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Uncovering the Embedded Histories of Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Ashley Ann Browne entitled "Uncovering the Embedded Histories of Knoxville." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture, with a major in Architecture.

T.K. Davis, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Scott Wall, Gregor Kalas

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Uncovering the Embedded Histories of Knoxville

A Thesis Presented
for the Masters of Architecture Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ashley Ann Browne

August 2009

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate the ability of architecture to activate and enhance the typical experience of the city from the perspective of the pedestrian. Through a series of framed sites distributed in specific locations throughout the historic downtown Knoxville areas, the city becomes a stage set waiting to be activated. The pieces can be explored sequentially, or by chance, allowing the pedestrian varied modes of viewer ship depending on approach, perspective, framing, location, scale, light, etc.

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Theories + Investigations

Throughout this investigation it is important to understand many factors simultaneously. To maintain a constant cross-referential approach, I have selected a series of theories and readings that are relevant to the development and discovery of the ultimate project.

The first subject of interest is that of psychogeography and the Situationist Movement, with their approximate beginnings in the 1950's. Guy Debord was the most prominent leader of the Situationist International Movement, and developed the notion of psychogeography as an attempt to transform urban life (both aesthetically and politically). Coverly (2006). Psychogeography has evaded definition throughout its lifetime, and has been considered everything from a literary movement, to a political strategy, to an avant-garde movement. Coverly (2006). However, the standing definition was given by Mr. Debord, who defined it as 'the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals'. Coverly (2006). The author suggests that psychogeography is "the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place". Coverly (2006). There have been, and still are, countless groups who participate in the "drift" through the city, recording their observations as they wander freely. The studies deal with the idea of the flaneur, which could be retrofitted into the urban city as a way to reexamine the contemporary pedestrian. Flaneur was originally a French verb meaning "to stroll". Charles Baudelaire made the term famous through his work and considered this role as important in understanding the participation in and the perception of the city from



Figure 1: Martin Stranka photograph

Image: www.martinstranka.com

the eyes of the pedestrian. Coverly (2006). Groups that have participated in the drift have conducted many studies and mapped their paths as a way to investigate the psychology of the flaneur. The concepts and practices of Psychogeography can tend to be evasive, therefore it will be considered as a topic of interest but does not provide this thesis with a concrete set of guiding rules or principles. However, the process of mapping will be important in my own investigations of individual tendencies of movement through the city.

The book *Sensuous Geographies* by Paul Rodaway is a wonderful synthesis to the ideas of psychogeography, but explores more specific ideas about the effects of psychology upon space, and space upon psychology. The author explains several theories about the 'context of perception', including cognitive and behavioral

perceptions of geography, the active versus the passive perceiver, ecology, and the contribution of the five senses toward our spatial experiences. Rodaway (1994).
Rodaway's book shall be utilized as a tool to synthesize theory and tangible design solutions.

Site

“The site is a place where a piece should be but isn't” - Robert Smithson

Architecture cannot exist without site. The potency of the site informs the potency of the architectural experience. A site can be loaded with external factors, so understanding the importance of each will strengthen or weaken the outcome. The first, and potentially the most critical decision (after defining the question), is the selection of site. After defining the goal, it is vital to choose a site with an appropriate scale for the project. Since this thesis is investigating the pedestrian within the realm of a daily commute, it is important that my site be of reasonable size. Also, since the program is physically broken into fragments, size is imperative to enable one fragment to reference the next. The program spans across a variety of sites throughout the downtown Knoxville area, in order to allow the architecture to tell multiple stories about the city. Although this could encompass a large amount of linear square footage, the “veins” of the project will be organized as individual excursions. The main hub of the visitor’s center will be suspended under an existing railroad bridge, in order to act as both a literal and figural bridge (between the myths associated with sites along the river, and as a literal pedestrian bridge between north and south Knoxville). Small “pavilions” will be extensions of the main center, with each location being determined by stories chosen from Jack Neely’s collection “Secret Histories of Knoxville”. The Project will act as a narrative of the city, both past and present, and as a bridge to the future.

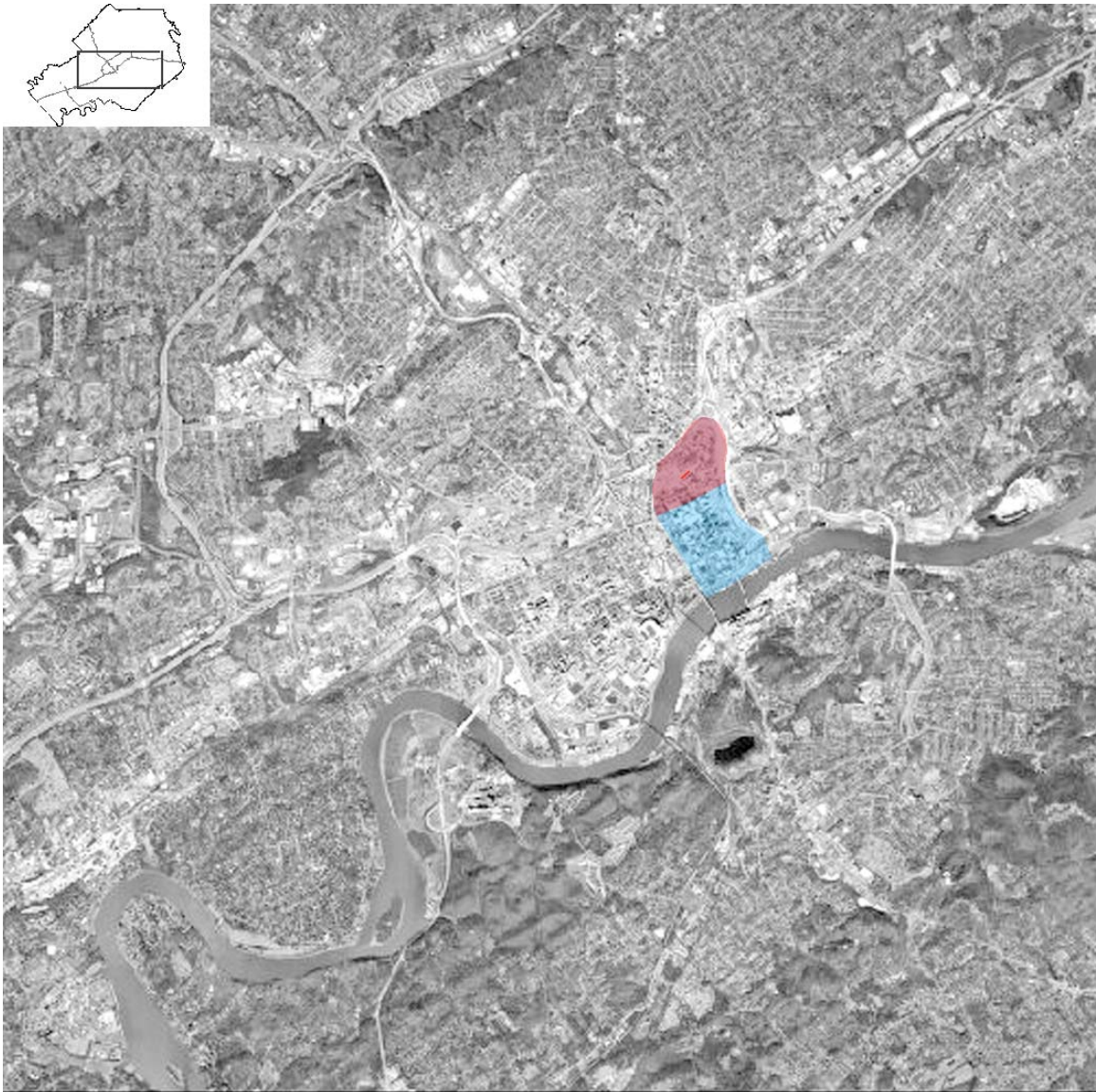


Figure 2: Knoxville, Tennessee (red: The Old City, blue: Downtown Knoxville)

