

old toronto  
⌘ psychogeographical  
⌘ portrait ⌘



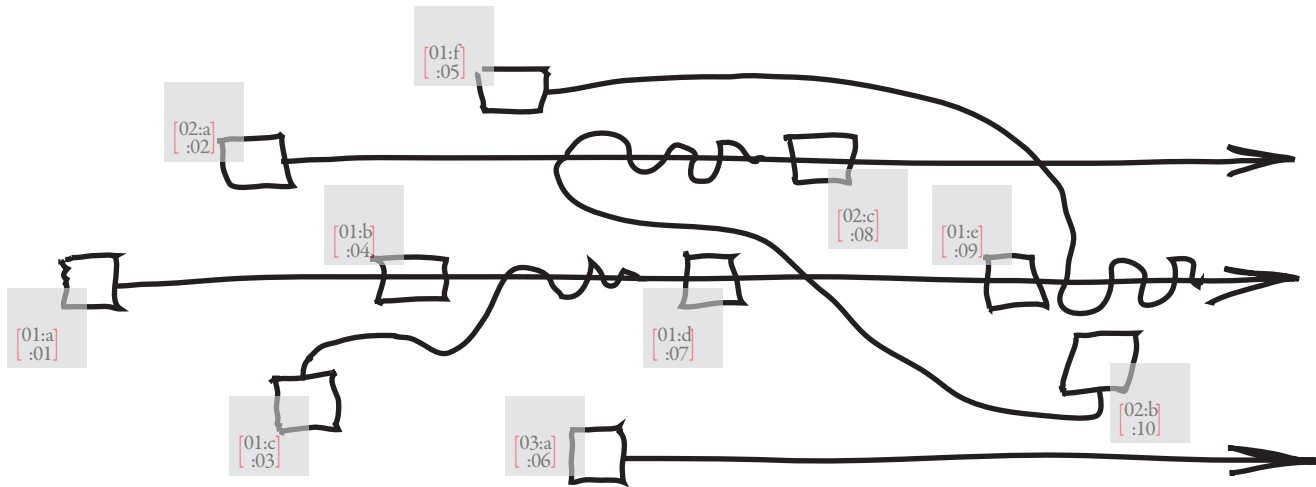
october ⌘ 28<sup>th</sup> ⌘ 2006

you can navigate through this document using arrow keys on the keyboard

# psychogeography

[urbansquares.com definition]

the subjective analysis of neighbourhood behaviours related to geographic location. a chronological process based on the order of appearance of observed topics, with the time delayed inclusion of other relevant instances.

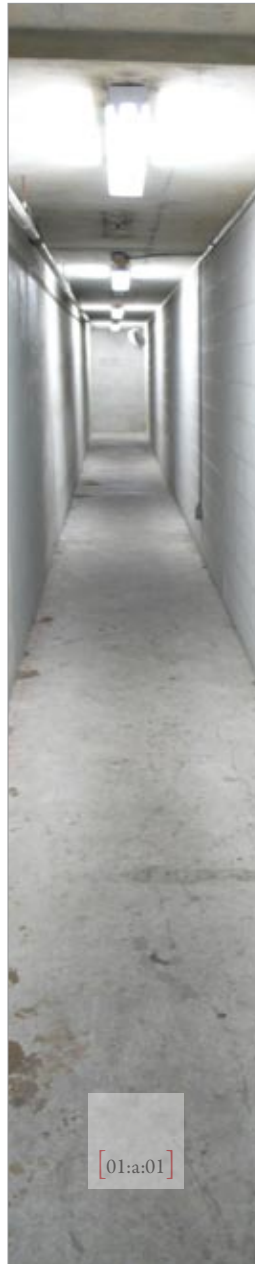


## list of major observed topics:

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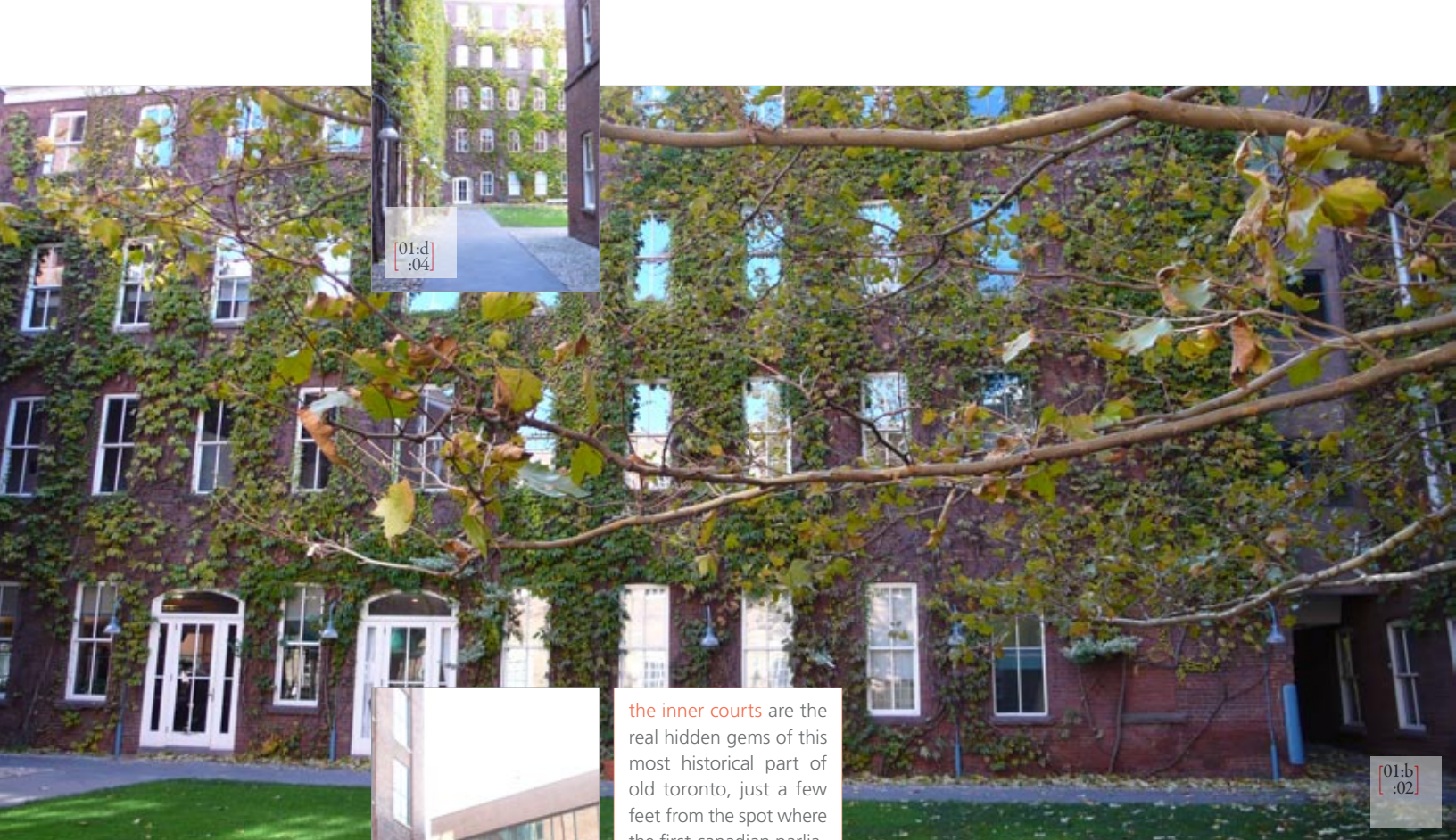
psychogeography, as understood here, is the active search for, and celebration of, chance and coincidence, concurrently with the divination of patterns and repetitions thrown up by the [meeting/collision] of the chaos and structures of cities, personal histories and interpretations. it is based on the technique of the “dérive”, an informed and aware wandering, with continuous observation, through varied environments. it can be sought and can lead anywhere.

