Framing Pluralism: A Reconfiguration of the Robson Square Complex in Downtown Vancouver, British Columbia

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the question of how a dialogue may be developed between the socio-political notion of pluralism and a pluralistic public sphere, and the design of public space and public architecture. More particularly, it considers how architecture may both accommodate multiple publics while simultaneously framing connection or association between them. Following an exploration of this question at an abstract, theoretical level, the thesis moves to a more specific architectural investigation. This investigation takes the form of a design project situated within the Robson Square complex in downtown Vancouver. The complex, constructed in the mid-1970's, was designed by Canada's pre-eminent architect Arthur Erickson and is the major civic space in the city. The thesis design project undertakes a theoretical re-evaluation and physical renovation of this utopian mega-structure, with the intention of shifting the existing homogeneity and institutionality of the complex to align it with the thesis argument.

Through the vehicle of a design project, the abstract theoretical argument is translated and focused through the particularities of an architecture embedded in its site. This methodology requires the project to address issues connected to the existing masterwork, including: the question of how to conceptualize monumentality in a grid city; the relationship between the 'sacred' space of the civic circumstance and the 'profane' space of the street and commercial program; the form of the institution within the city; and the issue of working within, and manipulating, a pre-existing architectural language. Further, the scale of the site is reflected in the scope of the design project. The project moves from the development of urban design strategies to the detailed consideration of the material and construction of the different interventions. The architecture remains, however, conceptual and is a demonstration of how the developed strategies may generate form and guide program. The project does not attempt to fully develop a building in detail.

The thesis concludes with an afterword on the success of the project as a demonstration of the thesis argument. At the same time, the limits of architecture to act as a socio-political device are acknowledged. Further, speculations are made as to the way in which the position and the strategies developed within the thesis might inform wider discussions on architecture and the urbanism of grid cities such as Vancouver. The key concept forming the basis of these speculations is the idea of a 'difficult' co-existence of parts and a whole, reflecting the pluralistic ideal of association within fragmentation.
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Introduction

"...no doubt there would be all sorts of dissonance and conflict and trouble in this space, but that would be exactly what we are after. In a genuinely open space, all of a city's loose ends can hang out, all of society's inner contradictions can express and unfold themselves... Open space is a place where people can actively engage the...world together, and as they do it, transform themselves into a public."

Marshall Berman

"Hemmed in by a threatening forest of the towers of private interests, the three blocks are a meadow sanctuary of civic and communal values: the law courts open to all witnesses, the government offices wrapped in nature's nurturing guise, and the arts once again dancing in their old Grecian robes."

Arthur Erickson
Implicit though rarely directly addressed in current debates around the form and legitimacy of the design of urban public space, whether it be in relation to the conservatism of the so-called 'New Urbanism' or the radicalism of 'Deconstruction,' are particular socio-political ideals and notions of the 'public.' This thesis takes as its starting point the ideal of the formation of a 'pluralistic public,' with the aim of exploring the way in which such an ideal may inform architectural strategies for the design of public space and public buildings in the prototypical North American grid city. The purpose of directly addressing how the ideal of pluralism may inform the design process is to both actively engage a political position considered to be relevant and necessary, and give insight into the way in which architecture of the public realm embodies and frames particular social agendas.

The above epigrams serve as a useful introduction to this project. The first illustrates how the difficult pluralistic ideal of the formation of a 'public,' both political and psychological, within the fragmented condition of social diversity, is linked within cultural theory to the physical space of the city. The second epigram presents the architect's statement for the site appropriated by this thesis as the vehicle for exploring the limits and possibilities of linking pluralism to architecture. As represented by Erickson’s statement, the site, the Robson Square Provincial Government and Courts complex in downtown Vancouver, is an example of a public space and building that is strongly informed by a particular socio-cultural ideal. Indeed it is envisaged as a socio-political device to support within its utopian “sanctuary” the formation of the idealized normative public that pluralistic politics question.

Berman's cry for a "genuinely open space" is overly simple, as the careful consideration of the mapping of the ideal of pluralism onto the design of public space and architecture leads to a host of complex questions - questions of representation, monumentality and spatial hierarchy. More specifically, how public space can accommodate

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and be appropriated by multiple publics and multiple subjectivities, at
the same time as framing connection or 'bridging' between them? Further,
inherent in the consideration of the manifestation of public space in the
North American city is the issue of the intersection of architecture and
the urbanism of the grid plan.

The Robson Square complex was selected as a provocative site for the
consideration of these questions as it is a significant public space and
institution which has major failings that provide a mandate for its
renovation. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, these failings can be
directly connected to the notion of the 'public' that informed Erickson's
utopian scheme. In the complex the desire to represent and nurture a single unified public and their "community
values" was melded with the notion of making a new city in the form of a mega-structure "sanctuary." The entire
form of the continuous extrusion constructed was dictated by the idea of overlaying the institutional space of the
government centre with an artificial landscape to provide public open space. This "sanctuary" was inserted into
the "threatening" living city as an autonomous utopian realm. The particular brilliance of the design was how it
masked the violence to the city required to construct this anti-urban utopia through the construction of 'nature.' It
thereby keying into the west coast reverence for the natural. The design strategy resulted, however, in serious
problems in relation to the buildings' function, amenity, economic viability and connection to the life of the city.

As a theoretical re-evaluation and physical renovation of the Robson Square complex, the thesis project will arise
at the intersection of addressing the existing pragmatic failings with the attempt to 'shift' the complex's design so
as to align it with the argument for pluralism and the idea of multiple publics. This requires the more general
consideration of the issues of the monumentality, identity and form of public buildings in the grid city, and the
generation of an architecture from the 'contradictory' notion of the mutual possibilities of diversity and unity.
More specific to Robson Square is the concern with the relationship of the built to the natural, and the transformation
of the language and form of an existing masterwork.

The purpose of embedding the exploration of the architectural translation of pluralism in a specific context is to
move it from the abstract generalities of a polemic to the specifics of the generation of form and experience rooted
in place. Further, it is to illustrate the way in which urban and architectural strategies may, and should, be interconnected. While the strategies developed will consequently be tied to the particularities of the city context and the existing buildings' function and form, they will subsequently be reviewed to ascertain their general applicability.

The thesis is structured into four chapters. The first develops the argument introduced and outlines the general position of the thesis with regard to the linkage of the political argument to public space and architecture. Chapter two combines a full description of Robson Square with a critique of its design, both from the position of the theoretical argument and from the desire to identify pragmatic programmatic and functional problems. Chapter three outlines the actual proposal, first by describing the design strategies to be implemented together with their rationale, and then giving an overview of the renovations and additions proposed. Chapter four acts as an afterword and considers what the project suggests about the limits and possibilities of architecture to frame the formation of a pluralistic public. More particularly, it reviews the strategies employed and speculates on what principles may be extracted for informing design at a more general level.
I. Pluralism, Public Space and Public Architecture
The interest in considering the architectural implications of the socio-political concept of pluralism and the public sphere occurs in the context of present trends in urban design and architectural theory. Two clearly opposing positions can be identified. First, there is the argument that any thought of a viable and meaningful public space is now hopeless and conservative. This argument suggests that if people do emerge from their private realm it is in a state of interiorized subjectivity and into a space, generally privatized, that has become all spectacle and commodity. An opposing position is argued by the conservative “New Urbanism.” This populist approach is successfully promoting the idea of an “urban renaissance” through linking the ideal of a unified public and the common good with the ‘traditional’ urban syntax of square and plaza and the systemization of architectural order and character. The aim of such systemization is to ensure the representation of the public realm as a cohesive whole. This architecture nostalgically looks back to what are perceived as ‘golden sites’ in which city form was resonant with public order and participative democracy - sites exemplified by the agora and the New England town square.

In this chapter I argue that the ideal of pluralism be used to question the underlying assumptions and implications of the above attitudes to the public realm, and to develop an alternative dialogue between the political and the spatial. A dialogue that on one hand reaffirms the continuing relevance and importance of conceptualizing public space in the city, and on the other, proposes a more open and inclusive model responsive to social diversity and the spatialization of heterogeneity. Prior to developing this argument in more detail the political and cultural

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3 The work of Jean Baudrillard is a good example of an influential theorist who almost gleefully makes apocalyptic statements about the state of the public world. He states: “Thus the body, landscape, time all disappear as scenes. And the same for public space: the theatre of the social and the theatre of politics are both reduced more and more to a large soft body with many heads. Advertising in its new version...invades everything as public space (the street, monument, market scene) disappears” in “The Ecstasy of Communication,” Hal Foster (Ed), The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983) 129.

theory used to frame the discussion will be outlined.

**The Public Sphere and Pluralism**

The idea of the 'public' has been tied historically to the social, political and economic changes occurring in eighteenth-century Europe. This period saw the growth of the middle classes, the densification of cities and diversification of their populations, and the secularization of the state following the development of democratic institutions. Two separate aspects of the notion 'public' can be identified as appearing during this time - one having to do with physical appearance in the space of the city, and the other linked to the more abstract political realm. Richard Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man* refers to how, in the eighteenth century, the term public came to mean a life passed outside the life of the family and close friends; in the public region diverse, complex social groups were brought into ineluctable contact.

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The link between the space of the city and the notion 'the public' was fostered at the time not only by the growth of particular sites of bourgeois culture, such as coffee houses, clubs and theatres, but by changes in the fabric of the city itself. The construction of urban parks, the opening of royal gardens and walks to the general populace, and the networks of promenades all expanded the opportunities to be and act in public as a cosmopolitan urbanite moving "comfortably in diversity."

The abstract political notion of 'the public' or the 'public sphere,' was tied to the rise of democracy and the ideal
of the 'common good.' The seminal theoretical analysis of 'the public sphere' and its relationship to democracy was developed by Jurgen Habermas in his influential work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Culture*, first published in 1962. Habermas argues that during the eighteenth century, the public sphere evolved as an arena of discursive relations and of "free rational debate," separate from the private sphere, which mediated between society and the state. As a construct, the bourgeois public sphere played a critical role in the realization of democracy in the emerging nation-states, acting as a vehicle for universal rights and electoral politics. Central to Habermas's notion of the bourgeois public sphere is, however, its integrity as a singular and coherent entity managed by the educated elite, and structured through the collective will established upon the putting aside of private interests and social inequalities. Habermas argues that the public sphere in fact ceases to function following the infringement on its structure by special interest groups, or the enacting of more 'irrational' representations such as demonstrations or riots. In this way the founding premise of the liberal bourgeois notion of democracy and the democratic nation-state structure the idealization of unity and shared values over dissent and diversity, which are seen solely as negative forces.

