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Rebuilding Urban Place: Negotiating Individuality and Belonging

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Rebuilding Urban Place: Negotiating Individuality and Belonging

A Thesis Presented

by

PETER R. WEBSTER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Rebuilding Urban Place: Negotiating Individuality and Belonging

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Bethany Webster, my wife, whose spirit and support continues to inspire me.

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I would like to recognize my committee members for their role in this project and my education. I'd like to thank Kathleen Lugosch for not loosing sight of the important moments, and Caryn Brause for helping me to see the systematic approach that helped move me forward. Thank-you both for the pushes and the standing back. You helped me to see the strength in architecture and the humility it takes to carry it.

ABSTRACT

REBUILDING URBAN PLACE: NEGOTIATING INDIVIDUALITY AND BELONGING

SEPTEMBER 2013

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The aim of this thesis is to test an approach for reconnecting ourselves with the urban fabric. By recognising the damage of urban renewal as more than simple blight but rather one that undermines our sense of place, we begin to appreciate the depth of the wound. It is not a matter of reconstructing what was taken away, but rather a process of rehabilitation. Re-establishing a viable sense of place requires the intertwining of both spatial form and social engagement.

The project makes use of a parking lot located between the main street and a disruptive artery that forms a rift in the urban fabric. A spatial reorganization mediates the automotive scale of the rift and re-establishes a human one. A local organization, Hygienic Art, is poised to engage the rift with a new performing art center. Interactivity between the site and the client is reflected outward across the block and inward through the building. The center's performance and service areas are designed to facilitate participatory events, which support the social interactions of the organisation and the extended community. This thesis examines how scale and materiality can nurture the individual and group experience, and how this might be tested at the scale of the city, street, organisation, event, parcel, and building.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Defining Place

In his book “Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience”, Yi-Fu Tuan explores the meaning of both terms. “Space” is more abstract while “place” is more sensory, but it is not an exclusive relationship. According to Tuan, both ideas require each other for explanation. He points out that it is space that allows movement, and “that each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place... from the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and the threat of space and vice versa.”¹ The architect looking to promote Place provides an environment to invite pause and ‘know it better’.

1.2 Loss of urban Place

Christian Norberg-Schultz argues that the changes in the structure of our cities following the conclusion of the Second World War resulted in the loss of a sense of place and meaning in human settlements.² He attributes this loss to the structure of development and defines this structure in terms of space and character.

“Lost is the settlement as a place in nature, lost are the urban foci as places for common living, lost is the building as a meaningful sub-place where man may simultaneously experience individuality and belonging.”³

Norberg-Schultz recognizes an imbalance between space and character. This shift toward space away from social character detaches us from where we live. In order to re-build Places, we need to engage a multiplicity of spatial scales, urban foci to sub-place; and social scales, individual to community. Like the paintings of Peter Brueghal the Elder, inhabited Places are ones of bodily engagement, ones that are sensory and social (Figure 1). It is the simultaneity of experience that Kent

¹ Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: Univ. Of Minnesota Press, 2001), 6.

² Norberg-Schultz, Christian. *Genius Loci : Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 12..

³ IBID, 31.

Bloomer and Charles Moore are looking for when they say, “What is missing from our dwellings today are the potential transactions between body, imagination, and environment,”⁴



Figure 1: The Fight Between Carnival and Lent, Pieter Brueghal.

1.3 Regaining touch to strengthen Place

Juhani Pallasmaa draws attention to the visual flattening of perception that has developed in Modern times, and he recognizes how normalized this visual imagery has become throughout our culture.⁵ These seductive images appeal to the primary frontal zone of our vision for maximum impact. Retinal architecture, as he calls it in the built environment, encourages the objectification and loss of connection in our settlements.⁶ It is composed as evocative and striking images of architectural moments masquerading as whole places. They appeal to the frontal, objective, vision but do not connect with our periphery senses. The ‘parts’ may not add up to

4 Kent C. Bloomer, and Charles W. Moore. *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977), 107.

5 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*.(Academy Press, 2005), 22.

6 IBID, 23

a 'whole' let alone be greater than it. These digital forms are built for competitions and boardroom approval, rather than being experienced as fully embodied spatial encounters.

Pallasmaa also suggests that standardized building practice and technologic culture weakens other sensory realms particularly tactility - the sense of nearness, intimacy, and touch. He describes hapticity, "the unconsciousness of vision", as a synthesis of vision and tactility⁷. Steven Holl expands that definition saying,

"The experience of material in architecture is not just visual, but tactile, aural, olfactory; it is all of these intertwined with space and our bodily trajectory in time. Perhaps no other realm more directly engages multiple phenomena and sensory experience than the haptic realm."⁸

Pallasmaa continues, "The task of architecture is to strengthen our sense of the real, not to create settings of mere fabrication and fantasy. The essential mental task of the art of building is mediation and integration."⁹ It is the integration of our senses and our social interactions that draws us into the experience of architecture and is essential for a sense of Place.

1.4 Individual attention brings connection to Place

Below is a paragraph with one sentence underlined (Figure 2). There is much to behold in a red line. Red is for danger or stop or error. In this context, it may bring up feelings from school and getting things wrong.

7 Juhani Pallasmaa, "Thought, Matter and Experience", *El croquis*, (Mexico: Arquitectos Publishing, 2003), 48-69.

8 Steven Holl, *Anchoring*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989), 16

9 Juhani Pallasmaa, Presentation: *touching the world – architecture, hapticity and the emancipation of the eye*, (Helsinki: Helsinki University of Technology, 2005).

Furthermore, the path to something beyond
both meadow flower and mighty tree,
Something detachable from their concrete
surfaces - one might call it, as Kant did,
eternity; or one might instead describe
it as the mental realm where, with or
without a god's help, the principles of justice
and goodness hold sway - suddenly ceased
to be a path of free movement and
became instead a path lined with obstructions.

Figure 2: Accentuated Text.

When I see this paragraph, I notice the underlined sentence, too. But my line is not red. I am colorblind. The line brings basic emphasis but not the associations of red. What catches my eye is that underline is printed differently. It is fatter, waxy and responds to the texture of the paper. Now, I realize it is not from the same graphite pencil and, consequently, not the same shade of gray. My first inclination is that it is, probably, a red line. Context is the biggest clue. Underlining is used to draw attention, and red is also. It is also a dark line; close in hue to the graphite, not a light color. The image of Mars, as I see it in the night sky, comes to mind and my deduction comes to a rest. Now the line has become red for me. A composite of visual perception, tactility and psychological associations compose experience.

I find that as I apply attention to the line and give it measure, I am connected to it. There is no right way to see the line nor proper associations to be made. This simply calls attention to the individual perceptions and associations that give depth to our surroundings. Our awareness can be specifically focused on a line of text or

broadly sensing our spatial context. Our experience simultaneously connects us though many scales.

1.5 Psychological nurturing loop.

Place is strengthened through the connection to the natural environment and connection to human inhabitation. When this is accomplished, it is not separate conditions but a unifying experience. A campfire circled by friends draws us together and uplifts. The illumination in the night establishes a Place in the darkness. This fire scene acts in a multisensory fashion. The gradations of heat and light are a physical entity that we respond to with our bodies. The smell of the smoke and the crackle of the logs help create a full atmosphere. A primordial element has been activated within us. This physical response merges with a psychosocial realm also. The support of friendship creates its own warmth and belonging. A positive feedback loop, each affirming the other, brings a sense of well-being that lasts longer than the fire itself.

In memorable experiences of architecture, space, matter and time fuse into one singular dimension, into the basic substance of being, that penetrates our consciousness. We identify ourselves with this space, this place, this moment, and these dimensions become ingredients of our very existence. Architecture is the art of reconciliation between ourselves and the world.¹⁰

This project proposes a rehabilitation of urban space by resetting the balance of space and place. Re-introducing the pedestrian scale of the surrounding neighborhood grounds the space and defines a pathway for further development. The extension of Hygienic Art into this space welcomes a strong, socially vibrant population that sets a tone for interactive inhabitation.

¹⁰ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Task of Architecture: The eyes of the skin*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 72

CHAPTER 2

ARCHITECTURAL PRECEDENTS

I began with architectural studies that connected people and place across multiple scales. Both Carlo Scarpa and Louis Kahn engage in this manner. With the Fondazione Querini Stampalia and Brion Family Cemetery, Carlo Scarpa provides architecture that expresses the specificity of site and the nature of the client within a broader context. Both exhibit a spatial attunement and social interactivity that resonate in a humanly restorative manner. Scarpa's attention to materiality and movement fosters a haptic experience that charges these projects with a strong sense of Place. At the Exeter Academy Library, Louis Kahn uses movement, light and material to ritualize the process of academic inquiry pushing it toward personal expression and enlightenment. With this, he establishes both a visceral resonance with the internal volume, and an existential connection between the self and learning.

1.6 Fondazione Querini Stampalia - Carlo Scarpa

Carlo Scarpa provides a beautiful example of architecture that connects people with their environment and, also, their social context. He achieves the first through his meticulous use of materials and his attention to the joint in particular. The second is addressed by his involvement of local craftsmanship and keen awareness of local tradition. Moreover, he is moved not from an idea about tactility, but by achieving a full, rich expression of place.

“The joint is treated as a kind of tectonic condensation; as an intersection embodying the whole in the part, irrespective of whether the connection in question is an articulation or a bearing or even an altogether larger linking component such as a stair or a bridge.”¹¹

¹¹ Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2001), 299.

Scarpa uses the joint as the generator of his form. He also uses the joint as the basis of his creative solutions within a particular spatial condition. This arises from his methodology in creative process that moves directly from drafting to making, a process that cycles between interpreting a form and constructing its realization. Tactility and other sensory perceptions are embedded in his entire process. Indeed, Scarpa's link to material, and its crafted form, is lauded throughout his life. It is this way of working - through perception and production - that sets him apart from his Modern contemporaries. He activates the entire sensory network. His details are not minimalized through mass production but inextricably tied to human spirit through craftsmanship (Figure 3). As dean at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, he expressed this commitment by superimposing *Verum Ipsum factum*, "truth through making", on the diplomas.

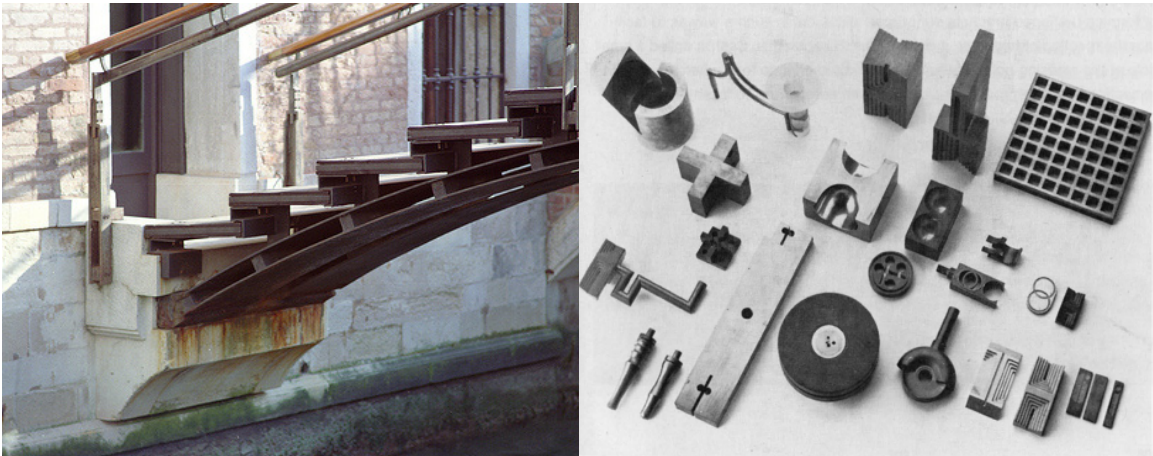


Figure 3: Detail elements from Fondazione Querini Stampalia.

