

**SCENES FROM SUBURBIA:
UNREAL STRATEGIES FOR REAL CHANGE**

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Abstract

The suburbs make obvious pressing dilemmas about architecture, urbanism, and social class. Due to repetitive housing designs, emphasis towards the automobile, and limited public amenities, the suburban landscape suffers from monotony and disconnection. However, as the demographics of the suburbs begin to change, there is an opportunity to profoundly redefine and expose the suburban ideal to a much greater range of domestic practices and lifestyles.

Scenes from Suburbia: Unreal Strategies for Real Change reimagines the suburbs as a “landscape of dreams” in order to develop an alternate vision – for intrinsically the suburbs are tied to dreams of homeownership and community. Illustrations and short narratives informed by surrealism and speculative imagination provide the tools through which to investigate possible new futures for the paradigmatic suburb. In a realm between practicality and fantastical vision, these depictions strive to reveal the suburbs’ latent potential to become relational landscapes providing dwellers with orientation in the world, and a sense of connection to community, city, and environment. Reimagining the suburbs infuses everyday life for suburban residents with delight and surprise.

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Preface

Family, community, a well-built home on a quiet cul-de-sac street, these optimistic themes come to mind when thinking about the suburbs. Today, however, the suburb conjures up images of tracts of single-family houses that all look alike, surrounded by a spatially diluted landscape of highways, shopping malls and parking lots, complete with long commutes and traffic jams. And yet, despite their highly problematic sprawl and their reliance on automobiles, the suburbs remain an idealized housing environment not only in North America, but around the world.

The focus of this thesis is to present a new vision of suburbia by reimagining the dream of the suburbs that has been lost over time. For many, the suburbs embody the quintessence of the American Dream. Dolores Hayden, an architect and urban historian, refers to the suburbs as a “triple dream” of “house plus land plus community,”¹ but this dream quickly inverted itself and became focused on the individual family instead of the neighbourhood or community. Although the suburbs have become a mundane environment, there is still an inherent element of imagination that can occasionally be seen scattered throughout the suburban landscape.

A brief examination into Levitt & Sons’ Levittown is a must when looking at the suburbs. Levittown demonstrates how a development designed for war veterans during a housing shortage unintentionally became a cultural phenomenon that has shaped the North American landscape for close to seventy years. Levittown also registered a profound shift in

social ideals and the moment of transition from renting to buying one's home.

Architect, community planner and pivotal researcher on Canadian housing, Humphrey Carver states, "the flight of the suburbs has taken us to a monotonous, standardized environment where everyone has much the same amount of money to do much the same things in the same ways."² Originally meant to fulfill the American Dream, this standardized environment is now at a standstill, not evolving as a landscape of domestic life, even though the demographics of its homeowners are changing.

Part I - The Suburbs: An Ambiguous Landscape

Unintentional Suburbia: A Brief History of the Modern Suburb

The North American or “corporate” suburb is a packaged suburb that is developed in a very standardized way,³ and has its origins in the post-war housing crisis. “In the years following World War II, the American government encouraged the production of large-scale suburban housing projects that were intended primarily for lower-income veterans and their families.”⁴ This demand for housing was largely due to The Great Depression and many years of being at war, resulting in a large influx of veterans returning home.

In the spring of 1947, the real-estate development company Levitt & Sons started the development of 2000 rental units in Long Island, NY. William Laird Levitt, president of Levitt and Sons, is widely credited as the father of modern day suburbia because of the scale of his developments. Levitt would repeat the same basic four-room house design and render them in the same materials, as a means to build the communities at a very fast pace. This process has often been compared to “an automobile assembly line in reverse. Where at General Motors the car would move from worker to worker, on the construction site it was the worker who moved. Workers moved in teams from unit to unit, completing just one stage of the construction before moving on to repeat that stage at the next site.”⁵ This method was so efficient that Levitt and Sons’ rate of production went from sixty houses per week to one hundred and fifty between April and July of 1948.

By the time of its completion, Levittown would incorporate 17, 447 four-room houses



Fig. 1 Levittown sales flier, *Country Clubber* model



Fig. 2 Levittown *Country Clubber* interior photo



Fig. 3 Aerial photograph of Levittown in construction



Fig. 4 Aerial photograph of Don Mills Development

spreading over two towns.⁶ William J. Levitt may not have foreseen the influence of his creation on the North American landscape, but his “cookie-cutter” houses would end up providing the framework for the future construction of suburban housing, creating the stereotypical image of the sprawling suburban landscape.

A story resembling that of Levittown also occurred in Toronto. John Sewell, mayor of Toronto from 1978 to 1980, believes that “stories of growth in other North American cities after the Second World War are similar to those in Toronto. They differ in degree, timing, and detail, but all share a history of growth that spread outwards as developers constructed new houses on large lots at low densities in the fringes.”⁷ Following the Second World War, Toronto transformed under heavy growth pressure, especially in areas outside of the already dense and compact urban core.

Toronto’s equivalent to Levittown is the 1953 development of Don Mills. The developer E.P. Taylor used a plan created by the urban planner Macklin Hancock, which proposed “a new community consisting of four neighbourhoods, an area for walk-up apartments, a central shopping mall, and industrial uses at the edges. Hancock proposed a looping discontinuous street system, considerable green space, and large lots for single and semi-detached homes.”⁸ The curvilinear roads, generously large lot sizes, and designated land for commercial and industrial use became the model for all the development proposals in the Toronto area.

Dreaming Suburbia: Home, Nature, and Community

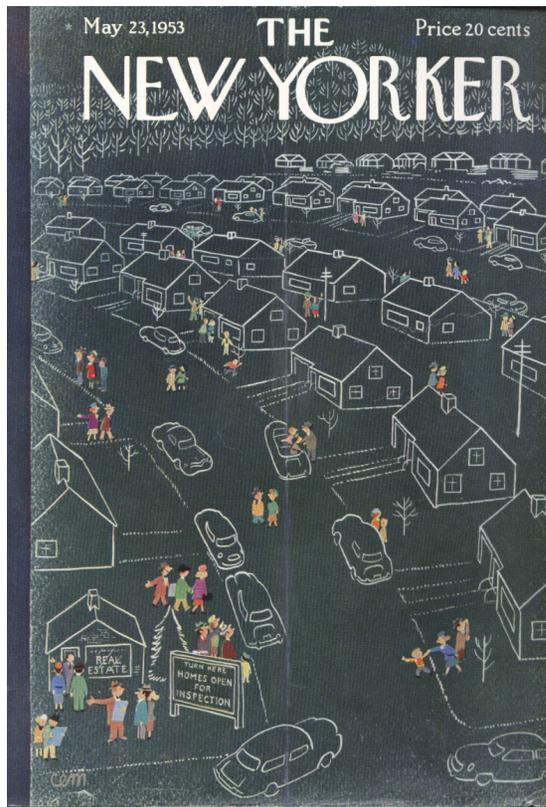


Fig. 5 *The New Yorker* Cover, illustration of the popularity of the suburbs

We were all in the same boat; we didn't have much money, but we worked together; everybody pitched in. We shared everything; we shared tools and cars, minded each others' kids, passed play-pens and high-chairs from house to house – everything.

It was – at least to us – a paradise.⁹

It is not a coincidence that the suburbs are a popular choice among those who are interested in homeownership and there are many who see the benefits of what suburbia has to offer. What residents appreciate about the suburbs goes back to the idea that living in the suburbs will provide a certain quality of family life and social standing. In the case of Levittown, the houses “may have been small and repetitious to their observers, but to their owners they represented something more than basic shelter – they were an opportunity to build a better life, a first step on the road to success.”¹⁰ Prior to this phenomenon, renting was common and the idea of owning a home was reserved for the upper class. In Toronto, “many single-family houses were rented: the proportion exceeded 50 per cent in Toronto as late at 1941.”¹¹ This shift from tenancy to ownership, which gave people a specific lifestyle to work towards, was the first step in the rise of the suburbs.

As vividly recounted by Barbara M. Kelly in *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown*, the early Levittown was characterized by a sense of cooperation between its residents. Dwellers assisted each other in the construction of their homes, lending each other tools in a spirit of camaraderie. For many residents, this sharing and cooperative



Fig. 6 Residents mowing the lawn in Levittown

spirit was a realization that the suburban dream was attainable and real.

Kelly explains that the suburban dream is rooted in a few core beliefs, which are comprised of: “the rural roots of the community, the benevolent builder, the pioneer spirit among the residents, the joy of single-family dwellings, the collective activity among the homeowners as they worked to impart an individuality through remodeling and landscaping, and the struggle for upward mobility through material goods.”¹² However, the last two beliefs in Kelly’s list signal a shift from community to individual ideals. This was perhaps a natural evolution, as once the residents were settled into their new homes there was no longer a need to work together anymore. Homeownership turned the family dynamic inward and engagement with the neighbourhood would decline.

Problems of the Suburbs: Repetition, Uniformity, and a Lack of Diversity

Houses in and around the Greater Toronto Area are not affordable for many new singles, couples, or even families, with sale prices averaging close to \$800,000 for a house in the Toronto area.¹³ Therefore, people are forced to “drive ‘til you qualify,” a process “whereby potential homebuyers travel away from the workplace until they reach a community in which they can afford to buy a home that meets their standards.”¹⁴ The elevated cost of centrally located houses not only forces people to move further away, perpetuating sprawl and encouraging driving, but it also further isolates them from the amenities of the city center.

The dream of home ownership and the amount of money that could be made from real-estate created a tempting formula for developers, who became more dedicated to the building of houses rather than to the building of communities.¹⁵ Thus, buyers start to perceive the suburbs in terms of investment potential. There is always the hope that once a mortgage on a house is paid off, there will be a return in profit that can be used towards retirement. This model worked well when houses were more affordable, but now, with the average house price hovering close to one million dollars in Toronto and Vancouver, many young families cannot afford, or even qualify for, a mortgage.

Humphrey Carver classifies common complaints about the suburbs in three groups: “the Lament about Muddle, the Lament about Uniformity, and the Lament about What Isn’t There.”¹⁶ Carver identified these three laments only nine years after the development of Don Mills,



Fig. 7 Suburban Sprawl. *EDEN PRAIRIE IV Florida*. Photo by Christoph Gielen



Fig. 8 Suburban Sprawl. *OUTER HOUSTON I Texas*.
Photo by Christoph Gielen

however, these issues have not yet been solved.

Carver's notion of "muddle" deals with the confusion, clutter, and sporadic placement of buildings in suburban environments. At times, services seem arbitrarily scattered and/or out of the way, forcing residents to have to drive to accomplish daily errands. Humphrey Carver explains that, unlike the city where similar services tend to congregate in similar locations, services in the suburbs remains scattered: "Essential services of the city, thrown out into the suburbs by the explosive forces of urban growth, have been left in a disorganized assortment. There has been a failure to sort out the raw material, arrange it in compatible groups, and put these groups in the right places – either in the living areas or in the works areas of the suburban city."¹⁷

The problem of uniformity is the complaint that everything looks the same, and is perhaps the most common criticism about the suburbs. This concern can be attributed to systematized and conventional building technologies aimed at increasing speed of construction, but it can also be attributed to building codes that prevent a diversity of building types. Carver explains that suburban zoning is a primary culprit to the suburbs' homogeneous nature:

social prejudices have denied to family neighbourhoods every feature that might give variety, surprise, and contrast to the scene. No kind of building but a family house shall enter here. No apartment houses for young people or flats for old people. No corner store. No housing for those who are outside the privileged circle of home-owners. None who are too poor or too rich. Sterilized and inviolate under the protective shield of by-laws, the rows of small homes are immaculate in their uniformity, in their infinite repetition.¹⁸

While the detached house with two-car garage and large yard in a picturesque neighbourhood



Fig. 9 Suburban Sprawl. *OUTER HOUSTON II Texas*.
Photo by Christoph Gielen

may be desired and even beneficial for families with young children, this ideal means little for teenagers and the elderly whose lives and needs extend beyond the house.

And this leads to Carver's third criticism of the suburbs, the complaint about what isn't there. It is the feeling that deep down, something is missing from the suburbs and there is nothing to identify with. For example, I grew up in the suburb of Thornhill, located just outside of downtown Toronto. When I was in high school, my friends and I would have no place to call our own. Evenings and weekends would often be spent in the basement of a friend's house, the park, or if someone had a car then we would go to the mall or movie theater. At the time, my friends and I would often refer to the suburbs as boring. Carver describes it as a frustration that everything in the suburbs is the same, and that everything sits in the middle without any extremes.¹⁹

Although these problems appear to be daunting, all hope is not lost. Being aware of these problems is the first step to thinking differently about suburbia and hopefully repairing it in the future. In order to change our current perceptions about the suburb, it needs to be thought of the same way as a city. Humphrey Carver put it simply when he wrote, "The suburbs are detached. Now there must be a new theme to the story, a new order and arrangement for a new kind of suburbanized city."²⁰ This thesis builds on Carver's strong belief that the suburbs must be reorganized and thought of entirely anew.

Part II – Unreal Strategies: An Alternative Suburban Experience Case Studies: Downtown Markham, Open House, and Traumhaus Funari

New interpretations of the suburbs are being imagined and built around the world.

With recent suburban developments around the Greater Toronto Area, the form is usually a dense, mixed-use neighbourhood with an urban centre. *Toronto Star* journalist Phinjo Gombu describes these centers as: “European-style piazzas for after-work mingling, towering office and residential towers stacked behind tightly packed street-friendly low-rise buildings, thousands of people streaming out of the subways or headed home via a network of bicycle paths.”²¹

Although these new mixed-use developments are quite a change of scenery for current suburban residents, these designs are not such a radical idea when viewed from the perspective of a city dweller. Urban centers could be how the suburbs around the GTA will develop in the next few decades.

An example of such “downtown” urban cores situated in the suburbs is the ambitious development of *Downtown Markham* by Remington Group, which draws design inspiration from the European promenade. *Downtown Markham* is the largest planned, mixed-use development in Canada, featuring two million square feet of retail space, three and a half million square feet of office space, seventy-two acres of natural and landscaped green space, and will be able to house fifteen thousand residents.²² This urban hub breaks away from the traditional model of separating the residential from the commercial realm. These types of mixed-use developments attempt to market the downtown lifestyle as being easily accessible,



Fig. 10 *Downtown Markham* site plan



Fig. 11 Render of *Downtown Markham*

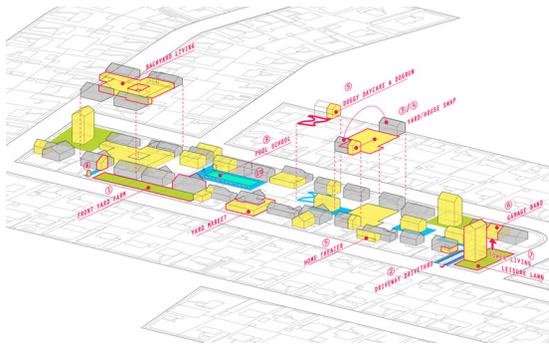


Fig. 12 *Open House* by Diller Scofidio + Renfro

even in the suburbs. However, while this suburban development and others like it are more pedestrian friendly than previous developments, they still heavily favour the automobile.

Open House is an installation project located in Levittown, NY. Started in 2011 by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Droog, it proposes a future suburbia. *Open House* features installations and concepts by various architects, designers, and artists in collaboration with homeowners in Levittown, proposing new models in suburban housing.²³ These installations explore possible new social and economic models as added layers upon existing suburban neighbourhoods, as a method of reimagining them. The *Open House* website explains the intent of the project:

Open house encourages self-inventiveness, offers ideas, and proposes new models for suburban housing, striking a new balance between the private and public realm. Starting with an economic argument for the struggling middle class, the proposal also addresses the challenges posed by urban sprawl and single-owner consumption. The new residential marketplace not only brings more capital and density to the neighborhood, it also increases social cohesion through service exchange.²⁴

Examples of the types of interventions on the Levittown houses is one could be converted to a dog kennel, another into a swimming school, another into a movie theater, or a take-out restaurant, etc. *Open House* is an interesting retrofit model that completely modifies existing houses and questions the traditional idea of the house as an entirely private domain. These installations also illustrate how residents could work where they live, saving travel time, lowering pollution, and creating a new type of community.

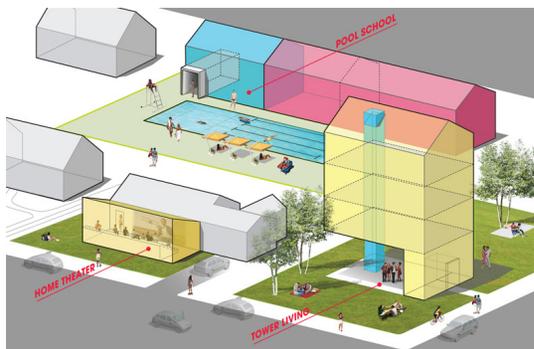


Fig. 13 *Open House* by Diller Scofidio + Renfro

The last example of a suburban development focused around pedestrians is the *Traumbaas Funari* project by MVRDV and Traumhaus, a master plan proposition conceived



Fig. 14 *Funari Development* by MVRDV and Traumhaus

in 2015 but not yet built. The 27,000 m² residential neighbourhood master plan redevelops a former US Army barracks in Mannheim, Germany in hopes to “transform the modern idea of village life with segregated households, into a rich diverse community where individuality and quality of life are paramount.”²⁵ MVRDV refers to this project as “the fully pedestrianized ‘village’.”²⁶ Although pedestrians are the primary focus, *Traumbaas Funari* can still be accessed by car because of the subterranean parking located underneath the development. MVRDV recognizes that the automobile is still an important consideration, so hiding the parking underground still acknowledges the car but places its priority after the pedestrian.

Downtown Markham, Open House, and Traumbaas Funari, illustrate new directions in thinking about the suburbs. These projects represent the possible design variations that can exist, and reveal the suburbs’ potential to change and be enriched.

In *Space and Place*, the insightful Chinese American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has written that when we see a place and start to experience it, we can then begin to think about and understand it:

To see and to think are closely related processes. In English, “I see” means “I understand.” Seeing, it has long been recognized, is not the simple recording of light stimuli; it is a selective and creative process in which environmental stimuli are organized into flowing structures that provide signs meaningful to the purposive organism.²⁷

Following Tuan’s thought, the architectural proposal in the form of drawings and models that one can “see and understand,” have a much better chance of convincing the public of new possibilities for the suburbs. The suburbs’ current form is such a familiar sight that



Fig. 15 *Funari Development* by MVRDV and Traumhaus

contemporary criticism of the suburbs in words alone is ineffective. That is why the creation and presentation of images of an improved suburbia is a central topic of this thesis. Images of new possibilities, whether they are realized or conceptual, are more likely to have a greater impact than reports and studies about what is wrong with the suburbs. By seeing the possible results of rehabilitating the suburbs, we can start to question the existing suburbs and a meaningful dialog can begin.

Suburbs: Worthy of Rehabilitation

The question that needs to be asked now is: how can we transform a settlement form that is so symbolic of North American life and culture? David Miller, mayor of Toronto from 2003 to 2010, who was friends with and influenced by the celebrated urban writer and activist Jane Jacobs,²⁸ believes that “the biggest impediment to transforming a city, though, is not a physical limitation; it’s the inertia that comes from historical legacy and a mentality of resignation. In other words, if a city is perceived in a particular way, it takes a tremendous amount of energy and inspiration to reimagine it as something radically different and better.”²⁹ To sway public perception and bring substantive change to the suburbs, small alterations may not be enough.

Since the suburban boom of the 1950s, the demographics of the suburbs have changed quite drastically. “Between the aging baby boomers and the surge of young echo boomers, increasing percentages of households are without children, even in suburbs,”³⁰ meaning that the ideal of raising a family in the suburbs may longer apply to the new, younger generation of home-buyers. An aging population, smaller families, globalization, and immigration are other factors that affect the suburban landscape.

Including a variety of housing types into the existing suburbs is one of many ways in which the suburban fabric could be renewed and made to embrace the mix of cultural values and traditions. *Cafe Fargo*, by architect, Davidson Rafailidis, is an example of a built project

that reimagines a building within an existing suburban neighbourhood in Buffalo, NY. This building was originally a corner store that was converted to a coffee shop. It is an example that rehabilitating an existing building can also help to rehabilitate the neighbourhood.

“Bit by bit, beneath the static image of uniform tract houses, many suburbs are undergoing significant physical, social, and cultural change.”³¹ Suburban ideals are slowly changing. There is now an opportunity to change the mistakes of the past and design spaces that are thoughtful and sustainable.



Fig. 16 *Café Fargo* by architect Davidson Rafailidis



Fig. 17 *Café Fargo* by architect Davidson Rafailidis

Surrealism and Architecture: Fantasy in the Rational World

Surrealism and the suburbs are widely studied topics, but they are most often approached separately from each other. Surrealism is not a well established topic within the field of architecture. Other than Thomas Mical's collection of essays, *Surrealism and Architecture* (2005) and the *AD: Architectural Design* journal, vol. 48, no. 23, edited by D. Veseley dedicated to surrealism which appeared in 1978 (and which, as Mical points out, is out of print), little has been written on the topic of architecture and surrealism. However, surrealism's dedication to "expressing the imagination as revealed in dreams, free of the conscious control of reason and convention"³² is perhaps what is needed to start conversing about architecture and the suburbs in a completely different manner than before.

As argued by Mical in his introduction, surrealism is a recurring conceptual strategy employed by architects.³³ Mical describes architectural surrealism as "a repeatable process of experiencing and representing space that is other than rational, yet grounded in individual subjectivity."³⁴ Such an approach to architecture can be employed to start thinking of alternative spatial strategies for the suburbs. Mical also highlights the strategy of defamiliarization, where "by making the familiar strange, we recover the sensation of life... art exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony."³⁵ The images in this thesis use defamiliarization to recover the suburban dream by representing the suburbs in a whimsical manner. While these images may seem irrational, they are based upon the rational environment. They are made strange so as to

“recover the sensation of life,” or, in this case, to recover “the sensation of life in the suburbs.”

