

ON THE VERGE:
Activating Public Space in the Periphery

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the suburban verge's latent potential as an alternative public space. It is located between the boundaries of private properties and public streets, where territorial boundaries and ownership are unclear.

The site for this thesis is the southeast quadrant of the intersection at Jane Street and Finch Avenue West in the former city of North York, now part of Toronto. The intersection reveals a fertile field of public activity that engenders new forms of social engagement and invites a reconsideration of public space in the urban periphery.

A product of modern planning, the suburban verge is a buffer between vehicles and pedestrians. Home to hydro poles, streetlights, small-scale furnishings and the ubiquitous cast-in-place concrete sidewalk, the suburban verge is a definitive element of the suburban landscape that accounts for a substantial amount of neglected public land. The suburban verge's ambiguity attracts a variety of unsanctioned and informal activities. At Jane and Finch, socio-economic issues, a diverse population and escalating pressure to increase density further intensify this unscripted behaviour.

This thesis calls attention to the unrealized potential of the suburban verge. It does not set out to create new public space; rather, it draws upon existing social patterns in order to enrich the suburban public realm. Subtle inflections in the existing terrain, deliberately modest in form and operation, expand the social and ecological capacity of the suburban verge and demonstrate the need to consider the potential of everyday practices as a vehicle for generating dynamic public space.

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DEDICATION

To Sharon and Douglas Young
for your love and support along the way.

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PREFACE

The idea for this thesis began during my time spent living in Mexico City in 2006. The new president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, had just been voted into power, yet the opposition refused to accept defeat and demanded a recount of the vote. Overnight, tens of thousands of protesters descended upon the streets, engulfing the city in a sea of political discontent. Staged protests, marches and blockades occurred daily as news reports warned of airport closures, bomb threats and attacks on parliament.

As the hours turned into days, Avenida Paseo de la Reforma—a critical urban thoroughfare—was transformed into a massive tent city. Previously jammed with cars, buses and peséros, the tree-lined avenue was now a solid mass of blue and black plastic tarps punctuated by portable toilets and parked cars. Palm trees were re-appropriated as structural supports, monuments were plastered with angry posters and flowerbeds were decorated as political shrines. Normally a major arterial route that served scores of morning commuters, the avenue was now a restricted pedestrian zone.

In a similar manner, my personal observations of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood have uncovered an emergent field of social activity. Though the shopping malls are popular community hangouts, it is in between boundaries—along edges and in loose, residual spaces, where use, ownership and purpose are most unclear—that unsanctioned activities and informal social behaviors unfold. On any given day, a bus shelter may become a temporary market stall, a public bench a platform for protest or an empty parking lot the site for a summer carnival. Disarmingly simple, yet powerfully effective, these subtle alterations and adaptations of everyday space reflect the unique social conditions of the neighbourhood and reveal possible futures for the suburban public realm.



Fig. i [top] A photograph taken in August of 2006 depicts the massive tent city that occupied Avenida Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City. Blocking the major urban thoroughfare for more than six weeks, a usually crowded avenue was now a hostile pedestrian zone filled with tents, portable toilets and crowds of demonstrators.

Fig. ii [bottom] Protesters found creative ways to reterritorialize the public street by appropriating trees, signage and street lights as structural components.

INTRODUCTION



This thesis examines the suburban verge's latent potential as an alternative public space. It is located between the boundaries of private properties and public streets, where territories and ownership are unclear.

The site for this thesis is the southeast quadrant of the intersection at Jane Street and Finch Avenue West in the former city of North York, now part of Toronto. The intersection reveals a fertile field of public activity that engenders new forms of social engagement and invites a reconsideration of public space in the urban periphery.

A product of modern planning ideals, the suburban verge was intended as a buffer between vehicles and pedestrians. Unlike the conditions of urban verges—where dense building fabric frames an active public realm—the suburban verge is typically isolated from adjacent properties by vast expanses of green space or barren asphalt parking lots. Without a clear relationship to the surrounding fabric, this arrangement reduces opportunities for informal social interaction. Now home to hydro poles, streetlights, small-scale furnishings and the ubiquitous cast-in-place concrete sidewalk, the suburban verge has become a definitive element of the suburban landscape—one that accounts for a substantial amount of neglected public land. In Toronto the suburban verge constitutes roughly 16km², or five times the footprint of the Toronto Islands.

In addition to the transformation of the traditional main street, Modern planning strategies implemented a strict division of uses, vast expanses of green space and a rejection of traditional housing typologies. Unlike the dense urban core, these sprawling edge communities consumed copious amounts of land and were heavily dependent on infrastructure. Seldom utilizing traditional forms of public space, the suburbs were socially reductive and physically isolating.

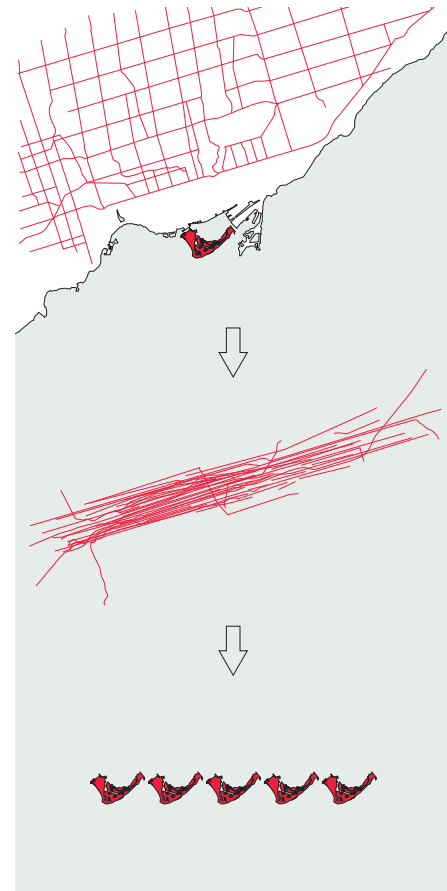


Fig. 0.1 [opposite] A photograph looking east along Finch Avenue West emphasizes the vast amount of underutilized public territory located within the study area.

Fig. 0.2 [above] A diagram of Toronto equates the total space of Toronto's suburban verges to roughly five times the footprint of the Toronto Islands, approximately 16 km².

Like many neighbourhoods developed between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, Jane and Finch is characterized by large stretches of empty space and scattered building arrangements that have effectively decentralized the neighbourhood. As a result three shopping malls, which occupy the intersection, act as quasi-public spaces. However, in the mall consumers are regulated by dress code, hours of operation and acceptable behaviour. Portraying a safe, happy and social environment the malls have converted active pedestrians into passive consumers.

As the neighbourhood has limited resources, many grassroots associations have worked hard to improve community access to services and amenities. As well the Jane-Finch Mall, in an effort to improve its community image to increase profit margins, has established the Sunday flea market. A popular neighbourhood venue, which draws people from other areas of the City, the market allows local entrepreneurs to sell their unique products and wares. Everything from household tools, to African jewelry, exotic birds and Asian silks can be purchased there. Although the market has helped to construct a community identity, it is still controlled by authorities and regulated by permits that determine who can participate each Sunday.

The open spaces that attend the shopping malls and high-rise apartment towers are also ineffective as public spaces. While they are accessible to all, they are so vast in scale that they are difficult to navigate or manage and as a result are locations for informal practices. The lack of usable public spaces forces people to establish alternative sites along the edges of properties and buildings, outside of main entryways, around bus stops and at street crossings where people naturally tend to congregate and linger.



Fig. 0.3 [top] The Sunday Market inside the Jane-Finch Mall attracts a diverse crowd of shoppers. Posing as a public space, the mall offers places to sit and chat with friends and acquaintances. Most feel compelled to buy a coffee or a magazine from the convenience kiosk, but some merely watch the spectacle.

Fig. 0.4 [bottom] Women chat at a vendor's booth in the Jane-Finch Mall.



While the suburban verge is limited in performance and has few tools to foster acts of place making, its narrow dimensions along the perimeter of larger properties attracts a diverse range of uses and social activities. At Jane and Finch, socio-economic issues, a diverse population and escalating pressure to increase density further intensify this unscripted behaviour. Though it appears at first glance to be a no mans land, visits to the site have encountered a wide range of informal patterns and behaviours.

In Toronto, approximately 70% of the city's five million citizens reside in the suburbs and generally live within walking distance of a major intersection similar to the physical conditions of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West¹. This suggests that a large portion of the population has some form of access to the suburban verge. It also reveals the suburban verge's capacity to be a viable alternative to traditional models of public space. While street parades use the suburban verge to accommodate for spectators, landlords often dump excess snow onto it, retailers post neon signs and advertisements within it and shopping carts somehow seem to gravitate towards it. In the summer children often decorate the sidewalk with chalk. Others see the suburban verge as a community billboard and plaster its hydro poles and bus shelters with posters and notices. Some even park their cars on it to sell merchandise. These seemingly trivial aspects of suburban life signify the emergence of an unconventional public space, an unplanned-for and essential centre of activity set far away from the city's grand urban squares.

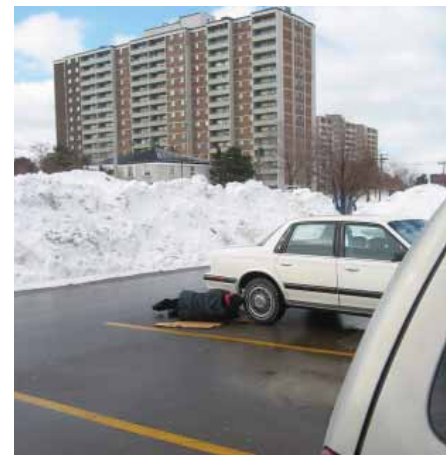


Fig. 0.5 [top left] A bus shelter is covered in advertisements and posters. One of the only inhabitable spaces along the length of the suburban verge, the bus shelter is an ideal location for advertisements and communication.

Fig. 0.6 [top right] A man parks his minivan on the sidewalk. Attracting a crowd, the minivan vendor offers a good price on comforters, winter coats and other miscellaneous products. Totally unexpected this spontaneous market alters the monofunctional purpose of the suburban verge.

Fig. 0.7 [bottom] The boundaries of private and public space are subverted as a man replaces his muffler in the Jane and Finch Mall parking lot.

1-2006 Census population of Toronto. www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/popdwel/Table.cfm



In an effort to revalidate common everyday practices, Margaret Crawford establishes a theory of “Everyday Urbanism.” Crawford investigates the loose and ambiguous zones found within the public realm of Los Angeles, documenting bus shelters reappropriated as market spaces, chain-link fences employed as display walls and shopping carts repurposed as portable storage units. Crawford sees these self-organized uses of space as indicative of the special social, political, cultural and economic conditions of the community. Crawford argues that understanding these shifts in the public realm is critical to anticipating future needs and evolutions of the greater city. In addressing the significance of informal social behaviours, Crawford posits:

The everyday city has rarely been the focus of attention for architects or urban designers, despite the fact that an amazing number of social, spatial, and aesthetic meanings can be found in the repeated activities and conditions that constitute our daily, weekly, and yearly routines. The utterly ordinary reveals a fabric of space and time defined by a complex realm of social practices—a conjuncture of accident, desire, and habit.²

Fig. 0.8 [above] A group of morning commuters linger by the bus shelter. Informal conversations and casual chatter arise as people become impatient waiting for the bus in the cold. This bus shelter is important as both an inhabitable space and as a public bulletin board. Advertisements offer rooms for rent, local babysitters and other miscellaneous bits of information. This photograph also captures a common winter scene. Mounds of snow are cleared from the parking lot, only to be dumped along the edges of the suburban verge: the suburban verge becomes a temporary extension of the parking lot.

2-Crawford, Margaret. *Everyday Urbanism*. 1999, 8.

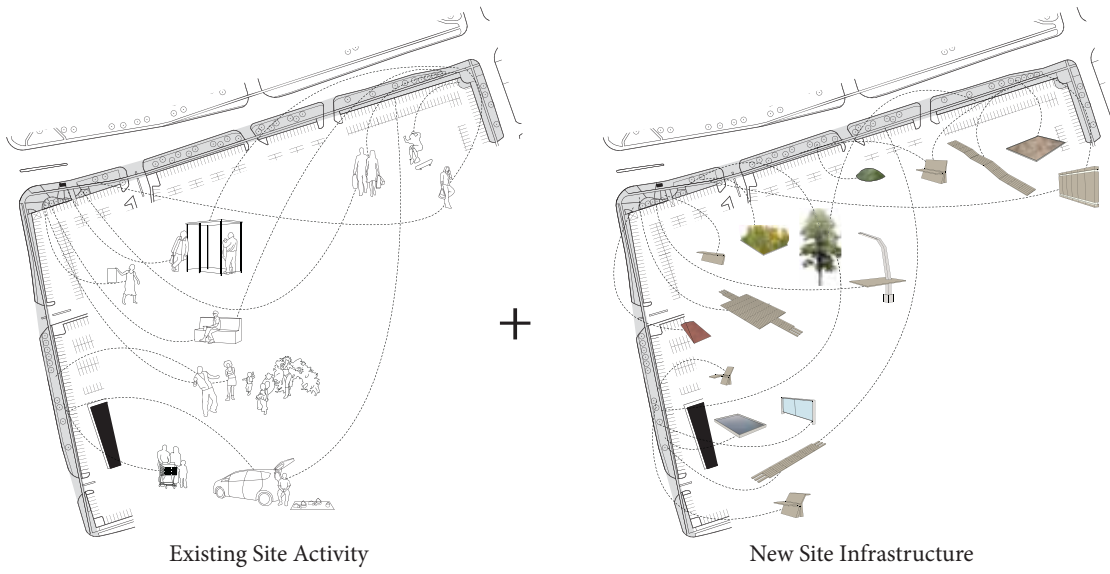
This bottom-up approach celebrates the users ingenuity and establishes a design methodology that is informed by the actual practices of the people who use these spaces and pieces of infrastructure—for both conventional and unconventional purposes—everyday.

A collection of related architectural precedents share many similarities with Crawford’s theory of “Everyday Urbanism.” These projects demonstrate how daily social practices embody the capacity to foster engaging public space—a provocative counterpoint to the inflexible, typologically unimaginative spaces currently found in the suburban public realm. Along with personal observations of the existing site patterns, these precedents help to shape the final design strategy.

The design proposal is not meant as an exercise in “beautification.” It seeks out informal everyday practices as an approach to expanding the social capacity of the suburban verge. Presented as a prototypical public space design, the interventions demonstrate the theories and concepts of this thesis along Jane Street and Finch Avenue West. Constructed from a kit of infrastructural parts, the design proposes a variety of small-scale interventions. These subtle modifications enhance the social connectivity of the site while also expanding its environmental performance. Enhanced by this new infrastructure, the suburban verge remains versatile, informal and open. The outcome is not predetermined; rather, the public space evolves as different lifestyles and living practices continue to shape and transform it.

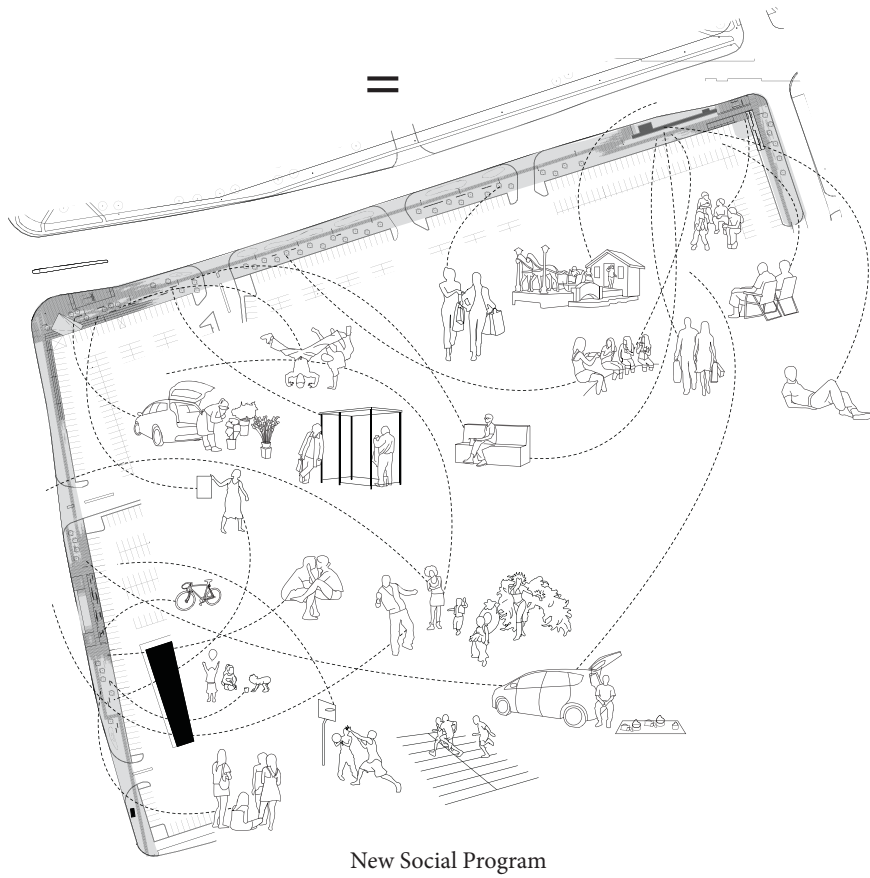


Fig. 0.9 Schouwbergplein by West 8. Minimal architectural interventions set along the perimeter of a large open square attract a variety of people and activities to the site. The central space becomes a stage while spectators linger along the edges. This condition is very similar to the way in which the suburban verge frames parking lots and green spaces.



Existing Site Activity

New Site Infrastructure



New Social Program

This thesis calls attention to the unrealized potential of the suburban verge. It does not set out to create new public space; rather, it draws upon existing social patterns in order to enrich the suburban public realm. Subtle inflections in the existing terrain—deliberately modest in form and operation—expand the social and ecological capacity of the suburban verge and demonstrate the need to reconsider the potential of everyday practices as a vehicle for generating dynamic public space.

Beyond the scope of this thesis, yet relevant to the work are four categories, which help to imagine how this intervention may be fully realized. These categories include Economic Viability, Infrastructure and Spatial Expansion, Phasing and Cultural Analysis.

The feasibility of this project is based upon the scale of the interventions. For example a basic combination of seating and pathway, while minimal in form, would amplify the existing conditions of the site by providing new opportunities to linger and reappropriate space. More extravagant installations, which would incorporate multiple elements of the toolkit, would be able to support larger crowds or festivals. Both interventions however, regardless of scale, effectively instigate social interaction and activate the public realm along the perimeter of the verge.

As this test site develops, public transit routes would be used to expand the system beyond the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. Spreading into adjacent urban periphery communities the bus stops would become the central links between sites, using the toolkit to instigate and amplify public action.

Fig. 0.10 [opposite] Observations of the site expose a range of informal social practices along and within the suburban verge. Dependent on these patterns the design intervention sites are selected. Each design site incorporates various components of the tool kit with intentions to amplify the existing social conditions while simultaneously engendering new forms of social engagement.

