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# **Liminal Becoming: Studies within Movement**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial  
Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

## **Professional Masters of Architecture**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis has been an exploration within the various manifestations of movement; ranging from the intimate and tactile movement of the body, to the larger and general context of evolutionary movement within culture. On all scales, movement, which incorporates moments or events of stasis, informed the architectural process. This process was twofold: firstly, on the scale of the body, movement expressed as balance -- as seen in the tightrope walker, -- helps to inform a structural exploration and evolution. Secondly, but no less importantly, the cultural movement that takes place between the edge and centre, the subcultural and the establishment, assists in establishing and emphasizing the importance of historical movement and change within the potential performance history of Ottawa's public space. In both processes, the notion of the liminal, the edge, the precarious moment of balance, is the main impetus that propels both processes in their continual state of becoming.

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## Introduction

From the very beginning, this thesis has been a continual exploration within the realms of performance and architecture. My direct experiences in both are quite varied: architecture was experienced through the rigor of academia, while dance was mostly independently directed. The common thread between the two is the fact that both are personal expressions of creativity and play. My direct experience in the international festival Pulp 0 broadened my perspective from these specific topics to the general context of culture. Based on my direct experience with this festival as well as my observations and research within the general context of culture, this thesis began to explore the concepts of performance and architecture as transforming cultural narratives. In conclusion, the design proposal brings together my observations on culture, from the broad social context to the specifics of performance and architecture.

In order to acquire a general understanding of the theoretical models of culture, it is necessary to understand their evolution. One theoretical perspective views culture as a centred system with a static core structure, a tightly interwoven whole. This point of view is reflected from Classical to Structuralist theory, where there exists a common ground plane of understanding and order. The centered point of view reflects an age that was governed by a foundation of accepted knowledge initiated by Greek philosophy. Nietzsche and Heidegger, contemporary philosophers, however, represent a dismantling of this all-encompassing ground plan. Based on the present condition of secularism, international connectivity, and epistemological broadening, contemporary thought and philosophy have appropriated a wider, more diverse perspective.

These contemporary perspectives suggest another understanding of culture that more truthfully reflects the complex and transformative qualities of life. When considering the inevitability

of change as expressed throughout history, the concept of culture as a hermetic and static entity requires expansion. Culture can be observed as a multivalent entity with various perspectives and voices. Thus, the evolution of a culture can be attributed to the existence of multiple voices, especially those that are alternative, referred to as "deviant minorities" by Philip Salzman in his book, When Nomads Settle.<sup>1</sup>

The term "deviant minorities," also known as the 'other' or the 'outsider' suggests a marginality from the more central entity. Both are difficult to thoroughly ascertain as they tend to be very broad categories that encompass numerous layers of characteristics. Often, the experiences that are artistic, aesthetic, "unstructured or rudimentarily structured" tend to exist on the periphery, while the scientific, rational, and "structured" construct the central system. As can be observed in the qualities of both, there exists a hierarchy where the establishment, the social groups who have access to power and "politico-legal economic positions," exist in a higher social strata than the peripheral and marginalized, who hold minor authoritative power and are considered socially inferior.<sup>2</sup> The subcultural (periphery) and the establishment (centre) are not completely separate entities, but rather are characterized by constant borrowing and interaction. Their intertwined nature is one of the main reasons that they are difficult to classify.

The hybridization of the subcultural and the establishment is more evident from the perspective of cultural evolution. When attempting to define the establishment, or the "major," Joan Ockman refers to the definition of the subcultural or "minor." The relationship between the

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Carl Salzman, When Nomads Settle: Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response (New York: J.F. Bergin Publishers, 1980) 4.

<sup>2</sup> Victor W. Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969) 96.

two is a "historical condition," where the "major" is redefining itself in relation to the "minor."<sup>3</sup> It also occurs in the reverse direction, where the minor redefines itself in relation to the major. This heterogeneous quality of culture can be observed in the continuous dialogue that has occurred between the Western and Non-Western worlds through Imperialism and Colonialism. Both worlds can attribute the presence of certain 'rituals' within their cultures to continual historic borrowing.

This borrowing between the subcultural and establishment emphasizes the fluid nature of culture and history. Rather than an emphasis on any one event, culture must be defined as the movement or intermingling of one event to the next. According to Gilles Deleuze, this cultural condition is always in the "middle," within a continual process of "becoming."<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche further suggests a form of cycling within culture. With the term, "eternal return," Nietzsche emphasizes a recurrence of the "Dionysian" as a means of perpetuating and revitalizing culture.<sup>5</sup> The subcultural, or the role of the aesthetic within culture which he terms the Dionysian, is constantly mined by the establishment. This recurrence suggested by the term "eternal return" is not a true cycling or nostalgia for the past, but rather a referral back to the periphery as a form of inspiration to transform the old into the new.

Despite its importance in cultural advancement, the subcultural often holds an inferior status to the normative. Due to the philosophical separation of art and technics as well as the mass-production of the image, aesthetic experience occupies a peripheral position in culture. The

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<sup>3</sup> Joan Ockman. "Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture," Architecture of the Everyday, ed. Steve Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997) 123.

<sup>4</sup> The emphasis of the "middle" and process of "becoming" are notions developed by Gilles Deleuze.

<sup>5</sup> Alphonso Lingis, "The Will to Power," The New Nietzsche: Contemporary styles of Interpretation, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Del, 1997) 43.

terms work and play also successfully encompass the relationship of the technologically and scientifically bound system with the marginalized forms of art. Ignasi de Solà-Morales argues that the “weakness” within the aesthetic experience is in fact the “most solid, the strongest model of – paradoxically, indeed – a weak construction of the true or the real, and thus assume[s] a privileged position within the system of references and values of contemporary culture.”<sup>6</sup> The strength behind the weakness is based on the liminal ability of the aesthetic to hybridize the establishment and assist in propelling both cultures forward in a constant condition of becoming.

The term liminality was originally coined by Victor Turner in describing the threshold-like and high transformative second phase in three-part rites of passage. Often framed by ritual, it marks a threshold, an in-between condition where the original state of being is transformed. This in-between condition described as merging of juxtapositions such as “a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness” suggests a space where differences potentially collide.<sup>7</sup> In other words, it is a space where anything can happen. The subcultural, utilizing inter-semiotic forms of communication, displays an augmented level of playfulness and openness that is inherently liminal. Rather than a complete reliance on language as a form of communication, the liminal often uses sensory dialogue through movement, rhythms, music, and imagery.

Among the many arts, the realm of performance incorporates all the forms of inter-semiotic communication described above. The liminal evolutionary power of performance manifests on two

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<sup>6</sup> His concept of “weak architecture” is borrowed from Gianni Vattimo in his reference to “weak thought.” Ignasi Solà-Morales Rubió, “Weak Architecture,” trans. Graham Thompson, Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture, (Janson: The MIT Press, 1997) 60.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Turner, “Are the Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?” By Means of Performance, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 11-12.

scales: First, in the general context of culture, performance as a form of 'play' has the ability to evolve the establishment or manifestation of 'work.' It is through juxtaposition of difference that potentialities for new possibilities can grow through the collision of these folds of culture. Secondly, within the context of performance, street forms, often referred to as 'low art,' have the ability to transform the established or 'high' forms of art. As established forms often look to the streets for inspiration, street art has the potential to act as a catalyst for change.

The establishment's attraction to street cultures is due to their liminal nature: their improvisational and loose character that embraces experimentation and innovation. These performances form new types of 'rituals' within public spaces through the juxtaposed experience. 'Ritual,' a word which now has been separated from religion and myth, has multiple meanings within the context of contemporary culture. In one perspective, Turner sees the "ritual process [having the potential to open] up a time/space of antistructural playfulness."<sup>8</sup> This anti-structural playfulness has expanded ritual away from the constraints of religion to incorporate an ability to collage from a variety of sources throughout history. This liminal potency of the redefined 'ritual' can be seen in the subcultures and in their inherent playfulness with their surroundings as well as within their own structures. Whether it is by reclaiming the street during a festival or protest, or transforming a public square into a stage, street performances often appropriate everyday public space, and apply new meaning and programs. Their liminal freedom is directly connected to their nomadic nature, where being homeless allows them to have multiple places of residency simply through the process of appropriation.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Schechner, The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance, (New York: Routledge, 1993) 233.

Subcultural street performance has often acted as a catalyst for many types of established performance. One of the best examples is the transformation of Street Busking into the well-known genre of the Circus, one of today's modern secular rituals. The Circus has retained elements of the liminal throughout its evolution. Its liminality is defined by its contrast to the central normative. Even at its height of popularity and acceptance by the establishment, its appeal always remained in its difference to the central system. It is in constant motion, whereas most of the rest of culture remains static and rooted. The Circus' base in a framework of aesthetic experience and almost primitive ritualizing is in general opposition to the seeming banality of normal life. There is almost a defiance of the normal social structures and physical boundaries. There exists an affinity between the circus and the normative, however, despite their seeming opposition, in the same manner that the funhouse mirror's reflection speaks to a person. The audience is confronted with familiar social conditions and contexts, playing upon understood themes that touch everyone, but at the same time, distorting and expanding the experience to another level of reality or truth. For example, the acrobat courting danger reminds us of our relationship with life and death. The experience generates a *mélange* of emotions ranging from shock, fear, elation, to sheer pleasure and wonder. The experience of the circus has informed many different areas of culture both within realms of the establishment and periphery. Although the history of the modern circus is rather short, it has traveled a great deal between the periphery and the centre.

The circus is a great example of evolution within the culture of performance. Taking inspiration from its Street Busking roots, the circus has survived due to its ability to constantly reinvent itself. From a broader perspective, it is apparent that the realm of art and performance plays a peripheral role in the general context of culture. Due to the separation during antiquity of art and technics, the modernist phenomenon of industry and mass production, and the

fragmentation of the philosophical ground plane of knowledge, the now more apparent multiplicities of culture became hierarchized where work existed in a higher social stratum than play. This thesis, however, embraces present philosophies that indicate an opening of perspective where the liminal within the weak has been acknowledged as the main impetus in the cultural process of “becoming.”

All the characteristics of culture explored through the context of performance - such as the hierarchy of work and play, the hybridization that takes place between the two entities, and as a result, the continual process of “becoming” - also has manifestations within the realm of architecture. Within antiquity, architecture was a means of transferring the order of the cosmos to man-made structures through the use of mathematical geometry. This philosophy was carried on throughout the Renaissance period. Modernism, coupled with industrialization, brought about a break with the traditional unity of subject and object, theory and practice, and facilitated a self-referential functionalism. Within the present post-modern context, architecture is no longer governed by a common, central ground plane, but rather there is an embracement of multiplicity, intermingling, appropriation, and collage within design approaches.

Within the above context of history, when considering the multiplicity of culture, architecture, especially static buildings, are seen as the physical representations of the establishment. The relationship drawn between the establishment and architecture is often formed by the peripheral cultures. In opposition to the establishment, many subcultural forms of expression take place outside the private realm of buildings, and sometimes upon the exterior architectural surfaces as can be seen in street forms of art such as Graffiti. In general, architectural monuments represent the “willed expression of power, whether in the name of the

State or of religion.”<sup>9</sup> In opposition to this representation of the collective power, public space exists as an open and anti-structural arena for all levels of culture, but most significantly for the subcultural and temporary. Through the layering of multiple events, street culture is able to thrive, grow, and transform within the expressive ‘stage’ of public space.

The temporal and constantly moving character of street culture does find an architectural parallel within nomadic forms of building. Nomadic forms such as tents very much reflect their corresponding culture's liminal nature and opposition to immutability. The concept behind nomadic architecture is the ability to pack up and leave, therefore indicating a lack of one specific place of inhabitation, an embracement of multiple spaces. The tent typology, due to its ephemeral nature, has never been seriously considered in the history of architecture until contemporary times. An overlook of this kind is reflective of architecture's historical role of framing the normative or majority power within history. Nomadic architecture's significant presence within contemporary culture is also indicative of the change within post-modern culture towards multiple perspectives where there no longer exists a common ground plane that dictates the relationship between theory and practice.

Based on the observed role of liminal nomadic architecture and public space, this thesis attempts to engage the liminal within the public spaces of Ottawa. The threshold of the in-between described as liminality is engaged through an emphasis on process rather than one singular event; thus, the introduction of architecture and its evolution is used as a continual vehicle to promote performance. Influenced by the transformation of the Greek Dionysian ritual into the architecture of the theatre, the ritual of street performance is used as the seed or the spark of invention, which

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<sup>9</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, Force and Freedom: Reflections on History (New York: Pantheon, 1943) 163.

contains the potential for architectural growth. Each preceding event cannot only be considered a hermetic entity on its own, but rather is one of many loosely structured parts that form an overlapped and holistic narrative that travels back and forth from the subcultural to the established. This particular perspective on design parallels Aldo Rossi's analogy of history to a "skeleton," as well as his theories about the urban artifact. Both his description of the "skeleton" and the "urban artifact" suggest an "imprint of the actions that have taken place and will take place in the city."<sup>10</sup> Thus, each performance/architectural event or "artifact", through the process of time, has the potential to attain new meaning and program, and grow beyond itself.

This potential for new meaning is the impetus, which perpetuates change within each site. As the programs and events grow in size, the related architecture follows suit. As the existing structures are augmented and replaced by other structures, the sites become more and more established as noted in the previous observations about culture. Using a multiplicity of programs that blend the ritual of performance with the ritual of the everyday, each design remains open-ended. This liminality is further augmented by bleeding the edge of the established performance spaces with less structured subcultural performances. Thus, through a multiplicity of program and events through time, the design proposal incorporates evolutionary movement as a means of attaining the liminal.

There exists another form of movement within the design proposal. Each structure incorporates physical movement as a direct response to program multiplicities as well as site transformations. The nature of seasonal change is integral to the use and spatial configuration of

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<sup>10</sup> Aldo Rossi, The Architecture of the City, trans. Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982) 5.

each site. The evolution of the seasons coupled with the transition of different performance events dictate the physical movement of the structures.

The proposed historical narrative that incorporates different forms of movement is just one layer of process. A parallel form of process documents the evolution of the design as expressed through structural explorations. The two processes continually inform each other to create a continuous dialogue that explores a general yet specific, a strong yet weak, a multiple yet personal perspective on the potential folds of performance and architecture.

The exploration of movement in its multiple manifestations is the main drive behind the theories and design of this thesis. Initially explored through direct participation in dance and architecture, this thesis expanded away from the personal to incorporate the general context of culture. Within these spheres, there exist multiple layers of culture which often take on a hierarchical duality of the established and subcultural. This thesis does not attempt to break away from the suggested and defined dualism that exists in the exploration of the subcultural and establishment as “[d]efinitions are necessary for discourse,”<sup>11</sup> but rather attempts to enrich the discussion to include multiple perspectives, voices and thresholds that exist in between and around the dichotomy. One means of accomplishing this is by viewing these entities as intermingled and open-ended. Especially seen within the peripheral context, subcultures have the potential to hybridize the establishment and as a result a diluted form is appropriated in the central cultural system. However, the essence of the liminal within the subcultural remains, propelling the establishment forward in the continual movement of “becoming.”

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<sup>11</sup> Schechner, *Future of Ritual* 26.

The design attempts to develop the liminal seen within subcultural street performance and the architectural liminal counterparts of public space and nomadic structures, within the public space of Ottawa. Using physical as well as evolutionary movement, the architectural/performance moments transform and grow in response to the multiplicities of site and program, and the site changes from season to season. The design proposal is very much one perspective of cultural evolution, initiated by ephemeral street performance and developed into an established network of performing architecture and performance events. The condition of philosophical evolution is neatly summarized in Friedrich Nietzsche's famous maxim: "Thinkers are always, so to speak, shooting arrows into the air, and other thinkers pick them up and shoot them in another direction."<sup>12</sup> Taking inspiration from Nietzsche's words, this thesis proposes through an emphasis on process, evolution, and movement, a possible liminal threshold for exploration within the realms of performance, architecture and general culture that always remains open-ended and in the "middle."

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<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Negotiations, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 118.

## Exploration of Culture

After my experience in Singapore, having experienced a seemingly failed collaboration with an artist, I began to explore the notions behind the experience. The issues behind the experience ultimately led me to question the nature of the general context of culture, which encompassed all of us. Defining culture, however, turned out to be a much harder task, as it is a complex phenomenon that is affected by everything surrounding us, and in turn ourselves and our surroundings are informed by this social construct. Anthony Giddens, one of the world's leading social commentators, sees culture as consisting of "ways of life" that are composed of people's values, norms, and objects.<sup>13</sup> These elements cannot be understood as being distinct from each other but are highly inter-related, intertwined elements. For example, the architecture of a city, in terms of its placement within the city and its architectural style speaks strongly of the values and norms of a society. This phenomenon also occurs in the reverse direction where the object can inform the nature of cultural values and norms.

### *Cultural discourses*

In relation to an understanding of culture, there exist many different discourses. One significant theory describes culture as a "highly integrated system – with a strongly determined and invariant core-structure."<sup>14</sup> Two of the best known models of this discourse are Structuralism and Marxism. Structuralism, originally derived from anthropological research of primitive cultures, suggests that there exists an underlying structural mechanism that is universal and that governs all human behavior. Marxist theory, which simultaneously grew out of the evolution of the capitalistic society, revolves around the issue of value as the main impetus for social development. Both

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Knox and Steven Pinch, Urban Social Geography: An Introduction (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000) 54.

<sup>14</sup> Salzman, 4.

theories propose an underlying structural order that exists under the surface subjectivities. These surface subjectivities were considered unimportant and unrepresentative of the underlying structure, which was often constructed out of the activities of the groups and institutions in power.

In reaction to the structuralist's marginalization of surface subjectivities, post-structuralism very much embraced the notion of decentralized, multiple voices. Opposed to the view of the worlds as a "single, hidden, underlying structure, such as a class-based conflict," post-structuralism acknowledges the influence of multiple, shifting inequalities that are reflected in various forms such as language, intellectual theories, advertising, popular music, and city landscapes on the general context of culture.<sup>15</sup> This thesis proposes that the areas of performance and architecture also influence and are influenced by culture. Post-structuralist theory marks a "cultural turn" away from the traditional "superorganic" view of culture as a static central dominant force, and adopts a more anthropological perspective of culture as a layered system of shared meanings.<sup>16</sup> Thus, culture ultimately is defined through the notion of difference rather than universalisms.

Both structuralist and post-structuralist theories have been very useful in defining and generating a perspective of culture. This thesis finds particular interest in the relationship of the central social system to the periphery. The ever-present but vague place where the central structure of power emanates as described by the structuralists is often referred to as the establishment, the normative, or the centre.

The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the center always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that this phantom

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<sup>15</sup> Knox, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Knox. 5.

center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable power over the whole social framework of our culture, and over the ways that we think about it.<sup>17</sup>

This "real, undeniable power" of the establishment bases its power on the existence of a "hierarchical system of politico-legal economic positions" where it exists on a higher social strata than other marginalized forms of culture.<sup>18</sup> The center's alignment with the economic side of culture is also in relation to its association with the scientific, quantitative, and rational. The hierarchy of work - which is associated with the established - over play reveals this rational affinity. There also exist several other general characteristics of the established. Joan Ockman's definition of major and minor architecture in response to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's definition of minor literature, further expands the discourse.

If a minor architecture – and here let us make the move into our own field – may be defined by deterritorialization, intensified political consciousness, and the anticipatory assemblage of new cultural forces, then might a *major architecture* be defined as *territorial, apolitical, and conservative of the status quo, or normative*<sup>19</sup>

These definitions of major architecture can also be applied to the general context of culture, as architecture is an influential component. As can be seen in Ockman's comparison of major to the minor, the definition of the establishment is not only "perpetuated by those whose interests it serves," but is also defined from the perspective of the other.<sup>20</sup>

This other also referred to as subcultural, marginalized, or the periphery, encompasses the multiple voices acknowledged within post-structural theory. The subcultural can be defined as artistic, aesthetic, flexible, dynamic, fluid, and open to change. As seen in Ockman's perspective, it

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<sup>17</sup> Russel Ferguson, introduction, Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. Russel Ferguson et al (New York: The MIT Press, 1990) 9.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Ockman, 123.

<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, 9.

also encompasses the political and nomadic or deterritorial. Similar to the broad context of the establishment, the subcultural's definition encompasses a huge number of descriptions. However, rather than a result of a universal structure as can be seen in the definition of the establishment, the subcultural's diversity is a result of specificity of place and social conditions.

Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing ... To put it bluntly, the new cultural politics of difference consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment<sup>21</sup>

This specificity emphasizes the importance of difference and multiplicity rather than one central point of view of culture. Both conditions of the central and peripheral social systems have been difficult to define. On one hand, this is due to the general nature of their description, but more importantly, on the other hand, it is directly related to the fact that they are not segregated entities.

### *Hybridization, Intermingled Worlds*

The "margin and center can draw their meanings only from each other. Neither can exist alone."<sup>22</sup> Both the marginalized and central cultures define themselves in relation to the other. This process of identity creation involves an intermingling and intertwining of the established and the subcultural, where traits that exist within one side begin to bleed and blend into the other.

It must be stressed that the relationship between minor and major architecture that is being proposed is to be understood as a historical condition in which that which is major is constantly redefining itself in relation to that which is minor, and that which is minor is always potentially challenging or hybridizing that which is major.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, ed. Russel Ferguson et al (New York: The MIT Press, 1990) 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ferguson, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Ockman, 123.

Ockman acknowledges a hybridization that moves from the minor or subcultural, to the major or establishment. However, this transformation also takes place in other direction: elements which are contained within the established can also return to its roots when the mainstream tires of it and moves to the next innovation. This characteristic of rapid change is indicative of our present capitalistic culture.

Counternarratives of all kinds do constantly enter "mainstream" culture. One of the great strengths of the existing structure is its capacity to absorb a constant flow of new elements. In any system based on consumption, new products and new styles must be perpetually supplied. Such a flow is essential to its health and survival ... a salient characteristic of dominant Western culture is its denial of repetition in favor of the rhetoric of constant progress, growth and change. The vital, independent cultures of socially subordinated groups are constantly mined for new ideas with which to energize the jaded and restless mainstream of a political and economic system based on the circulation of commodities. The process depends on the delivery of continual novelty to the market while at the same time alternative cultural forms are drained of any elements which might challenge the system as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

This condition surrounding the constant flow of stimulation that characterizes our society of consumption is, however, a present contemporary condition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As indicated above by Ockman, the process of hybridization of the minor and the major is a "historical condition." Thus, one of the most important characteristics of culture is the fact that it is constantly changing through time as a result of the intertwined relationship of the major and minor.

### *The Process of Becoming*

One of the main contributors to the evolution of cultural dialogue between the centre and periphery is colonialism. Imperialistic discourses are one of the main forces behind the notion of the "other" or "othering." Western culture saw themselves as superior to non-western cultures, especially those they were exposed to through colonization and trade. This ethnocentric attitude

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<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, 11.

was a direct result of their position of power and ability to dominate through their advanced technology. Despite their inferior position within Western perspectives, the “other,” these colonized cultures, had a huge impact on the evolution of Western culture. Mainly initiated through trade of the highly coveted substances sugar and spice, elements of these marginalized cultures blended and mixed with the dominant Western culture. For example, the act of tea-drinking is very often associated with English tradition. This substance, however, is not native to English soils, but is imported from abroad. The fact that the drinking of tea has been solidly embedded within English tradition reveals the great influence that ‘minor’ cultures have had on the ‘major.’ Within the more modern circumstances of the population of North America and the proliferation of slave trade, the hybridization of the Western world was also carried out through immigration both voluntarily and involuntarily. The resultant culture is such a mish-mash of every culture, that the notion of “authenticity – the idea that there is some basic, pure, underlying culture” – of the West can no longer or has never really existed.<sup>25</sup>

Another contribution to the evolution of the relationship of the major and minor is the separation of art and technics. The word technics and technology refers back to the Greek word *techne*. The Greek culture is of great influence on the Western world, as its philosophy, art, architecture, and literature became the basis for European culture and thus for the Western world that branched out of Europe. Within the Greek context, *techne* described and encompassed both realms of art and technics. This union was their attempt at creating an underlying order through mathematical proportion, understanding of human anatomy, and physics behind their art, sculpture, and architecture. The united notion of *techne* was carried on through the Renaissance by such

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<sup>25</sup> Knox, 58.

well known artist-engineers as Leonardo da Vinci, who utilized the mediums of art to describe and analyze the human body, scientific explorations and inventions.

The initial schism that began to separate the realms of art and technics began with the birth of philosophy and theatre within Greek culture, where art became objectified and understood at a distance. However, the aesthetic remained an integral part of Greek culture and throughout the Renaissance as it was still viewed as an instrumental tool in propitiating the mythical or religious exterior world. It is through the introduction of mass production epitomized by the invention of the printing press in 1436 that the separation of art and technics began to take effect.

Victor Hugo describes in his book The Hunchback of Notre Dame,<sup>26</sup> the death of architecture in the hands of the printing press. This death, which Walter Benjamin refers to as a “decay of the aura” of the art object, is symbolic of the growing hierarchical separation of art with the mass production of industry which became associated with work; thus, art in Western thought is considered a separate entity, an object that is placed on the wall and perceived for (only) its aesthetic value.<sup>27</sup> As a result, “the eventual concealment of Being,” as Perez Gomez labels this transformation, lead to “the objectification and enframing that resulted in the substitution of the world for its scientific “picture,” leading to instrumental rationality and to the crisis of representation that confronts us today.”<sup>28</sup> This objectification perpetuated by the current obsessions with capitalistic consumerism coupled with the full embracement of technology now in the form of digital

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<sup>26</sup> Hugo, Victor. The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Trans. Catherine Liu. Toronto: Random House, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of the Mechanical Reproduction,” Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Brace & World, 1968) 222.

<sup>28</sup> Alberto Perez-Gomez, “Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation,” Chora Volume One: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture, ed. Alberto Perez-Gomez and Stephen Parcell (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994) 13.

preoccupation, has further separated the realm of the playfulness and creativity of art from the scientific and rational "picture."