Mical writes: “all of the topics addressed in contemporary surrealist scholarship have a place in architectural thought, as the rethinking of craft, materiality, symbolism, imagery, social order, domesticity, urbanism, technologies, and divided cultures and contexts.”³⁶ The speculative work by Rem Koolhaas in *Delirious New York* (1978) provides a very tangible example of how surrealist thinking can assist in the analytical study of existing architectural matter like the skyscrapers of Manhattan. This work also serves to illustrate how surrealism can expand conventional architectural modes of communication such as plans, sections, and elevations. This principle is important to this thesis: by utilizing fantasy as a mode of communication, this thesis aims to develop “a more inclusive and more approachable way to communicate architecture.”³⁷

Filip Dujardin, an architectural photographer and Belgian artist, creates surreal and fantastical architectural images. Using photography and Adobe Photoshop, Dujardin constructs beautiful images that upon closer inspection reveal to the viewer the impossible architecture of the buildings. Dujardin’s “resulting montages are simultaneously beautiful, disturbing, and provocative; even the most structurally improbable becomes plausible in the age of the Koolhaas CCTV tower.”³⁸ Surrealism is used by Dujardin to reimagine buildings that he has photographed, allowing him to present his own opinion on what makes for an appealing building.

While Dujardin’s altered photographs appear tame in comparison to the works of other surrealist artists such as Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, or Marcel Duchamp, he is able to create

an illusion of reality with strange images that appear to be real buildings. ““A structure without windows becomes strange,” he admits, “yet all my creations leave the impression that they could have been built – it’s just you’ve never seen it.””³⁹ The connection to the rational world in Dujardin’s work points to an important principle: that we can better understand the real, and see it as we’ve never seen it, by passing through the strange. This thesis similarly strives to present very unconventional ideas for the suburbs – ones we are perhaps not ready for without some help – as real possibilities that we are able to give consideration to.

Surreal representations of suburbia support conversations about the suburbs that go beyond purely practical questions of lot size, property value, rapid construction, and cost-effective building technologies. The lens of surrealism provides a framework to uncover the original intentions behind the suburb’s form and the architecture of its houses. In this thesis, surrealist speculations on Thornhill are meant to trigger a deeper understanding of what the suburbs are all about: affordable, diverse housing designed to provide residents with a home and community. The drawings in this thesis are intended to be inclusive, allowing the inhabitants of the suburbs to join in the conversation. The images provide a way to look past preconceptions about the suburban detached house, and to imagine alternative possibilities for the house and for the spaces around it.

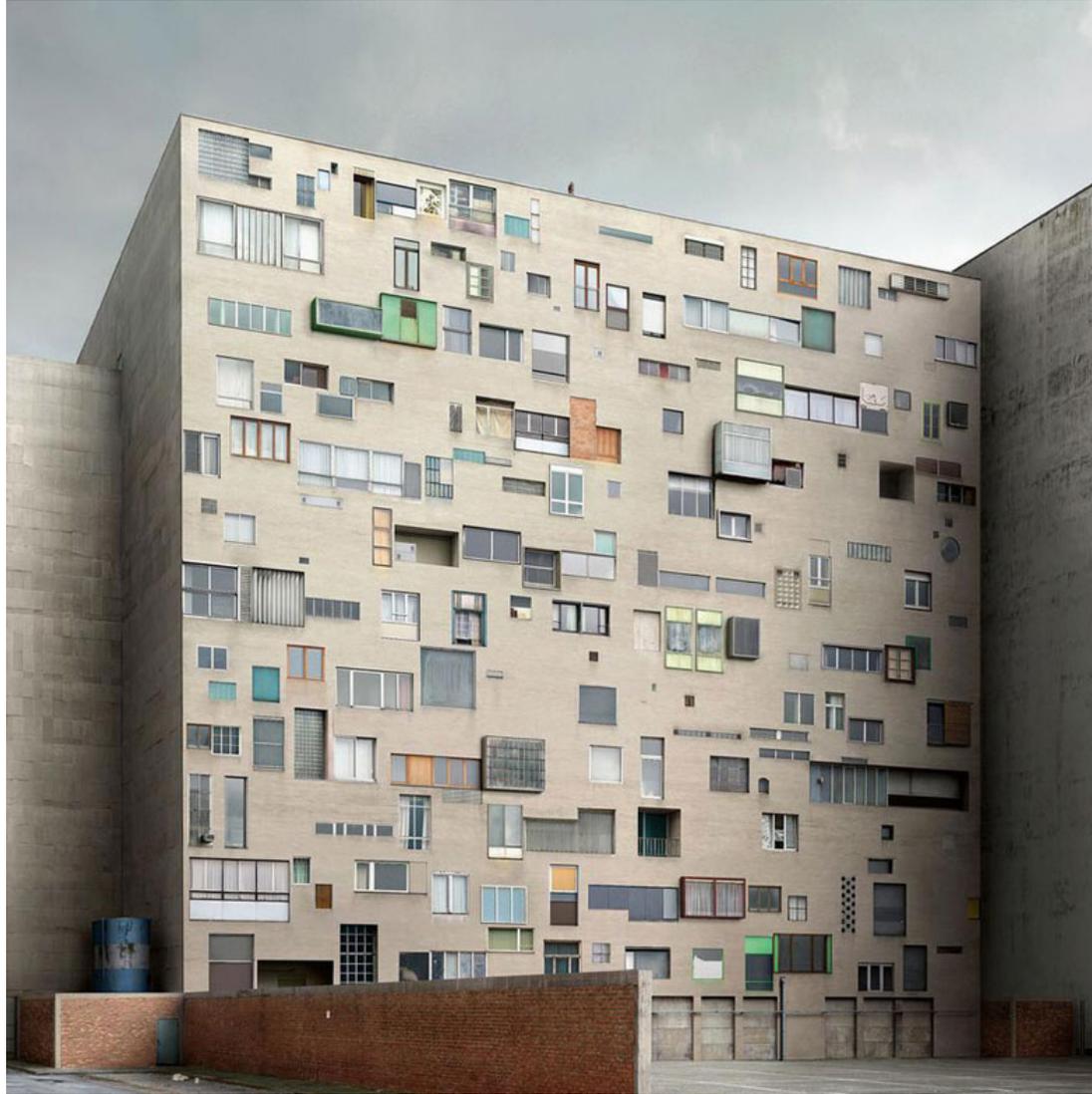


Fig. 18 Photo by Filip Dujardin



Fig. 19 Photo by Filip Dujardin



Fig. 20 Photo by Filip Dujardin

Part III - Unreal Strategies: A Proposition

Thornhill: A Brief Description



Fig. 21 Photo of my house on Summerdale Drive in Thornhill, Ontario

While it is important to reimagine new suburban developments before they are built, it may be even more important to rehabilitate existing suburbs since they currently occupy so much land and contain such a large part of the North American population. For this reason, the drawings of this thesis take place in the currently built suburb of Thornhill.

Thornhill is a neighbourhood located approximately twenty kilometers north of downtown Toronto, and “is divided in half between the Town of Markham and the City of Vaughan, and runs along both the east and the west sides of Yonge Street.”⁴⁰ Thornhill-Vaughan is situated west of Yonge Street between Dufferin Street, Major MacKenzie Drive West, and Steeles Avenue West. Thornhill-Markham is located on the east side between Yonge Street, Highway 404, Highway 7, and Steeles Avenue East. Thornhill is ethnically diverse, being composed of a large Jewish, Eastern European, Italian, and Asian population.

Scenes from Suburbia: Unreal Strategies for Real Change takes place at the edge of Thornhill-Markham, between Leslie and Highway 404. This site was built in the 1980s and is stereotypical of suburban design. The houses are all detached, feature two car garages, and have large front and back yards. This neighbourhood’s streets follow curvilinear lines, as opposed to the gridded system of the city. This is also the community where I was raised. While set in a specific neighbourhood, the idea of this thesis is to point the way toward a suburban ideal that is more generalizable.



Fig. 22 Google Maps view of entire Thornhill suburb



Fig. 23 Google Maps view of reimagined site of Thornhill



Fig. 24 Google Maps view of reimagined site of Thornhill



Fig. 25 Google Maps view of reimagined site of Thornhill

Reimagining Suburbia: Towards a New Thornhill



Fig. 26 Photo of the street, Summerdale Drive, located in Thornhill, Ontario

The first step to reimagining Thornhill is the removal of the road system and giving this space back to pedestrians. The typical suburban design starts with the placement of the road and infrastructure; subsequently, the placement of the houses follows this road system.

At eight metres wide, the roads in the suburbs occupies a large portion of space, acting like a suburban nervous system to connect the suburbs to other neighbourhoods and services. The additional space gained by removing the roads will help to provide more usable public areas. Therefore, the streets Summerdale Drive, Valleyview Road, Glendale Road, Leacock Court, Mowatt Court, Milestar Court, Parklawn Crescent, Sandor Place, and Frost Gate are removed, as if lifted away from the neighbourhood.

The next step is the placement of a canal where the roads Summerdale Dr., Valleyview Rd., Glendale Rd., and Leacock Ct. used to run. As Humphrey Carver wrote in *Cities in the Suburbs*, “Rivers and canals and water scenery have provided many small-scale poetic compositions; the Bank Street bridge seen from the Driveway, the spire of Gatineau Point church seen from the Rockcliffe Lookout, the new campus of Carleton University – man has joined with nature in making these pleasures.”⁴¹ A waterway flowing centrally through Thornhill would be a poetic gesture intended to provide a memorable space that could also be used as an alternative transportation route (for canoe, kayak, or boat). With roads removed and a canal system in place, Thornhill will have a very different dynamic than in its current state.



Fig. 27 Figure Ground of Thornhill Site

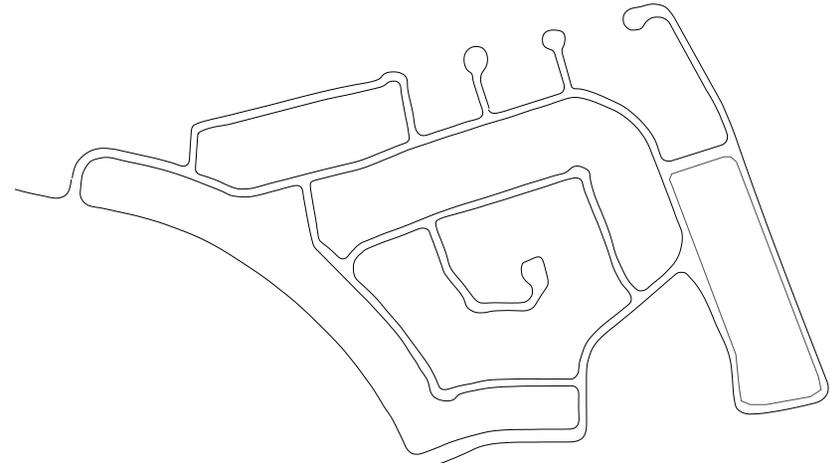


Fig. 28 Road System of Thornhill Site

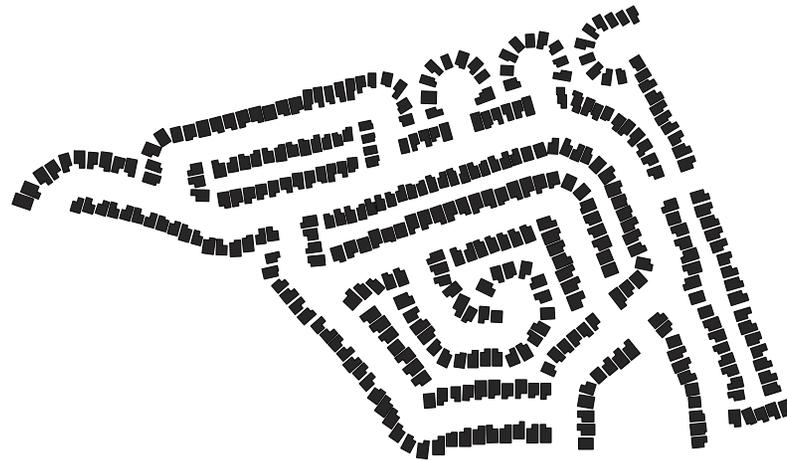


Fig. 29 Figure Ground of Thornhill Site without the Road

Scenes from Suburbia shows snippets of suburban life in a reimagined Thornhill. Along with the accompanying narratives, the following series of images illustrate the resulting alternative suburban landscape. Inspired by photographs of the suburbs, the drawings are presented in differing scales and orientations as if they were snapshots of a different in time. The suburbs have long been represented visually through photographs to capture both the scale of the suburbs and life within the communities. Written in first-person, the fictional narratives reveal my observations of the different areas that now make up the reimagined Thornhill. The narratives mirror the sense of discovery I experienced while researching for this thesis and the excitement of reimagining the possibilities for the future of suburbs.

In addition to the drawings, a series of postcards based on the fifteen scenes presented in this thesis were printed (see figures 30 - 33 and appendix). These postcards are designed to advertise a reimagined Thornhill to other suburban neighbourhoods. While this was not carried out in this thesis work, these postcards could be printed with a small questionnaire and mailed to suburban dwellers, to find out what the residents enjoy most or feel is lacking about their neighbourhood. When found in one's mailbox, the postcards' controversial front image would provoke thought. The backside, with stamp and address, would serve to capture an exchange of thoughts, opinions, and hopes about the suburbs. The postcard form alludes to the fact that each suburban house is an address that can receive mail. The postcard is also a tangible representation of the impalpable aura of values and hopes that surround the suburbs.

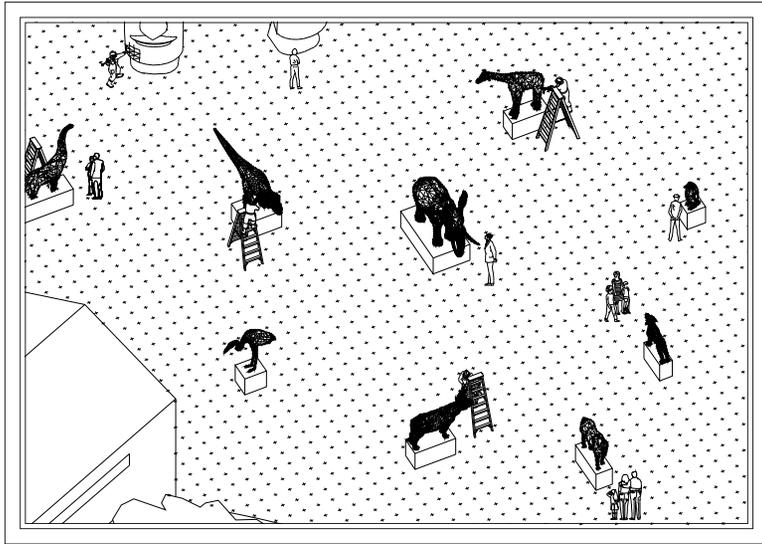


Fig. 30 *Topiary Exhibit* Postcard - Front

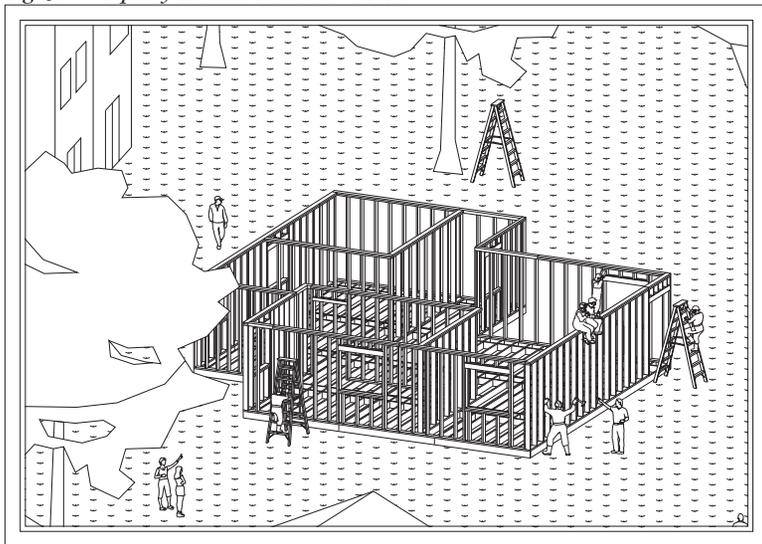


Fig. 32 *D.I.Y. Suburb* Postcard - Front

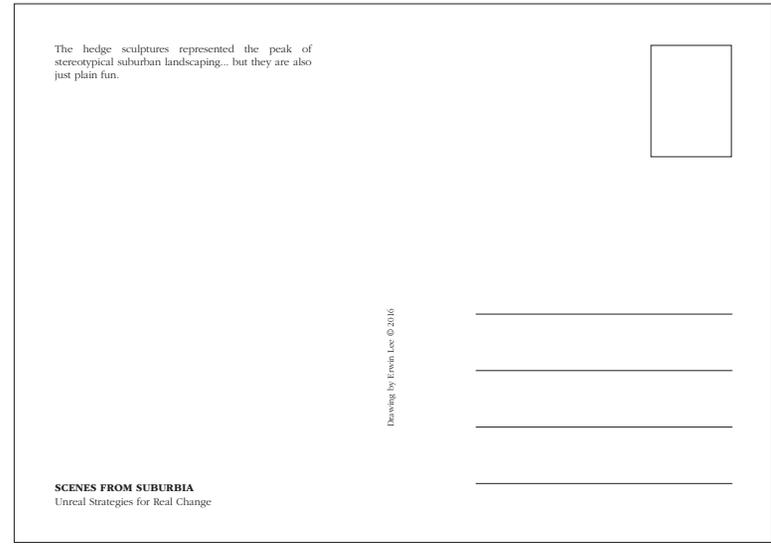


Fig. 31 *Topiary Exhibit* Postcard - Back

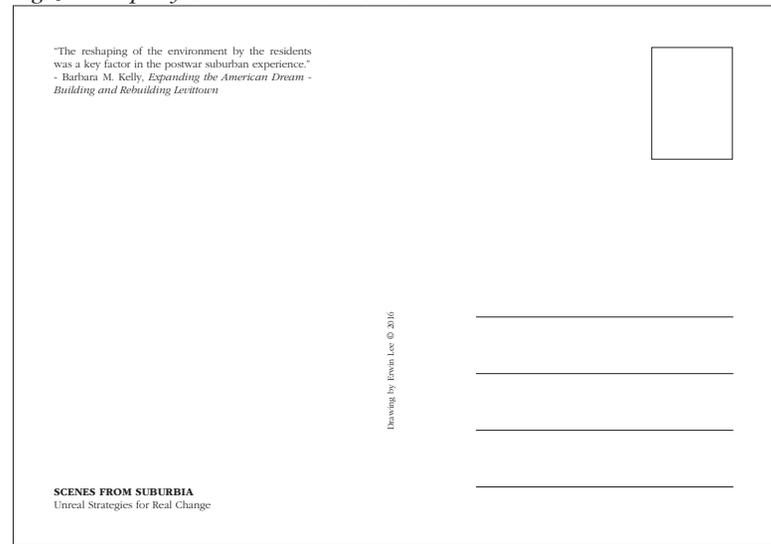


Fig. 33 *D.I.Y. Suburb* Postcard - Back

Thornhill

“You and I grew up in these neighborhoods when they were an interleaving of houses and fields that were soon to be filled with more houses.”⁴²

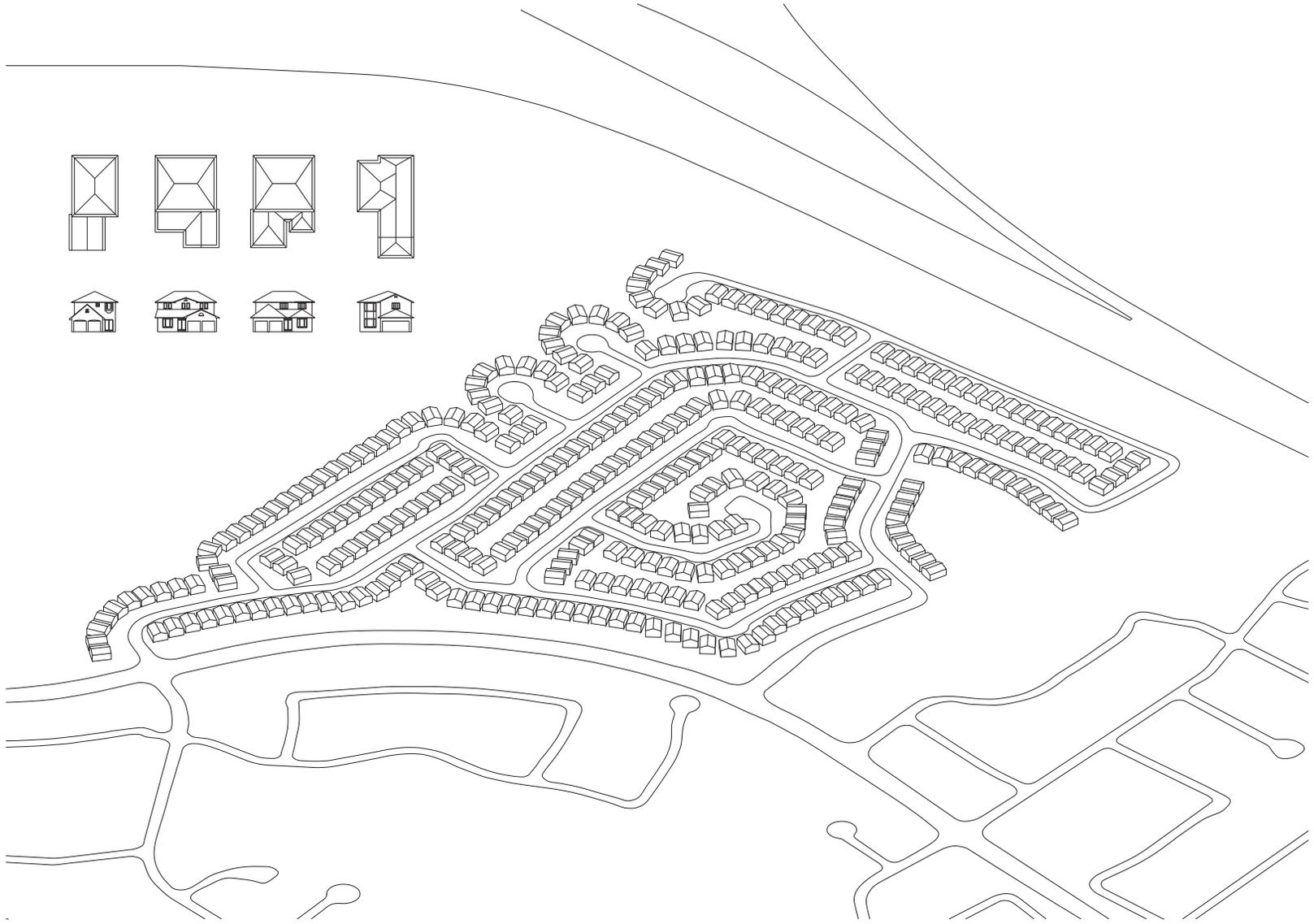
<p>A line drawing of a two-story house with a gabled roof. The front facade features two large arched windows on the ground floor and a smaller window with a decorative element above them. A central entrance is visible on the right side.</p>	<p>A line drawing of a two-story house with a gabled roof. The front facade features a central entrance with a small porch and two large windows on either side. The second floor has three windows.</p>	<p>A line drawing of a two-story house with a gabled roof. The front facade features a central entrance with a small porch and two large windows on either side. The second floor has three windows.</p>
<p>House Elevation 1#</p>	<p>House Elevation 2#</p>	<p>House Elevation 3#</p>
<p>A line drawing of a two-story house with a gabled roof. The front facade features a large window on the left side and a smaller window above a central entrance. A garage is visible on the right side.</p>	<p>A simple 3D wireframe drawing of a rectangular house with a gabled roof, shown from an isometric perspective.</p>	<p>A 3D wireframe drawing of a cul-de-sac layout. It shows a central circular area with several rectangular house blocks arranged around it, and a road leading into the circle from the right.</p>
<p>House Elevation 4#</p>	<p>Detached House Mass</p>	<p>Cul-De-Sac Mass</p>

Driving through the middle class neighbourhood of Thornhill and navigating the curving roads, I am reminded of my childhood home and the memories of growing up in a suburb just outside of downtown Toronto. The early 90's were a flourishing period for suburban neighbourhoods such as Thornhill. The houses were still relatively affordable and as a result, the area was occupied by many young new families. The American dream of homeownership, family, and independence was attainable, even for immigrant families such as mine.

