



VISUAL

Resident's Copy



ChoreoSensing Public Spaces

In Toronto's residential neighbourhoods

Mushtari Afroz, 2023

This booklet introduces a set of scores intended to establish a deeper sensory and embodied engagement with socio-spatial dimensions of residential neighbourhood public spaces.

These scores have been developed through a new interdisciplinary practice called 'ChoreoSensing' that proposes active and immersive sensorial and embodied connection to public spaces as a means of generating and strengthening residents' sense of belonging (Hagerty, 1992) to their neighbourhoods. It explores public spaces within residential areas through our two most dominant sensory modalities – visual and auditory – as means of enquiry. It develops simple performative scores through choreographic thinking on pedestrian movements and empowers residents through participatory events intended for activating sensory engagement.

The interdisciplinary practice is aimed at facilitating a more sensorily meaningful dialogue between residents and their everyday public spaces, a dialogue

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that instills active citizenship among residents but seems to have gradually disappeared in the run for creating ‘functional’ contemporary cities and communities while instigating the detachment of our bodies from public spaces

‘ChoreoSensing’ practice emerged from a year-long artistic research project conducted in different low to medium density, low to medium mixed residential neighbourhoods within the Greater Toronto Area.

It is part of an ongoing research study developed with support from faculty members, peers, artists, and staff of the ‘Performing Public Space’ program at Fontys University in The Netherlands.

Bibliography:

Hagerty, B. M.-S. (1992). Sense of belonging: A vital mental health concept. Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 6, 172–177.

Special thanks to:

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Editing & Design:

Donald Wiedman

Image Credit:

Dewan Masud Karim

Instructions:

- There are 7 visual scores and 8 auditory scores in this booklet.
- The scores are designed for urban residents and are designed to be used in public spaces within low to medium density and low to medium mixed residential neighbourhoods.
- No complicated or costly equipment is required for the activities.
- The Reflection pages are intentionally left blank. Use them to write down your responses to the questions asked in each score.
- Post your reflections, images, comments etc. on **#choreosensingpublicspace**

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Visual Score A: The House Watcher

Purpose:

Attentively explore the aesthetic and relational qualities of houses in your neighbourhood.

Type:

Solo activity.

Site:

Your neighbourhood streets. Neighbourhoods with detached and semi-detached homes are preferred for this activity. Conduct the activity on streets with sidewalks.

Materials:

👁️ A pen or a pencil to write down your reflections.

Note:

👁️ (XN) implies the task is done N times. For instance, (X1) means the task is done once.

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Part 1 – Task:

- 👁 Stand on the sidewalk of your street. If the street block is too long, select a short segment for the activity. Start walking. Walk normally, meaning use your regular pace and posture, back and forth between the two ends of your selected street segment (X1). Call this your ‘Base Walk’.
- 👁 Once your ‘Base Walk’ is established, do the walk with a small change in your posture. ‘Walk with Postural Shift’ by turning your head and your gaze toward the houses on the same side of the street as you. Maintain this posture and walk slower than usual, looking attentively at the houses. Walk back and forth between the two ends of your street segment (X2).
- 👁 Pay careful attention to colours, shapes and depths of the houses, their frontages, spaces in-between and other architectural features in their immediate surroundings.
- 👁 Pause when a feature attracts your attention. Get close to it if possible. Explore and establish a deeper visual engagement by looking at it from different directions.
- 👁 Repeat the above task on other streets in your neighbourhood. Make sure they have sidewalks on both sides.

- 👁️ Then go back to your 'Base Walk' (X1).
- 👁️ Cross the street and repeat the above tasks on the other sidewalk. Repeat the above on other streets in your neighbourhood. Use streets that have sidewalks on both sides.

Reflections:

- 👁️ What aesthetic qualities of the houses engaged you in your 'Walk with Postural Shift'? Compare them to what you experienced during your 'Base Walk'.
- 👁️ What relational qualities – frontages, in-between spaces, relation to the street, etc. – did you notice during your 'Walk with Postural Shift'?

Part 2 – Task:

- 👁️ Select at least one house on each side of your street that caught your attention in Part 1.
- 👁️ Stand in front of it with your body facing the house. Using the house as the centre, walk sideways two houses to the left, and two houses to the right (X2).

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- 👁️ Walk slower than your regular speed to allow for deeper visual engagement. Pay attention to the details of all five houses.
- 👁️ Look at the five house frontages, spaces in-between, and any other architectural feature in their immediate surroundings.
- 👁️ Conduct a 'Base Walk' (X1) between the far ends of the five houses.
- 👁️ Cross the street. Repeat the task above before the house that caught your attention on this side of the street.

