Community in the Electronic Age: An Information Resource Center at Government Center

by

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Abstract

In the wake of the exploding information and communication technology, this thesis explores the role of a civic architecture which restores on the one hand a traditional public institution, while on the other hand represents a functional information exchange in the Electronic Age. The proposed Information Resource Center is modeled after the positive social qualities inherent in the "third place". Utilizing the communicative ability of the available technology, the IRC supports the proposition of an intermediate realm, between the public and the private, which would restore community in our lives.

This exploration begins with a look at Ray Oldenberg's analysis of the third place whose socially redeeming nature is beneficial to both the individual and to the collective. Such intermediate places have now been replaced by a new paradigm; the notion of cyberspace, a gathering place that is not rooted in space or time, has became popularized. Yet its accessible characteristics are still bounded by a structured social environment. Architecture's role then is to adapt and to accommodate while further defining a changing cultural landscape.

In these times of rapid technological and social changes, people search for continuity and meaning in their surroundings. The design for the IRC addresses their need for community by providing them the resources to reach out to others virtually and as an intermediate place where an informal public life can be fostered.

Thesis Supervisor: Wellington Reiter
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The present situation of architecture is confused and puzzling. From the client we hear constant complaints about the architects' lack of ability to satisfy him, from a practical as well as from an aesthetical and economical point of view. The authorities give us to understand that it is often doubtful whether the architects are qualified to solve the problems which society poses. And the architects themselves disagree on issues so fundamental that their discussion must be interpreted as an expression of groping uncertainty. The disagreement does not only concern the so-called 'aesthetic' problems, but also the fundamental questions of how man should live and work in buildings and cities.

Christian Norberg-Schulz
Intentions in Architecture, 1965

Introduction

How people should live and work today is under enormous pressure from leaps made in the information and communication technologies. Technical innovations have outpaced our ability to adjust to how we interact with each other and to comprehend fully the ramifications to all aspects of our lives.

Unfortunately technology is often confused with social progress. For many, distinction is unclear between an enabling technology which allow work to be performed more efficiently and a defining technology which transforms the way we experience our lives. Communication advances has enabled many new possibilities such as instantaneous access to events around the world. Yet more importantly new technology has redefined the structure of society.

Our society's economy is increasingly dependent on the exchange and processing of information rather than of material goods. We find not only disintegration of communications systems due to the simple overload of information[1] but also a corresponding identity crisis from this universalization. The attention is on the processing of information rather than on the attainment of meaningful relationships. In the glut of information, a certain amount of redundancy is lost which traditionally would allow us to recycle information "from past into present, from memory into decisions and learning; and from generation to generation"[2] for the formulation of meanings in our lives. Good redundancy reinforces personal and collective identities by allowing us to mediate the multiplicity of symbols.

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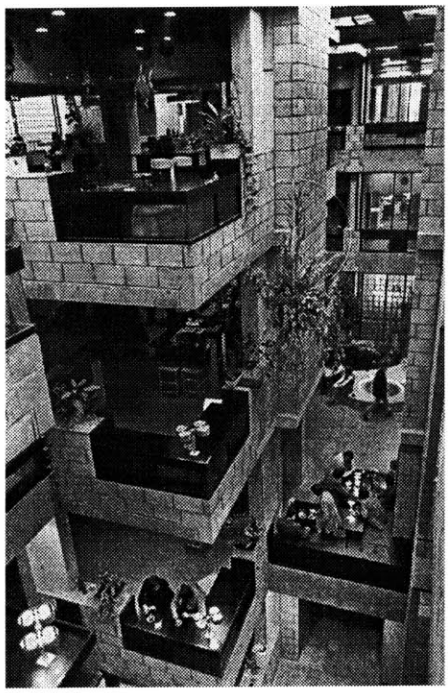
1. Orrin Klapp, Overload and Boredom. (NY: Greenwood Press, 1986)
2. Klapp, 73.

Neil Postman described our current state as a Technocracy, "a society only loosely controlled by social custom and religious tradition and driven by the impulse to invent."[3] As social institutions such as myths, ritual, politics, and religious traditions flounder, architecture which is so closely tied to these social constructs suffers a similar loss in significance. Consequently the role of architecture is unclear as we transit from a world defined by concrete, rational, and material measures to one that is electronic, abstract, and ephemeral. In spite of this transition, architecture must strive to continue to make the distinctions and to define the convergence between the public, the private, and the in-betweens.

Fig. 1 Central Beheer, by Herman Hertzberger, 1972. Workspace here is considered part of an internalized urban fabric. Common spaces are designed to maximize visual connections and social Interactions.



More and more, privatization and commercialization of what had previously existed in the public realm bring about the devaluation of social institutions and public spaces. This devaluation of the public realm can be seen in two ways. First is the convergence of the public and the private as in the case of the shopping mall. It is ambiguous if the mall is public or private or both; the activities of shopping is publicly orientated, yet the grounds are privately policed.

Another mean by which the pubic realm suffers is the greater separation between the two parts. For example, one no longer needs to leave home for news, entertainment, shopping, or even work, all activities which traditionally took one from private to public space, where association develops from day to day interaction.

Meanwhile in the workplace, individually assigned workspace is being usurped by the "virtual office, or hotel-style check-in offices,"[4] where there is no enclosed private offices and no perma-

3. Neil Postman, Technology (NY: Vintage Books, 1993) 41.
4. Kirk Johnson, New York Times, 3/7/1994, b1-2.

nent desks for any one employee. The majority of one's work is assumed to be conducted elsewhere (i.e. in private) facilitated by remote electronic hookup.

In looking at the devaluation of the public realm, we can further define two types, which Mark Lilla distinguished as the public and the civic. "Public places [are] those, like the shopping mall, marketplace and beach, that serve our shared but still private needs, whereas civic places are where we share places and purposes, by virtue of sharing citizenship."[5] It is these civic intermediate places which foster the individual as well as the collective. Architecture which serves this purpose reflects a local identity as well as a vital urban cohesiveness. When intermediate civic places which join our public and private lives disappear, community breaks down.

The absence of an intermediate ground which entertains an informal public life is the springboard of this thesis. The notion that an engaging public sphere fosters not only community but also individual growth is closely tied to the reestablishment of meaning and specificity to architecture. In addition, placeness is concerned with the historical value of a site, the dynamics between the individual and the collective, the unique spatial qualities of the built form, and the attention to the social transformation of a time when our lives are challenged by technological advances.

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5. Denise Scott Brown, "The Public Realm" (Architectural Design. Vol 60, no 1/2, 1990) 21.

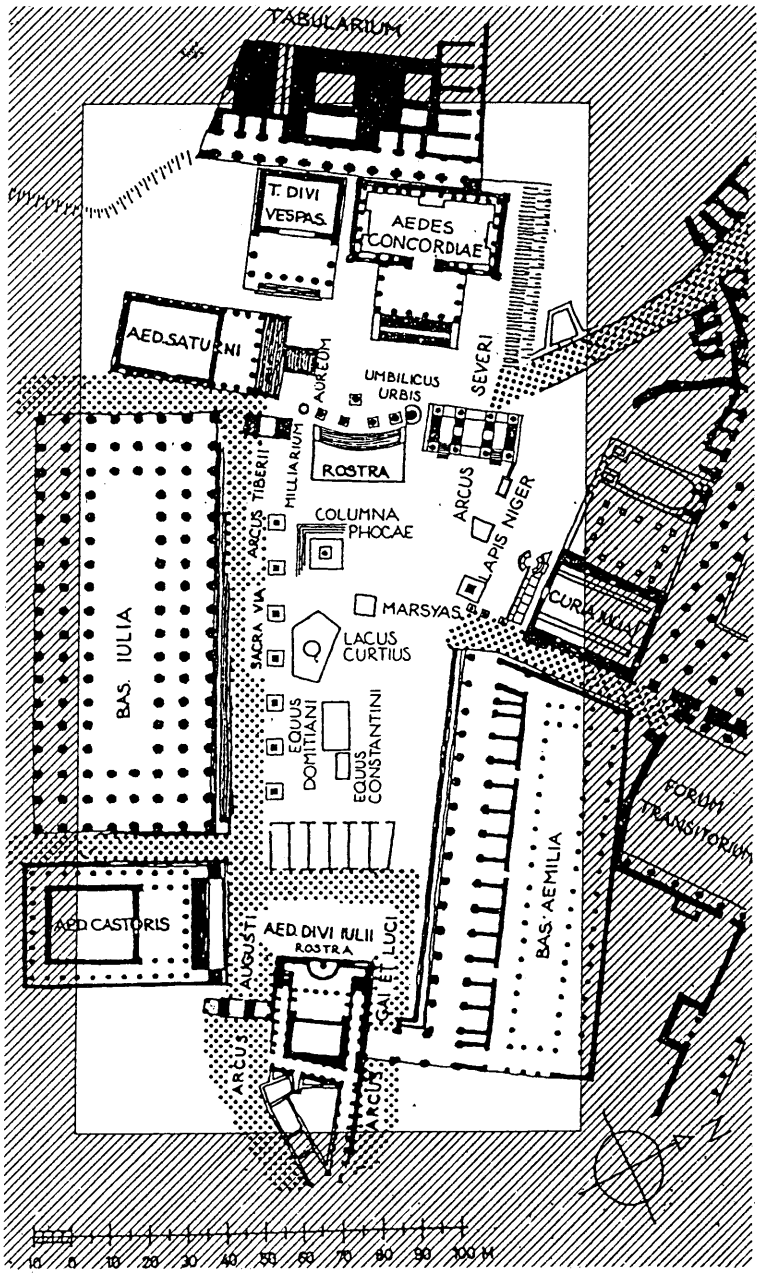

Fig. 2 Roman Forum, between A.D.203 and 608, where legal trials, electoral campaigns, sacrifices, important funerals, in addition to all variety of personal business took place.

Our most important forums are not designed to develop a sense of psychological "ownership" of the civic order, but rather to inspire or humble us.

Steven Brint & Michele Renee Salzman
Places, Vol 5, #1.

Necessity of the third place

The dichotomy between the pubic and private realms renders impotent those social and urban institutions which used to bridge the two. We find a breakdown in the traditional structure of the family unit as well as of the larger community. Public discourse is reduced to an unidirectional media production which led the passive spectators to believe in their participation. In comparison, places of public discourse which is the primary support for the existence of a public sphere[6], such as the Greek agora and the Roman forum in antiquity (Fig. 2), are represented by architecture as not only a physical condition but also a reflection of the social and political conditions.

Politics comes from the Greek word, polis, meaning city-state and by extension the form of government which presides over and encompasses the collective nature of the city and its forms. Instead of being cohesive, our cities are fragmented and the forms indicate the absence of civic intermediate places. This is a reflection of our political climate, one which is dominated by the media.

How then can we restore meaning to urban places, especially those which maintains the pub-

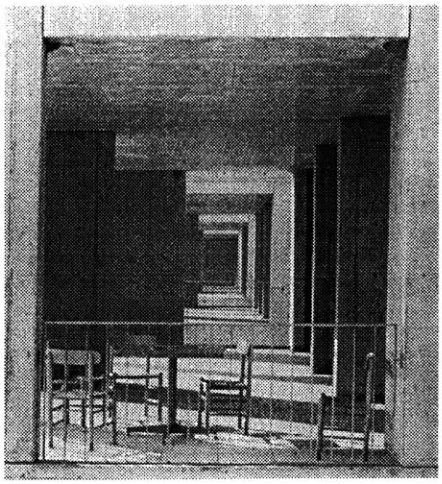

Fig. 3 Louis Kahn's Salk Institute, La Jolla, California, 1964. To accommodate intermediate places for social interaction.

6. Jugen Habermas defined it best. "By 'public sphere,' we mean first of all a domain of social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. They are then acting neither as business or professional people conducting their private affairs, nor as legal consociates subject to the legal regulations of a state bureaucracy and obligated to obedience. Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subjected to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinion freely." Rheingold, The Virtual Community (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley Publishing Co., 1993) 282.

lic sphere and, by extension, community. I suggest a social and humanist approach to the definition of place and put forth for consideration the necessity of the third place.

Sociologist, Ray Oldenberg, introduced the idea of the "third place" in his book, The Great Good Place: Cafe, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts and how they get you through the day. The third place, for lack of a better English term, simply is a physical surrounding which provides a setting for an informal public life outside of our home and workplace. Traditional third places in many culture include "Paris cafe, Roman forum, English pubs, Italian piazzas, Viennese coffeehouses, Irish grocery store-becomes-pubs, German bier gardens, and Japanese teahouses."[7]

Their functional commonality goes beyond being a place of eating and drinking but serve genuine purpose as backdrops against which casual conversations take place and provide an intermediate ground where people of different social groups can come together. What OIdenberg propounded is a place where formation of community is fostered through informal face-to-face communications, where commercialism is at a minimum, and where the individual feels appropriation and belonging. Third places are accessible, meaning not out of the way as well as being open to everyone when appropriate. Often there is a set of "regulars" who frequent the place yet no enforced routine. Not only are existing third places disappearing in our culture, there is no new form of public gathering place to replace them as the gap between private and pubic widens.

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7. The best illustration of an American third place is exemplified by the popular television sitcom, "Cheers - where everyone knows your name."

Third places are observed to have enormous soically redeeming values both for the individual and the collective. For the individual the third place affords a place of refuge from formally restricting environments of work and home. A most important aspect is its independence from the institutional order of the greater society. In another words, the non-hierarchial social structure is particular to each third place and set dynamically by the users and their consensus. Besides being a place for the individual to 'let off steam' from the day-to-day life, the third place afford affiliation almost without obligation.

The greater good of the third place is its ability to maintain the public sphere where informal free assembly can occur. This political contribution is not only essential to the democratic process but is a return to a Socratic approach to information processing. Furthermore, a habit of association in this environment has proven to be highly beneficial to the sense of community.

The disappearing American Main Street was an urban manifestation of the third place. In it we found human scale, accessibility, a dedication in design of all elements that reaffirmed human social interaction. It is geared to pedestrian not cars. There is a collective image and a discernible structure, and circulation does not mean merely getting from here to there but may allow many interesting stops along the way.

