RECROOM
URBAN STAGESCAPE

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ABSTRACT

This project explores a new design motif to create vibrant public open spaces in the city. It proposes the redesign of one urban plaza as a way to explore the idea of "stagescapes" as public places where visitors become both audience and performer, enhancing a city's social, recreational and cultural standing.

Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theater (QET) complex and plaza was selected as a design site because it is the main civic performing arts facility for a dynamic, growing, multicultural urban region. With little connection between the inside architecture and outside plaza, a lack of visitor-friendly spaces and little attempt made to integrate the site with its surroundings, the area's potential is not being met. A growing downtown residential population highlights the need for an engaging space designed to attract and engage users both day and night. This situation presents an opportunity to reconsider the future design and program of the plaza as a stagescape.

Analysis at the regional (Vancouver), local (Downtown) and site (QET complex) levels establishes the case for an urban stagescape at this location. The design itself is presented as a model which could be modified to fit local conditions elsewhere, providing at the least a case study of one proposal to enliven an urban space through performance art.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Goal

This project describes the design for a civic stagescape in Vancouver. It involves the following objectives:

1. Research global and local public open spaces precedents to analyze the use of performing arts in spatial organizations, to develop the project design criteria.
2. Define and program a public open space to enhance the social, recreational, political and cultural life in downtown Vancouver.
3. Develop the concept of a stagescape as a new design media for the creation of vibrant public open spaces.
4. Link the site to other open spaces in the city to create a network of stagescapes.
5. Provide varied, accessible and interconnected events year-round to a wide range of users both day and night.
6. Integrate indoor and outdoor performing arts facilities to create an appealing public venue.

1.2 Site Introduction

The Queen Elizabeth Theatre (QET) and the Playhouse (PH) are culturally important performing-arts facilities owned by the City of Vancouver and operated by Vancouver Civic Theatres. The plaza in which they are located between the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts can be seen as a gateway for downtown Vancouver. The area is dominated by large institutional buildings including the CBC headquarters building, the Main Public Library, the Main Post Office, BC Place and GM Place. Public transit is supplied by a nearby Stadium SkyTrain station and buses.

Fig. 1: Gate of Downtown Vancouver
2. STUDY APPROACH AND METHODS

2.1 Theoretical Orientation

A "stagescape" uses performance as a design motif, integrating the performing arts with public open space to program public assemblies, social events and recreation. It puts the public life of a city on display. Some of the key questions are:

a. What is public open space and what does it mean to the successful functioning of a city? Public open space is "the stage upon which the drama of communal life uploads"; it gives "form to the ebb and flow of human exchange" and provides "the channels for movement, the nodes of communication, and the common grounds for play and relaxation." (Betsky, Revelatory Landscape, p3)

b. What are the performing arts and what do they contribute to urban public life? In the traditional sense, the performing arts involves a uni-directional flow of information, such as in concerts, plays and other entertainment activities in which the performers perform and the audiences watch. Today, these roles can be changed. The city itself can be considered a stage for performance by everybody. People can re-express and represent themselves in several different identities. Because people are inherently attracted by others in a public open space, the performing arts can be reinvented by blurring the line between performer and audience.

A stagescape would provide a showcase for the public life of the city, enhancing its social and recreational opportunities by adding to and stimulating public interactions. A stagescape would bring vibrant urban life into public open spaces by analyzing the city itself a stage for anyone to use. A stagescape would integrate the relationship between the streets and public open spaces and create a unified outdoor room for all.

2.2 Precedents Analysis

Two public open spaces for performing arts were examined as global stagescape precedents: the Shouwburgplein plaza, which invites the surrounding modern architecture into a public open space for performing arts, and the Centre Georges Pompidou plaza which shapes an outdoor room out of the surrounded streets. They present new ideas in the programming and spatial uses of open spaces for public performance. The spatial relationship between the public open spaces and architecture...
was analyzed in the context of how plazas act as functional outdoor rooms on a city scale. Finally, successful and unsuccessful features were determined to create criteria and references for the proposed project.

2.2.1 Shouwburgplein Plaza
Adriaan Geuza, West 8

“The square is a stage, changing chameleon-like from one hour to the next, daytime to evening, summer to winter.” (Klazien Brummel, Topos, 1997/20)

Location and Context

Schouwburgplein plaza is a popular city square located in center of Rotterdam, close to the main railway station and the famous Lijnbahn shopping center. The open space is used for socializing and civic events.

Architectural Context

Shouwburgplein plaza is surrounded by buildings with “active, open facades that contain shops, entrances to various amusements and a large number of sidewalk cafes.” (Gehl,
New City Spaces, p118)
- North: the city's main concert hall, De Doelen (green and black modernist architecture, near the central station)
- South: the city's main theatre, Schouwburg
- East: cafes, offices
- West: a large cinema complex, Bioscoop, designed by Koen Van Velsen, with "a semi-transparent, milky white façade that shines like a translucent skin at night" (Gehl, p118)
- Underground: parking lot

Description

Shouwburgplein Plaza is built on a raised platform approximately 35cm above street level using untraditional materials and techniques for great visual effect. The look is particularly striking at night when it is said to resemble a floating stage in the middle of the city. A wood deck laid in a herringbone pattern serves as a dynamic pedestrian walkway and also as an audience seating area. Other surfaces include checkered wood plates, metal grates and rubber mats (Fig. 3). Lighting adds to the appeal of the space at night with perforated metal plates emitting beams of white, purple and green neon. A row of crane-like spotlighting at one edge of the square invites user participation with a coin-operated system switching on a series of searchlights. The raised floor is illuminated from beneath to produce a floating effect. The entrance to the parking lot includes brightly-lit triangular glass prisms (Gehl, p119) (Fig. 4).

