

Abstract

A PLACE FOR DANCE :The Design of a School of Dance
at the University of Calgary

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Presented in this document are issues related to the design of a building for a school of dance at the University of Calgary. The investigation is focused on the conceptual and historical background of dance and theatre, in an attempt to find an appropriate and meaningful precedent for the building form and architectural

expression.

The design is also a response to some of the objectives of the Faculty of Fine Arts: that is, to promote innovation and experimentation within the dance programme, and, to encourage collaboration between it and the other fine arts departments. In addition, the design is influenced by the existing arrangement of buildings and roads surrounding the proposed site. An effort is made to clarify the organization of the university campus through the articulation of relationships between buildings and paths of movement.

In response, the major space of the building is a public concourse, similar in form to the nave of a church. This similarity is intended to recall the centralizing force of religion in the medieval university, as well as the role of the early church as a performance setting. In addition to being a gathering place and performance space, it is also the concretization of paths of movement between various campus buildings. Around the dominant form of the concourse are arranged the other spaces of the building, which, in addition to satisfying functional requirements, can be transformed into a variety of indoor and outdoor performance settings.

Keywords: Dance, Performance Art, Theatre Design

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Dedication

To my best friend, Bill - thank you for understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

I. INTRODUCTION

Every dancer - choreographer dreams about the perfect environment for dance, a place where he finds no boundaries for his vision.[1]

This project is about environments, about visions, and most of all, about dance. In trying to define what the "perfect environment for dance" is I had to ask a number of other questions first, such as: What kinds of spaces do dancers need, to do what it is they do? In what way is dance affected by the space in which it is performed? And, ultimately, What is dance? While

attempting to answer these questions, I encountered, within myself and others, many rigid views and preconceptions about dance which needed to be critically examined. I discovered that the answers to these questions were not at all obvious, but rather, elusive and ambiguous. This led me to try to broaden my understanding by reading and attending dance performances of all kinds. I became excited by the multifarious nature of dance, and the immediacy with which it expresses ideas and emotions. As an architect, I became especially interested in dance pieces which seemed to grow out of their surroundings, in response to architectural or natural spaces. As a dancer, I began

[1]Al Huang, "A Natural Place," in "Impulse: The Dancer's Environment," (1967), p.23.

to experience and understand the dynamics of environments by dancing through them, sometimes only in my imagination.

Architecture and Dance

Rudolph Arnheim says: "Expanse becomes real when the dancer runs across it." [2] This belief underlies the work in this project, that architectural space and dance movement are interconnected, and that they influence and make each other visible. To divorce dance from the setting in which it occurs, no matter how minimal, would be like separating our actions and intentional gestures from the world around us.

The ordered movement of the dance can be comprehended only

[2] Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception (Berkeley, 1960), p.378

in terms of the space that surrounds it, that limits and in turn is limited by it. Likewise, the ordered space of architecture can be comprehended only in terms of the human movement, present and potential, that takes place within it. [3]

Project Focus

The result of this investigation is a preliminary design for a building in which dance, and a number of related activities would take place. This design represents an ideal vision. Rather than presenting the solution to a clearly defined problem, it is a speculation about what exactly the nature of that problem is. The cost of the building, and the details of construction are

[3] Barrie Greenbie, "A Theatre for Dance," in The Ideal Theatre: Eight Concepts Ed. M. Cogswell (U.S.A., 1964), p.44.

deemed beyond the scope of this project.

The design ideas for the building emerged from a number of sources:

- (1) The perceived needs of the Programme of Dance, and the Faculty of Fine Arts.
- (2) The specific demands placed on the building by its physical context, and the character of the site.
- (3) A consideration of a variety of existing spaces for dance, some of which I visited, some of which I only read about, and others which were described to me by other people.
- (4) From my own experiences as a student dancer and choreographer, and from various readings which led me through a number of dance-related realms, such as: the history of dance and theatre, ritual, religion and public celebration, philosophy, art, and architecture.

The first three categories are discussed under the headings of: "Overall Goals", "Space Requirements", "Physical Context", and "Existing Spaces for Dance." A more general discussion then follows, entitled "Conceptual and Historical Background", in which dance and the spaces it has been performed in are examined. Finally, the building design itself is presented, representing a concretization of ideas and conclusions formed from the preceding discussions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

OVERALL GOALS

The overall goals for this design project reflect those of the University of Calgary, specifically the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Programme of Dance. In the coming years, they hope to initiate and foster a spirit of innovation and experimentation. The Faculty of Fine Arts believes it must provide, "for both faculty and students, the climate and facilities for exploration, research and the expansion of knowledge." [4]. With this goal in mind, the Faculty of Fine Arts is currently proposing to develop a

[4]The University of Calgary Faculty of Fine Arts, "Letter of Intent-BFA(Dance) Proposal," (Calgary, 1984), p.1.

degree programme in dance which would allow the existing Programme of Dance to grow and reach its full potential as a distinct department.

According to the Faculty of Fine Arts, the objective of the degree programme in dance would be:

...the education and career preparation of adults who wish to pursue a study of dance as an art form, including pre-professional dancers and choreographers, dance scholars (historians, critics and analysts) dance managers, dance designers, semi professional dancers, performing amateurs and those interested in obtaining an understanding and appreciation of dance. [5]

In addition to providing instruction in so many aspects of dance, they

[5]Loc. cit.

would like to develop links between the degree programme in dance and other Fine Arts departments, namely Music, Art and Drama,[6] with the intention of providing opportunities for collaboration.

In order to achieve these goals, the existing facilities at the University would have to be augmented. A document outlining proposed space needs was prepared by the Programme of Dance in 1983, and this document was used as a starting point for the work in this master's degree project. Its contents and assumptions were challenged, refined, and sometimes modified. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of the project, please refer to the appendix. What follows is a brief

[6]Ibid, p.2.

summary of what were finally accepted to be the basic requirements for the design of a building in which both dance instruction and performance could take place.

SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Enrolment in the degree programme in dance is expected to reach a total of one hundred dance majors and eighty dance minors within a period of five years. To accomplish the overall goals of the Faculty of Fine Arts as discussed above, three different types of instruction space are required:

- (1) Dance Studios: These spaces require large, open floor areas with resilient "sprung" floors to protect the dancers from injury. In these spaces students will learn modern, jazz, ballet and other dance techniques, and

will also develop, rehearse and perform choreographic works.

- (2) Design Studio and Workshop: In these spaces, students will develop lighting designs, settings and costumes in conjunction with choreographic works. Activities will range from drawing and drafting to the construction of sets and costumes.
- (3) Lecture Rooms: These standard classroom spaces will be used for a number of dance related academic courses, and may be shared with other Fine Arts departments.

To support these activities a number of other spaces would also be required:

- (1) Shower, locker, and dressing rooms for students,
- (2) Student lounge and study areas,
- (3) Faculty and administration offices, conference room and lounge, and,

- (4) Resource centre for students and faculty.

Finally, space is required for the performance of work by students and/or faculty. The performances may be informal (works in progress, class demonstrations) or complete, finished works. They may involve collaborations with other Fine Arts departments, and may take a number of different forms. In short, the possibilities will be limited only by the creativity of the choreographers, and by the resources available to them.

Rather than being completely determined in the pre-design stage, the space requirements continued to evolve throughout the design process. They grew out of ideas about the nature of

dance and performance. They also relate to the identity of the proposed dance department as a small group within the larger context of the university community. The space requirements are thus an aspect of the design concepts which emerged after a cyclical process of research and design. In the final chapter of this document a more detailed description of some of these spaces will be provided. The discussion will be confined to those spaces of the building for which conventional solutions were inadequate, specifically, the performance space, dance studios and the locker/dressing room component. The other spaces of the building - workshop, classrooms and offices - have been treated in this preliminary design as standard spaces without unusual

requirements.

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The site selected for the proposed facility for dance is in the core of the University of Calgary campus. It is located between the Library and the Physical Education complex, and is bounded by the MacEwan Hall expansion to the north-west, and the University Theatre and Craigie Hall (formerly Calgary Hall) to the south-east (See Figure 1).

This selection was prompted by a study conducted in 1982 for the department of Campus Development, which suggested that an expanded Craigie Hall complex could accommodate the entire Fine Arts programme. The study proposed

- Proposed Site
 1 MacEwan Hall
 2 University Theatre
 3 Reeve Theatre
 4 Craigie Hall
 5 Parkade/Visual Arts
 6 Education
 7 Scurfield Hall
 8 Arts & Administration
 9 Sciences
 10 Earth Sciences
 11 Engineering
 12 Nickle Arts Museum
 13 Library
 14 Physical Education
 15 Olympic Oval
 16 Students' Residence

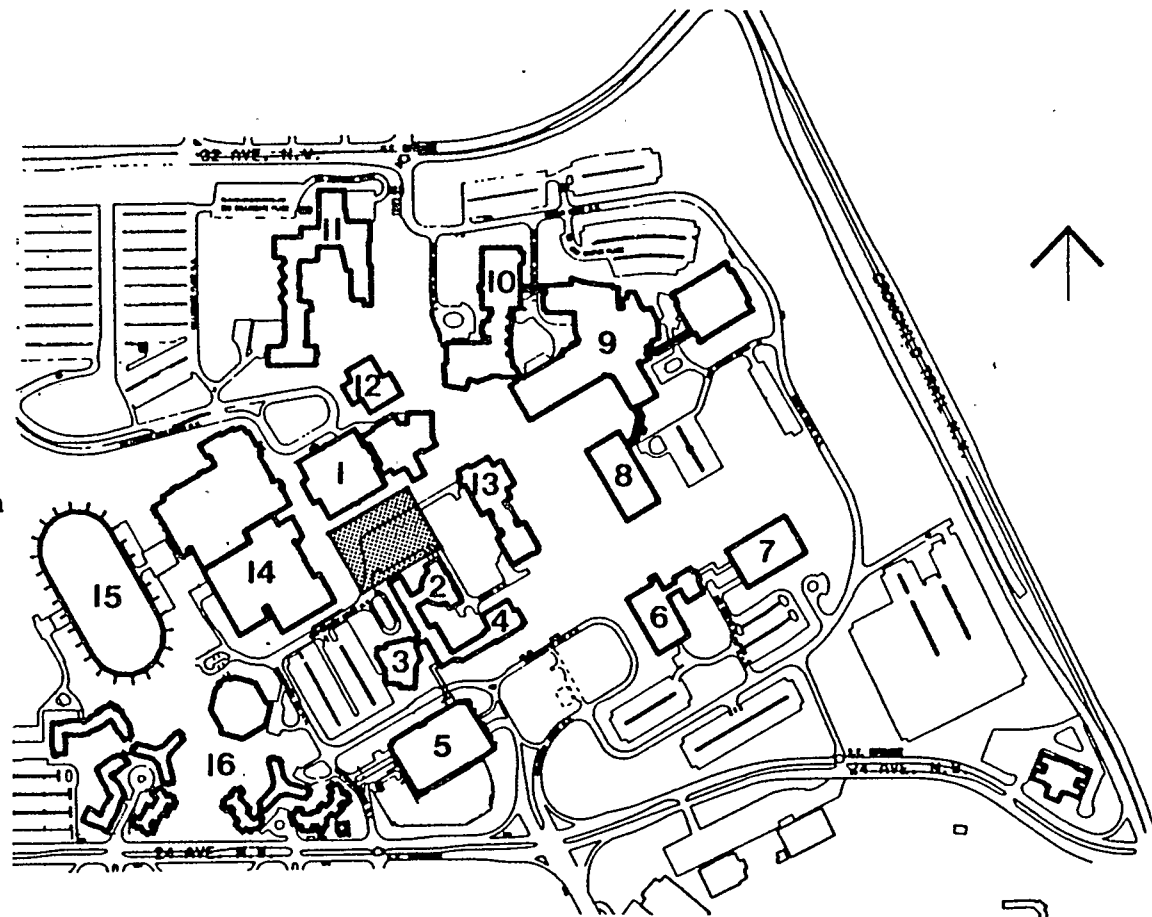


FIGURE 1. PROPOSED SITE

that new space be constructed for the Dance Programme, to the north of Craigie Hall's F and G blocks, as its requirements could not be met easily within the existing structure.[7] The Campus Development study therefore forms the scenario upon which this project is based. It does not necessarily reflect the intentions of the Faculty of Fine Arts, or the department of Campus Development, but was chosen simply as an ideal, hypothetical situation upon which to base this preliminary architectural design.

Before one can respond specifically to the site, it is necessary to see it as a fragment of a larger whole - the

[7]J.H. Christie,"Faculty of Fine Arts Calgary Hall Study" (Unpublished Study,1982), p.14.

university campus. As such it is subject to a number of broad objectives, determined by the department of Campus Development.

One objective is to create a pedestrian oriented campus, with pathways separated from service roads, and an enclosed, climate controlled circulation system linking buildings together. Another objective is to endow the buildings of the campus with a "unity of design to achieve an harmonious environment." [8] To this end, new construction must respond in a sympathetic manner to the appearance of existing buildings by employing similar building materials and finishes. Within this environment of

[8]The University of Calgary, "Development of the Campus - Appendix B" (Calgary, 1978), no pagination.

"unity" and "harmony" Campus Development hopes to create a variety of "stimulating setting(s) for informal activities." [9] This desire is reflected in the landscape of the campus, with its curvilinear paths and roadways, its variety of discontinuous green spaces and picturesque islands of shrubs and trees. Unfortunately, the way these objectives have been interpreted has produced a lack of order in the underlying plan of the circulation system, and has rendered the campus illegible to both students and visitors.

In his book Spaces, Barrie Greenbie points out that because of its public nature, a university must create an environment which is:

[9]Loc. cit.

... far more predictable and legible, at least as regards those details and landmarks that serve for orientation. [10]

Also, given the size of the campus, (full and part-time enrolment is now approximately 18,000 students), and the desire to welcome members of the community into University activities, [11] clarity and efficiency in the circulation system should be a priority.

Another criticism of the University of Calgary campus is that it lacks significant landmarks and focal points. In the past, religion provided a centralizing force and unity of purpose for

[10]Barrie Greenbie, Spaces: Dimensions of the Human Landscape, (New Haven, 1981), p.33.

[11]The University of Calgary, "Development of the Campus" no pagination.

universities, and their monastic beginnings were reflected in their form. Buildings were arranged around a cloistered quadrangle, and the chapel served as a strong focal point.[12]

Today, the University of Calgary, like most other contemporary universities, is composed of a heterogeneous group of people, with few shared values and religious beliefs. The absence of monuments and public meeting spaces in the campus landscape is, in part, evidence of this. These are elements of what J.B. Jackson refers to as the "public landscape," which seeks to establish permanent values and to satisfy:

...a fundamental human urge to be a part of an order which is more lasting than we are: a moral or ethical order which transcends our individual experience.[13]

Even without the strong unifying force of religion, it is possible to find some shared beliefs within a secular university community. Thomas Jefferson's 18th century design for the University of Virginia reveals a conscious attempt to break away from the ecclesiastical traditions of the university. The major building, the Rotunda, is a library rather than a chapel - a "temple of learning"[14] rather than a church of God.

[12]Paul Venable Turner, Campus: An American Planning Tradition (London, 1985), p.10.

[13]J.B. Jackson, Landscapes, ed. Ervin H. Zube (Massachusetts, 1970), p.152.

[14]Desmond Guinness and Julius Trousdale Sadler Jr., Mr. Jefferson Architect (New York, 1981), p.125.

In the 1967 Development Plan for the University of Calgary, the desire to make the library tower the "focal point" and symbolic centre of the campus, was expressed. Besides being located roughly in the centre of the academic core of the campus, however, there is little else to support its role as a "focal point." There is nothing about it which allows it to act as a landmark, for there is nothing which sets it apart from the other tall buildings on campus. Unlike Jefferson's design, the surrounding buildings and landscape do not provide the conditions necessary for the library to fulfill its symbolic function, for nothing actually focuses on it.

Rapid increases in enrolments in the past couple of decades have also influenced campus planning principles. Future growth and flexibility were major concerns, and a "physical planning process" was believed to be more appropriate than a more rigid "master plan." [15] But a changing economic climate has seriously affected growth in the past few years at the University of Calgary, and a planning process which deals only with rapid growth and change may soon become obsolete. Perhaps now the department of Campus Development will become concerned with creating a sense of order and coherence in the campus landscape. In addition, much could be done to

[15] The University of Calgary, Development Plan 1976-1985 (Calgary, 1976), p. 21.

recall the long tradition of universities, and to symbolize the fundamental values of knowledge and learning that have always been shared by academic communities.

EXISTING SPACES FOR DANCE

Dancers study, work and perform in a diverse assortment of spaces. This survey considers only those few spaces for which documentation could be found. Some basic generalizations can still be made though. For instance, very few facilities are new buildings, designed specifically for dance. Instead, most are spaces fit into the shells of abandoned buildings of all kinds - churches, movie houses, factories, and warehouses, to cite a few.

The spaces examined for this project fall roughly into two categories:

- (1) Dance teaching facilities at colleges and universities, which may have their own performance space, or may share a theatre with the other performing arts.
- (2) Spaces used by professional dance companies of various sizes, for rehearsal, and sometimes teaching. These companies perform their works in a variety of places, ranging from the studio itself to civic theatres and opera houses.

The second category may not appear immediately relevant to the design problem at hand, but in fact, these spaces, and the people who use them, have influenced the goals and requirements of university dance programmes. This is because educational institutions have become havens for professional dancers

and choreographers - places where they can retain artistic freedom while achieving a degree of financial stability.[16] Professional companies are no longer the only ones to present original choreographic works to the public, as this has now become an important aspect of university dance programmes as well. This represents a change from a few decades ago, when the function of a university or college dance programme was not perceived to be the preparation of dancers for careers in professional dance companies. Dance was seen instead as a form of physical activity and personal development through creative expression.

