vicinity. Jefferys lane, like Morley Safer Lane, appears to be maintained, but to a greater extent. Its structures are virtually free of graffiti and its road are clean of wild grasses and other intrusive plants. It is a notable example of a laneway in a well-off street in the neighbourhood of Cabbagetown in Toronto that sees constant upkeep and use by its residents while also being the only laneway from the selected group which is not situated in the neighborhood of Little Italy. Finally, the laneways found at the intersection of Dundas Street West and Palmerston Avenue and Dundas Street are, in contrast, significant in their length and unkept in their appearance. They are covered from end to end by graffiti art and host an abundance of invasive plants. These two alleys prove to be noteworthy examples of partially abandoned spaces which possess a heterotopic quality and engender a noticeable feeling of freedom from the “official city”.



Figure 15: Map of Toronto Highlighting Select Laneways, map

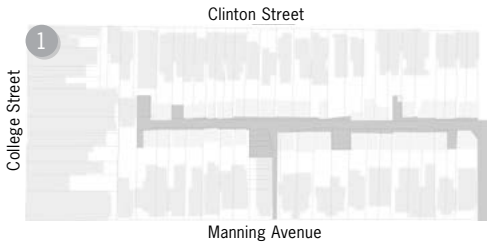


Figure 16: Select Laneway 1, map



Figure 17: Select Laneway 2, map

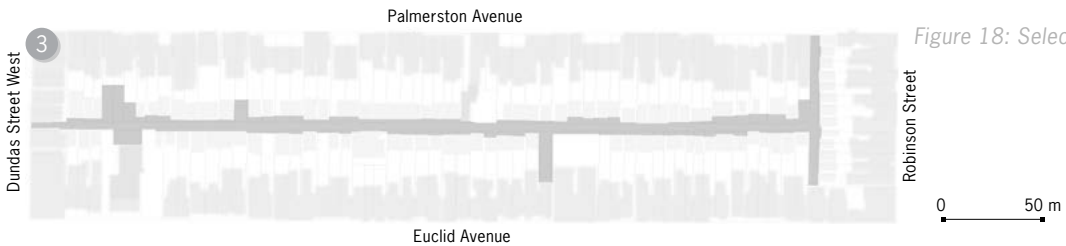


Figure 18: Select Laneway 3, map



Figure 19: Select Laneway 4, map

1 Morley Safer Lane, Toronto

Neighbourhood: Little Italy
Length of Laneway: 155 metres
Laneway Area: 545 square metres
Number of Structures: 35

2 Jefferys Lane, Toronto

Neighbourhood: Cabbagetown
Length of Laneway: 187 metres
Laneway Area: 656 square metres
Number of Structures: 33

3 Laneway at the Intersection of Dundas Steet West and Palmerston Avenue, Toronto

Neighbourhood: Little Italy
Length of Laneway: 406 metres
Laneway Area: 813 square metres
Number of Structures: 98

4 Laneway at the Intersection of Dundas Steet West and Manning Avenue, Toronto

Neighbourhood: Little Italy
Length of Laneway: 379 metres
Laneway Area: 1618 square metres
Number of Structures: 104

1: "Revitalizing Toronto's Untapped Laneways as Public Spaces" <https://nkspire.org/post/revitalizing-torontos-untapped-laneways-as-public-spaces/>
2: "Little Italy lanes to be named for well-known residents" <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/02/18/little-italy-lanes-to-be-named-for-well-known-residents/>

Material Expression

When walking through laneways, one of the first elements that presents itself in its many colours and textures is the cladding which covers the array of often delapatated garages. The layers of grungy surface material tell a story about the evolutionary history and the current condition of residential laneways. The maps shown on the right present different cladding materials covering the face of each structure within select laneways, distinguishing them by colour. These drawings help to visualize the diversity as well as the rarity and ubiquity of each exterior cladding type found in back alleys while at the same time revealing any apparent patterns and combinations of material expression. From a glance, it is evident that diversity and haphazardness characterizes the cladding types within the four laneways, but the same cannot be said of the main residential streets that run adjacent to them. These streets instead portray a more homogenous exterior face, one that is made predominantly of red brick cladding.

Six different cladding materials are found surfacing the garages lining the select alleys. Each of these materials, referenced in the legend, vary in their prevelancy within the lanes. This analysis reveals brick veneer and concrete masonry to be the most popular exterior material choice across the four laneways, and shingle cladding to be the least.

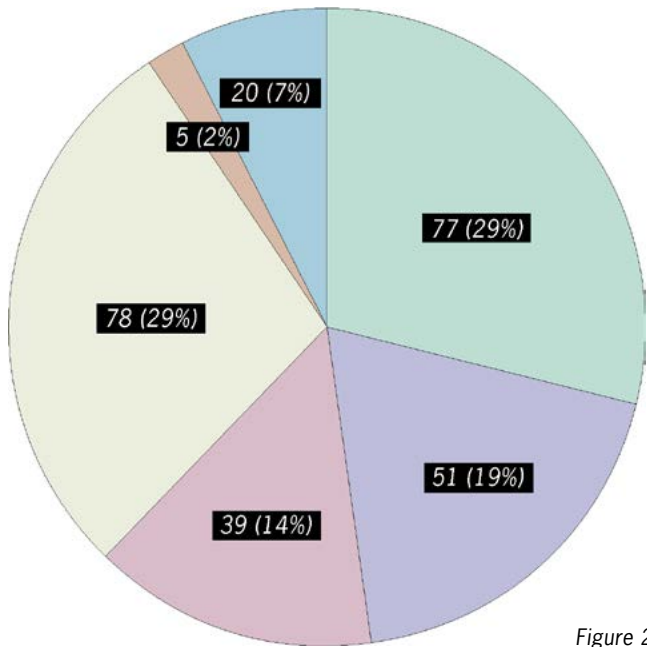


Figure 20: Materials Distribution Pie Chart, diagram

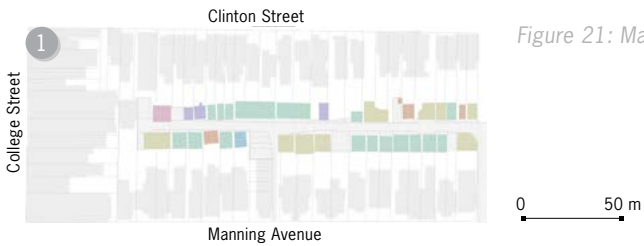


Figure 21: Materials Map 1, map



Figure 22: Materials Map 2, map

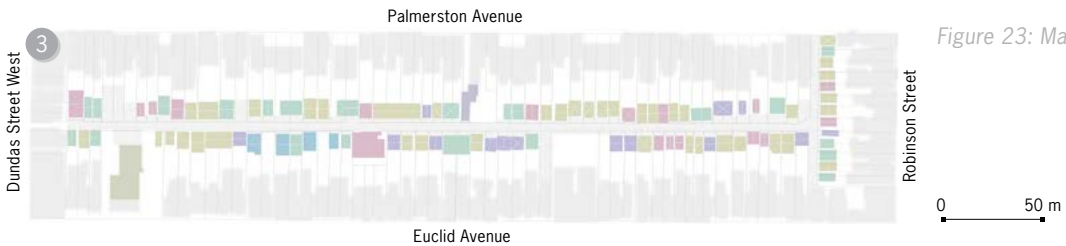


Figure 23: Materials Map 3, map

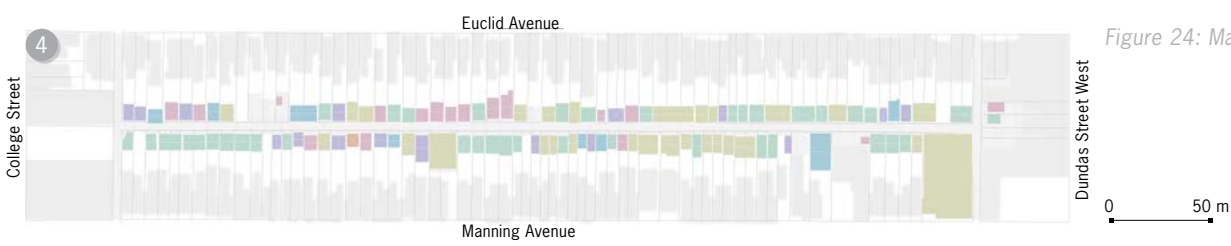


Figure 24: Materials Map 4, map

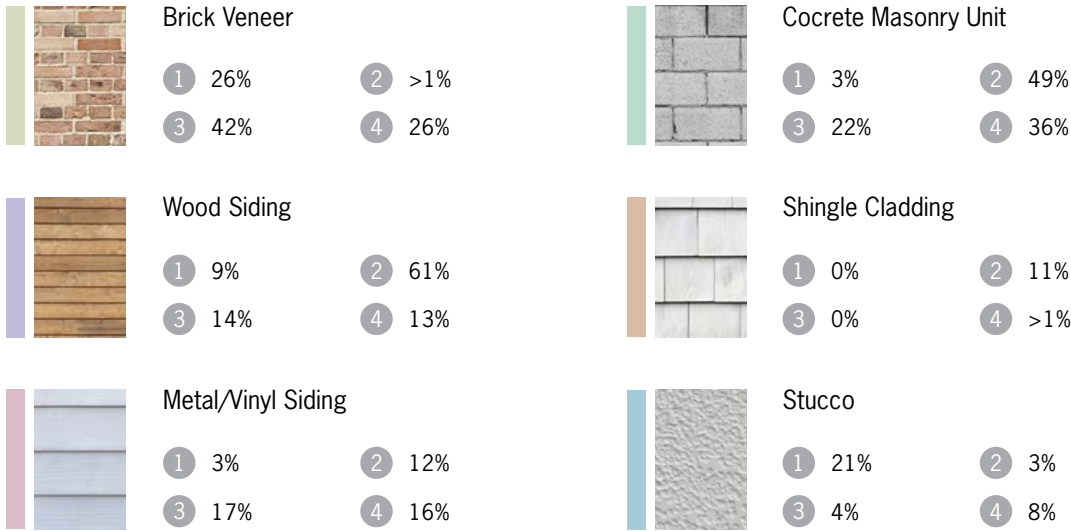


Figure 25: Materials Legend, legend

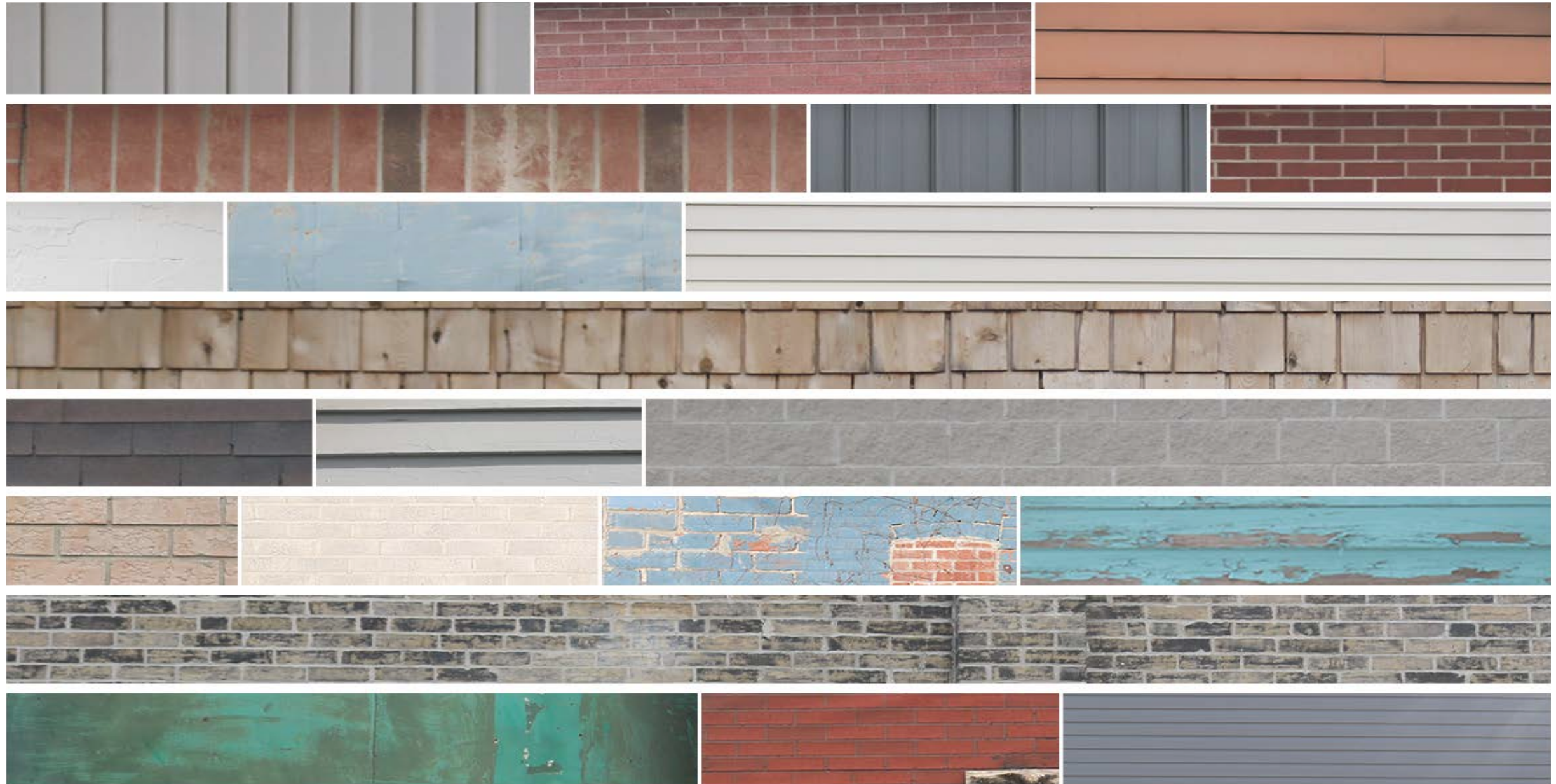


Figure 26: Materials Collage, collage

“On Laneways of Toronto”

Conclusion

The parklot system originally established in Toronto gave rise to the city's residential laneway network. This network was quickly populated with coach houses and other buildings serving both householders and the general public. This brought social activity to Toronto's underutilised spaces, activating them until their original services became obsolete. Eventually, coach houses were substituted with garages that provided residents with storage and parking space. The exteriors of the garages were constructed with a variety of materials, including masonry, wood, and metal siding. Over time, the unmaintained alleyways took on a dishevelled appearance with a indiscernible pattern. They contrasted with the uniform and well-kept exterior portrayed by the adjacent residential street.

Since their partial abandonment, Toronto's residential laneways have become a tranquil refuge from the city's bustling streets. Walking through them provides a view into the city's past and the lives of its residents, as numerous historic and neglected structures remain.

In recent years, many city residents have advocated for the transformation of laneways back into public spaces that are occupied and utilised. This is in contrast to the image of abandonment that has been associated with laneways. As Toronto has a need for public space, this may be an essential step, but it is also important to recognise the unused and neglected state of residential laneways prior to their potential redevelopment.

Figure 2: Teenagers In a Laneway, photo

Part 2 : Heterotopias, Terrain Vague and Toronto's Laneways



Figure 27: Orphanage Mews, May 28th, 2022, 1:18 PM, photo

Foucault's Heterotopia

The idea of heterotopia, developed by Michel Foucault, is intricate and nuanced, and it has had a significant impact on the area of cultural and social philosophy.

Heterotopia was initially discussed by Foucault in his 1964 article "Of Other Spaces."¹ In this piece, Foucault made the case that heterotopias are spaces that don't follow typical social norms and traditions. These places can be in the shape of parks, museums, or cemeteries, among other things.

Heterotopias, in Foucault's view, have the singular capacity to simultaneously mirror and question the dominant cultural and social norms of a particular civilization. For instance, a museum can be viewed as a heterotopia because it serves as a location outside of daily life where artefacts and objects are gathered and presented. As a result, a museum can both reflect and contradict the prevailing cultural norms of a society by providing a forum for discussion and analysis of various cultural beliefs and practices.²

The social order is disrupted and transformed by heterotopias, according to Foucault's argument. Heterotopias provide a special space where social standards are not strictly enforced, which gives rise to the potential for the emergence of novel ways of thinking and acting. This upheaval of the status quo can be viewed as a constructive factor since it makes it possible to examine and contest prevailing cultural and social conventions.

