

UNPACKING THE BIG BOX:
REINTERPRETING WALMART

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary society the big box store has become a common, even accepted, landmark in our suburbs. In some cases, it has even penetrated the city centre. By offering promises of lower prices than competitors, consumers are bound to end up supporting the large corporations behind these big box stores. Yet, unlike local business owners, these corporations are profit driven. With their own global market in mind, these corporations leave little or no consideration for the individuals in the communities into which they enter. Nevertheless, shopping has become a prevalent pass time, it works, quite literally, to re-fashion the city. Looking at the big box store, we (as a public) can ask: Should the acquisition of 'things' be the dominant social and cultural condition shaping exurbia? Looking at the big box store, we (as architects) can ask: Could these shopping centers not also be appropriate sites for alternate programs to shopping?

What if the big box store could offer something more?

This thesis addresses how the big box store offers the potential for an alternate spatial realm. The enquiry looks specifically at Walmart and attempts to reinterpret its corporate accomplishments. A defining question is posed: can an alternate space be created by borrowing from the principles that ensure Walmart's continuing success? Instead of going against the big box, what about harnessing its untapped potential? Why not build alongside it, under it, or over it? We could call this proposed strategy, *Unpacking the Big Box – or Reinterpreting Walmart*. The alternative can offer a contrasting view from what is, broadly speaking, a culture of commodity.

PREFACE

The initial inspiration for *Unpacking the Big Box* (or *Reinterpreting Walmart*) stems from earlier research that attempted to address the state of the consumer world

The project asked for creative proposals for an oil platform's 'afterlife' in the Adriatic Sea. Oil corporations typically use these structures for roughly 30 years before they are deconstructed at a very costly expense. ENI, a major oil company in Europe was interested in repurposing these platforms as an alternative to their expensive removal. This corporate mission informed the brief of a Master's design studio convened in Bologna, Italy, in which I participated in 2010. My proposal was that of a 'User Tower'. It responded to the surrounding consumerist culture, infatuated with well known Italian luxury goods and the Italian design world, including companies like Gucci and Prada. Instead of the platform being demolished and disposed – as is customary in our culture after any product's life span is exhausted – this User Tower was designed to be built from the unwanted products discarded by consumerism, it was meant, then, to serve as a contrast to 'throw away' culture. The aim was meant to bring awareness not just to the immediate Italian context, but also to other 'consumer' nations. There was a certain irony to the project, as was pointed out in the final review. The project was explained through a series of panels that had been designed with a clear graphic language, as is often the case in advertising or branding. Yet one concluding comment has continued to haunt me, leaving me to re-think the premise of my work "this project is still inevitably a product of Capitalism."

I arrived to a conclusion: escape from our consumerist society is perhaps impossible.

How does one break away when everything in our culture supports the very system? Run away to a deserted island? That would entail buying a ticket to allow for the flight, and relying on the naive assumption that there are still islands left in our world undisturbed. It is unavoidable. Consumerism is inevitable in our society, so if we

cannot flee the inescapable why not harness the very system to design an alternate use for a consumer space. Maybe place two opposing views, ironically, in stark contrast. Could the consumer landscape provide an appropriate location for an escape – an architectural flight – from consumerism?

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INTRODUCTION

Consumerism is a defining condition of our built environment, making an indelible impact on our lives. As contemporary consumer culture has evolved from a society of trading goods to a service economy, it is inevitable that our primary needs – food, shelter and water – all acquire a monetary value. However, our definition of ‘needs’ has now changed to include ‘unnecessary wants.’ Our production is astronomical; our natural capital treated as expendable. Companies thrive off **profit** alone. Our system revolves around a dependency on products. This consumer culture inevitably influences our surroundings; much of the built environment consequently reflects our product-oriented culture. Let us call these physical influences ‘consumer spaces’ – and they are everywhere.

Shopping has become more than just about the product. Glorified advertisements on billboards, whether beside the highway, on television, or in magazines, have the sole purpose of enticing the consumer. As Fredric Jameson posits, “What we do with commodities *qua* images, then, is not to look at them. The idea that we buy images is already a useful defamiliarization of the notion; but the characterization whereby we *shop* for images is even more useful.”¹ Branding and advertising are aimed at persuading us how wonderful our lives would be if we had that product. The intangible aspect or rather the mental pleasure of shopping, is what historian Rosalind H. Williams refers to as “the dream world of the consumer.”² It is the creation of a *space* – both mental and physical – that occurs even before the actual purchase.

“Consum[erism] is, to be sure, a hot topic.”³ It is a broad topic at that. Consumerism is synonymous with modern culture. From the actual design of products (and shops that sell them) to the profit motive fueling corporations: all this responds to the psychological ‘dream

profit |'präfɪt|
noun
a financial gain, esp. the difference between the amount earned and the amount spent in buying, operating, or producing something
source: *New Oxford American Dictionary*



BARBARA KRUGER
UNTITLED (I SHOP THEREFORE I AM)
1987
source: <http://www.warner.com/>

1 Fredric Jameson. “Future City.” *New Left Review* 21. May/June 2003: 78.

2 Rosalind H. Williams. *Dream worlds: mass consumption in late nineteenth-century France*. (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. P., 1982), 8.

3 Jameson, 67.

world' of the consumer. There is, unfortunately, little consideration for the indispensable resources that are exploited, or for the impact of globalization (or Americanization) of a product-oriented life style, on the planet. A large effect of this consumer culture is in its manifestation of the built environment – the proliferation of consumerism (as a habit, as an ideology) that shapes the city.

Our 'freedom' to shop is a part of every aspect of our lives. It is considered normal, even expected. After the events of 9/11, in an attempt to help return things to normal, Mayor Giuliani said in a speech to the public: "Take a day off... Go shopping."⁴

Every contemporary building offers the possibility to shop. Museums and airports, intended as cultural and transportation services respectively, now include shops. "Perhaps the beginning of the twenty-first century will be remembered as the point where the urban could no longer be understood without shopping."⁵ Dutch architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas even goes so far as to refer to the built product of modernization not as modern architecture but as 'Junkspace'. "If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet."⁶

American literary critic Fredric Jameson's 'Future City' is a critique of Rem Koolhaas' collaborative Project on the City, which produced the Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping. Jameson draws attention to Koolhaas' book as being the very product of consumption itself, with a certain enticing imagery intended to help it sell – despite the irony of 'Junkspace' being published within. Making the book sell is the fundamental motive. If the product does not sell, then what is the motive of producing the book in the first place? The success of a corporation is measured by the profit made from the products it sells. At the end of the day, when all is said and done, all that matters for the corporation is whether there is a financial gain.

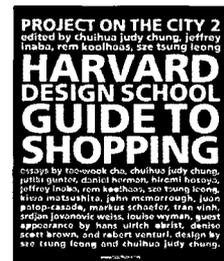


ANDREAS GURSKY

99 CENT.

1999

source: <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2001/gursky/>



PROJECT ON THE CITY 2:

HARVARD DESIGN GUIDE TO SHOPPING

source: <http://www.oma.eu/>

4 Sharon Zukin Point of purchase: how shopping changed American culture. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

5 Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, and Sze Tsung Leong. Project on the City 2 Harvard Design School guide to shopping (Köln: Taschen, 2001).

6 Rem Koolhaas. "Junkspace." Project on the City 2: Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping. (Köln: Taschen, 2001).

*Everything becomes crystal clear after you have reduced reality to one—only—of its thousand aspects You know what to do—whatever produces profit, you know what to avoid—whatever reduces them or makes a loss Let no one befog the issue by asking whether a particular action is conducive to the wealth and well being of society, whether it leads to moral, aesthetic, or cultural enrichment Simply find out whether it pays*⁷

As Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, the economist who popularized the 'small is beautiful' movement in the 1970s, once suggested, profit is purely a financial measure, disregarding social, cultural, or environmental value. However, not only are corporations preoccupied with profit but individuals are as well. It is a common belief that universal prosperity will bring peace, that our wealth will make us happier in life. With this individual quest for peace, shopping has become a means for displaying our wealth. The houses we live in, the cars we drive, and even our professions – all define who we are and how much money we have. It has become a competition amongst ourselves (or individuals) to reflect our happiness, whether it is by owning the biggest house on the street or driving the nicest car. Fredric Jameson has phrased it pithily: "In the end there will be little else for us to do but shop"⁸. Is this prediction inevitable? Is our culture preoccupied with following the road to riches? Is it the general belief that shopping will make us happy?

The efficiency of the downtown shopping district was appropriate for a society when pedestrian or equestrian traffic was the predominant form of transportation. In contrast, the suburban shopping mall arose due to a predominance of the car. The suburban big box store shopping centre responded to our increasing dependence on the automobile.

There is no other reason to drive to these massive suburban shopping centres other than to shop. They offer a vast asphalt parking lot fronting functional structures – i.e. big boxes – for corporations to sell their goods and services. It is not the architectural value that attracts the customers. There is no street front or pedestrian scape.



SHOP UNTIL YOU DROP*
*THEREBY FULFILLING YOUR ROLE IN
SOCIETY WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY FINDING
HAPPINESS
SELFRIDGES' SUMMER 2003
ADVERTISEMENT
source: Jayne M. K. C. and cons. mpt on London
Routledge 2006

7 E. F. Schumacher Small is beautiful: economics as if people mattered (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989) 272

8 Jameson 77

The site is leveled and masked by asphalt. In these 'heat sinks', runoff and pollutants are carried back to fields or water streams nearby. Shopping at these centres is further encouraged as exit lanes from highways are added for easier access.

Could a fixation with production and consumption be preventing our cities from becoming social and cultural hubs? Too much of the built environment is overcome by consumer spaces. Has there been too much emphasis placed on the acquisition of consumer goods and not enough on cultural and social conditions? Should the acquisition of 'things' be the dominant social and cultural condition shaping **exurbia**? Could these shopping centres not also be an appropriate site for alternate programs to shopping?

exurb |'eksərb|
noun
a district outside a city esp. a prosperous area beyond the suburbs
source: *New Oxford American Dictionary*

What if the big box store offered something more?

This thesis addresses how the big box store offers potential for an alternate spatial realm to shopping. The project looks specifically at Walmart and tries to explore its success in understanding its market, its relationship with its suppliers, and most importantly, its consumers. A question is posed: can an alternate space be created by borrowing from a consumer space like Walmart? Instead of going against the big box, what about harnessing its untapped potential? Why not build along side it, under it, or above it? The strategy is one of *Unpacking the Big Box – or Reinterpreting Walmart*. The alternative could offer a contrasting view of the consumer culture. Architecturally, building off a grid of an infrastructure already offered by the host, yet providing a new built landscape at a human scale. Economically, as if people mattered. Socially, encouraging interaction and community relationships. Culturally, developing alternatives to shopping. Visually, refraining from littering the landscape with branding. By paradoxically locating consumer culture and its proposed contrasting alternative in close proximity, it will offer a sharp and meaningful contrast, which may serve to exemplify the current state of our consumer spaces.

SHOPPING CULTURE

From Bourgeoisie to Big Box

Consumer culture follows a clear evolution beginning from an early longing to possess material goods. This evolutionary progression of consumerism also translates physically through architecture.

FRANCE

The human desire for acquiring goods – fulfilling our wants instead of our needs – is no recent development. The extent of shopping may have exponentially increased, but the longing to acquire something new (or to be able to portray your wealth) are evident throughout time. Historian Rosalind H. Williams, writing in *Dream Worlds: mass consumption in late nineteenth-century France*, states, “the history of France, even more than that of the United States, most illuminates the nature and dilemmas of modern consumption.”¹ The French have long prided themselves on their lavish consumer lifestyle. By the 18th century, the French aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie were enjoying a model lifestyle that became admired and imitated by the upper class throughout Europe.²

In the 11th century, Châteaux were being built for use by the aristocracy. However, “the enjoyment of the tiny consumer class were directly dependent on the exploitation of the peasant masses; this brute social fact was concretely visible in the contrast between the accumulated wealth of the châteaux and the poverty of the huts inhabited by those who worked the soil.”³ The peasants may have been consumers as well, but only in the sense that they used food, shelter, and clothing, to fulfill their needs. There was already class separation that dictated varying degrees of consumption.

These early stone castles in Europe, showed signs of elegance and luxury. The Loire Valley in France is spotted with elaborate châteaux, often built in rural settings near the water and surrounded with the



CHATEAU CHENONCEAU

source http://www.chenonceau.com/en/le_chateau

1 Rosalind H. Williams. *Dream worlds mass consumption in late nineteenth-century France*. (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. P., 1982), 8

2 Williams, 8.

3 Williams, 20.

large protective forests of the region. Château Chenonceau built on a slow moving river creates a mirror, to exude the elegance of its architecture. In this example, situating the château on the water was not for the purpose of strategic defense but to create an air of romanticism. The interior is lavishly decorated with tapestries and ornate furniture. The people who lived here surrounded themselves with things that expressed their wealth and pleasure of consuming.

PARIS

Although the terminology of the aristocracy and peasantry as formally defining classes have long since disappeared, these two categories are still recognizable today in social segregation along with their courtly style of consumption. Consumption was predominantly a leisure of the elite, as others were living at subsistence levels, unable to partake in such leisure's. "The merchandise itself is by no means available to all, but the vision of the seemingly unlimited profusion of commodities is available, is, indeed nearly unavoidable."⁴ Because of this habitual interaction with merchandise the desire to consume is inevitable, for the wealthy and those of lower income.

Not only were indications of consumerism visible in the rural French countryside, but Paris also began to transform with the growth of consumer capitalism. In the 19th century, Paris, as well as many other cities in Europe, changed from a medieval, haphazard and chaotically structured city, into an urban planned metropolis, incorporating wide boulevards and great avenues.

Walter Benjamin, who carefully reflected on arcades, refers to a city of arcades as a dream world that will charm the fancy of the Parisians.⁵ "The arcade came into fashion because the street still existed in a medieval state. It had no sidewalks, was dirty, and was too dangerous for promenading and window shopping."⁶

4 Willams, 3

5 Walter Benjamin The Arcades project Trans Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass Belknap P of Harvard Univ P, 2002), 17

6 Johann Friedrich Geist Arcades, the history of a building type (Cambridge, MA MIT P, 1983), 62

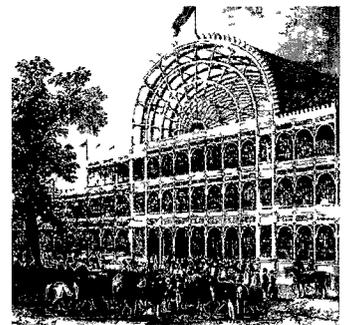
Johann Freidrich Geist, architect and architectural historian, offers a general definition of the arcade. In his project Arcades: The history of a building type, Geist defines “a glass-covered passageway, which connects two busy streets and is lined on both sides with shops”⁷ The shopping arcades built in 19th century Paris, built of glass and steel were architecturally functional, elaborate structures marking the beginning of iron construction. The arcade served to create a more enjoyable and appropriate atmosphere – one separated from weather – for the expensive products. The shop keepers within such arcades began to impress, with their “grand” shop fronts. Here, commodities were a luxury, placed on display to entice the shopper, who at this time was still predominantly the elite. Although arcades often consisted of a large cast iron atrium that internalized the street and encompassed the traditional shops, they were deliberate, isolating a section of the city for consumerism alone rather than the more diverse rituals of urban street life. “The arcades are a centre of commerce in luxury items – they are the forerunners of department stores”⁸

Paris later began to host *expositions universelles*, which gathered together the total production of nations. The first ‘great exhibition’ properly began in London in 1851 at the Crystal Palace, and was continued at regular intervals throughout the rest of the 1800s (in 1855, 1867, 1878, and 1889) in Paris. The pinnacle of which was held in Paris in 1900, that “spread over 550 acres and [was] visited by 50 million people from around the world”¹⁰ The exposition initially focused on modern science and technology, but as time went on, the fair started to offer more and more merchandise available for consumption. By 1855, price tags were being placed on all objects with an emphasis on selling

These expositions focused on promoting the new and the exciting and also brought attention to the architecture, which housed the extravagant events. The Crystal Palace (1851) and the Gallerie des Machines (1889) were just the beginning of an architecture that was no longer just about daily life in the city, rather, these glass-and-steel



GALLERIA UMBERTO I
arcade space
source: Johann Friedrich Geist: *Arcades: the history of a building type*. (Cambridge MA: MIT P 1983) 432



CRYSTAL PALACE
source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Crystal_Palace.PNG

7 Geist, 4

8 Benjamin, 3

9 Williams, 58

10 Williams, 58

behemoths housed the kinds cultural lifestyles society was looking for Could these massive gallery spaces, showing luxury while portraying innovation, have influenced both the scale and use of 'skylights' in modern day shopping malls?

The significance of these European expositions was a crucial development in the growing appeal to consume This interest in consuming is what Williams refers to as 'the dream world of the consumer' the non material dimension to consumption The idea of this dream world of the consumer is that the human mind transcended issues of physical survival to imagine a better, richer, more rewarding life

The 1900 exposition incarnates this new and decisive conjunction between imaginative desires and material ones, between dreams and commerce, between events of collective consciousness and of economic fact It is obvious how economic goods satisfy physical needs such as those for food and shelter, less evident, but of overwhelming significance in understanding modern society, is how merchandise can fill needs of the imagination ¹¹

As mentioned earlier, Walter Benjamin, refers to a city of arcades as a dream world that will charm the fancy of the Parisians ¹² The expositions *universelles* then continue to fancy and ignite this 'dream world of the consumer'

NORTH AMERICA

While arcades were primarily a European phenomenon, the development of the department store occurred on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean In Canada, the famous Hudson's Bay Company evolved from its origins in the fur trade and then progressed to a mail order service When consumer spaces began to flourish in North America, Hudson's Bay and other department stores began to modernize and inhabited the city centre

¹¹ Williams 65

¹² Benjamin 17

Johann Freidrich Geist states: “the department store is a massive sundry-article shop. All branches are represented in one building. The business principle is high turnover and low pricing. While the arcade attracts a classifiable clientele, the department store appeals to the masses.”¹³ In the middle of the 19th century, department stores offered a more accessible shopping opportunity not only for the elite but also to more economic classes. “Without having to buy, the department store shopper can handle and try on merchandise”¹⁴ The department stores were located in the city centre, designed with bright lighting and grand halls and were relatively safe shopping environments. Women were comfortable not only shopping on their own, but also even keeping a job as a clerk

20TH CENTURY

Mass production is most commonly associated with Henry Ford. His automotive assembly line featured production techniques that arose during the industrial revolution. Fordism refers to the system of mass production and consumption characteristic of developed economies during the 1940s-1960s. Under Fordism, mass consumption was combined with mass production to produce sustained economic and extensive material advancement.¹⁵ The rise of Henry Ford and the successes of the Ford Motor Company are an integral part of the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society of mass consumption.

