

Stealth Agents

by

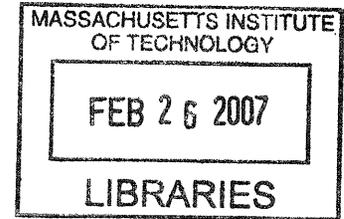
Brenda Gálvez-Moretti

Bachelor of Arts in Architecture. University of California at Berkeley, 2001.

Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Architecture

at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, February 2007.



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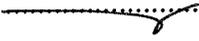
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Signature of Author.....  Department of Architecture
January 18, 2006

Certified by.....  J. Meejin Yoon
Associate Professor of Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by.....   Yung Ho Chang
Head of the Department of Architecture
Chair, Department Committee on Graduate Students

2|

Thesis Comittee:

J. Meejin Yoon, Thesis Supervisor
Associate Professor of Architecture
Department of Architecture, MIT

Saeed Arida, Thesis Reader
PhD Candidate in Computation
Department of Architecture, MIT

Michael Bell, Thesis Reader
Associate Professor of Architecture
Department of Architecture, Columbia University

Sanford Kwinter, Thesis Reader
Visiting Associate Professor
Department of Architecture, MIT

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the nature of public space has had either the endorsement of commercial enterprises, or the advocacy of state or religious institutions. In both cases, the apparent power of public appropriation is underlaid by a surrendering of basic civil rights and the stripping of privacy.

This thesis seeks to generate a true interface for body and city: public space in [on] the city and its infrastructure of policing where they become a single entity -from publicized private behaviors to privatized public affairs- finding in its ambivalence the opportunity for the emergence of a true public life, hesitant to pledge allegiances to its different publics, and capable of acquiring agency for all of them. *Public space that enables uncontrollable events while deploying a new type of surveillance.*

The operative site of this thesis is the Boston Government Center Plaza, regarded by many as failed public space. The response to its barren convexity is the re-centralization of basic services dispersed throughout the city: a gathering place for mobile units that offer free health, cultural, and communications services. This new public node responds to a much questioned Boston City Hall with unobtrusive opposition to achieve a landscape of simultaneous anarchy and safety, and most importantly, the choice of *resistance*.

Thesis Supervisor: J. Meejin Yoon
Title: Associate Professor of Architecture

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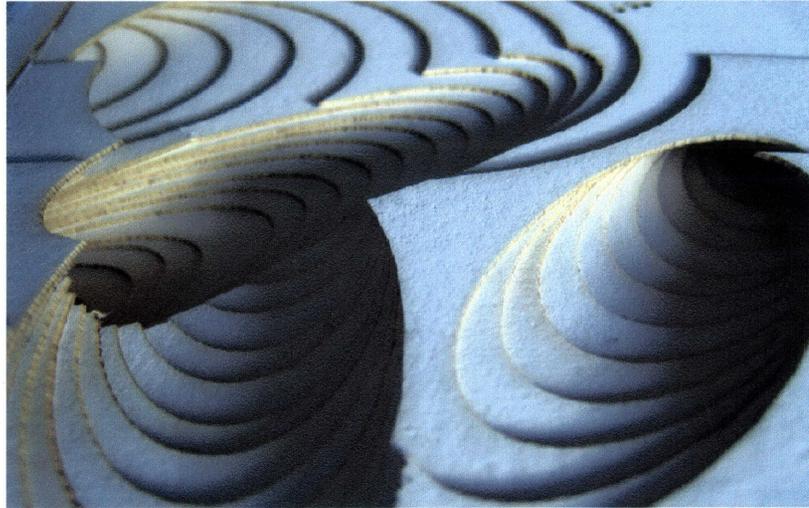
INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it is naïve to still advocate for the existence of true public space. It seems that the 'idea' of an all-inclusive area in the city is well received as long as not fully implemented. The insertion of parks, basketball courts and running paths are not without second intentions, but inarguably, open spaces -even if not public- are the primary interface of the citizen and the city.

Public space has been of interest to many different people, but postmodern intellectuals, particularly various political geographers brought back the academic discussion over public space by interpreting cultural performance as a tangible environment, quickly moving on to inform urban planning practices and ultimately architecture, which leaped the furthest in interpreting political space as available for physical development.

If public space -whether it exists or not- is indeed the mediator between body and city, it should be a true manifestation of this relationship, or even better, it should bring some balance to the asymmetry and directionality

of such relationship. Because the city cannot exist without its citizens, and citizens cannot exist without the city, but both cannot exist without public space, then public space must exist, What public space has come to be in the American city has experienced and continues to undergo a great deal of transformations, but its nature needs to anticipate the relationship between city and body. Presently, the quality of this relationship is experiencing an emerging condition of constant and subtle fear. Traditional roles of power within the urban network –the policing and the policed- are rapidly becoming obsolete, as traditionally resistant bodies are driven by their paranoia not only to tolerate, but to intermittently welcome practices of surveillance previously regarded as invasions of privacy. This proposal is the anticipation of a new ecology of power in the American city: the preparation for a constant fluctuation of control within a contemporary infrastructure of surveillance.



I. THE NATURE OF OUR public SPACE: A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

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The institution of public space follows a long tradition of democracy and visibility of governmental and religious institutions, the cultural infrastructure of the city set forth: a space of change and exchange, critical to the development of culture and identity in/of the city.

In the United States, the town square was the earlier form of inclusive place. The American green, based in the British system of the common took its place as the gathering place for people of a same community, becoming less and less inclusive, until evolving into public space and an intrinsic part of any city. Parks, as the interface of the body and the city, operated as a place of leisure, not as a place of political discourse. Currently in the United States, the formation of public or semipublic open areas follow commercial interests, typically allocating shopping concourses around them, or rather, positioning them within the confines of consumption, passing for democratic and popular urban space.

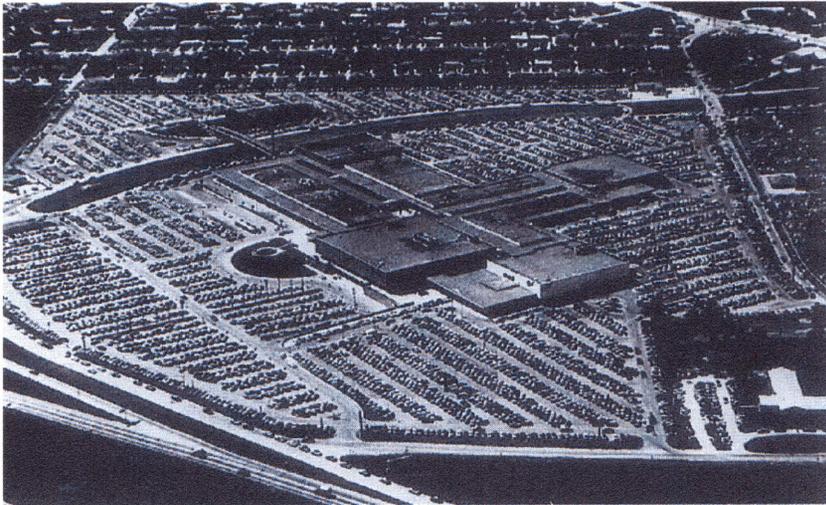


Fig 1. Anywhere Mall, U.S.A.

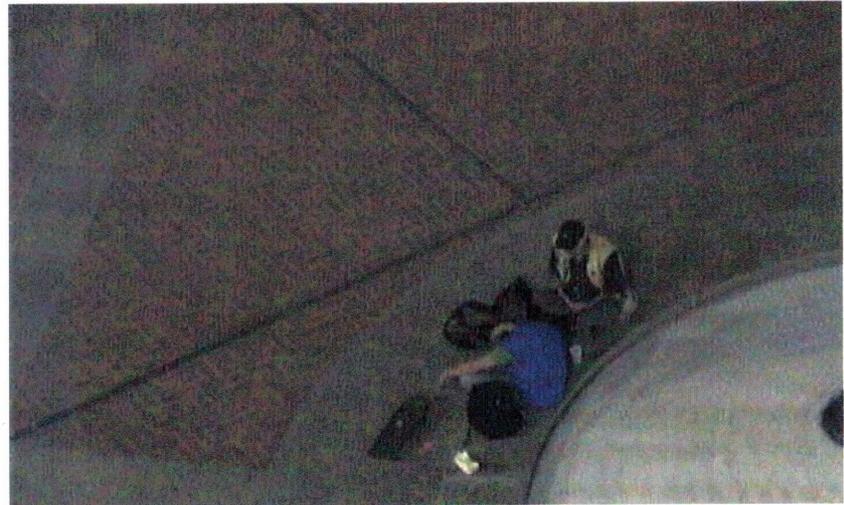


Fig 2. Still from *Demonstrate* commissioned by The Whitney Museum
Sproul Plaze, UC Berkeley, CA. 2004

These characterize the relationship between the city and its bodies as well.

This passing public realm along with its endorsers (whether commercial or institutional) is a special part of the city's infrastructure. It is in fact, the interface between the citizens and the whole physical organization of the city.

This thesis aims at generating a true interface for body and city; public space in (on) the city and its infrastructure of policing where they become a single entity, from smooth to striate, from publicized private behaviors to privatized public affairs, from chaos to order. Their symbiosis representing the experience of urban life: anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, consumption, authority, tactility, motion, danger, power, navigation, and restlessness. ^[1]

[1]

Henning Bech. Western city: Worlds of Strangers. Bech discusses experiences in the realm of the modern urban setting as capable of assigning it a sexual identity. The relationships between two different spaces, in this case, are eroticized to derive relationships of power and submission by means of these experiences.

There is an ambivalence at this meeting point that offers the opportunity for the emergence of a true public life, hesitant to pledge alliances to its different publics, and capable of acquiring agency for all of them.

A Paradigm Shift

Capitalism and its technological demands have brought with it an innumerable number of changes. One of them is the shift in the traditional mode of effective surveillance and control of the cities populace from the centralized panoptical model to the decentralized apparatus of Closed Circuit Television or CCTV. (And more recently, Open Circuit Television, or OCTV, which eliminates the need for re-centralization of information by the use of a wireless network, allowing a true distribution of surveilled and surveillant bodies).

The panopticon, the classical model of surveillance and control, relies on its absolute interiority to maximize the ration of controller/controlled, while CCTV, lurking omni-presently through the city's surface, inverts this ratio without sacrificing the integrity of the function of the control machine: where one body could watch one hundred, now one hundred bodies can watch a single one.

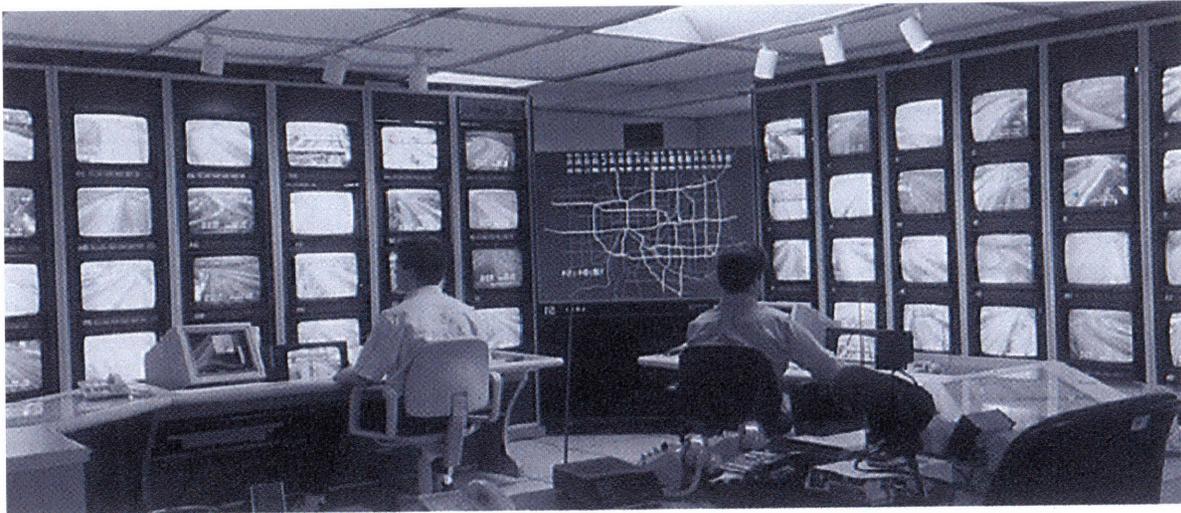


Fig 3. Subway surveillance system, city unknown

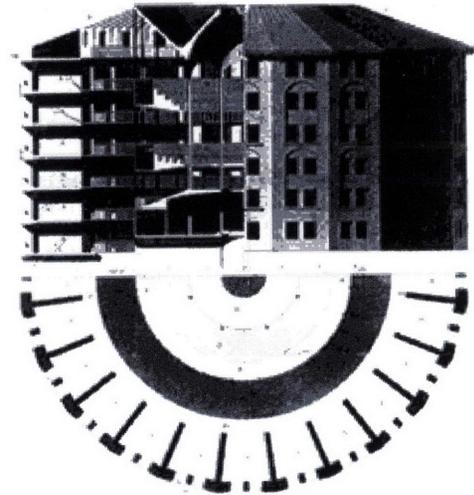


Fig 4. Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon

The enterprise of modern surveillance through systems as CCTV attempts a return to a model of crime prevention by means of transgression of the public body. However, unlike crime prevention strategies employed by a policing force, CCTV enables the transgression of all bodies, not just a selected few. Thus, the body in the city becomes 'flesh controlled by private and public interest, in which the rights of property are continuously mediated by the restrictions of propriety.'^[2]

[2] Diller+Scofidio. *Flesh*. 'Unlike land law, when property lines protect private space from transgressions of the public, the property lines that define the socially 'decent' body defend public space from transgressions of the private(s).'

The new decentralized surveillance apparatus has made public space expendable, and the very institutions that are able to habilitate space for public life (Church + State) are enabled now to instigate their values upon the surface of the body. The body (particularly the deviant body) precariously drifts between the moral codes prescribed by the Church and the conduct codes enforced by the State. The deviant body, under this definition, is the body which does not recognize such moral codes as its own values, thus not manifesting a normative behavior in accordance to 'lawful' ordinances. The body in the city has become docile, Foucault's docile body, disciplined by being adequately distributed in the space of the city.^[3]

[3] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*.

The city is a surprisingly conducive site for discipline. The enclosure necessary to impart discipline is no longer represented by city walls, bridges, or toll booths, but by the spatiality of the network: created spaces of authority. Urban spaces safe from the 'gaze' are relegated to areas without political or economic interest, to back alleys and the inner city: non functional sites,^[4] useless spaces: found spaces of resistance.

[4] Ibid. Foucault describes functional sites as places defined to correspond not only to the need to supervise, but also to create useful space.

In the city, authority spaces are designed, while spaces of resistance are always found. There are several instances in which there is a transgression of the authority in the opposite space, the insertion of the authority object the city street: cameras, uniforms, and billboards for example. The reversal, the infiltration of the resistant object in the realm of authority functions with a variant state of anonymity. Acts of urban resistance, like protesting, skating, and tagging, are visible and deemed illegal and therefore unable to become subversive. True subversive acts of resistance are enabled within and by the authority network, requiring a continuous performance, a conscious act of passing.

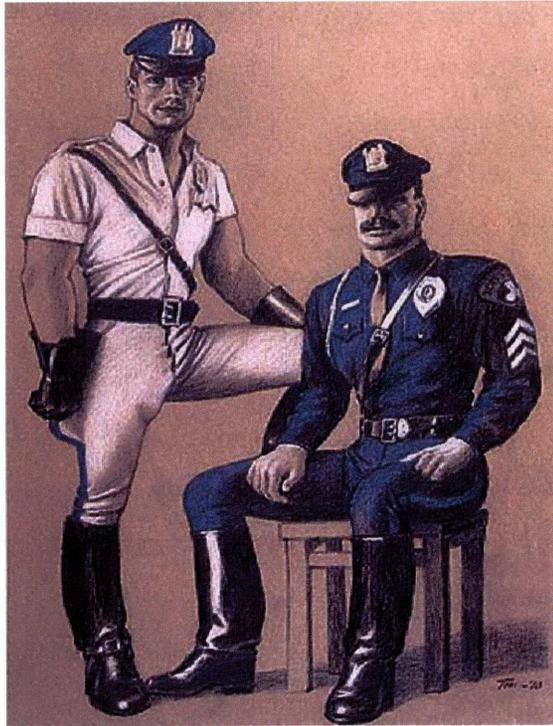


Fig. 5 Tom's of Finland. Illustration

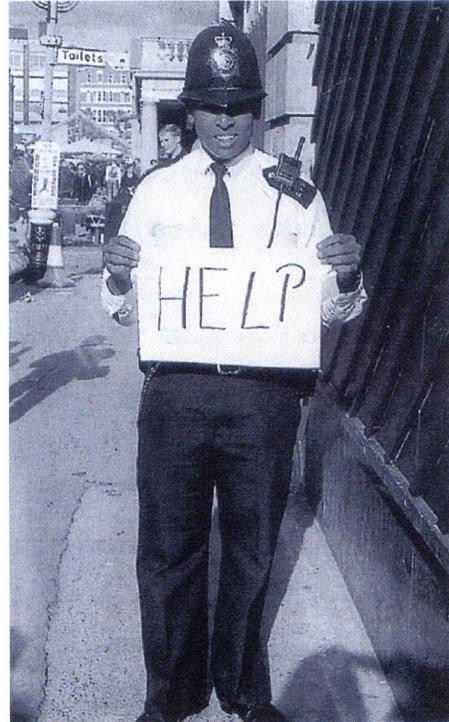


Fig 6. Gillian Wearing. Signs That Say What You Want to Say and not Signs That Say What Somebody Else Wants You to Say. C-Print. 1992/1993

Signs of [for] Behavior

The ability of the city's infrastructure to control the behavior of its citizens largely rests on its ability to discipline its citizens a priori –thus preventing any manifestation of subversive behavior. Considering the ratio between the city's populace and law enforcing officers, this is a rather evident fact. The image of the law imparts discipline as much as the image of deviance unleashes reprehensive actions upon it.

