

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: PUBLIC SPACE \ THE  
INTERNET: PUBLIC  
EMBODIMENT OF DIGITAL  
CULTURES.

Elizabeth Hampton  
Masters of Architecture  
December 2015

Directed By: Associate Professor Ronit  
Eisenbach  
School of Architecture,  
Planning, and Preservation

Public space is vital to urban society because it lies at the center of social and cultural life, however today the internet acts as a new centrality where interaction and socialization occur in a new invisible setting. Today both physical and digital public space serve as a vital interface for civic engagement and public participation, yet there is much content that often only remains significant on the internet. This thesis seeks to both strengthen the significance of our online public interactions and enliven the urban public realm by translating digital cultures into the urban environment, giving content the ability to flow between both worlds. This hypothesis will be tested through the redesign of Pershing Square in Downtown, Los Angeles, CA.

PUBLIC SPACE \ THE INTERNET: PUBLIC EMBODIMENT OF DIGITAL  
CULTURES

By

Elizabeth Anne Hampton

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Architecture  
2015

Advisory Committee:

Professor Garth Rockcastle  
Associate Professor Ronit Eisenbach  
Lecturer James Tilghman

© Copyright by  
Elizabeth Hampton  
2015

## Preface

This thesis topic is inspired in part by my own curiosity in watching my generation's conception of the public realm transition to this new virtual centrality, and is further motivated by the work of several artists whose aim is to both challenge preconceptions of public space and physically expose invisible facets of internet culture in clever and creative ways.

## Dedication

For Rob, the most creative person I know.

# Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Preface .....  | ii  |
| Dedication .....   | iii |
| Table of Contents .....  | iv  |
| List of Figures .....  | vi  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction .....  | 1   |
| Introduction .....   | 1   |
| Chapter 2: Layered Understanding of Public Space .....   | 4   |
| Urban Public Space .....   | 4   |
| <i>Physical Construction of Public Space</i> .....   | 4   |
| <i>Social and Cultural Construction of Public Space</i> .....                                    | 4   |
| Digital Public Space .....   | 7   |
| <i>The Internet as Public Space</i> .....  | 7   |
| Overlap between Physical and Digital Public Space .....  | 9   |
| <i>Art Installations that Speak to the Digital/Physical Overlap</i> .....                        | 9   |
| <i>Dead Drops – by Aram Bartholl</i> .....   | 10  |
| <i>Map – by Aram Bartholl</i> .....  | 11  |
| <i>Before I Die – by Candy Chang</i> .....   | 12  |
| Chapter 3: Designing Public Spaces .....   | 14  |
| Traditional Discussions by Architects and Urban Planners: Public Space as<br>Closed System ..... | 14  |
| <i>Designer as Author</i> .....  | 14  |
| <i>Current Efforts at Ethnographic Studies</i> .....   | 15  |
| Other Considerations: Public Space as Open System .....  | 16  |
| <i>People as Author</i> .....  | 16  |
| Defining Success in Public Spaces .....  | 18  |
| Scales of Activity .....   | 21  |
| Program Implementation .....   | 23  |
| Precedent Analysis .....   | 24  |
| Chapter 4: Site Selection .....  | 26  |
| Urban Public Commons: Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles, CA .....                          | 26  |
| <i>Preface</i> .....   | 26  |
| <i>Reasons for Los Angeles</i> .....   | 28  |
| <i>Condensed History of Pershing Square</i> .....  | 30  |
| <i>Personal Experience at Pershing Square: July 2015</i> .....                                   | 35  |
| Chapter 5: Design Application .....  | 39  |
| Hardware Component of Design .....   | 39  |
| <i>Existing Conditions</i> .....   | 39  |
| <i>Primary Design Moves</i> .....  | 42  |
| Software Components of Design .....  | 46  |
| <i>“The Search Engine”</i> .....   | 49  |
| <i>“FacadeCast”</i> .....  | 54  |
| <i>“letterPRESS   SCREENprint”</i> .....   | 60  |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <i>Movement, Action, &amp; Change</i> ..... | 68 |
| Chapter 6: Reflections .....                | 71 |
| Reflections of the Final Defense .....      | 71 |
| Bibliography.....                           | 76 |

## List of Figures

**No table of figures entries found.**



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction

To define it broadly, public space is “a social space that is generally open and accessible to people” (Public Space, 2015). In a poetic and urban sense, *public space* can be thought of as the physical manifestation of the values that a society holds. The ways in which a city’s public spaces function are indicative of the type of society that operates within it, from the array of cultures displayed within its public markets and public art, to the social values portrayed in the festivals hosted in its streets, the political climate of its occupied civic square in the midst of a rally, or the liveliness felt in the everyday passing of strangers in their daily rituals. Public space contributes to defining the image of a city and also shapes people’s attitudes and behaviors towards each other.

Throughout history, the creation of public space has always occurred out of necessity and remains at the center of public life. The common town square typology, whether at the scale of the Ancient Greek Agora or the traditional American courthouse square, can be taken as an example of this urban centrality where economic activities of exchange within the city have taken place, social interactions from various groups have played out, and political and religious assemblies have gathered. Today we can speak of the internet in a similar language and as playing a similar role in society – it has

proven a necessity in fostering communication and in shaping and defining collective values. The internet has not exactly taken the place of the town square, but has also come to play a very central role in the lives of society in a way that has made these web-based sites of interaction a new and significant form of public space. As a result, the practices of social and cultural daily occurrences that used to exclusively happen in the urban public realm are now increasingly played out in this new invisible world, so the content that makes up a conceptual portrait of society is not necessarily reducible to the urban anymore as they once were (Amin, 2008). Online public forums now host the background where debates and discussions between strangers occur, social media applications have become the new places of encounter and the display of self-expression, file-sharing sites present new ways to rapidly exchange information and knowledge, and digital mapping services have begun to influence our visual and spatial perceptions of the city. My thesis, in brief, can therefore be seen as a convergence of physical and virtual public space.

The public realm that is illustrated on the internet reflects a society that values speed, immediacy, and the ability to tap into a public realm from essentially any location and at any time. However, physical public space within a city remains vital in its ability to express a local character, establish a thriving collective urban atmosphere and experience, and provide a space for people to congregate in times of need. Despite society's new found ability to access the public realm from the comfort of home or the solitary corner of a

café, public space will always need to find itself grounded in a physical sense in order to build communities that are “capable of coping with and learning from complexity”, and able to produce real change in their world. (Bonnemaison & Eisenbach, 2009). Because today both physical and digital public space are important to maintaining resilient, inclusive, and transparent societies, are there possible ways they might be designed to work together or draw inspiration from one another? This idea will be explored through the design of an urban square that aims to restore physical public space to its historic *function* of being the center of social and cultural life by increasing opportunities for engagement with the digital public realm.

This thesis will explore possible ways to translate the realities of the internet’s invisible culture into the urban public realm in order to paint a larger picture of what it means to participate, whether actively or passively, digitally or physically, in the center of urban social and cultural life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Overarching goals of this thesis include developing the design of a public space that exposes and inspires this layered reality of the public realm - a space that encourages free and anonymous sharing of information and knowledge, fosters participation in the urban process, encourages the demonstration of art and creative endeavors, and allows users of the space to collectively contribute to the symbolic meaning of *place* rather than employing a top-down traditional approach to design with a singular author.

## Chapter 2: Layered Understanding of Public Space

### Urban Public Space

#### ***Physical Construction of Public Space***

In urban contexts, public space is simply the residual space between the privately owned spaces in a given urban area - the negative space of the city. For example, the District of Columbia's District Department of Transportation succinctly defines public space as the "publicly owned area between property lines" (DC Office of Planning, 2011). In a physical sense we can boil it down to this kind of explicit definition. Public spaces within urban areas are typically found outdoors such as town squares, courtyards, plazas, and parks. These typologies exemplify singular spaces within which multiple activities may take place. Transportation networks of streets, sidewalks, and the infrastructure that is comprised within them are vital components of urban life that also serve as public space.

#### ***Social and Cultural Construction of Public Space***

Although we could reduce the discussion of public space to the physical description of it, it is necessary to discuss the social and cultural dimensions of public spaces in order to truly discuss the nature of such spaces and their necessity in society, to compare one public space to another, and to inform the design of new public spaces. We can begin to

classify public spaces into typologies such as “square”, “plaza”, or “park” that aim to categorize a depiction of their physical and spatial qualities, yet events that occur within the space transcend the form they are contained within and provide a more genuine picture of how the public realm is socially constructed. Public space is dynamic and its uses shift with the time of day and changing seasons. A public space that supports this kind of dynamism would provide space for daily uses as well as extraordinary events. A public square might simultaneously be thought of as the space where a farmers

**POTENTIAL DAILY ACTIVITIES  
IN PERSHING SQUARE**

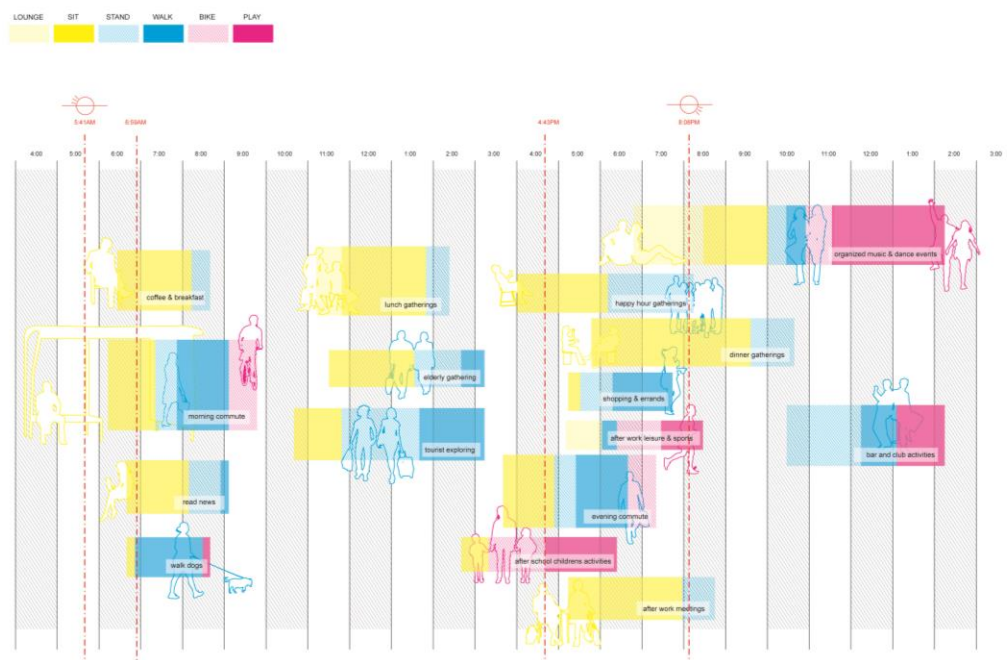


Fig. XX | Timeline of Potential Daily Activities in Pershing Square. Source: Author

market takes place weekly, the space where concerts happen in the summer and ice skating happens in the winter, the place where friends and acquaintances convene for socialization, or the space where social

revolutions may take place in the form of occupy movements or protests. Each of these activities and their frequency of occurrence communicate cultural values held within the community and express the agency of space itself.

Public spaces are made vibrant and successful by the social and cultural activities that occur within them, but architecture and urban design are the practices that bring order to where and how these public spaces become physically situated within our cities. Designers have the potential to provide agency to actively shape these social and cultural experiences through the planned establishment of the space itself, the programming of institutions that support its life and use, the spatial arrangement of activity zones, and the design of the various visual characteristics of the space. However, “architecture does not just create the material and very ‘objective’ circumstances within which society ‘works’. As it does so, it also immediately presents a picture of a possible world: it proposes a spatial expression of that society” (Verschaffel). Being able to spatially express society within the design of public space requires an understanding of the social and cultural operations of the users of the space, but the space becomes more resilient if citizens are able to take part in expressing this themselves through active civic participation and are able to engage in a communication loop between people, their ideas, and their city. Today active discussions and participation in civic matters are increasingly occurring on the internet.

## Digital Public Space

### ***The Internet as Public Space***

Social activity and cultural expression transcend the form of the space they are physically situated within. The social and cultural public events that occur on the internet exemplifies an extreme illustration of this idea, but has allowed us to see that today we don't actually need physical space at all to take part in the public realm. The interconnected experience of the internet has allowed societies to find new and meaningful ways to form relationships, express opinions, and experience cultural events, which allows us to see the internet as a new form of public space.

Much as the traditional relationship between society and the city is facilitated by the urban public realm, digital public space has similarly found its way to the core of human social and cultural life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Richard Sennett emphasizes the importance of this shift in the way public space is conceived of when he describes the public realm as a place that could "traditionally be defined in terms of physical ground, which is why discussions of the public realm have been traditionally linked to cities. Today, communications technologies have radically altered the sense of place; the public realm can be found in cyber-space as much as physically on the ground" (Sennett, 2010). Sennett emphasizes this new found ability to engage in social interaction without having to be physically present in the situation and implies that we have found new ways to shape our attitudes and

behaviors towards each other on the internet, expanding our preconceptions of what defines the public realm.

Mobile devices and the increasingly pervasive nature of a networked society have given us the ability to essentially carry the public realm in our pockets, allowing us to experience the functions of public space in new digital forms: online public forums now host the background where discussions and debates occur, social media sites have become the new places of encounter and the display of self-expression, and memes carry culturally relevant ideas and visual symbolism that cultivate collective meaning. In digital public space, we are able to reconstruct our personal identities and the identity of our cities through selective sharing of information, we have the ability to speak our minds and share our passions more fluidly in an anonymous setting, and are able to spread creative endeavors in rapid and viral ways. All of these aspects found so fluidly in digital environments are equally possible in physical public space, but perhaps this has not yet been fully realized.

Because the digital public realm now supports similar operations traditionally found within our public spaces, the role of urban public space has shifted. People have found this technology to be an adequate mechanism for feeling both civically included and personally expressive, but these modern ways to tap into the public realm do not negate the need for public spaces to exist in our cities. Urban public space is even more important in society today as we subconsciously proceed in a direction that suggests we have no need for physical interaction or grounded experiences. In a recent essay on the



creation and use of public space, Cosulich-Schwartz states that the role of the public realm in cities today suggests that instead of public space acting as the traditional open marketplace as it once did, it may more importantly be simply “a place for people to express themselves spontaneously in an increasingly predictable and privatized urban culture” (Cosulich-Schwartz, 2009). With this understanding of the shift in meaning of public space, how might we ensure that public space is being designed and maintained to support a 21<sup>st</sup> century interpretation of a successful public realm?

### *Overlap between Physical and Digital Public Space*

The public space in our cities and the public life that takes place on the internet have almost no spatial relationship to each other, yet today they both serve as the connective tissue of our society. Physical and digital space have the potential to coincide and influence each other in the creation of a more holistic view of the public realm. This thesis will attempt to understand what kind of promise these new social and cultural experiences found within the digital public realm are having on our urban public spaces, and how the integration of physical and digital realms might serve to reinforce one another.

### ***Art Installations that Speak to the Digital/Physical Overlap***

The majority of inspiration for my interest to explore this thesis topic has come from public art installations and artistic endeavors that challenge preconceptions of public space or expose facets of internet culture in creative

ways. Public art has the ability to create an open dialogue with communities and serves as a way to test concepts that can inform the way an architect might reflect on diverse issues within the public realm and can therefore inform the design of public space. The following projects explore questions similar to those that this thesis seeks to address.