Reflections:

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- 👁️ Which and how many of the houses caught your attention in Part 1? Why? Are they harmonious, disharmonious, in colour, shape or other features when compared with the rest of the houses on this street?
- 👁️ What more aesthetic and relational qualities of the houses became visible to you during this task?

Part 3 – Task:

- 👁 Stand at one end of the selected sidewalk segment. Start walking forward. When you reach the first driveway, pause, and turn your body toward the street. If there is no driveway, pause after every two houses.
- 👁 Look across the street. Pay attention to the houses and their environments. Pause for 20 seconds.
- 👁 Start walking again. Repeat until you reach the end of your sidewalk segment. Cross the street and repeat the above on the other side of the street.

Reflections:

- 👁 What have you discovered during the task about the built environment of neighbouring properties? What variations do you see in the environment of the houses on this street?
- 👁 Does each house present a unique characteristic or personality or do the houses and their surroundings all look similar? What visual perception(s) does it create in minds of pedestrians using this street?

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Overall – Reflections:

- 👁 Reflect on Parts 1, 2 and 3 together. Ask yourself what new perspectives you discovered about the houses in your neighbourhood.
- 👁 What kinds of aesthetics are commonly found in them?
- 👁 What relationship do the houses have with the streets?
- 👁 Do the architectural characteristics of the houses differ from street to street?
- 👁 How do the spacing and immediate surroundings of these houses help define the social dynamics among the residents in the neighbourhood?
- 👁 Did the different characteristics of the houses – aesthetic and relational – help shift your perception of the neighbourhood streetscape to some extent?
- 👁 If so, how? If no, why?

Reflections

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Visual Score B: Draw the House with Your Body

Purpose:

Embody the houses on your street.

Type:

Solo activity.

Site:

Your neighbourhood streets. Neighbourhoods with detached and semi-detached homes are preferred for this activity. Conduct the activity on streets with sidewalks.

Materials:

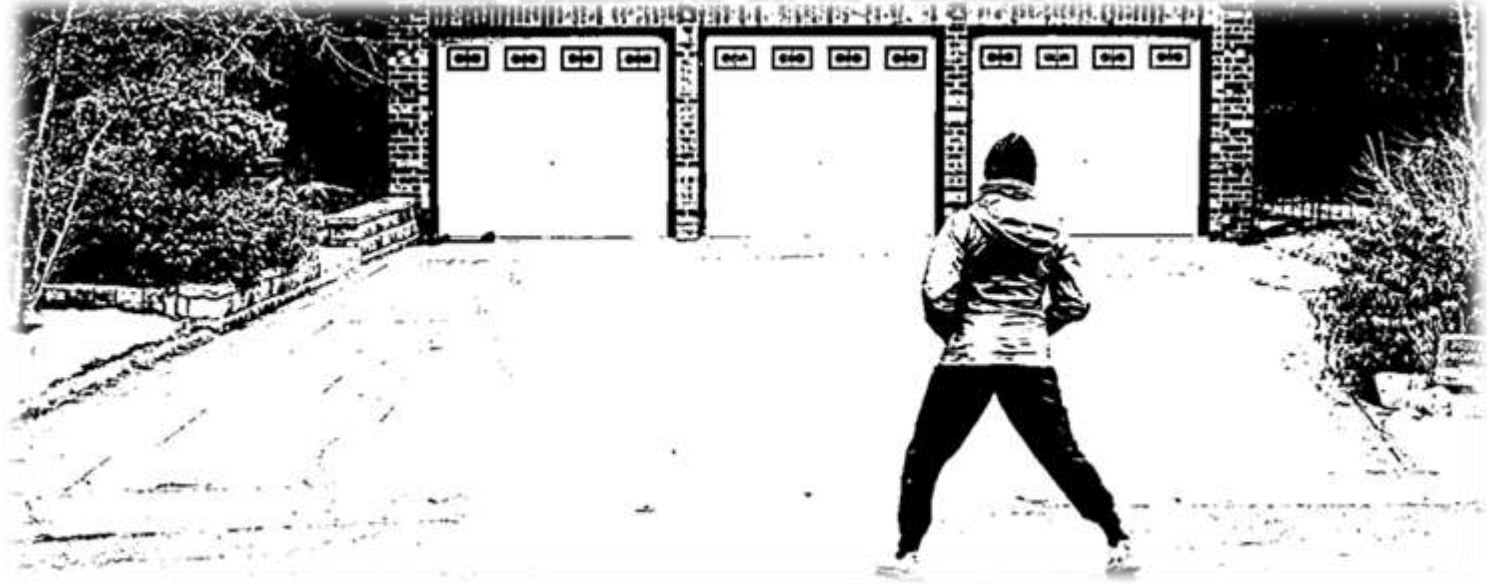
- 👁 A pen or a pencil to write down your reflections on the activity.
- 👁 A video camera or smart phone camera (optional).

