

**INTO THE EXISTING:  
A MULTIVALENT PROGRAMMATIC, ARCHITECTURAL AND  
URBAN APPROACH TO DEVELOPING  
A RENEWAL SCHEME FOR THE SMALL DOWNTOWN**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Consider the downtown of any smaller urban centre – typically in some state of decline/stagnation. In response, policies speak to general programmatic, planning and urban ideals, but do not account for the complexities that enable some downtowns to function and others not.

This thesis thus frames an approach to urban renewal that begins to address such complexities. The downtown under study is located in Fort William, one of two historic cores in Thunder Bay, Ontario. It reflects a historically/architecturally significant neighbourhood, part of the civic core, but suffers from chronic vacancies.

Working within a conceptual framework based on the discourse of adaptive reuse, programmatic gaps are identified, then tested within architectural solutions encompassing new form intercepting old. These responses are intended to then strengthen surrounding urban relationships.

This thesis aims to move away from the notion of ‘one solution.’ Instead, overlapped transformative strategies meaningfully lead the downtown through repurposing its identity.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Adapting the Existing

The problem with 'stagnation' permeating the downtown relates directly to the conflict of how to approach existing built form. The mentality surrounding new construction is a preference for 'newness.' Moreover, architecture is often associated with the ideal of permanence - but in reality "a 'building' is always building and rebuilding," never static (Brand 1995, 2). More importantly, buildings typically do not adapt well:

They're designed not to adapt; also budgeted and financed not to, constructed not to, even administered not to, maintained not to, regulated and taxed not to even remodeled not to. But all buildings...adapt anyway, however poorly.... (Brand 1995, 2)

More specifically, buildings of heritage value tend to become "redolent with historical context," and are "made into museums...Deliberately kept the same through detailed preservation" (Bloszies 2012, 7). For any subsequent intervention or adaptation, the emphasis is on new work "to blend in with the old in order to avoid controversy" (11). In fact, the *Canadian Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places* (2010) calls for any "new work [to be] physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic place" (23). This approach to addressing existing form subsequently can limit experimentation and create conflicts in the transition of a building to suit different or new needs. In addition, 'touching' or altering a historic structure can often be met with controversy and disapproval. Significant alterations immediately are viewed as radical, even 'disrespectful.' Despite the

criticism associated with the ROM in Toronto,

The Crystal is not meant to take a cue from something, it is meant to be an equal conversation between two buildings and two ideas. It is saying, 'We both have great ideas and we are going to like this.' (Goodfellow 2010, 23-4)

Consequently, in face of such obstacles and limitations (including financial and approvals), the choice is often between preserving and restoring or allowing a building to transition into disuse. Yet Architect Carlo Scarpa provides an interesting alternative to working with existing buildings all the while moving forward in developing and evolving the built form: "His dialogue is never with the past, but with the presence of the past in the present..." (Olsberg 1999, 15). Regarding the Museo di Castelvecchio,



Castelvecchio Museum, Verona, Italy, 1956-64 ("History of Art and Architecture, 2014)

Rather than viewing restoration as the opposite of renovation, Scarpa embarked on an intriguing strategy of demolition, change and modification. He layered history, allowing each historical movement to come alive, and take its place next to the others. Essentially functioning as a curator .... setting up a dialogue between old and new, provoking the older elements into conversation with wholly invented new forms, surfaces, textures and motifs. (Ranalli 1999, 70)



Conventional brick building, Victoria Avenue thesis site

For other buildings, (including many located along the block under consideration in this thesis), the buildings are simply old and of simple construction. Thus, as they are not of any significant architectural or historical value, there is no impetus for their improvement - they are stagnant. However for a city and its downtown to evolve, they need to be in a constant flux of change and transformation. Even 'banal' buildings benefit from periodic activation and enlivening. Such work unfortunately cannot compete with the ease of building new - and perhaps the general lack of imagination in

re-inventing the mundane into exciting new forms/uses. However, there lies beauty in re-framing how solid, functional structures can be interpreted.



Banca Popolare di Verona,  
1997, photograph by Guido  
Guidi (Ranalli 1999)

In many ways, combining old with new becomes a compositional challenge in a give-and-take relationship between the existing and introduced forms. On Scarpa's Banca Popolare di Verona in Spain, "the new building is an extension of the old one" (Ranalli 1999, 109). Both new and old construction face the same architectural issues but respond with different answers. In embracing a constant fusion between old and new, opportunities arise to be playful:

The free-standing add-on is an impressive, scaled down copy of the old facade. As such, the two shells vary slightly, causing delightful confusion as to why a window is slightly lower or slightly smaller than its counterpart. – Reuse of pig sty to show room by Naumann Architektur (Klanten 2009, 101)

Furthermore, when placing new architecture into context, the changes made today may seem 'out of place' but will eventually become ingrained into the site through the patina of time. Consequently, the architect can "leave conspicuous and characteristic evidence of his own era within the historic fabric" (Olsberg 1999, 14).

Thus, a fundamental component of this thesis is to examine the changing role of existing architecture in revitalizing the downtown. Joe Lobko, of du Toit Allsopp Hillier and du Toit Architects Ltd. observes that "more than 50 per cent of our construction economy is now related to the renovation or the adaptive reuse of existing buildings" while "more than 98 per cent of our buildings today are existing structures..." (Young 2012).

## The Existing Downtown Site

### Contextual Background

In Thunder Bay, my generation has seen whole neighbourhoods bulldozed in the name of progress (South Cumberland Street), other areas slide into neglect (Simpson Street, Victoria Street, McKellar Park), and historic buildings replaced by gaping holes (Cornwall Avenue School). In many cases these changes have happened with relatively little consultation, or outcry. Decades later we know we are missing something, but we don't quite know what. (Saj 2009, 85)

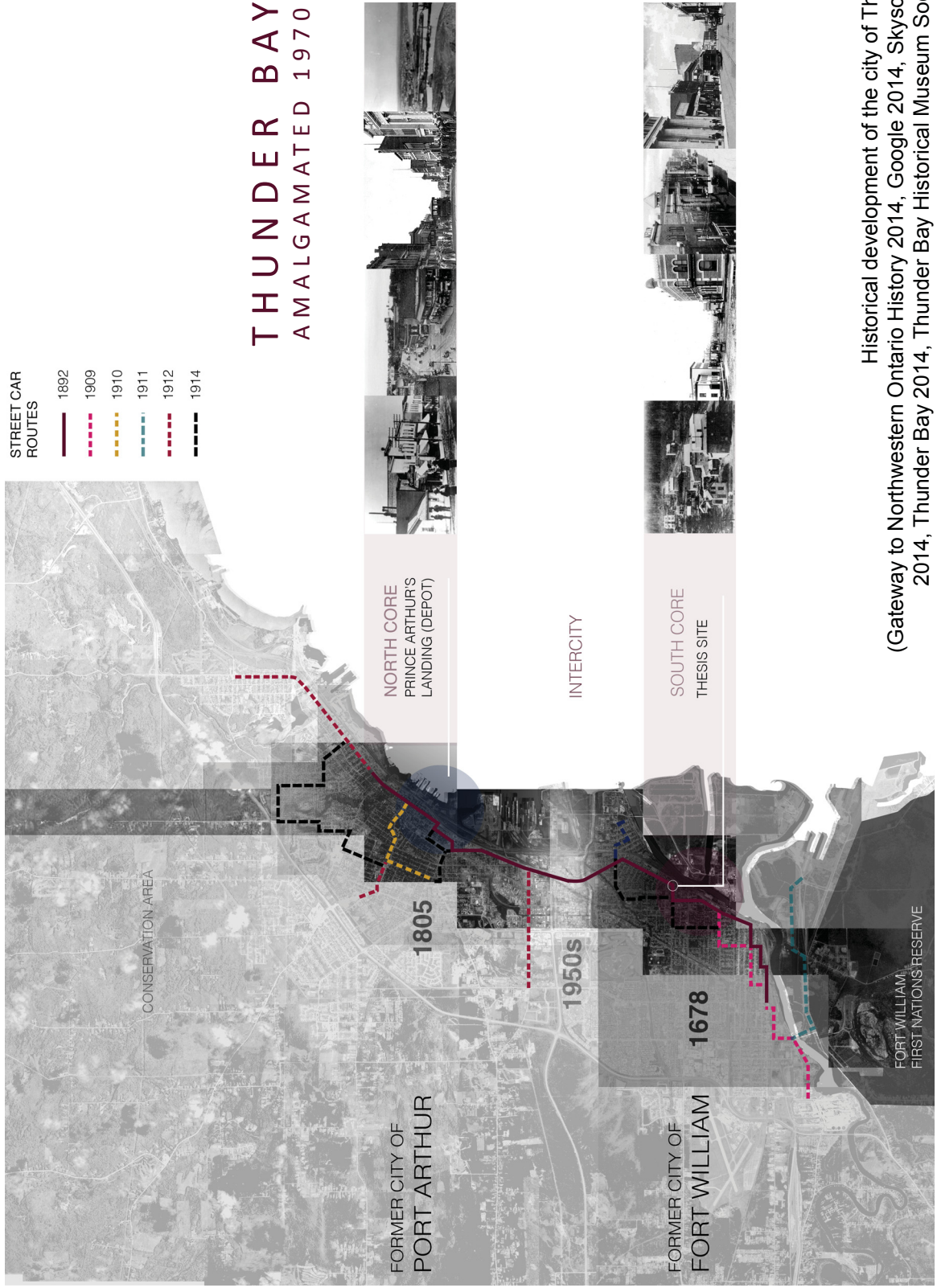
The site under study is located in the city of Thunder Bay, in the Province of Ontario. The City has a population of approximately 125,1000 people (Statistics Canada 2014). It is considered to be the largest metropolitan area in Northwestern Ontario but is also situated relatively remote from other municipalities of similar or larger size. The City is surrounded by Lake Superior to the east, the Nor'wester Mountains to the south and west, and natural landscape/conservation area to the north. The remainder encompasses rural land and the boreal forest (City of Thunder Bay 2005).

### *History*

Thunder Bay has long struggled with notions of developing one overall identity. It only recently amalgamated (1970), joining the former cities of Fort William (to the south) and Port Arthur (to the north) with the geographic townships of Neebing and McIntyre (City of Thunder Bay 2014). Residents of the city continue to identify with these former areas.

Fort William emerged as early as 1678, developing at the junction between Lake Superior and Kaministiquia





Historical development of the city of Thunder Bay  
(Gateway to Northwestern Ontario History 2014, Google 2014, SkyscraperPage 2014, Thunder Bay 2014, Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society 2013)

River to become a hub for Canadian fur trade. Port Arthur later developed further north, its origins dating back to 'the Depot' that was built in 1805 for ships landing along Lake Superior. By 1867, following Canada's formation, and instigating rivalry with Fort William, the Depot became the starting point for the road headed west. It was renamed Prince Arthur's Landing, developing into Port Arthur.

Particularly in Fort William, development patterns were largely influenced by the construction of the trans-continental railway and locations of the CPR station and street rail system connecting to Port Arthur (City of Thunder Bay 2005). The eventual relocation of grain elevators away from Kaministiquia River and removal of streetcar lines by 1947 largely impacted employment, mobility and consequently the 'vitality' for the South Core.

Industry today has evolved from fur trade and mining to graining/logging for resource-based pulp and paper. The city has also now acquired more diversified and knowledge-based industries including health, education, retail, manufacturing and construction (CMHC 2013).

### ***City Districts Today***

Today, both Fort William and Port Arthur have their own downtown cores, separated and out-competed by the Intercity Area of boxed retail that exists in-between. To help sustain both cores and in an effort to reduce competition between them, the City has designated Fort William for public and government-related services while Port Arthur's core is to be geared towards



#### IMAGE ROUTES

- · — · — · RED RIVER RD - GATEWAY
- — — — MAY ST / MEMORIAL AVE /  
ALGOMA ST - COMMEMORATIVE
- · — · — · ARTHUR ST - CIVIC

City programs ('districts') present today,  
 Images of Prince Arthur's Landing obtained from external source (Bustler 2012) and  
 the identification of image routes based on data from the city (Thunder Bay 2012a)

entertainment (“Downtown Ideas, Please” 2013). In recent years, the north end, encompassing Port Arthur and the Marina (Prince Arthur’s Landing), has been enjoying relative success through its identity as the Arts & Entertainment area. In large part, this success can be attributed to the revitalization efforts at the City’s waterfront, the redevelopment of which now links the north downtown to the city’s shoreline and historic port (Ross 2013). Local restaurants, specialty shopping, galleries and nightlife have opened and/or relocated to the ‘rebranded’ Waterfront District (Weller 2014).



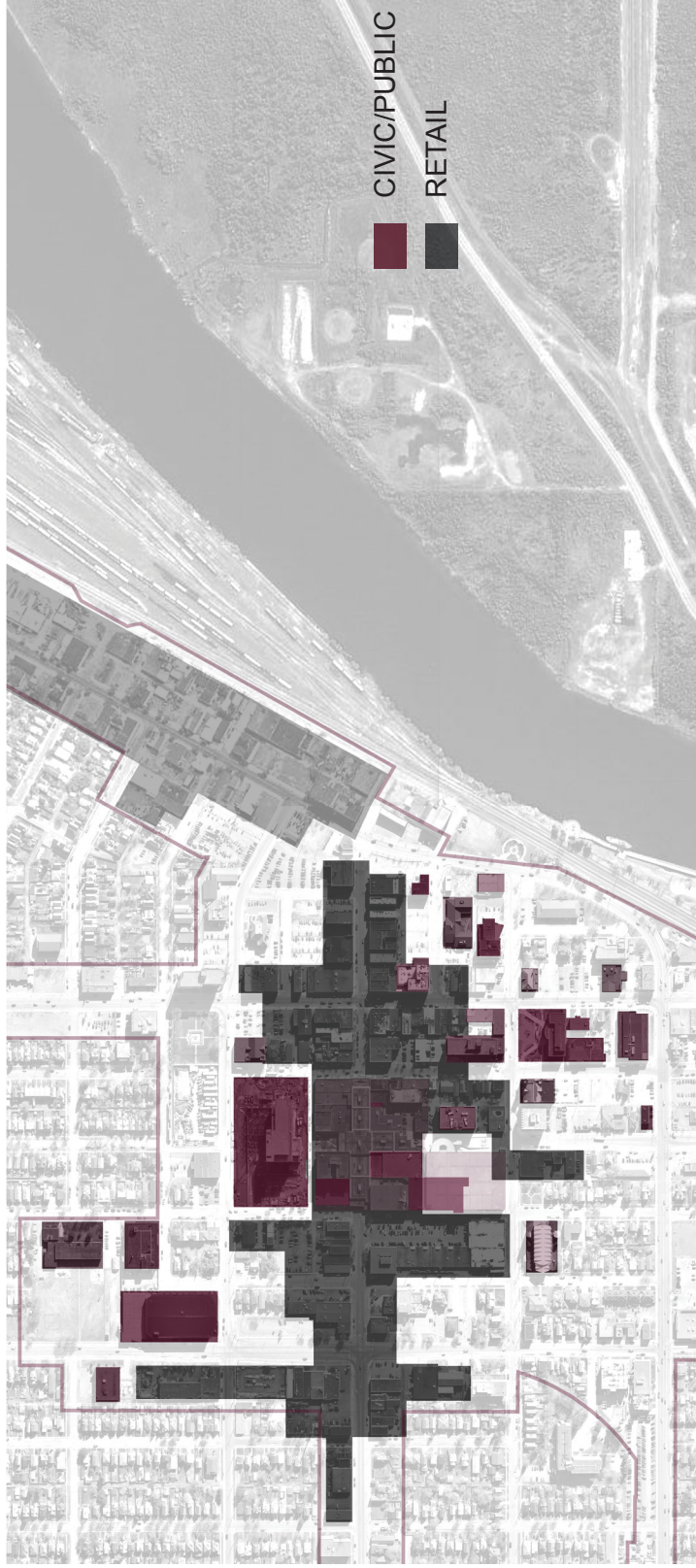
Victoriaville Civic Centre, East Entrance, Thunder Bay

Fort William, in comparison, does function as “a busy government administrative hub” with an agglomeration of civic and public programs clustering in the Victoriaville Business District (Ross 2013). Victoriaville Civic Centre (essentially a mall) is located at the heart of this area and particularly in the effort to help occupy the south downtown core, has largely transitioned into office use for both public and private employees. Beyond the civic component, and in keeping with its downtown function, local business owners are additionally branding the area as a “gift and specialty shopping district” (Fort William Business District 2013). Retail, again ‘spotty’ (in terms of success relative to vacancies) thus exists both within Victoriaville and its surroundings.

Fort William has also retained a certain stigma in being recognized as a ‘ghetto’ even by local municipal officials. While the civic aspects of the district may be thriving, the district is also at “the heart of...Thunder Bay’s swelling [urban] Aboriginal population” and dealing with issues of poverty and addiction (Ross 2013; City of Thunder Bay



South core renewal area  
(data from Google 2014 and Thunder Bay 2007)



Predominance of civic/public and retail uses in the south core of Fort William (data from Google 2014)

2005, 48). The south downtown also has a relatively higher rate of crime when compared to other parts of the city. Consequently, “south-end residents would like to see a similar strategy as the north side waterfront and business district” (Ross 2013). Moreover, many in the city are looking towards the newly constructed Thunder Bay Consolidated Courthouse to instigate a different, revitalized dynamic in Fort William, similar to the waterfront redevelopment becoming a catalyst for renewal in the north. The courthouse is to “bring together, the legal community, the judicial bar and students from our new law school into the Fort William Business District” (“Fort William Business District Looks Toward the Future” 2014). At this time, it remains too early to tell just how significant an impact this new courthouse (which is after all yet another civic use) will have on the revitalization effort in the south core. On one hand, the Courthouse is expected to draw disposable income to the area but on the other hand, some argue that the south downtown is currently not capable of appealing to lawyers or others visiting the building – people will come and then leave (CBC 2014).

### ***Fort William and Victoria Avenue***

Historic photos from as early as 1892 depict Victoria Avenue functioning primarily as a thoroughfare for the business district of Fort William (“Fort William’s Victoria Avenue in 1892” 1952). Though Simpson Street nearby, abutting the Warehouse District, served as the main area of business at this time, retail and commerce had already begun “to locate to the west on Victoria Avenue, May and Syndicate” (“Simpson Street Walk Popular

1982 Walk” 1952). With buildings directly adjacent to Victoria Avenue, the street becomes a place of activity, visibly indicating Fort William’s success as a centre for commerce (“Fort William’s Victoria Avenue in 1892” 1952)). Contributing to this image were the incredible number of financial institutions in this neighbourhood:

At different times the street has been home to the Traders Bank; the Bank of Montreal; The Royal Bank; the Canadian Bank of Commerce; The Ray, Street and Company Bank; The Toronto Dominion Bank; The Commercial Bank of Manitoba; and The Merchants Bank of Canada. (Saj 2009, 143)



Historical photo, date unknown, of Victoria Avenue showing the BMO building on the right (Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Archives 2013)

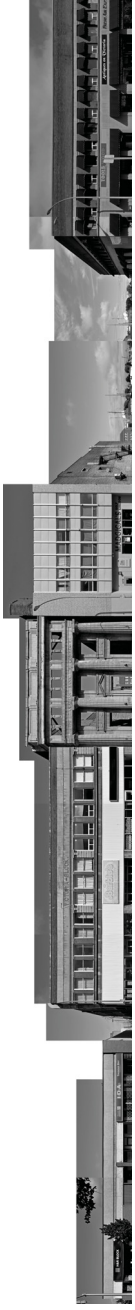
A Bank of Montreal (BMO) building has stood at the corner of Victoria and Simpson since its original construction in 1891. Another notable institution, the Canadian Bank of Commerce, was built in 1911 and still stands (in part).

Regardless of the street’s current lack of programming, “the whole block is a history lesson writ large: a visual reminder of Fort William’s heady early days when grain, timber, silver and the railway were king.” (Saj 2009, 143).

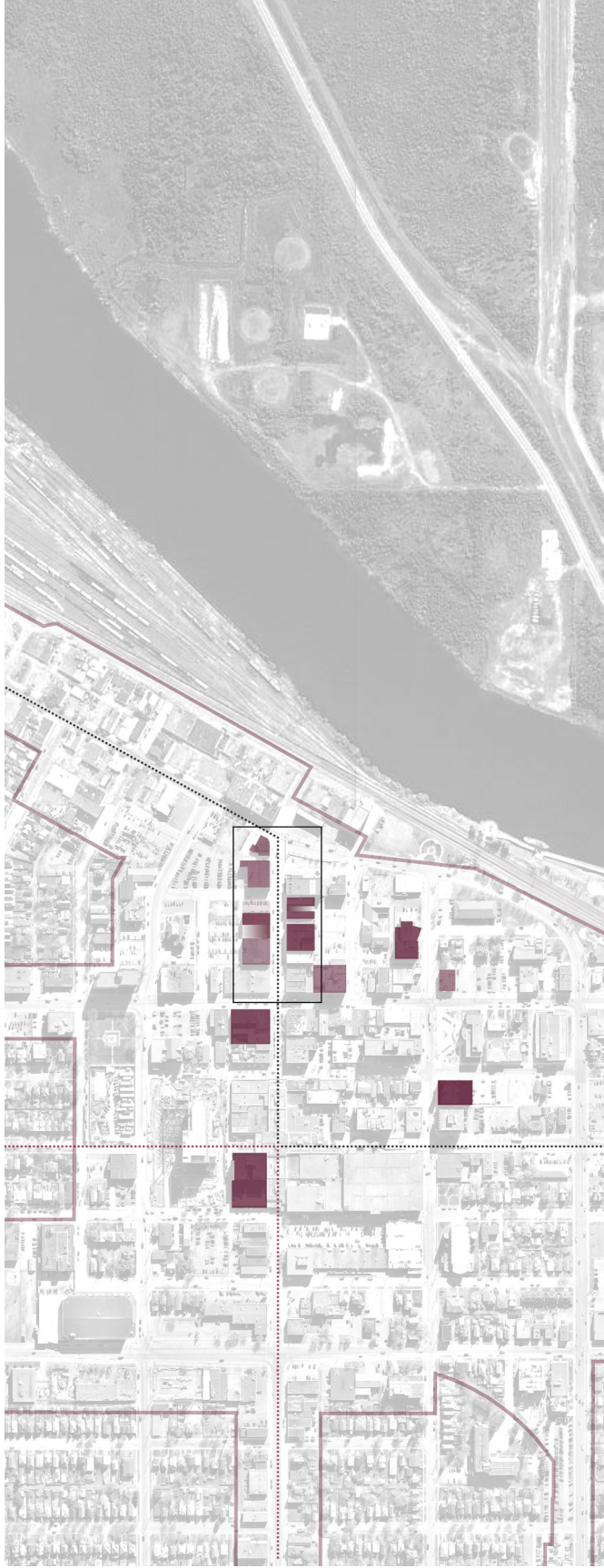
The block of Victoria Avenue specifically under study for this thesis is located between May Street and Simpson Street. The area contains a number of architecturally and historically significant buildings. These buildings were all constructed within a few years of one another. They are of similar structure, height (typically 3-4 storeys), frontage (about 25 feet) and setback. Diverse materiality (ranging from stone to glazed tile, brick and stucco) as well as façade ornamentation also characterize this street. Together, these buildings “create a unified urban presence, a kind-of New York skyscraper canyon, except that it is far reduced in scale” (Huzan 1998, 5).



Victoria Avenue, with streetcar and the CIBC building to the left (Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Archives 2013)



North Street elevations for Victoria Avenue, between May Street and Simpson Street (thesis block)



Buildings of architectural and historical significance (data from Google 2014)



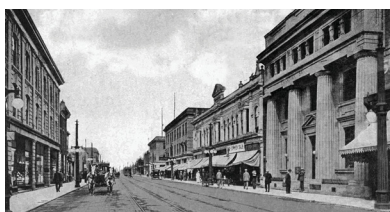
South Street elevations for Victoria Avenue, between May Street and Simpson Street (thesis block)



### ***Transportation and the Downtown Mall***

In many ways, the story of Victoria Avenue is closely tied to its transportation evolution. Horse and carriage preceded the trolley and streetcar lines, delineating the route for retail stores to set up along Victoria Avenue from Syndicate to Simpson Street. As Victoria along with Syndicate Avenue and May Street served as the main automobile routes for the South Core, the changing nature of traffic (transitioning from the closing of streetcars in 1949 to today's predominant automobiles vehicles) "began to re-shape the surrounding pedestrian shopping streets by increasing number of lanes, adding parking meters, and increasing the number of on-site parking spaces" (City of Thunder Bay 2005, 43).

People in the city directly blame the construction of Victoriaville Mall in 1980 for the specific decline of Victoria Avenue. The mall, known as Victoriaville Civic Centre, was built directly on the street, effectively cutting off the former east to west arterial. Located in place of "Fort William's former Grand Junction (the point at which a streetcar can go in any direction...)," which had been "often the busiest part of [the] downtown..." (Silver 2014). Buildings and stores, once outdoor, became integrated into the mall, still individually owned, but now removed from the original roadway. While the 'street' inside the mall functions as a public pedestrian promenade, in appearance and use it has assumed the characteristics typical of a mall rather than an outdoor street (City of Thunder Bay 2005). Vehicular traffic has now been redirected to surrounding streets including Vickers, Miles, Simpson and Arthur ("Give Us Input on



Evolution of Victoria Avenue through its transportation (Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Archives 2013)

Roads Urges City's Planner" 1978 ). Simpson Street in particular became "re-routed to connect to Arthur Street, a process that destroyed a large portion of the city's former warehouse district" while "Victoria Avenue was left as a minor arterial, its eastern extremity.... almost inaccessible" (Silver 2014). The mall was constructed with intent typical of that time to compete against suburban development – an urban mall had to be inserted into the downtown to counter boxed retail occurring elsewhere in the city (Filion et al. 2004). This solution ended up killing the activity historically associated with Victoria Avenue. One local blog describes the situation as follows:

They actually closed off our 50's and 60's cruising strip. This street was always incredibly busy all year long, especially in the summer months, on a Friday or Saturday night where guys and dolls would cruise up and down.... Everyone knew everyone, and life long friendships were made here. This is where you saw the poodle skirts, crinolines, draped dress pants and rolled up collars in action. This intersection (Victoria and Syndicate Avenues) was closed to make room for Victoriaville ....By doing this, the city created an immediate downtown in business and commerce for this side of Thunder Bay! (Hot Rods and Jalopies 2009)

Yet in other ways, the construction of the mall cannot solely be blamed for the negative downturn that has occurred along Victoria Avenue. The street is the result of "25 years of neglect and suburbanization," which began even before the construction of the actual mall: city residents moved out of the city, majority of the population acquired vehicles and by 1954, Intercity Mall had been built as a "clean, new, safe" alternative to the downtown with ample parking (Silver 2014). Comparatively lower rents in the downtown also attracted the poor who had previously lived among the middle and upper classes.