*Dead Drops – by Aram Bartholl*

Public sharing of information in free and viral ways takes place daily on the internet, and is a fundamental aspect of the way the digital public realm operates. Are there ways to encourage free



Fig. XX | Dead Drops Installation. Source: Aram Bartholl

and anonymous sharing in the urban public realm? *Dead Drops* is a low-tech offline viral art installation created by Aram Bartholl and replicated by anonymous individuals all over the world, which aims to do simply this. The premise of the project is to hide USB drives containing free art, literature, music, or data of any sort in publicly accessible spaces and then geotagging their location to an online database, choreographing an urban scavenger hunt to seek out free information in the public realm that can only be accessed on a device capable of reading the data. The project is a creative gesture that

speaks to the ways in which the digital and physical public realms might find ways to overlap, encouraging participation on both ends of the spectrum.

*Map – by Aram Bartholl*

What is the relationship between digital information space and public city space? This public art installation by Aram Bartholl aims to stir a conversation that poses this question. A conflated understanding of digital and physical place can be sensed in the real world as the red balloon icon that exists in the digital world to define location is placed in a series of real urban spaces. Google Maps is a prevalent online mapping service that gives users a layered understanding of their physical geographical surroundings



*Fig. XX | Map Installation. Source: Aram Bartholl*

through a digital representation of the way our world looks. The place-marking balloon icon has become a cultural tool for understanding location and defining place.

Google Maps defines centrality in its own terms by placing the marker where it deems it has found the center of the city, and that is the exact point where Bartholl places his physical installations. As people move around the

markers placed in the physical world, they are confronted with a new understanding of the dichotomy that exists between center and periphery. What is sensed as the “center” of a city is not often clear but left up to the perception of the individual. However, in the digital world, the center is defined as a singular point marked with an iconic symbol and appears in seemingly arbitrary locations.

Bartholl’s project aims to expose how the perception of the city is increasingly influenced by online mapping services. Google Maps is one example of how the internet has given us the power to reimagine what the spaces of our world look like, reframing the urban experience from one of a grounded singular presence to layered condition of physical and digital existence. *Map* is “a reminder that digital environments have their own spatial representations, and that these spaces have ramifications in our lived lives” (Gulesserian, 2011).

*Before I Die – by Candy Chang*

*Before I Die*, a public art installation by Candy Chang, is a simple and



powerful demonstration of how an assembly of private personal assimilations can become collectively transformative

Fig. XX |

when made visible to the public. The installation is intended as an interactive piece in which individuals can anonymously contribute to the chalkboard by filling in the blank “Before I die I want to \_\_\_\_\_” with their own private passions or ambitions. The project was originally intended to be a singular instance in the artist’s hometown, but the concept was so powerful it was met with a viral reaction and the piece has been replicated in public spaces throughout the world (Chang, n.d.).

The power of this installation lies in the simultaneous anonymity of the content and the public display of the open-ended and ongoing collection of results, which also happens to be precisely what the internet is good at. The internet similarly allows the sharing of personal information to remain anonymous, which often inspires a more honest depiction of results and encourages a higher volume of participation. Looking to this project for inspiration, it is possible that interchangeably pairing the notion of personal expression with public exhibition between digital and physical public realms may offer ways to encourage participation and establish a sense of ownership amongst individuals in public space.

## Chapter 3: Designing Public Spaces

### *Traditional Discussions by Architects and Urban Planners: Public Space as Closed System*

#### ***Designer as Author***

When we think of the great public spaces within our world, we might initially imagine a perfectly designed stage set for the actors of our publics: the centralized town square, the controlled urban center, the normalized plaza with over-determined form, each lined with established institutions that imply what their specific use shall be. We tend to consider these spaces as having a singular author – the architect or urbanist who employed a singular static strategy from which people would adapt to. Public spaces throughout the world continue to be created generally through a top-down approach to place-making.

A common way of creating public space is through the traditional developer-architect relationship. In some cases such as Yards Park at the Navy Yard in Washington, DC, public space is conceived of as a marketing tactic, a reason to attract attention and increase the value of condos and rental units in the adjoined development. Another example is seen through urban renewal tactics in the 1960s in New York City when privately-owned public spaces became the norm for development around Manhattan as the city continued to grow. These were small plazas, courtyards, and pocket

parks that were created partially out of need for light and air, but were more so created as economic incentive for developers and architects to increase their FAR (floor to area ratio) in their development scheme, landing them more profit. Although a connected network of small urban spaces scattered throughout the city sounds promising in spirit, the reality was that although these spaces were explicitly designed, they were designed for the bare minimum, leaving humans almost entirely out of the equation and were far from being truly public. Yet another example can be revealed in the urban renewal efforts of downtown Los Angeles in the 1970s when the attempts to bring more public space to the area were also driven by economic incentive in order to bring business development to the downtown area, and resulted in an abundance of exclusive plazas and courtyards that claimed to be public but related only to the private institutions they were built upon, and were only inclusive to a small portion of the population. In each of these cases, the design of public space was left up to a sole author, the architect or the developer, and had little to do with considerations of a society that would actually find agency within these spaces.

### ***Current Efforts at Ethnographic Studies***

In an effort to reclaim the design of the city and its public spaces as integral to the human experience today, there are several efforts being made by architects and urban designers. Jan Gehl, an architect and urbanist based in Copenhagen is a prominent advocate of this approach to designing public

space. He wrote the book “How to Study Public Life,” which describes methods for obtaining empirical research from simply observing people in the field in an ethnographic study of the users of the space (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). This is informative in understanding how people use space in a sort of post-occupancy examination, but does not dictate much more than patterns of use and association with the space that vary by day and season as they relate to physical factors of the space. It is a great effort of an architect to take into account the daily habits of humans to inform the use of public space, but what about now that these habits are increasingly invisible in online environments?

### *Other Considerations: Public Space as Open System*

#### ***People as Author***

The top-down approach to place-making is a design strategy that contradicts the fact that place-making is an emergent and collaborative act. We see this in action when we observe meticulously designed plazas that feel cold and empty because they are void of people, yet find underserved communities taking self-action in transforming abandoned lots into community gardens, or stumble upon community-driven websites that are filled with user-generated art and cultural discussion. In both the case of the community garden and the community website, we can see how powerful it can be when the public is given the power to become the author of their own content. Watching collective authorship in public space develop assures us that “value



and meaning are not inherent in space or place; instead they are continuously created, reproduced, recreated, and defended” (Conklin, 2012). The single greatest feature that attracts people to public space is other people. Although design cannot socially engineer the outcome of how the community might find value within a public space, designers can strive to create opportunities for social spaces where people are able to participate in ways that might connect people to a common idea.

A successful public space will “build social capital and encourage people to take an active role in the daily life of their neighborhood” (Project for Public Spaces, 2013). For an urban planner or architect, this means taking a step out of the traditional top-down approach to constructing a shared symbolic space and finding ways to give residents the agency to play an active role in painting their own cultural portrait. There is a middle ground that must exist in this approach, because by simply asking a community what they want or need will likely be a mixed bag of ideas. Instead design-thinking has the potential to manage and anticipate the needs of the community in a more broad understanding of society that exists in an open-sourced system of feedback loops between people and the city.

Understanding that the internet is a vehicle that has formed new modes of cultural communication and provides new access to knowledge, can we use it to harness innovative ways of engaging with society to create a better understanding of their needs in the public realm? Whereas “the Internet is a direct expression of the emerging energy structure of the planet in which

the need of the individual can be met within the organic evolution of the whole, and the evolution of the whole served through the free participation of each individual,” are there ways we can adapt our physical public spaces to reflect the agencies made possible by this new technology (Vaughan-Lee, 2011)? Are there ways to design public spaces to exist in more open systems that resist “over-determined form” and promote only singular uses (Sennett, 2010)? I am inspired to create public spaces or foster situations in public life that simply motivate people to become inspired by other people in viral and transmissible ways.



Fig. XX | “Evolution of the whole served through the free participation of each individual” Source: Author

### Defining Success in Public Spaces

How are we able to determine the success of a public space? Success is a difficult parameter to conclude in questions that ask design to produce a social response in order to answer them. On the internet we are able to judge the success of public sites through quantifiable means by the amount of web

traffic generated by a given site, the number of members within a social networking community, the number of followers of a particular blog, the average number of comments an article generates, or the number of times a piece of relevant content is shared across the web. In physical public space we can also apply quantifiable metrics to a given space to determine its success, such as its frequented use and accessibility, the diversity of its

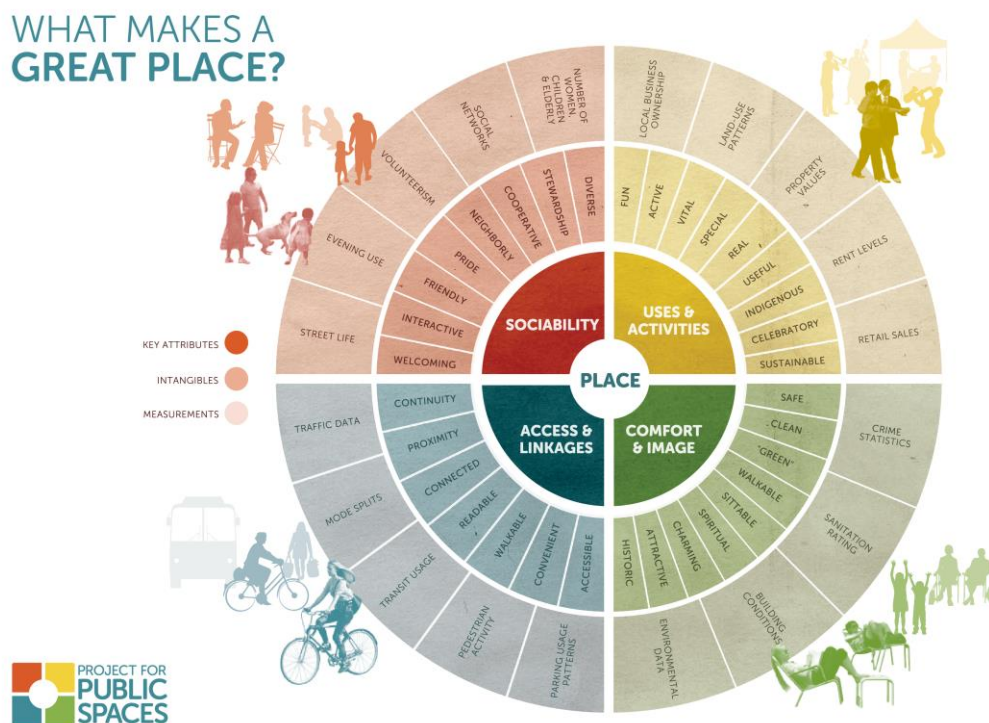


Fig. XX / What makes a Great Place? Reference graphic. Source: Project for Public Spaces

demographics that support its inclusiveness, or crime statistics that reveal its level of safety. Project for Public Spaces (pps.org) is a non-profit organization that specializes in community building strategies to design and maintain quality public spaces, who have provided a great interpretation of what a

successful public space looks like to them as demonstrated through both qualitative and quantitative means (see Fig \_\_\_).

There are attributes of successful public spaces that can apply to both physical and digital place, and today as both physical and digital public space remain significant to the resilience of society we should consider these attributes holistically. Below are a list of overarching goals I have determined can be used to judge the success of a public space, and what I personally hope to achieve through design in this thesis. A successful public space of the future, whether digital or physical, should:

- 1. Facilitate communication between citizens**
  - a. This can be measured through the level of accessibility to the space itself as well as opportunities to connect to others within the space
- 2. Encourage participation in the place-making process**
  - a. This can be measured through the amount of relative flexibility one has to control their own experiences within the space and for all to recognize design as an ongoing, dynamic process
- 3. Allow the collective contributions of individuals to define the symbolic meaning of place**
  - a. This can be measured through the degree to which users are able to adapt the symbolism within the space to communicate individual values
- 4. Enable the free sharing of information and knowledge**
  - a. This can be measured through the quantity of modes a person has to share with both individuals and the collective that accounts for a variety of mediums, as well as the number of institutions that are able to make their specialized knowledge accessible from the space
- 5. Create shared narratives between people, their ideas, and their world**
  - a. This can be measured through the number of opportunities people are given to leave their own traces within the space through art, music, literature, and other creative endeavors

## Scales of Activity

Public space was explored in multiple scales for its ability to support a variety of activity:

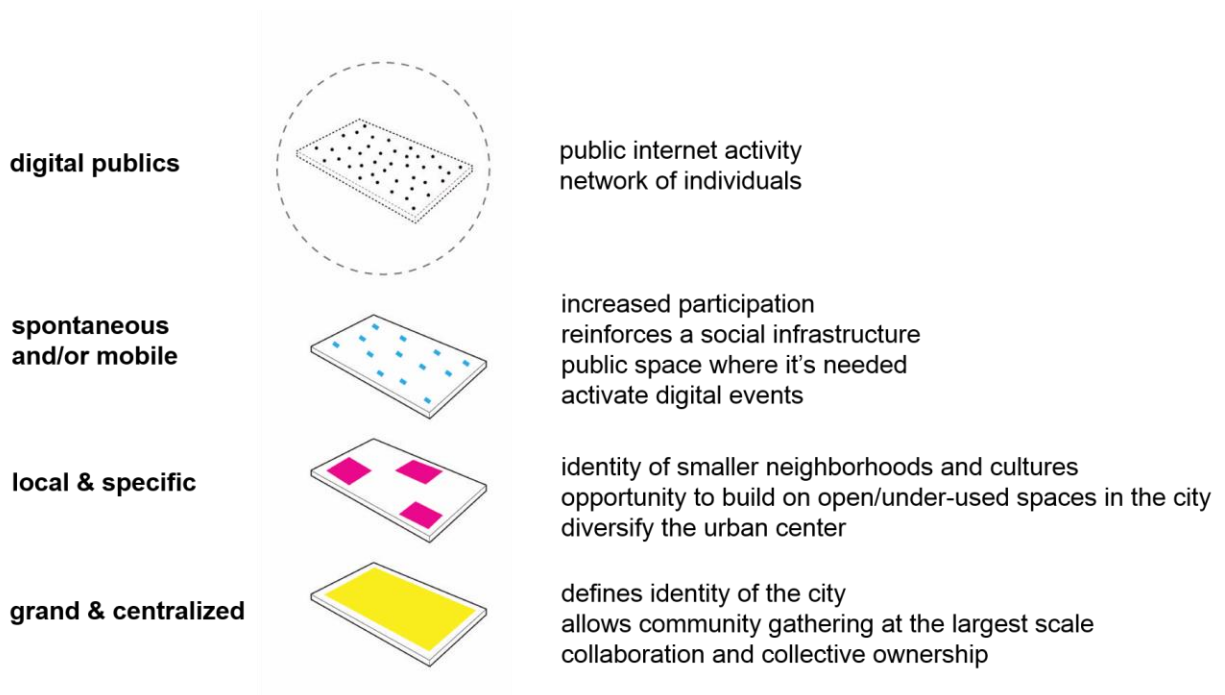


Fig. XX | Public space hierarchy / scales of intervention. Source: Author

At the scale of the grand and centralized, public space has the ability to allow community gathering at the largest scale. Understanding a public space at this scale allows one to see it as a space of true collaboration and collective ownership, and most broadly contributes to the identity of the city. Gathering at this scale supports activities such as a large festival or political protest.

A public space has the ability to support activities at the scale of the local and specific. Smaller gathering spaces throughout a large public space allow for the cultivation of smaller cultures, which assist in diversifying the

urban center as well as allow multiple events and activities to occur at once. A public space should promote gathering at this scale to support events such as a neighborhood meeting, an after-work social gathering, or a small film screening.