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Task:

- 👁 Based on Parts 1,2 and 3 of Score A, choose a set of houses on both sides of the street whose architecture interests you. The houses do not need to be similar in shape or form or colour. The more different they are the better.
- 👁 Stand on the sidewalk (not crossing the private property line) in front of the house you want to explore first. Choose a spot on the sidewalk from where if you draw an imaginary straight line to the house, the line will divide the house into two equal parts.
- 👁 Start moving (without changing your spot). Embodify the shape of the house and its features as if you are drawing them with your body. To keep the task simple, you can use only your hands instead of the entire body for drawing the shape. Move slowly while observing the details of the house.
- 👁 Embodify the shape of the house any way you like, from top to bottom, left to right, in diagonals, in one unbroken line, in fragments, etc. Choose what features you want to embody and move accordingly to capture them.

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- 👁 Use a camera to record your movement. Make sure to videorecord your entire body and its movement patterns in detail.
- 👁 Once you finish embodying the first house, draw, in your reflection pages, the lines your body made, reflecting the exact movement sequence. Watch the video to recall the patterns. Or recall the sequence from memory.
- 👁 Repeat this activity for other selected houses on the same side of the street.
- 👁 Cross the street and repeat the activity for the selected houses across the street.



Reflections:

- 👁️ Compare each drawing with the others. What architectural patterns of the houses triggered your visual attention more? What architectural patterns of the houses did your body connect more with than another? Were there any differences between the two sets of patterns?
- 👁️ From the drawings, what do you now understand about the overall architectural aesthetic of houses on your street? What are their similarities, their dissimilarities?
- 👁️ Reflect on how you felt when you embodied the houses through visual engagement and body movements. If you were given an opportunity to change the aesthetic of the houses on your street, what would you change based on how you felt during the embodiment?

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Reflections

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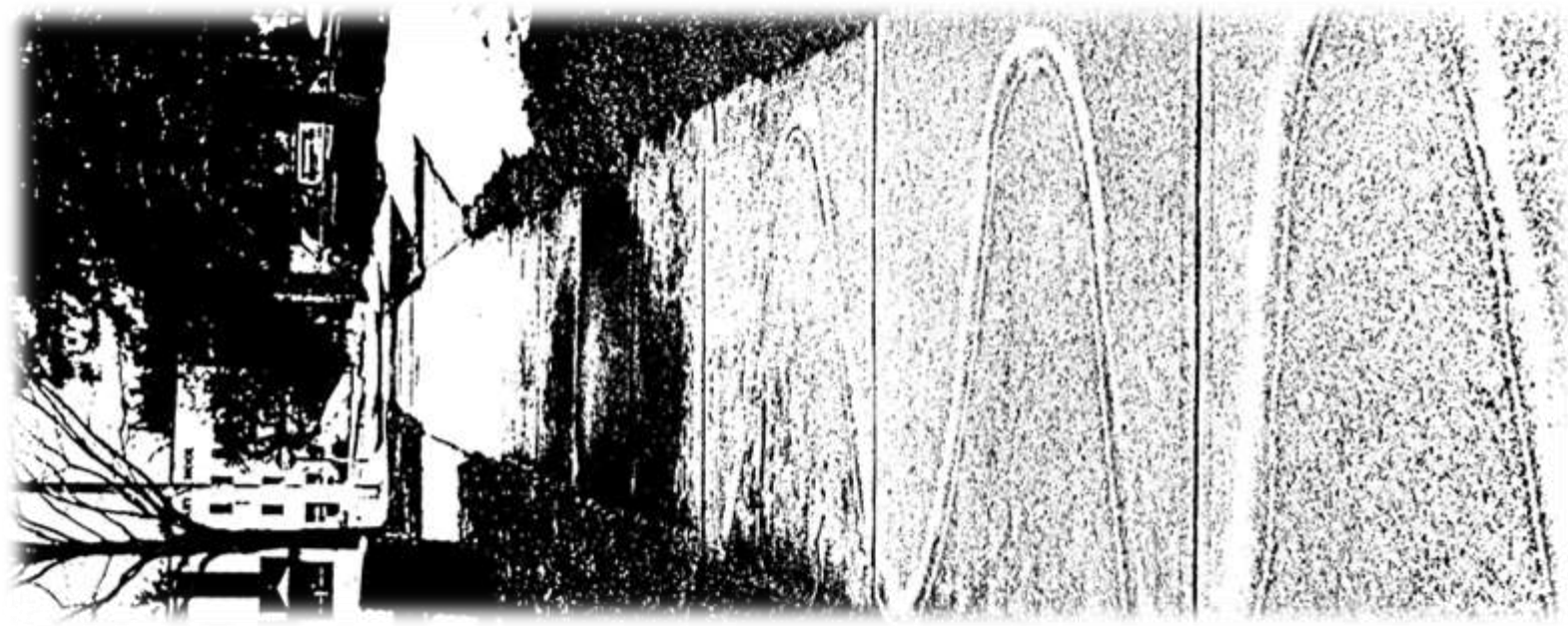
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Visual Score C: Meandering Sidewalk