Memories of walking to school, playing road hockey, biking to friends' houses, and sleepovers were the highlights of my childhood. Looking back on it now, I can see the benefits of suburban living for young families and why it has a reputation of being a safe, family oriented environment. Thornhill is a suburb much like any other, and it seemed to have everything I needed to be happy... that is until I reached the restless age of sixteen, and needed more stimulation to direct my energy towards.

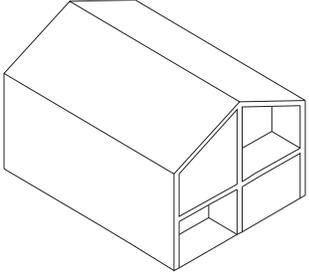
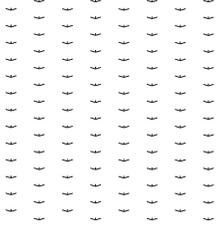
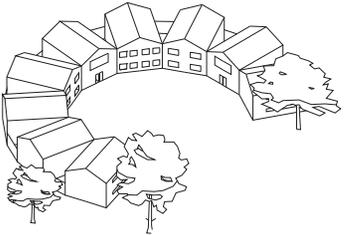
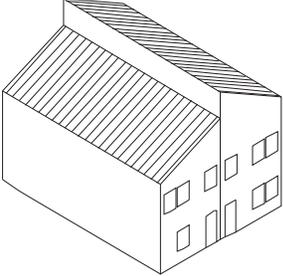
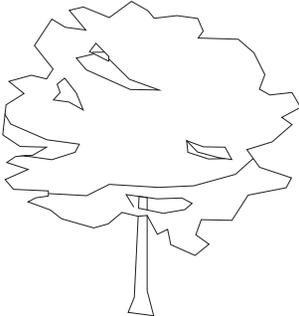
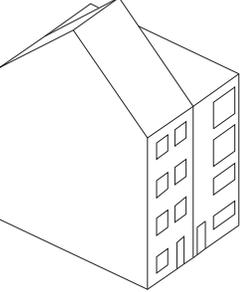
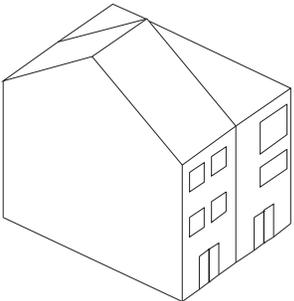
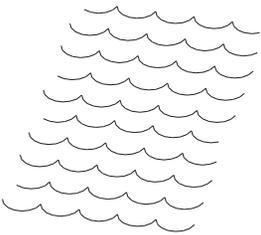
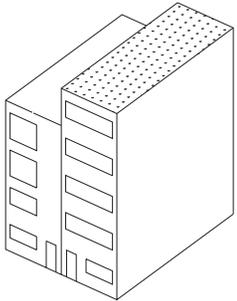
While residents will recognize their own neighbourhood, an outsider would likely have a harder time distinguishing Thornhill from another suburb. The houses repeat along the landscape like masses cut from the same mold. As a teenager, this was disheartening to me. I felt there was not a space that I could call my own. We would resort to going to the local Silvercity movie theater to hang out, skipping on watching a movie altogether. Basements were another refuge for the young and bored. Knowing that we would escape the dullness one day for the excitement of the big city was the only thought that got us through our teenage years in the suburbs.

I was the last of my friends to move out of Thornhill. While most of them moved to downtown Toronto for school or work, I went to a local university and would do the daily commute to school. I left Thornhill once I got a job downtown.



The Suburbanized City

“The suburbs are detached. Now there must be a new theme to the story, a new order and arrangement for a new kind of suburbanized city.”⁴³

		
<p>Detached House</p>	<p>Grass</p>	<p>Cul-De-Sac</p>
		
<p>Town House</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Four-Storey Apartments</p>
		
<p>Three-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Water</p>	<p>Multiple-Storey Apartments</p>

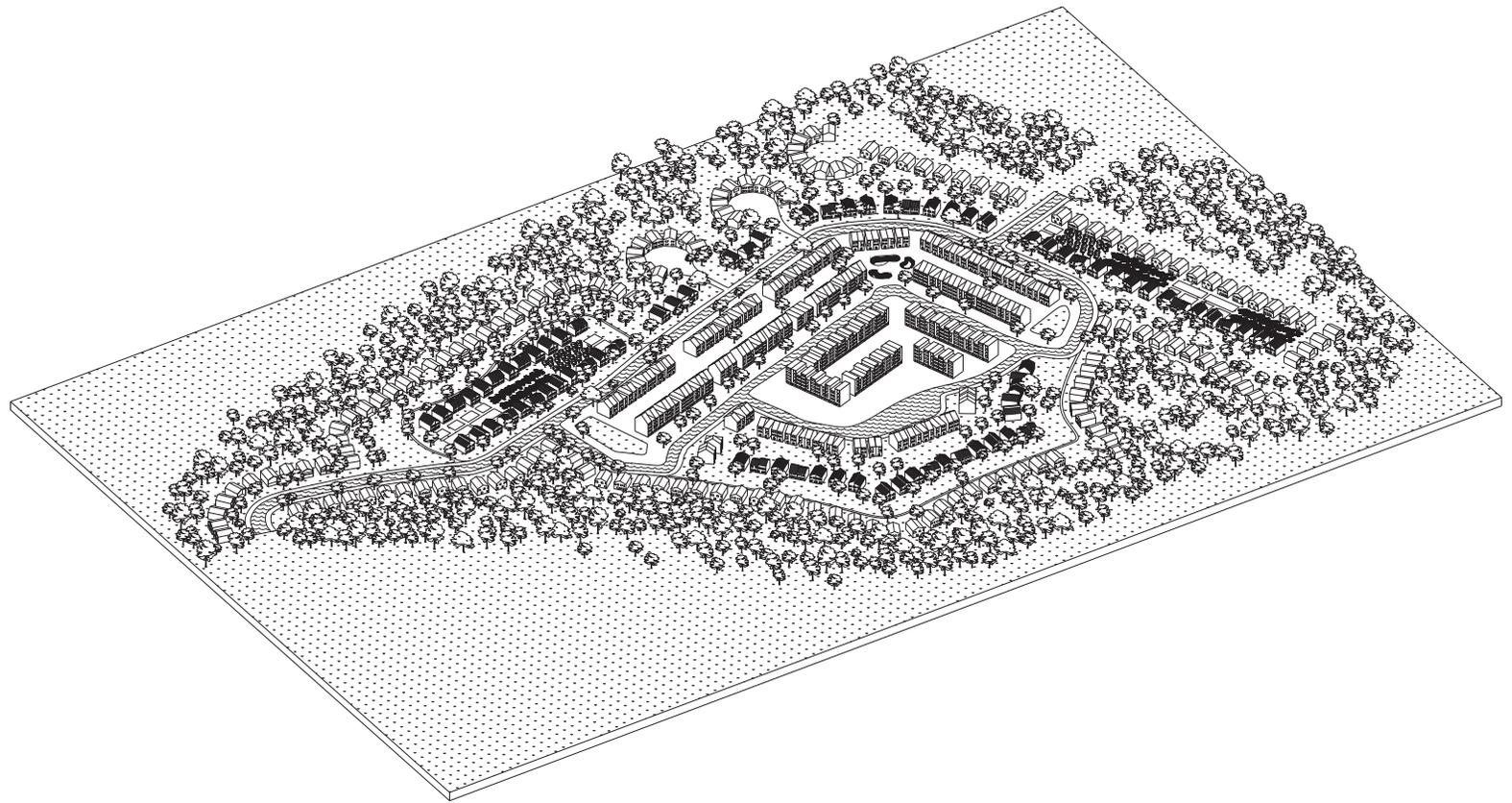
Thornhill has transformed into a suburbanized city. Detached and semi-detached houses, town houses, low-rise apartments, co-operative housing, and storefronts have been added to what was an otherwise uniform landscape of detached housing. Today, what used to be a sea of residential houses is now much more diverse, with public and private domains sharing the same space. With a central, dense core that branches out to detached housing, Thornhill is now like a smaller, concentrated city.

The most obvious change, the removal of the roads, has opened up the landscape to much more creative uses. This repurposed space can now handle a wide variety of public spaces. Another benefit is the car is no longer the primary concern. It feels refreshing to walk through the neighbourhood without seeing or hearing a single automobile speed by. The new landscape offers so many options now with new paths and destinations; people can walk to the store, bike to the café, skateboard to the pool... the reliance on the car is no longer a necessity.

At first, I thought this might be an issue. How do we get around if we don't have a car? But now, I see that it isn't such an extreme change after all. With so many things to do in such close vicinity, I'm finding less of a need to leave the neighbourhood at all.

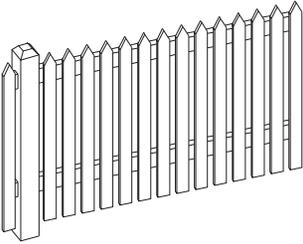
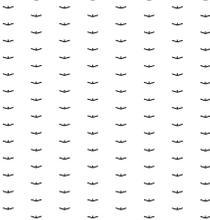
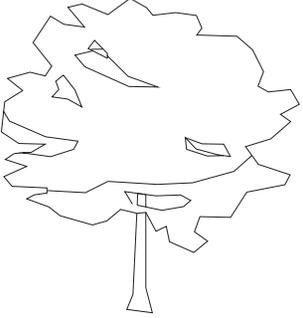
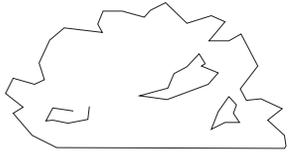
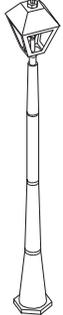
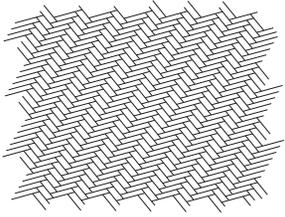
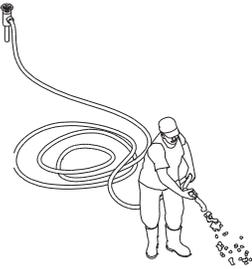
Upon further exploration, I realized that some of the roads have actually been replaced by a canal! I wish we had such a beautiful canal here when I was young. Not only is it a memorable feature, but a fun transportation route as well. Being able to canoe to a friend's house or a café is often reserved for people with cottages or for those who live in cities such as Amsterdam or Copenhagen.

The suburb as a city... considering that about two-thirds of Canadians currently live in the suburbs, change was bound to happen. Perhaps the proponents of the suburban lifestyle have finally accepted the absurdity of having to hop in the car to go to the convenience store when all they want is a pack of gum.



Heritage

“The flight of the suburbs has taken us to a monotonous, standardized environment where everyone has much the same amount of money to do much the same things in the same ways.”⁴⁴

		
<p>Original Detached House</p>	<p>Picket Fence</p>	<p>Warning Sign</p>
		
<p>Grass</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Bushes</p>
		
<p>Street Lamps</p>	<p>Interlocking Driveway</p>	<p>Landscape Maintenance</p>

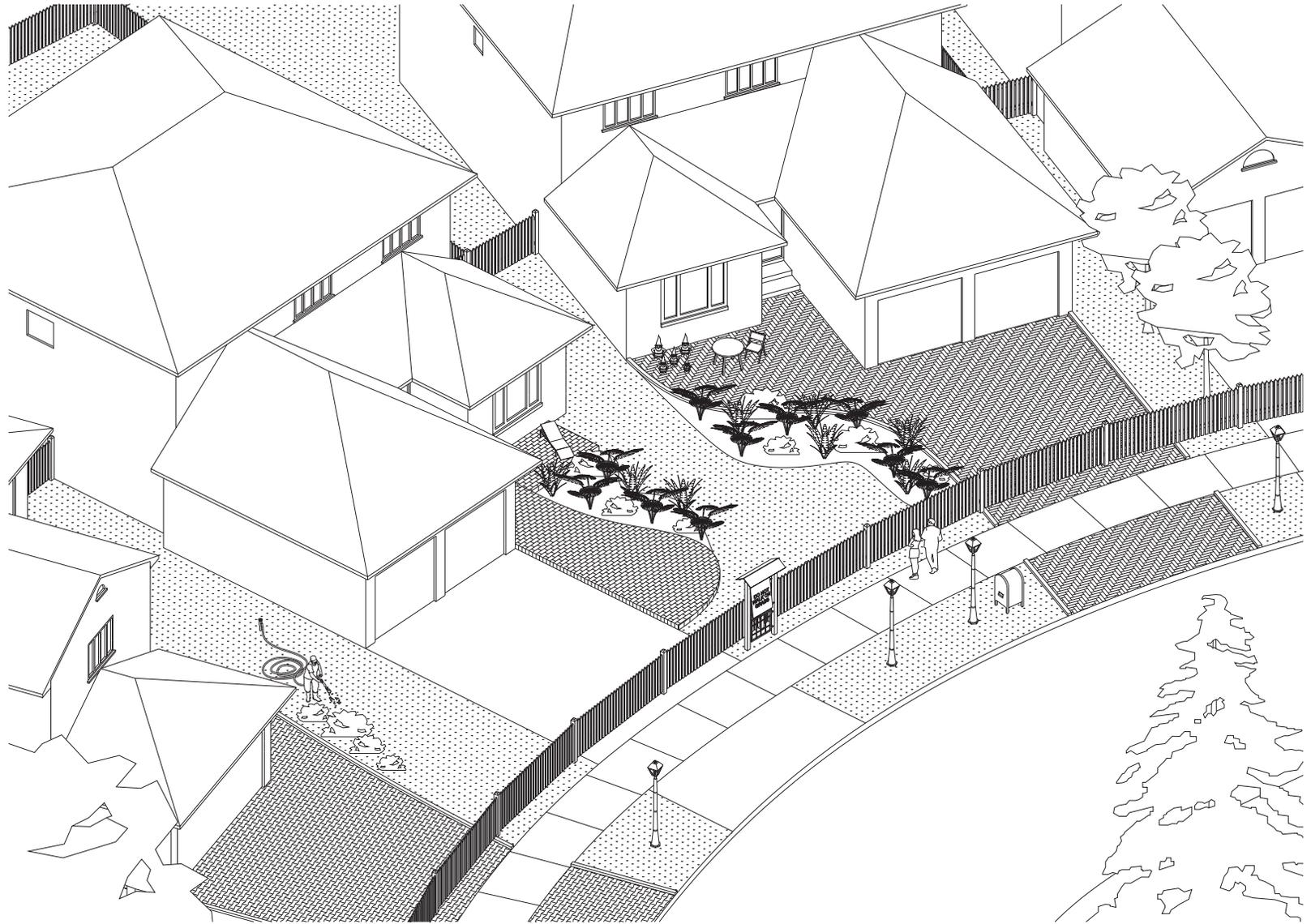
While exploring Thornhill, I noticed a few houses that looked very familiar. While everything in Thornhill has been modified, a strip of the original houses have been kept in pristine condition. These houses are left untouched and maintained as built records of what Thornhill used to look like before the new changes. It is important to remember the suburbs of the past, for the good and the bad. It was very nostalgic to see these houses and be reminded of how much maintenance is required to keep a house in good condition.

Visitors normally know what to expect when they venture north from downtown Toronto into the suburbs. Chances are, they likely grew up in Thornhill or a suburb similar to it. While some landmarks, such as Summerdale Park, Thornlea Secondary School, and Thornhill Square help to distinguish Thornhill from other suburbs like Richmond Hill, the landscape is essentially the same: detached houses with a two door garage, a generous driveway, a large front yard with professional landscaping, all situated on curving roads or cul-de-sacs.

Homeowners in Thornhill take a lot of pride in their homes and spend time individualizing them, such as painting the garage doors in different colours and designing the front landscaping. These little modifications help differentiate one home from another. My parents were no different. They would put money towards renovations such as interlocking driveways, a new garage door, new exterior lights, and the list goes on.

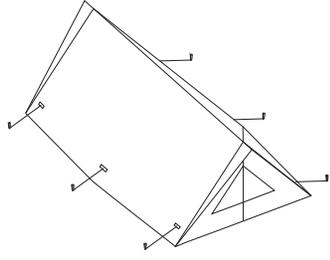
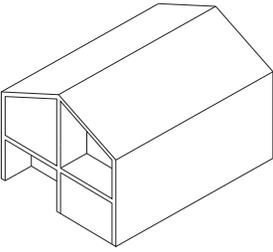
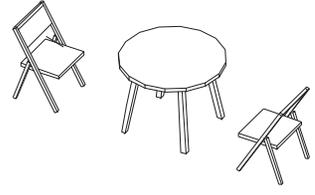
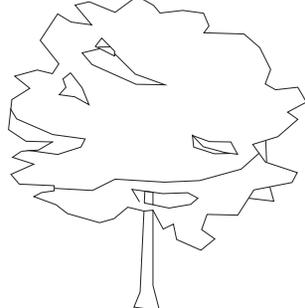
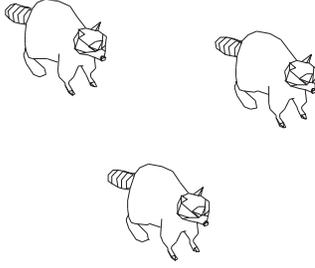
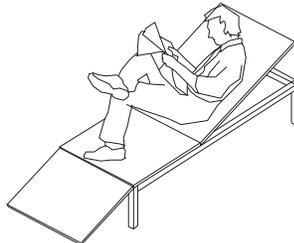
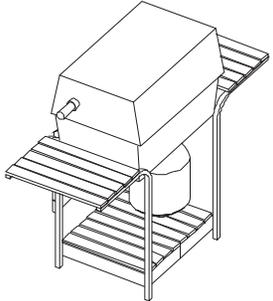
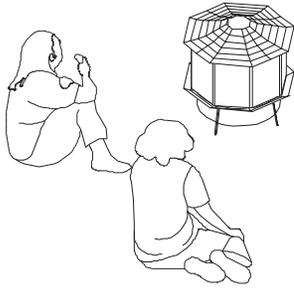
Differentiation only goes so far, though. Appearance is important in the suburbs. The need to “keep up with the Jones” and maintain the status quo is a necessity if one wants to be accepted by the community. However, neighbours don’t want to raise the bar too high either, because that would mean extra work (and money) which they would have to put towards the house.

Unfortunately, when I wanted to take a look inside the original Thornhill houses, I realized the picket fence had no entrance. I also saw a sign that simply read: DO NOT WALK ON GRASS.



