Open Space:
Theater and Public Life on the Central Artery

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, February 2003.

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Abstract

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How does public space work?

In the light of changes to the composition of society and the emergence of new technologies, conventional understandings of public space and inherited spatial forms no longer apply. Yet, for all the pessimism about whether these spaces will continue to exist, people still flock to places where they can be together. At the heart of this urge lies a crucial understanding of the modern city. Instead of being a closed community the modern city is cosmopolitan, a place for the gathering and living together of strangers. The city is the place where one goes to know people different from one self. Consequently, the city's reason for being is to socialize—for information, for business, for the development of the self. Like any place for socializing, it has its roots in pleasure. Located on the North End parcels of the central artery, my thesis project employs those programs that emerged right as this new understanding of the city dawned -- hotels, clubs, coffee shops, public promenades, restaurants, theaters, and pubs— to create spaces for socializing within the city.

Social interaction is discursive, based on communicating, instead of being a visual relationship. The goal of the design is to create those moments where individuals can approach each other instead of being passive spectators to one another. Despite its lightheartedness, socializing and pleasure are serious because they set the terms on which different people can communicate and relate to one another, which ultimately is the basis for any democratic politics.

Thesis Supervisor: William L. Porter,
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Theater and Public Life

> How many times have the city, its architecture, and theater been intertwined, for the theater is often the foil for the representations of public life, and public space frequently arranged as if for a theatrical performance. Both the theater and urban spaces are places of representation, assemblage, and exchange between actors and spectators, between the drama and the stage set....[1]

Throughout the history of western civilization the theater has been inseparable from the city. As the theater has attempted to encapsulate a complete vision of the city, the city likewise has been re-interpreted as a kind of theater. The spaces of the two have been pitted together, seen sometimes as distinct but often as identical. To recount their shared history would to be to trace a complicated web of relationships. For the Ancient Greeks the theater served a didactic role, instructing its audience in the city's values. With the entire city gathered in its audience the theater created an ideal portrait of the city, provoking the audience to compare its vision with the reality of the city. The city became a theatrical stage for public life during the Italian Renaissance. Perspective reduced the city building and painting to the same art, and consequently city design became the art of creating the proper setting for the citizen's actions. The civic square became a stage for great acting in front of the city, offering the possibility of glory and celebrity: "city became a pictorial stage for the representation of significant actions, a theatrical milieu of power and status, dignity and glory"[2] During the 16th century in England one of the first commercial theaters emerged, existing at London's margins. The theater became a vehicle to identify and re-hearse new social relationships in a city where they were being radically transformed by the emergence of a market economy: "By concentrating on the ideas of theatricality, the theater could meditate on these new social relationships emerging in a commercial world."[3] In the capital cities of the Enlightenment, which were filled with a new population who were strangers to one another, the theater became a gathering place where one assimilated the actor's craft as a way for presenting one self to and socializing with each other.

The theater and the city were intertwined in a myriad ways often simultaneously. The theater could represent the city on its stage as well as being itself an encapsulation of it; the city could become a theatrical space, designed using the principles of the stage design or most importantly, as I will explain in this paper, adopting the relationship of actor and audience as a way to form and mediate social relationships in the city. Regardless of the nature of the theater's connection to the city at a particular moment it offered a way to not only represent the identity of the city but also a way to negotiate its various inner relationships. At once it facilitated the well-being of the city and offered a way to critique and re-make it. Richard Schener argues that this is the essential role of the theater in the city and its ultimate expression:

> And no matter how we want to avoid social issues, politics, the life of the people in its collective manifestations, the City-as tragedy, satire, celebration, farce—is not what theater is about but its chief glory....[4]

However, in the nineteenth century the nature of public life in the city and the theater fundamentally changed. Public life disintegrated as man became alienated from society. A confluence of different forces robbed him of meaningful social relationships but more remarkably theater could not remake those bonds as it had in the past. Instead, theater or theatricality was seen as creating a false set of social relationships to replace those that capitalism destroyed. In the terminology of Marx, theatricality at the service of capitalism created a 'false consciousness', an illusion of the way society worked so that capitalism could simultaneously disguise its workings and operate more efficiently at the individual's expense. Yet artists persisted and valiantly tried to resurrect a new theater to remake society but each attempt ultimately ended with the opposite result. Another vision of the world was offered which capitalism co-opted to its own ends. The cycle continues up to the present, where new avant-gardes create critical stances offering hopefully a way to re-think relationships in the city only to end as another "analogous city"--for instance the Situationist city of ambiances slipping easily into a 'themed' city of festival marketplaces. It seems as if theatricality is doomed forever to become spectacle. Not so.

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[1] Boyer.), 74.

[2] Ibid, 79.

[3] Ibid, 87.

[4] Schechner, 52.

I will argue in this paper that the cycle has not been broken in part because of a fundamental misunderstanding of how the relationship of theater and society created modern public life, which was elucidated by Richard Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man.* This relationship emerged during the eighteenth century and was transformed in the nineteenth century through a complex series of events that ultimately resulted in the disintegration of public life. As Richard Sennett argues, it is the confusion about public life created during the nineteenth century that prevents us in part from recovering it in the twentieth century. I will examine his argument and use it as a basis to critique the strategies of the modern avant-garde and offer a different understanding of theatricality that will hopefully serve better to restore some measure of public life.

theatricality and the crisis of intimacy

The erosion of public life is a subject so vast that it seems to be insurmountable, but its breakdown can be elucidated in an essential contradiction. The desire to participate in public life persists even though we are skeptical of the interactions of public life. We flock to parks, summer concerts, and baseball games but rarely feel bold enough to speak to whoever is sitting next to us. In modern society we maintain silence in public and feel intruded upon when a stranger asks a question. Public exchanges are perceived as stale and hollow while private interactions are believed to be true and meaningful connections. Passion is rarely invested in our public dealings and instead reserved for private relationships. Despite these feelings we have not abandoned the public world. The great symbol of this predicament is the nineteenth century flaneur who silently wandering the Parisian streets seeks private nourishment from public life while distancing himself from it.

The origin of this contradiction is the erasure of the separation between private and public. By no longer understanding the public and private as two distinct realms, people have taken the public world and imposing a private mode of behavior on it. Public society is burdened with fulfilling private needs, but so much of what is important in public life cannot meet those demands. Ultimately, as Richard Sennett argues, public life is seen as lifeless, even as people continually look to it to provide what is absent from their private lives:

> Because this psychological imagination of life has broad consequences, I want to call it by name that may first seem inapt: this imagination is an intimate vision of society. "Intimacy" connotes warmth, trust, and open expression of feeling. But precisely because we have come to expect these psychological benefits throughout the range of our experience, and precisely because so much of social life which does not have a meaning cannot yield these rewards, the world outside, the impersonal world, seems to fail us, seems to be stale and empty....[5]

People ceased to participate in public life because expressing oneself in public life could not fulfill the same meanings gained from expression in intimacy. Instead of seeing public life as requiring a different involvement of one self, the ways of expressing oneself in private and its demands were placed on public life, which was a failure. Even more, by erasing the distinction between the private and public worlds, the individual felt an unprecedented exposure of the self in public. At the same time that the individual imposed the private realm into the public world, he also felt a loss of control in the public realm of his private self. Given these hazards it is incredible that public and cosmopolitan life was not abandoned to the absolute focus on the self. At various moments in the twentieth century, particularly the late sixties and seventies, it was. In the private realm, people sought to discover themselves: "We have tried to make the fact of being in private alone with ourselves and with family and intimate friends, an end in itself."[6] But society has returned to valuing participation in public life because the self could never achieve its fullest development within itself:

> Each person's self has become the principal burden; to know oneself has become an end, instead of a means through which one knows the world.

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[5] Sennett, 5.

[6] Ibid, 4.

> And precisely because we are so self-absorbed, it is extremely difficult for us to arrive at a private principle, to give any clear account to ourselves or to others of what our personalities are. The reason is that, the more privatized the psyche, the less it is stimulated, and the more difficult it is for us to feel or to express feeling...[7]

Because the insertion of the private into the public caused the weakening of public life the essential question becomes how could public expression become meaningful again. It is the idea of theatricality that can help restore the balance between and roles of public and private life.

The vitality of public life fundamentally depends on the way people can be expressive towards one another. It is the rules of these exchanges that determine what people are willing to believe of one another, what they find meaningful in the other's displays, and what can arouse to them act or feel. Unlike private life where expressiveness is measured in the ability to truly reveal your inner self, i.e. "bare your soul", public expression is judged by how convincingly one plays a role. The role one plays is by definition separate from the self. Public life broke down because expression within it was judged using the standards of the private sphere and consequently perceived as contrived and hollow. This way of thinking is so ingrained now that it is difficult to imagine otherwise. Public roles obviously seem false. It is not who we really are after all, but the roles are real to the degree in which they produce a response in another person, cause another to act or feel differently. Public life is about an individual's ability to affect others in society:

> In studying the erosion of public, we are adopting a mode of inquiry, which at the same time is a theory about our subject—namely, that the subject contains more than meets the eye, that it contains the hidden problem of the conditions under which human beings are able to **express themselves forcefully** to each other...[8]

Under what conditions is one willing to believe the role another plays? When are the roles considered meaningful? How did the very idea of roles, separate from one's self, emerge and become real in the first place? The idea of people playing roles distinct from their self, i.e. being actors, has a long history in western thought. It is the idea of the *theatrum mundi,* the world as a theater.

The concept of *theatrum mundi* has many different interpretations in western thought. Most of them are deeply pessimistic viewing the world as a stage for the audience of a divine authority, but during the eighteenth century people began to imagine a new audience for their posturing - each other. Consequently, a religious predicament gave way to a concern for the playacting and pretenses of everyday life. The eighteenth century understanding of *theatrum mundi* introduced three significant ideas about the workings of society. First, it established delusion and illusion as essential questions of social life, but more importantly, it gave birth to the idea of man-as-actor, separating his social actions from his self:

Man as actor arouses belief; outside the conditions and the moment of performing, that belief might otherwise might not be forthcoming; therefore, belief and illusion are tied together in this image of society. Similarly, an actor's nature cannot be inferred from any single role he plays, for in a different play or in a different scene, he may appear in a wholly different guise; how then infer human nature from actions in a theater of society?

By viewing man as an actor in social life, society at once recognizes the illusion that an individual creates when 'acting' but also the conditions under which it will be perceived as believable. In doing so, how is society to grasp human nature out of the images that society constructs of itself? What conclusions about us as human beings can be drawn from the ways in which we construct a theatrical world for ourselves? The answer is in the art of this fabrication—the ways in which we *create* roles and express them. Instead of viewing communication as an authentic revelation of the self, expression becomes the art of making an image of one self, one that is shared by society. It is through the creative art of acting within public life that society understands itself and human nature: "the images of *theatrum mundi* are pictures of the art people exercise in ordinary life." [9]

By interposing a role between one's self and the world like a mask on a face, theatricality opposes the vision of intimate expression where people can communicate directly to one another without any intervening obstruction. Intimate expression, ironically, results not in people being able to express themselves more truly but not at all. The more one turns inwards and focuses on subjective feelings, the more those emotions become unique to one self and consequently incommunicable. One has lost the art of making an objective construction of one's subjective states, and consequently those feelings become amorphous and unreal because there isn't any way to manifest them. The objective constructions are society's roles and conventions in which we invest ourselves to make them believable and meaningful. Theatricality is a discourse about how those inner states can be expressed by separating them from the self and giving them a life of their own. By looking outwards from the self instead of inwards towards it, theatricality opposes the modern idea of intimacy and nurtures a strong public life:

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[7] Ibid, 4.

[8] Ibid, 35.

[9] Ibid, 35.

> In the theater, there is a correlation between belief in the persona of the actor and belief in the conventions. Play, playacting, and acting, all require belief in conventions to be expressive. Convention is itself the single most expressive tool of public life. But in an age wherein intimate relations determine what shall be believable, conventions, artifices, and rules appear only to get in the way of revealing oneself to another; they are obstructions to intimate expression. As the imbalance between public and intimate life has grown greater, people have become less expressive. With an emphasis on psychological authenticity, people become inartistic in daily life because they are unable to tap the fundamental creative strength of the actor, the ability to play with and invest feeling in external images of self. *Thus we arrive at the hypothesis that theatricality has a special, hostile relation to intimacy; theatricality has an equally special, friendly relation to a strong public life....*[10]

theater and theatricality within the city

The relationship between theatricality and the street is not an abstraction nor is the concept of *theatrum mundi* merely a metaphor. Their connection is a real one that stems from a shared experience. In both places expressions takes place within a milieu of strangers. The individual in a society of strangers face the same dilemma as the actor on stage: how is one going to arouse belief in one's behavior? Within an audience of strangers the people who witness one's actions rarely has any knowledge of one's history nor any experience of your behavior in the past. Without any external standard to judge whether one is to believed or not, people must base their beliefs on the frame of the immediate situation. The arousal of belief consequently depends on how one behaves -- talks, gestures, moves, listens -- within the situation. Sennett relates the example of two people meeting a dinner party. One shares with the other that he has been depressed for weeks, but how is the listener able to ascertain whether or not that is true. He must rely on the way the stranger enacts the feeling of depression, which is not unsimilar to the fashion one evaluates an actor's performance. The audience within the theater does not care about the actor's private life in judging his performance. Knowing that he has many public love affairs does not make him a credible Romeo. Instead the audience looks to how he enacts his role to judge him.

Belief in the actor is consequently like belief in the stranger in that one takes the immediate encounter as the limit of knowable reality. In both external knowledge on the part of the audience is not involved—in the city by necessity, in the theater by fiat. The relationship between the theater and the street is more than a casual one because both share the same problem of an audience of strangers. The standards under which a stranger is to be believed resemble those of an actor. This connection is crucial because the theater provides the terms under which strangers in the city can relate to one another. In a society with a vital public life, there should be affinities in the street and the theater and the experience of both should be similar. The parallels should decline as public life deteriorates:

> In a society of strong public life there should be affinities between the domains of stage and street; there should be

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[10] Ibid, 37.

> something comparable in the expressive experiences crowds have had in these two realms. As public life declines, these affinities should erode...[11]

Likewise, the strongest link between the theater and the street -- and consequently a resilient public life -- should emerge in a society where the greatest number of people are strangers to one another, the cosmopolitan city. It is within the great city that strangers in a crowd are the most evident and the exchanges between strangers become crucial to the city's functioning. Within the capital cities of Europe during the eighteenth century a vibrant social life emerges and the theater blossoms at the moment when the city becomes overwhelm with a new population, all strangers to one another.

capitals in the ancien regime: cities of strangers

During the eighteenth century the capital cities of London and France experienced an incredible influx of new people from rural areas. Often young, single, and without family, the family names, associations, and traditions, which were identifying marks back home, became meaningless with the city. These newcomers were freed from past identities within the city. At the same time the class of the mercantile bourgeoisie emerged within the capitals, which further blurred social distinctions.

Both cities experienced a huge expansion in trade, growth in the distribution of goods not their production. People flocked to the city to work in these mercantile and commercial pursuits, but this middleman bourgeoisie who came to dominate the city had no clear class identity. It was far different from even the older Renaissance mercantile classes because of a new mobility within the market themselves. In the eighteenth century the markets moved from competition for a monopoly of trade, a guild, to competition of trade within a given area or commodity. This change broke down the relationship between families and businesses. Fathers could no longer give their sons an exclusive market as part of their inheritance. Without that advantage children had little reason to remain within the family business and struck out in new directions. The mercantile bourgeoisie were freed from past family associations and entered into a yet unrecognized economic class. Unaware of their similarities and their identity as a class, the mercantile bourgeoisie felt that the older social distinctions were no longer so strict:

> The appearance of a new class can thus create a milieu of strangers in which many people are increasingly like each other but don't know it. There is a sense that the old distinctions, the old lines between one group and another, no longer apply, but little sense of new rules for instant distinctions...Absent was a new language for "us" and "them", insider and outside, "above" and "below"...[12]

As family and economic markers were disappearing, the new physical shape of the capital city exacerbated the situation by preventing any coherence to be made of this new social group.

Paris and London were the largest cities in the western world at the time. In order to accommodate this swelling mass of people, the cities re-organized and expanded, but it was the very planning of the cities which prevented them from settling into any recognizable quarter or territory by social class. The traditional medieval and renaissance squares where the shared life of the neighborhood took place were being replaced with new monumental squares. In both cases the messy activities of daily life were restricted, and city dwellers lost the ability to associate with their neighbors as they had in the past:

> The social question raised by the population of London and Paris was the question of living with or being a stranger. The social question raised by the new terms of density was where these strangers were to be visible routinely, so that images of strangers could be formed. The old meeting ground, the multi-use square, was being eroded by space as monument to itself in Paris, by a museum of nature in London...[13]

No longer able to congregate in the same way as in the medieval square markets, the assemblage of crowds became a specialized activity divorced from its particular locale. The crowds congregated in three important new places—the café, the pedestrian park, and the theater.

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[11] Ibid, 42.

[12] Ibid, 48.

[13] Ibid, 56.

At these new places, people had to find a new way to communicate. The material changes in society, immigration into the city and a changing economy, alone should not have increased sociability, even though it was known as the great age of sociability. Coping with a city full of strangers , people became conscious of creating a distance between one self and one's traffic with the world. Because one did not know who one was dealing with, one had not only to hide one's own self but had to learn to communicate in a way that did not refer to the other personally, since they were an unknown. As I have mentioned earlier, the actor stands in the same relationship to his audience as the stranger did in the city. He must convince the audience of the role he plays, without any reference to his true self. What is forbidden for the actor is impossible for the individual in the faceless city. The theater offered a model for how one could act in public. A relationship based on kindred modes of behavior connected the public life of the city with the theater, what Sennett names a "bridge":

> Just as the actor touched people's feelings without revealing to them his own character offstage, the same codes of belief he used served his audience to a similar end; they aroused each other's feelings without having to attempt to define themselves to each other, a definition the material conditions of life would have made difficult, frustrating, and probably fruitless. The bridge, in turn, gave men the means to be sociable, on impersonal grounds...[14]

But what did that bridge consist of between the theater and social life in the city? What was concretely similar in the attitudes and behavior in the theater and those in the other great places of sociability in the eighteenth century city, the café and pedestrian park? The bridge was formed in two ways: one concerning the body and the other concerning the voice.

the body and speech in the *ancien regime*

During this time, the body disappeared under incredibly complicated clothing. While sumptuary laws still existed, albeit laxly enforced, the bourgeoisie dressed elaborately, even fancifully. Outfits became outlandish and artificial, for example *La Belle* Poule, where a replica of a ship of the same name was lodged in the hair in commemoration of one of its sea victories. Heavy makeup was worn that obliterated the face; the placement of rouge communicated what mood was in that night. The extraordinary dress called attention to itself rather than setting off or framing the wearer's body:

> If the casual visitor were to stop for a moment, indeed, and consider in what the playfulness and fantasy of the upper-class clothing lay, he would be struck by the fact that the wig, the hat, the vest-coat, while attracting attention to the wearer, did so by qualities of these adornments as objects in themselves, and not as aids... [15]

The body was treated as a mannequin. Clothes became a matter of contrivance and decoration, with the body serving to display the clothes rather than acting as an expressive, living vehicle.

The idea that the body was merely a mannequin took its greatest expression on the stage, where bodies would be elaborately draped to represent allegorical figures. At times, parts of the actors' bodies would be revealed, but that was irrelevant. A bare chest was only there to set off a particularly interesting knot of silk strung across it. In fact, the city's fashions closely paralleled the costumes of the theater. Many of the costume-makers were the elite fashion designers and used the stage to experiment with clothing that would become street clothing, much as Renaissance architects would try out new architectural forms as stage backdrops. By focusing attention on itself rather than the body, the clothing detached behavior from the physical attributes of the wearer. The fashion of the time provided an elaborate language for expressing one self without reference to the self, an important step in interacting with others in a society of strangers. The clothing had its own intrinsic meaning as an object in itself, independent of its wearer. This principle would be just as important to speech as it was to clothing. Language signified in and of itself without reference to outside situations or the person of the speaker. This understanding of language is the most clearly expressed within the *ancien regime* theaters.

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[14] Ibid, 64.

[15] Ibid, 70.

[16] Ibid, 78.

Before the middle of the eighteenth century the theater was not self-sufficient, dependent on royal and aristocratic patronage. Performing was a risky profession, having low status within society and work being subject to the patron's whims. But at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the audience and the theater took on a new form. The theaters became permanent, receiving public grants and defined privileges. Acting became a stable profession, and troupes were becoming permanent as well for a consistent group of patrons. The reason for this stabilization was the theater's growing popularity. In Paris the theater Comedie Francaise had 100,000 spectators in 1737 but 175,000 spectators in 1765. The major popular theaters in London and Paris at the time sat between 1,500 and 2,500 people compared to the Metropolitan Opera House that holds 3,600. It is a significant number when one takes into account the vastly different sizes of modern New York and eighteenth century London and Paris. London had a population of 750,000 while Paris's population was estimated at 500,000. The entire city had begun to flock to the theaters.