Purpose:

Generate alternative perceptions of your sidewalk.

Type:

Solo activity.

Site:

Your neighbourhood streets.

Materials:

A pen or a pencil to write down your reflections on the activity.

A video camera or smart phone.

Task 1:

- ② Choose a small segment of sidewalk for this activity.
- ② At your regular pace of walking, this segment should not take more than 5 minutes to travel.
- ② Stand at one end of the sidewalk.
- ② Start walking at your regular pace.
- ② When you reach the other end, turn around and walk back to the starting point at your regular pace.

- ② Choose a small segment of sidewalk for this activity.
- ② At your regular pace of walking, this segment should not take more than 5 minutes to travel.
- ② Stand at one end of the sidewalk.
- ② Start walking at your regular pace.
- ② When you reach the other end, turn around and walk back to the starting point at your regular pace.
- ② Now imagine the sidewalk is shaped like the body of a snake.
- ② Walk slowly on the body of this snake-shaped sidewalk and observe what is in the immediate environment of it.
- ② Walk until you reach the other end of the sidewalk.
- ② Turn around and walk back the same way until you reach the starting point.

Task 2:

- ② Repeat the steps from Task 1.
- ② This time photograph your visual observations as frequently as you want.
- ② For instance, during your regular walk, take one photo every five steps you travel. Then take one photo every five steps you travel during your meandering walk.

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Task 3:

- 👁️ Create one collage of the images taken during your regular walk.
- 👁️ Create a second collage of the images taken of the same sidewalk during your meandering walk.

Reflections:

- 👁️ Compare the two collages.
- 👁️ Did you discover any new visual perspectives of the sidewalk you regularly walk on?
- 👁️ Did they generate any new perceptions of this sidewalk in you?

Reflections

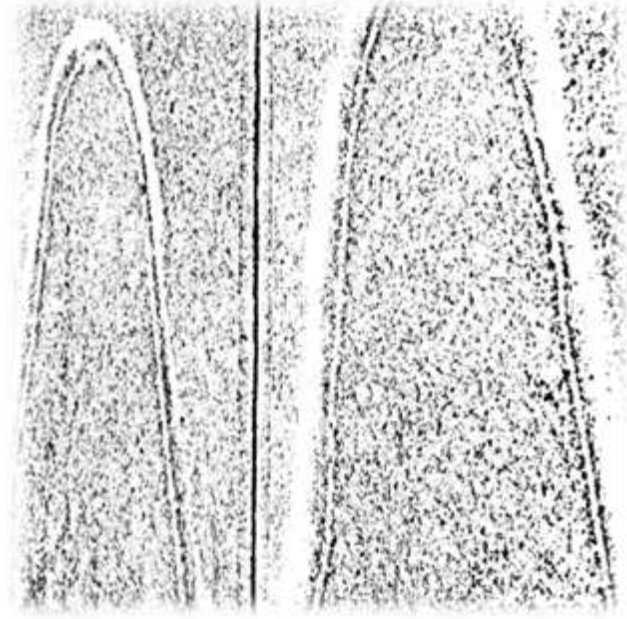
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Visual Score C: The Sidewalk Crawler

(For curious and advanced movers)

Purpose:

Observing the neighbourhood streetscape from a child's perspective.

Type:

Solo activity.

Site:

Your neighbourhood streets. Conduct this activity on streets with sidewalks.

Materials:

- 👁 A pencil/pen to write down your reflections.
- 👁 A pair of gloves and knee pads to protect your hands and knees from any potential injury during the crawl.