At the scale of the body, the significance of the police uniform is vital. Its color, its insignias, adornments and decorations –which subsequently carefully places each individual uniformly within the network of authority^[5] - as well as the objects of the trade, from handcuffs to pistols, make the visibility of the police officer, granting him/her a sign of order, and at the same time, investing him/her with the power of tools.

[5]
Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish

The recognition of *agents* of social order by the resistance is both what keeps deviancy from happening and what encourages it: *'As a system of representation, the uniform identifies the body's specific function in a given institution and thus defines the behavior of others'*.^[6]

[6]
Diller + Scofidio: Flesh

A uniform is not only an instrument of policing authorities, but are used to by deviant bodies as well. Just as insignias and decorations, signs of urban protest are worn just over the skin. Once a uniform becomes a pure sign, recognizable at the social level; the body in turn receives a named discourse, a proper name, an identity.^[7]

[7]
Roland Barthes: Mythologies

As a consequence, the body which structures its significant surface loses all value and becomes expendable.

The role of the resisting policed bodies is not of anarchy alone. Managed mischief is a necessity to maintain the delicate balance of a stimulating but ordered community. Richard Sennett elaborates on this point by stating that small events of disorder prevent larger events of disorder. The policed body becomes 'responsible for giving citizens the maturity to handle the consequences of lack of control'.^[8]

[8]
Sennett, Richard. The Uses of Disorder:
Personal Identity and City Life

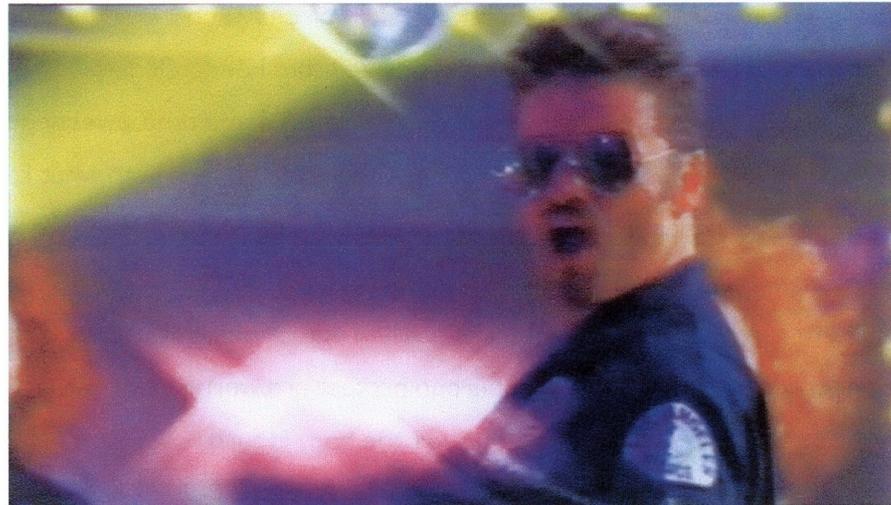


Fig 7. Still from the music video *Outside*. George Michael, 1998.

The policing body, in contrast, is responsible for exerting fear in order to manage anarchy. The police uniform prevents the body from individuality, fulfills its role of communicating a message that pertains to a group, and becomes a form of urban camouflage that liberates the subject within it from individual responsibility. This adherence to the group is forgiving to subversive members with their own agendas: gay men, minorities, or even women. This represents a form of 'passing', skill which becomes useful in everyday situations where the individual is made responsible for his/her behavior, usually attempting to contradict the message communicated by the group.

Between the policed public place and the policing entity is where authoritative and resistant bodies can conceal their true intentions, their true identities. The police/policed space becomes itself camouflage, where their actors disguise their intentions guided by the instinct of survival. The camouflage becomes the public experience, as prostitutes pass as common women, cruisers pass as men, and gay men pass as cops –or cops pass as gay men.

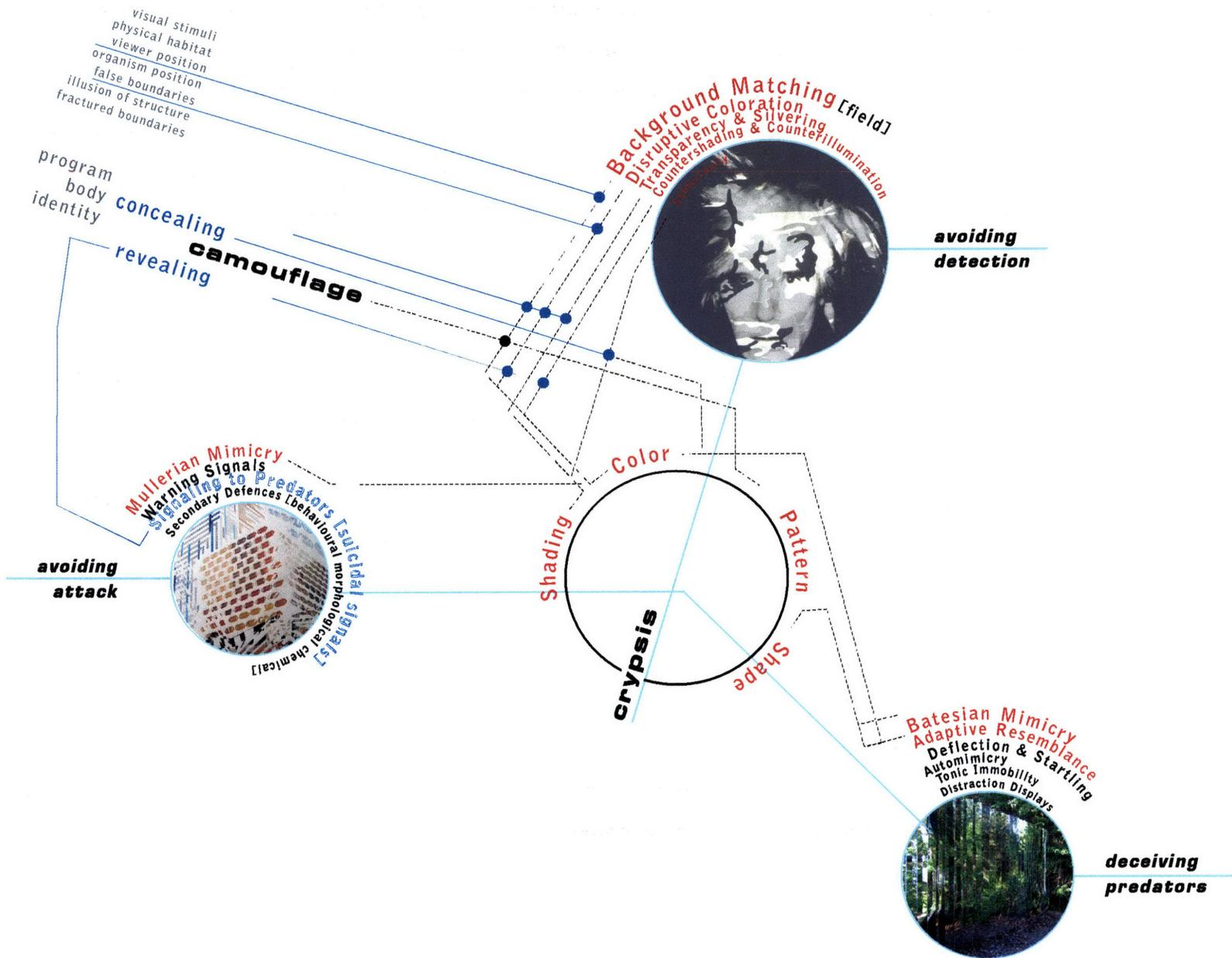
The relationships of power extend from the urban (a public space within the city) to the body (a uni-form within the city, the body within the uni-form[s], the identity within the body). The transition from identity to architecture –passing through the body, clothing, and going beyond, to the city- is a smooth, continuous process.

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Architecture of Stealth

The space for true public life, the crossing point of police and policed, shall obey a new social mechanics of power. The strategy is that of deception, of concealment, of undercover maneuvers. This strategy has been defined in other asymmetrical power relationships -such as colonialism-, as mimicry: a form of political camouflage by adaptation and ultimately assimilation. ^[9]

[9]



In this study, however, the relationships within the policed society are asymmetrical but bilateral as well, and mimicry/camouflage are two distinct operations with different consequences.

Mimicry is the ability of any species to appear similar to another by means of form, behavior, or habitat, while camouflage is the ability of a creature to become indiscernible from its surroundings. The crossing point, this deceptive architecture, lies between mimicry and camouflage, emerging from an unclear differentiation between figure and ground. It is possible that this lack of clarity is what renders an architecture a natural habitat for its surroundings, -not necessarily a natural inhabitant of them.

Catherine Ingraham, reflecting on Roger's Callois' famous essay *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia*, states: 'The breakdown in the difference between space and the inhabiting subject, and between inside and outside, is, among other things, always an architectural crisis. In the face of the failure to 'maintain the boundaries inside and outside, between, that is, figure and ground' the body 'collapses, deliquesces, doubles the space around it in order to be processed by its own surrounds'.

Modern surveillance methods have altered the way in which the urban eco-system operates, by eliminating the need for immediacy, and thus developing the capability of incorporating remote locations as part of its network. The police and the policed have formed their own ecology based on their mutual reliance of a surveillance infrastructure. It must find an expression which questions the clashing relationship between surveillance infrastructure and public place, where the traditional differentiations between inside/outside, police/policed are obsolete.

This new ecology must be what drives the design of a new type of architecture, both of authority and resistance, where there is no outside or inside, but an interstitial space that subverts itself in a constant impermanence, dissident architecture characterized by stealth. ^[10]

[10]
Diiller + Scofidio: *Flesh*

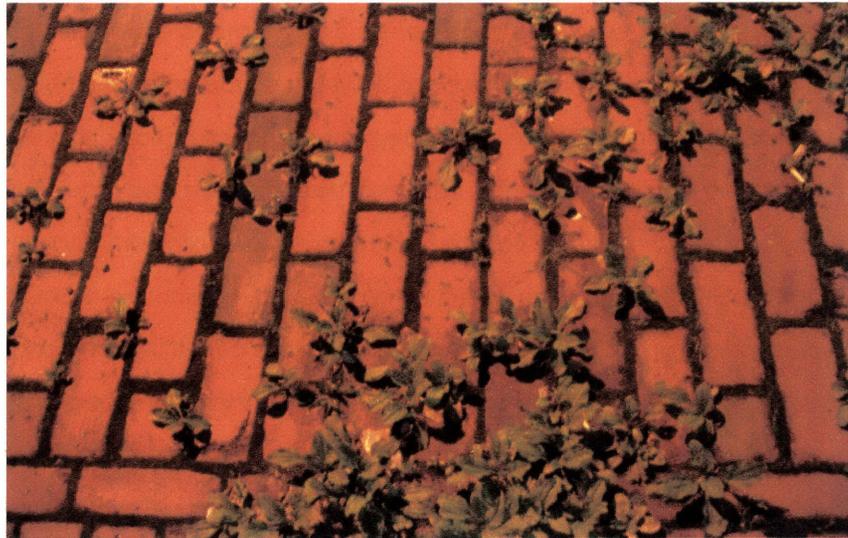


Fig 8. Subversive weeds grow at Government Center Plaza. Their main nutrients are rain water and urine.

II. THE RE-CENTRALIZATION OF EVENTS

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What makes public space successful? Public, by definition, means pertaining to *the* community, and not serving any particular group. For space to be truly public it has to serve the interests of *all* the publics it engages. It needs to be able to change and reinvent itself, but at the same time to be not an addition to the public landscape, but to be intrinsic to it.

The program developed as part of this thesis is that of various mobile services that might be to a greater or lesser degree desirable in the public realm. These mobile units -in fact, most of them as small as a large van- already operate within the financial center of the city of Boston with regular schedules, serving a considerable number of users.

The intention behind the deployment of mobile services is to reach to a disenfranchised public that might otherwise be excluded from access to these services. However, by distributing such services, the very

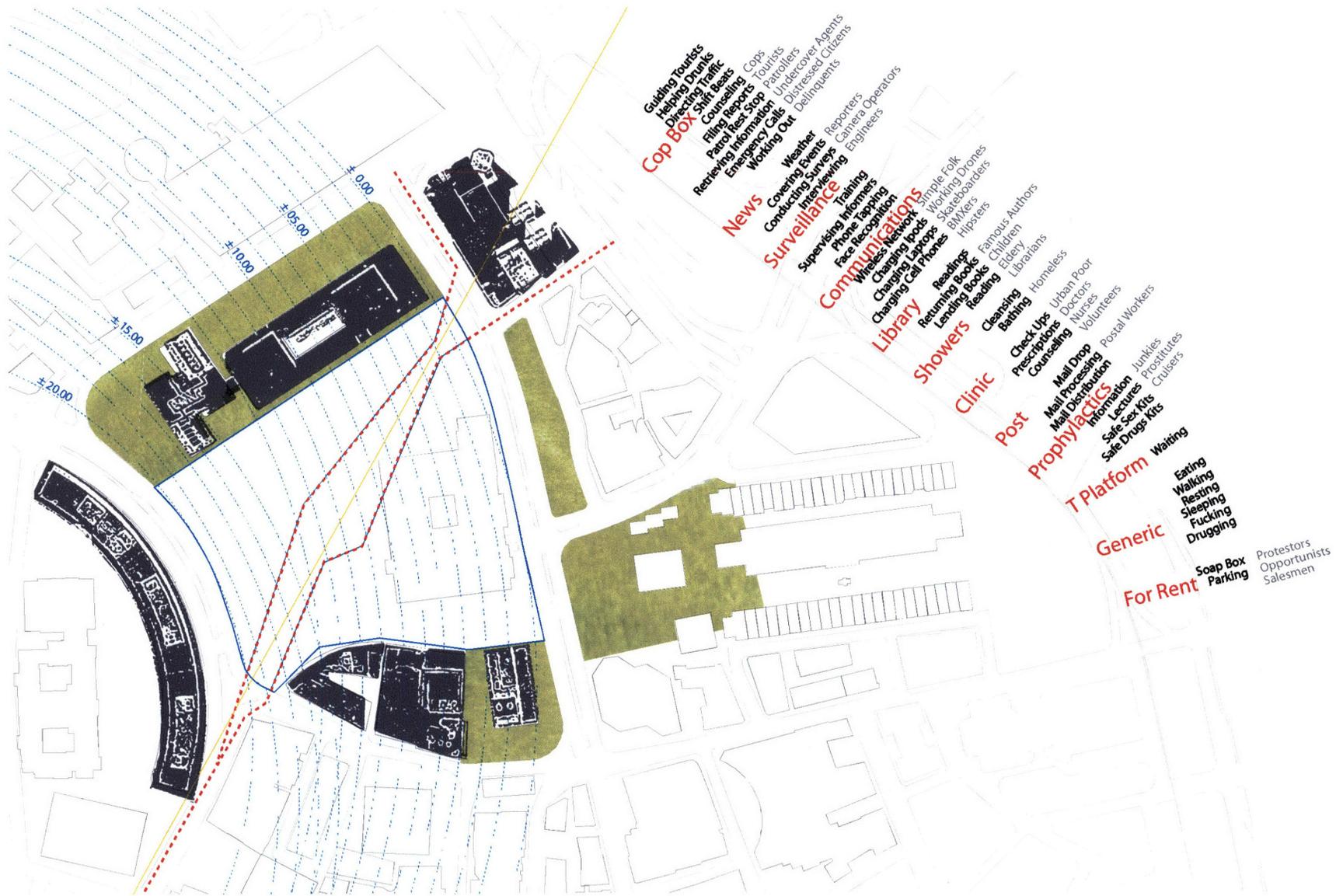


Fig 9. Site map showing the only direct existing line of sight, (yellow), the most legible pedestrian flow (red), and the existing elevations (blue). To the right, the proposed mobile services (red), their specific programs (black) and the anticipated users (gray).

same public can be kept out of certain areas of the city. The temporal characteristic of such services deny the community any sort of anchoring within it. Most services funded by the city are geared towards disease treatment or prevention, like needle exchange vans and prophylactics distribution stations. In this case, the city avoids the institutionalization of these services by denying them a permanent spatial allocation, thus delegitimizing their patrons as citizens. Other services considered more desirable, like the mobile clinic and the mobile library, are insertions of local governments and bring not only needed services and goods, but exercise control over their customers by subjecting them to limited choice.

Centralized space constructed as such is a sign of political repression. The re-construction of centralized space based on particular distributed events is, on the contrary, political innovation that guarantees some sort of freedom.

However, once re-centralized, these services must remain impermanent. Permanence is a function of power. *Transience guarantees a multiplicity of readings and therefore becomes democratic.*^[11]

The different services occupy the site at different times for variable amounts of time, turning the public plaza into a piece of infrastructure to which these services plug in.

Included in the program is the existing Boston's Metropolitan Area underground system, which has three stations adjacent to Government Center, serving all four lines in the city. As part of this proposal, the three subway stations are re-centralized into one, with minimum change to the existing train paths that run underneath the plaza. By doing so, an emerging verticality is revealed, as the different trains run between forty and eighty feet below the surface.

The plaza takes shape as a response to this program: spaces are carved for both overt and covert roads, parking, parks, and architectural moments that are engaged by the mobile services as they become present. The whole site is a hybrid between body, architecture, and infrastructure.

