WHEN METAPHORS SPEAK:
A Design for a Theater in Boston

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on 18 December 1987 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Architecture.**

ABSTRACT

This thesis pursues an examination of ideas in architecture and of ways that form may express both a conceptual metaphor for a building type and heighten the experience of that type for its participants.

The vehicle for this exploration is the design of a dramatic theater in Boston. This thesis proposes as an idea for theater that the dramatic experience is simultaneously an extension of life and an idealized world. From this metaphor grow two parallel suppositions: that theater represents an image of our culture as it exists; and that it concurrently explores alternate images of culture and reality.

This position suggests a model of theater as simultaneously an integral part of the city and as an isolated microcosm; these two extremes overlap and coexist in the lobby, offering a range of possible interpretations of its role. Architectural forms are sought that express this metaphorical order, with its inherent dialectic, and also respond to other orders, creating a degree of ambiguity in interpretation.

From this combination of clear idea and formal ambiguity, it is postulated that a stimulating architectural environment will result.

Thesis Supervisor: **William Lyman Porter**
Title: Professor of Architecture and Planning

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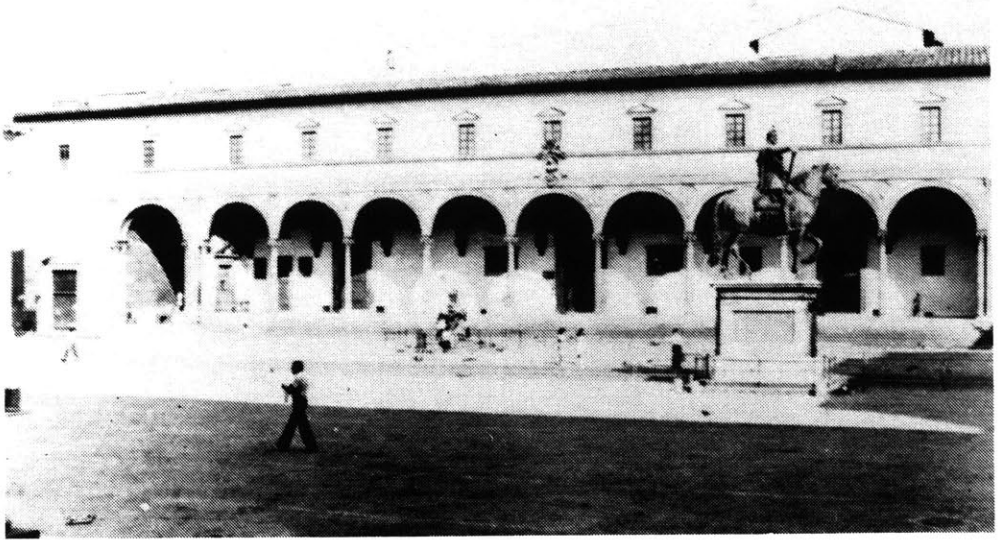
Finally, I would like to thank the other students who worked up in the thesis space: Denise, Jeff, Kevin, Gunny, Julie, and Harold. Their advice, comments, and encouragement, especially over these last few difficult weeks, was always much appreciated.



PREFACE

My interest in meaning and metaphor in architecture stems from research pursued on Filippo Brunelleschi since 1984 under the auspices of an Eloranta Fellowship from MIT. While in Florence, I was struck by the notion that his architecture represented an image of culture that the Florentines aspired to emulate: the glory of Rome revived in Tuscany. This suggested to me that the important lesson to draw from his work is that architecture may be a symbolic representation of a much larger idea; form has the power to transmit a socio-cultural message as well as to define space.

Brunelleschi's Ospedale de Innocenti is perhaps the best example. The first Renaissance structure, the loggia of this orphanage represents, I think, a conscious attempt to draw a connection between Quattrocento Florentine society and that of the Roman Republic. Engaged in a polemical war with Milan at the time of its construction, Florence sought political legitimacy, and it was believed that legitimacy rested in the ancient Roman origins of the city. Brunelleschi's Roman-looking facade proved to be the desired vehicle: it reminded all of the Commune's founding, an inheritance the Florentine inhabitants held in esteem. Thus the loggia was fantastically successful as a metaphor: it compellingly represented for its citizens all of the city's past and culture at once, and launched an architectural movement that would span three hundred years.

It was upon understanding the power of

Brunelleschi's metaphor that I began to seek an architecture of meaning. I have no background in drama, nor any burning interest in theater; this project stems not from a desire to design a theater, but rather from an interest in metaphor, meaning, and urbanism. A theater seemed to be an excellent subject to carry that interest forward.

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Chapter One

WHEN METAPHORS SPEAK
An Introduction to the Methodology

Every building that an architect builds is answerable to an institution.

-Louis Kahn

One way of thinking about architecture is to consider form as the physical manifestation of a building type. Kahn's famed aphorism *What does this space want to be?* sums up this philosophy of design: all great institutions have a life of their own that architecture can, at its best, heighten and reinforce. Design serves to enrich the meaning and human experience of society's institutions by discovering forms that manifest their basic character. Determination of appropriate form is achieved by finding an idea for the building that may be expressed architecturally: through this concept, or metaphor, the building speaks to us and tells of its nature. An organizational concept then emerges from the idea. To be successful, the idea should have a clear meaning: it must represent the central feature of the institution.

This does not imply, however, that all formal decisions need exactly to follow the metaphor; to create an environment of richness requires not only the clear and singular but the complex and ambiguous as well. The metaphor provides a large clear gesture within which many smaller intentions happily exist. Form serves several roles simultaneously. It must always remain conscious of the metaphor, but it should also satisfy other functions: it may respond to context, external forces acting upon it, or internal programmatic requirements. To achieve a stimulating experience for its users, forms that speak at several levels, both conceptually and physically, are actively sought.

Under the system of metaphorical architecture, the designer's task is central not only to the building at

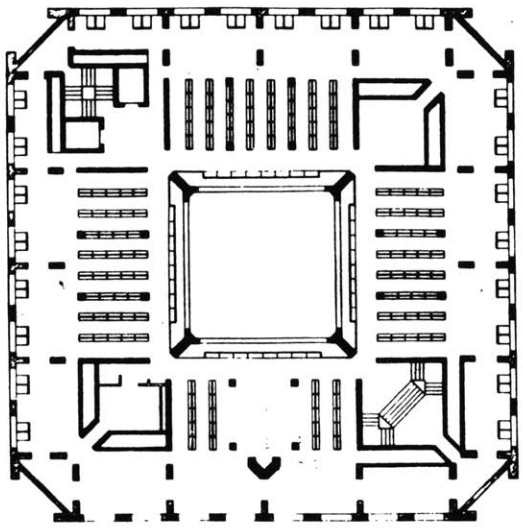
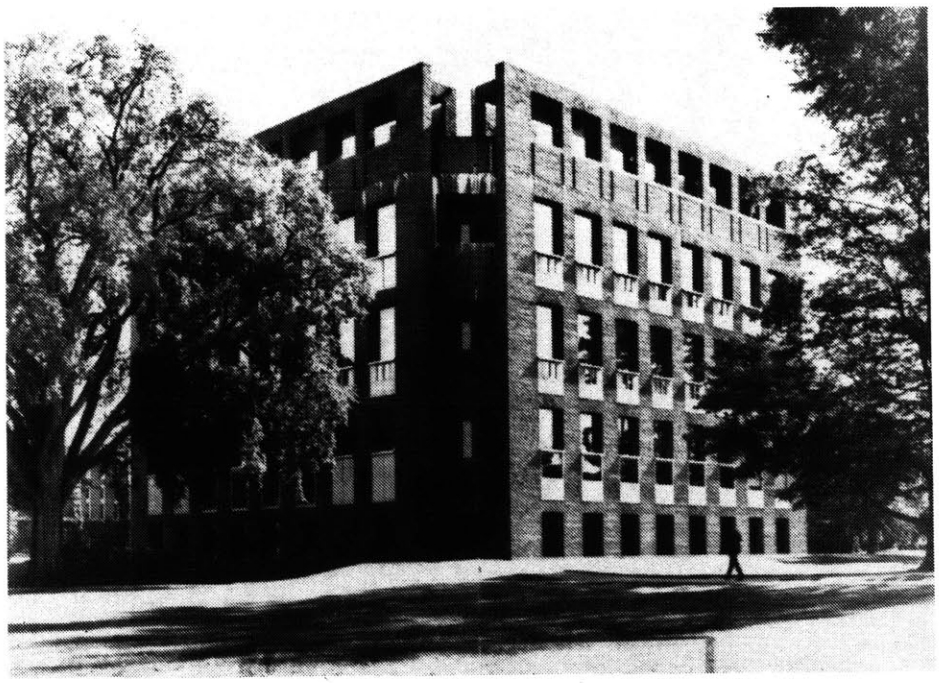


Figure 1.1
Kahn's Exeter Library (a)plan, (b)elevation. The clarity and integrity of the idea in this monument to knowledge establish a compelling image for an academic library. The new theater should aspire to achieve a similar greatness in its representation of its institutional nature.



hand, but to the entire community, for the idea selected will represent an image of the building type in the unified culture. If it is appropriate, compelling, and clear enough in its meaning, it will eventually establish the cultural identity of that institution for society. This implies a level of moral responsibility for designers: to perform their role as midwives of cultural representation they must understand the essence of the building type they design, its importance to society, and then choose a concept that fully expresses its character.

Kahn did not invent this way of thinking, although he is most poetic in describing it. According to van de Ven, a student of Kahn's, that form is generated from a metaphysical idea is readily recognizable as an extension of Hegel's theory on aesthetic. Hegel posited that art--and architecture--is the sensuous expression of an idea.[1] While many critics find much to fault in Hegel's theory, Rowe has suggested that his influence on the early modern movement was considerable. His main contribution was in the creation of a "spirit of the age" which architecture might invoke: "Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space; living, changing, new.... The architect's task consists of coming into agreement with the orientation of his epoch."[2] Form is an expression of inner content; beauty then derives from a congruence of spirit (or idea) and form.[3]

Modern architecture explicitly rejected the concept of beauty in architecture, but both Rowe and Banham have noted its reliance on generally Hegelian precepts

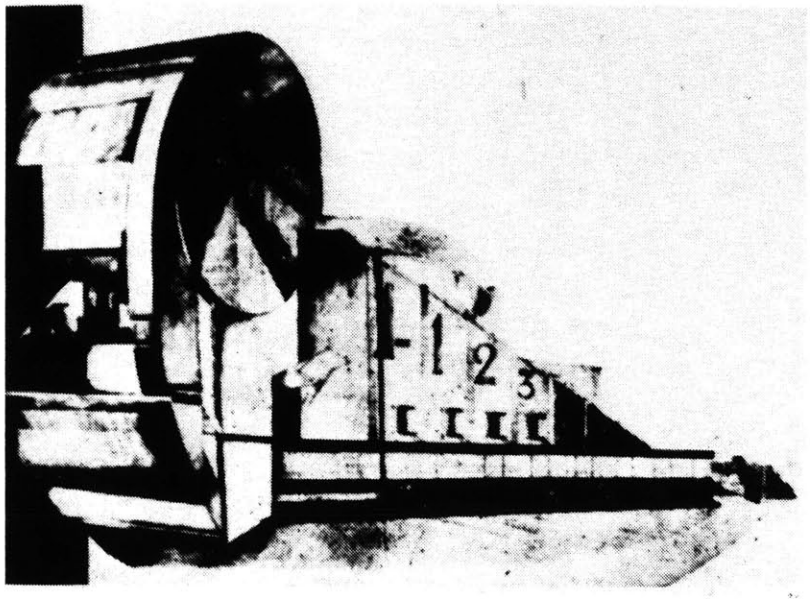


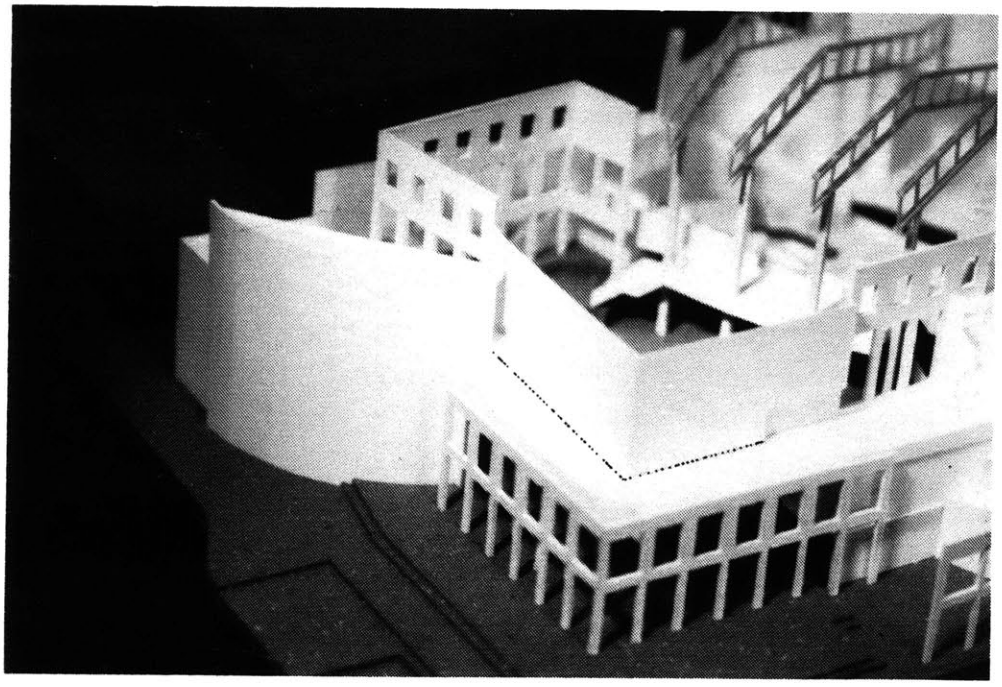
Figure 1.2
Mel'nikov's Moscow Central Theater project. Exhibiting the didacticism of Constructivism, Mel'nikov's structure is machine-generic; although planned as a theater, the image of technology was intended to be universal.

nonetheless: the modern movements sought to evoke the spirit of the machine age in new forms and materials.[4] For the Cubists, this meant expressing the emerging connection between space and time recently established by Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. Constructivism not only carried on that tradition, but also saw Hegel's notion of progressive revelation of truth as a vehicle for destroying the Positivism of 19th Century society in general and the Academic style of architecture in particular. Futurism was intent on realizing the changing nature of the world engendered by technology. In short, every "ism" of the early 20th century (and the term is not meant as belittlement of their importance) was preoccupied with expressing the spirit of the age.[5] The ultimately transcendant Le Corbusier united all these movements under a Hegelian banner: L'Esprit Nouveau.

The discussion of Hegelian influences on modern architecture is presented not as jusitification for designing with metaphor (it requires none); instead, the issue is raised because of its relationship to drama. Like architecture, theater also expresses an image of society and may present alternate or changing perceptions of reality; it evokes the spirit of the new age by offering an image of our culture in dramatic form.[6] In doing so, however, it is ambiguous. While theater may present an image of life, it also has the ability to reshape our perceptions of reality by interpreting a familiar thing in a new way. One's reaction is highly individual: the way the performance is interpreted depends on one's perception.

The ability to transmit a cultural message that may

Figure 1.3
Proposed new theater for Boston.



redefine our thinking demands a level of complexity in architectural meaning. Theater's architectural form must permit several possible meanings to emerge if the drama is to achieve its full impact on the individual.

This is where the early modernists failed. They sought to employ theater to create image of culture over and against the existing: theirs was a singular representation of a world of technology and science. To this end, early modernists, especially the Constructivists, allied themselves with dramatists to explore technology in theater.[7] While this alliance achieved many great accomplishments (the Bauhaus, with its intent of uniting art, architecture, and technology, was exemplary), the image of culture as a manifestation of technology did not allow for the possibility of idividual interpretation. The result was not theater that expanded our horizons by offering alternative or individual views of reality, but one that all too frequently substituted one univocal image for another.

This thesis seeks to represent theater by finding an architectural idea that clearly expresses its true nature. Because of drama's stated ability to convey a socio-cultural message, an idea that conveys the nature of theater will at the same time offer an image of our culture. In this way, the architectural representation of theater selected has a significant impact on the larger society's cultural identity. At the same time, we seek a metaphor that affords various meanings to the individual; ambiguity in form heightens the experience for the individual while the metaphor enriches the meaning of theater to our society.

Chapter Two

ARCHITECTURE RESULTS
Ideas, Concepts, and Design

The real modern theater can be imposed upon the general public only to the extent that it stoops to compromise. There are in fact times when today's public may also accept the essential, but only when it is presented to them with other things; this audience is not capable of tolerating the essential alone.

-Manfredo Tafuri

Key

1 *Coat Room*
2 *Cafe/Bar*
3 *Terrace*
4 *Toilets*
5 *Stage*
6 *Dressing*
7 *Rehearsal*

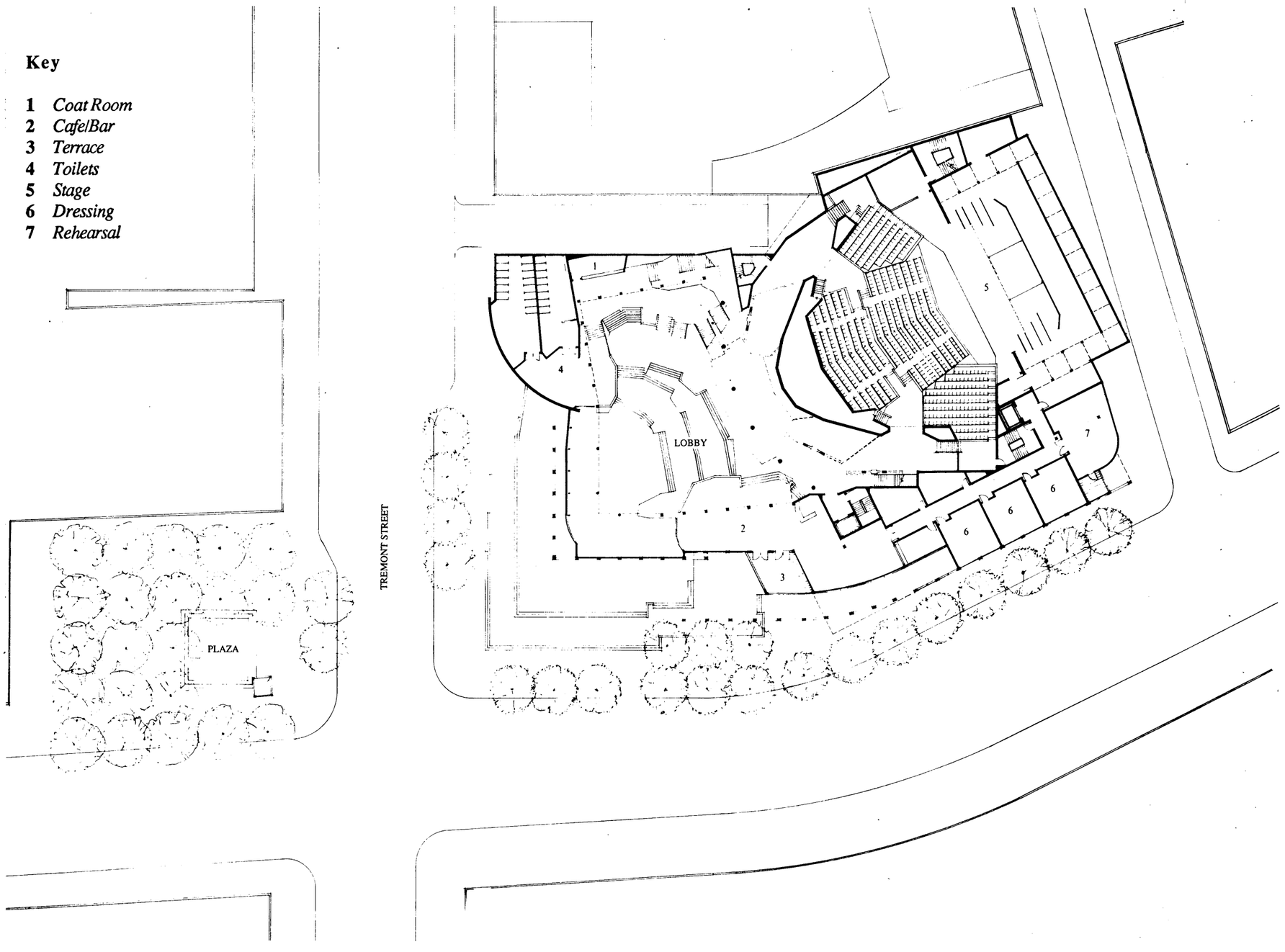


Figure 2.1
FLOOR PLAN AT LOBBY LEVEL

Scale in Feet

0 16 48

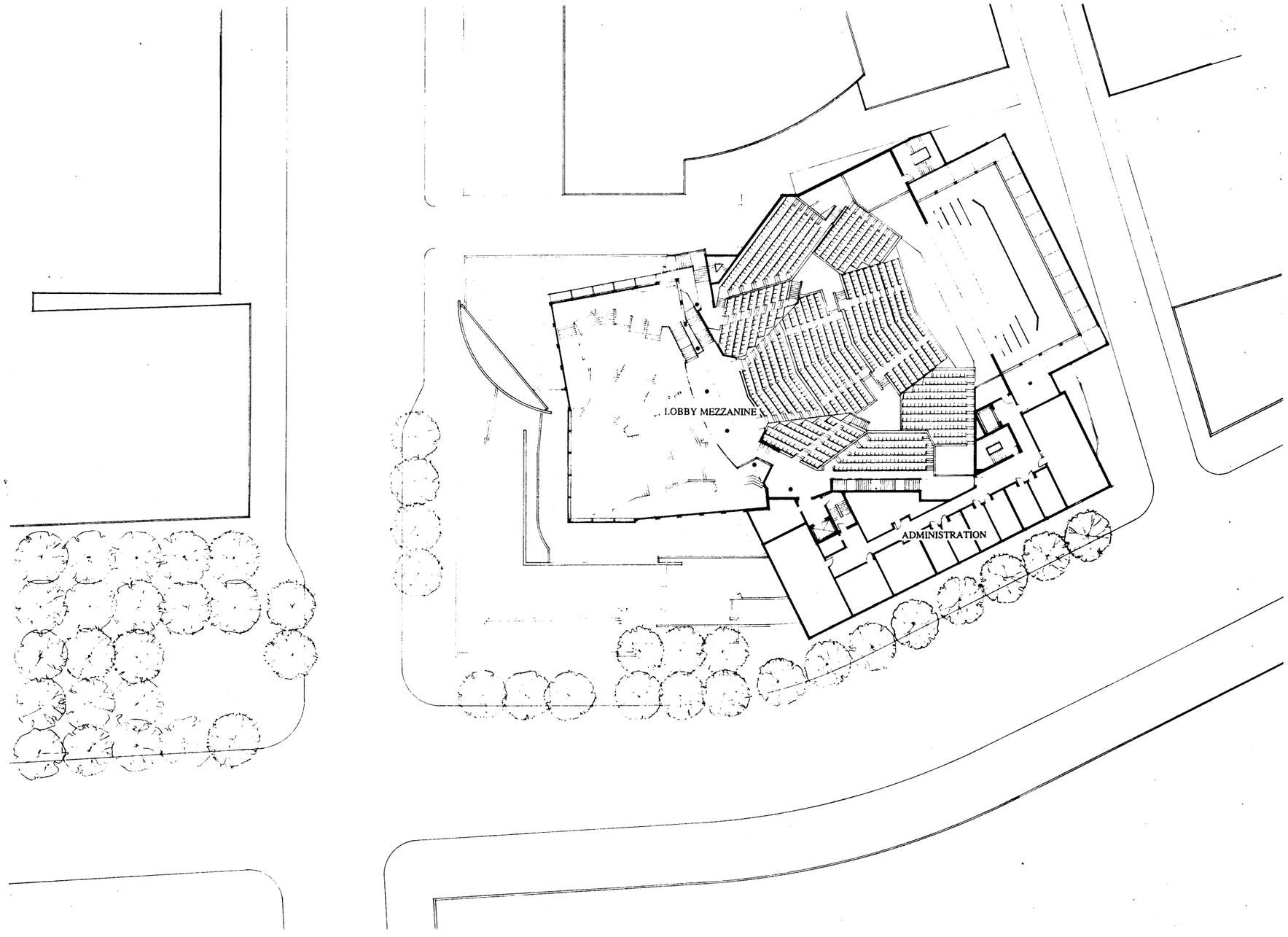


Figure 2.2
FLOOR PLAN AT MEZZANINE LEVEL

Scale in Feet

0 16 48

Key

1 *Entry Foyer*
2 *Box Office*
3 *Plaza Cafe*
4 *Service*
5 *Support Spaces*
6 *Orchestra Pit*
7 *Stage Elevator*
8 *Staging Workshops*
9 *Storage*

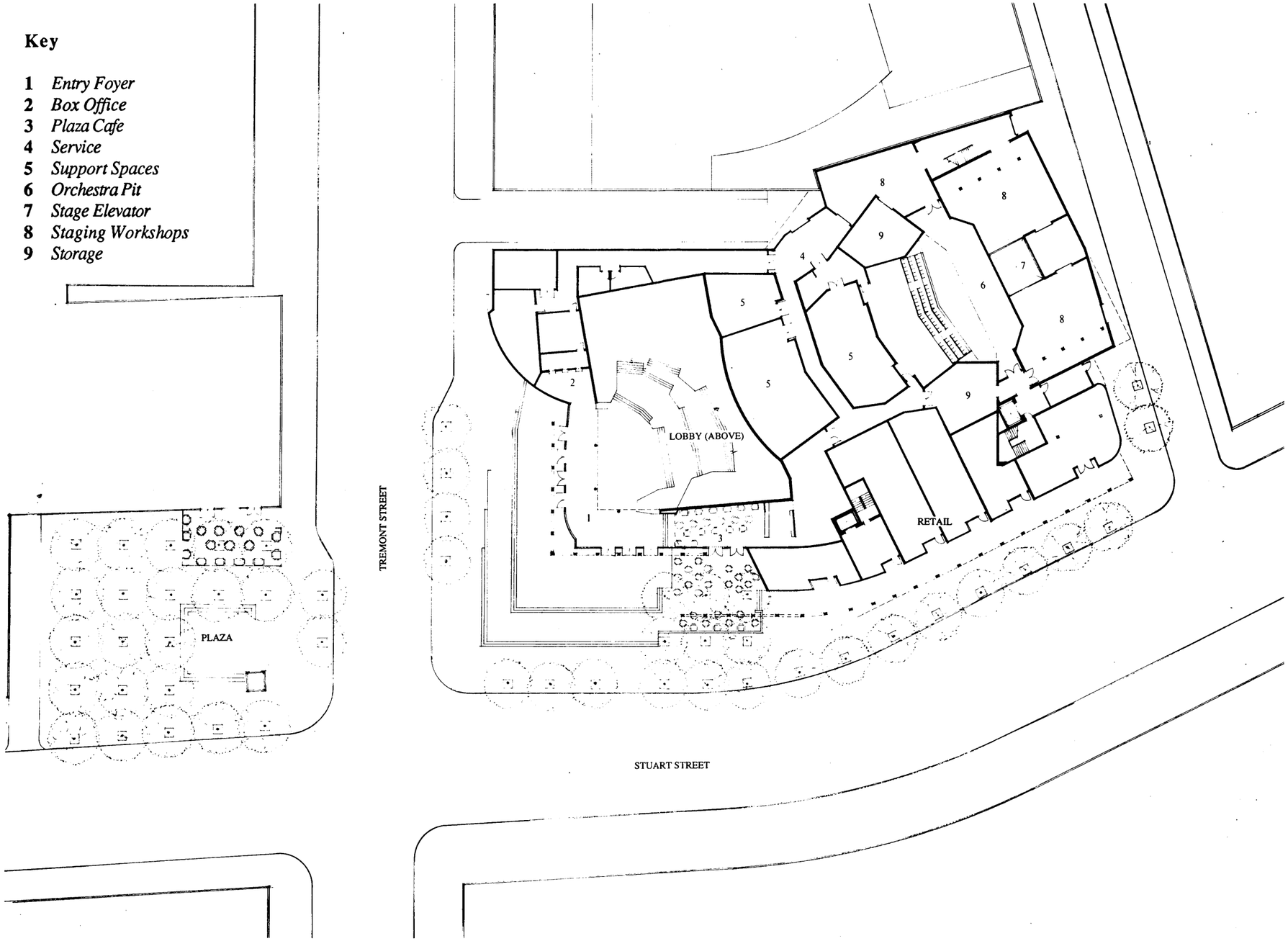


Figure 2.3
FLOOR PLAN AT STREET LEVEL

Scale in Feet

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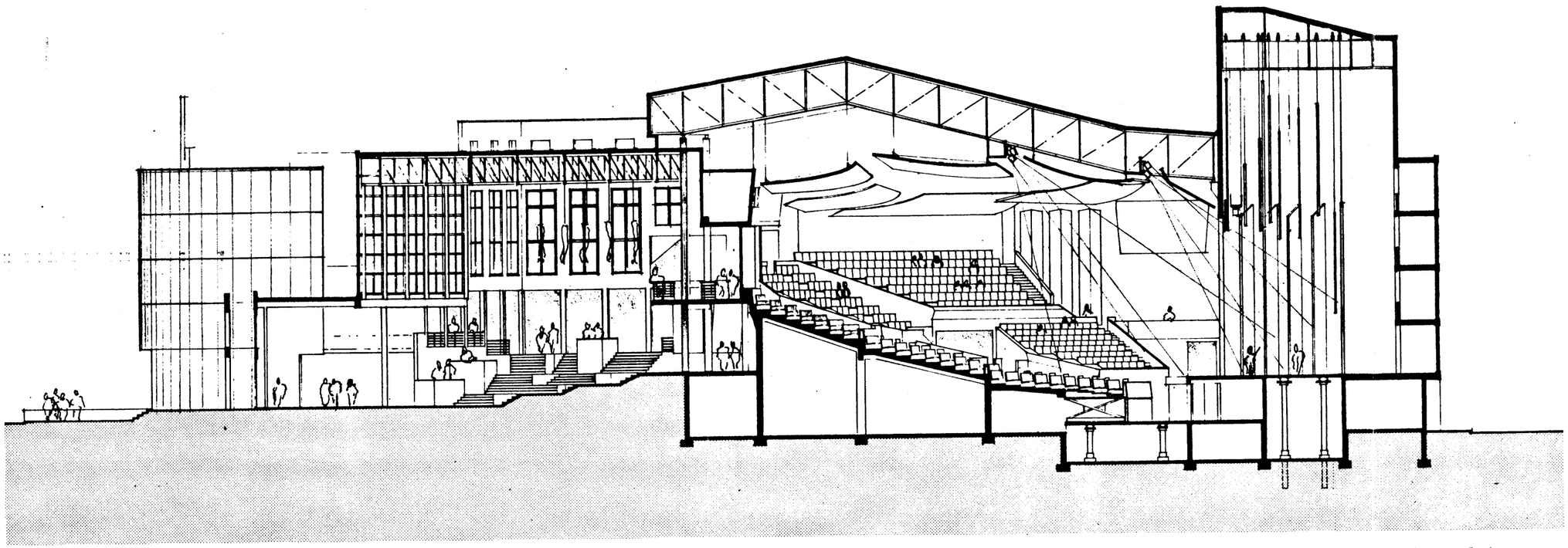