The public in the *ancien regime* began to treat the theater as it had been in Ancient Athens, a meeting ground for the populace as a whole. The design of the eighteenth-century theater reflected this. They not only accommodated a much larger and diverse audience but also considered the entire audience's experience of the theater much more carefully:

> More attention was paid to having unobstructed sight lines for a large portion of the audience rather than a few, and the royal boxes became less and less of an immediate focus of the audience's attention. Refreshments began to be served during the performance itself by hawkers wandering the aisles, rather than in the private apartments of the patrons. The foyer became a place in which to meet between acts, rather than as entrance. Tickets were sold in the theater building rather than distributed as a gift....[16]

The theater had become much accessible, a focus of social life in the city rather instead of an entertainment provided by the king. Theater's stabilization did not mean a loss of spontaneity but made it a much more reliable medium for an audience that was beginning to consider it crucial to the life of the city.

To meet popular demand the number of theaters and performances grew but curiously very few new plays were introduced. Instead the same works were presented over and over again. The consistently recycled repertoire provides a clue to the very special relationship between audience and stage in the *ancien regime* theater. Rather than remaining silent spectators though the entire play, the audience would be in dialogue with the actors, interrupting them and demanding attention. Often this would happen at well-defined points in the play in an act called *point and settling.* At a well-known favorite part of the play the actor/actress would come down to the stage front and center and deliver his or her lines full face to the crowd. The audience would respond with hoots or hisses, or with "tears, screams, and faints", calling for a repeat. It could be repeated seven or eight times. It could go as far as the audience saying the lines for the actors. In the 1740s the Theater Italien was forbidden to present anything but pantomine on the stage as the audience would sing along in unison. This style of acting within the theater facilitated a new understanding of how language worked.

Knowing the plays very well, the audience began to demand more finesse from the actors in their performance. No longer content with a rigid recitation of lines, they asked that the actor make each moment more alive and nuanced: "They played less attention to the play 'as a story revealed' and more to the work of 'enactment' as an aesthetic experience itself."[17] According to Sennett, this acting style, which turned performance into a sequence of moments rather than the progression of a greater narrative, entailed speaking as signs rather than symbols. The modern definition of symbol is a sign that stands for something else. Symbols refer to a world outside of themselves, but the idea that there would be a world behind a given expression would have been alien to the people of the eighteenth century. An utterance carried its own emotional weight and meaning:

> To speak was to make a strong, effective,

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[16] Ibid, 78.

[17] Ibid, 79.

> above all self-contained, emotional statement. The fact that this speech was so consciously worked at, or that body imagery was consciously toyed with, in no way detracted from the convention produced. The woman in the *pouf au sentiment* did not feel 'artificial', the *pouf* was an expression in and of itself...[18]

By considering speaking a sign rather than a symbol, an expression was meaningful in the moment of enactment regardless of who spoke it. It had a life of its own, a form independent of the particular speaker and his particular hearer. Freed from any reference to the self, an audience member used the same techniques to make the emotional impact of his statement felt as the actor did his lines. Consequently the line between stage and audience collapsed.

Numerous spectators had seats on the stage with the actors, and they shared the limelight with them. They would parade across the stage at a whim and wave at their friends in the boxes. They were unabashed on the stage, enjoying every moment, and mixed freely with the actors. For all their artificial frippery the theater audience behaved spontaneously and allowed themselves emotional displays which one could have only in the most private moments: "men and women weeping over a hero's death on stage; loud catcalls at an actor who forgets his lines; riots in the theater when a play takes an unpopular political line."[19] It is exactly the artificiality of this world that allowed its participants to feel so freely and deeply. Their actions detached from their selves, they invested themselves fully in the emotion of the moment. Far different from today where one's appearance and expressions are such a profound reflection of ourselves that we retreat fearful of exposing too much.

The same rules that controlled speaking in the theater regulated speech in the street. By the middle of the eighteenth century new institutions had arisen where strangers could gather: the first restaurants, the pedestrian park, the pub serving liquor, and most importantly the coffee house. The coffee house was a gathering place for the distribution of information. They began to print and edit newspapers themselves, and businesses that depended on good information for their success began in coffee houses. Lloyd's of London started as a coffee house. The sharing of information was dependent on talking to one another. In order to encourage everyone to speak the speaker's identity was tactfully ignored:

> The talk was governed by a cardinal rule: in order for information to be as full as possible, distinctions of rank were temporarily suspended; anyone sitting in the coffeehouse had a right to talk to anyone else, to enter into any conversation, whether her knew the other people or not, whether he was bidden to speak or not. It was bad form even to touch on the social origins of other persons when talking to them in the coffee house, because the free flow of talk might then be impeded...[20]

By concentrating on the enactment itself rather than the identity of the actor, the coffee house appropriated the actor's art for its own needs. Speaking in the coffee house became an act identical to emoting in the theater. As the social life between the theater and public gathering places became increasingly similar, the places became physically closer as well. When the coffeehouses disappeared for economic reasons, the drinking establishments around the theaters took over their role. Many of these drinking establishments were physically attached to theater buildings. The people who frequented them spent an enormous amount of time in them. Conversations were lengthy and exhaustive and governed by the same system of *point and settling* as the theater, each speaker standing to make a *point* followed by a *settling* from his audience. The theater and the cities' public spaces were gradually being drawn together just as the social connections between them grew. Not only did the spaces of the theater and those of the city overlap, but also there was a shared mode of behavior constructed between them. It was the shared culture of the theater and the street that created a true public realm where everyone was an enigma to one another.

To our modern minds theatricality is synonymous with spectacle—the powerful overwhelming if ultimately ephemeral images of the city. In the eighteenth century theatricality had less to do with the appearance of things than the terms under which people could be expressive towards one another. Theatricality was discursive rather than solely visual. The theatricality of the eighteenth century had created a strong public culture, but this had changed drastically during the nineteenth century. The elaborate social interchanges of strangers in the eighteenth century were replaced with the momentary enthusiasms and magnificent spectacles of the nineteenth century. Mass spectacle replaced sociability. As public life became more ostentatious in the nineteenth century, people became more alone within it and less likely to engage one another. Rather than be a participant in public life, the city dweller became a voyeur to it. The reasons for and the character of this transformation can be understood by again examining the relationship between theater and the street.

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[18] Ibid, 77.

[19] Ibid, 73.

[20] Ibid, 82.

tumult in 19th century social life

During the nineteenth century the city underwent a convulsive transformation because of the industrial revolution. These radical changes to both the economy and the city's physical organization were traumatic to its inhabitants, but the persistence of the public realm forged in the *ancien regime* gave people a way to cope with it. However public life itself changed in adapting to the industrial world. As been remarked upon by many critics, a public life of participation and engagement fell to one of spectacle and passivity on the part of the spectator. To understand this transformation, it is necessary to chart the social consequences of the industrial revolution on the capital cities.

The economies of the nineteenth century magnified the changes of the eighteenth century. Population of the cities increased even more rapidly, which forced to cities to once again undergo an even more radical re-organization, for instance Baron Hausmann's transformation of Paris. Trade, finance, and bureaucracy were still the main activities of the capitals, but a new form of economic activity emerged, retail trade, because of urban land values. Factories are generally land-intensive, making them costly to locate them in cities, but the sweatshop, a much smaller manufacturing operation, were common within the city. In the nineteenth century the sweatshops became the place to convert the raw goods of the colonies into consumer goods. Combining the emergence of sweatshops with the growing population, retail trade became highly profitable. A new form of commerce emerged at the expense of the traditional markets. In this novel type of commerce all the complexities and problems of nineteenth century public life appeared.

In the 1850s a new kind of retail store emerged. The goods would be sold at a fixed price, and stores would make a profit by selling a large volume of goods at a small mark up. Not only were the prices fixed, but they were also plainly marked. Anyone could feel free to enter the store and browse. This departed remarkably from traditional markets, which operated like a Middle Eastern bazaar. In markets where the price was fluid buyers and sellers engaged in elaborate maneuvers during negotiations: "displays of outraged feeling, impassioned declarations of pain and suffering".[21] Haggling over prices was one of the most common instances of theater in the daily life of the city. This interplay socially wove the buyer and seller together. To not participate was to risk losing money, but the fixed-price system lowered the risk of not engaging in the theatrics of buying and selling. The notion of free entrance additionally made passivity into the norm. In the retail establishments of the *ancien regime* there was an implicit contract to buy once one entered a store. This makes sense in light of the dramatic effort required by the seller in negotiating. It is simply not worth the seller's effort if the buyer does not make it worth his while. The elaborate theatrical is time intensive and consequently discourages high sales volume. In retailing by high volume and low markup such dramatic behavior could be expensive. But why the switch? Stores began to sell on high volume, low markup because of changes in the production system.

Machine-made goods could be made quickly and large volumes. The department store was response to the production of the factory. Additionally the volume of goods would require a mass of employees to sell them, but the store owner could not trust his clerks to bargain successfully and so sets a fixed price. However the department store still needed a mass of buyers. The population influx into the city helped, but there was a still the difficulty of transporting this mass of buyers to the store. The emergence of large public transport systems and the creation in Paris of the *grand boulevards* to replace the twisted streets of medieval Paris facilitated the movement of potential buyers to the stores. However, all these factors, mass produced goods, handled by a large bureaucracy, with a mass of buyers, explains why the seller might abandon the old system of commerce in order to make more profit but not why the buyer would so willingly forgo it. How would sellers induce people to not only engage in this new relationship, but convince them to buy enough volume to make it profitable?

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[21] Ibid,142.

Unable to afford the complicated verbal exchanges between buyer and seller, retailers developed a visual language to describe their goods. This new form of display surprisingly did not include the objective, factual qualities of the goods. They began by using unexpected juxtaposition of objects in displays, making them appear strange and consequently more stimulating and desirable. The jumbling of wares expanded to include placing "exotic nouveautes" besides the most banal products in an effort to make them seem more mysterious. By the end of the eighteenth century, department stores had perfected this new art of display, inserting plate-glass windows on the ground floor with more and more extravagant window decorations. The arrangements did not even hint at the good's prosaic uses but instead endowed them with a special aura. Through their spectacular and mystifying displays the department stores' products took on emotional qualities. The department store made shopping a passive activity, which would be emblematic of a new way of being in public:

> By stimulating the buyer to invest objects with personal meaning objects with personal meaning above and beyond their utility, there arose a code of belief which made mass retail commerce profitable. The new code of belief in trade was a sign of larger change in the sense of the public realm: the investment of personal feeling and passive observation were being joined; **to be out in public was once a personal and passive experience**...[22]

Karl Marx would be the first to notice the endowing of consumer goods with emotional qualities, terming it commodity fetishism. He argued that capitalism created a 'social heiroglyphic' out of consumer goods, meaning that it had disguised the social conditions under which it was manufactured by giving it a set of associations that had nothing to do with its production. While Marx explained why it was advantageous for retailers to do so, Sennett argues that he did not show why buyers would accept such an obfuscation: "But what the new economics will not explain about the nineteenth century urban culture is why and how the people of the great cities came to take their mystifying, unresolvable appearances so seriously"[23] At the same time that people began to take the display of goods so seriously, they were giving a new meaning to their own appearance.

As discussed previously clothing was an objective sign, distinct from its wearer. One had great liberty in playing with dress because it was separate from the one's identity, but by the nineteenth century it became synonymous with the self. By 1890 a change in clothes could make one feel chaste or erotic; the clothing expressed you. In the same fashion that consumer goods could be invested with emotional qualities completely foreign to it, clothes became filled with human feeling. Why was human character suddenly seen in everything? It was because of a change in the understanding of personality.

personality in the 19th century

The idea of personality appeared because a new form of secularity developed in the nineteenth century society. The eighteenth century believed the world had a natural order to it. Every event had a place within a general schema. It is a doctrine of secular transcendence based on the idea of a divine order within nature. However the nineteenth century no longer perceived a kind of divine order to the natural world. Phenomenon could no longer be analyzed by an order that no longer existed but instead could only be understood in themselves. Consequently their appearance became paramount. Concrete, immediate sensation of a thing was prized as the true understanding of it. The experience of something became inseparable from its meaning. Sennett termed this belief immanent sensation. There is a complex web of reasons for why this change in belief occurred in the nineteenth century, but this transformation is important because out of it emerged the idea of personality.

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[22] Ibid, 145.

[23] Ibid, 146.

The self became inseparable from the manifestations of one's emotions. One's appearance became not just a transparent revelation of the self but synonymous. This was the opposite of eighteenth century thinking where the self ultimately transcended any particular appearance:

> Because appearances have no distance from impulse; they are direct expressions of the "inner" self. That is, personality is immanent in appearances, in contrast to natural character, which, like Nature itself, transcend every appearance in the world...[24]

Since the idea of personality equated the self with an individual's emotional displays, it made sense that an object's appearance conversely could be invested with personality. The idea of personality became a complement to industrial capitalism. As capitalism sought to mystify the appearances of objects, it was the belief of immanent sensation that enabled people to create new readings out of those mystifications. The imposition of personality into the public realm radically alter one's behavior in public space.

In the nineteenth century the capital cities seem utterly incomprehensible. Not only had the population doubled but the physical fabric of the cities were uprooted and rebuilt, for instance Baron Hausmann's transformation of Paris. As disorienting as the remaking of the cities was, economic life made it seem completely chaotic. No one at the time really understood industrial capitalism as it transformed how people worked. It created a new fluidity in the marketplace, which could often make one family destitute and another wealthy. Even the rich were at a loss to the reasons for their wealth and felt at the mercy of an economic system that seem to act capriciously. The new economy also created a new mobility, freeing people even further from the social ties and obligations that defined their place within society. How was one to make sense of this jumbled, ever changing world? It was made doubly difficult because of the ways in which the nineteenth century analyzed the world. The concept of immanent sensation made every happenstance significant. As the city became more complex and strange, people felt even more strongly that all appearances were equally important. Each had the potential to be an important clue to unlocking the order of the world around them:

> Inflating the detail by making it seem so innately connected to everything else in the social world, the detail becomes pregnant, a fact crucial to decode and demystify. The way of seeing than naturally disposes the observor to see all the city as bursting and menacing in every particular, a *comedie* waiting to be fathomed if one seizes hold violently of each of its scenes as a world all its own...[25]

This feeling was the fruition of the belief in immanent sensation and the rise of industrial capitalism. Industrial capitalism simultaneously uprooted society's existing order and sought to mystify new social relationships for its benefit. To understand a world which was not only bewildering but seem to purposely exacerbate its own strangeness, the inhabitants of the nineteenth century focused on its kaleidoscope of details as a possible revelation of its workings. Such concentration demanded a new pose for people in public. In order to take it all in and not miss a telling detail, one removed oneself from participation and became detached from it. One became a voyeur to society in order to make sense of it. Balzac, the great novelist and cultural chronicle, named this activity *the gastronomy of the eye*.

> This rootlessness, this absolute relativism, this lack of commitment is what make Balzac's a bourgeoisie view of the city. The bourgeois writer suspends his commitments to particular beliefs, and commits himself instead to the act of seeing. Passion and a peculiar passivity; this "gastronomy of the eye" defines a mass culture, whose compass moves, as we shall see, from perception in the arts to perception in social groups...[26]

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[24] Ibid, 153.

[25] Ibid, 159.

[25] Ibid, 159.

[26] Ibid, 164.

One understood society by becoming a passive observer of it rather than an active participant in it like in the eighteenth century. This sole reliance on the visual and its intrinsic contradictions would doom the later avant-garde architecture that believed new ways of looking could undo the social ills formed in this earlier era. It would only perpetuate its problems.

While the theatricality of social life in the eighteenth century separated the private self from the public persona, the confluence of forces in the nineteenth century facilitated the collapse of such a distinction. Some of its effects have already been discussed such as the ability to invest objects in the world with private feelings. The change in the relationship between private and public transformed the connection between theater and street life. It is the link between the two that elucidated the terms on which people acted in public. Like the previous analysis of theater and public life in eighteenth century, it is best to begin with people's sense of the their own bodies.

theater in the nineteenth century

During the eighteenth century clothing was an expression independent of its wearer but by the nineteenth century clothes became identified with the personality of its wearer. This created a special problem for the public person of the nineteenth century. The self was constantly on display, accessible for interpretation. Because of the belief in immanent sensation those appearances were taken as reality. To appear in public meant to risk exposure of the self, and people sought to shield themselves accordingly. During this time dress became vastly simplified in an effort to mute their appearance, a behavior facilitated by the rise of industrial manufacturing. As clothing became less expressive in order to shield its wearer, the clothing's details received even more attention as revelations about its wearers. The cycle spiraled downward, with fashion became increasingly simple in response to even smaller differences becoming significant. Industrial manufacturing continued to exacerbate this slide because it was perfectly suited to producing huge volumes of nearly identical goods. However, it was even more complicated than stifling one's appearance.

Emotions only had validity in their manifestations. In this age of positivism nothing transcended their appearances, and emotions hadn't any meaning beyond expression. If one were to hide's one feelings, one could not just mask your emotions but had to stop feeling. People adopted a blasé attitude. One became even more detached and unfeeling in public. This was particular true for woman, whose appearance could be interpreted as wantonness and sexual immorality:

> If once an emotion is clearly felt it is involuntary shown even to strangers, then the only way to shield oneself is to try and stop feeling, in particular to suppress one's sexual feeling....[27]

People became socially withdrawn and hidden. The nineteenth century was the age of Victorianism, and its primness makes sense in light of society's feelings of absolute exposure.

The theater of the nineteenth century reflected society's new found concerns. During the 1840s naturalism and literalism became fashionable in costume design. Audiences demanded that costumes reflect clearly who the characters were: "There was no possible deception, no act of deduction which might go wrong. In the theater, unlike the street, life was unshielded; it appeared as it was."[28] The pursuit of realism went to great lengths. In 1887 the Theatre-Libre in Paris attempted a precise reconstruction of life on the stage. If a character was cooking breakfast, the actor would be at a working stove frying the eggs on stage. The theater provided a simpler more comprehensible reflection of the street for its audience, but in the 1890s new theatrical troupes rebelled against the exact recreation of ordinary life, arguing that a drama was self-referential and autonomous. An early champion of this idea was the Theater d'art:

> The Theatre d'art sought to make all the elements of the play as free and harmonious with each other as possible. They abandoned the "real world" and its sights and smells as a standard of reference; they saw instead the form of a drama had a structure, a symbol or symbols, which defined how the scenery should relate to the costumes,

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[28] Ibid, 176.

[29] Ibid, 191.

[27] Ibid, 174.

[28] Ibid, 176.

> the costumes to the light, and so on. Physical appearances should express that form as sensually and immediately as possible...[29]

Freed from realistic imitation the Theater d'Art enjoyed a greater expressive freedom. Bodily appearances become fluid and could adopt to as many different guises as the symbolic world of the play suggested. The theater concocted elaborate costumes out of both real and fantastic elements, a dress which had no real meaning outside the fictional world of the drama. The theater created a separate and fantastical world, expressive and emotionally intense in a fashion that was unavailable to its audience:

> In the 1840s this accomplishment meant that the audience became a spectator to truth—they watched it, they did not enact it. By 1900 this passivity had grown stronger. The spectator at the theater sees freedom of expression, but like the spectator in the theater of fifty years before, he does not see something about his own perceptions clarified. An alternative form of perception is instead presented to him...[30]

If the theater of the 1840s were response to solve the difficulties of social life, the theater of the 1890s was a release from it. In each case the audience remained passive. It could not appropriate the codes of acting in the theater for themselves as they had in the *ancien regime.* Performing in public, which had once been within everyone's reach, became the domain of a few special individuals. The vast majority of society was resigned to being a passive spectator within the social life of the city.

People flocked to the great social amusements of the city, believing in the importance of being in public and that the public realm offered unique experiences despite its precariousness. However people became passive, looking to others to provide the experiences they could not give themselves. It was easier to live vicariously through others in achieving it, to watch others rather than draw attention to oneself: "it is easily seen that the public man might feel more comfortable as a witness to someone else's expression than as an active conveyor of expression himself"[31] The spectator remained passive because his feelings became confused and unstable within social interactions. As he doubted his own feelings, he looked to others to provide a model for feeling, for being expressive, in a world that was too risky for him to act. In the late nineteenth century theater a new type of performer emerged who provided this ideal for his audience to emulate.

During the enlightenment the performer was believed to be merely a servant not only to his audience but also to the text. His performance was thought to have very little leeway in interpretation and instead was grounded firmly in the text or score. In the 1880s a new school of thinking emerged that connected the performance of a work with the special qualities of personality in public. The text, or score in the case of the music, was no longer felt to encapsulate the work. The performer did not simply realize the work from the text but had to create it out of the insufficient text. An emphasis on skill was replaced with one on sensibility. The performer became a special kind of person with the ability to create the work from his self. It was during this period that words such as *creator, original,* and *genius* were applied to performers. The aesthete, a person with a unique sensibility, replaced the universal idea of aesthetics.

Most importantly, the performer created the performance **out of himself**. He turned inward to supply what the text could no longer: "The romantic performer, in making music an immanent experience, has therefore to play a text but also convert it into himself"[32] The performer was not necessarily an intellectual giant but a romantic genius in his ability to feel freely. Through his performance the audience hope to share in the emotions that no longer felt they could summon themselves. Because of the idea of immanent sensation, one could only feel to the extent that you could feel yourself feeling. It had to be seen within the self in order to be felt, thus the performer played special role in relation to his audience: "The performance became a matter of shocking the listener, of making him suddenly hear as he had never heard before." [33] The audience relied on the performer to provoke them to feel and reveal to them their capacity to feel. This moment, however, was short lived because the audience could never sustain it: "True he shocks his audience into feeling. But they can in no way take this feeling out of the theater and back into their lives. They can not "routinize" the power of the dominant figure."[34] The performance gave the audience a model for feeling but it could not be adapted to their own lives. They expressed themselves vicariously through the performer. This is a fundamentally different situation from the eighteenth century where the audience fully appropriated the actor's art, both replacing him on the stage and using it to nourish public life in society.

