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## The real, the spectacle, and the in-between: architecture as a stage for reality

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the real, the spectacle, and the in-between  
architecture as a stage for reality

Chelsea Adelson  
Master of Architecture  
School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation  
Roger Williams University



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Chelsea Adelson  
Master of Architecture

Date

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Andrew Cohen  
Thesis Advisor

Date

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Date



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*A drama is:*

**“a state, situation, or series of events involving an interesting or intense conflict of forces”**

**“an exciting, emotional, or unexpected series of events or set of circumstances”**

*...reality is a force*

*...the spectacle is a force*

**A drama is a state, situation, or series of events involving an interesting or intense conflict of reality and the spectacle.**



In today's media based society, we frequently lose sight of the reality of our lives. The collective "we" share a general knowledge of the state of affairs in the world, provided through the mass media. Our encounters occur more and more frequently in cyber space instead of through face to face interaction. We are more familiar with nonplaces than we are with our tactile surroundings. The power of chance encounter is diminished in the more anonymous world. Dubord states that the spectacle is "a social relation among people, mediated by images." Architecture should create real interactions that permeate the image based interaction.

But can architecture be based solely in reality?



Reality, at its core, is what exists without any further implications. It is the basis of everything. An apple is an apple, and nothing more. A building is a building; the structure is tectonic. The street is a place for circulation. Reality alone is an acceptance of what is. The buildings have presence, but are impassive.

At the other end of the spectrum is the world of the spectacle. In this world, everything runs through a set of filters, and gets lost in the imagery and technology. Lost in appearance, life becomes as mundane as a straightforward reality.

The world is more complex. The spectacle, at its roots, is a reaction to reality. It is their cohesion that creates experience. It is the celebration of an image in a real setting that creates interaction. The result is a more complex: where reality is understood by the images, and the spectacle is understood through the real. Everyday life becomes the playground in which the spectacle and the real meet.



**“The result of a reflection on reality is the reflection of another reality through a filter of experiences, potentials, needs and moods”<sup>1</sup>**

*...theater is a reflection*

**The result of a performance on reality is the reflection of another reality through a filter of experiences, potentials, needs and moods.**

---

<sup>1</sup> *Metapolis dictionary of advanced architecture: city, technology and society in the information age*, (Barcelona: ACTAR, 2003), 511.



The goal of the project is to explore the space in between as a place of activity. The project will compare the spectacle and reality through a theater and public plaza near Chinatown and the theater district of Boston. The theater is accompanied by a small acting school that uses both an interior venue and the plaza as stages. The theater is focused on the awareness of reality through the spectacle of performance while the public plaza can “turn the artificiality of everyday situations into a theatrical situation” and bring life to the streets.<sup>1</sup> Everyday life is put on display.

---

<sup>1</sup> Brenner, Klaus theo. *Stadttheater urban theatre: Manifesto for a style-free architecture* (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1994), 97.



“All the World’s a Stage”

# Origins of Theater

---

The concept of performance originated in the ancient civilizations. Primitive cultures frequently used dance as part of their communication. The Egyptians held performances for religious ceremonies and feasts. They took the form of ritual dances, grand processions, and sacrifices. Sometimes dances and reenactments were performed on wooden platforms. However, they had no set playhouse. These earliest performances were held in public squares and temple forecourts. They were the places within the city that could hold the largest groups of people.

However, it was the Greeks who first developed the theater and turned performance into an art. The earliest Greek theaters were most likely used for contests and ceremonies. They comprised of an orchestra and a series of stepped tiers in concentric circular sections allowing the audience to have a strong sightline to the actors.

The original chants took on a form of poetic expression, which turned into dialogue. The social problems of the times found their way into the plot of the dramas. Performances evolved to bring the audience emotionally into the drama.

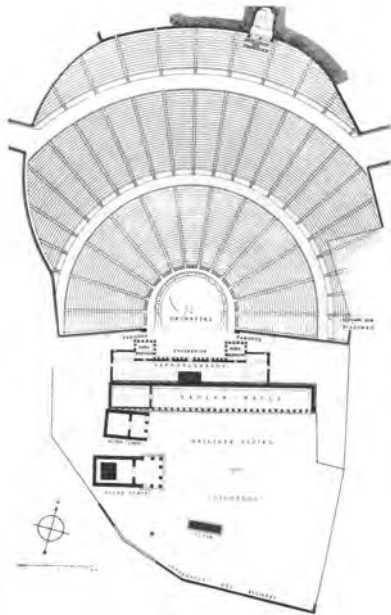
The infusion of the Hellenistic culture with the Greek resulted in a more secondary role of the chorus, and action took on a greater role than the spoken word.

The Romans reached a new level of prosperity that allowed for the spectacularization of the theater. Their theaters took on a monumental quality. The back wall of the stage was an elaborate scaenae frequently described as majestic, and the theater became a building of its own.<sup>1</sup>

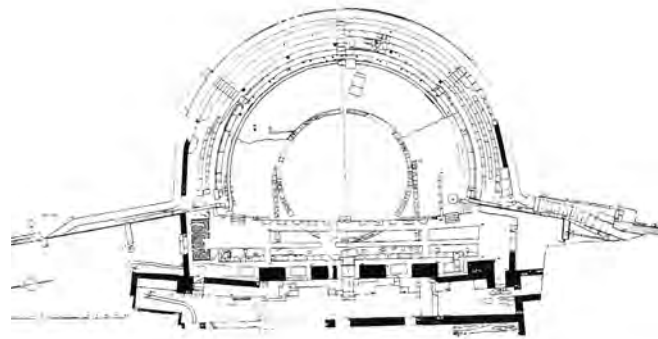
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1 Athanasopoulos, Christos G., *Contemporary Theater Evolution and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983), 15-40.

## Semicircular Amphitheater

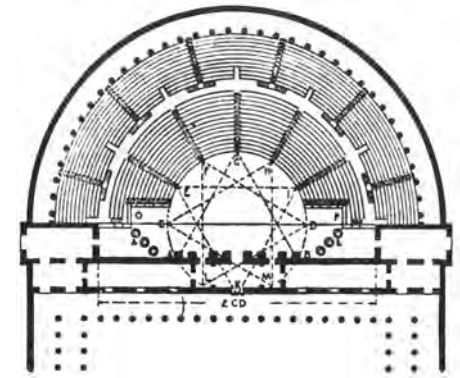


Proscenium as predominant for action;  
Orchestra for chorus  
Scenic presentation



5,000 spectators

Theater as a building  
Theater as Entertainment  
Stage for performance; orchestra for seating



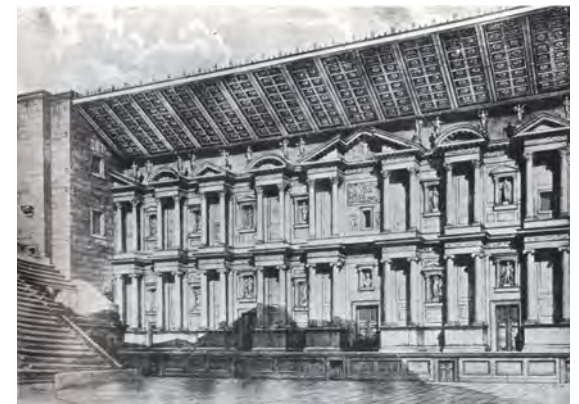
7,000 spectators



Theater of Dionysus  
Greece  
15th century B.C.



Theater of Delphi  
Greece  
4th century B.C.

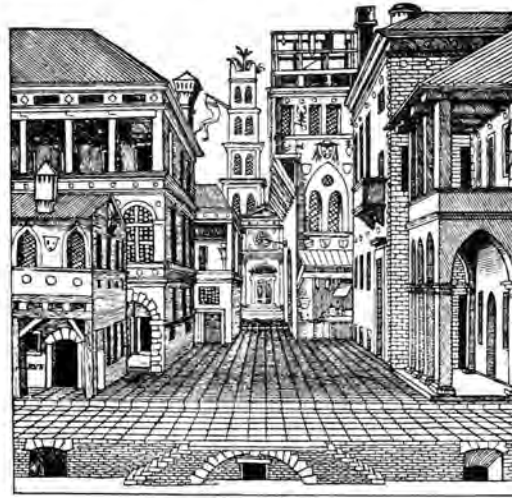


Theater of Aspendus  
Rome  
155 A.D.

# The Renaissance Theater



The Tragic Scene

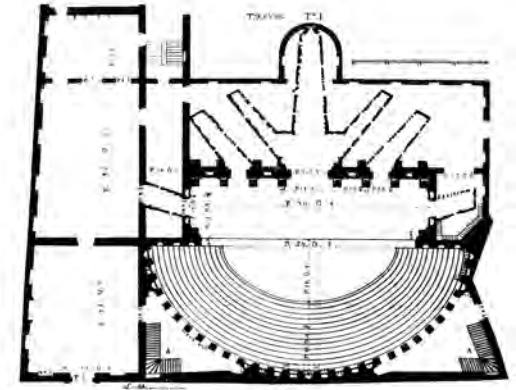
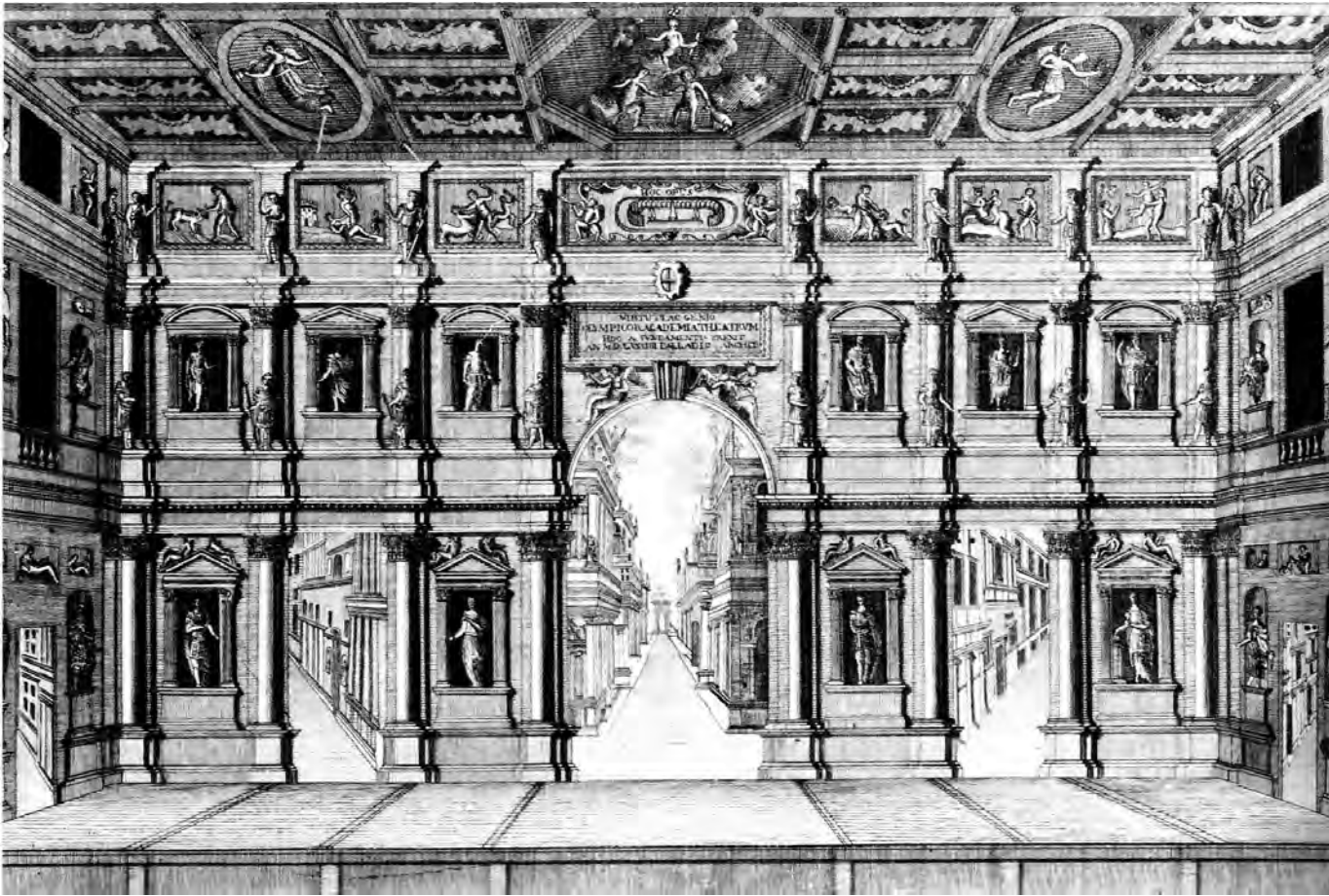


The Comic Scene



The Satyric Scene

During the Renaissance, scenery took on a new role in theater. Sebastian Serlio depicted the three types of scenes in the form of streets. The architecture of each scene is different and set the stage for the different types of activities that would take place in each. For example, the classical, tragic street is reserved for state and public rituals while the residential street of comedy is reserved for the activity of the merchants. The scenes were intended to act as the backdrop to create a greater reality for the different scenes performed on stage.<sup>1</sup>



In 1580 Palladio incorporated the streets in perspective into the construction of the stage for the Teatro Olimpico, changing the nature of the theater. He also placed the seating along a semielliptical form to maximize visibility of the stage.

“The building of the streets inside the theater brought the space of the real into the domain of the typical, the memory of the one allowing the observation and perhaps critique of the other”<sup>1</sup>

1 Athanasopoulos, *Contemporary Theater Evolution*, 58-60.

# The Elizabethan Theater

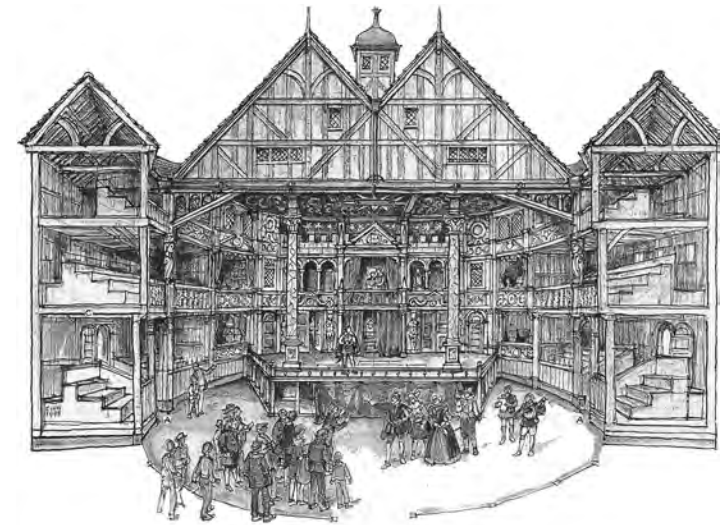
Prior to the succession of Queen Elizabeth I, theatrical performances in England were limited to booth performances. The actors had to rely on their words to entice spectators to stop and watch, and to carry them into the plot. Shakespeare's words are the driving force of the plays, not the way the action is played out on stage.

Once Elizabeth became queen, English theater reached the same level of distinction as the Greek. The theater as a building type formed quickly, and was experimental in nature. The simple construction was intended to maximize the potential audience.

The theaters were round, octagonal, or square with thatched roofs. The cheapest locations to watch the performance were standing in the yard. More expensive seats were in the tiers surrounding the theater. The stage had a small backstage area for the actors, and minimal scenery was used.

The Elizabethan theater was small and tight, standing as many people as close to the actors as was safe. This tightness promoted a closer connection between the actors and the spectators.

The Elizabethan theater promoted audience interaction with the play by evoking emotion through the spoken word. The audience members were gathered tightly together almost fully around the stage. Every audience member had a different sightline to the actors, and every member was aware of their fellow audience members, next to, across from, and behind.<sup>1</sup>



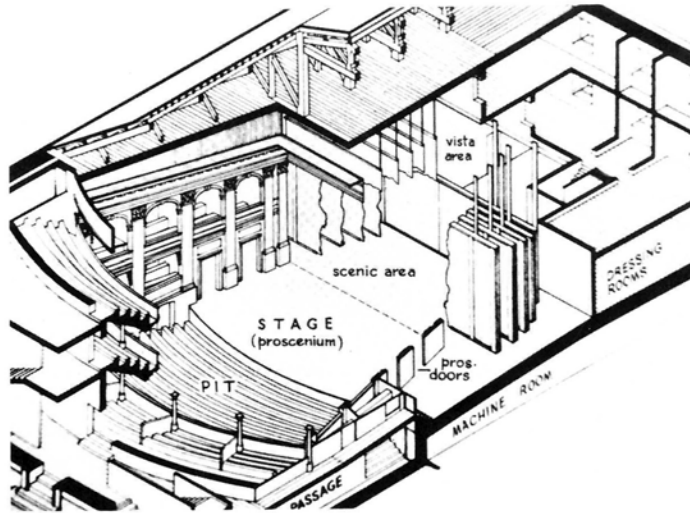
The Globe Theater



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<sup>1</sup> Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater Evolution*, 64-67.

# The Baroque Theater

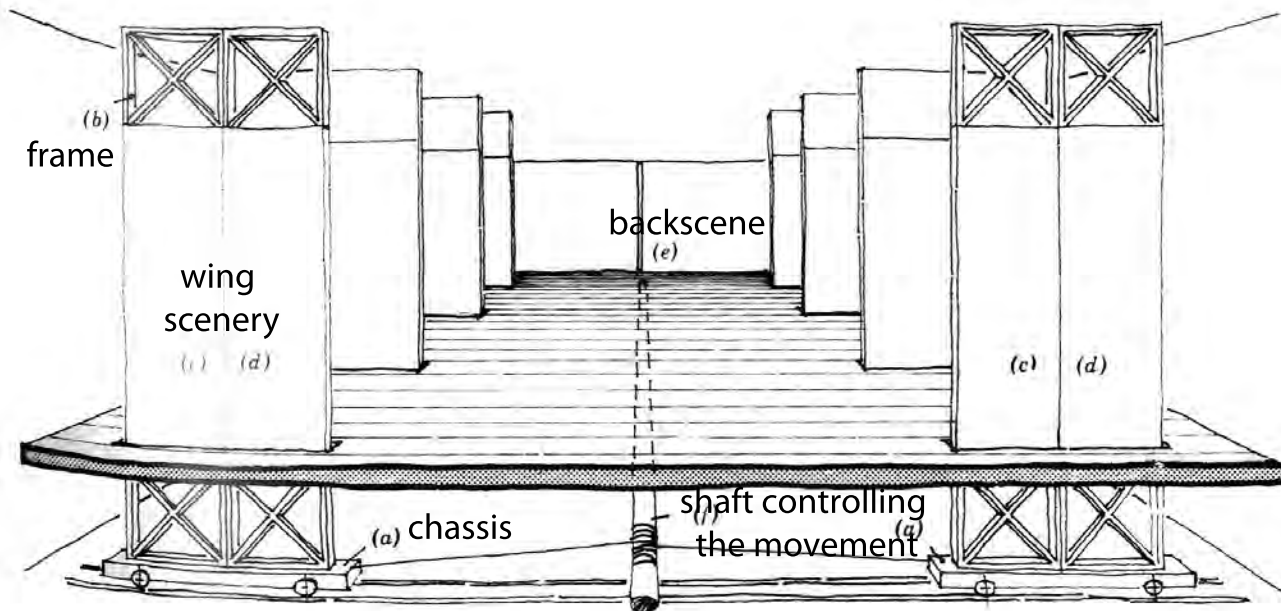


Drury Lane Theater

The baroque period was a transition period during which theater was brought closer to the public. The activity of going to the theater became even more of an experience. There was a search to increase the capacity of the theater. The seating extended further back and became wider. Similarly the size of the stage grew, so the back of the stage was significantly further from the audience.

In dealing with these changes, the Italian theater was about creating spectacular scenery that could be changed quickly and efficiently. The stage was made of three parts: the side wings, the backscene, and the drop curtains. The stage had the ability to transport the audience into different scenes.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater Evolution*, 72.



## Contemporary Theaters

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, theaters have continued to evolve from the Elizabethan round theaters and the Italian spectacular theaters to be more technically sound and use oriented. At the time, theater was an escape from reality. The world was romanticized, and the characters had to be emotionally approachable.

Following the period of romanticism, the focus shifted back to the world of the real. It was about connecting to the issues of the day, not hiding from them. To some extent, real objects can help set the scene, but ultimately the stage scenery is an illusion.

During the industrial revolution, production technology greatly improved, allowing better control over lighting, scenery, and acoustics. The use of the stage curtain emphasized the disconnect between actors and their audience. Theaters became almost generic, and fell into decline.

The twentieth century found itself experimenting with theaters. While the theater was headed in the direction of creating the biggest spectacle with large scale proscenium theaters and deep stages, there were theater theorists, directors, and writers who wanted a different relationship between the audience and the actor. People such as Brecht, Shaw and O'Neil had a desire for the written word to be the most important part of the performance and the best way to connect to the audience. A theater building, "so constructed as to respond to the imaginative faculty, can become in and of itself a field of action and a force that activates the imagination of the playwright, the director, and the spectator" (pg 143 contemporary theater)

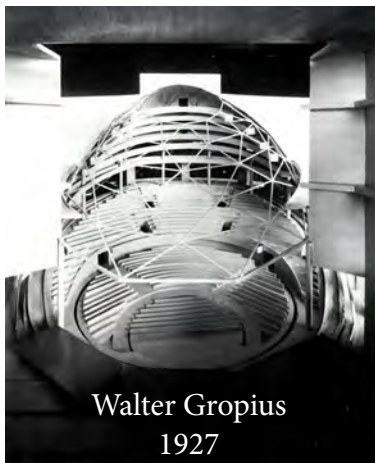
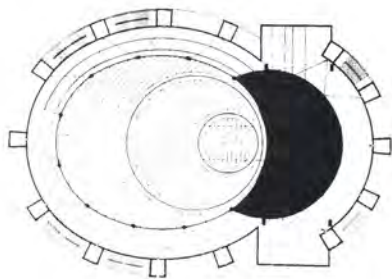
Piscator, Meyerhold, and Brecht developed the idea of the "forum theater" where the theater becomes a forum for discussing political ideas. The performance is a reflection of reality, and the audience is asked to evaluate the scenes. To force the audience to think critically, Brecht rearranged the scenes so as to abruptly alter the flow, making the audience aware that the performance is not reality, or an ideal form of reality. He used the alienation effect where actors would talk to the audience, break out in song in the middle of the drama, and say stage directions outloud. He would also use the architecture to create an awareness of reality through methods such as harsh lighting. Their explorations continued with the developments of the "spect-actor" where spectators can intervene and take part in the drama. The audience must choose how scenarios play out.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater Evolution*, 140-215.

### The Totaltheater Flexibility and adaptability

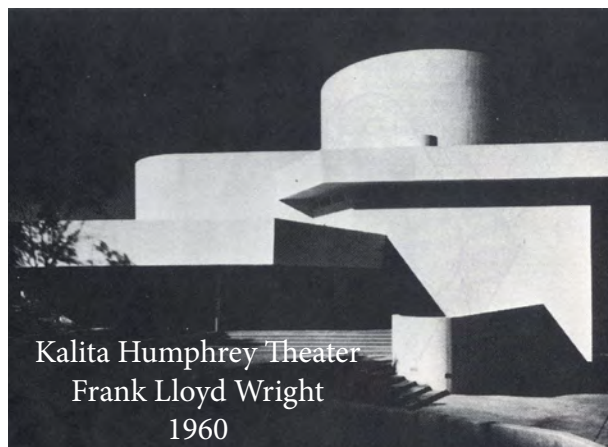
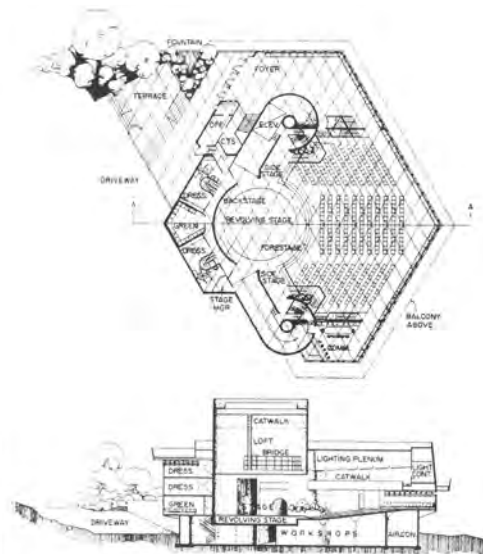
It functions like a machine. The theater can adapt to three basic stage types: the central area; Greek proscenium; and the deep stage. It is intended to be transformable during performances so as to incorporate the entire building in the performance and to surprise the audience.



Walter Gropius  
1927

### Open Stage Theater Importance of the Spoken Word

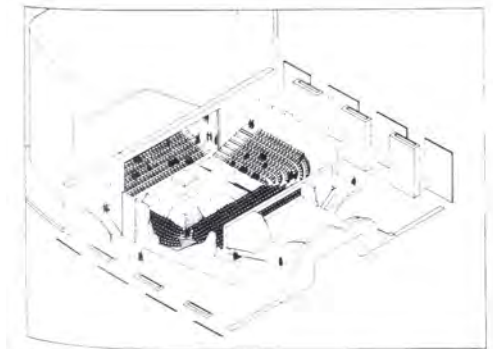
There is no frame for the stage, and it is open to the audience on three sides. There is limited space for any sort of scenery and has room for only a small group of performers.



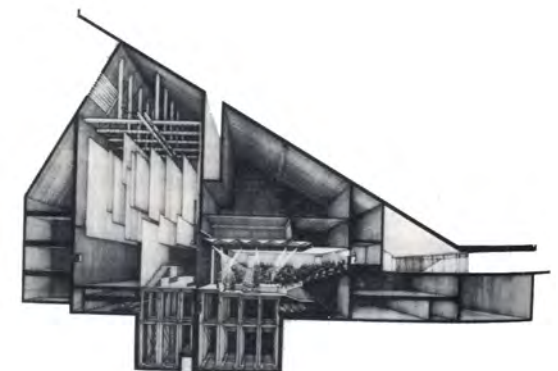
Kalita Humphrey Theater  
Frank Lloyd Wright  
1960

### Experimental Theater Adaptable to different types of stages

The theater works as a building if it aids in the creation of a relationship between the actor and the spectator. The best way for a theater to be adaptable is through mechanization that allows it to change smoothly and efficiently. The theater seating rotates around the stage to create a proscenium arrangement, an open stage arrangement, and a theater in the round.



Theater in the round



George Izenour



**“A scene is made up of a series of layers. All of them independent yet simultaneous. They evolve individually, but coexist on stage. Its layers: textual, visual, musical, choreographic, cardiac, the audience. Layers that are syntonized in the mind of the spectator.”<sup>1</sup>**

*...the actor controls the scene*

*...the stage controls the scene*

*...the spectator controls the scene*

The spectator is the actor.

The architecture is an actor.

---

1 *Metapolis dictionary of advanced architecture*: 538.

# Urban Space as a Stage

Public space was the original stage. Plazas, courts, and avenues were the site of rituals, parades, and ceremonies. Public squares served as community gathering points because they were the largest assembly spaces. They served a double function and were also part of the necessary activity of daily life. They were home to markets and trade.

Over time, public plazas gave way to arenas, courts, and theaters. However, the activities of daily life remain as vibrant as ever.