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Figure 3: Re-centering The Old City (showing UT Campus, Downtown Knoxville, Fort Sanders Neighborhood, World's Fair Park, and the South Knoxville riverfront). Image:

www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)

These districts are rich with history and culture that is currently hidden or not fully expressed, nor able to be experienced due to lack of facilities and access.

Site History

The Histories of Downtown Knoxville (Including: Fort Sanders Neighborhood, the Old City District, Market Square, Gay Street, and the north and south riverfronts) are the subject of investigation, and will be the deciding factors for the development and placement of the program. I will use the writings of Jack Neely in his book Secret Histories of Knoxville as a tool for investigation and discovery of unknown historical site and legends



Figure 4: Elements marking histories of downtown Knoxville

Images: Author



Figure 5: Downtown Knoxville and the Old City; Figure Ground showing the site (red/gray) and the proposed pedestrian greenway through the site (magenta). Image: Author



Figure 6: Site; Intersection of 100 Block Gay Street and Jackson Avenue, showing existing conditions.

Image: Author

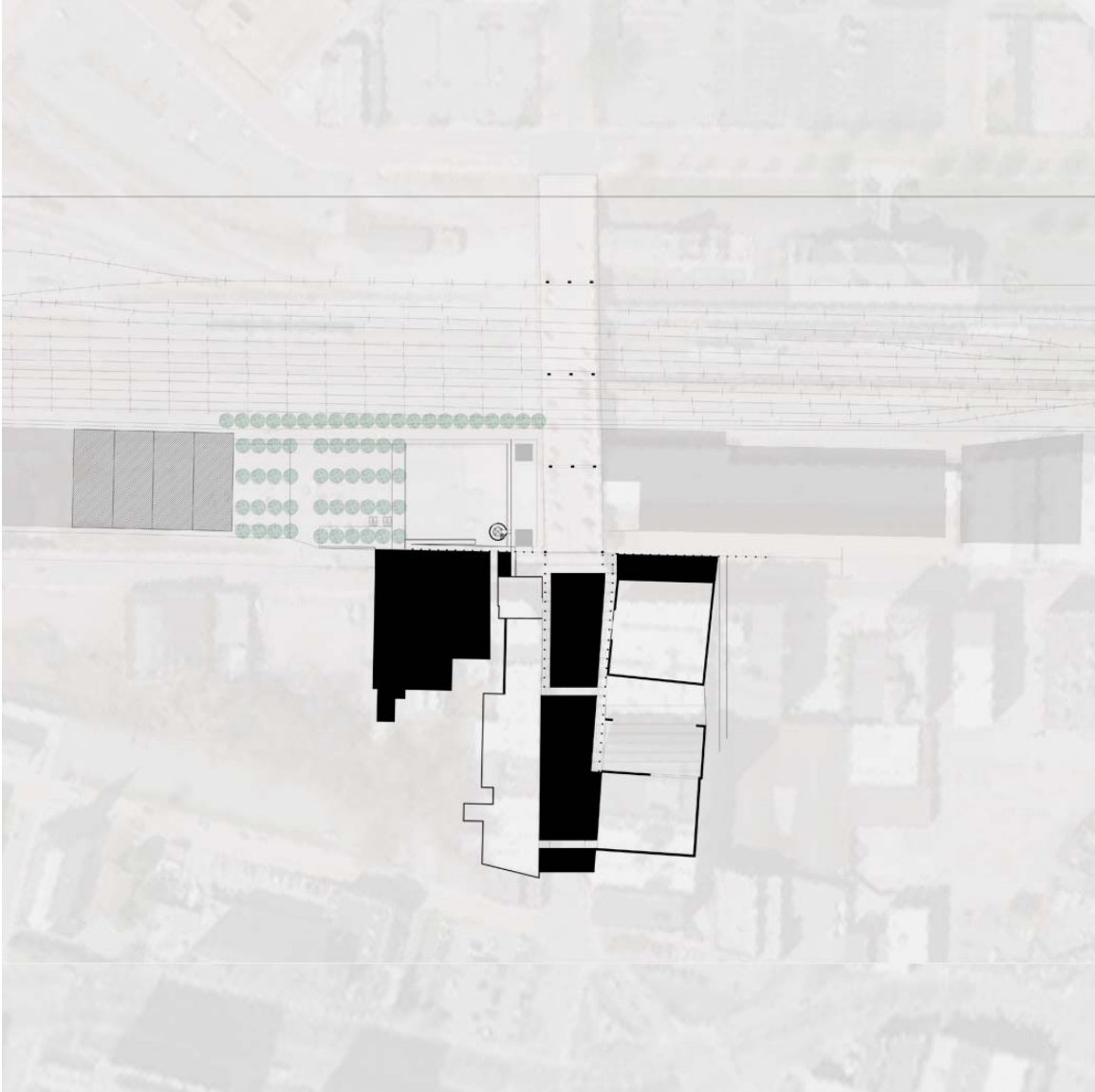


Figure 7: Site; Intersection of 100 Block Gay Street and Jackson Avenue with author's design proposals (showing revisions to Underground Knoxville as well)

Image: Author



Figure 8: Northeast corner of site from the Gay Street Bridge; existing condition

Image: Author



Figures 9 & 10: Northwest edge of site from the Gay Street Bridge. Images: Author





Figures 11 & 12: looking to south edge of site from the Gay Street Bridge. Images: Author





Figure 13: 100 Block of Gay Street looking south; showing the glass tile sidewalk that hints at Underground Knoxville below. Image: Author



Figure 14:Underground Knoxville, showing glass tiles from sidewalk above. Image: Author



