A Public Architecture to Encourage Plurality

by

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Abstract

A speculative design illustrates an architecture for plurality. The design rests upon George Baird's proposal that a plurality consists of individuals occupying a range of publicness from the collective distraction described by Walter Benjamin to the full engagement of Hannah Arrent's public realm. To encourage this range of publicness, the design gathers a diversity of public rooms— indoor, outdoor, and liminal— in order to bring many different kinds of people together. Occupants are able to move through, beside, and between the gathered rooms in a system of overlapping thresholds. Each person would encounter others within a syncopation of distraction and focus, thresholds and public gatherings.

Acknowledgements

Chapter One: Introduction

Architects of public space contend with a basic question— how should we live together? In a pluralist society, they must consider how the built environment affects many different kinds of people. A gathering of different people becomes a plurality when each person can maintain her individuality. This kind of plurality is rooted in each person's phenomenon of being. It should not be confused with a plurality of cultures, ideologies, or political support. A plurality of individuals allows two people to see each other as uniquely human, or, in the words of Hannah Arendt, to recognize their "sameness in utter diversity."[1] Encouraging plurality should be an architect's central concern in designing public space. Encouraging plurality is the central concern of this research and design thesis.

This thesis is a speculative account of how public architecture can encourage plurality. This speculation rests on the theoretical work of Hannah Arendt, George Baird, Walter Benjamin, and Steven Holl. Hannah Arendt argues that people can gather in ways that maintain their plurality, particularly when fully engaged with each other in an ephemeral institution she calls the "public realm."[2] George Baird makes Arendt's plurality more achievable by envisioning a broader spectrum of public engagement.[3] Baird's spectrum positions the full "engagement" of Arendt's public

realm at one extreme, while placing the collective state of "distraction" described by Walter Benjamin at the other.[4] I discuss the two ends of this spectrum using the figure of the *citizen* for Arendtian engagement and the *flâneur* for Benjaminian distraction. According to Baird, there are architectural qualities that correspond to this range of publicness. These qualities are "visibility," "continuity," and "propinquity" or the closeness of bodies together in space.[5] But designing public architecture from these qualities may be impossible, as it is difficult to instrumentalize them into simple rules. The design philosophy of Steven Holl offers a way forward. Holl avoids straightforward theories and deterministic outcomes. Instead, he proposes designing from a "limited concept," which accepts its constraints as it intertwines with a site to become architecture.[6]

The proposed design applies a limited concept called "gathered rooms" to redesign the Common, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The Common is a good site to apply this concept because it has great potential to be better public space: it has suffered 250 years of haphazard development, it is surrounded by inhabited neighbourhoods, and it is underutilized by those who live around it. The limited concept of gathered rooms involves amassing a diversity of public rooms. These rooms should be of various types and sizes. They may be indoor, outdoor, or liminal spaces. Some will suggest

specific activities, while the purpose of others remains ambiguous. Gathering a diversity of rooms provides more possibilities for different kinds of people to come together. The proposed Common gathers public rooms around two major design moves: a daylighted brook bordered by paths, and a branching promenade. These sweeping moves are rooms themselves, and like the rooms that adjoin them, have the potential to house different public gatherings, each with a particular focus and level of engagement.

In the proposed design, the gathered rooms exploit qualities peculiar to the Halifax Common. This thesis describes how these gathered rooms integrate with the site. Two speculative walk-throughs show how the design might work in ways that encourage a plurality. The first walk-though takes the perspective of the flâneur who encounters others as he drifts from one end of the Common to the other. The second walk-through takes the perspective of the citizen, always engaged with others, regardless of her location within the design.

This speculative design flirts with the idea that architecture can determine its occupants' states of being. It confronts the uncertainty that an architecture for plurality can exist. It emphasizes the potential rewards of such an architecture. And, in doing so, it expresses an optimism that such an architecture is possible.