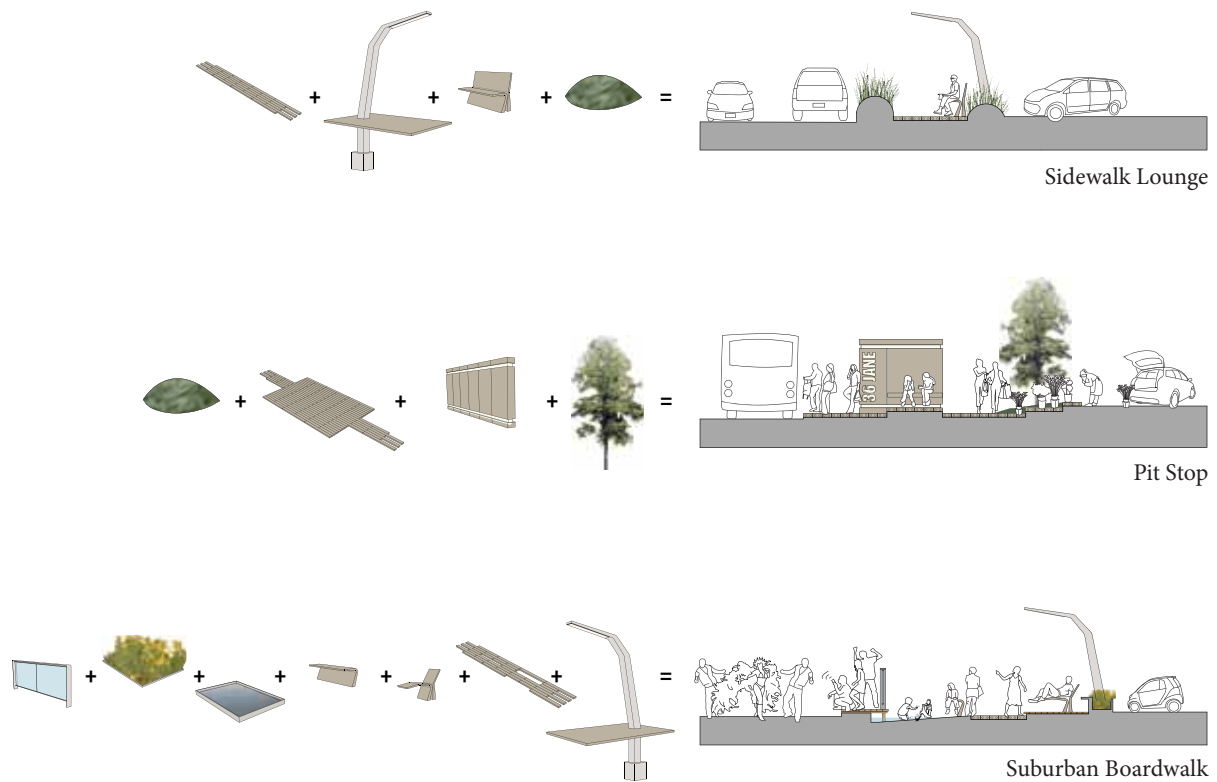


Fig. 0.11 [above] Examples of how the tool kit may be implemented. The most basic intervention, *Sidewalk Lounge*, incorporates a bench and landscaped berms. This creates a place to linger and clearly divides the vehicular and pedestrian traffic. More complex interventions may construct multiple levels in order to establish a pedestrian hierarchy, or may provide a collection of inhabitable forms that suit a variety of needs and uses.

The phasing for this project is flexible and looks to two general strategies. The first approach seeks to create a suburban Main Street by encouraging infill projects to thicken the low-density building fabric along the suburban verge. This method endorses a reconnecting of the street and the built fabric in order to create a fluid pedestrian realm. The second strategy attempts to intentionally disrupt the existing conditions of the site through the insertion of freestanding structures. This condition does not seek reconciliation; rather it maintains the suburban verge's unique edge condition while increasing the frequency and intensity of social activity on the periphery.

Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis, further investigation of the specific cultural practices of Jane and Finch's diverse community would also help to strengthen the design proposal. The toolkit could benefit from a deeper understanding of the ways in which different people choose to communicate, interact and relate to others. This information would allow the toolkit to specifically respond to the specific needs and wants of the users, highlighting their unique social conditions while helping to establish a clearer system for implementation.

Though urban projects are often wrought with potential problems because the issues they aim to address are so broad, this thesis remains optimistic. As a "seed of intensity," the proposal would act as a catalyst for future redevelopment of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. It recalibrates a disregarded public territory and draws attention to the urgent need for alternative public space typologies that can be sustained in the urban periphery; it is an instigator, renewing interest in a neglected public space.



Fig. 0.12 Site 1, Driftwood Ave. and Finch Ave. West intersection, looking west



Fig. 0.13 Site 2, Jane St. and Finch Ave. West intersection, looking southwest



Fig. 0.14 Site 3, Jane Street, looking south along

The following is a concise outline of the structure and organization of this thesis:

Chapter 1, *Groundwork*, briefly compares the traditional model of public space—a centrally located public square—to the emergence of loose, residual public territories. The discussion argues for a need to recognize and understand everyday practices as a generator of dynamic public space that can be supported by the sprawling suburbs. This argument applies to both high and low-density suburban neighbourhoods as both suffer from a lack of communal gathering space. This section also encompasses a review of key thinkers who have studied alternative typologies of public space in relation to everyday practices. A collection of personal photographs reveals some of these neglected social behaviours and gives the reader a glimpse of the suburban public realm, as it exists at the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West in the North York region of Toronto.

Chapter 2, *Emergent Patterns*, introduces the reader to the site through a series of mappings, photographs and personal observations. The work, which investigates both the physical and social conditions of the site, examines the informal activities and seasonal events that occur within and adjacent to the suburban verge in order to develop a socially reactive design response.

Chapter 3, *Subtle Inflections*, considers a selection of relevant architectural projects that embrace and are informed by site-specific conditions and everyday practices. This section then presents a prototypical design intervention which builds upon the latent potential of the suburban verge in order to amplify the social, spatial and environmental capacity of the site.

In closing, the section *Possible Futures* addresses both the successes and the failures of this thesis. It reviews the topics previously covered and speculates on the future implications of this work. How might this small-scale intervention instigate further redevelopment of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood? What might the site look like in 5, 10 or 20 years? How could this modest rethinking of a neglected public territory impact the future of Toronto's urban periphery?

Fig. 0.12 [*opposite top*] Stairs and ramps extend the inhabitable zone of the suburban verge at the intersection of Driftwood Ave. and Finch Ave. W.

Fig. 0.13 [*opposite middle*] Raised flower beds and brick paving attempt to make the Jane and Finch intersection more accommodating for pedestrians.

Fig. 0.14 [*opposite bottom*] A line of trees provide a meager barrier between vehicular and pedestrian traffic along Jane St. Dirt paths have been worn into the grass where people frequently cut across Jane St. traffic.

1 GROUNDWORK

“All men in their native powers are craftsmen, whose destiny it is to create ... a fit abiding place, a sane and beautiful world.”

Louis Henry Sullivan, January 27, 1924

LOCATING PUBLIC SPACE

This section examines the contemporary notion of public space. Traditionally understood as a centrally located square enclosed by dense urban fabric, shifts in the shape of the city have produced alternative forms of public space. Small, residual and neglected, these unauthorized reappropriations of public territory exhibit creative ways of operating within the public realm and reflect the need for more informal public spaces.

Historic Perspective

Public space is an integral component of the city. Lewis Mumford argues that, “Starting as a sacred spot, to which scattered groups returned periodically for ceremonials and rituals, the ancient city was first of all a permanent meeting place.”² This early notion of public space heavily influenced the shape of historic cities, as dense urban forms were constructed around central meeting spaces.

Born out of ritual, the public square was regarded as a place for social, political and cultural events. Often framed by both the principal cathedral and the city hall, the central public square was emblematic of the society’s civic and spiritual practices. This public space was also designed to provide views of the surrounding landscape, emphasizing man’s defeat over nature. In *Design of Cities*, Edmund N. Bacon describes the central square as “a clear and powerful expression of civic unity connected to some feature expressive of the natural forces of the region.”³ The public square was a physical manifestation of the society’s values and the stage for social interaction.



Fig. 1.1 [top] A schematic diagram of the Ancient Roman City highlights its construction around a central meeting place.

Fig. 1.2 [second from top] A schematic diagram of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City emphasizes the division of work and home structured around a central space - the shopping promenade.

Fig. 1.3 [second from bottom] A schematic diagram of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City suggests an arbitrary scattering of built form surrounded by agricultural land.

Fig. 1.4 [bottom] A schematic diagram of Le Corbusier’s Radiant City highlights its decentralized form and indifference to the landscape.

These diagrams trace the general evolution of the city as it shifted from high-density urban fabric to scattered, low-density form.

2-Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*. 1961, 95.

3-Bacon, Edmund N. *The Design of Cities*. 1974, 99.

Emergence of Utopian Ideals

The Industrial Revolution and the technical innovations that were introduced around the turn of the 20th Century created a boom in industry causing thousands of rural workers to migrate to the city in search of a better life. This sudden explosion in the urban population caused a massive housing crisis. Uncontrolled industry polluted the city while overcrowded tenements quickly led to unsanitary living conditions.

With much dislike for this new urban condition, planner Ebenezer Howard proposed the Garden City in 1902. Anti-urban in form, Howard intended the Garden City to be a place where the poor could live comfortably amongst nature. The book *49 Cities* describes this new urban form:

*The Garden City sought to combine the best aspects of country and city life with a comprehensive social vision for a hybrid place [Howard] called the “town-country”. The Garden City was composed of a 6,000-acre estate, with 1,000-acres for the city itself, 265 acres for parkland, and the rest reserved for agriculture. Concentric rings of program and parkland create the plan of the city. The center features administrative buildings flanked by a Central Park, which is surround by a “Crystal Palace”, an all-weather shopping arcade. Further towards the periphery, blocks of housing straddle axial and circular avenues. A park-like Grand Avenue contains schools and religious buildings. Industries are situated with easy access to a peripheral railway that connects the city to other Garden Cities.*⁴

Howard’s design was based upon a controlled separation of programs and activities, which attempted to minimize pollution and maximize interaction with nature. Howard envisioned the Garden City as a comfortable balance between urban conveniences and rural tranquility. Though his intentions were well meaning, the outcome was anything but. In describing Howard’s Utopia, Jane Jacobs outlines his biased agenda:



Fig. 1.5 [top] A schematic plan of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City emphasizes his desire to infuse city living with vast amounts of greenspace in order to provide healthy living conditions for all. This plan also separates work and home and limits its population to 32,000 residents.

Fig. 1.6 [bottom] A partial plan of the Garden City shows the separation of programs and activities. At the core is a greenspace and shopping promenade. By replacing the civic heart with a shopping centre, Howard fundamentally altered the future shape of cities.

4- WORKac. *49 Cities*. 2009, 36.

He conceived of good planning as a series of static acts; in which case the plan must anticipate all that is needed and be protected, after it is built, against any but the most minor subsequent changes. He conceived of planning also as essentially paternalistic, if not authoritarian. He was uninterested in the aspects of the city which could not be abstracted to serve his Utopia. In particular, he simply wrote off the intricate, many-faceted, cultural life of the metropolis. He was uninterested in such problems as the way great cities police themselves, or exchange ideas, or operate politically, or invent new economic arrangements, and he was oblivious to devising ways to strengthen these functions because, after all, he was not designing for this kind of life in any case.⁵



Howard's idea of the perfect city failed to appreciate or understand the complex social arrangements that were so integral to city life. These conditions could not be manufactured or artificially concocted: rather, they evolved over time out of established social practices. The Garden City, however, was unable to sustain such interactions. In a move that dramatically altered the form of the city, Howard replaced the central public square with an expanse of greenspace and a gigantic shopping promenade.



Lingering Effects

Though the Garden City was never fully developed, its implications had far-reaching effects on the future of city building. Architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier were inspired by many of Howard's ideals, designing new city forms that were similarly dispersed and decentralized. Jacobs remarks that, "Both in his preoccupations and in his omissions, Howard made sense in his own terms but none in terms of city planning. Yet virtually all modern city planning has been adapted from, and embroidered on, this silly substance."⁶ Developed out of Howard's ideals, the modern suburban neighbourhood replaced dense urban fabric with low-density scatter. From overcrowded to overspaced, the suburbs eliminated opportunities for social

Fig. 1.7 [top] A photograph of the study area shows a high-rise apartment building surrounded by a sea of white snow. Isolated from the public realm by this large empty field, the apartment building has no clear relationship to the public realm.

Fig. 1.8 [bottom] A photograph of the study area depicts the typical conditions of the suburban public realm. Vast expanses of open undefined space punctuated by high-rise towers, shopping malls and parking lots.

5-Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 1961, 19.

6-Ibid.: 19.



Fig. 1.9 On a typical weekend, vendors line the sidewalks of Spadina Ave. to sell their fruits and vegetables. This temporary extension of the permanent Chinatown markets is a popular destination for tourists and Torontonians alike. As self-organized reappropriations of the public street, these make-shift markets are easily transported and cheap to construct. Many of the vendors use the same boxes and crates to transport and display their products.

As these informal markets are dependent on weather conditions and product availability, their unpredictable nature provides an engaging social dynamic.

engagement and turned the active pedestrian into a passive consumer. In his description of suburban living, Lewis Mumford declares:

*Not merely did the suburb keep the busier, dirtier, more productive enterprises at a distance, it likewise pushed away the creative activities of the city. Here life ceased to be a drama, full of unexpected challenges and tensions and dilemmas: it became a bland ritual of competitive spending.*⁷

Replaced by the quasi-public shopping mall, traditional forms of public space were soon forgotten. Arbitrarily positioned amidst fields of grass and asphalt, the new suburban fabric eliminated opportunities for casual social encounters.

⁷-Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*. 1961, 494.

Finding Alternatives

Today Jane and Finch, a high-density suburban neighbourhood, still suffers from a lack of communal gathering space. Though plenty of open space is provided, none of it seems fitting or usable and remains empty and untouched most of the year. The areas immediately outside of the shopping mall and along the edges of parking lots and sidewalks, however, do attract people. As the place where pedestrians and transit riders naturally congregate, this undefined zone—the suburban verge—has the potential to be a productive public space.

Margaret Crawford discusses these types of residual public spaces in her examination of Los Angeles. In a city where dilapidated parks, gated communities and street vendors coexist, Crawford finds an emergent layer of public space. Significant because it reveals many of the special social conditions of a place, Crawford stresses that:

The concept of everyday space delineates the physical domain of everyday public activity. Existing in between such defined and physically identifiable realms as the home, the workplace, and the institution, everyday urban space is the connective tissue that binds daily lives together. Everyday space stands in contrast to the carefully planned, officially designated, and often underused spaces of public use that can be found in most American cities.⁸

As the glue that binds daily life together, everyday practices playfully challenge the established structures of daily routine. Counter to official patterns and behaviours, these unpredictable social encounters view the familiar landscape of the city with a new set of eyes anticipating the future of the suburban public realm.

8-Crawford, Margaret. *Everyday Urbanism*. 1999, 9.

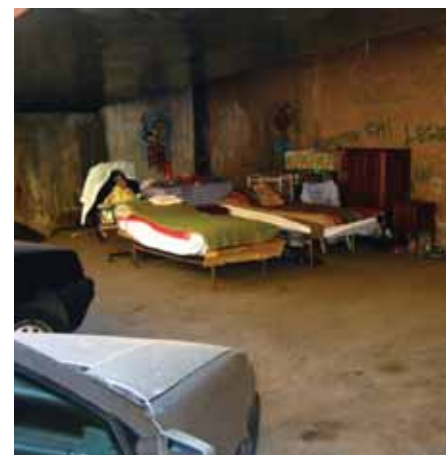


Fig. 1.10 [top] A bus shelter becomes a resting place for a man in Chicago. While it is officially public territory, the gestures and body language of the lounging man clearly define this space as an extension of his personal space. In response, other bus patrons choose to wait 'outside' of the shelter. Fig. 1.11 [bottom] The sheltered space below an over-pass is appropriated by a homeless family in Rome. Complete with bedding, mattresses and bedroom furniture, this residual urban space is reterritorialized as strictly private property. Though it does not encourage social interaction, it does allude to special economic conditions that have led to this situation, and proves how creative users can shape a public space.



RECONSIDERING EVERYDAY PRACTICES

*Loose spaces give cities life and vitality. In loose spaces people relax, observe, buy or sell, protest, mourn and celebrate. Loose spaces allow for the chance encounter, the spontaneous event, the enjoyment of diversity and the discovery of the unexpected.*¹

Many contemporary thinkers have written about the value of everyday practices. The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre argued that common human behaviours were not merely inconsequential aspects of daily life, but influential conditions that shaped social and political values. Defined as the “production of space,” Lefebvre believed the everyday was instrumental in derailing, if only temporarily, the rational rigors of Modernism. Playful, unplanned and spontaneous, the everyday was a valuable outlet for social development and exploration. In *The Critique of Everyday Life* Lefebvre stated, “To play is to transform our point of view into a decision by confronting chance and determinism in the absence of adequate information about our opponent’s game.”² Lefebvre believed the social space of the everyday presented a critical opportunity to engage with difference and to develop an understanding of the world.

The urban activist Jane Jacobs shared Lefebvre’s fascination for the active urban realm. Jacobs decried Modernism’s mandated separation of work, home and leisure, for its loss of social connections—the very essence of the city. In an effort to preserve this informal structure, she argued that the city was a complex web of interconnected parts that must not be divided or separated. Against the ideals of Modernism, she believed, “the need of cities [is] for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially.”³

Fig. 1.12 [opposite] A photograph by Helen Levitt, captures the excitement on a New York City street when a fire hydrant is temporarily reappropriated as a public water fountain. This image demonstrates how unplanned uses of public space heighten the socio-spatial experience of the everyday. Though short-lived, the event leaves a permanent imprint on the memories of the participants and momentarily reconsiders the public street as a neighbourhood playground.

1-Franck, Karen A., and Quentin Stevens. *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*. 2007, 4.

2-Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, Vol. 1. 1958, 17.

3-Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 1961, 14.

The adoption of Modern planning principles and the discreet internalizing of traditional public spaces greatly alarmed Jacobs. She saw this as a loss of authenticity and a step towards the destruction of civilized society. Yet Jacobs appears to have underestimated humanity's inherent desire for social contact. Though shopping malls proved to be popular destinations, informal social contact found ways of manifesting along the suburban verge. These casual encounters and unplanned activities provide "eyes on the street", the qualities Jacobs believes are essential to creating a good neighbourhood.

The work of Ray Oldenberg parallels Jacobs's visions of decay. In his search for authentic social experiences he found a disparaging link between the loss of public space and the growth of consumerism. When places for informal social engagement turn into places of consumption, meaningful social connections disappear. In reflecting on this shift in the form of the city Oldenberg remarked:

Where once there were places, we now find nonplaces. In real places the human being is a person. He or she is an individual, unique and possessing a character. In nonplaces, individuality disappears. In nonplaces, character is irrelevant and one is only the customer or shopper, client or patient, a body to be seated, an address to be billed, a car to be parked. In nonplaces one cannot be an individual or become one, for one's individuality is not only irrelevant, it also gets in the way.⁴

In his search for place, Oldenberg identified "Third Places." These venues included the local pub, the corner shop and the neighbourhood café, where regulars could buy a cup of coffee and chat about local events. Oldenberg contended that these places provided a common link for a diverse range of people and must be preserved. These places, however, are contrived social spaces that operate on the exchange of goods and services and still lack the authentic qualities that Jacobs pursued.

4-Oldenberg, Ray. *The Great Good Place*. 1999,205.



In the suburbs Jacobs's ideal public spaces do exist, albeit in forms very different from what she had envisioned. Instead of dense building fabric or tightly knit neighbourhoods, there are dispersed clusters of houses and apartment blocks. Instead of mom-and-pop shops Jane and Finch is littered with Tim Hortons outlets and McDonalds fast food restaurants. As traditional public spaces are seldom utilized, social encounters are often unpredictable and irregular. For example on a Monday one might find a van parked along the sidewalk, set up to sell flags or sports jerseys. Temporary and non-committal there is no guarantee that it will return.

Fig. 1.13 [above] A photograph shows a front yard converted into a commercial space in East L.A. This image illustrates the creative reuse of urban infrastructure, including the use of a chain-link fence as a display wall for brooms and mops, a truck bed as counter space and a gate incorporated as part of the structure for a canopy. This make-shift enclosure is much like a shop or market stall that signifies a point of sale and draws attention from passing pedestrians.

The significance of these loose public spaces is a central theme of Quentin Stevens's writing. Stevens researched several metropolitan cities, determining that these spontaneous reappropriations of space are most likely to occur along street edges, in parking lots and in between buildings, where authority and ownership is unclear. These spaces elicit a variety of responses. Often materializing in places that appear to be uninhabitable, informal social spaces can transform previously inactive sites into vital social magnets.