It is also important to note that while the street today may not be functioning ideally, Victoriaville has enjoyed relative success, compared to other suburban malls in the city (Silver 2014). Average daily traffic within the mall itself exceeds 1500 patrons and the local businesses within (primarily food-based) are thriving.

### **Vacancies and Hours of Operation:**

Despite what comes across as an optimal central location at first glance, majority of the buildings along Victoria Avenue are vacant or nearly vacant and overall underutilized. Habitual vacancies as they appear along this street seem to be typical and consequently contribute to the perception of 'abandonment' throughout Fort William's South Core (City of Thunder Bay 2005).

At the street level, within the thesis block, such vacancies include the H&R Block building, historic BMO and the former Academy of Learning offices located adjacent to the Roy Building. Majority of the upper levels, assumed residential and/or office also seem to be or are on the verge of emptiness. One promising sign has been the new apartments currently being developed on the upper levels of the Roy building by a local developer in conjunction with the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration, a portion of which will be for low-income housing. The empty lot behind the CIBC façade, the parking lot adjacent to Madgical's Golf Kingdom and vacant lot across the street between Amethyst Gift Centre and Discount Golf further contribute to the block's overall impression of being in a state of decline. Functioning retail/commercial buildings include Caledonia (The Strand, Fresh Air Experience, Antiques on Victoria, Tools

Wood Industrial Supplies), Amethyst Gift Centre, Little Mermaid, Jerzee City, and Threads in Time. Others, by the nature of their program (including Barbie's, Discount Golf, the Cash Store and Cash Pawn Brokers) while in business bring up the issue of what is appropriate for the future image or branding of Fort William's central core? On one hand, their choice in location makes sense in the short term as the preferred alternative to complete vacancies; on the other hand, they do not contribute to the image of a successful downtown and allude to social implications for consideration. The Red Sky Métis Independent Nation Administration Office and Firearms License/Regulation is the only service-based use within.

The influx of office into the South Core (through Victoriaville) has helped to mitigate the area's complete transition to vacancies and abandonment. On the other end, part of this transition to office use has negatively impacted the liveliness of the street. In being a hub for civic administration and even retail has led to Victoria Avenue functioning primarily during business hours. As one local businessman notes, "after 5 p.m., when the bureaucrats clear out for the day, the vibe on the street changes" and out come the "druggies and drunks" (Ross 2013). Vandalism and crime consequently are of concern for local business owners and also for the perception of the area by visitors. Moreover, the lack of residential options further detract from the "demand for services" (City of Thunder Bay 2005, 21). Currently, less than 1000 people actually live in the downtown and are thus transient: "they [do] not stay in the community long enough to contribute to, and thereby appreciate their surroundings" (City of Thunder Bay 2005, 24).

## **Programmatic Context**

In keeping with the programmatic vision of what constitutes the 'downtown,' Thunder Bay has zoned its south core as the Central Business District (C5). As such, permitted uses are intentionally presented as diverse in efforts to promote and encourage the multiplicity of program that is characteristic of a 'thriving' downtown (City of Thunder Bay 2011). Despite these 'opportunities' being permitted in the area, clearly the current vacancies speak to critical programmatic gaps which must be addressed in order to evolve the downtown towards revitalization.

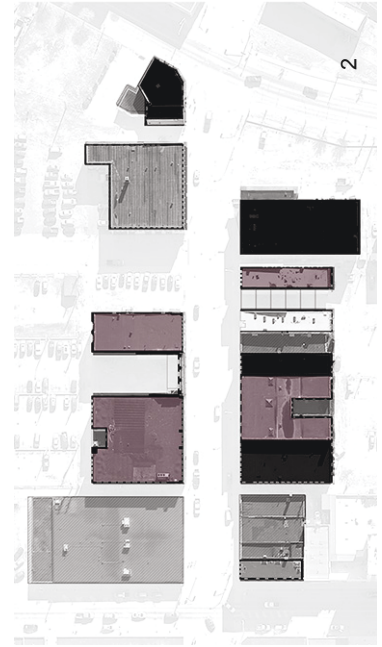
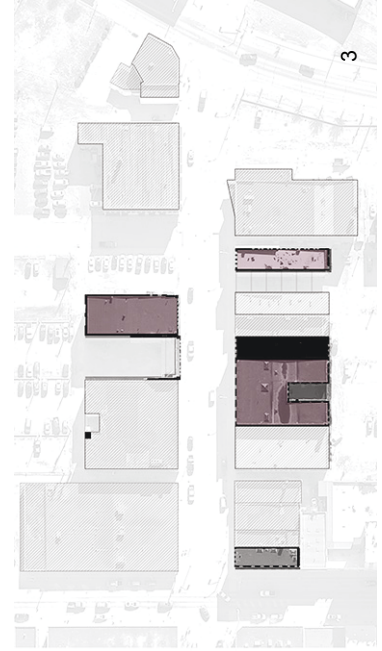
Programmatically, Victoria Avenue is more or less completely stagnant. Thus, in developing an urban renewal scheme, the question subsequently asked becomes, how can this neighbourhood be specifically programmed, beyond the generalities of standard zoning and even downtown 'master planning' (i.e. assignment of a particular mix of program deemed to be 'appropriate' for the downtown)?

In looking for alternate means of exploration, Bernard Tschumi offers some ideas for consideration. At Le Parc de la Villette in Paris, Tschumi (1987) develops abstract organizational systems of follies (points), lines and surfaces where the causal relationship between program and architecture is removed, allowing each system to become superimposed onto one another. The appeal in his approach lies in the evocative potential of stripping away the attachment of program as specific to a building and beginning to explore program as its own critical entity:



RESIDENTIAL

VACANCIES



Vacancies along Victoria  
(data from the City of  
Thunder Bay 2013 and  
Google 2014)

Yet architecture is inhabited: sequences of events, use of activities, incidents are always superimposed on those fixed spatial sequences. These are programmatic sequences that suggest secret maps and impossible fictions, rambling collections of events all strung along a collection of spaces, frame after frame, room after room, episode after episode. (Tschumi 1994, 157)

Influenced by this mode of thinking, the new urban renewal strategy for Victoria Avenue can develop into examining program as its own entity, to be layered into the site. Initially at least, the buildings can be viewed as essentially interchangeable with program indifferent to architecture. Later in the design process, these buildings begin to emerge as unique in programmatic identity. By not being so attached to a program's specific relationship to a building, the perception of vacancy changes as buildings potentially in danger of or in a state of vacancy can quickly transform to another use, boosted by surrounding programmatic synergies. Tschumi also speaks of cross-programming (unexpected combinations of new functions/programs), trans-programming (placing programs conventionally not associated with one another); and de-programming (allowing functions to potentially undo the others):

Pole vaulting in the chapel, bicycling in the Laundromat, sky diving in the elevator shaft....Conventional organizations of spaces could be matched to the most surrealistically absurd sets of activities. Or vice versa: the most intricate and perverse organization of spaces could accommodate the everyday life of an average suburban family. (Tschumi 1994, 146-7)

As the South Core exists today, a certain synergy seems to be missing between the civic and the retail/commercial components, in which both need to function successfully on their own prior to contributing to one another's efforts. Victoria Avenue thus requires a

programmatic complexity to be developed through intricate overlapping and interconnecting of various programs and uses, eventually cycling back to create programmatic 'cohesion' for the overall street.

With the above in mind, certain programmatic gaps can be identified, which should be addressed in the revitalization effort:

- Arts/culture – the introduction of which would not necessarily result in direct competition with the north end, but enable the south end to foster and cultivate its own unique interpretation of the arts. Arts and culture thus becomes a layer to be interwoven throughout the City and specific to Victoria Avenue, can be developed in a such way that it becomes rooted in the identity of the South Core and serves to animate the area. The relationship of developing arts and culture as means of revitalization efforts has been much successful in precedent cases. Artscape in Toronto, for example, leverages “the power of the arts, culture and creativity...to serve a community’s interest while directing a broader agenda for change, growth and transformation” (Toronto Artscape Inc. 2014).
- Development of particular ‘core programming’ to draw and retain people in the area. Such core programming can occur within context of the multi-use to be encouraged in the downtown, but serve to promote the ‘uniqueness’ of this particular site. Opportunities to develop core programming around Victoria Avenue’s ‘unique’ elements include capitalizing on the street’s rich history including



passage of the streetcar, its heritage buildings (found nowhere else in the city), and agglomeration of civic uses.

- Directly combat issues of vacancy and safety/ crime with the introduction of 24-hour occupation, particularly as pertaining to new residential. Residential would also further contribute to the area's efforts to further diversify programmatically.
- Begin to 're-forest' the South Core, which currently has limited greenspace and is disconnected from existing parks and recreation trails.

Post insertion of new programming, a second phase to the downtown renewal scheme would be to consider the relationships between different programs, specifically in how they are overlaid, interwoven, superimposed and situated in proximity to one another (the 'synergy'). After all, in keeping with Tschumi's ideas, multiplicity in programming is something to be continually encouraged. Furthermore, the relationship of indoor to outdoor programming and the threshold in between also become evocative.

### **Urban Context**

While the primary focus for this thesis is on the block of Victoria Avenue between May and Simpson Streets, its immediate surroundings (of Fort William) and larger city context also provide critical context to be addressed in the development of Victoria Avenue's revitalization strategy.

Fort William's south core is comparable to a medium-sized metropolitan downtown. At this scale, its issues are more complex than for smaller downtowns (of urban areas with less than 100,000 people) where revitalization simply requires the revival of one main street and targeted remedies of understandably limited scope – for example, a new program (farmer's market), identification of a 'theme,' or 'unusual attraction' (Filion et al. 2004). Additionally, when compared to larger metropolitan downtowns, ones like Thunder Bay's are actually in a greater state of decline as they do not have the advantages of "important employment and retail concentrations, world-class attractions and elaborate public transit networks" (Filion et al. 2004, 330). Instead, its population is even more decentralized as a result of "their limited critical mass, near total dependence on the automobile, and the relative ease with which different destinations, including peripheral ones, can be reached from anywhere within these metropolitan regions...." (Filion et al. 2004, 330).

The two downtowns in Thunder Bay (in addition to the Waterfront District and the specialty shopping area of Bay/Algoma Street) potentially raise issues of competition, particularly when all are competing against the Intercity boxed store area. Yet the solution to this challenge is not to necessarily agglomerate these 'urban' districts into one of the existing or introducing a more centralized 'new' downtown. Thunder Bay's development and distribution would not really support such a solution without detriment to the other areas. Instead, the solution lies in enabling unique identities to emerge in different areas. The City has begun this

process by designating the north and south downtowns differently (a start through not completely successful yet). Recently, as part of this process, Thunder Bay (in collaboration with Brook McIlroy) has developed “Urban Design and Landscape Guidelines”. Additionally, “Image Route Guidelines” identify 13.5 km of significant city arterials prioritized for improvement and intensification; these routes are to become the functional and cultural gateways to the City, linking its various districts together (City of Thunder Bay 2012a). Of particular relevance, the May/Memorial/Algoma Street Image Route is to adopt a ‘Commemorative’ scheme with three key destinations – the ‘modern downtown’ at May (near Victoria Avenue), the large-format Intercity area on Memorial, and Algoma as the ‘historic downtown’ (City of Thunder Bay 2012a). This plan thus raises a potential conflict between the modernity envisioned for the south downtown, particularly with the New Consolidated Courthouse, and the historic structures that align Victoria Avenue in the thesis site.

Overall, general downtown renewal plans and zoning policies call for diversification in the downtown but as a whole cannot account for the complexities and contradictions that underlie any urban neighbourhood. Even where detailed design guidelines, neighbourhood plans or conservation area policies are available, such guidelines speak to basic preferences in relation to massing, height, architectural style but really cannot define the uniqueness of each downtown’s identity. The downtown loses some of its potential for change and transformation in becoming grouped into the ‘mass’ of downtowns. In some situations, efforts to identify an

'identity' or the uniqueness of a downtown results in it being 'themed' or assigned a particular 'niche' (market, retail, arts etc.) which then in a way also simplifies and generalizes a narrow portion of the overall potential of what the site could be if multiple factors are given room to be explored. Financial incentives (including facade grants) are often offered in these 'Business Improvement Areas' but in reality only open the door slightly wider for some local business owners. Mixed use development is identified as a "new-urbanist approach to urban planning that encourages walkability, diversity, high quality design and density to revitalize or develop public space and breathe new life into communities (Toronto Artscape Inc. 2014). It reflects overall tendencies to promote "one-stop" destinations for residents to live and work. However, it can perhaps be observed that these schemes are somewhat superficial. Lessons from successful downtowns thus underscore the need for strategies that are both multi- pronged and well coordinated.

### **Developing a Conceptual 'Framework' for Revitalization**

Revitalization implies the need for intervention or adaptation of some sort – it is through changes that the downtown of former Fort William in Thunder Bay can be hopefully 'improved' for the better. As such, a framework outlining potential methods or strategies for intervening becomes necessary, different from conventional manners of renewal. Such methods may range in degree of 'invasiveness' but all are united in the efforts to change the presence of decline or stagnation characterizing the

downtown. Tania L. Saj, in her book entitled “The Last Best Places: Storytelling about Thunder Bay’s Historic Buildings” (2009), observes, that “sometimes we get stuck seeing a familiar place in one way, and forget there are hundred other ways to see it.” (145-6). This observation really holds true for majority of downtowns throughout North America and responses to their decline/ stagnation. Downtowns are plagued by their own history and in context of their role in the city, acquire a level of rigidity. Such rigidity becomes all the more apparent when considering that a city should be “a dynamic place of change and transformation...” (Klanten 2009, 3-4). Goldsmith Borgal & Company Ltd. Architects, in an Architecture Exhibition at Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre perhaps best describes the inspiration behind this thesis:

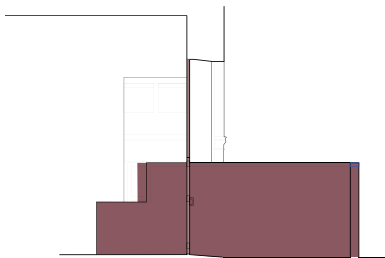
Architecture is the most enduring art form of mankind. If time and utility abandon it, creative transformations are required to re-animate, re-connect and re-weave these elements back into our urban and social fabric. Their beauty, history and cultural significance layer our cities with meaning and wonder. (Goldsmith Borgal & Company Ltd. Architects 2009)

Early on in the thesis process, after examining the discourse surrounding Scarpa’s and other architects’ work, a unique language began to emerge in relation to adaptive reuse. In particular, certain words became identifiable as potential strategies to both read and intervene in the revitalization effort. Such words included: *accretion/subtraction, abstraction, equilibrium, found conditions, incision, insertion, junction, juxtaposition, layering, plugging in, reductive means, remains, re-ordering/re-connecting, subordination and superimposing* among others (Appendix: Developing a Language Based on the Discourse of Adaptive Reuse).

Thus in the decision to step back from conventional manners of approaching revitalization, it became a useful exercise to abstract and consequently explore the discourse on intervention. In other words, what would it mean to intervene on a site given one word, for example the notion of 'juxtaposition' for example? Or perhaps 'subtraction?' The outcome of such exploration would inherently be different and the subsequent urban scheme that develops potentially more unique, even playful once freed from convention models of thinking, reading and intervening in the downtown neighbourhood. These words have been extracted from contemporary and innovative adaptive reuse projects. The discourse on these projects reflect some deliberate intentionality in the words that architects have selected to convey the intent behind design. Consequently, detailed explorations of a cross-section of the words were undertaken, as seen below.

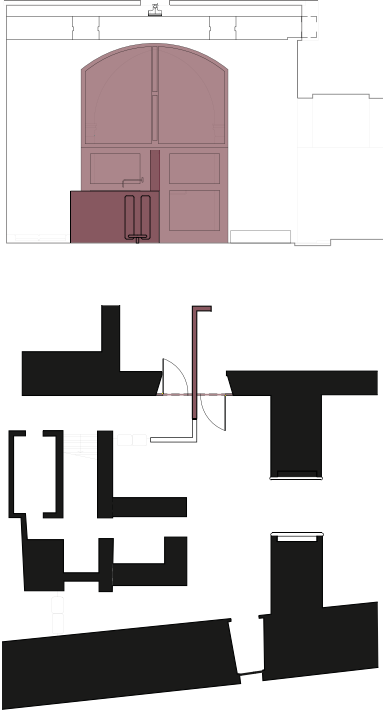
### Incision/Insertion

With almost surgical accuracy, he moved from space to space restoring some elements and adding new ones, integrating the two in a fusion so seamless ....  
 - On Scarpa's Museo di Castelvecchio (Ranalli 1999, 48)



Sectional study of 'insertion' in Scarpa's Museo di Castelvecchio (Murphy 1990, 40-41; Ranalli 1999, 69)

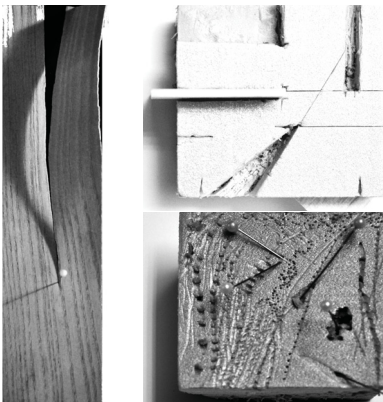
Thus emerges a common analogy in adaptive reuse projects where "architectonic intervention in the urban fiber" becomes "comparable to surgical intervention" (Wiel Arets 1994, 38-43). Medical definitions of incision refer to cutting and wounds to body tissue while insertion relates to "the mode or place of attachment of an organ or part" (Merriam-Webster 2013). Historically, this medical analogy really emerged around the time of the Industrialized City, in which the city is viewed as an 'ill'



Studies of 'insertion' continued  
in Scarpa's Museo di  
Castelvecchio (Murphy 1990,  
40-41; Ranalli 1999, 69)

body requiring healing, even 'surgical transplants' (Borasi and Zardini 2012). Urban renewal and redevelopment projects reflected intentions to raze "a dilapidated building or decaying neighbourhood" - viewed as wounds or a tumour requiring disinfection or excising - in order to make way for new tissue growth (Wiel Arets 1994, 38-43). Today, these surgical analogies continue to evolve, now transitioning into a strategy of 'tissue regeneration' (Borasi and Zardini 2012). Architects thus often allude to notions of incision and insertion in their efforts to strengthen, both tangibly and intangibly, the existing built fabric and architecture. Both in the Olivetti showroom and the galleries of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Scarpa surgically "[inserts] open space and incident within highly restricted existing envelopes" and "[reconfigures] the relationship of the buildings to their adjacent squares" (Ranalli 1999, 42).

As subsequently explored via modeling and drawing exercises, incision and insertion conceptually allude to notions of stitching/healing and acts of cutting, carving, marking, placing, and sliding. The following collage reveals initial filtering of the thesis site based on the identification of select opportunities to incise and insert to revitalize Thunder Bay's south downtown. The difference between incision and insertion lies in the degree of the 'mark' left behind post intervention (with incision being more precise and concentrated). In both cases, a primary entity is intervened upon ('repaired' or 're-stitched') to improve the existing. The significant presence of the primary entity immediately suggests dominant 'site' conditions and constraints within which to 'intervene.' Incisions and insertions can take root



Early model studies of 'insertion'



Junction at Cangrande della Scalla, Museo di Castelvecchio

within the space preestablished by the primary's existing conditions (thereby inherently working in a compatible/sensitive manner) or dominate over the existing conditions, ultimately changing the nature of the primary entity post intervention.

## Junction

This junction explodes with movement, structure, and detail.... It is in this act of almost archaeological separation that the present confronts antiquity. - On Scarpa's Museo di Castelvecchio, at the juncture surrounding Cangrande della Scalla (Ranalli 1999,70)

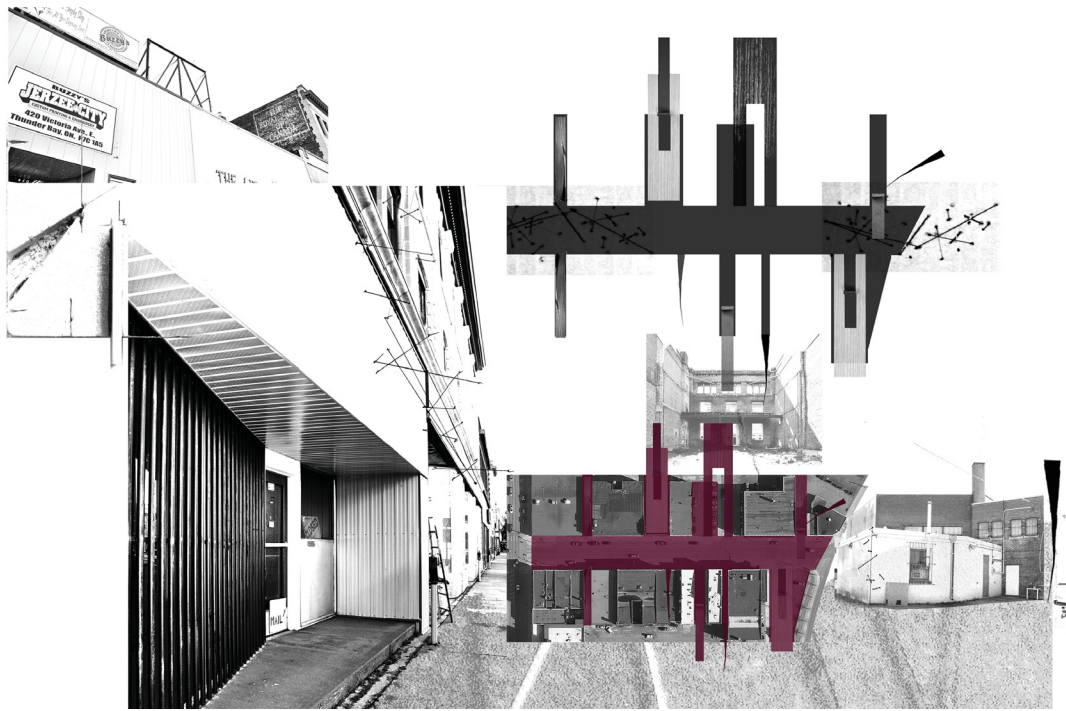
Junction refers to the act, process or condition of joining or meeting, particularly at a point, interface or intersection (Merriam-Webster 2013). It denotes or suggests some evident boundary delineating dissimilar entities (like material). In architecture, the junction often becomes "the primary visual delineator of the bipolarity of new and old" (Cramer and Breitling 2007, 151). It can serve as either a separator or a bridge, consequently determining whether predominance is given to the existing or the new construction. Tectonically, the junction offers much room for play with respect to structural explorations and implications.



Early model studies of 'junction'

In delving into its associated analogies, one type of junction relates back to the joints in a human body. These joints as well as those mechanized in machinery, can be static or rotational. In another exploration of meaning, a junction is also commonly associated with transportation networks in terms of the meeting, joining, and eventual termination of road and railway routes. Junction also offers opportunity to explore changes to the built environment at an extremely small scale – that

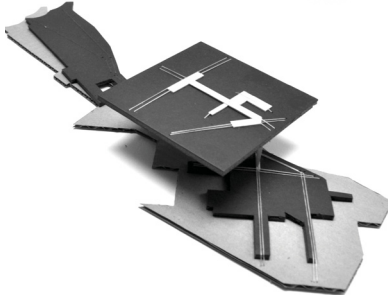




Site collage for 'insertion'



Site collage for 'junction'



Early model of 'junction' at an urban scale within the thesis site

of the wall detail for example. In all cases, an implied sense of complexity or density in the entities involved is suggested.

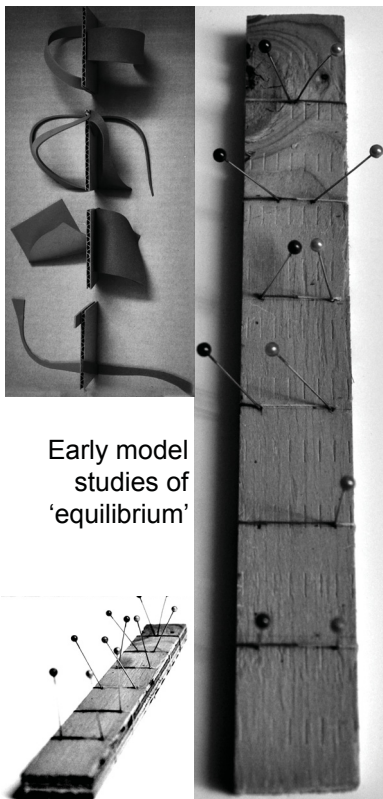
On another note, it is also interesting to consider junctions in a less physical form. For example, what happens at the juncture or junction between different programs? At the boundaries between private and public entities?

## Equilibrium

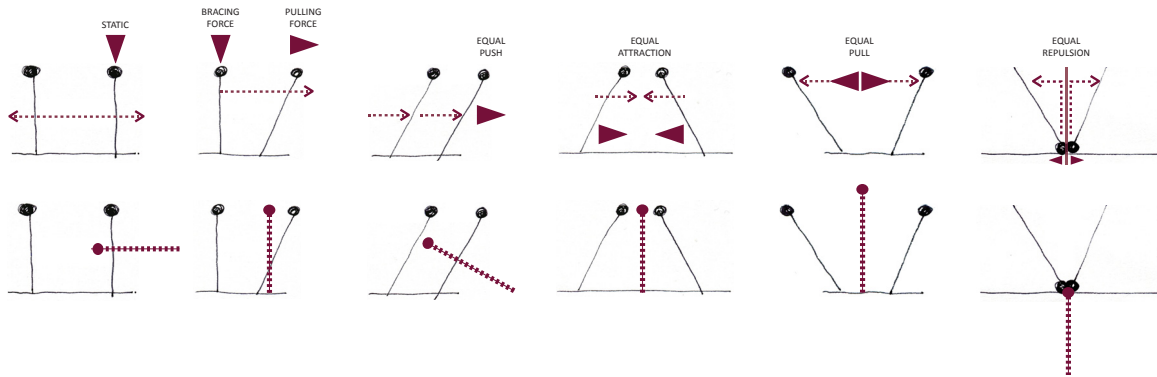
... inherited architecture and new construction forming imaginative equilibriums. (Klanten 2009, 7)

Old and new sections make no apology for each other.  
– On the Akron Art Museum, Ohio (Klanten 2009, 55)

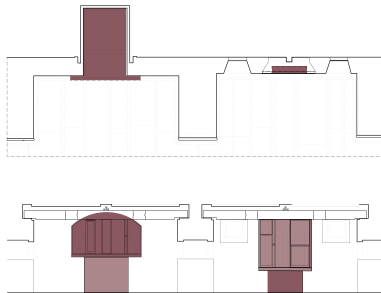
Equilibrium is defined as “a state of balance between opposing forces or actions” - either being static (in which case the net forces acting on the entity is zero) or dynamic (Merriam-Webster 2013). Such equilibrium may be stable (allowing for an entity to return to its original position) or unstable (leading to greater departure from the original position). In nature, equilibrium (or ‘balance of nature’) can be equated to “the stable state in which natural communities, of animals and plants exist, maintained by adaptation, competition, and other interactions between members of the community and their nonliving environment” (Collins Dictionary 2014). Newton’s Laws of Motions are also applicable, the first stating that “every object in a state of uniform motion tends to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to it” and the third stating “for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction” (Newton’s Three Laws of Motion 2014).



