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Gabe Hogness

**SOFT CORE**  
**COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE IN THE MADISON COMMUNITY**

Gabe Hogness

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

University of Washington

2012

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:  
Architecture



University of Washington  
2012

# **SOFT CORE**

## **A COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE SPACE IN THE MADISON VALLEY**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master Of Architecture

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Professor Nicole Huber  
Architecture

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Rob Corser  
Tom Maul  
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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

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I would also like to thank Rob Corser and Tom Maul. I don't know what I did to be in a place where such talented, intelligent, and enjoyable people offer their valuable time to talk about my cartoons - I am truly grateful.

I would also like to thank everyone who is doing their part to keep this process fun.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to Magda. You put up with me through this process and still plan on marrying me in three weeks. Wow.

## **Introduction: Book Clubs, Not Monuments**

This thesis evolved out of an interest in two topics that are closely related in my mind: the role of art and political action and the roles and boundaries of architecture and urban design in community development. While the connections between the two topics are neither simple nor immediate, they share common vein of being process-oriented and open-ended pursuits that have to be understood in terms of creating dialogue rather than providing answers.

In order to briefly unpack these complex topics, it is important to define the scope, scale and subject matter art, politics, architecture, and community. Speaking of art and politics brings to mind overwhelming scales and an immense sense of importance. Speaking of art and politics brings to mind artists, and movements like Marinetti and the Futurists or the Cubists and reframing human experience, whose manifestos supposed radically new ways of thinking about the world and a meteoric change that this thinking would bring. When speaking about art and politics, I am thinking of the roles that literature, theater, cinema, etc., can play in how we experience daily life and those around us; I am referring to a smaller and less manic scale. Literature, theater, and cinema provide us with opportunities to reflect on and reframe our thinking about the world. Community arts spaces like theaters provide us with the opportunity to work through a process of creation and production that is self-critical. They allow individuals within communities the

opportunity to participate in the production of a performance - a process that is often only experienced by those working at a professional level. In this very basic sense, art and individuals become involved at a political level. They are not campaigning or attempting to propagate a certain point of view. In participating in art forms such as community theater, people are participating in an artistic dialogue that allows for a discussion of what is important to express and discuss for themselves and their community. In this sense, community theater has the opportunity to occupy a space that professional theater and the political process often forget - it allows a community to discuss what is political for them in the first place. This could mean working producing work that ranges from staging a city wide protest to something as banal as knitting costumes for a third-grade play. These can all be both artistic and political actions that maintain a notion of audience and stage. Community theater can take many forms.

In architecture, development, and city planning, we can identify opportunities for spaces and organizations like community theaters to help define and develop community, however, we cannot force them as answers onto an unwilling community. To identify a community lacking in infrastructure and offer a black-box theater as an answer would most likely fall flat. This project is not looking to provide a prescription for social illness. Instead, it is an exercise in examining identify the strengths and potentials within a community and to work with those strengths in a manner that is both public and dialogue-based.

This project is an attempt to use the processes

and ideas of community theater, community development, and architectural design in order to develop a space that promotes public dialogue through the creative process on a neighborhood scale. It is an attempt to understand what it means for architecture to be open-ended, yet specific enough to promote a creative and public discussion. This thesis argues that there is opportunity in community theater different from that of professional theater at the community level in its attachment to a specific place and a specific set of people.

Framework

If the process of design is going to accommodate an open-ended dialogue with the specific nature of a community, the idea of community theater must also be open to discussion. While the intention is to design a theater space for a specific community, the form of the theater space is to be open-ended. The program of the theater, maps of the city and investigation into the specific aspects of the community are used as tools that mutually define each other.

First, the looks at theater and the City of Seattle through the lens of Seattle’s Urban Village development framework and US Census demographic maps in order to see how theaters, cinemas and music venues are working city and neighborhood levels. The purpose of this is to identify where these art forms are working, and where they are lacking, at the city level. This begins to draw the distinction between professional and community theaters and the spaces they occupy.

Next, I look at the community scale in the Madison/

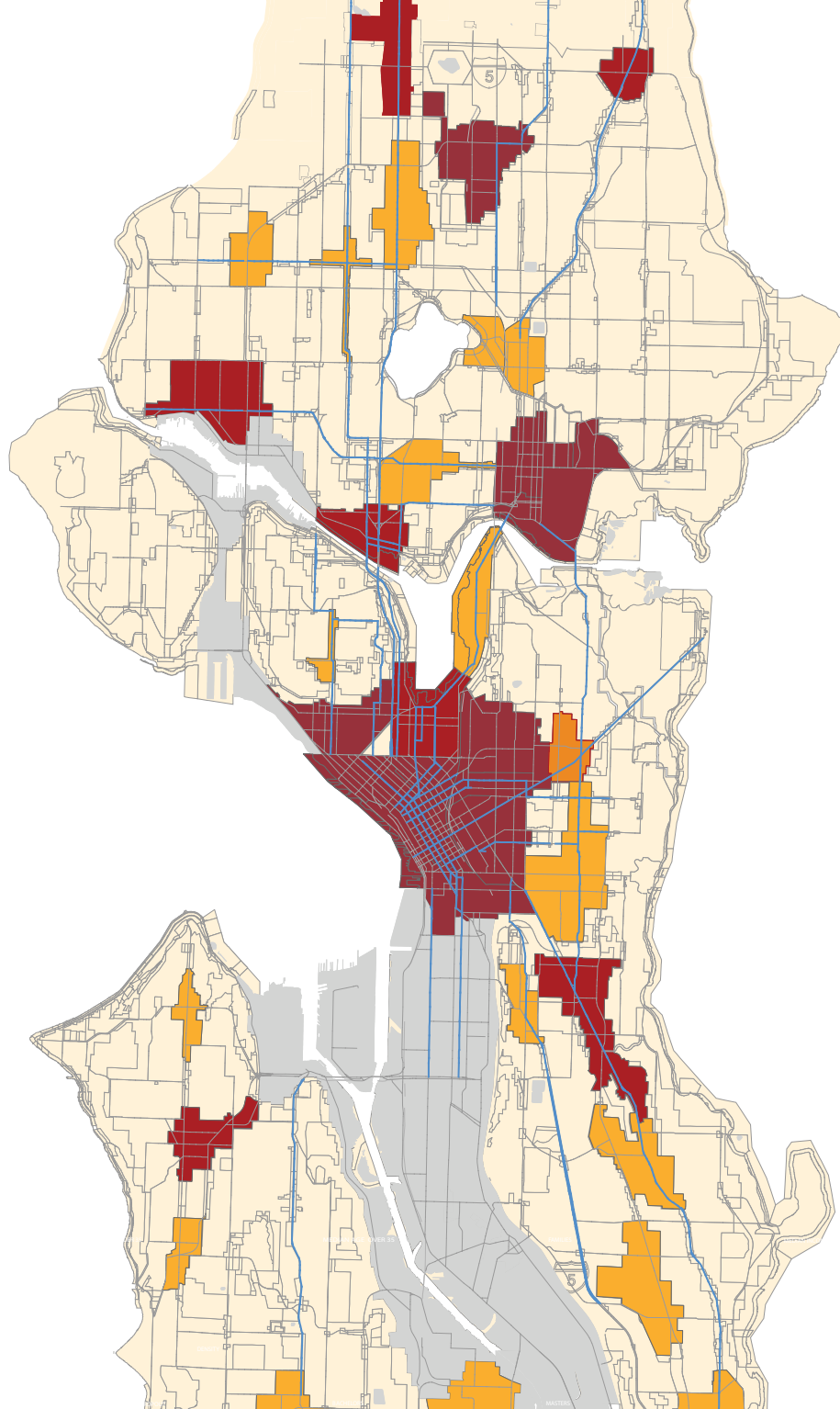
Miller neighborhood of Seattle as a specific site for community development. The Madison/Miller neighborhood is in the face of rapid development . It is an area that is both close to many urban cores and has many open and abandoned sites that are soon to be developed. It has a diverse and established population with much potential and little public infrastructure. Through identifying specific groups and characteristics active within the community, the project then begins to develop a program for a community theater that would be active beyond the confines of the building. By introducing shop spaces for manufacturing and retail into the building that are not solely tied to the theater space, the project begins to develop a program that reflects its surrounding community. These mapping exercises and community investigation become the foundation for an exploration of a building type that would facilitate community theater in the Madison/Miller neighborhood.

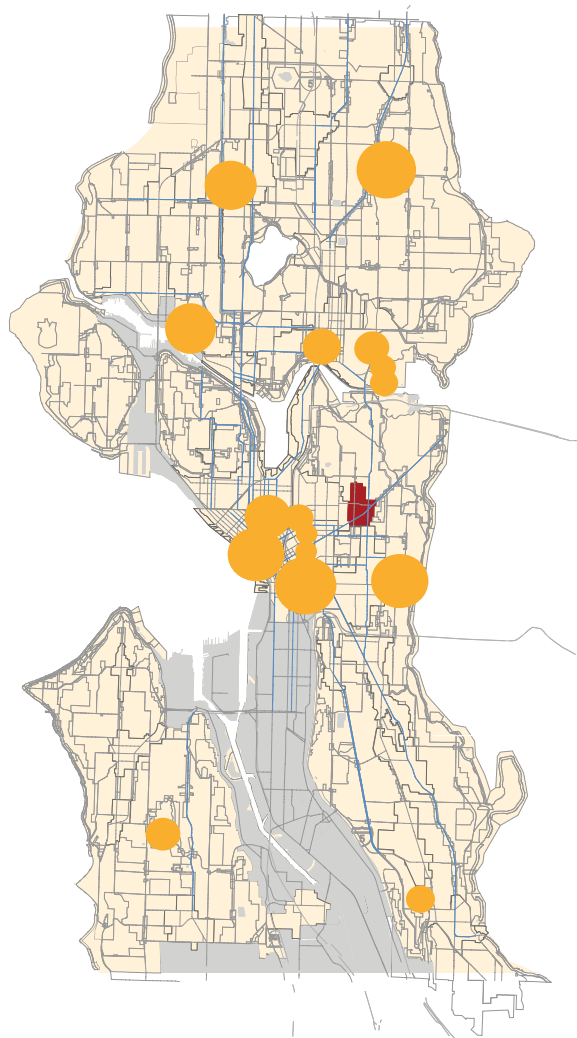
# CHAPTER 1 - Theater and the City

## 1.1 Theater Spaces In the City

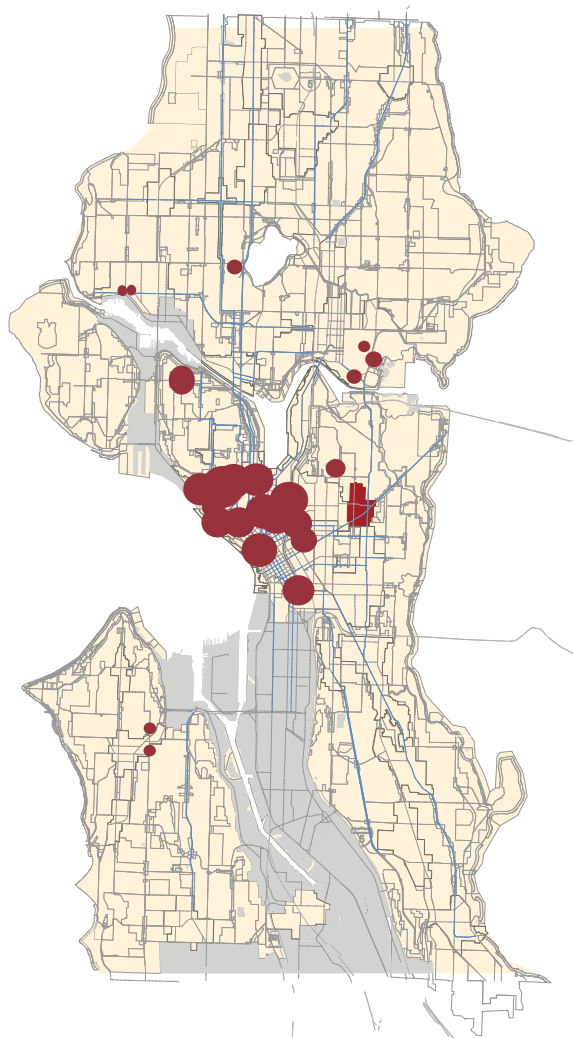
While there are no areas in Seattle widely known as theater or music districts, theater, performance and cinema spaces in Seattle are concentrated in the Downtown, Lower Queen Anne and Capitol Hill areas (see figures 1.2,1.3,1.4). These areas are all heavily populated with bars, restaurants and other venues associated with 'going out' and entertainment and are also some of the most densely populated areas of the city. Much of the density of live theater in the Lower Queen Anne area of the city is provided by the Seattle Center, which houses many of Seattle's larger scale theaters and performance spaces such as the Intiman and the Pacific Northwest Ballet. These theaters tend to be larger in scale, highly visible, and heavily funded by grants and Seattle's multi-national corporations. Moving away from these central theaters, there are a number a number of smaller performance venues.