It is this dependence on the normative ideals of homogeneity and universality that contemporary critiques of the liberal bourgeois notion of the public sphere question. History shows that behind "free rational debate," collective will and the distinction between private and public are exclusions and power imbalances. The politics of pluralism demand a more open and inclusive model. Such a model is proposed in Nancy Fraser's article "Rethinking the Public Sphere." Here Fraser argues that while "something like Habermas's idea of the public sphere is indispensable to critical social theory and to democratic political practice," its restructuring to give credence to multiple publics and a more complex relationship between private and public interests, is essential to ensure a democracy based on social equality, cultural diversity, and broad participation.8 The public sphere that Fraser proposes does not arise through stable unity, but through contestation between "counterpublics" and the gathering of a multiplicity of voices. Essential to this pluralistic model is the continuing importance of finding association within fragmentation, reflecting the aim of structuring a democratic society based on tolerance and inclusion. In this way the public sphere still arises as the conceptual arena for finding common ground, but as a less rigidly structured and more inclusive entity.

The notion of multiple publics may further be extended to the conceptualization of the public personae or subjectivity. Where the normative public sphere was based on the ideal of the engaged citizen actively participating

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8Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of an Actually Existing Democracy," in Bruce Robbins (Ed.), *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) 1.
in the "world," the framework of pluralism allows for a fluid, more detached subjectivity commensurate with contemporary culture. The continuing importance of connection and association in the pluralistic model requires, however, a level of engagement beyond simply the more interiorized detachment of the archetypal flaneur or the passive visual consumption of the tourist. In The Space of Appearance, George Baird directly addresses this issue. Baird, who is also interested in pluralism and its relationship with architecture, suggests that the conceptualization of a hybrid subjectivity is necessary - one which shifts between detached passivity and engaged participation.  

**Pluralism and Public Space**

The model for the public sphere proposed by Fraser provides the framework for the notion of pluralism and the pluralistic public sphere used in this thesis. What is critical is the dialogue that may be developed between this socio-political ideal and the design of designated public spaces in the city. Berman’s reference in the introductory epigram to “genuinely open space” indicates a basic requirement for such a dialogue. That is, the need for public space to be freely accessible and not controlled by private interests or the state. Later, in the same essay, Berman reinforces this position by stating that “implicit in our basic democratic right is the right to public space.” More specifically the ideal of pluralism requires in the conceptualization of public space the recognition and negotiation of the inherent tension associated with the co-existence of parts and a whole, of individuals and a collective.

The argument that pluralism leads to public space being conceived of as a site for a “multiplicity of simultaneous public interactions” is developed by Margaret Crawford, in “Contesting the Public Realm: Struggles over Public Space in Los Angeles.” Further, Crawford proposes that instead of a single “public” occupying an exemplary public space (the agora, the forum, the piazza, the town square), the multiple and counterpublics that Fraser identifies necessarily produce multiple sites of public expression, creating and using spaces that are partial and selective, responsive to limited segments of the population and to a limited number of multiple public roles individuals play in urban society.

While Crawford’s argument for multiple and diverse sites over a single archetypal public space is in line with the thesis position, it does not directly address the issue of connection within fragmentation. What is of interest is the...
way in which public space can accommodate and be appropriated by multiple publics and multiple subjectivities at the same time as framing connection or 'bridging' between them. Further, as the framing concern of the thesis is with the design of dedicated public space and of public buildings in the city, rather than solely the everyday space of the street or temporal nomadic occupations, it is proposed that any dialogue between the political and the physical be formulated through the consideration several factors: program, spatial configuration, and representation.

Program

The issue of program needs to be considered in two ways - explicit functional programming and the staging or framing of possible program (i.e. temporal occupations such street theatre, ceremonies, etc.). Explicit program is significant in that it directly relates to the presence of different publics. In relation to public space and buildings, the issue of explicit program may be considered in terms of exalted or 'sacred' program and quotidian or profane program. The former includes civic circumstances such as Courts, Art Galleries or public squares, the later commercial space and public infrastructure. The argument for pluralism suggests that these need not be separated, but rather conceived through the idea of hybrid programming and programmatic congestion.

Staged programming brings the possibility of a further layer of programmatic density and diversity of publics present. While this layer is more temporal and conditional it is nonetheless important because it increases the range of publics, and imbues the space or building with multiple meanings beyond its immediate programmatic or representational function. The theatrical nature of staged programming is related to the argument for pluralism not only through the way in which it frames association between different publics, but also in how it may prompt the shift of interiorized detached subject positions to more engaged active ones. This may occur through unexpected encounter or what George Baird has called "serendipitous circumstance." Such encounters contain the possibility of disrupting normality and giving voice to counterpublics and subversive representations.


5George Baird in "Public Space: From Public to Social Space(s). A Faculty Discussion" in GSD News, Winter/Spring 1993 (Boston: Harvard University Graduate School of Design) 5.
Spatial Configuration

In neo-traditional architecture exemplified by the 'New Urbanism,' the ideal of a homogeneous public is framed by the use of idealized archetypal public spaces such as square or piazza which share the characteristic of being a single unified spatial realm. Instead what I am proposing is to link the accommodation of multiple publics with a diversity of spatial realms. Given the issue of simultaneous fragmentation and association, and the co-existence of the part and the whole, the question is then the nature of the relationships of proximity and density, and the form of association between these realms. Central to achieving a dialectic between parts and the whole, is the occurrence of boundaries. The aim of accommodating a diverse range of publics and subjectivities, while creating a connection between them is reliant on not only on their association, but also their separation.16

Representation

The representational meaning of architecture is a more complex issue than that of programming or spatial configuration, although all are interconnected. Of concern is the relationship of the concept of the co-existence of parts and the whole to the semantic structure of the architecture. Particularly pertinent here is the relevance or appropriateness of monumentality. Monumentality is inherently connected to the imposition of hierarchy and unity, yet may act to frame a range of public presentations from the marginal to the honorific. This ambiguity is reflected in

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16 Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, refers to this when he introduces the idea of a conceptual 'grid' of spatial realms which is structured through boundaries and thresholds at points of transition between spaces of different publicness (i.e., a private room may have a public threshold). What Lefebvre argues in relation to this concept is that it would not attempt to "keep the spatial elements separate from one another in abstract space," but rather "reintroduce immanent differences and envision space as at once 'compact' and highly elaborated." Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994) 388.
Henri Lefebvre’s reference to monumentality’s “horizon of meaning.” In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre goes on to note that beyond the overt power it represents, monumentality may act to “permit a continual back-and-forth between the private speech of ordinary conversations and the public speech of discourses, lectures, sermons and rallying-cries, and all theatrical forms of utterance.”

The discussion of monumentality is furthered by George Baird. In *The Space of Appearance*, Baird contrasted the Royal Mint Square Housing competition entry by Leon Krier of 1974, with Herman Hertzberger’s Central Beheer Insurance Headquarters Building in Apeldoorn, Holland, designed in 1972. The Krier scheme was introduced as a clear example of the use of hierarchy and monumentality in the pursuit of collective symbolism. In Krier’s scheme, the city was shaped like a piece of art to suppress difference and construct a fictitious ‘whole.’ The idea of a single unified public was further represented by the public route which was structured as an axial spine and a central square, and by the bounding facade which acted as skin sealing in any representation that might counter the single fixed reading of the public realm constructed. From the perspective of pluralism, Krier’s scheme clearly is problematic in its use of architecture to aid the suppression of difference.

In contrast, Baird notes Hertzberger’s scheme was the product of the deliberate avoidance of any imposed representation of collectivity, a gesture which Hertzberger considered to be authoritarian. Hertzberger’s strategy for the building stemmed rather from the desire to frame pluralism and give primacy to the individual and not the whole. The building became an accretion of individual units which formed a web of connections, with the final external form of the building simply the resultant. Unlike Krier’s axial spine and square, the circulation pattern in Hertzberger’s scheme was not structured through hierarchy and did not attempt to construct a place of fixed gathering which might represent a single unified public. On the contrary the intention was for the architecture to
frame the representation of the everyday that arises through occupation and use, rather than impose a pre-existing order. To borrow the terms developed by Lefebvre, Krier's scheme may be considered a "representation of space" which constructed a pre-conceived abstract order that normalizes and homogenizes, where as Hertzberger was attempting an architecture that could become a "representational space" which, through its appropriation, could be resonant with everyday life.

These two examples offer radically different perspectives on the question of the relationship between the part and whole, yet neither reflect the idea of the relationship being structured through co-existence or a dialectic. While Hertzberger's Apeldoorn project is a good example of the rejection of the overt representation of a single public through the construction of a monumental whole, it is problematic in relation to the idea of framing connection between multiple publics, or of allowing for a "space of appearance" beyond the individual. The pluralism framed by Hertzberger's architecture was one in which the primacy of fragmentation was simply left as that with the final form of the building being a sum of its parts, akin to an ant mound, with no facade or frontality, and no foreground outdoor room.

My criticism of Hertzberger's eschewed monumentality serves to point out the value of reconceptualizing monumentality so as to maintain both the possibility for collectivity and a questioning of traditional impositions of unity and power. This is to suggest that the co-existence of the parts and the whole can be structured by the parts contained within the whole. In this concept, both the parts and the whole retain a difficult integrity, forming a matrix which can be read in multiple ways, and have multiple spatial relationships. This may arise through either internal or external conditions. Internally, the part may correspond to different publics housed within the single

*Lefebvre, "Introduction," The Production of Space.

*This is another term used by Arendt in her writings on the concept of publicness. It is also the term which forms the title of Baird's book earlier referred to.
institution. Externally, the part may occur as a consequence of forces in the city that conflict with the idealized condition of the whole. The difficult monumentality associated with the latter, can be linked to what George Wagner in his essay, “Freedom and Glue: Architecture, Seriality, and Identity in the American City,” describes as “dis-idealization.” In this essay, Wagner discusses how the perceived separation of urban planning and architecture in the American grid city, can be re-conceptualized through the idea of the dis-idealization of the pure monumental form. Wagner uses the examples of the New York and Boston public libraries to illustrate the way in which the attempt to insert the monumental object building, derived from Beaux Arts principles, into the grid city often resulted in the “self infection” of their purity, with the forces of the city and complexities of program “contaminating the logic of the architecture.”

The strategy of a difficult integrity and dialectic relating the part and the whole may be further linked to a representational strategy in which the architectural form reveals its internal tensions and the process of its production. This strategy works to break down the power of imposed fixed representations to allow a multiplicity of readings and subject positions in place of the single fixed reading dictated by a form constructed as a monumental whole. This strategy of exposing the relationship between the means and the effects reflects what Umberto Eco has called “open work.” In the “open work” the recipient is imagined as an active player in the interpretation of the work within the field of relations set up by the author.

The above strategies provide the conceptual framework for linking the ideal of pluralism to design. As previously stated, the more specific exploration of how they may generate architectural form occurs through the renovation of the Robson Square complex. The context of Robson Square will also require that the above strategies be considered in relation to the logic of the grid city and the juncture between this logic and the conceptualization of public architecture and space.