Figure 15: Foundation stones from original building on site. Image: Author

Site analysis

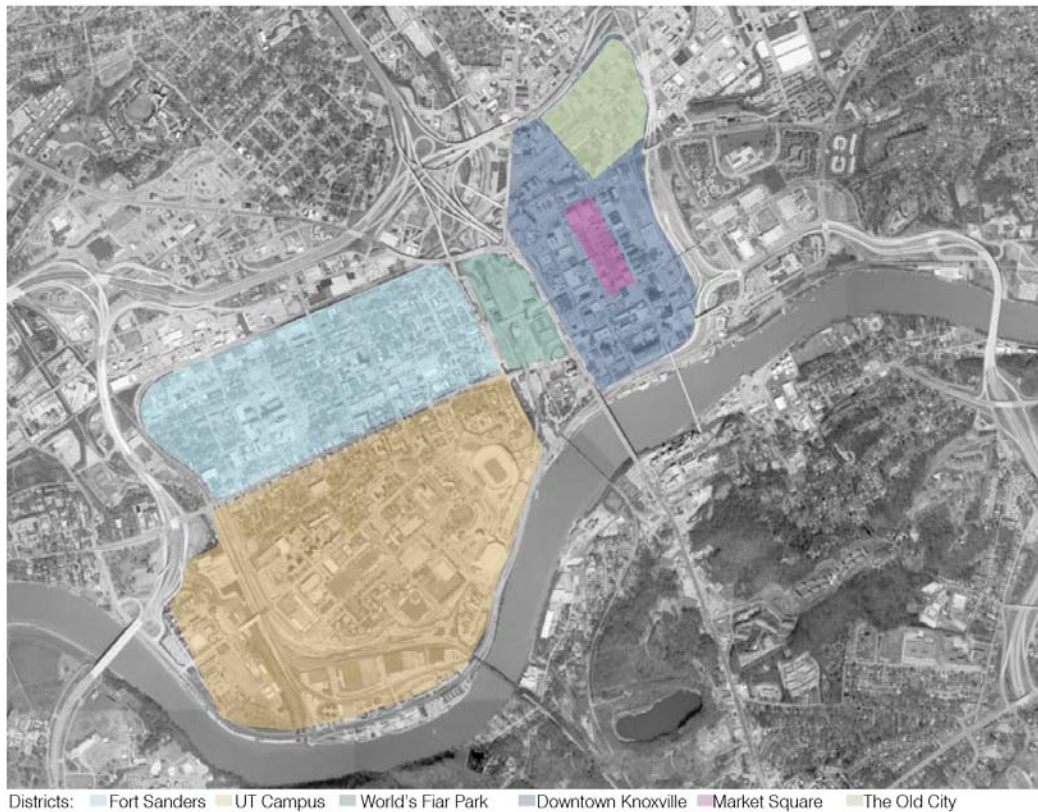


Figure 16: Identification of districts:

Light blue: Fort Sanders

Orange: University of Tennessee campus

Green: World's Fair Park

Blue: Downtown

Magenta: Market Square

Yellow: The Old City

. Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlays by author)



Figure 17: Downtown with figure ground overlay emphasizing buildings in close proximity to site. Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Figure 18: Initial investigation into downtown areas of interest

Image: Author



Property Land Uses

Unknown	Commercial/Retail	Parks/Gardens	Social Services/Gov't
Mixed Use	Industrial/Warehouse	Schools/Churches	Residential

Figure 19: Property zoning downtown

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Areas of Legend

Figure 20: Areas of legend downtown

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Reverse Figure Ground

Figure 21: Reverse figure ground downtown

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)

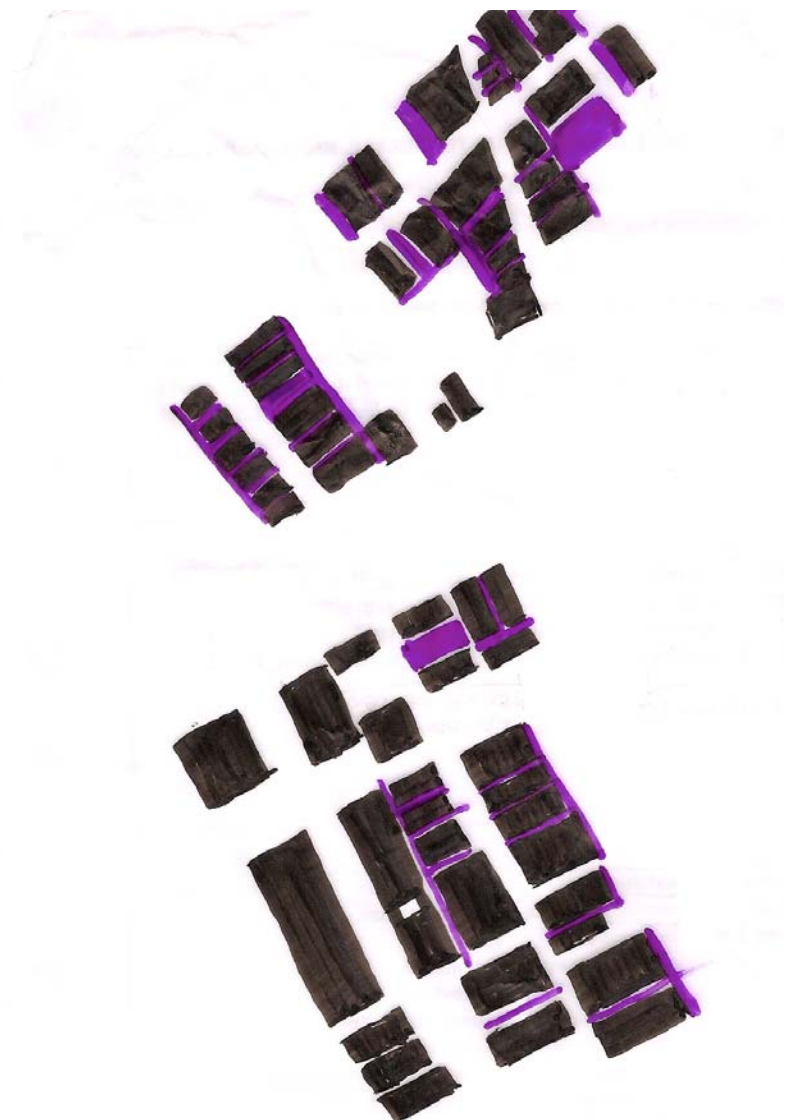


FIGURE GROUND of High INTEREST AREAS
■ SECONDARY ZONES

Figure 22: High interest secondary zones

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)