Fig. 3: The floor of plaza is executed in bands of light metal plate, steel grating, black rubber and wooden decks. (Gehl, New City Spaces)
Major Activities and Users

The Shouwburgplein plaza provides a variety of uses day and night with the character changing considerably after dark. During daytime, it is a popular place for people to sit, chat, relax or stroll through. Thirteen long wooden benches lined up towards the sun draw hundreds of sunbathers, and “as they are relatively hidden, this is an ideal place to succumb to voyeuristic tendencies” (Klazien Brummel, Topos, 1997/20). They also offer a sweeping view of the entire square. The 35cm-raised platform also serves as a good viewpoint to sit and watch the passing street scene. A low rail at the edge of the stage gives users another place to sit or lean on for the popular activity of people-watching (Fig. 5).

At night, the plaza changes dramatically into a major city stage, shimmering seemingly in mid-air with the translucent skin of surrounding buildings as a backdrop. Free events include theatrical performances, concerts, open air movies, dancing, circuses, a fairground and more (Fig. 6). The enticing open space lets people feel the cultural pulse of the city. They come to enjoy the public displays of art, take in the latest fashions and
watch each other. It can be considered an outdoor theatre in its own rite, a civic stage on an urban scale.

Successful Features

- Matches local recreational context (cinema complex, concert hall, civic theatre, cafes, shopping mall, etc.)
- Visible and accessible from many directions, near public transportation
- Attractive use of modern materials and construction methods
- Varied and appealing use of lighting
- Solar aspect well-considered
- Abundant formal and informal seating with various orientations
- Stage for both day and night use, hosting many free performances and activities
- Underground parking lot makes site accessible for car passengers
- Intimate visual relationship with surrounding buildings
- Accommodates a diverse range of visitors unrestricted by age, sex, ethnicity
- A good place to sit, rest, meet, gather in groups or simply watch people

Unsuccessful Features

- Lack of planting for seasonal comfort (considering sun, shade, rain, etc.)
- Noise from surrounding streets
2.2.2 Centre Georges Pompidou/Plaza
Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers

"I should passionately like Paris to have a cultural center which would at once be museum and center of creation". George Pompidou, 1969

Location and Context
The Centre Pompidou, also known as Beaubourg, is an example of the modern Paris multi-cultural center. Located in the center of the Beaubourg district along rue St.-Martin, the interior of the museum complex and the similarlyscaled outside plaza together create a civic stage for information, entertainment and culture.
Architectural Context

Inside
The Pompidou Center is one of the most famous modern art museums in the world. But it is not just a museum; it also has a huge public library, cinemas, concert halls, performance spaces, bookstores, restaurants, cafes and more - an ecosystem for culture in public life.
LEVEL 2 / Library (entrance via rue du renard)
1 General Collection
2 Self-training area
3 World televisions
4 Press room
5 The Library cafeteria

LEVEL 3 / Library (entrance via rue du renard)
1 Sound-video area
2 General Collection
3 Kandinsky Library and Graphic Arts Cabinet
(entrance via level 3, reserved access)

LEVEL 4 / Museum (entrance)
1 Collections from 1960 to the present day
2 New-media area
3 Museum Room
4 Galerie du musée
5 Galerie d'art graphique
6 Audioguide
7 Bookstore

LEVEL 5 / Museum (entrance via level 4)
1 Collections from 1905 to 1960
2 Terrace sculptures by Calder, Takis
3 Terrace sculptures by Richier, Miró
4 Terrace sculptures by Laurens

LEVEL 6 / Exhibitions
1 Galerie 1
2 Galerie 2
3 Galerie 3
4 Restaurant 5 Bookstore

Fig. 8: Floor plans (Centre Pompidou website)
Fig. 9: Restaurant at level 6

Fig. 10: Exhibitions (Centre Pompidou website)
Façade

This exposed steel skeleton machine design was seen as shocking by its first viewers. By expressing the interior of the building on its outside structure, functionality was turned into art. A visual rhyme of colored pipes presents the different functions: green for water; blue for air and heating; yellow for electricity; red for circulation; etc.

Fig. 13: Auditorium and library (Centre Pompidou website)

Fig. 11: West elevation

Fig. 12: Color-coded structures

Fig. 13: Auditorium and library (Centre Pompidou website)
Description

The huge plaza in front of the center acts as a front lobby for this cultural/informational venue. A cobblestone surface sloping down to the main entrance of the center contributes to the success of the activities within. Linking the center to the popular St.-Martin shopping boulevard, the plaza has a lively atmosphere and is used by many. At night when surrounding bars and restaurants begin to hum, the open space takes on an air of civic adventure where seemingly anything can happen.

Fig. 14: Centre Pompidou/plaza attracts thousands of visitors everyday.

Major Activities and Users

The Centre Pompidou plaza presents as a huge outdoor amphitheater for public use. An extraordinary array of street performers, jugglers, musicians, artists and fire-eaters compete with each other to capture the crowds' attention. "Often people joined in, dancing and singing to the music, actively a part of the scene". (Tate, Great City Parks, p112) The plaza holds various opportunities for people to meet, watch each other, view or join in a performance, relax, eat, read or sleep.