Heterotopias can be observed in a variety of circumstances in modern society. Online communities, for instance, might be viewed as heterotopias because they frequently have their own rules and standards and operate outside of physical space. Similar to heterotopias, festivals and events that unite individuals from all origins and cultures can also be considered as such since they offer a forum for the discussion and exchange of various cultural practices and beliefs.



Figure 28: Carlsberg Glyptotek Sculpture Gallery, image



Figure 29: Panopticon Prison, image

1: Lieven De Cauter, Michel Dehaene, Heterotopia and the City, Public Space in a Civil Society, 13
2: Lieven De Cauter, Michel Dehaene, Heterotopia and the City, Public Space in a Civil Society, 20

Terrain Vague

Ignasi de Solà-Morales’s concept of the “terrain vague” is a term that refers to abandoned or underused spaces in the urban landscape. These spaces, which are often found on the fringes of cities or in the gaps between buildings and infrastructure, are typically seen as “non-places” that have no particular identity or purpose. However, de Solà-Morales argued that these spaces can also be seen as sites of potential and possibility, offering the opportunity for new forms of social and cultural expression to emerge.¹

In his work, de Solà-Morales argued that the terrain vague represents a space of resistance and subversion within the urban landscape. They stand diametrically opposed to late capitalism as they are unproductive spaces.² These spaces, which are often overlooked or neglected by mainstream society, provide a place for marginalized or outsider groups to gather and express themselves. As such, the terrain vague can be seen as a site of resistance to the dominant cultural and social norms of the city.

De Solà-Morales also argued that the terrain vague has the potential to be a site of innovation and experimentation. These spaces, which are often underutilized or underdeveloped, offer a blank canvas upon which new forms of social and cultural expression can emerge. For example, graffiti artists and other urban art movements have often used the terrain vague as a space for creative expression and experimentation, turning these neglected spaces into vibrant and dynamic places of cultural activity.

In contemporary society, we can see examples of the terrain vague in a variety of contexts. For example, abandoned industrial sites or empty lots in urban areas can be seen as terrain vague, as they are often underused or neglected by mainstream society. Similarly, abandoned or disused buildings or infrastructure can also be seen as terrain vague, offering the opportunity for new forms of social and cultural expression to emerge.

Solà-Morales’s concept of the terrain vague highlights the potential of neglected or underused spaces in the urban landscape. By considering the role of the terrain vague in contemporary society, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which these spaces can be used to resist and subvert dominant cultural and social norms, as well as offering the opportunity for new forms of social and cultural expression to emerge.



Figure 30: Artist Installation at Abandoned Railroad Yard in Brooklyn, image



Figure 31: Shots From “Terrain Vague” (1960), image

1: Patrick Barron, Manuela Mariani, Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale, 26
2: Patrick Barron, Manuela Mariani, Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale, 125

Theoretical Relationship

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Ignasi de Solà-Morales's concept of the terrain vague are both concerned with the role of space in shaping and being shaped by cultural and social norms. While these concepts are distinct and have their own unique histories and contexts, they also have a number of important connections and overlaps.

Foucault's concept of heterotopia refers to places that exist outside of normal, societal norms and conventions. These spaces can take many forms, including gardens, museums, cemeteries, and even utopias. According to Foucault, heterotopias have the unique ability to both reflect and challenge the dominant cultural and social norms of a given society.

De Solà-Morales's concept of the terrain vague, on the other hand, refers to abandoned or underused spaces in the urban landscape. These spaces, which are often found on the fringes of cities or in the gaps between buildings and infrastructure, are typically seen as "non-places" that have no particular identity or purpose. However, de Solà-Morales argued that these spaces can also be seen as sites of potential and possibility, offering the opportunity for new forms of social and cultural expression to emerge.

One important connection between these two concepts is that both heterotopias and terrain vague can be seen as spaces of resistance and subversion within the urban landscape. Heterotopias, by virtue of their existence outside of normal, societal norms and conventions, offer a space for the contemplation and critique of different cultural values and practices. Similarly, the terrain vague, which is often overlooked or neglected by mainstream society, provides a place for marginalized or outsider groups to gather and express themselves. As such, both heterotopias and terrain vague can be seen as sites of resistance to the dominant cultural and social norms of the city.

Another connection between these concepts is that both heterotopias and terrain vague have the potential to be sites of innovation and experimentation. Heterotopias, by offering an alternative space where societal norms are not enforced, allow for the possibility of new modes of behavior and thought to emerge. Similarly, the terrain vague, which is often underutilized or underdeveloped, offers a blank canvas upon which new forms of social and cultural expression can emerge.



Figure 32: Artists at Bulldozer Exhibition, image

The Bulldozer exhibition shown above is an example of a vacant lot being used in a way that is contrary to the societal and cultural norms of the time. A number of artists held an abstract art exhibition, which was disallowed by the Soviet government at the time. The exhibition was later halted and destroyed by force by government authority.

Laneway As Heterotopia

Abandoned residential lanes in Toronto might be seen as heterotopias for a variety of reasons. One of Toronto's distinctive characteristics is the atmosphere of otherness and originality that permeates the city's abandoned residential alleyways. It is reasonable to think of these spaces as existing outside of societal norms and expectations because they are not typical places where people live, work, or engage in leisure activities. Since they are snuggled away from the city's main thoroughfares and hidden from view, they frequently give off the atmosphere of being secret, out-of-the-way places. The fact that they are in a semi-abandoned state adds to their sense of otherness as they are not the typical, well-maintained streets that the general public is accustomed to seeing and experiencing.

Heterotopia, according to Foucault, refers to areas that are "in-between" and possibly contradictory. Since laneways in Toronto exist in a liminal space between the private spaces of residences and the public spaces of the street, this idea can be applied to them. They present themselves as a third space that is distinct in its features and purposes since they are neither totally private nor entirely public.

The ability of heterotopias to subvert social expectations and norms is one of their fundamental characteristics. The purpose of a street is redefined in residential laneways in Toronto, challenging the conventional usage of space. However, they are currently transforming into public areas for community events, art installations, and outdoor dining for neighbourhood businesses. Laneways were historically thought of as spaces for garbage collection and access to garages. The traditional use of space is challenged by this reinvention of space, which also fosters a new feeling of community.

Furthermore, the idea of heterotopia put out by Foucault implies that these areas have the power to alter society. In the case of Toronto's residential lanes, the transformation of these areas is a development that responds to the need for cheap housing in the city and supports sustainable urban growth. In order to increase the city's housing stock, laneway houses are being constructed in residential laneways. These houses offer a less expensive option to conventional houses in the metropolis. Later in the thesis document, this will be covered in more detail.



Figure 37: Toronto Residents Watching Movie in Their Laneway, image



Figure 38: Neighbours Gather in Toronto Laneway, image



Figure 33: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Palmerston Ave., June 15th, 2022, 4:17 PM, photo

Graffiti tag artists treat laneway structures as a canvas for their artistic expression.



Figure 34: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Palmerston Ave., June 15th, 2022, 4:32 PM, photo

When unattended, laneway vegetation can grow freely and quickly.



Figure 35: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Manning Ave., May 28th, 2022, 4:37 PM, photo

Besides the functional uses that Toronto's laneways provide to its residents, they are occasionally used for having fun.



Figure 36: Peperonata Lane, June 3rd, 2022, 2:40 PM, photo

Peperonata Lane is known for hosting its annual pepper roasting festival. It features a unique laneway furnace that is used during the special occasion.

Laneways During Covid-19

The Covid-19 induced pandemic which lasted from 2019 to 2022, inspired some to come up with creative solutions for spending time quarantining. With many public spaces such as parks and community centers closed for safety reasons, residents in Toronto, looked towards empty laneways as a potential space for gathering with their neighbors and friends. Laneways, being mostly free of traffic and patrolling, made for a unique spot for discrete gatherings that in some cases bent the rules set in place by The City of Toronto regarding health and safety. In a coverage done by CTV News Canada, a Toronto laneway has been activated by its residents who live in an apartment building without a designated backyard.¹ The neighbours took to gathering in their adjected laneway, hosting movie nights and yoga classes as a way to pass time during the pandemic.² The laneway used primarily for parking access served to bring the neighbors together like never before, as the residents have claimed to have never interacted with each other in such a meaningful way. In this reported instance of gathering it is likely that the neighbours mutually agreed to follow social distancing rules. However, it may be the case that Toronto's residnetial laneways have also been used for different kinds of get-togethers where the participants did not follow social distancing rules.



Figure 37: Toronto Residents Watching Movie in Their Laneway, image



Figure 38: Neighbours Gather in Toronto Laneway, image

1: "Toronto neighbours transform shared parking alley into backyard oasis for families" <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/toronto-neighbours-transform-shared-parking-alley-into-backyard-oasis-for-families-1.5041259>
2: "Toronto neighbours transform shared parking alley into backyard oasis for families" <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/toronto-neighbours-transform-shared-parking-alley-into-backyard-oasis-for-families-1.5041259>

Laneway Anonymity

Toronto’s residential laneways, abandoned in their appearance and unproductive in relation to commercial and residential streets, are not an inviting site for the public. While at times used as a shortcut by pedestrians, residential laneways stay quiet and free of activity for most of the day. This lack of both noise and eyes on the street turns them into a space where culturally or socially transgressive activities can be practiced discreetly and anonymously.

Within the west, alleys are portrayed as unpredictable spaces that should be avoided at night. A popular cliché about laneways is that they are prone to being used for criminal activities. This is true of numerous laneways in Toronto, including Reggae Lane which has become a concern for its residents. The neglect of this mixed-use laneway has led to a constant stream of people doing drugs, yelling, and throwing garbage into neighboring backyards. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities across Toronto, including the community surrounding Reggae Lane. The ugly situation of this laneway has even prompted some of its residents to move out of their home, encouraging the city to work with local leaders to address under-investment in the area and proactively restore community well-being and vibrancy.¹

To deter the lack of safety and useability which plagues laneways like Reggae Lane, a community initiative which goes by The Laneway Project² has made it its mission to directly and indirectly, through inspiring the city residents, tackle safety problems regarding laneways. On its designated website, it provides a guideline for laneway transformation, which mentions the cleaning up of laneways, by way of consistent weeding and waste management, the “humanization” of laneways, through the introduction of plant pots and the installation of cameras.³ The laneway project is also working alongside the city to name every laneway in Toronto for the purpose of making it easier for police to locate them during emergency situations - as nameless laneways can take longer to find.

Although the absence of activity within most laneways can create a quiet escape from the busy city and foster an intimate relationship between pedestrians and the layered structures that line laneways, it can also invite certain city dwellers to participate in illegal actions which are more likely to go unnoticed. To demonstrate the lack of activity within residential laneways, the author of this thesis conducted an experiment which involved recording the soundscapes of select laneways (those mentioned on pages 34 and 35), as well as the residential streets and major roads adjacent to them. The sound recording captured a walk through the length of each street. The results of the experiment can be found from pages 60 to 65.



Figure 39: Reggae Lane in Toronto, image



Figure 40: Alley Cat Lane, image

1: "Famous laneway in Toronto is a hub for illegal activity and the residents want it to stop" <https://www.blogto.com/city/2022/02/toronto-laneway-hub-illegalactivityreggae-lane/>
2: "The Laneway Project" <https://www.thelanewayproject.ca/>
3: "Clean Laneways" <https://www.thelanewayproject.ca/clean-laneways>

Laneway Soundscape



Figure 41: Google Streetview of Laneway “3”, image

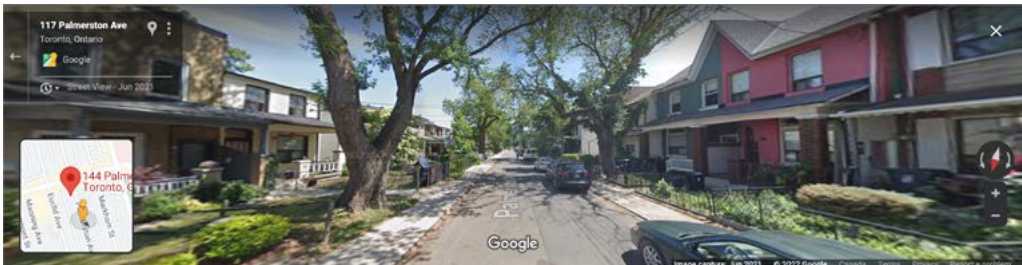


Figure 42: Google Streetview of Palmerston Avenue, image



Figure 43: Google Streetview of Dundas Street West, photo

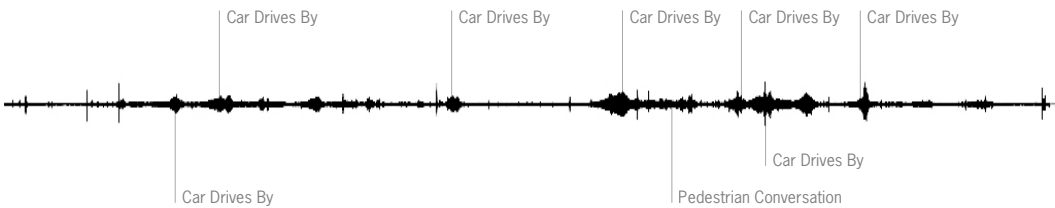
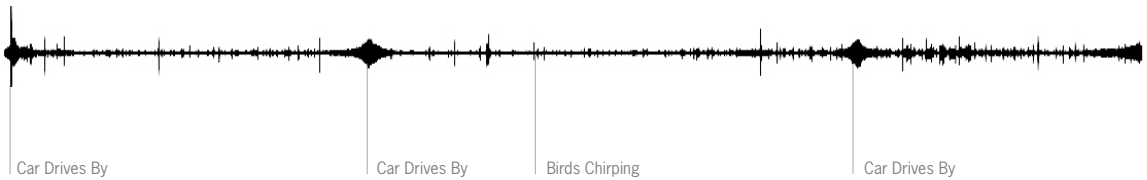


Figure 44: Laneway “1” Soundscape Diagrams, diagrams



Figure 45: Google Streetview of “Laneway 4”, photo



Figure 46: Google Streetview of Manning Avenue, photo



Figure 47: Google Streetview of Dundas Street West, photo

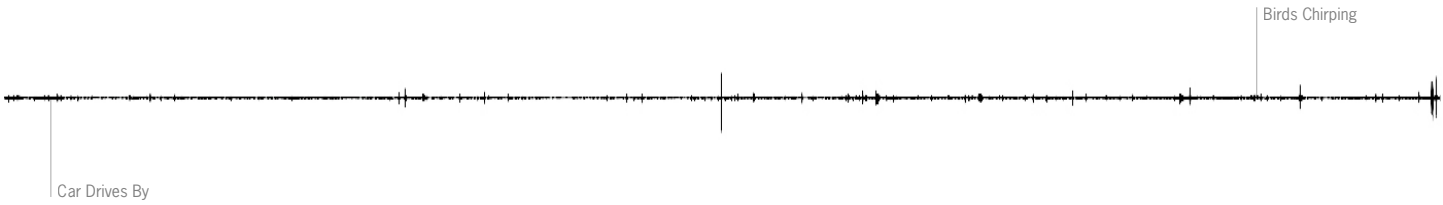


Figure 48: Laneway “2” Soundscape Diagrams, diagrams



Figure 49: Google Streetview of “Laneway 1”, photo



Figure 50: Google Streetview of Manning Avenue, photo

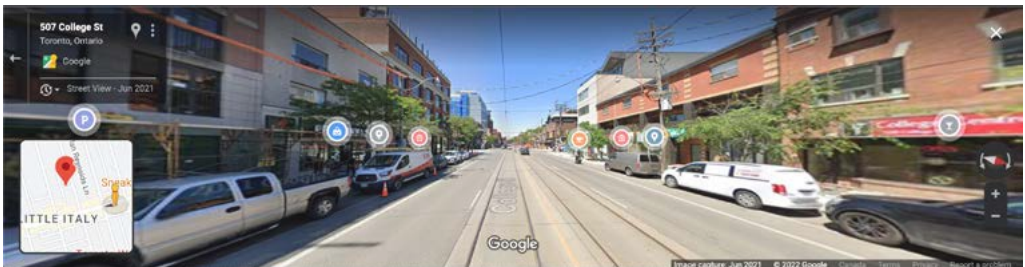


Figure 51: Google Streetview of College, photo

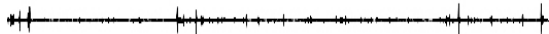


Figure 52: Laneway “3” Soundscape Diagrams, diagrams

Residential Laneway Art

The laneway culture of Toronto includes graffiti art, which provides a forum for the creative expression of individuals as well as a critique of prevailing social and cultural conventions.