[16]Seymour Kleinman, "Dance, the Arts, and the University," in "Journal of Aesthetic Education," (January,1969), p.54.

College prospects who had a professional dance career as their goal were advised to forget a liberal education and to rush posthaste to New York where they could study first-hand with famous professional dancers who were teaching in order to support their companies.[17]

Many dance companies still offer classes to subsidize their operations, but now dance departments are also turning out dancers of professional quality who are able to pursue careers in dance.[18]

In the first category of spaces, noted above, the Dance Instructional Facility for the State University of New York College at Purchase is one of the

[17]Elizabeth Hayes, "Dance in the Universities: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," in "Arts in Society," (Summer, 1976), p.340.

[18]Elizabeth Zimmer, "Revamping Dance at Purchase," in "Dancemagazine," (November,1981), p. 56.

few new buildings to be designed specifically for dance (See Figure 2). It is considered by many to represent the "state-of-the-art". The building, designed by architect Gunnar Birkerts, working with the former dean of the school, William Bales, consists of twelve dance studios, and contains a studio theatre. Students can also perform on the "sprung" stage of Theatre 'C' in the Performing Arts Centre on campus. Some of the studios have mezzanines for video-taping equipment or spectators, and the studios receive borrowed light from the skylit corridors adjacent to them.[19] The building sits on a long narrow site, and as a result, the interior spaces of the building are

[19]Ibid, p. 57.

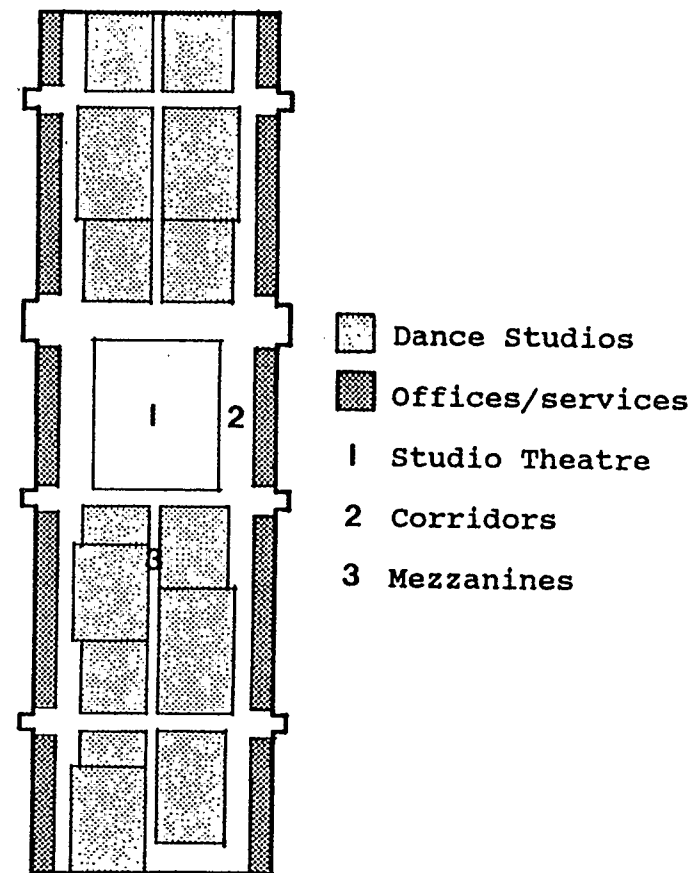


FIGURE 2. DANCE FACILITY AT
PURCHASE, NEW YORK

arranged in a linear manner, linked by long narrow corridors. The specific functional requirements of dance have been well addressed in the design, and one can see why it is considered to be one of the best facilities of its kind. But the overall organization and form of the building seem to be more of a response to the "strongly controlling master plan"[20] for the campus (by Edward Larrabee Barnes) than to any concepts the designer may have had concerning the nature of dance (See Figure 3).

The second category of spaces, those used by professional companies, can be subdivided into two groups:

[20]Mildred F. Schmertz, "A School for the dance by Gunnar Birkerts," in "Architectural Record," (February, 1977), p. 85.

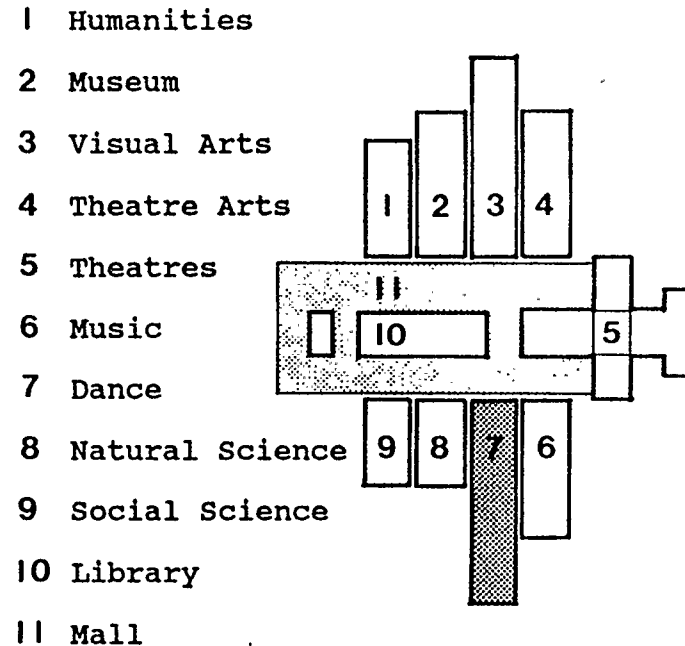
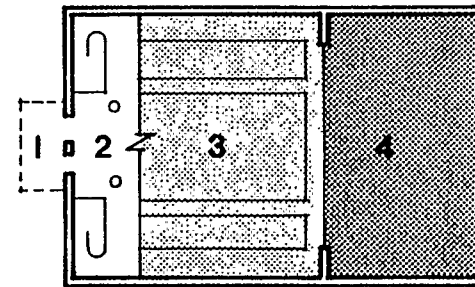


FIGURE 3. MASTER PLAN OF
CAMPUS AT PURCHASE

- (1) Theatre buildings which may have been renovated to suit some of the specific requirements of dance.
- (2) Alternative spaces, which are usually multi-use in nature.

In the first category, adapted theatres are characterized by a clear separation between the private and public spaces of the building. The Joyce Theatre in New York, a converted 1941 movie house, is an example of such a space (See Figure 4). To better suit the presentation of dance, architect Hugh Hardy increased the size of the stage, and improved sightlines by giving the seats a steeper rake. The stage has been given a sprung floor, with two retractable floor surfaces to suit the requirements of either ballet or modern dance.[21] Other than these special concessions to dance, the building resembles a traditional theatre in all other



- 1 Public Entry
- 2 Lobby
- 3 Auditorium
- 4 Stage

FIGURE 4. THE JOYCE THEATRE, NEW YORK

respects. It contains a lobby, auditorium with fixed seats, stage and backstage area, each space serving a distinct and separate function.

[21]"For Dancers Exclusively," in "Architectural Record," (November, 1984), p. 103.

The other category is the so-called alternative space. This is usually one

space, where the dancer/choreographer works, rehearses, teaches, performs, and sometimes even lives. These spaces speak eloquently about the economics of being an artist in our society, for they are pared down to the bare essentials, as in Tricia Brown's studio/living space in Soho New York. The 10.5m x 15m space, in a former garment manufacturing house, was renovated without the aid of an architect, and the priorities were to provide a sprung floor, proper heating, and track lighting.[22] David Gordon and Douglas Dunn, who have dance spaces in the same building with Brown, hold performances within their studios, seating the audience on folding chairs and

cushions on the floor.[23] Brown, on the other hand, performs her dance pieces in a number of non-theatre spaces such as "gymnasiums, museums, art galleries, and public spaces, once even floating on rafts in a pond." [24] One of her most well-known works, "Roof Piece," was performed above her studio, with dancers scattered across the grey landscape of rooftops in lower Manhattan.[25]

These three examples, the School of Dance at Purchase, the Joyce Theatre, and Trisha Brown's New York studio, represent a cross-section of existing spaces for dance. In some respects they are similar - for instance in all three cases sprung floors were considered a

[22]Leslie Armstrong and Roger Morgan, Space for Dance (USA,1984), p. 139

[23]Ibid, p. 140.

[24]Don McDonagh, Complete Guide to Modern Dance (Toronto, 1977), p 416.

[25]Ibid, p.415.

priority. But they differ greatly in other respects. For example, they each reflect a different approach to performance space. At the dance school in Purchase, an experimental "black-box" theatre is provided, while the Joyce offers a traditional proscenium arch theatre. Trisha Brown often rejects both experimental and traditional settings in favour of an expanded concept of theatre in which almost any environment can become a performance space for dance.

CONCEPTUAL
& HISTORICAL
BACKGROUND

III. CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE NATURE OF DANCE

Many preconceptions exist concerning the nature of dance, and Professor Allegra Fuller Snyder articulated one of these in a 1983 lecture:

When I use the word "dance" what or who comes readily to mind?... How many, whose first and immediate thought was related to ballet, think of it almost synonymously with the word "dance"? Are they willing to realize and acknowledge that ballet, like every other form of dance, had its first roots in "a people", and is representative of a "world view" but is in no sense universal?[26]

In trying to define "dance" therefore,

[26]Allegra Fuller Snyder, "Examining the Dance Event from a World Perspective," presented as a lecture in New York, April 12, 1983.

one must look beyond specific forms, like ballet, to what the essence of dance is, and what distinguishes it from other activities.

According to Susanne Langer, our vitality is revealed through movement and gesture:"In actual life gestures function as signals or symptoms of our desires, intentions, expectations, demands and feelings."[27] In dance however, we are not concerned with actual gestures, but with abstract and illusory "virtual" gestures which spring from imagined feelings and intentions.

The primary illusion of dance is a virtual realm of Power - not actual, physically exerted power, but appearances of influence and agency created by vir-

[27]Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York, 1953), p. 174.

tual gesture.[28]

According to Langer, the purpose of dance and the other arts is not the expression of the artist's own feelings or the excitation of these feelings in the beholder, but rather, and objectification of feelings to bring them into the realm of understanding.[29] All art, including dance, is symbolic, and is an "articulate but non-discursive form having import without conventional reference." [30] This means that artistic symbols do not refer specifically to some object or item of experience outside of themselves, but rather give form to, and "bestows a conceptual identity" on that

[28]Ibid, p. 175.

[29]Ibid, p. 18.

[30]Ibid, p. 32.

which is ineffable in our experience - namely: feelings. [31] Discourse runs parallel to art, and gives form to our world of ideas, and together art and language provide us with a complete representation of our experience as feeling and reasoning beings.

A comprehensive definition of dance must therefore transcend individual dance forms such as ballet, jazz or modern, to embrace any activity which symbolizes, through 'virtual' gestures, the life force or power which animates us.

A complete discussion of the many and varied forms of dance is well beyond

[31]Susanne K. Langer, "On a New Definition of Symbol," in Philosophical Sketches (Baltimore, 1962), p. 62.

the scope of this document, but it is important to consider the number of human activities in which dance plays an integral role. Dance has been used in religious worship, the performance of ritual, and the working of magic. It is a form of theatrical performance and popular entertainment. It serves social, recreational and courtship functions, is an occupation or career for some, and a means of physical or emotional therapy for others.[32] For the ancient Greeks, dance represented the "ideal integration of the body and spirit." [33] Later, in the period of decline of the Roman Empire, dance became an element in violent and

[32]Richard Kraus and Sarah Chapman, History of the Dance in Art and Education (Englewood Cliffs, 1981), p. 15.

[33]Ibid, p. 39.

sadistic spectacles,[34] while later still, within the context of the Christian Church, dance assumed the form of dignified and worshipful processions. The entire history of dance reflects the polarities of human existence, for "it is so closely linked with amusement, dressing-up, frivolity, on the one hand and with religion, terror, mysticism and madness on the other." [35]

In addition to the various forms that dance may assume, its relationship to the other arts also fluctuates. At times, dance may appear to be the dominant element in an event, clearly distinct and separate from drama, music, or visual art. But at other times, there

[34]Ibid, p. 46.

[35]Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 184.

may be such a fusion of the arts that traditional nomenclature is insufficient to fully describe the resultant form.

RoseLee Goldberg refers to this fusion as "performance" or "live art", and sees it as an elusive form which defies traditional definitions and categories. As a result, it has largely been excluded from discussions of the history of art, even though it is inextricably intertwined with that history.

Whether tribal ritual or medieval Passion plays, Leonardo da Vinci's experiments before invited audiences or his river pageants, Bernini's staged spectacles, such as "The Inundation of the Tiber", or the 'soirees' of the so-called primitive painter Henri Rousseau in his Montmartre studio, such events have always played an important part in shaping the history of

art.[36]

We now have a definition of dance which acknowledges the rich variety of its forms, and includes performance events in which dance may be one of many equally important means of expression. It is an intentionally broad and inclusive definition which represents my view of what a dancer's education at the university level should consist of. It considers not only dance which is intended to be viewed by an audience, but also those forms which are primarily participatory in nature, for these also contribute to the vocabulary of theatre dance. This necessarily expands our conception of dance spaces to include

[36]Roselee Goldberg, Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present (New York, 1979), p. 6.

any place that these performance and participatory events may occur. As a result, we realize that the types of spaces used for dance are as diverse as dance itself.

In ancient Greece and Rome, they danced in outdoor amphitheatres; in feudal Europe, cathedrals, village squares and market places were their ports of call; during the Renaissance they performed in fancy indoor theatres, court ballrooms and gardens;...[37]

In the 17th century however, ballet dancers moved onto the proscenium stage, and subsequently dance remained linked to the drama stage for more than three hundred years. This connection between ballet and the proscenium theatre was

[37]Peter Frank, "New Dance Art: The Arts in Fusion," in "Dancemagazine," (April, 1974), p. 62.

rooted at first in underlying conceptual similarities, but as the "world view" and dance changed, the setting remained the same. Professor Fuller Snyder suggests that, "much of the way we think about dance, understand dance, is left over from other periods of history - other environments." [38]

In response to this statement, and in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the proscenium theatre for dance in the 20th century, a more detailed examination of the evolution of classical ballet will now be undertaken. Even though we have established that ballet is only one of many dance forms, we cannot underestimate its influence upon the

[38]Allegra Fuller Snyder, "The Kinesthetic Environment," in "Impulse: The Dancer's Environment," (1967), p. 3.

way we think about dance and dance spaces, even today.

BALLET AND THE ITALIAN STAGE

Ballet is a dance form which evolved from the elaborate court dances of the Renaissance. These provided a vocabulary of movements which became increasingly complex, ornate and systematized, especially once ballet was brought into the court of Louis XIV. Louis himself played a leading role in many of the court performances, with the same skill and grandeur that he played the role of the "Sun King".[39]

Louis' life was one continuous pageant in which each hour had its appropriate activity, cos-

tume, cast and audience. [40]

The formality and symmetry of the dance form represented perfectly the absolutism and centralized power of the monarch. In addition, the rules of etiquette and the ornate clothing styles of the King's court were mirrored and elaborated in the stylized dance movements and elaborate costumes.

In the settings for ballet, and other performances, notably opera, an emphasis on scenic spectacle and impressive illusions developed. The same held true for architecture and landscape design - the settings in which Louis played out the role of the supreme ruler took on the appearance of "impressive

[39]Kraus, op. cit., p. 70.

[40]William Fleming, Arts and Ideas (Toronto, 1974), p. 248.

backdrops" [41] for the performance of ceremonies, processions and other displays of wealth and power.

Ballet grew out of, upheld, and thus became a part of a specific power structure.

For the arts, the alliance with absolutism meant that they were of value as instruments of propaganda, factors in the assertion of national power and prestige and the means of enhancing the glory of the court, impressing visiting dignitaries, and stimulating export trade.[42]

The "world view" that ballet originated in was one of a centralized organization with all of the power radiating from a single source at its centre. When this organization was replaced

in the late 18th century following the French Revolution, ballet underwent changes as well, but they were not as dramatic as one might anticipate. It was not until the early 20th century that modern dance in America fully expressed concepts of freedom, equality and democracy. In the meantime, ballet followed a path which led ultimately to decay and stagnation because it failed to remain relevant to the concerns of society.

During the reign of Louis XIV, in 1673, the Royal Academy of Music and Dance was given the use of the theatre in the Palais Royal. This was a theatre built in the Italian style with an elevated stage at one end beneath a proscenium arch, and seating for specta-

[41]Ibid, p. 243.

[42]Ibid, p. 242.

tors facing the raised stage. [43] The so-called Italian Stage had developed during the Italian Renaissance, and represented a continuation of ancient Roman theatre forms. This earlier form consisted of semi-circular tiers of seats confronting a narrow stage behind which was the scene-building. Its front wall, the "scaenae frons", was highly ornamented with architectural detail, and presented an impressive and overpowering backdrop for the dramatic action.

The Teatro Olimpico, begun by Palladio in 1580, and finished by Scamozzi in 1585, was based on the ancient form, but incorporated certain variations. A major central arch and two smaller

doorways were cut into the scaenae frons, and through these openings vistas were created. These consisted of models of "streets or tree-lined avenues, in strict perspective, all converging on a central piazza, the stage." [44]

Gradually this idea was simplified to a single arch, encompassing the entire width of the stage opening, behind which the illusion of depth was created using perspective scenery. The arch suggested the use of a curtain to separate the auditorium from the stage area, and from this point on:

The typical "Italian stage" form had arrived, and it served as the basic model for most theatres built since then, with very

[43]Kraus, op. cit., p. 72.