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22 Wagner refers to the way in which the Boston Public Library is the resultant of an assemblage of different typologies and ordering systems which are in turn distorted through functional requirement and site characteristics, and give rise to no single dominant reading. He states: “Again in argument with Tafuri’s position on the “separation” of architecture and urban planning in the American city, the Boston Public Library exemplifies how the important work of architecture in the city can begin to bridge such “separation” by addressing it in a rhetorical way, by allowing the problem of the building in the city, and that of the reading of the building in the city, to become the agency of dis-idealization.” Wagner, 81.
23 K. Michael Hays describes a similar strategy in reference to the work of Machado and Silvetti:
“So conventional, compensatory architectural representations tend to constantly obscure and efface the complicated processes of enunciation, offering illusory, comforting fixed subject positions and roles; and specular, contemplative consumption reassures us of this subjective centrality... But what if an architecture could configure spaces and images not as representations cut off from a background and presented to a spectator who occupies a secure, stable position, but rather as combined networks of meaning having many points of access, none with priority over others? What if an architecture could thereby deconceal the productions of its fictions, estrange and extend its possible uses at the level of enunciation and of representation, making fictive discourse visible in the way that certain films use jump cuts, camera movement, and points of view to disclose through fiction the cinematic apparatus behind them?” K. Michael Hays, Unprecedented Realism: The Architecture of Machado and Silvetti (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995) 111.
II. Forming the Brief - Description and Critique of Robson Square

2.1. View North over Robson Square complex.
Introduction

The aim of the design project is to develop and test design strategies for a public architecture that is responsive to the ideals of pluralism outlined in chapter one. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the site of the thesis project, Robson Square, and to undertake a critical analysis of it to reveal what aspects of its form and program need to be addressed in order to shift it to a more pluralistic condition. As the interest is in the development of an architecture tied to the particularities of its site, the intention is to derive the mandate for the reconfiguration of Robson Square from not only the argument for pluralism but also the need to address pre-existing functional and programmatic problems, as well as the desire to maintain positive existing qualities.

Following this logic, the chapter commences with an introduction of Robson Square with reference to its place in the city, geographically and symbolically. It subsequently attempts to discuss Erickson's design intentions and ideology, and their realization in the form of the building. The design is then critiqued, both in relation to functional failings and the argument for a pluralistic public architecture. The chapter concludes with a set of aims and questions that arises from the critique. These form the general brief to be addressed by the design project.
Figure 2.3 The existing three block scheme

**Robson Square - The Site**

The choice of Robson Square is inherently provocative. It is the most significant public building in the city, both functionally and representationally. Functionally, it houses the Supreme Courts, the Provincial Courts, Provincial Government offices, a modest exhibition and conference centre, some restaurants and cafes, and an expanse of public open space on its landscaped roof. Associated with the complex is the Vancouver Art Gallery. This was placed within the historic courthouse buildings renovated by Arthur Erickson's firm as part of the grand project. Representationally, the complex is loaded with meanings, due to its scale, location, history and function, and its significance as a masterwork by an architect whose status has been elevated to mythical proportions.

The existing complex is a mega-structure that is extruded over two-and-a-half blocks in the centre of the downtown core. Its orientation is such that it transversely spans the ridge of the downtown peninsula in a south-west to north-east direction, covering almost a third of the width of the peninsula at that point. The complex is also situated in a pivotal position within the heart of the city. It is crossed by Robson Street which has the highest pedestrian volume in the downtown area, and is also the main cruising strip for cars; it is positioned at the 'crossroads' of pedestrian routes linking different quarters of the city; it is bounded by the two major traffic routes, Howe and Hornby streets; and it is in a topographically significant location near the high point of the downtown peninsula ridge. The landscaped roof and sunken plazas form the largest public space in the centre of the city. Additionally,
associated with the open space is the forecourt square on Georgia Street fronted by the historic court buildings now housing the Vancouver Art Gallery.

\textbf{Robson Square and the Neo-Classical Courthouse Buildings - Representing 'The Public'}

The Robson Square complex provides fertile ground for the exploration of the thesis argument. Juxtaposed within the site are two radically opposed iconic attempts to represent the ideal of the public realm, resulting in not only two different architectures, but also in different notions of the city and the formation of the monument within the grid. At the north-east end of the site are the historic law court buildings, designed in 1906 and 1912. In their morphology and composition they are representative of normative public buildings in proto-typical grid cities, such as Vancouver. In them, the authority of the state and the ideal of a unified public is represented through the transcendence of the grid's constrictions by the making of a clearing, a piece of non-city, in which the freestanding figure is placed. Unlike the buildings in the surrounding plat of the grid, both public buildings have four facades which construct symmetrical 'wholes.' The expression of the power invested in the buildings is then reinforced by the making of a \textit{piano nobile} which is accessed by grand stairs, symbolically presenting the buildings as 'temples' within the city. Street level side entrances provide access to the quotidian functions housed beneath the 'temples.' The rest of the 'clearing' becomes the foreground to the 'temples,' and, being on axis with its classical facade, share its symmetry and hierarchy. The occupation that this exemplary civic space structures, physically and semantically, is of a single unified 'public' gathering as a static whole, distinct from the fluid space of the street. In Vancouver, the Georgia Street forecourt was used historically by the state and official institutions as the site for civic celebration and commemoration.
To the south-west, abutting this generic public building and civic space typology, is Erickson’s representation of a west coast socialist democracy associated with the newly elected left-wing New Democratic Party of 1972. Highly political in nature, the conception of the government complex as a low-rise scheme followed the rejection of the 55-storey ‘tower of power’ proposed by the incumbent right-wing Social Credit Party. The realized public building and landscape was conceived as a ‘people’s place,’ a benevolent gesture that was a built critique of the perceived elitism of the temple-like court buildings.

In the design of the masterwork, “civic and communal values” are represented through the making of a new world, a utopian “sanctuary” within the “threatening” city. The monumental object in the city has been replaced by an artificial landscape in which the ideal of the common good has been conflated with the virtues of nature. The resulting form constructs a monumental ‘whole’ on a grand scale, yet as an amorphous mound which lacks any of the morphological clarity of the surrounding city. The brilliance of this anti-urban response to the idea of the public realm, is manifested in the way in which it naturalizes its rejection of the city and history through exploiting the west coast reverence for nature and the associated mythical power of the surrounding landscape. In the Robson Square complex the clear hierarchical symbolism of the normative public building is replaced by a more obtuse representation of the collective, in which unity is evidenced in the abstract homogeneity of the ‘total project.’ The various manifestations of this are discussed further below.

Associated with the two notions of the public building and public space are differing attitudes to the city. Whereas the historic courthouse buildings are structured through a verticality which grounds them to their site and reinforces their presence as objects within the city, the strong horizontality and amorphous nature of the mega-structure does
not suggest any delimiting. The court house buildings work within the logic of the grid to establish their difference and power, while Erickson’s masterwork occurs as an alternative city not constrained by the limits of the grid. Where the court house buildings sit in a clearly delineated ‘clearing’ within the grid, Robson Square conceptually clears the rest of the city.²⁵

**Robson Square - Formal Structure**

Barbara Shapiro, one of the project team members who worked on the design of the building, described the Robson Square complex as a “truly modern building,” and observed that:

Frontality is avoided... Entry points are obscured. Conventional notions of balance, symmetry and composition are defied. The building determines its own setting. It defines space on its own terms, by creating its own vocabulary, a singularly ahistoric gesture... Its seven-storied great hall offers transparency in place of traditional opacity of form. Its stramps lead diagonally across its northern plane as sculptural forms, not a directional guideline... [The landscape] found in the hallways, on the rooftop patios, the undulating mounds, in the flying planters and sunken plazas blurs the distinction between exterior and interior.²⁶

Clearly apparent in this statement by Shapiro is the celebration of the sheer bravura of the complex and its creation as an autonomous masterwork freed from history and the city. Central to this was the manner in which the way the

²⁵ This attitude to the city can be linked to Erickson’s larger urban planning ideology. Prior to designing Robson Square, Erickson’s firm, then Erickson Massey, developed an urban design proposal for the downtown core which proposed a massive restructuring of the area. The Robson Square complex acts in many ways as a demonstration of many of the principles developed in this scheme. See A Proposal for Block 61 and the Downtown Core, Vancouver prepared by Erickson Massey Architects for the Community Arts Council, May, 1966.

building determined its own setting' through the creation of the artificial ground plane. Erickson himself refers to the building as “merely a container for a classic, bushy Olmstead park...and more landscape than architecture.”

As this quote suggests, the logic of the building's formal structure has little connection to its program, either spatially or representationally, but rather is generated by shaping the form to make an artificial landscape and constructed ground.

The constructed ground is designed so as to effortlessly transcend the constriction of the grid. Moving from the north to the south, the 'ground' falls away from the terrace level it formed upon abutting what is now the Vancouver Art Gallery, and recedes below Robson Street as a sunken 'plaza.' It then rises up progressively to three levels above the street, before bridging over Smithe Street to pass through the Supreme Courts building as the public concourse. Finally, it drops down again to create the main entry to the Supreme Courts at Nelson Street. The only points of real connection between the 'ground' and the program of the building occur at the sunken plaza, where restaurants and the Conference Centre open onto it, and at the Supreme Courts where the 'ground' moves through the interior of the building to form what is called the 'great hall.' At this point the 'ground' is covered by a sloping glass roof which sails over the entire Supreme Courts portion of the complex. The design of this roof is such that it reinforces the building's extruded form and the representation of the continuity of the 'ground' as a public realm.

The representation of the artificial ground was achieved through a number of moves. Perhaps most significant was making the building low and wide, pressing it down into the ground and out to the street edges. The floor-to-floor heights were minimized and the largest office floor plate created was placed one level below grade. In addition to the flattening of the building, was an emphasis on horizontality achieved through hiding the structural work.

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together with the design of the stairs and the placement of planters or water at level changes. Further, a terracing effect was established through the use of large concrete ‘flying planters’ along the length of the building’s edges which act to pull the ‘ground’ down to the sidewalk and reinforce the continuity of the mega-structure as an extrusion. The representation of the landscape was also achieved by the use of the same material for the walls and the ground, the use of water, and the creation of simulated landscape mounds.

The asymmetry of the constructed ground occurs in concert with the picturesque design of the landscaping. Erickson together with the landscape architect, Cornelia Oberlander, mounded earth and selected plant species to create meandering paths and carefully revealed vistas. One of the central concerns informing the landscape design was the establishment of a visual relationship between it and the neo-classical gallery buildings such that the city disappeared, and the landscape appeared to flow up to and around the gallery buildings “in an eighteenth century manner.” The plant species were also selected with the idea of representing an “altitudinal change” in conjunction with the rise of the ‘ground’ height.

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28 ibid.
29 ibid.
Robson Square - The Critique

The Robson Square complex is clearly the work of an architect at the height of his powers. It appears to effortlessly accommodate a complex program at the same time as achieving a grand gesture, immense in its scope and thorough in its detail. It is historically significant, representing a mode of architecture which operated within the language of modernism at a time when a post-modernist sensibility was being embraced. The thesis project acknowledges both the mythology of the work and the fact that there are many positive qualities realized within it that are worth retaining. Following the realization of a "sanctuary" is the provision of a place for retreating from the activity of the street, and an elevational change which provides a public experience not usually available in the downtown other than within private buildings. Also noted is the pleasurable sensory experience of being next to falling water, and the power of the contrast that the scale of this gesture has in relation to the more intimate spaces within the landscape. The idea of the public promenade through the site from Robson Street to Nelson has potential, however, as will be discussed below, it was not fully realized.