Chapter Two: A Public Architecture to Encourage Plurality

Idea

A pluralist society depends on the idea that everyone has worth and deserves a chance to live life with the fullest meaning. Hannah Arendt argues that such a life is possible only through engagement within the "public realm."[7] In the public realm, she tells us, each individual must retain her own identity,[8] so it cannot be a place for losing oneself in the crowd. The public realm must accomplish the task of gathering people without anonymizing them. To be one's own self, to hear and be heard, to see and be seen: the sum of these qualities suggests a place that cannot become an echo chamber for a singular ideology. It suggests an architecture to emphasize the plurality of those gathered. Such gathered people, Arendt explains, are united by the their "sameness in utter diversity."[9] This is to say, to see an other as unique is to see him as fully human.

To see the humanity of others is critical to the health of a pluralist society. Arendt herself experienced the worst of what happens when a single identity overtakes plurality. As a young Jewish German in the 1930s, she witnessed the rise of National Socialism and the thoughtless indifference of her friends and neighbours.[10] This indifference allowed a quiet division

of people into those who belong and those who do not, which eventually gave licence for violence against this second group. Ardent, in her later years, reflects on the thoughtless indifference of most Germans while covering the trial of Adolf Eichmann for *The New Yorker*.[11] In Eichmann she sees the absurd consequence of non-thinking. She coins the term "the banality of evil" to describe the how Eichmann can be both a thoughtless bureaucrat and the architect of the final solution.[12] In *The Human Condition,* Arendt proposes a simple antidote to these non-thinking tendencies. She suggests "nothing more than to think what we are doing."[13]

The way many people live in the developed world resembles the banality that Arendt feared. We are living at a time when mass society is in danger of overcoming us with a general malaise, a collective existence of passivity and thoughtlessness. This state of being, Arendt argues, inclines people to populism at its best, and, at its worst, mob rule or totalitarianism.[14] To avoid these outcomes, we need to structure our world to encourage thoughtfulness.

With cautious optimism, I suggest that architecture can encourage a thoughtful existence for its occupants. This is an architecture where people would slow down, think, and engage with others. This is a destination for which different kinds of people would leave the privacy

of their of their homes to be with others explicitly. These gatherings would present opportunities for those assembled to see each other as complicated human beings. An architecture with this kind of effect would be an architecture for plurality.

Being Public

Arendt's public realm suggests an architecture for plurality that is ideal, but also too perfect to be realized. Her public realm requires complete engagement from its participants in what she calls "action." Arendtian action consists of activities beyond the "labour" that provides basic subsistence or the "work" that comprises the remainder of daily life.[15] Action, in contrast to labour and work, involves those rarefied deeds done with the fullest publicity amongst one's peers. In the strictest of terms, action consists of speech and combat, where "not life, but the world is at stake."[16] It would be unrealistic to expect every member of the public to be fully engaged with others to this extent and at all times. An achievable architecture for plurality, therefore, must allow for a broader range of engagement than Arendtian action. George Baird helpfully proposes such a "publicness."[17] He takes Arendt's public realm as a starting point for a pluralist architecture. Arendtian action is the highest level of engagement on a spectrum; this end is occupied by the fully-engaged citizen of Arendt's public realm.[18] The low end of the spectrum

involves a state of being occupied by most people most of the time in public. To describe this end of the spectrum, Baird looks to Walter Benjamin's observation that most people occupy public spaces as part of "a collectivity in a state of distraction."[19] This distracted person, I submit, can be embodied in the figure of the flâneur who drifts through crowds and public space in a series of almost scenic experiences.[20] There is a great risk that the flâneur is so distracted that he melds into a crowd and destroys the plural nature of a gathering. But the distracted state of the flâneur may be an asset in maintaining his individuality. As long as he is too distracted to join a faceless mob, he can at least retain the ability to be seen by others as an individual. Any design for plurality, then, must at least provide for this minimum level of individuality.