[44]Christos G. Athanasopoulos, Contemporary Theatre: Evolution and Design (Toronto, 1983), p. 60.

few variations.[45]

It also served as the primary setting for dance for over three hundred years. Not only did the Italian stage separate the dancers' space from the audience's space, the element of linear perspective fixed their relationship to one another (See Figure 5).

In the early part of its development, perspective scenery was an important element in creating the illusion of depth so essential to the visual spectacles favoured at the time. One of the major problems with this technique, until the stage acquired more depth, was that if a person moved back into the stage area, his height would not dimin-

[45]Loc. cit.

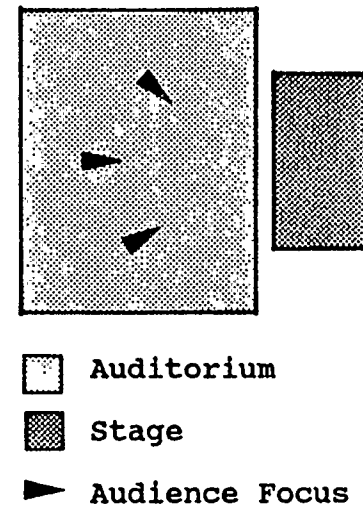


FIGURE 5. SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM
OF ITALIAN STAGE

ish at the same rate as the perspective scenery. The result was that the scene would be thrown out of proportion, and the illusion ruined. [46]

[46]Ibid, p. 75.

This limited the actor or dancer's sphere of movement to a narrow strip of stage parallel to the picture plane, and perpendicular to the audience. As a result, ballet became a predominantly two-dimensional form, focused toward the audience. Dancers developed a means of moving side to side across the stage while maintaining a frontal focus, by turning out their legs and feet from the hip.

Gradually, the turnout became more and more pronounced, and became the basis of the five positions of the foot in classical ballet...which are essential to all ballet technique even today.[47]

In addition to limiting the dancer's performance area, the

[47]Kraus, op. cit., p. 72.

principles of linear perspective also determined the position of the audience in relation to the proscenium arch which framed the spectacular visual illusions created on stage. The audience's angle of vision in relation to the center line of the stage picture needed to be kept as narrow as possible or the effect of the perspective scenery would be lost.[48] This was achieved by grouping the seating for the spectators along the center line of the theatre. In addition, by separating the stage area from the rest of the auditorium, the distinction between observer and participant was made explicit and final.

No longer did dance represent a somewhat casual, social activity, in which members of the

[48]Athanasopoulos, op. cit., p. 77.

court might intermingle freely with professionals.[49]

This is not to say that ballet created this distinction for the first time, for even in primitive dance "the dance magic may be projected to a spectator, to cure, purify or initiate him." [50] However, the spatial separation and inflexibility, and the emphasis on visual spectacle reinforced the passivity of the spectator in an unprecedented manner, so that non-dancers became completely shut off from the visceral and kinaesthetic experience of dance. This attitude persists even today, according to Professor Fuller Snyder, for "the emphasis in our cul-

ture, at the present time, is on experience which happens through our eyes and our brains but not our bodies." [51] The distinction to which she refers can be traced back to the beginnings of western civilization.

Following the tradition of Greek rationalism, the visual and aural were regarded as the higher senses because they were considered to be most closely related to the operations of reason, while the tactile, kinaesthetic, and other contact senses were given the stamp of inferior status because they were less related to "reason" and more associated with "body". [52]

Although it is beyond the scope of this document to investigate the

[49]Kraus, op. cit., p. 72.

[50]Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 199.

[51]Fuller Snyder, "The Kinesthetic Environment," p. 5.

[52]Jan Fethers, "An Experiential Body Aesthetic," in Aesthetics and Dance (Reston Va., 1980), p. 8.

implications of this distinction and the problems associated with such dualistic thinking, it is necessary to state that such a separation is an impediment to the fulfillment of human beings as both physical and mental beings. It is an underlying assumption of this work that wholeness is an ideal to be sought after in all aspects of life. Dance is seen as an important element in the integration of mind and body, and of inner and outer experience.[53]

As a symbol of our vitality and intentionality as expressed through virtual gesture, dance must be interpreted in terms of our own experiences of movement. The dance audience cannot fully grasp the intention that motivates

movement if it relies only on visual perception, but must also experience the dance empathetically and imaginatively in order to comprehend its import. It is my contention that the immobility and passivity induced by the traditional proscenium arch theatre space has contributed to a degree of kinaesthetic illiteracy, which has impoverished our conceptions of dance to the present day.

The separation of the performer's space from the rest of the audience, and the separation of participant from observer are two major issues which emerge from the preceding discussion. They are also concepts which have been explored and questioned in the 20th century in an attempt to rejuvenate the performing arts in general, to make them

[53]Fuller Snyder, op. cit., p. 9.

a vital part of society once again.

DANCE IN THE 20th CENTURY

In the preceding discussion I attempted to illustrate how classical ballet, and its affinity for the proscenium arch theatre, arose from and represented a specific world view - one of absolutism and centralized power.

As the world view changed, so did dance. In the 20th century, modern dance emerged in America as a strong rejection of classical ballet.

In rejecting the vocabulary of ballet movements and the artificiality of its traditional forms and themes, modern dance was viewed as a true expression of contemporary life - alive, vital and constantly changing.[54]

[54]Kraus, op. cit., p. 121.

Whereas classical ballet can be associated with the concept of absolutism, modern dance grew out of a relativistic world view.

...a relative world in which all things appear differently to each person and each group ... can be understood only in terms of many frames of reference ...[55]

The organization of modern dance companies, visible through the presentation of their work, illustrates this idea that many individual points of view can co-exist with equal validity and value. Most modern dance companies consist of a virtually non-hierarchical group of individuals, drawn together by the movement vocabulary of one person,

[55]Fleming, op. cit., p. 393.

usually the founder and choreographer of the group.[56] This type of organization, although not completely egalitarian because of the special status attributed to the founder, represents a dramatic contrast to the traditional ballet company, "which was as hierarchically arranged as an army or a king's court." [57] Within the ballet company the hierarchy ranged from the corps de ballet, the lowest rank, through to the principal male and female dancers, the danseur noble and the prima ballerina.

The themes dealt with in modern dance also demonstrate a relativistic world view, in that they reflect a multiplicity of human concerns and images.

[56] Don McDonagh, op. cit., p. 19.

[57] Ibid, p. 18.

Mythology, folklore, psychology, philosophy, contemporary social issues, and the dance forms of other cultures, are just some of the sources that have been tapped for choreographic inspiration.

The movement vocabularies of the original founding members of modern dance have been perpetuated and sometimes modified by successive generations of dancers. Many of these ideas have found their way into ballet, and have helped to rejuvenate it in the 20th century. Conversely, classical ballet technique has become recognized as an acceptable adjunct to the training of modern dancers, [58] and the blending of forms has created many new and exciting possibilities for dance. But even

[58] Kraus, op. cit., p. 202.

though new concepts of movement had emerged in the early 20th century, it took longer for new approaches to performing space to be explored.

Modern dance continued to be performed in drama theatres, partly for economic reasons. Even until recently, it was not deemed feasible to build theatre spaces specifically for dance, because it had such a small audience.[59] But also, the connection between dance and the drama stage had become so deeply entrenched in the minds of audiences and performers alike, that any other arrangement was not thought to be necessary.

Many of the drama theatres of the 20th century have been much more appropriate for dance than the proscenium arch theatre, because of their emphasis on the three-dimensionality of the performer in space. But it is only within the last three decades that a different conception of performance space has emerged which has the potential to fully acknowledge the relation of dance gesture to environment and space. Before discussing it in more detail though, a brief history of 20th century theatre design will help to show how and why it evolved, that it represents a logical progression in the history of the theatre, and is not simply a passing fancy.

[59]Armstrong, op. cit., p. 7.

THEATRE DESIGN IN THE 20th CENTURY

A multiplicity of theatre forms emerged in the 20th century in response to the initial desire to break away from what was felt to be a limiting and stagnant form. By the 19th century the proscenium arch and its accompanying curtain were conceived as a complete fourth wall, separating the stage "box" and its illusions from the auditorium. A preference for naturalistic scenography helped to create "a stage picture little different from a good photograph." But for many this apparent reality, watched as if through a peephole, represented a form of theatre incapable of expressing the truth behind appearances,[60] and the realities of a modern

[60]Athanasopulos, op. cit., p. 118.

technological society. With the development of photography, and later, motion pictures, the theatre was challenged to re-evaluate its mode of expression, to discover what essential qualities drama possessed which could not be duplicated by other arts.

As a result, there was a general trend away from naturalistic and pictorial scenography toward simpler, geometric settings which emphasized the tri-dimensionality of the actor in space.[61] Similarly, the form and content of dramatic works, and performing techniques also began to change. In response, the theatre building itself was radically transformed, mainly with the aim of reintroducing a more dynamic

[61]Loc. cit.

relationship between the audience and performer. One approach was to return to earlier forms of theatre, such as the Shakespearean and Greek theatres, where the stage was thrust into the auditorium and surrounded on three sides by the audience. The "arena" theatre extended this idea, by completely encircling the performance area with the audience. The emphasis in all these cases was shifted from the creation of the illusion of reality to the actor's dialogue and actions.

Another direction taken was to try to create completely new spatial relationships between the audience and performer. The theories of Oskar Schlemmer, director of the Bauhaus stage in the 1920's, were concerned with the con-

cept that theatrical space should emanate from the geometry and movement of "Man as Dancer".

Although Schlemmer's theories were meant to apply primarily to dance, they sparked the creation of a "space theatre", a theatre divorced from the patterns of the past, where the three dimensional actor, assisted by every theory and every available technological medium, emerged from his "Italian box" to approach and identify with the spectator."[62]

In the hypothetical designs of Weininger (one of Schlemmer's dance students) and of Molnar (another Bauhaus student) these ideas were given form. In their "space theatres", the actor became "a moving element in space and the action (was) visible from every

[62]Ibid, p.139.

point in that space." [63] Technology played a key role in animating these theatres, and the static, uni-directional focus of the Italian stage was completely discarded in favour of a dynamic, omni-directional experience of spatial relationships between audience and performers.

Between these two approaches - the return to earlier theatre forms on the one hand, and the search for entirely new forms on the other, theatre designers developed a compromise solution. The adaptable, or experimental drama theatre is basically an empty space which contains elements which can be manipulated to produce a variety of forms. In addition to being able to

recreate any one of the "known" theatre forms, (stripped down to its essential characteristics) the open space or "black box" theatre can be filled with an "environment" which can bring together audience and performer in a number of different ways.

This so-called "environmental tradition" in theatre has its roots in traditional folk and popular performance, and is based on the intention of creating a functioning, instead of illusory, space. The action of the performer, and the members of the audience can be placed anywhere within the environment, a clear contrast to the other theatre forms discussed which separate the audience from the performers in some way, and designate spaces for each. The pros-

[63]Ibid, p. 291.

cenium arch theatre is an extreme example of this separation, but even thrust and arena theatres establish, and make rigid, the separate spheres of performer and audience.

Fundamental to the environmental approach is the emphasis which is placed on the physicality of the performer, for gesture and movement in space become as important as dialogue and verbalization.[64] In addition, the audience is allowed a degree of mobility and freedom not possible in theatres which have fixed seating. The emphasis is on the involvement of the audience in the theatrical event, rather than on the

creation of an illusion of an actual event.

In order to achieve this sense of immediacy and the involvement of the audience in the performance as event, traditional concerns for perfect sight-lines and acoustics may be sacrificed. The performance shares some of the characteristics of a parade, procession or carnival, where audiences determine their own viewpoints and receive the event in a fragmentary and sometimes incomplete way.

Like other environmental performances the procession is based less on comprehension of all the details of a single highly focused theatrical event than on the involvement of the spectator in a complex of theatrical experiences in a distinctive per-

[64] Brooks McNamara, Jerry Rojo and Richard Schechner, Theatres, Spaces, Environments: Eighteen Projects (New York, 1975), p. 14.

formance environment.[65]

In many ways this reflects the concerns of the Cubist painters from the early part of the 20th century. Cubism presented a vision of the world in which objects were perceived from a multitude of viewpoints at the same time.

The world,... was seen fragmentarily and simultaneously from many points of view rather than entirely from a single viewpoint.[66]

This is radically different from the underlying intentions of linear perspective, so fundamental to the development of the Italian stage. Perspective representation reinforces the sensation that everything can be seen and

comprehended from a single viewpoint - that of the observer - and that nothing of importance lies outside of the viewer's perception.[67] The Cubist approach, on the other hand, emphasizes that the world is too complex to be grasped in a single whole. Perceptions of reality vary according to viewpoints which are simultaneously and equally valid.

The world view that the "black box" theatre embodies is one of complete relativity and pluralism. Within the void of the theatre the artist as an individual is free to create his own new world from "ground zero".[68] The

[67]Ibid, p. 184.

[68]Robert W. Corrigan, "The Search for New Endings: The Theatre in Search of a Fix, Part III," in "Theatre Journal," (May, 1984), p. 157.

[65]Ibid, p. 4.

[66]Fleming, op. cit., p. 369.

environment can develop from the content of the performance itself, and may even be allowed to influence it. The production of the event becomes a non-hierarchical, participatory experience in itself, and the process becomes evident in the congruence and dialectic between form and content.

The creation of a new "world" for each production is a monumental task though, for it places heavy demands on creative energy, time and resources. In contrast, the mechanisms of the proscenium theatre allow rapid changes in scenery, and a degree of flexibility and economy of means. It is a flexibility which is confined to the stage area, however, and only projected to the audience in a two-dimensional, pictorial

manner.

In an environmental theatre, on the other hand, the audience is placed directly within the space created for the performance, and shares it with the performers. A different kind of flexibility is achieved, in which the audience itself becomes another element to be manipulated according to the import of the work.

The environmental approach to theatre design can also take another form. Rather than creating a totally new environment, existing spaces may be adapted or transformed in some way to suit the needs of each production. These spaces may range from a "fixed environment theatre", consisting of permanent elements such as platforms,

stages, galleries and staircases, but no fixed seating,[69] to spaces not specifically designed for theatrical purposes.

The environmental approach almost certainly first developed out of the need to adapt sites not originally conceived of as theatres, for various kinds of performances - rituals, festivals, processions, and plays. Throughout history both indoor and outdoor spaces have been used, some left in their natural state ... and others transformed in some special way for the event which they housed.[70]

ROOTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL TRADITION

Perhaps the richest expression of this aspect of the environmental approach occurred during the Medieval period, when not a single building was

constructed specifically for theatrical performance.[71] Because of the absence of these types of remains, many believe that drama and dance were non-existent as well. But in addition to itinerant musicians, actors, and dancers, there existed an active theatrical element within the Christian Church itself, of which dance was an important aspect.

. . . the early Christian Fathers approved of the use of dance in religious ceremonials, provided that its form and intent were holy and not profane. Dancing was a formal part of the Christian service and litany until about the 12th Century. . . [72]

In addition, dance was a part of many Church festivals, and not always in

[69]McNamara, Rojo and Schechner, op. cit., p. 36.

[70]Ibid, p. 3.

[71]Athanasopulos, op. cit., p. 46.

[72]Kraus, op. cit., p. 48.

a respectful devotional form. For example, the Festival of Fools, a New Years' celebration, included dancing, singing, and drinking. The upper clergy, even the Cardinal and Pope, and the church service itself were ridiculed and parodied by the lower clergy.[73]

There was another form of dance within the Church, besides these clearly identifiable instances. In her dissertation entitled "Parallels between Ecclesiastical and Theatre Architecture," Sister Mary Andrea Corcoran, S.C.N., emphasizes the importance of the procession to Christian liturgy, where the faithful walk from nave to altar with gifts and offerings. She points out the parallels with Medieval

[73]Ibid, p. 51.

performance, in which processions of many sorts also figure largely.[74] Given our expanded definition and frame of reference discussed earlier, procession may be seen as a dignified and restrained form of dance. Thus, far from being non-existent, dance in fact permeated many aspects of Medieval worship and performance.

Other dance activities, not sanctioned by the Church included the Dance of Death, an expression of the common man's disillusionment with his often miserable existence. The dance depicted Death as the "universal leveler," bringing everyone, no matter how powerful and

[74]Sister Mary Andrea Corcoran S.C.N., "Parallels Between Ecclesiastical and Theatre Architecture," (Unpublished Dissertation, Tufts University, 1970), p. 21.

rich, weak and poor, to the same end.[75] It was seen as a criticism of the wealth of the Church, and as a threat to its absolute power, and as a result many prohibitions against dancing in graveyards, the usual setting for these symbolic protests, were issued.

Social dancing among the peasants was also popular during the Middle Ages, and these dances were "extremely boisterous and robust, often frank in their sexuality and earthiness."[76] They consisted of large expansive gestures, and were performed in open spaces, on the grass or in the town square. When they were adopted by the nobility, the movements became more

refined, and because they were performed indoors on smooth wood or marble floors in ballrooms, graceful turns and precise steps were possible. From this discussion we see that a number of settings were used for dance and theatrical performance in the Middle Ages. They ranged from outdoor spaces of fields, squares, streets and graveyards, to the indoor spaces of ballrooms and the church building itself. Although these spaces were not designed specifically as theatres, they could easily be transformed, and their form was intimately connected with the content and quality of the performance itself.

It is perhaps, to return to an earlier assertion, something of a fallacy to say that no theatre building was con-

[75]Kraus, op. cit., p. 53.