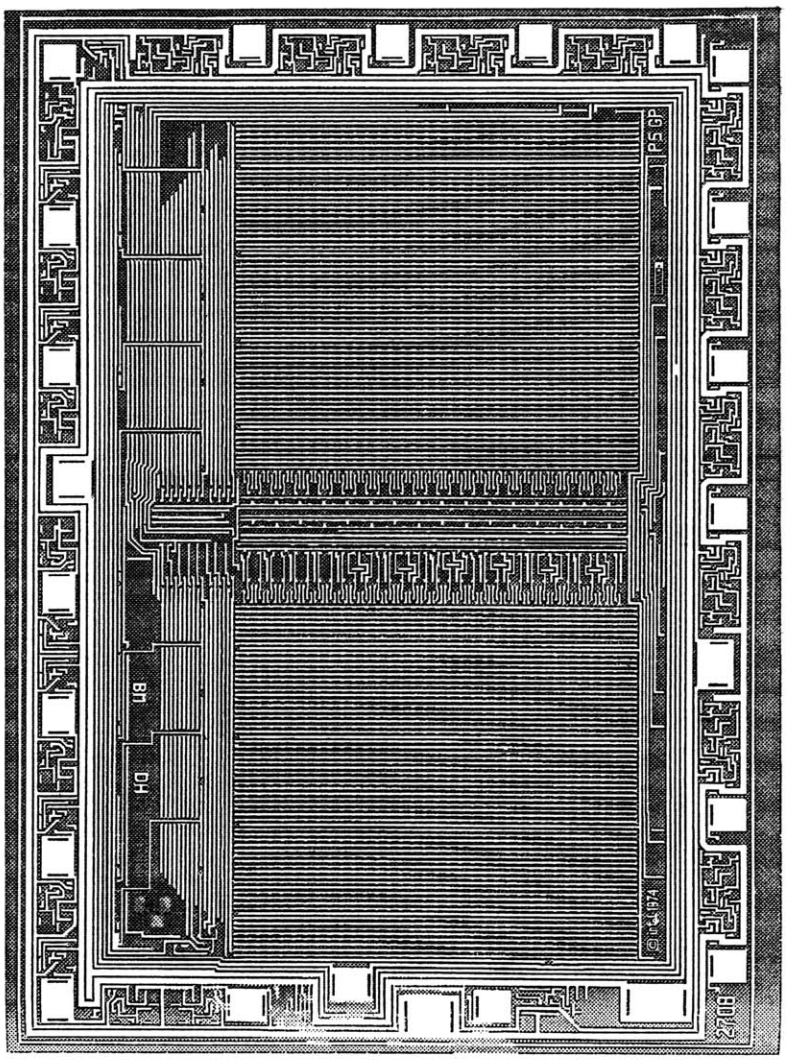
Finally, Oldenberg assets, "the key to the sustained level of activity lay in the fact that the great majority of persons who visited the places along Main Street and who did so with a desire for company in mind, did so alone. It is this characteristic that modern community fail to achieve and that is so much missed in modern life."[8] We will

8. Oldenberg. 117.

find that this description parallels the trend in which people are taking advantage of the computer networks to reach out to others. The following section set forth the circumstances of the electronic community and its role in the establishment of a civic third place.

In subsequent section of this paper, the proposed site, Boston's former Scollay Square is discerned to have characteristics of an urban third place. The proposed project is designed with a view that third places in the electronic age not only displayed the previously discussed qualities but seek to employ current communications technology to implement this goal. In fact community formation in the third place is contingent on facilitating one most important elements: conversation.

Fig.4 Diagram of Intel's Erasable Programmable Read-only Memory Chip (EPROM), 1974. Though not designed for aesthetic appeal, internal circuits compel with their inner order, logic, and the intricacy of patterns.



New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think *about*. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think *with*. And they alter the nature of community: the *arena in which thoughts develop*.

Neil Postman
Technolopy, 1993.

Electronic Community

Much debate over the future role of architecture has been concerned with the emergence of a new spatial paradigm, cyberspace. Science fiction writer William Gibson's term and depiction of cyberspace in his novels have so stirred the imagination that many foretold the role of architecture in this new frontier. Cyberspace has no real physical or temporal properties. However, architecture is rooted in the physical world, as well as the cognitive and social so that cyberspace has significance only in its representation and abstraction of the real world. Its primary function would be to provide an alternative perspective and not to replace reality. To go further is self-delusion and escapism. Therefore, this section explores the possibility of the social aspect of the computer revolution as manifested in computer mediated communications (CMC).

In 1993, there were 60,000 computer bulletin board services (BBS) in the U.S. and over ten million users on the Internet.[9] The sudden popularity is attributed to many factors but none so compelling as the ability of CMC for previously impossible social and intellectual interactions and with the formation of community that is not rooted in a geographical place but in a commonality of interest. Rheingold suggested that "one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our lives."[10]

Fig.5 Reaching out in cyberspace.

CMC then can be interpreted as the modern electronic version of the third place where people of all background comes together to converse. In the

9. Rheingold, 8-9.
10. Rheingold, 6.

form of the BBS or the Usenet, it is essentially a database of recorded conversation, which users can browse through at their leisure. This not only acquaints the user of the history of a particular group but also allows for a collective continuity and myth-making. Like the third place, the electronic network is a leveler where individuals are not discriminated. Here physical features which include race, sex, and other affiliations are not known unless the person made it so. The medium is used to meet others on basis of information exchange. (In fact, Internet was originally conceived as a tool for intellectual collaboration for researchers). There is a real sense of community and appropriation. Virtual community is by definition "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feelings, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace."[11]

On the one hand, this new mode of communication can renew a sense of community with those who share similar interests. But on the other hand, it can very well be transformed into a panotic[12] environment if its use is not carefully nurtured in the public sphere. If the electronic community was left to capitalist dictate, it can easily be commodified and consequently controlled by the large multimedia conglomerates. "The great power of the idea of the electronic democracy is that technical trends in communications technologies can help citizens break the monopoly on their attention that has been enjoyed by the powers behind the broadcast paradigm."[13]

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11. Rheingold, 5.
12. From Jeremy Bentham's 18th century panopticon which was a prison designed to regulate prisoners by inducing a feeling of being seen without being able to see the watcher.
13. Rheingold, 289.

Many politicians and municipalities recognize this attribute and have began to utilize the technology for public service. Prototypes of the idea — sponsorship of CMC by local government for public interest — which involved creating a local computer supported networking and conferencing system and making communication equipments available to the general public, has been undertaken at as diverse municipalities as Santa Monica and Cleveland, and statewide in Hawaii and France.

The role of architecture in this context is to represent an endeavor to define a new civic institutions, one which take advantage of current communications technology to bring back a decentralized populace. Also it aims to intergrade our physical construct with the new medium which is not only a "channel for conveying information between two or more environments but rather environments in and of themselves."[14] The following section describes the proposed Information Resource Center.

14. Joshua Meyrowitz. No Sense of Place (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985) 16.

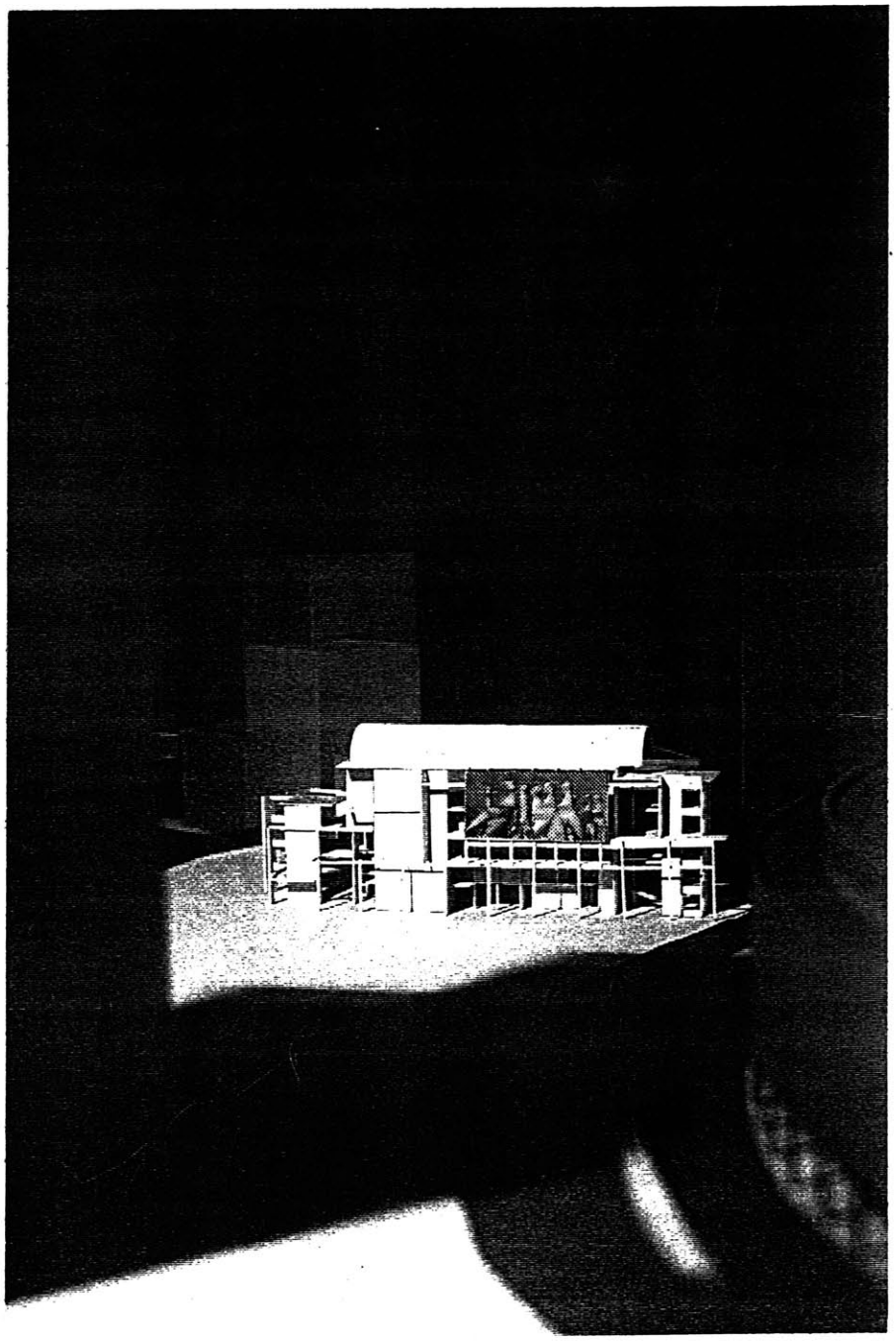


Fig. 6 Model, plaza elevation, view south from Congress Street next to the JFK building.

Community is what we hold together that holds us together.

Daniel Kemmis
Places, Vol. 8, #2, 1992.

Proposed Project

This section set forth the basis and considerations in the design of the new Information Resource Center (IRC). The site is at Boston's Government Center, what was up until the 1960's known as Cornhill[15]. The design attempts to address the difficult issue of building on a vast, over-sized plaza urbanistically. Meanwhile the intention is to advocate the public role of a new civic institution to renew the pubic sphere and to promote individual empowerment through information dissemination. Metaphorically it is conceived as one stop on a path which links many urban public chess pieces. Promgrammatically the building is a purveyor of technical equipments supported by the city to foster community involvement utilizing the new communications media. In short, the IRC furnishes the necessary equipments as well as provides the architectural setting for the purpose of rebuilding a third place.

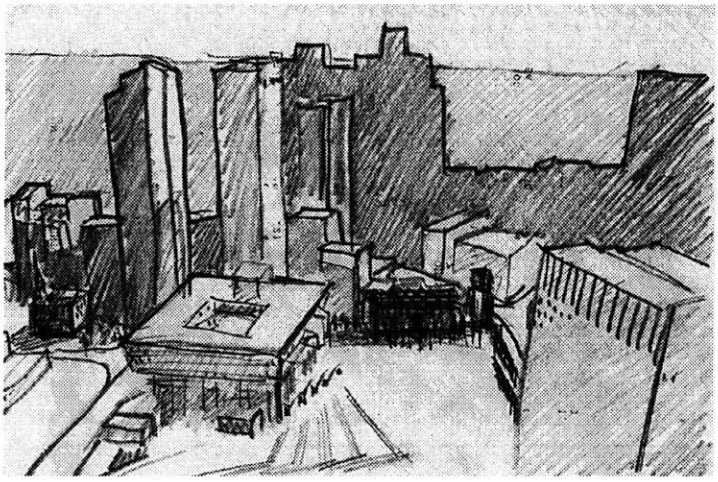
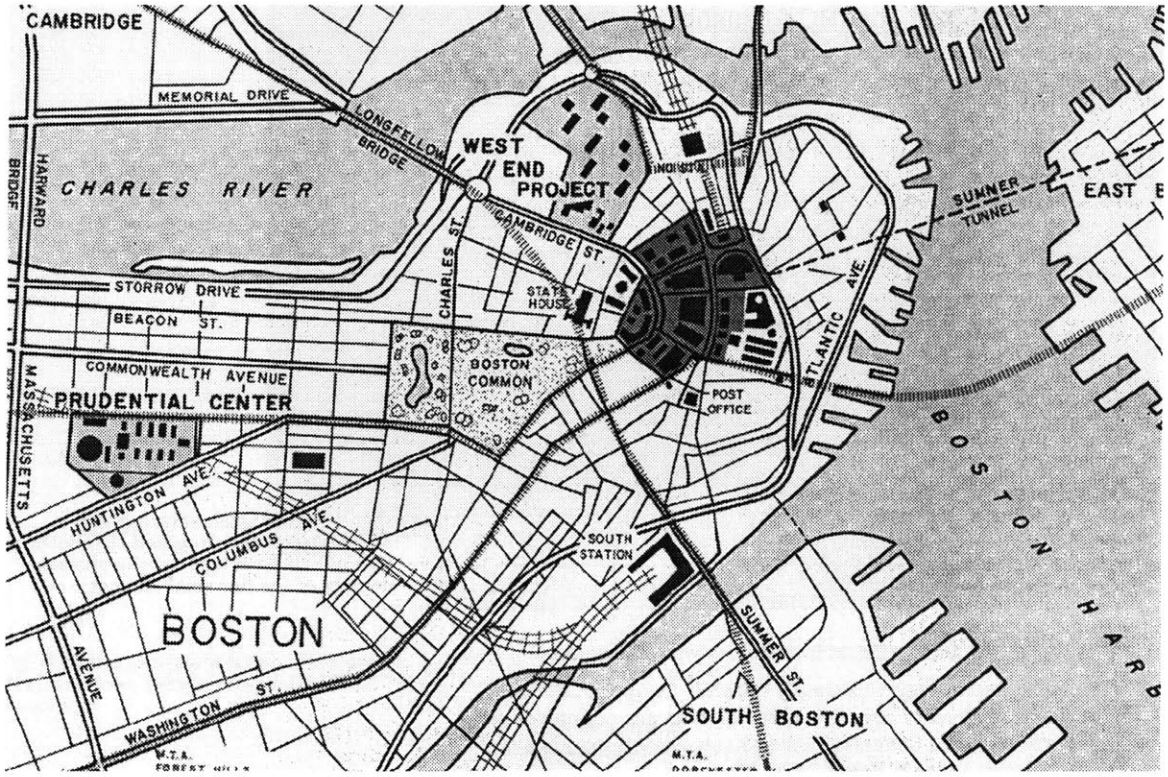


Fig. 7 Early sketch showing the connection of the proposed IRC with Fanueil Hall set against the packed density of the financial district.