Production was no longer about skilled individual craftwork, but rather the production line. The key concept was standardization: standardization of components and manufacturing processes. Labor productivity was radically increased by *breaking down each job into component motions and organizing fragmented work tasks according to rigorous standards of time and motion studies.*

The separation between management, conception, control, and execution was already underway in many industries. What was

¹³ Geist, 39

¹⁴ Williams, 92

¹⁵ Mark Jayne Cities and consumption (London: Routledge, 2006), 35

different about Henry Ford was his vision for a new kind of rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society, built simply through the proper application of corporate power.¹⁶ Ford introduced his five-dollar, eight-hour workday in exchange for the workers operating the automated car-assembly line he established. This was also meant to provide workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products that corporations were starting to pour out.¹⁷

Although there was general excitement about this radical shift towards an industrial society, new issues arose in response to Fordism. First, the state of class relations throughout the capitalist world was hardly conducive to acceptance of the new production system.¹⁸ Ford had relied almost exclusively on immigrant labour to set up his assembly line. The hierarchical social relations and de-skilling within the labour process created inequalities and the immigrants quickly learned they were not included in the benefits of Fordism. For example, the organization of the work force created serious tension and strong social movements.¹⁹ There was discrimination in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. Large sections of the work force were also denied the 'joys' of consumption. The second issue to arise due to Fordism was the unforeseen "shock of the savage depression and the near collapse of capitalism in the 1930s." Although the Stock Market Crash of 1929 was not solely the result of Fordism, it was due to a variety of factors all relating to the growth of a consumerist economy. This economic rise and subsequent fall, led capitalist societies to establish how governments should help stabilize the economy. Despite the issues of the **Great Depression**, mass production and mass consumption established by Fordism eventually paved the way for a major shift in economic productivity, where advanced capitalist countries eventually saw steady economic growth.

As a result of this economic growth and available credit to the consumer, large corporations could now start planning ahead, market and package their products, as well as create their own branding and

The Great Depression

was a severe worldwide economic depression lasting until the late 1930s or even 1940s. Profits and prices dropped while unemployment rose. It's devastating effects were felt across the world, both rich and poor alike. There are many opinions as to the cause of the Great Depression. Whether the Stock Market Crash was a cause or rather a symptom. Was the Great Depression due to structural weaknesses including bank lending, an overall failure of the free market, or rather a failure of government to regulate banks rates and control money supply, or was the severe drought to blame?

16 David Harvey [The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change](#) (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 126

17 Harvey, 125

18 Harvey, 128

19 Harvey, 138

start advertising. This also led to a city retail infrastructure where mass produced items could now be sold through larger and larger shops. Consumer products were now influencing every aspect of society: jobs, economic class, leisure-time, city planning, thus producing an entirely new economic class: consumerists.

As mass production became more effective, prices continued to drop. Mass production technology responded to the demand of the market and factories increased their plausible quantities of products produced. For example, store managers soon realized how affordable certain items were becoming. The five and dime shops took advantage of the affordability, offering products at the lowest cost. Sociologist Sharon Zukin states in Point of purchase: how shopping changed American culture, that “unlike the department stores, which were known to cater to different social classes, the five and dime welcomed everyone.”²⁰

With an abundance of factories drawing workers from other parts of the country and world, urban life was bustling. Affordable housing was built on large parcels of land in rows of identical units built for fast accommodation. These types of identical dwellings, often referred to as **post-war housing**, contributed to the suburban developments of today. The suburban land was sought after for its comfortable mix; convenience of living in the city, while offering the space and lush green yard of a more rural private lifestyle.

post-war housing

After World War II, there was a housing shortage with the return of a large number of veterans. Governments encouraged people to live beyond the city in newly built, single-family houses. After the war there was also an economic boom that helped the rapid expansion of the city.

CONTEMPORARY

While the city expanded, larger land plots offered an opportunity for consumer spaces to sprawl as well. New shopping facilities could be expansive. In the suburban landscape, there is no real size limitation as there is in the city centre.

It was an architect who pioneered the shopping mall. Victor Gruen designed one of the first suburban shopping facilities in 1954. Considered a pedestrian shopping centre, these malls were designed with equally expansive parking lots in which to leave the automobile



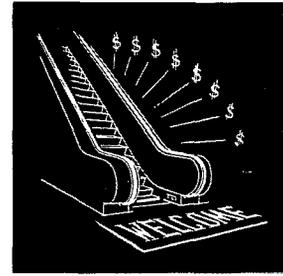
NORTHLAND SHOPPING CENTRE
Southfield, Michigan, 1954

source: Wayne State University,
<http://urbanplacesandspaces.blogspot.com>

20 Sharon Zukin. Point of purchase: how shopping changed American culture. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 71.

and shop by foot, analogous to previous shopping environments like the arcades discussed earlier.

The shopping mall also introduced new technological designs and innovations. Although the first mall was not entirely enclosed, it did not take long to enclose the exterior spaces and add the comfort of air conditioning. No matter what the temperature outside, a humid day in Texas, USA, or a snowstorm in Ontario, Canada, the mall's climate is always consistent to offer a pleasant shopping experience. Other technology that came about through shopping phenomenon was the escalator. This innovation allowed the consumer to pause while the machines did the work. While consumers saved their energy moving throughout the mall, they could then shop longer, increasing the merchant's revenue.



OTIS ELEVATOR COMPANY
MARKETING BROCHURE, 1949
source: Koolhaas Rem Mutations, Barcelona Actar, 2000

As land was not an issue, malls became competitive in attempting to provide it all. The West Edmonton Mall (WEM) claims to contain the entire world within its walls. WEM, which is the largest indoor shopping centre in North America, is larger than 100 football fields.²¹ Beyond countless shops, numerous department stores, and eating options, the mall also includes a theme hotel, skating rink, Victorian Bridge, ship, submarine, dolphins and a wave pool, even a wing that mimics nineteenth century Parisian Boulevards and another a New Orleans' Bourbon Street. These shopping malls became attraction centres and tourist destinations. Although the attractions and destinations within this type of shopping centre are beyond abundant, "the mall is easily recognizable as an elephantine version of a generic type – the regional shopping mall."²²



WEST EDMONTON MALL
source: <http://www.bing.com/maps/>

Department stores that were originally located in city centres were opening new stores in the suburbs, anchoring the shopping malls. Often, department stores were even closing their doors in the city centre locations. The shopping mall was becoming a more profitable location than in the city centre, as the shopping mall was easily accessible from suburban homes.

21 Michael Sorkin, Variations on a theme park, the new American city and the end of public space. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

22 Sorkin, 6

DISCOUNT TREND

Luxury shopping, originally a practice only the elite of the times could participate in, soon became more accessible to the middle class with the advent of department stores. However it was the original five and dime shops that started the discount trend that really opened up the opportunity for all income brackets to spend. By offering basic household goods and other inexpensive necessities like clothing and products, the less wealthy would join in on the shopping craze.

The discount trend soon outgrew the five and dime. The developing of Walmart exemplifies this growth (This growth can be read in further detail in the following chapter, *The Rise of Walmart*.) Of course, discount shopping centres understandably require a more affordable structure to house discount products. Because multiple stories and escalators are expensive and time consuming to build, the traditional shopping centre discussed previously, was ruled out. The obvious solution was a simple structure with minimal, affordable, and quick assembly materials. We have now arrived at the **Big Box Store**

big box store

noun [usu as adj]
informal a very large store that sells goods at discount prices esp one specializing in a particular type of merchandise

source: *New Oxford American Dictionary*

The '**big box building**' as articulated by *Julia Christensen* in [Big Box Reuse](#), is a free-standing, warehouselike building, with one main room taking up basically the entire building

THE BIG BOX

Today's Big Box Store, much like a shopping mall, is spread across expansive plots allowing for as much, if not more, space to accommodate the automobile – along with rows upon rows of shelves. The difference is that these stores stand alone, independent of the other shops. Often, you drive to opposite ends of the shopping complex to visit another Big Box

SUBURBS

For people who live in the suburbs or exurbs, these shopping centres are the only convenient place to shop. They are found everywhere, strategically placed so that no one is further than a few kilometers away. Instead of expensive billboards competing for your attention, as found in city centres on buildings and at bus stops, the Big Box site relies on its sheer size and scale of the store sign on the façade to make

itself known. Big box stores are the most recent and prevalent addition to the consumer landscape. But how did the big box store merge its way into being acceptable, even expected in the suburban landscape?

Perhaps in an ideal world, a city's latest developments would reflect the market forces, and cities would evolve to reflect the preferences of its residents, the market would ensure that people get what they want. Yet there seems to be many flaws to this principal.

Today cities are becoming more suburban than urban. Sprawling developments are perpetually growing new outer exurban rings. In our system, it is believed that if everything is left to individual choice, the market will ensure that we get what we want. No matter what people say about urban sprawl, the statistics show that the most popular housing choice is the new houses in new subdivisions on the edge of the city. Choosing a house is often more complicated than location and cost. A homeowner often compromises on certain aspects, like distance to travel to work, property taxes, house prices, neighbourhood reputations, etc. when looking to buy. So the developers are taking what they see to be as the homeowners' choices and neglecting the trade-offs like demand for a community.

The problem arises when each family makes their own decision. Sure if everyone lived in a smaller house on a smaller lot we would have a more densely populated city, designed to have both public and private spaces to enjoy. Yet each family also wants what they believe to be best for their personal family, which is often a **greenfield** development – unaware of the repercussions this has on the city. The urban environment is, ideally, a public space – a shared resource that we all contribute to. If each individual takes a '**free-rider**' choice buying their home, then our city will sprawl yet inhabitants will be discontent with the resulting urban environment.²³ These types of residents are usually referred to as '**NIMBYs**.'

The same goes for the choice of where to shop. Assuming most people live in the suburban developments, the most convenient stores are also built by developers, where they are taking what they see to be

greenfield |'grɛn,fɛld|
adjective [attrib]
relating to or denoting previously undeveloped sites for commercial development or exploitation. Compare with **brownfield**
source: *New Oxford American Dictionary*

free-rider problem
where any one person's choice has only a small effect on others' outcomes, but because these small effects are shared among everyone, they accumulate and become significant
source: Slee, Tom. No one makes you shop at Wal-Mart, the surprising deceptions of individual choice. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006.

NIMBY |'nimbɛ|
acronym for not in my backyard, referring to those who object to the siting of something perceived as unpleasant or potentially dangerous in their own neighborhood, such as a landfill or hazardous waste facility
source: *New Oxford American Dictionary*

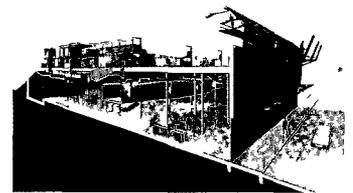
23 Tom Slee No one makes you shop at Wal-Mart, the surprising deceptions of individual choice. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 55

the consumers' choices and neglecting the trade-offs such as demand for local vendors.

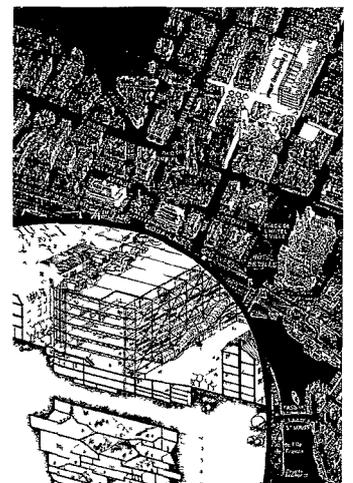
This being said, consumer spaces are most likely to be found among the sprawling subdivisions. Today these big box store consumer spaces are referred to as 'power centres'. The big box stores offer the best prices – being that they are discount stores – which many families find the most affordable. These 'free rider' choices reflect poorly on the public's environment and are the reason why small local shops and vendors have a hard time staying afloat when Big Box Stores enter their neighbourhoods. Yet this is a free market and demand influences supply.

There is a disconnect between our actions and our dreams for the city. Our greed or free-riding actions speak louder than our desire for a better built landscape. "We can expect the market to undervalue public spaces and other non-commercial aspects of cities, where we cannot express our wants through purchases."²⁴ Although most architects agree that the suburban landscape could be greatly improved, there is little they can do. The voices of the corporations, backed by money, speak louder and are more profitable to the economy than theoretical projects by architects. Many architectural projects propose an improvement to the suburban condition. Lewis Tsurumaki Lewis Architects' (LTL) *New Suburbanism* accepts that the mini-mansion home and the Big Box store is desired, and looks to combine the two in an attempt to densify the city.²⁵ Yet this project and many more utopic designs, remains as a playful exploration – far from actualization.

Proposals for alternate landscapes go beyond architects. The So-Called Utopia of the Centre Beaubourg was originally published in 1976 by the Swiss sociologist Albert Meister under the pseudonym Gustave Affeulpin, and now translated and 'interpreted' by Swiss artist Luca Frei. Meister proposes an alternate realm, under the Beaubourg – a palace of culture, a museum – but for a totally new kind of radical libertarian world. Meister's work is an ironic utopia, a counterculture



LEWIS TSURUMAKI LEWIS ARCHITECTS
New Suburbanism
source: Lewis, Paul, Marc Tsurumaki, and David J. Lewis. *Lewis Tsurumaki Lewis opportunistic architecture*. Chicago: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, 2008.



BELOW BEAUBOURG
75 floors of counterculture
source: Frei, Luca. *The so-called utopia of the Centre Beaubourg: an interpretation*. London: Book Works, 2007.

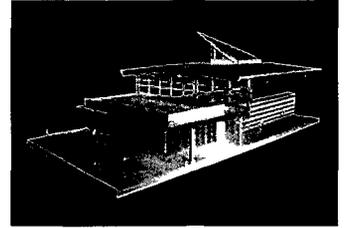
24 Slee, 54

25 Paul Lewis, Marc Tsurumaki, and David J. Lewis. *Lewis Tsurumaki Lewis opportunistic architecture*. (Chicago: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, 2008), 100

for Parisian inhabitants where they are free to express themselves. Despite being a fictional written work, Meister recognizes the lack of public space available for community in cities.²⁶

Unfortunately the big box, now recognized as a problem, cannot be ignored. In fact it demands our attention. But how do you ameliorate the problem of the big box? In an attempt to enter the downtown Vancouver market, the Walmart Corporation approached Peter Busby Architects to design a sustainable store. Busby had an ethical decision to make: either to offer his expertise in sustainable architecture and support a controversial megacorporation that the local neighbourhood was attempting to isolate, or to turn the job down to protest the megacorporation. The later choice would leave Walmart to continue building the current suburban big box stores they already have. However, understanding that suburbia and its big box stores are going to continue and even increase their anti-sustainable practices, Busby's decision came down to accepting the evolution of these stores and perhaps do his small part in trying to improve the situation by designing a more sustainable Walmart. Despite Peter Busby Architects efforts to do their part in improving a particular big box, the bigger issues of our consumer culture and therefore consumer spaces are still at play.

Undoubtedly, contemporary consumerism remains a 'dream world' of the consumer. Just as the aristocracy in the 18th century France, today's society is still preoccupied with shopping; adorning ourselves and our houses with goods which reflect our wealth. The major difference has been in the physical modernization of the city. The consumer spaces that reflect our habits have progressed – or rather regressed – to today's Big Box store.



BUSBY ARCHITECTS
sustainable Walmart concept model
source: http://www.treehugger.com/files/2005/04/vancouver_ad_s_1.php

²⁶ Luca Frei. The so-called utopia of the Centre Beaubourg: an interpretation / Luca Frei. (London. Book Works, 2007), 1.

WALMART PERVADES

Growth of the mega-retailer

TO VALUE A DOLLAR

As founder and chairman of Wal-mart, Sam Walton was the man who learned how 'to value a dollar'. He created a business around it, bringing us the world's largest discount store whose catch phrase was: 'always low prices.'

Sam Walton launched into the retail industry at the age of 27 when he purchased a variety store in northwestern Arkansas under the Ben Franklin franchise. Within five years he broke out of established franchise practices by beginning to experiment with the store's operations. In turn, Walton successfully increased the store's profit over the next few years. However, when a slight fault in the lease arose and he was unable to renew it, his family picked up and moved to Bentonville to buy a new store. Before long Walton's 'Five and Dime' opened and in 1950, it was only the third self-service variety store in the whole country.¹ Walton soon began to expand and he purchased an old grocery store right on the town square across from its competitors, Scott Store and **Woolworth's**. Walton was already innovating, experimenting, and expanding from the more traditional franchise business practices.

1962 would mark a major shift in the retail world: the discount idea was to become the future and shape our lives more than could have been expected. By this time Sam and his brother Bud Walton owned fifteen stores, and they began looking to make a better profit for all their efforts. To achieve this, there had to be a dramatic increase in scale requiring much bigger stores. (Later these stores would be called 'family stores.')

In the early sixties, however, no one wanted to gamble on this new store; Bud pulled out all his money, except for about 3 percent, leaving Sam to make up the difference. So setting out on his own this time, without the support of buying into a pre-established franchise, Sam Walton built his own, first discount store in Rogers,



WALTON'S FIVE AND DIME

Sam Walton's original shop in Bentonville

source: http://www.arkansas.com/photo_gallery/more.aspx?id=45

F.W. Woolworth Company

Later in Sam Walton's career he would buy out his competitor, as Walmart.

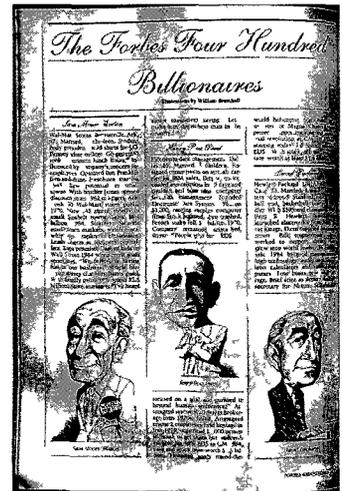
1 Sam Walton and John Huey Sam Walton, made in America: my story. (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 43.