Of particular interest to me is Scarpa's interest in, and expression of, duality. He explores form and composition through differences, not by minimizing them like early modernist (Figure 4a). He uses modern materials as an allusion to other material not as simulation (Figure 4b). He evolved his joints functionally and as celebration of craft. He renovated and reorganized existing structure rather than tearing them down. He worked with the layers of material and time as one member in the sequence, not as the definitive one (Figure 4c). He embraces the duality of water as a life force and as the depths of death (Figure 4d). He embraces mortality

rather than shutting it away.

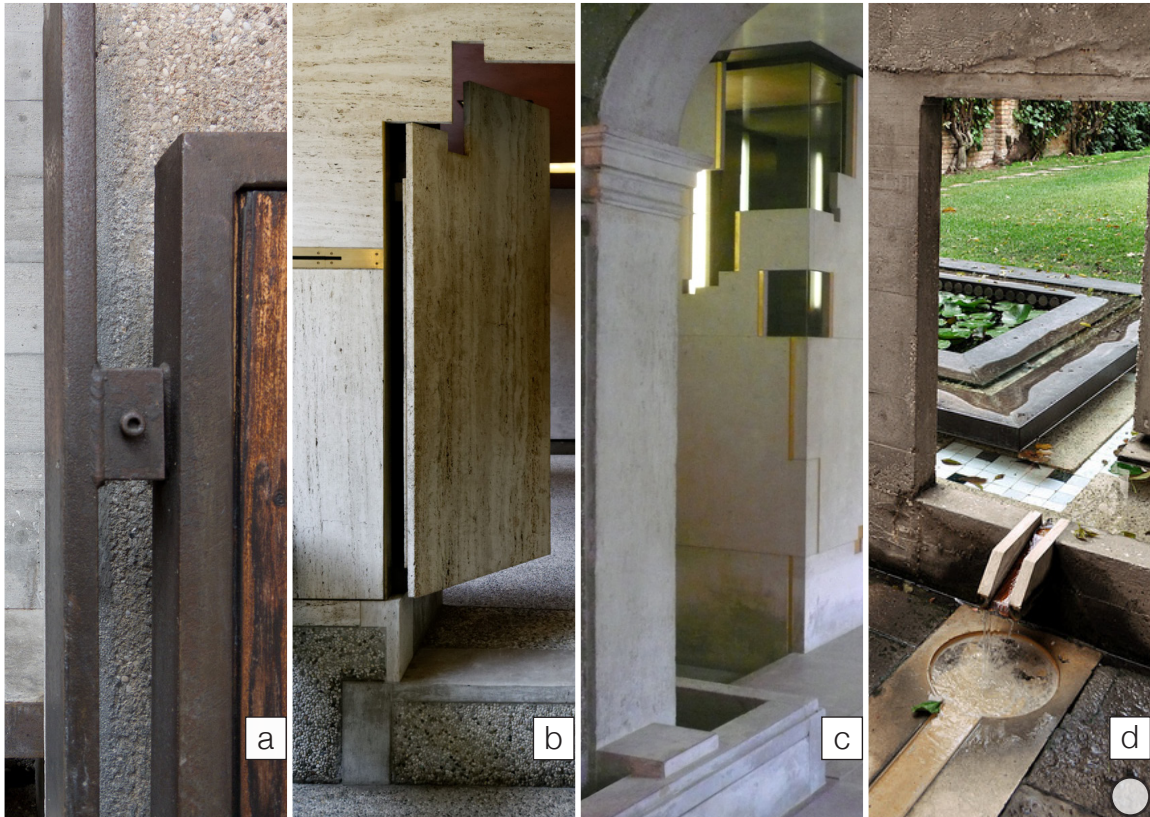


Figure 4: Scarpian Details a) material differentiation b) stone with cabinetry detail c) generations of construction work together d) life affirming water.

The tactility of his joints and the way he treats his materials creates an activated haptic realm. There is an intimacy created through his process of accepting the past and manifesting integrity of spirit. Ultimately, his joints between physicalities become existential bridges. Scarpa employs the joint to provide pause. This is a dramatic counter balance to the hectic pace of society. We enter the moment of now. It is not a moment outside of time like other Modernist. He creates a moment situated within the progress of time. He is not reliving the past nor hypothesizing the future. He does not offer resolution in grand utopian schemes but rather access on a very human scale. That pause is timelessness, and a momentary relief from the tension of duality. He provides a connection to both the environment and the social context.

1.7 Brion Family Cemetery – Carlo Scarpa

The Brion Family Cemetery is considered Carlo Scarpa's finest work. With conditions of life and death at the forefront of this project, Scarpa's attention to the detailing and craftsmanship finds a powerful and poignant expression. I am interested in Scarpa's use of the tectonic joint in symbolic representation. His commitment to the tectonic joint is the substance behind symbolic gestures. Rather than a façade of symbols hung in ornamentation, he provides the level of depth required to evoke the power of true symbol. We move beyond the symbol itself and into another world, a world that straddles life and death. He does not bring us between the worlds into some sort of foggy purgatory where neither exists. He is not providing an escape either, but rather creating a place for, both, life and death, body and spirit. I am going to look at two elements in the Cemetery the entry and perimeter where he transports us into his realm, and explores the role of water in life and death.

"I would like to explain the Tomb Brion. I consider this work, if you permit me, to be rather good and which will get better over time. I have tried to put some poetic imagination into it, though not in order to create poetic architecture but to make a certain kind of architecture that could emanate a sense of formal poetry. The place for the dead is a garden. I wanted to show some ways in which you could approach death in a social and civic way; and further what meaning there was in death, in the ephemerality of life other than these shoe-boxes."¹²

Scarpa uses detail and joinery to focus us and bring us into this place. The entryway is used to both connect us to the Brion family plot and move us away from the other cemetery plots. He employs a perimeter wall to help us stay in this powerful stasis. The approach to the entry is through a standard Italian cemetery with a strong efficient grid. His entryway takes us under a draping tree into a dark passage (Figure 5a). Rising 4 steps, a number symbolic in its representation of

¹² Carlo Scarpa. *Carlo Scarpa: The Architect's Working Method as Shown by the Brion Cemetery in San Vito D'Avitole* (The Other City, 1989), 17-18.

worldliness – 4 seasons, 4 directions, 4 elements, we must choose to turn right or left. The view in front of us is through the Vesica Piscus – one of Scarpa’s dominant symbols representing, here, the inescapable connection between life and death – and across an open green lawn (Figure 5b). We gain a sense of the perimeter wall across the lawn and the very distant foothills of the Alps. This perimeter wall is not just a fence or an abstract division of space. At 2.5 meters in height, Scarpa has selected for us to be able to see over the wall and obscures the quotidian nature of the farm lands immediately beyond. We raise our head to a broad expanse of sky with rising mountains beyond. Our palette is being cleared and tone set. In just a few paces, we have been brought out of the cemetery through a dark constrictive passage rising to view open lawn and the majestic Alps. A deep breath enters our lungs and the body begins to relax.



Figure 5: Transition details a) Entry approach b) Stair, lawn, and wall beyond.

Two more important details about the perimeter walls set the scene throughout the lot. First, the wall is slanted inward 60 degrees. The plants draping over this wall into the cemetery sway in the wind animating our periphery vision (Figure 6a). Activation along the periphery of our senses provides a broader contextualized sense of space. Softening this boundary eliminates the feeling of being trapped inside. The claustrophobia of a coffin or mausoleum is not found here. This angle also bounces the sounds of our voices and footsteps downward

into the earth. And second, as we move away from the entry we can also see above the wall the higher buildings of San Vito village center including the cathedral. This ties us into the village (Figure 6b). Scarpa is building this Place with close associations to its neighbors: the village, the mountains, and god. We do not need to fear becoming lost in this land between worlds.

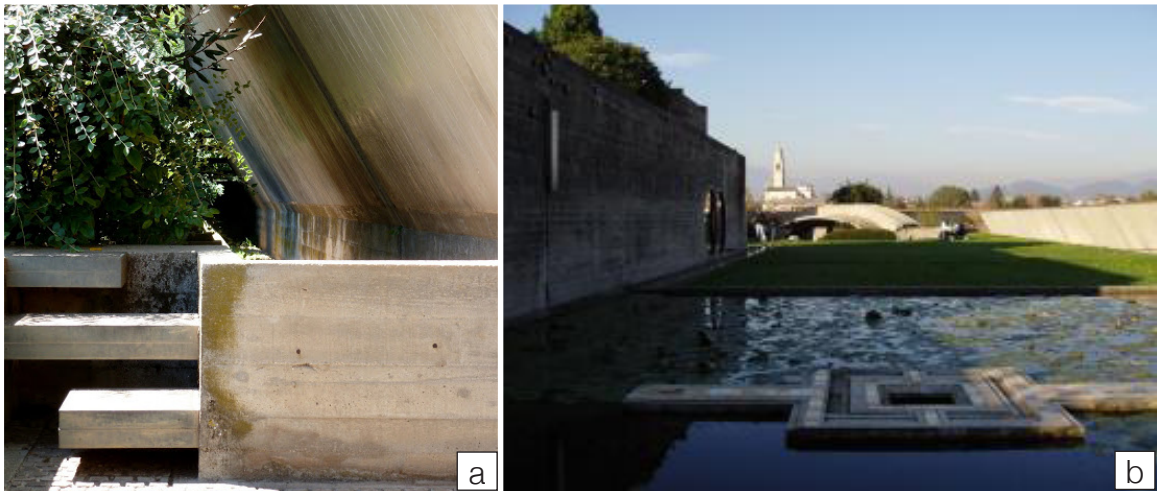


Figure 6: Perimeter Wall a) angled inward b) village beyond.

Scarpa, the Venetian, is known for his use of water and the Brion Cemetery is no exception. His uses water to bring us closer to life and death. Symbolically, the flow of water is the flow of life. Here, water forms the Eastern edge of the plot surrounding and beneath the pavilion. This side of the plot is not open to the public; it is for the family alone. The water starts its journey here as the primordial beginning, the place of spirit. Scarpa remarks that he can picture the spirits leaving their grave to sit at the waters edge. This would make life a cyclical event. The path of water he creates is a linear element as it flows on earth. The journey of the spirit to complete the cycle has been left a mystery. From the pavilion area, the water thins out and moves in a linear path directly towards the tomb. The water flows slowly past and below the entryway where we join it for its earthly journey. The water has become the path of life. One's life may seem to be scattered and seemingly unorganized, but here Scarpa shows the linear path of everyone's

life. There is always fluidity in life, although it is not always recognized. This path continues and thins again picking up pace ending in a vessel holding the water directly in front of the tomb of the Brions (Figure 7). Here Scarpa locates the end of life.

