

Leftover space: urban sensibilities

some of the world's most densely developed cities are defined not by monuments, but their approach to the fine grain and in-between spaces

Byera Hadley
Travelling Scholarships
Journal Series
2015

Andrew Daly





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Andrew Daly was awarded the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship in 2010.
Cover image: Shibuya, Tokyo.
The city's maze of bridges, overpasses and underpasses allows uncanny spaces to develop around their edges.
Photo by Andrew Daly

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A study of Tokyo, Kyoto, Kanazawa and Osaka — where ambiguous, left-over spaces are integral to the urban fabric — with lessons for Australian cities.

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Through the lens of four Japanese cities (some of the world's most densely developed urban centres) this research aims to show how 'boundaryless' left-over spaces could be better utilized in Australian cities.

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Introduction

'Left-over' and 'in-between' spaces occupy the ambiguous territories between the boundaries of other apparently well defined spaces and places. But because of their programmatically neglected nature they seem left-behind and left-out of the life of the city. Seen as 'back-of-house' spaces (dirty places that serve as an urban waste-bin that keeps the clean face of the city clean) or even as space left behind as a reminder of trauma or neglect, there is increasingly a desire amongst urban populations to investigate possible ways that these spaces might be 'capitalized' upon for the benefit of cities.

Through a series of documentation exercises using drawings, films and images chronicled in this report and website (www.andrewdaly.com.au/theleftbehind-project), and studying examples of successful re-appropriations of these spaces into some of the world's densest urban environments in Japan, this research aims to add to the broader understanding of the potential of these spaces to contribute to our cities.

Throughout this report, 'left-over' is a term that refers to a spatial and programmatic similarity as much as a typological or taxonomic one; laneways, pocket spaces, undercrofts, carparks – all of these could circumstantially be considered 'left-over' because they share one overarching similarity; in their current configuration the spaces are failing to contribute productively to the city. They are in a state of programmatic stagnancy, but rich in their untapped potential. Urban left-overs can be engaged in a mismatched, ad-hoc, spontaneous and opportunistic way that the structured, legislative apparatuses of city making are not agile enough to engage with directly – though legislation needs to remain flexible enough to allow these activities to occur.

Left-over spaces offer a latent economy, scattered horizontally throughout urban environments with the key potential

to be reprogrammed towards desirable ends that can affect a wider change in a city's behaviour and culture.

What's even better is that they are already there, waiting. In many cases these spaces could likely be re-activated and re-folded in to the productive cycle (culturally and financially) of a city through minimal and even playful topological and programmatic modifications – and modifications that might even avoid the architects' endless desire to fill things in with more architecture (even in some cases, taking some away).

In Melbourne and Sydney for example, the success of art festivals has seen a renewed interest in the ways that these spaces might be returned to a positive, enjoyable part of the urban experience, and doing so through temporary interventions that attract people into places they would not normally go. Even these temporary attractions bring attention to these spaces, and begin to inform a sensibility to urban living that sets the potential for these spaces to become productive in city life.

Despite their success, temporary art festivals in laneways seem strained to reconsider in a permanent and pervasive way how urban left-overs can become productive parts of the city beyond the instantaneous gratification of temporary attractions. While these temporary uses are highly successful, their success has come as much from the activities they leave behind – bars, restaurants and galleries – and the spin-off attitudes that opportunistically find ways to permanently integrate these areas into the productive city.

With thanks to Dr Chris Smith, Dr Lee Stickells, Matt Chan, Tom Henegan and the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship board.

Productive Product and Other Problematic Paradigms

The word 'product' is most usually associated with a 'capitalist' paradigm - where something is considered most valuable if its output is of a form of wealth. Most definitely, following through a rigorous capitalist logic would present left-over spaces with what is likely to be the prevalent way that they will be reused in the urban environment. Japan, in this sense, and particularly Tokyo, is an important example where land values became so inflated that every possible space was 'capitalized' upon - built-in even with the smallest and most unusual architectures as way of making the land produce capital and harness that potential financial value. But beyond the tiny buildings, this hyper-density has produced other kinds of financial coping mechanisms - like signage - that have become synonymous with Japan, as recognizable as images of temples or tatami-matted tea-houses. It has also inspired one of the world's most developed urbanized sensibility, an enviable cultural adaptation and 'ritual-ization' of how living in hyper-dense cities can be productive.

However, part of the discussion that needs to be had about left-over spaces is how as part of a broader approach to developing unique urban sensibilities, financial benefit can and should be linked to the production of a desirable cultural and social outcome. In other words financial success cannot be held solely accountable for

a tiny building occupies a tiny space, with advertising increasing its financial viability - a condom department store.



the re-valuing or the failures of urban renewal policies in modern cities. In most cases, if financial gains are allowed to outweigh any cultural or social intent, the prevalent mode of agglomeration will continue and as it has historically done in Sydney particularly, continue to erase fine-grain urban structures and left-overs in favour of the hyper-rationalized, large-footprint, podium and tower type development. There are examples, and those places studied as part of this report aim to demonstrate some success stories, where financial success has brought with it or been brought with a particular approach to cultural and social intentions that does not treat cities as *tabula rasa*. Such projects do not treat existing situations with the distant and hyper-rationalized economic teleology of large commercial projects - here Melbourne's Art programmes for example are a key success, accessing latent cultural, social and economic trends to return these spaces to both economic and culturally productive roles without their obliteration. The cultural and social lessons to be learnt from the architectural infill projects of Tokyo and throughout Japan present interesting cross-cultural potentials, precisely because of their perceived 'strangeness', but equally charged are the spaces still left-over in Tokyo, even stranger by being left-over still, and the micro-urbanisms employed by the Japanese to 'cope' with the effects of hyper-density. It is, in a way, precisely this sensibility with which this study finds such fascination.

Culturally the Japanese seem to be capable of approaching space without many of the qualms of Western society. What spaces we see here in Australia as 'disgusting' or 'dirty', precisely because of

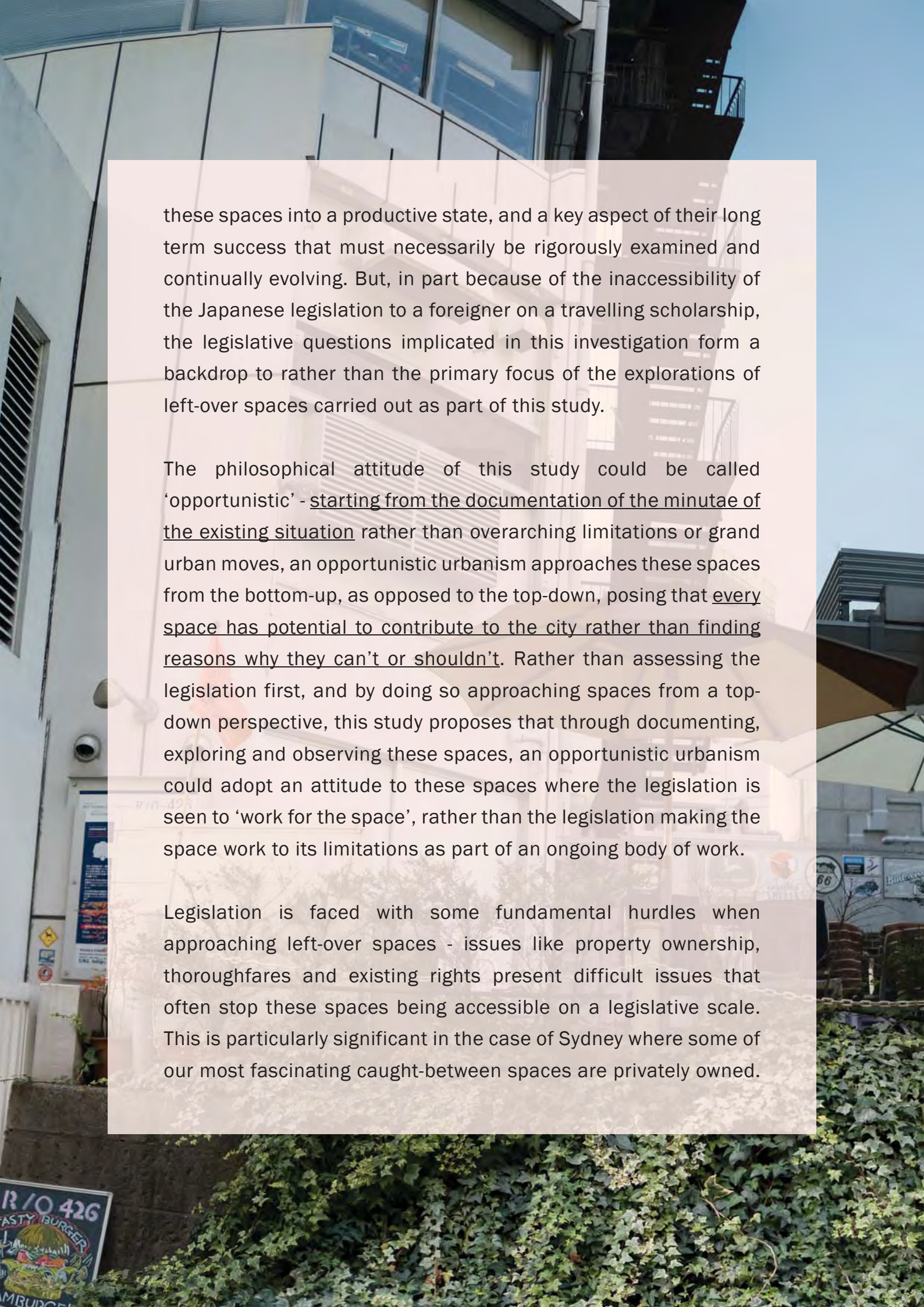
the pressure placed on urban environments by a huge, consuming population, Japan has addressed and culturally adapted to these spaces in a way which has defined cities like Tokyo so idiosyncratically.

Perhaps the most problematic paradigm in approaching urban left overs, a paradox for architects, is the prevailing view that unless built-in these spaces cannot be activated to their fullest potential. Catch-words like 'activate' are, in our current mind-set, words that imply in fill architecture, part of architect's hunger for commissions. Architects are not yet agile enough to fully engage with urban left-overs, with our domain so firmly set in the creation of objects inserted into voids. Maybe this is also why we have such a small voice in how these spaces become part of the future city. Bars and art installations command the present influence; these programmes could be called 'conflationary' - they expand and contract, engaging the spaces more dynamically, fluidly and with a more agile sensibility. Infill architecture risks being too sedentary to evolve as our urban sensibility changes and develops.

Architects are ourselves caught in between legislation, technique and desire. But surely, this is in fact a position of power rather than helpless reactionism - or could it become one?

Top-Down, Bottom-Up, Legislation and Opportunism

On top of a cultural acceptance of left-over spaces, and in part responsible it, legislation plays a fundamental role in turning



these spaces into a productive state, and a key aspect of their long term success that must necessarily be rigorously examined and continually evolving. But, in part because of the inaccessibility of the Japanese legislation to a foreigner on a travelling scholarship, the legislative questions implicated in this investigation form a backdrop to rather than the primary focus of the explorations of left-over spaces carried out as part of this study.

The philosophical attitude of this study could be called 'opportunistic' - starting from the documentation of the minutiae of the existing situation rather than overarching limitations or grand urban moves, an opportunistic urbanism approaches these spaces from the bottom-up, as opposed to the top-down, posing that every space has potential to contribute to the city rather than finding reasons why they can't or shouldn't. Rather than assessing the legislation first, and by doing so approaching spaces from a top-down perspective, this study proposes that through documenting, exploring and observing these spaces, an opportunistic urbanism could adopt an attitude to these spaces where the legislation is seen to 'work for the space', rather than the legislation making the space work to its limitations as part of an ongoing body of work.

Legislation is faced with some fundamental hurdles when approaching left-over spaces - issues like property ownership, thoroughfares and existing rights present difficult issues that often stop these spaces being accessible on a legislative scale. This is particularly significant in the case of Sydney where some of our most fascinating caught-between spaces are privately owned.



a hot dog cart uses a left-over space - it's not really temporary, but it's not really infill either.

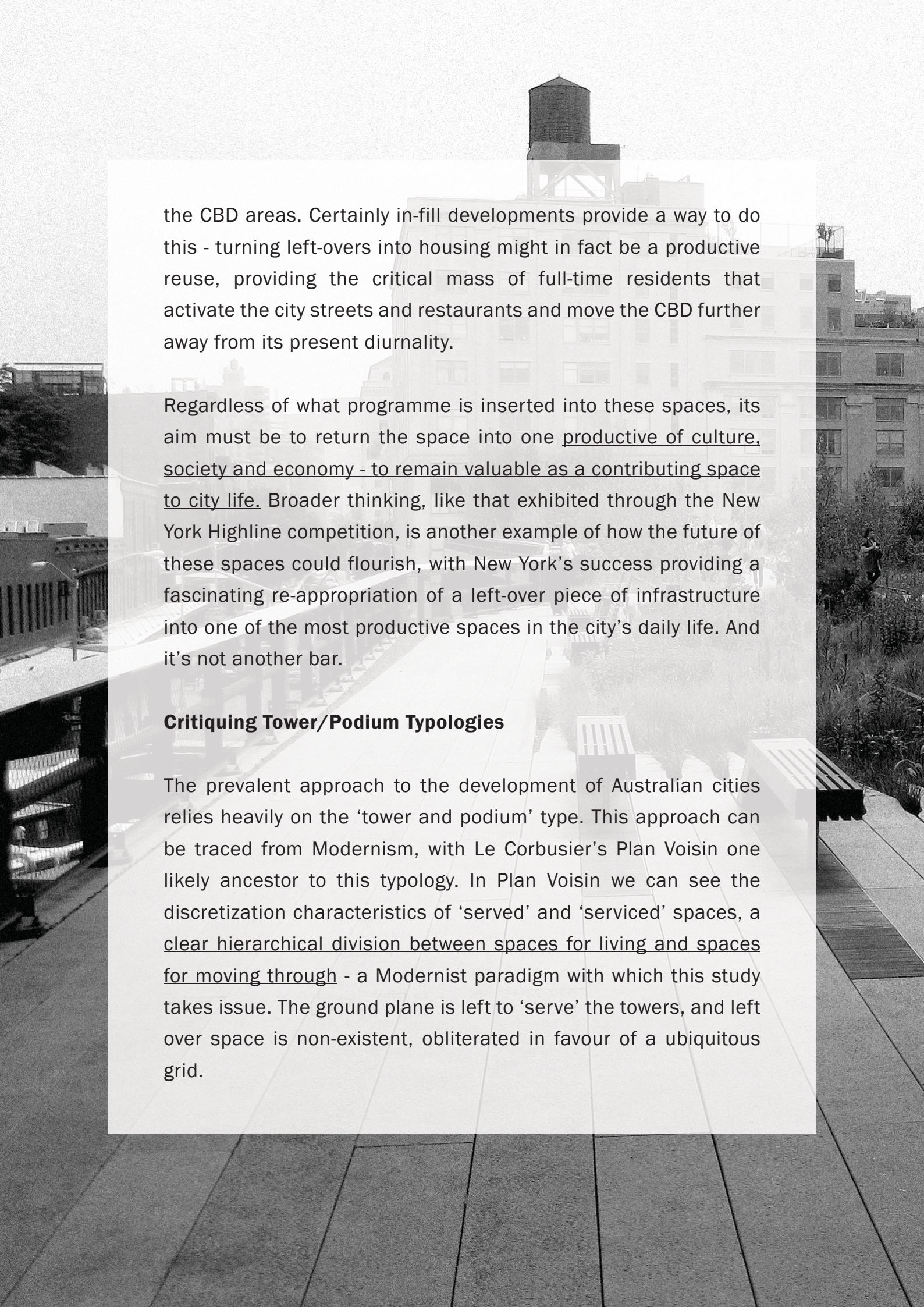
In no way can these issues be ignored in the broader picture. Rather, what this study hopes to do is become part of the body of knowledge that might help us to find where the opportunities lie in the specific recording and exploration of actual places. What it's searching for is some clues to help us develop an urban sensibility whereby cities become more liveable hand-in-hand with density. By presenting studies of existing spaces with potential future adaptations and examples of successful occasions of a fine-grained urbanism, the entire body of knowledge might in the future be able to contribute to future legislative changes that need to occur for these spaces to be successfully integrated.

Recently Sydney has seen a shift in the attitude towards legislation with the 'Small Bars' licensing aimed directly at making it increasingly feasible to develop small sites into cosy, relaxed city venues that aim to emulate the small bar culture of successful examples like Melbourne. And while the early examples of these ventures maintain ongoing popularity, moving away from bars and finding some further productive programmatic augmentation of these spaces is important. Not every space in the city that isn't a bar can become a bar and while this programme seems capable of occupying weird and wonderful spaces, to leave them as the be-and-end-all of left-over urban spaces seems somewhat simplistic and dismissive.

Against Bars and Diurnality

There is also, as critique of the legislation and approach taken presently in Sydney, an issue of too much of a good thing when such a homogenous programme as bars/cafes is ubiquitously rolled out, particularly when the ultimate aim is ostensibly to promote variance in the experience of the city. Perhaps the biggest problem with the present small bars legislation and its ongoing popularity, particularly in the Sydney CBD, comes in its extension of, rather than liberation from, the diurnal activation of the city central areas. While a step towards ongoing activation of the CBD, the small bars legislation remains tied to finding ways of making people stay in the city longer rather than a considered, philosophically driven attempt to restructure the way we consider the CBD as a productive environment. The small bars ultimately only extend the diurnal city cycle, encouraging a longer stay after work but not significantly shifting the engagement with the city in a lasting way, and even regressively turn the city into a playground for hedonism rather than more lasting cultural production. Without an equal legislative and capital investment in providing a desirable way to more permanently inhabit our city, bars should be seen as a step in the right direction, perhaps even showing us the way - but only one part of developing an urban sensibility.

Further investigations of left over spaces that seek to look beyond the small bars programme need to seek a more lasting programmatic augmentation of these places that supports a broader challenge to the traditional, hierarchical planned logic of

The background image is a black and white photograph of a city rooftop garden. In the foreground, there is a paved walkway with a metal railing. To the right, there is a lush garden area with various plants and a person walking. In the background, several multi-story buildings are visible, including one with a prominent water tower on its roof. The overall scene is an urban rooftop space.

the CBD areas. Certainly in-fill developments provide a way to do this - turning left-overs into housing might in fact be a productive reuse, providing the critical mass of full-time residents that activate the city streets and restaurants and move the CBD further away from its present diurnality.

Regardless of what programme is inserted into these spaces, its aim must be to return the space into one productive of culture, society and economy - to remain valuable as a contributing space to city life. Broader thinking, like that exhibited through the New York Highline competition, is another example of how the future of these spaces could flourish, with New York's success providing a fascinating re-appropriation of a left-over piece of infrastructure into one of the most productive spaces in the city's daily life. And it's not another bar.

Critiquing Tower/Podium Typologies

The prevalent approach to the development of Australian cities relies heavily on the 'tower and podium' type. This approach can be traced from Modernism, with Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin one likely ancestor to this typology. In Plan Voisin we can see the discretization characteristics of 'served' and 'serviced' spaces, a clear hierarchical division between spaces for living and spaces for moving through - a Modernist paradigm with which this study takes issue. The ground plane is left to 'serve' the towers, and left over space is non-existent, obliterated in favour of a ubiquitous grid.

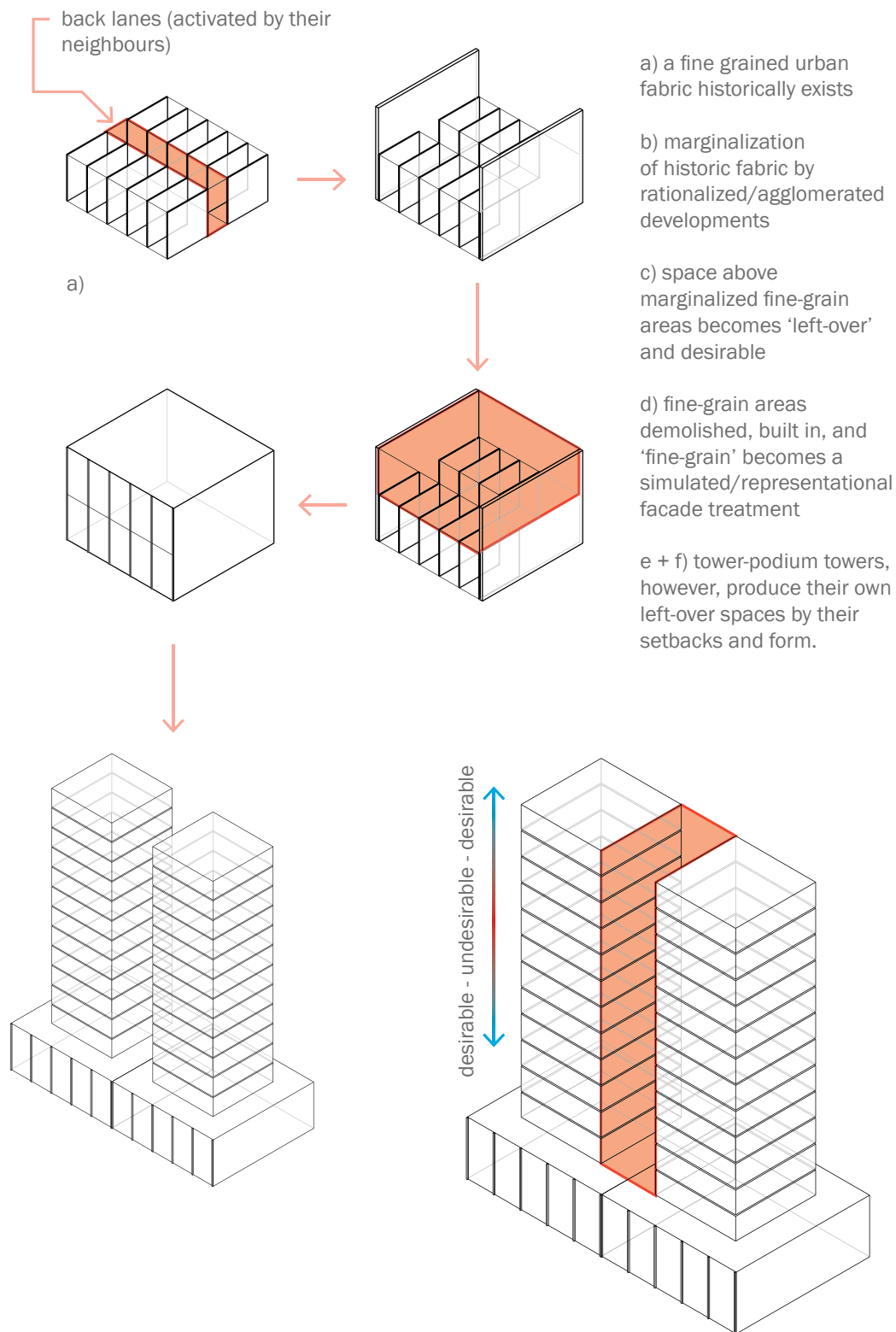


the new york highline project
is a fantastic example of the
reprogramming of a left-over space.