Margaret Crawford studied the transformative power of everyday practices in Los Angeles. In this city where a diverse range of people with a variety of cultural, political, social and economic backgrounds coexist, Crawford uncovers a unique urban vernacular that validates the everyday as a fundamental component of dynamic public space. These emergent, self-organized spaces, outside of current design practices, highlight the need for an alternative approach:

Ambiguous like all in-between spaces, the everyday represents a zone of social transition and possibility with the potential for new social arrangements and forms of imagination.⁵

Learning from informal social behaviours, Crawford's theory recalls Lefebvre's earlier argument for the legitimacy of everyday practices. These unscripted collisions of people and activities transcend the boundaries of functionality and fundamentally alter one's perception of the city.

Apart from Crawford, many designers have neglected to understand the emergent nature of public space. One urban theorist who does address this issue, however, is Ian Chodikoff. In examining Toronto's suburban neighbourhoods, he notices subtle shifts in the everyday conditions: signifiers of a neighbourhood in transition. Chodikoff stresses the urgency of this matter when he states, "Beyond our infatuation with postwar suburbs and near-academic curiosities associated with sprawling ethnocentric malls, architects must improve their visual literacy and develop a greater understanding of the multitude of adaptations to our suburban environments being initiated by a range of ethnic and cultural groups living in the GTA."⁶ Impacted by special cultural, political, economic and social pressures, the generic strip mall has responded with specialized solutions that inevitably enhance the socio-spatial conditions of suburbia.

5-Crawford, Margaret. *Everyday Urbanism*. 1999, 9.

6-Chodikoff, Ian. *Fringe Benefits: Cosmopolitan Dynamics of a Multicultural City*. 2008, 41 in *Ourtopias : Cities and the Role of Design*.



The suburban public realm is evolving. Even the slightest manipulations and alterations are critical evidences of a place in flux and may help to anticipate the future conditions of the suburbs. Observations of the everyday reveal the insufficiencies of Modern planning agendas and stress the urgent need for public space typologies that can be sustained by the sprawling suburbs. As Crawford, Stevens and Chodikoff insist, a fundamental understanding of the everyday is essential in predicting, preparing and accommodating for the future growth of the city. The objectives that support this thesis share a similar premise. The design proposal demonstrates the suburban verge's latent potential to become an active social space while amplifying the everyday experience of the suburban public realm.

Fig. 1.14 A photograph of an outdoor photography exhibit in Milan demonstrates how public art can act as a catalyst for social engagement. The artwork attracts curious pedestrians, indirectly generating informal social engagement as people stop to chat about the work. This unconventional use of public territory also disrupts the regular flow of pedestrians by restricting their movement. This redirecting of foot traffic creates bottlenecks and dense crowds, causing collisions and encounters with others.

PICTURES OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The following collection of photographs was taken during a series of visits to the study area between January 2007 and November of 2008. Centred on the area adjacent to the Jane - Finch Mall, these photographs immortalize the ephemeral conditions of daily life—freezing in time the very qualities that continue to shape, form and transform the city. A heightened experience of the everyday, the photographs shed new light on the suburban landscape, a planning model that has become so common in the western urbanized world that it's almost completely invisible.

Fig. 1.15 Heavy Load



Fig. 1.16 Platform for Protest



Fig. 1.17 Sidewalk Sale



Fig. 1.18 Parade of Lights



SPANNER
A perfect 10 in the deep end.
2065

Diesel

DIGITAL
PHOTO
BEST PHOTO READY IN 5 SE.

Shopping Center
Pizza Hut
SUBWAY
Medical Offices
Fast Cash Advance
CASH ONE HOUR CLEANERS
The Beer Store
Pharmacia Drug

Classic Beauty Supplies

Fig. 1.19 Pedestrian Oasis



Fig. 1.20 Flat Façade



Fig. 1.21 Morning Commute



Fig. 1.22 Curbside Appeal



Finch Ave W

LIBRARY →

Bell

MAXIMUM
60

2 EMERGENT PATTERNS

*It is useless to seek to strip the desert of its cinematic aspects in order to restore its original essence; those features are thoroughly superimposed upon it and will not go away.*¹

The fieldwork and research for this thesis was completed through a series of site visits with notebook and camera in hand. Between January 2007 and March 2009, visits to the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West uncovered a potent layer of neglected public space. Despite the limitations and utilitarian functions of the suburban verge, everyday activities continuously found ways to temporarily reappropriate this linear band of space. Whether it was the use of Jane Street as the parade route for the Caribana Childrens Festival, the bus shelter as a public bulletin board or the parking lot as the stage for a hip-hop music video, active participants were constantly adapting, forming and transforming the suburban verge to suit their specific needs and desires.

1-Jean Baudrillard. *America*, trans. Chris Turner. 1988, 127.



Legend

- A - Palisade high-rise apartment building
- B - 5 San Romanoway apartment building
- C - Residential Playground
- D - Residential Parking Lot
- E - Jane - Finch Mall
- F - Mall Parking Lot
- G - Single and Semi-detached Houses
- H - 2970 Jane Street apartment building
- I - Norfinch Shopping Centre
- J - Petro Canada Gas Station + Store
- K - Esso Gas Station + Store
- L - Esso Car Wash
- M - York Gate Mall
- N - Study Area



IDENTIFYING THE SITE

The Jane and Finch neighbourhood is one of many communities situated on the fringe of Toronto's urban core. Similar to other suburban neighbourhoods, Jane and Finch is separated from the city centre by a highway corridor. It is also located beyond the TTC subway line, making it difficult to access and therefore heavily dependent on infrastructure.

The epitome of 1960s suburban developments, Jane and Finch has an abundance of open and undefined space interrupted only by the occasional high-rise apartment building or sprawling shopping mall. This image of horizontal fields punctured by vertical towers is striking. Lacking a sense of scale, the neighbourhood does not offer sympathy to the pedestrian: rather, it is streamlined for speed and efficiency.

Though the neighbourhood of Jane and Finch supports a high-density population, its scattered population is unable to support traditional forms of public space. As a result, the shopping malls have become the main attractions and meeting places. A popular Sunday flea market held at the Jane - Finch Mall draws hordes of bargain hunters and offers a diverse range of products: everything from household tools to African jewelry to exotic birds can be purchased. Beyond the mall, the public realm is limited and banal. No plazas or central squares can be found—only parking lots and concrete sidewalks.

Many alternative forms of public space do, however, emerge along the borders of private properties. The suburban verge—the undefined zone where payphone booths, billboards and bus shelters accompany the empty sidewalk—is a favourite place for many of these spontaneous and unsanctioned public acts. Since it does not have much to offer in the way of place-making tools, its allure is in its location. While the parking lot offers excessive amounts of space, it seems to be along the edges, where hydro poles, public benches and bus shelters provide a sense of scale, that people feel most comfortable to linger, congregate or temporarily occupy space. This location is easily accessed: it is not controlled or surveyed like the shopping mall, and is constantly occupied by commuters and pedestrians.

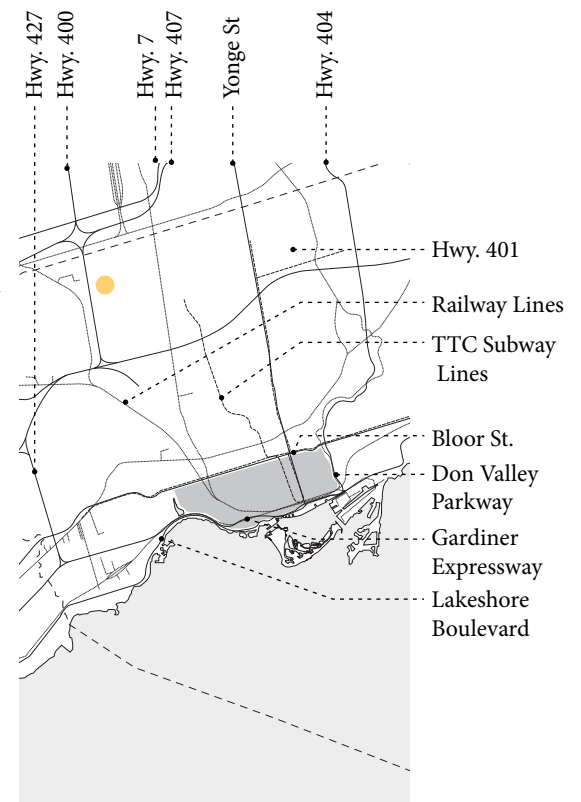
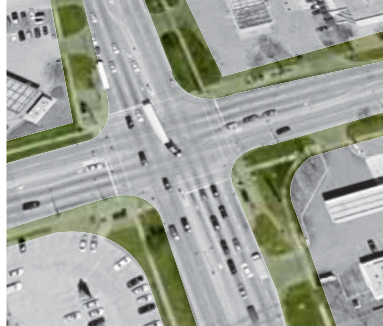


Fig. 2.1 [opposite] A magnified aerial view of the intersection at Jane St. and Finch Ave. W. gives a sense of the neighbourhood's low density sprawl. Three malls, along with two gas stations and an enclave of high-rise apartment buildings occupy the main intersection. The aerial also highlights the variety of housing typologies located along the gently curving streets and crescents amidst a sea of open and undefined space.

Fig. 2.2 [above] A diagram of Toronto highlights the location of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood in relation to the 400 highway series and the central urban core.



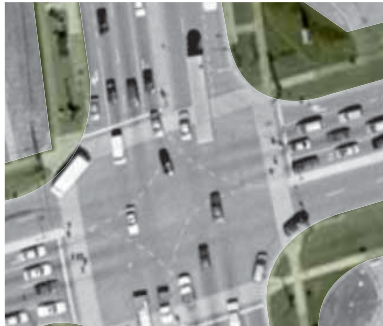
Ellesmere Rd. & Victoria Park



Warden Ave. & Sheppard Ave.



Dixie Rd. & Burnhamthorpe Rd.



Keele St. & Finch Ave. W



Morningside Ave. & Sheppard Ave.



Jane St. & Wilson Ave.



Jane St. & Finch Ave. W



Victoria Park & Lawrence Ave.



Markham Rd. & Lawrence Ave.



Dixie Rd. & Dundas St. E.



Steeles Ave. E & Don Mills Rd.



Birchmount Rd. & Lawrence Ave.



The Jane and Finch neighbourhood supports a growing community of more than 85,000² inhabitants, of which approximately 50% have recently immigrated to Canada³. The community, which represents more than 120 nationalities, contains a large population of youth and has a high rate of unemployment⁴. The neighbourhood's built environment, combined with these socio-economic issues, presents a unique set of parameters for finding alternatives to formal and conventional types of public space.

A controversial proposition supported by City Councillor Anthony Perruzza endorses the re-branding of the Jane and Finch area as University Heights. In an attempt to shed its negative connotations, the new name refers to York University situated northeast of this site, at Sentinel Road and Finch Avenue West. Perruzza is also an advocate of economic expansion and is currently pushing for a three billion dollar surge that could kick-start new development and revitalize a slowing job market. The investment, which would finance much-needed change, could also improve living conditions for tens of thousands of residents⁵.

In addition to local initiatives, Toronto's Mayor David Miller, recently launched the Mayor's Tower Renewal program. The proposal focuses on redeveloping and improving the hundreds of residential towers found throughout Toronto. The framework for Tower Renewal is established through seven key strategies including, external cladding, green retrofits, green infrastructure, urban agriculture, transit city, community improvements and new housing⁶. This proposal recognizes the need to reconsider the vast amounts of open, undefined space that typically surround these buildings and intends to improve community access to essential services and amenities.

At this pivotal moment in the redevelopment process, the Jane and Finch neighbourhood invites a rethinking of suburban public space and offers an ideal test site for these innovative proposals. In response, this thesis investigates the suburban verge as an underutilized public territory and seeks out everyday practices as a catalyst for true neighbourhood change.

Fig. 2.3 [opposite] A series of aerial photographs taken from Google Earth emphasize the typical conditions of suburban intersections in Toronto: main arterial thoroughfares framed by grassy suburban verges and large asphalt parking lots. A substantial amount of underutilized land, the suburban verges throughout Toronto invite a rethinking of the suburban public realm.

2-Neighbourhood population as of 2007. Available at <http://jane-finch.com/about.htm>

3-City of Toronto, Immigrant Population 2006. Available at http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/atlas/ct06_immigrants_percent.pdf

4-Facts about the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. Available at <http://jane-finch.com/about.htm>

5-Ryerson TV: Rebranding Jane-Finch (2008 film). Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYg1Lc_Kshg&feature=channel_page

6-Mayor's Tower Renewal. Available at <http://www.towerrenewal.ca/>

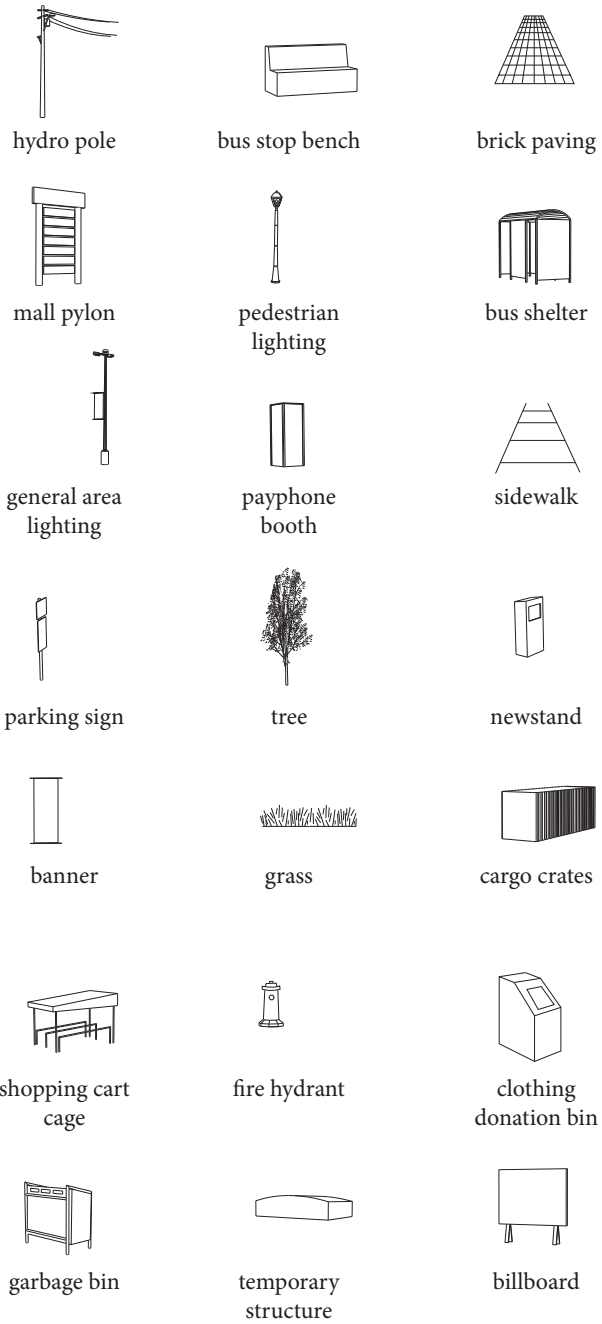


Fig. 2.4 A ground survey of a 1km² area around the study site produced an inventory of suburban infrastructure typically found within or adjacent to the suburban verge. Limited in performance and operation these inhabitable forms are often reappropriated for a range of unintended public activities. For instance, billboards provide shade during hot summer days, bus shelters are ideal for posting advertisements and information while public benches can act as a platform for protest.

INVENTORY OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

A ground survey of the site and the immediate surroundings has produced an inventory of suburban artifacts most commonly found within or adjacent to the suburban verge. These small-scale furnishings and mass-produced pieces of infrastructure are cost-efficient and designed to resist vandalism and decay. The public bench, for instance, is made from pre-cast concrete forms held in place with an internal metal structure. Difficult to damage, these benches are only intended for short-term seating as their form—essentially three chairs melded together—is not comfortable for long periods of time. Its surfaces, which might otherwise be susceptible to graffiti, are covered with oversized advertisements.

Though these components are monofunctional in design, they are often used for a variety of unintended purposes. The aforementioned socio-economic conditions of Jane and Finch promote creative reappropriations of public territory and amplify the socio-spatial experience of the everyday.

In order to understand some of the main similarities and differences between traditional and alternative public spaces, the analysis also surveyed a few local parks, plazas and parking lots. Three themes emerged: spatial dimensions, site location and common infrastructure.

The dimensions of the suburban verge are very narrow. Its edges, however, are porous and unclear and as a result its boundaries are constantly expanding and contracting to suit a variety of unofficial functions. For instance, in the winter, landlords dump excessive amounts of snow onto the verge, extending the invisible property lines of the parking lot beyond its asphalt border. During the week early-morning transit commuters line up and crowd around the bus shelter. If there are too many people, some may stand back along the edge of the parking lot where garden planters provide additional seating, or they may choose to wait in their cars in the parking lot. In contrast, parks and plazas are often wide and expansive, and provide a variety of places to linger. They can accommodate a range of populations, large and small, and very rarely need to expand beyond their boundaries.

Fig. 2.5 A diagram of typical park conditions is used to illustrate some of the many items commonly found in parks surveyed in Toronto. Unlike the suburban verge, parks are open and expansive. They can accommodate a wide range of uses and activities. The park is generally furnished with a range of landscape treatments and vegetation whereas the suburban verge has only strips of grass and concrete.

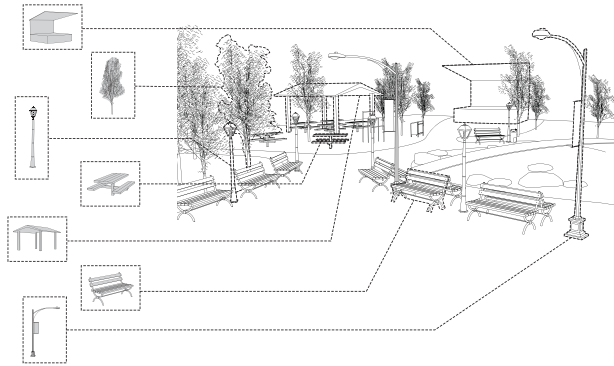


Fig. 2.6 A diagram of typical plaza conditions is used to demonstrate some of the many items found in plazas observed in Toronto. The plaza typically has many places to sit or linger, provides a variety of inhabitable structures and can accommodate a range of activities. The suburban verge, however, is very narrow in width, typically ranging between 3 and 12 metres wide. This linear dimension limits the number of people and types of activities that can occur here. As a result activities often expand onto the adjacent properties.

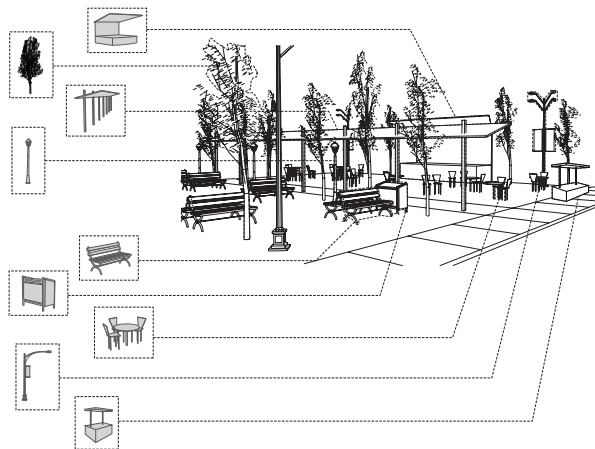
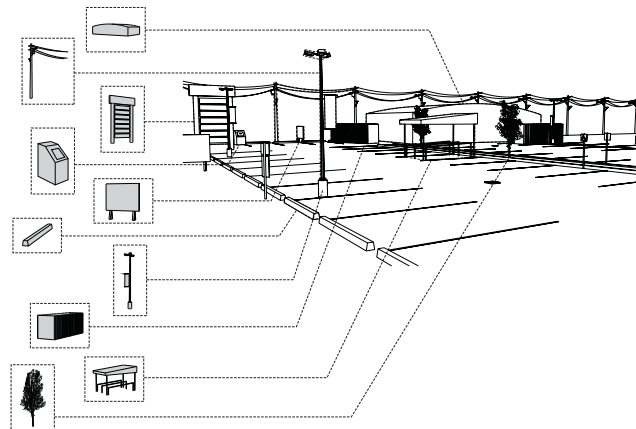


Fig. 2.7 A diagram of typical parking lot conditions is used to depict some of the many items commonly found in the parking lots surveyed around the site.