Arkansas Wal-mart No 1 opened on July 2, 1962² Walmart's largest competitors (Target and K-mart) opened the same year³

Sam Walton's first Wal-mart store's sales were reasonable but still far from that of the competitors However, within two years he had enough money to open two more Wal-marts in the surrounding area

The first Wal-mart stores were by no means on par with the Wal-marts of today They were simple operations by comparison, yet Walton's experimentation of business and sales practices was crucial to the growth and later success of the corporation For years, while still building Wal-marts, Sam and Bud Walton maintained operation of their earlier Ben Franklin franchises and a few of Walton's Five and Dime shops These stores served as financial stability for them while they continued to explore options, trying to find the best recipe for a 'family store' Eventually these original shops were slowly phased out and most often replaced with Wal-marts⁴ Sam Walton and his store managers worked together; experimenting, trying to do something different, educating themselves as to what was going on in the retail industry and trying to stay ahead of the trends⁵ For example, on a given Saturday, Sam Walton might put on some mangy cut-off jeans and a baseball cap, and go to the K-mart in town, to strike up a conversation with a clerk and posing questions such as How frequently do you order? How much do you order at a time? If you order on a Tuesday, when does it come in? How do you keep track of how much you have in the store? Then, he would scribble all of the information in his little coil notebook.⁶

Understanding the competition was imperative to beating their prices. When the whole concept of the business is to offer the lowest prices to the customer, the store operations must be frugal Charles Fishman, business journalist, says in describing Wal-mart, "Frugal is too pale, too diluted a word for how Wal-mart and its managers have



THE FORBES FOUR HUNDRED BILLIONAIRES

Sam Walton is published in Forbes Magazine, October 1985

source: The Forbes Four Hundred Billionaires Forbes 138.11 (1985) 114

2 Walton, 57

3 Charles Fishman The Wal-Mart effect: how the world's most powerful company really works-- and how it's transforming the American economy (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 8

4 Walton, 67

5 Walton, 61

6 Walton, 62

come to think about spending the company's money."⁷ They were far from able to afford constructing decent stores and tried to keep their rent lower than \$1.00 per square foot.⁸ One store was an old Coca-Cola factory. Clothes were layered up and hung on a conduit pipe. Shelves were wired to the wall and everything was piled high on tables, with no sense of organization. It took time to establish an organizational system for merchandise. Purchasing goods and replenishment systems were still to be implemented. Finances were completed by hand. Emphasis was placed on item promotion; choosing an everyday item that Wal-mart could buy cheaply then offer the product to the customer for less than any competitor, with little or even no profit to Wal-mart. It was a tactic to get people in the store and, once there, to keep them shopping. Wal-mart strategy featured an intense focus on merchandizing and moving product; refining the business practices like keeping the financial books in order would come later.

- Rule 1 **Commit** to your business
- Rule 2 **Share** your profits with your associates and treat them as partners
- Rule 3 **Motivate** your partners
- Rule 4 **Communicate** everything you possibly can
- Rule 5 **Appreciate** everything your associates have to do for your business, loyalty
- Rule 6 **Celebrate** your successes
Find some humor in your failures
Loosen up Have fun
- Rule 7 **Listen** to everyone in your company
- Rule 8 **Exceed** your customers' expectations
- Rule 9 **Control** your expenses better than your competitor
- Rule 10 **Swim** upstream. Ignore the conventional, go the opposite direction

SAM WALTON'S 10 RULES

source: Walton Sam and John Huey [Sam Walton made in America my story](#) New York: Bantam Books 1993

EXPANSION

Before long Wal-mart was a household name. Stores emerged in every part of the United States. Each new Wal-mart location was strategic. By concentrating on only one location at a time, each new store was chosen within a set radius of a Wal-mart **distribution centre**. That radius was then filled in with more stores. The reason for this was simple: so that each store was within driving distance of another, offering easier supervision while new ones were getting established. As K-marts were appearing but keeping to big cities, Walmart was confident their 'formula' was working even in towns smaller than 5,000 people.⁹ This systematic Wal-mart formula has succeeded in being an **anchor** in the big box store shopping centres, attracting customers to not only their stores, but also for the small corporations in the complex.

distribution centre

These warehouses are a key element in the success of Walmart, helping them become leaders in logistics as they are strategically located in both affordable and accessible areas. These warehouses are where large shipments of products are first delivered, then unpacked and repacked into smaller quantities that a store is able to sell.

source: Christensen Julia [Big box reuse](#) Cambridge MA: MIT P 2008

anchor store

a store, e.g., a department store, that is the principal tenant of a mall or a shopping center

source: *New Oxford American Dictionary*

Sam Walton's success in establishing a country-wide discount store was due to his dedication and hard work. He was a merchant, passionate about the stores, the people, frugality and competitiveness

⁷ Fishman, 30

⁸ Walton, 67

⁹ Walton, 140

Even in the last few weeks of his life he was reviewing sales figures for the week. But just after Sam's seventy-fourth birthday, his struggle with cancer finally ended. He passed away peacefully on April 5th, 1992.¹⁰

WALMART TODAY

Walmart (note the name change from Wal-mart) has been one of the world's largest retailer for years. Their sales last year were greater than the combined economies of 144 countries.¹¹ They are a success story of profitable business in a capitalist economy. They have played the game so well that they have now entered the international market, expanded into China,¹² South Africa,¹³ and India.¹⁴ Business schools around the world use Walmart as case studies because of their corporate strengths.¹⁵

Although Walmart has been around since the 1960s in the United States, its presence in Canada is much more recent. With their headquarters in Mississauga, Ontario, Walmart Canada was established in 1994 with the acquisition of the **Woolco** Canada chain of 122 stores. As of July 31, 2010, Canada has three hundred and nineteen Walmart Stores across the country.¹⁶

Woolco is a subsidiary of **F.W. Woolworth Company**, with its biggest impact being in Canada until its demise in 1994.

INITIATIVES

As one of the largest retailers, Walmart has become in a situation of being at the scrutiny of the public eye. It is known that Walmart is a profitable business; but with this profit comes a social and

10 Walton, 331

11 <http://www.forbes.com/2007/01/30/wal-mart-comps-the-world-biz-cx_tv_0131walmart.html>

12 <<http://wal-martchina.com/>>

13 Stephanie Clippord "Wal-Mart Bids for Massmart to Expand Into Africa" New York Times 28 Sept 2010 4 Oct 2010 <<http://dealbook.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/28/wal-mart-bids-for-massmart-to-expand-into-africa/>>

14 Tim Ferguson "Opening Doors in India for Wal-Mart" Forbes (blog) 28 Oct 2010 9 Nov 2010 <<http://blogs.forbes.com/timferguson/2010/10/28/opening-doors-in-india-for-wal-mart/>>

15 Constance H. Hays "The Wal-Mart Way Becomes Topic A in Business Schools" New York Times 27 July 2003 Web Oct 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/27/business/the-wal-mart-way-becomes-topic-a-in-business-schools.html?scp=1&sq=topic%20A%20Walmart&st=cse>>

16 Walmart Canada Fact Sheet <www.walmartstores.com>

environmental responsibility Given their size, there is no hiding how they conduct their business Decisions they make about who their suppliers are, the practices of their suppliers, the lawsuits that unfold, the employees they hire, promote, or fire – all are decisions that do not go unnoticed As one of the world's largest retailers they are not only making decisions for themselves but they are influencing the practices of many smaller retailers Walmart has an enormous influence on the entire retail industry There is pressure for the megacorporation to set a good example not only with record profits but also their external community engagements

Walmart is currently active trying to maintain a corporate identity that is 'responsible' and reflects public interest. Walmart has teamed up with First Lady Michelle Obama and her 'Let's Move!' campaign to fight unhealthy eating and childhood obesity by making their house brands healthier¹⁷ Although some of their actions are well intended and advertised extensively, there are other insidious actions that Walmart takes and, strategically, does not showcase

For example, if Walmart supports a salmon farm in South America that practices socially and environmentally irresponsible acts, Walmart is also held responsible if the information goes public Walmart has, in fact, been scrutinized for hiding certain practices in the past Therefore, responding to the public interest for a more transparent supply chain and sustainable products, Walmart is beginning to develop a worldwide sustainable product index¹⁸ However well-intentioned, is there not a conflict of interest in Walmart creating its own sustainability index for the products it sells?

Despite the numbers reflecting Walmart's profit as well as their efforts to respond to the public, there are many who oppose the practices of Walmart When trying to enter the city centres of both Vancouver and New York City, Walmart has had to respond to resistance from local communities who do not support its practices

17 Sheryl Gay Stolberg "Wal-Mart Shifts Strategy to Promote Healthy Foods" New York Times 20 Jan 2011 Web 20 Jan 2011 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/20/business/20walmart.html?scp=1&sq=walmart%20michelle%20obama&st=cse>>

18 Stephanie Rosenbloom "At Wal-Mart, Labeling to Reflect Green Intent" New York Times 15 July 2009 15 Oct 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/business/energy-environment/16walmart.html>>

WALMART

1962 - 1964

Sam Walton names his new stores **WALMART** The Walmart name was presented in just about any font/style available to the printer

WAL-MART

1964 - 1981

Also known as the "Frontier Font Logo," this was the first official and consistently used logo



1968-1981

The Discount City mark was used in print advertising, on the uniforms/smocks, in-store signing and other things However, it was never used as building signage or in an annual report.

WAL-MART

1981 - 1992

The logo was updated again in 1981

WAL★MART

1992 - 2008

The star was adopted as an update to the existing logo in early 1992

Walmart

2008

New logo adopted by Walmart Stores U S

FROM WAL-MART TO WALMART

The evolution of the Walmart logo

source: <http://walmartstores.com/aboutus/8412.aspx>

Trying to open a shop in downtown Vancouver, Walmart even went as far as to hire Peter Busby Architects. Walmart wanted Busby, who are known for their sustainable architecture, to design a new, sustainable, and, importantly, modestly-sized box store. However, the public still saw a Walmart – albeit disguised behind a new facade – and vetoed the decision to let the retailer into their community.

Overall, there are mixed opinions about Walmart. Consider the opinion of Ian Lee, professor at Carleton University's Sprott Business School professor and expert on corporate business practices, or that of the small shop owner that had to close his or her doors when Walmart came to town. One opinion will evaluate the corporation in business terms, looking at the economics of their business practices. The other opinion will be based on personal and community well-being. Economic practices prevalent in today's consumer society evaluate a business primarily on its profit or monetary value, with little or no consideration for non-material values such as preserving a community. Economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher recognized a problem where monetary worth takes preference.

Money is considered to be all-powerful, if it could not actually buy non-material values, such as justice, harmony, beauty or even health, it could circumvent the need for them or compensate for their loss. The development of production and the acquisition of wealth have thus become the highest goals of the modern world in relation to which all other goals, no matter how much lip-service may still be paid to them, have come to take second place.¹⁹

Just as Walmart's business practices are primarily concerned about their economic success, their big box store too, is developed with profit in mind where "all other goals have come to take second place."²⁰ Should the economic prosperity of a megacorporation be defining the architectural condition of our exurban communities?

¹⁹ E. F. Schumacher, *Small is beautiful: economics as if people mattered* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989), 313.

²⁰ Schumacher, 313.

UNPACKING THE BIG BOX

Reinterpreting Walmart

Can the big box store offer a platform for a non-consumerist space? Instead of protesting against a corporation like Walmart (since this may, according to research shown in the previous chapter, be impossible) perhaps we can identify and even harness an untapped potential

The forthcoming enquiry looks at the Big Box Store as a platform on which to design an alternative. The strategy could be called *Unpacking the Big Box*, or *Reinterpreting Walmart*. Perhaps this alternative could offer a contrasting view of our commodified culture.

Looking closely at Walmart's operations it becomes apparent that due to careful information management, which places the company in their ranks as one of the most profitable retailers, they could probably run an airline company more successfully than the airlines themselves.¹ With every number crunched and statistic taken into consideration, Walmart's profits are reliable and the corporation effective. However, looking closely at the surrounding suburban neighbourhoods, it is apparent that there is little consideration for the people in the immediate community. Researcher Stacy Mitchell has observed "fast disappearing under the big-box influx are the kinds of public spaces that nurture a vibrant, informal public life."²

With an increasing number of Walmart stores affecting communities everywhere, is there a way to capitalize on the strategies of their success *and* to satisfy a diminishing social condition? There is no intention to push Walmart out or take over the enterprise (again, it would be impossible). But Walmart could very well be the perfect host – a long-established and abundant one that might offer innumerable opportunities for a more social, *Un-Boxed* landscape, thereby creating a symbiotic type of architecture.

1 Ian Lee "Walmart Discussion with Professor of Strategic Management and International Business at Sprott School of Business" Personal interview 10 Nov 2010

2 Stacy Mitchell [Big-box swindle: the true cost of mega-retailers and the fight for America's independent businesses](#) (Boston: Beacon P, 2006), 92

However, it is important to note that although Walmart is the focus of our attention, the aim of this enquiry is, fundamentally, to bring awareness to our world of consumerism. If we were to offer an escape from this consumerist culture by ‘politely’ tweaking the existing functions of a Walmart store, could we achieve this overall awareness while also creating entirely new and culturally rich social spaces?

Walmart is constantly expanding. It is out-growing its current stores. Often it is more affordable for Walmart to build a new Supercentre within a couple kilometer radius of the original, thus not having to make up for lost revenues (i.e. by not interfering with renovations at the original). In many instances these Big Box Store companies maintain lengthy land ownership to control what might become a site for a competitor. In this circumstance, Walmart itself writes the rules for any possible tenant. Certainly, the site will not be used for K-mart or any other competitor. In this respect, the ‘alternative architecture’ proposed here will be responsive to Walmart’s dominance and control of immediate competition. The aim is not to overcome a corporation or even to compete for your dollar – if that were the case, it would be a business opportunity to create a newer, better, discount Supercentre. Rather, this architectural enquiry focuses on the ramifications the Big Box landscape.

As seen in the previous chapter, Walmart’s business practices are primarily concerned with their economic success. Walmart’s decisions all come down to a profit motive driven by promises of ‘lowest prices’. Recognizing the seeming absurdity in evaluating our lives and cities in economical or profitable terms (i.e. net profit or loss), this project aims to create (or restore) a sense – even a place – of community.

Because the goal is a symbiotic architecture between the host (the big box) and the alternative (a new cultural realm), it is imperative that Walmart be brought ‘on board’, so to speak. Therefore, submitting a proposal to Walmart is required, let us call it a ‘sales pitch’ (of the architectural ideas proposed here). Based on their history, Walmart is more likely to cooperate if a project also benefits them. The reinterpretation of Walmart – the strategy of *unpacking the big box* – is here organized in two parts. First, a *sales pitch* – how could an alternative

benefit Walmart and thus allow the project to proceed? (This will be presented here in a lighter font). Second: the *unpacking*: how to create an escape from shopping? (Details of this phase will be politely omitted or strategically hidden from the pitch to Walmart) With this second phase, side effects may, in time, begin to show: people may begin to have other dreams than simply to shop.

The enquiry will be organized into five key categories, each with architectural significance: site, occupants, form/organization, program, and construction.

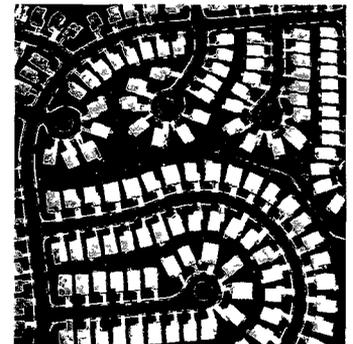
REINTERPRETATIONS.



Walmart is already in the real estate business in the U.S., selling and leasing old or adjoining sales spaces.³ Why not sell the air rights?

Walmart chooses its sites based on affordable land, the income bracket of the surrounding community, other shopping or lack of shopping in the area, and the distance to one of their distribution centres. However, it comes down to the area where another Walmart could be profitable. Because the Walmart Corporation is already well established, we recognize the hard work of selecting a site and utilize it as our own site for the alternative space. This alternative will ultimately bring more people and offer programs that are not in competition with the business below – this project is not competing against Walmart.

The site for the alternative has been carefully chosen: above a very common and widely recognized consumerist space. Walmart has already done the work in creating a worthy location, with infrastructure and an endless stream of consumers – thereby offering both structure for and occupants of the ‘unpacked’ alternate space. Since Walmart is most often found in suburban areas, we, as architects, can assume that the surrounding community is often lacking a social atmosphere, at least in terms of a dense or centralized concentration. As an escape and a public space, the intension is to educate people of the consumer



SUBURBIA
Walmart often locates itself here
source: Koolhaas Rem [Mutations](#) Barcelona Artar 2000

3 walmartrealty.com

society we have become: serving as a subtle and gradual learning grounds, an alternative landscape, free of shopping.



There is a symbiotic relationship at work between Walmart and its customers, analogous to the balance between traditional supply and demand. Walmart's business relies on customers to purchase goods. Conversely, Walmart's customers count on its 'always low prices.' Largely attracting middle income families, Walmart is also able to include lower and upper income brackets simply because the company tempts anyone looking for the 'lowest prices.'

Looking at the suburban landscape, it becomes apparent that the inhabitants are of all types. Consider peopleofwalmart.com: the individuals posted on this website all have interests or hobbies, common or individual, which the 'unpacked' alternative space will try to recognize (unless, of course their pass-time is shopping). Offering a multitude of non-consumer programs, people are free to interact with each other, meet their (new) neighbours, relax, and enjoy all that the alternative realm has to offer.

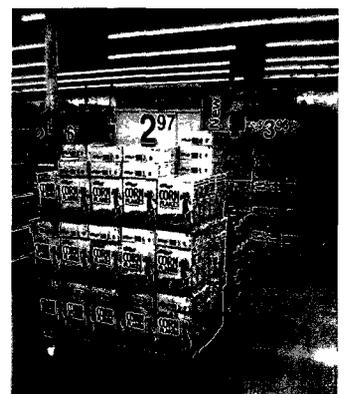


Action Alleys are big aisles that work like arteries as they connect the various departments in Walmart.⁴ The purpose of the alley is to offer an enticing promenade for shopping that interrupts you along the way to display everyday goods in prime locations where people are more likely to purchase impulsively. Just as action alley is profitable to Walmart, the alternate space will also offer a version of the big aisles jam-packed with action.