[ <http://www.psygeo.org/essays/psychogeography.php> ] →



[ 01:a:01 ]

the starting point of this psychogeographical walk was underground, below the most historic block in old to-  
ronto. it is surrounded by berkeley, front  
and princess streets and the esplanade.  
a three level garage connects all of the  
buildings on this block. there are sever-  
al exits, but a particularly attractive one  
heads to the courtyard of berkeley cas-  
tle, one of the most beautifully restored  
buildings, previously a knitting and yarn  
factory built in 1871. →



[01:d]  
:04

[01:b]  
:02

## i. inner courts

the inner courts are the real hidden gems of this most historical part of old toronto, just a few feet from the spot where the first canadian parliament buildings stood until 1824. this corner of berkeley street and the esplanade was the site of the two most prominent industrial giants of the era—elias rogers coal & lumber and the consumer gas companies.

the photos on this page are all from berkeley castle's inner court. most of the people in this community are not aware of these types of spaces because they are closed to the public on weekends and after 6 p.m. on workdays. →



[01:e]  
:04a

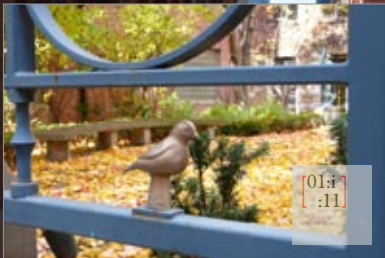


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:03

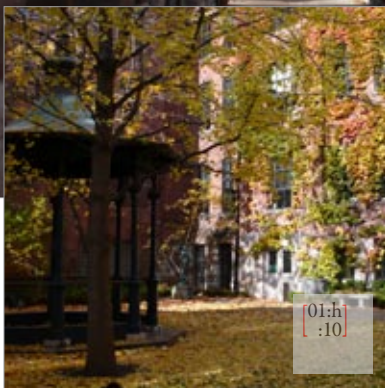




[01:g]  
:08



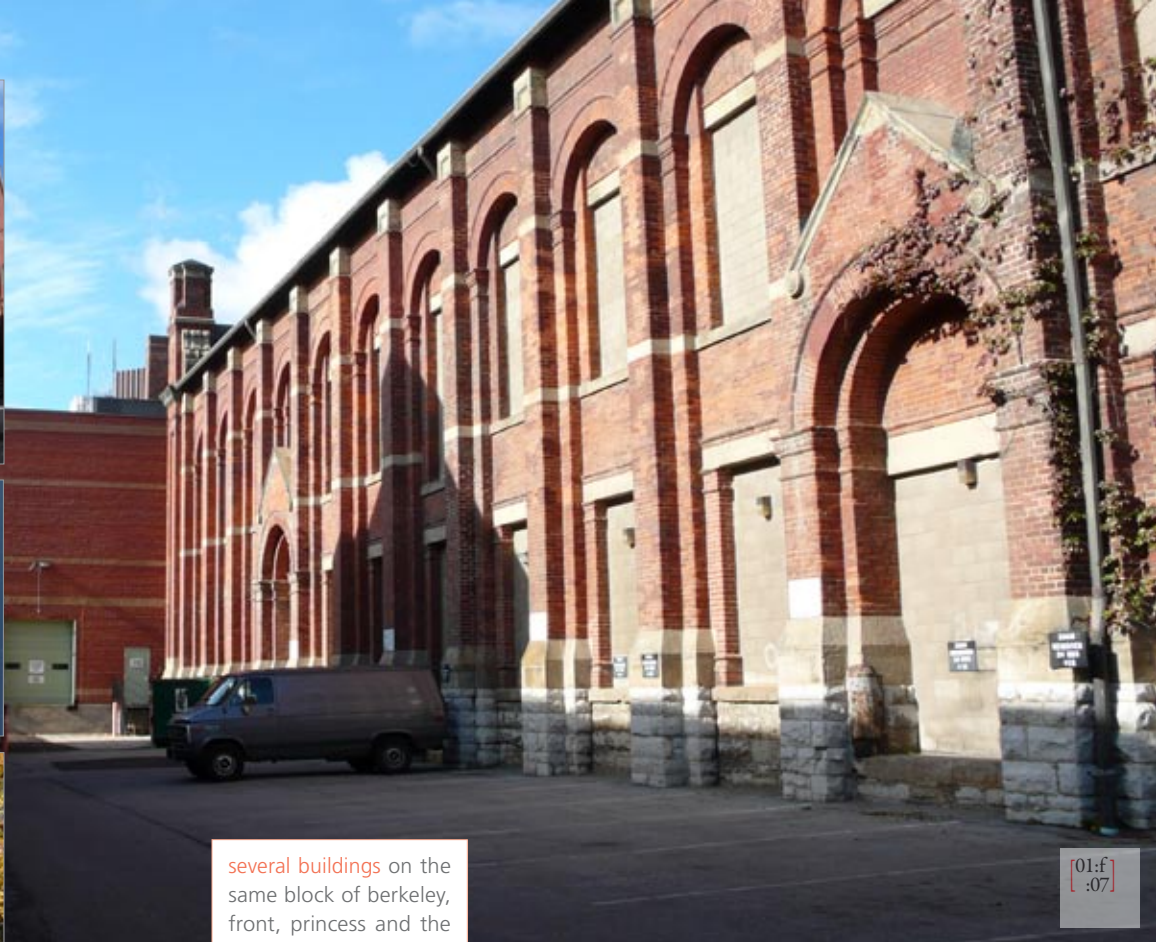
[01:i]  
:11



[01:h]  
:10



[01:j]  
:12



[01:f]  
:07

## I. inner courts

several buildings on the same block of berkeley, front, princess and the esplanade were part of a huge industrial complex during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. they survived mostly by accident, because a demolition company used them for their offices. today, they accomodate the canadian opera company, the canadian stage company and several other offices. these alleys are a pleasure to walk through, and are mostly unknown to the public, with the exception of the homeless population from the area. →