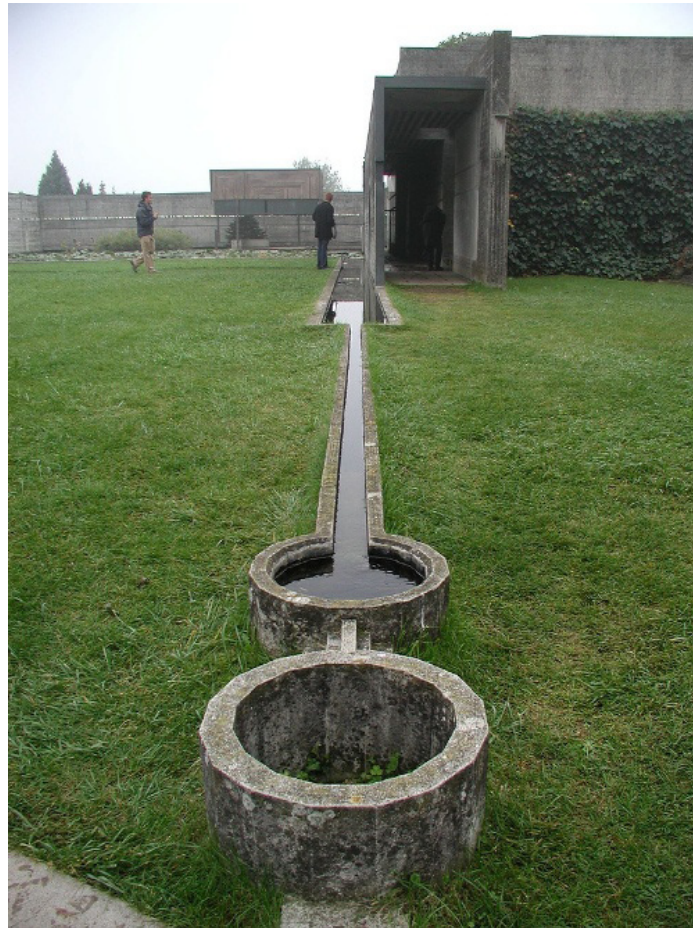


Figure 7: Water holds the path of life.

Scarpa makes a profound statement with the water surrounding the chapel, at the end of the western edge of the plot, where it symbolizes the perseverance of life and the strength of memory. Although the person is no longer living on the earth, the memory of the person will forever be remembered and cherished. Two low windows behind the altar in the chapel can be opened to allow the circulation of water-scented air and reflections of sunbeams to flicker (Figure 8). Scarpa attributes water with the passage of time in another manner also. In both the larger bodies of water, near the meditation area and surrounding the chapel, there are sunken

elements. These elements vary from sunken vessels to continuations of the steps with articulated detail. These elements evoke thoughts of an ancient civilization and make the cemetery timeless.



Figure 8: The chapel is open to water and the memories below.

Scarpa also evokes a less literal use of water. As descending the gradual ramp from the lawn to the tomb it is apparent that the lawn is not entirely flat but rather undulates like the sea. The tombs' lower sections are carved from marble in the shape of a boat's hull. This then sets up the Brion tombs as two boats floating below the surface of the sea.

And finally, a glass door bars the passage from the entry to the private, family pavilion. This door separates the spirit realm and the earthly one (Figure 9a). Access is gained by lowering the door into the water; underwater is the realm of the dead. As this happens, the counter weight on the other side of the concrete wall, above the lily-covered waters of life, rises up to the heavens that Scarpa has defined with the mechanical pulleys. One body plunges into the underworld (the door), and one soul rises to the stars (the counter weight) (Figure 9b).



Figure 9: a) At the door to the spirit world b)The counter weight has risen to the stars.

1.8 Exeter Academy – Louis Kahn

Louis Kahn uses movement, light and material to ritualize the process of academic inquiry pushing it toward personal expression and enlightenment. With this, he establishes both a corporeal resonance with the internal volume, and an existential connection between the self and learning.

Delivered in 1972, Philip Exeter Academy received a new library that met its concerns about fitting in with the campus of Georgian buildings and providing the ideal environment to study. To achieve this, Louis Kahn began with two ideas about 'light' and the 'room'.

“A man with a book goes to the light. A library begins that way.”¹³

“The room is the beginning of architecture. It is the place of the mind. You in the room with its dimensions, its structure, its light responds to its character, its spiritual aura, recognizing that whatever the human proposes and makes becomes a life. The structure of the room must be evident in the room itself. Structure, I believe, is the giver of light.”¹⁴

¹³ Louis Kahn, “The Continual Renewal of Architecture Comes from Changing Concepts of Space,” *Perspecta*, no. 4 (Cambridge: The MIT Press 1957), 207.

¹⁴ Louis Kahn, “The Room, the Street and Human Agreement”, *AIA Journal* 56 (Washington: American Institute of Architects, 1971) 203.

The structure of the library can be seen as three concentric rings that give form to these ideas. Within this form he creates space for freedom and a strong sense of place to ground inhabitation. The interplay of the individual with light and material creates a physical path from the stacks to the study corral, through space and into place. Generations of students have embodied this ritual, lacing together not only the room and light, but also the individual and the quest for enlightenment.

Kahn establishes the outer ring with a load bearing brick façade. The locally made brick and pattern of fenestration establishes the library in its Gregorian neighborhood. Its load bearing nature, carrying deduced loads as it rises, is expressed by the tapering of the brick piers. Fenestration between the piers hold both glass to flood the interior with light and smaller wood panels. The wood panels mark the location of the wood carrels inside. The 16-foot wide outer ring harbors the perimeter carrels and communal worktables to the interior. The load bearing masonry walls provide natural alcoves and vaults giving this space the necessary grounding to feel personal. By chamfering the corners of the building, he also allows us to infer that this is not the only structural layer (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Exterior corner.

The middle ring is built of reinforced concrete and supports the heavy stacks of books. Circulation towers and other services are located in the corners of the library with the metal book stacks filling between them. Light filters into the stacks from the large perimeter windows to one side and the central core from the other.

The inner ring is the dramatic open space surrounded by the stacks. The concrete walls have huge circular openings that reveal the books and wooden 'podium' edges. Overhead are two massive concrete crossbeams that also act as reflection plates for the clerestory windows (Figure 11). Light fills the central cavity from overhead and filters through the circular openings (Figure 12). The cathedral-like feeling provides a humbling entry into the library. Kahn is at his best using heavy structure and warm wood to create a place of light. As we move up into the stacks, Kahn employs this monumental presence in another manner.

The use of woodwork in the library is not structural but selected to mark places where students and books interact. This includes the carrels and study



Figure 11: Central void with concrete trusses.



Figure 12: The monumental core.

tables as well as the card catalogs, reference desks, and tables at the perimeter of the central atrium (Figure 13a).

The ritual of books and learning, light and enlightenment activates with entry into the grandeur of the central atrium. The strength and power concentrated in this place acts as both a moment of departure and arrival. We leave the ordinary world, take a breath, and arrive in a sacred place. This communal portal sets a tone for the personal journey ahead.

The student rises into the stacks searching for the text and moves through the heavy concrete, middle layer with soft light filtering in from both sides. After selecting the text, he moves toward the light, toward the central atrium. The



Figure 13: Wood meets the hands a) card catalog b) podium.

wooden tables along the perimeter of the atrium provide the student a place to examine the books away from the dimly illuminated stacks. These tables act as long podiums looking out into the monumental core. The student is now located within the grand, circular, concrete cutout and positioned to read the text to the people below (Figure 13b). We have become a part of the mythic process.

The carrels are in partnership with the atrium tables. With the text calling for deeper investigation, the wooden carrels provide a personal place to study. Moving from the atrium to the perimeter carrels we re-emerge into natural, direct light behind the brick façade. Here, at the carrels, the individual dives into their personal journey. Kahn has created a refuge (Figure 14). The mythic atrium has established an openness and comfort for the psyche. Using contact with wood Kahn leads the students to their own personal sacred space, the carrel with light flowing through the window. The operable portion designed into the wood panelling reinforces the personal nature of this place. Students have control over their own light. An individual can choose to be alone even with others near.

Kahn ritualizes the path toward knowledge raising it to a level of enlightenment. Beginning with a search and finding of text, the individual proceeds to the light, opens themselves up to the larger than life experience, and is provided

refuge as an individual to integrate this into a new sense of being. The careful orchestration of material, structure, and movement engages the individual and the community in a library that is more than just a repository books.



Figure 14: Student study carrels.

CHAPTER 3

THE SITE

At the stage of site selection, two criteria emerged as a result of my interest and studies. One, I wanted a context that replicable so that this investigation could have bearing at other sites. I do not mean a replication, but rather a set of conditions would be familiar to other locations. And two, I wanted to place the project within daily life as opposed to an oasis or retreat. I am interested in design that locates us in the flow of a modern, social context.

1.9 New London, CT

New London, Ct was chosen as a location to test design for rebuilding place for a number of reasons. It is a small city with a dense urban core making it both village-like and urban. Over the past 300 years the port city built a strong sense of place, but since World War II the downtown has experienced a loss of people and economy. This flight to the suburbs was a common phenomenon through out the country and downtown areas are now being re-examined for their potential in the 21st Century. Recently, New London has seen State sponsored economic investment in the expanding transportation hub and shipping piers. The arts and entertainment scene has experienced secondary growth as a regional urban entity. Empty property cleared by urban renewal provides spatial opportunity to help connect people and strengthen the sense of place.

1.10 Location

New London is a post-industrial, seaport city sitting on the west bank of the Thames River in southeastern Connecticut. The Thames is a deep-water harbor inside the eastern edge of Long Island Sound. The city is located midway between Boston, MA and New York, NY along the I-95 corridor (Figure 15). The 2010 census recorded a population of 27,620.



Figure 15: Locating New London, CT.

1.11 Climate

New London sits in a humid subtropical climate and enjoys a fairly mild climate due to its proximity of the gulf stream. Its four seasons are equally distributed around the year. Winters are cool to cold with average temperatures in the thirties and low humidity while summers temperatures rise into the eighties with high humidity (Figure 16).

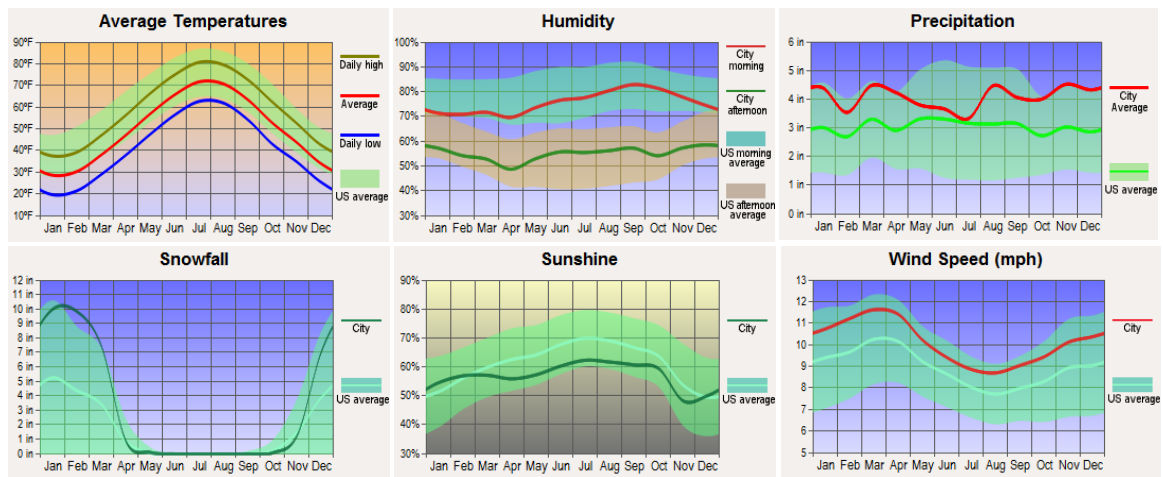


Figure 16: Climate Indicators.