Unlike the Walmart alleys offering discounted products that try to grab your attention, the major alleys above will (politely) offer a



WALMART CUSTOMER
source <http://walmartstores.com/>



ACTION ALLEY PALLET
source photo by Chris Bretecher

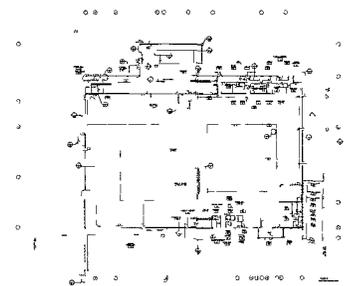
4 Charles Fishman. *The Wal-Mart effect. how the world's most powerful company really works-- and how it's transforming the American economy*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 67.

multitude of programs (without any overwhelming price tags). Each alley is unique in its action, from a band of sports fields to an aisle of community gardens to a library zone. These alternate action alleys encourage favorable social interruptions and impulsive relaxation (rather than the interruptions for impulse buying). Above, the new alleys aim to borrow from the social ideals of a Main Street instead of consumer aisles.



The layout of a Walmart is well thought out, both structurally as well as spatially. The most profitable departments are placed furthest from the entrance, which requires the shopper to pass more products. Feature items are always on display and prices are written larger than orientation signs. Every detail is carefully considered to encourage shopping. The overall hierarchy of aisles and departments will inform certain placements in the alternate space. For example, structural organization and the column grid will configure what happens above.

Certain key elements in Walmart’s building will influence the layout and structure of the alternate space. The design of the above space will be site specific and therefore reflect elements of its host. The department locations and hierarchy of travel paths and column placements will all carry through to the spaces above, yet they will not simply be copied, but added or omitted as required for the spatial organization of the alternative.



WALMART PLAN
A detailed drawing of a typical Walmart store
source: <http://www.walmartreality.com/>



While monumental in scale, the Walmart entry must also be inviting, hence the role of the “greeter”, who welcomes the crowds of shoppers. The ‘unpacked’ alternative will help to frame the Walmart entrance by enhancing, not subtracting from the existing facade. The multiple points of entry to the alternate space offer both a way up but also a way back down, ideally, the choices for circulation are endless. Just like shopping in the big store, no department is closed off: the shoppers’

promenade is open. The shopper is invited to take a break, however quickly, from shopping, through the many vertical connections just a few steps away.

The Big Box Store requires a large point of entry that can be easily recognizable to the customer as they park at the far end of the parking lot. While almost inhuman in scale, the overwhelming proportions of this façade allow, in fact, more opportunities for access. Each alternate access point, unique in its design, will offer a range of possibility, from the generic to the playful, from monumental to more personal. The array of passages are the initial step up to the alternative, a space for people not products.



The Alternate Realm will harvest fresh produce, grown both outdoors as well as year round in greenhouses, aiming to become one of Walmart's local fresh food suppliers. After all "the [fresh food] business in Canada is brand new, so there's a lot they can do...for instance, Wal-Mart expects to buy 30% of its produce locally by the end of 2013."⁵ The Alternate Realm will also host farm animals feasting on their trough above the Box, supplied by the perishable (and unsold) foods from Walmart's Fresh Food Department. Unfortunately there is always a percentage of produce that turns bad before being sold. Walmart already has their shrinkage reduced to the lowest percentage compared to any competitor.⁶ However, the perishables only last so long and by taking them off their hands, the corporation would no longer have to discard the unwanted food.

Imagine, a local farm growing fresh produce, directly above Walmart. This would supply 'local produce' for Walmart's new Fresh Food Department. How much more local can you get than directly above Walmart? The perishable foods Walmart is unable to sell before their due date, will then ironically be returned to the farm where



PEOPLE GREETER
A Walmart employee, Snookie, who's job is to welcome people at the door.
source <http://walmartstores.com/>



FRESH PRODUCE
Available at any Walmart Supercentre.
source <http://walmartstores.com/>

5 Stephanie Clifford. "Wal-Mart to Buy More Local Produce." *New York Times* 14 Oct. 2010. 15 Oct. 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/15/business/15walmart.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=walmart%20local%20food&st=cse>.

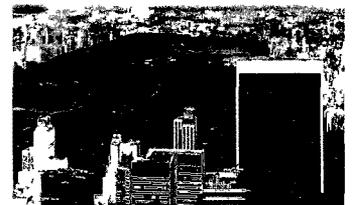
6 Lee.

animals would feed from their troughs. Being able to maintain a certain number of animals' diets by the sheer volume of unused fresh food at a Walmart Store could provide more insight into the amount of waste we produce. The waste produced in one household may not seem like much, but what volume of food does Walmart throw away on a daily basis? The animals sustained on site as well as the farming would then allow a reconnection with people and where their food comes from. Perhaps the cow manure could even produce methane gas to heat the alternative!



Like a green roof, this park will help reduce Walmart's ecological footprint. Consumers are encouraging companies to put more emphasis on the environment and sustainable practices. Walmart already uses its insight and influence to help change the world by unboxing the antiperspirant and saving millions of trees.⁷ Now they are announcing plans to develop a worldwide sustainability index, attempting to bring about a more transparent supply chain, drive product innovation and, ultimately, provide consumers the information they need to assess the sustainability of products.⁸ The park will not only offer an enjoyable outdoor space for the customers, but also for employees. Everyone can benefit from some daylight and fresh air.

Imagine a little greenery in a surrounding sea of asphalt. A public park, an escape from the consumer space; it allows something for everyone: a soccer pitch, jogging tracks, plots for starting a community garden, or simply nice views – and all of these ready subjects for amateur painters. Think of Central Park in New York City: an oasis in the metropolis, a site to play or to relax. The big box store is the antithesis to the public park. Yet both are equally massive, designed for mass use and occupation. The park, however, proscribes the option to shop. Here, in the 'unpacked' alternative realm, the park will cover the box.



NEW YORK CITY'S CENTRAL PARK
source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Park

⁷ Fishman, 1

⁸ walmartstores.com

Walmart is not the largest retailer by accident. They have strong strategic plans and business techniques that are widely discussed through a series of case studies.⁹ Take, for example, how Walmart has developed its own ‘RetailLink’ database. Not only is Walmart a hot topic in schools, but Walmart also gives back to the education system. Through their scholarship programs, Walmart awarded more than \$9 million in academic scholarships to help students afford higher education in the 2010-2011 school year.¹⁰ The alternative’s education space is for learning and developing the mind – “preparing the leaders of tomorrow.”¹¹

Sure, Walmart provides us with an excellent business model, but what about their ethical decisions? Does Walmart know or consider the impact of their stores on the environment? Or the built environment? An educational space in the ‘unpacked’ realm provides holistic information and teaches people to draw their own conclusions on consumer spaces. The entire Alternate Space itself, being a stark contrast to the consumer space that resides below, serves as an educational tool. The intended contrast or comparison would offer people a chance to see the difference, to determine for themselves, which space is more humane and psychologically pleasing. Classrooms could offer points for viewing into the big box. A library offers resources to learn. After all, as a Walmart advertisement says, “studying makes the difference.”



**‘STUDYING MAKES THE DIFFERENCE.’
 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, WALMART**
 Walmart recognizes the importance of education for global advancement.
source: <http://www.bellevueadv.com/2010/07/walmart-cristoforo-columbo-galileo-galilei-saac-newton/>


 Construction
SCALE

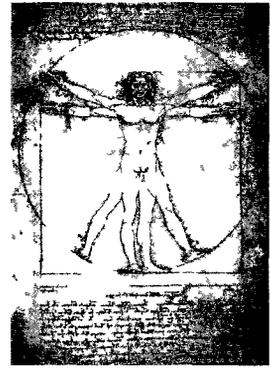
The overall size of the Walmart store allows for a large new structure in the air rights. A small building would be lost, unnoticed from below. The alternative will have to match Walmart, size for size. Just like Walmart, the alternative too has a lot to offer.

⁹ Constance H. Hays. “The Wal-Mart Way Becomes Topic A in Business Schools.” *New York Times*, 27 July 2003. Web. Oct 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/27/business/the-wal-mart-way-becomes-topic-a-in-business-schools.html?scp=1&sq=topic%20A%20Walmart&st=cse>>.

¹⁰ walmartstores.com

¹¹ walmartstores.com

The Big Box is inhuman in scale. The sheer size dwarfs the shopper. However, for the success of the alternative, the above structure will have to compete with the host. The scale of the building materials will be exaggerated further. By playfully disorienting the inhabitant is to draw attention to the absurdity of the Big Box.



LEONARDO DA VINCI'S VITRUVIAN MAN
A drawing based on the correlation of
ideal human proportions with geometries
described by Vitruvius
source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitruvian_man

'UNPACKED:' AN ALTERNATE REALM

The extended city should represent more than simply a consumer culture. Consumer spaces can become social and cultural spaces. For this to happen, the 'dream world of the consumer' is in need of a new mental pleasure that does not involve material products. By awakening from an all-consuming shopping culture, we could allow our extended cities to become vibrant social and cultural communities.

For so long our imaginative capacities have been directed to fantasies of escape, adventure, eroticism, and wealth incarnated in commodities that we have neglected other uses of inventiveness. To supersede the dream worlds of the consumer will require not the stifling of imagination but its expansion and redirection.¹

To this effect, the Alternate Realm attempts to harness the preexisting Big Box condition to help us awake from the dream world of the consumer. As a catalyst, this project ultimately seeks an unboxed exurban landscape, a built environment where the acquisition of 'things' is no longer the defining social and cultural condition. Big boxes are reinterpreted, architecturally, as if people mattered.

The site for the alternate realm is above Walmart Store #3131 located in South Keys Shopping Centre, Ottawa. The surrounding South Keys neighbourhood is a prominent example of an exurban consumer-oriented culture, recognizable by sprawling row houses, networks of roadways connecting each cul de sac to shopping centres, and larger freeways beyond that are necessary to commute to work. The shopping amenities or district centres in the exurbs are mainly big box stores run by megacorporations that make shopping homogeneous from one place to the next.

This typical district centre, the South Keys Shopping Centre, is comprised of roughly twenty-two Box stores with seven smaller outparcel buildings. The two major anchoring stores with the largest

¹ Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream worlds: mass consumption in late nineteenth century France* (Berkeley: Univ of Calif P, 1982), 396.

Boxes are Loblaws and, critically, Walmart Walmart Store #3131 has been selected for *unpacking* towards our proposed Alternate Realm

The site not only reflects the larger issues of a common exurban consumer space, the particularities of this specific site also begin to lend themselves to certain programs that might benefit the community Yet before we revisit the *airspace* proposal discussed in the previous chapter, let us look at the history of this particular Walmart store and the Big Box Store complex to which it belongs

SOUTH KEYS SHOPPING CENTRE

The South Keys Shopping Centre in Ottawa sits on a ninety acre land parcel It is surrounded by the Johnston Road alignment to the North, Bank Street to the East, transit way on the West and Hunt Club Road to the South ²

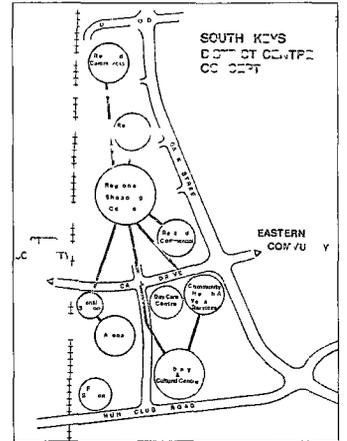
Campeau Corporation, a large real estate development company, purchased the land parcel by parcel By 1978, Campeau owned fifty six acres of what was previously agricultural land Their aim was to develop a shopping centre, the company thus hired researchers for market, economical, and transportation analyses, as well as architects for preliminary program and design ideas

Preliminary design proposals by Murray & Murray Architects & Planning Consultants were particularly interesting because they included both shopping centres as well as recreational and community spaces Their 'South Keys District Centre Proposed Land Use Program' document was particularly thorough in outlining the need for many programs other than shopping for the community The proposal included sports facilities such as an arena, curling rink, pool, gym, and squash courts, a Health Centre with a clinic, group practice space, and a pharmacy, Socio Cultural services including a library, day care, and other office space Murray and Murray wished to allocate roughly 250,000 sq ft to these subsequent programs, about half of the overall land

2 Larry Smith Regional shopping centre study Bank street/hunt club road Ottawa Ontario (update 1978) 1976 City Archives Ottawa



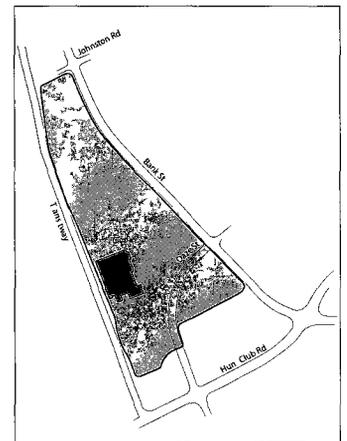
WALMART STORE #3131 AERIAL
 source: <http://www.bing.com/maps/>



**SOUTH KEYS DISTRICT CENTRE
 CONCEPT**

by Murray & Murray Architects 1975

source: Murray & Murray Architects & Planning
 Consultants South Keys District Centre Proposed Land
 Use Program Report by Architects Ottawa 1975



**ACTUAL SOUTH KEYS SHOPPING
 CENTRE LOCATION**

The South Keys project was shelved, un-shelved, dusted off and re-shelved, as Campeau Corporation underwent financial troubles. They eventually sold the property to Trinity Development Group Inc in the 1990s. Trinity's proposal for a Box Store-style shopping centre on the land was accepted by Ottawa City Council in February 1994. The Ottawa City Council vote was carried to allow the project to move forward provided "that future site plan applications for this subdivision examine the option of orienting the buildings rather than the parking lot to the street in order to create a more pedestrian friendly environment"³ Recorded in the City Council meeting minutes, it is clear that the Planning Committee and City Council repeatedly drew attention to the inclusion of 'Public Space' with building frontage along a main concourse. Seen today, South Keys shows no evidence of such stipulation.

South Keys Shopping Centre, like many other projects of its type, is predominately a consumer oriented space. Just as Murray & Murray Architects proposed more integrated program strategies, Ottawa City Council also brought attention to the importance of public space and requested consideration for the pedestrian and sightlines from the street. Even though some people recognized the need for an integrated District Centre, in the end the result was the South Keys District Shopping Centre. Consequently, South Keys caters only to the automobile, and is designed with little or no other community facilities.

WALMART STORE #3131

Walmart Discount Store #3131, built in 1995, is one of the larger lots at South Keys, measuring roughly 13,000 m² (140,000 sq. ft.) To contextualize this vastness, a series of graphics compare Walmart's size to non-consumer spaces (Appendix A). Take, for example, the area of Store #3131 being equivalent to 192 local fair-trade Bridgehead coffee shops, or being comparable in size to an Ottawa centretown city block.

³ City of Ottawa Canada City Council Meeting, February 16, 1994 By E M Robinson
Vol 6 (Ottawa Department of Planning and Development, 1994), 167

Like most Walmart Discount Stores, Store #3131 has an extensive list of available services, from a travel agency (Connection Centre), Garden Centre, Grocery and Frozen Foods; hearing supplies/assessment store (Hear at Last), hunting gear, Lotto, McDonald's, pharmacy, Photo Centre, hair salon, and Tire & Lube Express Centre. The list goes on. This Walmart, like all the others, has become a true variety store, a completely updated five-and-dime, open year round, twenty-four hours a day.

Since 2010 Walmart Store #3131 has been undergoing an expansion. Open throughout renovations, Walmart is adding roughly 2,000 m² (21,500 sq. ft.) of floor space to include a fresh food department – the same department that will also feed the farm animals in our Alternate Realm above. More often than not, Walmart must abandon their current store when they wish to expand and begin from the ground up at a new location. Luckily at this specific site there was a couple rows of parking space between the current store and Future Shop next door; just enough space to accommodate the expansion.

Currently in Ottawa there are seven Walmart Stores. All stores are located among other big box stores in similar exurban conditions. Julia Christensen, author of Big Box Reuse, states that “by examining the evidence [of the surrounding architecture], we gather an insightful portrait of culture.”⁴ This sprawling landscape is representative of our culture today – of Ottawa today.

We are what we build.

By examining the contemporary big-boxed landscape, does our current portrait define us as auto-dependent consumers? Should the acquisition of ‘things’ be the dominant social and cultural condition shaping exurbia?

Can what we build define us?

Christensen argues “...constructions on Earth are also a great instigator of change. What we build perpetuates a feedback loop, determining



BIG BOX REUSE
Julia Christensen
source: Christensen, Julia Big box reuse. Cambridge, MA
MIT P 2008

⁴ Julia Christensen. Big box reuse. (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2008), 9.

activities of the future.”⁵ Could an alternate landscape above these shopping centres not then influence people to engage in activities other than shopping? With programs from community gardens to swimming pools to petting zoos, would this not encourage sports, recreation, and leisure? The aim is that the community will ultimately alter their previous consumer routines to include the new, *cultural* addition in the built exurban landscape.

The ‘Unpacked’ Alternate Realm introduces vertical density to a sprawling horizontal development (and reintroduces the lost community programs once proposed by Murray & Murray) while respecting the site’s history of agriculture. This project attempts to juxtapose the Big Box landscape with an Unboxed alternative.