Arcadia

“The residents’ hope of unspoiled nature fails because open land vanishes with increased development.”⁴⁵

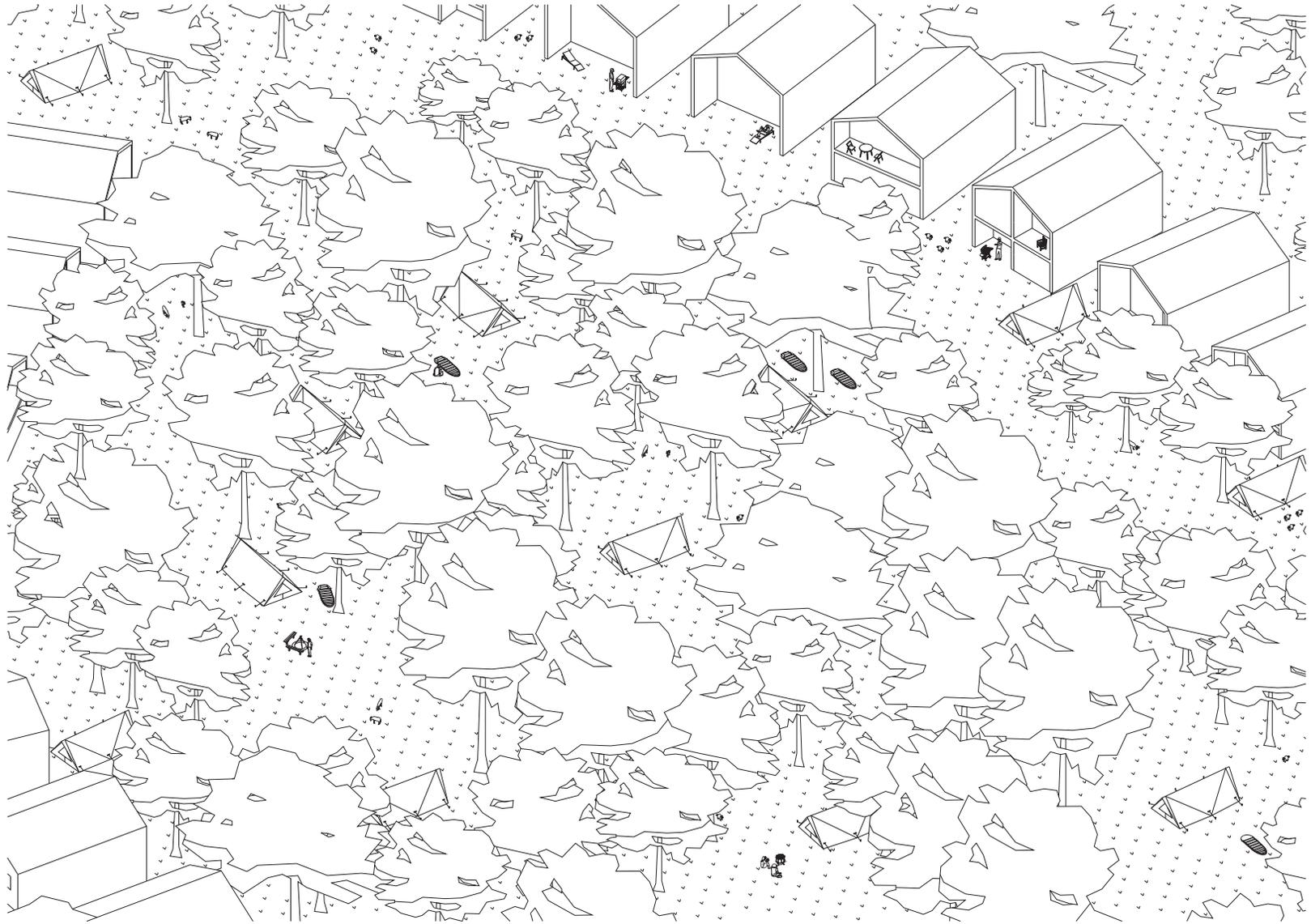
		
<p>Tent</p>	<p>Detached House</p>	<p>Patio Furniture</p>
		
<p>Grass</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Wild Animals</p>
		
<p>Adult</p>	<p>Barbecue</p>	<p>Children</p>

Poinsettia Drive, Daffodil Avenue, Valleyview Road, Parklawn Crescent, these are the street names typical to the suburbs. The suburbs have always claimed to be rooted in nature and an alternative to the hustle and bustle of city life. But this has always been an illusion, with nature being used in the most minimal sense. "Nature" in the suburbs has been limited to front and back yards, small parks, trees along the streets, and if you are lucky, there is also a ravine in the area. I was one of the lucky ones, as Thornhill has a large ravine that I would play in when I was young.

Now Thornhill is robust with greenery; it's an Arcadia that is in harmony with nature. Dense trees and vegetation are more than just an extension of the home, as Thornhill is now immersed in them.

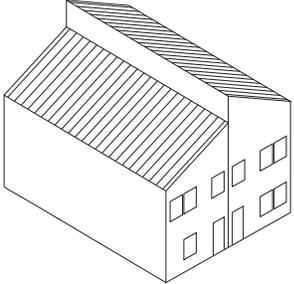
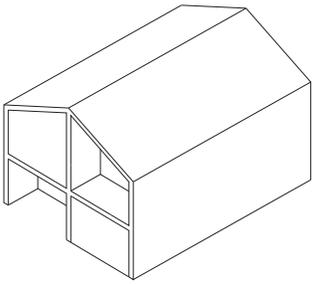
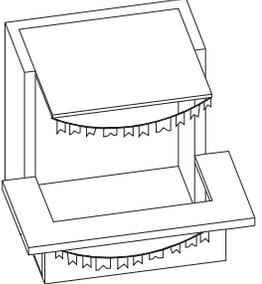
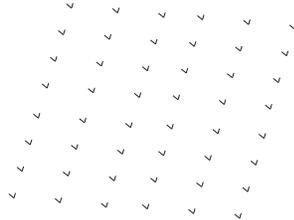
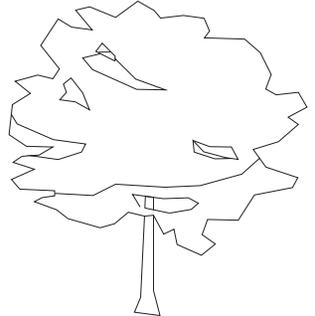
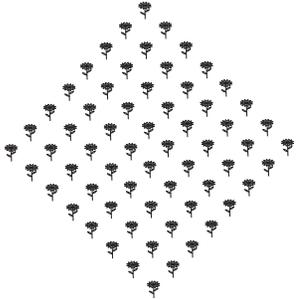
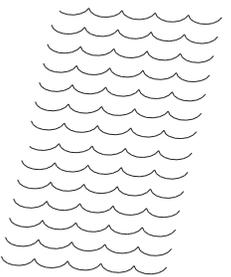
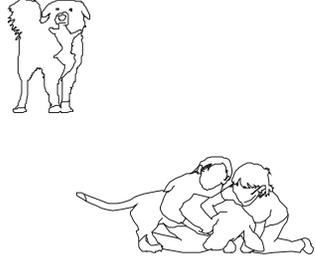
Every summer I would go on a camping trip with my friends, which would require planning months in advance. We would have to coordinate schedules and make reservations at a camp ground. Here, families now enjoy the advantages of cottage life and camping, right in their own backyard. The forested areas provide ideal campsites.

Strolling through this forest, it is easy to be overtaken with a sense of calm and peacefulness. This type of escape from urban life usually requires me to hop in a car and drive two hours to a secluded park. I always find that the need to drive to nature is awkward, and I am glad to see instead that Thornhill unifies nature and the neighbourhood together.



Crunchy Suburb

“A crunchy suburb is populated by countercultural urbanites with kids as well as businesses that cater to these families, such as food co-ops.”⁴⁶

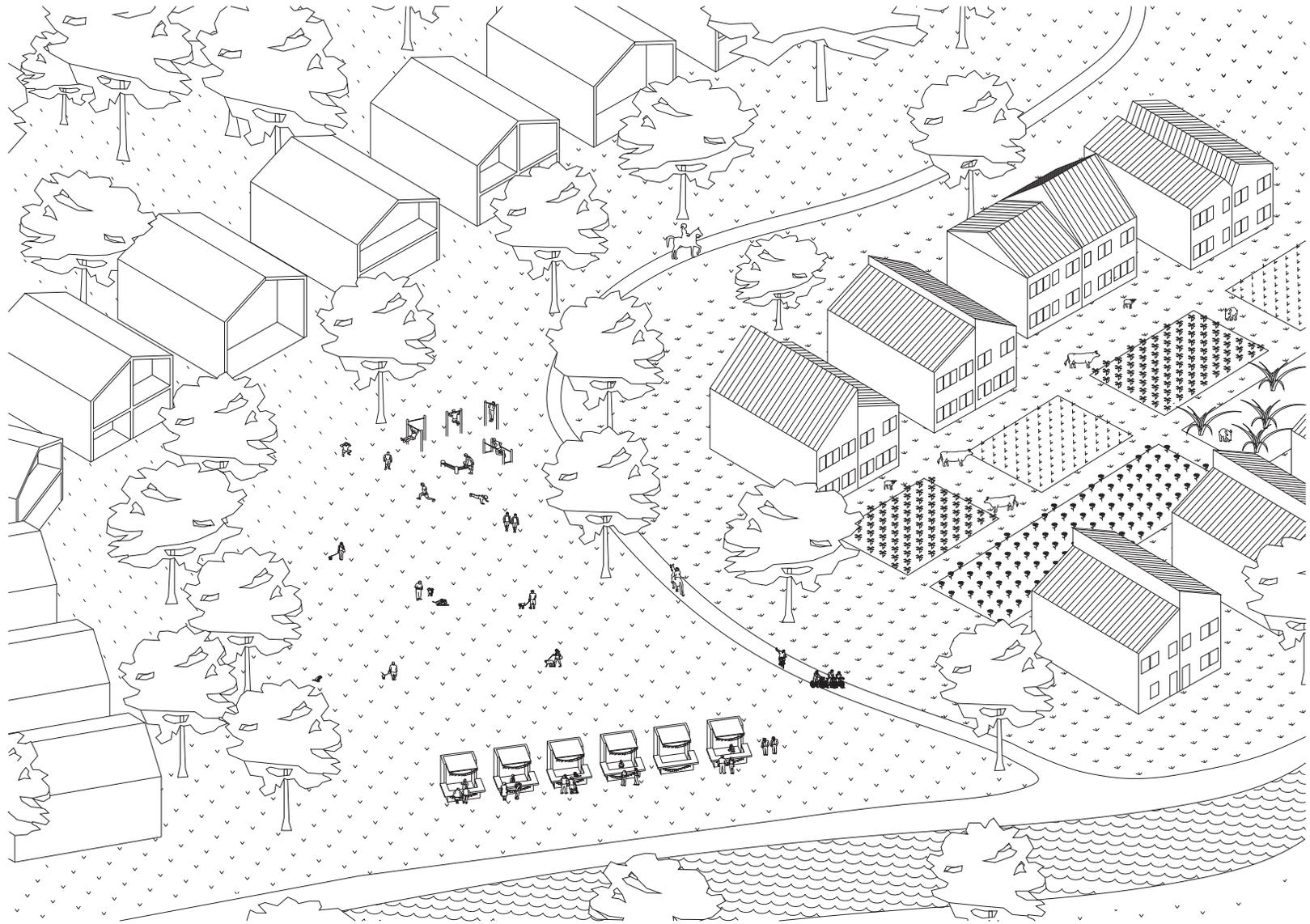
		
<p>Town House</p>	<p>Detached House</p>	<p>Market Stall</p>
		
<p>Grass</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Flowers</p>
		
<p>Water</p>	<p>Fitness Classes</p>	<p>Pets</p>

The commute to work or school has been one of the biggest downfalls to living in the suburbs. Going to work would be at least an hour's drive to reach downtown Toronto, and that doesn't even include the amount of time I would be stuck in traffic! Taking public transportation would be even longer of a commute.

However, the dwellers here have been able to cut out the commute from their lives, simply because they can now work in close proximity to where they live. In fact, many of the residents here are entrepreneurs and run their own businesses from their homes.

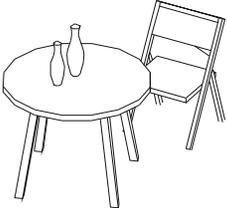
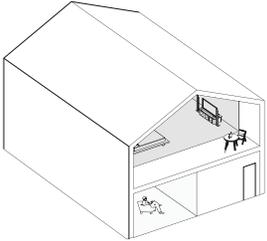
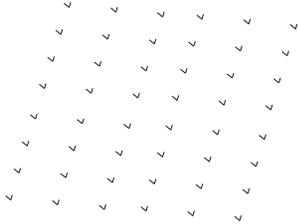
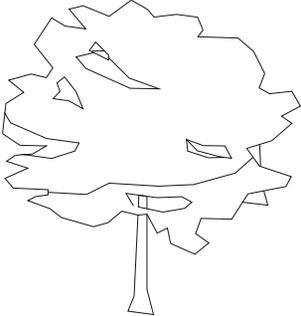
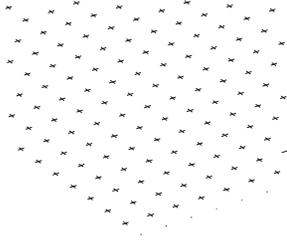
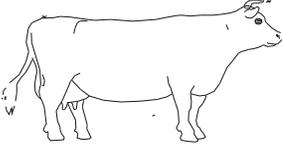
The types of services I have seen in Thornhill range from yoga and fitness lessons to owning and maintaining urban farms. Fitness classes in front of the houses, vegetable gardens growing in backyards, and market stalls in open spaces have turned Thornhill into a community market of goods and services. The best part about these resident run businesses is that it unites the community. It allows the residents to work from home and makes it more convenient for people when they don't have to leave the neighbourhood to buy vegetables, take swimming lessons, watch a band, etc.

The residents are visually happier now. They get to work from home, spend more time with their kids and pets, they can run their own businesses, and they have more opportunity to meet other members of the community.



Glass Facades

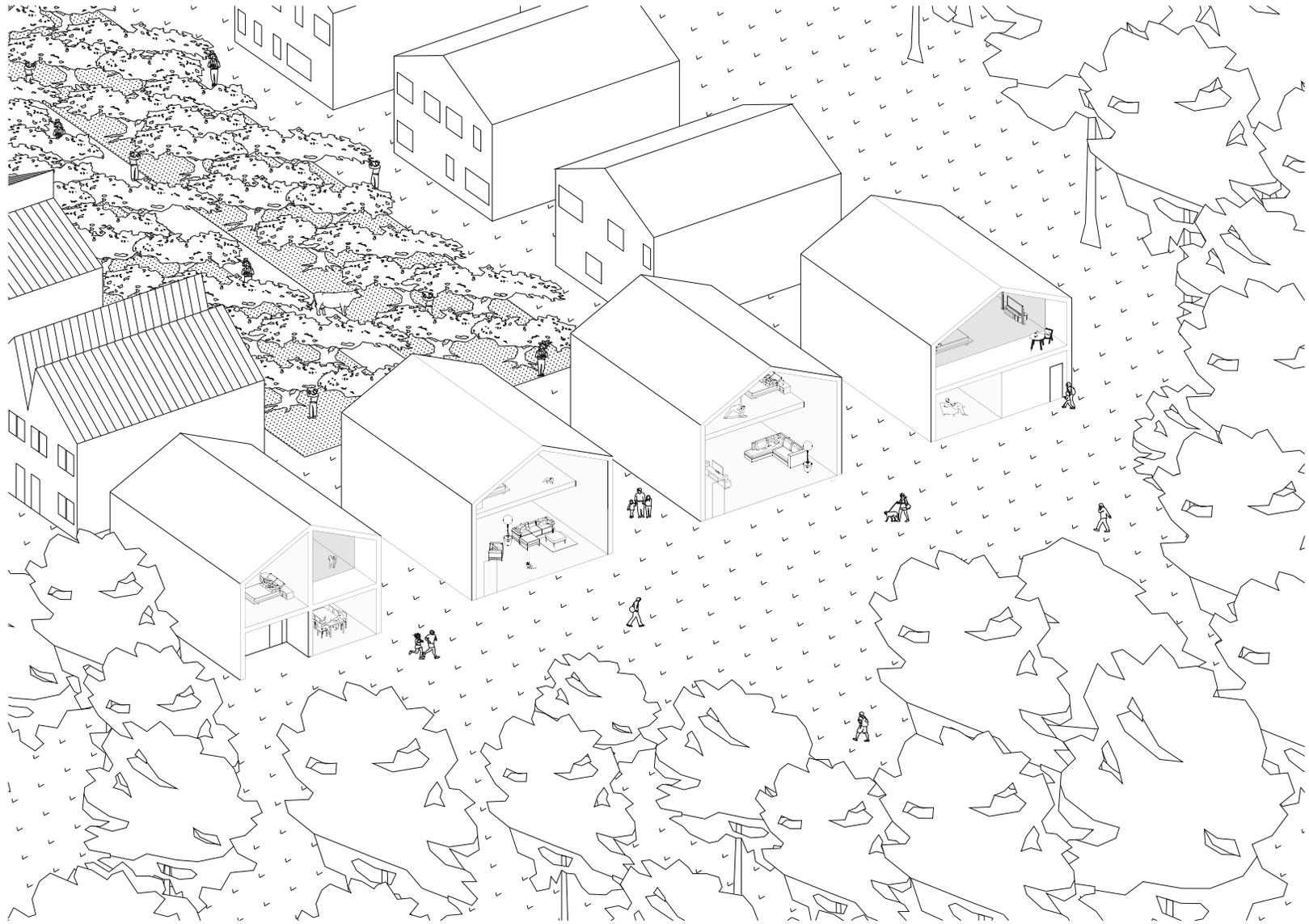
“In the usual suburban house, the view through the front window is arranged to give a picture of socially accepted normalcy; the façade, through nostalgic and conventional signs and symbols, is intended to express the homeowner’s identity.”⁴⁷

		
<p>Patio Furniture</p>	<p>Glass Facade House</p>	<p>Dog Walking</p>
		
<p>Grass</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Dirt</p>
		
<p>Joggers</p>	<p>Olive Tree</p>	<p>Cow</p>

In the suburbs, public and private spaces have always been kept separated. Residents want their privacy and for many people, the home is a sanctuary away from the prying eyes of the public. However, a few of the houses in Thornhill depart from this belief and instead blur the boundary between the public and private realm.

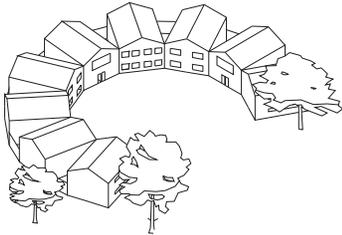
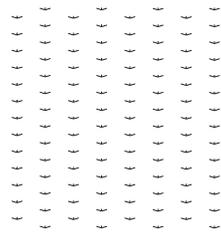
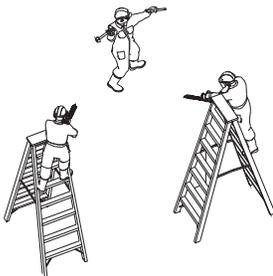
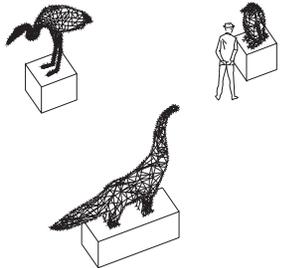
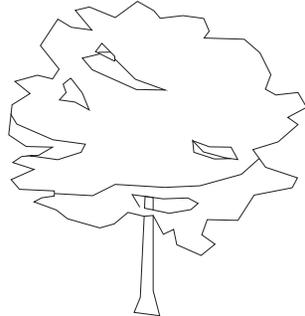
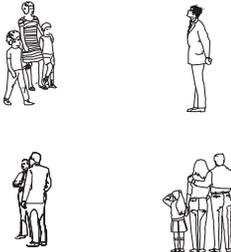
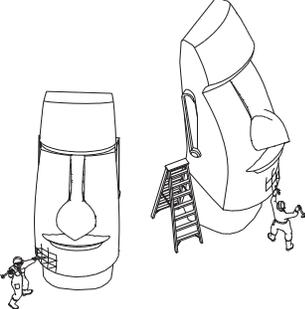
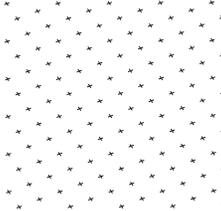
While most houses have windows for views inside and outside, there are a few houses here that have completely transparent facades made of glass. While I have seen a few modern houses with large glass windows, I have yet to see homes that are completely transparent on the front.

Walking past these glass facades, I could see the arrangements of homeowner's furniture, what their different rooms look like, and I could see their pets staring outside. With a traditional suburban house, homeowners would individualize their homes with different exterior renovations, but these houses have their interiors on display instead. Each house has different interior designs, and the individuality of the homeowner can be seen expressed through their furniture and appliances.