This collection of diagrams highlights many of the similarities determine between traditional and alternative forms of public space. Though the suburban verge and the parking lot are not designed for long-term occupation or large crowds, users find innovative ways to adapt and alter the infrastructure to suit their manifold needs.



The location of the suburban verge, as a perimeter condition, is very different from that of the typical park or plaza. Traditional models of public space are often framed by dense urban fabric and are centrally located. The suburban verge is a perimeter condition. It acts as a storage space for suburban infrastructure and a waiting space for people who are on their way to somewhere else. An element of the suburban landscape, the verge is not enclosed or framed by any buildings.

The amenities found within the suburban verge are similar to those typically found in urban park and plaza conditions. Though the styles are different, their utilitarian functions are generally the same: to provide temporary places to linger and short-term shelter from the elements. It is in their scale and performance that they differ greatly. While the suburban verge is very limited in capacity, its undefined boundaries allow it to act like a large public space. The park and the plaza, however, are typically designed to accommodate for a wide of range of people and uses. As well, the types and forms of infrastructure are much more versatile than the simple public bench that is occasionally provided along the suburban verge.

While it is already an active public space, the design proposal for the suburban verge should incorporate additional opportunities for occupation. An increase in seating, for example, would be a basic and cost-effective means to attract additional forms of social engagement and enhance the daily use of the suburban verge.

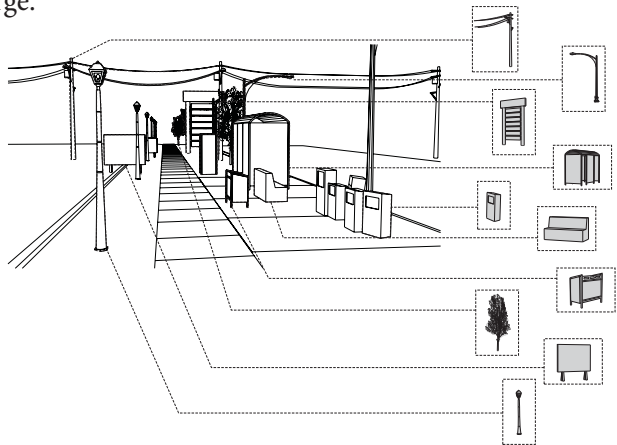
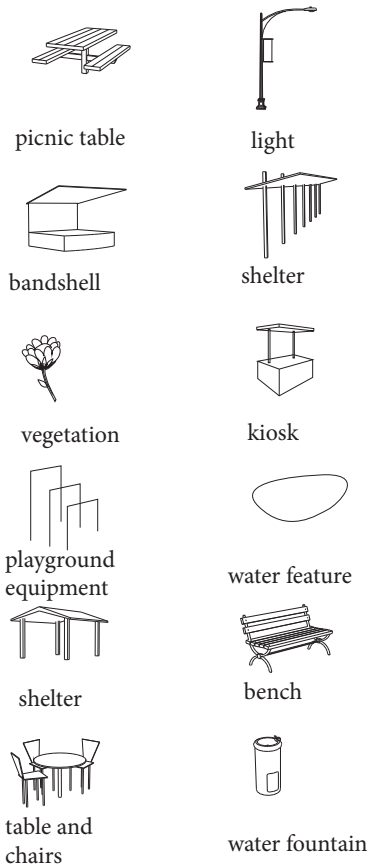


Fig. 2.8 [above] A survey of some of Toronto's parks, plazas and parking lots has compiled a list of infrastructure often encountered in addition to the elements listed in Fig. 2.4. These items are generally designed to suit particular forms of inhabitation but are occasionally used for unsanctioned activities. Fig. 2.9 [left] A diagram highlights many of the common suburban artifacts found within and adjacent to the suburban verge. The bus shelter tends to be the only inhabitable structure with the exception of the occasional public bench.

Fig. 2.10[*opposite top*] A photograph of La Brea Street in Los Angeles shows how a parking lot is repurposed as a display space for a local store. This condition expands the pedestrian realm beyond the narrow dimensions of the sidewalk.

Fig. 2.11[*opposite middle*] A photograph of La Rambla captures a man out for a morning walk. Flower stands, information kiosks, cafés and street performers line the central pedestrian boulevard, fostering opportunities for casual social engagement.

Fig. 2.12[*opposite bottom*] A photograph shows how a series of bollards, trees, plantings and benches create a series thresholds and frame the pedestrian realm along Avenida Paseo de la Reforma.

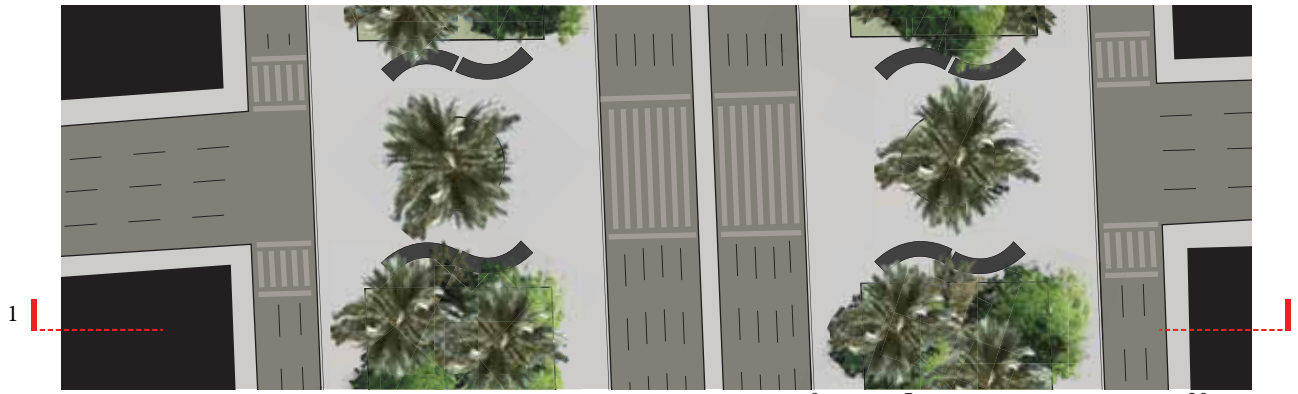
COMPARISON OF LINEAR PUBLIC SPACES

The verge is the pedestrian component of the suburban street: a linear public space. This section of Chapter 2 draws comparison between the design site and three linear streetscapes in order to measure the suburban verge's capacity to entertain social activity. In examining these sites, three main conditions become apparent: thresholds, public amenities and spatial dimensions.

In contrast to the undefined territory of the Jane and Finch site, La Rambla of Barcelona and Avenida Paseo de la Reforma of Mexico City both clearly demarcate their pedestrian zones with extensive use of vegetation. The layers of plantings and trees form a series of thresholds, which provide a variegated spatial experience. These layers also create a visual hierarchy that outlines a clear boundary between pedestrian and vehicular zones. At Jane and Finch, the boundaries of the suburban verge are far less clear. Although a few planting beds and strips of grass are meant to signify a boundary between pedestrian and vehicular zones, these meager thresholds are easily crossed and fail to create a sense of security or clarity. From this observation, the design intervention must create a sense of boundary and transition by developing a stronger, definitive pedestrian zone. This may be achieved through the use of levels, paving systems and vegetation that form visual and physical dividers yet maintain a permeable edge for expansion, as activities require.

La Brea in Los Angeles has conditions similar to those of Jane and Finch, where the pedestrian strip is surrounded by parking lots and busy traffic. While little vegetation is present, the use of chain link fencing forms a hard physical barrier for both cars and pedestrians. Though not ideal, the fence provides a sense of scale and acts as a backdrop for pedestrian activity.

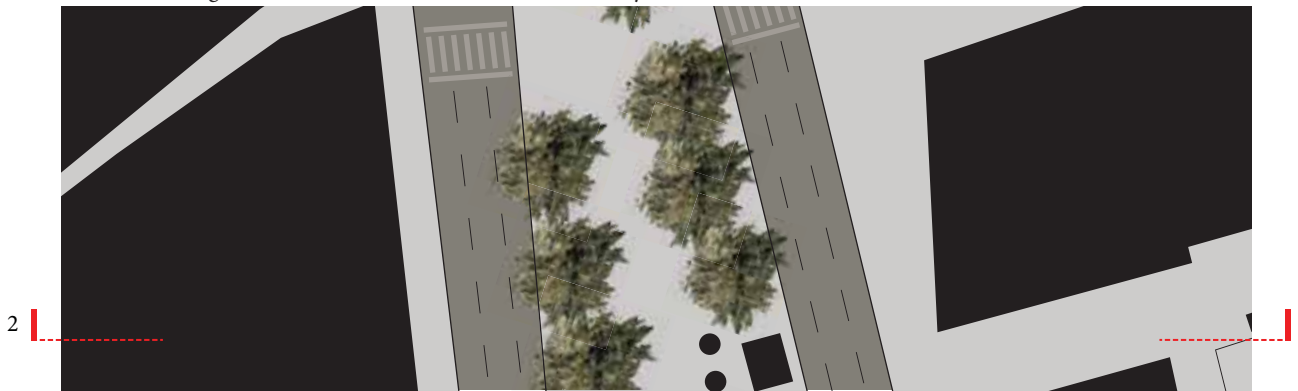




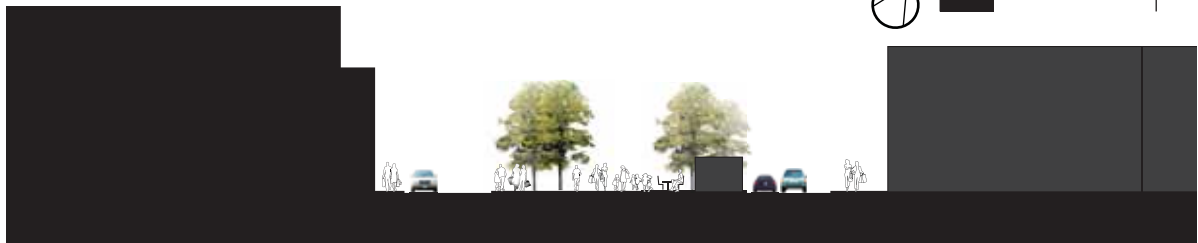
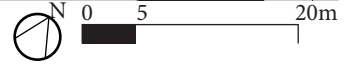
Partial Plan of Avenida Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City



Section 1 through Avenida Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City



Partial Plan of La Rambla, Barcelona



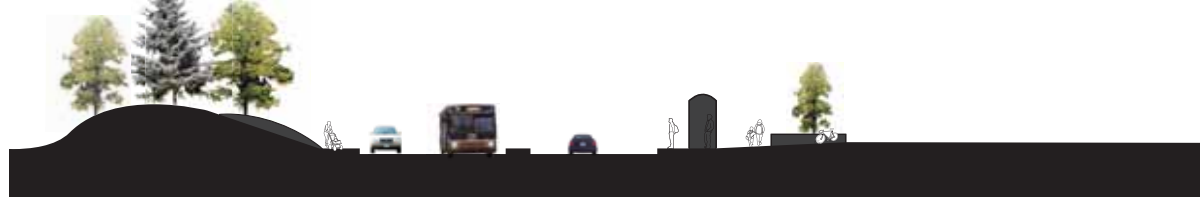
Section 2 through La Rambla, Barcelona

As discussed in the previous section, titled Inventory of Infrastructure, the inhabitable forms located in the suburban verge include bus shelters, payphone booths and newsstands. Though people find ingenious ways to manipulate these systems, the infrastructure is still very limited in its uses. The infrastructure of La Rambla and Avenida Paseo de la Reforma is somewhat different, but serves the same basic functions. Although Avenida Paseo de la Reforma only provides benches for seating, their unconventional design lends them to a multitude of uses. Curved in plan, the benches can accommodate a large social group or an individual, depending on where one chooses to sit in relation to the curves. This design recalls Martha Schwartz's Jacob Javits Plaza in New York City, where the ubiquitous public bench is stretched and curved to create areas for both the individual eating lunch and the office crew taking a coffee break.

The other important condition of Avenida Paseo de la Reforma is the number of public benches. While the Jane and Finch intersection has one lonely bench, any stretch of Avenida Paseo de la Reforma contains a dozen places to sit. Along La Rambla, there are also plenty of locations to relax—however, these are only available for café patrons. Whether permanent or temporary, the inclusion of public seating is an effective method for attracting social activity.

Fig. 2.13[*opposite top*] The partial plan and section of Avenida Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City highlights the amount of space allotted to pedestrians. The boulevards are transitional spaces, continuously crossed and accessed by tourists, commuters, and citizens on a daily basis. This frequency and intensity attracts a range of activities and people to the site, particularly street vendors and performers. The layers of vegetation and small-scale furnishings give a sense of scale and create a series of outdoor rooms: public spaces for people to linger, congregate and interact.

Fig. 2.14[*opposite bottom*] The partial plan and section of La Rambla in Barcelona shows how the central pedestrian boulevard is used as a public space. A liminal zone, La Rambla is animated by the kiosks, cafés and street performers who inhabit the space on a daily basis.

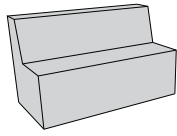


The last theme discussed with the diagrams included in this section, addresses the dimensions of usable area provided within the suburban verge. Though the verge is narrow in width, it is the cast-in-place concrete sidewalk that restricts the opportunities for gathering or lingering within the suburban verge. The sidewalk, with a standard 1.5-metre width, is unforgiving in its form and location. Rarely does the sidewalk expand or contract. The only place where the walking surface extends beyond the sidewalk is at bus stops and crosswalks, where the addition of brick paving or an asphalt coating provides extra standing room.

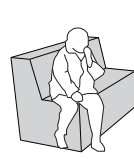
In contrast to the suburban sidewalk, La Rambla and Avenida Paseo de la Reforma do not have restricted walking paths: rather they provide unlimited walking surfaces that are often occupied by street performers, vendors and tourists. The design proposal must reconsider the conditions of the walking surface as an instrumental component of the public space. The proposed paving system should respond to the needs of the site and the users, rather than generic city codes.

Fig. 2.15[*opposite top*] The partial plan and section of La Brea in Los Angeles emphasizes the vast amount of space allocated to the car. Without places to congregate the street is undesirable as a public space. Property owners and retail stores, however, find creative ways to attract potential clients, using the chain link fences and parking spaces as an extension of their storefronts.

Fig. 2.16[*opposite bottom*] The partial plan and section of Finch Avenue West also highlights the excessive amounts of space required for the car. Whereas La Brea is framed by adjacent buildings, the suburban verge along Finch Ave. W. is framed only by parking lots and grass berms. Due to its ambiguous boundaries people tend to linger along the edges where small-scale furnishings and suburban infrastructure provide a sense of scale and offer a few places to linger.



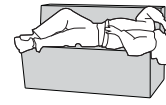
Public Bench



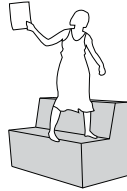
as a place to sit



as a display space



as a place to sleep



as a platform for protest



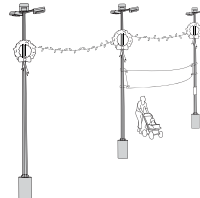
as a place to read



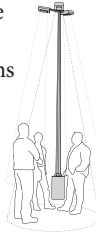
as a place to rest heavy bags



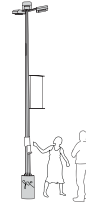
Perimeter Lighting



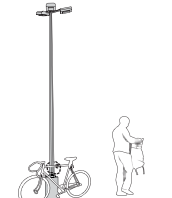
as a place to hang decorations



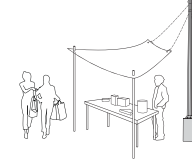
as a place to gather



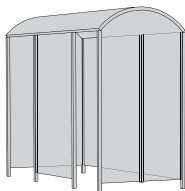
as a public bulletin board



as a bike lock



as a supporting structure



Bus Shelter



as a public bulletin board



as a bike lock



as a place to rest



as a storage space



as a shelter from bad weather

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

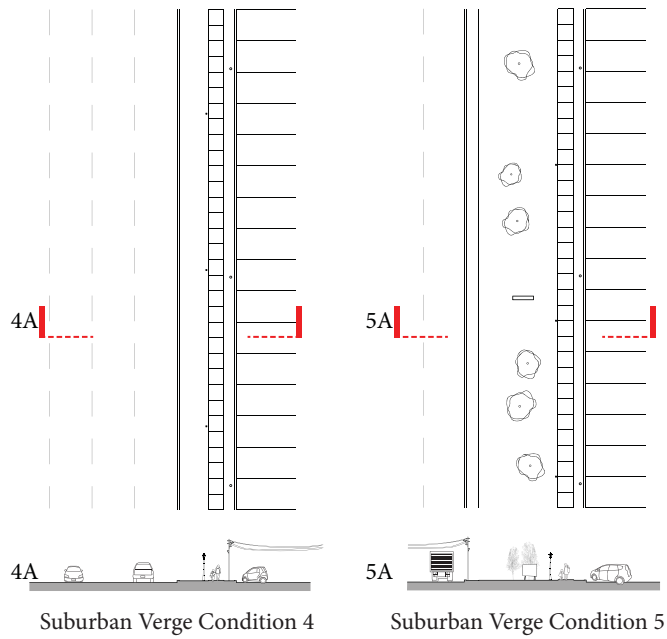
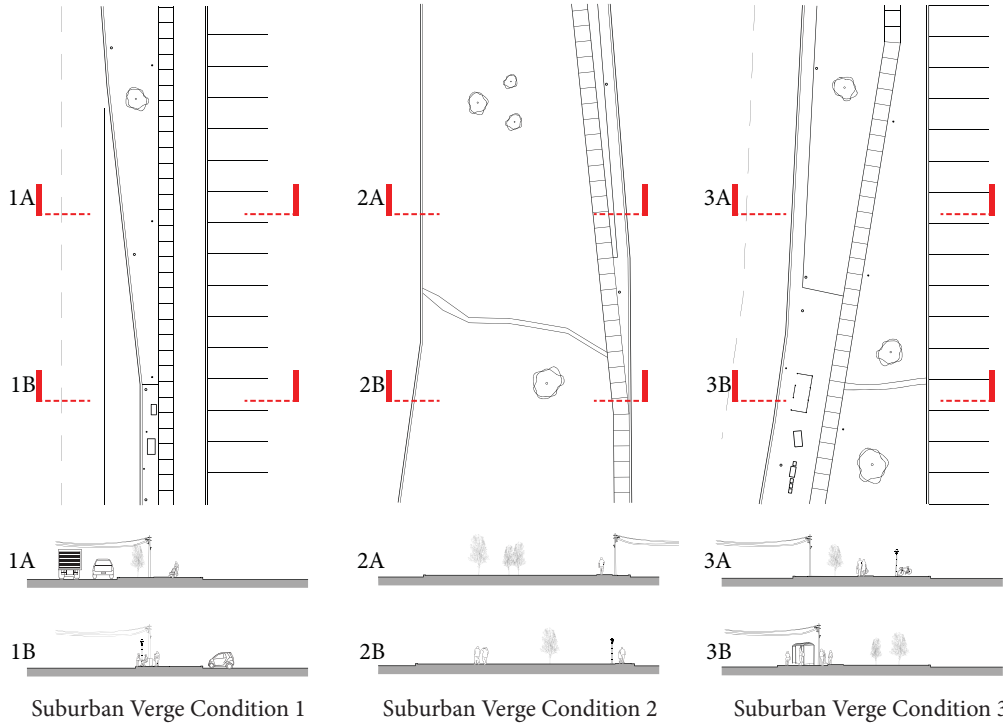
The Jane and Finch neighbourhood supports a diverse population. This wide range of identities creates a rich social network as people are exposed daily to a multiplicity of religions, ethnicities, races, cultures and social practices. For this reason, the public realm of the Jane and Finch site is particularly intriguing.

The following set of maps and diagrams, created from personal observations of the site, illustrate the intensity and frequency of informal public acts that occur along the suburban verge. While daily practices such as drinking a coffee or smoking a cigarette tend to happen near mall and coffee shop entryways, spontaneous and unsanctioned activities often occur at the perimeter, where boundaries and ownership are most ambiguous.