5 Christensen, 9.

MENU:

SITE —  Site
AIRSPACE


OCCUPANTS —  Occupants
PUBLIC


FORM / ORGANISATION —  Form/Organisation
'ACTION ALLEY' a k a MAIN STREET


 Form/Organisation
GRID

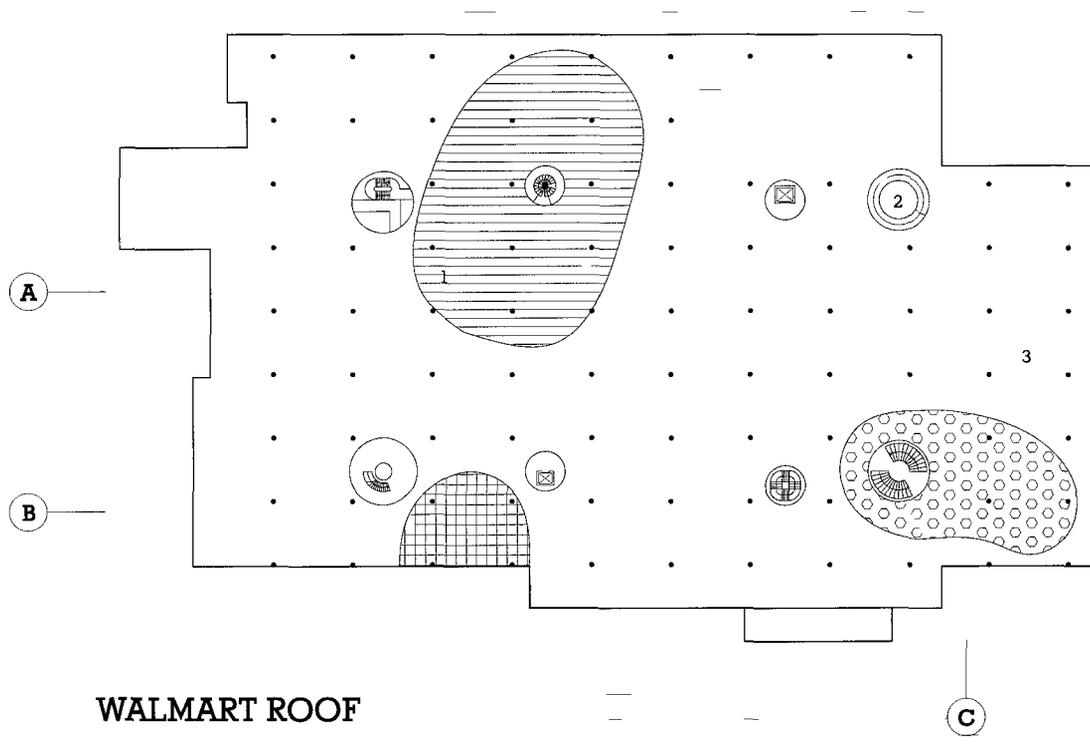

 Form/Organisation
ENTRANCE


PROGRAM —  Program
FARM


 Program
PARK

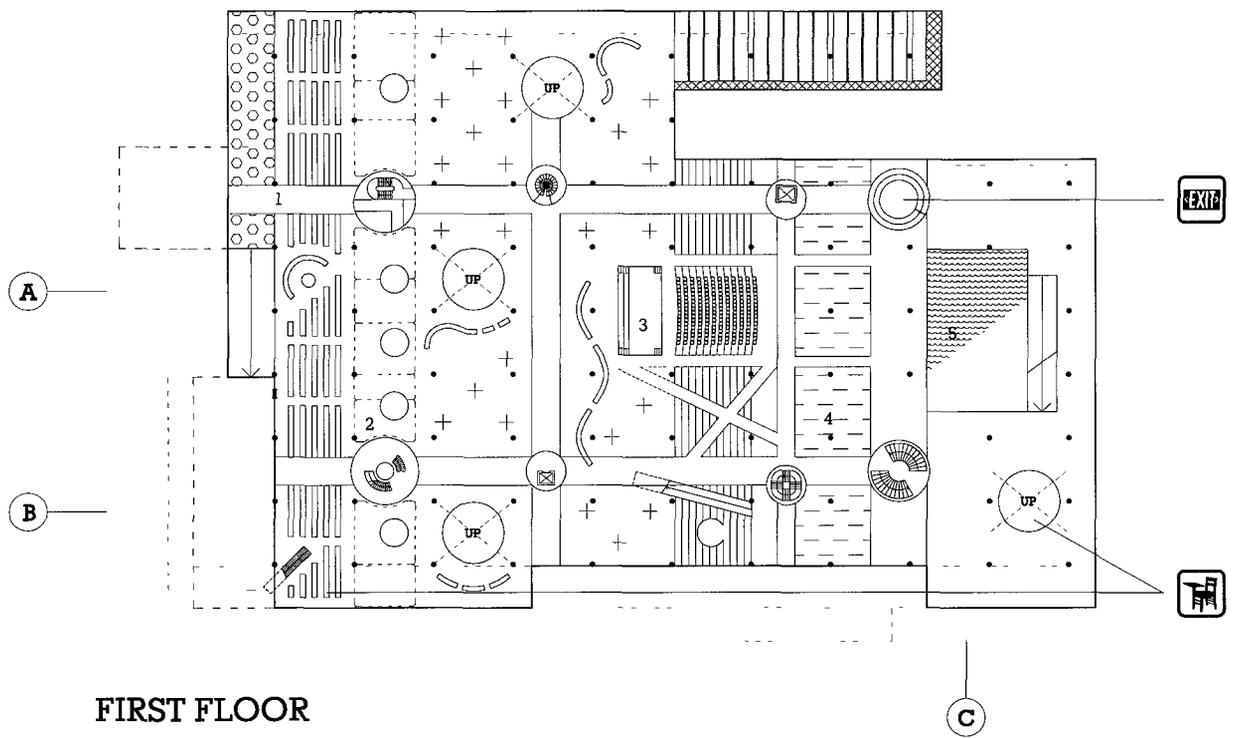

 Program
EDUCATION


CONSTRUCTION —  Construction
1: _ SCALE

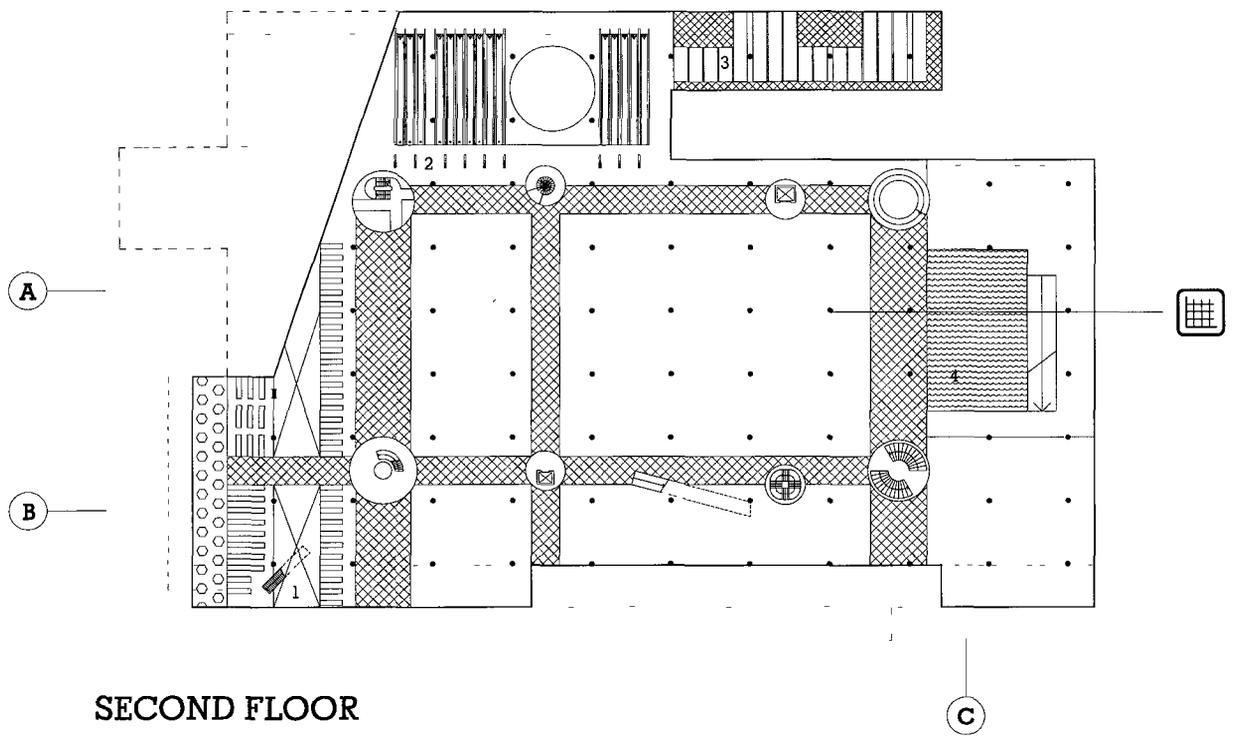



WALMART ROOF

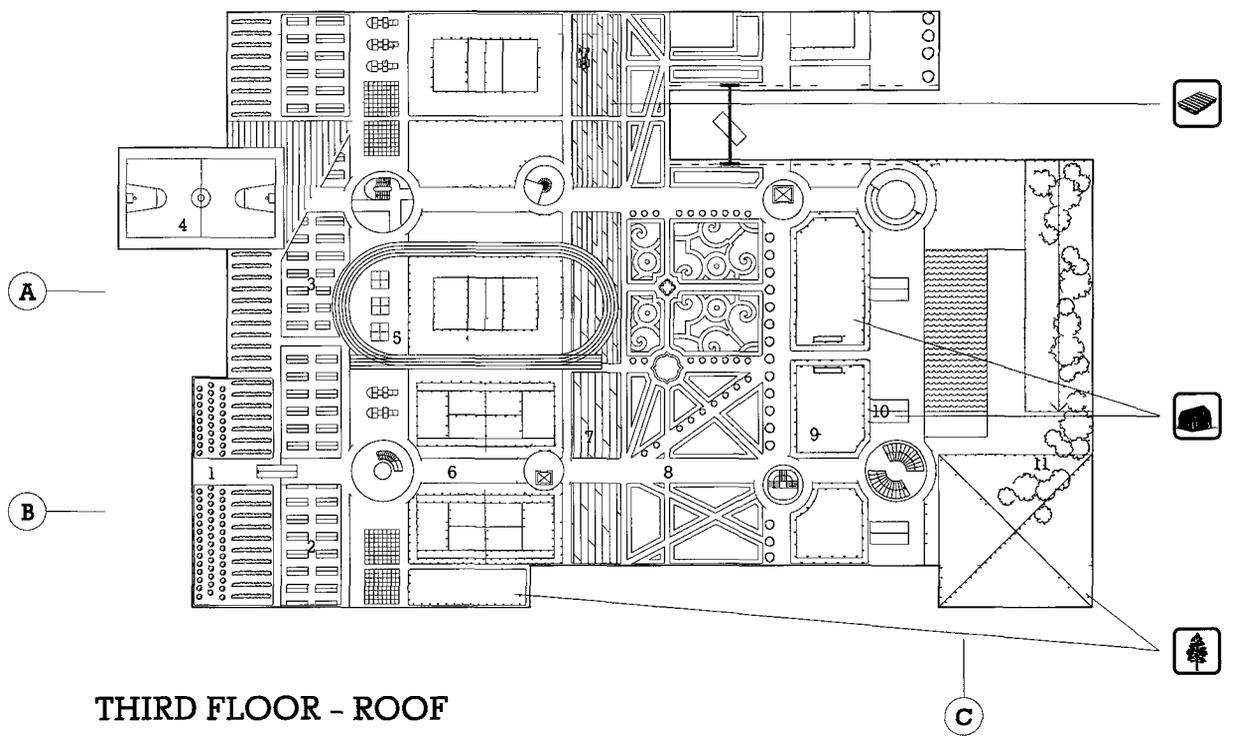
- 1 skylights
- 2 vertical access
- 3 walking path



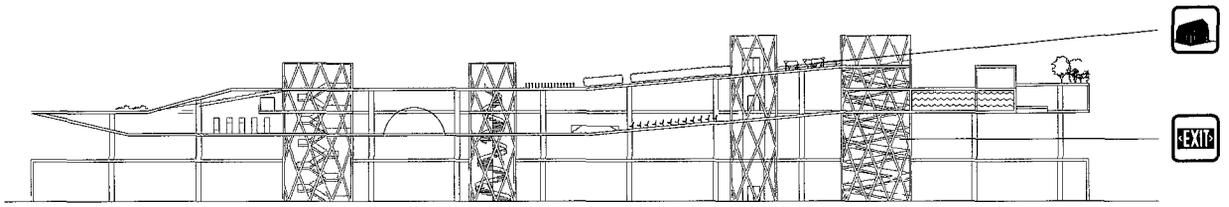
- 1 library + study space
- 2 classrooms with viewing bubbles to below
- 3 amphitheater
- 4 gallery
- 5 swimming pool



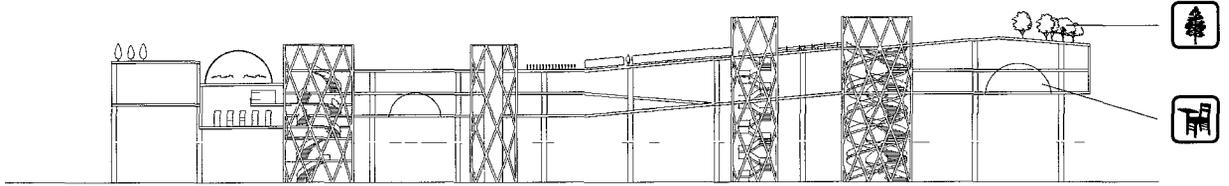
- 1 library + study space
- 2 bowling alley
- 3 shipping containers
- 4 swimming pool



- 1 christmas tree farm
- 2 greenhouses
- 3 community gardens
- 4 basketball court
- 5 sports fields
- 6 running track
- 7 hay fields
- 8 french gardens
- 9 petting zoo
- 10 barns
- 11 forest



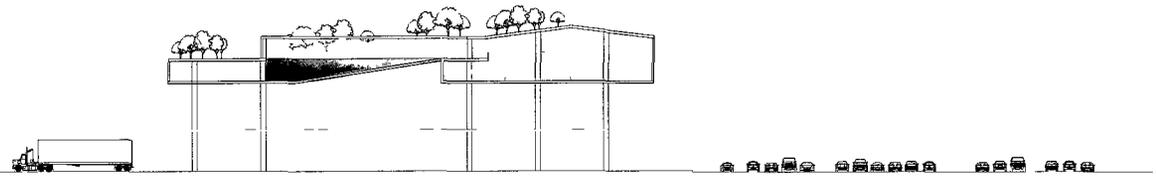
SECTION 'A'



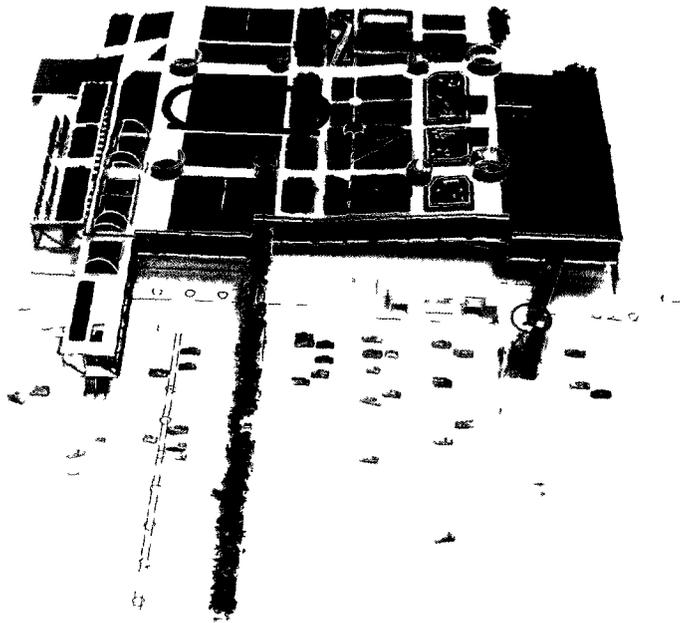
SECTION 'B'

