

Fugitive Architecture: Obsolescence, Aspiration, and Adaptation  
in Vancouver's Urbanizing Industrial Areas

by

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## **Abstract**

'Fugitive Architecture' is a provocation born as a response to development practices that commodify architecture through the dictum of "highest and best use." In contrast to market-driven aspirational architecture, this thesis problematizes notions of urban decay and renewal, unsettling norms of market economics and urban planning. Profit-driven design methodologies diminish a building's material quality and longevity, adversely impacting life-cycle outcomes. Central to this thesis is a new design approach that embraces obsolescence and uses adaptability to prolong building lifespans while anticipating aging. This expands material and temporal notions of transience to include socioeconomic and political factors in the built environment. Fieldwork, including the photographic documentation of existing conditions in Vancouver's urbanizing industrial landscapes, informs speculative design interventions over a continuum of scales, from infrastructures to assembly details. Fugitive architecture reciprocates the evolving needs of building inhabitants, area residents, and local communities as they face pervasive gentrification.

This thesis acknowledges the traditional, unceded and occupied territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́lilwətaʔł (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. As a guest in this territory, this acknowledgement recognizes my part in the collective responsibility to take care of this land that we share.

I recognize my privilege as a white settler and beneficiary of the structural and institutionalized oppression, erasure, and marginalization of Indigenous people in society and in academia.

## **Acknowledgments**

This thesis is for Vancouverites—for every person that lives, works, or frequents the areas described in this text, and for the communities they form. These are the people that shape fugitive architecture and that, in turn, are shaped by it.

To Lesley and Chris – my loving parents

Thank you for being with me during the ups and downs, and for our many conversations.

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## Preface

The primary focus of this thesis is on Vancouver's light industrial areas, their buildings, and the communities active within them. Due to the pandemic, it was not possible to visit the interiors of most of these spaces, while connecting with individuals and businesses active in these spaces also proved challenging due to the circumstances. This led my preliminary fieldwork to extend its focus to the arts and creative sectors, also active in the industrial areas, whose spaces and community members remained more accessible to the general public.

My fieldwork conducted at the site and in the study area lasted 8 months and encompassed dozens of informal and more focused conversations with community members, supplementing photographic surveys that documented existing conditions in the built environment. As a non-resident, I felt a responsibility to spend extensive amounts at the site and in the study area, observing and interacting with community members. The decision to conduct this outreach, in addition to the photographic surveys and site studies, was informed by a social justice framework which does its best to represent the needs and perspectives of local residents and communities from a diverse array of backgrounds.

To respect privacy, the identities of those I communicated with must remain anonymous and identifying details have been changed for this purpose. As such, this preface provides a brief overview of these encounters and a description of the different communities living in the industrial areas that were studied as part of this thesis.

The following chapters explore how these areas have a significant place in Vancouver's identity, representing an industrial history that has mostly been lost, while also hosting a vibrant creative center that is advertised as an important industry leading the region into the future. This thesis hopes to contribute ideas, analysis, and a new design approach that will help shape the built environment in a way that supports and builds upon existing communities.

In addition to traditional light industrial users, such as those in the "production, distribution, and repair" (PDR) category, the communities that were targeted as part of the fieldwork can be broadly categorized under intersecting spheres of "visual arts", "maker culture", and "creative industries." In almost every case, these users occupied older buildings originally built for industrial uses, or that were adapted to suit a new use.

During my fieldwork, I spoke with a significant number of people from these communities, representing a cross section of those living and working in the area, mostly in informal public settings. The single greatest concentration of encounters took place over three days of the 2020 Eastside Culture Crawl, an event similar to Nuit Blanche, where studios, workshops, and galleries open their doors to the public. As I was able to visit dozens of these spaces, and speak directly to their occupants, I learned a lot about the various unique needs associated with different uses of adapted spaces.

In addition to the activities of the Crawl, I had the opportunity to continue a series of more focused one-on-one conversations over the following months, taking place across multiple in-person studio visits in the study area. This involved building relationships with a furniture maker, a painter, a multidisciplinary artist, and a jeweler, all of whom provided firsthand insights into their lived experience of working in industrial spaces in the study area. In response to my thesis work, they provided unique reactions to, and perspectives of, the topic of fugitive architecture.

I also held phone conversations with two different property managers of artist studios in the study area and elsewhere in Vancouver, both of whom were active supporters of these uses instead of traditional light industrial uses. These conversations were crucial to my understanding of real-world factors affecting the operation of these types of spaces. In particular, there are many challenges around city bylaws, zoning, and bureaucracy when adapting spaces to new uses, as well as economic feasibility.

These conversations underlined the importance of challenging conventional planning and development practices, and the value of immersive fieldwork as a methodology which can enrich architectural practice. At a broader level, this thesis problematizes dominant capitalist power structures which have shaped the urban fabric through profit-driven planning and development practices. In this text, the term speculative is used in an academic and theoretical sense. This allows the imagining of many possible futures outside of the typical free-market real estate investment which has so far defined Vancouver. By engaging with local communities and centering the experience of residents, I hope to bridge economic feasibility and existing policy with social issues. The existing development practices often privilege profit over the existing communities who occupy the spaces which can be described as fugitive architecture.

My positionality as an academic acknowledges that I am an external observer and that I do not have the same lived experience as many of the residents of these areas. I am also highly aware of how my thesis and proposed design interventions could be co-opted as a gentrifying force. To prevent this, I have made every attempt to engage with the area's residents and businesses as primary stakeholders to represent their needs and desires.

Furthermore, my perspective from the conventions of architectural training recognizes that it is not typical to use immersive field methods, however these methods afforded me deeper insight into the site conditions and added a greater sense of human agency to the project. I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to interact with the people who live and work in the study area, as they have been foundational in shaping this thesis by providing cues to my design strategies and overall approach. As I will show, a balanced understanding of both the built environment and the social environment was necessary to inform my analysis of fugitive architecture.

*Note on images: Unless credited or noted otherwise, all photographs included as images in this text were taken by the author between September 2020 and April 2021 during fieldwork and are representative of present site conditions in the study area.*

## Introduction

The settler colonial City of Vancouver originated as a center of industry a century and a half ago at Hastings Mill. Today, at the scale of the built environment, Vancouver’s remaining industrial identity and material culture could be lost in the span of a few decades. Few might notice that the characteristic features of industrial areas, including the unassuming and utilitarian buildings that make up the majority of the city’s industrial heritage, have quietly been disappearing as new developments focused on increased density and economic expansion take their place. In this context, the term fugitive may be best defined by its synonym, elusive:

“That which eludes distinct perception or precise definition; evanescent.”<sup>1</sup>

As a lifelong Vancouverite, I have watched as a unique part of this city’s fabric evolves before my eyes. This change is not exclusive to the architectural fabric of the built environment, but also affects the cultural landscapes and underlying communities that animate them. If the current pace of change continues, an irrevocable loss of industrial character—and historicity—is the most likely outcome. The fugitive nature of industrial landscapes means that many characteristic features change with time as obsolescence, decay, development pressures, and other related factors take their toll. This thesis argues that it is insufficient to preserve isolated structures which best characterize the industrial typology, as is current practice, because it is the less prominent architecture that forms the majority of the urban fabric’s social significance. This minor architecture has equal, if not greater, importance in establishing local character. Building on a lifetime of examinations and excursions in the Metro Core industrial areas, the role of this thesis is to advocate for those who live and work in the study area and for the established communities that depend on the types of buildings and spaces which are described as fugitive.



Figure 1. The recently demolished Monte Clark and Equinox galleries, with the new Emily Carr University of Art and Design Campus in the background. The foreground shows the excavation for a stalled condominium project by Onni. Image credit: © Michael Jaworski

1 Fugitive as defined by its synonym, elusive: “elusive, adj.”. OED Online. March 2021. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/60643?redirectedFrom=elusive>



Figure 2. 1600-1602 Western Street, home of The Welding & Engineering Co. Ltd., is part of the Eastern Core Heritage Register. Loading doors with graffiti are framed by warped and worn corrugated steel siding. Image credit: © Michael Jaworski

‘Fugitive Architecture’ is both an original concept and a series of conditions that already exist in the built environment. That is to say, while all architecture is fugitive, it is the analysis of these fugitive conditions that has informed the theories and designs which are proposed in this thesis. Although the initial inspiration for this topic is specific to Vancouver’s rapidly urbanizing industrial areas, this thesis aspires to establish a new design approach with broader applications both regionally and globally in cities facing de-industrialization. Speculation is key to this thesis and its design approach when applied in an academic and theoretical sense which attempts to predict possible futures. This allows for creative visions of future forms of development that subvert the popular usage of the term speculation in economics and real estate to describe the potential for financial gains on an investment.

The documentation of present conditions in Vancouver’s urban industrial landscapes through fieldwork serves as a point of departure in designing facilities for industrial and cultural production. The methodological process of this thesis involved the close study, collection, and analysis of knowledge gleaned from the existing fabric of industrial buildings and from the greater urban fabric in which they exist. This body of knowledge was amassed through fieldwork consisting of recurrent photographic surveys of the study area and site visits to local light industrial spaces of production. During these visits, and by phone when in-person visits were restricted, conversations with the occupants of these spaces provided valuable first-hand input, reflecting their lived experiences in the study area. While the stories included in this text are partly fictionalized, they are based on these real-life conversations. Together, these methods engendered an intimate understanding of a rapidly changing sociocultural, material, spatial, and temporal milieu, which would not have been possible at a distance from these field conditions, such as through the exclusive pursuit of the regular academic mediums of literature review, theory, and study based in empirical research which also support this thesis.

With careful analysis of the fieldwork and further extrapolation of theory, this thesis topic evolved into a design approach that encompasses the key conditions of fugitiveness, obsolescence, aspiration, and adaptation. In turn, this approach has been tested and applied through design exercises that translate these broader fugitive elements into localized design interventions, which are highly responsive to their context. It is hoped that lessons learned through this process will serve as a model for more socially responsive architecture in a broader sense. In particular, design methods focused on adaptability and other lessons learned from the design interventions can be applied to urbanizing industrial landscapes around the world.

Within the theory and approach to ‘Fugitive Architecture’, this thesis relies on foundational works by authors whose literature has deeply informed the positions taken to support this original interpretation of fugitiveness, obsolescence, aspiration, and adaptation as key conditions. How these core works have shaped the positionality of this topic is reflected in the ideas and analysis put forth, with central works referenced throughout the text. An early inspiration for this topic was Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow’s 2001 book *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*,<sup>2</sup> which has had a profound role in identifying and defining the relationality of the four key conditions. Leatherbarrow’s recent book *Building Time: Architecture, Event, and Experience*,<sup>3</sup> expanded on a number of ideas around which ultimately led to this thesis topic. Concerning the study area, the title ideas that see buildings existing over time in constant states of change, without disavowing permanence,<sup>4</sup> ultimately coalesced into the proposed design approach. Other important inspirations which address the fundamentally fugitive spatial, material, and temporal conditions of architecture include the ‘Index of Immaterial Architectures’ in Jonathan Hill’s 2006 book *Immaterial Architecture*,<sup>5</sup> which parallels the fieldwork’s attempt to document the idiosyncratic and peculiar conditions specific to the study area, and Stephen Cairns and Jane Margaret Jacobs’ 2014 book *Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture*,<sup>6</sup> which confronts the inevitable endpoint of building life cycles. To further elaborate on obsolescence as a phenomenon specific to architecture and development, which is seen as part of wider economic and social factors, Daniel Abramson’s 2016 book *Obsolescence: an architectural history*,<sup>7</sup> has been indispensable in elaborating this key condition of fugitive architecture, and to which adaptive reuse is presented as a counterpoint; Sally Stone’s *UnDoing Buildings: adaptive reuse and cultural memory*,<sup>8</sup> has been useful in further defining this relationship. In turn, important architectural inspiration for the design interventions spans many individual works and architects and is referenced throughout the design precedent section of this thesis. These design interventions

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2 Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*. (Cambridge (Mass): MIT Press, 2001).

3 David Leatherbarrow, *Building Time: architecture, event, and experience*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

4 Ibid, 5.

5 Jonathan Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*. (Milton Park; New York: Routledge, 2006). The “Index of Immaterial Architecture” is not discussed in this text because it is a distinctly different theoretical interpretation of fugitive conditions, although Hill’s ‘Index’ is worth reading as a complement to ‘Fugitive Architecture’.

6 Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture*. (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 2014).

7 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016)

8 Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: adaptive reuse and cultural memory*. (New York: Routledge, 2020).

are informed by architects who take a contextual approach to working with existing buildings, including the archetypal works of Gordon Matta Clark (1943-1978), Carlo Scarpa (1906-1978), and Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992), along with more recent works by Wang Shu, Garth Rockcastle and MSR, Bruner/Cott & Associates, and ERA Architects.

To best elucidate 'Fugitive Architecture', which by definition is "hard to define," this thesis will follow a five-chapter structure in three parts.

The first chapter, 'Theory', attempts to unravel the knots, fill in the blanks, and make sense of 'Fugitive Architecture' as a novel architectural approach while laying the foundation for the design interventions described in Chapter 5. Fugitive conditions of architecture exist at the nexus of many different fields such as development, planning, urban geography, sociology, and photography, which will be touched upon throughout this text. This chapter will introduce key theories that will help capture the indeterminate nature of fugitive architecture as applied to industrial sites, in particular with reference to literature studies and built works.

The second chapter, 'Precedent', applies the ideas covered in Chapter 1 to built works in greater detail through the analysis of precedents. These examples have been selected to illustrate both the forms of conventional development which this thesis discourages and is critically responding to, and also the recommended alternative forms of development whose design strategies serve as models for the design interventions presented in Chapter 5.

The third chapter, 'Fieldwork', explains the activities and archival methods that informed the development of this thesis topic, which, together with analysis, form the basis of the theory and approach, and which are woven into the design work as precedent and inspiration. The fieldwork consisted primarily of photographic surveys, mappings, and conversations with locals, and seeks to directly communicate the experiential qualities of the study area. The stakeholders who inform this thesis and its design interventions, and who were identified over the course of the fieldwork, are profiled.

The fourth chapter, 'Locality', details the historical context and background of the study area and site up to the present moment. The complex, multilayered, and nuanced factors that characterize the fugitive architecture found in the False Creek Flats and wider study area are discussed. The social factors that have influenced the choice of site, as well as the political stakes that compel the choice of topic, are critically addressed alongside Vancouver's planning policies. These circumstances are also considered in the context of neoliberalism, real estate investment, and climate mobilization.

The fifth chapter, 'Practice', builds off the preceding chapters by demonstrating the new design approach through design interventions to sites in the study area. As depictions of possible futures, the speculative nature of these interventions illustrates the architectural thinking behind them, and how these thought processes and design processes are continuations of the theory and fieldwork. A temporal narrative guides the discontinuous exposition of various permutations and possibilities of design interventions made to the site through fugitive hybrid drawings.

The conclusion contemplates potential outcomes of the design interventions and revisits key notions of fugitive architecture, while making a call for the continued discussion and analysis of this novel topic in the field of architecture and beyond.

# PART 1

## Chapter 1: Theory

### Overview

One definition of the term fugitive applies to mortality, encompassing regeneration and degeneration as applied to the material treatment of buildings.<sup>9</sup> The discussion of the life and death of buildings is at the core of 'Fugitive Architecture'. This is manifested through the practice of equating a building's life to its use and the equating of disuse to obsolescence, while the life and death of buildings can be symptomatic of the broader life and death of cities.<sup>10</sup>

The overarching study area rests within the economic epicenter of the City of Vancouver. As part of the Metro Core, this area contains the most concentrated development in Metro Vancouver, which is a regional body of twenty-one municipalities.<sup>11</sup> The study area includes the unceded territory that was originally Skwácháys, which in the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh language means "water coming up from ground beneath,"<sup>12</sup> and which is now referred to as the False Creek Flats, or simply the Flats.<sup>13</sup>

As shown in Figure 4, the industrial districts which form the study area create a band around the neck of the downtown peninsula, limiting its outward growth. The study area is surrounded by vibrant established neighbourhoods on all sides, but also hosts some of the city's most intensified social marginalization and visible forms of poverty, with inequalities in access to food security, housing, and social resources starkly highlighted against newly gentrified areas. In addition to traditional industrial and commercial uses, its built environment is also home to what can be described as the heart of many of the city's arts and creative industries.

Sub-areas of the study area include the Mount Pleasant Industrial Area, the False Creek Flats, and the Clark and Powell Industrial Areas. The last three of these partially overlap with the Eastside Arts District, which is being developed and marketed by the non-profit Eastside Culture Crawl Society with the support of the City.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 47.

10 See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (Toronto: Random House, 1961). This visionary text describes factors affecting 20<sup>th</sup> century cities, supplementing discussions of the study area relative to wider urban conditions and planning policy.

11 City of Vancouver, *Metro Core Jobs and Economy Land Use Plan*, June 26, 2007.

12 See the following sources: Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram, 'still underwater: Aesthetic interventions as investigations into land theft, ecosystem erasure, real estate speculation, hazards & resurgence for the Skwácháys neighbourhood of central Vancouver.' March 8, 2021; Stephanie Wood, "What does 'consultation' mean on occupied Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh land?", *National Observer*, May 21<sup>st</sup> 2019; and footnote 82 on page 42..

13 Skwácháys is also sometimes used to refer to False Creek and its wider area. It should be noted that the name Skwácháys has been previously translated as "deep hole in bottom" or "deep hole in water", which is inaccurate. Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh sníchim is a living language, which after almost being made extinct through colonial suppression, is now seeing a resurgence through initiatives such as the Squamish Nation's Squamish Language Policy Framework.

14 Eastside Culture Crawl Society, *A City Without Art?*, report published October 2019; Vancouver City Council, *Motion- Declaring Support for an Eastside Arts District*: 2020 Feb 26.

The scope of this thesis is thus limited to Vancouver, specifically to the areas inside of and contiguous to the manufacturing and industrial districts in the Metro Core, which are facing urbanization. These areas are significant because they are an anomaly of industrial fabric interposed between the surrounding urban fabric; therefore, they exist in a liminal condition, which can be seen in Figure 4. The present moment is vital to observe the architectural relevance of this area, as development pressures and new planning policies from the City increasingly use economic decline and perceived decay as justification for intervention. Despite a regional shortage of industrial land, this could result in these industrial areas facing continued, and intensified, de-industrialization. As new developments consist of higher land value uses per highest-and-best-use (H&BU) analysis,<sup>15</sup> they subsequently influence the character of the area by dislocating established community identities. Examples of higher density mixed-use projects, on sites previously used exclusively for light industrial uses, include stacked industrial with office space and in some cases residential and retail. Established businesses are then displaced by rising property taxes and through eviction from properties sold for redevelopment.<sup>16</sup>

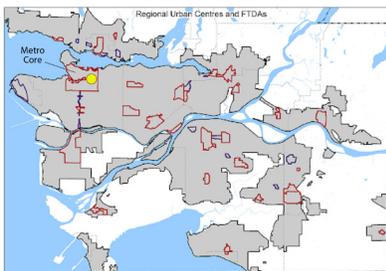


Figure 3. (above). Map of Metro Vancouver and its urban centres outlined in red, with the primary site inside the Metro Core identified with yellow dot.

Figure 4. (right) Study area in blue, with Downtown Vancouver on upper left and False Creek on center left. Port of Vancouver to North and residential neighbourhoods to East and South. The Flats Planning Area (2017) outlined in red with primary site identified with red rectangle.

Image credit: © Google



‘Fugitive Architecture’ as a design approach is an alternative to conventional industrial development. The theoretical analysis questions the present economic motivations of development, including market-driven real-estate speculation and land use planning considerations of taxation and municipal revenues associated with H&BU analysis. Much of this new development, which this thesis critically responds to, has been described as siteless, generic, and globalized in nature. In this view, rigid overdetermined forms suppress the organic growth of cities and the unplanned moments that allow idiosyncratic experiences in the built environment.<sup>17</sup>

15 See page 14 in the section of this thesis ‘Obsolescence’, in ‘Chapter 1: Theory.’

16 Eastside Culture Crawl Society, *A City Without Art?*, report published October 2019, 29. Figure 82 on page 39 shows studio sites and likelihood of redevelopment.

17 Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennet, *Designing Disorder*, (New York: Verso, 2020), 40; 53.

Therefore, the proposed theoretical contribution of this thesis asserts sited-ness, contextualism, and regionalism as preconditions to designing “underdetermined,”<sup>18</sup> or indeterminate site interventions.<sup>19</sup> Gentrification<sup>20</sup> remains a key theme discussed in relation to the four key conditions and underlying social issues, particularly how the interrelationship of these conditions contributes to the fugitive nature of a given area.

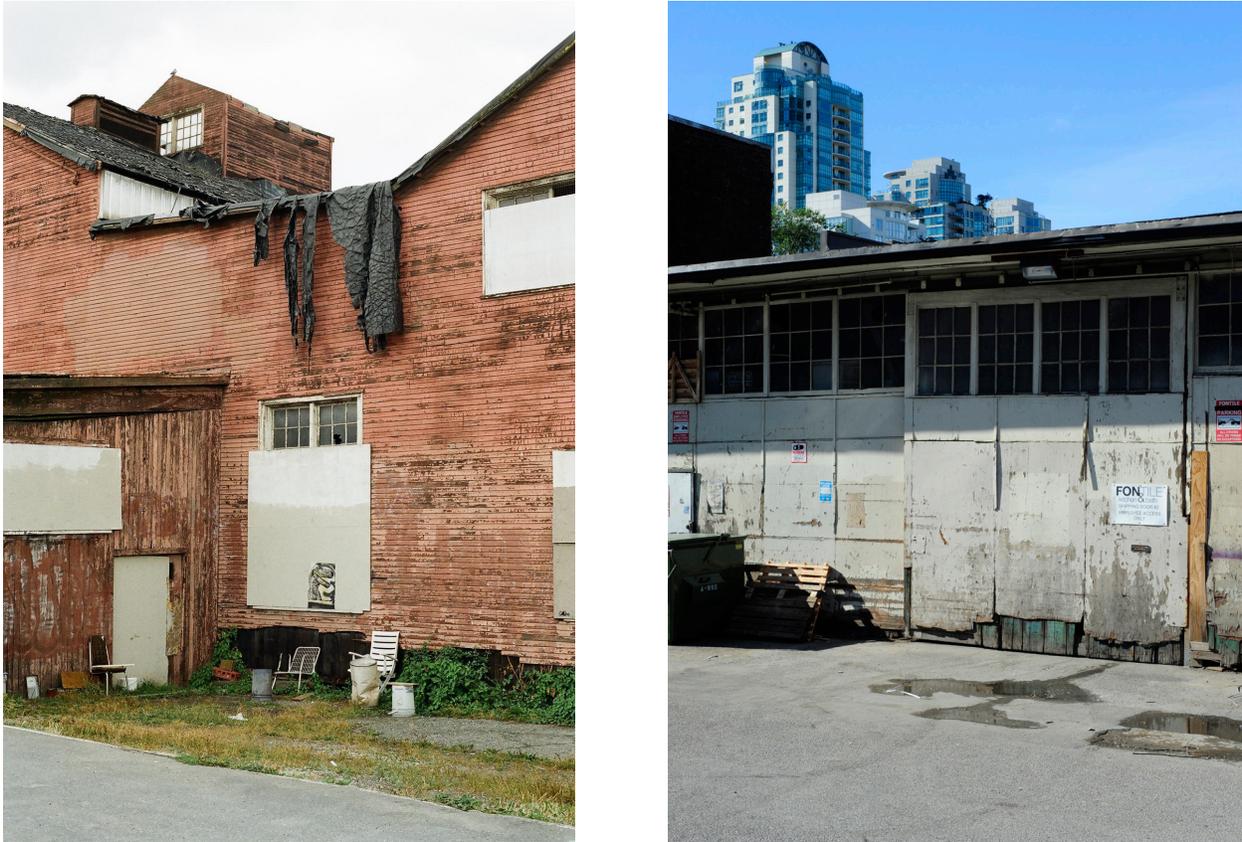


Figure 5. Examples of Vancouver's industrial buildings. (left) The Opsal Steel Building in Southeast False Creek, photographed in 2009 prior to its adaptive reuse into the podium of a condominium tower as a restaurant space. (right) The 1990s condominium towers of City Gate mark the eastern edge of downtown Vancouver and loom over a low-rise light industrial building typical of the Flats in the foreground, photographed October 2020. The City's 2017 plan for this area would see tech and health sciences among potential new uses for the site in the right image.