[11]

Gordon Matta-Clark: the ontological involvement of the observer could be exported to the architectural dimension, thus acquiring other meanings. Transience is the quality necessary for a work to guarantee a multiplicity of readings and therefore to be democratic. Interview.

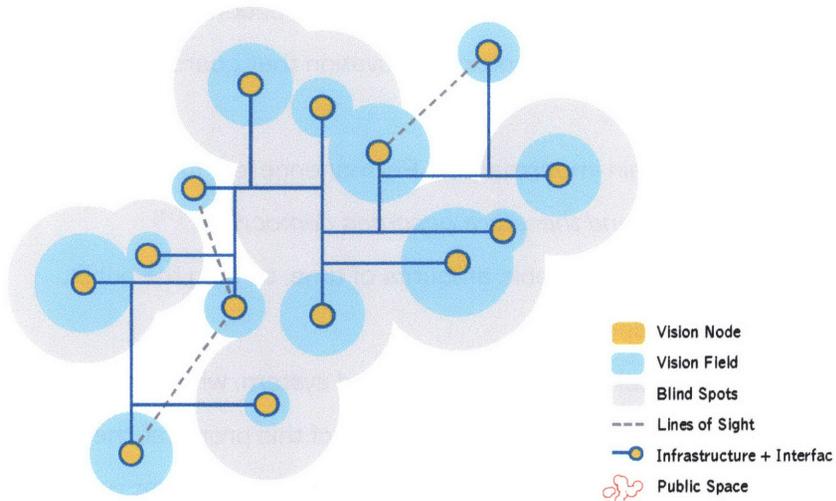


Fig 10. Types of Control Space Created by Visual Hierarchies.

Vision Node	Implicit	[Covert + Submissive]	Hidden Cameras
Blind Spots	Self	[Covert + Defensive]	Non-Functional Sites
Vision Field	Social	[Overt + Passive]	Sites of Social Influence
Lines of Sight	Explicit	[Overt + Aggressive]	CCTV, Police Patrol



Fig 11. The original needle exchange van in New Haven, CT. 1990

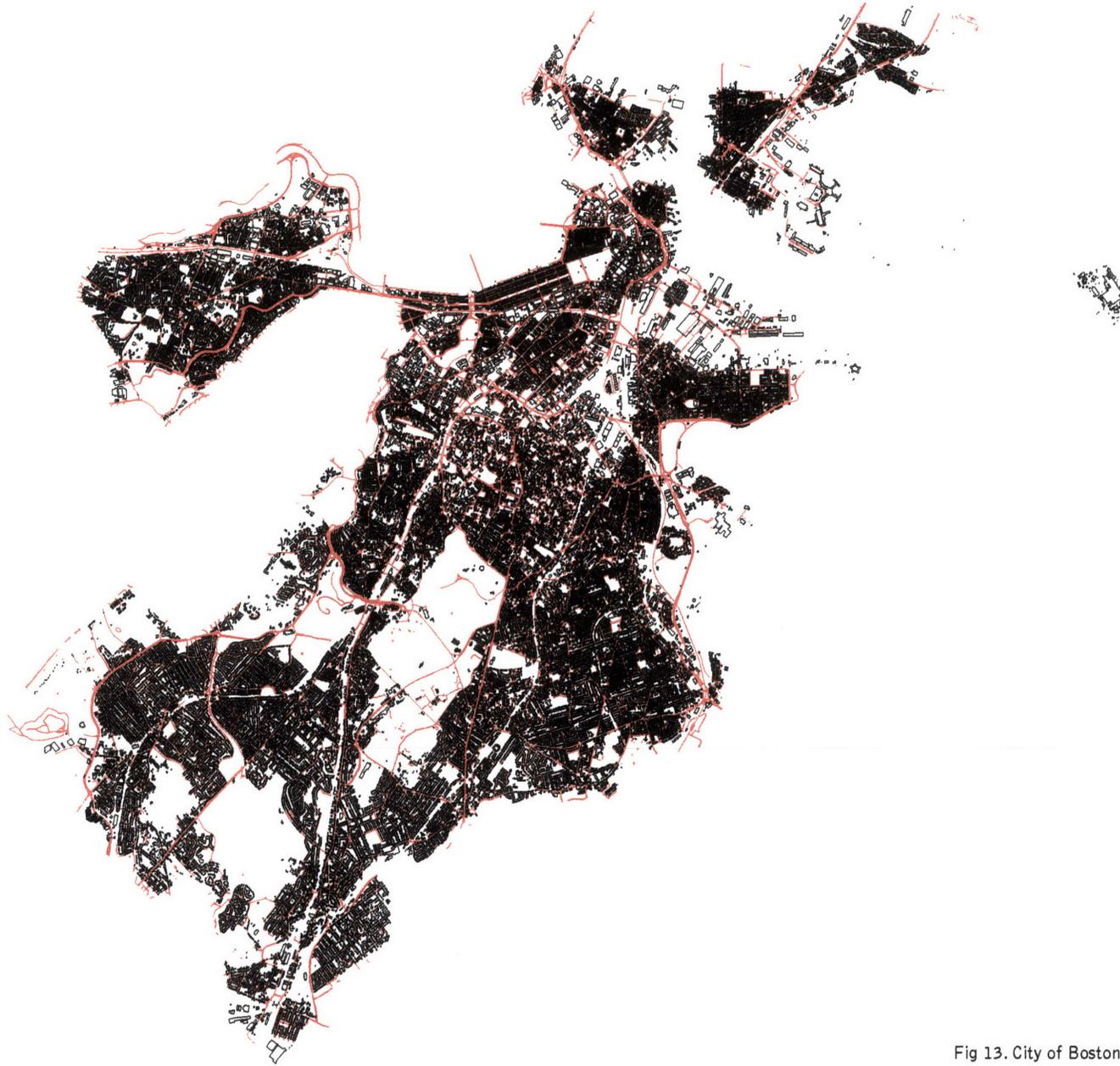


Fig 13. City of Boston

III. THE BARREN CITY

The site is bound on all sides. This brings the opportunity for a self organized system that, although has a relation to it's surroundings, can create its own rules.

It is immediately recognized that the existing site is a convex surface, due to its continuity, without a change in the horizon, eliminating local data, -views, light, circulation- including the surrounding buildings. Its surface is unable to generate public life.

The proposed space must *pass*-adapting and re-adapting-, as space which is simultaneously public, controlled, and of protest, and most importantly, as space that is continuously generating difference.

It must precisely respond to its boundaries, fitting perfectly within its surroundings in order to deploy an antagonistic internal logic that will blur its condition of inside/outside, place/non-place, and architecture/landscape/infrastructure.



Fig 14. Contained volume: Government Center. Boston, MA.



Fig 15. Government Center Plaza, City Hall, and the John F. Kennedy Federal Building in the Background

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Fig 16. The existing plaza has very few discreet spaces



Fig 17. Most people transit through the plaza, but very few spend time there.

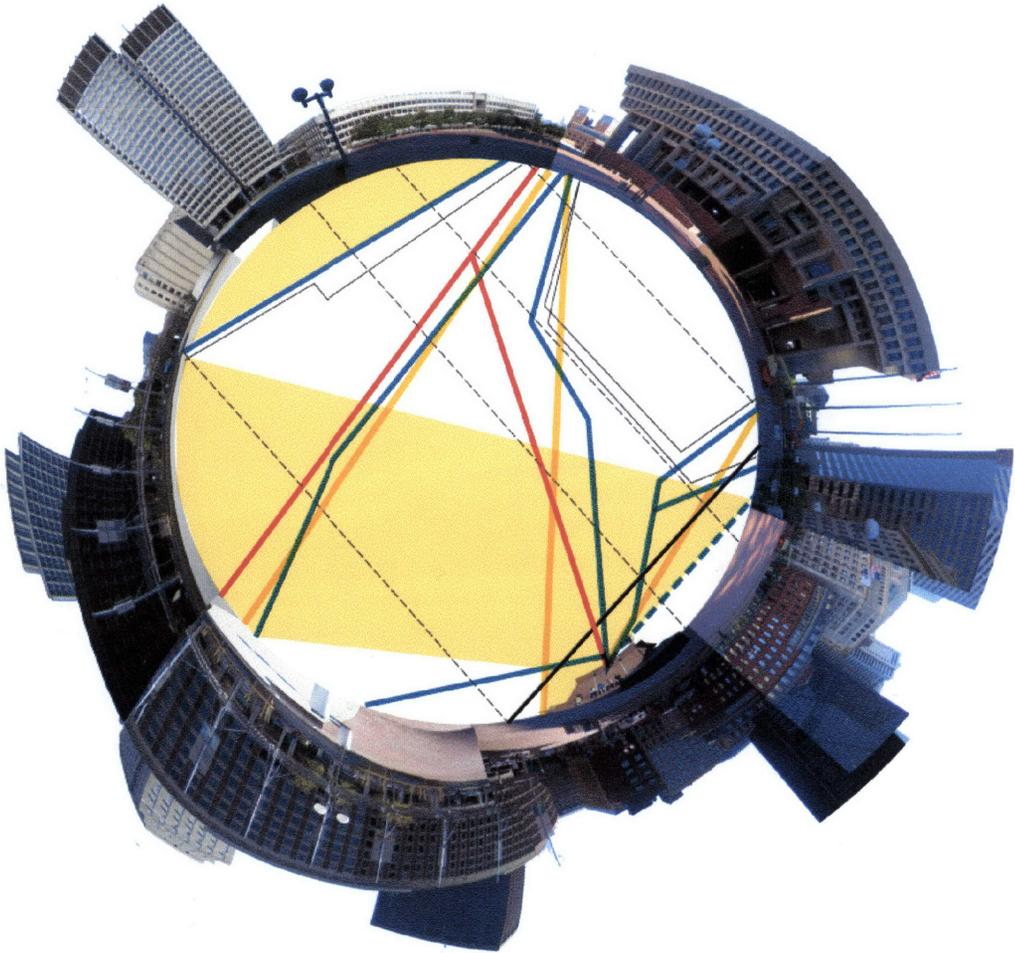
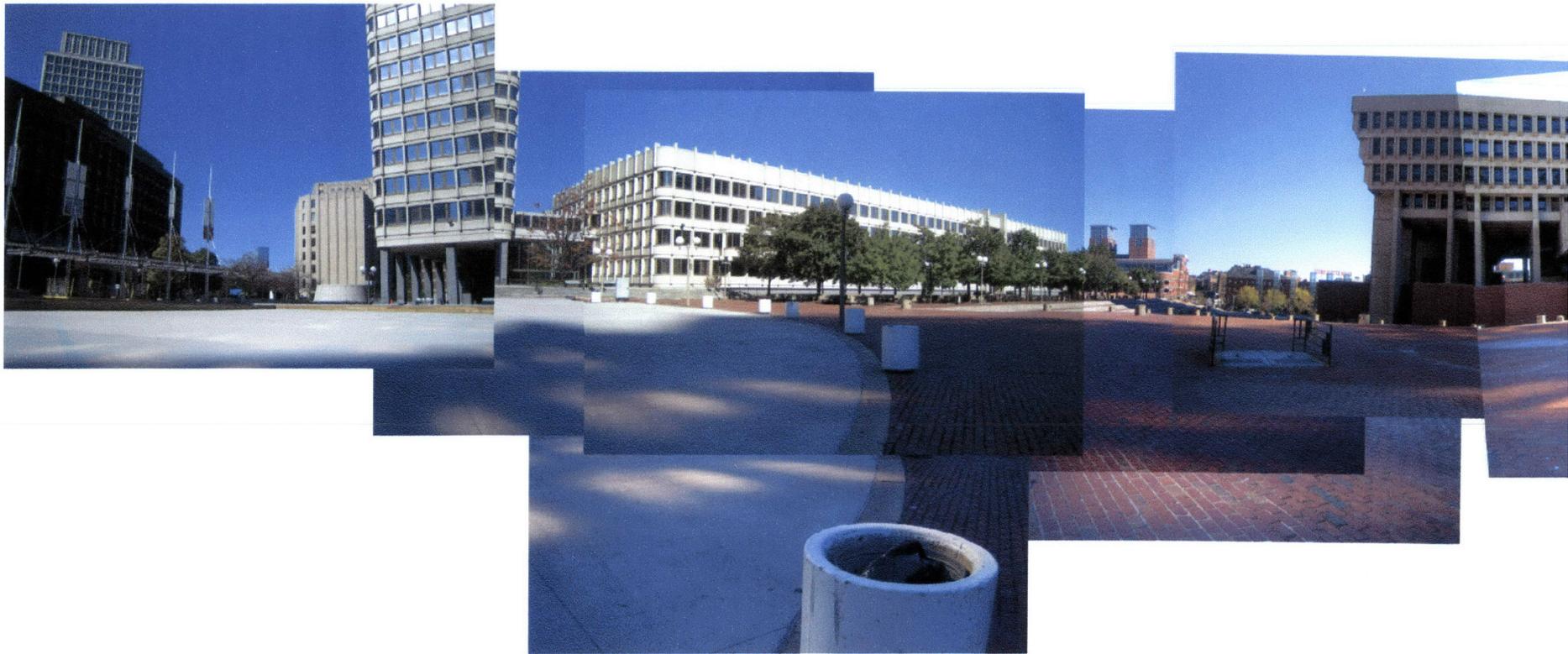


Fig 18. The bound area of the plaza with all transit systems: pedestrian circulation, subway routes and street access.



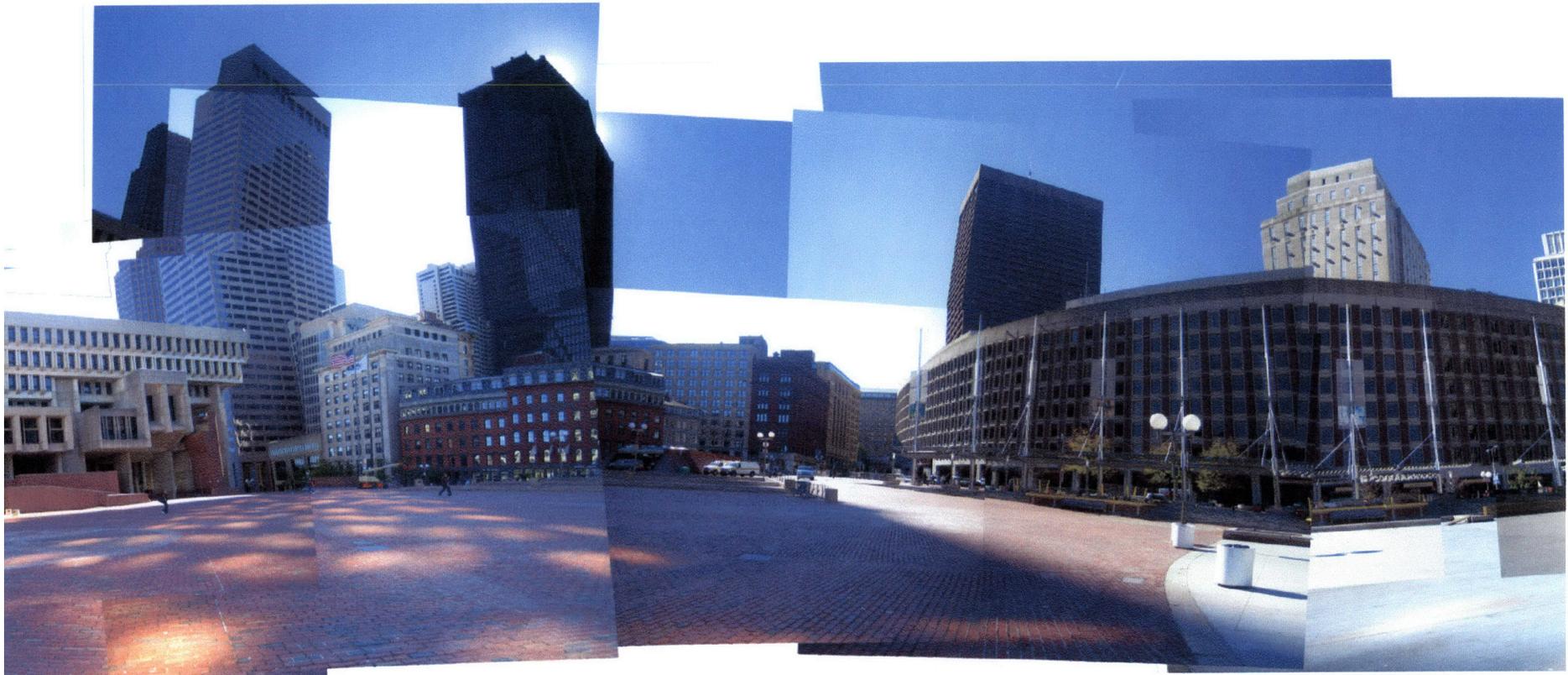


Fig 19. Most of the surrounding buildings belong to the city, state, or federal governments. They are typically used during office hours only.

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IV. THE VERTICAL LANDSCAPE

To break away from its convexity, the plaza must stop being a surface. A first attempt to break away from the condition of surface is its transgression by vertical elements. The transgression could be a perforation or incision, a first step that will reveal the site as a volume. The first step was to design a system that could generate a vertical landscape and distribute all programmatic elements within it.

A series of conceptual models attempted to deploy an organizing grid uniformly on the site. These early models were not successful, as they represented an introduction of foreign systems as oppose to an emergence of an intrinsic one.

The next series of plaster models recognized the site as a solid. They yielded a system of ruptures that was very difficult to predict, but generated a differentiated field. The ruptures allowed the formation of a system of caves, tunnels, and wells.