At an urban scale, Erickson's masterwork is memorable in its 'otherness,' in its occurrence as a utopia audaciously inserted in the city. What is problematic is the cost of the construction of this utopia to both the city and the actual building's function and internal amenity. The positive qualities cited above all appear within the space of the constructed landscape. Once you move outside this space, and the subjectivity it presupposes, the complex becomes dysfunctional. The complete privileging of the form and its abstract diagram over the program, together with the internalized institutional circulation which minimizes any relationship to the city, creates a number of strange and uncomfortable conditions, morphologically, representationally and functionally. Further, the sinking of the building has resulted in many spaces suffering from poor amenity. The following sections take up these issues in more detail.
Morphology

The building's lack of morphological clarity in relation to the logic of the existing city has already been mentioned. Overlaid as an autonomous order, the complex comes into conflict with the city at the seams of their juncture. The manner in which the building bridges over Smithe Street is one such instance. Here the transgressing of the grid's limits has resulted in the denigration of a major city street. The bridging not only creates a dark and unpleasant local condition, it also confuses the order of the city at the larger scale. The other line of juncture is of course the street edges along Howe and Hornby Streets. Here there is a problematic ambiguity between the institutional typology of the complex and the relationship of its edges to the sidewalk. The building edge is not set back yet remains impermeable for its entire length. Further, the edges occur as continuous lateral extrusions which do not front the street. The linearity of the edges is reinforced by the use of a double row of street trees.
Representation and Function

Associated with the lack of any street address or frontality along the length of the mega-structure are the representational issues which arise due to the schism between the form and the program. A consequence of the representation of the new ground is the suppression of the identity and difference of the various programs and publics within the complex. This has resulted in severely problematic entries and a general lack of address for significant public bodies and commercial interests. Examples of this are the two entries to the office complex and Provincial Courts. The Smithe Street entry into the lift lobby is situated opposite the Supreme Courts administration floor entry underneath the bridging portion of the complex. As mentioned above, this is an unpleasant space that provides no civic presence. The other entry into the complex is remote from the street, accessed from the landscape and set back in a low space under the overhead ‘ground.’ This entry has better amenity but also suffers from a lack of presence. Effectively, the identity of the Provincial Courts has no real manifestation other than through signage.

The Robson Square Conference Centre, which is situated below Robson Street and the sunken ‘plaza,’ also has a major representational problem. The main entry to this important facility is under the stairs of the historic Courthouse Annex building, off the north side of Robson Street. Again, its presence in the city is primarily marked through signage. The commercial lease space flanking the sunken plaza, now accommodating restaurants and the building manager, has a stronger identity but still has a weak connection to the street. Its disconnection from the street that results from it being four metres lower is reinforced by planters...
and landscaping. Both the conference centre and the lease space are a financial burden to the state and were the subject of a recent review which considered how their revenue could be increased. A major factor in their present economic position is their lack of presence and amenity.

The representational problem is not constrained to the program housed within the complex. The Vancouver Art Gallery, which was inserted into the historic court house buildings, has different though related issues of identity and address. These have arisen as a consequence of placing what was once a vital contemporary gallery into a neo-classical 'temple,' that in turn is enveloped in the institutional space of the masterwork.

Erickson's idea of the cloaking of the Vancouver Art Gallery with "the old Grecian robes" of the historic courthouse buildings has resulted in a very uncomfortable 'fit' between the existing form and the inserted modern gallery. The neo-classical architecture was treated simply as a shell within which an uncompromisingly 'white-box'-type gallery was built. Originally, the neo-classical buildings were functionally divided by the piano nobile with the quotidian functions, the government offices, at grade with street addresses, and the exalted functions, the courts and chambers, in the 'temple' one level up and accessed via grand stairs. The main building addressed the formal Georgia Street square. The Annex addressed Robson Street, although it was generously set back. The planning strategy for housing the Vancouver Art Gallery ignored this division and closed both of the original main entries, together with the street level access to the offices. Through an addition, a new street level entry was created on the south side of the main building fronting the complex, in what was previously the rear facade. This addition functions formally to maintain the continuity of the constructed ground, and to terminate it by making a terrace. Below this terrace is the exhibition entry, information booth and bookstore. Above sits the Gallery Café. The exhibition space of the gallery was placed in the four floors of the main building, the administration offices and library were situated in the annex building.

The nature of the juncture of the constructed ground with the historic buildings, is perhaps the most vivid illustration of the masterwork's attempt to reorder the city. By pulling the ground through to abut the once freestanding public
edifices, the masterwork not only transcends the grid, but also history. The buildings lose their autonomy as discrete objects, and appear to be no longer grounded to their site but, instead, to be floating on the constructed ground. Additionally, their representational integrity is severely undermined through their violent re-orientation to the space of the masterwork. This re-orientation also comes at the expense of the life and significance of the Georgia Street square which no longer has a connection to the interior of main building.

These effects are not only problematic from the perspective of the undermining of history and the erasure of difference, but also from the perspective of the functioning of the Vancouver Art Gallery, representationally and programmatically. Most obvious is the disjunction between the position of the new entrance and the powerful marking of the original entries. This results in people continually going up the stairs to the Georgia Street entry, only to be greeted by a sign telling them that it is, in fact, not the front entrance. Additionally, the gallery has a problem in expressing its identity within the city, and connecting to the life of the street, due to its containment within the neo-classical building. This is exacerbated by the envelopment of the gallery by the space of the masterwork which strengthens its institutionality and lack of autonomous identity. On a more practical level, the
design of the gallery failed to provide the necessary facilities for lectures, film, performance art, and sculpture. Further, the planning strategy has effectively foreclosed any opportunity to expand the facilities, other than through a radical re-working of the way the Robson Square complex abuts the Gallery buildings.

**Amenity**

The grand gesture of the masterwork was achieved not only through suppressing the identity of the different programs, but also through sacrificing the quality of space within the building. Ironically, the benevolent public gesture was only able to be achieved through exploiting the fact that government agencies had little choice in their place of work, and commercial standards of amenity were not required.

The privileging of the constructed landscape led to a large portion of the complex being pressed down into the ground, becoming at times totally submerged. Associated with this was the need to keep the floor-to-floor heights low. For the government offices portion of the complex, this led to the problematic condition of the lower floors having both deep floor plates and low ceilings. The resulting office space lacks amenity and now is two-thirds empty. The largest and lowest floor, which houses the Provincial Courts, is one level below ground and is particularly unfortunate.

The only source of natural light for most of the Provincial Courts level is from the atrium space, below the running water, in which the main waiting area is situated. This light source is actually rather disturbing due to the constant refraction of light through the water. Natural light is also provided along the edges, however it is restricted to the
meeting rooms. The majority of the people working in the office area receive only diffuse natural light from the central atrium, or no light at all. Additionally, no view is afforded. All the waiting areas outside the courts, and the courts themselves, receive neither light nor view. This unfortunate condition is exacerbated by the length and low height of the passageways.

The conference centre suffers from similar problems. Not any of its meeting rooms, passageways or waiting areas receive natural light. The problem of the lack of light and low ceilings is not restricted to the interior of the complex. The portion of the sunken plaza below Robson Street is unpleasant for the same reason. Here the unfortunate effects of the necessary bridging of the road is exacerbated by planters and plastic domed roofs.

**Plurality**

As previously stated, the Robson Square complex was conceived as a socio-political device. A “meadow sanctuary,” it was to foster “civic and communal values” commensurate with the ideal of a normative public. The didactic nature of the complex’s utopianism can be critiqued in relation to its interlocked programmatic and representational strategies, which work against the connection and association of diverse publics and the accommodation of multiple subject positions.
Despite housing a range of different programs, the design minimizes any dynamic relationship between them, and between them and the city. The basic diagram of the complex results in the programs it houses being strung out below the constructed ground with little, if any, interconnection. Additionally, any interaction between the life of the landscape and that of the building interior, was prevented to ensure the purity of the representation of the new ‘ground.’ The only point where there is an intersection of different programs and publics is in the sunken plaza where the conference centre, restaurants and pedestrian thoroughfare meet.

Representationally, the design totally suppresses the parts and local conditions, to achieve an homogeneous monumental whole with a single fixed reading. The representation of the unified whole is most apparent within the space of the constructed utopian “sanctuary.” In this ‘other’ world, the ‘public’ becomes subjected to the orchestrated experience of the masterwork, with the contamination by the “threatening” city kept to a minimum. While the complex did not establish collective symbolism through the use of traditional hierarchy and figure/ground typology, the abstract homogeneity and continuity of the constructed ground similarly work to reduce the diversity of spatial realms established. This is seen in the representation of the ‘ground’ as a total entity, a monumental landscape, spanning unbroken over the entire two-and-a-half blocks, thereby minimizing any boundaries or transition conditions.

The suppression of difference by the masterwork, is clearly illustrated by the juncture of the ground with what is now the Vancouver Art Gallery. Here, as earlier discussed in relation to representation, the entire historic building was visually and representationally wrenched into the space of the masterwork, and the possibility of a variety of spatial realms lost. The entry way to the gallery has no real particularity, appearing as a leftover section of the
'ground,' and the terrace occurs simply as part of the continuous whole, having no autonomous identity. The minimization of different spatial realms at points of conjunction such as this, reduces the possibility for the multiple publics present to be simultaneously represented or to appear as distinct entities. Further, it erases any tension that may arise at the juncture.

Connected to the suppression of spatial diversity is an homogeneous representation that acts to offer only fixed passive subject positions. This is illustrated by the design of the constructed ground and the way it carefully orchestrates experience so as to fix its reading. In the constructed ‘picturesque’ landscape, primacy was given to visual consumption and passive contemplation of the spectacle produced. Related to this was the emphasis on movement with most of the open space in the landscape dedicated to circulation rather than the making of places. Further, central to effecting the landscape was the suppression of verticality and sectional relationships. The placement of trees, shrubs and planters aided this by preventing any of the opportunities of overlook or visual connection the section would have enabled.

The public space of the complex is also problematic simply in the way in which it physically restricts the range of occupations that can take place within it. Despite the monumentality of the design gesture and the sheer size of the site, the actual scale of the open spaces established is such that large gatherings are not possible. This, together with the lack of diversity in the types of spaces created, decreases the opportunities for multiple forms of spatial appropriation by different publics.

At present there is not a great deal of activity within the greater portion of the landscape. The most popular area
is in front of the art gallery and the steps of the Annex building, which does in fact work as a vital public space, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Apart from the sunken plaza area, which has external seating for the restaurants, and is also occasionally used for outdoor fetes or exhibitions, the rest of the landscape is really only used by people at lunch time, or by tourists visiting it as an attraction. There are a couple of interesting marginal exceptions to this. The landscape deck on the Howe Street side seems to be a place known for the safe smoking of drugs. It is usually empty and affords warming views of intruders. Also, the heavily-landscaped mound on Robson Street is a site for homosexual nocturnal rendezvous.