Image credit: © Michael Jaworski

18 Ibid, 54.

19 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 88-92.

20 Neil Smith, Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 45:4, 538-548. Here Smith writes that “gentrification is an expected product of the relatively unhampered operation of the land and housing markets. The economic depreciation of capital invested in nineteenth century inner-city neighborhoods and the simultaneous rise in potential ground rent levels produces the possibility of profitable redevelopment. Although the very apparent social characteristics of deteriorated neighborhoods would discourage redevelopment, the hidden economic characteristics may well be favorable.” This definition of gentrification originates in 1970's North American residential areas where there was an influx of wealthier suburban residents to poorer inner-city neighbourhoods. It equally applies to the Vancouver's industrial lands which have been converted to residential expansions of the dense city center, such as Yaletown, False Creek, and Coal Harbour. In the study area the pressures are similar, except with commercial uses instead of residential.

## Terminology

The term fugitive has two principal definitions: the first more common usage applies to people who are running away from something, such as persecution, while the second definition applies to things which last a short time. The common origin is reflected in the similarity of the words fleeing and fleeting. The second definition is where the theory of fugitive architecture originates, with further sub-definitions, synonyms, and antonyms providing even greater subtlety of connotation.

FUGITIVE	
First usage: Middle English 1500s Etymology: < French fugitif, fugitive, < Latin fugitivus, < fugit- participial stem of fugere to flee.	
SELECT DEFINITIONS OF FUGITIVE	SYNONYMS OF FUGITIVE
1. fugitivity -moving from place to place, wandering -running away or intending flight -flitting, shifting, vagabond	-transient, transitory, evanescent, fleeting -temporal, temporary -perishable, mortal -precarious, impermanent
2. fugitiveness of immaterial things: -evanescent, fleeting, of short duration -quickly fading or becoming effaced -difficult to grasp or retain, elusive  of material substances: -likely to evaporate, deteriorate, change, fade, or disappear -perishable	ANTONYMS OF FUGITIVE  -permanent, long-lasting -perpetual, immortal -durable
Sources: Oxford English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Roget's Thesaurus	

Figure 6. Select definitions of the term fugitive.

Taking inspiration from what is already contained in the historical etymology of the concept of fugitiveness, are the three chosen characteristics of obsolescence, aspiration, and adaptation; In this application, fugitiveness is concerned with the iterative material potentials of the act of building. The following descriptions clarify the usage of these terms as key conditions.

The first key condition, the term obsolescence, has a particular history and usage in the field of architecture. It originated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and gained popular interest in the 1920s United States to describe the feverishly paced speculative real estate development in cities such as New York and Chicago, becoming prevalent worldwide by the 1960s when obsolescence was a major subject of architectural study and experimental practice.<sup>21</sup>

21 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

The second key condition, aspiration, has a specific contemporary application in the field of consumer marketing. This is the primary usage referred to in this thesis, where aspirational architecture as image making is challenged, since the intangible nature of images is at odds with the tangible and capitalized material realities of buildings.

<p>SELECT DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONDITIONS</p> <p><b>OBSOLESCENCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-the process or fact of becoming obsolete or outdated, or of falling into disuse.</li><li>-the process whereby or state at which machinery, consumer goods, etc., become obsolete as a result of technological advances, changes in demand, etc. (see planned obsolescence)</li></ul> <p><b>SYNONYMS OF OBSOLETE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-antiquated, dated, ageing, old, historical, disused, useless, dead, vanished, discarded</li></ul> <p><b>ANTONYMS OF OBSOLETE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-contemporary, current, modern, new, present-day, active, alive, functional, renewed, operational</li></ul> <p><b>ASPIRATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-the action of aspiring; steadfast desire or longing for something above one.</li><li>-originally from marketing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Of a product, advertising, etc.: representative of or associated with a sophisticated, stylish, or otherwise attractive lifestyle to which consumers might aspire.</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>ADAPTATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-the act or process of changing something to fit a new use or situation</li><li>-also, adaptability as flexibility and resilience</li><li>-from biology:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-A process of change or modification by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment or ecological niche</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Sources: Oxford English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Roget's Thesaurus</p>
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Figure 7. Select definitions of key conditions.

Lastly, the key condition of adaptation is often conventionally seen as the action or process of a building adapting to conditions or being physically adapted, or the process of change by which a building or design becomes better suited to its environment. This thesis places an emphasis on the biological definition of adaptation, used metaphorically alongside the anthropomorphizing of buildings, which can be imagined as living entities with their own bodies and life cycles over the course of which they adapt to the built environments in which they are situated.<sup>22</sup>

22 Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die*. (Cambridge (Mass): MIT Press), 11-15. These pages provide an elaboration of this biological metaphor and of the anthropomorphization of architecture; The following readings provide complementary theories of the liveliness of "things" which can also extend to buildings as entities: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), and Arjun Appadurai, *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

## Dialectical approach

A dialectical approach will guide the theoretical framework of fugitiveness by exploring the key conditions as they apply to Vancouver's building stock across key time periods, as outlined in 'Chapter 4: Locality.' The interrelationship of these guiding ideas and periods better positions the overall theory, delimiting boundaries to the thesis topic's scope.

In the 'Dialectic Map' (see Figure 8, page 12) the dialectical relationships are arranged vertically in columns and horizontally across the key conditions. As opposed to limiting theory to binaries of meaning, the dialectics explore a spectrum of arguments. The farthest left column contains positionalities of conventional development versus alternative development and their corresponding divisions of time in Vancouver's built environment. Interrelationships between ideas are shown with arrows. This map was created early on in the thesis process and it has been helpful in articulating the core ideas and relationships that define the conceptualization of 'Fugitive Architecture'. Some of these main ideas include fugitiveness as impermanence, the inverse function of (im)permanence as (in)completion, the relationships between use and obsolescence, and how obsolescence feeds into adaptive reuse. The benefit of a dialectical approach is also how it emphasizes the un-fixed, open-ended, and always in-flux nature of fugitiveness as it appears in any given late-industrial context.

## Fugitiveness

As a notion, the fugitiveness of architecture can be understood through a simple example. At any given moment, the buildings that we inhabit, and which populate the built environment, exist in various states of decay, of use and disuse. Some can be considered at the end of their functional lives or obsolete, and without adapting to changing conditions they will feed into constant cycles of development where existing buildings are demolished and replaced by new ones. No building is truly permanent, and this impermanence is at the core of this thesis.

A counterpoint to this example is the anticipation of changing conditions and practices of proactive, versus reactive, adaptation. As opposed to a typical building which endures change in conjunction with the passage of time, obsolescence can be slowed or dodged by instead anticipating change.<sup>23</sup> This constant responsiveness to states of flux creates a state of perpetual incompleteness that is the closest architecture can come to permanence or immortality. While this idea can be extended to theories of unfinished architecture, in the design approach of 'Fugitive Architecture' this state of incompleteness is not viewed through a lens of romanticization, or allure,<sup>24</sup> rather, incompleteness is pursued objectively as a functional state of receptivity to change. This dialectic of (im)permanence and (in)completeness is further explored through the application of theory in the design interventions in 'Chapter 5: Practice.'

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23 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 88-92; David Leatherbarrow, *Building Time: architecture, event, and experience*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 10.

24 Rumiko Handa, *Allure of the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent: designing and appreciating architecture as nature*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2015). Handa's theories share with this thesis a common criticism of ideas of completeness, though her reaction differs by romanticising and celebrating states of ruin whereas this thesis looks to more active forms of intervention and continued usage of existing buildings.



## **(im)permanence and (in)completeness**

Buildings are never complete. Completeness is both an idealised state and a social construct that never exists materially in time. As it relates to architecture as an aspirational image, completion is an arbitrary point in time. An example of this is the legal role of architects who determine the percentage of completion in a construction project, which, among other things, determines release of funding from investors and eventual handover and occupancy, buttressing notions of completion. Any architect who has overseen completing deficiencies can also attest to the “post-completion” incompleteness of construction. After the conventional point of completion, when construction is over and the building is inhabited, buildings are never truly finished because they continue to change over time. Theoretically, through a continuous state of incompleteness which allows adaptation to changes, a building could achieve near-permanence as a quasi-living entity adapted to its specific urban ecology.

From a philosophical perspective that informs speculative and experimental building practices, if incompleteness equals permanence, then this constant cycle of adaptation could become perpetual and self-sustaining. As fugitiveness pertains to mortality,<sup>25</sup> this immortality may seem antithetical. To reiterate, while this thesis studies the fugitive nature of architecture topically, as a design approach ‘Fugitive Architecture’ is a response to fugitiveness as impermanence and stems from the following provocations and questions:

“How might buildings last forever?”, “How can architects anticipate and plan for the demise of their own buildings?” and “Can buildings have a multiplicity of lives?”

The material aspects of (im)permanence and (in)completion as ongoing processes is captured in the following passage from *On Weathering*, by Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow:

“Our aim in the argument that follows is to revise the sense of the ending of an architectural project, not to see finishing as the final moment of construction but to see the unending deterioration of a finish that results from weathering, the continuous metamorphosis of the building itself, as part of its beginning(s) and its ever-changing ‘finish’.”<sup>26</sup>

Here the authors play on the notion of weathering, which as deterioration is usually a physically subtractive process, as an additive process where a building undergoes a metamorphosis over time. This accumulation of physical changes is a process which ‘Fugitive Architecture’ aims to anticipate and celebrate in its design approach. There is also a play on words in the quotation with the term ‘finish’ as both a material application and as a state of completion. This applies directly to notions of (im)permanence and (in)completion, with this temporal and material process of ‘finishing’ supporting the idea that architecture can achieve a state of near permanence through this constant process of incompleteness. This challenges current understandings which see the end of an architectural project being the same as the “final moment of construction”.

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25 Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die*. (Cambridge (Mass): MIT Press), 196. The authors write that “demolition annihilates architectural fantasies of permanence” and “must be understood as architecture’s mortal enemy.”

26 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 16.

## Obsolescence

Abramson describes obsolescence as something that came about as the result of “changing technology, economics, and land use, in which the new would inevitable outperform the old.”<sup>27</sup> These notions of devaluation and expendability are now taken for granted as normalized dimensions of the central principle of land appraisal, known as Highest and Best Use (H&BU) analysis. This is defined by the Appraisal Institute of Canada as “the reasonably probable and legal use of property, that is physically possible, appropriately supported, and financially feasible, and that results in the highest value.”<sup>28</sup> Over the past century, the H&BU principle has become foundational to “best-practices” in how municipal planning and development departments determine zoning districts and property taxes. H&BU analysis intensifies evaluations of obsolescence by placing additional development pressures on properties with aging structures, especially those properties that have been rezoned to allow for greater density than what existing structures were built to. In Vancouver’s industrial areas this has led to the progressive loss of the original industrial fabric on a large and rapid scale.

Impermanence is viewed narrowly as tying into how obsolescence engages with “the temporality of use—and disuse,”<sup>29</sup> specifically how a building changes over time in use and value. With many examples of existing industrial buildings being adapted to commercially viable uses,<sup>30</sup> it is evident that H&BU distorts the notion of value and functional building life, favouring new construction and the demolition of older structures. When it comes to financialized economies, and considerations of profit in construction, capital investment plays a large role in the restructuring of how buildings are conceived and constructed in the modern and post-modern world.<sup>31</sup> As a manifestation of neoliberalism, the H&BU model of new development reduces architecture to a commodity, which can be easily marketed to the aspirational consumer. This has the result of feeding into increasingly rapid cycles of obsolescence, with many new buildings being less durable and adaptable than older buildings due to profit-driven design methodologies. The astounding impact and consequence of these practices on people’s lives is substantiated by the leaky-condo crisis of the 1990s in Vancouver, which affected 31,000 units of housing in over 900 buildings, and which caused an estimated \$4 billion in damages.<sup>32</sup> This thesis responds to these realities, asking how alternative forms of development can help bolster these economical value-seeking trends with high-quality design practices that both anticipate and embrace obsolescence.

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27 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 2-3.

28 Appraisal Institute of Canada, *Canadian Property Evaluation Magazine, Best and Highest Use*, Volume 54, Book 3, 2010.

29 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 4-5.

30 See ‘Chapter 2: Fugitive Precedent.’

31 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 23.

32 Government of British Columbia, “The Renewal of Trust in Residential Construction: Commission Into the Quality of Condominium Construction in British Columbia” (Barrett Commission), 1998.

## The ‘impoverished detail’

The last fifty years are representative of this capitalist form of real-estate speculation, with the consequences of short-term profit-driven design practices such as the value engineering of building and material life cycle outcomes, and the notion of obsolescence in architecture in general, now becoming evident in the built environment. The design interventions to the study area seek to respond to these conditions and offer alternatives. Value engineering, also known as value analysis, is defined as “an organized effort directed at analyzing systems, equipment, facilities, services, and supplies for the purpose of achieving essential functions at the lowest life cycle cost consistent with the required performance, reliability, quality, and safety.”<sup>33</sup> While this has become standard practice in the Architecture, Engineering and Construction (AEC) industry for the vast majority of projects, it is also widely agreed that this practice greatly simplifies designs.

In addition to its impact on creativity, which greatly diminishes the human experience through the production of mediocre architecture, value engineering can also lead to what this thesis calls “impoverished details.” These are designs and construction details that can paradoxically lead to greater weathering and deterioration; lesser maintainability, repairability, and adaptability; and an accelerated onset of obsolescence and decay. This can be compounded by “insufficient instruction by the architect, and poor workmanship by the builder,” which are “among the principle causes of material deterioration in buildings.”<sup>34</sup> This thesis does not suggest that buildings must be built in the most extravagant or expensive manner; rather, through the analysis of industrial typologies, it can be shown that utilitarian solutions exist which include construction materials, techniques, and assemblies that have a richness of detail and which can contribute to the longevity of these structures as useable and useful spaces. Thus, like the issues with H&BU analysis, by problematizing the notions of value engineering and value analysis, this thesis argues in favour of a non-linear view of progress and innovation in building technology.

The following case study is an impoverished detail common to Vancouver that is the product of fugitive material, temporal, and economic factors. Exposed concrete floor slabs on the exteriors of buildings, which are often turned into balconies, show design expression at its most economical. They provide flexible form-making while often incorporating exhaust vents or lighting, but as thermal bridges, they cause wasteful heat loss and make a mockery of sustainability.



Figure 9 and 10. Examples of painted concrete with staining from weathering, exposed slab edge (left), painted exterior concrete decorative facade elements (right).

Image credits: © Michael Jaworski

33 American Institute of Architects, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p.1138.

34 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 23.

While it is possible to build thermally broken balconies and to use additional external structure to create horizontal fins and other expressive forms, value engineering quickly reduces these features to dumbed-down versions of the original design intent. The ubiquitous exposed concrete slab edge has become a defining feature of Vancouver condominium construction since the 1990s. One specific element of this which exemplifies fugitive conditions is the weathering process of painted concrete. Soon after construction finishes, these ledges begin to display characteristic staining from rainwater, becoming streaked with green and black algae while accumulating dirt and requiring periodic re-painting. Depending on one's point of view, this can either be alluring,<sup>35</sup> and a reminder of natural processes, or an aberration. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow argue that staining carries ethical implications, stating: "This form of surface modification might be called 'aesthetic' deterioration, as it can make buildings either 'sightly' or 'unsightly.'"<sup>36</sup> These judgements lead to conversations of aspirational marketing and architecture as image.

### Aspiration

The above example identifies an important aspect of the third key condition of fugitive architecture, aspiration. As soon as an aspirational building is complete, it becomes obsolete when judged by the realities of usage and change over time. While temporality is elemental, these buildings-as-images are not designed to exist in time and do not weather, adapt, or change readily. They are designed as an aspirational idea or image that will never fully translate to a materially accurate form. As Leatherbarrow writes, "the building's 'photo-ready' or 'move-in' condition never lasts very long, hardly more than a season, certainly not through the years and decades of its use."<sup>37</sup> The actual finished state and eventual future states of the building are never captured in the renderings or "in the moment of the pre-occupancy photograph" because "time's passage in architecture includes a building's inception, construction, and inhabitation."<sup>38</sup> This is true for conventional mainstream development and particularly applies when grandiose visions of architecture are aimed at aspirational consumers as a "lifestyle" product. This thesis does not presume that all forms of development are poorly designed, although even the most well-designed buildings are often portrayed in an aspirational manner to satisfy the needs of public engagement, development permitting and reviews, real estate marketing, and publicity.

The aspirational marketing of commodified architecture limits the public understanding of the discipline to idealised images and aspirational narratives, increasingly in digital formats, as shown in Figures 11-17 on page 17. This thesis asserts that other material realities exist such as decay, disrepair, and obsolescence, and that perceptions of image change with consumer trends. Conventional development frequently promotes unreal representations, expectations, and beliefs about architecture amongst the public, a practice which architects participate in.

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35 Rumiko Handa, *Allure of the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent: designing and appreciating architecture as nature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015).

36 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 31-32.

37 David Leatherbarrow, *Building Time: architecture, event, and experience*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 5.

38 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 112.



Image credit: Bosa + Kingswood / Heatherwick Studio



Image credit: Westbank / Revery Architecture



Image credit: Westbank / Revery Architecture



Image credit: Squamish + Westbank / Revery Architecture



Image credit: Westbank / Henriquez Partners Architects



Image credit: Westbank / BIG



Image credit: Conwest / TKAD Architecture + Design

Figures 11-17. Recent examples of Vancouver developments which employ aspirational marketing techniques. Clockwise from top left: 1700 Alberni by Bosa Properties and Kingswood Properties with Heatherwick Studio; “The Butterfly” by Westbank with Revery (formerly Bing Thom) Architecture, view of “sky gardens” in open-air breezeways on each level; “The Butterfly” exterior view of curved precast-concrete panels and gym amenity; Oakridge Mall redevelopment by Westbank and Quadreal with Henriquez Partners Architects; Ironworks by Conwest with TKAD Architecture + Design; Vancouver House by Westbank with Bjarke Ingels Group, night view of planned public programming underneath the Granville Street Bridge; Señákw by the Squamish Nation in partnership with Westbank, designed by Revery Architecture.

Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow question this promotion of idealised spaces in the context of Modernism, asking that “given the desire for purity, whiteness, and newness, how can modern architects have thought of inevitable stains on their buildings as anything other than defilement?”<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this legacy of Modernism has influenced today’s usage of highly idealised and perfected forms of architectural representation. In the conclusion of *On Weathering*, the authors state that “images are media of representation that communicate a building’s style, character, and identity and are often thought to do so without change,”<sup>40</sup> which is the main mistake being made by aspirational images of architecture: denying change.



Figure 18. This photo from February 21, 2021, shows the the demolition of the Monte Clark/Equinox Galleries in Vancouver’s False Creek Flats in preparation for the new Broadway Subway’s eastern tunnel entrance.

Image credit: © Michael Jaworski

Figure 18 shows the recent demolition of the Monte Clark/Equinox Galleries in the False Creek Flats, housed in the former Finning paint and mechanical shop, built in 1964, which was one of the last large industrial buildings in the area. The life of this building is a case study of fugitive architecture: its construction and operation exemplified the heyday of industrial uses, which with de-industrialization was followed by a period of vacancy, decay and obsolescence; it was then saved through an exemplary adaptive reuse into contemporary art galleries, which was so successful it would come to anchor its own localized arts district; and finally, demolition due to the construction of a new subway line, which itself will support a new wave of de-industrialization through mixed-use development and gentrification in the Flats.

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39 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 86.

40 *Ibid*, 120.

Aspirational architecture has become symptomatic of neoliberalism at a global scale, which promotes homogenized space and siteless conditions in the built environment. This can also be ascribed to the trans-nationalization of financial markets, which pays no heed to borders or localized identities.<sup>41</sup> At the local level, as a form of gentrification, these aspirational developments are rapidly transforming the fabric of cities across the planet into generic iterations of each other. This is especially visible in cities such as Vancouver, where newer developments in different parts of the city have become indistinguishable from each other, despite existing in distinct neighbourhoods with unique pre-gentrification characters. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow make the following comment on the notion of sitelessness:

“Architecture made up of a ‘kit of parts’ changed the relationship between building and site, allowing assembly and construction to take place on any site, to a great degree independent of its local environment and climatic conditions—which paradoxically make it siteless.”<sup>42</sup>

While this is true for mainstream development, for the alternative forms of development proposed by the design interventions in the study area, it will be argued that when using a “kit of parts,” such as prefabricated, modular, or off-the-shelf construction, design interventions must, at the same time, still be highly contextualized and site-specific. In doing so, new developments, while still containing elements of aspiration, become more responsive to change and may be less prone to the aforementioned forms of obsolescence which afflict mass-market developments.

## Adaptation

The material life of a building is not something that is singular and linear, or than can be captured in aspirational images. Rather, buildings have many lives and formal expressions which aggregate over time. This is sometimes an unsightly process, yet it builds a unique character that is not predictable, and which is representative of that specific building’s life in time and its situation in an urban ecological context. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow ask the following question, which this thesis seeks to answer:

“Dirt and staining: can they be anticipated? Certainly they are inevitable, but can they be projected, or envisaged as a likely future occurrence; still further, can they be incorporated into a design project?”<sup>43</sup>

This anticipation of future material conditions and urban ecologies, and incorporation of such conditions into social spaces, is one of the integral goals of ‘Fugitive Architecture’ as a design approach. This anticipation is synonymous with notions of adaptability, which must be understood as both a proactive and reactive quality. The buildings produced by this design approach should proudly display the modifications of weathering and inhabitation made during their adaptation, which visually indicates them as architectural aggregates. In the study area, many industrial buildings have housed informal social and cultural uses during periods of “vacancy” of commercial uses, which is evidence of lively adaptation. In addition to the accumulation of wear from weathering, the traces of adaptive processes such as renovations, additions, temporary installa-

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41 Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennet, *Designing Disorder*, (New York: Verso, 2020), 20.

42 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 29.

43 *Ibid*, 72.

tions, and other forms of reuse of existing fabric accumulate at every stage of a building's life and should be considered as valuable fugitive elements.

This concept of adaptation also applies to the urban fabric and to the interface between a building and its context. Fugitive architecture favours the inevitable disorder of things, and this notion of "designing disorder" is an important concept explored in the book of the same name. In response to systems which impose order on the built environment, such as planning and public policy, the authors of *Designing Disorder* state the following:

"In contrast to these impositions, designing disorder means designing urban interventions that are flexible, adaptable and open to constant change; which encourage the emergence of informal, spontaneous and unplanned uses of the public realm; which stimulate cultural expression; and which create an atmosphere of tolerance towards differences and the unknown through the construction of common places where people can interact and share interests and experiences."<sup>44</sup>

This aspect of 'Designing Disorder' can be applied almost word-for-word to the smaller scale of an individual industrial site and to how discrete buildings and interior spaces connect with their surroundings. This thesis looks beyond purely material, spatial, and temporal conditions by engaging with social factors such as community building and the public realm. This idea is explored in detail in the design interventions proposed to the chosen sites in 'Chapter 5: Practice.'



Image credit: ERA Architects



Image credit: Shane Carslake

Figures 19 and 20. The left image shows Trinity Street in Toronto's popular Distillery District, which is a National Historic Site that features the adaptive reuse of the Gooderham and Wort's distillery, a largely intact collection of Victorian industrial buildings. The right image shows the Clear Spirit and the Gooderham condominium towers with Trinity Street in the foreground. As examples of real estate speculation, these developments used the adaptive reuse of the Distillery District as aspirational marketing material.