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[29] Ibid, 191.

[30] Ibid, 192.

[31] Ibid, 195.

[32] Ibid, 200.

[33] Ibid, 146.

Even though the spectator witnessed the performance from a comfortable distance, he was uncomfortable and filled with a profound self-doubt. During the eighteenth century the audience had been participating in the drama of the play, interrupting the flow of the drama with comments and parading across the stage. In the late nineteenth century, the audience restrained itself. It no longer engaged in *point and settling* and waited discretely to applaud until after the performance. It stifled its own responses and eventually became quiet. It steeled its own emotions to be more receptive to those of the performer. The theater lighting was dimmed as well to reinforce the silence and focus attention on the stage.

The design of theaters reflected this new understanding of theatrical performance. The late nineteenth century was a time of great theater building, ones that dwarfed those of the eighteenth century in size. The theater design was oriented to this new idea of passive spectatorship, best exemplified by the two most significant theaters of the time, Garnier's Opera in Paris and Wagner's Opera House in Bayreuth. Garnier's Opera House was designed as a overwhelming spectacle. Its own magnificence placed the building at center stage, reducing the socializing of its lobby spaces and the performance itself as secondary:

> The Opera building was not a cover which enclosed building, nor a façade against which the audience consorted with each other, nor a frame in which the actors appeared; the building exists to be admired independently of any of the people or the activities in it. The immense interior spaces especially served this end...The magnificence of the Paris Opera left no room room for ordinary social intercourse. Talk and intimate chatter in the lobby were to erode in a building whose sole purpose was to command a "silent awe"... [35]

The Opera house became one of the great spectacles of Paris. The theatergoers became a passive audience to the architecture's audacity, standing in the same relationship as a passive spectator to it as to the theater performance. Its immense interior spaces where it became nearly impossible to recognize another audience member or even clearly perceive the stage particularly served to limit ordinary social intercourse. The building was meant to seduce and transport its audience from the activity in front of them. Garnier commented about his design: "The eyes begin to be gently charmed, then the imagination follows them into a sort of dream; one drifts into a feeling of well-being"[36] The theater became a kind of narcotic.

Wagner's design for the Opera House at Bayreuth was intended in part as a rebuke to the Paris Opera House but ultimately produced the same result. Its design de-emphasized the physical building and focused all attention. Rejecting any ostentation the building's exterior was bare, but more important was the interior's design. The seating was arranged in the model of an ampitheater so that each audience member had an unobstructed view of the stage while limiting the view of the audience itself. The Opera House hid the orchestra by covering the orchestra pit. The music was heard but its production was never seen. In addition a second proscenium arch covered the edge of the orchestra pit in addition to the arch over the stage. Through the design all attention was turned away from the theater itself and onto the stage. These arrangements produced what Wagner called the *mystiche Abgrund*, "the mystic gulf". Wagner would write of this idea:

> It makes the spectator imagine the stage as quite far away, though he sees it in all the clearness of its actual proximity; and this in turn gives rise to the illusion that the persons appearing on it are of larger, superhuman stature...[37]

Wagner's theater was an attempt to make the stage total and complete life. The music, in its long unending melodies, complemented the theater. It disciplined its audience into a subservience. The role of the audience was to see and not respond, accepting in silence a vision of the world much more powerful than their own.

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[34] Ibid, 201.

[35] Ibid, 207.

[36] Braudel,161.

[37] Ibid, 172.

The relationship between performer and audience extended beyond the theater into street life. It offered a way to comprehend the emotional life of the crowd. Within the public sphere the attention given to a performer was shifted onto the stranger on the street in the figure of the flaneur. The flaneur was a special individual within the bourgeois. While not an aristocrat he was wealthy enough to be an educated man of leisure. This economic distinction gave him a distinctive social standing. Like the actor of the theater he was seen as having special sensibility and offered himself for display. According to Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life", the flaneur, dressing to be noticed, strolled the wide boulevards, his sole purpose being to arouse emotions of the part of others on the street. Later Walter Benjamin would take this figure as a symbol for the nineteenth century bourgeois who imagined what it would be like to be interesting.[38] The flaneur was a silent performer in the social spaces of the city, offering a model of assurance and feeling beyond the reach of the common bourgeois.

But how is the flaneur to be understood and responded to? Certainly not by engaging him in conversation. The flaneur is gazed upon at distance appreciated in silence. In E.T.A Hoffman's story, "The Cousin Corner's Window" offers a fable of just this way of understanding the social life of the city. The cousin is paralyzed, looking out his window at the crowd passing him by. However he has little wish to enter the fray or meet the people who catch his eye. Instead he offers to a visitor who can use his legs that he would like to instruct him in "the principles of the art of seeing". The visitor is persuaded that he will never truly understand the crowd until he too is like the cousin, watches but does not move himself.[39] Therefore the flaneur can only be grasped through silent observation, by Hoffman's phrase *the art of seeing* or in Balzac's terms *the gastronomy of the eye*. This attitude was simply an extension of the culture of the theater where the audience quieted itself in order to truly 'take in' the performance.

This is a complete reversal from the eighteenth century, not only in the theater but in public life as well. In the eighteenth century one's own involvement did not diminish another person's ability to be expressive but by the nineteenth century public expression could only be understood through restraining oneself. The connection made between the theater and urban social life in the eighteenth century was response to the problem of relating to strangers. Theatricality of city social life made a greater sociality possible because it construed one's actions, words, and appearance as a performance separated from the self. During the nineteenth century that boundary disappeared between the self and an individual's appearance. One became nothing but one's appearance, which facilitated a profound change in the way people engaged one another. Once again there was a clear relationship between the culture of theater and the social life of the city. This connection, or bridge in Sennett's terminology, was significantly different between the nineteenth and the eighteenth century. Recall that the eighteenth century audience was indistinguishable from the actors in theater; the audience was permitted to be equally expressive, actually more so. The eighteenth century city dweller appropriated the art of the actor socially within the city, but by the nineteenth century the audience had become subservient to the performer. The performer's talents were no longer available to everyone to enrich their own lives:

> The whole rationale of public culture had cracked apart. The relation between stage and street was now an inverted one. The sources of creativity and imagination which existed in the arts were no longer available to nourish everyday life...[40]

The effects of this change are clearest in the mutation of the great social spaces of the eighteenth century, the coffee house. A new form of social entertainment grew up in the nineteenth century to replace the coffee houses, massive banquets. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of people, but most only knowing a few others, would gather together for a public dinner. A few performers would entertain, making speeches and reading from books, but otherwise the crowd was silent. It marked the end of speech as interaction, the end of an easy and free sociability. The crowd of strangers in the city had lost the ability to engage one another and consequently the capacity to forge new social relationships.

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[38] Benjamin, 82.

[39] Ibid, 173.

[40] Sennett, 218.

[41] Boyer, 118.

contemporary theater and public life

Twentieth-century theater has largely been motivated in an effort to create the new social relationships that the city could not form. However those attempts have proven largely unsuccessful because they failed in part to understand why the failure occurred within the city in the first place. It is beyond the scope of this paper to survey twentieth-century theater but there is a fundamental line of argument that has animated its discourse, that of the avant-garde theater, which is a response to the Marxist critique of the modern city. Believing that the city had become a place of passive entertainment that masked its political workings, the avant-garde advocated a theater of shock to awaken its audience out of its stupor in order to look honestly at the society around them. It had a fundamental flaw. It did not recognize that theatricality is discursive, establishing the terms on which people may express themselves to one another. The avant-garde argued that a radical subjectivity could transform society when ironically it was the withdrawal into radical subjectivity, *the gastronomy of the eye*, that facilitated in creating the nineteenth century city of spectacle. It perpetuated the crisis it purported to resolve. .

avant-garde theater

The Marxist critique of the modern city as being a city of spectacle was mostly eloquently articulated by Siegfried Kracauer. He noticed the rise of what he called 'ephemeral phenomena' within the city: forms such as city streets, the circus, sports events, and theatrical revues. While seeming to be related to the city's social and political life these events were completely superficial and apolitical:

> Kracauer felt that these entertaining image spectacles, far from renewing perceptual sensibilities and forging new political associations, were instead the surface ornamentations of the twentieth century, which bound the spectator to a world of passive visual entertainment...[41]

Continuing the Marxist line of arguing Kracauer felt that theses entertainments had become so prevalent because people felt alienated by their own depersonalized labor. Pleasure was envisioned as an escape from routinized work into a world of fantasy:

> a flight of images, the killing of time, an emptying out of all meaning—Kracauer noted were offered as the perfect illusory escape for white-collar urban workers... [42]

The spectacles alleviated the drudgery of life for the city dweller but it also serves to re-knit a world that seemed fragmented. As capitalism increasingly compartmentalized life, a new imagery arose falsely weaving together its disparate parts: "the fragmentation of everyday life enabled the superficial to insinuate itself into the modern metropolis"[43]

Opposing the shallowness of the popular theater the avant garde theater invented a theater of shock in order to, borrowing Kracauer's words, 'forge new perceptual sensibilities'. The avant-garde theater hoped to upset the way we had become accustomed to perceiving the world, making us look at it anew. This philosophy was best exemplified by the Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty". Following the Surrealists Artaud argued for a relentless intensification of theater that would possess the spectator fully, indifference would turn into involvement:

> Our long standing habit of seeking diversions has made us forget the slightest idea of serious theater which upsets all our preconceptions, inspiring us with fiery magnetic imagery and finally reacting on us after the manner of unforgettable soul therapy...[44]

But how is this involvement caused? Why does this intensification naturally lead to involvement? In the book *Achtung Architektur: Image and Phantasm in Contemporary Austrian Architecture*, Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen argues that it is through the surrealist idea of *image* that this engagement occurs. The surrealist *image* is such a powerful a presentation that is transcends reason:

> Surrealism wished to intensify the image, weakened by centuries of reasonable and correct analysis...For Breton it is the violence with which reason is transgressed that drives the image into the unconscious and opens its utopia of desire for the revolution...[45]

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[41] Boyer, 118.

[42] Ibid, 119.

[43] Ibid, 119.

[44] Artaud, 210.

[45] Mann, 43.

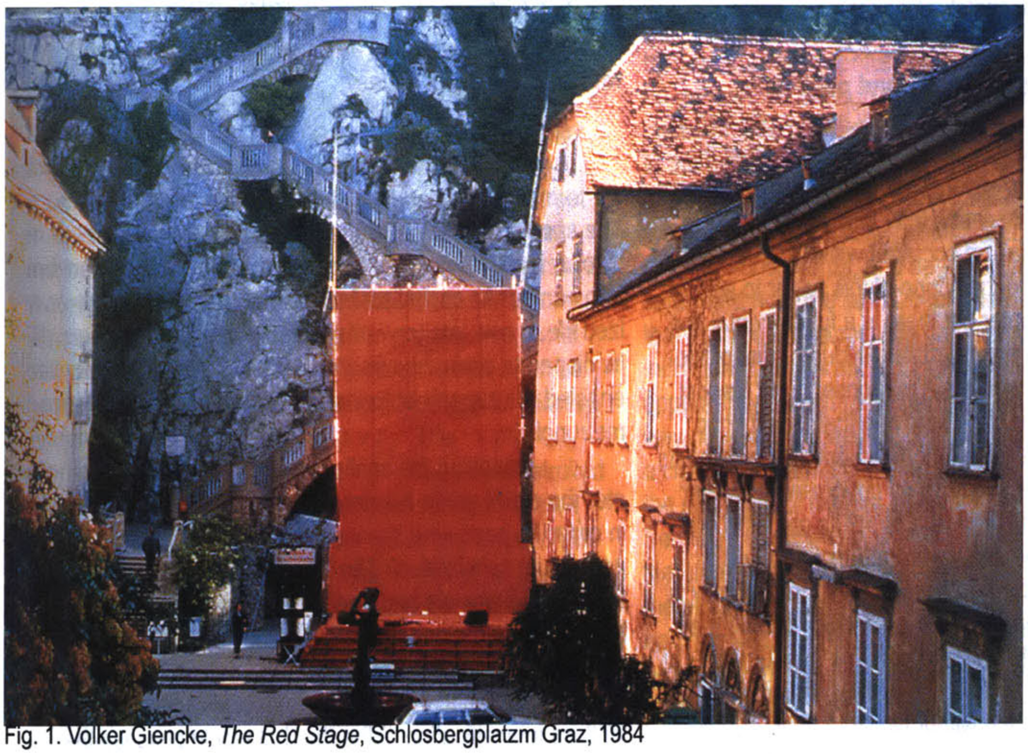

Fig. 1. Volker Giencke, *The Red Stage*, Schlosbergplatzm Graz, 1984

By dismantling reason the *image* moves us from a stance of mere contemplation to one of active engagement in the world, a state of desire. However, the desire is never fulfilled because the *image* refuses to be completely grasped. It remains indecipherable, spurring one to action in the pursuit of understanding. In the language of Surrealism *image* is contrasted with form, which represents an object that has a closed and finite meaning. Its identity can be fully articulated through reason. Pelkonen offers Volker Giencke's *The Red Stage* (1984) as an example of an architectural project that is an *image*. A flexible and intensely red screen on a city street Pelkonen argues that *The Red Stage* defies any easy understanding. It possible meanings constantly shift, its identity and origin open to endless conjecture. It is a perfect example of the avant-garde strategy of negation, which Michael K. Hays defines as:

> The dismantling of traditional formal conventions, the production of ruptures and discontinuities, the repudiation of the individual author as the originator of meaning, **and the denial to the viewing subject of space apart from life in which the mind is free to dream, to escape** is not just naysaying; it is the active construction of new perception, the forging of a new situation...[46]

Hay's explanation is particularly interesting because he seems to argue that the result of the negation is a mystification of the object that causes some sort of personal union with it. The mind is beholden to it, but this is exactly the same process that Sennett explained underlies the breakdown of public life in the nineteenth century. Undergoing terrible upheavals the city was already strange and alien but people were able to makes sense of it through endowing it with personal and emotional qualities. It was the projection of the self on the public world that created the new fundamental social relationship, *the gastronomy of the eye*. Is the avant-garde's strategy of negation essentially any different then Marx's commodity fetishism? In both cases an object is mystified and made strange, generating infinite number of readings in the effort to create desire, one the desire to buy and other the desire for revolution. Why is the red stage different from a window display at Macy's? It ultimately isn't. Using the same strategy it is easy to see why capitalism has consistently appropriated the work of the avant-garde, even as the avant-garde struggles to oppose it. The revolutionary *image* easily becomes mere spectacle.

Their recourse to theatricality failed because of a fundamental flaw in understanding: believing that theatricality was visual instead of aural, that it created a totalizing image instead of being discursive. While theaters gathered together the entire city and took its life as its subject, theatricality truly concerned the individual, by giving him a method by which to engage the world. When this sense of theatrically was lost, the art of participating in public life diminished as well: "The sources of creativity and imagination which existed in the arts were no longer available to nourish everyday life."[47]

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[45] Mann, 43.

[46] Hays, 18.

[47] Sennett, 218.

Fig. 2. Summer Concert Series, PS 1 Contemporary Arts Center, NYC, 1999

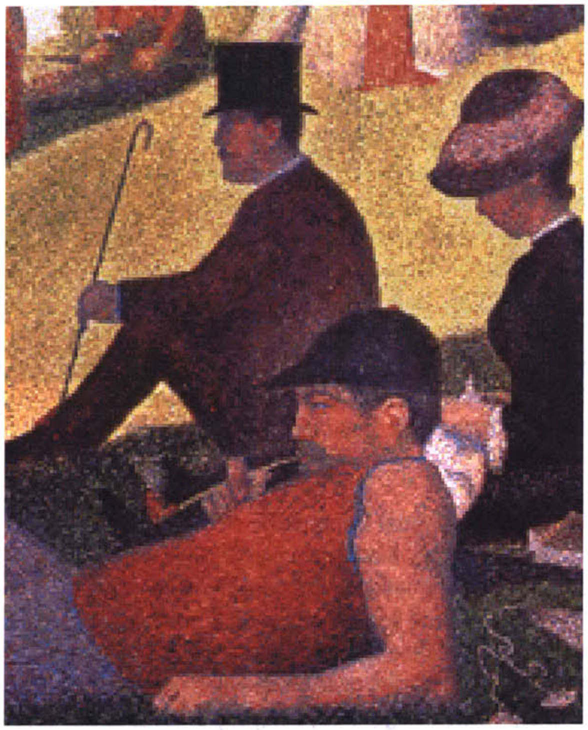
Design Thinking

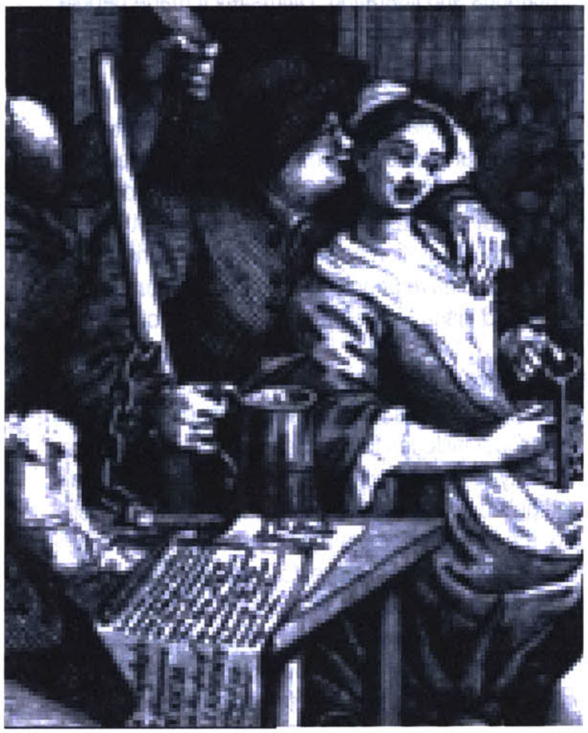
I have argued that the avant-garde approach of a new visual language will not work. Consequently the question becomes what kind of design would facillitate socialibility within the modern city. It would be too simple-minded to resurrect the eighteenth century city within a contemporary context. However, Richard Sennett's depiction of the Enlightenment and Victorian Capital provides important clues and points of reference to the development of my design. It was the emergence of theater within the city, both as a program within the city and as a conceptual framework for understanding relationships between strangers, that made for such a rich public life. It is between these two axis, theater as a program and a conceptual framework, that I have worked within my thesis project.

theater as a conceptual framework
Within the modern city the breakdown of public life was caused by a transformation in the relationship between public and private and consequently the terms under which people could be expressive to one another. In the nineteenth century the division between private and public collapsed, making participating in public life at once precarious and liberating. Ultimately it made people reluctant to socialize and reduced public life from one of lively engagement to a voyeuristic spectacle.

Urban design has failed because it had not accounted for the evolving understanding of public and private in its thinking about public space. Successful urban design must begin with an articulation of those ideas that helped maintained the separation between public and private in public space and gave people expressive freedom--a set of ideas rooted in the eighteenth century world of theater.

theater as a program
For my thesis, theater is not narrowly defined as "black-box theater" but includes the whole realm of performance within the city. Beginning in the eighteenth century socializing and public engagement has migrated from the public plazas of the city into its semi-public spaces of entertainment : coffee shops, theaters, restaurants and bars. During the nineteenth century the concert or beer garden fused those the public plaza with those performance and entertainment spaces. This type became the foundation for my thinking about the design of social spaces.





Socializing in the City

Fig. 3 Georges Seurat, *Sunday* Afternoon on the Island of Jatte, 1884-86

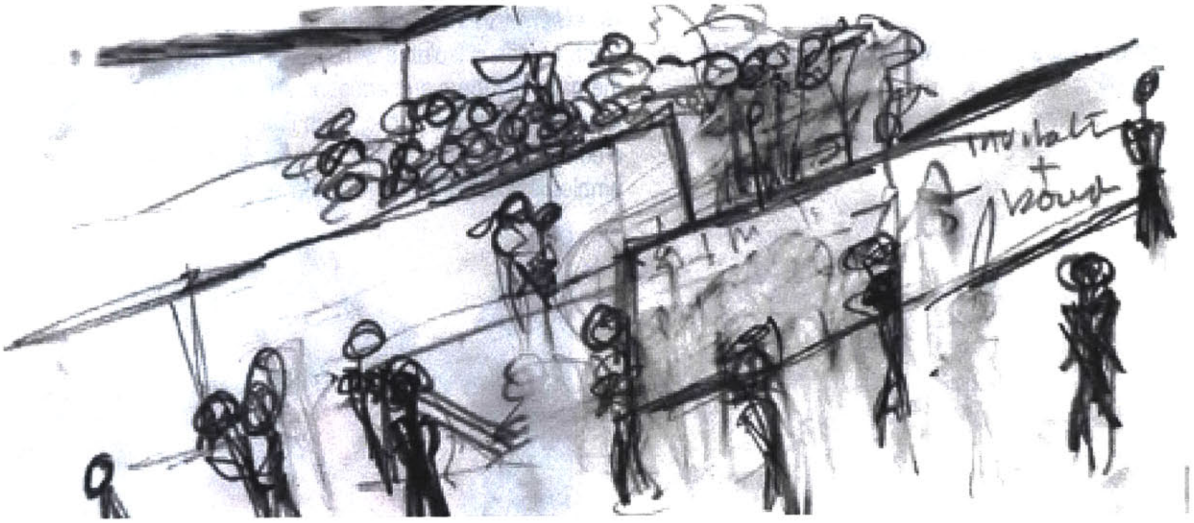
Nineteenth century city of anonymity

Each person is isolated within their own world, evading the gaze of others and adopting a mask of passivity. Even though out in public, each individual exists within a completely private space. This feeling of anonymity is emblematic of contemporary society.