Even with a broader range of publicness, there remains a fundamental question of how a person in this range can see an other as an individual. I choose to take a phenomenological view on this relationship between self and other. The phenomenon of the self and an other is a primordial relationship between them, a relationship that is preconscious and based on the body's active role in the world as "an intertwining of vision and movement," in the words of phenomenoligist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[21] This "intertwining" effectively describes the state of the flâneur encountering an

other. In his distracted state, he drifts through a blur of vision and movements of other people. This blur could make others appear to him as a crowd, but the potential remains for *some* of those others to stand out as individuals. In contrast, an engaged citizen meeting an other presents a situation where the intertwining of vision and movement brings the other into full relief. This engagement is Arendtian action. It involves a level of focus that makes it impossible for one citizen to miss the individuality of an other. Interesting situations would likely occur when two people encounter each other while occupying different places on Baird's spectrum of publicness. A distracted flâneur may have an ability to recognize more individuals from the sidelines of a gathering. He may understand the situation with greater clarity than the citizen who is occupied by her extreme engagement, "in the thick of it." Baird's spectrum allows us to imagine the individuality of people on both of its extremes. If it is possible to imagine the extremes, it is possible to imagine the individuality of people in the middle of the range. It remains an open question as to which architectural qualities will allow people to assume this range of publicness while maintaining their collective plurality.

George Baird suggests corresponding architectural qualities for his range of publicness. These qualities

are visibility, continuity, and propinquity or bodies coming together in space.[22] Visibility matters because the self cannot encounter others unless she can perceive them. For this thesis, I take a broad view of visibility that includes how all five senses contribute to one person's perception of an other. The architecture of pluralism must frame others in such a way that makes this perception possible. A fully engaged gathering of citizens must hear each other and be heard by each other;[23] so, the acoustics of their architecture must allow conversations to be heard and to be overheard. In some instances, speakers should be able to address larger numbers of people. Such is the case with Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, London. Anyone may speak there with a publicity broad in the sense that anyone else can gather to listen. Since people in a plurality must see others and be seen by others,[24] the design must be a place for people-watching, social interaction, and public performance. The flâneur may drift through or near these occurrences, so it is important that he be able to serendipitously see or overhear the interactions of others. It is also important that he can be perceived by others, even in his most distracted state.

The second architectural quality of Baird's suggestion, continuity, involves how a public space is connected to a larger urban fabric or landscape.[25] In the case of the flâneur, a continuity among public architectures makes it possible, or even likely, that he drift from his current

location into a focal point of engagement. In terms of the citizen, continuity means that she can place her engagement in context. The street brawl at the opening of *Romeo and Juliet* illustrates the effect of continuity. The Capulets and Montagues clash on the stage which might be a public market, square, garden or other public space.[26] This imaginary focus is fully connected to the larger urban fabric where other characters hear of the brawl and rush in from off-stage. Even Romeo is interrupted from brooding in a dark and private room and drawn into the public gathering.[27] The manipulation of visibility and continuity very much suggests the staging of a play, but of course the difference between a play and public architecture is that autonomous persons are their own actor, writer and director. The architect can only set the stage and imagine what play might take place as others inhabit it.

Propinquity, or bodies coming together in space, is the final architectural quality that Baird suggests as essential to pluralist architecture.[28] The architecture may suggest how physical bodies in space are positioned; it may suggest where individuals come together and where they spread apart. By manipulating the context of bodily proximity, architecture can encourage small groups engaged in discussion, crowds sharing in the experience of watching a parade, couples on recreational walks, or even teams engaged in organized

sports. The proximity of bodies can explicitly affect levels of engagement among individuals. A group that is huddled close together might be able to speak more intimately than one loosely gathered. The manipulation of bodies in space may be the most profound of Baird's observations. He argues that focused and engaged groups cannot exist without the contrast of distracted and dispersed moments around.[29] The gathering at Times Square for New Year's Eve is all the more focused because the procession to get there is through much emptier streets. The challenge for a pluralist architecture is the same as this Times Square gathering: is it possible to gather groups of people in sheer human togetherness without making them a faceless mob? And, if so, how does that architect know she has designed the architecture that will allow this gathering of individuals to happen?