Closer to home, the three biggest developments in Sydney's recent history in the Carlton United Brewery site (Central Park), Green Square and Barangaroo employ precisely this tower and podium typology. This type, however, is responsible for creating a kind of left-over that also needs to be considered when discussing future ways of developing cities. It is a spatial, a financial and a programmatic left over, wherein the ground floor and upper floors are seen as desirable retail and office spaces respectively, achieving high rental values and thus, to the capitalist paradigm, being the most effective and productive of a development. The physical form of these developments also creates left-overs without real potential to be reused - the space between towers, for example, or the spaces created above shorter buildings surrounded by taller ones.

The by-product of this mentality, assigning status to height in a building, is that the low to middle floors seem less-desirable. Not associated particularly with the important physical proximity to the street required for retail, nor benefitting from the height status symbols of office towers or tall residential penthouses, the lower floors of a tower are comparatively 'left-over' spaces.

In at least some way, the lack of a discreet podium, tower typology found in Tokyo, replaced with a more homogenous mid-height, narrow typology of building with generally two shared walls, reduces these 'left-overs' between, around and created by discreet towers forms. It also reduces the overall height of the city - one of the primary complaints and issues raised in argument against density.



Ways of Seeing Left-Over Spaces

Photography is one of the major techniques used throughout this study, and has a significant history in the formulation of the aesthetic fascination held with left-over urban spaces. Architect Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio's article "Terrain Vague" (in *Anyplace*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995, pg 119) provides some fascinating insight not only into this relationship, but critical commentary on some of the pitfalls architects face when approaching the re-use of these spaces.

Sola-Morales fixes on a key terminology and conceptual way of seeing 'left-over' spaces through the notion of *terrain vague*:

Empty, abandoned space in which a series of occurrences have taken place seems to subjugate the eye of the urban photographer. Such urban space, which I will denote by the French expression *terrain vague*, assumes the status of fascination, the most solvent sign with which to indicate what cities are and what our experience of them is. As does any other aesthetic product, photography communicates not only the perceptions that we may accumulate of these kinds of spaces but also the affects, experiences that pass from the physical to the psychic, converting the vehicle of the photographic image into the medium through which we form value judgments about these seen or imagined places.

As Sola-Morales suggests, photography holds the potential as a

medium to both record but also to aestheticize the left-over spaces in our city, and has done so pervasively. Like our perception of cities and places which we have not yet visited is established by generally still images, photography has the potential to communicate atmosphere, memory and many other aesthetic traits through the image in a way which fundamentally affects human perception and impression of what a place might be like.

Photography here is presented as a very powerful tool - aesthetically and perceptually it offers the capacity to very selectively represent as well as document left-over spaces in a way which might seek to further liberate our conception of them in city hierarchy or perhaps, as would be the aim of this study, to continue to romanticize them in a way which draws out the potential for reinvention, newness and rebirth in their existing state. Photography can give the tantalizing glimpse of possible futures through its aestheticization, a very significant tool in inspiring the public both professional and general to re-invisage the way they might consider these spaces part of the city landscape. Given further the ease in which images today are transmitted and manipulated, photography remains a formidable tool in the repertoire of those seeking to change opinions or spark imaginations.

Sola-Morales goes on to offer a definition of left-over spaces that might prove a rich conceptual paradigm to approach our own spaces:

The relationship between the absence of use, of activity, and the sense of freedom, of expectancy, is fundamental to understanding the evocative potential of the city's terrain vagues. Void, absence, yet also promise, the space of the possible, or expectation.

For architects, this “promise, the space of the possible” is overwhelmingly seen as the potential site for architecture - the prevalence of architects to desire new commissions is part of why in-fill urbanism is the pre-dominant approach to the densification of cities (also made difficult to a void because it seems to work to suit the popular definitions of density).

Part of the attitude expressed by Sola-Morales is that these forgotten spaces, in the economic point of view, are wasted-spaces that do not contribute to a productive cycle - a traditional point of view when evaluating left-over spaces in cities, one suggested already by this report, and most certainly an attitude that engenders the architect's lust for in-fill urbanism projects:

Recent photographers [...] have captured the condition of these spaces as internal to the city yet external to its everyday use. In these apparently forgotten places, the memory of the past seems to predominate over the present. Here only a few residual values survive, despite the total disaffection from the activity of the city. These strange places exist outside the city's effective circuits and productive structures. From the economic point of view, industrial areas, railway stations,

ports, unsafe residential neighbourhoods, and contaminated places are where the city is no longer.

Once again, to architects, these places “where the city is no longer” is an opportunity, but particularly an opportunity to provide ourselves with commissions, to fulfil our desire to build.

Infrastructure and Adjacency

Infrastructure forms an important part of the study to follow. If not always foregrounded, the role that infrastructure plays in the formations of cities like Tokyo is one that has been observed to produce interesting, fascinating, potentially productive and valuable adjacencies and interruptions in the urban fabric.

As concepts, ‘adjacencies’ and ‘interruptions’ inspire much of the discourse in this study. Devices of infrastructure in cities are often obliteratingly large-scale and a-historical - that is to say that lines of infrastructure are often added into a city post it’s development and are somehow importantly different than the rationalized accretion of building over time. They offer a way into cities like Tokyo, with the importance of these large infrastructure figures producing a disruptive force on the otherwise homogenous urban environments around them.

It is in the eddies and flows of this force - if we can use the metaphor where lines of infrastructure are as the rivers of the modern urban landscape with people as their particles of water -

that we can find some of the most interesting interactions between top-down hierarchical planning and emergent kinds of urbanism, adjacencies that seek to occupy, cope with and appropriate these devices towards their own ends, and produce a unique urban sensibility.

Apparatuses for Reinvention

One of the key attitudes that this study works with focuses around a concept of “apparatuses”, a concept that suggests that the different identifiable elements of the city like roads, buildings and so on are engaged by economic, social and cultural forces as the devices through which they are able to carry out their purposes. Roads, as an example, are an apparatus that allows the distribution of people into the city, but at the same time allows people to move around it; roads also divide blocks of the city into quantifiable portions; they define the masses of the city; they act as a locating device for addresses of places; they act hierarchically to divide city precincts; the list goes on. In this way, the roads act as the devices - or the apparatus - through which a city is discretized, organized and essentially understood as compartmentalized, organized and rational bodies.

The paradigm of ‘apparatuses’ allows the potential also of elements being multifarious and multi-purpose - as in the example above it’s very hard to pin down a single purpose for roads because so many different organizational structures use them as the device/ apparatus through which they all interact. If you were, for example



to remove roads entirely from cities (not just cars, but actually trying to envisage a city without identifiable roads at all), then the kinds of spaces, places and behaviours that use roads as a device in their functioning would also need to undergo significant change - to find a new device through which they can be activated.

Left-over spaces are, in this sense, 'apparatuses' in their own way - they are not always planned spaces (but sometimes they are the result of other planned processes) like we expect of roads, but rather left-over spaces are very productive because they fulfil varying temporal facilitatory or apparatus-like roles that might also be important in understanding what future role we might envision for them. They facilitate or make more fluid the use of other spaces around them while appearing themselves 'unused' or 'neglected'. However, by virtue of these facilitatory rather than determined uses left-overs are in fact quite productive in an ambiguous, potentially variable and opportunistic way.

We can see this principle in action in some of the spaces documented in Sydney as part of this study. For example, as shown in the image to the right, these spaces often act as fire-escape exits, as services entries, as spaces where air-conditioning systems draw or exhaust their air, or for parking. There is an importance and an important potential for these spaces to continue to fulfil these facilitatory roles as well as take on new behaviours, reprogrammed or extra-programmatically-loaded to affect other desirable behaviours in the city around them.

Left-over spaces are apparatuses of connection that facilitate the movement of the spaces around them, and can be amplified to be more successful in this role, economically and socially ‘filling in’ the gaps while remaining thoroughly unbuilt. We find them on the sides of places of intense activity, metaphorically in the eddies of the river spiralling off the main flow, not part of it yet unavoidably connected to it and often (in)directly facilitating that intense activity. Tokyo’s many spaces squashed up against and under train lines and stations are a fantastic example of this - they feed off the huge volume of people that flow through stations, walk past or through them, and in turn are an apparatus that consolidates the station’s own importance in the fabric of the neighbourhood and future city development. At once, left-over spaces both feed and are fed by the more determinedly planned spaces and places around them.

A Doubly-Articulated Contradiction

Isn’t this understanding of left-overs (as devices/apparatuses already engaged in the overall behaviour of the city) contradictory to the intent of this study?

If these spaces are already being used, why do we need to be considering new ways to use them?

This is one of left-over spaces’ key capacities: because of their liminal, facilitatory, transitory roles in our urban lives, they are programmatically adaptive, fluid, and thus capable of picking

up new behaviours (and more than one behaviour at once) that can alter the behaviour of the wider urban system towards a new, more suitable or desirable end. It is this more desirable end that is as much in question in this study as the technical details of how these spaces can be used.

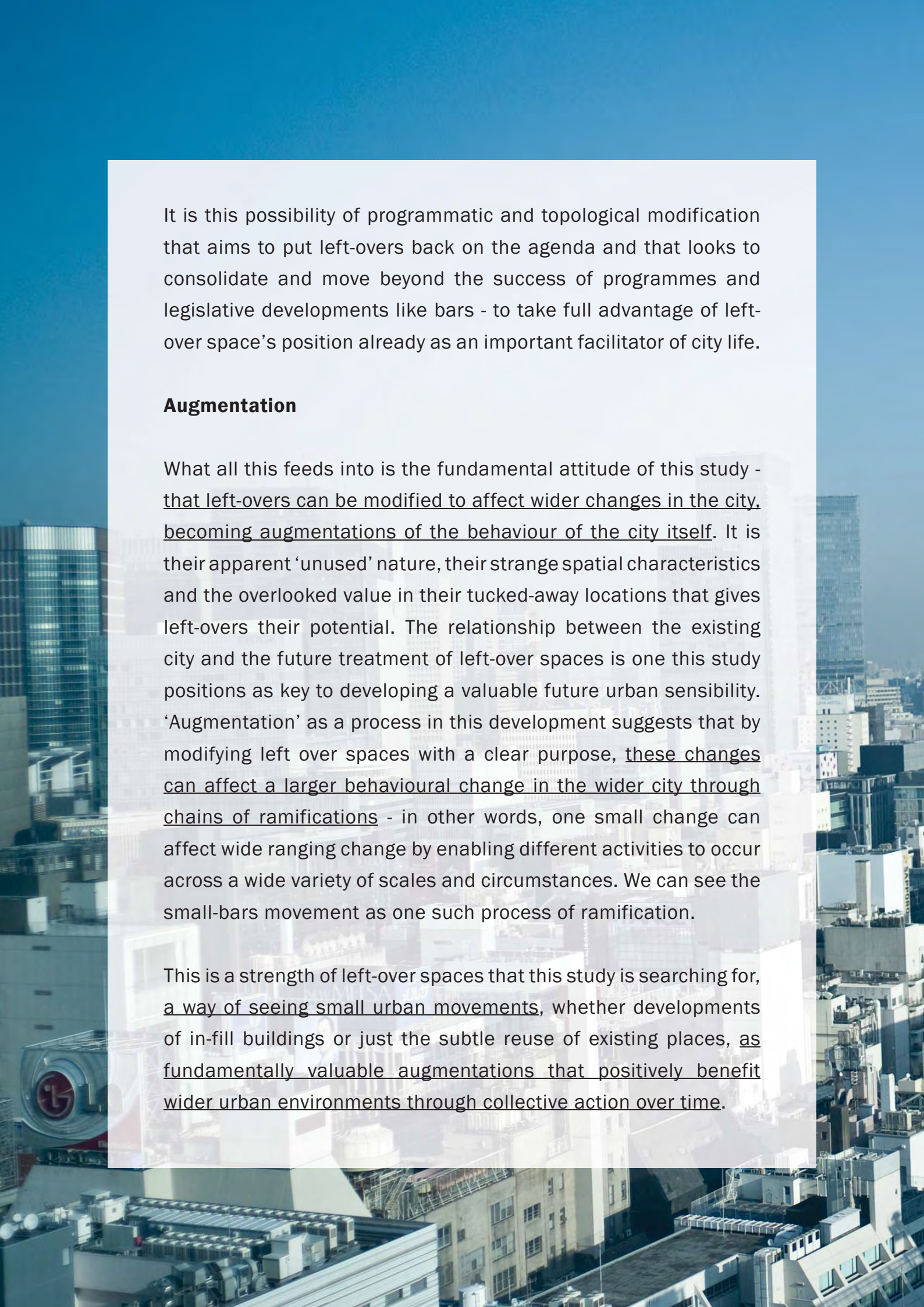
One pitfall of this apparatus-focused philosophical approach is to continue to be complicit in an externalized definition of left-overs that subjugates them to a binary 'served' or 'serviced' dictum present in Modernism's rhetoric. We need to see left-overs as important as any other space, and a paradigm like the apparatus understanding briefly laid out here aims to do just that - to suggest that left-over spaces should sit equal to other spaces because they exhibit equally important present behavioural and potential characteristics that make them as valuable if not more valuable to the future of the city than existing (and thus more 'stagnant') spaces. Though rather than necessarily exhibiting their own well defined spatial borders, left over spaces are programmatically elastic in a way that more purposefully planned spaces might not be. Through analysing what role these spaces play presently in the broader city precinct, left over spaces can be programmatically, typologically and topologically altered with the clear intent of producing a wider augmentation in the behavior of a city district. Their lack of definition and the other topological ambiguities that come with them are an opportunity to capitalize upon in the full sense of the word - to make productive of capital as well as the beneficial cultural and social activities that they may support.

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It is this possibility of programmatic and topological modification that aims to put left-overs back on the agenda and that looks to consolidate and move beyond the success of programmes and legislative developments like bars - to take full advantage of left-over space's position already as an important facilitator of city life.

Augmentation

What all this feeds into is the fundamental attitude of this study - that left-overs can be modified to affect wider changes in the city, becoming augmentations of the behaviour of the city itself. It is their apparent 'unused' nature, their strange spatial characteristics and the overlooked value in their tucked-away locations that gives left-overs their potential. The relationship between the existing city and the future treatment of left-over spaces is one this study positions as key to developing a valuable future urban sensibility. 'Augmentation' as a process in this development suggests that by modifying left over spaces with a clear purpose, these changes can affect a larger behavioural change in the wider city through chains of ramifications - in other words, one small change can affect wide ranging change by enabling different activities to occur across a wide variety of scales and circumstances. We can see the small-bars movement as one such process of ramification.

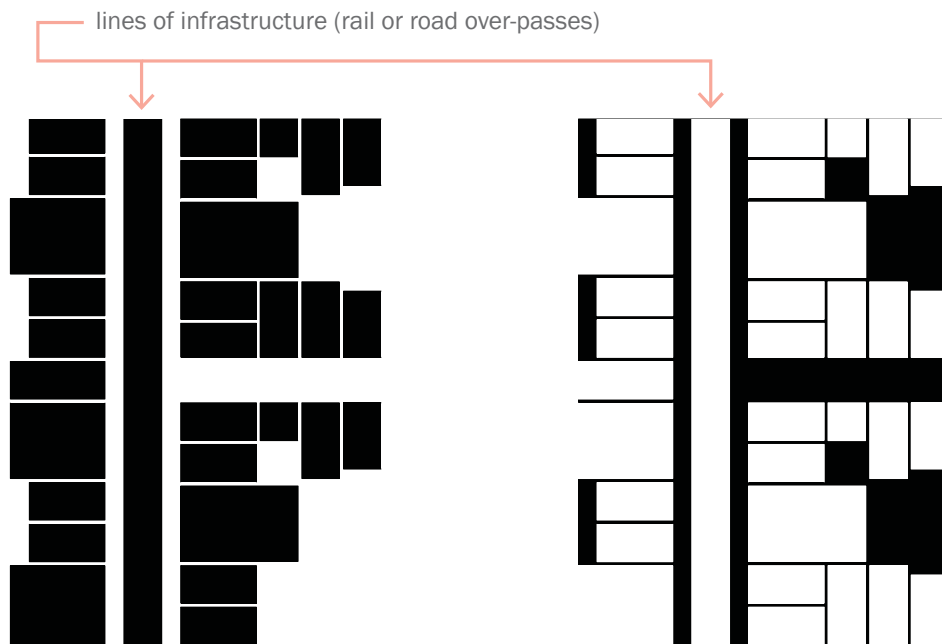
This is a strength of left-over spaces that this study is searching for, a way of seeing small urban movements, whether developments of in-fill buildings or just the subtle reuse of existing places, as fundamentally valuable augmentations that positively benefit wider urban environments through collective action over time.



Figure-Grounds and Complexity

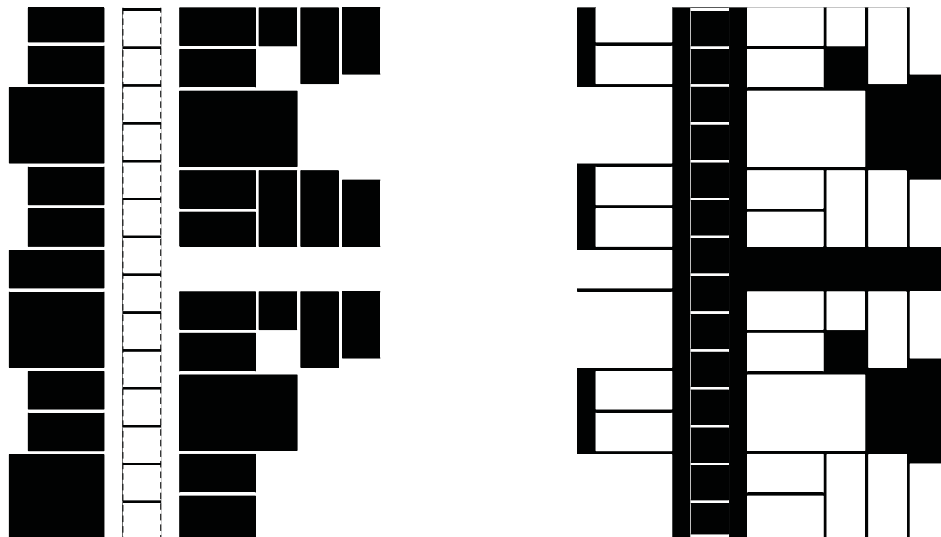
The figure-ground drawing is used throughout this study as a first touching-base with traditional representations and understandings of the city. As a drawing it is reliant on the simple graphic representation, generally in an orthogonally projected 'plan'-type drawing, of solid and not-solid - shown black and white respectively. This type of representation is one with a long history in the discussion of urban fabrics, being a powerfully simple representation of the relationship between built environments and the spaces between buildings that can facilitate many deeply-ingrained metaphors about city character - 'fine-grained' or 'broad-brush' for example might be some examples of the observations of the quality of urban form exhibited in these drawings.

However, despite its long history and strengths, the figure ground is when addressing 'left-over' spaces charged on one hand with significant poignancy and on the other with a likely oversimplification of the problem at hand and misses the value in treating left-over spaces as inherently complicated, complex, difficult and openly ambiguous sites. Several of the spaces studied defy identification through the figure-ground, being in built up areas but often associated with infrastructure - infrastructure that while thoroughly 'urban' and 'built' is ill-suited to analysis through the figure-ground. A rail bridge for example sits somewhere between figure and ground in this drawing, both at once, but it is this ambiguity that makes these spaces 'left-over', or 'in-between'.



a) a traditional figure-ground drawing treats buildings as black, and roads/spaces in between as white

b) an inverted figure-ground flips this relationship, presenting a different way of perceiving the urban-form



c) the more correct truth is that the space beneath these lines of infrastructure is in fact awaiting reprogramming, being well positioned valuable inner city space.

Why Japan?

The temptation with studying tight urban form, particularly in regards to laneways, is to use Europe as the primary precedent - and without doubt the tightly-knit historic city fabrics of Europe provide ongoing inspiration and fertile ground for the development of fine-grained urban approaches in Australia given our historical links to Europe.

Alternatively and perhaps more regionally relevant in light of current cultural influences upon Australia, Japan offers a less historical study of fine-grain city structures in urban development - it is a decidedly non-nostalgic, successful example, regionally relevant if culturally contrasting, and with the interesting parallel of pairing a rapid increase in population and density to a time-frame largely after World War II (if for very different reasons). In these ways even at first glance Australia has much to learn from Japan. Our wealth, population growth and predominance in the region has developed most significantly after World War II. We face high and still climbing (some may argue over-inflated) land values in the inner city areas though not (yet) reaching the highs of Tokyo. Unlike European cities with long histories, Sydney and modern Tokyo evolved very much in a technological age and under the auspices of booming economies in an age of regular economic boom-bust cycles.

Japanese architectural studio Atelier Bow-Wow's series of books (*Made in Tokyo*, *Pet Architecture* and *Graphic Anatomy*) are

通り

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significant precedents for this study and works that set Tokyo apart from other potential areas of interest. These books document the oddities of Tokyo, with *Pet Architecture* focusing on the strange, quirky in-fill 'pet'-like buildings of Tokyo, while *Made in Tokyo* investigates the strange programmatic hybrids that make it a unique architectural breeding ground.