Adaptive reuse is the primary design approach proposed by this thesis to intervene in the built environment, seeing that it focuses on existing buildings. While this approach implies a change of use of the building, this thesis mainly focuses on light industrial spaces and retaining existing uses. Therefore, terms such as renovation and retrofitting may be better suited, along with conservation practices to address building fabric of heritage value. Adaptive reuse acts as a counterpoint to obsolescence by presenting the possibility of a new or extended life, past that which has been determined through traditional appraisals. Overall, an adaptive reuse approach

44 Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennet, *Designing Disorder*, (New York: Verso, 2020), 52.

contributes many benefits to development, in particular by addressing concerns foregrounded by climate change, sustainability, and heritage preservation, and is highly relevant to the study area.<sup>45</sup> However, without being polemical, the position taken by this thesis towards adaptive reuse remains a critical one, and in the context of fugitive architecture it suggests that there is a risk of being co-opted by neoliberal forms of development which promote aspirational forms of architecture that worsen gentrification.<sup>46</sup>

If the aspirational consumer is defined by “the desire for their actions to meet their needs, have a positive impact on others and connect them with an ideal or community that’s bigger than themselves,” and where this depends on “connecting the right thing to do with the cool thing to do,”<sup>47</sup> then in this light, adaptive reuse is becoming a marketing tool for developers and the public to virtue signal.<sup>48</sup> While patrons of adaptive reuse maintain that they are aligned with heritage preservation and sustainability, too often they still represent a major gentrifying force which can be tokenistic of the aesthetics of weathered and deteriorated buildings, especially the industrial ones which Sally Stone points out “have proved to be a very popular source of entertainment.”<sup>49</sup>

Deployment of adaptive reuse as spectacle can distract from the gentrifying consequences of a project, such as displacement and the destruction of communities.<sup>50</sup> In regard to the extensive literature on weathering and decay, obsolescence, and the end years of a building’s life, this thesis is positioned as arguing that the design interventions to the study area do not romanticize ruin;<sup>51</sup> in many cases decrepit buildings are still in use, or useable, and provide invaluable creatively reimagined spaces for activities that support established community uses and survival.

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45 Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: adaptive reuse and cultural memory*. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 19.

46 Michel Arnaud, *Cool is Everywhere*, (New York: Abrams, 2020). This coffee-table book capitalizes on the current trendiness of “the adaptive reuse design movement,” and is mass-marketed to the average consumer with glossy images and accessible, buzz-word-filled language. The author romanticizes the “spread of urban life into smaller towns” in America, detailing “how today’s architects are blending the past with the present in exciting ways” and how they are “[transforming] ordinary buildings into works of art.” In the context of this thesis, this book supports arguments of aspirational image making, which, combined with the neoliberal co-opting of adaptive reuse, are major forces of gentrification.

47 BBMG and Globescan, *Five Human Aspirations & the Future of Brands*, (New York: BBMG, Toronto: Globescan, 2015), 4.

48 “Virtue signal” definition by Lexico by Oxford Languages: (pejorative) The public expression of opinions or sentiments intended to demonstrate one’s good character or the moral correctness of one’s position on a particular issue.

49 Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: adaptive reuse and cultural memory*. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 73.

50 Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 28.

51 See the chapter ‘Ruins-Lust’ in Sally Stone, *Undoing Buildings*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2019), 81-84. This covers the attractive qualities of ruins regarding their potential for reuse; See the chapter ‘Ruin’ in Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die*, (Cambridge (Mass): MIT Press, 2014), 187-191. This provides a wider survey of architectural history and theory on ruin.

The capitalization of “run-down old buildings” as adaptive reuse projects, especially industrial buildings, has become a cliché that is often superficial in practice and which fails to protect the role of these structures in broader cultural landscapes. As the following chapters will show, strategies other than adaptive reuse should be considered for design interventions to existing building sites, and if adaptive reuse is pursued, it should be sensitive to potential impacts on existing communities.<sup>52</sup> Yet, even with a sympathetic approach, there should be good reason to preserve decrepit industrial sites, or else “the buildings.... become museums to themselves; despite their embodiment of the area’s identity, they do little more than celebrate their own obsolete past”<sup>53</sup>—this is why this thesis advocates for the continued industrial use of buildings in both the design interventions and the broader study area, while also integrating increased services, amenities, and flexibility of use.



Figure 21. Vancouver Mill Machinery, 1st Avenue Plant Building, South East False Creek, Vancouver. This is one of the last remaining industrial buildings around False Creek that has not yet been demolished or adapted to new uses. It sits on City-owned land across from the upscale and desirable Olympic Village neighbourhood. Its front elevation is a patchwork of materials, each showing unique patinas and levels of deterioration, reflecting different durations of weathering.

Image credit: © Michael Jaworski

52 Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: adaptive reuse and cultural memory*. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 73.

53 *Ibid*, 74.

## PART 2

## Chapter 2: Precedent

### Overview

While many striking examples of the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings can be found around the world, especially in post-industrial cities in Europe and the United States such as Manchester and Brooklyn, the Vancouver region offers fewer opportunities for these popularized forms of adaptive reuse due to the limited number of major extant industrial buildings from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite this, there is still great potential in the many existing buildings which may not be categorized as primary heritage, but which are nonetheless over forty years of age, which is the typical number of years required to consider a building heritage, and are representative of industrial histories.<sup>54</sup> In addition, there are examples of new-built works which can provide inspiration for adaptive reuse strategies. The following precedents should be viewed through the lens of 'Chapter 3: Theory'.

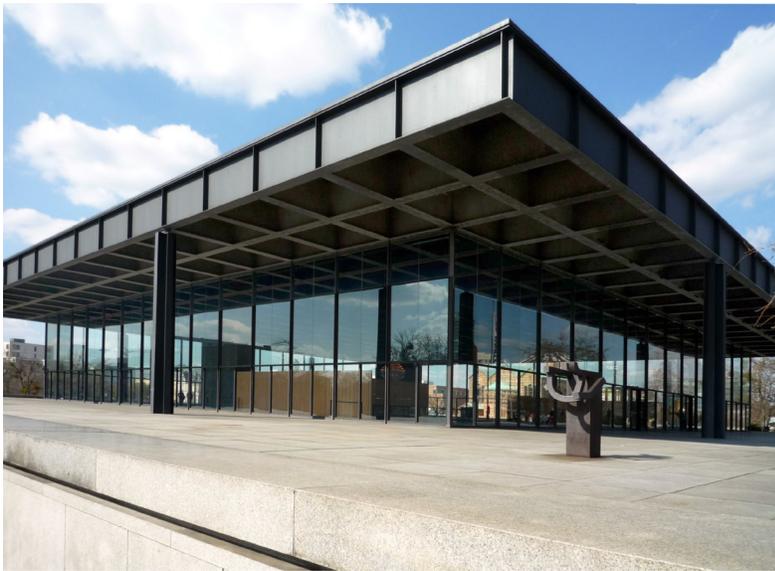


Image credit: Manfred Brückels



Image credit: RG72

Figure 22. (left) Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, by Mies van der Rohe. Figure 23. (right) Centre Pompidou, Paris, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano

### Anti-obsolence

In *Obsolescence*, Abramson discusses the design solutions developed by architects specifically in response to obsolescence. The most prevalent 20<sup>th</sup> century solution was the factory shed typology, which offered maximum flexibility contained within a durable shell.<sup>55</sup> Outside of actual factories or laboratories, there are many famous and successful uses of this typology such as the New National Gallery in Berlin (1968) by Mies van der Rohe, and the Centre Pompidou (1971) in Paris, whose design was led by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano (see Figures 22-23). These are both

54 Donald Luxton, "Eastern Core Statement of Significance", (Vancouver: Donald Luxton and Associates Inc, 2013). Pages 55-68 provide a registry of 'Eastern Core' heritage sites, which translates to the False Creek Flats portion of the study area and which covers the site of the design interventions.

55 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 80.

examples of “interstitialism,”<sup>56</sup> which visually minimized building systems and services in interior spaces, either by hiding them in floors or by displaying them on the exterior. The design interventions in ‘Chapter 5: Practice’ adopt aspects of this typology by maintaining large, clear span industrial spaces on the ground floor, which could be set up for a number of uses from workshops and manufacturing to food processing and wholesaling. The interstitial approach is then employed in plenum spaces that are sandwiched between the roofs of the existing buildings and the floors of new additions added above. This plenum provides updated systems to the existing buildings without cluttering interiors with vents, pipes, or wiring. In the new spaces, uses can move around in plan without worrying about the location of services.<sup>57</sup>

The factory shed had its own limitations such as expense and redundancy of systems. Abramson describes ‘indeterminacy’ as a new approach and a direct response to the factory shed typology. One of the largest examples of this is Northwick Hospital (see Figure 24), which was built with individual blocks or wings of buildings that could be demolished and rebuilt without impacting the overall site’s functions, and “growing ends” on wings with knock-out walls which could accommodate expansion as needed.<sup>58</sup> These strategies support the idea of (in)completeness and (im)permanence and are explored in the design interventions which use prefabrication and modular construction to easily expand or dismantle portions of the structure based on changing needs. While designing an indeterminate (or unfinished) building which can easily be modified or adapted over time is more challenging than a typical design which stays static, it avoids the paralysis that ‘determinate’ (or finished) buildings face when they cannot be easily modified or adapted—which is when obsolescence sets in.



Figure 24. Northwick Park Hospital (1970), Harrow, England, by architect John Weeks. Image shows knock-out wall at “growing ends”.

## Design precedents

It is important to mention the range in scale between the examples of adaptive reuse proposed in this thesis, such as individual buildings, and that of larger industrial buildings which can span entire multi-block sites, or even larger industrial sites which are integrated into landscapes.

Francois Bollack identifies five design approaches to adaptive reuse in her book *Old Buildings, New Forms*<sup>59</sup> (see Figure 25) and these help categorize the following precedents which have guided the design interventions, each of which adopts a slightly different approach.

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56 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 82-85.

57 See ‘Chapter 5: Practice’ for images and descriptions of the design interventions.

58 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 89.

59 Francois Bollack. 2013. *Old Buildings, New Forms*. New York: Monacelli Press.

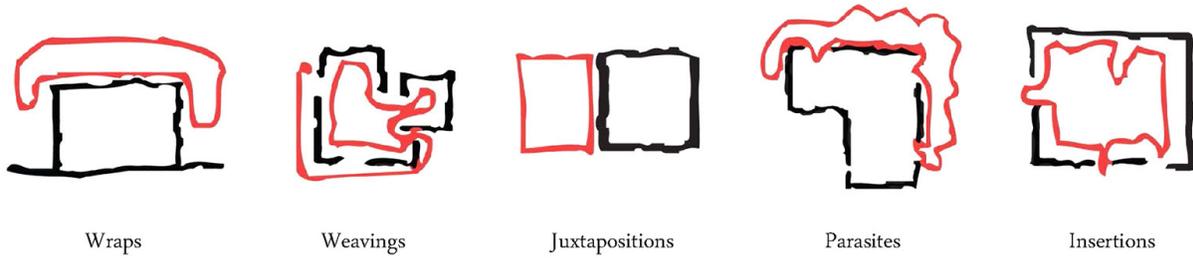


Figure 25. Five approaches to adaptive reuse, from *Old Buildings, New Forms*, by Francois Bollack. These are employed in the design interventions in 'Chapter 5: Fugitive Practice.'

Image credit: Francois Bollack.



Image credit: EU Mies Award



Image credit: Robert Cesar

Figures 26 (left top and bottom) and 27 (right). Le Fresnoy (1991-97) by Bernard Tschumi in Tourcoing, France.

A key precedent of the wrap or roof building typology is Le Fresnoy (1991-1997) by Bernard Tschumi. As the National Studio for Contemporary Arts, it provides facilities for multidisciplinary artists in a former leisure center built in the 1920s. It was decided to adapt these buildings instead of demolition and new construction because their size and volume exceeded that of anything that could be built with the given budget. This common situation applies to many older industrial buildings such as warehouses with large, open span spaces: it would be prohibitively expensive to replicate them with modern building techniques. One other aspect of Le Fresnoy which is employed in the design interventions is the building of a roof or enclosure over existing buildings, which is one of the most effective forms of preservation through the prevention of further weathering and deterioration caused by the elements.

The juxtaposition of a vertical addition above an existing building is an approach often used when working within an existing building's footprint or a constrained site. The following examples are precedents for this strategy which is adopted in the majority of the design interventions to the study area proposed in 'Chapter 5: Practice':

Figure 28—The Sharp Center for Design (2004) at OCAD University by Will Alsop (1947-2018) and Robbie/Young + Wright Architects Inc, in Toronto, playfully levitates a two-story volume over existing buildings, presenting a novel spatial solution to a complex urban site.

Figure 29—Zaha Hadid Architect's Antwerp Port House (2016) in Belgium, took a historically significant but obsolete fire station and balanced a four-story faceted glass office volume above it. This avoided disturbing the existing building by placing one set of "legs" inside the fire station's courtyard and another larger "leg" outside of the building.

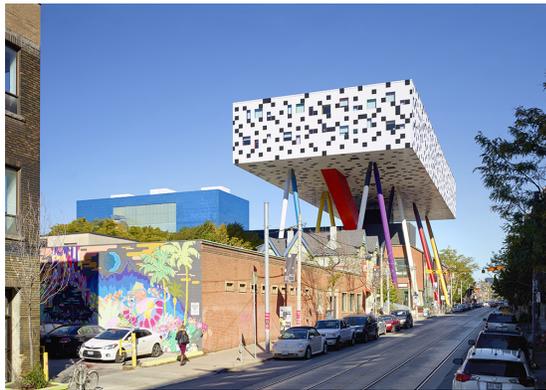


Image credit: OCAD University

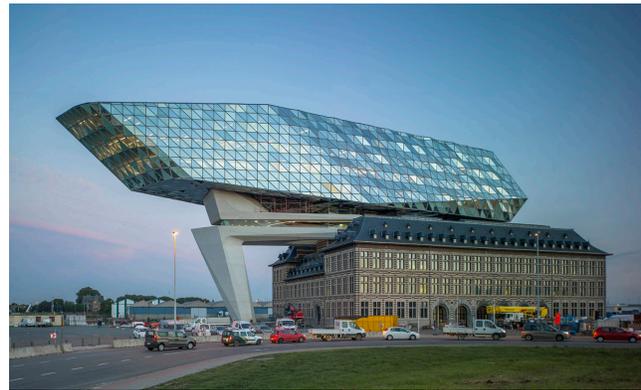


Image credit: Tim Fisher

Figures 28-29. (left) OCAD University in Toronto, by Will Alsop and Robbie Young + Wright Architects Inc.; (right) Antwerp Port House, by Zaha Hadid Architects

Figure 30—Fenix Factory I (2019) by Mei Architects in the port of Rotterdam, Netherlands, is a former warehouse built in 1922, which was damaged in WWII then renovated in 1956, and was most recently converted into the podium of a condominium project. In an honest example of gentrification, the architects describe the project as transforming "a disadvantaged area into a trendy and most popular district, with numerous culinary, creative and cultural enterprises".<sup>60</sup>

Figure 31—Fahle House (2007) in Tallinn, Estonia, partially preserved and expanded a former boiler house complex built in 1926 by adding a vertical addition. This distinctive glass volume is described by the architects as "a modern, chic and stylish living environment, which is meant for a self-aware, wealthy, youthful customer," and "that supports and cultivates an urban elitist lifestyle;"<sup>61</sup>—a description which epitomizes aspirational architecture.

Figure 32—The Hamburg Philharmonic (2016) by Herzog & de Meuron Architects in Germany is a mixed-use "cultural complex" containing world class concert halls, restaurants and bars, a hotel, and apartments, all built above the Kaispeicher A building, a massive warehouse with a brick exterior originally built between 1963-66.<sup>62</sup>

60 Mei Architects. Fenix I. Accessed March 2021. <https://mei-arch.eu/en/projecten-archieff/fenix-i-2/>

61 Koko Architects. Fahle House. Accessed March 20, 2021. <http://www.kokoarchitectseu/en/projects/type/all-types/project/59-fahle-house-celluloze-and-paper-factory-reconstruction-tallinn>

62 Herzog & de Meuron Architects. Ebphilharmonie Hamburg. Accessed March 20, 2021.



Image credit: Herzog & de Meuron Architects



Image credit: Mei Architects



Image credit: KOKO Architects

Figures 30-32. Clockwise from top left: Fenix I in Rotterdam, by Mei Architects; Fahle House, in Tallinn by KOKO Architects; and Hamburg Philharmonic, by Herzog & de Meuron Architects

The spatial, material, and temporal theories and approaches displayed by Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) in his body of work are major influences on the theory and design approach of this thesis. His well-known work *Conical Intersect* (1975), shown in Figures 33 and 34, is an important precedent which shows the opportunities that abandoned or obsolete buildings present for creative interventions to their fabric. Another parallel is that many adaptations to light industrial



Image credit: The Whitney Museum



Image credit: Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark / ARS

Figures 33 and 34. (left) Exterior view of *Conical Intersect* (1975) by Gordon Matta-Clark in Paris, France. (right) Interior view, photo montage by the artist.

spaces in the study area are carried out surreptitiously, which is how Matta-Clark often worked. In addressing the popular association between notions of unlawfulness and that of abandoned or obsolete buildings, in which these buildings are often assumed to be the site of illicit activities, this thesis aims to challenge these views by highlighting the positive aspects and opportunities presented by these sites and their place in urban and social fabrics.



Image credit: Åke E Son Lindman

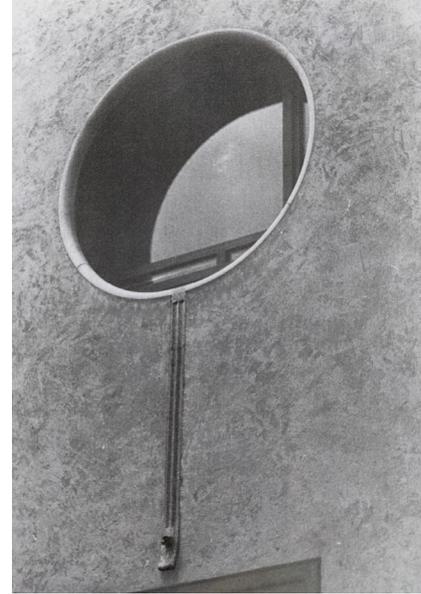


Image credit: Charles Teshima

Figures 35 and 36. (left) Exterior view of the Brion Tomb, by architect Carlo Scarpa. (right) Window detail, Banca Popolare di Verona by Scarpa.

The works by Carlo Scarpa (1906-1978) in Figures 35 and 36 are precedents which show how weathering can be anticipated and incorporated into a design. Intentional staining is shown at his Brion Cemetery (1968-1978), in Altivole, Italy, while the Banca Popolare di Verona has windows designed to direct rainwater along a thin stone channel and away from the building.<sup>63</sup>

The SESC Pompeia Factory (1977-1986) by Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) is a key precedent of the adaptive reuse of an industrial site. The project included a highly compatible new addition and shows how industrial sites can be urbanized, creating social spaces for people and communities to thrive, while preserving industrial fabric and character; these being goals of the proposed design approach.



Image credit: Markus Lanz

Figure 37. SESC Pompeia Factory, by architect Lina Bo Bardi, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

63 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 103.

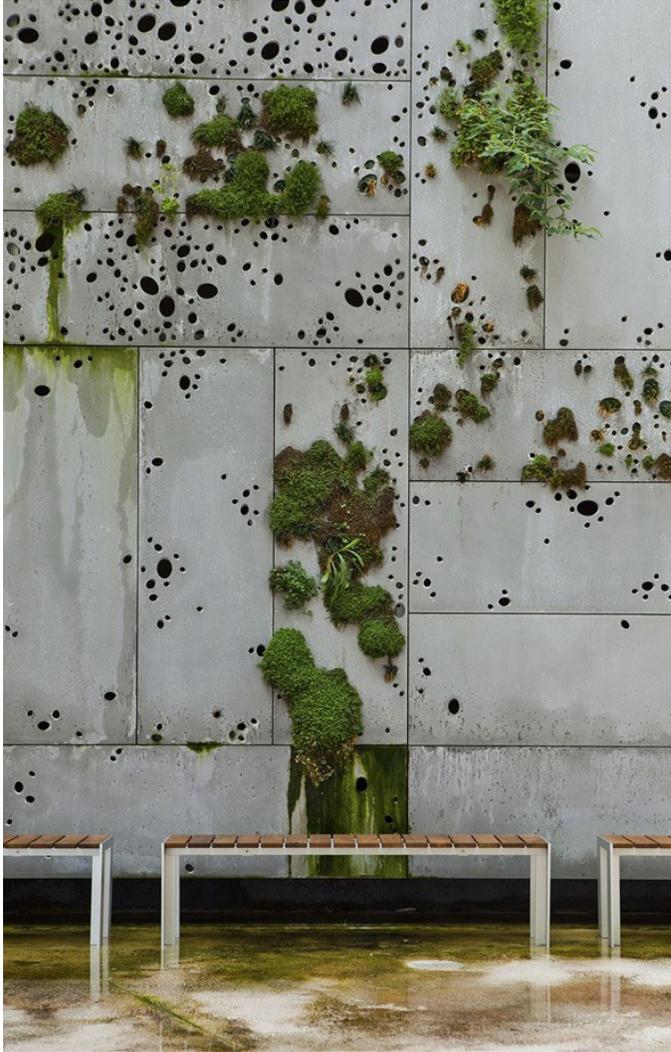


Image credit: STUA

Figure 38. Facade of the San Telmo Museum expansion by Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos showing intentional plant growth and weathering.

The San Telmo Museum expansion (2011) in San Sebastian, Spain, by Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos is another example of the effects of weathering being anticipated and incorporated into the design. Holes in the perforated aluminum façade provide habitat for mosses and other plants which over time have created distinctive streaking and green algae growth. The line is blurred between the design intent and uncontrollable natural processes which cause plant growth, staining, and which can also affect material and assembly lifespans.

### Canadian precedents

The Passive House Factory in Pemberton, BC, by Hemsworth Architects is the foundational precedent for the building materials, methods, and technologies employed in the design interventions to the study area. The building is all-wood construction, and as its name suggests is built to Passive House standards. It goes even further in its use; as a factory it produces pre-fabricated building components and wood products used in Passive House construction. As a new-build industrial building, it demonstrates best practices which can be used for the new-build portions of the design interventions.



Image credit: Think:Wood



Image credit: Naturally Wood

Figure 39 and 40. BC Passive House Factory (2014), Pemberton, BC, by Hemsworth Architecture. (left) Interior view showing the all-wood structure, including CLT wall and roof panels, glulam posts and beams. (right) Exterior view showing wood cladding.

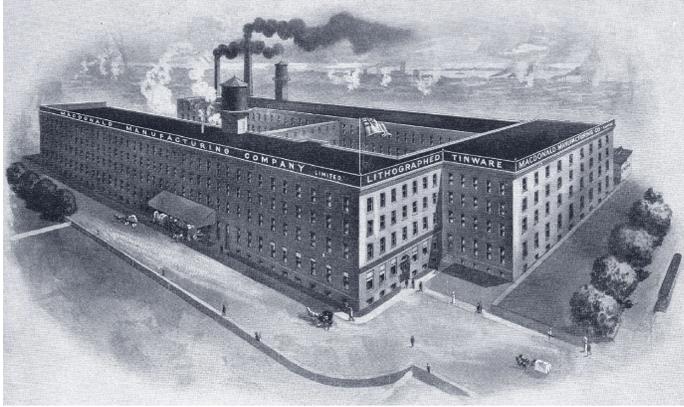


Image credit: Urbanspace Property Group



Image credit: Urbanspace Property Group

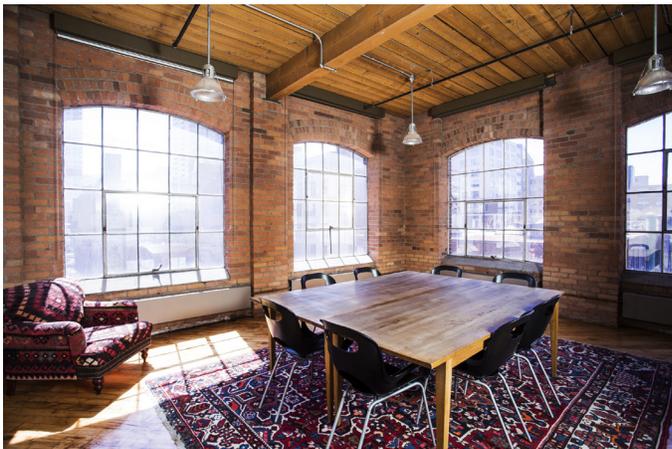


Image credit: Urbanspace Property Group



Image credit: Urbanspace Property Group

Figure 41-44. Clockwise from top left: Illustration of the historic MacDonal Manufacturing Company Ltd. at 401 Richmond Street West, Toronto; Illustration of the adapted building's community and sustainability elements; Exterior view from street; Interior view showing original structure.