Arnheim (1969) examines equilibrium from a more



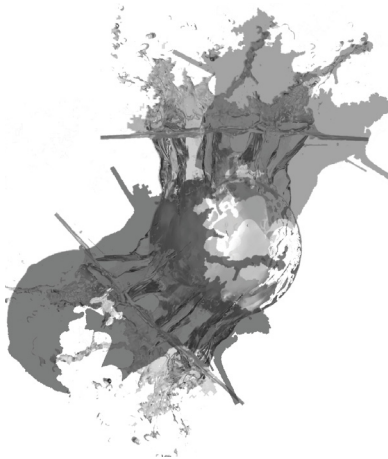
Diagrammatic exploration of equilibrium through a study of 'forces'



Examination of 'equilibrium' in Museo di Castelvecchio (Murphy 1990, 50)

formal, composition and visual perspective: "...a shape may abandon its own stability in order to adapt itself to a stable whole" (63).

The current condition of the stagnant, even declining downtown calls for revitalization, in other words a re-balancing of sorts. This re-balancing is to be achieved formally through its architecture, more intrinsically through its program, and comprehensively and visually through its urban scheme.



Drawing of 'dynamic equilibrium'

Applying equilibrium as a revitalization strategy at the urban scale has interesting implications with respect to first identifying areas of stability and instability within existing found conditions and then through interventions, again examining how new entities contribute to the overall 'balancing' act of the street. How does the introduction of a new entity impact or influence the existing? Does it simply blend it, becoming another element of the current overall group? Does it upset the balance and alter the dynamics?

When examining Victoria Avenue, one could observe that the street and its buildings is in a state of static



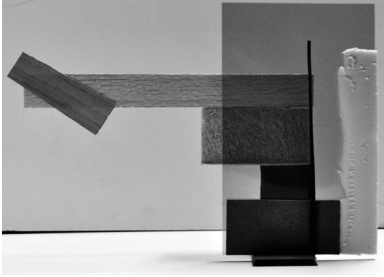
Site collage for 'equilibrium'

equilibrium. Consequently, a primary objective in the revitalization efforts would be to introduce 'intensity' via dynamic equilibrium. The collage below demonstrates a reading of the site in which 'stable' areas (namely heritage architecture) are identified as permanent entities, contributing to the area's historic identity but also contributing little to enlivening the street.

### Juxtaposition

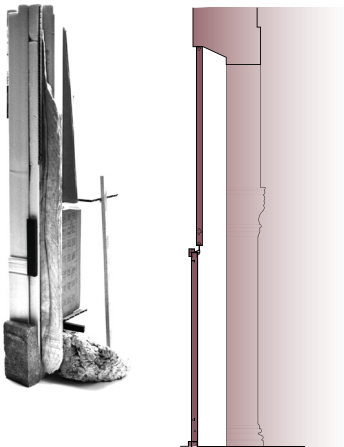
This residue left behind from former users not only attests to the history of a site, but serves as the building blocks for its revival, often leading to unconventional yet complementary juxtapositions between the form and new use. - 'Lost and Found' Exhibition at the Toronto Harbourfront Centre (unit a architects inc. 2012)

Juxtaposition is perhaps the most blatant form of interaction between existing and new in any given adaptation project. It involves the "act or instance of placing close together or side by side, especially for comparison or contrast" (Free Dictionary 2013). When effort is made to work with the existing environment,



often those involved in the project prefer to emphasize the ‘differences’ between new and old. This strategy reflects attention to composition and formal explorations. In the Museo di Castelvecchio, Scarpa deliberately contrasts:

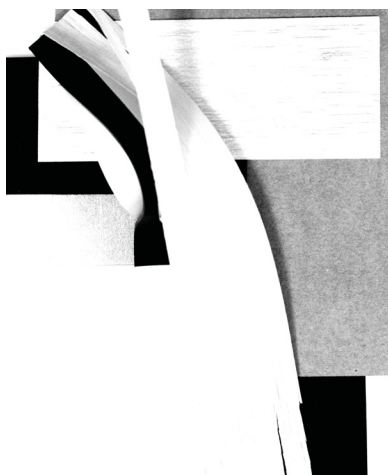
...the use of orthogonal against the freer forms of previous structures and by the use of well-finished textures, precise jointed materials adjacent to rougher homogeneous surfaces. (Murphy 1990, 15)



More fundamentally, juxtaposition is often inherently linked to art, particularly Cubism and Surrealism, and assemblage. Cubists brought forth “the idea of ‘relativity’ – how the artist perceived and selected elements from the subject, fusing both their observations and memories into the one concentrated image” (Art Factory 2013). Assemblage in particular emphasizes use of found conditions and moreover, identifies ‘juxtaposition’ as its primary strategy (Seitz 1961, 25).

Early studies of ‘juxtaposition’

In approaching Victoria Avenue then, what elements of the site can be ‘extracted’ to highlight ‘contradiction’ with the proposed changes?

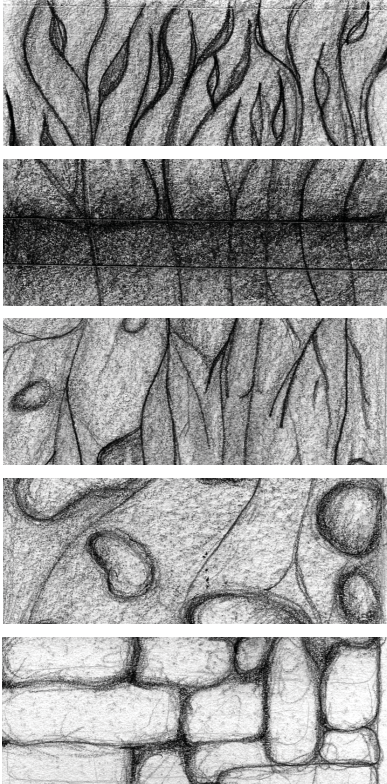


Model study of ‘layering’

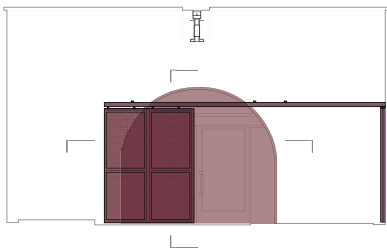
## Layering

For over 120 years, its uses continued to evolve – beginning as a smithy, then a horse shed, a storage depot and most recently, a sculptor’s live-work studio. The rich history of the building was most expressively registered on the exterior through the assemblage and overlapping of materials in various states of decay – rusted steel panelling, Insulbrick and barn board. – on 40R Laneway House by Superkul Inc., Toronto (Fain 2010, 22)

Layering suggests some level of ordering, even hierarchical arrangement as entities are placed on top of or under one another or adjacent (Merriam-Webster 2013). Implicit is the need for more than one entity to



Details of early drawing on 'layering' in the soil horizon



Examination of 'layering' in Museo di Castelvecchio (Murphy 1990, 76)



Conceptual model of 'layering' as a facade

be involved as, like juxtaposition, the notion of relativity emerges. Specific acts of layering involve covering, placing, laying, weaving and peeling. Layering is often associated with soil composition both with respect to a soil's profile and horizon (Free Dictionary 2013).

Architecturally, layering is perhaps both the most tangible and intangible of the five words explored as strategies. On one hand, layering speaks directly to an exploration of materiality with respect to the existing, the new and some combination of old and new. Intangibly, within context of revitalization and adaptation efforts, layering is also commonly linked to a strategy about unveiling or uncovering moments of history associated with a particular site. Some of these moments may be physical in form, others are more poetic, perhaps even programmatic, etc.

Cramer and Breiting (2007) observe that "the traces and scars of history leave their mark on the building fabric in successive layers" (15). This correlation where architecture meets history can also be succinctly described as follows:

Sometimes these layers are readily accessible in the tectonics, finishes and furnishings of the building, but more often than not, invisible in the building ordinances, past uses and inhabitant's personal stories. (Kongats Architects 2012)

Consequently, in turning to examine Victoria Avenue, layering as a strategy becomes all the more important in context of the area being rich in hidden and present history, diverse materiality in its architecture and the desperate need for new programming to be interwoven throughout a programmatically spotty area.



Site collage for 'juxtaposition'



Site collage for 'layering'

## **Thesis Question**

How can a multi-layered approach, encompassing strategies of inserting programmatic diversity, architecturally exploring combinations of old with new, and strengthening surrounding urban linkages be developed to revitalize or evolve the small downtown?

## **Assumptions Moving Forward**

- Building information (including program data and architectural drawings) were obtained where available. Sources included own inventory via site visits, archival information, and drawings obtained through permission of the building owners and the City of Thunder Bay. The City also provided invaluable CAD and aerial information. However due to the scale of the site in combination with the age of many of the buildings, necessary information was not always obtainable. In such cases, information was conjectured based on standard building dimensions, photographs and commonalities with other buildings.
- Building interiors in particular are left open to interpretation (and alteration). As information on these interiors was relatively limited and inaccessible, the emphasis of the thesis is on the exterior with the interior coming into consideration in relation to thresholds and connections to the urban environment.
- Images of the thesis site are vital in that they capture the block's complexity and richness with respect to as-found conditions – from heritage to architecture to materiality and spatial awareness. At the same time,



this reliance on photographic information comes with inherent issues relating to potential distortions in the information revealed.

- Individual sites for detailed interventions were originally chosen based on readings of the thesis area as revealed through the word strategies. Over time, however, this approach evolved to the point where combinations of strategies were being utilized,. Consequently, the individual strategies about to be identified have the potential to be undertaken independently or in combination with one another. It is believed that any act of intervention, no matter how small, has the potential to impact a site. Yet in moving forward with the site as it exists today, it was quite quickly noted that a key number of large moves needed to be undertaken first.

## CHAPTER 2: DESIGN

### Developing a Renewal Scheme for Victoria Avenue

#### Renewal in Context of the City

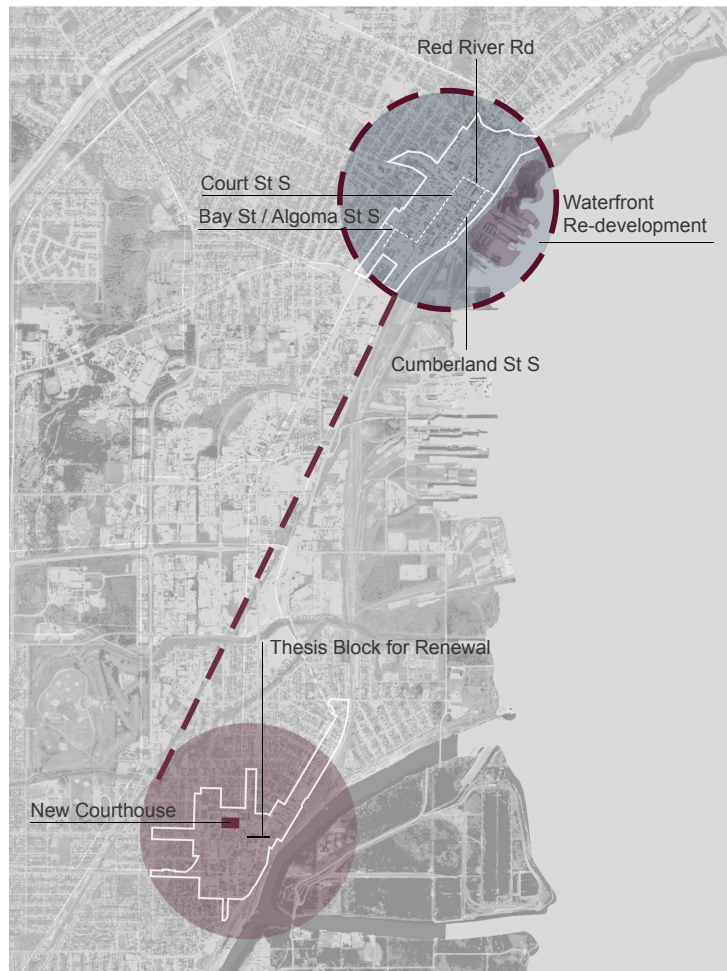
In recent years, Thunder Bay has thus been picking up momentum in terms of revitalizing and repurposing its downtowns. To date, this interest has been primarily focused in the North end (seen below) and, as particularly pertaining to the waterfront redevelopment of the Marina (Prince Arthur's Landing), has resulted in the successful completion of a quite large and ambitious project.



View of Pier 2, Prince Arthur's Landing, photograph likely by Brook McIlroy (Bustler 2012)



View of new Thunder Bay Courthouse



Revitalization taking root in Thunder Bay (data from City of Thunder Bay 2007 and Google 2014)

With the Thunder Bay Courthouse now opening in the South end, the timing is promising and evocative for pushing forth a renewal scheme for this part of the city – particularly as pertaining to its historic heart, the former banking district of Victoria Avenue.

### **Beginning to Phase Renewal into Victoria Avenue: Identifying Key Initial Moves**

Much of Victoria Avenue is notably underutilized, particularly in light of chronic vacancies. Consequently, to begin to develop a renewal scheme, one must initially address the programmatic gaps via architectural and urban interventions to animate such areas. Based on this move in conjunction with initial readings of the site (as depicted in the collages), the following map (page 40) identifies potential key sites within the block to be first intervened upon. Each of these sites are of importance as they also contribute to the ‘first impression’ that any visitor has of the street.

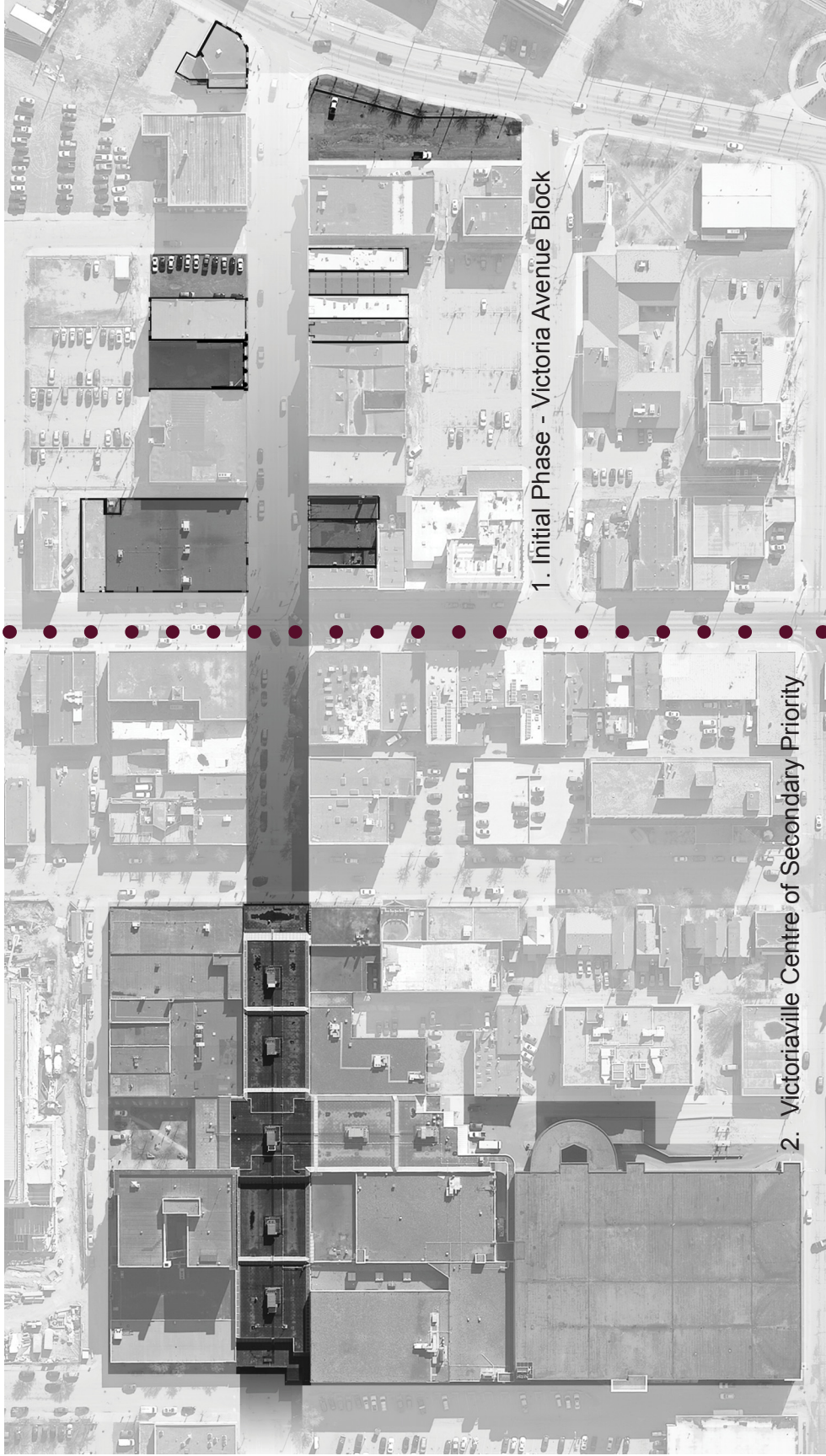
These moves can be undertaken independently or in conjunction with one another. To note, this renewal scheme is initially independent of any efforts to improve the mall (as has been called on for by many). The focus on the block is deliberately fostered in recognition of its uniqueness and value as a historic neighbourhood valuable on its own entity.

### **Beginning to Intervene: Initial Site Strategies**

#### **Insertion: The Gallery Behind the Facade**

##### ***Response to Site Context***

The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC)

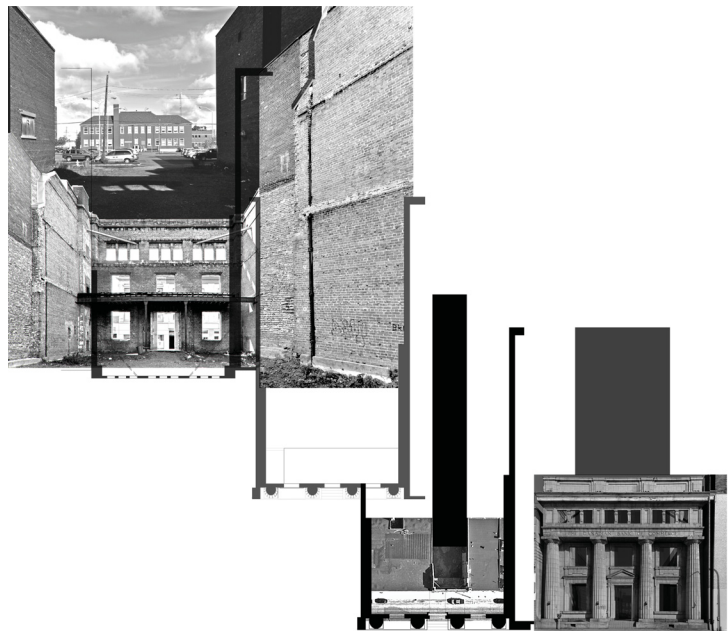




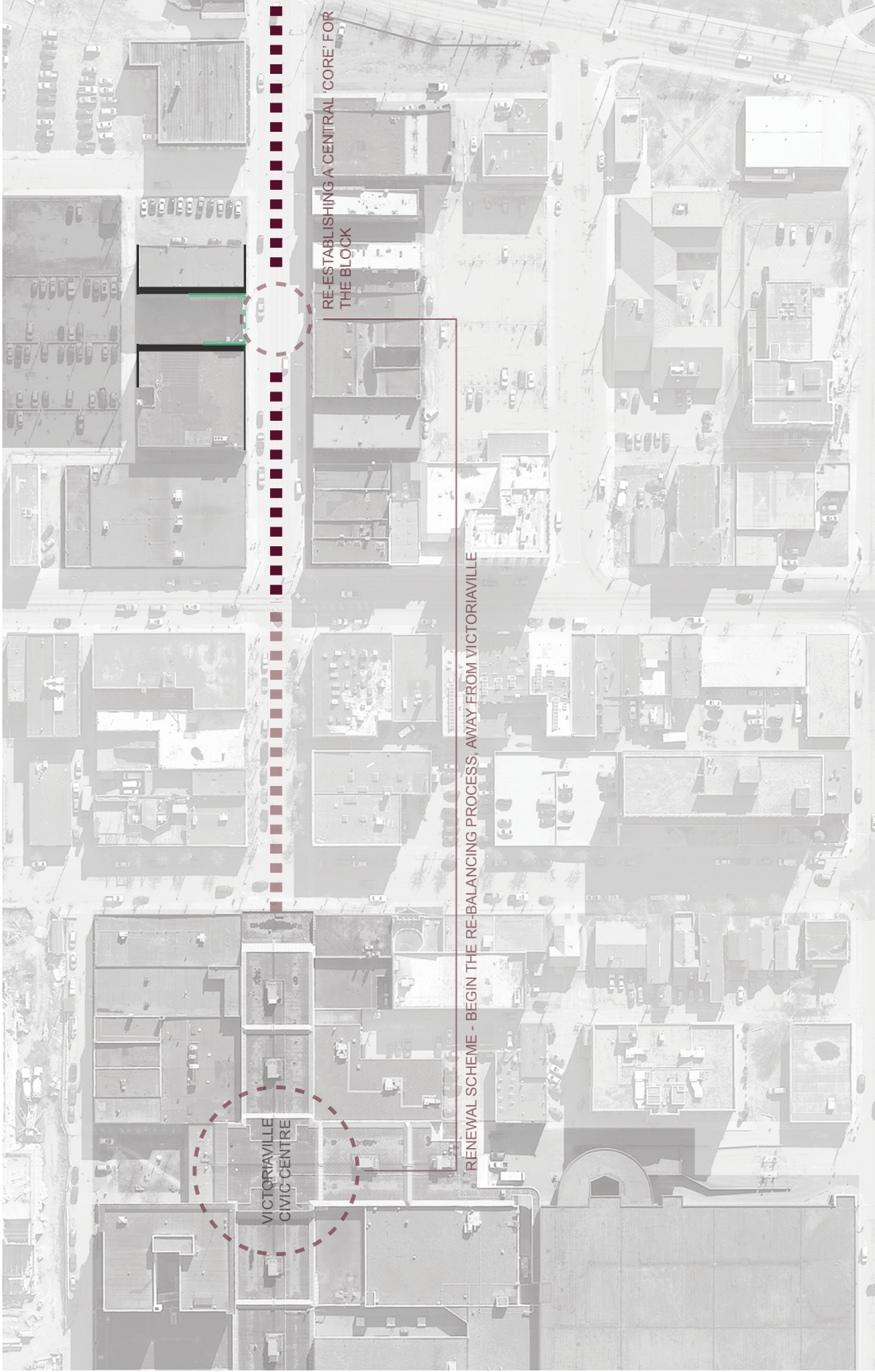
Key map: Location of the bank facade along Victoria Avenue (data from Google 2014)

Building is essentially located at the heart of the thesis block. It is unquestionably the most recognized building along the street and as one of the oldest (constructed in 1911), it presents an architectural relic for the street's historic function as a centre of commerce ("Imposing New Bank Building" 1911). The centrality of its location in combination with its place as a historic architectural 'ruin' serves even now as a pull for visitors to the area. In a way, its dominant presence can be viewed as a potential counterpoint to the mall (Victoriaville) located not too far away. At the time of its construction, the façade (designed in the Classical Revival style), was described as follows:

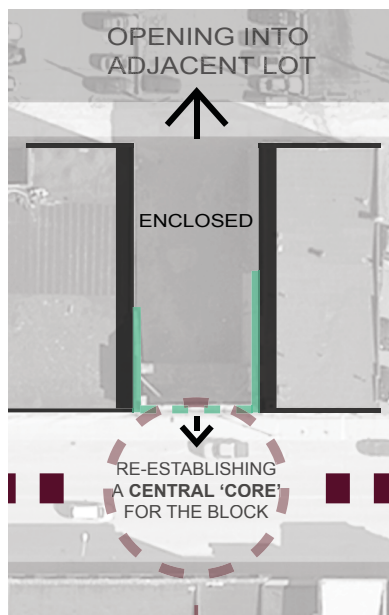
The exterior finish facing on Victoria Avenue with the main entrance and two large windows with elaborate decorations, will make the new building one of the most imposing in the two cities. The whole front will be of Grecian Doric design, ...of Terra Cotta, of a silver grey colour, imported from Leeds, England.... Four extra large, fluted columns, 25 feet in length, standing out four feet from the main wall, will give the building a very outstanding and massive effect. ("Imposing New Bank Building" 1911)



Initial collage: Applying 'insertion' to the facade site



Immediate site conditions for the bank facade (data from Google 2014)



Immediate site conditions  
for the bank facade  
(see previous page for  
larger context)

Today, only the façade stands, as the rest of the building was destroyed in a 2007 fire. Yet the façade on its own remains quite provocative. In keeping with the characteristics of a site suited for insertion, immediate surrounding site conditions encompass enclosure on three sides with the fourth backing onto a parking lot (left image). This parking lot can more or less be treated as part of a separate site (with its own potential for future new development). The front façade, though containing window and door openings, still serves as a barrier between the lot and the street. With such enclosure, the lot itself is relatively isolated and thus also raises concerns as to safety due to blocked visibility.