The essence behind the realm of art lies within its ability to play with its own genre and boundaries. As a phenomenon that refuses to conform within the restraints of rationalism and the 'scientific picture,' the concepts of play and playing have maintained a low social status within the context of Western culture.

In the West, play is a rotten category, an activity tainted by unreality, inauthenticity, duplicity, make believe, looseness, fooling around, and inconsequentiality ... The reason why play – or more properly playing – is a rotten category is because the multiple realities of playing are situated inside a pyramidal hierarchy of increasing reality leading from unreal make believe to "just the facts, Ma'am."<sup>29</sup>

The reality of "just the facts, Ma'am" is a strong characteristic of the normative or establishment, where the concept of "work" is embraced above everything else. As a historical result of the dilution and simplification of the notion of techne to the limited perspective of 'work' and the "scientific picture," the relationship of the establishment and the subcultural realm of art is put into the context of change and evolution. However, the changing dialogue does not end there. There has been a critical reaction of this centered perspective of culture, as can be seen in post-structuralist thought where there exists a revival of interest in the value of the peripheral aesthetic among other marginalized cultures.

### *Discourse of Difference*

In reaction to the hierarchical and centered point of view of culture, many contemporary thinkers began proposing a discourse of difference and multiplicity as a more accurate picture of

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<sup>29</sup> Schechner, The Future of Ritual 1993.

culture. Gilles Deleuze, one of the most well known philosophers of difference, replaced the well-used conceptual system of the “hierarchical and centralized” tree with the figure of the rhizome.

The rhizome is proliferating the serial, functioning by means of the principles of connection and heterogeneity. In simple terms, any line can be connected to any other line. However, these lines do not converge to form an organic whole. In sort, the rhizome is another step in Deleuze’s project of creating a new image of thought. The rhizome is a multiplicity, and as such seeks to move away from the binary subject/object structure of Western thought.<sup>30</sup>

The rhizome as a model for culture suggests a layered and multiple discourse, a “multiplicity of planes of intensity or plateaus” that are open-ended “with multiple exits and entrances”, and always belongs in the “middle.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, in essence, Deleuze is referring to the movement forward that is inherent within culture. Nothing within culture, according to Deleuze, can be considered an end, but is a possible door into another plane of reality, or in other words, the potential for transformation in an evolutionary narrative of culture. He sees culture as an evolutionary condition of “folding, unfolding and refolding” where “we are always becoming other ... in order to produce the new and the strange out of the old and familiar.”<sup>32</sup> This notion of folding suggests an emphasis on the line rather than on a point of matter.<sup>33</sup> In other words, Deleuzian thought in reference to culture can be interpreted as an emphasis on the multi-fold and layered dialogue of events that form a history rather than one singular event.

Friedrich Nietzsche further expanded upon the nonhierarchical perspective of difference.

He postulated that this historical narrative contains an element of the cyclical, but finding that word

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<sup>30</sup> John Marks, Gilles Deleuze: Vitalism and Multiplicity (London: Pluto Press, 1998) 45.

<sup>31</sup> Marks, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Keith Ansell Pearson, introduction, Deleuze and philosophy: the difference engineer (New York : Routledge, 1997) 14.

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze describes his concept of the fold within The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

inadequate to describe his concept, he termed the circular condition of appropriation seen between the various layers of reality and culture – as stated above, between the established and the subcultural – “eternal return.”

Metaphysical reiteration of the ideal is founded on the death of God and on the dissolution of the ego. Recurrence in the Dionysian world must not be understood as the return of something that is, that is one, or that is the same. What recurs is not being, but becoming; not identity, ideality, but difference.<sup>34</sup>

Nietzsche's reference to the Dionysian is in relation to his comparison of the distinct aesthetic associated with Dionysus and Apollo in The Birth of Tragedy. Greek mythical gods were symbolic of the Greeks' understanding of life, and were full of cultural meaning. The relationship of Dionysus and Apollo parallels the relationship of the subcultural with the establishment. Dionysus was associated with the experiential (intoxication), the direct and the mind-expanding; where Apollo was connected with justice, rationality, and logic. Nietzsche saw within the Dionysian the ability to expand beyond the present realities, “annihilate’ the veil of maya and open the way for a direct and unmediated participation in reality.”<sup>35</sup> Further enriching Nietzsche's words, it is perhaps more useful to see the Dionysian as potentiality revealing moments of clarity within the often complex transforming phenomenon of being that is referred to as maya. The opening of some threshold which is characteristic of the subcultural, in turn, assists in transforming maya. Thus, Nietzsche's embracement of the Dionysian aesthetic can be interpreted as a parallel acknowledgement of the role of the subcultural within the general evolution of culture. Within this evolution, the establishment, or the central social system, eternally returns to the periphery to fold, unfold and refold the old into the new.

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<sup>34</sup> Lingis, 43.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Broadhurst, Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory (New York: Cassell, 1999) 32.

Ignasi Solà-Morales also acknowledges the pivotal position of the periphery in relation to the continual cultural process of “becoming.” He argues that the aesthetic’s “weakness” can be interpreted as a privileged position, as it harbors the potential to transform the established central social system.<sup>36</sup> Due to the noted shift of attention away from a common ground plane of truth or objectivity of culture, “weakness” can be viewed as a strength due to its ability to threshold between layers of reality and culture, and potentially evolve both realities forward.

If, as Heidegger warned in his meditation on technology, science ultimately becomes routine, it is not difficult to see why culture should have shifted the centre of its interests toward those regions formerly regarded as manifestly peripheral. The most “full,” the most “alive,” that which is felt as being experience itself, that in which the perceiving subject and perceived reality are powerfully fused, is the work of art.<sup>37</sup>

It is not, however, about an eradication of the present hierarchy, because the struggle for power within society will always remain. Instead, it is about recognizing the position of the edge as being valuable and acknowledging its ability to propel and evolve culture and performance forward.

This is not to suggest that in the contemporary world, aesthetic experiences are at the center of the referential system. On the contrary, they continue to occupy a peripheral position; but this peripheral position possesses not a marginal but a paradigmatic value. Aesthetic experiences constitute, in some sense, the most solid, the strongest model of - paradoxically, indeed- a weak construction of the true or the real, and thus assume a privileged position within the system of reference and values of contemporary culture.<sup>38</sup>

Solà-Morales describes the essence of the “weak” as a means of illuminating the “true” or the “real.” As revealed in the interaction between the “weak” periphery and the established centre, the periphery’s power rests in the fact that it contains the ability to transform and hybridize the centre.

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<sup>36</sup> “Weakness” is in reference to Vattimo’s idea of “weak thought” that acknowledges that everything can be interpreted and the ‘real’ and ‘truth’ are relative conditions.

<sup>37</sup> Solà-Morales, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Solà-Morales, 60.

Thus, the meaning of truth and the real cannot be interpreted as a universal underlying structure, but rather periphery's construction of truth or reality lies within its liminal ability to evolve.

### *Liminality*

The openness to multiplicity and change that is inherent within the peripheral subcultures is in essence liminal. Liminality, a contemporary term that was first utilized by Victor Turner in describing the secondary space or "moment in and out of time" within three-part transformative rites of passage, is characterized as a threshold.<sup>39</sup> Most often framed by ritual, it "describe[s] a certain marginalized space which holds a possibility of potential forms, structure, conjectures and desires."<sup>40</sup> This marginalized space of the liminal is often occupied by the subcultural as it often acts as a transformative threshold for the establishment, and for the general evolution of culture that incorporates both the centre and the periphery. Susan Broadhurst further describes the liminal within Liminal Acts.

Quintessential aesthetic features of the liminal appear to be hybridization, indeterminacy, a lack of 'aura' and the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and popular culture ... Other quasi-generic traits are experimentation, heterogeneity, innovation, marginality, a pursuit of the almost chthonic and an emphasis on the intersemiotic: that is, a signifiatory practice which involve such non-linguistic modes as those provided the corporeal *gesta* ... A certain sense of excitement is generated by the liminal: for instance, in many of the works, feelings close to disquiet and discomfort are experienced. A certain 'shift-shape', stylistic promiscuity favouring pastiche, is signaled, together with repetition (a repetitiveness which foregrounds not sameness but difference), parody, playfulness and a delegitimation of authorial authority. Moreover, liminal performances strive to play to the edge of the possible, continually challenging not only performance practice but also traditional aesthetic concepts.<sup>41</sup>

Broadhurst's description of the liminal very much parallels the characteristics within the subcultural, marginalized, and peripheral. The fact that the description is so broad and

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<sup>39</sup> Turner, The Ritual Process 96.

<sup>40</sup> Broadhurst, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Broadhurst, 1.

general ascribes to its ability to transform because there is the possibility that anything could happen. This open ground plane or threshold of creativity, often framed by both the religious and secular ritual, relies upon the experiential that expands away from the constraints of the scientific and rational cultural picture to encompass new and different truths and realities.

Before a thorough understanding of the liminal can be achieved, its frame, the ritual, needs to be defined in relationship to the changing perspectives of culture. Traditionally, ritual was often yoked with the mythical and the religious. It was a means of physically translating the power behind the myth by attempting to propitiate the external forces.

It is difficult for us to conceive a personified, willful, and therefore totally unpredictable external reality, identical and continuous with the self, needing constant propitiation through human actions to secure the survival of the world from one instant to the next. Nevertheless, this is precisely the context of ritual.<sup>42</sup>

This appropriation was not based on a rational or scientific ground plane but was based on a cultural construction, the imaginative homology of the human mind and the external world that created a connection “between the “mountain” and the “pyramid,” between the tholos and the cave.” Thus, “these acts of ritual construction were part of an a priori order, they were affirmations of the “given” – indeed, a gift – through a propitiatory action in the infinite thickness of the present, rather than product-oriented projects.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, through participation within the social constructs of ritual, primitive humans were able to connect with their surroundings.

As famously proclaimed by Nietzsche, the death of God, or the lack of religious and mythical affinity within contemporary society has initiated a new definition of ritual that is no longer

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<sup>42</sup> Perez-Gomez, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Perez-Gomez, 10.

tethered to religion. The redefined ritual has been expanded to include a variety of sources that can “apply to a great range of human activities” and no longer follows the old boundaries that separate cultural elements from each other. This multi-disciplinary attitude of the new ritual contains the liminal potential to transform the old cultural “ghosts” and hybridize segregated layers of culture.<sup>44</sup> This new ability to collage and appropriate is a level of freedom that is most often found within the subcultural due to its inherent open structure. The rituals of the subcultural street performances are an excellent example of this experimental and explorative attitude. Within both definitions, traditional and contemporary, the ritual’s liminal strength always resided in its direct connection with the experiential, often relying upon dialogue through movement, rhythms, music, imagery, performance, and art.

Within the framework of the ritual, liminality is often characterized by experiences that are intersemiotic, bridging beyond discourses of language into the realm of the experiential, especially that of physical movement. Susan Broadhurst describes the need for an intersemiotic form of discourse, “one which includes but also goes beyond language”, as a means of interpreting the liminal. It is through a “centrality of non-linguistic modes of signification” such as the “visual, kinetic, gravitational, proxemic, aural,” an affinity with the “Dionysian,” that a fresh form of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ can be achieved.<sup>45</sup> The emphasis on the experiential, or “non-linguistic” modes, is in

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<sup>44</sup> See Schechner’s expansion of the meaning of ritual: “This understanding of ritual, as a process applying to a great range of human activities rather than as something tethered to religion, is a very important development. The relatively tight boundaries that locked the various spheres of performance off from each other have been punctured. It is doubtful if these boundaries ever really functioned, in fact. Certainly they didn’t in popular entertainments and religious rituals. The boundaries, in fact, are the ghosts of neoclassical and Renaissance reading of the Aristotelian ‘unities.’” Schechner, 19-20.

<sup>45</sup> Broadhurst, 12. The fresh Dionysian forms of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are in reference to Nietzsche’s comparison of the aesthetics of Apollo and Dionysus within Greek culture, and his affinity to the directness of the Dionysian aesthetic.

opposition to the linguistic, conventional, intellectual responses common in the general establishment.

One of the most direct and powerful of the non-linguistic modes of signification is movement. The liminal threshold's power to transform can be interpreted from four different perspectives: within the reconstruction and deconstruction of the body, within the ritual constructs of a culture, within the general nature of a culture (more specifically nomadic subcultures), and within the greater framework of the evolution of culture.

Within the immediate scale of the body, movement is characterized by balance. It embodies the liminal, which has been interpreted as a threshold, that secondary 'space' between and during movement. Often, it is considered an ordinary characteristic of motion, and is an unconscious part of everyday life as it guides the body's movements through even the most mundane tasks. The movement of the body, especially epitomized in the body of a dancer, requires an unsettling of the existing established balance. "[F]orm *needs to play dangerously with the body*, to deconstruct and reconstruct it according to its own plan of action."<sup>46</sup> Through the 'rituals' ranging from everyday actions to those related to performance, we have trained our bodies to take weight, and balance in certain positions. When we encounter new 'rituals,' our body is literally thrown off balance, deconstructed, and undergoes a restructuring to regain the threshold of balance.

Movement and dance are integral to cultural rituals worldwide. Whether associated with the mythical and religious propitiation of the external forces and Gods, or put forth as an expression of the joy of life, dance plays a central pivotal role within culture. Some of the best

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<sup>46</sup> Schechner, 40.

examples of the cultural incorporation of dance that greatly reflect upon the Western context of performance are the Greek Dionysian rituals. The Dithyramb, a spring ritual dedicated to Dionysus actually means “a leaping and inspired dance.” The dithyramb form “was an actual bringing-back of life, a rising-up or calling-up that took the form of *dromena*, or actual ‘things done,’ such as song and dance” and was seen to have cathartic or transformative properties.<sup>47</sup>

Movement can also be interpreted as one of the defining characteristics of the general structure of a culture. Traditional nomadic subcultures (those of animal herders rather than pastoralists) are defined by their movement and their lack of specific place. The concept of nomad, however, has been broadened thanks to thinkers such as Deleuze, who associated this word with a new type of philosopher or state of being. Taking inspiration from the transient way of life, Deleuze has stated that the true philosopher is nomadic. He “can reside in various states, he can frequent various milieus, but he does so in the manner of a hermit, a shadow, a traveler or boarding house lodger.”<sup>48</sup> Within the context of performance, the circus exists as a parallel of the traditional model of nomadic subculture, for it embodies the same lack of specific place or ‘home,’ instead embracing multiple places through its movement.

Movement can also be considered within the evolution and history of culture. This evolutionary ‘movement’ is a result of the interaction between the transient subcultures and the sedentary establishment as described above. The static character of the establishment is a direct result of the stability that is inherent to a centralized structured system.

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<sup>47</sup> Perez-Gomez, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Marks, 52.

The contrast of the static with the mobile, observed in the relationship between the subcultural and the establishment, reveals the liminal as a threshold between differences. Turner describes liminality as a “fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure.”<sup>49</sup> Turner’s paradoxical combination of words in his description of the liminal suggests a potential for anything to happen. It is “a storehouse of possibilities” that has the potential to transform the body of the dancer to another level of performance, and facilitates the transition from childhood to adulthood as seen in primitive initiation rites.<sup>50</sup> This threshold can also take place on a subjective level, where within Greek dithyramb, a cathartic transformation is reached through participation in dromena, where a “reconciliation between the darkness of personal destiny and the light of the divine *dike*” is achieved.<sup>51</sup> Whether within the broader historical narrative of culture, between the oppositions of the peripheral and central social systems, or within the intimate transformations of the body, the liminal exists as a threshold between differences.

### *Cultural Observations*

The exploration within liminality has further established a connection to the subcultural and peripheral social systems. The subcultural realms of play which manifest within art and performance are by nature open and flexible to change. The inherent playfulness within the peripheral cultures is considered inferior in relation to the rationalistic and quantitative perspective of the centre. It is, however, through this considered “weakness” that a potential liminal threshold is achieved, for the centre and periphery cannot be considered separate entities. Through

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<sup>49</sup> Turner, *By Means of Performance* 11-12.

<sup>50</sup> See Turner’s description of the Ndembu tribe’s initiation rites in *The Ritual Process*.

<sup>51</sup> Perez Gomez, 12.

constant borrowing and hybridization, the periphery is constantly mined for ideas to refresh the mainstream. Therefore, the liminal contained within the periphery has the power to move the establishment and indeed the general context of culture forward in a continual process of 'becoming.'

## Cultural Context of Performance

All of the previous observations within the general context of culture also apply within the context of performance. As demonstrated in the previous section, culture must be considered a complex phenomenon, composed of a wide array of manifestations, one of these being performance. Due to the separation of art and technics as a result of mass production and the decentralization of the ground plane of knowledge, the scientific and rationalistic has been hierarchized above art, and the manifestations of play. Within the microcosm of performance, this phenomenon is not definitive, but rather is multiple and intertwining.

### *Multiple layers*

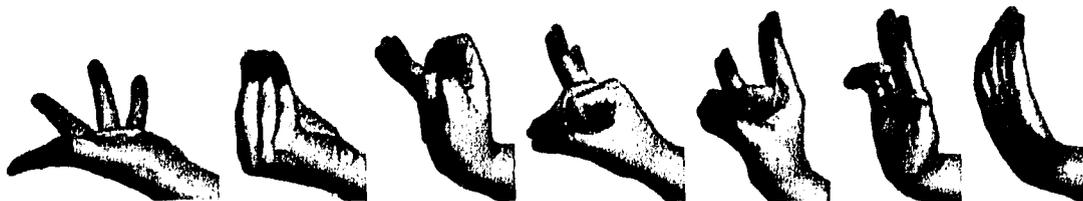
Performance embodies many different typologies under one word. It takes the form of art, dance, theatre, and circus. Within each of these categories also exist a plethora of layers of performance. All these typologies of performance do carry similar emphasis on the “the “visual, kinetic, gravitational, proximic, aural” as expressed by Broadhurst in describing the liminal.<sup>52</sup> However, as within the broader context of culture, there exist hierarchies between the different layers, a segregation that is often referred to as high and low art. This hierarchical attitude is revealed in the very wording of the festival, “Pulp O: Where Street and Art Collide”: “The aim of **Pulp O** is to recognise that street art has come to a point where it deserves to be recognised as art and a valid form of creative expression.”<sup>53</sup> This necessity to address a separation, and the attempt to legitimize street art, are clear indications of an existing hierarchy.

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<sup>52</sup> Broadhurst, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Pulp O Festival, Project Proposal, 3 Aug. 2003, 1-2.

The high art forms, referred to as art in general in the Pulp 0 description, are often characterized by an acceptance and recognition by the established social structure. Often titled institutional, these art forms have a stronger affiliation with the centralized bodies of power. Thus, the structure behind these established forms reflects the centralized structure, and is often regimented and static, utilizing a strict vocabulary that has been solidified through tradition. Ockman's description of the major as "*territorial, apolitical, and conservative of the status quo, or normative*" can also be witnessed within high art.<sup>1</sup> In the Pulp 0 Festival, I along with two other Canadian street dancers (Breakers) from my dance collective, collaborated with a traditional Bharata Natyam dancer from Singapore.



**Figure 1** Bharata Natyam Hand Mudras or gestures that symbolize specific meanings.

Bharata Natyam, which is often referred to as equivalent to the Western form of ballet, is a quintessential example of an established form of performance. Having evolved out of Hindu religion, Bharata Natyam follows a strict vocabulary of body movements and facial expressions that do not deviate from a pre-determined narrative. This narrative, however, has lost much of its original meaning and context in relation to the worship of the Hindu Gods, as it has been secularized and diluted to survive within contemporary culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ockman, 123.

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from Anne-Marie Gaston, Bharata Natyam: From Temple to Theatre, (New Delhi: Manshar, 1996) 26-58.



Figure 2 Bboy Ken Swift

Subcultural forms of performance are often hidden from the majority of society and follow a code and language of conduct that is specific and particular. An inherent part of most subcultures, due to their lack of concrete and stable social structure, is an openness to new influences which ultimately leads to change. This structural looseness is directly related to the age of many subcultures, and to the energy of its often young members. Again, I refer back to Ockman's description of minor architecture to further illuminate the present discussion of subcultural performance. The minor "may be defined by deterritorialization, intensified political consciousness, and the anticipatory assemblage of new cultural forces."<sup>3</sup> The subculture of breakdancing reflects all of these characteristics. Its "deterritorialization" is apparent in its synthesis on the streets and its inherent lack of specific place. A breakdancing performance can really take place anywhere as long as there are willing participants. The concept of performance is also deterritorialized as there are no concrete rules as to who can and who cannot perform. The edge of the performance space referred to as the cipher or circle, is fluid and dynamic, allowing a member of the audience to switch roles and become the central performer as he/she steps into the circle. The language of this dance form is in essence an eclectic assemblage of influences that crosses over cultures. It takes influences

from Latin dances, Jazz, Tap, Yoga, and Capoeira to name a few. Breaking's roots are directly

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<sup>3</sup> Ockman, 123.

associated with the political as the cultural movement of Hip Hop, which breaking is a part of, was a means of artistic and cultural expression of marginalized groups of people within a Caucasian dominated culture.<sup>1</sup>

### *Intermingled Worlds*

Upon observing Bharata Natyam and Breakdancing within the context of time and history, their seemingly distinct nature and descriptions begin to break down. As illuminated in the exploration of culture, both the centre and periphery define themselves in relation to the other through a process of hybridization. As a result of this intermingling, that which was subcultural becomes incorporated into the establishment. This phenomenon also occurs in the reverse direction, where the established can become subcultural. This characteristic of hybridization that occurs over time can be seen in both Bharata Natyam and Breakdancing, as well as within the general cultural context of the Festival and within Singaporean society.

### *Process of Becoming*

Although Bharata Natyam's history is significantly older than the history of Breakdancing, both experience a movement back and forth from the peripheral to the establishment. These transformations assist in propelling both cultures forward in a continual eternal return of becoming. Bharata Natyam's origins began within the Hindu temples where young girls, referred to as Devadasies, became "married" to the gods through the communion of dance. The love of life and their god manifested through movements of their bodies and it was considered the highest honour to be dedicated to the Gods in this manner. The dance was not only performed within the realm of the temple, however, but was used often within public festivals and celebrations. The dance did not

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<sup>1</sup> Observations about Breakdancing are taken from personal experience and direct participation in this subculture.

remain an individualized communication of the dancer and the God, but eventually came to represent a symbolic spiritual communication of the whole community. The movement of these Devadasies contained strong ritual ties to the importance of performance within Hindu life.

With the movement of the dance into the court, there was a slow degeneration of the form from the pure celebration of life through movement, to the presentation of the dance for the male sexual gaze. As the Devadasies became more associated with prostitution, the dominant forces in power tried to eradicate it from culture. Only with the influence of Western culture was the reputation of the dance slowly restored to its present state. The West's notions of high Art have also been appropriated. With the introduction of Western ideals, the dance became commercialized, giving birth to a new form of competitive dance unrelated to its original religious history.<sup>2</sup>

Although born within a secular tradition, Breakdancing shares a similar form of evolution where a transformation occurs back and forth from the periphery to the central social system. Breakdancing is one of the manifestations of the cultural phenomenon presently referred to as Hip Hop. The roots of Hip Hop originate in New York during the 70's. As expressed above, it was a means for ghetto youths of African and Latino backgrounds to express themselves as something other than the dominant Caucasian culture. Thus, from its conception, the movement was political in nature, and instigated revolutions within genres of music and dance. After the blow-out in the media in the early 80's where Breakdancing became extremely popular, the subculture returned to its underground roots. It was during this residence within the mainstream that the danceform was

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from Gaston, 26-86.

given its name of "Breakdancing" by the media. However, diehard Hip Hop heads<sup>3</sup> only refer to it as "Breaking." The supplanting of the Hip Hop culture to an international level occurred within the second revival of this genre in the early 90's. At the time, breaking became a worldwide phenomenon, and kids internationally were hitting the floor in Six Step.<sup>4</sup> There was a loss, however, of the essence of the movement, of its original roots as a political and revolutionary movement against the Western majority. The Hip Hop phenomenon moved from subculture to popular or pop-culture.<sup>5</sup> This transformation is aptly expressed in the renaming of commercialized Hip Hop to "Hip Pop."

Breaking developed as a positive alternative to gangfighting. As a ritualistic expression of life and hip hop culture, it grew out of playful improvisation and inventive appropriation of other artforms. As time progressed, the genre became more defined and regimented, and a vocabulary of moves and names which were referred to as Breaking's 'foundation' were strictly adhered to. This school of thought is referred to as "Old-school." In contrast, the "New-school" of thought, still upholds the importance of improvisation and originality, which helps the danceform to continue to expand and explore different arenas. Breaking has developed a more established form as well as a looser form that holds on to its subcultural roots.

The international popularity of the contemporary form of Breaking as well as Hip Hop is telling of the hybridization that has taken place on an international level between the West and the

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<sup>3</sup> Hip Hop head is in reference to a person who is well knowledgeable about the culture of Hip Hop.

<sup>4</sup> Six Step is one of the basic foundation moves of breaking.

<sup>5</sup> The Freshest Kids: A History of the B-Boy, dir. Israel, Image Entertainment, 2002.



**Figure 3** Little India, Singapore

Non-West. Much of Singapore's present culture is a result of British colonial occupation from 1819 to 1959, which transformed a small Asian village into one of the biggest international ports in Asia.<sup>1</sup> Everyone speaks English with a unique British-Asian accent, you can find a wide variety of foods, and the city boasts all of the Western conveniences. The concepts of high and low art, which originates out of a hierarchical perspective of culture, also reveal the Western

influence. The culture has a direct effect on the cultural minds of the people. All the Pulp 0 participants have been influenced by the Western hierarchical systemization of work and art, as can be seen in the wording and structure of the Pulp 0 Festival. Even the fact that Hip Hop is a prevalent culture within Singapore is a direct indication of this phenomenon.