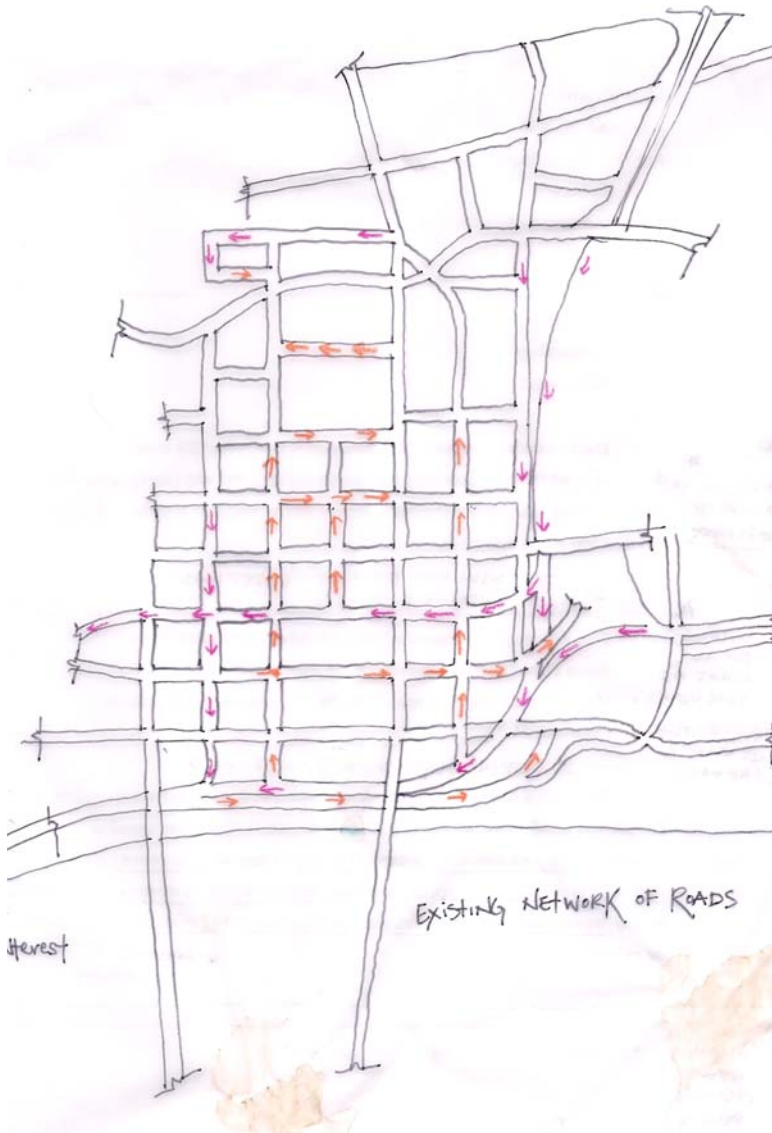


Figure 23: Existing road network

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Figure 24: Downtown traffic routes: automobile vs. bus

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Walkable Distance
■ 1/4 Mile (10 Minutes)
■ 1/8 Miles (5 Minutes)

Figure 25: Walk able distances downtown

Image: www.knoxnetwhere.com (overlay by author)



Figure 26: Existing downtown greenspace

Image: www.googleearth.com (overlay by author)

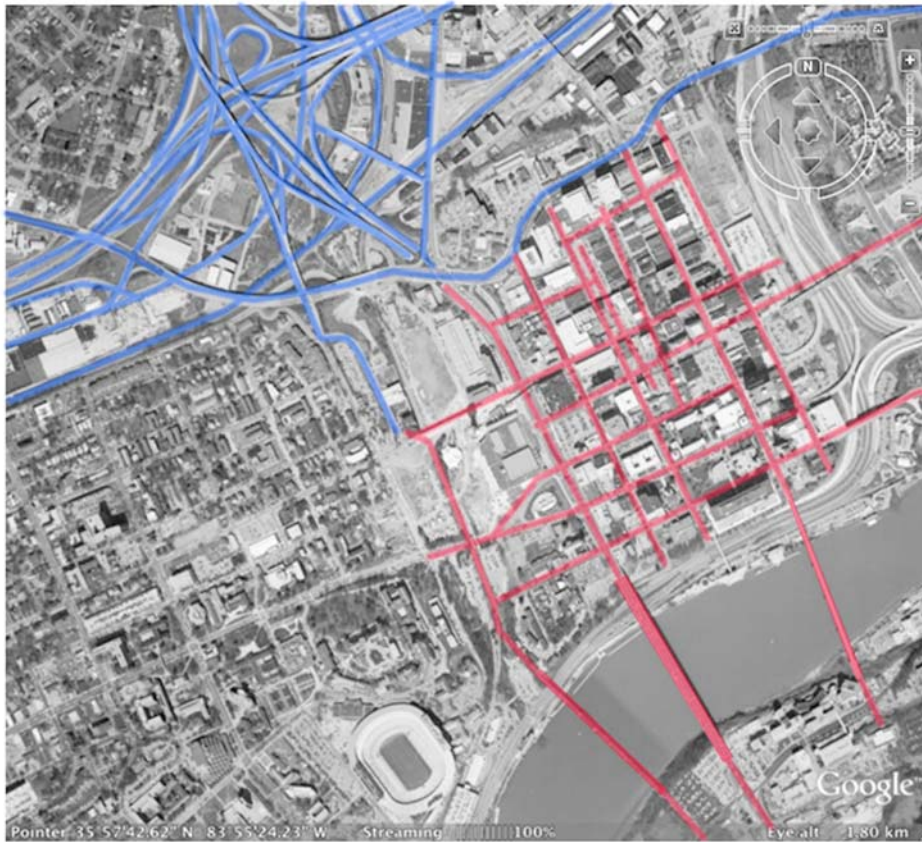


Figure 27: Interstate network (blue) + city roads (red)

Image: www.googleearth.com (overlay by author)