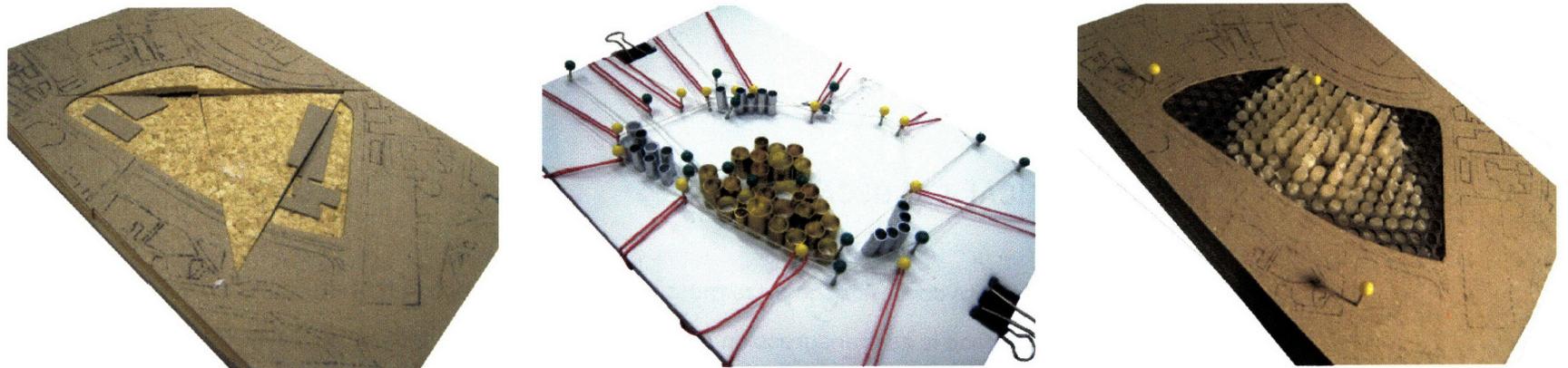


Fig 20. Early study models showing different types of vertical transgressions.

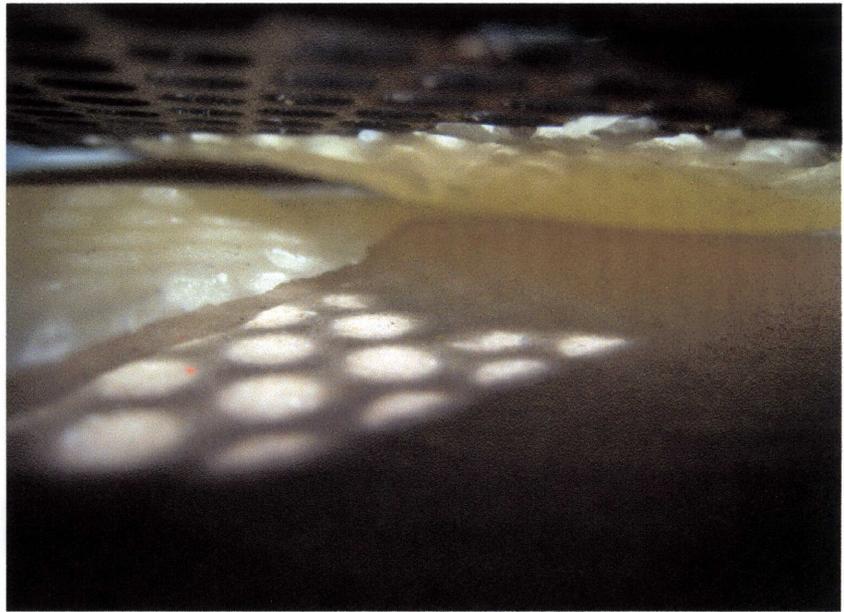


Fig 21 & 22. Early study of underground landscape.

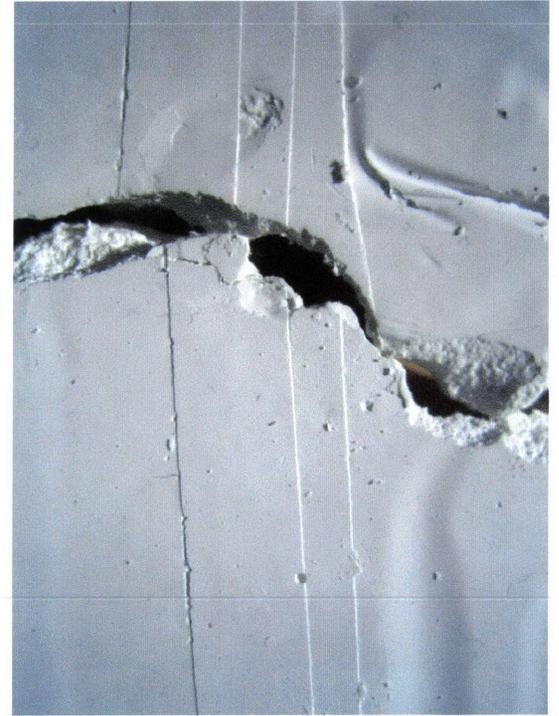


Fig 23. Plaster casts

Vision Fields & Blind Spots

The existing site condition makes it a surveillance field, undifferentiated and convex, where all actions are overt under the gaze of its context. In general, fields of vision are more or less a smooth field with an uninterrupted relationship to the observer. This is the natural condition of the whole site, hence, the vertical carving of voids generates interruptions –blind spots.

The system deployed on the site should be one of discontinuities in the surveillance field. To determine where these discontinuities would be more effective, the *lines of sight* and the *blind spots* of the site needed to be revealed.

The lines of sight are strong and direct visual connections established between target points on the site and its perimeter, taking into account its strong slope and access points. Blind spots are defined as the zones within the site that have less visual contact with flows of people within and adjacent to the site, surrounding buildings, and access points.

After these zones have been designed, a series of studies tried to determine the way in which best to exercise the punctures.

Perforated surfaces were layered on both sides of programmatic voids to create depth and displacement. As the layers became more numerous and thicker, the site returned to its original volumetric condition. As the punctures enlarged, they became voids. As these voids grew they erode not only the original volume, but each other as well. The arrangement of voids produced a different organization of knowing, an alternate way of navigating the site, they are not simply residual, but fragments designed for ephemeral ownership.

Based on the human vision field and geographic characteristics, All intrusions in the site became conic sections, with particular visual and acoustic properties that distort perception and reference points.

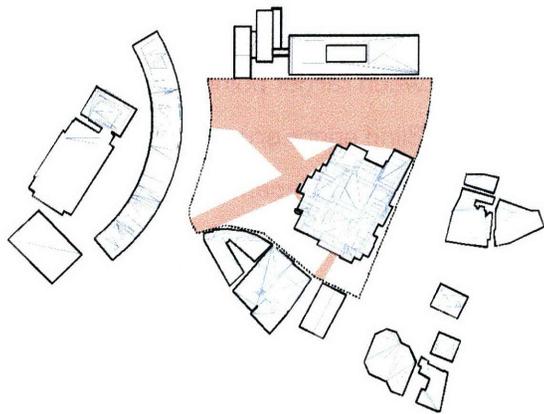


Fig 24. Most visibly and access areas based on existing pedestrian flows

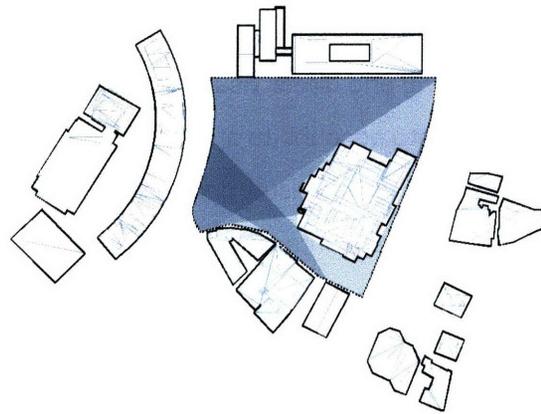


Fig 25. Most visibly and access areas from surrounding streets.

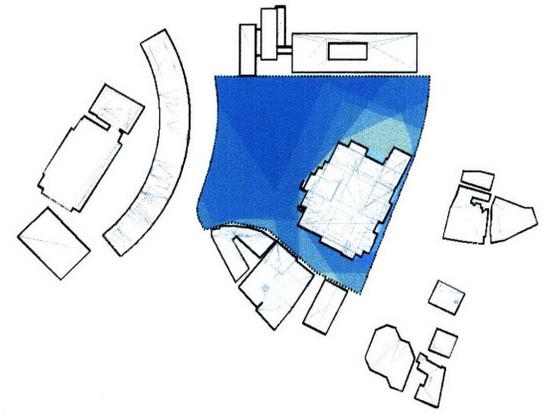


Fig 26. Visibility range from surrounding buildings including City Hall

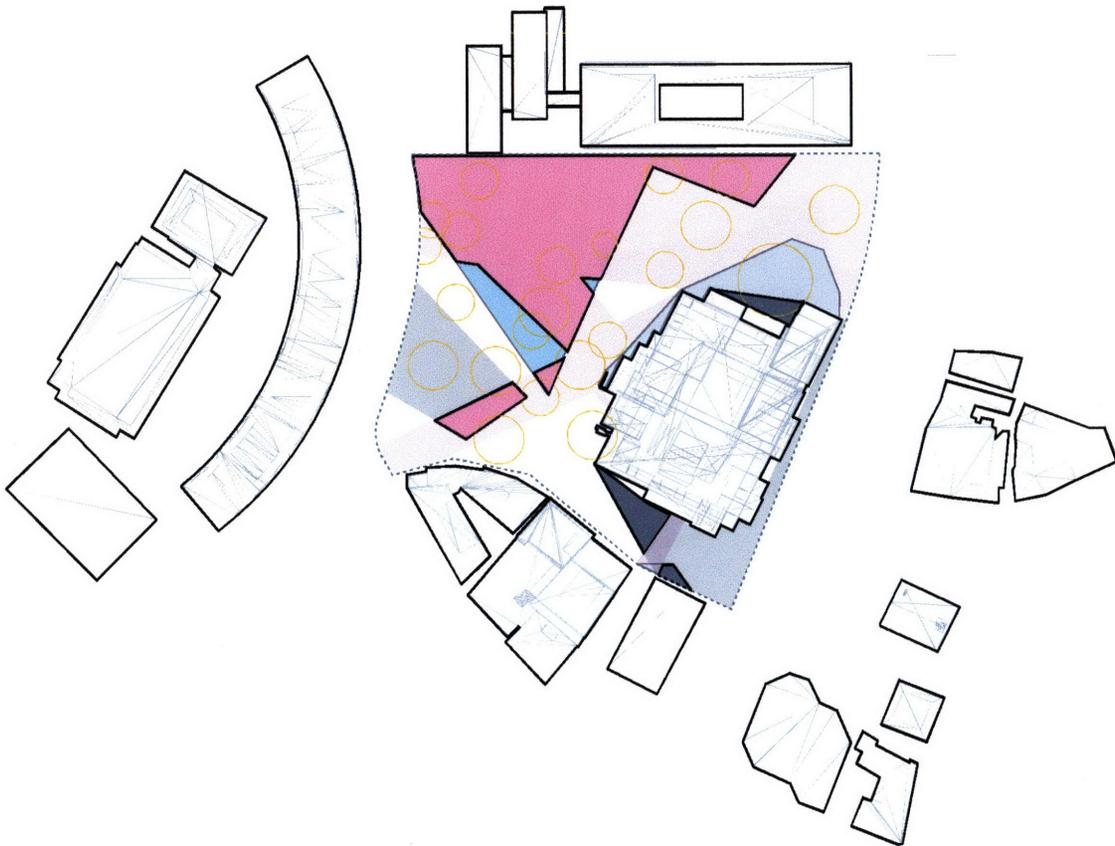


Fig 27. Most vulnerable spots on the site and its 'blind spots'.

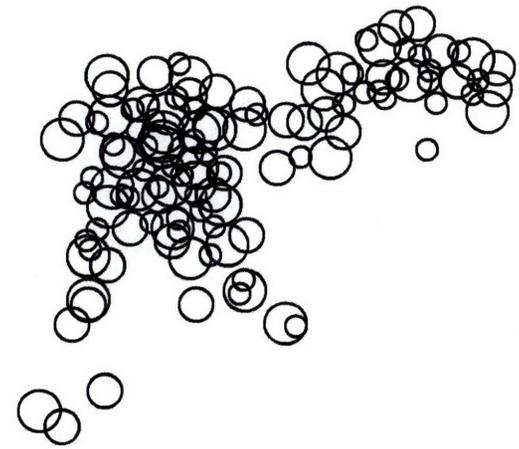


Fig 28. Concentration of areas for possible intrusions, yet unaltered by issues of light or landscape.

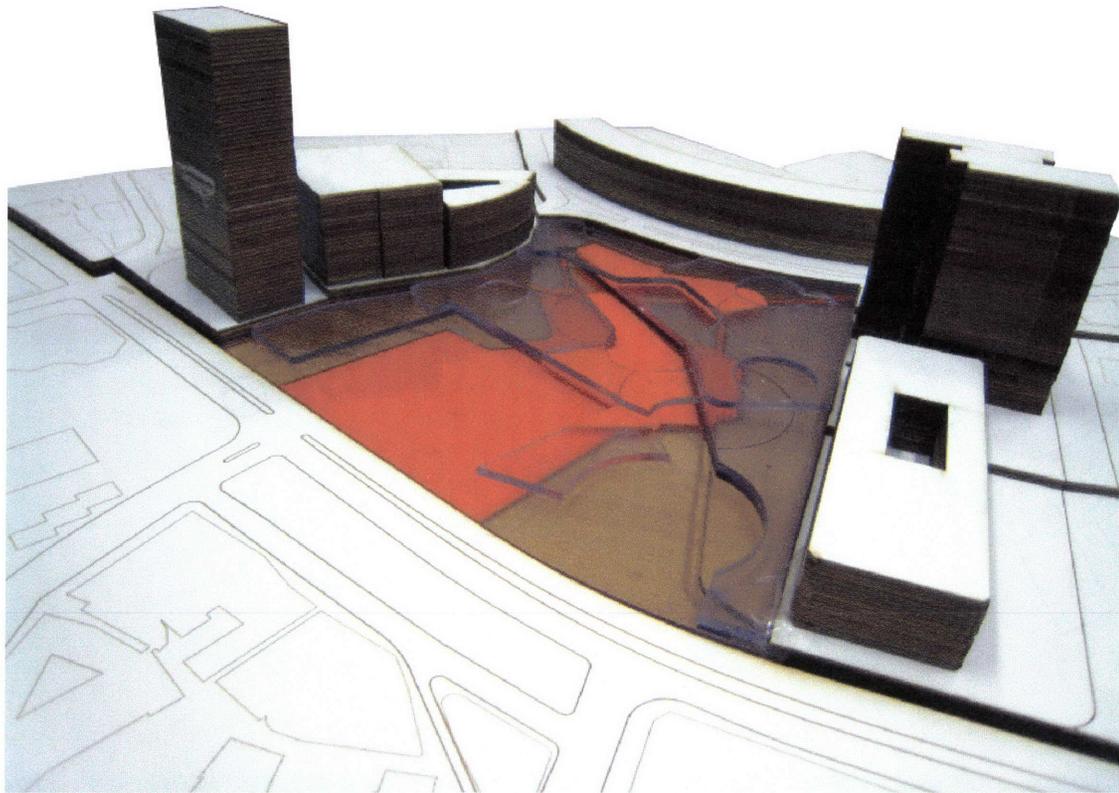


Fig 29. Study model showing possible allocation of program.

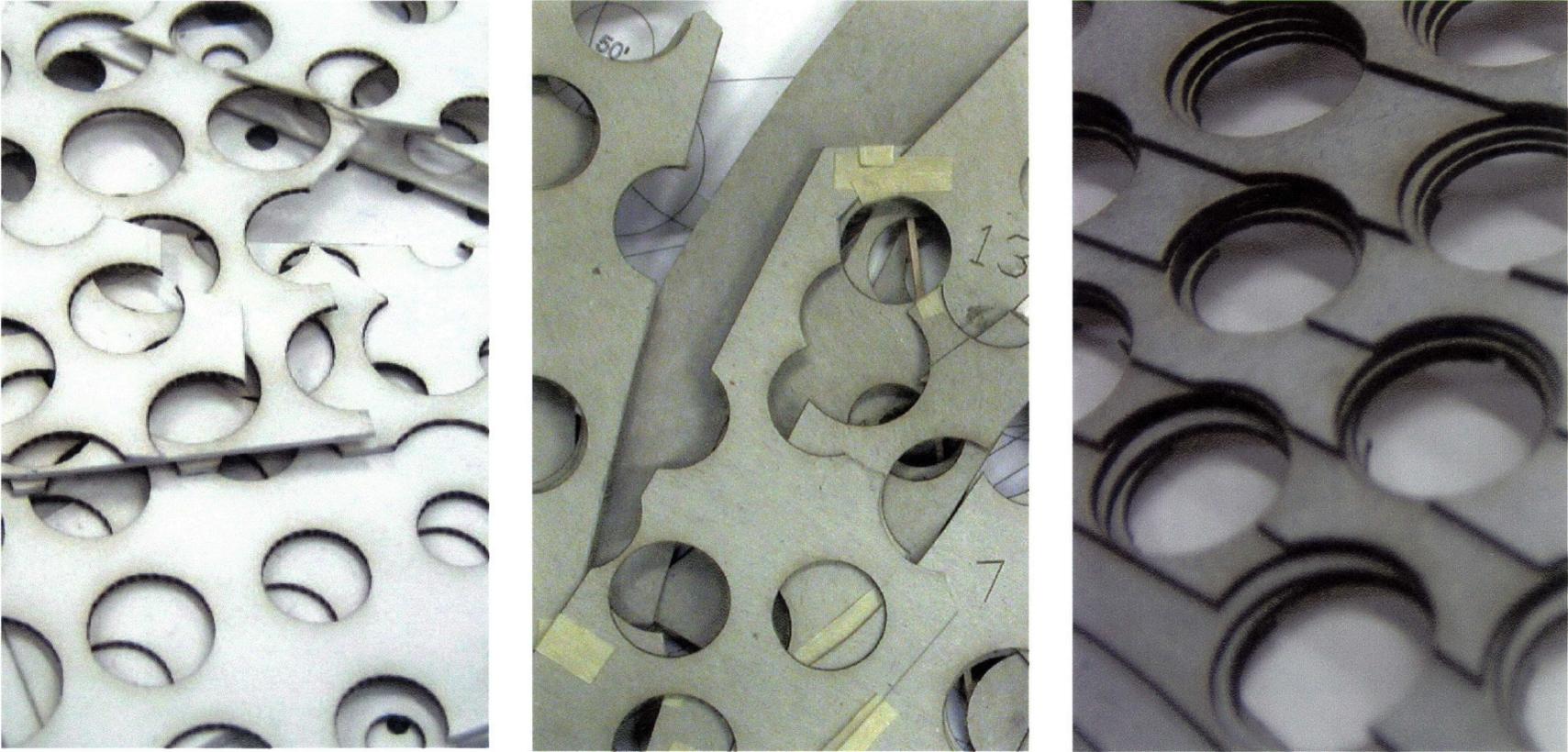


Fig 30. Studies showing the layering of perforated surfaces. The one to the right shows the earlier results of the parametric model.