Fig. 15: The plaza supports use by people in various amounts from singles to large groups.
Successful Features

- Ideal location with historical context in the center of the city
- Accessible and visible from the main pedestrian streets
- The building, architectural context attract visitors from around the world
- The façade and tunnel structures act as a medium between inside and outside
- Well-designed main entrance from the plaza
- Building scales are linked and closely matched to the plaza
- Accommodates a mix of people from singles to large groups regardless of age, sex, ethnicity
- An appealing place to sit, rest, meet, gather or watch people
- Surrounding facilities, bars, restaurants and sculptural pool provide various opportunities
- A magnificent stage to accommodate major events

Unsuccessful Features

- Insufficient lighting at night
- Lack of adequate seating for audiences
- Lack of planting for seasonal comfort (considering sun, shade, rain, etc.)
- Lack of color in vegetation
- Monotone pavement in a vast open area
- Without significant programming
- Entry orientation for first-time visitors could be improved
3. THE SITE: INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Regional Analysis: Vancouver

3.1.1 Location

Vancouver is the key city in a rapidly growing urban area in Canada's southwest corner in the province of British Columbia. The 113 square kilometers of Great Vancouver accommodates a population of more than 2 million (http://vancouver.ca/aboutvan.htm). With a downtown area surrounded by mountains, ocean and spectacular natural views, it is often declared one of the world's most beautiful and livable cities. An international reputation as a natural urban wonder helps draws tourists who come to ski, sail, hike, shop, attend cultural performances or engage in other forms of indoor and outdoor recreation.

Fig. 16: Watercolor aerial view of Vancouver (www.eyecon.bc.ca)
3.1.2 Vancouver Performing Arts

Vancouver hosts a variety of performing arts events throughout the year. Thanks to a mild climate, popular public gatherings occur in all seasons, day and night, serving the cultural needs of the local people while also attracting tourists drawn by Vancouver’s reputation as one of the world’s most attractive places to visit. Traditionally well-attended events include the longstanding Folk Festival and the Jazz Festival. Changes in social demographics can be seen in a number of new events such as the Pride Parade, Chinese New Year celebrations, fireworks celebration nights, a Lantern Festival and a Halloween Parade of the Lost Souls.

Fig. 17: The Pride and Chinese New Year Dragon Dancing.

Fig. 18: Sports events and nightlife festivals.
3.2 Local Analysis: Downtown Vancouver

3.2.1 Location

Downtown Vancouver sits on a peninsula surrounded by water on three sides. On the north, the Burrard Inlet is the city's main harbor. English Bay marks the western boundary with well-used swimming beaches and sailing areas. False Creek defines the southern border with a combination of new condo towers, waterfront parks, and commercial and retail buildings serving a population of 14,000. (http://www2.jurock.com) Downtown is the heart of Vancouver with various land uses including business, shopping, live-work residential, institutional, recreational and various international neighborhoods with a population of approximately 72,900. (2001 Census Data) The population density downtown is "as high as 20,000 people per square kilometer," the third highest density of any city on North America after New York City and San Francisco. The west end neighborhood in particular is a "compact, walkable and transit/bike friendly urban core." (ww.wikipedia.org)

Fig. 19: Aerial depictions of Downtown Vancouver
(Left: www.eyecon.bc.ca Right: www.skycorpmap.com)

3.2.2 Green Space

Downtown Vancouver is surrounded by various green spaces, such as Stanley Park, waterfront parks and other parks. These green spaces host all kinds of events and recreational opportunities and attract people in all seasons.
a. Stanley Park
With an area of about 1,000 acres, Stanley Park is the third largest urban park in North America. The city's best-known and much-loved park attracts 8 million people every year. (http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/stanley/history.htm) Trips on foot, bike or roller-blade along the seawall perimeter offer gorgeous views in all seasons; in the park's interior, forests, open playgrounds and various types of wildlife habitat provide opportunities for public recreation in a beautiful natural setting.

Fig. 20: Stanley Park plan (www.city.vancouver.bc.ca)

b. Waterfront parks and green spaces
The downtown peninsula includes waterfront parks and green spaces in addition to Stanley Park. Waterfront parks to the north along Burrard Inlet near Coal Harbour serve as a scenic walkway to transportation options such as the Sea Bus and the Sky Train. To the south, Sunset Beach Park, Vainer Park, George Wainborn Park, David Lam Park and Coopers' Park host a variety of events and recreational opportunities, including large-scale celebrations such as the summer fireworks celebration nights and the annual Folk Festival.

Fig. 21: Nightlife festival
Fig. 22: Green space activities analysis
c. Other parks and green spaces
Many different types of green spaces are scattered throughout downtown Vancouver. Robson Square, a civic space in the middle of a major shopping and commercial district, offers a welcome green spot for people to gather amid the tall buildings. Victory Square at the gateway to the popular tourist attraction of Gastown serves the city’s collective memory by honoring Canada’s war veterans. Dr. Sun Yat-sen Garden in Chinatown presents “the first full-sized classical Chinese garden outside China” (http://www.vancouverchinesegarden.com/history.html) which adds to Vancouver’s growing reputation as a global city.

Fig. 23: Robson Square, Dr. Sun Yat-sen Garden and Victory Square

3.2.3 Neighborhoods

Downtown Vancouver is made up of a collection of neighborhoods, some of which attract visitors with special characteristics of their own.

a. Gastown
Located in the northeast corner of the downtown peninsula, Gastown is one of the most attractive neighborhoods in the city. Dating back to 1867 when Vancouver was founded, today it is a heritage-rich area mixing old and new buildings, trendy shopping stores, restaurants and clubs. Specials events such as the Jazz Festival draw thousands to join the crowds already enjoying the sights of the birthplace of the city.

Fig. 24: Aerial depiction of Gastown (www.gastown.org)
b. Chinatown
Vancouver's Chinatown, the largest in Canada and the second largest in North America, began attracting Chinese immigrants in 1850. Today this colorful neighborhood combines Chinese shops and restaurants with various types of residential buildings. Each year thousands from beyond the area itself come to celebrate the Chinese New Year with a parade, dragon dancing and more.