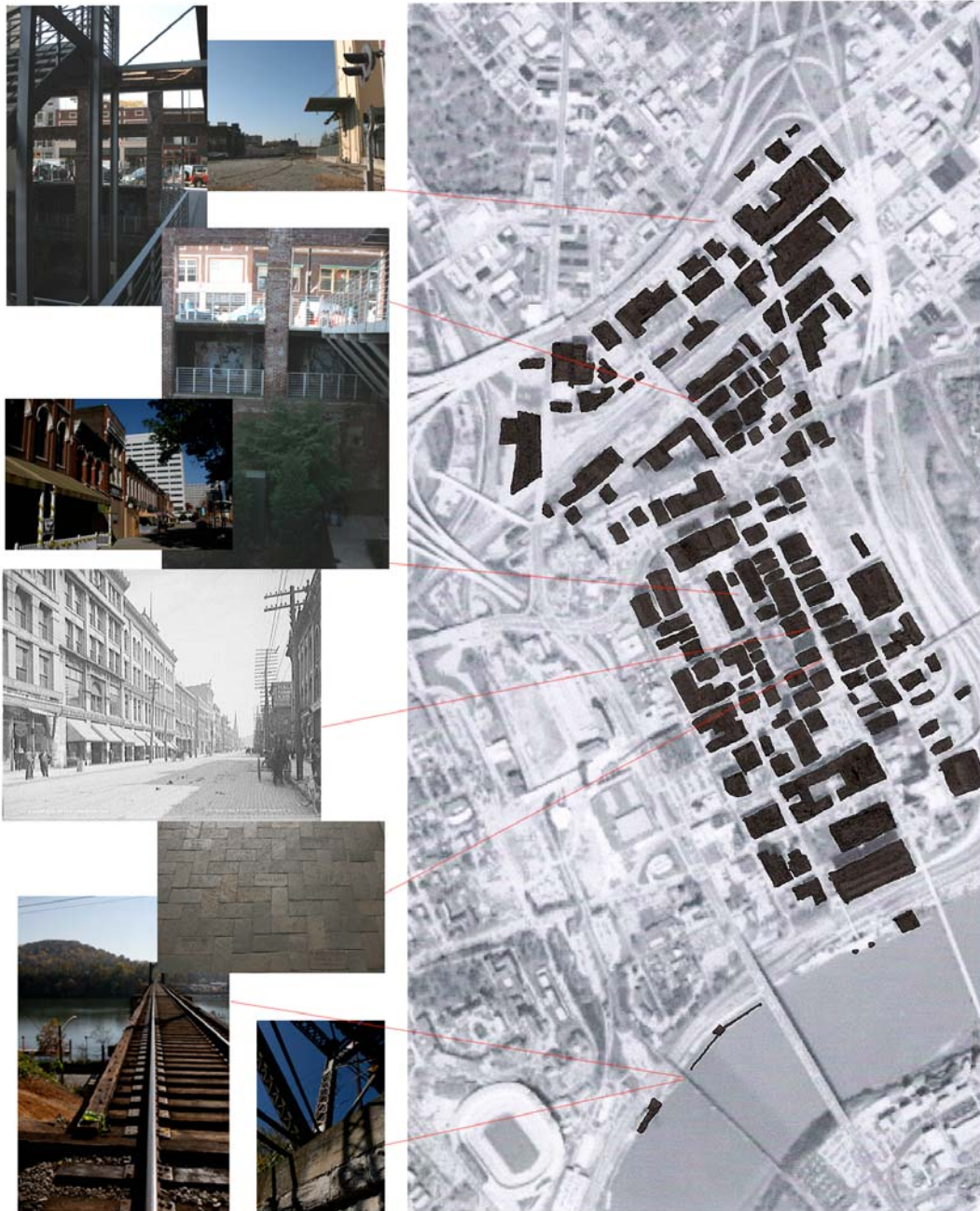


Figure 28: Montage of downtown images

Image: www.googleearth.com (overlay by author)

Precedents



Figure 29: Peter Greenaway, 'The Stairs/Geneva'

All Images of "The Stairs/Geneva": www.cri.ch/stairs/

In Peter Greenaway's installation '**The Stairs/Geneva**'

he places one hundred freestanding staircases throughout the city of Geneva. Greenaway is a film maker, and conceives the installation as a way to explore cinematic notions in a tangible, three-dimensional way. He perceives the city as the stage set and the inhabitants as the audience and actors in a "living cinema...acting as spectators of the unstaged everyday life of the city". In his desire to activate the audience, Greenaway sets up opportunities for

multiple view points and framing of the site, which is accompanied by commentary and intended as frames in a film. A map is provided if one chooses to experience the exhibit sequentially (the only ordering system being a number assigned to each site, directly referencing the clicking of frames or time lapse in cinema).

Greenaway also provides for the opportunity of a serendipitous encounter with a fragment of the whole, depending on the “viewer’s desire to follow the suggested trajectory”. The installation is a perfect precedent for the investigations conducted throughout this thesis. Greenaway lays out guidelines that are applied in film making, which can also be applied in architecture.

The elements include:

Location

Audience

The frame

Acting

Properties

Light

Text

Time

Scale

Illusion

He also marks an important distinction between film and art (or architecture), remarking on the limitations of its “singularity” due to the fact that it can only provide its viewers with one frame at a time (compared to a painting with its “multiple possibilities to stop, ponder, and return to...”



Figure 30: Peter Greenaway, ‘The Stairs/Geneva’

All Images of “The Stairs/Geneva”: www.cri.ch/stairs/

Parc de la Villette, Bernard Tschumi

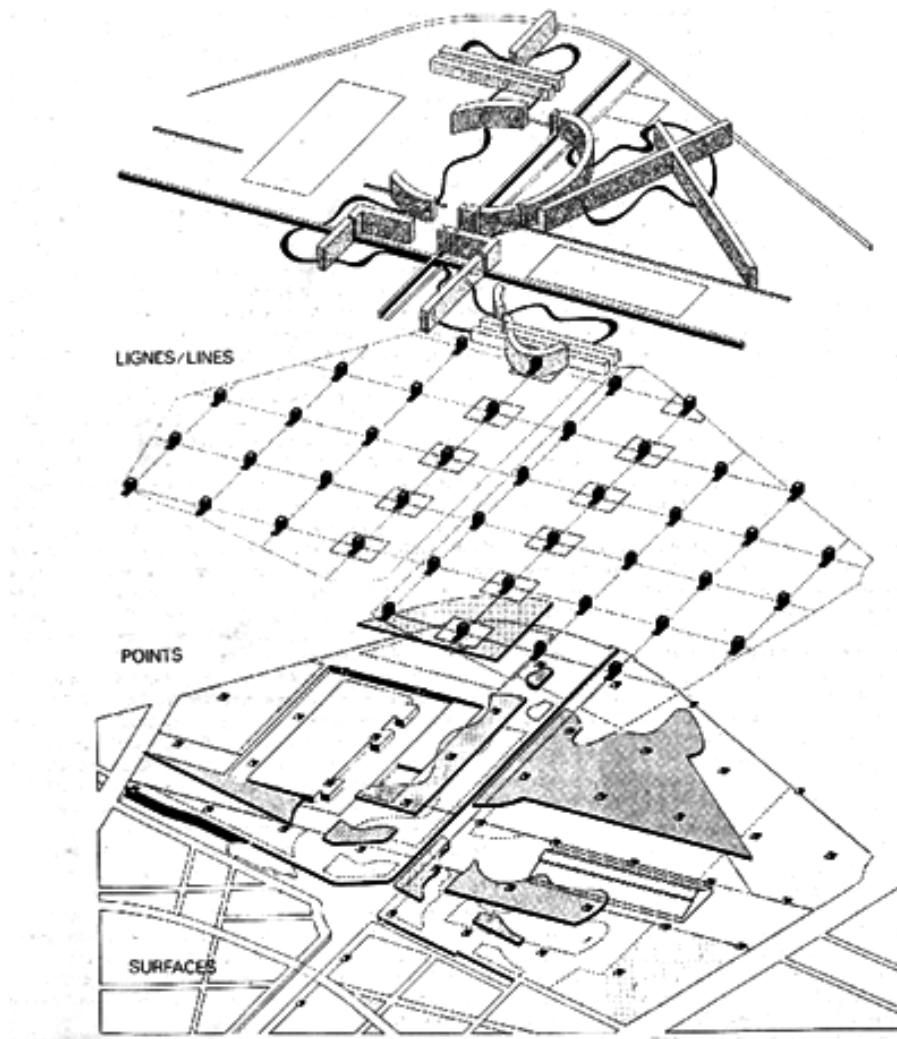


Figure 31: Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette, diagram of ordering system

Image: architect

Bernard Tschumi designed Parc de la Villette as a series of architectural interventions within the existing landscape. The park was designed in three layers, including: points, surfaces, and lines. There is a prescribed pathway elevated over the park, but the pedestrian can choose their path through by wandering on the ground level around architecture and landscape, which seems at times interchangeable. From the eyes of the patron, the arrangement seems haphazard, but there is an order underlying the apparent disorder.