Fig 4 William Hogarth, *Beer Street*, 1751. Engraving.

Eighteenth century of sociability

Talkative, physically engaged, people felt at ease with other in the public spaces of the city. Strangers could approach and talk to one another. The interest in the spaces of the concert or beer garden is a belief that it can support such behavior again in public space.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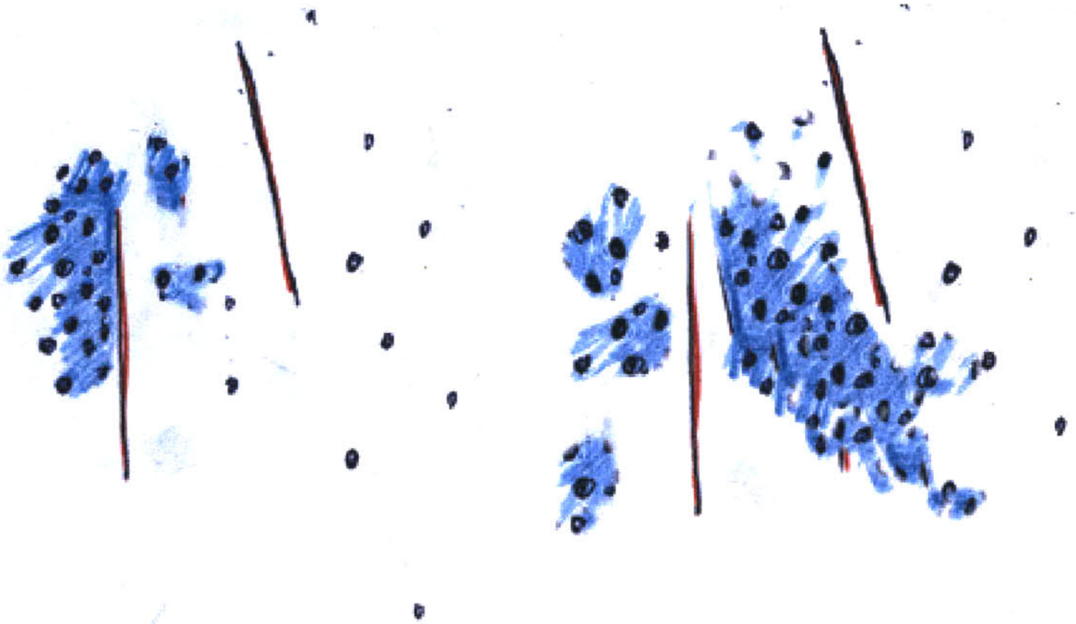


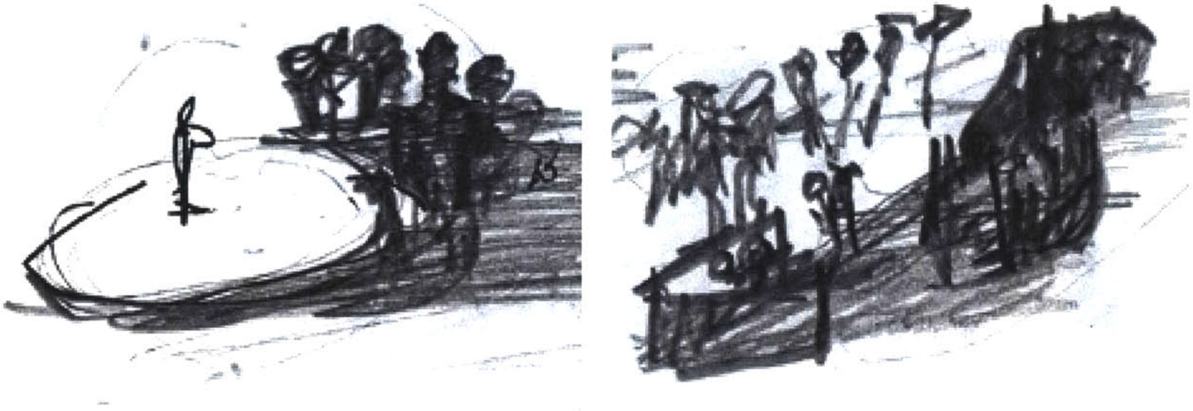
Theater as Conceptual Framework

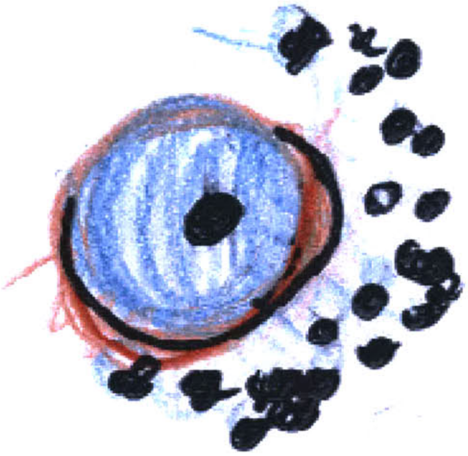
boundary

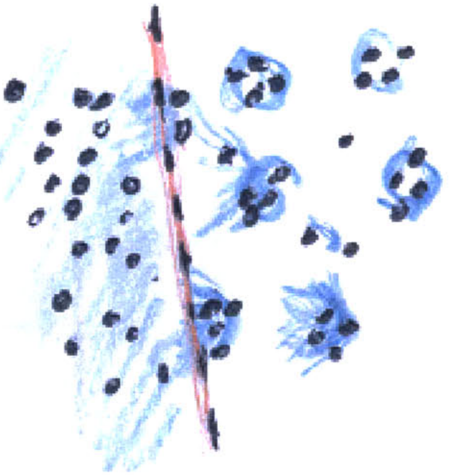
A boundary marks a space as special and in part offers a place to escape the endless milling of the contemporary city. But how does crossing it become a conscious decision while still keeping the space open to everyone?

Concept sketch of boundary condition

Plan sketches of movement across boundary and importance of the threhold space







control over presentation

At what moments are you being observed? Are those moments under your control?

Concept sketch of tradtional theater (left) and theater of lively public space (right)

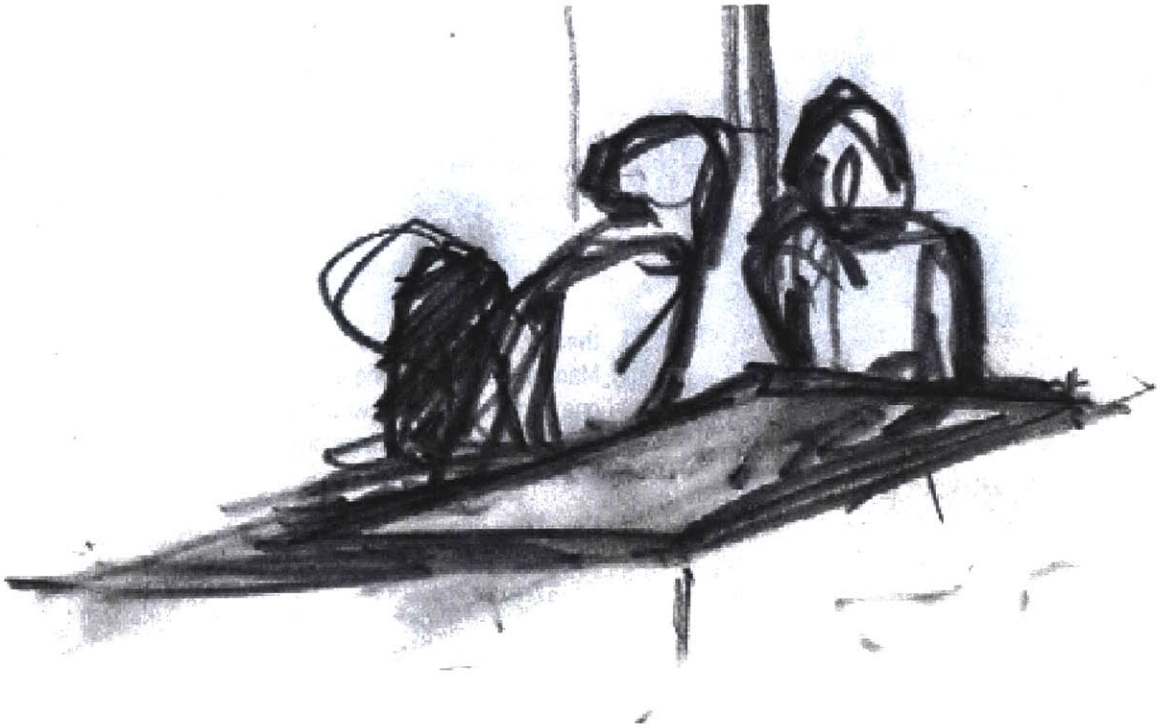
traditional theater

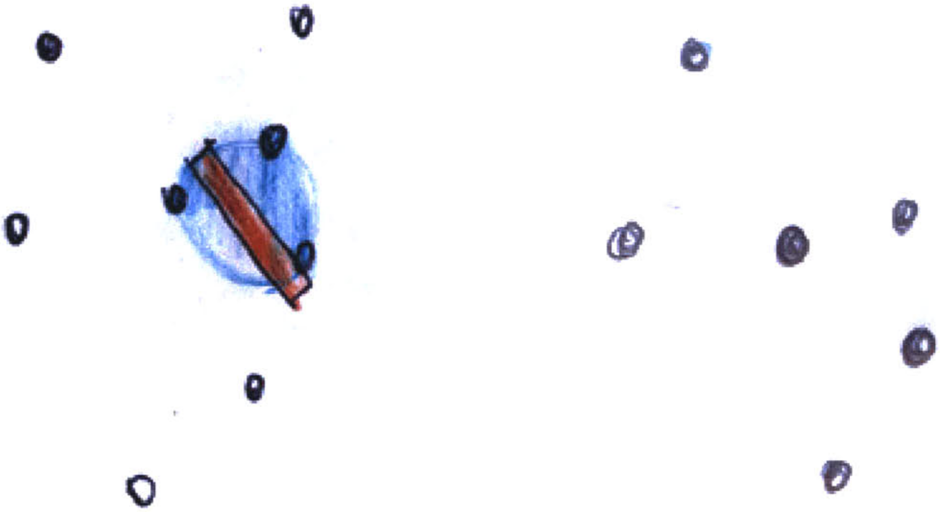
An individual performer and anonymous audience, highly exposed and one way relationship. This is the tradtional model of actor and audience in public space.

theater of lively public space

Many performers, acting as both actor and audience to one another. An arena where one expects to be engaged and a private space where one socializes with people one knows.

Plan sketches of tradtional theater (left) and heater of lively public space (right)



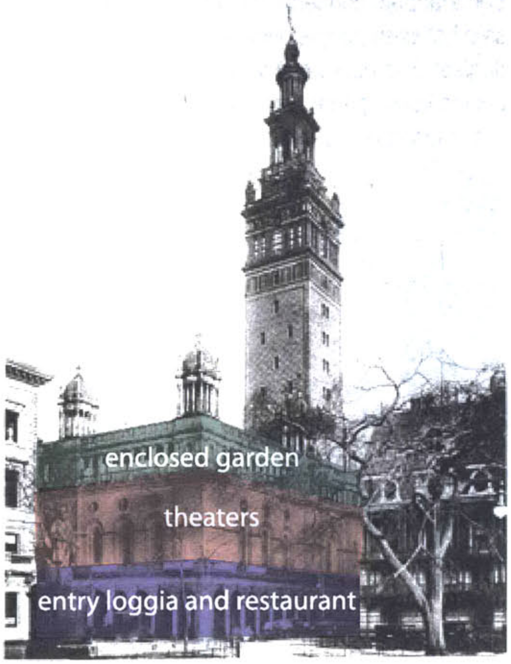


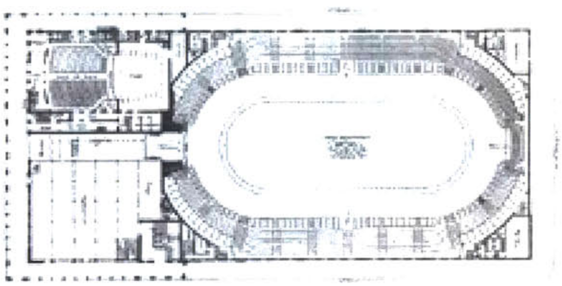
a third thing

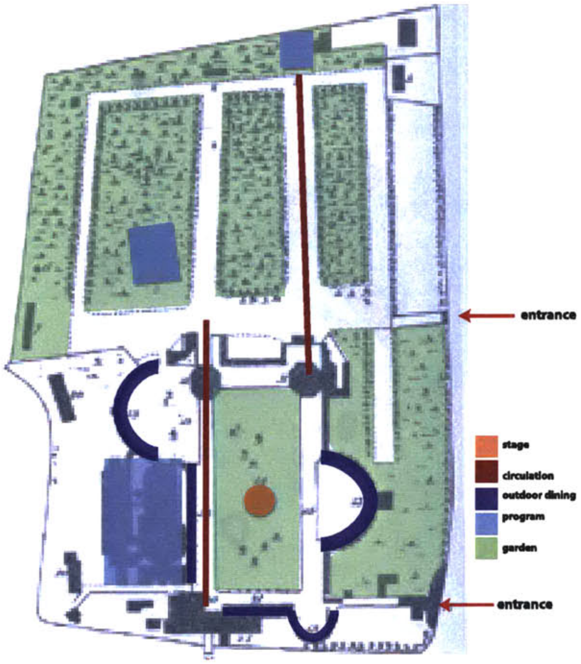
An intervention that both connects and gives definition to the relationship between people. Not only physical, it is also psychological. For instance a shared activity or an event, interposing itself so that communication does not require a direct sharing of the self.

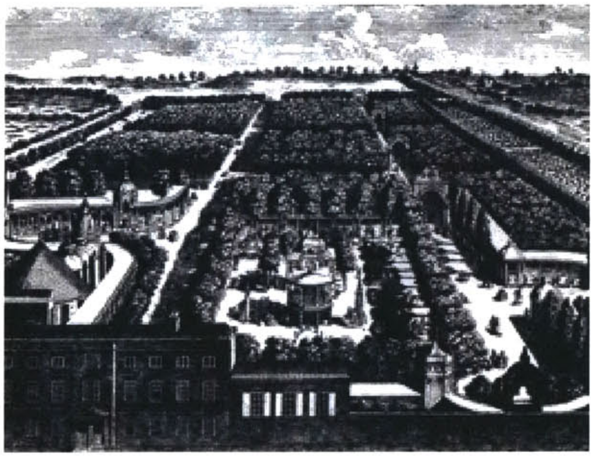
Concept sketch of a surface acting as third thing

Plan sketches of how a "third thing" can become the focus for assemly and interacting.


enclosed garden
theaters
entry loggia and restaurant




entrance
stage
circulation
outdoor dining
program
garden
entrance



Theater as Program

Fig. 5 Program diagram of original Madison Square Garden (left)
Fig. 6 Plan. Madison Square Garden, NYC, 1887-91. (right)

Fig. 7 Organizational diagram of Vauxhall Park, England, 1826.*(left)*
Fig. 8 Vauxhall Park, England, 1751. Etching. *(right)*

concert garden

An important quality of the beer garden is that is a more intimate space where people can can gather but yet still be in public. As such, it is a place where people would feel comfortable engaging strangers, a place for the city to gather informally and socially. The potential to meet people different than oneself and know them, cosmopolitan-ness. Cosmopolitan-ness is the essential quality of the city and the crucial function of public space. In the contemporary city public space performs a social role rather than a political one, but few designers have thought through when and how people will engage one another.

expanding the definition of a beer garden

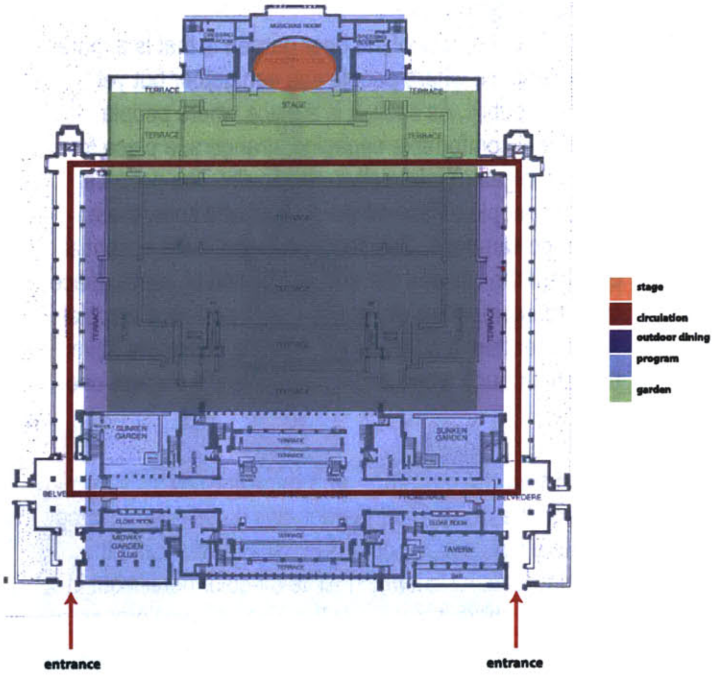
Mention the words Beer Garden and it conjures an image of young man soused on a Sunday afternoon, but the typology is important not in all its off-color details but in its salient characteristics: 1) the idea of a wall around a public space claiming it as special while still being part of the city, 2) a space where socializing and theater can be simultaneous to one another and inter-related 3) a space for both organized and accidental

purposeful and accidental

By being programmed and yet open to the city, the beer garden has a clear purpose without confining participation or activity. It can bring people together in a space, if not private at least outside of the 'milling around' of the modern city, allowing people to come into social contact without limiting what that interaction may be,

adaptibility

Being outside in a garden, the beer garden has always been limited to a summer daytime activity, but it could be for all seasons and all times of day and night. Its activities and performances would change as the seasons and light changed. For instance it could become open in the summer and enclosed in the winter, or could include a reversal of the black box theater, enclosed in glass instead of being completely opaque. Open and airy during a cold winter day, and alive to the city at night.


TERRACE
STAGE
TERRACE
SUNKEN GARDEN
SUNKEN GARDEN
BELVEDERE
BELVEDERE
CLOAK ROOM
CLOAK ROOM
MIDWAY GARDEN CLUB
TAVERN
stage
circulation
outdoor dining
program
garden
entrance
entrance

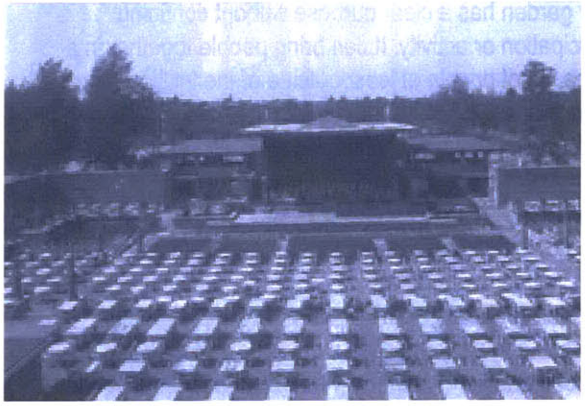


Fig. 9 Organizatonal diagram of Midway Gardens, Chicago, 1913.

Fig. 10 Midway Gardens, Chicago, 1913

program

Midway Gardens had many important precedents in terms of programming : such as the formal aristocratic pleasure gardens of Europe, their urban and public children, such as London's Vauxhall, American amusement parks and the nightclub district of the Columbia Exposition in Chicago, and German Beer Gardens. The Midway Gardens combined the amenities of the older, urban pleasure parks with modern American amusements. Its chief influence, however, was the German Concert Garden.

The German Concert Garden was a family activity. Entire families would visit the concert gardens for a Sunday outing enjoying the music and the food. When German immigrants brought the type to Chicago, the variety of programming increased as owners tried to make the Beer Gardens appeal to a more sophisticated and middle class clientele. Ravinia, famous beer garden in Chicago, included in its programming chamber music, musical comedy, and plays in a small theater, orchestras in a grand pavilion, lunches and dinner parties in its small casino. The Midway Gardens would continue this tradition.