Fig. 25: Jazz Festival at Victory Square

Fig. 26: Chinese Festival at Chinatown

Fig. 27: Yaletown

c. Yaletown
Located next to False Creek in the south, Yaletown is characterized by historic redbrick warehouses which have been renovated into modern residences and businesses. This once-neglected district has become one of the city's trendiest areas and an increasingly popular tourist draw.

Fig. 28: Downtown neighborhoods analysis
3.2.4 Institutional Buildings

The eastern part of the downtown peninsula contains several major civic institutions.

a. BC Stadium and GM Place
Near False Creek, BC Stadium and GM Place host various kinds of sports, concerts and performance events throughout the year.

b. Civic Theaters
The Queen Elizabeth Theater (QET) and Playhouse complex, the Orpheum and the Center are among the city's most important performing arts facilities. They add to the city's recreational life and enhance its standing as a cultural life center.

c. Public Library
Located between Robson Street and Georgia Street at Homer Street, the central branch of the Vancouver Public Library is the third largest public library in Canada with over 395,000 cardholders and more than 8 million items borrowed annually. (http://www.vpl.ca/VPL/about.html) A distinctive architectural design by Moshe Safdie with large plazas on both the north and south sides attract large numbers of locals and tourists every day. This city landmark is used for reading, relaxing, public gatherings and big events.

Fig. 29: Public Library outside and inside

Fig. 30:
Downtown neighborhoods and activities analysis
3.2.5 Street System

Downtown Vancouver is framed by commercial streets, ceremonial streets, special streets and waterfront trails, which connect the commercial, institutional, recreational and tourist districts.

a. Commercial streets

Downtown Vancouver is one of the city’s main commercial and shopping districts. A framework can be seen in which Robson Street and Davie Street running east to west, Granville Street running north to south and Denman Street on the west side establishing a network of shops, clubs and restaurants which contribute to vibrant street scenes of public activity. Hastings Street, Pender Street and Main Street link the area to the Downtown Eastside, currently a focal point for the city’s social troubles and the subject of much discussion on how to bring the neighborhood back into a healthy state.

Fig. 31: Aerial depiction of Robson Street at night (left) and Downtown aerial view (above)
b. Ceremonial streets
Ceremonial streets are "major streets that have a peninsula-wide connection and gateway function where one would expect a ceremonial procession to be held." (http://vancouver.ca/dtp/m_pedestrian.htm)

"Georgia Street has such a role today, and an extension to False Creek is proposed." (http://vancouver.ca/dtp/m_pedestrian.htm) It links Stanley Park and False Creek from the west to the east, while Burrard Street does the same from the north to the south. These streets are typically chosen for festivals, ceremonies, parades, sports activities, political processions and more.

Fig. 32: Public parade at Georgia Street

Fig. 33: Festivals at Chinatown and Gastown (www.gastown.org)

c. Special streets
Special streets are "streets that have an historical or functional significance and may also have scenic qualities or distinct designs." (http://vancouver.ca/dtp/m_pedestrian.htm)

Water Street in Gastown, Keefer Street in Chinatown and Mainland Street in Yaletown can be considered special streets which contribute to their neighborhoods by adding economic, recreational or cultural meaning to their immediate surroundings. Along Mainland Street, for example, many of the old loading docks have been converted to outdoor patios which create highly scenic viewpoints from which to enjoy the passing city scenes.
d. Waterfront trails
Vancouver is well known as a popular place for biking, roller-blading and strolling amid gorgeous views. Waterfront trails along the downtown peninsula add an invaluable recreational value to the city that is accessible to all. “Today, more than half (58%) of the City’s waterfront is public; the longest continuous stretch is 23 kilometers from Portside Park to Kits Beach Park”. (http://vancouver.ca/parks/board/2003)
3.3 Precedents Study

The Vancouver Art Gallery/plaza and Vancouver Public Library/squares in downtown Vancouver were studied as precedents, examining their daily/special use activities and pattern to evaluate their effectiveness as public open spaces and performing arts.

The public open space for performances in Vancouver has unique characteristics venues:

1) Intimate relationship with streets
The busy streets and street corners act as the “lobby” of a theatre, leading people to stage, while at the same time becoming a part of the public performance stages on an urban scale.

2) Interactive performances
Passengers, performers and audiences interact with each other. Watching and being watched is a new form of expression for public performance. Also, a variety of overlapping performances can occur in various scales at the same time. This blends traditional stage and viewing areas into one.

3) Audience on the steps
People in groups, couples or singles use the steps to create audience seating, watching the passing scenes of the city. This represents the traditional amphitheater used in a modern way.

4) Dynamic performance spaces
In a major circulation route, passersby become the dynamic performers on undeclared stages for parades, sports events, etc. This enhances the streetscape as part of the public open space for performing arts.

3.3.1 Art Gallery/Plaza

The Vancouver Art Gallery, the largest art gallery in western Canada, presents national and international exhibitions of works by a range of artists from contemporary visionaries to historical masters. Founded in 1931, the gallery has more than 7,900 works in its collection, valued at over $100 million. [http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/about_gallery.cfm](http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/about_gallery.cfm) The plaza is one of the most popular places downtown for the public to hang out and a various of performances happen here, not because of its special location or architecture but the steps which create new ways to the outdoor space between the building and the streets.
a. Location
Vancouver Art Gallery is found in the commercial district along Robson Street between Howe and Hornby Streets.

b. Use Patterns

Daily Use
• Front row: the prime space
• Corner: singles, couples leaning on the foundation
• Street corner: street passengers, vendors, artists
• Top row: gathering space for groups

Special Use Pattern
• Radial performance and audience spaces
• Performances at the busy street corner
c. Activities

**Daily Activities**
People-watching, reading, sunbathing, talking, relaxing, meeting, eating lunch, creating art, vending, chess playing, etc.