### ***Inserting New Core Programming***

For the neighbourhood, a critical programmatic gap exists in that the lot behind the façade currently sits empty – in direct disconnect with the draw of visitors to this building. Post fire, the site has transitioned into a pedestrian thoroughfare and depositing ground for needles. Consequently, in developing this site as a new 'heart' for the neighbourhood, the type of programming to be introduced needs to function as a 'feature' for the neighbourhood. Also at this critical stage, any intervention will set the tone for revitalization of the larger neighbourhood.

With such intent in mind in conjunction with the objective to introduce arts and culture into the neighbourhood, a gallery is thus proposed. Currently, the majority of the galleries have agglomerated in the north end of Thunder Bay. With the City being so potentially rich in local arts and crafts traditions (Fort William even annually hosting



City -wide programming of galleries and public art  
(data from City of Thunder Bay 2013c, Google 2014,  
and Weller 2013)

the Native Arts and Crafts Show) and recent initiatives to interweave public art and culture throughout the city (from gateway locations to the Baggage Building Arts Centre at Prince Arthur's Landing), the gallery offers a great opportunity to begin to establish a permanent arts presence in the south end as well.

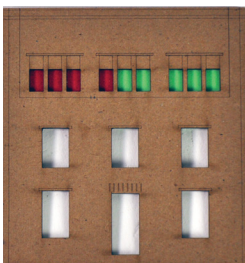
In 2010, Lakehead University organized a pilot course entitled 'Installation Art in Public Spaces' that took place in this very site. The installation increased "local traffic as it became an attraction" while garbage, drug paraphernalia and crime were reduced (Lake Superior Art Gallery 2014).





Initial studies examining materiality and composition of insertions behind the facade

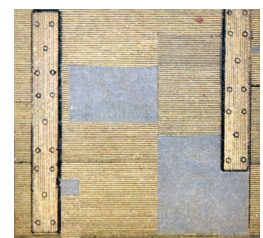
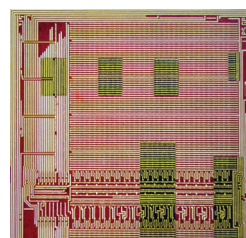
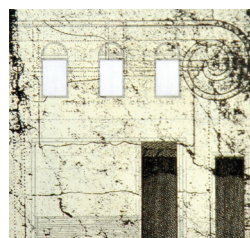
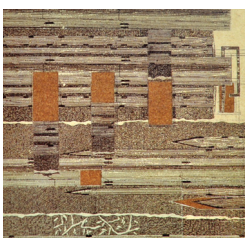
### ***Architectural Intent***



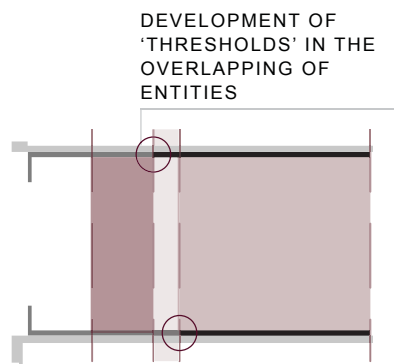
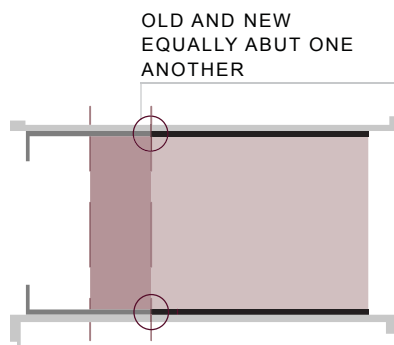
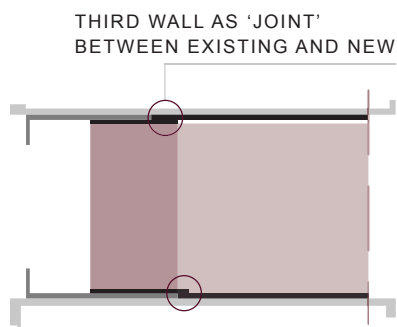
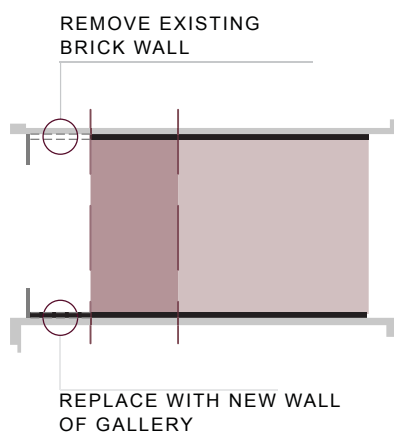
Initial studies of lighting and framing the openings, as viewed from the back of the facade

With the façade being so important, the introduction of a secondary entity called for a series of façade studies to be undertaken to examine relationships between the old and the new. Formally and compositionally, the bank façade on its own is quite rigid; however the openings create opportunities to consider how views of the new entity are framed, especially from the street. Taking cue from Scarpa’s use of asymmetrical windows juxtaposed against the traditional in the Castelvecchio, early façade studies thus led to a series of compositional and material explorations. These studies were also influenced by the work of Robert Mangurian and Mary-Ann Ray in “40 Possible City Surfaces for the Museum of Jurassic Technology: Wrapper” (1999).

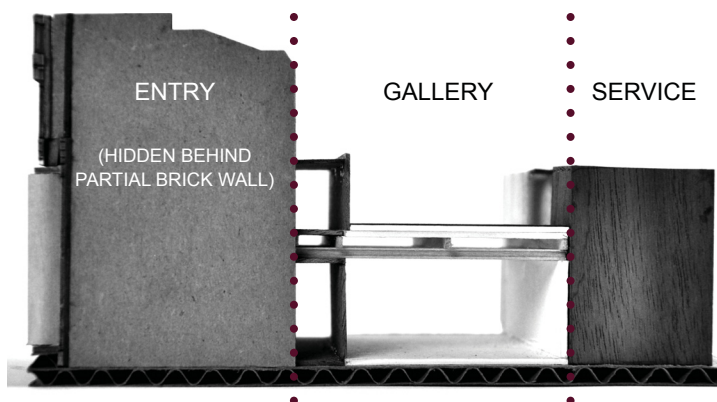
The new gallery, materially and formally, is organized



Examples of ‘city surfaces’ as explored by Mangurian and Ray (1999)



Where old walls meets new:  
Initial options for identifying the programmatic zones



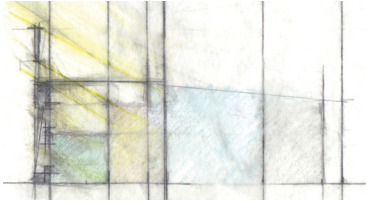
Model in progress, demonstrating three programmatic zones

into three programmatic zones – that of 'entry' (including lobby and outdoor space), 'gallery' (which partially envelopes the first zone), and 'service' (including the rear entry) backing onto the parking lot. As shown in left diagrams, these zones emerged from consideration of the insertion of new walls in relation to the location of existing partial brick walls.

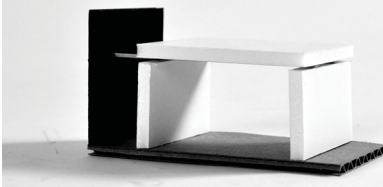
The façade is currently held in place by two angled steel beams that anchor into the adjacent brick walls. With the gallery insertion, these temporary beams can be replaced by new floor beams that extend from the gallery out to support the old façade. The intermediary space between old façade and new insertion then create a five metre 'threshold' zone between public street and private gallery. With this zone directly abutting the facade, visitors may then occupy the facade's openings.

Moreover, a lighting scheme can also be developed for the higher openings, allowing for the animation of both street and gallery. The main two-storey gallery space is to be sunken one into what was once the basement (filled in post fire), as shown in the Section (page 49).

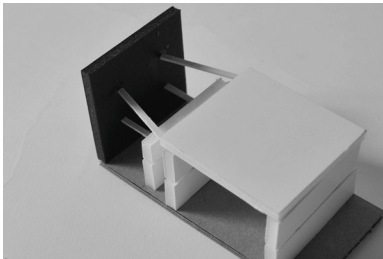
### ***Contribution to the Urban Scheme***



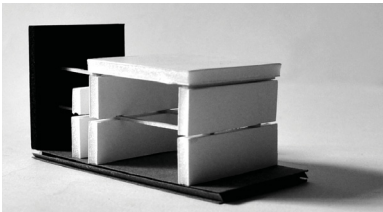
The CIBC Block, encompassing the gallery and its adjacent buildings, explores urban renewal via ‘creative place making’. In terms of precedent, Artscape in Toronto has been transforming existing buildings into artist housing, studios, performance and exhibition spaces. As these buildings are re-purposed, new activity enlivens the surrounding community, contributing to the “wider regeneration and revitalization of neighbourhoods” (Lyonnais 2013).



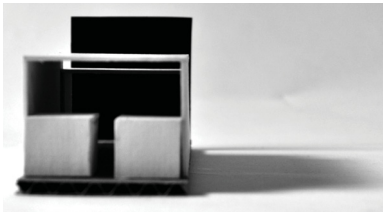
a



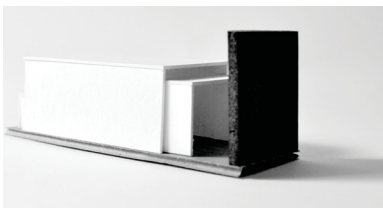
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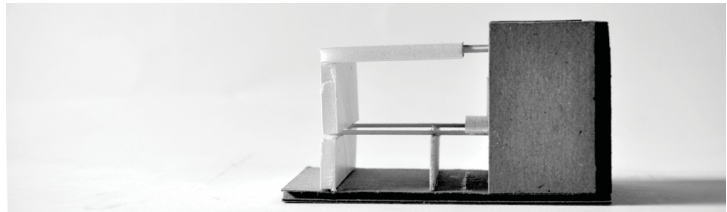


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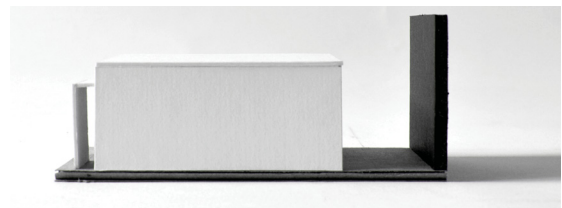


f

At a larger scale (though greater than desired for Victoria Avenue’s revitalization strategy), entire districts may be transformed based on the development of the arts scene. Beijing 798 Zone, for example, reflects the transformation of former industrial plants into an art and fashion district (Beijing 798 Art Zone Administration & Development Office 2014). More locally in Toronto, at Wychwood Barns, Artscape transformed former streetcar repair sheds into artist live/work spaces, studios, gallery and offices. Another project, involving the Artscape



e

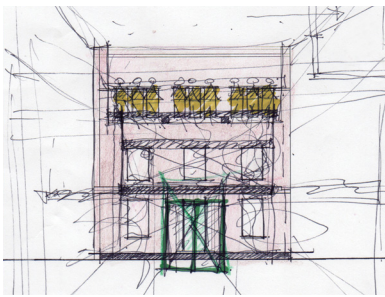


g

Preliminary drawing and model studies to examine the interlapping of formal and programmatic zones

Distillery Studios, began with the adaptation of industrial buildings and led to the area becoming a “cultural tourism destination” (Toronto Artscape Inc. 2014).

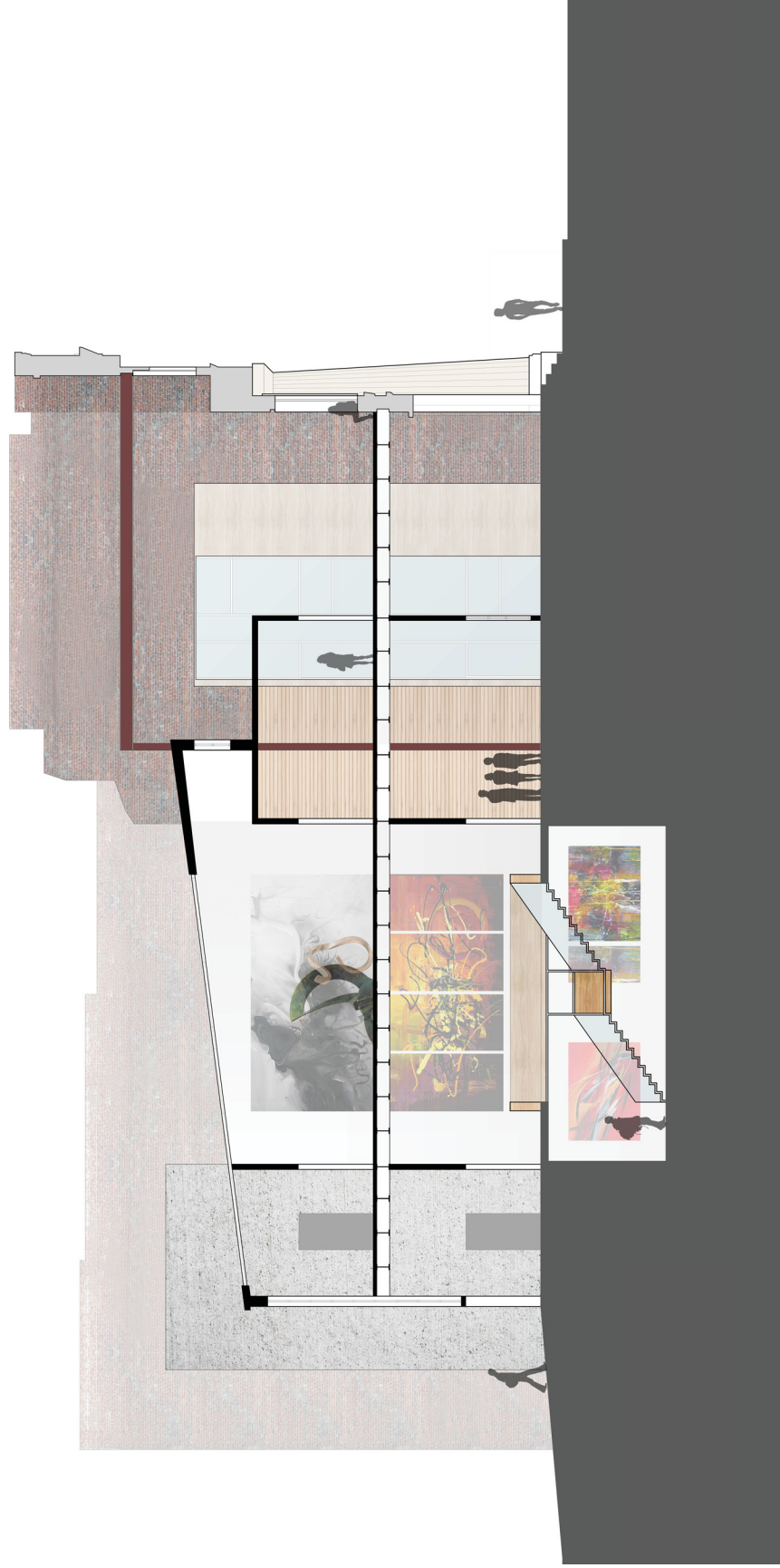
The introduction of an arts/culture facility into the block can also serve as a formal counterpart off of which informal public art strategies (including permanent and temporary public art installations, wall murals, etc.) can begin to occupy the neighbourhood. Practically, “one of the roles assigned to visual art is to give the impression of difference, whilst in actuality having a negligible impact to the local economy...” (Miles 1997, 112).



Preliminary sketch of semi public-private zone between facade and new insertion

In the scheme for this first site, thresholds began to emerge with potential to be integrated throughout the thesis block as a new form of public space. The semi public-private zone between the façade and inserted gallery essentially reflects a soft five to six metre zone that can bridge the gap between indoor and outdoor and also create opportunity to soften the hard urban conditions through vegetation.

In addition, a circulation threshold can link this lot with the neighbouring building to the east (currently known as Madgical’s Golf Kingdom). By establishing mutual entryways between what will become two programmatically-related buildings, this soft public zone can then extend from the gallery into the interior of the adjacent building, continuing out to the proposed outdoor public space beyond (a park). The combined ground plan of these two buildings (page 53) speaks to their interconnectedness. The latter building presents the next site under study.



0 1 2 5 10m

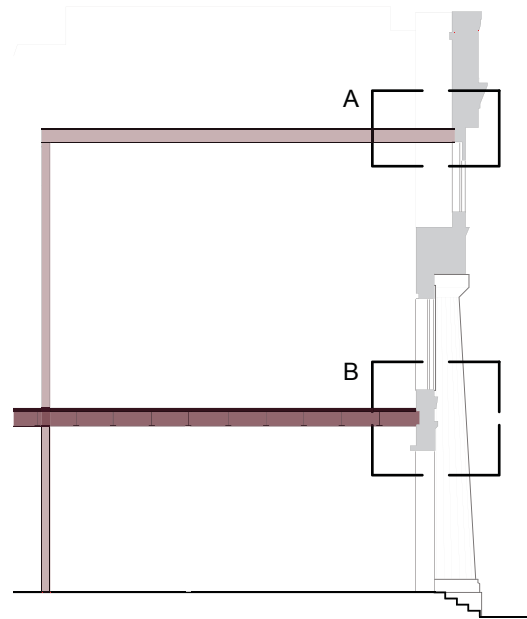
Section of new gallery insertion in relation to the CIBC facade and abutting Madgical's Golf Kingdom behind



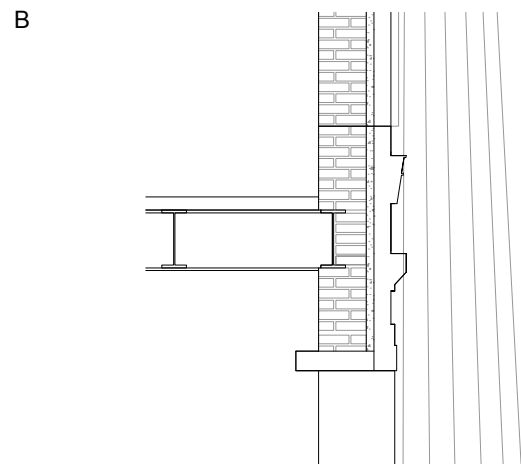
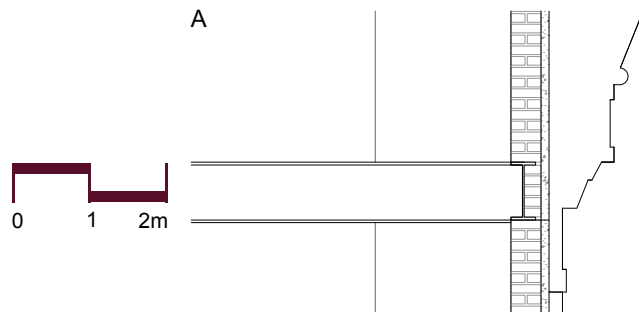
'Hidden' new gallery elevation behind the facade



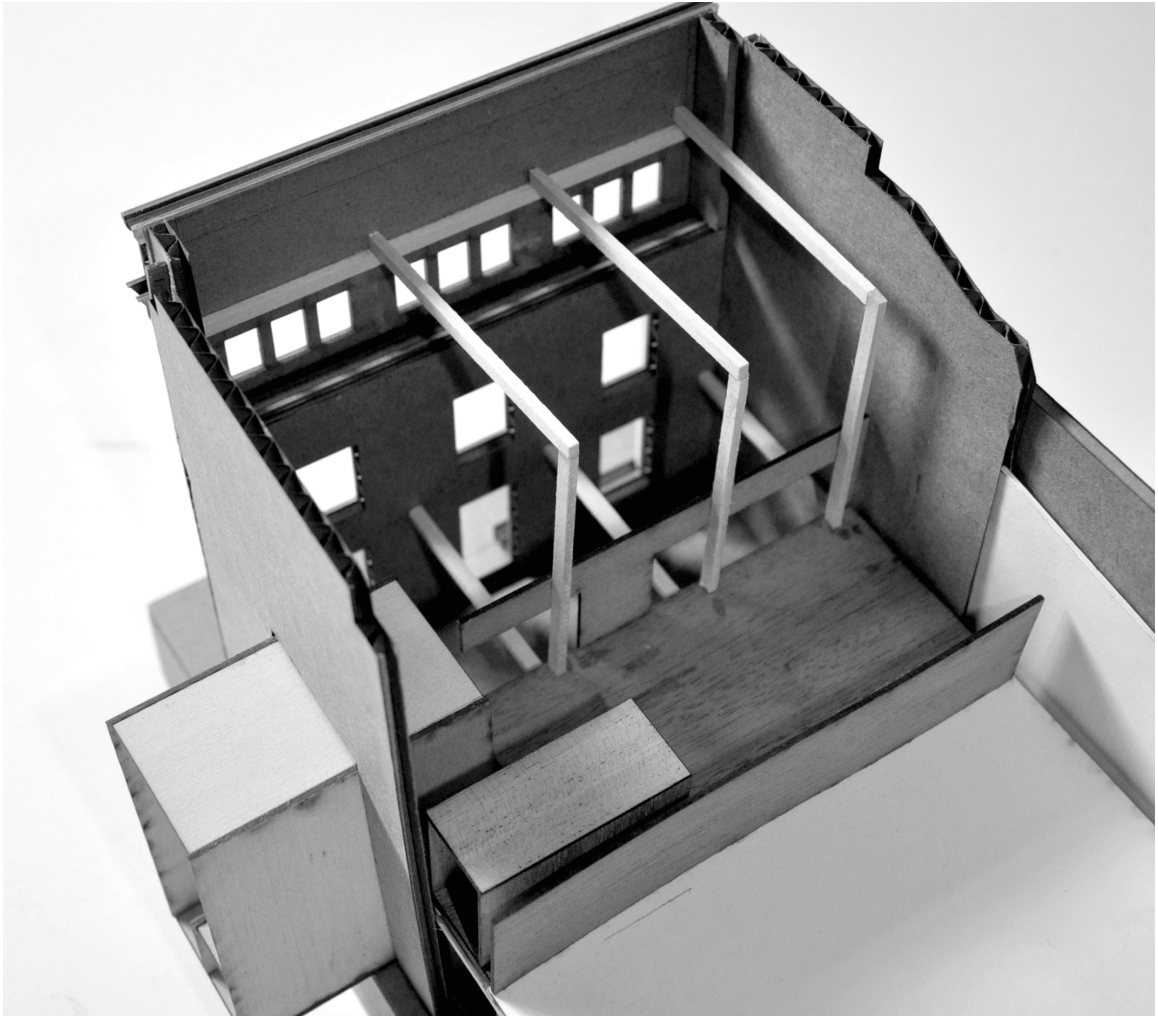
Street elevation to 'hint' at new gallery inserted behind the bank facade



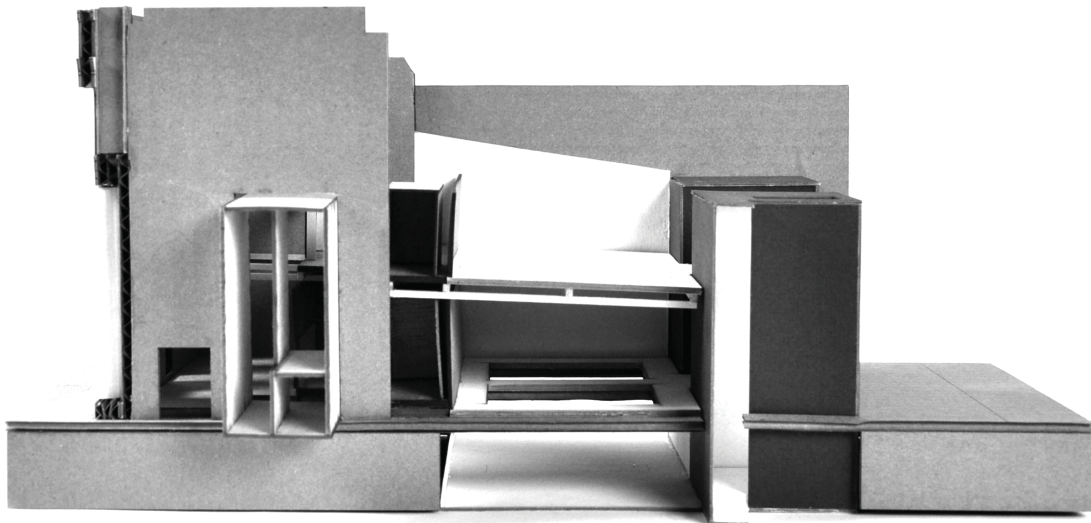
Isolation of wall section to demonstrate the extension of beams from the new insertion to support the existing facade



A and B: Details of wall section, demonstrating where the beam intersects the existing facade



Threshold zone encompassing open steel beams and columns to structurally support the facade and also to transition from public (street) to private (gallery)



Sectional in-progress model showing circulation cut-outs into adjacent building, sunken gallery and the overall formal/material division of programmatic zones

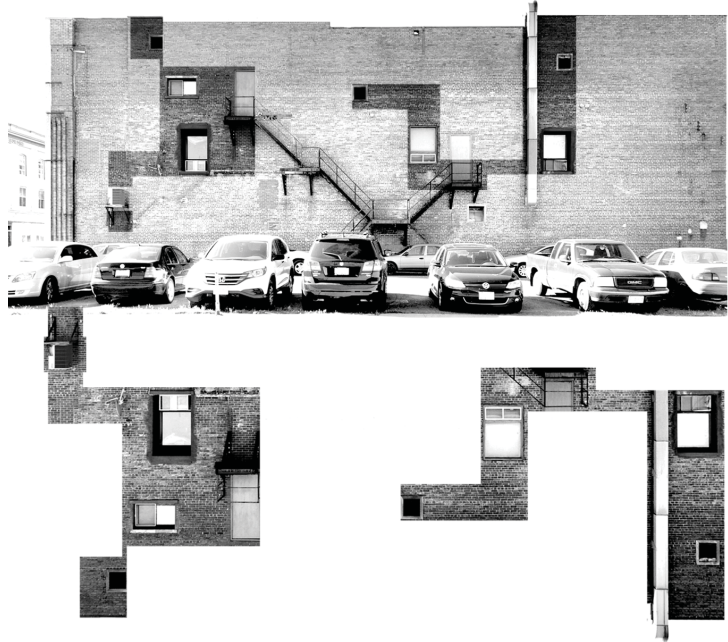




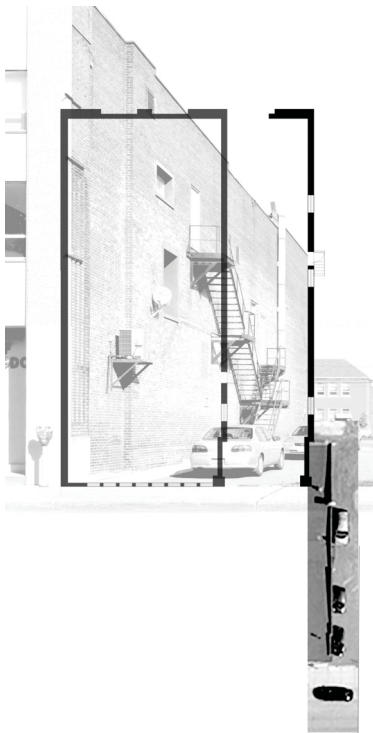
- 'ENTRY' CIRCULATION
- CIBC - GALLERY 'ENTRY'
- CIBC - 'GALLERY'
- CIBC - 'SERVICE'
- EXTERIOR CIRCULATION 1 (MAINLY OUTDOORS)
- EXTERIOR CIRCULATION 2 (INDOOR/OUTDOOR THRESHOLD OR SPECIALITY)
- GREEN AREAS TO 'SOFTEN' OVERALL NEIGHBOURHOOD
- OUT OF SCOPE BUILDING INTERIOR