15. "The name, by the way, was simply Cornhill. To append Cornhill with the word *street* or *avenue* is a Boston faux pas not unlike adding an s to the word Common." David Kruh, Something Always Doing (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1990) 35.

Fig. 8 Aerial view over Government Center with the Central Artery in the foreground.

Fig. 9 Map showing relative location of Government Center within central Boston.



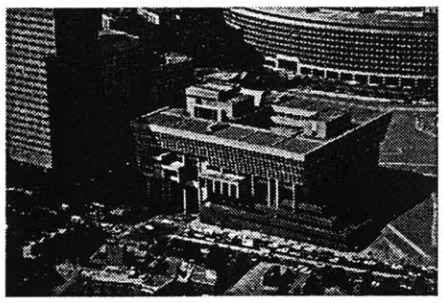
Site Analysis

The location of the new building is along the Sears Crescent Building from Cambridge Street to the Boston City Hall on the southern edge of the Government Center Plaza. The entourage of buildings which surrounds the plaza dating back to late 1960's holds a prominent position in the middle of Central Boston half way between the Charles River and the harbor's waterfront.(Fig. 9) This centripetal location calls for an urban strategy which should be contextual and historically sensitive in a city known for its cohersive and intimate setting.

Despite a comprehensive master plan by I. M. Pei in 1960 (Fig. 11), the powerful identity conceived for Government Center plaza is weakened by the lack of cohesion and containment. Envisioned to match the grand urban squares like Rome's St. Peter and Siena's Campo, the plaza is cold, windy, and lacking in human scale. A good amount of pedestrian traffic exists due to the location of the MBTA subway station at the Cambridge and Court Streets intersection. Otherwise, this is not a place to linger except intermittently during large assemblies such as sport and civic celebrations, First Night, and other large citywide events.

The architecture here is hardly compelling and not at all conducive to public use despite their public functions as government offices. The surrounding buildings include the domineering Boston City Hall (Fig. 10), designed by Kallman, McKinall, & Knowles. This Brutalist concrete structure is memorable and idealistic, yet forbidding and insular. The donut plan has been described as confusing and monotonous. In contrast, the exterior massing and organization illustrate well the differentiation of the bureaucratic hierarchy: the Mayor's office is different

Fig. 10 Boston City Hall, showing transition from the brick pedestal to the concrete shell.



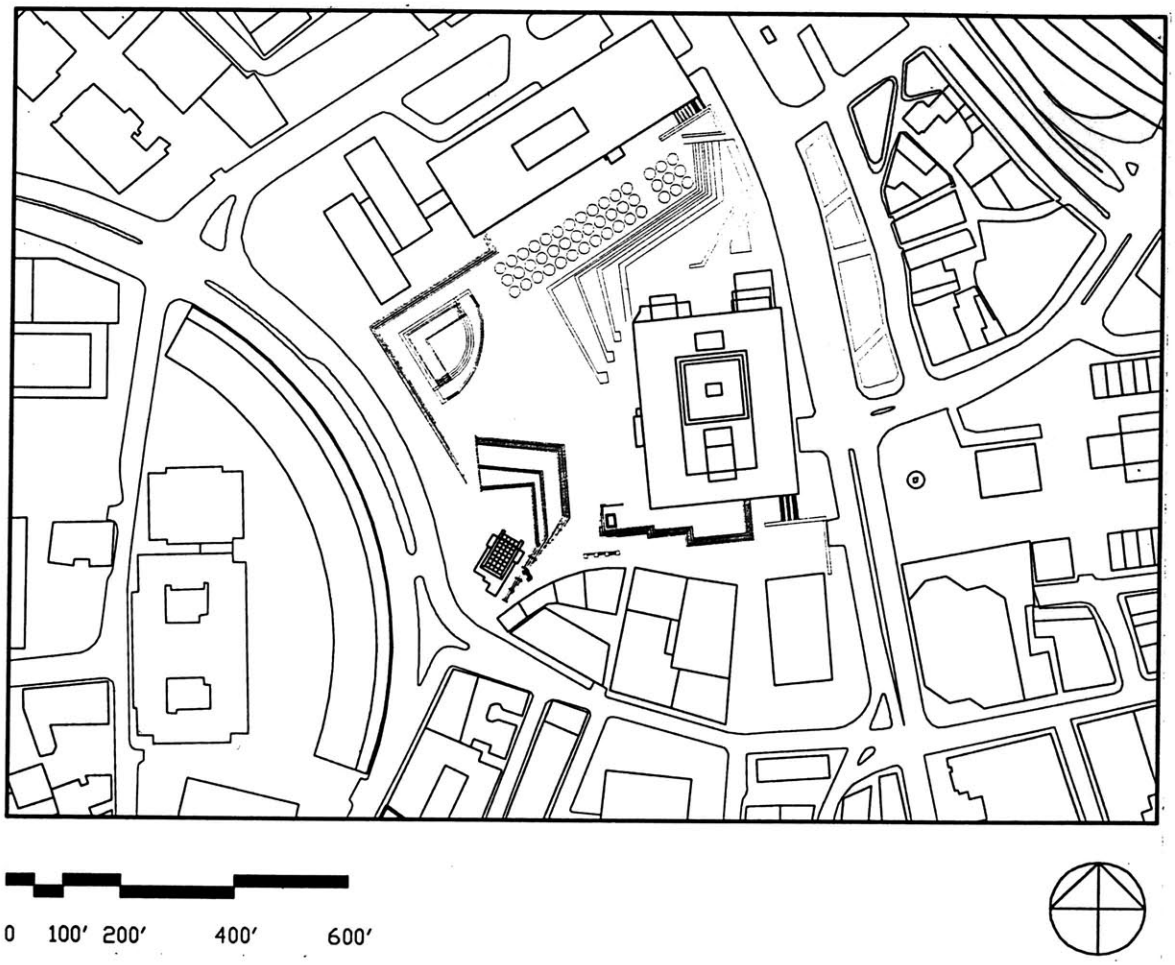


Fig. 11 Existing site plan.

from the City Council Room which is different from the lower service agencies.The civic image conveyed here is that of a mammoth bureaucracy embedded within a tough concrete shell.

Similarly out of human scale is One Two Three Center Plaza (Fig. 12) by Welton D. Becket west of the City Hall. The office buildings' curved form reinforced by the Cambridge Street create more of a laceration for the west edge of the plaza rather than proper closure.

Fig. 12 Three Center Plaza and JFK towers.

The Architects' Collaborative's JFK Federal Building (Fig. 12) on the other hand anchors the northern edge of the plaza with two 26-story towers which provides vertical visual focus from lower Cambridge Street (from Charles Station) and from Tremont Street. The adjacent lower extension claims an appropriate section of the plaza by differentiating the zone with trees and seatings and forming a very pleasant path and a place to sit and rest.

The Sears Crescent Building (Fig. 13) completes the current plaza ensemble.[16] Dating back to 1841, it is the only historical piece remaining from the 1965 demolition of Scollay Square. Because of its human scale, the building is overpowered by everything that is around it.

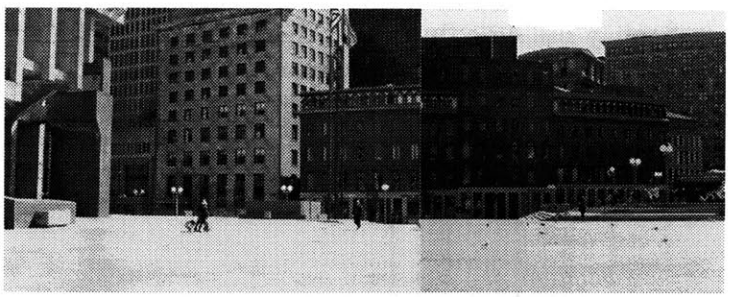


Fig. 13 Southern edge of plaza, with historic Sears Crescent Building.

16. The Government Center subway station, though one of the oldest stations in the system, was designed with nothing in mind but to be inconspicuous and subservient to the City Hall.

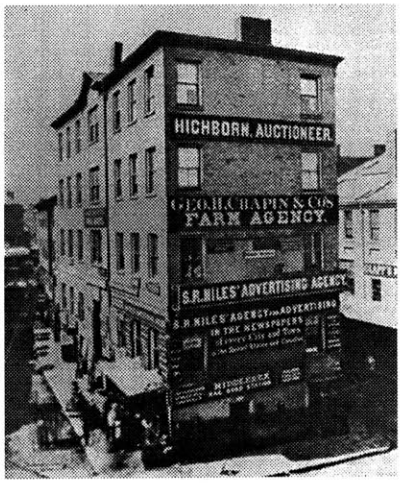
Finally, the proximity of many civic structures such as the gold-domed Massachusetts State House, the Suffolk County Court House, and other governmental buildings and public establishments such as Fanueil Hall with Quincy Market, the Old State House, King's Chapel and burial grounds within easy walking distance of this site is a clue to the nature and role of the proposed Information Resource Center within the larger urban scheme.

Historical Perspective

Due to its central location in the Boston peninsular, the area that is known today as Government Center dates back to the city's early days. At the edge of Cotton Hill, one of the Trimount in colonial days, the site was home to the first Quaker meeting house and was an urban isthmus between the two distinct neighborhoods of the North and South End (today's Downtown Boston).

In the 1830's, Cotton Hill was leveled to make way for the elegant town-houses of Pemberton Square which quickly became the fashion address for wealthy sea merchants. Pemberton Square led directly down into the intersection between Tremont and Court Streets which was officially named in 1838 Scollay Square after the Scollay Building that stood there.(Fig. 14) Since the early 1800's this intersection was used as a major transfer point for commuters, who often designated Scollay Square as common meeting place. The popularity of commercialized Scollay Square in the 19th century continued to be a function of its strategic location between the residential neighborhoods (Beacon Hill, West End, and the North End) and the commercial districts (Dock Square, the waterfront, and the financial district about State Street).

Fig. 14 Scollay Building just after the Civic War with trolley tracks on either side. Demolished 1871.

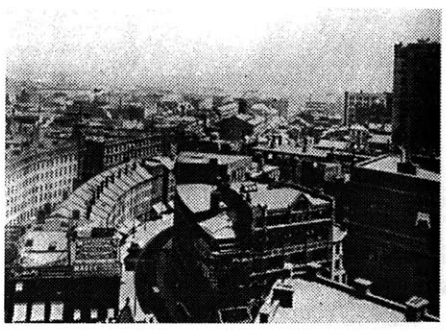


Kevin Lynch described Scollay Square as "a node which is structurally vital but which did not seem easy to identity or describe."[17] This is due to the fact that Scollay Square was not strictly a square in configuration but rather a shapeless traffic intersection. Coupled with incoming roads which arrive randomly at odd angles, it was extremely difficult to visualize.(Fig. 15) Its most memorable topographical distinction was its gentle slope down from Pemberton Square to Dock Square.

Corhhill (Fig. 16, 17) was first laid out in 1816 after a namesake in London's busiest district. The place has a fascinating history as an informational source. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was known for its over thirty used and antique bookstores. In addition, there were located here many publishing houses of both books and pamphlets. During the prohibitive 20's and 30's when many books were banned, Cornhill emerged as the "symbol of literary oppression."[18]

Fig. 15 Map, Scollay Square and the streets that intersect it.

17. Kevin Lynch, Image of the City (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960) 173.
18. Kruh, 33.



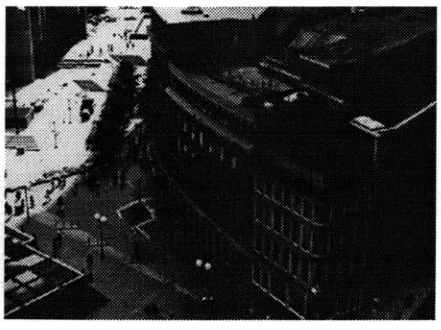
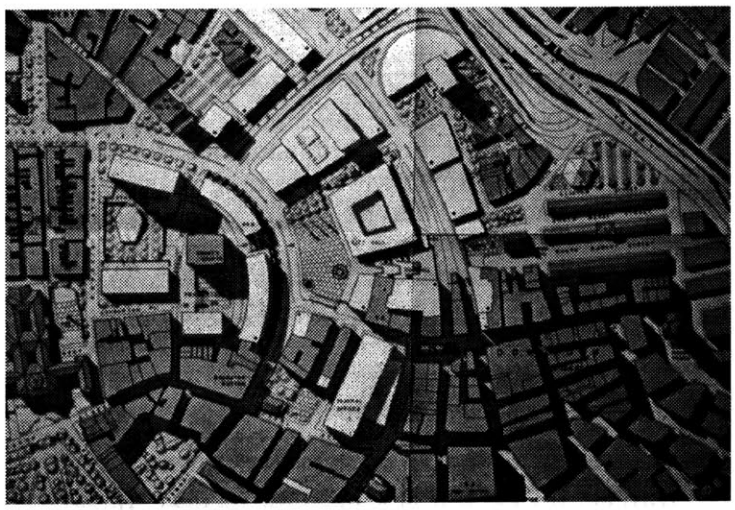


Fig. 16, 17
(Left) Cornhill in the 1920's and (right) in the present, view towards Fanueil Hall.