In the Jane and Finch neighbourhood, a high percentage of residents do not own their homes. Many live in subsidized housing complexes and high-rise apartment buildings. Though vast amounts of open spaces are readily available, they are ill suited for any useful purpose. Finding suitable alternatives is a challenge. The Mayor's Tower Renewal program targets these undefined open spaces and offers one way to developed these underutilized spaces.

Limited to apartment balconies and common yards, many residents exchange public and semi-public spaces for private purposes. For instance, one visit to the site encountered a man in the mall parking lot fixing a broken muffler on his car—an activity that would typically happen in a private driveway. A separate visit to the site found a van parked on the sidewalk, selling sweaters, jackets and comforters and other miscellaneous goods; a public yard sale. An afternoon walk through the site found a group of teenagers recording a music video in the parking lot. These unique social behaviours reveal a special tolerance for unconventional uses of public space. These practices also demonstrate how the suburban verge could better respond to the community's needs and desires. (Refer to pages 67 through 76).

Fig. 2.17 [opposite] These diagrams illustrate some of the ways in which the suburban furnishings and monofunctional infrastructure found within in the study area are used to construct temporary public spaces. These informal and self-organized arrangements of public territory outline some of the special social, cultural, political and economic conditions of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood and reveal the latent potential of the suburban verge.







The last map included in this section, *Activity Maps: Tracing Traffic Routes*, highlights the main points of access, types of traffic and common gathering points that have been documented within and adjacent to the site. This map illustrates the intensity and frequency of activity that occurs in the southeast quadrant of the intersection, where an equal balance of vehicular and pedestrian movement constantly crosses through the site. This map emphasizes the amount of pedestrian traffic and unsanctioned activities that occur specifically within the southeast quadrant. While the southwest and northwest corners do have a lot of pedestrian movement, they are constantly accessed by vehicles; a condition which makes them highly undesirable areas for pedestrian use. The northeast block is the least active. Isolated by a series of grassy berms, the high-rise apartment building has no connection to the street or the pedestrian realm. As a result the southeast quadrant appears to be the most appropriate location for examining the suburban verge's latent potential as an active public space.

Fig. 2.18 [opposite] Personal observations of the study area along Jane Street and Finch Avenue West have compiled a series of typical suburban verge conditions. These five partial plans and sections illustrate the most common arrangements of the suburban verge. The sections emphasize the absence of thresholds or transitions. The boundaries are vague and unclear and provide minimal accommodations for pedestrians. As a result neighbouring landlords constantly extend their own properties beyond their official borders. Unlike the traditional main street, the suburban street is separated from adjacent stores by large asphalt parking lots, this further isolates the suburban verge and limits opportunities for casual social interaction.



On the Suburban Verge
Locating Alternative Forms of Public Spaces
Fig. 2.20











Suburban Verges

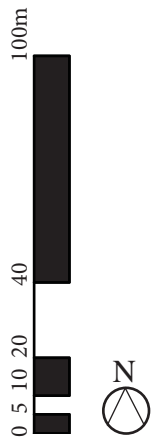
-  thesis site
-  adjacent verges
-  semi-private
-  semi-public





Large Seasonal Events
Mapping Community Activities
Fig. 2.22

-  Toronto Caribana Children's Parade
-  Canadian Hispanic Day Parade
-  Together for Jesus Parade
-  Sunday Market
-  Winter Snow Mounds
-  Summer Carnival
-  Flag Sale
-  Car Service Centre
-  Christmas Tree Centre
-  Summer Garden Centre

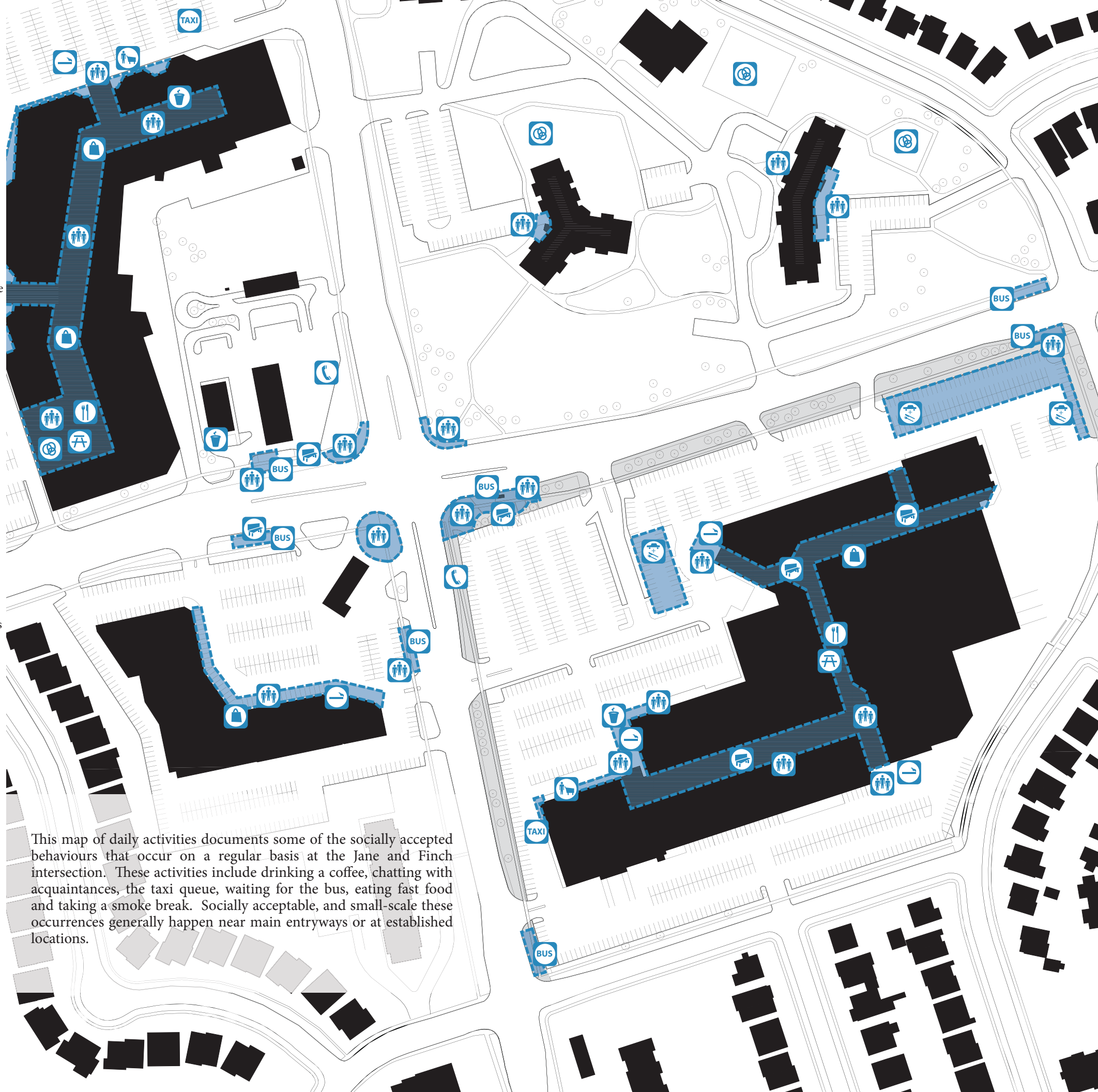


This map of large seasonal events shows a variety of sanctioned activities such as the summer carnival, the spring flower centre and the windshield repair shop, which tend to inhabit sections of the Jane-Finch Mall parking lot. As well, formal parades and festivals take place on Jane Street and Finch Avenue West. Often temporary blocking vehicular traffic, these events are typically positioned along the edge of the parking lot or on the street itself expanding into the suburban verge as crowds require.



Daily Activities
Mapping Everyday Occurrences
Fig. 2.24

-  buying fast-food
-  eating in a foodcourt
-  drinking a coffee
-  sitting
-  congregating
-  retail shopping
-  grocery shopping
-  smoking
-  waiting for a bus
-  taxi line-up
-  playground
-  eating in a parked car

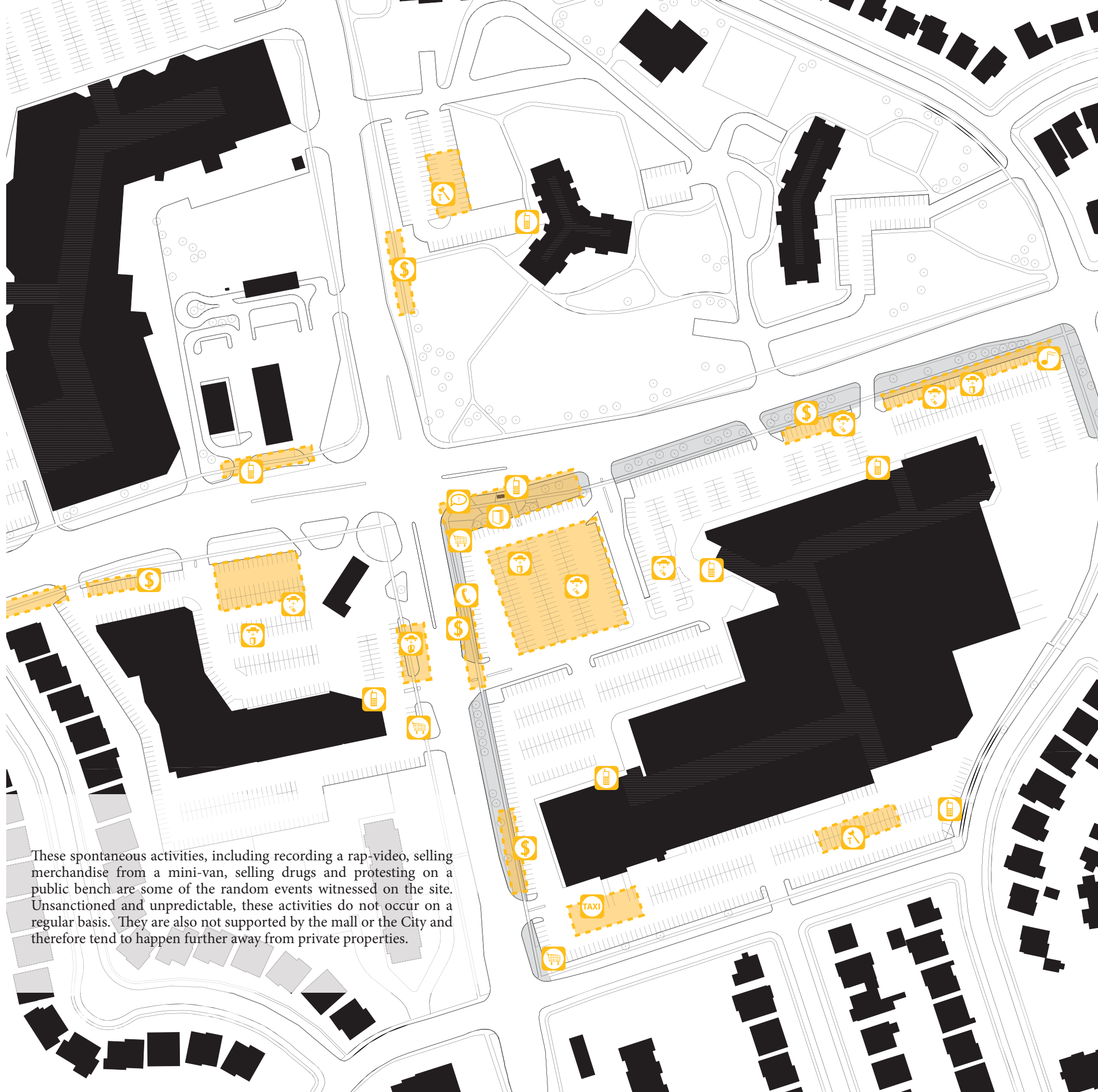
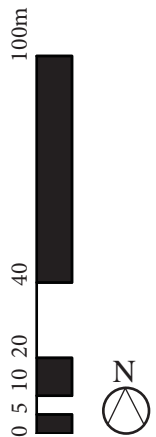


This map of daily activities documents some of the socially accepted behaviours that occur on a regular basis at the Jane and Finch intersection. These activities include drinking a coffee, chatting with acquaintances, the taxi queue, waiting for the bus, eating fast food and taking a smoke break. Socially acceptable, and small-scale these occurrences generally happen near main entryways or at established locations.



Spontaneous Activities
Mapping Everyday Occurrences
Fig. 2.26

-  recording a music video
-  chatting
-  reading
-  protesting
-  discarded grocery cart
-  selling drugs
-  fixing a car
-  using a pay-phone
-  TAXI extra taxis waiting
-  making a phone call in a parked car
-  selling items from a parked car
-  reading in a parked car

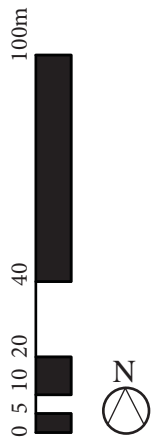


These spontaneous activities, including recording a rap-video, selling merchandise from a mini-van, selling drugs and protesting on a public bench are some of the random events witnessed on the site. Unsanctioned and unpredictable, these activities do not occur on a regular basis. They are also not supported by the mall or the City and therefore tend to happen further away from private properties.



Traffic Patterns
Mapping Movement
Fig. 2.28

- Re-appropriated Space
- continuously
 - frequently
 - occasionally
 - pedestrian paths
 - vehicular routes
 - entryways



The traffic patterns of vehicular and pedestrian movement illustrate two types of movement. While vehicular routes are structured and defined, pedestrian paths are irregular and meandering. This map illustrates how people and vehicles move through the site and suggests where pedestrians are most likely to congregate. As patterns reveal on the northeast quadrant, there is no vehicular access. Strictly limited to pedestrian movement the area lacks activity and is merely a space to pass through. The Northwest and Southwest sections of the intersection are very different. With gas stations, convenience stores and shopping centres, these locations are frequently accessed by cars and are therefore less available to pedestrians for informal activities. The Southeast block, where the design intervention focuses, depicts a majority of pedestrian activity, occasionally interrupted by vehicles. As the previous maps reveal, this section of the intersection is most ideal for informal activities and the self-organized appropriation of space.



3 SUBTLE INFLECTIONS

Contemporary public practices should no longer be concerned primarily with a search for meaning or even for form. The concern here is not about geometries or spatial relationship, nor about absolute cultural ideas. Rather, the radically revamped contemporary condition – defined most broadly – is characterized by globalization, deregulation, privatization, and mobility. With regard to public space and public works, this revamped condition demands a search for new agendas, new working methodologies and approaches that better account for these changed circumstances.¹

1- Reed, Chris. *StossLU*. 2007, 13.

PRECEDENTS: DESIGNS ON PUBLIC SPACE

Since Lefebvre's theory of the "production of space," discussed in Chapter 1, *Revisiting Everyday Practices* page 23, has revealed both the social and political dimensions of public space, it is no longer a question of what public space is, but rather how it is. We must reconsider how our approach can create innovative spaces that respond to the inherently unstable conditions of the public realm, how architecture might inform—rather than form—everyday space and how it might empower its users to continuously shape and redefine it. In an effort to imagine opportunities for the site, this chapter reflects upon a number of contemporary public space interventions that revalue the social patterns already evident within the public realm. Though the styles and levels of permanence vary greatly, all of the projects operate on the premise that unscripted everyday occurrences can generate authentic public space. This perspective aligns with the concepts of this thesis and is the central theme of the resulting design work.

An initial assessment of these architectural projects uncovers several recurring themes, including: a concern with the latent potential of loose, residual public spaces; the inhabitation of uninhabitable spaces; and the relationship between architectural forms and user ingenuity. Whether it is the temporary occupation of a street corner or the permanent rehabilitation of an abandoned expressway, each project explores the transformational possibilities of everyday practices, suggesting rather than predetermining outcome. As these projects push the boundaries of conventional public space, they preserve existing social patterns and enable users to find new ways of interacting and communicating with others.

SYN Atelier d'Exploration Urbaine (Urban Exploration Workshop) is a design firm that constantly questions the status of temporal spatiality. With a particular interest in probing the possibilities and limitations of urban "junkspace"—residual or neglected urban spaces—their work examines how everyday interactions can shape, influence and inform one's experience of



Fig. 3.1 [top] Hypotheses d'Insertions by SYN Atelier d'Exploration Urbaine installed a foosball table below an expressway. This temporary reappropriation of public territory explores the social capacity of an urban "junkspace".

Fig. 3.2 [bottom] An unconventional use of public territory, the informal activity attracts spectators and generates social interaction. Temporary yet effective, this public space intervention pushes the boundaries of convention and influences one's experience and perceptions of the city.

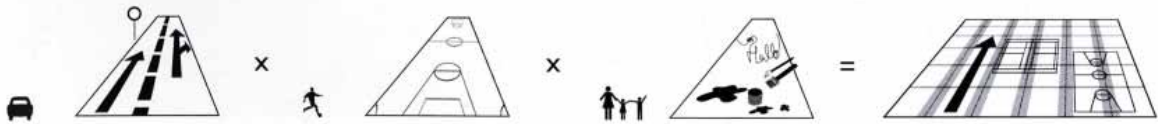


Fig. 3.3 [top] A photograph of Büro Kiefer's Flämingsstraße Apartment Block Parking Lot. Playful graphics are a simple yet effective method for instigating alternative uses and transform a monofunctional parking lot into a lively multifunctional public space.

Fig. 3.4 [middle] A schematic diagram illustrates Büro Kiefer's strategy for combining a parking lot and a playground.

Fig. 3.5 [right] Topotek1 also used bold and colourful graphics to interrupt the monotonous asphalt surface of an office building parking lot. The design also provides a sense of scale that relates not to the car, but rather to the pedestrian.



the city. In their ongoing installation titled, *Hypotheses d'Insertions* (Hypothetical Insertions), mobile game tables are stationed in urban no mans lands. These informal acts temporarily alter the experience of place and destabilize preconceived notions of public space.

The contemporary work of SYN is closely related to the earlier practices of Situationist International (SI). Founded in the late 1950s, SI rejected the modern city as tedious and uneventful. In an effort to energize the monotony of the urban experience, SI developed the *Dérive*, a technique that encouraged an unorganized “drifting” through the city. This exercise was a way “to alert people to their imprisonment by routine”². This theme parallels the intentions of SYNs *Hypotheses d'Insertions* where foosball, ping-pong and pool tables—typically found in a pub or gymnasium—are installed in unconventional locations, provoking a new social program that disrupts urban routine.

The design firms Topotek1 and Büro Kiefer also use play as a tool to initiate unplanned social encounters. The DKV Insurances Office-Building Parking Lot and *Flämingstraße* Apartment Block Parking Lot illustrate this condition. In both designs, bold and playful graphics are superimposed onto standard parking grids. This simple modification transforms the monofunctional parking lot into a multifunctional public space that animates the ubiquitous asphalt surface with a variety of social practices. For example, in Büro Kiefer’s project, children are encouraged to take over the parking lot as a daytime playground. This activity draws a crowd of children and their mothers and fathers to the space, fostering opportunities for casual social engagement between both children and adults.

The use of play to instigate alternate forms of social engagement follows the earlier work of the architect Aldo van Eyk. In postwar Amsterdam, his playgrounds converted hundreds of interstitial spaces into active social centres. These playgrounds enlivened dead urban sites and generated secondary and tertiary social programs in neighbouring properties. As social networks were reestablished, the war-torn city recovered.



Fig. 3.6 [above] A photograph captures the essence of Aldo van Eyck’s playgrounds: the act of play. In post-war Amsterdam, van Eyck cleverly used play as an instigator for social engagement. Not only did the new playgrounds attract crowds of neighbourhood children, but they also indirectly reactivated war torn neighbourhoods and helped to re-establish essential social behaviours.

2-Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*. 1998, 95.



Fig. 3.7 [above] A photograph of A8erna by NL Architects demonstrates how minimal architectural interventions can revamp the underutilized space below an expressway. As a skate park and 'art gallery', the space uses the act of play to instigate social engagement. Fig. 3.8 [right] The A8erna project also incorporates an urban boardwalk, a bike path and new retail shops, which create new opportunities for social encounters and help to define the pedestrian public realm. Simple in its use of building materials and surface treatments, the space can easily accommodate a variety of public activities, small or large.