The diagrams on the following page show the relative size of performance spaces in Seattle, their locations, and their type according to three categories: cinema, live theater, and music venues. While mapping according to these categories is imperfect because of the amount of crossover between kinds of performance venues and the difficulty of mapping theater organizations that are not tied to a specific place, the concentrations of professional performance spaces are clear. Cinemas, which tend to need a large amount of space, tend to be either downtown, where the density of people can support expensive leases by attracting more people - or in the periphery of the city, where multi-plex style operations can afford large amounts

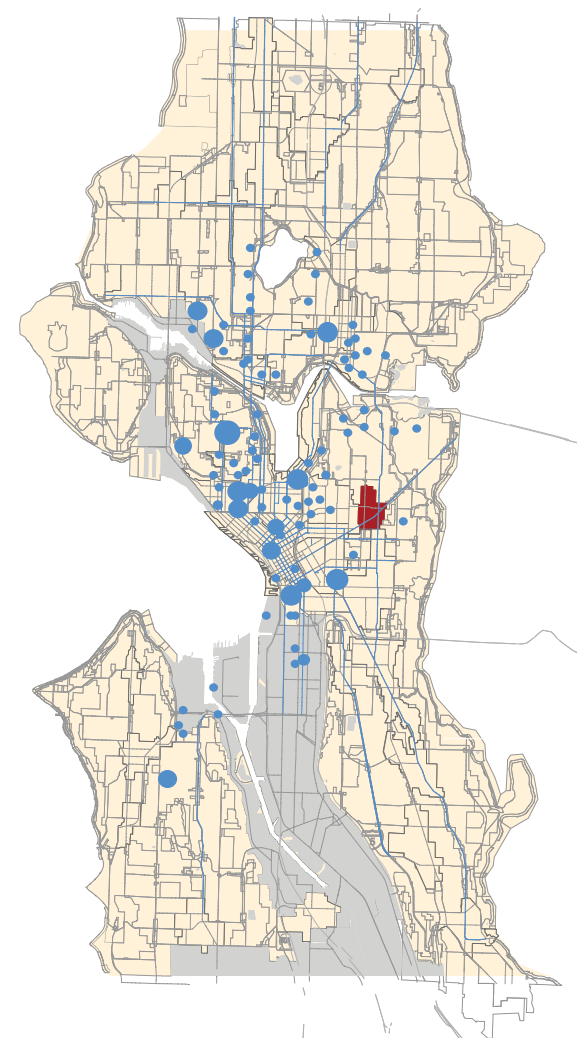




CINEMAS

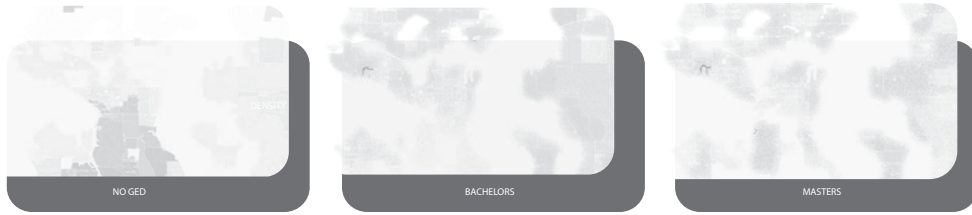


LIVE THEATERS



MUSIC VENUES

2. Seattle Performance Space Densities



of space. On the opposite side of the spectrum, spaces dedicated to live music tend to be at a smaller in size, larger in number, and more integrated with the grain of the city. Live theater spaces tend to be small to medium sized operations that occupy spaces in urban centers.

The concentration and densities of these performance spaces, especially live theater spaces, show a the phenomenon of districting within industries rather than attachment to community. The purpose of these maps is not to criticize the format of professional theater, rather it is to show a lack of theater performance spaces at the community level, especially in comparison to music venues.

### 1.2 Demographics of Seattle

Demographic maps taken from census data show a fairly clear story of the City in terms of population, diversity and income (see figures 1.5 - 1.23). As is true with many American cities,



### 3. Seattle Demographic Maps

the median income of residents tend to be higher near the waterfront and in communities with single-family homes.

Seattle is still a fairly racially segregated city, with the vast majority of its non-white population living in South Seattle and in the interior of the City. South Seattle is one the most racially diverse area codes in the country, largely due to the fact that much of the racial diversity in the city is focused in a small area. In these maps of Seattle, racial diversity, poverty, lower income levels, and lower education levels are all shown to be co-located in the south of the city and on a north south axis along 23rd street.

Similarly, as shown in figure 3, those working in the arts and entertainment industries tend to be living in the South and toward the middle of the city, along 23rd. Set side by side, a map of the densities of where those working in the arts are living and where they are working show that while there are a decent number of artists and entertainers living and working in the downtown and capitol hill areas, the majority seem to be living and working in different locations - the majority of which are living in lower income neighborhood. This is not to say that people should be living and working in the same space. It is true with many industries and many cities that where people live and where people work are in different locations. Rather, I argue that these diagrams show the potential, especially in lower income neighborhoods, for the potential for successful community based arts programs in that there is a wide amount of diversity to draw from as well as the talent of those already working in arts and entertainment industries and living in these neighborhoods. The talent is an available resource that we to draw upon at a community, as well as a city-wide level.

### **1.3 Seattle's Urban Village Framework and Neighborhood Cores**

Recently, Seattle City planners developed a charter that describes the need for Seattle's neighborhoods to maintain their community identities in the face of citywide development. The "Urban Village" strategy presented by the city first and foremost as a sustainable response to the area's inevitable growth. It is a strategy for maintaining some 'key characteristics' of the city in the face of job creation and the need for increased density. A charter released by the city states, "this plan envisions a city where growth: helps to build stronger communities, heightens our stewardship of the environment, leads to enhanced economic opportunity and security for all residents, and is accompanied by greater social equity across Seattle's communities. The City has made a commitment to growing wisely, to growing in ways that ensure a livable future, and to grow sustainably. Growing sustainably also means building on the cities successes." (1, city charter link). While the charter discusses a number of strategies for 'building upon the city's successes', the main thrust of the plan is to accommodate growth through 'ground-related' multi-family housing for new developments and infill lots while still maintaining the village character of neighborhoods by maintaining single family plots and housing. The 'village' aspect of the urban village plan maintains successful neighborhood qualities through encouraging neighborhood cores that are walkable, pedestrian friendly and self-sustainable in that each neighborhood has its own infrastructure for food, community

services and places of employment. The 'urban' aspect of the Urban Village plan attempts to introduce the inevitability of growth and development through mitigated amounts of multi-family housing, larger development in neighborhood cores, and greater access to city and region-wide transportation.

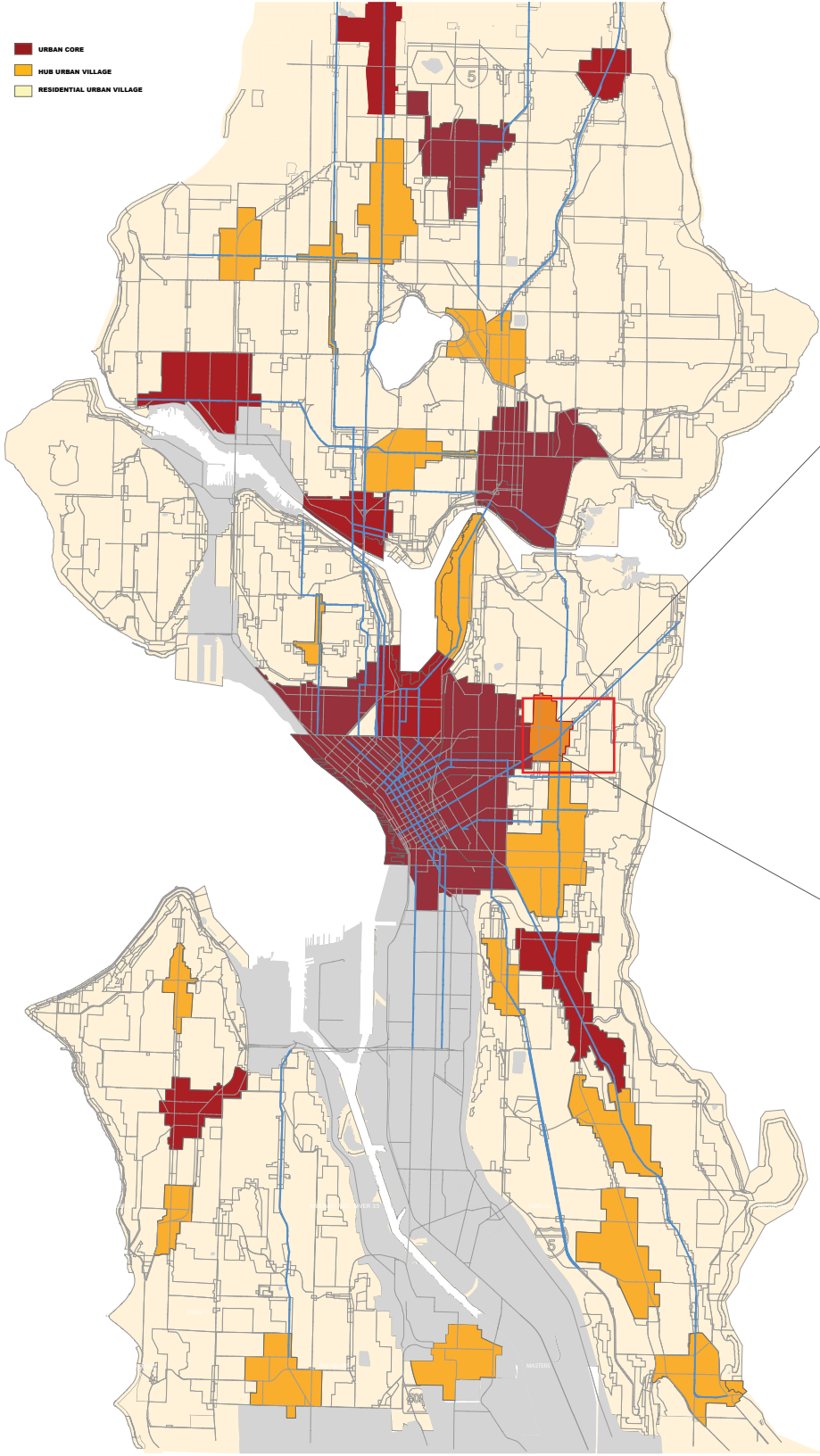
The current plan divides the urban villages strategy into four categories: urban centers, hub urban villages, residential urban villages, and manufacturing/industrial centers. The goal of these designations is to "guide public and private activities to achieve the function, character, amount of growth, intensity of activity, and scale of development of each urban village consistent with its urban village designation and adopted neighborhood plan" (Charter, 1.9). In short, urban centers are the densest zones with the widest range of land uses. Hub urban villages accommodate a broad mix of uses, but at a lower densities of employment and industry than urban villages. Residential urban villages are primarily residential areas that surround a core of commercial services and manufacturing/ industrial centers are intended to maintain and promote industrial activity.

Of the four categories of in the urban village scheme, the category of the residential urban village seems the most appropriate in scale for the role of the community theater in that it is a type of neighborhood that is balancing residential, commercial and cultural aspects of a community. The designation of an area of an area as a residential urban village means that the area meets the following criteria set up by the planning department:

- 1) Under current zoning, the area can accommodate a concentration of residential development at a density of at least 8 units per acre, with a capacity for at least 1000 housing units within 2000 feet of the village center in small to medium sized structures.
- 2) The area includes one or more centers of activity that provide commercial or retail support services to the surrounding area within the 2000 foot radius.
- 3) The area is generally surrounded by single family or lower density multi-family areas.
- 4) The area is in the city's current arterial network and is served by a transit route providing direct transit to an urban hub. This requires peak-hour transit frequency of 15 minutes or less.
- 5) The area has the opportunity to be connected by bicycle/ pedestrian facilities to adjacent amenities.
- 6) The area has, or could possibly have, opportunities for public open space.

The nature of a residential urban village is both in its cohesiveness as a community and in its relationship to larger urban hubs. It is supposed to maintain its own character and identity in the face of further growth, while at the same time working within a complex urban network that extends beyond its boundaries.

- URBAN CORE
- HUB URBAN VILLAGE
- RESIDENTIAL URBAN VILLAGE



## **2 - The Madison/Miller Neighborhood - the intersection of Madison and 23rd**

The Madison/Miller neighborhood surrounds the intersection of Madison Street and 23rd Avenue, two city arterials, with the majority of its core businesses and public spaces running along Madison. In this sense, the core of the neighborhood exists on a city wide scale. While the area is designated in the Urban Village charter as one of the city's primary residential urban villages, the neighborhood itself lacks the recognizable character that similarly designated areas such as Fremont and Ballard have. There are a number of businesses and social services organizations in the area, but these tend to be aimed toward a city level. Organizations such as Planned Parenthood and the Bailey Boushey house have a presence in the community, but are oriented toward city wide service rather than serving the specifics of the Madison/Miller community. This can be largely attributed to lower rents than the Capitol Hill and Downtown areas.

### **Madison Street**

Madison was developed in the late 19th century by Judge John McGilvra, who had amassed large amounts of land during the founding of Seattle. Much of this land was in what is now Madison Park and was turned into vacation land for many of Seattle's wealthier class. The street was created in order to pass from the downtown area to vacation homes by the lake. The street became well traveled and Madison park became a

ferry port for travel across Lake Washington and a cable car was installed. The street has since been a major means of east/west travel throughout the city and is the only unbroken arterial traveling from downtown to Lake Washington. While the street itself remains a main east/west corridor, much of the storefront business and public functions are located on the Pike-Pine corridor in the Capitol Hill area. (See Appendix A)

As Seattle expanded and the north/south street grid was continued through the city, a number of awkward, triangular sites were created along Madison that are now the sites of empty sites, difficult buildings, and parks. These spaces, such as McGilvra park on 14th and Madison, have been turned into open public spaces with varying degrees of success, often because their use as public space is because of their difficult form and leftover nature.

Today, Madison is essentially divided by the ridge of Capitol Hill. On the west side of the hill, as the Urban Village maps show, the downtown and Capitol Hill areas are dense urban areas populated mostly with commercial scale and apartment buildings. On the east side of the is less densely populated and more residential oriented, following the historical development of Seattle where industry utilizes the Puget Sound and residences and leisure developed along Lake Washington.



Church Garage



Vacant Lot



Original Chamber of Commerce



Girlie Press Building



Planned Parenthood



Vacant Building



New Construction



New Construction



Open Lot



Intersection

Figures 6.1 through 6.10 show the texture of the neighborhood. The area is a mix of older, single-family residences, new multi-family construction, and a number of vacant buildings and lots that are soon to be developed.

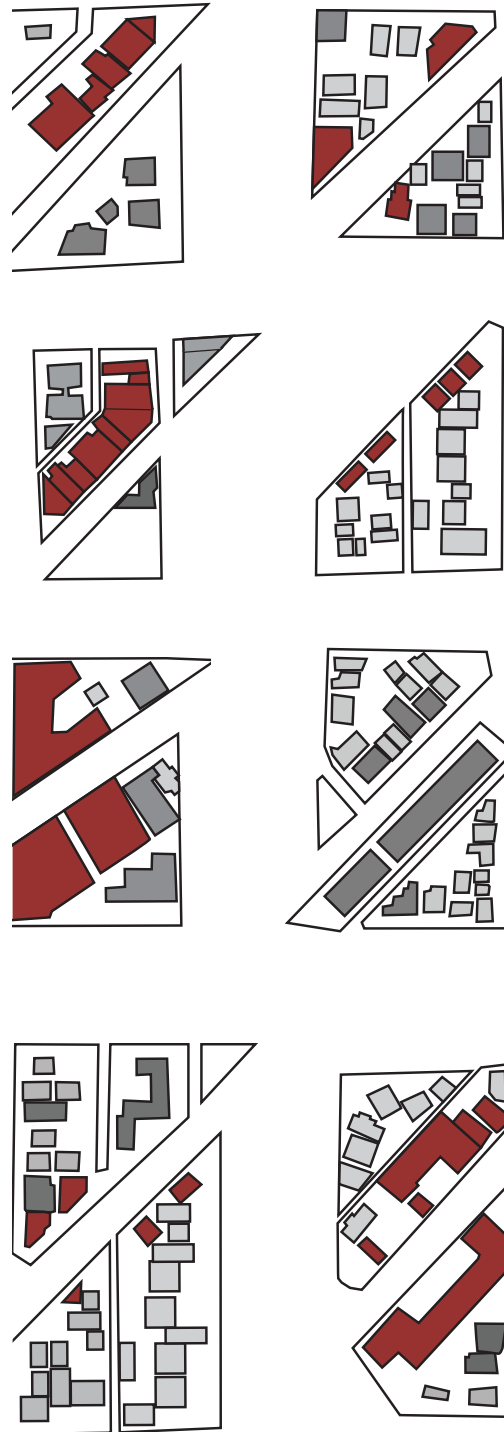


Figure 7.1 through 7.8 show the organization of triangular sites along Madison according to public and private functions - red being public or retail.