1.12 Arts Community

New London is home to many fine and performing arts organizations ranging in scale from small galleries to the regional symphony. Local artists are seen playing on the streets and in international galleries. Performance venues include the historic Garde Arts Center, a 1400 seat, vaudeville proscenium stage, and seven smaller stages. There are nine art galleries and numerous non-traditional spaces for art exhibits and cultural expressions (Figure 17).



Figure 17: New London Arts Community.

1.13 Urban Patterns

While most of the streets have not changed since New London's colonial origin, the buildings have undergone some dramatic shifts (Figure 18). Because it was the base for American naval operations during the Revolutionary War, Benedict Arnold led British forces to burn the city to ashes in 1781. By the first half of the 19th century, New London was the third busiest whaling port in the world and much of today's architecture was funded by this wealth. The hurricane of 1938 left the city in

shambles, but wartime vigor saw the coast rebuilt. Then as business and residents fled to suburbia in the 50's the city embraced the principles of Urban Renewal and cleared vast tracts of land to make way for new economic vigor. There have been numerous fits and starts since then but the scars of that action still remain.

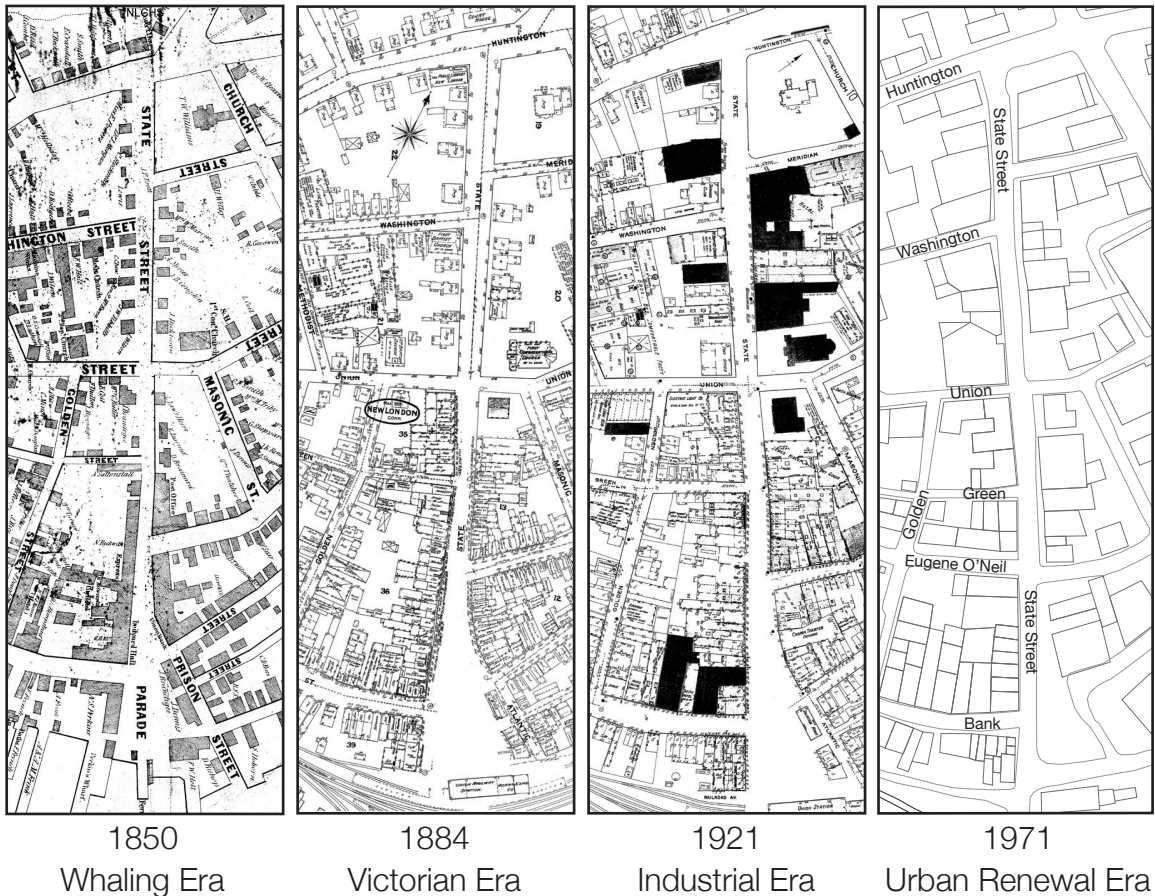


Figure 18: State Street: scale and density have increased.

1.14 Urban Succession

The Victorian period saw a major reorganization of urban space. The strength of the whaling industry and the arrival of the railroad in 1849 brought a new wealth to New London. A new sense of values arrived with this money and the character of urban space began to change. Previously, houses, large and small, had been neighbors to artisan workshops and general commerce, but now class stratification became more popular. New London's waterfront became the industrial zone, the commercial district started up the hill, and a green neighborhood of large houses

and cultural institutions formed near the courthouse looking down on the city.¹⁵

The 19th century functional reorganization affected individual buildings and urban space. The realms of industry, commerce, and residence existed apart from one another. Multi-use structures fell into disfavor. The sights, sounds, and smells of labor and the sea were pushed away by middle class sensibilities.

The 20th century brought the rise of commercial interest. Profit became the directive force and pushed the residential component further up and over the hill. After World War II, people fled all sections of the downtown for the promise of the suburbs. As the working class relocated, sales of goods and services were less profitable bringing an end to the shops and artisans. With only the very poor left between the vacancies, the next wave of reorganization met little resistance. Urban Renewal cleared vast tracts of old neighborhoods. Lots were paved and roads widened in hopes of courting the automobile and suburbanite (Figure 19). Akin to other American urban centers, New London has had many challenges surviving the physical and cultural damages of the late 20th century. As our urban sensibilities begin to shift in 21st century, New London provides an apt setting for the reconnection of urban place.

¹⁵ Abigail Van Slyck, "A Century of Change", *Maps of State Street 1850 -1951*, New London Historical Society, July 17, 2009, www.nlhistory.org, (February 15,2013).

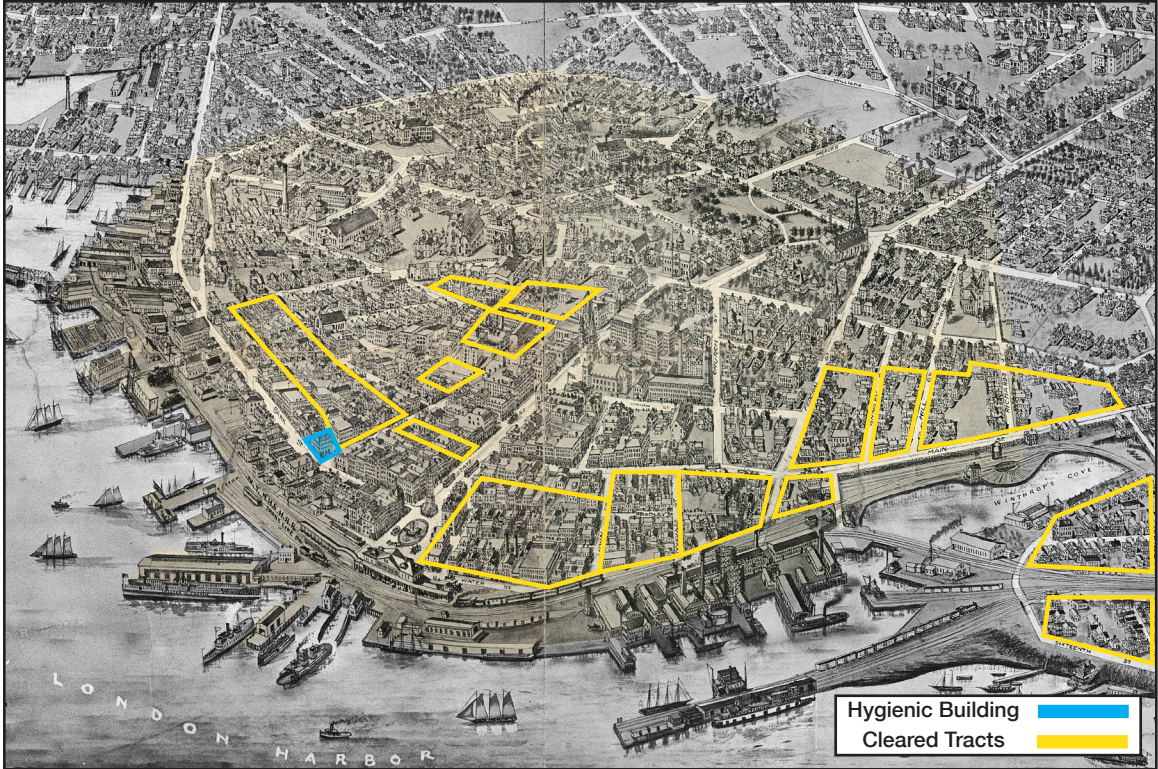


Figure 19: Tracts to be cleared during Urban Renewal have been highlighted on this 1911 map.

CHAPTER 4

CLIENT: HYGIENIC ART

1.15 Client Origins

As the government agencies struggled to reestablish Downtown New London in the 70's, independent, grassroots efforts were remaking the social fabric. Out of the gritty margins emerged an art show, the "Salon des Independence," and a group of artist/citizens that became known as Hygienic Art. The name came from the Hygienic Restaurant, a centrally located, 24-hour diner, which had become an impromptu community center and host for the first Salon (Figure 20). Modeled after the cafe showings of late 19th century Paris, the 'Salon Des Independants' opened the doors for artist of all types. The rules were simple: no judge, no jury, no fees, no censorship, one piece per artist, and all are welcome. The show became an instant success and continues to thrive 34 years later. When the restaurant closed in 1985, the annual exhibition, attracting over 450 artists and an audience of thousands, went nomadic, occupying venues throughout the city.



Figure 20: 1970's Hygienic Restaurant

1.16 Expansion

During this period of spatial marginalization, the event expanded its geographic territory as patron/participants scurried through the cold night between participating venues. In 1996 the Hygienic Restaurant's building was slated for destruction to become another parking lot. Massive community outreach resulted in the purchase and historic renovation of the building. This gave Hygienic Art, Inc. a new home in its original building. Hygienic Art supports a year-round gallery on the street level and six artist live-work studios above (Figure 21).