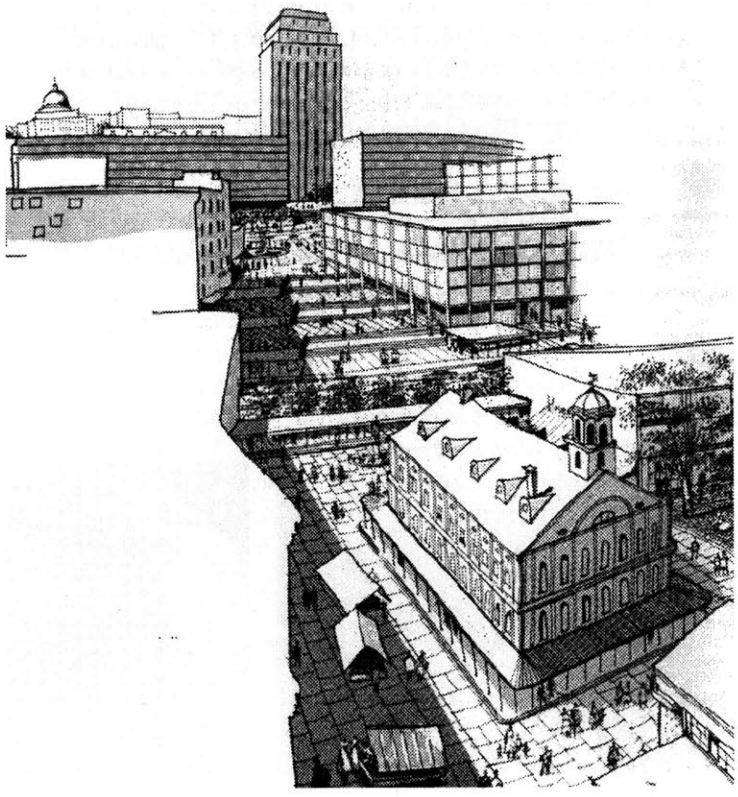


Fig. 18, 19 Lynch & Myer plan and perspective view showing a "pedestrian cascade" from Pemberton Square to Fanueil Hall. State House in the distance.

In the 1960's Urban Renewal hit Boston with full force, spearheaded by Mayor John Collins and Ed Logue, the director of then newly formed Boston redevelopment Agency. Along with the West End almost 60 acres were wiped out for reconstruction. Both renewal projects were seen by many as drastic, yet necessary for economic reasons. A great deal of attention was directed at how to attract businesses and life back into the deserted urban core. The plans reflect an attitude about the city that was precipitated by the decline of urban areas and the exodus to the suburbs and that championed urban renewal through major public intervention.

Prior to Pei's master plan there were several other urban schemes which placed less importance on the new City Hall as a centerpiece. One was by The Architects Collaborative (Fig. 20). Another was a 1959 design proposal by a team which included Kevin Lynch and John R. Myer.(Fig. 18,19) This plan in particular recognized the importance of the site's typography and saw the unique opportunity for making connections in the urban fabric by linking up the various public

Fig. 20 TAC's proposal for Government Center Renewal Project.

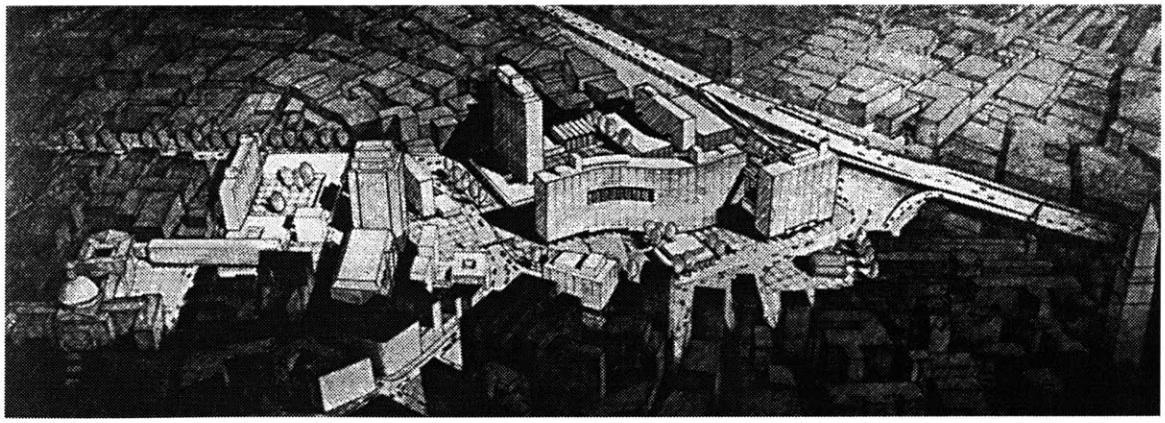


Fig 21 (Left) Road from Scollay Square up to Pemberton Square, 1920's. (Right) Current approach to Pemberton Square through opening in Three Center Plaza.

institutions with a series of public open spaces. This is an important strategy because it took advantage of the major attribute of the site and it was designed for people's activities.

Scollay Square as Urban Third Place

Despite acquiring a rather infamous reputation by the end of WWII, Scollay Square was a place well remembered and cherished by its former users and whose description rather resemble Oldenberg's criteria for the third place.

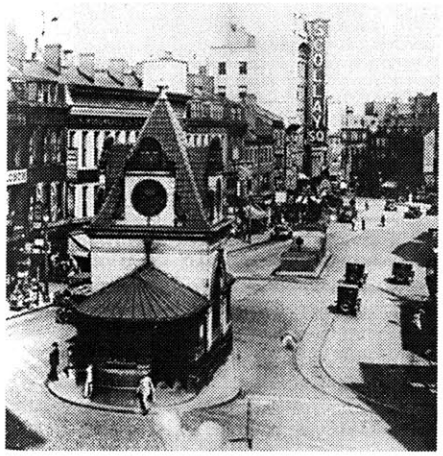


Fig. 22 Scollay Square subway station in 1908, a node in the city.

Scollay Square's public image as a junction among neighborhoods and as a crossroad of paths had been well examined.[19] It was this accessibility factor which first drew people in the beginning. Very early on, the place was a hub of transportation activities with the first electric trolleys and subways and nearby train stations and docks. Moreover the multi-functional aspect of the place corresponded with the diverse groups of users who frequented there: from locals to sailors, from young to old. Scollay Square meant a great deal to many people and had such compelling qualities that former locals petitioned to have the name restored to the site 10 years after Government Center was built to replace it.

Scollay square was a place of business. It welcomed those with lesser means with cheap eats, and those seeking diversion with entertainment houses. People remembered going there as children, The place was always bustling with activities. Unlike today's Government Center plaza, it may be a little rundown, but Scollay Square was full of life.

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19. Kevin Lunch, p. 173.

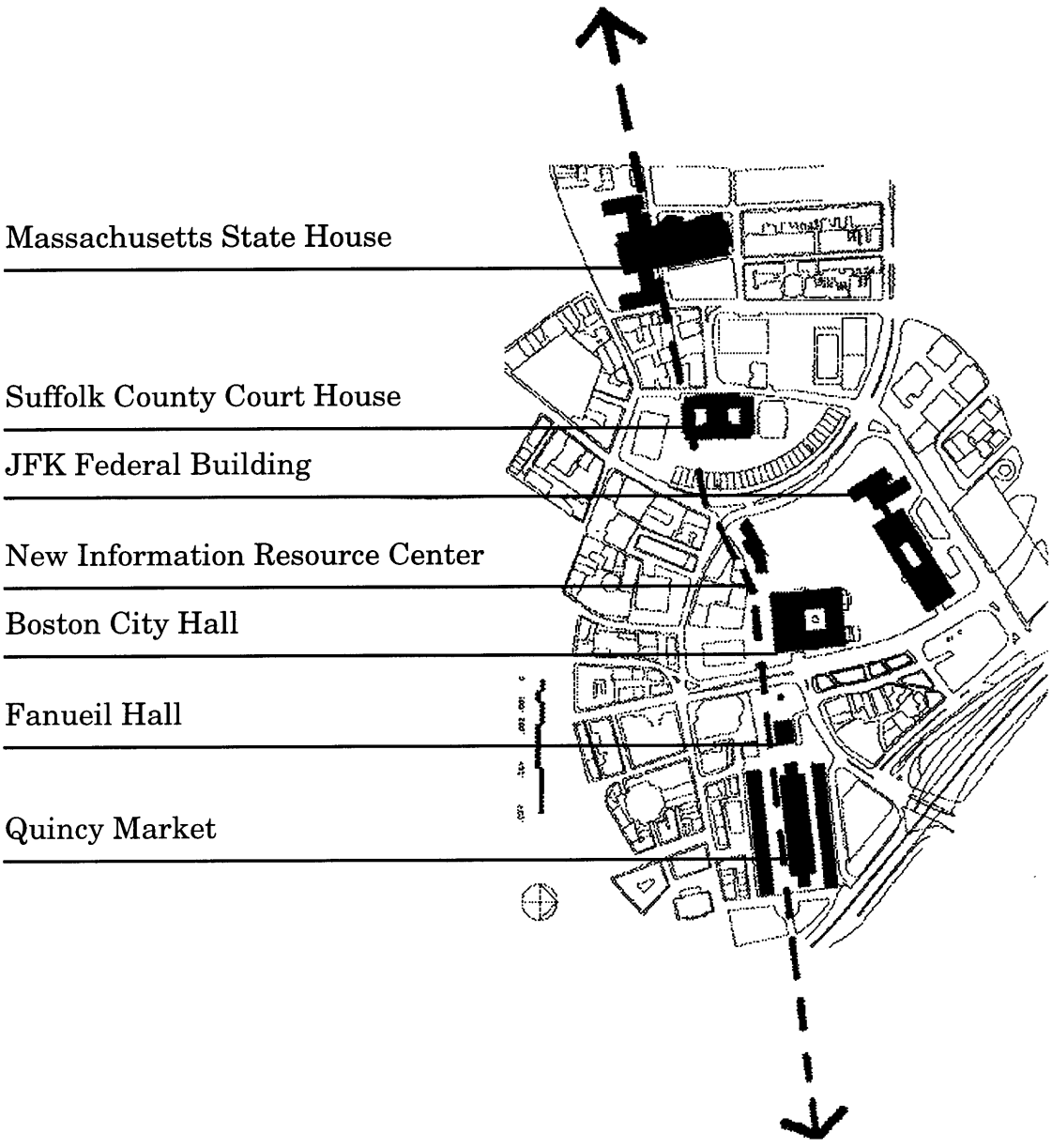

Fig. 23 Cultural Promenade.

From site analysis, to historical perspective, to interpretation of former and possible future role of the site as an urban third place, all of the considerations discussed above combined to formulate the following urban agenda.

Urban Agenda

- Cultural promenade. (Fig. 23) To provide a definition on the south edge of Government Center plaza which takes advantage of existing public open spaces and pedestrian pathways and connecting them. The promenade leads from the State House, pass the County Court House, through Pemberton Square and Three Center Plaza, along the Sear Crescent Building, pass Boston City Hall, to Fanueil Hall and Quincy Market, and to the waterfront beyond.

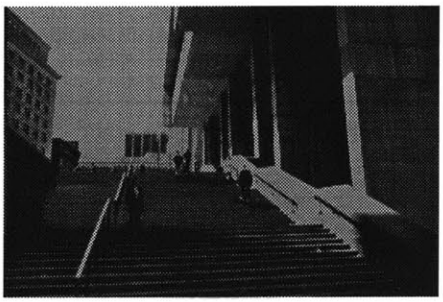

Fig. 24 Steps next to City Hall leading from Fanueil Hall to Cornhill.

- Re-establish Cornhill as pedestrian street running from Cambridge to Congress Streets. (Fig. 25)

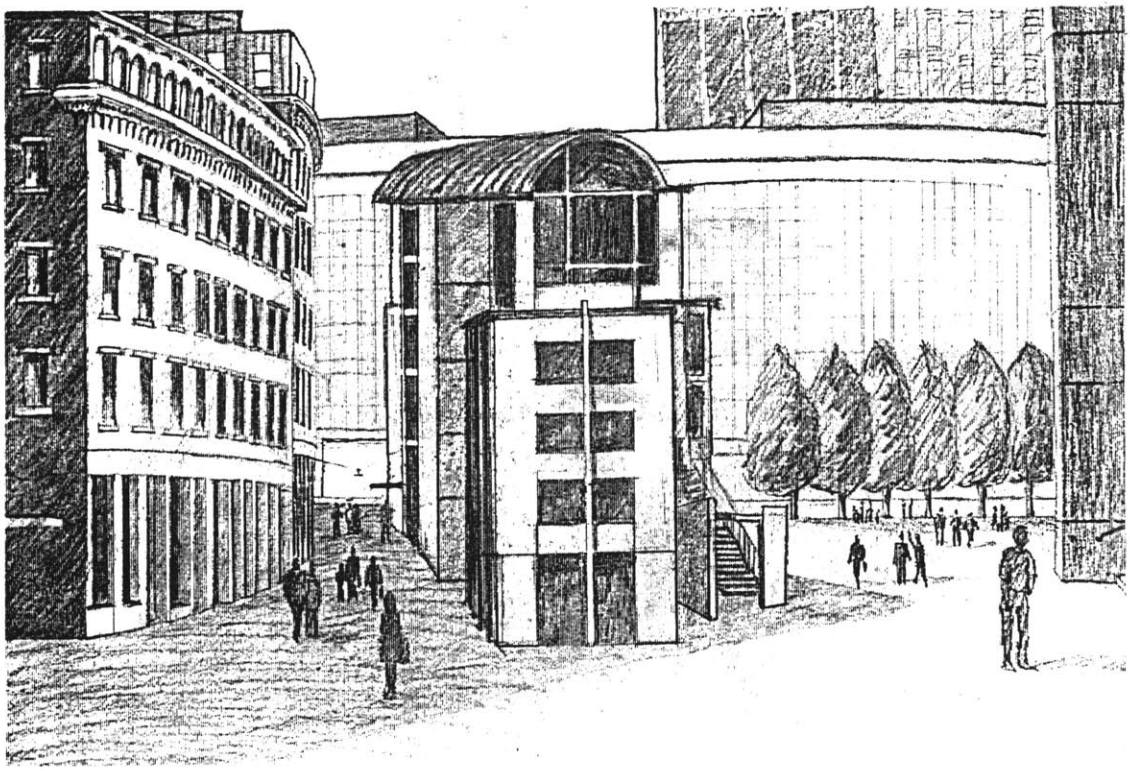

Fig. 25 Sketch of new Cornhill (left) formed by the new IRC. Looking up to the passageway under Three Center Plaza which leads up to Pemberton Square. (right) Entrance into plaza.

- Closure of the street corner (Fig. 26) at intersection of Cambridge, Tremont, and Court Streets (under the "Steaming Tea Pot") and integration with the Government Center subway entrance to form "Scollay Square". Also as a prelude to larger Government Center Plaza.