Figure 2.4
LONGITUDINAL SECTION

Scale in Feet

0 8 24

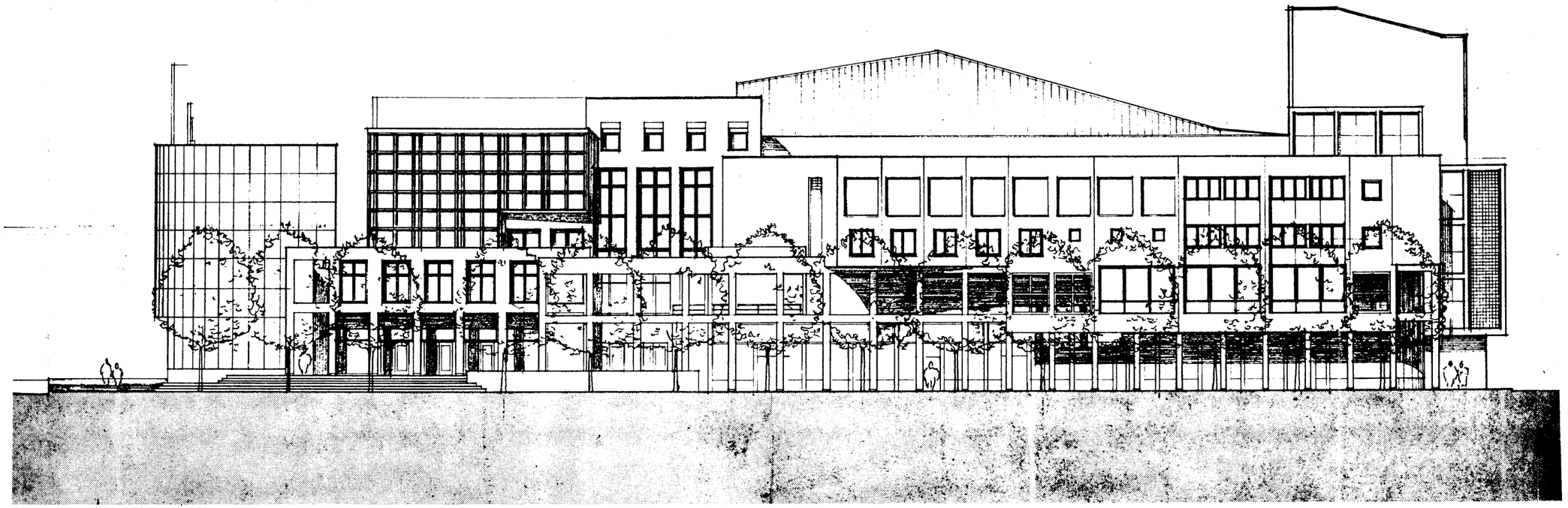

Figure 2.5
STUART STREET (NORTH) ELEVATION

Scale in Feet

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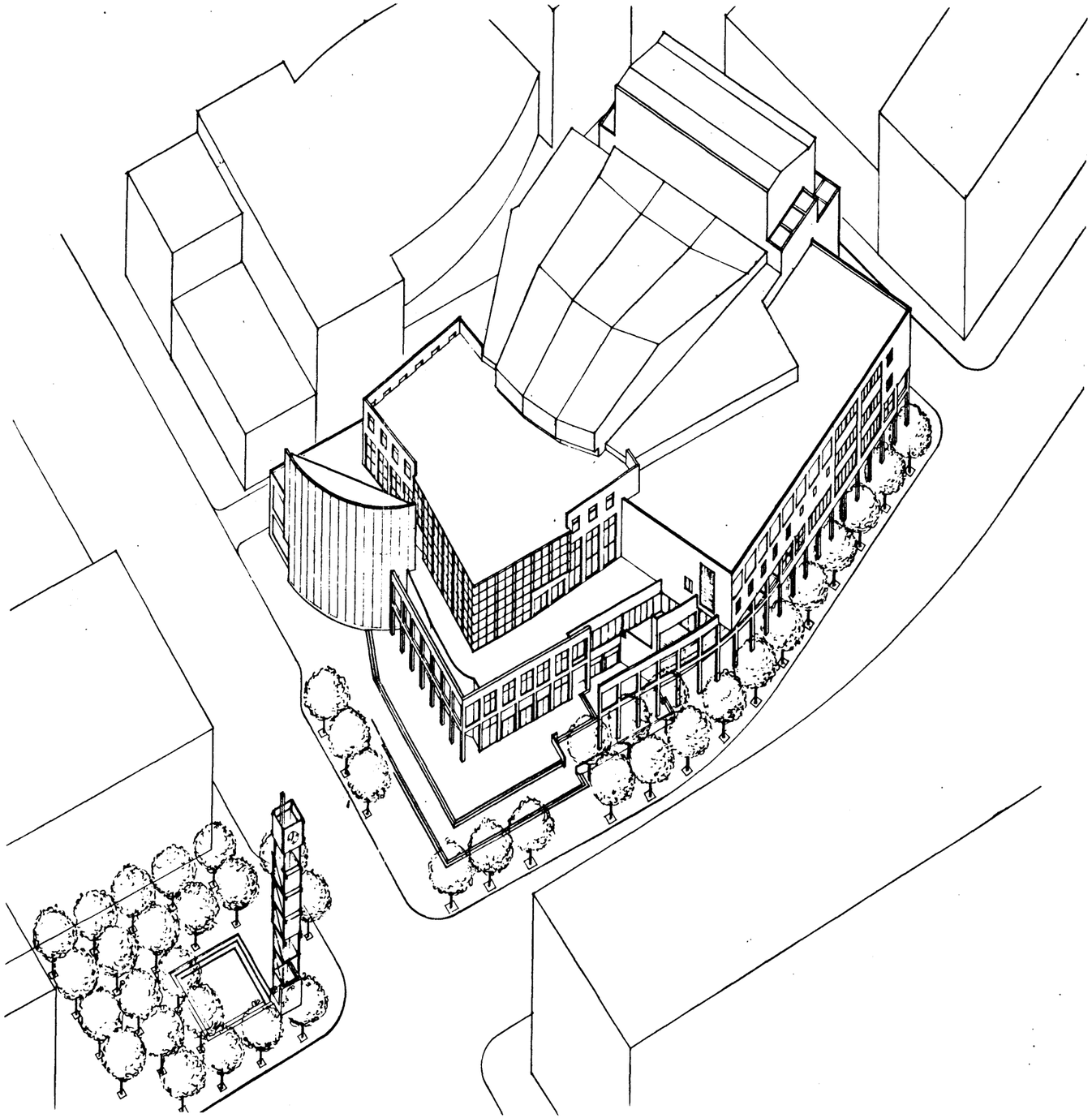

Figure 2.6
AXONOMETRIC

Scale in Feet

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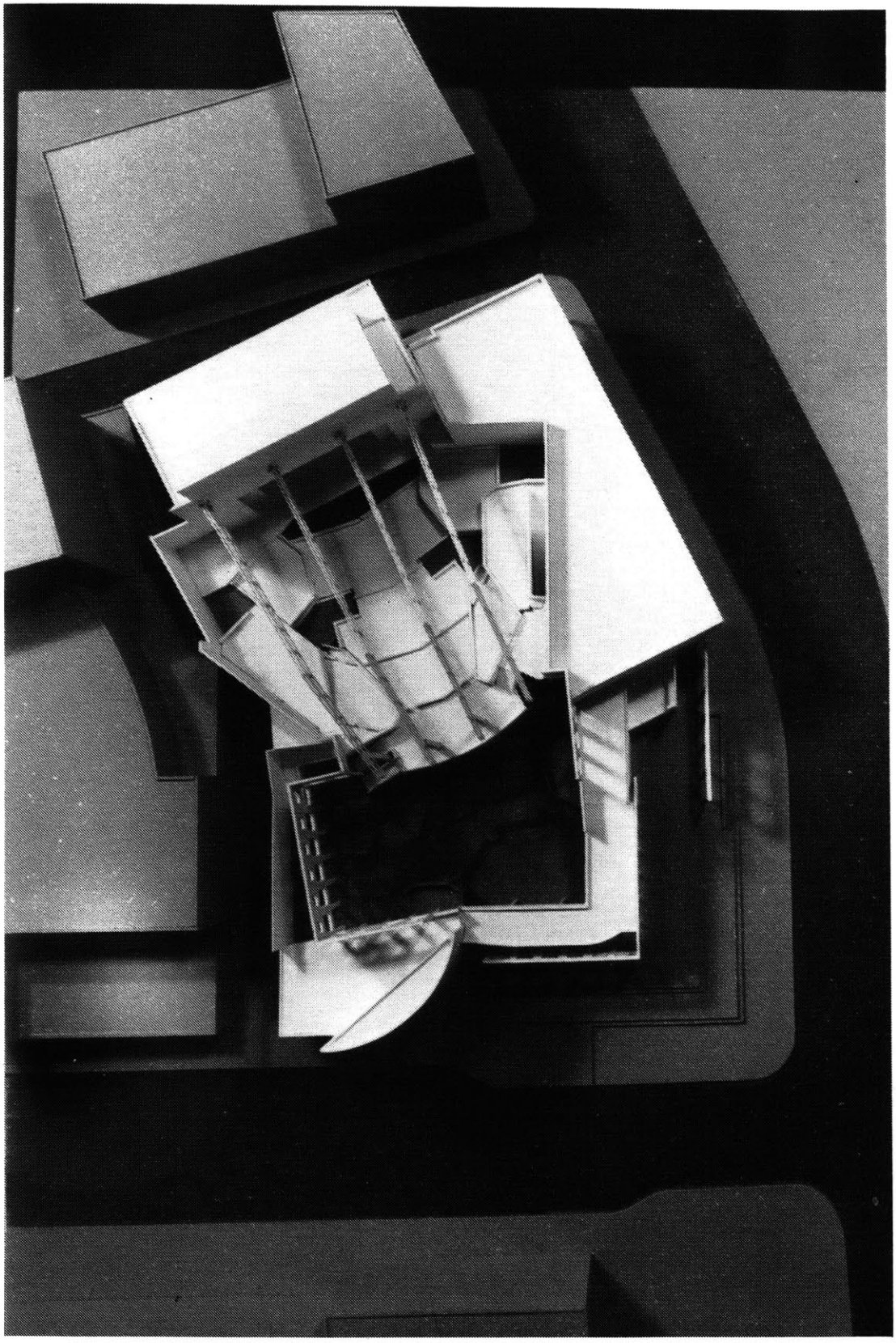


Figure 2.8
MODEL PHOTO
General View

Figure 2.7 (previous page)
MODEL PHOTO
Plan View

Figure 2.9
MODEL PHOTO
General View

Figure 2.10
MODEL PHOTO
Abstraction of Stuart Street Elevation

Figure 2.11
MODEL PHOTO
Detail of Lobby Space

Introduction

The complete design is presented in this chapter, along with a brief description of the metaphor and conceptual order from which it was generated. While the metaphor should be clear enough to make unnecessary extensive explanation of a scheme, it is of interest to divide a building into its components (both conceptual and physical) and to analyze them. Subsequent chapters will clarify how the idea came about and explain the scheme in greater detail; the entire project is exhibited here to provide a reference for that later discussion. In essence, this chapter is a summary of the thesis.

The Idea and Conceptual Order

This thesis proposes as an idea for theater that the building is a metaphorical city superimposed on and connected to the real city. This metaphor arises from two propositions: that the institution of theater represents an image of physical culture as it exists; and that theater may concurrently express an alternative vision of physical, social, or cultural reality. To heighten the experience of theater for the individual and project the nature of the institution to society, architectural form must reflect these propositions despite their inherent opposition. In response, the theater lobby plays the crucial role: it is the center of the microcosm of theater and at the same time an extension of the public space into the building. This is an architectural representation of the nature of theater: an ambiguity is created between the building as a self-

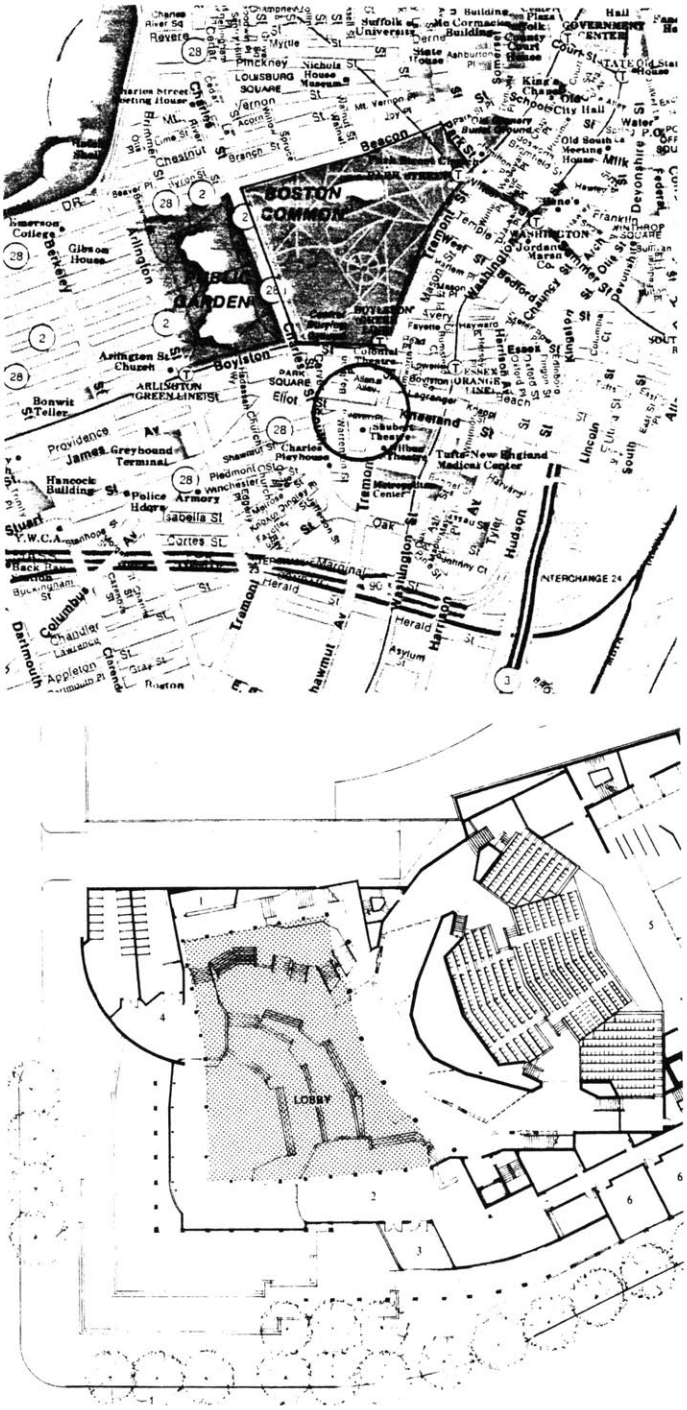


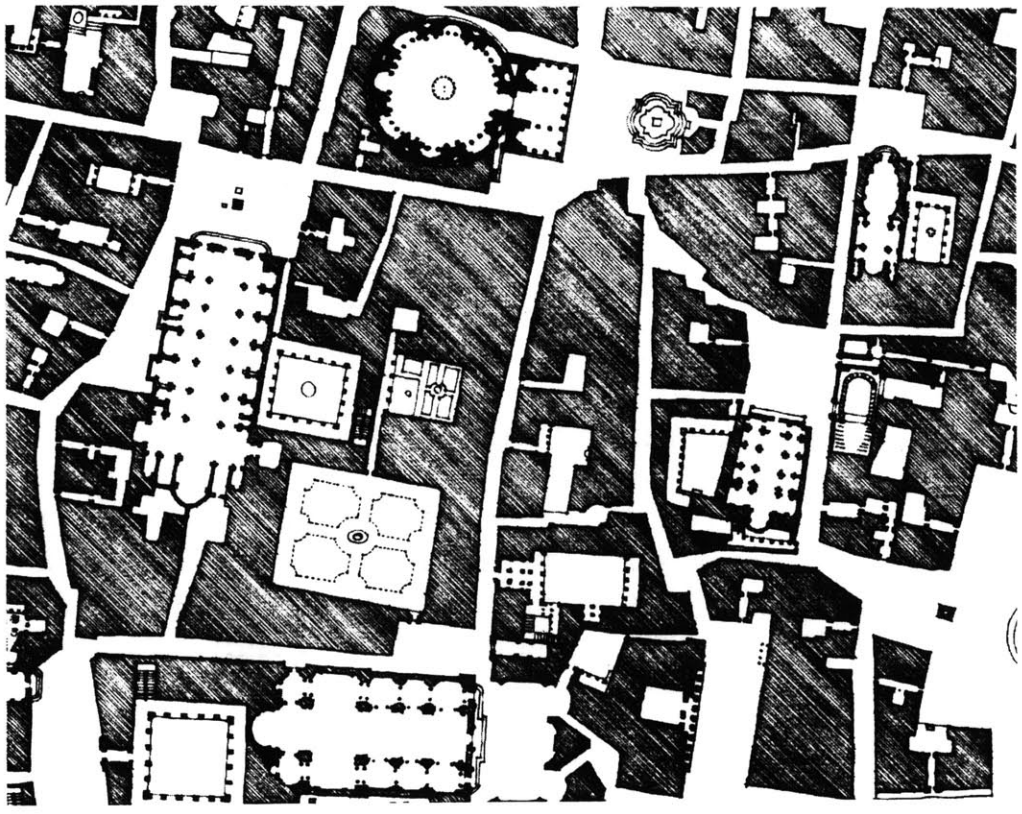
Figure 2.12
The lobby is similar to the Common: both are at once figural urban spaces and responses to the form around them, and both serve as connectors to the fragmented spaces around them. Thus the lobby may be seen as the town plaza at the center of the theater microcosm.

contained metaphorical city and the building as an extension of the public space. This ambiguity is manifested in the lobby, where the real and metaphorical cities co-exist and their meanings collide.

The idea engenders a conceptual order that reflects the stated dichotomy: the lobby may be experienced as the center of an introspective universe entirely removed from the city, or as a public territory with strong connections to the existing fabric. Aspects of both intentions are present in the total design, including some elements which may be individually interpreted either way. The following discussion explains the conceptual order from both view points: theater as a self-contained microcosm and as an extension of the street.

The notion of building as a metaphorical city isolated from the real world is manifested in its internal order and the external expression of that organization. Internally, all programmatic spaces relate to the lobby: to pass from one functional space to another, the theater-goer must first pass through the main lobby. In this sense, the lobby is conceptually and formally similar to the Boston Common. At a physical level, both are formally ambiguous: it is not clear whether they are figural spaces or an expression of the inward pressure of the enveloping fabric. More important, however, are the conceptual similarities: both spaces serve as a physical link between other spaces. The Boston Common is the center of the city: it ties all of the loosely linked neighborhoods together, and citizens relate the surrounding districts to the Common. The

Figure 2.13
A fragment of Nolli's map of Rome. Instead of being pochéd in with the rest of the structures, churches are represented as open space: they are considered an extension of the street, even though they are tightly woven into the city fabric. The theater lobby should be read the same way.



lobby, meanwhile, represents the formal ideocenter of the theater, linking its various parts to one another. It is experienced as the center of our virtual city.

To reflect the metaphor of a self-contained microcosm on the exterior, the outer form assumes its fragmented massing. Elementary composition articulates the building as a collage of discrete parts surrounding the center. Again, form references the larger city. Cities are collages of disparate elements accrued over time; as time passes their uses and meanings alter. The theater massing reflects this trend: it is a composition of forms that suggest both the history of Boston's growth (in the geometry of their collisions) and that history's happily chaotic result (in the spaces contained within them). In short, the exterior form, like the internal order, assumes a prominent aspect of the city. The result is a formal microcosm of Boston, reinforcing the conceptual microcosm of theater that it contains.

While the metaphorical city is created on a large scale by reflecting the order and form of Boston, the idea of theater as an extension of the real city is established at a more localized level: it draws connections to the existing fabric and reinforces the immediate context. The operative principle here is that the lobby is perceived by the public as covered open space; like the basilicas in Nolli's map of Rome, it is a public place, spatially and associatively connected to the open space. To achieve this connection, the theater lobby is experienced not only as the center of the metaphorical city, but also as a part of the outdoor public plaza that has been captured by the enclosing

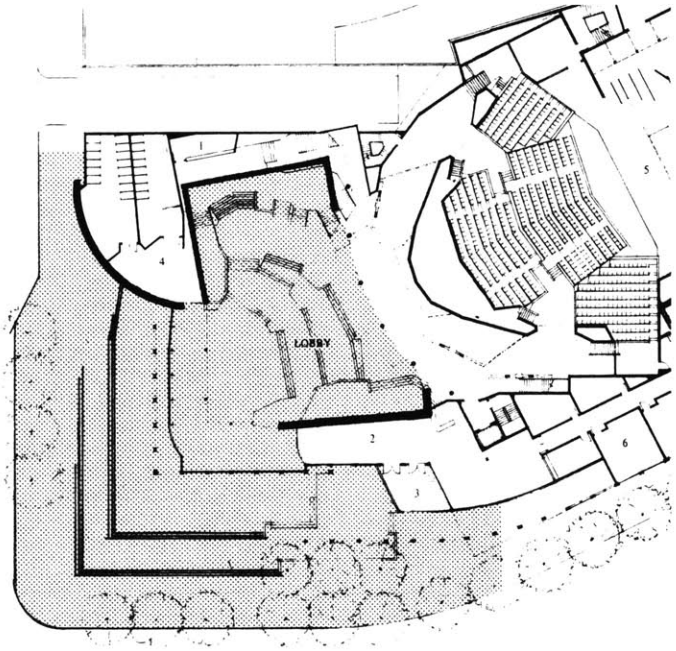


Figure 2.14
The lobby is in one sense part of the public realm, a piece of the plaza that has been captured by the curving sign/form and enclosing screen walls.

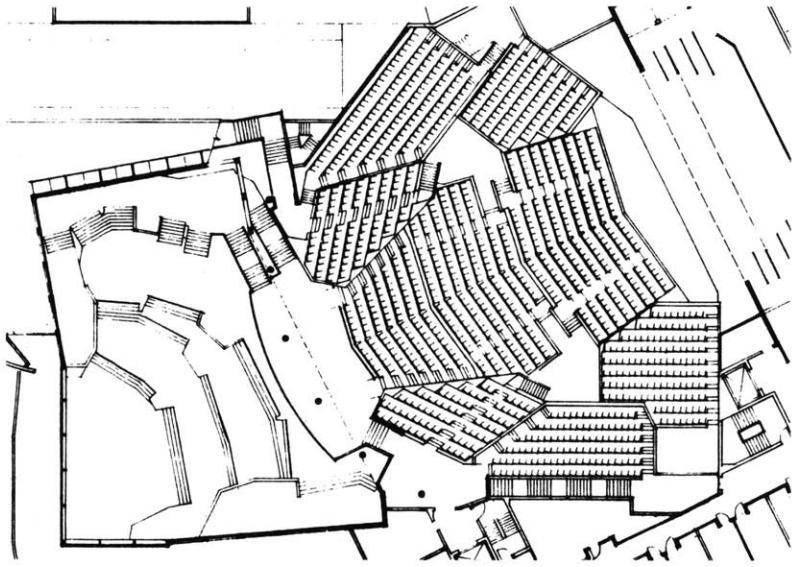


Figure 2.15
The form of the lobby steps begin to suggest seating tiers like the auditorium; this introduces the visitor to the auditorium before arriving in it, and creates a performance space of itself. The lobby experience becomes a part of the performance, or a separate theatrical venue.

screen walls. Though partially contained by those screens, the space may be understood as an extension of the life of the city into the building.

Once the lobby is claimed as public territory, it creates a continuity from street to auditorium. That continuity is spatial: open at its sides facing street and auditorium, the lobby is defined only by the screen walls laterally. Space flows through unhindered from plaza to performance area. The public is invited to enter the lobby; once inside, the auditorium is highly accessible.

The notion of the theater as a part of the real city is heightened by the continuity of form and material established within the lobby by the steps. As they move up through the space, the stairs increasingly assume the geometry and function of the the auditorium seating tiers: they invite the theater-goers to divide into smaller groups within the larger space, and their expressive form creates a strong physical link with the form of the performance area; this serves to relate the lobby to the auditorium.

That link becomes more significant when one considers the possible activities associated with the lobby: the steps transform the space into an independent performance area. This performing space continues outside to the sunken plaza across the street. All three performing areas could be employed simultaneously or linearly: from the least structured (street theater) to the most (proscenium). During such an event, the dramatic experience becomes active: the audience moves between venues rather than remain

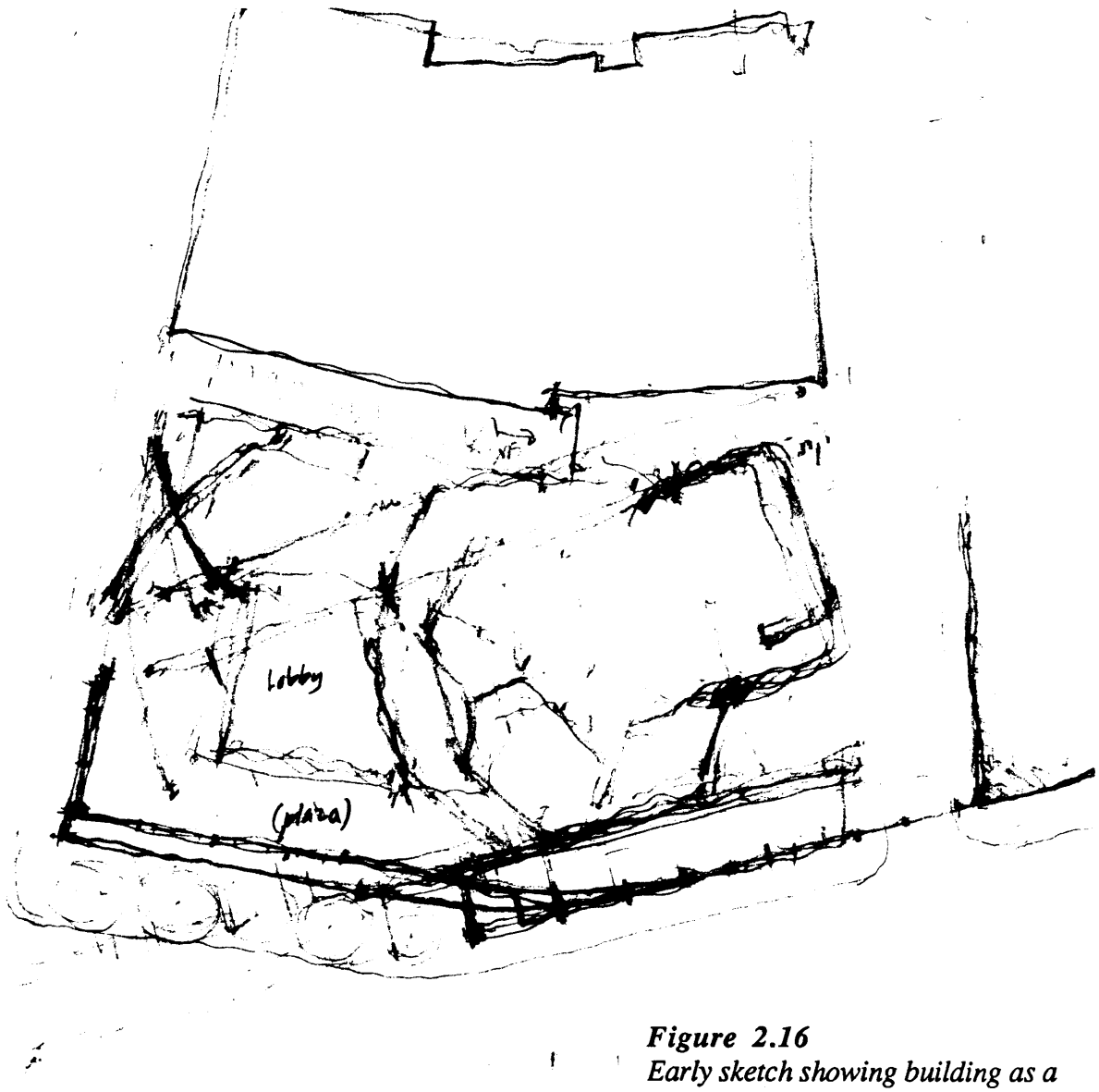


Figure 2.16
Early sketch showing building as a collage of forms and geometries that reinforce the existing context. Individual elements relate to adjacent buildings in scale and geometry, while the massing defines the plaza at the corner and establishes a node.

passively stationary. This interpretation of the lobby represents a complete integration of theater and city: performance moves out of the shoe box and into the street.

The exterior form also reinforces the notion of theater as an extension of the real city by reflecting a strong relationship to context. The elements, which when taken together form a virtual/collage city, individually speak to the existing fabric. Each part shows a concern for immediate context in scale and function and together represent a conscious effort to create a node at the intersection; in this way the new building aspires to establish a center for the entire Theater District. To this end, building massing defines the street edges and steps back at the corner to create a figural urban plaza spanning the intersection. This plaza acts as a center; it and the new theater provide a compelling image for the district as a whole. The attempt to reinforce and draw on existing urban patterns further ties the building to the city.

Thus the conceptual order reveals the design to be an introverted microcosm within a friendly urban building. This ambiguity is an expression of the idea and manifested in the lobby, where form most clearly creates an environment of multiple interpretation. Strong formal, use, and conceptional continuities exist within its articulated character. The continuities of space, movement, form, convey the impression of a building relating to the public realm, while the organization around the lobby implies that it is an introspective system.

Theater-goers will interpret for themselves which

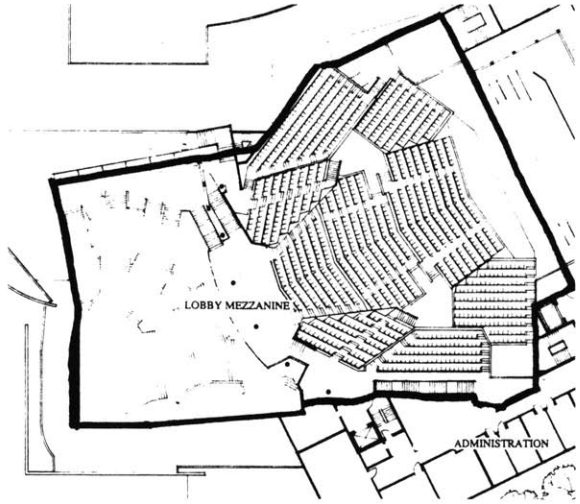
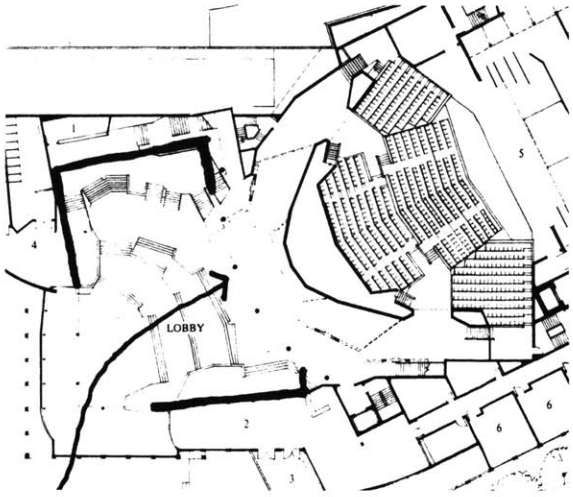


Figure 2.17
The lobby may be experienced as the center of the virtual city or as the connection between street and performing space. Four possible interpretations are as follows (clockwise from top left):
(a) the lobby is a discrete spatial volume independent of either auditorium or street;
(b) it is a foyer space for the auditorium beyond, and the two are closely related and isolated from the street;
(c) it is an enclosed plaza, somewhat removed from the auditorium;
(d) or it is part of a continuous spatial sequence open to both stage and street.



role the lobby plays. Over time its meaning will change: at different periods it will assume alternate identities. Further, this plurality of possible interpretations offers flexibility; it affords drama the opportunity to define its own reality. While theater cannot transform architecture, it can transform our understanding of both architecture and culture. The ability to redefine our interpretation of culture is central to the idea of theater; the ambiguity in this design offers a clear expression of that idea.

Chapter Three

CONSTRUCTING AN IDEA
Creating a Metaphor for Theater

We have no reality outside this illusion--and don't you know your reality today will be illusory tomorrow?

-Luigi Pirandello

Introduction

If, as Hegel generally suggested and Kahn has shown clearly, architecture can express the idea of an institution, then architects should understand the nature of buildings before designing them. We therefore begin the design of a theater with a brief look at the theatrical event. Its purpose is to clarify the central features of the dramatic experience: from this examination an idea may be constructed that reflects upon and heightens the experience architecturally.