Impossible

A public architecture for plurality may be impossible because it is difficult to instrumentalize Baird's architectural qualities into simple rules. Arendt highlights the difficulty of attaching architectural conditions to the public realm when she describes its essential spatial quality: "action and speech," she explains, "create a space between participants that can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere."[30] Baird echoes this uncertainty in defining

a pluralist architecture when he says that

> [s]uch potent political phenomena must
> not be seen to be dependent on particular
> architectural - or even spatial - forms. Or to
> put it another way: architecture and action are
> indisputably interrelated, but the relationship
> between them is neither instrumental or
> deterministic.[31]

Baird is sending the mixed message that, although he is able to describe the architectural conditions for plurality, these conditions cannot be employed as a design tool in any reliable way. But Arendt's observation leaves open the possibility that a pluralist architecture can be designed. Her public realm might be possible "almost anytime and anywhere," but it also could be more *probable* within certain architectural conditions. It is this small opening that allows Baird to simultaneously express extreme optimism and pessimism for a pluralist architecture.

George Baird expresses mixed feelings about the possibility of a pluralist architecture at the end of his book, *The Space of Appearance*. Of an architecture for plurality, he cautions that no architect will be able to claim a unified vision, and that many designers "may be dismissed as inauthentic."[32] He further suggests that architects will never be able to foresee the consequences of their designs, while everyone else will see them clearly for what they are as soon as they are built.[33] It is a disabling idea that the consequences of every design

Figure 1.   Predicting the effects of architecture is dubious. Even the monumental St. Peter's Square can surprise, in this case mediating an intimate conversation.

are unforeseeable, but that their effect can be seen by everyone in the finished work. Since the proposed design of this thesis will not be built, we are left with speculation. Any imagined consequences are impossible to confirm, and it is likely that a realized design will surprise , for better or worse, by defying expectations. Against this uncertainty, Baird optimistically clings to the possibility of a pluralist architecture. He describes an architecture that would embrace the uncertainty of its own meaning by becoming

> [a] world of passionate symbolic reinterpretation, the precise social meaning of which we will not be able to determine by ourselves, or in advance.[34]

Baird gives no clues for how to design within this uncertainty. He offers the architectural qualities of

visibility, continuity, and propinquity but refuses to instrumentalize them. Certainly these qualities should offer some clues for how to design them. But to design with clues instead of clear principles requires a leap of faith. It requires an optimism that design choices will be good enough when they invariably fail to reach their full potential. It requires letting go of the myth that design can tell the story of its inhabitants, instead allowing for the unexpected stories people will tell for and of themselves. It embraces the ambiguity and uncertainty of designing for plurality. Such an embracing of uncertainty is central to the design philosophy of architect Steven Holl.

The design philosophy of Steven Holl presents a way of confronting uncertainty and designing without deterministic principles. He recommends that designers abandon "precision and perfection" which are easily overcome by doubt.[35] Instead he recommends embracing the complexity of the world and its systems, and working with doubt and openness this presenting the possibility of yielding a plurality of public spaces.[36] The beauty of such thinking is that it is automatically anti-totalitarian. The reality of human culture is much messier than comforting myths of a singular identity.

A pluralist architecture cannot depend upon straightforward theories with deterministic outcomes. Holl is particularly skeptical of general theories that

represent a singular vision, preferring the messiness of plurality.[37] He dismisses general theories of architecture as unlikely because they must apply to all people in all places at all times.[38] Holl further suggests that such theories are doomed to failure because for one to be true, all competing theories must be false.[39] Of a boundless number of general theories, it is unlikely that one is correct. Baird and Arendt also fear these singular visions. Baird suggests that such schemes lead to alienation among their inhabitants.[40] Arendt fears that singular visions discourage people from thinking, suppress the richness of their individualities, and alienate them from each other.[41] It is doubtful that a general theory of design would lead to the plurality desired by Arendt, Baird and Holl.