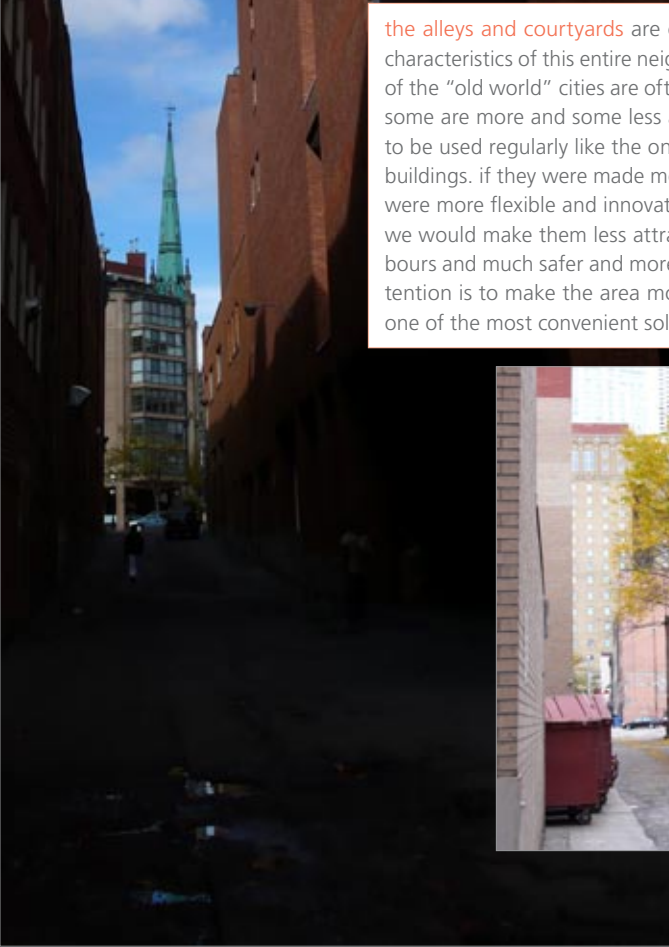


[01:k]  
:13





the alleys and courtyards are one of the more important characteristics of this entire neighbourhood. streets in many of the "old world" cities are often narrower than our alleys. some are more and some less attractive. some are created to be used regularly like the ones in the co-operative living buildings. if they were made more open to public and if we were more flexible and innovative with how they are used, we would make them less attractive to problematic neighbours and much safer and more useful to all of us. if the intention is to make the area more walkable, this would be one of the most convenient solutions. →



1. inner courts



## 2. heritage buildings

many very well preserved heritage buildings exist throughout this neighbourhood. the canadian opera, the canadian stage company, the lorraine kimsa theater and the young centre for the performing arts are just a few of the prominent cultural institutions located in renovated structures.

in the last couple of years the distillery district, the largest saved collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial architecture in north america, was converted into the first pedestrian-only area in toronto, promoting the arts, culture and entertainment. some of the best city galleries, restaurants, cafes and boutique retailers are all located in this area. →



[02:t  
:71c]



[02:b  
:06c]



[02:c  
:09]



[02:f  
:18]



[02:d  
16]



[02:k  
:35]



[02:g  
:19]



## 2. heritage buildings



the enoch turner school from 1848 (photo above), toronto's 7<sup>th</sup> post office from 1853 (bottom left) and a few more buildings from the distillery district are among the best preserved structures in toronto still standing.

instead of visiting a museum building, museums should be unpacked and the entire area treated as such, allowing everyone to enjoy it. →





## 2. heritage buildings



[02:o]  
:86]



[02:s]  
:40b]

over the years, only a few churches survived in this area. one of them is the monumental cathedral of st. james from 1853, the fifth church built on the same spot.

another important building in this neighbourhood, is the anglican church of the holly trinity. finished in 1844, it is the oldest standing church in toronto. it was designed by henry bower when he was only 25. →



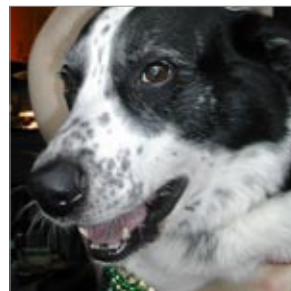
[02:m]  
:79]

[03:a]  
:40]

### 3. urban dog

the urban dog, a very specific subspecies of dog, could be the subject of a much more elaborate study. it not only influences the habits and behaviours of its owners but also impacts the degree of sociability of the entire neighbourhood. the usage of space, urban furniture, paving methods, relations with the younger generation, relations with other urban animals, types of living and even security are effected by dogs. surprisingly, many more people in condominiums and apartment buildings dominant in this area, have dogs than anywhere else. the owners have established exceptional social contacts among themselves, but dogs are also the perfect excuse for non-owners to start a conversation. →

[03:d]  
:127]



[03:b]  
:75]



[03:c]  
:123]



#### 4. empty lots & orphaned spaces



the majority of empty lots have historically not been a part of old toronto neighbourhood. the land south of the esplanade is a land fill, mainly used by industry, railway tracks, highways, parking etc. geographically the lots gravitate towards the northern part of community—today divided by highway and railway—and any future plans should work on uniting them. very ambitious ideas for developing the harbourfront and a large plot of land on the area's eastern edge do exist. 10–15 years ago this area was almost entirely neglected, but what we have today is the result of a massive effort from urban enthusiasts like jane jacobson and others. a few abandoned structures still await their owners but the future appears bright! →





4. empty lots & orphaned spaces

recently, the developers of expensive condominiums sensed the opportunities of the area and large towers began rising. just by looking at the underground excavations it is possible to imagine a huge concentration of tiny apartments. there is a danger that the neighbourhood spirit, so rare and valuable these days, will be seriously damaged if there is no control of the physical structure and impact of these buildings. →







[05:a]  
:05

the traffic in the area is relatively well regulated. there is enough parking, wether it on parking lots or in underground parking garages. parallel parking is also available on some of the streets which is a good way of providing physical protection for a large number of pedestrians on the sidewalks. only sidewalks are paved, but the paving styles are inconsistent and overall they need improvement.