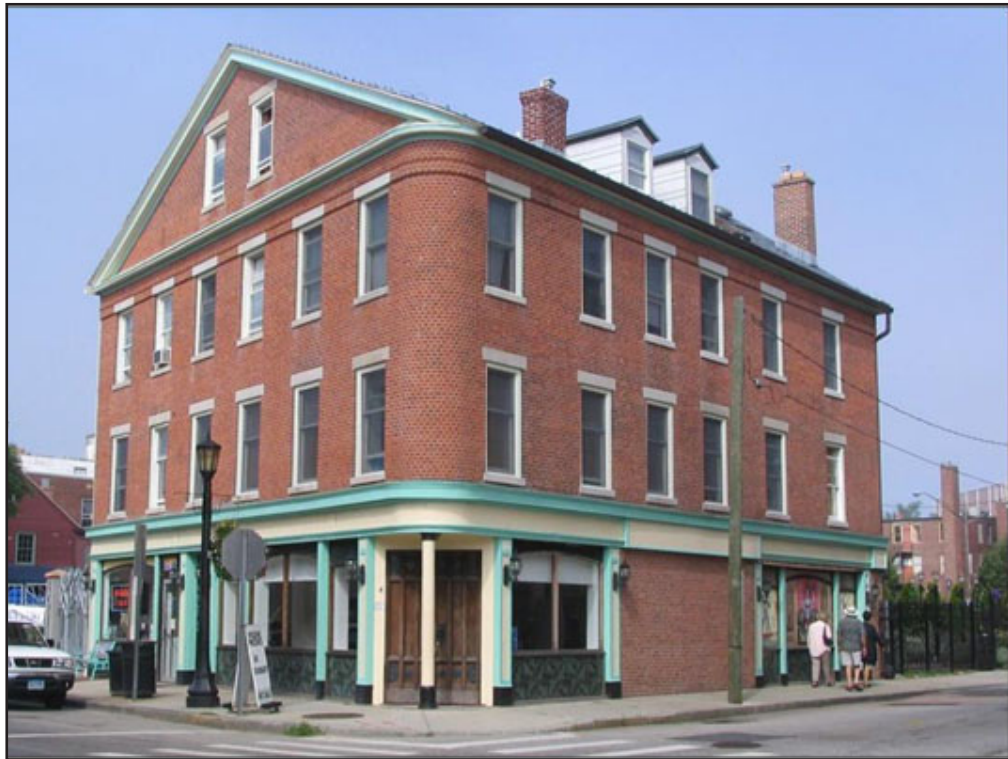


Figure 21: Hygienic Building with galleries and artist studios above.

The Salon des Independants moved the fine art portion of the event to the Hygienic Gallery, and the neighboring venues continued to support the growing performing arts contingency. A sense of motion between the, now, many venues has become a natural part of the event.

No longer a nomadic tribe itself, Hygienic Art has solidified as the center of the fine arts community and the organization has emerged as an agent of urban

change. Continuing its commitment to the growing arts community and city neighborhood, the Hygienic Art Park and Sculpture garden opened in 2002 (Figure 22).

Located on an adjacent parcel, the park design accommodates sculpture, a fountain, a reception zone, and a large performance area with seating. This exterior engagement of city space has transformed an empty lot into a place of active programming.



Figure 22: Hygienic Art Park during iam festival.

Hygienic Art continues to build its strong base as a grass roots organization. It has provided local artists a venue for expression and draws worldwide talent expanding the idea of community. Most of all, every showing becomes inspiration for fellow artists.

Hygienic Performing Art expands the opportunities for year round performance and strengthens the connection between interior and exterior; the organization and the city.

CHAPTER 5
HYGIENIC PERFORMING ART

1.17 Program Requirements

With the Hygienic Art Park, Hygienic Art Inc. has been able to develop its performing arts program that was previously restricted to the Salon. As an outdoor venue it hosts musical, dramatic, and cinematic events from June to September. Every year brings greater turn out and increasing programmatic opportunities. Using this success as a springboard, Hygienic Art seeks another expansion. Hygienic Performing Art will be a full service, year round black box theater, including office, classroom, and support services for the Art Park.

	<u>Requirement</u>
Main stage	200 Seats
Concession	50 Seats
Classroom	20 seats
Administration	5 Seats
Meeting Space	15 Seats

1.18 Urban Condition

The current impact of Hygienic Inc.'s activity in the neighborhood encourages a larger look into urban fabric of New London. The Hygienic building lies adjacent to one of the scars left by urban renewal (Figure 23). The tear resulted from the removal of old housing stock opening the way for an automobile corridor. As economic growth did not follow, most of the area became a paved parking lot. A reorganization of this area can open opportunities for neighborhood use.

Three conditions keep this area marginalized. One, it has an overt automobile scale – a suburban trait. There is a two lane, one way, auto arterial along Eugene O'Neil Drive where 35 mph speed limits are posted, but regularly exceeded. The other roads downtown are limited to 25 mph and are frequently slower.

Two, because the buildings facing Eugene O’Neil drive were cleared away, the surrounding structures offer their backs or sides to the street. Combined with large and irregular set backs, building and street interactivity is dampened. And three, the center of the cleared land has become a long, open, asphalt parking lot that parallels and strengthens the auto throughway. This sense of exposure further reduces interactivity by undermining pedestrian comfort (Figure 24).

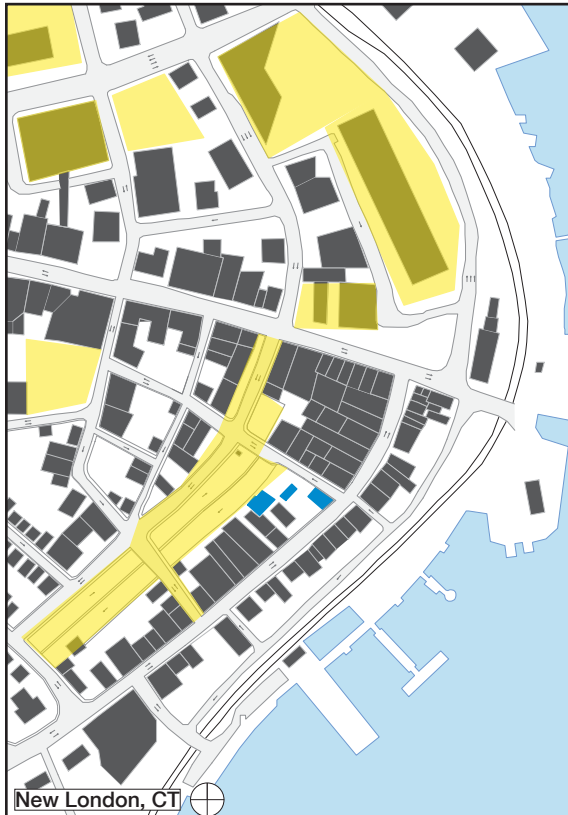


Figure 23: Hygienic Art is located downtown..

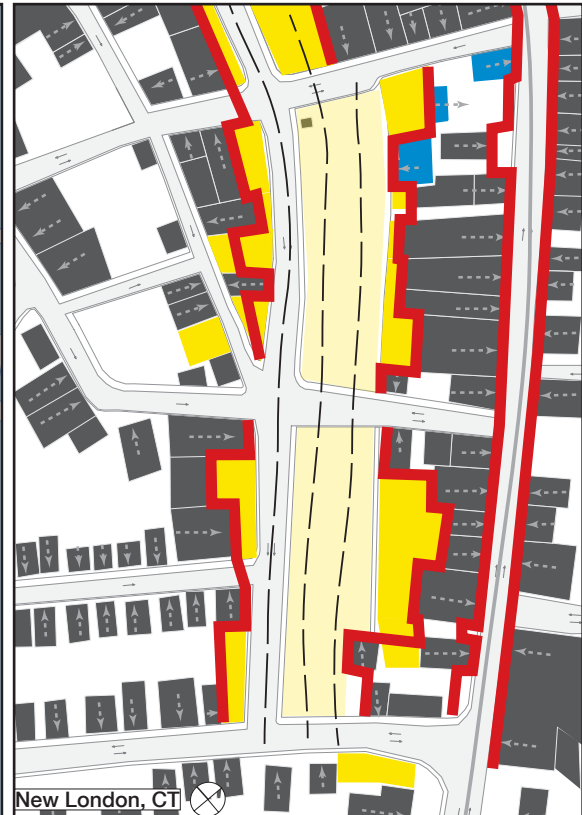


Figure 24: Marginalizing Conditions.

The first two conditions are currently being addressed at the city level. A proposal to return Eugene O’Neil Drive to a two-way traffic pattern has been submitted by the planning office and an application to fund a façade improvement loan program with the State is being drawn up¹⁶. The façade program is directed toward readdressing the back doors along this corridor as new business fronts. The third condition is addressed by this thesis through a reorganization of spatial qualities for the longitudinal parking lot.

16 Harry Smith, New London City Planner, conversation with author, December 2012.

1.19 Lateral Event Fields

In the current longitudinal form, there is no flexibility in use for the open space. Automobile dominance is clear and opportunities to share the space with pedestrians are limited. Human scale activities, or events, that occupy less than the entire space remain out scaled and marginalized, subordinated to the motorized flow. Introducing lateral regulating lines to match the rhythm of the existing property lines creates smaller spatial opportunities (Figure 25).

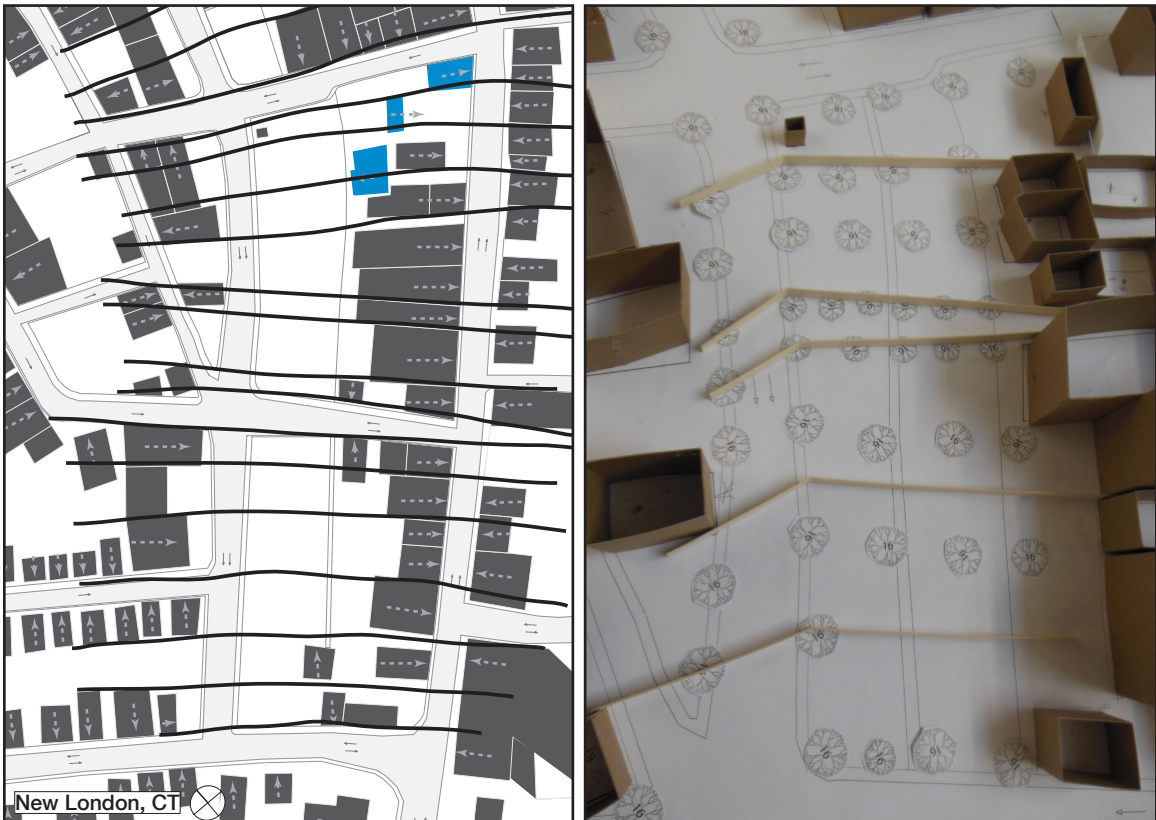


Figure 25: Extended property lines to express urban rhythm (diagram - model).