More recently, there has been a growing desire to revitalize public space and renew the life of the streets. The trend in modern theater is one that “seeks a political militant, a theater that moves out of its traditional space in search of its public in the public’s own surroundings- the factory, the school, the street.” Urban space is continually a stage for the world.<sup>1</sup>



---

1 Athanasopulos, *Contemporary Theater Evolution*, xi.



# Urban Space as a Stage

## Revitalized



[http://www.neighborhoodnotes.com/news/2010/08/cyanpdx\\_20minute\\_lifestyle\\_in\\_portlands\\_university\\_district/](http://www.neighborhoodnotes.com/news/2010/08/cyanpdx_20minute_lifestyle_in_portlands_university_district/)



<http://www.djc.com/blogs/SeattleScape/2008/10/10/boise-portland-make-apa-2008-great-places/>



[http://www.gerrysfineirishart.com/gallery2/d/801-3/temple\\_bar.jpg](http://www.gerrysfineirishart.com/gallery2/d/801-3/temple_bar.jpg)



[http://www.romanhomes.com/your\\_roman\\_vacation/quarters/navona-quarter.htm](http://www.romanhomes.com/your_roman_vacation/quarters/navona-quarter.htm)



<http://www.picturenation.co.uk/view/info/194846/covent-garden-london>



<http://www.mrld.net/blog/index.php?paged=4>



**“As in the theatre, scenic calculation in the arrangement of mass, space, colour, light and material makes urban architecture comprehensible to onlookers (a condition for communication between individuals), but also extends it into a perceptual experience that creates the theatrical framework necessary for public life and encourages a kind of identification with the place that goes beyond the individual.”<sup>1</sup>**

*...the staging controls the scene*

*...the staging transcends theatricality and returns to reality*

---

1 Brenner, Klaus theo. *Stadttheater urban theatre*, 95.

“Urban architectural space, to the extent we see it as public, is the set upon which social life is played out”





## “All the world’s a stage”

Scenes are played out in all aspects of life. Sometimes they are quick interactions on the street corner, and sometimes they are elaborate performances in opera houses. They occur in the most mundane places, and the most dramatized.

Interactions can occur in a variety of ways. There is person to person interaction where people are engaged face to face with no mediator. Then there is the machine to person interaction. Transactions and interactions are filtered through the machine. There are also third party observers that bear witness to unscripted events from afar. They can be sitting and watching the activities of a street or watching people move from place to place. A fourth variation is the observer to a scripted event. The observer’s reactions are determined through how the scripted event is staged.



Person to Person

<http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2008/12/05-01.html>



Person to Machine

<http://en.beijing2008.cn/news/olympiccities/shanghai/n214201128.shtml>



Observer from afar

[http://www.cclapcenter.com/2009/01/photo\\_of\\_the\\_day\\_people\\_on\\_the.html](http://www.cclapcenter.com/2009/01/photo_of_the_day_people_on_the.html)



Observer to a Scripted Event

<http://thesevenpillars.blogspot.com/2009/05/romeo-juliet.html>

# Program

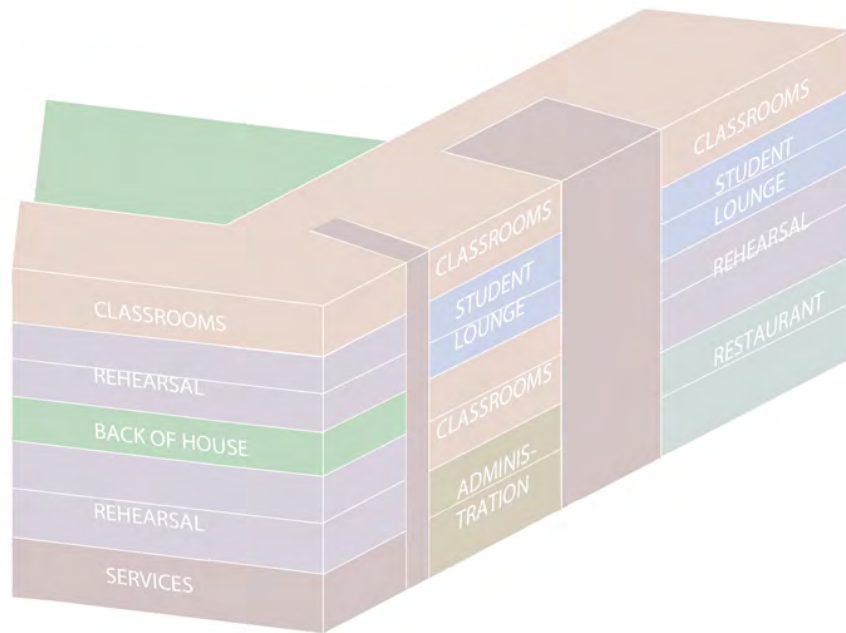
The program will explore the creation of different types of scenes, everyday and staged, through an addition to the performing arts program at Emerson College. It will add classrooms and rehearsal space, as well as a new experimental theater, and a student lounge with views to the city. It will also incorporate a public restaurant that caters to both the daily life of Washington Street and can be part of the experience of going to the theater.

Classrooms and the activity of going to class provide a unique set of scenes that provides both direct interaction between students and indirect interaction where the students can be actors and spectators. Similarly, rehearsal spaces are large spaces that can be broken into smaller group spaces.

The theater is a small experimental theater, focused on the relationship between actor and audience. The viewing paths from each seat will encompass the staging area and another section of audience, so as to never forget that the experience is staged. The theater should, at times, be able to open out to the building, creating a larger stage and turning the entire building into a theatrical performance.

The path of travel takes on as much importance as the activity spaces themselves, from the entry sequence to the theater to traveling up to the classrooms and rehearsal spaces. They become an internal, unscripted stage.

A small public plaza off Washington Street is the welcoming point for visitors and is intended as a celebration of everyday life. It is a stage without a script and with just enough scenery to promote activity. It places on display the acts of pausing and eating lunch, of walking through the city, and of chance interaction between individuals. The plaza is flexible in nature, and visual connections between the plaza and the different programs within the building will help to create interest. The plaza becomes the audience while the interior spaces become the backdrop.



<b>Performance</b>	<b>12,500 sq ft</b>
Experimental theater	3000 sq ft
Lobby/ circulation	5000 sq ft
Bar	350 sq ft
Box Office	100 sq ft
Back of House	4000 sq ft
Dressing rooms (communal)	4 at 300 sq ft
Dressing rooms (private)	4 at 100 sq ft
Costume shop	300 sq ft
Props	300 sq ft
Green room	400 sq ft
Offices	1000 sq ft

<b>Rehearsal/ Learning</b>	<b>20,200 sq ft</b>
Classrooms/ group rooms	8 at 800 sq ft
Private Practice Rooms	4 at 500 sq ft
Rehearsal	2 at 5200 sq ft
Double height space	1600 sq ft
Second story	1800 sq ft
Dressing rooms	2 at 400 sq ft
storage	1000 sq ft
Rehearsal	1400 sq ft

<b>Gathering</b>	<b>9,800 sq ft</b>
Lobby	2500 sq ft
Student Lounge	5000 sq ft
Restaurant	4000 sq ft
kitchen	400 sq ft
bathrooms	2 at 200 sq ft

<b>Services</b>	<b>2,600 sq ft</b>
Bathrooms	2 per floor at 200 sq ft
Administration	400 sq ft

<b>Circulation</b>	<b>5,600 sq ft</b>
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**50,700 sq ft**

<b>Plaza</b>	<b>11,000 sq ft</b>
Outdoor seating	2500 sq ft



# Washington Street and Downtown Crossing

Boston, Massachusetts

A New Urban Stage

# Site

Latitude: 42.4

Longitude: -71.0

The site is located in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. Boston is a major seaport on the Atlantic Ocean and is a historical, commercial, industrial, and cultural center of New England. Starting as a small town on the 750 acre Shawmut Peninsula, Boston has continually expanded its borders and absorbed neighboring towns. Today, the city covers 47 square miles. Through the nature of its development, most of Boston is not on a grid but made up of narrow, winding roads.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Kennedy, Lawrence W. "Boston," *Encyclopedia Americana* 4. (Danbury: Scholastic Library Publishing Inc., 2004): 301.





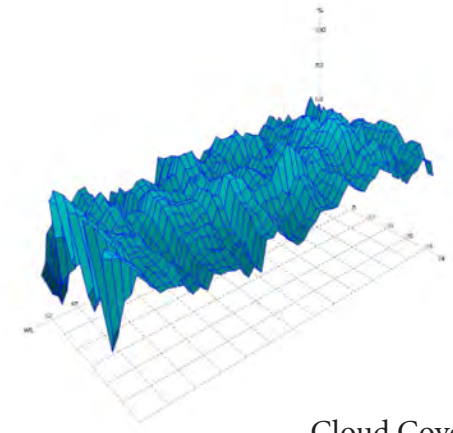
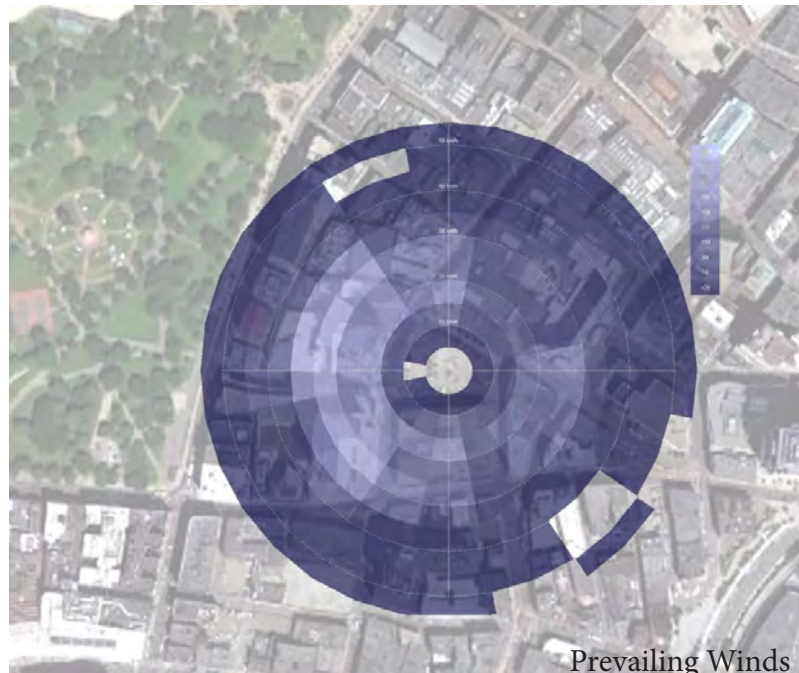
# Climate

The city of Boston experiences typical New England weather. It experiences warm summers and cold, windy winters. The average winter temperature is 29.9°F, and the average summer temperature is 73.7°F. The city experiences wind mostly from the west, but it also gets wind off the ocean.<sup>1</sup>

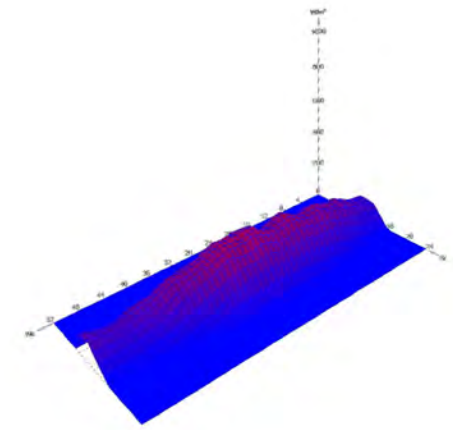
The climate is not ideal for year round exterior spaces, but there is plenty of sun to warm up a plaza on Washington Street in the winter.

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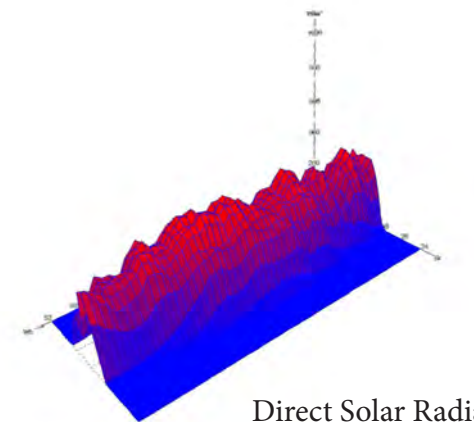
<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, *Encyclopedia Americana*, 301.



Cloud Coverage

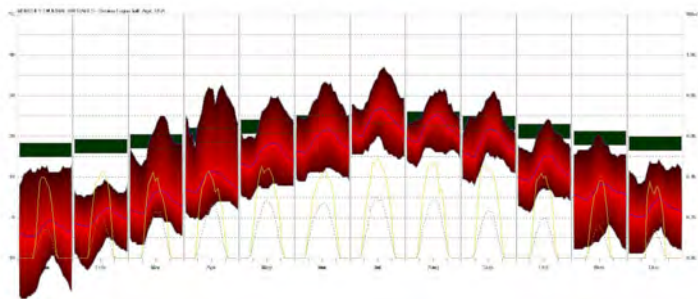
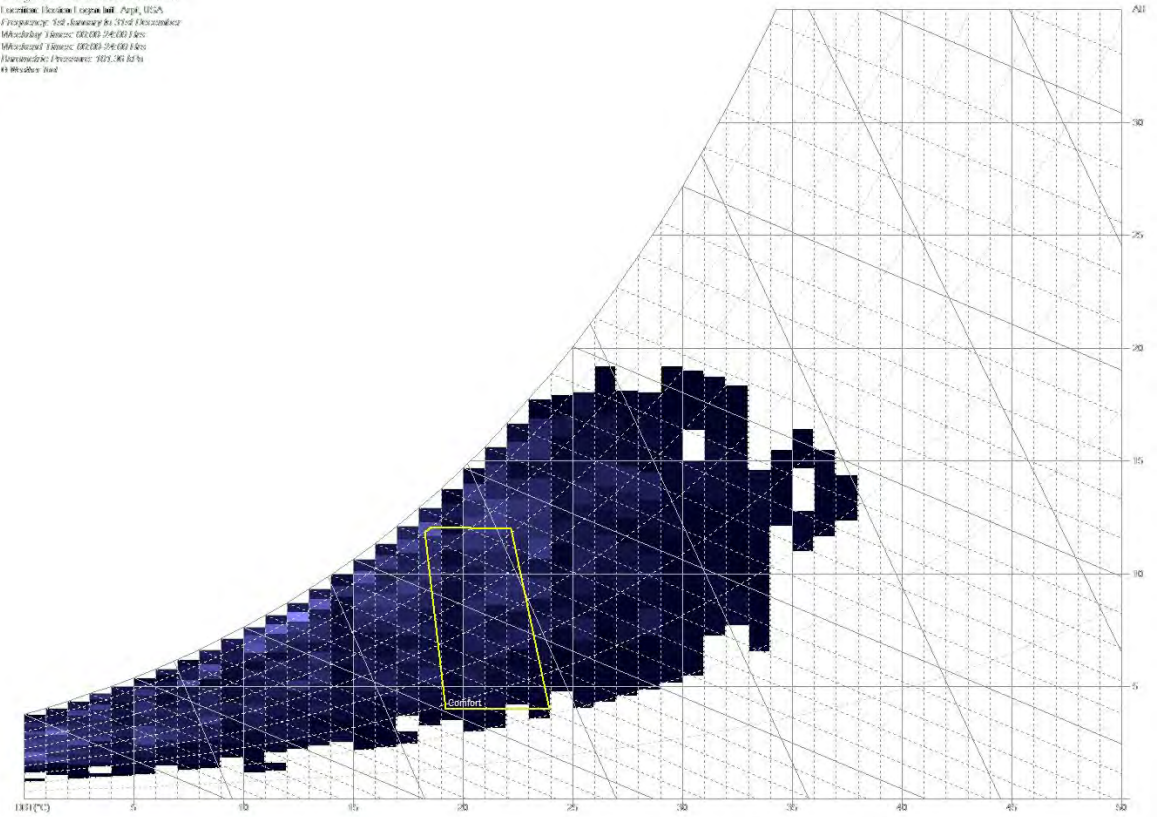


Diffuse Solar Radiation

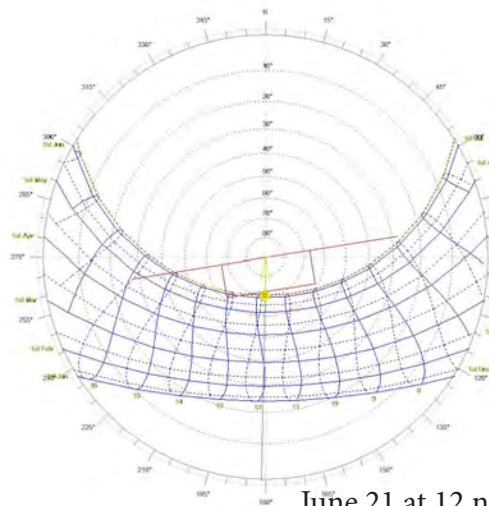


Direct Solar Radiation

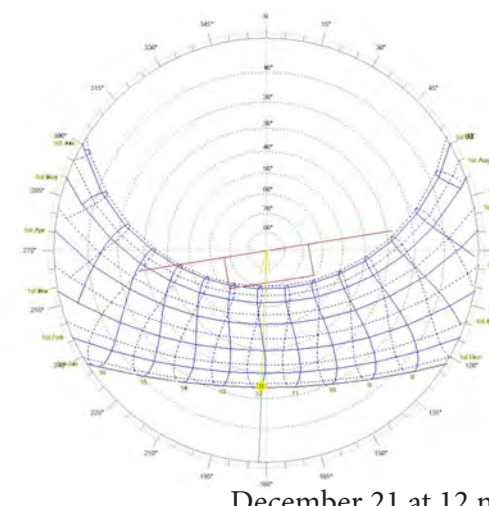
Psychrometric Chart  
 Location: Boston Logan Intl. Airport, USA  
 Frequency: 50 Hz January to 31st December  
 Windchill Index: 00.00 to 40.00 f/hr  
 Windchill Index: 00.00 to 40.00 f/hr  
 Humidity Ratio: 0.01 to 0.10 lb/lb  
 Wet Bulb Temp: 50.0 to 100.0 f/hr



Yearly Temperatures



June 21 at 12 noon



December 21 at 12 noon

# Public Space in Boston

Throughout its history, Boston has designated land for public use across the city. It currently has a public park system that covers 2200 acres of land. The Boston Common is one of the oldest public parks, originally designated for grazing and public events. It was part of the original city plan in the 1600s. Post-Civil War, Boston developed Copley Square, Olmsted's Emerald Necklace, a series of parks developed from 1879-1895 that run south into Roxbury. In the 20th century, the Charles River Esplanade was developed and houses concerts including the Boston Pops. Boston also has a series of renovated marketplaces, such as Faneuil Hall, and a variety of public plazas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, *Encyclopedia Americana*, 302.





The **Boston Common** has been a part of the city since 1634. It incorporates 50 acres of land and was originally used for grazing cows. It has had a variety of civic uses over the centuries and was proclaimed a national historic landmark in 1987. Now it is open to the public and used for major events including annual concerts.



Faneuil Hall Marketplace started as a market hall and meeting place in 1742. The building has since been rebuilt and remodeled, but it has continually functioned as a market. Today, it is part of the larger festival marketplace that incorporates Quincy Market, North Market, and South Market. It functions as a retail center and food eatery.



Copley Square is a public plaza established in the 1800s when the Back Bay was infilled. It is surrounded by educational institutions and marked by icons such as the Hancock Tower, Trinity Church, and the Boston Public Library. The square has minimal programming but it is open to public events like the seasonal farmer's market.

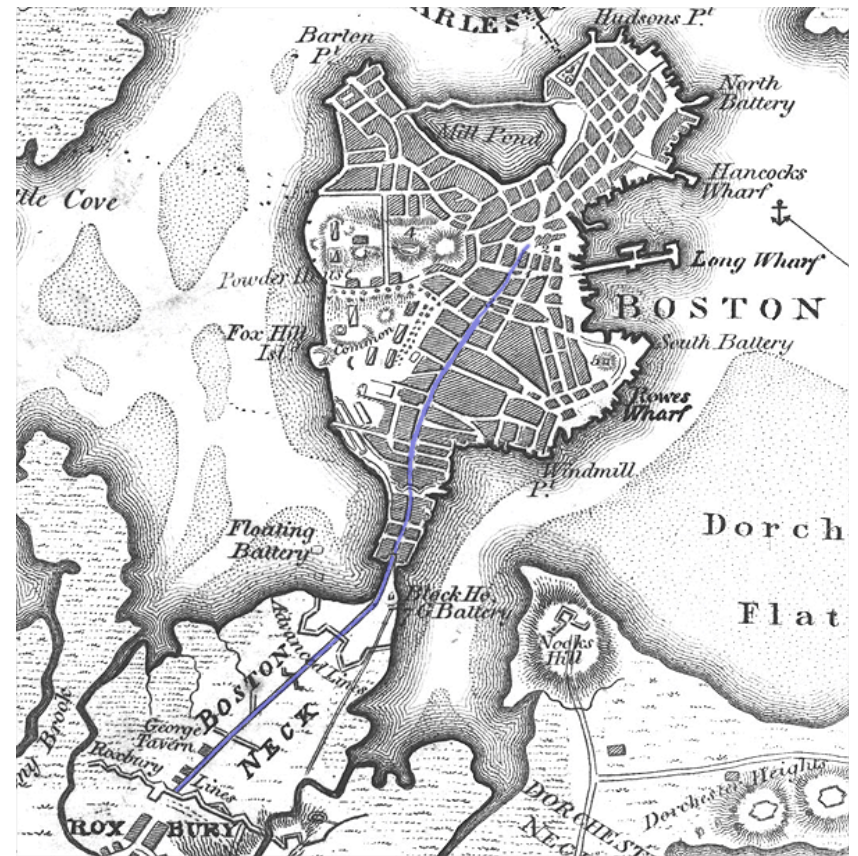
# Washington Street

Originally founded as a small town on the Shawmut Peninsula, Boston expanded to the Back Bay and South Bay. Washington Street was the connecting artery and became a dominant transportation route as well as a social center.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, Boston was also a hub of immigration, taking in refugees from Ireland, and later Italy and Europe. The different cultures met in the theaters of Boston from local vaudeville shows to baseball stadiums. At the same time, middle class women were finding their place in society through the department stores.<sup>2</sup>

Washington Street, as the major artery, was a new cultural hub. It was lined with a variety of theaters and stores and in the early 1900s, “resemble[d] the tiers of boxes in an opera house. They seemed to contain an audience, one that is looking down in anticipation of a good performance of the daily festival of street life.”<sup>3</sup>

Washington Street has undergone a series of changes from awnings and deep-set windows to over signage to emptiness to revitalization. It is currently part of the Downtown Crossing district, a pedestrian friendly shopping area.



<http://www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/history.htm>

1 “A History of the South End.” <http://www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/history.htm>.

2 Robert Campbell and Peter Vanderwarker, *Cityscapes of Boston: An American City Through Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 129.

3 Campbell and Vanderwarker, *Cityscapes*, 128.

## Street as a Theater



# Theaters

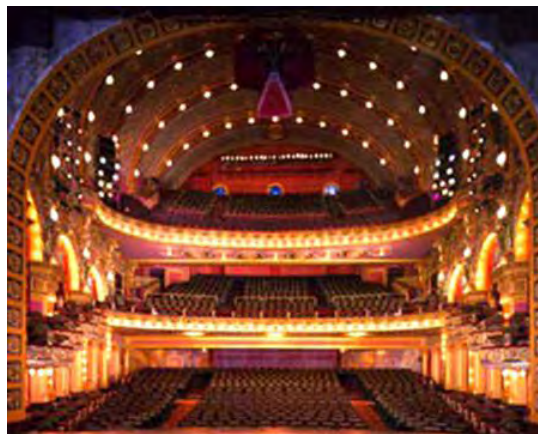
Washington Street has historically been a theater district. The theater district extends down Washington into the Chinatown district and wraps around the Boston Common. The theaters are both public and institutional. Emerson and Suffolk have classrooms and performance centers in the area. For example, the Paramount was rehabilitated by Emerson and is now one of their larger stages.





Paramount Center

<http://johncraigfreeman.wordpress.com/2011/10/>

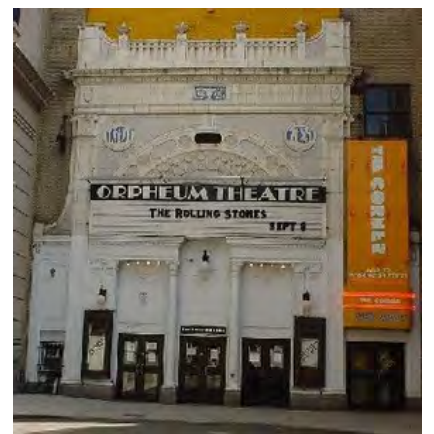


Cutler Majestic

<http://www.maestroartist.com/event-details-7-date-31.aspx>



Opera House



Orpheum Theater

[http://www.guidespot.com/guides/where\\_see\\_concerts\\_and](http://www.guidespot.com/guides/where_see_concerts_and)

# The block

The site is located along Washington Street in Downtown Crossing, one block east of the Boston Common and on the northern edge of Chinatown and the Theater District. It sits just below the Financial District in downtown Boston. The site opens to Washington Street. It has retail, housing, hotels, and entertainment. Across Washington Street is the Paramount Theater, the Boston Opera House, and the Millennium Place Towers. To the north is the Ritz Carlton.

The block is 40,000 square feet, and triangular in nature, opening to Washington Street. Hayward Place is a quiet, narrow street, while the Ave De Lafayette is larger and closer to the retail section of Downtown Crossing.





## An Addition to Emerson

Emerson College is known for its performing arts programs and has a variety of spaces throughout Boston's Back Bay particularly in the Theater District.

The mission statement of Emerson Stage:

“To enhance the cultural life of Emerson College and the larger local community through the presentation of meaningful, diverse, and multicultural programming that upholds high artistic standards and a commitment to open-minded cultural exchange.”

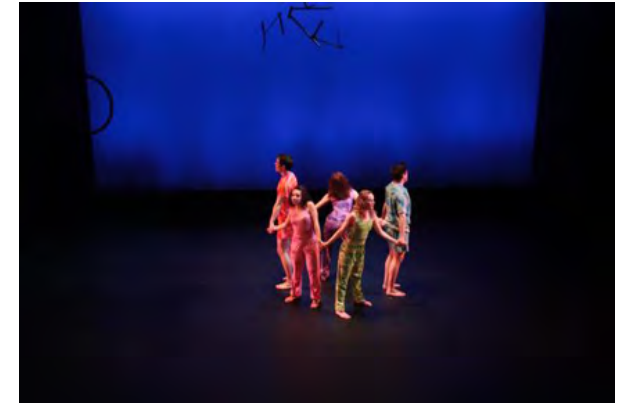
Emerson has a variety of theaters including a large proscenium theater, a small thrust stage theater, and a small end stage theater. It also has a variety of rehearsal spaces, classrooms, and private practice rooms. They can use additional practice space, and a flexible style theater.