Topiary Exhibition

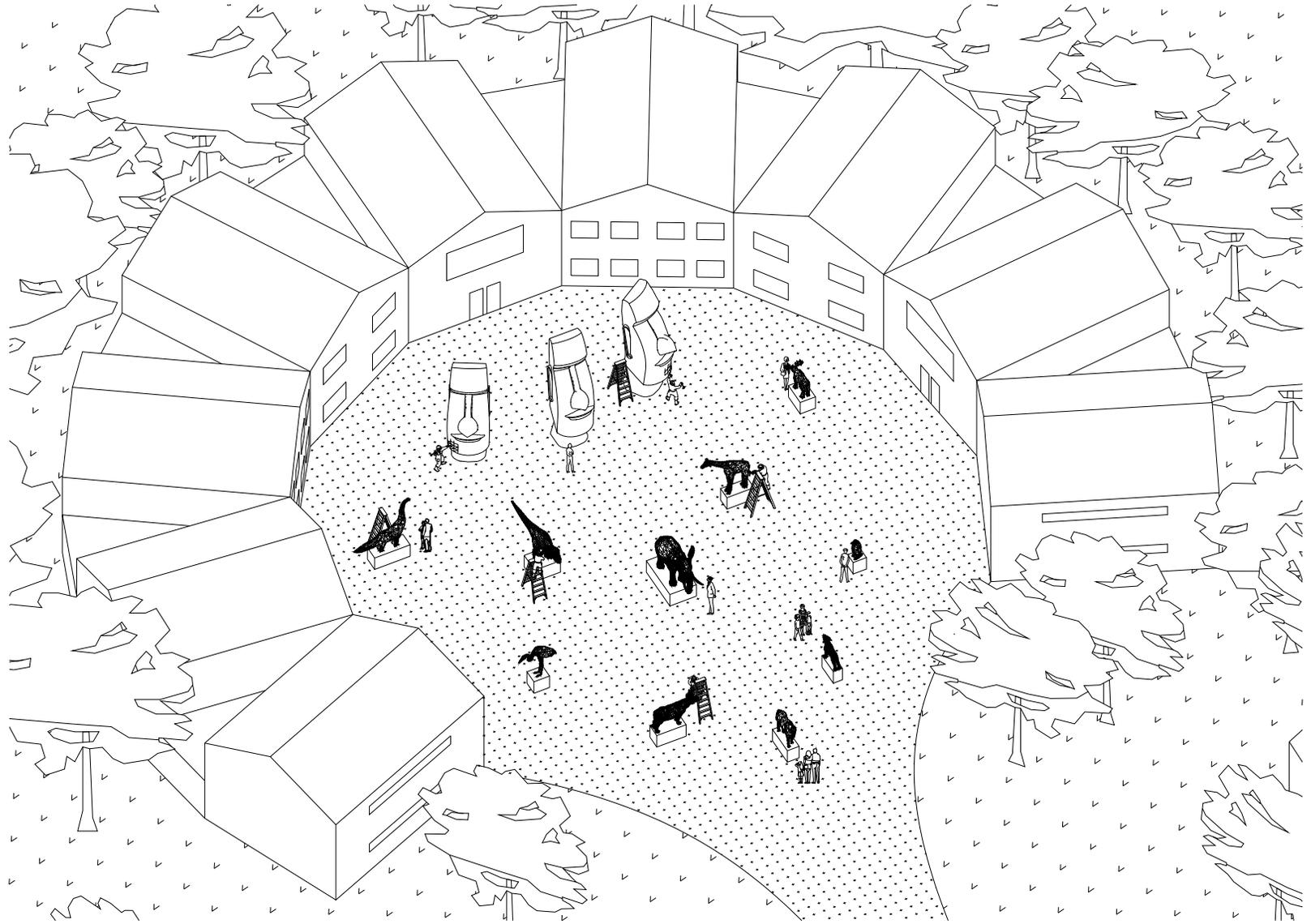
Hedge sculptures represent the peak of stereotypical suburban landscaping... but they are also just plain fun.

		
<p>Cul De Sac</p>	<p>Grass</p>	<p>Sculpture Artists</p>
		
<p>Hedge Sculptures</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Residents</p>
		
<p>Stone Sculptures</p>	<p>Dirt</p>	<p>Ladders</p>

As I entered the enclosure of the cul-de-sac, I immediately felt like I walked onto the set of the Edward Scissorhands movie. All around me were intricate hedge sculptures of animals and dinosaurs created by talented topiaries. This topiary exhibit was a fun and interesting event to have in the suburbs. It reminds me of when I used to walk around the neighbourhood with my mom during spring, looking at new landscaping and blooming flowers in people's front lawns.

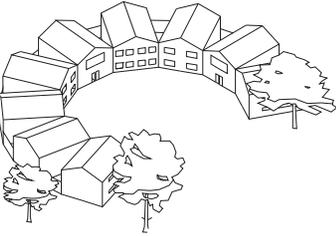
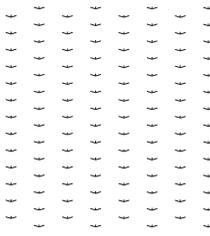
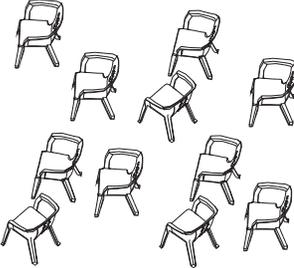
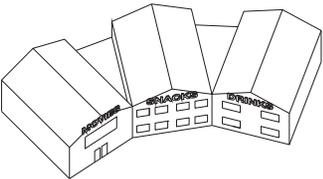
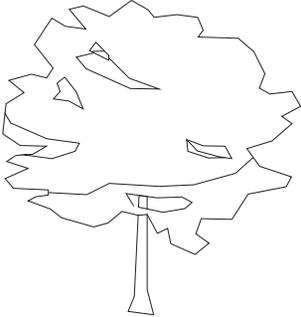
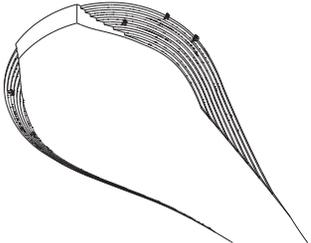
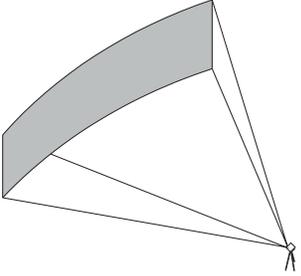
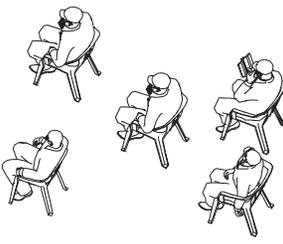
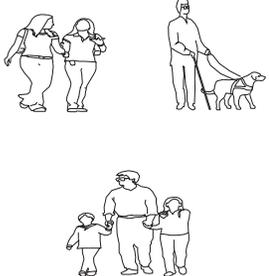
Hedge sculptures were so stereotypical of the suburban image; it was a way for homeowners to add some individuality to their homes. Although they were a bit tacky, these sculptures provided a fun way to add character to the house. Now as an exhibit, the hedge sculptures can be enjoyed by the entire community.

The cul-de-sac is a great location for this exhibit. While the enclosed space of the cul-de-sac used to represent privacy for the homeowners, it is now a shared space for the community.



At the Movies

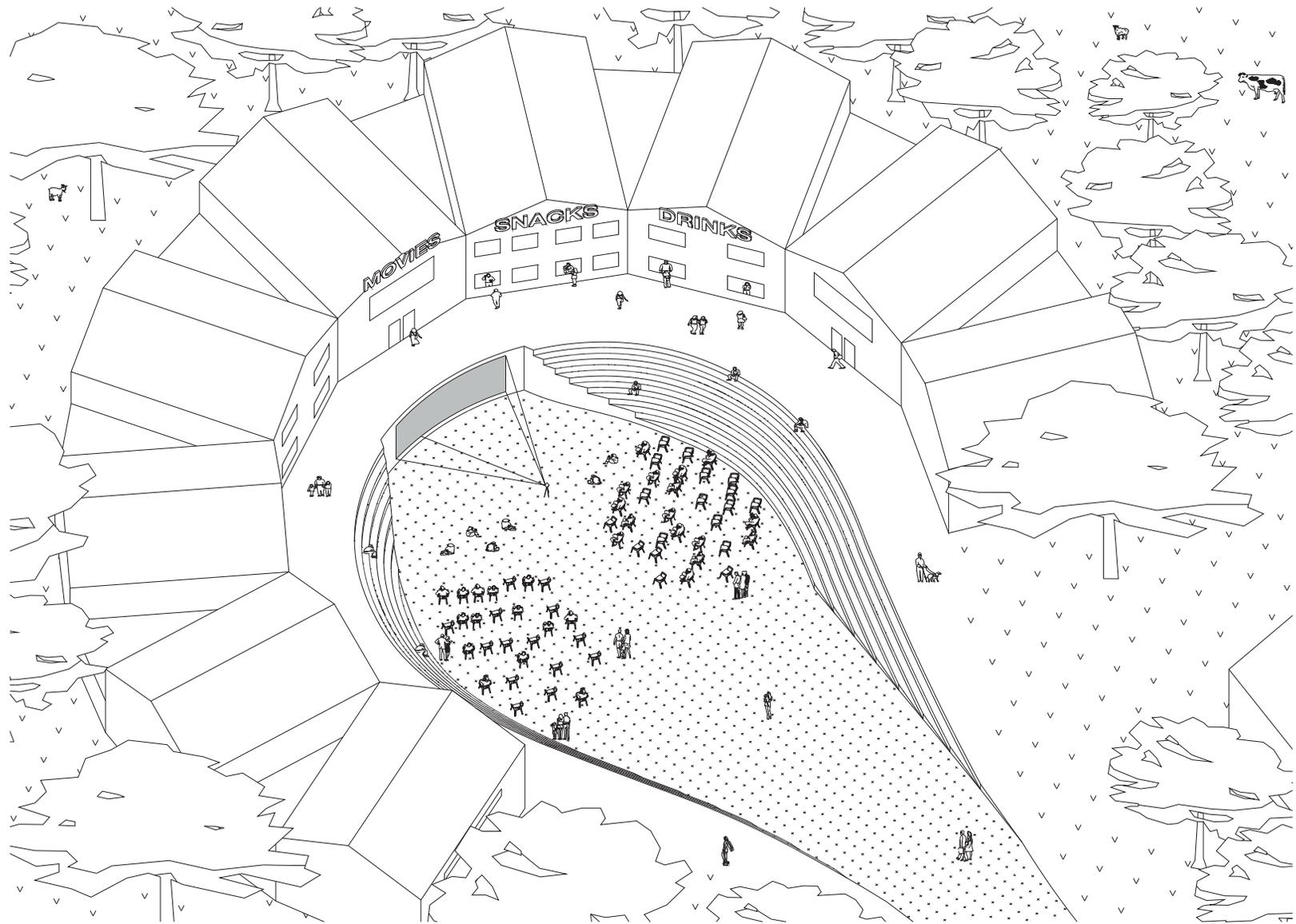
I felt there was not a space that I could call my own. We would resort to going to the local Silvercity movie theater just to hang out, skipping on watching a movie altogether.

		
<p>Cul De Sac</p>	<p>Grass</p>	<p>Chairs</p>
		
<p>Houses Converted to Concession Stands</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Amphitheatre</p>
		
<p>Movie Projector</p>	<p>Audience</p>	<p>Local Residents</p>

I wandered into the adjacent cul-de-sac and noticed this area has also been transformed into a community space. As you enter the cul-de-sac, the ground slopes down and forms an amphitheater with plenty of seating. There was already a group of people sitting around the projector, waiting for the movie to start. It was also interesting to see that some of the houses became concession stands, offering snacks, drinks, and movie rentals. It really felt like being out at the movies, although much more fun and interesting.

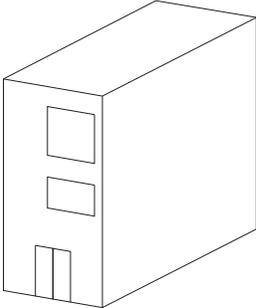
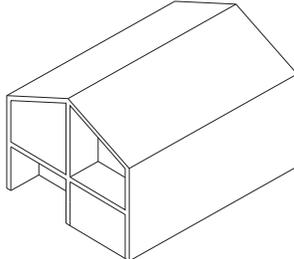
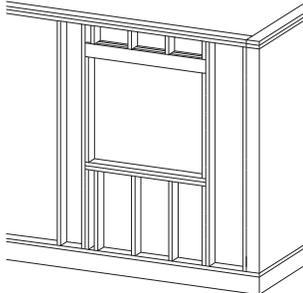
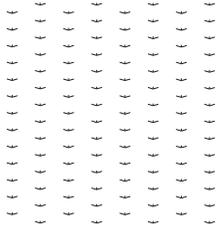
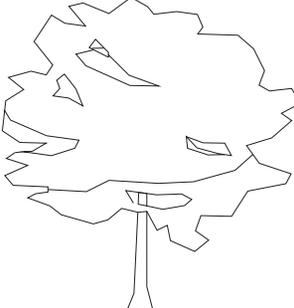
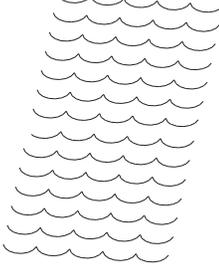
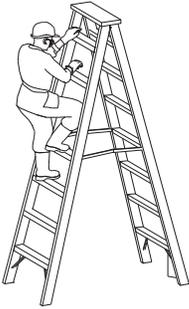
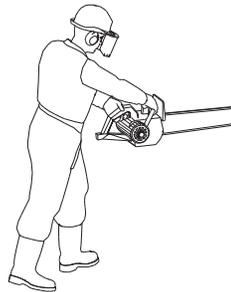
Talking to some of the residents, they tell me this theater space is used to play movies, sporting events, and can also be booked for personal showings. Watching a hockey game with a large crowd on a big screen is much more exciting than watching it in a basement on a television.

Growing up in the suburbs, the movie theater was the place I went to the most. Going to the movies was one of the few activities that got us out of the house and that our parent's approved of. It was a place for friends to gather and socialize. Occasionally, we would actually watch a movie.



D.I.Y. Suburb

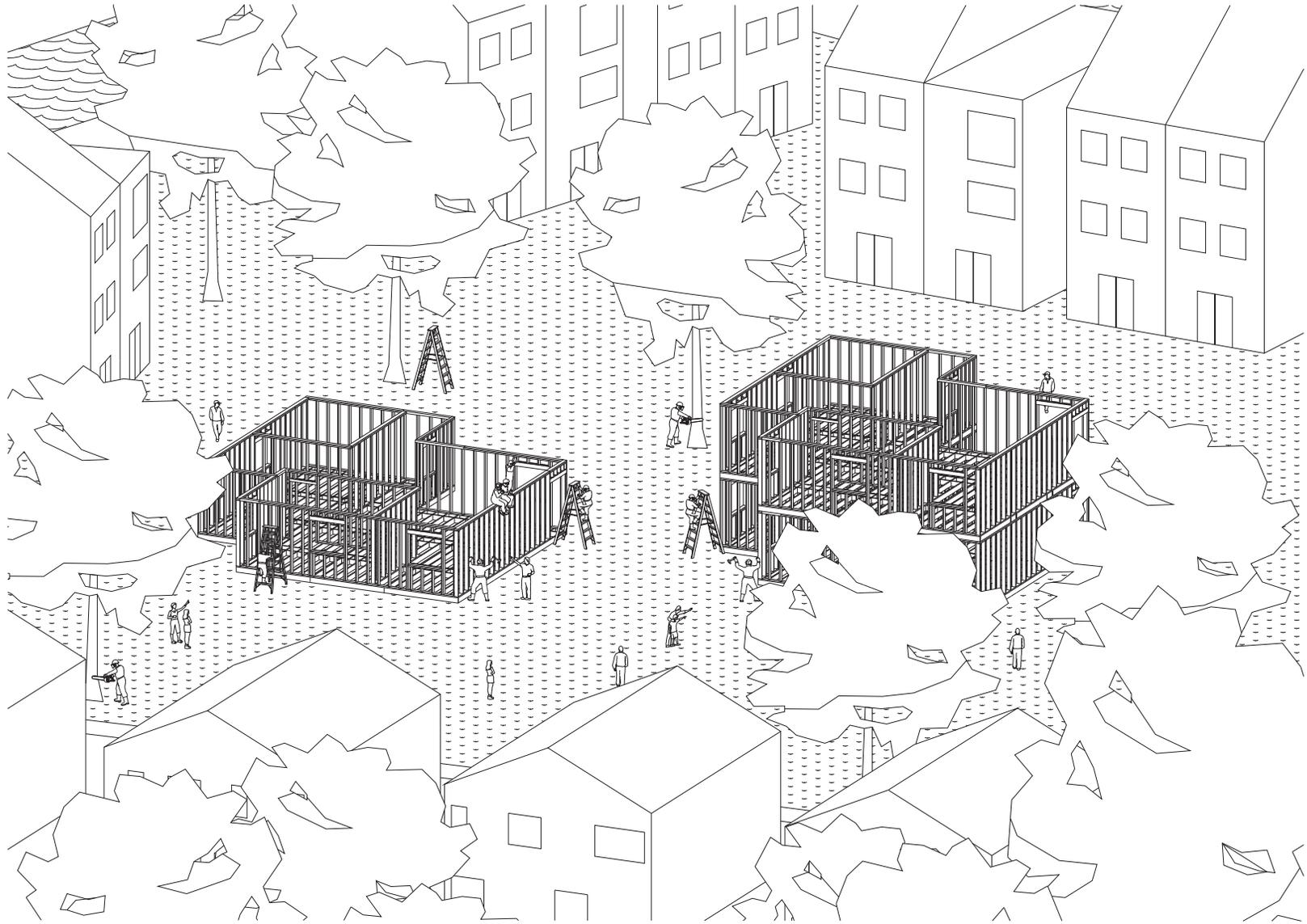
“The reshaping of the environment by the residents was a key factor in the postwar suburban experience.”⁴⁸

		
<p>Low-Rise Apartment</p>	<p>Detached House</p>	<p>Wood Stud Construction</p>
		
<p>Grass</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Water</p>
		
<p>Ladder</p>	<p>Thornhill Residents</p>	<p>Construction</p>

Suburbia is continuously in a state of transition. New buildings, renovations, landscaping, and basic house maintenance are a common sight in the suburbs. I remember when I used to live in Thornhill; my mom would spend so much time working on the house. There is great joy in individualizing and maintaining a beautiful home. There is also a lot of pride in knowing that you can design, build, or repair your house without having to hire someone else to do it for you.

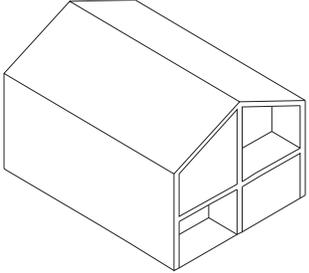
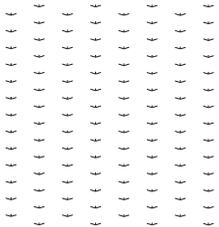
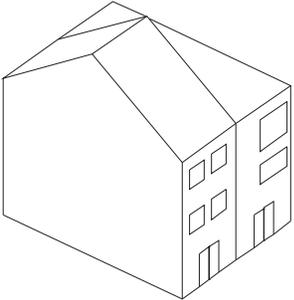
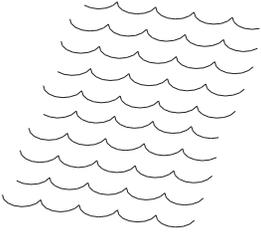
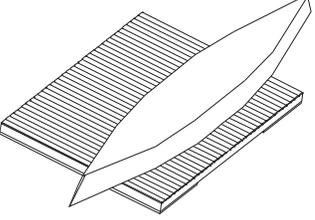
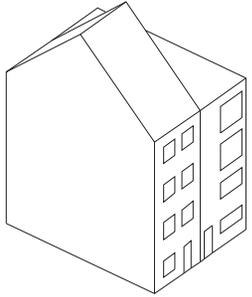
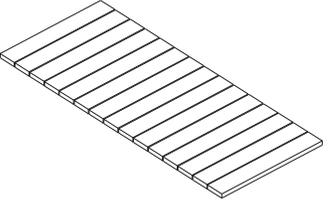
This builder characteristic is evident amongst the residents of Thornhill. There is a Do-It-Yourself mentality here in that the residents build their own decks, gazebos, fix their foundations, and even build their own houses. This is a similar lifestyle to the early post-war suburbs such as Levittown, where residents would band together to develop their community.

It is nice to see Thornhill constantly evolving and growing as a community.