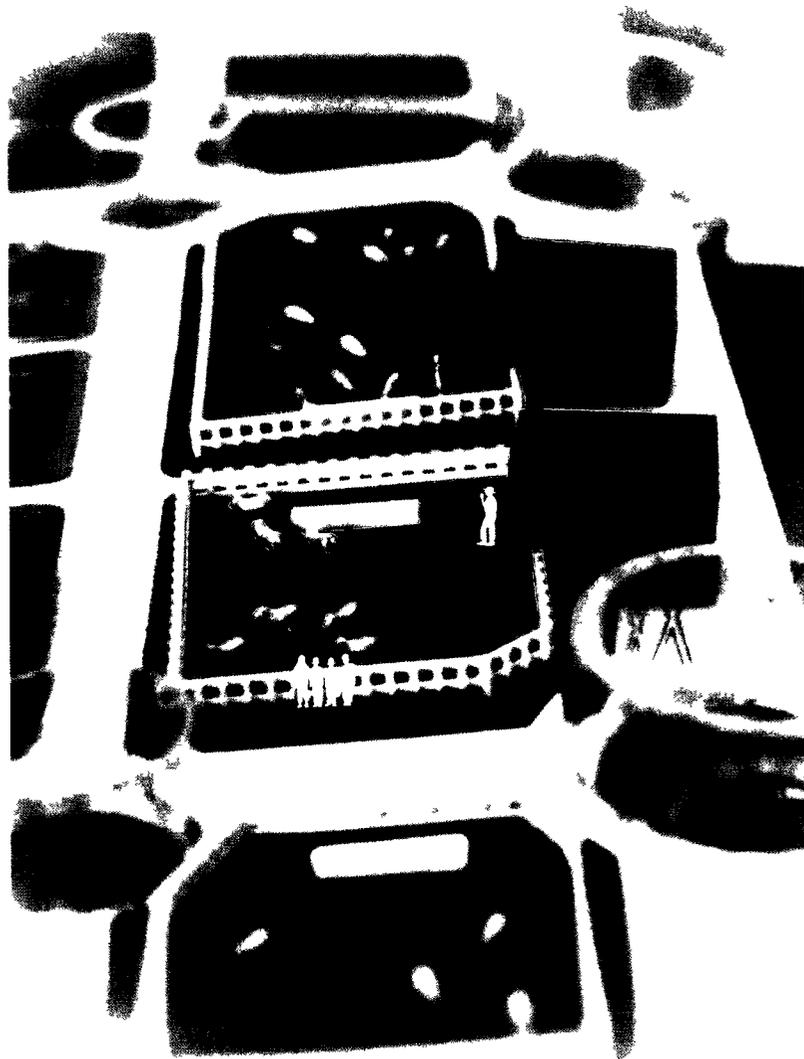


ELEVATION

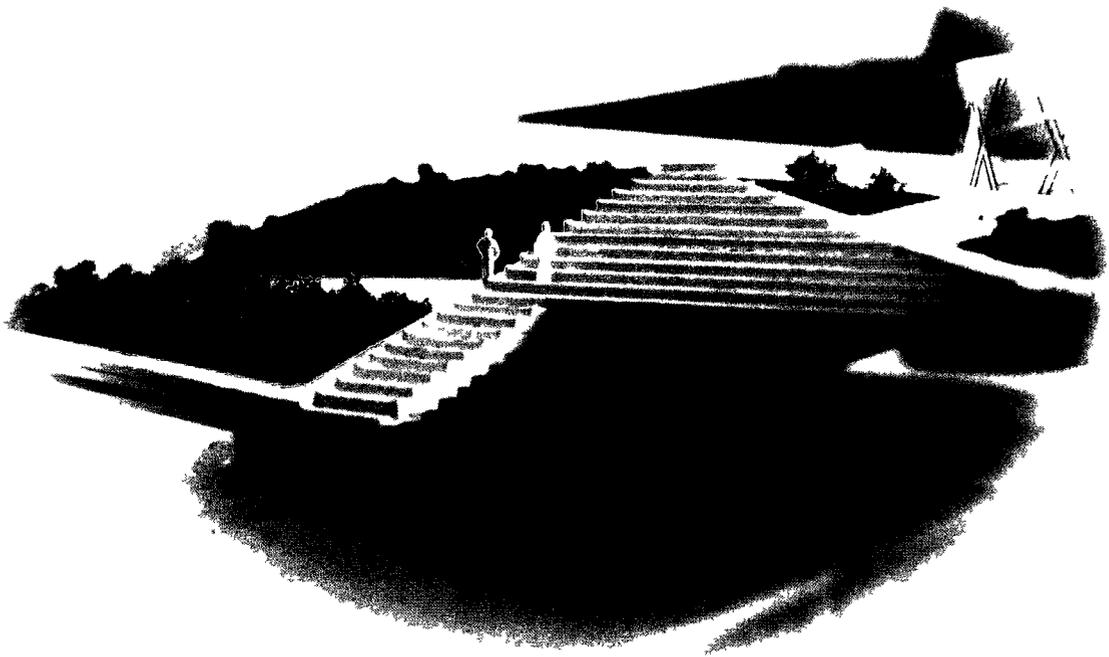


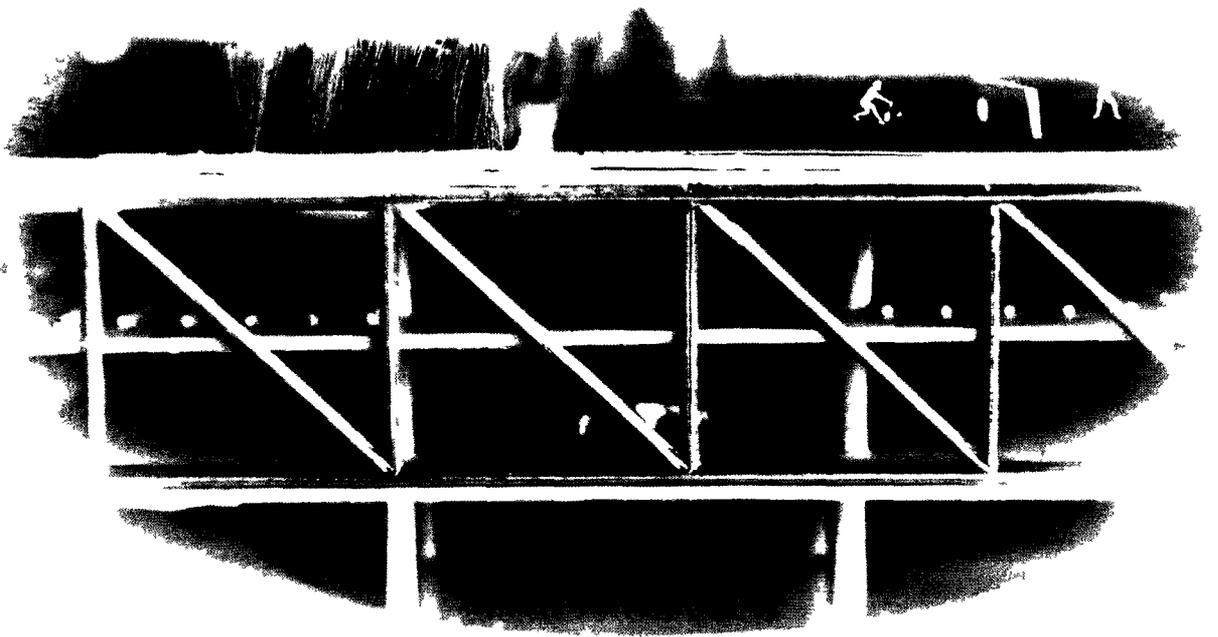
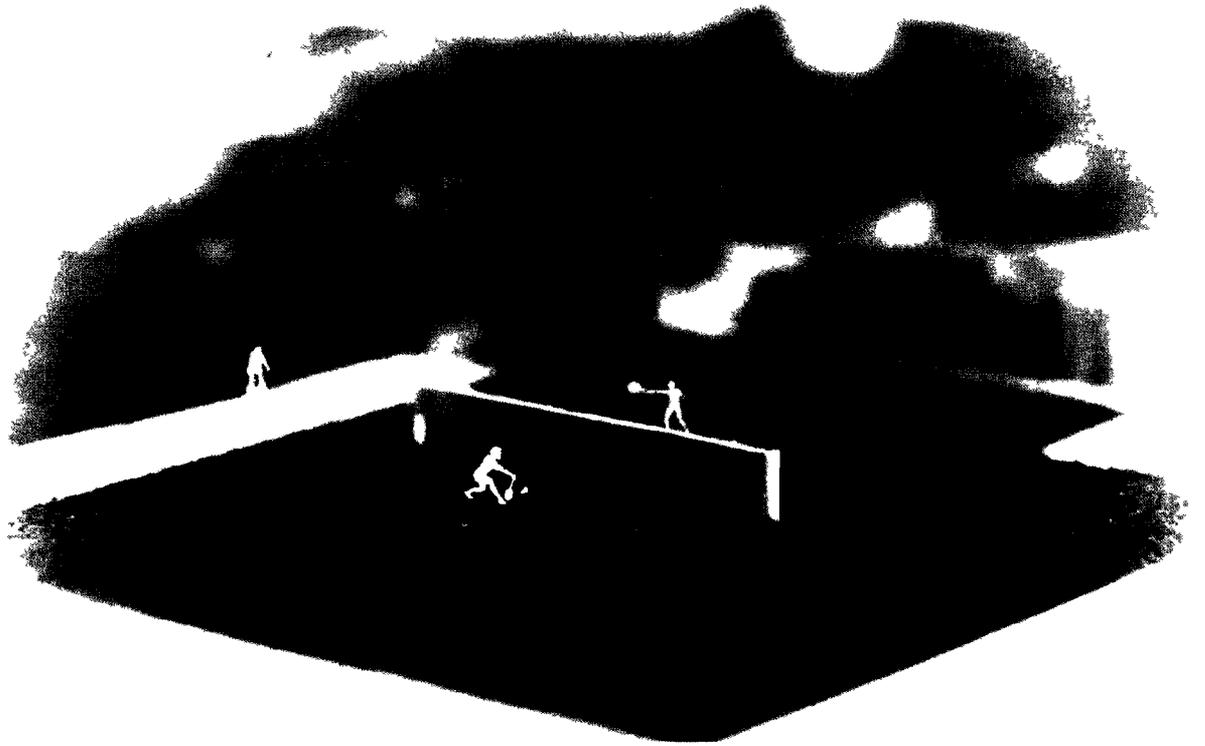
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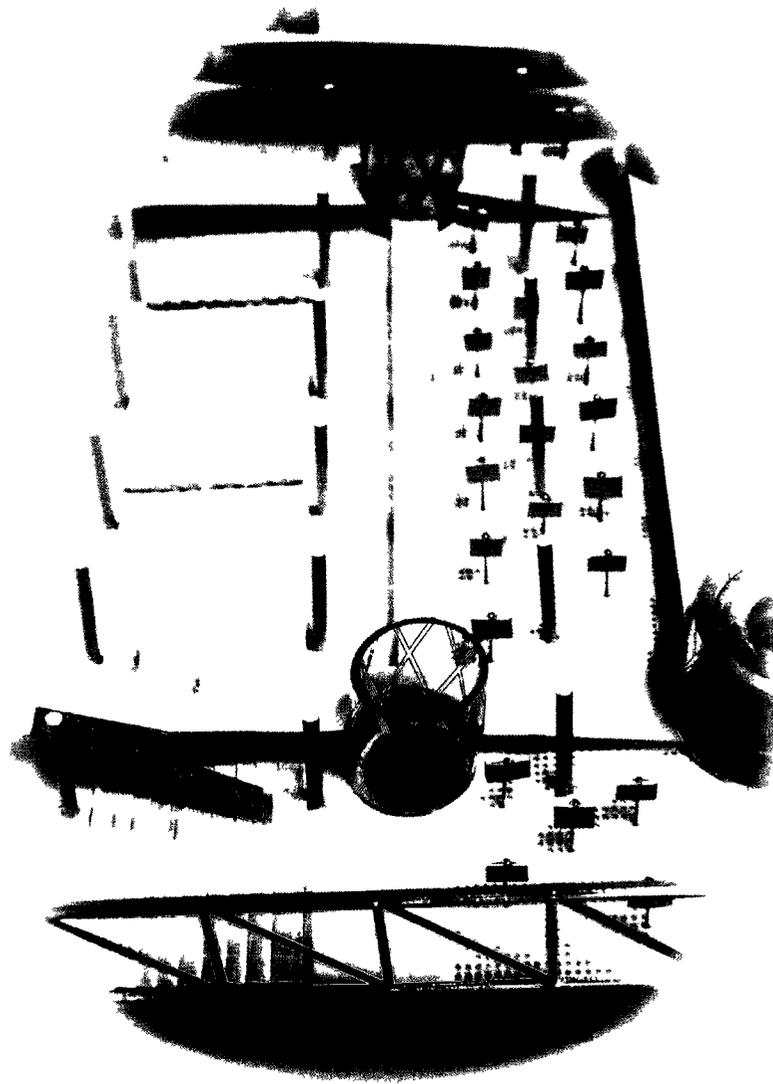


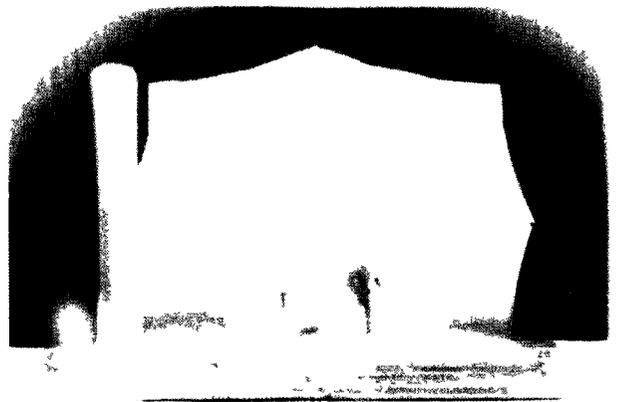


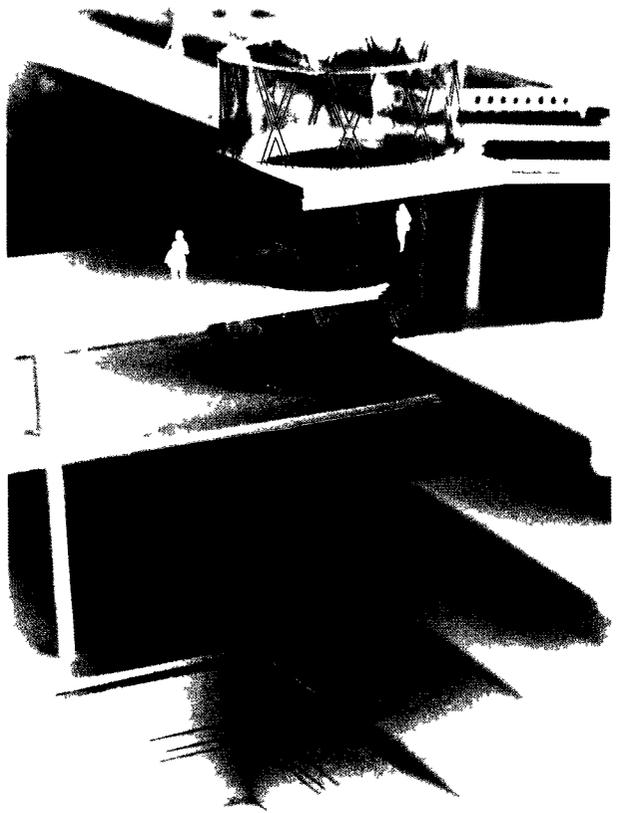
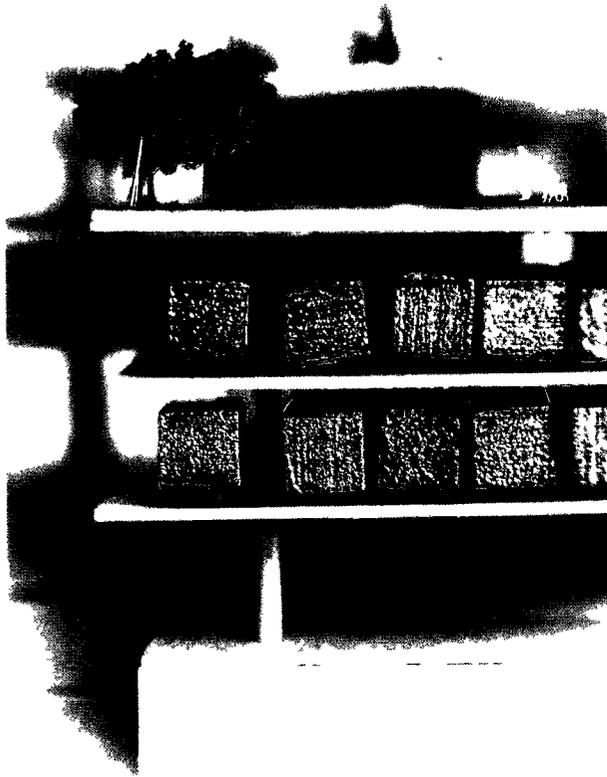


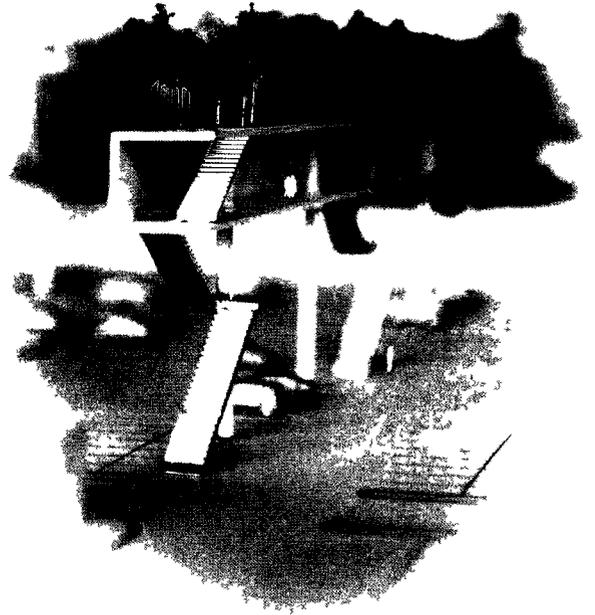
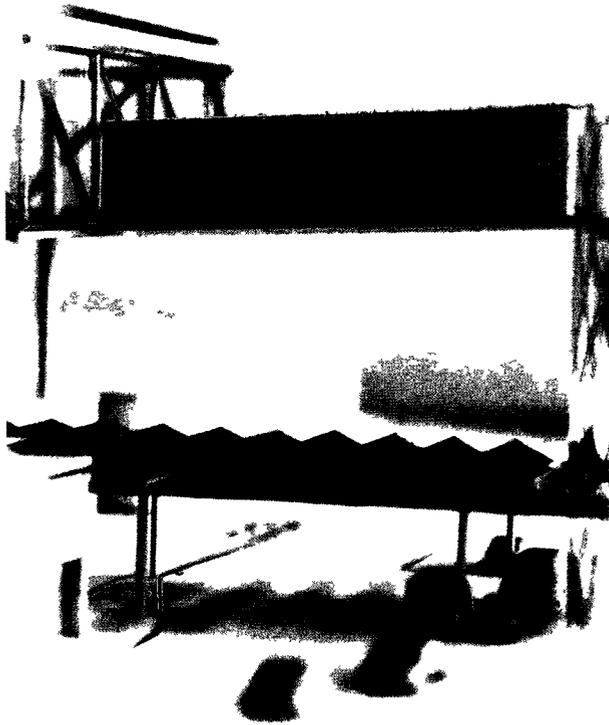