### *Enriching the Hierarchy*

Pulp 0's efforts in "breaking the barriers" that exists between art and the street indicate a post-structuralist criticism of a centred and hierarchical point of view.<sup>2</sup> They acknowledge the power and potential within street art as "valid form of creative expression." In essence, the Pulp 0's attempts to "break the barriers between 'art' which is often perceived as being highbrow, and popular culture" and their perspective of seeing the creativity of young people as the future for the arts recognizes the importance of street art in the evolution and progression of art.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Singapore," [Asian Studies Network Information Center](http://reenc.utexas.edu/asnic/countries/singapore/Singapore-History.html), University of Texas, 13 Dec. 2004 <<http://reenc.utexas.edu/asnic/countries/singapore/Singapore-History.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> [Pulp 0 Festival](#), 1.

<sup>3</sup> [Pulp 0 Festival](#), 1-2.

### *Liminality Performance*

The liminal quality within street art and performance challenges the status quo. It embraces change and openness, as can be seen in the example of breaking, and ultimately contains the potential to evolve performance culture forward. Framed by the ritual of performance that incorporates and appropriates the surrounding context, street performances create a threshold of in-between through a layering of difference, meaning and program within public space.

As previously described, the term ritual has been redefined to include a variety of resources. The redefined ritual engages through appropriation, layering, and multiplicity. To "seek roots, explore and maybe even plunder religious experiences, expressions, practices, and liturgies to make art ... is to ritualize."<sup>1</sup> This openness of the ritual finds its parallel counterpart within the subcultural forms of performance. The street arts of Breaking, Capoeira, Flamenco, and Busking all incorporate the element of improvisation.<sup>2</sup> This characteristic, which is facilitated by a flexible structure, assists in allowing each form to grow out of itself, merge, collage and ritualize in a continual process of evolution.

The concept of collaging and overlapping within the contemporary ritual is visible in the appropriation and usage of space by street performances and art. The liminal threshold, described by Turner as a juxtaposed condition of "fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities," takes place in the layering of program and meaning of a space by subcultural forms

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<sup>1</sup> Schechner, Future of Ritual 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> The observations on these street artforms are based on direct experience by participating and being immersed within the subculture, or by watching multiple performances.

of performance.<sup>3</sup> Forms of street theatre and performance have existed for centuries, as can be seen in early records of international minstrels, acrobats and entertainers. The recent interest in peripheral forms of culture and performance has revealed imaginative interpretations on the concept of the stage, where performance experimenters have used “outdoor spaces - courtyards, streets, walls, beaches, lakes, rooftops, plazas, and mountainside – for a number of overlapping purposes – aesthetic, personal, ritual, and political.” Thus, the emergent performative forms reposition themselves “in places where public life and social ritual have traditionally been acted out.”<sup>4</sup> The overlapping of meaning and program is evident in the appropriation of public spaces by Breaking, Capoeira, Flamenco, and Street Busking, overlapping mundane events with performative ‘rituals’.

The liminal ritual in each of the above genres of street performance are a result of an intersemiotic experience that, according to Broadhurst “includes but also goes beyond language” to include “non-linguistic modes of signification” such as the “visual, kinetic, gravitational, proximic [and] aural.”<sup>5</sup> Due to the specificity of locale, context, and culture, each street art develops its own language that is devoted to the Dionysian: intoxication through body movement, gestures, and music. Underlying the flexibility of each art, there exists a basic and simple structure that governs the general performance. How the performer decides to interpret this structure is where liminality through personal expression is achieved. Within Breaking, there exist various aggressive gestures that carry a certain meaning. The more creative the interpretation of the gesture, the more response and energy the dancer receives from his/her opponent, as well as from the circle of

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<sup>3</sup> Broadhurst, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Schechner, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Broadhurst, 12.

active observers. Within Capoeira, the whole process of performing is seen as a language where a martial conversation is struck up between two dancers within the circle, or *Roda*. "The players learn from each other and those who are watching in turn learn from them."<sup>1</sup> The music, singing and rhythm of the berimbau, pandeiro and atabaque, form the heart beat of the 'conversation.' In Flamenco, the triad between the singer, dancer and guitarist embodies the same emphasis on intersemiotic modes of communication. The words and clapping of the singer are interpreted by the dancers, and the stamping of dancer's feet as well as the strumming of the guitar add to the rhythm and general melody of the whole performance. Each performer whether singer, dancer, musician or observer, is an active participant in the whole creative process. Street busking involves a slightly different dynamic where the artist is mainly performing for a crowd of spectators. This being said, there still exists a high level of intersemiotic communication. A sign of a good busker is their ability to initiate a performance as well as keep the audience interested throughout the show. In the Ottawa's Busking Festival, Meet Pete successfully attracted a large audience through the simple acts of setting up his equipment and donning his costume. By performing his quirky character during this process, he created an entertaining atmosphere of performance before his show even began.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 4 Capoeira Circle

<sup>1</sup> Capoeira, Nestor, The Little Capoeira Book, trans. Alex Ladd (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995) 57.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Sweet, Busker, Meet Pete Busking Show, by Peter Sweet, Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa. 6 Aug. 2004.



**Figure 5** Flamenco Performance

Movement is the most direct and powerful of the non-linguistic modes of signification that thoroughly engages the liminal. It can be interpreted in several different ways. The most obvious and direct is through the body. The fluid dynamic between the edge of the space of observation and the central space of engagement reveals another form of movement that transcends the roles of performance between the spectator and performer. Within the nature of each subcultural performance, there exists a nomadic movement that lacks a specificity of space, but rather engages multiplicity. Lastly, there exists an evolutionary form of movement where on the grander scale, motion lies in the transformation from periphery to centre and back again.

Antonin Artaud, well known for his radical theories of theatre, art and life, called for a transcendence of the separation between the viewed and the viewer within theatre, where "we abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the

action, is engulfed and physically affected by it.”<sup>3</sup> This direct interaction between the roles of the performer and spectator is prevalent within the loose structures of street performance.

All of the mentioned forms of street performance share a similar interweaving of the roles of performer and spectator. The previously outlined spatial contexts of Breaking, Capoeira and Flamenco utilize an informal circle where one or two individuals perform in the centre and the related edge is occupied by active observers that participate through clapping, vocal encouragement, and music making. In these scenarios, everyone is an active participant.

However, there exists another layer of activity, a level of interchangeability within the edge of the circle. The intersemiotic dialogue



**Figure 6** Breaking Circle

is further carried out as a member of the 'audience' can actually switch roles, enter the circle and become the centre of attention. This fluid interchangeability allows a certain level of spontaneity, and diverse and ever-changing 'language' to develop where one performance circle will never be exactly the same as the next.

Within the context of busking, a similar type of interchangeability also occurs. The audience members are actively engaged as volunteers and helpers over the course of a show. Within Meet Pete's busking show, he acquired as many as 10 volunteers to actively participate,

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<sup>3</sup> Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 96.



**Figure 7** Meet Pete's Busking Show

either to lend physical support to his slack-rope structure, or to act as comic relief.<sup>1</sup> These volunteers were placed in a performance context which allowed them the freedom to become something or somebody beyond their regular identity. In most cases, these volunteers rise to the occasion, and add tremendously to the hilarity and entertainment of the whole show, more so than if their actions were accomplished by the performer him/herself. This is a result of the direct connection that we as an audience member, feel for the volunteer, knowing that his/her performance is genuine and unrehearsed. The more spontaneous his/her reaction is, the more entertaining the show becomes. In all of the street performance examples, the high level of improvisation, communication and perceptiveness to the other endows the form with a liminal movement that transcends the usual roles of audience and performer, very much in the spirit of Artaud.

Street performance's cultural and nomadic nature is another manifestation of liminal movement. Street cultures can be found within the public spaces of cities, and their performances can arise almost spontaneously. During a trip to New York, I experienced several spontaneous Breaking circles spring out of chance encounters between dancers who had never met. Suddenly, I was thrown into a performance that appropriated a street corner in the middle of the Bronx. Although short and ephemeral, it had a lasting effect on my understanding of the subculture.<sup>2</sup> A similar form of spontaneity is seen within Capoeira and Flamenco. In Capoeira's roots, its spontaneity was a result of its prosecution by the Dutch authorities within Brazil where the artform was banned. Thus, performances or practices often began and ended abruptly and would disperse

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Sweet, 6 Aug. 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Rock Steady, by Rocky Steady Crew, New York, 24 July 2000.

in a matter of seconds when the authorities would appear.<sup>3</sup> Flamenco's roots are based within the nomadic lifestyle of Spanish Gypsies, and thus took on the transient nature of this culture.<sup>4</sup>

Busking is by nature transient, as its livelihood depends on the frequency of use of a place. There are two significant types of traditional buskers: those that remain stationary in one place for an extended period of time, and secondly, those who set up a show for short period of time, and when the show is completed, move on to another area. In both cases, the sites of performances are often chosen for their high level of use, as in downtown urban areas, and are usually accompanied by a secondary program that attracts usage. Timing is also crucial within the frequency of use of a space. For example, daytime weekend hours downtown would naturally be more populated than the same spaces late at night. Thus, due to numerous factors contributing to the transient nature of public space, the success of a site can change immediately. The performer must react accordingly by vacating and moving to another site. Only in the case of an advertised performance is a substantial audience guaranteed. Despite the specificities of social context and sites that individualize each of the above examples, all share a common similarity in their inherent incorporation of movement into their social behaviour and structure.

As revealed in the evolution of Breaking's history, due to their open and flexible nature, these subcultural street rituals evolve away from their original forms and are often adopted and incorporated into the mainstream. As a result, the original motivations behind the street form become lost, diluted, or commercialised. As mentioned above, the political roots of Hip Hop were forgotten to a certain extent as soon as the culture became appropriated into the mainstream.

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<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from Capoeira, 3-37.

<sup>4</sup> "A Brief History of Flamenco," Solo Flamenco Dance Co, 13 Dec. 2004 <<http://flamencodance.com/history.html>>

Capoeira remained on the periphery of Brazilian culture, because of socio-racial segregation: it was originally developed by African slaves who cleverly disguised their martial art as a ritualistic dance form. In the 1930's it recently became nationally and internationally recognised and quickly rose to the institutional status of a national sport.<sup>5</sup> Flamenco underwent a similar process of commercialisation, where it moved away from the intimate setting of the "cafes cantantes"<sup>6</sup> (song and dance cafes) to the formalized stage. The compositions and songs were often swayed by mainstream popularity, and the traditional forms were forgotten. In all three of these dance forms, there currently exists a revival to preserve their original form and structure. This historical adherence centralises their traditions as they become more culturally established.

Busking has also developed into a formalised art. One of its well-known established manifestations is the circus. Throughout the circus' history, it has shifted from the peripheral manifestations of small travelling acrobatic shows to the epitome of glamour and success seen in the three-ring circus of Barnum and Bailey's. Another revitalization of the circus has taken place within contemporary culture as can be seen in the establishment of giant circus industries such as Cirque du Soleil. Interestingly enough, although it has become grandiose in scale and quite commercialised, the circus has always been able to retain a liminal edge through the constant reversion back to a form of the subcultural. The "weakness" or openness to imaginative play contained within the circus's roots allows the form to reinvent itself into another evolutionary reiteration of its genre.

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<sup>5</sup> Paraphrased from Capoeira, 1-19.

<sup>6</sup> Translates in English to song and dance cafes. See [Solo Flamenco Dance Co](http://flamencodance.com/history.html), <http://flamencodance.com/history.html>

*Case Study: The Evolution of the Circus*

As the circus is the main program utilized within the proposed design, it is necessary to describe the evolution of the circus from its initiation at the periphery into the establishment; in light of the explorations in both the cultural and performative context.

The original roots of the circus are unknown due to lack of documentation. This is not surprising since the history of culture - as revealed in the domination of the centred point of view for centuries of history - is often described in the perspective of the normative. Despite this condition, however, there is archaeological evidence of existence of artists, acrobats, and contortionists in Ancient China 2000 years ago. It was strongly supported by the ancient dynasties as court entertainment, and even the "art of acrobatics was practised by Taoist metaphysicians in an effort to perfect their physical skill and mental concentration."<sup>7</sup>

At approximately the same time, a similar type of appreciation of circus performances is also found within the Egyptian Tradition. There is evidence on Ancient Egyptian wall paintings depicting the importance of acrobats, musicians, and dancers. As described above, these activities played a significant role within the religious rites. There is also evidence of ritualistic animal processions held by the Ptolemies, a dynasty of Macedonian Kings in Alexandria. As Egypt had been conquered by the Greeks, this procession was an interesting cultural hybridization of "native Egyptian pageantry with the ritual religious procession of the Greeks."<sup>8</sup> Often marking the celebratory festivals of Dionysus<sup>9</sup>, these gigantic assemblages of exotic animals attest to the

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<sup>7</sup> "Information," Witness the Impossible: Imperial Circus, 13 Dec. 2004 <<http://imperialcircus.com/info.html>>

<sup>8</sup> Rubert Croft-Cooke and Peter Cotes, Circus: a World History (London: Paul Elek, 1976) 8.

<sup>9</sup> Dionysus is not only found within Greek cultures. There is evidence that its original establishment within Greek culture was actually a result of outside sources, for Dionysus is located in many primitive religions all over Africa, Europe, and Asia. See Harrison, Jane Ellen, Ancient Art and Ritual, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1948)

Greeks' admiration and curiosity of nature. Often the animals ranging from horses and bulls, wild beasts such as stags and lions, and birds from many different lands were trained to perform acrobatics, dance to music, pull chariots, or walk quietly beside their trainers during many different religious festivals and processions. The same amount of religious rigor that was applied to the human body within Greek culture, was also extended to the animal kingdom. This fascination with animals specifically demonstrated by horse drawn chariot races and other spectacles, was brought back to Greece, and is one of the main influences within the Roman cultural spectacles.

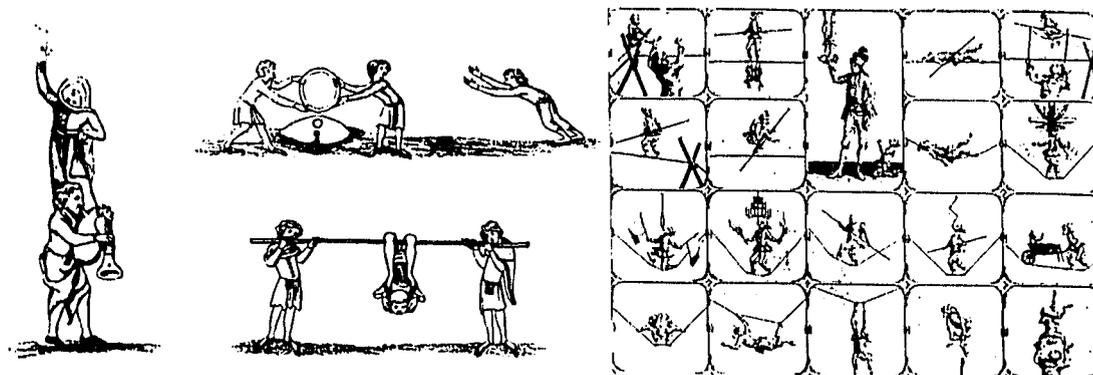
The Romans appropriated "the Greek version of the *pompa* with their own *venatio*, and yet they lost much of the intelligent curiosity which was characteristic of the Greek mentality."<sup>10</sup> Initially developed for their religious festivals, it quickly morphed into a bloody spectacle that was used as a diversion for the masses. The phrase "Bread and Circuses" describes this type of attitude. In the decline of the aristocracy of the Republic, public figures such as Pompey and Julius Ceasar, used the entertainment of the circus to their own political ends. The best-known architectural spaces for these exhibitions are the Circus Maximus and the Coliseum. Originally designed for chariot races, the programs were expanded to include gladiatorial battles between a whole array of animals and warriors, and various types of acrobatics.

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fourth century A.D., the circus as an organized entity of performance dissipated for fourteen centuries. During this time, there is little evidence of any organized circus entity, and most performers with circus skills lived a nomadic and downtrodden life. During the Renaissance or the "Age of Discovery of the New World," these

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<sup>10</sup> Croft-Cooke, 14. The Latin words of 'pompa' and 'venatio' are translated to procession and hunting performance or wild beast display.

performers would travel alone or in small groups making a living off improvised performances on the streets, fairgrounds, or in castles.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 8** Right: In the Middle Ages, a traveling acrobatic group  
Left: Circus Pioneer Signor Spinacuta and his talented monkey.

Undoubtedly the spirit of the circus lived on, despite it being a “pale shadow of its former self.”<sup>12</sup> The modern-day circus was created in London in the 1770’s by a Sergeant-Major of exceptional equestrian skill named Philip Astley. His circus was originally based on equestrian acts, most likely taking inspiration from the Roman example as demonstrated by the Astley’s direct appropriation of the word Circus from the Roman Circus Maximus. It was so well received by audiences that he further expanded it to include acrobatics, rope walking, clowns, and exotic animals, as well as further developing and solidifying his circular seating with a roof, lights and music. Thus, the modern circus was born. The popular phenomenon spread throughout England and Europe, and across the ocean into America in 1793. Within America, the circus reached its golden age during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The popularity of the American circus is very much related to the cultural condition of the time. The circus catered to rural small-town America. It brought in the exotic, the absurd and freaky that was inaccessible to the average American at that time, and speaks of a growing interest in the ‘other.’ The merge of P.T. Barnum’s circus with that

<sup>11</sup> Croft-Cooke, 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Croft-Cooke, 34.

of James Bailey into the first three-ring circus marked a climax of the circus' "commercialism, big business, and razzle-dazzle spectacle."<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 9** Toulouse Lautrec

The 1920's, a pivotal period of development in art, architecture, philosophy and culture, saw a great interest in the circus not only within mass culture but also within the higher ranks of the avant-garde. Many well-known Western artists and philosophers were fascinated by this art. To many, the circus represented an alternative to the establishment, which appealed to a wide variety of people: those who were attracted by its great difference from themselves (the average person), and also those that felt an affinity to it. Pablo Picasso as well

as Toulouse Lautrec among many others studied it within their paintings and lithographs. The well-known American sculptor, Alexander Calder visited the circus every day for two weeks in the 1920's. It was the inspiration for his own miniature circus and acted as a catalyst for his mobile structures. Even those who existed within the context of the establishment still found themselves drawn to the circus' ritual power.

In the advent of the world wars and the development of cinema, circus's popularity dropped dramatically. Due to lack of interest and the dispirited nature of wartime, many circuses went out of business and returned to the fringes; yet, this was not the end of the circus. Through its ability to constantly reinvent itself, a different form of circus was generated, one that focused strictly on the acrobatics and abilities of the human body. The tradition lives on, as audiences will

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<sup>1</sup> Croft-Cooke, 4.

always crave the thrill of the live performance. With the combination of new age music, spectacular lighting and projections, dazzling costumes, and innovative structures, the circus has risen again to a new height of popularity and status. Cirque du Soleil is a great example of circus's present-day popularity. Its particular history developed out of the streets of Montreal and has grown continuously to its present behemoth status.

As can be seen in the above history, the 'ritual' of the circus has developed through a constant evolution from the peripheral and subcultural to the established. This contemporary ritual constantly appropriating from different cultures as well as delving and mining its own history, blends, borrows, and collages in order to give new meaning and significance to old cultural ghosts. The end result is a ritual that exists as a liminal "moment in and out of time," a constructed 'myth' to the reality of the established.<sup>76</sup> This 'myth' resides on the edge between the centre and periphery, fear and pleasure, beauty and grotesque, and life and death.

A circumstance of culture and entertainment: death is the great counterpoint to life. The animal in us harbors this knowledge which comes to consciousness in moments of danger, or anxiety or deep reflection. This is why glimmerings of this counterpoint ordered and restrained by the imagination, delight us so much. Anything that exposes our buried apprehension of annihilation in forms that give us pleasure relaxes the vigilant tension of the animal in us. But for this pleasure to go deep, it has to embody the fears from which it sprang, even as it has to turn them inside out or on their head. Art is one such reordering. The circus is another.<sup>77</sup>

In an attempt to appropriate and collage meaning, let us look back to the original ritual transformation of the Greek dithyramb. The notion of catharsis can be interpreted as having a similar awakening quality that is present in the circus' juxtaposition of difference. Both delineate a transformation through a vehicle outside ourselves whether that be circus or drama. This *mimesis*

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<sup>76</sup> Turner, The Ritual Process 11.

<sup>77</sup> Donna Gustafson, Images From the World Between: The Circus in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Art, (New York: The MIT Press, 2001) 163.

-- the Greek definition of "the expression of feelings and the rhythms of speech – an acknowledgement, through the body's presence, of its intermediate location between Being and Becoming" as described by Perez-Gomez as well as today's definition of imitation -- speaks to us through an unfamiliar representation of that which is so familiar.<sup>78</sup>

This new ritual of circus is effective because of its shock value. Its affinity to death, our greatest fear, helps us to acknowledge and go beyond it as we watch things that we would think were impossible: tightrope walkers precariously balanced high above the ground, trapeze artists whirling in the air with dazzling precision. Like the liminal conditioning of the Greek theatre, it allows us to step out of our mundane realities and reach another plateau. The circus ritual is another world onto its own, another plane of reality that coexists, opposes and reflects the normative reality.

We toil to make a home in one place, and the circus travels through the world in perpetual motion. We strive to stay attached to our lives, and to keep hold of the material possessions that support our lives, and the circus send men and women flying through the air. We try to suppress our animal natures; the circus puts humans and animals on an equal footing, or sometimes even reverses the hierarchy. We laugh until we cry; the clown cries until we laugh. We feign normalcy to conceal our strangeness; the circus freaks flaunt their strangeness until, observing them, we begin to doubt our normalcy. The circus comes to an end, moves on, and begins again; when our lives come to an end, there is no place to go to.<sup>79</sup>

Gustafson goes on to describe the relationship of the periphery with the centre. It is through the liminal awakening that takes place between juxtapositions, the greatest of which contrasts life and death that the individual is transformed and evolves. The same movement seen in the circus is embodied within culture. Despite the fact that our individual lives are short-lived, expressions of

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<sup>78</sup> Perez Gomez, 12.

<sup>79</sup> Gustafson, 163.

culture such as the circus are continual. The circus has the potential to move those that exist within the centre through sheer difference: through lack of structure in opposition to static stratification, through gravitational freedom as opposed to steadfast grounding, and an embracement of difference in contrast to a perpetuation of conservatism.

The circus juxtaposes itself onto an existing reality. Being human, we share an innate connection to each other. We understand and appreciate the circus through a set of constructed relationships. We see the body of the acrobat and understand the means of its movement through our own understanding of movement, but at the same time, we are alienated and challenged by these movements as they represent that which is beyond our physical capability or experience.

Movement is in fact one of the circus' essential liminal qualities. The movement manifests itself on three different scales: the first being the immediate scale of the performers and their actions; the second encompassing the nature and culture of the circus as a nomadic microcosm; and thirdly, the circus' intertwining history with the establishment.

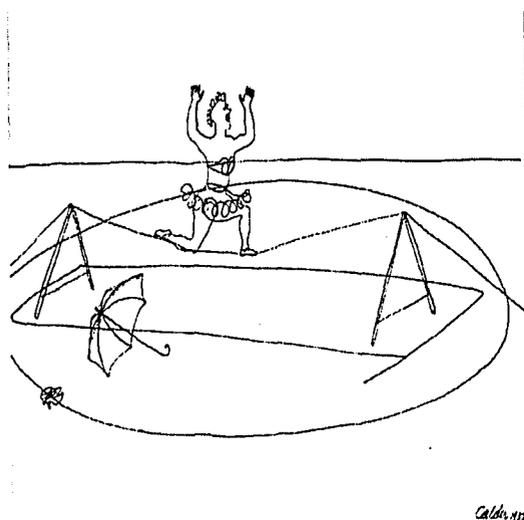
The bodies of performers are constantly flirting with the liminal, through the process of unbalancing and rebalancing or deconstructing and reconstructing, as balance "needs to play dangerously with the body."<sup>80</sup> Every body, thus, is "each a maya-lila of human possibility."<sup>81</sup> Based on this form of this recognizable condition of the body, the performer's movements indicate another juxtaposition of the familiar and unfamiliar. There is a level of comprehension in the

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<sup>80</sup> Schechner, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Schechner, 40.

performer's actions; but, simultaneously, a level of alienation especially in relation to the acrobat. Circus encompasses "both a spectacle of man's tragic failings, as seen in the often bittersweet performances of clowns, and a vision of his rich potential, symbolized by the daring and skill of aerialists."<sup>82</sup> Again, we are confronted with the condition where the subject, in this case the performer's body, lies in between, balanced precariously on the back of a galloping horse, or high above the audience on a thin piece of rope.



**Figure 10** Tight Rope Walker. Drawing by Alexander Calder

The performance of the tightrope walker is key in the thesis's discussion of liminality. As a perfect model of the in-between condition, the acrobat is literally poised on the edge. The feat relies completely on balance between two sides. Like a seesaw, any excessive inclination towards one side will imbalance the whole system and send the acrobat tumbling to his/her demise. This simplistic paradigm sums up the essence behind the circus's liminal condition.

Upon stepping back and absorbing the full effect of the circus, we can see how all of the acts overlap each other, sometimes occurring at the same time, as is the case in three-ring circuses. This eclectic collage of actions and movements, demands a very real response from the audience:

<sup>82</sup> "The Circus in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Art: Images From the World Between," The Austin Museum of Art, 13 Dec. 2004 < <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/3aa/3aa299.htm>>

"The circus's arresting dramas are enacted so rapidly that the adrenaline of anxiety, the endorphins of relief, and the throat catching of joyous aspiration that they stimulate follow each other in immediate succession. Such bodily participation in the spectacle, coupled with its ambitious multi-sensory stimulation, makes the audience's experience unusually intense, something like the effect Wagner's opera strove to provide: emotional saturation through a total artistic experience achieved through the synthesis of several art mediums. The visual is but the most immediate dimension of the circus experience"<sup>83</sup>

The circus' ritual is a powerful moving spectacle. Similar to the use of the exotic and impressive animals used in the Greek and Roman religious festivals, the circus utilizes a barrage of "sensory cues" ranging from "[t]he smells of the sawdust in the ring and the popcorn in the stands, the elusive taste of cotton candy purchased among the sideshows on the midway, the sounds of stirring marches played by the circus band and the growls of the big cats, the avidly imagined textures of glittering sequins, elephant hide, horses' manes, and the polished hard bar of the trapeze" to the "death-defying feats and knee-slapping antics of the performers." This "overall impression of exciting chaos, a place where both fear and pleasure are juxtaposed," "elicit[s] very specific somatic responses from onlookers."<sup>84</sup> It is through this incorporation of intersemiotic experiences spanning all the physical senses that the circus elicits a very real cathartic response from its spectators.