[76]Ibid, p. 59.

structed in the Middle Ages. There was definitely a discontinuation of the Greek and Roman theatre building tradition, mainly because of the decadence and excesses which characterized many of the later Roman spectacles - but performances continued on through the Middle Ages in an altered form, with a sacred as opposed to secular emphasis. In addition, religious services, festivals, marriages, coronations, funerals and even warfare, were forms of theatrical expression which employed symbolic actions and settings. Strictly speaking, there were no 'theatres' built, but the places where these symbolic actions were performed became theatres by virtue of their intent to satisfy peoples' desire to watch and participate.

The primary "theatre-like" building of the period was the church, and the clearest picture of how these spaces were adapted for performances comes to us from descriptions of Mystery plays. At first the main scenic element was the altar, but as the performances became more popular, the acting area was extended into the nave of the church, and eventually, into the church square outside (See Figure 6).[77] Arranged around the open area, or "place" were "mansions," small edifices which served as a symbolic place of action, or as a station for an actor portraying a certain biblical character. The "mansions" appeared at first as specially designated seats, distinguished only by cano-

[77] Athanasopoulos, op. cit., p. 46.

elaborate and architectural.[78]

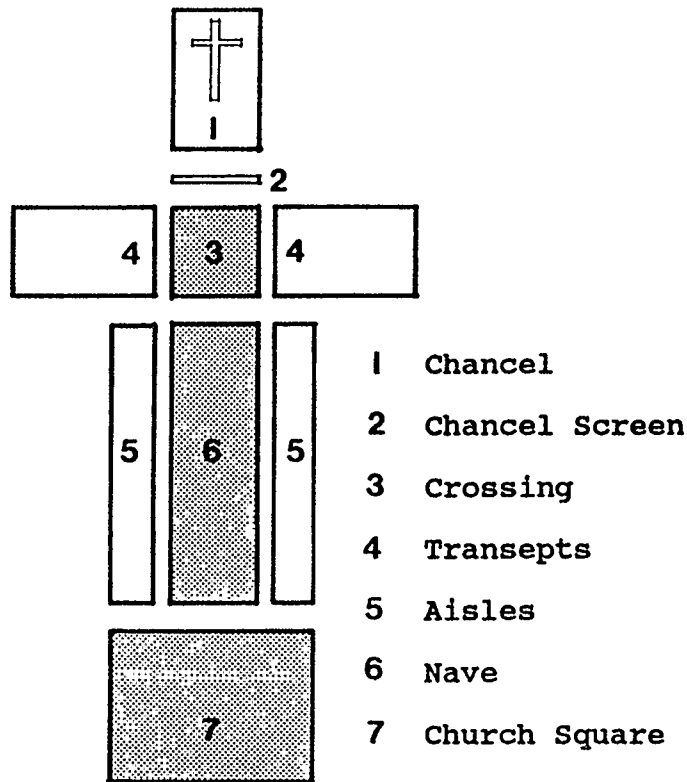


FIGURE 6. CHURCH AS THEATRE

pies and curtains attached to their cornerposts, but later they became more

At times, the arrangement of "mansions" and "place" retained the form of the church nave, even when staged outdoors,[79] (See Figure 7) but at other times, they assumed a circular form.[80] The audience could assume a number of different positions in relation to these scenic elements. Sometimes they moved in processions from "mansion" to "mansion", following the action of the performance, or the action could move from the "mansion" into the "place", to be surrounded by the audience. At other times, spectators were seated on scaffolds, or could observe the performance from the balconies and windows of nearby

[78]Ibid, p. 47.

[79]Richard and Helen Leacroft, Theatre and Playhouse (London, 1985), p. 37.

[80]Athanasopulos, op. cit., p. 49.

buildings.[81]

A variation on these arrangements was the pageant wagon, essentially a mobile mansion which moved through a city or town (See Figure 8). The streets themselves became the "place," and the performers could use both the pageant wagon and the street as a performance space.[82]

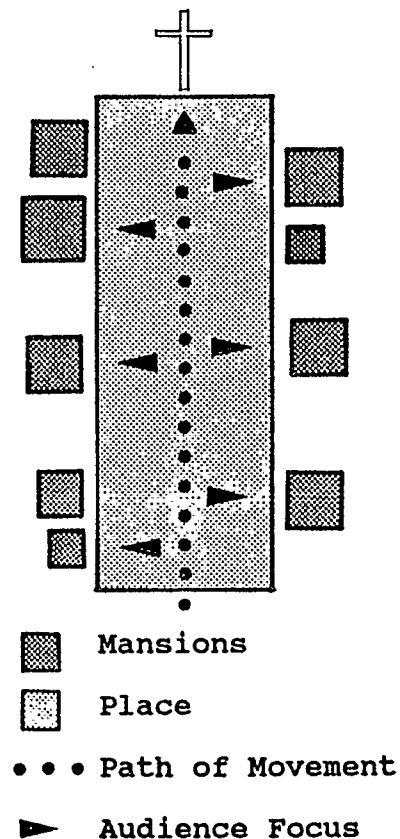


FIGURE 7. OUTDOOR MEDIEVAL PERFORMANCE SPACE

As theatre activity progressed in the late Middle Ages, secular performances occurred in the halls of palaces and manors. These halls usually had a screen at one end which provided a gallery above and openings below. These screens could be transformed into mansions, and also allowed performers to

[81]Ibid, p. 48.

[82]Leacroft, op. cit., p. 40.

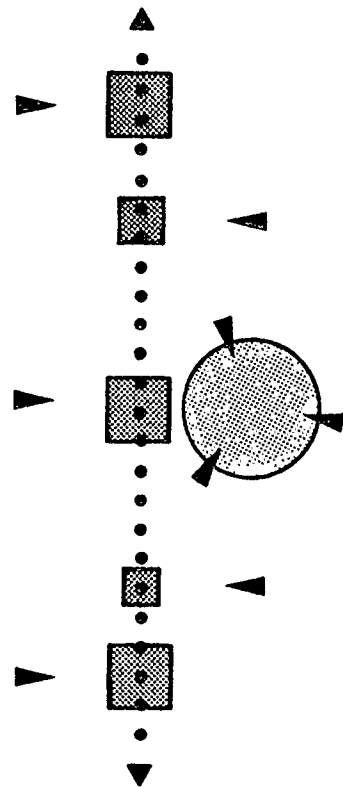


FIGURE 8. PAGEANT WAGON

exit and enter the hall. Additional mansions were sometimes brought in and arranged around the open "place" of the

hall, while benches for the audience surrounded the playing area on three sides.[83]

Sister Mary Andrea Corcoran points out how the scenic elements used in the church were borrowed and incorporated into secular theatre settings. Besides the use of mansions, she notes the resemblance of church chancel screens (used to separate the chancel from the nave and to protect the sanctuary) to the galleries of the manor halls. They are similar not only in form, but also in function, allowing entries and exits to and from the playing area of nave or hall. She also describes the use of curtains and tapestries in churches as scenic backdrops which could be changed

[83]Ibid, p. 41.

depending on the liturgical season. These elements, which originated in the ancient Greek theatres, serve the same function as painted backdrops and scenery in later, secular performance settings.

These and other connections are important, for they "externalize the fundamental bonds which join worship and theatre." [84] Even though religion does not occupy the same central position in society that it once did, and even though art has been separated from its original sacred function, the connection remains a vital one. The idea of a church evokes universal feelings which are not based in the belief in any one organized religion. Art and performance

retain the potential to introduce a sacramental element into our lives, by elevating, celebrating, and ultimately transcending our individual existences. Thus it is with a deep sense of reverence for the arts and dance that I approached this design. Ingmar Bergman expresses similar thoughts in his introduction to the screenplay for his film "The Seventh Seal."

... in former days the artist remained unknown and his work was to the glory of God. He lived and died without being more or less important than other artisans ... Today the individual has become the highest form and the greatest bane of artistic creation. The smallest wound or pain of the ego is examined under a microscope as if it were of eternal importance. The artist considers his isolation, his subjectivity, his individualism almost holy. ... if I am asked what I would like the general purpose of my films to be, I would reply that I want to be

[84] Corcoran, op. cit., p. 125.

one of the artists in the cathedral on the great plain. I want to make a dragon's head, an angel, a devil - or perhaps a saint - out of stone. It does not matter which; it is the sense of satisfaction that counts. Regardless of whether I believe or not, whether I am Christian or not, I would play my part in the collective building of the cathedral.[85]

[85]Ingmar Bergman, The Seventh Seal, trans. Lars Malmstrom and David Kushner (New York, 1960), p. 9.

DESIGN RESPONSES

IV. DESIGN RESPONSES

OVERALL FORM

The design responses in this section relate very specifically to the characteristics of the site, and to the desire to make the building an integral part of the campus.

Concourse

One feature of the new MacEwan Hall expansion is an interior concourse, running north-south, and terminated at each end by a glazed drum containing a circular pedestrian ramp. The main building entries are to either side of these drums and, on the south facade, are oriented towards the insignificant end wall of Block G of Craigie Hall.

In response the main public space of the Dance building, a long linear concourse, is placed directly along this "found" axis to extend the concourse and to supply a rationale for its orientation and grand gesture towards Craigie Hall (See Figure 9). To further enhance this relationship the end wall of Block G is removed and the stairwell relocated to one side, so that the space of the concourse can extend even further, right into the main lobby of the University Theatre. As a result of this response the Dance building becomes part of a major indoor pedestrian route, extending from the new Carpark/Visual Arts Building to the MacEwan Hall expansion. The concourse would be animated by the constant flow of students going to and from classes, and the activities of the Dance

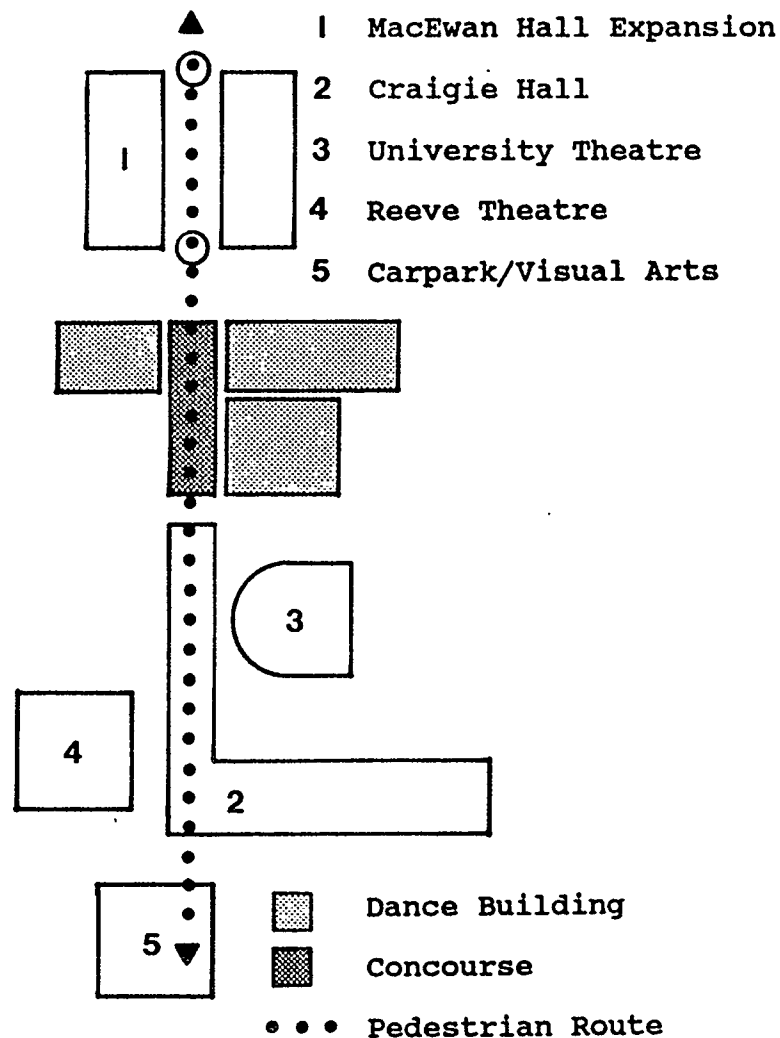


FIGURE 9. ORIENTATION OF
MAIN CONCOURSE

Programme could truly become an integral part of campus life.

Campus Development's objective, to link the buildings of the campus together with an enclosed circulation system, has thus been allowed to become a primary determinant of building form. The Dance Building's concourse is a concretization of movement within the campus, and is the major space around which the rest of the building is organized.

Pavilions

This major route is intersected at two points by important east-west outdoor pathways - one leading from the east campus to the Physical Education building, the other leading from the west campus to the Library. The first

delimits the north end of the Dance concourse, the second its south end, and in each case, the path passes through a pavilion with a tunnel vault roof, oriented along the direction of the path. This form is derived from the curved glazed sections of the MacEwan Hall expansion, and also echoes the three vaulted forms perched over the entry to the Physical Education Building to the north-west.

At its north location, this edifice is at once a gateway, porte-cochere, and a scenic device similar in form and function to the Medieval mansion. At the south, the structure is detached from the building to form an entry pavilion, and it is oriented in accordance with the true cardinal points. This

places it on the same grid as the city, and thus symbolically connects the dance building with that of the larger context. The point where the path crosses the concourse is marked by a vestigial tower. Derived from the pavilion form, it acts as a landmark in the landscape. The pavilion contains a small, mobile, ticket kiosk/mansion, which can be wheeled to any location in the university to draw people back toward the Dance building, or, to act as a scenic device for performances in other settings on campus.

Another function of this entry pavilion is to give the Dance building a presence on the paved plaza created in front of the University Theatre. Like the Reeve Theatre, the small structure

flanks the entry, and an opening in the trees allows it to become visible from the centre of the plaza (See Figure 10).

Entry Plaza

The plaza itself is intended to provide a formal public entry to the performing arts venues within the Craigie Hall Fine Arts complex. It would not only be a place for vehicles to drop off passengers, it would also be the setting for outdoor concerts, exhibitions, and performances.

The plaza consists of a grove of trees, planted in a radial pattern, with a circular clearing at its centre. From any point along the edge of the grove, the individual is drawn toward the centre of the clearing between the rows of trees, reinforcing its function as a

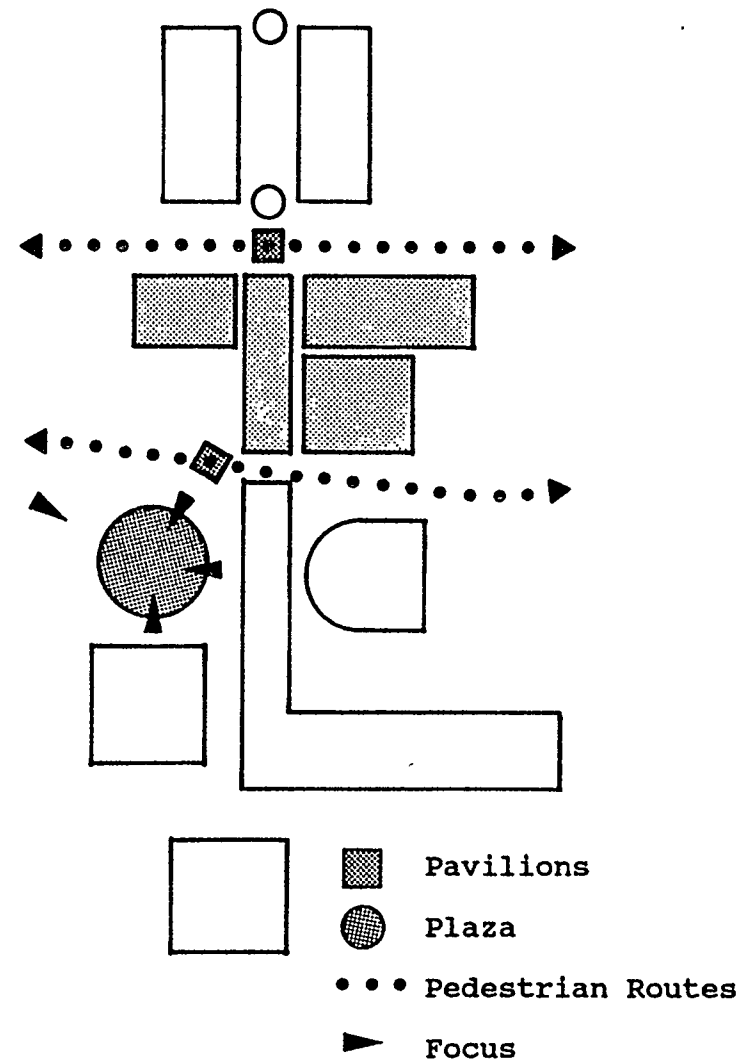


FIGURE 10. PAVILIONS AND ENTRY PLAZA

meeting place, and a focus for the Fine Arts.

Courtyard Garden

In contrast to this highly public plaza, a more private courtyard garden is formed to the north side of the existing University Theatre lobby (See Figure 11). Facing it across the garden is a small lobby in the dance building, and the spaces along the west side of Block G have also been converted to similar uses. The courtyard links the new building with the old, and becomes a visual and physical extension of both lobbies. In addition, the space could be used for small outdoor performances, with the shallow steps serving as impromptu seating.