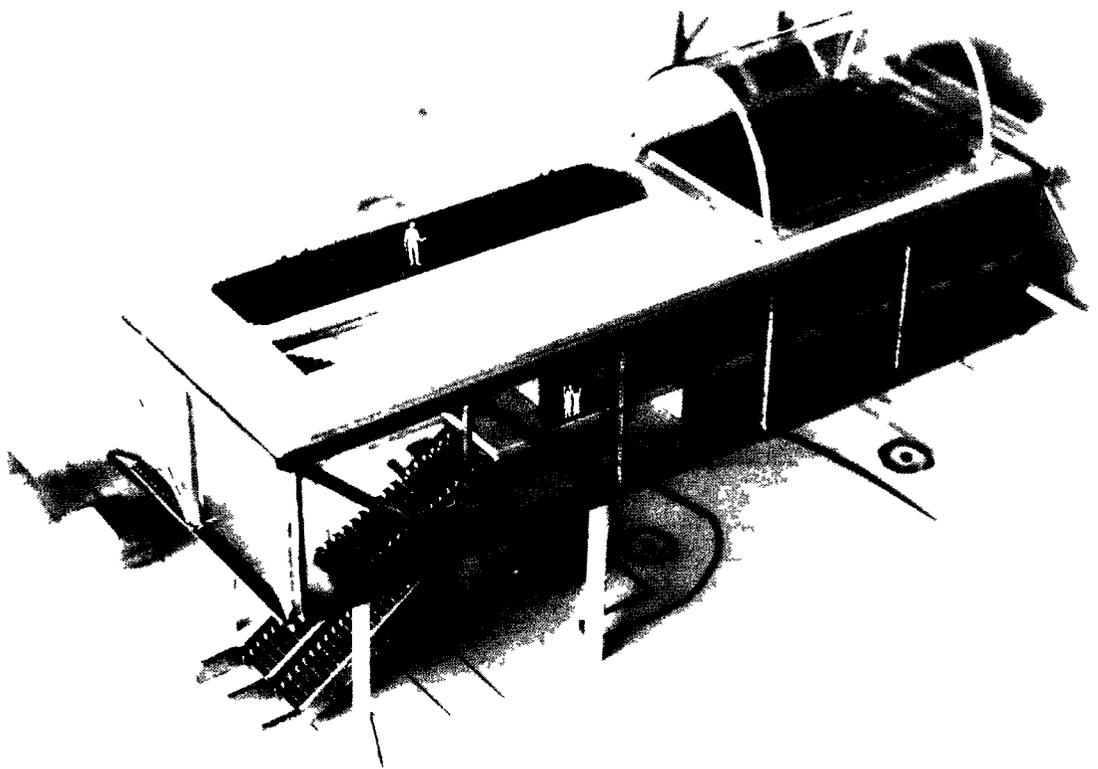


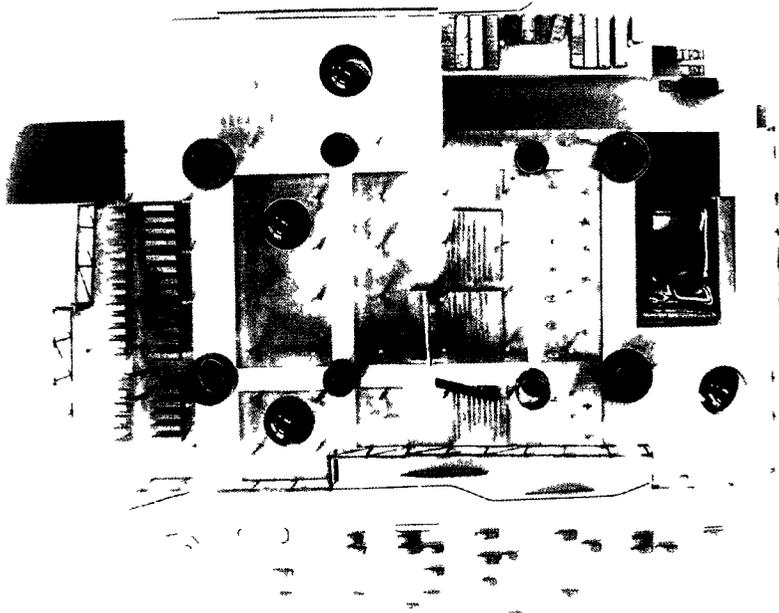
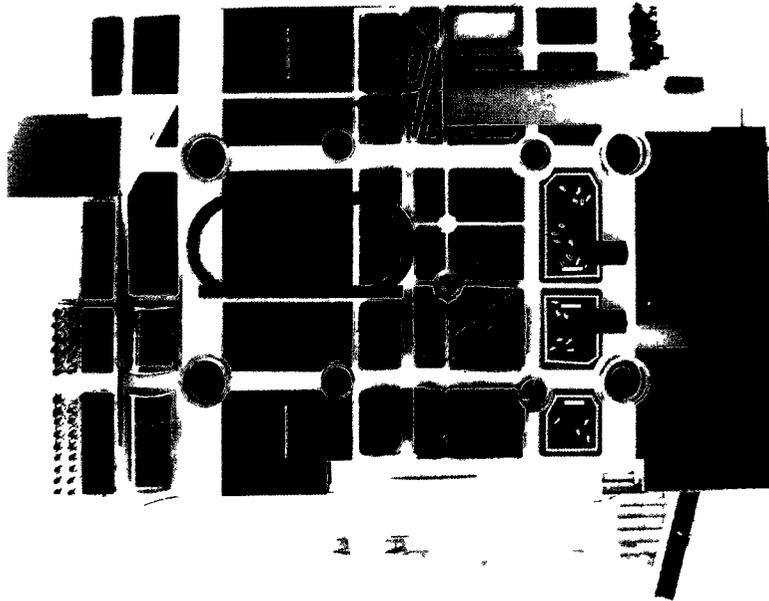


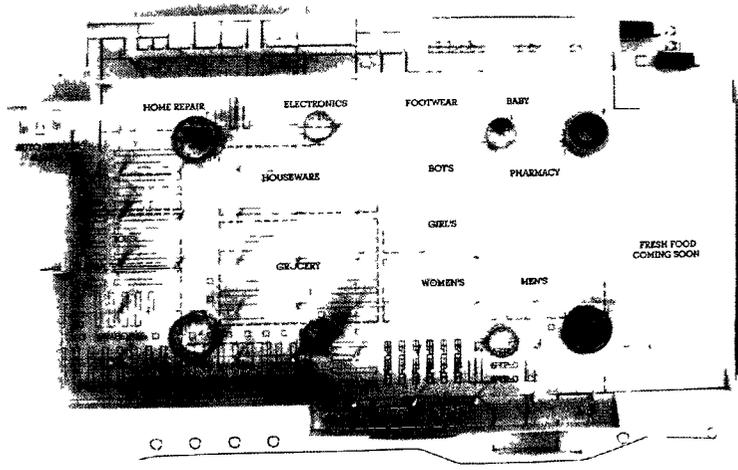
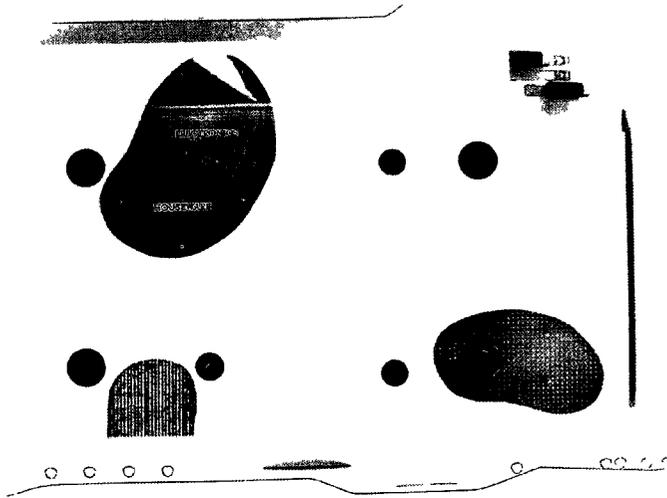




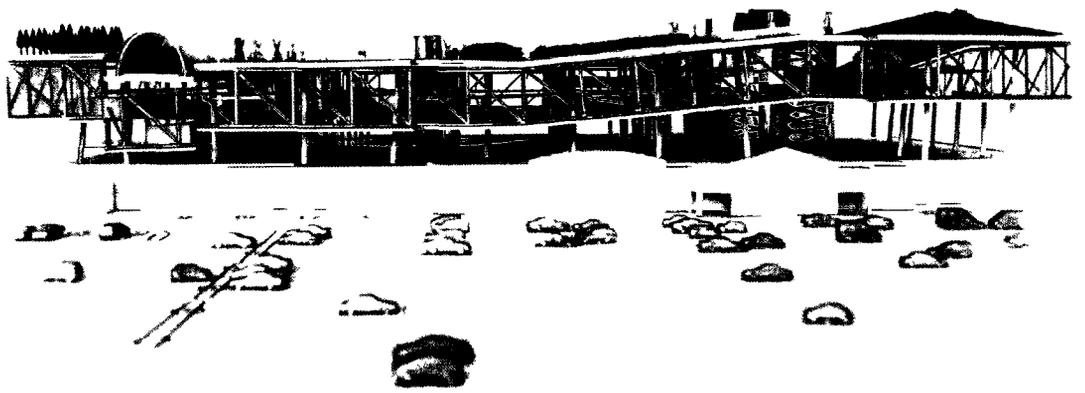












WALMART 2050

Post-shopping

A FUTURE IS IMAGINED

Imagine a Big Box Store in the year 2050. Imagine that each Big Box Store will have an alternate realm floating above, offering entirely new programs and places for people to interact, relax and sustain themselves – to live off the land, or in this case, roof scape. Imagine that each Big Box Store has long since been evacuated of its consumer purposes. Imagine that corporations have fizzled. Yet both buildings and the infrastructure have been repurposed or reinvented to serve contemporary society, in the year 2050, after natural resources have run dry, after we have peaked from Big Oil.

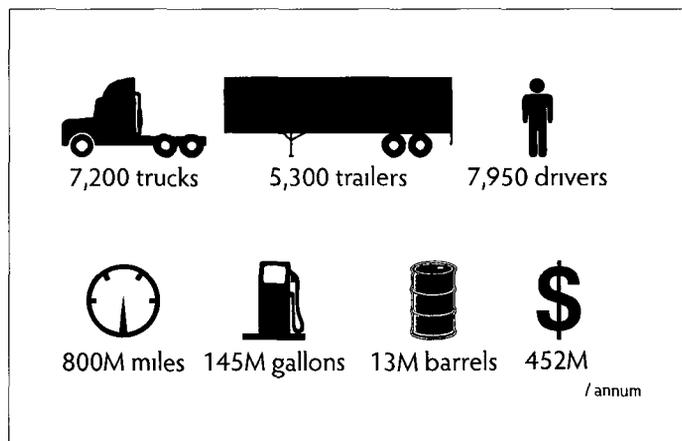
The Big Box, once the host to an alternate realm, has now been overtaken by its alternative. The initial proposal for the alternative, circa 2011, was not, however, to push out or take over the enterprise. Indeed, it relied on Walmart to play an important role in the inauguration of an alternative. Yet in *Reinterpreting Walmart*, the information omitted from the ‘sales pitch’ to Walmart (as presented in the chapter Unpacking the Big Box) was, in fact, precisely the information that suggested the real possibilities of the alternative and a plan for its future – a future beyond consumerism. The difference between the corporation Walmart and the alternate realm – and therefore the reason for the alternative outlasting the host – was the consideration for the future.

Our contemporary consumer culture is preoccupied with living in the present. Communication, technology, and shopping all offer immediate gratification. Our daily schedules are filled up with work, commuting consumes hours out of our day, and dinners are often pre-made. Our fast-paced lives are focused more on the present and neglect the pressing realities of the future. Retail corporations are dependent on a presumed never-ending supply of resources to produce goods. Our consumer habits depict the disposable culture we have become, demonstrated not only through the products we use once or twice and throw away (to end up in a landfill), but, on a larger scale, in the ephemeral consumer spaces like the Big Box Store. These

actions reflect our inattention to the long-term. The abandoned lots of an outgrown big box store are an irresponsible use of space, leaving a careless void in the urban fabric and a simultaneously under and over exploitation of land and natural resources. Acts like this should remind us to plan for the future. The alternate spatial realm attempts to repair the disconnection between our contemporary consumer lifestyles and a long term plan for the future.

Walmart 2050 responds to possible changes and limits of growth that generations may face in the next 40 to 50 years. Speculation is already circulating today about drinking water shortages, global warming, rising sea levels, and exploding populations needing to be fed – all of these depleting natural resources.

Yet change is imminent! Consider, for example, the looming possibility of the end of oil. How will Walmart, the current leaders in logistics with their just-in-time delivery, transport goods when oil prices skyrocket? How will they acquire goods for us to buy? How will they be able to stock their shelves? How will we shop? In other words, how will we (and Walmart) produce and consume ‘things’?



When Walmart can no longer fill its shelves, what will become of the big box craze that is currently representative of our societies? If by *Reinterpreting Walmart* an alternate realm can be imagined, then could the entire Walmart network not serve to accommodate an alternate network for social cultural cities? Julia Christensen's research in [Big Box Reuse](#) covers how many big box retailers played a role in recovery

efforts after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005¹ Despite what the Walmart's motives might have been, it was their distribution centres, trucks, and information systems, making up their famed 'just-in-time delivery' supply chain that channeled disaster relief efforts. "Ultimately, Walmart performed relief tasks that are generally assumed to be the role of the government, including the distribution of blankets, water, radios, and even strawberry Pop-Tarts. The Walmart Corporation has harnessed the infrastructure of the country so effectively that in a time of emergency, in a time of disaster, those same networks can be put to use to save lives."² Water and blankets were distributed as swiftly as the products in the Walmart store themselves. In other words, Walmart's profit-driven practices have developed a network of host infrastructure that could all become a part of a growing alternative. Whether adopted through a polite sales pitch to the Walmart of today, or seized if/when Walmart goes out of business, an alternate city could be designed, channeled through Walmart's entire retail network.

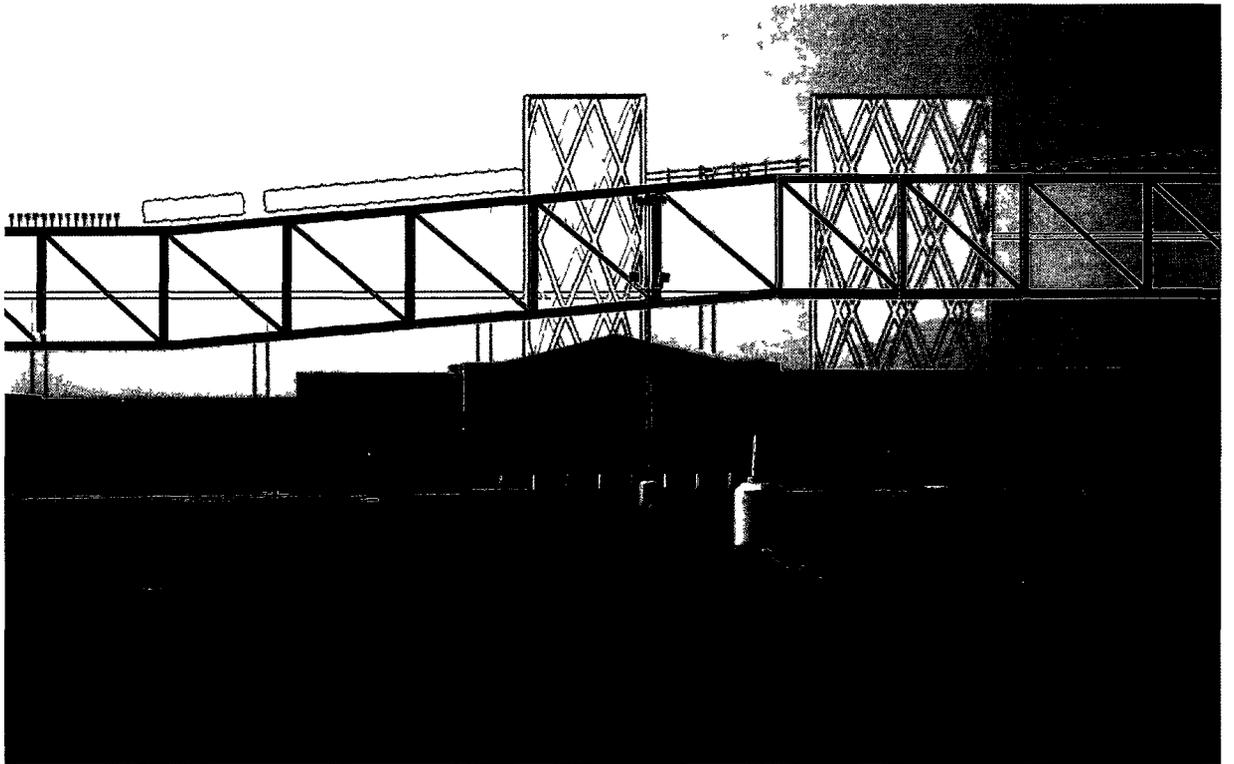
Rosalind Williams states: "Our dreams are coming up against the reality of revolutionary aspirations. Now that the 'democratization of luxury' is being extended globally, we realize that even our moderate versions of luxury cannot possibly be copied by the world's population. Neither natural nor human resources permit the extension of the American way of life to the entire planet."³ Assuming consumer trends of today can no longer be sustained, the acquisition of things will no longer be defining our built environment. However, in the future, the remnants of the failed consumer space like the big box will become a common, even accepted, landmark as a thriving site for an alternative to a passé consumer society

In the year 2050, Walmart may still be in our vocabulary, but no longer as a place to shop; instead, we can imagine that it will become a place – really, a site – for a thriving, sustainable, community, maybe even a utopian one, well after consumerism has been overcome.