Upon contemplating the movement inherent within the structure of this particular culture, it becomes obvious that the nomadic lifestyle is by nature on the edge both physically as well as sociologically. The circus has always been characterized by the element of the unknown. Often the performers, even the owners, would not be able to accurately assess tomorrow's success

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<sup>83</sup> Gustafson, 88.

<sup>84</sup> Gustafson, 88.

based on the present circumstances. Climate, and socio-economical conditions are a few aspects that affect the success of a show. Also, and perhaps most importantly, the level of danger involved with many circus acts is an issue that every performer has to deal with each time they step into the circus ring.

The lack of specific place of residency – or of multiple sites depending on how you look at it – constitutes a large portion of the reason for the looseness and flexibility of the circus. Unlike most sedentary cultures, which become hierarchized as a result of their traditions, nomadic cultures are not as spatially bound. Travel automatically narrows everyone's notions of their personal space. The circus, in essence, is a "microcosm of the metropolis." This "portable tent city" mimics the nature of the sedentary but at the same time embodies a type of freedom of play and existence, a heightened level of liminality that is lacking within the established.<sup>85</sup>

The circus's nomadic character, at any point in its evolution, is telling of the particular relationship with the established culture. Nomadism in the modern day circus was a necessity. The circus thrived on the image of the unknown, the other, the exotic, and the audience's attraction to the unfamiliar. The American circus mainly performed within rural areas, where most people had never seen a flying trapeze show or an elephant.

"We are swept out of the monotonous mundane, beyond the relentless routines, past the aggravating actuality of our days and nights. Every civilization has constructed and made available a moment of carnival; every society has established a convention of unconventionality; we have the circus."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Gustafson, 94.

<sup>86</sup> Gustafson, 163.

As previously elaborated, within its ever-changing and fluctuating history, the circus has at points become established and sedentary. There are three main aspects to be considered in this occurrence: the first surrounds the fact that the settlement of the circus might become established within the context of performance; however, within the larger and general context of culture, in relation to the social placement of work and play, the circus will always be considered a component of the other. Secondly, the roots of the circus within the subcultural, such as street busking and acrobatics, will always exist to spark another reinvented form of the circus. This can be seen in the development of the Cirque du Soleil from its humble origins on the streets of Montreal to the height of its international popularity and cultural acceptance. Thirdly, as demonstrated by the popularity of the Cirque, the ability of the circus form to reinvent itself through embracing the possibility of change and challenging its own boundaries, contributes to its continual existence on the edge, and confirms a continual process of evolution and becoming.

Movement, the essence behind the contemporary liminal ritual, is inherent within the whole structure of the circus. Movement can be interpreted within the intimate process of deconstruction and reconstruction that takes place within the body, where the liminal edge exists precariously, balanced on a tightrope between two conditions of being. The movement of all the various acts of the circus merging spontaneously in a multi-sensory choreography express an inherent quality of movement within the general framework of the whole culture. Even at the most sedentary moments within the circus' evolution, it has in essence remained nomadic. The fact that the circus does travel from periphery to centre suggests another form of movement that is evolutionary. It is through its roots and origins within subcultural forms of performance such as contemporary Busking that the circus has sustained its open nature. Through a constant hybridization and appropriation of subcultural forms, as well as a general openness to different influences, the circus is able to constantly reinvent itself and propel its genre unto new grounds of being and becoming.

## Cultural Urban Context: Architecture and the City

The discussion of space and place is essential in a dialogue of culture. The word place is “one of the most multi-layered and multi-purpose words in our language” as it touches upon multiple aspects of our cultural existence. Its layered meaning reflects the perspectival condition that defines our distinct and communal social being. Heidegger ultimately saw the construction of place as existentially imperative to the construction and definition of people.

Their “creation” of space provides them with roots, their home and localities becoming biographies of that creation ... Through repeated experience and complex associations, our capacity for dwelling allows us to construct places, to give them meanings that are deepened and qualified over time with multiple nuances.”<sup>87</sup>

Through this process of layering and folding meaning, place plays a pivotal position of response and representation of a cultural point of view, perspective, or way of thinking. However, this response and representation no longer adheres to a centrality of perspective as seen in classical cultural approaches. Rather, it is an embracement of difference, of multiple identities that contribute to a spatial process of becoming within the urban context.

### *Urban Evolution*

This embracement of multiplicity is a contemporary condition that has transpired as a result of the separation of the object and the subject. The humanist tradition, dating back to the Greeks, attempted to bring together the object and the subject, *fabrica et raciocinatione* or theory and practice, under the mathematical order of proportion and geometry. This ordering was a means of applying the divinity of the “supra-lunar world” of the Gods and nature to the “sub-lunar

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<sup>87</sup> Knox, 238-239.

world" of humans.<sup>88</sup> The Greeks' architectural tradition, however, was based upon the rituals that surrounded and influenced their culture. The worship of diverse gods was a reflection of a cultural multiplicity, which is now very relevant within contemporary theories.

The development of the Greek theatre is of particular concern as it marks the progression from ritual into the realm of architecture. Developed out of the dithyramb of the Dionysian spring rituals, theatre came about as a result of the birth of philosophy. Through the passive observance of the dramatic metaphor, catharsis, which was previously achieved through direct and physical participation in the dromena, was now achieved through the coupling of drama and architecture. Drama was "experienced as a tight weaving of temporality and spatiality. Its effect must be attributed to the narrative dictated by the poet, as opposed to the plurality and diversity of traditional myths."<sup>89</sup>

Daedalus, the first recorded Architect in Western history, designed both the famous labyrinth as well as the first known dance platform in Knossos. For the Greeks there was a special connection that existed between a performer and the underlying order of the world that was transferred into the labyrinth. As a condensed symbol of human life – "one entry, one centre" and "of the presence of order in apparent disorder," the labyrinth encompasses the essence behind classical centre point of view.<sup>90</sup> The form of the circle perfectly embodies their centred notion as its geometry is completely symmetrical and ordered. Every line emanates from the centre of this

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<sup>88</sup> Perez-Gomez, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Perez-Gomez, 14-15.

<sup>90</sup> Perez-Gomez, 12.

form. In the theatre, the centre is where the drama takes place, and within the labyrinth, it marks the finality of life through death.

The “cosmological picture grounded in divine transcendence” seen within Greek tradition, was appropriated by numerous cultures, and can be seen interpreted in Renaissance illusion with the introduction of perspective. Often seen within the design of theatrical space, this “perspective artificialis” or “scenographia” marked another interpretation of the notions of “chora,” or of space. Architects and painters alike utilized this infinite mathematical structure of depth as a means of depicting another layer of reality. Renaissance art and architecture remained a humanist attempt to continue a unified “picture.” As a result of Galileo and Descartes’ work, however, a schism began to separate the unity of divinity and science. Depth and objects in space became measurable and consequently lead to the beginnings of scientific objectification. As a result, these evolutions in thought eventually lead to the scientific enframing of the present context exacerbated by industry and capitalism.<sup>91</sup>

In search of new depth, several movements including present contemporary approaches have suggested a decentred point of view. This is evident within the drawings of Piranesi who collaged multiple perspectives into one seemingly ordered image. In the world of painting this turn was exemplified by Cezanne and his emphasis on brushstroke and colour, rather than a mimetic depiction of the image. The emergence of Modernism also began with roots initially attempting to

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<sup>91</sup> See Perez-Gomez, 16-25.

break away from the “ ‘capitalist’ canon of reputability and power.”<sup>92</sup> Although having roots within the peripheral social systems, modernism was quickly adopted into the Establishment.

“The subsequent fusion and transformation of these movements into the glib ‘Esperanto’ of the International Style and the simultaneous adoption of the style as the preferred image of corporate and bureaucratic conservatism, solidity and respectability provides an important example of the way in which the dominant social order is able to protect itself from opposing ideological forces.”<sup>93</sup>

Ockman referenced the evolution of modernism and the creation of the International Style in her characterization of major and minor architecture and of their hybridized and intertwined relationship. She emphasizes the importance of the minor, subcultural or peripheral forms, within the greater context of architectural evolution in their influence on the major. For Ockman, it is a point of future departure and potential imaginings.

Like the deterritorialized literary imagination of Kafka, it might entail a process that begins with the major, little by little appropriating it and making it strange, until the normative, the familiar, becomes something new, the inception of a different consciousness.<sup>94</sup>

In criticism of Modernism’s universal functionalism, Postmodernism represents a decentred point of view that is not “associated with the militant tradition of the [depoliticized] avant-garde” that spouts manifestos of utopian ‘truths,’ but focuses on a matter of difference.<sup>95</sup> This attitude is nothing new, as there has always existed diversity, yet it is often marginalized. In accepting a cultural multiplicity that is interwoven, Post-modern theories also accept change and evolution as a result of hybridization. The diversity of Post-modern architectural approaches can be seen in the

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<sup>92</sup> Knox, 272.

<sup>93</sup> Knox, 272.

<sup>94</sup> Ockman, 152.

<sup>95</sup> Ockman, 152.

eclecticism of styles that range from “ ‘high-tech’ to neo-classical,” and within buildings that attempt to be “less serious and more playful,” at times “full of irony ... or pastiche.”<sup>96</sup>

In reaction to the ‘form follows function’ ideology of Modernism, Aldo Rossi devised an exploration of architecture and the city that concentrated on the process that exists in the liminal, in between the object and the subject. Unlike the classical “humanist conception [which] attempted an integration of subject and object” and “the modernist conception [which] polemically attempted their separation,” Rossi took a middle position.<sup>97</sup> Thus, he suggested a form of interpretive and playful ‘historicism,’ where the archaeology of the city could be further enriched and exist in constant flux. His reference to archaeology suggests the “superimposed reading(s) of tectonic reality: of a reality the can no longer be regarded as a unitary whole, but appears instead as the overlapping of different layers.”<sup>98</sup>

If the subject and object are to be independent, it is now the process, previously considered neutral, which must assume the forces which formerly were contained in the subject and the object. Into this new idea of process Rossi reintroduces the elements of history and typology, but not as a nostalgia for narrative or a reductive scientism. Rather, history becomes analogous to a “skeleton” whose condition serves as a measure of time and, in turn, is measured by time. It is this skeleton which bears the imprint of the actions that have taken place and will take place in the city. For Rossi, architecture’s history lies in its *material*; and it is this material which becomes the object of analysis – the city.<sup>99</sup>

Rossi’s notion of the “skeleton” is significant, as through this metaphor, he allows the viewer to imagine future possibilities for the evolution of the city, and “reconstruct a future time of fantasy.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Knox, 65.

<sup>97</sup> Rossi, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Solà-Morales, 66.

<sup>99</sup> Rossi, 5.

<sup>100</sup> Rossi, 10.

His reference to the labyrinth by his choice of image on the cover of his book The Architecture of the City reveals an 'eternal return' back to the humanistic closed system where life concludes at the centre with death. Analogous to Nietzsche's warning against a full cycling, this return adds another layer of contemporary meaning onto the image. This secondary layer of meaning suggests an interpretation of the spiral as "an unfolding path or route", "a psychological figure, the symbol of a process of transformation."<sup>101</sup> The coupling of the two meanings suggests reconstructive and deconstructive processes that are inherent within all scales of culture, from the direct movement of the body to the intertwining of the cultural centre and periphery.

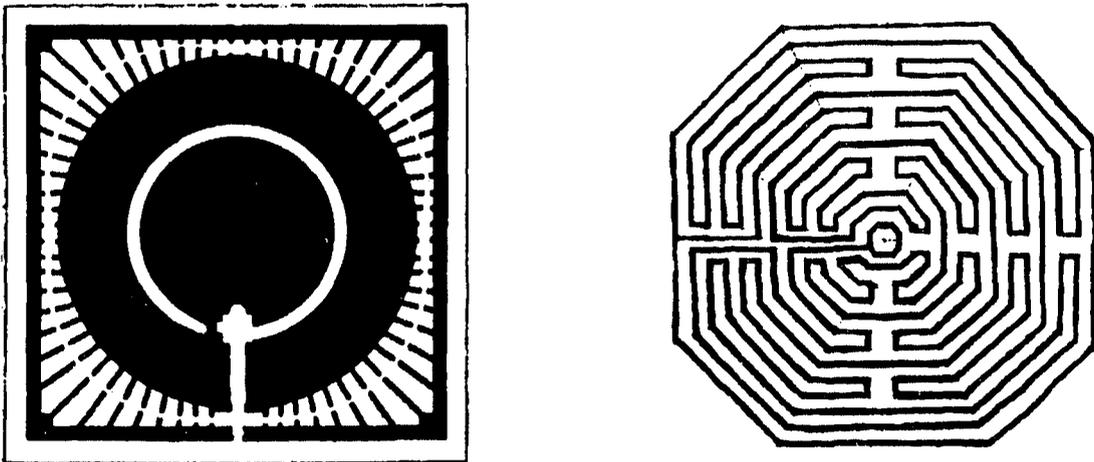


Figure 11 Left: Horizontal section of the Mausoleum of Hadrian (135-139 A.D.)  
Right: Drawing of the Labyrinth based on the floor pattern of Amiens Cathedral

### *Social Meanings of the Built Environment*

The static elements of the city, the buildings which Rossi calls "urban artifacts," become crystallizations of the flux of the city, and are telling of urban history and memory. Rossi considers the architectural monument as either "catalytic" or "pathological" in terms of the dialectic of

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<sup>101</sup> Rossi, 3.

“permanence” and “growth” within the processes of the city.<sup>102</sup> This multiple discourse expresses similar interpretations of the monument. The classical conception of the monument suggests a closed centrality, a “transcendent divin[e]” symbolism that “guarantees the consistency of time”<sup>103</sup> This form of monument can be seen in the “imago Dei ... The figure of the King in the middle of the Royal Square thus constitutes the emblem of power that hierarchically orders a given public space”; “[t]he obelisk at the central point of the perspective ... that guarantees coherence and immovability of the representational visual structure.”<sup>104</sup>

This definition of monument that symbolizes a dominating set of values has contributed to the contemporary crisis. Within the present, the definition of monument has been attached to imperialist, capitalist, corporate values, as can be seen in the incorporation of the functionalist skyscraper as the corporate ‘monument.’ The association of space and place with the issues of power is a well known topic explicated in the works of Michel Foucault. Foucault saw the component of power as not necessarily an external element of the social fabric, but a phenomenon that was a “crucial component in daily life that helps to construct the ordinary, everyday actions of people.” Foucault described the manifestations of power taking place within space, coining the term “micropowers,” which he used to describe through the spatial contexts of institutions. Foucault’s theories reveal that the notion of power is an intrinsic part of culture. As a means of expressing their notion of power, the establishment has utilized the monumental as its architectural representation.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Rossi, 6.

<sup>103</sup> Solà Morales, 70.

<sup>104</sup> Solà Morales, 70-71.

<sup>105</sup> Knox, 59-60.

Maintaining the juxtaposed relationship between the establishment and subcultural, the freedom embodied within public space parallels the lack of structure associated with the subcultural. Like many of the words used in a sociospatial exploration, the word public space encompasses a great deal of variety. Ranging from recreational green spaces, parks, and community gardens; open markets, plazas and squares; to streets, sidewalks and pathways, public space encompasses a complex layering of social uses, functions, and values. In reference to the establishment represented in the static built world, public space contains less structure, and more openness to play, 'ritualize,' and appropriate from various sources. This multiplicity in its anti-structural playfulness is inherently liminal in nature. The improvised ability to appropriate multiple uses and programmes – those that are anticipated and those that are spontaneous as seen in street performance – is a result of the liminal temporality of the social events that take place.

This diversity of times becomes absolutely central in what I have chosen to call weak architecture...these architectures transform the aesthetic experience of the artwork, and specifically of architecture, into *event*. Temporality does not present itself as a system but as an aleatory instant that responding above all to chance, is produced in an unforeseeable place and moment. In certain works of contemporary art, in dance, in music, in installation, the experience of the temporal as event, occurring once and then gone forever, ably explicates a notion of temporality that finds in the event its fullest form of expression.<sup>106</sup>

This 'weakness' within liminal forms found in public space can be defined by an experience coloured by multiplicity and temporality. Solà Morales also suggests that the temporal event, is defined by spontaneity of time and place. This spontaneous characteristic that welcomes the inter-semiotic experience is inherent within subcultural forms, specifically street art. According to Solà Morales, street art can be interpreted as being composed of a series of temporal events. Based on my socio-cultural explorations, these events affect one another, thus creating a history.

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<sup>106</sup> Solà Morales, 68.

### *Nomadic structures*

In observation of the liminal scale of the movement and temporality within a culture, an exploration of the architectural manifestations of certain vernacular forms is required. As seen in the traditional nomadic tribes, the vernacular mobile structures are in direct relationship to the social conditions of the culture. Despite the lack of acknowledgement within architectural histories, "ephemeral architecture was without doubt man's first form of building," and there exists archaeological evidence that support its role in humankind's survival. As primitive humans developed the ability to grow crops, and thus established permanent settlements, the earliest of these ephemeral buildings undoubtedly became the precursors of permanent dwellings. "The arch and the vault can both be traced back to precedents in temporary architecture."<sup>107</sup>

Paralleling the post-structural embracement of multiple perspectives and architectural styles, there has recently been renewed interest in nomadic structures such as tents. Using modern technology and materials, architectural pioneers such as Frei Otto constructed large scale and permanent tent structures that have definitely transformed from their nomadic precursors. Despite their undergoing the process of stabilization and establishment, the emphasis on balance has allowed their typology to remain on the edge.

The tent is characterized by its structural minimalism, an attribute that springs from its nomadic roots. As a result of the necessity of constant travel, lightness of material was an absolute requirement. This lightness and minimalism highlights the condition of balance that all

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<sup>107</sup> Robert Kronenburg, Houses in Motion: The Genesis, History and Development of the Portable Building (Cornwall: Wiley-Academy, 2002) 11.

structures must negotiate, including those of the human body. Similar to the tightrope walker, the tent retains its liminal quality through an emphasis on structural balance.

### *Liminal Movement within Spatial Contexts*

Nomadic architecture did not only operate on a purely utilitarian plane. The ritual of movement from place to place, from event to event, and the spiritual connection of humans to their landscape, brought about a new social layer above and beyond the basic reality of survival. Aboriginal culture and mythology surrounding the journey of the “wanderer” exemplifies an archaeologically rich dialogue encompassing the liminal movement from space to space.

The primeval concept of wanderers' space is expressed in Aboriginal mythology and their way of living. Aborigines live in a mythical space of archetypal paths and sacred places in which remain traces of those who were passing through a country before, as well as the signs of those who are crossing now. Following the tracks of mythical progenitors is a symbolic journey, searching for the Nomads' identity. Wandering along archetypal paths is a period of spiritual transition between ancestors and descendants. The archetypal paths are marked by landscape and topographical monuments which are treated as if they were created by the progenitors, therefore keeping the memory of past events ... Knowledge of the mysteries and secrets within a tribe is handed down from the old to the younger generation. Aborigines repeat their journeys in directed and circular time (forward moving).<sup>108</sup>

It is unclear whether the above myth is referring to a spiritual or physical journey. This is not relevant, however, since the myth's importance to this thesis lies in its ritualistic usage of the spatial and theoretical concept of path. The concept of the path is in essence liminal. Its socio-spatial structure is in direct relation to movement, and to the overlapping or folding of events upon events. The Aboriginal path parallels the definition of street art as described above. In a similar manner, the nature of the redefined rituals of street art and circus parallel a similar form of transformation that transcends the rational intellect into the realm of the experiential. The

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<sup>108</sup> Ada Kwiatkowska, "Following the Trace-Spirits in the Landscape," *Transportable Environments: Theory, Context, Design and Technology*, ed. Robert Kronenburg (New York: E & FN Spon, 1998) 23.

Aboriginal ritual is carried out along the path in relation to the overlapping of events that traverse time and history. Akin to the juxtaposed encountering of the aboriginal progenitors with the present reality of the journey in determining the future identity of the nomad, Rossi's city also contains an overlapping of meaning that spans the past, present as well as potential future of the 'ruin.' The layered archaeology of this mythical journey reveals the inherent condition of eternal return and becoming. The evolutionary path as described in the Aboriginal journey and Rossi's redefinition of the city is integral to the process of design.

*Design: Emphasis on Process*

The liminality behind the transformative path or journey is the main focus within the thesis design. This design, within the public spaces of Confederation Park, City Hall Festival Plaza and the Rideau Canal in Ottawa, chronicles an evolutionary 'journey.' As the Canadian capital, the socio-cultural context of Ottawa is ripe with the influence of the institutional, governmental, and established. The design proposes an 'archaeology' of performance that folds, unfolds, and refolds the establishment "in order to produce the new and the strange out of the old and familiar."<sup>109</sup> Before elaborating any further, it is necessary to describe the social and physical contexts of these potential sites of activity.

One of many elegant green spaces in Ottawa, the canal proves to be the most interesting and historical. Originally built to transport goods from Kingston, the canal is presently used for leisure and tourist cruises and during the winter, it becomes the world's longest skating rink.

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<sup>109</sup> Pearson, 14.

Architecturally, the canal reveals a layering of existing events that are directly related to the change of seasons. During the summer, most of the activity is characterized by linear movement along the edge of the canal, on the bike paths. Except for the sporadic use by leisure and tourist boats, the actual canal space is inaccessible and the two sides of the canal become separate entities. During the winter, the water transforms into ice, bridging and connecting the two sides of the canal. The lowering of the canal's water level creates a dynamic vertical dialogue between the ice's surface, the edge of the canal and the vehicular bridges on either side of the Park. Despite the cold, the canal's surface becomes the most popular public space in all of Ottawa. Just down the canal in front of the National Arts Centre, vendors sell their wares, making this particular stretch of the canal busy and populated.

The canal site is connected to the secondary site in question: Confederation Park. Like most established green spaces, this park is characterized by green fields, asphalt pathways, and multiple historical statues and plaques noting contributory social individuals or groups. The main feature of interest is a monumental stone fountain located in the centre of the park. An elliptical concrete landscape encircles the fountain fringed at the edge by a number of wooden benches facing the centre, vaguely reminiscent of Roman fountain plazas. The benches reside at the point where concrete turns into grass. All the asphalt pathways intersect this ellipse and continue away on the corresponding sides. Out of the whole park, this area contains the most interesting pedestrian dynamics, as often, people congregate on and around the benches as well as on the edge of the fountain.

The final site resides on the other side of Laurier Street in front of the new City Hall. The large plaza is nondescript except for an arched pathway fringed on both sides by flag and light

poles that cut through the space. Normally, this site remains empty and unused. It is only during the occasions when summer festivals are organized that the space is occupied. During such festivals as The Blues Festival and the Beer Festival, the site completely transforms and hosts a chaotic mass of people. As the events are often paid performances, the area is sectioned off, often spilling on to Laurier Avenue, transforming the street into a pedestrian-dominated space.

Based on an initial reading of the sites, there exist potentialities for the instigation of a new ritual. According to Aldo Rossi, this ability to layer new meaning or function to a space or form indicates a shift from history to memory.<sup>110</sup> This is directly related to the definition of the city as a “ruin” in relation to memory. This notion is crucial to the design, as it suggests a redefinition of the city as a “ruin” in order to link the “discarded and fragmentary with new beginnings.” Thus, each site requires a reinterpretation as a means of actualizing these potentialities. Paralleling Rossi’s declaration of “activating this unconscious memory” through the inventive potential of the “analogous design process,” each site is now re-read keeping the notion of subcultural performances in mind.<sup>111</sup>

Based on this lens of potential ‘memory,’ the site of the canal reveals a possible scenario for performance. The condition of the two banks divided by the void is reminiscent of the spatial conditions of the tightrope or slackrope walker. The same lens can also be applied to the two other sites. In the park, the viewer/viewed dialogue between the edge of the fountain and the wooden benches provides an excellent site for street busking. Taking into consideration the lifelessness of this space, the vertical structures of the flag and light poles within the Festival Plaza have the potential to create an intimate setting that promotes everyday occupancy and performance.

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<sup>110</sup> Rossi, 7.

<sup>111</sup> Rossi, 11.

By redefining each site as a possible stage and implementing an additional layer of structure, the sites are transformed and layered with a history beginning with street performance. However, the emphasis of this design is not only on the singular event of street performance, but rather an emphasis on the evolution of that event into a potential established history of performance. The cultural edge condition must be considered in light of its interaction and hybridization with the central system as the two are intrinsically linked in their historical progression. Thus, the design itself is a process of evolution.

The liminality of an event, expressed through its temporality, is essential in a discourse of becoming. Temporality of the event allows reality to fold on top of folds, just as Rossi suggests a multiple reading of the city, or the Aboriginal journey of the 'wanderer' layers memory upon memory, event upon event. All these examples of the temporal event suggest an inherent multiplicity through time as events overlap upon each other.

Within the design, liminality is achieved through a multiplicity that layers sites, programs and events. The seasonal changes as well as the transformations from day to night suggest another form of multiplicity. As time progresses, each site's social and present architectural structure is redefined as a "skeleton" and imbued with new possibility of program and performance. Thus, the liminal within multiplicity is a result of an evolution through time.

Coupled with the introduction of an everyday program such as a daytime restaurant / lunch bar that appropriates the space of the pathway, spontaneous street performance is encouraged to develop during the day at the Festival Plaza. During the

night, this space can be transformed into a stage for music performances, where the original space of the path becomes the core servicing spine for both the performers as well as retail for the audience members.

