



LOOKING BEYOND:

understanding the visual landscape

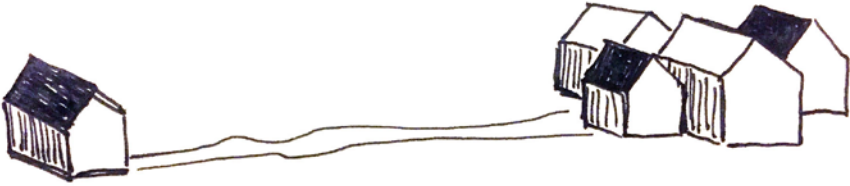
LOOKING BEYOND:

understanding the visual landscape

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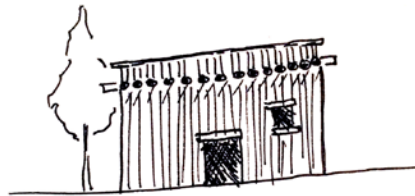
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We are constantly observing environments, but do we really understand what we are observing? Our physical environments are organized and constructed through the constant layering of identities and the processes of everyday life. The resultant landscapes are representations of these identities and are constantly shifting as we interact with them. How does changing our perspective of these landscapes affect how we understand, process, and react to them? This is an attempt to understand the language articulated by landscape.



introduction

As people move through places and spend time within them they leave imprints of themselves in some way. From traditional historical contexts to more recently developed areas, every place has a language that is communicated. This communication informs us not only of the physical environment, but also the social, economic, and cultural elements of a place. These elements come together as layers that are stacked and intertwined. These layers then converge in multiple ways, and in many cases these convergences create larger environments that emit a cohesive atmosphere. In the exploration of this thesis these atmospheres are deemed landscapes.

Landscapes are the combination and connection of places; places are the parts that make up the whole landscape. It is through a visual and physical language that these places are connected. As if these visual elements are words that make up the sentences of place. The sentences of place are then strung together to create a readable language of landscape. This readable language is then interpreted differently by individuals, who each overlay a constructed dialect on the existing landscape. It is through this process

of observation and reinterpretation of landscape that generates the meaning of a certain place. Are there ways to direct the meaning of place to represent the authenticity and social energy of a particular place?

Through a deep investigation of place, identity, and landscape this thesis begins to dissect all of these elements within the context of a particular landscape. The goal is to unfold the landscape and discover and understand the language place communicates with in order to intentionally and responsibly communicate with it in return.



FIGURE 00

1

LANGUAGE OF THE PAST

“The beauty that we see in the vernacular landscape is the image of our common humanity: hard work, stubborn hope, and mutual forbearance striving to be love. I believe that a landscape which makes these qualities manifest is one that can be considered beautiful.”

—John Brinckerhoff Jackson

LANGUAGE OF THE PAST

Just as relatives pass down knowledge and wisdom to younger generations in order to contribute to their success, places also provide us with the knowledge necessary to evolve successfully. The past has significant value in that it is one of the deepest layers of the landscape; it is the base of what the evolution of the landscape is built on – it is the landscape's first image. Looking at how the past shapes and informs us is critical in how we begin to look at the current landscape and its future.

1.0 VERNACULAR

The term vernacular can refer to many things. Many know the term as meaning 'local' or the 'native' context of a particular area. It could be referring to objects, language, architecture, or anything that is directly related to the original people of an area. When it comes to architecture, it is the built environment of the local people; how they made it, and how they exist in it. The fact that the built environment is directly related to the people who live in it gives us a raw and clear representation of those people and how they live; in total it is a form of their identity.

Bernard Rudofsky, an architect who spent much of his life studying vernacular architecture, quoted another architect Pietro Belluschi with a well developed definition of vernacular:

“a communal art, not produced by a few intellectuals or specialists, but by the spontaneous and continuing activity of a whole people with a common heritage, acting under a community of experience” (Rudofsky, 7-8).

We can tell from the form of the built environment the main goals and intentions of the people living there. The process of

how the built environment was constructed and the materials that were available to construct with are all clues that inform us of identity of this 'community of experience'. Through further examination of these built environments the identity of the place and the people are revealed as we look deeper into the interaction the environment has with the objects and people within it. All of these things are connected and intertwined. We cannot look at each of these things (objects, people, and the built environment) separately. Together as a layered process they have created each other and they reflect each other.

Many scholars such as Bernard Rudofsky, David Stea, and Mete Turan, have examined the nature of vernacular, articulating its impact on heritage and community image. Stea and Turan describe vernacular as an intertwined process:

“True grasping of the built form lies in the vernacular architecture as process together with the product” (Turan, 14).

They go on to describe process as a living environment and product as a non-living environment:

“Vernacular architecture refers both to living and non-living environments in specific cultural and environmental conditions of existence, it broadens the scope of architecture beyond function and aesthetic” (Turan, viii).

This description reinforces the idea that there are much deeper meanings associated with place, and that the meanings are often in constant flux, while still being dependent on the context of the physical conditions on which the place is created.

2.0 EXPLORATION

The vernacular built environment communicates a lot to us. It reveals the values and processes of the people who dwelled in that space. There is a clear connection between the actions of these people and their built environment. So what would happen if we took their built environment and placed it in a foreign context with different people? Would the built environment communicate something different to us if its removed from its original contextual conditions? The images that follow are experiments on disrupting the context of vernacular architecture.



FIGURE 1

A Takienta, the vernacular architecture of the plains of Togo, placed within the physical context of Greenland, with an overlay of a Japanese rice farmer.

Media: photoshop collage



FIGURE 2
The ruins of a 14th century church in Greenland, placed within the physical context of the Gassho farming region of Japan, with the overlay of a Togolese farmer.

Media: photoshop collage



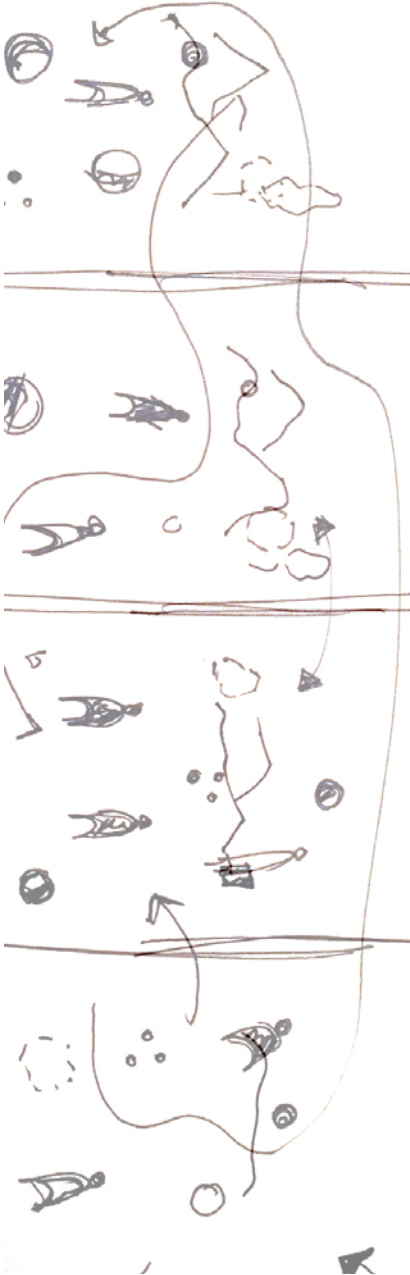
FIGURE 3
A Gassho style Japanese home, placed within the physical context of
Togo, with an overlay of a herder from Greenland.
Media: photoshop collage

PRODUCT

PROCESS



PROCESS



3.0 CONCLUSION

Understanding the elements that lead to vernacular and unfolding its many layers is important to us as designers because it is our responsibility to use design first and foremost to meet the needs of people. How can we meet the needs of people if we are blind to those needs and how they operate? We can't. Going a step beyond the needs of people are what they value. Values are revealed through the elements of the landscape. How people arrange their environments and objects can clearly show what is important to them. This vernacular exploration shows that understanding the context of vernacular landscapes and its people is critical when trying to understand their values and needs.

2

LANGUAGE OF THE LANDSCAPE



*Spectators bring their own
subjectives, histories, and
geographies to a landscape,
and that it is their viewing of
it that gives it its significance
(or, indeed, irrelevance).*

-Gillian Rose

LANGUAGE OF THE LANDSCAPE

Before we can understand landscape we must first understand the parts that compose it. The word landscape is composed of two parts – land and scape. What do these words mean to us separately? It is common to associate the word land with the natural physical soil of the earth – they physical surface we exist on every day. However, this seemingly simple word has much more associated with it. When looking back to its Germanic roots, land frequently refers in some form or another to a defined portion of the earth, or an enclosed space on the earth. Adding the idea of measurable parts to the term land connects us immediately to the idea of land as a commodity and the farming culture of many historical rural contexts (Jackson, 6). This is an important note, because it suggest that land has always been connected in some way to a human element – or a connection to repeated interference from humans.

The second part of landscape – scape – also has multiple associations and relations. Its similarity to the word shape suggests it references the idea of similar objects. The tendency of seeing scape tacked on the end of many words such as housescape and townscape also informs us of its role to describe the organization of particular typologies or instances (Jackson, 7). Examining the words together once again we understand landscape to be more than just the suggestion of a natural environment, but the description of a particular synthetic environment that has both human and natural interaction. J.B. Jackson, a scholar and expert on forces that shape landscape, described landscape as “a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve

as infrastructure or background for our collective existence” (Jackson, 8). Landscapes are therefore a collection of places with a common atmosphere. Places being the parts that build landscape we must be clear on what place is and how they communicate this atmosphere.



3 dimensional model representing the layered nature of landscapes, and how they incorporate both living and non-living elements.



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8
Navrango, Ghana / Women work together to finish a the floor of a hut
while singing.

1.0 PLACE

The word place get thrown around quite frequently. The images that are usually called to mind are primarily visual – images of a physical environment we can exist within. But what does it truly mean to exist within a place? According to architect and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz place is “something more than an abstract location. We mean a totality made up of concrete things having a material substance, shape, texture, and color” (Norberg-Schulz, 6).

David Stea and Mete Turan, authors of *Vernacular Architecture: Paradigms of Environmental Response*, describe place as an action in using the term placemaking:

“architecture and the art of placemaking are the products of such a cognitive framework, which itself organizes and structures practical aspects of human activity” (Turan/Stea, 107).

When thinking about place in the sense of an action it loses its objectiveness, and suddenly becomes something with much more depth. It is helpful to imagine place as a part of a continuum. As an action that is constantly occurring over both space and time. It includes past actions, current actions, and the action of being open to the future. It is an overlaying of both product – the built environment – and process – human existence – and how they impact each other. The physicality of place changes over time as well as the people that act within it. But what are the key aspect of human existence that are reflected in place?

Mark Augé, a French anthropologist, frames place in even more specific terms, describing it as anthropological place. This term suggests that place is inherently tied to human nature. Anthropological place to Augé is:

“any space in which inscriptions of the social bond (for example, places where strict rules of residence are imposed on everyone) can be seen” (Augé, viii).

As studied by Augé, anthropological places are a layering of places of identity, places of relation, and places of history. Places of identity is “the idea of the connection of place needing connection to the body and the identity of the person” (Augé, 43). Places of relation are places of “...shared identity conferred on them by their common occupancy of the place” (Augé, 44). Places of history are described by Augé through the ideas of Pierre Nora, a French historian who focused on the topics of identity and memory. Nora said “what we see in them [places] is essentially how we have changed, an image of what we are no longer” (Augé, 45). In order for a place to be meaningful all these layers must be present. In other words to get a clear idea of the identity of a place these elements must exists. So a place without these elements are not places with identities – maybe they are not really places at all.

2.0 NON-PLACE

In order to fully understand the idea of place it is important to also examine not only what it is, but what it is not. Augé goes on in his book, *Non-Places*, to thoroughly examine the idea of place through the study of non-place. What is a non-place? According to his previous definition, it would be a space that lacks the elements of identity, relation, and history. But what does that really mean?

“A person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer, or driver. . . . The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude. There is no room for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle, usually in allusive texts” (Augé).

In other words non-places are areas without identity and places that instill no identity or meaning in the people that occupy them. People in a non-place simply take on the roles the place directs you to become – in non-places these roles tend to be the consumer and the traveler. People simply go through the motions in a non-place; they are unable acknowledge their identities except upon entering and leaving (Augé, 89). Some common examples of non-places are places of consumerism and transport such all shopping malls, strip malls, airports, train stations, etc. In these places people are directed through the space as a means to an end, they do not usually acknowledge other aspects of themselves while there besides the fulfillment of a task: to get what they need or get where they need to go. Kenneth Frampton in his attempt to acknowledge the problem of non-places, or as he describes it, the problem with universal civilization, stated:

“The fundamental strategy of critical regionalism is to mediate the impact

of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place” (Frampton, 21).

The concern with non-place, or the universal civilization, is that it does not allow for the acknowledgement of identity. People are forced to conform to one identity, diminishing the beauty of the human condition. It is vital that our environments reflect our unique identities as humans so we can continue to fill our lives with meaning and celebrate diversity in identity.

The common thread to gather from these multiple observations and definitions of place is that place goes beyond the mere physical, tangible environment. It consists of what many have described as the human condition or human experience. It is fitting, then, that landscape being composed of places also signifies something much deeper and intangible. How then do these places communicate the idea of the human condition and meaning within the landscape?



FIGURE 9
Lyon, France / Saint-Exupéry Airport corridor.

3.0 EXPLORATION

This is a study of non-places that targets strip malls within the metro Detroit region. Using the same method as the vernacular exploration, each of the strip malls was placed in the context of another strip mall. The images show that the context is not a vital aspect of the strip malls, and although changed, the overall atmosphere of the structures remain the same.

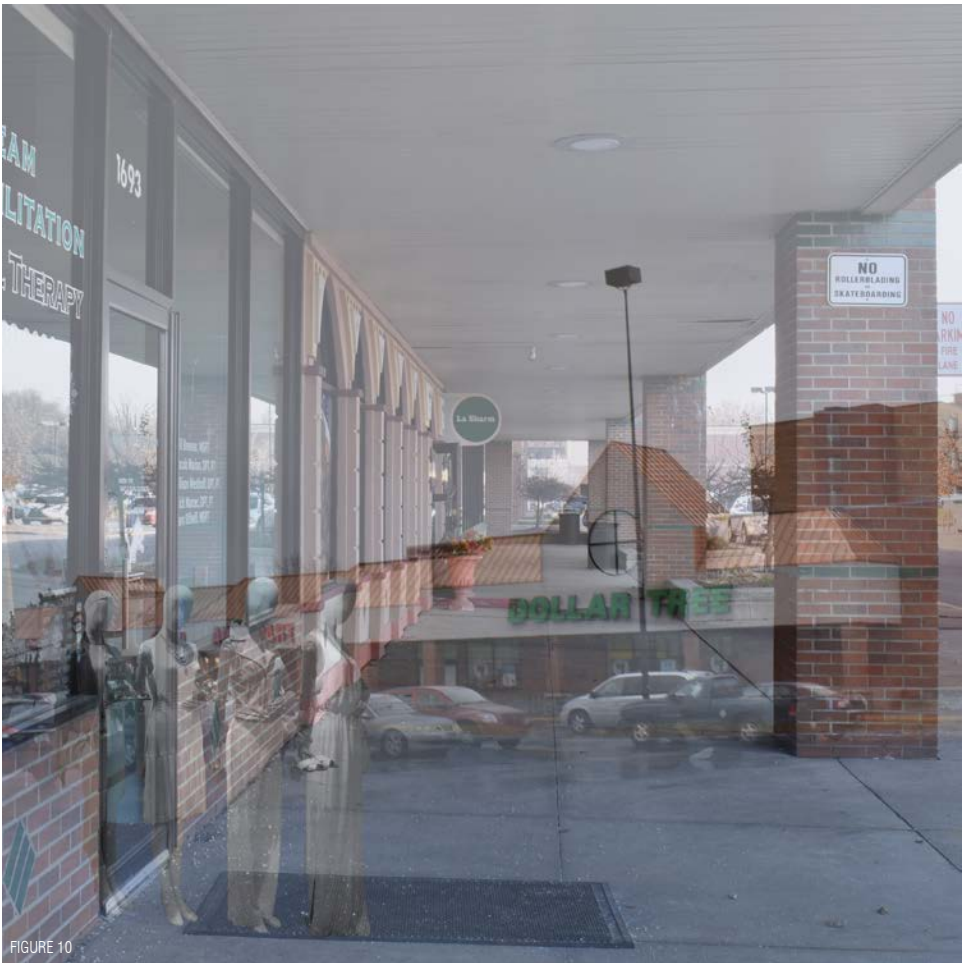


FIGURE 10



FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12



FIGURE 13

A structure in Baekje, Korea representing the role of detail and articulation in the representation of identity.

3.0 IDENTITY TO ARTICULATION

Knowing that identity is ingrained within place and landscape it becomes our next objective to understand how that identity is revealed to be able to understand it. Though the identity of place is composed of countless layers that span across multiple generations and represent all aspects of life –from social and economic, to cultural and demographic – identity is manifested in a physical form that is then perceived visually.