In *The Ludic City*, Quentin Stevens discusses the influential power of play. A common tool used to provoke social interaction, play also reveals many of specific social conditions of a place by enabling users to redefine a space to suit their particular needs. Stevens defines play:

*Play thrives on the density and diversity of people and experiences to be found in urban public space...[and] is a lived critique of instrumentally rational action, because it discovers new needs and develops new forms of social life.*³

StossLU's Safe Zone also draws upon the catalytic qualities of play. The artificial terrain, constructed with recycled rubber pellets and mass-produced safety equipment, playfully subverts the functions of infrastructure to produce an unconventional public space. Imaginative in form and design, this landscape encourages participants to actively invent new ways of engaging with both the site and each other while temporarily suspending preconceived notions of what is socially, politically or culturally acceptable.

The site for the design intervention in this thesis, however, is not located in a lush green park or framed by compact urban fabric. The suburban verge along Jane Street and Finch Avenue West is an unadorned strip of sidewalk and grass situated between a busy street and a parking lot.

One project that shares similar linear dimensions is A8erna by NL Architects. A8erna reconsiders the unclaimed territory below an urban expressway. A prevalent condition of many metropolitan cities, the expressway divides and isolates sections of the city from each other. Underneath this massive piece of infrastructure one finds a vast amount of undeveloped public space—though it's usually dark, dirty and unwelcoming. In rethinking this neglected "junkspace," NL Architects proposed a series of subtle interventions that include generous pathways, new surface finishes, seating forms and nighttime lighting. The architecture seeks informal (rather than formal) inhabitation of the space, reconnecting the people on either side of the expressway



Fig. 3.9 [top] The peculiar rubber terrain of StossLU's Safe Zone attracts a range of people. This innovative use of standard safety materials challenges conventional notions of public space and creates a dynamic social space that invites exploration.

Fig. 3.10 [bottom] A group of children investigate the new terrain. While examining and inventing ways in which to interact with the landscape, they are also finding new methods of socializing with each other. Age, race, ethnicity and gender are irrelevant here as play engenders casual encounters with difference.

3-Stevens, Quentin. *The Ludic City*. 2007, p.8-9



with an urban boardwalk. A hybrid design that combines the characteristics of a boardwalk with urban infrastructure, this new public space employs minimal architecture to maximize social potential.

This strategy of rehabilitation is incorporated in West 8s Schouwbergplein, or Theatre Square. In this large public square, West 8 uses a simple kit of parts to create a multipurpose public space. While towering red masts and a lengthy bench occupy the site, it remains relatively empty, with many similarities to a stage. It is a move which makes people both spectators and the spectacle; the design motivates people to define, transform and reappropriate the square as their needs require. The space serves a variety of interests, and on any given day may be encountered as a picnic site, a skate park or a market square—depending only on the users.

The people behind all of these projects believe that unsanctioned, user-defined actions are essential qualities of the city. Contrary to the deterministic planning styles of the 1950s and 1960s, today's architecture must make itself available to multiple interpretations and outcomes, but never define them. It must provide accommodations for a multiplicity of lifestyles and living practices, creating spaces that are open, flexible and undefined.

As Margaret Crawford reminds us, “The juxtapositions, combinations and collisions of people, places and activities... create a new condition of social fluidity that begins to break down the separate, specialized, and hierarchical structures of everyday life.”⁴ Punctuating the public and semi-public realms of the city, these loose, anonymous spaces provoke a variety of spontaneous social acts and establish an intangible, yet vital constituent of the public realm. As a result, we cannot define public space as a static, immobile condition: rather it is something fluid and dynamic, constantly evolving and adapting to satisfy a range of social identities and relationships. Open-ended design engenders open-minded society, and promotes acceptance of difference. This increases the social connectedness of a community and enriches the socio-spatial experience of the city.

4-Crawford, Margaret. *Everyday Urbanism*. 1999, 34.



Fig. 3.11 [opposite] A photograph of Schouwbergplein by West 8 illustrates the adaptability of the public square. Minimal architectural interventions allow the space to remain flexible and open ended, while maximizing its potential to become a productive public space.

Fig. 3.12, 3.13, 3.14 [above] Photographs of the seventy foot long bench illustrate how a range of people choose to inhabit and reappropriate the seating structure.

ACTIVATING THE PERIPHERY

The term landscape no longer refers to prospects of pastoral innocence but rather invokes the functioning matrix of connective tissue that organizes not only objects and spaces but also the dynamic processes and events that move through them. This is landscape as active surface, structuring the conditions for new relationships and interactions among the things it supports.¹

As the observations and analysis of the Jane and Finch intersection have revealed, the suburban verge is a thriving public space. Understood as public territory, the suburban verge appears to be a no man's land yet attracts a wide range of uses and activities. Unlike traditional models of public space such as the plaza and the park, the suburban verge is narrow in dimension and is always located between the boundaries of public and private properties. Due to its unique edge condition and ambiguous qualities it has become a desirable location for a variety of informal public acts. As a result the suburban verge has evolved into an essential space for operating within the suburban public realm—an alternative public space.

In light of this discovery, this thesis presents a conceptual design intervention that draws upon and reacts to the existing social vernacular of the site. Deliberately subtle, the design enriches one's experience of the everyday as it unfolds the suburban verge's unrealized potential to become an active public space.

In the previous section, *Precedents: Designs on Public Space*, the discussion emphasized a need for public space designs that are adaptable, multifunctional and informal. In keeping with this argument the design intervention for the Jane and Finch site is based upon a kit of infrastructural components. These elements resemble conventional infrastructure typologies including; lighting fixtures, seating units, landscape treatments and a paving

1-Alex Wall, "Programming the Urban Surface," in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, ed. James Corner. 1999, 233.

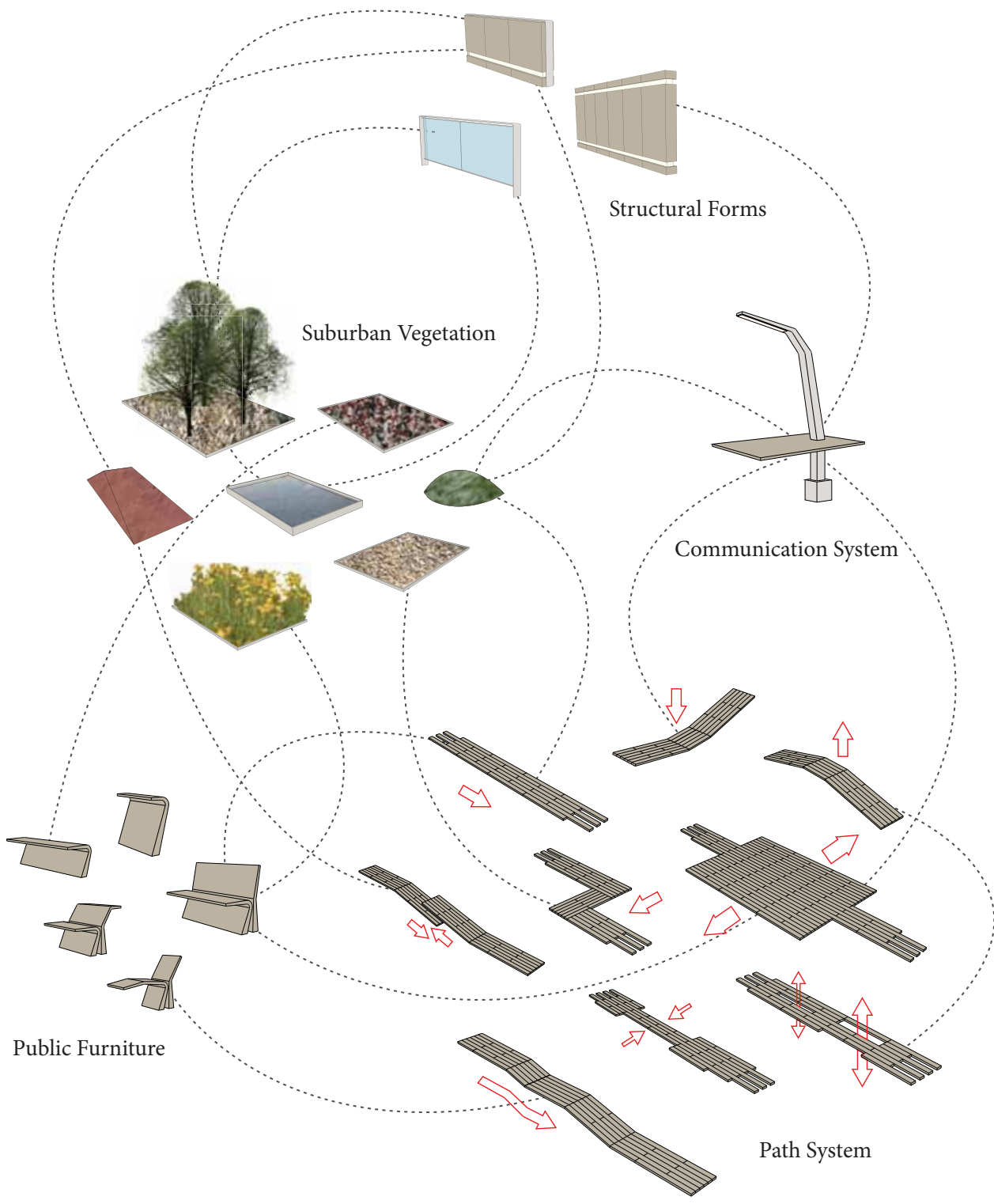
system. The decision to use a tool kit rather than a fixed program allows an infinite number of possible arrangements and lends itself to multiple interpretations. This method of design creates a variety of inhabitable forms yet does not define how they are to be used or reappropriated. Instead it empowers the end users to define and redefine the functions according to their manifold needs.

This proposal is not meant as an exercise in “beautification”. It seeks out informal everyday practices as an approach to expanding the social capacity of the suburban verge. The new infrastructure creates new places to linger, congregate and interact thereby increasing the frequency and intensity of social encounters within and adjacent to the site. The design also introduces a new paving system and additional landscape treatments that require little maintenance and minimize the ecological footprint of the suburban verge.

This thesis recalibrates a marginal public territory. It draws upon the emergent conditions of the site to enrich the experience of the suburban public realm and elevates the value of everyday practices as a critical design resource.



Fig. 3.15 [above] A rendering imagines what the suburban verge might look like if a few picnic tables were installed. Simple and inexpensive, it is very easy to imagine how people might be attracted to the site to linger, eat their lunch or set-up informal market space.



THE TOOLKIT

The Path System

The path system broadens the limited performance of the generic concrete sidewalk. Adaptable in form, the path system lends itself to a variety of possible installations and uses. While the traditional sidewalk maintains a consistent and predictable width, this new system accommodates for changes in elevation and responds to both the new vegetation and existing social practices.

In addition to the flexibility of installation, the path system is also sensitive to seasonal changes. Fitted with in-ground heating, the path system collects excess heat loss from the Jane - Finch Mall to heat its pathways. The heating system melts ice and snow and provides a consistent walking surface throughout the year, thereby reducing the suburban verge's dependence on City services and winter maintenance.

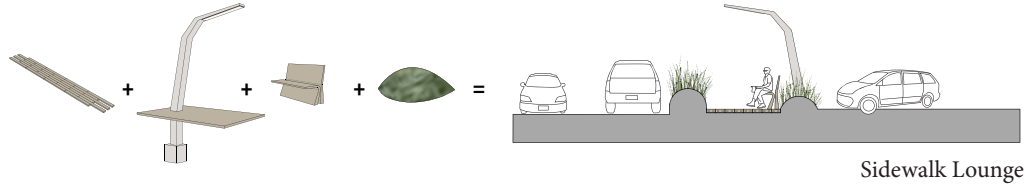
Structural Forms and Public Furniture

The seating and wall systems can be used individually or in combination to construct inhabitable forms such as bus shelters, platforms, kiosks, tunnels, walls and various seating components. Minimal in design, these elements encourage their users to interpret and define the functions of their forms. What may be used as a bus shelter during rush hour could easily become an informal performance space, a market stall or hang-out spot at other times of the day and night.

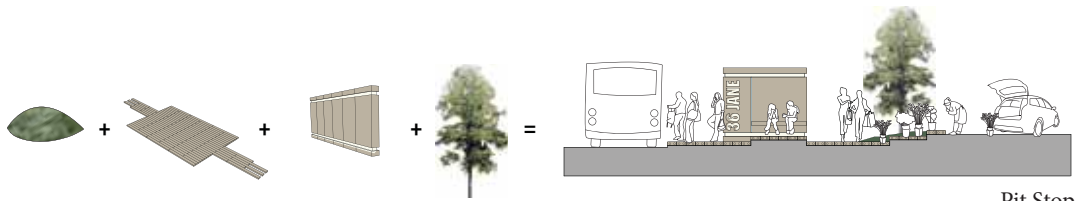
Suburban Vegetation

The kit of landscape treatments includes, but is not limited to, the items depicted in the companion illustration. The selection of indigenous meadow flowers and grasses has been chosen according to their maintenance requirements and blooming seasons. These plants, including False Blue Indigo, Lanceleaf Coreopsis, various Milkweed breeds and Lavender Hyssop, create

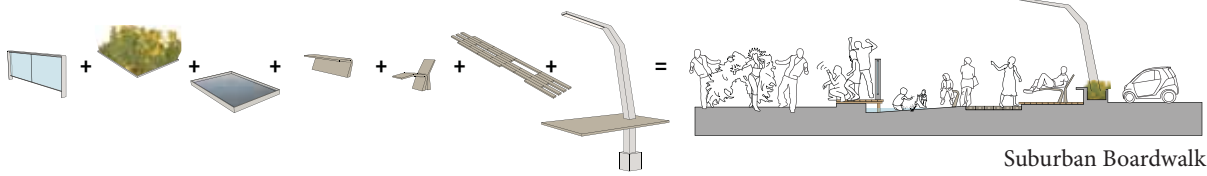
Fig. 3.16 [opposite] A diagram of the five systems includes: the Path System, the Structural Forms and Public Furniture, Suburban Vegetation and the Communication System. This diagram illustrates some of the basic components of the tool kit that are implemented in the design. The tool kit is not meant as a fixed selection of items: rather it is intended as a flexible, adaptable system. An infinite number of combinations will produce a multiplicity of possible arrangements that may be used to activate and amplify the social conditions of the suburban verge.



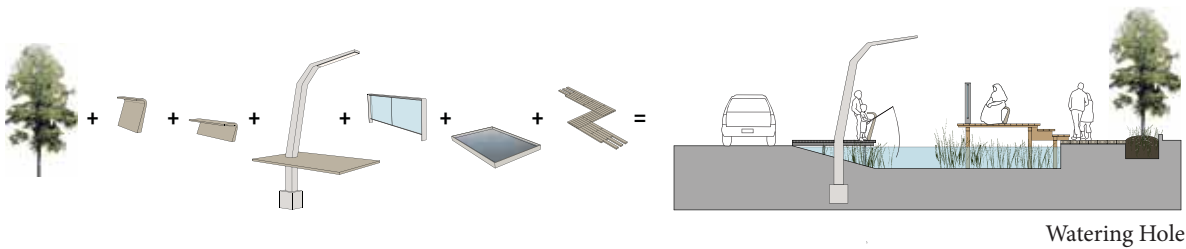
Sidewalk Lounge



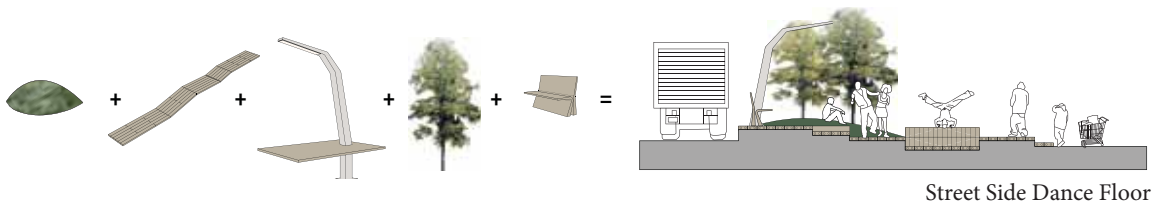
Pit Stop



Suburban Boardwalk



Watering Hole



Street Side Dance Floor

an assortment of seasonal blooms and floral fragrances that appeal to the senses while nurturing the local ecosystem. These native plants also help to create visual thresholds, while earth berms and gardening beds provide privacy from the adjacent street traffic. Trees are also included in the kit, as they provide valuable shade and help to demarcate the public territory.

The eco-lawn, composed of thirteen various grasses, is a slow-growing, low-maintenance grass. Planted in combination with a series of cylindrical piles the grass is reinforced against erosion due to occasional crowds, parked cars and pedestrian traffic.

The stormwater management system has a significant impact on the site. The ponds store and recycle rainwater collected from the Jane and Finch Mall parking lot. While the ponds relieve pressure on the City sewage system, the stormwater also provides a cost-effective water source for the suburban verge's new vegetation. Through the use of an underground irrigation system, the recycled water supply drastically reduces summer watering costs and eliminates the need for routine maintenance, minimizing the suburban verge's dependence on City funding and services.

Communication System

The hydro poles and utility lines commonly found in the suburban verge are here re-located to an underground plenum while existing lighting is replaced with a new communication system. Powered by photovoltaic panels located on the top of each fixture, the lighting system is self-regulating and seasonally adaptive. As the sun retreats, the solar fixtures adjust to provide adequate light levels.

At selected locations the lighting fixtures are also equipped with power and sound connections. This feature could be useful for summer carnivals and festivities, outdoor movie theatres, market stalls and food booths.

Fig. 3.17 [opposite] This diagram depicts ways in which the tool kit may be deployed onto the suburban verge.

Sidewalk Lounge is the most basic intervention, utilizing a seating unit and grass berms to create a visual buffer from the adjacent traffic. This division of zones also creates a physical barrier between street, walkway and parking lot, reclaiming the public territory as an active pedestrian zone.

Pit Stop builds upon the existing bus stop as a central gathering point. The intervention constructs an outdoor amphitheatre around the bus shelter, making it an ideal performance space.

Suburban Boardwalk is a more complex intervention which is developed around a shallow wading pool. Cutting into the land, this intervention creates a series of transition spaces which help to demarcate the pedestrian zone and amplify the experience of the suburban verge.

Watering Hole splits the walkway into a series of levels which frame the waste-water collection pond. The elevated walkway gives the pedestrian priority over the adjacent properties and reclaims the pedestrian territory.

Street Side Dance Floor is constructed out of a series of folding path systems which rise, and sink above the ground plane, creating conversation pits and mini platforms that would be conducive to a variety of social activities.

As the suburban verge is already a thriving public space, even the most basic of interventions, like the *Sidewalk Lounge* would be successful social interventions. Additional seating units and inhabitable forms will further enrich the socio-spatial experience of the suburban verge by creating new places to linger and interact. As the suburban verge continues to evolve, these interventions will further the social experience of the suburban public realm.

THE DESIGN FRAMEWOK

The overarching strategy for the design builds upon existing social activities already prevalent within the Jane and Finch site. This system establishes a framework for social and environmental fluidity. The design intervention does not create new public space: rather it enriches an existing one, calling attention to the latent conditions of the suburban verge as a catalyst for social engagement.

In a series of small-scale interventions, the design proposal subtly alters the terrain, amplifying the existing conditions with new infrastructure, seating components and a path system. Fragmented yet connected, these insertions treat the suburban verge with a singular language that clearly defines the space as a public territory. Though the forms resemble conventional typologies, they suggest a multiplicity of potential uses and attract a diverse range of users. This ambiguity empowers the users to become active participants on the stage of life, transforming, deciding and reinterpreting the scene to meet their particular needs.

The suburban verge is a liminal public space and a natural collector. In its everyday existence, the suburban verge is a place people use to wait for a bus or streetlight, or cross over on their way to the mall. It is a grey space, unclear in its value or ownership, yet often utilized for unexpected social activities. This proposal sheds light on a neglected suburban condition and uncovers a unique social vernacular that must be preserved.