## 23rd and its Intersection

23rd runs on the North/South axis of Seattle's street grid and is a major connection between the South Seattle and the University District. As the previous demographic maps show, the area along 23rd is home to a relatively poor, diverse and young population. Symbolically, the street can be seen as a connection between a poor and under-represented community and the city's major public institution of higher education - an institution often seen as the city's major institutional vehicle for class mobility and change. This is a stark contrast to Madison, which connects the major international business institutions of the downtown area with the wealthy residential area of Madison Park.

The fact that the Madison/Miller neighborhood lies at the intersection of these contrasting arterials provides the possibility for high visibility and presence to a wide variety of populations and different sources of infrastructure. Physically, the intersection is a mess and a clash of 9 lanes turning awkward angles in order to make their way through the city. While the neighborhood occupies a kind of in-between space that is not a destination for the majority of people traveling through, it has the opportunity for a major presence beyond simply providing housing for those working on in other locations. The neighborhood has the opportunity, potential, and vacant spaces to develop a unique identity and its own set of core functions. The other side of this coin being that it is also in the face of massive development that might ignore the unique aspects of the community.

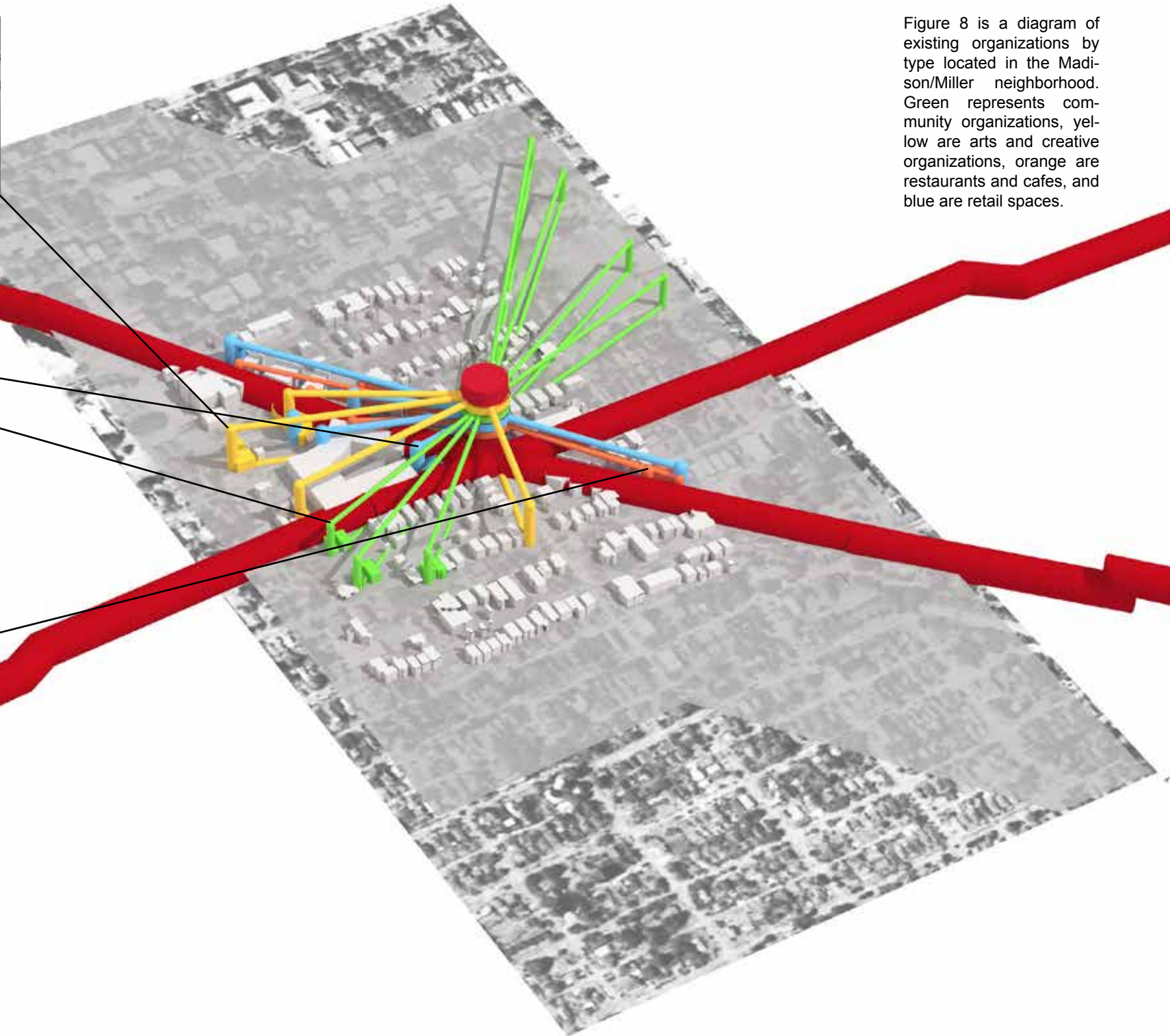
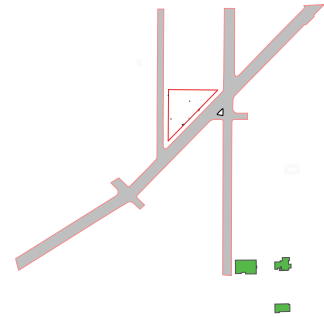


Figure 8 is a diagram of existing organizations by type located in the Madison/Miller neighborhood. Green represents community organizations, yellow are arts and creative organizations, orange are restaurants and cafes, and blue are retail spaces.

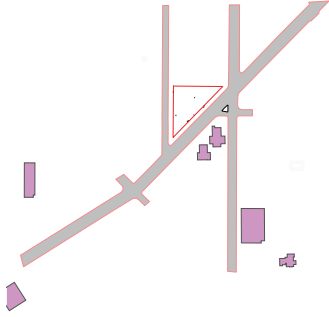
### The Neighborhood and the Site

The Neighborhood has a diverse fabric in terms of building types and occupants. There are a relatively large number of churches and service oriented organizations in the immediate area. The retail in the includes a Safeway, a tire facility, and a number of retail spaces that have been abandoned. While there are condos and apartments in the area and more being developed along Madison, the majority of the residential structures in the area are single family homes, with a few multi-family developments mixed in. Much of the open space in the neighborhood is open because it is private, undeveloped property, rather than being reserved for public use. One of the key features of the neighborhood that distinguishes it from other residential urban village of this scale is a number of small arts-based manufacturing and studio spaces located one block south of Madison. A small printing press, a film school classroom, a furniture shop with adjacent artist studios, a wood shop, and a small design studio are all concentrated in a micro arts and manufacturing district.

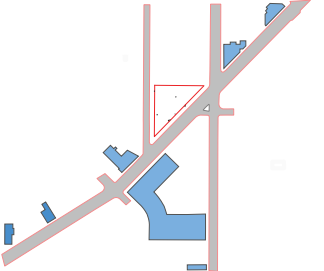
The site for this thesis sits across Madison street from the Safeway and this miniature fabrication district, occupying one of the areas characteristic triangular sites. The site itself is ideal for a community theater project, having the hypotenuse of the sight facing and cut open by the city arterials, while the shorter sides of the site face a residential street and a series of single family homes. It provides the opportunity for the program, the occupants and the physical building to translate between the scales of the neighborhood and the city - their organization having the opportunity to display a wide range of attitudes about this particular community and those scales.



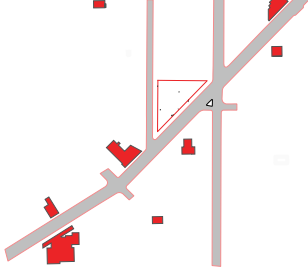
2.15 - Community



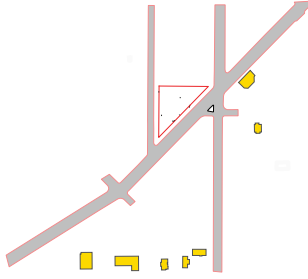
2.16 - Churches



2.17 - Retail



2.18 - Service



2.19 - Arts



Figure 9.1 through 9.10 shows the organization of triangular sites along Madison according to public and private functions - red being public or retail.

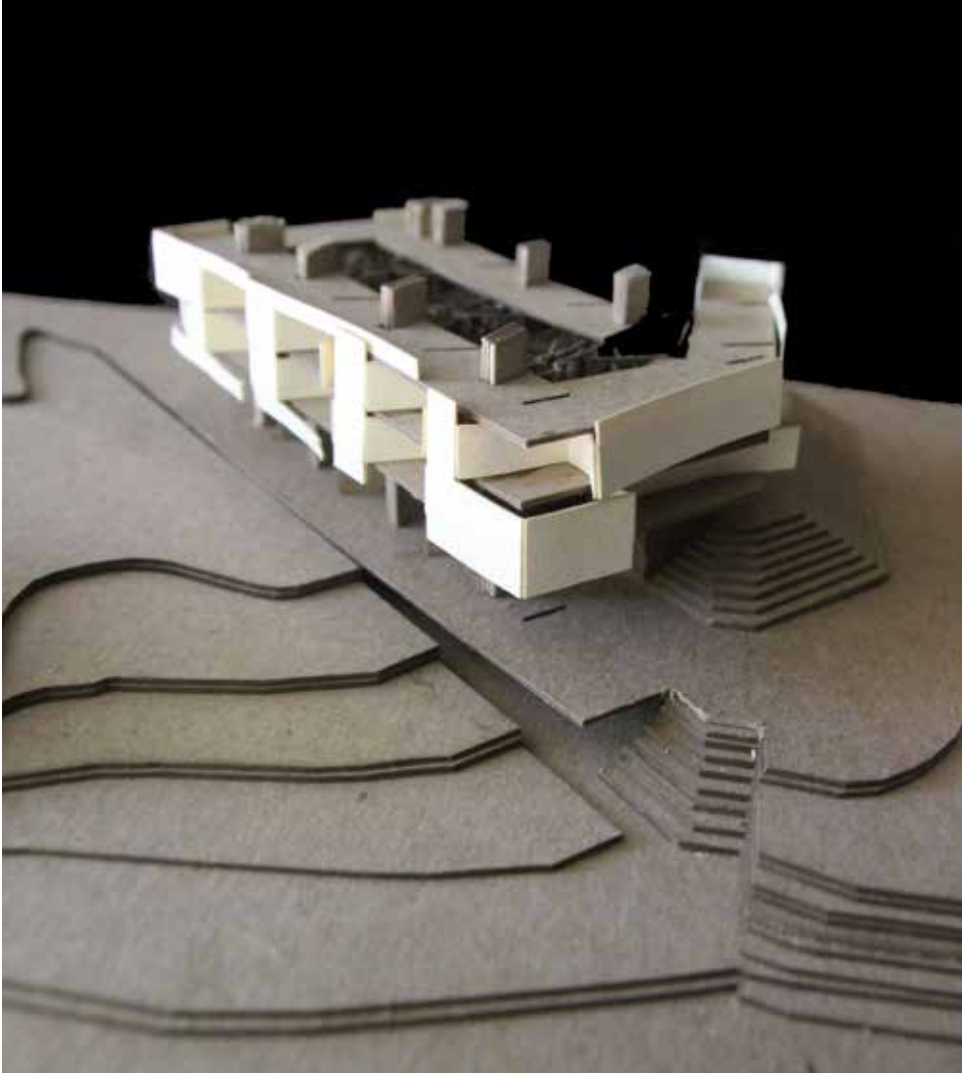
Figure 10 shows the proposed site for the project: and empty lot located at the intersection of Madison and 23rd. This shot looks across the site from the intersection of Madison and 22nd Street.







Figure 11 - Exterior Col-  
lage from the intersection  
of Madison and 23rd.

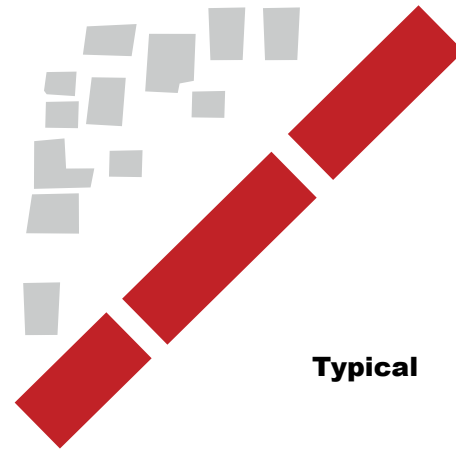
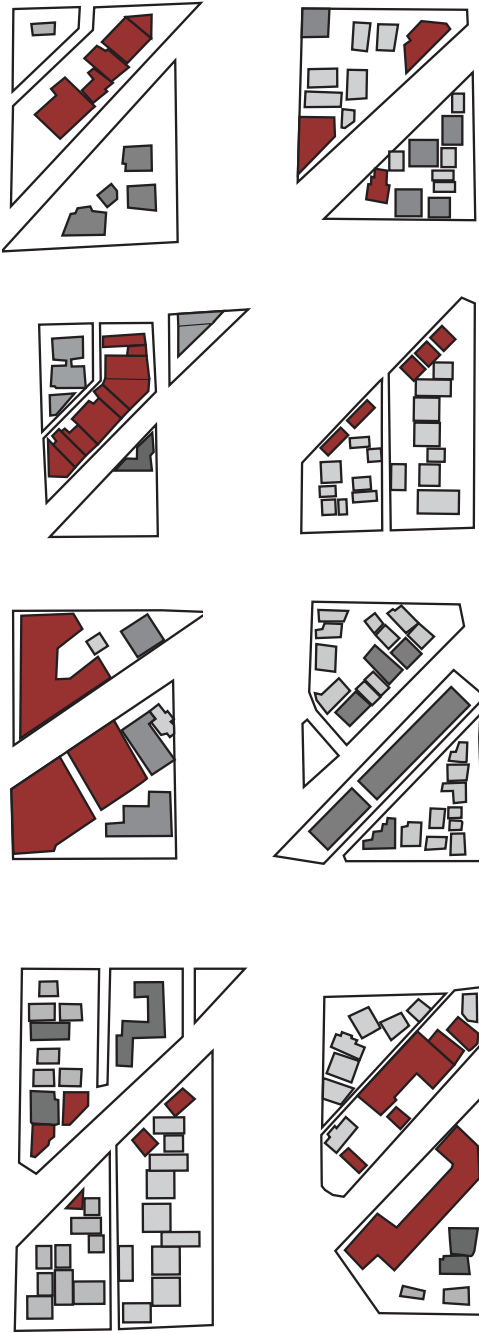