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Task:

- 👁 Start the activity on the sidewalk of your street. If the street block is too long, choose a short segment for the activity.
- 👁 Start at one end of the sidewalk. Start crawling forward. Crawl slowly and observe your surroundings mindfully.
- 👁 Look to the sides. Look at the ground. Look up. Look in front of you. Look behind you. Look in all directions from your crawling height.
- 👁 If something catches your attention, go close to it, and observe it from different directions: down, up, sideways. Imagine how a child would visually explore it.
- 👁 Continue your exploration until you reach the end of the sidewalk segment. Pause and make notes of your observations.
- 👁 Cross the street and repeat the above tasks on the other side of the street.
- 👁 Repeat this activity on other streets in your neighbourhood, and on streets where sidewalks do not have green boulevards.

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Reflections:

- 👁️ What new perceptions did you gather about your neighbourhood streets when you observed the streetscape from your crawling height? What did you discover about the sidewalk floor?
- 👁️ How do these perceptions and discoveries shift your understanding of your streets? How did your visual experience of the streetscape vary from street to street?
- 👁️ How was it when you crawled on sidewalks with no boulevard? Were there boulevards that made you more curious than the rest?
- 👁️ Were there perspectives that became visible only when you were crawling?
- 👁️ How do you think a child's relationship to these streets differs from an adult's given that the child observes the streetscape from a much lower height?
- 👁️ What kind of a sense of place does the child develop about these streetscapes?

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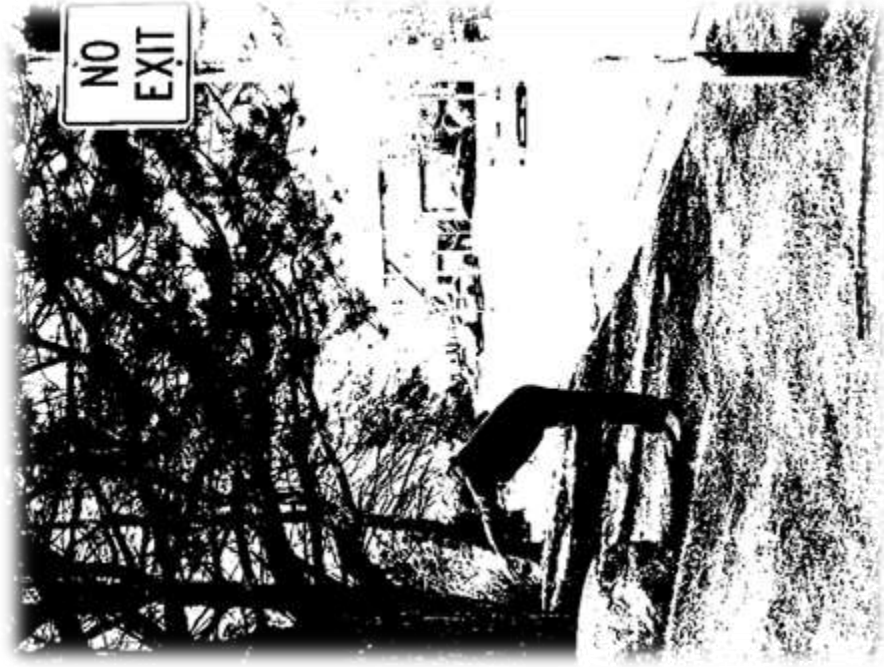
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Visual Score E: Observe, Embody and Re-imagine a Street Intersection

Purpose:

Observing and embodying existing socio-physical dynamics at street intersections and re-imagining possibilities.

Type:

Solo activity.

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Site:

Your neighbourhood streets.

If an intersection has sidewalks on only two sides of the street, for instance, only use those sides for this activity.

Do not cross streets if the intersection is too wide, too busy, or if there is no pedestrian signal. When crossing the street, always be mindful of personal safety. Keep checking your right and left for any oncoming traffic.

Materials:

- ② A pen/pencil to write down your reflections.

Task 1:

- ② Stand at one corner of the intersection facing the street.
- ② Look at the intersection corner across the street. Observe what interests you there. Make a note of it.
- ② Is it a tree, a bench, a house, people? Something else? Is there a sidewalk on the other side? Can you cross the street safely? If yes, start crossing the street.
- ② When you reach the other side, pause, and walk up close to the object noted from across the street.
- ② Observe the object from various directions. Walk around it if space allows.