These scaled 'event fields' encourage urban, pedestrian use to resume. Multiple small event fields that fit in the neighborhood also provide modularity for expanded use (Figure 26). Small activities can settle into a single event field and larger city scale activities can inhabit several event fields (Figure 27). Over the course of time - daily, weekly, seasonally, the events activate the urban landscape with a sense of motion. This is human centered activity supports the neighborhood and city which is in sharp contrast to the current, devisive automobile flow and unprogrammed, feral space.

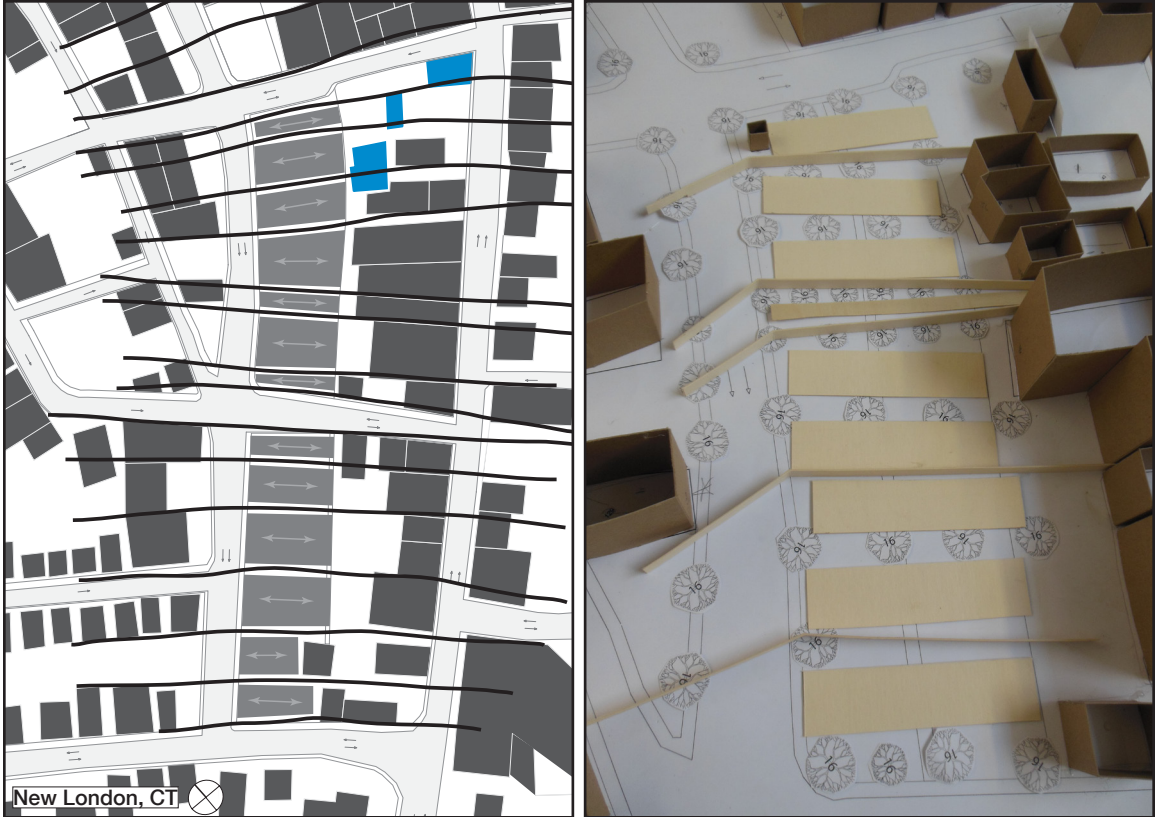


Figure 26: Spatial events develop within the urban meter (diagram - model).

For example, the base layer for many of these event fields will still be auto parking events. On Wednesday, the farmers market will also occupy one event field while the rest remain for parking. On Saturday, there will be a crafts fair in two with reserved parking in another, and a basketball game holds another event field toward the center.

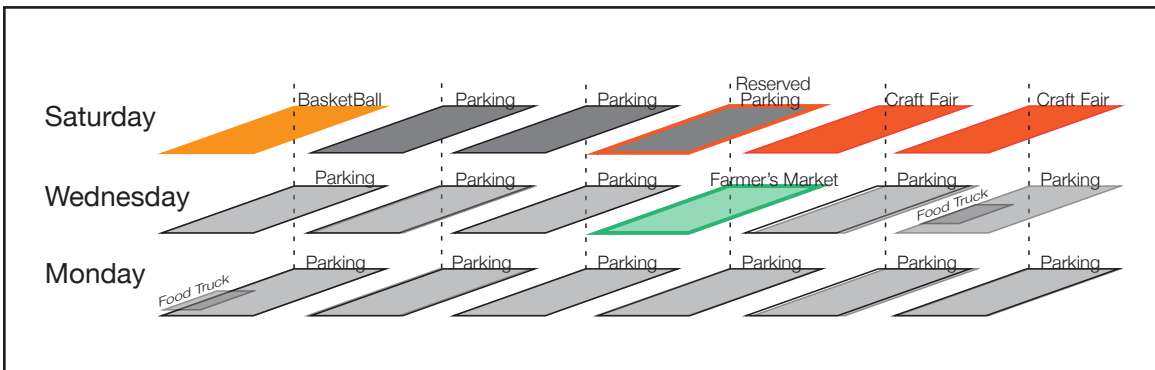


Figure 27: Event fields support different programming during different times of the week, or season. The scale of the programming can be aligned with appropriate fields.

Subdivision within an event field allows for another kind of interaction. A car charging station can be located at the end of one event field. Food trucks will find a desirable place for weekday lunch, or courting other events.

Another capacity of the event fields is to establish placeholders for subsequent development. These fields, as neighborhood scaled parcels, open the gate for infill development opportunities. As the current large parcels, their economic viability is out of range. Starting with the northern event field, Hygienic Performing Art is the next step in the regeneration of the downtown. In three years, a public pavilion could be built in the center event field. And in five years, a new mixed-use building for the southwest corner could be breaking ground (Figure 28).

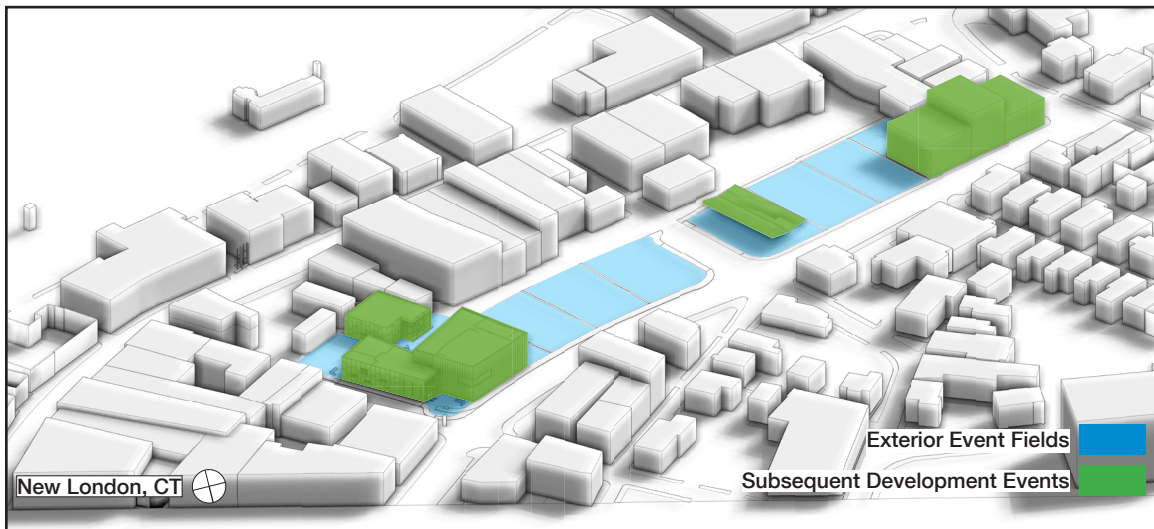


Figure 28: Event fields establish flexible and proportioned parcels for future growth.

1.20 Locating Hygienic Performing Art

The northern most event field is the corner of Golden St. and Eugene O’Neil Drive. Hygienic Art has acquired this parcel, 36 Golden Street, and it abuts their current property. The former Stoltz Meat Market, a 2800 sq. ft. 2-story building, occupies the southeast corner of this parcel that is away from the street corner. The remainder, and majority of the parcel, is parking lot. As it stands, the programming requirements for Hygienic Performing Art outsize the existing building.

I investigated three options for this parcel with the intention to adaptively reuse the existing structure - extruding the existing footprint upward, stretching it laterally,

and a dispersed strategy with multiple structures. The least invasive action led to extruding the footprint upward. This vertical stacking maintains the memory of the original structure and provides panoramic views on the upper levels. It also brings conflict. Hygienic Art has been engaging the public on the street, not towering above them. The height of the structure, 6 stories, would contrast significantly with the scale of the surrounding neighborhood. Another strong consideration is that the building remains set back from the street with grand open expanses on all sides. While shifting the parking areas into lateral arrangements alleviates some of the suburban character, having the large setback across flat terrain reinforces the, out of place, suburban tone (Figure 29).