To arrive at an appropriate metaphor for theater, this chapter will study drama from the viewpoints of its three participants: the performer (and, by extension, the playwright and director); the theater-goer; and the designer. Each has a different agenda that must be understood: the performer is most concerned with finding a satisfactory expression for the dramatic material; the audience seeks enlightenment and entertainment; and the designer interprets the role of both and brings the two together. The performer's view of theater is established in traditional dramatic theory on the nature of performance, while the theater-goer's view is based on a look at the ritual associated with going to a play. The designer's role is seen in light of past interpretation of architecture in theater. From this tripartite approach a single architectural metaphor for theater will be synthesized.

Theories on Performance

Dramatic theory divides into three approaches. Theater may be interpreted as an idealized

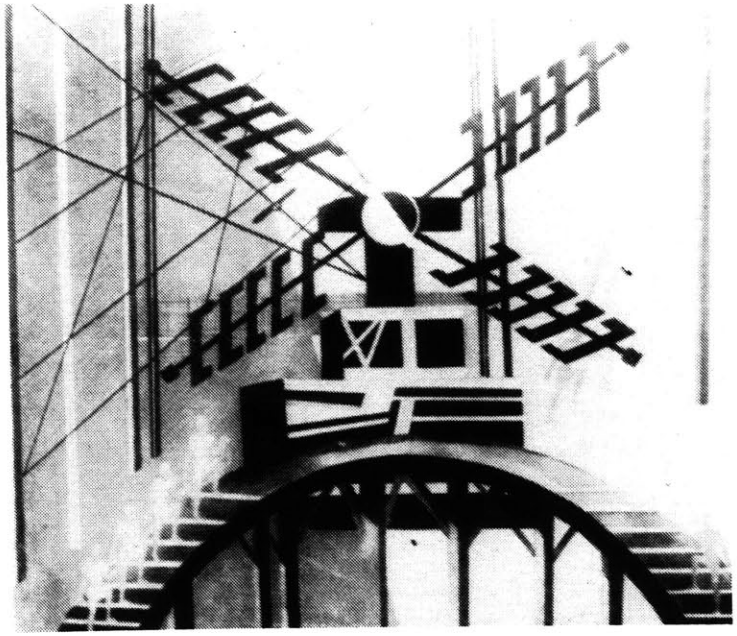


Figure 3.1
Aleksandra Ekster, painting of a planned stage setting. Theater as an expression of technology in culture.

The belief that art reflects reality is as old as Aristotle, yet equally persistent is the hope that art might affect reality as well. Aristotle's Poetics proposes both a mimetic and a cathartic theory of dramatic literature, a means and an end.[3]

representation of culture (utopia), as a social "mirror" in which the existing culture is reflected with varying degrees of accuracy, or as an alienating force whose purpose is to shatter conventional perceptions of reality and thus allow other visions to emerge.[1] Each is a different way of thinking about performance and has implications for both the metaphor and final form of the theater.

There are, however, two common threads to all these positions. All assume that drama, far from being merely a form of entertainment, is a powerful interpreter of culture and society.[2] That power may be employed variously to reinforce or question our notions of society--an element of morality may be discerned here--but none of the three theories challenges drama's ability to achieve such an impact. Additionally, all three accept Aristotle's notion of dramatic catharsis. He suggested that drama's value lies in its ability to play on the audience's emotions: in performance, the excitation of emotion is the precursor to purging it, leaving the viewer restored as well as enlightened.[4] These two common features will help in the construction of a single metaphor for theater.

Probably the most familiar approach in theater is that of idealizing the existing society, or creating a dramatic utopia. This mode rarely presents the existing as ideal per se, but rather its possibility for achieving perfection: the existing culture is abstracted into its purest form, representing the society in an idealized light. The individual exists in an arcadia, and the woes that befall him are of his own creation. The fault really does lie

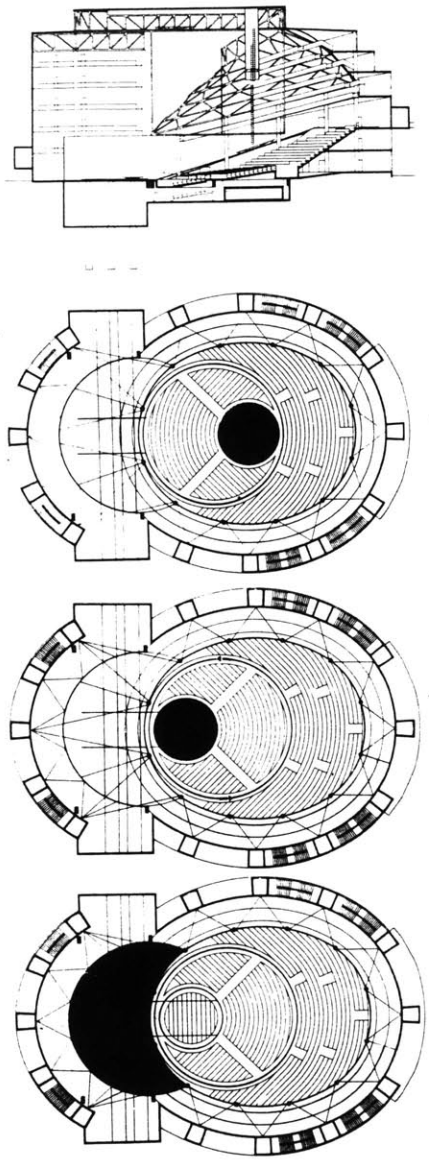


Figure 3.2
Gropius's Total theater, in which the new technology accommodates a flexible theater space. The proscenium issue is transcended.

For 400 years every connection between the auditorium and the stage stopped at the proscenium, as if it were the boundary line between two different worlds that must on no account be overstepped. On one side was the world of the theater, mysterious, esoteric, hinting at obscure and secret doings; and on the other, the world of the audience, the secular lord, the simple citizen, the customer, the consumer.[6]

"not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings".

In this dramatic approach the proscenium represents a divider both real and metaphysical, physically dividing the actors from audience and the utopia of the stage from the real world of the auditorium.[5] The separation heightens the sense of utopia being projected. This approach may be most familiar because it readily lends itself to the modern legitimate theater, where a proscenium is used for technical reasons; it permits a rapid transformation of stage settings and allows easier direction of large performances..

Theater as a social mirror, on the other hand, attempts to take a more independent position. It concentrates on providing an image of society as it is: the proscenium becomes a window into the culture. Instead of a utopia, society is seen in all its iniquity as well as glory. Some critics have suggested that the term "mirror" is misleading: it implies complete objectivity in an area where objectivity is impossible. Theater as a lens is offered instead: the drama depicts culture more or less accurately, while intensifying and occasionally distorting it.[7] Depending on the dramatic material, the performance magnifies some aspects of society, muting others.

This is a more socially neutral stance than utopia: drama attempts to present life without glorifying the existing system. The attempt, however, ultimately fails; although it does not accept the existing society as the ideal, it does not really question that order. The social mirror or lens theory serves to perpetuate conventional views of society merely by representing them. It may

In Marinetti's "manifesto of the variety of theater" (1913), the destruction of time and of scenic space is an introduction to the "schock technique" and to an exchange between reality and artificiality based on surprise. In 1915 Marinetti himself, with Settimelli and Corra, enunciated the principles of the futurist synthetic theater, underlining the irruption into the performance itself "of the reality which vibrates around us, assailing us with the gusts of fragmentary facts combined together, wedged into one another, tangled up and rendered chaotic".[10]

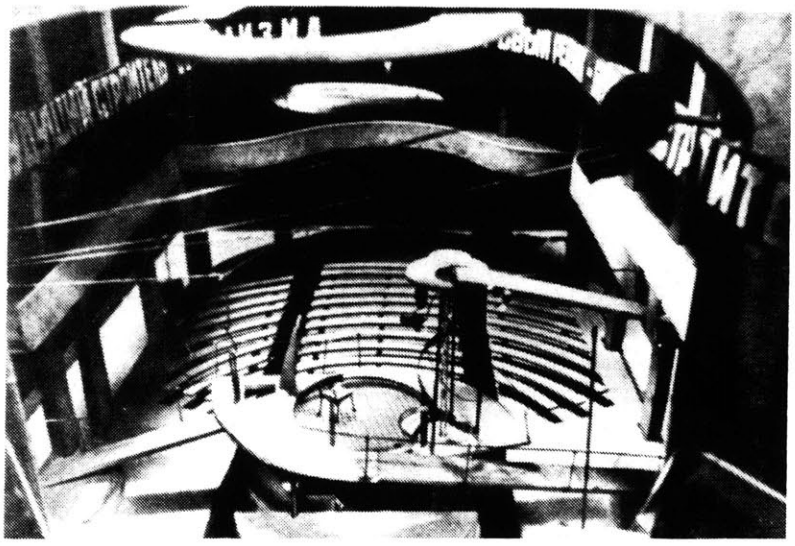


Figure 3.3
Lissicky, stage setting for Meyerchol'd's theater. Performance occurs on ramps all around the spectators, enveloping them in the real.

display doubts about society, but it reinforces that system nonetheless.[8]

This dialectic troubles many avant-garde theorists. They postulate that reality is personal; each individual has a different perception of society, and thus it is not possible to have a uniform view of culture. Theater should not perpetuate a false image of reality; instead it should break down that certainty and allow alternate visions to emerge. The avant-garde movement destroys conventional notions of reality by challenging and reinterpreting them to provoke a highly individual reaction from the viewer. Rather than present the drama as a series of actions occurring consecutively in discrete locations, it proposes that both time and space are perceptual.[9] Actions that occur linearly in time might be transposed in performance and divorced spatially; alienation is sought.

To further the estrangement of viewer from conventional society, the avant-garde breaks down barriers between actor and audience. This removes the viewer from her traditional relationship with drama, encouraging her to consider alternate possibilities.[11] Physical alterations to the theater form are often employed: the proscenium may be removed, and seating tiers surround the stage to increase interaction between individual members of the audience and performers. Because theater spaces are seen as copies of life rather than a continuation of it, some directors have eschewed the theater form altogether, preferring a space completely devoid of cultural representation.[12] The problem still remains though:

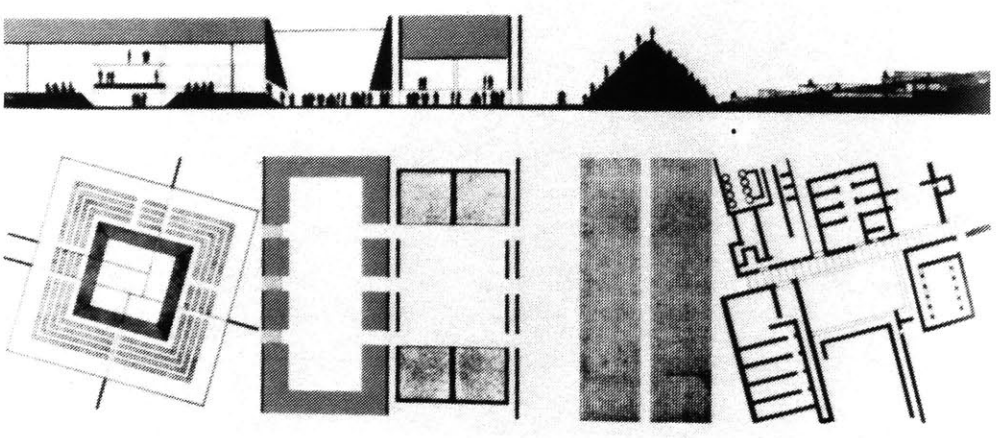


Figure 3.4
Gae Aulenti's proposal for a theater with 5 discrete performance spaces. The audience moves between these venues, increasing its participation in the event.

Although the external skeleton of a play is fixed within the dialog the playwright has written for it,the meaning imparted to the audience differs with each new production, and with each performance of a production: each dramatic image created on the stage is unique and cannot be repeated....[14]

while increased interaction between performer and viewer is actively pursued by the performers, most dramatic performance still requires passivity on the part of the audience. Thus the interaction achieved is generally passive. Until the entire form of drama is recast, even the avant-garde is a compromise.[13]

These are three elemental views of theater, each with its inherent difficulty for the theorist. Despite their differences over the role of drama in society, in all of them one basic tenet is present: drama has the power to influence our perception of the culture in which we exist. The theater is a world in which the nature of society is subject to interpretation, and it is the role of drama to offer an interpretation. The dramatic form establishes a microcosm of society: the performance then dictates whether the world is understood as a utopia, fixed reality, or a set of conventions to be constantly challenged. The power of definition exists within the drama to achieve any of these ends. If architecture represents a physical manifestation of culture in society, drama's power to define and redefine culture implies that theater architecture must accommodate this ambiguity; cultural representation should be the work of the performer, not the architect.

The Ritual

Dramatic theory may be an intellectual exercise to its performers, but the theater-goer's involvement is experiential. The audience does not see theater as an abstract concept in cultural representation; it views theater as entertainment. Drama should enlighten, stimulate, and possibly even be therapeutic, yet it

The audience is a momentary unity of tastes...with a collective response to art.[15]

Figure 3.5
A setting for the Bauhaus Theater, by Oskar Schlemmer.

remains an event in which one participates for enjoyment. Further, if one accepts Aristotle's cathartic theory, the audience's emotions are affected by the performance: in attending the theater, the viewer implicitly agrees to having her emotions manipulated. The conclusion one reaches is that the public's image of drama is based on its experience of attending the performance, rather than grounded in theory, and the best way to represent that view is through a narrative describing participation in the event. What follows, then, is a narrative of the way we attend theater.

We arrive by taxi, tram, or on foot: never by private automobile -- that is cinema. We enter the foyer, highly visible to the street and brightly lighted; by its activity it serves as a beacon to the city that a performance is scheduled. Tickets are claimed at the desk and coats are checked. All of these actions bring us into a community: each is more specific to the drama than the previous and thus brings us into contact with other members of the audience.

As we pass through the ticket gate and into the main lobby we realize there is no going back; in the simple act of surrendering our ticket we have entered a different world. The difference is understood: we are now members of the Audience, acquiring a group identity to accompany our individuality. From here we may proceed directly to our seats if we are late, or to the restroom or refreshment bar. But we always come early to spend a few minutes in the lobby -- chatting with acquaintances about the performance (we always pick up a program for perusal), spotting celebrities, or watching the crowd as it arrives.

Seats are taken and the performance begins. We watch, absorbed by the action but not completely transfixed, remaining conscious of others around us. As the drama unfurls we establish an empathy

Luigi Pirandello's

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Directed by Robert Brustein
Sets and costumes by Michael H. Yeargan
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September 24 - October

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Translated by Eric Ber
Directed by Andrei Se
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with the players, identifying with the cast and perhaps relating our experiences to the events occurring on stage. This interaction is individual and highly personal, but we are aware that others feel it too. The play evinces thoughts and emotions from each of us: though private, in the auditorium these feelings assume a collective force that heightens their effect on everyone.

At intermission the lobby again fills with the audience, and the crowd is very social. We make a trip to the restroom and to the bar; while waiting, we speak to the person in front of us, whom we now consider a neighbor. Whatever we may do during intermission, we always return to the lobby: it is the focal point of all these activities.

As the lights dim, we return to our seats. We are now even more conscious of belonging to this group called the Audience and react more strongly in unison, even though we each find different meaning in the drama. The play is stimulating: the author and director have done their work well. We are enmeshed in the characters and their stories; the actors are not playing parts but acting out life on the stage before us. Their stories have a hold on us, drawing us in deeper as the play progresses. The interaction grows, and a crackling tension fills the auditorium, culminating in the final scene when resolution is at hand. As the lights come up, we feel a sense of release: the drama no longer has a hold on our emotions. We are free to leave, taking our shared experience with us.

We return to the lobby with the crowd, discussing the play and our reactions. There are side exits, but few people use them. It is late; we should go, yet we linger in the lobby a moment longer, enjoying for a few more minutes the experience. Then we gather our coats and exit into the night.

From the theater-goer's perspective, the power of drama is in its ability to be a collective event while remaining a highly personal emotional experience.

The role of architects was never subsidiary to that of the playwrights, directors, or actors; the architects' share in the development of the theatrical form has always been primary and determinative...they tried to find the architectural form appropriate to the trend of each period and adapt it to the latest technological developments and to current social conditions.[18]

Although watching the performance itself may be personal and engrossing, most of the ritual of theater-going involves interacting with other members of the audience as much as with the performers; this shapes the audience into a community.[16] To this end, theater becomes a microcosm of society whose focus of activity is the lobby space. This is where the communal aspects of drama are most evident: any synthetic idea for a theater must account for the importance of the lobby in the audience's experience. At the same time, however, the watching of the drama is personal: the performance has different meaning to those watching. This implies that the possibility of different interpretation must be present; to heighten the experience of drama, the individual must be allowed to dissent.

Architectural Interpretations

Since the Renaissance architects have taken a central role in the development of western theater. From the first architectural theory in Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* to John Hejduk or Gae Aulenti's recent conceptualization of performance, designers have participated in the evolution of drama.[17] Advances in dramatic theory have paralleled developments in architectural thinking: consequently theater architecture has, like drama, reflected changing perceptions of culture; designers have assisted in the reformulation of society through theater design.

Renaissance architects developed a key precept of theater that has shaped its role ever since: theater is

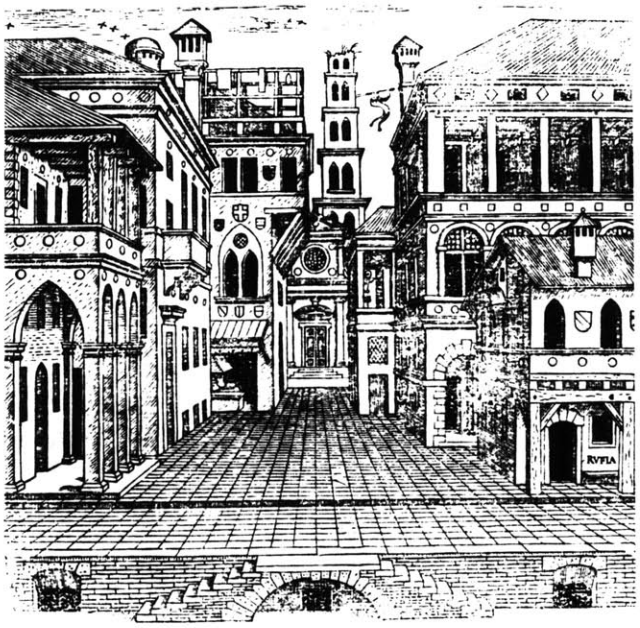


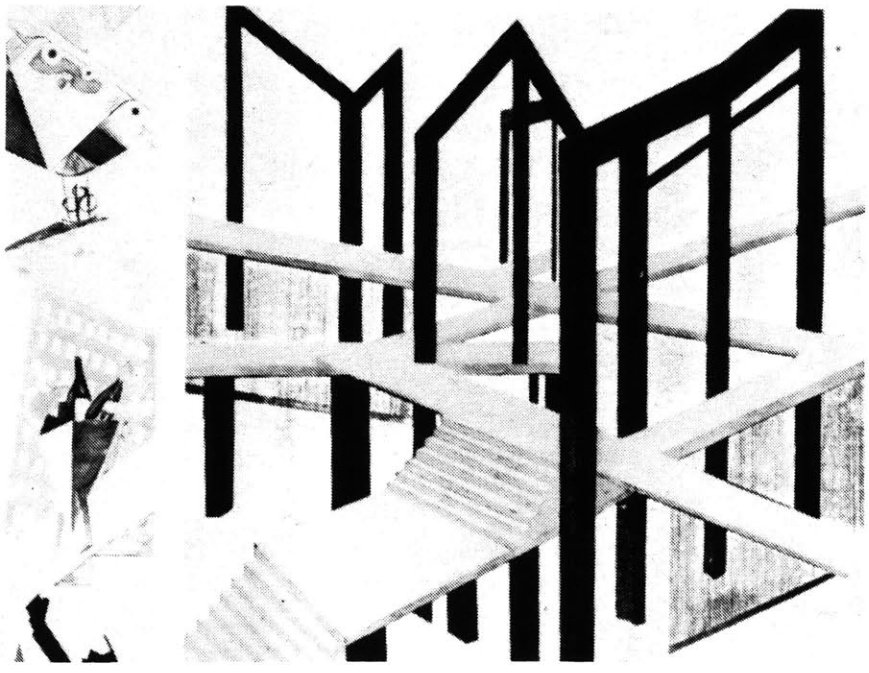
Figure 3.6
Serlio's designs for stage settings. Top, tragic scene; below, comic scene. The theater represents culture: both its own form and the form of the production it contains express a representation.

seen as a quintessential urban institution, perhaps the most urban of all institutions. First Alberti and then Serlio created its position as such. In his treatise on architecture Alberti recognized the power of drama as a humanizing force in society, placing theater at the center of urban culture: "I imagine our Ancestors instituted publick Shows in the City, not so much for the Sake of Diversions themselves, as for their Usefulness" in bringing the citizens "together in Friendship and Humanity."[19] Theater is accepted as a necessary and desirable part of the urban fabric.

Serlio not only embraces this position but extends it in his manuscript. Theater belongs in the city and is of the city: it becomes a vehicle to represent civic culture. He manifests this conclusion in his famed stage sets. His designs were generic, representing an image of culture rather than a specific place: "Serlio's stage designs are not realistic representations of a city street...what the stage represents is an idea of man made visible. Man is placed in a universe that is unified, harmonious, and coherent. The stage recreates this ideal universe, is itself a microcosm where that universe is held steady for man's gaze."[20] Thus the theater is a continuation of the city, a microcosm representing the life of the place, its values, its culture. The parallel between dramatic theory and architecture is now evident: as drama strives to represent life through performance, architecture attempts the same through form.

Serlio's model was accepted as more or less complete for almost four centuries. Drama developed

Figure 3.7
Aleksandra Ekster, sketch for Tairov's theater: theatrical constructivism expresses its own separation from reality; estrangement hinges on presenting an unbuildable utopia.



The actual place of the theater itself will have to be dissolved into the city.[24]

and evolved; the operatic form uniting performance and music was introduced. Architectural styles changed, practitioners came and went, technology improved, and theater form changed with the times, but no one questioned the basic premise of performer, audience, and civic culture established by Serlio.

It was not until the first decades of this century that a significant change occurred in architectural thinking. The crumbling of positivism that science wrought was accompanied by a reevaluation of conventional perceptions of culture: as the implications of Einstein's universe became better understood, all certainty vanished.[21] Early modernists, obsessed with finding an architectural expression of the new age, saw the distinction between reality and perception as their key. They concluded that physical setting plays a significant role in the perception of drama, accepting the Einsteinian maxim that one's vision of reality depends on one's vantage point. Again paralleling dramatic theory (the theater avant-garde had its origins in this period[22]), architects sought to destroy conventional images of culture in theater form. From Mel'nikov's constructivist Moscow central theater to Gropius and Piscator's exploration of the rational in the Totaltheater, the goal was to present a divergent vision of culture.[23]

It is important to note that these visions supplemented, not supplanted, Serlio's. Their conscious intent was to be provocative, to promote catharsis, yet they fully accepted Serlio's charge of responsibility; theater was still a vehicle for exploring culture and an expression of urbanism. The vision they espoused was provocative, perhaps, but not dismissive: the early

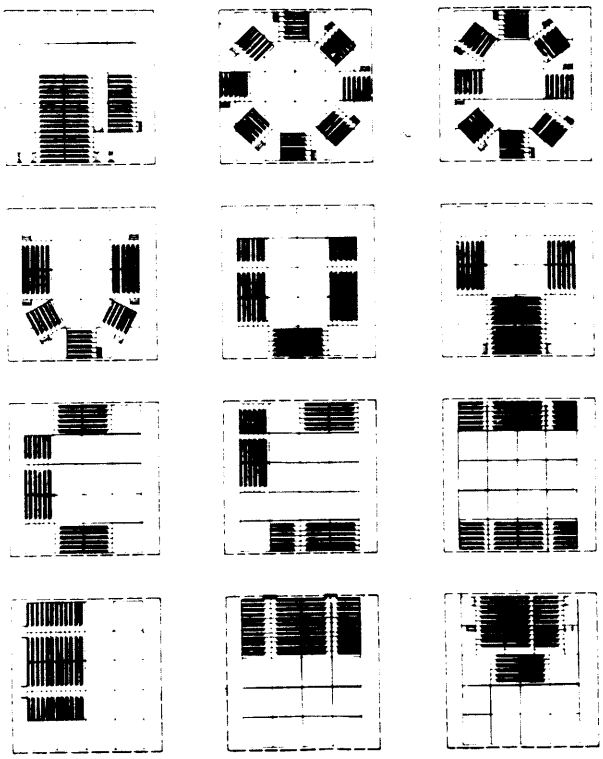


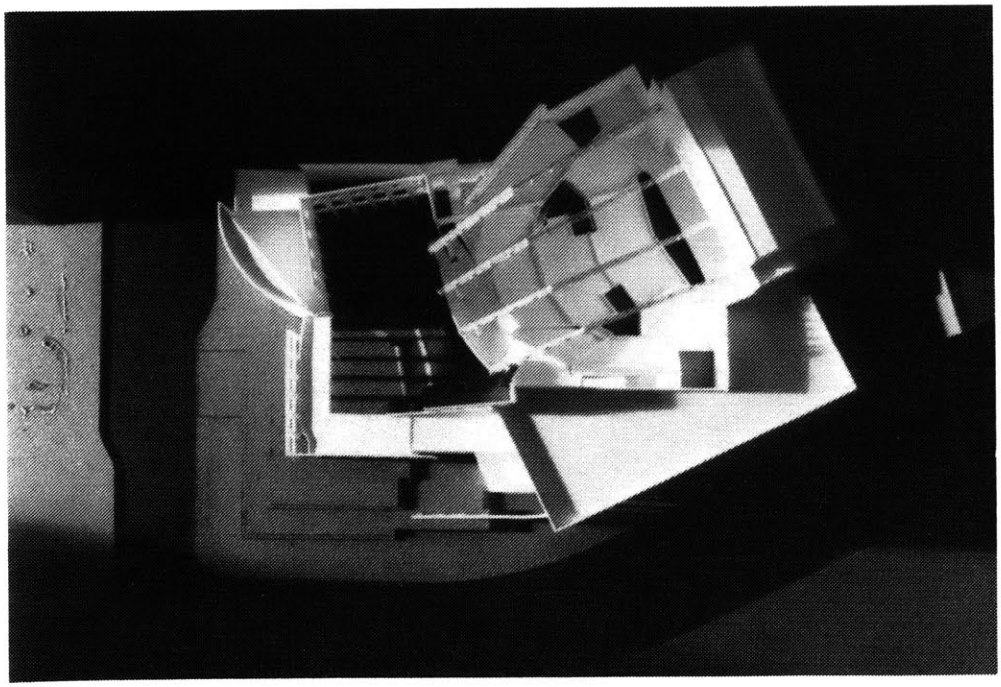
Figure 3.8
Experimental Theater: The National Theater , Hungary.

modernists sought to service the avant-garde without rejecting all that went before.[25]

Some contemporary architects have carried on in this tradition: theater-in-the-round, adaptable theaters, and exploratory spaces represent the trend toward increased interaction between performer and watcher desired by avant-garde theorists.[26] Hejduk's exploration of conceptual theaters has tested the limits, prompting one to question at what point the experience ceases to be drama and becomes something else.[27] This exploration ends in the same dilemma facing avant-garde theory: what is the essence of drama and how does theater achieve it? For the dramatic artist it is a question of performance, for the architect, one of form. The two are tightly linked.

Architects, then, have played an integral part in shaping the development of theater form. From the early Renaissance designers have positioned theater as a microcosm of the city, reinforcing both its urban character and its station as a model of civic culture; this formulation determined the shape of theater for centuries and is still held valid today. Closely tied to the evolution of dramatic theory, theater design and theory have informed each other; for example some designers have supported the shift toward a more interactive view of performance, adopting the theory that the theater space itself influences perception. Still, even most avant-garde designers accept Alberti and Serlio's basic premises.

Figure 3.9
Proposed new theater in Boston: a theater that is at once an isolated microcosm and an integral part of the city.



Synthesizing an Idea

We have now polled the three participants in theater design: performer, audience member, architect. Each represents a different, although related, opinion on the nature of dramatic experience; a good architectural idea for theater should accommodate and synthesize the salient features of all three. To the theorist, theater is a vehicle to express a socio-cultural message, perhaps by altering the viewers' perception of reality, in which ambiguity in form permits dramatic impact. To the theater-goer, it is a form of collective entertainment in which the audience represents a microcosm of society. The architect finds in theater a method to explore urban culture; the theater inhabits the city and comments on it.

I propose that theater represents at once a continuation of the real city and a symbolic representation of that city. It is an integral part--both physically and culturally--of the urban fabric it rests in, but it is also a separate microcosm expressive of the culture and values in which it exists. It may be experienced by its users as a sort of vessel which floats in the city but has no connection to it, or as a series of enclosed public spaces closely related to the exterior. Thus it is a metaphorical city superimposed on the real city and connected to that city, responding to several different roles simultaneously.

This idea accepts the various theories of dramatic performance established above. It may be seen as a model of an ideal culture, as a comment on the existing, or as an extension of the existing; which role is correct is entirely dependent on one's individual perspective.

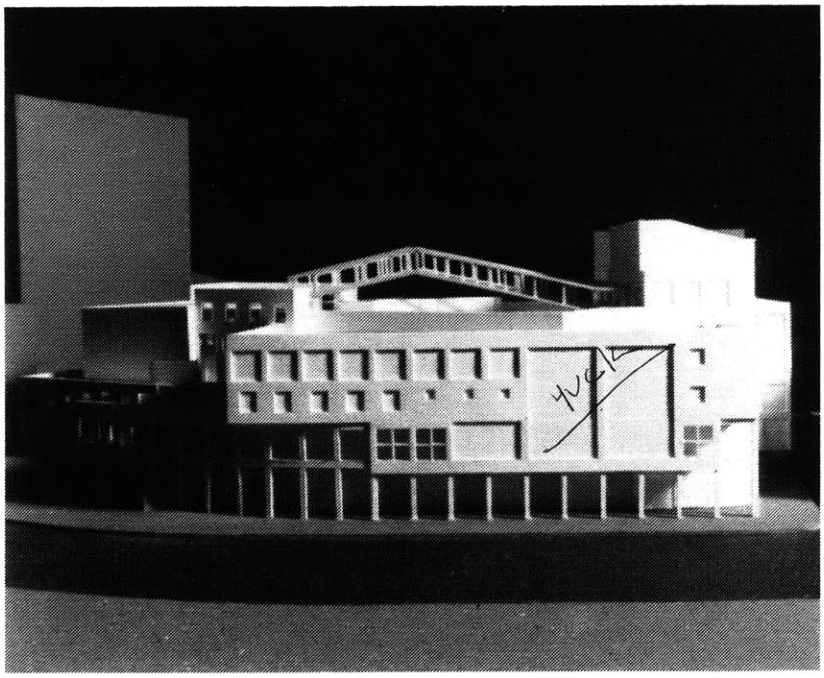


Figure 3.10
The new theater's city face; behind it a separate reality exists.

The alternatives allow the performance to determine that perspective; the architecture remains ambiguous. In proposing a microcosm overlaid on the existing city, the metaphor also recognizes the sense of community established by the audience. The metaphorical world retains theater's collective nature: the audience becomes the populace of an idealized society. At the same time, it remains part of the real environment; the theater may be interpreted as an extension of reality rather than a symbolically separate entity.

The theater as a metaphorical city within the real city contains the inherent dichotomy of theater: like drama, it is at once an extension of life and a copy of it. The metaphorical city is a copy; the real city is an extension of life. The lobby is the pivotal space in this duality: it speaks to both real and metaphorical worlds at once and is the locus where the two overlap. It is identified with the real city as a public space, an extension of the life of the street. It speaks to the microcosm as the center of the metaphorical city; it is the main square and focus of activity within the fantasy world. Finally, it the place where these two very different interpretations mesh, the connection between the metaphor and reality.