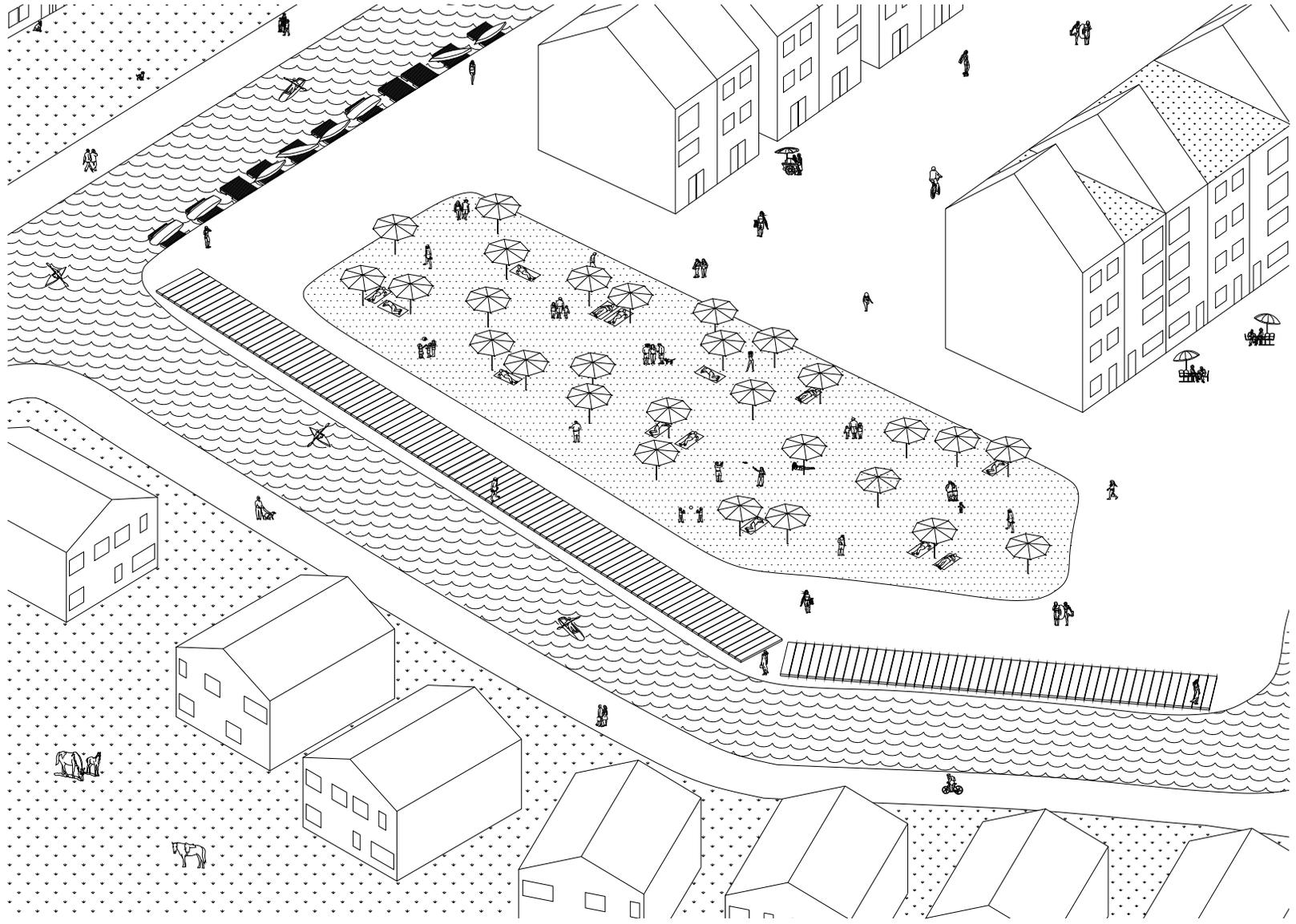
The Beaches

“When it heats up in the city, the sweaty hordes flock to the beaches.”⁴⁹

		
<p>Detached House</p>	<p>Grass</p>	<p>Beach Umbrellas</p>
		
<p>Three-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Water</p>	<p>Docks and Boats</p>
		
<p>Four-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Sand</p>	<p>Boardwalk</p>

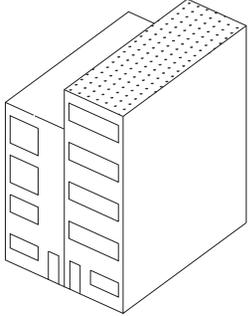
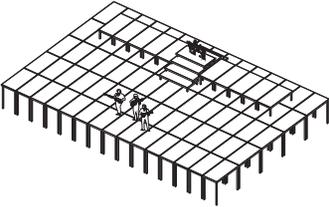
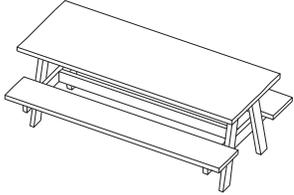
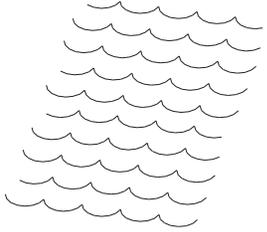
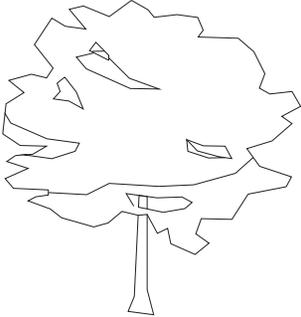
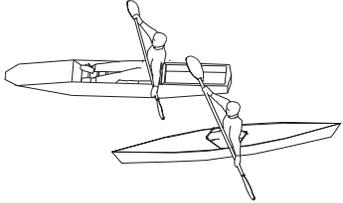
Near the center of the neighbourhood, along the canal, I heard a lot of laughter and excitement. As I got closer to the noises, a series of beach umbrellas came into view. To my surprise, there was a small beach between the low-rise apartments and a section of the canal that forms a small pond. Kids were playing, teenagers were throwing around a Frisbee, and even adults were out sun tanning. The boardwalk provided a nice path to walk a dog on and take in the scenery. Everyone was enjoying the weather and relaxing on the sand.

While a beach in Thornhill is a welcomed surprise, it is not too unrealistic of an idea. There are many small scale urban beaches in Toronto and around the inner-suburbs such as Scarborough that suburbanites would drive to on the weekend. Some suburban neighbourhoods also have small ponds that attract locals and visitors from surrounding communities. The beaches in Thornhill combines the best of both the urban beach and the suburban pond into a relaxing retreat.



Subtropolis

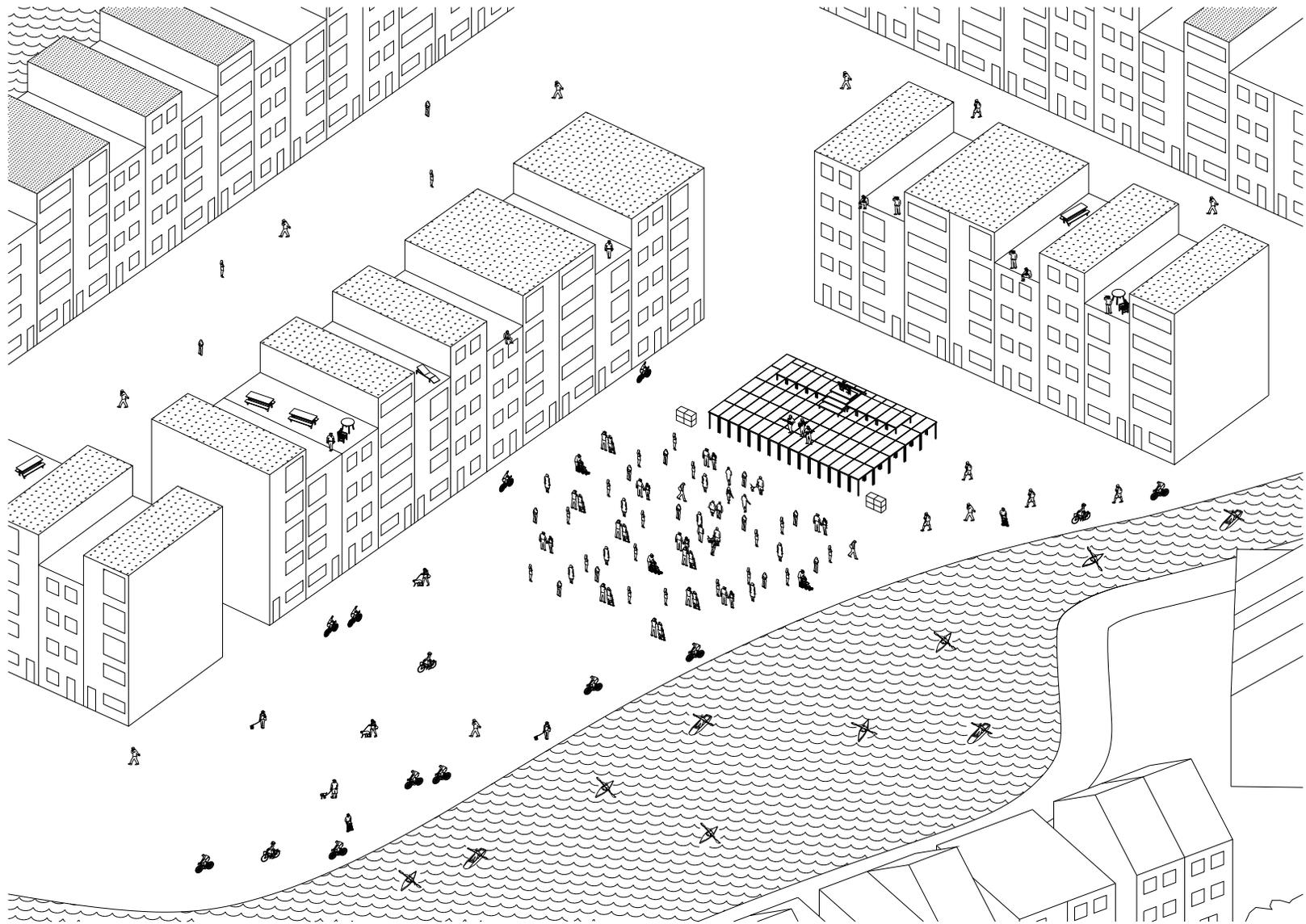
“It is impossible to contemplate a town or a city without seeing some kind of heart to it and some kind of boundary to it. All the imaginings and all the experience of succeeding generations in making cities have been concerned with the nature of what is in the middle and with the definition of the edges.”⁵⁰

		
<p>Multiple-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Music Performance</p>	<p>Picnic Tables</p>
		
<p>Water</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Cyclists</p>
		
<p>Dog Walking</p>	<p>Kayakers</p>	<p>Joggers</p>

A compact city located in the centre of the suburbs... a subropolis. Mid-rise buildings, restaurants, stores, cafes, and even a canal form the heart of Thornhill. This heart functions as a hub for the surrounding suburb, giving residents walkable access to amenities that they used to have to drive to. It feels like I'm taking a stroll in a European city.

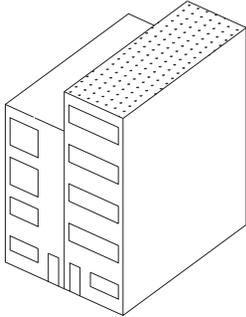
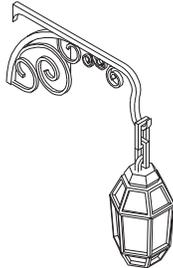
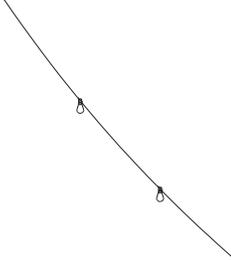
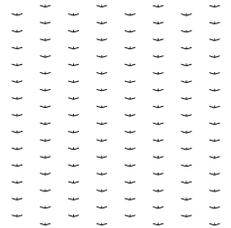
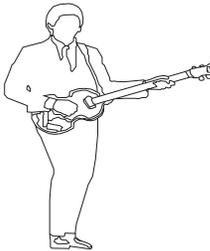
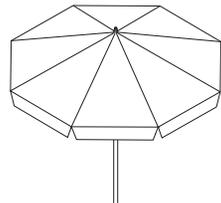
The area is densely occupied. Residents walk through the neighbourhood, stopping at the cafés for coffee, pausing for a view of the canal, or catching the band playing a show in the square. People walk through the neighbourhood to socialize and enjoy the scenery.

There is space for everybody, from the young to the elderly. Apartment buildings allow for smaller living spaces and more people, but also encourage daily routines and activities to take place in the public realm rather than the private.



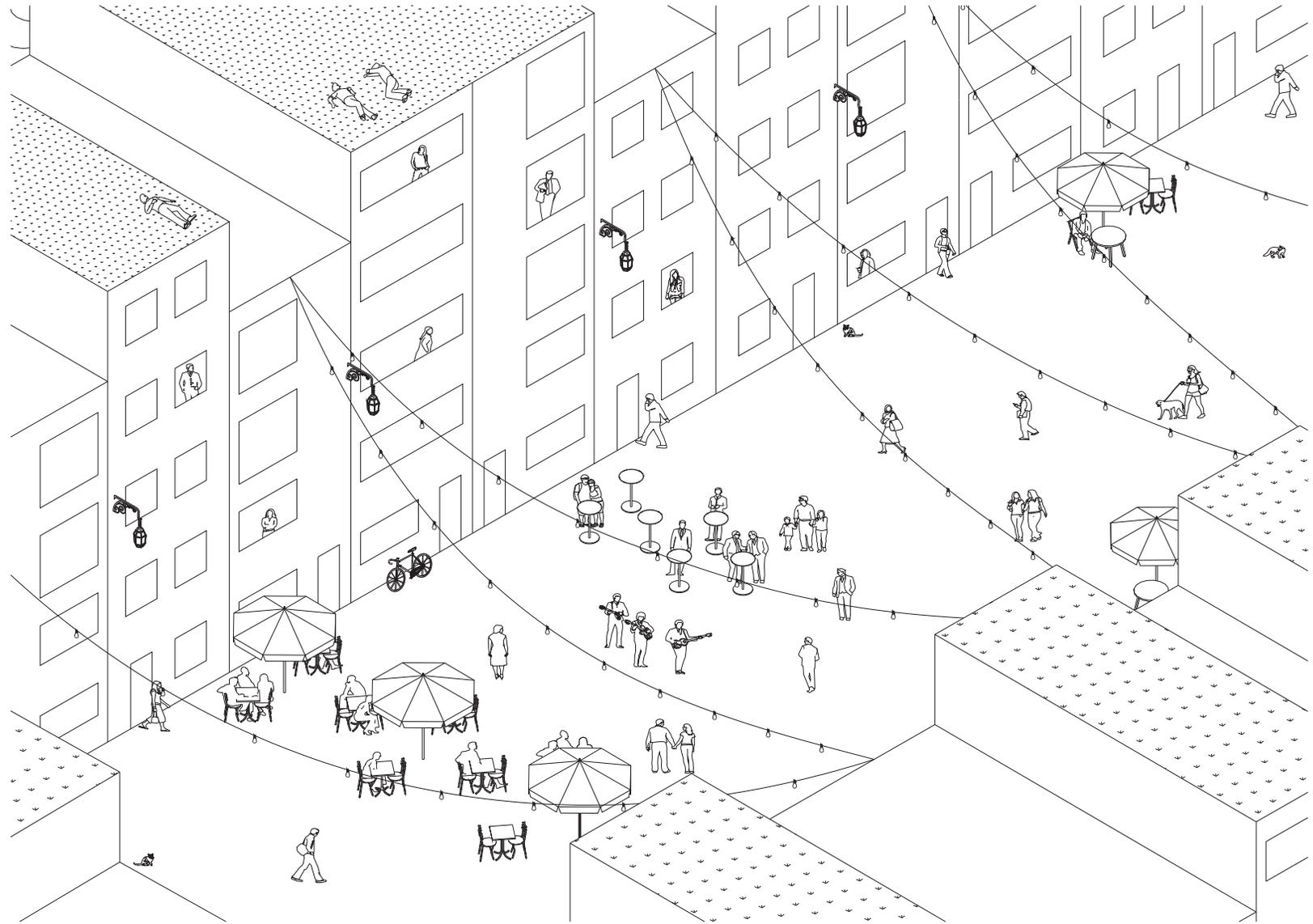
Patio Suburb

“The answer hinges upon the needs of some households to be particularly close to stores, restaurants, public transportation, and recreation centres. The family household is a self-contained, independent operational unit, but the life of the apartment-dweller is incomplete and dependent. He must go out and get company and meals and make contact with the world around him.”⁵¹

		
<p>Multiple-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Lamps</p>	<p>Decorative Lights</p>
		
<p>Patio Furniture</p>	<p>Thornhill Residents</p>	<p>Grass</p>
		
<p>Musicians</p>	<p>Patio Umbrella</p>	<p>Cats</p>

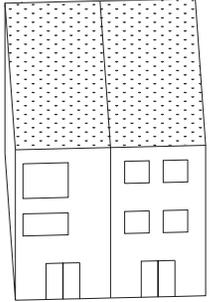
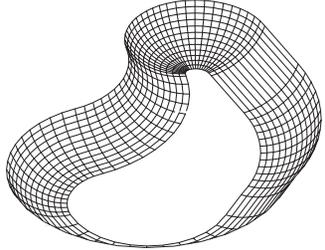
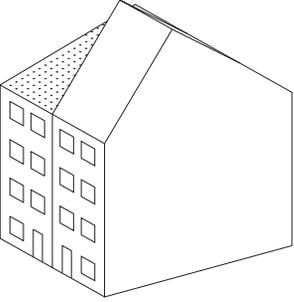
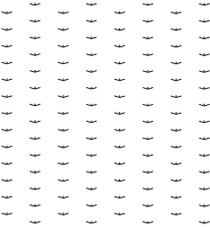
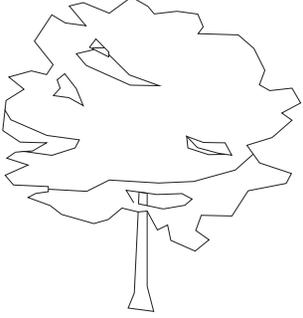
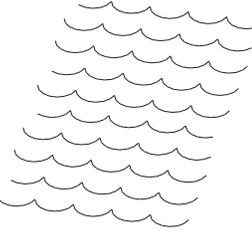
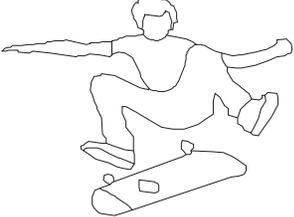
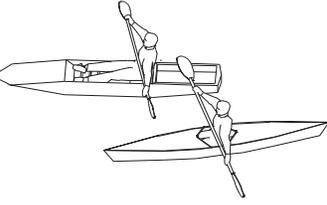
There is more life and vibrancy in this neighbourhood of Thornhill. Families are out for a walk or enjoying a drink on the patio. When I lived in Thornhill, this type of activity rarely happened on the street or even in front of the house. Perhaps it is because the addition of low-rise apartments forces people to engage with each other more often than if they lived privately in a detached house.

The suburbs paint a picture of everyday life. This life now encompasses much more variety for the residents. The dwellers can choose to enter the heart of Thornhill and experience a lively environment, or they can venture to the edges of the neighbourhood if they want more peace and quiet. Thornhill and its residents have embraced the urban lifestyle and adapted it to suburban life. There is now a diversity that I never really noticed when I lived in Thornhill.



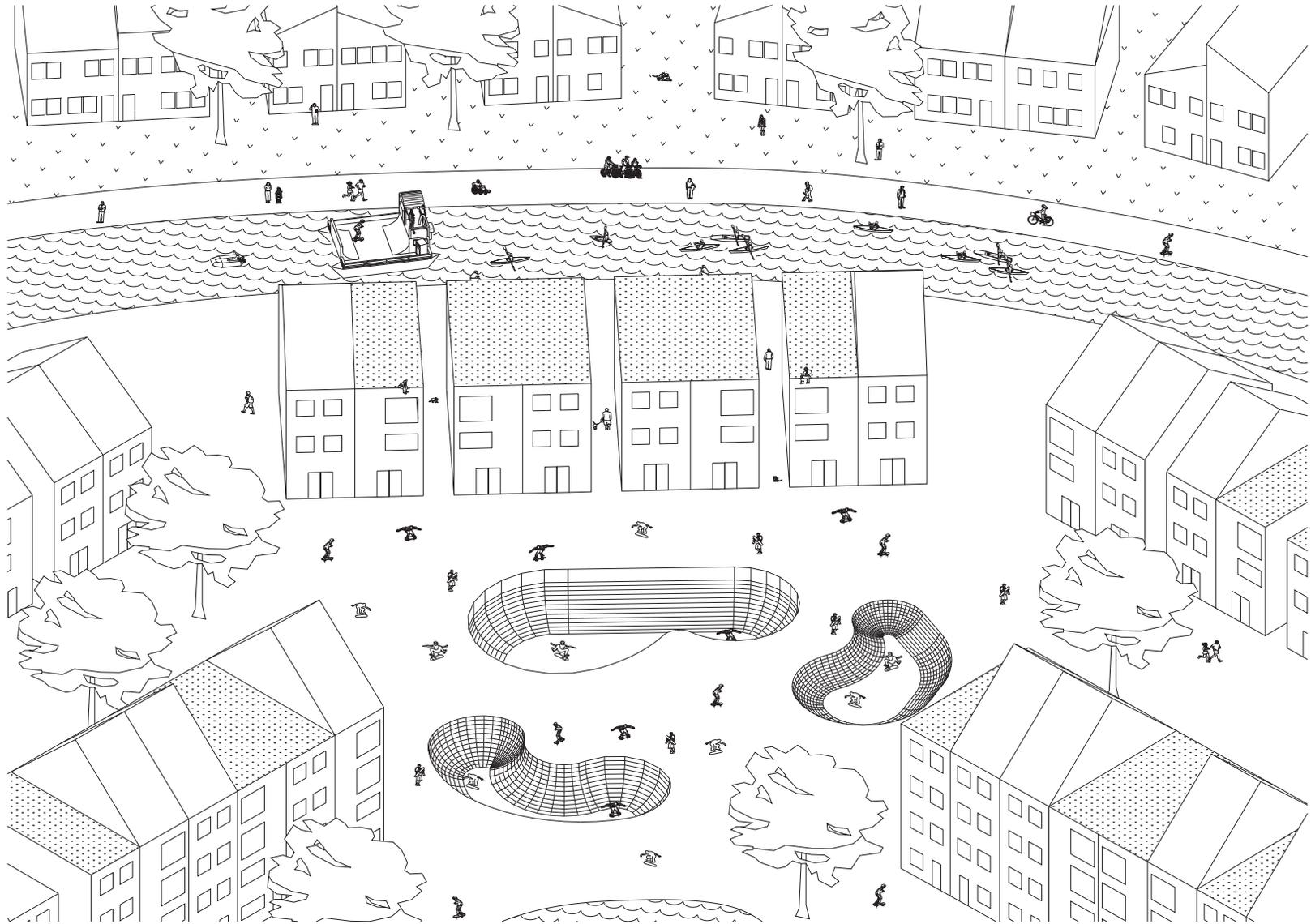
Skate City

“Suburbia’s detractors began to portray it as a landscape that sapped its residents of their individuality, morality, and agency, and dignity.”⁵²

		
<p>Three-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Skatepark</p>	<p>Four-Storey Apartments</p>
		
<p>Grass</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Water</p>
		
<p>Skateboarder</p>	<p>Kayaker</p>	<p>Joggers</p>

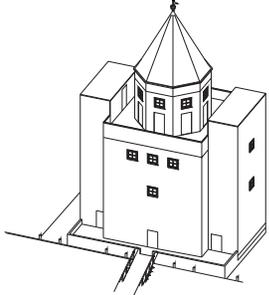
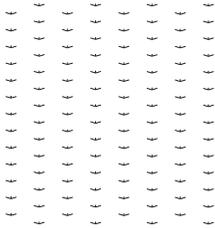
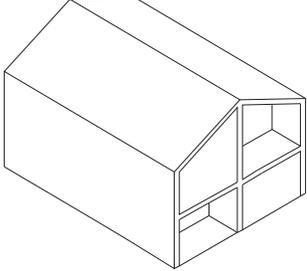
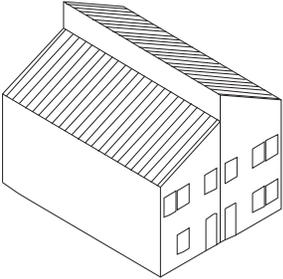
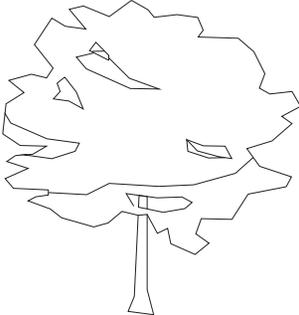
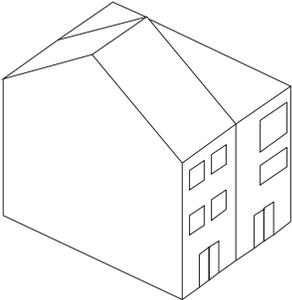
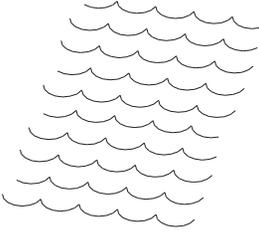
Skateboarding was frowned upon when I grew up. Kids who skateboarded around Thornhill were often seen as vandals who were up to no good. But this was just a stereotype. Skateboarding was a means for bored suburban teenagers to rebel against the boring landscape of the suburbs. If anything, skateboarding kept the kids away from things like drugs and vandalism.