Legend

- A-Jane-Finch Mall
- B-Semi-Detached Homes
- C-2970 Jane St. Apartment
- D-Norfinch Shopping Centre
- E-Petro Canada Gas Station
- F-Palisade Apartments

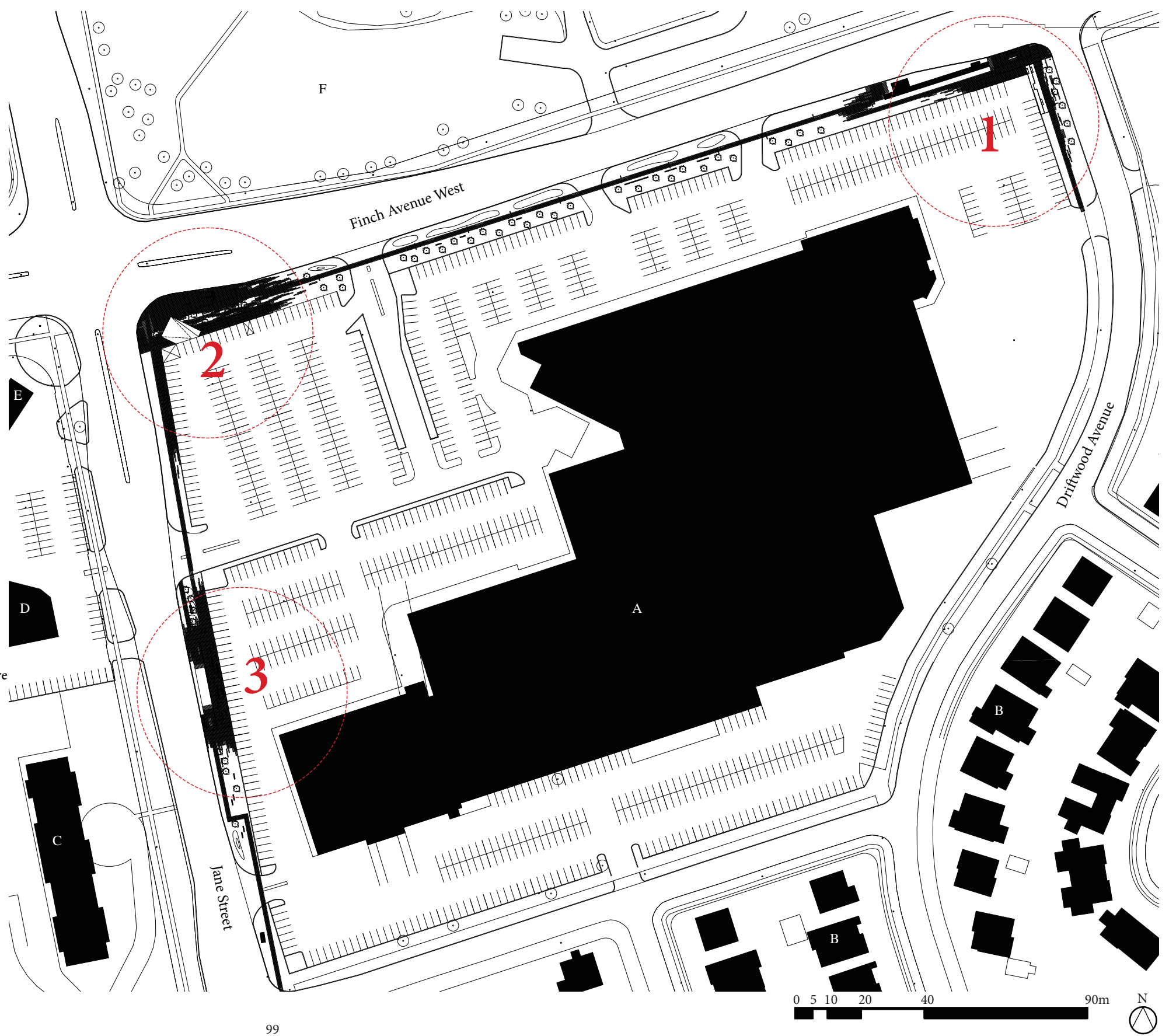


Fig 3.18 Site Plan



Fig. 3.19 Site 1, Driftwood Ave. and Finch Ave. West intersection, looking west



Fig. 3.20 Site 2, Jane St. and Finch Ave. West intersection, looking southwest



Fig. 3.21 Site 3, Jane Street, looking south along

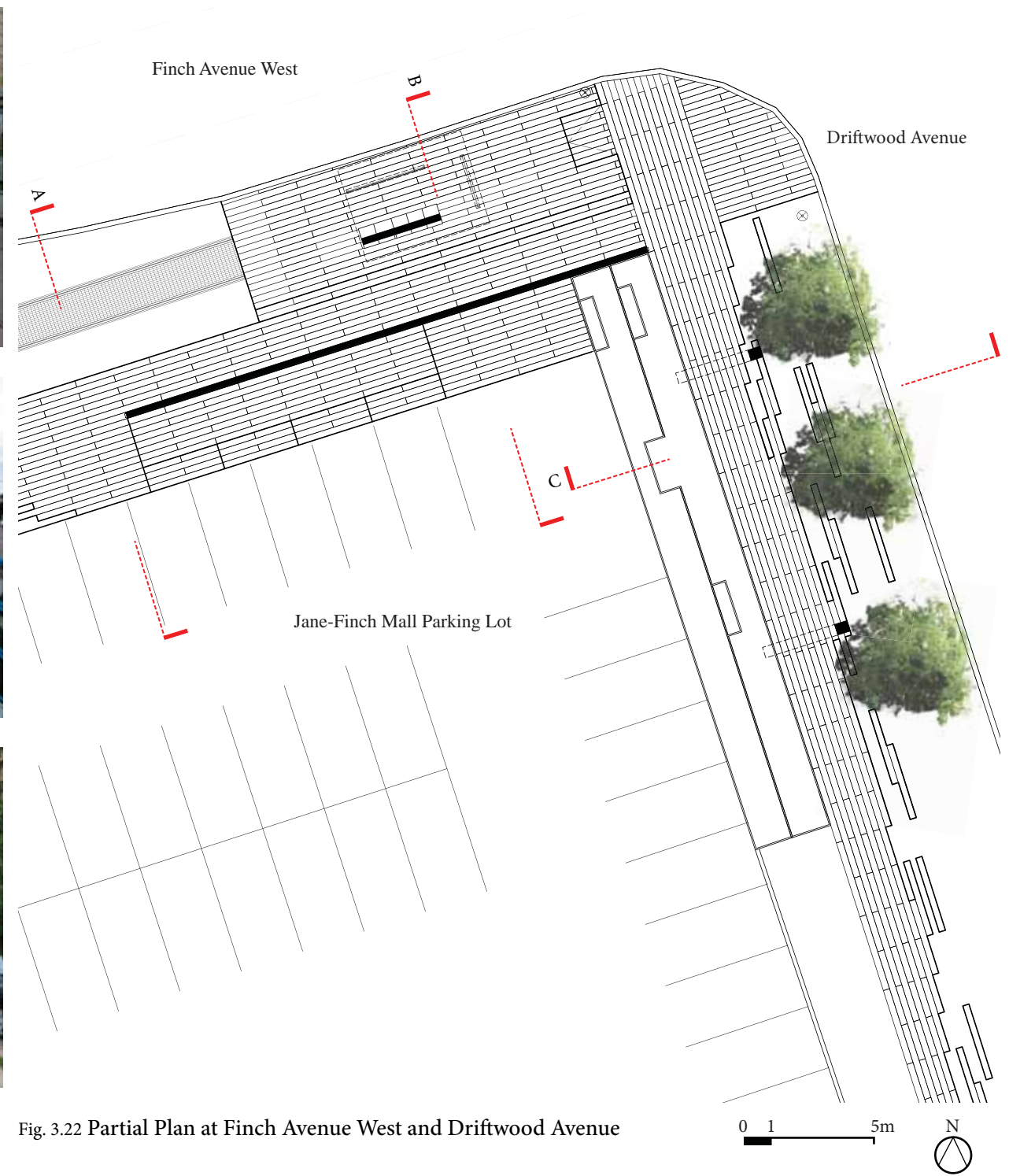
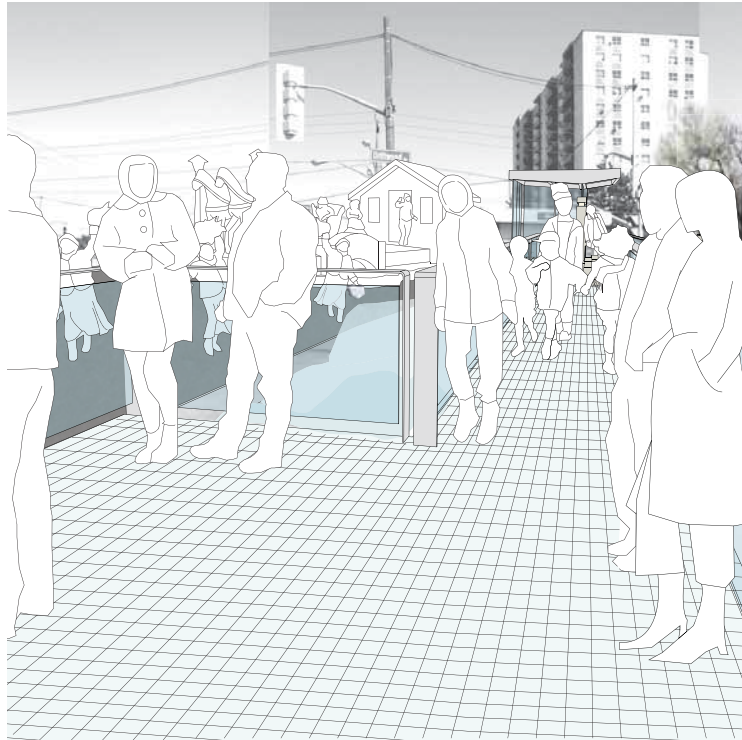


Fig. 3.22 Partial Plan at Finch Avenue West and Driftwood Avenue



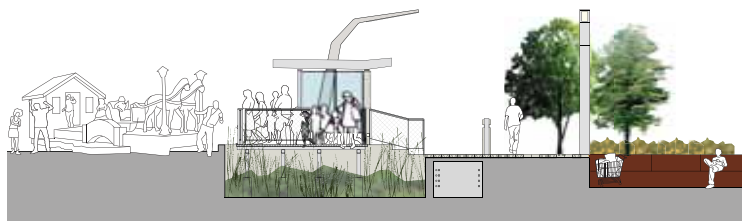
Garden Path



Outdoor Movie Theatre

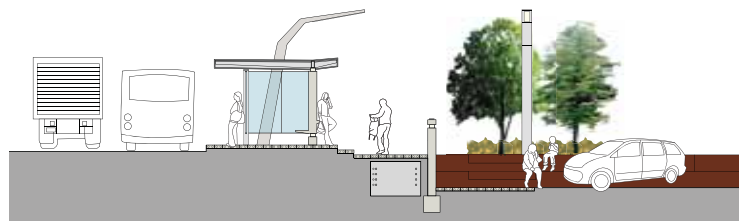


Lunch Pit



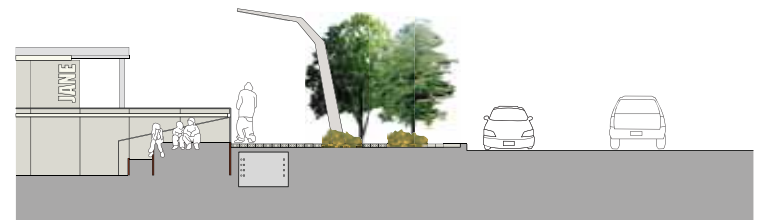
Section A

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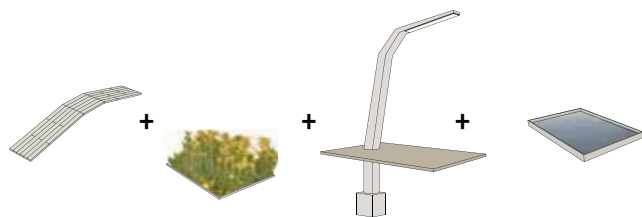
Section B

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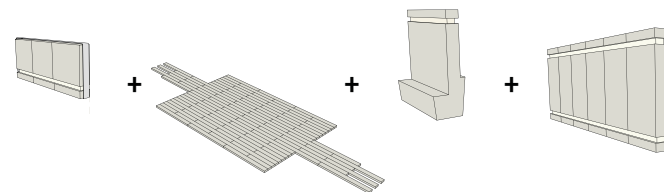


Section C

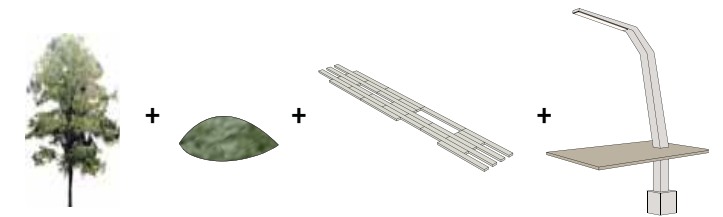
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Tool Kit A
Fig. 3.23



Tool Kit B
Fig. 3.24



Tool Kit C
Fig. 3.25

ACTIVATING THE PERIPHERY - SITE ONE

This site is located along the northeast section of the parking lot in close proximity to the McDonald's and KFC restaurants. Customers frequently occupy this site as a place to eat their take-out meals. City workers and transport truck drivers frequently gather here have lunch together, parking their trucks against the edge of the lot as they stand around, conversing and eating their burgers. Others choose to eat alone in their parked cars, reading a newspaper or listening to the radio.

The informal social patterns that occupy this site tend to happen at meal times, between the hours of 8:00am and 6:30pm. The design intervention intends to extend the social hours of the site by providing a variety of seating elements that encourage people to lounge or congregate in the suburban verge outside of the existing timeframe. Sunken below the street level, the existing site already forms a gathering space. Through the arrangement of new infrastructure the intervention takes advantage of the site's existing physical and social conditions creating an informal conversation pit. With a series of flat surfaces, including railings and dividers, new events that require a background or a screen can now occur.

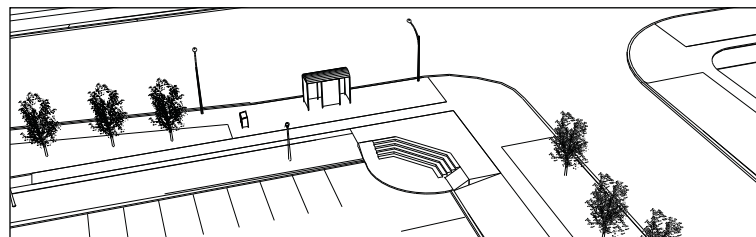


Fig. 3.26 Existing Site 1

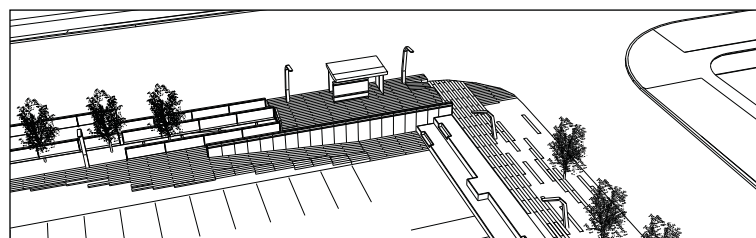


Fig. 3.27 Proposed Site 1

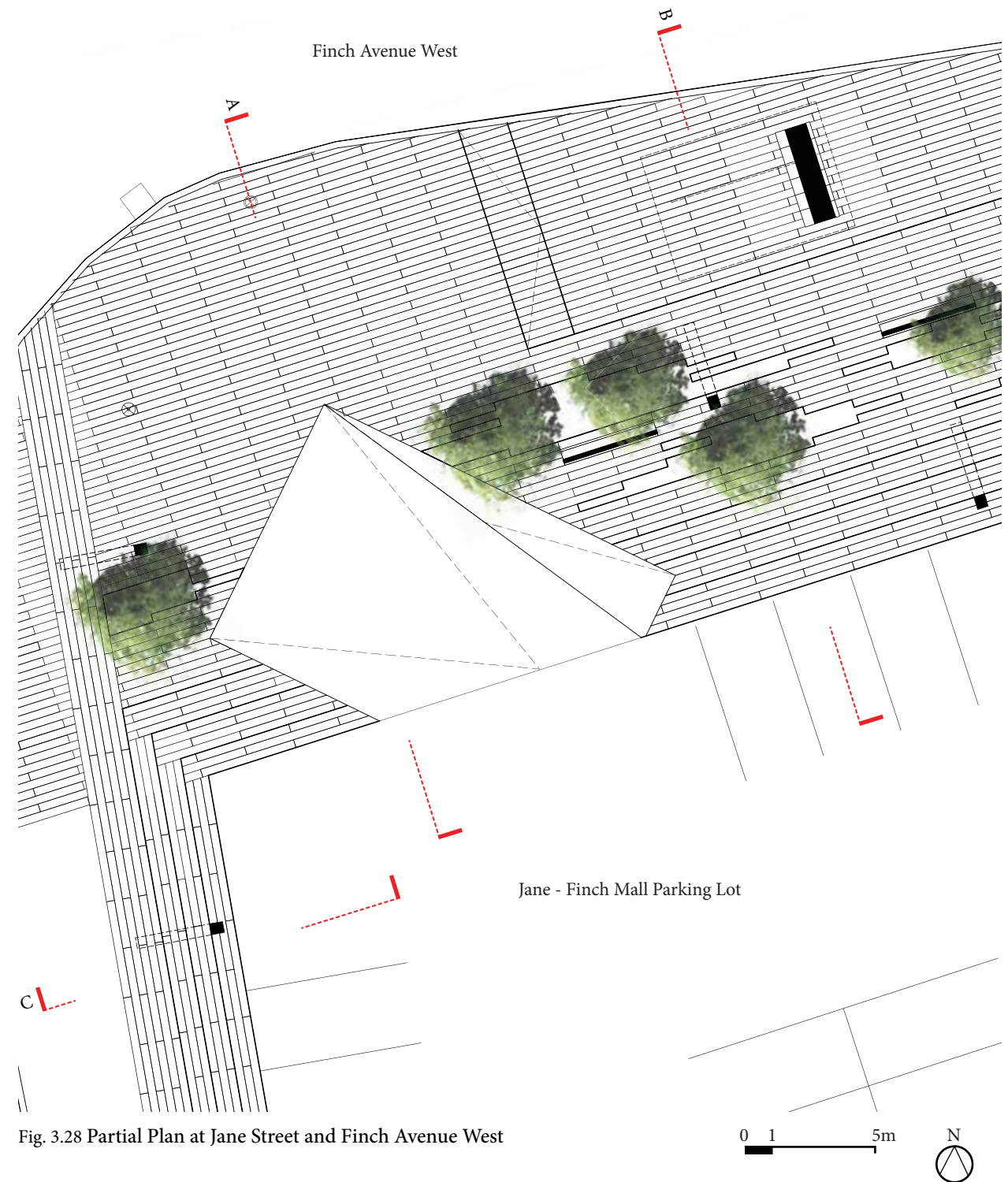


Fig. 3.28 Partial Plan at Jane Street and Finch Avenue West



Morning Commuters



Outdoor Music Performance

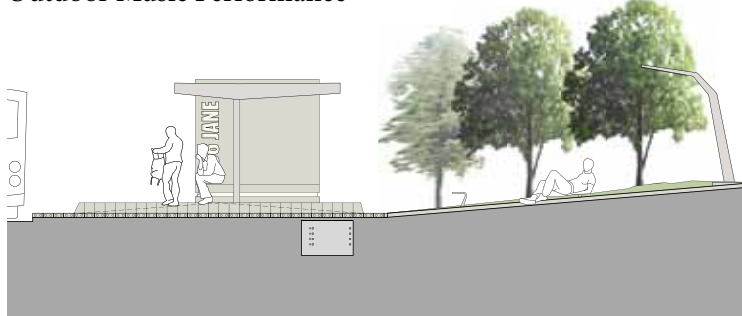


Caribana Festival



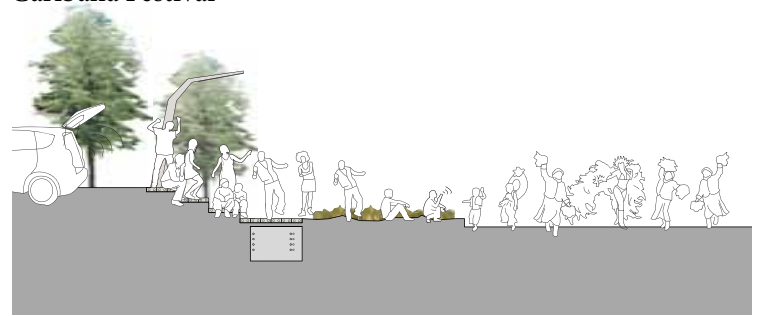
Section A

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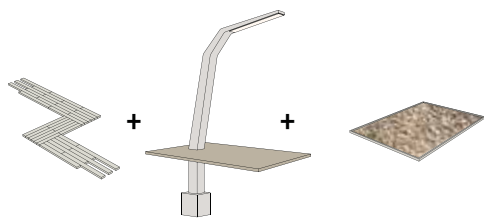
Section B

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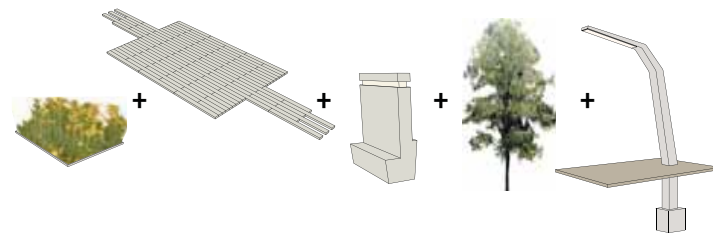


Section C

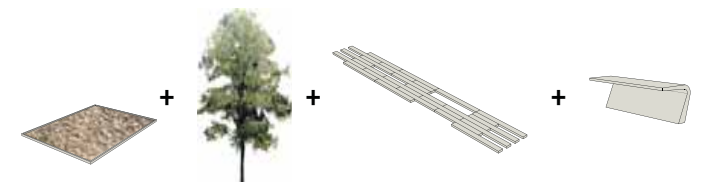
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Tool Kit A
Fig. 3.29



Tool Kit B
Fig. 3.30



Tool Kit C
Fig. 3.31

ACTIVATING THE PERIPHERY - SITE TWO

This site was selected for its prime location at the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West, where commuters, shoppers and pedestrians intersect as they travel to the mall or bus stop. A standard stop for TTC drivers to switch shifts, it is also an important connection to the Spadina subway line, bringing a constant flow of people in and out of the neighbourhood. As the maps in Chapter 2 document this corner is also a popular venue for large formal events, including the Hispanic Day Parade, the summer carnival and the spring garden centre.