The lack of activity and occupation of the landscape can be attributed to a number of factors. First is its lack of connection to the street. Despite the analogy Erickson has made to it being a ‘park,’ the reality is that, unlike a typical park, it has little connection to the street and can not be easily traversed. Additionally, not everyone enjoys being remote from other people and the passing life of the city. Second, the landscape, which is conceived as a park, is not activated by internal programs. The ambiguity of the landscape as to whether it is a park, or built outdoor space associated with a building, results in the problematic situation of unrelated interior functions overlooking parts of the open space in a manner which erodes its perceived degree of publicness. In a number of areas the interior spaces rely on reflective glass for privacy. The waterfalls that were placed in front of the windows are another case in point. In this instance, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that what is one of the more dramatic gestures in the landscape is not able to be experienced by the general public. Third, associated with the above factors, is the perception of the landscape as presenting a risk to personal safety at night, particularly for solitary women.
The `Brief`: Aims and Goals for the Project

As aforementioned, the above critique informs the general `brief` for the renovation of the complex. This `brief` reflects the idea of simultaneously aiding and undermining, or shifting, the existing complex and masterwork. The actual siting of the proposed works and the selection of their program will result from the intersection of the response to the pragmatic problems with the pluralistic critique, within the reasonable constraints of the existing structure. This strategy reflects the argument that the functional and the formal failings are interconnected. For clarity however, the `brief` addresses them separately.

*Function and Program- Aims*

The following aims are informed by both the above critique and other sources of information, including the building managers, provincial court staff, a study completed by external consultants on alternative uses for the conference centre, and the director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Brookes Joyner.

The aims include:

- addressing the provincial courts need to:
  - improve its address and achieve a positive presence in the city;
  - improve the amenity of the waiting areas and the office space;
  - and increase, if possible, the number of courts, and create a division between the small claims and the family courts (this is related to the problem of there being no recognition of the emotionally traumatic aspect of family court proceedings);

- addressing the office complex's lack of marketability as commercial office space by accommodating alternate functions. This requires finding uses suited to the dark central and lower spaces within the complex.

- addressing the existing retail space's need to increase their commercial viability or find alternative uses.

- addressing the conference centre's need to increase its patronage together with its lack of visibility in the city.

- addressing the art gallery's need for the expansion and improvement of existing facilities, including an auditorium, a sculpture garden, more exhibition space, more merchandise space, space for temporary installations, and function rooms. This may be done through both the replanning of the existing facility and the construction of a new wing.
Form and Representation - Aims

The general aim in relation to shifting or reconfiguring the form and spatial construction of the complex is to break down its homogeneity to respond to the functional and representational needs of its parts, to establish conditions for the accommodation and association of multiple publics, and to address its problematic juncture with the city and street. This requires the consideration of:

- the improvement of the amenity of the internal spaces;
- the improvement of the different functions’ address and connection to the street;
- the improvement of the connection between the landscape and the street;
- the separation of the Vancouver Art Gallery from the institutional space of the complex;
- the creation of local spatial conditions and the diversification experiential possibilities responsive to the adjusted programming of the internal spaces and landscape;
- the opening up of the imposed fixed representation and engagement of less passive subject positions;
- the staging of non-specific programming of the open space such as outdoor performance, festivals, etc.

The above programmatic and functional aims are informed by the position that the existing masterwork not be totally undermined. The retention of the semblance of its integrity imposes limits on both the nature of the programmatic changes and the extent of physical restructuring. The re-programming needs to be of the type and the extent that does not erase the identity of the complex as a public institution. The orchestration of the reconfigurations and additions must not overwhelm the visual integrity of the external appearance. This is in keeping with the idea of the co-existence of the parts and the whole previously developed in the previous chapter, with the whole here being the existing monumental masterwork. Further it is in recognition of the importance of the complex as an historical event. The reconfigurations are to be conceived as a new layer which mark time and register its passing.

This approach reflects the idea that the Robson Square complex be viewed as, what Aldo Rossi has termed, an “urban artifact.”

In this sense the building is a shell that retains a continuing formal contribution to the city but allows for changes in program over time. The changes to the building are not intended then to destroy the building’s integrity as a ‘shell,’ but to work with it. More specifically, the reconfiguration of the complex shifts it to act as a “propelling element” which evolves and adapts so as to persist as a monument that “constitutes the city.”

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31 Rossi, 60.
III. The Design Proposal
This chapter consists of two sections. The first gives a general overview of the scope of the project and the general ideas and strategies used to achieve the aims of the ‘brief.’ The second provides a detailed description of the programming, form and idea of the interventions and additions.

Part I: An Overview

Scope
The proposal takes in one-and-a-half blocks, from Smithe Street to the Georgia Street square, and includes:

- reworking the program and space of the office complex to better accommodate the Provincial Courts, to create leaseable storefronts and establish a theatre complex;
- reworking the conference and exhibition centre and creating a small cinema complex;
- altering the program and space of the commercial area fronting the sunken plaza;
- constructing a new wing for the Vancouver Art Gallery together with reworking the existing gallery planning;
- and reconfiguring sections of the open landscaped space.

The scope of the project allows for the exploration of the thesis concerns in relation to a range of different sites and conditions - the everyday space of the street edges, the 'sacred' space of the constructed 'landscape,' and the edified space of the new gallery wing.

Process
The project commenced with the examination of the existing office complex, conference centre, and landscape to identify both restrictions and opportunities, programmatically and formally, for its reconfiguration. Following this examination a series of strategies were formulated. These strategies were subsequently extended and reconsidered in relation to the extension and replanning of the Vancouver Art Gallery.
3.2. Axonometric of existing complex with exploded external additions / reconfigurations.

- government offices
- provincial courts
- conference centre
- resturant / cafe
- art gallery - offices / b.o.h.
- art gallery - exhibitions
- art gallery - public areas and merchandising
- art gallery - function rooms
- community arts
- cinema complex
- theatre complex
- lease space

3.3. Axonometric of reconfigured complex with proposed program exploded.

chapter three
Reconfiguring the Robson Square Complex

Programmatic Strategies
The proposed re-programming of the complex is informed by both the existing form, function and location of the building, and the ideas developed in relation to the argument for pluralism. Critical to this is the recognition that the current ambiguous relationship to the street can be exploited by reconfiguring the impervious edge to construct a frontality to the street and a connection between the interior and sidewalk. This move enables the introduction of new programs such as leaseable storefronts which need direct connection to the street. It also allows for the establishment of appropriate entries and addresses to the functions housed. A similar strategy is pursued in relation to accessing the interior of the building from the landscape. The adoption of these strategies results in the reorientation of the masterwork from an assemblage of two distinct entities, the landscape and the institution, to a more complex and dynamic composition in which there is an interaction between the landscape, the institution, and the city.

This infection of the ‘sacred’ institutional space of the complex by the ‘profane’ programs associated with the street, and the introduction of multi-valency in place of the internalized institutional circulation, works with the notion of multiple publics and pluralism discussed in chapter one. The changes to the program and planning of the complex are, however, selected to maintain and even reinforce its identity as one of the most significant public buildings in the city. The leaseable space does not impinge on the public landscape, the theatre’s provide public benefit, and the retained Provincial Courts are appropriately given a stronger and more prominent position and address. The specific nature of the associated formal reconfiguration is discussed below. It is worth noting here though that a major factor in the selection and location of the different programs is the flexibility, and the limits, of the existing precast concrete structural system. While the nature of this system’s assemblage dictates a tripartite division of space, it allows for either the removal of entire sections of floors or the cutting away of the floor slab within each of these divisions. This makes possible, for instance, the insertion of theatres.

Formal Strategies
The consideration in chapter one of what dialogue could be developed between the ideal of pluralism and public architecture led to the idea of diverse but associated spatial realms, and the co-existence of parts and a whole. The critique of the existing complex gave these ideas particularity in relation to the aim of breaking down the homogeneity...
and singularity of the masterwork through the creation of local conditions deemed necessary for functional, representational and experiential ends. Further insight into what design strategies could be implemented to achieve this aim is gained through the study of the one space within the existing site which is very successful in relation to the concerns of this thesis. This is the main entry stair and portico of the monumental classical facade of the historic courthouse Annex building which fronts Robson Street.

As discussed in chapter two, the conversion of the courthouse buildings to the Vancouver Art Gallery, which occurred in conjunction with the making of Robson Square, led to the street entry of the Annex building no longer being used. The unplanned result of this was that the north-facing portico and stairs became one of the most vital public spaces in the centre of the city. Having been severed from the interior of the building, they have become the stage for a diverse range of occupations, from the intimate to the civic, and provide a good example of a public space that achieves the aim of accommodating multiple publics at the same time as bringing them into association with each other.

While the portico and the grand stair to the piano nobile form a symmetrical monumental whole, they also provide a sectional condition, where, within a small sectional depth, a number of spatial realms are created. These range from the space of the sidewalk to the more intimate space of the portico. The portico area has been appropriated by street kids and transients as a hangout and shelter, and the stairs provide general seating for overlooking the activity of the sidewalk and street, as well as viewing performers or speakers. The stairs and portico are also a popular site for demonstrations, with the top of the stairs becoming the speaker’s podium. All of this activity occurs close to, and parallel with, the everyday life of the street. It does not rely on unified collective
gathering, but rather frames a multiplicity of occupations and events. Further, it constructs a theatrical space in which there is a dynamic between seeing and being seen. In this sense it illustrates Baird's notion of 'serendipitous circumstance.'

The relevance of the Annex stairs as a precedent for developing strategies specific to the Robson Square Complex, is connected to the role the sectional condition plays in its function as a public space. One of the major features of the existing complex is the construction of different datums. At present the strong horizontality of the design minimizes any connection between these datums other than at those points where they are merged via the stair/ramps. The examination of the Annex stairs indicated the way in which the sectional condition of the complex could be reconceptualized so as to overlap different spatial realms and the publics occupying them. This strategy, of exploiting the existing section to overlap publics, works to create a diversity of spatial realms in section and, while maintaining difference, to simultaneously structure relationships of proximity and association.

Associated with the overlapping and differentiation of the datums of the existing public space of the complex, is the structuring of theatricality. As the example of the Annex stairs illustrates, this theatricality not only provides a stage for specific events such as protests, but aids the occurrence of unintended performance outside the usual experience of the street. In the context of the existing masterwork, the idea of theatricalization is additionally used to achieve the aim of breaking down the imposed fixed representation so as to allow for the formation of representation and meaning to arise more through its occupation by less passive subject positions.

A consequence of the above strategies is the disruption of the scenography of the constructed landscape. This disruption is also a deliberate strategy used to reveal the artifice of the constructed ground. The relevance of this strategy to the aim of shifting the masterwork to a more pluralistic condition, is associated with the way in which it 'opens' the existing stable fixed representation to questioning, and leads to more engaged readings and diverse interpretations of the built form. In the proposal the strategy of revealing the artifice is implemented in a number of ways. One is the cutting away of the street edge planters and landscape to expose the 'bones' of the building and hence reveal the relationship between the means and effects. The second is visually connecting the landscape decks and the street at certain points to register the real ground. The third is placing new pieces of constructed ground above that existing on the roof of the proposed art gallery wing. This final strategy is connected to the idea of manipulating existing language and is discussed further below.
Language

Associated with the aim of maintaining the existing masterwork as an unstable whole is the strategy for the formal language adopted by the proposal. The idea is to combine the moments of extension and erasure of the existing form with the layering on and weaving through of a new lighter and more agile structure. This strategy follows the tactic de Certeau has termed "the art of the weak," where the new architecture works with the existing language when within the powerful space, or 'sight-lines,' of the masterwork, and introduces an overtly new language when outside. The desire to work with the existing language, to shift the representation of the space, at the same time as retaining a semblance of the original identity, is based on the surrealist strategy of manipulating and distorting conventional language to create new meanings and associations.