Based on the existing program of the fountain and the potential for a more complex dialogue between the roles of performance, the audience and performer, the seating (both the benches as well as the edge of the fountain) and the corresponding site line limitations are explored and challenged. As a result, a potential for multiple performance scenarios is suggested through the transformed 'chair.' This simple structure, simultaneously embodying the programs of seating, canopy/shelter, as well as a 'reinterpreted' fountain, opens up the possibility for overlapping and complex public discourses. Taking inspiration from nomadic furniture, explorations on the reversibility of viewing initiated by the movements of this furniture have assisted in the evolution of the circular edge of the fountain into a decentered continuous line. This line can potentially be perceived as a liminal threshold between now vertically separate ground-planes. Taking inspiration from the fluidity of roles within street performances, this line of structure becomes the edge where the possibility for the reversal or bleeding of the roles of the performer and spectator can take place.

Initially inspired by the vertical conditions of this site in relation to the height of the retaining canal wall during the winter, and the almost natural compulsion to bridge the two banks, the introduction of a rope thrown over the canal suddenly has the potential to transform the space into a site of performance. Through 'time,' the moving body of the performer becomes abstracted into the moving 'body' of structure. This abstractive process was greatly inspired by the kinetic processes of Alexander Calder.

Within the processes of Calder's work, the concept of balance and rebalance is the link between the human body of the slack-rope walker with the architectural structural body. In many ways, this prolific artist redefined sculpture. His experiments with balance and movement were directly related to his exposure to the circus. He enjoyed the "mechanics of the thing" and saw it as a "diagram of force."<sup>112</sup> In 1926, Calder constructed his own miniature toy circus and abstracted all his figures in wire as "diagrams of force" that physically sprang into action. Based on the kinetics and balance of these whimsical figures, he was able to make the abstract leap into his most well-known work. The inspiration of the mobile is directly related to the condition of the slack-rope walker, where there exists a moment of balance that thresholds between two sides. Using the see-saw model, Calder interpreted these two sides as gravitational force.



Figure 12 Left: Alexander Calder's Circus Drawing; Middle: Calder's kinetic Circus; Right: Calder's Mobile, Little Spider



Figure 13 Left: Calder's White Cascade; Right: My process work inspired by Calder's mobiles

<sup>112</sup> Calder's Circus. Ed. Jean Lipman and Nancy Foote. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1972, 42.

In a similar vein to Calder's interpretation of body as a "diagram of force," the body of the slackrope performer is replaced by an equivalent structure that is composed of compressive and tensional components. This structure belongs to an architectural typology referred to as Tensegrity structures. The frozen choreography of a traditionally static Tensegrity structure is imbued with movement by allowing the overall tension of the structure to push and pull according to the weight and applied forces of the performers. Simultaneously, the notion of the 'bridge' that is initially suggested by the first event of the rope, is further elaborated into a physical pedestrian bridge. This bridge structure, however, is given multiple programs, depending on the programmatic circumstances. Partially as a response to function and partially as a means to coax the liminal through a folding of programs, the bridge acts as a supporting structure for the performance as well as a pathway that connects the two sides of the canal. A similar folding of multiplicities is also applied to the carved out performance space. It functions as a marina to dock boats and canoes during the summer, as well as a place of performance and pedestrian access during the winter.

The multiplicity through the choreography of structural movement reveals another form of liminality embodied in the actual architectural structures. In response to the numerous spatial requirements of the applied programs, the structures accommodate through physical movement. In the Plaza site, the canopy expands and contracts depending on the size and constraints of each program. In the middle of Confederation Park, the proposed structures, tripling as seating, canopy, fountain, pivot depending on the desired direction and site lines of a performance. The bridge over the canal moves to accommodate both the need for transportation of pedestrians and boats, or for support in the case of a performance. Another form of movement which is evolutionary in nature, chronicles a transformation of the architectural events through augmentation and replacement. As each site grows in scale, the existing 'skeleton' of each architectural event is re-examined. In the

spirit of the contemporary ritual, each architectural event is fragmented, reused and re-collaged together.

As revealed through the above transformations, each site traverses from initial temporary events of street performance to an establishment of multiple programs, performances, and supporting architectural structures. As an inherent quality within culture, the thesis embraces evolutionary movement as a means of constructing a design. Every event must be placed in a greater context, in relation to past events with consideration for those in the future. Thus, this journey does not necessarily end at the conclusion of the thesis design. Each of the three designs contains the liminal potential to grow beyond delineated boundaries, and merge and hybridize in a continual process of becoming.

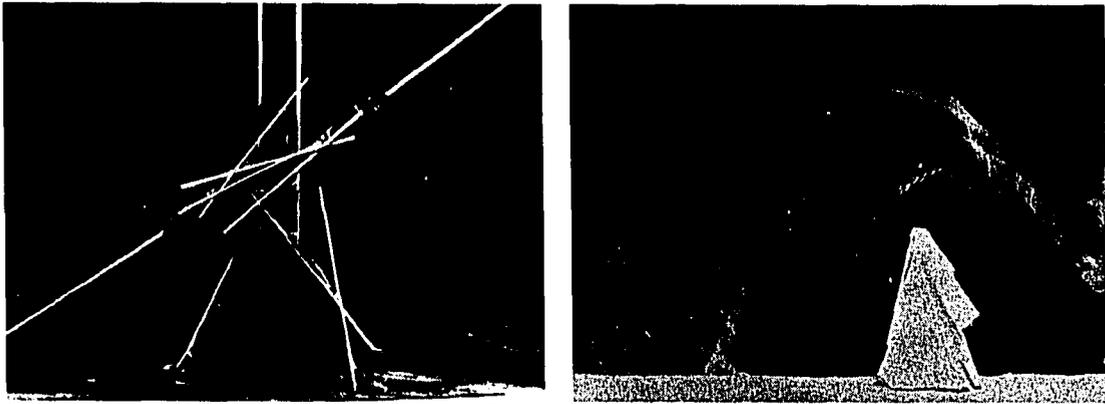
This process of becoming, marked by the introduction of street performance and perpetuated by the coupling of liminal architecture and performance, chronicles a transformation through a continual re-ordering of rituals. The process of becoming is twofold: the first is a proposed 'historical' narrative that takes place within the evolutionary context of the public spaces of Ottawa. The second is in relation to the process of design within the realm of structural exploration. This structural, explorative process takes inspiration from the writings of Paul Valéry on the notions of making.

The compulsion to make as a means of understanding is a very human trait. According to Valéry, "[t]he idea of making is the first and most human of ideas. 'To explain' is never anything more than to describe a way of making: it is merely to remake in thought."<sup>113</sup> In a similar manner, Calder suggests an explanation of balance and movement through the vehicle of sculpture.

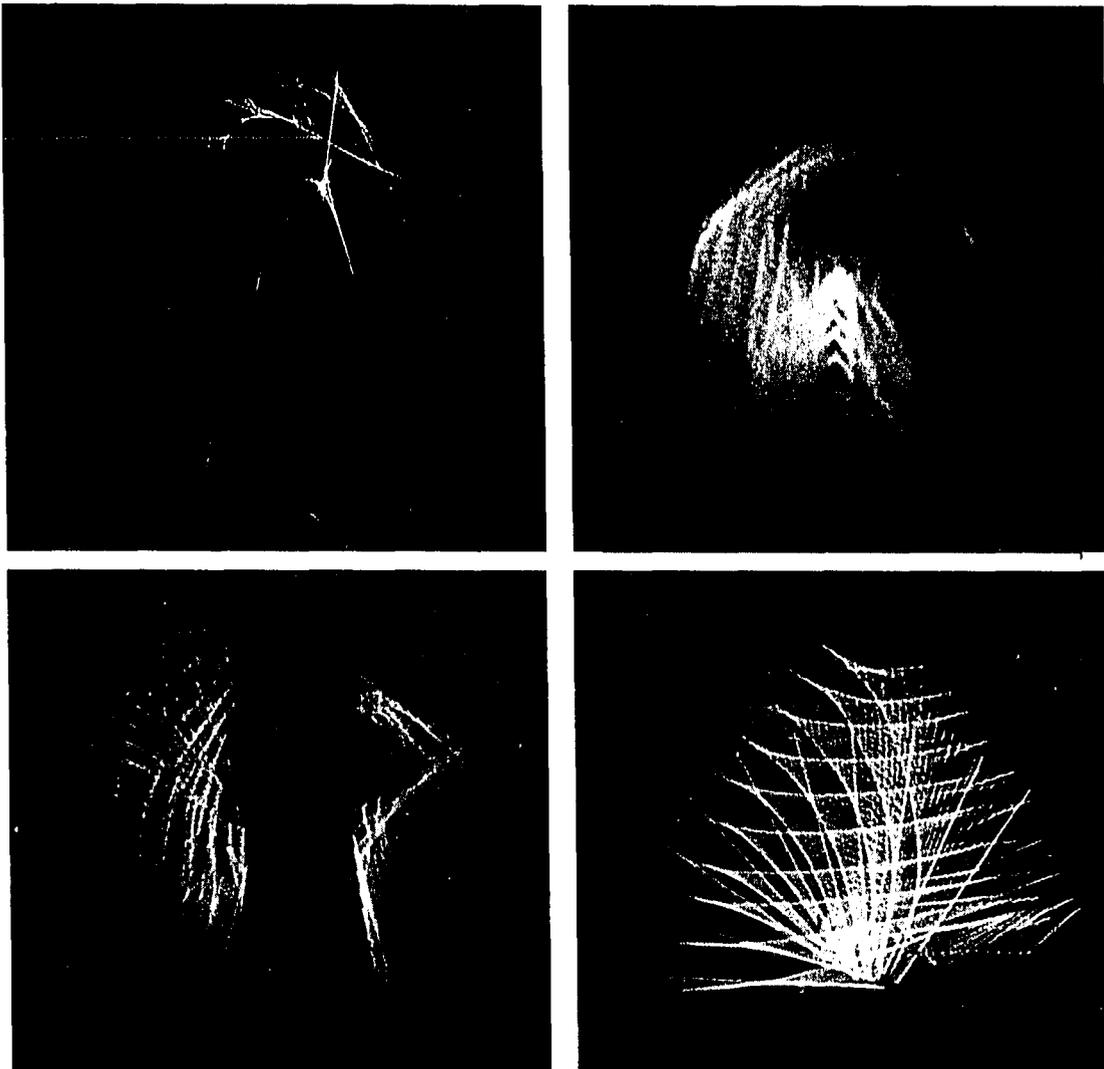
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<sup>113</sup> Paul Valéry, "Man and the Sea Shell," *Seashells* (Boston: Beacon Press) 12.

Utilizing a similar form of abstraction as seen in Calder's work, the design process explores the potentialities behind the model of the slackrope walker as a basis for structural abstraction and exploration. It is through a desire to understand, explore, and possibly 'ritualize' that simultaneous growth is achieved within the larger context of the design's historical process as well as on a intimate level, a personal development through the process of making.

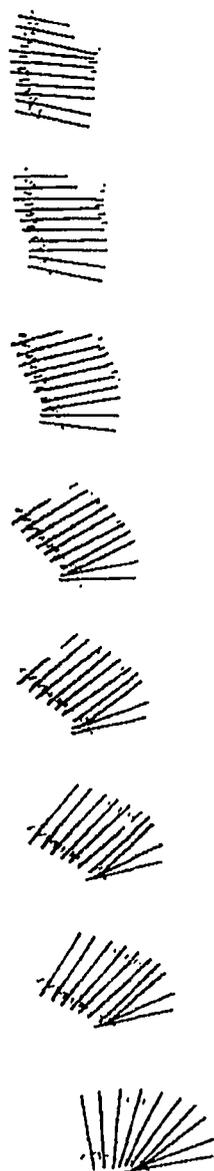


**Figure 14** Left: Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet, The Stick Dance  
Right: Etienne-Jules Marey, Movement Studies, Saut Obstacle



**Figure 15** Taking inspiration from both Schlemmer and Marey, I performed my own movement studies. I explored the movement of the general body (top right), transformation of the negative space in between the arms (top right, bottom left), and the movement of the spine (bottom right).

## Conclusion



**Figure 16** Video Stills of my motion experiment

In retrospect of the whole process of this thesis, there exists a common thread throughout the seemingly disparate events. The resultant design proposal has a parallel relationship to the initial video experiments of the body. Inspired by Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet,<sup>114</sup> these videos assisted in dematerializing the human body to an abstracted structural level. These experiments revealed the transformation of the body through the means of pure movement. The main essence of the thesis design also focuses on movement. Whether discovered through the abstracted movement of the body in dance, or explored through the dance of architecture seen within the proposed history of performance, movement is the common thread throughout this creative process.

On an intimate scale, the movement of the human body follows many of the characteristics of the evolution of culture. The body undergoes the eternal return of becoming through the learning of new rituals whether in relation to the everyday or particular to performance. "[A] maya-lila of human possibility," the body undergoes a transformation process that deconstructs and reconstructs it according to situation.<sup>115</sup> This evolutionary phenomenon within the body expresses a liminality where it is always on the brink of transforming and becoming. The experiential condition of bodily movement is a general experience; however, within the context of performance, it becomes the focus

<sup>114</sup> Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet is a constructivist exploration of movement, structure, and space. These 'metaphysical dances' transformed and dematerialized the body through costuming and lighting. See Roselee Goldberg, Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979) 72-73.

<sup>115</sup> Schechner, 40.

and centre of attention. It is this liminality contained within performative motion that is used as the catalyst for an architectural process of design.

The body's movement parallels the movement of the design structures. As can be seen within the design, the notion of liminal transformation is inherent on both the intimate scale of the human body as well as on the larger scale of the architectural event. When the choreography is frozen within established structural moments, or when the tight rope walker is poised high above the ground, balance is the essence. And inseparable from this notion of balance is the notion of rebalance or movement. Thus, our understanding of movement is intrinsically bound to the notion of moments. By adopting an archaeological perspective, in reference to Solà-Morales, we can gain a better understanding of the importance of process in the construction and ongoing function of the design.

The movement within the design proposal is thus twofold. The physical movement of the structures which parallel the deconstructive and reconstructive processes of the body are in reaction to the various available stimuli: multiple programs, sites, and events or moments of performance. The evolutionary movement which is the essence of history, chronicles the transformation of the architectural structures by augmentation or replacement. Each structure harkens back to a previous architectural and performative inspiration and eventually leads back to the initial spark of the subcultural within street performance. It is at this moment of direct bodily interaction where the leap from the human body to the architectural body is achieved. This connection can be seen in the Greek transformation of ritual into architecture. Architecture was first inspired as an analogous frame for the ritual of the body's movements through performance. In a parallel manner, the initial architectural moments are in reaction to the movements of the street

performers. Each performative moment coupled with its architectural reaction, thus, assists in further folding multiple realities upon realities, enriching the dialogue of the liminal to a constant process of becoming.

The constant process of becoming, as suggested by Deleuze, is a condition of the "middle." Based on this statement, the 'beginning' is not really a beginning, and the 'end' is not really an end, but both are two moments that are extracted out of a multifold historical dialogue. It was necessary to theorize within the design in relation to the extended picture. The conditions of the design were extracted out of the broader framework of both architectural and performative histories, and expanding outwards even further, within the general context of culture that incorporates both of these elements. Through an observed evolution of philosophical thought as well as cultural examples within architecture and performance, evolutionary movement is observed as a result of an intertwined dialogue between the established cultures and the less established subcultures. The essence of the liminal, the condition of a 'fructile chaotic' threshold where anything is possible and which is found most often within subcultures, is the driving force behind the continual process of becoming.

The constant process of becoming can also be interpreted in relation to one's perspective. As one thinker shooting arrows in the air, my design proposal is one potential history within the public spaces of Ottawa amongst a multitude of possibilities. The nature of history can also be viewed in relation to this perspective, as often, a theory re-interpreted by another thinker, architect and/or performer takes on a different life. In the various perspectives of becoming, it is the embracement of multiplicity and movement that allows "folding, unfolding and refolding" the old and the familiar into the new and strange.

**Appendix A: Site Documentation**

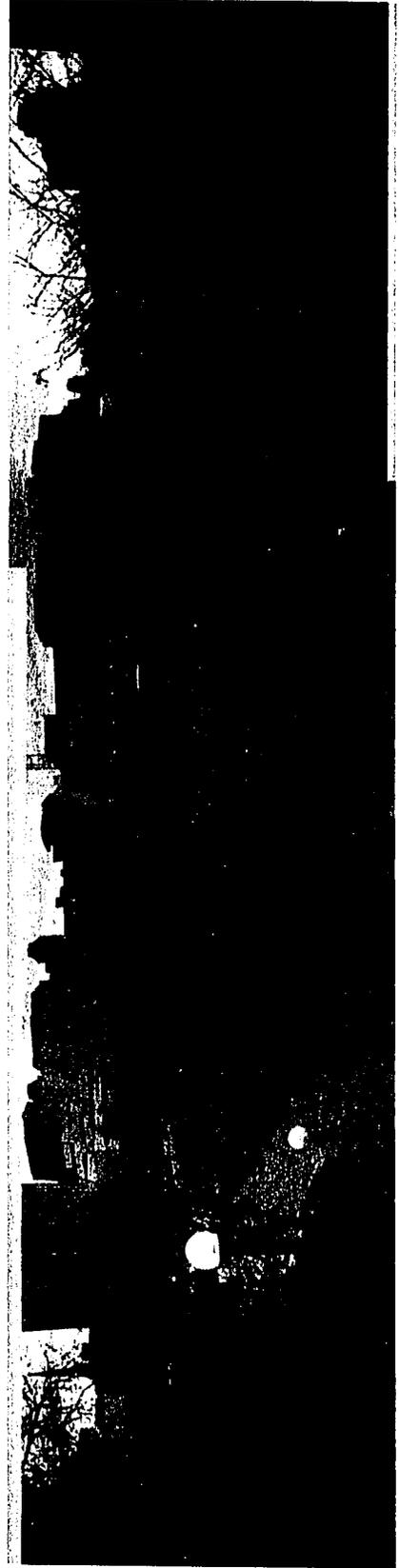
**Site Plan 1:4000**



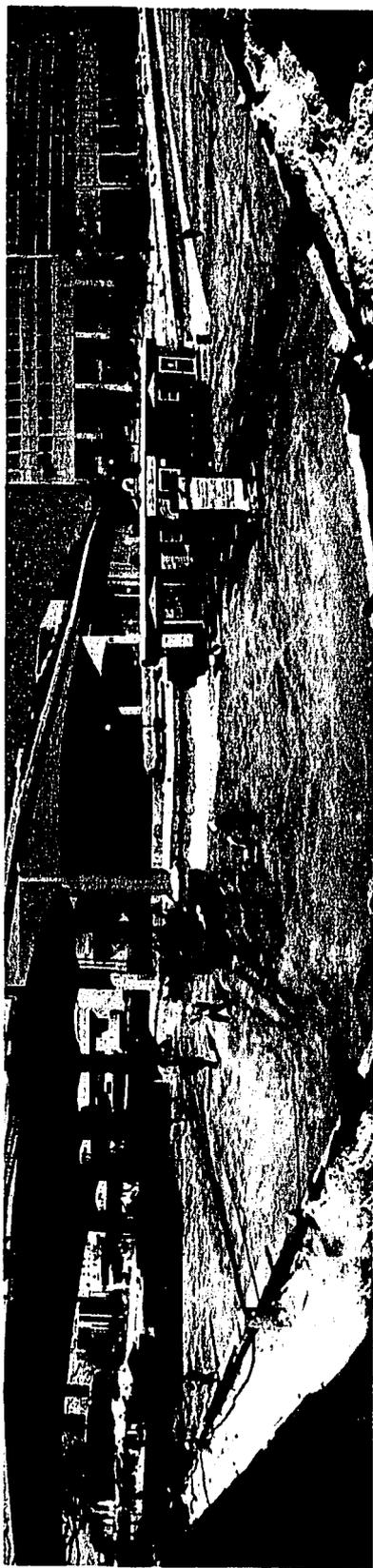
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**Appendix A: Site Documentation**

**A.1 Rideau Canal: During the summer**

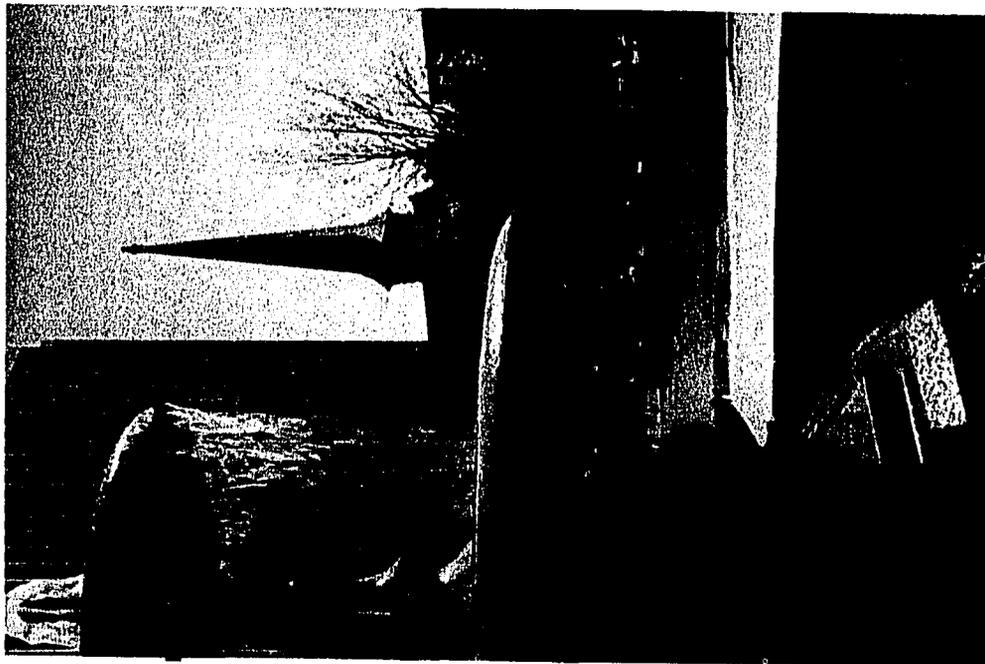
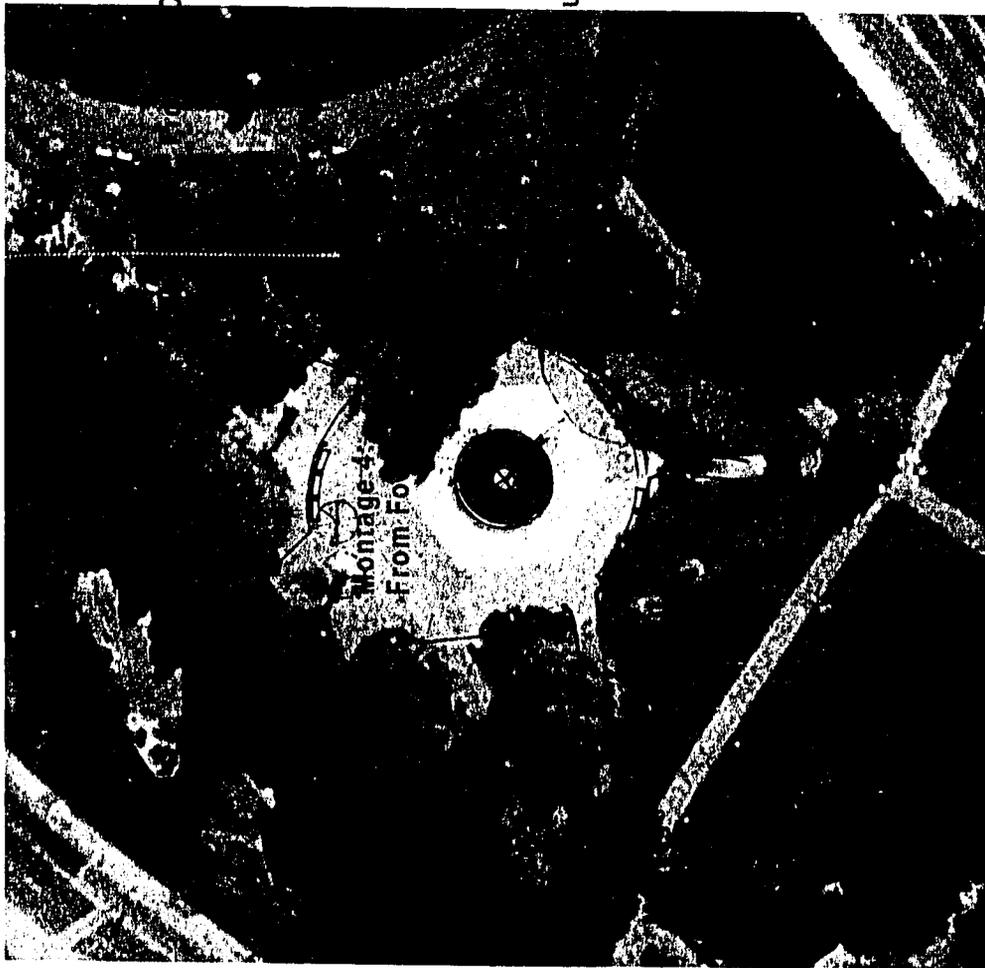


**Appendix A: Site Documentation**  
**A.1 Rideau Canal: During the winter**



**Appendix A: Site Documentation**

**A.2 Confederation Park 1:1000**



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**Appendix A: Site Documentation**