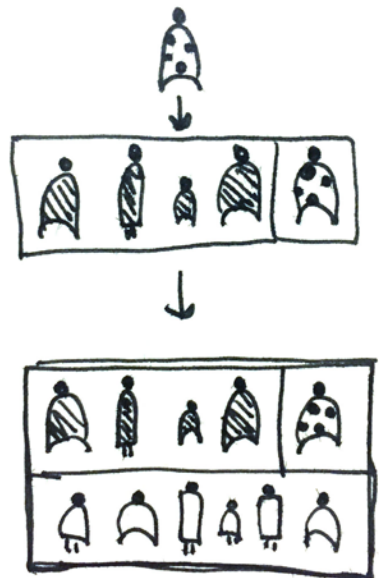
Identity occurs at multiple different scales. From individuals with a personal identity, to the idea of collective identities belonging to groups such as families, schools, cities, or even nations. Not only does place need a direct connection to the body and the identity of the person, but place also reflects shared identity associated with people “by their common occupancy of the place” (Auge, 44). How people begin to organize themselves has a direct impact on place as people begin to structure it to accommodate how they structure themselves. Auge describes the tendency and need for people to showcase their identity:

“Collectives like their individual members, need to think simultaneously about identity and relations; and to this end, they need to symbolize the components of shared identity, particular identity, and singular identity” (Auge, 42).

So how does the character or atmosphere of a particular identity become physical? It is easiest to correlate this process of identity in the landscape to that of language. In order to be clearly understood and represent ourselves authentically we must clearly articulate ourselves. The word ‘articulate’ has roots in the Latin ‘articulus’ meaning: small, distinct connecting part. So identity must be articulated through detailed parts in the physical environment, just as each of our words must be clearly stated so the phrases we speak can be comprehended. These small parts are then combined to create a whole picture that radiates the atmosphere

of a particular identity. Schulz reinforces this idea claiming identity is “determined by location, general spatial configuration, and characterizing articulation” (Norberg-Schulz, 179), and that “character depends upon how things are made, and is therefore determined by the technical realization” (Norberg-Schulz, 15).

A detail as small as a window frame can effectively represent the identity of a group of people. In order to bring the frame into reality, the people who will use it need to decide how the window will open if it opens at all, which determines if there needs to be handles, screens, or glass of some sort. They also must consider what material the window will be constructed with which depends on the materials they have available around them. Finally, they must also consider the ornamentation that adorns the frame they make. This intentional detail often reflects specific values and priorities of the people who use the object. All of these elements of technical realization reflect the needs of function of the people, but also their values and desires as a group.



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF PLACE ON IDENTITY

The goal of this exploration was to begin to examine different identities and how they are experienced in place. Does place impact how different identities are expressed? Three individuals were interviewed all of different backgrounds and identities, and all growing up in the same suburban area. The intention of the interviews was to get an understanding of how each individual identifies and what places, besides their homes, they frequent in their immediate area and if they are comfortable expressing their identities in these places. From the interviews a general trend of how people express their identities in places was gathered as well as correlation of comfort to expression of identity in place. From these interviews and their examination it was clear that many elements factor in to how a person is comfortable expressing their identity within place including the physicality of place, the people within place, as well as the history of the space. It was clear that in many public spaces with a mix of people from different backgrounds many people feel they must conform their identity in some way, but that in areas where people are surrounded by people of similar backgrounds, people were much more open. It was also clear to see that the physicality of this particular suburban area could be suffocating to identity in many ways such as not allowing for easy connection or interaction with others.



Jessica Vo

22 years old
Born: Ann Arbor, MI

Where were you living growing up? Did you move around at all?

We moved to Ypsilanti after I was born for a year or so but then moved to Canton. I have lived here since then.

How do you culturally identify? If you identify more than one way is one identity stronger to you than others?

I consider myself Vietnamese-American. As far as if one identity is stronger or not I'd say it just depends on who I am with. When I am with my family the Vietnamese side is definitely stronger as well as if I am around my other friends who are Asian. But around other people who are not Vietnamese that side definitely gets played down. One time we were visiting family in Washington State and it was strange seeing really only white people all around. We still spoke Vietnamese to each other but it definitely felt weird... We didn't try and be overt about it, no that we usually do but there was definitely more of an awareness.

What are activities or traditions or habits that you think reflect your identity? Where do these take place?

Well my entire family always celebrates Lunar New Year which happens around February each year. We always have a large gathering with family in either our house or my grandma's

house, who also lives in the area. Also, each holiday, either our cultural holidays or even more Americanized holidays, we have an altar in our home to remember and honor our deceased relatives. My father is Buddhist and my mother Catholic. The altar is a Buddhist tradition and it is usually filled with photos of relatives as well as incense and decoration. We convert our office each holiday to accommodate the altar. Even though it's a Buddhist tradition we always combine it with our Catholic holidays too.

Which 5 places other than your home did you visit most frequently while living in the Canton/Plymouth area?

Target, The Canton Library, Himani's House, Downtown Plymouth in general. I just remember always walking around down there with friends all the time and the whole area has a sense of nostalgia for me.

In each of those places did you feel comfortable reflecting your identity? Please describe your feelings in these places.

I never felt uncomfortable expressing my identity in these places, but there weren't many ways in which Vietnamese culture was too visually expressed in my family. We don't have a lot of traditional dress that we wear outside of ceremonies, plus they are too fancy to wear outside haha! But in most of these places it was fairly diverse already so there were lots of languages being spoken so it was never uncomfortable to speak mine out loud. But often times it was more convenient to speak English.

Do you express your identity differently in private versus in public? How so?

We just really have a lot of our cultural connections within the home so it is often expressed differently than outside just because of where our traditions take place. My more American culture is expressed in public I guess. I always had a bit of anxiety expressing some of my identity in high school just because that time it was stressful to express anything about yourself. The only thing I remember going to culturally outside of my home was the Lunar New Year Celebration in Detroit, but we only did that when we were fairly young.



Himani Rajput

22 years old

Born: New Delhi, India

Where were you living growing up? Did you move around at all?

We moved directly to Dearborn from India after I was born. We then moved to Canton when I was 7 years old and I have been there ever since.

How do you culturally identify? If you identify more than one way is one identity stronger to you than others?

I consider myself Indian. I participated in the Indian-American Student Association at school but never really felt I belonged there. I really felt more connected to the temple and the Sunday school community even though I am not very religious. The first year of college there was a large culture shock for me and for others. My roommate was white and had never met an Indian person before. But we became best friends, haha, and still talk!

What are activities or traditions or habits that you think reflect your identity? Where do these take place?

Definitely going to Sunday School at the Chinmaya Mission at Temple. We went every week and had strong connections. I have a strong sense of comfort in that place and with those people. I don't often dress in traditional Indian attire, but when I do that's a reflection.

Which 5 places other than your home did you visit most frequently while living in the Canton/Plymouth area?

I'd say Temple, School (both CCA and High School), Plymouth Coffee Bean, and the Airport at Lilly and Joy Rd. The airport is a strange community, haha! The airport is a bunch of old retired white men. I felt uncomfortable at first going there and wondering how they would react, but really they were just very kind and welcoming. But my Indian heritage never really came up. They would be curious about what I was because I look a bit different, but I never really pursued the conversation topic if I didn't have to.

In each of those places did you feel comfortable reflecting your identity? Please describe your feelings in these places.

The comfort level is different in each place. I definitely felt like I adapted my identity more in Temple rather than in more public places. I just felt I had to be more reserved since there was a certain way we were expected to act and every one of my Indian friends and their parents were around. Whenever I wore traditional Indian attire to school, which wasn't very often, I felt a bit uncomfortable.

Do you express your identity differently in private versus in public? How so?

I definitely swear a lot less at home, haha! My friend culture is very different from my home culture. I almost feel as if I was born and raised here honestly. I guess outside of the home I act a bit more "Americanized", but it's more than just that. My family isn't very open in sharing so a lot of the things I do aren't always shared right away and remain separate from home. Like I've been dating this guy for about four months and he's white. I still haven't told my parents.



Kaval Shah

22 Years old
Born: Livonia, MI

Where were you living growing up? Did you move around at all?

I lived in Westland until I was 6 years old, and then moved to Canton until I left for college (19 years old).

How do you culturally identify? If you identify more than one way is one identity stronger to you than others?

I identify as Indian, Indian-American, and Hindu. I know Hinduism is technically a religion, but a lot of its facets bleed over into culture.

What are activities or traditions or habits that you think reflect your identity? Where do these take place?

I try to participate in Hindu festivals like Navratri, Diwali, and Holi. Navratri – culturally – is a festival of 9 nights of dancing. It can take place either at a temple or large venue. Diwali and Holi celebrations usually happen at the home and at the temple.

Another really big way I reflect my identity is through dancing. Since I was about 10 years old I have been dancing a form of Indian dance known as 'raas'. In college I was part of a competing team and now after graduating I am part of an executive board that help run those competitions.

Which 5 places other than your home did you visit most frequently while living in the Canton/Plymouth area?

School, Temple, Summit, Meijer, Outdoor Parks

In each of those places did you feel comfortable reflecting your identity? Please describe your feelings in these places.

So school brought out a different side of my Indian culture. I was never ashamed to be Indian, but I definitely acted differently than I would at home or the temple. One easy example was my food. At home/temple I would eat traditional Indian food, but then at school I would definitely do my best to stay away from things that smelled/looked different. At a young age I was teased about food that had those qualities so I would do my best to distance myself from it at school. However, I had a pretty large group of Indian friends and we would frequently talk about Indian things – food, dancing, music, etc. One day to promote the IASA show we all wore traditional Indian clothing. I would've been really nervous to do that without their support.

At the temple, it was kind of the opposite. When you're in the presence of each other's parents and grandparents we had to be as Indian as possible. Our clothing and language was relatively conservative compared to school or anywhere else outside. This is when I'd hide my 'Indian-American/American' identity.

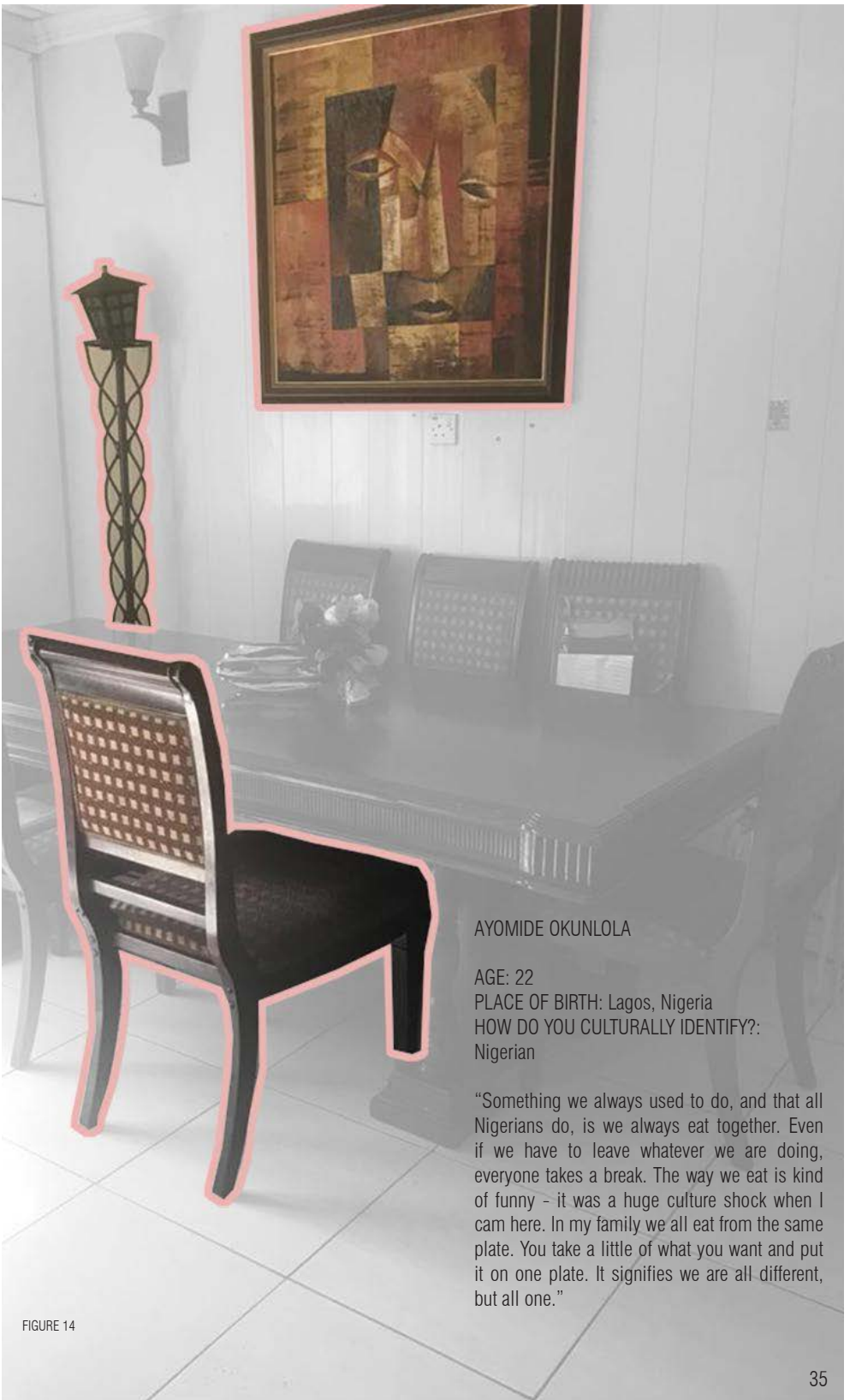
At the Summit, Meijer, and parks there wasn't much to hide or show regarding my identity.

Do you express your identity differently in private versus in public? How so?

I don't think so. I frequently listen to Indian music and don't have a problem if others see or hear it. Sometimes I may feel awkward if I have to wear my traditional Indian clothing in public, but I try to embrace it. However, I also knew my community well enough in Plymouth/Canton to know that I wouldn't face any discrimination. I don't necessarily feel the same way in Texas. Its totally plausible that they are just as open, but I simply don't know the community well enough yet.

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF IDENTITY ON PLACE

This exploration aimed to get a glimpse into how people begin to impact their personal places with their identity. Interviews were conducted with the goal of seeing how people physically change the place they live based on identity and tradition. What follows are categories of their spaces and how they have been created or modified to accommodate identity that was not already present. Comparing this series of interviews to the former interviews it is clear that people are extremely comfortable showcasing their identity within personal intimate spaces more than they are in public spaces.



AYOMIDE OKUNLOLA

AGE: 22

PLACE OF BIRTH: Lagos, Nigeria

HOW DO YOU CULTURALLY IDENTIFY?:

Nigerian

“Something we always used to do, and that all Nigerians do, is we always eat together. Even if we have to leave whatever we are doing, everyone takes a break. The way we eat is kind of funny - it was a huge culture shock when I came here. In my family we all eat from the same plate. You take a little of what you want and put it on one plate. It signifies we are all different, but all one.”

FIGURE 14

JUAN ARIAS-HERNANDEZ

AGE: 22

PLACE OF BIRTH: Pueblo, Mexico

HOW DO YOU CULTURALLY IDENTIFY?:

Latino

“Pictures and different rosaries. My mom has to put crosses in each room above the bed, and we have alters in different rooms with the Virgin Mary, The alters are where ever it is most convenient, like the kitchen, and we have on in our office space as well.”



FIGURE 15

JESSICA VO

AGE: 22

PLACE OF BIRTH: Ann Arbor, MI

HOW DO YOU CULTURALLY IDENTIFY?:

Vietnamese-American

“My father is Buddhist and my mother Catholic. The alter is a Buddhist tradition and it is usually filled with photos of relatives as well as incense and decoration. We convert our office each holiday to accommodate the alter. Even though it’s a Buddhist tradition we always combine it with our Catholic holidays too.”