12. Photo of Model looking uphill

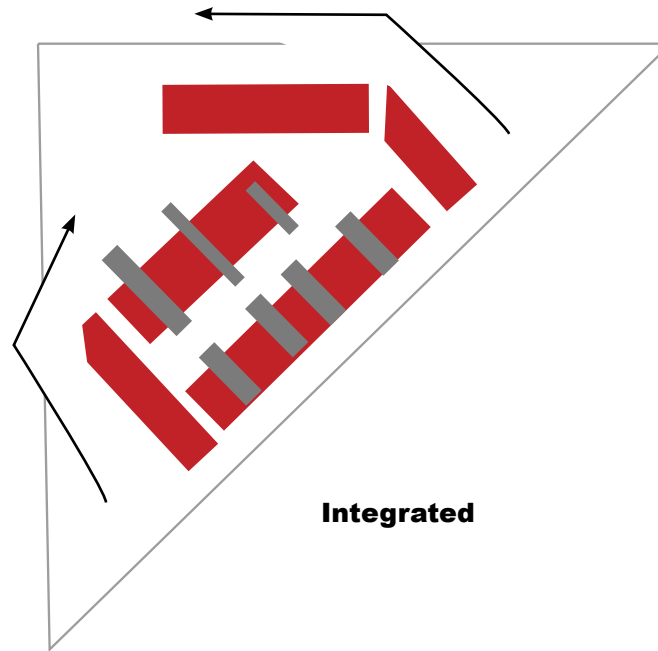
## Site Response

Diagrams of triangular sites along Madison show a familiar pattern of public and private functions within neighborhoods. Retail and public functions occupy the space along the arterial street while residential and other, more private spaces are lie behind the store fronts, creating a definite relationship of stage and backstage within the community. In the typical neighborhood arrangement, the public facade of a neighborhood is relatively shallow.

This project wishes to extend the boundary between the public facade of the block and the supporting functions behind it by folding layers of community, business and private functions into multiple, interactive layers within the site. The idea is to allow the actor/audience interaction to happen on multiple levels and at multiple scales. The core of the building - the community - is a dynamic set of forces and relationships that are constantly changing and redefining itself that pushes and pulls in different directions throughout the site. The lobby, shops and gallery spaces are pulled into the interior of the site, encouraging public interaction throughout, while private shops and offices - perhaps the most private functions of the program - are put on display in the front of the building along Madison. The idea is not to simply subvert the public and private or the served and service spaces of the building, but to expose the spectrum of these relationships as happening in layers throughout the building. The form of the building does not treat the performance space of the building, the core, as something precious like the shell of an egg that protects a yolk. Instead, the building has a core in the same way that a cinnamon roll has a core - it is messy and the center of the



**Typical**



**Integrated**

Figure 13 shows different layouts of triangular sites along Madison.

Figure 14 is a diagram of a typical site response for a triangular site along Madison, with clear public and private division versus the site response for this particular project.

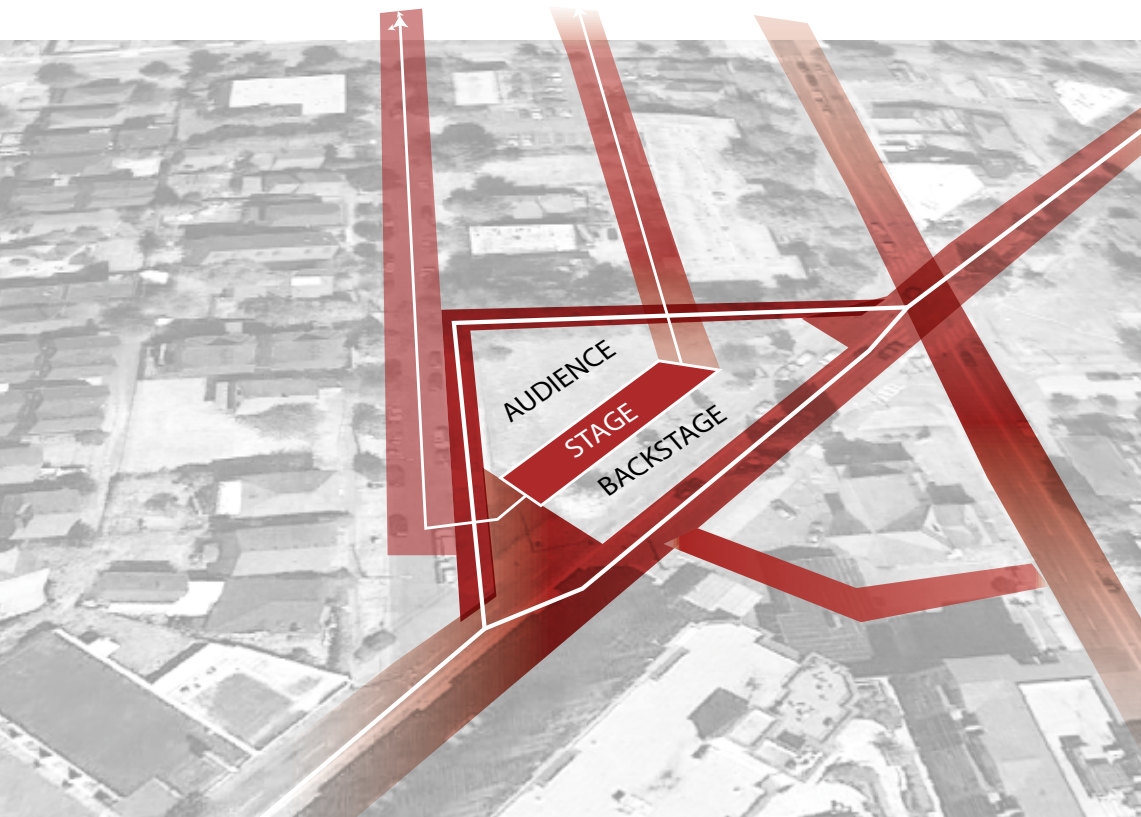
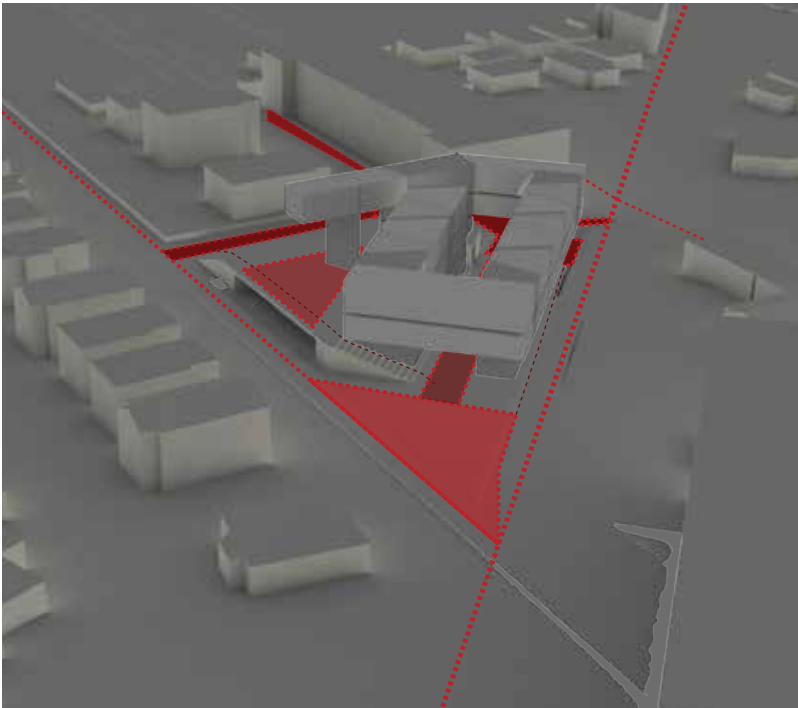


Figure 14 - A diagram of the flows and public spaces on the site and how they relate to the stage and production spaces behind the stage.

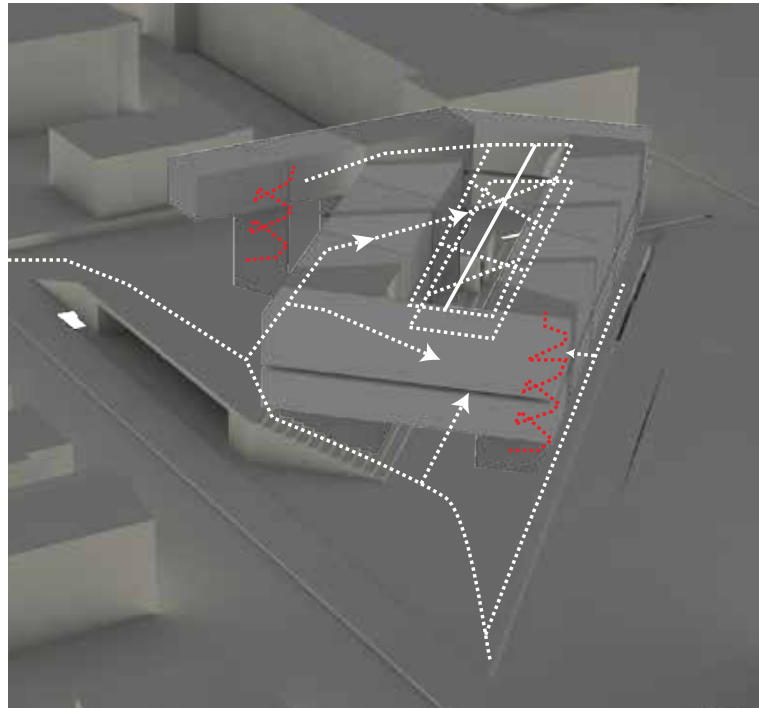
building has no definite boundary.

The corners of the triangular site are completely open public spaces with differing relationships to grade level due to the twelve foot grade difference from the east and west sides of the site, as well as the tiering of the ground level that allows for seating. The west end of the site meets the sidewalk, the east end of the site is at the same level, but twelve feet above the sidewalk, while the north end of the site is an additional twelve feet above grade. All of these spaces are free and open to the public, but with varying degrees of accessibility and different relationships to the interior of the building.

The stage area of the site is on the same grade as the sidewalk on the west side of the site, separated from the city on rolling doors, creating the potential for the stage to act as an extension of the street level to accommodate processional performances, or for it to be completely open during set construction. If necessary, a truck could be driven straight into the stage and out the other end into the loading dock. The stage area could also be completely closed off from the street if a closed theater setting were decided upon. In this case, circulation would be routed away from the street to the a lobby space, where the audience would trickle into the performance spaces through the tiered seating to the stage below. More direct circulation to the shops above and the rest of the fly space would be made possible through either stair cores or an elevator at each corner of the site. The result is a pushing, pulling and lifting of the streetscape, creating multiple stage areas inside and out.



Open Space and Site Circulation



Circulation within the building

Figures 15 and 16 - Show circulation around and within the site.

# CHAPTER 3: Community, Program, and Flexibility

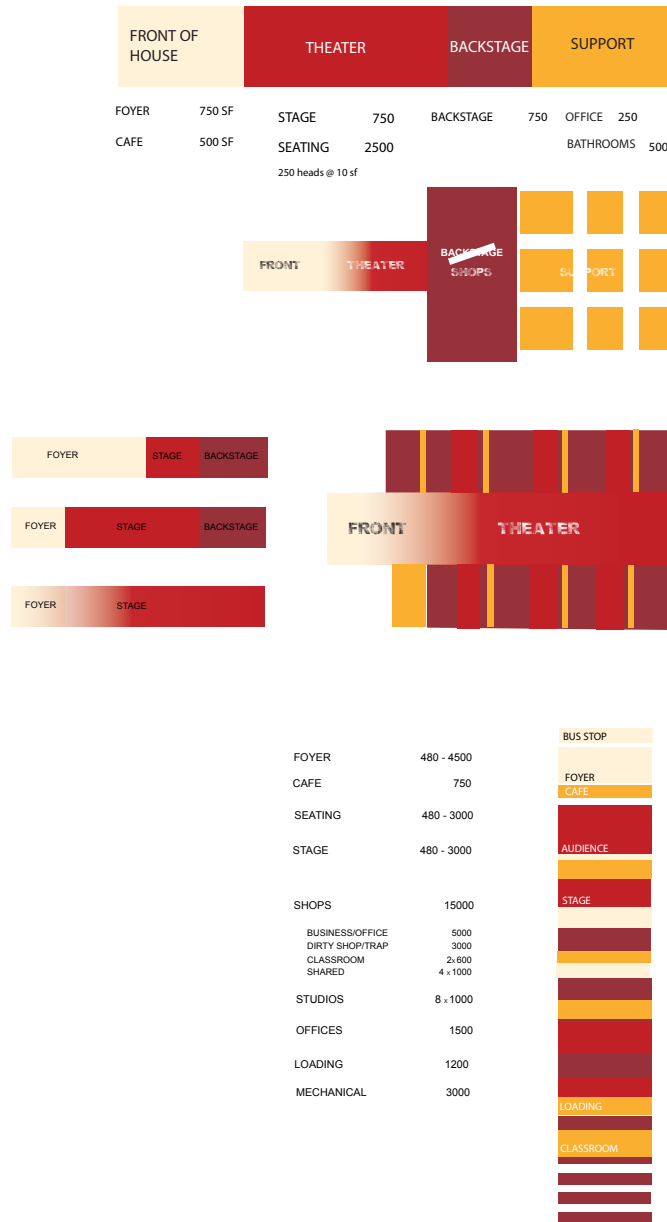
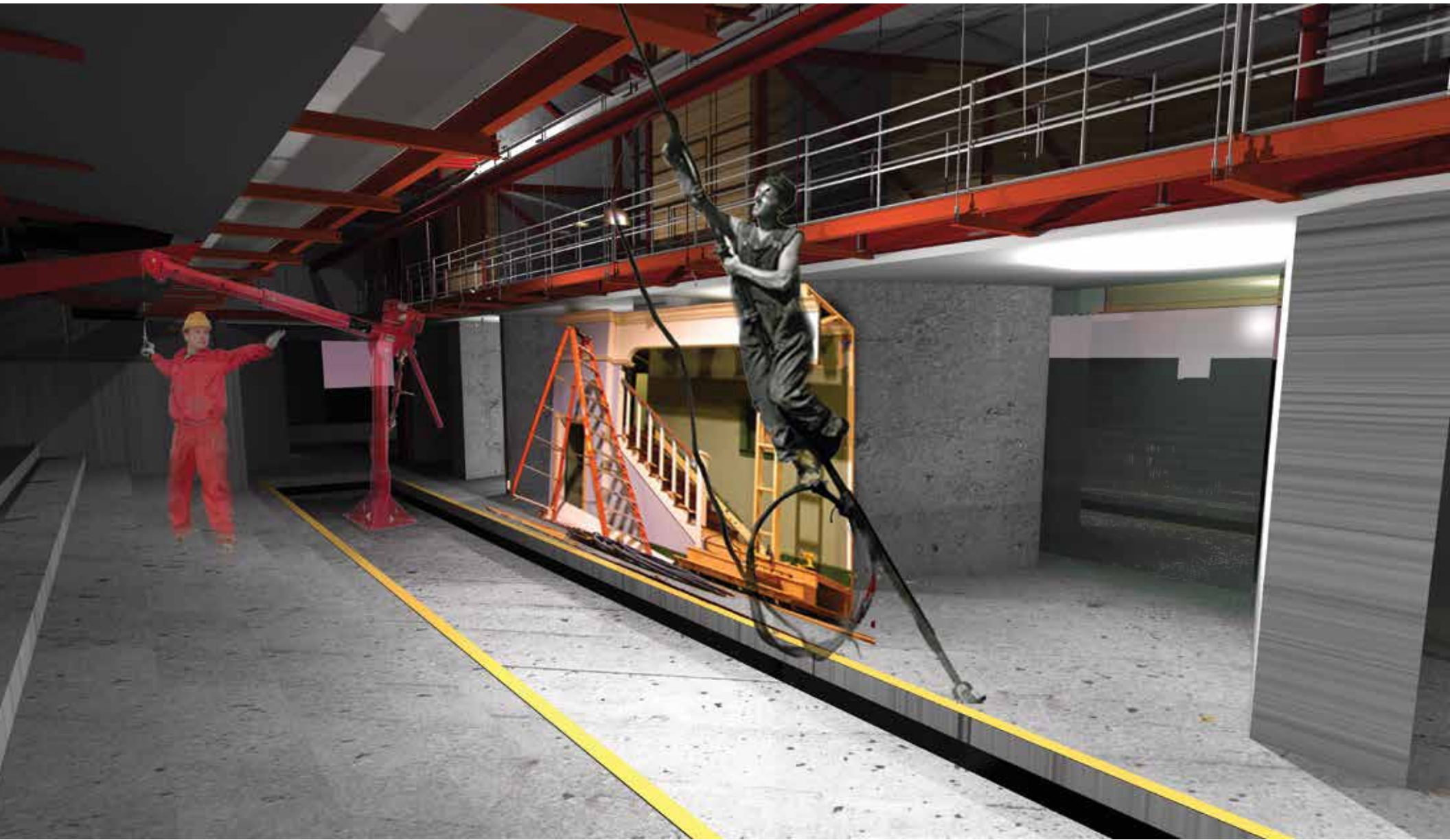