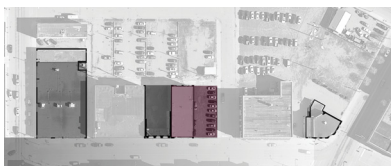
Ground plan for combined CIBC Block, including inserted gallery and juxtaposed wall/park



Juxtaposition site collage 1: An elevational perspective



Juxtaposition site collage 2:  
A plan perspective



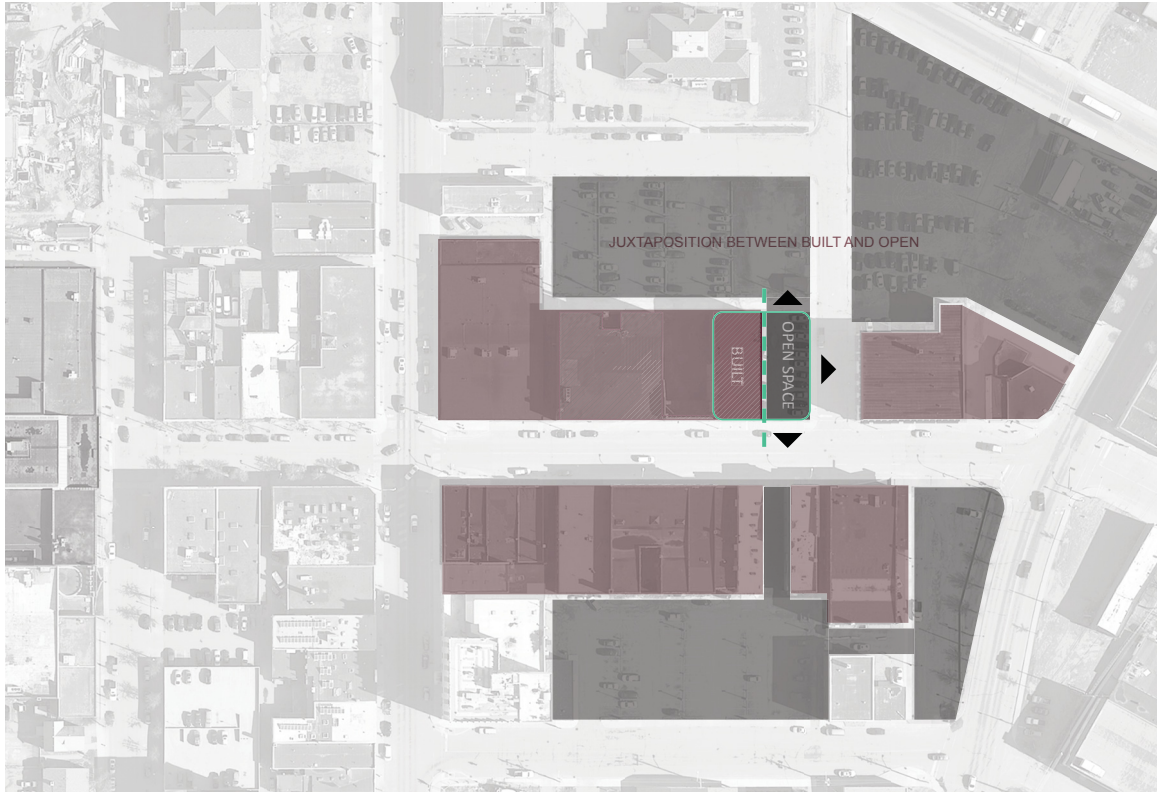
Key map

## Layering and Juxtaposing: The Nondescript Wall and Park

### *Response to Site Context*

In contrast to the formal street façade of the gallery, the emphasis for this site transitions to a conventional brick wall. The wall was previously hidden behind the former St. Louis Hotel, demolished to leave a parking lot in place. Intervening on this nondescript wall questions the scope of current adaptive reuse projects in which typically buildings that possess some heritage or architectural value are considered worthy of the difficulties of intervention. Other conventional buildings that really represent the majority of the urban environment are either torn down, once in disuse, or downgraded to minor additions and renovations.

This renewal strategy thus examines the boundary between built space and its neighbouring 'left-over' or



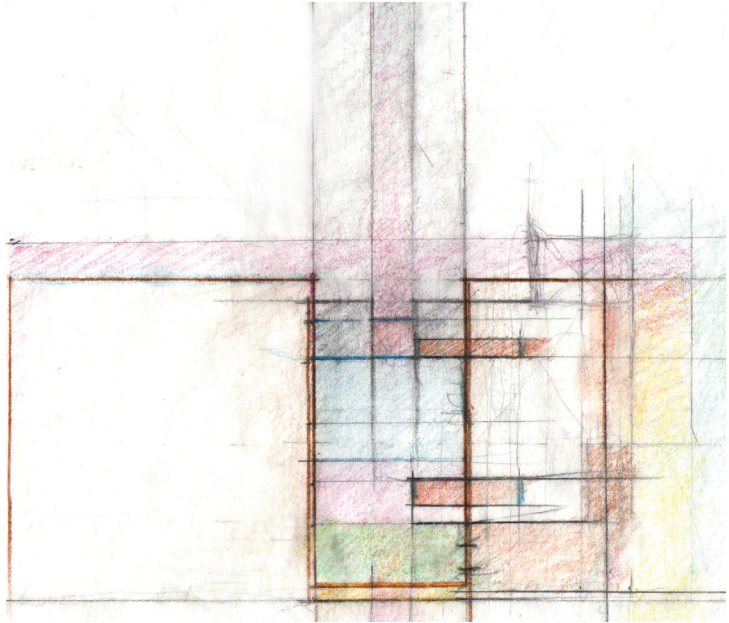
Immediate site conditions for juxtaposed wall/park, including built versus open space

essentially ‘unoccupied’ space, combinations of which make up the fabric for the block within Victoria Avenue. The parking lot is also in a relatively centralized and unique corner lot situation with views potentially to three sides. Despite its current use for parking, the lot contributes to both spatial and visual relief for an otherwise built up area.

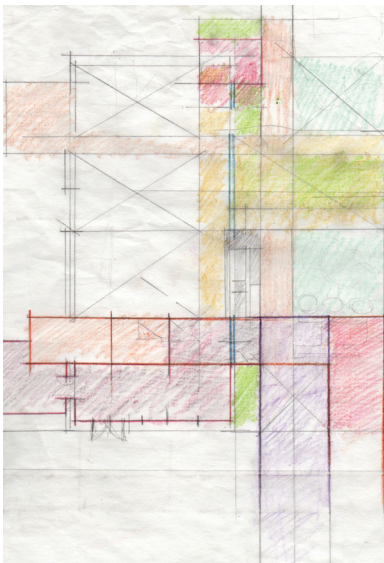
### ***Programmatic Layering***

To date, buildings along Victoria Avenue are more or less isolated from one another, with little interaction amongst them. Yet there is potential to instigate synergy through connected programs, which only create greater impetus for renewal.

With a gallery thus proposed next door, introducing



Early trace sketch of CIBC block, demonstrating programmatic layering and circulation thresholds



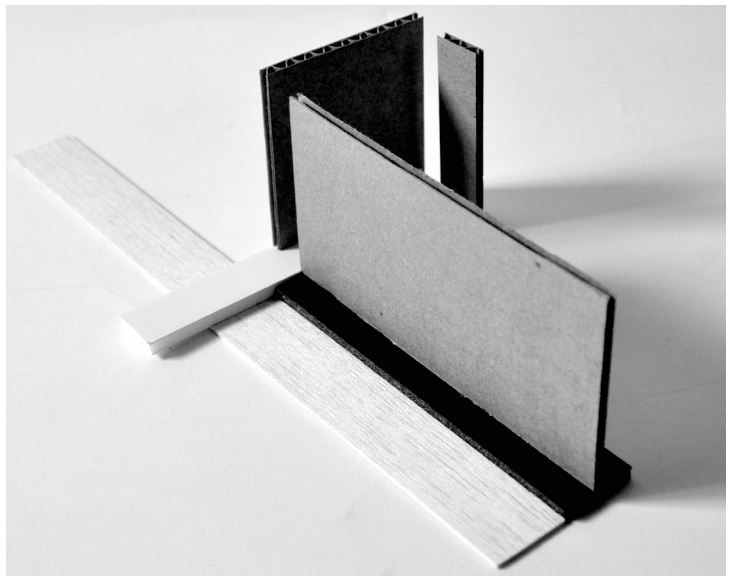
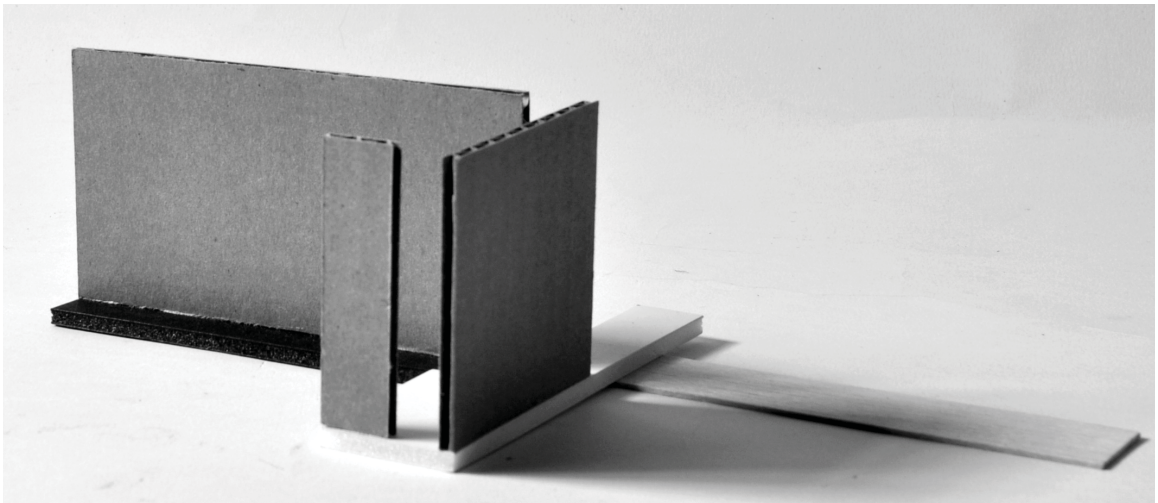
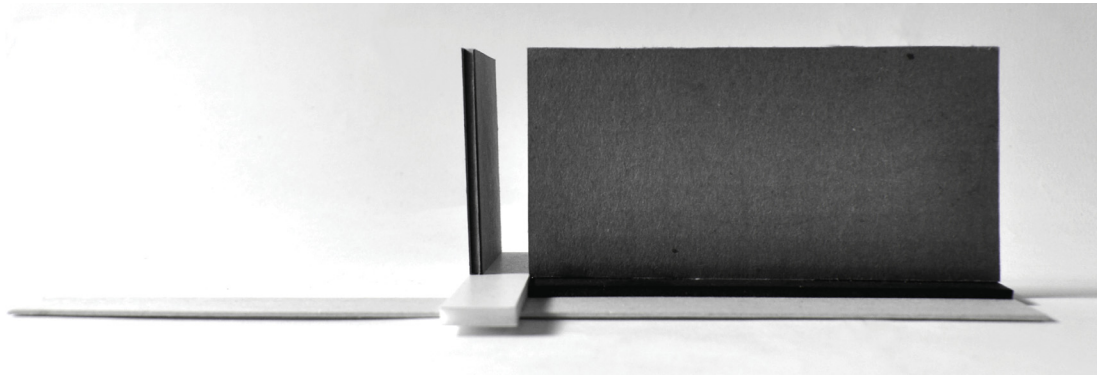
Ongoing sketch of programmatic layering and threshold circulation through building and into the adjacent park

arts and culture into the neighbourhood, the program proposed for this building encompasses artist studios, workshops and/or large community spaces...like the 'work' parallel to the display occurring in the gallery.

In addition, programming within the building must transition and extend out into the adjacent lot, which is to be transformed into much needed (and currently lacking) park/open space. Keeping Tschumi's concept of superimposed programming in mind, a diversity of programs and activities is ideal for this combined site. Moreover, at the intersection where wall meets park, a critical programmatic threshold emerges (in the form of 'cut-outs').

### ***Juxtaposition in Architecture and Landscape***

Influenced by Scarpa's preoccupation with new interventions juxtaposing (often orthogonally) against



Early layering model: Developing circulation thresholds and defining the zones that link to the gallery and abut the park

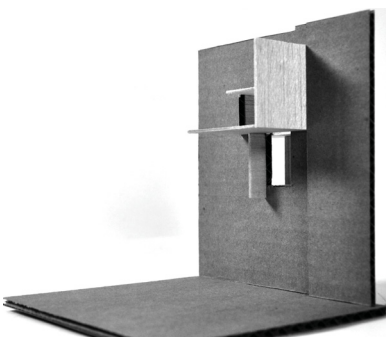


Initial exploration of the 'cut-out'

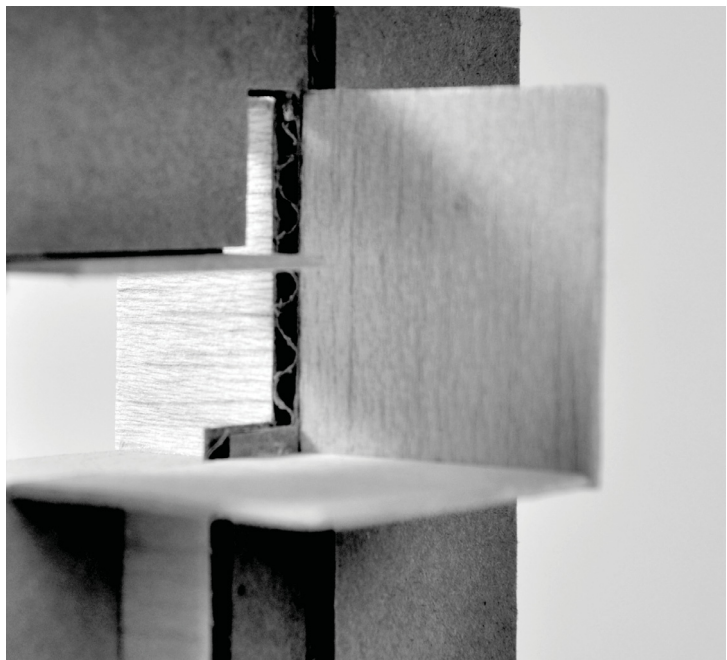
the existing, the conceptual idea is to playfully introduce 'cuts-outs' into the wall, which will be used for studio or gathering spaces. Formally, these cut-outs are abstracted reflections of the arrangement of windows (see initial juxtaposition elevation collage) and openings currently located along the existing wall. This interpretation of cut-outs will also be translated into the paving, landscape and furniture layout of the adjacent park.

The cut-outs in the walls experiment with the notion of the ceiling becoming the wall becoming the floor and the distinct delineation between materiality. Contrast in materiality also brings to attention the previously nondescript buildings. For example, Scarpa works as follows in the Canova Plaster Cast Gallery:

The black metal baseboard makes a sharp joint at the floor. There is also a small reveal between the ceiling and walls in the high room, which gives the illusion that the ceiling is suspended above the walls. (Ranalli 1999, 61)

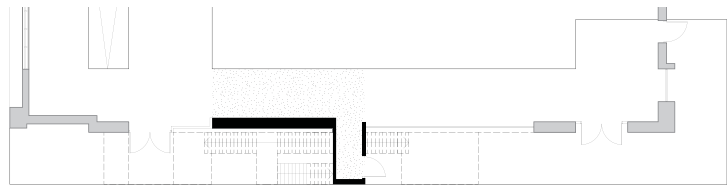


Another view of the 'cut-out'

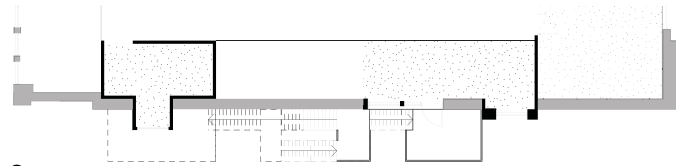


The 'joint' within the cut-out, the boundary between indoor and outdoor

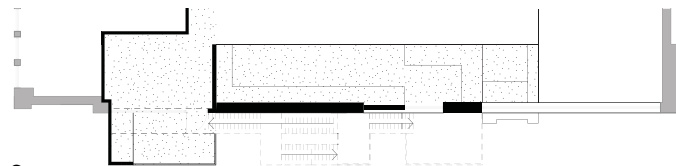




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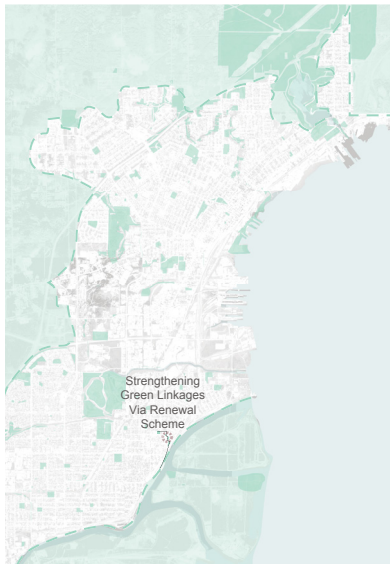


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Plans demonstrating various 'cut-outs' that bisect the threshold between indoor and outdoor



**Contribution to the Urban Scheme**

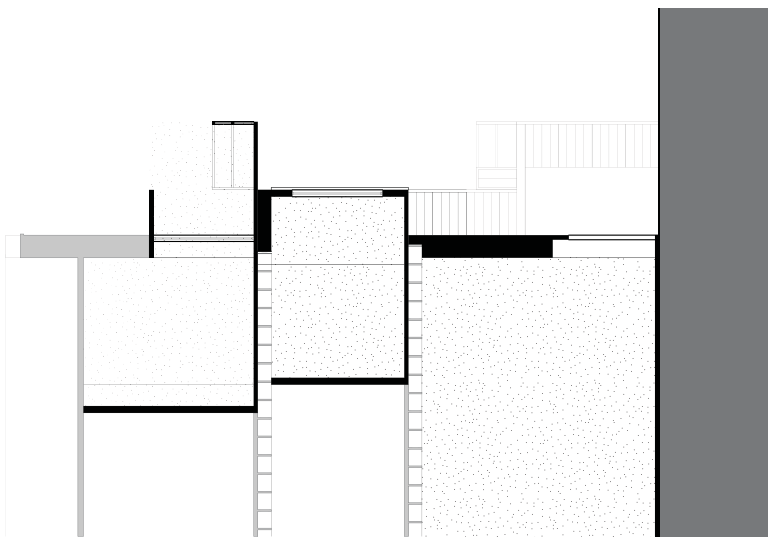
Intervening on a conventionally nondescript building begins a conversation with respect to how the everyday existing building is viewed and valued. This perspective then begins to establish a precedent for other buildings in the area and elsewhere throughout the city, even in other cities, in how to address such conventional forms.



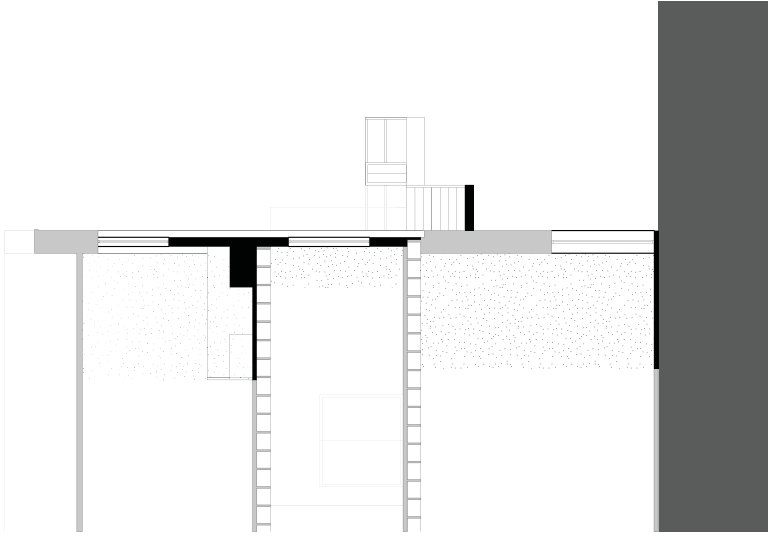
Park contributing to overall green linkages (as part of the larger renewal strategy)

The park not only establishes much needed relief within context of the neighbourhood, but in the larger scheme of an urban strategy for the City, reflects the necessary first steps to establishing and promoting a network of urban green space that will eventually 're-forest' Thunder Bay.

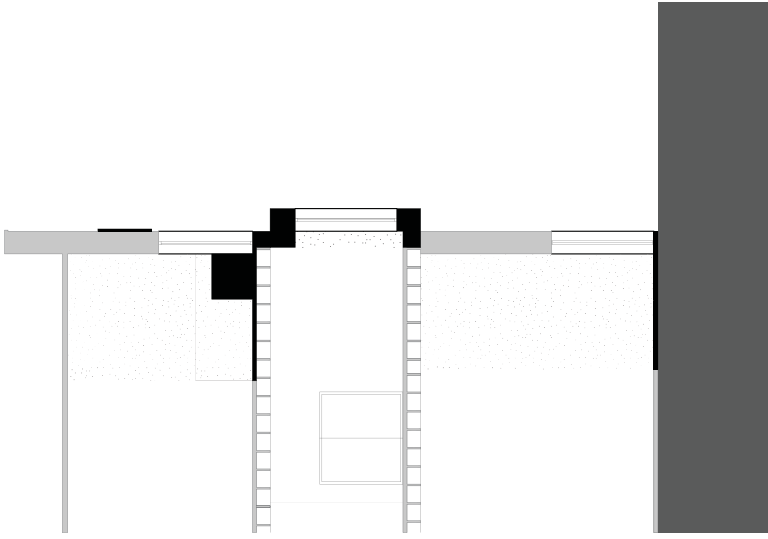




First 'cut-out'

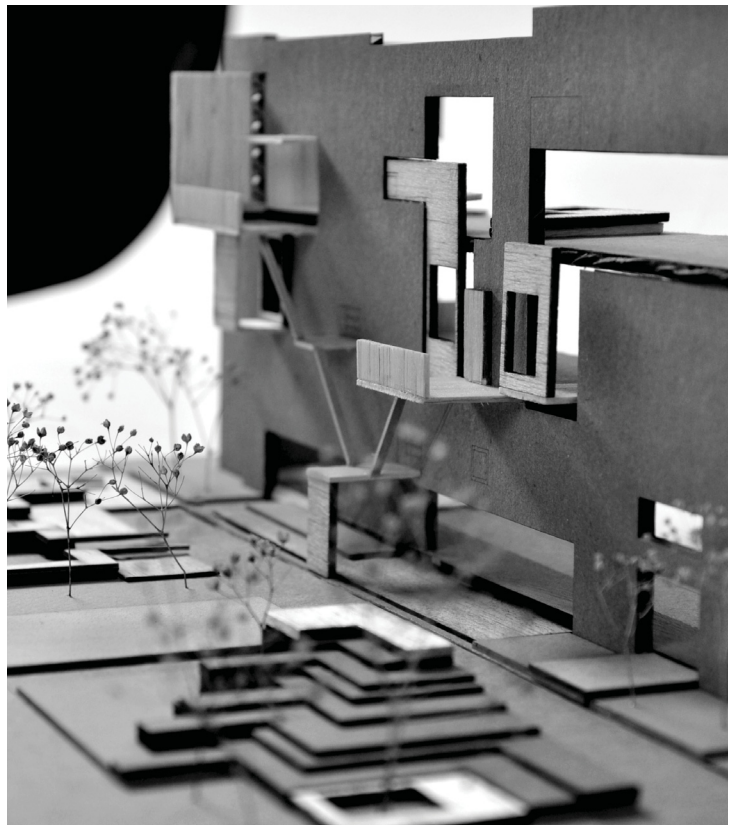
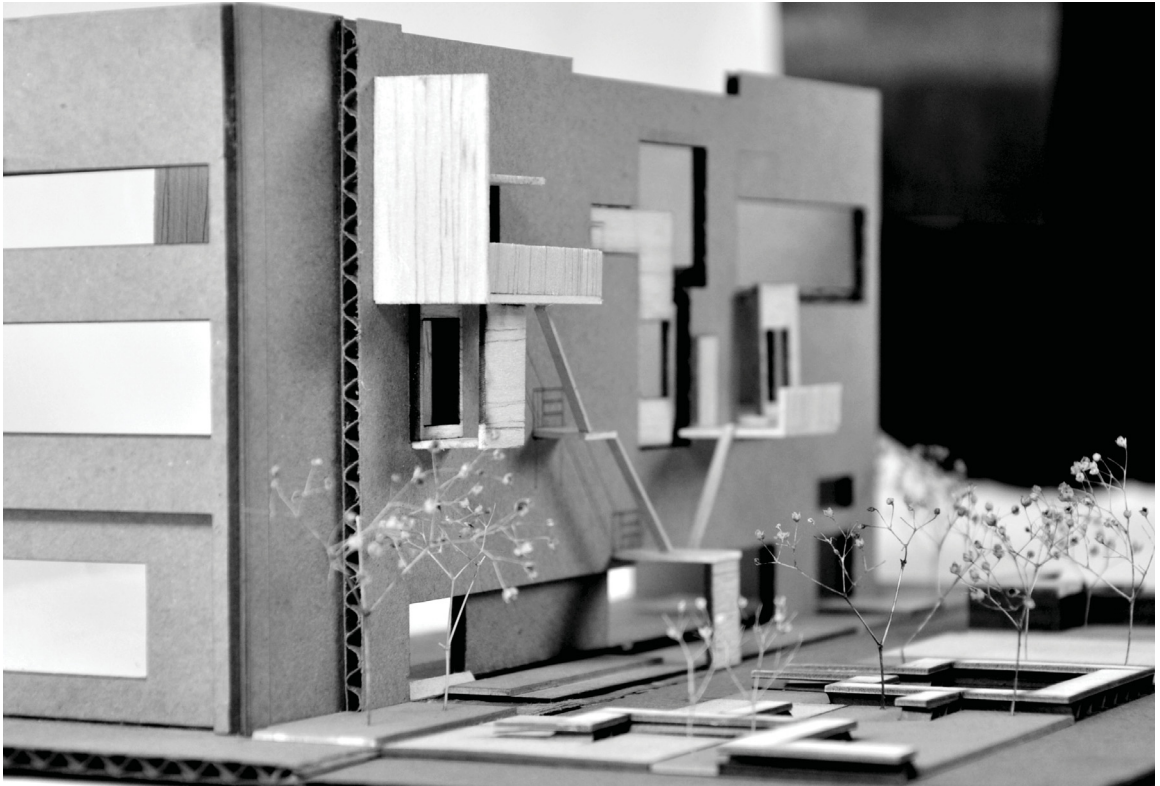