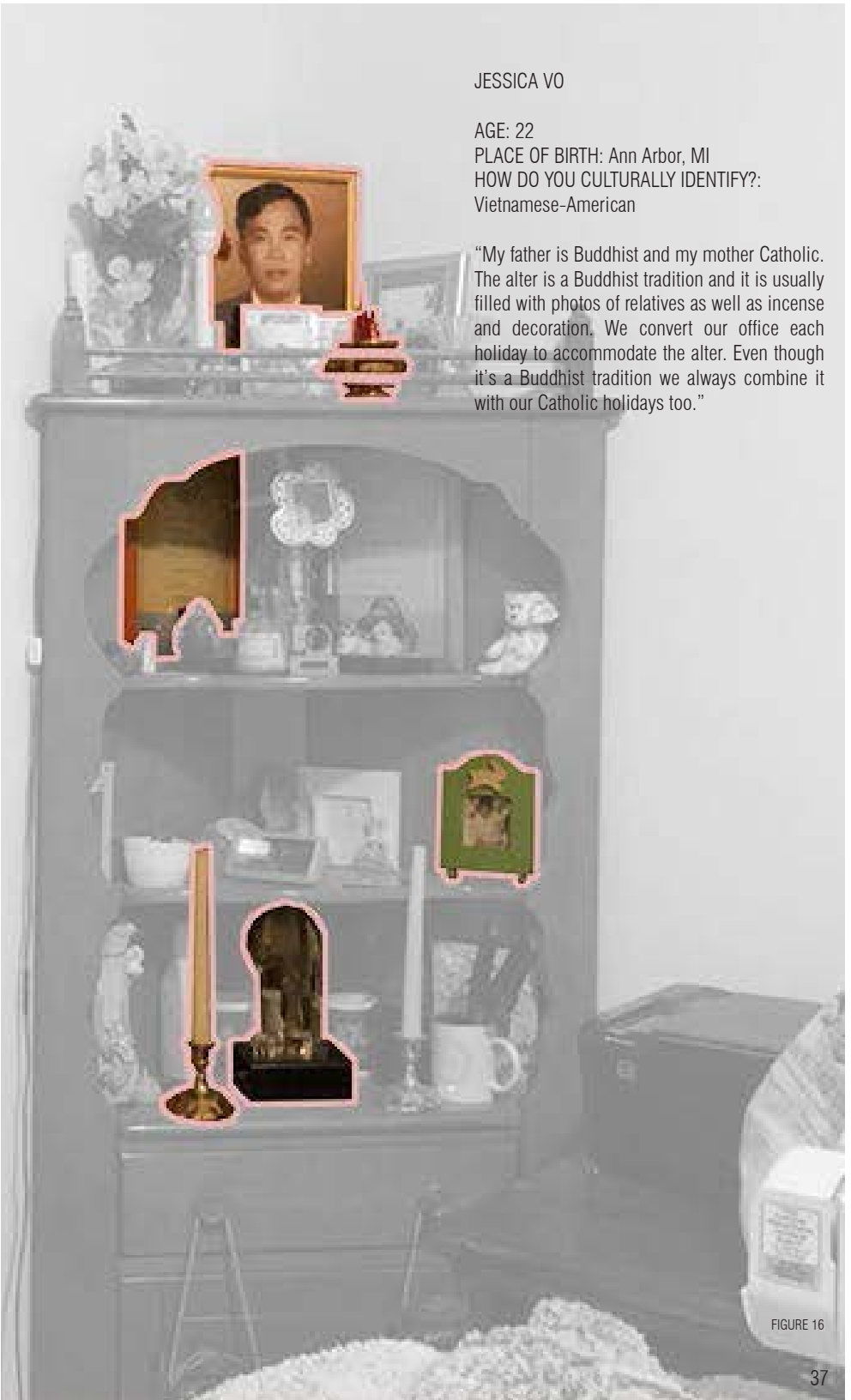


FIGURE 16

COMMONLY PERCEIVED ELEMENTS OF PLACE

Taking a step away from the tangled web of different terminology, it is important to examine how people with different backgrounds and identities perceive place. The goal of this exercise was to identify elements of place that people observed in places they documented themselves and see if those elements correlated in any way with the element the background research had suggested were needed for meaningful place. Those elements being: elements of identity, elements of relation, and elements of history. Participants in this exercise were asked to select the last photo on their cameras or phones that had a place as the main subject. Participants were then asked to explain why they took the picture and if there were any elements of the place that stood out to them. They were then asked where the place was, how old they were, what they did for a living, and how they identified. Participants in the study were respondents from a general survey posted on social media. The responses collected were then examined and coded for key words used in the responses. From the most common words and phrases mentioned in reference to each place general categories were determined from the information. The three main categories determined were material, historical and atmospherical. Materiality came from description words that dealt with the tactile and visual quality of the place mentioned, such as “water like glass”, “blooming white honeysuckle”, and “unique rail detail”. All responses had some form of materiality about the physical place in the description, showing that materiality plays a large initial role in how we perceive place. The second category deals with the historical. This does not necessarily limit the place to having a deep history, but also includes the history the person has with the place. Responses that dealt with personal memories of the place such as: “this place

inspires me and takes me back through my years of college”, “it’s a beautiful building that I drove by for years”, and “I like going to the cemetery in my hometown to visit family members”, were also included in this category. The category of atmospherical dealt with an overall feeling given off by a space. Going through the responses it was clear that the overall feeling of a place was not prominent unless the other elements of materiality and history were also present, suggesting that the other elements are necessary to create strong sense of meaning in the place.

After this exploration it was clear that there must be certain elements present for a place to hold meaning and that these meanings are dependent on the role of the person experiencing the space.

It was also clear that materiality plays a large role in how a space is perceived. But the areas where this experiment failed were how these meanings of place brought about by these layering elements deal with the concept of identity. How does place impact identity and how does identity impact place?

ATMOSPHERE:

LANDSCAPES ARE DYNAMIC AND CHANGE IS ONE OF THEIR FEATURES (ATMOSPHERES CHANGE WITH THE SEASONS) COGNITIVE VALUES ARE PASSED THROUGH ESTHETICALLY FELT SCENERY. (ANTROP., 32)

ATMOSPHERICAL

HISTORY:

LANDSCAPE IS USED AS CONTAINER FOR A LARGE NUMBER OF OBJECTS AND ACTIONS WHICH BRINGS A BROADER CONTEXT AND HENCE ENRICHES THEIR SINGULAR VALUES. (ANTROP., 32)

HISTORICAL

MATERIALITY:

LANDSCAPES ARE MATERIAL OBJECTS WHICH MAKE THEM TANGIBLE. (ANTROP., 32)

MATERIAL

FIGURE 20



FIGURE 17

"I took the photo because even though it is a prison it's a beautiful building that I drove by all the time for years. And it's important to remember our history."



FIGURE 18

"I took this photo to show to my grandpa that I had placed flowers on his parents' tombstone for fall. I like going to the cemetery in my hometown to visit my family members, and I find graveyards rather peaceful. I like that it is quiet at the cemetery and that the lawn is always well manicured so I have a place to sit or stand without feeling uncomfortable during my visits. In this particular photo, I like the contrast between the black headstone and the crisp white and yellow flowers."



FIGURE 19

"I took this photo because it's a place that inspires me and takes me back through my years of college. I appreciate the detail and the physical mechanics of it as it relates to the whole building."

3

LANGUAGE OF THE VISUAL



“How a boundary is depends on its formal articulation, which is again related to the way it is ‘built.’ Looking at a building form this point of view, we have to consider how it rests on the ground and how it rises towards the sky”

-Christian Norberg-Schulz

LANGUAGE OF THE VISUAL

1.0 VISUAL PERCEPTIONS

Details such as a cornice crowning the top of a building or an ionic column straining to hold up the weight of a roof are physical elements that in some way articulate a meaning. How they were made, what they were made of, and who made them are all a part of this meaning. This structure can also be applied at larger scales – not only to details, but systems such as cities as well. How are cities constructed and spatially organized? There are many different types of visual perception within landscapes; it is important to understand some of the key perceptions in order to be able to effectively interpret landscapes as we move within them. Gordon Cullen, a prominent architect who studied the visual elements of the urban contexts outlines many of these perceptions in his book *Townscapes*.



THERENESS – the perpetually out of reach. It is always present but also shifts as we move through a landscape. Thereness is blurry and not definable. It exists beyond thisness and remains there. We are constantly aware of its existence and it adds to the atmosphere of a landscape but its specific characteristics remain anonymous.



THISNESS – the property of something being itself; easily defined. Thisness refers to the elements of a landscape that we can easily distinguish and that are near to us. We can clearly understand these elements and are always conscious of where they are. The thisness we perceive in landscape shifts and we move through the sight. As we move along in a landscape thisness shifts to what is closest in proximity to us, and the former thisness we perceived becomes thereness.



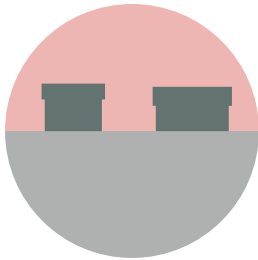
VISCOSITY – the mixture of static possession and possession of movement. The character of the street. The idea of viscosity is that it is an animation of the activity within the landscape. How people move and interact with the inanimate objects of the landscape. Is the landscape lively with lots of movement and occupation, such as people chatting on benches or buying goods from vendors? Or is the landscape quite with sporadic activity such as a lone bicyclist or pedestrian?



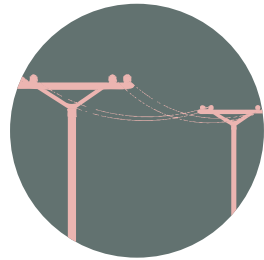
INCIDENT – a specific instance that catches and hold the eye. Things that break up monotony within the landscape. Incident is an instance where that similarity of a landscape is disrupted. For example, perhaps there is a large tree along a street that is otherwise barren of greenery, or a brightly colored home in the mix of a desaturated neighborhood.



NARROWS – the crowding together of buildings which forms a pressure. This is a condition of density and proximity within the landscape. Buildings that tightly encroach on the edges of the buildings it neighbors, or natural elements such as trees or bushes that create in-between spaces. These spaces are read as compact and act as frames that we view the landscape through.



TRUNCATION – foreground cuts out background which clearly juxtaposes the near and the distant. This condition is dependent of the position of the audience or viewer within the landscape. It occurs when there is a readable foreground, middle ground, and background that clearly define regions within the landscape. For example, sitting in a field within a park while there is a garden shed in the distance with the city just beyond. The garden shed effectively separates you from the city while the greenery of the field separates you from the shed.



NETTING – serves to link the near to the remote. Small parts that join the whole into a significant pattern. Netting are smaller elements of a similar language that tie separate parts of a landscape together. For example, light posts or telephone poles that link blocks together, or a myriad of signage that gives a common language to a commercial street.

2.0 READING LANDSCAPE

All of the spatial elements that are used as a communication tools by the landscape need to be perceived by an audience. Each member of that audience will perceive and interpret this communication differently because of their own experiences and their unique background. This unique condition is what makes landscapes so vastly complicated. They can be interpreted in an infinite amount of ways. It is important to understand this concept because it creates the question: where does the meaning of place originate? Does meaning come from the spatial configuration of the landscape or the interpretation of it? I claim that meaning is split between the physical manifestation of identity and the reading of it and there are multiple meanings that generate from one place. Understanding how we process a landscape cognitively is important to understanding how multiple meanings within landscape can be formed. According to Stephen Kaplan, an environmental psychologist who studies the cognition of environments, there are four element we use to perceive our environments. These elements are coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery. All people have different preferences, however Kaplan concludes that there are trends in how most people react to these elements in the landscape (Gifford, 72-73).

With all of these elements in mind and a landscape that meets the tendencies of people, those that experience that landscape will be able to effectively navigate and spend time understanding the landscape.



COHERENCE is the ease of cognitively organizing an environment. Our brain has an easier time understanding things if they are broken down into patterns or structures. Our brain then has an easier time associating these patterns with certain meanings. For example, our brain may read a cluster of houses spaced closer together as one group separate from another cluster of houses that have a different wider spacing between them. This idea correlates with the Gestalt principle of similarity and closure – concepts that revolve around perception.



COMPLEXITY is the environments ability to keep an individual busy. People are more likely to enjoy environments that occupy the brain. When we have an environment that is too similar our brains tend to get bored. Just think of driving along a highway that is continuously straight with no major landmarks; you have probably fallen asleep driving in an environment like this for too long. Having a bit of variety in the landscape is beneficial to keeping people paying attention to the landscape.



LEGIBILITY is the ease of navigation of an environment. Are people able to understand how to move around the landscape based on its organization? Are streets and landmarks celebrated and visible to help guide people through the landscape? The idea of legibility is not to get people to a specific destination, but to have them understand it enough to move freely within it.



MYSTERY is the ability of the environment to promise further engagement and interaction. You do not want a landscape to answer all of our questions. There should be some things that cannot be discovered quickly but require a bit of exploration. Not so much mystery that it hinders the legibility of the landscape, but enough to keep people interested in staying in the landscape.

4

A CITY SPEAKS



*“There was an identity there
- there was a story there. I
remember planting flowers
in those gaps and taking such
pride in them. I also remember
the connections I made with
my neighbors. You hear all of
the joys and all of the problems
of each other through those
spaces.”*

-Virginia Skrzyniarz



A CITY SPEAKS

Looking beyond the literature review and research I realized that when dealing with the concept of landscape it was vital to work within and experience a specific landscape in order to test the ideas of identity, identity's relation to visual elements, and how we begin to perceive these elements within the landscape. In order to do this it was my goal to place myself in an environment I was unfamiliar with. Taking an etic approach was important in order to have a clean view of the landscape and identify visual patterns without bias and knowledge of the landscape's history. It was important to identify a site based on its visual patterns instead of its history. Although I wanted a completely blank approach, it was necessary

to have a general area of interest identified in order to have a manageable area to explore. I settled on the city of Hamtramck, having spent minimal time within the city, but knowing generally of its diverse population and multitude of interesting events, such as the Hamtramck Music festival, Paczki Run, Detroit Football Club games, and many more. The next step was getting out in the city to identify a specific site to analyze further.

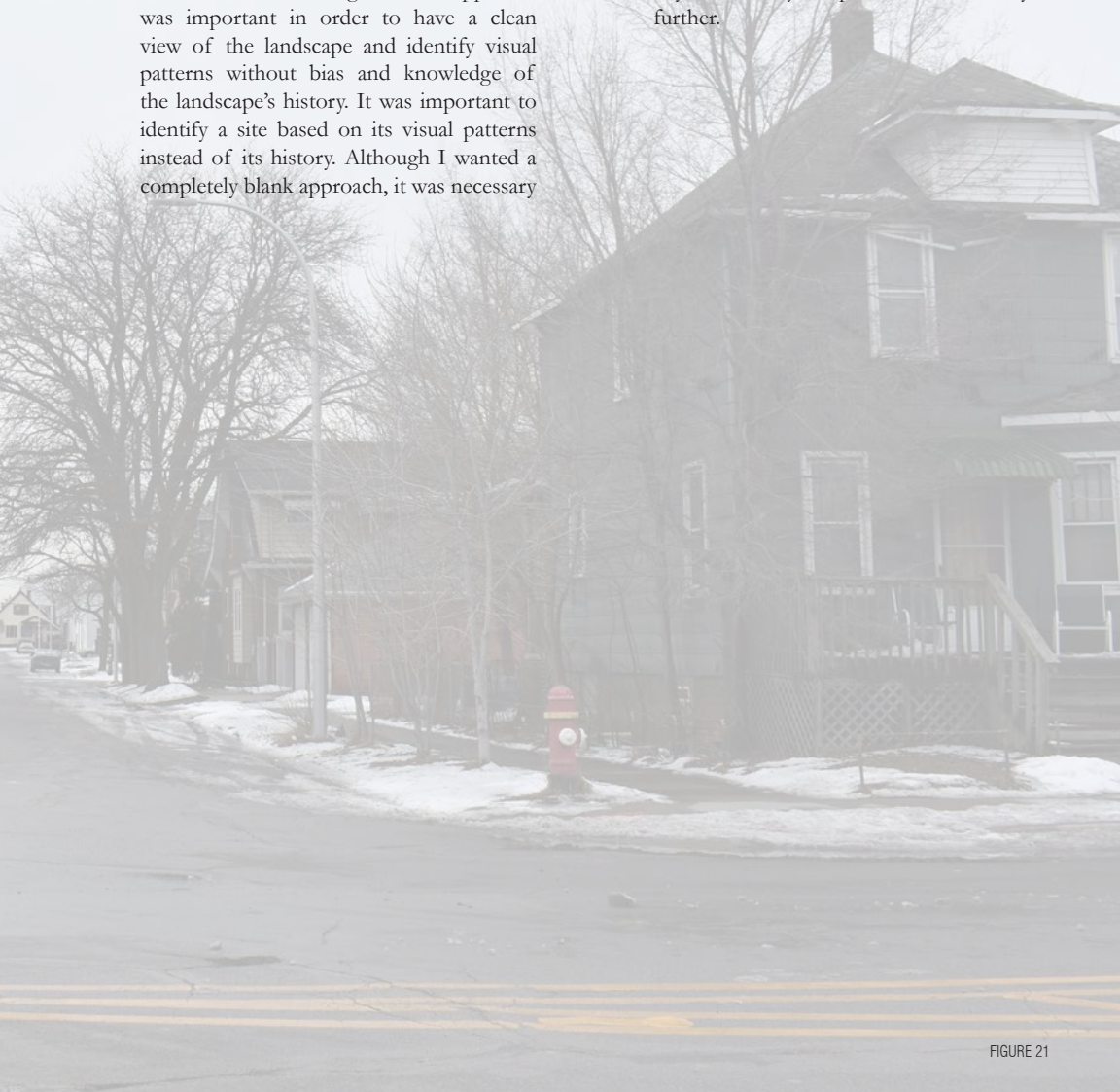


FIGURE 21

MY FIRST CONVERSATION WITH HAMTRAMCK

I first approached the city as most people do in the Detroit area: by car. I took the ramp off of 75 south at the exit for Caniff St and Holbrook Ave. I crossed 75 using the Dequindre Bridge that stops at an awkward traffic light seeming to direct us towards oncoming traffic exiting off 75 north. Once our light turns green I realized we cross the strange intersection and continue onto a much less narrow and busy section of Dequindre Street. I followed the street for a while, trying to get my bearings. I remain on Dequindre until it stops abruptly, and I'm looking at a parking lot filled with the endless sight of Ford F150s packed like sardines, grill to bumper, as far as I could see. The endless view of trucks lead me to a tall tower in the distance that rose from the very far corner of the parking lot. The blue letters across the top of the tower read 'AAM' – I later discovered that this stood for American Axel and Manufacturing, and the tower was their world headquarters.