Another value in Tokyo and Japan lies in the historical development of a different typology than the ubiquitous tower-podium as witnessed in Sydney. Discussed further in the following sections of this report, Tokyo's urban fabric seems more focused on a multi-storey, less articulated built form, compensating for lack of street-frontage with copious signage, but creating an urban fabric where (somehow) the upper levels of these narrow, small footprint medium-height buildings are financially viable for uses that, in our cities, would never be considered for upper storeys (like restaurants and so on). Our exception, in Sydney, would be Chinatown - in itself an interesting cultural note - where upper levels of buildings fronting onto the street also seem activated and financially viable in a way that the big-footprint, setback podium and tower types popular in new developments are not.

But perhaps despite all the hard-talk and concrete rhetoric, what is most fascinating about Tokyo and Japan is the cultural, social and financial sensibility that has made high-density city living synonymous with the international identity of the country. Where Australia's identity both architectural and 'romantic' remains in a bushranger myth, with our most famous and world renowned

rchitects and their work being still part of this tradition. We are seen as a big country, and as a Japanese businessman pointed out during this study, a young country still developing a sensibility and a culture that is as distinctly ours as Japaneseness is theirs.

That is the primary hope of this study - that this work, these photos, images and words can be part of a broader body of knowledge that might offer some humble clues as to what that developing sensibility might even be. By exploring a culture so idiosyncratically known for its density and urban environments, maybe there is just a hint of a way of seeing living in dense urban environments that we can adopt here, and see it as part of living well in Australian big cities.

eleven themes

urban form and infrastructure

unusual adjacencies

spaces and places caught in the eddies

architectural infill

street form

land uses and economic pressures

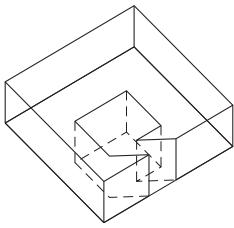
building typology

traditional and modern

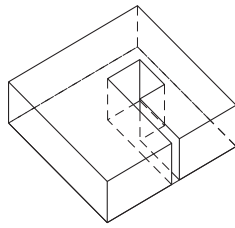
opportunistic urbanisms

coping mechanisms and micro-amenity

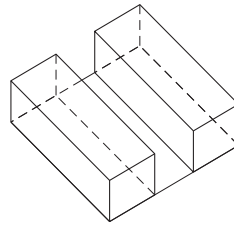
temporal occupations



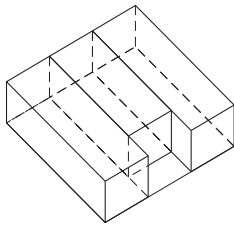
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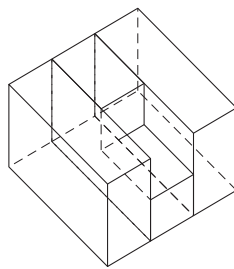
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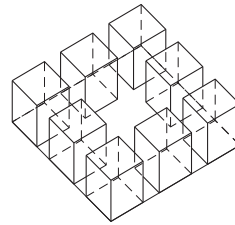
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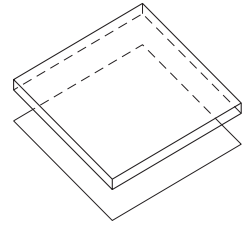
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we can categorize the kinds of left-over spaces this study has encountered through some simple topological and typological observations. these simple understandings might also help us tabulate or formulate some responses to our own left-overs;

typology/topology (taxonomy) of left overs

1. basement/underground
2. pocket space
3. laneway/alley
4. sliver
5. uppercroft
6. forum
7. undercroft

urban form and infrastructure

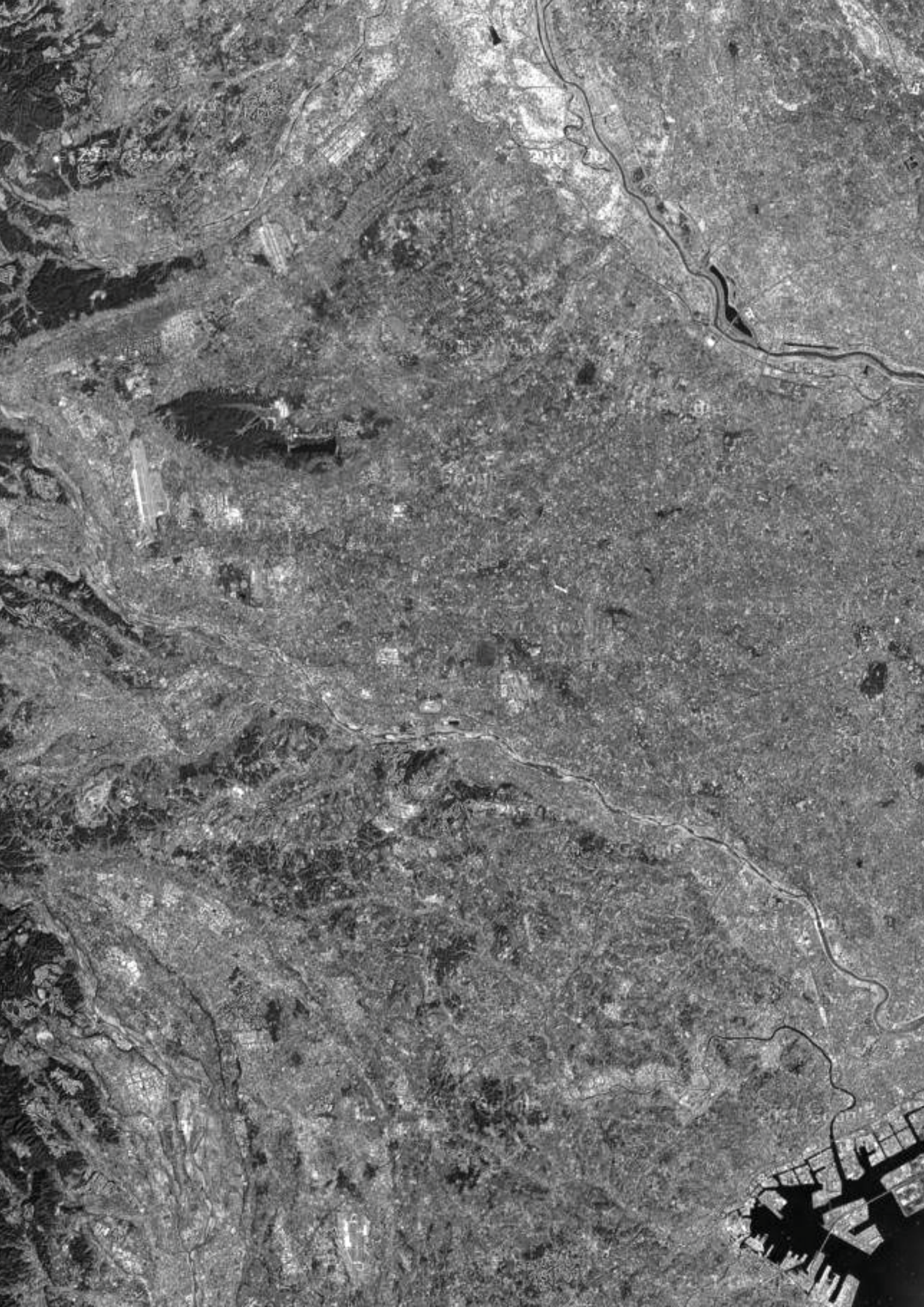
the need to move millions of people around each day has implications: tokyo is a city defined as much by its consistent density as by the lines of transport that cut the landscape of the city apart and the spaces it creates along its edges.

these devices, not set to a particular grid or predetermined ideal of ordered utopia, create the ambiguities, the oddities, and the irregular but fantastic adjacencies and uniqueness of cities like tokyo. some of this potential for the unexpected can be found in sydney's own adjacencies of infrastructure and building - a chance for unusual neighbours that is sanitized more deliberately in the grid-based planning ideals of cities like kyoto and melbourne.

the size and incisive nature of these infrastructure constructions suggests that they are informative devices through which the apparent complexity of tokyo can be broken down, compartmentalized, accessed and analyzed.

how we might begin to unpack the role infrastructure plays in developing and influencing the emergence of particular places and spaces? how can we assess these 'figures' of cities that have emerged and been constructed to achieve complex facilitating roles - moving traffic, dividing, controlling and managing the movements of a city like tokyo? what affects do they produce, and how can we harness these affects, collect, direct and coagulate them into urban spaces and behaviours productive of culture, society, and economy?







tokyo - megalopolis and bay



tokyo and sydney

seem less planned, less geometric, and a clearer influence of large pieces of infrastructure



kyoto and melbourne

more planned, repeated grid system producing a more rational and homogenous urban fabric

four major cities have been studied in this piece - with some interesting correlations in city structure. whereas melbourne and kyoto display a clear grid-based organizations, both sydney and tokyo display a less centralized, less geometric organization with large infrastructure elements disrupting the potential for strongly geometric orders to develop.



TOKYO'S SHIBUYA



shibuya, tokyo, figure ground

... we often use anthropomorphic metaphors for cities as a way of abstracting and understanding the complexity of the behaviours and interactions between the different components ...

major lines of infrastructure

arteries, veins

building mass
muscles

openings
organs process, redistribute, allow flows through and feed the muscles

lanes
capillaries



is there a nervous system to this city? what's telling this system to behave, what's evaluating its behaviour?

is the city's nervous system our shared cultural, social urban sensibility?



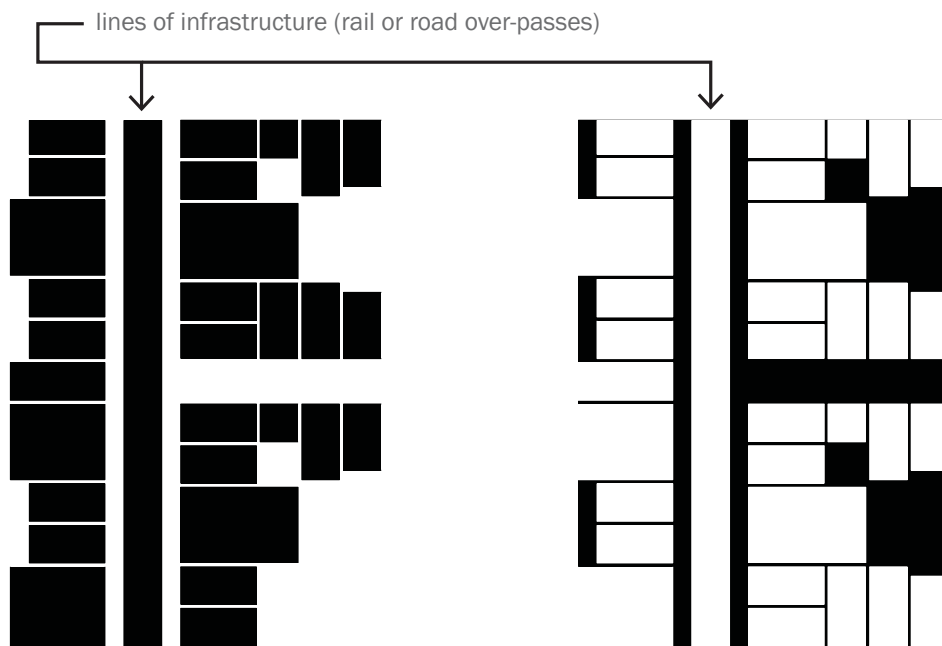
in inverse figure ground shows immediately the impact of infrastructure on the city, and the confluences of scale that it operates at.

when addressing infrastructure constructions, the figure-ground drawing lacks a certain level of fine-grained analysis - it produces a misnomer suggesting the solidity of these city spaces that falsely classifies them as undevelopable or unusable spaces.

the drawing convention requires some minor, simple modifications when dealing with existing pieces of infrastructure that captures the actual permeability and condition of figure to ground on the human ground plane. often these large infrastructure devices, while disruptive in the sense that they introduce noise, heavy vehicles and can block-out amenity like sunlight, their interaction with ground plane offers fantastic latent potentials for spaces and places to be developed that take advantage of the otherwise traditional 'undesirability' of these 'by-product' spaces.

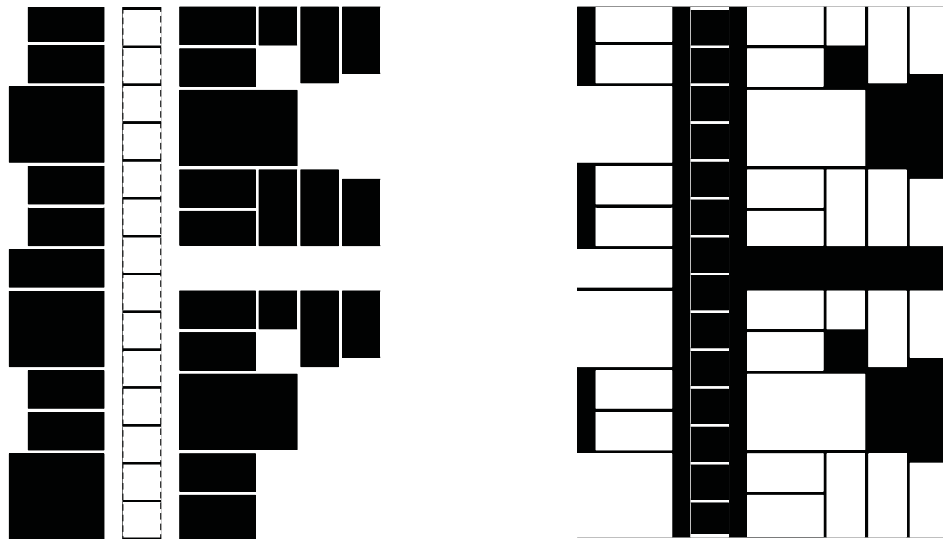
there is throughout japan no shortage of this ingenuity in adapting to the situation at hand; taking advantage of the latencies produced by disruptive, nonhomogeneous devices in the figure-ground landscape is one of these key adaptations. they are valuable because of this disruption - if the ubiquity of the figure-ground of individual plots and discreet buildings were to be rolled out homogeneously, less opportunity for irregularity would arise, and these spaces could not be productive of the subcultures and countercultures they have often been associated with in recent, urbanised history.

subcultures and countercultures adopt these spaces as both the symbols for and the functioning spaces in which their activities can find a 'home' that suits their movements away from traditional expectations of space and behaviours. while not always producing desirable results (like crime), these kinds of spaces offer a latent economy waiting for users with the desire and intent to utilize those capacities.



a) a traditional figure-ground drawing treats buildings as black, and roads/spaces in between as white

b) an inverted figure-ground flips this relationship, presenting a different way of perceiving the urban-form



c) a traditional figure-ground drawing treats buildings as black, and roads/spaces in between as white

d) an inverted figure-ground flips this relationship, presenting a different way of perceiving the urban-form





how does this space conform to a traditional figure-ground analysis? there are figures on figures, or figures within figures - spaces doubly-articulated

SHIBUYA, TOKYO



we could see these devices of infrastructure as apparatuses that facilitate the movement that the city desires (moving an 'economy' of both material goods and the desires/intents of people around to satiate whatever desires and needs the city has manifested) around the city. they can be in this sense conceptualized as 'vectors' - they have a directionality, speed, acceleration, and enact some forces that affect very directly the urban fabric around them.

the forces that interact along the edges of lines of infrastructure produce fascinating adjacencies which, if the sensibility is mature enough, can be observed and ridden (in the way that a surfer rides a wave and benefits from its movement) to generate novel responses to city life.

in tokyo and japan this sensibility exists and taps the valuable capacities of these spaces to full benefit. one of the key objectives of this study has been to develop some understanding as to how this sensibility might inform the development of our own approach to urban spaces.

unusual adjacencies

in japan, but particularly in tokyo's maze of highways, bridges overpasses and underpasses, the spaces produced by the 'mega-figures' of infrastructure ('mega' in the sense that they seem oversized in their relationship to the tightly packed buildings of tokyo) suggest how these unusual adjacencies are tapped to produce some of the city's most fantastic, memorable, well-used and uncanny spaces.

often these spaces lack what we would consider to be traditional urban amenity - they aren't green, they aren't necessarily well-lit, and they are often under the lines of extremely high-speed, high-noise transport forms, like the famous japanese *shinkansen* bullet trains.

but the impact that these lines of infrastructure have on the urban fabric is one in tokyo met with an incredible ingenuity in the development of small, unusual, and unique architectural/typological responses that emerge from this 'unusual adjacency'. whereas in a western city these spaces would be largely ignored, in japan they are necessarily part of the urban environment and seem effortlessly folded into the development of the city, not excluded from it.

all this is part of a sensibility, or a paradigm, or an attitude towards the value of urban environments in part inspired by inflated land values and a high cost of living, a necessity forced by the sheer numbers of people, but also a cultural sensibility that has emerged that makes cities like tokyo synonymous with modern japan and its urban landscape.

what is the australian urban sensibility? do we have one? how can we get one? and what do we want our cities to be like when the population is 6 million, 8, 10, 20 million?



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tokyo's akihabara electronics town is a retail hub tucked up under and around a major train line. in akihabara we can find some of the quintessential oddities of tokyo.

in tokyo, subject to pressures like extreme land values and inheriting the impact of large pieces of infrastructure carving through the cityscape and needing to support huge volumes of people and goods moving through the city, every space has some value. in response to these particular conditions, japanese culture and urban form has taken on a number of traits or capacities to 'cope' with the issues that arise from this need for a hyper density - including an attitude towards the value of left-over spaces in augmenting and supporting the overall behaviours of the city.

the closeness to the large lines of infrastructure has bred many strange buildings, strange geometries, and created unique and culturally identifiable examples of an urbanism that values space without many of the qualms that we maintain in the west.



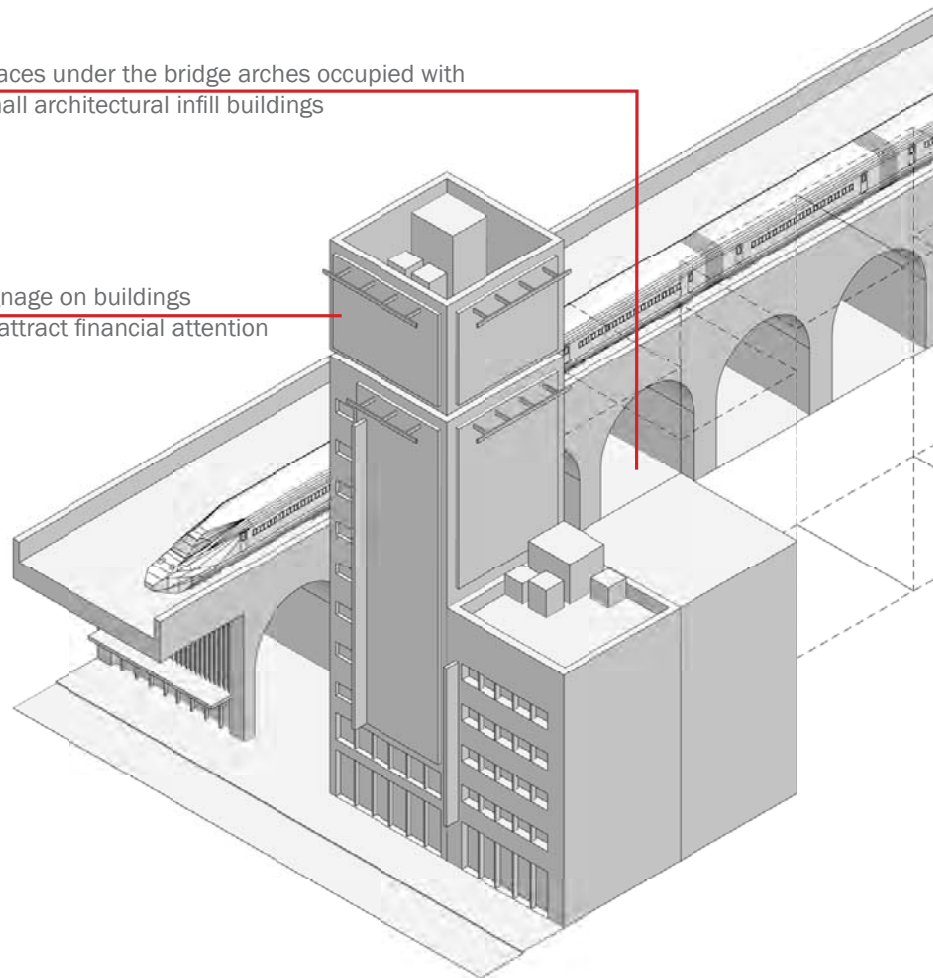


ed between the arches of a rail line.



spaces under the bridge arches occupied with
small architectural infill buildings

signage on buildings
to attract financial attention



this street in akihabara uses small architectural infill buildings slotted under the arches of a high-speed train line to create one of many highly active, productive uses of this otherwise left-over spaces.

in a city where face-to-face retail to consumer surface area is one of the most important devices in making the city a viable financial entity, these kinds of uses of otherwise wasted space are an important part of how latent possibilities in existing situations are exploited to a productive end.



a retail street tucked under the arches of a rail bridge, with little buildings slotted in to take advantage of every space available.

trains move above at high speeds

signage an important element in the visual and spatial characteristics of tokyo

under the arches of the shinkansen tracks buildings are slotted in to utilize the space

ground floor retail is hyper-inflated in value because of its direct rather than visual connection to consumers

the sheer mass of numbers in tokyo allows such places like this to maintain their financial viability





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the pressures of japan's density have also led to the particular development of buildings types and responses to this hyper density - typologies that do their best to make viable living in these environments.

often buildings are less than a few metres away from major pieces of transport infrastructure, and employ copious signage across their facades to attempt to draw people's attention and their business to all levels of the buildings. in many cases, each floor of the building, as small as they are, has a different tenant, a different function, and the only way to make this viable in tokyo is to take advantage of a relatively low-level of regulatory control on elements like signage and facade composition.

the city of lights and advertising we immediately identify with tokyo springs from this latency - low regulation and high demand for visual stimulus to attract your financial attention.

spaces and places caught in the eddies

to conceptualize the importance of infrastructure in the formation of japanese cities and particularly tokyo's (with 'infrastructure' being also used as a tool for breaking down the traditional figure-ground reading of cities), an allegory of 'rivers', 'eddies', 'taps' and other 'hydraulic' metaphors is one that could help us unpack the complicated relationships at work in tokyo. it is also a possible way into beginning to formulate a response to japanese urbanism and how we might learn from its successes and failures that moves beyond observations simply that 'buildings are smaller and more tightly packed in japan'.

whereas the figure-ground sees the city as a set of defined, bordered, static blocks, a representation also of what spaces are 'permanent' and those that are 'transient', seeing these major lines of infrastructure as 'rivers' with a current, a flow, and producing 'eddies' and so on suggests a less static analysis is possible than that offered initially by the figure-ground; the city is constituted by millions of individual flows (people and their desires and their movements), flows that are collected in rivers (infrastructure), tributaries (smaller streams and creeks that feed into major rivers and supply them), reservoirs (buildings and other places where flows momentarily come to rest, interact, and then resume their journeys), with other controlling devices - dams and sluice-gates (traffic lights, ticket barriers etc) acting as ways of controlling the rate of flow, and tapping its energy (ticket barriers exact fares from the flow, tapping its potential energy like a hydro-electric dam does to produce something from the movement of the flow itself) .