Second 'cut-out'



Third 'cut-out'





Photographs of model for juxtaposed wall and park

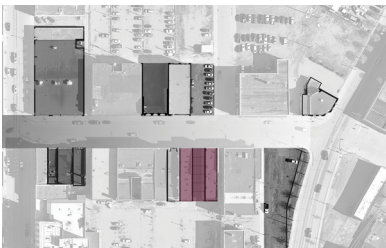


Photomontage of street, showing Amethyst Gift Centre, vacant lot, Discount Golf, Red Sky Metis office and Roy Block

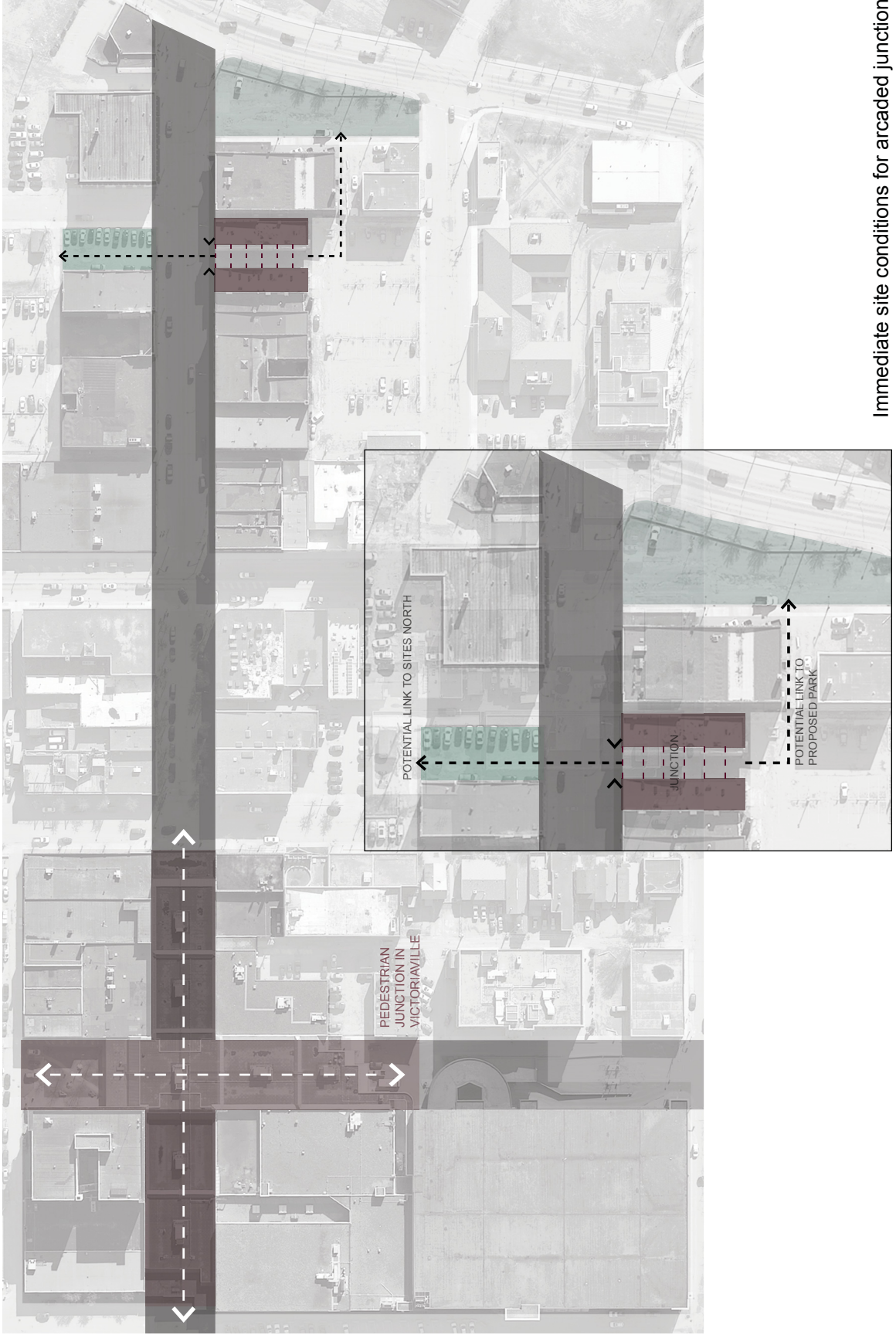
## The Arcaded Junction

### *Response to Site Context*

On the south side of Victoria Avenue, essentially across from the juxtaposed wall/park site, is a vacant lot that is situated at the juncture between the three-storey Amethyst Gift Centre (east) and the two-storey Discount Golf (west). Once a building stood here; today, architectural 'ruins' are still present in the form of steel beams that span the entire lot and allude to a natural sense of enclosure. Full and partial structural brick walls on either side support these beams. The lot is also situated at a juncture in terms of serving both as a point of entry and departure, for people cutting back and forth to the parking lot behind, Victoria Avenue running perpendicular and the proposed park/parking lot further north. It also can link to the corner lot adjacent to Simpson Street (currently used for parking but to be developed into a park as part of the renewal scheme).



Key map

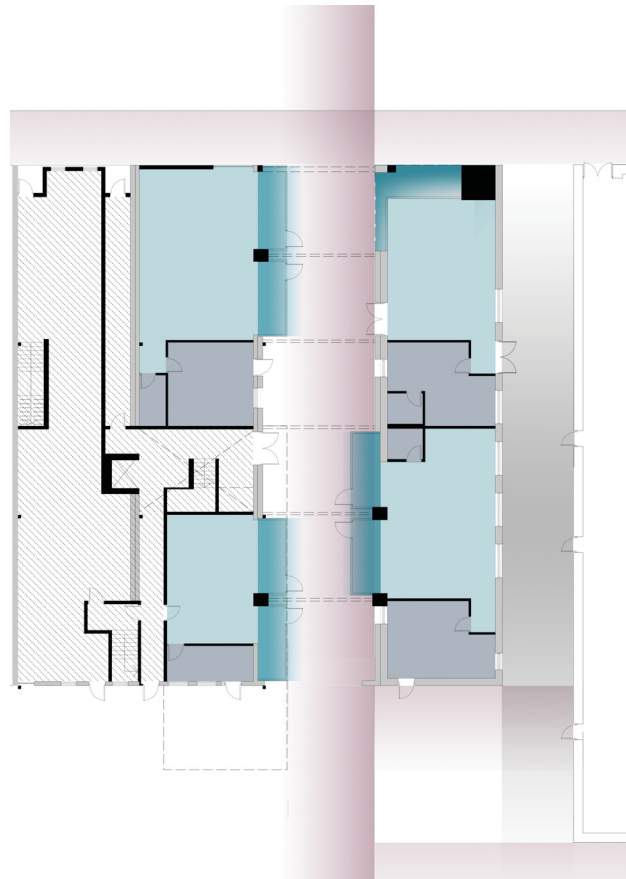


### ***Programming the Junction (the New 'Street')***

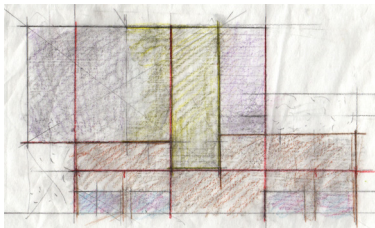
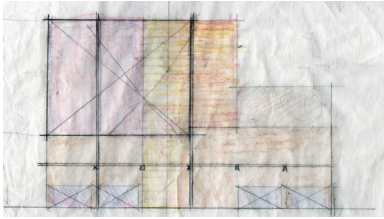
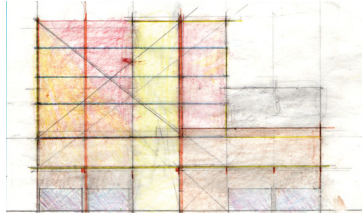


Photo of existing beams on site

The beams, which run along the entire length of the lot, create a natural arcade, protected between its adjacent buildings and forming another pedestrian thoroughfare through the thesis site. Yet this thoroughfare, as it exists today, remains the width of a lot as opposed to a street. Consequently, this strategy proposes to re-orientate the interior programming of the adjacent buildings to face the middle lot in an interpretation of an arcaded retail/commercial 'street.' Interior programming at the ground level is to cater towards flexible small-scaled retail/commerce for tenants. Moreover, the arcade is also seen as an alternative solution to the attempt nearby in the Victoriaville Civic Centre to completely enclose buildings with a covered 'pedestrian promenade.'



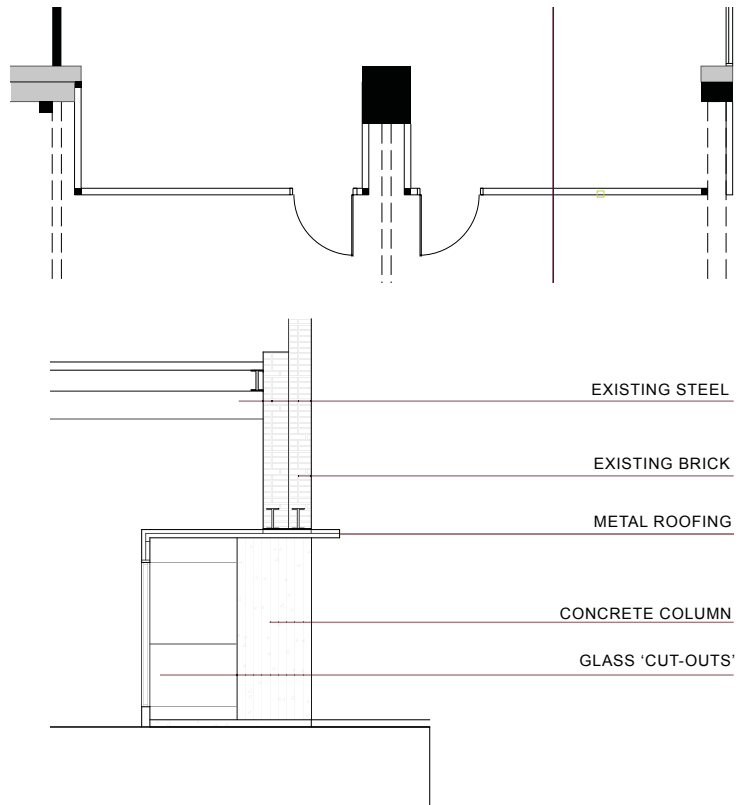
Ground plan of arcade



Early trace drawings of the west elevation for the arcade (plus residential component)

### ***Architectural Intent***

Working again with blank brick walls that are functional but subtly interesting in material texture, the architectural strategy involves another interpretation for selectively 'incising' into the existing built fabric in order to bring about new interactions between old and new construction. The beams provide a rhythm against which to formally space the cut-outs. Keeping in mind the importance of the front facades still fronting onto Victoria Avenue, the openings wrap around the corner. Moreover, within a soft zone 1.5 metre zone, the cut-outs play with the threshold between indoor and outdoor. In narrower areas, they allude to spaces of movement and in wider areas, spaces for rest. A partial green wall is also being considered as part of the strategy to 'soften' and occupy the existing 'hard' conditions of the neighbourhood.



Plan and section details of arcade cut-out



East elevation for the arcade (plus residential component), currently Amethyst Gift Centre



West elevation for the arcade (plus residential component), currently Discount Golf



Covered pedestrian promenade within Victoriaville Civic Centre

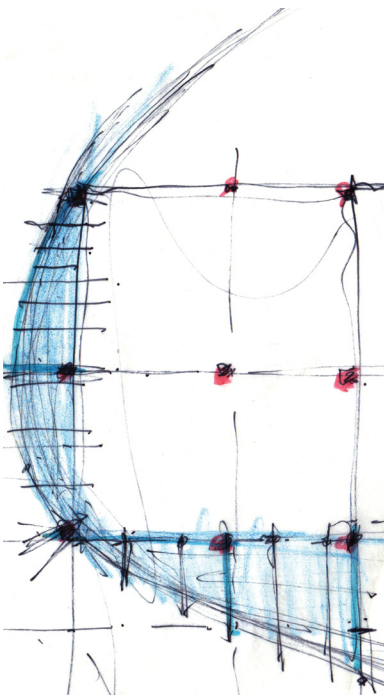
### ***Contribution to the Urban Scheme***

In one manner, the arcade is a re-interpretation and response to the covered pedestrian promenade provided within Victoriaville Civic Centre. Rather than being completely enclosed (as done in the mall), the building plays within an identified threshold zone to collectively produce a street and plaza feel. Furthermore, by translating the notion of the 'main street' (Victoria Avenue) onto a 'side street,' this renewal scheme thus breaks away from traditional main street renewal strategies, setting up a precedent for the alleyway to take root throughout surrounding lots and streets.

### ***The Canopy***

Walter Benjamin comprehensively explored arcades and galleries in Paris:

These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marbled-paneled corridors, extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in a miniature.... During sudden rainshowers, the arcades are a place of refuge for the unprepared, to whom they offer a secure, if restricted, promenade – one from which the merchants also benefit. (Benjamin 2002, 31)



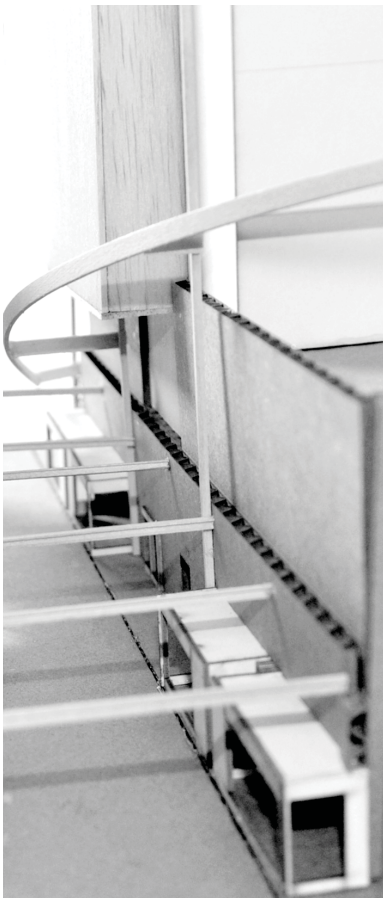
Preliminary plan of canopy (including structural grid)

Roof coverings thus provide a certain level of intimacy for a given arcade. Yet, as witnessed through Victoriaville, complete coverage is not necessarily wanted in the development of the new Arcaded Junction for Victoria Avenue. Consequently, in addition to the 'covering' provided by the steel beams running above, a canopy structure is proposed to providing partial coverage via a freer and playful form, which also guides movement





Model: View of ground level arcade



Model: Photo of canopy and overhead beams

through the arcade from the back parking lot. Moreover, this canopy serves as a mediating element between the ground-level arcade and the residential rooftop occupation outlined in the next renewal strategy.

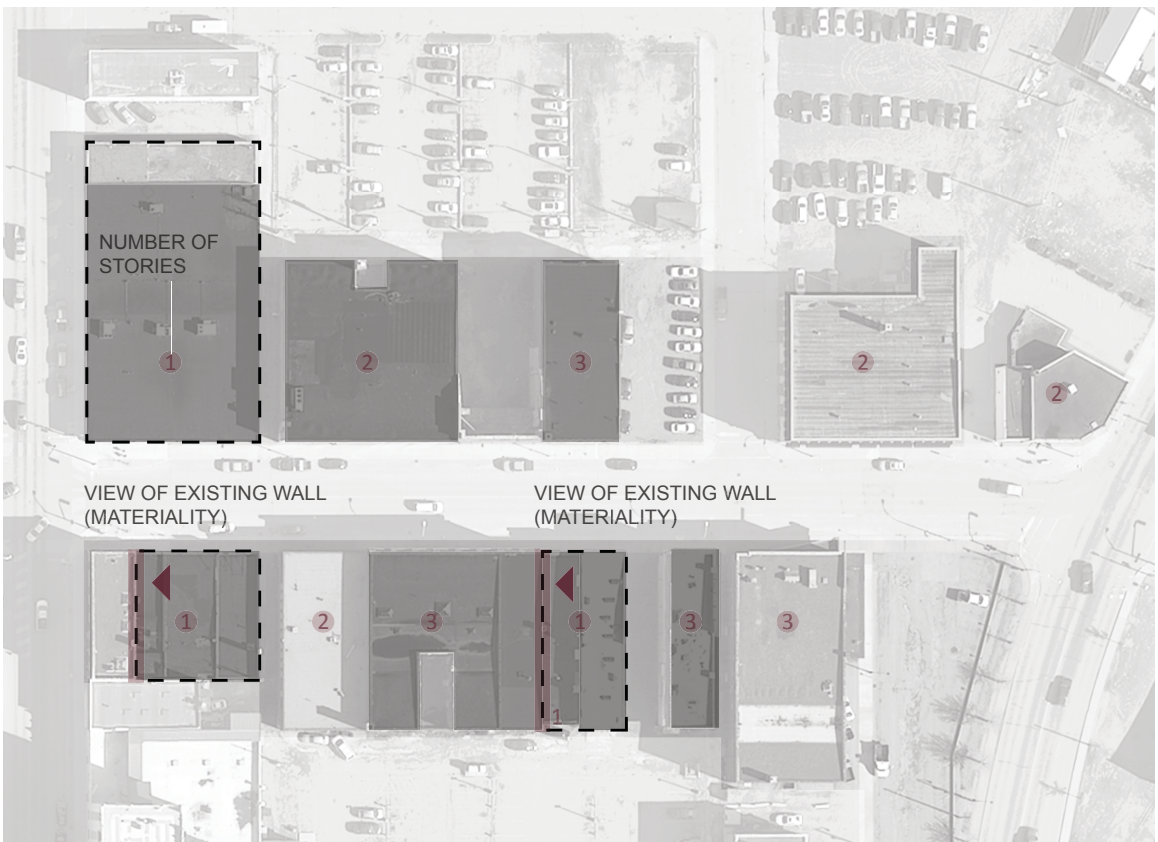
### **Filling in the [Residential] Gap - Restoring Equilibrium**

#### ***Response to Site Context***

Whereas the thesis block is typically characterized by three to four-storey high buildings, a series of low-lying one-story buildings diminish the overall presence of Victoria Avenue. These low-lying buildings in themselves are not architecturally interesting but are relatively in use. The issue lies in that the absence of upper stories removes potential opportunities to further animate and add density to the street. As such, the impression of ‘vacancy’ still lingers.



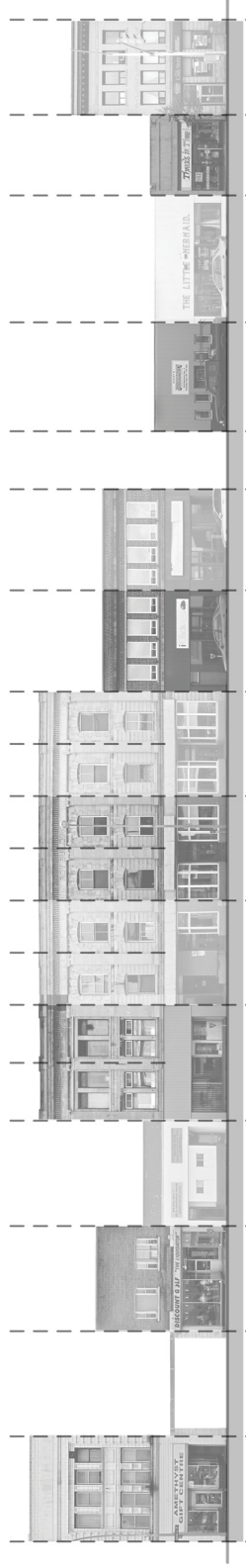
Early model: Canopy transitioning from arcade to area of rooftop occupation



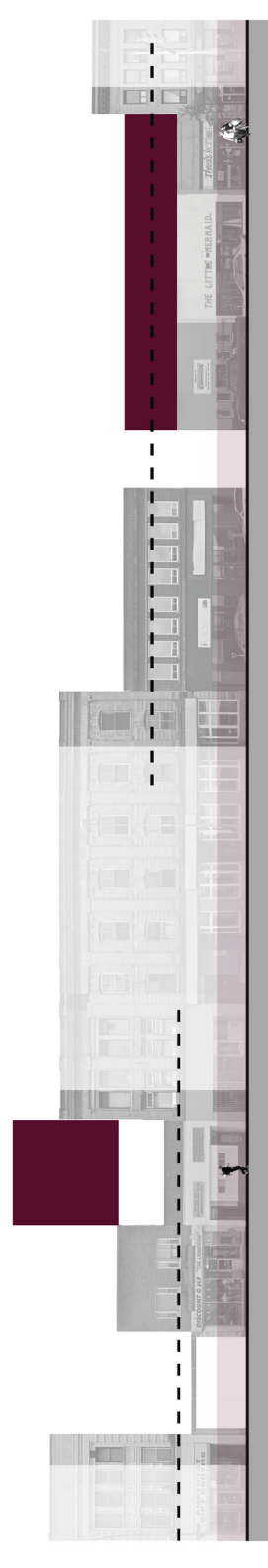
Immediate site conditions for rooftop occupation (residential)



Re-balancing Victoria Avenue: Identifying the datum



Re-balancing Victoria Avenue: Vertical (structural) axis



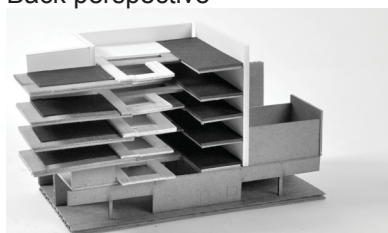
Re-balancing Victoria Avenue: Occupying upper level vacancies

### ***'Re-Balancing' Program (via Residential)***

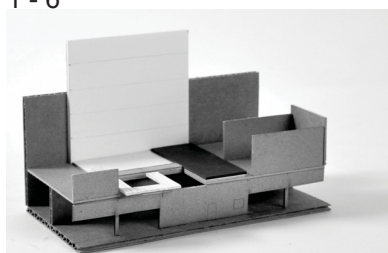
One of the major programmatic gaps to be addressed in the revitalization of Victoria Avenue involves the introduction of a greater residential population. A great opportunity for doing so emerges on top of these low-lying buildings. Two such groups of buildings align the south side the of the street, one block including Discount Golf and the Red Sky Metis service building and the other encompassing retail stores of Jerzee City, the Little Mermaid and Threads in Time.



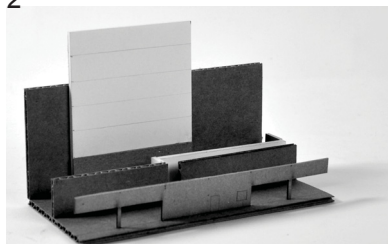
Back perspective



1 - 6



2



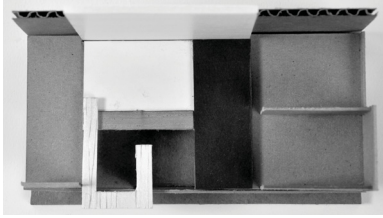
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In-progress model of residential component: Examining interior programmatic/material layering

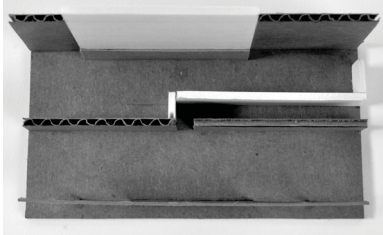
Increasing residential density is also in keeping with current planning mandates to intensify urban areas (in place of sprawling outward). Moreover, this density can contribute to the development of a 24-hour downtown that is enlivened beyond regular business hours. From a crime and safety perspective, more people means more eyes on the street and thus reduced propensity for crime. Retail and commercial businesses can also benefit from improved proximity to a 'built-in market' of customers (City of Thunder Bay 2005). 68.9% of housing in Thunder Bay currently encompass single detached homes with limited options for smaller households and low vacancy rates for multi-residential; consequently the introduction of alternative types of multi-residential would help to further diversify dwelling types in the City (Statistics Canada 2014).