Frank Lloyd Wright's innovation in designing for this program was to place it all within an urban court, connecting the various programs through loggias and an exterior wall. Until this time, the concert gardens had been organized in two fashions: one was to litter the garden with various elements of the program in a similar fashion to Central Park, and the other was to place the entire program within a massive building, such as in German concert gardens and in a unique

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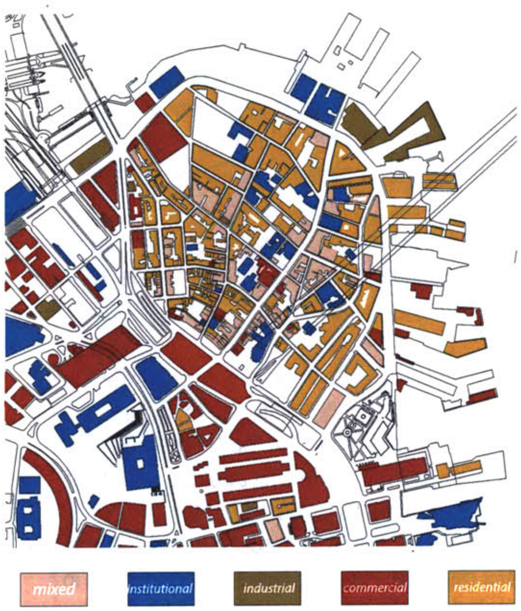
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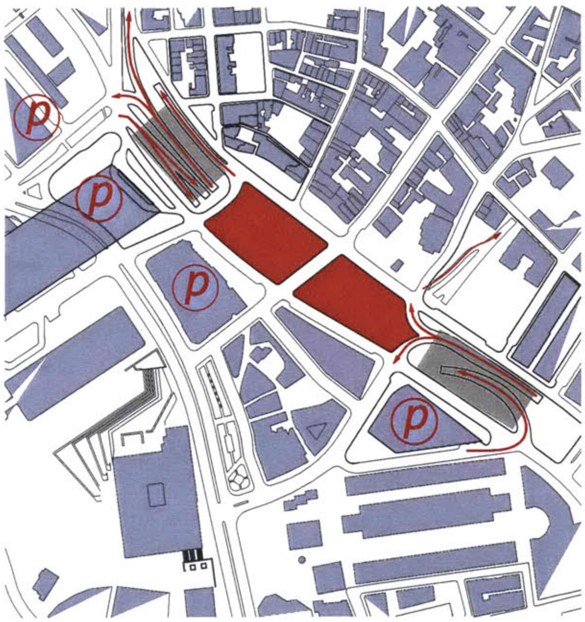
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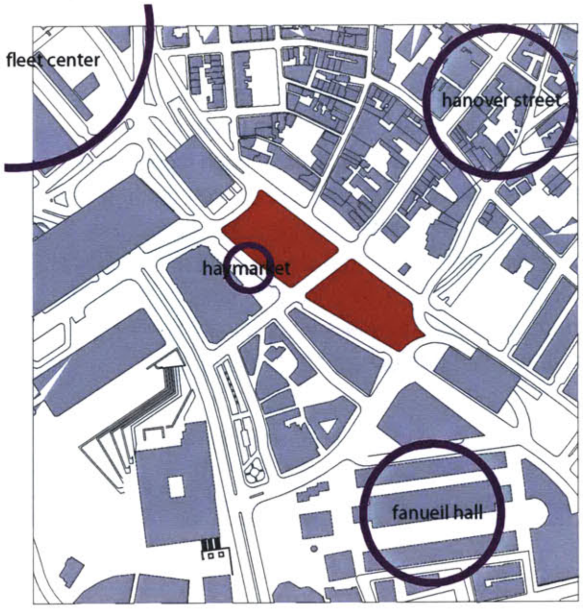
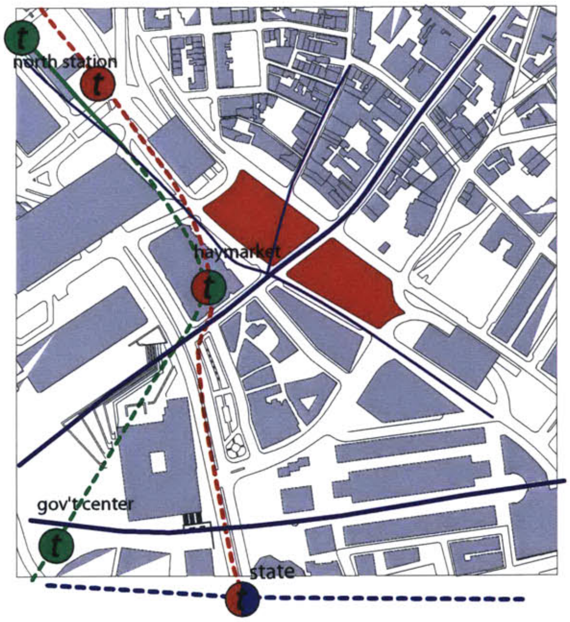

fleet center
hanover street
haymarket
fanueil hall


t
north station
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gov't center
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state
t

Uses (left)
Automotive circulation (right)

Site Information

The project's site was Parcel 8 and 9 of the Central Artery Projecte, located between Haymarket, the North End, and Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market. Located between these important public spaces of Boston, the site has the potential to reknit these spaces and make the flow and mixing of people more continuous. However the abrupt changes in the urban fabric between these various areas and the voluminous surface traffic of the central artery make any connection between them a challenge.

Event Spaces (left)
Pedestrian circulation (right)

an architecture arising out of the
deep fascination that draws people
towards others; an architecture
that recognizes passion, carnality,
and sociality...[48]

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[48] Evans, 278.

Circulation in the City

A central tenant of modern planning is the separation of circulation from the spaces of the city, particularly automotive traffic. This was done in part for functional reasons, to improve movement through the city and make getting around easier, but it also had its social causes as well. This can be perceived most clearly in the birth of the promenade. By the end of the nineteenth century the promenade become an important public space of city. However the promenade did not make moving through the city more efficient than previously but instead offered a new experience of the city. It made it easy to enjoy the city without really engaging others – allowing one to escape into a private experience of the city. By doing so the promenade was a response to and extension of the city as a spectacle.

An essential aspect of the project is how the circulation can be brought back into the spaces of inhabitation, both in the interior and exterior spaces of the project. My approach is two-fold: to analyze the character of the circulation through and around my site and second to propose new models of circulation that can inform my design. In his article *Figures, Doors, and Passages* Robin Evans analyzes how the domestic spaces of architecture have undergone a similar transformation as the circulation of the city. Until the nineteenth century domestic plans were organized so that one moved directly from one room to another but in the nineteenth century corridors began to appear within homes, separating circulation from the rest of the house. Like the city this re-organization of the space decreased the moments to mix and socialize. Consequently Evans attaches a special importance to those domestic spaces without corridors and hallways, a type of space he calls the matrix of connected rooms:

> The matrix of connected rooms is appropriate to a type of society that feeds on carnality, that recognizes the body as the person and in which gregariousness is habitual...[47]

Unfortunately the public spaces bordering the project site do not exhibit such qualities but go to great lengths to differientiate their circulation from the rest of the space . With the exception of the North End and Haymarket they separated circulation from their gathering spaces, facilitating a voyeuristic relationship between people. The circulation analysis looked at four areas: Government Center, North End, and Quincy Market. It divided circulation into three kinds: purposeful (quick), meandering (slow), and perches (places from which to watch people moving).

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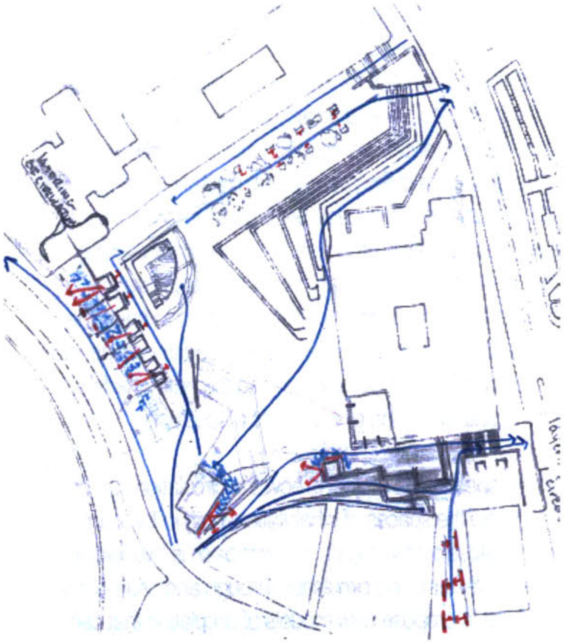
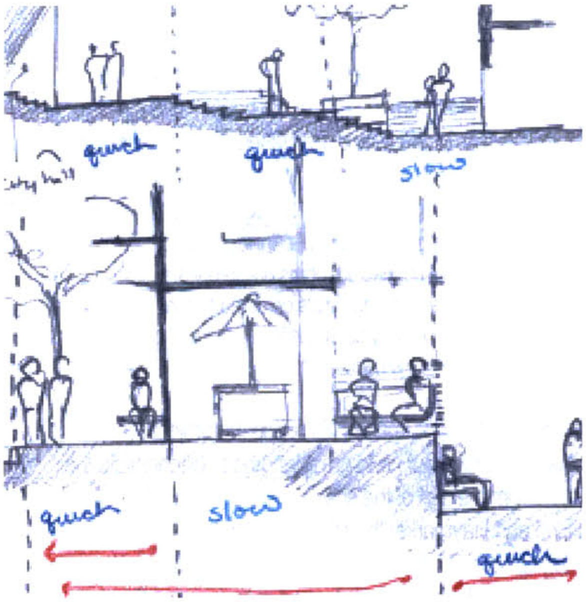
[47] Evans, 278.



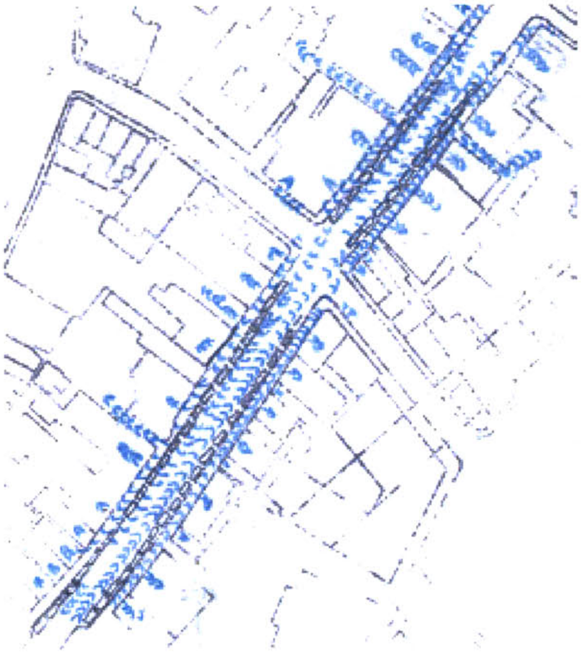

quick
quick
slow
City hall
quick
slow
quick

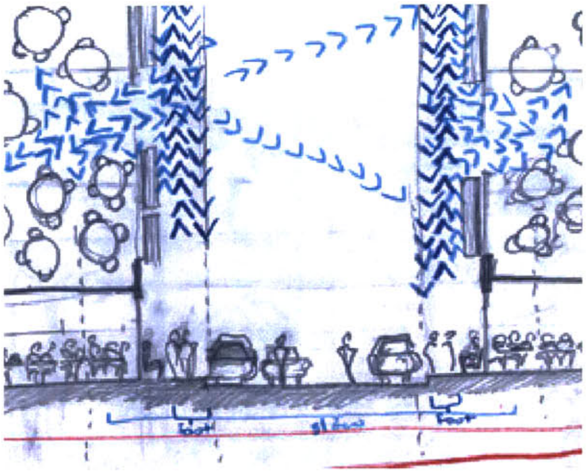
Plan analysis (left)
Path leading from subway to Fanueil Hall (right)

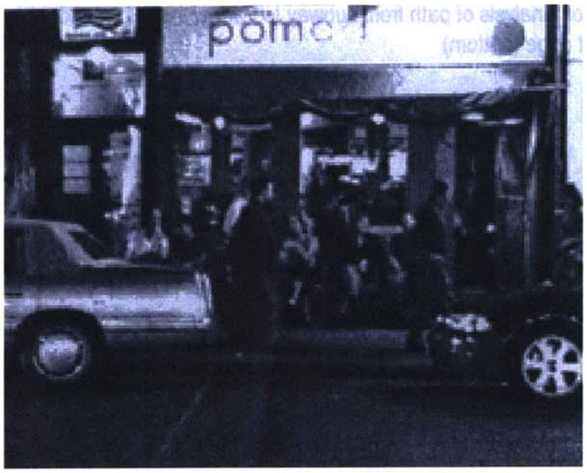
government center

Influenced by Italian Renaissance piazzas government center was supposed to be the central gathering space of the city. However the design of its pedestrian circulation has modernist planning's tendecy to segregrate and rationalize circulation.

Section analysis of path from subway to Fanueil Hall (top) and street edge (bottom)





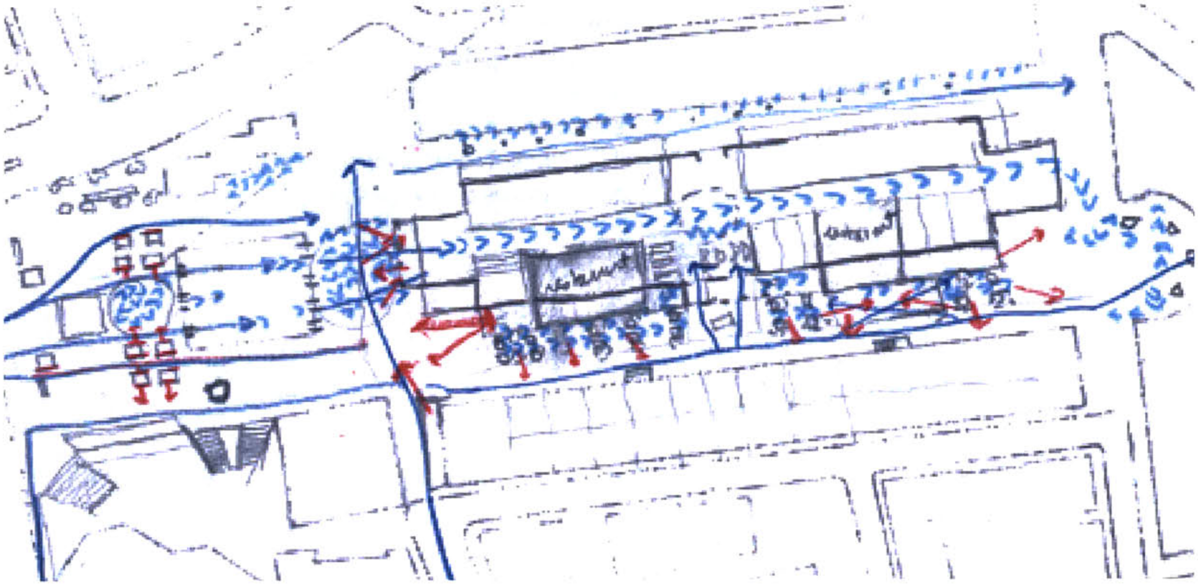


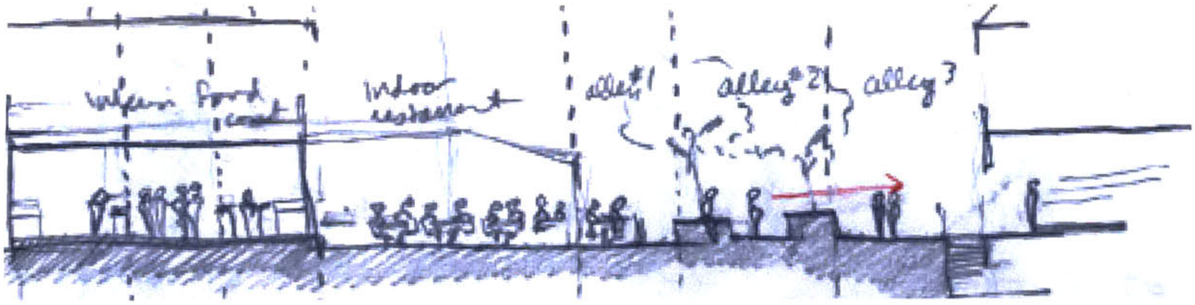
Plan analysis of Hanover Street (left)
Path leading from subway to Fanueil Hall (right)

north end

The narrow space of Hanover Street does not allow for any clear differentiation of spaces. The openness of the restaurants and cafes help to meld their space with that of the street. The two intermingle and the street and their interior spaces of its edges seem like one large room.

Section analysis of Hanover Streetl (top)
Typical restaurant entrance (bottom)


restaurant

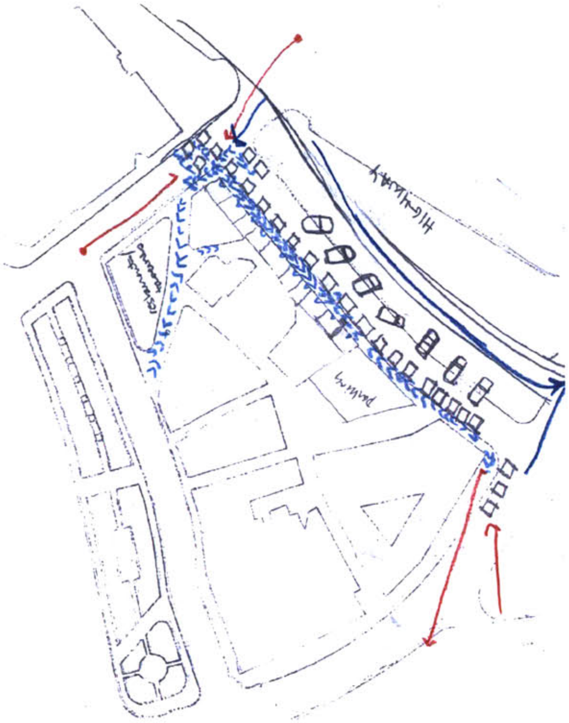

interior food court
Indoor restaurant
alley #1
alley #2
alley 3

Plan analysis of Quincy Market
Section analysis of Quincy Market

quincy market

Very carefully the circulation between the buildings is divided into a series of promenades, each one suited to different walking pace. The layering of circulation seems natural and fitting given the long narrow shape of the warehouses but ulitmately emphasizes a visual relationship between individuals.

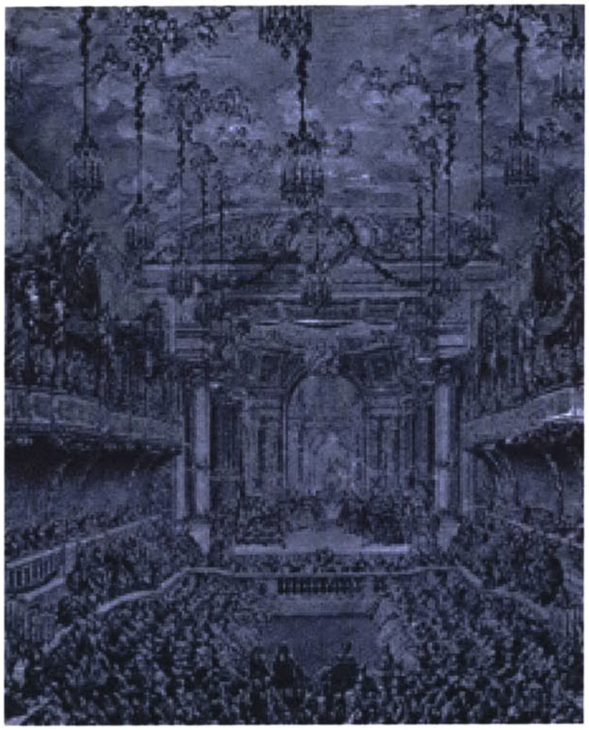
Promenade between warehouse buildings *(top)*
Section analysis of Quincy Market *(bottom)*

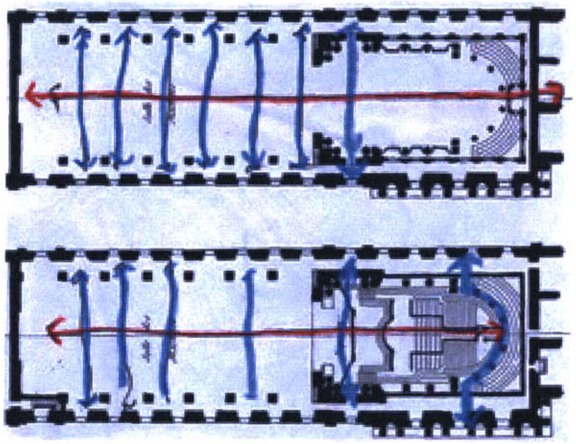

Highway
parking

Plan analysis of Haymarket

haymarket

A temporary farmer's market alongside the Central Artery, the density of stalls and narrow passages slow down movement, making everyone very aware of each other's physical presence.

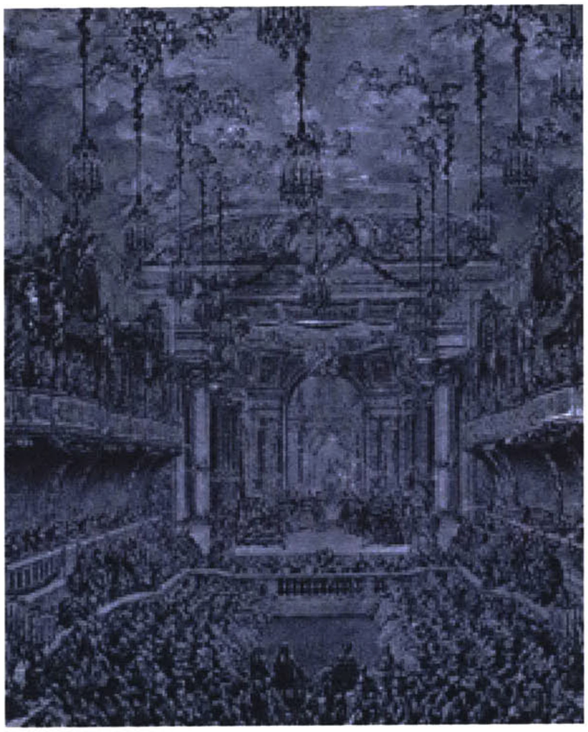




Site Strategy

The concept consists of two bars that serve mutliple functions. They act as porous boundaries which bridge the gap in the movement along Hanover Street and from Quincy Market to the North End. As porous boundaries they slow circulation and become spaces in themselves. Finally, the two bars create a series of charged spaces between them that are at once continuous with the spaces of the city but set apart.