In other words, the city is dynamic, the result of ongoing dynamic processes, not a static relationship between 'figure' and 'ground'.





4218

歩行者に注意!

北参道自動二輪車等駐車場
誘導路案内図



this overpass on the outskirts of harajuku shields and nurtures a bicycle park. overhead and alongside traffic moves extremely fast, but strangely the bike park seems surprisingly calm. it is also a function that enables a city like tokyo to be as dense as it is without even more vehicular stress.

HARAJUKU, TOKYO



Lipping beneath the fast-flowing traffic above, bike parks under overpass bridges have multiple benefits: dirty spaces are turned functional, bikes become a viable means of transport with places to park them reliably and the confidence that this offers in moving about the city.

these spaces are produced by, and simultaneously supporting of city flows and movement - sitting under the forms of infrastructure they support, without these 'eddies' supplying the flows with their constituent materials (bikes and people), both these behaviours would lack the symbiotic relationship that ensures their ongoing production.



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any space possible is used for bike parking - one of japan's key microamenities and uses of otherwise wasted spaces.

OSAKA



bike parks like these have two important uses: not only do they make useful otherwise wasted spaces, they also show the potential of left-over spaces to become a set of supporting, faciliatory or supplementary apparatuses/ devices to the larger city culture.

in cities as dense as those in japan, this use of otherwise left-over spaces as such supporting devices makes feasible the functioning of the bigger city. a huge collection of small spaces can impact on the behaviour of an entire city and culture, and it is this sensibility (that a series of tiny co-ordinated movements can amount to massive change) that is an important part of the formation of a japanese urban sensibility.

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tucked in behind some of the densest shopping streets of Tokyo (Shibuya), stumbling across this small series of restaurants is like coming across a character of Tokyo rapidly disappearing. It exists in the left-overs created by large streets and railroad lines around it.

SHIBUYA

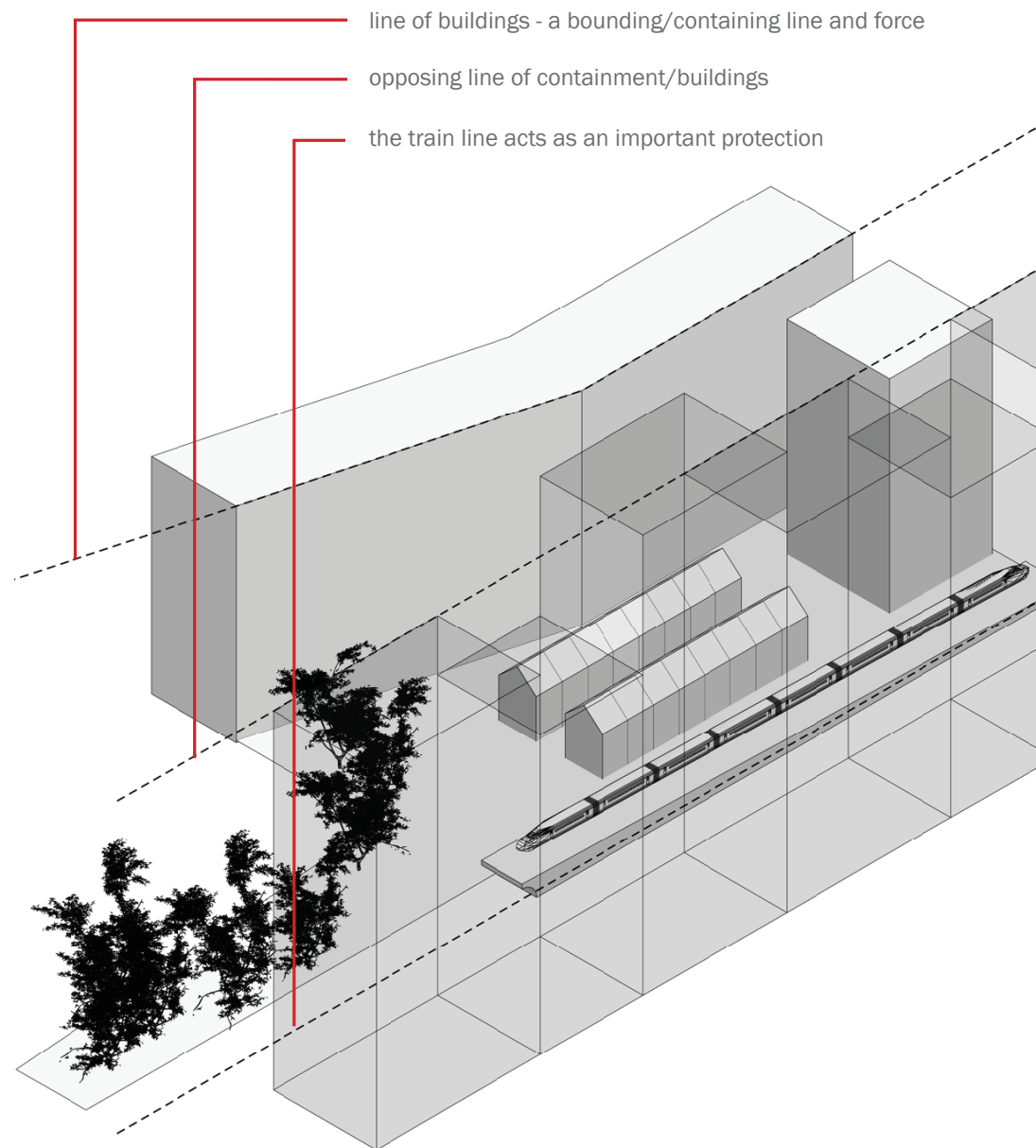


some of Tokyo's most curious and fascinating places are caught in the eddies of the flows around them.

produced by the adjacency of rapid commercial development and a local train line, in the centre of one of Tokyo's densest retail/commercial centres, this slice of Shibuya survives as small restaurants and bars.

It's an example of a space existing in the eddies of major rivers flowing around it, sustained by appropriating/tapping the energy of these larger forces around it to sustain itself.





the forces of formation on this sliver of old
tokyo - a train line, and two corridor's of dense
development.



泉福

うまい
アムをどうぞ



in a way this part of shibuya is 'left-over' - it's not part of the rapid development of the city around it but is made more valuable by its strangeness. it's a pleasant, almost nostalgic part of old tokyo remaining in modern megalopolis.

architectural infill

particularly in tokyo, one of the major ways that urban form has developed to benefit from the large volume of flows the city produces is through its many tiny examples of infill urbanism. in responding to its many strange left-over places, the japanese have developed a sensibility and approach to tiny 'wasted' spaces that through curious little infill buildings are converted from useless places in the urban environment to spaces productive of an urban culture and economy.

there are many benefits of this approach to wasted space (filling it in); it takes spaces that would otherwise be marginalized and havens for illegal activities (in a malicious fashion) and makes them both culturally and financially productive but they also become well-surveilled, well-trafficked and safer than their unused counterparts. there is certainly a very particular paradigm at work here that also needs identifying: the city is importantly positioned as a 'civilizing' influence, a homogenizing one and a sanitizing one. In these examples of infill urbanism from japan, the city is seen as a possible solution to social and financial issues through architecture's/urbanity's capacity to provide opportunities for people to be busy - productively busy and a part of the city life. space is treated in this same way (for better or worse).

宿通り

NABAUKU 33

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these restaurants under the train lines of yurakucho in ginza, are some of the most well frequented of the city. in these inner-city, hyper dense places, spaces like these are too valuable, and potentially too productive of both wealth but also culture and society to be ignored.



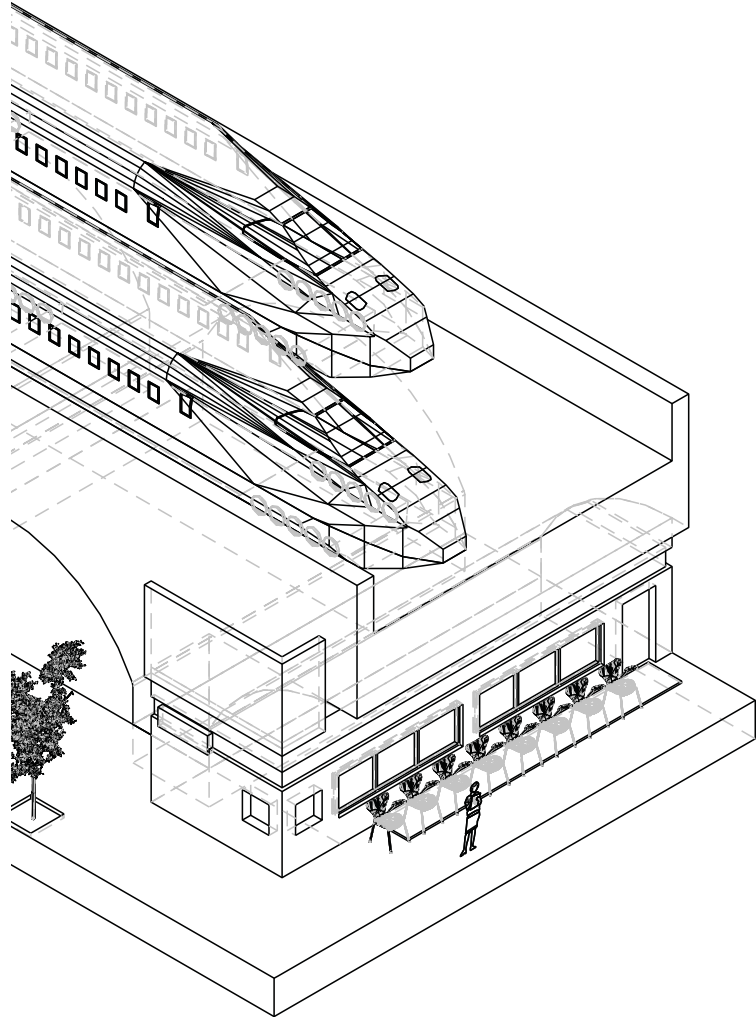
中華台灣料理

新台北

3212-5055

ミルクワンタン

despite the space being what we would consider undesirable, in Tokyo it's well used and even, when the light catches it right, somehow beautiful.



these tiny restaurants and bars turn what would otherwise be an unused, dirty and possibly dangerous space into a fascinating glimpse into Japanese culture and society. Small and cramped, with many different sittings/turn over of clients each night, these places have emerged to satisfy the Japanese businessmen late at night, and are often open till dawn.

ホッビー もつ焼 煮込み
ニユー 加賀屋
☎ 5208-1100

大園 山 菜

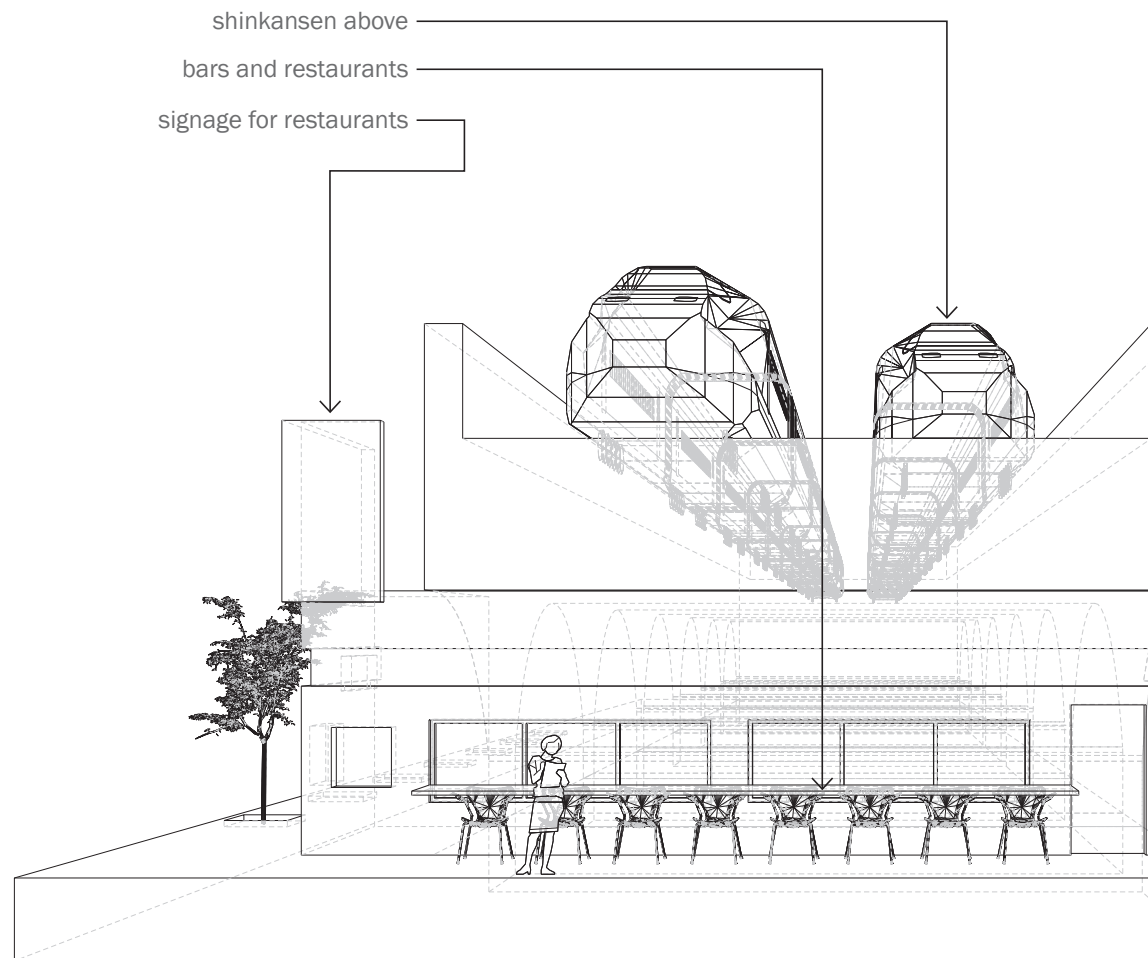
ラ 谷





nothing here is hidden - services and structure are exposed, taking advantage of whatever room there is available to do whatever it is they need to do.

UNDER THE LINES, YUROKUCHO, TOKYO



the spaces exhibit nothing of what we could consider 'good amenity'. they are not particularly well lit, not well ventilated, and are exposed to the very loud trains above, and are uncoordinated environments with an ad hoc quality, the result of many adaptations over their lives.

but this is fantastic part of what gives them their character and makes them so idiosyncratically tokyo.





an eclectic, spontaneous bunch of buildings
take advantage of the potentials of this space.





sydney's cahill expressway remains a wasted space - a poorly used thoroughfare that fails to contribute back to the city it is a part of. there is much to learn here from the japanese examples.

sydney's cahill expressway divides the cbd from the harbour - it's a widely disliked piece of infrastructure precisely because of the disruptions it causes in the continuity of the urban fabric around it.

interestingly, it also divides fine-grain historical sydney from the rationalized, tower-podium, large footprint cbd developments to its south - and one of its effects is to act as a boundary to that development.

how might we reuse it as a place of positive cultural, social and economic value to a future sydney city?

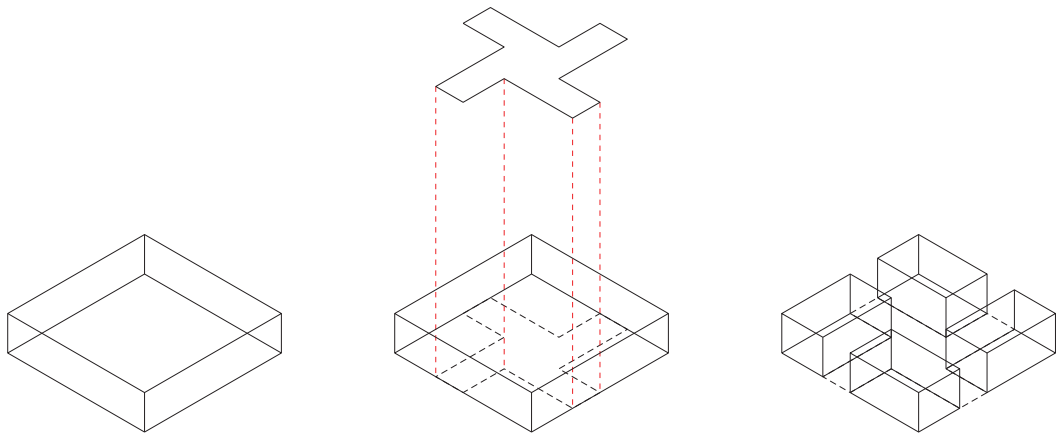
street form

the street-form of japan, the character of the lanes and alleys that make up much of the dense parts of the city (as opposed streets form by podium-types with towers above) is an important part of what makes a city like tokyo never feel over-dense or crowded, at least in comparison to cities that do rely heavily on a tower/podium-focused form of density (singapore, for example).

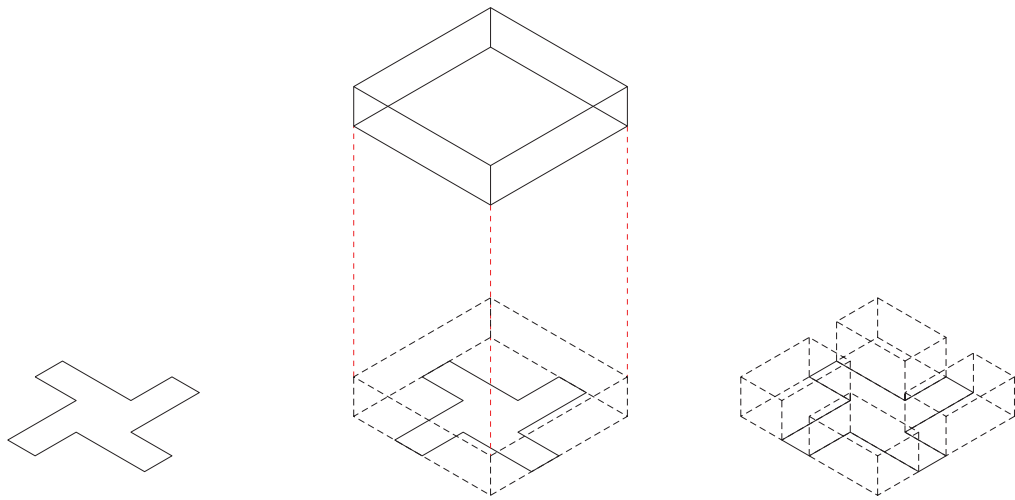
there are a few important formative processes and influences at work in japan that directly impact the form of the built envelope, perhaps the most significant being the development of a street-form where often the front wall of the building is in fact the wall of street, with generally no setbacks as we know them in australian cities, and very often with no distinct sidewalk.

there are many effects of this form on the feeling, character and experience of the city streets - a generally slower speed of traffic allows these streets to be essentially pedestrianized without the need for particular provisions (paving etc), and allows moving around by bicycle to be more effortless, less dangerous and much less of a contentious issue. the street forms in tokyo and japan are much more conducive of a pedestrianized street culture - however, there are other issues with this approach. without a sidewalk or any space between the roads and the front walls of buildings, there is no opportunity for a sidewalk culture to develop - there are no cafes on streets or restaurants. this is certainly one important drawback of the japanese streetscape, one that perhaps australia's idolization of europe's sidewalk culture seeks to ameliorate and take advantage of our benefit of space.

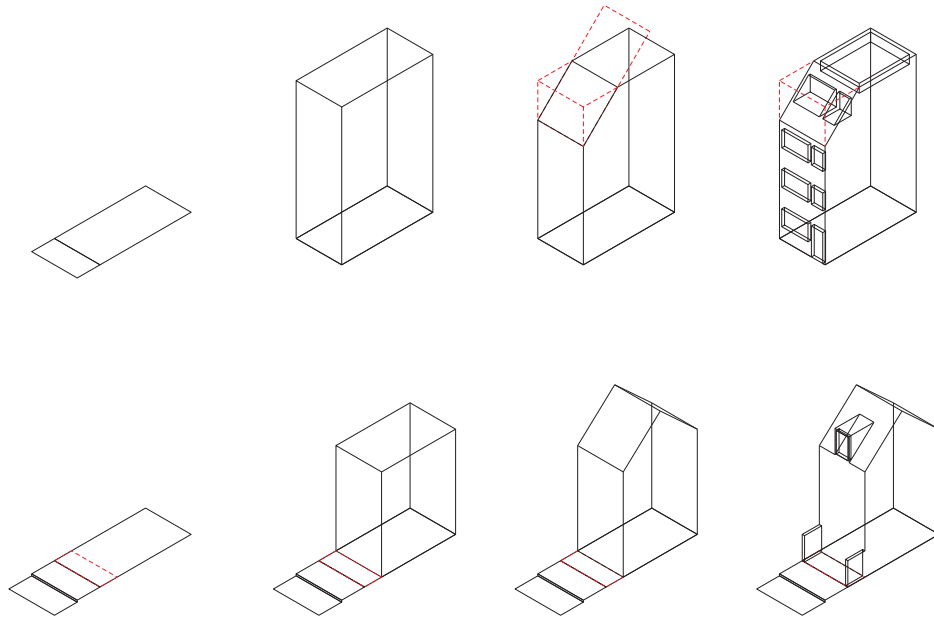




1 roads are subtracted from a potential solid mass - buildings are in fact a result of the processes of forming roads.



here the inverse is focused on - roads are accepted as articulated beginnings, with mass added - the roads here are the in-betweens.