Public spaces are often experienced by individuals who come alone or with a small group of people, and so public space should be able to design for this scale of activity as well. This not only includes providing places for individuals to sit and engage in solo activities such as reading and people-watching, but could also cross outside of the boundaries of the given place to bring an element of public space where it is needed. In this way public space should also be designed to accommodate the spontaneous ways that individuals participate in enlivening the public realm, whether through publicly announcing their opinions, staging an impromptu theatrical performance, or simply being present alongside others.

Today we understand that there is an entire network of individuals operating within the public spaces of the internet. This is where my thesis hopes to go beyond traditional means of understanding how a successful public space is designed, in hopes that design can give public space a chance to engage with this scale of activity.

Program Implementation

In order to support the life within a central location for social and cultural events to take place, it must be flexible enough to host a variety of program, both formal and informal. This flexibility must also be managed by stakeholders within the city with the hopes of providing a full schedule of seasonal events as well as reason to go there on a daily basis. To participate

in public space does not mean that one has to engage with others or partake in prominent social events – to participate could be as simple as being of presence in the space. Again, the greatest appeal in drawing people to

public space is the presence of other people. There are many reasons a person may choose to partake in the public realm, both digitally and physically. Sometimes it is more about interactions that occur between individuals, such as the desire to send art or music to one another via a peer-to-peer file sharing site or to meet someone on a park bench to discuss personal interests. An individual may also find benefit in public space if they wish to broadcast their ideas to the collective, which is understood in the way a person chooses to share a video they made on a user-generated

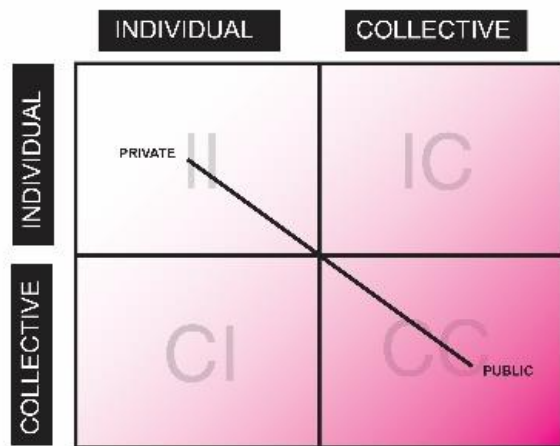


Fig. XX | Program Intervention Chart. Source: Author

entertainment website or the way an individual might tag a wall with graffiti. A public space is also a place where an institution can make their knowledge accessible to individuals, such as the way news media websites filter their stories to the individual or how offering park space to a local cultural institution could provide a more public venue to give people access to knowledge and information, and perhaps even allowing individuals to then share these experiences with others. Generating program with this kind of organization in mind will inform the way Pershing Square is designed to host activity at each of these levels. The physical nature of Pershing Square may also be designed to be formally flexible in itself to provide for the dynamic nature of activities.

### *Precedent Analysis*

For this thesis I did not actually draw much inspiration or direction from studying and drawing existing public spaces. These explorations were not nearly deep enough to understand the relationship between public space and the internet. For the sake of this thesis, I have never been interested in the visual or assembled qualities of public spaces, because my intent was only to find ways to hybridize the modes of communication between digital and urban environments.

If I had more time to develop this thesis, I would have liked to do a precedent analysis comparing the relative success of public spaces in terms of their political agency or daily use, linking historic spaces of action or heavily



used space to their physical attributes. This would have allowed me to speak on behalf of the kinds of agency a space has in terms of its physical design.

For this thesis I would consider my earlier explorations of art installations to be a more effective form of precedent than actual designed public spaces. I have learned that in the development of a process-based thesis, a static precedent doesn't give much insight. I was much more interested in the process and creative mindset these artist utilized to test their ideas, and used them as fuel for how I might begin to develop my own process.

## Chapter 4: Site Selection

### *Urban Public Commons: Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles, CA*

#### ***Preface***

Before the internet, public commons were the focus of civic engagement and were the center of collective social and cultural life. Pershing Square was once a model for this condition in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was site of agency and action, and the context that defined many daily habitual occurrences and larger events that together expressed the values of local cultures that were on display in public space at the time. Today in many American cities, and in Los Angeles especially, it is common to find public space-making tactics that give disproportionate attention to the symbolic or formal attributes of the space as opposed to focusing on public participation and social and cultural experiences. The Pershing Square we know today has now become an example that epitomizes this condition. Throughout the past century the design of the space itself has gone through a series of physical transformations that speak to efforts at updating civic place-making. This thesis will ultimately propose further updates that I believe will be for vital and sustainable. This thesis will offer ways to re-envision the future of a public space that bring digital cultures into the foreground, where a new context is being established for similar social means, and will propose how the physical

expression of this might function in Downtown Los Angeles. Pershing Square will be the center of focus and the testing ground for this thesis. It will be redesigned as a means of re-appropriating the city center as a more dynamic commons while taking into consideration the complex networked structure of publics that modern society operates within, and restoring its function to be one of agency, participation, and possibly even necessity.



## ***Reasons for Los Angeles***

Although a process-based approach to design is sought after in this thesis, the ideas that come of it could be applied to many different scenarios and in many different contexts. However, there are several reasons for choosing Los Angeles as the best cultural climate for applying my thesis exploration to.

While a residential population within downtown Los Angeles had been on the decline since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a recent resurgence to the area by individuals and families who now again desire to move downtown. Los Angeles is currently experiencing a transformation of its downtown area that is bringing life to the center of the city through both public and private development. Pershing Square remains a public asset that lies at the center of these surrounding privatized endeavors, and serves as a testing ground for examining how a thriving public space can support a society that promotes full inclusion and resists commodification. Of all the new development, an estimated 140 new residential projects are in progress in the Downtown area, signaling a shift in understanding that it's time again to focus on the people.

Los Angeles is well known for its decentralized nature, as understood by the fact that the maximum daytime population of downtown itself only accounts for 5% percentage of the total population of the city, which claims a 5.82 sq. mile area (Los Angeles Times, 2015). This demonstrates the fact that there is a large physical gap in connectivity within the greater community.

These statistics prompt a desire to find strategies that seek to manage decentralized publics across the greater region and to find meaning in urban spaces that speak to both the local and the collective. This is similarly a motivation for bringing digital cultures into conversations of how public space could function.

There is a history of public space-making in Los Angeles that is top down and capitalist driven. There are very few urban places in this area where people can simply enjoy public life without feeling like they are being asked to uphold a certain status or being primed to purchase something. Grand Park, the central open space component to the city's core of grand civic buildings was even accompanied by an adjacent underground shopping mall in the 1970's, and was nothing but a barren and uninviting plaza at ground level. Efforts to reestablish this particular space as one that promotes civic participation and leisure for residents were not even realized until 2012. Lost Angeles then provides a testing ground for acting against the top-down approach to community making and illustrating ways that communities can become involved in the process of envisioning their public spaces.

Pershing Square will be the focus of this thesis for its historic significance to greater Los Angeles, its position as an established centrality, and its current state of perceived failure that this thesis will seek to offer solutions for.

### ***Condensed History of Pershing Square***

Pershing Square in downtown Los Angeles was a model of what public space had the potential to be in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Through a series of aggressive redesigns, among a plethora of uncontrollable global forces that are outside the scope of this thesis, has transformed to become a walled-off and highly underused waste of urban space. It is apparent that the public no longer finds agency in this amenity. Today Pershing Square is a space that has become more focused on providing a convenient spot to park a car and less about facilitating its use for people. It is a space that is often used for organized events, but is hardly seen as an amenity for daily use as it once was.

Pershing Square is the oldest public space in Los Angeles. It's very unique for a public space in that it has gone through a series of many changes and redesigns throughout its lifetime, so much that change itself has become a part of its identity.

The first change to come was the formalization of its design in 1918, after nearby landowners saw the residual parcel as a utility and appropriated it for public use. Declared in 1866 as "...a public square for the use and benefit of the citizens of the common" (Wallach, 1999), it gradually became appropriated by the residents of Los Angeles to act as a communal site for the public aspects of everyday life to play out in the city. It was a site where people went to receive and read the newspaper as part of a daily ritual, a site that was in direct connection with the library and through its partnership

offered Pershing Square as a site where knowledge and information could be shared, a place where people felt compelled to publicly express their opinions in a soapbox fashion, a place people went to find both organized and impromptu entertainment, a site for protests and political action, and an open air public forum where civic debates occurred. All of these events and uses of the space contribute to this public space as being the center of social and cultural life for residents of Los Angeles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today we find similar agency on the internet, as the same events that once defined the social center of communities haven't really changed at all, they have simply shifted to a new medium. I imagine stepping into Pershing Square during this time to be a similar experience we find today on the internet – news boys shouting headlines, people on their soapbox yelling their disapproval of things, the commentary of the news amongst those reading alongside each other, and the gathering of people to enjoy the music played at the bandstand. The Square was the 20<sup>th</sup> century's interface for social progress



*Fig. XX* / "Borrow a book to read in the park" - Pershing Square as site for public sharing of knowledge. Source:



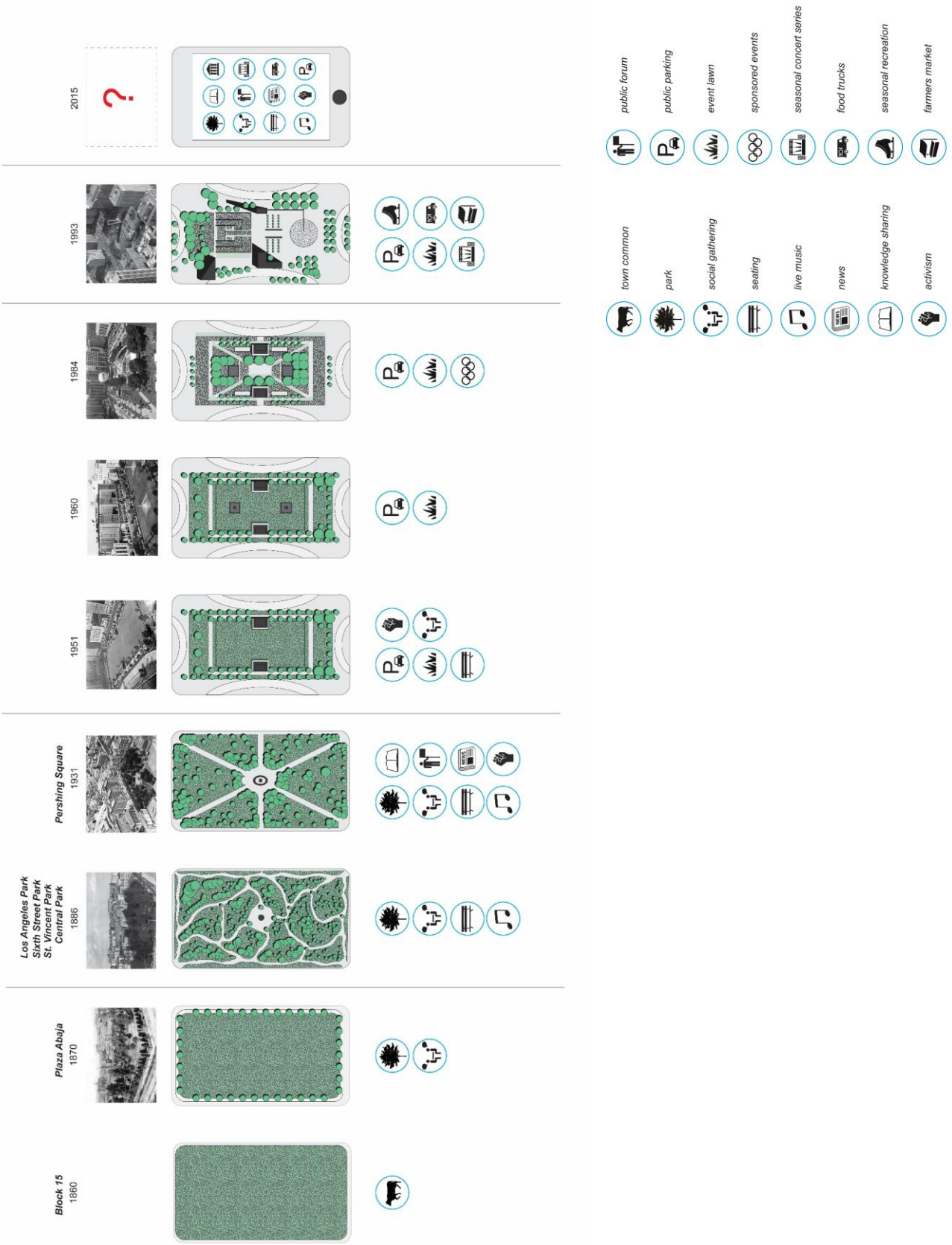
*Fig. XX* / Pershing Square as a site for receiving and discussing news and written media – 1939. Source:

and public engagement.

Part of the reason for the early success of Pershing Square, aside from the fact that downtown was more pedestrian friendly and had more of a residential emphasis, was the fact that it was established as a true *commons*. It was a publicly owned space not governed by any specific institution and not pre-destined for any one particular use. It was a space that was left up to the public to decide how it should be used, a space that allowed for the emergent act of place-making to take place at a time when this was only able to take place in a physical urban setting. It is important to preserve Pershing Square as a space in society that once acted as a model of how public space should be, but especially for downtown LA where there is a lack of open space that isn't a surface parking lot.







The next modification to the site drastically changed the function of the square, as the entire site was disrupted to install a 4 story parking garage beneath its surface. Its most recent redesign was in 1993, when nearby property owners partnered with the city to make the space more attractive to their tenants, and they hired two architects, Ricardo Legoretta and Lorie Olin to provide the design. In the early 1990's the site was considered to be at the forefront of urban trends, but today the space is already largely considered a failure by local residents and city officials:

Pershing Square is yet again at a critical point at securing its place in history that falls under a positive light as well as finally coming to an idea of what it wants to be for this generation of users. A local initiative is coincidentally in the process of taking place to thoughtfully propel its future use in the right direction, as yet another design competition launched in September 2015 that asks an open-ended amount of international participants to reimagine what this space could be. This is exciting to discover that at this time in history Pershing Square is a public space that is most appropriately open to new visions of public space, one that is receptive to changes in "approach, attitude, and aesthetic" (Pershing Square Renew). Results from community outreach endeavors conducted by Pershing Square Renew throughout the summer of 2015 were made publicly available for the use of this competition, and so these documents along with marketing materials shared by the initiative along the way are being followed simultaneous to the development of this thesis.

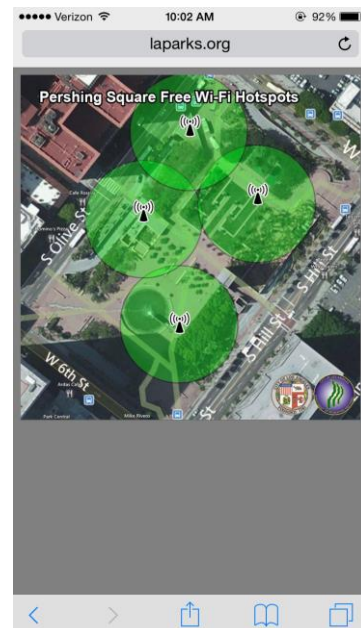
### ***Personal Experience at Pershing Square: July 2015***

In July of 2015 I had the opportunity to visit Pershing Square and live the life of a local downtown Los Angeles resident for a short time. I stayed three blocks away from Pershing Square and visited the space at various times of day over the course of two days. Below is an account of my experience at Pershing Square:

My first encounter with Pershing Square was at night. It was approximately 11:00 pm, and I approached the southernmost entrance to find a sign that listed its hours of operation. I did not make it in time to lawfully enter the space according to the sign, but there was nothing keeping me from entering aside from the unapproachable nature of the darkness that waited beyond the fortress walls along with the added temporary fencing that lined the already walled-off square. I entered anyway to find myself walking across a large expanse of pavement that was dimly lit by security lighting. Almost the entire space was visible, and it was barren. I took in the silence and stared up at the skyscrapers that contained the view from the top. I made my way to the center of the space where the pavement starts to transition to grass when I was approached by a security guard who appeared out of the small yellow structure along the west wall and asked if he could help me in a demanding way. I replied that I was a visitor simply curious in checking the space out, and he let down his guard but advised me to leave and to stay safe.