I will use this study to examine how Tschumi intervened into a landscape with existing architecture and used a series of buildings and sculpture which seemed unrelated, but were actually laid out on a grid and referenced one another.

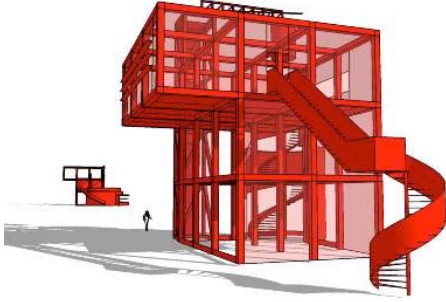


Figure 32: Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette, Folley

Image: architect

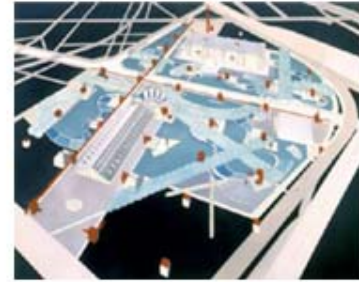
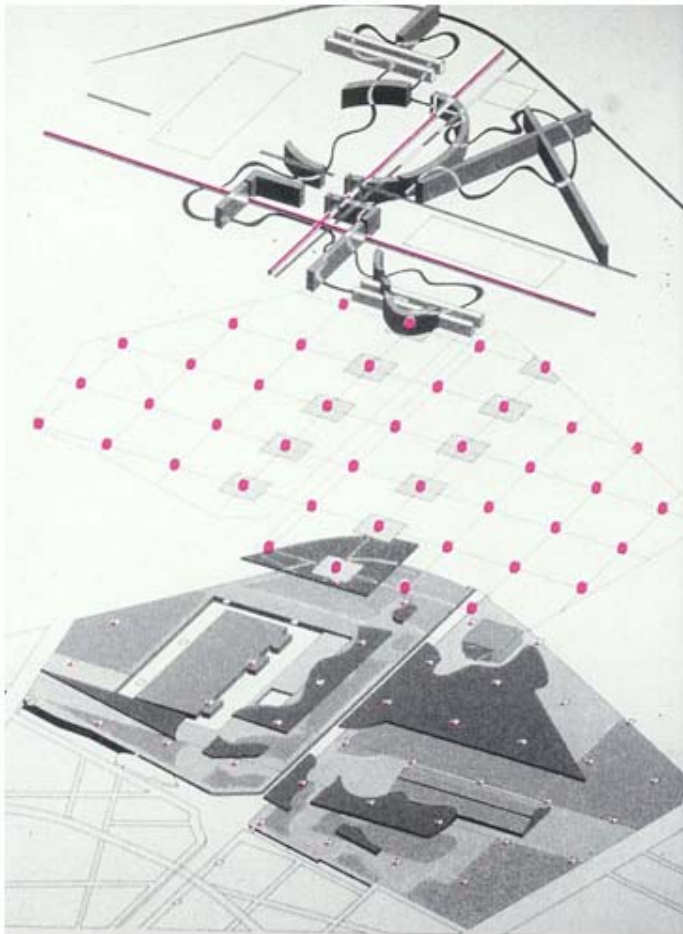


Figure 33: Bernard Tschumi, Parc de la Villette

Images: architect

Clinton Library, Little Rock, Arkansas

Polshek Partnership

The Clinton Library in Little Rock is an example of a building that was inserted into an existing landscape

And was meant to simultaneously enhance and preserve the culture and identity of the existing city. It extends over the waters edge among existing bridges, and insinuates the idea of a bridge, both literally and figuratively. I will use this project as a precedent for the main node of my visitor's center, which will also act as a bridge to the past, present, and future of the city and culture of Knoxville.



Figures 34, 35, & 36: Clinton Library

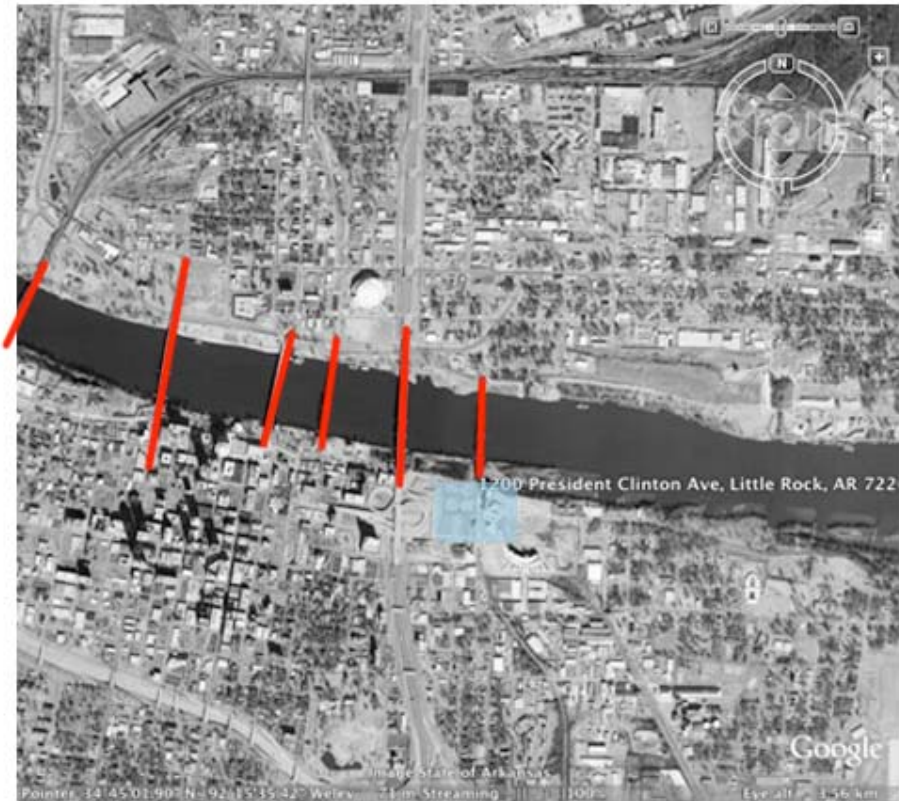
All Images: www.clintonpresidentialcenter.org





Figure 37: Clinton Library

All Images: www.clintonpresidentialcenter.org



Google Earth image (with author's overlay: highlighting Little Rock's 6 main bridges)



Site Plan (highlighting the designs reference to Little Rock's 6 bridges)