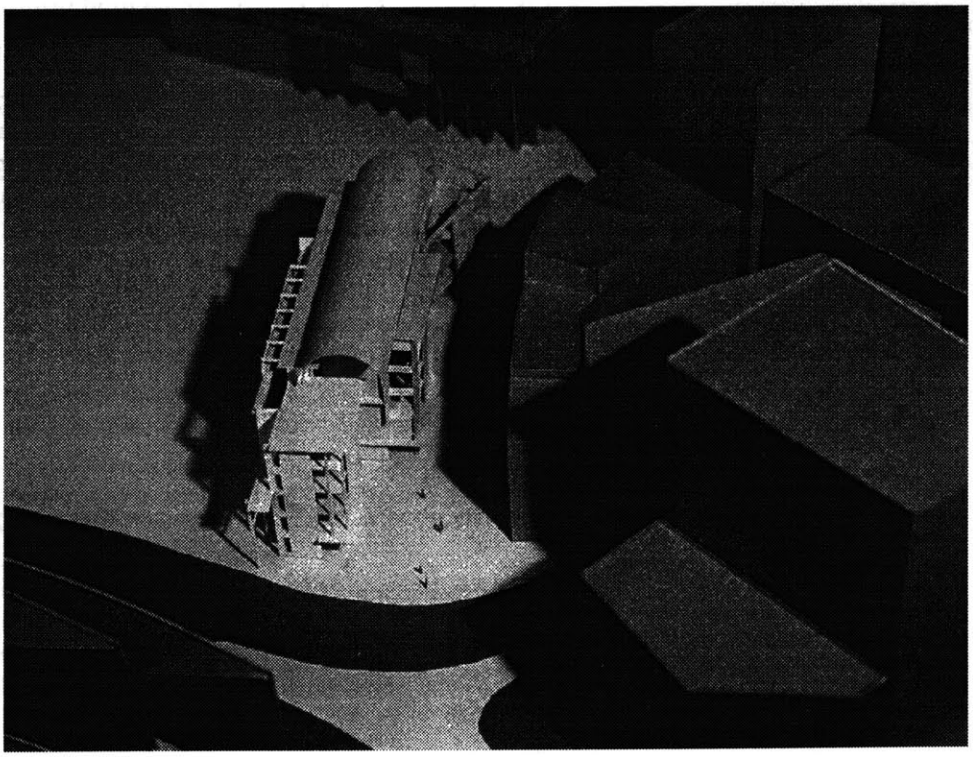

Fig. 26 Model showing intersection of Court and Congress Street at head of Cornhill and Congress street.

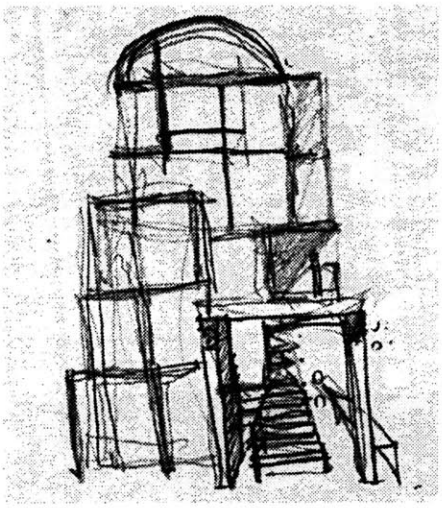

Fig. 26 Sketch, looking as one approaches from Fanueil Hall.

Building Program

Like many third places, the Information Resource Center plays many roles and would be of different meaning to different people. The IRC is a library in the sense that it is a depository of information and it provides the mechanisms to retrieve the information in a manner useful to the inquirer. Rather than the experience of reading physical books, the center offers media of a more advanced audio-visual nature, hypertext with images and sound. The ability to search electronically multiple faraway databases also enhances traditional library services.

Referencing historical models of such public spaces as the Greek agora or the Roman forum, the IRC is also a community based multimedia forum in that opinions may be voiced in many settings or media. Participation on any number of on-line discussion topics from personal to local to national is encouraged by the ease and leveling nature of the place. The flexibility of the plan accommodates many possible interactive event. Every citizen is accorded an account where the civic activities of the government are put up for public monitoring.

Alternatively, the IRC can be perceived as a place of learning where the emphasis is placed on intellectual exchange and personal improvement. Discussion on electronic bulletin boards allows interaction between people who may be distanced in space and class or background. Psychological benefit develops as a result of sense of involvement and appropriation.

The programmatic requirements consist of multiple computer clusters on different floors which allow a diversity of architectural environments. Particular attention is paid to the lighting conditions (natural, diffused, or indirect), levels of

enclosure, views, and proximity to circulation. Classrooms and conference rooms of various sizes are dispersed in the building to allow for meetings and other gatherings that may require enclosed spaces. Series of intermediate places conducive to chance meeting and impromptu discussions reflects the intent to balance the two distinct mode of communication: 1) virtually via computer networks 2) realistically via face-to-face interactions. There are also a staffed reference area and a cafe.

Building as "Information System"

Buildings are simultaneously message carriers and facilities of information exchange. The former indicates architecture's intrinsic capability to reflect the intentions of the designer, the status of its owner, and many other metaphysical messages. Meanwhile the latter refers to the specific function of buildings to house the actual activity of information exchange. "Intelligent" buildings today can also be understood to represent yet another discrete information system. This is data about users and environmental variables which are gathered and used in the design and maintenance of the building.

Martin Pawley described the earliest manifestation of a building type which is a multiple information systems. This occurred with the development of the gothic cathedrals 850 years ago which incorporated both audio and visual media.

> The tall, thin acoustic space of the Gothic nave produced unprecedentedly long reverberation times which responded to the sound of polyphonic chanting and choral music to produce an overwhelming aural effect. In the same way the windows ceased to be simple penetrations designed to admit light, but became instead complex translucent colored-image screens built up from mosaics

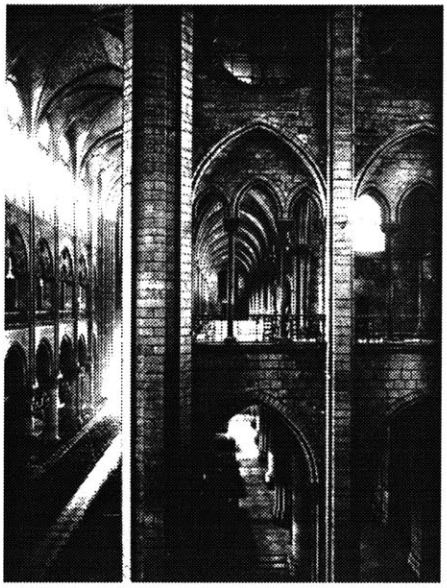

Fig. 27 Cathedral of Notre Dame, c. 1063-1195, interior view.

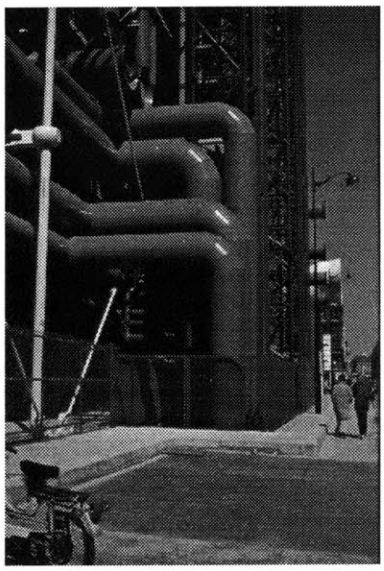

Fig. 28 Pompidou Center, externalized structure and mechanical systems, 1977.

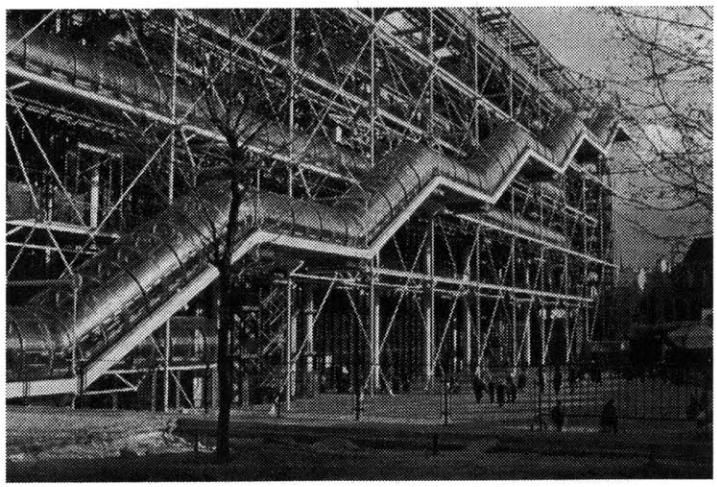

Fig. 29 Pompidou Center, showing exterior public circulation system on the west facade, and Place Beauborg, 1977.

> of stained glass. Coupled with the still astounding acoustic performance of these buildings, what remains of the imagery of their immense windows makes it clear that they were in fact total pre-electronic information systems.[20]

At the same time, the gothic cathedral provided a physical place not only where the congregation received their messages from the church but where communion and informal socialization also took place.

Undoubtedly, the most famous "live center of information" is the Pompidou Center in Paris. The building's architects, Piano and Roger, described it as "a cross between a computerised Time Square and the British Museum."[21] Information for interactive purposes in this case is defined in two ways:

- Primary: actual exhibits, books, les objects d'art, and live performances
- Secondary: anything stored on a second media

Just as for the gothic cathedrals, the importance of a public image is such that much attention was paid to the building's mega-structure and its innovation. Going beyond the engineering complexities, there are two notable architectural features. The building's circulation system, completely exposed on the facade (Fig. 29), not only reinforced the project's public nature but also is an inversion of the interior of buildings. Secondly the desire for flexibility and changeability required the externalization of structure, building services, mechanical systems, etc. (Fig. 28) The unfortunate result being that the interior spaces are vast and warehouse-like, unsuited for human occupancy.

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20. Architectural Design, #90, p.90.
21. Architectural Design, 2/77, p.128.

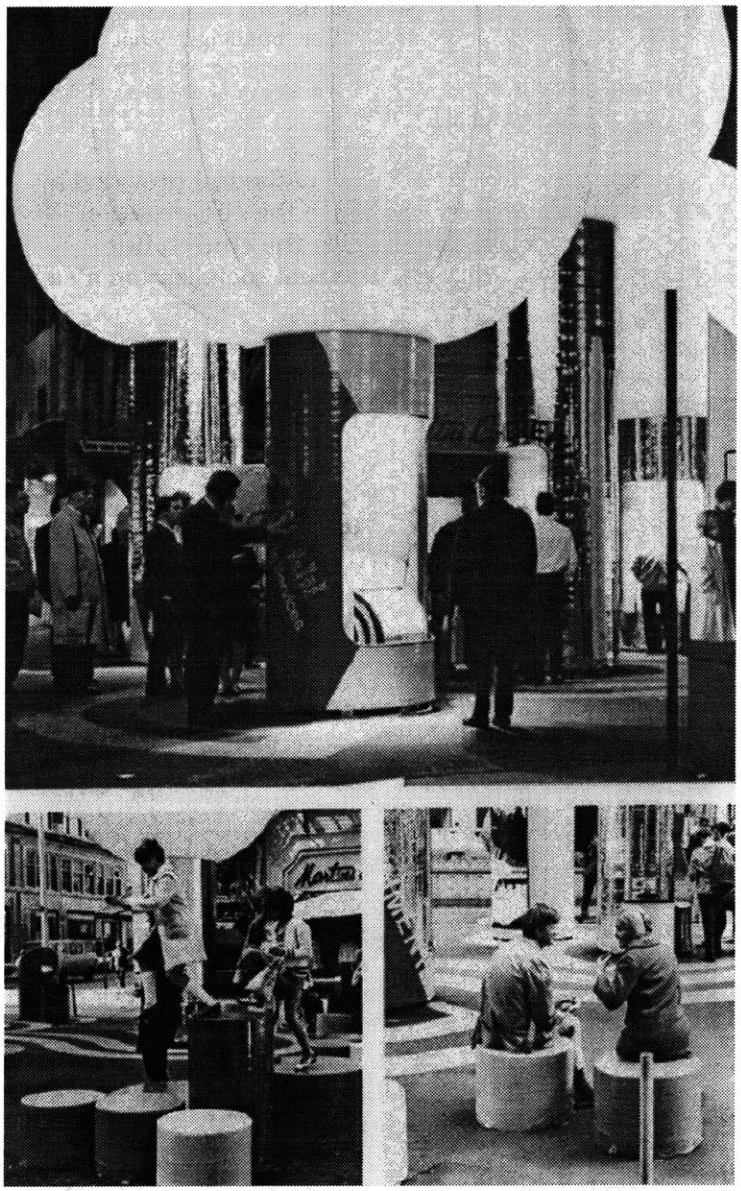


Fig. 30 People shown visiting and interacting at the Park Square installation of the Information Center, 1969.

At the same time the Pompidou Center was conceived, Boston also experimented with the idea of an Information Center. A working model was designed and evaluated by architects/planners, Ashley/Myer/Smith.[22] The working model, sited in Park Square, consisted of a grouping of eight cylindrical kiosks marked by 12-foot translucent balloons. Each of the kiosks supplied a different type of information about the city, from trivia to directory services to talking map. (Fig. 30, 31) It should be noted that product advertisement was not endorsed.

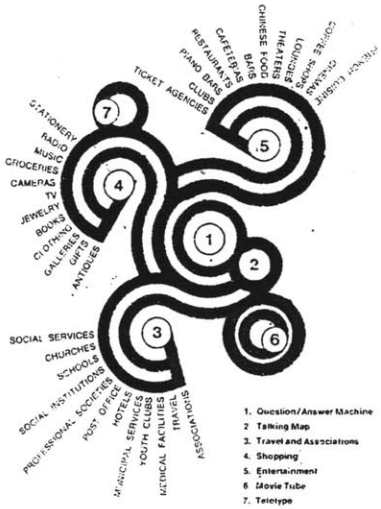


Fig. 30 Layout of the Park Square Information Center, 1969.

Although the design was not of a building, the project illustrated several salient features essential to an information center. First of all, the center was seen as defining a new public space, one which introduced the machine as an intermediary communication device (whereas previously one would ask another person for information). Secondly, the kiosks were chosen for a site significant as a urban junction for people on foot with nearby connections to subway and bus. Also the result of the 33 days experiment indicated favorable result for the establishment of a place where information on the City's various activities can be obtained interactively. Finally, the Park Square Information Center experiment demonstrated most emphatically the designers' social intentions that machine-to-people communication can stimulate local people-to-people interaction.