Steven Holl confronts the uncertainty of designing from theory with what he calls a "limited concept." A limited concept recognizes its boundaries.[42] Unlike general theories doomed to failure, it does not overstate its effect on the world. A limited concept means choosing an idea and applying it to a specific site with sensitivity and nuance. In the case of this thesis, a limited concept must take the place of the abstraction of plurality which is unachievable on its own. Whatever this limited concept happens to be, it can only become architecture when it intertwines with a site.[43]

Opportunity

The site of a pluralist architecture is arbitrary, but also of the greatest importance. A pluralist architecture cannot be a generic design for anywhere. In place of a generic architecture, Steven Holl advocates for architectures that emphasize the individuality of their location. He proposes

> denying the homogeneity of the accepted by celebrating the extraordinary [in an] architecture of strange and mysterious beginnings, with the hope of original and unique meanings in each place. Its aim is variation, precision and a celebration of the as-yet-unknown.[44]

There is a plausible connection between Arendt's instance that people see each other as unique and Holl's suggestion that the architecture of each place be unique. This connection could also work in reverse. Banality in architecture could be related to the banality of thought that prevents people from seeing the humanity of others. When all cities begin to look the same, it is not unreasonable to see how one would miss the diversity of the people who live there. I took the opportunity to choose a site early in the process of research and design to avoid this banality. I chose a site that I could repeatedly visit and in which a reasonable person could envision a better kind of public space. The site provided a canvas upon which I could develop a limited concept that might encourage a plurality among its

inhabitants. It is useful for our purposes to overview the site and its qualities so that later discussions will be in a clear context as they explain the limited concept and proposed design.

The site for this design proposal is the Common in Halifax, Canada. I have chosen it as the site because it has so much potential to host vibrant publics. This potential rests in the fact that it is an under-inhabited green space, surrounded by inhabited neighbourhoods. The program of today's Common is nominally one of sports and recreation. Its surface area is dominated by grassy sports fields, paved roadways and surface

Figure 2.   A muddy line of desire marks the location
of a buried brook; a large fountain sits at the
Common's centre, mostly for the viewing pleasure
of distant motorists and passers by.

parking. Motorists speed up at the Common's edges and through its centre; pedestrians walk through its muddy paths as quickly as possible. When people do linger, they tend to be engaged in a small number of activities: dog walking, organized sports, public skating, and skateboarding. This under-inhabitation begs the question "who is the Common for?"

The original purpose of the Common was clear, but the contemporary Common suffers from an identity crisis due to 250 years of haphazard change. When British settlers founded Halifax, they reshaped the land to allow for their European way of life. They protected their new town with fortifications on a large drumlin, which occupies the highest point in Halifax and is today known as Citadel Hill, with its 19th century ramparts overlooking the city.[45] In 1763, King George III granted 95 hectares of land north of the citadel as a common "for the use of the inhabitants of the Town of Halifax forever."[46] This was the sort of common that arose in Great Britain after the end of feudalism and the subsequent enclosure of common lands. As in a British common, the Halifax Common was available for any person to graze his cattle or horses.[47] The contemporary Common is not used for grazing cattle, and many parcels of its land have been appropriated for institutional and private buildings. Over two hundred years of this kind of development have occupied 65%

of the open space from the original grant, reducing the remaining open lands from 95 to 33 hectares. These remaining lands are divided from the rest of the Common by three immovable institutions pictured in figure 3. These institutions are the:

1) Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre;
2) Camp Hill Cemetery; and,
3) Public Gardens.