Having no option to continue forward, I was forced to turn left onto Poland Street, where in the distance I could see housing. I took the next immediate right onto Lumpkin Street in order to follow along the edge of the parking lot, getting brand new view of the hundreds of trucks. Lumpkin was bordered by housing on its East side and

the AAM on the West. The street did not seem very active, just the sporadic car seeming to take this side route to make it past the AAM to get to the highway. As I drove I noticed the houses I was passing were very dense, like a forest of homes standing against the expansive parking lot opposite it. The homes all had pitched roofs which my eyes followed up and down quickly as I drove. The next crossroad I approached was much busier than Lumpkin. Most cars seemed to be heading East into town from the highway. I took a left onto this street hoping to get closer to the center of the city. I was on Holbrook now and it had a similar condition to Lumpkin – very dense housing on one side and a mix of industrial and larger developments on the other. It seems like I was driving along the edge of the residential area. Wanting to start exploring by foot I began to look for parking, but the streets were lined with cars. There were many cars behind me, and not wanting to hold up traffic I kept driving in search of a more convenient parking situation. Only about a half mile down from where I turned onto Holbrook I reached Joseph Campau, a street I recognized as the main commercial artery of Hamtramck, and to my right there was a large parking lot servicing a sprawling strip mall opposite the dense housing. The strip mall seemed so out of place near the

residential area, but it familiar to me in the sense of parking so I entered the lot and found a spot.

Exiting my car I stood for a while just observing the parking lot. In my mind it seemed to be the size of two football fields – most of the black asphalt was visible since the majority of the lot was void of cars. There were dense rows of cars immediately adjacent to the stores of the strip mall, but none on the side that ran along Joseph Campau. Eager to walk around, I picked a direction – the one I was most familiar with – and started. I chose to stay on Holbrook which ran East/West, and walked towards Joseph Campau. Joseph Campau was busy with the sporadic pedestrian, but most of the traffic was from cars. The amount of signage struck me most. It was a very colorful street, but the colors were a bit dull – storefront windows, trim, and siding were beat up just enough to seem off putting. The opposite corner of where I parked housed a CVS, and the other two corners were occupied by banks. Where the strip mall parking lot was located seemed to be the demarcation between the dense section of Joseph Campau and the more sparse section. I decided to continue past Joseph Campau to walk through more of the housing along Holbrook.

As I passed the blocks of houses I began to notice things that were

not visible from the car. The similarity of the houses was almost eerie. Each house had a pitch gable roof creating a rhythm of rising and falling as I walked. Though some of the heights of the houses varied from one story to two or three, the peaks of the roofs were consistent. All of the houses rose about five steps off the ground, each series of stairs terminating at a porch. Each porch was slightly different and cluttered in unique ways; most porches had chairs, each seemingly unfit for the outdoors. Some chairs were wooden dining room chairs that could have been pulled straight from the kitchen table, others were fully upholstered awaiting an affront from the pouring rain. Many porches had clusters of shoes piled near the doors representing the number of inhabitants or visitors inside, and every porch was demarcated by some type of rail. Many were simple wooden railings, while others had twisted wrought iron with a variety of detail. One house I noticed had colorful cut paper decorations hanging from the rails – an ornament I recognized as papel picado, commonly used in Mexico as decoration. Each porch had its own character, but all were connected and visible from one another. I imagined the residents of each house sprawling out onto their porches and entertaining conversations with others across the street as they also sat on their porch. On this particular trip I saw no one resting outside, most likely due to the fact it was a cold January day.

As I walked among these houses there was another noticeable feature: between each pair of houses there was a gap about an arm span wide. These spaces were quick moments of relief from the towering houses pack so closely together. Walking past these fleeting open spaces you were able to see beyond to the alleys and blocks behind. There were shrubs and roofs of structures behind as well as telephone poles with groupings of wires stretching across to the next pole. The gaps were a visual connection to something larger; a reminder that there was more than just the house you were next to. The contents of these spaces were also amusing. I witnessed everything from trash cans to more chairs; ladders propping up gutters, broken fences, statues, and signage. I even saw a surfboard hanging on one fence with the word 'smile' written across it – a small reminder to those that pass by. I walked up and down multiple blocks, each with the same organization, but each house with a special character. Eventually I found myself crossing back across Joseph Campau and walking along the denser side of Holbrook once again.

The stark contrast between the two sides of Holbrook puzzled me. It just seemed so odd to have such a tight pattern of houses and then have that pattern be completely broken. Across from the houses

I took note of the building type: There was the parking lot that lay at the feet of the strip mall. Behind the strip mall there was a senior apartment complex that rose about eight stories, also with a large parking lot in front of it. Just after the senior apartments was another large parking lot, but it was filled with multiple blue commercial trucks belonging to the Kowalski Sausage Company. The factory was at the end of the lot. This particular lot was fenced off and was about twice the length of the factory itself. There was a security station letting cars and trucks in and out. I felt it would be odd to have a house that looked directly at these structures and expanses of parking, and wondered if it had always been this way. I felt that it couldn't possibly have always been like this. As I continued pacing up and down Holbrook I suddenly heard a deep echoing projection fill the air. The chanting bounced and echoed off every surface and rang in my ears. I recognized the rhythmic sounds as the Muslim call to prayer and was moved by the vulnerability and yet strength of this sacred act being projected into the expanse of the city. Looking more closely at the housing, I noticed that unlike the blocks father away from Holbrook, there was more mixed use for the houses. I saw Café 1923 – a coffee shop with a green and white awning, Kelly's Bar, an Islamic Center where the call to prayer had originated from a loudspeaker mounded on its siding, and a store that had a brightly colored awning with the

name 'HOLBROOK BRAZAR' boldly written on it. It was such a strange mix of buildings, but all maintained the similar pattern that the rest of the houses composed: dense spacing, five steps, porches, and railings. The pattern was legible and coherent, and the odd mix of building type and use was both mysterious and complex. This stretch of Holbrook captivated my interest. I had been introduced to my area of study. Although it was an informal first meeting, there would be plenty of chances to get to know each other.



FIGURE 22

2.0 HAMTRAMCK

Having identified my area based on its visual structure, it was now necessary to familiarize myself with the history of the place. As mentioned earlier, landscape is a combination of multiple layers intertwining product and process. The past is the deepest layer of this ongoing process and influences the formation of the future landscape. As we look closer to the history of Hamtramck, the framework for the current landscape is revealed.

Hamtramck is a place that has seen major shifts in most facets of its existence. From its cultural and demographic make up to its economic situation, and even its physical land area, the city has changed a great deal over time. The area of Hamtramck was settled in the late 1700s as a farming community by primarily German and French settlers. The city gets its name from Jean Francois Hamtramck a decedent of French and Belgian Canadians. Jean Francois was successful in the American Revolutionary War and made his way to colonel. After the war the territory around what was known as Detroit switched between French and British hands, until finally the United States took it over from the British. The territory was then split into four townships in 1798, one of them being named after Colonel Hamtramck (Kowalski, 14). During this time the township was extremely rural and primarily only supported farming. Overtime, as the neighboring city of Detroit grew, Hamtramck became smaller and smaller though it was never fully taken over. At its beginning Hamtramck reach all the way to the Detroit River, while today Hamtramck begins just north of Interstate 94.

It was not until in the 1830s when Hamtramck began to see more immigrant activity as the city of Detroit grew even more and opened the first public school and developed waterworks and the first sewer lines in the area. By 1845 the city of Detroit had a population of 13,000 and contributed greatly to the prosperity of the farming

community in Hamtramck (Kowalski, 17). The two major groups of immigrants settling in the 1800s were primarily the Germans and later on, the Polish. The large growth of Polish immigrants into Hamtramck began after the American Civil War in the 1870s as the conditions in German occupied Poland urged Poles to move. Industry in the growing area included rail companies, stove and iron works, and even some breweries, all while still having a strong farming industry. In 1901 to continue to protect their borders from the still growing Detroit, the 500 residents of Hamtramck decided to become an official village (Kowalski, 22).

With the establishment of so much industry in the region, the Detroit area had the perfect conditions to grow the car industry. There were many players in the auto game, but none impacted Hamtramck as much as the Dodge Factory. In 1910 John and Horace Dodge brought auto manufacturing to the city of Hamtramck opening up the Dodge Main factory at the village's south end. The brothers were in direct competition with Ford and required many employees in order to keep up with production. They enticed workers by offering a \$3 a day wage – while this was less than what Ford was paying his workers, the \$3 was given in cash to employees, cutting through the wait time checks took. With this opportunity the influx of workers, and in turn residents, grew exponentially in the early 1900s (Kowalski, 28-31).

In 1910 the population of Hamtramck was 3,559 people and just ten years later the population had reached 48,615 people. To keep up with the growing population, the number of houses also had to grow exponentially. In 1901 there was a total of 252 homes and by 1920 there were approximately 5,730 homes. Between 1915 and 1930 85% of the current housing stock was built in the form of national style duplex homes (Kowalski, 31-32). At the time there was a huge influx of immigrants

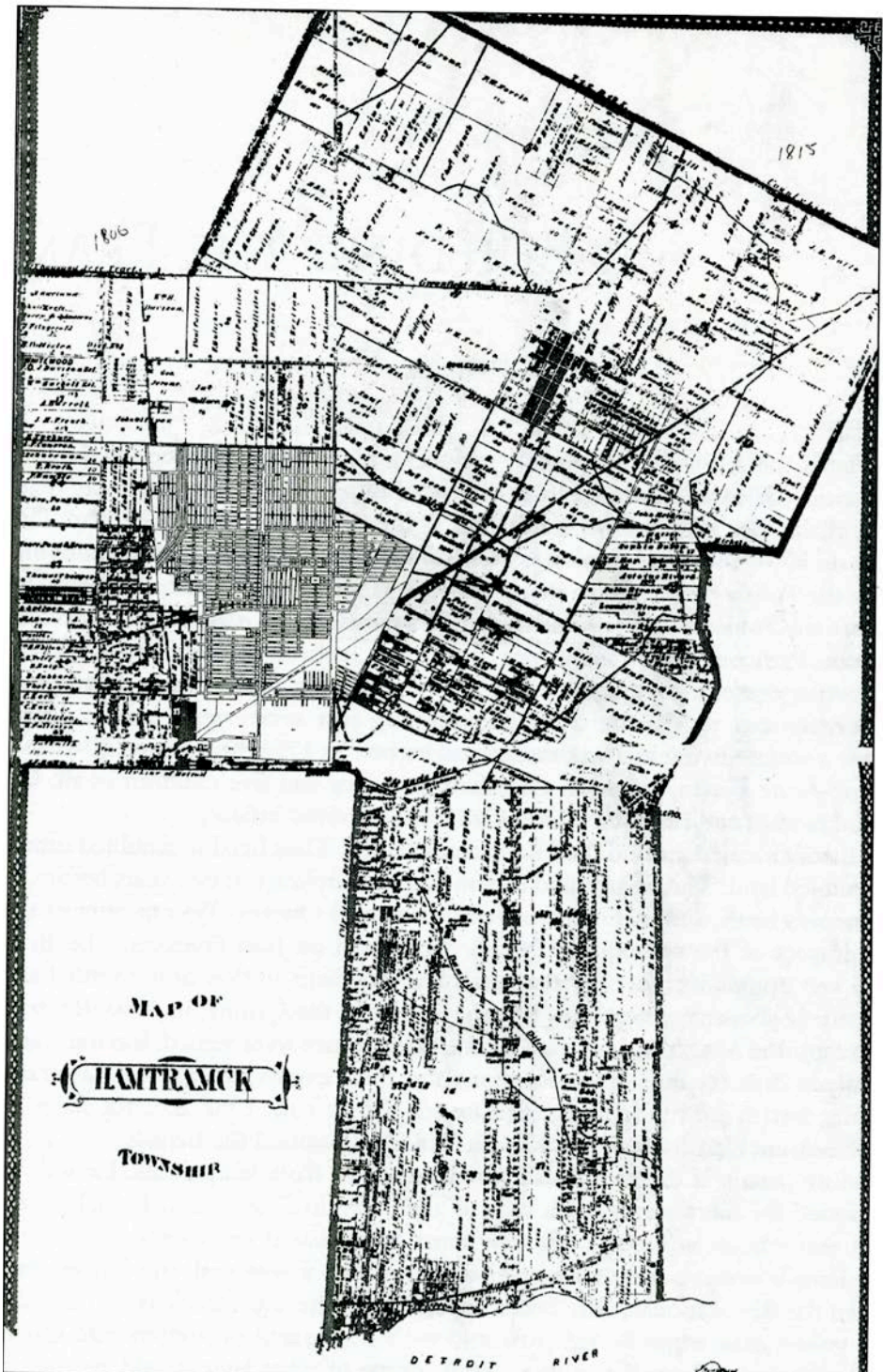


FIGURE 23
Map of Hamtramck in 1876 when its borders extended all the way
South to the Detroit River and North to 8 Mile.

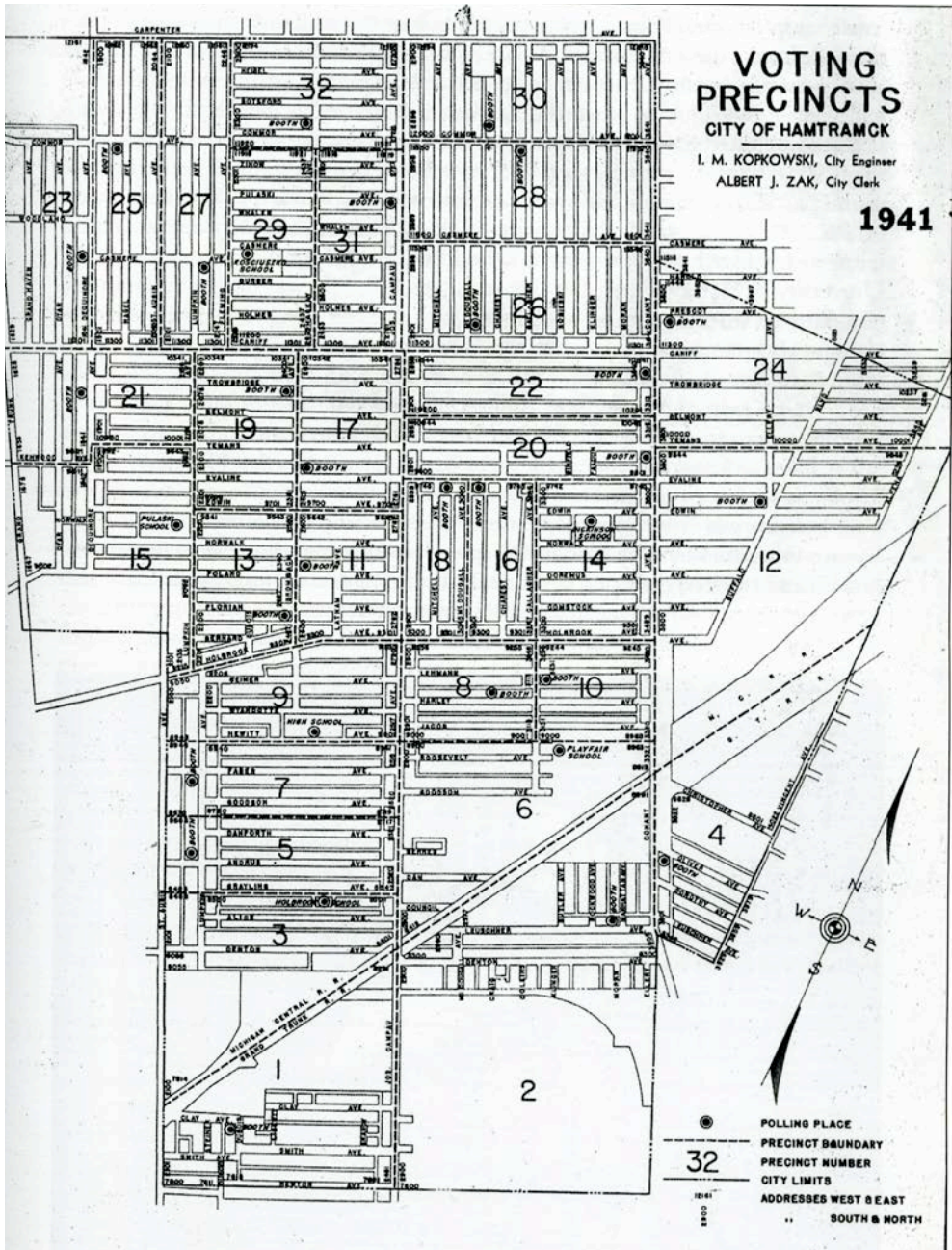


FIGURE 24
A Voter Precinct Map of Hamtramck from 1941 showcasing the present day boundaries for the city.