22. City Signs and Lights, a Policy Study, 1971.

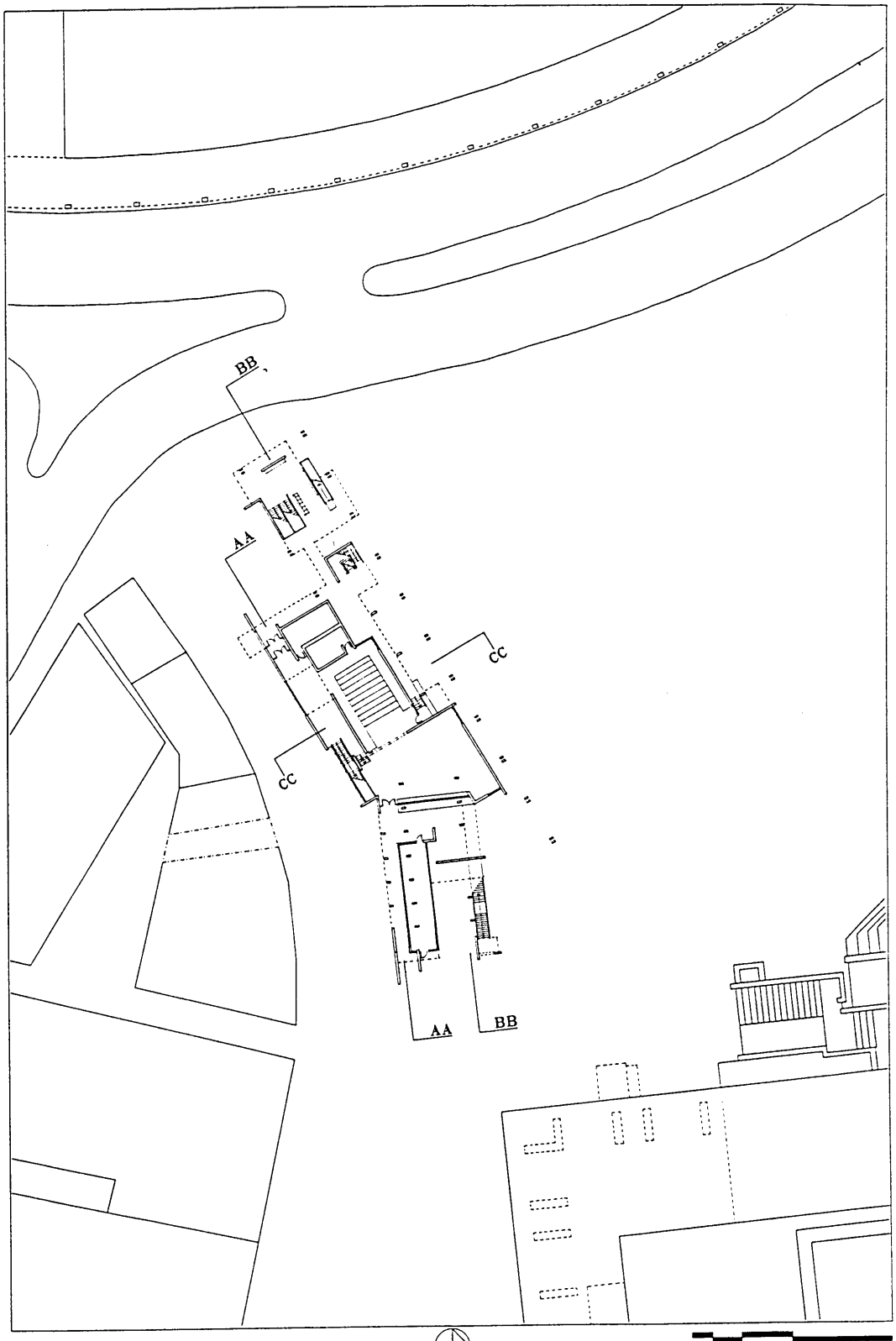


Fig. 32 Ground Plan

Following the above discussions on the multiplicity of roles that the IRC plays (despite a simple program) and the multiplicity of a building as information systems, the design of the building adheres to the following organization.

Building Design Agenda

- Parallel circulation systems. (Fig. 34) Due to the building's orientation along the new pedestrian street Cornhill, interior circulation runs parallel from either end. This also correspond to the duality of a street side and a plaza side to the building. Thus the building has two entrances at both ends. Each circulation path is integrate with building interiors and travels from the ground to all upper levels.

- Floor to floor differentiation. To maximize people interaction, this allows sight communication between floors as well as a specificality to the different levels of working spaces.

Fig. 33 Parallel pathways.

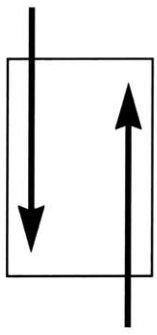
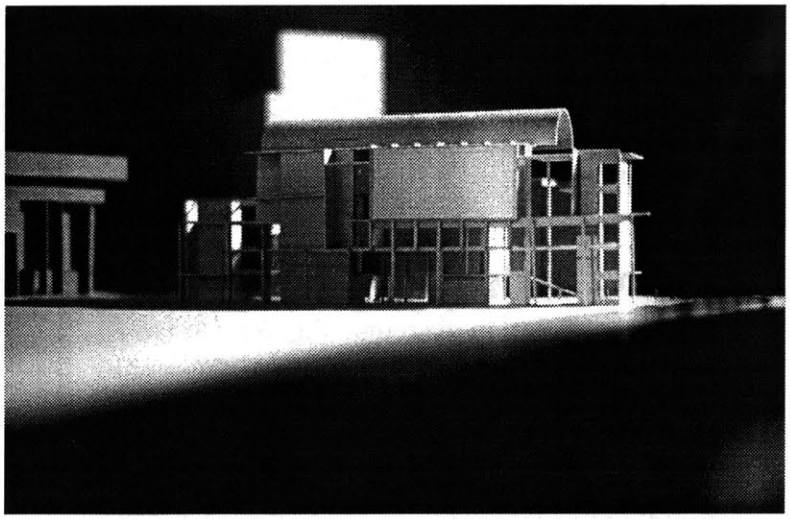


Fig. 34 Diagram, parallel circulation system.



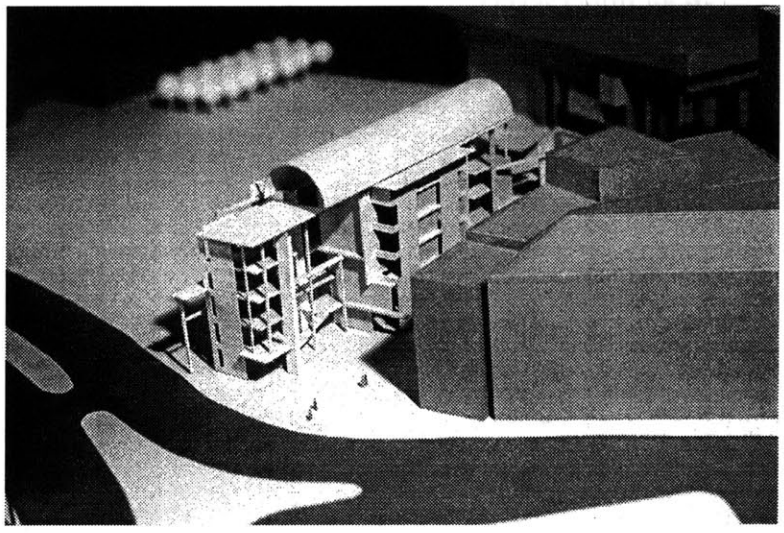


Fig. 35 Model, north elevation facing plaza, shown with electric billboard and pedestrian arcade.

Fig. 36 Model, south elevation facing new Cornhill.

- Vaulted roof: The classical form reinforces the directionality of the path while literally collects all the diverse activities which take place at the IRC under one roof. (Fig. 38)

- Differentiate plaza side and street side facades. Arcaded walks on plaza side and flat building facade on street side at pedestrian level. On plaza side, the facade is equipped with electronic billboard controlled from the gallery cluster directly behind it.(Fig. 35, 36)

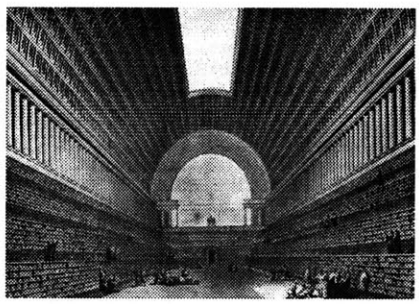


Fig. 37 Boullee's proposed expansion of National Library, 1780.

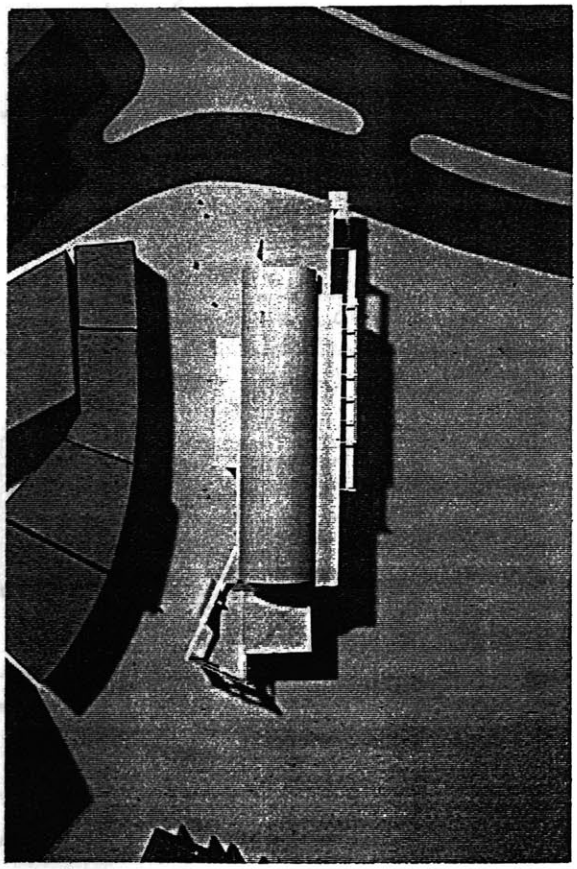


Fig. 38 Model showing roof plan.

Fig. 39 Louis Kahn sketch.

- Diversity of Lighting conditions. Light is the primary mean by which we make spatial definitions. In addition, attention is made because of the special requirement of areas with computer monitors to maintain minimal glare.