construction work in the area is consistent which leads us to believe that the residents' needs are being considered. it is obvious that a lot of public initiatives regarding city take place right here, and this is reflected in the overall state of this neighbourhood. →

5. traffic



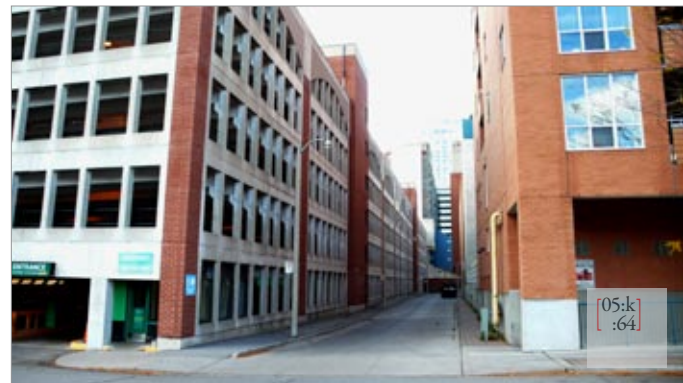
[05:b]  
:38



[05:c]  
:41



[05:d]  
:70



[05:k]  
:64

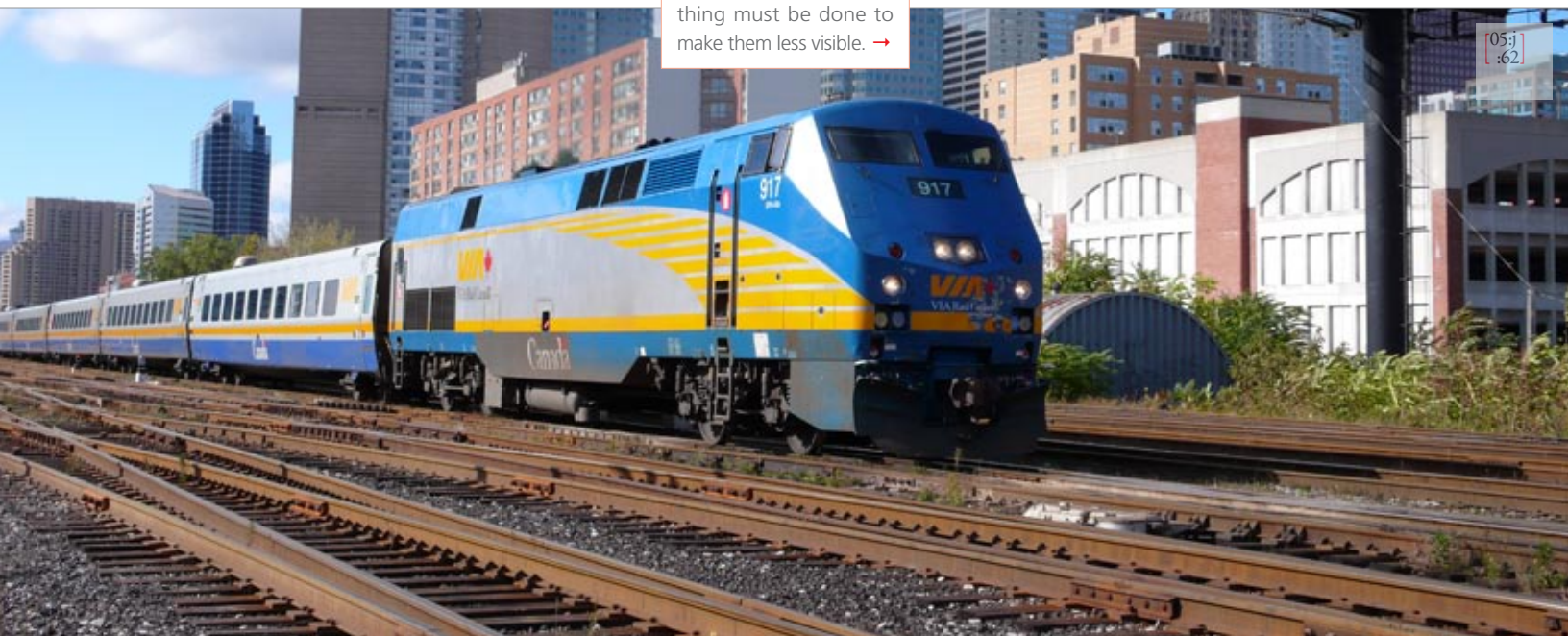




the gardiner expressway and the railway corridor are two well known and over-discussed problems. both clearly do not fit into this area and something must be done to make them less visible. →

s. traffic

[05:g  
:48]



[05:j  
:62]