Figure 17 diagrams the progression of a typical program for a theater this size, exploded and re-formatted to allow for additional shops and gallery spaces in the building.

The programming of the theater is a key connection between the community and the theater itself and is meant to accommodate and integrate local businesses, organizations, and artists into the process of developing the form of the performance space itself. There are two main mechanisms integrated into the project for facilitating community interaction. First, the theater itself is not based on a specific typology such as a proscenium or a black box theater. Rather, a relationship between stage and viewer is established through raising tiers above the ground level in order to provide seating platforms and a relationship of audience and stage. This relationship between audience and stage is extruded parallel Madison throughout the south side of the building with openings on the east and west sides in order to create the opportunity for extending the street into the building. Above the stage and seating tiers on the ground floor are a series of gantry cranes and rigging systems that constitute the 'fly' of the building. This fly system is extruded through the building the similarly to the stage, creating a 150 foot long area for stages to be constructed. The entire stage and seating area is essentially a construction site for the theater, leaving the size and form of the theater to be decided by the community rather than the architect.



18 - Interior Perspective - Stage Under Construction

Second, the 'fly' and 'backstage' of the building include an entire system of leased and shared shops that wrap around and enclose the rectangular stage area (see figure 4.5). The upper floors of the building are comprised of a series of shop and office spaces that are alternately outward and inward facing, creating a corrugated floor plan. The outward facing spaces are occupied by local, small business that would be operating independently from the productions of the theater as well helping to produce the performances happening in the building. The inward facing shops would be shared by the two adjacent shops as additional shop space, storage, space or gallery space, providing the opportunity for collaboration on a smaller scale as well as the ability for organizations to expand and contract their presence within the building. While the shops would be designed with small production and prototyping shops in mind, the spaces would ideally not be limited to creative and industrial industries. An economic model for the leasing of these spaces could be found in other cooperative style shops, where leases are subsidized by participation in teaching and organizational work with other projects within the cooperative space. The shops would therefore be functioning independently, while subsidizing their leases through participation in performances.

The placement of organizations within the theater space that are normally associated with theater is key in what creates the atmosphere of a community theater. Ideally, shop owners, craftsmen, and community activists would not only be helping as back stage hands in performances, but their skills and interests would be helping to create the format of

the performance. If the shop spaces were occupied by musicians and fashion designers, the resulting performance could take on the form of a fashion show or something else vastly different than if it were occupied by film studios and furniture makers. The idea is to promote collaboration between individuals and organizations that might not normally have the opportunity or desire to collaborate and to create performances that represent the multi-faceted and multi-centered nature of the community. Rather than only show a polished performance at the end of an arduous process, the stage would display the process, performance, construction site and war-zone that is community organization as well as the resulting performance. While the resulting play, movie or parade that resulted from the collaboration would be the goal of the process, much of the emphasis of the 'perfect performance' that is associated with professional theater would be replaced by an emphasis on the process of collaboration. In community theater, the questions of how and why are as important as understanding the immediate performance. It is the process incongruous processes and parties coming together to create a not-always-complete whole that allow theater to define and display community identities that differentiates this type of theater from professional theater. Process, collaboration and struggle do not take a backseat to imperfection as they do in professional theater. Instead, these qualities are on display for the city to see.

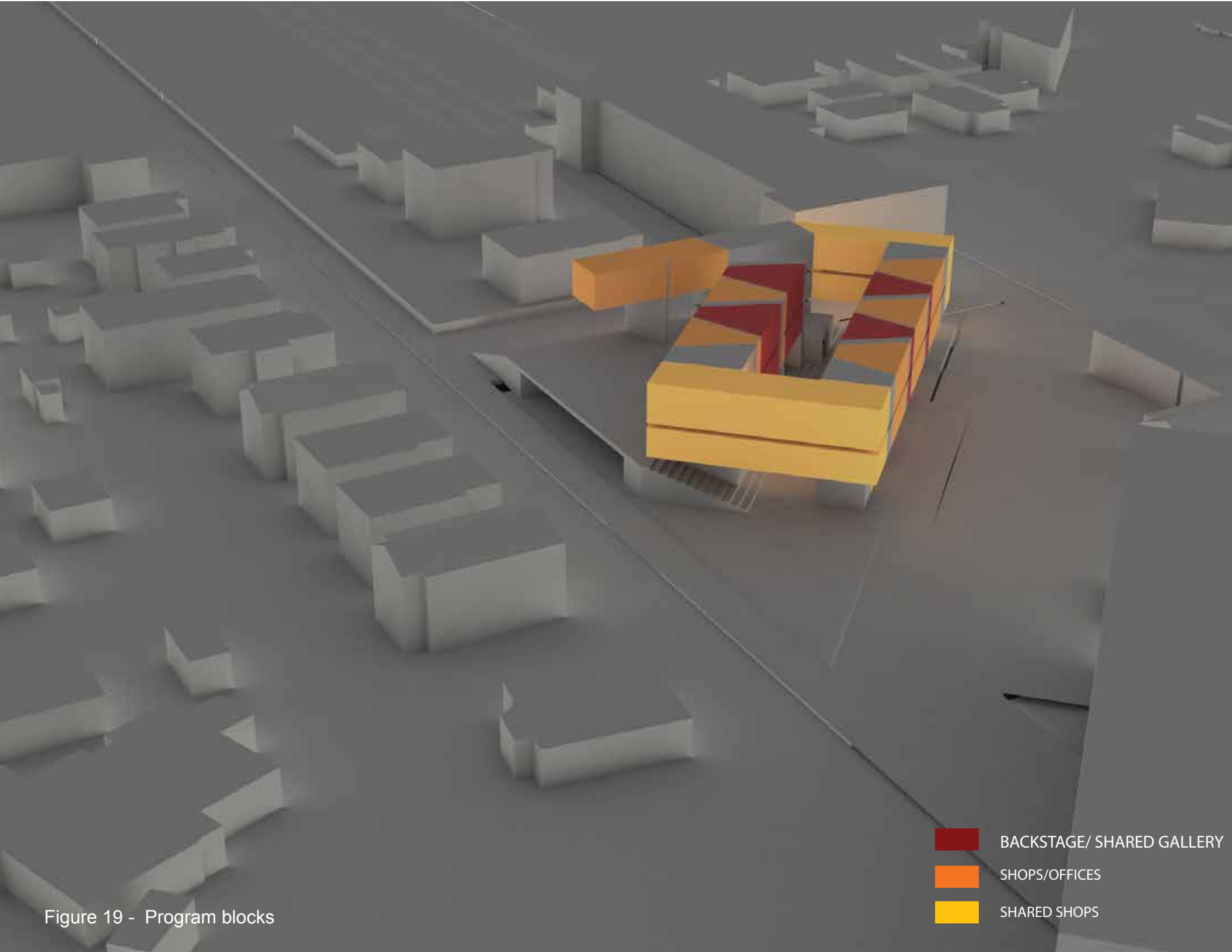


Figure 19 - Program blocks

- BACKSTAGE/ SHARED GALLERY
- SHOPS/OFFICES
- SHARED SHOPS

## 4 - FLEXIBILITY AND FRAMING: ART AND THE CITY

“Art is not political owing to the messages and feelings that it carries on the state of social and political issues. It is not political owing to the way it represents social structures, conflicts or identities. It is political by virtue of the very distance that it takes with regard to those functions. It is political as it frames a specific space-time sensorium, as it redefines on this stage the power of speech or the coordinates of perception, shifts the places of the actor and the spectator, etc. Because politics is not the exercise of power or the struggle for power. Politics is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, the setting of objects posed as “common” and subjects to whom the capacity is recognized to designate these objects and argue about them.” Jaques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*

Community centers generally require a large amount of flexibility due to a wide range of activities that they have to accommodate in order to fit the needs of the communities they serve. While the program of this building has a focus in the arts, it maintains the ability to serve a wide range of activities and styles of theater. The importance of this flexibility goes beyond the need for accommodate multiple undefined activities - it allows the users of the building to define the conversation between the theater and the city. The stage can open to the street, be completely closed off, or change from one act to the next.

As Jaques Ranciere writes, the importance of art in the political sphere is not to propagate a certain point of view, or in this case, to show the dominant point of view of the users or the community. The importance of art in the dialogue of the city is in its ability to challenge, deconstruct and discover what viewpoints mean and the assumptions on which they lie. In the process of making art, we create a distance from and engage with the subject matter that we are dealing with in a

way that is often absent in everyday life.

This abstract idea takes a fairly simple shape in this project. The form of the theater as a black box, a proscenium, a procession, or anywhere in between is to be decided by the organizers of the performance: the owners of the shops and the members of the Madison/Miller community. Through the process of discussion, decision making and inevitable power struggles, the form of the theater is developed. The process may result in great theater or it may end up self-destructive. The end result is not necessarily the point for the community theater. It is the process of working with the desires and needs of the community and exposing the entire process as being essentially political that makes the space effective on the community level. The identity of a community will not be able to fit into two hour narrative or a fashion show. It will begin to be discovered and continually rediscovered through the process of engagement with the real actors and stages within the community.

Figure 17 - Exterior Rendering of the community facing lobby space.



## 4 - FLEXIBILITY AND FRAMING: ACTIVE FLEXIBILITY

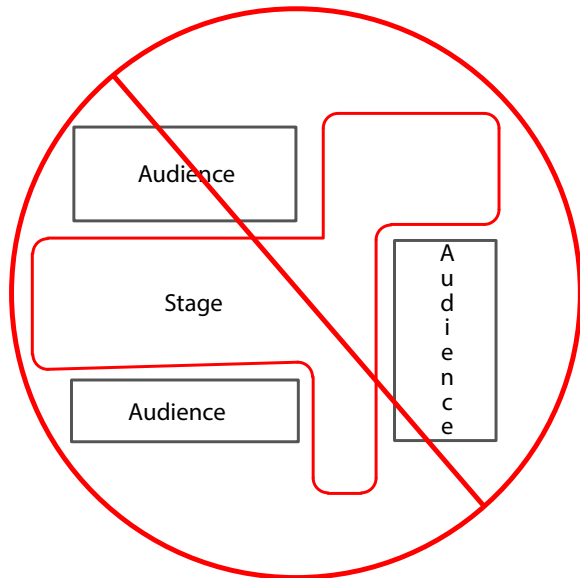
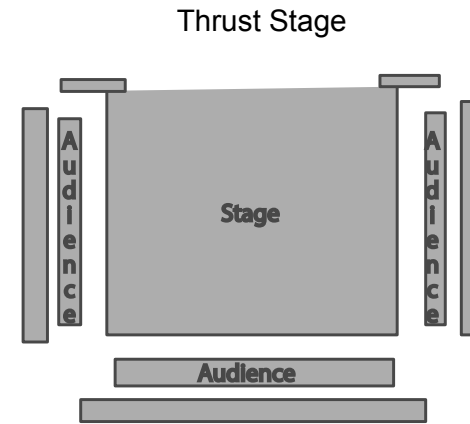
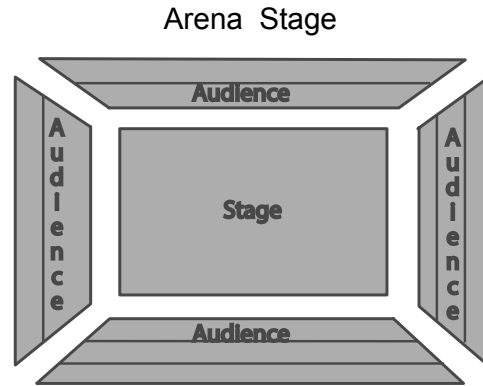
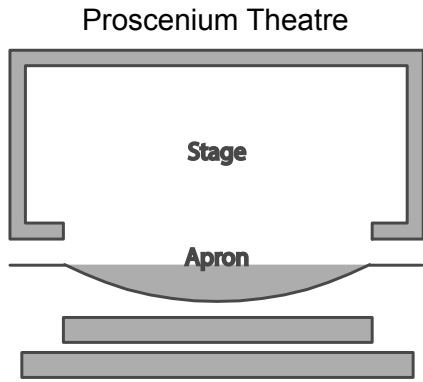
“The goal is to find a structure, a tectonics that can absorb life, chance and change, while the structure itself must last and persist over time, to span the unforeseen with the foreseeable. The strategy of the Cartesian grid and the box have always been to average out all possible events, to be general enough for anything... to engage in the unforeseen does not mean that these are just accidents happening to our agendas” Lars Spuybroek, *The Structure of Vagueness*

The goal of flexibility in program and architectural design is to facilitate and encourage a wide range of possibilities in the face of changing and different needs. We often look at multifunctionalism in terms of neutrality: a space cannot be too attached to a particular form because that form would prohibit another activity from happening in that space. Multiple uses within a space cancel each other out until we find the least common denominator - the white box. Community theater often takes place in these spaces: school gyms, auditoriums, YMCAs. Here, we begin to develop an idea of the spectrum of definition with professional theater spaces on one end, amateur spaces on the other. The community theater space occupies the middle range of this spectrum. It has to accommodate a wide range of uses while still maintaining the identity of a theater space. The community theater space is flexible in that it is vague, not passive.