2 buildings in tokyo and japan are a maximum possible envelope with slices lopping off corners for solar access - our process however is very different, with an existing typological solution employed rather than each unique site producing novel variations.

these simple diagrams look to briefly explore some of the different processes of formation we might witness japan and australia to undergo in the development of urban form and streets.

1. is the mass of tokyo, so solid and continuous, an excellent example of how figure-ground drawings are doubly-articulated? are the buildings the space between lanes, or are lanes the left-over spaces between buildings?

2. japanese built form in areas like harajuku, where the road is formed by the buildings themselves, is notably different than our densest suburbs, where still a notion of setbacks and predetermined typological solutions are preferred. japan's important pressures make it a breeding ground for novel typologies and topological solutions to problems of density and amenity.



趣味の切手
フジスタイン

麺類 丼物 相生餅
0371-6689

20
No parking

近代ガラス

a street in kyoyo



the more suburban streets of japan have, despite the obvious signs of density, a remarkably pleasant character, regardless of the absence of what we consider traditional amenity - trees, sidewalks and etc.

ら子焼

素人料理
京部・先斗町
かげ山
おこしやす

代取

いふしスワン
一養軒

一養軒

竹

山

真心
まごころ

スナック
つくしんぼ

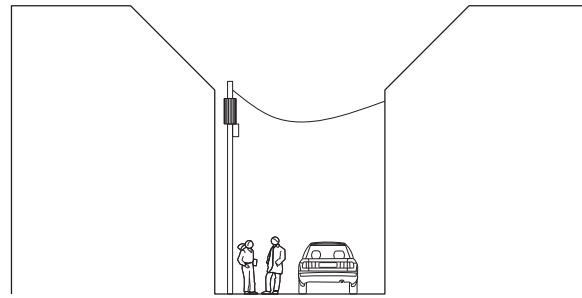
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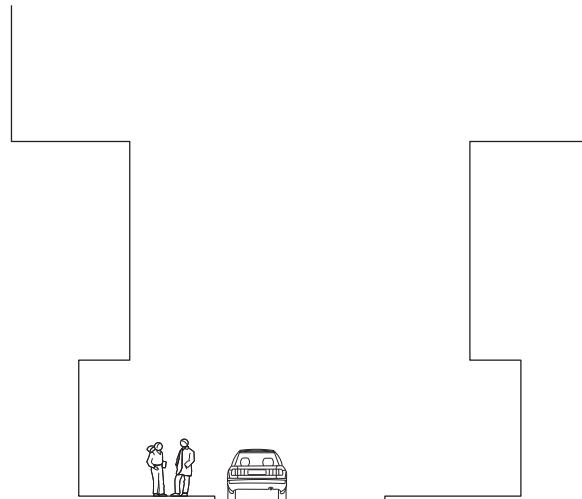
串エ門



a slim little street in kyoto is lined with restaurants. the scale and grain of buildings creates a pleasant but never over-bearing sense of enclosure, enlivened by lights and glimpses into the world behind the timber screens that line the street.



japanese street form
small scale units in large quantities

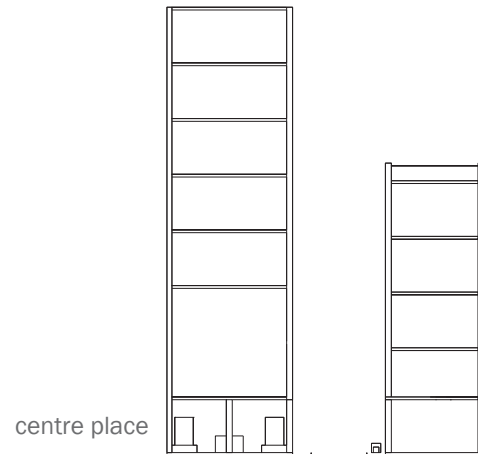
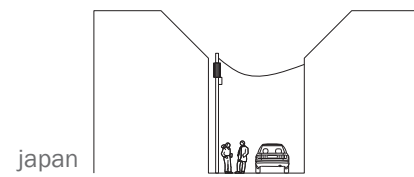


sydney modern street form
larger podium type developments in small quantities

h is street in kyoto, just off one of kyoto's main modern shopping boulevards and running parallel with the river, is a fantastic example of fine-grain urbanism at work. here the tiny buildings also conform to the general rules laid out above (no controlled setbacks etc, and utilizing a lot of signage to attract attention) to create a very tight, but beautifully and pleasantly scaled collection of restaurants. running for several hundred metres, it was never empty.



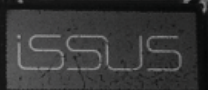
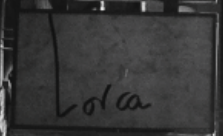
centre place's street form is more akin to that of the tight knit streets of tokyo than it is to that of modern development's podium types.



centre place is one of melbourne's identifiable streets, synonymous with the resurgence of a laneways and urban-focused culture in the city centre. it is an active thoroughfare as well as a fantastic street for eating, drinking and some small shopping.

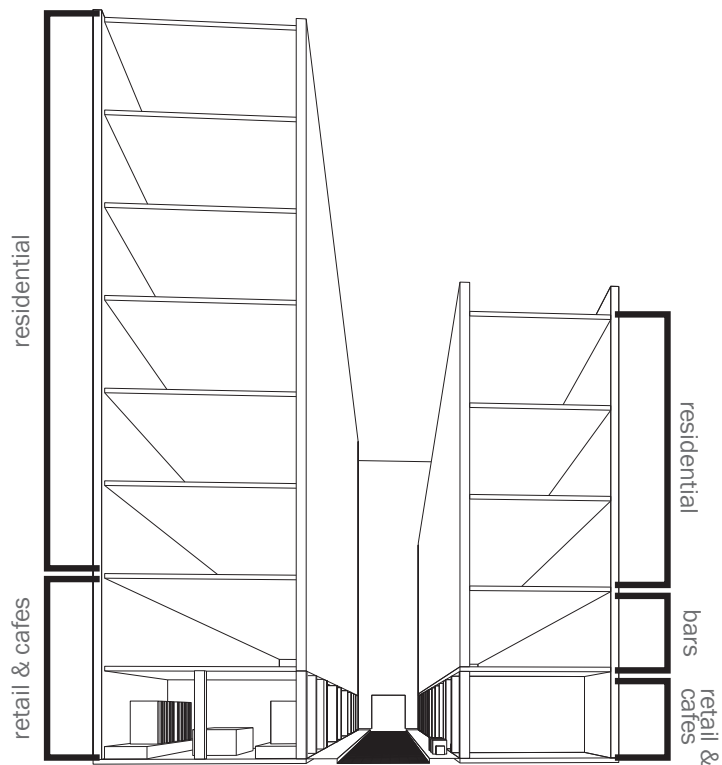
in its history, centre place has gone from a left-over space itself into one of the city's most vibrant and recognizable icons. it achieved such a revival precisely because of a clear, concerted effort on part of the developments either side of it to engage with it, and turn it into the fantastic street it is now.

most interestingly, perhaps, is that in cross-section it has more in common with even the modern packed back-streets of tokyo's harajuku than it does with modern podium-tower developments.





centre place closes late, but is also a common thoroughfare. with its art-nouveau styles street lighting, it is well surveilled and well lit.



centre place's constituting developments also take advantage of the particular scale of the street, with both the ground and 1st elevated floor displaying well used and profitable functions - the boutiques in the majorca building (on the left of the image) spread up two floors, while the second floor of centre place house (on the right) is occupied by bars accessed through stairs directly off the street.

it is a fantastic, novel variation on the typology and behaviour of inner-city infill developments and their relationship to the streets.



上野ビル
UESHIN A BLD.

大阪駅前
坂口

OGIN
LADIES C



y the maximum envelope they can, and are then sliced off at the corners based on setbacks from roads. this is aimed to maintain some amenity in terms of sunlight in the lower parts of streets. this process produces many interesting typological and topological results.

this method of forming buildings that we witness in japan, as opposed to the more typologically reliant approach in australian cities, results in some interesting and unusual building shapes. they are very much the result of a highly traceable, mechanical process of slicing off parts of a 'maximum' envelope.

the typology of japanese streets and the buildings that constitute them in this sense is very much determined by a series of very quantifiable and therefore analysable rules - setbacks are read directly into the built form rather than simply causing a shift or translocation of the footprint of an existing typology. the topological to typological relationship in japanese urban environments is in this sense more sculptural than our own, and more capable of producing variations to the existing typology.

there are certainly elements of this process in australian approaches to developing urban streets, however, with the tower-podium typology remaining the ubiquitous status quo for large developments, processes like these that produce interesting architectural volumes and are aimed towards a co-ordinated and idiosyncratic streetscape are voided in favour of an established and rarely challenged typological solution.





sydney's cahill expressway remains a wasted space - a poorly used thoroughfare that fails to contribute back o the city it is a part of. there is much to learn here from the japanese examples.

HARAJUKU, TOKYO / 100 ■

there is throughout some of the lower-height but still very dense neighbourhoods of tokyo, like here in omotesando/harajuku, evidence of a 'thickened' street approach to developing more sustainable, dense and valuable street-frontages for retail. here, using the natural slope of the landscape, the retail space is effectively doubled, with restaurants and a hair salon above, and retail shops below.

this approach significantly increases the potential financial output, maximizing or augmenting the potential direct surface contact with a potential consuming public.



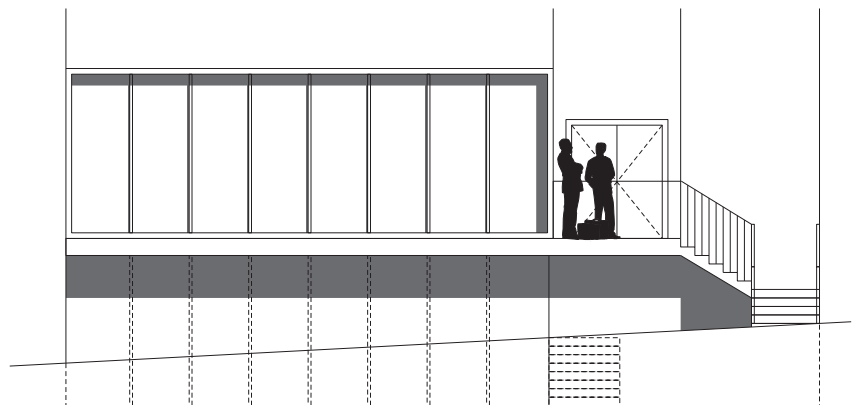
KSTAR

flower

Pris



a split level street frontage in harajuku. below is a clothing store, while above is a hair salon.



this split level approach effectively doubles the available retail area contact with street level, and also nullifies otherwise undesirable ground/first floor residential units. these units in australia are typically harder to sell because of their lack of views and proximity to noise - this approach turns this relationship into a more productive one.





on weekends, and particularly on sundays, the main street of tokyo's biggest and most famous shopping street in ginza is closed to traffic and pedestrianized.

it becomes a fantastic temporal use of this space, also engendering and interesting cultural trend on sunday afternoons - shopping and strolling down the street. tables and chairs are also placed in the street for informal meetings and relaxing. as one of the wider streets in the city, ginza is also the beneficiary of sunlight, making sunday afternoon sunning another cultural adaptation to the density of the back streets of tokyo.

land uses and economic pressures

the density of cities like tokyo is often hard to truly read at street level. despite the number of buildings covering the city landscape, one important factor of the success of japanese cities is the presence of overlapping figures - undergrounds, street level and overpasses that effectively increase the available space for people to move about. this spreading-out of the traffic effectively reduces the effects of density felt at the street level, with some of these upper or lower levels exhibiting direct connections into neighbouring buildings, to the point of even exerting typological influence on those buildings.





UMEDA HANKYU

時差信号

めいわく
駐車追放
大阪梅田駅周辺ライオンスクラブ
館根崎警察署





tokyo's shibuya is underpinned by a massive underground network of exits and malls connecting the streets into the transport infrastructure.

these secondary (under/over) figures effectively relieve much of the human traffic pressured placed on the street, belying the true density of tokyo.

building typology

responding to the particular pressures of japan's urban density, japan's cities have developed a tall, narrow building type that stacks programmes vertically, rather than the horizontal mentality we witness in western cities.

while we put significant pressure both financially and architecturally on horizontal street frontage areas, the land-use patterns and the economic situation of japan has engendered something different - a search for ways to make the upper storeys of these tall, narrow buildings economically viable. while stacking programmes vertically does achieve a density of function, thanks to a lack of direct visual and haptic it is more and more difficult to attract the necessary financial attention to these upper floors to support them.

this alone is a strong argument for the development of mixed use developments, but in a city like tokyo, where for the significant number of people the city supports the overall height of the buildings of the city is surprisingly low, often buildings have many of the same kind of function stacked above each other. in parts of shinjuku you can find multistorey buildings (6,7,8 floors even) of restaurants and bars stacked into a building only 5 metres wide.

japan's most prevalent compensating mechanism is the use of its available surface area for large graphic signage - signage designed to attract your attention and financial interest to the upper storeys of these tall narrow buildings. without this, without any way of drawing attention to their functions, likely the upper levels of these otherwise uniform buildings would have a harder time surviving without the benefit of the direct face to face contact of the ground floor.



廣瀨無線

HIROSE





signage is the first and foremost tool used in japan to attract attention to the functions of upper floors. in some cases, this signage-use of available surface area is more valuable to the financial success of the buildings than natural daylight is.

廣瀬 洋行 HOSOKAWA ROSE

map アミューズメント館
マップ アミューズメント館
あなたと楽しみたい
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海外向け電気製品

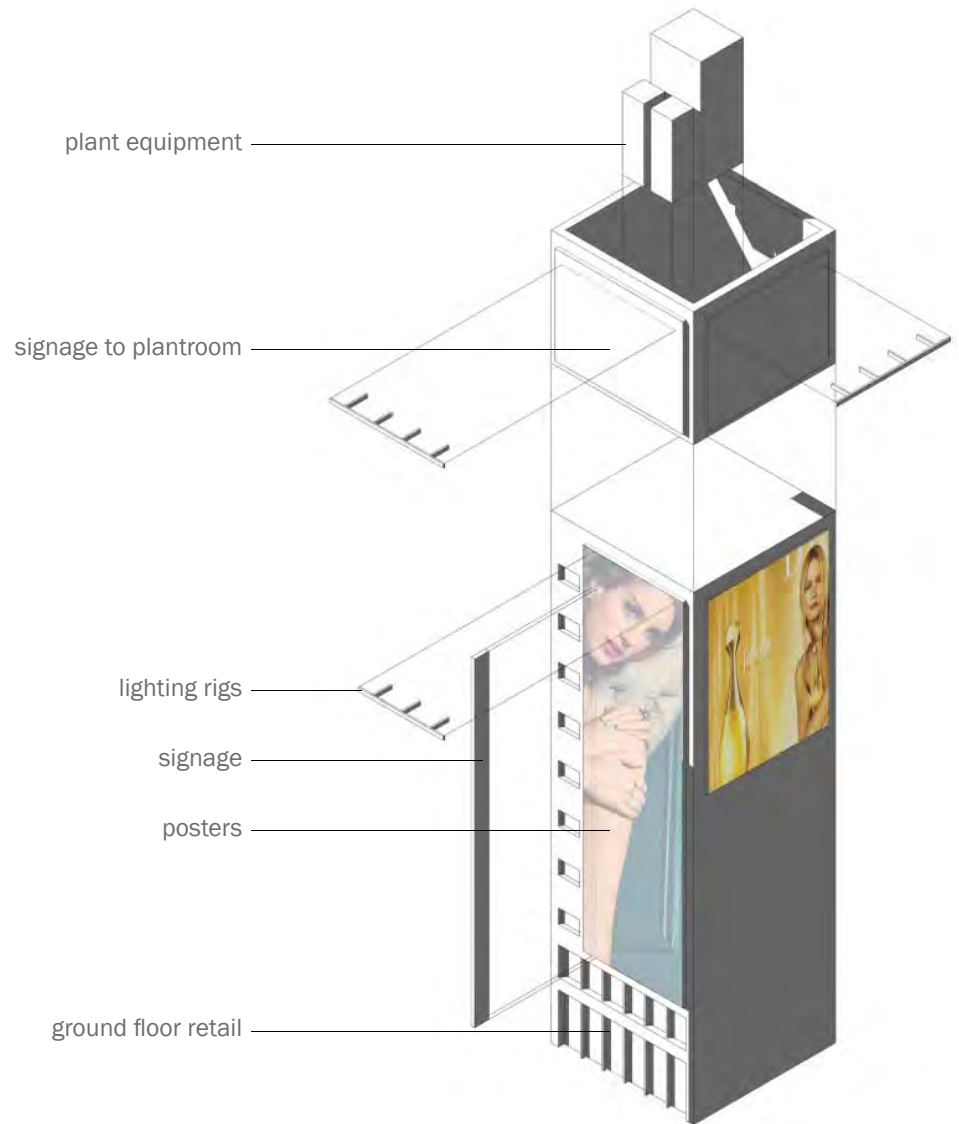
免税店

DUTY FREE SHOP

貸ホール



these buildings are fascinating examples of where the valuable of facade area has become more profitable as advertising than it has for daylight.



this type of development is an interesting contrast to that of our own cities. there is no real distinction between a podium and tower, with the focus being on occupying and using simple as much space, and as much surface area as is possible.

signage and lighting around plantrooms

surface area is more valuable for signage than windows

signage obscures windows behind
signage surface area more valuable - perhaps even the function
behind doesn't require natural daylight (gaming arcades)

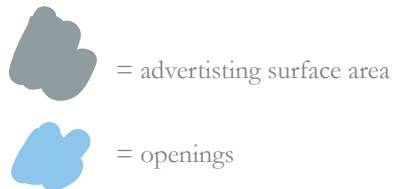
temporary awning (retractable)

valuable direct surface area contact for retail

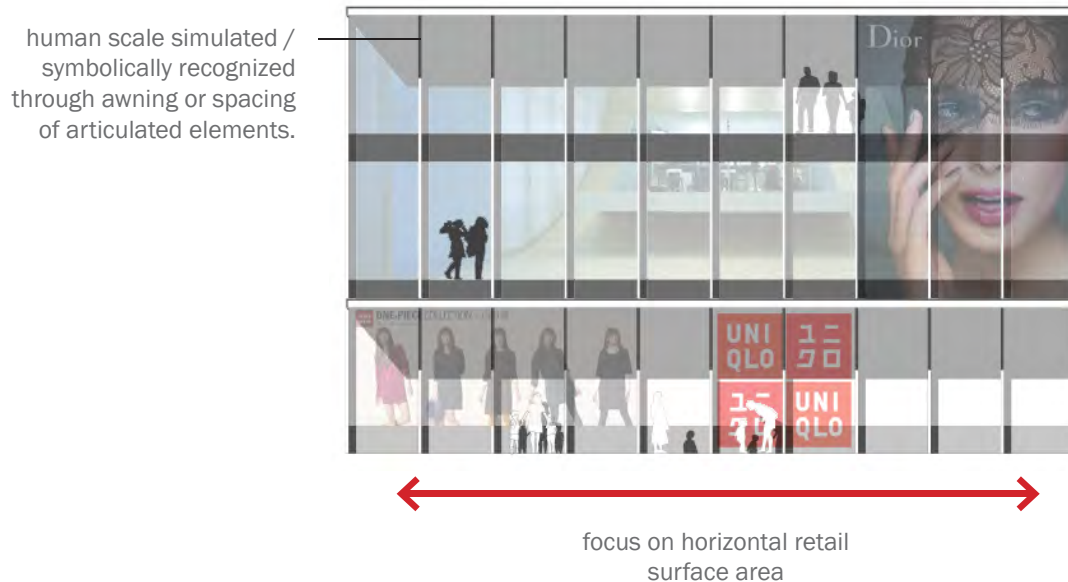
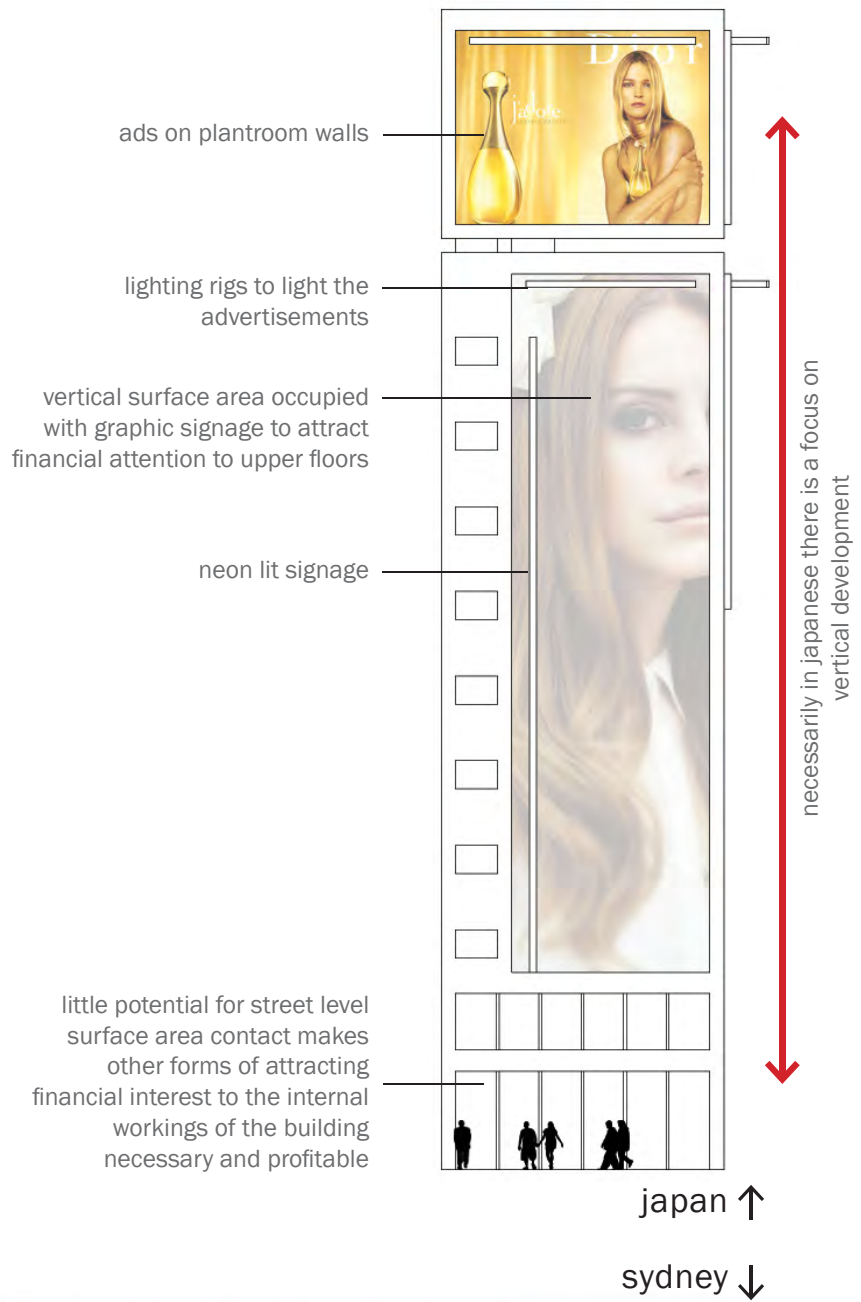


the small footprint, tall building demonstrates the importance of surface-to-people contact area in the streets of japan. here, the surface area of the facade is more valuable for signage to garner financial interest from passersby, than it is for the functions inside receiving natural daylight.





the composition of facades in akihabara and tokyo is telling of the financial pressures placed upon surface area in making the commercial functions of these buildings viable.



in sydney we focus development of street frontages through the podium type, and an emphasis on horizontal contact area between the public, the street, and retail areas.

in japan there is little or no potential for this horizontal surface area due to the small land plots and the generally prohibitive costs of acquiring and agglomerating enough adjacent plots - it makes this kind of development too expensive.

in the japanese form of development, with taller narrow types of buildings lining the streets and creating a legitimate sense of fine-grain scale urban environments, the buildings themselves take on the burden of using available facade surface area and signage to attract financial attention to compensate for this lack of direct contact at street level. however, this approach, with many smaller buildings as opposed to large podiums in sydney does produce a real rather than a symbolic connection to 'human scale'.

in the podium type of development that our more rationalized pattern of property ownership has engendered, connection to human scale tends to come through symbolic architectural gestures, like the spacing of mullions or an awning, but because of the nature of the large footprint, open plan, concrete framed spaces that result, it is questionable whether this building type can produce an amenable, pleasant kind of inner city density.