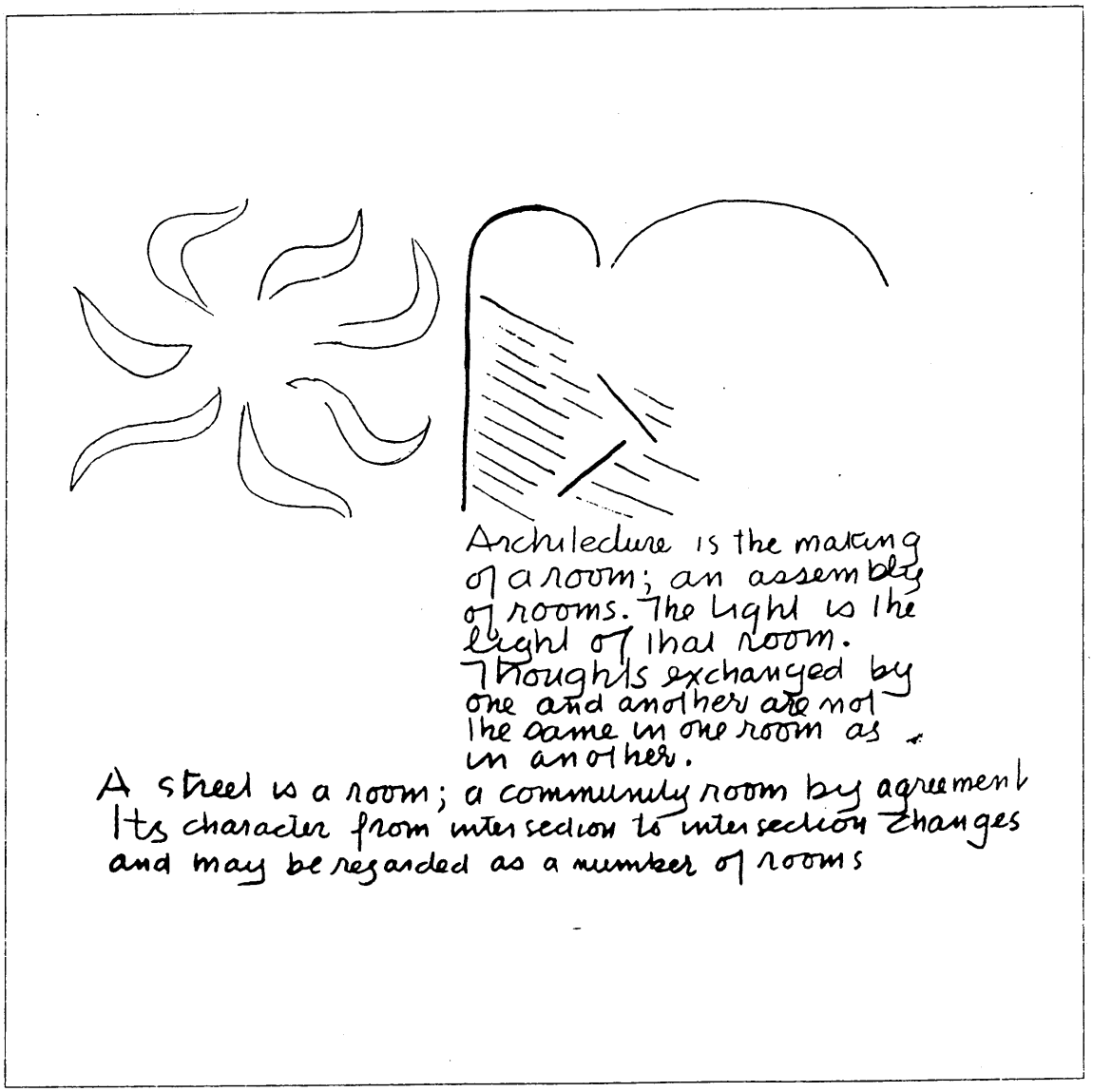
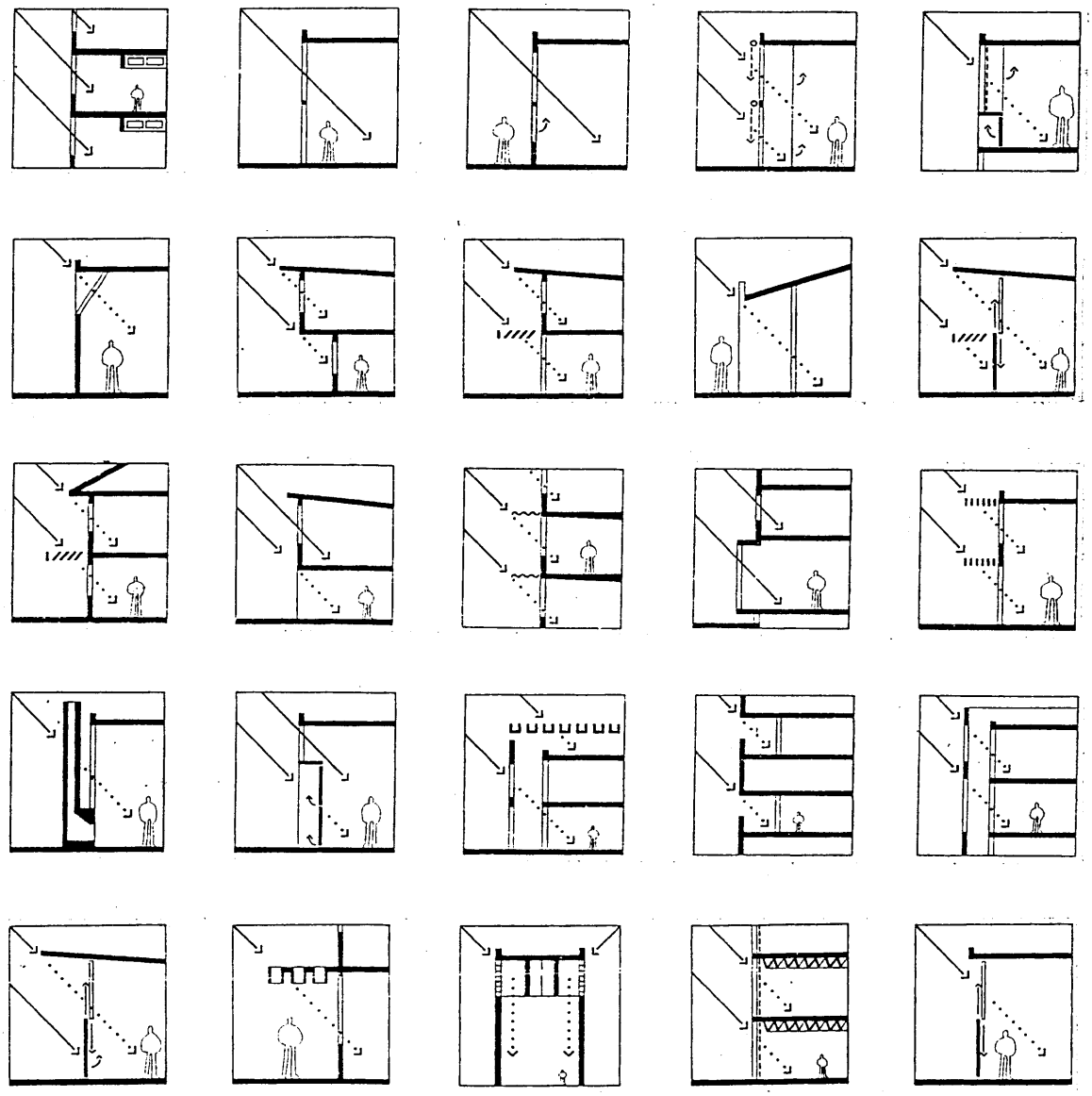


Fig. 40 Analytical studies and Schematic representations of light control and modulation.



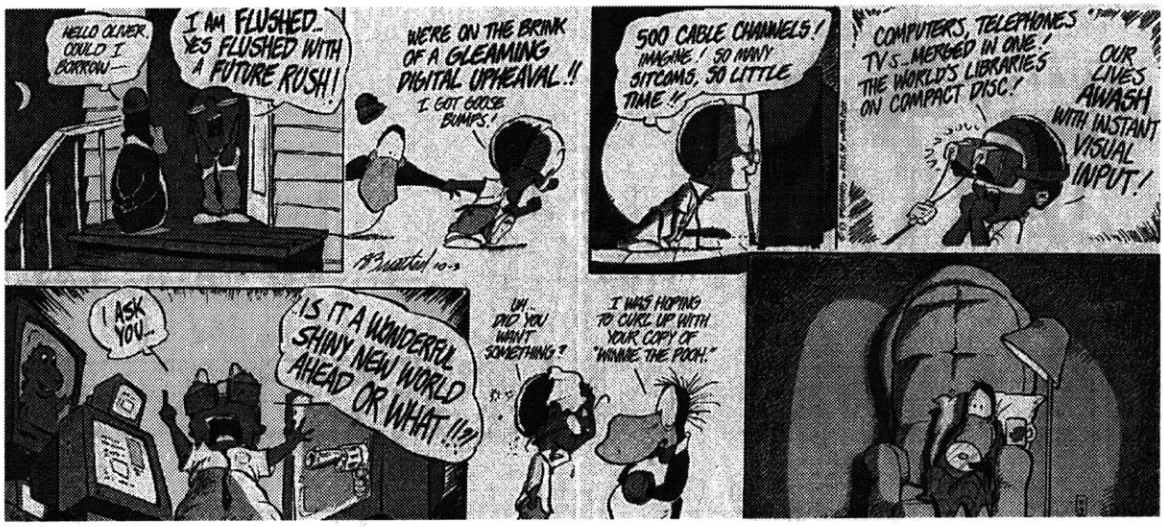


Fig. 41 **Outland** by Berkeley Breathed

Epilogue

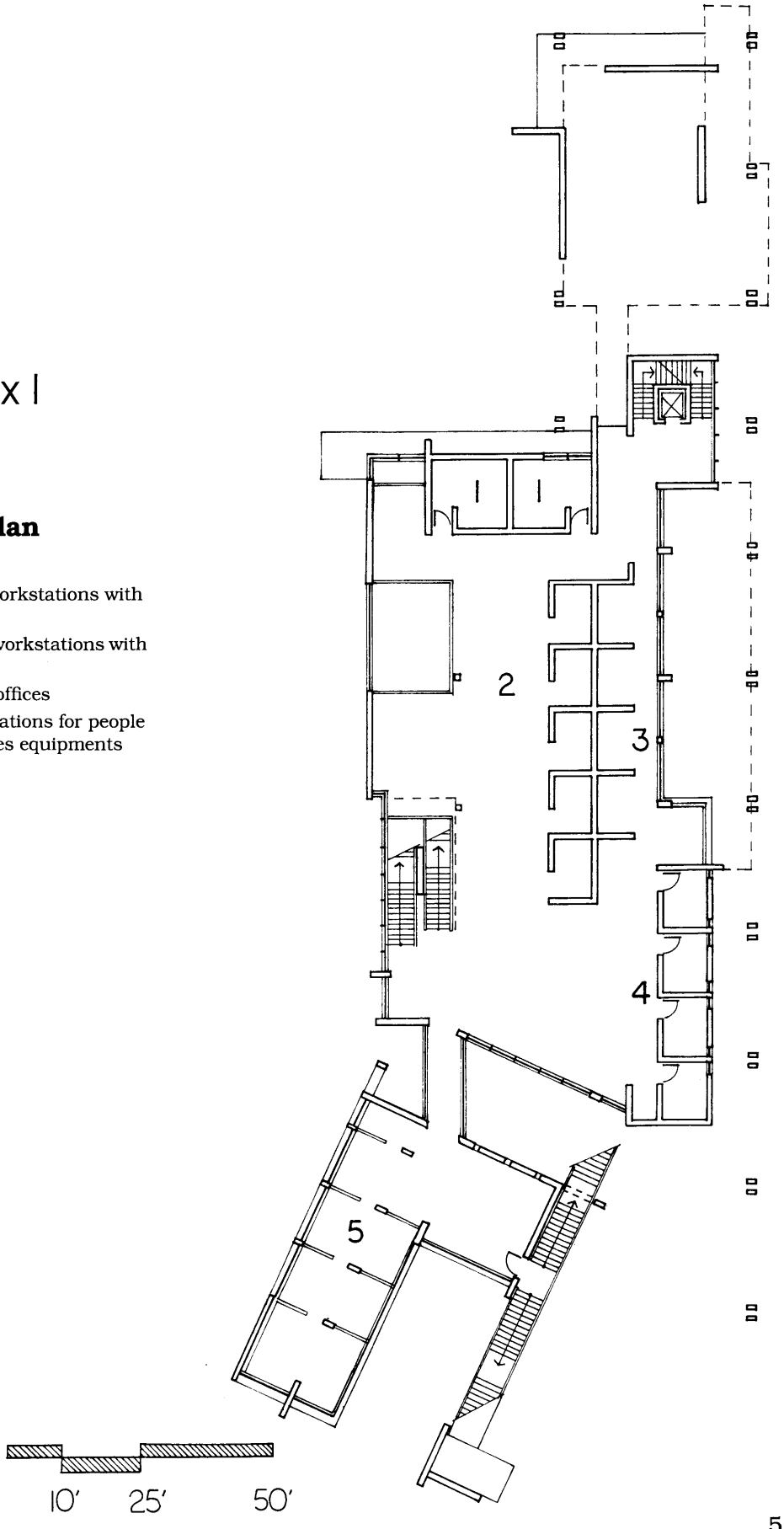
As our society progresses further into the electronic age, we need to look for ways to replenish those intermediate grounds where an informal public life can take place. This thesis explored the nature of the third place, a traditional institution in many cultures for many years, and the new institution established with the aid of computer mediated communications. These are settings and tools with which we can rebuild community and to develop a better awareness of how people should live and work.

The design for the Information Resource Center seeks to make amendments in our social and urban fabrics. It does not make new definition so much as redefine what we have at hand. The creation of the Civic Promenade and pedestrian Cornhill reinforces the already people-orientated and walkability of the city. Meanwhile the building itself represents a coherent civic place with design considerations for people interaction and use and whose primary function is to provide the resources to find our way in the new electronic frontier.

Appendix I

Level 2 Plan

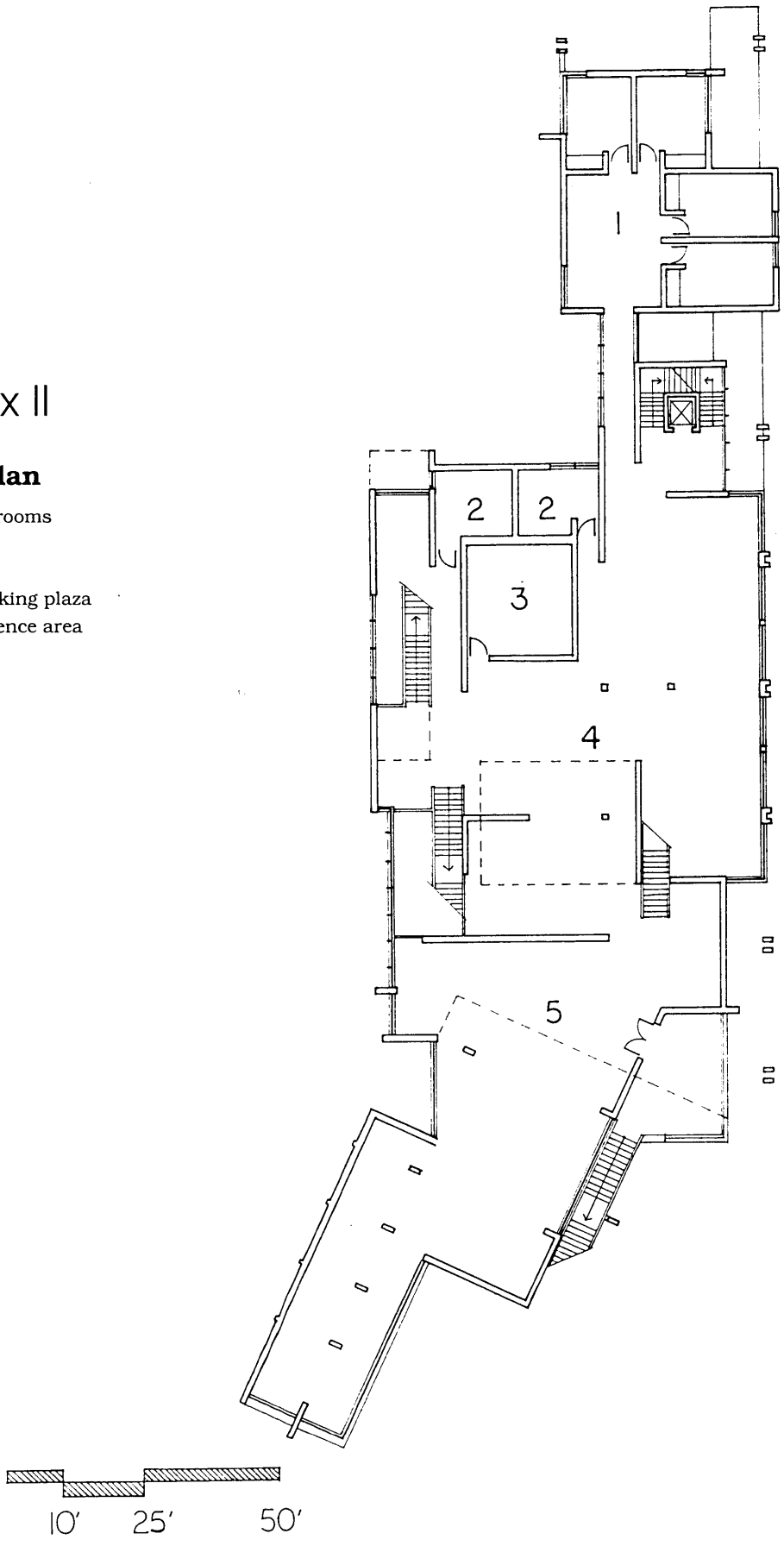
1. W.C.
2. Individual workstations with partitions
3. Partitioned workstations with view of plaza
4. Consultant offices
5. "Docking" stations for people with portables equipments