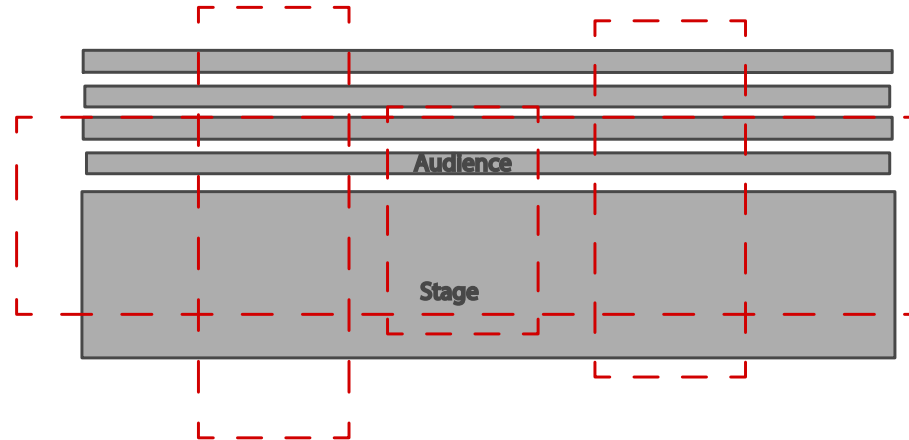
Spuybroek describes the vague in its opposition to passive flexibility - as something that is on its way to becoming possible; it is something that allows for the achievement of clearly defined goals as well as unforeseen possibilities. Designing flexibility in terms of vagueness instead of neutrality involves setting rules for a game

that are meant to be broken, bent and redefined. It involves the facilitation and understanding of the defined goals that we normally associate with fixed typologies while being elastic enough to criticize those typologies. The rules of the game change, but it is still recognizable as an arena for a game, not a space for any and all games.

This theater maintains its flexibility by creating a simple relationship between stage and audience. The stage is flat and open with a trap below. The seating is elevated above the stage through a series of concrete tiers. The city acts as the backdrop of the stage. The nature of the stage is not definite. It can open to the street or be closed off. The gantry cranes above the stage can hold walls and curtains that define a black box around the audience and actors or hold projectors for a film screening. Decisions about the specific form of the stage are to be defined by the users. The space is intended to function best as a construction site rather than in any particular theatrical organization. It is the act of creating the form of the stage that is the most important aspect of the performance for the community theater.



Flexible Stage



Soft Core

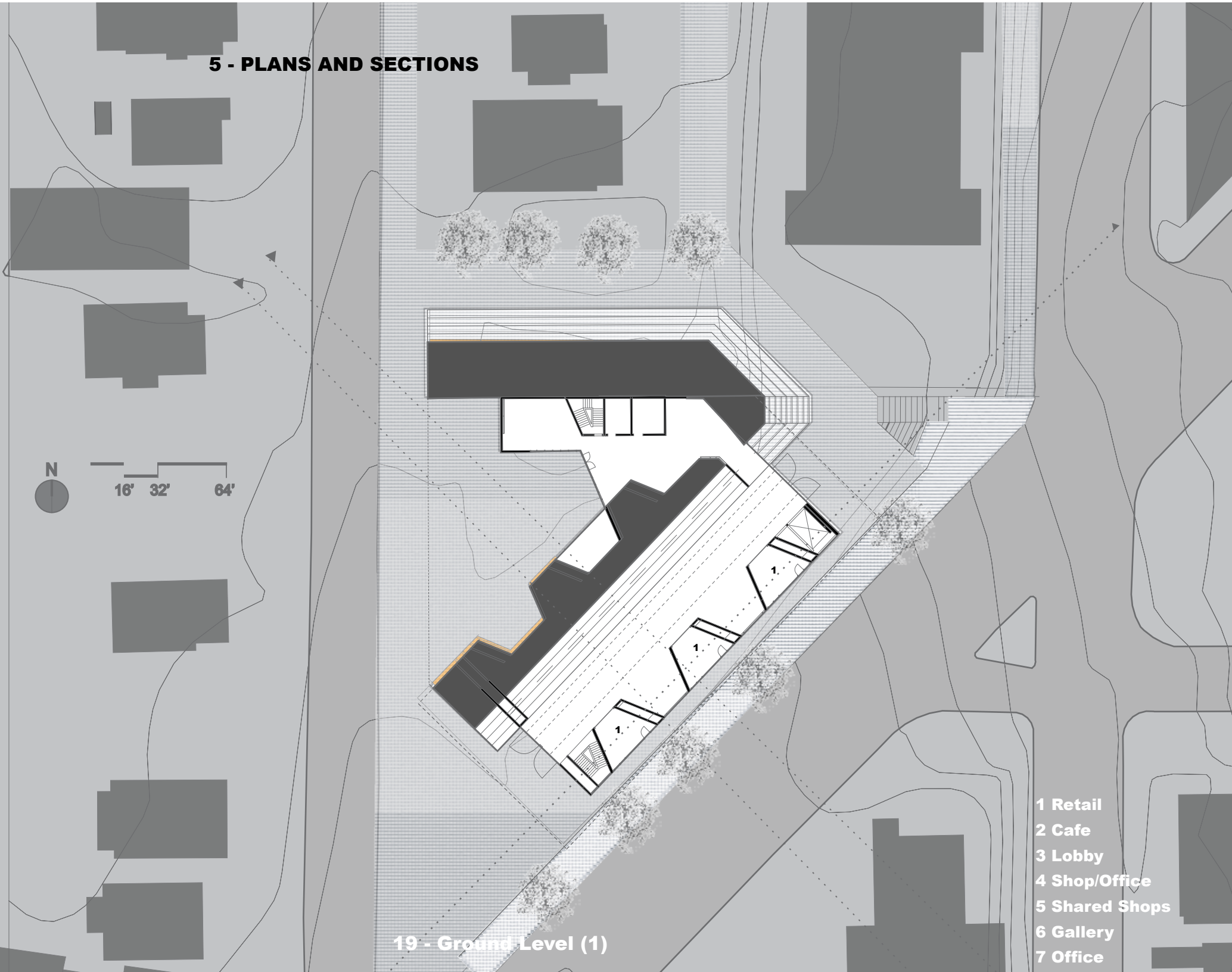
Figures 18 - Diagram of different types of theater spaces. This shows the both passively and actively flexible theater spaces.

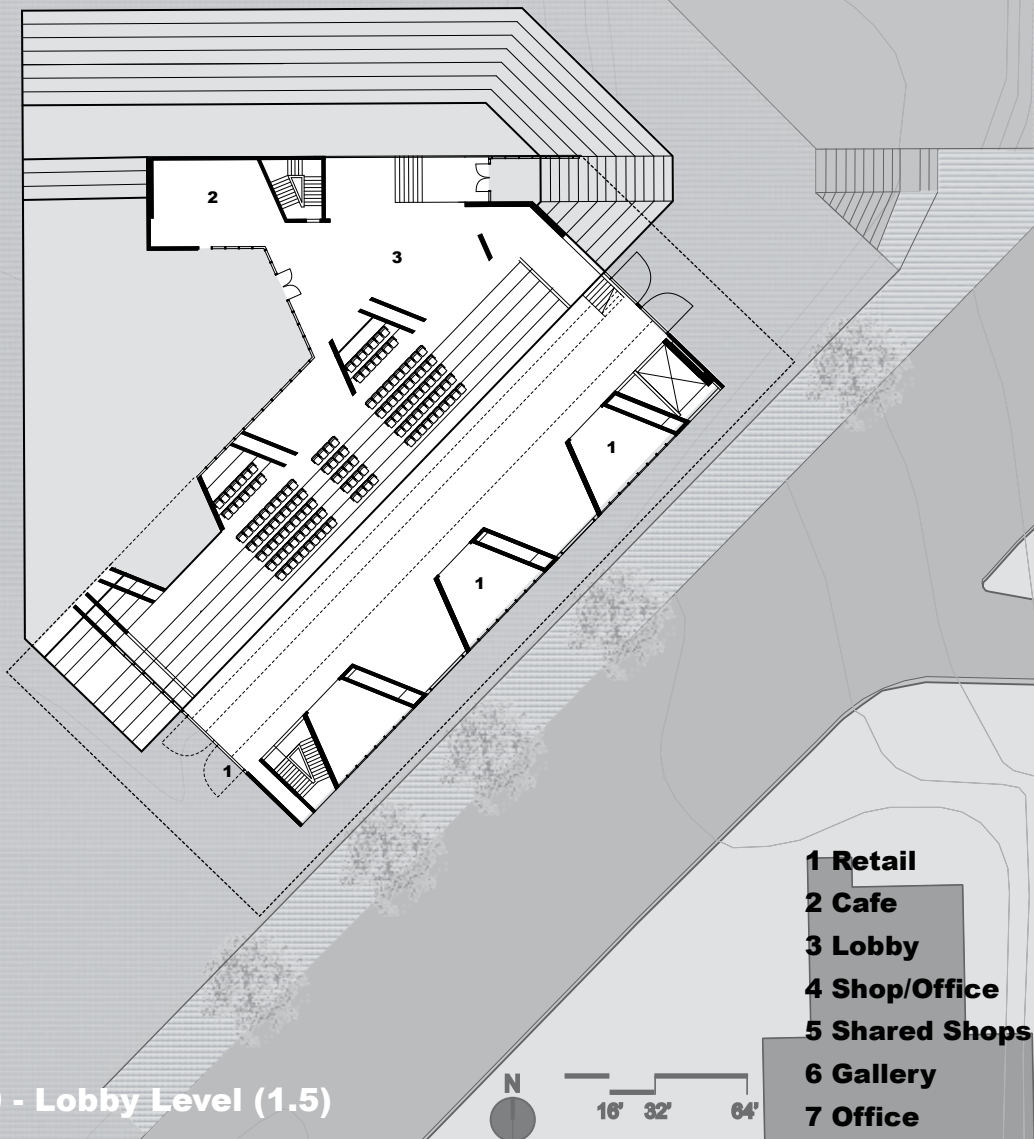
# 5 - PLANS AND SECTIONS



19 - Ground Level (1)

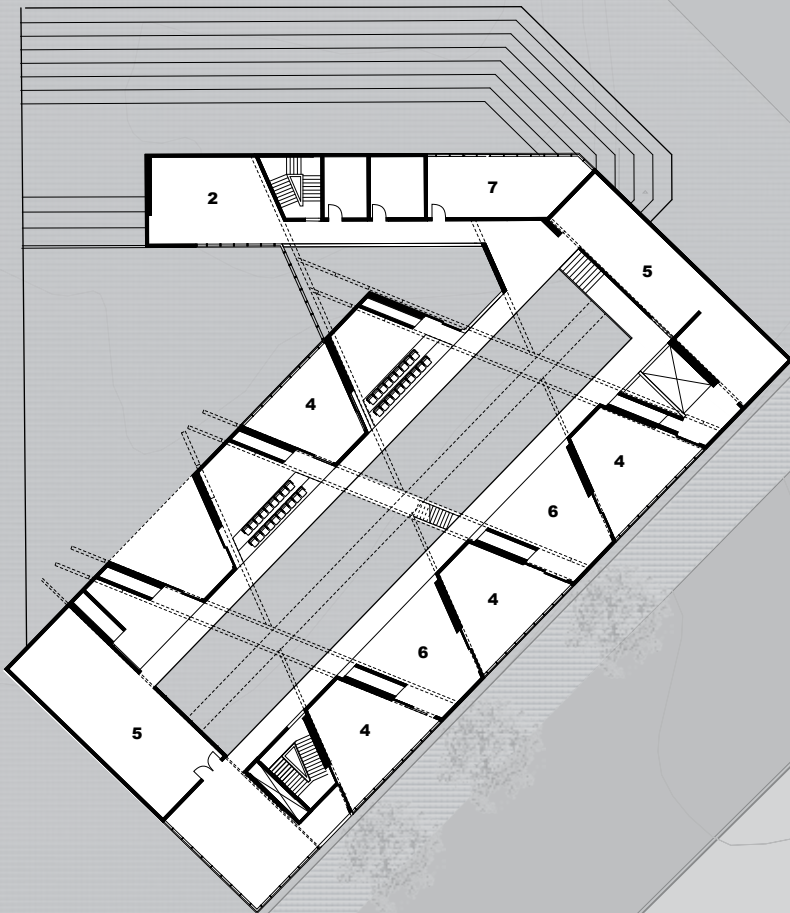
- 1 Retail
- 2 Cafe
- 3 Lobby
- 4 Shop/Office
- 5 Shared Shops
- 6 Gallery
- 7 Office





The ground floor contains the stage, seating and retail shops and covered loading docks on either end of the stage. While the plans show a seating arrangement, this arrangement is not rigid. It is based on the ability to accommodate two small theaters, but can be divided in many ways, or not divided at all. The large doors on either end of the stage space can open to create an extension of the street or an open market style environment. While the format of the space is largely flexible, it maintains the notion of audience and actor through the concrete tiered stepping of the ground plane.

The retail spaces face the city and are associated with the shop spaces above. Each retail space is adjacent to an inward-facing, shared space that is meant to function as an extension of the stage or as a back stage. These spaces interact with the retail spaces as either additional display space or storage space. This provides the opportunity to blur the boundaries between stage set and retail window display. The only separation between the backstage and the sidewalk are glass panels, allowing the city to be the backdrop for the set and for the interior of the set to be seen by those walking and driving by.