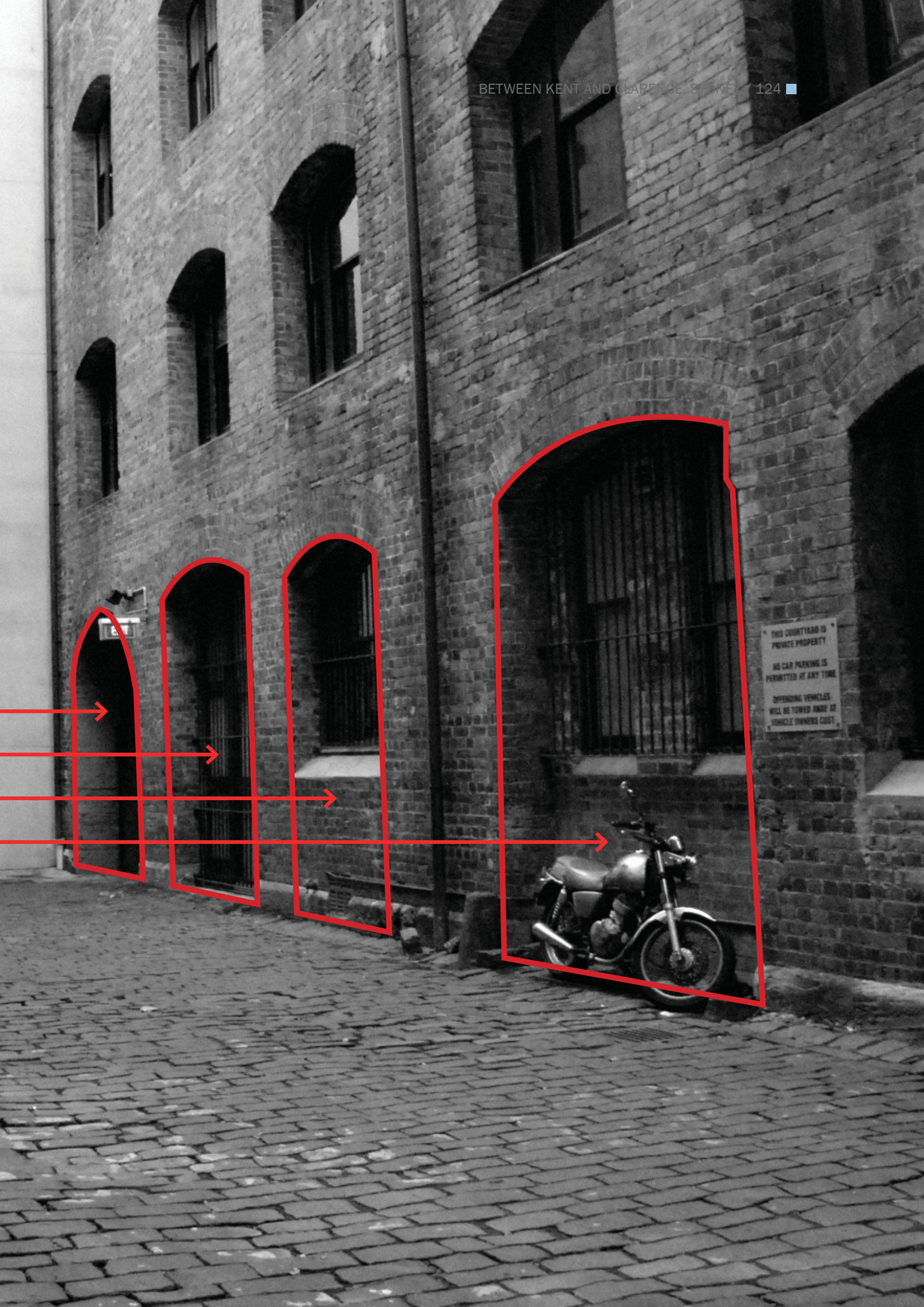


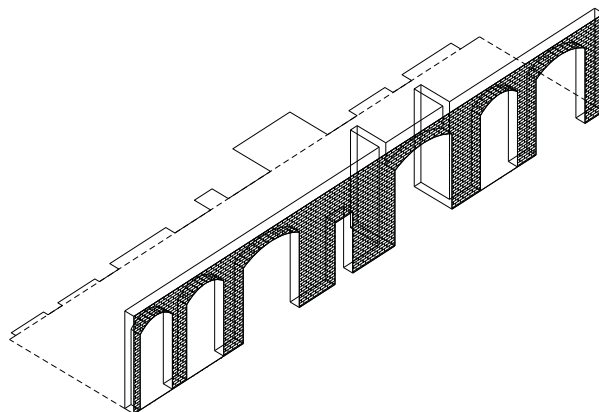
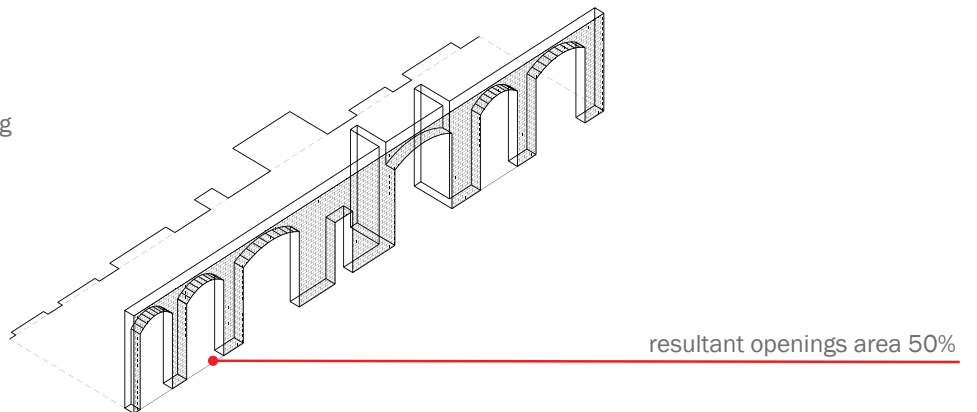
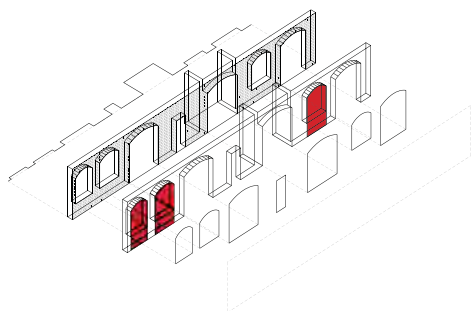
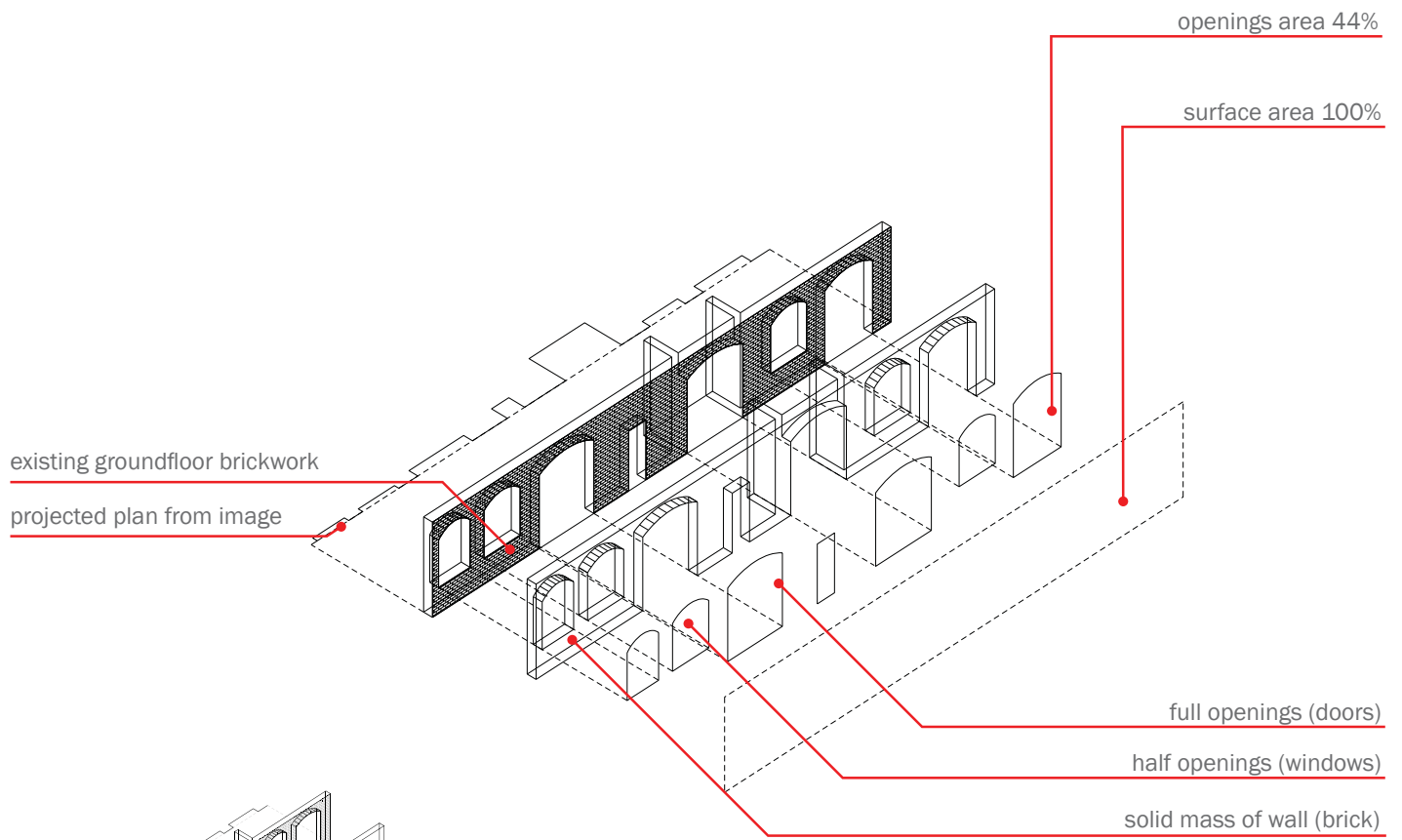
this courtyard is in sydney - an unused internal courtyard between two beautiful brick warehouses between kent and clarence streets in the cbd (one of our interesting typologies)

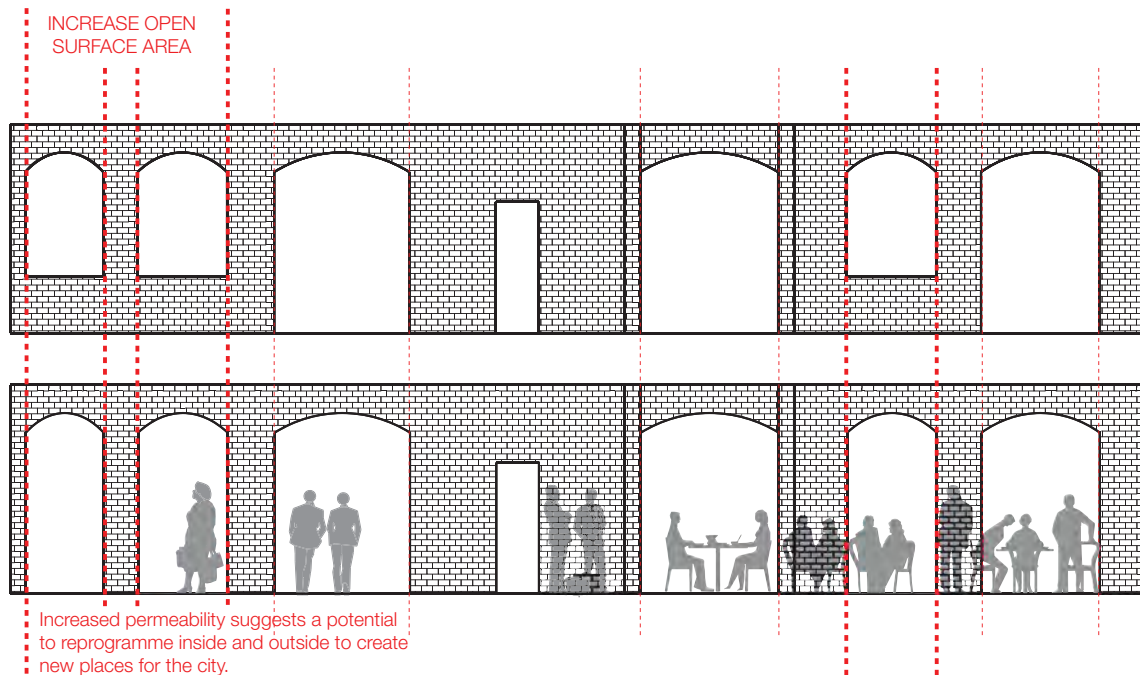
we can imagine the importance of surface area here in any future reuse of this space after seeing its key value in japan, but we can also see what importance there is in the material quality and the spatial quality of some of sydney's left over spaces.



potential for openings and
connection to the internal
programmes





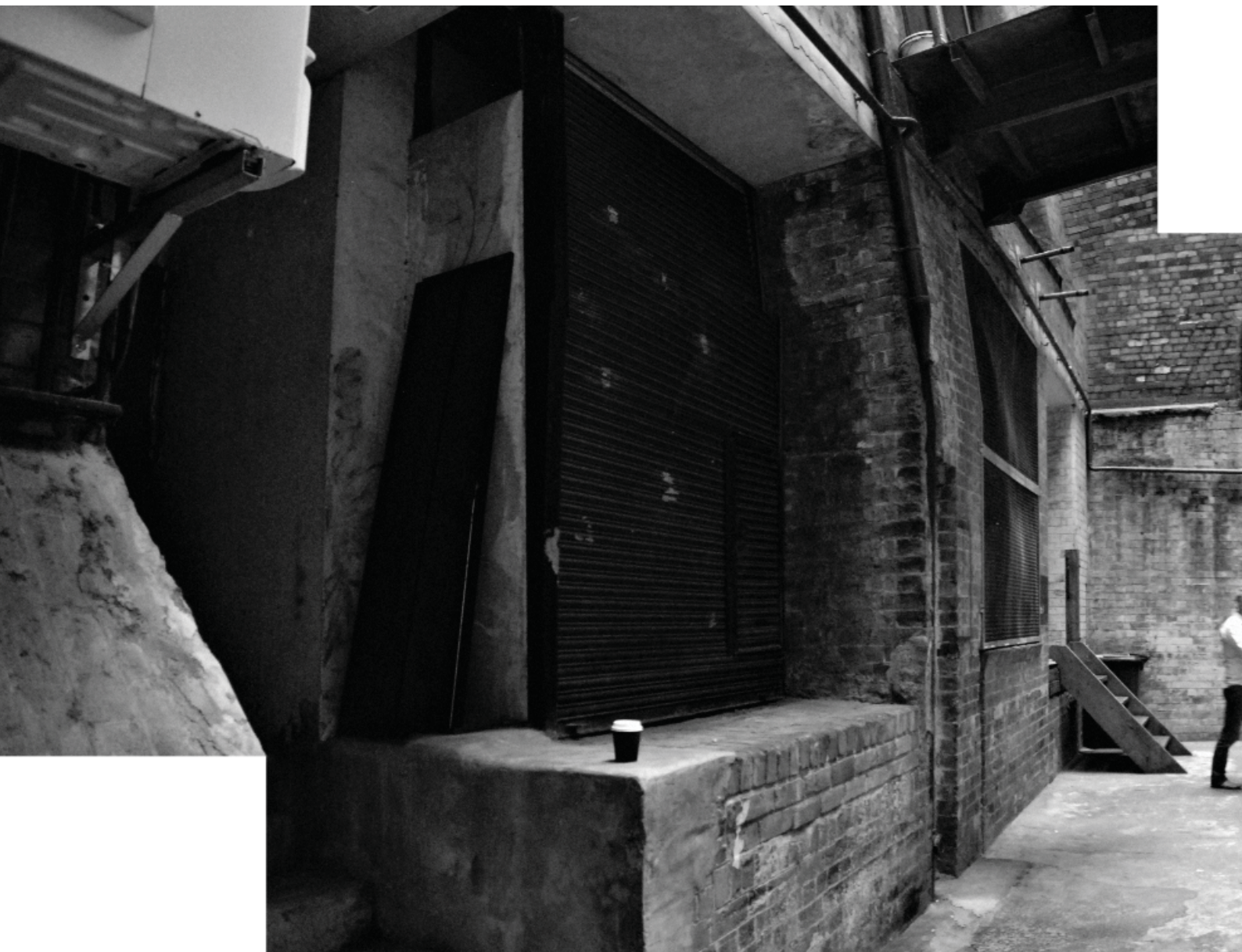


from the japanese, we can learn the importance of direct surface area contact between people outside and the inside workings of a building - the more contact there is, the more successful these functions can be. in japan, the use of signage compensates for this lack of horizontal surface area contact between programme and people.



a shared courtyard garden - a public/private amenity for everyday use in the heart of the cbd,

this space is completely unused - what about a garden? a moment of calm tucked away in one of sydney's old warehouse courtyards - a very modern use of a piece of our heritage and one of our oldest building typologies?



connection through to brick courtyard as shown above



this space borders onto the brick courtyard above. if the two of them were combined, we could create a interesting, beautiful public courtyard tucked away in historical sydney.

traditional and modern

is there a traceable relationship between traditional japanese concepts of the street, the architecture and the culture that engaged with them, and the modern culture of big-city japan?

and if there is, can we find there a valuable sensibility that might assist in us revaluing our own traditional understandings of the street and how we maintain a social, cultural and historical continuity in our own future development?

the traditional streets of cities like kanazawa and tokyo display interesting treatments to the street - but also the relationship with the street directly impacts on the planning of the *machiya* or townhouses of traditional japanese architecture. here, with their partially transparent timber batten facades, the *machiya* type recognizes the importance of the street in the everyday rituals of the city. the front room of these houses becomes the most public of the house - greeting rooms or shops - with the private functions moved away from the street or onto upper floors.

further, as a link to tradition still found commonly throughout kyoto and kanazawa are shrines dotting the streets, occupying left-overs themselves, and sometimes even integrated into new architectures, giving traditional a strong role in the ongoing life of japanese cities. in our increasingly secular but more importantly a-traditional developing world, where new development is rapidly eliminating our own potentials to retain strong connections to our history and its particular successes and qualities, in australia we have no real equivalent.

nonetheless, it is an interesting and valuable use of left-over space in these cities, reminding japanese of a long cultural tradition and heritage, and providing yet another form of public/private public amenity in the city.








the front facades of kanazawa's *higashi* district are a screen of fine timber battens, creating an interesting approach to surveillance of the street, and also producing a change in the housing type, with front rooms the most public and the back most private.

the traditional streets of kanazawa's *higashi* tea district offer a historical link to the streets of modern japan.

is there something to be learnt from these traditional japanese *machiya*-townhouses; their relationships with the street, the material warmth of the timber, or the human scale of these streets?





the traditional streets of kanazawa's historical *higashi* district are beautifully scaled, and use timber battened facades that 'borrow' the street as a virtual room through glimpses between these battens.

the result is a street that is at once public and private, at once busy, but well surveilled and a part of the life of the buildings that line them.