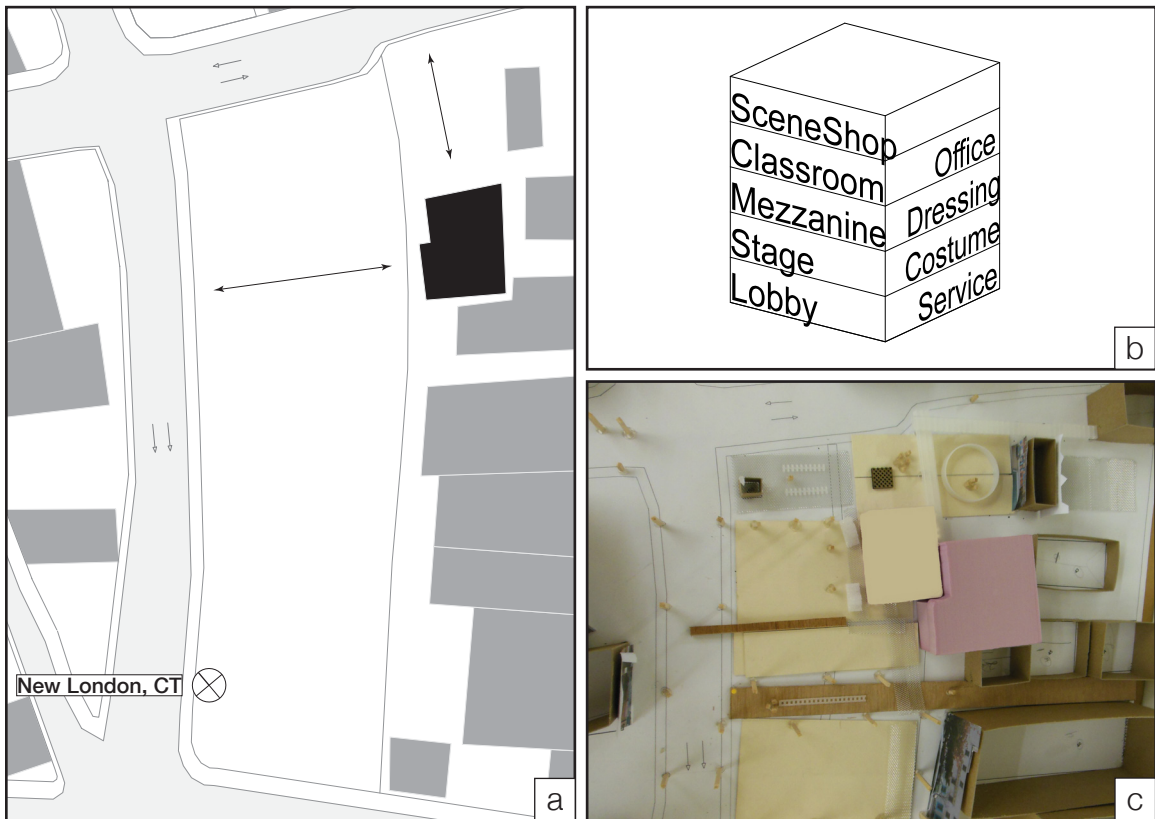


Figure 29: Vertical Extrusion Scheme, a) Site Map b) programming c) model

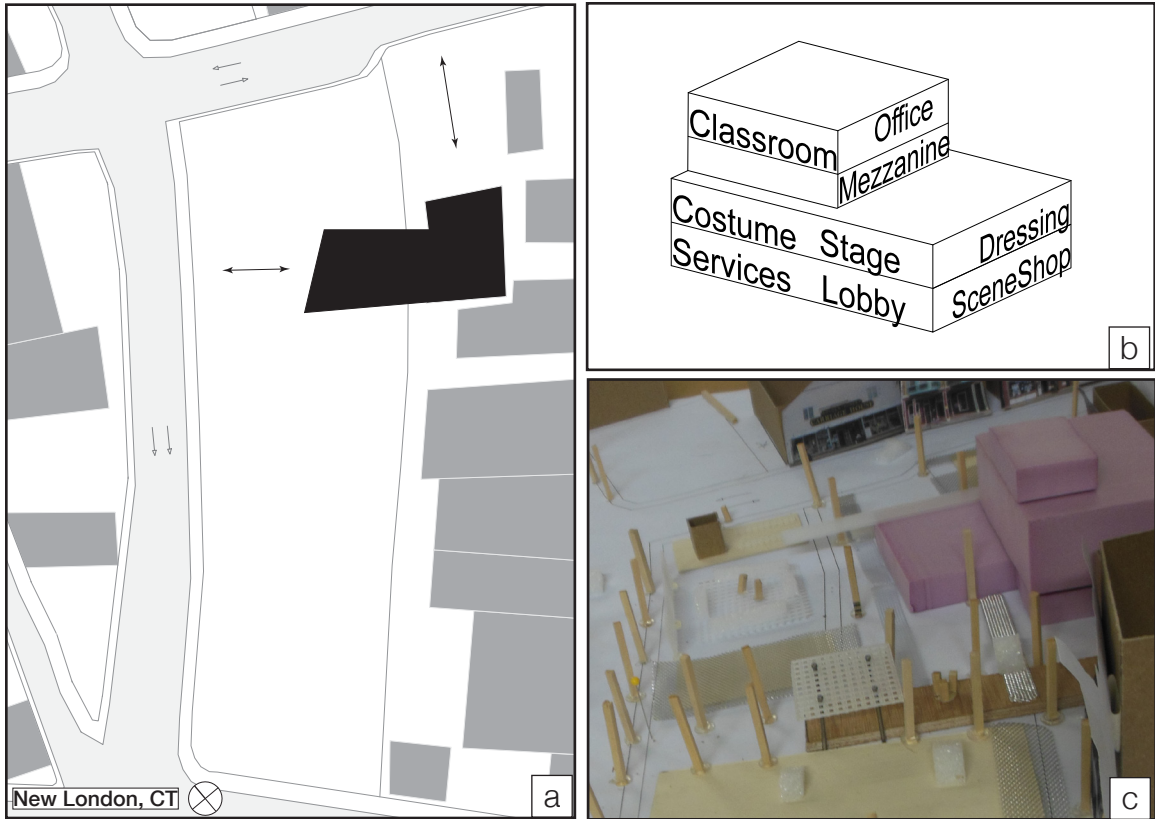


Figure 30: Extended Scheme, a) Site Map b) programming c) model

Stretching the building toward street to reinforce the urban grid begins to relieve the spatial tension and allows the existing structure to be incorporated into the design. The rear of the Art Park Stage is the publicly funded ‘Many Faces, Many Cultures’ mural. This constraint directly impedes building toward Golden Street resulting in a pull toward Eugene O’Neil Drive. This move separates Golden Street from the emerging events fields leaving urban grid compromised rather than strengthened (Figure 30).

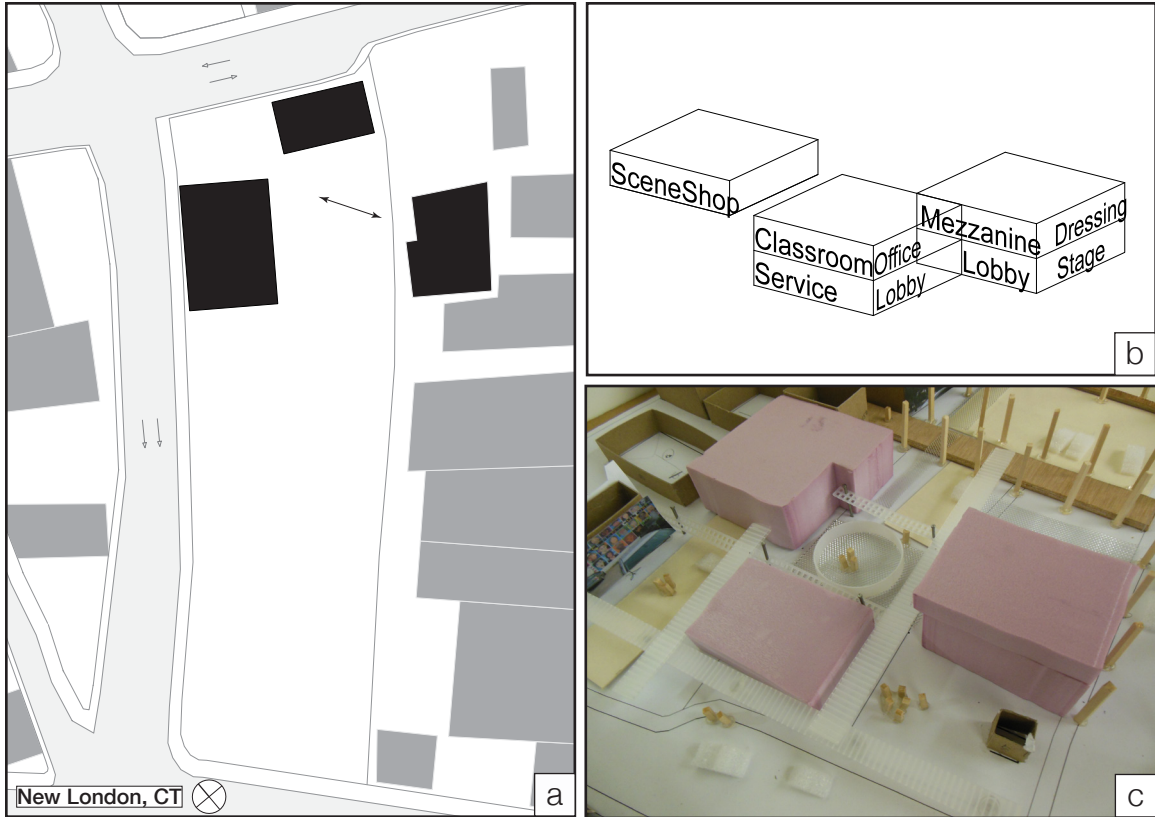


Figure 31: Dispersed Scheme, a) Site Map b) programming c) model

Moving focus away from the existing structure and toward the corner of Eugene O’Neil Drive and Golden Street provides a stronger solution. Placing the theater on Eugene O’Neil Drive strengthens the urban rhythm by providing an arrival point after a non-interactive stretch between State Street and Golden Street; provides greater continuance for Golden Street from one side of Eugene O’Neil Drive to the other; and maintains the vertical profile of the neighborhood. The existing structure can be maintained to house the programmatic requirements shared with the adjacent Art Park. A series of buildings on scale with the neighborhood provides a dispersal of program and requires public movement between them. There is also a poetic justice for locating the theater on the street named for America’s greatest playwright (Figure 31).

1.21 Arranging Form

I selected the dispersed model for the urbanistic strengths mentioned above

and because it initiates a porosity of structure. Creating a sense of depth with periphery views through layers of solid and void sets the stage for a stronger haptic experience. Arranging separate volumes along Eugene O'Neil Drive and Golden Street maintains the grid without expanding the scale. Introducing a modified grid arrangement organizes the program, and the develops several event fields between the new and existing structures.(Figure 32)

Programmatically, the black box theater as the generator for Hygienic Performing Art receives a prominent location on Eugene O'Neil Drive. The daily workings of the Center will be conducted in the service area and will be located to facilitate the pedestrian nature of Golden Street. The existing structure will be developed as a scene shop and a storage facility with easy access to both the Art Park stage and the black box.

Three exterior event fields interact directly with the structures. The corner of Eugene O'Neil Drive and Golden Street is a small open area that acts primarily as the entry court. The mid-block field, adjacent to the Hygienic garden patio, provides an event field between the Hygienic Performing Art and the Art Park stage. It provides delivery access the scene shop and views to both the 'Many Faces, Many Cultures' mural and the inner event field.

Cradled between the new structures that form the street corner, and the existing structure that holds the opposite corner, an inner event field is captured. This field becomes the central spatial volume for Hygienic Performing Art. Being open to the South and East, it also becomes a transitional public field. It is distinctly within the Hygienic sphere of influence, but not exclusively. Events may be planned such as social gatherings, independent theatric offerings, or sideshows to the main event inside. Impromptu public opportunities include a casual lunch, practicing guitar, or 'cutting through' to another part of the neighborhood.



Figure 32: Dispersed arrangement promotes interior/external interaction.

1.22 Shifting Grid

Because the colonial roadways accommodated the river's edge, there is an eight-degree shift in the urban grid at this intersection. Keeping each wing aligned to its street results in the building expressing both grids. The corner is flexed open. This geometry expresses the natural twisting of the urban fabric with its original topography (Figure 33).

This topographic response is used strategically to define program and social opportunities. Where the northwest corner approaches the streets, the wings are offset to open an external entry court and create opportunities for pause and gathering in groups. It also provides a point where one can see through the building to the inner event field. A series of filters provides a sense of depth and something beyond. It is not a closed, static face to the city.