The auditorium is a reflection of what meaning one finds in the lobby: it is either an isolated space entirely removed from the world around it or the termination of a spatial progression that begins at the street. This allows the drama to determine for itself what its relationship to the outside world is: whether it is a utopia, a mirror, or an extension of reality.

Chapter Four

WHAT THE CITY SAID
An Analysis of Context and Culture

I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past.

-Italo Calvino

Figure 4.1
Central Boston. Theater site is in the circled area, at the intersection of Tremont and Stuart Streets.

Introduction

The idea of a metaphorical city superimposed on the real city suggests that the form and culture of Boston are central to the ultimate form of the theater. Further, if the metaphor itself is to achieve clarity, it will have to draw on the existing city. It is therefore appropriate to begin with an analysis of the larger city. There are clues to be found in the existing fabric; if we uncover them they will tell us how to start. Understanding Boston's urban fabric will both provide some basic principles to guide the design as it advances and strengthen the metaphor; this is what the city said.

The proposed theater site is located at the corner of Stuart Street and Tremont Streets in the Theater District, one block south of Boston Common. Stuart Street travels east-west, parallel to Boylston Street; Tremont Street travels approximately north-south in the vicinty of the site, and arrayed along it in this area are most of the theaters in Boston. With this basic orientation, we consider the city.

The City and Theater District

Central Boston is a peninsula composed of several distinct districts radiating away from the Common. Each district has a strong sense of place but poor edge definitions: although virtually all Bostonians can articulate images of the various areas and those images are remarkably unified, Kevin Lynch has noted that very few residents can define with any certainty where boundaries between districts lie. Instead, they tend to relate the various areas of the city to the Common: it is

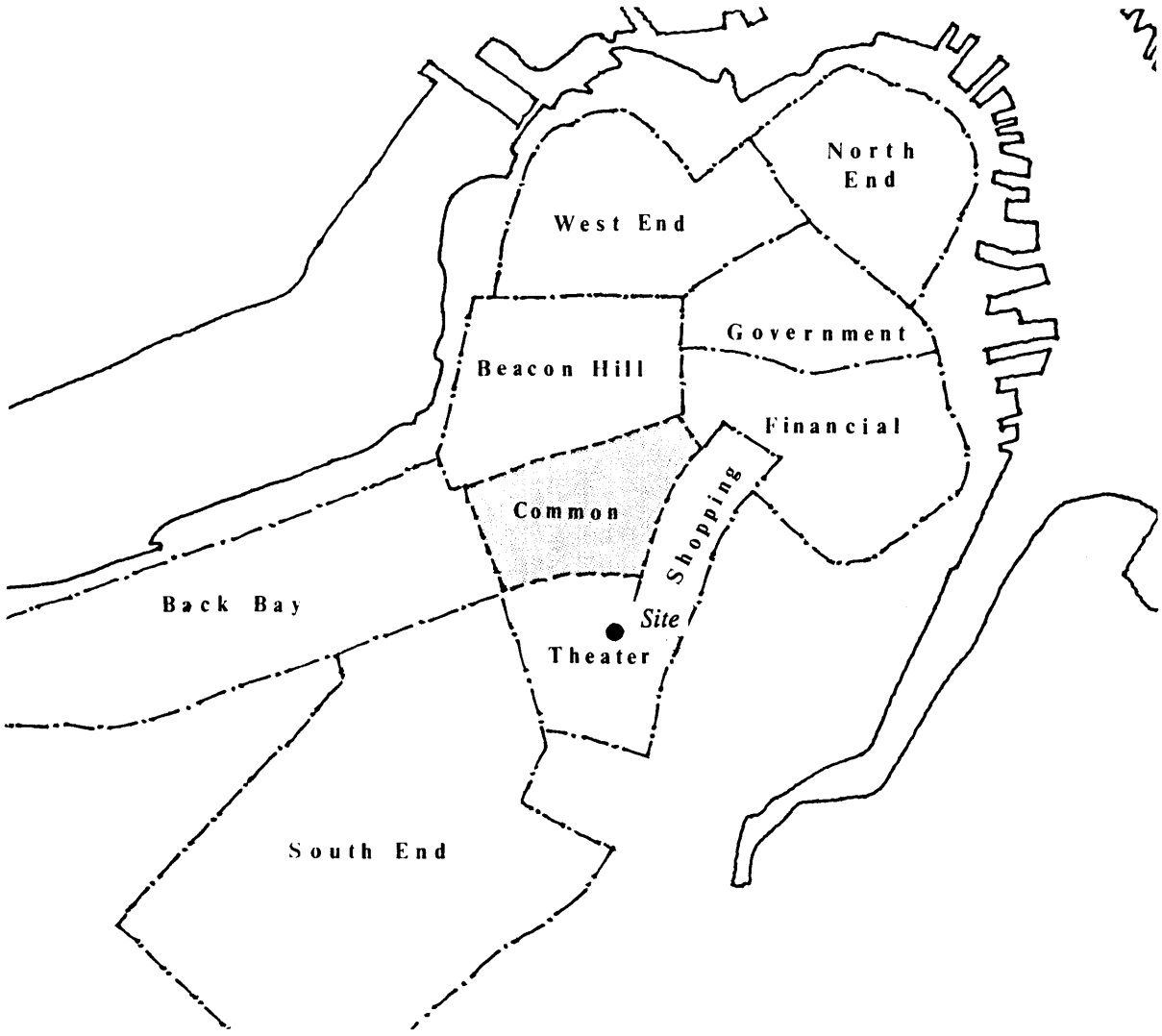


Figure 4.2
Districts in central Boston. The connections between these districts are generally poor; most people do not relate them to one another. Instead, the whole city is seen in connection to the Common.

the geographic and mnemonic center of Boston.[1] Thus the city is seen by its inhabitants as several culturally and physically distinct neighborhoods that are incompletely linked except by the open space at its heart.

The strong sense of place associated with each area may be attributed to the unity of the fabric contained within. There are four basic elements that act in concert to establish a strong image for a district: the existence of a relatively coherent street grid and system of open space; continuity and similarity in building massing and dimensions; consistency in the pattern of use; and consistency in the formal vocabulary and materials employed.[2] Anyone familiar with Boston will immediately recognize this as a description of the Back Bay, and though Olmsted's masterpiece may be the epitome of all these features, they exist to some degree in most of the districts.

The major exception in Boston is the area known variously as the Theater District, Park Square area, or South Bay. (It will be referred to as the Theater District here, the name bestowed upon it perhaps hopefully by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.) For purposes of analysis, it is defined as the precinct immediately south of the Common and Public Garden, between Arlington Street to the west and Washington Street to the east and north of the Massachusetts Turnpike.[3] Of all the major districts in the city, the Theater District is most conspicuous for its lack of identity: Lynch found that few people could name the area or offer a description of its character or geometry.

Figure 4.3
Major street grids in central Boston. The highly regular Back Bay geometry is introduced to the Theater District by Boylston, Charles, and Stuart Streets; Columbus Avenue terminates in Park Square; and Tremont Street transitions from the downtown grid to the South End in the area.

Most, in fact, did not even know of its existence; the Back Bay, South End, and downtown districts are not understood to collide in the area.[4] To many residents there is a conceptual void in the city south of the Common.

This is not surprising: the area fails all of the tests established above for creating a strong sense of place. The basic problem of the Theater District has to do with the geometry and street pattern of Boston. Far from having its own street grid, the district is the collision point of three conflicting city geometries: Boylston, Charles, and Stuart Streets intrude from the west with the orientation of Back Bay; Tremont and Washington Streets are major elements of the downtown grid; and Columbus Avenue bisects the district as it sets up the South End pattern. These systems meet in the heart of the Theater District, precluding it from having a pattern of its own, and the result is predictable for its chaos: virtually no two streets in the area are parallel and open spaces are poorly defined. The Common may be the ideographic center of Boston, but the Theater District is the geographic hinge from which much of the city rotates.

The lack of a rational grid may be easily overlooked, and in fact may be desirable for its richness (as it is in the North End), if other elements conspire towards unity; in the Theater District they do not. Perhaps because of the lack of order in the street pattern, consistency in dimension and massing is absent: the area is characterized by twenty story structures competing with small buildings. Any semblance of rhythm and dimensions is interrupted by these

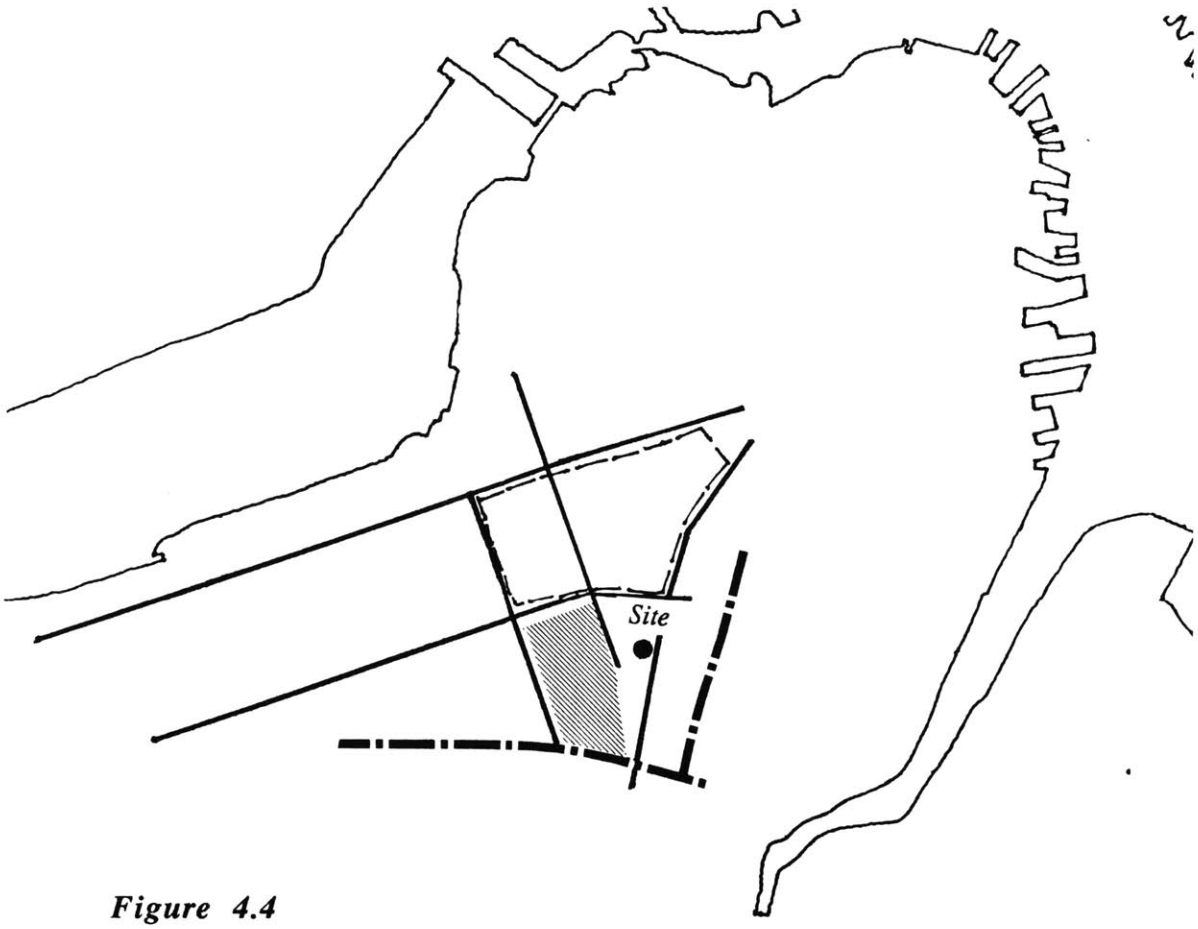


Figure 4.4
Edges and urban confusion in the Theater District. Hatching indicates area where urban fabric is most confused. Broken lines represent hostile edges: the Mass Pike to the south and Washington Street to the east.

Figure 4.5 *(right)*
View from site looking west shows disruption: buildings at odd angles to the street, lack of consistency in dimensions, and street views are disjointed.

juxtapositions. No primary use exists in the area: the district is a pastiche of building types and uses, from the Tufts Medical Center on Washington Street to the unfortunately tall Howard Johnson's hotel in Park Square. In between are shops, offices, light industry, residences, and the theaters.

The result is an area of urban chaos, especially in the vicinity of Park Square (the western half of the district), where the fabric is most disrupted by the clash of geometries. The confusion effectively creates a barrier between the Theater District and the Back Bay: vistas are obstructed, and both the pedestrian and vehicular traverse are almost impossible. The isolation is heightened by the Massachusetts Turnpike; it severs all connection in the fabric to the south, and presents an unfriendly and uncompromising edge to the district. To the east, Washington Street also presents an isolating edge, although it is more forgiving than the turnpike. Here the edge is created by hostile architecture, dilapidation, and disjointedness in the streetscape. In short, the Theater District is isolated on three sides; its only strong connection to the city is along Tremont Street to Boston Common.

One concludes that the Theater District lacks identity in the conceptual map of Boston because it lacks a strong pattern in the urban fabric. Since the mind is unable to project a "normal" order on the area, it is unable to create an image.[5] One major step to remedy this problem is to create a compelling sense of place that residents will associate with the area, not unlike the role Commonwealth Avenue plays in the Back

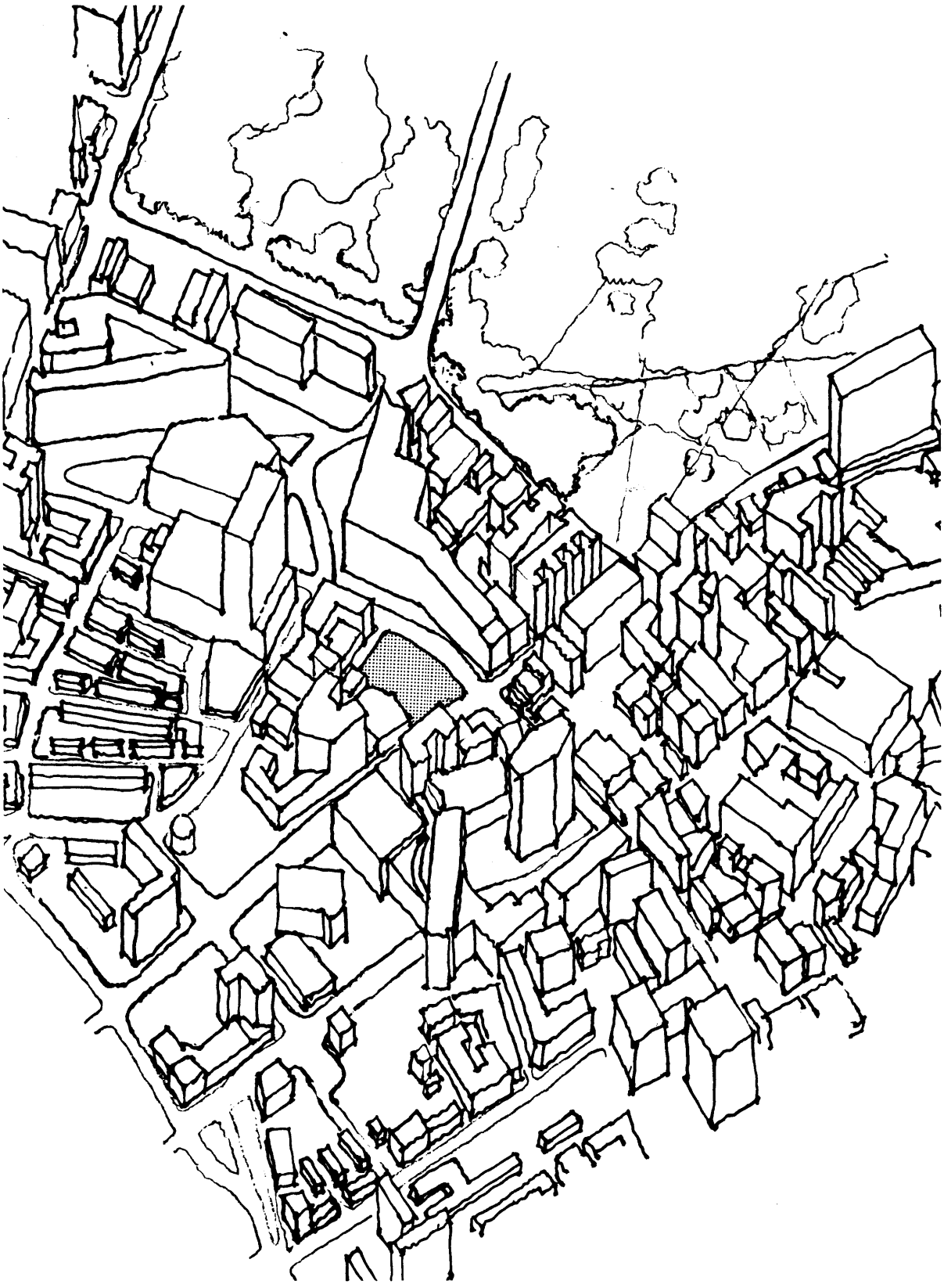


Figure 4.7 *(above)*
Figure ground map of Theater District and vicinity. Note the absence of figure definition at upper left (Park Square) and the rapid decrease in density as one moves south away from Common; the intersection is a transition point for both Stuart and Tremont Streets.

Figure 4.6 *(left)*
Axonometric sketch of Theater District and vicinity.

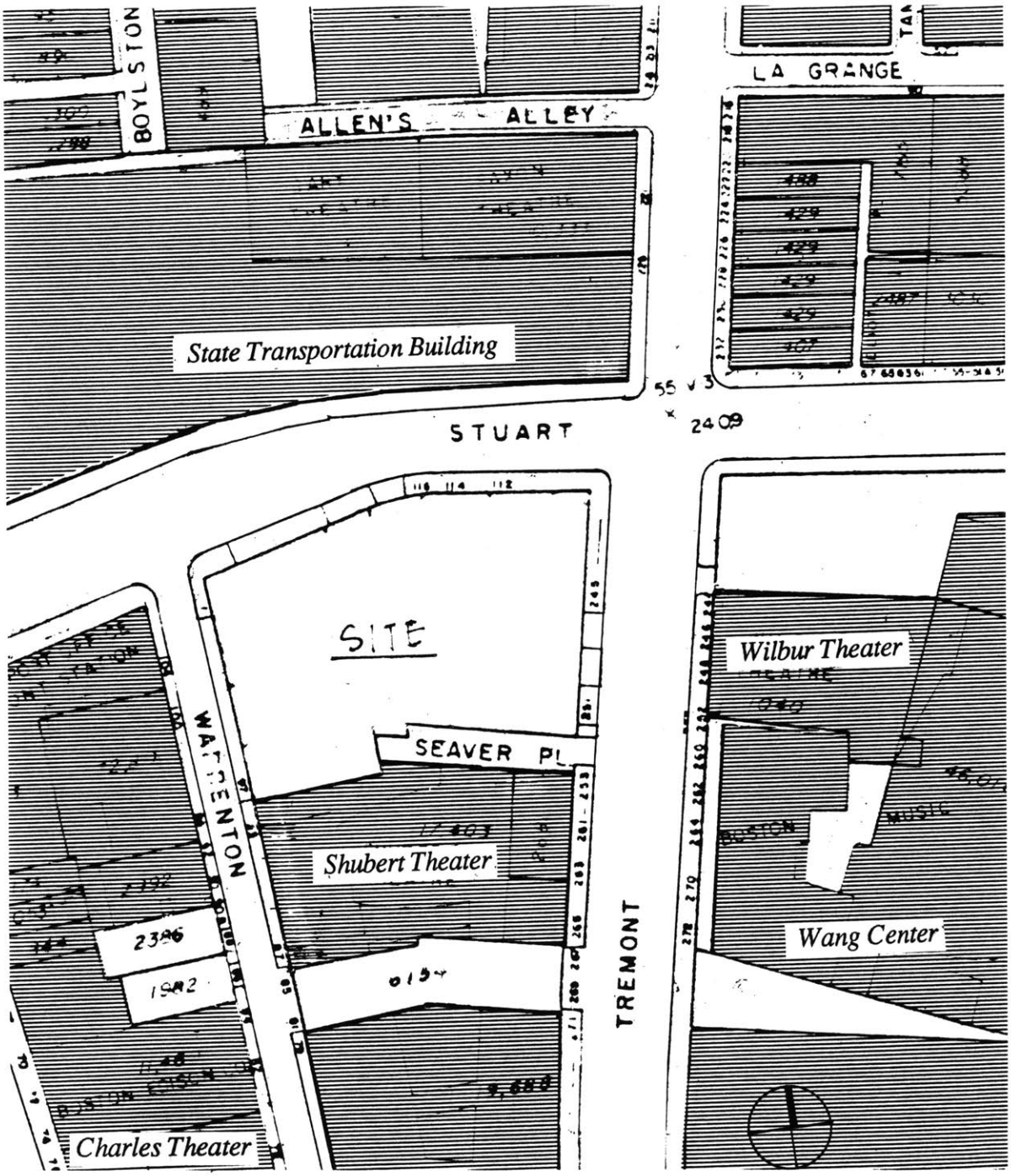


Figure 4.8
Site vicinity plan. The parcel is currently a parking lot.

Bay. Given the rich cultural and urban history of theater, it is the perfect vehicle to express such an image. It affords the opportunity to at once unify the district into a single coherent image and create a stronger connection to the rest of the city.

Site Analysis

Moving from an analysis of the district as a whole to the site vicinity, it is evident that if a strong image of the theater district is to emerge, the proposed theater site is the location where that image will occur. The intersection of Tremont and Stuart Streets forms the heart of the district: virtually all of Boston's extant commercial theaters are within a few minutes walk of this corner and four (the Wang Center, Schubert Theater, Wilbur Theater, and Charles Playhouse) are immediately adjacent. These theaters form a nucleus for the district that should be exploited, but they need a strong form to unite them.

The intersection forms a natural center; besides its central location to the theaters, it occupies a transitional point in the district. Only one block from the Common, it marks Tremont Street's change from commercial to residential character. For Stuart Street it is the point where the Back Bay grid collides with downtown. A natural node in the city, the crossing is appropriate for development as the center of the theater district.

The same urban problems that plague the larger area manifest themselves at the intersection: it lacks a clear pattern and urban image. Each of the four corners is different. A series of one and two story row buildings

Figure 4.9
The site, viewed from across Stuart Street, looking southeast.

Figure 4.10
The site, viewed from the corner, looking southwest.

Figure 4.11
The site (at left foreground), and the State Transportation Building, viewed from across Tremont Street looking northwest.

occupies the northeast corner. Although most contain commercial uses, none is particularly inviting from the street, and this is essentially a "dead" corner. The southeast parcel is almost vacant, currently occupied by only a small trailer from which discount theater tickets are sold. This is an important function, for it serves as a unifying feature for the district, but it poorly utilizes its site: most of the parcel is grown over with weeds and strewn with garbage. Immediately adjacent to this corner, on Tremont Street, are the Wilbur Theater and Wang Center.

The southwest corner is the proposed site for the theater; at present it is a parking lot. Adjacent to it is the Schubert Theater. With the arrival of the new building four performance halls will exist at this corner, and the Colonial and Charles Theaters are just around the corner.

Finally, on the northwest corner of the intersection is the State Transportation Building, an office structure that inhabits the length of the block on the north side of Stuart Street. The building curves with the street, providing, some much needed continuity to its streetscape. Its ground floor is arcaded and given over to commercial uses, providing some public activity at street level. Thus of the four corners of this major intersection, only this last one makes a positive contribution to the fabric.

Further afield, the Common is only one block north of the site, bordered by Boylston Street. Boylston is a major commercial retail edge as well as an important link between downtown and the Back Bay. The New

Figure 4.12
Looking south on Tremont Street from corner.

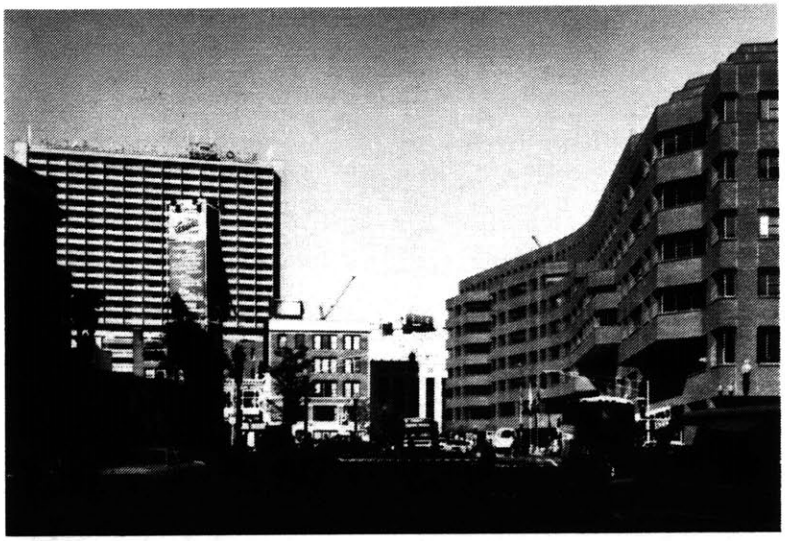
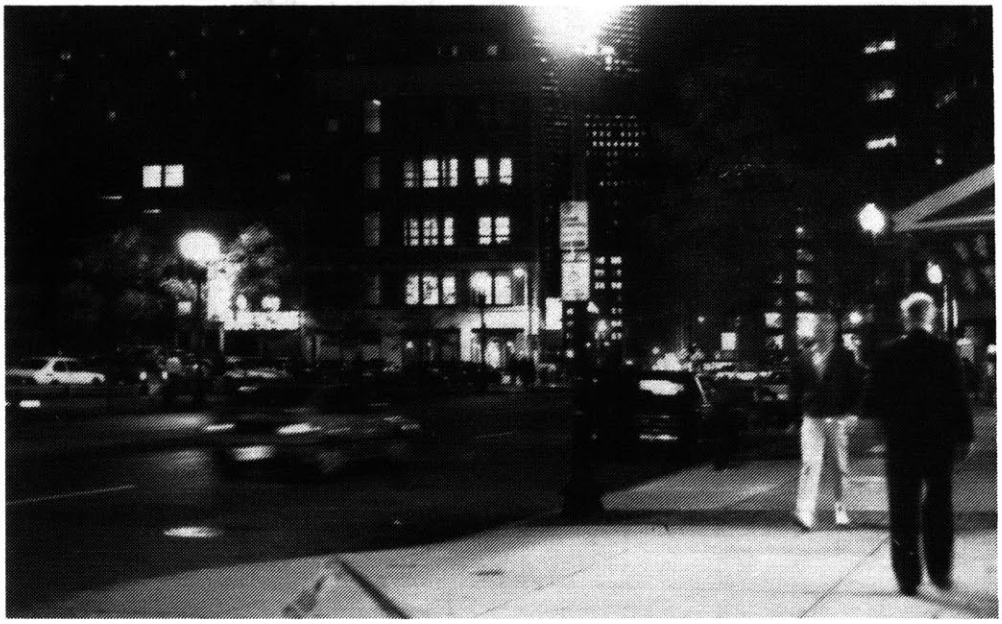


Figure 4.13
Looking west on Stuart Street from Washington.

Figure 4.14
Theater District at night.



England Medical Center is one block east on Washington Street, while the Combat Zone, with its attendant dilapidation, is isolated to the area northeast of the site. Just west of the site lies the urban disaster of Park Square. It is neither a park nor is it square; the space is merely a large intersection. Bisected by Charles and Stuart Streets and the terminus of Columbus Avenue, what space is left is dedicated to automobile parking.

In general, these conditions imitate the problems of the district as a whole: conflicting geometries and inconsistency in form, materials, and use engender the same urban fragmentation at the site as exists in the larger vicinity. To successfully create a viable center for the Theater District will require dealing with these issues at both the site scale and the city scale. The urban pattern needs strengthening, and especially at the corner of Tremont and Stuart Streets: a center is a place to go to, not through.

Chapter Five

DESIGNING A RESPONSE
Developing the Parti

The city is the formal expression of history: through an architectural design either a new possible living space is proposed or every existing residual quality is used up and erased. Architecture today can only be designed for the city or against the city.

-Mario Botta

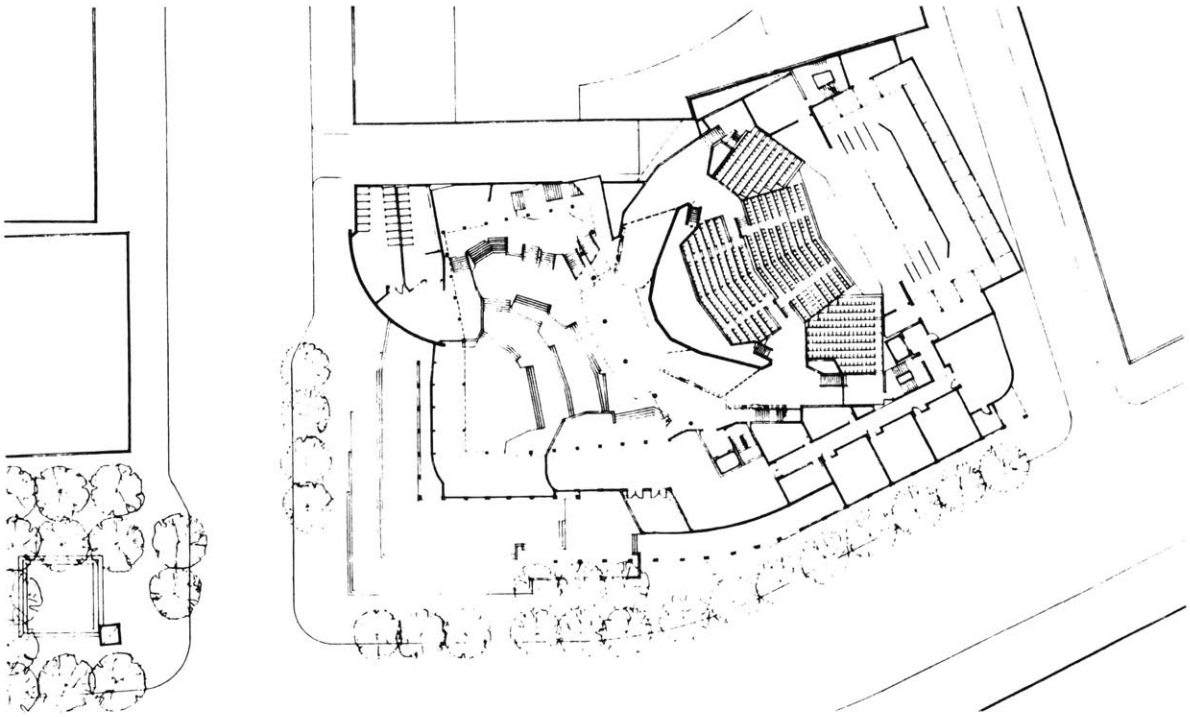
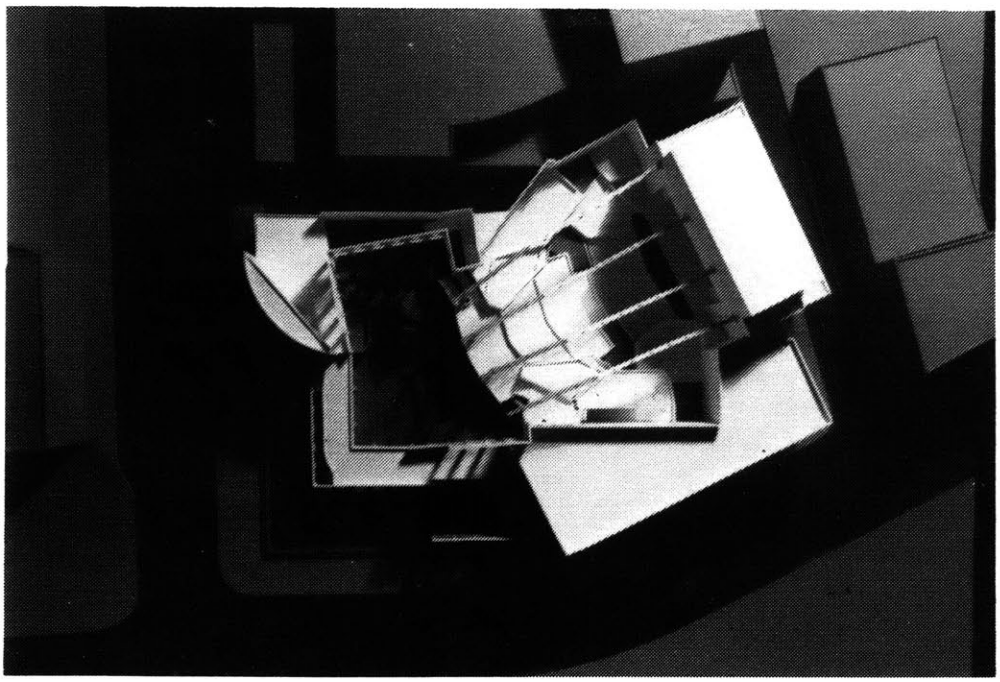


Figure 5.1
Lobby level Plan. Shown for reference.