- ② Stand at one corner of the intersection facing the street.
- ② Look at the intersection corner across the street. Observe what interests you there. Make a note of it.
- ② Is it a tree, a bench, a house, people? Something else? Is there a sidewalk on the other side? Can you cross the street safely? If yes, start crossing the street.
- ② When you reach the other side, pause, and walk up close to the object noted from across the street.
- ② Observe the object from various directions. Walk around it if space allows.
- ② If it is a fixed element, embody its shape. Make a shape of it using your body. If it's a moving element, follow its rhythm. Move with it.
- ② Repeat the above task on all the corners of the intersection. If a corner does not have a sidewalk, do not use that side of the intersection.
- ② If it is not safe to cross the street, stay on the corner where it is safe. From there observe all four sides of the intersection and embody the shapes of objects that interest you on each corner or move with a moving element on each corner.

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Task 2:

- ② Imagine the activities you would like to do at one or more of the corners of the intersection.
- ② If it is safe to cross the street, walk to each corner.
- ② Walk slowly around within the corner's space. Use your vision and other senses to experience the space.
- ② Imagine how this corner space can create opportunities for your desired activities.

Task 3:

- ② Repeat Task 1 and Task 2 at other intersections within your neighbourhood. Keep safety concerns in mind.

Reflections:

- ② What kind of elements – living or non-living – caught your attention at each corner in Task 1?
- ② How did embodying their shapes, following their rhythm, moving with them make you feel?
- ② What did they inform you of how they occupy, shape, or transform these street corners?
- ② How do they regulate the way you occupy or move in these spaces?

- ② What activities did you imagine at the street corners in Task 2? How did the slow walking, observing, and sensing the corner space help you re-imagine it for your desired activities? How do the re-imagined spaces look?
- ② Compare different street intersections within your neighbourhood. How did your responses to the above questions vary between intersections? Did any evoke more imagination than the rest?

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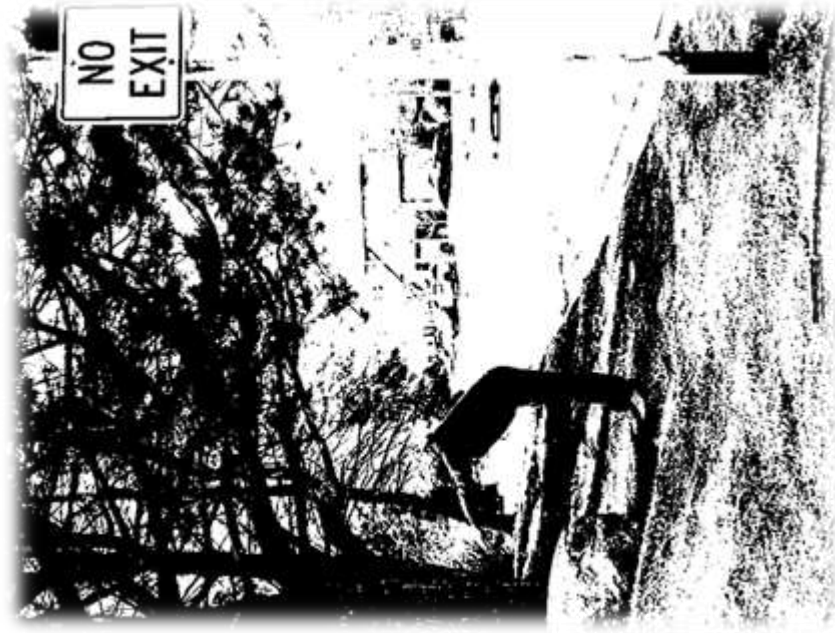
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Visual Score F: Social Life Watching

Purpose:

Here we are particularly interested in observing the everyday social life as it unfolds in front of our eyes in our neighbourhood's public spaces. The definitions of 'social life' watching can be found in *Appendix A*.

Type:

Group activity for 2-3 people per group.

Ask your family members or neighbours to join you.

Divide yourself into small groups of 2-3 members.

Site:

Neighbourhood public squares or open public spaces, those seen as social junctions.

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Materials:

- 👁 A visual frame – made of wood, cardboard or even a simple piece of white paper (cut a hole in the middle). The recommended size of the frame is 8” x 10”.
- 👁 A wooden plaque, marker/chalk, string (optional).

Task 1:

- 👁 Choose a convenient location at the site. The location should allow you to comfortably observe the social life unfolding at the site.
- 👁 Everyone stands at the location and observes the social activity, then discusses the experience with their group members.

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Task 2 (5 minutes per observation point):

- 👁 Each group then takes a visual frame. Members share the frame with each other.
- 👁 Each group chooses a spot at the site as its observation point. The spots should not be too close to each other.
- 👁 From the observation point each group looks at a particular side of the public space. No two groups should observe the same side.
- 👁 When one member finishes the observation, the frame is passed on to the next member of the group.
- 👁 First observe the side without the frame, and then with the frame.
- 👁 Each group member identifies social perspectives that interest them (with the frame and without) and shares the experience with the group.
- 👁 If there's only one group, make sure to observe at least 3-4 sides of the public space.