The QEII Health Sciences Centre is the most advanced medical facility in Atlantic Canada, with close ties to Dalhousie University.[48] The removal of cemeteries is prohibited by the *Nova Scotia Cemeteries and Monuments Protection Act*.[49] The Public Gardens is a National Historic Site of Canada. In proposing a new design, it is not my intention to chip away at the Common with monumental buildings or substantial enclosures. Rather, I prefer the approach of taking stock of what lands remain, and mending them into a contiguous public space for the enjoyment of the people of Halifax. Fortunately, there is nearby green space that can be consolidated with the remaining Common. The urban reading in figure 3 shows how these adjacent green spaces can increase the practical size of the open Common to 60 hectares. This larger contiguous space flows from the remaining common lands around the local high school. The school is a major obstruction in the centre of this consolidated space, but it does not sever its continuity. On the other side of the school,
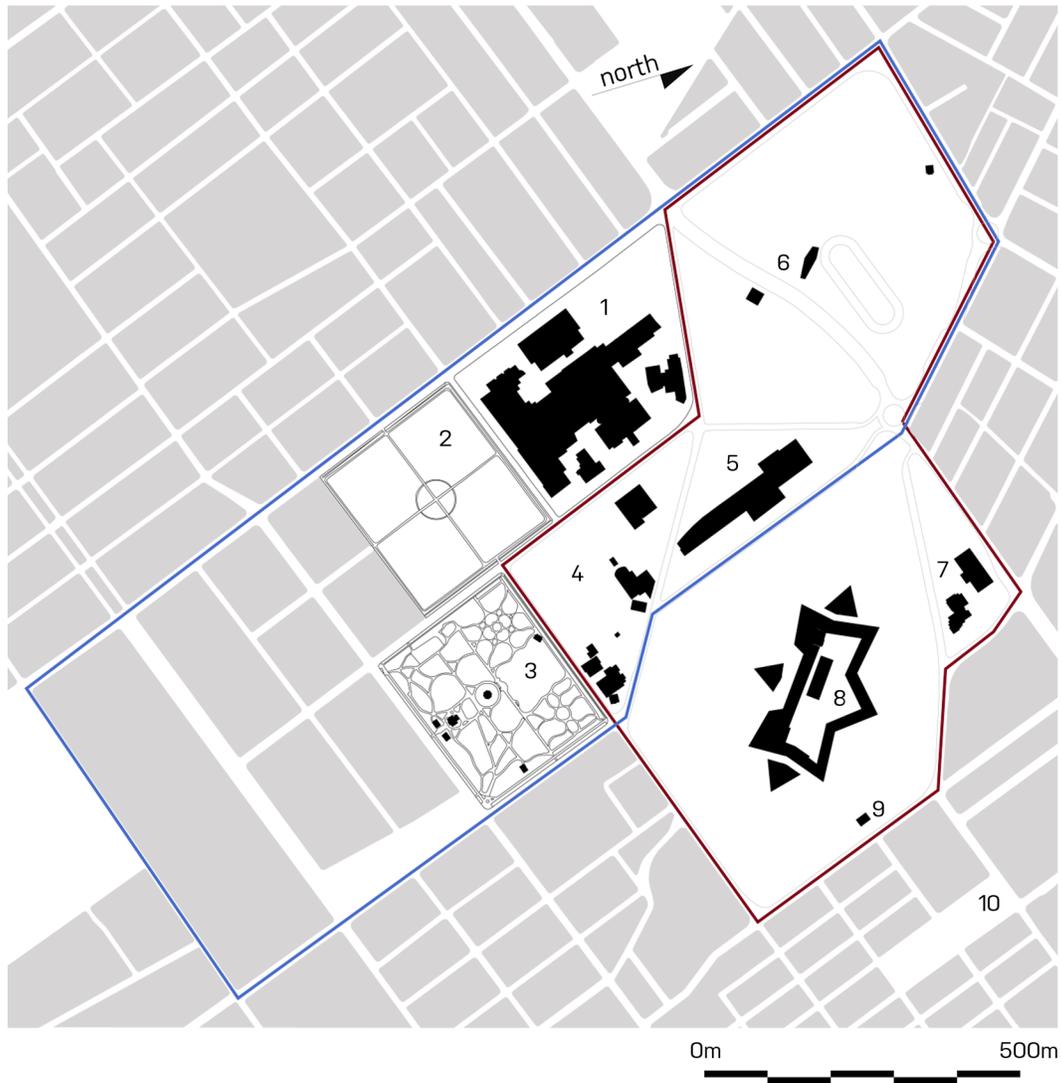
1. QEII Health Sciences Centre
2. Camp Hill Cemetary
3. Public Gardens
4. Wanderer's Grounds
5. high school, community centre, and theatre
6. main Common with music and skating pavilions
7. Centenial Pool and site of proposed Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre
8. citadel
9. town clock
10. city hall and Grand Parade

—— extent of 1763 land grant

—— extent of remaining Common with added contiguous public lands

Figure 3.   An overview of the Halifax common and environs

the common lands blend into the large lawn on the west side of Citadel Hill. This lawn wraps around the fortifications to the east side of the hill that adjoins downtown Halifax. To the north of the hill is a portion of land that connects to the Citadel lawn, as well as the remaining Common. This sunken precinct hosts the Centennial Pool, and will host a proposed new building for the Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre, a community institution in need of more space.[50] When I refer to the Common, I include these additional grounds, as well as the streets that border and pass through them. As a space defined by clear urban walls, this Common is a generous public room. The question that now remains is how this room can be reformed to encourage plurality within it. Before proposing a pluralist architecture, it is useful to consider how previous urban movements would fail to elicit pluralism in the Halifax Common.