**A.2 Confederation Park**

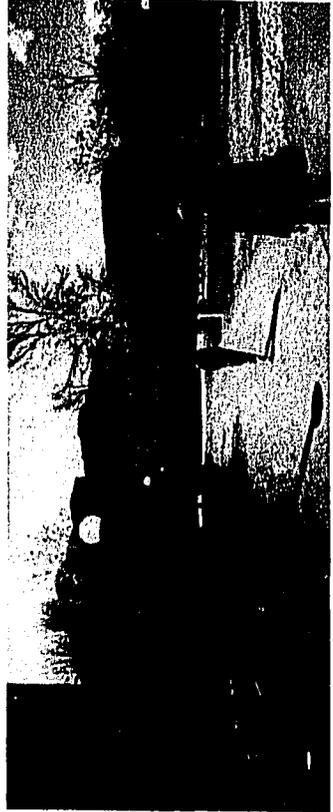
**Montage 1:**



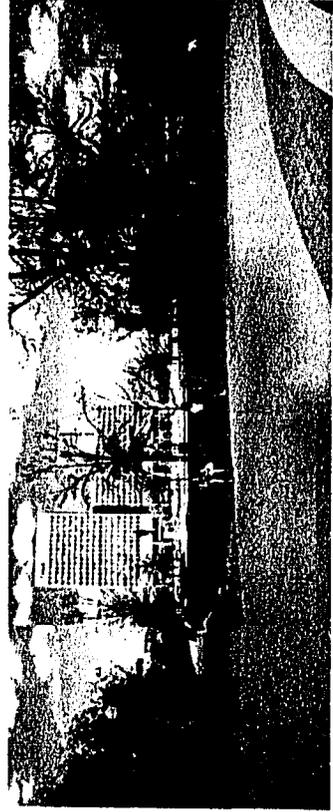
**Montage 2:**



**Montage 3:**



**Montage 4:**



## Appendix A: Site Documentation

### A.3 City Hall Festival Plaza

#### Bluesfest 2004



#### Winterfest 2004



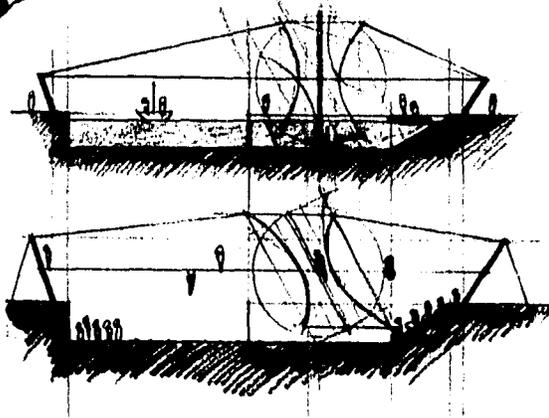
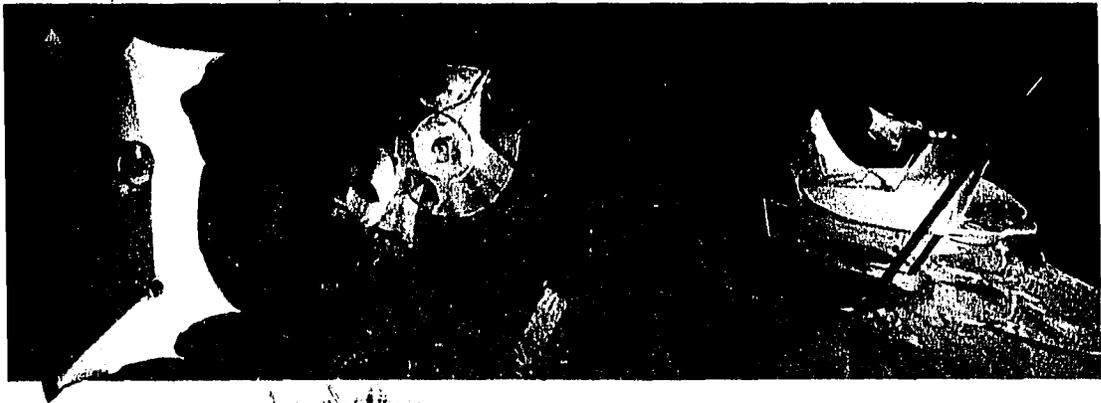
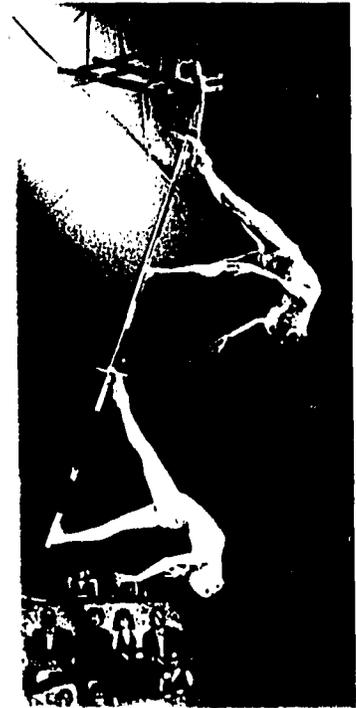
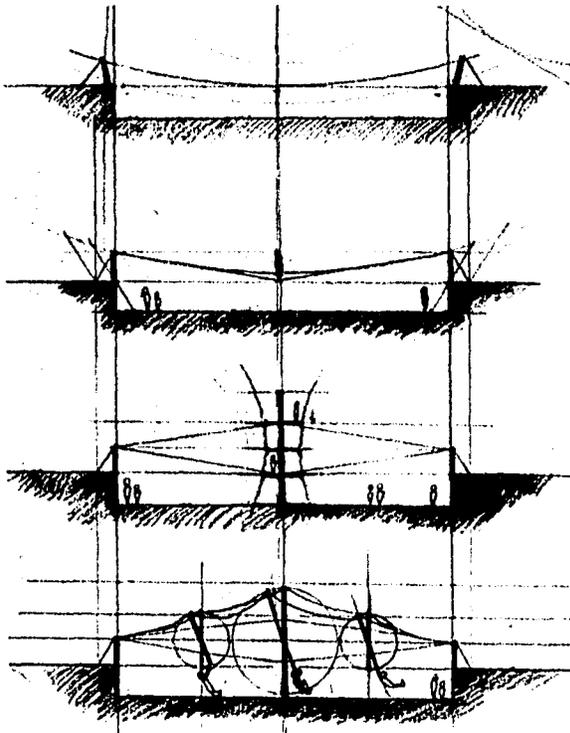
**Appendix A: Site Documentation**

**A.3 City Hall Festival Plaza**



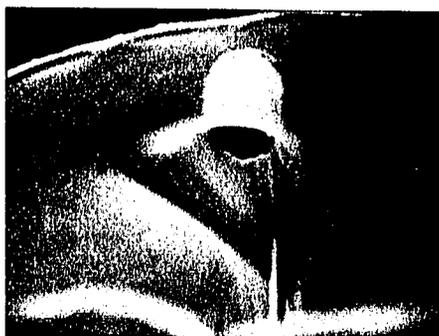
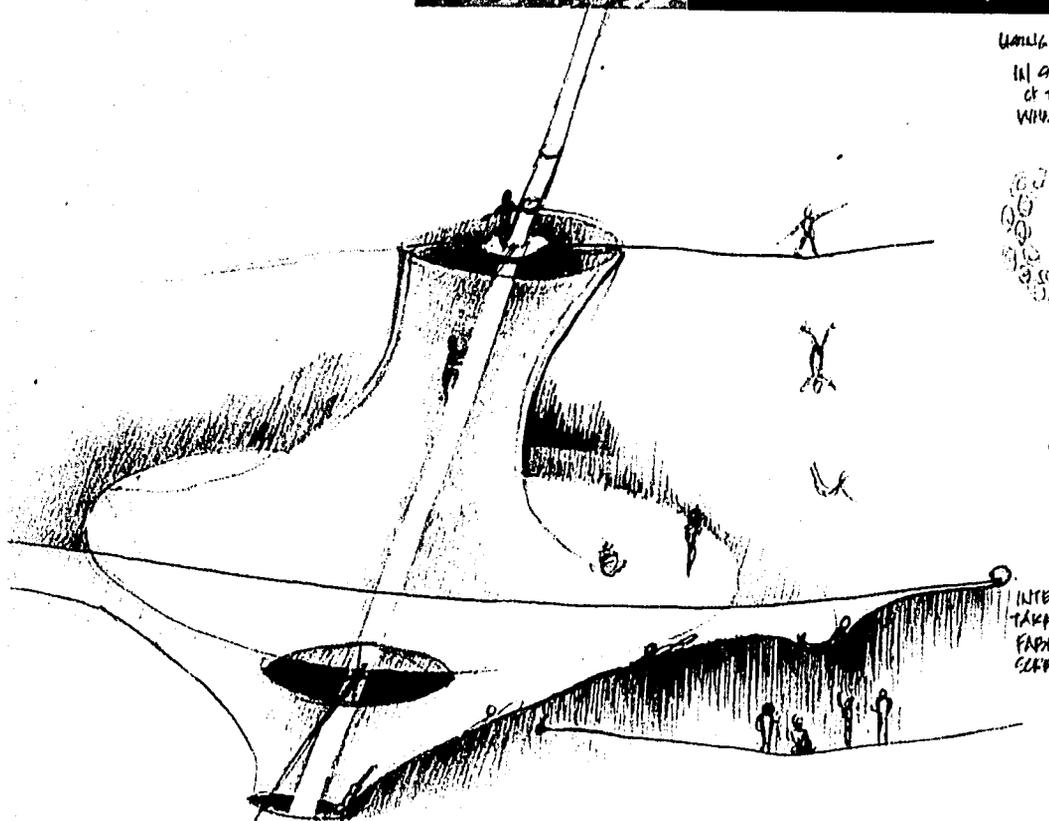
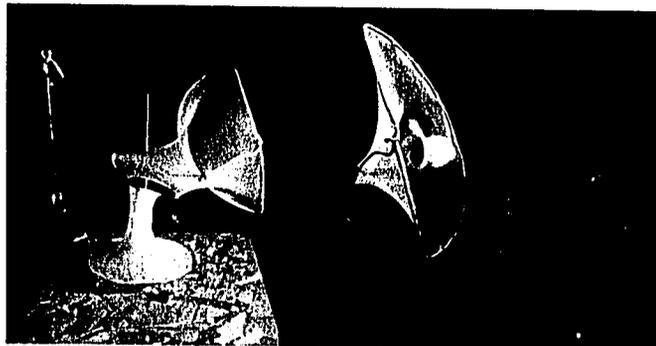
## Appendix B: Design Process Work

### B.1 Rideau Canal Evolution



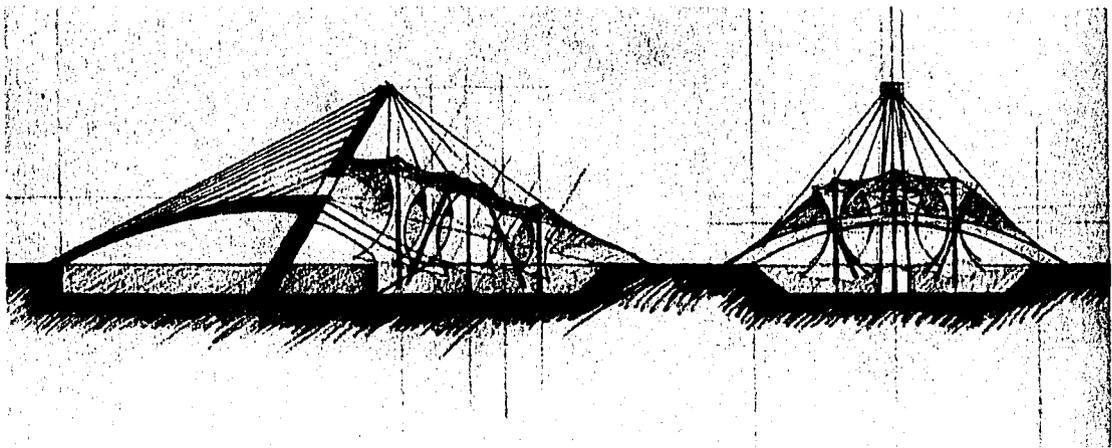
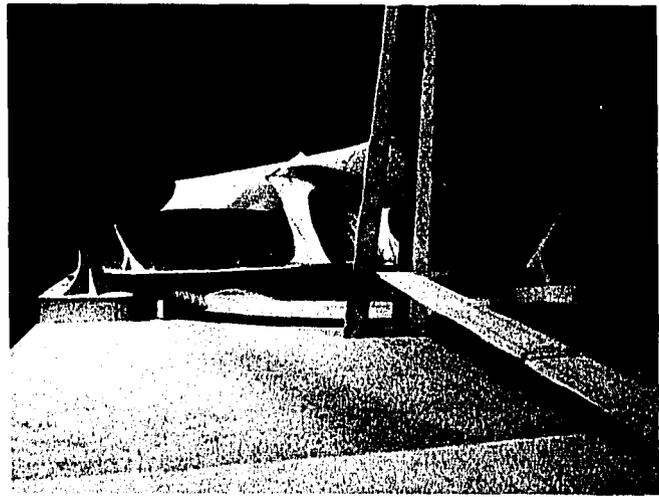
# Appendix B: Design Process Work