So when I saw the skate park right in the middle of the neighbourhood, I couldn't help but appreciate the new direction of Thornhill. Finally, planners understand that teenagers need a space to call their own. Places such as skate parks are a haven for bored teenagers who have nothing to do.



Teatro Del Mondo
The Floating Theater
Dedicated to Diogo Seixas Lopes

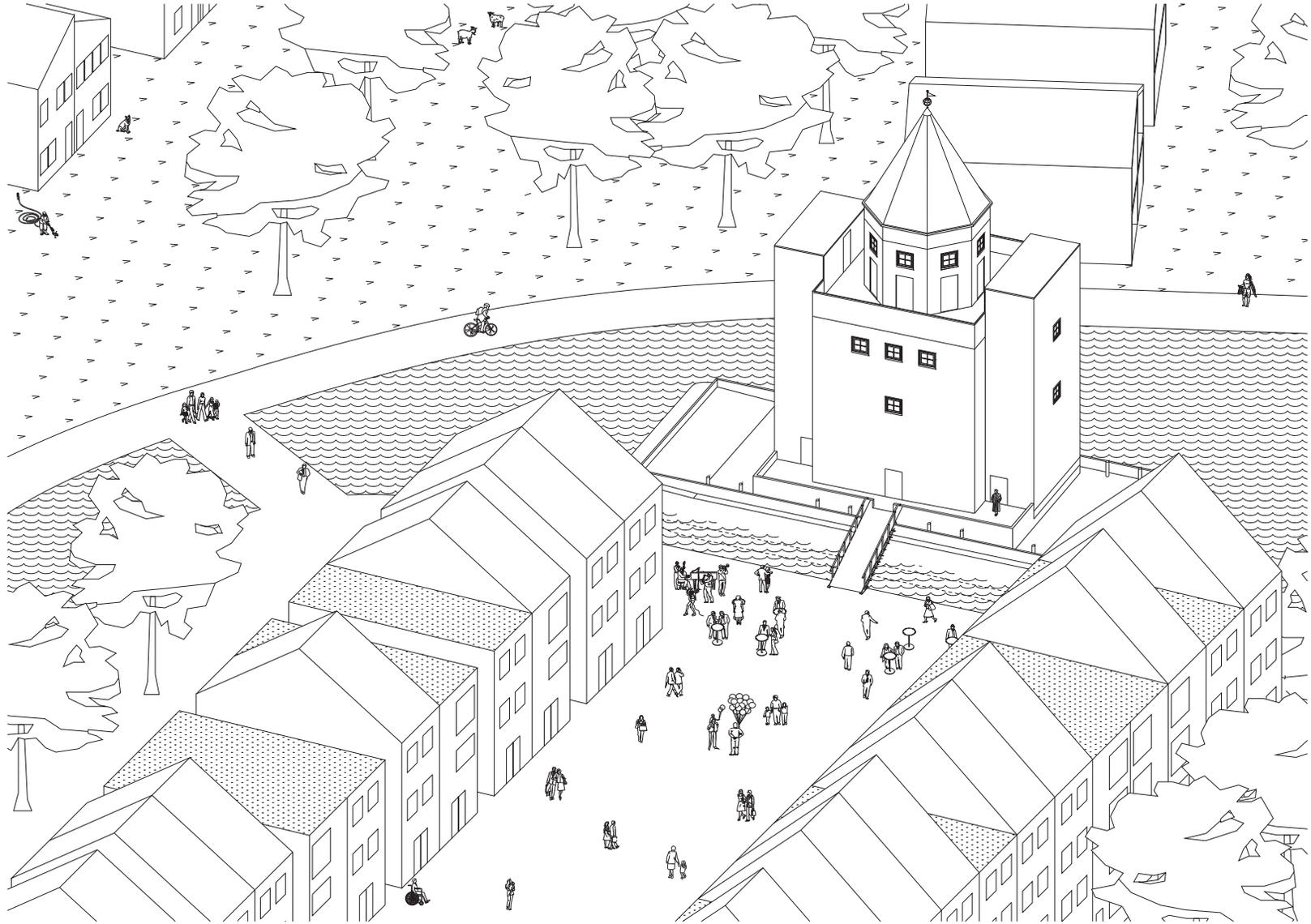
“Rossi described the project in its site, as “a place where architecture ended and the world of the imagination began.”⁵³

		
<p>Teatro Del Mondo</p>	<p>Grass</p>	<p>Detached House</p>
		
<p>Town House</p>	<p>Trees</p>	<p>Handicap Accessible</p>
		
<p>Three-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Water</p>	<p>Residents</p>

At first, this building stuck out like a sore thumb. Why is there a large theater floating in the canal? It was a movable building that reminded me of an RV or motorhome. A building that isn't constricted to one location but can move along the canal. But it made sense to me after I went to see a play there.

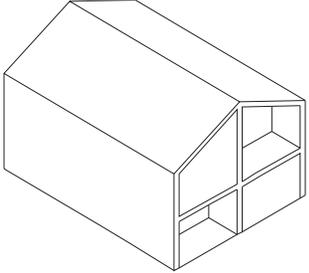
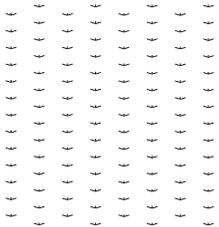
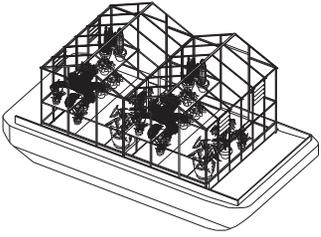
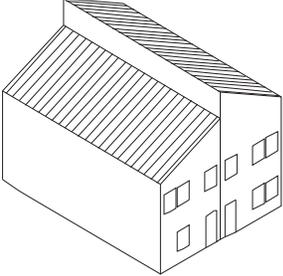
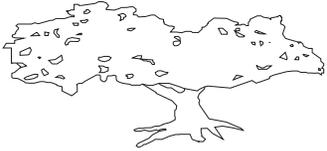
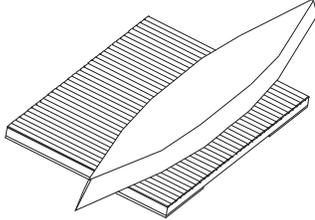
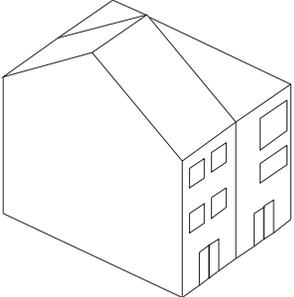
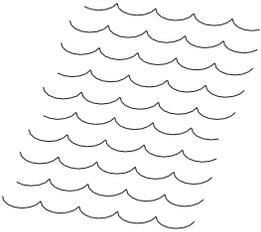
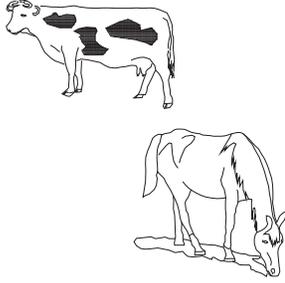
The Teatro Del Mondo by renowned architect Aldo Rossi provides a space of artistic and cultural significance to Thornhill. Theater involves being immersed in another world. It is a place where our imaginations can provide a sense of escape from the stresses of everyday life.

Everyone seemed so excited for the show. While waiting outside the theater, it was refreshing to see all the well-dressed people having cocktails and having a good time. The live musicians helped to create the enthusiastic mood of the crowd. Even the children were enjoying themselves.



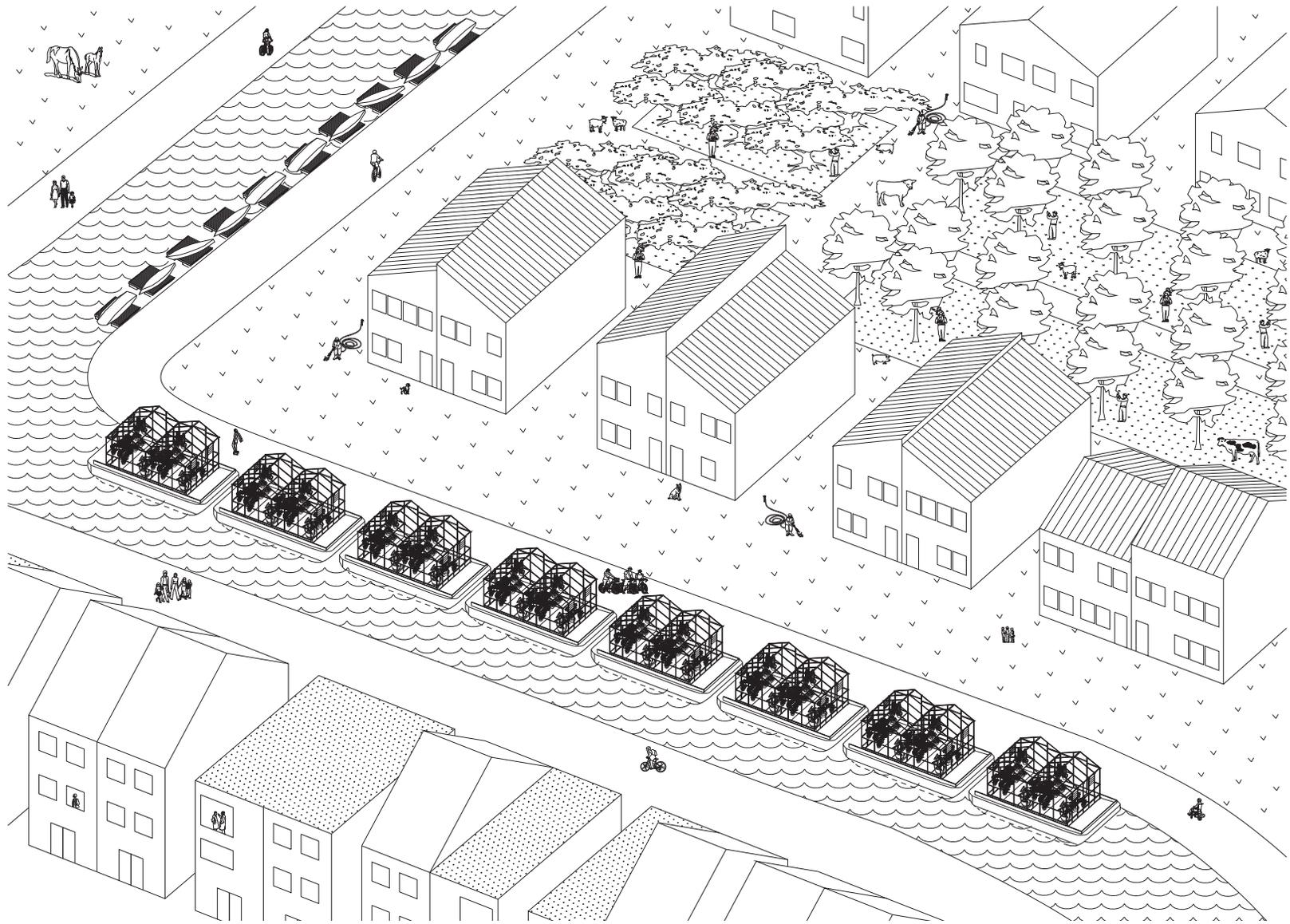
Floating Greenhouses

“After an era of cheap oil, America’s metropolitan regions will need to be more self-sufficient, not least in terms of food production.”⁵⁴

		
<p>Detached House</p>	<p>Grass</p>	<p>Floating Greenhouses</p>
		
<p>Town House</p>	<p>Fruit Trees</p>	<p>Docks and Boats</p>
		
<p>Three-Storey Apartments</p>	<p>Water</p>	<p>Animals</p>

A series of greenhouses sit side-by-side on top of small barges in the canal. I took a peek inside one of the metal and glass structures, and could see a wide assortment of different coloured plants. A look into the adjacent greenhouse showed the same thing, except this one was filled with various small vegetable plants. These greenhouses would be able to provide fresh vegetables to residents in the neighbourhood and would be much more gratifying than driving to the local supermarket. The dwellers will be able to eat healthy greens that they grew themselves.

The greenhouses are also conveniently placed along the canal, leaving more area on land for activities and communal space. Local residents who are taking a stroll along the canal can see what is growing in the greenhouses. The greenhouses are easy to access and maintain because they are located close to the resident's homes. The greenhouses also have the advantage of being mobile while on the canal, allowing residents in Thornhill to take turns caring for the fauna.



In Closure

“It is time to reconsider the terms in which we think about suburbia: how we comprehend and critique its physical fabric, those who dwell and work there, and how they live.”⁵⁵

There is the opportunity to reimagine suburbia in a deeply thoughtful way. The time is ripe for the suburbs to be rethought and transformed into a city not as it is but as can and should be.⁵⁶ In his early critiques of the suburbs he witnessed being built around Toronto and Ottawa, Humphrey Carver expressed his conviction that the suburb needed to be thought of as a city. Without this urban thinking, it would be impossible to avoid further deterioration of the suburban dream.

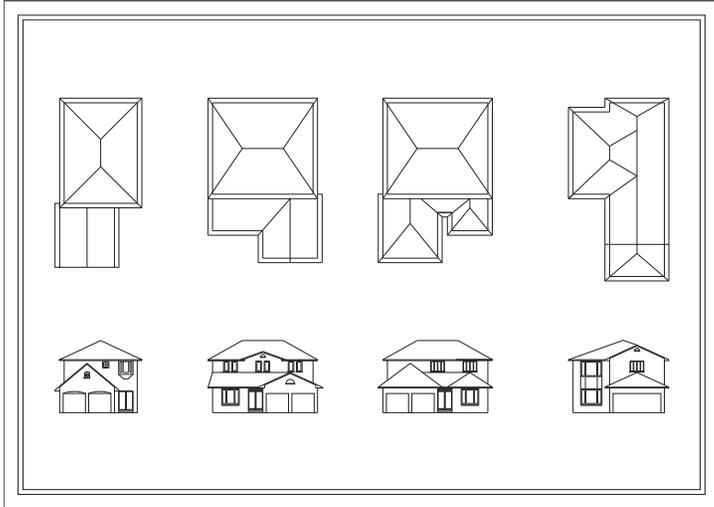
Scenes from Suburbia: Unreal Strategies for Real Change proposes a fantastical vision for a new suburban ideal. These depictions are presented as unconventional scenes of suburban life meant to provoke thought and conversation about a landscape that has largely remained unchanged for nearly seventy years. With a focus on community, activity, and a heightened arcadian vision of nature, these scenes offer an extreme vision not often associated with the suburbs today. They serve as reminders that the suburbs are still able to fulfill the dreams of the inhabitants.

Surrealism is used to help re-frame our thinking about the suburbs. By combining irrational elements to the familiar landscape of suburbia, the surrealist strategy used in the drawings aims to trigger a disruption to the current dominant perceptions of the suburbs, as

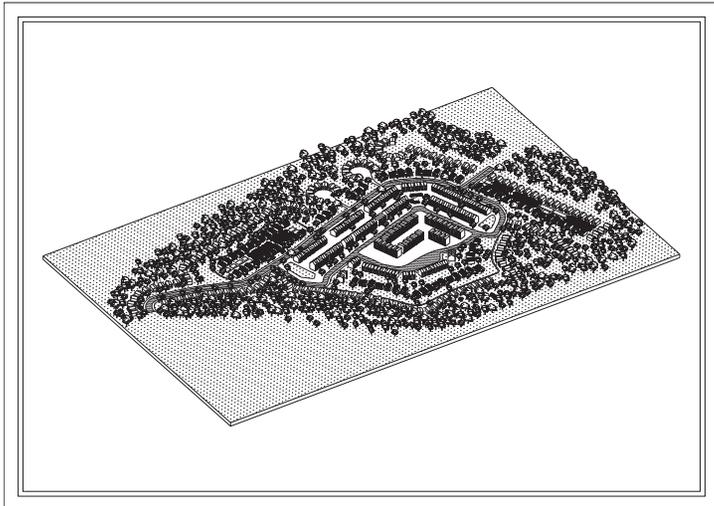
well as re-activate some of the original beliefs, hopes, and values. Low-rise apartments, beaches, concerts, boats, floating greenhouses and theaters, are things that would appear strange in the suburbs, but could actually help in changing the way we define modern day suburbia. As one example, the drawing titled *Teatro Del Mondo* imagines Aldo Rossi's floating theater as an artistic and cultural center in reimagined Thornhill, but it also reinterprets the idea of the mobile home, with the floating building as a new form of the RV in a carless suburb. As these surrealist visions slowly influence thinking, suburbia might well evolve into a more sustainable landscape, and respond to a changing demographic and evolving social consciousness as well.

While this thesis is not a solution to the suburbs, the ideas and visions presented here are meant to inspire further investigation into a landscape that is rich with meaning and interpretations. Architecture involves both reason and imagination, for buildings must be structurally stable while also visually engaging. Surrealism and fantasy have the potential to restore imagination to the suburbs. An answer to the speed and efficiency of construction that produces today's suburbs, *Scenes from Suburbia: Unreal Strategies for Real Change* proposes to follow a different schedule, a slower one that has the time and makes room for a fuller life. The changed suburb hopes to once again "engender a balance and synthesis between reason and the imagination."⁵⁷