The Proposed Art Gallery Wing

The primary strategy generating the design of the proposed Vancouver Art Gallery wing, continues the idea of simultaneously breaking down the masterwork and working with its existing spatial construction. The proposal is to maintain the horizontal continuity of the complex by retaining the sunken plaza which extends under Robson Street and abuts the Gallery. The strategy is to then mesh the horizontal 'city' of the masterwork with the vertical 'city' of the historic neo-classical buildings. As will be discussed in more detail below, this occurs through the creation of an urban void formed by the proposed gallery wing and the reconfiguration of the plaza. Within the meshing space, local conditions and diverse spatial realms are created that continue the strategy of overlapping datums and hybrid programming. The language of the gallery wing continues the approach outlined above. Its primary mass works with the language of the masterwork, and its edges with the new lighter structure. Particular

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to the gallery wing, however, are walls which are of the order and materiality of the stone Gallery buildings.

**Representation of the Proposal**

The design project is conceived as a conversation between the urban scale and the architectural. The intention is to develop the design of the different interventions to a level which demonstrates the possibilities for the architectural translation of the general strategies introduced. In this sense the project is positioned on the cusp of the conceptual and the developed architectural solution. The representational vehicles used to communicate the project reflect this position. The representation moves from the abstraction of diagrams communicating urban strategies to the architectural specificity of detailed perspectival photo-montages. The decision to use perspectival photo-montages reflects the desire to achieve an immediacy of possibility that moves the reader into the heart of the effect. The use of perspective also stems from the fact that the understanding and experience of the urban environment is strongly linked to the external surface of its architecture.

The overall modeling of the project remains at the more abstract scale of 1:200 and works to aid an overall understanding of relationships within the space of the Robson Square complex and to the surrounding context. Larger scale sectional models of the edges are used to illustrate the reconfiguration of the street edges of the existing complex.
Part II: The Proposal - Detailed Description

The Proposal - Program

This section outlines the program proposed by the project in conjunction with its rationale. The proposal is as follows:

1. Provincial Courts

The program retains the provincial courts, but relocates them within the complex, by stacking the courtrooms and associated waiting areas along the Hornby Street side. This is based on several considerations:

- the complex is a public building containing certain infrastructure, such as prisoner holding cells, and the area is historically the legal precinct in the city.
- the stacking of the courts on the street edge has several advantages: it allows for the provision of waiting areas and meeting rooms with natural light and view; it establishes a strong connection between the life of the courts and the street; and it allows for a division between the public involved with the small claims proceedings and the public attending the more personal family and youth courts. Further, the courtrooms can be given a degree of natural light by dropping lightwells down through from the landscape.
- the redistribution of the provincial courts program and the creation of a new entrance on Hornby Street, achieves a frontality to the street and an appropriate strong address to the building. The strength of the address will additionally work with and aid the representation of the Supreme Court.
- the exploitation of the building's section to accommodate the waiting areas and balconies further supports the idea of overlapping the realm of the landscape above with the space of the interior. With the sectional reconfiguration, particular local conditions, from public to more intimate spaces, are established within the side of the homogeneous, extruded body of the complex.

2. Leasable Space

Generic leasable space for a variety of uses, including retail outlets, cafes, service shops or galleries, is won from the conversion of the Howe Street edge. Two reasons justify this action:

- it optimizes the use of the streetfront in an area of existing commercial activity and provides rental income for the complex;
- it activates the street and connects the interior to the exterior, establishing a multi-valency in place of the single institutional circulation system.
3. Theatres

Two theatres are added to the existing complex, one approximately 800 seats and the other an experimental 250-seat space. These are inserted into the middle lower three floors of the office complex (including the archives level). The entry foyer to the theatres appropriates the existing Provincial Courts entrance off the landscape next to Hornby Street. The theatres have a public bar jutting out under the waterfall at the ground level and a cafe/restaurant opening onto the landscape deck facing Howe Street. This cafe can also be accessed from the Provincial Courts building. The rationale for the inclusion of the theatres is that they:

- provide a semi-public use that is appropriate to the civic monumentality of the complex;
- utilize the space in the centre of the large floor plate which receives little light, thus exploiting the structural system's capacity for the removal of sections of the floors;
- aid the activation of the landscape and the bringing together of different publics;
- create memorable rooms below the landscape which have an added potency through their difference from the homogeneous space of the complex. The strategy for the design of these theatres, and their lobbies will be to amplify their presence as discrete objects to be discovered below the 'ground.'

4. Conference / Exhibition Centre

The conference (and exhibition) centre is retained and expanded into the empty lease space at the 'plaza' level, and the motor license bureau at the ground level. A new entrance is created opposite the proposed theatre entrance, and a new auditorium inserted which has the ability of opening onto the sunken plaza for public events. The existing auditoriums are converted into commercial cinemas, as described below. The rationale for the retention of the 'conference centre and its replanning is that:

- the centre has facilities which are in demand and fulfill a community role appropriate to the civic centre. Reconfiguring it would lead to the improvement of its public profile and civic presence;
- the positioning of the new entry opposite the proposed theatre entry, aids both their addresses and exploits the only street-level covered area. The new entry also provides the opportunity to create a memorable void and stair that drops down through to the lowest level. This potency of this is the strength of the vertical drop experienced upon entry, in contrast to the horizontality of the external landscape.
5. Commercial Cinemas

Commercial cinemas are created from a conversion of the existing conference centre. The cinemas have their own entry off the ‘sunken plaza.’ The rationale for this conversion is that:
- they would increase the income of the complex and add to the activity of the ‘plaza’ level;
- they could be block-booked during off-peak times by the art gallery to provide the auditorium facilities they lack. A new passage down to them would be made in concert with the gallery reconfiguration;
- the dropping of a new entry from the sunken plaza down into the cinemas below, allows for the amplification of the sectional experience of the complex which at the moment is muted. This also reinforces the formal strategy of piecing, or delaminating the constructed ground to reveal its artifice.

6. Cafe Restaurant

The cafe/restaurant is retained on the east side of the sunken plaza. The rationale for this is that:
- the use remains appropriate given the design and location;
- the viability of the existing use will be enhanced by the design changes which will increase their visibility and general activity in its vicinity.

7. Community Arts Centre

A community arts space is placed on the west and north side of the northern plaza. This space is envisioned as an umbrella for different arts groups including the centre for the arts festival coordination. The space uses the plaza for staging outdoor performances and film screenings. The rationale for the inclusion of a community arts centre is that the program works both in conjunction with the conference centre’s original mandate of providing a place for community events at the same time as expanding and reinforcing the location as a locus for the arts.

8. Vancouver Art Gallery

The Vancouver Art Gallery is reorganized by moving the administrative offices into the ground floor of the existing buildings and extending the gallery space into the upper floors of the annex building and into the new wing. Additionally, the main entrance is moved to the position of the original courthouse front entrance facing Georgia Street. The bookshop is expanded into the ground level of the new wing together with a leaseable cafe/restaurant space which extends down to the sunken plaza level. The gallery cafe is moved to the roof of the new wing together with a public roof garden, and what was the cafe terrace is converted into a sculpture garden accessed
only from the gallery. The rationale for this is that:

- the representational integrity of the historic buildings is returned, with the more quotidian functions placed in the plinth, with the original street edge entrances re-opened, and the more exalted functions at the piano nobile level;
- the stacking of the program within the gallery and the proposed wing works to reinforce the ‘meshing’ of the gallery and the landscape, the overlapping of publics, the de-institutionalization of the complex, and a shift to a multi-valency;
- the extension of the merchandise outlet and bookshop together with its street frontage will increase sales. Similarly, the enlarging of the gallery cafe and positioning of it in such a spectacular position will increase the patronage as well allow for a greater range of alternative after-hours uses;
- the extension of the gallery space into the annex building pushes the gallery going-public into close proximity to the hangout space at the top of the annex front stairs;
- the reworking of the entrance establishes a public route from Robson Street through the centre of the main building to the Georgia Street square.
The Proposal - The Primary Interventions

The Edges

Overview

Both the interventions to the Howe and Hornby Street edges simultaneously cut away part of the existing building and add new structure to it. The primary purposes of the edge interventions are to:

- establish a frontal condition and connect the interior to the exterior;
- reveal the relationship between the means and the effects of the existing form by cutting away the existing edge;
- overlap the realm of the landscape with the realm of the street;
- provide infrastructure for signage and lighting together with services to the landscape, such as power and water;
- introduce a lighter more techtonic language which re-scales the massive homogeneity of the existing mega-structure and provides new accommodation, without requiring major reworkings of the existing structure.

Hornby Street

The edge intervention on Hornby street specifically establishes a strong address for the Provincial Courts. Sections of the ‘flying plantes’ are cut away and a new steel and glass structure is clipped on. The use of glass, and its detailing, echoes the Supreme Court building’s glass roof to help establish an association between the two Courts. Entry is directly off the sidewalk through a glass-roofed area, which also contains external seating for both the general public and the court patrons. This threshold space forms a loggia that runs parallel to the double row of trees.

The new line of enclosure allows the waiting areas for the courtrooms to overlook the sidewalk and to be bathed in natural light and afternoon sun. Additionally, the upper level opens up onto a balcony connected to the landscape. The roof of the new structure forms a platform off the landscape perched above the sidewalk amongst the branches of the street trees.

Finally, a new elevator is incorporated into the edge structure which provides public access from the sidewalk to the uppermost landscape level. The elevator structure, which is formed by a pair of concrete elbow frames, echoes the expressive frames of the Supreme Court building at the same time as undermining the representation of the terraced ground.
Howe Street

The primary move of the Howe Street edge intervention is the addition of a steel frame which runs parallel to the street. When adjoining the complex, the frame is in the form of a light steel truss 3.5 meters above the ground, with columns every nine meters on centre with the existing structure. The frame occurs in conjunction with the art gallery wing, as the line of enclosure hung off the side of the building supporting the glazing and the awning.

The frame performs a number of roles. At a general level, it demarcates the boundary between the sidewalk and space of the masterwork, structuring a threshold. It also aids the shifting of the existing edge to a streetfront typology by structuring frontality and providing support for infrastructure such as signage, lighting and weather protection. Within the general system of the frame, particular conditions are established through associated design moves. In the case of the streetfront created through re-programming the office space as generic leaseable space, the frame occurs in combination with the cutting of a section of the existing ‘flying planter’, together with extending the landscape deck level by cantilevering it out over the sidewalk. Further, the over grown frame is tied back to the landscape level by a steel ‘pergola,’ as will be discussed in more detail below. These moves not only serve the programmatic function of increasing the visibility of the shopfront, but work with the idea of overlapping spatial realms. The ‘in-between’ space established, both heightens the transition from the street to the interior and frames a dynamic connection between the realm of the landscape and that of the sidewalk.