a public room borrows the street view by utilizing
glances through the battened facade

entrance lobby (genkan)

timber batten/slat facade

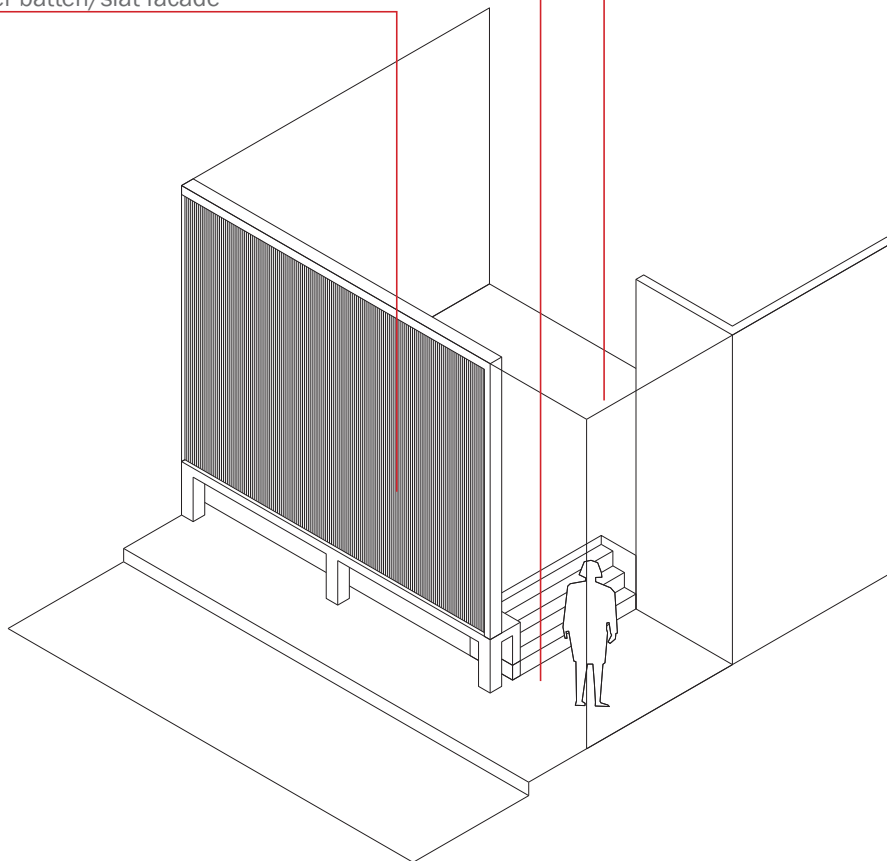
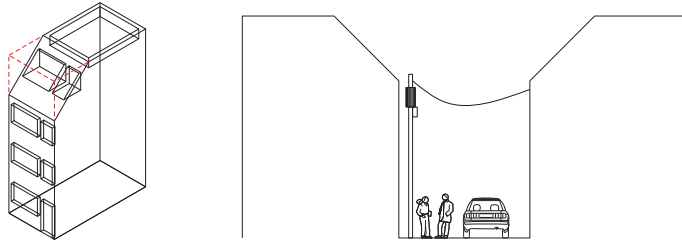


diagram of a simple machiya entryway

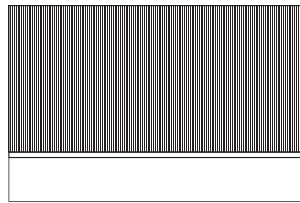


traditional japanese streets offer some precursors to the form of its modern streets, also exhibiting some of the topological relationships.

the ‘machiya’ type is a japanese traditional townhouse, in some ways an equivalent to our own terrace type in australian cities.

however, it exhibits some key differences - no setbacks, its materiality and its relationship to the street set it apart from our own typologies - where, generally, privacy is created by retreating from the street, and closing in more of the available facade area to preserve the privacy of those rooms on the street side.

the lack of setbacks in traditional japanese streets and machiya types produces a very different result, whereby the narrow streets are essentially ‘borrowed’ by the front rooms of the buildings that line them, with the street becoming a virtual room of the houses through the glimpses captured through the timber batten screens.



base condition (solid)

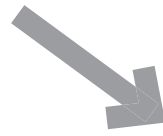
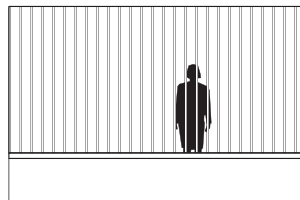
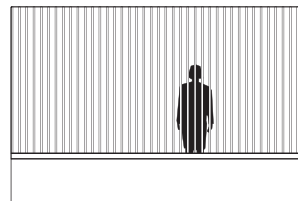
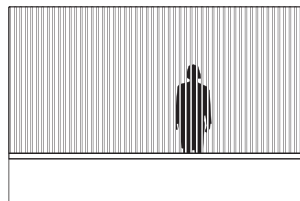
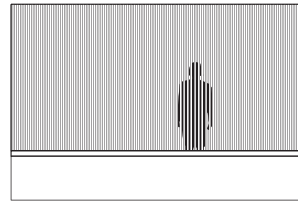
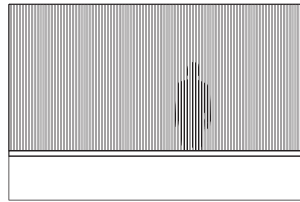
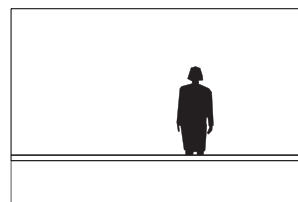


diagram becomes more transparent



variations on japanese facade batten spacing produce a possible insight into understanding the successes of these facades in turning the street into a public/private shared room, at once part of the public realm as well as 'borrowed' by the front room of the traditional machiya types.



base condition (transparent)



different facade batten spacings found in kanazawa and kyoto produce an intriguing relationship of privacy with the spaces behind them. they give the street a perception of spatial depth.

the composition and spacing of the facades onto these traditional streets create an interesting effect - the street is effectively privatized as part of the workings of the front room of these houses, with the glimpses into these spaces from outside developing a fascinating character. at once active and private, the character of these old streets is one of continued interest and glimpses into the world behind.

the street here is like a 'room' itself of the houses, as are the front rooms of the private realm almost little extensions of the street.

there is an important visual depth to these facades, a visual depth that extends to create perceptions of space and of activity. our modern developments, relying on sheets of glass pushed right up to the sidewalk to maximize available area produce no such effects of depth nor perceptions of warmth.









the shrines in the streets of kanazawa and kyoto are often fantastically crafted, well kept, and an important part of a link to tradition maintained by the Japanese.

the streets of kanazawa and kyoto are littered with tiny shrines in all the little spaces left between buildings. they are another form of public-private amenity, a link to a long-lived traditional way of life in the urbanity of daily life. They were inevitably beautifully made, considered and maintained.

in our increasingly secular world, regardless of any religious association, these little breaks in monotony offer moments of calm, peace, reflection - a pause in the busy urban life. in this way, they are another form of 'micro-amenity', providing little bits of amenity that collectively combine to make these streets idiosyncratically japanese - and pleasant.



曉町々内会

日本地産



勤王ノ子
中井正五郎殉難ノ
地











河原
昌和
興明

島本
慶和
和泉

上田
莉奈
央奈

上田
郷群

蔵尊

松山
荒木

和道
敬

和道
敬

松山
荒木

安産御腹帯
授典

安産御

a tucked away shrine in kyoto, behind a shopping mall and ringed by tall buildings.



one of japan's most important cultural identifications is with their exquisite temple gardens. typically these spaces are found on the outer-edges of towns where the pressures of density are lower.

however, in this space in kyoto, tucked away behind a shopping mall and ringed by tall buildings, this shine and tiny garden offer an intriguing vision of how tiny otherwise left-over urban spaces could be used to produce links to cultural history, and become supportive of tradition's role in new cultural production.



ringed by tall buildings



the entrance from the mall



the entrance from the street, through
an icecream store.

page opposite: the shrine and garden
is surrounded by building

the shrine is in fact so much of a left-over spaces
that it is accessed only through a tiny gateway
off a shopping mall, and through a purposefully
left opening in a newer construction.

opportunistic urbanisms

japan's hyper urban density has also spawned a micro-consumerism occupying every available space in the city. This is, despite any associations with a crass hyper-consumerist culture, a productive, opportunistic, but somehow amenity-focused capitalism - and one that has come to be synonymous with japanese cultures (particularly tokyo). where an opportunity arises for the production of consumption (which in itself feeds back into the production of the city) in japan it is taken with relish.

the primary mechanism is vending machines. they dot (sometimes line) the streets like buildings themselves, in a way they are micro-architectures often with concrete and steel footings, and some built into new buildings at some considerable expense. while to foreigners it seems a 'tacky', 'crass' and 'consumerist' approach to making the city, to the japanese these devices provide incidental amenity through their ubiquity, affordability and instantaneity. they take up less space than a convenience store and, in some circumstances when clustered together as often is the case, can provide a similar level of amenity to a convenience store in a fraction of the space of a formalized store.

in a way, these opportunistic urbanisms are also a coping mechanism, and take full advantage of left-over spaces or caught-in betweens that in our cities would simply sit idle.





稼働して
点灯中



盗難防止ブザー付

注意



Handwritten graffiti on the left side of the machine, including 'Fuck Life..', a stylized signature, and 'STM'.

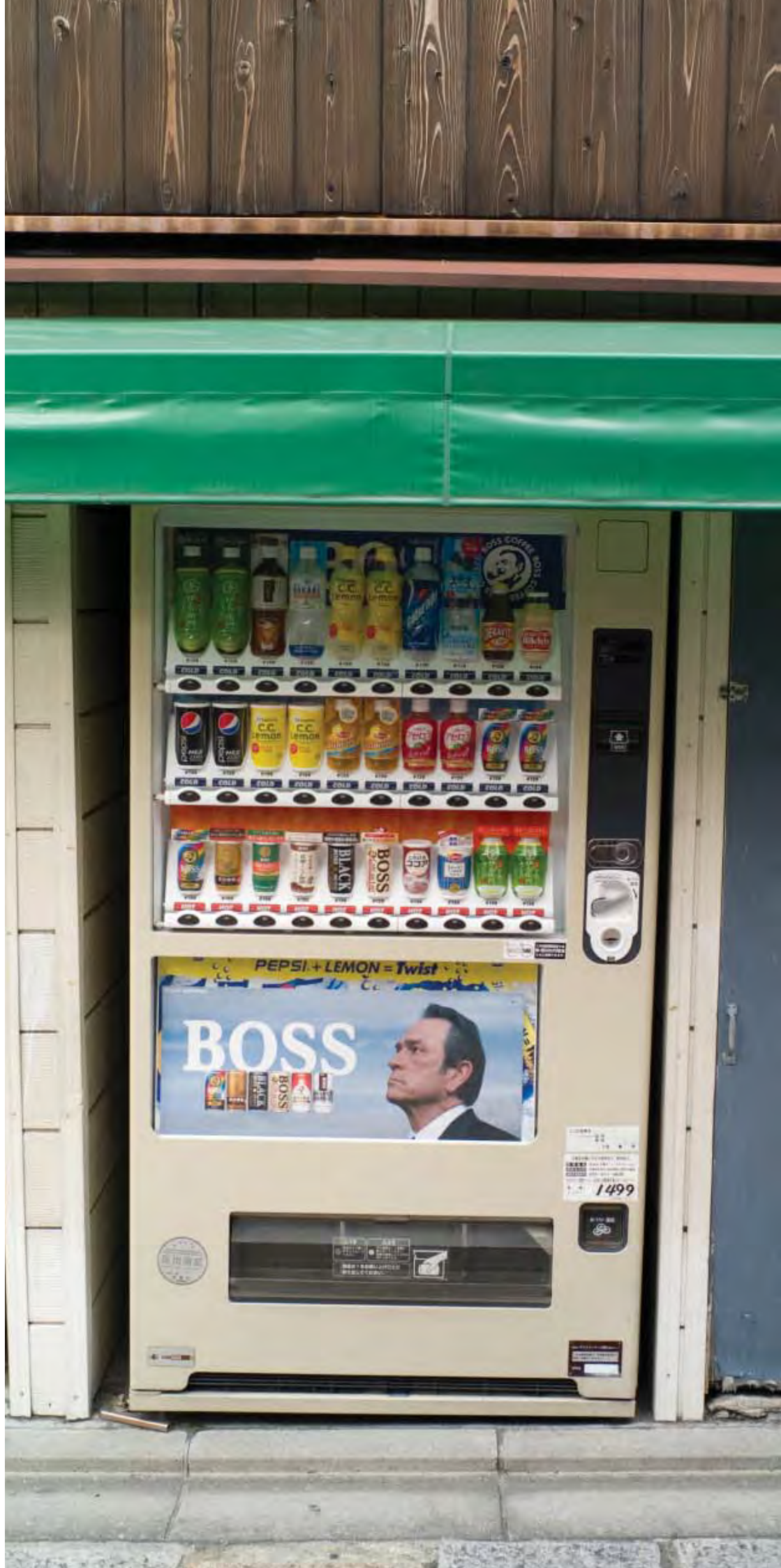


sydney's cahill expressway remains a wasted space - a poorly used thoroughfare that fails to contribute back o the city it is a part of. there is much to learn here from the japanese examples.

vending machines occupy every left-over space they can - under air-conditioning fans, in every nook and cranny that can be found.











ジョージア特注品
20万人に当たる!
ジョージア特注品!






sometimes there's even architecture to protect the vending machines - sometimes they're built into buildings at significant expense.

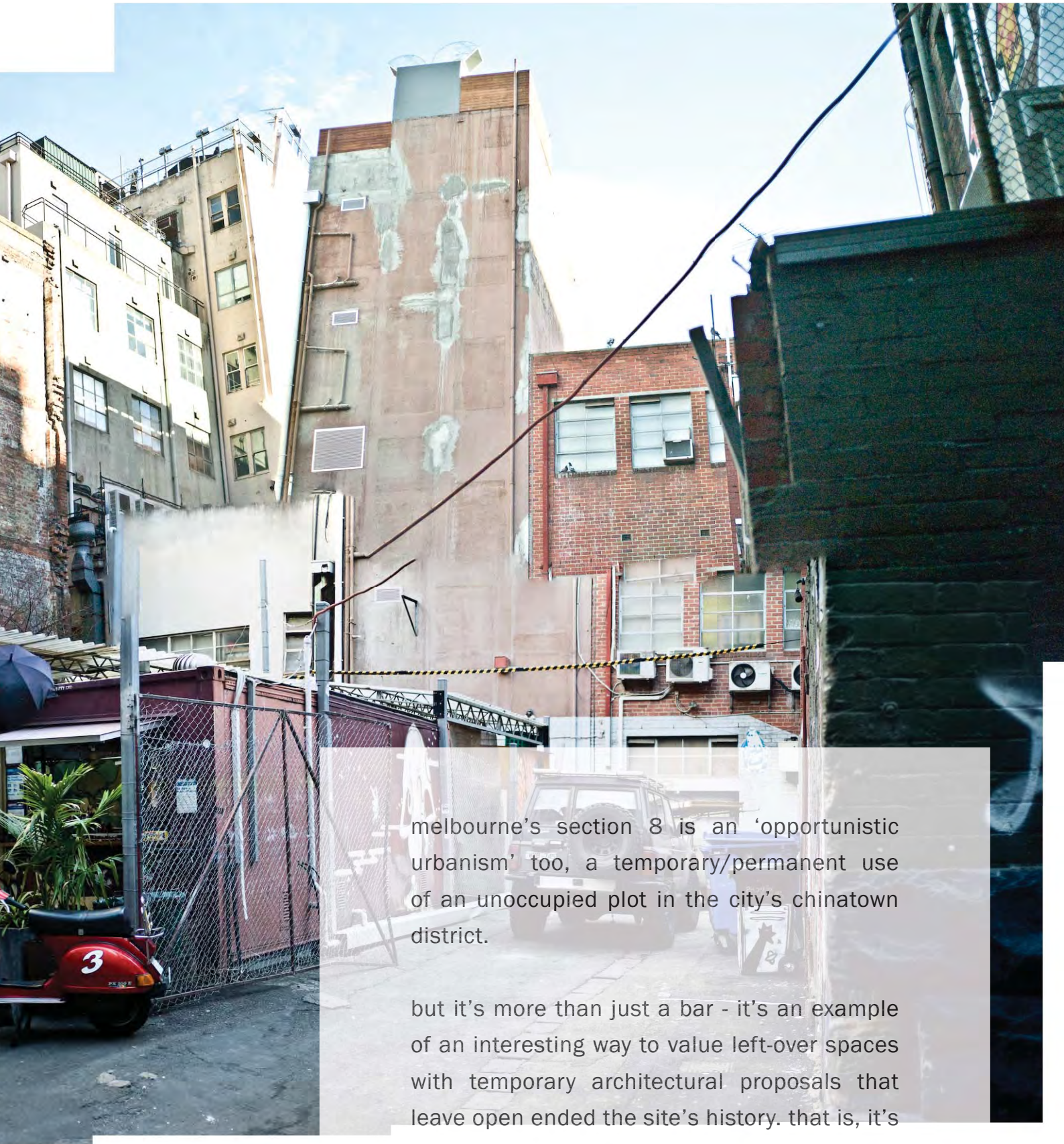
although risking the label of crass consumerism, vending machines in japan offer up the value of left-over spaces are more potential surface area for producing some small form of capital. they are a form also of micro-amenity, providing instantaneous satiation of desires in a landscape where every space is valuable.





a garden in a vacant lot (the imprint of the now demolished building remains) - an opportunistic urbanism, the result of japan's "de-densification", reusing left-over spaces for amenity. japan's population is rapidly decreasing, and an ageing population combined with high cost of living is set to radically alter the socioeconomic landscape of urbanism.





melbourne's section 8 is an 'opportunistic urbanism' too, a temporary/permanent use of an unoccupied plot in the city's chinatown district.

but it's more than just a bar - it's an example of an interesting way to value left-over spaces with temporary architectural proposals that leave open ended the site's history. that is, it's not built in.

trees allowed to grow through the canopy



corrugated polycarbonate roofing



prefabricated trusses

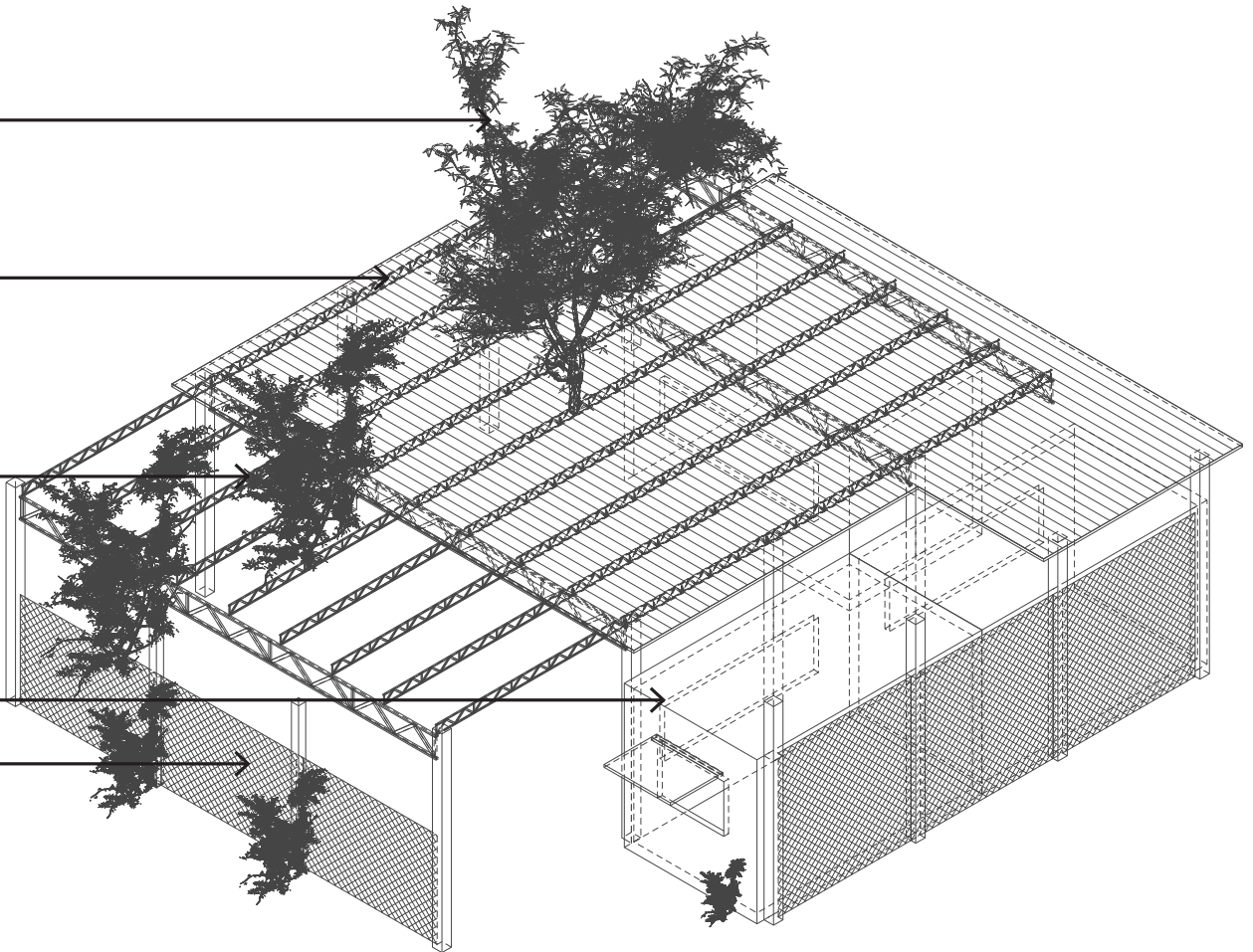


shipping containers as bar and bathrooms



chain fencing





the architecture of section8 sits somewhere between infill and a coffee cart. made of prefabricated elements, shipping containers and crates, it is a place that feels temporary, open ended and part of an approach to left-over urbanism which is not purely infill.

coping mechanisms and microamenity

supplementing what could be considered as the lack of private amenity in these hyper dense urban environments of japan are a number of small-scale, shared urbanisms; public/private gestures that provide locals with a shared economy of pleasantries that cannot be afforded to individuals because of that density.

these 'micro-amenities' are a fascinating element of the urban sensibilities of cities like tokyo, and they give the city a strange uniqueness borne directly from its density. what cannot be provided singularly is provided spontaneously - the desire for something remains, and so a way is found to express it from within the latency of the system. the result is a network of little interventions - of pot plants on doorsteps and in gutters, of tiny gardens in little left-over spaces, of temple gardens caught in between rampant development that provides the people of these dense cities with amenity on an extremely fine-grained scale.



this tiny garden in tokyo's harajuku is tended by a local resident, but it produces a kind of fantastic little shared amenity to green an otherwise concrete landscape.





some of these potted plant gardens on doorsteps were quite elaborate and established, splashes of colour and greenery in otherwise often overwhelming constructed environments.

a pot plant urbanism - a landscape of potted plants - decorates the city streets, compensating (a 'coping' mechanism') for the lack of back or front yards in the hyperdensity.

it's also a shared public/private amenity. although owned and maintained privately, by necessarily being on the street side, these tiny gardens become shared little reliefs from the possibility of succumbing to the overbearing carpet of buildings and concrete in tokyo and japan.