I returned the next morning at 9:30am. I entered through the same entrance on 6<sup>th</sup> Street and was immediately confronted with several sleeping homeless people who had found a place to camp for the night in the space between the permanent wall and the temporary fencing. More surprisingly I was greeted by two policemen who appeared to be on duty inside the square at this time of day. They didn't approach me until I attempted to drink my coffee at the side of the empty fountain and I was told that the entire area surrounding the fountain was not to be utilized during construction, although the only construction I saw was in the far west corner where a children's playground set was in the process of being implemented. I observed their orders and walked across the square to find seating on the low concrete walls that divided portions of the grass. I took out my phone and logged onto the Pershing Square Wi-Fi and was similarly greeted with a page of site terms and conditions that I had to agree to before entering the World Wide Web through this public resource. An unavoidable video advertisement played that persuaded me to purchase a Ford truck and I was finally free to browse at my leisure.

I observed the people that passed through the space as well as those who stopped to stay. The vast majority of people were alone. Of the few that remained in the space, only a few were engaged with their cell phones, others



were reading books, and a few slept on the peripheral benches. It was overcast at this time of day, so others were able to comfortably rest in the open grass. The space was quiet and although I could count a maximum total of 15 people at any given time it felt empty.

I remained in the square until 11:00am, when I got up to take some pictures and became curious in a temporary stage set that was held at the far north end that was meant to be used during the summer concert series held at the park. I approached the vacant stage and was startled by a woman who came out from the on-site park office and asked if she could help me with anything in a very forward and unfriendly tone. I replied that I was just exploring the space and went back to taking pictures. She stopped me yet again to ask if she could help me, this time with a tone even more aggressive and so I revealed to her the project I was working on. I discovered that she worked for the LA Parks Department and was a member of the Park Advisory Board at Pershing Square. I asked her questions relating to the nature of the people who visit the space, the types of activities that occurred there, and if she was involved in any of the efforts that sought to redesign the space. She answered each question very defensively and demanded that she was proud of the space and what it could do, arguing that “all you need is an open space.” We were standing near a desolate corner of the park where a few chess tables had been positioned near the permanent concrete benches, and she remarked that Yahoo! had given the square a grant that provided this. She mentioned that downtown has become a lot more family friendly, no

longer just a space for single businessmen and young professionals. There was another police officer on duty at this end of the park and she began ordering him to reposition some of the temporary fencing, at which point I left.

I returned later that day around 4:00pm. There were approximately the same number of people appropriating the space as before, although there were significantly more couples than I saw earlier who could be found lounging together in the shady areas of the grass along with a girl resting with her dog. The only place you could find anyone who chose to stay in the square was in the shade. I was also in search of shade at this point, and so I took a few more pictures and left.

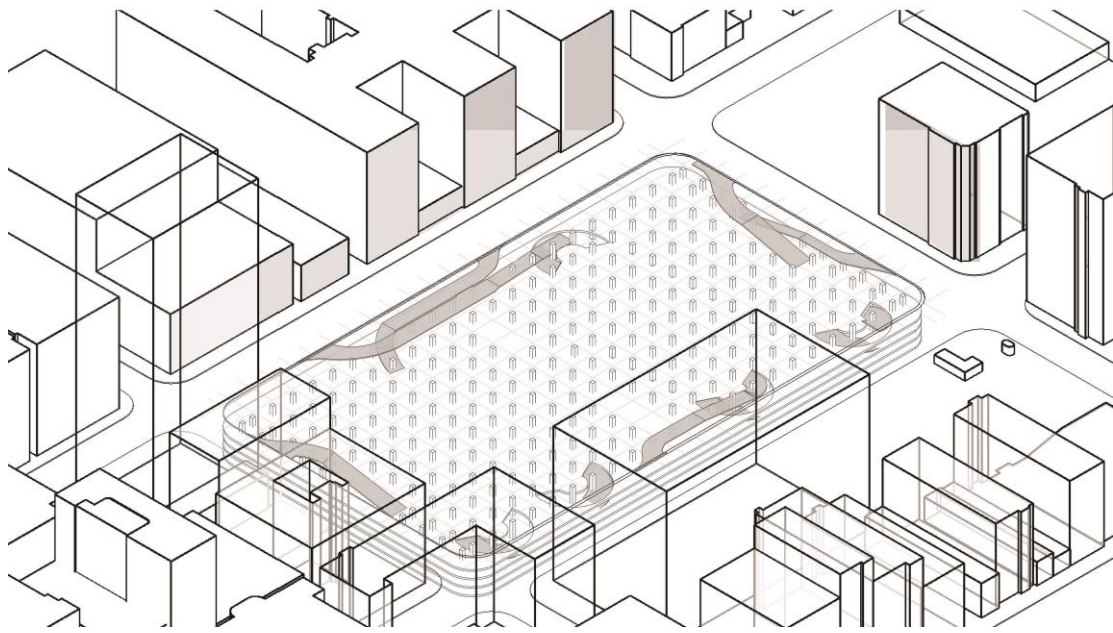
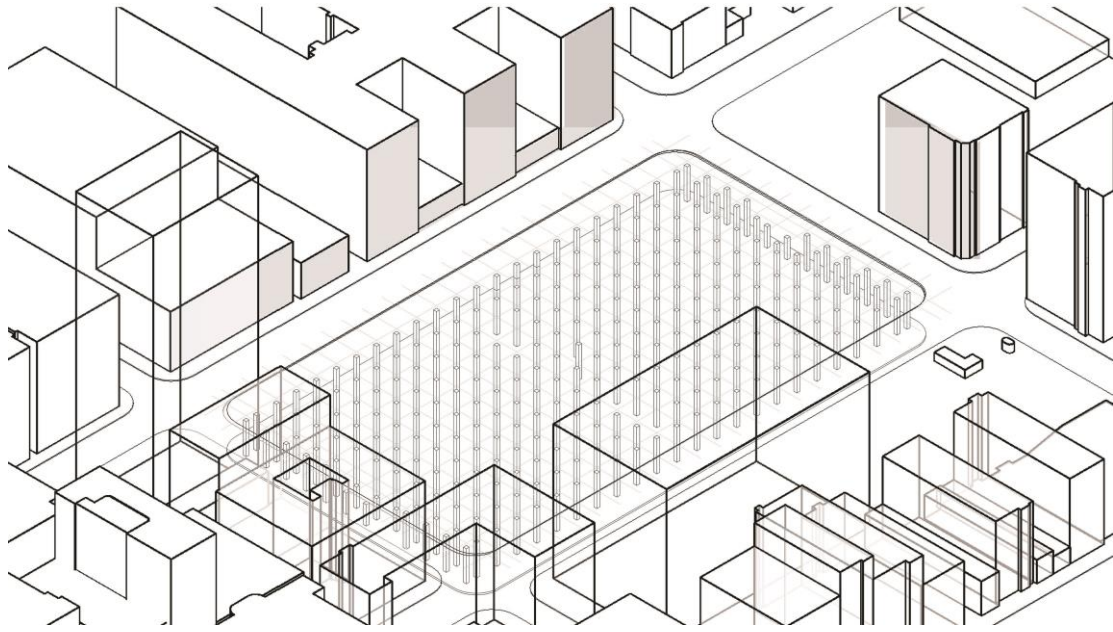
## Chapter 5: Design Application

The aim of this thesis is to find ways that architecture and the process of design might be able to reconcile the disconnect between virtual public space and physical public space, engaging with this transfer of medium and shift in culture. To test this hypothesis on site, I intervened in two different ways. I first took into account the primary design moves that are specific to the conditions of Pershing Square, utilizing the existing infrastructure to provide a space that can change and adapt to a variety of uses along with the addition of new infrastructure to support this hybrid condition that I am seeking. With the “hardware” component of the project in place, I then sought to design the “software”, creating situations or systems that looked specifically at broader concepts that can serve to both program the space with activity and immediately translate the way public activity is played out on the internet back into an urban experience.

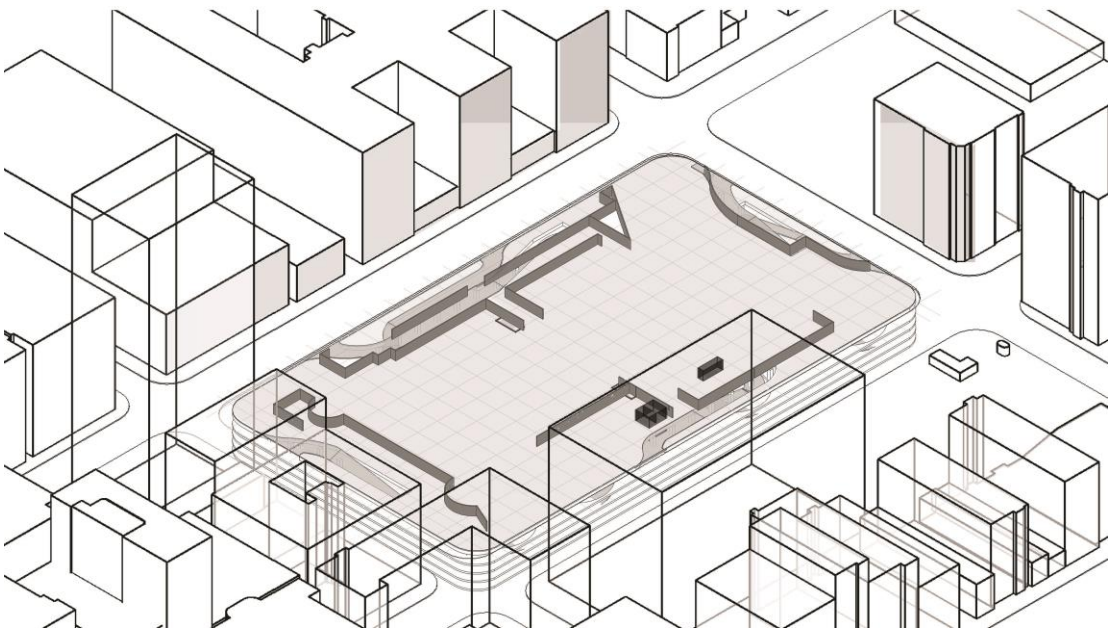
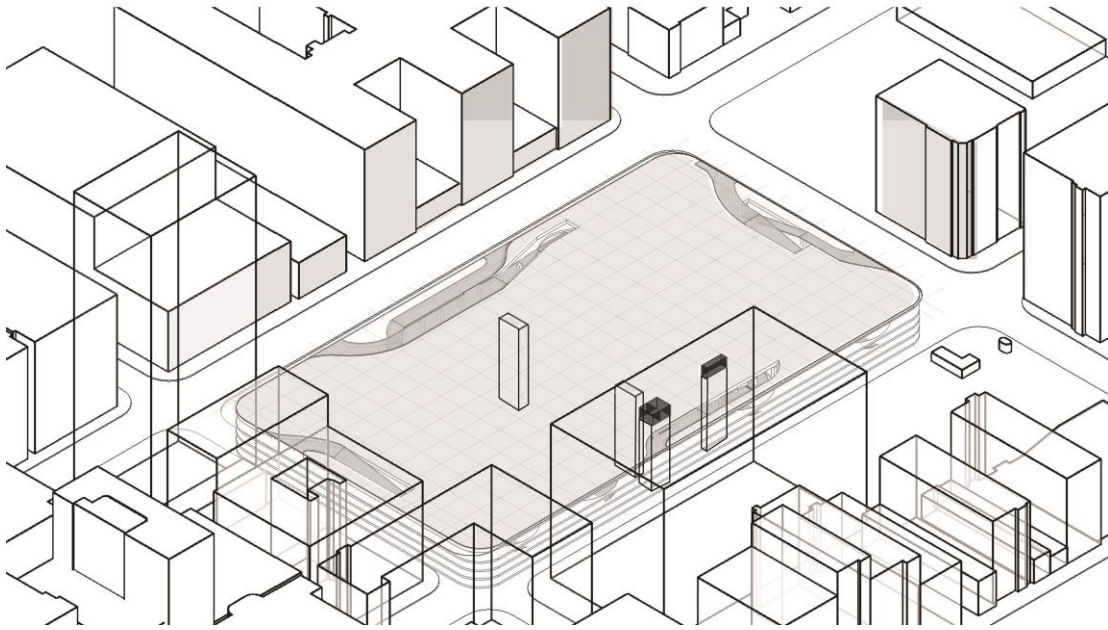
### *Hardware Component of Design*

#### ***Existing Conditions***

The following images and their descriptions depict the existing conditions of the site:







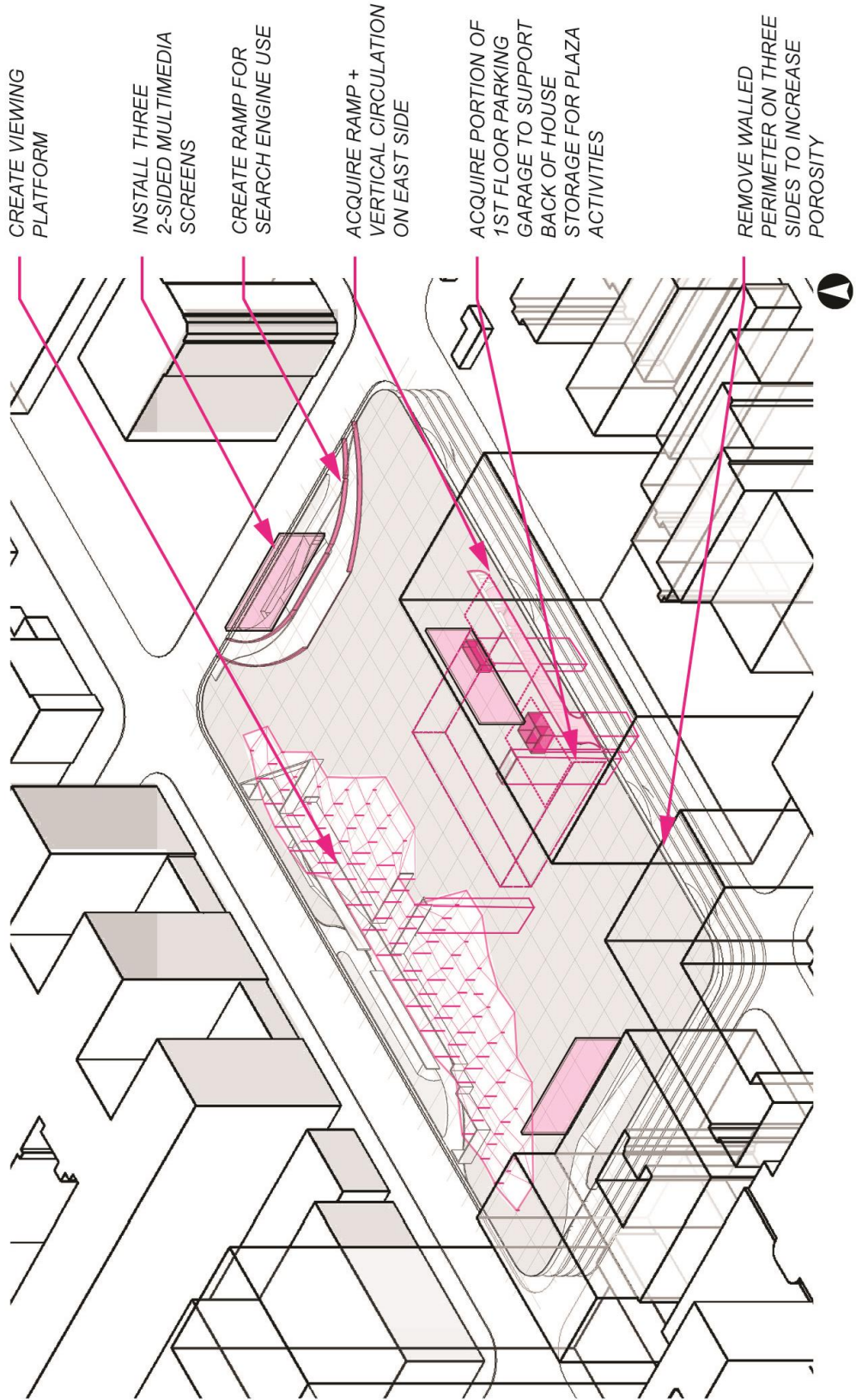
## ***Primary Design Moves***

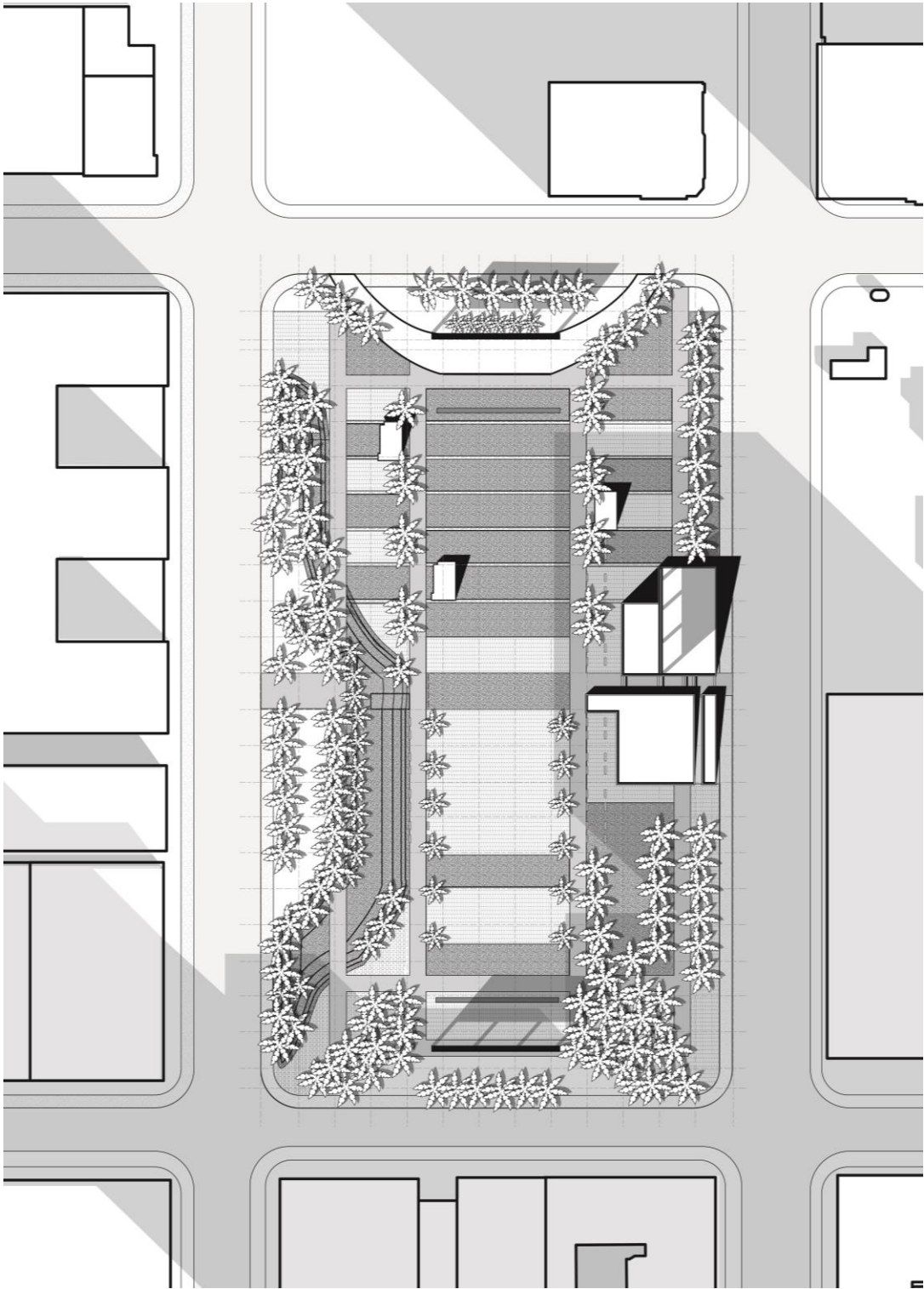
The primary design moves implemented on the site were not developed in the linear fashion that they are presented in this document, but were developed in conjunction with the programmed interventions as they found an ideal position on site.

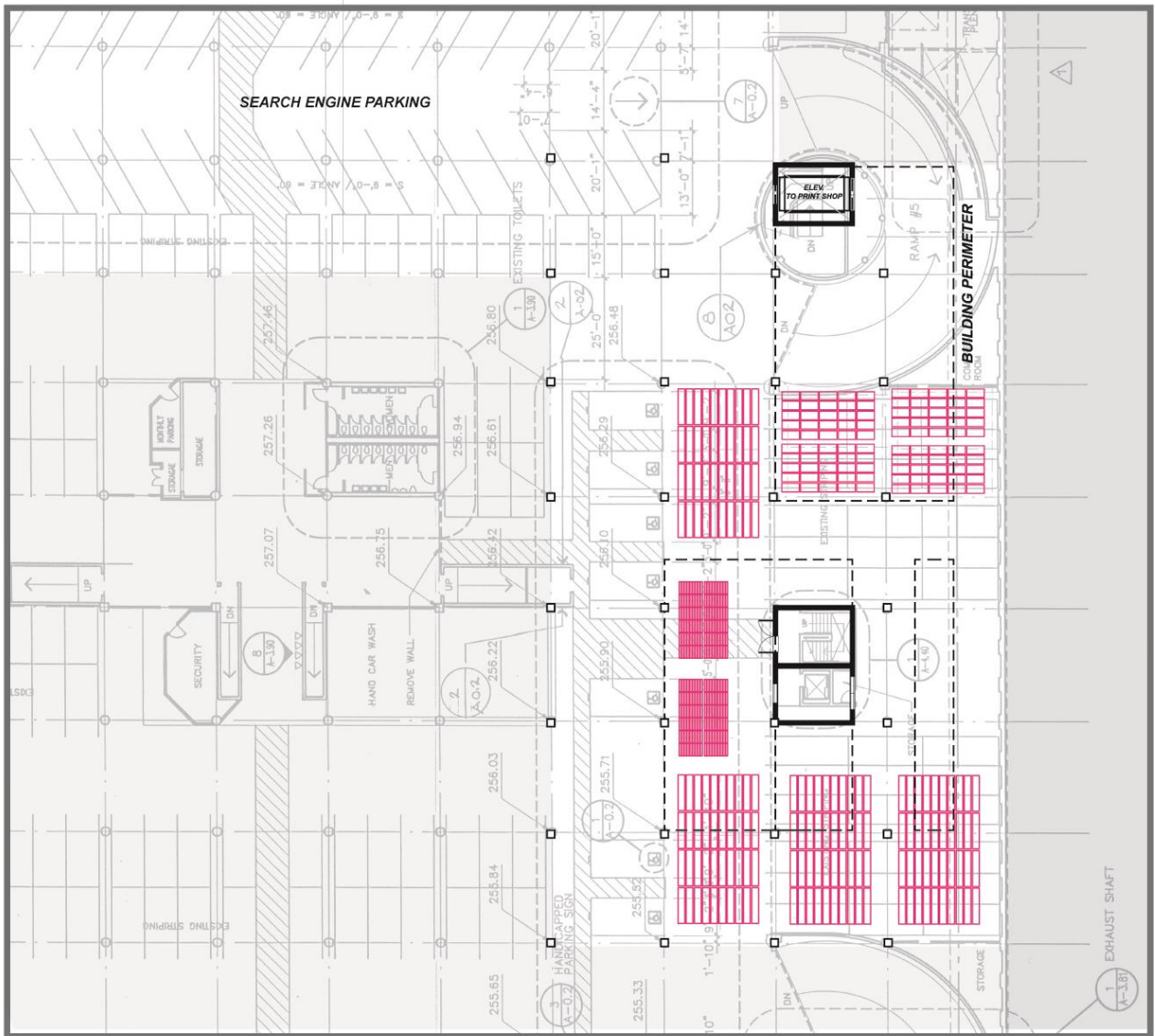
The first move that was made sought to take advantage of the unique condition that the parking garage offers the site by acquiring a portion of the first floor of the parking garage to service the back-of-house storage needs that the site can use to support a variety of public activity. Storage components include chairs and market stalls, as well as integral components of the installations such as poster infrastructure for the print shop and a dedicated area for Search Engine parking. An additional ramp was also constructed on the North side of the site to allow the Search Engines to directly engage with the park.

The next large move to the site was to implement 3 dual-sided multimedia screens that each tie into one of the 3 main programmatic interventions. These screens were not developed to the level of their construction, but their conception is necessary to allow digital communication within the interventions.

A sloped platform made of built-up earth and ground cover allows a flexible space for observing and viewing a variety of activity within the square.





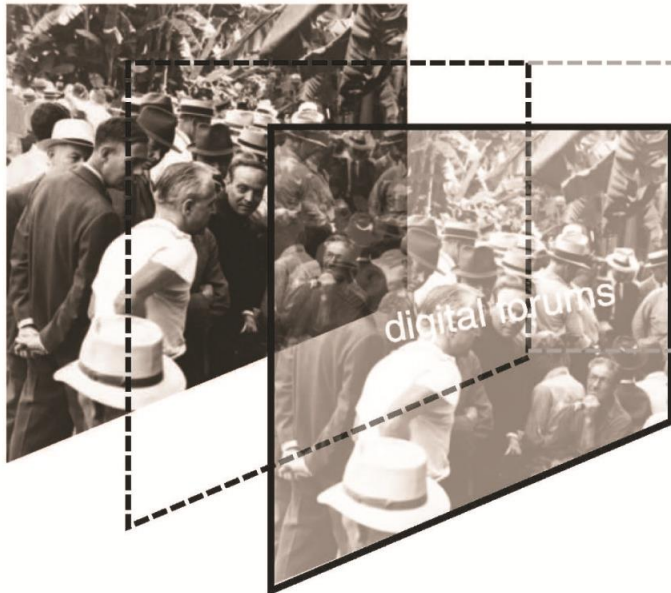


### Software Components of Design

The most direct way that this thesis translates digital cultures into the urban environment is through the design of a series of installations that give content the ability to flow between both digital and physical worlds, whereas today it only consciously resides in the digital world. These situations engage with the digital systems that are already in place on the internet to derive an equivalent physical system that similarly allows content to be created, shared, and discussed in urban contexts. These explorations resulted in the development of three smaller projects, “The Search Engine,” “FacadeCast,” and “letterPRESS | SCREENprint,” that each focus on broader ideas and concepts. Each of the three projects takes into account previous studies of time and scale, and links them into a narrative that discusses how the space becomes programmed with activity.

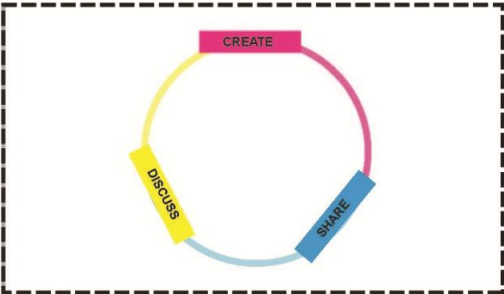
The diagram and chart below breaks down how each idea was taken through this methodology of engaging with the systems at play in both urban and digital contexts, understanding how a specific activity or idea functioned before and without the internet as well as how it is experienced today in this new medium. Each project then finds a way to translate the possibilities of each into a new hybrid experience all together, as well as bring a tie specifically to Los Angeles culture.

BEFORE/WITHOUT INTERNET



AFTER / WITH INTERNET


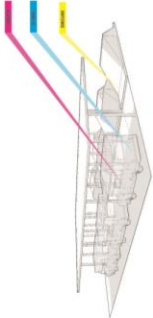


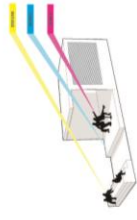


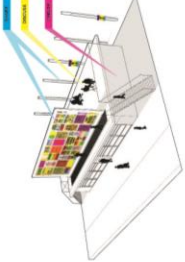

TRANSLATION / INTEGRATION



+

LOCAL CULTURE



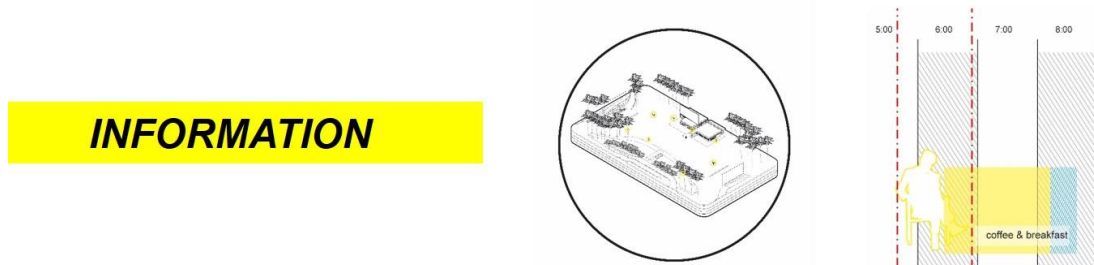
|                  | BEFORE / WITHOUT INTERNET  | AFTER / WITH INTERNET  | TRANSLATION / INTEGRATION  | LOS ANGELES CULTURE  |
|------------------|--|--|--|--|
| NEWS / KNOWLEDGE |  <p>dispersing free knowledge<br/>partnership with institutions<br/>social programming</p>  | <p><b>FILE SHARING SITES</b><br/><b>BLOGS</b><br/><b>SEARCH ENGINES</b></p> <p>free and on-demand knowledge<br/>knowledge can come from anywhere<br/>discussion</p>                                      |  <p>public library annex<br/>seating area<br/>parklet hub</p>                             |  <p>los angeles downtown public library<br/>est. 1872 - constructed 1926</p>                          |
| ENTERTAINMENT    |  <p>urban spectacle<br/>talent of local culture<br/>spontaneous entertainment</p>           | <p><b>VIRAL VIDEOS</b><br/><b>-YOUTUBE</b><br/><b>-VINE</b><br/><b>-VIMEO</b></p> <p>talent discovered to global audience<br/>ideas easily shared/replicated<br/>feedback and discussion</p>             |  <p>performance pavilions<br/>facade projection<br/>identity vs. anonymous</p>            |  <p>los angeles historic theaters<br/>culture of performance</p>                                      |
| IDEAS / OPINIONS |  <p>urban spectacle<br/>change at local level<br/>public space as platform for change</p> | <p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b><br/><b>-TWITTER</b><br/><b>-MEMES</b><br/><b>-FACEBOOK</b><br/><b>-BLOGS</b></p> <p>project to global audience<br/>ideas easily shared/replicated<br/>feedback and discussion</p> |  <p>letterpress poster printing annex<br/>billboard display<br/>cafe / seating area</p> |  <p>Colby Poster Printing Co.<br/>promoted local happenings<br/>integral part of LA streetscape</p> |

**INTERVENTION METHODOLOGY CHART**



## ***“The Search Engine”***

This project is a design installation that focuses on how society's relationship to knowledge, news, and information has transformed because of the internet. Today the internet allows knowledge to be retrieved on demand and allows user-generated ideas to become an accepted form of news and information, and no longer resides in selective institutions such as the public library or within the media.