Other Urbanisms

In a survey of the past 100 years of urbanism, George Baird notices that most theories neglect pluralism as a serious consideration.[51] For his survey, he isolates three urban concerns in the concepts of "mobility," "history," and "plurality." Modernist ideals advocated mobility at the expense of history and plurality.[52] Reactionary movements, namely the rationalists and post-modernists, abandoned mobility in favour of history; pluralism did not receive serious consideration.[53] It

would seem that balancing the three considerations is better than suggesting another pendulum swing.

Modernist architects focused on mobility at the expense of plurality and history. They often failed to provide good public space in the rebuilding of post-war Europe, especially when following the aggressive rebuilding schemes of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM).[54] CIAM's urban approach led to widespread alienation as people had to mould themselves into a daily life of rigidly compartmentalized functions.[55] Industry, residential, and commercial zones corralled buildings for these singular purposes, so that people would need to use roadways and other transportation on a daily basis. The CIAM offshoot of Team X made similarly controversial but slightly more livable designs by focusing on the metabolisms of daily life in the city, particularly dealing with "concerns of mobility, and of growth and of change."[56] Team X's urbanisms attempted to shape the strict separation of the functions of daily life around a more realistic vision of how people actually live. They failed to see, however, that social isolation and a general feeling of alienation would persist with the strict separation of modes of transportation, green space, and buildings (fig. 4). It was the aggressiveness of these schemes, in particular, that made Steven Holl wary of "mid-century modernism's positivistic, authoritarian

Figure 4.   The Bijlmermeer development shows how an aggressive interpretation of Team X's modernism can be alienating. It highlights Team X's emphasis on mobility and the spatial separation of the functions of daily life.

determinism."[57] These kinds of ideologies would likely reform the Common into an unlivable place that would promote an idealized model of daily life by separating its daily functions.

In a modernist Halifax Common, I can imagine how CIAM or Team X would demolish the surrounding blocks and replace them with residential towers with plenty of green space between them. Some residential towers might invade the Common itself, to mix the two functions of green space and residential life. Roads that cross the Common would become elevated highways that would join a network that cuts through the city. The network would provide transport routes

to industrial areas, business centres, and suburban residential communities. In the Common, the ground under the raised highway would be dark except for rare moments during the day. This area would provide parking, but it would also provide opportunities for crime and a general foreboding feeling among passersby. The large towers would encourage residents to live inside the microcosm of each building. Much of the green space in between would feel pointless, empty and unsafe. In plan, this scheme might look compelling, but its lived experience would be alienating.

The Common would not become an architecture for pluralism if its design followed reactionary movements to modernist urbanism, such as rationalism or post-modernism. Rationalists would respond solely to the neglect of historical consideration in CIAM and Team X design ideas. Post-modernists would react specifically to the modernist abandonment of meaningful symbols and forms.[58] The folly of post-modernism was that it often favoured meaning over lived experience. Urbanism schemes under this model were often flashy and insistent on making a statement (fig. 5). The Common could become a large art piece that is quite entertaining, but a clear meaning or an absurdity of meanings directly conflicts with pluralism's requirement that the diversity of meanings come from the people themselves. This requirement is in line with Steven

Figure 5.   Post-Modernism's strong emphasis on semiotics
can be alienating.

Holl's habit of celebrating variation and "denying the
homogeneity of the accepted [with the] original and
unique meanings in each place."[59] Interpreting the
meaning of the Common should be a consideration, but
it must be done with care, and in balance with concerns
of mobility and plurality.