The laneways of Toronto are distinctive aspect of the urban landscape of the city, offering a rich and varied history as well as a variety of cultural and social functions. Graffiti art is a vital component of the laneway culture of Toronto and has long been a prominent feature of the city’s urban environment.

Graffiti art in Toronto’s lanes provides a forum for creative expression and criticism of prevailing cultural and social standards. These artworks, which are frequently produced by outcast or disadvantaged groups, might be viewed as an act of defiance against accepted cultural and societal standards. For instance, laneway graffiti in Toronto has frequently criticised topics like gentrification, capitalism, and the commercialization of art.

A platform for the expression of various and alternative kinds of cultural expression, graffiti art in Toronto’s lanes is also a significant component of the city’s cultural landscape. These works of art constitute a distinctive and dynamic element of Toronto’s cultural scene because they are frequently produced by artists who would not have access to conventional exhibition settings. Given the significance of the graffiti art in Toronto’s lanes, it is crucial that these areas be kept in their deserted condition. Allowing the development of these areas would probably result in the eviction of graffiti artists and the extinction of this cultural phenomenon.

Graffiti art within laneways can be broken down into two categories, tagging and mural art. Tagging, which is largely seen as a form of vandalism is done without permission by street graffiti artists. Tags usually depict the artist’s name, the name of their graffiti group, a sign or a short phrase. It is up to the property owner to remove any undesirable tags that they may find on their laneway facing garages. Since tagging is a reoccurring phenomenon in many of the city’s laneways, many property owners do not bother with removing the graffiti work as it is more than likely to reappear on their garage. Mural art on the other hand is a form of street art that is done with the permission, commission and, in some instances, the guidance of the property owners. Mural art, which appears like a more refined version of street art, can be illustrated in a variety of styles and depict a variety of subjects or objects.

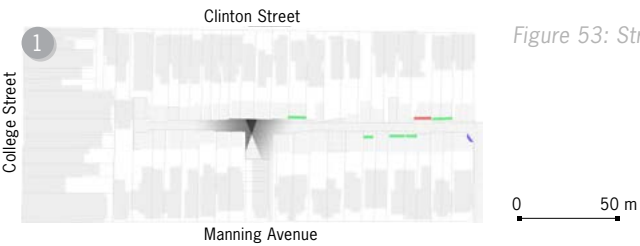


Figure 53: Street Art Map 1, map



Figure 54: Street Art Map 2, map

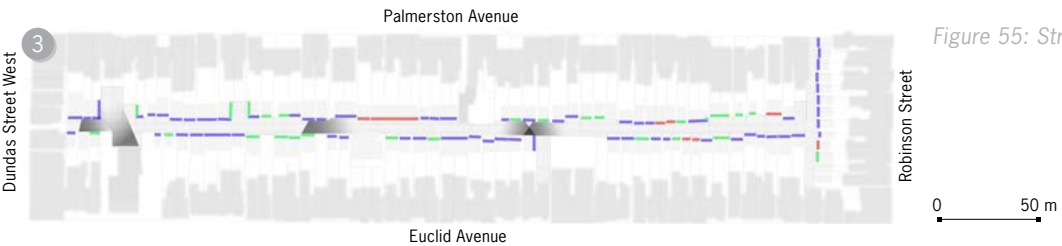


Figure 55: Street Art Map 3, map

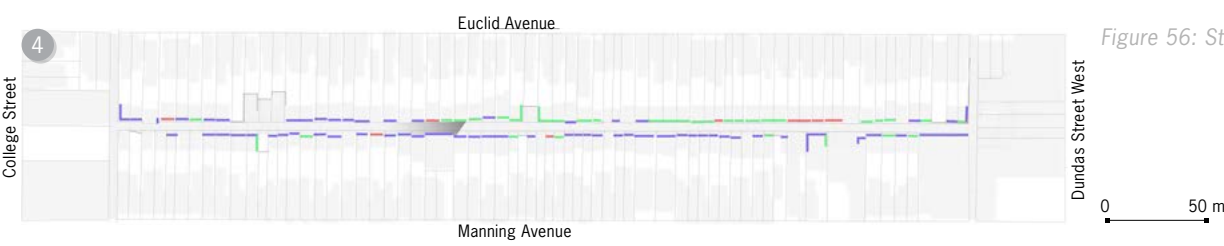


Figure 56: Street Art Map 4, map



Light Graffiti - Few Graffiti Tags

1	29%	2	32%
3	0%	4	14%



Heavy Graffiti - Many Graffiti Tags

1	64%	2	61%
3	0%	4	3%



Mural Art

1	11%	2	9%
3	0%	4	3%

Figure 57: Graffiti Art Legend, legend

Legal Status of Graffiti

Toronto's legal framework for graffiti art is intricate and complicated. Graffiti is typically regarded as vandalism and is prohibited in Toronto. Graffiti is defined as unpermitted writing or drawing on public or private property. There are a number of legal and partially legal ways for graffiti artists to produce and exhibit their work in Toronto as there is also a growing understanding of the significance of graffiti art as a respectable form of expression. Using approved graffiti walls or mural sites is one of the main legal ways to display graffiti art in Toronto.

Graffiti artists are able to legally create and display their work on a variety of authorised graffiti walls and mural sites across the City of Toronto. These areas are often run by local governments or nonprofit groups, and their purpose is to give graffiti artists a safe place to express themselves. Graffiti Alley at the west part of the city and Underpass Park in the east are two of the most well-known designated graffiti walls in Toronto.¹

Utilizing private property is another authorized method for the creation of graffiti art in Toronto. In Toronto, some property owners have made the decision to permit graffiti artists to paint murals on their structures, either to support the arts or to prevent graffiti vandalism. In these situations, the property owner typically gives the graffiti artist permission to produce the work and assumes responsibility for its upkeep.

Additionally, there are other partially legal ways for graffiti artists in Toronto to produce and exhibit their work. For instance, some graffiti artists decide to work in places that are less noticeable to the general public, like vacant buildings or building sites. Although these actions are theoretically prohibited, authorities frequently let them as long as they do not significantly harm or disrupt the peace.

There are several legal and illegal ways for graffiti artists to make and display their work, making the legal position of graffiti art in Toronto complicated. While most people view graffiti as vandalism, there is a growing understanding of the importance of graffiti art as a legitimate form of expression, and initiatives are being taken to give graffiti artists legal platforms to express themselves.



Figure 58: Montreal Counter Information Graffiti, images



Figure 59: Grange Park Labyrinth in Toronto, image

1: "Graffiti Alley" <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/graffiti-alley-rush-lane>

Collage of “Laneway 3”

Inspired by Edward Ruscha’s *Every Building on Sunset Strip*, Collage of Laneway “3” is a photo collage rendering of both sides of the laneway at the intersection of Dundas Street West and Palmerston Avenue.



Figure 60: Laneway “3” Graffiti Collage Section 1, collage



Figure 61: Laneway “3” Graffiti Collage Section 2, collage



Figure 62: Laneway “3” Graffiti Collage Section 3, collage

End of Side A

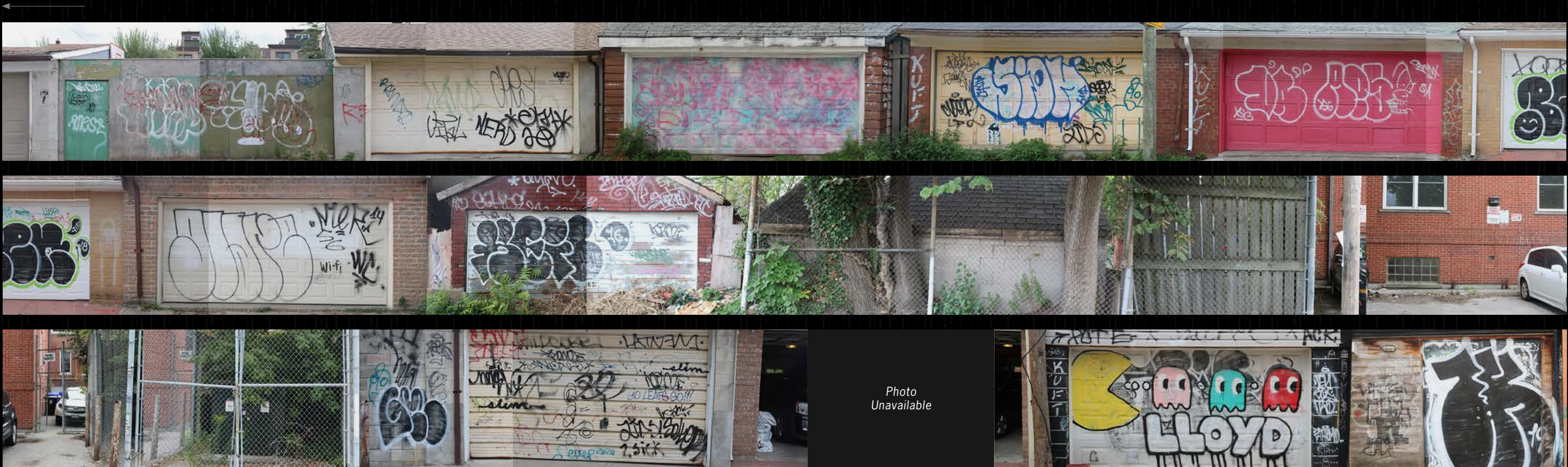


Figure 63: Laneway “3” Graffiti Collage Section 4, collage

Start of Side B



Figure 64: Laneway “3” Graffiti Collage Section 5, collage



Figure 65: Laneway “3” Graffiti Collage Section 6, collage

End of Side B



Photo
Unavailable



Figure 66: Laneway "3" Graffiti Collage Section 7, collage

Laneway Plant Life

A diverse variety of natural plant life, including grasses, weeds, flowers, and shrubs, can be found in Toronto’s lanes. These plants add a distinctive and dynamic element to the city’s urban landscape, which frequently coexists with more traditional landscaping.

Numerous significant ecological and environmental advantages result from the proliferation of wild vegetation in Toronto’s lanes. For instance, by absorbing carbon dioxide and other pollutants, wild plants can assist to enhance air quality while simultaneously serving as an essential home for birds and other wildlife.

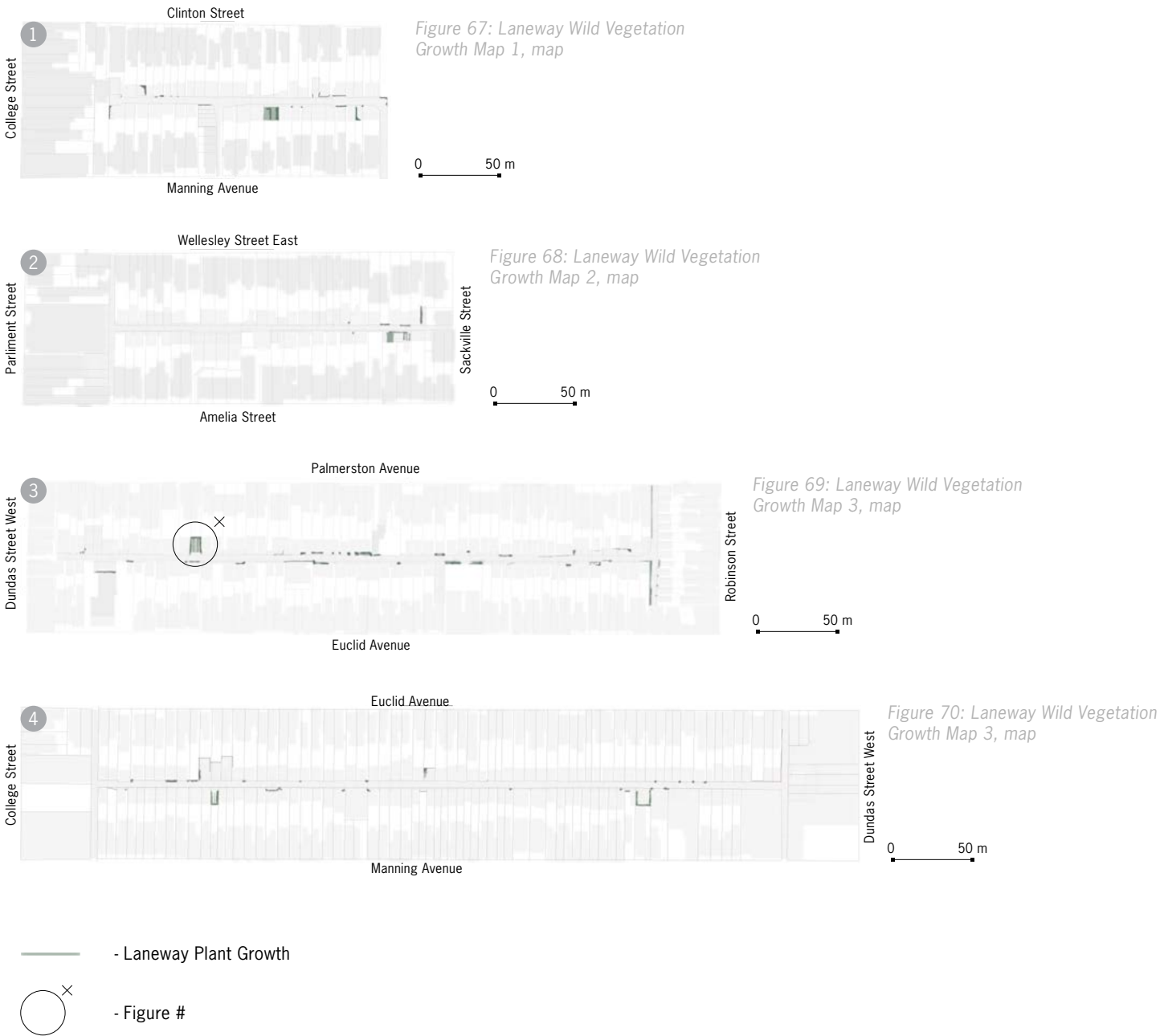
The development of wild plants in residential lanes can boost biodiversity while also serving practical purposes. These plants can assist with soil stabilization, erosion prevention, and water and air pollution filtering. They can also provide shade and evaporative cooling, which can assist to reduce the heat island effect in metropolitan areas.¹

The proliferation of untamed plants in Toronto’s lanes might have cultural and social implications in addition to these environmental benefits. For instance, a space for the expression of alternative landscaping and gardening techniques, as well as a sense of connection to nature inside the city’s urban landscape, can be created through the growing of wild plants.

Furthermore, the development of untamed vegetation in Toronto’s lanes might be viewed as a sort of defiance against the city’s prevailing cultural and social norms. These plants, which frequently coexist with more formal landscaping, can be considered as a celebration of nature’s beauty and a challenge to the established urban landscape aesthetics.

An important component of the urban landscape of the city is the wild plant life that can be found in Toronto’s laneways. A variety of ecological, cultural, and social advantages result from the proliferation of wild plants in these areas, which can also be viewed as a sort of defiance against the dominant cultural and social standards of the city.

1: “Using Trees and Vegetation to Reduce Heat Islands” <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/using-trees-and-vegetation-reduce-heat-islands>



Laneway Plant Life Cont.

In Toronto’s residential lanes, one can find a wide variety of wild plants, both native and non-native. Some of the most frequent types of wild vegetation that can be found in these places include weeds, grasses, and shrubs. These plants have the ability to proliferate on their own or with human assistance through seed distribution or planting.