When the frame occurs beside the sunken plaza, it continues the idea of marking a boundary, but whereas in the above case the landscape was effectively projected out beyond the boundary, in this case the sidewalk is pulled through into the landscape. A new street level platform is added above the sunken plaza which widens the sidewalk. The frame, together with cables spanning to light-poles situated at the edge of the platform, provide support for awnings to cover temporary occupations such as street vendors. Power outlets are also built into the structure of the frame.

The reappearance of the frame on the north side of Robson Street in conjunction with the proposed art gallery wing, not only reflects the perpetuation of the ideas of multi-valency and establishing a frontality to the street, but also the intention of meshing the horizontal space of the masterwork with the gallery buildings. Further operations of the frame in relation to the proposed gallery wing will be discussed below.
The Gallery Wing and Reconfigured Northern Plaza:

Description

The proposed addition to the Vancouver Art Gallery is formed by a thin L-shaped bar building which fronts both Howe and Robson Streets by wrapping around the sunken plaza to form a vertical void space. The bar is elevated to the height of the piano nobile creating a 'negative plinth' which is infilled along the Howe Street front and left open along Robson Street. The structure of the building is aligned with that of the existing complex on which it sits and it adjoins the main gallery building in a manner that mirrors the existing link to the Annex.

The creation of the void is reinforced by re-configuring the section of the masterwork where its 'ground' abuts the main historic gallery building. Both the stairs from the plaza to the ground level, and the stairs up to the terrace are removed. Additionally, the terrace is extended out towards the plaza, so as to form a two-level section change at that point. The sides of the plaza similarly become escarpments, although they are only one level in height.

The 'negative plinth' houses the gallery bookshop and the leaseable cafe/restaurant space along the Howe Street edge. The two levels of the elevated bar accommodate general gallery exhibition space, a reading room on the Howe Street edge, and a double height multi-purpose 'grand room' in the portion fronting Robson Street. The 'grand room' can be linked to the rest of the building as an extension of the exhibition space, or be accessed via its own lobby which is entered at street level. The corner of the bar is a large ‘terrace room’ open to the street, which can be used as a space for external exhibitions or as a balcony to the ‘grand’ room. The roof of the bar is occupied by the gallery cafe and by a public roof garden positioned above Robson Street. The terrace at the piano nobile level is a sculpture garden that is accessed only via the internal gallery circulation.

Intention

The proposal for the gallery wing is generated as a negotiation between a number of existing representational, structural and formal conditions. These include: the intersection of the form and representation of the historic neo-classical buildings and the modernist utopian masterwork; the alignment of the structural grid of the complex and the composition of the main gallery building; the street alignment of the neighbouring commercial buildings and the set back of the gallery buildings. Informing the actual manner by which the building performs this negotiation are the different strategies employed with regards to multiple publics and simultaneous fragmentation and unity. Further, the intention is to create a stronger connection between the Vancouver Art Gallery and the city than that presently afforded by the elitism of the Victorian ‘temple’ buildings.
Meshing
The primary means of negotiation is, as referred to in part one of this chapter, the meshing of the horizontal ‘city’ formed by the masterwork with the vertical ‘city’ of the neo-classical buildings. The elevated bar and resulting void act as a buffer against the thrust of the space of the masterwork which currently envelopes the gallery. The bar allows the lower landscape space to slide under it and be captured by the void, at the same time as fronting and intercepting the primary sight-line of the masterview at the higher level. The meshing is further reinforced by the continuity of the plaza edge treatment over both plazas, the placement of a waterfall at the terrace end of the void, and the reappearance of the steel frame edge on Howe Street.

Multiple Spatial Realms
The form and position of the proposed wing also breaks down the homogeneity of the existing space of the complex and forms a range of spatial realms. This occurs at the urban scale in relation to the way in which the wing reinforces the integrity and morphology of the Georgia Street square. The Georgia Street square becomes the formal ‘big room’ in the city associated with the re-opened front door of the gallery, and the new bounded space, becomes the ‘small room’ associated with the secondary, more informal entry. The position of the proposed wing is also such that its Robson Street facade is pulled forward of the Annex and aligned with the typical set-back which strengthens the morphology of the existing monumental gallery building as an object in the grid. This move aids the meshing of the masterwork and the gallery by increasing the association between the elevated bar portion of the wing and the complex. Additionally, it works to amplify the experience of discovering the void when at street level, as the alignment of the wing gives the perception of continuing the street wall when viewed down Robson Street. The void is only fully revealed when the viewer moves in front of it and slips under the bar and into its space.

Overlapping Publics
The idea of meshing the two ‘cities’ in combination with the reconfiguring and replanning of the existing gallery and plaza works with the strategy of exploiting the section to accommodate and overlap diverse publics. This is apparent in relation to both the street edge and the void. It occurs along the street edge through the placement of the outdoor room in the corner of the bar above the sidewalk and the position of the window to the multi-purpose room balcony which overlooks the Annex stairs. The interior space of the proposed wing also registers the assembly of different publics. The section of the exhibition space and reading room allows the frontal condition of the screen edge to be experienced from the interior in a way which disrupts the typical white box space. Also, the
circulation within the gallery wing projects its patrons out into the space of the street by intermittently directing them outside the realm defined by the solid walls of the building to the hung glazed edge. Further, a projector positioned at the reading room level, can project films and images at night onto the blank white facade of Eaton's shopping mall opposite. This both reinforces the presence of the gallery in the city and the frontal nature of its Howe Street edge.

In the void space multiple publics are gathered together and connected by the arrangement of the spatial realms occurring at the various datums which form its edges. Each of the datums have a particular program. The sunken-plaza level, which remains an extension of the landscape, is retained as a place providing space for public events, though with a stronger link to the arts. At this level there is the conference centre, the cinema ticket office and lounge, the lower level of the cafe/restaurant, and the community arts space. Additionally, the different platforms within the plaza can be used for outdoor events, either together or independently.

The ground level is the datum which directly connects the space to the city, by structuring a series of different thresholds and entry conditions. There are the shopfronts to the gallery bookshop and to the upper level of the cafe/restaurant fronting Howe Street, between which a passageway is formed to connect the sidewalk to the balcony on the edge of the void’s escarpment. There is the platform which extends the Robson Street sidewalk under the elevated bar which forms a ceiling 5.5 metres above. Further, off the forecourt created between the void and the Annex, is the entry to the public room on the ground floor of the Annex together with what has become in the proposal the rear entry to the gallery and the public route through the main gallery building. A threshold to the balcony on the void edge of the forecourt is structured by a line of flagpoles and the steel pergola frame they support. This datum is also linked to the plaza level by two stairs on either side of the void.

The datum of piano nobile level is associated with the art gallery, containing the sculpture terrace, the first level of the exhibition space in the proposed wing, and the ‘grand room’ fronting Robson Street. The sculpture terrace runs across the facade of the main gallery building, forming a platform onto which the gallery-going public spill out following entry to the gallery proper. The portion of the terrace above the entry is on axis with the gallery forecourt and is visually connected to the landscape beyond. Adjacent to the void, the terrace is pulled forward to form an escarpment and bounding edge. Within the exhibition space of the proposed wing the gallery patrons overlook the void from a large window balcony. This window also forms a space for exhibitions which can be
seen from the entry forecourt. The ‘grand room’ in turn has large glass doors which open to the void space allowing access from its interior to a balcony. This room can be used for general public functions at all hours, so may be occupied by publics separate from gallery visitors.

The uppermost datum is the roof level, which is occupied by the gallery cafe patrons and the general public visiting the roof garden. The relationship of this datum to the others in the void is more remote but remains associated at a perceptual level due to the overflowing vegetation and its visibility upon approach.

The void space may also be used as a site for public events and performances. The waterfall can be turned off and the platforms at the plaza level can become stages. The waterfall structure is also designed as a frame for supporting a projection screen or backdrop. Bleachers stored at the plaza level can be pulled out for seating which can extend up to the sidewalk level. If desired, the handrail to the Robson Street platform can be removed so as to allow direct access off the sidewalk to the seating and plaza.

Form
The form of the gallery wing building is shaped by a number of different systems acting simultaneously and negotiates between them, while reinforcing the above intentions. The different elements comprising the building’s form are:

- the wall on the void side of the bar. This wall is of the same formal nature and materiality as the wall of the existing gallery building connected to the proposed wing. It acts to make the ‘clearing’ for the void and ties the wing back to the existing building;
- the elevated linear, exhibition-space box which occurs on the street side of the ‘clearing’ wall. This forms the edge piece to the void, its structure forming the loggia space of the ‘negative plinth.’
- the wall that wraps around the box and contains the ‘grand room’ fronting Robson Street. This wall, which has a plaster finish, is of a ‘dumb’ formal nature that echoes the language of the existing complex. It is slightly higher than the linear box it wraps, both to reveal the assemblage and give greater height to the undercroft space off Robson Street;
- the screen edge hung off the wrapping wall, both continues and brings to a halt the frame edge placed alongside the complex;
the edge piece which supports the 'grand room' on its western edge opposite the Annex. This piece serves to break the space of the masterwork down into a 'grid of realms' by demarcating the entry axis of the gallery and in turn projecting it beyond into the space of the landscape. It also contributes to the bounding of the void.

The formal strategy is to reveal the assembly of these systems that comprise the building. Representative of the overall project, the gallery wing stands in a state of tension, as something both caught in, and capturing the multiple fields present; its formal matrix both making space for and bringing into connection multiple publics. Not attempting to resolve this tension, the wing demonstrates the idea of the co-existence of the parts and the whole that frames the project.

The Landscape

The site of the major proposed intervention in the landscape is the first level terrace on the Howe Street side. In the proposal the middle section of the landscape is largely cleared and its edge is extended toward the steel frame rising up from the street level to overlap the sidewalk. A steel pergola structure replaces the edge planting, creating a transitional space that is of a more intimate scale in relation to the space of the larger landscape and the street section. The frame structure meshing with the pergola introduces infrastructure to the terrace, such as power, water, and lighting. The open space established is bounded on the southern side by an extension of the upper level of the complex which spans over the terrace. This new piece also creates a transition space below it as well as shields the terrace space from the gaze of the Supreme Court building. The physical connection of the terrace to the street was strengthened by the adding of stairs which rise up through the ends of the 'flying planters.' The location of these stairs transgresses the logic of the masterwork and provides an unexpected experience which links the space of the sidewalk to that of the landscape.

Where the landscape deck meets the waterfall, the idea of overlapping datums is realized through a combination of moves. At the deck level a platform is placed over the existing pool of water. The waterfall itself is diverted out and away from the building edge by a glass canopy under which is situated a deck connected to the theatre bar. The effect of this is to simultaneously overlap publics in the landscapes, the publics in the building's interior, and the publics on the sidewalk. The deck on the pool may also act as a stage for performance or display.
diversion of the water maintains the integrity of the original intention of the masterwork, while disrupting and questioning it.