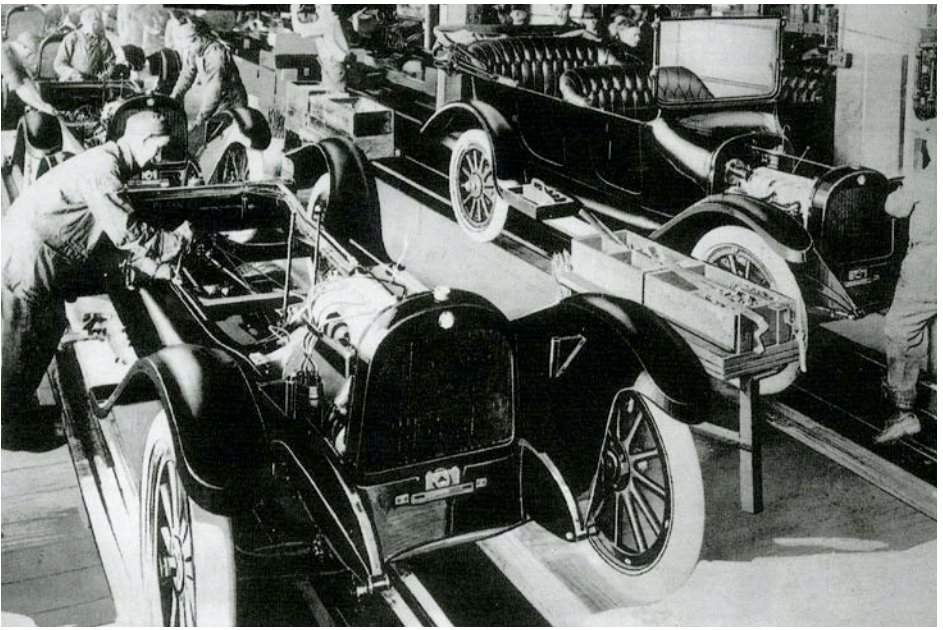


FIGURE 25
A Dodge Main Factory worker at work on the assembly line

of Polish decent as well as a large existing African American population. Due to the large population numbers that continued to grow, most of these homes housed anywhere from 2 to 4 families at a time. The lots were a typical 30 feet by 70 feet and spaced on average 5 feet apart, creating a very dense housing situation (Kowalski, 32). The typical street to street width was 30 feet and the alleys were 17 feet wide and accessed from the back of the homes. Such living conditions were very tight, but most people endured such conditions in turn for having a secure job – that is until the depression descended in 1929.

When the depression struck it hit Michigan extremely hard due to the auto industry. In a good year the Dodge factory would produce 250,000 cars but in the year of 1932, only 28,111 cars were made (Kowalski, 49). Times were hard, and eventually in 1934 Hamtramck even began printing its own money to try and stay afloat (Kowalski, 50). Keeping a job was necessary but difficult as the factory conditions were horrible and there were a surplus of people willing to work for low wages. It was World War II that

brought the city back. Needing the factories to produce machinery for the war, more people were able to get back to work. At the end of the war there was suddenly the desire to have more. During the war people had worked hard and saved. Afterwards many found they were not happy with the dense living conditions and lack of lawn in the city of Hamtramck. Many moved to the suburbs which offered amenities such as more land area, and just like that, after hitting a peak population of around 56,000 in the 1930s the population began to decline consistently. By 1950 the population was 43,355 people (Kowalski, 96).

With post war culture shedding light on the less desirable living conditions and housing stock of the city there were many calls for urban renewal. Detroit had undertaken many urban renewal projects, and many city officials in Hamtramck wanted to follow suit. In the late 1950s and the early 1960s there were proposals for the improvement and removal of many homes in order to make way for more civic facilities. One particular area of interest was titled the R-31 section and spanned between Holbrook,

Joseph Campau, Hewitt, and Lumpkin streets (the area I had identified as my area of interest). It called for the clearing of 197 lots to make way for a new civic center (Kowalski, 112). The issue that arose with this proposal was that the majority of the houses to be removed belonged to African American residents, and there was no new affordable housing proposed to replace the homes demolished. A lawsuit was filed against the city on the ground that the city was conducting 'systematic Negro removal'. The suit required that the city get court approval before demolishing any home. The city appealed the decision and only received partial reversal. The city cleared the lots they could and fought for 30 years over the case (Kowalski, 114). Due to the court battle the new civic center was never built and the cleared lots remained vacant over the duration of the dispute. The case was only recently settled after the city agreed to finish building new housing as reparation for those demolished.

After the city's pursuit of the renewal proposals, they lost much public respect and the moral of the city was low. Unfortunately this was not the end to the woes for Hamtramck. The finances of the city grew worse as populations decreased while debt increased. In 1970 the population of the city was 27,245 people. In 1980 the city received devastating news that the Dodge Main plant would be closing despite efforts to keep it running. Even outside funders that the city often relied on for some types of bailouts or grants were out of money. The factory closed its doors on January 4, 1980, and with it over 70 years of the city's history. In 1981 it was announced that General Motors would be opening their new assembly plant on the site of Dodge Main, and despite some backlash, the project moved forward due to strong city support. In January 1982, two years after Dodge Main closed its doors, the symbol of Hamtramck's industrial prosperity was demolished to make way for a new future (Kowalski, 135).



FIGURE 26



FIGURE 27

Typical housing conditions around the city of Hamtramck.



FIGURE 28



FIGURE 29

1798

HAMTRAMCK FOUNDED AS A VILLAGE

1910

JOHN AND HORACE DODGE OPEN THE DODGE MAIN PLANT IN HAMTRAMCK

1922

HAMTRAMCK IS INCORPORATED AS A CITY

1930

PEAK POPULATION: 56,268

1949

POPULATION: 3,559

1950

POPULATION: 43,555

1951

1952

PROPOSALS FOR URBAN RENEWAL INITIATIVES SUBMITTED

1961

1985

DEMOLITION BEGINS ON THE R-31 URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT FUNDED BY THE HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

1981

1981

DODGE MAIN FACTORY DEMOLISHED

1985

DETROIT/HAMTRAMCK ASSEMBLY PLANT OPENED ON THE SITE OF THE OLD DODGE MAIN FACTORY

1990

POPULATION: 18,372

1997

2018

POPULATION: 21,959



FIGURE 30

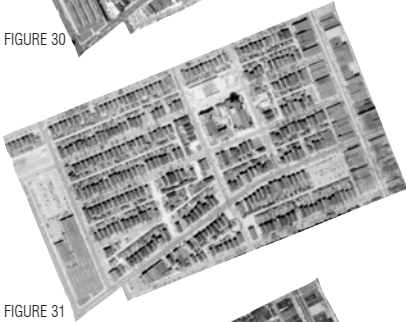


FIGURE 31



FIGURE 32



FIGURE 33

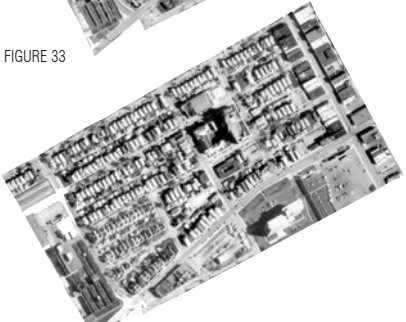


FIGURE 34

SITE OF R-31 RENEWAL - 1949

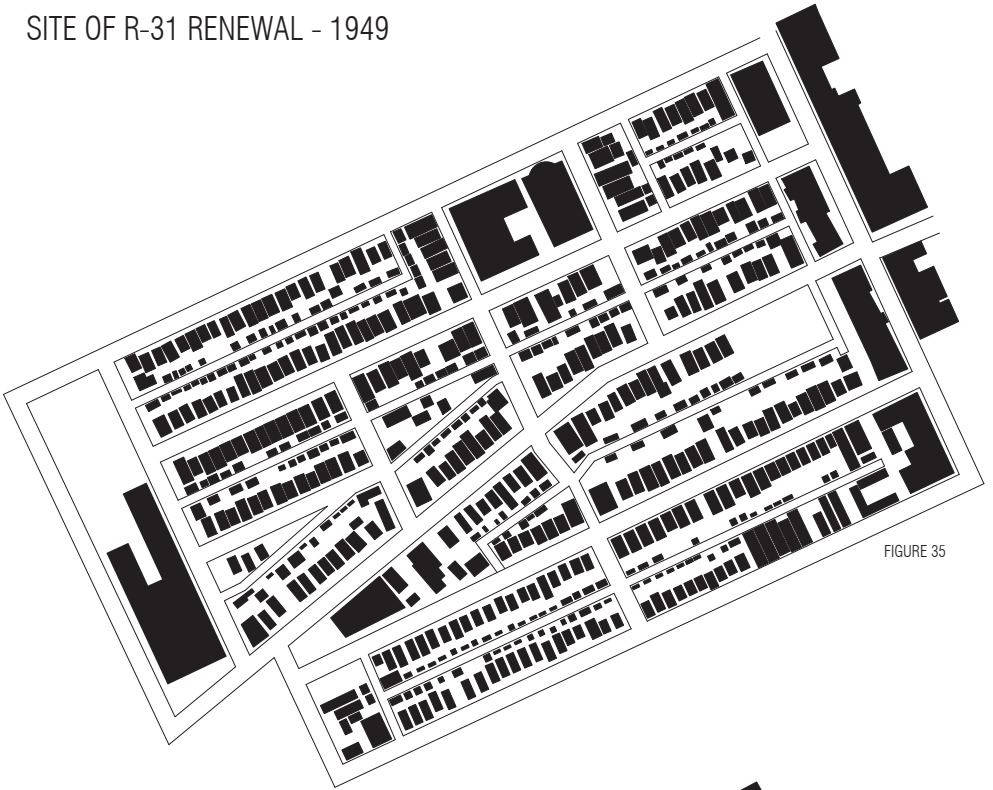


FIGURE 35

SITE OF R-31 RENEWAL - 1997

*DASHED LINES REPRESENT HOUSES
REMOVED DURING THE R-31 RENEWAL
PROCESS STARTING IN 1965*

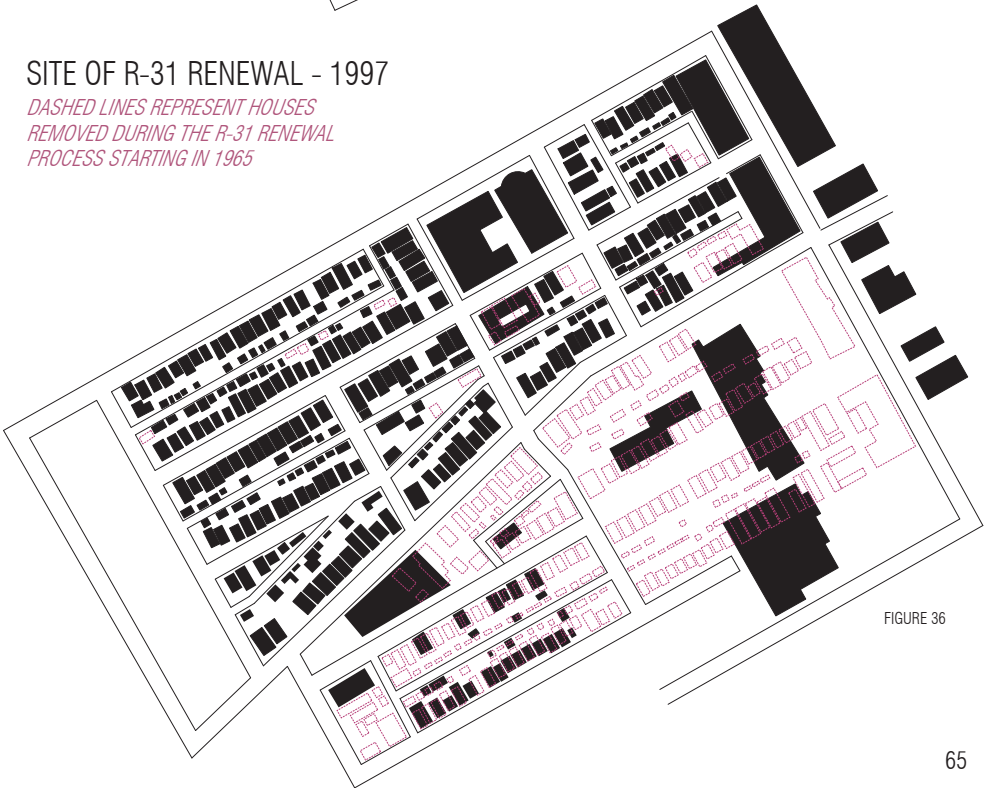


FIGURE 36

It was not just the industry of Hamtramck that was shifting. There were also large changes in the influx of immigrant groups within the city. Currently the city is one of the most diverse in Michigan. There are still large numbers of Polish immigrants, however there are a growing number other groups, the largest being Bengali and Bosnian. Other major groups include Yemeni, Iraqi, and Lebanese. In 1940, 81% of the total population of Hamtramck were Polish immigrants (Kowalski, 96). According to U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2013-2017 survey years, 42.3% of the Hamtramck population today is foreign born. This only includes people not born in the U.S. or not

considered U.S. citizens at birth, meaning it is not those of foreign decent but those actually born outside of the U.S. That is a vital statistic in understanding the large amount of diversity that exists within the city and how much of a cultural shift there has been. You can see mosques on the same block as churches and an endless supply of food from every corner of the earth. It is a rich diverse community where different parts of the world come together and coexist in a landscape steeped with history and known for its role of supporting immigrants. It is clear that Hamtramck is not done telling us all it has to say and there is an even greater future ahead.



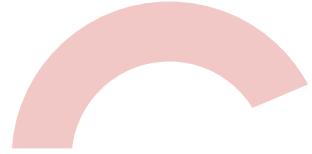
FIGURE 37

CULTURE TODAY

66% OF PEOPLE SPEAK A
NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT
HOME