One of the most common weeds in Toronto’s residential lanes is the dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*).¹ The deeply lobed leaves and brilliant yellow flowers of this hardy shrub set it apart. Despite having its roots in Europe and Asia, dandelion plants have now expanded to North America. They are usually found in disturbed or compacted soil and are known to endure a variety of weather conditions.

Grass is another common plant seen in Toronto’s residential alleys. The most common grasses in these areas include crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*), quackgrass (*Elytrigia repens*), and annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*).² These grasses are commonly referred to as weeds because of how invasive they are and their ability to outcompete other plant species. They can be difficult to control and spread quickly through seed dispersal.

Shrubs are yet another type of unkempt vegetation that can be seen in Toronto’s residential lanes. The shrubs that are most frequently observed in these spaces are multiflora rose, privet, and buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) (*Rosa multiflora*). These shrubs may spread rapidly and sometimes displace local plant species. They are typically introduced through seed dispersal or planting in urban regions.

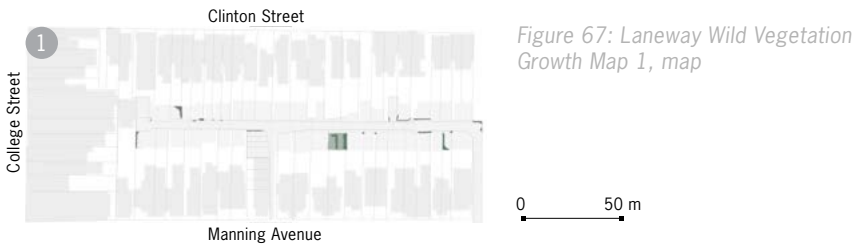


Figure 67: Laneway Wild Vegetation Growth Map 1, map



Figure 68: Laneway Wild Vegetation Growth Map 2, map

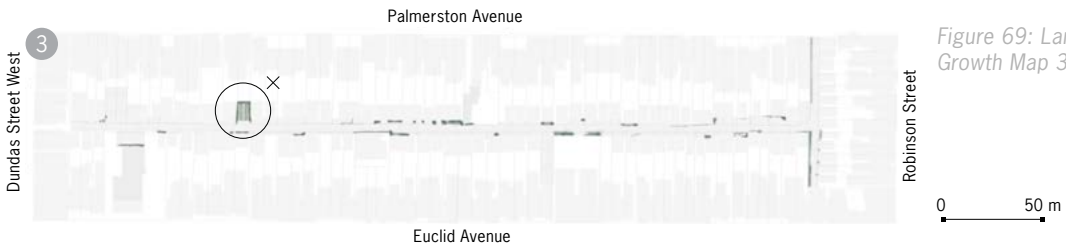


Figure 69: Laneway Wild Vegetation Growth Map 3, map



Figure 70: Laneway Wild Vegetation Growth Map 3, map

- Laneway Plant Growth
- Figure #

1: "Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)" http://www.columbia.edu/itc/cerc/danoff-burg/invasion_bio/inv_spp_summ/Taraxacum_officinale.htm
2: "Invasive and Exotic Grasses and Grass-like Plants" <https://www.invasive.org/species/grasses.cfm>

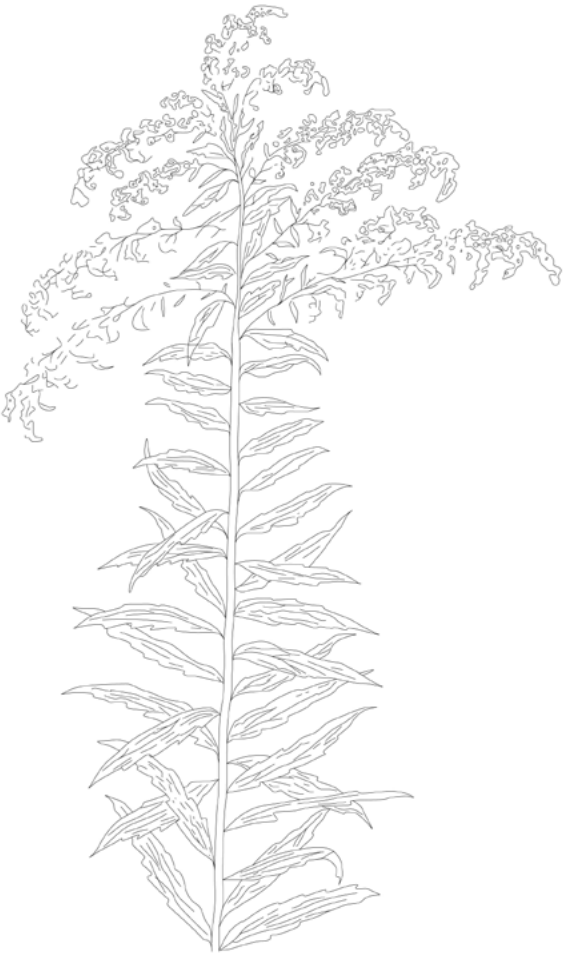
Observed Laneway Vegetation

1: "A Tree of Too Many Names" <https://www.audubon.org/news/a-tree-too-many-names#:~:text=But%20as%20the%20naturalist%20John,Some%20states%20consider%20it%20an>



English Elm (*Ulmus Minor*)

Elm, which has been severely affected by Dutch elm disease since the 1960's has made a comeback in Toronto. This deciduous tree grows best in well-drained soil in hedgerows and woodland. It can usually tolerate a range of pH levels in soil. Its leaves are often characterized by an asymmetrical base and a taper to a sudden point at the top.



Goldenrod (*Solidago*)

Goldenrod is a perennial with single woody stems that grow to heights of 3 to 7 feet. It is often found along roadsides and in open fields. Its yellow flowers, which generally appear in August and September, are only about a quarter of an inch wide, but they come in large clusters.

Sow Thistle (*Sonchus Arvensis*)

Perennial sow-thistle is a perennial weed reproducing by seed and by buds on underground roots. They grow throughout Ontario in cultivated fields, pastures, meadows, woodland, waste places, roadsides, gardens and occasionally in lawns. Leaves are broadly club-shaped and have irregularly toothed margins with prickles at the end.



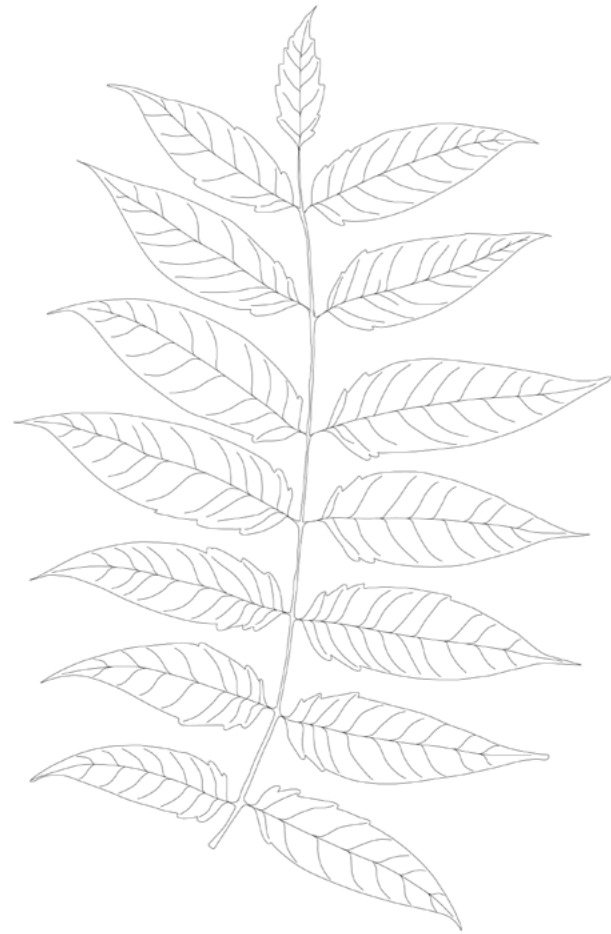
Boxelder Maple (*Acer negundo*)

Boxelder is a species of maple native to North America. It is a fast-a, short-lived tree with opposite, compound leaves consisting of three, five, or seven coarsely toothed leaflets. The box elder is often regarded as a weed tree because of its prolific sprouting and its tendency to lean, shed branches and generally ignore human standards for an attractive tree.¹



Figure 71: Wych Elm and Sow Thistle, diagram

Figure 72: Goldenrod And Box Elder, diagram



Tree of Heaven (Ailanthus Altissima)

The Tree of Heaven is a rapidly growing ornamental shade tree with the ability to grow on a wide range of site conditions, tolerating poor soils and air quality. It is native to both China and Taiwan and was first introduced to North America in the late 1700s. Tree of heaven leaves are pinnately compound, meaning they have a central stem in which leaflets are attached on each side. One leaf can range in length from 1 to 4 feet with anywhere from 10 to 40 leaflets. When crushed, the leaves and all plant parts give off a strong, offensive odor.



Virginia Creeper (Parthenocissus Quinquefolia)

This perennial plant is a woody vine up to 60' long. It usually climbs up trees, shrubs, or fences, but sometimes sprawls across the ground, forming a ground cover up to a foot tall. The stems are initially green and hairless, but eventually they become brown and woody. Its habitats include deciduous woodlands, woodland borders, thickets, gravelly seeps, limestone glades, rocky bluffs, fence rows, abandoned or little-used railroads, and walls of buildings.

Figure 73: Tree of Heaven and Virginia Creeper, diagram

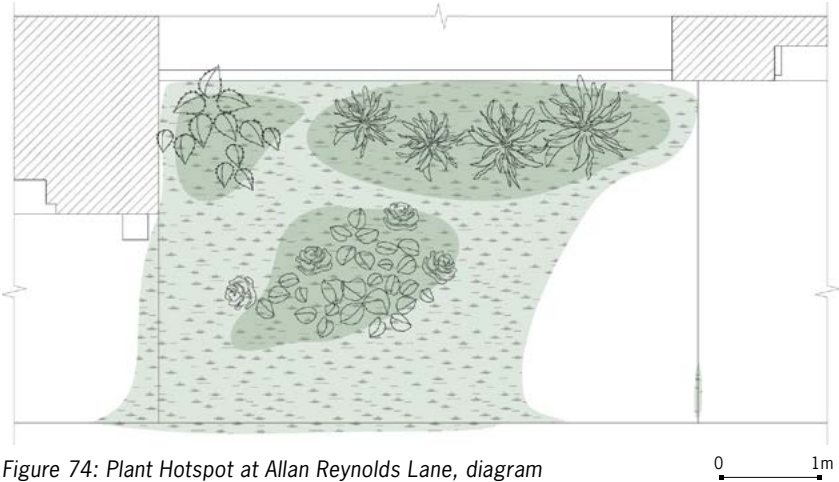


Figure 74: Plant Hotspot at Allan Reynolds Lane, diagram

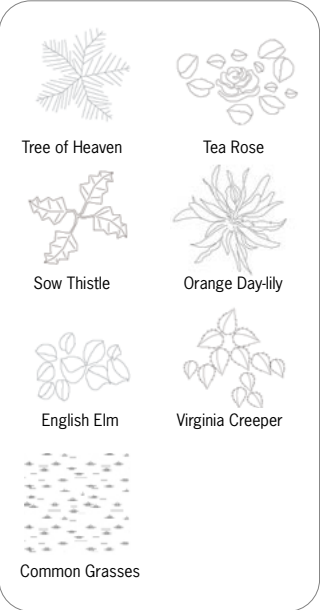


Figure 76: Wild Plants Legend, legend

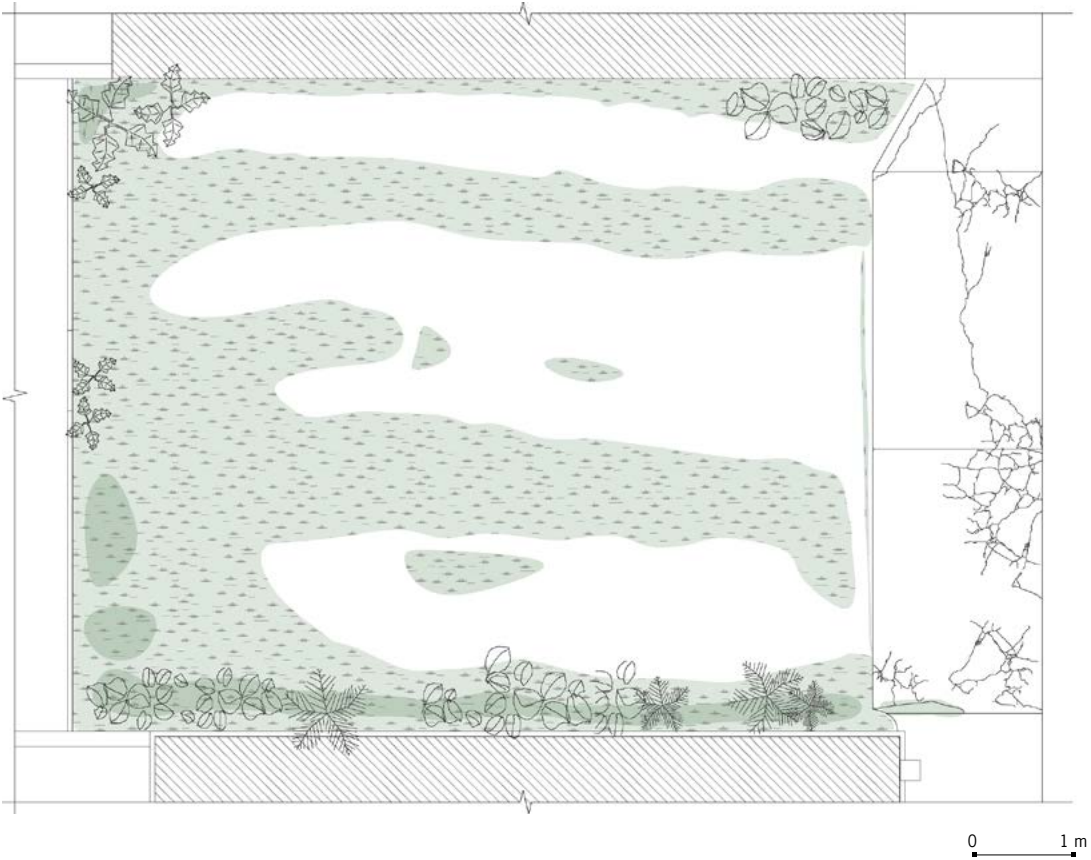


Figure 75: Plant Hotspot at Laneway "3", diagram



Figure 77: Morley Safer Lane, August 3rd, 2022, 8:03 PM, photo

A common occurrence with property lots that are missing a garage unit is the spreading of vegetation from their backyard to the adjacent lane. The open space provided by the lack of a laneway abutting structure become a wild garden to which seeds of various plants are propagated to by wind.



Figure 78: Jefferys Lane, August 3th, 2022, 9:02 PM, photo

While unattended plants may grow in a haphazard fashion across laneways, those that are guided in their growth can be used to alter the appearance of properties according to the property owner's wishes. For instance, The Virginia Creeper can be used as a decoration for garage exteriors.



Figure 79: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Palmerston Ave., June 15th, 2022, 4:39 PM, photo

In this instance of invasive plant growth, Goldenrod and Boxelder maple growth has obstructed the laneway entrance to a garage in Palmerston Avenue's laneway.



Figure 80: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Palmerston Ave., June 15th, 2022, 4:39 PM, photo

The Virginia Creeper can spread its leaves to great heights when given the opportunity.



Figure 81: Laneway at Dundas St. W. and Palmerston Ave., June 15th, 2022, 4:35 PM, photo

The Tree of Heaven grows in front of a garage entrance.



Figure 82: Allan Reynolds Lane, June 15th, 2022, 7:21 PM, photo

Yellow Rose grows amongst Orange Day Lily at the back edge of a property abutting Allan Reynolds Lane. The small area between the rear end of a property and the laneway it abuts can be used for growing a small garden.