Fig 31. Layered surfaces with inserted program voids.

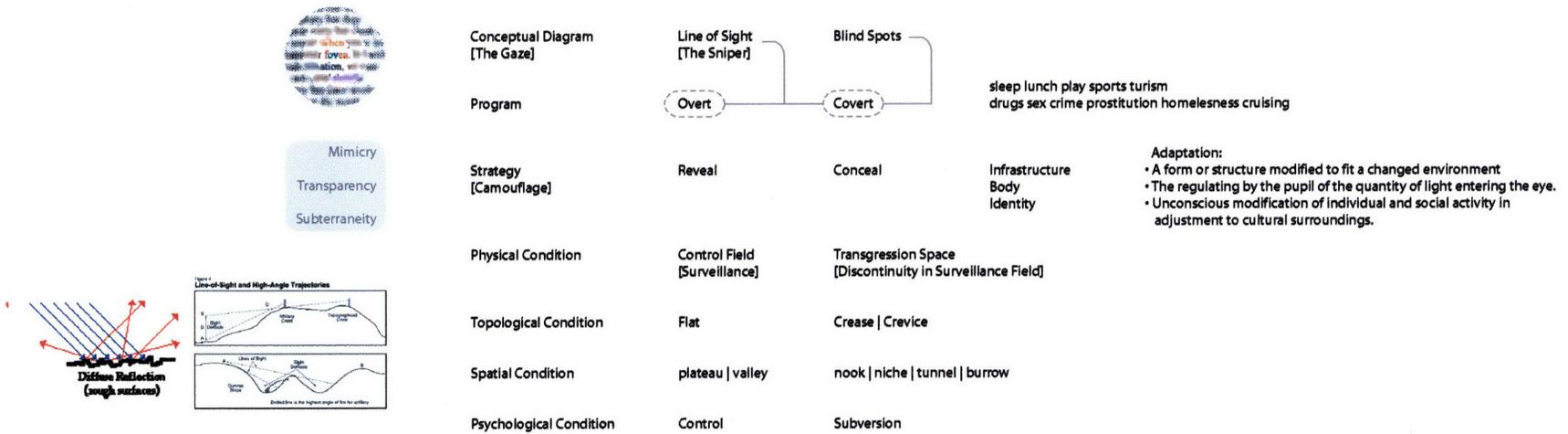


Fig 32. Conceptual diagram.



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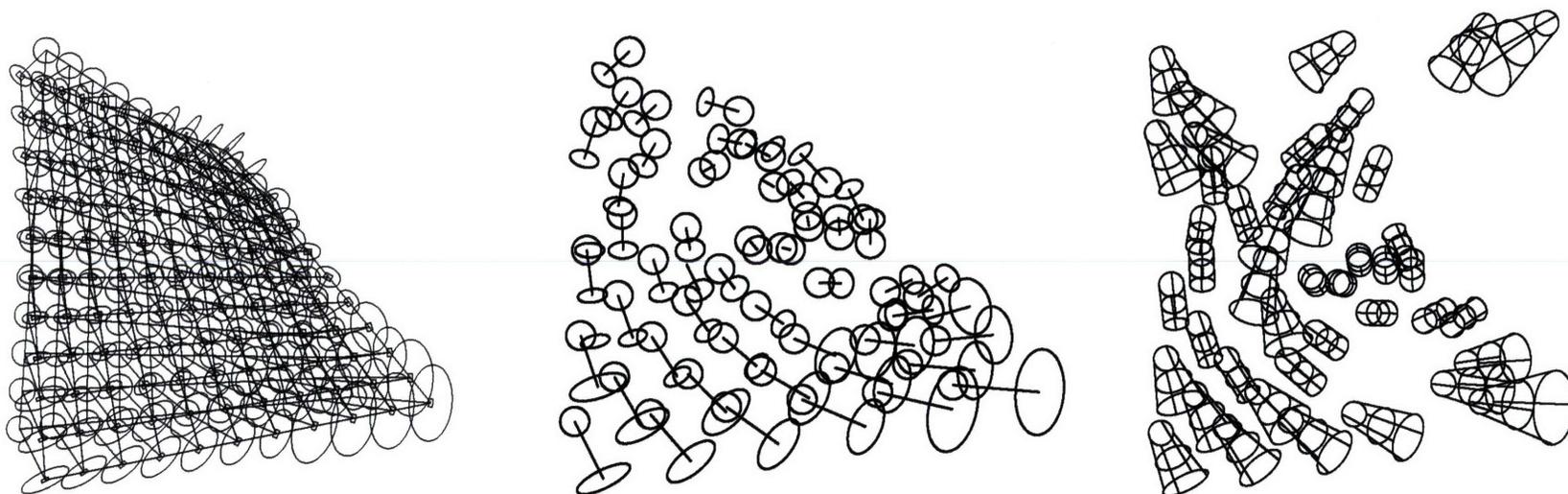


Fig 33. Evolution of the parametric model. All intrusions are generated so the total volume subtracted from the site is constant and equal to the amount of space needed to allocate all program.

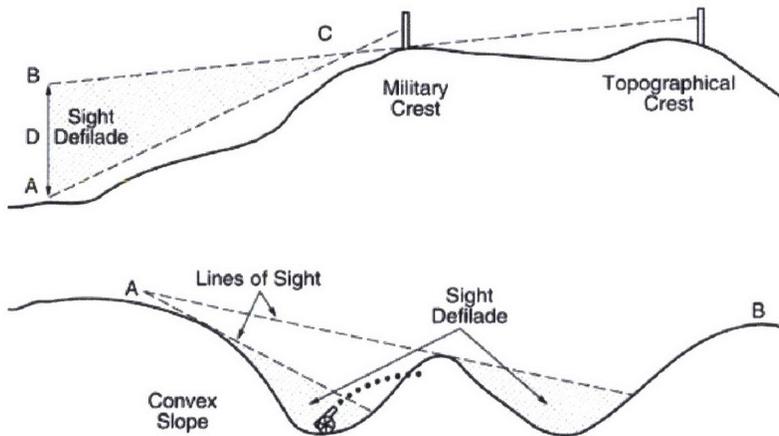


Fig 34. Diagram showing the criteria under which the angles of the conic intrusions are deployed.

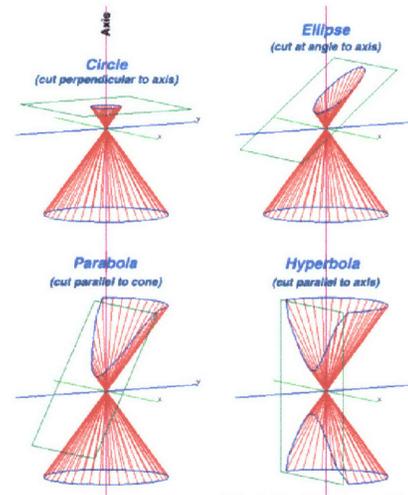


Fig 35. Conic sections

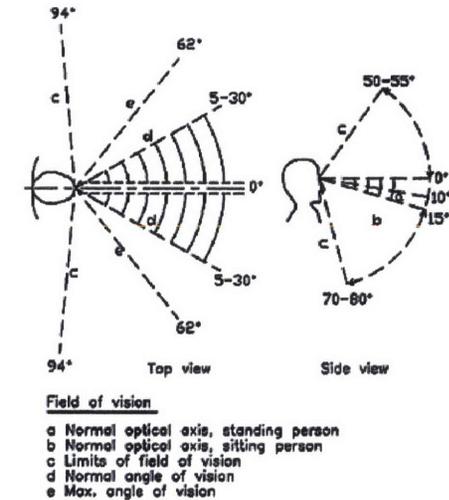


Fig 36. Human filed of vision

The deployment of these intrusions on the site was first done as a uniform field, generated with a parametric modeling software. The digital model was refined enough that the shape of each cone could be controlled: its length, radii, and position on the site.

Four strings were developed at different scales: a string of conic intrusions at a larger scale would produce landscape features, at a smaller scale, another string would determine views from/to different voids (spaces), a third string respond to light as it moved through the site, and finally, the circulation paths for both pedestrians and vans are determine by points of adjacencies from one intrusion to the next.

These strings, working together, become a distributed network of both discreet spaces (conic intrusions) suitable for brief appropriation, and continuous spaces (circulation) which intertwine and loose their singularity by blending into each other: roads become pedestrian paths and landscape, and landscape in turn becomes programmed space and part of the circulation system.

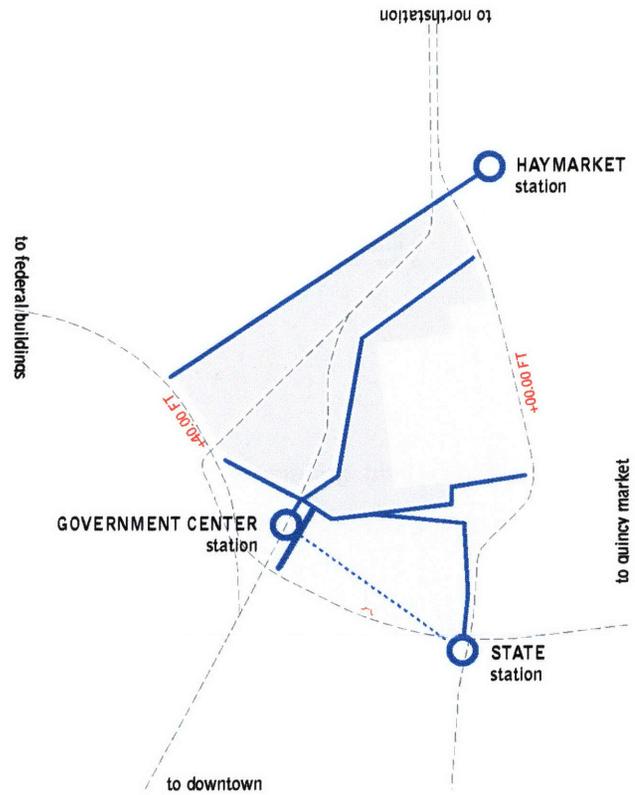


Fig 37. Existing underground train stations.

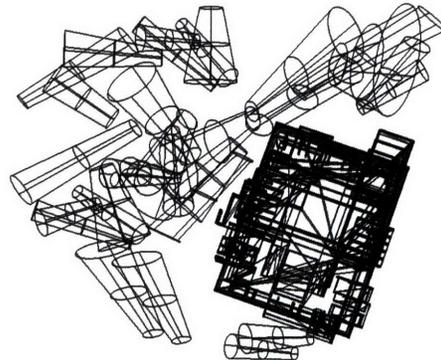


Fig 38. Final arrangement of conic intrusions.

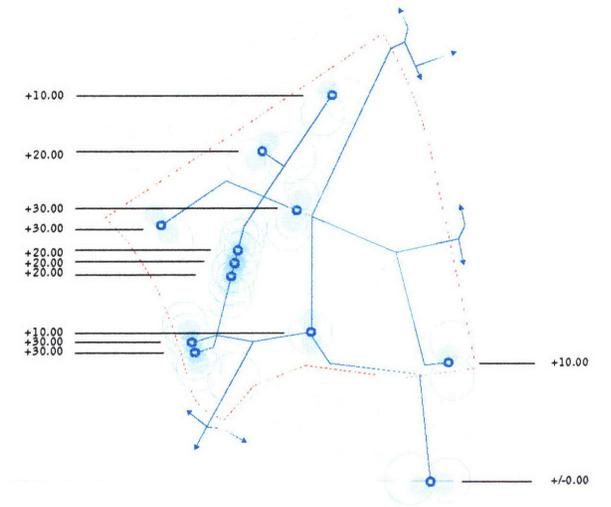


Fig 39. Distribution of mobile services. Their placement is based on different proximity to streets, access points, and degrees of isolation.



Fig 40. Four different strings for the placement of conic intrusions.

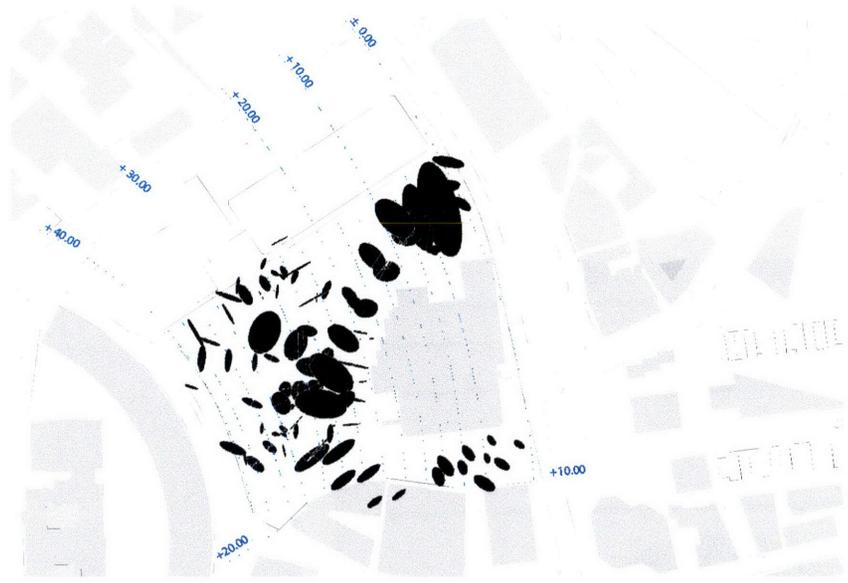


Fig 41. Interruption in the field shown in black.

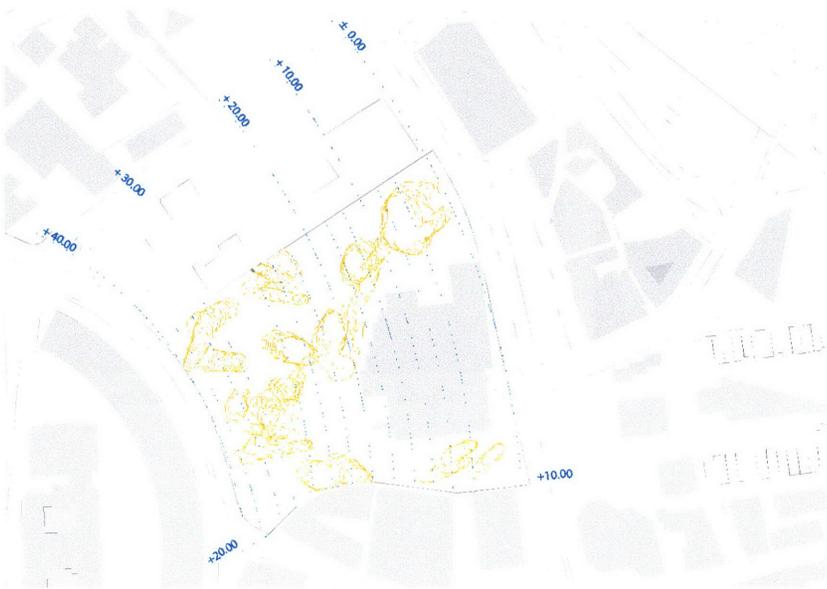


Fig 42. Voids generated by the intrusions.



Fig 43. Van circulation system.