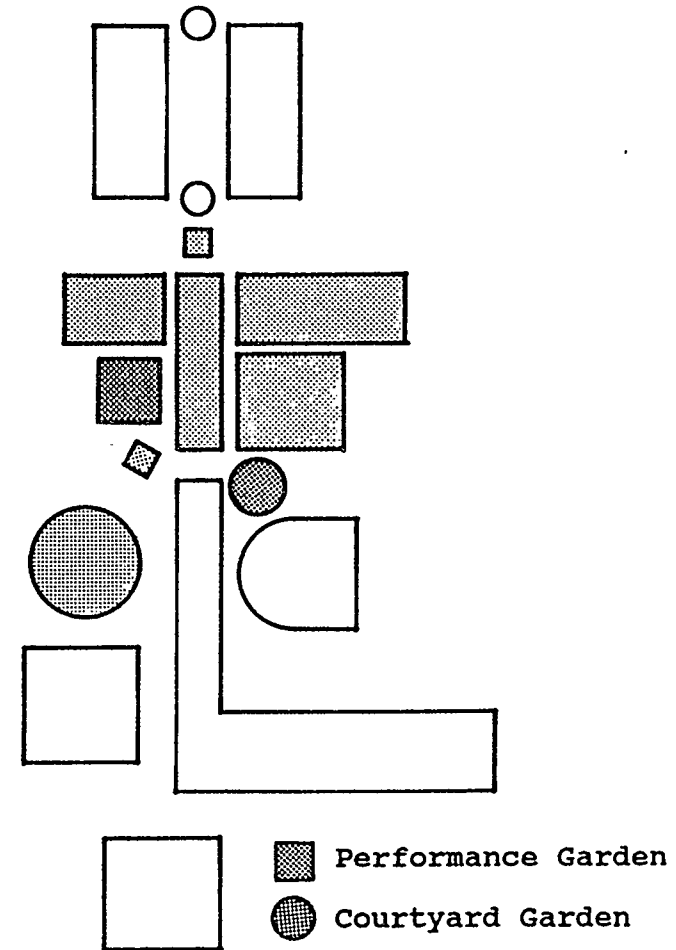


FIGURE 11. PERFORMANCE GARDENS

Facades

The new building is also integrated with surrounding structures through the use of similar materials and structural rhythms. The long south-east facade of MacEwan Hall is mirrored in the facing wall of the Dance Building in its stepped form and horizontal and vertical divisions. On the north-east elevation, the low bunker-like form of the locker rooms is contained in rough grey concrete, like the University Theatre adjacent to it. In contrast, the design workshop which wraps around the north corner of the locker room component is finished in the same pinkish-buff pre-cast concrete as MacEwan Hall. The structural rhythms of the new building, and the materials of the old are merged

in the locker room component to create a transition between the two.

The south-west side of the concourse is heavily glazed, and transparent to an outdoor performance garden (See Figure 11). The rhythms of structure and mullions are derived from Craigie Hall to the south-east and a skeletal steel framework is used to create an outdoor gallery along its length. Sheet metal shapes attached to the framework shade the glazed wall from the sun, and also suggest individual mansions. The gallery follows the configuration of the building, but then detaches itself from it and meanders into the garden. Its articulated form gradually resolves itself into a single structural framework, which, along with

the larger entry pavilion, can be transformed into a localized place of action within the generalized space of the garden.

At certain points along the perimeter of the building the base steps down from the wall to the ground plane, to reinforce the connection between the building and its surroundings. The steps also function as perches from which the movement and activity of the campus can be observed.

THE SPACES WITHIN

The design is also a response to the discussions concerning the nature of dance, and the evolution of theatre form. This is most apparent in the approach taken to performance space.

The emphasis on the performance of dance reflects its importance as an integration of all the other aspects of the educational programme, namely, technique, design, choreography, history and theory.

Performance Space

Instead of creating a space specifically intended for the performance of dance, the whole building and its immediate surroundings were seen as potential performance spaces. In the previous chapter we saw that the Medieval, "non-theatre" tradition offered a variety of staging arrangements - some dynamic and omnidirectional, others more static and uni-directional. Instead of changing scenery by technical means, a theatre

setting could be changed by shifting the focus of the audience, or by shifting the entire audience to a new place.

The concept of a mobile audience is fundamentally appropriate to performance space for dance. Not only could the movement of the audience become part of the choreographic work, but the spectator would be able to share in the kinaesthetic experience of the performance and thus become more aware of himself as a physical being.

The fixed environment/mobile audience concept is an inversion of conventional theatre forms. People become the dynamic elements in performance, while the setting becomes a stable, permanent background against which dance movement becomes visible.

In the design response, the disposition of spaces within the building and the special significance attributed to circulation spaces reflects these concepts (See Figure 12). Five dance studios are aligned along the east edge of the main concourse. Like houses along a street, they each have a front porch which steps down into the concourse, providing a transition from the studio to the public space. Each studio is conceived of as a potential performance space. An overhead pipe grid in each allows for the hanging of lighting instruments or settings, and the gallery at the west edge provides space for musicians, spectators, performers, videotaping equipment or settings. A mobile and flexible seating system can be employed for larger audiences, and,

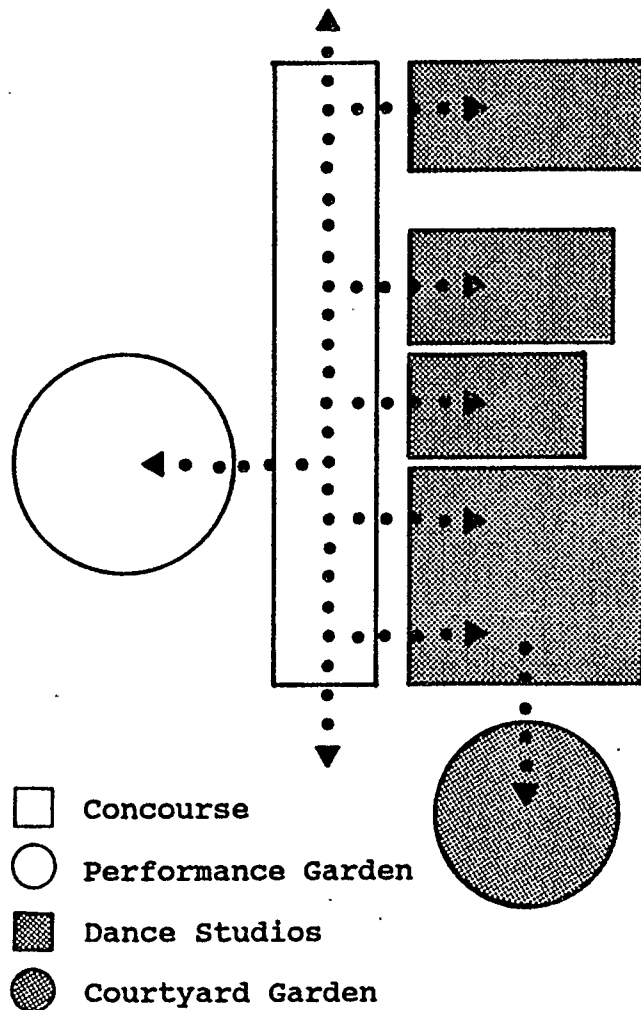


FIGURE 12. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF SPACES

like the medieval manor hall, the space can be transformed to provide a variety of staging arrangements.

The two studios at the south end of the concourse, are separated by a folding wall, so that they may be merged to create a large studio theatre. A control booth high on the south wall enables more elaborate lighting and sound environments to be created within this space, and the second level gallery extends around three of its sides.

Each studio could be used as a separate performance space or sequentially with the other studios. In addition, the concourse itself has the potential to become a complex multifocal performance space. Low sitting steps in front of the studios provide

impromptu seating, and galleries on both sides provide additional vantage points. The width of the galleries and of the spaces beneath them allow the concourse to retain its function as a pedestrian route, even when it is also being used for performance. Vertical pipe grids and railings allow for the hanging of settings and lighting instruments.

The main axis of the concourse runs north-south, and this directionality is reinforced by its structure. But within this linear path are moments of rest, created by spaces lodged within the structural grid, and symmetrical along their east-west axes. These spaces within spaces extend the staging possibilities inherent in the concourse, and allow the space to be seen and used in a

variety of different ways.

The performance space of the concourse can also be extended to the outdoors in fine weather. The east side of the concourse is a transparent glazed wall, with doors leading out into a performance garden. The gallery inside is repeated outside, and the sitting steps are also repeated at a larger scale, to ease the transition from building to landscape.

Instruction Studios

So far, all the design responses discussed have focused on making the dance building an integral part of the campus. This public accessibility creates some conflicts, however, in terms of privacy and security. We have seen how the studios may function as

performance spaces in conjunction with the main concourse, but, when they are being used for instruction and rehearsal, the dance students may desire privacy and security from undesirable intrusions.

To accomplish this dual function each of the five main dance studios is given a front door and a back door. The front doors open into the main concourse, while the back doors open into an inner, more private concourse, adjoining the locker rooms and student lounge and study spaces. By closing the front doors, the studios, workshop and support spaces can function independently. The front and back walls of the studios also express their dual role - the front being more opaque, the back

more transparent (See Figure 13). The inner concourse has large clerestory windows which bring light into the dance studios and workshop through their glazed back walls. These windows would be equipped with blackout shutters or drapes so that theatrical lighting could be used anywhere the dance designer wishes. The inner concourse links together the studios, design workshop, lounge, and locker rooms. It not only allows the movement of equipment and sets, but can also function as an informal performance space, and an extension of the studio performance spaces. Like the main concourse, it is equipped with a gallery and sitting steps. Behind the studio theatre, the concourse is enclosed to form a backstage area, with direct access to the dressing rooms.

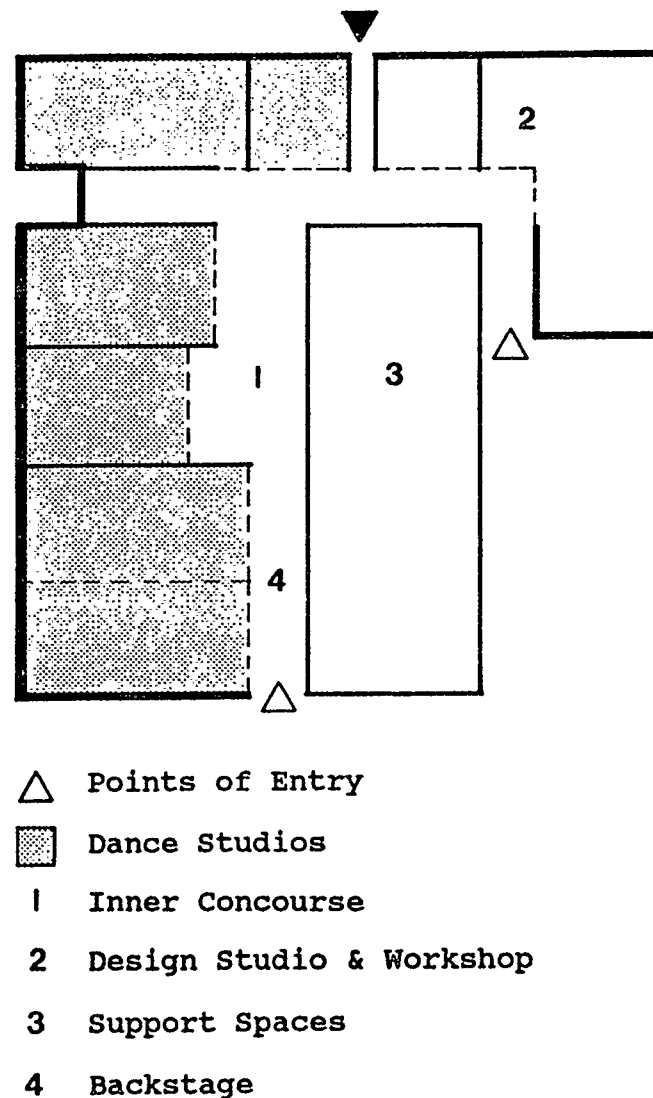


FIGURE 13. RELATIONSHIP OF STUDIOS
TO INNER CONCOURSE

Support Spaces

Even though the requirements for the locker rooms and dressing rooms are fairly straightforward, their design is complicated by the unequal numbers of men and women in the dance programme. Presently, less than 25 per-cent of the students are men, but this may fluctuate in the future.

In response, the total requirements for one-hundred dance majors and eighty dance minors are broken down into six equal parts. Each of the six rooms provides seventeen permanent lockers for dance majors, and seven lockers for day-time use by dance minors, giving a total of one hundred and forty-four lockers. The plumbing and shower fixtures are also equally distributed among the six

units. The number of rooms assigned to each sex can be changed easily, and rooms serving one sex can become contiguous by opening the sliding doors between them (See Figure 14).

The dressing rooms have different requirements than the locker rooms, and are used in conjunction with performance. They contain dressing tables with lights and mirrors, space for costume racks, toilets, and showers. They are placed in between the men's and women's locker rooms, and open into them in case more space is required. The dressing tables and lockers are the same dimensions to allow these elements to be shifted about as required.

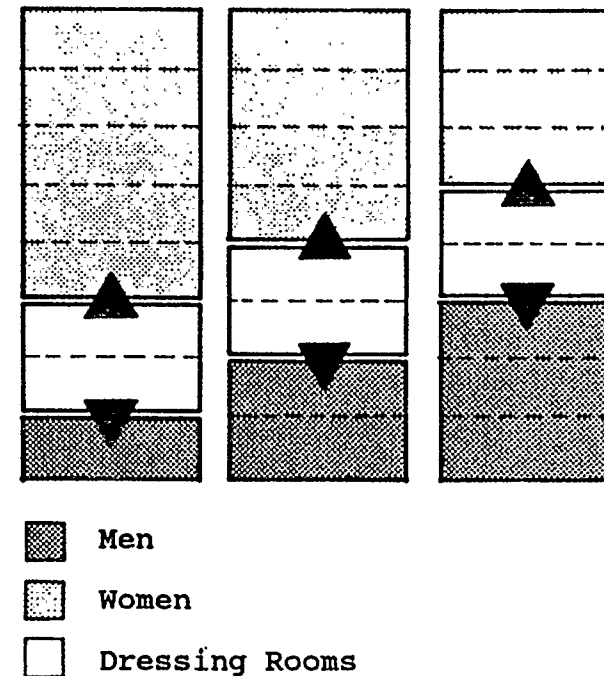


FIGURE 14. FLEXIBILITY OF LOCKER AND DRESSING ROOMS

BUILDING IMAGERY

When I began this project, I had no idea what a building for dance should look like. I had in my mind some cliched images of dance studios garnered from popular films about dance, and from television advertisements, but these seemed to me to be tainted by commercialism and superficiality. I hoped instead to find some form which could truly express the richness of dance, and connect it to its long history and tradition. But even though dance is an ancient and primal activity it is not connected with any single architectural form.

Church as Precedent Form

At the very beginning of this study I visited a school of dance in England called the Laban Centre. They had just recently moved into a beautiful new extension to their facility built into a Victorian Church.[86] In many of the dance spaces, elements of the church architecture had been retained, such as stained glass windows and pointed Gothic arches, and I was struck by their peculiar appropriateness. Peculiar because I had always assumed there to be a fundamental antagonism between the physical nature of dance, and the spiritual aims of Christianity. I was surprised, therefore, to discover that dance had

[86]Edward Lucie-Smith, "The Laban Centre: Past, Present and Future," in "Dance and Dancers," (May, 1983), p. 21.

actually played an important role in many aspects of Christian worship over the centuries.[87]

This apparent paradox was further dissipated by a statement by Sister Mary Corcoran, in which she articulates the common bond that exists between worship and performance, including dance. She proposes that they are both animated by a common purpose, that is "meaningful and mandatory for the human spirit, but which does not seek to advance man's material welfare." [88]

In the course of my research I found other examples of Churches used as dance spaces. In New York, St. Mark's Church in the Bowery gave a home to many

of the pioneers of modern dance in the "20's" and "30's", and continues to support dance today.[89] In 1970, the dance programme at the University of California, Berkeley, acquired new space in a 19th century Unitarian Church,[90] and in Canada, the Toronto Dance Theatre is using a former church to house its company.

Some of these churches were no longer being used for their original purpose, but many others are still active, and have become involved in the arts in order to remain relevant and vital to society. For example, St. Clement's in New York "has resurrected

[87]Kraus, op. cit., pp. 47-52.

[88]Corcoran, op. cit., p. 10.

[89]Armstrong and Morgan, op. cit., p. 140.

[90]"University of California, Berkeley: Dance," in "Impulse: Extensions of Dance," (1969-1970), p. 40.

the early Christian tradition of integrating dance into liturgical services." [91] and has provided performance space for professional dance groups, without exerting artistic control over their work. The Judson Church is another example of such a place. It has a long history of being involved in political and social causes, and in the "60's" became a focus for experimental dance work.

In this project, these dance spaces were considered to be significant precedents, and as a consequence, many aspects of church form are alluded to in the design. I believe that the church imagery imparts to the study and performance of dance an appropriate spirit of

[91] Frank, op. cit., p. 65.

dedication and reverence.

The Nave

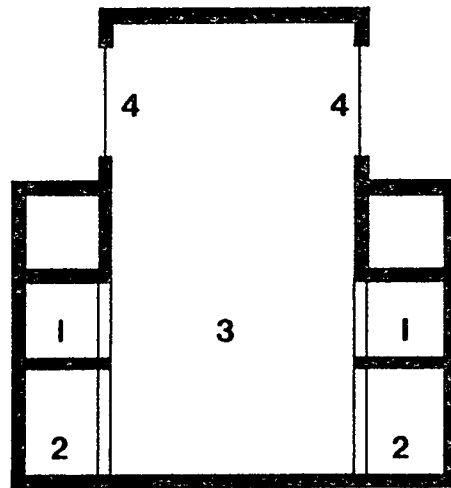
In response, the main concourse of the building is conceived of as a nave-like space. Arnheim sees the nave of a traditional church as the "architectural embodiment of a path." [92] - a place of pilgrimage and procession - and these are the qualities which make a nave an appropriate space for dance. Other elements which contribute to the metaphor are the galleries, side aisles, clerestory fenestration and the pulpit-like landings of the stairways which are distinguished by metal frameworks similar in form to a baldachin or mansion (See Figure 15).