“Heterotopias, Terrain Vague and Toronto’s Laneways”

Conclusion

Toronto’s residential laneways are a unique street type that present an unmaintained image within the city. Their lack of productivity and maintenance permits the development of various plant species and the appearance of graffiti and mural art. The laneways of Toronto are a terrain vague and a heterotopia. They are places where societal conventions appear to be suspended and where the “other” can reside.

In the aftermath of the development of Toronto’s residential laneways, what will become of the sub nature, street art, and other potentially transgressive forms of artistic expression? As wild plants tend to grow within the boundaries of private property, the development of their laneways would hinge on the residents. Can untamed vegetation and street art exist within a developed laneway, not only to serve as a reminder of their unproductive and erratic nature since the abandonment of their original functions, but also to preserve laneways as a space where they can continue to exist freely?

If sub nature and graffiti still have a place in residential laneways after their development, this would indicate that the laneways will retain their heterotopic character, but will no longer be a terrain vague typology, as the development will bring public eyes to the street. Even though residential laneways will not contain “other” individuals, they will still be home to “other” vegetation and artistic expression.

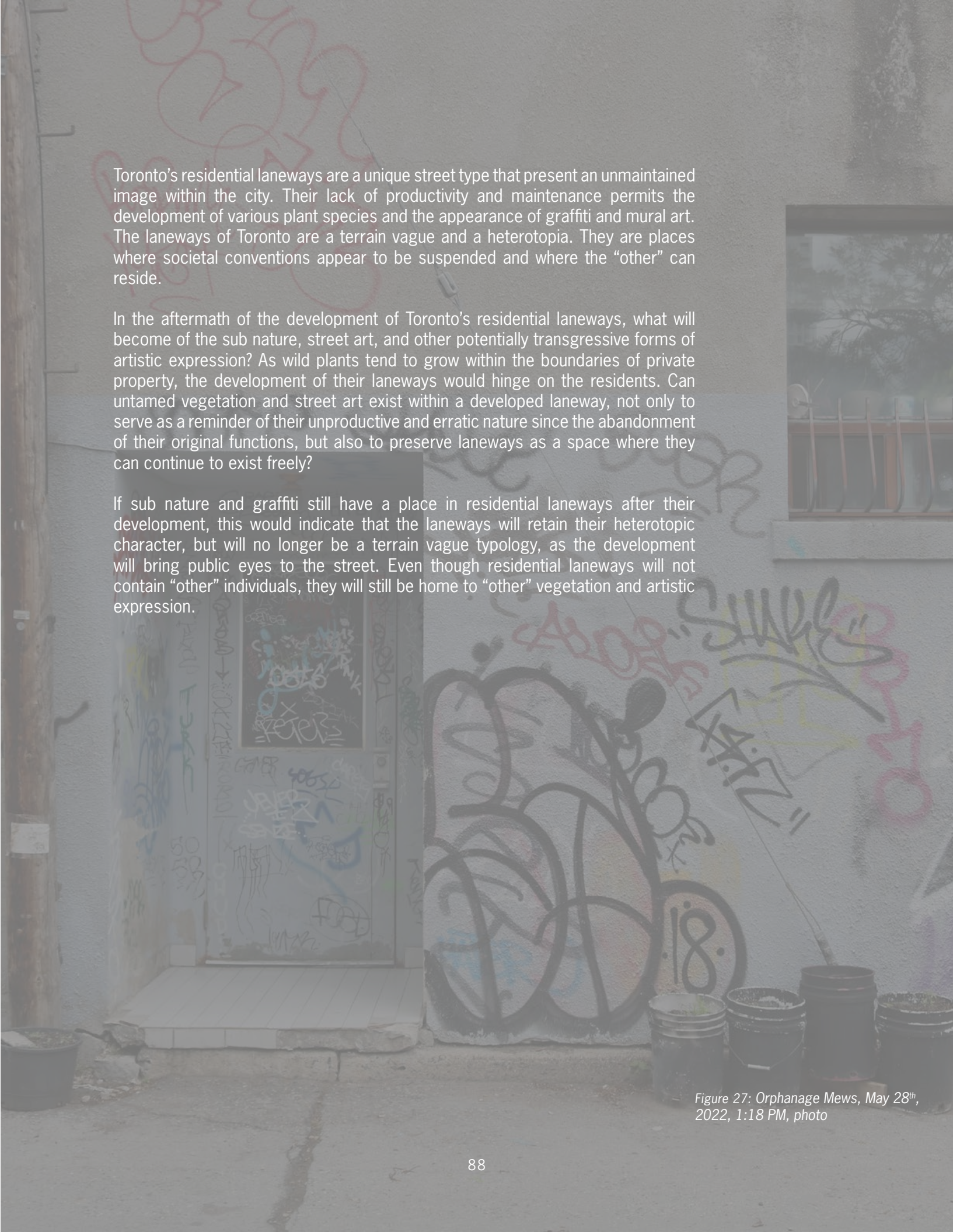


Figure 27: Orphanage Mews, May 28th, 2022, 1:18 PM, photo

Part 3 : Laneway Development and Adoption



Figure 83: Basketball Hoop and Hockey Net in Toronto Laneway, photo

Urban Redevelopment

Urban redevelopment is a process of renovating or rebuilding urban areas, typically with the goal of improving the economic vitality and physical appearance of the area. Urban redevelopment projects often involve the construction of new buildings, the rehabilitation of existing buildings, and the improvement of infrastructure, such as roads, sidewalks, and public transportation. Urban redevelopment may also include efforts to address social and environmental issues, such as affordable housing, public health, and sustainability. Urban redevelopment projects may be led by government agencies, private developers, or a combination of both. The specific goals and priorities of urban redevelopment projects vary depending on the needs and circumstances of the community in which they are being undertaken.

The urban redevelopment of West Don Lands in Toronto and the lack of redevelopment in Detroit’s residential neighborhoods represent two very different approaches to addressing the challenges and opportunities of urbanization.

West Don Lands is a former industrial area in Toronto that has undergone a major transformation in recent years. The area has been transformed into a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood with a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces. The redevelopment of West Don Lands was led by the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, a government agency that oversaw the planning, design, and construction of the new neighborhood.¹ One of the main goals of the West Don Lands redevelopment was to create a more livable and sustainable community. To achieve this, the planners incorporated a range of green infrastructure features, such as green roofs, rainwater harvesting systems, and a network of bike lanes and pedestrian paths. The new neighborhood also includes a mix of housing types, including affordable and market-rate units, to ensure that it is accessible to people from different income levels.

In contrast to the successful redevelopment of West Don Lands, the residential neighborhoods of Detroit have seen little in the way of revitalization. Despite the city’s rich history and cultural significance, Detroit has struggled with a range of social and economic challenges, including high rates of poverty, crime, and population decline.² Many of the city’s neighborhoods, particularly those on the city’s East Side, are characterized by abandoned houses, overgrown lots, and a lack of investment. One of the main reasons for the lack of redevelopment in Detroit’s residential neighborhoods is the lack of funding and political will. Many of the city’s neighborhoods are located in low-income areas, which makes it difficult to attract private investment. Additionally, the city’s declining population and tax base have made it difficult for the government to allocate resources to neighborhood revitalization efforts. While the West Don Lands redevelopment has been successful in creating a more livable and sustainable community, the residential neighborhoods of Detroit continue to struggle with a variety of social and economic issues.



Figure 84: 1894 photograph looking east along the Esplanade, Toronto Public Library, photo



Figure 85: Photographs of residential buildings in Detroit’s Westwood Park neighbourhood, photo

1: “West Don Lands” <https://www.waterfronttoronto.ca/ourprojects/scope-scale/west-don-lands>
2: “Detroit – A City Being Abandoned” <https://www.worldabandoned.com/detroit>

Laneway Housing

As the demand for affordable walk-up housing increases in the City of Toronto, so does their cost. The cost of single-family housing in Toronto has been consistently rising since the mid-nineties and no signs of peaking are visible as of yet. People who seek to live in Toronto cannot be too picky with regards to housing – they can either rent a high-rise condo or move into an estate outside of the core. Housing options are few and mostly unaffordable for low to middle income families.

For decades, some architects have argued that laneway redevelopment is a solution for Toronto’s housing crisis. A laneway house is a form of detached secondary suite built into a pre-existing lot, usually in a backyard and opening onto a back lane. Toronto’s laneway housing pioneers Jeffry Stinson and Bridget Shim have conducted initial research into laneway housing in Toronto. They have recognized the laneway as “an untapped resource of city property, which could be developed for much needed low-cost housing while effectively using existing infrastructure.”

Jeffry Stinson’s report, a study of laneway housing in Toronto which argued that the City of Toronto’s urban form could support the development of laneway housing on a city-wide scale and Brigitte Shim’s *Site Unseen: Laneway Architecture and Urbanism in Toronto*, a study into laneway housing based on a studio led at University of Toronto’s School of Architecture and Urbanism have become important works on the potential of laneway housing development in Toronto and catalysts for future zoning amendments. Ever since 5 Leonard Place, Toronto’s first modern laneway house was constructed in 1989¹, multiple architects have built laneway houses in existing lots across Toronto, mostly through repurposing old structures that once served the city public.

When the first laneway houses were built in Toronto, depending on the project, getting approved for construction could have been a long and expensive process that involved working out numerous issues with the Committee of Adjustment. In 2018, the city passed new zoning rules to allow laneway housing as of right – meaning, no Committee of Adjustment or OMB hearings required. This saved homeowners upwards of \$100,000 in rezoning fees.² This was beneficial for homeowners interested in building a laneway house, considering laneway housing tends to have higher-than-average square-metre costs, a reality when building on tight sites. But still, the current zoning isn’t entirely permissive. It allows backyard laneway suites not stand-alone houses, like Brigitte Shims 1993 laneway house, which has its own address.³ There are also many other regulations that limit where and how the suites can be designed and constructed. However, there is a trend of laneway houses populating Toronto’s backspaces and loosening of zoning restrictions pertaining to laneway development. The city’s abandoned backspaces are gradually developing, taking on a new façade; one that exclaims – this is a residential/commercial neighbourhood or a designated public space. The rising interest and approval of laneway housing in Toronto, the government push for laneway development as well as the emerging efficient and affordable laneway housing construction methods are some of the key factors leading to the eradication of Toronto’s inner-city terrain vague.



Figure 86: Jeffery Stinson Laneway House, image



Figure 87: Bridgette Shim Laneway House, image

1. "A landmark in residential innovation" <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/real-estate/a/landmark-in-residential-innovation/article673236/>
2. "Laneway Suite Zoning By-Law Amendment Review" <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/9739-CityPlanningLanewaySuitesOct2021.pdf>
3. "A Brief History of Laneway Homes in Toronto: From the '90s to Now" <https://www.designlinesmagazine.com/the-history-of-laneway-homes-in-toronto/>

Laneway Suite Eligibility

As of 2018, getting approved for constructing a laneway suite in Toronto has become a comprehensive and feasible process for homeowner's whose property abuts a laneway. To qualify, the homeowner's property must meet the following minimum requirements. The property must be located in neighbourhoods that have an established laneway network within Toronto, East York, North York, Scarborough and/or Etobicoke. It must be found within the city's R, RD, RS, RT, RM zones - spaces allowing for residential building and activity. The property must have enough space to fit a laneway suite. There must be a setback of 1.5m from the lane, a minimum width of 4.75m (maximum of 8m) and a minimum depth of 6.75m (maximum of 10m). The property must have enough space for emergency services to reach the laneway suite. Emergency services require 0.9m of sideyard access alongside the primary property, or a distance 45m from the nearest established street. The potential buildable space must be clear of municipally protected trees. Some tree demolition and compensation efforts may be allowed - an arborist may need to be contacted to understand the conditions of this requirement.

If the minimum requirements outlined above are met, the property owner will need to contact a specialized laneway housing developer, architect or builder that can provide them with a detailed property analysis, create drawings and other supporting documents. Next, they must gather supporting documents from their laneway housing developer, and apply for a building permit. As mentioned above, the laneway developer will take care of the logistics. Next, they will need to apply for a building permit with the City of Toronto and include these supporting documents. If city approval is received, the City will review the application, determine conditions and/or permissibility of the overall concept. This step typically involves some back-and-forth. Once cleared in a preliminary hearing, the property owner will have to post Public Notice signage to inform their neighbours on the situation. If they recieve the official building permit, they can start building.

The process of becoming eligible for laneway suite construction has seen consistent change with the hope to make it as seamless and inexpensive as possible for homeowners in Toronto to build extra housing units. The relaxation of design guidelines on laneway suites and amendments made to policies regarding the approval of laneway suite construction are done to meet Ontario's government goal of building 1.5 million homes in 10 years. The City of Toronto is trying to encourage homeowner to try out laneway housing through hosting the Affordable Laneway Suites Pilot Program which provides funding in form of a forgivable loan of up to \$50,000 for eligible property owners developing a laneway suite. As the rules pertaining to laneway development change over the years, it would come as no surprise to see many residential laneways take on the face of lively public streets.



Figure 88: Eligible Zones for Laneway Housing, map (2018)

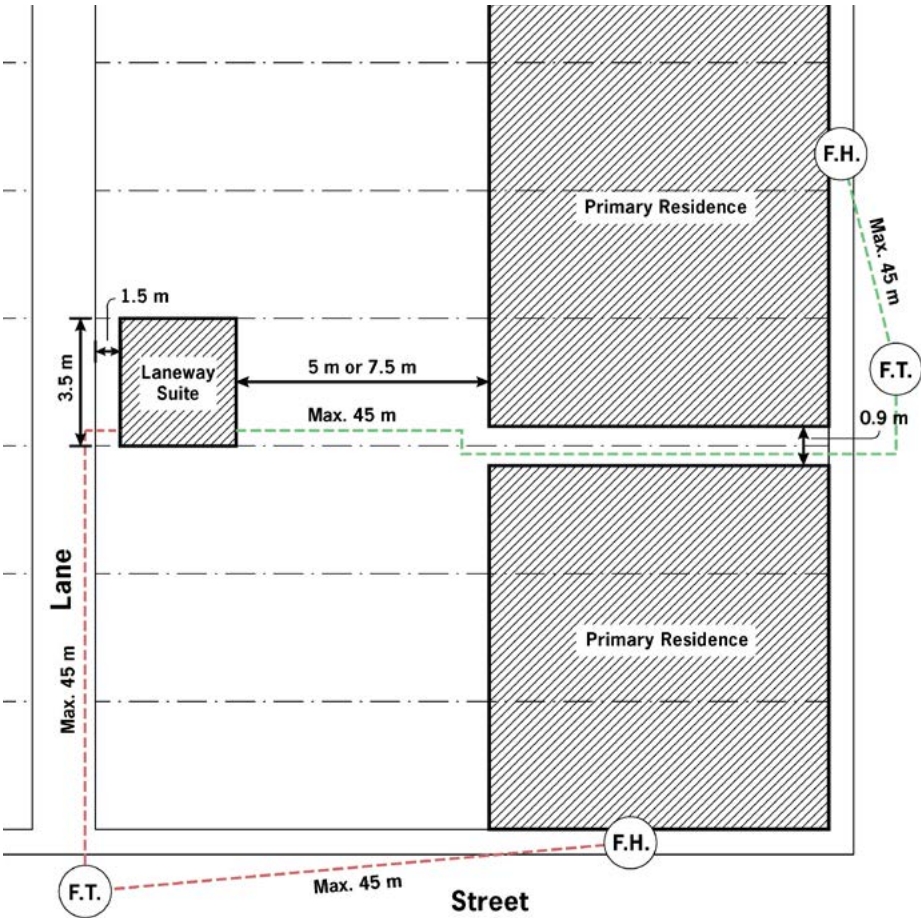
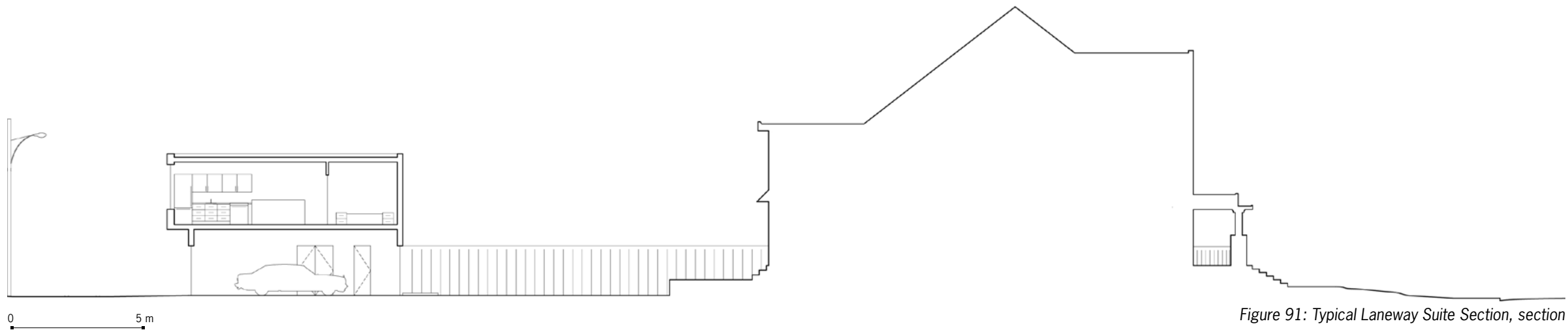
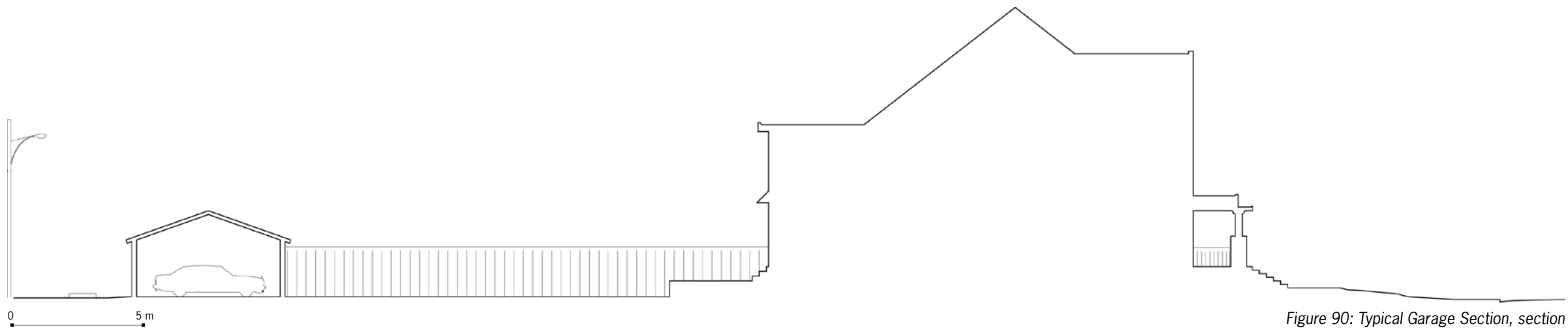