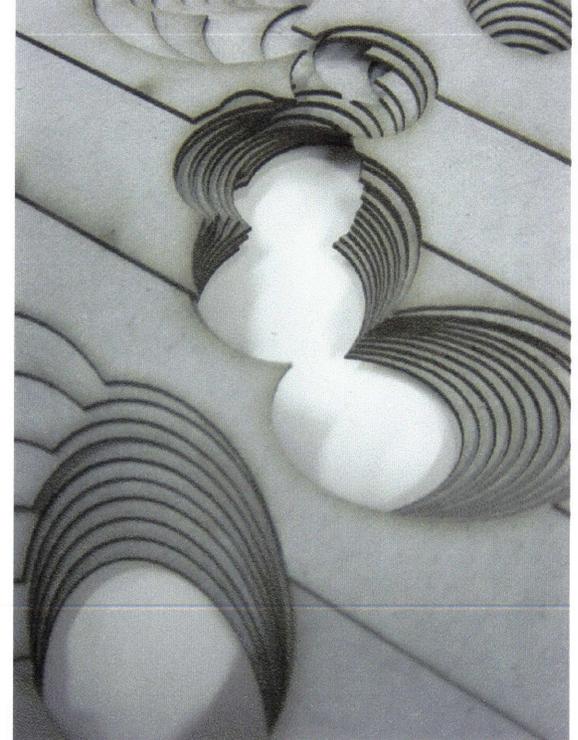
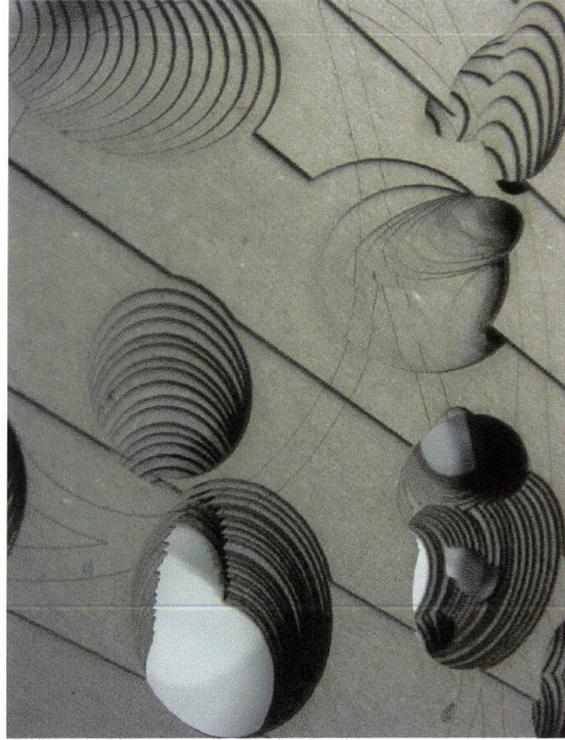
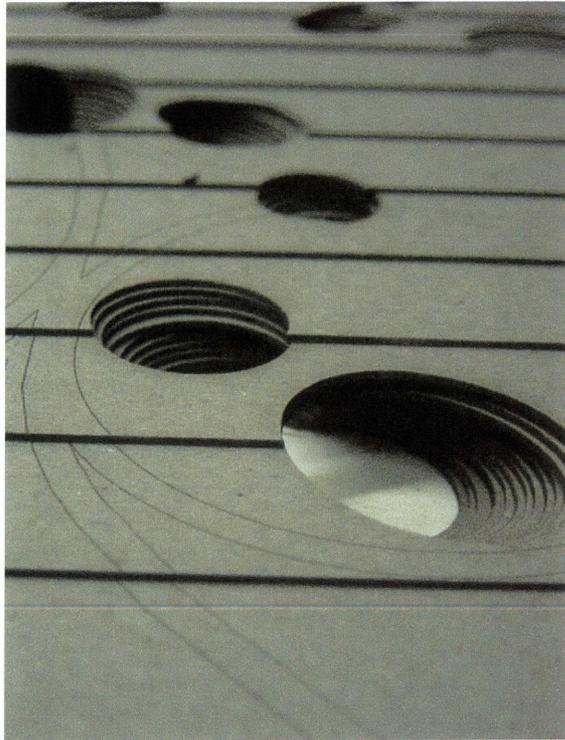
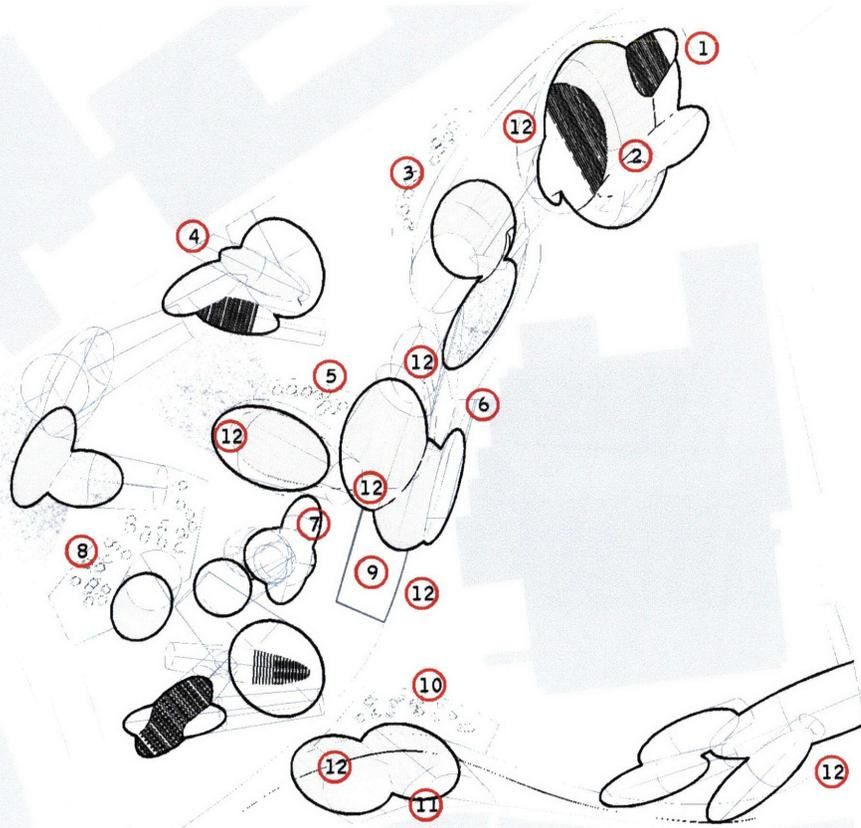
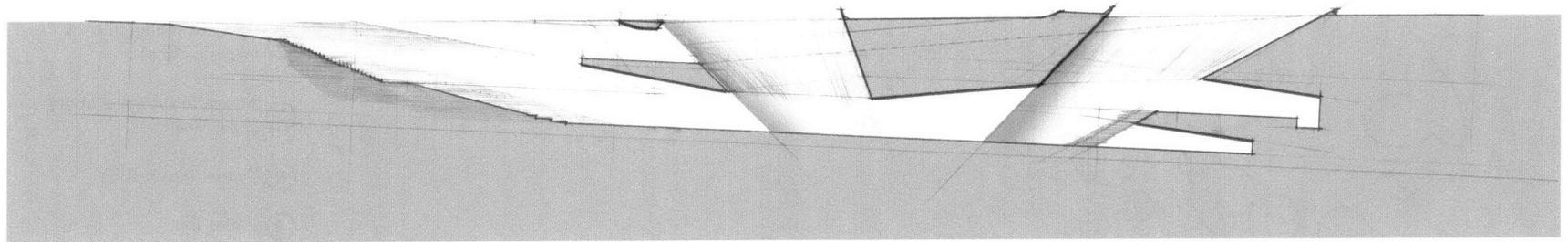


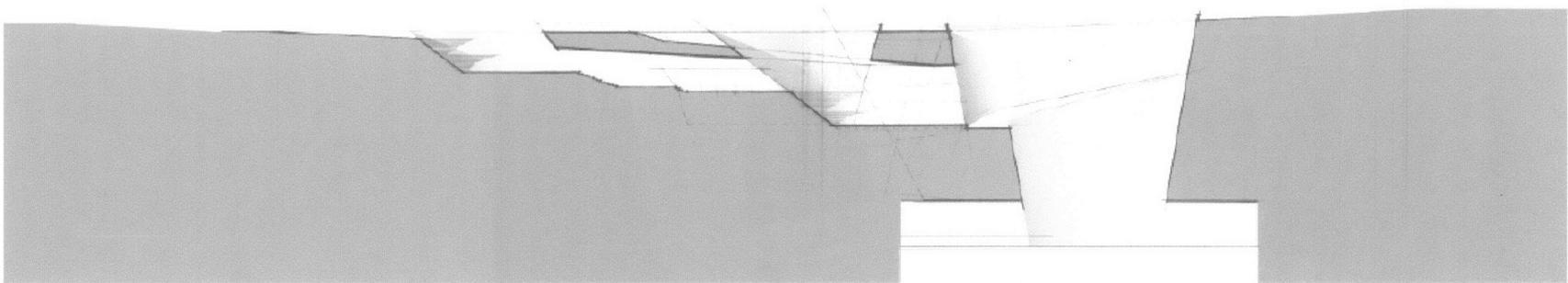
Fig 44. Different iterations evaluating the system.

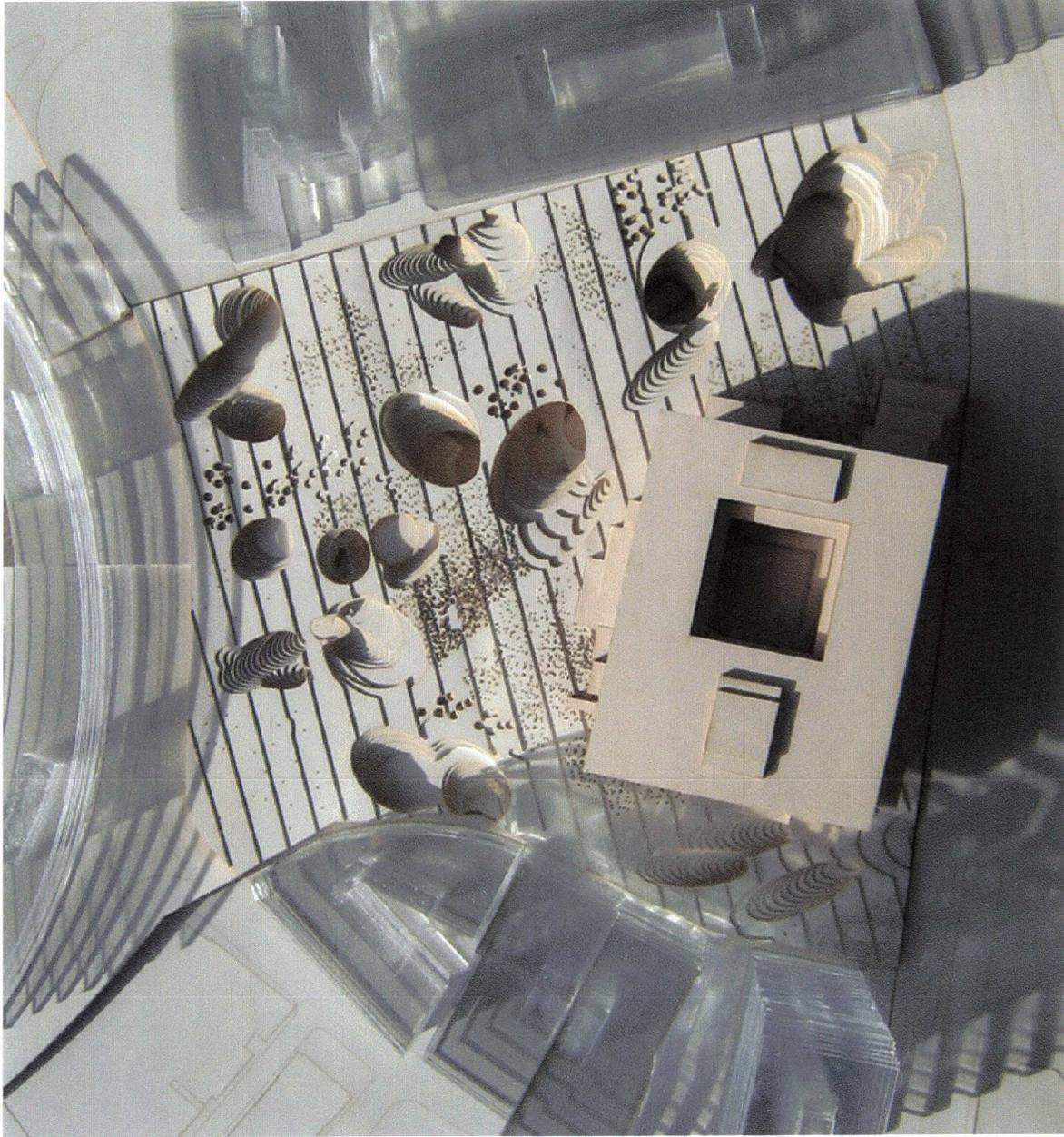


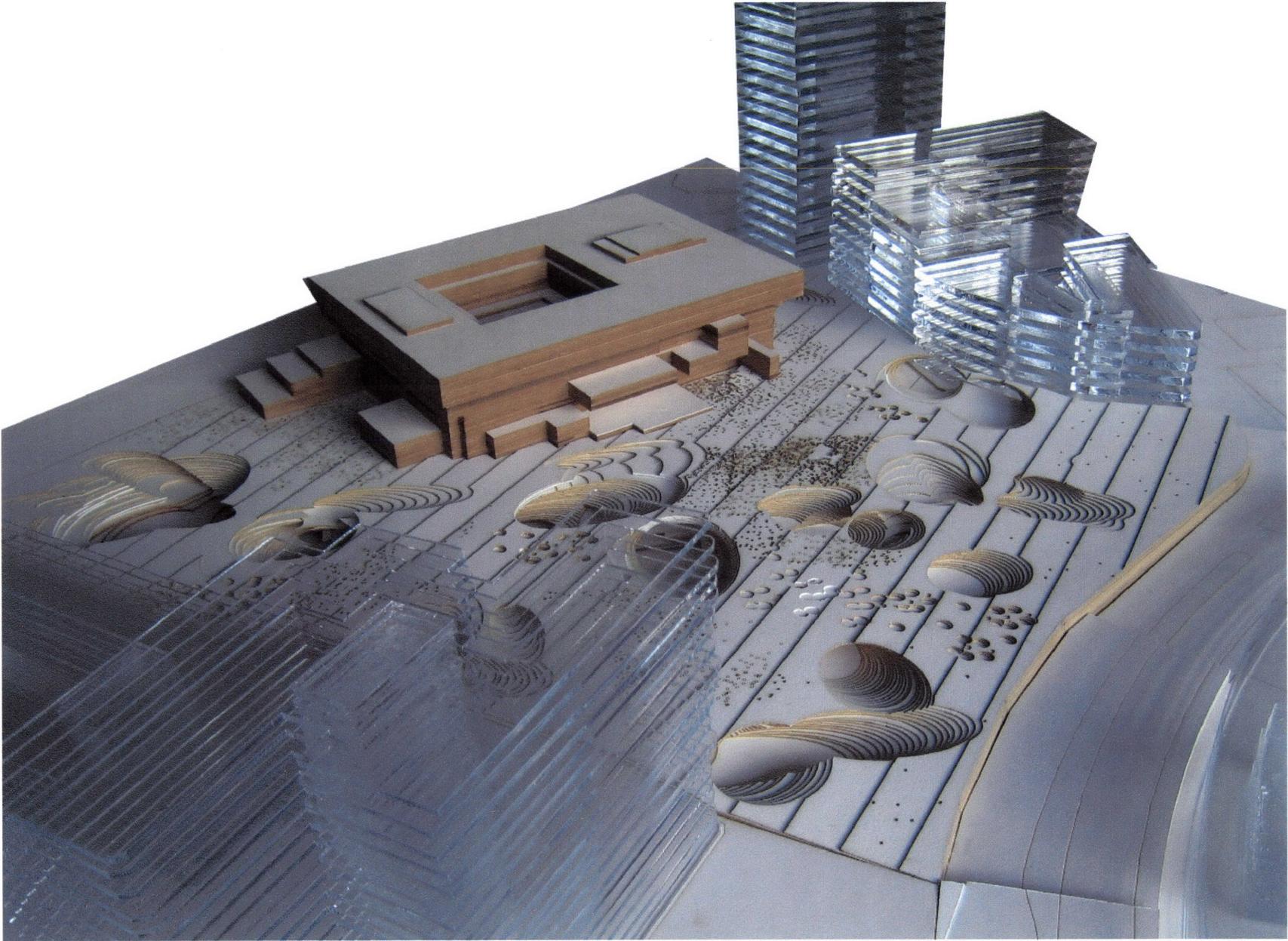
- ① Entrance to subway station, main level
- ② Amphitheater
- ③ Showers/Bathrooms
- ④ Access to subway station (from upper level), and plaza from federal building
- ⑤ News/Coffee/Wireless Services
- ⑥ Carved circulation (4'-0" below surface)
- ⑦ Access to subway station, upper level
- ⑧ Tourist information
- ⑨ Police Box
- ⑩ Management Office
- ⑪ Access to shops and adjacent buildings
- ⑫ Parking platforms