Cutler Majestic  
1,200 seat proscenium



Semel Theater  
218 seat thrust stage



Greene Theater  
108 seat end stage



Bordy Auditorium  
160 seat flexible arrangement



Paramount rehearsal space



Private Practice

# Paramount Center

The Paramount Theater has the most direct connection between Emerson and the proposed site. The theater, originally built in 1932, was revitalized in 2005 by Elkus Manfredi Architects. The redevelopment included the “Arcade” building along Washington Street along with an adjacent lot next to Mason Street. The Center was intended to strengthen Emerson’s curricula in the arts.

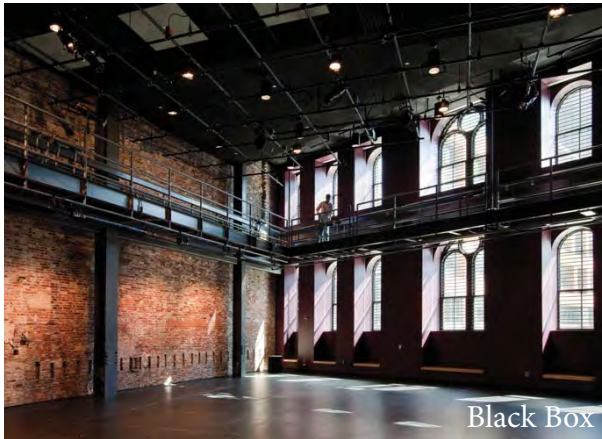
Included in the Paramount Center is a diverse program including a 590 seat live performance space, scene/ prop shops, rehearsal studios, classrooms, faculty offices, a sound stage, a 180 seat film screening room, a 125 seat experimental black box, dorms for 262 students, and a 150 seat restaurant. The Paramount Center faces Washington Street with its traditional marquee.<sup>1</sup>

1 “Paramount Center” Elkus and Manfredi Architects.

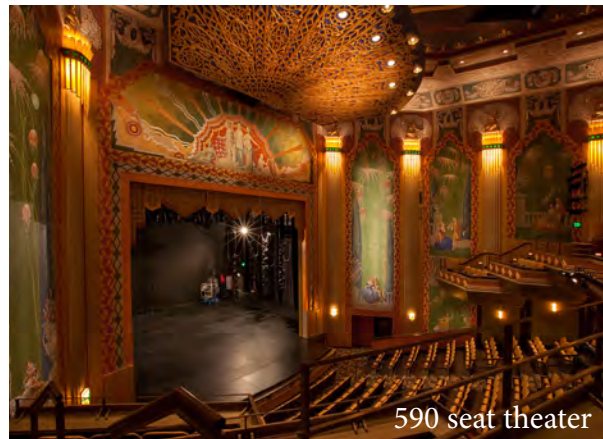


<http://www.paramountcenterboston.com/>





Black Box



590 seat theater



180 seat film screening

## Site Sections

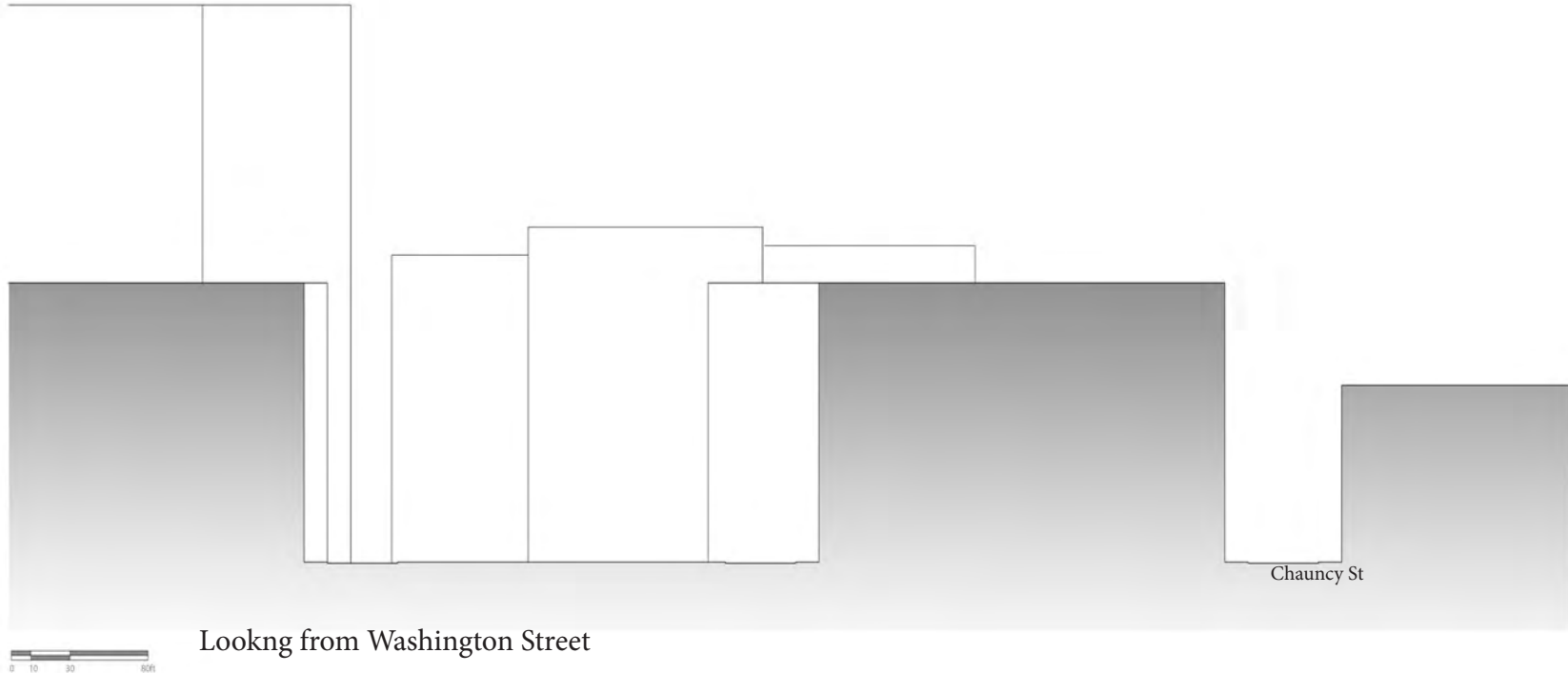
The neighboring buildings are an eclectic mix of architecture. Some of the theaters, such as the Paramount and the Opera House were part of Washington Street's early glory, while the glass Millenium Towers provide a new sense of modernity. The Lafayette Place, once an early department store, became a concrete mall in 1983 under Mitchell and Giurgola, and was later revamped to open more to the street.<sup>1</sup>

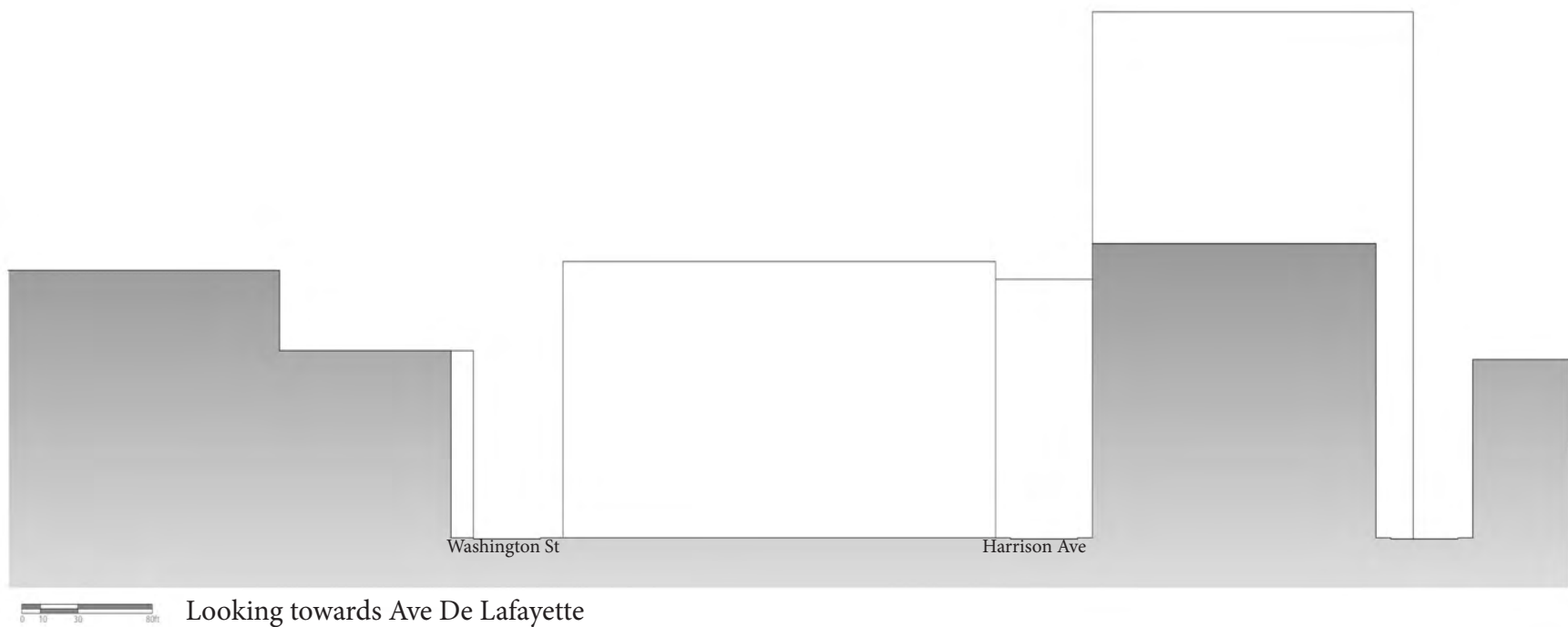
The average height of the neighboring buildings is around 100 feet, or between 8 and 12 stories. The Millenium Towers and the Hyatt anchor the area by adding significant height. They give the impression of overlooking the activity of Washington Street and Hayward Place.

The taller sections of Boston such as the Financial District provide a distant backdrop for the area.

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1 Ehrman Mitchell and Romaldo Giurgola, *Mitchell/ Giurgola Architects*. (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 232-235.





# Site

## Circulation- Pedestrian Access

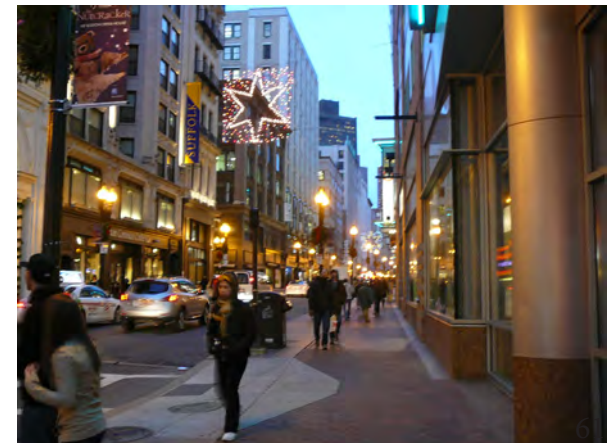
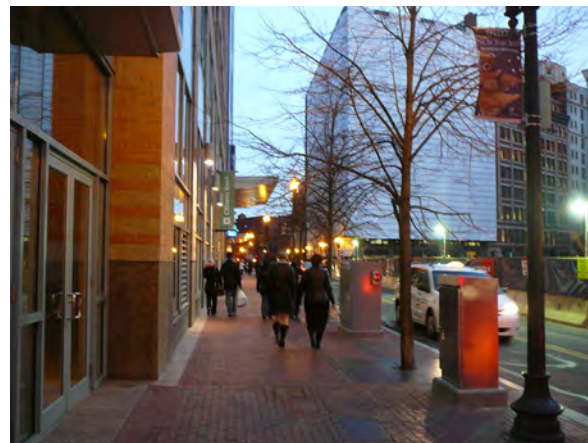
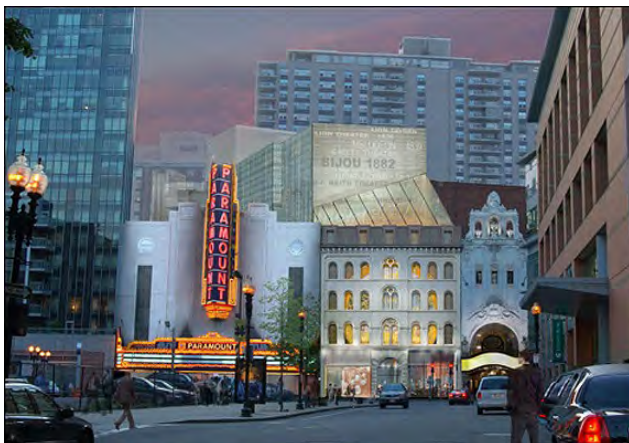
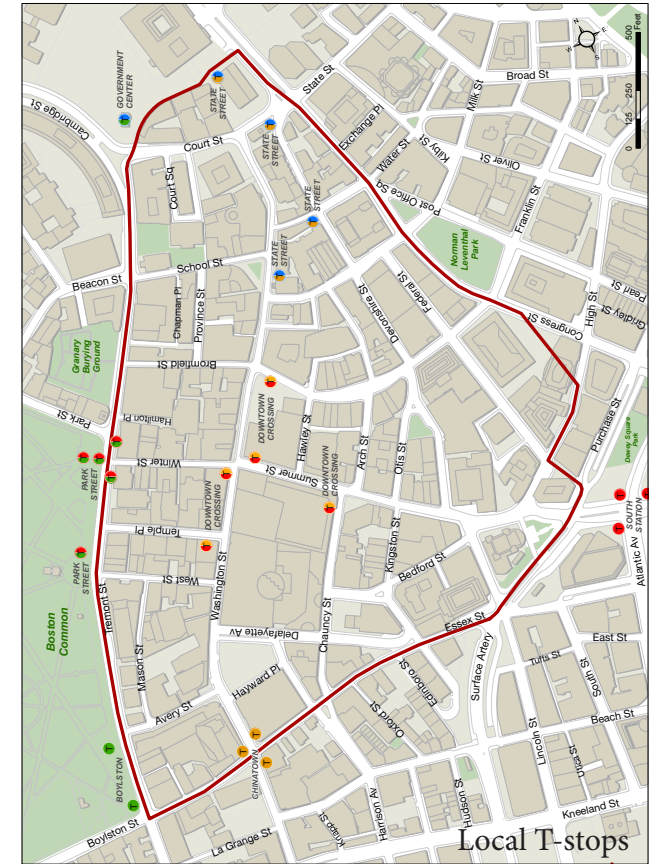
Boston, with its narrow, winding roads, is a pedestrian friendly city. The public spaces and attractions are within walking distance from each other. One of these places, the Downtown Crossing, and Washington Street area is historically a pedestrian area. One block to the east of the Boston Common, the street is easily accessible. It is a retail area as well as part of the theater district.

Washington Street is the main pedestrian through-way, while Harrison Ave and Hayward Place Street leading towards Chauncy Street, are much quieter.

There are several T-stops including ones on Essex Street, several off Washington Street, and several off Boylston Street, and Park Street on the Boston Common. The site is less than a mile from South Station in the Back Bay.

Washington Street, Hayward Place and Harrison Ave are all one way streets. Therefore they are already primarily for pedestrians. A central plaza would enhance the walkability of the area.





## Current Site Development

The site is owned by the Millennium Partners, a Boston, mixed-use developer. They also currently own the Ritz Carlton hotel and towers, located off Washington Street. For this site, they worked with Handel Architects to develop Millennium Place III. Millennium Place III will be a 256 unit, luxury residential building. It will be a 15 story tower with 9,700 square feet of retail on the ground floor and a parking garage underneath for 125 cars.<sup>1</sup>

Construction was started on November 29, 2011 by the Suffolk Construction company. The project will cost about \$220 million and will be completed in the fall of 2013. It was designed to achieve LEED silver certification.<sup>2</sup>

This proposal will fill the entire block, and will lose the potential to be a gathering point for the public within the Theater District and will alter the character of Washington Street.

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1 <http://handelarchitects.com/projects/location/boston/millennium-place-III.html>.

2 [www.suffolkconstruction.com](http://www.suffolkconstruction.com).



Millennium Place Towers I and II



<http://handelarchitects.com/projects/location/boston/millennium-place-III.html>



## Precedents

Kimmel Center - “jewels in a glass case” that lacks openness

Schouwburgplein- minimalist where “everyone is an actor”

Kursaal de San Sebastian- circulation between facade and “objects”

# Kimmel Center

260 South Broad Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

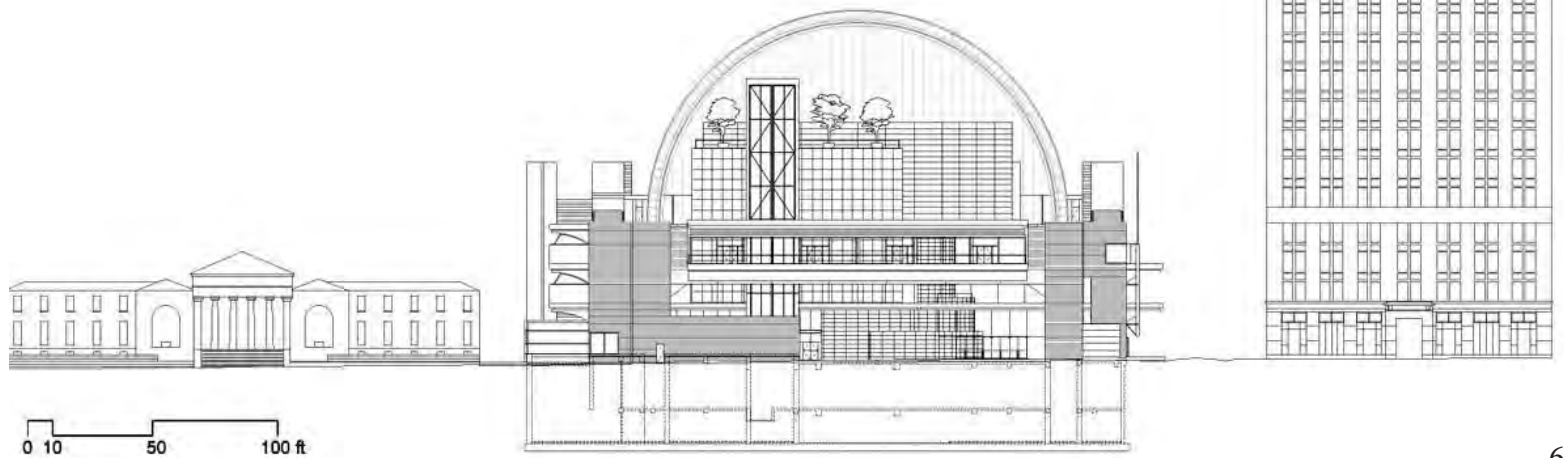
Architect: Rafael Vinoly  
Completed: 2001

The Kimmel Center for Performing Arts is home to the Philadelphia Orchestra and was designed to be an iconic image for Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts. It is approximately 429,085 square feet, filling an entire city block. The center houses six performing arts companies and sits within the Avenue of the Arts district of Philadelphia. The Kimmel center is situated in the southern portion of the Avenue, a few blocks south of City Hall. Its doors open north to City Hall as opposed to the poorer district further south.

It features two main theaters, Verizon Hall and Perelman Theater that act as independent buildings contained within the Commonwealth Plaza, a vast public space. Around the perimeter is a brick, concrete, and steel building that houses the support spaces. A barrel vault of glass encloses the Commonwealth Plaza.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Gosbte, Michael J. "Kimmel Center Civics." *Architecture Week* 1.1 (2002).



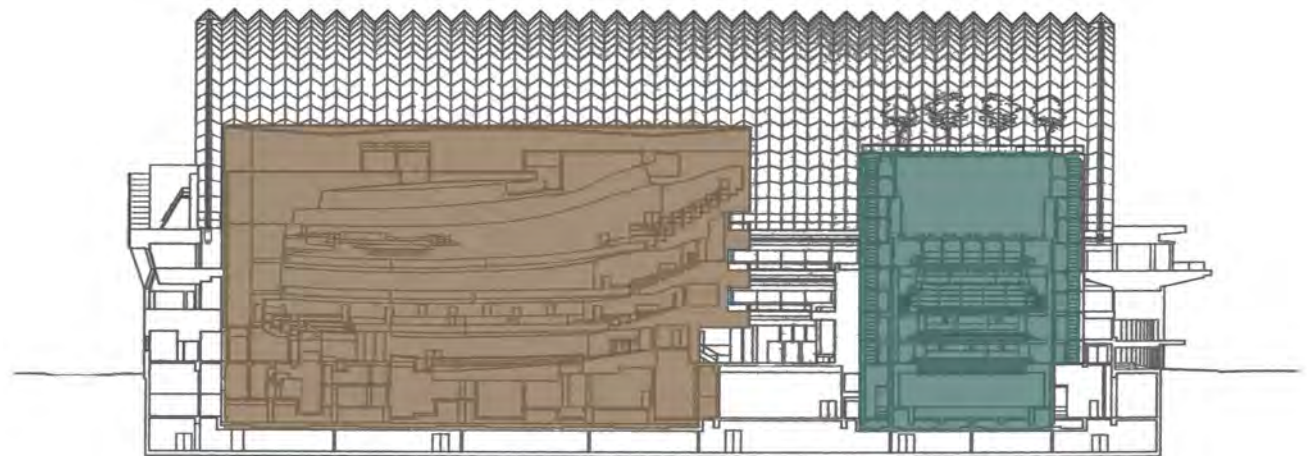
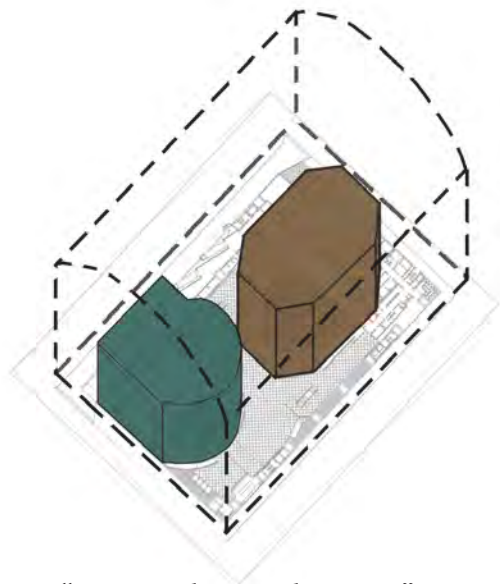
# Kimmel Center

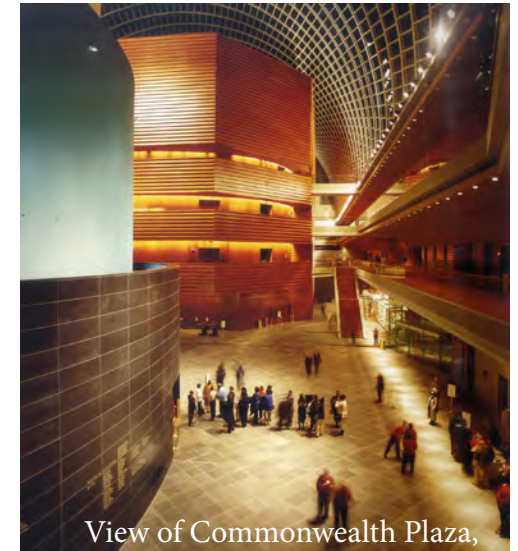
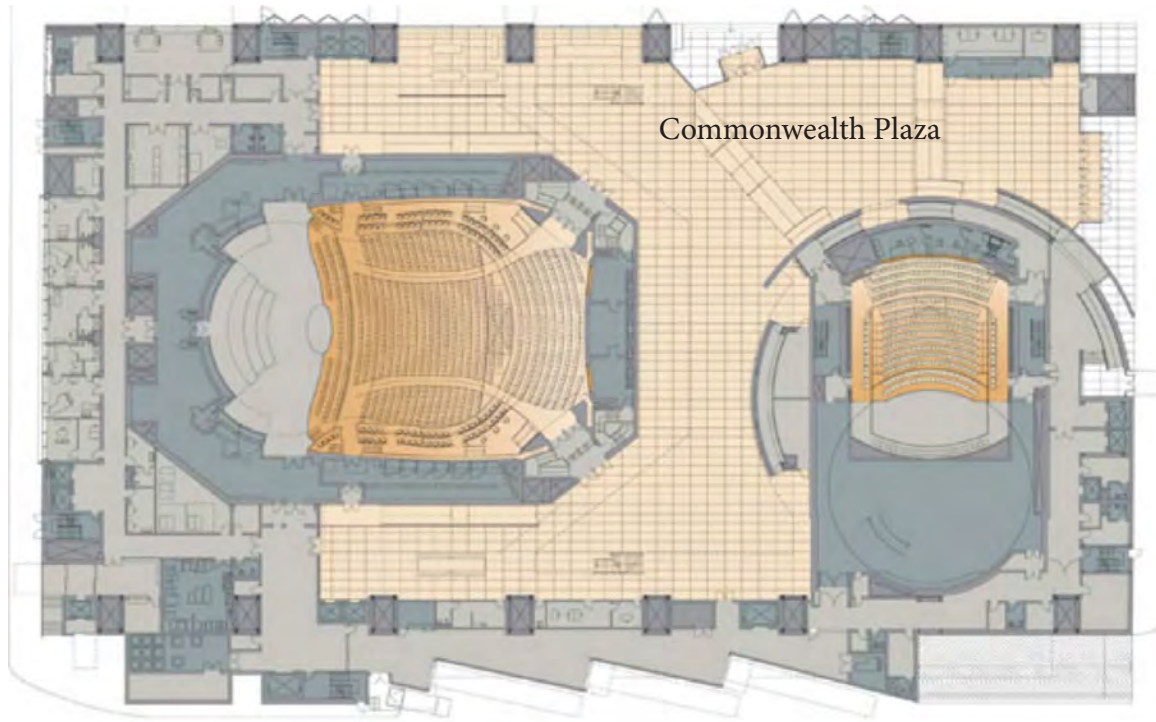
## Concept

Vinoly describes the theaters within the plaza as “two jewels in a glass case.” The glass allows for more connection to the city.