Figure 5.2
Model showing massing relationship to immediate context. The new theater is simultaneously an embodiment of the metaphor and an integral part of the urban tissue.



Introduction

We have now arrived at a nexus; with a metaphor for the theater established by theory and an analysis of site and context complete, the methods would appear to diverge. An idea-based design process suggests the creation of an object indepedent of the world around it, in which the particular needs of the metaphor are satisfied. The contextual approach, on the other hand, encourages making connections to the existing fabric, the opposite of object-making. These two methods may be reconciled, however: the analysis of context suggests some general positions into which we shall fit the idea.

To achieve this reconciliation, the new theater must respond on at least three distinct levels of meaning: as a conceptual construction of the metaphor; as an image and center for the Theater District; and as a part of the local context. At the first level, design must satisfy the metaphor. I have set this pursuit as the purpose of this thesis. At the same time, the Theater District requires a center, a place where a strong image for the area may emerge: the prominence of the proposed site demand that it aspire to fulfill this role. The third function of responding to local context is suggested by the fragmentation of the existing urban fabric.

Though very different in their concept and scale, it is immediately evident that these parts are interrelated. The role of the idea (theater as an ideal city within the real city) not only circumscribes the other two parts but actively welcomes them. If the theater represents a microcosm, or "ideal city", it naturally creates a center

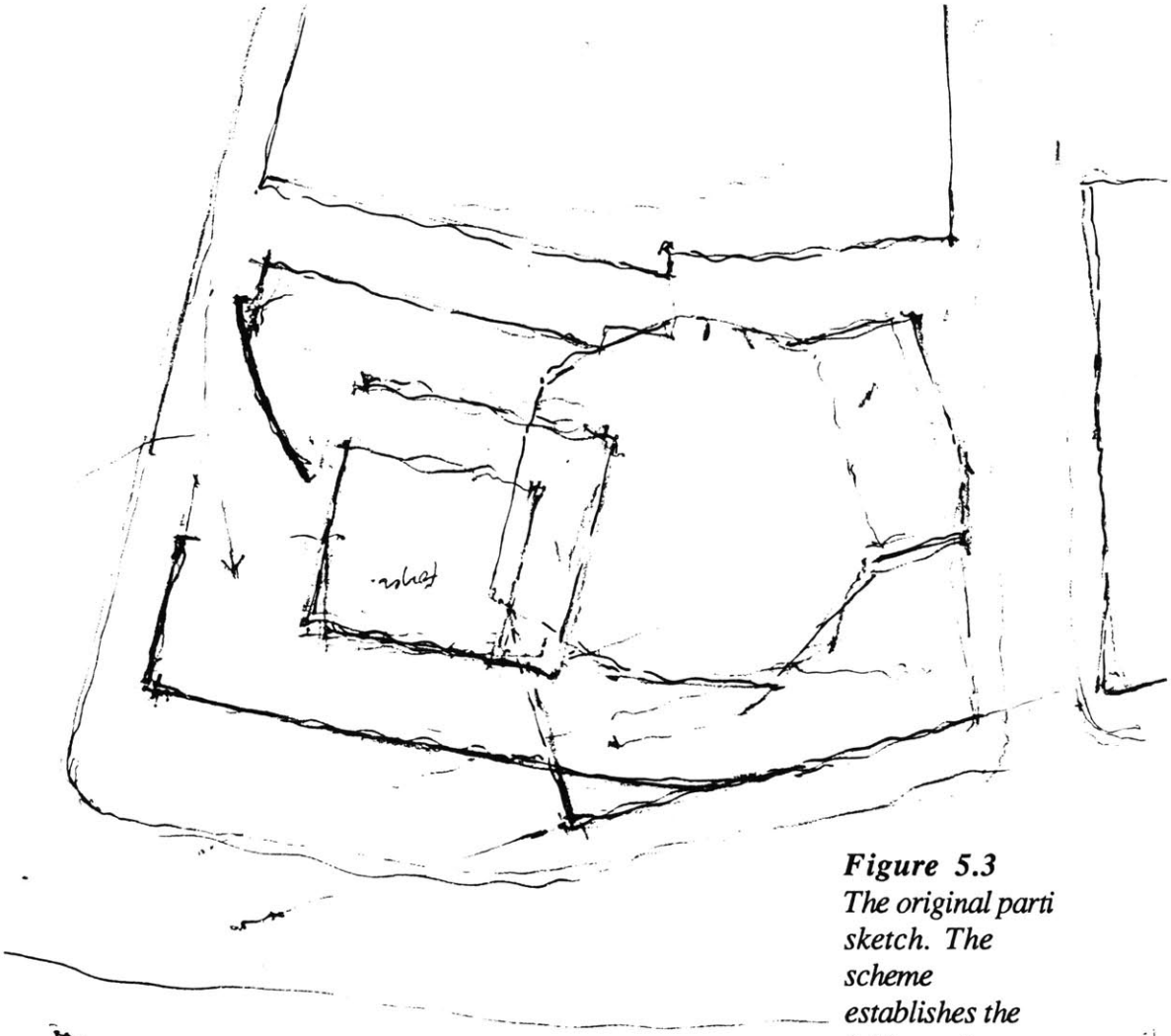


Figure 5.3
The original parti sketch. The scheme establishes the lobby as the center of the virtual world by creating a centralized form that unites the colliding elements around it. The outer forms were determined by context.

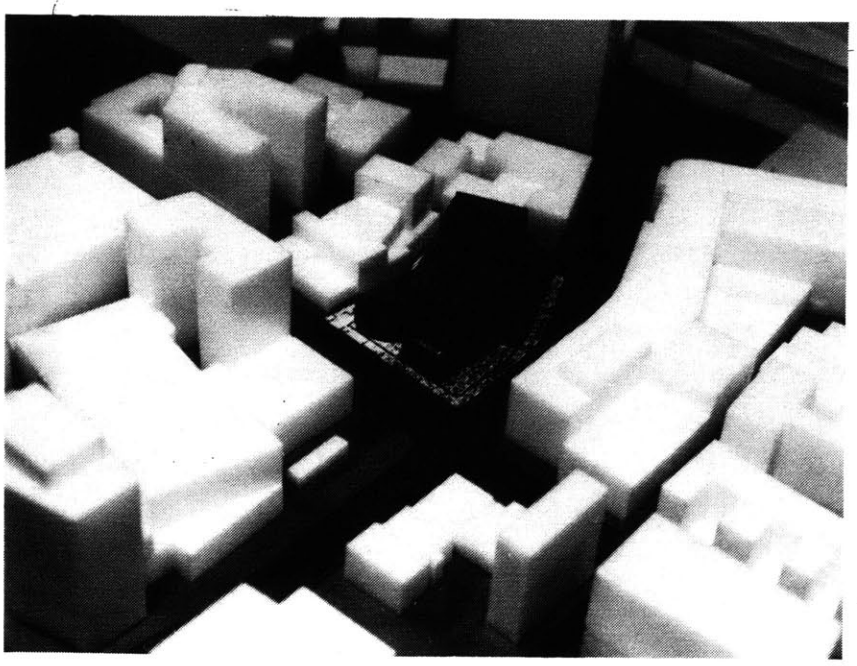


Figure 5.4
Site context with parti model inserted.

for the district: the ideal representation of theater unites the other theaters in the area and establishes a strong image of what the institution should be. At the same time, the metaphor insists that the new design establish itself as a piece of the existing fabric--the ideal city within the real--and respond to the local context. All three levels are operating simultaneously.

This represents a unification of the theater as both an idea/object and an integral part of the fabric at several scales. Accepting this marriage of conceptual and physical order, one is left to discover the appropriate form that satisfies the metaphor while drawing on the existing context. What follows, then, is the generation of the formal parti. All elements are intended to respond to the three levels of meaning: metaphor, district center, and local context.

The Parti

As developed previously, the lobby is the hub of the metaphorical city; all other spaces gravitate around it. It functions similarly to the Boston Common: one passes through the lobby to get to other spaces in the theater, and it is the public gathering space. The lobby is also the connection between the real and metaphorical world of the theater. It mediates between the outside environment and that of the auditorium, where drama reigns.

The lobby squares itself to the intersection of Tremont and Stuart Streets, suggesting its participation in the public life of the city. It is readily understood as a response to the local conditions and strongly related

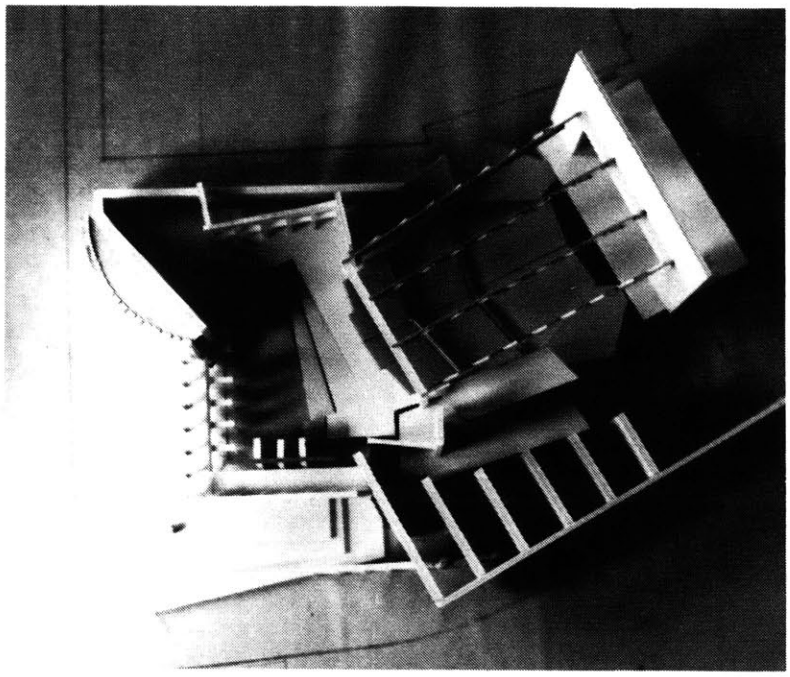
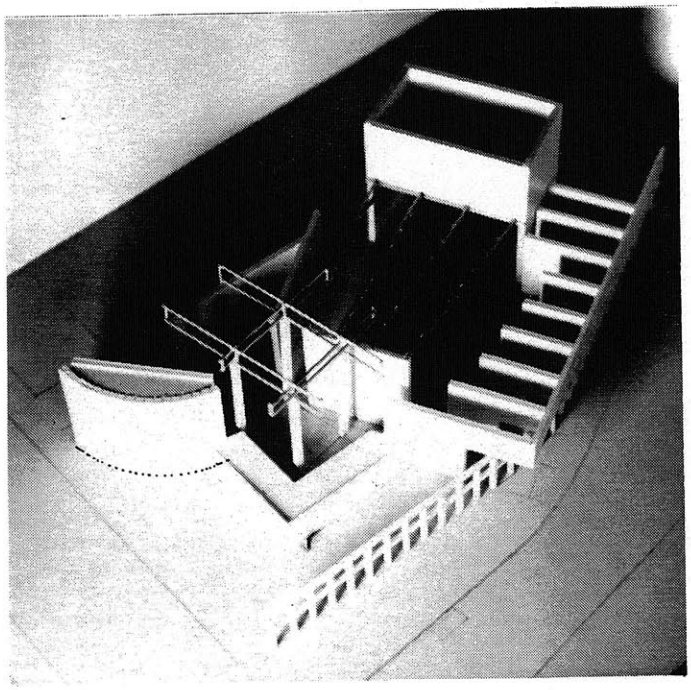


Figure 5.5 *(left) Study model showing lobby as mediator between other forms. The fragmentation expresses the metaphorical city to the exterior, while the lobby ties the parts together.*

Figure 5.6
The fragmentation of the volumes reflects on the confusion of geometries in the Theater District; each volume speaks to an immediately adjacent part of the existing. At the same time, the collage creates an elevation that suggests a city skyline; this is the metaphorical city manifesting itself from behind the contextual elements.

to the corner. As one moves inside, however, the lobby distorts from the geometry of the corner and conforms to the other forces acting upon it, especially the auditorium. The lobby's true form is not entirely evident from the street: it is not revealed to the observer until one is inside. Like drama, one must participate in it to comprehend. In this way the lobby speaks to both street and auditorium while maintaining its own unique identity: it may be interpreted as an extension of the street that creates a grand public space, as a foyer to a self-contained auditorium, or as a separate entity in which activities not directly related to either might occur.

The metaphorical relationship between lobby and other elements also offers an opportunity to explain the geometric chaos of the area. Employing elementary composition to express the various parts of the theater allows the lobby to more strongly assert its role as city center; at the same time the massing responds to the several geometries found in the area. The Stuart Street edge obediently follows the street line at the ground floor colonnade, curving with the street to mediate between the Back Bay and downtown grids. This gesture reinforces the much-fragmented streetscape and provides a strong continuity at the street level. Up above, however, the massing ignores the curving street line, continuing straight to the corner. This creates a conflict at the corner between the orthogonal lobby massing and the Stuart Street massing, manifesting the clash between Back Bay and downtown that occurs at the Theater District; the ideal city expresses the real city.



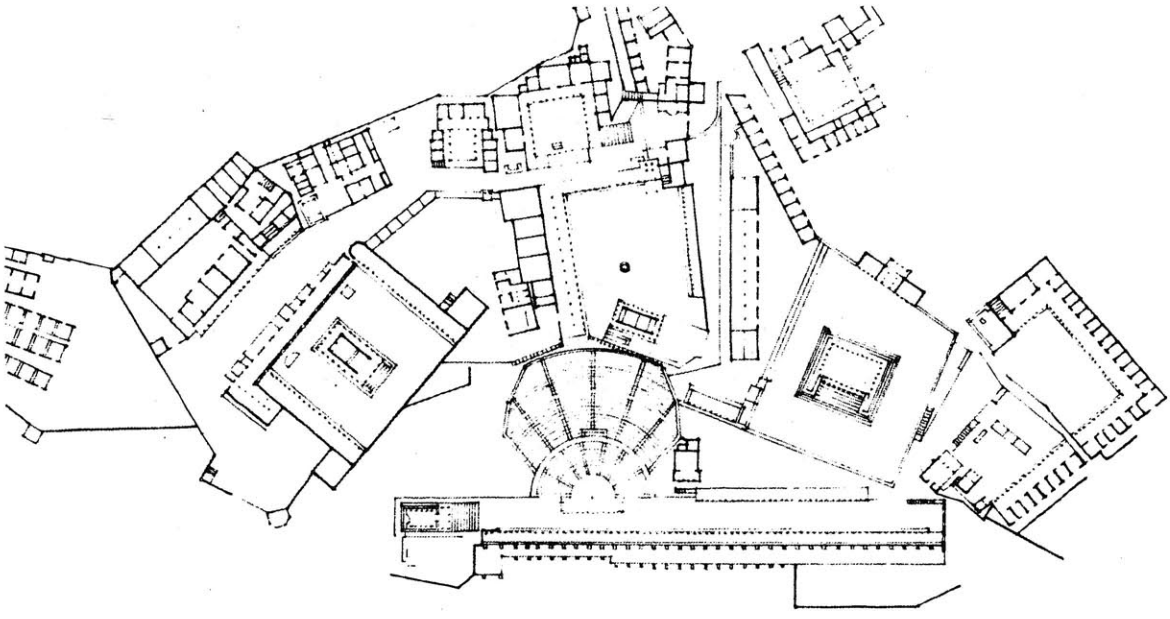
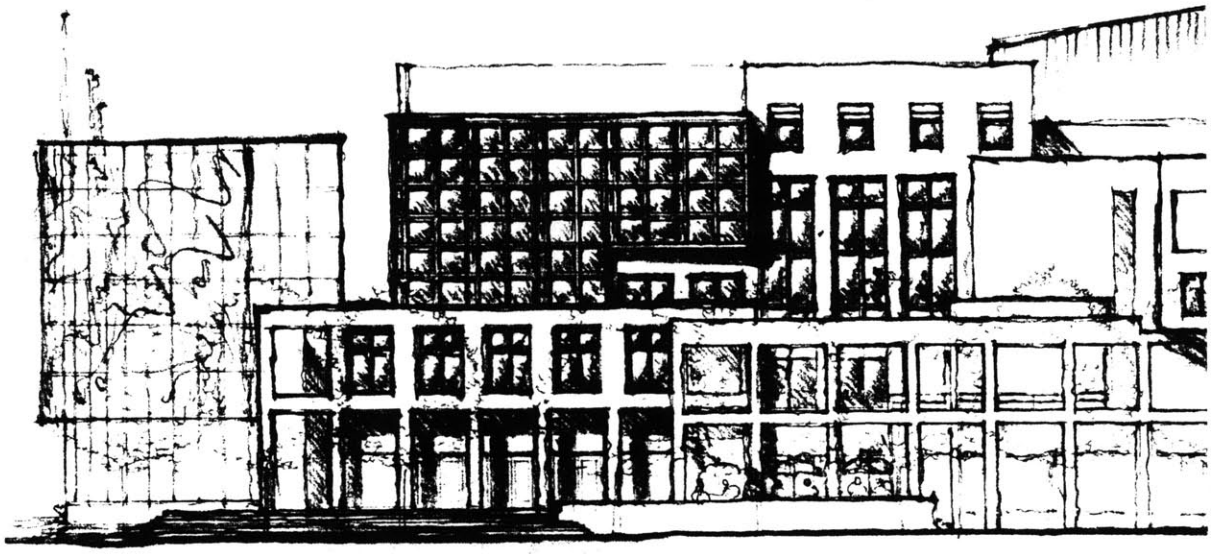


Figure 5.7
(a) Study model, and (b) plan of the city of Pergamon. Fragmentation serves both the metaphor and the urban context well. The collage of volumes suggests the growth of a city over time, like Pergamon, while also creating connections to the existing city. As an aside, it is interesting to note the prominence of the theater form in Pergamon's organization.



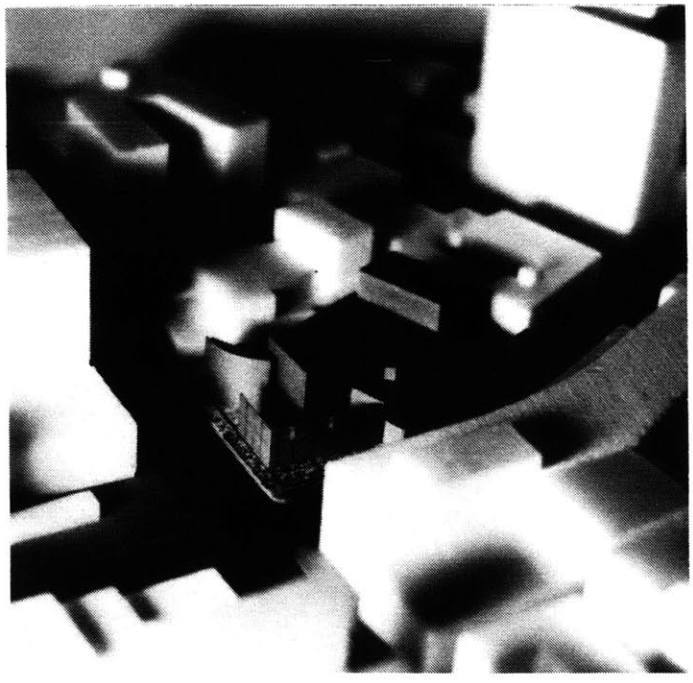


Figure 5.8
Elevation sketch, detail of the plaza. The collision of geometries results in a varied "cityscape" within the building. The glass volume at the lobby corner squares itself to the plaza, but the screen walls supporting it skew to other geometries.

Figure 5.9
Site context model.

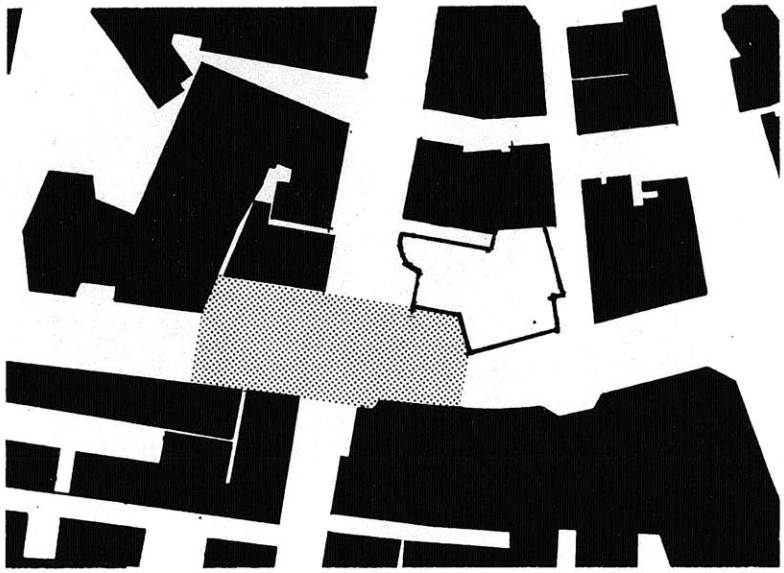


Figure 5.10
Figure ground plan. The new theater setback aligns with that of the Wilbur Theater (across Tremont) to create a shaped urban space bridging the street. This setback defines a node at the corner.

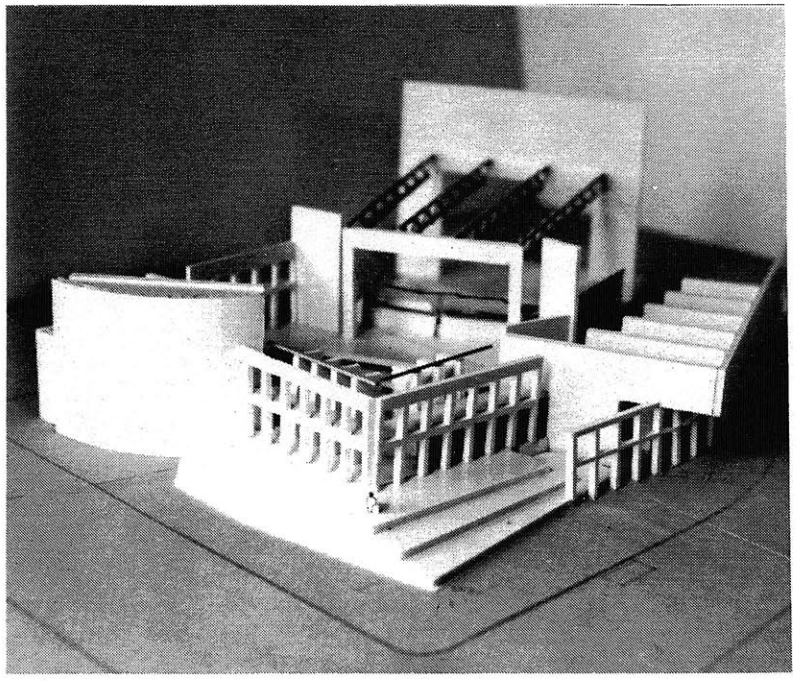
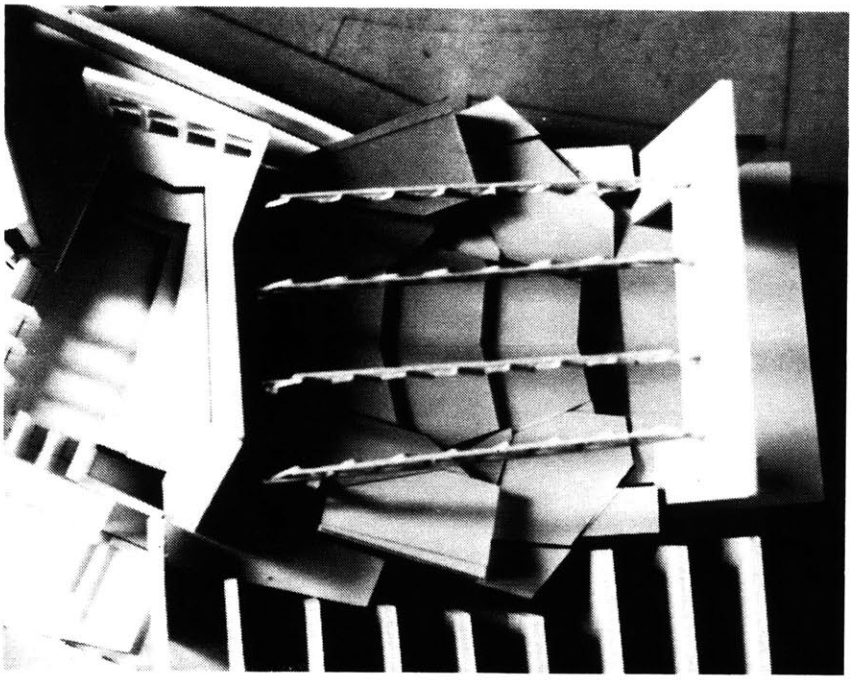


Figure 5.11
Gestural forms partially contain the lobby.

At the corner of Tremont and Stuart, the building mass steps back to create a plaza, while the ground floor colonnade at Stuart Street continues on as a free standing screen wall that creates a partial definition of the plaza. In this light the plaza may be seen as an extension of the lobby space out into the street (since it is partially contained by the screen wall). Alternatively, the setback may be considered a response to local conditions, stepping back to allow light access at the corner, or as a conscious attempt to create a node in the city fabric by uniting with the open space across Tremont Street to form a major square at the intersection. In this role the plaza serves as an arrival point for both streets, defining and marking the transition that occurs on each in this area.

The lobby establishes itself as an ambiguous space of externally uncertain formal characteristics conforming to forces acting upon it, surrounded by strong figural forms that alternatively express fragmentation of the real and metaphorical city. The strong enclosing forms, like the massing at Stuart Street, respond in size and function to an urban need as well as to a functional or programmatic aspect of the theater. Their scale and gestural power reflect their position: they speak to the entire city as well as to the immediate vicinity. Most notable in this role as a voice to the city is the large curved form on Tremont Street. Facing the Common, the direction from which most traffic comes to the area, it serves as a signpost for the district. It marks the heart of the Theater District memorably; with appropriate treatment, it will provide an image for the

Figure 5.12
The theater auditorium has its own form, independent of and surrounded by the loose-fitting exterior volume. In this way, it "floats" inside the city.



entire Theater District. At the same time, it also acts more locally as a gentle entrance into the plaza from the south; connecting lower Tremont Street to the intersection in a similar fashion as the gently curving screen wall ties Stuart Street to the corner.

Behind the figural forms united in elementary composition, the auditorium uneasily rests. They are extroverts, in dialog with the city; the auditorium is introverted. This self-conscious character reflects on the possible psychological nature of drama: when watching a performance, one may be either isolated from the outside world or intimately connected to it. Theater is an extension of life or a microcosm; which is a function of the director's intent and the viewer's perspecive, but either frame of reference should be possible. The lobby, again, plays the pivotal role: it serves to insulate from or connect the audience to the larger city . For this reason, the auditorium appears at first tightly linked only to the lobby, entirely unrelated to either the other parts of the building or the city beyond, but it is in fact grounded in both.

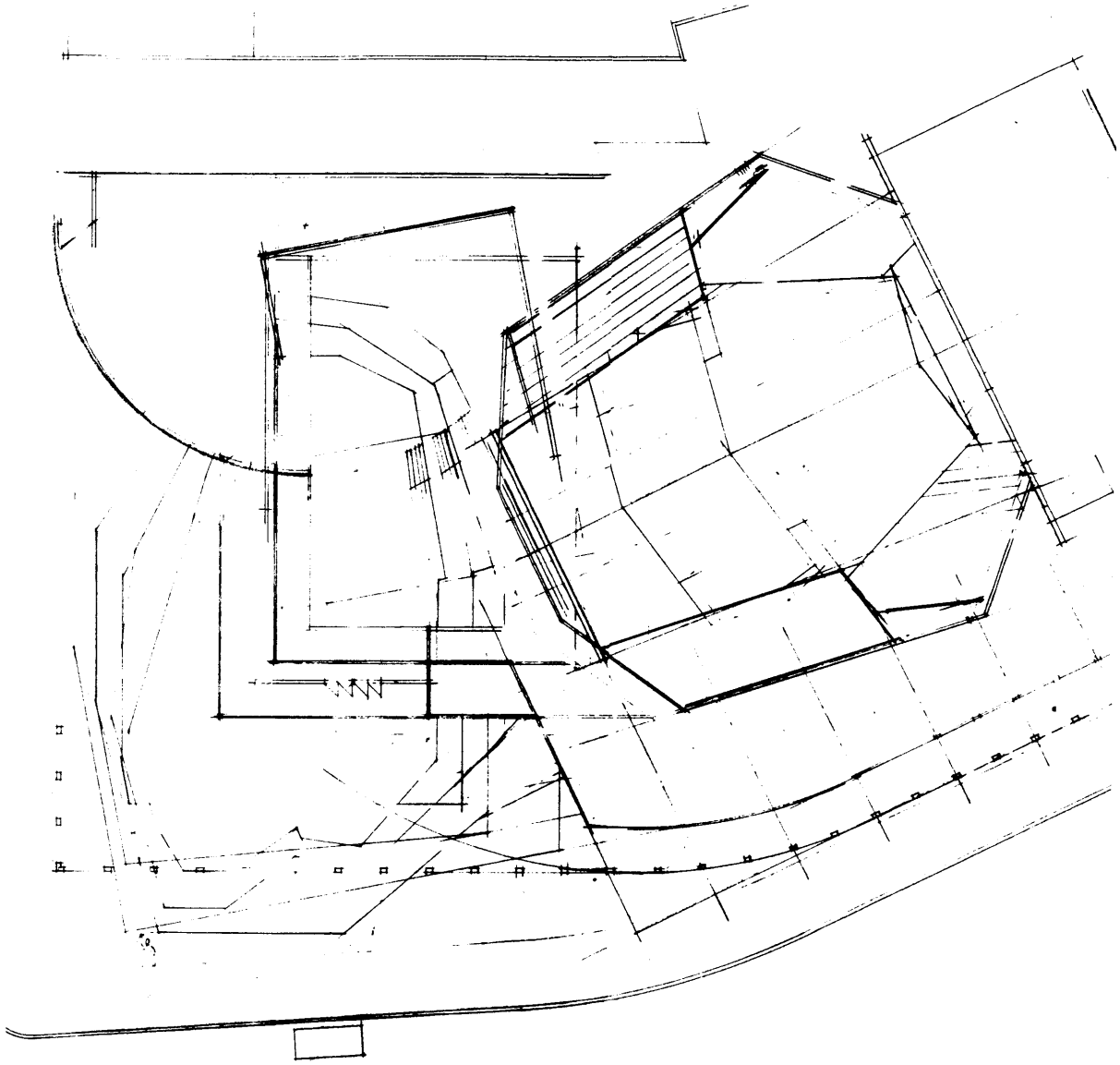


Figure 5.13
Preliminary floor plan based on parti sketch.