Plan sketch of site concept showing relationship between exterior and interior spaces



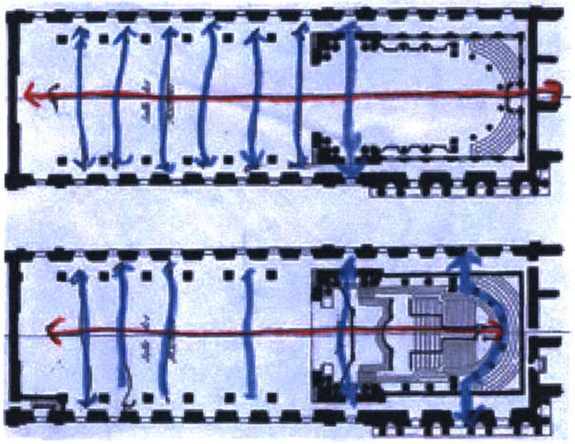
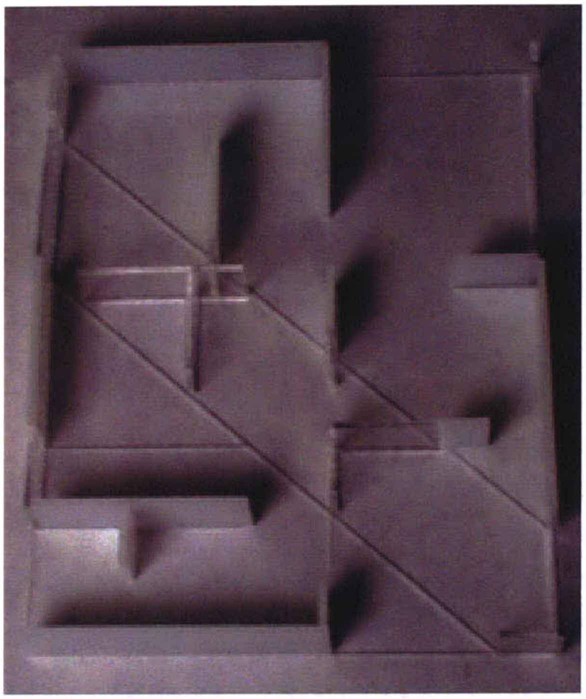


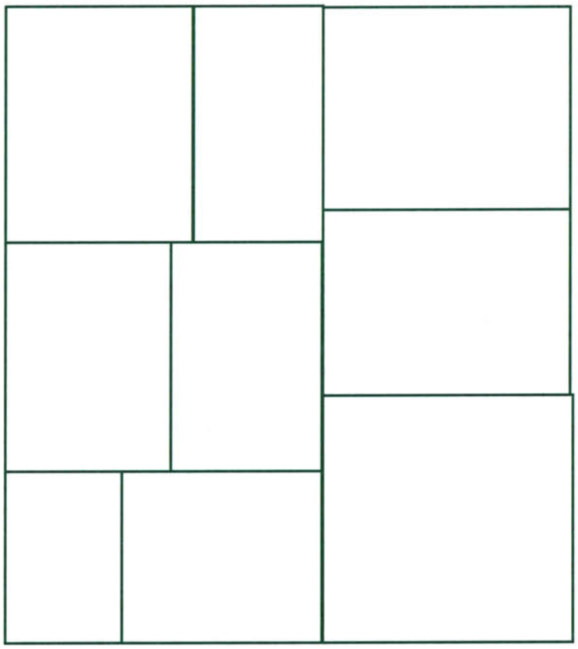
Fig. 11 Salles a Machine, Versailles, 18th century. Etching.

“The Bars”

The idea and form of the bars is taken from Renaissance court theaters. Not only were they ideal places for socializing and theater, but their forms implied two axis of movement: the long axis consisting of a strong sightline for performances and the short axis acting as a porous boundary, allowing infinite points of entry.

Fig. 12 Salles a Machine, Versailles, 18th century. Plan



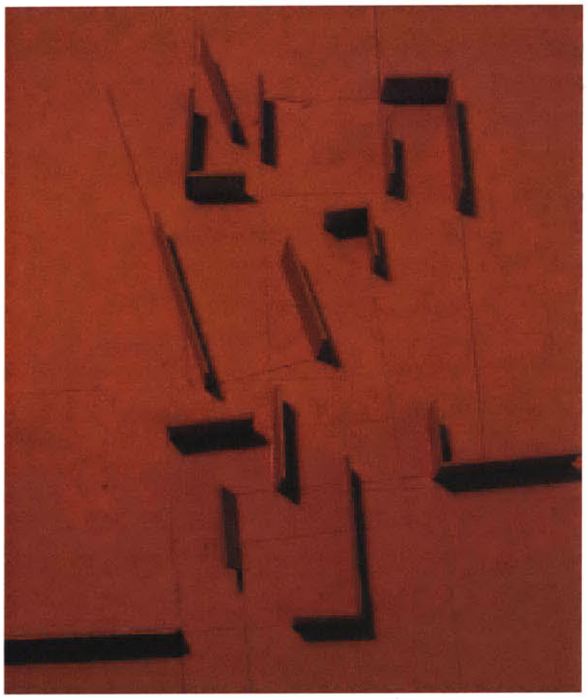


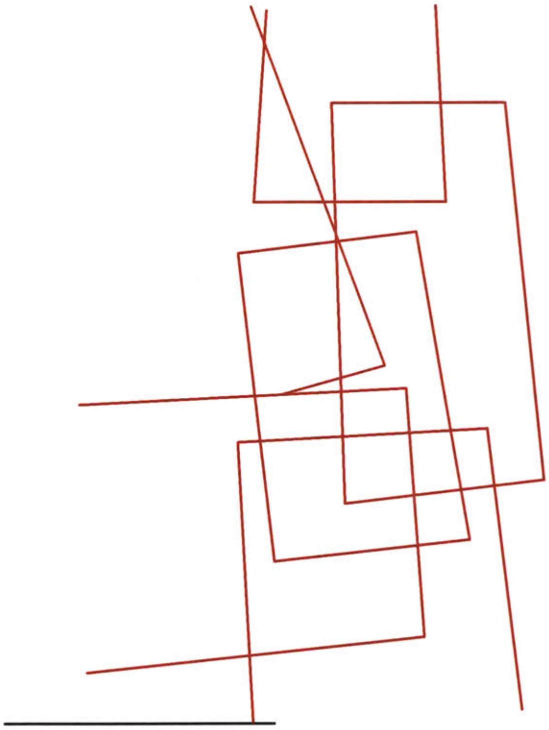
New Models of Circulation

Three models of circulation where the circulation was integrated into the space were developed. The model's served to not only order the larger urban spaces but also the interior spaces of the architecture.

connected rooms

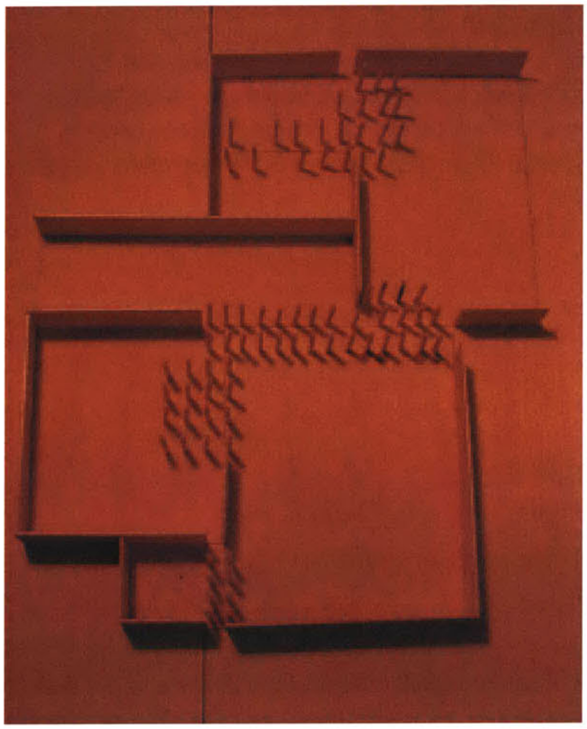
The "connected rooms" model was based on Evan's matrix of connected rooms. Spaces are joined directly with multiple entrances and no dedicated circulation. The alignment or mis-alignment of openings became the crucial factor in determining the relationship between the spaces and character of circulation.

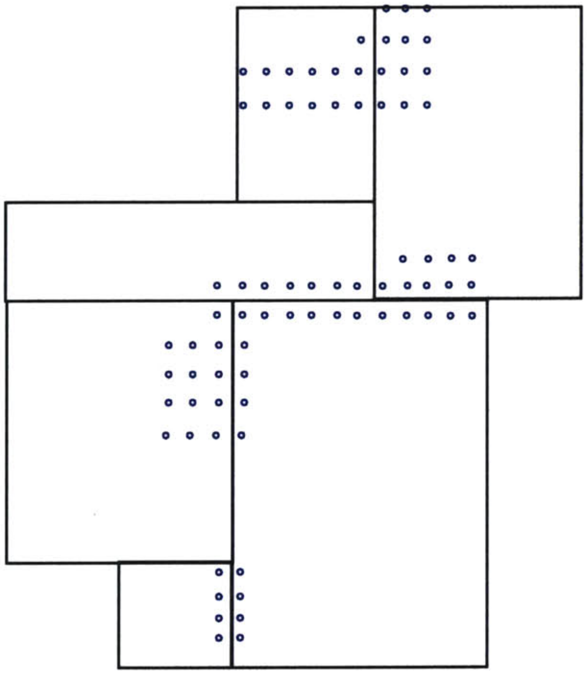




overlapping spaces

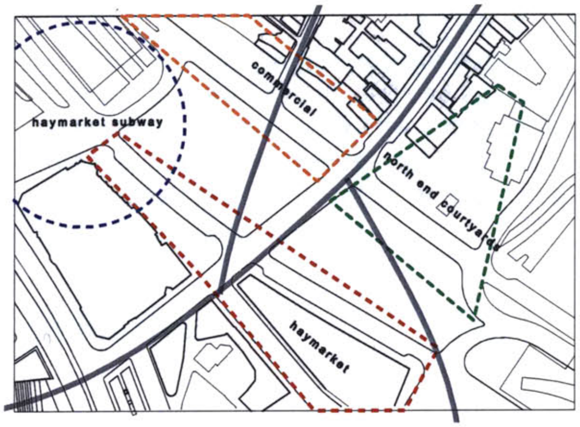
In this model the space's lack of definition created the circulation space. By overlapping the spaces the line between the circulation and the inhabitable space became ambiguous, allowing each one to act like the other.

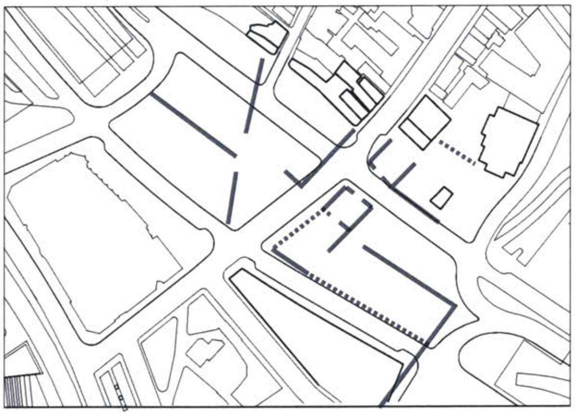




porous edges

Expanding on the connected rooms model, the openings between spaces were widened into large zones with their own specific qualities. The openings ceased to be mere thresholds and became spaces in themselves.


haymarket subway
commercial
north end courtyards
haymarket



Site Concept Development

Using the circulation models the site was re-analyze, looking at which models would be most appropriate depending on the circulation through the site and the surrounding programs.

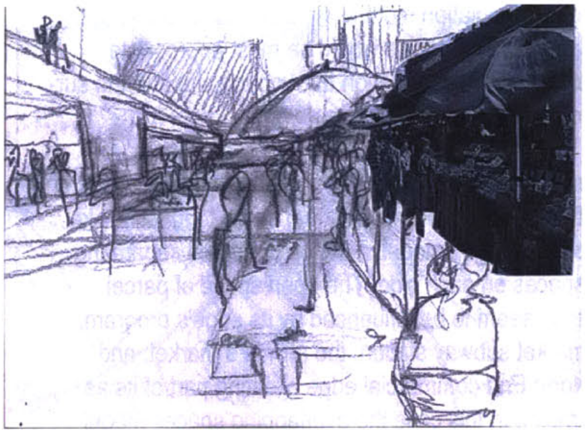
Instead of choosing one each model was an appropriate at different places. Hanover street seem to function like the porous edges model, a dense threshold separating two spaces on each side. The open space of parcel eighteen seem to be influenced by its edge's program. Haymarket subway station, the farmer's market, and the North End commercial edge claiming part of its as its territory. In this case the overlapping spaces model worked best. Finally the central artery highway had created a fortuitous accident. The closed perimeter block of the North End was opened, forming dual U shapes, that suggested a series of linked courtyards smilar to the connected rooms model.

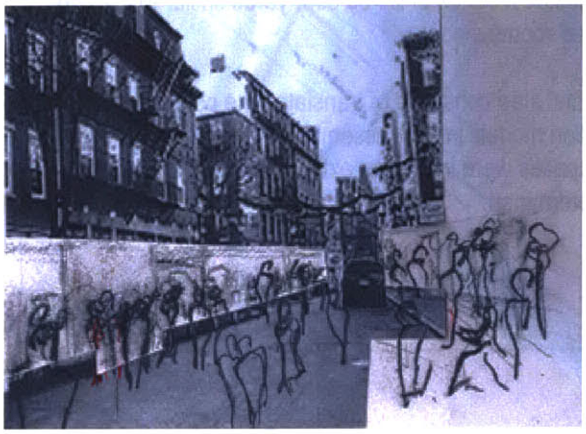
The last step consisted of translated the combined circulation models into an assemblage of spaces. Whether the spaces were interior or exterior was purposely left undetermined.

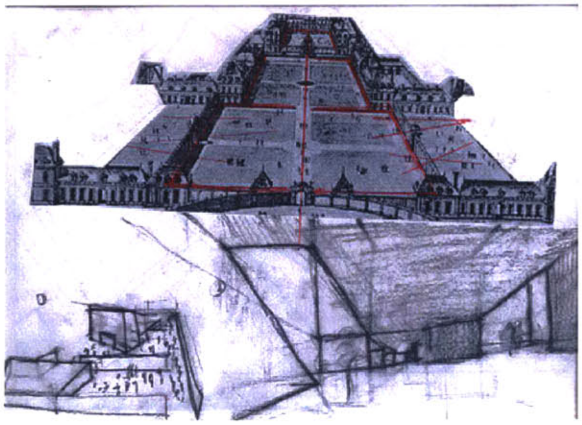
Diagram of major circulation and program

Circulation models overlaid on site

Initial definition of spaces







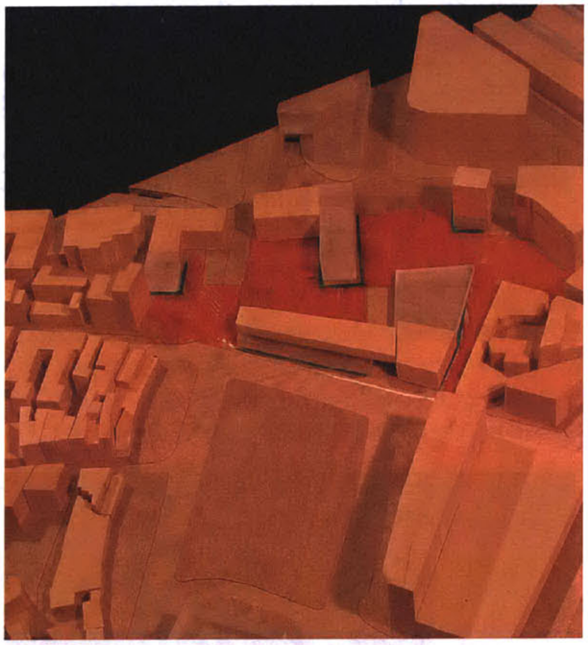
study drawings

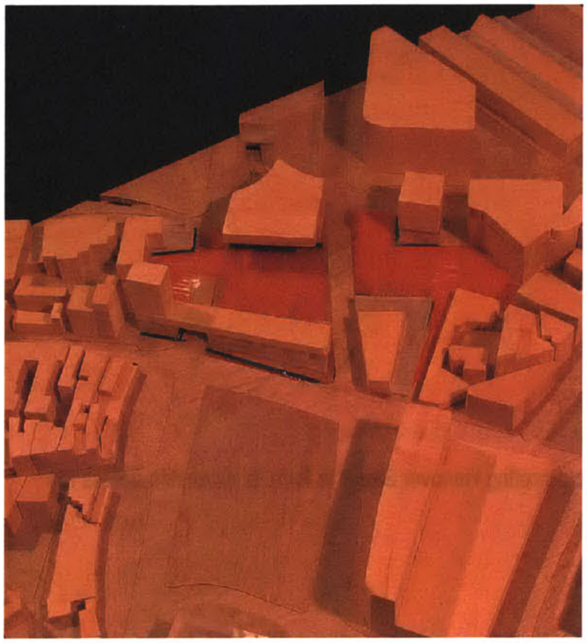
Collaged from site photos perspectives wereused to further develop the initial assemblage of spaces and elucidate their potential use and character.

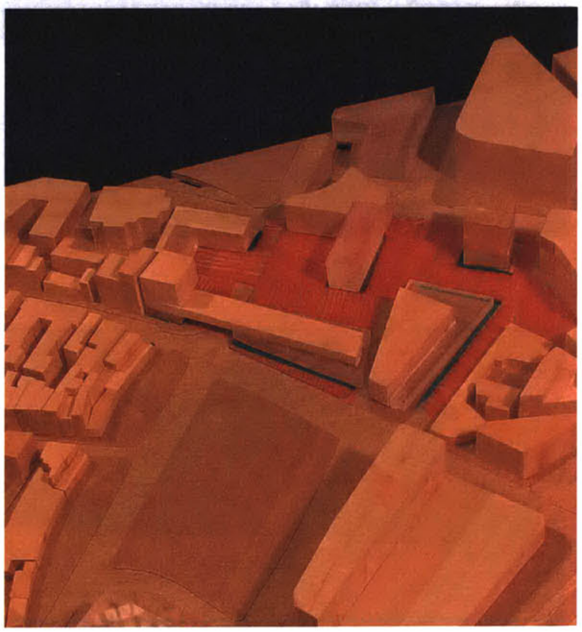
A new haymarket that works as both a space and a street.

Re-interpreting Hanover Street to form its extension across the site.

The programmed spaces of the project acting as linked courtyards.

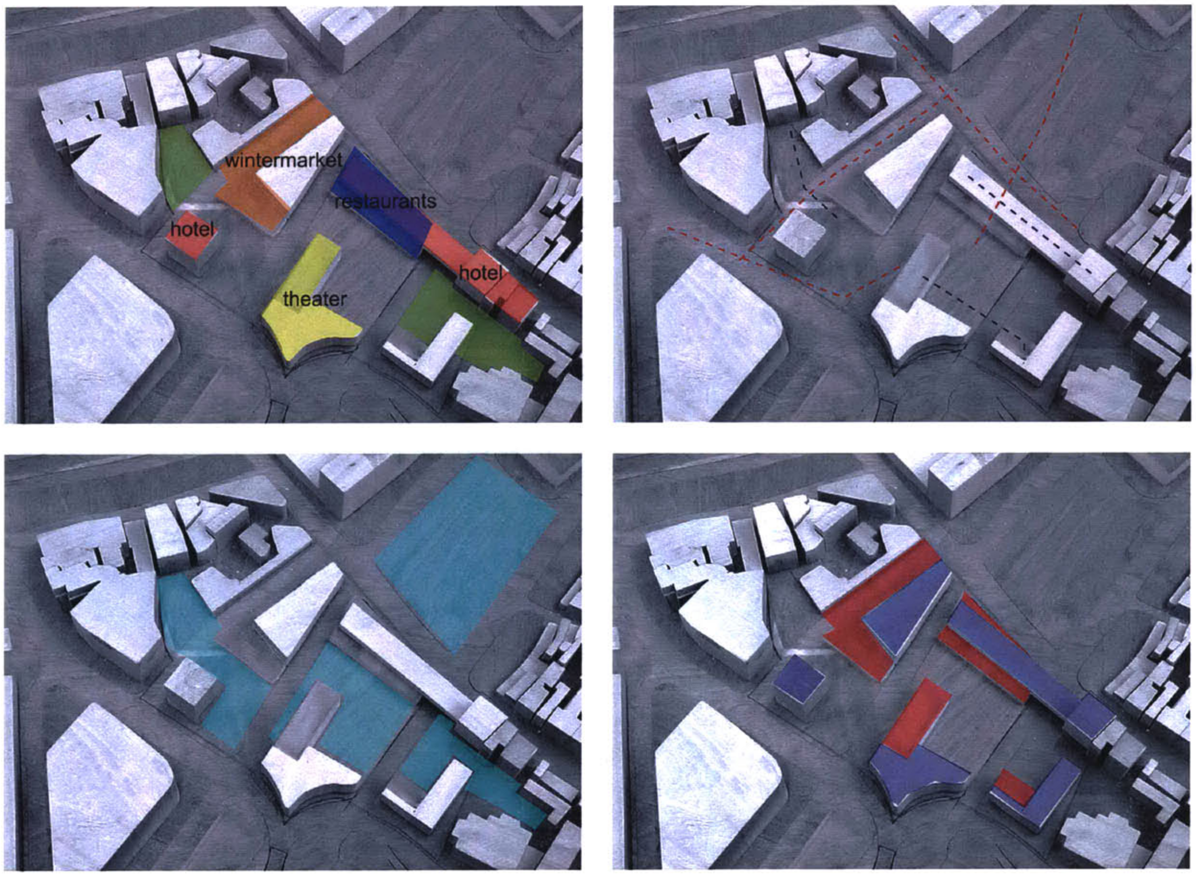






Morphology

Having some sense of the organization and character of spaces, a series of models at 64th scale were constructed to develop the urban morphology. Two materials, opaque and transparent, were used not only to suggest materiality but also to distinguish the quality of publicness of the spaces. The final model is the one in the left bottom corner.