Commonwealth Plaza is described by Vinoly as a “sheltered extension of the sidewalk that encourages the fabric of the city to flow into the heart of the complex.” The plaza is brought to life by the cafes, free performances, and the “spectacle of the space.” The perimeter building contains several cafes, restaurants, and lounges intended to help enliven the space. It also houses the support spaces such as the administration and the dressing rooms.<sup>1</sup>

1 Gosbte, Michael J. “Kimmel Center Civics.” *Architecture Week* 1.1 (2002).





# Kimmel Center

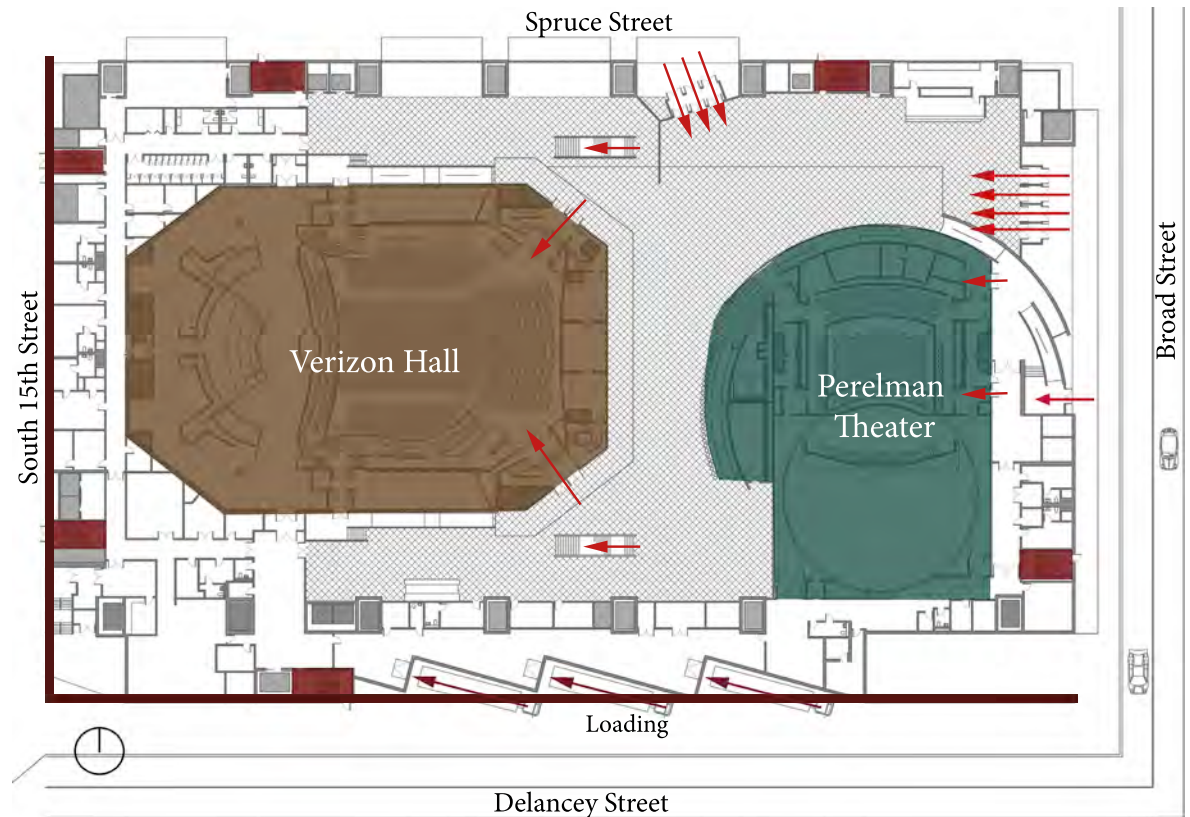
## Circulation

The Kimmel Center is predominately focused towards Broad Street. The main entrance to Commonwealth Plaza and an entrance to the Perelman Theater are located off Broad Street. There is also a primary entry off Spruce Street.

Once inside, Verizon Hall and the Perelman Hall are accessible off the plaza, and the upper mezzanine levels are accessible through two celebrated stairs.

The Kimmel Center's back of house is primarily on South 15th Street, allowing only for egress. Delancey Street is given to a loading dock. This does not allow the Commonwealth Plaza to be used as circulation through the city, but rather as a side stop or final destination.<sup>1</sup>

1 Gosbte, Michael J. "Kimmel Center Civics." *Architecture Week* 1.1 (2002).



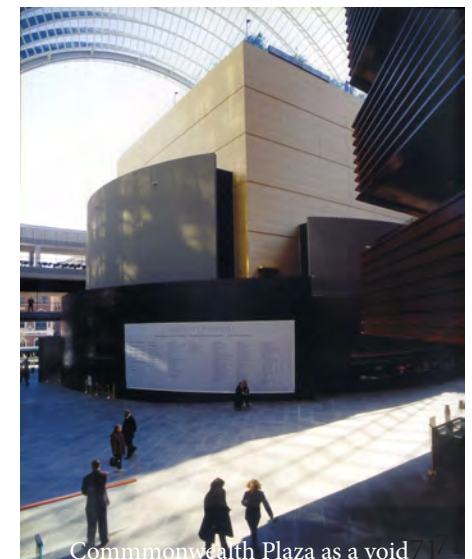
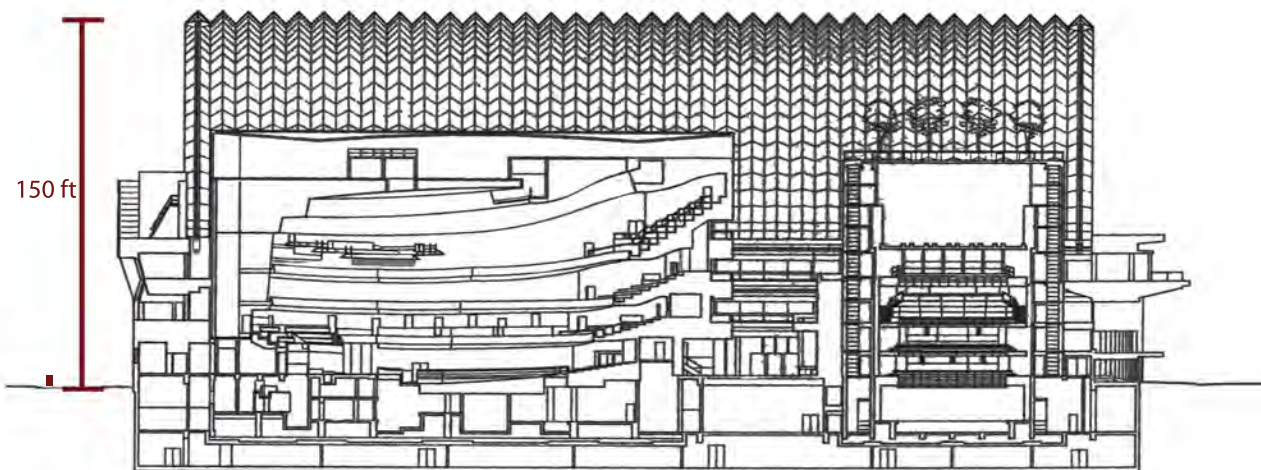
# Kimmel Center

## Criticism

Despite the conceptual promise of extending the sidewalk into this vast public spaces and these two jewels in a glass case, the Kimmel Center does not seem to meet expectations.

The Kimmel Center is described as feeling like a void instead of a celebration. The plaza is leftover space between the theaters instead of a public destination. The 150 foot high ceiling is too imposing for pedestrians, and the design attention went to the glass roof instead of the details.

The building is said to lack power as a civic form. There is little to differentiate it from a corporate office building and it does not act as a celebration of the spectacle of life.



# Schouwburgplein

## Location

Architect: West 8 (Adrian Geuze)

1996

The Schouwburgplein is an urban plaza located in Rotterdam, The Netherlands near the center of the city. The city was rebuilt after the Second World War, and the plaza sat as an undefined, run down void. The plaza is situated over an underground parking garage. The plaza is approximately 1500 square feet of open space in the center of the city.

Schouwburgplein is located in an arts area of the city. The Pathe Cinema is the northwestern anchor to the plaza. Further north is the De Doelan Concert Hall, and at the southern end is the Rotterdamse Schouwburg Performing Arts Center.

The plaza acts as a platform in the city that can be accessed from all sides. Because it is so open, the plaza invites movement in all directions.

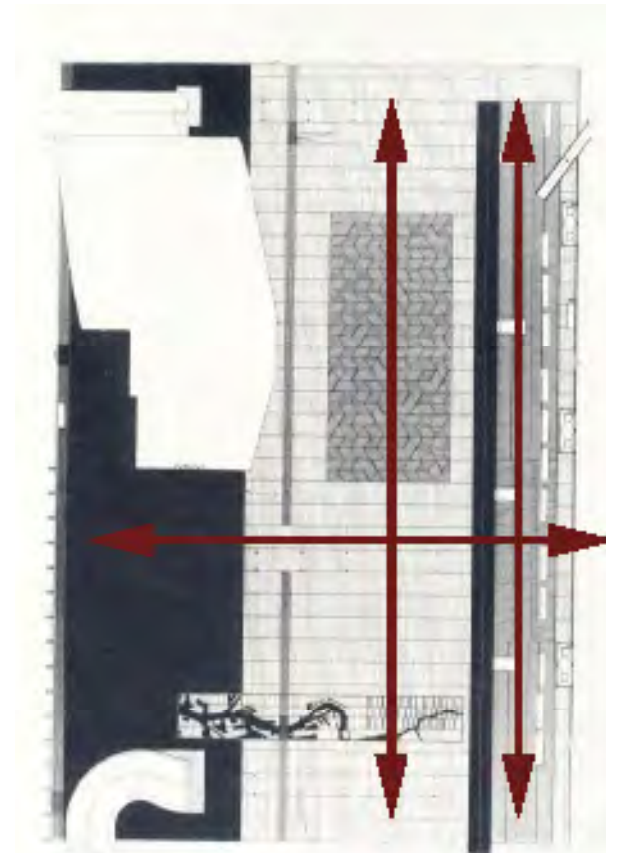
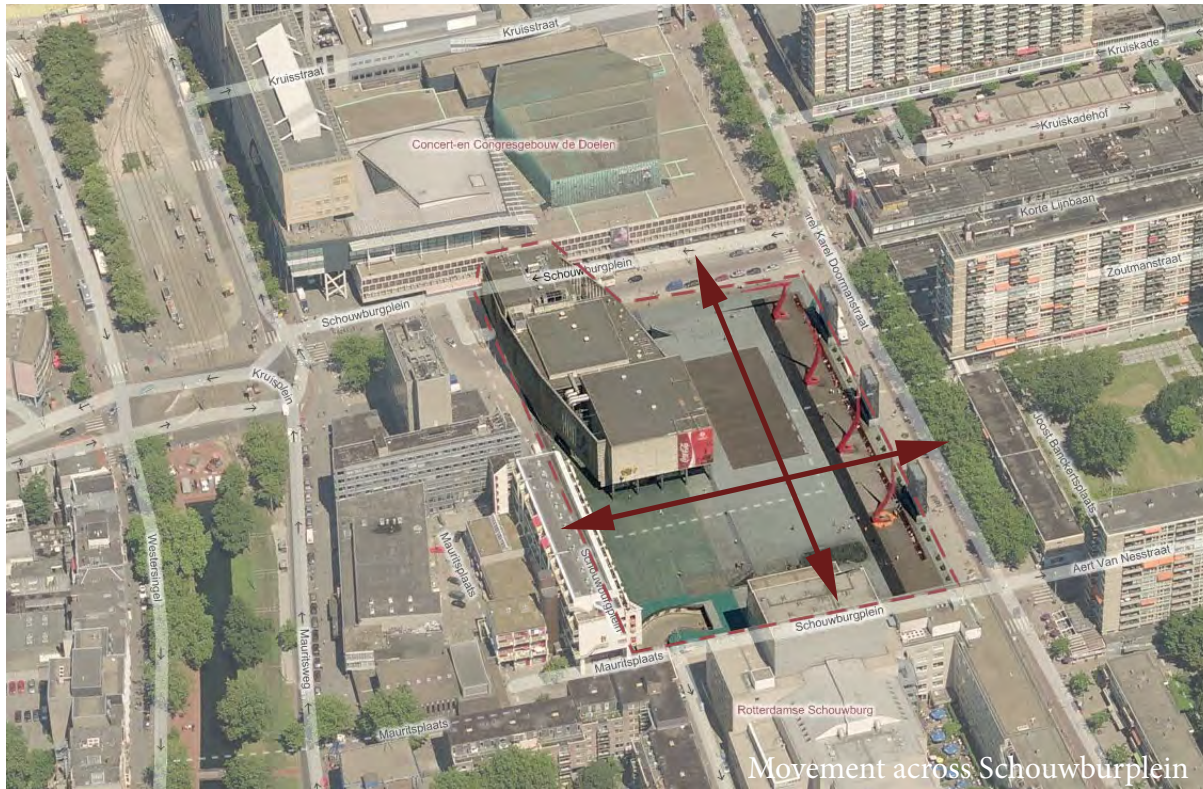
As a void in the city, the plaza becomes a place to pause as people pass by.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Lootsma, Bart & Stefano Boeri, "Redesign of the Schouwburgplein and Pathe multicinema, Rotterdam," *Domus* 797 (1997): 46-57.



Activity at night



# Schouwburgplein

## Concept

The plaza is treated with a minimalist approach. It is broken into three sections by material. On the west side, the ground is a poured epoxy with silver leaves. On the east, where the sun hits longer, the material is a warmer wood. In between is steel paneling.

Cutting across all sections is granite, with a sand blasted image of the River Maas.

The entire plaza is raised a foot off the ground in order to heighten the experience of an urban stage.

Schouwburgplein is intended to be a “place for spectators and a place where everyone is an actor.” As such it is a relatively unprogrammed void that is a stage set. It uses several props to bring the plaza to life.

There are four hydraulically operated light cranes that can be moved to flood the area with light at night.

There is a circular steel grill that acts as a fountain in the summer.

Wooden benches line the eastern side of the plaza. Soaked with ample light, they make good places to watch people interact in the space.

The entire plaza is wired underneath for temporary booths, performances, etc out on the plaza.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Lootsma, Bart & Stefano Boeri, “Redesign of the Schouwburgplein and Pathe multicinema, Rotterdam,” 46-57.

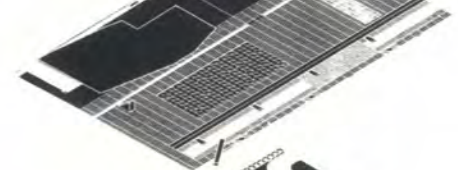
Cinema



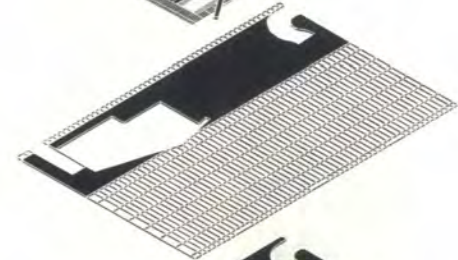
Lighting and  
Ventilation  
Masts



Floor



Under  
structure

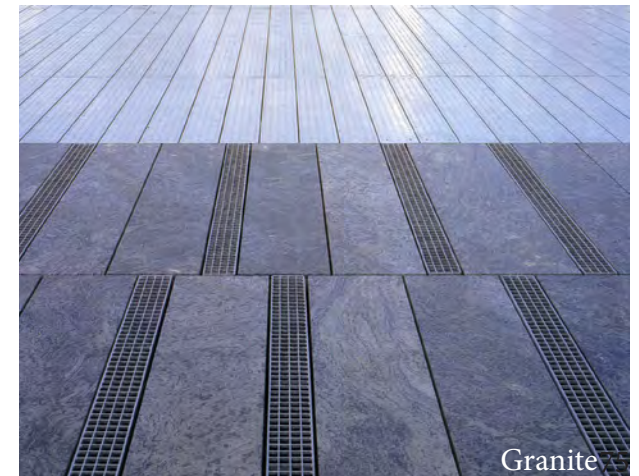
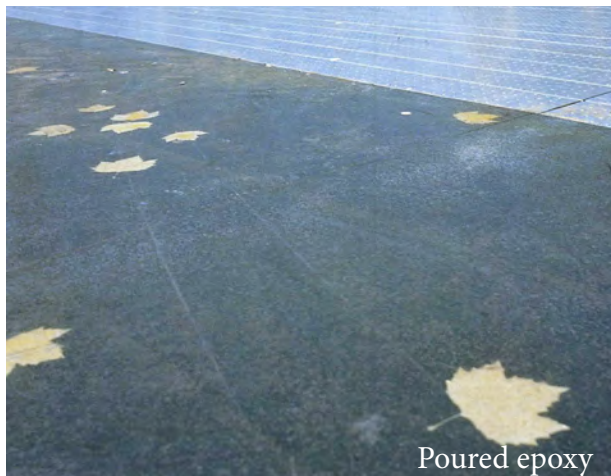
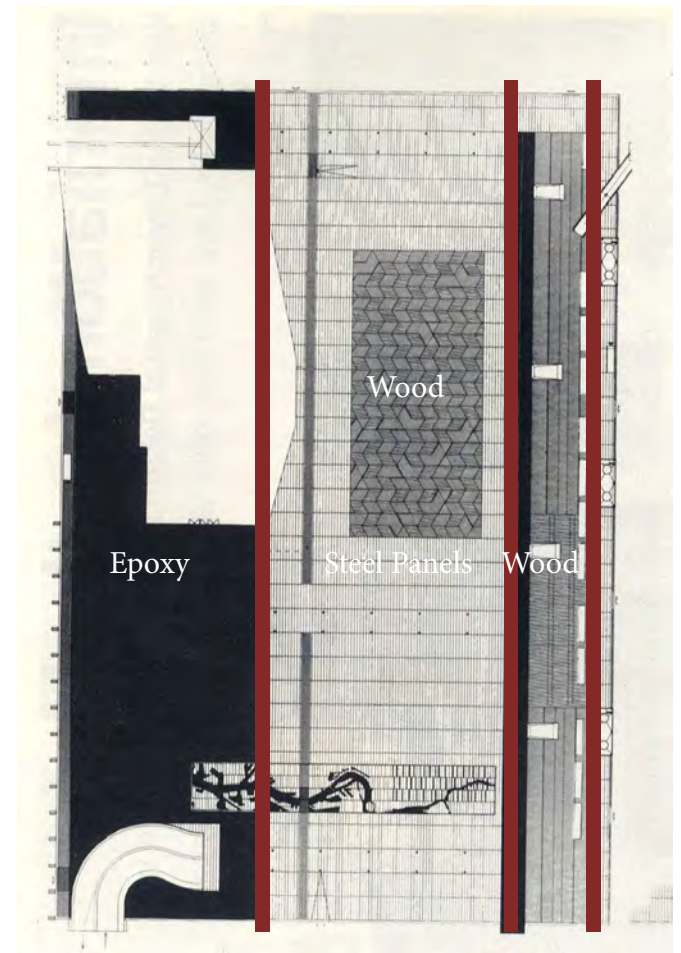


Parking garage  
roof



Parking





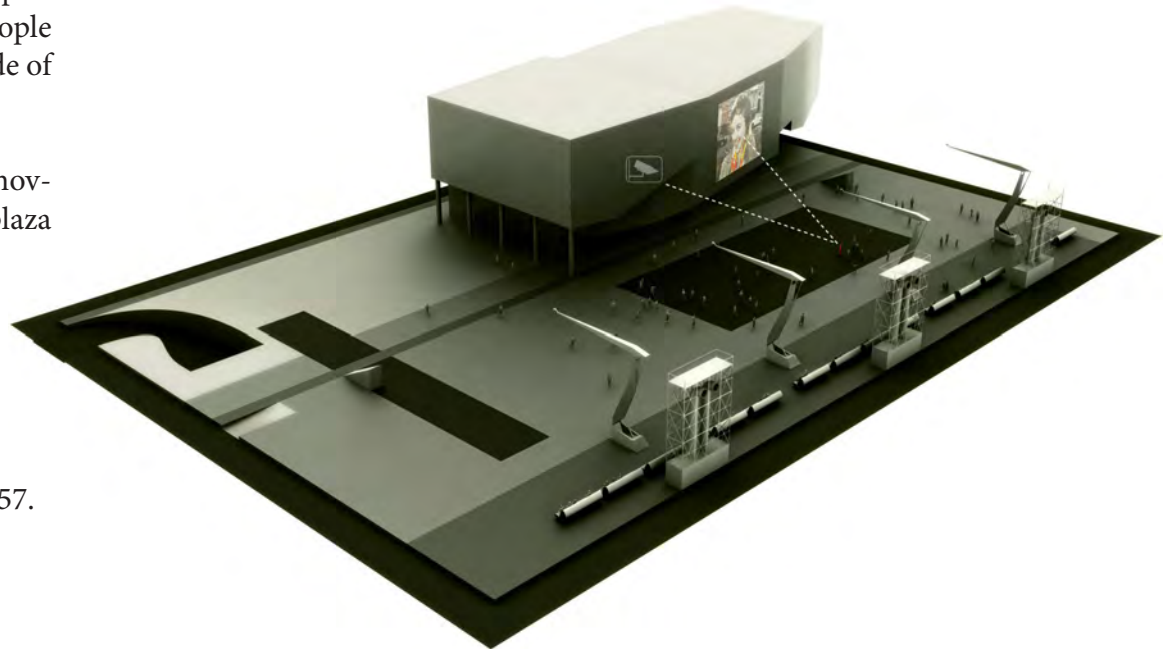
# Schouwburgplein Cinema

The Pathe Cinema becomes part of the theatricality of the plaza. The translucent facade shows the silhouettes of the people inside, reflected for the people in the plaza to see. The inside of the cinema becomes the theater for the plaza.

Additionally, the facade can act as a projector for outdoor movies, as well as for interaction between the people on the plaza and the building.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lootsma, Bart & Stefano Boeri, "Redesign of the Schouwburgplein and Pathe multicinema, Rotterdam," 46-57.



People on plaza watched and projected on building



Pathe Cinema lit up at night



Pathe Cinema front- facade as a projector

# Schouwburgplein Cinema

Architect: Koen van Velsen

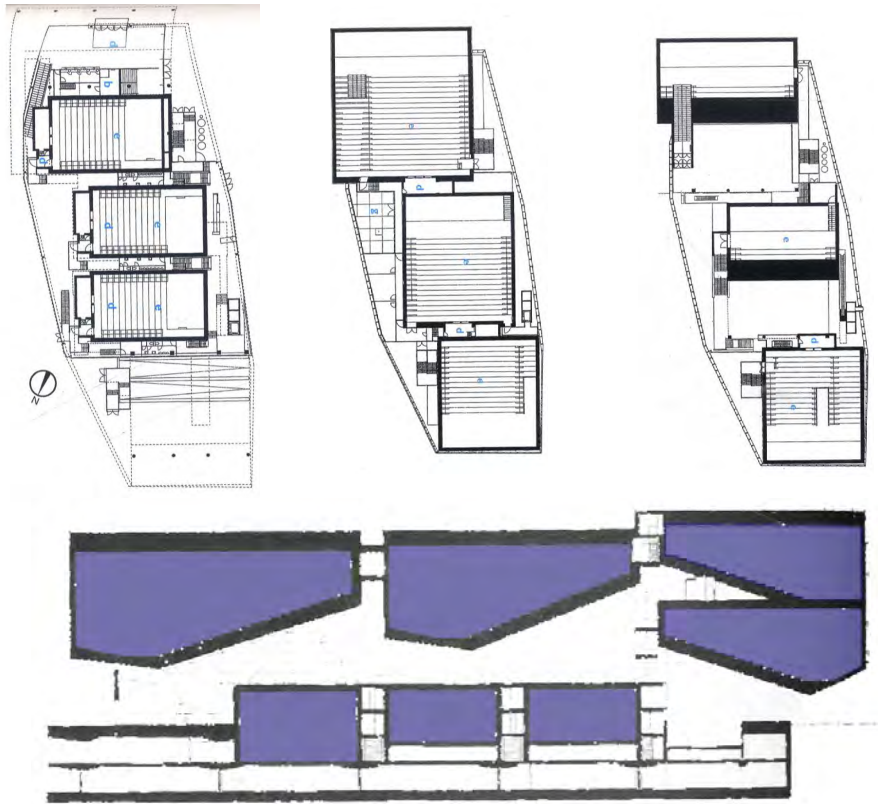
The cinema was designed as part of the revitalization of the cultural focus of the area and it anchors the Schouwburgplein on the west.

It houses seven cinemas ranging in size from 700 people to 200 people. In total it seats 2700 people.

Each cinema is treated like a volume. The three smaller theaters are set into the ground while the four larger theaters hover above, creating an undulating foyer space. The foyer is open to the public all day, and functions as an extension of the plaza.

As a whole, the building reads as a translucent volume. The cladding does not touch the ground so that the building appears to be hovering, and people can be seen moving between the volumes.<sup>1</sup>

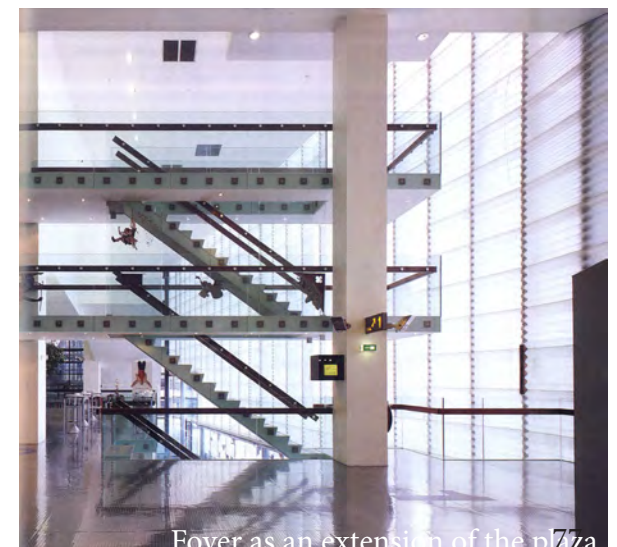
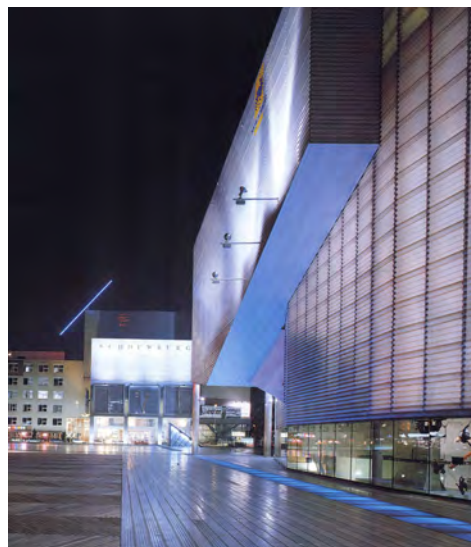
1 Lootsma, Bart & Stefano Boeri, "Redesign of the Schouwburgplein and Pathe multicinema, Rotterdam," 46-57.