[92] Rudolf Arnheim, The Dynamics of Architectural Form (Berkeley, 1977), p. 89.

The Crossing

The secondary circulation space that intersects the concourse is articulated in the building mass as a transept. Arnheim describes the crossing in a church as a "dwelling place for the worshiper" on his pilgrimage, and a meeting place for man and God, earth and heaven.[93]

The crossing of paths in the dance building also creates a special meeting place. It is a meeting of the public concourse with the more private secondary path, originating at one end in the academic/office portion of the building, and in the studio/support spaces at the other (See Figure 16). As a meeting



- 1 Galleries
- 2 Side Aisles
- 3 Concourse
- 4 Clerestory Windows

FIGURE 15. SCHEMATIC SECTION THROUGH
CONCOURSE

[93]Ibid, pp. 89-90.

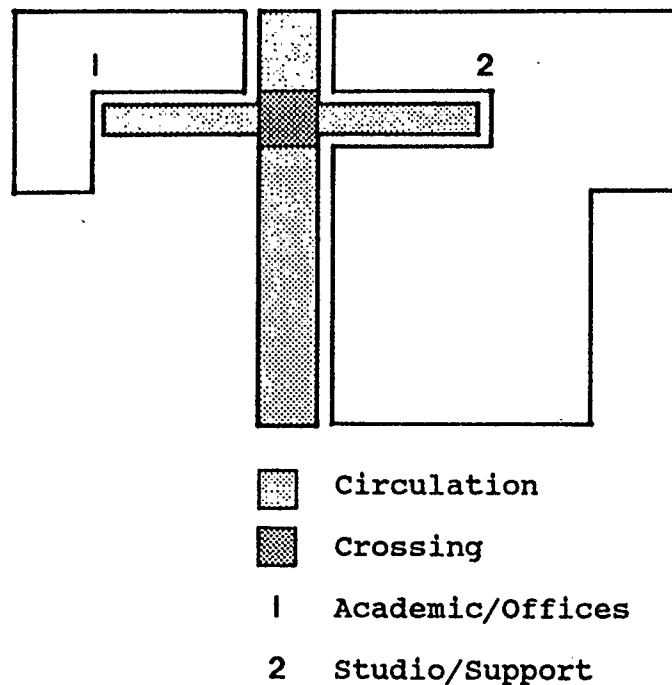


FIGURE 16. THE CROSSING OF PATHS

place it is symbolic of dance itself, as a fusion of the physical and intellectual, and an integration of the visual, musical, and dramatic arts. This point of intersection is given significance

and form with a glassy tower which floods the crossing with natural light.

The Village

The other spaces of the building are grouped around the primary space of the concourse. They form a village-like grouping, organized and held together by the central church-like space. The sectional proportions of the concourse - 3:5 - are repeated in the proportions of the various facades, except in portions of the north and south facades belonging to the studios. Here, the wall is curvilinear and composed of glass block, to express the transitional nature of these spaces, shifting back and forth from public to private.

The image of a church relates not only to dance, but is also appropriate

within the context of the whole campus. Because it arises from our fundamental existence as active and intentional beings, dance touches all aspects of life and crosses the boundaries between disciplines. The dance building therefore has the potential to become a meeting place for the campus, in the same way that the Church was once an important meeting place in the early colleges and universities. Through the arts, we are able to bring a sacramental element into our lives and work. We discover what is universal and permanent about our existence, and can thus forge a continuity with the past that gives meaning and significance to the future.

SUMMARY

V. SUMMARY

I began this project by trying to answer the question: what is "the perfect environment for dance"? My investigations into the various aspects of the problem have led me ultimately to the belief that there is no one "perfect" place for the performance of dance. Instead, it would appear that a dance and the environment in which it takes place are interrelated, and must evolve from similar beliefs and views of the world. The "perfect" environment comes into existence only when there is congruence between all the forces called into play by the choreographer - dancer's vision.

Investigations into the history of dance and theatre revealed that a variety of different configurations of performance space have existed. A primary source of inspiration for this project is the environmental theatre approach, which emphasizes the physical movement of performer and audience within a shared three-dimensional space. The dynamic interaction and shifting points of view experienced by audience and performer, are seen to be fundamentally appropriate to dance, and consistent with the 20th century relativistic world view.

This approach is reflected in the building design, for almost every space is conceived of as a potential performance space. A variety of settings for

dance are provided, and they assume a number of different configurations, including a circular plaza, an irregular shaped garden, a linear concourse and rectangular dance studios. They are organized in such a way that the audience and performers can move freely from one space to another. Pipe grids and railings provide frameworks throughout the building for the attachment of sets and lighting instruments, so that the choreographer and designer can transform, disguise, or enhance the environment to suit the demands of specific productions.

The design responses are also influenced by a number of other factors. One of these is the intention of the Faculty of Fine Arts to encourage

exploration and experimentation, and to provide opportunities for collaborations between the various fine arts disciplines. The main public concourse around which the building is organized is intended as a gathering place, performance space and exhibition hall, not only for dance students, but also for other fine arts students who wish to share their work. Because the concourse is situated along a primary circulation route, it would be an active and lively place, bringing many others into contact with the activities of the Faculty of Fine Arts.

The desire to provide contact between the school of dance and the rest of the campus brings with it some limitations. During rehearsals and dance

classes, more privacy may be desirable, and for this reason the dance studios, design workshops, and support spaces, are organized so that they may face in upon themselves and function independently from the public spaces of the building.

Another factor influencing the design is the desire to contribute to the environment of the campus by clarifying the relationships between buildings and circulation. The nave-like concourse is one response to this, for it clarifies and makes visible the connection between Craigie Hall and the MacEwan Hall extension. In addition, the vaulted pavilions at each end of the concourse define the primary entries to the building, and along with the rows of

trees to the south-west and north-west, help to articulate the exterior paths and roadways. Finally, the tower which surmounts the crossing of axes within the building acts as a highly visible landmark and focal point.

The massing of the concourse, tower, and transverse circulation corridor of the building recalls the form of a church. This refers to both the medieval roots of the environmental theatre tradition and to the monastic origins of the early universities, making the building form meaningful not only for the students of the performing arts, but to the university community as a whole.

APPENDIX

The Programme of Dance prepared a document in 1983 which described the space needs for a proposed degree programme in Dance. It was not intended to be a complete architectural programme, but rather, an indication of the additional space and equipment that would be required if the existing dance programme was to be expanded. The spaces described in this document include:

- (1) A dance recital space, which could be subdivided by a folding wall to form two dance studios
- (2) A dance theatre control room
- (3) Three dance studios and a small experimentation studio
- (4) A warm-up space

- (5) Faculty and administration offices
- (6) Three shower/dressing/changing rooms
- (7) Lecture rooms
- (8) A design studio
- (9) Student and faculty lounges
- (10) A sound listening room

This document formed a starting point for the design work in this master's degree project, but as mentioned previously, its contents were challenged, refined, and sometimes modified.

For example, the requirement for a dance recital space was challenged by questioning whether the problem of providing space for dance performance could be solved in an entirely different way.

As a result, in the final design, instead of providing one space specifically for the performance of dance, almost the entire building and its immediate surroundings were considered to be potential places for performance. (A discussion of the ideas which prompted this approach forms part III of this document.) Two of the dance studios in the final design are still separated by a folding wall, enabling them to become one large studio, but this space is considered to be only one of many possible performance spaces.

The basic requirements were also refined in various ways. For example, the dance studios were required to be large open spaces, with stage lighting capabilities, sound reproduction facilities,

pianos, mirrors, barres and sprung floors. In the final design, mezzanine balconies were added along one edge of each studio, and these balconies serve a variety of functions. They provide places overlooking the studios for spectators, video cameras, portable lighting control boards, and lighting instruments. Below, they form alcoves for the pianos, sound equipment, loose chairs and the miscellaneous bags and personal belongings that dancers bring to class. The spiral stairs leading up to the balconies provide a number of different vantage points for the choreographer or instructor to observe the dancers. Finally, the balconies and alcoves below create transitional spaces between the private studios and the public circulation concourse beyond.

The original space needs were also modified in various ways. For example, the shower/dressing/changing rooms were expanded to provide adequate plumbing facilities and lockers for 180 students. These spaces were also subdivided and organized differently than originally specified to allow for some flexibility of use, as described on pages 61-62.

Some additions were also made to the original requirements. These include:

- (1) A design workshop, in addition to a design studio, for the construction of full scale settings to be used in performances
- (2) A physical therapy room for diagnosis and treatment of dance related injuries
- (3) A resource centre, for special dance related periodicals and

videos, and also to house the sound listening room and its audio holdings

- (4) Major public spaces, such as an indoor multi-use concourse, an outdoor performance garden, entry plaza, and courtyard garden
- (5) Storage space, a loading dock, circulation space, public wash-rooms, a box office, and coat storage room

Some of these additions, such as the physical therapy room, are generally applicable to dance facilities anywhere. Other additions, such as the main concourse and outdoor spaces, are in part responses to the unique opportunities afforded by the campus setting.

In general, however, the refinements, modifications and additions discussed above do not reject the intent of the original document prepared by the

Programme of Dance. Instead, they expand upon the possibilities inherent in the original, to bring it into the realm of an ideal design.

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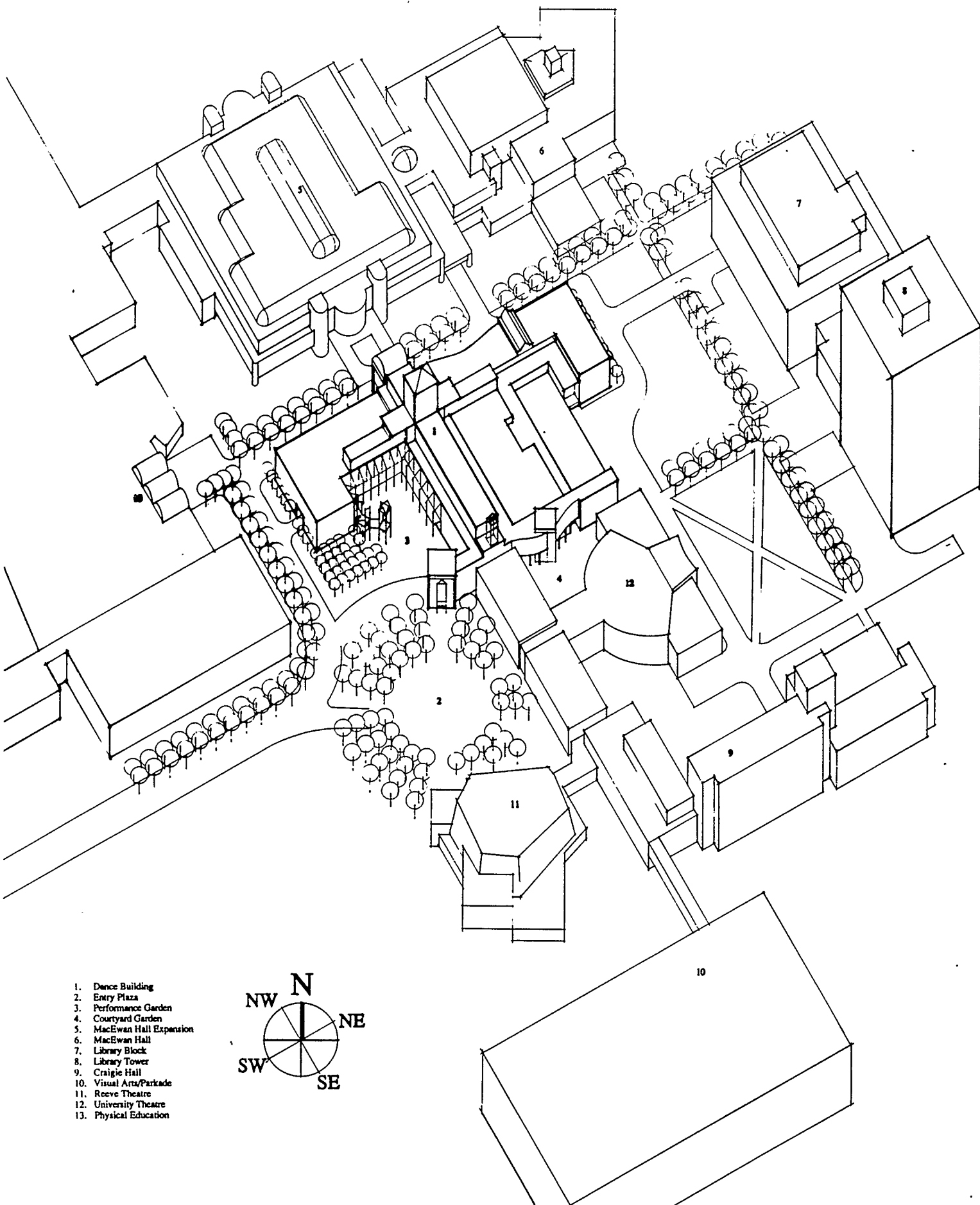
University of Calgary Faculty of Fine Arts. "Letter of Intent - BFA(Dance) Proposal." 1984.

University of Calgary. "Development of

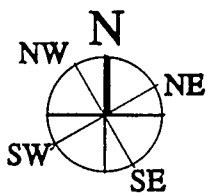
the Campus - Appendix B." 1978.

University of Calgary. "Development Plan
1976-1985." 1976.

DESIGN DRAWINGS



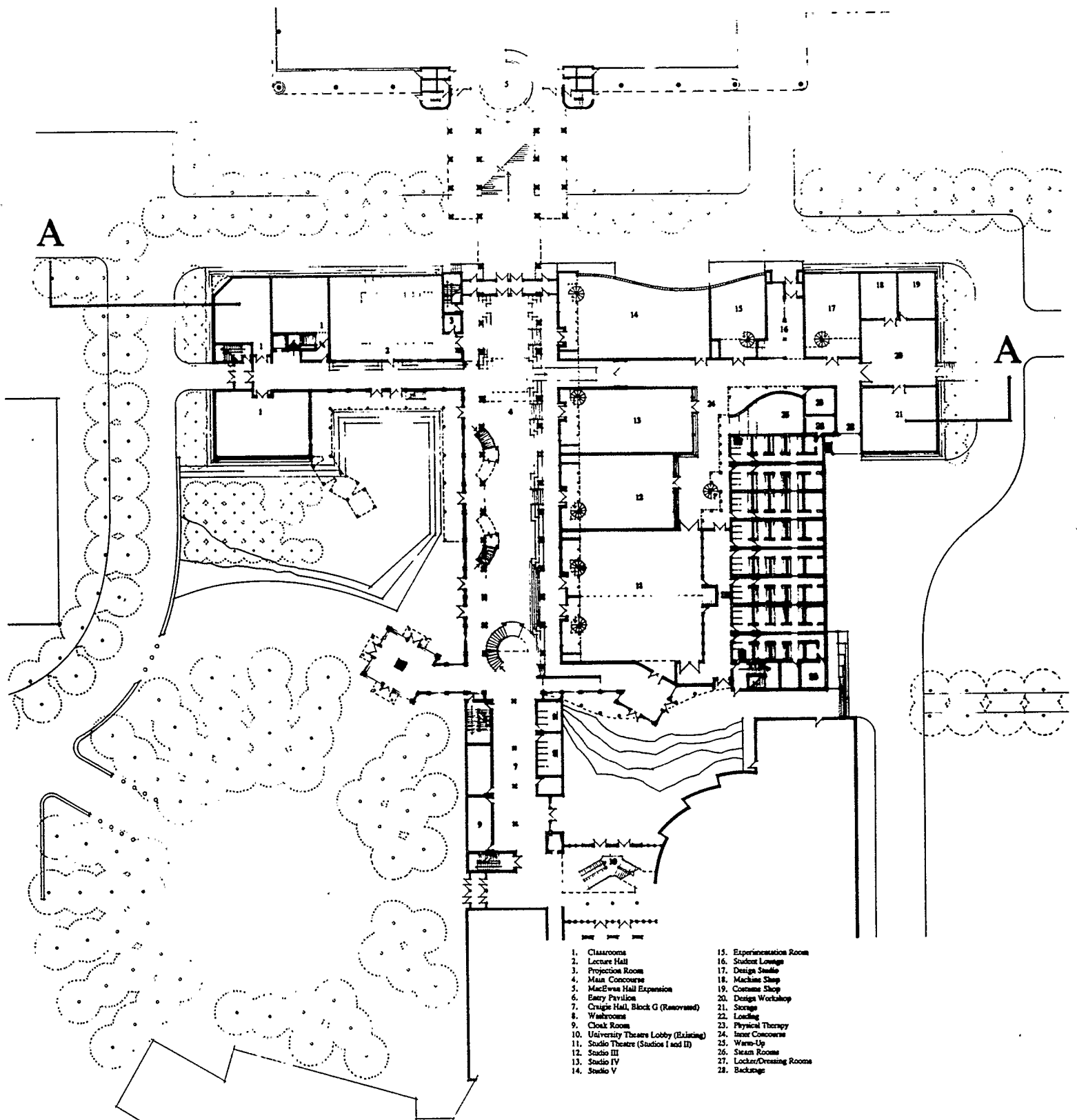
1. Dance Building
2. Entry Plaza
3. Performance Garden
4. Courtyard Garden
5. MacEwan Hall Expansion
6. MacEwan Hall
7. Library Block
8. Library Tower
9. Craigie Hall
10. Visual Arts/Parkade
11. Reeve Theatre
12. University Theatre
13. Physical Education