Figures 38 & 39: Clinton Library Aerial views

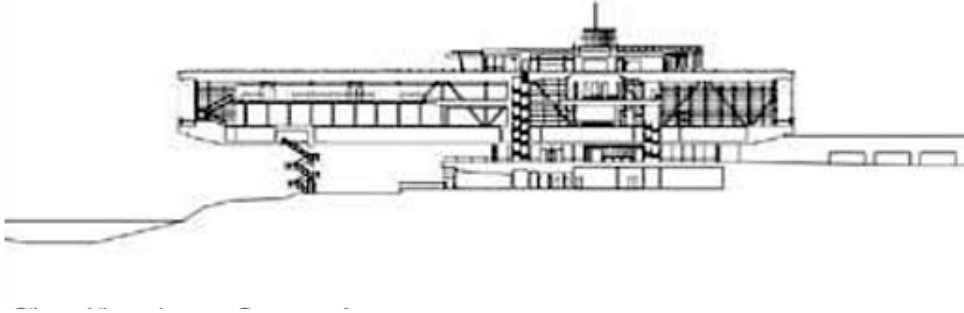


Figure 40: Clinton Library

Image: www.arcspace.com

Freedom Trail, Boston, Massachusetts

The Freedom Trail in Boston was one of the first historical walking trails in America. It was conceived by a local journalist in 1958 in order to link the past with the present. The walk is a 2.5-mile trail that links 16 historical sites, from Boston Common to the Bunker Hill Monument. The trail actually overlaps with another trail, the Boston Harbor Walk. A red line and a line of red bricks to keep people going in the right direction map the whole trail. It is also possible to explore the trail out of sequence. I will analyze this precedent to see how the sites were successfully or unsuccessfully linked to one another. I am also interested in the fact that it was designed to facilitate tours as well as the casual “flaneur” who could choose to experience the monuments in any sequence.



Figures 41 & 42: Boston Freedom Trail

Images: www.bostoncitylinks.com, www.flickr.com

Program + Design Solution

The thesis program consists of a visitor center for downtown Knoxville. Along with the visitor center, the main node of the complex also houses the offices for the *Metropulse* (the publication for which Neely writes), as well as a bike share program and a skate park on the grounds. The center will branch into the city through a series of “markers”, each of which will highlight areas of historical or cultural importance (based on the writings of Jack Neely). The number and location of markers is based on the mapping of relevant historical or legendary sites throughout the downtown Knoxville area. The markers will vary in size and approach, based on the specific site per marker. The materiality will remain consistent, so that the fragments will reference one another and serve as a way-finding strategy for the pedestrian or bike rider. The markers are designed as bike racks that serve the bike share program, and also work as benches and light boxes that are inscribed with the stories of Jack Neely. Instead of a collection of fabricated pieces of art, the city will act as the permanent collection on display. There will also be a main node for the visitors center from which people can get information and maps, purchase food and gifts, act as a lookout tower for photographic opportunities, and will also serve as a cultural hub (hosting events, music venue, etc...). The main node is both the source of origin for the stories, as well as the vessel for disseminating the stories throughout the community.

The main node would be the bridge-like piece, extending toward the future, grounding us in our present, and providing a link back to Knoxville's rich cultural past.

Program:

Visitor's Center/Main Office:

Bookshop: 100 linear feet

Art / History Gallery: 10,000 linear feet

Metropulse Office: 10,000 square feet

Bike Share space: 440 square feet

Pavilions/Galleries:

Number and size dependent upon location and story being told (locations to be determined by stories chosen from the writings of Jack Neely)