Theaters as volumes



Floating volume



Foyer as an extension of the plaza

# Kursaal de San Sebastian

Architect: Rafael Moneo

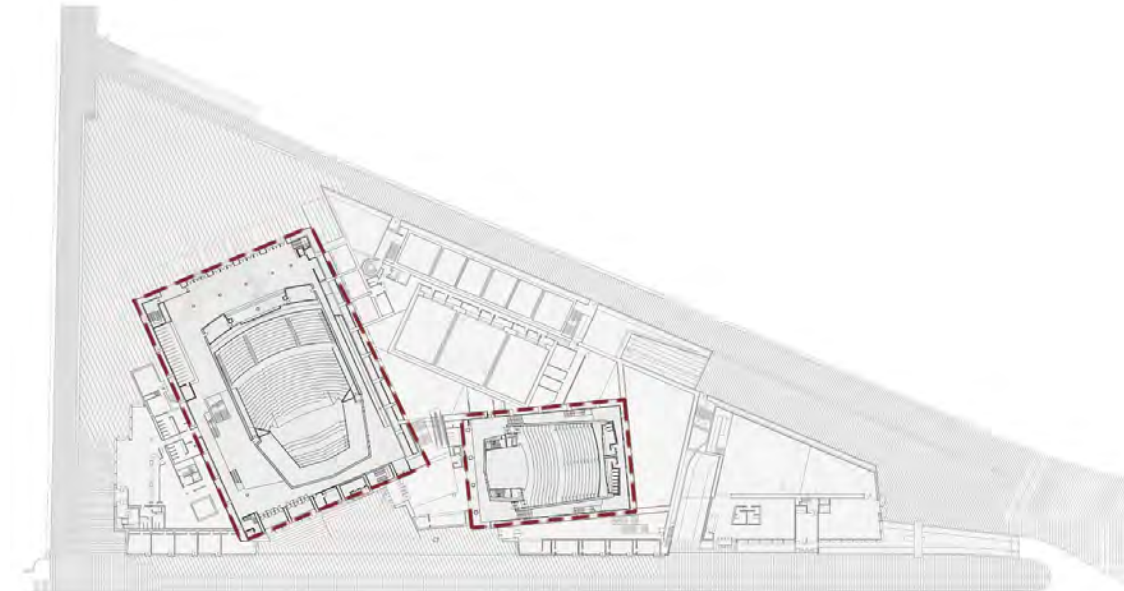
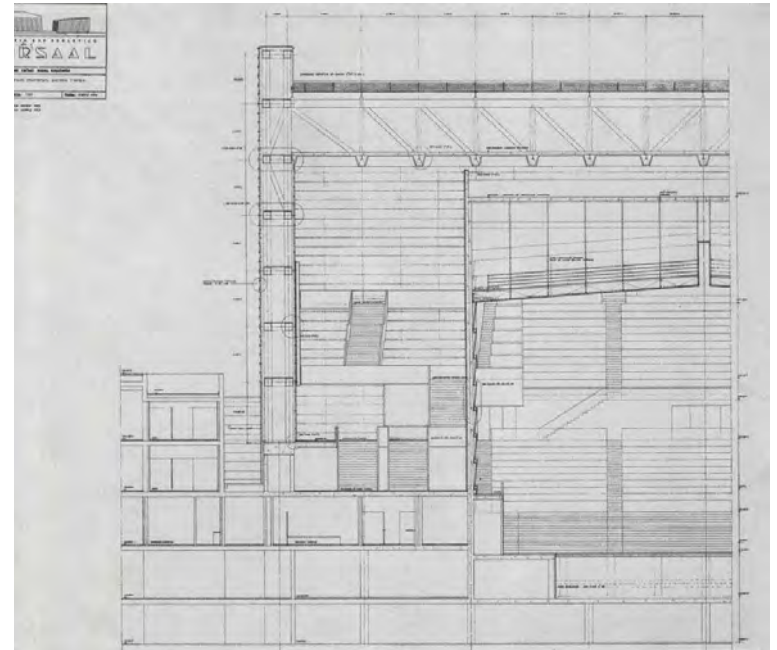
1999

“Two Rocks Stranded”

The project features two large theaters that act as independent volumes, while all the other program is contained within a platform. The two volumes are illuminated at night, and housed in a double facade. The circulation sits between the facade and the volume of the theater.<sup>1</sup>

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1 “Kursaal de san Sebastian.” *El Croquis* 98 (2000): 90.





<http://www.blogspot.com/-GQY54pLAJUK/T61pQefM88I/AAAAAAAAAcM/NEA-0nnc-akU/s1600/Monco+Kursaal.jpg>



# Regulations

The site is zoned in the midtown cultural district. One of the goals of the zoning regulations for midtown is to “revitalize [it] as the region’s center for performing and visual arts by rehabilitating historic theaters and creating new cultural facilities for the city’s nonprofit arts community” and “to preserve Boston’s historic resources and public open spaces, which provide enjoyment to all residents and visitors.”

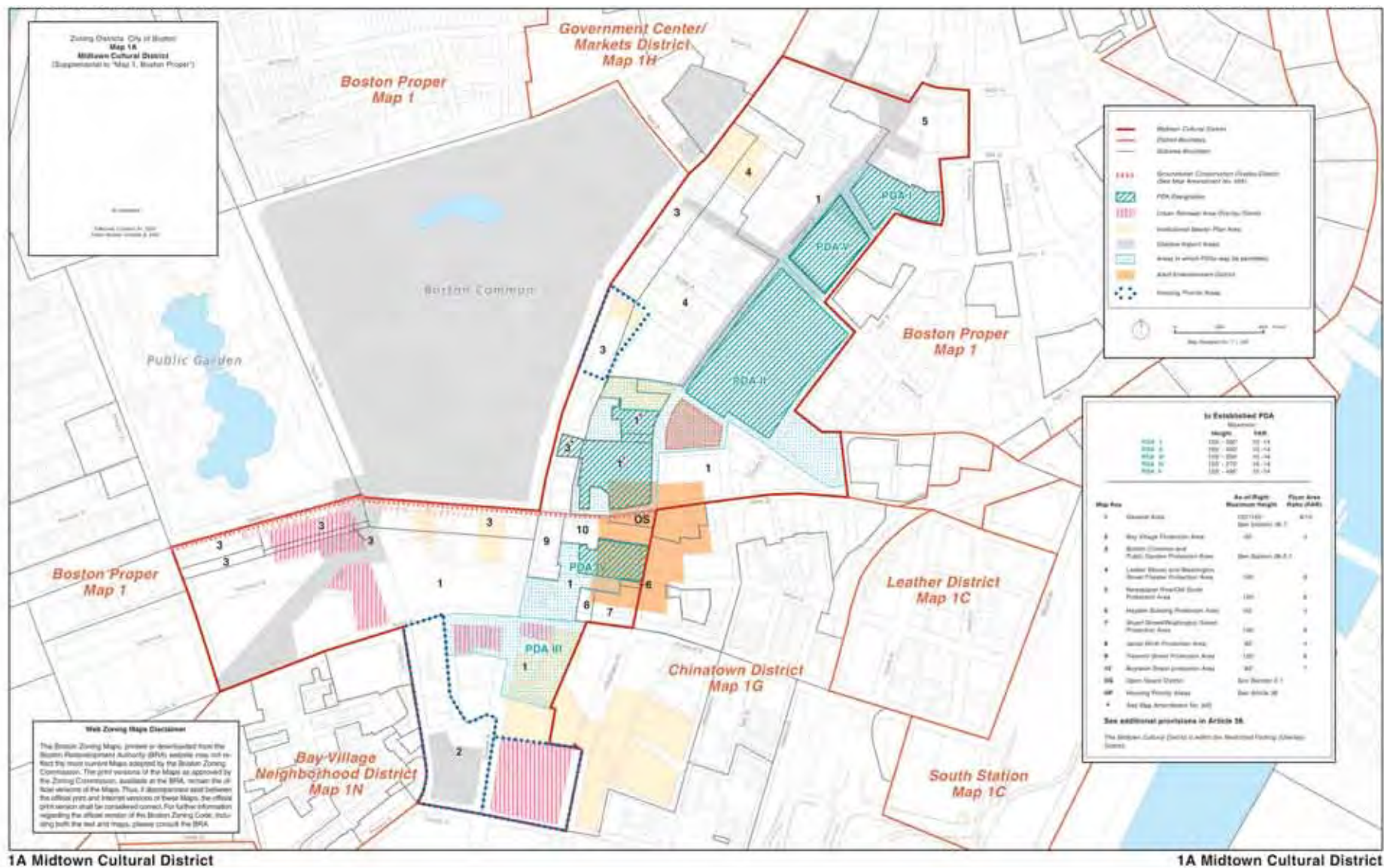
It is zoned in a general area with a maximum height of 125-155’ and a floor to area ratio of 8/10. It is also zoned for potential PDA where the maximum height could be increased to between 155’ - 495’. The site is not within a historic district or residential area. It does have a parking restriction overlay.

Each building has to be designed to not cause ground-level ambient wind speeds. Open plazas cannot have an effective gust velocity of 4.0 m/sec with a 20% permitted occurrence frequency.

Setbacks are required on Washington Street and Essex Street when the building rises above the street wall height. The building will have to be setback by 10’ when it rises above 90’.

There are strict limitations in the Downtown Crossing area for the amount of signage allowed. The total sign area cannot exceed the sign frontage times 1.5. Also, signs can only protrude out from the building by 6 inches, and a sign attached at a right angle cannot extend further than 4 feet out. Free-standing signs and billboards are not allowed.

Off-street parking is not required in the Midtown Cultural District.



# Building Codes

## Occupancy Group: Assembly (A-1)

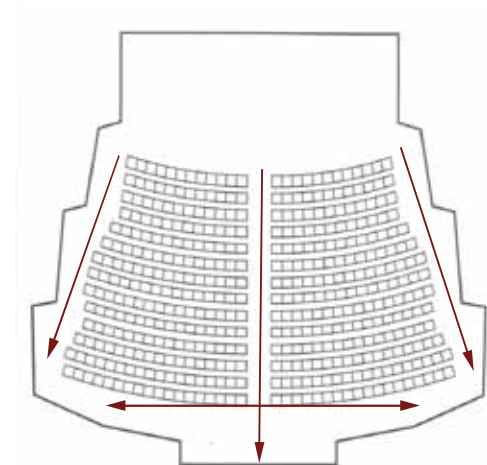
“for purposes such as civic, social or religious functions, recreation, food or drink consumption”

A-1 is based on the potential for a high number of occupants with low light levels that could cause panic in an emergency.

The educational component of the program could also factor under occupancy group E for educational facilities.

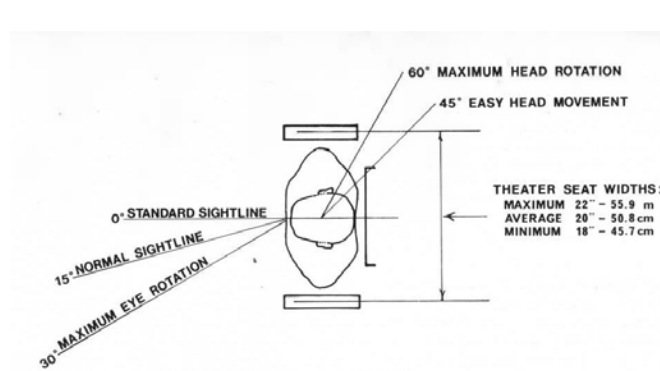
The two occupancy groups are meant for large amounts of people and therefore have similar requirements. Both occupancy groups require automatic sprinkler systems, and they have the same egress requirements. For an occupancy of under 49, only one egress door is required. For an occupancy of between 50 and 500, two doors are required. The length of travel before two separate paths of egress are required is 75 feet. All occupancies must be ADA accessible.

Assembly spaces have a series of special requirements. The IBC specifies that handicapped seating must be spread throughout the theater so that they can experience different views, and sightlines always have to be considered.

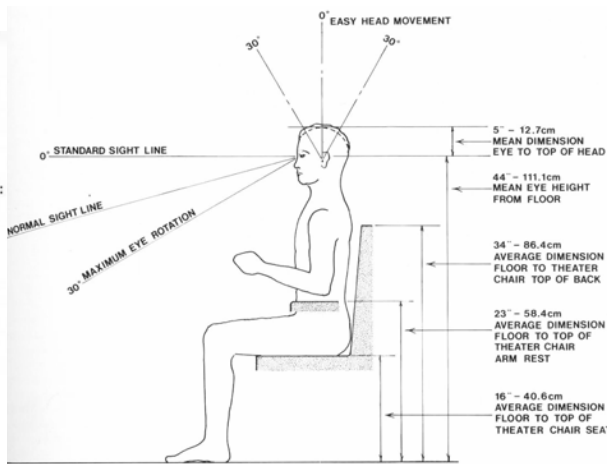


Egress requirements for an assembly space

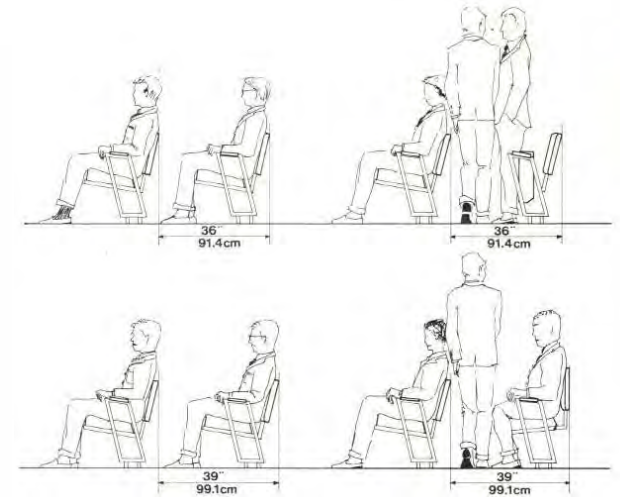
## Special Regulations for Assembly Spaces



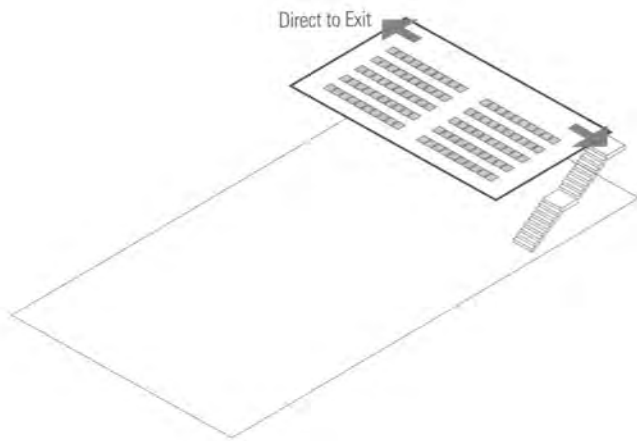
Sightlines



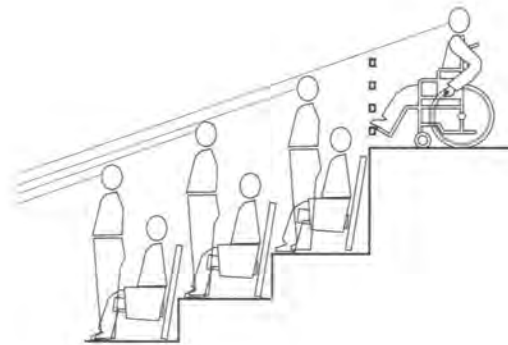
Seating Dimensions



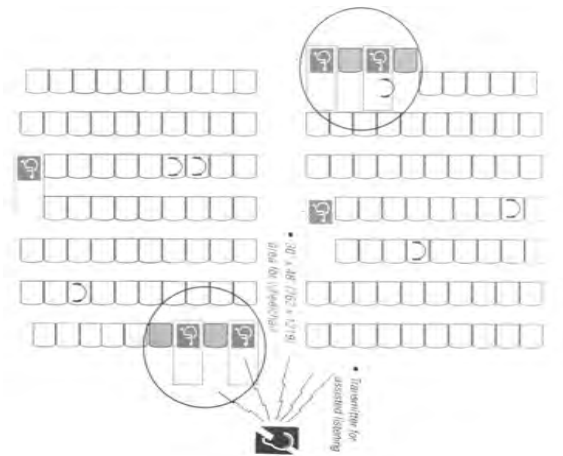
Row Dimensions



Two means of egress required for a balcony with 50 or more occupants



Sight lines for Handicapped Seating



Dispersal of Handicapped Seating



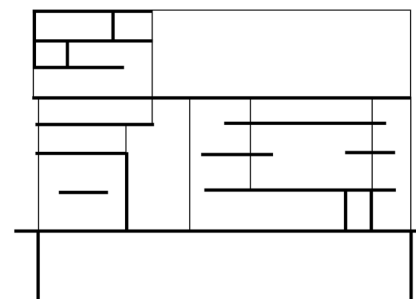
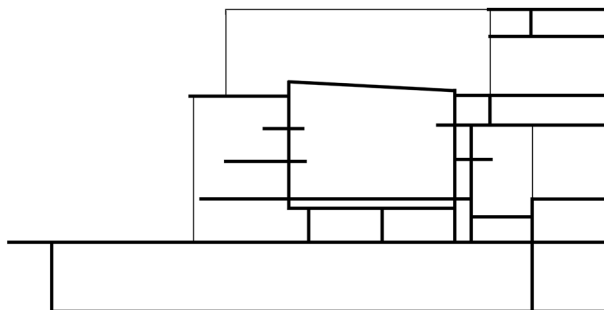
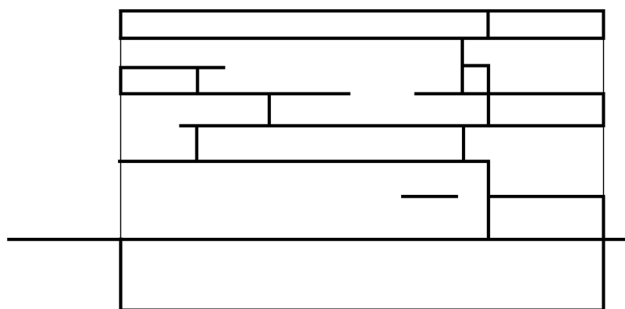
# Design Proposal

# Choreographing Reality

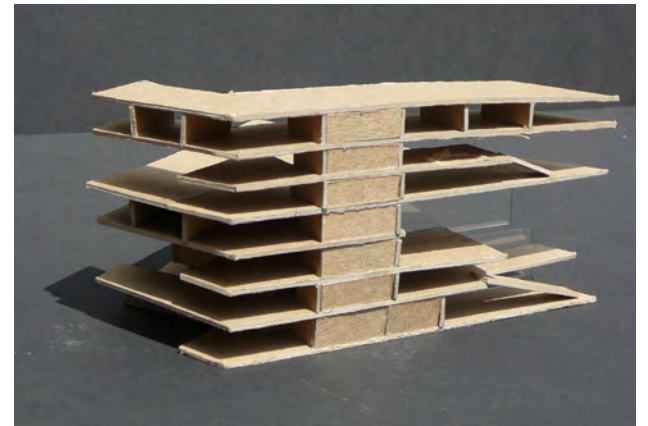
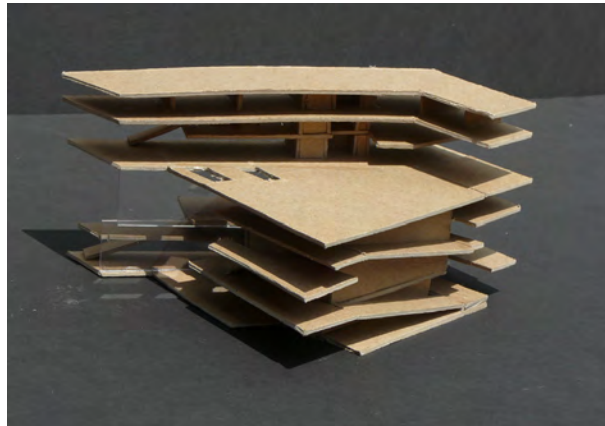
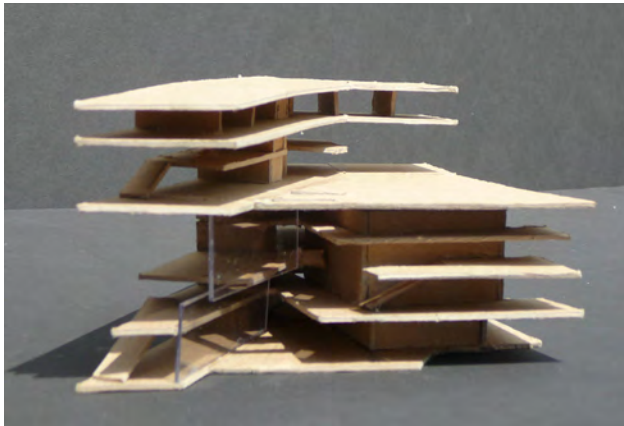
**A series of layers creating a variety of scenes and a variety of experiences,**

**some open to each other, some more private,**

**all connected by the flow of movement.**







## Stage in the City





## Stage in the City

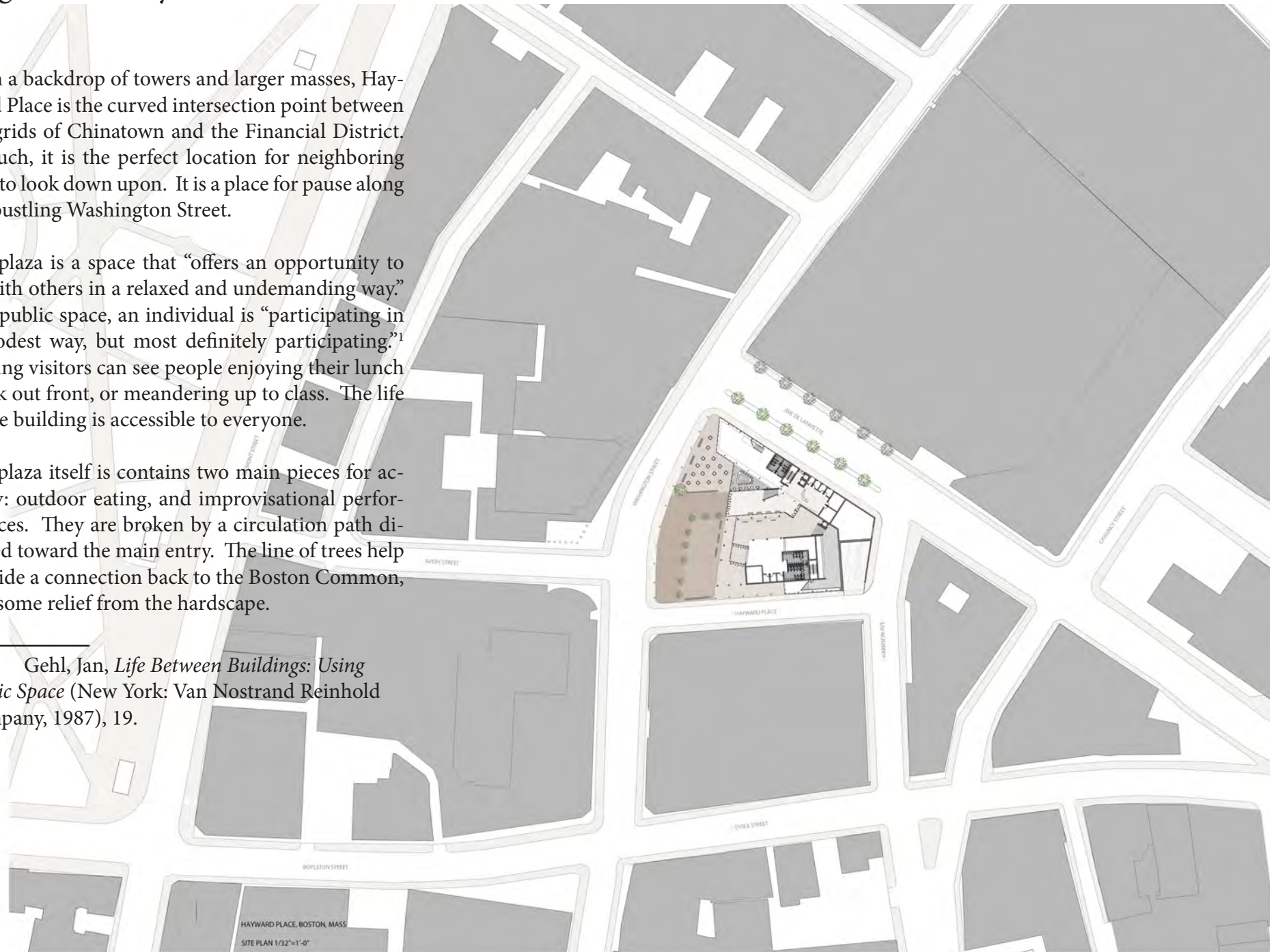
With a backdrop of towers and larger masses, Hayward Place is the curved intersection point between the grids of Chinatown and the Financial District. As such, it is the perfect location for neighboring eyes to look down upon. It is a place for pause along the bustling Washington Street.

The plaza is a space that “offers an opportunity to be with others in a relaxed and undemanding way.” In a public space, an individual is “participating in a modest way, but most definitely participating.”<sup>1</sup> Passing visitors can see people enjoying their lunch break out front, or meandering up to class. The life of the building is accessible to everyone.

The plaza itself contains two main pieces for activity: outdoor eating, and improvisational performances. They are broken by a circulation path directed toward the main entry. The line of trees help provide a connection back to the Boston Common, and some relief from the hardscape.

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1 Gehl, Jan, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1987), 19.