The aim of the Search Engine as an urban intervention is to translate the way news and knowledge is shared in digital settings back into an urban experience. The components of the project are a mobile truck that serves



coffee and contains a system of parklets that can be unloaded at a variety of locations throughout the city, a wifi network that directs users to a homepage

with content that is simultaneously shared on a large screen in Pershing Square.

An example of how this intervention might play out with the morning ritual of drinking coffee and reading the news is explained through the following narrative that pairs with the referenced flow diagram.

On their way to work in downtown LA an individual who typically spends their mornings inside a café encounters the search engine and decides to purchase coffee from the truck and enjoy it in the parklet seating. They take out their phone and log onto the free wifi, and are greeted with the Pershing Square home page. They browse their typical news sites and find an interesting article from their favorite blog and share it with their friends on



social media as they typically do. However, they also have the option to share this story with their city, and just as easily feed the article into the shared

system. They see their article amongst others and know that the content they shared is being seen by those who are currently in Pershing Square.

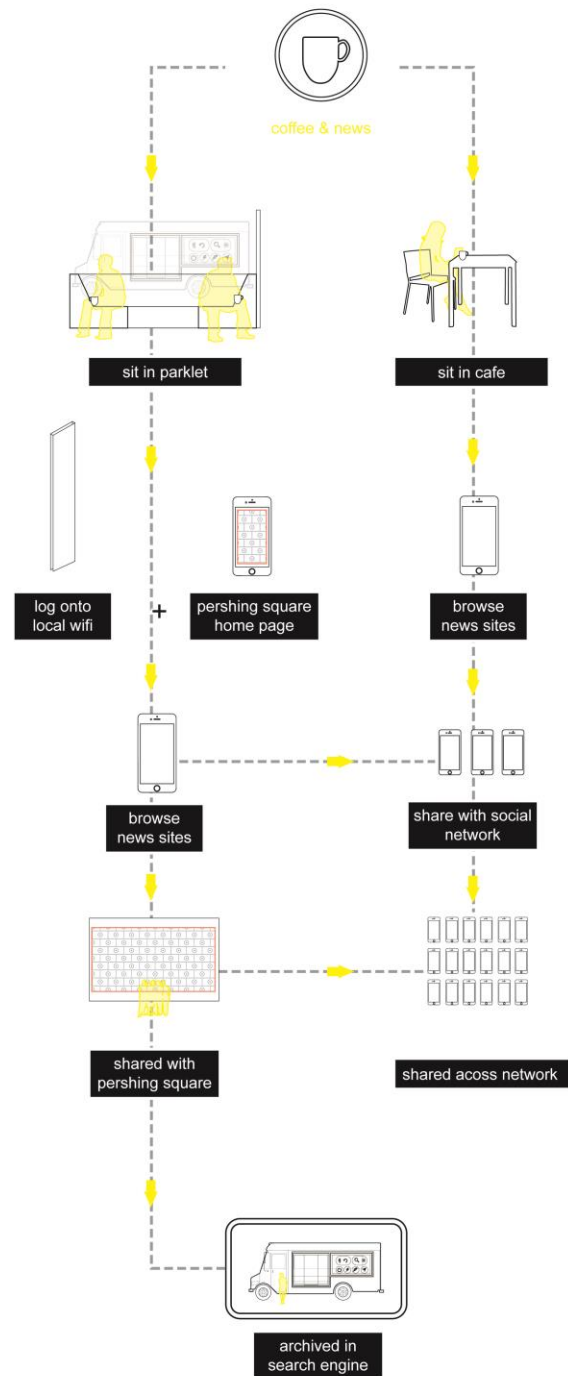
Meanwhile inside Pershing Square, the screen is streaming this recently shared article. Those who encounter Pershing Square that morning can find the article on the large screen or on their devices, and if it interests them they can retrieve it and either consume or re-share the article. Information goes both ways in this system.

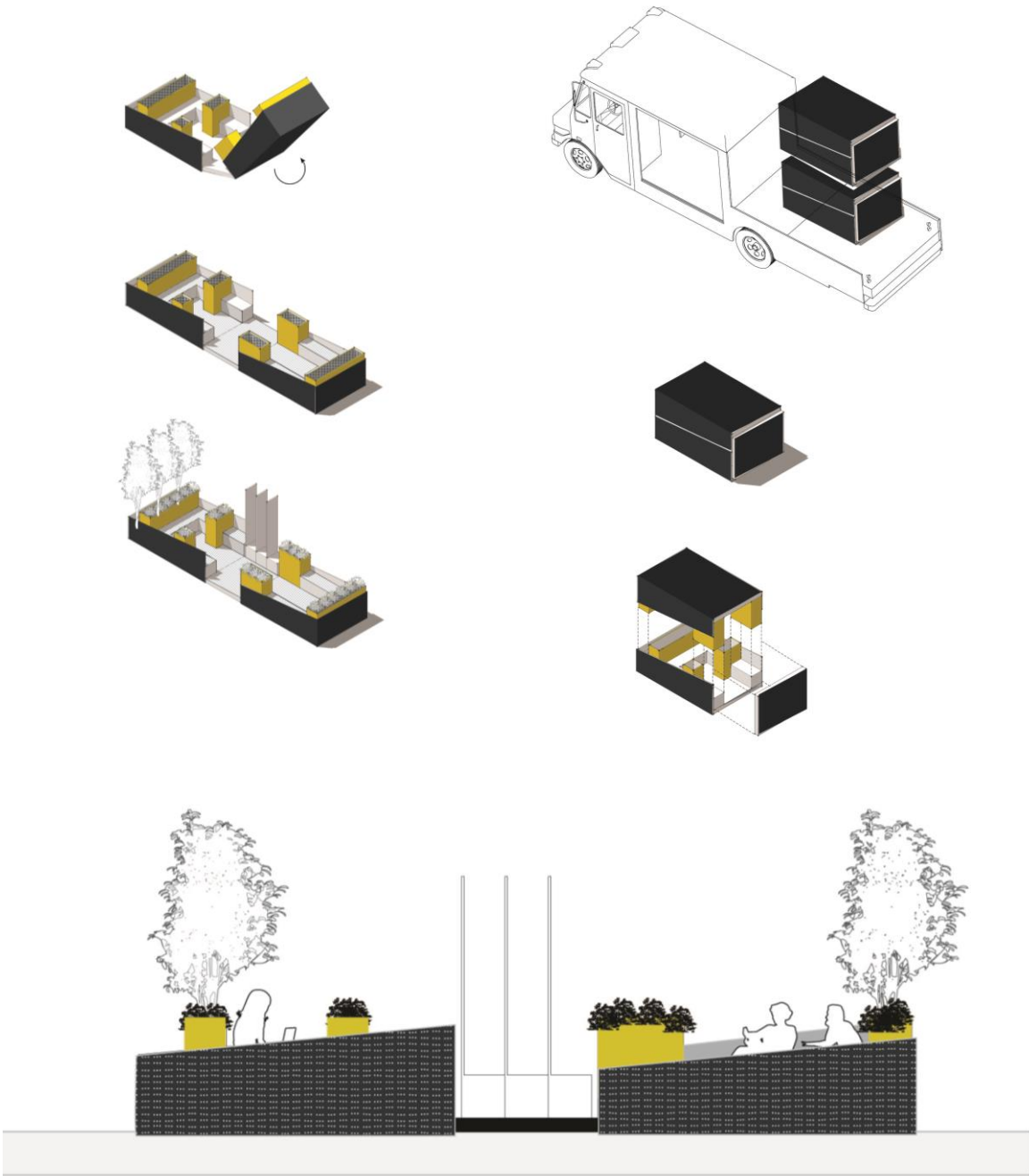


The truck itself is the portable system for transporting the parklets, but will also serve as the archive for all of the urban activity that occurs within this system. All of the activity within this hybrid system will be recorded and

hosted on its servers while a GPS tracking device links activity to a specific place in time. This information can then be retrieved by anyone who wants to know more about how a particular event was received within their city, track opinions and activity, or suggest locations and events for the search engine to appear.

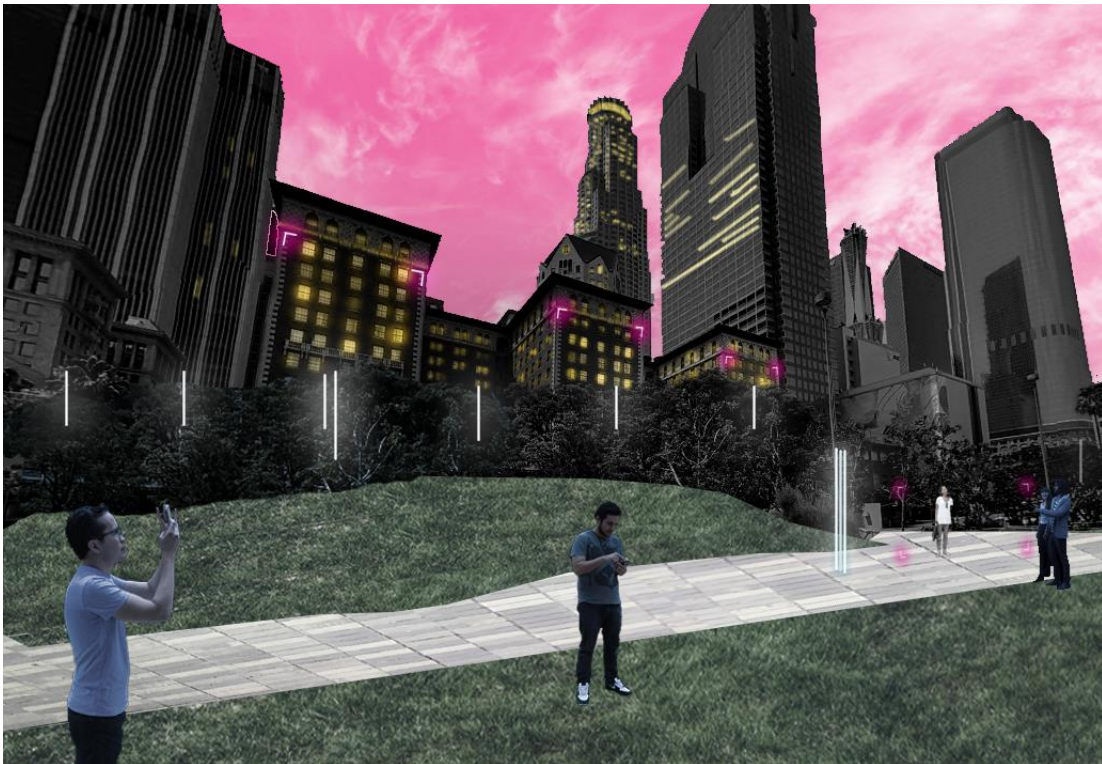
This project engages current digital practices used in sharing information and news while reinforcing a social infrastructure and actively increasing participation in the urban realm.





## ***“FacadeCast”***

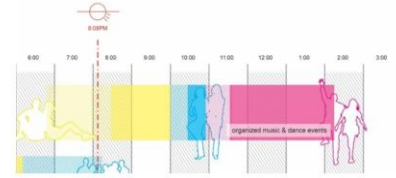
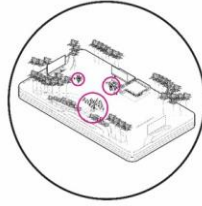
The design of this system focuses on how our relationship to entertainment and theatrical self-expression has transformed because of the internet. Today spontaneous entertainment can still be found in public space, however the internet allows user-generated entertainment to propel itself into true cultural significance through active sharing, liking, and broadcasting content to a global audience through applications such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Vine. This phenomenon of shift in medium is perhaps most greatly felt by Los Angeles, a place with a Hollywood mindset and more local theaters than any other city.



The aim of the FacadeCast project is to translate expressive user-generated entertainment into an urban experience. The components of the project are a series of performance pavilions that record and project public activity performed within them onto the façade of the Millennium Biltmore Hotel, and then archives these performances for on-demand broadcasting through the local wifi network and onto the large multimedia screen in Pershing Square.

The Millennium Biltmore Hotel is significant for two reasons. First, it was the very first location to host the Academy Awards ceremony in 1927 (Wikipedia). This intervention then highlights the transition our society has made from allowing culturally significant pieces of entertainment to be voted into relevance by a small elite group, to putting this task into the hands of a larger group of voters via the internet. Today, voting a piece of entertainment into cultural significance entails simply up-voting, liking, or sharing the content and puts the power into the hands of the user. The second significant detail about the Millennium Biltmore Hotel is the proportion of its façade bays. Each bay has an approximate proportion of 9:16, the same proportion for ideal filming on our devices. The pavilions are designed in light of this connection, and films within a 9:16 vertical picture to project onto the façade. When watching a piece of entertainment in person it is best to film horizontally, so the pavilions are designed with the horizontal proportion of 9:16 on the reverse side.

## ENTERTAINMENT



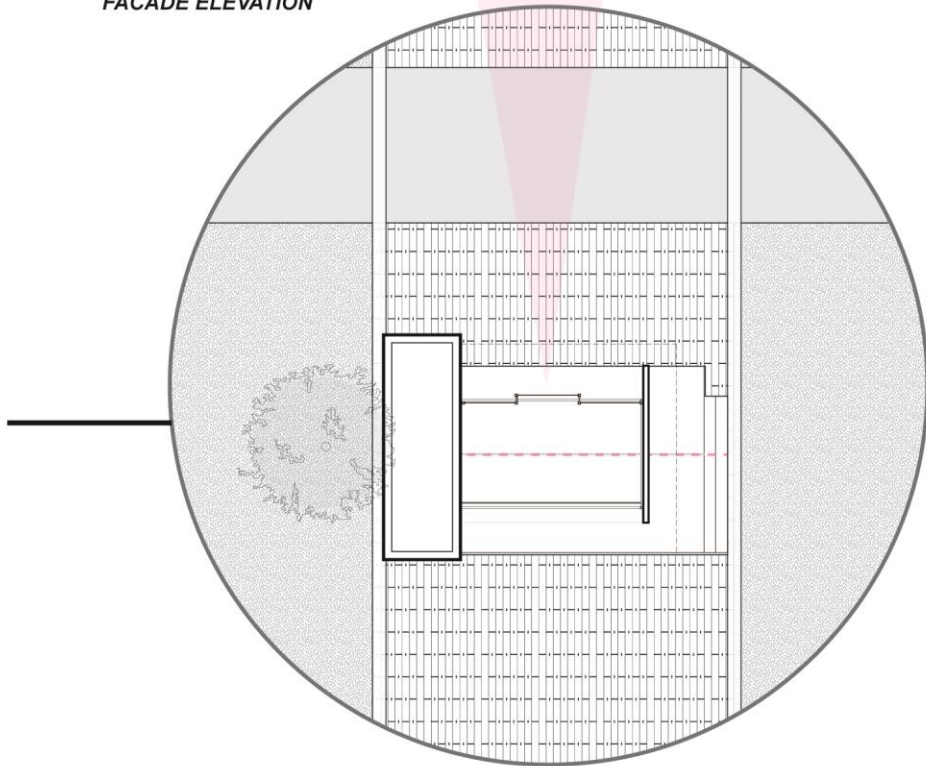
An example of how this intervention might play out with a small evening film screening event that is occurring within or nearby the square is explained through the following narrative that pairs with the referenced flow diagram.