401 Richmond Street West is a “restored, heritage-designated, industrial building turned arts-and-culture hub in downtown Toronto. It is home to over 140 artists, cultural producers, social innovators, microenterprises, galleries, festivals, and shops.”<sup>64</sup> Before being purchased and restored by Margaret Zeidler, this building was abandoned and threatened with demolition. In both design approach and programming, this project is an ideal model for the study area and is an example of “reprogramming” an existing building using minimal interventions.<sup>65</sup>

Alexander Center is one of the largest adaptive reuse projects in Vancouver. Originally a canning factory, it underwent major renovations in 1988 led by the architect Bruno Freschi. The building is now a hub for design-based industries such as architecture and fashion, containing offices, a campus for SFU’s visual arts program, and light industrial spaces.

64 “401 Richmond,” 401 Richmond (Urbanspace Property Group), accessed March 25, 2021, <https://401richmond.com/>.

65 Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: adaptive reuse and cultural memory*. (New York: Routledge, 2020). Stone refers to the notion of “reprogramming” throughout her text; Michael Jaworski, “Reprogramming Architecture”, (unpublished typescript, 2015). This text provides a detailed history of 401 Richmond and analyses “reprogramming” as an approach to its adaptive reuse.



ICOV-S535-F4-: CVA 786-43.10

Vancouver Archives



Image credit: Aritzia / Battersby Howat Architects Inc.

Figure 45 and 46. (left) Photo ca. 1978 of the American Can Company building in Vancouver. (right) Interior view of the Aritzia head offices in the adapted building, now called Alexander Center.

1000 Parker was originally a mattress factory and now houses a significant cluster of artist studios, including some uses unique to light industrial areas such as wood and metal shops. As a large heavy timber building, it provides direct architectonic inspiration for modern mass timber design. The building is an important landmark in the area and has acted as an anchor for the local artist and maker communities, notably when it opens its doors to the public for the annual Eastside Culture Crawl which attracts thousands of locals who tour the studios.



Image credit: C-02424 RBC Museum & Archives



Image credit: Michael Jaworski

Figure 47 and 48. (left) Restmore Mfg. Co. Ltd. ca. 1920 (1000 Parker Street); (right) Exterior of Parker Street Studios in February, 2021.

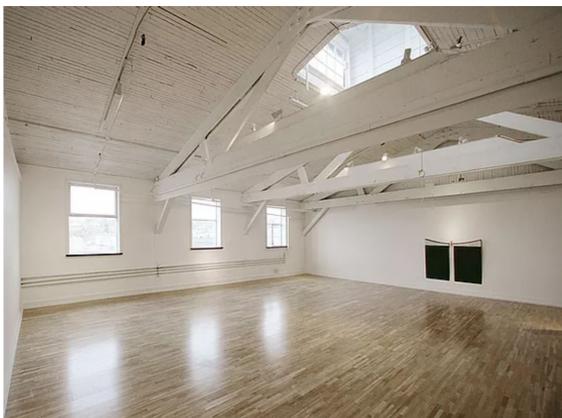


Image credit: Parker Projects



Image credit: Parker Street Studios

Figure 49 and 50. (left) Parker Projects Gallery, a refurbished space inside Parker Street Studios; (right) Interior view of a wood working studio inside Parker Studios during the annual Eastside Culture Crawl

## Chapter 3: Fieldwork

### Overview

Fugitive can be defined as “wandering from place to place,” and in this sense the fieldwork, and the situated experience of gathering the data that supports this thesis, was carried out in a fugitive manner. This approach developed organically after recurrent site visits to the industrial areas at the eastern edge of Vancouver’s city center became the primary means to develop the theory of fugitive architecture. Travelling on foot and by bicycle was the strategy for covering a large study area with distinct neighbourhoods, stakeholders, and experiential phenomena. These excursions entailed surveying an area close to five square kilometers, which is over 1200 acres or 300 standard city blocks. As a process, these site studies highlighted various measurable qualities and created datasets, providing insight into how the study area exemplifies fugitiveness.

The False Creek Flats and adjacent areas are an exemplar of North American, and more specifically Canadian, industrial landscapes undergoing urbanization. Across the North American continent, landscapes such as this one are being subsumed by ever-expanding urban centres, often in tandem to the gentrification of lower-income neighbourhoods. Lefebvre describes how historically there is a violent clash between urban reality and industrial reality, adding that this is a dialectical process.<sup>66</sup> The clashing of dialectical realities is an important theme which supports the analysis of the study area. When examining the built environment of these industrial areas, there is a particular condition that exists between that which has become obsolete and the new development which replaces it. As a border condition, Sendra and Sennet describe a form of open system in cities where:

“Both porous walls and borders create liminal space — that is, space at the limits of control, limits which permit the appearance of things, acts and person unforeseen yet focused and sited.”<sup>67</sup>

Fugitive architecture proliferates in this liminal condition—what this thesis describes as the interstices of obsolescence, aspiration, and adaptation—which bears witness to the erasure of the industrial fabric and the non-places generated in this transitory state. Regarding non-places, the French anthropologist Marc Augé explains that “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.”<sup>68</sup> The unusual urban morphology of the False Creek Flats and adjacent industrial areas contains many such moments which fit this binary of place and non-place, and the ethnography-informed photographic surveys seek to better understand these moments within the city fabric.

### Photographic surveys

Returning to another key theme, temporality, the intrinsic basis of fugitive architecture is not rooted in past histories or future potentials, but in documenting the awkward and imperfect moment that is “right now”. The importance of temporality reflects how the material and spatial qualities of buildings must be understood relationally to a third dimension—time. With this emphasis on the present, the area’s history can be read through material traces and urban morphologies which embody past conditions while inferring future states. In contextualizing the present, these temporalities are better understood through direct experience, and are traced in the fieldwork.

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66 Henri Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, (Cambridge (Mass.): Blackwell, 1996), 7.

67 Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennet, *Designing Disorder*, (New York: Verso, 2020), 31.

68 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, (London: Verso, 2008), 77-78.

In his book *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, where the term non-place was coined, Augé provides this commentary on his discipline:

“The practising ethnologist is a person situated somewhere (his ‘here’ of the moment) who describes what he is observing or what he is hearing at this very moment. It will always be possible afterwards to wonder about the quality of his observation and about the aims, prejudices or other factors that condition the production of his text: but the fact remains that all ethnology presupposes the existence of a direct witness to a present actuality.”<sup>69</sup>

Augé is writing from a Western Euro-centric colonial perspective, which he acknowledges and discusses further following the above passage as “two worlds,” traditional and modern. While this is an outdated view that promotes a hierarchy of social evolution towards non-European cultures, Augé’s concept of supermodernity supersedes this bias. The description of direct experience is relevant in how well it describes the immediacy of fieldwork, which is a term this thesis borrows from ethnology and anthropology to describe the forays into the study area and the photographic surveys undertaken there. An interdisciplinary approach has thus guided the process of ‘Fugitive Architecture’, though the use of the term fieldwork is deployed within a framework of architectural study and practice.

The character defining elements of the built environment documented through photographic surveys create an archive of important indications of wider sociocultural landscapes. Analysing the archive through the lens of fugitiveness begins to crystallize these experiences by highlighting the natural process of material aging, attuning individuals to the sociocultural histories inscribed in this temporal process. The essence of fugitive architecture lies in the individual and their personal experiences, explorations, and process of acquainting oneself with urbanizing industrial landscapes. Through design interventions to the built environment that apply theories of fugitiveness, the intention is for residents, workers, and visitors to these areas to develop their own intimate understandings of the material, spatial, temporal, and socioeconomic conditions that are unique to these areas.

As evanescence, fugitiveness can be understood as something of shifting, twisting, and quickly dissipating nature. When situating oneself in the built environment through plein d’air urban exploration, the individual experience of site conditions will never repeat person-to-person, as every venture will offer new discoveries. Thus, the older and more complex the fabric becomes, with palimpsest and through the juxtaposition of old and new fabric, the harder it is to replicate idiosyncratic and subjective phenomenological experiences.<sup>70</sup> Analysis of the fieldwork archive reveals that new development creates a uniform, ordered fabric that is devoid of these opportunities for diverse experiences. It documents an attribute of gentrification that conflicts with the established character of the existing fabric, which is the outsized scale and rigid modernity of new development. This is also due to new buildings not having had time to adapt to, and be adapted by, their new context. Being worn-in by adaptation is a slow process, and it takes time for the new fabric to age and metamorphosize into something resembling the fabric it replaced. The following pages show a selection of the photos taken during fieldwork.

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69 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, (London: Verso, 2008), 8.

70 Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennet, *Designing Disorder*, (New York: Verso, 2020), 53. These unplanned activities and social experiences are central to Sendra’s proposed design interventions to the urban fabric of cities.

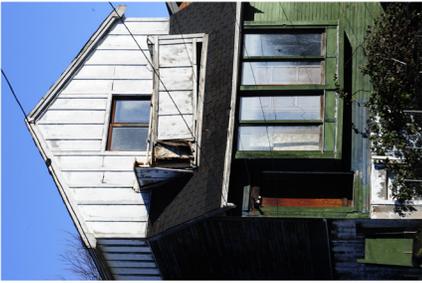


Figure 51. A decrepit, possibly abandoned house in Strathcona



Figure 52. The weathered and deteriorated exterior of a Produce Row warehouse



Figure 53. Screened fencing securing a space under the Georgia Viaduct



Figure 54. The passenger SkyTrain passes over a freight train in the Flats near a vacant lot



Figure 55. Rear entrance to City Gate condos with barbed wire and security cameras



Figure 56. Stucco peeling off concrete block on the Cobalt Hotel SRO near Thornton Park



Figure 57. A person's tent under the Dunsmuir Viaduct



Figure 58. The original pine block paving exposed underneath asphalt in Chinatown



Figure 59. Passerby in front of non-descript loading doors on the edge of the Flats



Figure 60. A hang-out spot at the Aboriginal Shelter Vancouver



Figure 61. View of graffiti around 1000 Parker Street, facing the CN and CP railroad tracks



Figure 62. The former rail sheds at 1725 Cottrell Street



Figure 63. The Downtown Skateboard Park underneath the Viaducts with a Skytrain passing behind



Figure 64. Part of the Camp KT encampment in Strathcona Park, photo taken September 2020



Figure 65. A typical alleyway in the Clark Drive Industrial Area



Figure 66. The Raymur pedestrian overpass in Strathcona, crossing the CN and CP railroad tracks

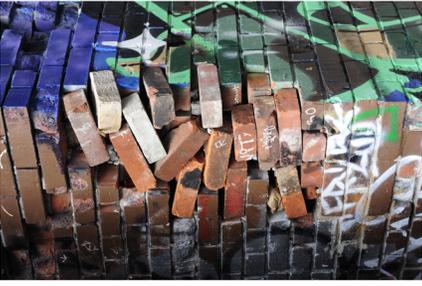


Figure 67. An improvised repair to a brick chimney at 1000 Parker Street

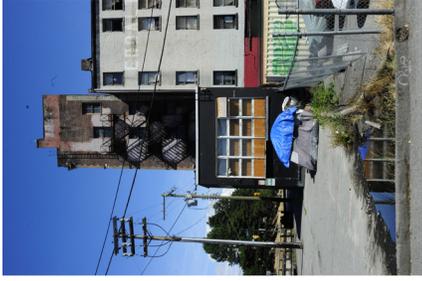


Figure 68. Rear view of 901 Main St. and the Cobalt Hotel, adjacent to the Viaducts



Figure 69. A painted door and wall in the Powell Street Industrial Area



Figure 70. Some of the oldest houses in Vancouver, 600 block E Cordova, formerly the East End



Figure 71. One of the many food processing businesses in the Powell Street Industrial Area



Figure 72. Pacific Central Station, built by CNR after the filling-in of the Flats, still in operation



Figure 73. A upscale restaurant contrasts with unhoused residents of Main Street



Figure 74. Peeling paint on an auto repair shop on Vanables near Clark Drive



Figure 75. A profusion of greenery on a typical light industrial space on Victoria Drive



Figure 76. An auto servicing shop on Powell Street with the Viterro grain silos in the background



Figure 77. Freight trains on the CP / CN tracks near the thesis site



Figure 78. Vancouver Mill building in SEFC, one of the last industrial buildings in False Creek



Figure 79. Strathcona, with warehouses, historic houses, new condos, and the Rogers Sugar complex



Figure 80. View from ECUAD towards rail yards, industrial buildings, newer offices, and mountains

## Experience of the study area

From lush and fecund tidal basin to industrial heartland, the series of events that led to the creation of the Flats has produced an anomaly of city planning. When viewed through the lens of traditional urban revitalization initiatives, this area is highly dysfunctional and a hostile environment relative to newer master-planned residential districts nearby and is a clear candidate for “urban renewal.” Jacobsean notions such as “eyes on the street” do not apply to an area with sparse residential and commercial uses and little pedestrian traffic, but there is an opportunity to consider and examine the daily life of the area’s workers.<sup>71</sup> A confusing network of disconnected streets gives the area a labyrinthine quality, and furthermore, active freight rail, incessant semi-truck traffic, and noisy or smelly industrial activities dissuade visitors from lingering on streets that are often bereft of sidewalks and landscaping, making one feel vulnerable. With a lack of public spaces and amenities, most Vancouverites have never had reason to visit or linger in the Flats, despite its central location and regional importance. This makes the area and its spaces a blind spot in the public consciousness. As a result, this lack of awareness allows fugitive conditions to proliferate.

The fieldwork shows that certain older buildings, especially industrial ones, have been adapted to new uses with great success. Even more noteworthy are older buildings that can be considered obsolete, or close to it. While some are left vacant, a considerable number remain in use. Two aspects of this near obsolescence capture the imagination: the material condition and the potential for reuse. The advanced state of “decay” of these buildings presents an opportunity to study the weathering and deterioration of materials.<sup>72</sup> The building fabric, along with the surrounding urban fabric, is integral to fugitive architecture in how it embodies the effects of time. The potential for reuse may seem obvious from the popularized aspirational view, but very few of these buildings fit conventional heritage criteria and most likely face demolition under increasing development pressures. Despite this, the fact that many of these buildings have exceeded the typical forty-to-sixty-year lifespan allocated to most buildings today should be proof that they are worth reconsidering, especially when the buildings that will inevitably replace them may not have nearly as long a functional life. In light of the movement towards sustainability, future buildings should conceivably last longer, although a renewed focus on longevity does not necessarily protect them from the economic drivers of obsolescence which can see the demolition of buildings early on in their lifespans.<sup>73</sup>

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71 Henri Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, (Cambridge (Mass.): Blackwell, 1996), 7. This examination of daily life is captured in the following passage:

“Is it essential to describe at length, besides the condition of youth, students and intellectuals, armies of workers with or without white collars, people from the provinces, the colonized and semi-colonized of all sorts, all those who endure a well-organized daily life, is it here necessary to exhibit the derisory and untragic misery of the inhabitant, of the suburban dweller and of the people who stay in residential ghettos, in the mouldering centres of old cities and in the proliferations lost beyond them? One only has to open one’s eyes to understand the daily life of the one who runs from his dwelling to the station, near or far away, to the packed underground train, the office or the factory, to return the same way in the evening and come home to recuperate enough to start again the next day. The picture of this generalized misery would not go without a picture of ‘satisfactions’ which hides it and becomes the means to elude it and break free from it.” (Lefebvre, 64)

72 This thesis challenges the assumptions embedded in notions of decay, that it is by default ‘blighted’ or ‘unsightly’, arguing instead that ‘decay’ can teach us important things about the social life of buildings.

73 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1-4.

Many existing properties that are not meeting their site’s “Highest and Best Use” based on allowable uses, as defined in ‘Obsolescence’ in ‘Chapter 3: Theory,’ nevertheless play important roles in their communities. The illustration of fugitive conditions in the fieldwork aims to shift notions of value from an economic perspective to a community-based social one.

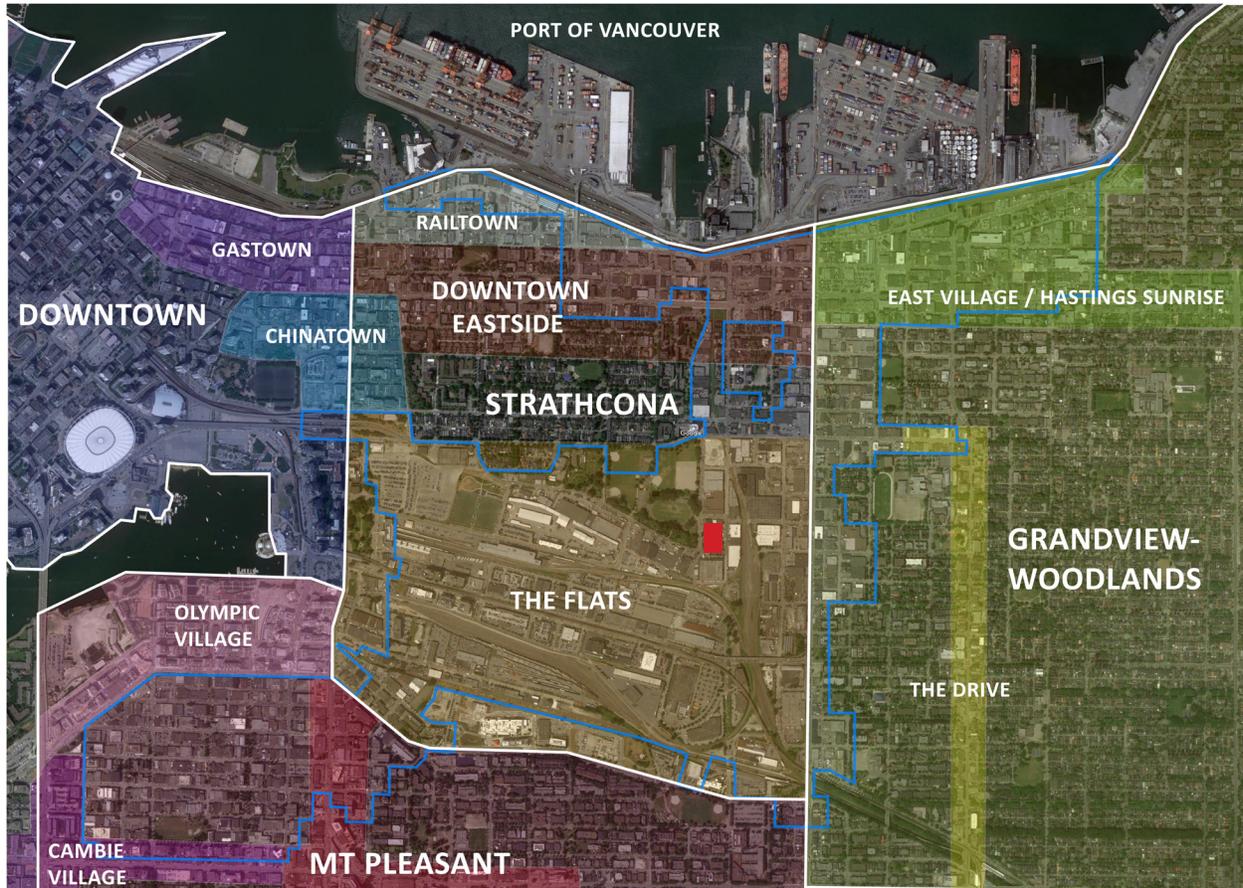


Figure 81. Map of selected Vancouver neighbourhoods shown in large text and white outlines, sub-areas in smaller text. The primary site of the design interventions is shown as red rectangle, with the Metro Core industrial areas and thesis study area shown with blue outline  
Base image © Google

## Stakeholders

In the site-specific application of the proposed design approach, the questions of “How is the public engaged?” and “Who is this project for?” are crucial to its success. These questions are answered by identifying the principal stakeholders of the site and study area, who can be broadly described as the community members, residents, and businesses within the neighbourhood of Strathcona (see Figure 81). More specifically, those who are property or business owners, tenants, or who are employed in light industrial spaces in the I-2 zoning district;<sup>74</sup> including, but not limited to, activities in the approved uses of artist studios, workshops, manufacturing, and distribution or warehousing; these are the primary stakeholders. The interventions are designed to accommodate the particular activities and requirements of these users.<sup>75</sup> Community organizations such as the ECCS, Strathcona Resident’s Association, Strathcona BIA, East Village BIA, and the

74 See City of Vancouver, I-2 zoning district schedule, (City of Vancouver, 2019).

75 This can happen through existing practices such as community benefit agreements, or through entities such as land trusts that allow community members to decide themselves how development occurs. Examples include the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust in Toronto, and locally the Hogan’s Alley Society’s efforts to create a land trust on the city-owned blocks where the historic Black community of the same name was formerly located.

many organizations catering to the DTES, are also important voices on the future development of the area. The City of Vancouver, which has the greatest control over what can be built on the site through its urban planning, zoning, and development departments, is a key stakeholder along with the regional, provincial, and federal governments, although to a lesser degree than the City. The overlap between the ECCS’s Eastside Arts District and the thesis study area is shown in Figure 82. This community of artists is a primary demographic targeted by the design interventions.

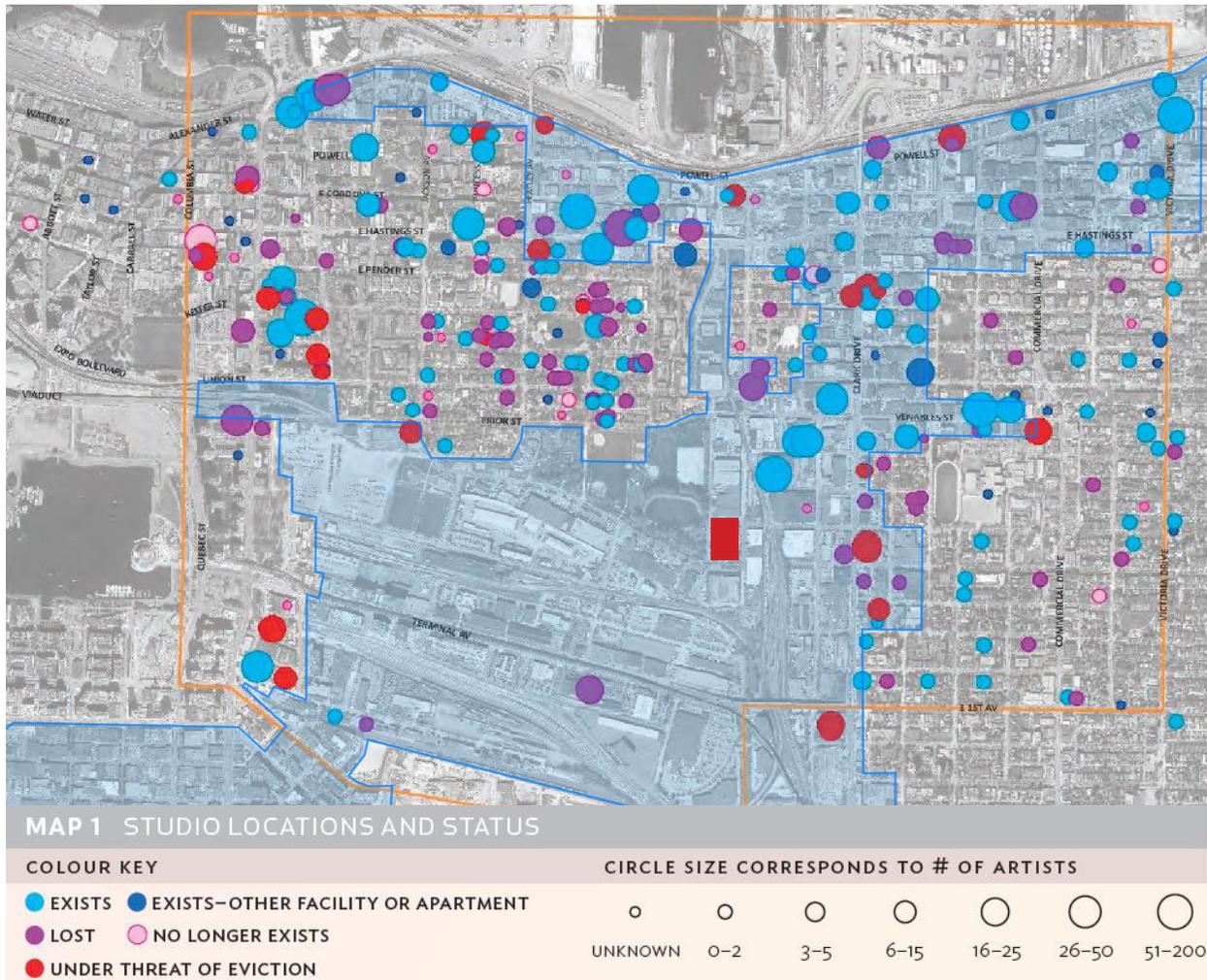


Figure 82. Map of artist studio locations and status in the ECCS Eastside Arts District, shown with an orange outline. This district overlaps with large parts of the Metro Core industrial areas and thesis study area, added in blue with the primary site of the design interventions shown with a red rectangle. Image credit: ECCS “A City Without Art?”