CURRENT POPULATION:
21,959 PEOPLE

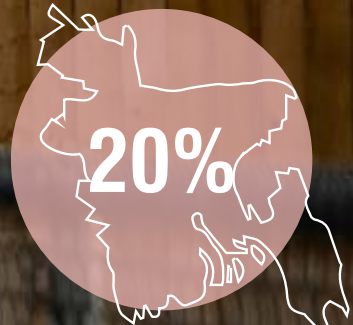
CURRENT FOREIGN BORN
POPULATION:
9,076 PEOPLE



41.3%
FOREIGN BORN POPULATION



BOSNIAN



BANGLADESHI



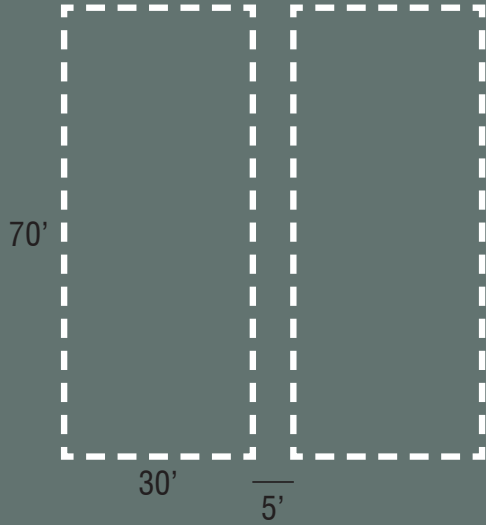
**YEMENI, IRAQI,
LEBANESE**

SPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS

COMMON LOT ITEMS



AVERAGE LOT SIZE



HAMTRAMCK **2.1** SQUARE MILES


251
HOUSES

1914

2,061
HOUSES

1920

5,730
HOUSES

CURRENT

6,158
HOUSES

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS



\$39,339

MEAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$24,369

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$76,000

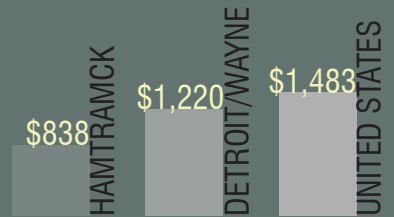
MEDIAN HOME VALUE



50.3%
HOME OWNERS



49.7%
RENTERS



MONTHLY RENT COMPARISON

TOP 4 INDUSTRIES



ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT,
RECREATION,
ACCOMMODATION, AND FOOD
INDUSTRY



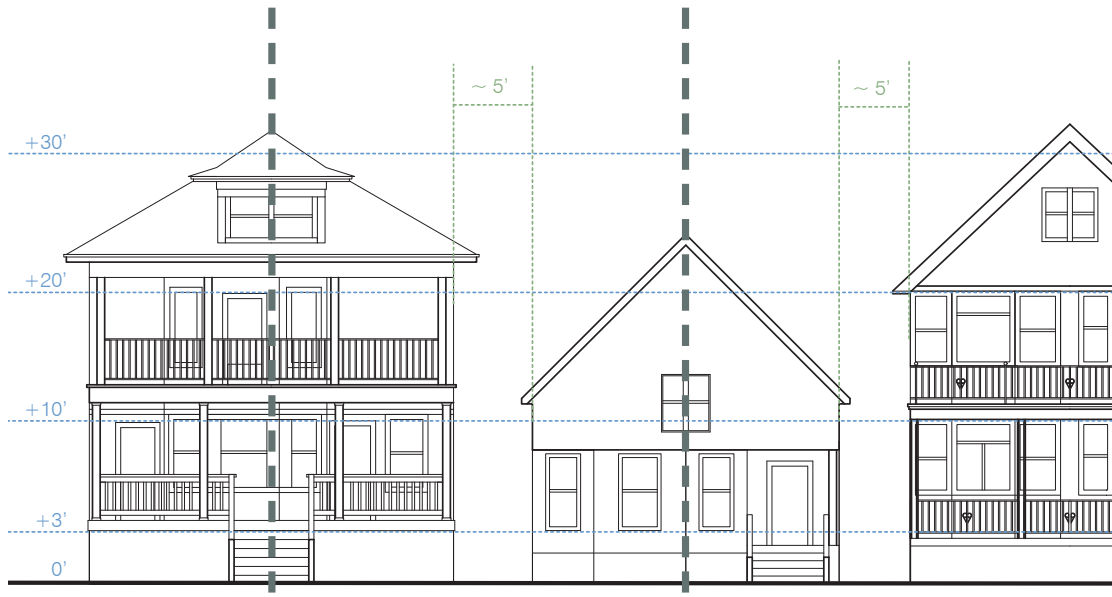
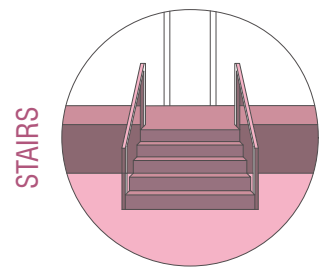
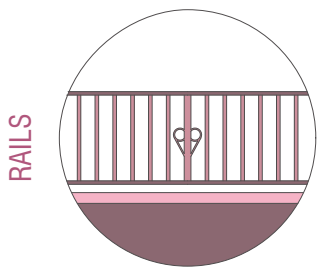
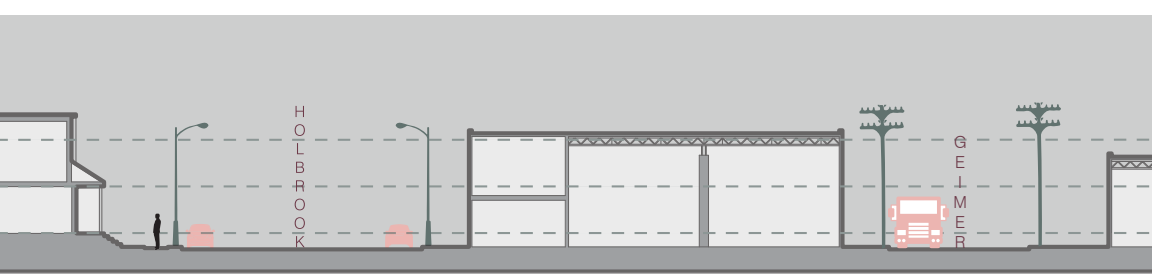
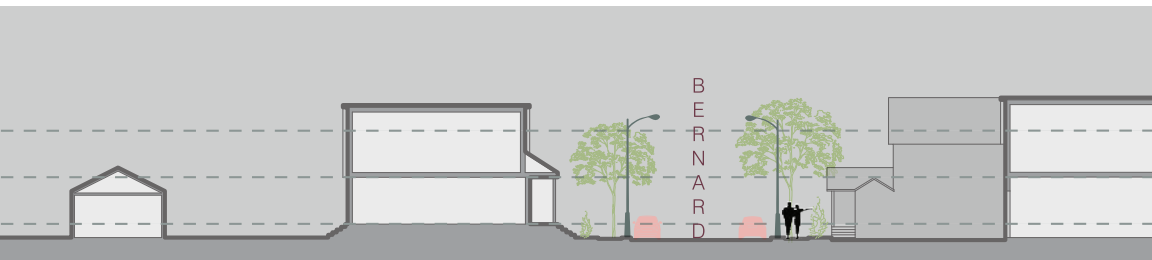
MANUFACTURING

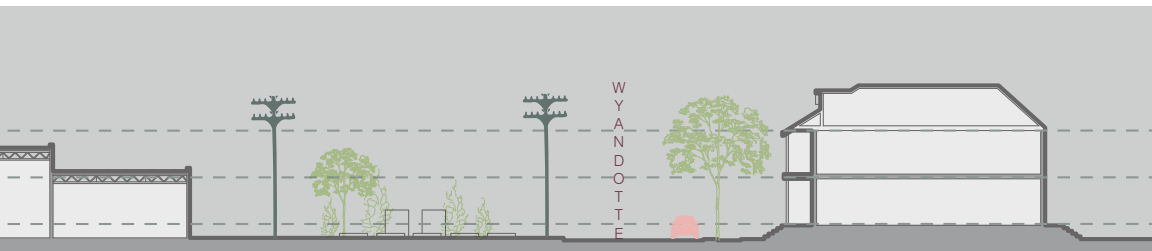
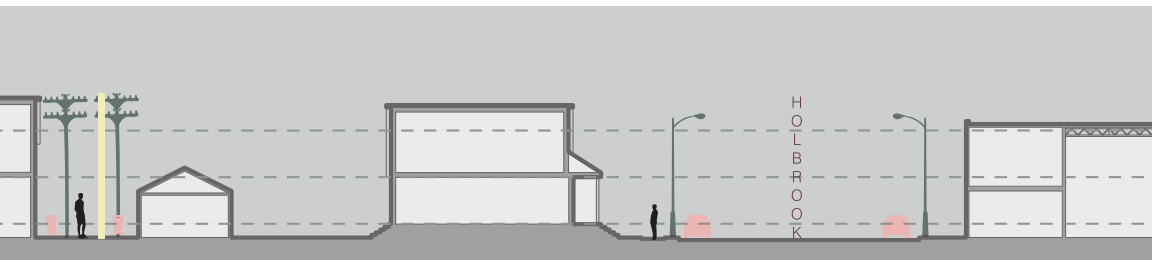


RETAIL
TRADE



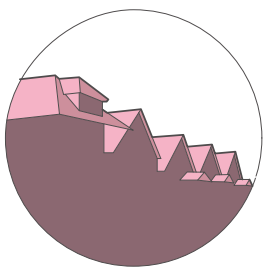
EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL
SERVICES



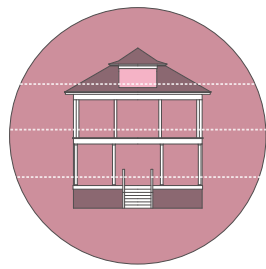


FIGURES 38

ROOFS



PROPORTIONS



5

AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF THE CITY



AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF THE CITY

In an attempt to take what I have come to understand identity, place, and ultimately the landscape to be – a layering of product and process that effectively communicates the instance of the human condition in time and space – and use these ideas to help translate what the landscape tells us, I needed to implement a study within the site. The goal was to use an approach that targeted visual and social aspects of the site that would encourage human response and interaction.

1.0 ANALYSIS OF SITE

Having selected a narrowed area of Hamtramck – the stretch of Holbrook Ave that lies between Lumpkin Street and Joseph Campau – is was necessary to begin to analyze the are based on the visual elements of perception outlined earlier through a series of diagraming. This diagraming was an attempt to identify regions of thinsness and thereness within the landscape, as well as elements such as incident, narrows, netting, and truncation. It was clear through the diagraming that the North side of Holbrook was much denser than the South side and revealed a smaller portion of the thereness that lies beyond the middle ground of the street, while the south side provided larger gaps where larger expanses of thereness were able to be taken in. It was clear that the series of telephone poles and wires acted as netting for both sides of the street, stringing together each structure that existed in the middle ground.

Through another exploration of the site I was able to highlight the major spaces of compression that existed in the landscape. By doing a series of shadow studies on top of the street views it was clear to see where deeper spaces were more prominent in the site. The main spaces that come to view in these drawings are the five foot gaps between the houses and the porches that are nestled in the façade of most homes on the North stretch. It was the narrow voids between the houses that captivated me most.



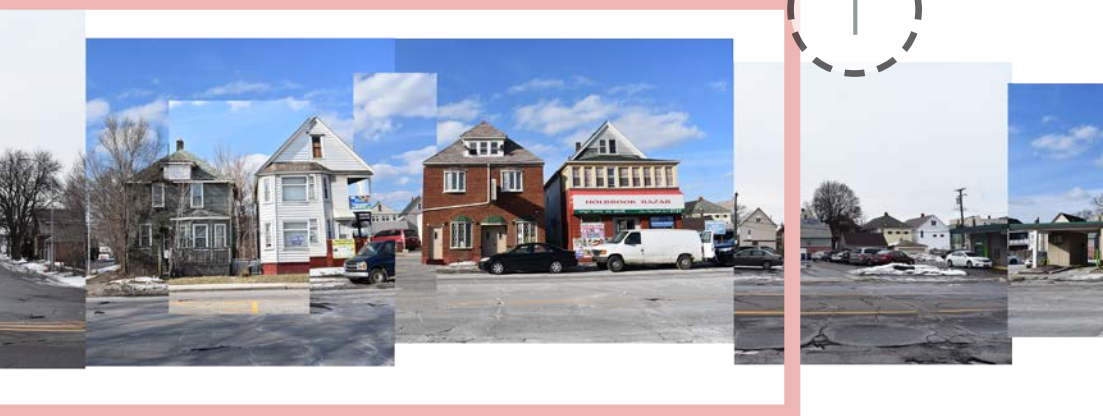
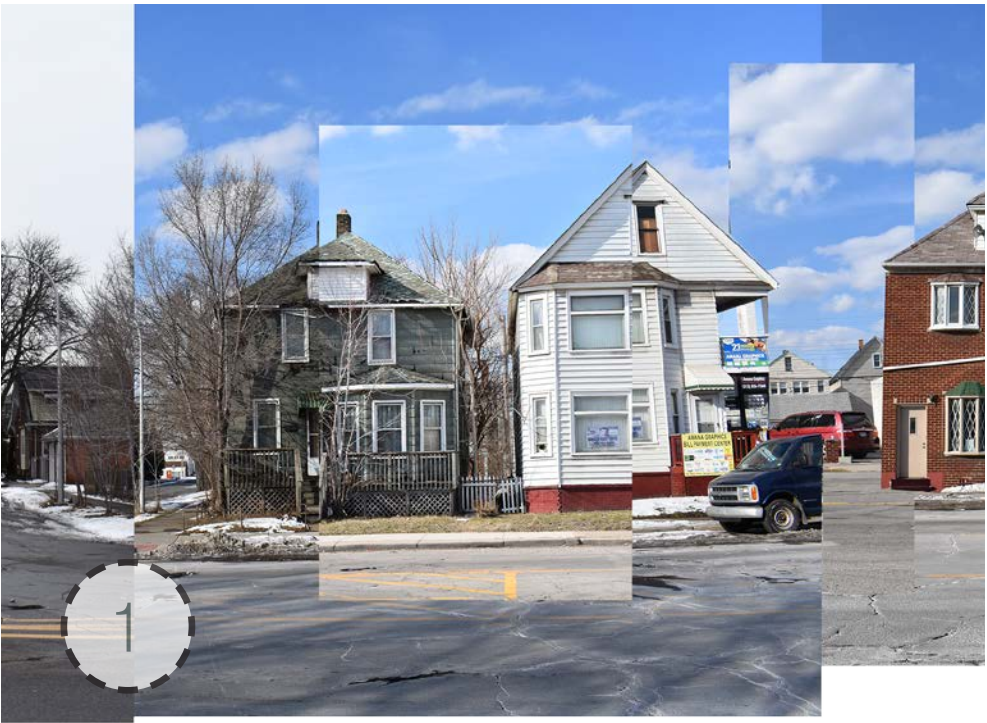