Figure 89: Eligibility Requirements for Laneway Housing, diagram (2021)

Comparative Drawings

The following illustrations are a set of sections, elevations and plans that compare the typical residential laneway garage in Toronto with a two-storey laneway suite, featuring garage storage on the ground floor and a typical, tight yet functional living unit on the second.



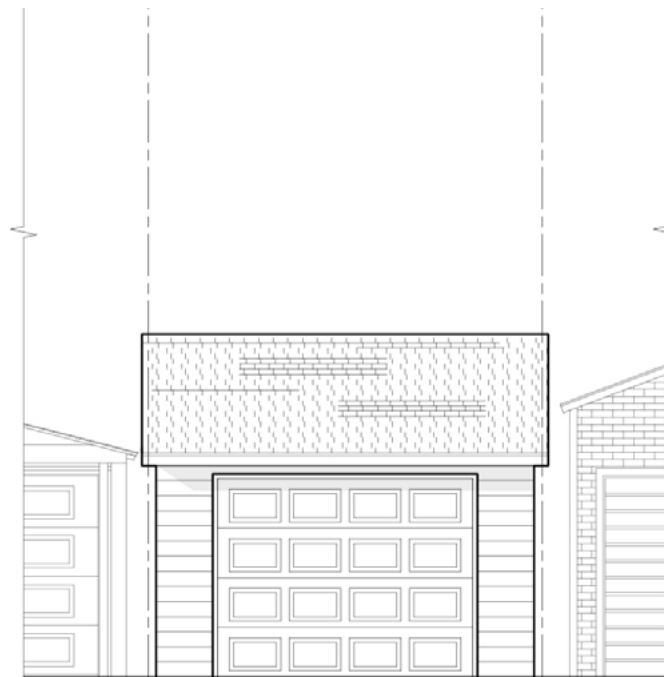


Figure 92: Garage Front Elevation, elevation

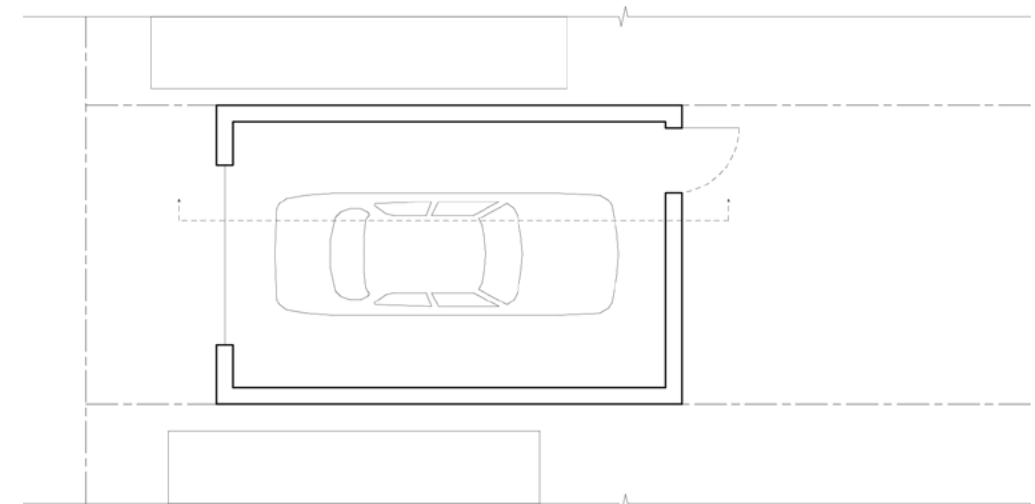


Figure 94: Garage Ground Floor Plan, plan

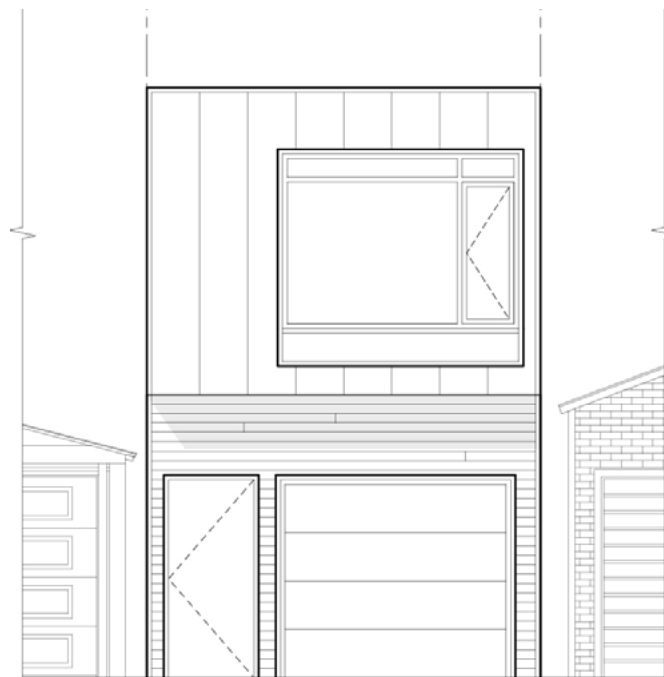


Figure 93: Laneway Suite Front Elevation, elevation

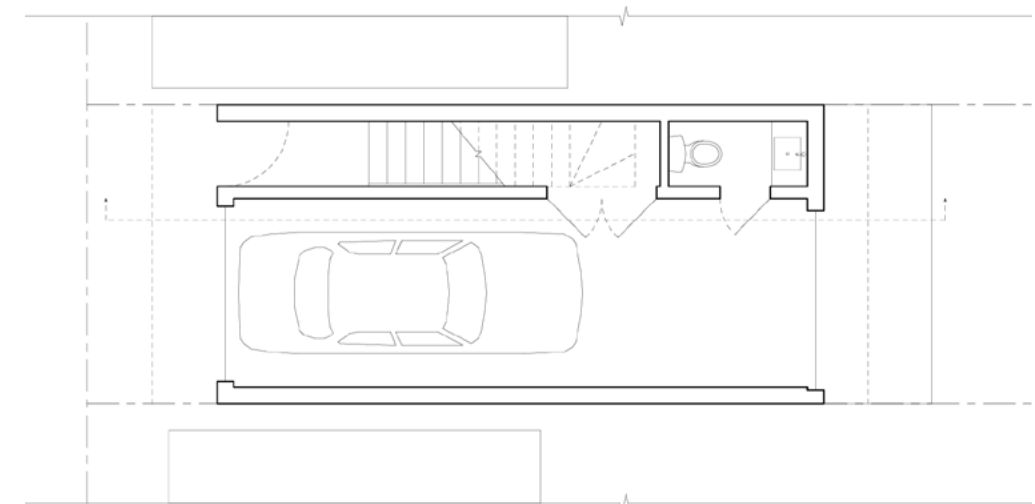
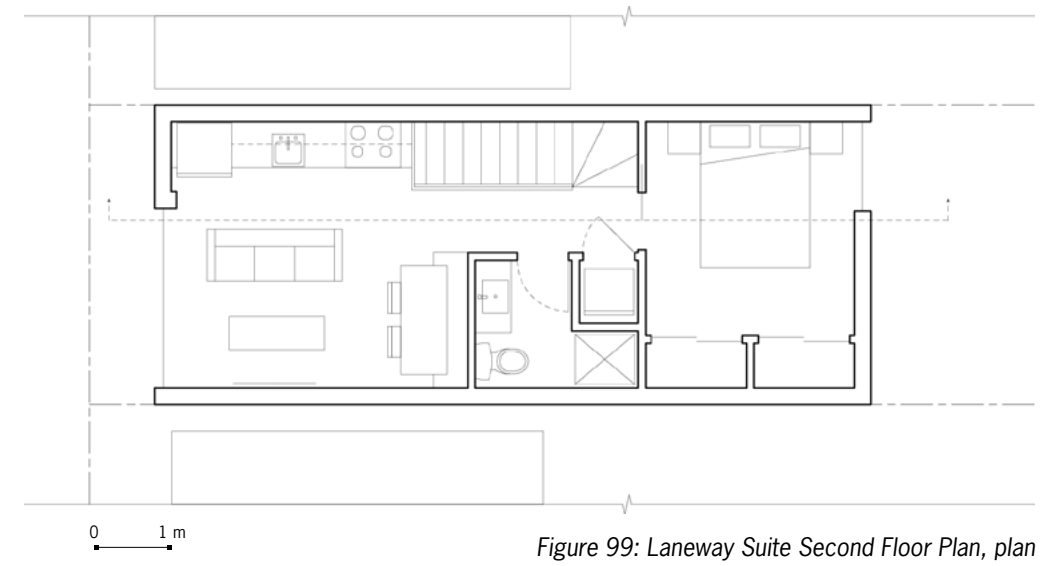
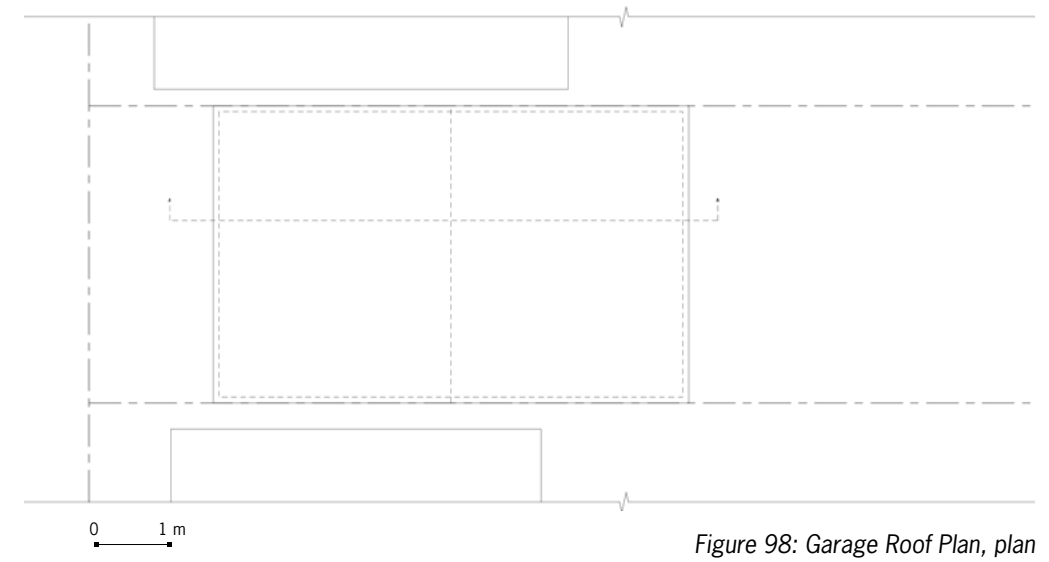
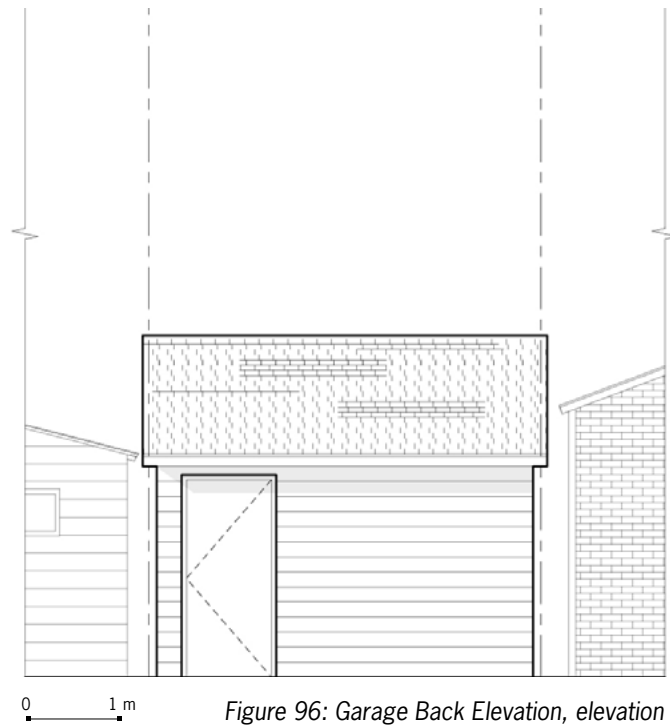


Figure 95: Laneway Suite Ground Floor Plan, plan



Impact of Laneway Suites

Now that the possibilities for laneway suite construction have been made available for many homeowners across the city, how great of an impact will laneway houses have on the residential laneway network in the city? Will residential laneways transform into mature streets lined with affordable yet tight living units in the near future? It is safe to say that this will not be happening any time soon due to a few substantial reasons.

For one, regulations such as emergency access requirements set in place regarding the building of laneway suites leaves many homeowners without the potential for transforming their garages into living spaces. While an estimated total of 36,000 properties in Toronto are considered eligible for laneway suite construction, within some of the city’s residential streets, nearly half of the properties do not meet the minimum requirements to be given the green light. To try to establish an accurate representation of properties within residential neighborhoods which hold the potential for developing an accessory dwelling unit, a startup group by the name of *Communalley* has taken on the initiative of mapping eligible properties within several neighbourhoods; Dufferin grove, Corso-Italia Davenport, Leslieville. The interactive map found on their website demonstrates that, the number of properties eligible for a laneway suite within a given residential can range anywhere from 50 to 90 percent. No single street within the neighbourhoods mentioned has been examined by *Communalley* to hold the possibility of having all of the garages lining its laneway turn into units for living. Therefore, the current regulations set in place surrounding laneway suite construction are a limiting yet reasonable force which virtually nulls the possibility for a complete transformation of laneways into residential streets.