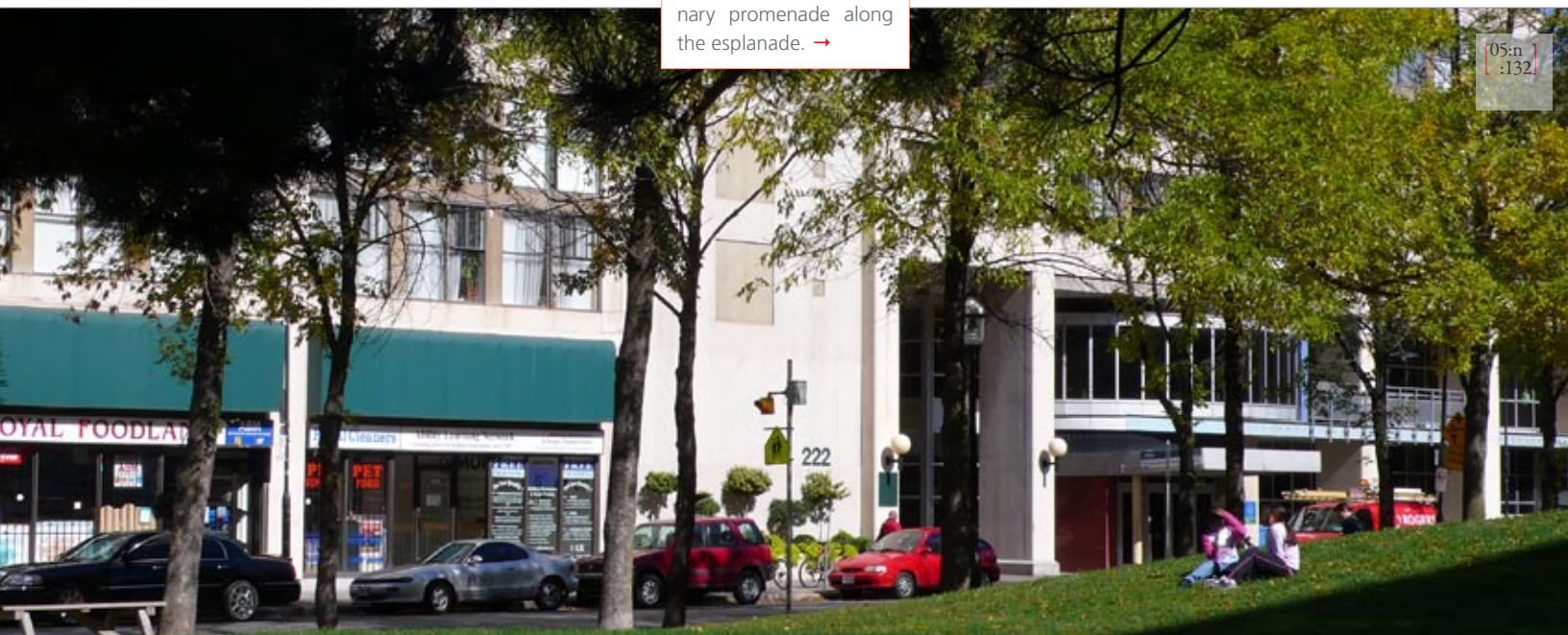




two examples of excellent traffic formulas, with nice solutions to almost all of the street's issues are segments of king and front and the extraordinary promenade along the esplanade. →

s. traffic

[05:m]  
:81]



[05:n]  
:132]



## 6. urban squares & neighbourhood centers



[06:a  
:61]



[06:s  
:133]



[06:c  
:72]



[06:n  
:110]



[06:o  
:111]

indisputably, the centre of this neighbourhood is the st. lawrence market. it is consistent with what historically has been the centre of the community in the old world, where cities grew organically around a gathering place—the market. that was not case here. this was originally the city market but city was not growing organically. someone just drew 10 city blocks on a piece of paper!

today, the spirit of this neighbourhood is all around the market and stretches from this geographical centre east and west [see a graph on page 36]. unfortunately the space is very limited for community activities and the natural extension should continue along the beautiful promenade—david crombie park on its south side. →





↑ click on the interactive image to play ↓

## 6. urban squares & neighbourhood centers



st. lawrence market was built in 1902 over the old toronto city hall from 1845. the remains are still visible and are incorporated into the market structure. the unique atmosphere of a highly functional market, together with many other heritage buildings, are making this social urban space one of the most attractive in toronto. this interactive panoramic image [above] is navigable in a full circle, with options to zoom in on details, and hopefully captures some of the typical saturday morning ambience of the st. lawrence market.

a large number of people, visiting, living, shopping, selling and entertaining each other, contribute to extraordinary and exemplary social bonds in this neighbourhood. →



## 6. urban squares & neighbourhood centers



recently a few new urban squares were developed in the area. one of them is small pleasant space at the back of the welington square building [interactive image above]. geographically they belong to the neighbourhood but somehow, probably because they were developed as private initiatives around corporate buildings, they have a specific substance quite distant from the rest of the community.

that is especially the case with the courthouse square park, created by janet rosenberg, an eminent landscape designer [photo right]. while the elements are beautifully executed, they look quite uninviting and cold. no one has ever seen anybody performing on the granite box with granite books, intended as an impromptu stage. →







## 6. urban squares & neighbourhood centers



the sculpture garden, (top left), st. james cathedral park (top right), the community center and wading pool on the esplanade (bottom left), and the crombie park, (bottom right) all deserve to be mentioned as exceptional public spaces serving this neighbourhood. →





[07:c  
:105]

the potential to attract tourists is beneficial for a neighbourhood in many ways. when the area attracts tourists it brings business and of course income to the community. it is also an opportunity for future investments to draw even more visitors. the concept of smart tourism develops content that is very well serving those living in the area. all of these elements are present in this neighbourhood: a lot of preserved historical ambience, attractions, shopping, good hotels and other accommodations, and even potential for specific kind of filming [movie making] tourism. the future looks very bright, unless control slips into the hands of investors looking for the fast profits. their efforts are usually quite short sighted and their actions have harsh consequences. →

[07:f  
:71][07:c  
:90][07:b  
:89]





[08:a]  
:20



[08:n]  
:128



[08:e]  
:63



[08:n]  
:134

is this object above, located in the canadian stage company's back yard, public art? yes, and so is everything else created by the public and for the public. even the most disputed urban art, graffiti, in this neighbourhood is very modest and tasteful [photo left]. it is apparent that these artist respect their neighbourhood. is that a message? what would happen if this type of urban space involvement was encouraged everywhere? →

8. urban art





[08:b]  
:36

how many public art elements, are visible in this image on the left?

it is really hard to determine where art stops being art. making that distinction is not really important. the significant step is recognizing and respecting what any of us think art is, and treating everything suspicious as if it was.

traffic signs, advertising signs, billboards, window signs, political messages, election signs, urban furniture and many other visual elements are all components of a specific mode of communication—the language of urban space. →



[08:k]  
:105



[08:c]  
:43



[08:t]  
:131



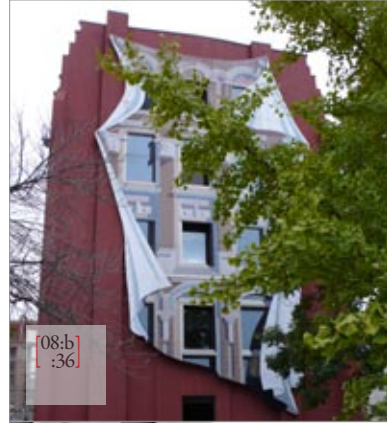
[08:j]  
:100

8. urban art



## 8. urban art

the most sophisticated, and of course the most expensive kind of public art, is done by professionals. it is sometimes even controversial. this example [photo below] is a kinetic billboard "in sit you" created by jennifer marman and daniel borins for toronto's famous sculpture garden, a unique outdoor public exhibition venue. public art is present in this area in many other forms, like murals, advertising billboards, water features, and is expanding every day with more and more new works of art. →



THE SPIRIT OF JANE JACOBS?