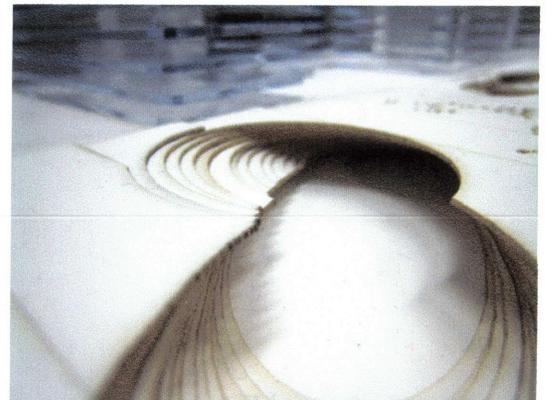
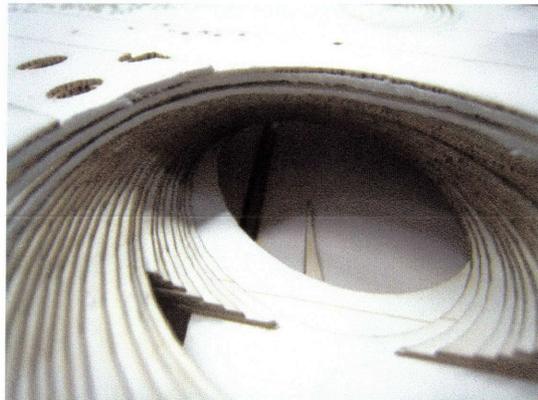
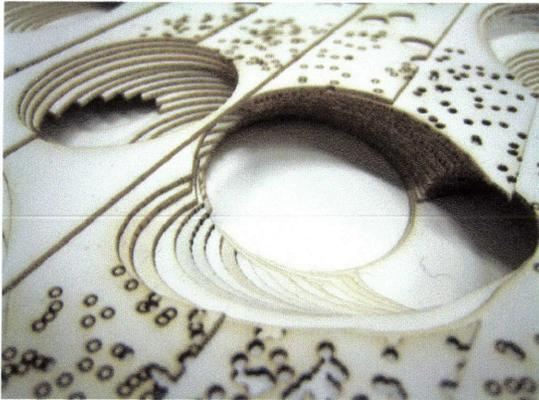
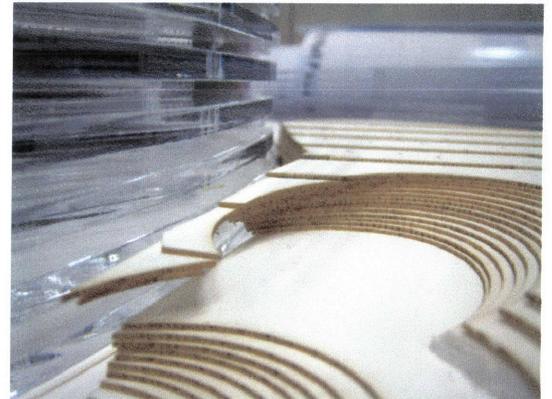
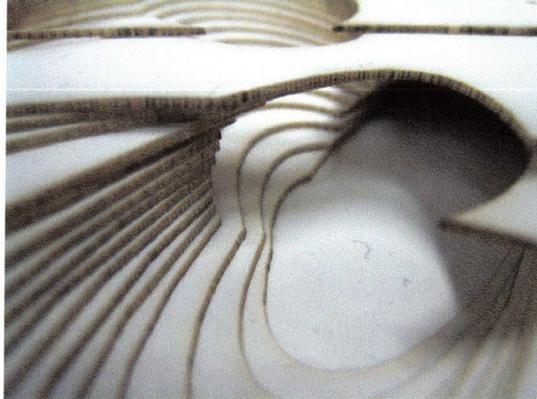
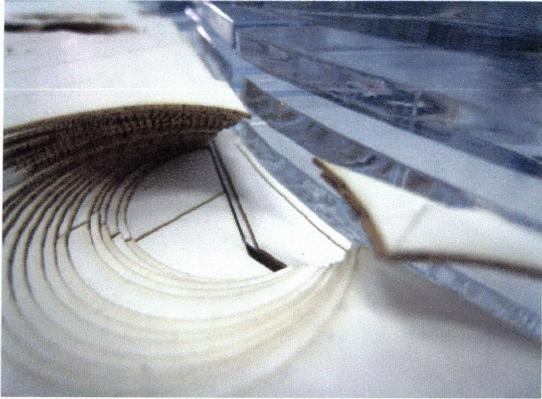
Fig 45. Landscape plan showing formally programmed spaces, circulation, and site access.

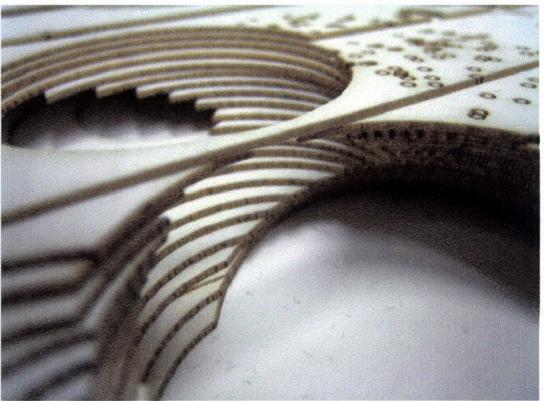
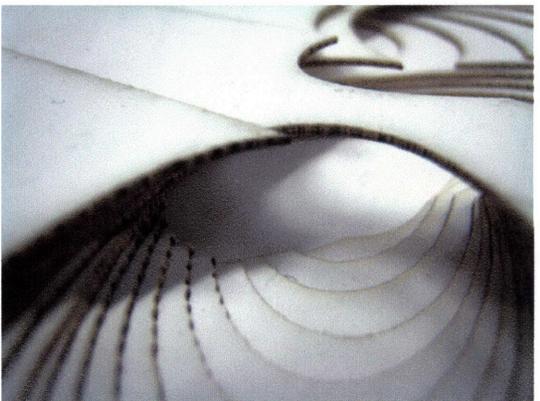
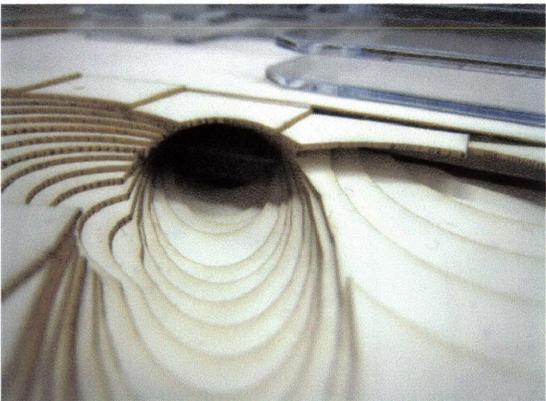
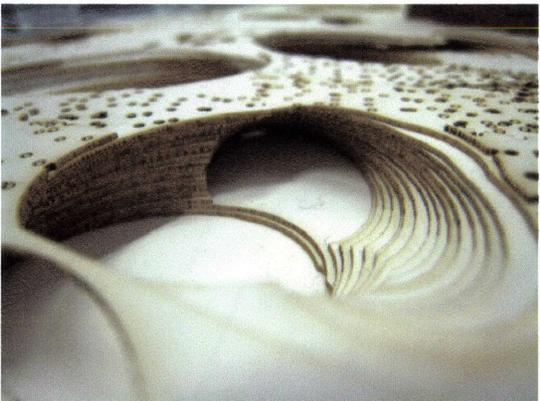


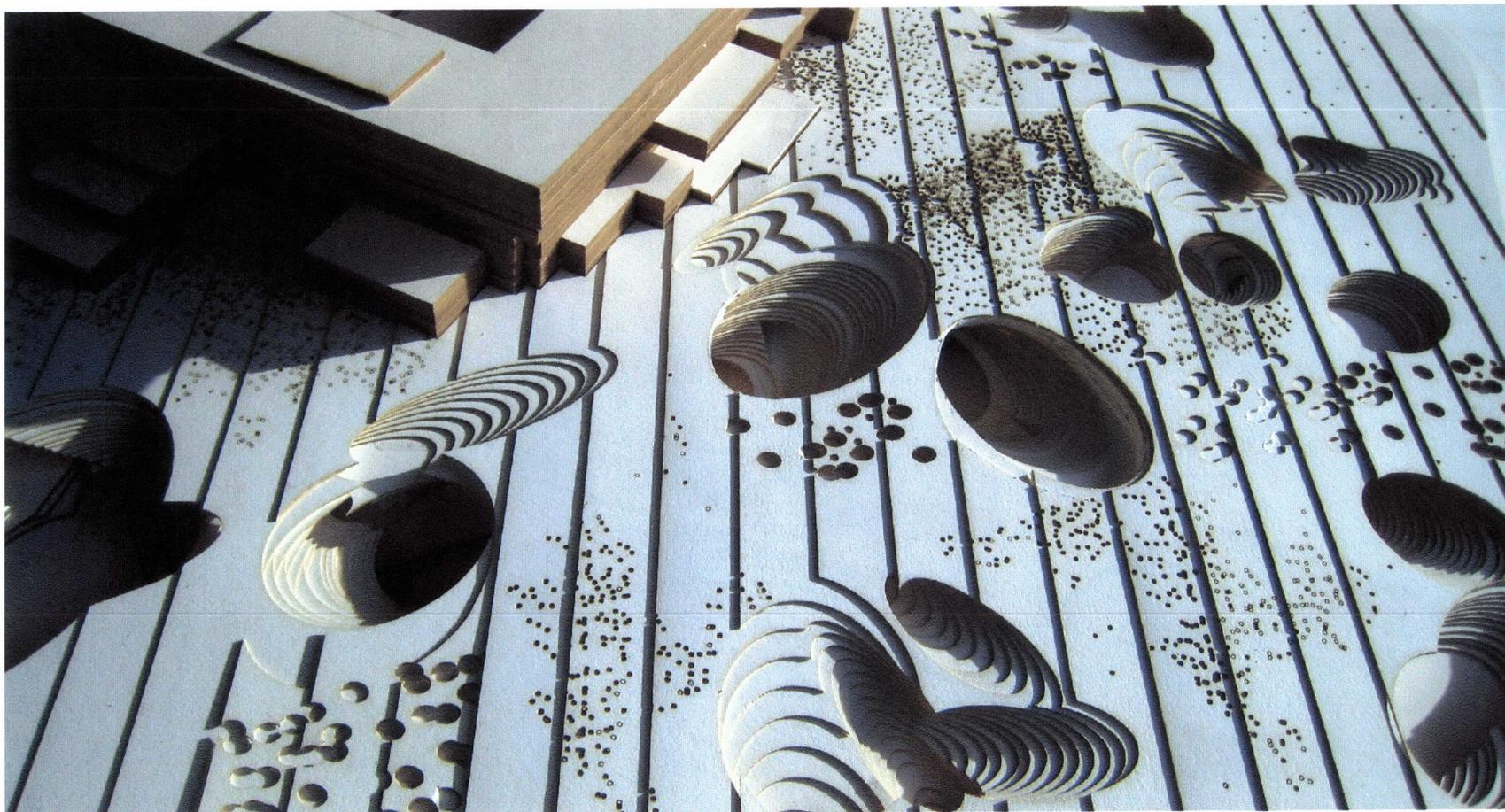


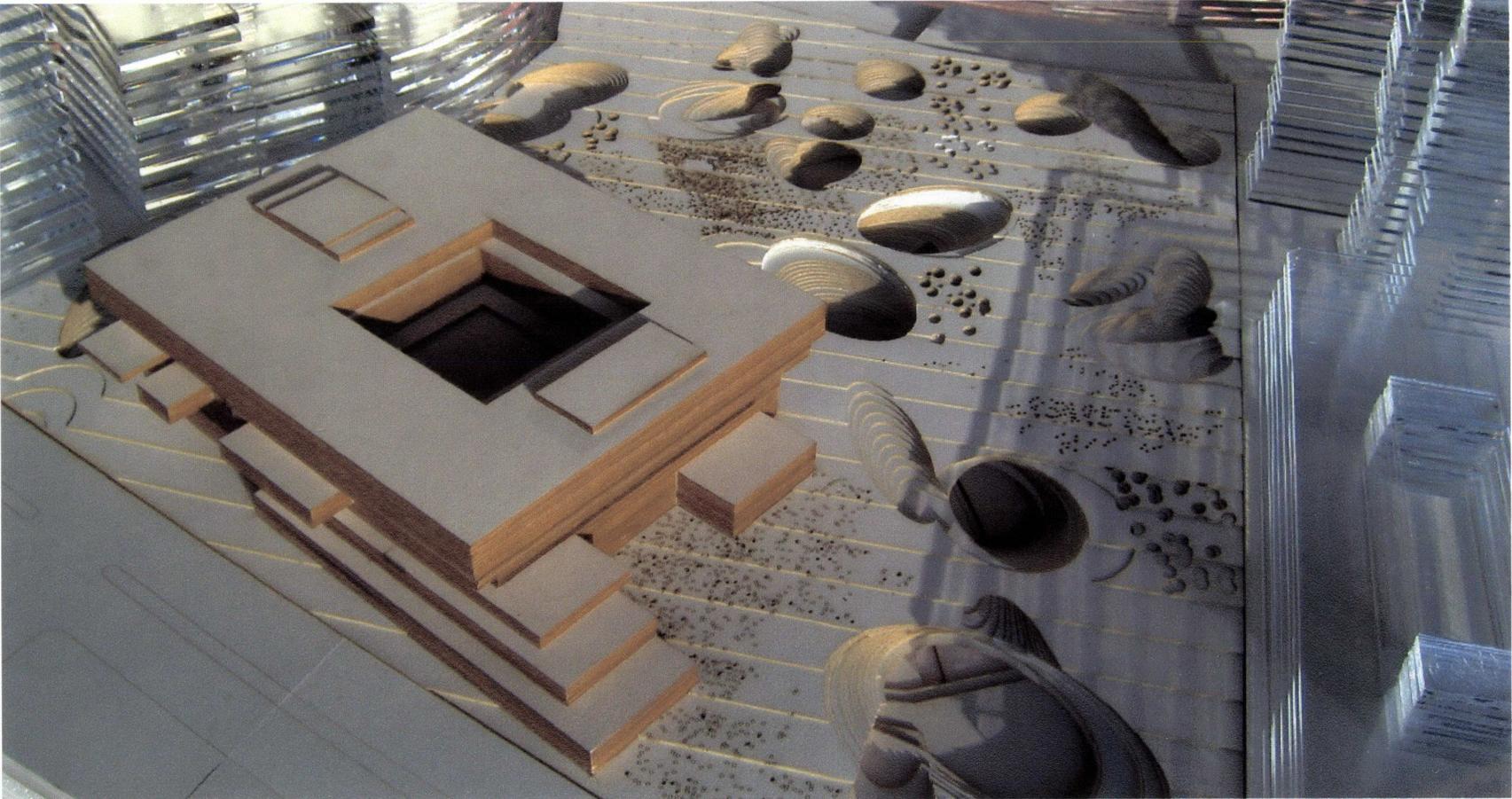


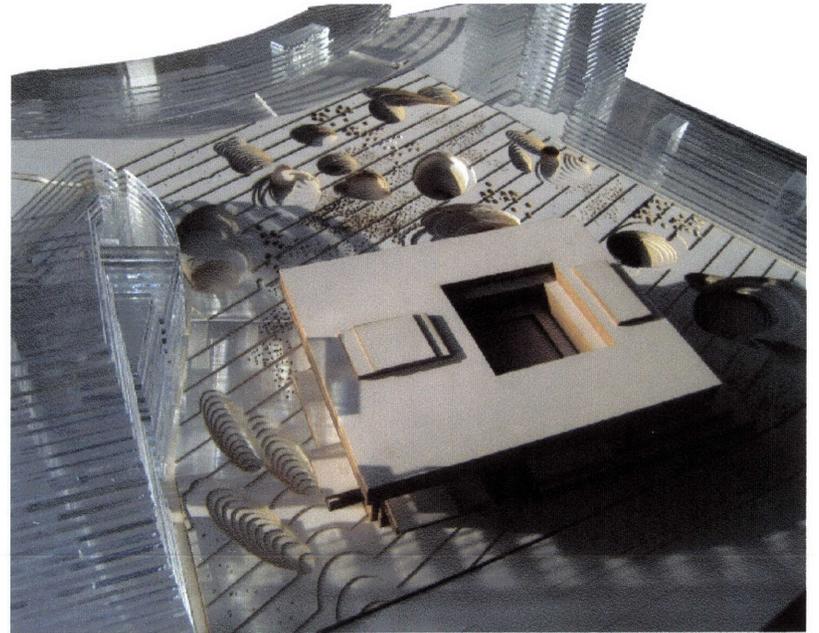
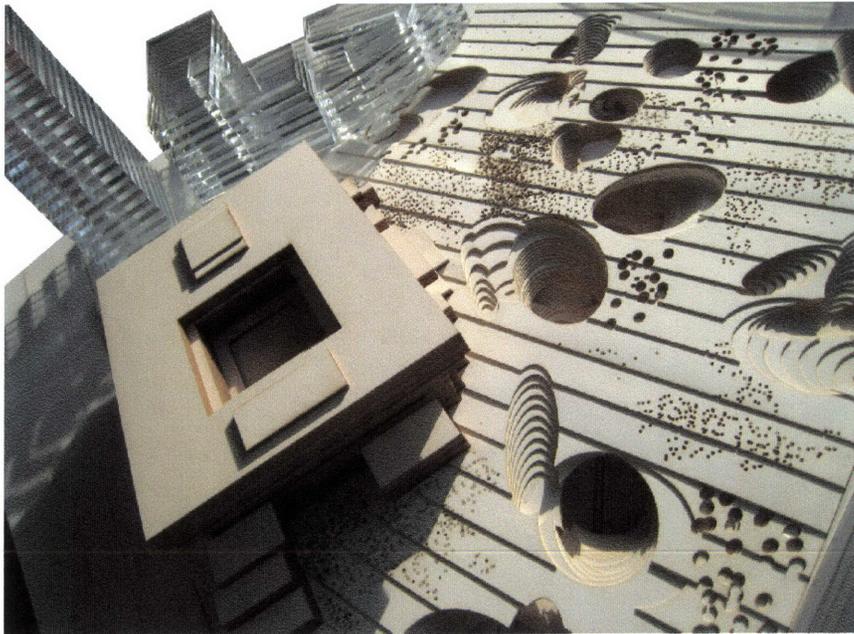