SITE AXONOMETRIC

1:500

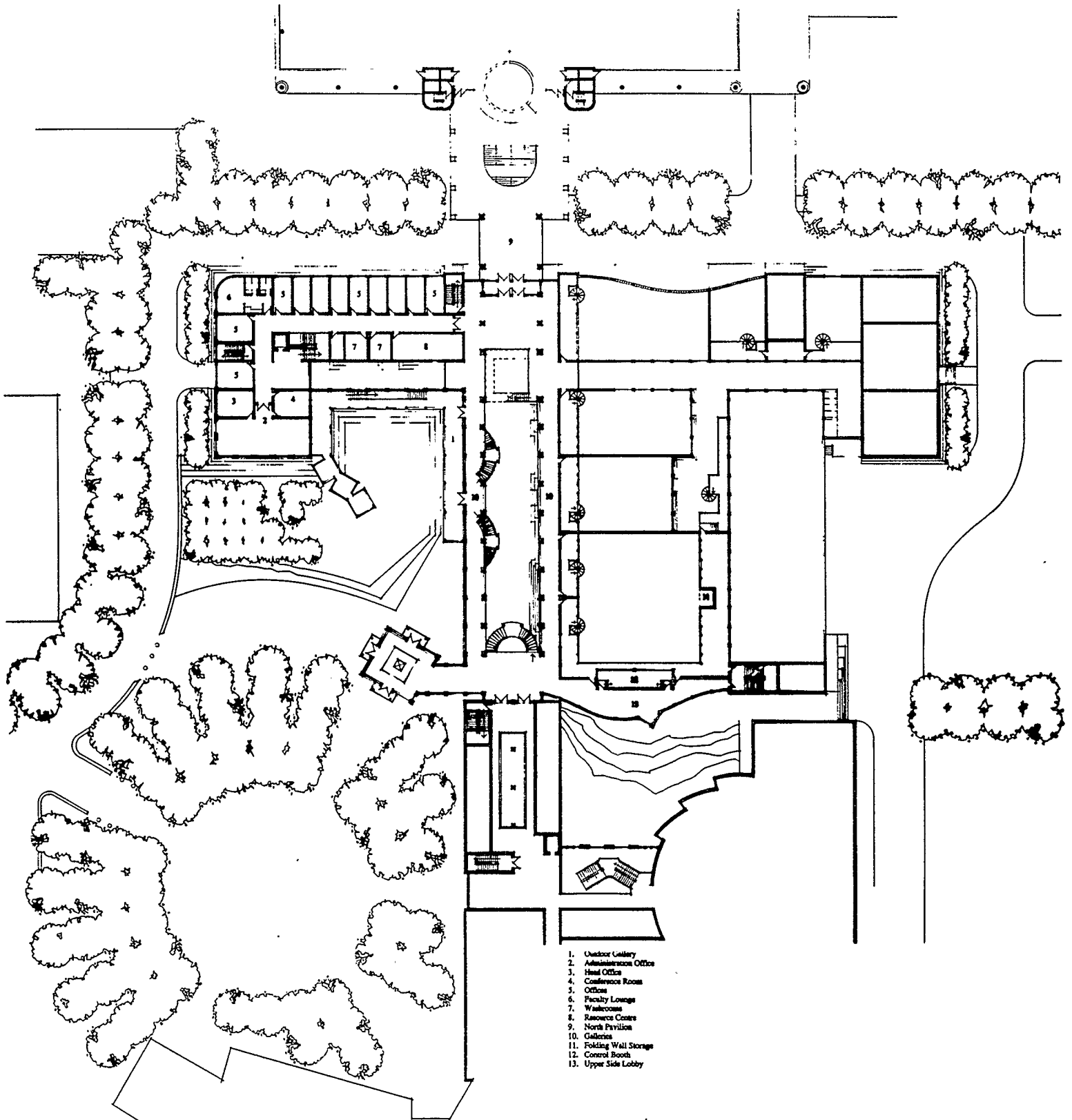
0 5 10 20 50 meters



GROUND FLOOR & SITE PLAN

1:200

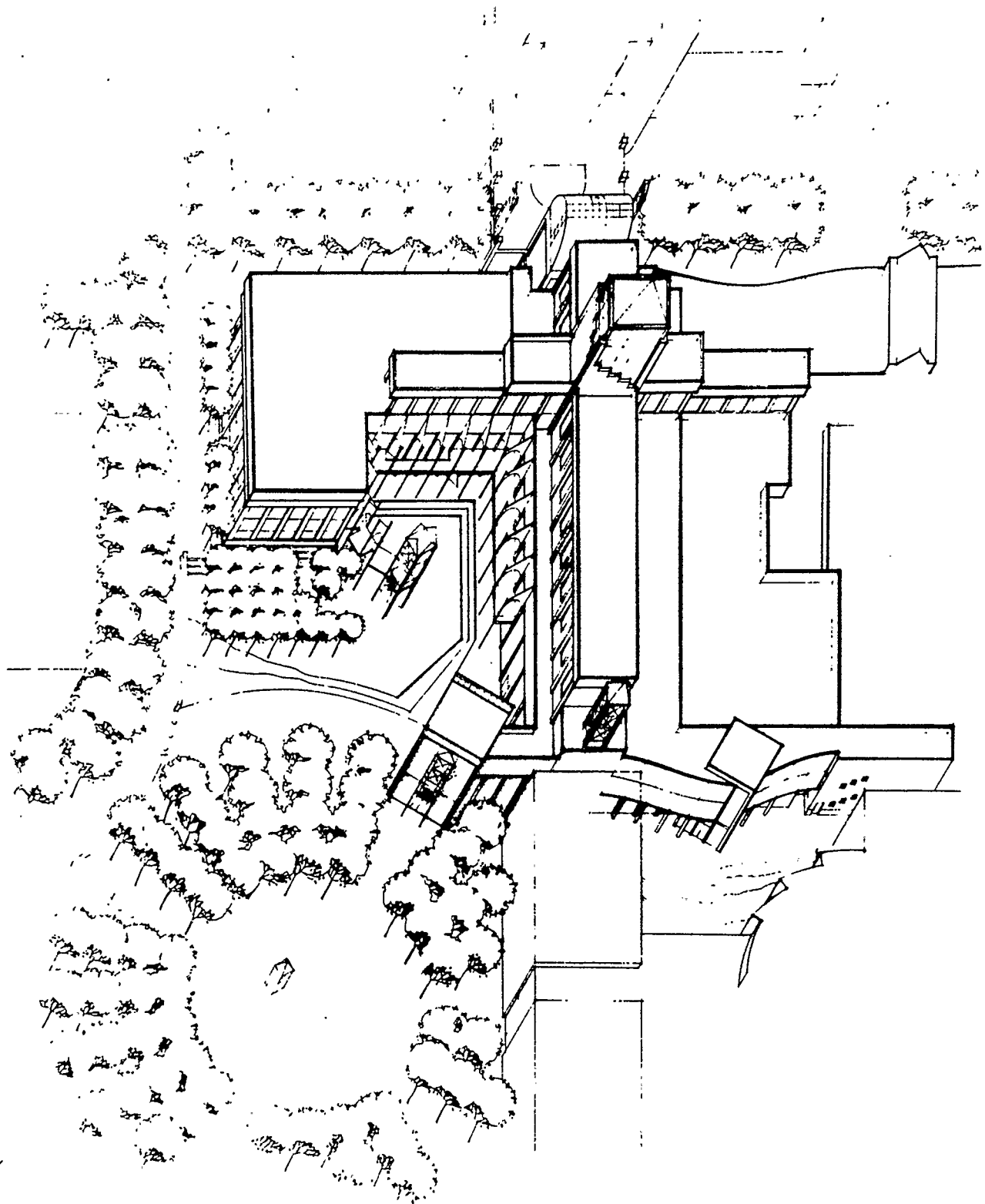
0 5 10 20 meters



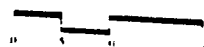
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

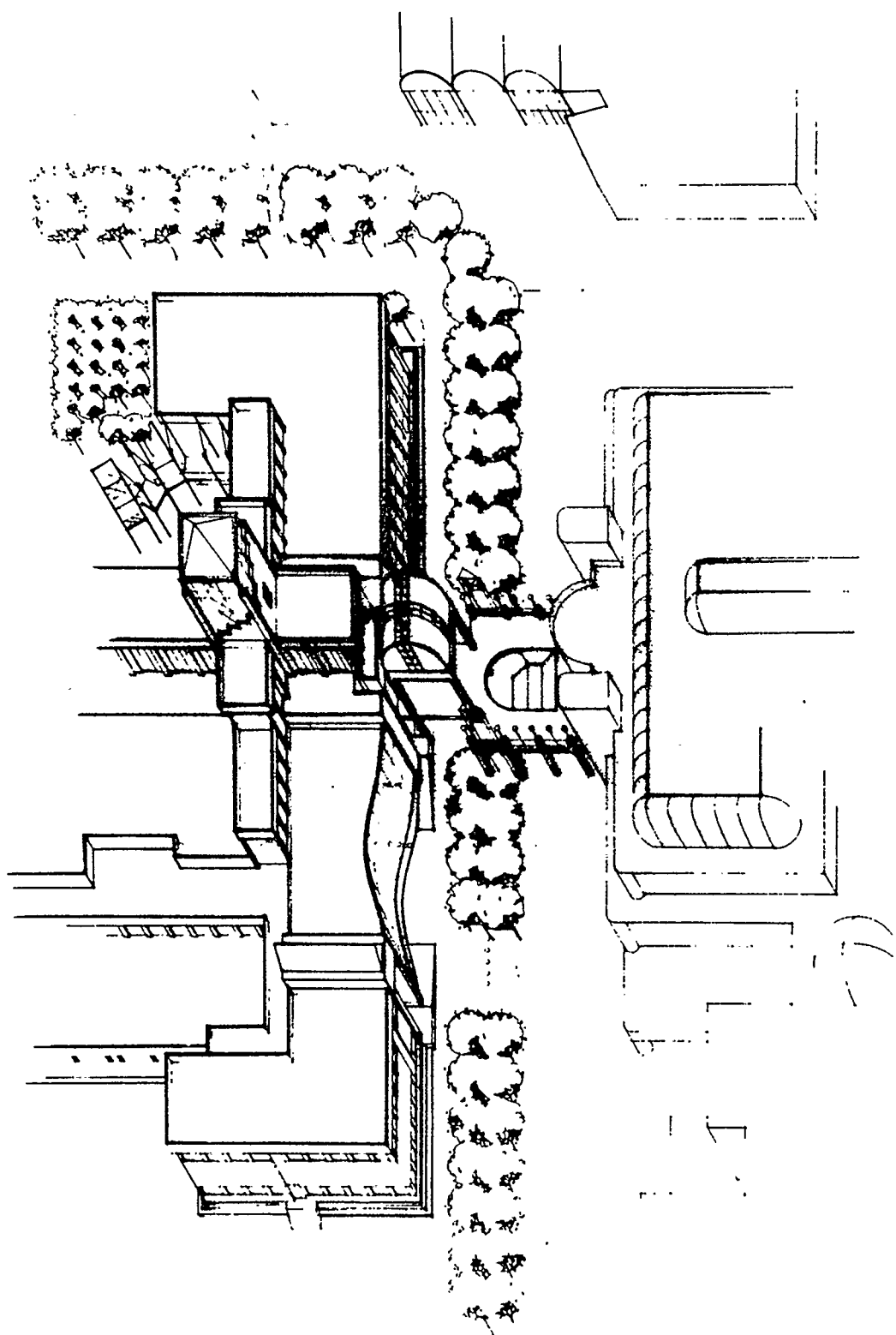
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0 5 10 20 meters



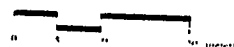
PERFORMANCE GARDEN &
ENTRY PLAZA 1:200

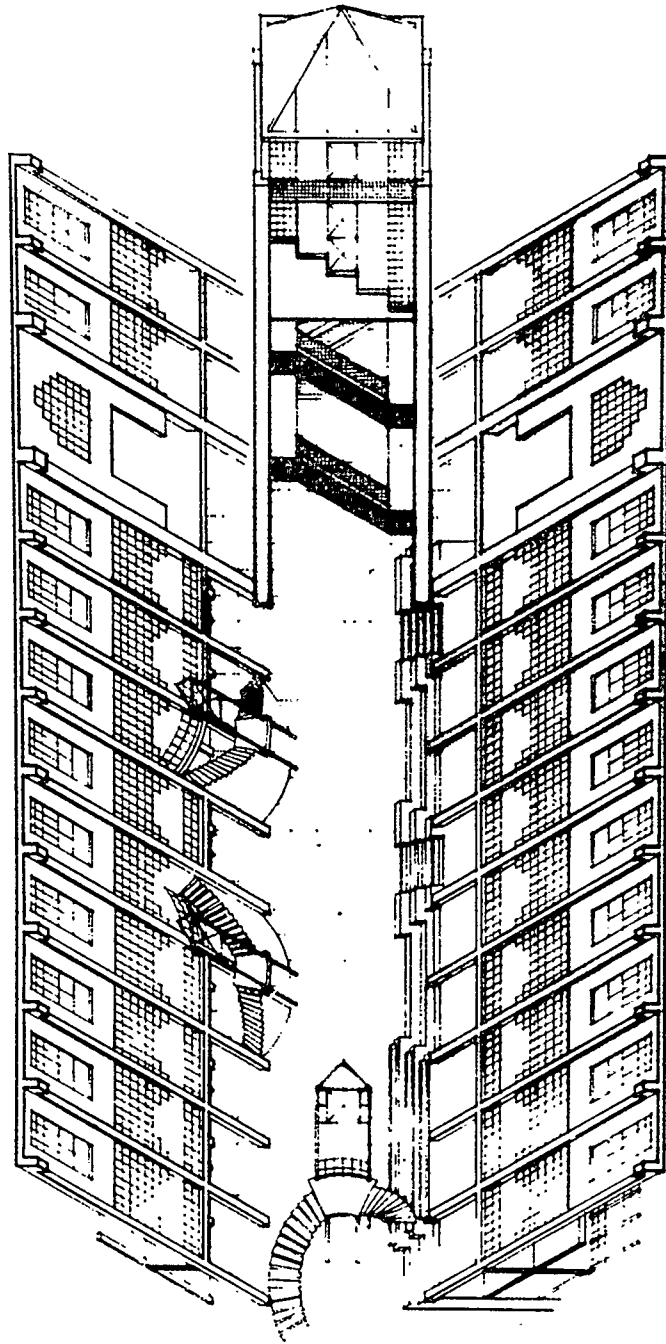




JUNCTION WITH MACEWAN
HALL

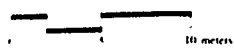
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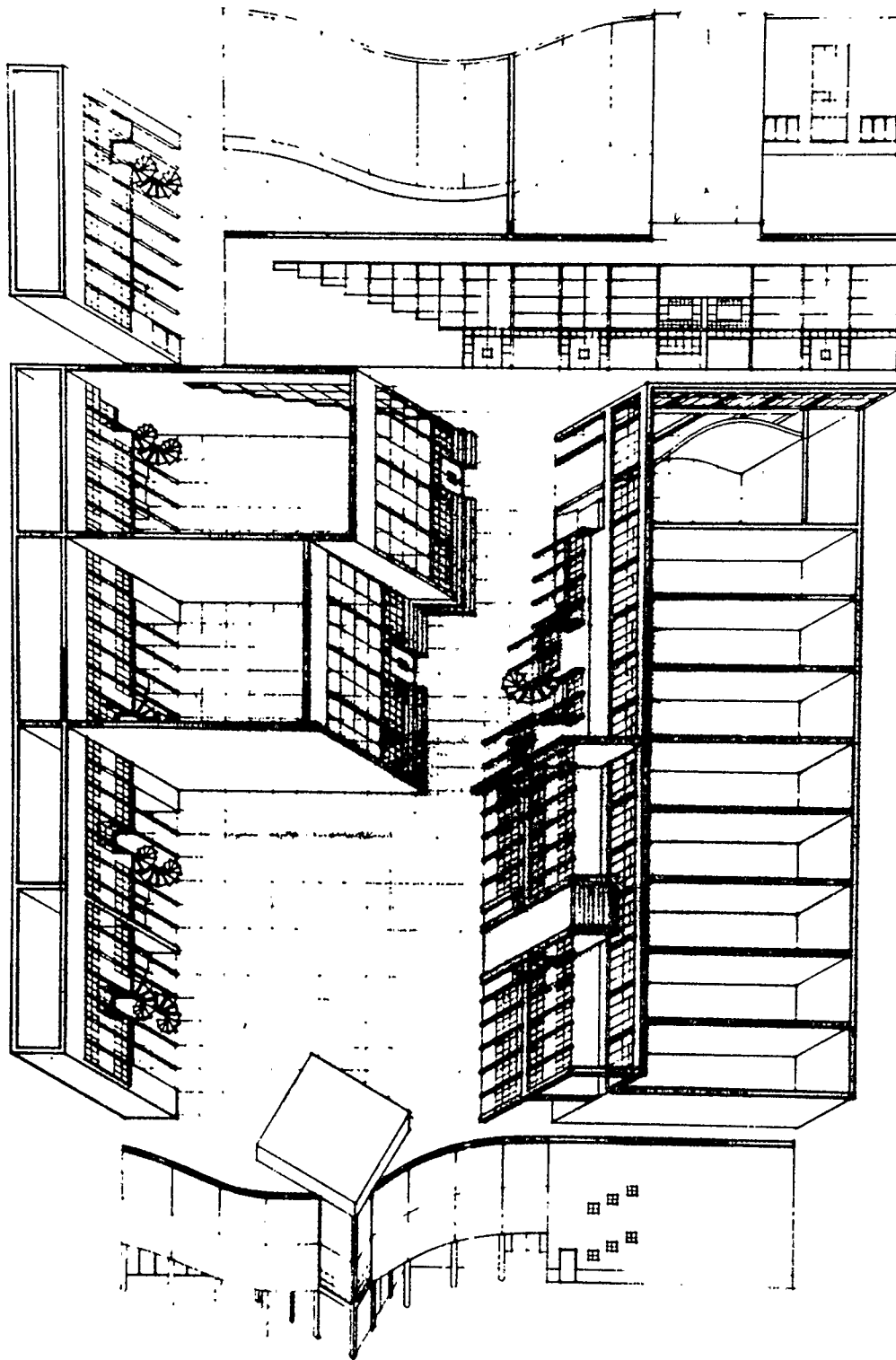