21 - Floor 2

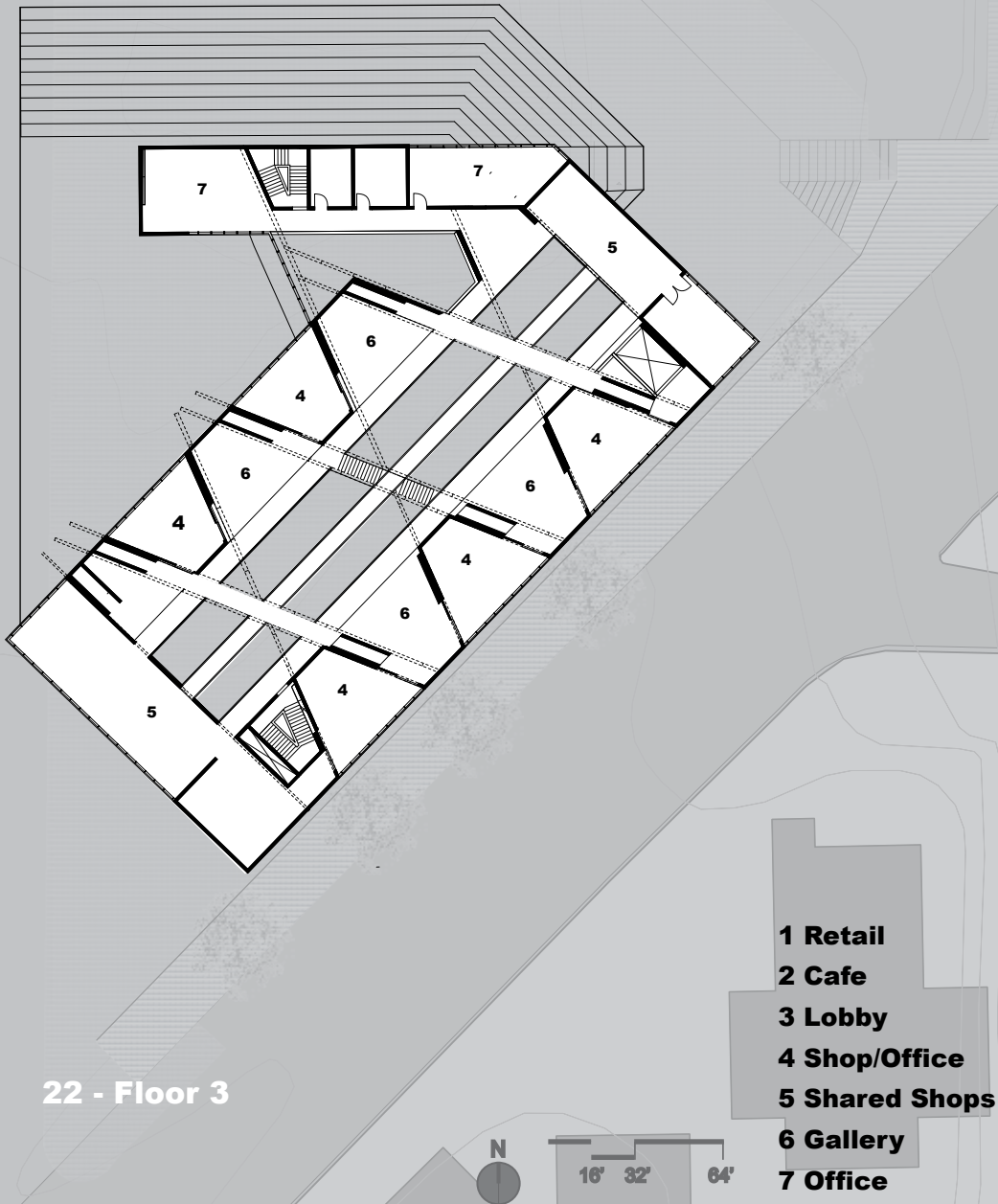
- 1 Retail**
- 2 Cafe**
- 3 Lobby**
- 4 Shop/Office**
- 5 Shared Shops**
- 6 Gallery**
- 7 Office**



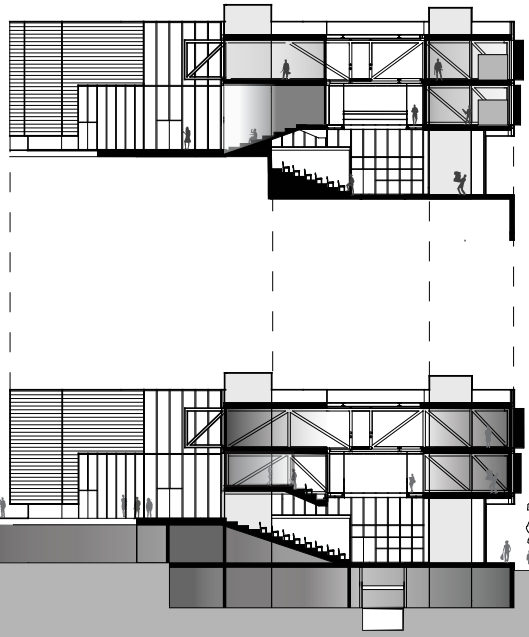
The second floor houses three individual shops with gallery spaces in between. Similar to the backstage spaces, the gallery spaces are meant to be shared by the adjacent shops and are intended to be associated with the theater productions. Their use is intended to be decided by the shops and allow for the presence of people and organizations within the building to expand and contract with their participation in community activities. The gallery spaces on the seating side of the building are intended to be used as box seats and additional seating for performances. Similarly, their use would be curated by adjacent shops.

The corrugated fly section is book ended by larger shop and fabrication spaces that would house larger, more intensive equipment that might be prohibitively expensive for any individual shop. The tail of the building - on the north side - has bathrooms, offices, and an open office/meeting room that would house communal and administrative functions in the building.

The circulation in the interior of the fly space on the upper floors is provided by a series of catwalks that hang from a truss system on the top floor. These catwalks are moveable with the gantry crane and are intended to fluxuate with circulation patterns and different theater forms.



The top floor layout is similar to the second floor, with the exception of a fixed, central catwalk. The structure of the top two floors is made possible by a series of crossing, full story trusses on the top floor. The fixed catwalk extrudes through the meeting point of these trusses.



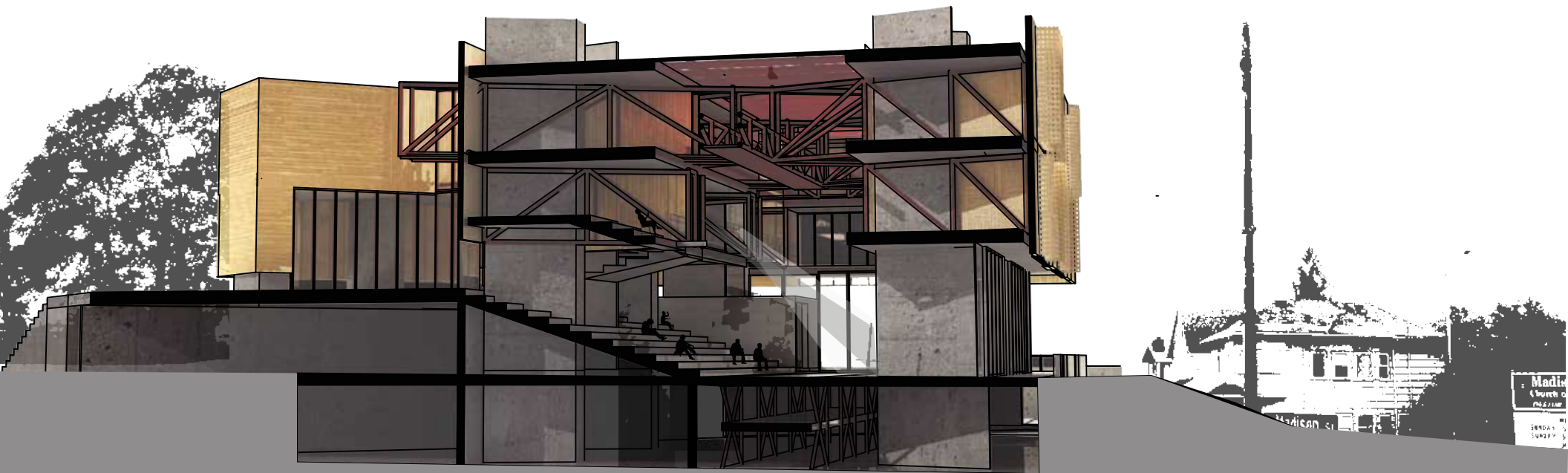
23 - Sections A + B

24 - Sections C + D





**Figure 26**



The skin of the building provides another level of separation or inclusion within the interior and the exterior of the performance spaces. It often follows the corrugated shape of the shop and gallery spaces and divides the individual organization from the shared gallery spaces. In some places, the skin able to be peeled back from the frame through sliding doors and louver panels on the exterior of the building.

The cores in the building provide the main vertical structural support in the building and house the massive amounts of mechanical, vacuum and other services necessary in shop and fabrication spaces. They follow the corrugated pattern of the shop and gallery spaces to give alternating direction to those spaces.

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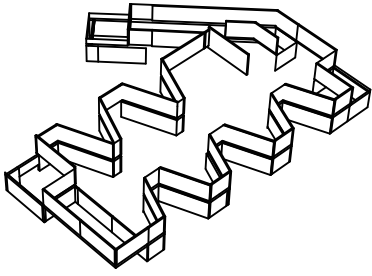
The trusses are full story height on the top floor and span the entire width of the building, allowing the open performance space below and also support for the moveable, hanging catwalks that circulate throughout the interior of the building.

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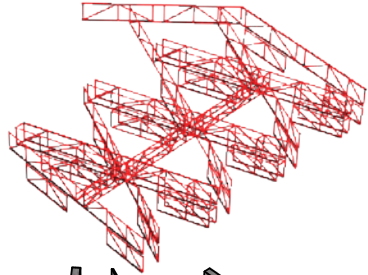
The base of the building is the tiered extension of the street level. This provides raised seating and elevates the lobby space above the street level, providing service access below the lobby, at street level.

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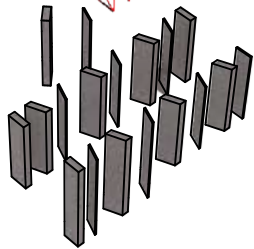
SKIN



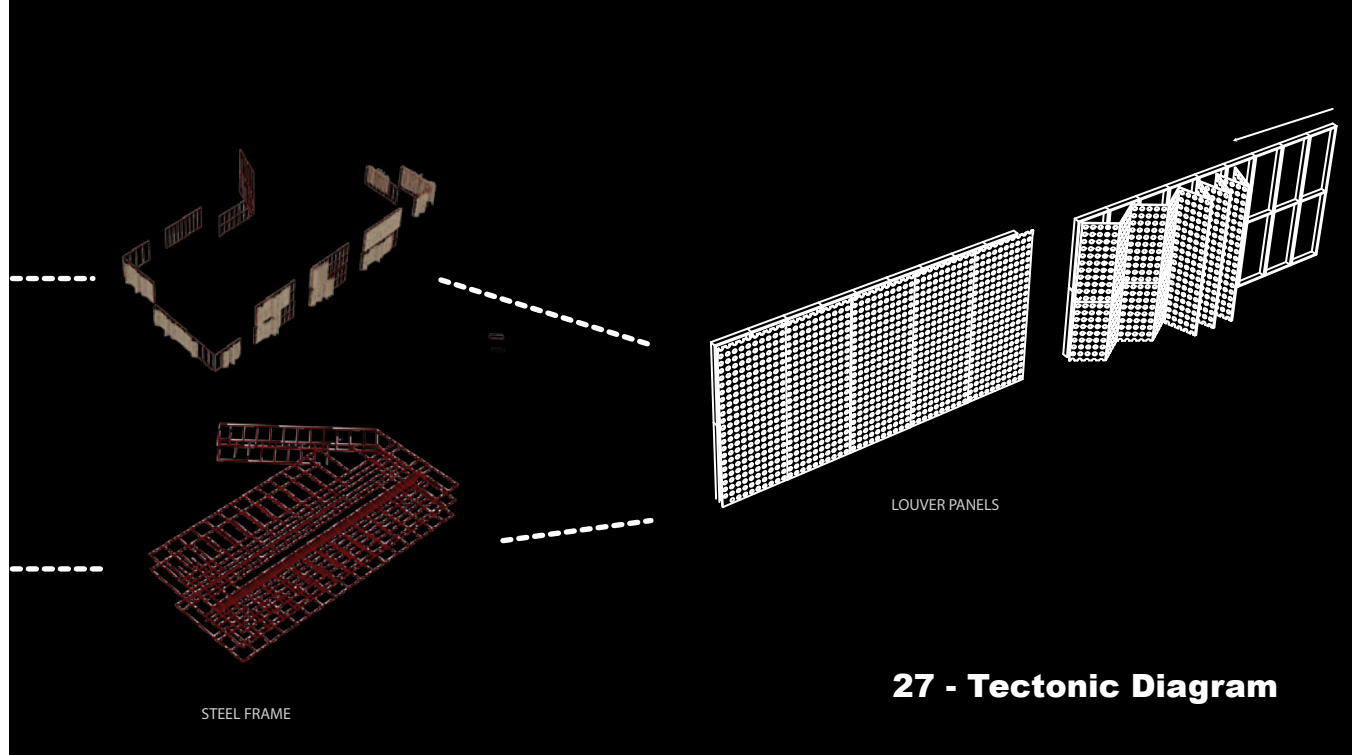
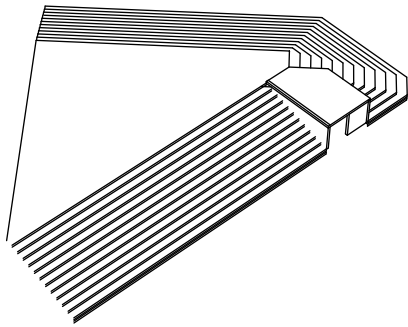
TRUSSES



CORES



BASE





## **Jury Feedback**

Describing a building that is self-critical and constantly in flux is difficult both visually and verbally. The purpose of the project is to help to define and begin an open-ended conversation rather than to provide a specific answer, making for a difficult time defining the boundaries of the design process. This said, once the conversation was off the ground, the jury response was helpful and insightful.

The ideas behind the project were well received. Much of the feedback was focused on taking full advantage of the possibilities that the process had created. Admittedly, much of the exterior, open public space was under-designed or not taken fully taken advantage of. The east end of the building facing the intersection is both an important face of the building to the busy arterial and an important passage between 22nd and Madison. These spaces need weigh heavily and be inviting to be successful and public spaces.