![Vancouver Art Gallery daily use activities analysis](image)

**Special Activities**
Festivals, celebrations, concerts, promotional events, political rallies, folk performances, etc.

![Vancouver Art Gallery special use activities analysis](image)

### 3.3.2 Vancouver Public Library / Squares

The Public Library / squares attract citizen and tourists by its distinctive architecture and huge squares on both sides everyday. It is the landmark of public assembling, reading, relaxing and big events happening here. The arc shaped arcade like a giant arm contains and welcomes the people passing by. Also the steps on the south side of the square with the arcade wall construct the amphitheatre position between the corners of surrounding streets, and blur the boundary between streets and city stage.

![Vancouver Public Library/squares](image)

*Fig. 39: (Vanmap website)*
Aerial photos of Vancouver Public Library/squares
a. Location
The Public Library is located in the heart of downtown Vancouver's sports and entertainment district, between Robson Street and Georgia Street.

b. Use Patterns

Daily Use
- Top row steps: group meeting place
- Steps provide seating, space for people watching
- Ramp: main circulation, leading to the library
- Upper steps offer prime seating in the sun with good views of city scenery
- Street corner: meeting, passenger stop

Special Use
- Radial performance and audience spaces
- Performances at the busy street corner

Fig. 40: Vancouver Public Library squares use patterns analysis

c. Activities

Daily Activities
Seating, reading, relaxing, lunch-break, watching, etc.
Special Activities
Public fairs, information displays, movie sets, commercial filming, promenade events, entertainment, trade fairs, etc.
3.4 Site Analysis

The QET plaza is a central entertainment node used for tourism, commercial, residential and institutional purposes. Major north-south and east-west routes link it to nearby sports and commercial facilities. Also, the site is one of the plazas least affected by shade in the downtown area, so it has more opportunities for vegetation.

3.4.1 Land Use Analysis

Land uses vary according to neighborhood. The public open spaces are outdoor rooms created and shaped by their relationship to their institutional, residential and commercial surroundings. This provides opportunities for public open space to be programmed for a variety land uses and performances.

Institutional
This district extends from the central downtown area towards its eastern end includes a number of large-scale institutional buildings. Recreational, cultural, entertainment, athletic and educational facilities here draw large amounts of people, particularly during event times.

BC Place Stadium and GM Place are located between the central downtown area and the Downtown Eastside, between the major traffic veins of Georgia Viaduct and Dunsmuir Viaduct. These facilities host public entertainment events such as sports, concerts, trade shows, exhibitions and more, attracting millions of people every year.

The Vancouver Public Library’s Central Branch provides a large cultural and educational facility indoors, while its atrium and outside plazas have become popular places for people to gather, read or lounge.

The Queen Elizabeth Theater (QET) and the Playhouse complex is “one of Vancouver’s foremost modernist architectural landmarks” (Commonwealth Historic Resource Management, P23). The civic performing arts facility hosts concerts, operas, plays, galas and more. At nights before and after events, this area comes to life with a buzz of public activity. The modernist architecture transforms the indoor and outdoor spaces, and can act as a mutual for performances.

The city is planning to build in the parking lot next to the QET complex a separate theater facility to enhance this performing arts center. Also a new proposal for renovation in this area is the CBC headquarters across Georgia Street from the QET complex. Plans call for a large transparent news broadcast room providing visual access into the studio for people passing by.
Commercial
Office buildings, restaurants and clubs in are also found in this district. Additional retail shops in the future would be expected to draw more visitors to the area.

Residential
City officials have approved a plan to construct a Costco to the west of GM Place between Georgia and Dunsmuir Street. Also planned for the south side of the CBC building is a new development which would become the highest residential tower in Vancouver and an architectural landmark (designed by Hotson Bakker Architects). This influx of people into the immediate area would encourage more economic activity and provide the new residents with a wealth of options for social, recreational and cultural activity.

Public Open Space
The QET plaza south of the QET building is located in the heart of this entertainment area, surrounded by the CBC headquarter building, the Public Library, and the Main Post Office. Nevertheless, the plaza is seldom used by the public; only on event nights when audiences line up for tickets does it appear lively.

The Public Library squares, on the other hand, are among the most popular outdoor plazas in the city. On a pleasant day, people gather in the southern square for sunbathing, reading, relaxing, to meet friends, eat lunch or just enjoy the scenery of passing pedestrians on Robson Street. The northern square, which is shadier, serves as a major entrance to the facility. Both squares and the interior atrium are also used for filming, festivals, exhibitions, parades and more. (Vancouver Public Library/ Plaza 3.1.4 Downtown Vancouver Precedents Study, P25)
3.4.2 Streets Analysis

Streets take the role of the city veins which convey and transfer people and goods between various nodes and districts. For example, Robson Street as the major commercial street downtown is narrowed with intimate spaces on the sidewalks, transparent facades and an interactive relationship with pedestrians and traffic. On the other hand Georgia Street and Dunsmuir Street, which serve as major ceremonial streets, are wider and use street trees to create a safe zone between pedestrians and traffic. These two designs provide an opportunity for the project to link the streetscape design to the public open space as an urban stagescape network.

a. Georgia Street/Viaduct
Georgia Street/Viaduct is a major traffic route to and from the downtown area.

b. Dunsmuir Street/Viaduct
Dunsmuir Street/Viaduct is also a major connection, bringing traffic into downtown on a one-way route.

c. Robson Street
Robson Street, downtown’s busiest commercial street, attracts a large number of pedestrians with a wide variety of retail stores.
d. Hamilton Street
Hamilton Street links the two special neighborhoods of Gastown in the north and Yaletown in the south.

e. Beatty Street
Beatty Street east of Hamilton Street offers another potential link from Chinatown in the north to the Roundhouse Community Center near False Creek in the south. It includes the Stadium Sky Train Station at Dunsmuir Street.
3.4.3 Vegetation Analysis

Street trees and other vegetations provide attractive, healthy and green zones for outdoor neighborhoods. They enliven the character of a street with an ever-changing performance in which growth, transformation and decay all play a role. They are living symbol structures leading people from one place to another. However the planting in this district is not well coordinated. The project proposes integrating not only the horizontal but also the vertical planting materials to create a continuous, thriving green environment in the neighborhood.