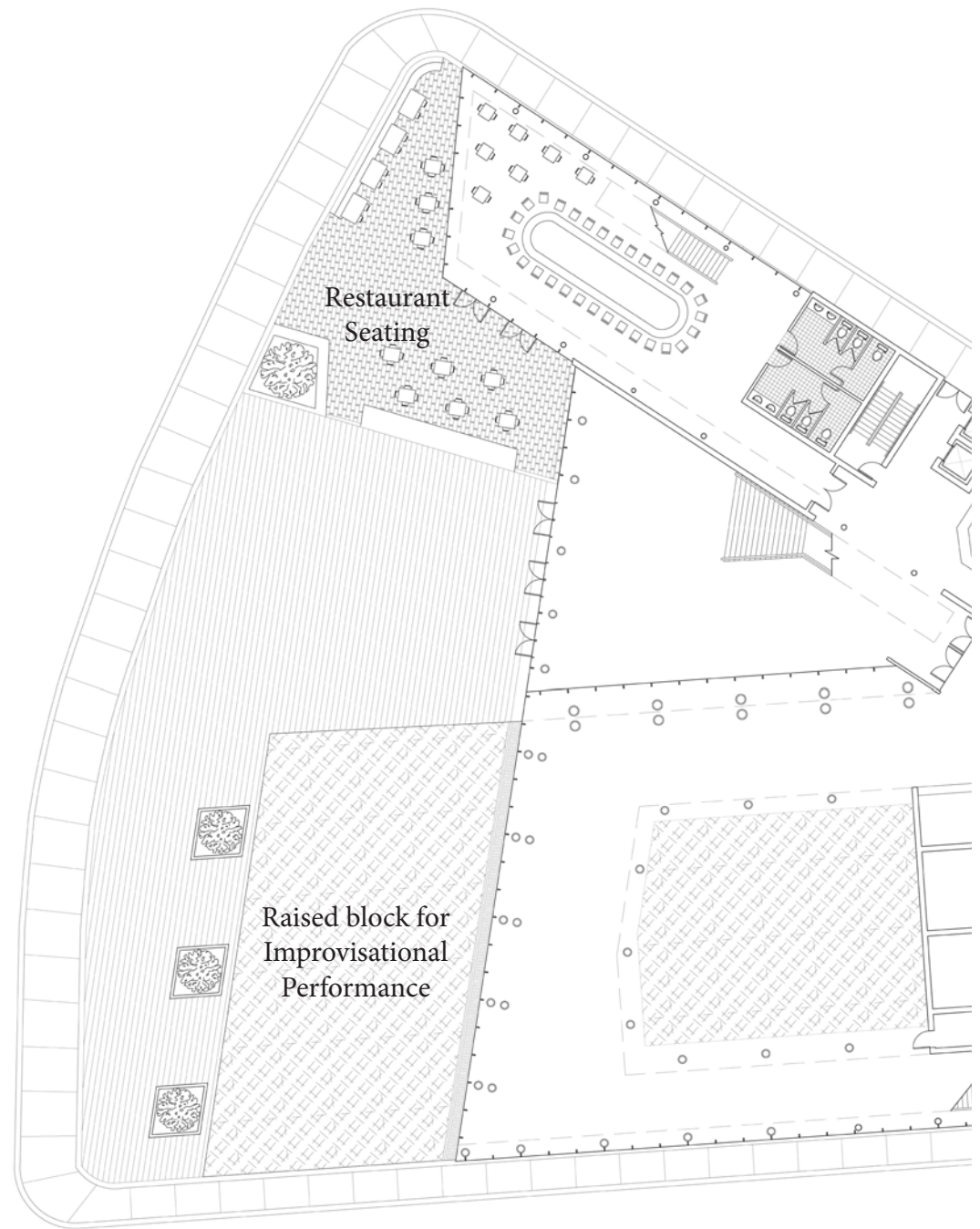
Up Washington Street

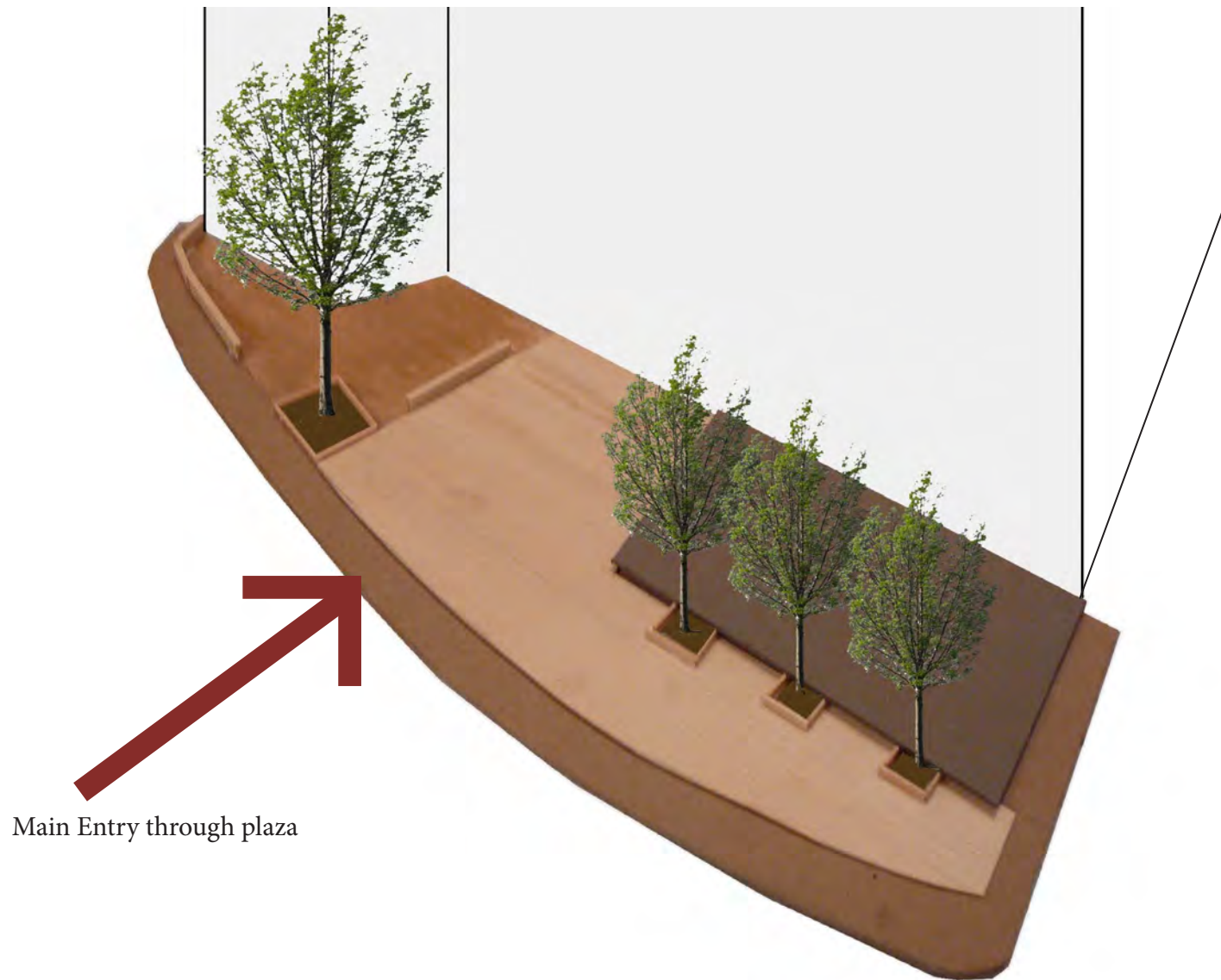


# Plaza

The plaza is comprised of two main activity sections separated by open circulation. The raised granite block in front of the theater can be used for improvisational performances, or as simple seating. As general seating, it acts as a viewing platform for watching the activity on the rest of the plaza, up and down Washington Street, and for watching theatergoers inside. The second activity space is the restaurant seating. With doors that open directly from the restaurant, this area is the most inclusive and private portion of the plaza.

Separating the two activity spaces, a wood planked, open area serves as primary circulation and as a general gathering space. It leads to the main doors of the building. The trees provide some relief from the hardscape.



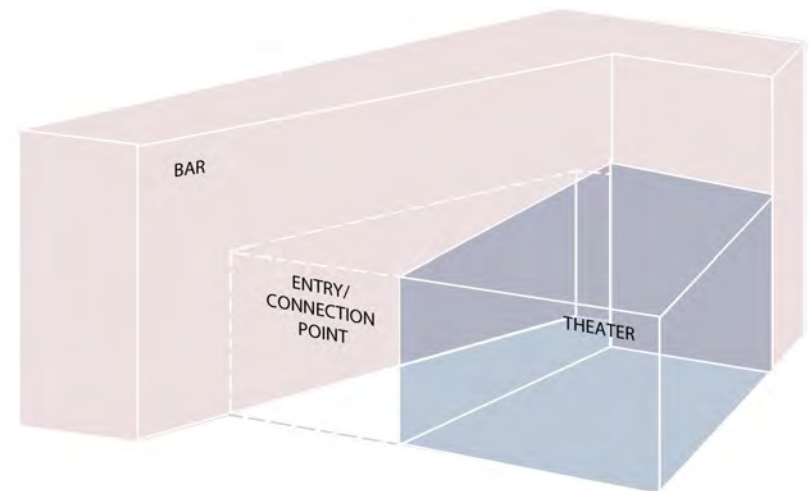


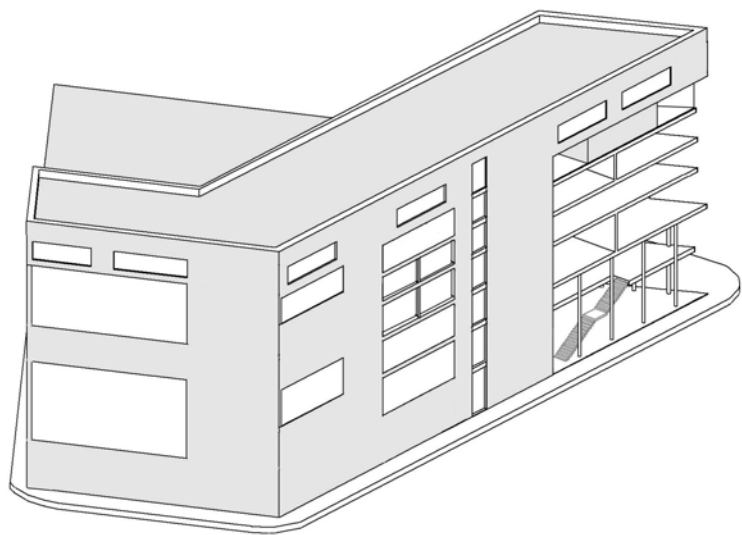
Main Entry through plaza

# Parti

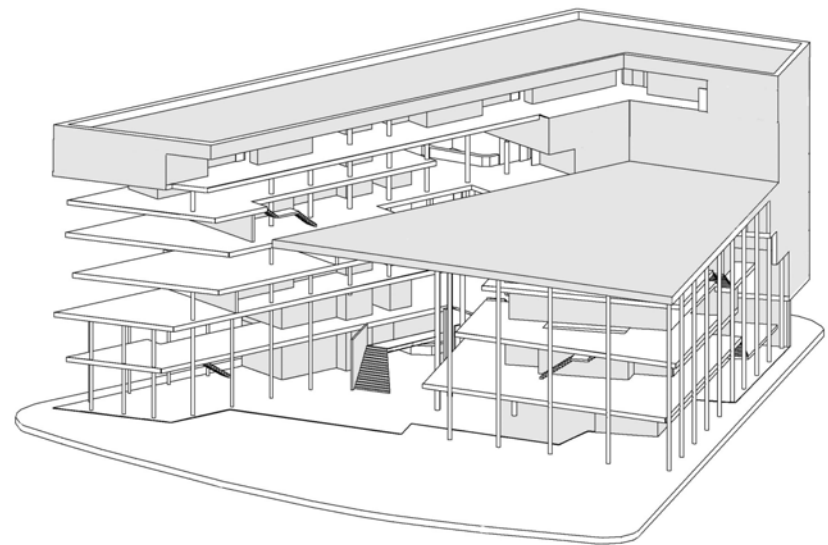
The basic parti is a solid bar that wraps along two sides with an object that floats in the middle. The bar houses the majority of the program including the restaurant and the student spaces. The floating object is the theater. It is raised one story above ground level, allowing the main floor to be an open gathering space. The theater is enclosed by glass, allowing the experience of attending the theater to be on display.

In between the regulated bar and the floating object is the main entrance and an open atrium. On one side of the atrium is the stair to the theater, and on the other side is the restaurant. From the atrium, visitors can see a variety of activities from dining, and mingling to rehearsals and attending classes.





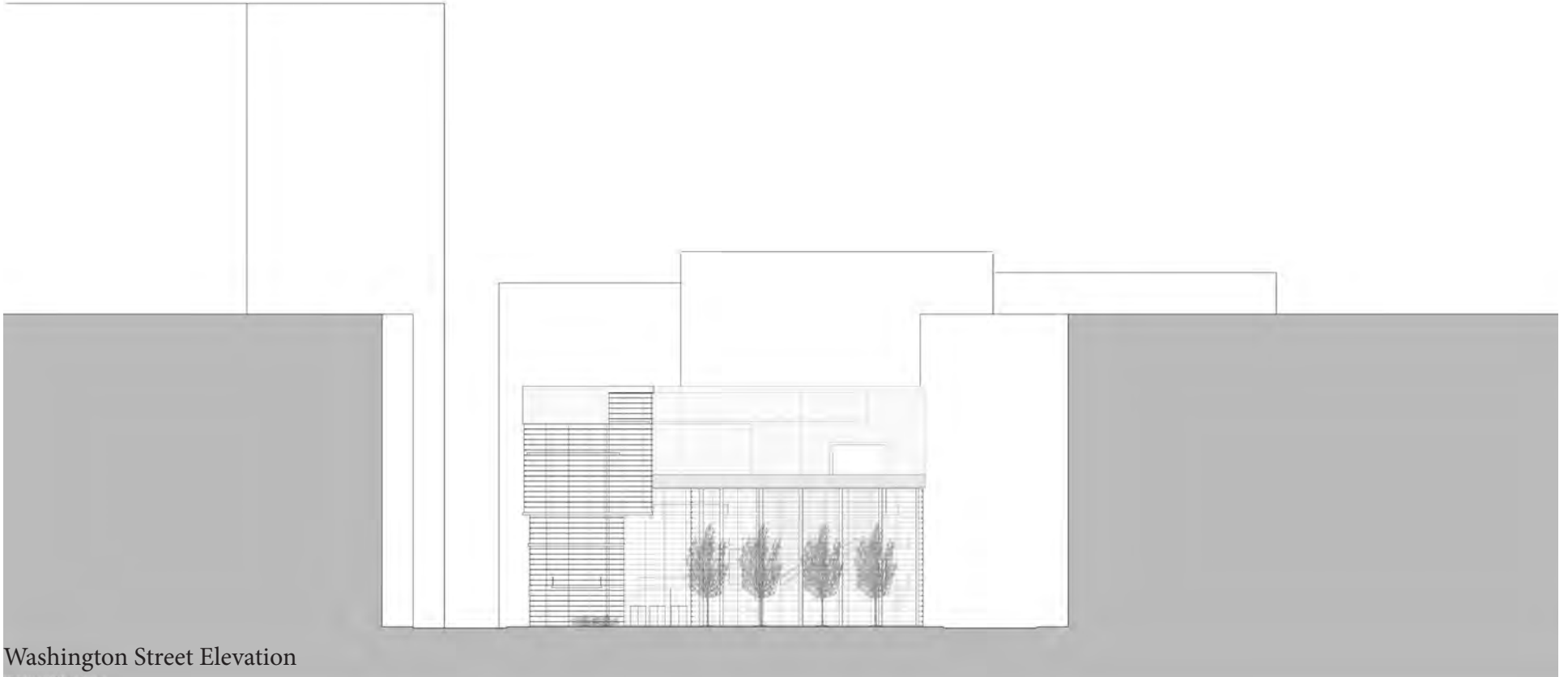
Solid “back of house”



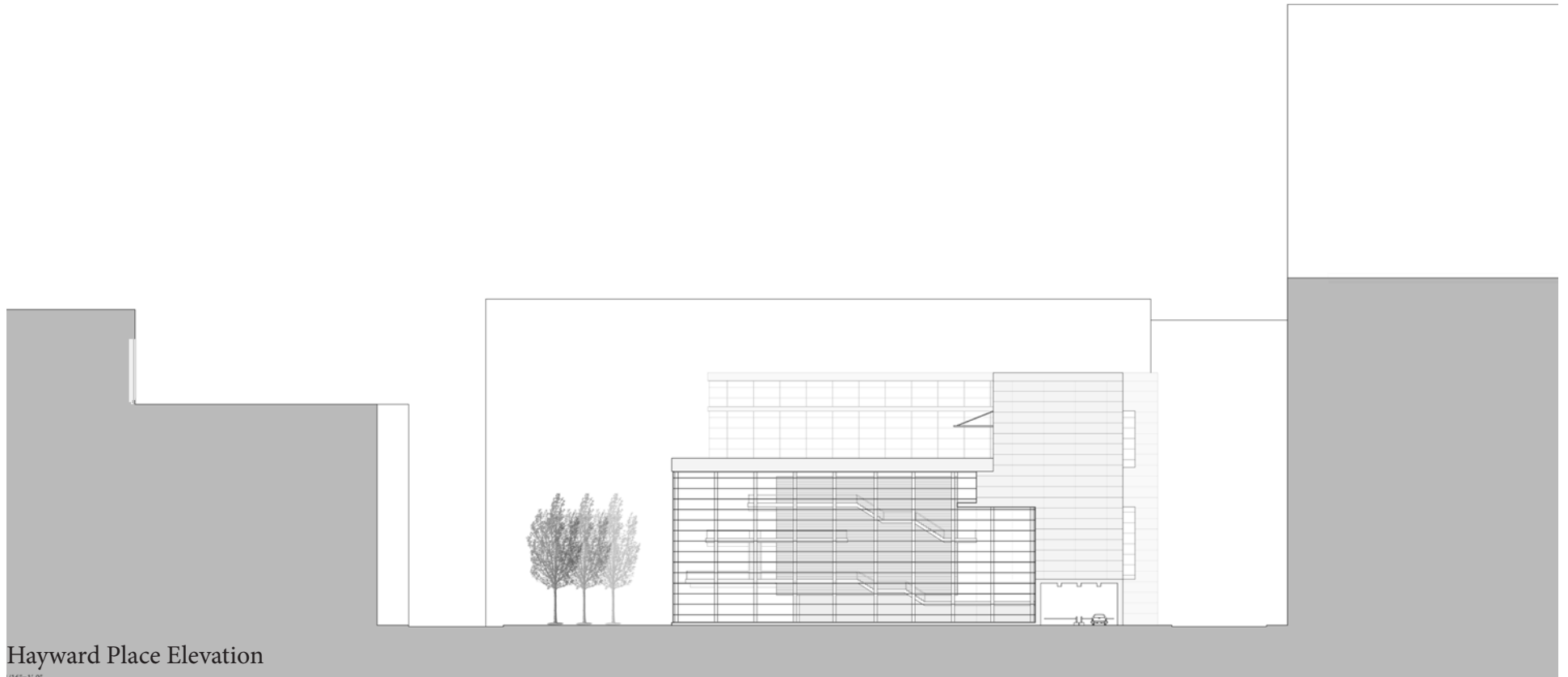
Open front

# Facade

The facade is primarily solid on the “back of house” end, specifically along Harrison Ave and the back end of Delafayette Ave. It is comprised of a metal paneling system and portions of glass. Washington Street and the front portion of Delafayette Ave are glass, allowing the activity to be clearly visible from the street.

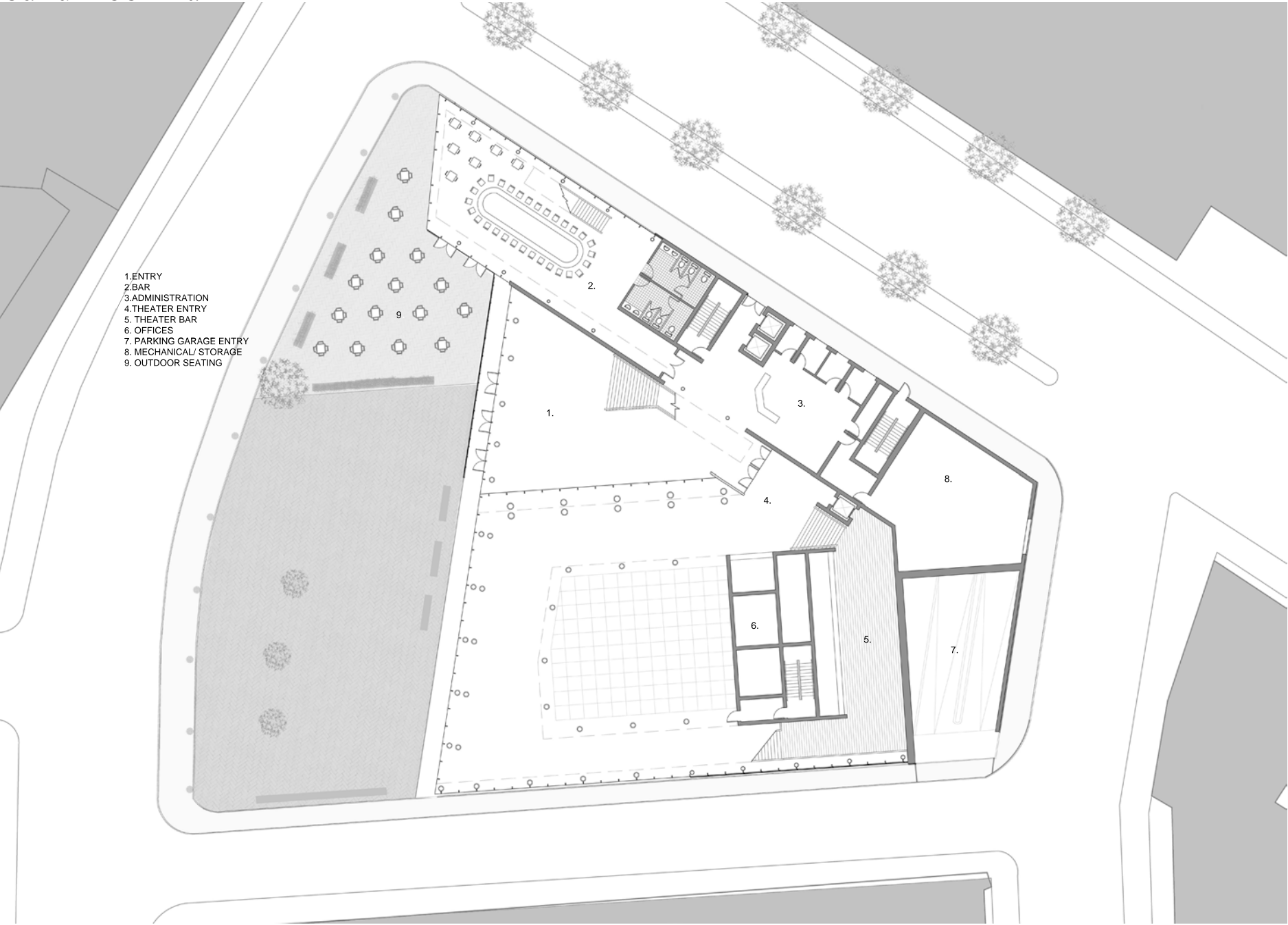


Washington Street Elevation



Hayward Place Elevation

# Ground Floor Plan

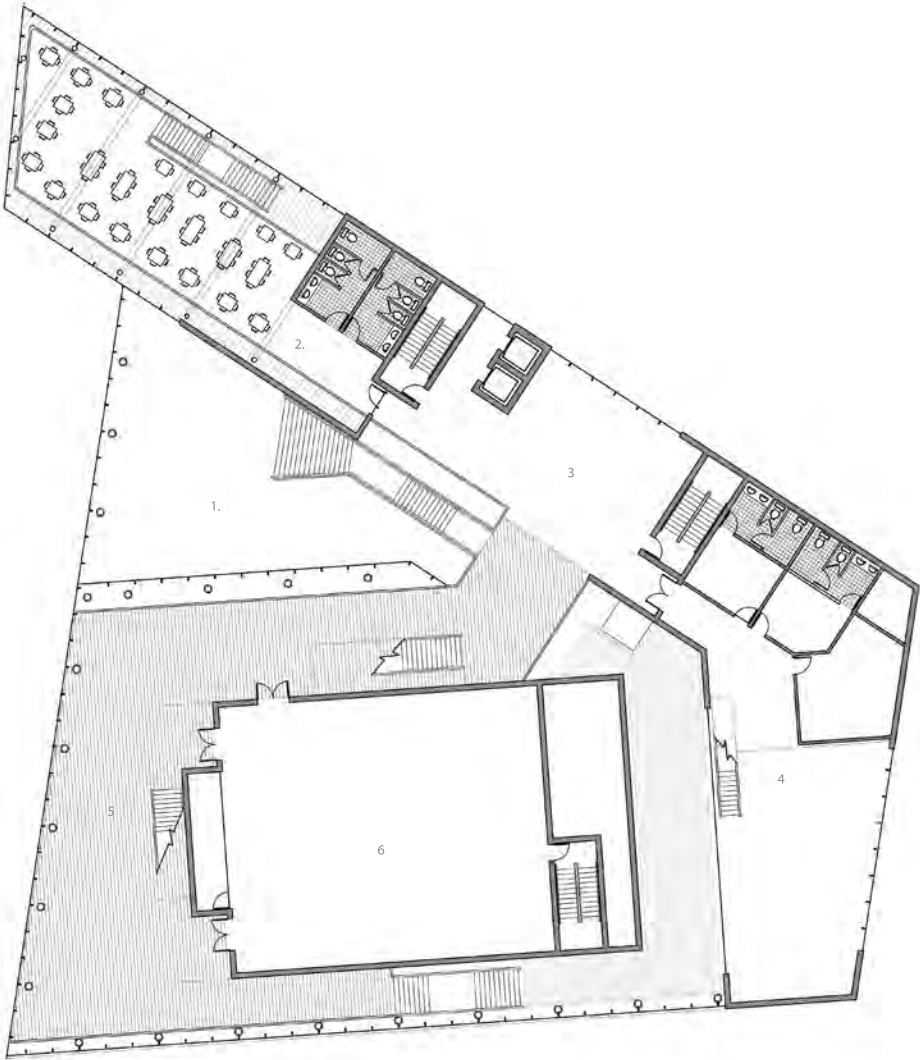


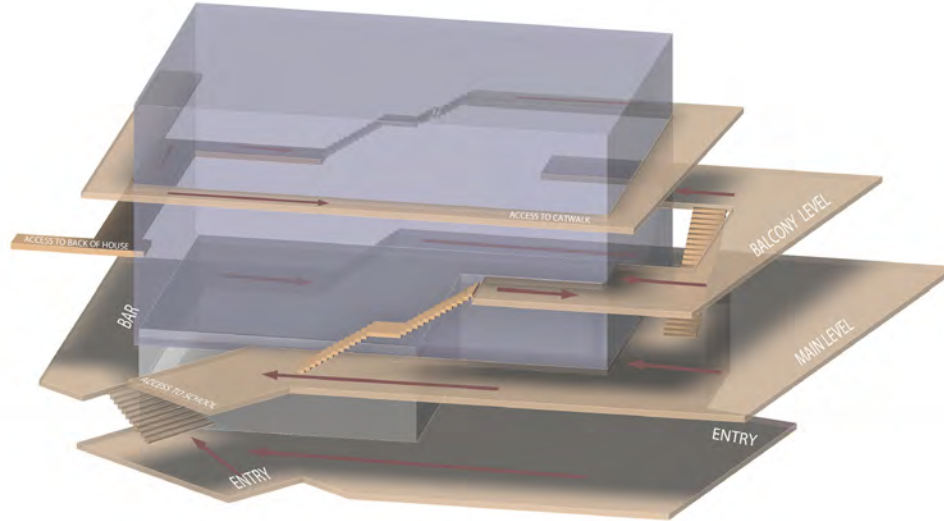


Atrium

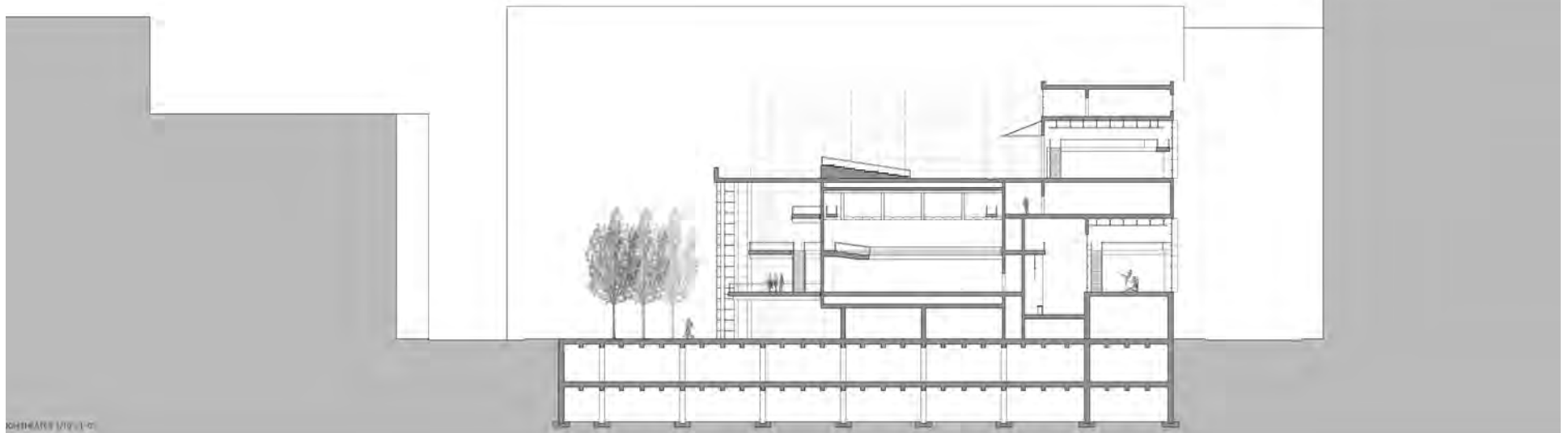
Second Floor Plan

- 1. Atrium
- 2. Restaurant
- 3. Gathering Space
- 4. Rehearsal
- 5. Main Level Balcony
- 6. Theater