FIGURE 39



HOLBROOK NORTH



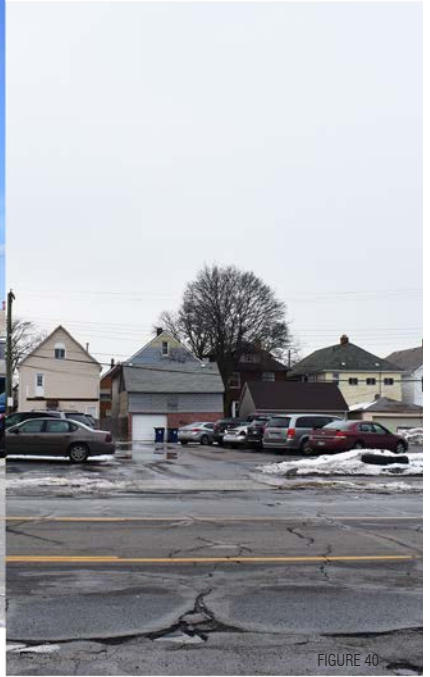


FIGURE 40



FIGURE 41





FIGURE 42

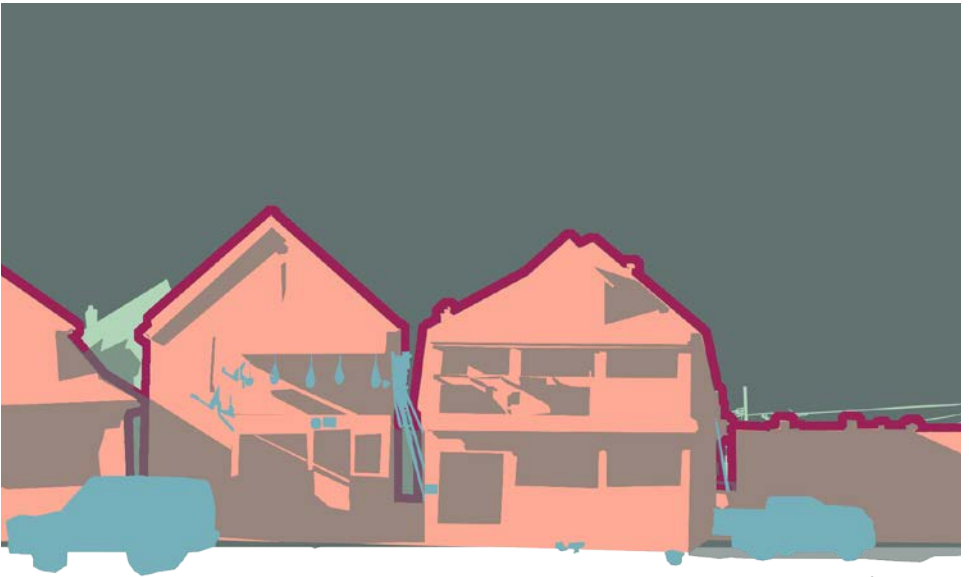


FIGURE 43



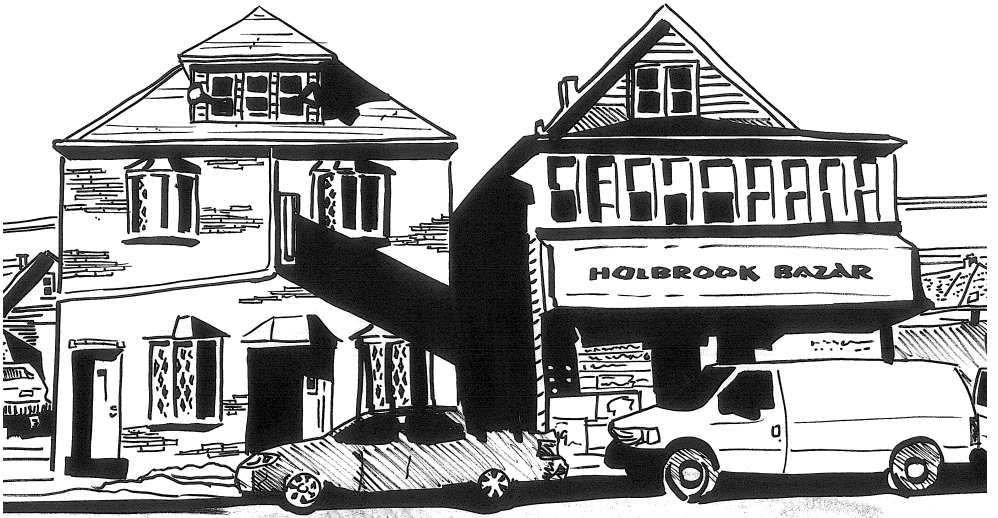


FIGURE 44



FIGURE 45

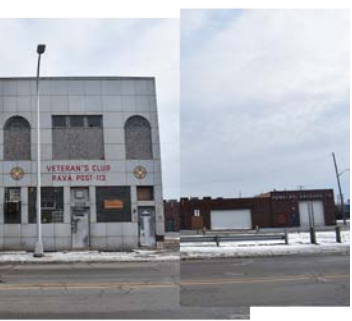


1



2





← HOLBROOK SOUTH

FIGURE 46



HOLBROOK SOUTH





FIGURE 47



FIGURE 48

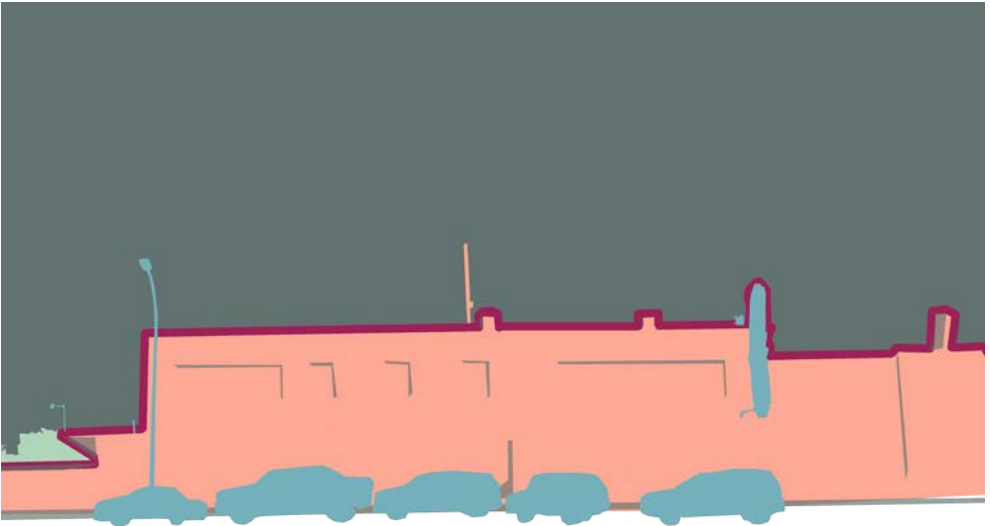
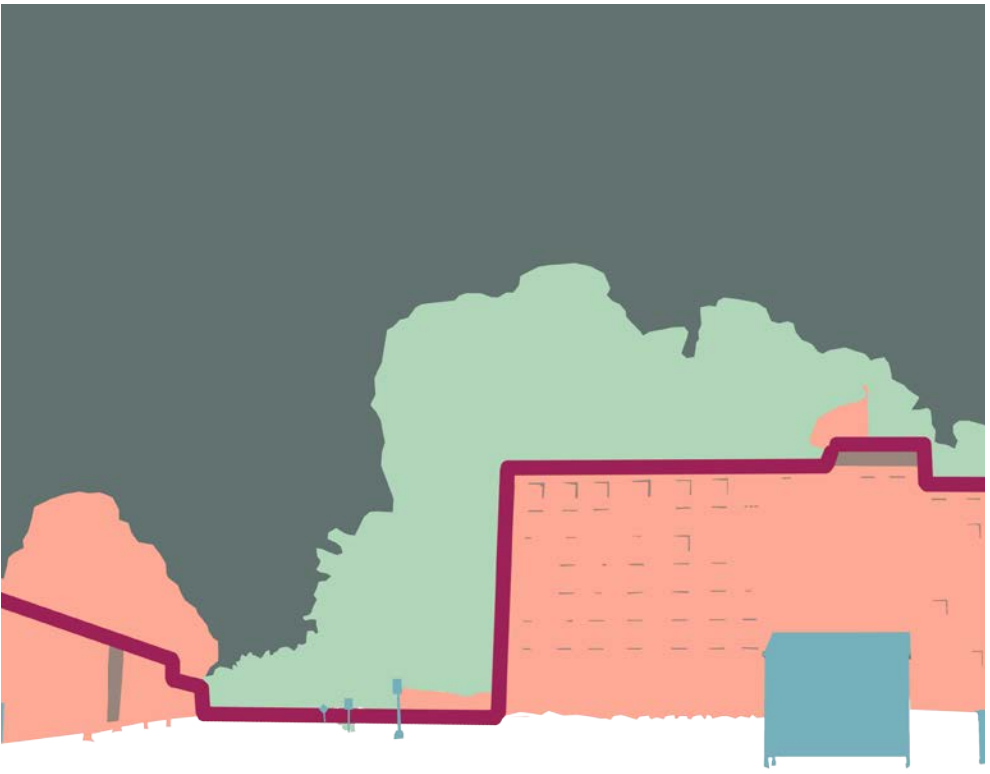




FIGURE 49

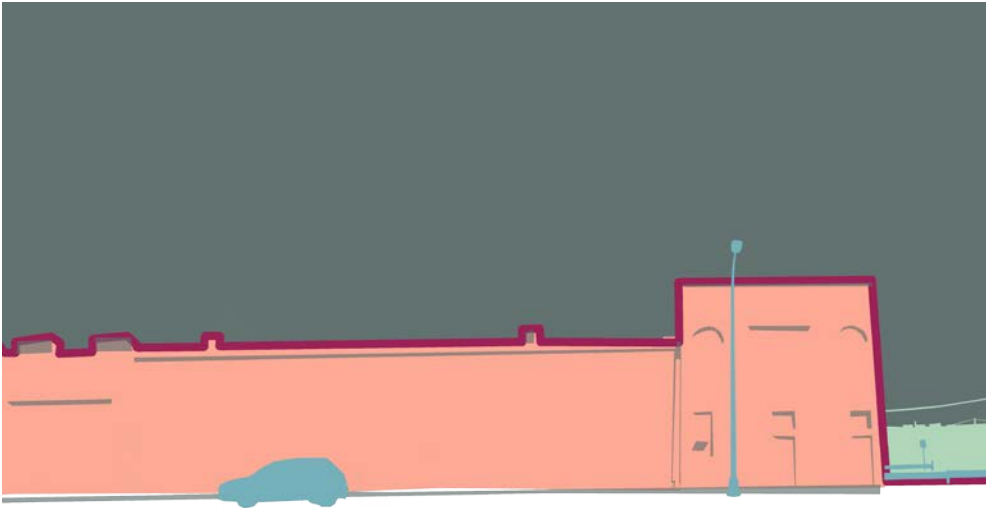


FIGURE 50

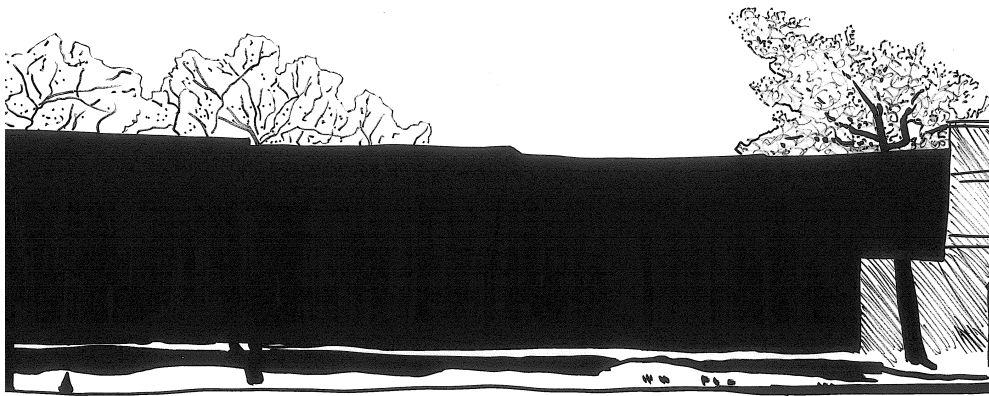




FIGURE 51

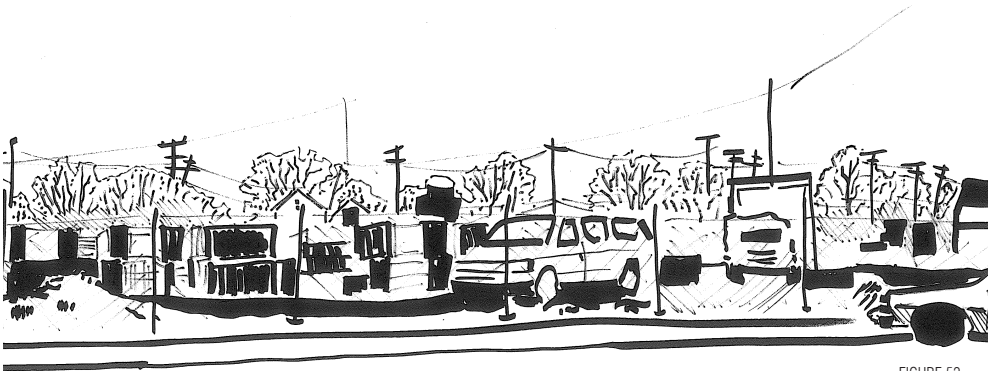


FIGURE 52

2.0 PASSIVE VOICE OF THE CITY

The spaces that I was the most drawn to the most walking through the site were spaces that seemed almost a hidden; areas that revealed themselves in an intimate way. These spaces were the thin narrow voids between homes. As I looked at these places I held my breath. They seemed to be trying to tell me what had existed there in the past, what they revealed in the present moment, and what they could reveal in the future. They held unique personalities that spoke loudly among the consistent hum emanating from the houses surrounding them. Dissecting these places revealed a wealth of information that equaled, if not exceeded, the information that could be surmised from the built environment around them. Looking at the instances of human intervention within these voids, from the makeshift structures created to support infrastructure to inanimate objects that suggest unspoken traditions, we can see a human layer interwoven within them. The draw of these places is the tendency of people to claim them. To suggest that such places are passive is not to lessen them in any form, nor is it to suggest they are secondary to their built surroundings. It is merely a description of their inclination to become a part of the overall landscape and frequently be overlooked. In reality, these gaps have the opportunity to reveal a key part of the identity that exists within this landscape. Their informal nature allows these places to be candid in what they reveal to the observer. Drawing attention to these voids was a key goal moving forward with the implementations.

It was also important for me to get an understanding of these voids from the people that live among them. I was able to talk to two residents of Hamtramck about their experiences specifically with these spaces:

Mike Jacobs, Hamtramck Resident for 3 years:

“The residential areas of this city are so dense and crowded that open space is welcomed. It is a relief to see the sky sometimes, and I love walking over in this area because I get to see sky!”

Virginia Skrzyniarz, Lifelong Hamtramck Resident

“There was an identity there - there was a story there. I remember planting flowers in those gaps and taking such pride in them. I also remember the connections I made with my neighbors. You hear all of the joys and all of the problems of each other through those spaces. I can remember when I was younger hearing my friend's parents who lived next door arguing one day, and that was my cue to ask my friend how she was doing the next day. You built strong relationships being so close.”

From these conversations I knew I wanted to some way celebrate the impromptu social relationships that could be formed due to these voids as well as use them as opportunities to visually highlight their ability to impact how we perceive the landscape. So I set about designing two series of vignettes that would impact the sight visually and socially while attempting to reveal the language of the landscape. A key aspect of these vignettes is that they would directly interact with the voids.



FIGURE 53

SITE LOCATION

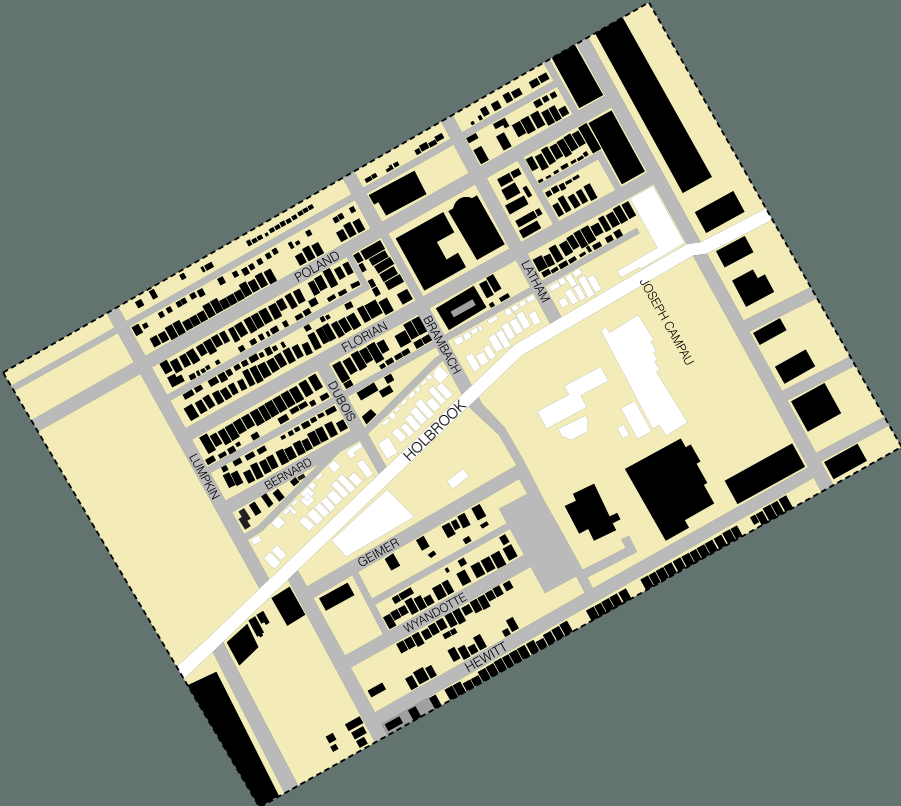
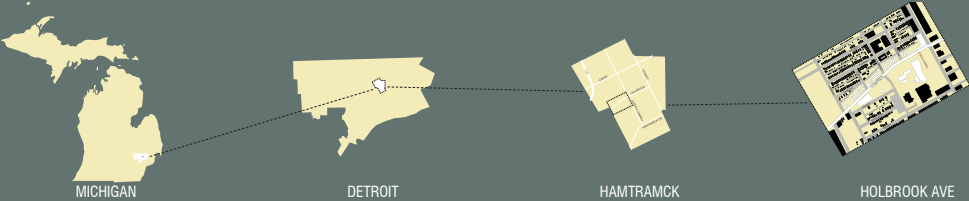
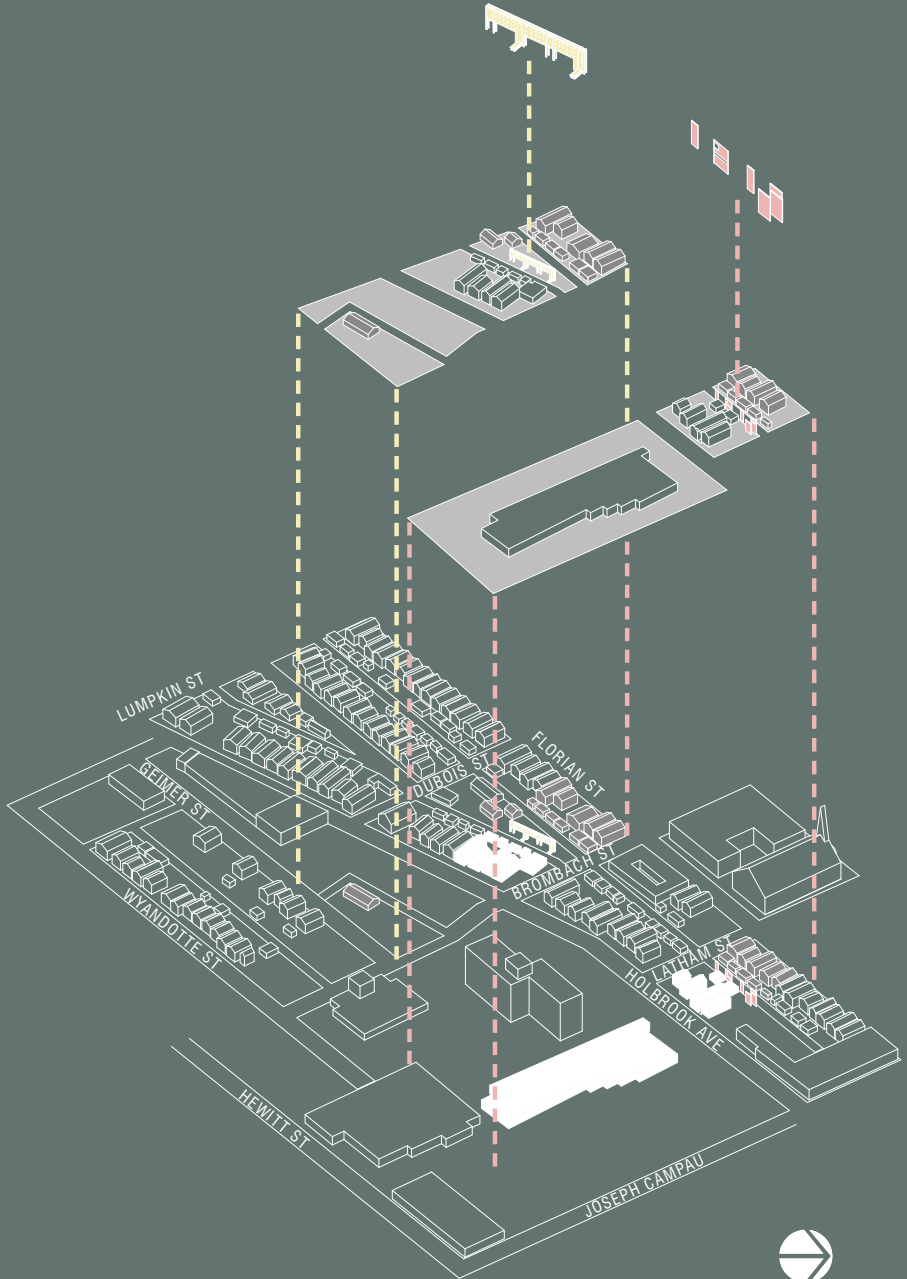


FIGURE 54



SITE AXON

FIGURE 55

The first vignette was a series of panels that would reside in the alley behind the houses and fill the space of the voids in different ways. The four different ways the voids would be approached would be through mirroring, framing, blocking, and distorting.