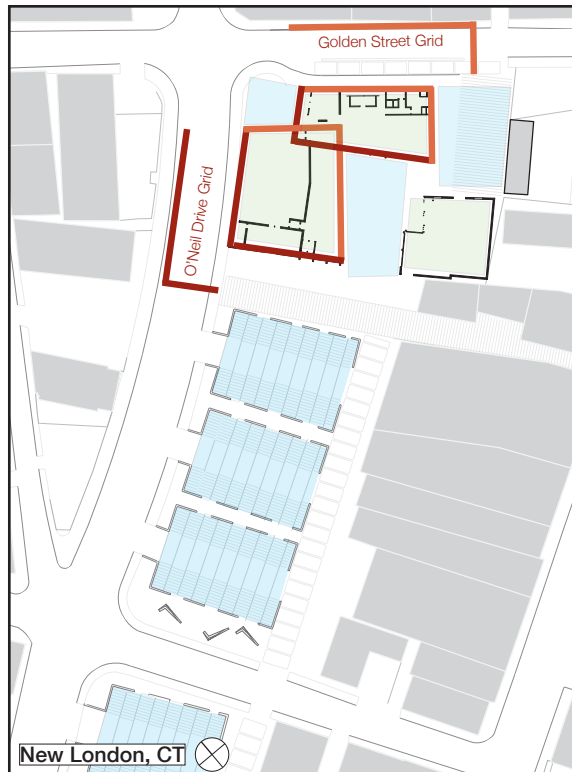


Figure 33: Each grid is reflected in the composition and the individual volumes.

1.23 Entry

The street corner and the building offset provide a place for people to assemble before entering building. A bench rises out of the mortarless, permeable masonry for those waiting for their party and a plinth supports a rotating public art offering. In the spirit of the Hygienic Salon, these will be temporary pieces from all walks of the community (Figure 34).

The entry passes through a double height wall of transparent glazing allowing clear communication from the street and entry court to the lobby interior. Sight lines flow down the service side of the lobby and provide glimpses through to the inner event court. A mezzanine catwalk can be seen leading away down each wing and has an expanded platform above the entry. Walls parallel to Golden Street are translucent channel glass to allow figurative communication and begin creating privacy.



Figure 34: Main Entry a) rendering b) sight lines through layers c) massing concept model.

Entering parallel to Golden Street along the channel glass wall we are screened from street activity easing our arrival. This double height space greets us with a large wall for artistic display that allows the director to begin setting the stage. Overhead, the catwalk delineates the entry volume from the entire lobby. Passing under the walkway the lobby opens up with a clear glass façade that looks out to the inner court. The ticket counter lays to the left with the single height lounge beyond. Above the lounge and service area the catwalk leads to the office and classroom before descending behind the ticket counter. To the right we find an open stair rising to the mezzanine. Seeing through and around the stair reveals the gallery in front of the theater doors.

1.24 Primary Volumes

Both the theater wing and the service wing secure the building to the site in a stereotomic fashion. The steel frame and panel construction anchor these two volumes to the city. A separate tectonic expression is made for the social space. It is built with columns and glass.

The theater is the most solid form. Sealed and insulated, it forms the black box to hold the formal theatrical events. It is a safe place for the freedom of artistic expression. When we enter the theater we move into a new realm leaving the everyday world behind.

The service wing containing the ticketing, coat check, restrooms, classrooms, office, and concessions supports the activity of the Hygienic Performing Art. Due to the interactivity of these services, this wing is not a closed box like the theater but an open 'C'. The exterior wall is punctured with regular translucent apertures allowing communication with Golden Street. The open side of the 'C' extends into the social space inside allowing for freedom of access (Figure 35).

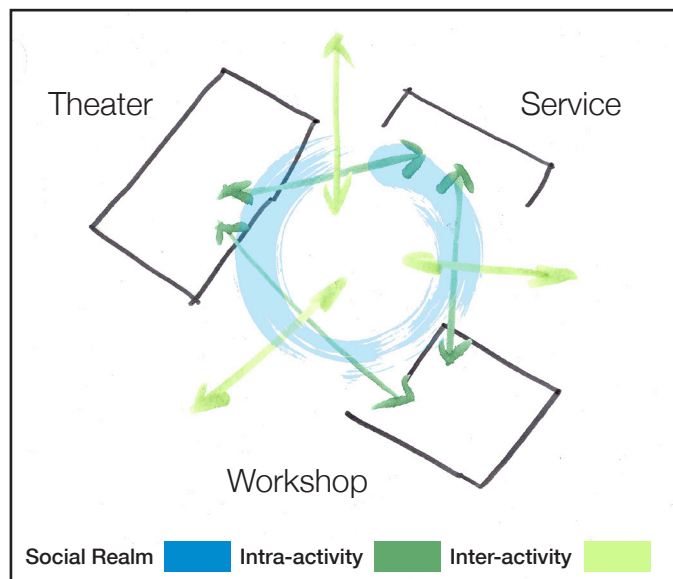


Figure 35: Interactivity Parti

The formal social space of Hygienic Performing Art passes from the street corner, between the wings, and extends along both internal sides of the 'L'. This includes the lobby, circulation, and concession. This space uses the service and

theater volumes as a backdrop and is separated from the center courtyard by the operable glass panel wall. The panels can be opened to encourage free flowing interior/exterior experience (Figure 36).

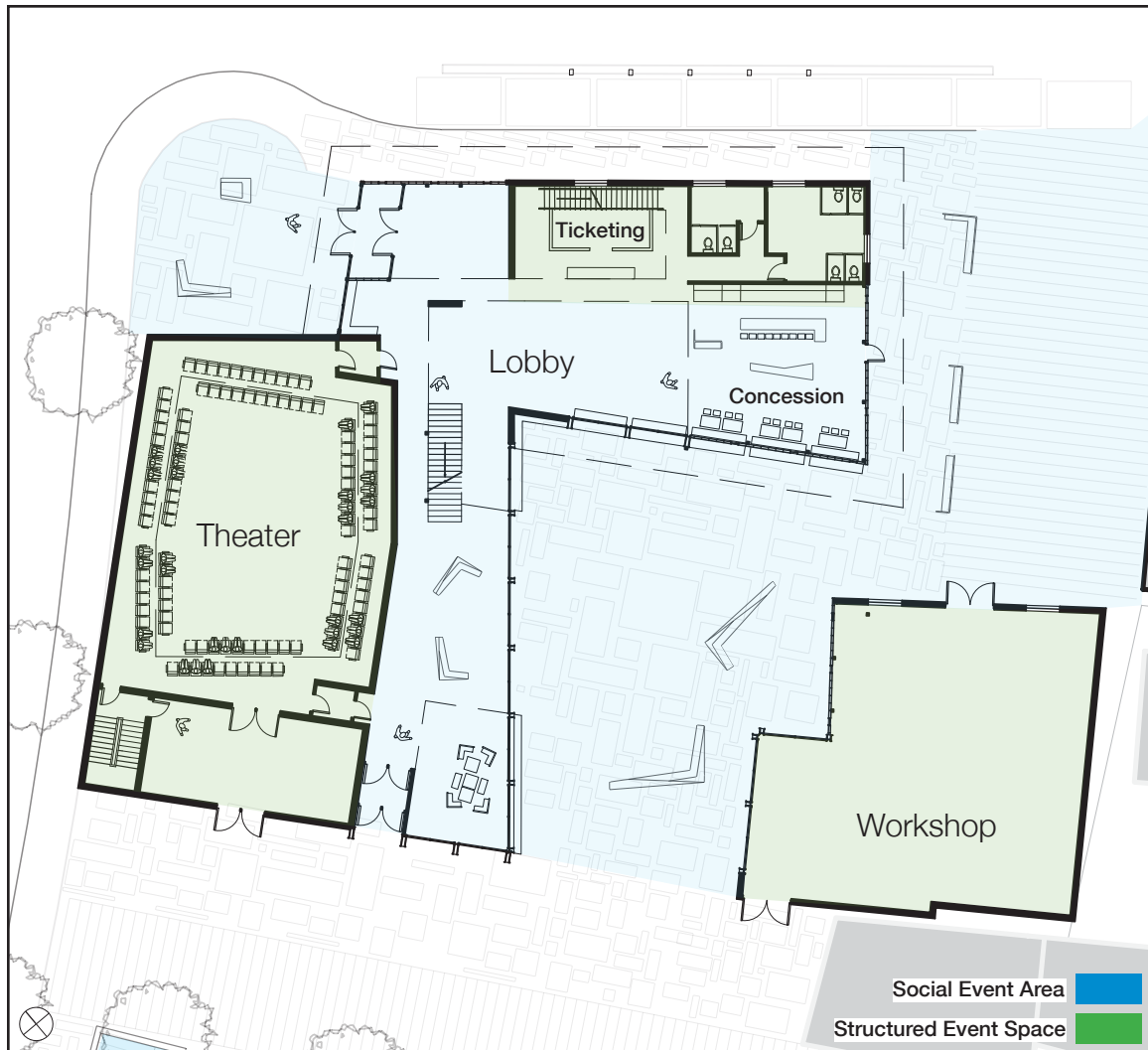


Figure 36: Ground Level Floor Plan

1.25 Events Venue

The Hygienic Salon originated during a period of growing isolation for artist from galleries and museums. Curators were deciding what constituted as valuable Art. The Salon provided an alternative by inviting everyone to hang art without hierarchies. Value is not to be determined by an outsider's judgment of the object. But rather, the value of Art is to be in the process. Artist and patron, art and value, are not separated. The Salon became an Event celebrating the artists by bringing their work into the community. The Salon became an Event celebrating the

community by bringing out the artist and their work.

Hygienic Performing Art is designed as a venue for Events. The theater provides a nucleation site and serves the 'social' opportunities. Performance happens in the theater and the Event extends to the entire site. When the entire site becomes the stage then both the scheduled performers and the patrons are participants in the Event. This blurring of lines is analogous to the Salon.

The ability to adapt the building to each show helps extend the Event into the site and blur the line between spectator and participant. Physically locating elements of the show into the social space affects the balance of participation. Adapting the building to a specific show can range to embrace full fledge sideshows or subtler atmospheric shifts. As sets can be changed in the theater so too can the surfaces of the building. Most significantly is the shutter system for the large glass façade of the social area. The columns contain a multi-track theatrical style fly system that carries interchangeable frames. These frames are use to mitigate climatic conditions, shutters to reduce heat and glare buildup on this southern façade and additional frames are available for theatrical effects like scenery, projection screens, or light screens.

2. Conclusion

This thesis explores the re-inhabitation of a scar left from urban renewal. It does not look to reinact the past nor introduce a foreign object. It exhumes the current neighborhood development pattern to span the rift and establishes the growing, grass roots organization, Hygienic Art, to anchor neighborhood occupancy.

The new Hygienic Performing Art center fosters interactive events within its walls and sets the stage for social reengagement across the whole site for its members, and neighbors. Hygienic Performing Art is organized in such a way that it acts as a self-contained building as well as a member of the community. This project embodies a sense of place by intertwining both social engagement and spatial form. Rapid auto flow and vast open space disrupt the urban space. By first mitigating automobile presence and then realigning the site, multiple event fields are capable of addressing activity at scales ranging from the individual to neighborhood to region.

While this project is specific to its site and community, similar scars exist in other cities. The rise of urban populations places renewed interest in our cities and their viability. The scale and qualities of urban life vary from place to place, and the on-going process of developing healthy cities remains a critical one. By recognizing that a city is more than a proximity of individual buildings fighting for survival, architects and clients can draw together urban design and urban planning to create interconnected places. It is this mutual reinforcement of inclusive urbanity and inclusive sociality that resonate across scales creating vibrant places.

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