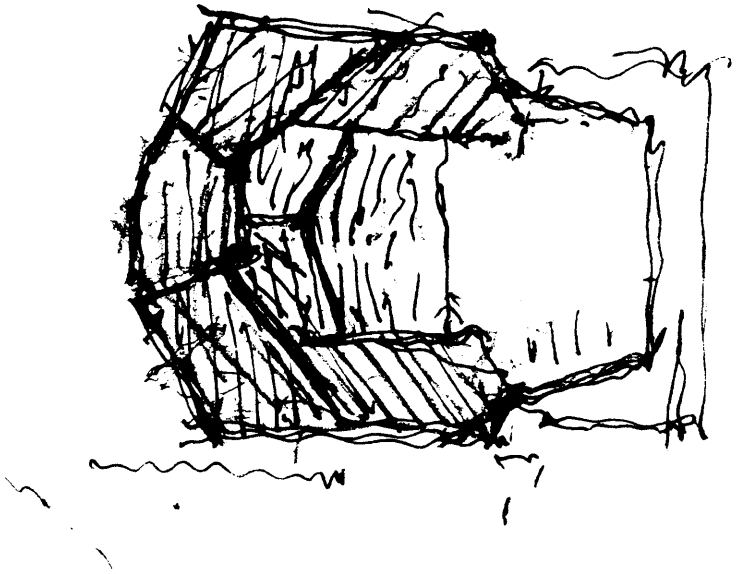


Figure 5.14
Original auditorium sketch.

Figure 5.11
Sketch section, showing dominance of the lobby space in the spatial sequence. The steps establish continuity.

Chapter Six

MANY VOICES TALKING AT ONCE

(Or, The Troublesome Chapter Six)

Orders and Elements

A building is a conversation between ideas.
-Louis Kahn

Introduction

The entire design was presented briefly in Chapter Two as a reference for the subsequent analysis. Following chapters delineated the metaphor and a general response to it, but the concepts employed have not been explained in detail. From the idea a parti was generated that fixes the general form of the design. It responds to metaphor and city at the largest scale, and consequently it is only a diagram of the conceptual order, to be articulated by smaller gestures. Within the conceptual order many smaller ideas, systems, and elements are embedded in form. They talk to one another, to the metaphor, and to the city. Building systems, form concepts, and programmatic elements all reinforce the metaphor yet also exist independently of it, creating levels of ambiguity and complexity within the total. The power of the scheme arises from its conceptual clarity; the interrelationship between its parts creates its architectural interest.

The following pages examine and clarify the issues from which the scheme arose. Having been touched upon in Chapter Two, these are not new themes but further discussion on issues already introduced. Because this thesis started with the assumption that form can express an idea, further explanation of the concepts and their relationship to the metaphor is in order. Thus we listen in on the conversations between the building components.

STRUCTURE

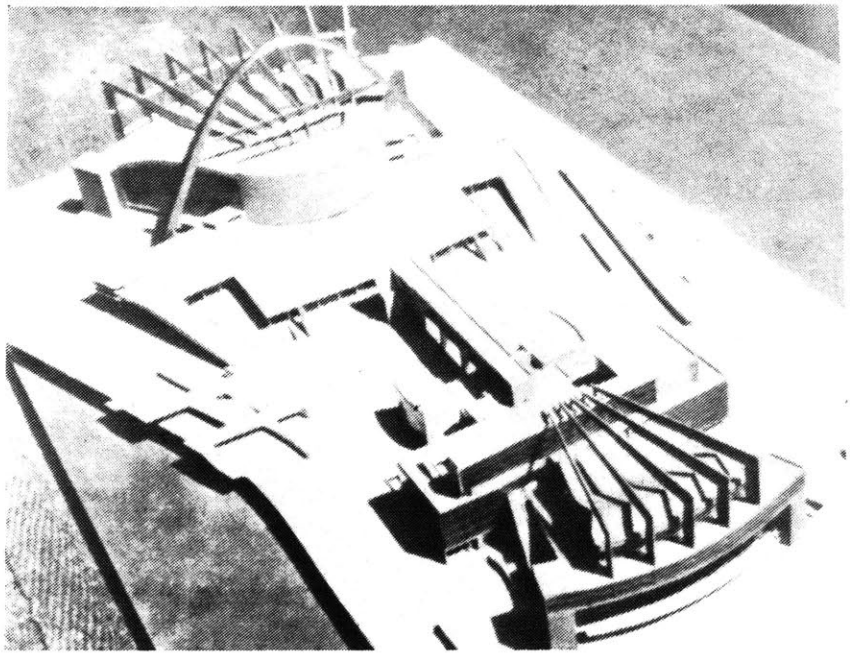


Figure 6.1
Le Corbusier's Palace of the Soviets project, one of the purest examples of structure as an expression of elementary composition; each volume is articulated by an independent structural system.

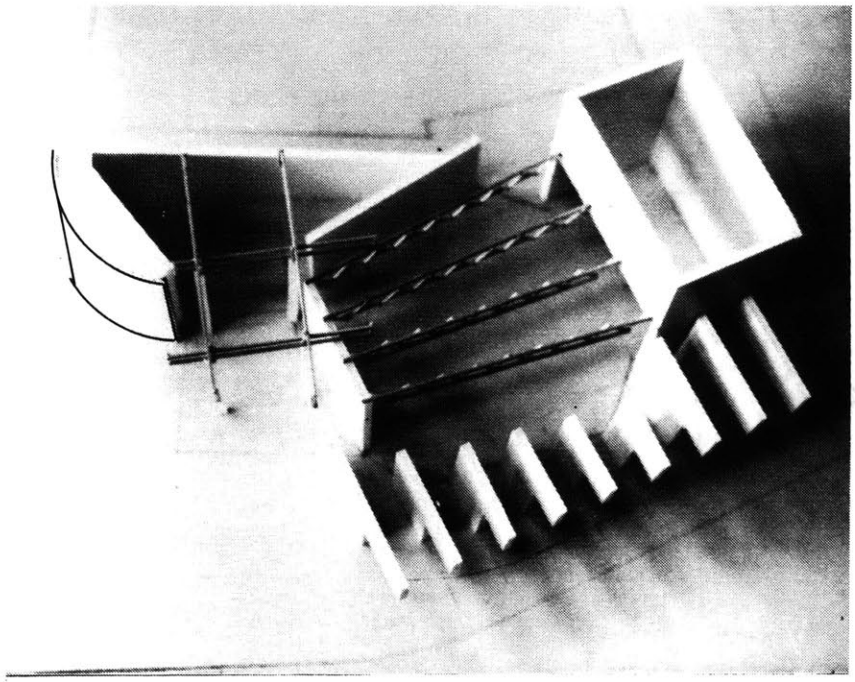


Figure 6.2
Structural diagram model. Three major systems are at work: trusses span the auditorium axially; trusses span the lobby laterally (not shown); and a short span bearing wall system is employed along Stuart Street. Remaining areas are structured between these major systems with an infill.

Structural Order

The structural system reinforces the metaphorical order while articulating and modulating spaces to create differentiation. Generally, the structure is composed of four discrete systems reflecting the composition of mass and idea: each building element has its own structural concept to articulate it as a part of the concept but independent from the other parts.

The auditorium is spanned by a series of steel trusses splayed from columns in the lobby to the proscenium arch. The directional splay creates a formal radiance away from the lobby to the stage house: in this light the auditorium is a directional extension of the lobby space, and the axial relationship to the lobby of the trusses and columns strongly create a physical spatial connection between the two. At the same time, however, the arc of the truss columns between the two spaces is read as a spatial divider, albeit an ambiguous one: the curvature in column line engenders a gentle spatial overlap between lobby and auditorium that suggests linkage.

Thus the auditorium structure suggests the connection between it and the lobby and at the same time denies that connection: the dichotomy of the metaphor and ambiguity of form are expressed. This ambiguity is intentionally contrasted with the stage end of the auditorium, where termination of the trusses at the straight wall of the proscenium creates a sharp distinction between auditorium and stage house; this separation is the nature of a proscenium.

The bent shape of the trusses manifests the presence of the auditorium to the exterior, but they are only visible

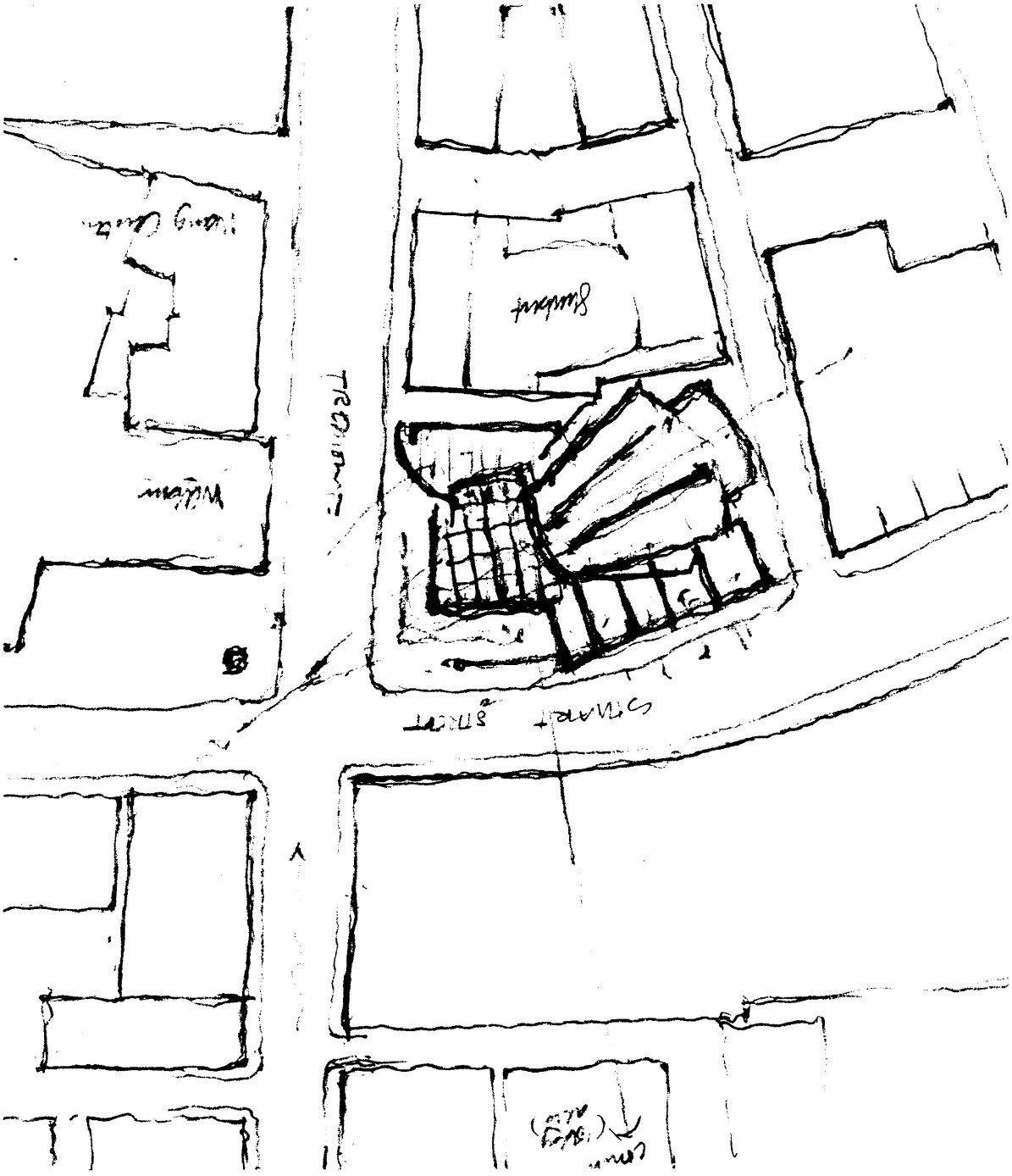


Figure 6.3
Sketch showing geometry of structure. The auditorium trusses splay out from the lobby, revealing its axiality to the plaza beyond. The lobby trusses establish their own major direction perpendicular to the auditorium. Bearing walls along Stuart Street reinforce the street character.

from the plaza. This creates a visual link between performance space and plaza, reinforcing the notion of theater as an extension of the city street. Further, their radial splay reveals that the auditorium is axial to the plaza; this is the only vantage point from which the geometric situation of the auditorium is clear.

The lobby structure expresses its role in the conceptual order as both city center, transitional space, and extension of the street. A steel truss system, spanning between the screen walls that define the lobby space, allows space to flow through from the street to auditorium without interruption. The lobby is understood as covered open space for public use, and it becomes a major indoor space for the entire district.

At the same time, the trusses are discrete from and perpendicular to the auditorium system, reinforcing the possible separation between spaces: the ambiguity created by the auditorium trusses is maintained and reinforced in the lobby.

The building mass on Stuart Street is composed of a bearing wall system not unlike the row buildings that populate Boston. This short span structure articulates its distinction from the lobby and auditorium and fits in well with the existing fabric: it represents a kind of pragmatic, contextual solution in contrast to the muscular trusses in the spaces behind it. The small span defines a series of spaces appropriate for their use: these are dressing rooms, support spaces, and offices, not major public areas. Just as the mass of this part is designed to reflect site context, the structure suggests it is a "street building" insulating the auditorium from the city.

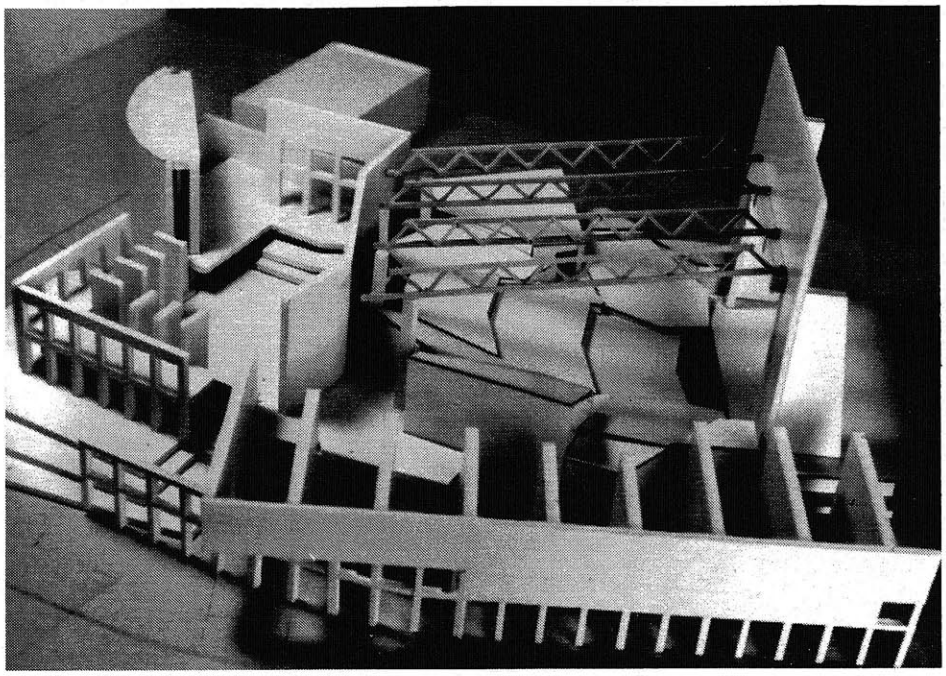
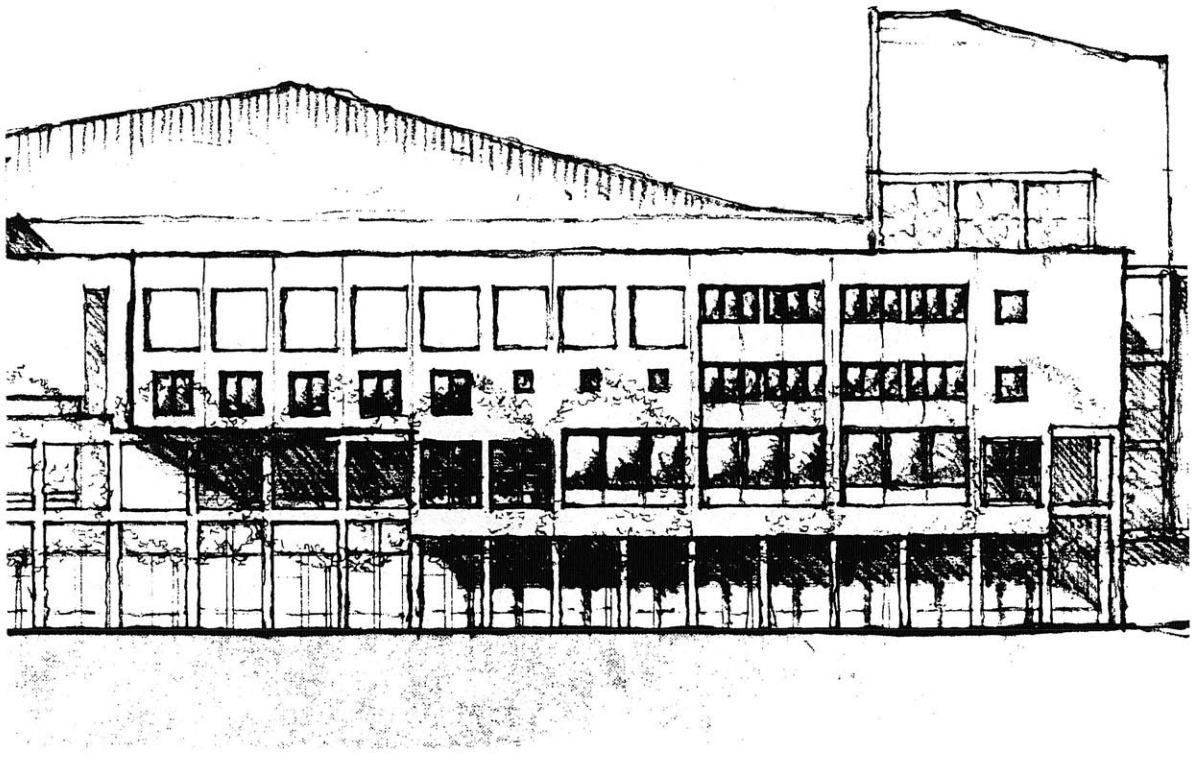


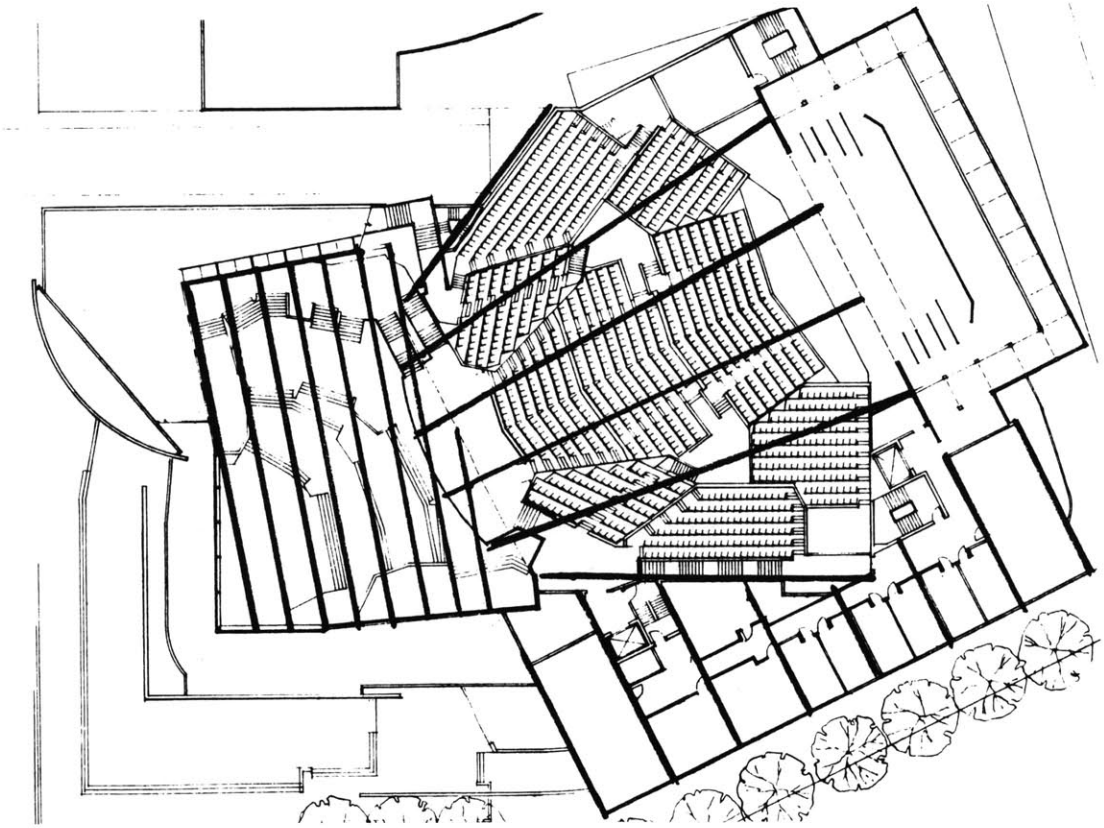
Figure 6.4
The bearing wall system at Stuart Street insulates the auditorium from the city.

Figure 6.5
The Stuart Street elevation reflects the structural system in its dimensions.



The other spaces that surround the lobby (bar, coat room, box office, toilets) are structured by a concrete slab infill system that spans between the other systems. As one passes through the screen walls defining the lobby the structure changes, articulating the distinction between the major spaces and ancillary uses. This suggests that one is in a separate building once one has left the lobby, an ambiguity that both reinforces the metaphor and provides another layer of complexity to the spatial order.

Figure 6.6
Diagram of major structural systems.



FIGURAL GEOMETRY

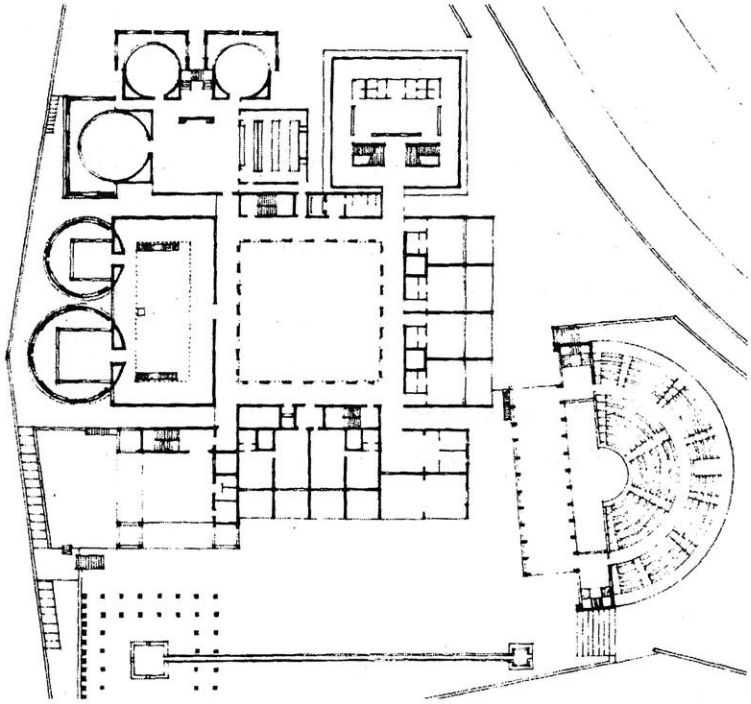
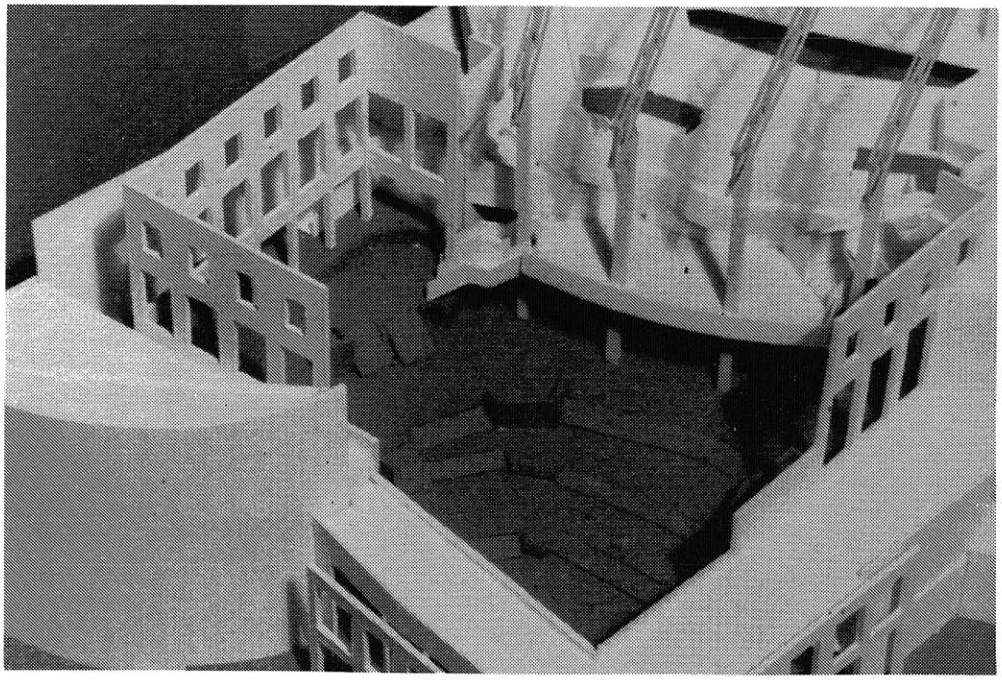


Figure 6.7
Kahn's Salk Institute Meeting House. The outer forms make large gestures to the landscape; inside them a smaller, complex spatial order emerges.

Figure 6.8
The theater's outer form is also composed of figural forms; inside, the geometric and spatial characteristics of the lobby and auditorium take over.



Figural Geometry

Large figural forms create a primary definition of the building at a scale that reflects the city size: they express the monumental relationship between city and the institution of theater. At the same time, however, they relate to the existing context in a more local manner and achieve a human scale through their interaction.

The gestural forms collide to create a series of intricately interwoven spaces; the lobby, especially is a product of their geometry. It is contained as a part of the plaza, captured by the curved sign/form and Stuart Street block, but it is part of the public realm nonetheless. At the same time, it is a figural space defined by these forms and the skewed screen walls that enclose it, a separate entity independent of the other spaces.

The collisions of the large forms reinforce the elementary composition of the design. Between them, a smaller order emerges, creating a complexity of large- and small-scale spaces. These are defined by systems operating independently of the figural forms: structure, steps, and screens. Thus as one moves from the plaza into the theater, the outer order of determinism dissolves into an expressionistic inner form. This is theater with its great institutional face and inherent inner ambiguity.

FIGURAL GEOMETRY

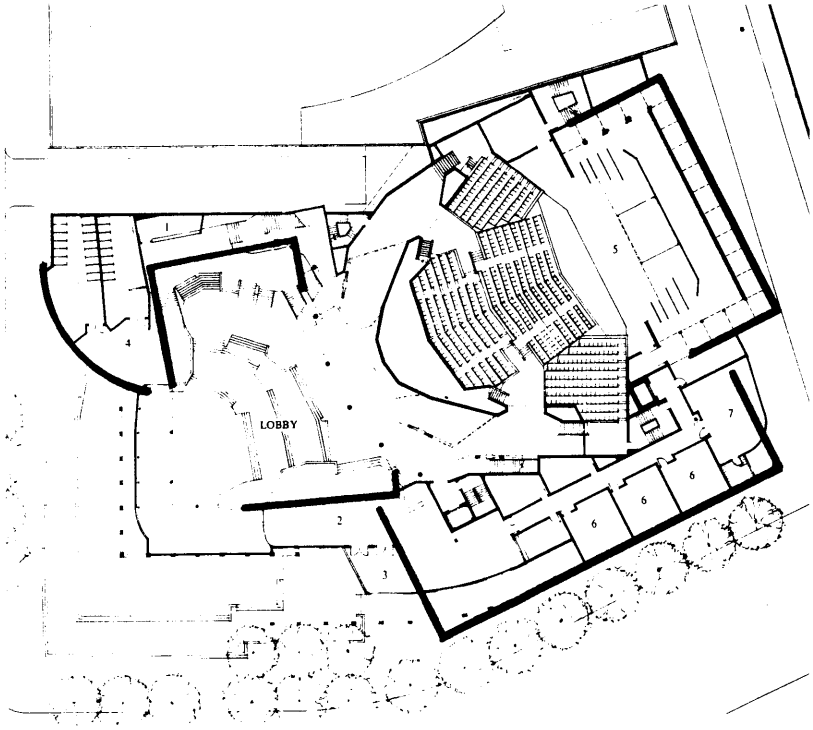
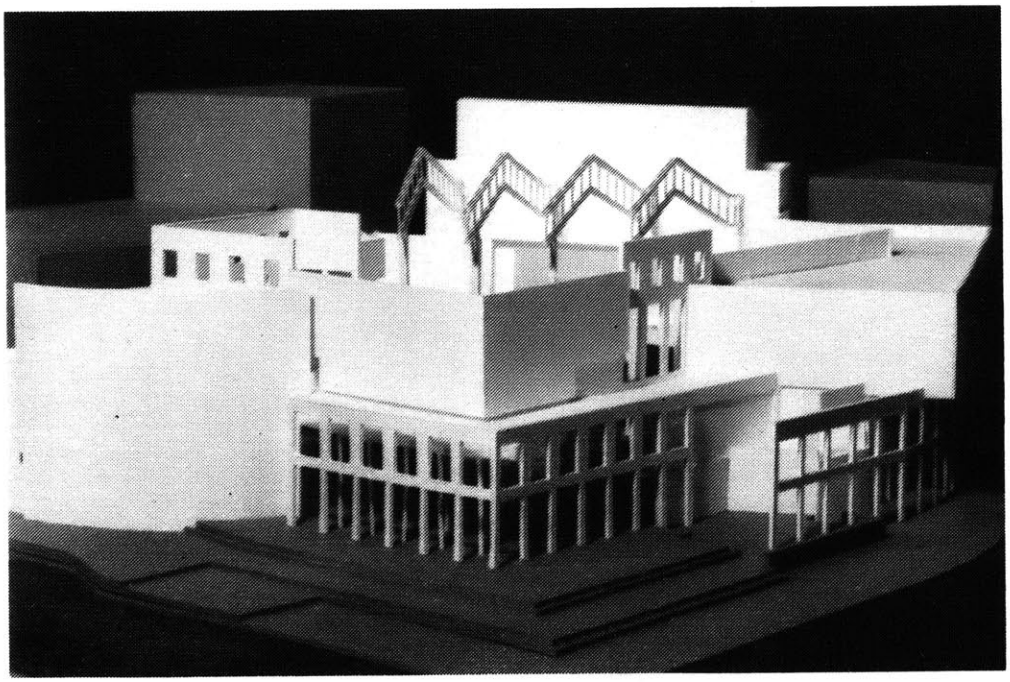


Figure 6.9
Diagram showing the external order created by the large gestures; between their collisions the theater space take shape. The steps and seating establish an independent system within the skewed geometry.

Figure 6.10
Axonometric detail showing figural massing at exterior.

Figure 6.11
The protruding lobby corner at the plaza reverses the angled Stuart Street element, all glazing instead of continuous surface.