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Task 3 (5-7 minutes):

- 👁 Based on the two tasks above, each group collectively creates at least two short descriptions of the site.
- 👁 These descriptions should tell in a few words, what known and/or unknown perspectives have been discovered.
- 👁 Group members can also collectively give names to the public spaces based on their observations and share them with the other groups.

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Task 4 – Optional (10 minutes):

- 👁 Each group writes down the descriptions from Task 3 on a wooden plaque using chalk or marker.
- 👁 Leave the plaques at the site, where they will be most visible. Use strings to hang them from trees or poles or simply place them on the ground.

Reflections:

- 👁 How did the activity help you develop a sense of place at this public space? What new perspectives did you discover and how did they shape your perception of this public space?
- 👁 How did the visual frames affect your observations and experience?

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Reflections

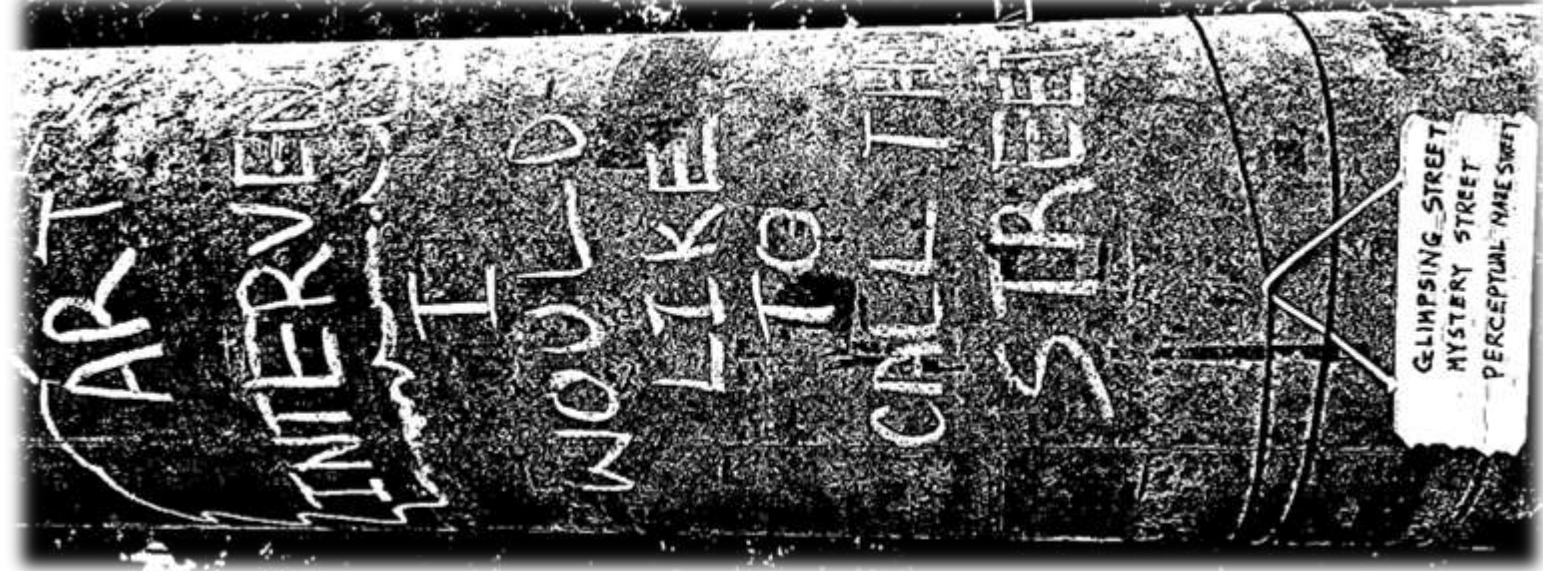
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Visual Score G: Perceptual Innuendo, Unexpectedness, Whimsy

Purpose:

Exploring three visual aesthetics of the neighbourhood streetscape – perceptual innuendo, unexpectedness, and whimsy.

The definitions of the visual qualities can be found in *Appendix A*.

Type:

Solo activity.

Site:

Your neighbourhood streets.

Materials:

A wooden plaque, marker/chalk, strings (optional)

A camera or a smart phone (optional)

Task 1 (10 minutes):

- 👁️ Take a slow and attentive walk on the sidewalk of your street.
- 👁️ Identify the visual qualities – perceptual innuendo, unexpectedness, whimsy – of the streetscape.