As a speculative work which reimagines a building’s situatedness, this thesis retains the creative freedom to propose ideas that defy, critique, or openly subvert existing policies that affect the site. Furthermore, operating in contested spaces and communities means sharing responsibility for the wellbeing of marginalized and vulnerable residents by engaging them equally as stakeholders. This includes those who are street-involved, without shelter, or who have precarious housing. Without furthering stereotypes around “transient”<sup>76</sup> populations and crime, safety has to be addressed as an important factor in the study area, especially after dark. While recognizing Crime Prevention Through Industrial Design (CPTED) as a fraught approach to safety and

76 “Transient” is both a derogatory term for people experiencing homelessness and a synonym of the word fugitive. Here it is used as a play-on-words, without mal-intent.

inclusion in the built environment,<sup>77</sup> it is particularly important to create safe environments for single women, children, seniors, and racialized folks in the study area. An intersectional approach further highlights Indigenous, Black, and racialized groups, along with LGBTQ2S+ individuals and people with disabilities, as populations who can benefit from equity, diversity, and inclusion informed design practices for safe communities.<sup>78</sup> While some of these demographics, such as children and the elderly, may be underrepresented in the study area due to its industrial nature,<sup>79</sup> a safe environment for these residents is a safe environment for everyone, especially as pedestrian activity increases from new development as the area urbanizes.

Addressing broader factors in Vancouver, the city's housing and affordability crisis are mostly outside the scope of this thesis. Considering that industrial-zoned areas have limited residential allowances, related challenges facing many community members such as homelessness and the opioid epidemic are also outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to consider how prior policies have allowed the study area to be used by many communities as a form of accessible space, including for street-involved communities, substance-users, and those who have precarious housing. This is evident directly adjacent to the site in Camp KT in Strathcona Park, which over its existence has been one of the largest encampments in Canada, and on Raymur Street and Vernon Street, among others, which are lined by dozens of campers where many people live who are unable to afford the region's skyrocketing market rents. These populations bear the greatest risk of displacement due to their status as transient urban fugitives, which informs the proposed design interventions as a site factor.



Figures 83 and 84. (left) Homelessness is a crisis in Vancouver, as shown by encampments such as Camp KT in Strathcona Park, seen here in February 2021. (right) Housing precariousness is tied to affordability, with camper vans along Vernon Drive providing critical shelter to those who cannot afford rent. Image credit © Michael Jaworski

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77 Paul Cozens and Terence Love, *The Dark Side of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

78 Sherene H. Razack, *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping White Settler Society*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002). This text is crucial to understanding race, space, and the law in the Canadian context, covering topics of space and unmapping which are especially relevant to architecture and the built environment. The following passage highlights some of the themes relevant to this thesis: "It must be said at the outset that our focus on racial formations is automatically a focus on class and gender hierarchies as well. Racial hierarchies come into existence through patriarchy and capitalism, each system of domination mutually constituting the other. The lure of a spatial approach is precisely the possibility of charting the simultaneous operation of multiple systems of domination." (Razack, 6)

79 City of Vancouver, *Downtown Eastside Local Area Profile*, (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2013). This profile provides detailed statistics which cover large parts of the thesis study area; Statistics Canada, *Census Local Area Profiles for the City of Vancouver, Census 2016*. Included are detailed demographic data for the neighbourhood of Strathcona.

## Chapter 4: Fugitive Locality

### Overview

Any discussion of locality must begin by addressing the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlílwətaʔł (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, whose traditional and unceded territories are occupied by what is now known as the City of Vancouver. The entirety of the city exists on the unceded territory of these three Nations. Unlike the majority of Canada, which is covered by the Numbered (and other historic) Treaties, 95% of British Columbia's area remains the unceded territory of almost 200 First Nations.<sup>80</sup> This thesis centers decolonial approaches which acknowledge the current and sustained presence of Indigenous peoples in this area since time immemorial and this area's traditional significance to them.

The locality of the study area is itself thoroughly fugitive and representative of settler colonization, which is revealed through historical analysis of the area. Two major events were both large-scale erasures of natural and cultural landscapes, and were the most integral in shaping the study area's present conditions. The first of these events was the filling in of Skwácháys,<sup>81</sup> which was the former eastern tidal basin of False Creek. The second event encompassed City initiatives in the 1950s-70s which, had they been fully realised, would have demolished large portions of Vancouver's historic East End through slum clearance, urban renewal, and the construction of a major freeway.



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Image credit © Google Earth

Figures 85 and 86. (left) Main street in 1889, with new settlement in recently logged areas of what is now Mt. Pleasant in the foreground. False Creek is in the midground with its eastern basin, now the Flats, on the right. Behind on the right is the East End with Downtown to its left. In the background is Burrard Inlet and the North Shore Mountains. (right) This 2021 Google Earth 3D imagery shows the same view of Main Street running north, with the Flats and parts of False Creek now filled in and developed. The towers in the distance are Downtown, and the low-rise area to the right includes the former East End neighbourhoods of Chinatown, the DTES, and Strathcona.

### Colonial history

False Creek is a narrow saltwater inlet separating the Downtown peninsula from the rest of the Burrard Peninsula. The creation of the False Creek Flats and the infill of industrial areas along reclaimed land on False Creek's shores meant the destruction of Skwácháys in the physical sense, which was an intertidal basin that extended False Creek east of what is now Main street

80 British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, Interactive Map (online resource), 2021. This map shows the locations of BC's 196 First Nations. <https://www.bcafn.ca/first-nations-bc/interactive-map>; BC Treaty Commission, Interactive Map (online resource), 2021. This map shows the BC First Nations engaged in the treaty process, and their respective stages in their treaty negotiations. <http://www.bctreaty.ca/map>

81 See footnotes 12 and 13 on page 6, and footnote 82 on page 42.

to Vernon Drive.<sup>82</sup> This area was filled in over a period of time, beginning in 1911 as the Great Northern (GN), Canadian National (CN), and Canadian Pacific (CP) railways built new rail yards and constructed new passenger railway stations, of which Pacific Central Station still exists and provides VIA rail and Amtrak service. From 1915-1917 the remaining portions of the Flats were filled in, with the fill material mostly sourced from excavating the Grandview cut, as well as from dredged material, though at the time industrial and household waste may also have been used. Railway companies were highly influential in the early urban and industrial development of Vancouver and its wealth. For example, CPR was granted large tracks of land where it controlled land use and types of development, which resulted in the intensive industrial growth around False Creek. This would become the region's industrial core from the 1920s-70s. The industrial landscape of the False Creek Flats as it exists today might never have been developed, possibly remaining a body of water, if it were not for the actions of these rail companies and their orchestration of industrial growth.<sup>83</sup>



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Image credit © Google Earth

Figures 87 and 88. (left) Nov. 30, 1917, showing the construction of railyards in the Flats to serve Pacific Central Station, completed 1919, with Grandview in the distance; (right) 2021 Google Earth 3D imagery showing the same railyards, with Trillium Park, the National Works Yard, and Produce Row on the left, and Evans Avenue to the right of the tracks.

In the colonial context, it must be noted that in situating itself in Vancouver's former East End neighbourhood, which now includes Strathcona and the False Creek Flats, this thesis must also recognize the racialized immigrant communities who originally settled there. In particular, the Chinese, Japanese, and Black communities, whose sustained presence as business owners and residents in the area for the past century and beyond is a fundamental part of the area's cultural landscape.<sup>84</sup> Japantown was devastated by the internment of Japanese Canadians during WWII, while the Black community of Hogan's Alley was physically demolished in the 1970s as part

82 This name is still used by the Skwxwú7mesh to refer to the location of the former basin and the surrounding area. For deeper explorations of Skwácháys as a place of significance, see the artwork *Lookout* (1999) by Noel Best and Christos Dikeakos with Robin Blaser on Marina Crescent in Vancouver, and the ongoing experimental art and archival research project *still underwater: Aesthetic interventions as investigations into land theft, ecosystem erasure, real estate speculation, hazards & resurgence for the Skwácháys neighbourhood of central Vancouver* by Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram.

83 Donald Gutstein, *Vancouver Ltd*, (Toronto: J. Lorimer. Ltd 1975). This book exposes the power structures of 1960s and 70s Vancouver, while also providing a detailed account of the influence of rail companies in shaping Vancouver.

84 City of Vancouver, *Northeast False Creek Community Plan 2017*; Heritage BC, *Vancouver Chinatown Intangible Heritage Values Report, 2015*

of Vancouver's failed freeway project.<sup>85</sup> Of these original communities, only Chinatown remains, in both its historic buildings and original residents, but it too has faced the flight of many of these residents to areas with larger Chinese communities such as Richmond and Burnaby. The neighbourhood has also faced periods of economic decline, intense gentrification, and forms of newer development that are out of character with the existing historic fabric. Together, these histories highlight the key themes of presence and absence, material traces, and the fugitive nature of spaces, buildings, and communities, which are at the core of this thesis.

## Divisions of time

As an added dimension in the discussion of fugitive conditions in the study area, this thesis divides the fabric of the built environment into four periods of time. These durations relate to how the core conditions of fugitiveness, obsolescence, aspiration, and adaptation each have had different meanings when applied to different moments in time, and these different meanings can be traced in the local fabric which persists today. The naming of these periods takes inspiration from the field of gerontology.<sup>86</sup> Thus, Vancouver's built environment is divided into the categories of Old-Old (pre-1945), New-Old (1945-1986), Old-New (1986-2010), and New-New (2010-present). These are shown in relation to the four key conditions of 'Fugitive Architecture' in the Dialectic Map on page 12.

During the Old-Old period, which is pre-WWII, some of the greatest examples of industrial architecture were built in the study area, a surviving example of which is the Rogers Sugar refinery. Other examples adjacent to the study area include the Canadian Fishing Company headquarters in the Port of Vancouver and the collection of former industrial warehouses in what is now the Yaletown Historic Area District. In a young city like Vancouver, described in colonial language as a "boomtown", which was incorporated in 1886 and has seen many consecutive periods of rapid growth, little Old-Old pre-war historic fabric remains in the built environment.

Like many cities in Allied Western countries there were post-war economic booms, which by the 1970s in Vancouver had led to de-industrialization around False Creek.<sup>87</sup> In other parts of the city, the New-Old period, spanning 1945 to Expo '86, saw the construction of many significant works of mid-century Modernist, International Style, and Brutalist architecture. While the majority have been lost to redevelopment in urban areas, some influences can be found in the industrial areas where many utilitarian buildings from this period remain.

Together, Old-Old and New-Old buildings form a significant percentage of the built fabric in the industrial study areas, though in the de-industrialized False Creek this is not the case. In the 1960s and 70s, the industrial areas in South False Creek were cleared by the City for a new low-rise master-planned residential neighbourhood. Later, the remaining industrial areas around

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85 Vancouver Heritage Foundation, Japantown Historic Map-Guide, 2000; City of Vancouver, North-east False Creek Community Plan 2017; See Hogan's Alley Society which "is a non-profit organization composed of civil rights activists, business professionals, community organizations, artists, writers and academics committed to daylighting the presence of Black history in Vancouver and throughout British Columbia. <https://www.hogansalleysociety.org>

86 These divisions, 'young-old', 'old-old', and 'oldest-old', have widespread use in gerontology for referring to seniors of different age groups, though there is a wide variation in age ranges coupled with each term. It is unclear where the practice began or who coined the terms.

87 Bruce Macdonald, *Vancouver: a visual history*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992). 58, 62.

the shore of North and Northeast False Creek would be chosen as the site of the 1986 World Exposition on Transportation and Communication (Expo '86), resulting in them also being cleared and the shores of False Creek further filled in.<sup>88</sup>

Between Expo '86 and the 2010 Winter Olympics, large new high-density master-planned neighbourhoods were built on these former industrial lands.<sup>89</sup> In False Creek North, the Exposition grounds were sold off for residential development to Concord Pacific, which has led the continuous urban development and expansion of the area, advertised as North America's largest master planned community. Other recent examples include Coal Harbour and the Olympic Village. While these neighbourhoods retained almost no industrial buildings, the revitalization of the Yaletown Historic Area District in the early 1990s saw entire blocks of Old-Old and New-Old brick and heavy timber industrial warehouses converted into trendy shops, restaurants, offices, and lofts. This large-scale gentrification of an industrial area was a huge success, sparking a new wave of highrise condominium developments and setting a precedent for other industrial areas.

Recent development has also suffused the built environment with building technologies tied to neoliberal profit-driven design, resulting in a profusion of "impoverished details" that could represent a future wave of obsolescence—potentially rivaling the leaky-condo crisis (see page 14 'Obsolescence' and footnote 32). These examples of the Old-New stand out at the level of urban morphology and material fabric in contrast to the heritage districts of Strathcona, Chinatown, and Gastown, which represent the last large pockets of Old-Old and which, along with the Metro Core industrial areas, are in the path of Downtown's inevitable eastward expansion.

Since the Olympics, the Vancouver real estate market, which is globally recognized as one of the least affordable, has continued major growth with upcoming neighbourhood-scale developments on former industrial lands. This includes North-East False Creek (NEFC), which is the last undeveloped portion of the original False Creek industrial lands leftover from Expo '86. At the scale of the city, the evolution of the built environment has often involved new urban development on former industrial lands. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that in contrast to the older industrial fabric, many of these modern buildings, especially the Old-New and New-New, are becoming increasingly unfit to achieve longevity without the onset of obsolescence due to profit-driven design methodologies.

It should be mentioned that future fieldwork in this study area, and fugitive architectural methodologies, can consider the renewed relevance of artists squats in 1970s and 80s Vancouver,<sup>90</sup> in which the occupation of vacant industrial buildings led to the City amending zoning bylaws to allow artist studios. This is directly connected to ongoing forms of activism that have deferred and delayed obsolescence and gentrification up to the present moment. Likewise, future interventions to existing buildings should consider how planning policies used in these industrial landscapes have shaped community engagement with development pressures and the preservation of historic fabric and industrial heritage, and should thus seek frameworks which allow established businesses and communities to remain and thrive.

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88 Bruce Macdonald, *Vancouver: a visual history*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992). 62,64.

89 Ibid.

90 Birmingham & Wood, Denise Cook Design, John Atkin, et al., *Railtown Historical Area Context Report*, 2015, p.12.

## PART 3

## Chapter 5: Fugitive Practice

### Overview

Fugitive architecture as place, space, or structure is a “somewhere” that a person cannot understand immediately through a single visit. It is a set of spatial, material, temporal, and social conditions that require a process of lingering, exploration, discovery, analysis, and contemplation across repeated visits.

The design approach proposed by this thesis is best understood through applied practice. The design interventions made to the site do not aspire to be fixed images or concrete and delineated comprehensive designs. Instead, these speculative interventions reflect the depth and breadth of the photographic surveys and fieldwork as a selection of vignettes, containing glimpses of possible futures. Each one captures moments of presentness,<sup>91</sup> where permutations are stacked as accretions, calling attention to the aggregation of architectural temporality. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow describe how the temporal structure of a building can be compared to a person’s experience of time:

“At every moment in one’s life earlier times of infancy, childhood, youth, and all other stages up to now are still present, increasing in number yet unchanged and familiar, and subject to redefinition and appropriation.”<sup>92</sup>

The above thought is further articulated through the idea that duration invokes recollection in each of its advancing moments.<sup>93</sup> The design interventions show architecture as progression and process, evidencing adaptation explicitly through the hybrid drawings. Combining hand sketches and photography, the drawings show a layering of future anterior conditions, the events that will have happened, over those of the present.<sup>94</sup> When considered over the broader study area, these individual fragments take on greater meaning through the relationships to their context and to each other. As a network of sites across the study area, the design approach can achieve greater potential by tracing a narrative path through these speculative modifications to the built environment.

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91 Peter Eisenman, *Post/El Cards: A Reply to Jacques Derrida*, *Assemblage*, August 1990, No. 12, 14-17. The use of the term presentness is a variation on the notion of presence, which in this thesis has so far been defined in relation to fugitive architecture as the direct experience of spatial, material, temporal, and social conditions. Here I also refer to Eisenman’s notion of presentness as the discursive event that is architecture, elaborated in his famous exchange of letters with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida:

“In architecture, there is another condition, which I call presentness, that is neither absence nor presence, form nor function, neither the particular use of a sign nor the crude existence of reality, but rather an excessive condition between sign and the Heideggerian notion of being: the formation and ordering of the discursive event that is architecture. As long as there is a strong bond between form and function, sign and being, the excess that contains the possibility of presentness will be repressed.” (Eisenman, 16).

92 Mosen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering*, (Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press, 1993), 112.

93 Ibid, 116.

94 The notion of future anterior is relevant to the field of historic preservation and can be explored in GSAPP’s journal of the same name. This thesis also approaches historic preservation from a position of critical inquiry, although in its methodology the focus extends preservation methods to everyday buildings with no traditional heritage value.

At a community level, residents experience changes at a humanistic scale and pace that is responsive to their needs. Socially, this growth is endemic and material outcomes reflect community engagement. Partnerships with existing businesses and organizations ensure that anticipatory planning protects established character defining elements as determined by locals, while the design interventions project a unique neighbourhood identity and character, which carries forward into future development.

### **Idea of an impossible project**

In some ways, the design approach proposed by this thesis as a response to fugitive architecture is impossible, especially if seen as a problem-solving proposition. That is why a dialectical approach is so important, and why the mapping of these dialectics is so useful. What exactly is impossible? It can be said that designing a finished building (a determinate project) is easy, and designing an unfinished building (an indeterminate project) is much harder.<sup>95</sup> The focus of the design approach on planned aging, and buildings that build character as they weather through climatic conditions and inhabitation, responds to future changes through proactive adaptation. While this has an inherent element of improbability due to the unpredictable nature of future conditions and events, it is not impossible. One aspect that supports long-term prediction is the common past, which all futures emanating from the present share. By analysing historical precedents, it is possible to identify proven, low-tech, or off-the-shelf building materials, methods, and techniques which can be applied to the design interventions, guaranteeing a certain level of durability, maintainability, and adaptability.

The approach proposed herein, along with the proposed design interventions, could also be considered impossible according to existing planning and development practices that are chained to the neoliberal prerequisites of profitability and H&BU analysis. From the perspective of real-life private developers in Vancouver, policies from the municipal planning, zoning, and development departments make many aspects of the proposed design interventions highly cost prohibitive. For example, for a property owner to convert a warehouse in the I-2 zoning district to a different allowable use for that zoning district, such as artist studios or offices, they would have to apply to the City for a change of use. This could involve upgrading the entire building to conform to current building codes and city bylaws. For older buildings that are non-conforming, this would be prohibitively expensive, and would also result in corresponding property tax increases related to H&BU analysis. Together, this makes reduced-rent or lower-productivity uses, such as artist studios or community uses, impossible from a private development perspective. Such spaces would have to be owned, funded, operated, or subsidized by the City or other public sources at cost or at a loss. Co-operatives, collectives, and community land trusts are potential partners for such publicly funded spaces, or for existing older spaces that do not require major upgrades, and which have lower rents due to their advanced states of obsolescence. There is a strong argument for potential “fugitive interventions” where codes and bylaws could be relaxed for temporary uses, such as the use of vacant or obsolete industrial buildings for arts and cultural uses. These could include community uses such as “pop-up” workshops, artist studios, markets, live music and recording studios, dance or fitness studios, and social event spaces, all of which are currently in great demand in the city.

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95 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: an architectural history*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 88-92.

This scenario is already happening to a large extent, with the existence of a significant grey area where property owners have converted spaces to other uses illegally, without going through City departments. These spaces form a significant percentage, possibly the majority, of total artist and grassroots community-oriented spaces in Vancouver.<sup>96</sup> This thesis, and the alternative forms of development it proposes, advocates for these illicit forms of adaptation as they contribute to extending the life of the city’s historic industrial fabric while supporting arts and culture. This grey area, which has been highly beneficial to local community members despite being deemed illicit, parallels demands from disparate groups that include both large developers, non-profit organizations, and grassroots community organizations. They all call for an elimination of restrictive policies from municipalities, and other levels of government, to allow for greater freedom and diversity of development at more cost-effective levels. Since illicit uses are already happening to a significant degree, the inflexibility in how laws are being enforced should be replaced by a level of tolerance from City authorities. Unfortunately, this would still not amount to actions or policies which would protect spaces, which are currently left to exist for indefinite periods of time. This thesis proposes interventions that would make it safer for these spaces to exist in a less precarious fashion. Even if these solutions are deemed impossible by current standards, it benefits the cause to present alternative realities, which make visible what is otherwise fugitive. Accordingly, the design approach can be seen as a practice of ephemerality that observes existing conditions, seeking to extend a building’s life and the communities fostered by it.

### Site description

The site is almost an entire city block in the False Creek Flats near Clark Drive and Venables Street. Figure 92 illustrates the sub-sites which are referred to throughout this section.



Figure 89. Thesis site with sub-site locations of the design interventions identified with letters

96 Eastside Culture Crawl Society, ‘A City Without Art?’, report published October 2019.



Figure 90. Looking north along Glen Drive from the intersection of Glen and William Street at the northeast corner of Site B. The former Food Bank warehouse on the left, Alfa Paper on the right.

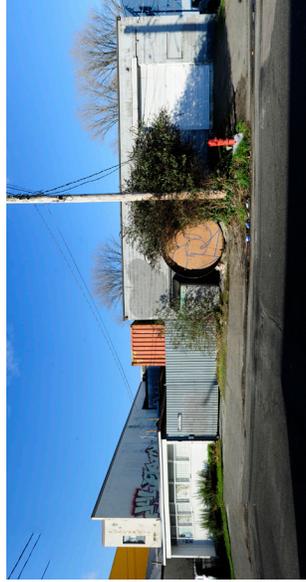


Figure 93. East elevation of Site B (one story mid-century office on left, warehouse with manufacturing space on right with shipping container storage and vehicle access in between, all Landyachtz).



Figure 96. Looking south along Glen Drive from intersection of Glen and William St. (Site B Landyachtz office in foreground, Site C Kum Sing poultry facility in midground, Site D orange building behind)



Figure 91. North elevation of Site B (building with mural and adjoining shed structure occupied by Landyachtz on left); Site A on the right (white produce wholesale building on the corner); both along William Street.



Figure 94. Looking west along William street, between Glen Drive and Raymur, towards Strathcona Park with the tent encampment (Camp KT); Site A and B on left.



Figure 97. East elevation of Site C (Kum Sing poultry facility cold storage building on left with peaked roof, warehouse on right)



Figure 92. The northeast corner of Site A facing the intersection of William Street and Raymur Drive (Total Fresh Produce building)



Figure 95. West elevation of Site A (Total Fresh Produce building) looking north along Glen Drive towards the former Food Bank building.



Figure 98. East elevation of Site D (Tacomio and Woodshop Workers Co-operative).

## **Temporal narrative**

To demonstrate the proposed design approach, it was determined that exploring many possible futures for the chosen site was the best strategy. This is expressed through a “temporal narrative” and is shown through the fugitive sketches and their descriptions. Although there is variation between each of the design interventions, some of which exist in different timelines from one another, they share certain important similarities.

The stakeholders described in ‘Chapter 3: Fieldwork’ remain the same and the targeted users would still be related to light industrial uses and creative industries. In general, the program is light industrial on the ground floor and second floors, and studio or office use above. The built form adheres to the existing zoning’s allowable height. In general, the construction methods, materials, and technologies would follow hybrid mass timber approaches, although other traditional and proven forms could be integrated, including brick or concrete masonry, light gauge steel or wood frame, heavy steel, and concrete—the latter mostly limited to foundations. The sustainability approach would be a hybrid of best practices at the given time, which presently include Passive House, the Living Building Challenge, and LEED v.4.1, along with other building certifications that target net zero energy or carbon. This is balanced with traditional approaches to heritage conservation that allow losses in energy performance in favour of preserving character defining elements and capitalizing on embodied energy in existing materials. A broad analysis of industrial architecture and the selection of key precedents has informed the design process.