[08:f  
:74]



[08:o  
:129]

the most precious type of urban art, without any doubt, is art created by each of us when observing and appreciating spontaneous urban visuals, such as the play of autumn leaves with the green balloon [above] or the sunlight illuminating the directional signs [left]. observations such as these, usually indicate a high degree of personal involvement, spiritual well-being and the affection for one's surroundings →

## 8. urban art

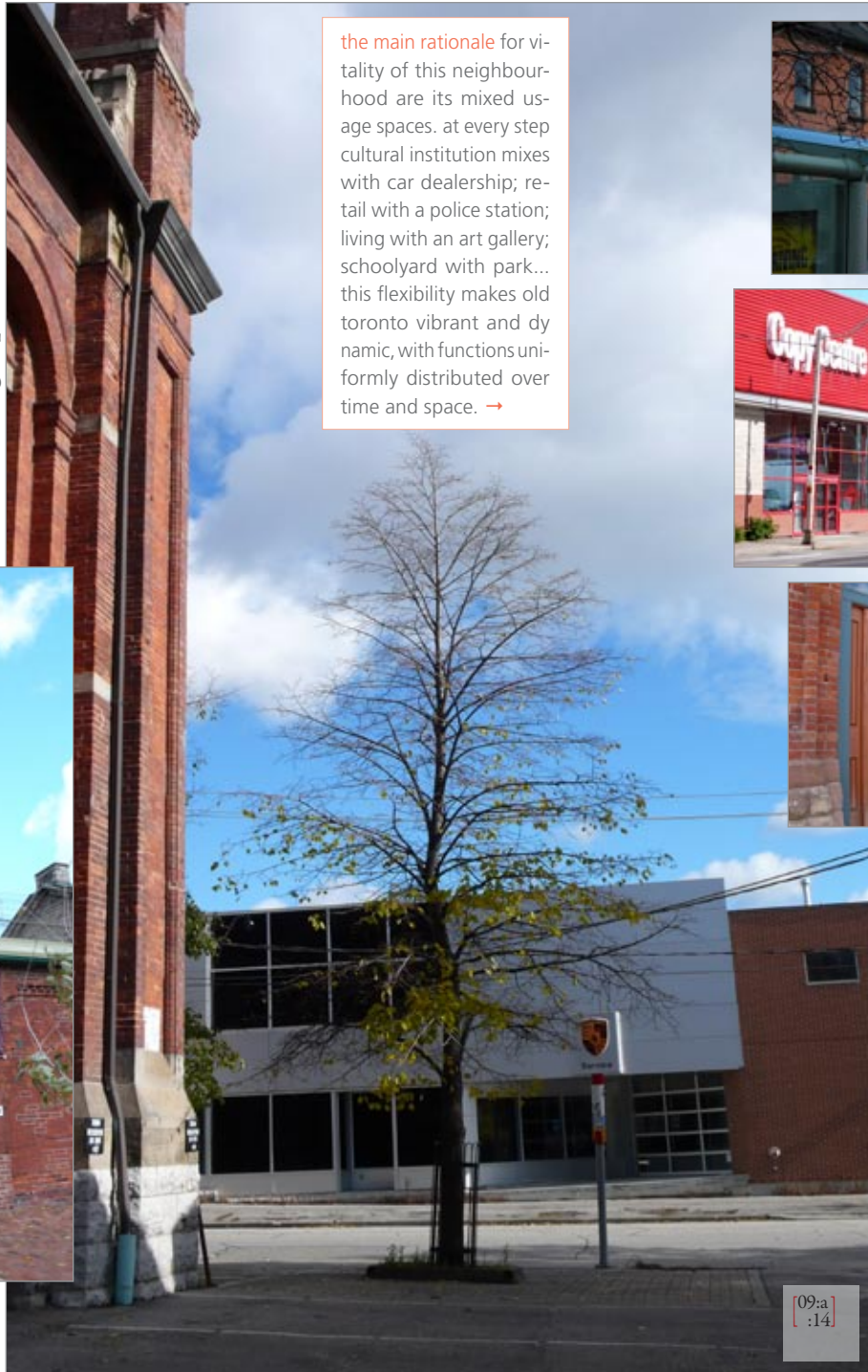


## 9. mixed usage spaces

the main rationale for vitality of this neighbourhood are its mixed usage spaces. at every step cultural institution mixes with car dealership; retail with a police station; living with an art gallery; schoolyard with park... this flexibility makes old toronto vibrant and dynamic, with functions uniformly distributed over time and space. →



[09:e]  
:39



[09:a]  
:14



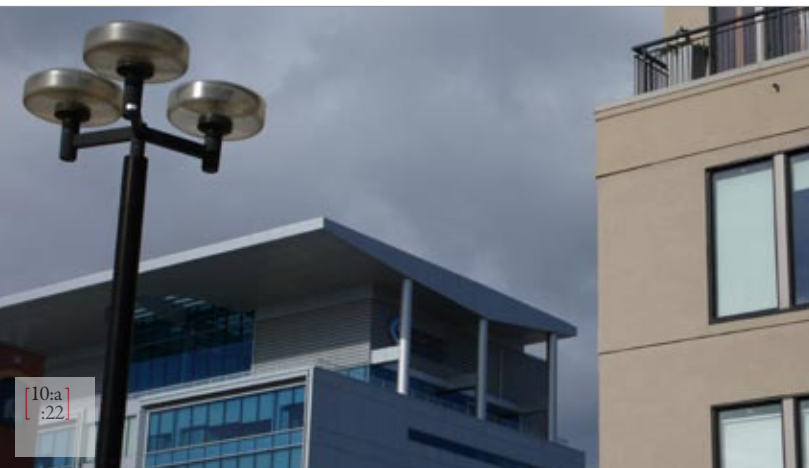
[09:d]  
:30



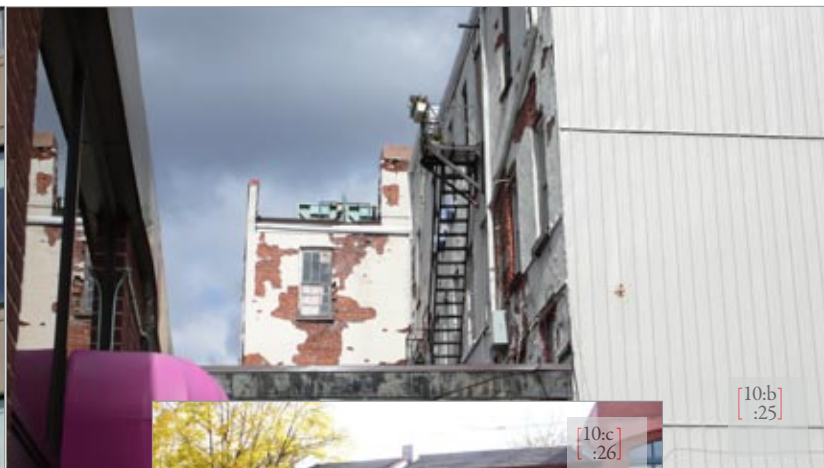
[09:b]  
:21



[09:c]  
:23



[10:a]  
:22



[10:b]  
:25

the two photos above, taken 2 minutes apart from each other, from almost the same spot, represent the factual state of the whole area: a brand new award winning office building beside modest size condominiums, and a renovated furniture gallery beside an old apartment building in poor shape. the structures built in the last 10-12 years blend fluidly with heritage buildings, some restored to great satisfaction. they add to the density of the area which is at the acceptable level and could even be increased in the future without negative consequences. some older structures await their destiny and others stand without purpose

an example in two photos [bottom left] is a really innovative and creative renovation of an older structure with the addition of a new section, incorporated in the combination of gallery space and luxury living. →