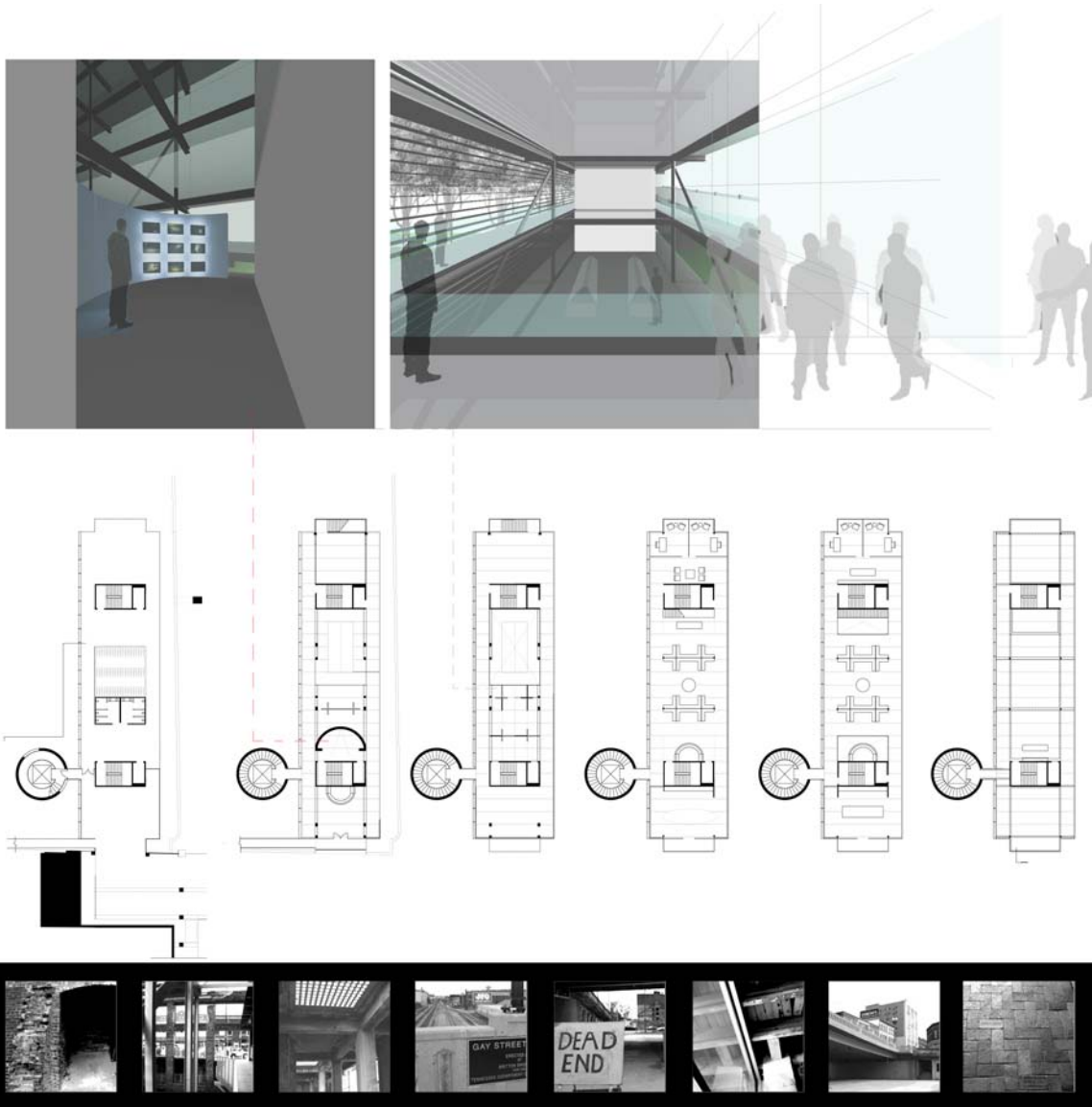


Figure 43: Floor plans + Perspectives

Images: author

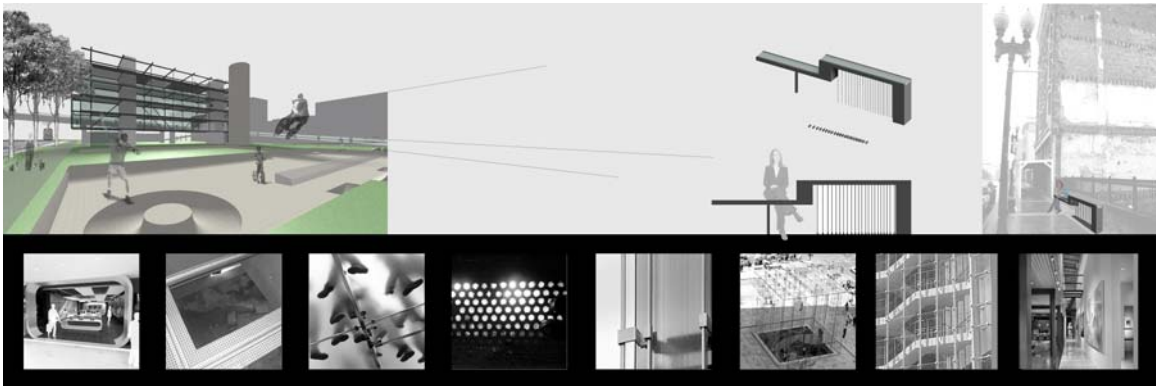
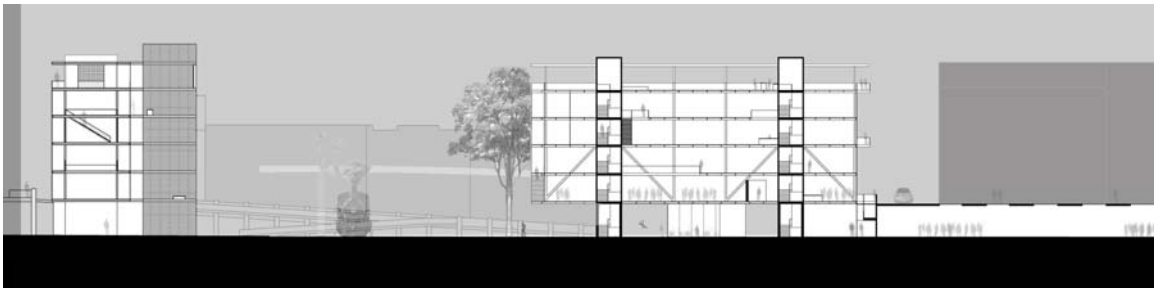
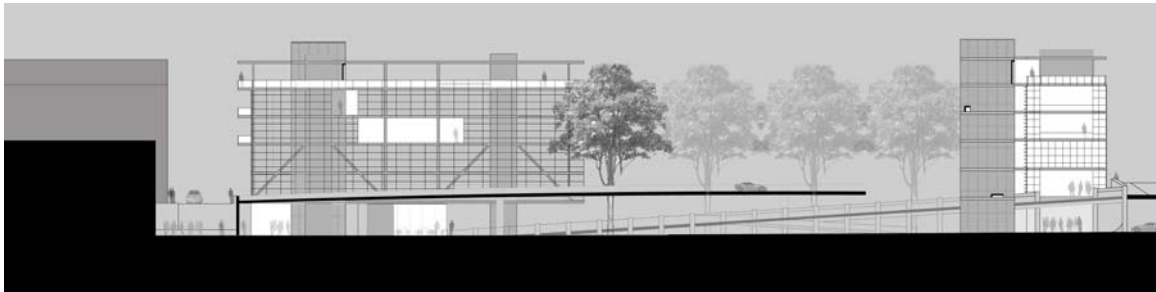


Figure 44: Sections + Elevations + Perspectives

Images: author

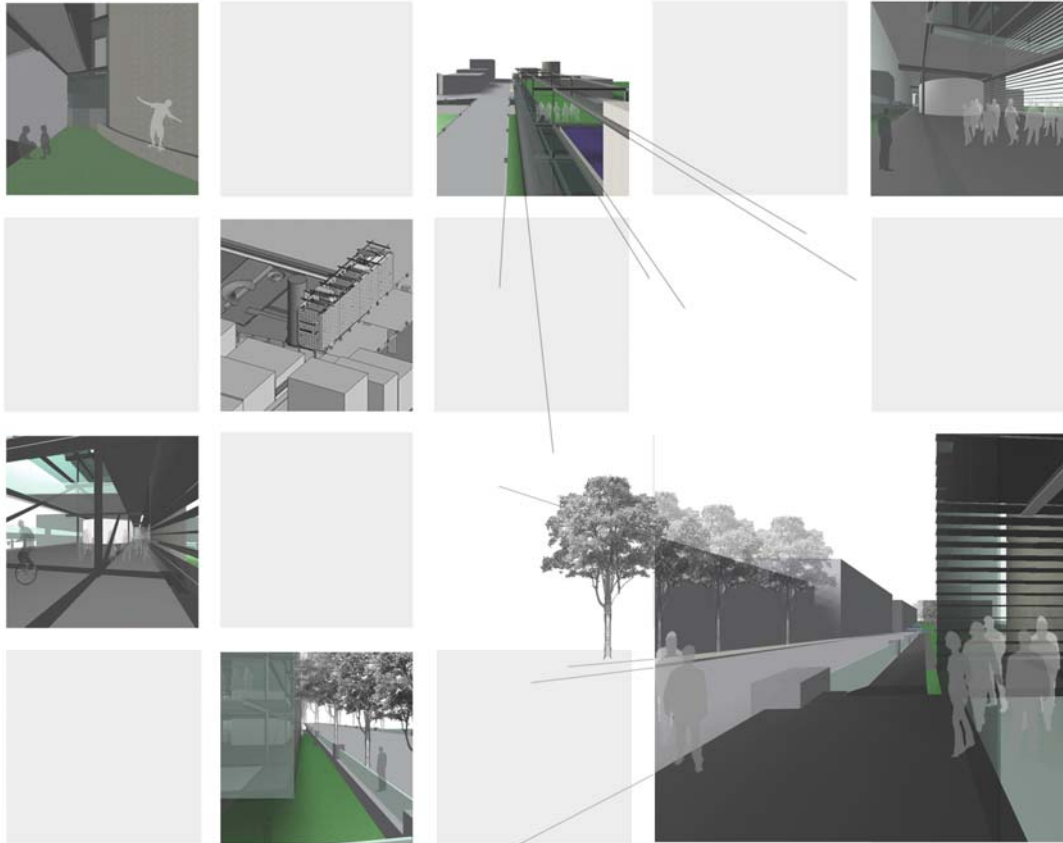


Figure 45: Perspectives

Images: author

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Vita

Ashley Browne is from Jackson, Tennessee and attended The University of Tennessee as an undergraduate where she received her b.s. in Interior Design in 2005.