Second, members of the jury thought that the Madison face of the building was perhaps too quiet and not informative enough of the purpose of the building. Throughout the project, this was a difficult balance, wanting to place the visual emphasis of this facade the activity happening within the building rather than of the form of the building. Surprisingly, the general feeling of the feedback was that given the conditions of the project

I set up, perhaps the building was too reserved and did not reach out, into public space as much as it could - something I agree with completely. Loosening up the Madison facade of the building and making the interaction of the skin and openings in the building more active would certainly be the next step in the process.

## **Directions/Reflections**

The central goal of this thesis is to explore the possibility as an open-ended dialogue and to give form to ideas in urban planning and design that are often discussed but difficult to implement. Much of the design process became a conversation about the boundaries and role of an architect and how this role changes from project to project. In this particular project, that was mostly in the terms of the role of the architect and the role of the set designer(s). This flexible set area is the main interface between the building and the community. This, I believe, is both the greatest strength of the project and the area that could use the most development. However, this need for more development also points to a main issue in the thesis: the desire for resolution and the boundaries of architectural design.

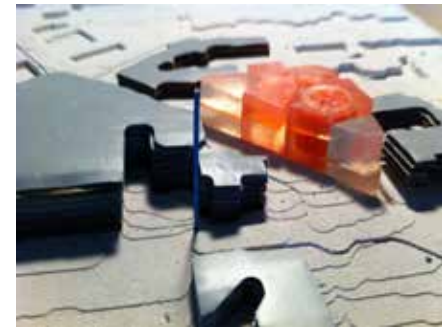
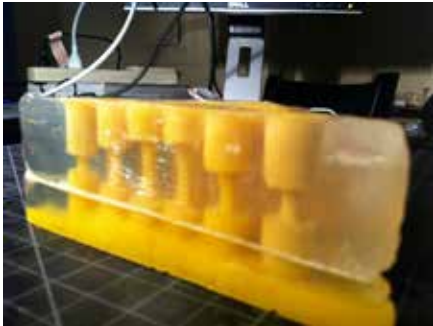
The entire process of the thesis is about exploring the desire that we designers have for resolving, problem solving and providing answers, when providing and answer is not always the best solution. In the case of the

development of community and developing community identity, we are dealing with designing for a process that is inherently changing and redefining itself. This is the challenge of designing flexible spaces. We have to be okay with being as vague or definite as the project requires. This puts architecture in an interesting, but fairly thankless position. Designing truly flexible spaces requires moving beyond passive notions of flexibility. Viewing space as universal and 'open to all possibilities' means at the same time designing with no possibilities in mind. Designing universal spaces actually relieves the designer of much of the burden of decision making. These spaces are open to everything and nothing at the same time.

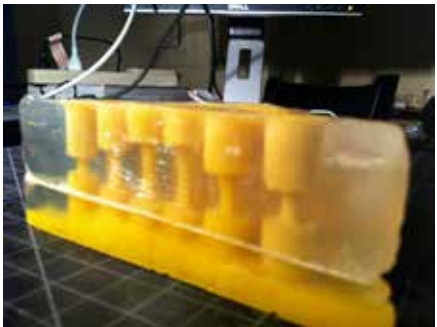
Vagueness, on the other hand, requires rigorous investigation and knowledge of program in order to criticize and reorganize that program. It needs to no the boundaries of an art form in order to see what new possibilities could come from that art form. When I say that this project could use more development in understanding the flexible stage area it doesn't mean that the area is lacking in resolution or that I should have designed the hand rails. I mean that now that the problem of community and theater is set up, the next step in the process would be to identify the possible users of the building and to engage in a process of involving community members in the design process in order to more closely understand the needs of the community. The use of theater in aiding the development of a community core is not the answer to a communities problems - it is a point of entry for understanding a community, its actors and its issues - it is a conversation starter. There is, I believe, a strong argument to be made for theater as an art form being able to function at a community level. However, the form of this theater needs to be

open, to the point where the theater may not even be recognizable as a theater. As a designer this means being responsible to the conversation of the community as well as our design intentions. In this case, perhaps more resolution would mean less building.





**Appendix A - Process Photos**



Madison Street has a long history in the City of Seattle. At present, it is the only vehicle street that directly connects the Puget Sound to Lake Washington. The street stands out on the map because it cuts through the city's east-west and north-south streets, creating a large diagonal gash in the city's grid. This move is largely attributed to Judge John J. McGilvra in the days of Seattle's founding. McGilvra, originally from Illinois, was appointed in 1861 by President Lincoln to be the Attorney for the Territory of Washington and moved to the area that year. He amassed large amounts of land in the area that were sold at five dollars an acre in order to fund the new University of Washington. (Put footnote here). Much of that land was located in today's Madison Park Neighborhood, which was heavily forested and undeveloped at the time. McGilvra established Madison Street as a path from what is now downtown Seattle to his "Laurel Shade" residential retreat in Madison Park. In essence, the street was created by McGilvra and his friends as a means of getting from the downtown business district to their vacation homes.

While Madison street was at first a rough residential road, it soon became heavily trafficked by wagons and horses to Madison park, which became a popular vacation spot. Following the increased activity on the street, McGilvra and his colleagues created the Madison Street Cable Railway Company which had cars

running every two minutes at peak summer hours. A ferry dock was soon created at the end of Madison that crossed Lake Washington to multiple other communities, making the street even more heavily trafficked and an even more important connection throughout the region. Construction of the cable railway resulted in more right-of-way clearing through the Madison Valley. While the Madison Valley and what is now the Madison/Miller community were home to a salmon stream and plenty of forest, the entire area remained heavily passed through on the way to Lake Washington and not developed itself.

While much has changed along Madison - it has been largely developed and Capitol hill is an urban center that extends beyond downtown - the idea that the Madison valley is an area that is passed-through remains the same. Madison street can still largely be seen as a connector between the downtown business district and the wealthy residential neighborhood of Madison Park and what is in between is home to lower-income residents and businesses. (expand).

The triangular nature of the site is physical evidence that the spaces along Madison are afterthoughts of the larger political and economic actions of McGilvra and the city that created the direct connection between Madison Park and Downtown. The site is one of a number of properties awkward triangular sites along Madison that are a result of the collision of the street and the rest of the city's grid. Perhaps the most emblematic of these sites is McGilvra park, located on fifteenth and Madison, which is a small, triangular site that the city has attempted (and is still attempting) to activate through a number of park schemes.



Judge McGilvra



Madison Under Construction

Madison Park

Much of the program of this project is designed for instances that are to be defined by the Madison/Miller community and the users of the building. These uses will change throughout the life of the building and require flexibility. The theater space is the most prominent example of this. This thesis uses the idea of a performance space to include multiple uses and forms of theater, from an enclosed, traditional black box performance to a circus could parade in from the street. However, even traditional styles associated with theaters have multiple forms of stage/seating setups that encourage different forms of audience/actor interactions, from the proscenium style opera to Shakespeare's Globe theater, where the stage is surrounded by standing audience members. To attempt to facilitate all types of stage spaces would be inevitably bring about an overwhelming and most likely unsuccessful project: in trying to accommodate everything, the project would most likely end up with nothing. In this vein of thinking, it is important to maintain simplicity in the program and also to better define the concept of flexibility involved with the theater.

The concept of flexibility is often thrown around without explanation, and understandably, not clearly defined. Within the typology of community centers, we often have large open boxes that are proposed to accommodate any type of activity - meeting spaces that also function as classrooms or gyms that can accommodate any sport, but aren't really great for any one in particular. In this sense, this is where the concepts of flexibility and performance

meet. The better a space tends to be for a specific mode of performance, the more specific the structure and organization of the space is - and the worse it tends to become for other activities. For instance, a beautiful hall that has beautifully engineered acoustics for a large number of seats is great for the symphony but terrible for a rock show simply because you are forced to be seated. In this situation, the flexible gym that can be used for many things is more appropriate for the community center setting.

However, in the search for openness, we often define flexibility is often defined in terms of its neutrality, passivity and lack of definition. Architecture steps back completely and the all activity is organized by an institutional body. Lars Spuybroek associates this passive flexibility in his essay, *The Structure of Vagueness* (footnote) with Modernist concepts of openness and states that it often results in an "averaging of program and equalization, even neutralization, of space.... and is unproductive because of the type of space is not engaged in the emergence of events themselves" (*Performative Architecture*, 171). In reaction, Spuybroek describes his search for a flexibility that can,

"find a structure, a tectonics that can absorb life, chance and change, while the structure itself must last and persist over time, to span the unforeseen with the foreseeable. The strategy of the Cartesian grid and the box have always been to average out all possible events, to be general enough for anything... to engage in the unforeseen does not mean that these are just accidents happening to our agendas" (same quote)

The goal of flexibility is to find a structure that facilitates and encourages change. Spuybroek frames this in terms of the choice of the architect historically being between determined functionalism

and undetermined multifunctionalism, between early and late modernism. He presents the concepts of vagueness and potential as a way out of the traditional conversation; vagueness is an active proposition opposed to the neutrality of passive flexibility. The vague comes before the situation, while neutrality comes after.

What does this mean? Spuybroek describes the vague in its opposition to passive flexibility as something that is on its way to becoming possible; it is something that allows for the achievement of clearly defined goals as well as unforeseen possibilities. Designing flexibility in terms of vagueness instead of neutrality involves setting rules for a game that are meant to be broken or bent. On the spectrum that ranges from the completely undefined box to the professional stage, vagueness lies somewhere in between. It involves the facilitation and understanding of the defined goals that we normally associate with fixed typologies while being elastic enough to play with those typologies. In the tectonic conversation of what is skeletal and what is skin in a building, the flexible space is the cartilage of the building.

Spuybroek demonstrates his idea of flexibility through vagueness in a project called SOFTOFFICE. While the demonstration of the ideas and the demonstrated process of the SOFTOFFICE are fairly complex, there are a few key ideas that can be taken away from it as a case study. In terms of programming, the first step was to get to become familiar with the 'occupancy rates' of the users and to break those users into categories. The categories describe three types of users within a company that can more or less be broken down into job type. There were those whose jobs involved an

occupied desk time of 90 percent, those at 60 percent and those at 35 percent. Those spending 90 percent of their time at desks were fielding calls and doing working at their computers, while those spending 35 percent of their time at the desk were spending the rest of their time meeting with others within and without the office and were generally higher up on the pay scale. The result of mapping people's work habits on a smaller and more dynamic level was the ability to reduce the amount of square footage of the office and the defined and furnished space through shared office space and fewer partitions.

Decisions on how to program shared space were made by mapping the use of the building in terms of daily work and use flows and to examine how those flows would inform the geometry of the building. In this way, the building is begun to be thought of not simply as series of offices that were fed by a corridor, where the static offices are where work gets done and the corridors are the necessary service spaces that are moved through and are a means to an end. In the SOFTOFFICE, the corridors are filled and programmed space, but are less rigid and are meant to grow and shrink as the office configures, reconfigures and adapts to different projects it takes on. Movement and meeting are all programmed into usable and 'vaguely flexible' space. The geometry of the building turns to fixed materiality where demands are more certain, in the 90 percent office spaces, bathrooms and more basic service areas require more regular use, the demand of the program is shared and less likely to change, and where the 'paths' of the building intersect to make nodes. In

this way much of the geometry of the building is inferred or suggested, but not walled-in, creating what Spuybroek refers to as 'soft-rigidity' and 'wet versus dry grid'.

One can on a critical hat in the case of the SOFTOFFICE and argue that the plan and the rendering of the building do not exactly appear to be conducive to flexibility and the geometry of the building would most likely have to be more rigorously considered in order truly function in the manner proposed. It is hard to tell in this case where in the process the geometry was generated and there might be many less complicated solutions to the problem, but these lines of criticism are not the point of presenting Spuybroek's work. The point is to present the concept of flexibility as a positive and active force in the design process as opposed to a passive one and to introduce the idea of 'vagueness' as a concept that is not simply unresolved or 'guessing at the future', but as an approach to design that requires and uses an understanding of program in order to create a flexibility within limits and to create architecture that can actually produce encourage other possibilities in an active manner.

A built example of suggestive flexibility can be found in REX/OMA's Wyly Theater in Dallas. The strategy of the building is to employ all of the back-of-house functions as the "fly" of the building and to place those above in order to create what they refer to as "superfly" (see figure). By placing these functions above the ground level, the entire ground level is opened up and programmatically considered "stage". This stage level employs a number of devices that engage the interaction between the performer and the

viewer, creating a stage that is beyond the idea of the empty box. The exterior skin employs large sliding doors with curtains that allow the set designer to play with the openness of the theater and its relationship with the city. The floor is actually a series of mechanical traps that raise and lower to allow access from below or to provide a stage that is sunken and defined in the floor plane. The seating itself uses devices normally found in sports arena scoreboards that allow the boxes to raise, lower and be completely removed so that not only can the height relationship between viewer and the performer be changed, but the shape of theater can be altered to change in the full spectrum between proscenium and arena seating. The entire floor plane/stage of the building becomes a landscape built for actors, directors and theater goers to interact with and not simply occupy. The theater engages theater and possibility through a rearrangement of program and a series of movable devices that allow for a vast number of possibilities for stages. There are, of course, downsides to this organization in that the theater will never be the best proscenium theater nor the best arena theater in the terms of traditional theater, however, the owners and the architects decided that the capability of flexibility outweighs the need for perfection in the terms of a traditional typology.

The notions of "vagueness" or "flexibility beyond absence" require difficult decisions to be made that require the architect to make commitments and judgments on value. When one hears Joshua Prince-Ramus speak of the Wyly theater, he carefully employs terms of theater such as proscenium and arena, giving the feeling that the decisions made about theater are made from careful analysis and a rigorous process of editing

the necessary from those aspects of the program that can be left to be open to interpretation. Similarly, Spuybroeck uses a process of analysis a percentages of occupied time at desks in the context of the office in order to make decisions of the necessary versus the temporary. Here we see another difference between flexibility as absence versus vagueness. Viewing space as universal and “open to all possibilities” means at the same time that it is really built with no possibilities in mind. It is open to everything and nothing at the same time and it relieves the architect of the burden of decision making. Vague flexibility requires a rigorous examination of typology and knowledge of the program of a space. It is difficult and requires the architect to take the responsibility of producing a space that can engender possibilities and create a framework for spontaneous interaction with that space. At the same time it provides none of the reward of being able to take credit for the design of a particular configuration of that space after construction. Identifying possibilities, yet leaving them open involves work and risk with relatively little reward in terms of the authorship traditionally associated with architecture. It involves liability without much control. This approach to design, in turn, requires architects to be rigorous, brave and to take a back seat to the project itself. In other words, we need to begin recruiting from other fields.

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