Besides the rules set in place, another steppingstone in the way of the evolution of residential laneways is cost. Going through the process of building a laneway suite is quite expensive, and affordable only to a select population within the city. The cost to build a laneway suite depends on several variables; laneway access, location of infrastructure on the property (electrical service, sewers, drains, plumbing, and natural gas), proposed square footage of the laneway suite, access to primary residence infrastructure (to provide connection to electrical, sewers, drains, plumbing, and natural gas), exterior finishes and interior finishes. Overall, it may cost homeowners anywhere from 250 to 500 thousand dollars to build a small living unit in their backyard.¹ The City, however, is as of 2021 trying to financially incentivize the use of laneway frontages through the launch of its Laneway Suites Pilot Program which offers loans up to \$50,000 to owners building rental laneway properties.² To receive the loan, rent prices on these properties cannot exceed the city’s average market rent for 15 years. Moreover, various groups like R-Hauz and Balance Containers have explored affordable and speedy solutions for laneway suite construction through the use of pre-fab construction.

Although the niche market of laneway housing is gaining in popularity and is expected to make a noticeable dent in the housing industry, the limiting factors of policy and cost will likely cause a stunted, fragmented growth of laneways

suites throughout the residential laneway system rather than a wholistic one – with wealthier neighborhoods potentially seeing more change in their laneways. As living suites populate Toronto’s laneways in a disjointed fashion, the character and perception of laneways will progressively evolve into one that may be likened to the “official city”. A newfound incentive amongst the laneways’ residents for maintenance and patrol will in part dictate the transfiguration of laneways into safe and active neighborhoods. This will probably help disable the potential dilapidated laneways hold for attracting and hosting transgressive activities as studies have shown that unmaintained urban spaces which see rejuvenation tend to drive down crime rates.



Figure 100: R-Hauz Pre-fab Laneway Suite, image



Figure 101: Shipping Container Laneway House, image

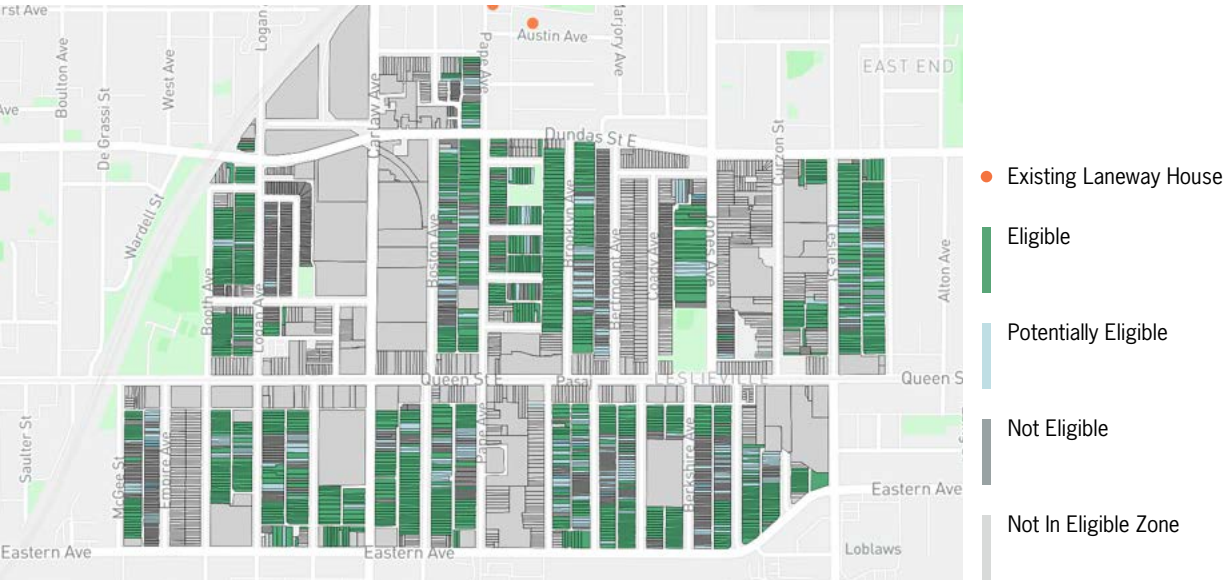


Figure 102: Communalley Map of Leslieville, map

1: “How Much Does It Cost To Build a Laneway House in Toronto?” <https://novacon.ca/how-much-does-it-cost-to-build-a-laneway-house-in-toronto/>
2: “Laneway Suites Programs” <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/community-partners/affordable-housing-partners/laneway-suites-program/>

Laneway Housing Industry

The laneway housing industry in Toronto has seen significant growth in recent years, as more and more homeowners look to add small residential units to their properties in order to increase its value which also increasing density and providing affordable housing options in the city’s tight housing market.

There are a number of key firms that are involved in the construction of laneway suites in Toronto. These firms include “Lanescape”, which specializes in designing and building laneway suites and has completed over 23 projects in the city.¹ Its co-founder Craig Race has played an important role in the advocacy of the legalization of laneway suites in Toronto. Besides architectural design firms, the laneway housing industry also includes firms like “2x2 Construction” which specializes in the construction of laneway suites, and “R-Hauz” which developed pre-fab construction methods for efficiently building laneway houses.

The growth of the laneway housing industry in Toronto has been driven by a combination of demand for affordable housing, favorable regulatory and financial incentives, and the efforts of key firms in the industry. As the demand for affordable housing in the city continues to grow, it is likely that the laneway housing industry will continue to evolve and expand, providing more housing options for Toronto residents.

CRAIG RACE ARCHITECTURE

superkool

LANEHOUSECAPE

creative-union.network

sustainable.

AFA////////////////////
architecture for all

2X2
CONSTRUCTION


R-Hauz

Figure 103: Firms Involved with Laneway Housing, images

1: “Projects” <https://lanescape.ca/projects/>



Figure 104: Laneway Suites of Toronto Collage, collage

Tactical Urbanism

A variety of low-cost, short-term interventions that work to enhance the public environment and promote more active and involved communities are referred to as tactical urbanism. Its adaptability, experimentation, and iterative nature define this bottom-up approach to urban design and development.

The majority of tactical urbanism projects are small-scale and can be completed quickly and affordably using techniques and materials that are already in circulation. Local citizens and stakeholders are frequently encouraged to participate and are asked to assist in identifying issues and propose solutions.

Tactical urbanism projects can take many forms, from temporary public art installations and pop-up parks to street furniture and wayfinding systems. They are often used to test ideas and gather feedback before committing to more permanent interventions, and can serve as a way to build support for larger-scale projects.

One example of tactical urbanism in action is the use of parklets, which are small, temporary public spaces created by converting a few parking spaces into seating areas, gardens, or other amenities. Parklets are often designed and built by local residents and businesses, and can be used to encourage more foot traffic and social interaction in a neighborhood.

Groups like The Design Trust for Public Space in New York have had tremendous success implementing tactical interventions throughout the city, by following their Pop Up, Pilot, Permanent framework. By starting with a low cost, temporary prototype, the Design Trust is able to test ideas and solicit user feedback while also providing a service. In 2003 a pilot project to improve the pedestrian experience in Times Square was proposed.¹ By 2009 Broadway Ave was fully pedestrianized and temporary tables and chairs were installed. The intervention has been so successful that in 2011 the Department of Transportation selected the architecture firm Snøhetta to transform Times Square into a pedestrian area.² In three phases over 5 years the proposal will widen the sidewalks, and install integrated electricity connections for new lighting and street furniture.

Tactical urbanism has been embraced by many cities around the world as a way to quickly and inexpensively address a range of urban issues, from public safety and sustainability to economic development and social cohesion. It is a flexible and innovative approach that can help cities become more livable and responsive to the needs of their residents.



Figure 105: New York Public Trust Temporary Pedestrian Improvement, image

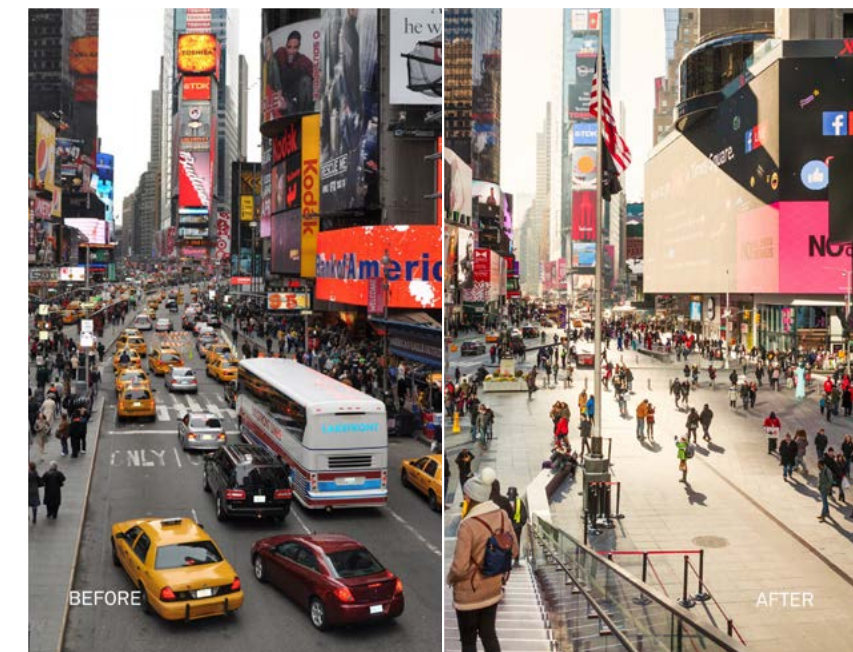


Figure 106: Times Square Reconstruction Project by Snøhetta, image

Alley Activating Programs

Programs known as “laneway activation projects” are designed to turn unused alleys and lanes into attractive and useful public areas. Depending on the program’s particular aims and resources, these initiatives might take a variety of shapes. Around the world, there are numerous instances of laneway activation projects, each with a special purpose and method.

As part of its “Love Your Laneway” program, the city of Melbourne, Australia, has developed a variety of laneway activation activities. Small parks and other green spaces have been created as a result of these initiatives, as well as public art installations, the growth of street food vendors, and other activities.¹

Since the early 2000’s, Los Angeles has seen a variety of alley renovation initiatives in both business and residential alleyways. Different projects have different funding sources, partners, strategies, and goals, but many of them work to address issues with stormwater management, trash dumping, and a lack of park space, particularly in lower-income neighbourhoods. Projects are being undertaken all across the city, from the 20 alleyways in Boyle Heights², a working-class neighbourhood east of downtown, to a once-gated business alley in Hollywood that is now busy, to the ongoing Green Alley Network in South LA’s park-short area.

The Ruelle Verte, or green alley, programme in Montreal involves turning unused lanes into green spaces by putting in trees, bushes, and other plants. The programme also calls for the installation of lights and benches as well as the replacement of the laneway surfaces with more pedestrian-friendly ones.³ The Ruelle Verte community initiative is known for hosting events to draw people to the lane and foster a sense of community in addition to renovating the laneway’s physical infrastructure. These have included events like food markets and art installations.

Laneway activation projects are becoming more popular in cities all over the world as a way to convert underused areas into useful and appealing spaces that improve urban public life.



Figure 107: Montreal Ruelle Verte Laneway Greening, image



Figure 108: Activated Laneway in Melbourne, Australia, image

1: “Love Your Laneway Program” <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/parking-and-transport/streets-and-pedestrians/Pages/love-your-laneways.aspx>
2: “Reclaiming the alleys in Boyle Heights: A community effort converts blighted areas into play zones” <https://boyleheightsbeat.com/reclaiming-the-alleys-in-boyle-heights-a-community-effort-converts-blighted-areas-into-play-zones/>
3: “Green Lanes of Montreal” <https://www.ruellesvertesdemontreal.ca/pourquoinellesvertes>

The Laneway Project

“What defines a character of a city is its public space, not its private space.”
— UN-HABITAT Executive Director Joan Clos i Matheu

The Laneway Project is a leading non-for-profit social enterprise that specializes in the activation of laneways in Toronto. Working with developers, municipalities, stakeholders, and residents, the collective was able to revitalize 24 laneways in Toronto as of 2022.¹ Their services include master planning and design of laneways, management of public and stakeholder consultation, analysis of policy and best practices for laneway improvement and activation planning and improvement. The steps to a full realization of laneways in Toronto, according to them, are outlined on their website; they include collaboration between community members, throwing a laneway event, adding mural art, greening and finally laneway naming.

The Laneway Project’s catalogue of work includes both permanent and temporary revitalizations of laneways in the city. For instance, their 2015 Bloordale Laneway Crawl project featured pop-up activities such as art workshops, music jams, pickup sports and a garage mural in a residential laneway in the southwest corner of Bloor and Dufferin, brought the local community together for a few hours during the day.² An example of a more permanent activation of a laneway done by this organization is that of Nicholson Lane where over the course of 2018, the team worked with St. Lawrence neighbourhood residents, businesses and organizations to develop a revitalization master plan to transform Nicholson Lane from a utilitarian space into an appealing shared place for community and service use — including infrastructure for community-led activation, multi-modal safety and traffic management measures, art by local artists, pedestrian-friendly lighting for safety /and character, and greening that softens the space and ties into existing programs at the adjacent St. Lawrence Community Recreation Centre.³

The Laneway Project group believes in the potential of laneways to transform into usable public space across the city. They have already made a considerable impact on a number of laneways in the city and have contributed to the trending conversation regarding their development. The laneway revitalising work that they have been engaged in with different communities also acts as a support for the laneway housing phenomenon which is also gradually transforming laneways in the city. As The Laneway Project livens up and restores the site, laneway housing transforms the structures that exist within it. Over time, organizations like The Laneway Project will affect the characteristics that make Toronto’s abandoned laneways a terrain vague within the city.



Figure 109: Laneways Activated by The Laneway Project in Toronto, map



Figure 110: Bloordale Laneway Crawl by The Laneway Project, images

1: “Our Projects” <https://www.thelanewayproject.ca/projects>
2: “Bloordale Laneway Crawl” <https://www.thelanewayproject.ca/bloordale-laneway-crawl>
3: “Nicholson Lane Revitalization” <https://www.thelanewayproject.ca/nicholson-lane-revitalization>

Peperonata Lane

A locally popular yet relatively uncommon event within Toronto's laneway network is the Peperonata festival at Peperonata lane.

Peperonata lane, which hosts an annual pepper roasting party for its predominantly Italian neighborhood is an example of a utilized residential laneway with an evolving social event. The festival has become an important tradition for the neighbourhood, so much so that in 2013, the name of the laneway was changed as a way to commemorate it. Francesco Gallé, a neighborhood resident whose home backs onto the laneway, started the local tradition 25 years ago, when he invited over a few friends to roast some peppers as his family had done in Calabria.¹ The locals loved the gathering so much they told their friends, and the next year more people showed up. As the years went on, the peperonata feast became a community event. Today, Peperonata Lane is likely the only laneway in Toronto named for such a tradition.

After the host greets the attending neighbours, the collective process of making the peperonata dish begins with the roasting of peppers by Francesco Galle's brother Bruno. Bruno roasts the red peppers in a brick fireplace built at the back of a property abutting the laneway. This furnace is a fixed structure which has contributed significantly to the social life that has been brought to the laneway over the years - a special monument in Toronto's laneway network. After the peppers are charred and consume a smoky flavour, they are taken outside to be peeled of their burnt skin and torn into thin slices. Subsequently, the torn slices are brought to Francesco's sister Rosa who stirs them in a cauldron alongside freshly peeled potatoes, olive oil and salt.

In an interview conducted by Brent Tryon for Toronto Life about the festival, Franceso says "Let's get every lane named after a tradition, it means there's something going on there.". Even though currently Peperonata lane is one of a kind, what it has achieved is feasible for virtually every other residential laneway in the city. It exists as a symbol of what is possible, and with enough growth and exposure though the use of tools like social media, this laneway festival can influence other neighbourhoods to follow suite in establishing an event associated with their laneways. Through community initiatives like Peperonata Lane, we can expect and gradual adoption and activation of residential laneways in Toronto.