### ***Architectural Intent***

The buildings and lots are narrow and long while the Roy building on the west side blocks lighting for the lower levels. With this in mind, atrium spaces (particularly



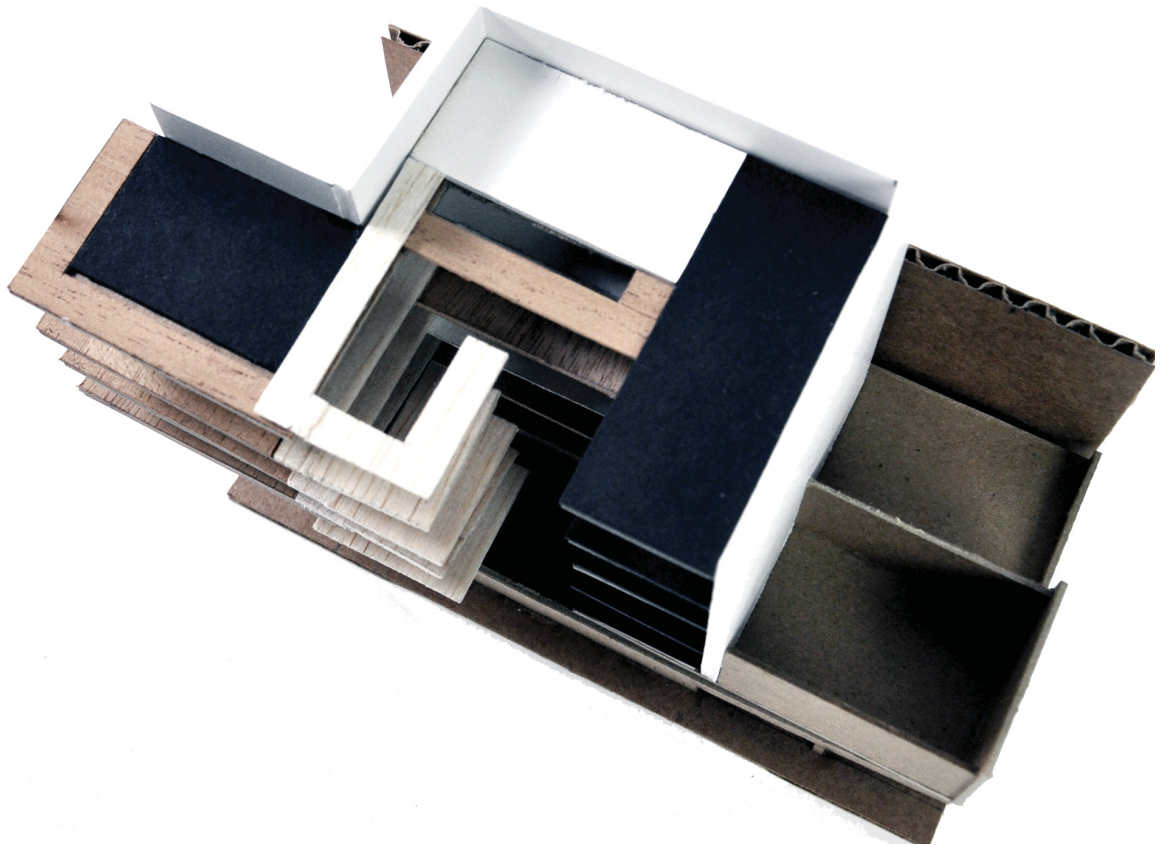
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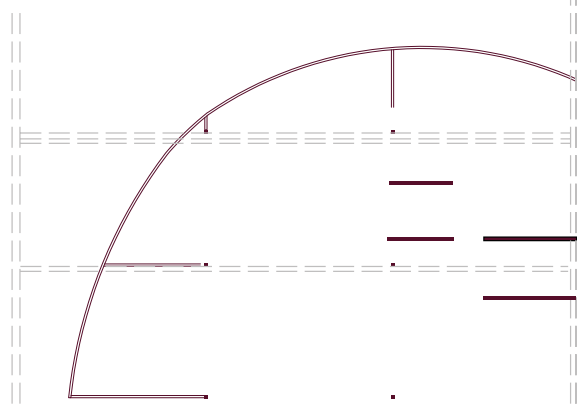
Threading of residential/  
commercial through existing  
ground level and new atrium

associated with circulation cores) are explored to bring light deep into all units. Taking into account the differences in height for the existing buildings, the combined residential insertion (built over both) rises 5-6 storeys in height respectively. The new insertions are independent from the existing in that they rely on their own light-weight steel structure with columns piercing down into the basement foundations below ground. In other places, new and old construction merge (particularly at the second and ground levels) where some of the existing is appropriated in order to make room for the atrium.

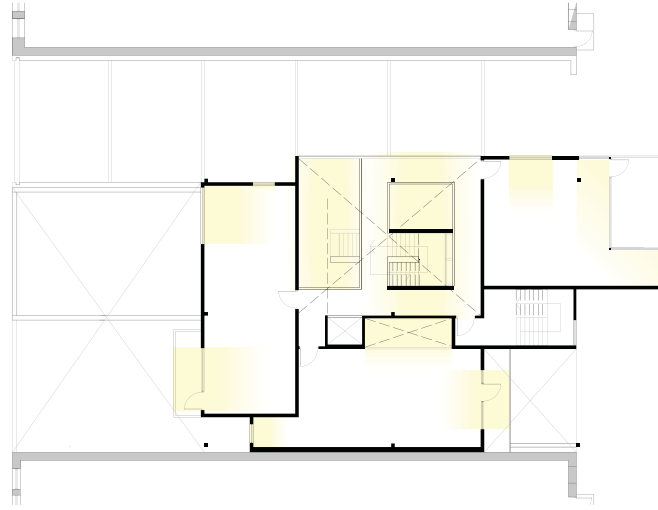


In progress model: View of residential component, reflecting programmatic and material layering as well as opening for atrium

EXISTING  
STRUCTURE



Primary canopy structure

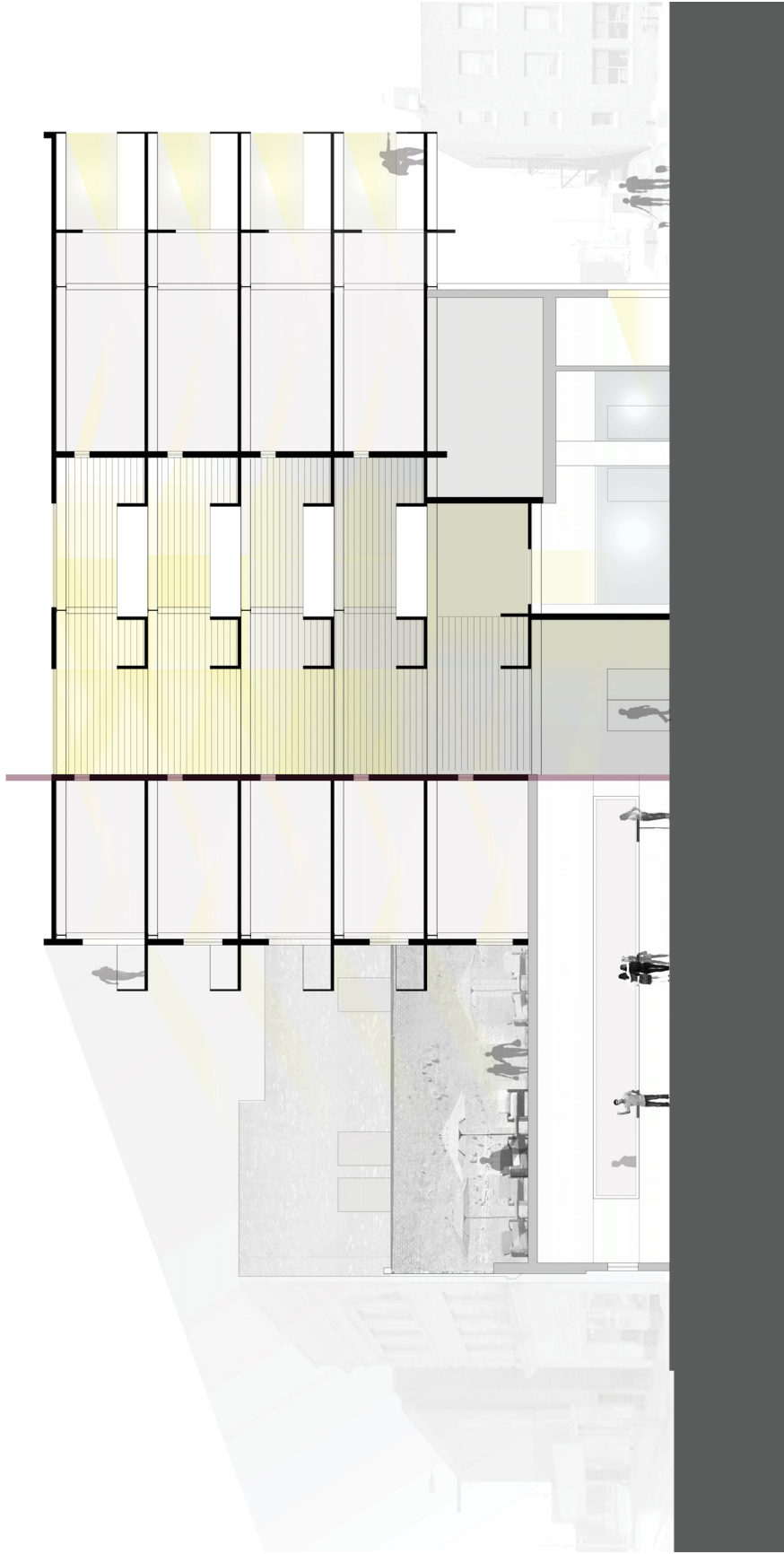


Upper level lighting



Residential/commercial ground level





Section through arcade and new residential occupying 'building over the rooftop and infiltrating into the existing below as needed

### ***Contribution to the Urban Scheme***

By filling in the upper-storey gaps along Victoria Avenue, the neighbourhood is thought to reach a better, more stable (yet enlivened) state of equilibrium. In the effort to retain the downtown character as is (3-4 storeys in height), the decision to go up 5-6 stories was justified by stepping the new rooftop residential to the back of the site. The Royal Edward Arms building, which is 8 storeys high and located just southwest of the site on May Street, provides a good urban comparison and counter-balance against which to measure and determine the appropriate height for new residential along the southern edge of Victoria Avenue.

Overall, this strategy can then be applied to other current low-lying rooftop spaces. Residential is well suited for the corner H&R Block at May and Victoria. In other ways, the infiltration of commercial/retail space upward from the ground level also adds a level of activity, creating a potential second public realm or semi public/private threshold abutting 'above' the street.

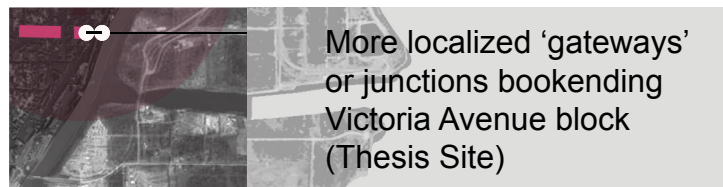
### **Other Sites: Important 'Junctions' or Gateways**

The sites selected thus far for initial moves of intervention have essentially been located at the centre of the thesis block. Such selection was deliberately undertaken in the effort to create core attractions to draw visitors to the neighbourhood. In addition, these specific sites also revealed unique opportunities to explore a group of buildings, interconnected in some manner or other, that also had potential for significant intersections between old and new architecture.





City's Image Route 'gateways' (data from City of Thunder Bay 2012a and Google 2014)

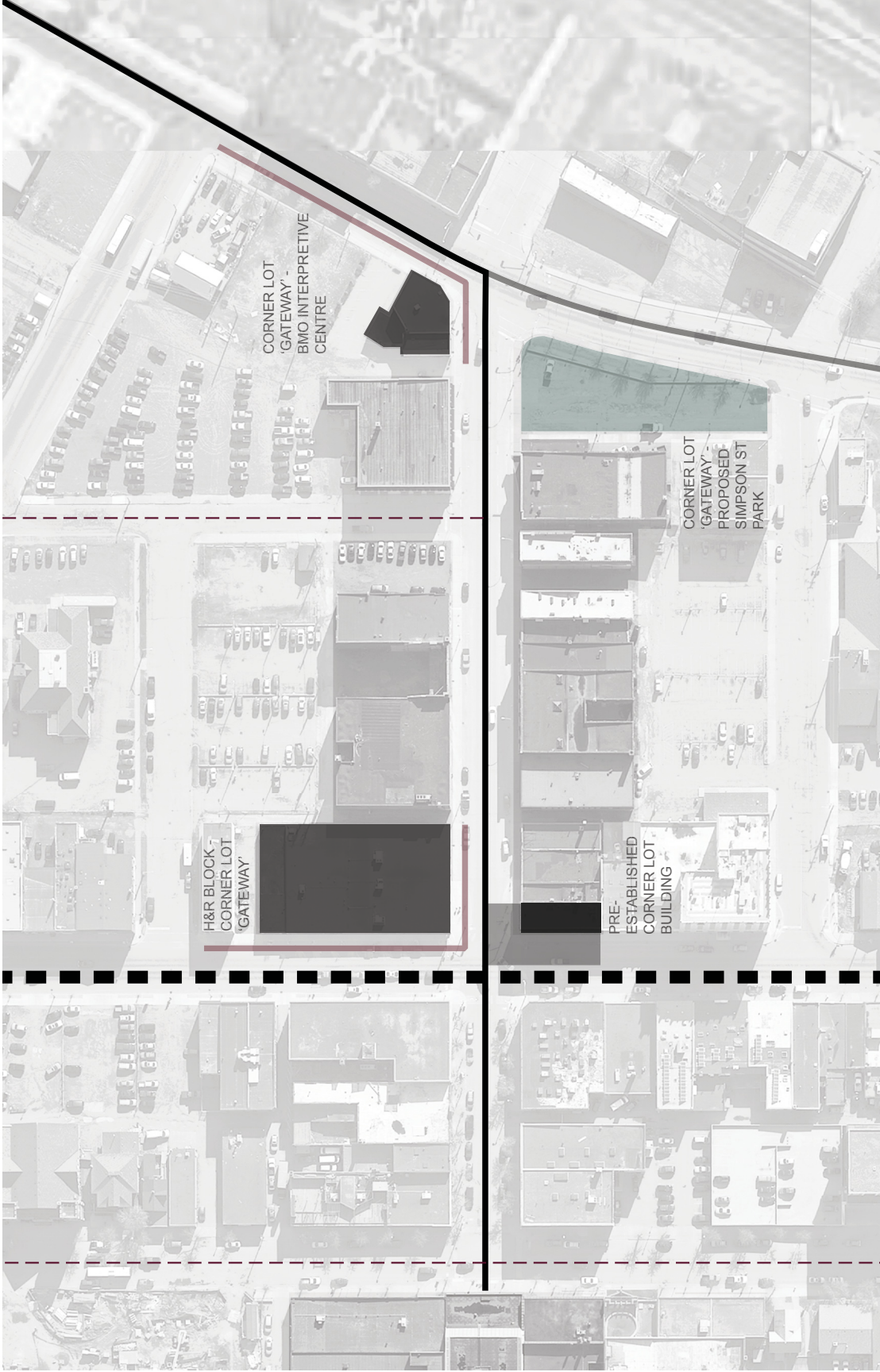


More localized 'gateways'  
or junctions bookending  
Victoria Avenue block  
(Thesis Site)

City's Image Route 'gateways' - Zoom-in of Victoria Avenue

Consequently, in continuing this first phase of initial moves, another group of buildings to be examined include 'gateway' locations – or corner lot buildings. These 'gateways' become localized versions of the larger gateways identified by the City in its Image Route Guidelines (City of Thunder Bay 2012). Gateways within the thesis site encompass:

1. The BMO building located at the juncture between Simpson Street retail and Victoria Avenue renewal. Especially in considering its long history on-site, the



Immediate site conditions for thesis block junctions ('gateways')



OTHER  
ROOFTOPS



BMOAS  
ANCHOR



NEW SIMPSON STREET  
PARK AND  
COMMUNITY CENTRE



OTHER  
ROOFTOPS



BMO building is ideal for an interpretive or historical museum dedicated to highlighting local aspects of the neighbourhood's rich history, including the streetcar and the historic banking district.

2. The H&R Building Block on the opposite end serves as a juncture between Victoria Avenue and the main arterial of May Street (key in linking Thunder Bay's South end to the North). Part of its redevelopment would involve the residential component suggested earlier but also expand to include the re-interpretation of its ground-level commercial/retail.

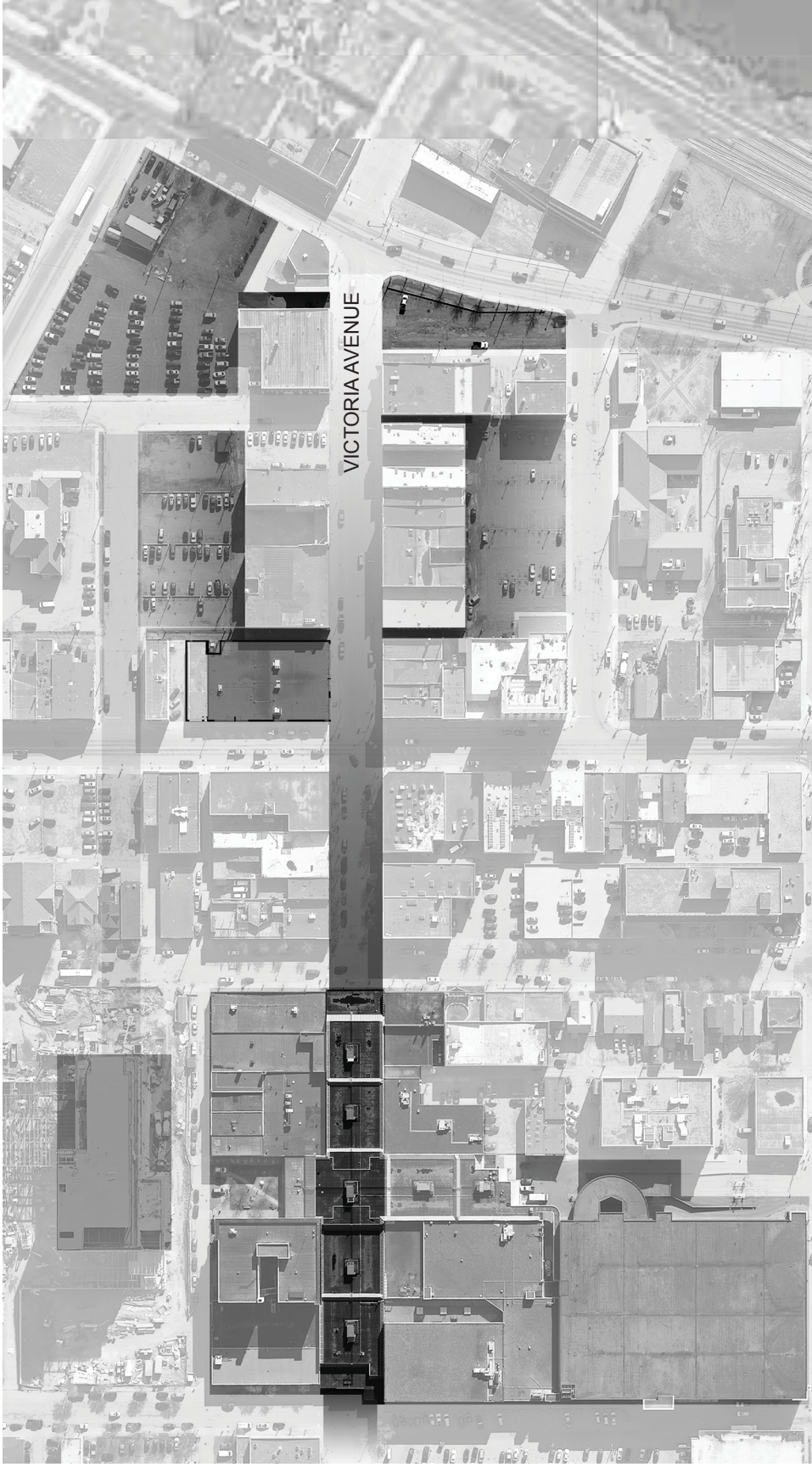
3. The three low-lying retail buildings (Jerzee City, the Little Mermaid, and Threads in Time) abutting the Cash Store, which again call for residential occupation; and

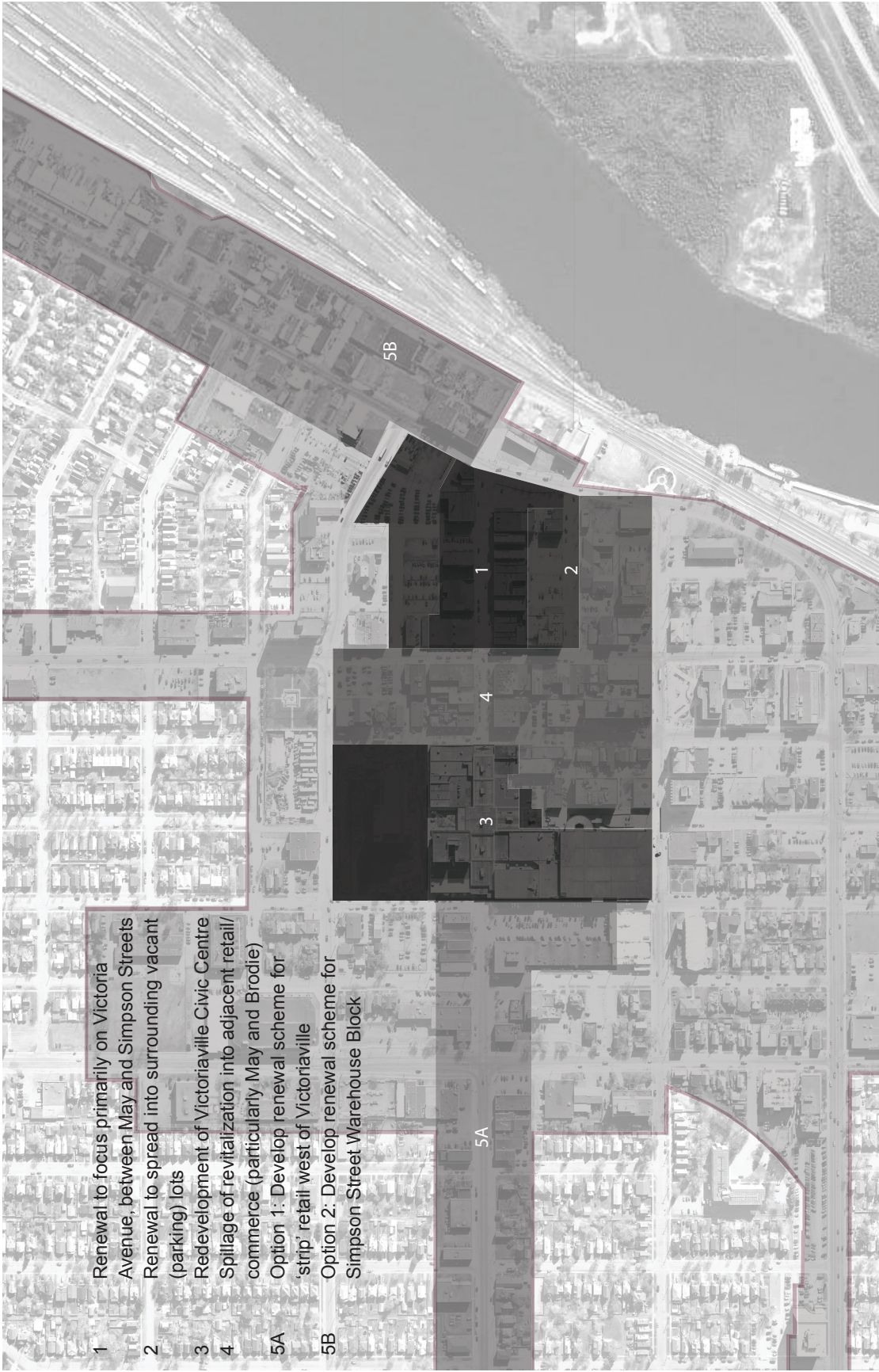
4. Simpson Street Park and adjacent Cultural Centre in the current Pawnbrokers building, again layering aspects of 'culture' into the neighbourhood as well as further developing the green space in the area.

## **Ongoing Renewal (Subsequent Phases)**

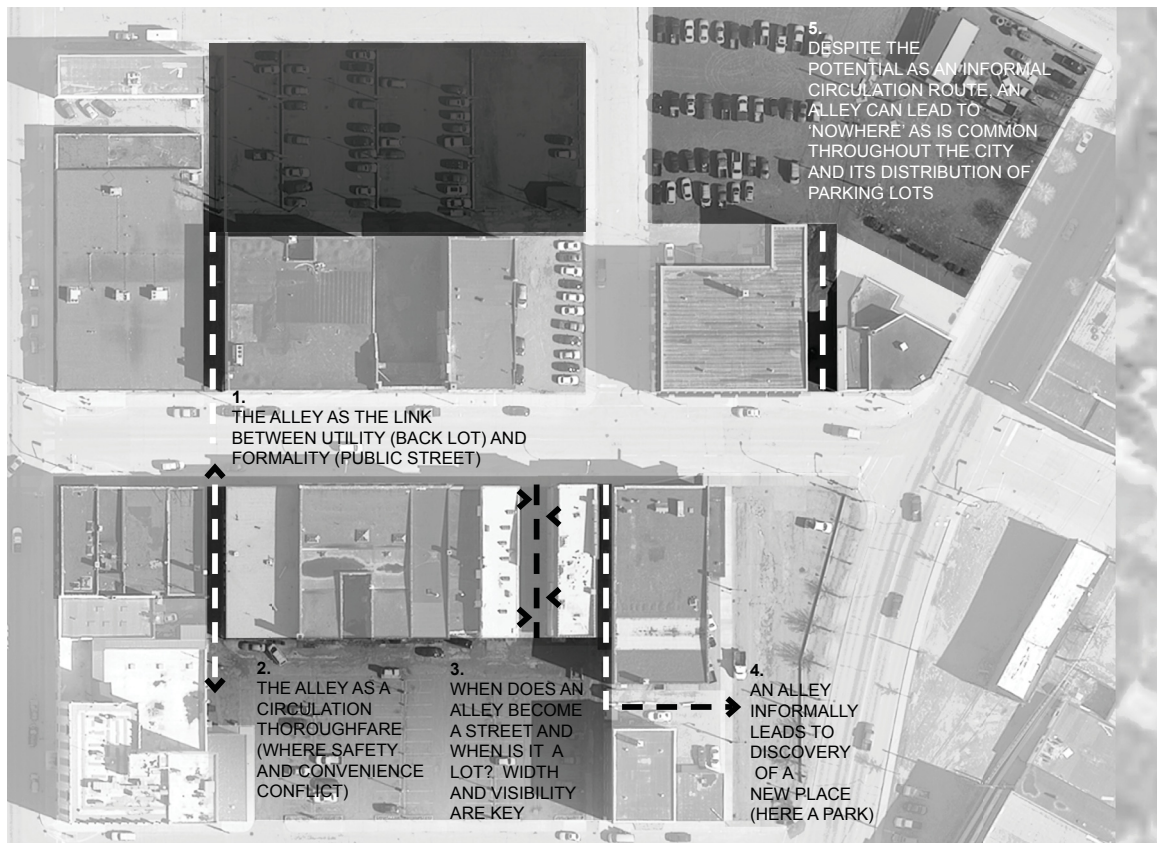
### **Along Victoria Avenue**

The initial strategies outlined above have great potential to then filter and layer into the surrounding urban areas (see page 81 and #2 on page 82). With renewal thus introduced and instigated for Victoria Avenue, it can be assumed that later phases of renewal will continue to expand as revitalization takes root in the South end. Thus in speculating on these later phases, the following strategies are suggested, which build off of the initial moves:





- 1 Renewal to focus primarily on Victoria Avenue, between May and Simpson Streets
- 2 Renewal to spread into surrounding vacant (parking) lots
- 3 Redevelopment of Victoriaville Civic Centre
- 4 Spillage of revitalization into adjacent retail/commerce (particularly May and Brodie)
- 5A Option 1: Develop renewal scheme for 'strip' retail west of Victoriaville
- 5B Option 2: Develop renewal scheme for Simpson Street Warehouse Block



Examining the alleyways of Victoria Avenue (data from Google 2014)



Beginning to 'occupy' the arcade and alleyways through informal art exhibitions: Initial collage



Beginning to 'occupy' alleyways by incising into abutting walls: Initial collage

1. Continue to layer the provision of 'soft relief' (via public art, vegetation and the integration of diverse materials and textures) into the surrounding downtown area. This may be an opportunity to capitalize on the City's intention to highlight Woodland native art (City of Thunder Bay 2005).
2. Continue to reveal and highlight moments of history both within and beyond the thesis block. Such history may be both tangible and intangible.
3. Utilizing the Arcade for basis, the numerous alleyways running into and out of the neighbourhood can be addressed next. Like the arcade, majority of the alleys contain solid walls (some with former windows now blocked in). The question then becomes how to start incising into these alleyways to bring about openings –



which on one hand can contribute to the perception of safety (if visible and occupied by visitors) and on the other hand, without proper surveillance, could contribute to crime.