[10:c]  
:26



[10:d]  
:44



[10:k]  
:103



[10:j]  
:102

10. the physical structure of the neighbourhood



[10:c  
:26]



the usage of materials, shapes, colours, sizes and other architectural elements are not always correlated extremely well but the examples in these photos show that creativity and smart thinking in most cases result in very successful physical structures. →

[10:c  
:26]



## 10. the physical structure of the neighbourhood



[10:c  
:26]



[10:c  
:26]



[10:c  
:26]



[11:f]  
:122



most of the parks in the area are small with the exception of the afore mentioned crombie park. individual and some community initiatives (like smartliving st. lawrence, kidsplay and youth outlook) continue to do their best and the results are starting to show.

greenery, is always hard to maintain in an area with high pedestrian traffic, as in this neighbourhood, and it needs special attention. some innovative treatments have been implemented successfully. surface paving and street furniture are quite inconsistent, but the effort is obvious. →



[11:b]  
:28b



[11:c]  
:68



[11:d]  
:86



[11:a]  
:27



[11:e]  
:95





old fashioned individual houses, newly built townhouses, affordable living co-op buildings and some luxurious condominiums all blend in this harmonious community. extraordinary efforts from many urban enthusiasts, such as jane jacobs, contributed significantly to the well-being of this neighbourhood.

social interactions are exemplary and fear for safety and security is unnecessary. studies show that the more people pass through the area [even strangers] the safer we are. →







[12.a]  
:24]



[12.j]  
:76]



[12.b]  
:33]

## 12. mixed income living

population density will inevitably increase in the near future with the development of new condominium towers which is good to a certain degree and is a sign of the area's potential.

the invisible line between richer [north] and poorer [south] along the esplanade still exists. with the expected development on the harbourfront, the large residential complex west of cherry st. and a few new condominiums under construction, it will certainly become less visible.

the proportion between affordable and condominium housing should be kept in 30:70 or 40:60 ratio and should serve as an example of a healthy and socially sustainable neighbourhood. →



[12.l]  
:128]



[12.o]  
:115]





[13:b  
:126]



[13:a  
:117]



[13:d  
:94d]

friday night—entertainment, saturday morning—market day or late summer sunset—romantic time, are certainly special time zones when neighbourhood is functioning quite differently.

this walk was taken on a quiet sunday morning.

the influence of time should be taken into consideration when actively searching for answers. they might lead on in a completely unexpected direction. →



[13:d  
:24b]

13. the influence of time





[14:c]  
.:140]

## 14. social functions

a public school and a catholic school, are both located facing crombie park. it serves as a school yard and a playground for children but, as mentioned before, it has many other social functions. all of them co-exist successfully.

the neighbourhood is very active and has a full range of initiatives for children, greenery, safety, recreation, the homeless, and many other issues. various organizations, associations and collectives find their place here too.→



[14:b]  
.:82]



[14:a]  
.:28]



[14:c]  
.:104]



[14:f]  
.:107]





## 15. connectivity

the first impression is that this is a very pedestrian friendly area but many improvements are possible: back yards and alleys could be better utilized; connection should be established with the area south of the gardiner/railway corridor; business area north of king street is separated more mentally than physically. this neighbourhood is probably in the best shape compared to others in toronto. it has its own unique psycho-geographical characteristics and most of the city attention and initiatives usually address this area. here are a couple of reasons why: 1. most of the land previously used by industry was transferred to the city and later used for development of affordable housing; 2. this area has a large concentration of heritage buildings under direct protection of city authorities; 3. tourists potential bringing in large amount of revenue to the city is greatest here. 4. the only well developed functional market in toronto is in this area, encouraging a significant degree of social interaction.

all of these factors are unifying and with so many visitors, pedestrianization and further connection to surrounding areas will hopefully be a natural consequence. →



[16:b  
:72b]

## 16. neighbourhood identity

analyzing a neighbourhood can be compared with a diagnostic procedure for a patient. the healthier he looks, the less attention the doctors pay. in the case of psychogeographical portraits that trap should be avoided. to make serious observations, especially in the neighbourhood of this complexity, you need to prepare and arm yourself with lot of patience and an open mind.

this neighbourhood looks quite healthy. but that's the catch. it has not organically grown around the st. lawrence market as it looks at first glance. half of the territory was a land fill added over time and has historically been used in a totally different way, mainly for industry, storage, railway, etc. most of the preserved heritage buildings were originally used for purposes other than what they are used for today. the street grid system is artificial and does not follow any geographical characteristics. the zoning system in urban planning in toronto is not helpful either and in most cases leads to total decomposition of the city.

in visual terms the photo above best represents what this neighbourhood is today. the image speaks as thousand words, don't you agree? →



## 16. conclusion

**what do we have here?** is there a unique identity? are the inhabitants satisfied with their urban environment? what are the needs of this neighbourhood? is it functioning?

**lets try** to answer some of these questions.

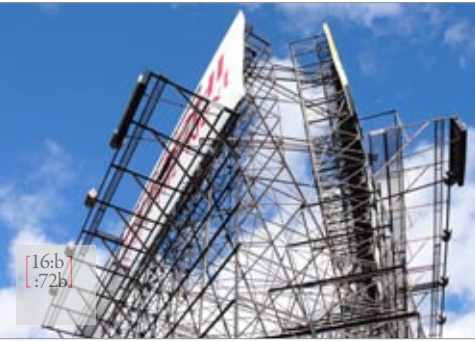
**compared to any other** neighbourhood in toronto this is a unique neighbourhood and the only urban area with the feel of the “old world, small town” atmosphere. the proximity to the lake and some initiatives [mentioned on pages 7, 11, 13, 20, 32 and 33] concerning the usage of the previously neglected spaces are contributing factors. it does have somewhat natural boundaries but the neighbourhood is not really strictly defined. parts on the outside edge are overlapping with nearby downtown business areas and areas with more residential functions. this characteristic is quite helpful in communicating community and improving its expression.