City plans for the street tree area along Georgia Street include “tree replacement, grass boulevards, and tree species substitution. These modifications will further improve the quality of the sidewalk treatment and tree planting.” (City of Vancouver, P1)

Although not open to the public, a roof garden on the Public Library provides an attractive view of greenery for some in nearby towers. The library complex also features a vertical green screen wall along its eastern curving wall.

![Vegetation analysis](image)

3.4.4 Topography and View Analysis

Land in this district slopes gently from the northwest to southeast until it reaches False Creek. Views to the water are provided in several areas with elevated prospects. Moving west from the eastern side of the QET plaza to the Main Post Office along Georgia Street involves a gain of 7 meters in elevation.
3.4.5 Sun and Climate Analysis

Sun is one of the major factors affecting the use of public open space. The project site receives full sun in all seasons providing many opportunities to attract users.

Vancouver is located at N49 latitude and W123 longitude. Its climate is among the mildest in Canada thanks to the temperate effects of the Pacific Ocean and the Coast Range mountains rising up to 1,500m in the north. Temperatures range from an average 3 degrees Centigrade in January to 18 degrees in July. Vancouver is widely known as a rainy city, which is particularly true in the winter when there may also be occasional snowfalls. An average 1,219mm of precipitation falls each year (http://vancouver.ca/aboutvan.htm#). Angles of the sun vary from about 63 on June 21 (the summer solstice) to about 16 on December 21 (the winter solstice). (Marsh, Landscape Planning: Environmental Applications, P289)
4. DESIGN

4.1 Introduction to Design

The concept is to create a stage for all, giving every visitor the chance to experience being on stage.

This design proposes the creation of "stagescapes" as vibrant public open spaces which enhance the cultural, economic and recreational life of a city. While use of this design theme by others would inevitably lead to various interpretations and results, all stagescapes would encourage more people to engage in outdoor activities and re-interpret public open spaces as sites for shared visual and mental experiences with everyday civic activities themselves considered performances.

Analysis of global and local precedents included an examination of the unique spatial characteristics of public open spaces in Vancouver:

1) The public open spaces of Centre Georges Pompidou and Schouwburgplein in Europe have clearly defined boundaries between the outdoor space and the surroundings.

2) Public open spaces in Vancouver demonstrated in the Vancouver Art Gallery and Vancouver Public Library often have ambiguous spaces separating the site from the plazas, streets and nearby buildings. The streets serve as a part of the public open space and also as a link to other areas. Also, in Vancouver steps are often used as seating.
4.2 Stagescape Network Proposal

A stagescape network proposes to link and create a variety of public open spaces for performing arts in the city with different programs, scales, and uses. This project defines and programs a number of public open spaces to improve the social, recreational, cultural and political life of people in the downtown area. It integrates the site's surrounding streets as streetscapes into a larger stagescape, creating a varied urban stagescape network in downtown Vancouver.

Stages Proposal
The waterfront parks and green spaces on the north side to the Burrard Inlet and the south side to the False Creek define the scenic stagescapes around the downtown peninsula.

The inner intimate stagescapes spread along the major commercial street, Robson Street and the ceremonial street, Georgia Street, will enhance the public social, economic, cultural and recreational life of Vancouver.

Fig. 51: Stagescape network linkage and proposal
**Streetscape Proposal**

a. Georgia Street

Georgia Street is the downtown peninsula’s major ceremonial street, stretching from Stanley Park in the west to False Creek in the east. It serves as the main east-west traffic connector through downtown. A mix of office buildings, public open spaces and civic institutions are situated along this wide, heavily-used street.

Georgia Street downtown can be divided into five sub-areas:

1) The West End (Chilco St.-Cardero St.) with the influence of Stanley Park and the surrounding West End residential district;
2) The major office developments (Cardero St.-Bute St.);
3) The central block with potential for redevelopment (Bute St.-Thurlow St.);
4) Hotels and department stores (Thurlow St.-Seymour St.);
5) Predominantly large-scale institutional uses and cultural facilities (Seymour St.-Beatty St.) to the east.

(City of Vancouver, P22)

The city’s new development objectives for Georgia Street are

1) to reinforce the dominant prestigious, ceremonial image and character;
2) to preserve and enhance all existing views;
3) to provide views for new developments;
4) to create a strong unified street edge;
5) to provide visual interest to the public;
6) to create a coherent high-quality environment within the public realm;
7) to provide major amenities and facilities for pedestrians;
8) to encourage the provision of open, usable, green spaces with a significant street planting program in the public realm; etc. (City of Vancouver, P22)
Georgia Street Design Proposal

The project builds on the character of Georgia Street as a major west-east ceremonial axis for pedestrians by programming more public use along the street and within the public open spaces near it.