## B.1 Rideau Canal Evolution



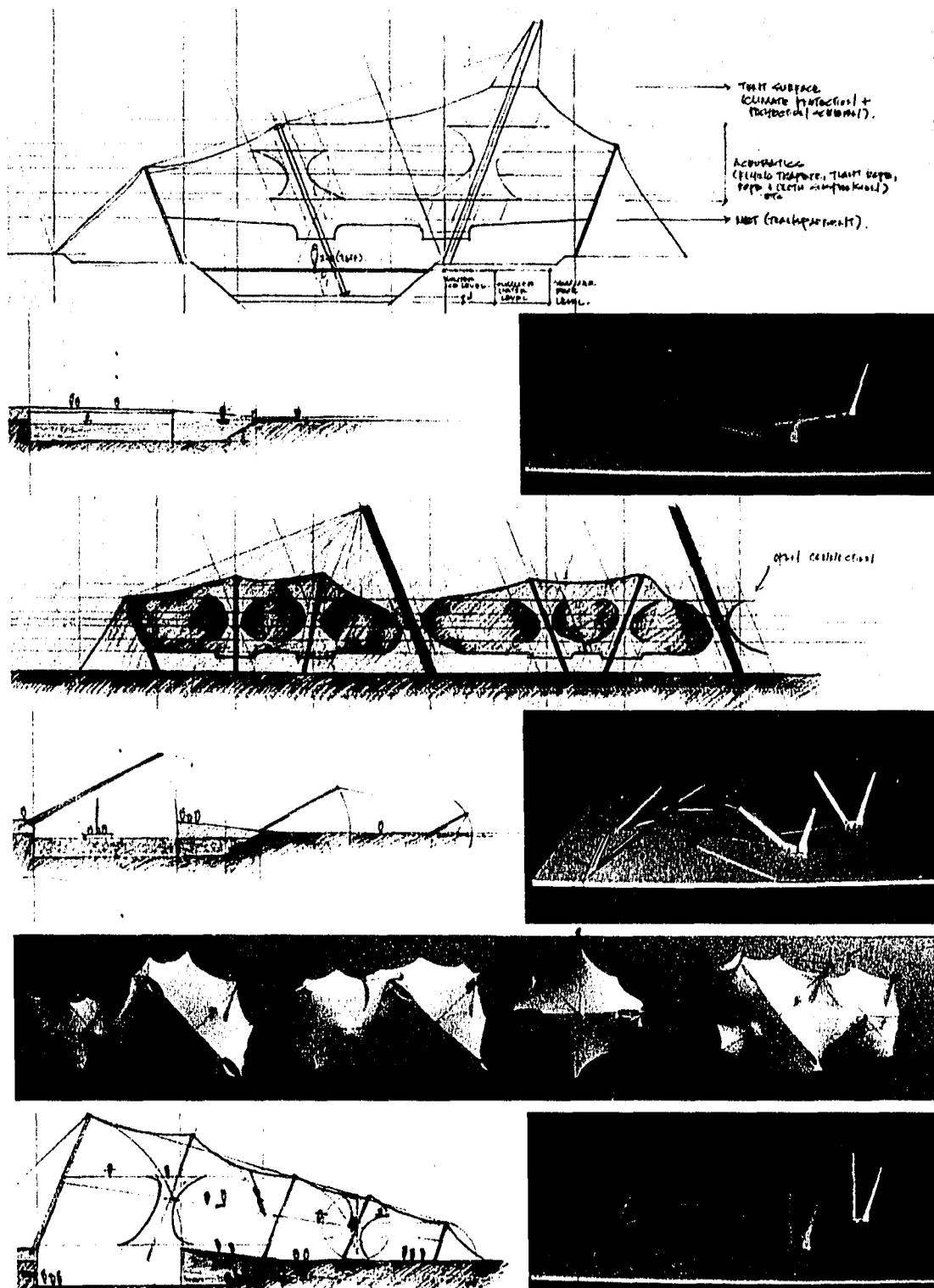
# Appendix B: Design Process Work

## B.1 Rideau Canal Evolution



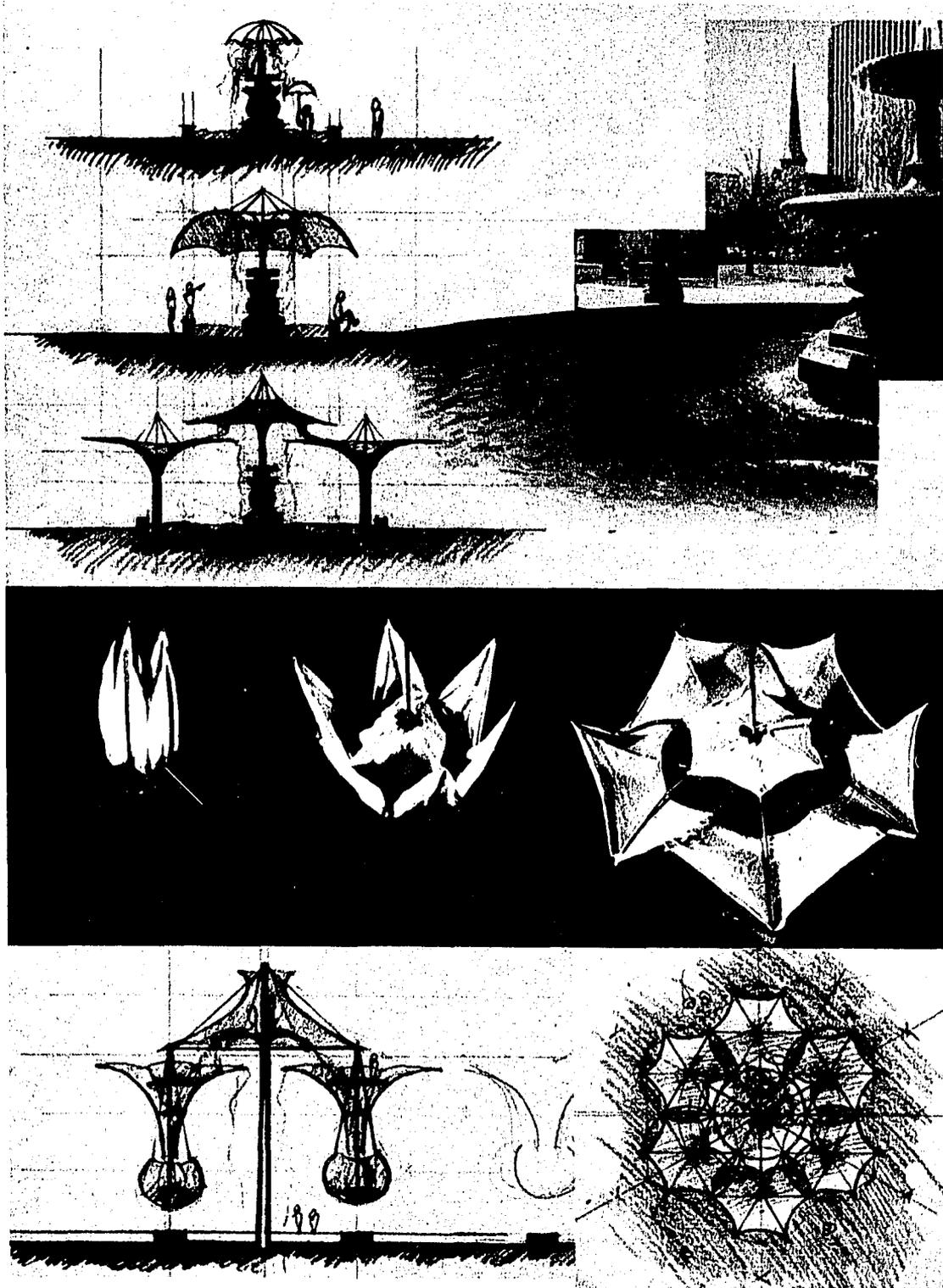
# Appendix B: Design Process Work

## B.1 Rideau Canal Evolution



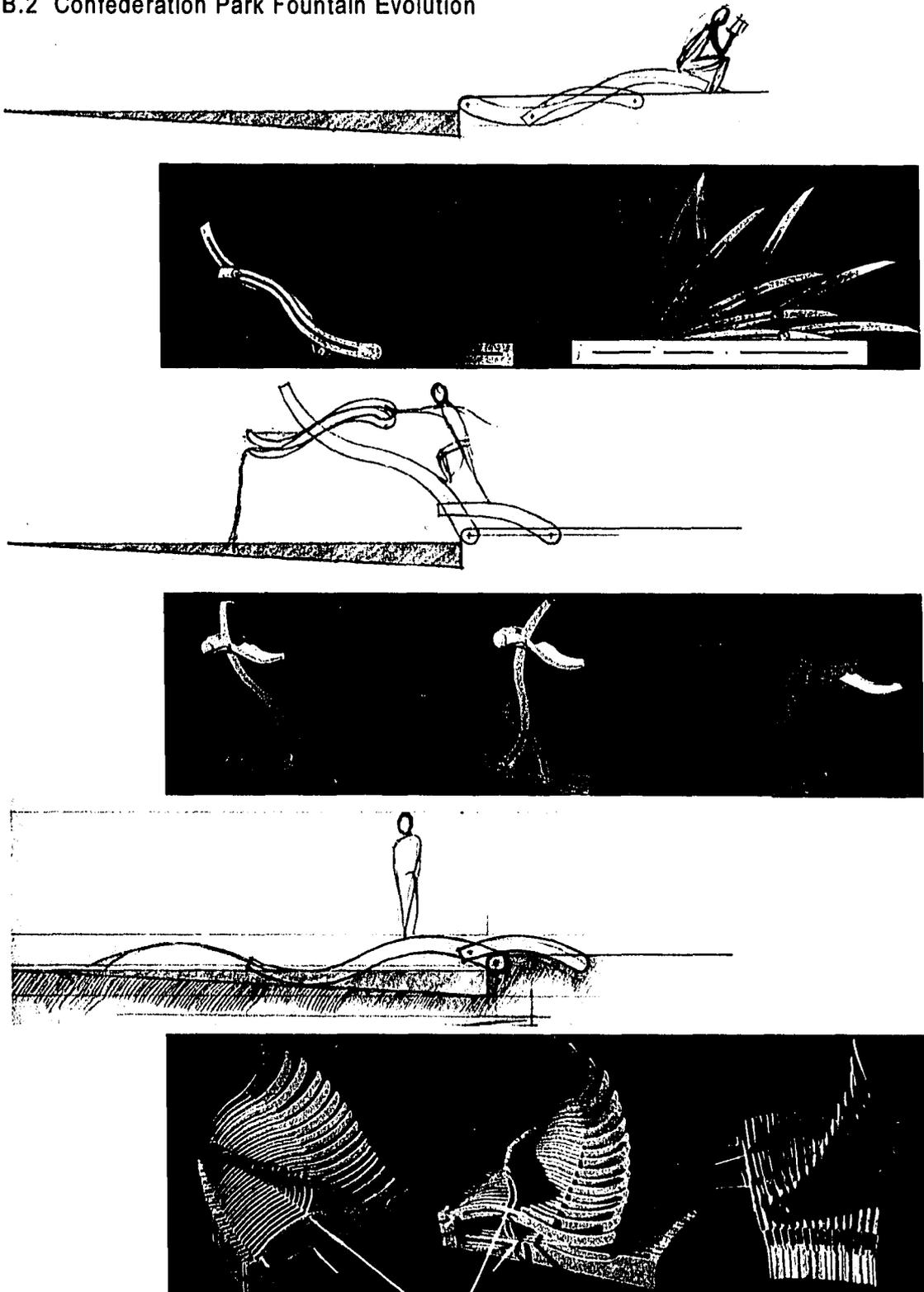
### Appendix B: Design Process Work

#### B.2 Confederation Park Fountain Evolution



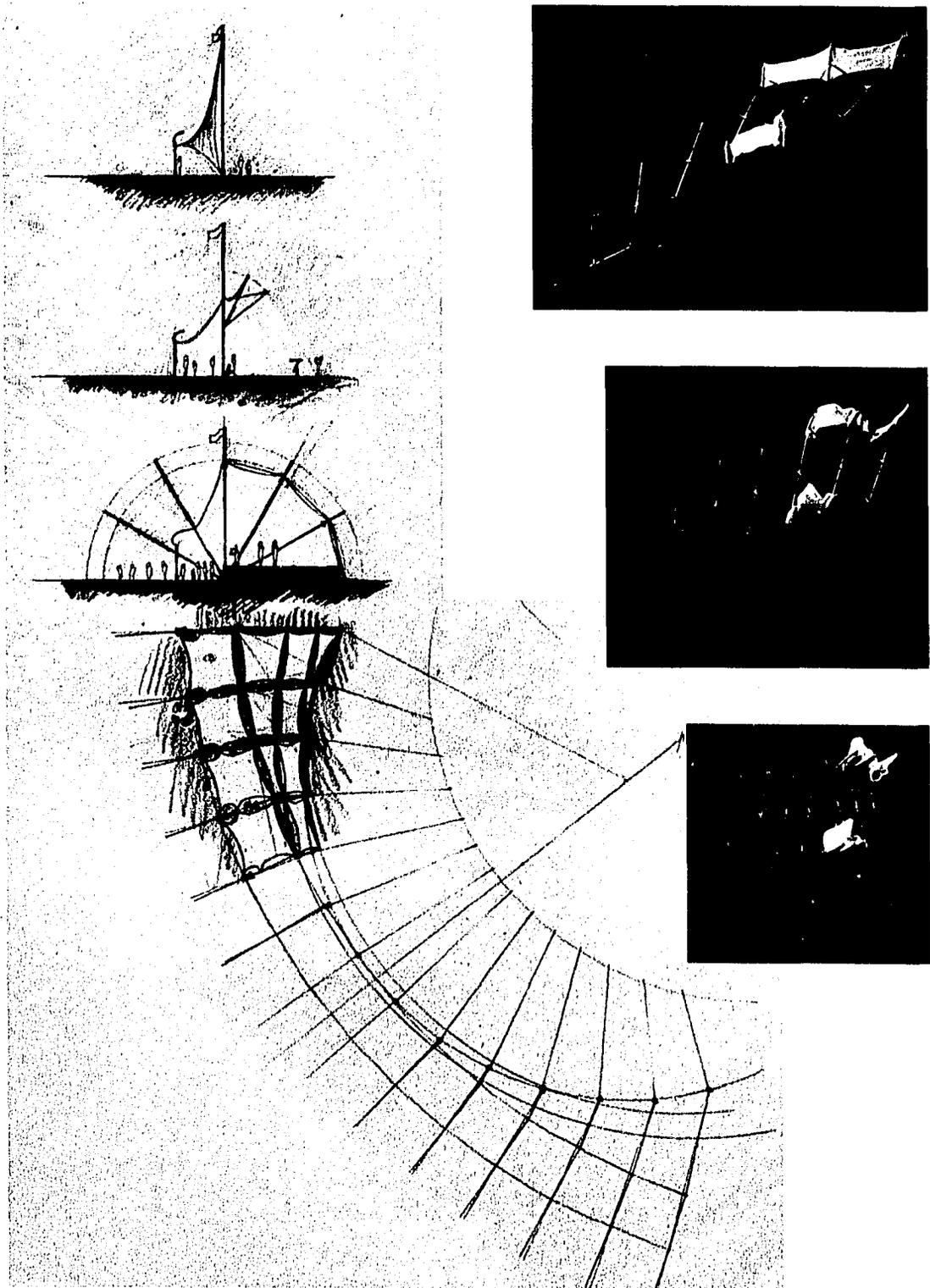
## Appendix B: Design Process Work

### B.2 Confederation Park Fountain Evolution



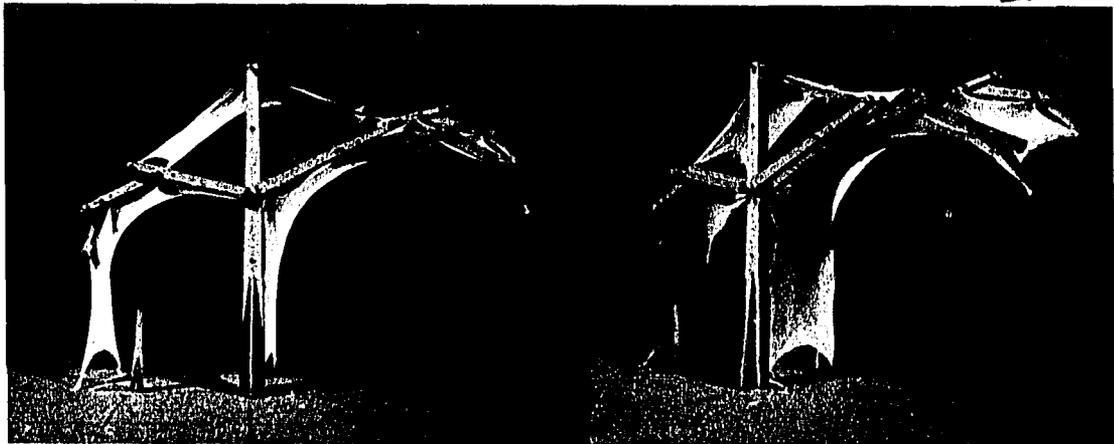
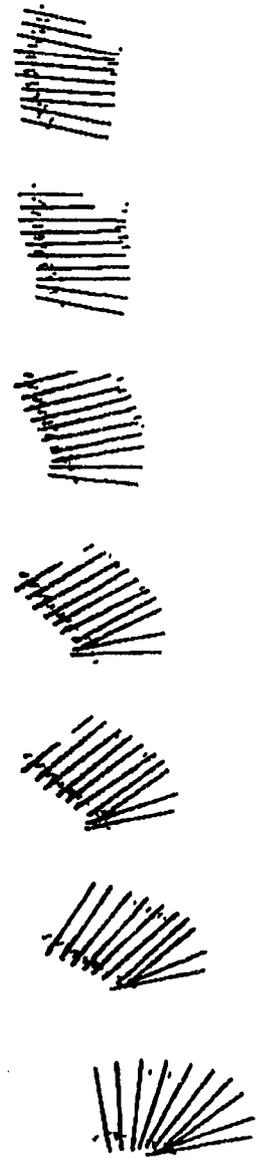
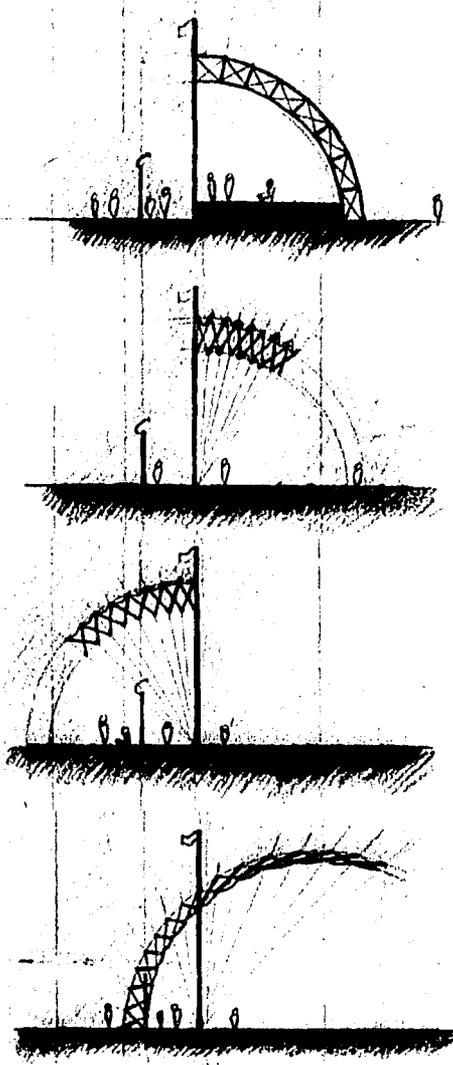
**Appendix B: Design Process Work**

**B.3 City Hall Festival Plaza Evolution**



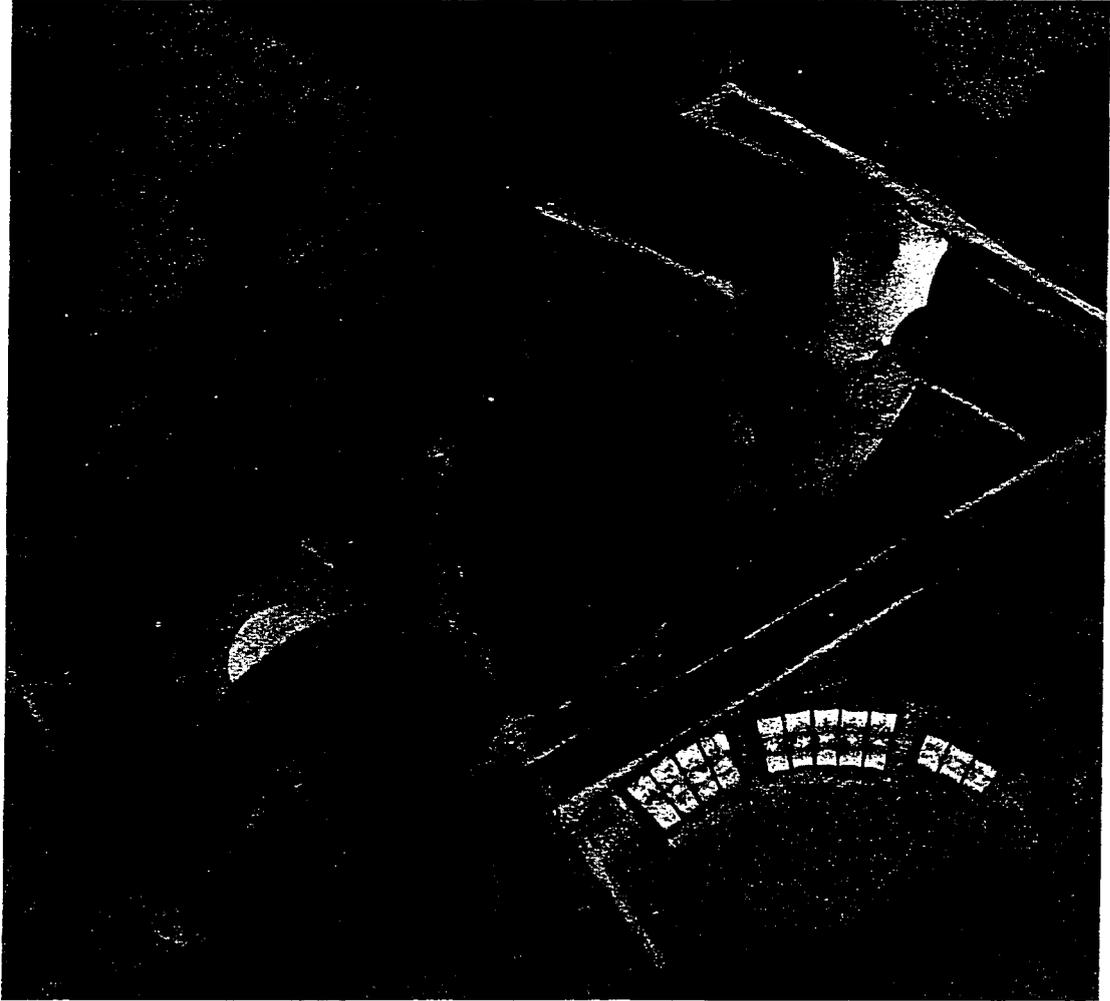
### Appendix B: Design Process Work

#### B.3 City Hall Festival Plaza Evolution



**Appendix C: Final Design**

Site Plan 1:2500



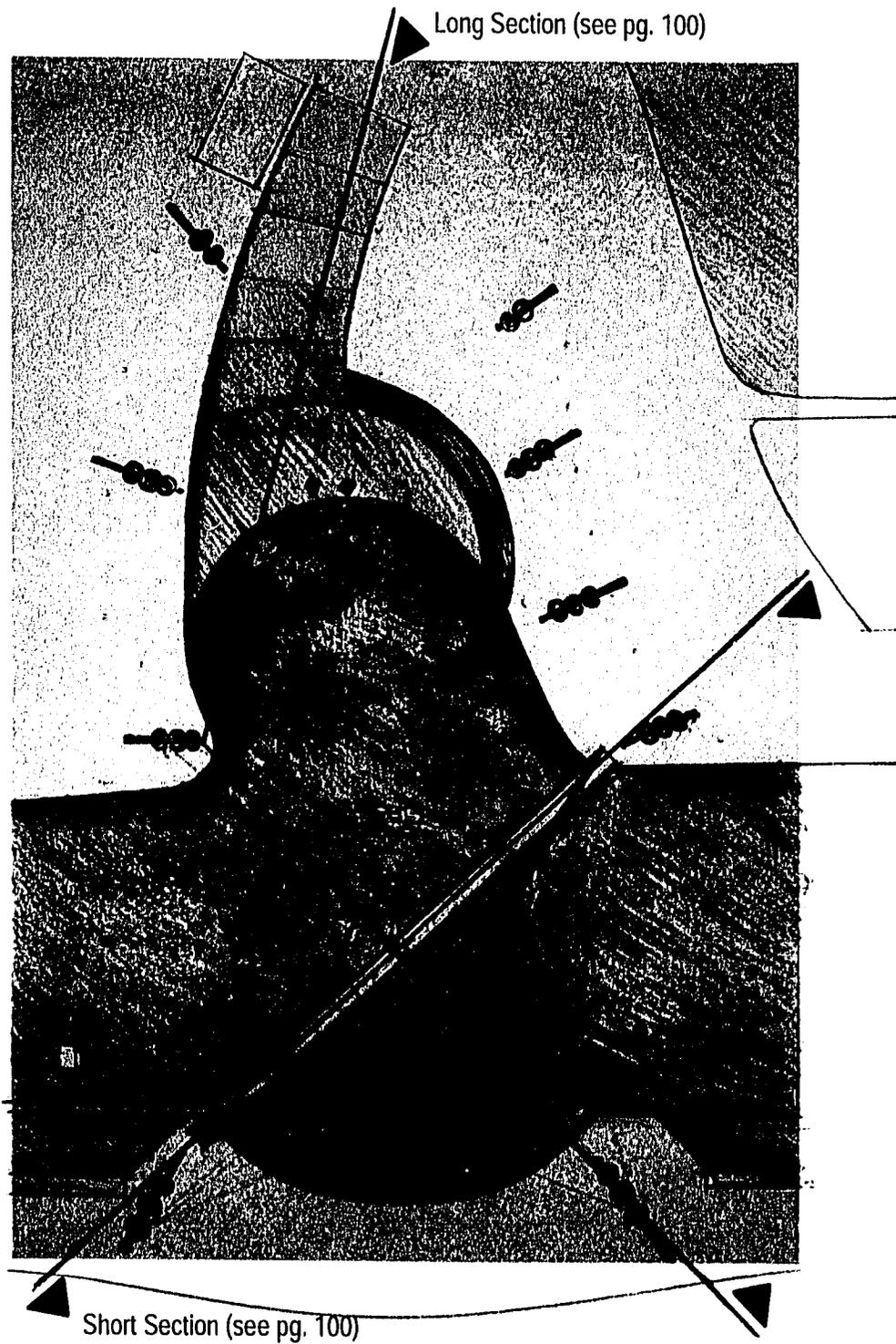
**Confederation Park  
Fountain**

**Rideau Canal**

**City Hall  
Festival Plaza**

Appendix C: Final Design

C.1 Summer Ground Plan (without exterior skin)



## Appendix C: Final Design

## C.1 Rideau Canal Plan 1:500



## Appendix C: Final Design

### C.1 Rideau Canal: Plan 1:500



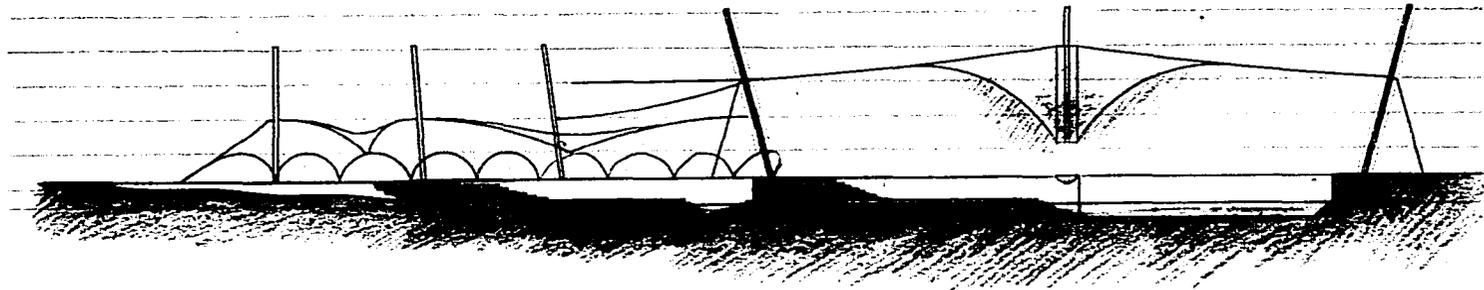
Appendix C: Final Design

C.1 Roof Plan 1:500

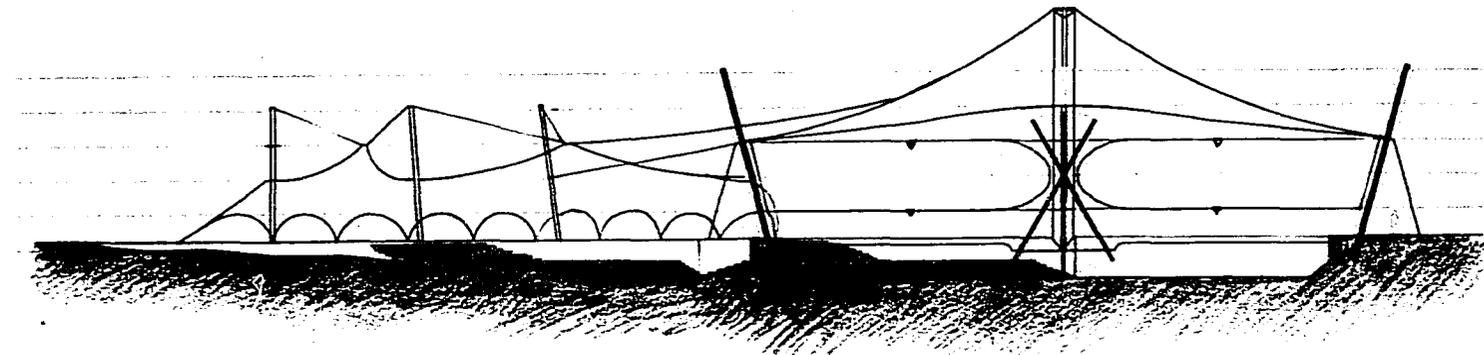


Appendix C: Final Design

C.1 Rideau Canal: Long Section 1:500



Summer Section showing bridge in lowered position

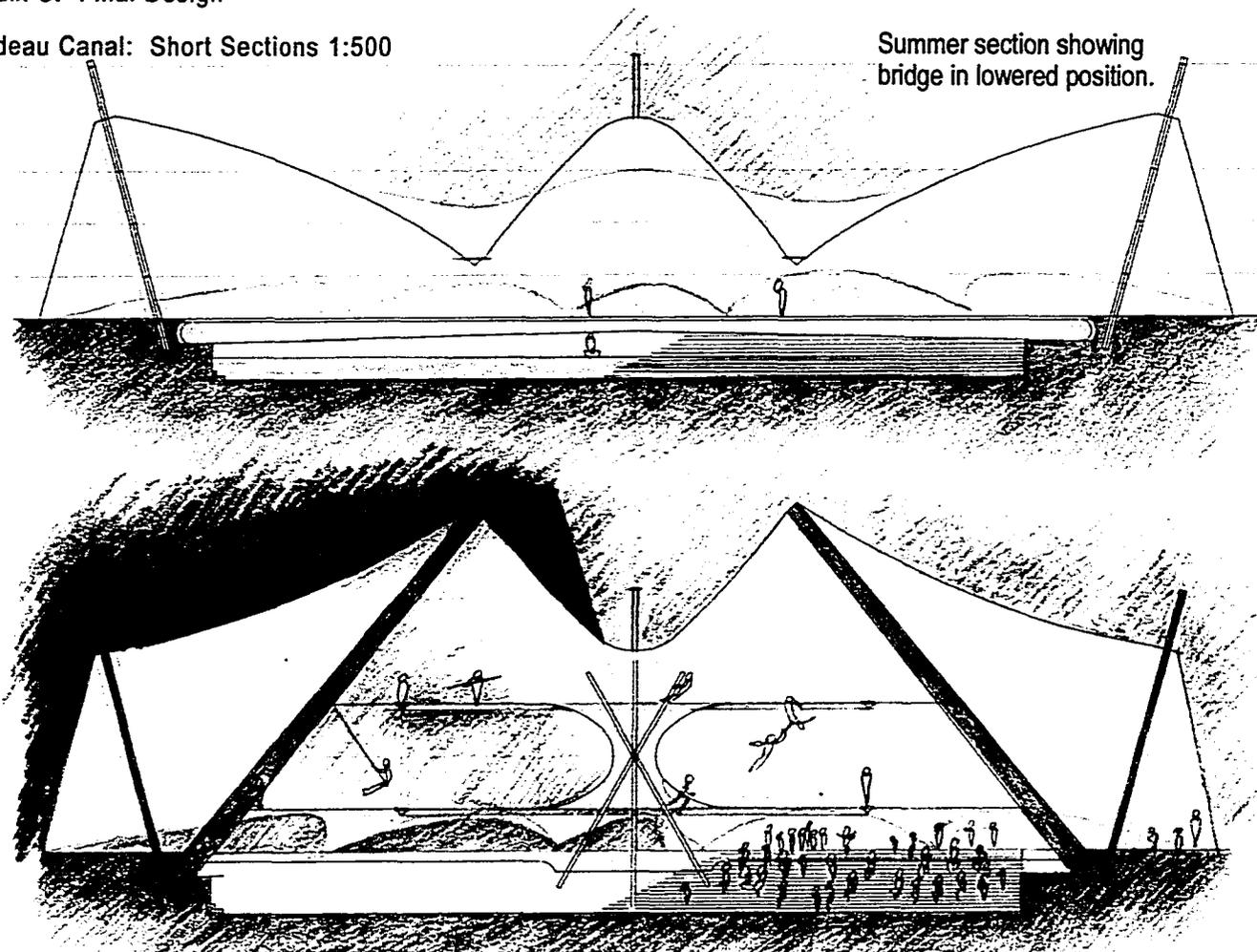


Winter Section showing bridge in upper position supporting performance structure and cabling

Appendix C: Final Design

C.1 Rideau Canal: Short Sections 1:500

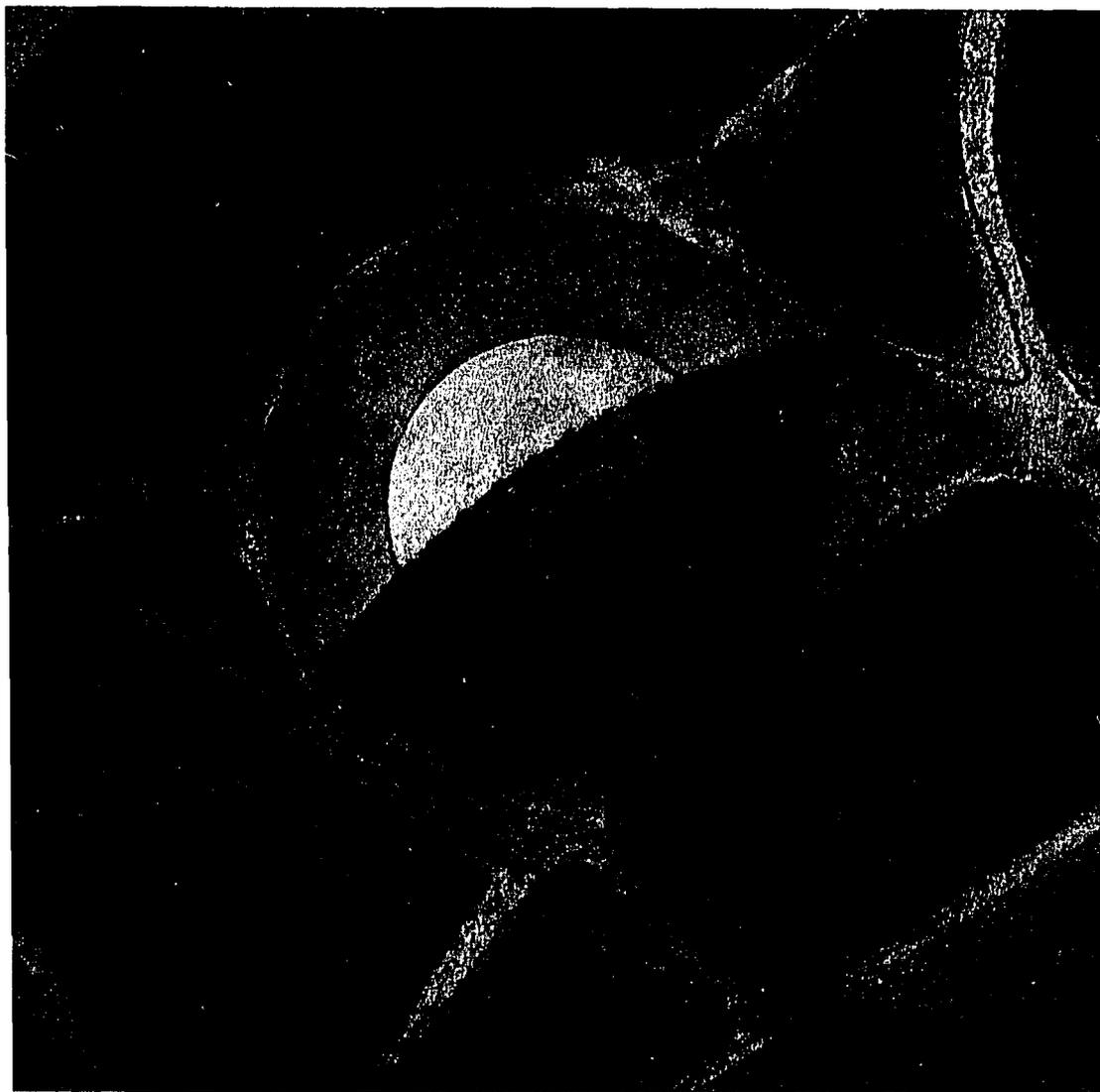
Summer section showing bridge in lowered position.