Figure 111: Peperonata Feast in Peperonata Lane, image



Figure 112: Bruno Roasting Peppers in Peperonata Lane, image

1: "How one Toronto laneway became the home of an annual pepper-roasting party" <https://torontolife.com/food/how-one-toronto-laneway-became-the-home-of-an-annual-pepper-roasting-party/>

Future of Garages

In the upcoming years, garages in Toronto and other cities are anticipated to experience major changes as a result of a number of variables, including technological advancements, changes in transportation trends, and shifting urban land use patterns.

The rise in popularity of ride-sharing and other types of alternative transportation is a significant factor that is expected to influence how garages evolve in Toronto.¹ The need for traditional automobile parking may decrease as more residents choose to use ride-sharing services or take public transportation instead of owning a car. This might result in the conversion of garages into other facilities, such storage or offices, or the creation of more versatile garages that can handle a variety of purposes across time.

Shifts in urban land use patterns and demographics may also impact the future of garages in Toronto. As the city’s population grows and densifies, the demand for parking in certain areas may decline, while the demand for other types of urban amenities may increase. This could lead to the development of more multi-use garages that incorporate features such as bike-sharing stations, car-sharing programs, or other amenities that cater to the needs of urban dwellers.

Aside from a potential future decline in car ownership, another trend that will make an impact on garages within residential laneways is an increase of people working remotely within the city. Since the COVID pandemic, more and more people have shown to prefer working remotely when having the opportunity to. This has led to a number of Toronto residents to transform their garages into workspaces, like in the case of Gary McClusie, an architect at Toronto’s Diamond Schmitt Architects, who renovated his 400 square foot garage into small workshop where he can pursue his hobby for woodworking.² The same garage was later tweaked to double duty as an office. During the quarantine he would spend his weekdays working in the office and the weekends chipping away at his woodworking projects. Eventually, the garage evolved further, taking on the function of an overflow bedroom for the homeowner’s son.

It is likely that a variety of reasons will cause garages in Toronto to substantially change over the coming years. Garages will need to adapt and innovate as the city’s transportation and urban land use patterns change in order to fulfil the shifting needs of their residents.



Figure 113: Laneway Garage Office, image



Figure 114: Joys Garage Museum in Toronto, image

1: "The Era of Car Ownership Is Over. And These 4 Charts Prove It" <https://investorplace.com/2019/04/4-charts-car-ownership-over/>
2: "Inside a Diamond Schmitt architect's home office in a converted garage" <https://torontolife.com/style/inside-a-diamond-schmitt-architects-home-office-in-a-converted-garage/>

A Cooperative Effort

Significant changes that are influencing the urban typology of residential laneways in Toronto include laneway suite construction, laneway activation projects, and the evolution of garages. While the majority of the city’s residential lanes are being impacted by these developments, certain lanes will inevitably remain in a mostly abandoned condition.

When all of these factors are taken into account, it is apparent that they are influencing the majority of Toronto’s residential lanes considerably. While laneway activation initiatives work to make laneways more livable and foster a feeling of community, laneway suite construction increases the density of urban neighbourhoods and gives homeowners new sources of revenue. As more homeowners convert their garages into living units, this trend is also being influenced by the evolution of garages.

It’s worthy to note that not all of Toronto’s residential lanes will be significantly influenced by these trends. Due to elements like the location of the residential laneway, the state of the nearby homes, and the availability of funds for renovations, some lanes may continue to be considered inner-city terrain vague.

Toronto’s residential lanes are being impacted by the development of laneway suites, laneway activation programmes, and the evolution of garages. These trends are expected to continue to influence how the majority of residential lanes are utilised and viewed in the city, even while certain lanes may continue to be in a semi-abandoned state.

Laneway Activating Initiatives + Laneway Housing + Garage Reutilization

A Look Into The Future

The following pages feature a visual representation of one side of Laneway “3” (Laneway at Palmerston Ave.) in an activated state. These illustrations depict the various public and private programs that garage structures may take on in the future, such as; workshops, discussion spaces, commercial spaces, and office spaces. It can be seen in the elevation drawings that not every garage in the laneway is activated, some still serve as storage or parking space for its respective property owner. Before a potential major catalyst causes a complete transformation of laneways into “official” residential or commercial streets, many residential laneways will gradually evolve into informal urban typologies that host living units and workshops, alongside untamed wild plant life and graffiti art covering some of its garage structures.

Today, the residential laneway network in Toronto is in a liminal state. It is not quite an evolved urban typology that the public consistently uses or indulges in, but it also not completely abandoned as it is being recognized for its potential for hosting living units and acting as public space like it did before. Residential laneways are in the process of blossoming into a unique urban typology at the cost of losing their abandoned and unmanaged condition which gives them their appeal within the city. While being in this work in progress state, Toronto’s residents can experience laneways in their recognizable semi-abandoned state and also get a glimpse of what they might become.

Figure 115: Speculative Elevation Part 1, elevation

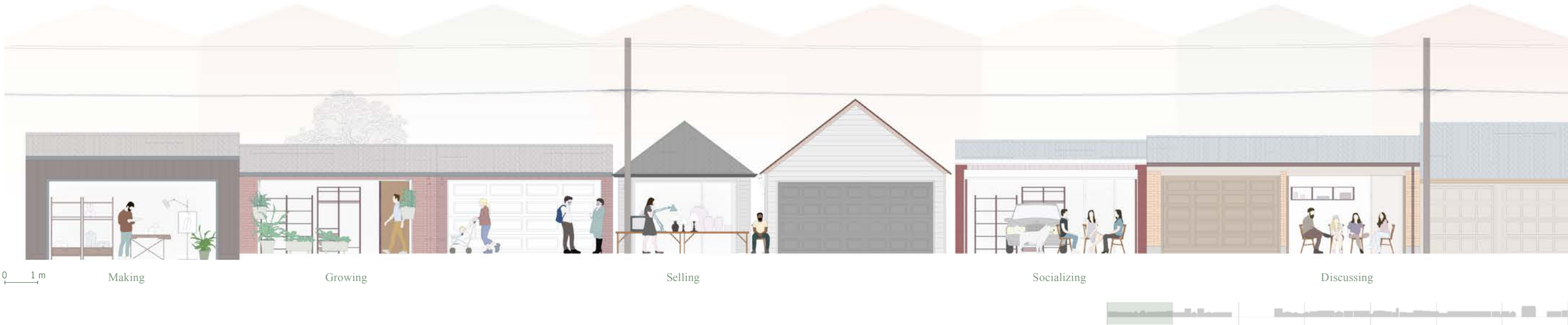


Figure 115: Speculative Elevation Diagram of “Laneway 3”, diagram

Figure 116: Speculative Elevation Part 2, elevation

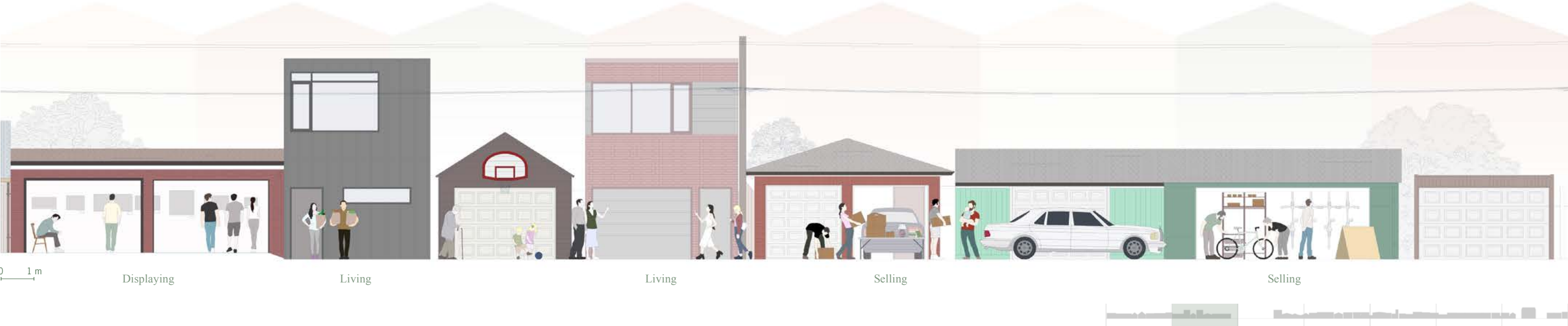


Figure 117: Speculative Elevation Part 3, elevation

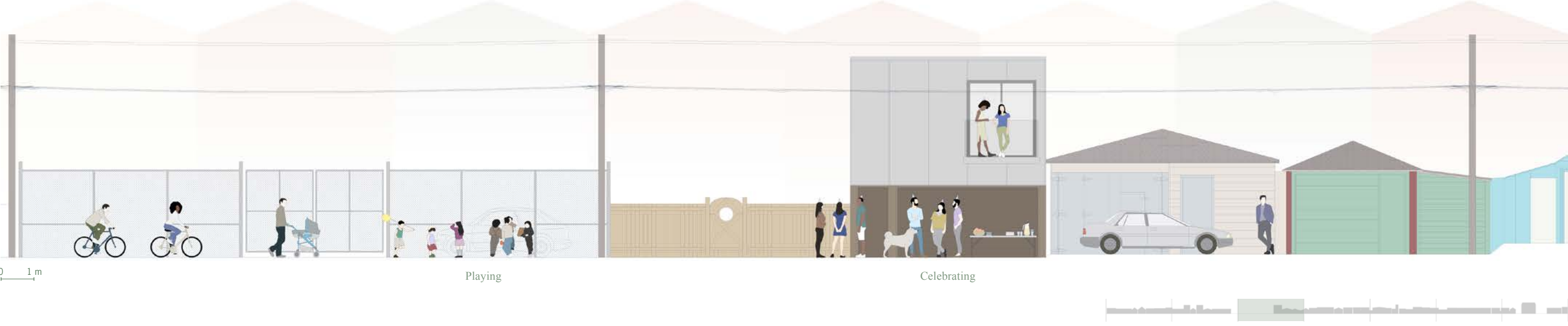


Figure 116: Speculative Elevation Part 4, elevation



Figure 117: Speculative Elevation Part 5, elevation



Figure 116: Speculative Elevation Part 6, elevation



Figure 117: Speculative Elevation Part 7, elevation



“Laneway Development and Adoption” Conclusion

The gradual urban redevelopment of Toronto’s residential laneway network via laneway housing, the reprogramming of laneway structures, and the hosting of public events is a significant stage in the evolution of Toronto’s urban landscape. Through the continued efforts of the city’s residents and communities to revitalise the laneways, distinctive urban street typologies will emerge, possibly unlike those found in the “official” city. The future appearance, atmosphere, and use of laneways rests almost exclusively in the hands of residents, and it is probable that each laneway will have its own unique personality. Through the repurposing of existing laneway structures, some laneways may resemble narrow residential avenues lined with laneway suites from end to end, whereas others may see less housing development and more commercial programmes and public amenities. Overall, it is difficult to forecast the future of Toronto’s residential laneways.

The characteristics that distinguish residential laneways from other urban typologies are their lack of maintenance, which allows for the proliferation of wild vegetation and street art, and their lack of patrol, which allows for a variety of potentially socially transgressive social activities. It is essential that Toronto’s residential laneways are populated with laneway suites, which provide much-needed housing. In addition, it is essential that they become secure, accessible public spaces with a variety of amenities. As a result, residential laneways will no longer be regarded as terrain vague, as they will be subject to public traffic and will once again become productive and inhabited.

Even though residential laneways may not be terrain vague in the future, it is conceivable that they will continue to be heterotopias. Public festivals and events such as the Peperonata Festival, which, according to Foucault, constitute a heterotopia, would likely continue to occur more frequently in laneways if organised by residents or community initiatives. Moreover, with the consent of residents, laneway graffiti art and wild vegetation or sub-nature may continue to flourish as they did prior to development. This would also maintain residential laneways heterotopic, as they would function as a space for the “other”: undervalued vegetation and artistic expression.

Figure 83: Basketball Hoop and Hockey Net in Toronto Laneway, photo

Conclusion

The parklot system originally established in Toronto gave rise to the city's residential laneway network. This network was quickly populated with coach houses and other buildings serving both householders and the general public. This brought social activity to Toronto's underutilised spaces, activating them until their original services became obsolete. Eventually, coach houses were substituted with garages that provided residents with storage and parking space. The exteriors of the garages were constructed with a variety of materials, including masonry, wood, and metal siding. Over time, the unmaintained alleyways took on a dishevelled appearance with an indiscernible pattern. They contrasted with the uniform and well-kept exterior portrayed by the adjacent residential street.

Since their partial abandonment, Toronto's residential laneways have become a tranquil refuge from the city's bustling streets. Walking through them provides a view into the city's past and the lives of its residents, as numerous historic and neglected structures remain.

In recent years, many city residents have advocated for the transformation of laneways back into public spaces that are occupied and utilised. This is in contrast to the image of abandonment that has been associated with laneways. As Toronto has a need for public space, this may be an essential step, but it is also important to recognise the unused and neglected state of residential laneways prior to their potential redevelopment.

Toronto's residential laneways are a unique street type that are forlorn and present an unmaintained image within the city. Their lack of productivity and maintenance permits the development of various plant species and the appearance of graffiti and mural art. The laneways of Toronto are a terrain vague and a heterotopia. They are places where societal conventions appear to be suspended and where the "other" can reside.

In the aftermath of the development of Toronto's residential laneways, what will become of the sub nature, street art, and other potentially transgressive forms of artistic expression? As wild plants tend to grow within the boundaries of private property, the development of their laneways would hinge on the residents. Can untamed vegetation and street art exist within a developed laneway, not only to serve as a reminder of their unproductive and erratic nature since the abandonment of their original functions, but also to preserve laneways as a space where they can continue to exist freely?

If sub nature and graffiti still have a place in residential laneways after their development, this would indicate that the laneways will retain their heterotopic character, but will no longer be a terrain vague typology, as the development will bring public eyes to the street. Even though residential laneways will not contain "other" individuals, they will still be home to "other" vegetation and artistic expression.

The gradual urban redevelopment of Toronto's residential laneway network via laneway housing, the reprogramming of laneway structures, and the hosting of public events is a significant stage in the evolution of Toronto's urban landscape. Through the continued efforts of the city's residents and communities to revitalise the laneways, distinctive urban street typologies will emerge, possibly unlike those found in the "official" city. The future appearance, atmosphere, and use of laneways rests almost exclusively in the hands of residents, and it is probable that each laneway will have its own unique personality. Through the repurposing of existing laneway structures, some laneways may resemble narrow residential avenues lined with laneway suites from end to end, whereas others may see less housing development and more commercial programmes and public amenities. Overall, it is difficult to forecast the future of Toronto's residential laneways.

As discussed in the book's conclusion, the characteristics that distinguish residential laneways from other urban typologies are their lack of maintenance, which allows for the proliferation of wild vegetation and street art, and their lack of patrol, which allows for a variety of potentially socially transgressive social activities. It is essential that Toronto's residential laneways are populated with laneway suites, which provide much-needed housing. In addition, it is essential that they become secure, accessible public spaces with a variety of amenities. As a result, residential laneways will no longer be regarded as terrain vague, as they will be subject to public traffic and will once again become productive and inhabited.

Even though residential laneways may not be terrain vague in the future, it is conceivable that they will continue to be heterotopias. Public festivals and events such as the Peperonata Festival, which, according to Foucault, constitute a heterotopia, would likely continue to occur more frequently in laneways if organised by residents or community initiatives. Moreover, with the consent of residents, laneway graffiti art and wild vegetation or sub-nature may continue to flourish as they did prior to development. This would also maintain residential laneways heterotopic, as they would function as a space for the "other": undervalued vegetation and artistic expression.

Overall, the evolution of Toronto's residential laneways is largely unpredictable. The construction of laneway suites, the repurposing of laneway garages, and the public use of laneways are three forces operating independently to improve the condition of laneways in the city for the benefit of its residents. The outcome of this development is uncertain and will most likely be informal. For the time being, the only thing Toronto residents can do is appreciate the semi abandoned landscape of the laneways before they are transformed.

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