The streetscape and the stagescape are brought together to create a dynamic network of social, recreational and cultural venues for the downtown area. Designing the Georgia streetscape with a double row of street trees and a unified sidewalk to the east side of False Creek would enhance this major east-west ceremonial axis and bring more pedestrians and activities to the water edge.

The project proposes that Hamilton Street link the special neighborhoods of Gastown to the north and Yaletown to the south. As it crosses the east-west axis of Georgia Street, an effective treatment of the streetscape here would play an important role in establishing the area as an attractive venue for public activities.

4.3 Programming and Options

The programming of the project is driven from the QET plaza’s combination of a special context, architectural treatment and public open space characteristics:

1) Wide Corridor Leading to Site
Georgia Street is a wide-open corridor creating the sense of a grand entrance hall leading pedestrians and traffic to the stage.

2) Modern Architectural Backdrop
The QET plaza with the QET complex building and restaurant on the corner acts as a container at the end of the open corridors from Georgia Street and Hamilton Street. Closed and partially closed spaces set up the major stage areas for performances. Also, the façades of the two buildings feature transparent glass walls which can alter the relationship between the inside and outside spaces with varying types of light.

3) Visual Corridor Linkage
The proposed CBC community plaza and raised platform create a visual and physical link to the QET plaza from south to north. This provides a chance to design a second pedestrian link up the busy Georgia Street and offers more opportunities for access from the proposal residential neighborhoods.

4) Topography Change
From the west side of the Main Post Office to the east side of QET plaza the ground level
drops about 7 meters, providing the opportunity to create a pedestrian corridor to the QET plaza rather than use the busy traffic route along Georgia Street.

A stagescape for the Queen Elizabeth plaza fits these characteristics and allows the site to function as a civic performing arts venue and a public activity assembling space, offering visitors the experience of being on stage themselves in a shared public performance; The greenery public meeting space proposes to embed with small scale stages or social communication areas, while share the performing arts for everybody. Circulation affecting and integrating with the public open space for performances also provide the opportunity for people to experience the stage in a dynamic way.

Thus the project designs five major spaces on the QET plaza: the public open space for major performances, public performances, public access and linkages, food and support space and studio experience space.

4.3.1 Civic Stage

As a performing arts stage, the site would be available for use day and night and in all seasons for concerts, fashion shows, festivals, celebrations, outdoor movies and more. Because rain can be an issue in scheduling events in Vancouver, protection from the weather is an important design consideration.

![Fig. 53: Images of performing arts at civic stage](image1)

4.3.2 Public Stage

As a public activity stage, the site would be used as a place for people to express their own ideas in art, design and fashion. It would encourage use by street artists, musicians, dancers and anyone else interested in performance.

![Fig. 54](image2)
4.3.3 Public Space

Criteria to create a successful public space at the Queen Elizabeth Plaza include effective treatment of the: access and linkages, comfort and image, uses and activities, and sociability. The site would become a public attraction for informal meetings, eating lunch, sitting, reading, or simply a place to enjoy the passing city scenes. It would be a comfortable and sociable space with easy access for singles, couples, groups, children, the elderly, the physically impaired and all others.

a. Seating in a Public Open Space

Seating is a major consideration for a successful public open space. The design should integrate a variety of different forms and materials for various uses, taking into account the wide range in user types expected.

![Fig. 55: Images of seating in public open space](image)

b. Accessing a Public Open Space

Linkages and access are important elements in integrating a public open space into its surrounding neighborhood. The Queen Elizabeth plaza design, in accommodating many types of people and activities, would provide a variety of access points to encourage more people to visit.
4.3.4 Studio

Providing space for “studios” would create a laboratory for public experiments in personal performance. Special hi-tech materials would be used to build an assortment of various functional studios. These could be used as single rooms, interactive spaces, 3-D labs, media lab, etc.

Fig. 57: Images of studio spaces
4.3.5 Food and Support

The present restaurant on the east side of the plaza is an important factor in programming use of the space. It should be considered as an opportunity to add audience space for special events. The style of seating, linkages, weather protection and access points are major factors to keep in mind in redesigning this space.

Support for special performances and the restaurant must be integrated into the design, taking into account factors such as supply delivery access and space, stage backdrops, electricity requirements, soundproofing, etc.

4.3.6 Stage Options

After programming use of the spatial structure overall, six options for stage arrangements are proposed as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Options</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Along Hamilton St</td>
<td>- Enclosure, safe public space and audience</td>
<td>- Stage lacks backdrop&lt;br&gt;- Support too long&lt;br&gt;- Noise affects stage&lt;br&gt;- Stage is interrupted by circulation&lt;br&gt;- Public space is not easy to access, poor imaging&lt;br&gt;- Stage and entrance compete against each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Unified edge of circulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Linkage with CBC corridor extending to divide food and public space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Along Georgia St</td>
<td>- Stage visible from Georgia St.</td>
<td>- Noise affects stage&lt;br&gt;- Stage blocks Georgia St access&lt;br&gt;- Stage lacking backdrop&lt;br&gt;- Support far away&lt;br&gt;- Stage in the middle of major access and circulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Semi-enclosure for public space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Easy access from Hamilton St</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In front of Restaurant</td>
<td>- Open public space</td>
<td>- Diners behind stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Support and loading unified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Restaurant as backdrop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No noise problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Central Plaza Area</td>
<td>- Flexible public space</td>
<td>- Performance types limited&lt;br&gt;- No stable audience seating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Centralized stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spread Plaza</td>
<td>Throughout Performer-audience interactions</td>
<td>Varied views of stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In Front of QET Building**

- Positive architectural backdrop
- Joint indoor-outdoor performances possible
- Open, accessible public space for audience
- Diners and audience have different views
- Views and linkage with CBC corridor

- Noise proofing may be needed on southern edge
- Stage use must be coordinated with building entrance

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**Unacceptable Options**

**Acceptable Options**

Fig. 58 Stage arrangement options and analysis
4.4 Master Plan

The master plan stresses links to and from the site from the downtown area in the west along Georgia St. to False Creek in the east, and along Hamilton St. touching the Gastown, Chinatown and Yaletown neighborhoods.