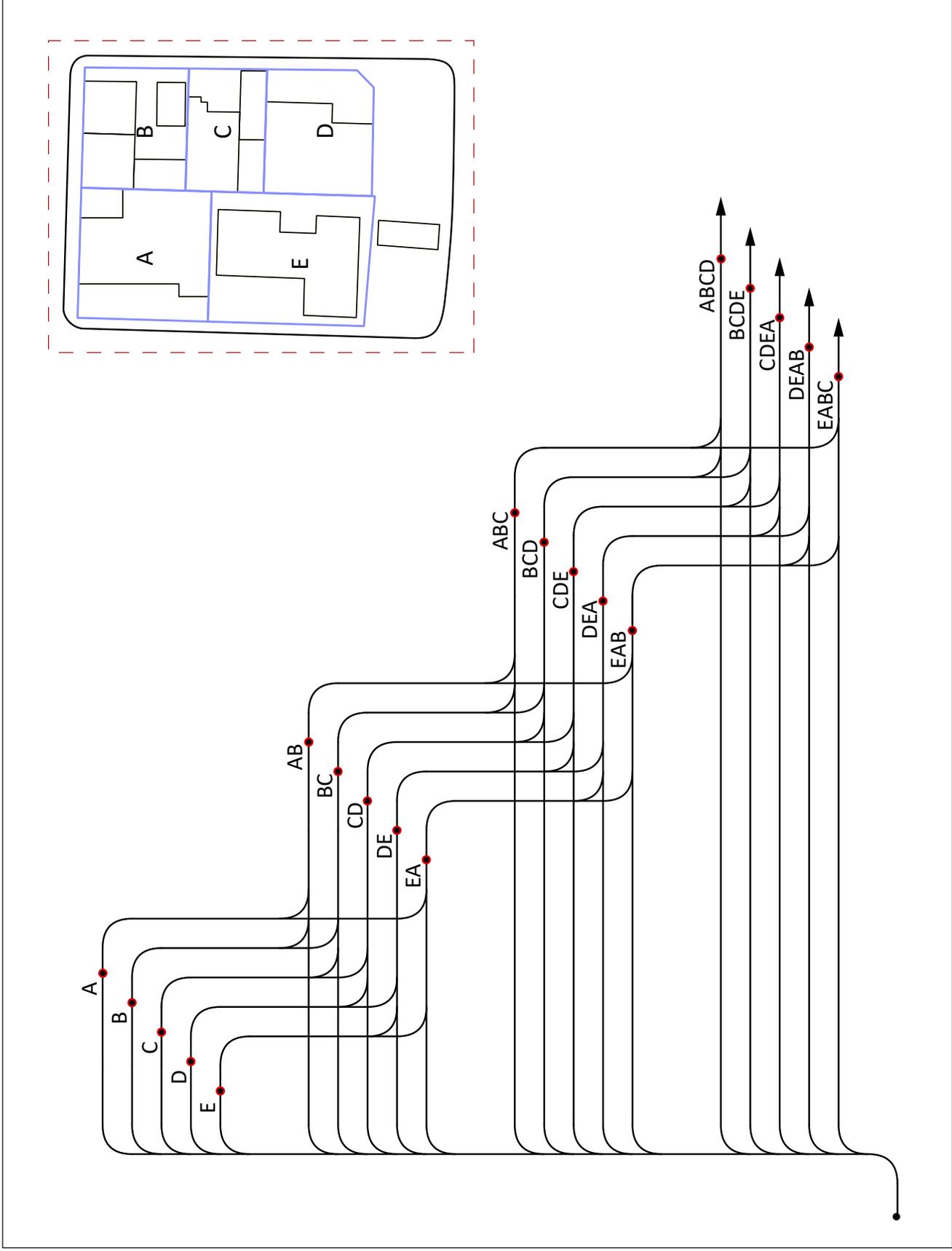
There are two concepts which help explain the “temporal narrative” that has shaped the design interventions. Firstly, a permutation is a single possibility among many variations, and as explained in Figure 99 on page 51, the site has five properties on it, so the number of ways it might develop could be expressed as  $5^4$ , or twenty. This is if the variations are limited to being developed with a total of four adjacent properties only. Secondly, these possibilities can be mapped with each timeline having its own diagram showing what year, within a range, each of the properties are developed individually or are combined with an adjacent property, as shown in Timelines 1, 2, and 3, on pages 52, 63, and 68 respectively.

## **Design interventions**

The following hybrid sketches are responses to fugitive architecture, each applying the theory and design approach outlined in this thesis, while also referencing and incorporating some of the diverse positionalities which are mapped in the Dialectic Map in ‘Chapter 1: Theory,’ page 12.

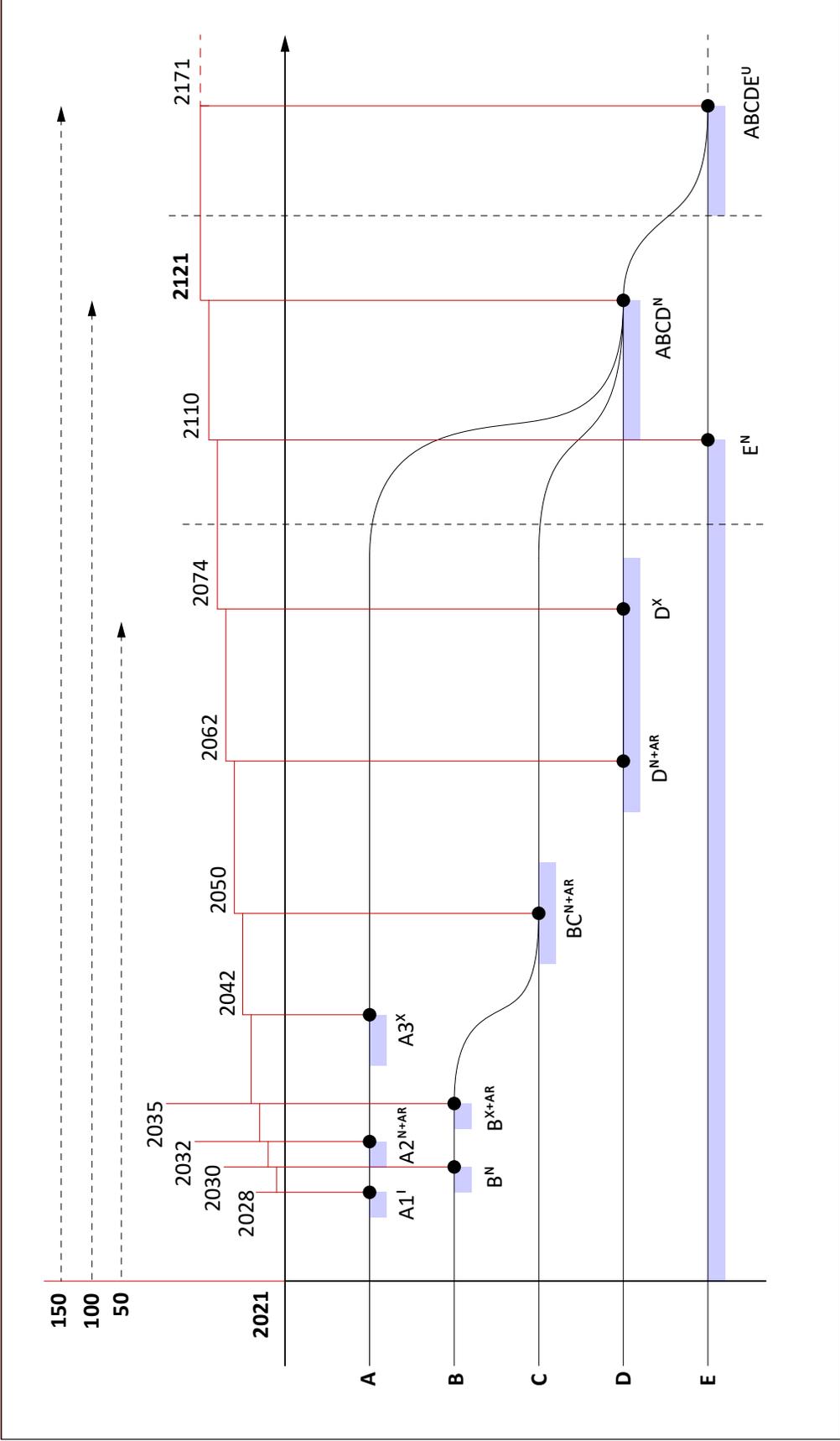
The design interventions are speculative in nature in how they encompass many possible futures while commenting on current architectural practices. Social themes are engaged across the spatial, material, temporal, and dimensions discussed in the preceding chapters.

These proposals are organized into three different timelines of development possibilities. An enlarged version of the relevant timeline will precede each group, with a smaller reference timeline included on each page with the temporal narrative text.



# PERMUTATIONS

Figure 99. Diagram of possible development permutations with site plan. Sub-sites are referred to individual with letters, combinations of letters indicate land assemblies.



**Legend**

- X1, X2, etc = site of design intervention
- Superscript = type of intervention
- Blue bar = margin of possibility
- Curved line = land assembly
- I = illicit
- N = new construction
- AR = adaptive reuse
- X = expansion
- A = adjoined
- U = rezoned urban

# TIMELINE 1

Figure 100. Timeline 1 showing the speculative development possibilities for the main site and sub-sites A, B, C, D, and E. 52

# SITE A

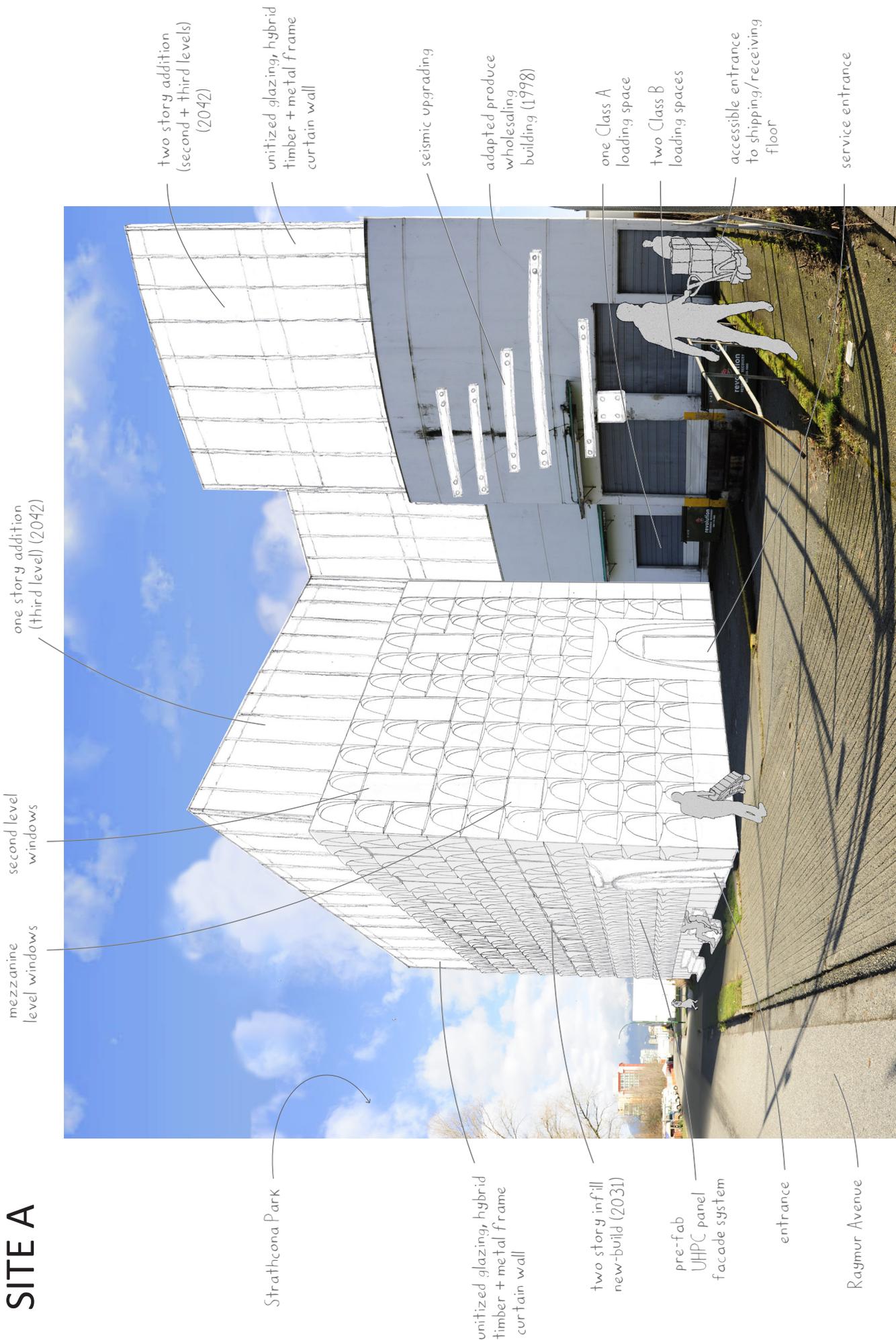
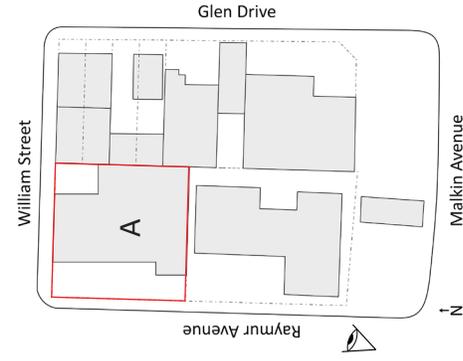
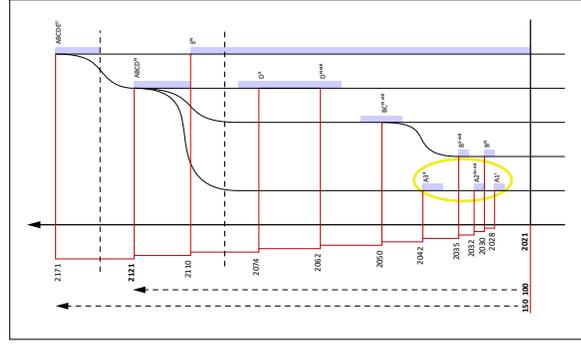


Figure 101. Looking North along Raymur Avenue from the southwest corner of Site A. The original 1988 building is on the right, the new infill on the left, and the vertical additions above.

# SITE A



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 101.



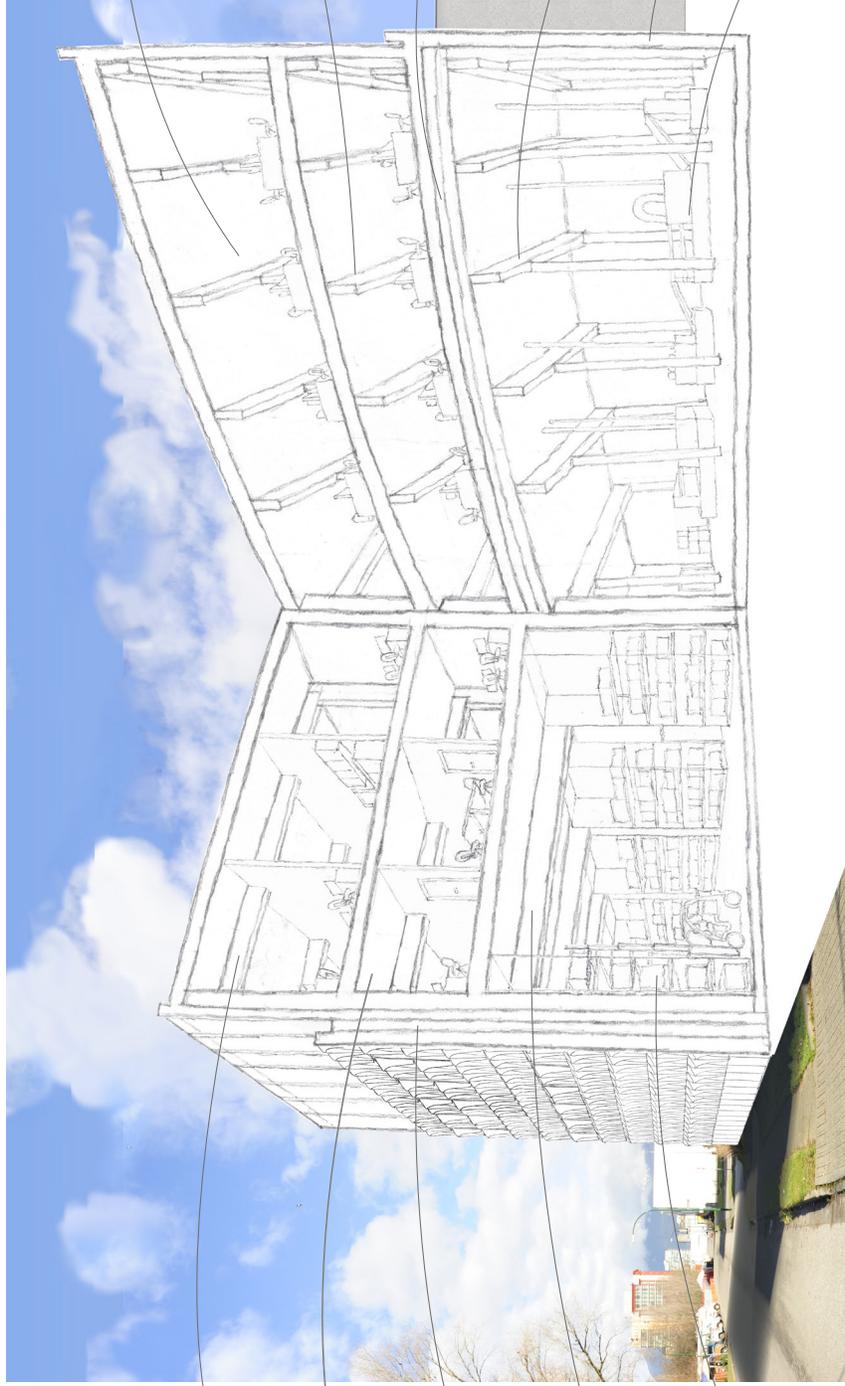
Location of design interventions to Site A shown in Figure 101 relative to other developments in Timeline 1.

Once across the street from the shores of False Creek’s eastern basin, on the edge of Vancouver’s East End, Block 117 was surveyed to be developed as a residential neighbourhood with modest Edwardian houses built on narrow residential lots with timber from old-growth forests. Instead, after the logging of these same forests, this land sat vacant until the mud flats were filled in with earth extracted from the Grandview Cut in preparation for the new CPR rail yards constructed nearby. With land use planning came a new industrial zoning, and over time brick and timber became concrete block and glulam, then concrete and steel, then timber again—this time blended with the glue and fire retardants which compose CLT, LVL, and PSL.

With a warehouse built in 1988 for produce wholesaling, Site A joined the ranks of Produce Row, which at its height saw over 4000 semi-truck deliveries a day. When the City of Vancouver expropriated all the warehouses along Malkin Street in 2028 to build a new arterial road, most of the remaining produce wholesalers moved to Langley. The warehouse on this site was still in operation as of 2021, when portions of the office space and mezzanine were converted to impromptu artist studios (technically illegal at the time). In 2028, when the produce company did not renew its lease, the resident artists saw an opportunity for a cool new event space. After signing a lease with the property owner, the building became known as The Box (A1<sup>1</sup>) and would go on to host community programming such as farmers markets, flea markets, concerts, and after-hours club events for the queer community.

With a proliferation of new stacked-industrial developments in the area, property taxes became prohibitive, and the property owner decided to sell. This spelled the end for The Box, whose name was appropriated by a new owner for a new infill building (A<sup>2N+AR</sup>) on the site’s parking lot. Built in 2031, this project included a retrofit of the existing building and featured a flexible and forward-thinking design that anticipated the future vertical expansion of both buildings. A high-performance athletic apparel company leased the new spaces, which saw the ground floor return to industrial uses as the company’s clothing manufacturing facilities, with head offices on the upper level. By 2039 the apparel company started planning for a new headquarters on the site (A3<sup>X</sup>), partnering with another local developer to redevelop the buildings which their brand had come to be associated with locally (many people still called it The Box). This major expansion saw a vertical addition of two floors of office, building off the pre-integrated structure and vertical circulation cores, and the adaptive reuse of the remaining industrial facilities in the original 51-year-old building, converting the site into an amalgam of old and new building fabric.

# SITE A



hybrid mass timber construction

two levels of office or light industrial uses (4m clearance)

high performance new build envelope

>6m clearance warehousing + logistics space

vertical storage shelving + forklift

two levels of office or light industrial uses (4m clearance)

hybrid mass timber construction

plenum w/ integrated mechanical + electrical systems

>6m clearance manufacturing space

adapted 1988 building

assembly line

Figure 102. Section perspective of Site A

This section perspective shows the spatial configuration of programs inside The Box, as set up for the apparel company headquarters. The range of programs allows for a holistic approach, with offices and in-house research and development, design, manufacturing, and distribution of goods. The ground floors each have minimum 6m clearance, allowing for the warehousing of goods and materials. In plan, the infill building has a 10m x 18m column free factory floor, and the adapted building has two parallel 13m x 25m column-free production lines for manufacturing. This is achieved with mass timber posts and beams, while walls and floor panels are CLT. There is a plenum above the adapted building's roof with integrated mechanical systems. The top two floors of each building have a minimum floor-to-floor height of 4m, with the robust structure and concrete-topped CLT floor panels allowing for both light industrial and general office uses.

# SITE A

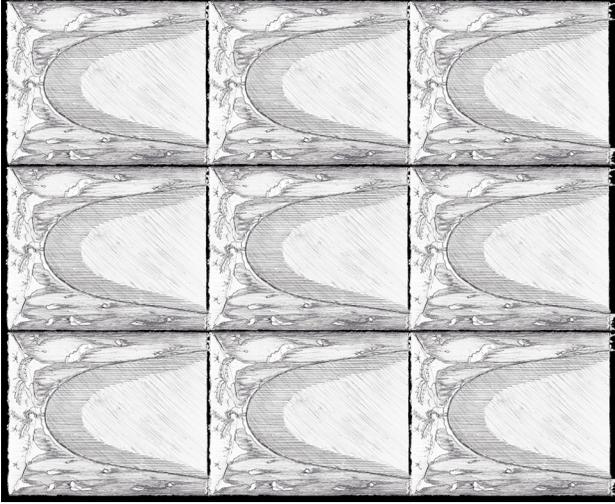


Figure 103. North elevation detail

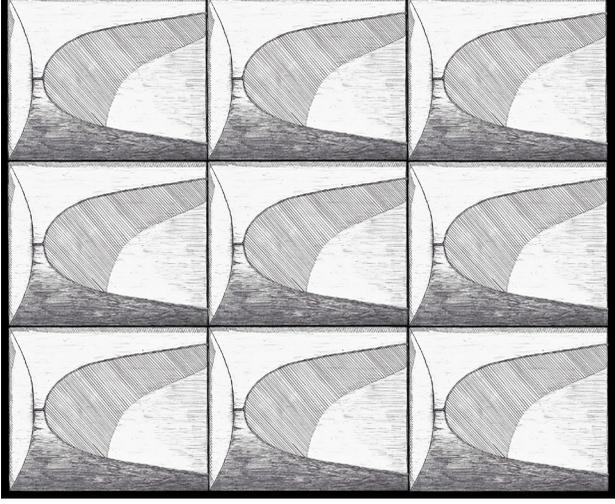


Figure 104. West elevation detail

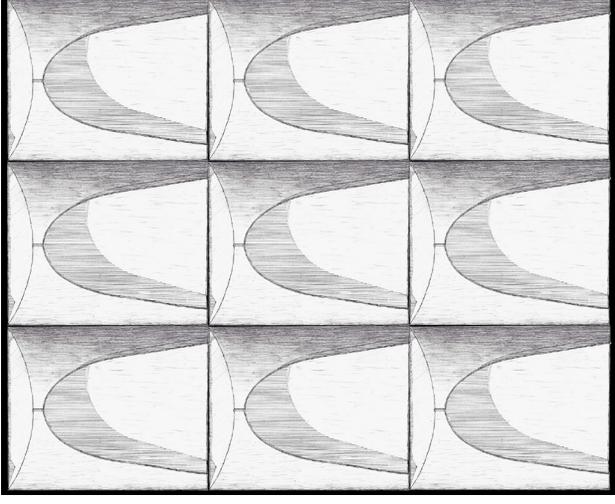


Figure 105. South elevation detail

The facade of the infill building on Site A was designed to anticipate and embrace weathering. Made from 2cm-thick ultra-high-performance concrete (UHPC) in precast panels, it is durable and resistant to impact despite its thinness and lightness. The shape of each panel is the same and is sculpted to direct the flow of rainwater while creating a play of light and shadow. At the bottom center of each panel's top surface in a notched channel, which directs water onto a stainless-steel rim inserted into the central bell-shaped cavity. Each elevation has a different panel finish which corresponds to the solar exposure and microclimate. Mechanical connections allow for easy maintenance, repair, and replacements of panels and the ventilated rainscreen.