The design intervention at this site focuses on the existing social patterns, seeking ways to enhance the everyday. In response to the observed social patterns, the proposal constructs an outdoor amphitheatre along the edge of the parking lot. Centred on the bus stop, which is slightly elevated, this space becomes a natural location for performances, protests and crowds. The stairs, which double as seating, create a transitional space between the parking lot and the sidewalk that defines—but does not restrict—the respective boundaries. For summer carnivals, flag sales and the spring flower centre, the suburban verge will become a natural extension of the parking lot, expanding the social potential of the site and undoubtedly attracting new events and festivals.

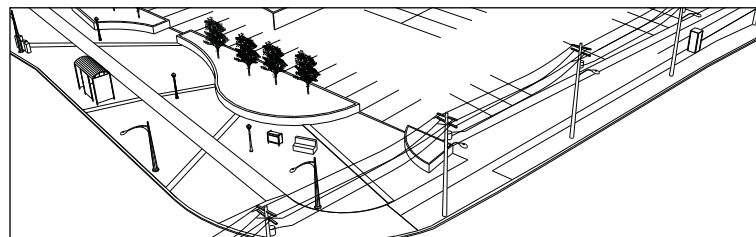


Fig. 3.32 Existing Site 2

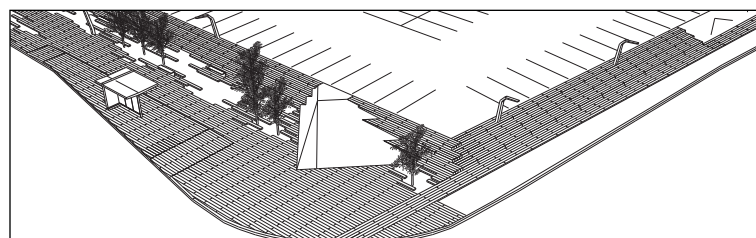


Fig. 3.33 Proposed Site 2

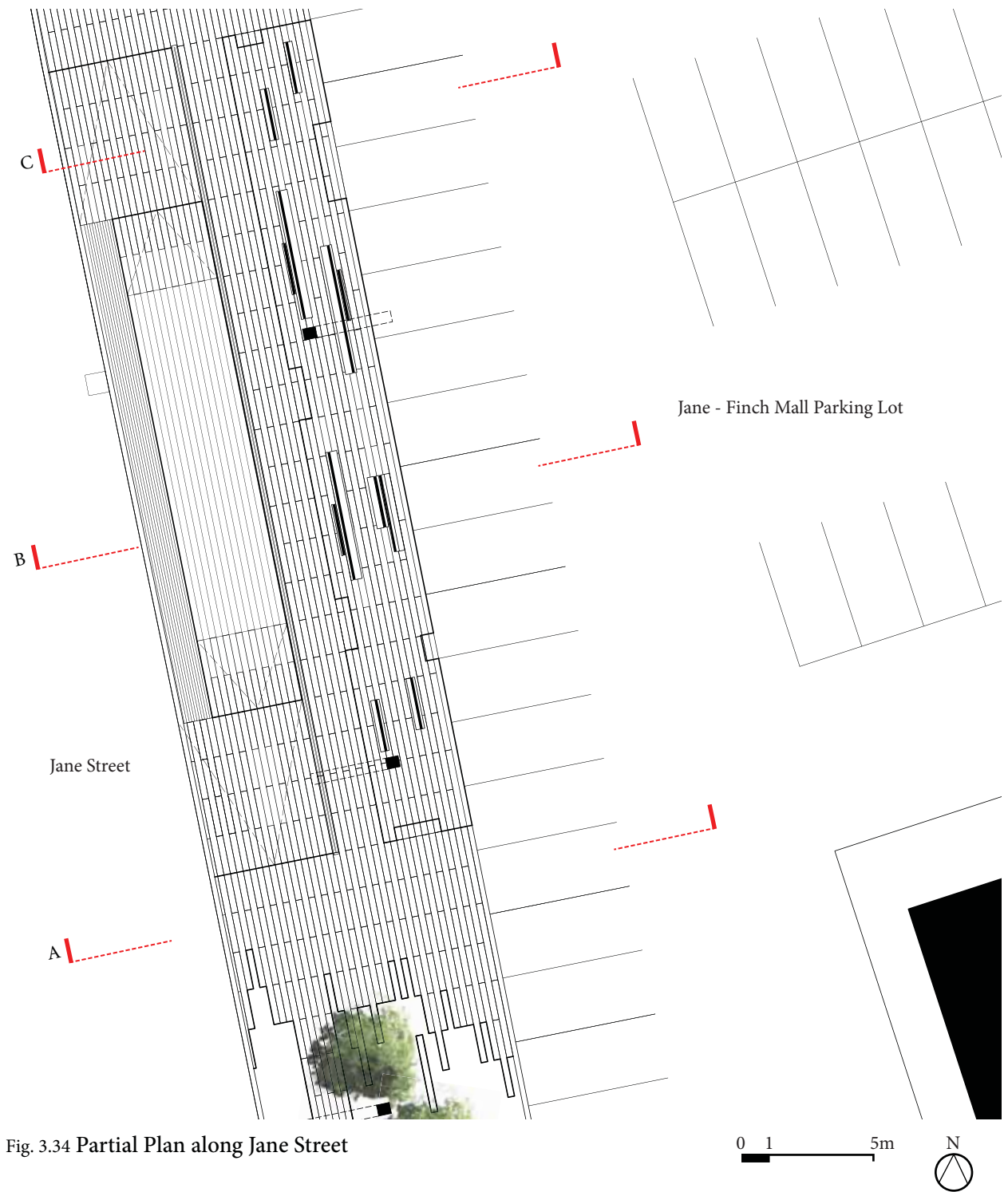
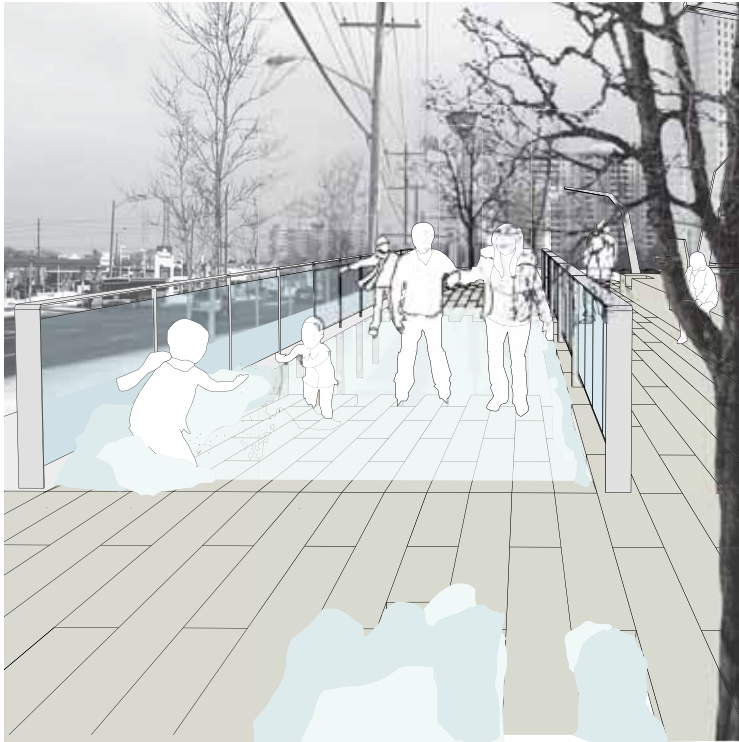


Fig. 3.34 Partial Plan along Jane Street



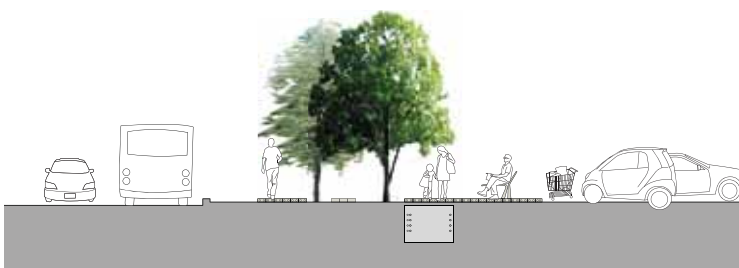
Winter Skatepark



Sundeck

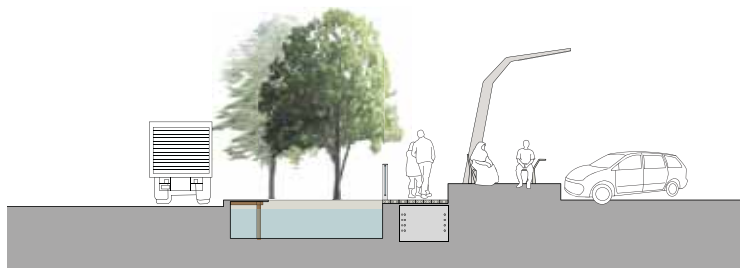


After hours Basketball



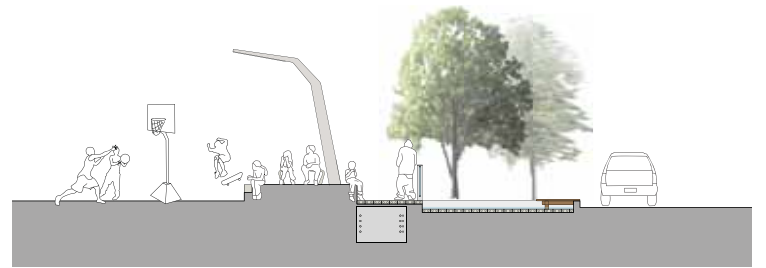
Section A

0 1 5m



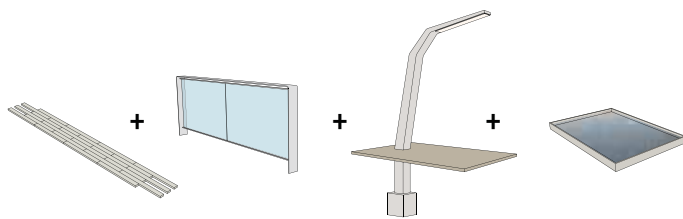
Section B

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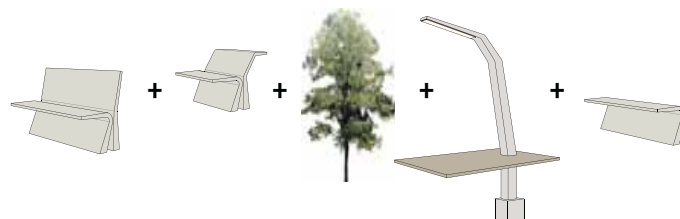


Section C

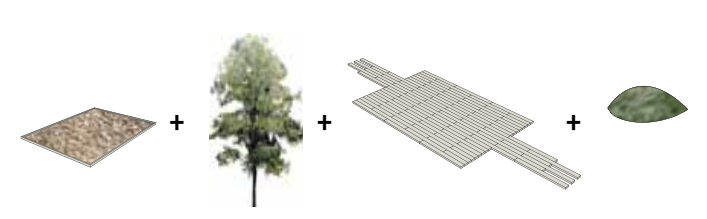
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Tool Kit A
Fig. 3.35



Tool Kit B
Fig. 3.36



Tool Kit C
Fig. 3.37

ACTIVATING THE PERIPHERY - SITE THREE

This site was selected because of its location parallel to Jane Street. Along the suburban verge, desired paths have been worn into the grass where people cut across the land to access the mall. Currently the site is not able to sustain activity: it is merely a thoroughfare. However, as it is adjacent to the taxi queue and main mall entrance, it experiences large volumes of foot traffic.

The intervention seeks to slow and capture the site's users by creating a series of thresholds and leisure spaces, which would encourage people to linger. A good place to attract a crowd, this site could become an informal market space, extending the Sunday Market beyond the limits of the Jane - Finch Mall, hold a weekend basketball tournament or perhaps watch the Hispanic Day parade.

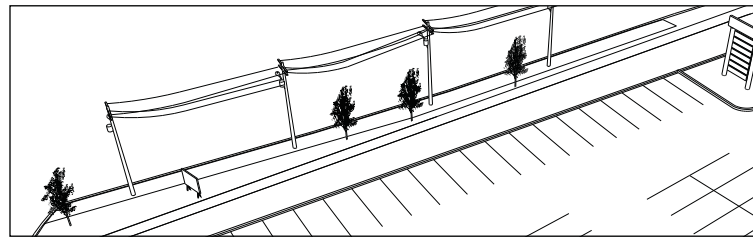


Fig. 3.38 Existing Site 3

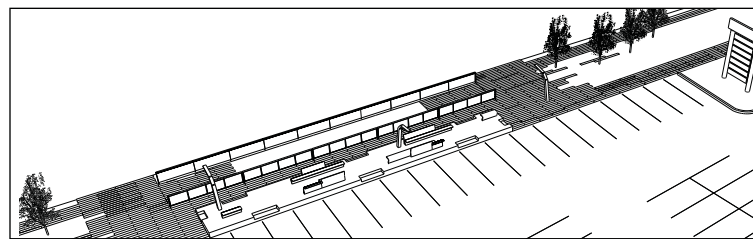


Fig. 3.39 Proposed Site 3

POTENTIAL FUTURES

The evidence presented in this thesis highlights the potential of the suburban verge as an active public space. The creative adaptations and reappropriations of this neglected territory accommodate a range of uses and activities that stimulate social interaction. Whether it is through the use of the bus shelter, the sidewalk, or other infrastructure, the limitless reinvention of this banal strip of land invites serious reconsideration.

Architects rarely address the ugly and gritty conditions of the suburban public realm, instead favouring manicured urban sites. These everyday parts of the city are thought of as unavoidable side effects of suburban sprawl; unappealing consequences of failed planning agendas. Yet everyday spaces are the foundation from which all other aspects of life are formed. They are the stage upon which life unfolds.

In the absence of traditional public space, the residents of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood have sought alternative arrangements. The suburban verge is the place where they wait for the bus, meet a friend or cross the street. A common place to linger for a short period of time, the suburban verge is a vital component of the suburban public realm and is intricately connected to everyday life. These emergent social practices test the limited performance of the suburban verge turning it into a thriving public space. In this new system, participants actively imagine new ways of inhabiting this territory and subsequently alter the socio-spatial experience of the suburban public realm.

The informal social behaviours reflect the unique political, cultural, economic and environmental climate of the Jane and Finch community. These patterns are invaluable resources for understanding the current circumstances and future outcomes of the neighbourhood. Margaret Crawford mirrored this position when she stated, “The intersections between an individual or defined group and the rest of the city are everyday space—the site of multiple social and economic transactions, where multiple experiences accumulate in a single location. These places where differences collide or interact are the most potent sites for everyday urbanism.”¹

1-Crawford, Margaret. *Everyday Urbanism*. 1999, 11.

This thesis calls attention to the unrealized potential of the suburban verge. It does not set out to create new public space; rather, it draws upon existing social patterns in order to amplify the existing conditions of the suburban public realm. Subtle inflections in the existing terrain—deliberately modest in form and operation—expand the social and ecological capacity of the suburban verge demonstrating its ability to generate dynamic public space.

There are two main methods for approaching this site. The first strategy transforms the suburban verge into an infill project, which replicates the traditional main street. Examples of this approach include the Regent Park Revitalization, Mayor's Tower Renewal and La Rambla in Barcelona. Like these examples, the edges would transform overtime into a suburban main street, which would work to heal and reconnect the suburban verge to the built fabric that frames it.

The second approach acts to intentionally destabilize the existing conditions of the suburban verge in order to alert people to its potential as a catalyst for fostering an active public realm. Examples that draw comparison to this condition include the freestanding park pavilion set in the landscape, or the typical beach condition where a continuous boardwalk is occasionally punctured by an ice cream bar or a lemonade stand. With this strategy the suburban verge would always remain as an edge condition, never fully reconciled with the adjacent properties and never forming a traditional main street, yet renewing interest in a neglected public space.

The suburban verge is able to respond to both infill development and asphalt desert. Its strength comes from its ambiguity. If the Mayor's Tower Renewal does eventually redevelop the residential towers then the system can adapt to suit or act as a test pilot for measuring the neighbourhood's potential. If the neighbourhood is never redeveloped, the project still acts as an instigator and stands to enrich the public realm.



Fig. 4.1 [*above*] The current conditions of the suburban verge along Finch Avenue West.



As a seed of intensity one begins to wonder how this small-scale intervention might instigate further redevelopment, what the site might look like in 5, 10 or 20 years and how the rethinking of an underutilized public territory stands to impact the future of Toronto's suburban neighbourhoods.

The form and shape of the Jane and Finch neighbourhood will continue to transform and evolve over time. As Joel Garreau writes in his book *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, Venice was not formed in a night. In discussing the possible future of suburbia, Garreau reminds the reader that:

*[Venice] was full of land speculators and developers. The merchants' primary concern was the flow of goods, of traffic. Those who now romanticize Venice collapse a thousand years of history. Venice is a monument to a dynamic process, not to great urban planning.*²

This thesis calls attention to the potential implications of a small-scale design intervention and the everyday practices that have informed it. Architecture must not ignore the diverse range of living practices and lifestyles that shape, form and transform the everyday.

Fig. 4.2 [*opposite*] What does the future hold for the suburban verge?

2-Garreau, Joel. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. 1992, 10.

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