FIGURE 56



FIGURE 57

MIRROR



FRAME



BLOCK



DISTORT

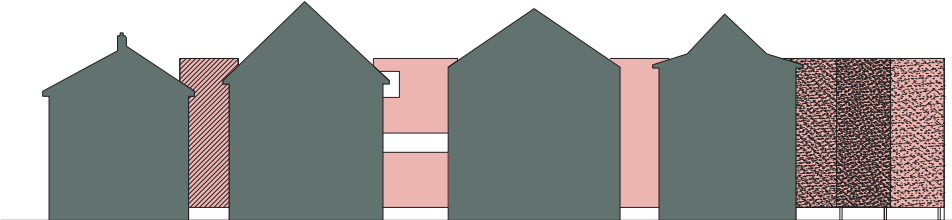


FIGURE 58





FIGURE 59

The panel that mirrors creates an insubstantial space – a space that would not only block out the theresness that lies beyond the void, but also compress the space three dimensionally and reflect it back on itself making it hard to perceive. This approach also addresses the idea of directly acknowledging you as the viewer and forcing you to be aware of your role in the landscape as you move through it.



FIGURE 60

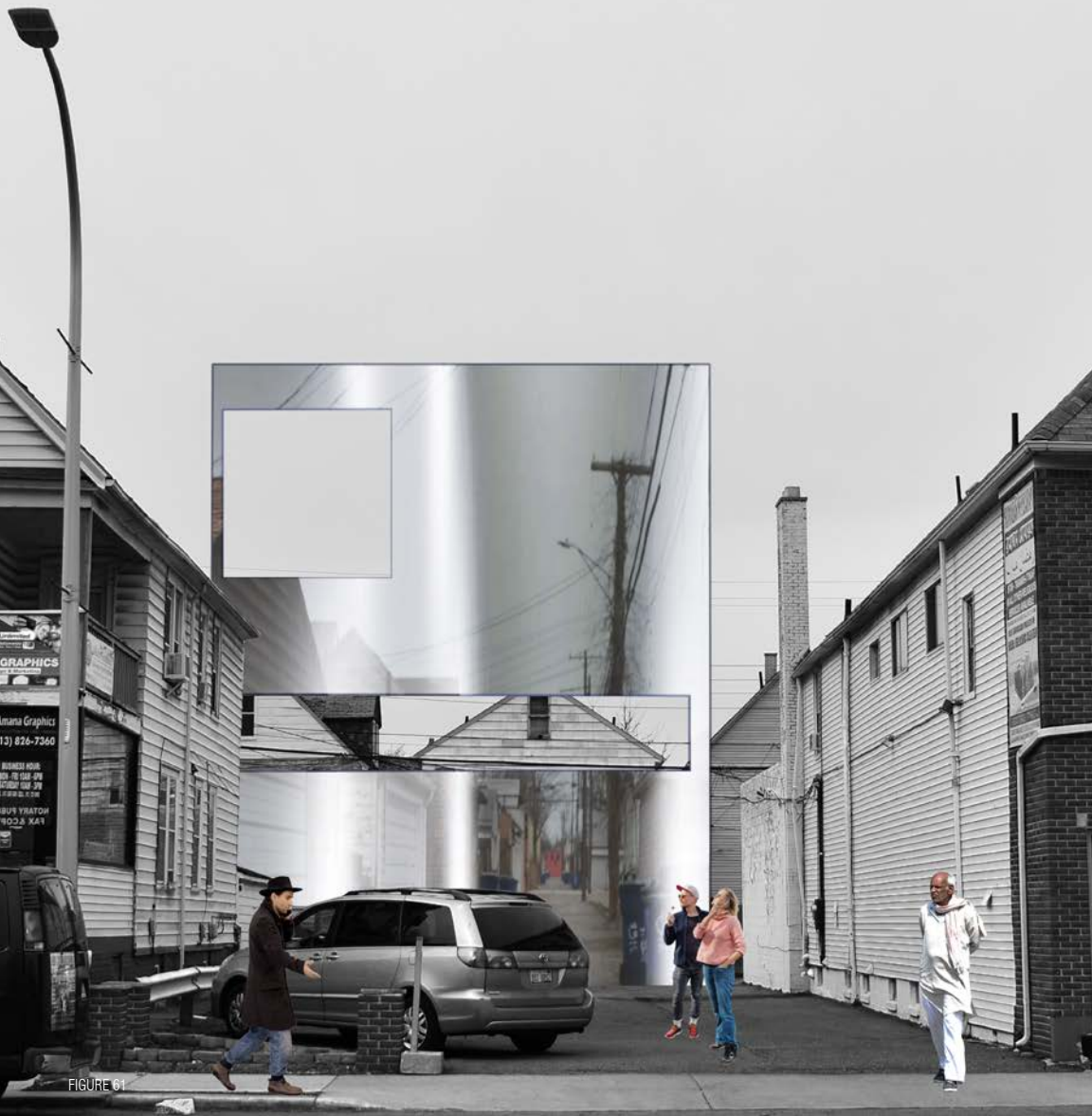


FIGURE 61

The panel that frames has sections cut out if it that intentionally frame certain elements of the thereness that lies beyond, such as a landmark or detail that may influence how you perceive the elements of the thisness you are in closer contact with.

The panel that blocks would completely cover the view of the thereness that lies beyond the void. The goal of this method is to completely disconnect the viewer with the thereness beyond and turn the void into a true void which contains no visua. Does this make the landscape more illegible and harder to understand, or is it still easy to comprehend without the additional information?



HOLBR

হলব্রুক বাজার এন্ড গ্ৰোসারি

HOLBROOK BAZAR & GROCERY
হলব্রুক বাজার
WE ACCEPT ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS
BRIDGE CARD 74-1710 WIC

19
500MB

FIGURE 62



FIGURE 63

The panels that work to distort the view of the
thereness beyond are transparent with different
hues and gaps that overlap to change the
appearance of the beyond. Does still being able
to see the beyond but seeing it in a different way
change our interpretation of the landscape?

The second vignette is a connected system that is viewable from between the voids. The system is a double layered panel with four piers that are directly viewable between four voids in the site. These piers are intended to be places of play, talking, and reflection. It is meant to be a place to gather and interact with others or a place to view this social interaction from between the voids.

Both of these vignettes are meant to be viewed and interacted with by anyone who is walking along the site, whether they are a resident of the area or just a visitor. The intended use and audience of the vignettes are intentionally ambiguous. The ambiguity is meant to intrigue people and captivate interest, as well as test who is willing to push the bounds of private and public thresholds within a landscape. The interaction with the vignettes becomes yet another element of process within the layered landscape and that interaction is viewable. This interaction can be used as a communication tool for the landscape. By interacting with the vignettes people can interpret what they believe the landscape is trying to say through the effectiveness of each vignette. Each vignette is a detail that articulates the atmosphere and character of the landscape. We interact with these details and experience this atmosphere first hand, allowing us to communicate with the landscape.

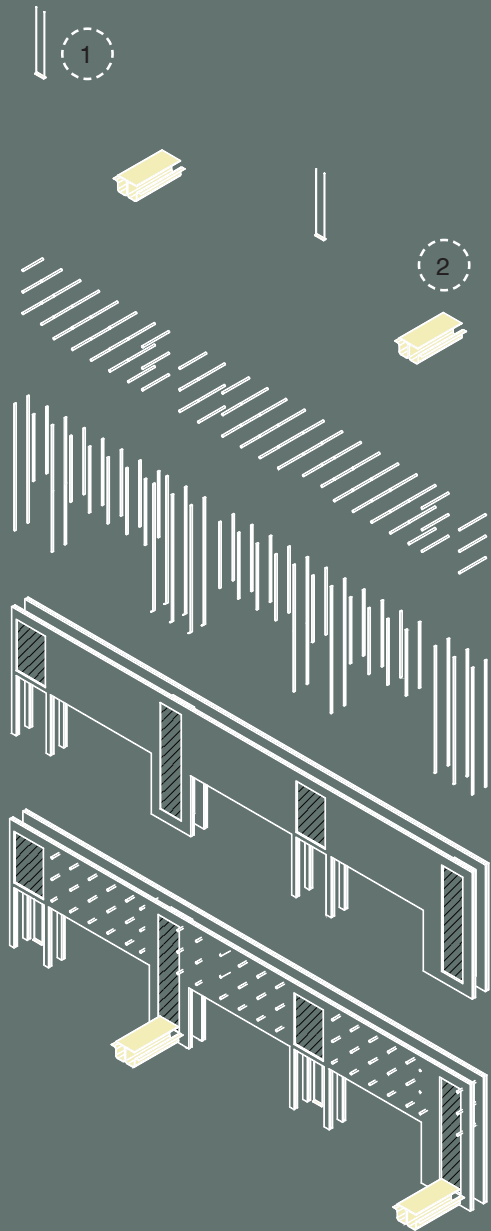


FIGURE 64

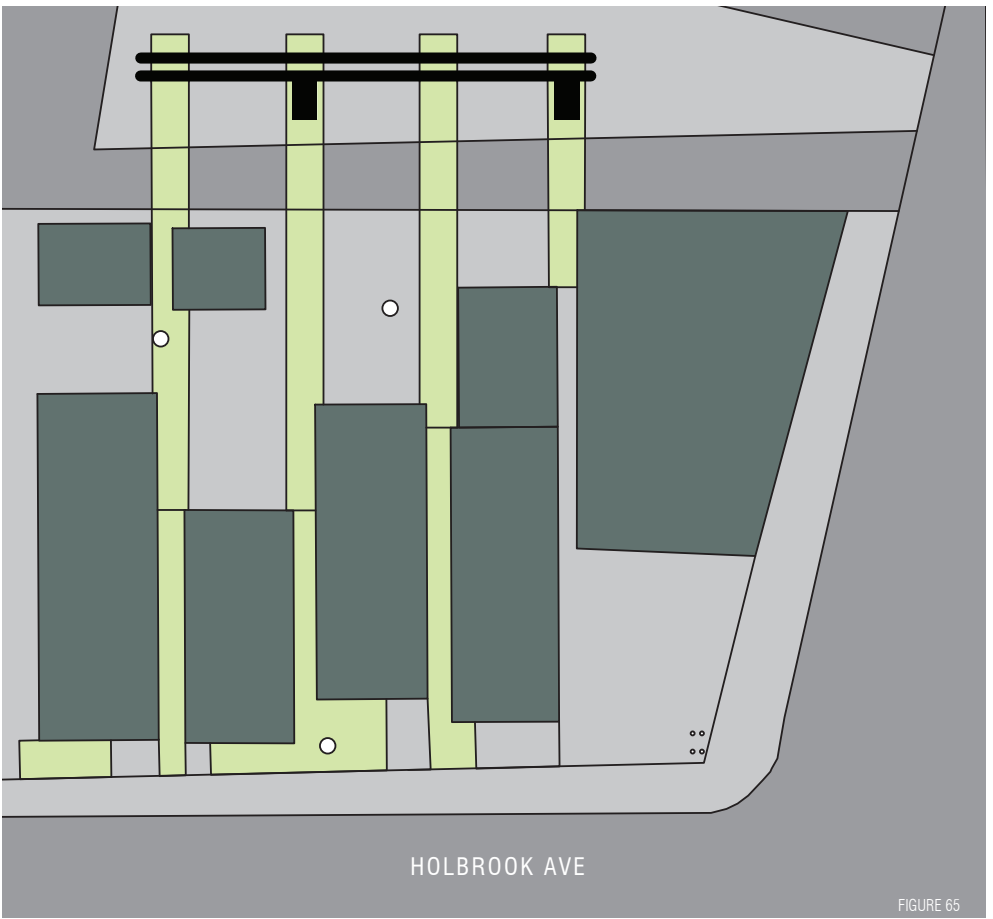


FIGURE 65

P L A Y



T A L K



REFLECT

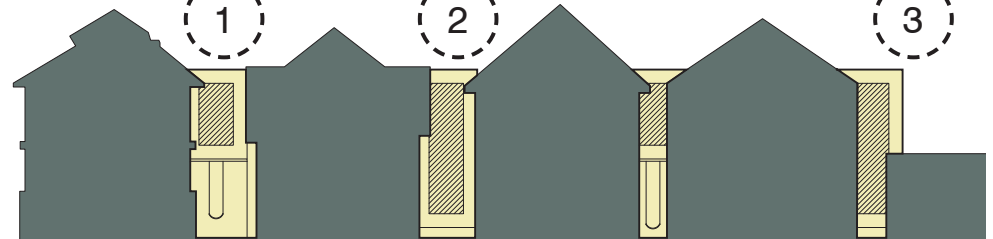


FIGURE 66





FIGURE 67



FIGURE 68

The idea of play was introduced due to the lack of green space among the housing in the city and is accomplished through swings that hang from the panels at two of the piers.

The importance of talking originated from the idea of impromptu meetings and conversations people have in this dense environment, whether on their porches, in the alleys, or anywhere in the city. This idea is accomplished through benches placed at two of the piers. Lastly the concept of history would be incorporated throughout the system as the mirrored material would have inscriptions and images of the sites history on it for people to view as they experience the landscape. Such historical elements as the R-31 renewal that happened in this site, or accounts of people who have lived here in the city.



FIGURE 69



FIGURE 70

FUTURE CONVERSATION

This series of vignettes is only an attempt at starting the conversation with the city. There is nothing final about them. These vignettes within the site require the observation and feedback from those that experience and exist within the landscape of Hamtramck. Just as a landscape is created through a combination of process and product, so too must the methods used for the interpretation of the landscape. Through a series of iterations and constant reevaluation we must keep interpreting what the landscape is trying to tell us through a variety of lenses that expand beyond the visual and social including the tactile, audible, historical, and so on. These vignettes have primarily centered on the visual and social approach to the landscape with the goal of sparking a human response. Now it is time to expand upon that human response to get a more comprehensive understanding of the human perspective in the landscape and voice it clearly. The conversation has just begun.

EXCERPT FROM LUIGI GHIRRI, PHOTOGRAPHER

[Kodachrome] – Introduction (Part II)

1978

“My work emerges from the desire and the need to interpret and translate the sense of this sum of hieroglyphs – not only the easily identifiable reality or the reality that has highly symbolic content, but also thoughts, memories, imagination, fantastical or alienated content.

For my purposes, photography is extraordinarily important because of its specific characteristics. In photography, the deletion of the space that surrounds the framed image is as important as what is represented; it is thanks to this deletion that the image takes on meaning, becoming measurable. The image continues, of course, in the visible realm of the deleted space, inviting us to see the rest of reality that is not represented.

This double aspect of representing and deleting not only evokes the absence of limits, excluding every idea of completeness or finitude, but shows us something that cannot be delimited: reality itself.

The possibility of seeing and penetrating the universe of reality instead passes through all representations and cultural models that are known and given to us as defined and decisive. Our relationship with reality and life is that same relationship that exists between the satellite image and the actual earth.

Thus photography, with its indeterminacy, becomes a privileged subject: it allows us to move away from the symbolic nature of defined representations, and we can attribute to it a value of truth. The possibility of analysis in time and space of the signs that form reality (the entirety of which has always been elusive) thus allows photography, with its fragmentary nature, to be closer to what cannot be delimited: physical existence.

So I am not interested in images and ‘decisive moments’, the analysis of language in and of itself, aesthetics, the concept or all-consuming idea, the emotion of the poet, the erudite quotation, the search for a new aesthetic creed, or the use of a style. My duty is to see with clarity, and this is why I am interested in all possible functions – without separating any of them out, but taking them on as a whole, in order to be able, from time to time, to see the hieroglyphs I have encountered and make them recognizable.”



FIGURE 71

Image Credits

FIGURE 00, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10,11, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 35, 36, 38-71 - Produced or taken by author (RachelPisano)

FIGURE 1 - UNESCO, Timothy Joffroy

FIGURE 2 - UNESCO, Keld Jensen

FIGURE 3 - UNESCO

FIGURE 8 - Createrre, Gisele Taxil

FIGURE 12,13 - UNESCO, 2015

FIGURE 17 - Lauren Kelley

FIGURE 18 - Cori Hinterser

FIGURE 19 - Courtney Sturgis

FIGURE 23,24,25,27,28 - Hamtramck: The Driven City

FIGURE 26,29 - Hamtramck Historical Society

FIGURE 30,31,32,33,34 - Wayne State University Digital Collections, DTE Aerial Photo Collection

FIGURE 37 - Hamtramck, Mich.: An Evolving City Of Immigrants, Melissa Block, Elissa Nadworny, 2017

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Virginia Skrzyniarz, PIAST Institute, Hamtramck, MI