Task 2 (15 minutes max per visual quality per street):

- ➊ After the walk decide which one visual quality on the street you would like to explore further in the next 15 minutes.
- ➋ Once decided, do the following, if:

A) Perceptual Innuendo: for example, shrubs, fences, or something else that creates a perceptual innuendo, then:

- ➌ Walk slowly past the perceptual innuendo while facing the street. Your peripheral vision is alert during the walk, but you are not directly looking to your side.
- ➍ Imagine what's on the other side of this perceptual innuendo. Can you come up with a short story for it?
- ➎ Now observe it through the frame. Hold the frame in your hands. Walk away from the perceptual innuendo, walk toward it. Observe it independently and observe it in relation to the surrounding.
- ➏ Take photo(s) and/or video(s) of what you see through the frame.
- ➐ Repeat this activity on a few other streets in your neighbourhood.

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B) Unexpectedness/Whimsy: for instance, objects one doesn't expect in a space, or objects that create a feeling of playfulness.

If it is a non-living object:

- ② Walk slowly around it, if possible, and observe it from different directions.
- ② Walk around it again, but this time use your frame to observe it through different visual framings.
- ② Walk away from it. Walk toward it. Observe it through the frame.
- ② Observe it independently through the frame and observe it in relation to its surrounding environment.
- ② Take photo(s)/video(s) of what you see through the frame.
- ② Repeat this activity on other streets in your neighbourhood.

If it's an ephemeral event that creates unexpected encounters, for instance, a sudden appearance of someone dressed up in funny clothes who then disappears quickly from your sight:

- ② Take a moment and think about why this was unexpected to you.

- 👁️ Take photo(s)/video(s) of what you see through the frame.
- 👁️ Repeat this activity on other streets in your neighbourhood.

Task 3 (*10 minutes per street*):

- 👁️ Now re-name the street based on their visual qualities. For instance, if you explored perceptual innuendo on a street, what perceptions did it generate for you about the street?
- 👁️ Create 2-3 names for the street based on the perceptions.
- 👁️ Write these new street names on wooden boards and hang them from the street post.
- 👁️ Give 2-3 names to each street based on the visual quality that is most dominant there. If you explored all three visual qualities on a street, choose the one that appeared most dominant to you. Use that to create new names for the street.

Reflections:

- 👁️ How did your perception of the streets shift when you explored them through a new lens of visual qualities – perceptual innuendo, unexpectedness, and whimsy?

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- 👁️ What did you already know and what did you discover?
- 👁️ What role did the frame play in your exploration? Did the frame help those visual qualities perform for you? How?
- 👁️ Reflect on the naming activities of various streets. How did they help you re-imagine the streets that are part of your everyday life?

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Appendix

The following definitions have been taken from the book *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory* by Lyn H. Lofland.

Perceptual Innuendo:

By 'perceptual innuendo' Lyn Lofland refers to the pleasure that arises from glimpsing a small piece of the built environment, a glimpse that suggests that an interesting, exotic, weird, enticing and even enchanting social world exists just outside of one's range of vision.

According to Lofland, one takes pleasure in the very incompleteness of the information one can gather exactly because incompleteness gives reign to imagination.

Unexpectedness:

By unexpectedness, Lyn Lofland suggests the quality of unfamiliarity in the built environment. In her study, she found some people took pleasure in not knowing and being surprised by the unexpected encounters.

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However, she recognized that the definition of pleasure exists primarily in the eye of the beholder. This means what is surprising to one person is 'old hat' to another.

Whimsy:

By whimsy, Lofland refers to frivolity, eccentricity, kookiness, nuttiness, capriciousness, and oddness. She suggests people take pleasure from objects or arrangements found within a built environment that are merely fanciful or frivolous.

Social-Life Watching or People-Watching:

The event invites residents to sensorily engage with the social dimension of their neighbourhood public spaces. Residents are encouraged to visually observe how their public spaces perform through means of social/human activities.

What social fabric unfolds daily, and what narratives does one gather from the unfolding social fabric? What does observation of public life bring to residents' lives or how does it shift their perception of their public spaces?

For this, Lofland's concept of 'people-watching' is used, which she describes as:

Activities in the public realm that involve watching people go by, to be entertained by street life and to inhale the atmosphere of the city.

Lofland uses the theatre metaphor to describe the activity of people-watching from a sidewalk cafe since in this activity one group of people – for instance, the passers-by – play the role of 'performers', while another group – such as customers of the cafe occupying intentionally street facing chairs – take on the role of 'audience'.

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Overall - Reflections

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Overall - Reflections

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CALL THIS
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PERCEPTUAL MAZE STREET