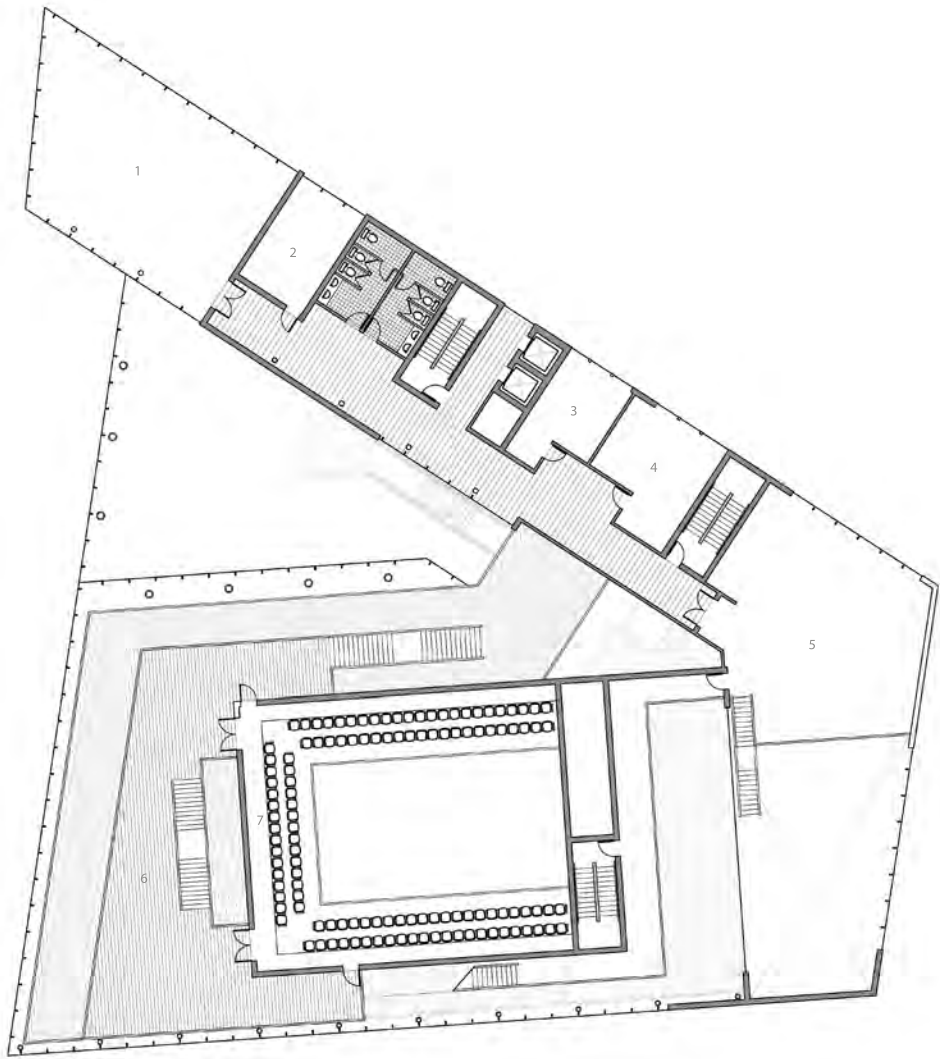


Circulation around the Theater



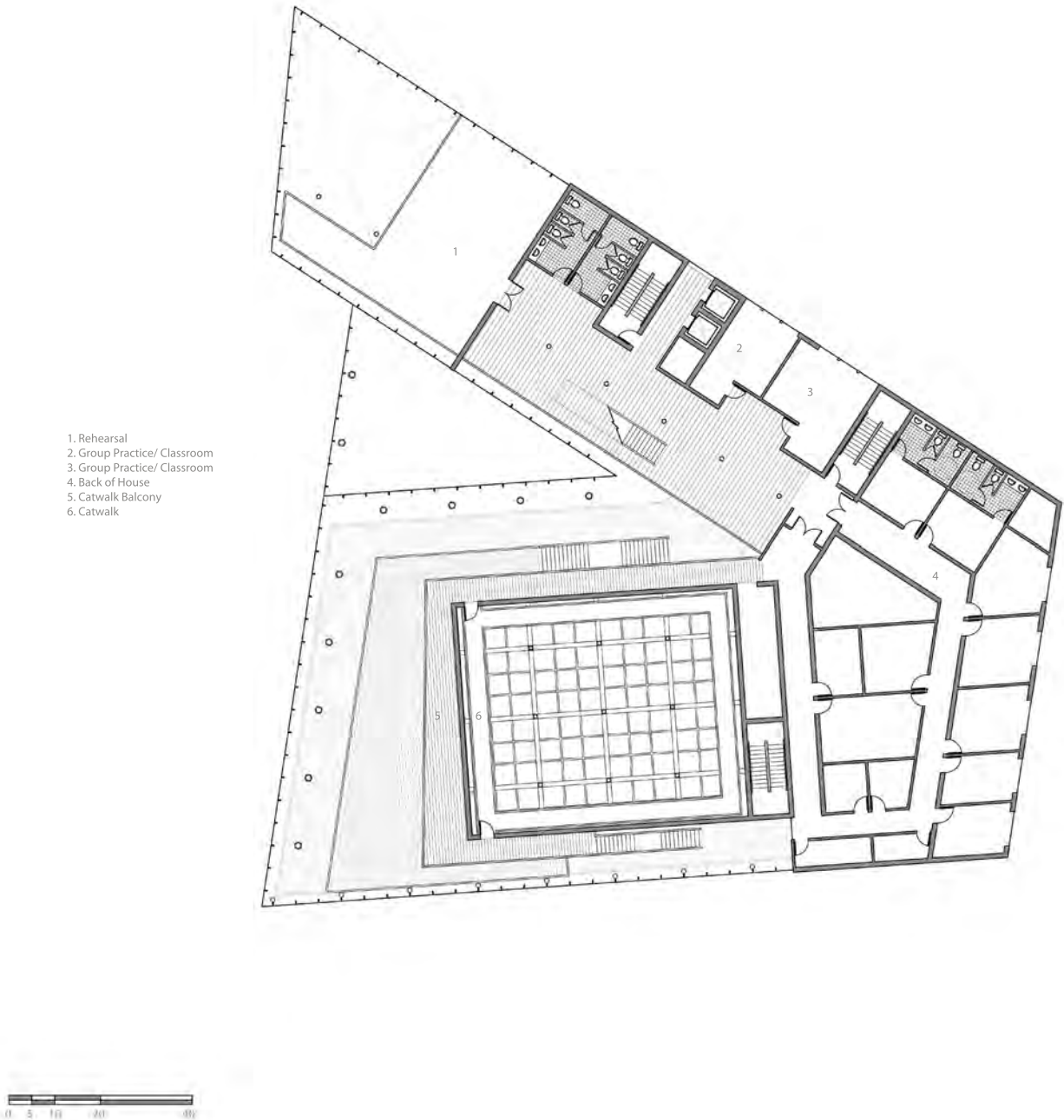
# Third Floor Plan

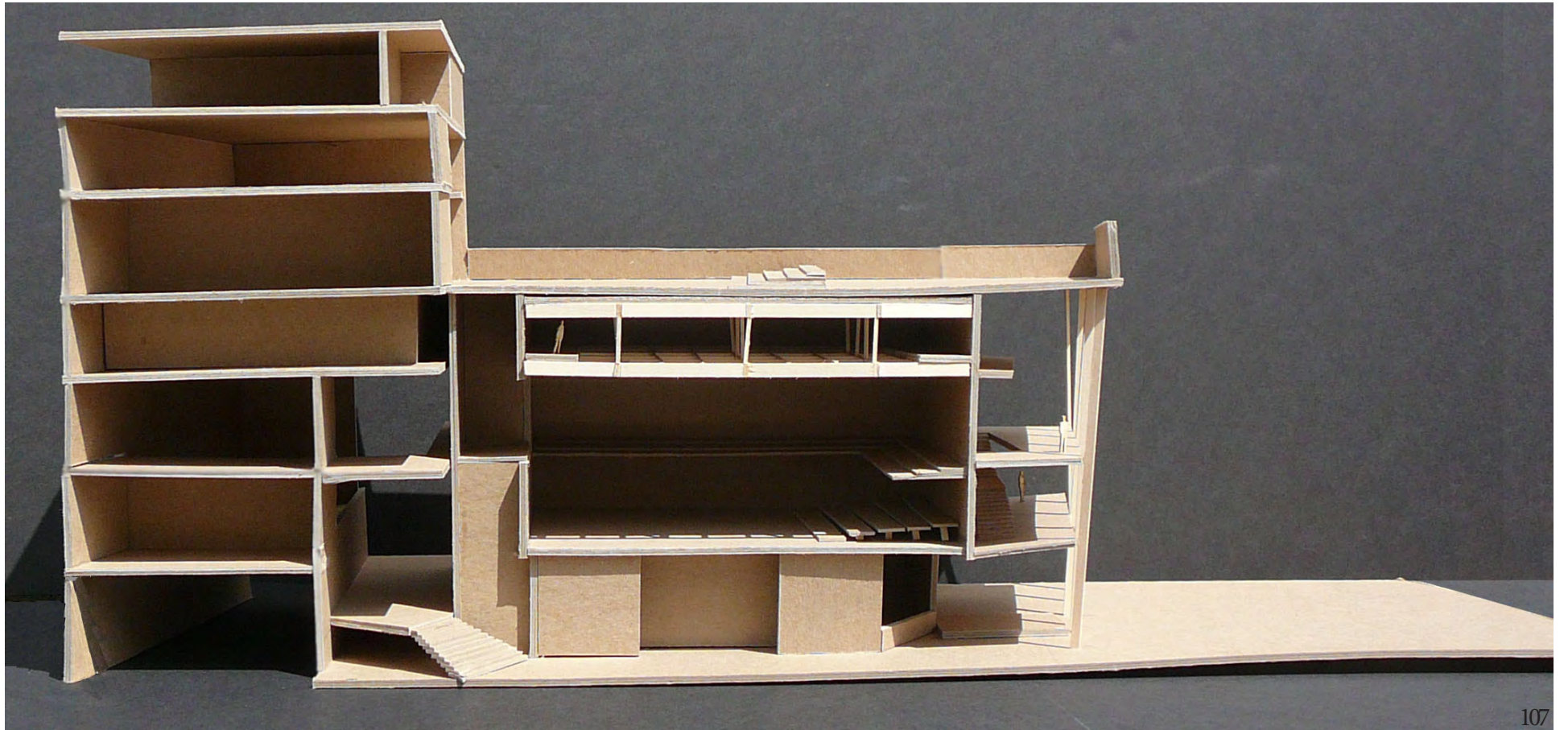
- 1.Rehearsal
- 2. Group Practice Room
- 3. Group Practice/ Classroom
- 4. Group Practice/ Classroom
- 5. Rehearsal
- 6. Balcony
- 7. Balcony Seating





Fourth Floor Plan



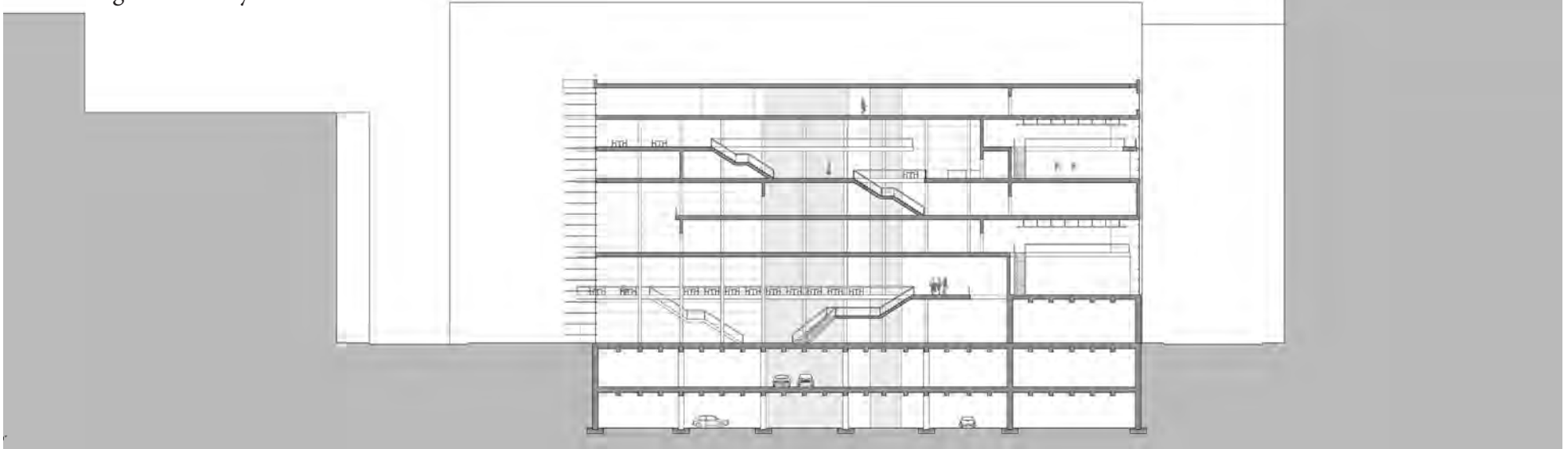


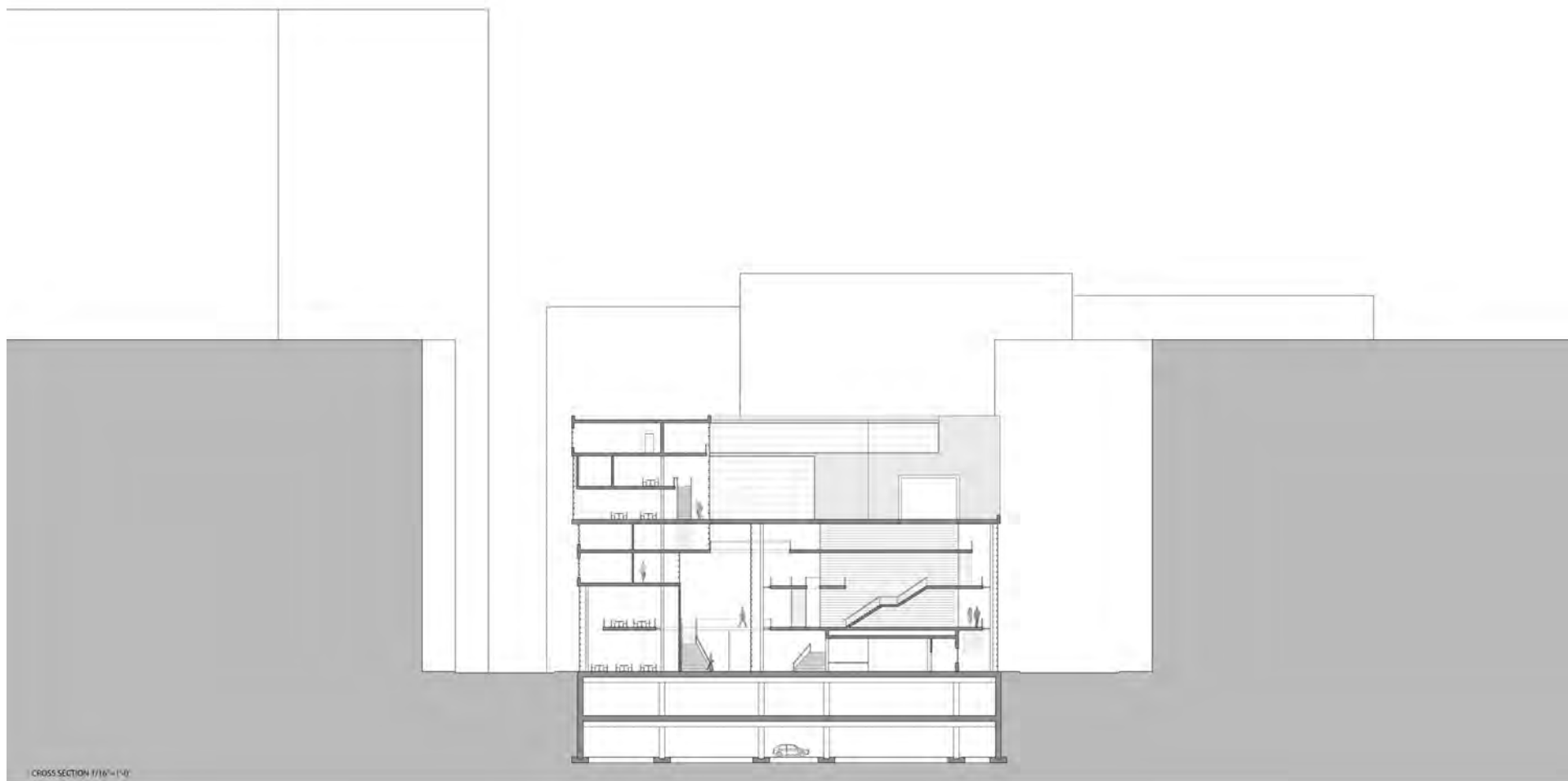
# Unscripted Stage

In order to create a variety of scenes, the architecture must become both a stage and a viewing platform. Visual connections between programmed spaces are instrumental in creating the awareness of the different scenes. On one floor students are rehearsing, while down below, people are finding their way to the theater doors. They are both aware of each other's presence, but not direct players in each other's activities.

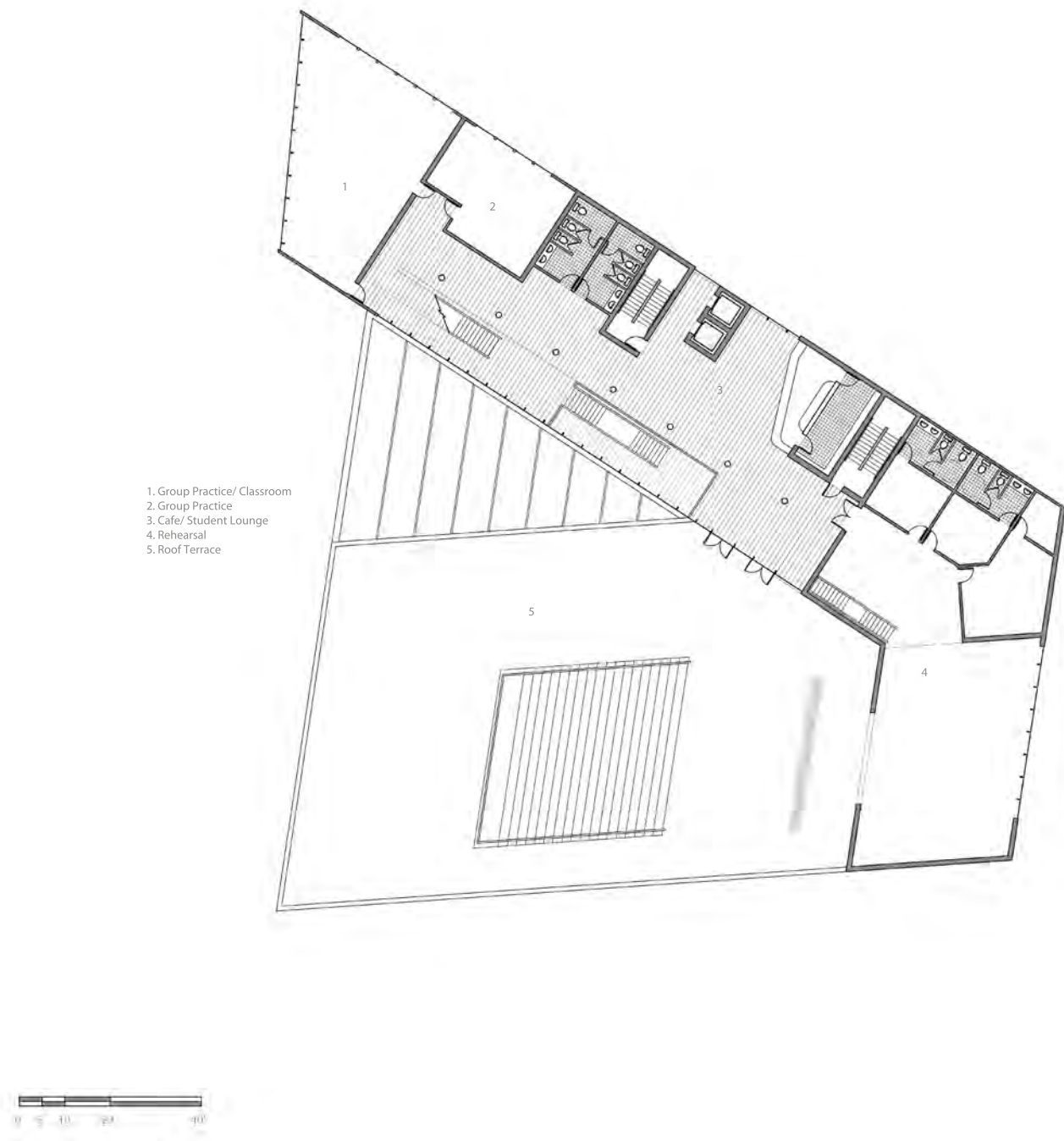
Also, an open circulation allows for the daily journey to class, or the procession into the theater to be on display. Here the path becomes an audience for the programmed spaces, and also an audience for themselves. Anyone can pause, and see other people moving throughout the building: an unscripted stage.

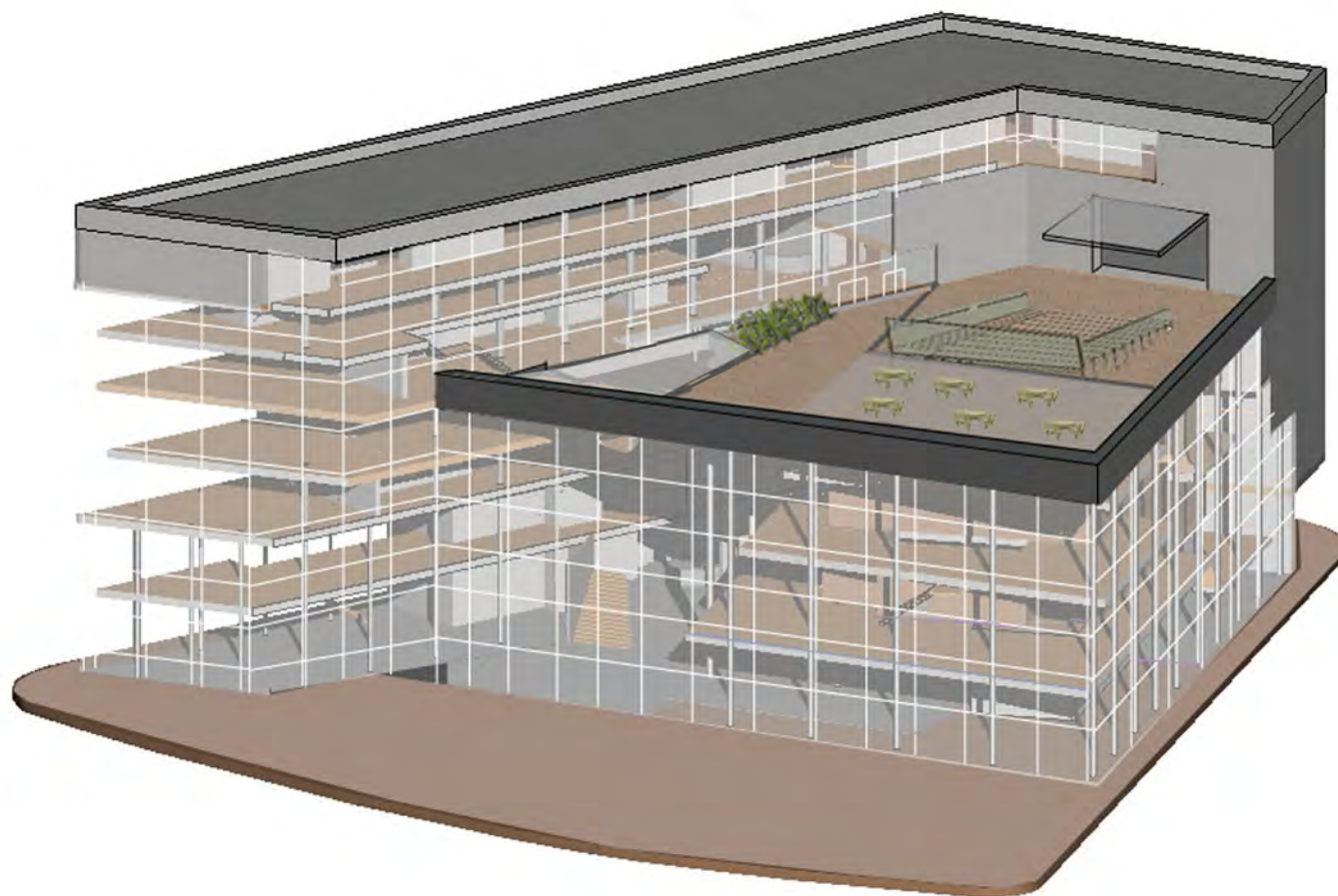
The space is choreographed, creating a general flow of traffic, but it only sets the stage for activity to occur.