Appendix II

Level 3 Plan

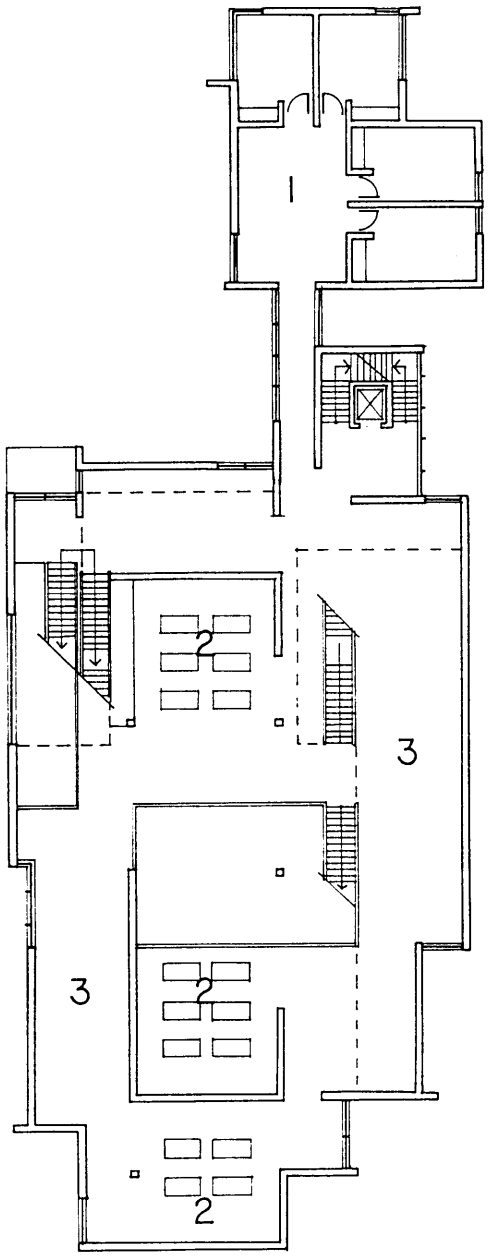
1. Conference rooms
2. W.C.
3. Kitchen
4. Cafe overlooking plaza
5. Lobby/reference area

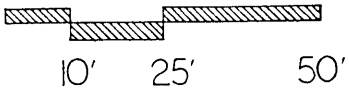


Appendix III

Level 4 Plan

1. Classrooms
2. Semi-enclosed group cluster with large shared screen
3. Linearly arranged cluster gallery

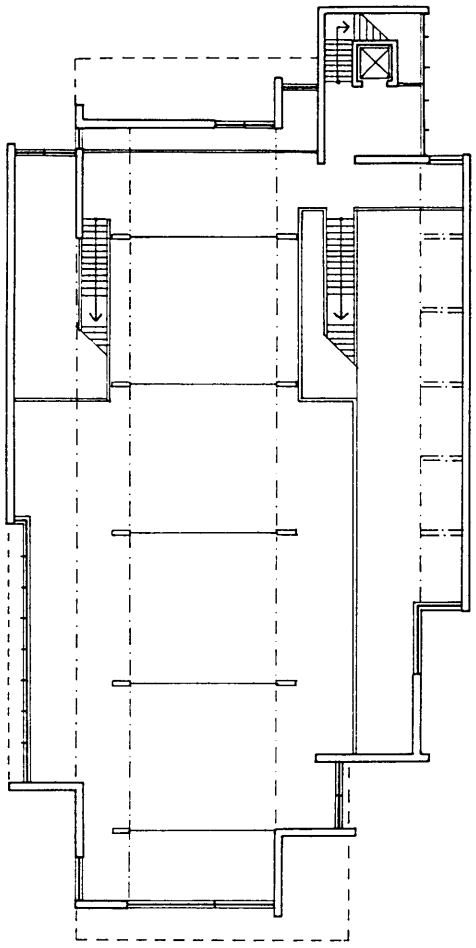


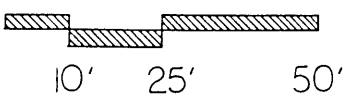


Appendix IV

Level 5 Plan

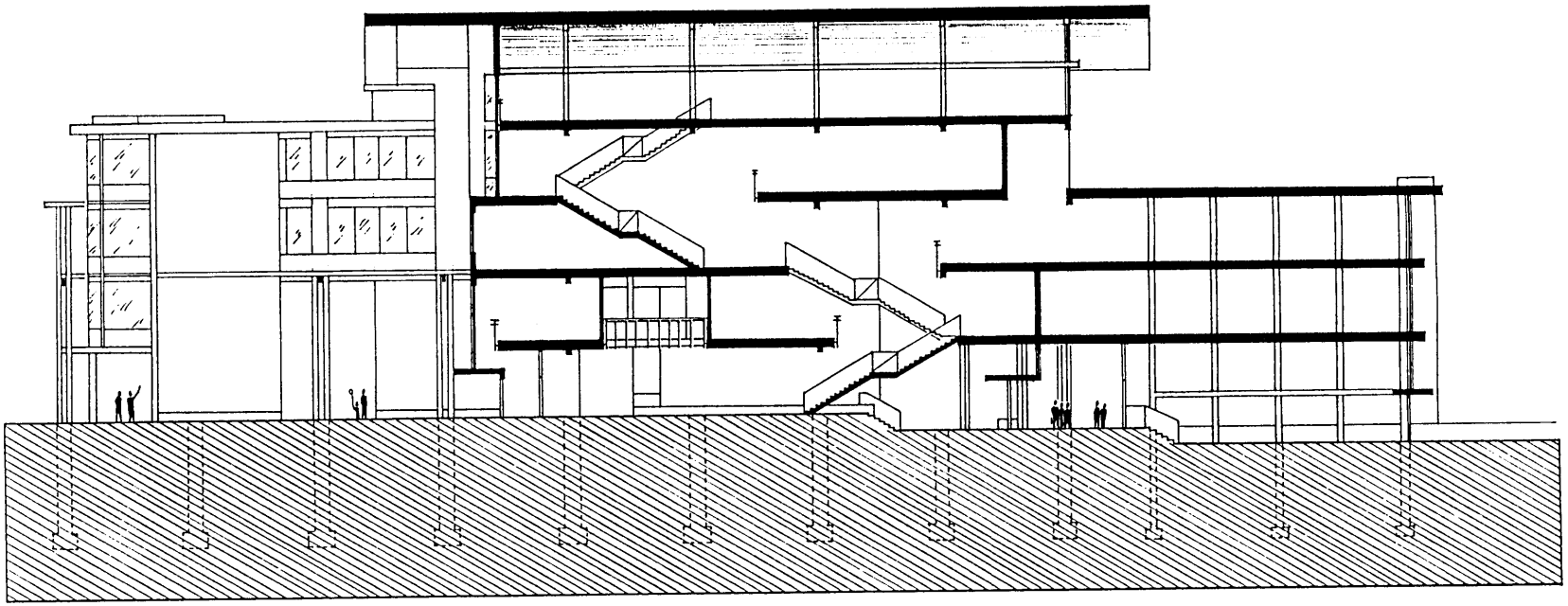
Naturally lit cluster under barrel-vault roof with view in the direction of Fanueil Hall and the State House.





Appendix V

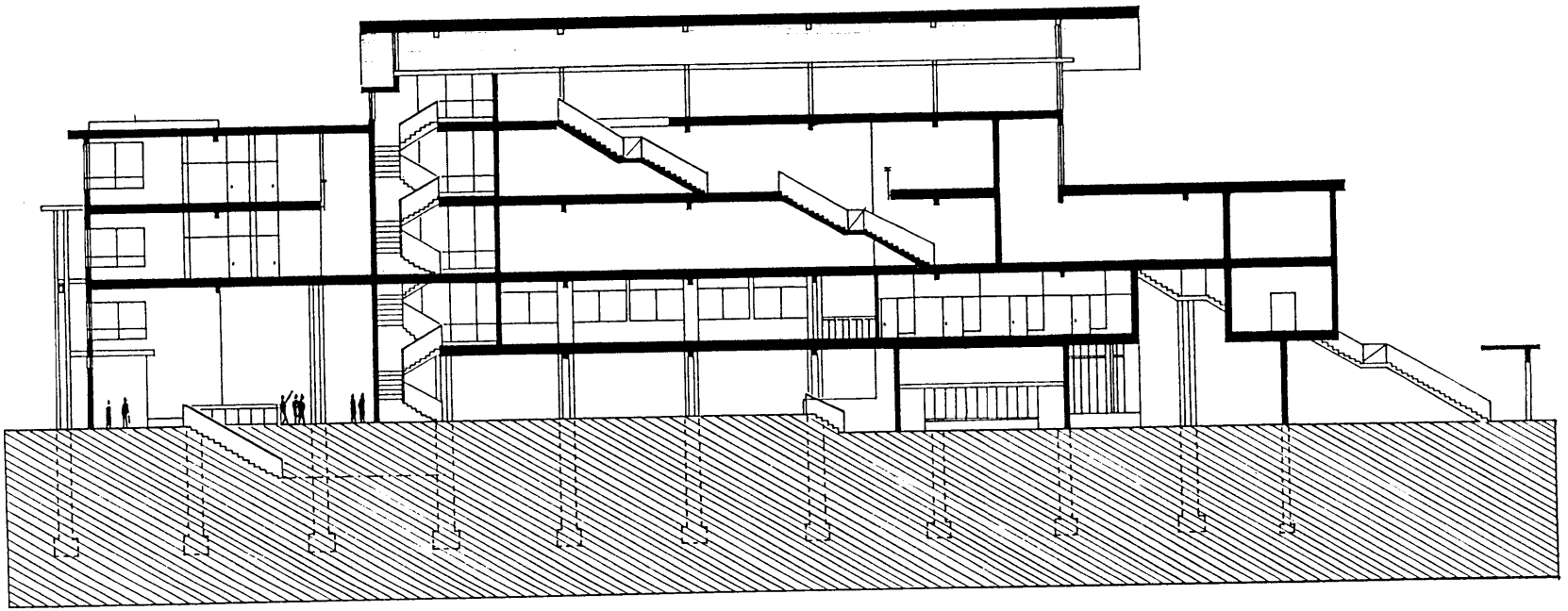
Section AA



Appendix VI

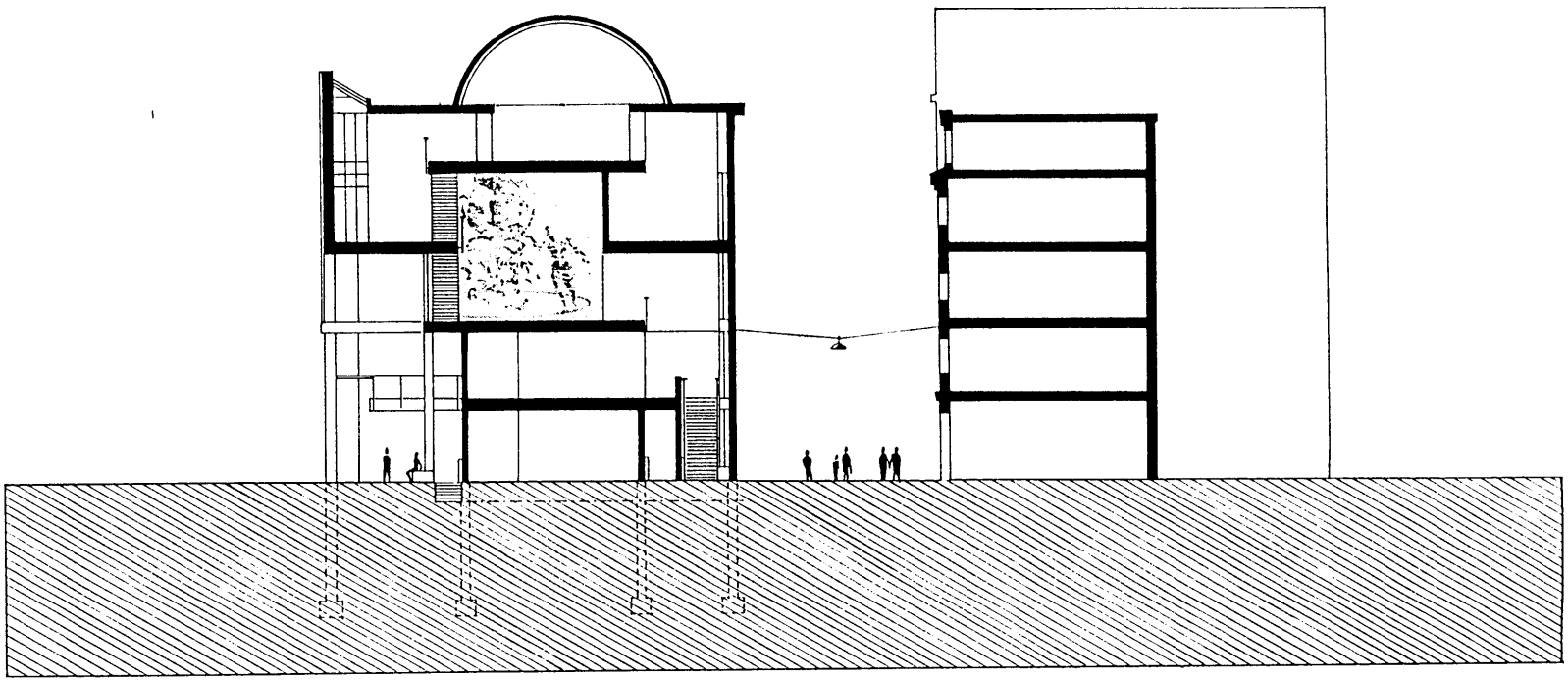
Section BB

10' 25' 50'



Appendix VII

Section CC



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1. Progressive Architecture, March 1994, p6.
2. Places, Vol 5, #1, p25.
3. Center, Vol 4, p84.
4. Information Art, p16.
5. Wired, December 1993, p65.
8. Rotch Visual Collections
9. Government Center-Boston, p7.
10. RVC
12. Boston, a Topographical History, p209.
14. Always Something Doing, p14.
15. Image of the City, p175.
14. Always Something Doing, p142.
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30. City Signs & Lights, p58.
31. City Signs & Lights, p50.
33. Domus, October 1989, p29.
37. Visionary Architects, p62.
39. Louis Kahn, Light & Space, p186.
40. Louis Kahn, Light & Space, p187-189.
40. Boston Sunday Globe, October 3, 1993.

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