**a major positive** attribute of this area are particularly developed territorial bonds among inhabitants—its psychological unity. it is definitely the result of mixed income living: condominiums, rental units, affordable co-op housing, individual residences, and opportunities for work in the area. this attracts more people to live and work here and reduces commuting. the ethnic and cultural mix is also essential in developing the ground level social fabric connecting different groups. the meaning and importance of this connection was recently confirmed in the study: “improving the health of canadians: an introduction to health in urban places”; it compared health outcomes and behaviors affecting security, health, vitality and the well-being of the neighbourhood.

**of course**, there is a lot of room for improvements. the visual identity can be improved by engaging more creative young minds (like graffiti artists) in developing specific urban art. this could be combined with local initiatives and associations, some city planning structures and the use of funds available for improvements of areas attractive to tourists.

**tourists** from out of town or foreigners and visitors from other metropolitan areas are extraordinarily important. visitors will come if they like the area, if they feel comfortable, safe and if there are enough activities. those same characteristic are what inhabitants like and feeling cosmopolitan is also adding the value to the area.

**formula for improvement is very simple**, the more locals love their neighbourhood, the better it looks and feels. in reverse better the area looks the more locals will love it. in turn others will follow that trend and make their neighbourhoods better. watching and being with happy people will make us happier too! on paper this looks great, but formula for implementation is much more complicated, we all know that. →



[16:b  
:72b]



[16:b  
:72b]



[16:b  
:72b]



[16:b  
:72b]



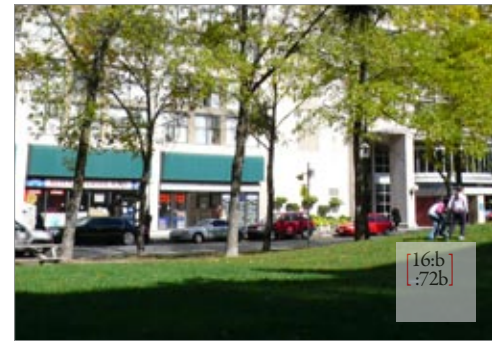
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[16:b  
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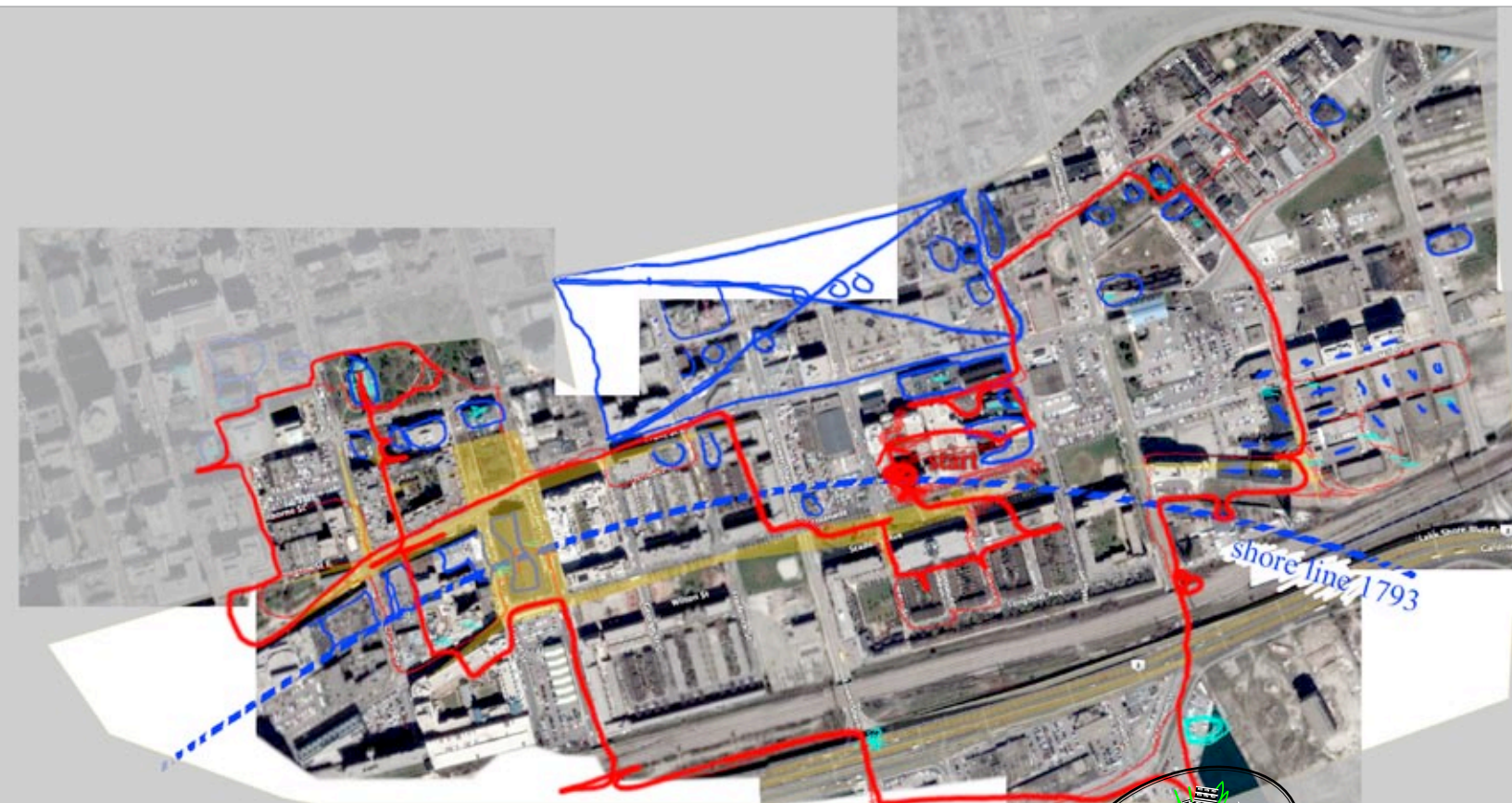


[16:b  
:72b]



[16:b  
:72b]





## 17. additional information & credits

this map was created in preparation for this psychogeographical portrait.

the blue line is marking heritage structures found in a research documentation, the crossed blue square represents the 10 blocks which were the toronto's city core in 1793. the turquoise line marks some other points of interest, the thin red line was the intended path and the thick red line is the actual walk performed on october 28, 2006. the yellow area is observed social center of the neighbourhood and was added after the walk.

the intention of this portrait, psychogeographical analysis of the old toronto area, is to be used as a subjective cross section of an observed situation and one of the case studies for the project 'enabled neighborhoods' in collaboration with bill humber and brian kilin at the centre for the built environment of seneca college in toronto.

all the photos and texts, as well as the concept and production of this document, have been created by aleksandar janicijevic and they remain his intellectual property.

toronto, december 12th, 2006