The panels on the north elevation are finished with a rough surface, while the material itself has a sponge-like texture with air holes formed by a specially formulated concrete admixture. The purpose of this is for windblown dirt and debris to accumulate, creating an environment for plant growth. After many years, this elevation would have green and black streaks of staining and algae growth, along with thick pads of moss and tree ferns on the sloped top of each panel, contributing to urban ecology.

The panels on the west elevation also have a rough finish, although with a typical solid composition. With wind, rain, and sun, the western surface of each panel would see slightly greater weathering than the east facing surfaces. The sheltered hollow in the center of each panel would be protected from rain, creating a gradient of staining and weathering from top to bottom. Overall, the patterns would be multiplied across the entire elevation, adding texture and visual interest to what is often left as blank wall.

The south elevation takes advantage of the UHPC, using another admixture to create an impermeable, poreless, and self-cleaning surface which is polished smooth. This elevation is the balance of opposites of the north elevation, which accumulates a "finish" of dirt and plant matter over time, while the south elevation remains pristine by comparison. The south-facing exposure contributes to this, with the UV rays from the sun activating the self-cleaning chemical mechanism at the nano-scale of the concrete.

# SITE A + B

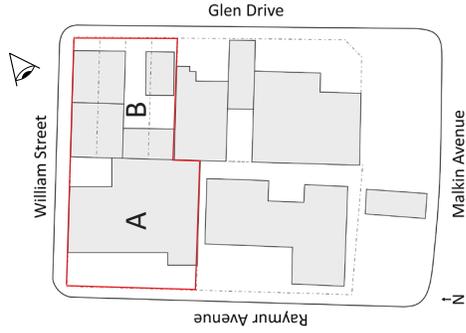


Figure 106. North elevations of Site B (left) and Site A (right) along William Street showing design interventions

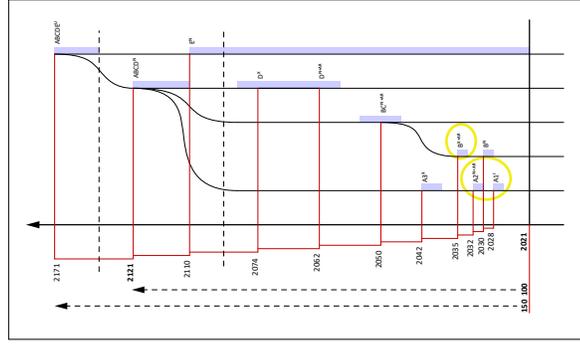
# SITE A + B

This north view, showing Site A on the right and Site B on the left, collages an assemblage of fugitive architectural interventions which would exist at various times along William Street. While The Box (A1) was still operating as an artist collective and event space, but towards the end of its run when eviction seemed inevitable, a group of locals affiliated with the collective decided to perform an act of tactical urbanism in the form of a two story community programming space (A1<sup>H+X</sup>). This makeshift structure was inserted as an infill of Site A's loading docks facing William Street and was partially constructed using lumber scavenged from building demolitions and waste recycling centers, with other materials from the nearby Home Depot on Terminal Avenue. It was designed to be disassembled and recycled or reused.

This piece of ephemeral architecture, which defied City permits, lasted long enough to see the construction of The Box 2.0 (A2<sup>N</sup>) on the northwest corner of the same site, but was dismantled prior to the new apparel company moving in. Fortunately, some of the artists displaced in the process later found a new workspace at the neighbouring site's new arts cooperative (B<sup>X+AR</sup>), whose modular construction can be seen rising above Site B with the preserved low-rise buildings from 1950, with a plenum in between old and new construction. These various interventions and their activities would animate the streetscape and engage passerby.



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 106.



Location of design interventions to Site A+B shown in Figure 106 relative to other developments in Timeline 1.

# SITE B

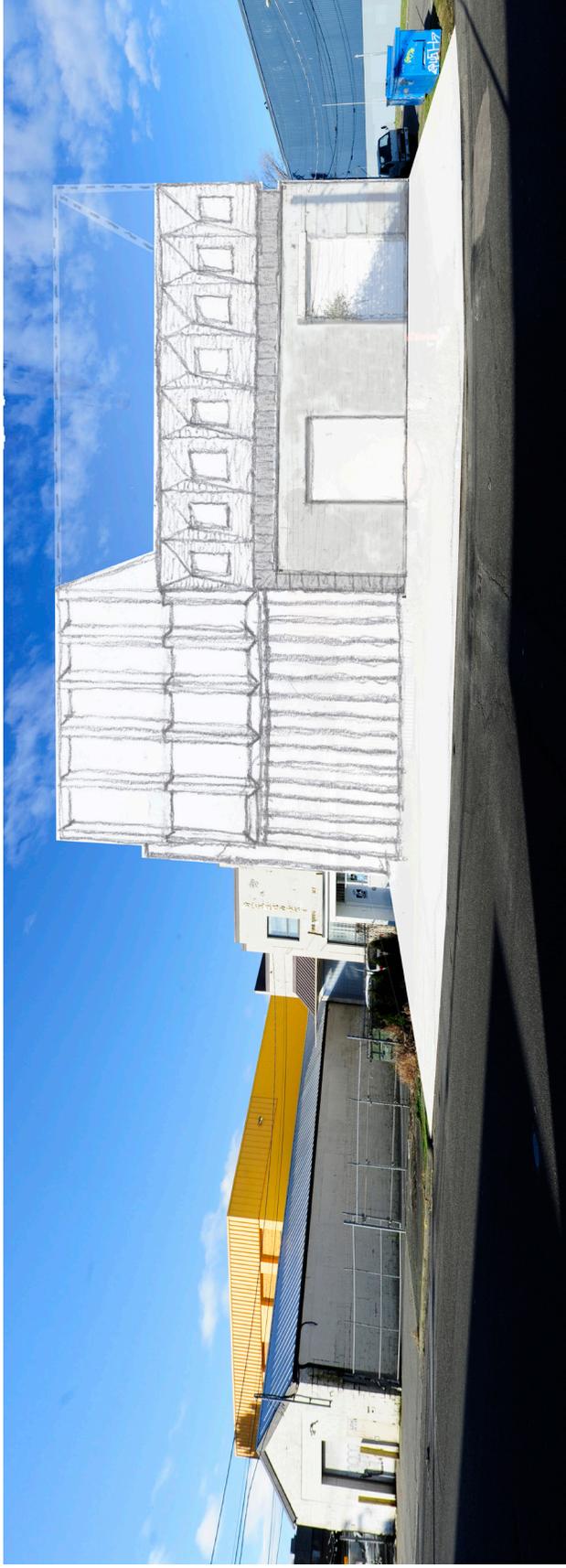
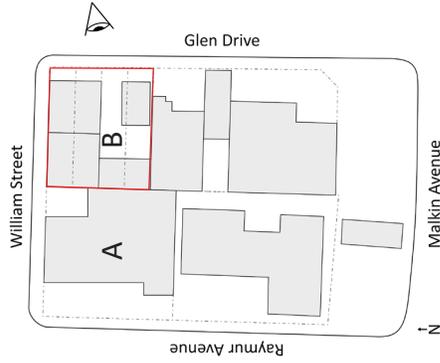


Figure 107. West elevation of Site B design intervention (right), Kum Sing Poultry on Site C in middle, and Site D on far left

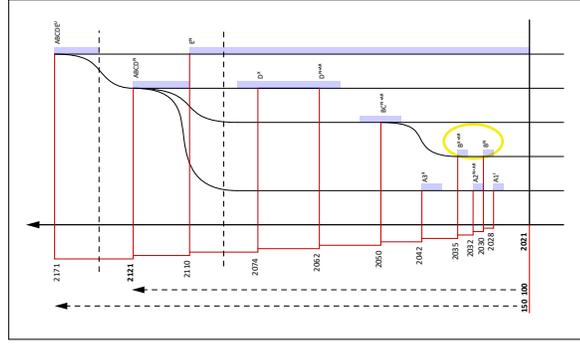
# SITE B

The utilitarian one-story buildings on William street have been used for industrial uses (sometimes just storage) since 1950 when they were built alongside a small one-story office building in the mid-century style facing Glen Drive. A two-story building at the back of the site was built in 1970, while the stacks of shipping containers filling the spaces in between came later with the most recent tenant and landowner, Landyachtz, who used the north buildings for in-house prototyping and manufacturing of skateboards and the south buildings for their head offices. As shown in their nearby flagship store on Venables, an old industrial shed which was adapted to retail and outfitted with an indoor skateboard ramp, Landyachtz has a fondness for the quirky industrial character of the area.



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 107.

This is why they would undertake an adaptive reuse of the site, with the buildings from 1950 and 1970 on the south half of the site demolished in 2031 to make way for a three-story new construction infill (B<sup>N</sup>) with state-of-the-art manufacturing on the ground floor and offices above. Old growth timber from the demolished buildings was repurposed on-site as millwork and furnishings. The new building was partially financed from the sale of the north half of the site to the City, who would partner with the BC Arts Alliance and the Province to deliver a live-work artist cooperative operated by the Eastside Culture Crawl Society. Once the first phase was complete, the existing buildings from 1950 on the North half of the site would be retrofitted with updated wood, metal, and hot shops on the ground level, and an additional story of prefabricated modular artist studios above, all opening in 2035 (B<sup>X+AR</sup>). These two projects would allow a home-grown Vancouver success story to stay in the community which they had grown alongside of over the years, while providing a new home to artists and makers who had been threatened by displacement due to gentrification.



Location of design interventions to Site B shown in Figure 107 relative to other developments in Timeline 1.

# SITE D

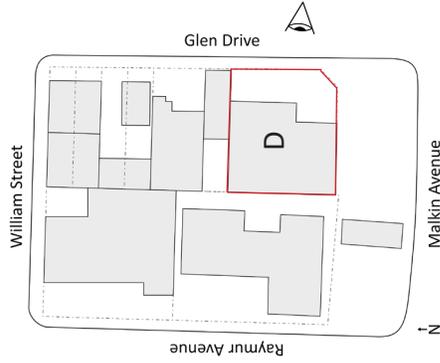


Figure 108. West elevation of the Site D design intervention

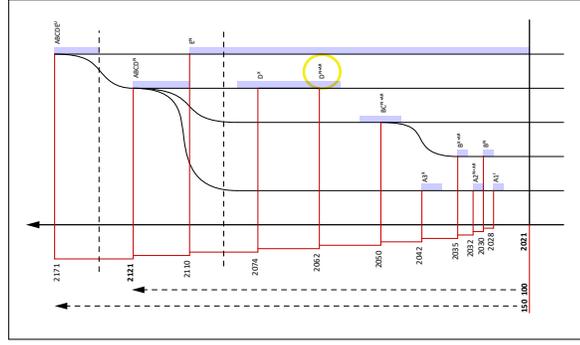
# SITE D

The existing two-story building on this site was built in 1989 with wholesaling on the ground floor and offices above. As of 2021, most of the ground floor was occupied by Tacomio, a Mexican restaurant chain who used the space for food preparation, and who also had a community pick-up window for take-out orders. During this time, the other part of the ground floor had a wood-shop in it, operated by the Woodshop Workers Co-Operative, a local furniture company who also had offices on the top floor along with other community-focused organizations. This building would see a retrofit in the late 2030's to update mechanical systems and worn-out finishes, greatly extending its functional life.

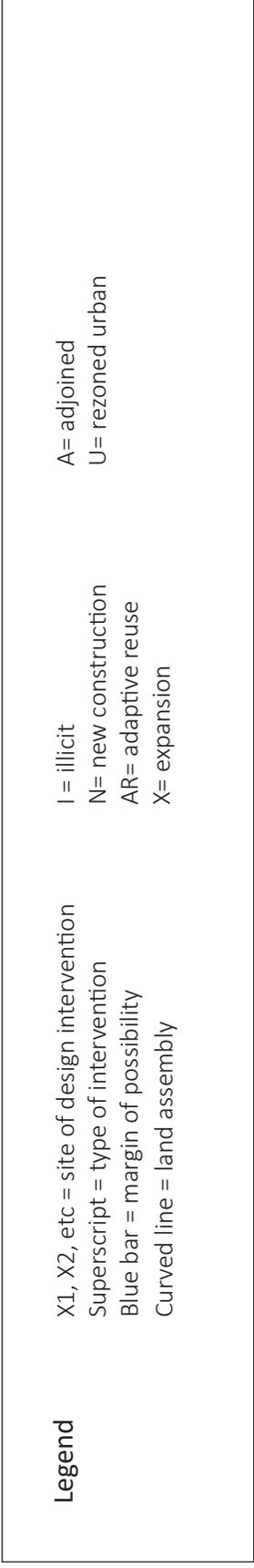
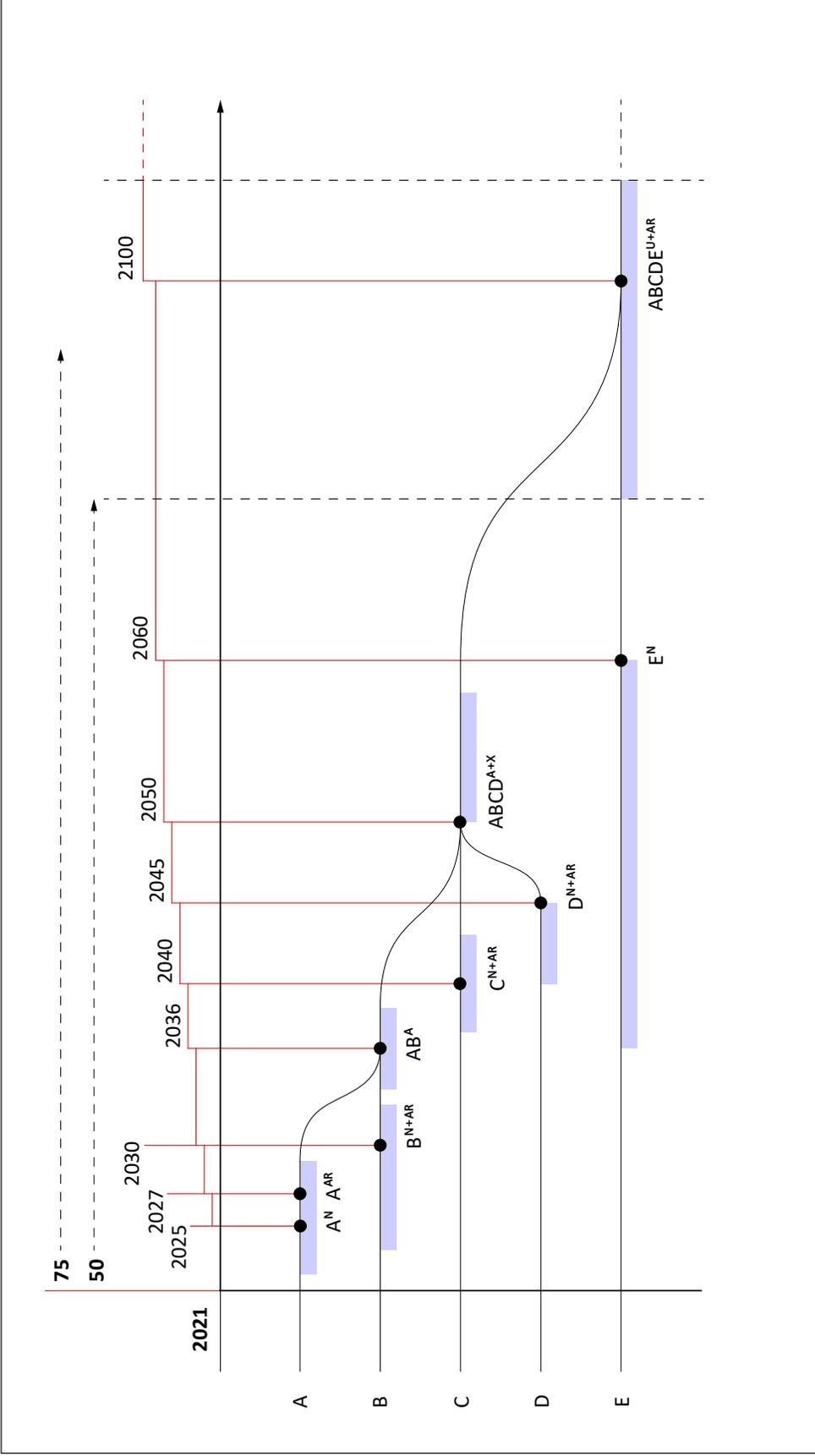
By 2060, with ongoing gentrification of the surrounding area and intense development pressures on the region's remaining industrial land, this property would be purchased by a local biotechnology start-up, spun-off from a research lab at UBC. Since the existing building would be designated heritage by that point, the biotech company would decide to pursue an ambitious adaptive reuse and addition. The first phase (D<sup>N+AR</sup>) saw the existing building stripped down to the concrete shell, and an eastward addition in the form of staggered stacked volumes. The exterior cladding used high-tech furfuryl alcohol resin treated pine, contrasted with stripes of low-tech shou sugi ban cedar, both of which were chosen for their durability and low maintenance. Future phases would see an additional floor of labs added as the area would become a regional bio-tech hub.



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 108.



Location of design interventions to Site D shown in Figure 108 relative to other developments in Timeline 1.



# TIMELINE 2

Figure 109. Timeline 3 showing the speculative development possibilities for the main site and sub-sites A, B, C, D, and E. 63

# SITE AB(CD)

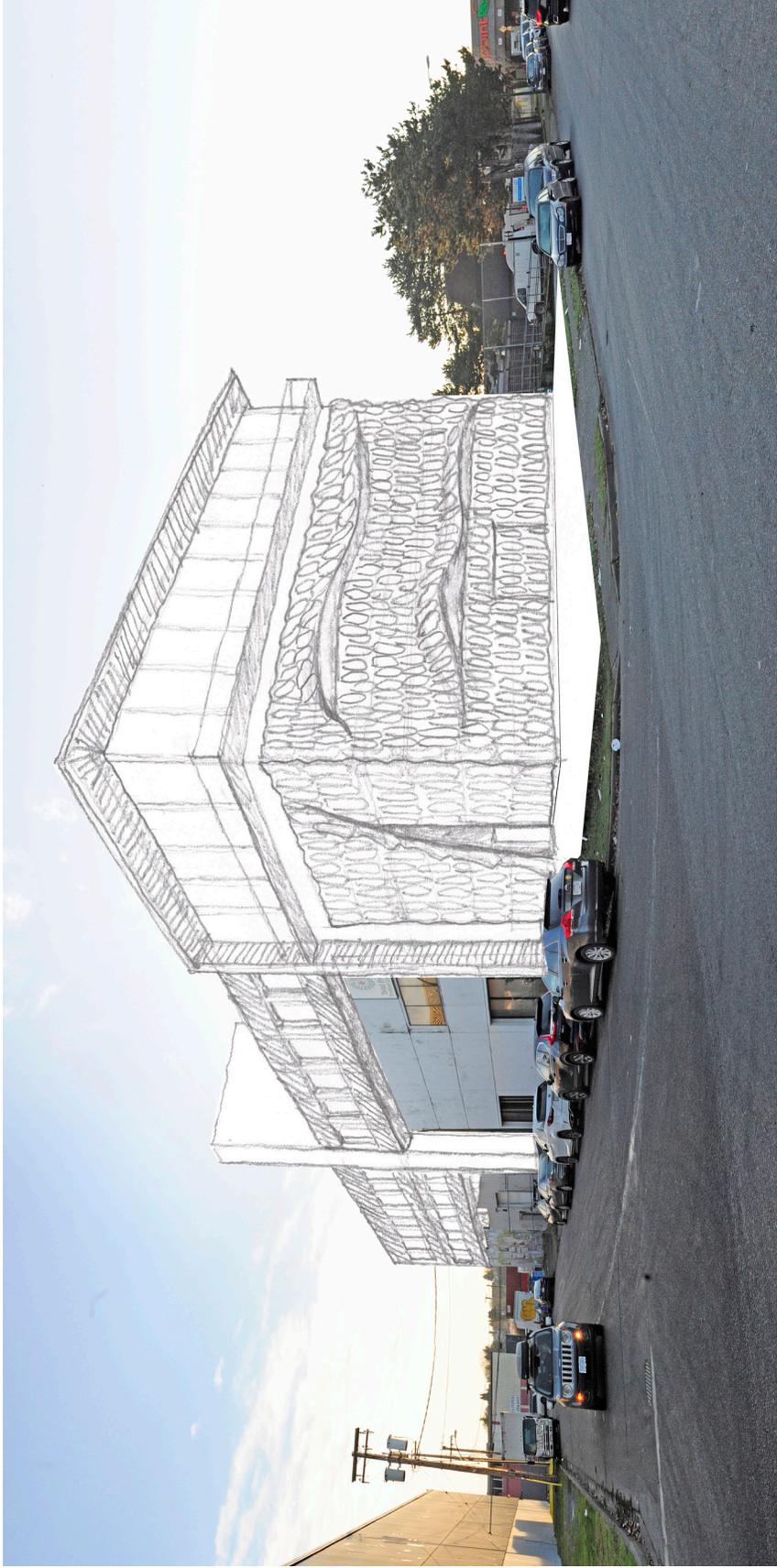
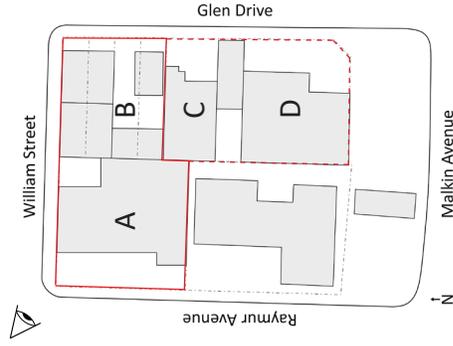


Figure 110. Intersection of William Street and Raymur Avenue facing northwest corner of Site A with the site's "AB(CD)" design intervention

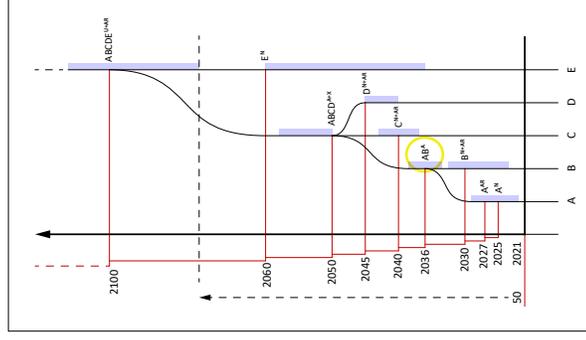
# SITE AB(CD)

A second timeline would see the eventual land assembly of Sites A, B, C, and D. This would be sparked by the property owner of Site B, Landyachtz skateboards, buying Site A to house their new headquarters and a major production facility, which would expand existing manufacturing of skateboards and longboards to also include bicycles and apparel. This expansion would involve a phased approach to development.

First, in 2025, a new construction three story infill would be built on the northwest corner of Site A using prefab mass timber (A<sup>N</sup>). The exterior would feature an undulating screen made from recycled skateboards that would become a landmark in the neighborhood and a popular spot to pose for photos. While this building would be under construction, produce wholesale could continue in the main building on Site A. Next, Landyachtz would move offices and some production to the new infill, while the wholesalers would vacate for a major renovation of the main building in 2027 (A<sup>RS</sup>). This would weave in new foundations, structure, circulation, and services for a future vertical addition. Once complete, Landyachtz would vacate Site B and fully move into the Site A complex. A future intervention in 2036 to Site B (AB<sup>A</sup>) could align floorplates and combine programs across the two sites. This phased approach would provide minimum interruptions to businesses while also sensitively incorporating the maximum amount of existing building fabric and retaining industrial uses and character.



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 110.