Winter Section showing bridge in upper position supporting performance structure and cabling

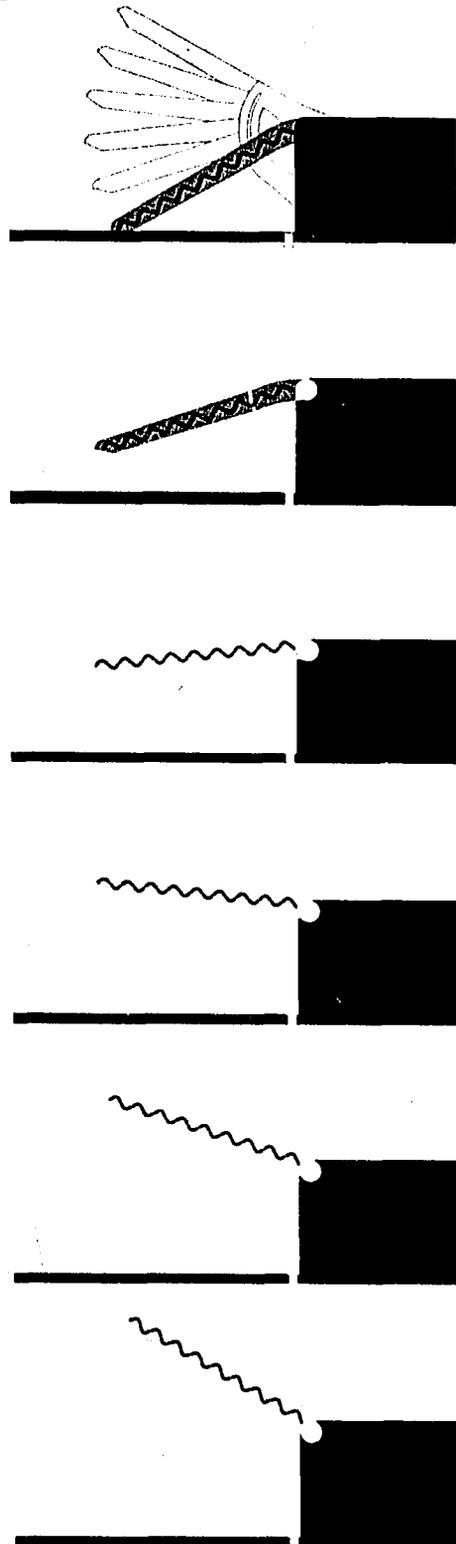
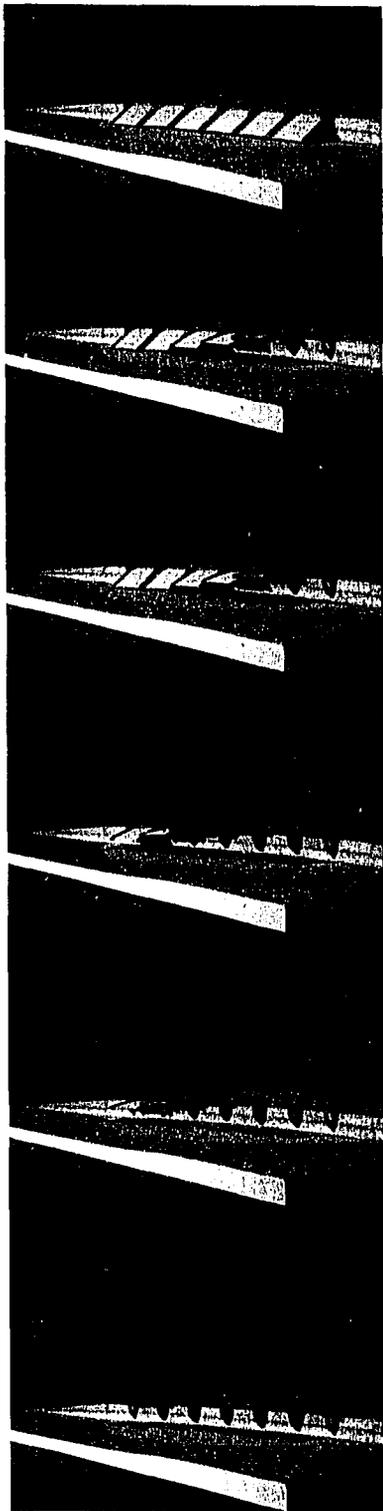
## Appendix C: Final Design

### C.2 Fountain Plan



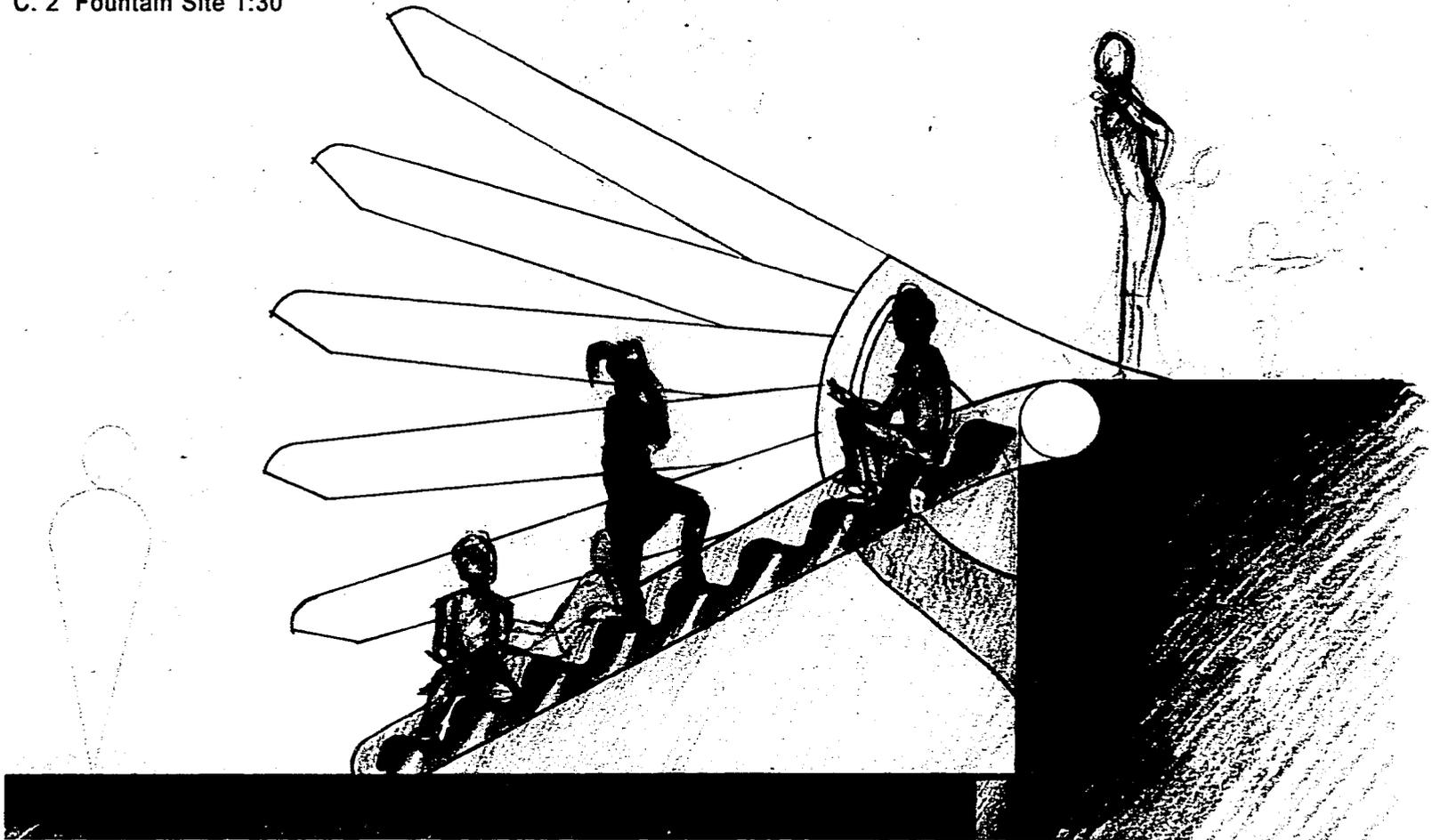
Appendix C: Final Design

C.2 Fountain: Movement Sections and Vignettes



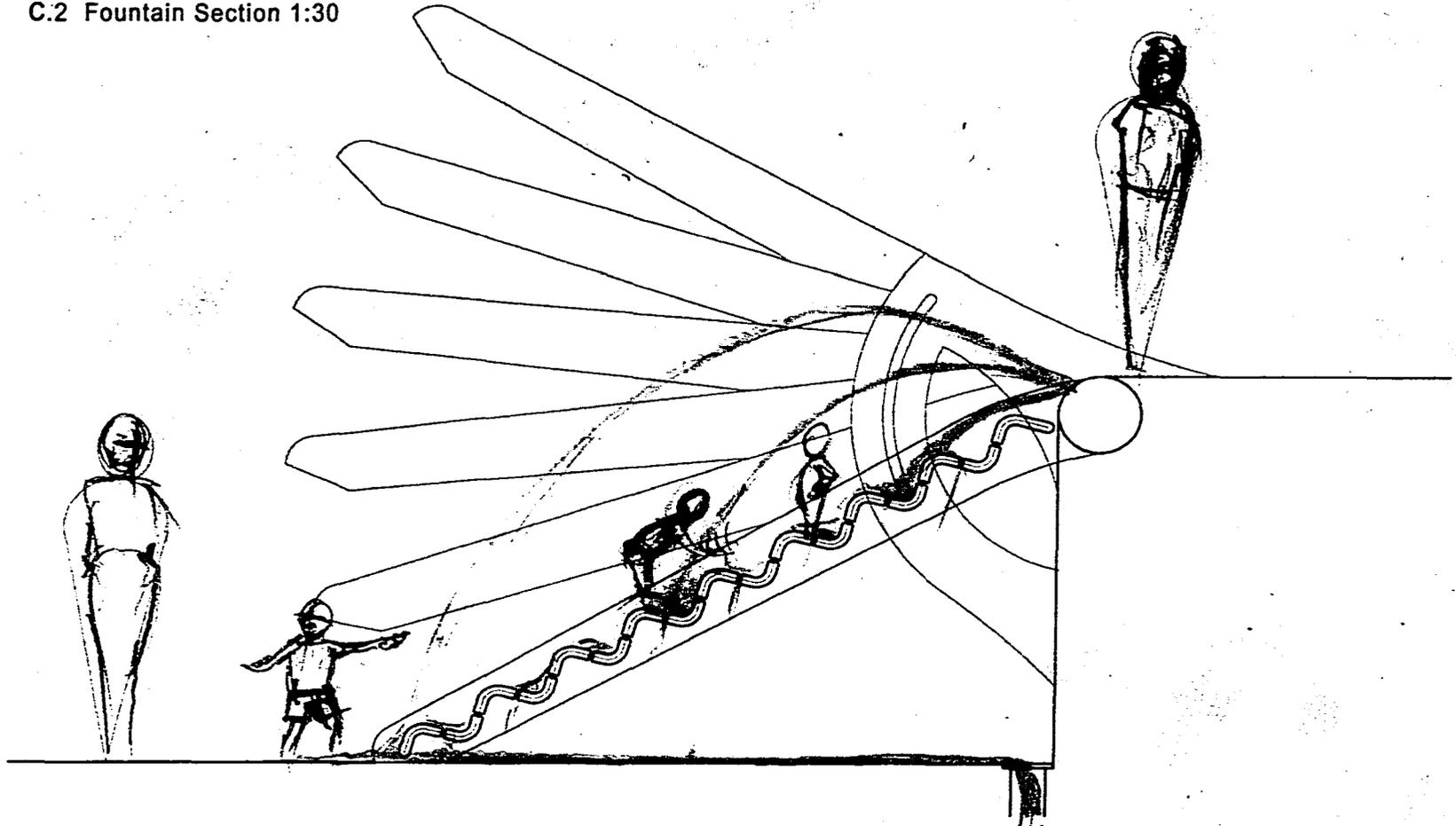
Appendix C: Final Design

C. 2 Fountain Site 1:30



Section showing structure in down position.  
Structure acts as seating as well as vertical access.

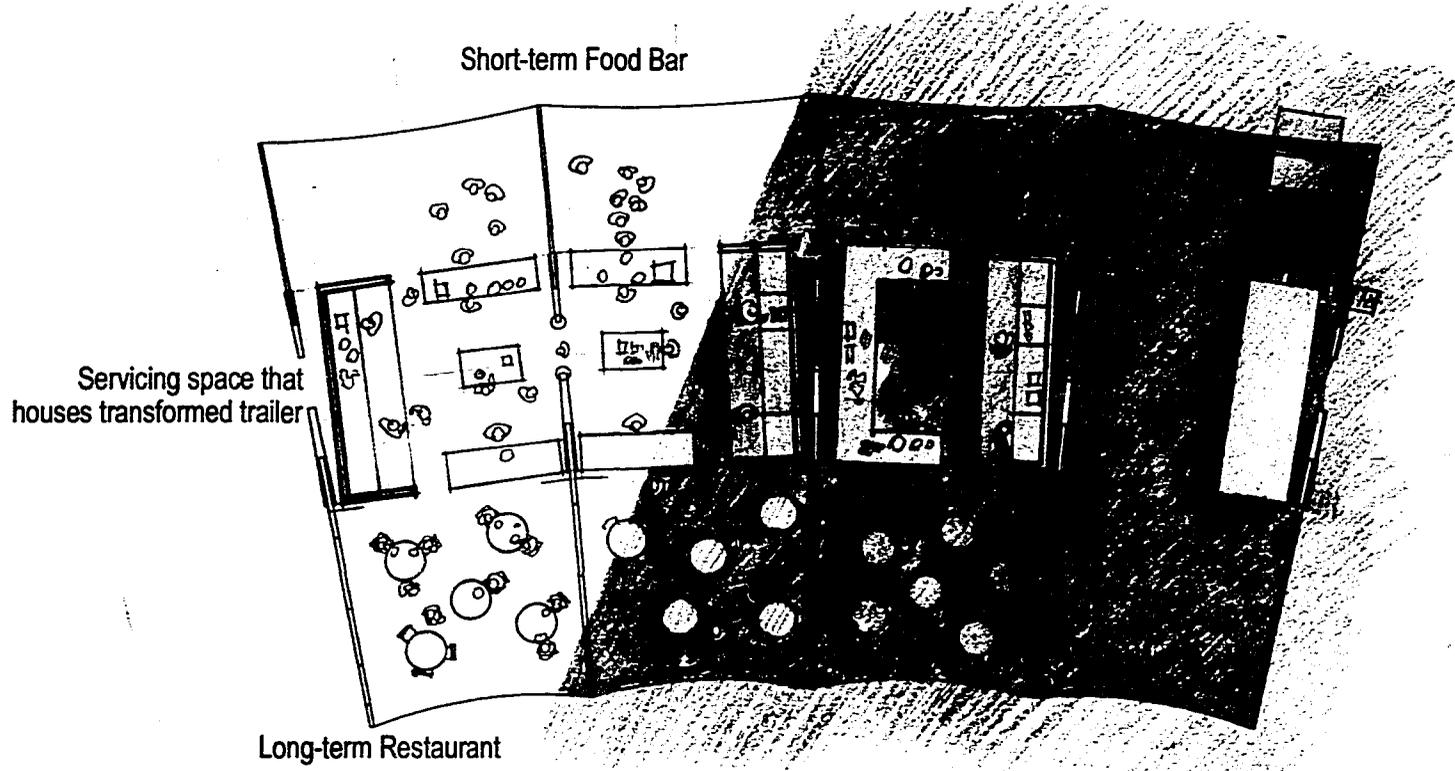
Appendix C: Final Design  
C.2 Fountain Section 1:30



At certain times of the day, the structure becomes a fountain.  
The site has the potential to transform into a temporary water park.

### Appendix C: Final Design

#### C. 3 City Hall: Restaurant Plan 1:200

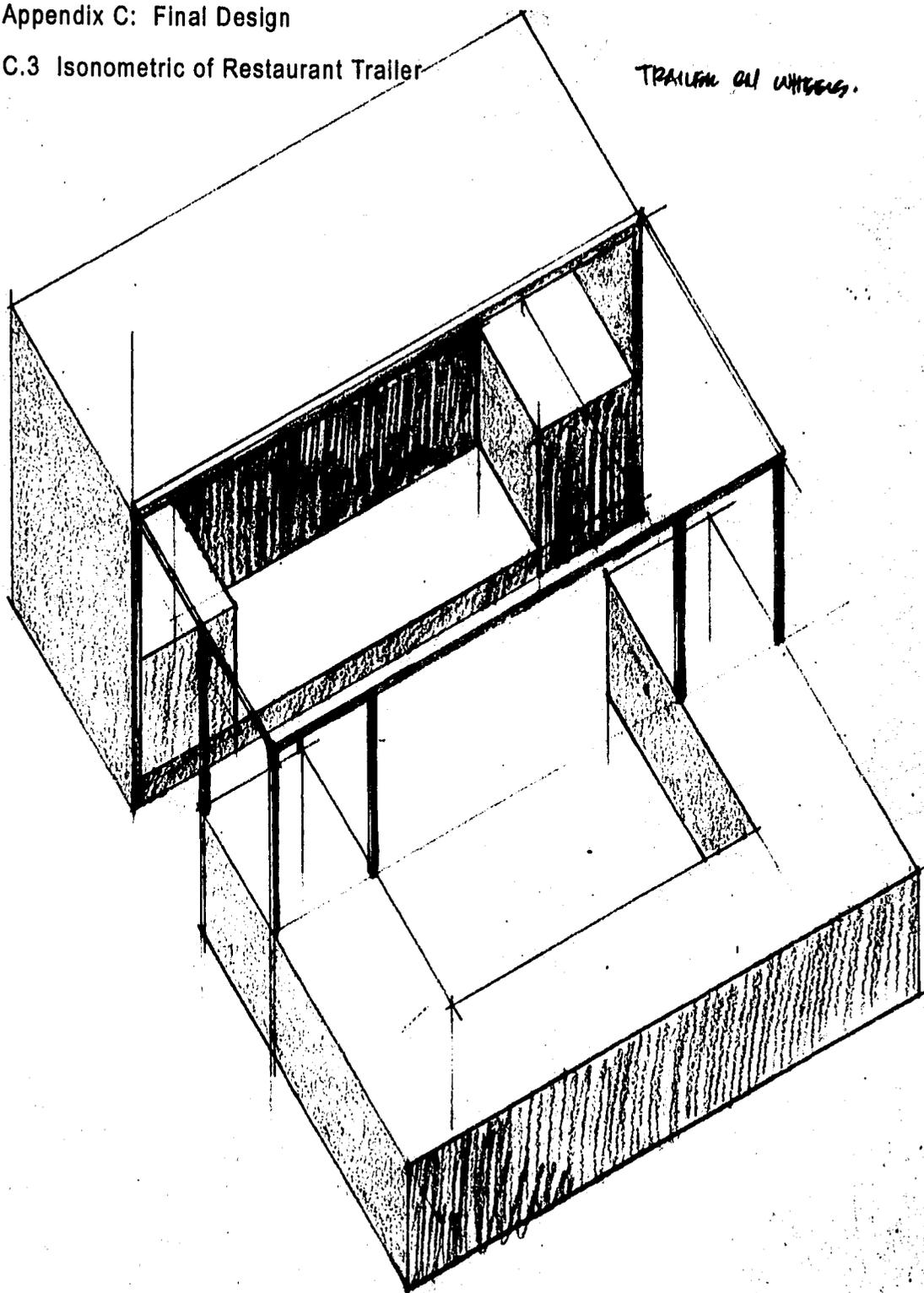


Section shows the transformation of a trailer into a temporary restaurant. The path is transformed into servicing area for the restaurant. The inside of the curve is used for long term customers while the opposite side is used as a short-term food bar. See next page for details of the restaurant trailer in its opened position.

Appendix C: Final Design

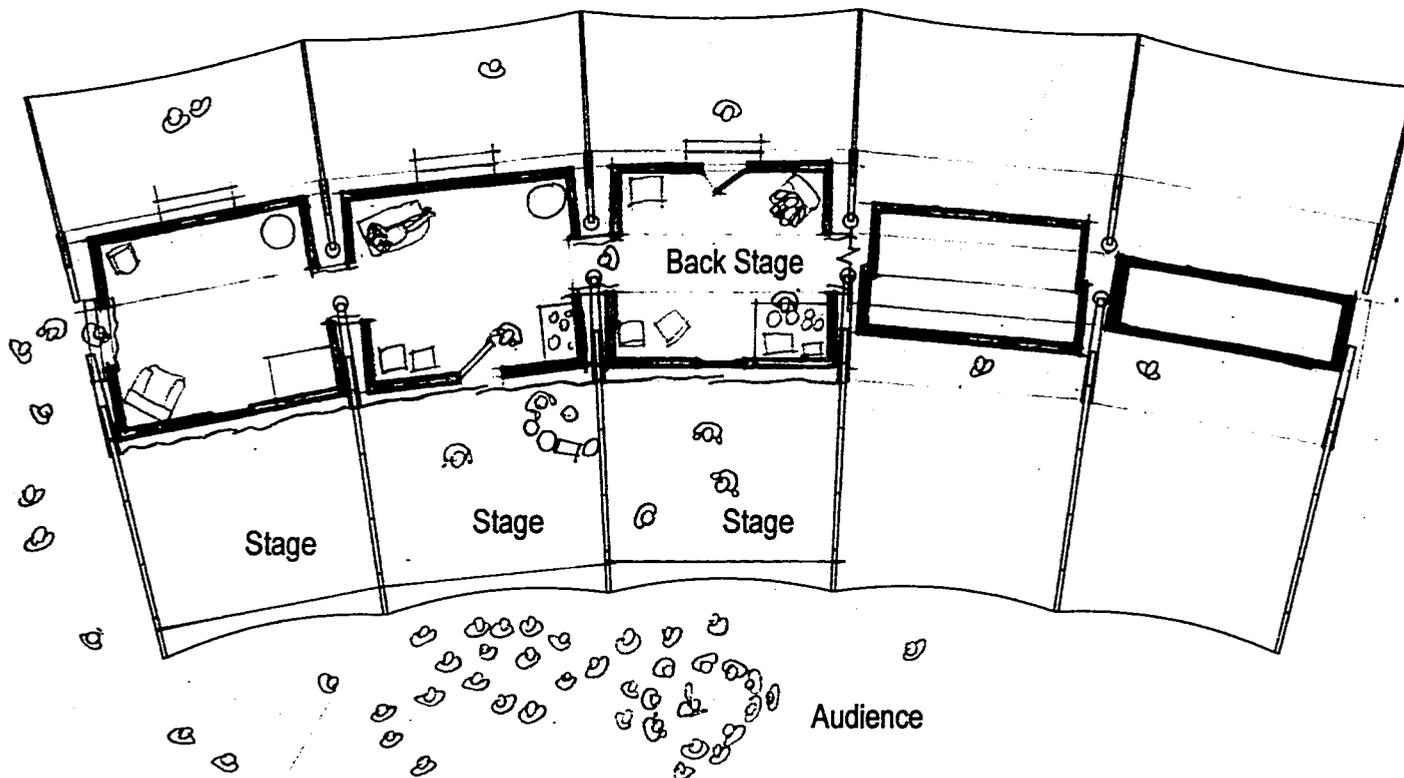
C.3 Isonometric of Restaurant Trailer

TRAILER ON WHEELS.

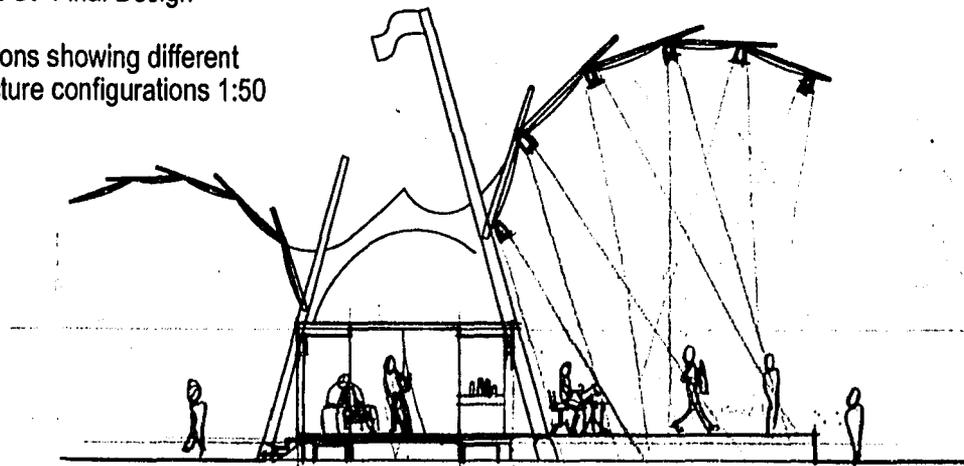


### Appendix C: Final Design

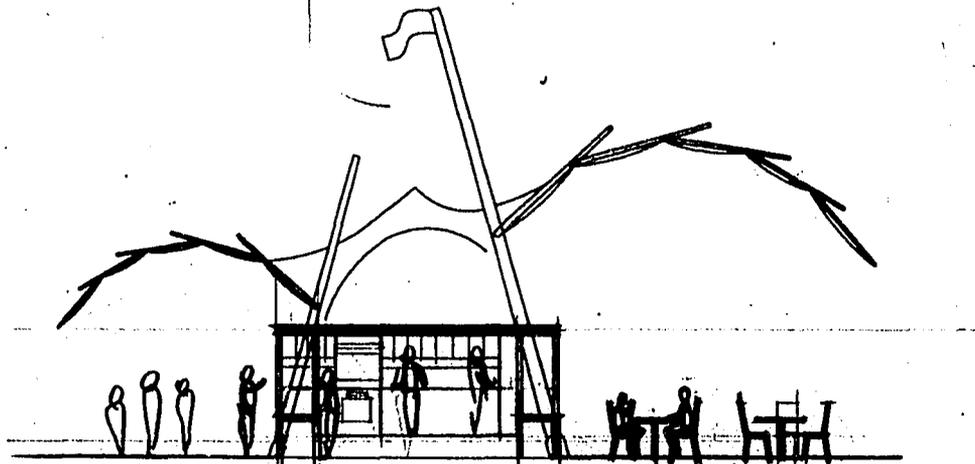
#### C.3 City Hall: Concert Plan 1:200



Section shows the transformation of a trailer into a temporary concert space. The path is transformed into back stage for the performers.

**Appendix C: Final Design****C.3 Sections showing different structure configurations 1:50**

Section showing Concert configuration



Section showing Restaurant configuration



Section showing no activity and closed structure

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