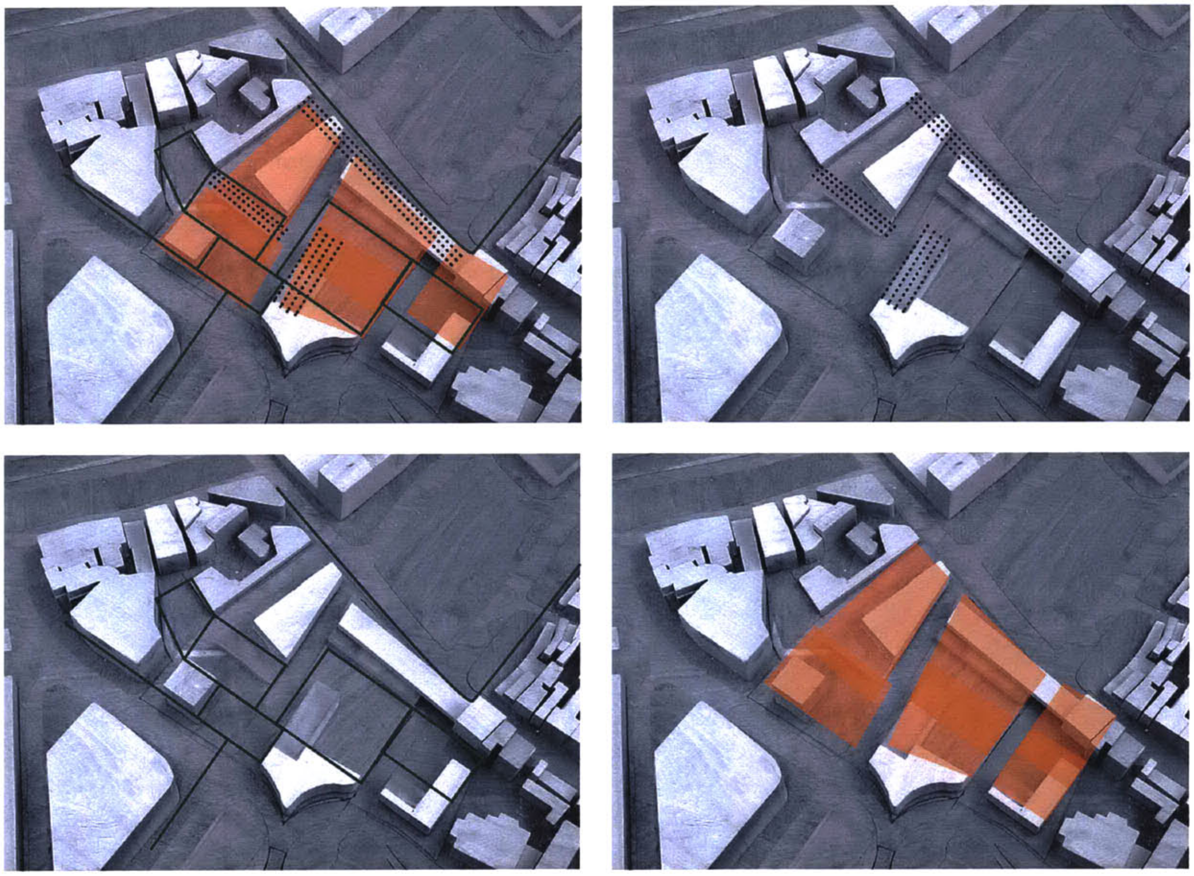

wintermarket
restaurants
hotel
hotel
theater

urban morphology diagrams

A series of diagrams explaining program, circulation routes, open spaces, and public & semi-public spaces.

Program *(left)*
Circulation *(right)*

Open Space *(left)*
Public (red) and semi-public (purple) *(right)*

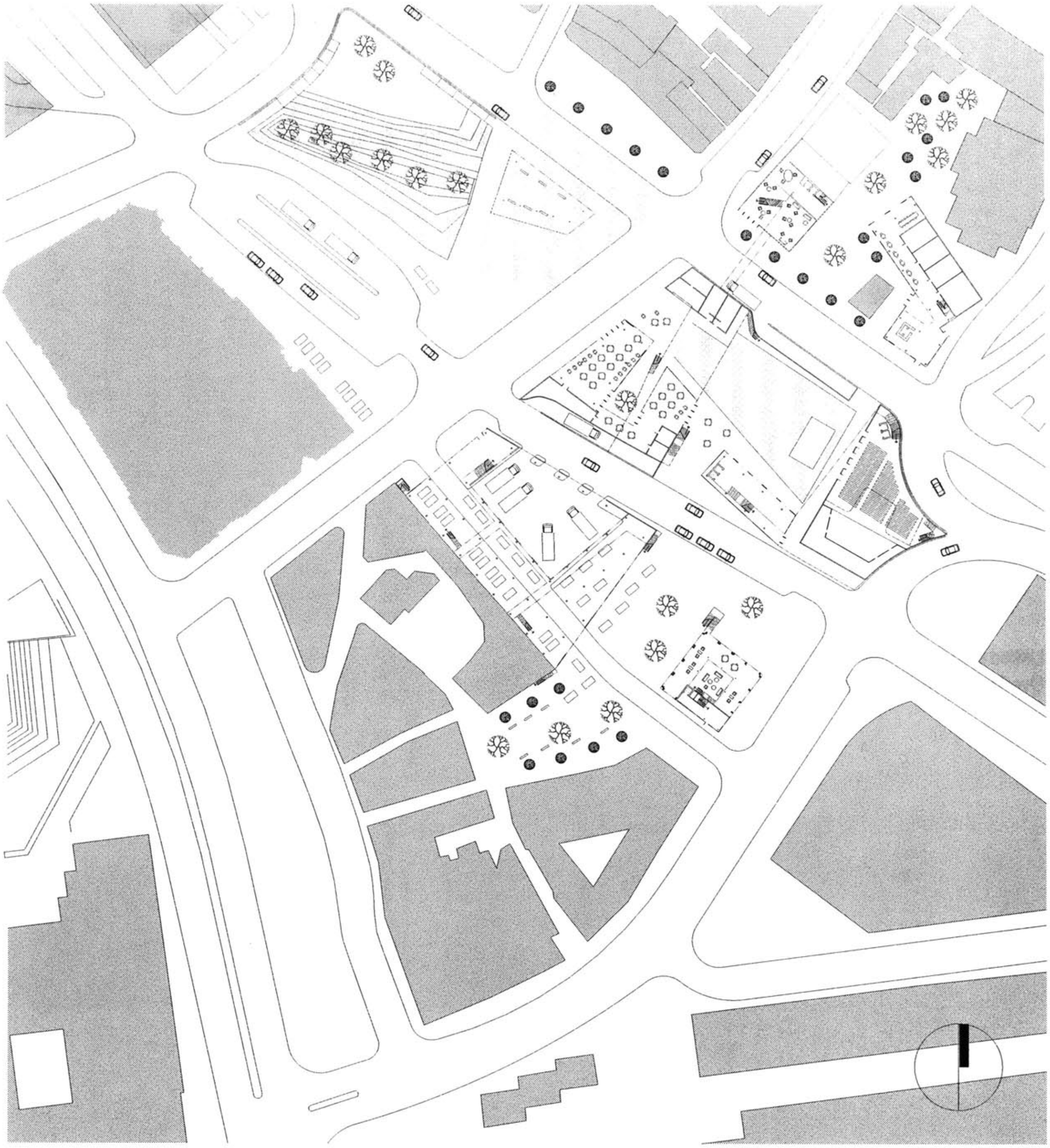


urban morphology mapping

The urban morphology model was further investigated using the language developed in the circulation models. This analysis further elucidate how the buildings related to one another and the surrounding open spaces.

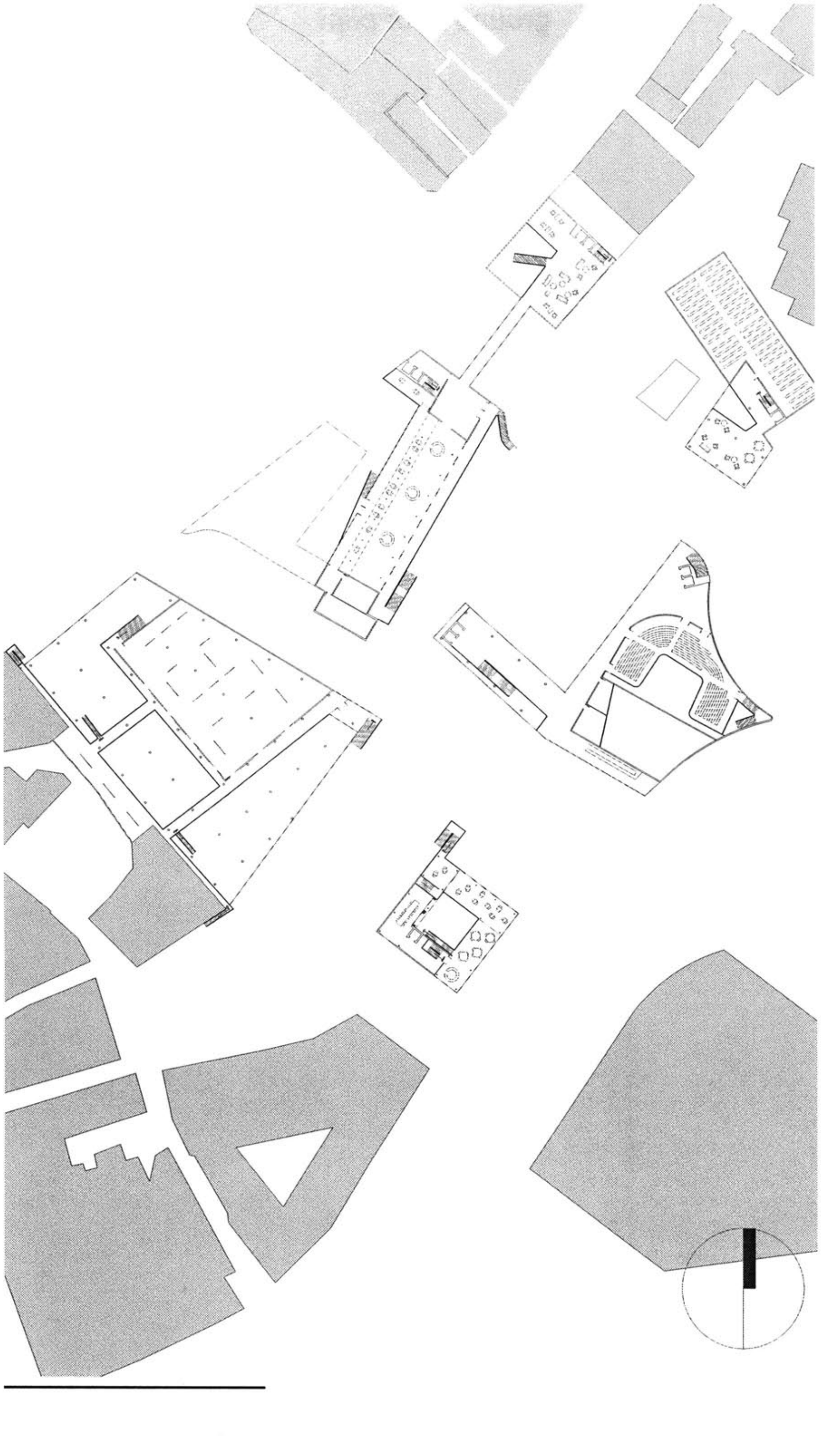
Combined *(left)*
Porous Edges *(right)*

Linked Courtyards *(left)*
Overlapping Territories *(right)*

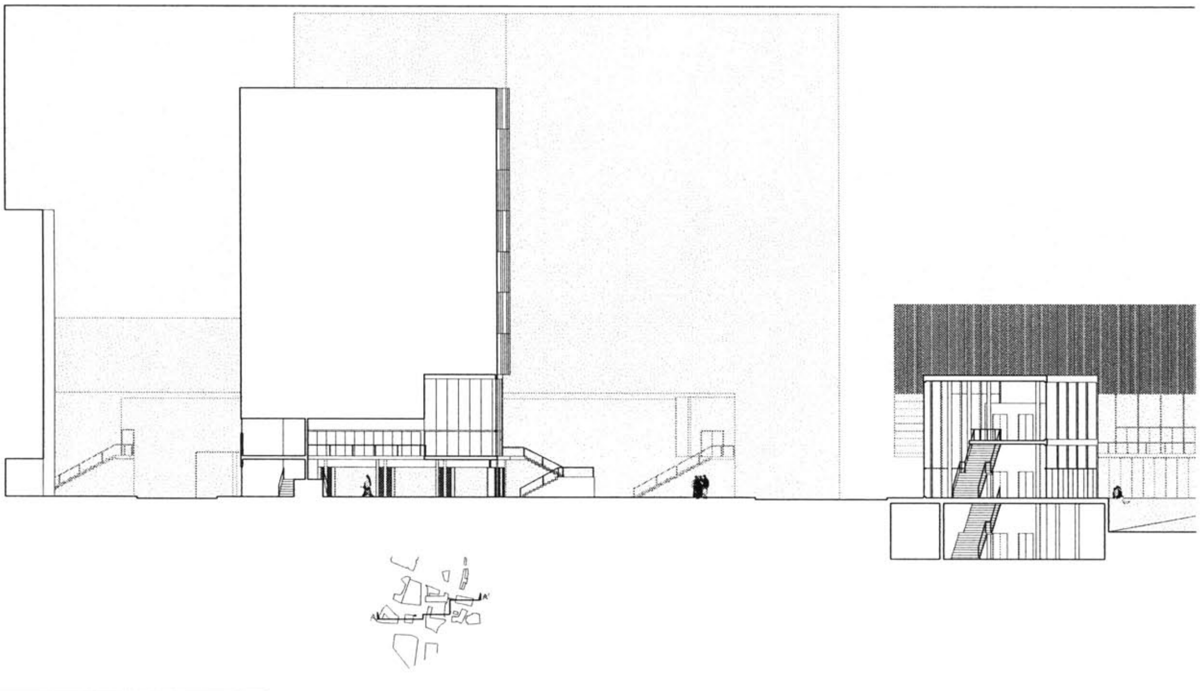


Final Drawings

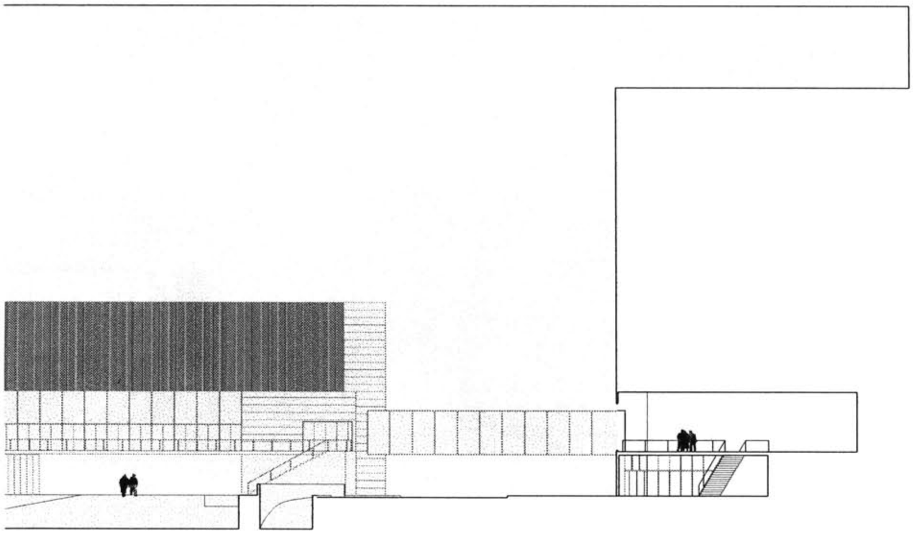
ground floor plan

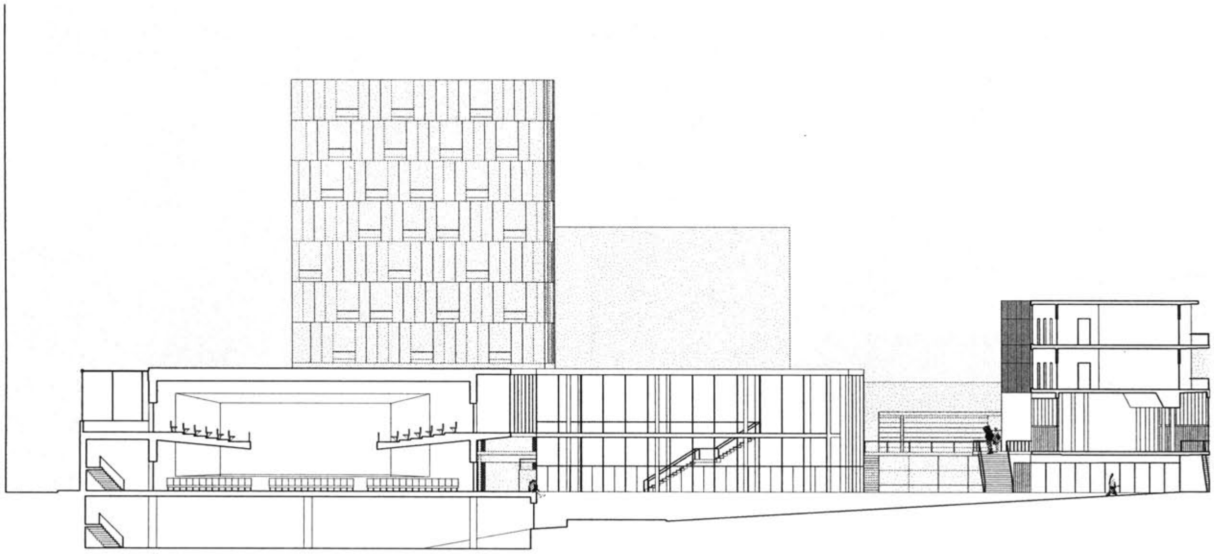


first floor plan


A
A'