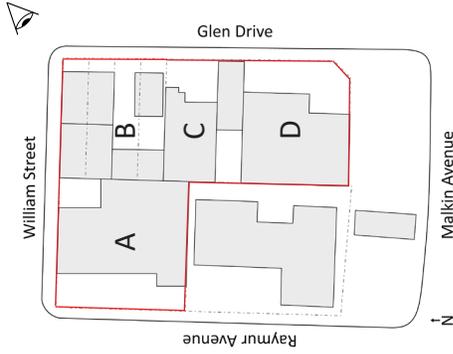
Location of design interventions to Site AB shown in Figure 110 relative to other developments in Timeline 2.

# SITE ABCD

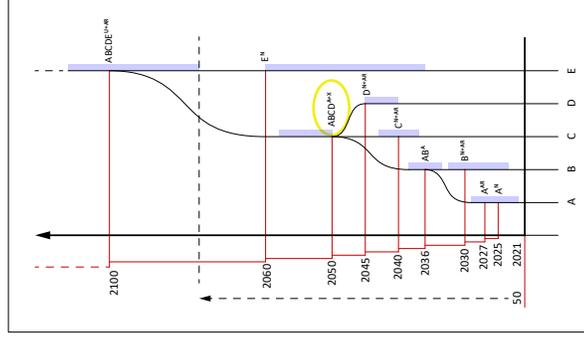


Figure 111. Intersection of William Street at Glen Drive showing northeast corner of the "ABCD" design intervention on Site B (center), with Site A on far right, Site C and D on far left

# SITE ABCD



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 111.

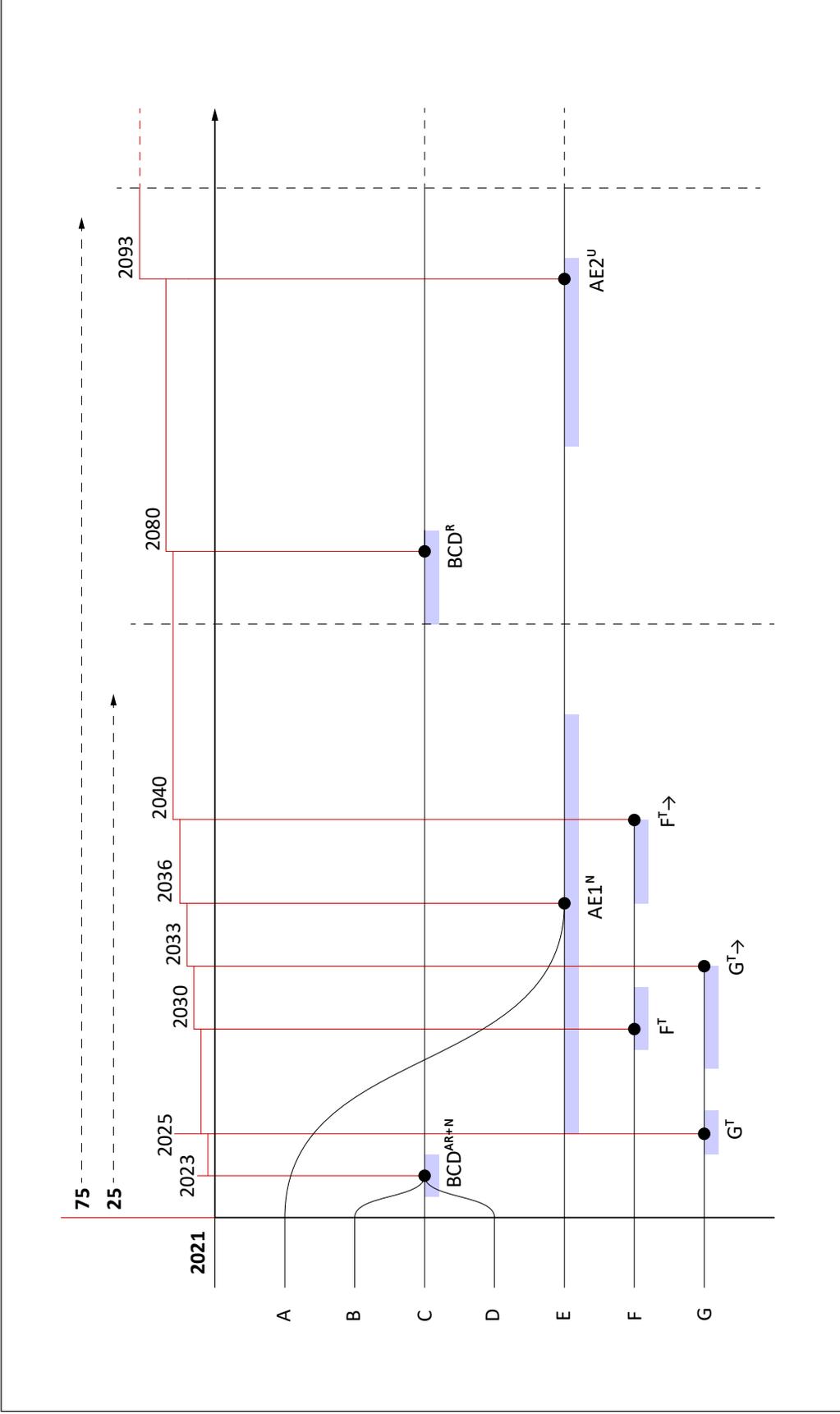


Location of design interventions to Site ABCD shown in Figure 111 relative to other developments in Timeline 2.

In 2030, Site B would be redeveloped using an adaptive reuse approach, incorporating the two 1950 buildings along William Street (B<sup>N+AR</sup>). This would see a similar weaving of new structure into the existing fabric, and a vertical addition using modular prefabricated mass timber units. Overall, the adapted and expanded Site B would see industrial uses on the ground and second floors, with office uses on the third floor, whose floor levels would be aligned and connected to Site A's third floor for a larger floorplate in 2036. Ground floor uses such as a coffee roaster or a microbrewery would also allow for a small eatery or cafe facing Glen Drive, anchoring and animating the streetscape. Consecutive phased expansions of the land assembly in 2040-2045 would see the adaptive reuse of buildings on Site C and D (C<sup>N+AR</sup> & D<sup>N+AR</sup>), with a vertical single-story addition of mass timber modules on steel posts, woven into existing fabric, and a westward three-story expansion towards Glen Drive on Site D.

By 2050, Sites A, B, C, and D could all be combined across their third levels for a potential 45,000+ square foot floorplate, something highly sought after by tech companies in the area. Throughout the assembled sites, vertical cores would allow for a future fourth floor of the same size (ABCD<sup>A+B</sup>). These high rent per square foot office uses have the potential to subsidize lower rent, community-focused uses in other parts of the complex, such as a satellite location for the nearby Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center Society, an organization providing comprehensive and holistic services to Indigenous people, or the Ray-Cam Co-operative Center, a community center serving the Downtown Eastside. While residential uses are not currently allowed by policy or pursued in the design interventions, some degree of public programming in a mixed-use development would better respond to the immediate context and local demographics, which includes residential areas in Strathcona and Grandview-Woodland.

The far future is more difficult to speculate on, though by 2100, if the area has not been flooded by sea level rise or the infilled land liquified in an earthquake, it is likely that the entire site would be assembled and redeveloped, potentially being rezoned from industrial to comprehensive development which would allow mixed-use with residential (ABCDE<sup>U</sup>). It is hoped that at this distant point the proposed design approach would still prove valuable, with the material from the design interventions proposed here incorporated into some form of architectural aggregate with the new construction.



Legend	
Superscript = type of intervention	I = illicit
X1, X2, etc = site of design intervention	N= new construction
Blue bar = margin of possibility	AR= adaptive reuse
Curved line = land assembly	X= expansion
	A= adjoined
	U= rezoned urban

# TIMELINE 3

Figure 112. Timeline 3 showing the speculative development possibilities for the main site and sub-sites A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

# SITE BCD

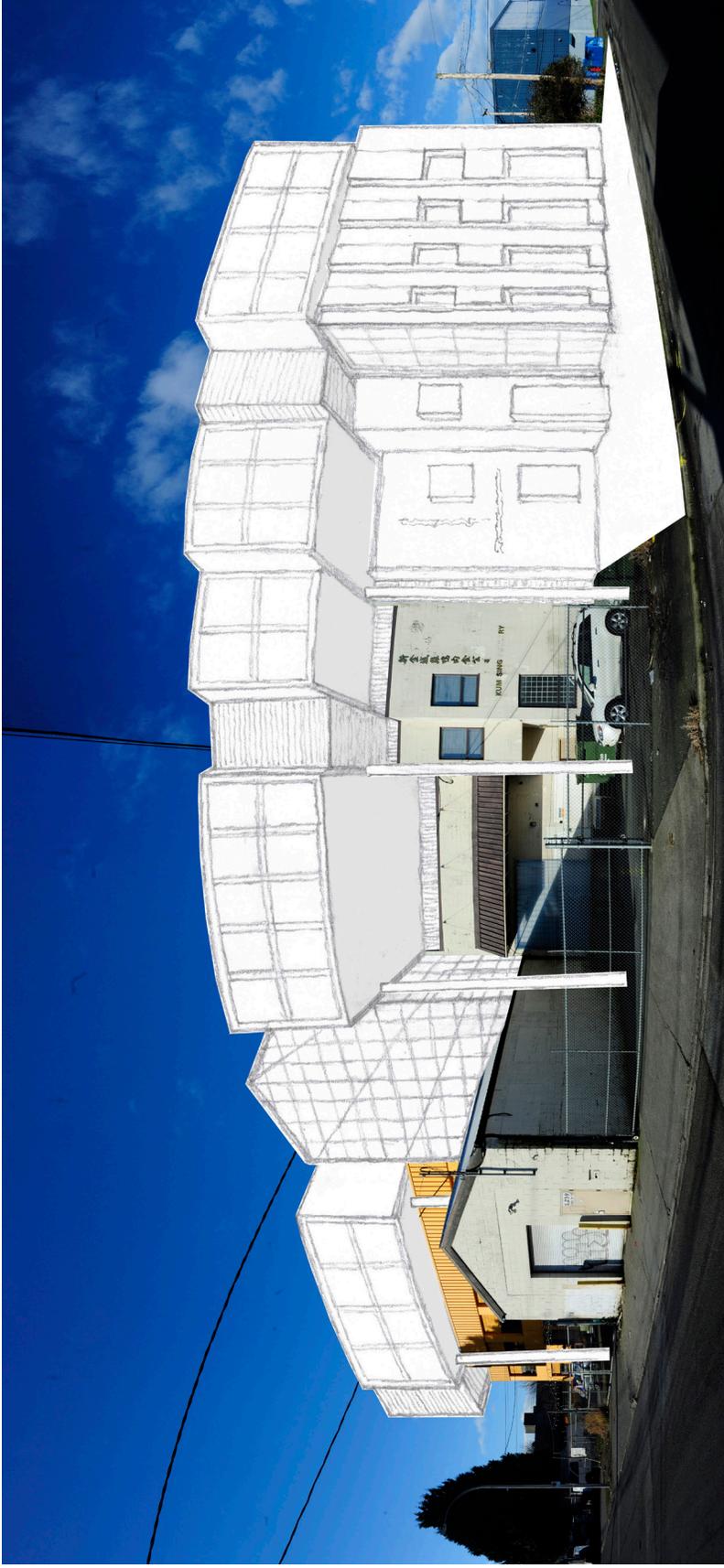
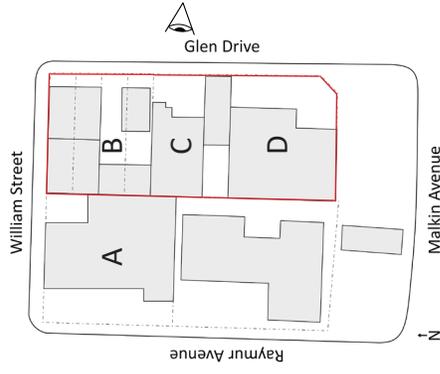
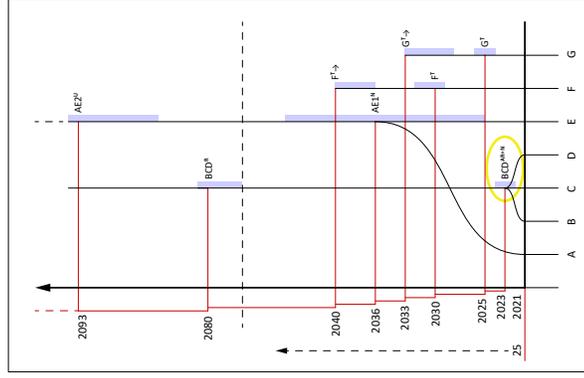


Figure 113. West elevation of the “BCD” design intervention with Site C and the Kum Sing Poultry buildings centered, Site B far right and Site D far left

# SITE BCD



Site plan showing location of sub-site and viewpoint of Figure 113.



Location of design interventions to Site BCD shown in Figure 113 relative to other developments in Timeline 3.

In a third timeline, Sites A, B, and C could easily be assembled and redeveloped simultaneously. This would provide many of the advantages of conventional development, such as economies of scale and labour. From an adaptive reuse approach, it would also provide the advantage that the collection of existing buildings could be seismically upgraded while new foundations are laid to support the new structure.

In the wake of the 2017 False Creek Flats Plan, this industrial area has seen a wave of development which came on the heels of the Mount Pleasant Industrial Area's transformation into Vancouver's own miniature version of Silicon Valley. In the Flats, the ripple effects of this led to land assemblies and the redevelopment of massive industrial sites into the "stacked industrial" typology encouraged by the City.

In 2023, the developer who assembled sites B, C, and D, would take an alternative development approach, focusing on the heritage value of the existing 1953-built storage shed and adjoining 1995-built Kum Sing Poultry building on Site C, and the 1989-built light industrial building on Site D (BCD<sup>AR+N</sup>). The plan would be to maintain the varied depths of street frontage, which could be activated with "commercial retail unit" style stratified light industrial units, which were popularized locally by Conwest in their Ironworks and Riverworks projects. Flexible double-height warehouse-style spaces on the ground floor could accommodate a variety of tenants, while two floors of office above would make the adaptive reuse approach economically feasible.

There would be some compromises, including demolishing the existing buildings on Site A after the discovery that seismic upgrades to the deteriorated structures would prove too costly. The exterior portion of the development replacing these buildings would be designed with inspiration from the artist Rachel Whiteread, with part of the façade forming an inverted "cast" of the Kum Sing building facade, while the rest of the development would follow a modern, industrial-inspired design. The centerpiece of the substantial project would be a glass atrium, built above the rear half of the 1953-built storage shed, containing a café and communal lounge spaces for the office employees, also open to the public, which would open out onto Glen Drive to engage with the streetscape.

# SITE F



Figure 114. South elevation of the Site F design intervention

# SITE F

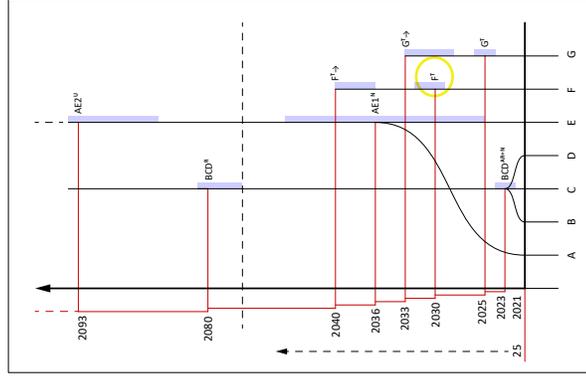


Figure 115. Main site in red outline, Site F identified with red arrow

Alfa Paper on Glen Drive had not used their rear parking area for decades for anything other than storing their dumpster or the occasional shipping and receiving of goods. With the ongoing success of the ECCS's Eastside Arts District, Alfa Paper's landlord would decide in 2030 to commission two light industrial accessory buildings to fill the under-used space (F). This would also complement the Cultural Hub first planned by the City in its 2017 Flats Plan, across the railroad tracks at the newly redeveloped 1000 Parker Street by Beedie Development Group.

These modular buildings would be designed and built locally at the Pemberton Passive House Factory, with a West Coast Modern inspired design, and would take the form of two large trailers, similar to the portables used by schools. They would set an important precedent for temporary modular spaces in industrial and commercial areas, partly taking inspiration from the City and Province's ongoing use of temporary modular structures for housing.

During the years that they were active at Site F, these spaces would host a variety of uses, including artisan paper making, lighting design and manufacturing, and a yoga studio, among more traditional uses such as visual art studios. When the landlord would eventually decide to sell the property, they would be sold to the Parks Board for community uses and moved to Strathcona Park.



Location of design interventions to Site F shown in Figure 114 relative to other developments in Timeline 3.

# SITE G

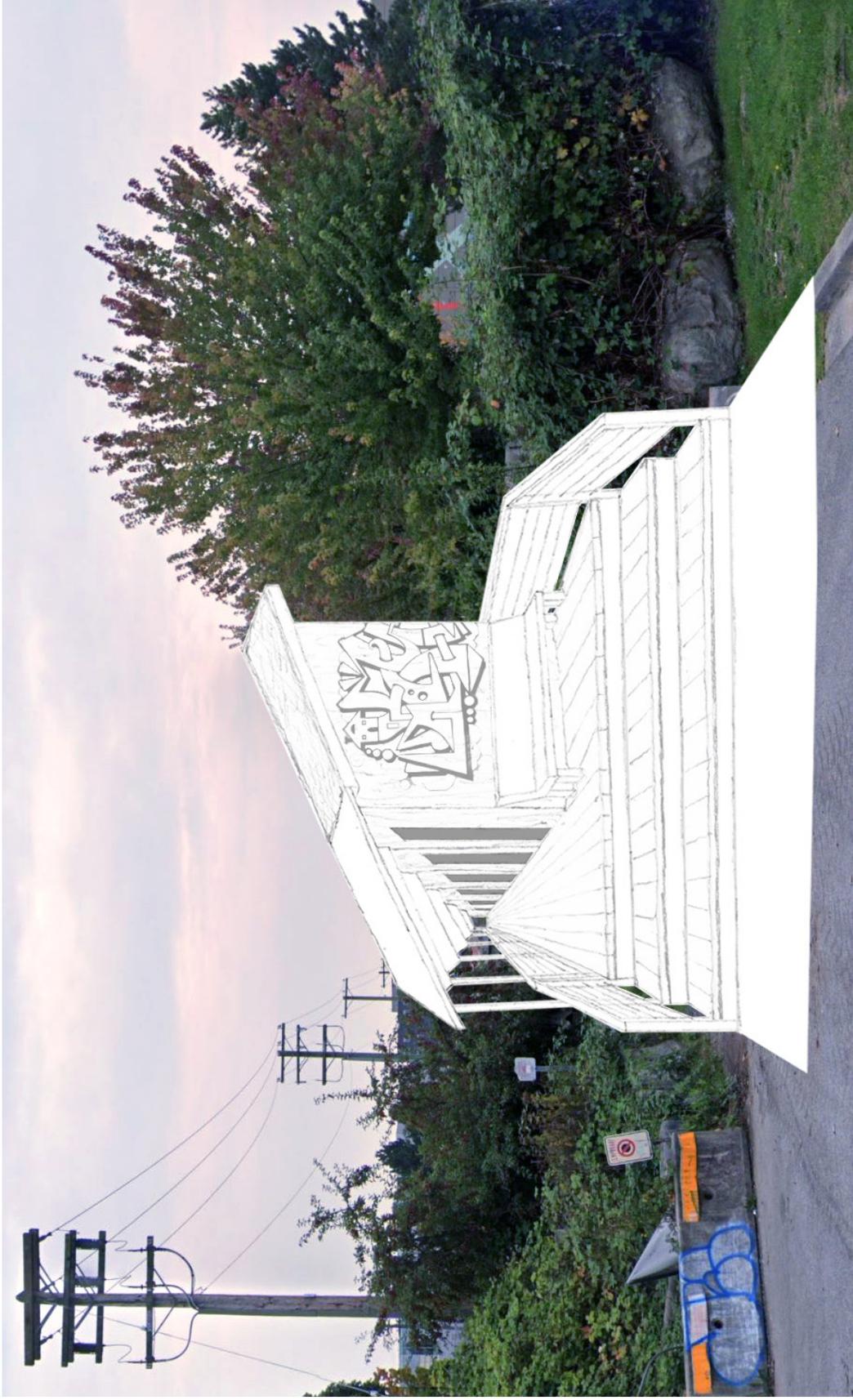


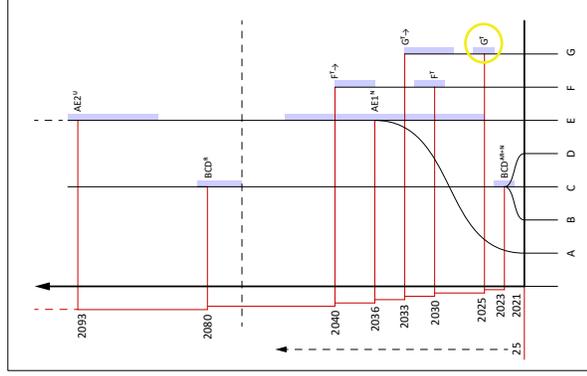
Figure 116. North elevation of the Site G design intervention

Graffiti art © crums  
Instagram @crumstheword67

# SITE G



Figure 117. Main site in red outline, Site F to its right, Site G identified with red arrow



Location of design interventions to Site G shown in Figure 116 relative to other developments in Timeline 3.

Four blocks south of Block 117, across two sets of railroad tracks, is a peculiar patch of urban no-man’s land. Technically the right-of-way for Glen Drive, which, if completed, would be the only North-South street to fully span the Flats unimpeded. Over decades of neglect this site became a dumping ground for precast concrete retaining wall blocks and street dividers, along with garbage and other detritus. This hidden place also became the site of fugitive activities such as urban camping, bush parties, sex work, drug use, and graffiti. In other more privileged Vancouver neighbourhoods, these activities could happen in the relative safety of private homes and public parks, but for socioeconomically disadvantaged and marginalized residents in Strathcona and Mount Pleasant, this urban armpit was their territory.

In 2025 a groundbreaking, unprecedented, and highly controversial pilot project (G) was launched by the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia, Pivot Legal Society, and a local non-profit housing organization. This pilot would see the installation of temporary modular “safe spaces” staffed by DTES outreach teams, with the goal of daylighting and protecting residents engaged in otherwise illicit and potentially dangerous activities. Part community gathering place, part shelter, part safe injection site, part love hotel, and part graffiti wall, these spaces would dignify vulnerable populations and reduce harm to them by moving stigmatized activities from a literal dumping ground to supervised spaces of acceptance and care.

After eight years of operation, the City would decide to complete Glen Drive and the temporary structures would be repurposed, although the valuable lessons learned from this pilot project would continue as precedents for future fugitive interventions to the urban fabric.

## Conclusion

The topic of fugitive architecture aspires to provoke new discussions that foreground the “un-glamorous” subject of urbanizing industrial areas, which has so far eluded popularization. This thesis has problematized notions of urban decay and renewal, while complicating conventional design approaches in the process. By challenging established development practices and planning ideologies that favour the demolition of existing buildings, this thesis unsettles norms of market economics and urban planning by proposing alternative forms of development. The proposed design approach centres existing urban and social fabrics, while protecting established neighbourhoods and their constituent communities of businesses, workers, and residents from gentrification. The resolution of social justice issues, which are often treated as non-essential to the development process, must be included as an essential precondition to the longevity of buildings and communities.

The core notion explored in ‘Chapter 1: Theory’ that a building’s state of incompleteness and receptivity to change equals greater permanence from a life cycle perspective, results in responsive and adaptable buildings informed by spatial, material, and temporal site conditions. Through proactive adaptation that anticipates ageing and change, the design interventions are able to defer obsolescence through continuous evolution. The inevitable death of a building can be postponed through design interventions which creatively incorporate existing buildings into new projects. This process maintains usefulness as uses change, while reciprocating the needs of users. In this sense, the life of a building becomes a multiplicity, the richness of which deepens with age and weathering.

It is not the intent of this thesis to solve problems and present determinate solutions. Instead, the objective is to raise awareness of the role and relevance of fugitive architecture as a topic that has escaped the attention and criticism of scholars. Ultimately, it is the agency of this thesis, more than the thesis as a project, that is the scope of this work. This agency can be measured through its capacity to spread awareness about fugitive architecture and its role in our cities. At the intersection of theory and real-world conditions, this thesis hopes to politicize architecture, provoke further discussion of fugitive conditions, and mobilize greater attention to urbanizing industrial areas.

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