The design integrates a boulevard corridor of street trees and special structures as unified symbols creating a streetscape leading people to the major civic stage area at the QET plaza.

An additional link is established through a pedestrian bridge joining the CBC plaza to the site, improving access for people from surrounding areas.

Fig. 59: Master plan and analysis
4.5 Plan, Sections and Spatial Structures

The four sections shown here represent different views of the site and also the gateway structure announcing the entrance to the stage area. The bridge and 4-meter-high catwalk improve access and links to the site.

Fig. 60: Plan, sections and spatial organization
4.6 Detailed Spaces Design

The concept is to create a stage for all, giving visitors the chance to experience being on stage. To do this, the site is divided into five major areas: the green meeting space; the public gathering space (allowing special use for performances); the amphitheatre and media lab; the studios arcade; the restaurant seating area.

Special materials would include illuminated transparent concrete which absorbs sunlight in the daytime and transforms that energy into a nighttime glow, providing an ecological and sustainable form of illumination.

Fig. 61: Flexible arrangements of stage
4.6.1 Public Gathering Space (Main Stage)

The public gathering space (main stage) is designed to be free of intrusive lighting and other infrastructure fixtures. Instead, these fixtures are introduced as a part of the performance structure framework. An overhanging trellis linking the structures can be used to integrate lighting, speakers, cameras, etc., creating a variety of performance theaters.

4.6.2 Green Meeting Space (Intimate Public Stage)

A green meeting space is provided for those interested in social gatherings, sitting, reading and so on. Several arc-shaped spaces allow room for small group meetings, with the spaces linked to permit interactions with other groups.

It also creates various intimate public stages used by street performers, artists and musicians in small-scale performances.

Seating in the green space is varied. Sculptured steel chairs are designed in different forms to accommodate a range of users including singles, couples, readers, nappers, lunch-eaters and more.
4.6.3 Amphitheatre and Media Lab

The amphitheatre stands on the southeast side of the plaza acting as a symbol of the site. It represents the unique use of public open space in Vancouver with ambiguous or interactive distinctions between spaces. The amphitheatre accommodates the inside plaza audience; integrates with the public small stage for performances; and at the same time, itself has tripartite functions: as an urban stage, an audience seating area and a public stage. It could be used for audiences, seating up to 400 people, or as a small and intimate stage in the landing between two sets of stairs.

The Media Lab would accommodate up to 30 people for live shows, film shoots, a 3-D studio and more. People walking through the tunnel would be able to watch the performances within.

Transparent soundproofing materials would protect the performance space from traffic noises.

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Fig. 63: Amphitheatre
4.6.4 Studios

The studios are designed to be inspirational spaces for the public to experience the performing arts. These include an info booth, a “transtage,” a video room and a “frame”.

a. Info Booth
An info booth at the corner of Georgia St. and Hamilton St. invites visitors to enter the site and learn about the options within through the use of a touchable screen. Printed information booklets would also be offered for pick-up. Information on the site could include updated news on performances here and throughout the city, further linking the plaza to its surrounding neighborhoods.

b. Transtage
A “transtage” is a place where the city itself becomes a performing arts venue and anyone can become a performer. Cameras aimed at the plaza and other sites around the city would project onto a large screen, creating a communication network involving a multi-layered look at everyday citizens and their relationship to the performing arts.

c. Video Room
The video room brings the concept of the movie theater outside, encouraging public use of outdoor space through what is typically considered an indoor exercise. Accommodating up to 10 people at one time, the large screen and speakers envelop the viewers with light and sound.

d. Frame
The “Frame” establishes a gateway between the plaza and the street which announces the entrance to the stage area and offers views to those within of the city outside the site.

Fig. 64: Various experiences in studios
e. Studio Arcade (Circulation and Access)

The studio arcade is integrated with the studio spaces to be seen overall as kind of sculpture. Visitors entering the plaza through different access points experience markedly different views of it, contributing to the space's attractiveness as a site to be appreciated often. For example, those entering from the underground parking area walk through a tunnel to the ground level of the plaza while enjoying on both sides a visual projection screen of information about performances. The top of this tunnel also serves as a gently-sloped ramp from the ground level to the amphitheater, suitable for use by the elderly or those in wheelchairs.

The shelter along the salon of QET on Hamilton St. is designed to connect the amphitheater with the bridge crossing Georgia St. to the CBC plaza. Pedestrians using this green corridor can enjoy several pod-like small stage spaces along the way.

The plaza gateway, using the same visual language as the studios, resembles a separate studio of its own with a projection screen serving to frame the transition between the inner and outer spaces, to enhance the entrance to the plaza.

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Fig. 65: Experience on studio arcade
4.7 Material Illustrations

The project explores new material, media and high tech in design. A variety of materials illustrate unique characteristics in studio, pavement, lighting, water features, performances and exhibition spaces.

Fig. 66: Studio material: Interactive, 3D, transparent and high-tech materials.

Fig. 67: Other material: Panel, track, recycled and temporary materials.
Fig. 68 Pavement material: Illuminated, transparent, sustainable and symbol

Fig. 69 Lighting: Sustainable, high-tech, lighting structure, symbol.
Fig. 70 Performance material: Flexible, stretching, temporary and soundproof materials.

Fig. 71 Water feature: Water fountain, projection, lighting and other features.
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