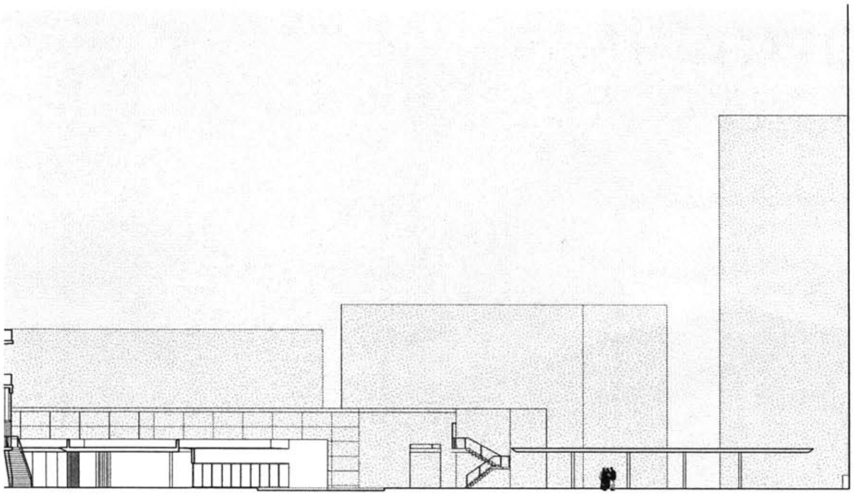
section through courtyard

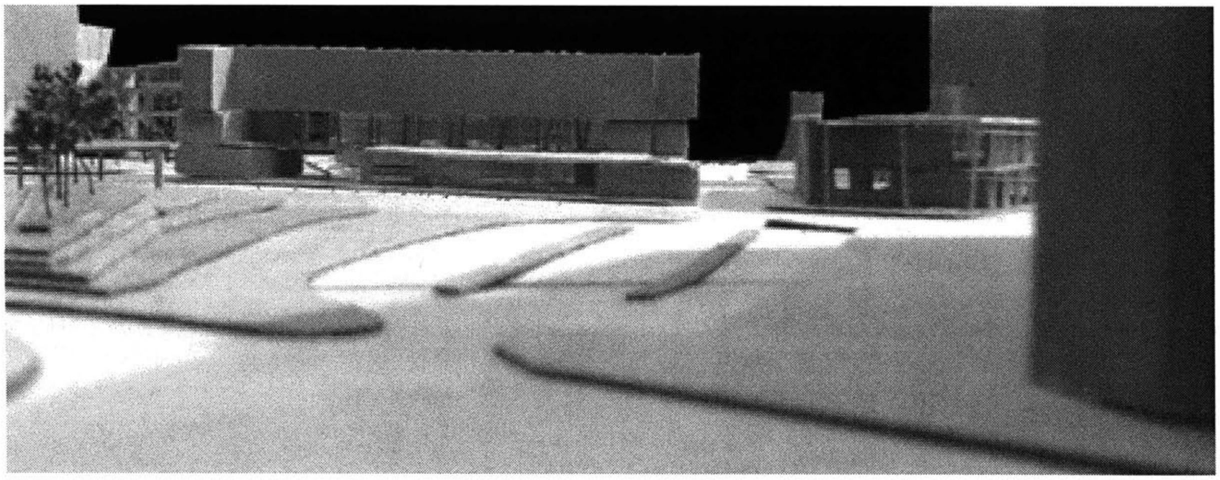


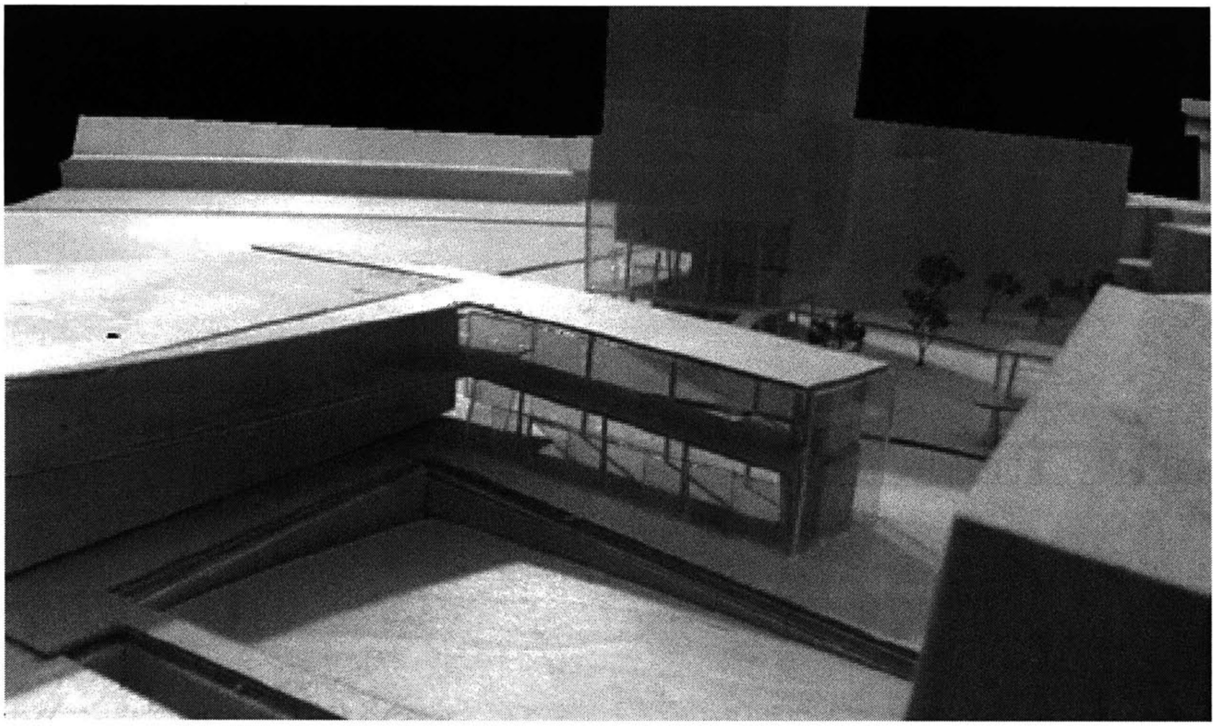


B'
B

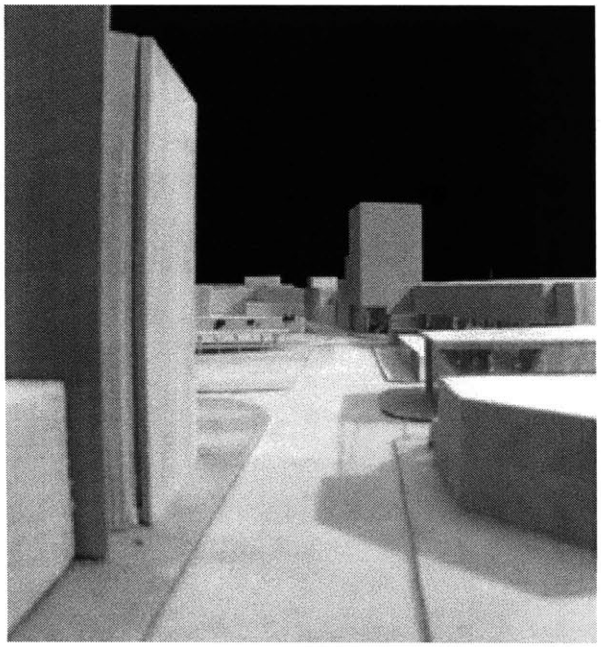
section through theater

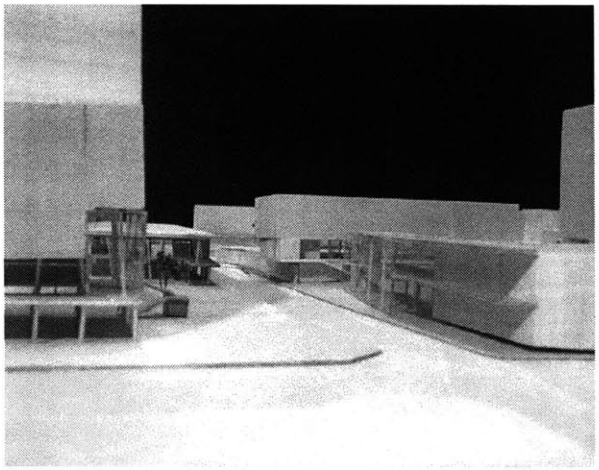


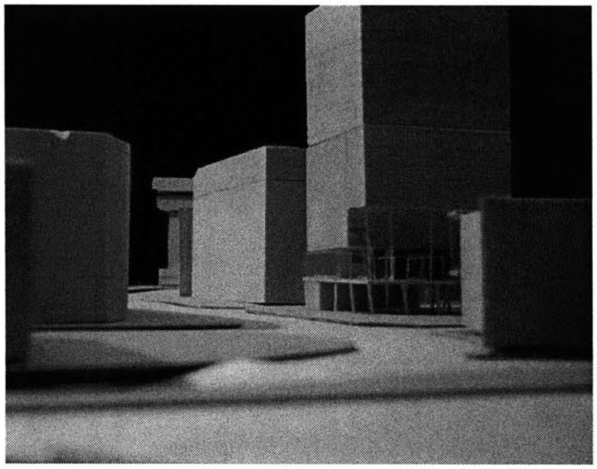


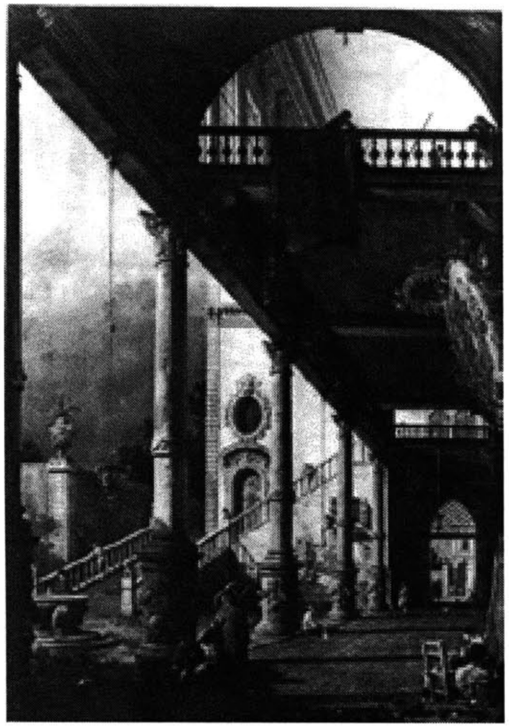


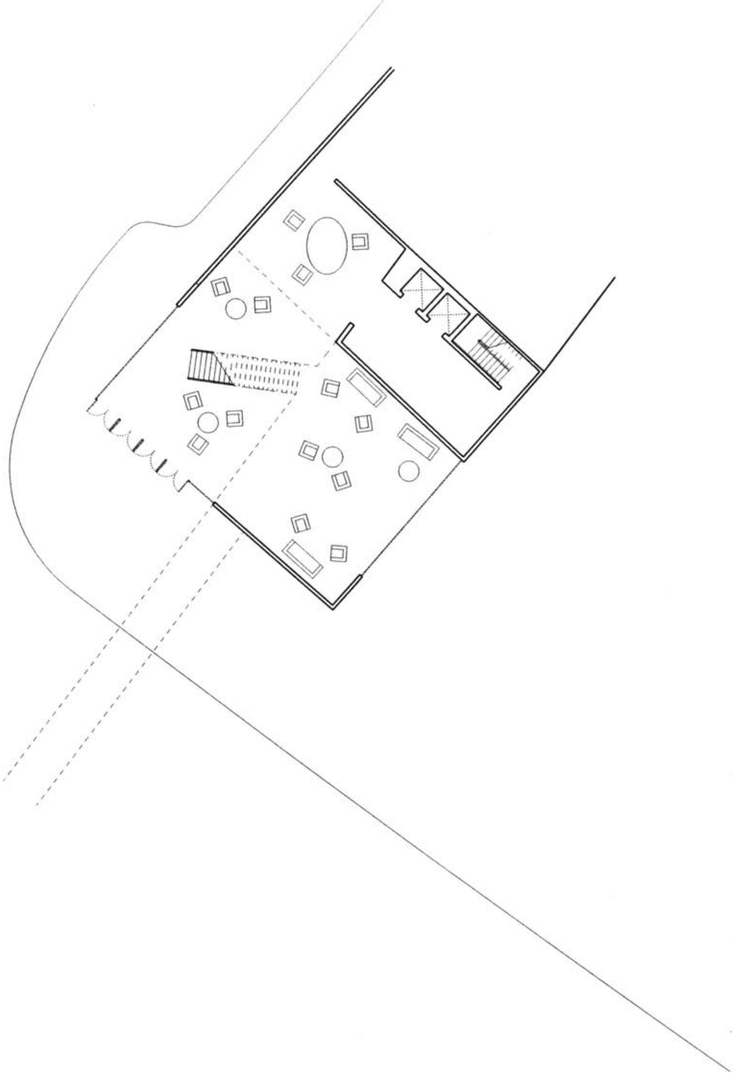
Model

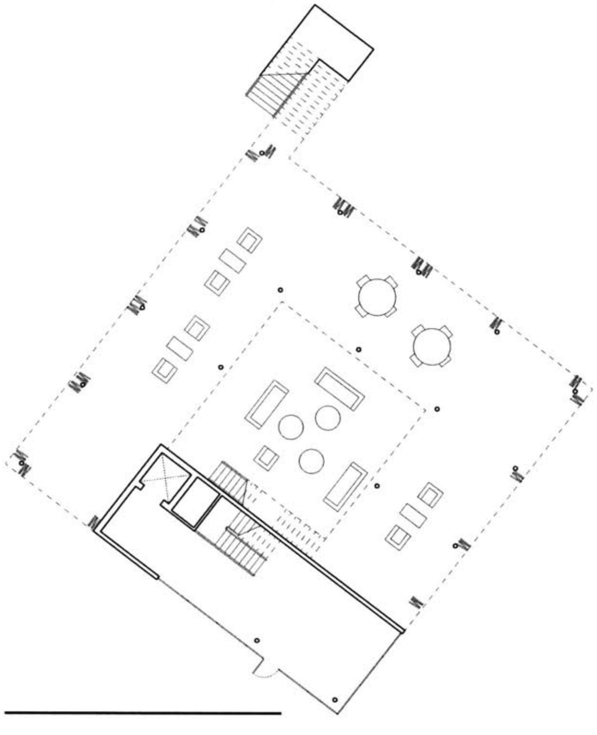












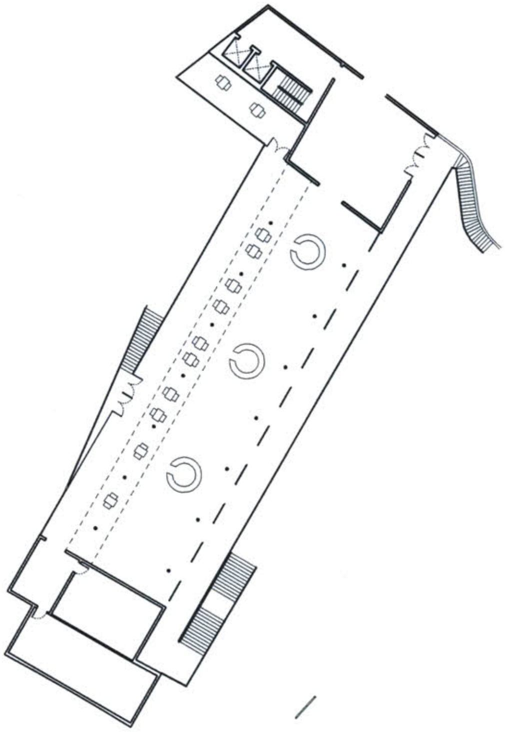
Plan Concepts

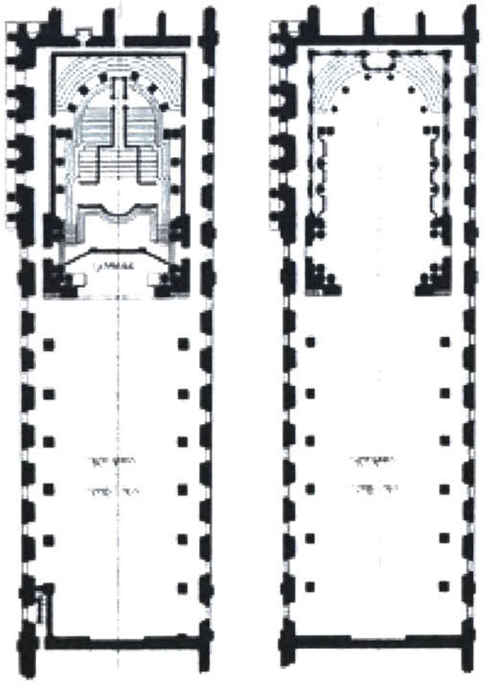
Fig. 13 Canaletto. Ca Dd'Oro. *(top)*
Ground Floor Plan, Hanover Street Hotel *(bottom)*

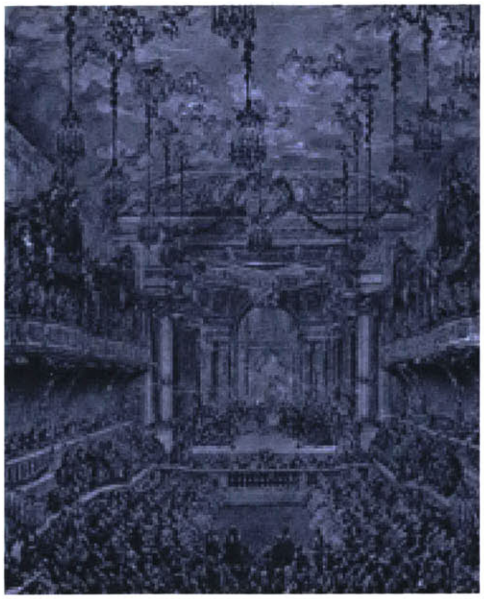
hotel lobbies

A hotel lobby can be important public space of the city serving two populations: the city at large and a public place for hotel guests to meet with others and relax. Because of its dual nature the Venetian palazzos became a natural touchstone for the design of the hotels' lobbby spaces. The Venetian palazzo had two level of semiublic spaces: the ground floor work space which was an extension of the city's surface and its piano noble, the public reception spaces for the family. The two floors were initmately related -- connected through the void of an interior courtyard and a grand stair.

Ground Floor Plan, Bostonian Hotel Extension





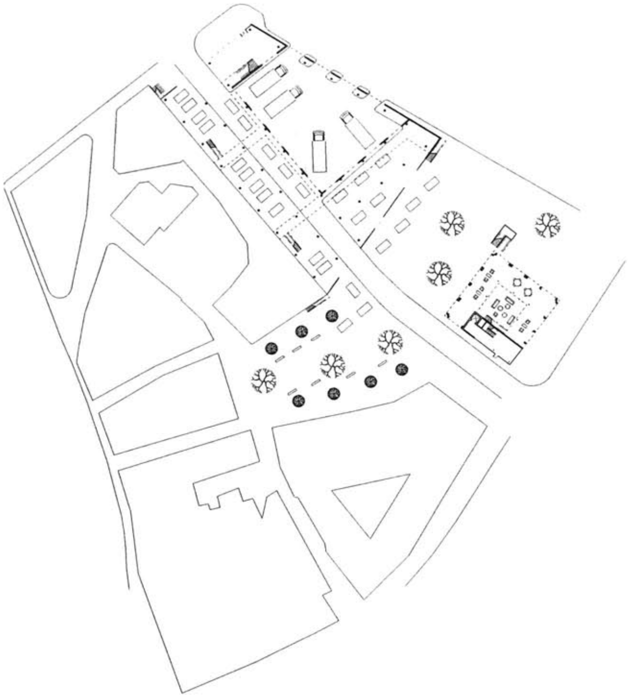


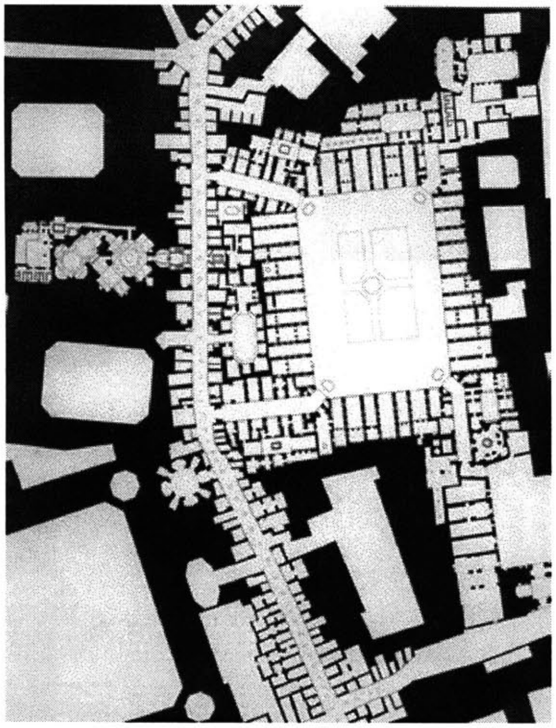
Restaurant/bar connecting to North End hotel and overlooking theater courtyard

restaurant bar

The long bar along hanover street is connected to the North End Hotel and faces the main theater. Its pivotal location makes it the focal point of activity. Like the royal court theaters the space work both formally and informally-- a task for which its long narrow shape is ideally suited. The short acis allows for casual entrance and departure while the long axis emphasizes the formal movement of a procession.

Fig. 14 Salles a Machine, Versailles, 18th century. Plans. *(left)*
Fig. 15 Salles a Machine, Versailles, 18th century. Etching. *(right)*





haymarket

A covered street and exhibition hall, haymarket acts as spine allowing one to move laterally out from it at each "veterbrae" into various spaces: shops and row of stalls, outdoor courtyards, other streets, and an exhibition hall. The outward movement of shoppers is equaled by the inward movement of goods. It functions like a transparent modern version of caravansary.

Haymarket extension including loading docks and exhibition spaces on first floor

Fig. 16 Caravansarai-I-Gulshan, Isfahan, 17th century

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image sources

Fig. 1. Volker Giencke, *The Red Stage*, Graz, 1984
Pelkonen, 89.

Fig. 2. Summer Concert Series, PS 1, 1999
Courtesy of PS 1 Contemporary Arts Center

Fig. 3 Georges Seurat, Sunday Afternoon of the Island of Grand Jatte, 1884-86
www.artcyclopedia.com

Fig. 4 William Hogarth, Beer Street, 1751. Engraving
Smith, 66.

Fig. 5 McKim, Mead, & White, Madison Square Garden, NYC, 1887-91. Monograph.
Roth, 160.

Fig. 6 McKim, Mead, & White Madison Square Garden, NYC, 1887-91. Plan.
Roth, 160.

Fig. 7 Vauxhall Gardens, London, 1751. Etching
Wroth, 300.

Fig. 8 Vauxhall Gardens, London, 1826. Plan.
Wroth, 319.

Fig. 9 Frank Llowd Wright, Midway Gardens, Chicago. 1913. Plan.
Kruty, 75.

Fig. 10 Frank Llowd Wright, Midway Gardens, Chicago. 1913. Photograph.
Kruty, 75.

Fig. 11 Salles a Machine, Versailles, Eighteenth century. Etching.
Izenour, 89.

Fig. 12 Salles a Machine, Versailles, Eighteenth century. Plans.
Izenour, 89.

Fig. 13 Canaletto, Ca D'oro, 1755.
www.artcyclopedia.com

Fig. 14 See cit. fig. 11.

Fig. 15 See cit. figure 12.

Fig. 16 Caravansarai-I-Gulshan, Isfahan, 17th century.
Plan by Klaus Herdeg.
Herdeg, 30.

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