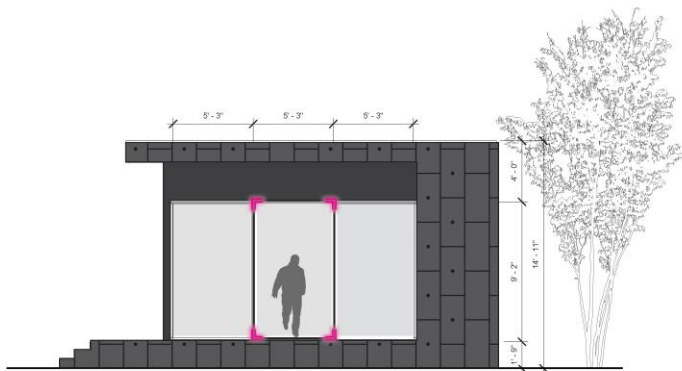
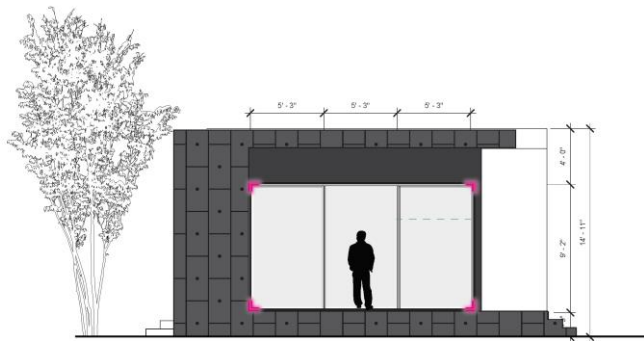
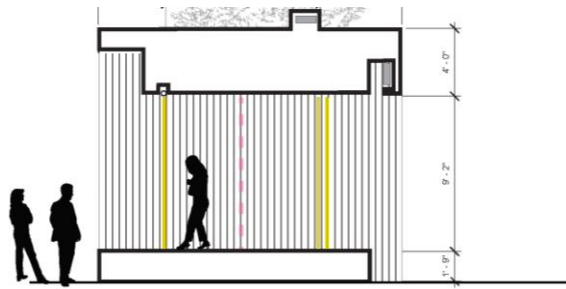
The pavilions are dual-sided themselves, with one side that films vertically to project onto the bays of the facade, and another for horizontal filming for the local audience.



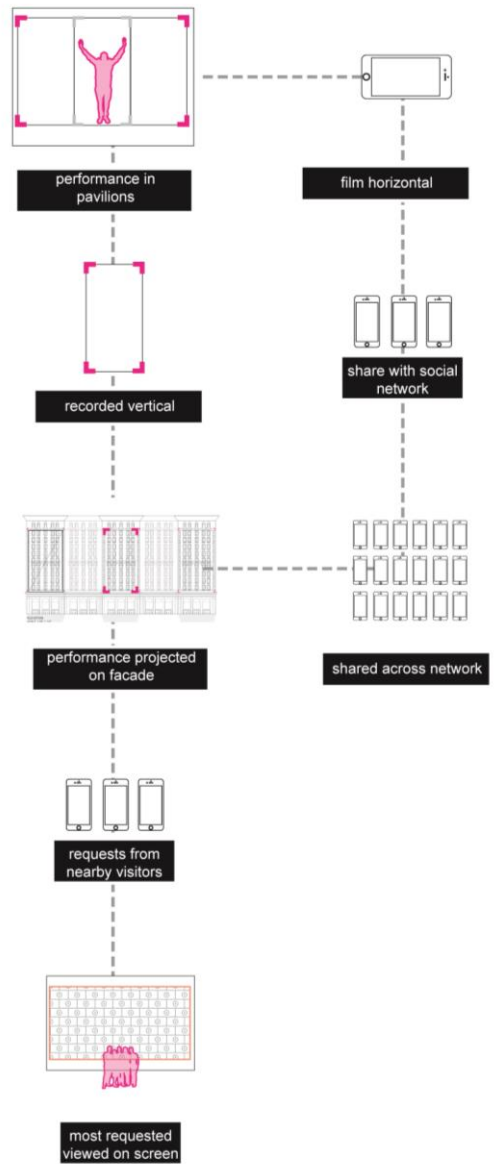


**MILLENNIUM BILTMORE HOTEL  
FACADE ELEVATION**

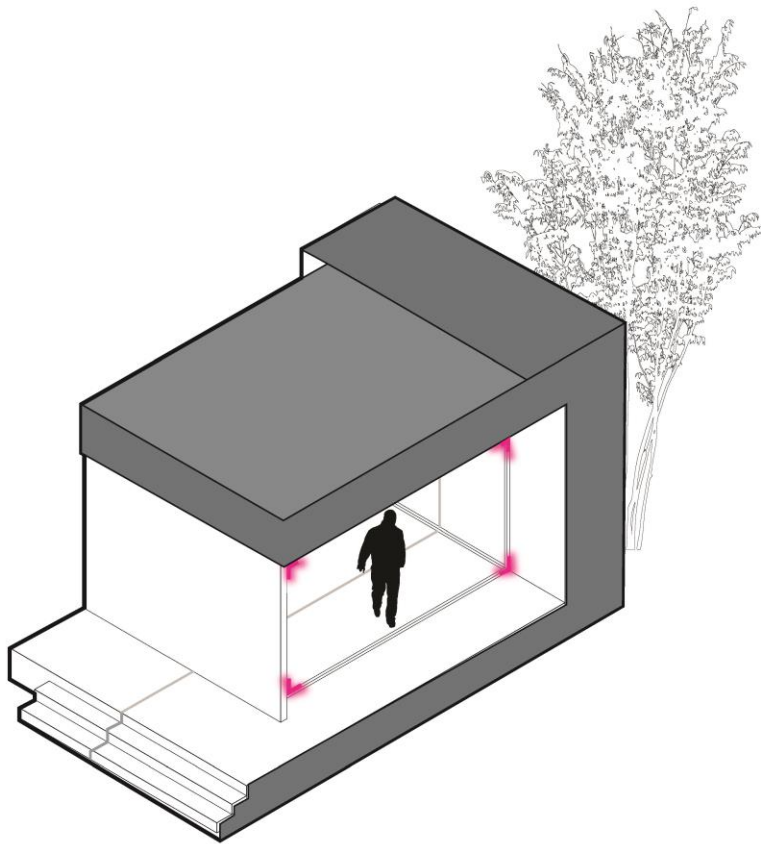




nightlife around  
Pershing Square



These recordings can then be simultaneously shared by people with their social network and on the screen within Pershing Square. The performances will be archived within the city's servers, allowing nearby visitors who witness the projections to send requests to watch the performance again, giving the performance an urban platform to rise to popularity, which I see as the urban version of creating a viral video stream.

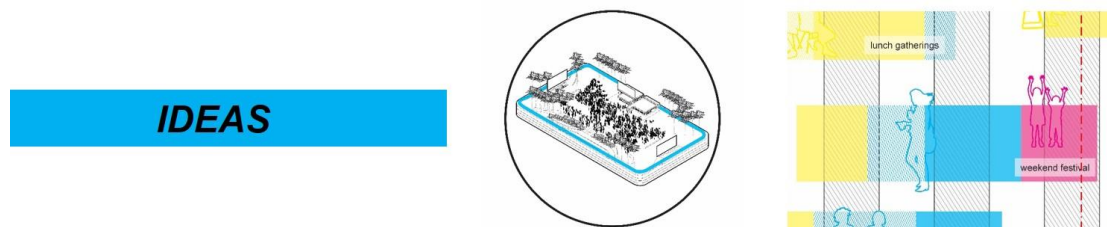


This project serves to increase awareness of the spontaneous entertainment that occurs in public space, giving the entertainment pieces a

user generates a platform to rise to cultural significance within their local setting.

### ***“letterPRESS | SCREENprint”***

The final system that I tested within this site focuses on how ideas spread today on the internet with their ability to be easily shared, replicated, reproduced, and defended. Today the internet allows thoughts, opinions, and ideas to virally pervade our digital landscapes that we inhabit with text and image.



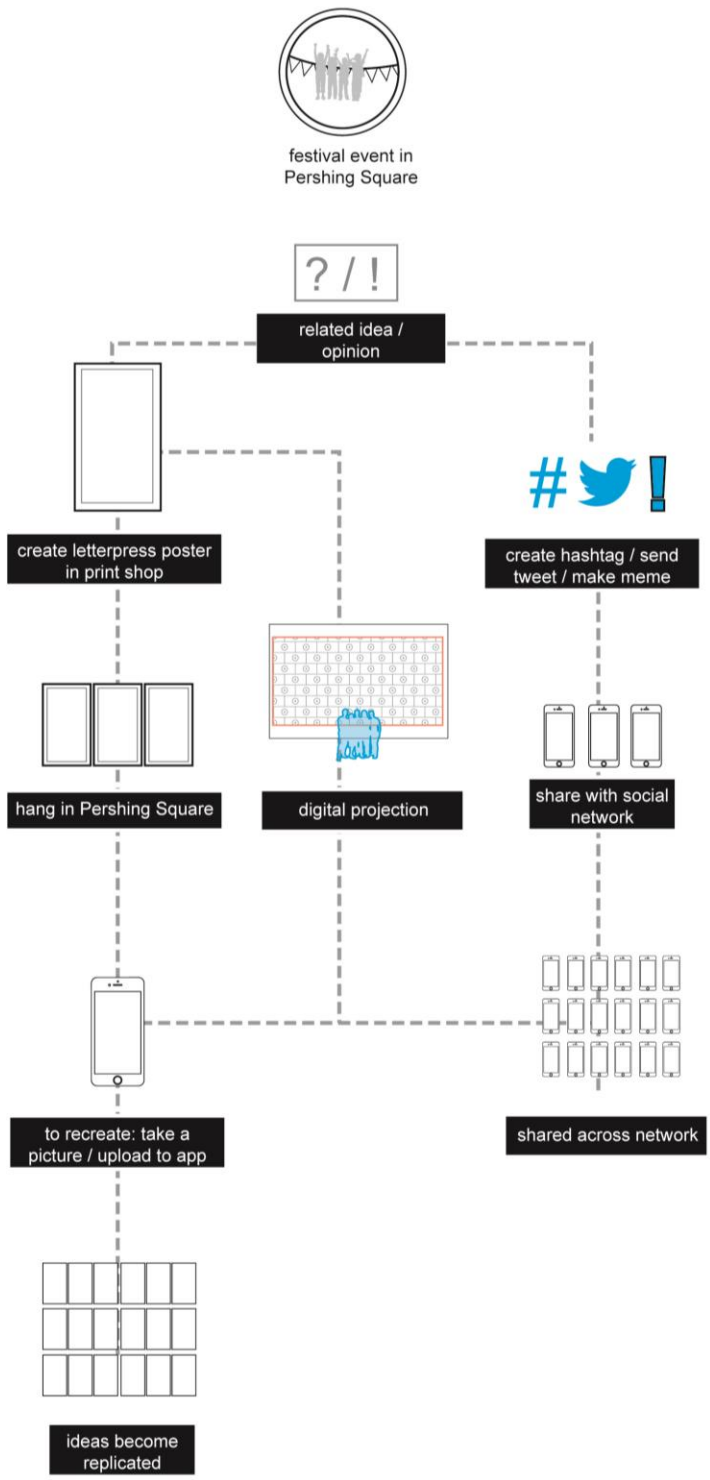
This is a project called the letterPRESS | SCREENprint, which translates the way ideas are spread from person to person on the internet back into an urban experience. The components of the project are a letterpress print shop in the likeness of the Colby poster printing company whose low tech signs became ubiquitous to the Los Angeles streetscape, a wifi network with an app that allows users to simultaneously share the idea they just printed on a digital billboard, and an infrastructure that supports the posters created and allows these ideas to pervade physical space again.

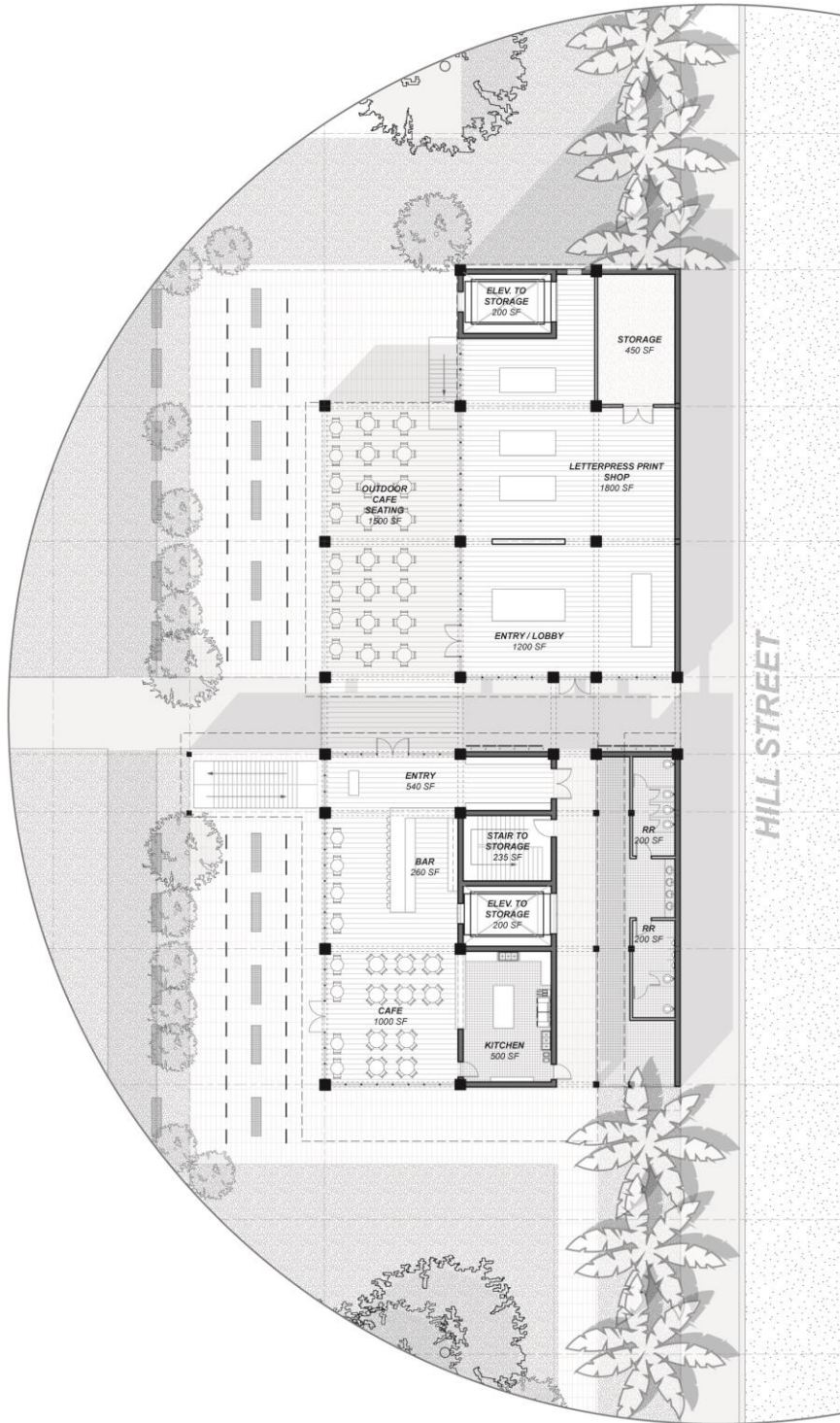
This is an example of how this intervention might play out at a weekend festival hosted in Pershing Square:

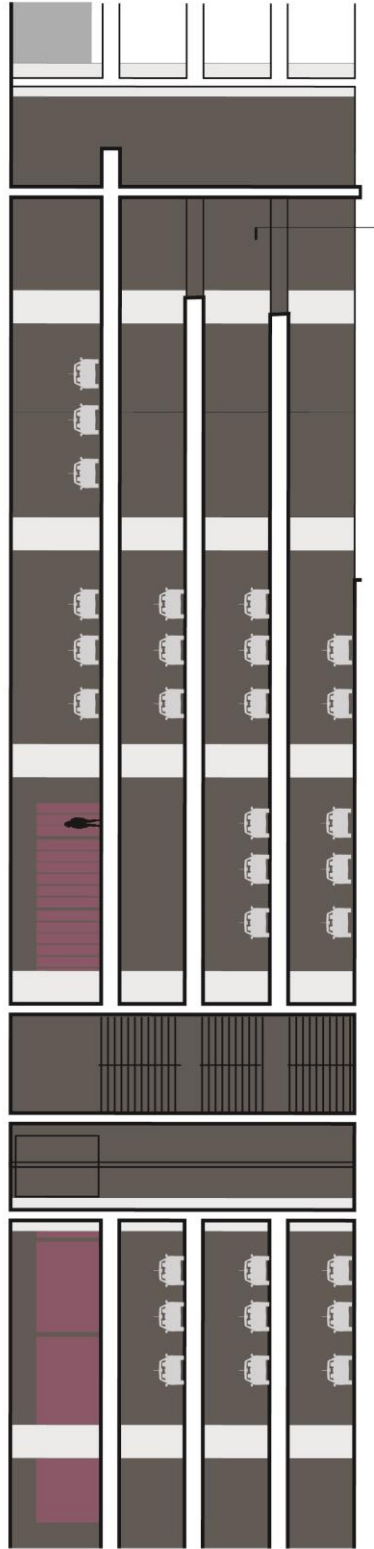
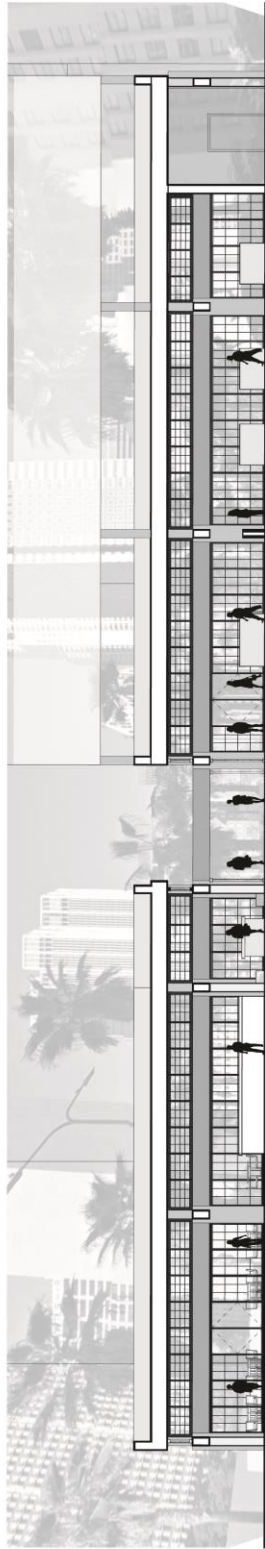
A large population comes together in celebration of a particular event, in this case the LA podcast festival that is hosted downtown every year. On the internet when we want to express our personal opinion or promote an occasion, we create a hashtag, send a tweet, or make a meme that allows these thoughts to move through the system and create an impact. With this project Pershing Square would have the ability to make this happen



physically, as a person is given the agency to create a simple poster to hang in the square that essentially does the same thing. Their poster is simultaneously projected digitally on a billboard. Then through an app, a person who sees a poster idea in the square that they resonate with can take a picture to have reprinted. Ideas then have the ability to visually alter the nature of the place in support of a similar cause.









#LAPODCAST  
#LAPODCAST  
#LAPODCAST  
#LAPODCAST  
#LAPODCAST  
#LAPODCAST

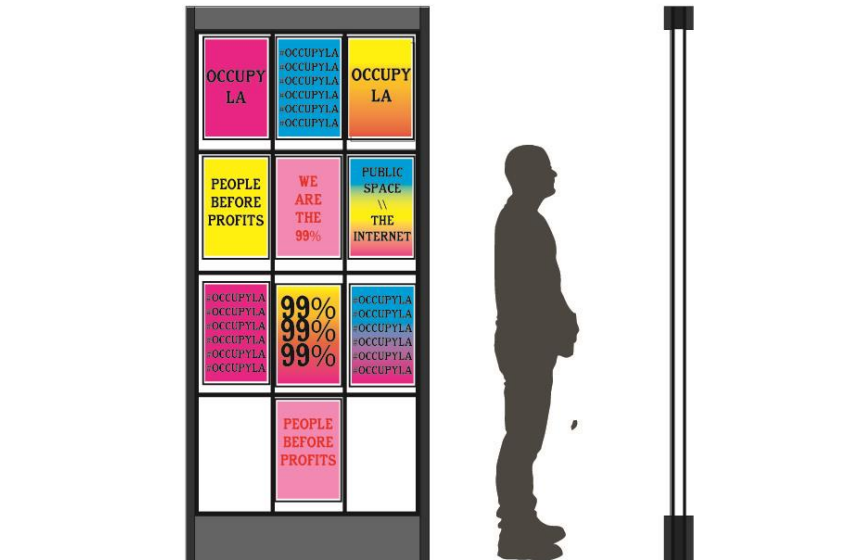
AU  
DI  
BL  
E

PUBLIC  
SPACE \\  
THE  
INTERNET

OCCUPY  
LA

LA  
PODCAST  
FESTIVAL

PEOPLE  
BEFORE  
PROFITS





**WEEKEND SECTION**

SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"



**EVENING SECTION**



**MORNING SECTION**

SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"

## ***Movement, Action, & Change***

Even in an age where an increasing amount of political action occurs on the internet, it is incredibly important that people still have the right and desire to assemble in public space to call upon real action to be made. The hope or the intent would be that these interventions might actually help to manifest these practices in the physical world where change actually takes place.



Along with the aim of creating a more participatory atmosphere in our cities and insisting upon the design of a more holistic public realm, this thesis exploration has sought to present a model of thinking that can generate new

ways to explore opportunities and situations that could be brought to public space. It also seeks to prompt a discussion about the role that public space plays in our society today and what its role might become in the future. This thesis has prompted some questions for me that position this topic to engage in further discussion:

In an age where social movements themselves have the capacity to become replicated in a viral fashion throughout the world, such as the Occupy Movement that began in New York City in 2011 and spread to over 951 cities throughout the world (Wikipedia), what role will the internet play in propelling future movements such as these? Will it make a difference in the outcome? How has our ability to both rapidly assemble and be globally connected at the same time affected the way action is taking place in our world? I would conclude that the internet plays a large part in our nation's ability to rapidly assemble groups of protestors, affecting the speed in which a movement can take place. However, speed in assembly does not equate to speed in application of the actual change. Although there has been no drastic change to our laws and policies as of yet, the Occupy Movement has certainly changed the language our nation uses to discuss the state of our economy and disproportionate system of wealth, which is a sign that the movement is proving its effectiveness. Discussion and sharing opinions of the topic on the internet is ongoing today, keeping the movement alive even though the physical occupation of space has subsided.

And finally, what is the role of public space today? On one hand it seems that urban public space is evolving to only serve a recreational purpose supported by commercial activity, but on the other hand it is also probable that one day soon a large portion of our world could be looking for a place to physically congregate in support or in protest of a particular cause. As new technologies progress, the internet's position as a public space will continue to evolve alongside physical public space. I believe there is opportunity today to test the integration of the two.

## Chapter 6: Reflections

### Reflections of the Final Defense

There were a few trains of thought that I felt dominated the conversation at my final defense. All of these thoughts and directions were appreciated because they were all concepts that I also grappled with myself during this process as possible directions for the thesis to land, but deliberately chose to set aside to find focus and application. Below I have categorized these thoughts into a few of the directions I felt the conversation went, and how I wish I could have responded to them now that the thoughts have set in.

#### **Those who thought it was all about the screen:**

There were several critics whose comments related to the agency of the screen itself as a flexible and adaptable surface. Screens have become a part of our culture in such a way that we understand them as portals to new worlds. Whether in cinema, television, or computer, screens allow us to be both here and there at the same time. Today screens are directly manipulated by the user, and serve as the surface that mediates our physical interactions with those that occur in the digital world, and today the internet has infused screens with the ability to call upon almost any piece of information conceivable in a very on-demand fashion. Although today screens are significant to society on many levels, my intent throughout this whole process

was to uncover what was going on beyond the screen. I would argue that in order to hybridize these modes of communication, simply implementing the screen itself is not enough. ***The most important aspect of each of the interventions I designed for this site is their ability to stand alone as a physical system.*** These physical systems are immediately derived from the process our culture has created in online environments. For instance, in the “letterPRESS | SCREENprint” project, people are given the agency to make this physical change apparent without the aid of the internet. Posters with ideological opinions have the ability to alter the visual landscape of the physical place and engage with the process of change at the local level. This process of replicating simple messages in order to bring relevant ideas into significance was derived from the way we actively share our opinions on social media and throughout other digital environments. When a hashtag is created in digital space it has the ability to spark conversations and encourage change through its ability to be replicated. The letterpress project creates a similar process in the physical world that is strengthened by the screen but does not rely on the screen to function. Without this physical translation, the screen is still just a screen regardless of what form it takes. Each of the projects that I have developed in this thesis strategically give content the ability to flow between both worlds, whereas today it only consciously resides in the digital world.



**Those whose conception of public space did not separate parks and natural areas from places of pure congregation and potential civic action**

It's true that the "town square" typology has the ability to act as an area of repose from city life just as much as it can act as a lively place of debate and discussion. The discussions posed by certain critics at the final defense reaffirmed what I had already discovered through this thesis: that the term "public space" is used in many overlapping instances, and is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms "park," "square," and "plaza." To many, public space means simply a common area of convergence, while to others it means an investment in the needs of the community. What I would now like to clarify is that the public space I specifically focused on was one of congregation, political agency, and action. Of course these spaces can take on many forms and definitions as well, but I want to be clear that I am not interested in focusing on public space for its ability to service the recreational or environmental needs of the city, although the space I've designed has the ability to provide this as well.

**Those who focused on flexibility as being key and that the internet might have a way of enabling this flexibility**

There was a lot of discussion by jurors at the final presentation who seemed to believe that the agency that the internet provides our public spaces today is one of customizable interests. I gather from this discussion

that this thought also aligns with current urban trends that understand a space should be thought of as being multiple things to multiple people. This makes sense for the reviewers to discuss this point because with the internet we have the ability to crowd-source opinion at an enormous rate, and on-demand technologies allow for more things to happen in the same space. While this is true, the inherent flexibility of a space was not of my interest for this thesis. I was already aware that a public space's capacity to be flexible and adapt to multiple situations is possible going into this thesis because it's been done for thousands of years. As an example, the Piazza San Marco in Venice was brought up during the review as an example of a space that has the ability to transform from a marketplace to one for religious ceremonies. While design plays a certain degree of agency in allowing simultaneous events to occur throughout the day in the same space, the programming of the place plays just as much of an important part in the creation of a place that is able to be many different things for different groups of people and individuals. Within the scope of this thesis I did image potential programs of activity that would be accommodated by the site, and they inspired the situations that I designed. However to truly engage in the adaptability of a place such as this, I feel that the solutions would need to be more realistic and specific to stakeholders' and real community members' local needs. I wanted to take a more imaginary and speculative approach with this thesis, since my question and hypothesis did not rely on this particular site to seek its answer. The flexibility in my design proposal comes into play as the systems I have designed take on a

shape and process of their own as intended. What I find most effective in the installations proposed in this thesis is their ability to transform into their own organisms as more people and groups participate, allowing the “evolution of the whole to be served through the free participation of each individual,” in physical space (Vaughan-Lee, 2011).

## Bibliography

- Amin, A. (2008, April). Collective Culture and Urban Public Space. *City*, 12(1), 5-24. Retrieved from <http://www.publicspace.org/es/texto-biblioteca/eng/b003-collective-culture-and-urban-public-space>
- Bartholl, A. (2012). *The Speed Book*. (D. Quaranta, Ed.) Gestalten.
- Bonnemaison, S., & Eisenbach, R. (2009). *Installations by Architects: Experiments in Building and Design*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Chang, C. (n.d.). *Before I Die*. Retrieved July 2015, from Candy Chang: <http://candychang.com/before-i-die-in-nola/>
- Conklin, T. (2012). *Street Art, Ideology, and Public Space*. Masters of Urban Studies Thesis, Portland State University, Urban Studies, Portland.
- Cosulich-Schwartz, P. (2009). *Spatial Injustice in Los Angeles: An Evaluation of Downtown L.A.'s Privately Owned Public Open Space*. Occidental College, Los Angeles. Retrieved from [https://www.oxy.edu/sites/default/files/assets/UEP/Comps/2009/cosulich%20master%20doc\\_final.pdf](https://www.oxy.edu/sites/default/files/assets/UEP/Comps/2009/cosulich%20master%20doc_final.pdf)
- DC Office of Planning. (2011). *Public Realm Design Manual*. District Department of Transportation, Washington, DC. Retrieved July 2015, from <http://ddot.dc.gov/PublicRealmDesignManual>
- Gehl, J., & Svarre, B. (2013). *How to Study Public Life*. Washington: IslandPress.

Gulesserian, L. (2011, September 22). *Critical Cartography: Aram Bartholl's "Map"*. Retrieved from viz.:

<http://viz.dwrl.utexas.edu/old/content/critical-cartography-aram-bartholls-map>

Los Angeles Times. (2015). *Mapping L.A.: Downtown*. Retrieved September 2015, from Los Angeles Times:

<http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/downtown/>

Project for Public Spaces. (2013, March 14). *To Make a Great Third Place, Get Out of the Way*. Retrieved from Project for Public Spaces:

<http://www.pps.org/blog/to-create-a-great-third-place-get-out-of-the-way/>

*Public Space*. (2015, September 8). Retrieved from Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_space)

Sennett, R. (2010). The Public Realm. In G. Bridge, & S. Watson (Eds.), *The Blackwell City Reader* (Second Edition ed., pp. 261-272). Wiley-Blackwell.

Varnelis, K. (2008). Invisible City Telecommunication. In K. Varnelis, *The Infrastructural City: Networked Ecologies in Los Angeles* (pp. 120-131).

Vaughan-Lee, L. (2011, November 17). *The Internet as a Living Symbol of Global Oneness*. Retrieved from Huffington Post:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/llewellyn-vaughanlee/the-internet-as-a-living\\_b\\_451147.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/llewellyn-vaughanlee/the-internet-as-a-living_b_451147.html)

Wallach, R. (1999, October). *Pershing Square Historic Background*. (USC Libraries) Retrieved September 2015, from Public Art in LA:  
[http://www.publicartinla.com/Downtown/figueroa/Pershing\\_Square\\_History/pershing\\_history.html](http://www.publicartinla.com/Downtown/figueroa/Pershing_Square_History/pershing_history.html)