STEPS

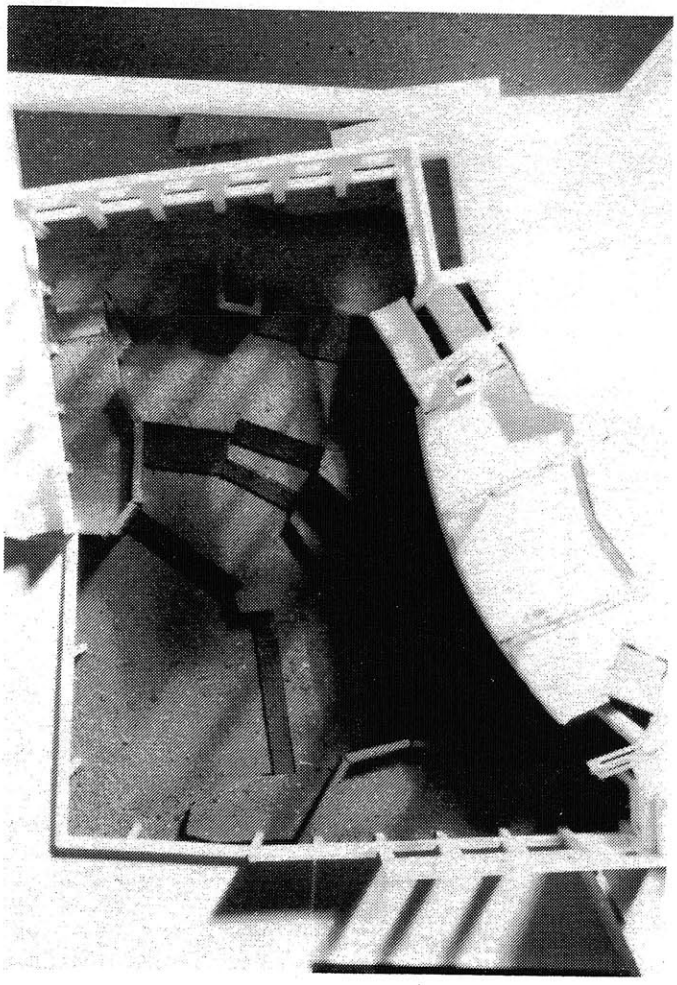


Figure 6.12
Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonic. The experience of moving up the stairs through the foyer becomes a part of the event.

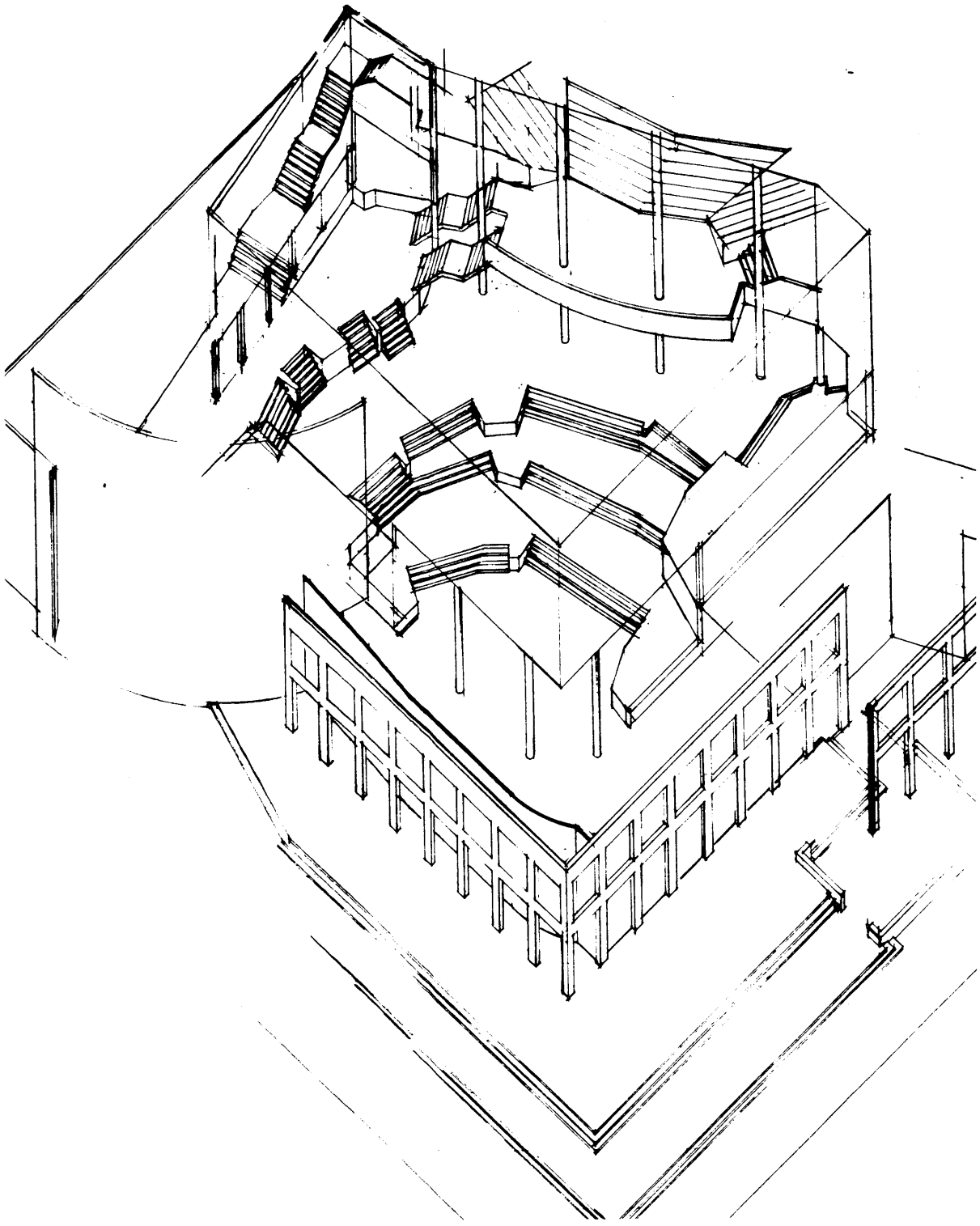
Figure 6.13
The new theater lobby is a series of terraces whose form recall the auditorium beyond.

Steps

The steps play a major role in the conceptual order, bringing more clarity to the scheme. They also introduce an entirely new level to the experience: moving between levels and spaces becomes a celebration. They create strong linkages in the design, uniting all spaces from street to stage in a continuity of form and materials which all theater-goers experience. While the sectional experience of the building is made occasionally discontinuous by its elementary composition, the steps provide an uninterrupted procession from street to seat: the ground form continues from plaza right to the aisles of the auditorium.

The steps move up through the building, each programmatic function occurring at a different floor level. The lobby ground form becomes a series of platforms providing access to various spaces through the screen walls; steps provide the continuity between platforms. As they progress upward, the stairs divide into narrower flights, and the audience is gradually winnowed into smaller groups. When one finally reaches the seating tiers, one is alone, an individual prepared for the drama. The process of arrival, however, is a collective experience enjoyed by all in the lobby. This narrowing also creates smaller places for gathering: within the grand public space the steps swirl to create a series of places amenable to the human figure. During performance intermissions the public will form pools and eddies on the steps and platforms, finding a range of dimensions suitable for small groups within the collective experience of the

Figure 6.14
Sketch axonometric shows continuity engendered between the plaza, lobby, and auditorium by the steps.



lobby space.

Their form within the lobby suggests an important new link between plaza and auditorium: the lobby becomes a performance space with an inverse relation to the auditorium. The steps create tiers for gathering and observing; they are analgous to the auditorium beyond, both in concept and form. When one enters the theater from the plaza, one is walking on stage. Life and theater have completely reversed themselves: the lobby is a performance space and the performance space a lobby.

Thus it is possible to imagine the lobby as a separate performance space because of the steps. This invites the notion of a theater with several performance venues which the audience moves between. One could be the traditional space of the auditorium, another in the less structured plaza outside, and the third in the lobby itself. Lunchtime events can occur here, and the street performers could move inside when the weather requires.

Finally, the steps provide another degree of complexity to the auditorium/lobby relationship. They ignore the axial protrusion of performance space into lobby; they sweep up around the auditorium at the lower level and move perpendicular to the axis at the mezzanine. This contradictory gesture eliminates the symmetrical connection in the experience; it is physically present and readily perceived, but not experienced.

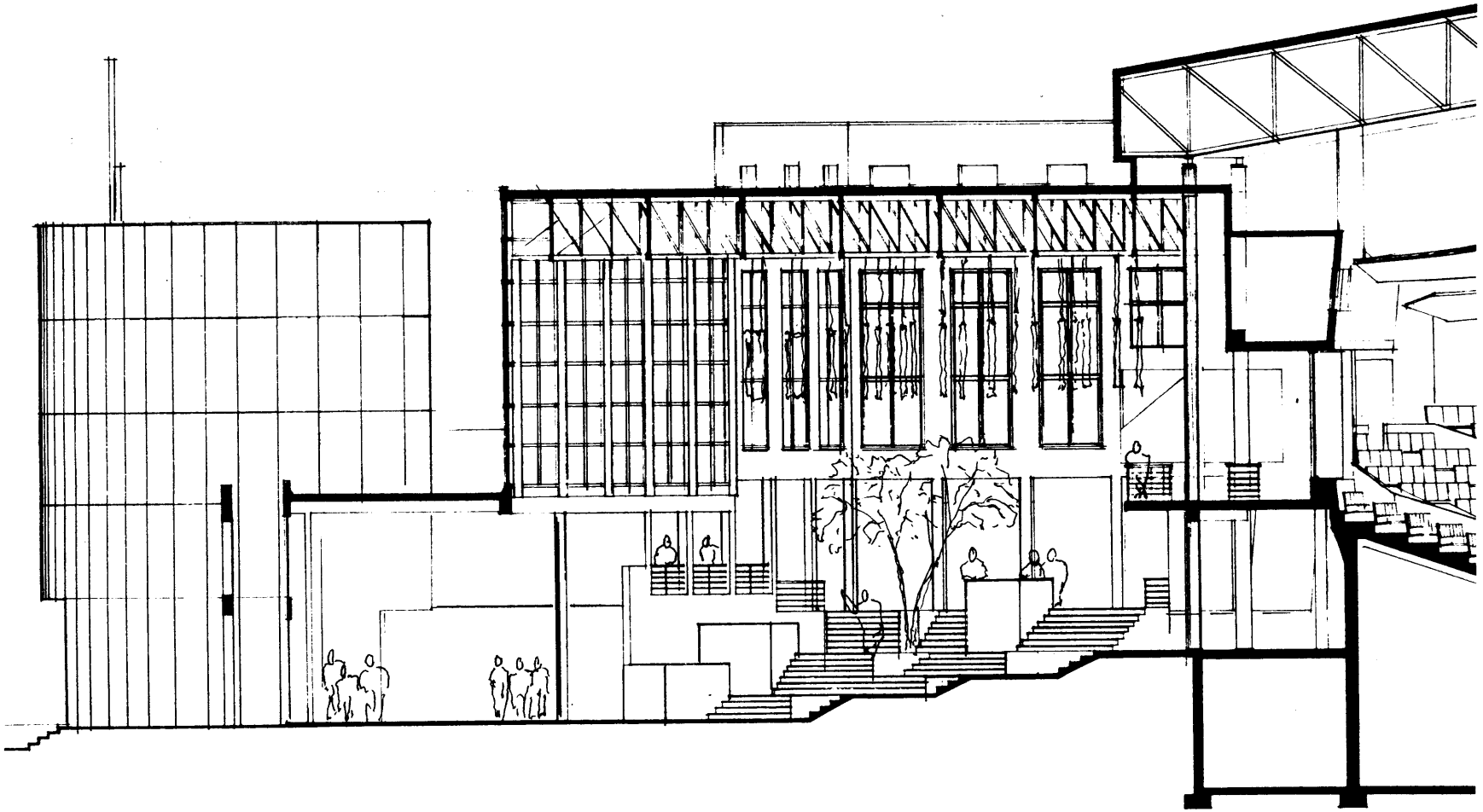


Figure 6.15
Theater Lobby Section
Scale 1"=16'
Movement through the lobby is a procession up the gentle steps.

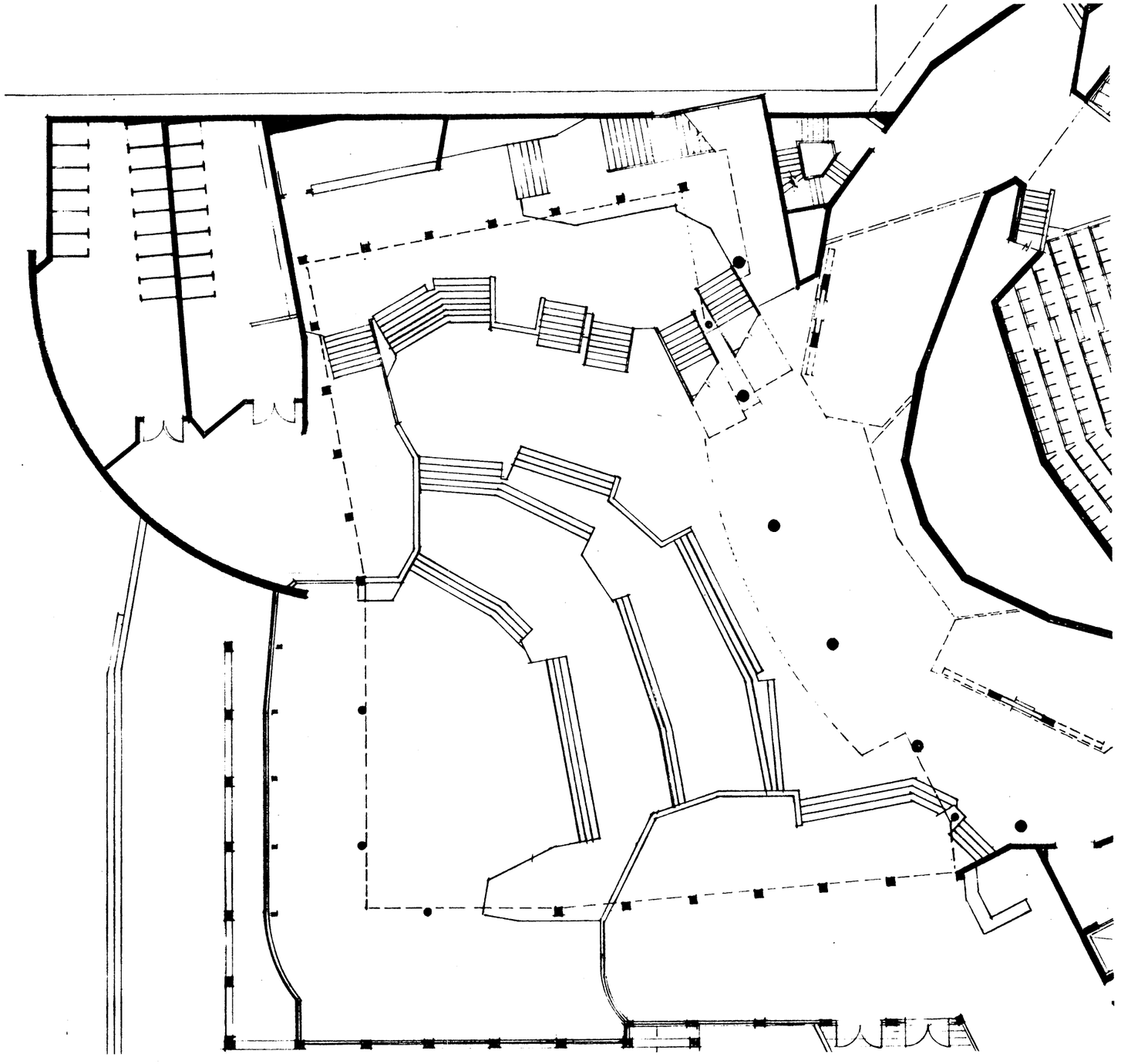


Figure 6.16
Theater Lobby Plan
Scale 1"=16'
The steps assume the shape of an amphitheater, inviting their use for public performance.

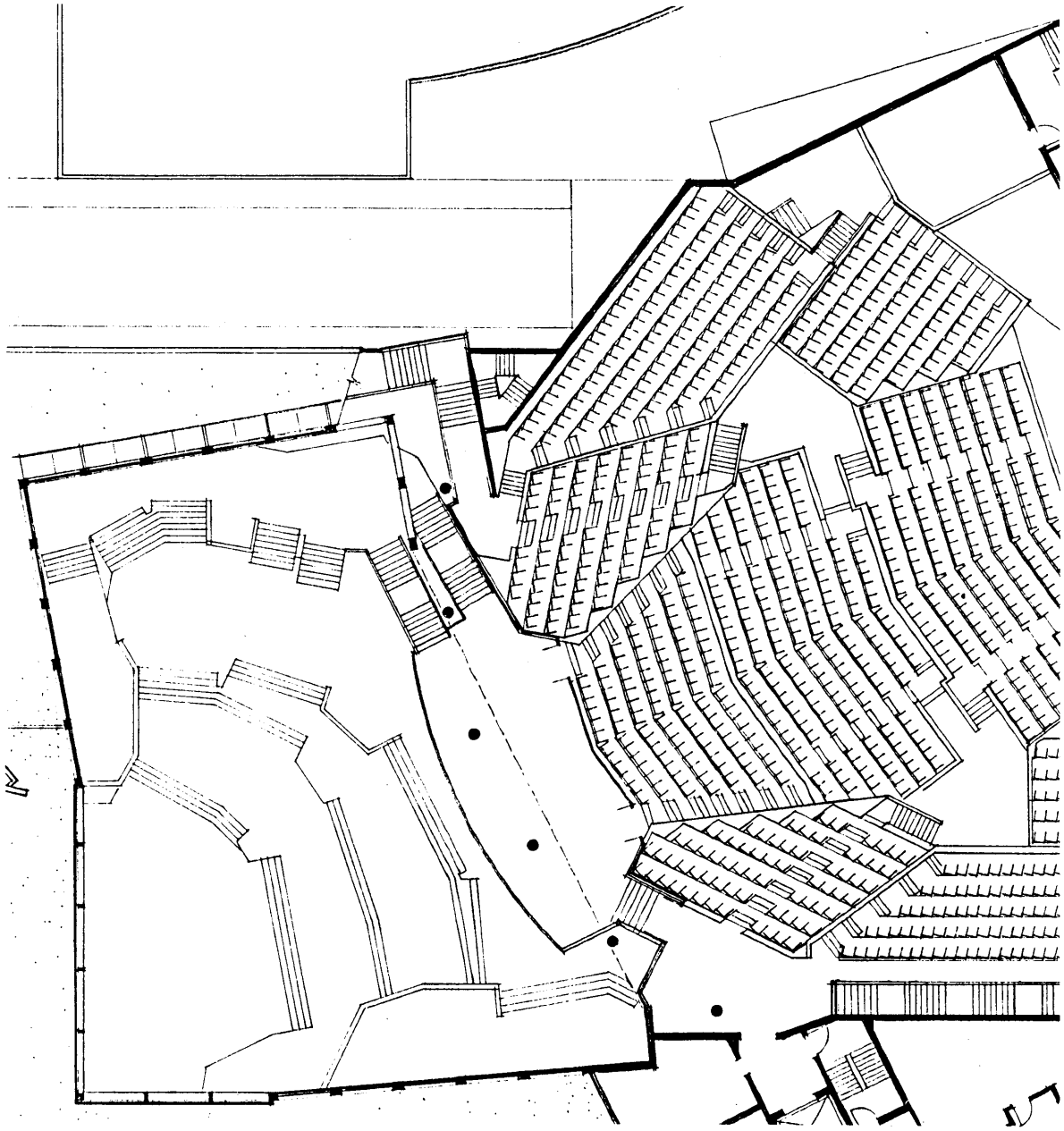


Figure 6.17
Lobby Mezzanine Plan
The steps create a strong formal connection between the auditorium and the lobby.

SCREENS

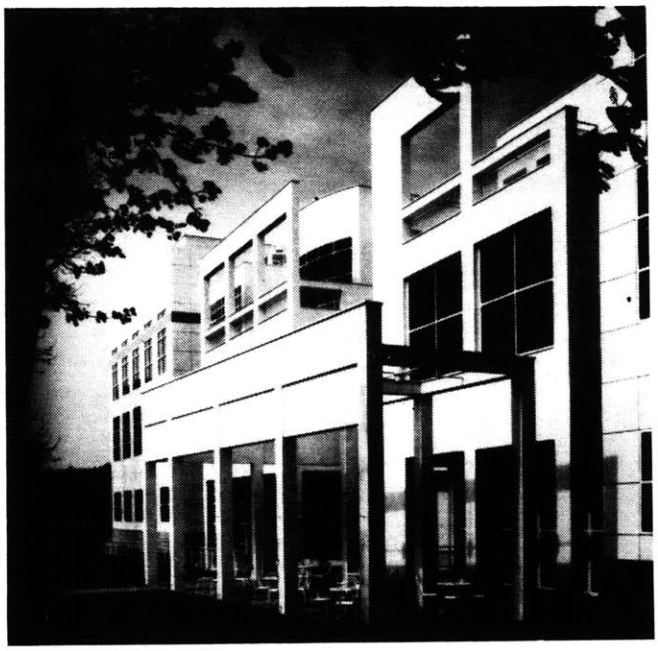
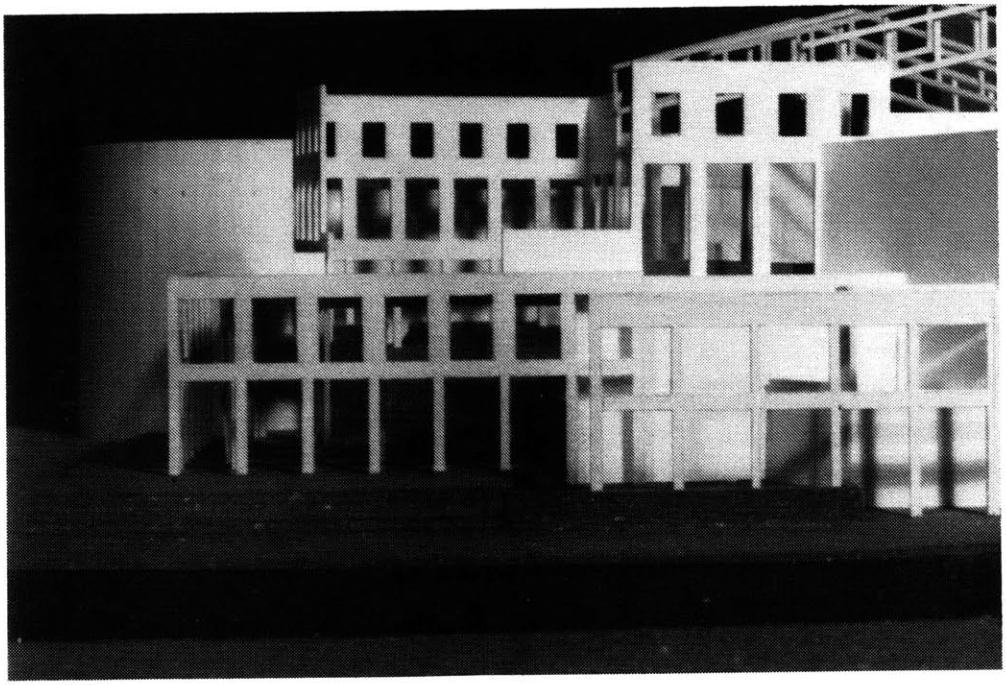


Figure 6.18
Meier's Frankfurt Museum employs screen walls to break down the mass of the building a to create a layering of spaces around it.

Figure 6.19
Exterior screen walls establish partial definitions of the plaza and building edges.



Screen Walls

Screen walls are deployed to create partial definitions between spaces. These are not the delicate screens of Japanese architecture; they are big tough structures formed in concrete and granite. They divide spaces without separating them, engendering a degree of spatial discontinuity while maintaining physical and visual access. The extent of discontinuity varies: when viewed axially or in silhouette (as at night, when light emanates from within the building), they become almost ephemeral, but when seen from an acute angle, they are visually impenetrable. This principle is employed in the Stuart Street colonnade: from a long view down the street the screen reinforces the street-scape, yet transforms into an open definition of the plaza when one arrives at the corner.

Within the building, the screen walls enclosing the lobby establish a system of access from the major public spaces to ancillary functions: one moves from the lobby through the defining screen to coat room, toilets, bar, or backstage. As previously noted, the screens enclose only laterally to allow the free flow of space from street to auditorium. Their skew suggests a distortion due to both the outward pressure of the figural lobby form and the inward force of the city fabric. This heightens the ambiguity of the lobby. Because of the skew the screens are perceived not only as a means of spatial enclosure, but also as a buttress against the inward pressure of the city.

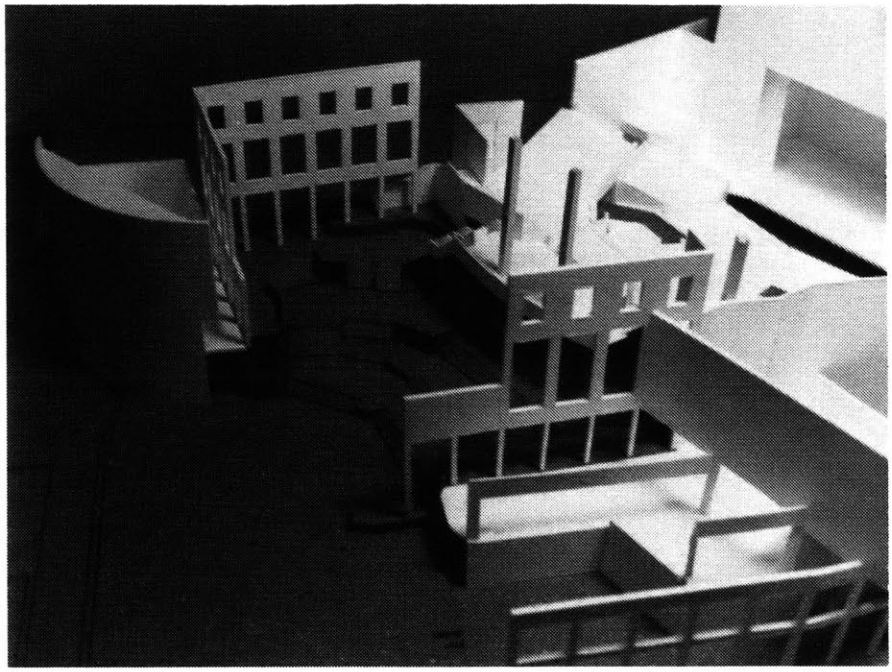


Figure 6.20
Interior screen walls contain the lobby laterally but allow free flow of space from the corner to the auditorium. Access to the ancillary spaces in the theater is through the screen.

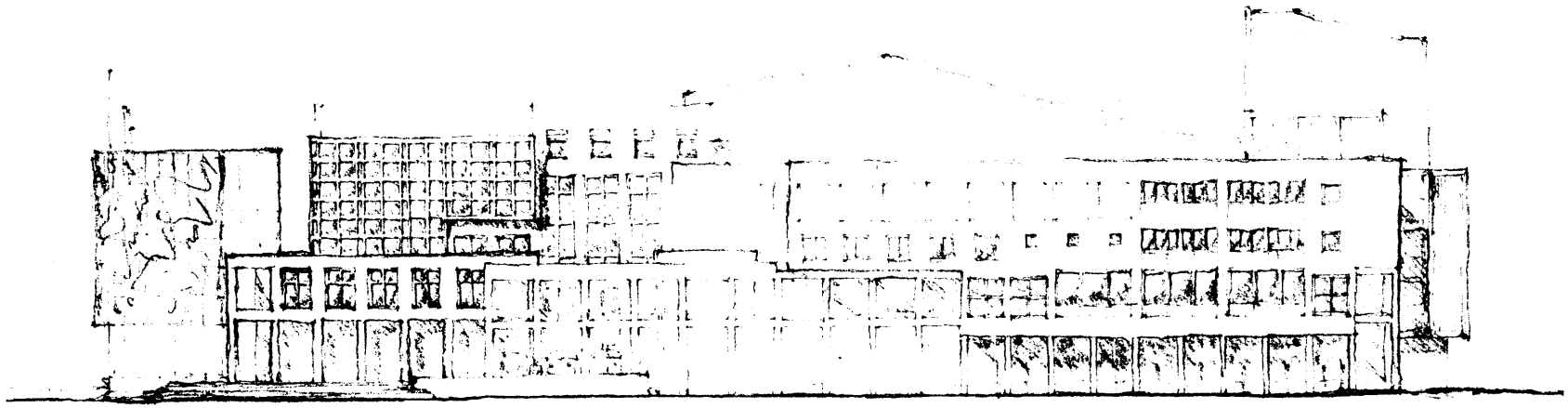


Figure 6.21
Sketch elevation. The use of the screens provides a layering of the building that is gradually peeled away at the plaza, until the lobby is finally exposed as the glass corner.

AUDITORIUM

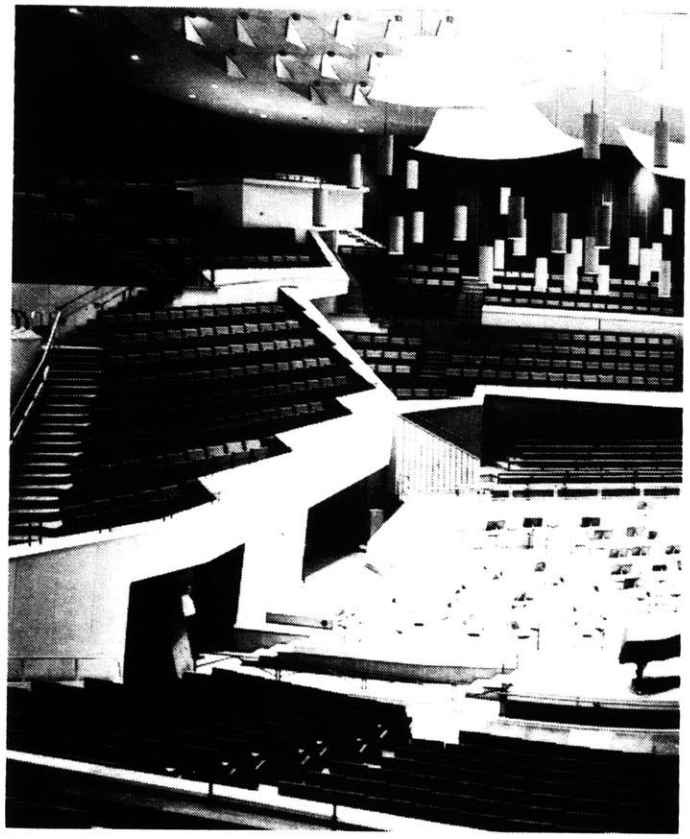
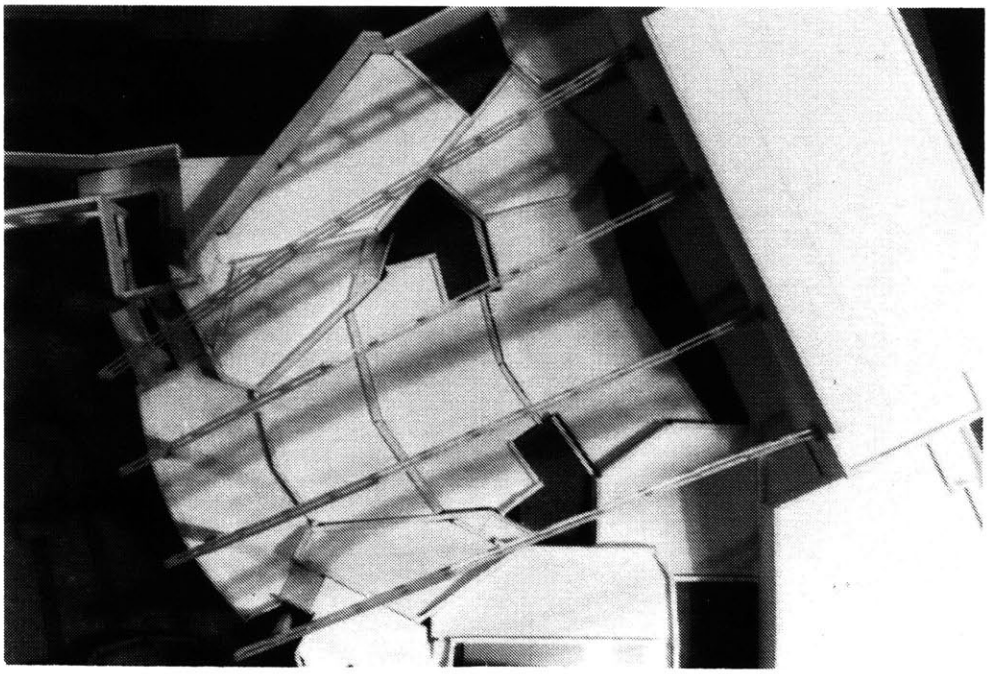


Figure 6.22
Scharoun's Philharmonic. The seating tiers break up the mass of the audience.