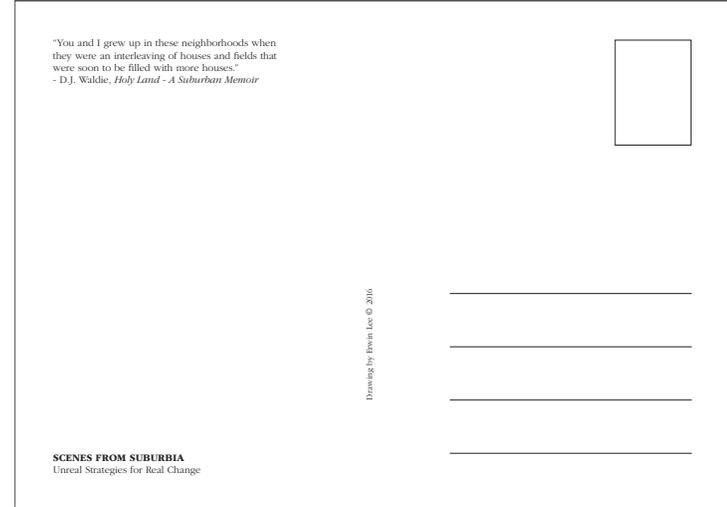
Appendix



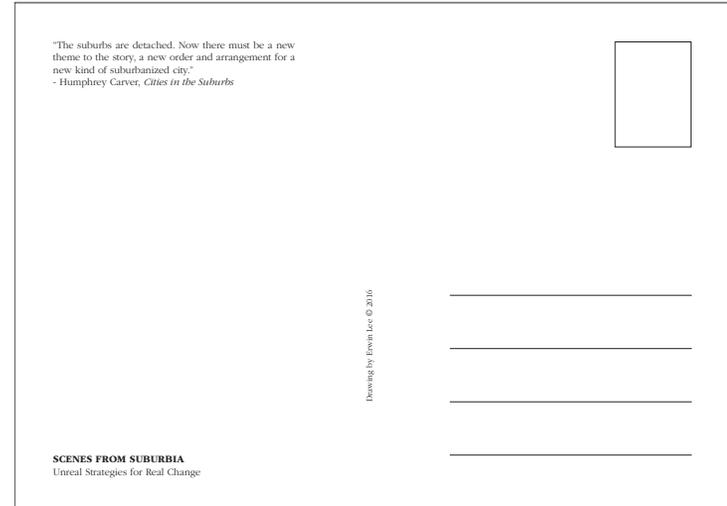
Thornbill Postcard - Front



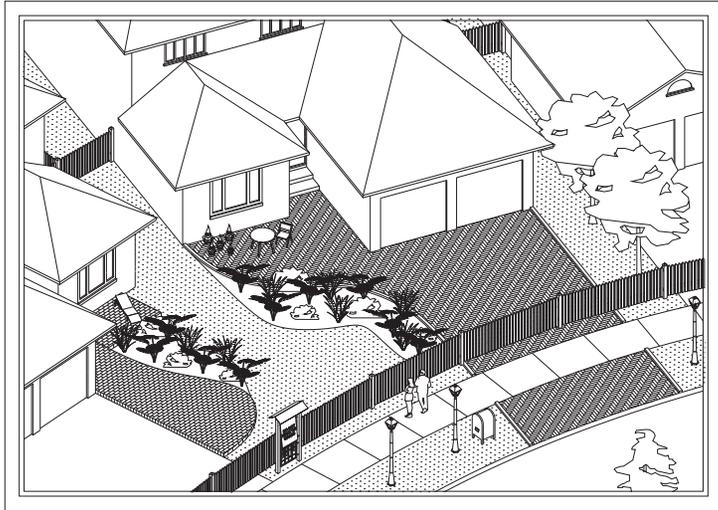
The Suburbanized City Postcard - Front



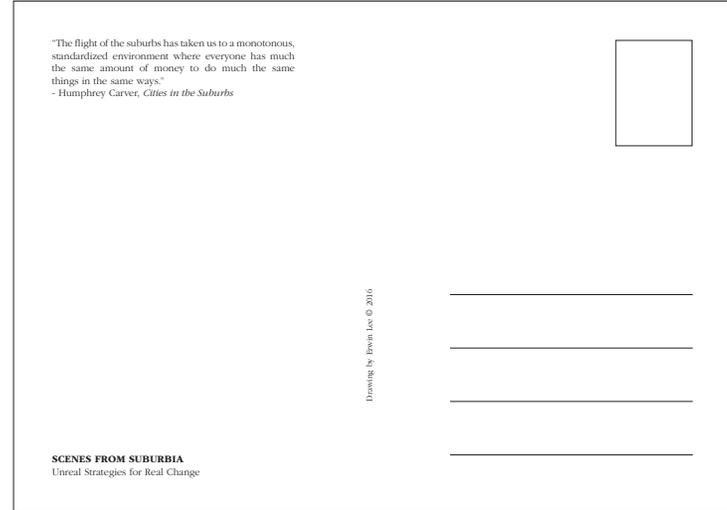
Thornbill Postcard - Back



The Suburbanized City Postcard - Back



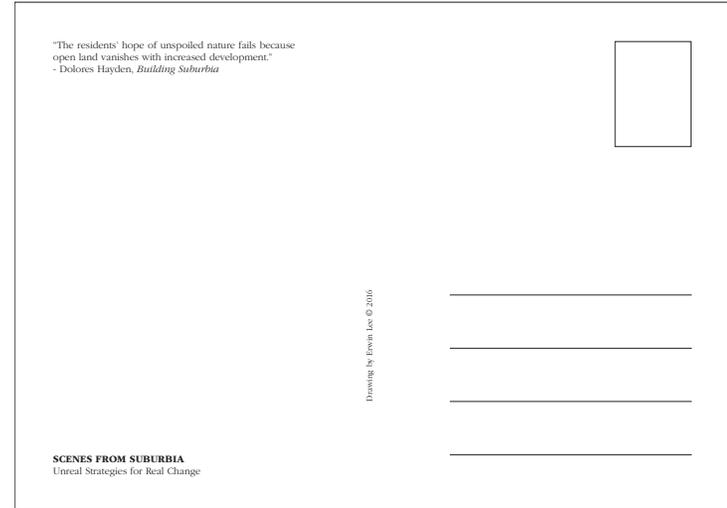
Heritage Postcard - Front



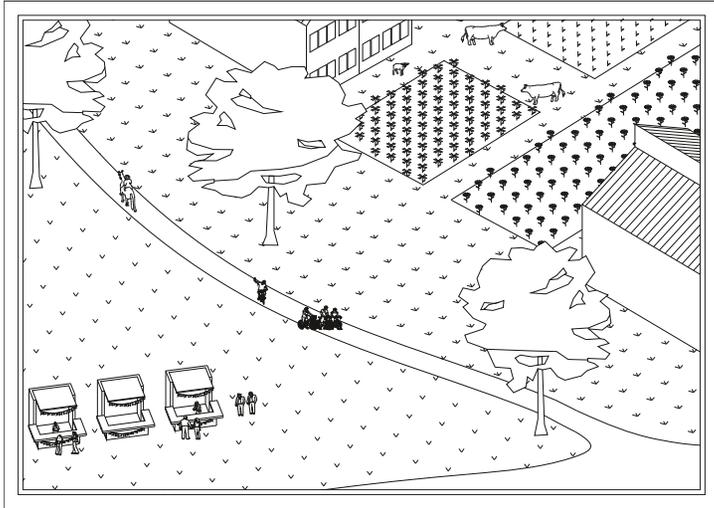
Heritage Postcard - Back



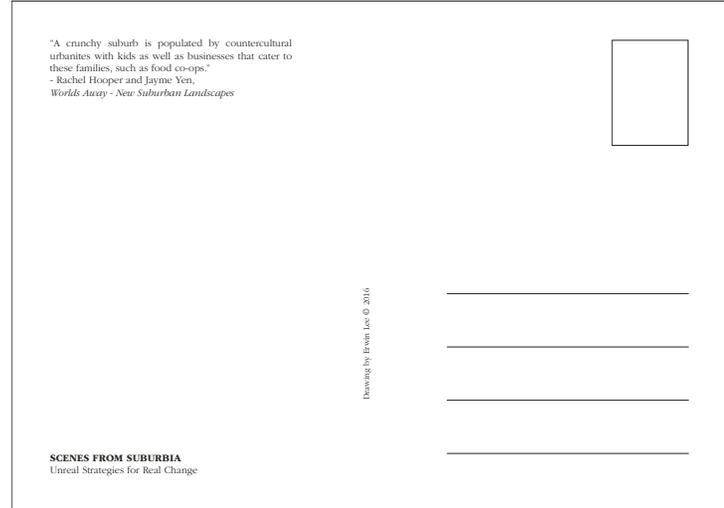
Arcadia Postcard - Front



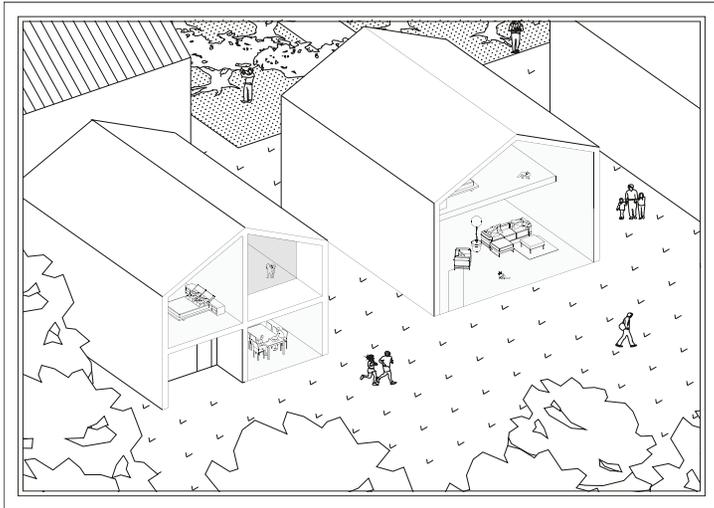
Arcadia Postcard - Back



Crunchy Suburb Postcard - Front



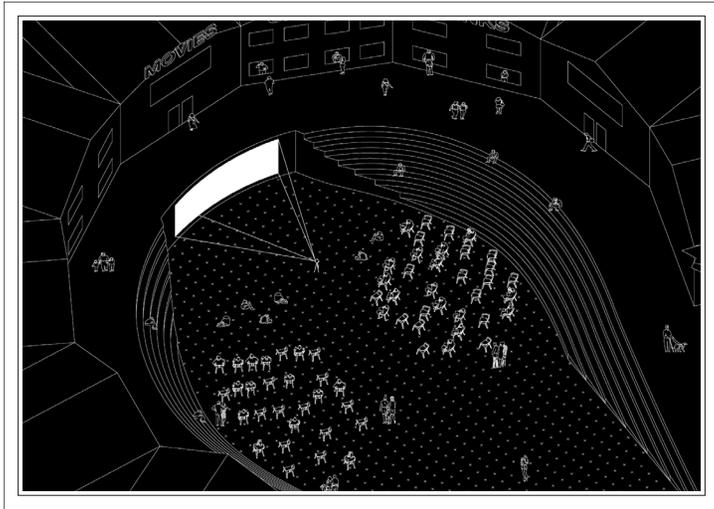
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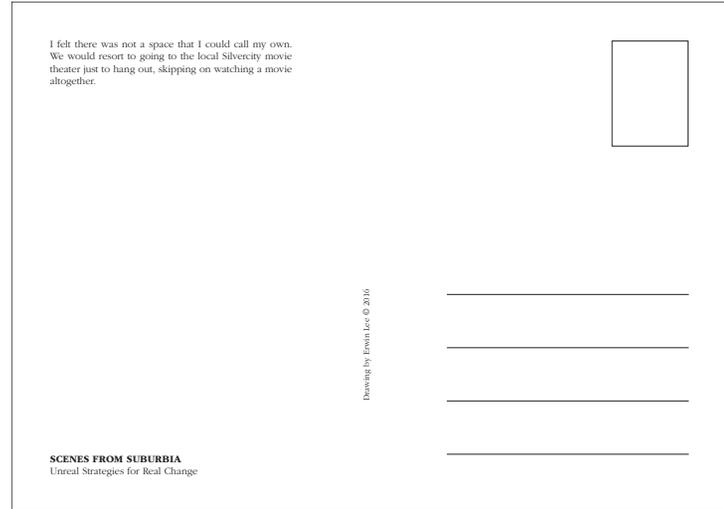
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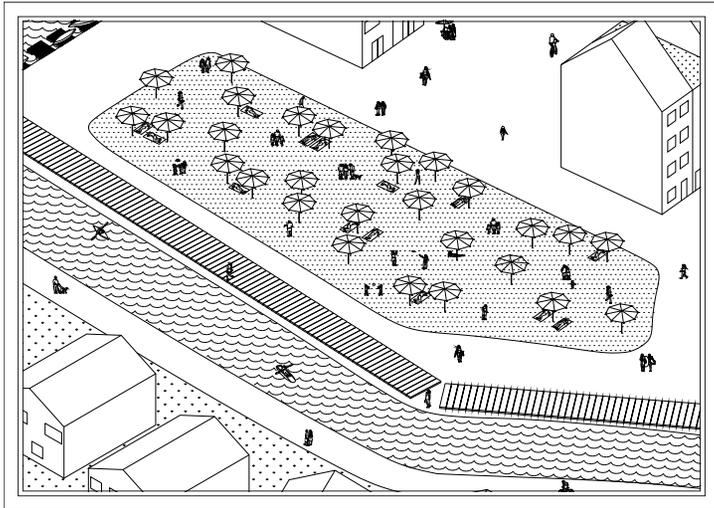
Glass Facades Postcard - Back



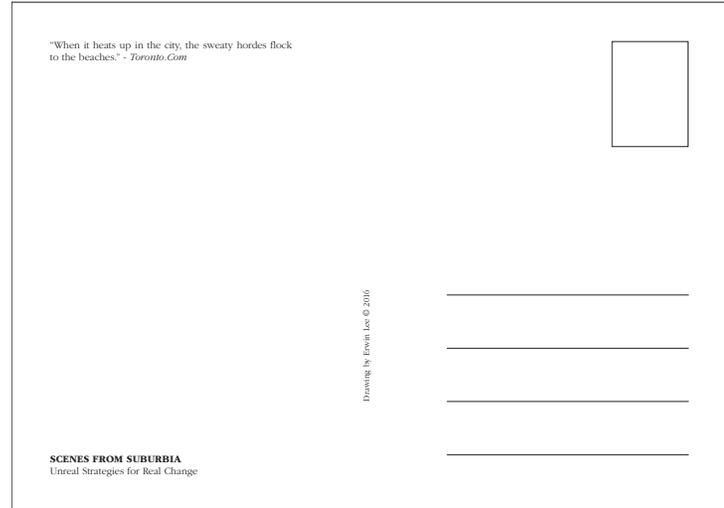
At the Movies Postcard - Front



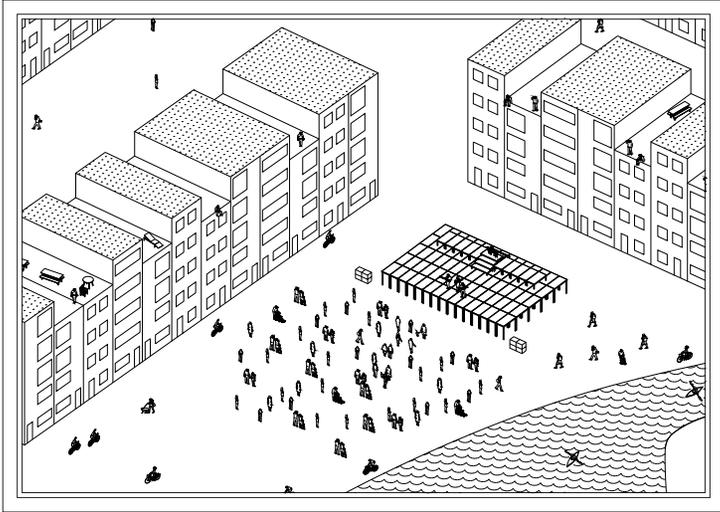
At the Movies Postcard - Back



The Beaches Postcard - Front



The Beaches Postcard - Back



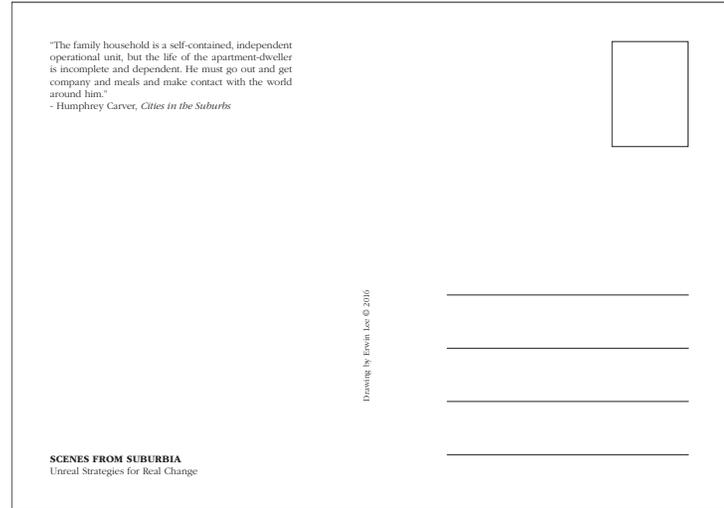
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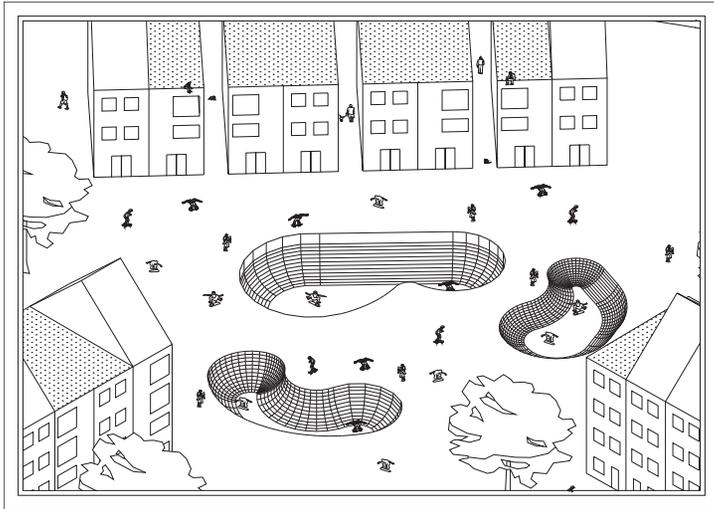
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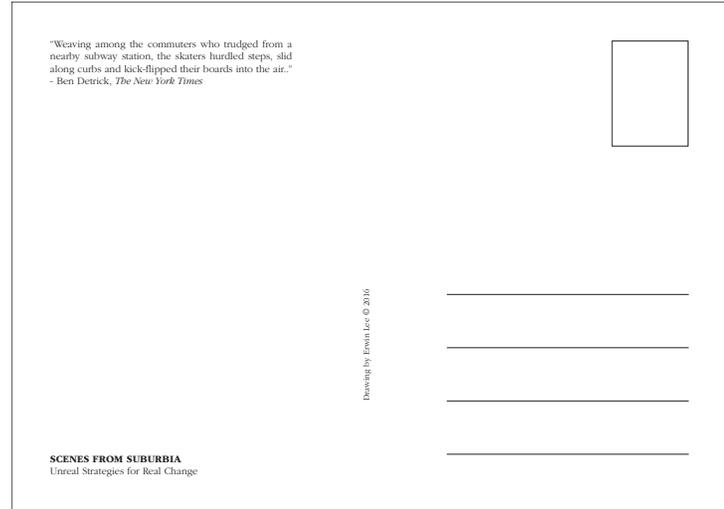
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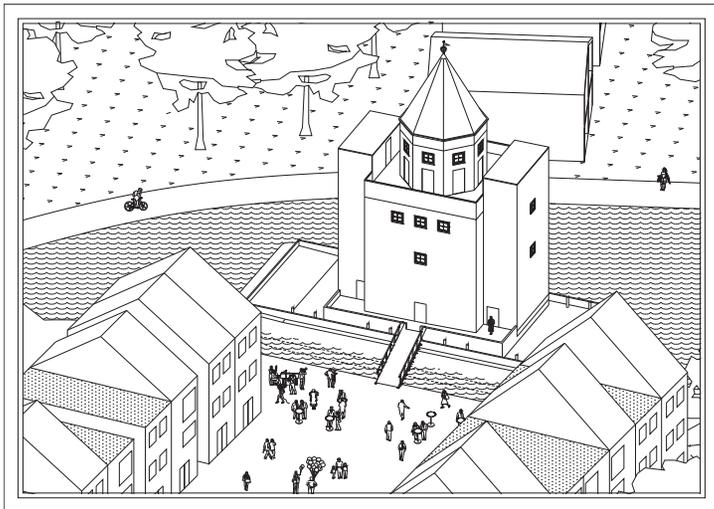
Patio Suburb Postcard - Back



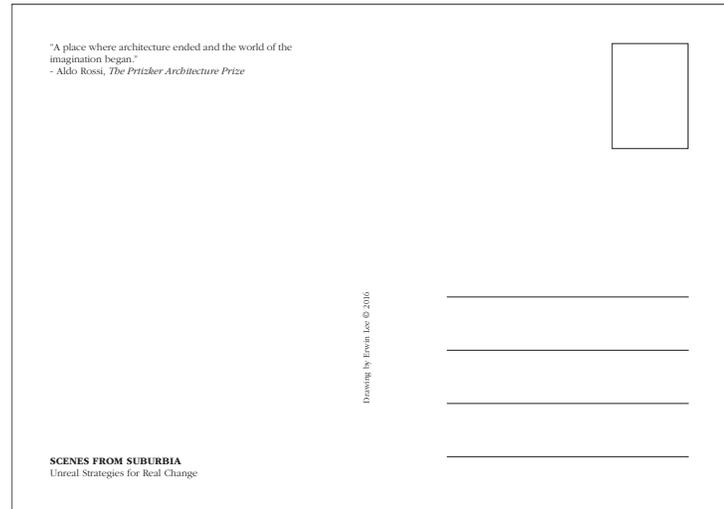
Skate City Postcard - Front



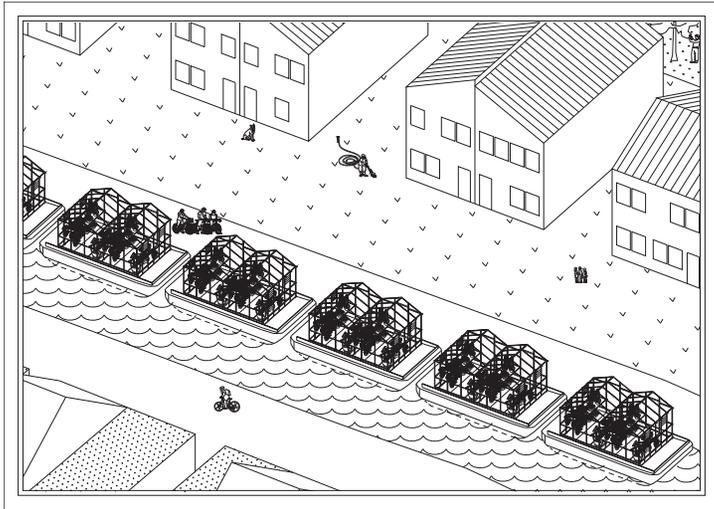
Skate City Postcard - Back



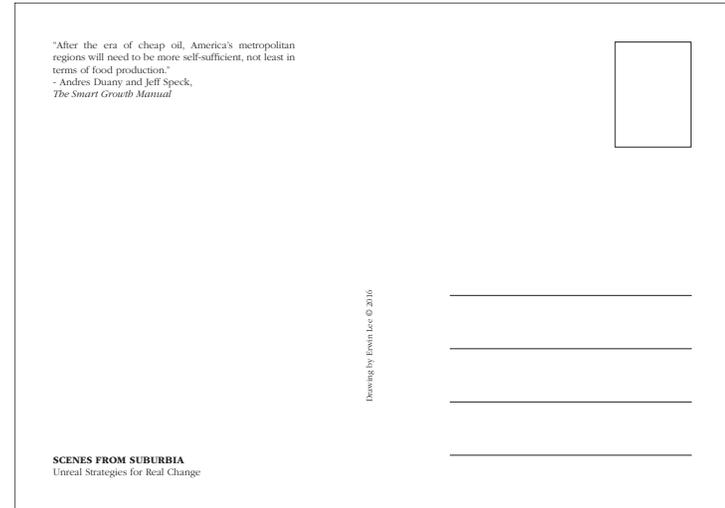
Teatro Del Mondo Postcard - Front



Teatro Del Mondo Postcard - Back



Floating Greenhouses Postcard - Front



Floating Greenhouses Postcard - Back

Endnotes

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