MAIN CONCOURSE

1:100





STUDIOS & INNER CONCOURSE

1:100

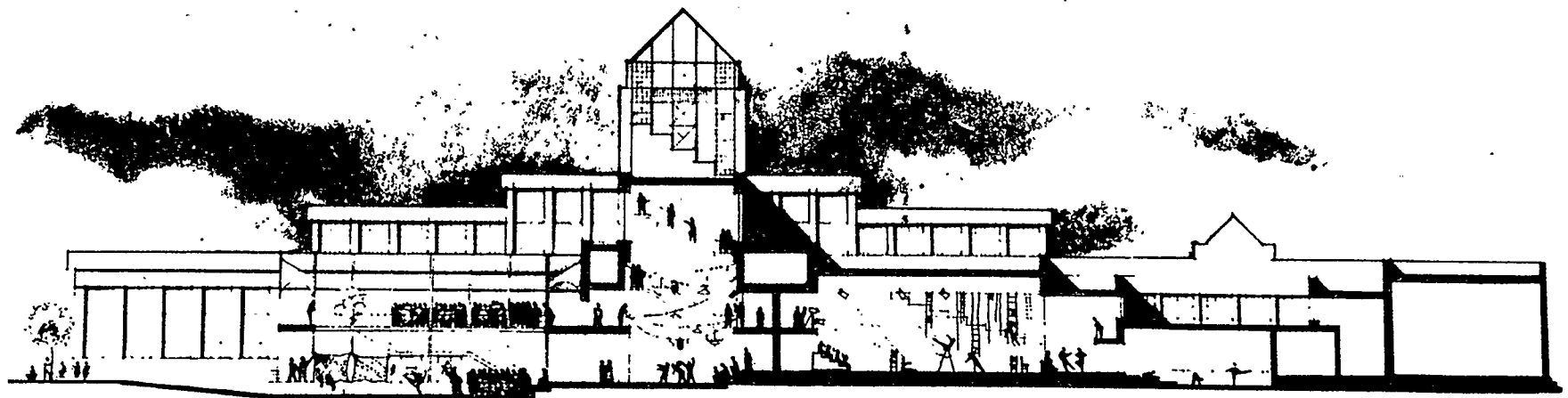




SECTION A-A

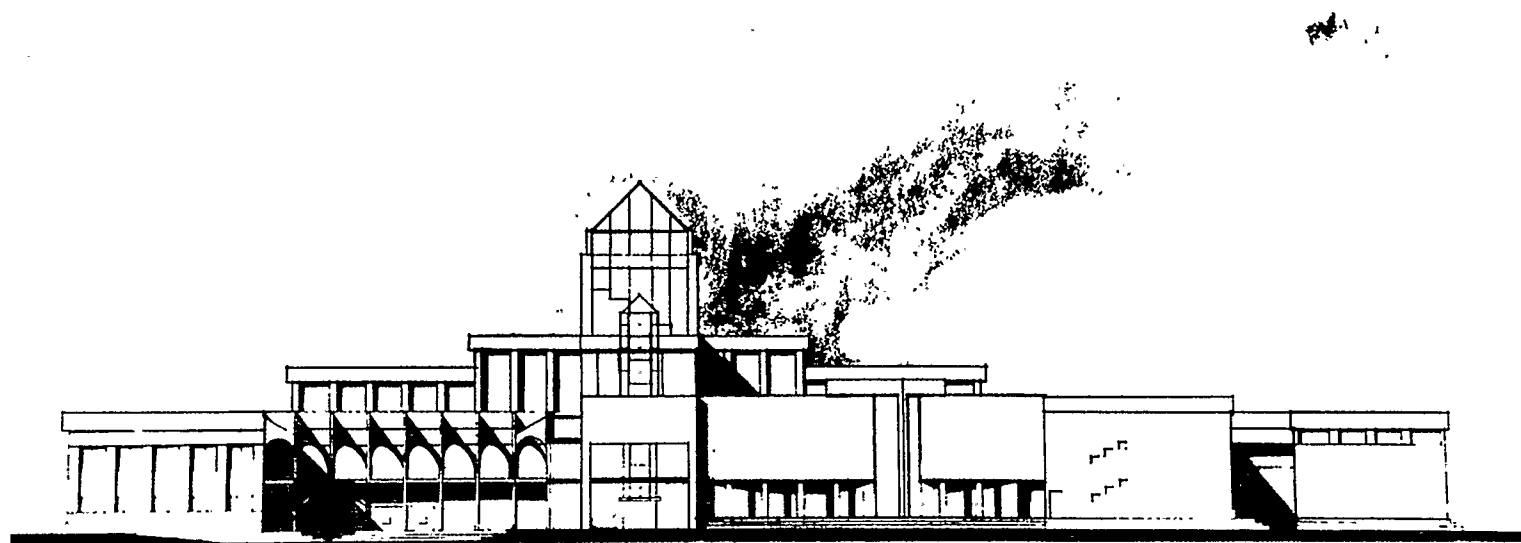
1:200

0 5 10 20 meters



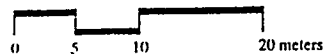
SECTION THROUGH GALLERIES

— — — — —
20 meters



SOUTH-EAST ELEVATION

1:200

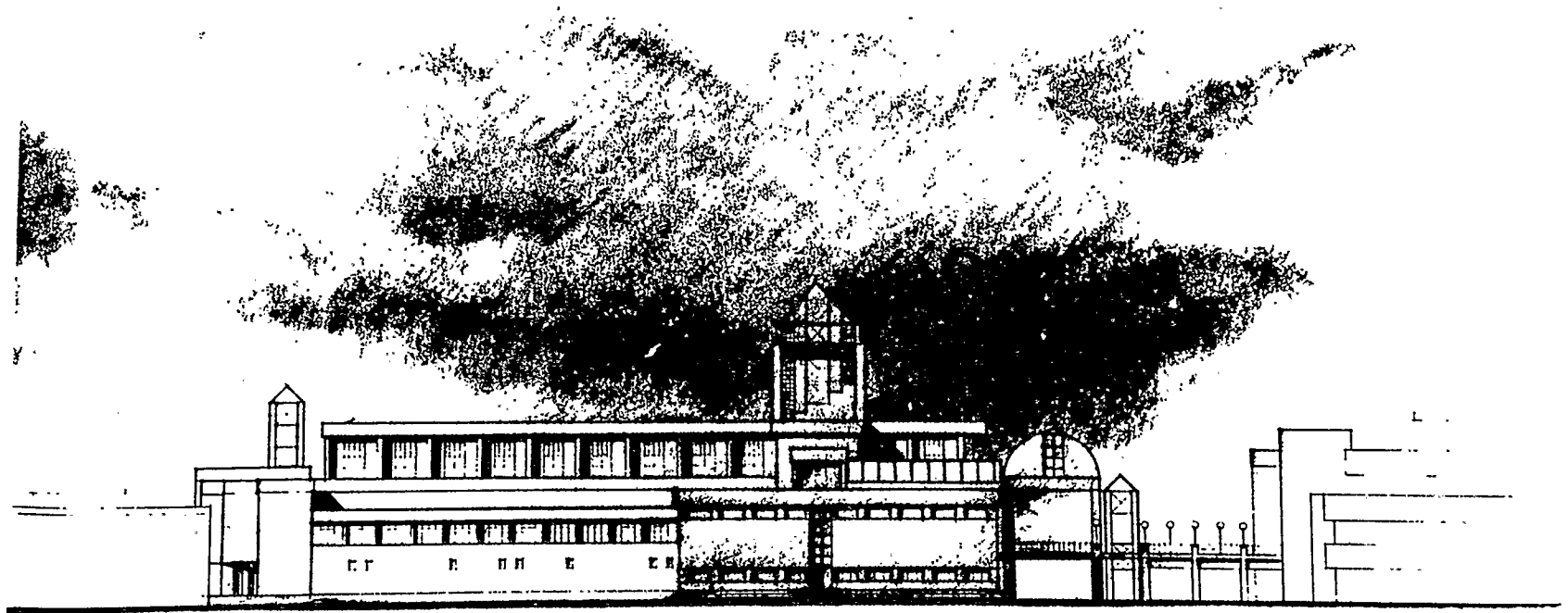




SOUTH-WEST ELEVATION

1:200

0 5 10 20 meters



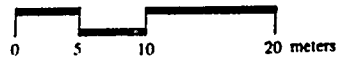
NORTH-EAST ELEVATION

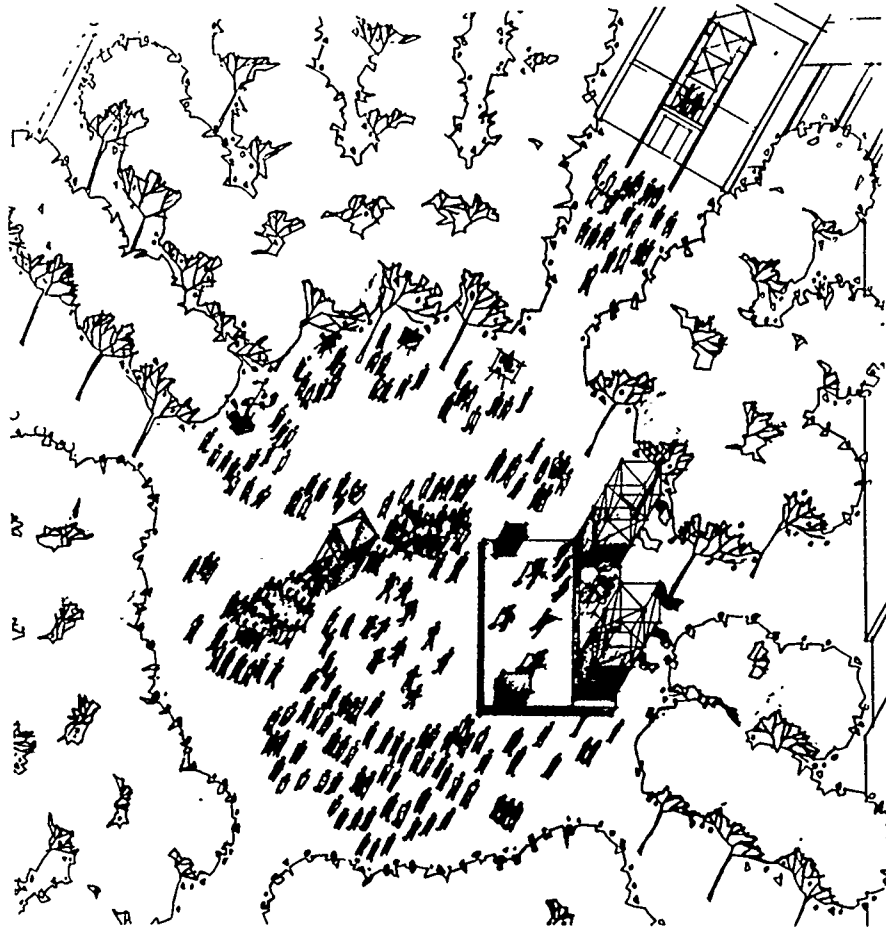
1:200 0 5 10 20 meters



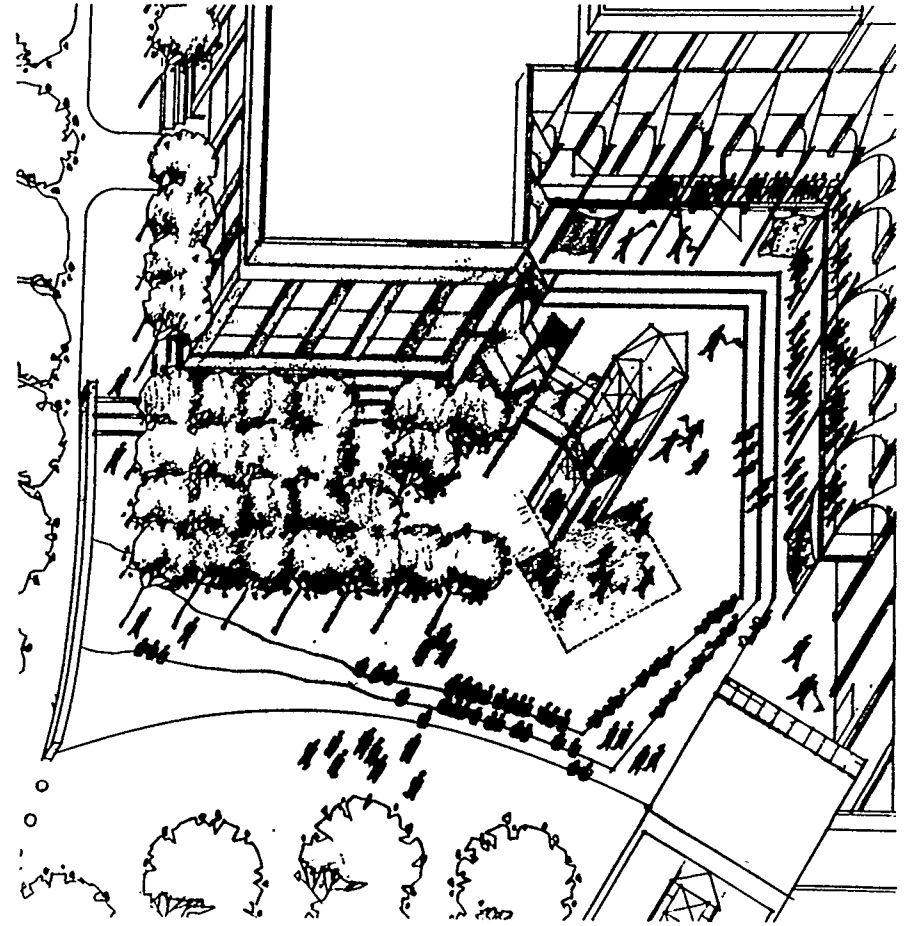
NORTH-WEST ELEVATION

1:200

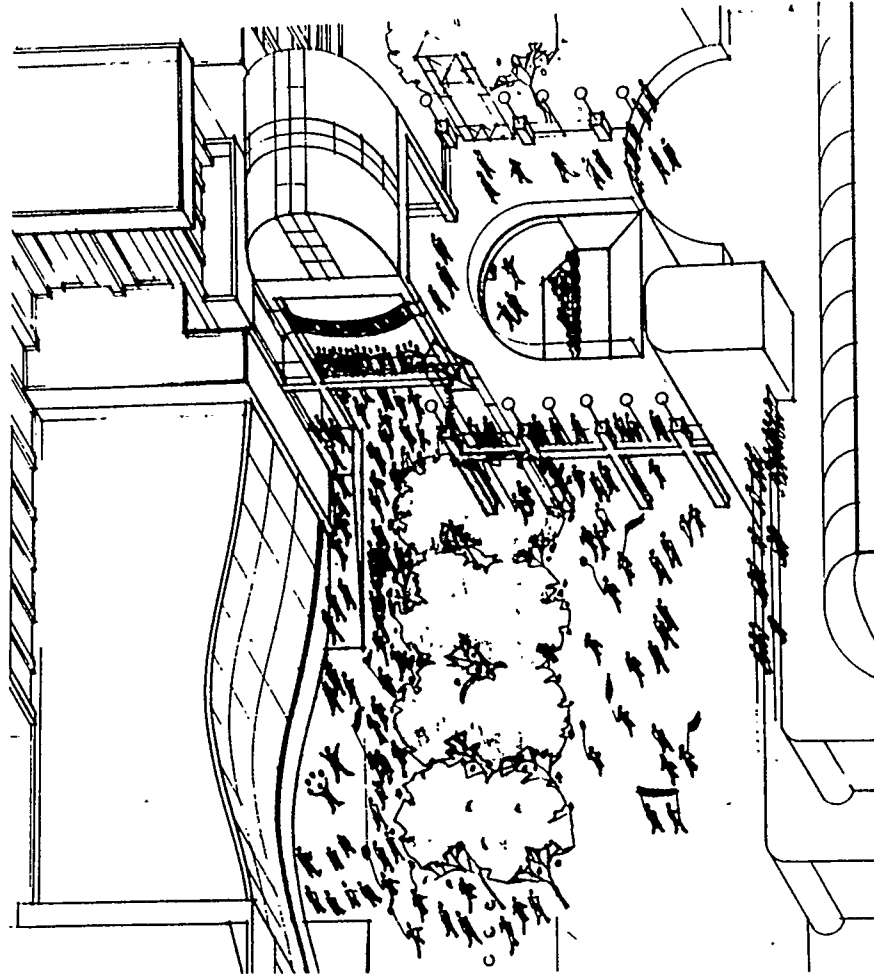




Entry Plaza



Performance Garden



North Pavilion