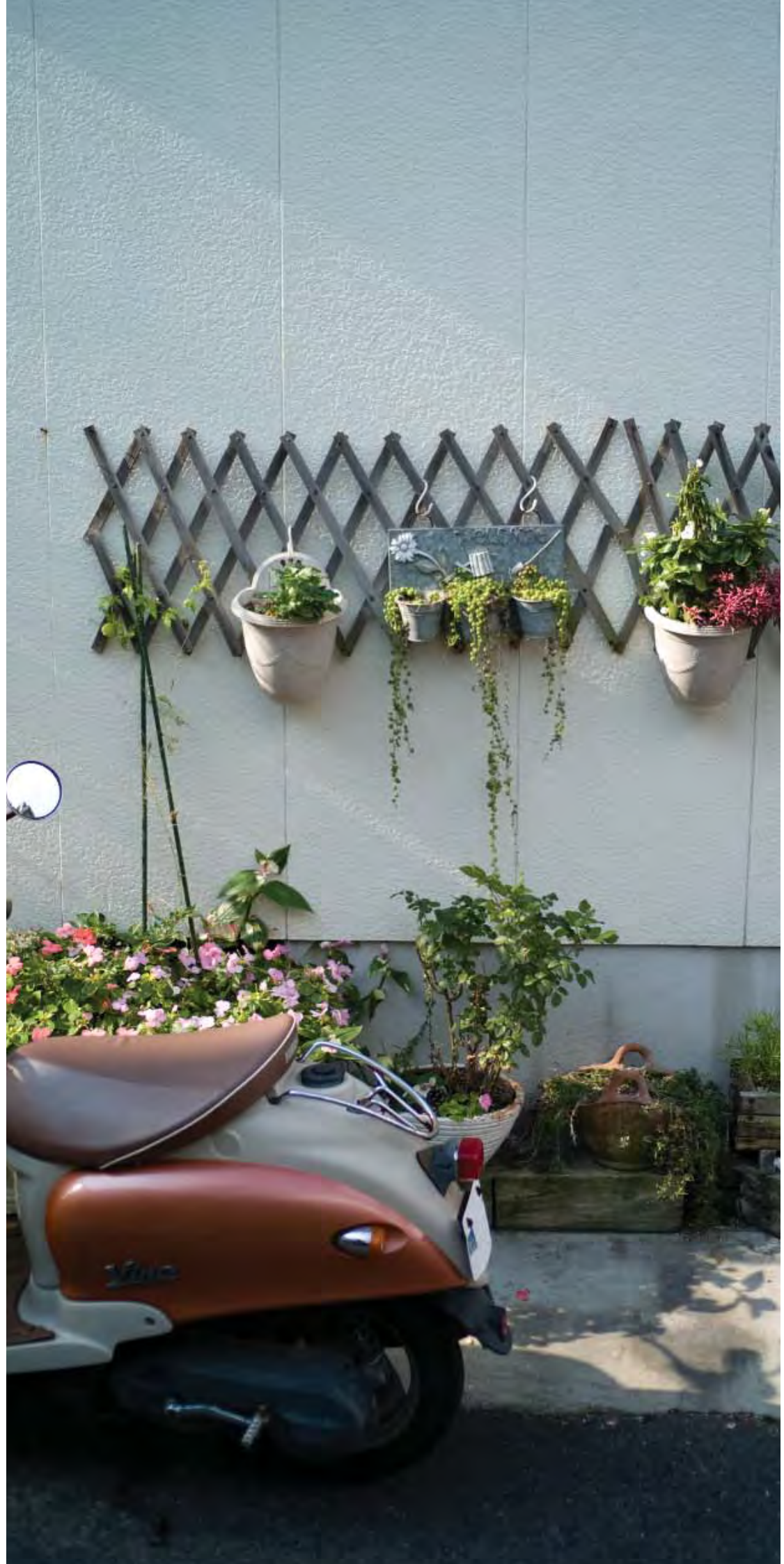
some of these gardens were well kept, others not, some small, some large and overgrown, but they marked an interesting and pleasurable sensibility with which the japanese inner city fringe suburbs were made amenable by the residents themselves. in a way, it is this sensibility (that a million tiny movements in the same direction can affect change on a broader scale) that this study aims to suggest for our own urban development.



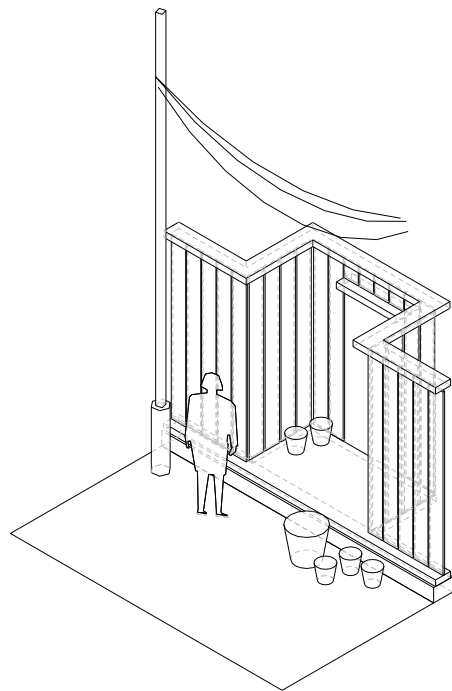
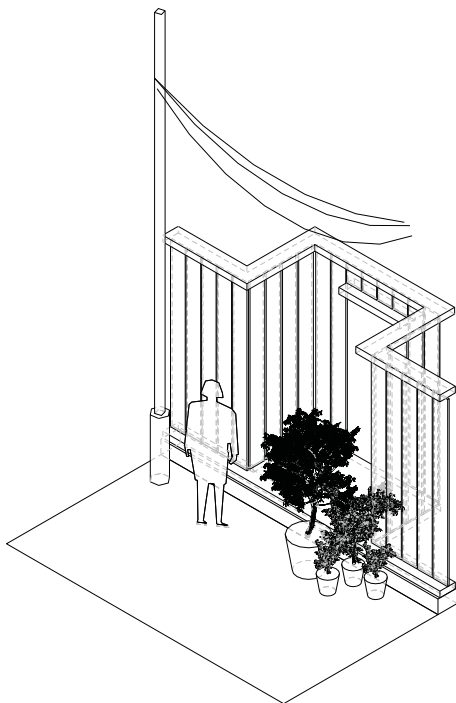
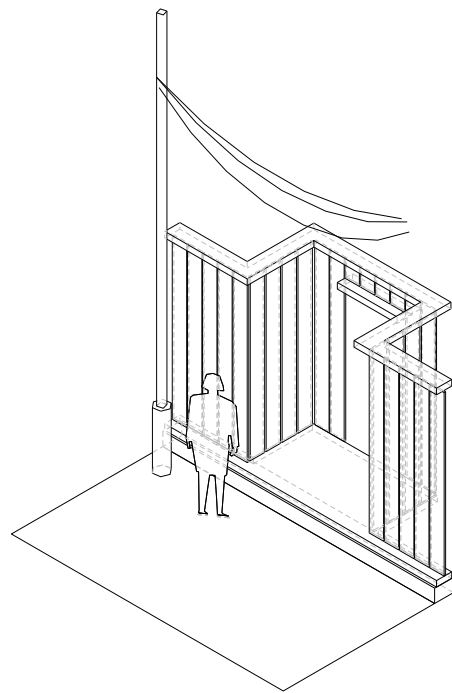
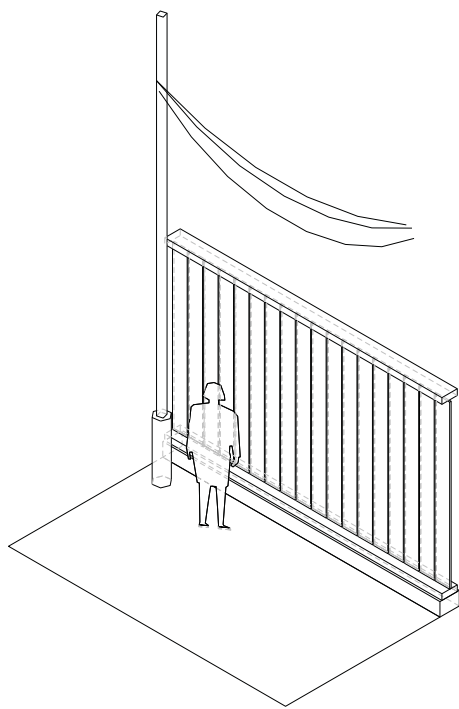












1.



four steps to your own japanese front garden:

- a) find a blank wall and gutter - preferably under an power pole
- b) make this fence an entrance to your new home (optional)
- c) plant some small pots (well-draining pots, good rich soil)
- d) water. wait. watch.





some of these pot planted landscapes could be used as tiny food supplies, growing herbs or simple vegetables for the city.

there is a latent potential economy here - it's a public-private amenity, but perhaps it could even go further and become a productive economy: could they be little herb gardens, supplying the restaurants of the city?



the cahill expressway is one of sydney's most disliked pieces of infrastructure, carving up, dividing, bounding and limiting the relationship between the CBD and the foreshore.

with an important train station integrated into it, the structure is unlikely to move anytime soon.

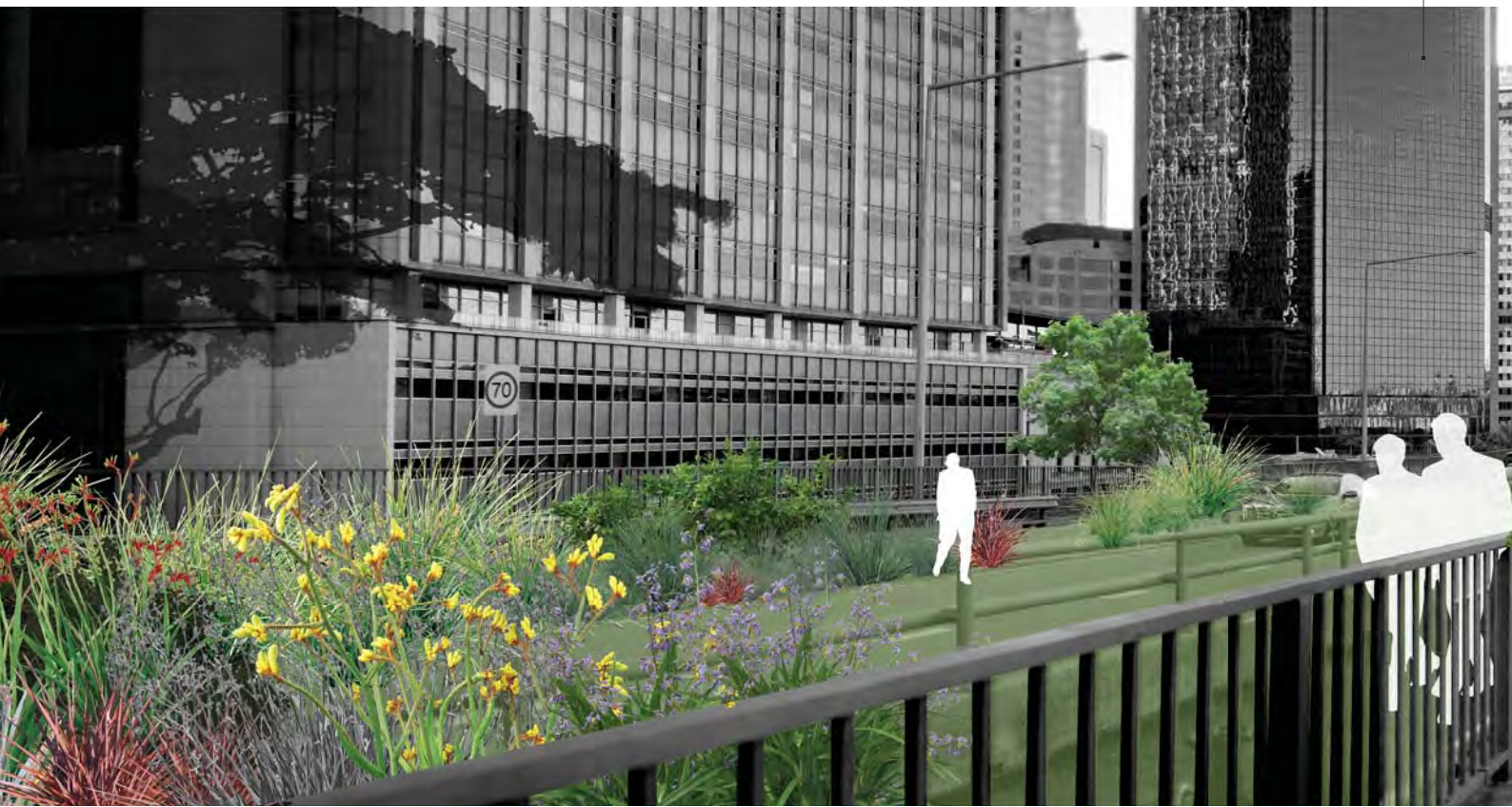
important potential connections to existing greenspaces



but it's definitely one of the cities most important 'left-overs' (in the sense that its hard to see it as contributing to the production of a lively, unique inner city culture)



it's rich with potential - its location, its size - and we can see instantly how japan's and even new york's highline could provide interesting precedents for its refolding into a productive urban culture. it's a fantastic opportunity for sydney to refocus and re-energize its most important cultural and historical foreshore.





sydney's central business district

circular quay train station

circular quay ferry terminals

a cultural centre - museum of contemporary art



a highline-styled public park, connecting observatory hill with the botanical gardens, the domain and through to hyde park above small shops and uses under the bridge itself.





this space here is also a potentially fantastic space that could be integrated into a broader revitalization of this piece of infrastructure.

temporal occupations

in many cases, and in most examples we've seen in australia, the foremost approach to urban left-over spaces so far limited to 'laneways' has been art festivals. these festivals are successful on one hand, drawing attention and traffic to these forgotten parts of city anatomy. in many cases, these festivals have left-behind them a more determined attitude to the use and development of these parts of the city, with bars and restaurants feeding off this renewed interest and starting a culture of small restaurants and bars in the inner city urban areas.

the opportunity for left-over city spaces to be reinvigorated through these temporal occupations, that is non- or semi-permanent interventions that leave little or no direct physical impact on the space, is one that acts as a potential bridging apparatus between 'left-over' and future permanent productive uses while having immediate value in themselves, both financially and culturally.

melbourne in particular, as an australian example, has had significant success in development a series of co-ordinated temporal uses that engage with these spaces and has supported the development of an inner-city urban sensibility that other australian cities now envy. just as successful as the particular art programmes and coordinated sanctioning of graffiti in certain areas has attracted attention to these areas, so have these areas been revitalized through bars and restaurants taking advantage of these new flows of interested visitors to otherwise forgotten alleys. sydney now emulates melbourne's success with its own series of art festivals, and is seeing a similar revitalization of fine-grain city structures (those that remain post the podium-tower development) temporal occupations are an important kick-starter for developing a mindset that sees value in left-over spaces.



RASK

BICOZ

KPHH

TEKNE

WE VIF

CHAZIT SHO



SIVE

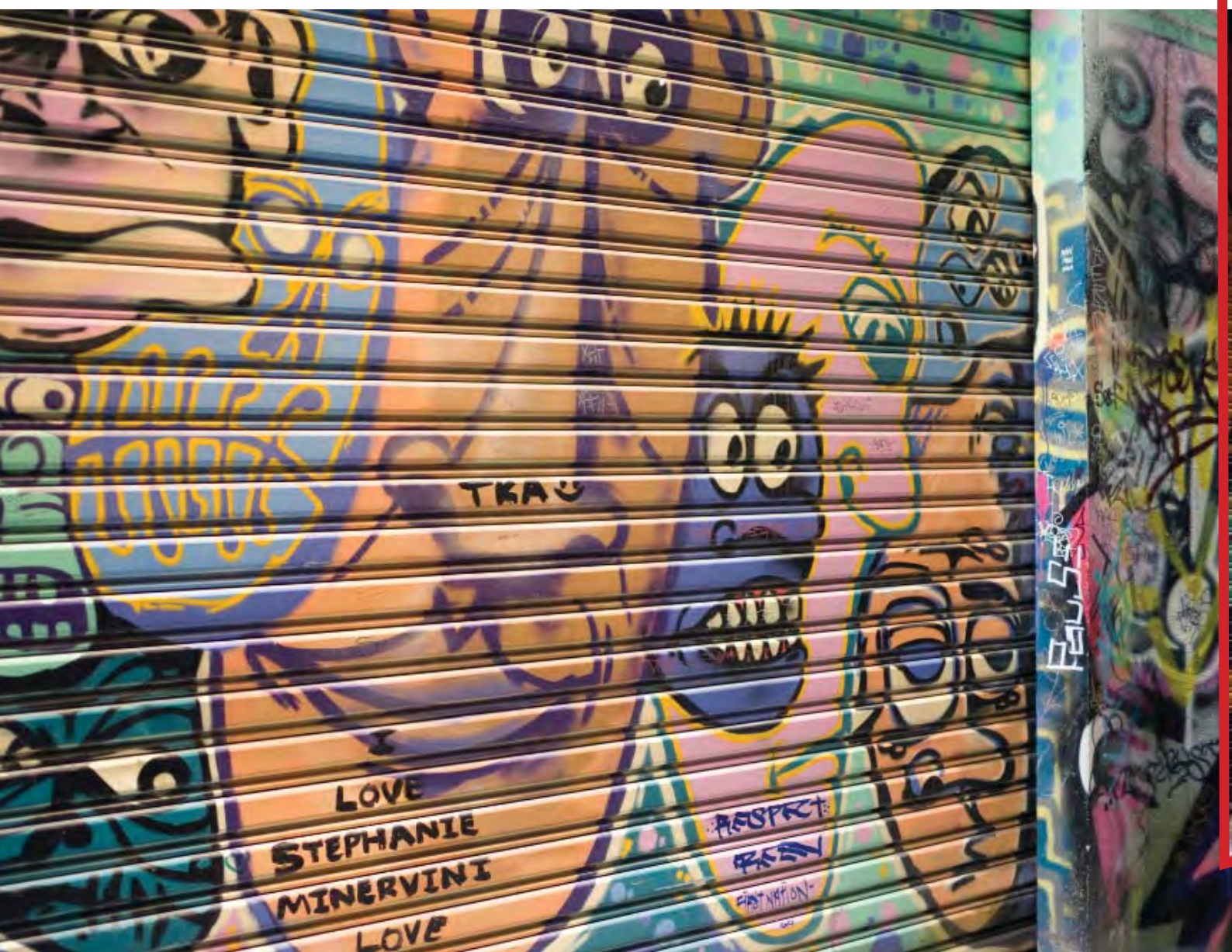
UNTIL NEVER
GALLERY OPEN
12-6PM
WED-SAT
9663 0442



hosier lane is part of melbourne's broader approach to sanitizing their laneway districts. this is at once a successful and flawed approach - while it folds these spaces back into a socially acceptable, mainstream approach to the inner city, through these controlled programmes of graffiti much of what makes these art forms valuable (in that they function outside the norm and outside of accepted social norms) becomes nullified.



melbourne's hosier lane is a prime example of how a city-sanctioned acceptance of graffiti art (while sanitizing it and arguably institutionalizing its initially anarchical intent) has consciously enforced an urban culture that uses all these otherwise empty, abandoned, garbage-dump like laneways and left-over spaces.





union lane, also in melbourne, is another example of this sanitizing of graffiti art, and turning it into part of an approach to city left-overs that harnesses the potential of this counter-culture to produce interest and later redevelopment of these sites.

there is also more potential here to use the existing typology of the buildings that line the lane to create more spaces for culture to be produced - for example here the possibility of reopening existing penetrations in the built fabric in the spirit of other melbourne success stories like centre place.



in harajuku this unusual sliver of land is used as a restaurant, a hot-dog van permanently parked here.



HARAJUKU, TOKYO







this coffee van in omotesando uses a garage during the day, is packed up and drives away during the night, activating an otherwise dead street frontage for the pleasure of passersby or locals of harajuku.

Any Closing Notes? Conclusions? Questions?

This study has aimed to add to an understanding of the Japanese sensibility towards their hyper-dense urbanism. It is a sensibility that across the world is known for its support of an idiosyncratic, culturally identifiable approach to living in cities.

In Australia, this sensibility is only beginning to develop. Our relatively short history, and our relatively recent urbanization lacks the intensity and cultural pervasiveness of the Japanese sensibility to urban living. Whereas we see density as something of an inconvenience, an affront to our own self-image of Australia as a country without any particular land pressures (so why should we all live on top of each other - I want my own backyard!), Japan through the absolute necessity of its history and its geography has developed a way of living in dense urban environments that manages to produce a vibrant, productive economic and social culture. Despite some significant social issues coming to the forefront of Japanese society in the next century (an ageing population and an economy perpetually in recession) it remains one of the world's key economic players, one of the world's most exported and recognized cultures, and home to some of the most fascinating ways of living in hyper-dense megalopolises.

What can we take away from Japan? The eleven themes of this paper (shown again here on the right) have aimed to take away some little bits and pieces all of which, when the attitude is right and the pressures are develop, might help us to develop our own sensibility, and our own ideas of how we, like the Japanese, can life in dense urban environments happily and amenably and productively.²²

eleven themes for an urban sensibility

from studying tokyo, kyoto,
kanazawa, osaka, sydney and
melbourne to find a few clever
ideas whether little or small
as to how we might be able to
develop a sensibility for living in
hyper dense environments that
does not see it as being less
pleasant, lacking in amenity or
any less australian than having
a backyard and a pool

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