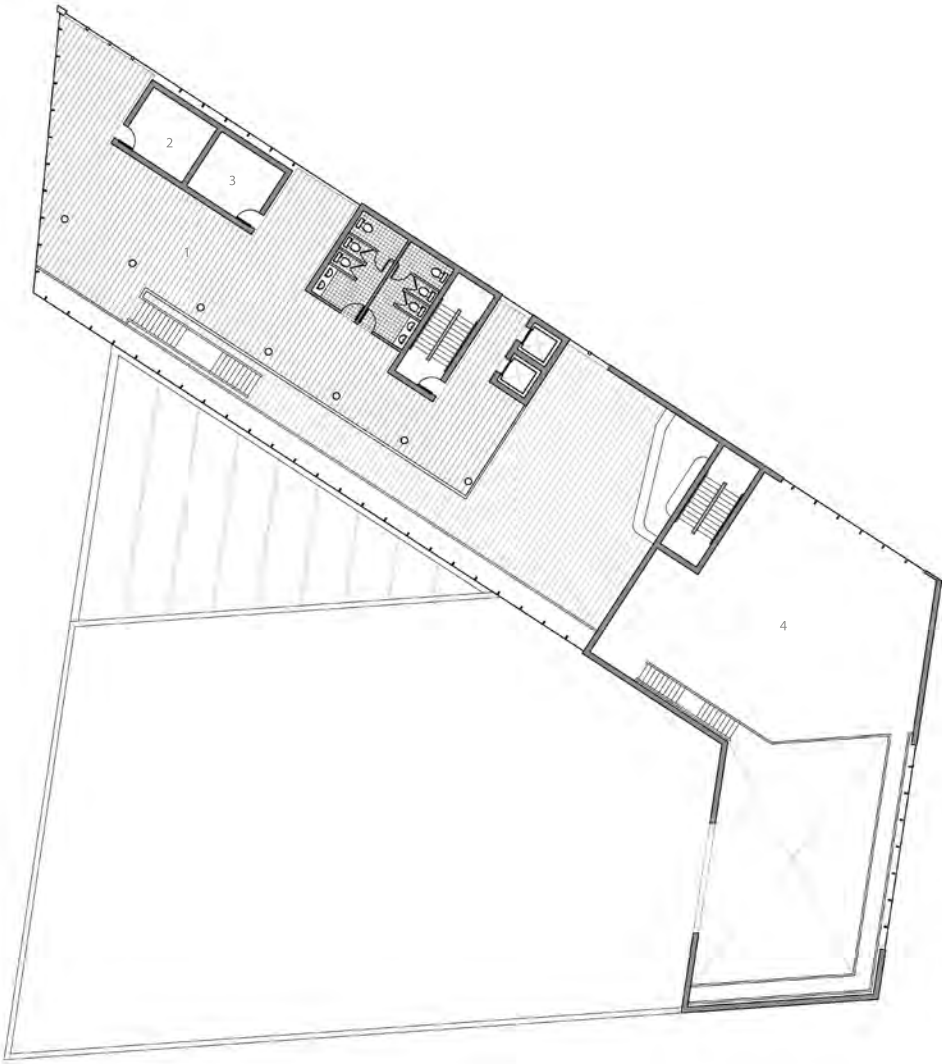
# Fifth Floor Plan





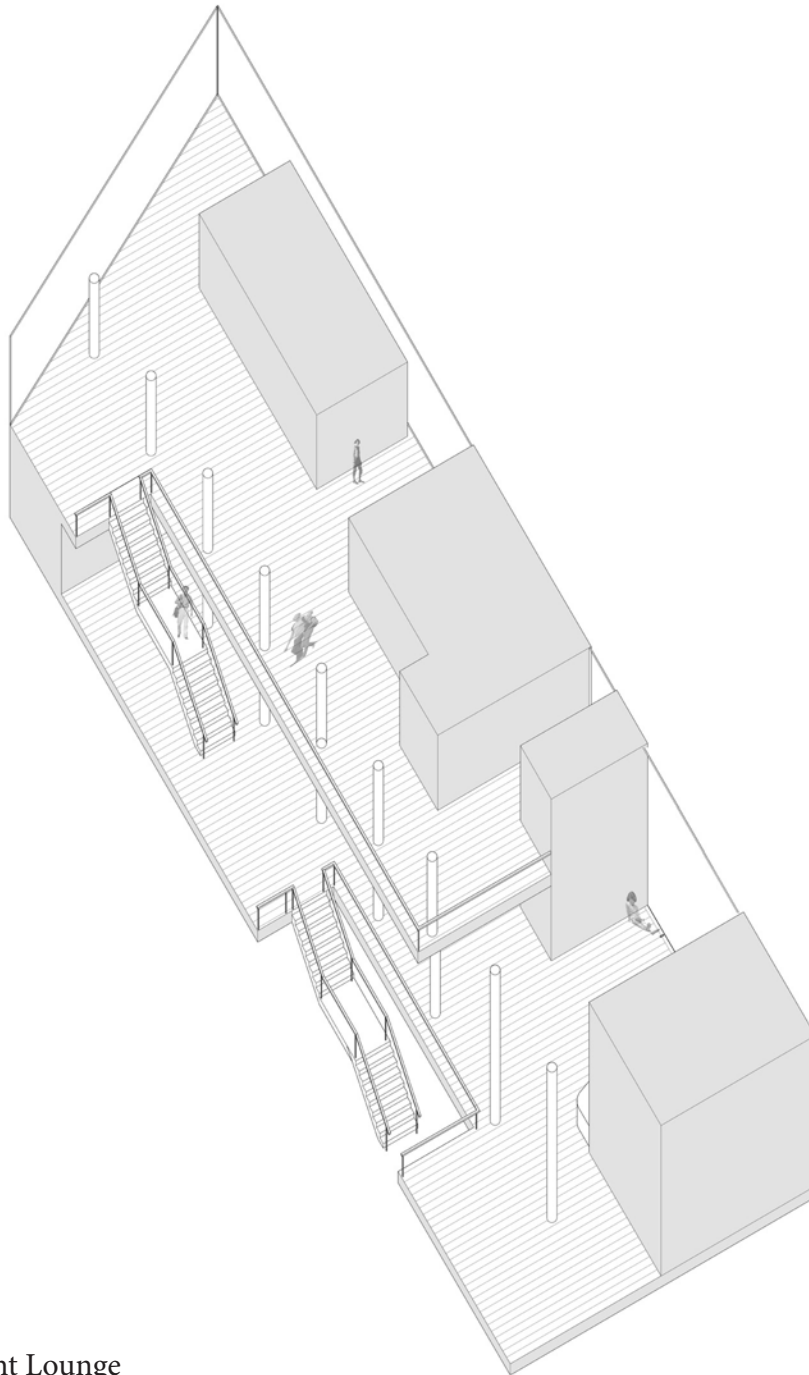
Sixth Floor Plan

- 1. Student Lounge
- 2. Private Practice
- 3. Private Practice
- 4. Rehearsal



## Multi-level Spaces

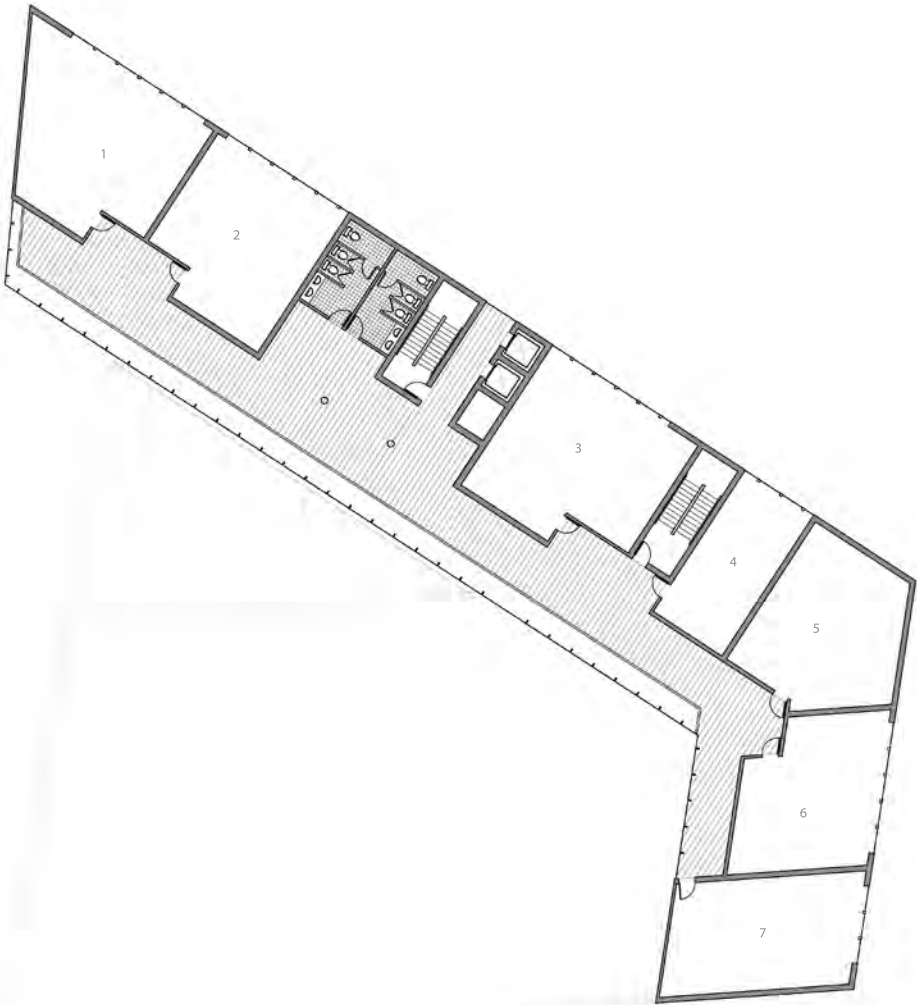
With a variety of levels, each floor can act as its own stage, and spaces can be private, but open. The cafe sits on the first floor while the more private study spaces are on the upper portion.



Student Lounge

# Seventh Floor Plan

- 1. Classroom
- 2. Classroom
- 3. Classroom
- 4. Group Practice
- 5. Classroom
- 6. Classroom
- 7. Classroom

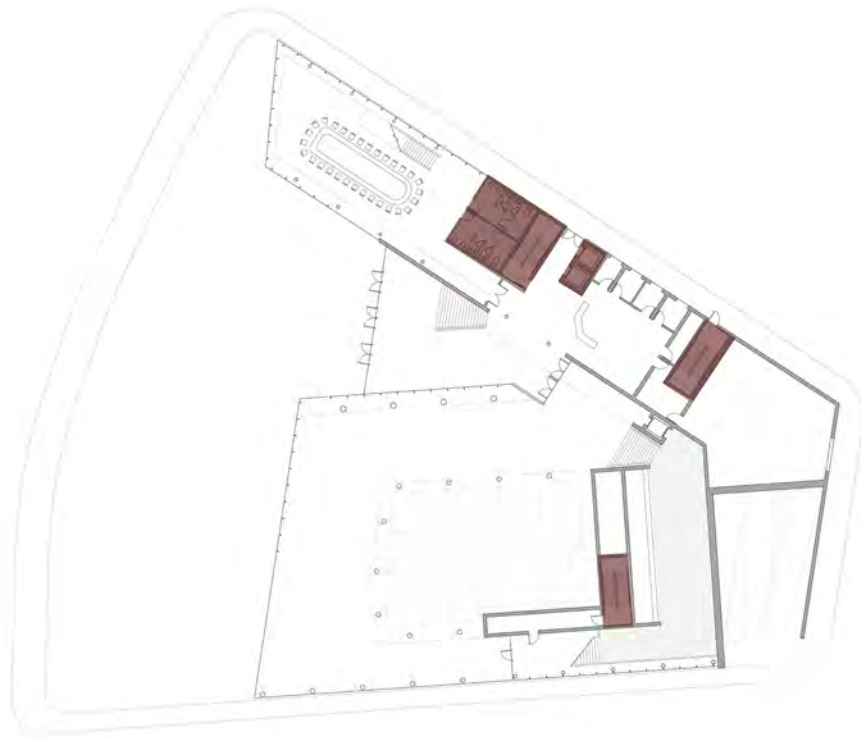




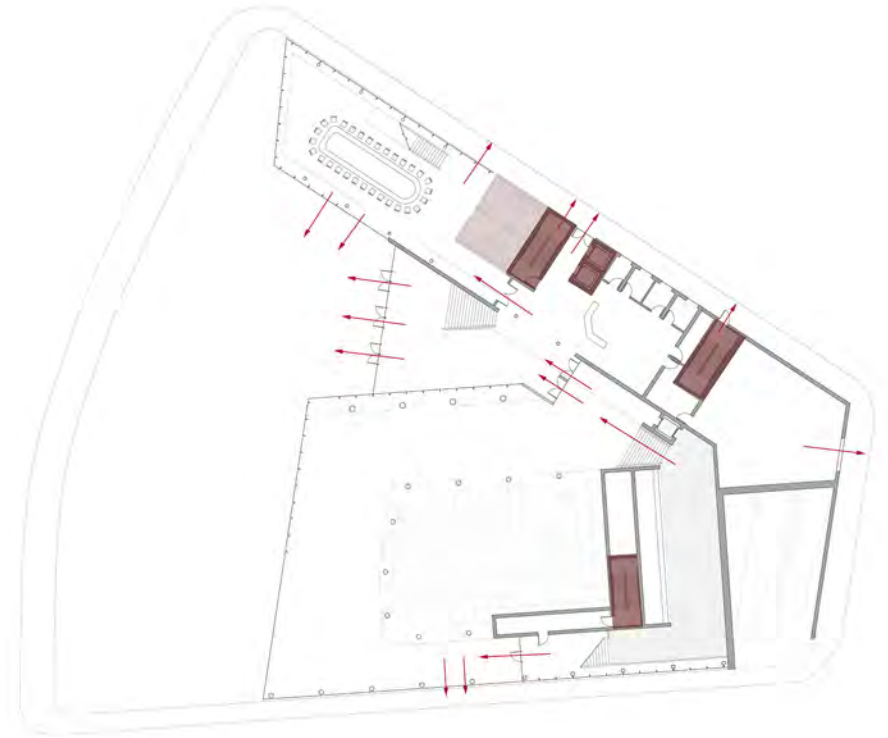
## Services

The building is served through three primary cores: two in the bar, and one in the theater. There are exits to all sides of the building allowing for crowds to exit as necessary.

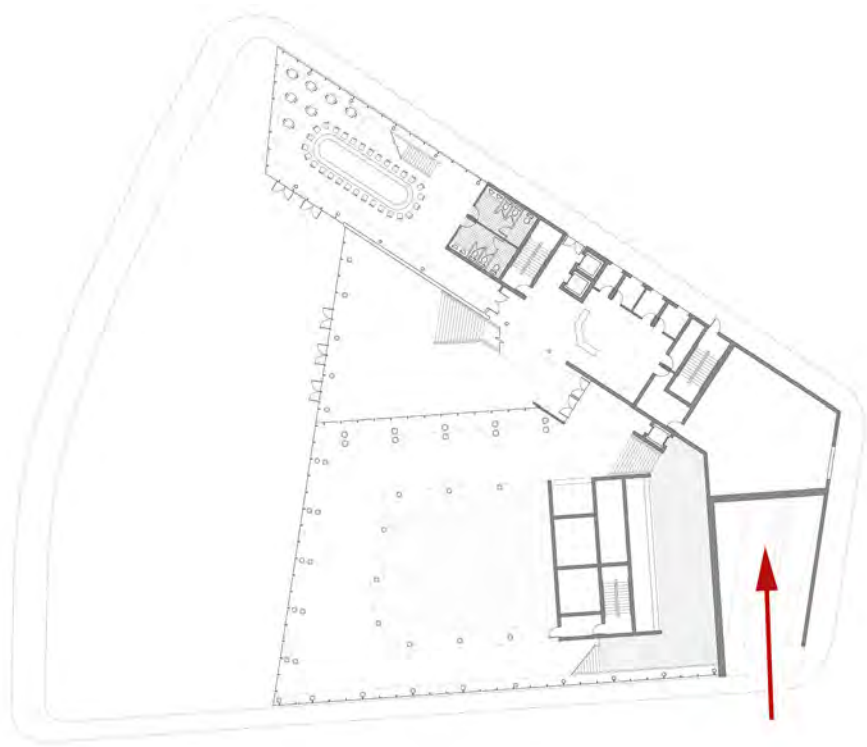
The building also features several floors of underground parking. Accessed from Hayward Place, the cores along the bar provide pedestrian access into the building.



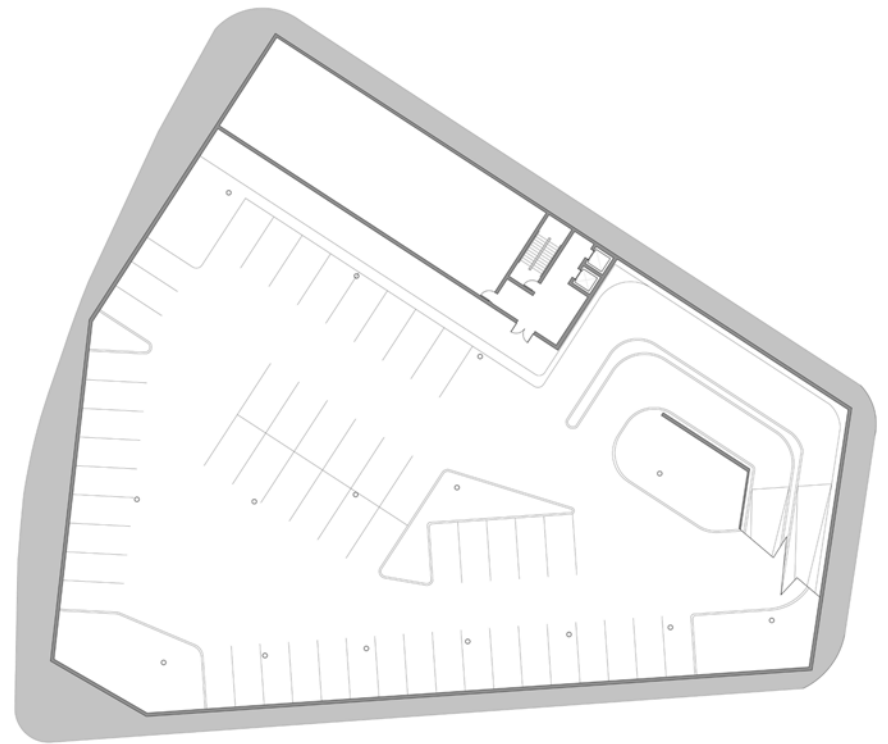
Cores



Egress



Parking entrance off Hayward Place

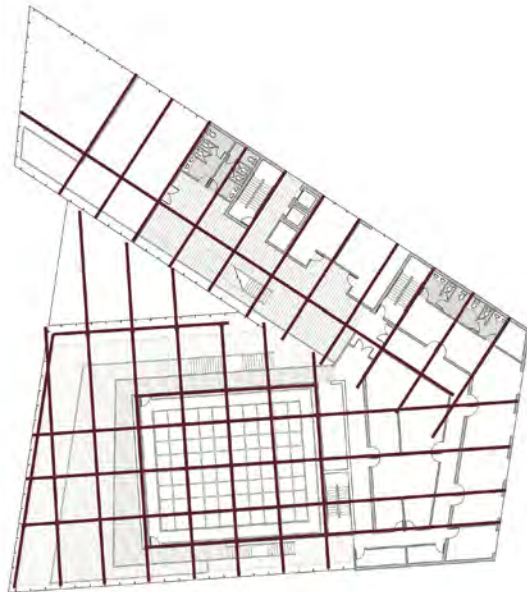


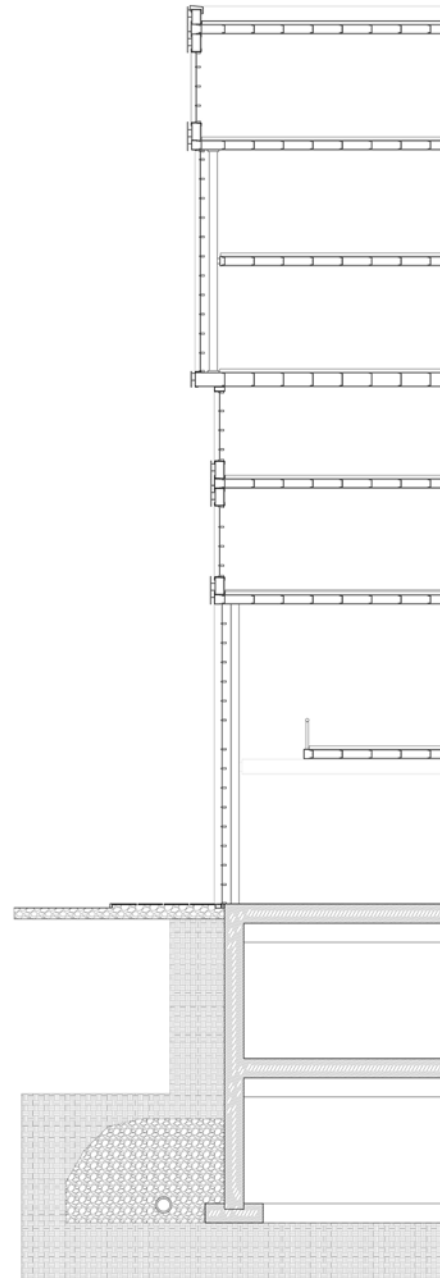
Parking- two floors underground

# Structure

The building has a primarily steel structure, divided into two portions. Both sections are set on a fifteen foot grid. The first portion is the “bar” where the steel beams run regularly.

The second portion is the theater. The theater has its own steel box frame. It is set in its own “glass box” held by two rows of simple, clean columns along the perimeter. The goal was to keep the surrounding atrium space as transparent and open as possible. One row of columns supports the theater balconies, also supported by the theater box. The other row of columns primarily holds the glass facade and supports the roof.





Typical wall section of “bar”



# Mechanical

The building utilizes a variable air volume system that allows for individual control of zones, and is a centralized, quiet system. The main system will feed from under the bar, next to the egress stairs, up to the classrooms, and across. The rooms are fed from above through drop ceilings. The theater is treated as its own unit, and the atrium is heated through a secondary system, and can utilize natural ventilation through the skylight.

## Zones

### Zone 1: Theater

The theater requires acoustic isolation as well as variability between high impact use and nonuse.

### Zone 2: Restaurant

Dealing with food, the mechanical system needs to be separated from other rooms and therefore requires its own air handling unit.

### Zone 3: Rehearsal

The back portion of the bar is primarily rehearsal spaces which, like gymnasium spaces, vary between periods of high impact and periods of nonuse.

### Zone 4: Classrooms

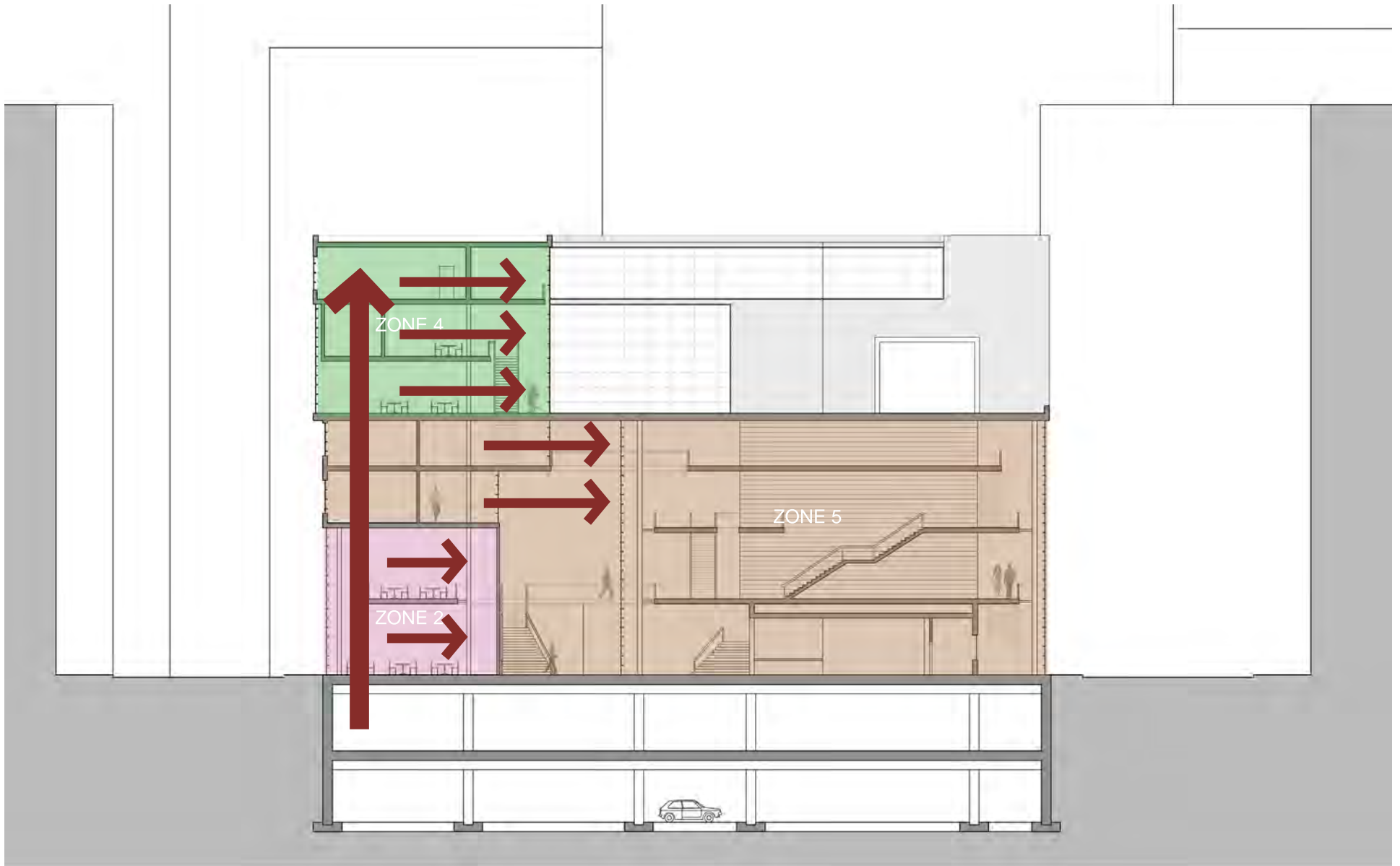
The classrooms are fed vertically from the basement and then horizontally across the upper two floors.

### Zone 5: Atrium

The atrium, as a public, open space surrounded by glass, can vent to the outside and uses radiant floor heating to help offset the cold.



Zones (Second floor)



Zones- Fed from basement up through bar

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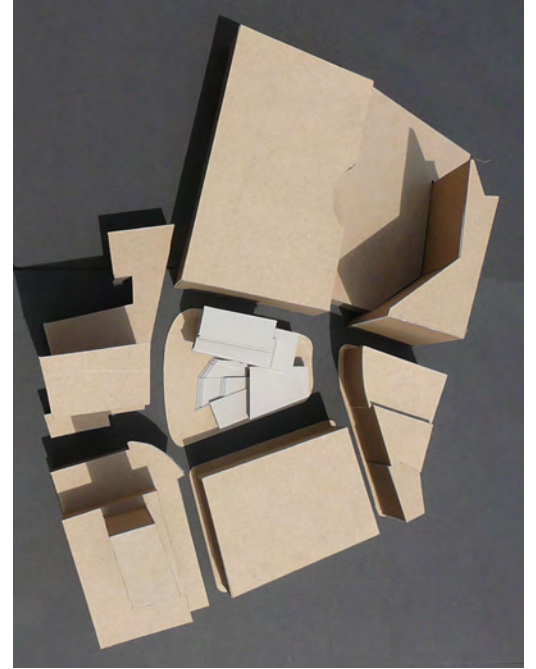
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## Appendix I: Process

## Early Studies: Finding an Appropriate Form





## Early Studies: How to Activate the Plaza





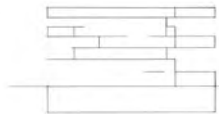
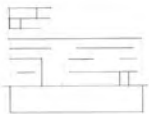
## Early Studies: Bringing the Plaza in



Mid crit:  
Adapting to the bar and object



Final Review



the real, the spectacle, and the in-between  
architecture as a stage for reality

In today's media based society, we frequently have signs of the reality of our lives. The collective "real" is a general knowledge of the state of affairs in the world, provided through the mass media. Our encounters occur more and more frequently in other spaces instead of through face-to-face interaction. We are more familiar with images than we are with the things themselves. The power of images is enormous in the mass communication world. Robert Rauschenberg said that the spectacle is "a social relation among people, mediated by images." Architecture should create and interactions that permeate the image based interaction. But can architecture be a social relation?

Reality, at its core, is what exists without any further qualifications. It is the basis of everything. An apple is an apple and nothing more. A building is a building. The spectacle is a performance. The street is a place for circulation. Reality shows an awareness of what is. The buildings have programs, but are invisible.

In the other end of the spectrum is the world of the spectacle. In this world, everything runs through a set of filters, and gets lost in the images and technology. Life in appearance, life becomes a performance in a theatrical world.

The world is more complex. The spectacle, at its core, is a reaction to reality. It is a social relation that creates experience. It is the celebration of an image in a real setting that creates interaction. The result is a social relation where reality is understood as the image, and the spectacle is understood through the real. Every day life becomes the playground in which the spectacle and the real meet.

The goal of the project is to explore the space between the real and the spectacle. The project will explore the spectacle and reality through a theater and public space near Chatham and the theater district of Boston. The theater is accompanied by a small acting school that can be an interior venue and the place in images. The theater is located on the awareness of reality through the spectacle of performance as the public place can "turn the reality of everyday life into a theatrical situation" and bring life to the street.