Figure 6.23
The new theater auditorium.



Auditorium

The metaphor for theater arises from the proposition that the theater is an idealized city superimposed on the real city, and the entire building reflects this dichotomy, offering interpretations of form that satisfy both. The lobby is space where the two cities coexist, and thus it is the most ambiguous. The auditorium, however, is the space most subject to interpretation by the drama; consequently it must be the most flexible in its form.

As previously stated, the expressionistic form evident in lobby and auditorium is the natural result of an internal order of theater: its non-orthogonality indicts the rational certainty of the past, affording drama the opportunity to create or express an alternate vision. The seating tiers break the conventional "us versus them" relationship of traditional theater. While individual seats orient themselves to the stage, the tiers are skewed to face one another: the effect is to establish an individual connection between audience member and performer while still emphasizing the collective nature of the event.

The seating tiers themselves, like those in Scharoun's Philharmonic, break down the mass of the audience into smaller communities more in scale with the performance area. There are no balconies: each individual is an equal participant in the event. When not necessitated by the exigencies of financial need, that hierarchical device is better left to the opera houses of Europe. Each tier has its own access to the lobby, and one may not move between the tiers except by returning to a gathering space. In this way the possibility of individual interpretation exists within the larger shared experience.

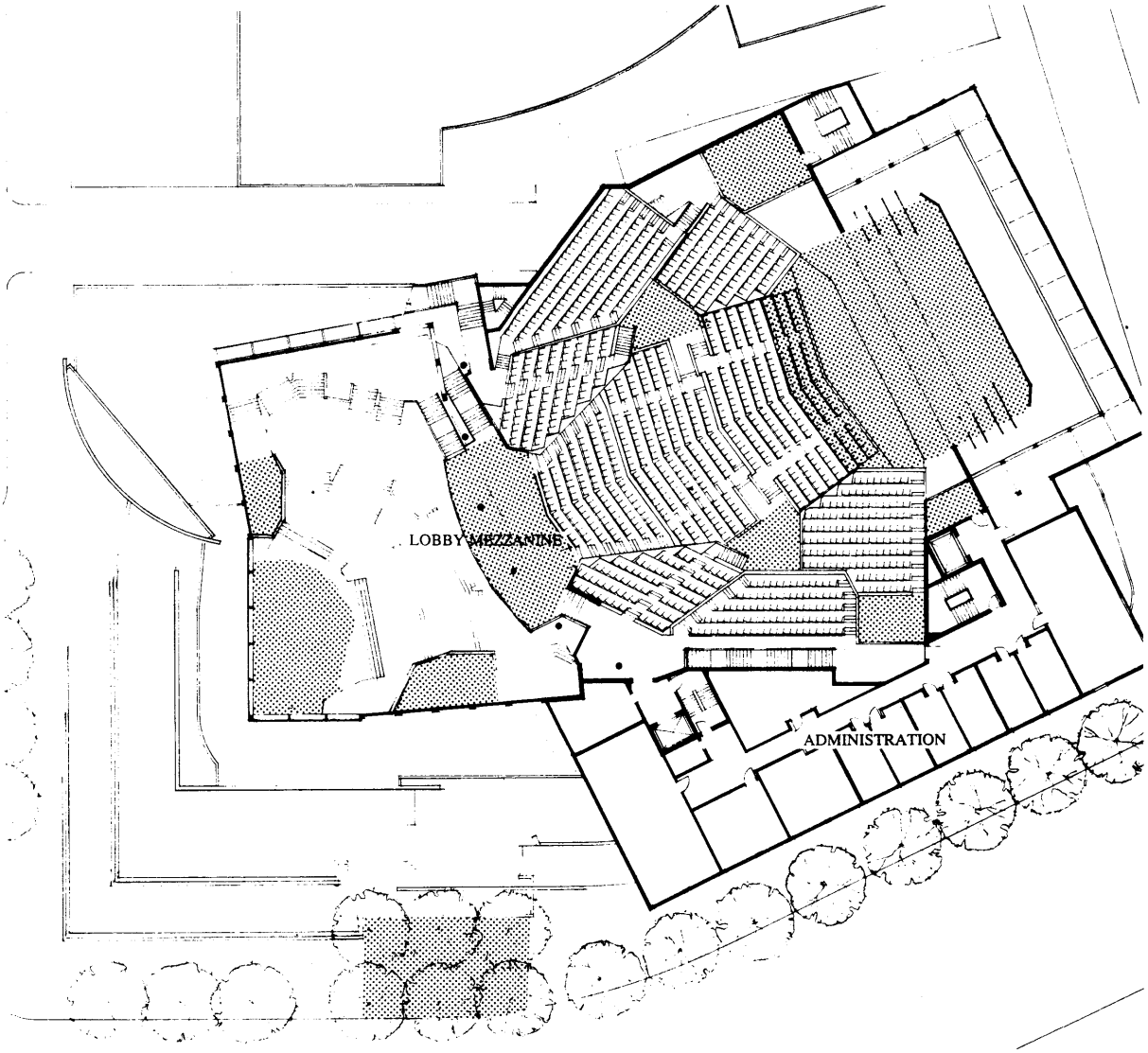


Figure 6.24
Diagram showing possible locations for performance in the theater. The small gathering areas within the auditorium may be read as extensions of the lobby into that space or as small stages.

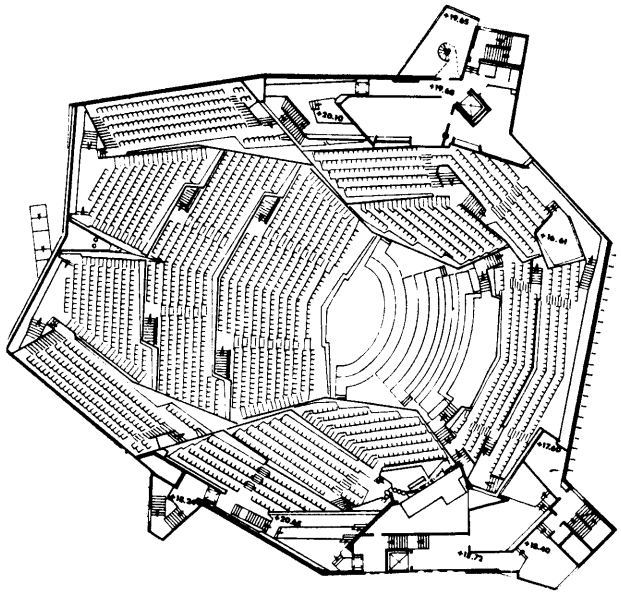


Figure 6.25
Scharoun's Philharmonic hall.

The expressionistic shapes of the tiers create gaps between them; these become small gathering areas for the audience. They are like small lobby spaces within the performance area, where the audience may pause before finding its seats. To this end they are the termination of the spatial procession that begins at the plaza and experientially associated with the lobby. They may even become performance areas: to create a stronger exchange between actor and audience a director might choose to extend the performance off the stage and out into the audience, utilizing these platforms for dramatic action. The result is a transformation of the traditional theater into a kind of structured street theater. Just as the lobby is transformed into a performance area, the auditorium is recast as both lobby and street.

That transformation begs the question of the proscenium. While these gestures all create more exchange between actor and audience member, the proscenium stage seems completely contrary to that effort: it divides performers from watchers. Given the theater size (1200 seats), a proscenium is necessary and appropriate for the existing repertory; legitimate theater requires the machinery of the the stage house. The space may be transformed, however, into an open thrust stage stage or even a three-quarter round theater.

These arrangements are generally more suitable for smaller audiences; to this end the auditorium volume is flexible. The acoustic clouds which float above the seating tiers may be lowered to create a more intimate space. They close off the upper seating tiers and define a smaller auditorium. In short, the auditorium is flexible

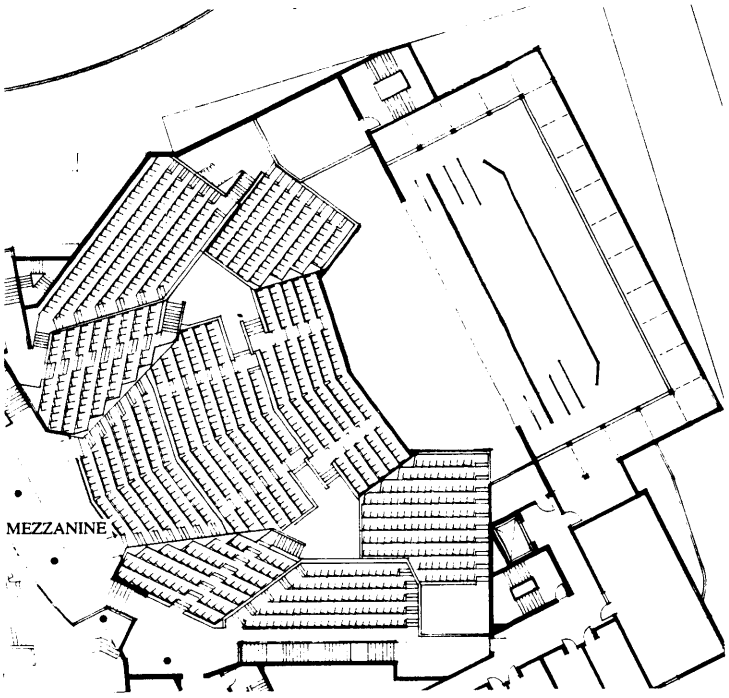


Figure 6.26
Diagram showing auditorium converted from proscenium mode to open thrust stage.

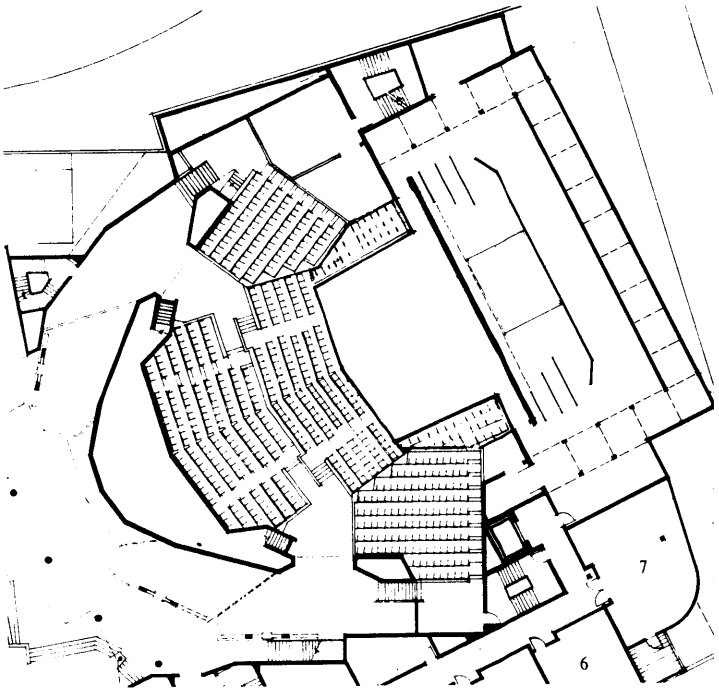
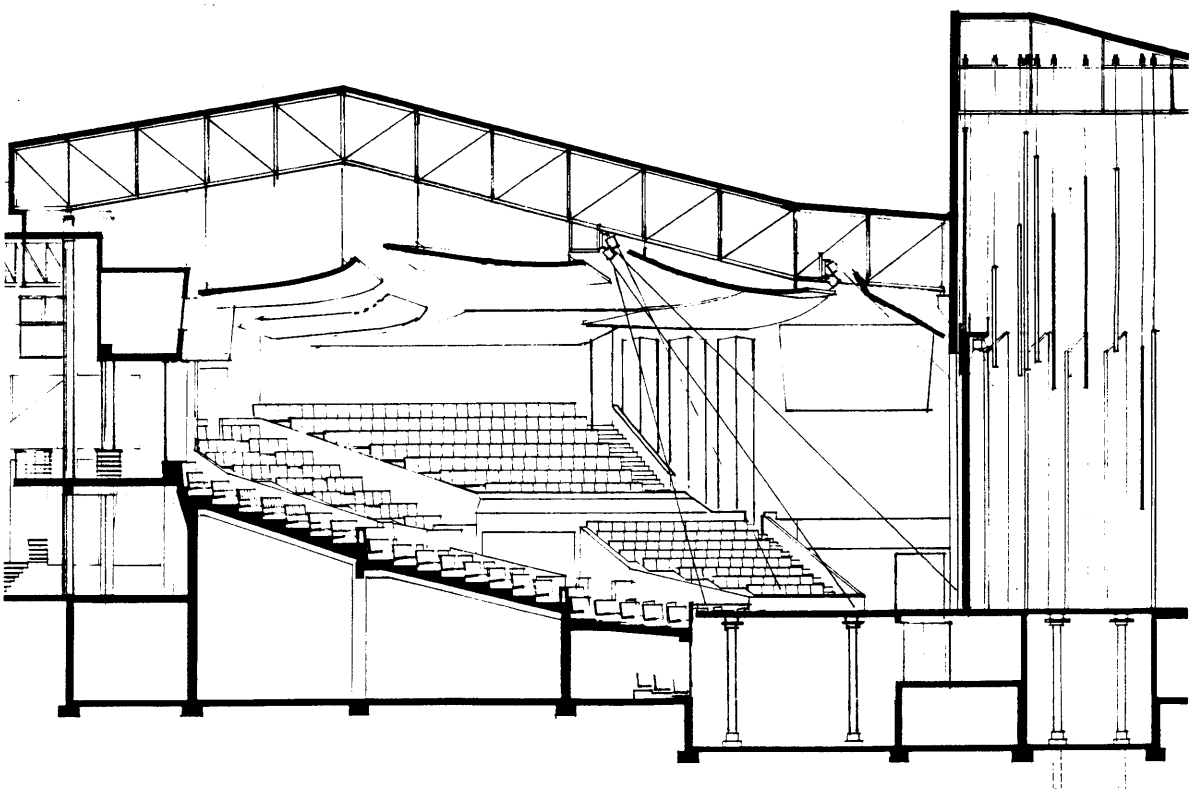


Figure 6.27
Seating tiers may be adjusted to even accommodate theater in the three-quarter round. Diagram shows this configuration with the upper tiers closed off to create a small theater.

enough to accommodate a variety of performance types from legitimate theater to small playhouse performance.

Figure 6.28
Section through auditorium showing theater in thrust stage mode with stage house closed off.



PLAZA

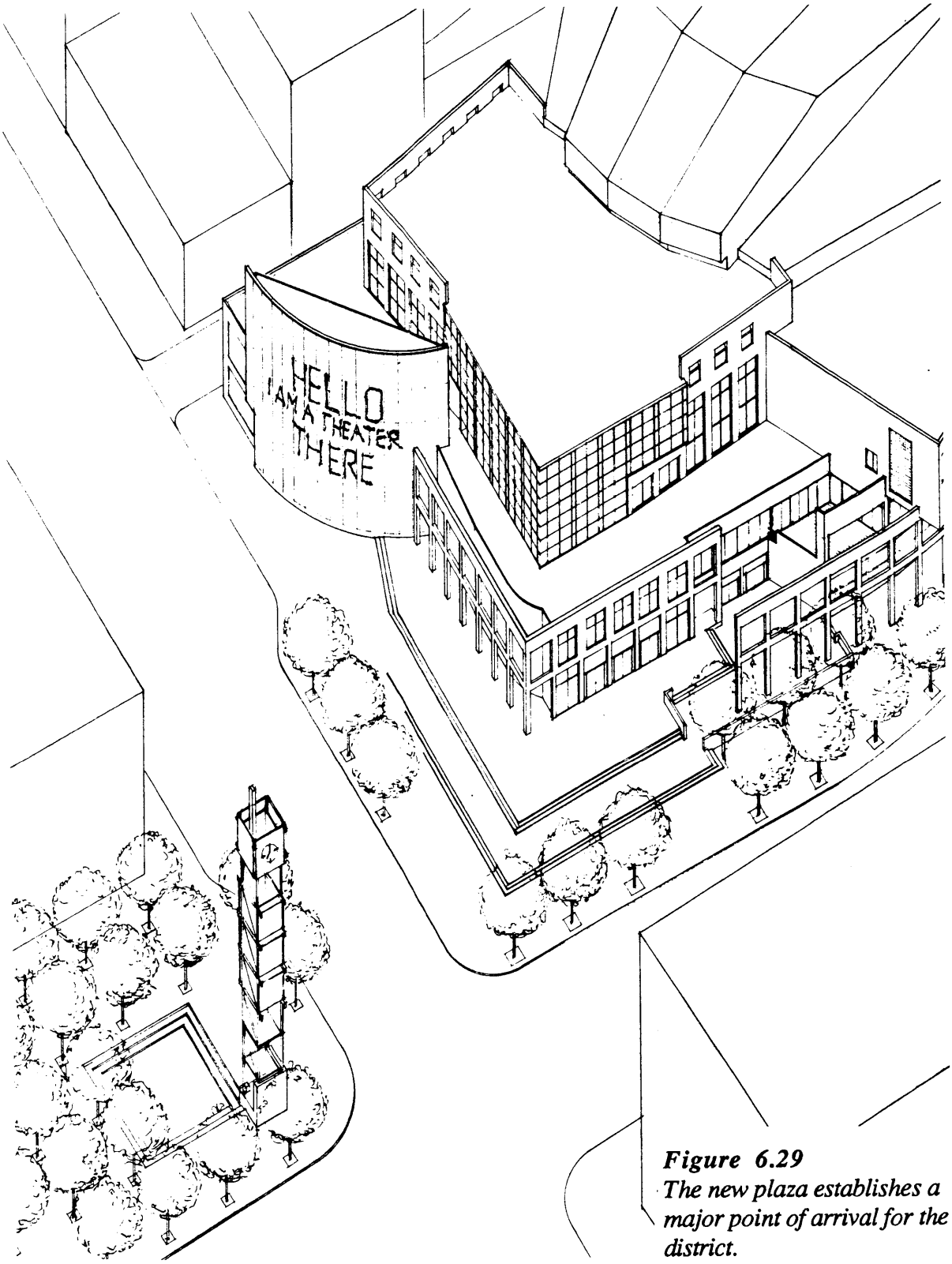


Figure 6.29
The new plaza establishes a major point of arrival for the district.

Plaza

The plaza is the center of the Theater District; it establishes a public space that city residents will connect with theater. The new building steps back at the corner of Tremont and Stuart Streets, implicitly recognizing the importance of the intersection. More importantly, its massing aligns with the Wilbur Theater across the street, establishing a larger public space well defined by its edges. In spanning Tremont Street, the new plaza becomes a node in the city: the intersection is seen as a point of arrival for the district. It is marked by the companile on the corner, a slightly taller and more permanent version of the sign structure that already exists.

To insure activity within the plaza, commercial uses are provided. The ground floor space along Stuart Street is given over to retail uses; the theater ticket concession, which formerly inhabited a trailer across the street, occupies the prominent corner space. A new cafe restaurant is planned to attract people in the evenings. It will provide a post-theater destination for audience members all over the district. The existing restaurant in the Wilbur Theater expands out into the plaza on the other side of Tremont Street. Both these facilities will also serve the large lunchtime crowd in the area; the plaza offers a pleasant place to sit and enjoy one's meal. In times of inclement weather (all too frequent in Boston's climate), the public may move inside the lobby.

The most prominent feature of the plaza is the curved form of the new theater which faces it. This form is a huge electronic screen that will variously project theater

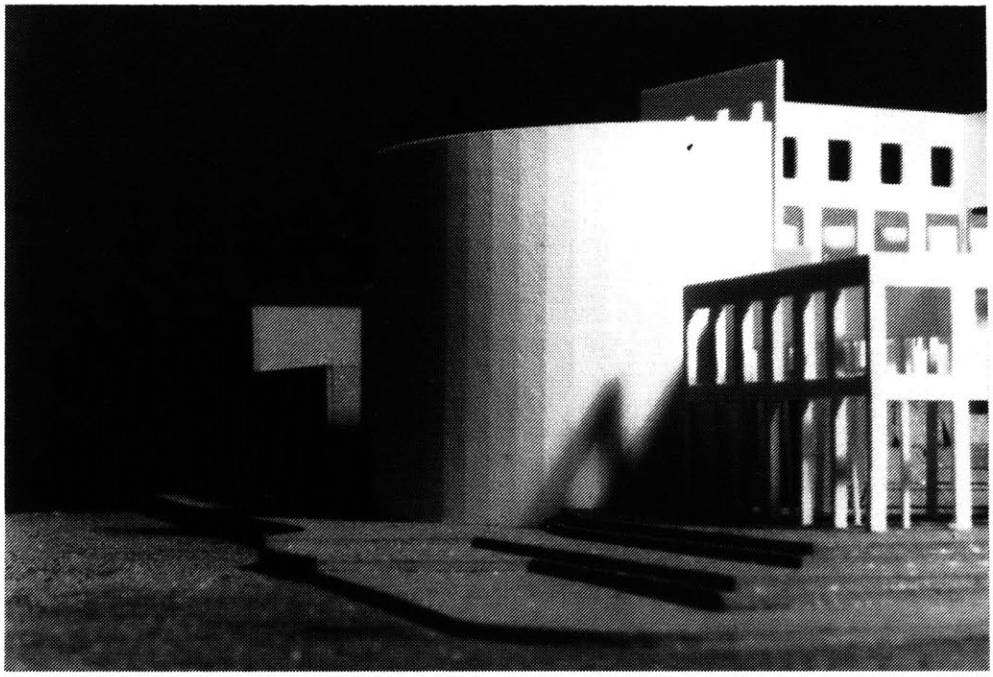
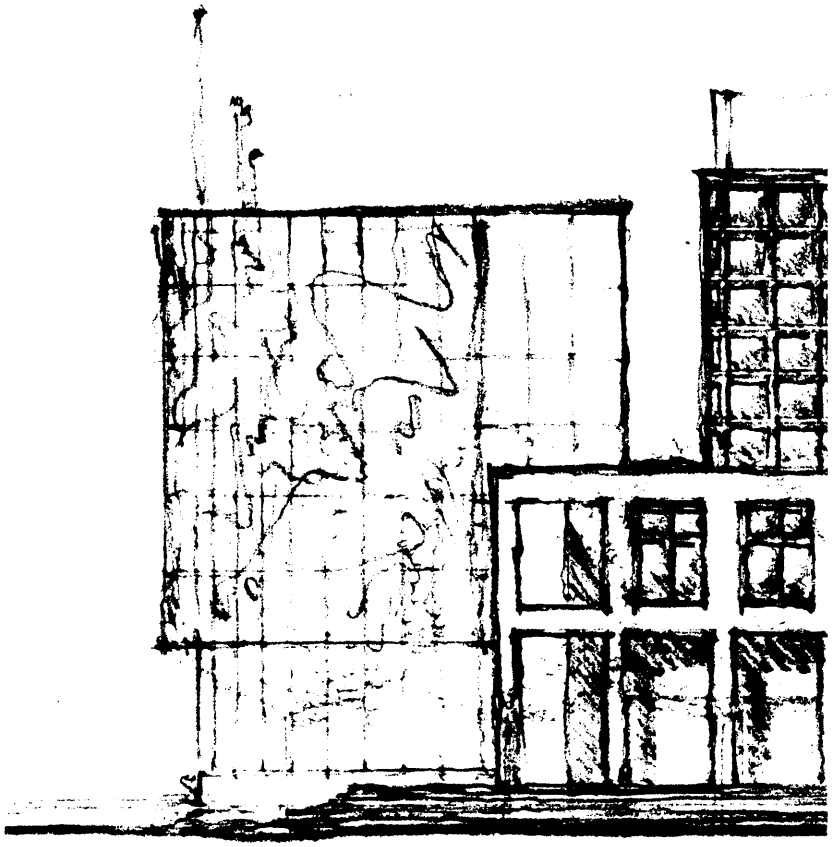
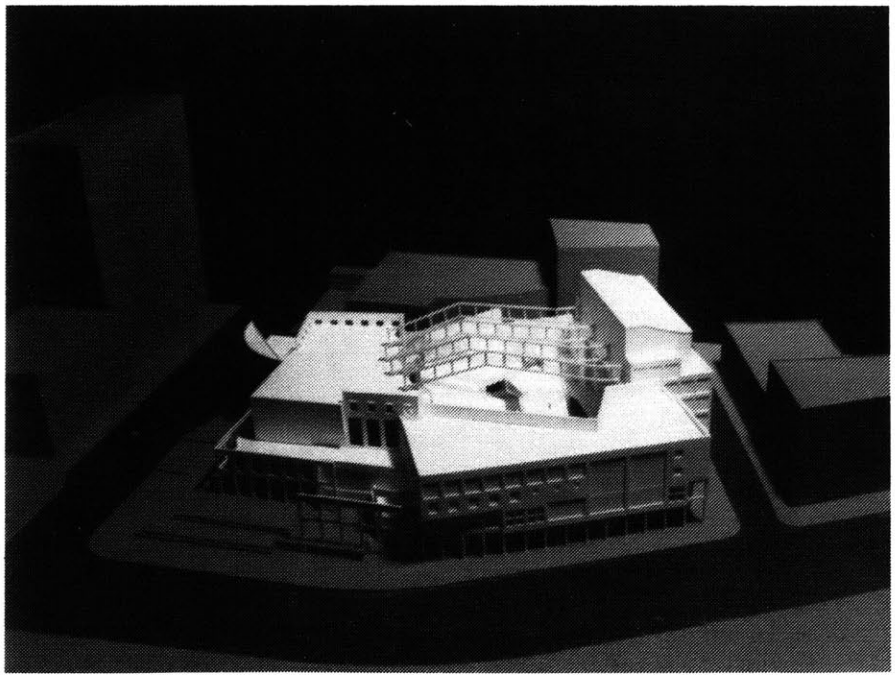


Figure 6.30
The curved sign form as seen from plaza. It may broadcast events occurring inside.

event information, videos, or even the performance as it happens. No more standing room only: go outside and watch it on diamond vision! The sign faces Boylston Street and the Common, marking the center of the district. Like the lighted signs of Times Square or, more locally, the Citgo sign in Kenmore, the screen will create an image of the place.





LOBBY

(A Few Final Words)

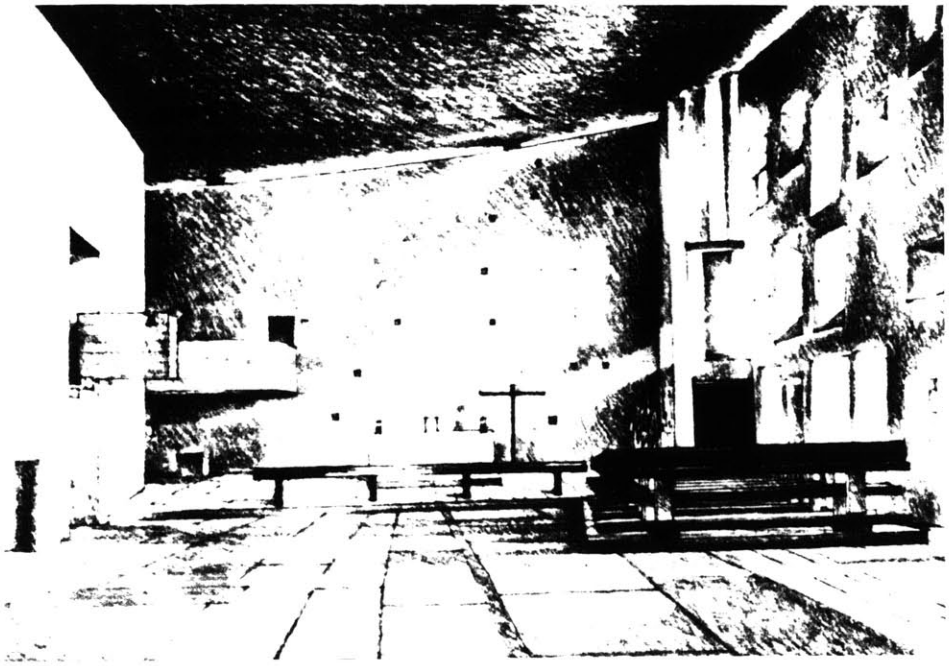
This thesis has generally explained the theater as an artifact, the physical result of a series of formal decisions and manipulations. The theater, however, is not so much about form as it is about a series of experiences created by form. This is especially true of the lobby. It cannot be described as a singular place, because it is the result of the several overlapping and conflicting systems described in Chapter Six; its identity is the end result of the forms that create it. In this sense the building orders and elements take on reduced importance as objects or expressions of design intent; their larger purpose is to create the lobby experience. It is an event that exists because of the relationships between those elements.

For example, the lobby is not intrinsically a performance space, even though it is in theater's nature for it to be so; it becomes a theatrical space only when its form suggests the possibility of performance to the user. In the case of this design, the form of the steps exist within the envelope of the screen walls and structure. The participation of all these systems is necessary for the lobby to be a theatrical venue. Without them reinforcing this role, the notion of lobby as a performance space does not transmit to the user.

As a result, the lobby should not be understood as a physical setting suitable for some programmatic purpose but as a place of many possible uses. Those purposes change over time and the lobby changes its

identity. This ability to recreate itself for differing performances is central to its role: it becomes the introduction to the world of the theater as the performers intend for that world to be understood. The lobby sets the tone for the drama.

This, in the end, is the true nature of theater: it must remain ambiguous in its relationship to the larger culture. Thus the importance of the lobby to the overall experience; it establishes that relationship in the perception of the theater-goers. Only then does the drama itself have the latitude to achieve its greatest impact on the audience.



But suppose that walls rise toward heaven in such a way that I am moved. I perceive your intentions. Your mood has been gentle, brutal, charming or noble. The stones you have erected tell me so. You fix me to the place and my eyes regard it. They behold something which expresses a thought. A thought which reveals itself without word or sound, but solely by means of shapes which stand in a certain relationship to one another. These shapes are such that they are clearly revealed in light. The relationships between them have not necessarily any reference to what is practical or descriptive. They are a mathematical construction of your mind. They are the language of Architecture.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1 van de Ven, p. 37.
2 Rowe, p.28.
3 van de Ven, p.38
4 Rowe, p.28.
Banham never mentions Hegel *per se*, but this is his thesis.
5 Tafuri, *Theater as Virtual City,* pp.32-35.
6 Athanasopulos, p.135.
7 *Ibid.,* p.137.

Chapter 3

1 Schnee, p.66.
2 See for example Wiles, pp.111-157.
3 *Ibid.,* p.1.
4 *Ibid.,* p.6.
5 Athanasopulos, p.148.
6 *Ibid.*
7 Schnee, p.66.
8 Artaud, pp.54-60.
9 Tafuri, p.32.
10 *Ibid.*
11 Wiles, p.126.
12 Artaud proposed this in Theater and Cruelty. Many followed;
e.g. "The Performing Garage" in New York.
13 Tafuri, p.31.
14 Wiles, p.20.
15 Drinkwater, pp.192-193.
16 *Ibid.*
17 Athanasopulos, p.148.
18 *Ibid.*
19 Alberti, Book VII, ch.7.
20 Santaniello, p.11.
21 Tafuri, *Utopia,* pp.50-51.

22 Athanasopolus, p.124.
23 See generally Tafuri, *Theater as Virtual City;* note also Tafuri, *Utopia,* p.89.
24 Tafuri, *Theater as Virtual City,* pp.49.
25 Tafuri, *Utopia;* p.49.
26 Tafuri, *Theater as Virtual City,* p.32.
27 See for example Hejduk, "Berlin Masque" in *Mask of Medusa.*

Chapter 5

1 Lynch, pp.17-25.
2 *Ibid.,* pp.67-69.
3 This division is somewhat arbitrary on my part; while theaters occupy only the northwest quadrant of this area, the area as a whole suffers the same problems and thus should be considered together.
4 Lynch, p.20.
5 Arnheim, Chapter 4.

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