4. Develop the parking lots with the intention to encourage greater density. Determine the best alternative solutions for parking. Intermediate solutions can include re-direction of parking to the underutilized Violet and George Streets (to the north and south) while more permanent solutions involve parking structures below and above ground.

### **Addressing Victoriaville Civic Centre**

The programming and functionality of Victoria Avenue is inherently tied to its proximity to the mall. Once renewal takes roots along the thesis block, attention can return to efforts to redevelop Victoriaville. In one option, the mall can be incised upon in the effort to soften the boundaries between the indoor and surrounding urban outdoor. In this scheme, possibilities could then be explored for how to once again restore the linkages between east and west, north and south (#3 on page 82, Option 1 on page 87). In other words, this scheme would explore what many residents of Thunder Bay call for - the transformation of the interior promenade back to an outdoor street.

Another option (page 88) lies in allowing for the centre to completely transition into civic and office use, thereby indirectly encouraging retail to take root outside in the now re-purposed street or allow for greater variety of programs (including diverse retail) to begin to infiltrate and bridge the gap between interior and street uses.





## Ongoing Speculation

Other subsequent phases:

1. Renewal within the thesis block may begin to filter out to impact retail/commerce along May and Brodie Streets (#4 on page 82). Much like in the North end, where local commerce has benefited from proximity to the redeveloped waterfront, this may happen naturally in reaction to the proximity of these retail blocks in relation to Victoria Avenue.

2. Both the strip retail east of Victoriaville Civic Centre and the Simpson Street Warehouse Block (#5 on page 82) are of scales significant enough to require their own strategies and schemes of intervention. Each area is defined by its own character and issues. If revitalization were really to take off in the Victoria Avenue area, public interest to further extend such efforts could potentially occur in either or both areas, depending on priority.

3. As part of the City's 'Re-forestation' or Urban Parkway objectives, linkages between the south downtown area and its surrounding parks and trails could further be strengthened, beginning with nearby parks and green space. Such areas include the Kaministiquia River Heritage Park (which is a 6-hectare park with 550-metre boardwalk) and to a lesser extent Paterson Park to the north and the civic plaza by the new Courthouse (City of Thunder Bay 2005). The Urban Parkway becomes all the more significant especially with recent policies to intensify tree canopy and implement an Urban Forest Management Plan (City of Thunder Bay 2012).

## **Applying Renewal Strategies to Other Downtowns**

Through the process of discovering an alternative approach to downtown renewal, the following general observations can be made that can serve as guidelines and thoughts for consideration in applying renewal strategies to other downtowns.

### **Understanding Context**

Understanding context is critical in developing a 'successful' renewal scheme. One aspect of this is to consider the various factors at play that are typical of any downtown. Yet even more important is the notion of extracting the elements and relationships that make this particular downtown 'unique.' They can include but not be limited to:

- Existing architecture and materiality;
- Historical 'moments' or elements along the site;
- Urban relationships and connections; and
- The story of its users

It can be assumed that in most downtowns, majority of the buildings are already existing. The nature, location and characteristics of these existing buildings can really inform the subsequent integration of new construction and adaptations. A lesson to keep in mind from Scarpa's work is that "his dialogue is never with the past, but with the presence of the past in the present..." (Olsberg 1999, 15).

At the same time, in order for the downtown to transform and change, context cannot be so restrictive as to stagnate what is to be done with the site – in some cases, it is difficult to see the downtown as anything different than what it currently is. Thus perhaps a critical second part to understanding context is to develop a conceptual or abstract system within which to identify and then ‘play’ with the findings revealed by context. The exact nature of this system is really quite flexible; what is important to ensure is that the system needs to develop into a framework within which issues of program, old architecture meeting new and urban relationships can be explored in a multivalent manner. To counter issues of stagnation and superficiality of solutions within the downtown, such a system also needs to function at various scales and layers. For purposes of this thesis, and with potential to be further explored in other downtowns (even within the framework of a different ‘discourse’), a conceptual framework was developed with respect to adaptive reuse. This system was then utilized to filter all contextual information.

### **Undertaking Major Moves in the Renewal Scheme**

Moves can be undertaken as independent projects or in conjunction with others. What is important to note is that all three areas of program, architecture and urban context must co-exist, layered and superimposed over one another in order to obtain the ‘diversity’ and synergy required for a renewal scheme to take off. Not one of the three is enough on its own to really instigate the process of transformation of any site.

***Key Program Moves to Consider***

- Identifying a 'niche' for the area is not a necessary first step; instead, through the exploration of layering program will a complex 'niche' more engrained to the site emerge.
- Programs should not be restricted to individual buildings, but be shared/connected, superimposed, and multi-layered. Development of circulation cores and thresholds offer one means by which to do so. By initially removing direct associations between program and building, ideas of cross-programming, trans-programming and de-programming begin to offer unique insight into intervening on a given site.
- Stagnation in the downtown often calls for careful consideration and insertion of new core programming that is to serve as both a major contributor to the area's new identity but also should add another layer of dimensionality and depth to the primary focus of downtowns as centres of commerce/retail.
- Two areas of programming essential for any downtown and present in successful ones are the inclusion and threading of public art as well as green space.
- Overall interventions need to bring about programmatic complexity (this complexity is what underlies the intentions of encouraging 'mixed' use in a given downtown and moreover also presents a confusing challenge in terms of its success and failures).

***Key Architectural Moves to Consider***

- The buildings prioritized for major intervention need not be limited to the historic/architecturally significant. Conventional buildings also have value/potential for adaptation (perhaps even more so as they are not as restricted as heritage buildings).
- When working with existing buildings, key elements to isolate and highlight include materials, textures and form. The latter may be viewed as a 'compositional challenge' in a give-and-take relationship between the existing and introduced.
- Minimal but key interventions can transform the identity of any given existing structure, enhancing an existing identity, revealing a new one or simply interacting with other structures. Thus, certain buildings should be identified as having greater potential for selective subtraction to cut away, reveal and alter existing conditions.
- Moments or 'junctures' where new architecture meets old offer unique opportunities to highlight a renewal scheme's interpretation of the constant fusion between old and new.

***Key Urban Moves to Consider:***

- Downtowns typically contain buildings directly abutting the street. However, to create a more 'collective' identity for the area, attention needs to be directed away from the internal workings of individual buildings to the encouragement of connections, linkages, and interstitial spaces between.



- 'Soft' zones or thresholds can be developed between indoor and outdoor, public and private spaces to create opportunities for lingering and rest.
- The downtown mall and boxed retail continue to challenge any given renewal scheme. Unique shopping and specialty are promoted to counter such 'convenient' shopping but beyond superficial programming, do not necessarily address the impacts of such dominant retail figures. To begin to filter and alter the way in which these structures fit into our downtown neighbourhoods and even with respect to their integration in any part of the city, developing and fostering urban relationships that link such structures to its surroundings becomes all the more important.
- In today's car-dominated cities, the need for parking lots cannot be ignored. However, as they take away from the density and synergy of the downtown, these lots should be viewed as opportunities to bring compatible new programming/development to the area. Parking requires lower priority.

### **Reflecting and Adapting**

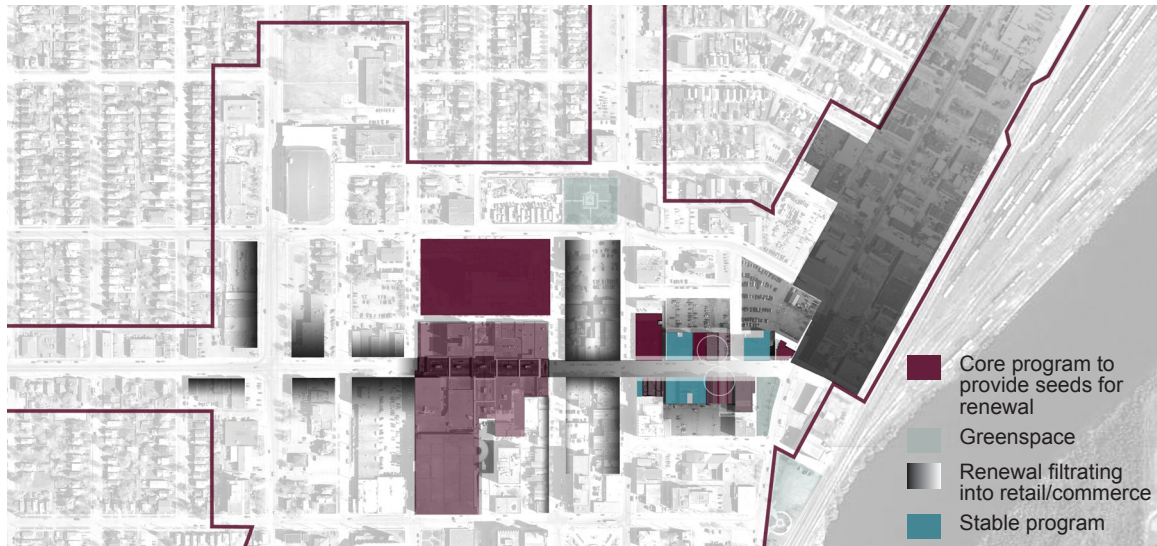
Overall, the downtown continues to exist in a flux. Thus, changes to 'improve' today's downtown shall inevitably alter the downtown's current course of transformation, but will still not reflect its 'end' state. New interventions merely add another layer to be interwoven into the existing conditions. As such, it becomes important to consider how 'new' constructions will inevitably transition and become ingrained into the existing.

## CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

The ambition to offer an alternative approach to a renewal scheme for Thunder Bay's south downtown core ultimately led to the discovery of an emergent process to back the renewal. The nature of this process became vital in identifying revitalization strategies that would be inherently ingrained to the site and as such, create a multi-dimensional 'solution' that would be unique to this downtown (although aspects of such strategies could be applicable to other downtowns as well).

Early recognition and appreciation for the complexities associated with the downtown led to inclusion of site context within a conceptual and abstract system based on the architectural discourse of adaptive reuse. The intent behind this 'abstract' system was to divert attention away from typical solutions to the downtown, thus allowing for the downtown to be 'filtered' and 'improved' via more unconventional means of renewal. In this system, specific words (identified to be a representative cross-section of the adaptive reuse discourse) became provocative, but also retained a certain level of ambiguity critical in discovering strategies appropriate and sensitive for Victoria Avenue's revitalization. Scarpa's work provided invaluable insight. The process and subsequent discovery of strategies in the end became more valuable and important in undertaking renewal than the individual words themselves.

The scale of the site under study combined with the effort required to develop an appropriate conceptual framework for identifying intervention strategies in some



The renewal of Thunder Bay's south core, including Victoria Avenue: An overall scheme (data from Google 2014)

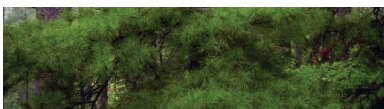
ways inhibited the depth at which a renewal scheme could fully be flushed out. Beginning with an initial phase that focused primarily on the main street block of Victoria Avenue between May and Simpson made sense in terms of establishing the first phase of renewal. However even at this scale, the project proved to be quite complex. In light of the significant level of vacancies and lack of programming currently on site, establishment of particular core programming (including the gallery) and major centralized intervention moves (the gallery, park, and arcade) had to first be undertaken. However just as important to these centralized moves is the need to address the 'gateways' into the block – in other words, the critical junctions (like the BMO Interpretive Centre for example) that initially could be invaluable in drawing visitors into the historic block of Victoria Avenue and also providing a counter balance to Victoriaville Civic Centre.

The residential component (or rooftop occupation in general) could also benefit from development of a

more comprehensive study on how to introduce higher densities into the area all the while maintaining the current ‘urban presence’ as established by the historic buildings located along the street. To date, the residential strategy has focused primarily on formal strategies for the interior, specifically the programmatic layering of materials and inclusion of lighting into otherwise deep and narrow lots. Future iterations of formal ideas on the upper stories need to bring attention back to the intersection of how these essentially large new constructions balance and interact with the existing buildings below. Moreover, the residential strategy explored was of greater scale than originally planned for a ‘rooftop occupation.’ Thus, perhaps it would further be beneficial to examine less intensive means of intervention as well.



Potential opportunity to reflect local woodlands native art through informal and formal public art strategy (“Thunder Bay Gallery” 2012)



Vegetation to soften and counter the built up spaces (image from Horley 2012)

Finally, with so much attention focused on addressing the ‘major’ gaps, much of the finer details for a revitalization effort were unfortunately not explored to the depth originally envisioned. Such details include incorporation of an informal public art strategy interweaving through the site as well as comprehensive development of ‘soft’ landscape to counter the built components (via a certain materials palette and vegetation). These details should be considered in any future work.

A multivalent approach to urban renewal, distinct from a one-solution ideal, emerged through the exploration of various programmatic, architectural and urban relationships – potentially being independent, working in conjunction, and/or superimposed onto one another and interwoven into the site. All three program, architecture and urban linkages were given more or less equal

value – where one could not be undertaken without consideration of the others. In doing so, the scheme allowed for the ability to create a very ‘dense’ solution that ventured deeply into the workings of this particular downtown. With respect to a multi-layered programmatic approach, it became critical to the renewal scheme to develop synergies and work within Tschumi’s framework of cross-, trans-, and de-programming, all functioning together to encourage multiprogramming. In terms of undertaking a series of architectural interventions involving varied combinations of new construction intersecting the old, an appreciation emerged for the need for minimal but key and strategic interventions that would instigate the process of transformation and its essential role as part of the neighbourhood’s new ‘revitalizing’ identity. At the urban scale, a multivalent approach called for a re-balancing of indoor or built space to outdoor or open space. Moreover, each intervention proposed for individual sites also had implications at the neighbourhood (in relation to each other), South Core (particularly with respect to the mall and surrounding vacant lots) and larger city scales (in terms of city programming), all of which informed/influenced each other.

Development of a multi-pronged approach, however, continues to raise potential concerns as to how this approach is applied in reality. As such, in the future, more in-depth analyses and investigations into implementation strategies could potentially be integrated into the renewal strategies identified to date in order to strengthen the actual means of revitalization. Moreover, perhaps in comparison to downtown policies outlined throughout

planning and urban design documents, this thesis is not overly quantitative but instead left intentionally qualitative. The objective in doing so was to be able to grasp an intricate understanding of the 'context' within which this particular downtown of Thunder Bay's south core was functioning. Thus, in many ways, this thesis is quite conceptual in nature. Part of the next steps in the implementation phase may be to translate the conceptual design strategies into more quantitative measures.

The thesis ends with suggestions as to how the lessons learned from this renewal scheme may be applied to other downtowns. Integral to these lessons is the idea that revitalization is an ongoing effort. If the 'solutions' developed through this thesis (in all of its phasing) were to be carried out, the resulting scheme would still not represent the 'end' condition for Thunder Bay's south core. Instead, what this thesis attempts to do is spark the revitalization effort in such a manner that it remains ongoing. The initial strategies, in their consideration of local context, are given opportunity to become deeply rooted in the site so that any challenges or difficulties faced in the future cannot easily uproot the beginnings of transformation along Victoria Avenue and its altering character as a promising area with repurposed ambition.

## APPENDIX A: DEVELOPING A LANGUAGE BASED ON THE DISCOURSE OF ADAPTIVE REUSE

Following is a sample of words extracted from the discourse on adaptive reuse. Each become evocative as a potential strategy for reading and intervening on a site.

Accretion/subtraction:

“This theme of contrast is developed consistently throughout, pairing the historical with the contemporary, **accretion** with **subtraction**...” – on Realarchitektur, Collection Boros/Boros Penthouse (Klanten 2009, 81)

Abstraction:

“Exterior elevations aim for formal simplicity with the creation of an **abstract** pattern that will be a fitting counterpart to the Neoclassical ornamentation of the existing historic building. Inspired by textures and motifs drawn from the Club’s tapestries, lacework and carpets...” (“Mount Stephen Club” 2012)

Equilibrium

“...inherited architecture and new construction forming imaginative **equilibriums**.” (Klanten 2009, 7)

Found conditions:

“Building on innate characteristics and potential, the architectural design does not erase here but instead reveals the beauty of **found conditions** in unexpected, even radical ways.” (Klanten 2009, 4)

Incision (implied):

“With almost surgical accuracy, [Scarpa] moved from space to space restoring some elements and adding new ones, integrating the two in a fusion so seamless that the observer is hard pressed to find the juncture between them.” (Ranalli 1999, 48)

Insertion

“The Olivetti showroom and the galleries of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia deal with the problem of **inserting** open space and incident within highly restricted existing envelopes, and with reconfiguring the relationship of the buildings to their adjacent squares.” (Ranalli 1999, 42)

Junction:

“The main entrance, marked with a copper canopy, draws visitors in at the most important **junction**, the connection between the new addition and the historic Carnegie Library.” (Hariri Pontarini 2001)

Juxtaposition:

“This residue left behind from former users not only attests to the history of a site, but serves as the building blocks for its revival, often leading to unconventional yet complementary **juxtapositions** between the form and new use. In this conversation between the two, we can challenge typology and convention in the process towards revealing dormant potential and crafting exciting opportunities in architecture.” (unit a architects inc. 2012)



## Layer

“Each project contains its own **layers** of history. Sometimes these layers are readily accessible in the tectonics, finishes and furnishings of the building, but more often than not, invisible in the building ordinances, past uses and inhabitant’s personal stories.” (Kongats Architects 2012)

## Plugging in

“In effect, the new building components were literally inserted into the existing site situation. Perpendicular extensions were attached to the rear side of the buildings, and **‘plugged’** into the existing units.” (ArchDaily 2012)

## Reductive means

“The architects merely emphasized their original character by **reductive means**: paring each down to its most essential elements and interpreting these by means of a well-considered colour scheme.” – on 51N4E Weekend Home (Klanten 2009, 38)

## Remains:

“...And given the fact that in most parts of the world our built environment is still largely determined by already existing buildings and constructions rather than new developments, one of the great challenges faced by today’s architects is the creative handling and inspiring transformation of such architectural **remains**.” (Klanten 2009, 4)

Re-ordering / Re-connecting:

“**Re-ordering** is essential for the functionality of the space: the ‘fit’ of its new use. **Re-connecting** makes reference to the human experience, perception and understanding of our natural and manmade environments, and the intersection of the two.” (Goldsmith Borgal & Company Ltd. Architects 2009)

Subordination:

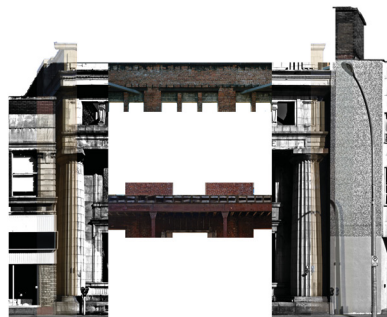
“Conserve the heritage value and character-defining elements when creating any new additions to an historic place or any related new construction. Make the new work physically and visually compatible with, **subordinate** to and distinguishable from the historic place.” (Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada 2010, 23)

Superimpose:

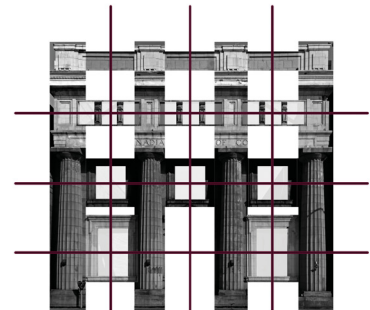
“...where “new spaces extend, penetrate and **superimpose** onto already existing buildings.” (Klanten 2009, 4)

## APPENDIX B: EARLY COLLAGES OF INITIAL SITES

Each of the initial sites chosen for intervention quickly became associated with certain dominant word strategies (of insertion/incision, junction, equilibrium, juxtaposition or layering). Initially, however, every site was to be examined within context of each of the potential strategies. The following images (collages) demonstrate early readings of these sites based on the remainder strategies.



**JUNCTION**



**EQUILIBRIUM**

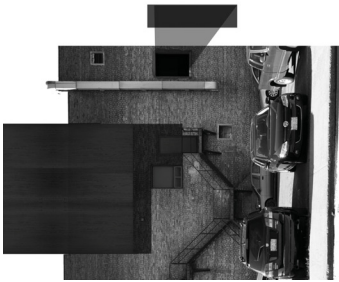


**JUXTAPOSITION**

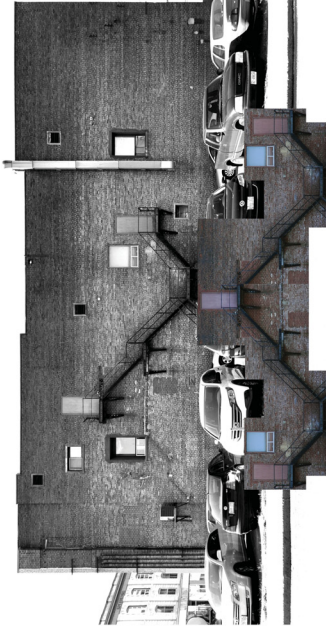


**LAYERING**

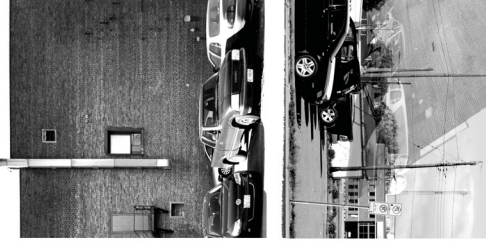
Exploration of other word strategies  
in relation to the bank facade site



**INSERTION**



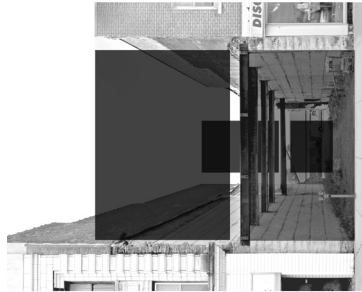
**JUNCTION**



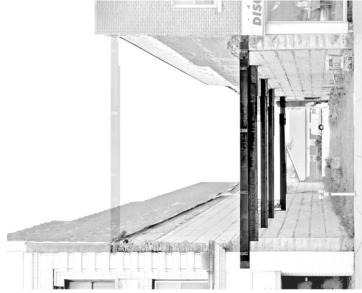
**LAYERING**



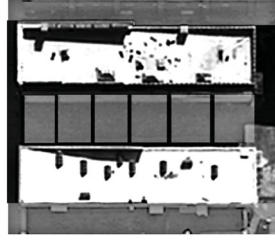
Exploration of other word strategies in relation to the nondescript wall site



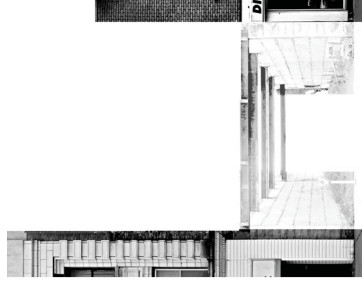
**INSERTION**



**JUNCTION**



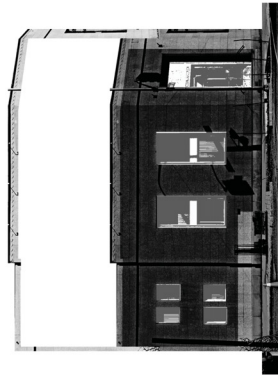
**EQUILIBRIUM**



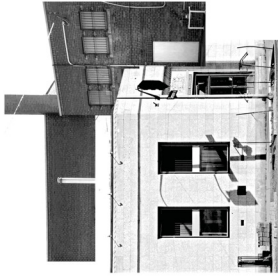
**JUXTAPOSITION**



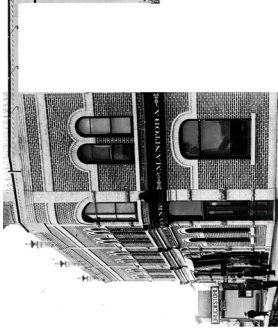
**INCISION / INSERTION**



**EQUILIBRIUM**



**JUXTAPOSITION**

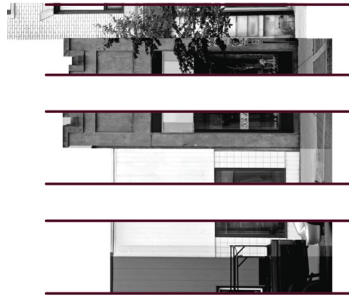


**LAYERING**

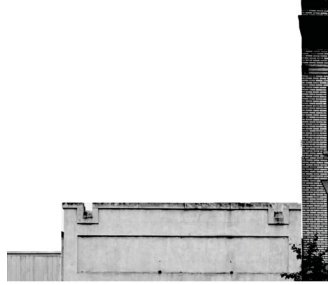
Exploration of other word strategies in relation to the BMO site



**INSERTION**



**JUNCTION**



**JUXTAPOSITION**



**LAYERING**

Exploration of word strategies in relation to low-lying buildings (rooftop occupation)

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