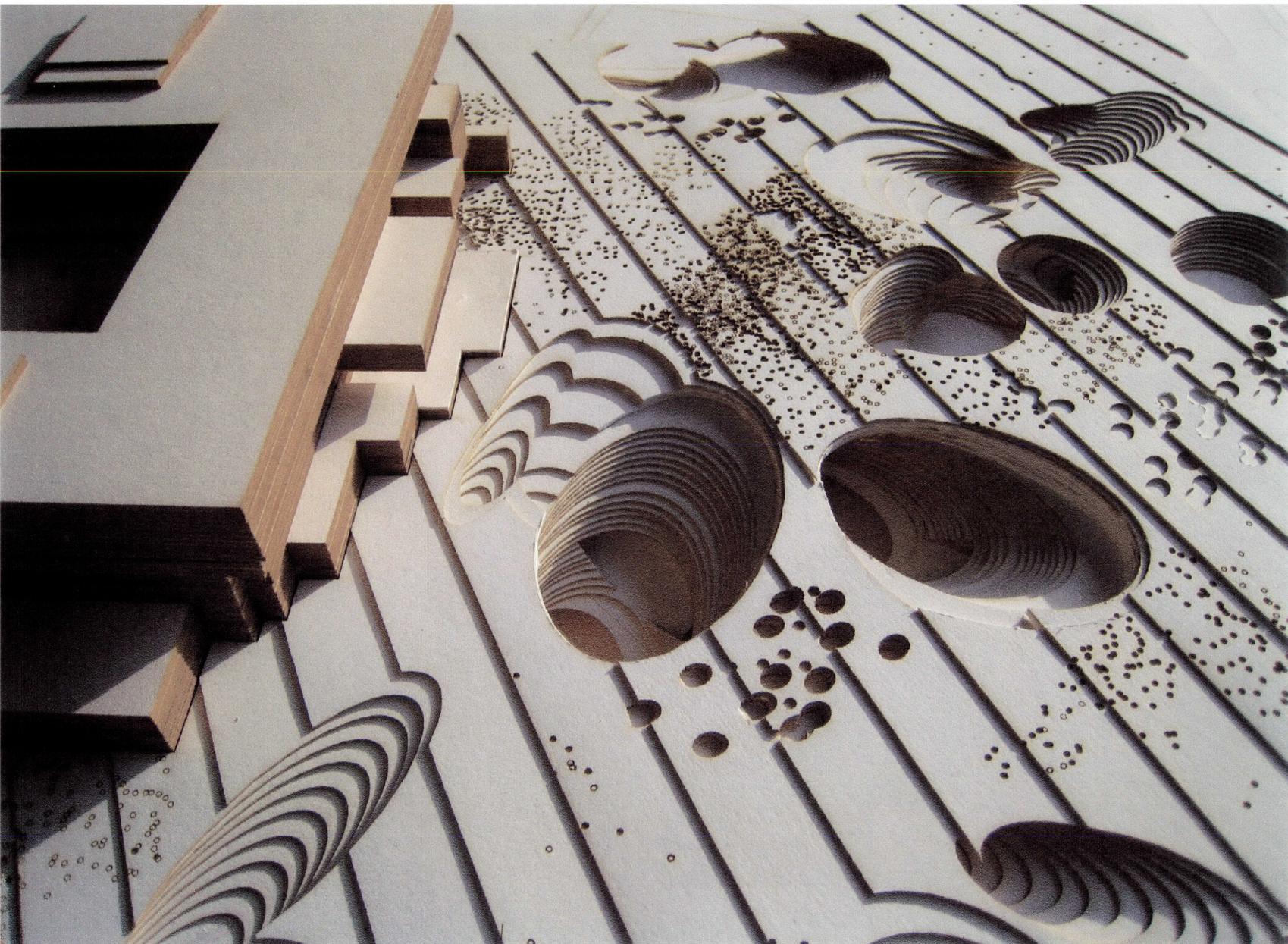




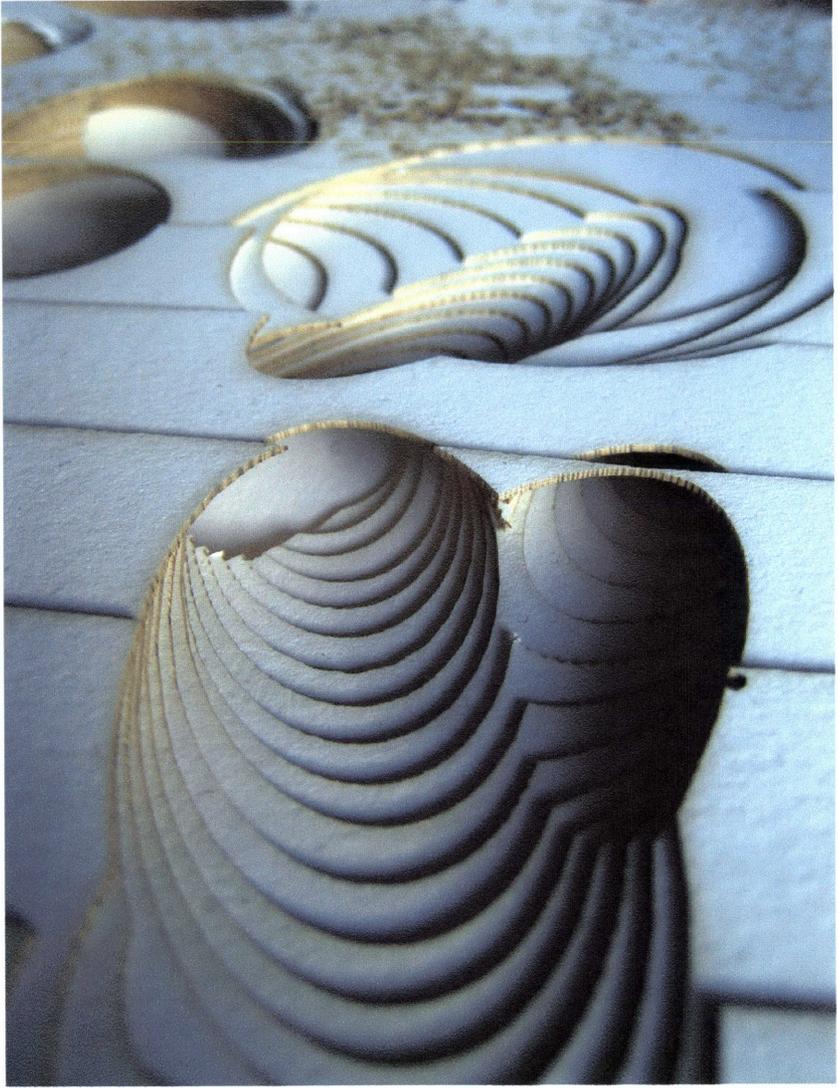
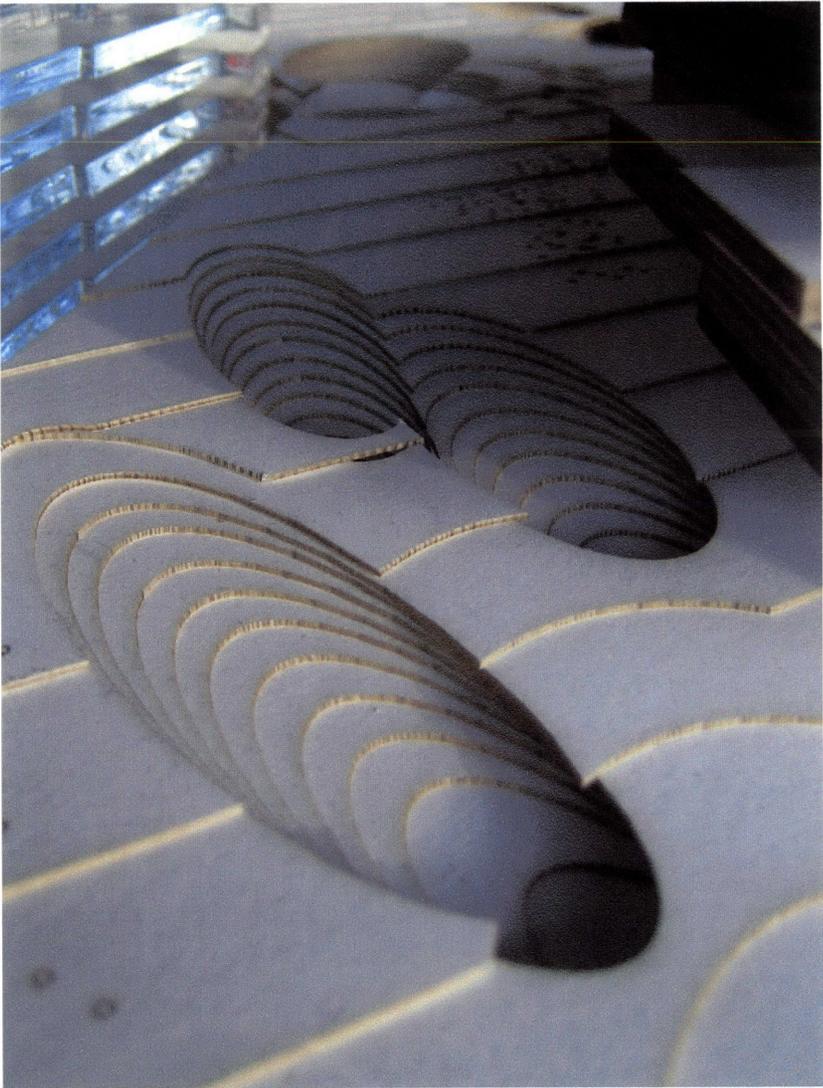


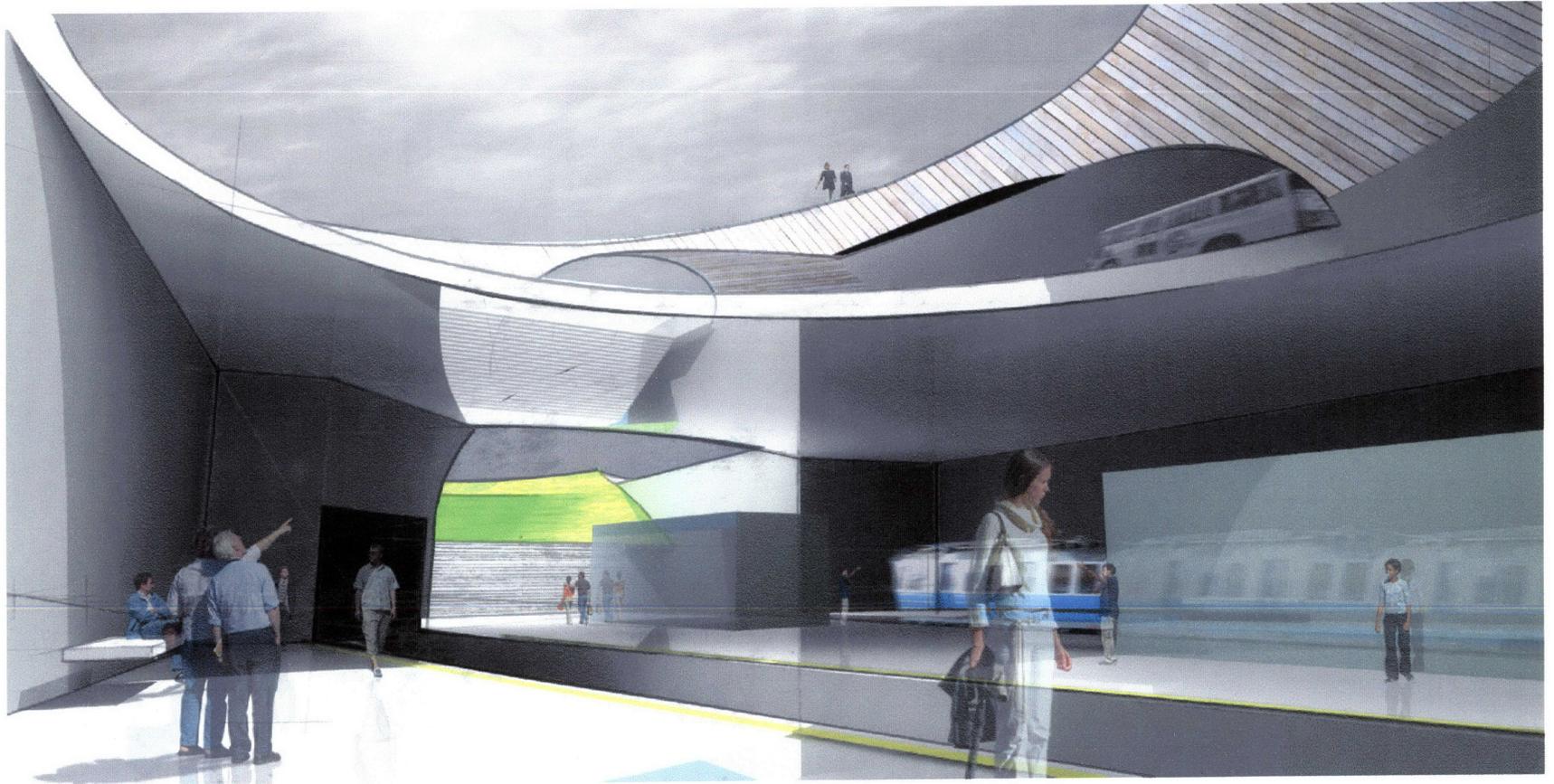


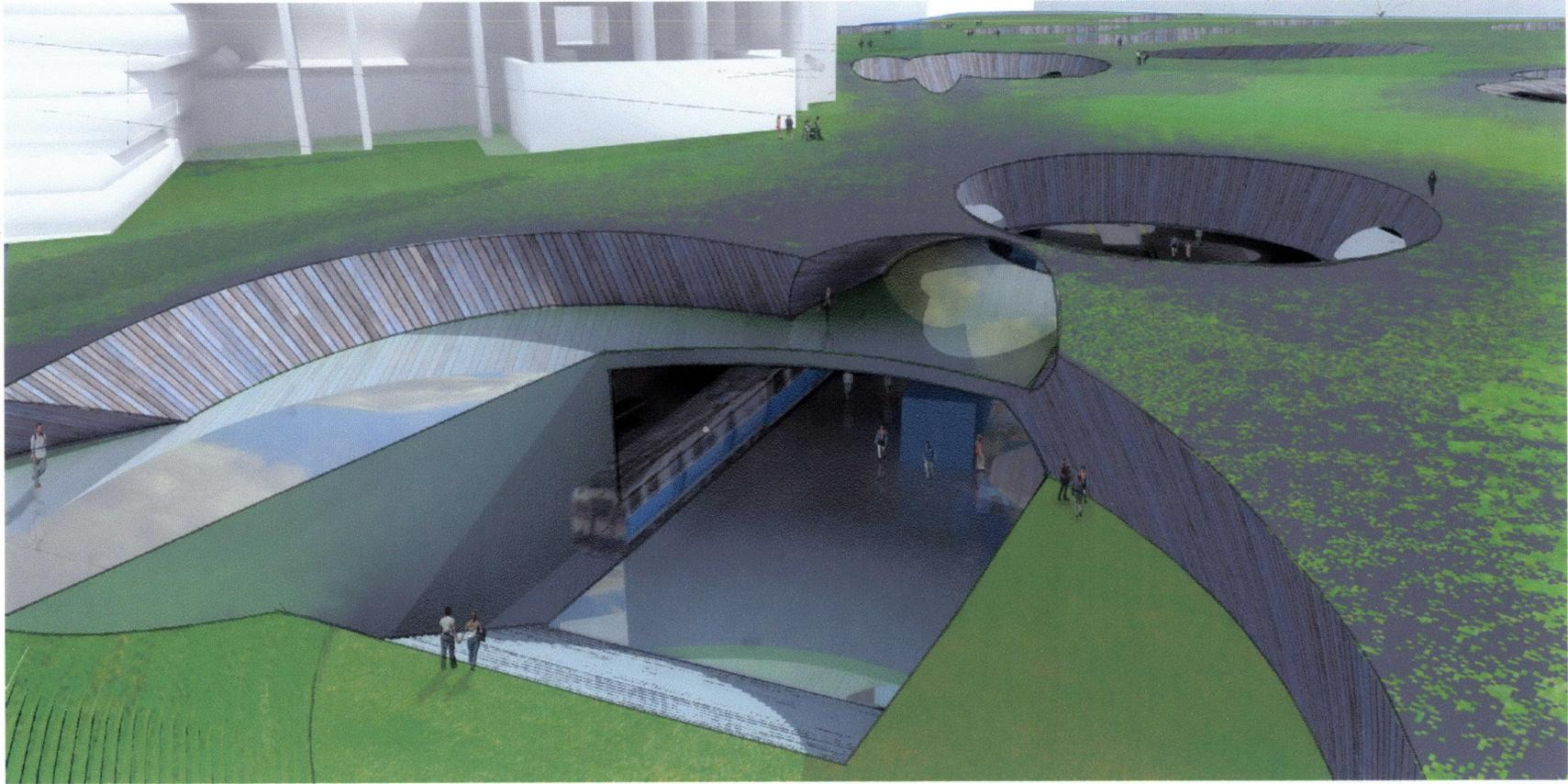












V. CONCLUSIONS

The challenge of transforming an unwanted plaza into a successful public space was driven by a very particular agenda: to create public space that is truly public, ready for appropriation, subversion, and constant hacking, all under the gaze of omnipresent surveillance systems.

I believe architecture can be an instrument of political protest, and generate relevant interventions that can shape and change our culture.

I hope that the work in this thesis illustrates one of the many ways in which architecture can be precise and intelligent, but most importantly, a way in which it can improve the city and the life of its citizens.

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- Figure 16: Kallman, McKinnell and Knowles
- Figure 17: Kallman, McKinnell and Knowles
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