The other point of intervention in the landscape occurs at the uppermost deck. Here the reconfiguration is more subtle. The roof of the provincial courts waiting area forms a deck pulled off the edge of the landscape. This deck does not overly disrupt the existing landscape but expands the experiential possibilities by enabling the overlook of the provincial courts entry and the street. Further a visual relationship is established between the deck and the hotel balconies opposite.
Project Drawings and Model

3.11 Presentation Snapshot
Section A. Art Gallery Annex, proposed wing, and north sunken plaza.

Section B. Conference and exhibition centre, cinema complex and plaza cafe.

Section C. Provincial Courts, theatre complex, and lease space

3.12. Proposal Cross Sections
3.14. Existing condition

3.15. Edge post-extractions

Section A

Section B

3.16. Proposed Sections

Level -1

Level 0

Level +1

1. meeting 2. waiting 3. courtroom 4. entry 5. void 6. balcony 7. lightwell

3.17. Proposed Plans - Central Section
3.18. Model. Proposed Hornby Street Elevation

3.19. Study Model. Proposed Provincial Courts

3.20. Study Model. Hornby Street edge.

3.21. Sectional perspective through Provincial Courts entry, waiting areas and court rooms, and the rooftop landscape.
3.22. Diagram - Overlapping Realms

3.23. Diagram - Frame Edge as Infrastructure

3.24. Photomontage sectional perspective through lease space and landscape deck.
3.25. Study model.

3.26. Study model.

3.27. Photomontage sectional perspective through lease space and landscape deck.
3.28. Existing condition

3.29. Howe Street edge post-extractions

3.30. Photomontage perspective of edge frame, landscape platforms, and waterfall terrace to theatre complex.

3.32. Perspective view of the landscape deck looking out to the street.

3.34. Diagram - Overlapping realms

3.35. Diagram - Gallery Wing assemblage

3.36. Diagram - Gallery datums with program

3.38. Diagram - Overlapping realms

3.39. Sectional perspective through gallery wing looking North to existing building.

3.41. Perspective view to Gallery Wing and reconfigured sunken plaza from landscape deck.
3.46. Model. Robson Street view east.

3.47. Perspective montage looking East on Robson Street to Gallery wing.

3.49. Perspective montage looking North from landscape to Gallery entrance.
3.50. Model. Howe Street view north.

3.51. Perspective montage of view from sidewalk platform off Robson Street.
3.52. Perspective montage of the captured void from the sunken plaza level. At centre is the waterfall which can be turned off as required upon different occupations.
3.53. Sketch of possible staging of performance at the plaza level

3.54. Sketch of outdoor cinema screening in the void space. Shown is the possibility of the removal of the balustrade to the platform off the Robson Street sidewalk upon placement of bleacher seating in the sunken plaza.
V. Afterword

Developed in this thesis was an argument for the relevance of considering approaches to the design of urban public space from the perspective of underlying socio-political ideals. The purpose of this was to reveal the assumptions behind the use of the term ‘public’ and to question how these assumptions are embedded in the construction of ‘space.’ More particularly, the notion of a pluralistic public was proposed as a critical device for conceptualizing an inclusive democracy responsive to social diversity. The primary aim was then the exploration of how a dialogue between this socio-political ideal and the design of public architecture could be achieved. A number of general ideas were presented, including: the idea of the co-existence of, and dialectic between, parts and a ‘whole’; the creation of multiple spatial realms which both separate and frame connection between different publics; the concept of ‘difficult monumentality’ and ‘open’ representation; and the strategy of hybrid programming.

The exploration of these ideas was given greater specificity through the examination of how they might generate architecture within the context of the Robson Square complex. Here the central issue was the way in which an existing monumental and autonomous mega-structure could be reconfigured programatically and formally so as to realize a more heterogeneous condition and stronger connection to the city. The success of the strategies developed in relation to the aims set for the project, is primarily connected to the manner in which they subvert and shift the existing masterwork in a radical way without destroying the integrity of the its primary parti - the constructed landscape. Having tested the programmatic, spatial, and representational ideas developed in relation to the argument for pluralism through the design project, it is useful to conclude the thesis with arguments and speculations at a more general level. The approach developed in the thesis and the site of its exploration are particularly relevant to two areas of concern: the limits of architecture as a socio-political device, and the relationship between architecture and the grid city.
The Limits of Architecture

Central to the thesis argument was the recognition that architecture as a cultural product gives form to socio-political ideals. The development of the strategies for pluralism reflected, however, the recognition of the limits of architecture as a socio-political device. The stance taken for pluralism, and the critique of the power of normative notions of social unity, was not directly translated into aggressive architectural acts, but rather the subtle and humble approach of framing possibilities and circumstances. Crucial to this was the idea that the architecture not attempt to act as a critical device which dictates meaning solely through formal articulation, but rather that it work to give space for meaning to arise through occupation. This is evident in the strategies of theatricalization and 'open representation,' which aim to induce engagement with the architecture physically and semantically. Such an approach is reflected in the statement made by Robert Unger in a debate on public space at the Harvard Graduate School of Design:

I think that the most significant transformative influence of the designer would not be the aggressive notion that his [sic] designs will change social behavior, but rather in the idea that his [sic] work will expand the collection of spatial forms available by which people can think about their forms of connections. Such an influence would be, more subtle, more modest; but it would be I think, immensely more powerful and promising than the authoritarian program of transformation of behavior.\(^{(34)}\)

The above discussion begins to indicate how the approach taken to the problem of linking the political and spatial may be further abstracted and extended to the question of invention versus convention in architecture. The relevance of the strategies developed in response to this question is apparent in the idea that pluralism need not lead to total fragmentation. It can instead lead to a dialectic between parts and a whole, between fragmentation and unity. Here the 'whole' is tied to the formation of the public sphere and therefore the generation of collective meaning, which in turn is directly associated with the recognition of architectural and cultural conventions. This argument reinforces the position that architecture need not be conceived as an autonomous art free from the constraint of convention, or even placed in deliberate counterpoint to it as a means of didactic political critique. The notion of avant-garde architecture becomes problematic when it is imposed as a self-referential object with esoteric semantic codes. Once cut off from all conventions the work becomes elitist, disengaged from its cultural and social context. This restricts the degree of semantic access to it and subsequently engenders passive subject positions.\(^{(35)}\)

The total reliance on formulated conventions is similarly problematic. As noted to in chapter one, the systemization of architectural order to enforce unity may stem from a concern about the common good and public realm, but it is also associated with the authoritarian imposition of unity and homogeneity. The abdication of authorship and fossilization of design prevents the questioning of social and cultural norms, as well as the particularization of architecture in relation to its site and program. The argument for association and the formation of a 'public' within social diversity, and the accompanying concept of the co-existence of parts and a 'whole,' suggests that a middle position be adopted which recognizes and works with conventions while simultaneously reinterpreting or ques-


tioning them. Maintaining a conversation with conventions ties in with the idea of the tension in simultaneous fragmentation and unity. This approach is reflected in the statement of the architects, Machado and Silvetti, "authorship is a responsibility, rhetoric is unavoidable."\textsuperscript{16}

Architecture and the Grid City

The critique of the mega-structure and its attempt to reorder the city may be extended to other conceptions of public architecture which similarly view the urbanism of the grid city as problematic and in need of taming. The evenness of the grid and its resistance to the inscription of hierarchy, together with the unruly nature of its fabric, has historically been a concern for parties interested in bringing an order to it, whether it be for the representation of power or the pursuit of aesthetic and 'cultural' ends. The City Beautiful Movement is the key example of such an attempt to reorder and tame the grid city. Whereas Erickson looked to nature to construct an utopian "sanctuary," the City Beautiful Movement based its reconstruction of American cities on the example of places such as Paris and Vienna.\textsuperscript{37} The current construction of urban enclaves which follow the precepts of neo-traditional design, and transcend the limits of the grid, similarly exemplify the desire to impose on the city unity and monumentality. The discussion of this situation can be linked back to the reference to 'convention,' as there is a reliance on a system of conventions, but the system is foreign to the urbanism of the grid.

The desire to fix the reading of the city, through masking the forces of its production and constructing an imposed unity, is also apparent in 'urban design masterplans' which co-ordinate signage, planting and set design regulations to orchestrate a themed homogeneity. Such plans effect the production of a simulation of reality, in a manner illustrative of Jean Baudrillard's argument that today a 'hyper-reality' is constructed through the manipulation and commodification of dominate signification systems by the economic system, with the city becoming a "simulacra of itself."\textsuperscript{38} In terms of the argument for pluralism, the controlled production of what constitutes the public realm of the city is problematic in relation to its suppression of difference together with the way in which it induces passive subject positions. The consequence of this is that citizens become tourists in their own city.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16}Machado and Silvetti, "Afterword," 263
\textsuperscript{17}For writings on the City Beautiful Movement see Mario Manieri-Elia, "Towards an 'Imperial City': Daniel Burnham and the City Beautiful Movement," in Georgia Cucci et. al., The American City (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973). For additional references see Alex Krieger, "Civic Lessons of an Ephemerall Monument" and Alfred Koetter, "Monumentality and the American City," in The Harvard Architectural Review, No. 4, 1984.
\textsuperscript{18}Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in Art and Text, No.11, September, 1983.
The above notions of urban design and public space impose on the city an abstract logic external to it. The thesis project demonstrates that an alternative strategy may be employed that does not attempt to manipulate the city as an holistic artifact or work of art. The argument for pluralism can be linked instead to an architectural/urban design strategy of discrete interventions, or what Umberto Eco refers to as “urban acupuncture.” Here, in a process of “conjecture and adjustment,” the negotiation between architecture and the city is particular and local. This strategy also works with the idea that architecture not be seen as simply a piece of the city, the ‘whole,’ but that the city also be formed in the architecture. That is, the materiality and form of the building be inflected by and act as a register of, the larger landscape of the city. In this way, the rhetoric of the architecture is concentrated within its limits. The proposed gallery wing is an attempt to realize this. The idea of ‘conjecture and adjustment’ is further demonstrated by the approach to the alterations and additions to the existing Robson Square complex. Here the results of simultaneously aiding and undermining the existing masterwork reflect Rossi’s statement that, “when a project or a form is not utopian or abstract but evolves from the specific problems of the city, it persists and expresses these problems both through its style and form as well as through its many deformations.”

To conclude, the thesis is presented as a call for architecture to be cognizant of the ideal of pluralism, by imagining and designing places of public appearance in the city which give space for a diverse range of publics and subject positions to engage and negotiate the city together. What the thesis demonstrates is that this requires architecture to not resist the erosion of the public realm of the city, due to privatization and commodification, by looking backwards and constructing simplistic models and representations of unity and consensus. Rather, it should attempt to realize the ideal of pluralism, through the dis-idealization of the architecture, and the development of a more complex and subtle relationship between built form, its program and the proto-typical instruments of the grid city.

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*Aldo Rossi, 18.
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