1 Julia Christensen Big box reuse (Cambridge, MA MIT P, 2008), 198

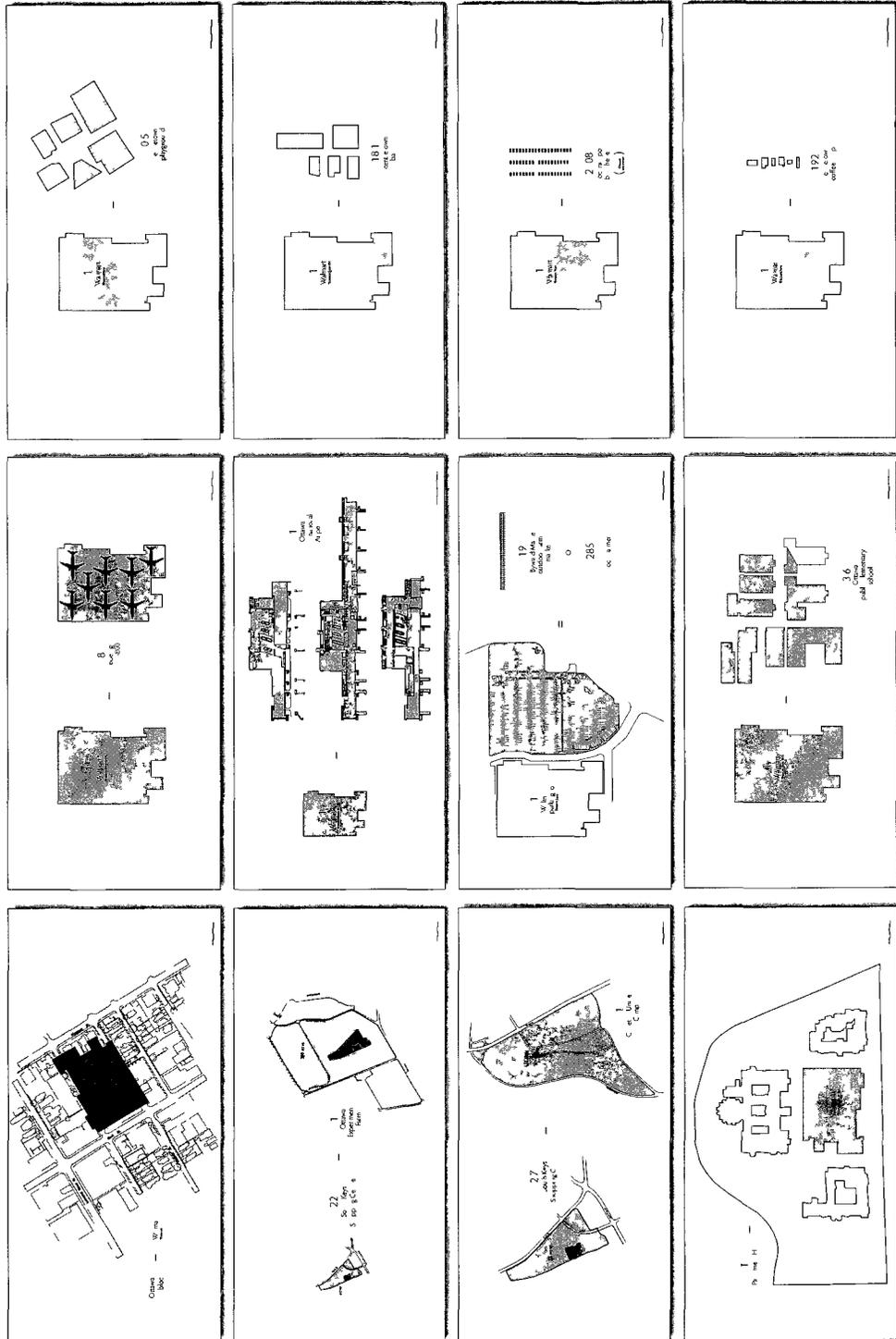
2 Christensen, 202

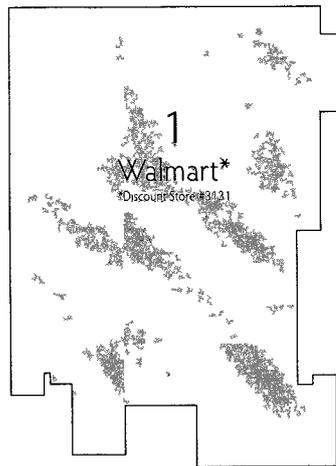
3 Rosalind H Williams Dream worlds mass consumption in late nineteenth-century France (Berkeley Univ of Calif P, 1982), 396



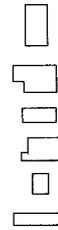
**APPENDIX A:
SCALE OF WALMART**

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SCALE OF WALMART**



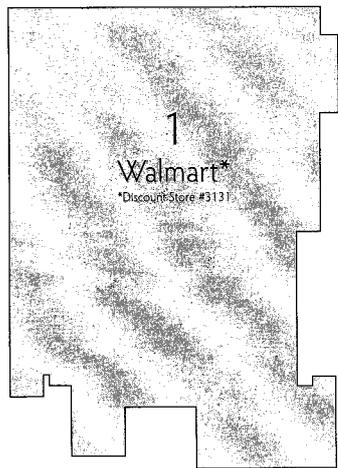


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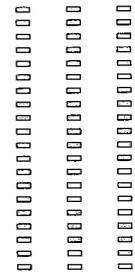


192
centretown
coffee shops

0 m

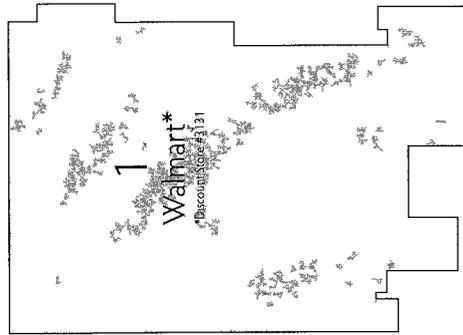
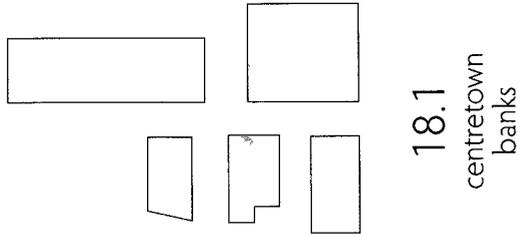


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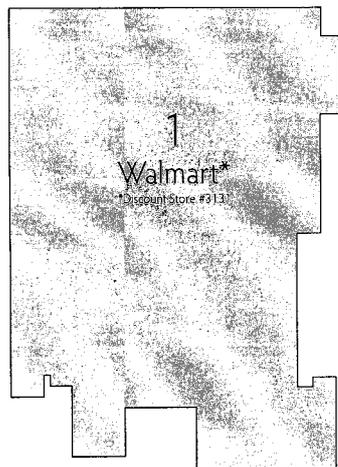
2108
oc transpo
bus shelters
(1/3
Ottawa's
bus shelters)



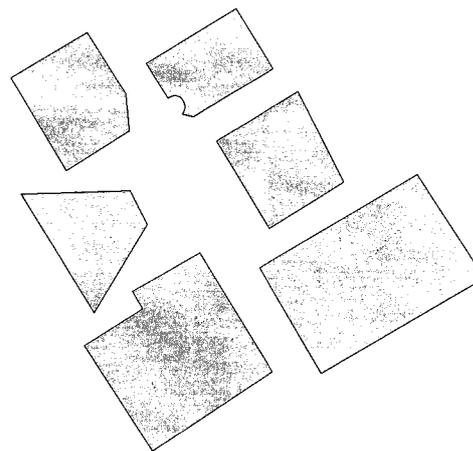


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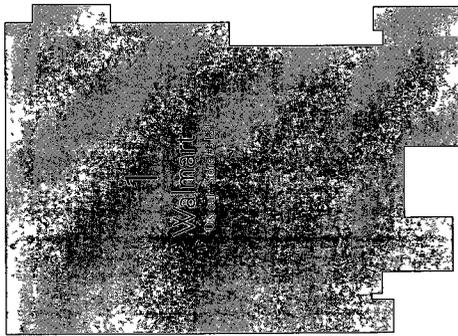


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3.6
Ottawa
public elementary
schools





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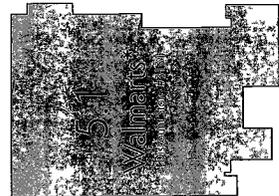


19
'Byward Market'
outdoor farmers
markets

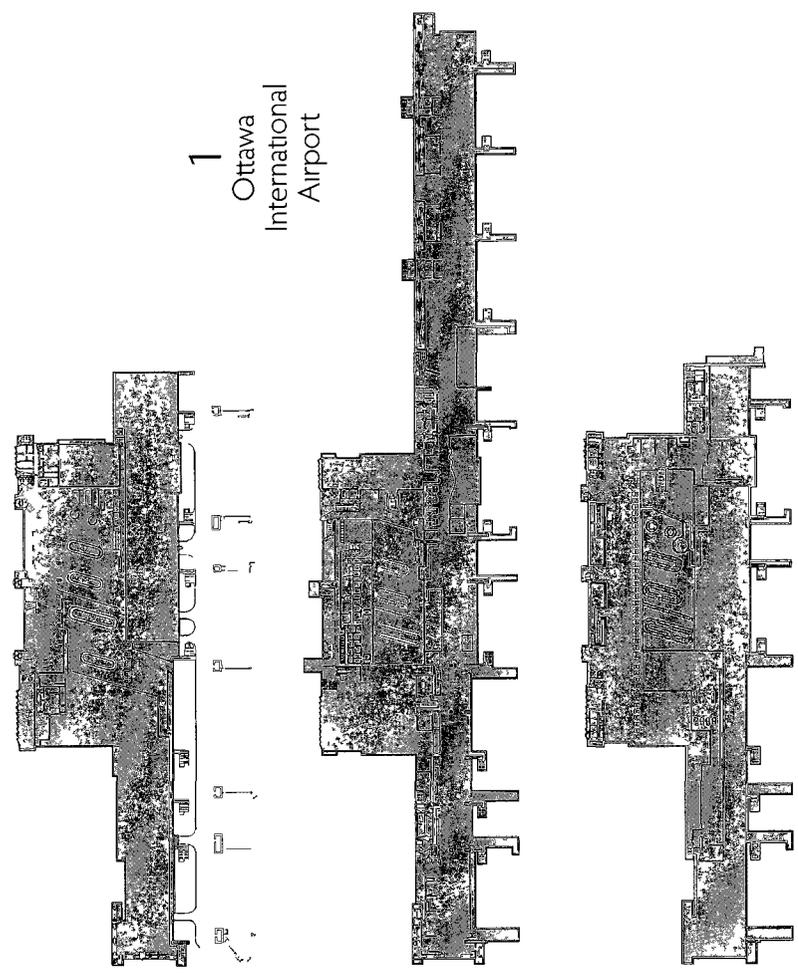
or

285
stalls for
local farmers

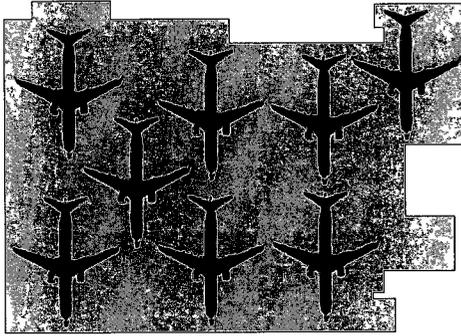




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6
25



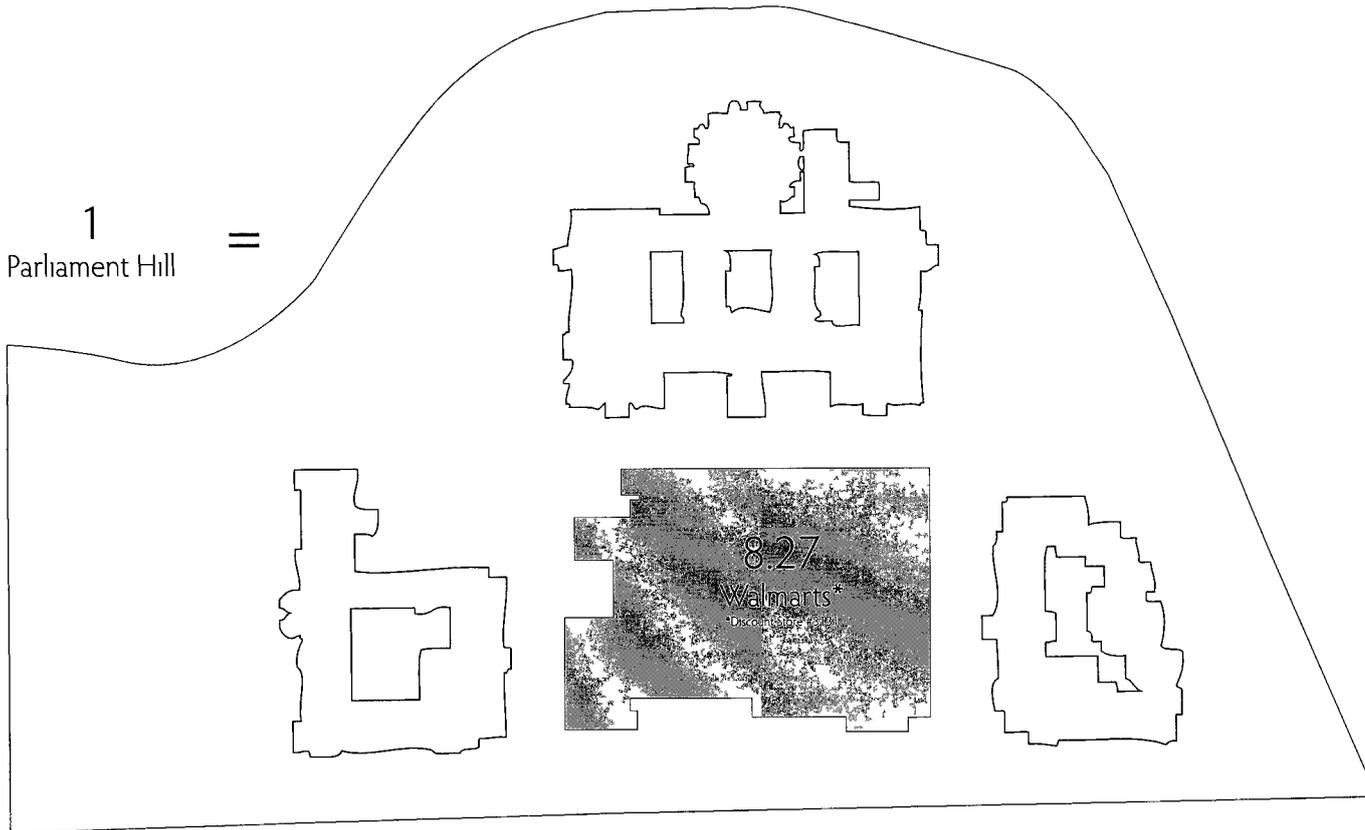
8
Boeing
737-800

=



1
Parliament Hill

=



10 m



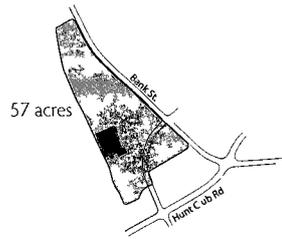
2.7
South Keys
Shopping Centres

=



1
Carleton University
Campus

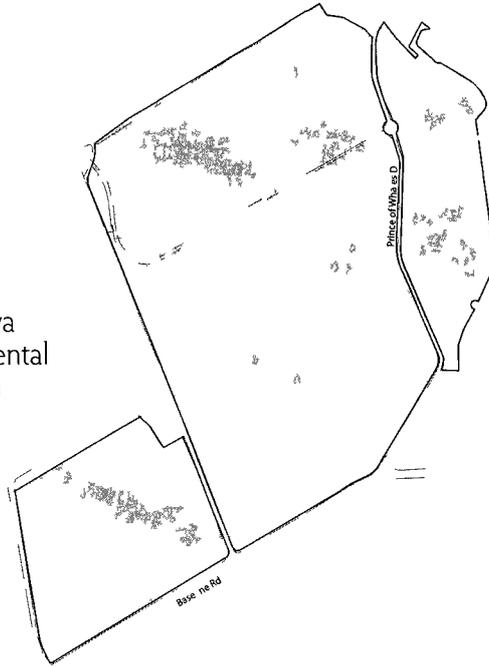


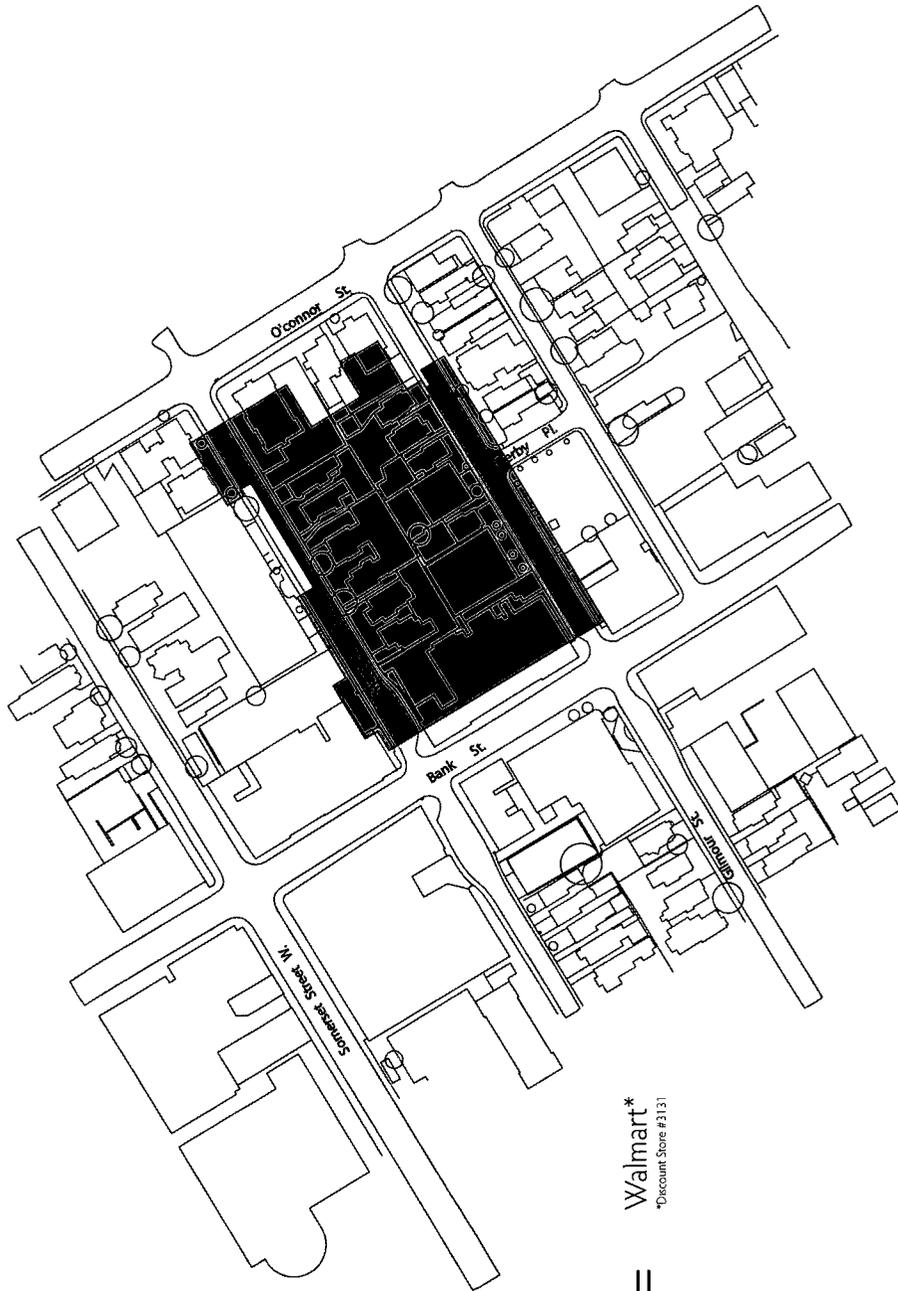


22
South Keys
Shopping Centres

=

1
Ottawa
Experimental
Farm





Ottawa
city block

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