A rationalist vision would also fail to create a Common
for plurality. Such a vision would focus on the history
of the site and its symbolisms at the expense of all else.
It would create a Common that is an anachronism in
the centre of Halifax. This Common would be truest
to the idea of the Common at its conception: a land
that is open and unobstructed for the agrarian use of
Haligonians (fig. 6). It would be absurd to remove all
built work from the Common, to leave it green. The
Victorian-era Public Gardens might not survive a

Figure 6. An 1857 painting by Gaspard LeMarchant Tupper shows how the Halifax Common was a still barren field at that time.

purist return to this past; or perhaps, the Public Garden would become the model and the entire common would become a Victorian revival garden. The absurdity of such revisionist historicism is that it would ignore the needs of people to be plural, but also the practical functions of mobility in a contemporary city. The removal of all roadways would affect the functioning of the city, and the blank canvas of grass would prompt no better inhabitation than what is present now. The historic ideal would mean a return to a pastoral fantasy that bears little resemblance to the needs of public life. To pursue such an ideology would illustrate that an abundance of green space is not automatically better public space.

In the case of the modernists, rationalists and post-modernists, a singular emphasis on mobility or history would limit the design's effectiveness. It is uncanny that

strict modernist and post-modernist ideologies both lead to urbanisms that function better as alienation machines than public space. Considering all three concerns is a better strategy. I propose designing a pluralist public space that does not forget about history and mobility. Balancing these three concerns would likely lead to a public architecture that is messy, uncertain, and beautiful. I see an architecture unfold when I read Arendt's call for plurality. Just as individuality is relational, situatedness is relational. I am me because I am not the other; I am here because I am not there. This compassionate relationship between being and place may be seen in the work of Steven Holl. With a site in place, the remaining unknown is to find a limited concept, that when intertwined with site, allows for plurality. The key to designing for such a plurality could involve the application of a limited concept to accentuate the uniqueness of the site. Designing this way necessarily creates a one-of-a-kind architecture because the specificness of site and concept will combine in a way that no other site and concept should.

Gathered Rooms

The proposed design follows a limited concept called "gathered rooms." Designing gathered rooms means placing public rooms close together in order to bring people together. Some of these rooms will be indoor,

outdoor or liminal spaces. Some rooms suggest a particular type of activity, while others do not. Many of the rooms facilitate mobility by allowing people to walk through, beside, or between them. Each room has the capacity to host a public gathering with a common focus or purpose. These are gatherings that might be planned or spontaneous. They might spill from one room to another. When more than one gathering becomes a plurality, these gatherings, taken together, become "plural publics."

The proposed design hinges on the possibility that gathered rooms will attract plural publics. Plural publics are a composite institution. They consist of many publics, which are gatherings of people where each person has the opportunity to see the humanity of others. Each public is amorphous, so that its shape and size can change over time. Its boundaries can overlap with other publics. Each public is impermanent, so that it exists only so long as people are gathered within it. One public might exist in a place where countless have existed before and where countless could exist in the future.

It may seem like an impossible design brief to encourage plural publics with gathered rooms. Fortunately, plural publics, by their very nature, suggest a palpable architectural condition— namely, enclosure. Enclosure happens even if people gather in the abstraction of

a boundless field. The bodies at the gathering's edge define a threshold, similar to the boundaries of a school of fish or flock of birds. Most publics, however, would be unlikely to form in such a boundless condition. The extents of most publics will likely coincide with physical features of the natural and built environments. These are the places with favourable conditions for each kind of public gathering, a kind of public. A design of gathered rooms can invite plural publics by exploiting such favourable conditions as it intertwines with a site.

Gathering rooms involves an effort of imagination. It involves imagining as many ways as possible that plural publics could form in public rooms that are close together. The proposed Common design gathers a variety of rooms in the landscape to maximize opportunities for public gathering. This combination is not an incoherent mess, but suggests a continuity within the Common that extends outward into the surrounding neighbourhoods. This combination of rooms creates as many opportunities for people to perceive each other, while providing the thresholds that hold bodies close together in space. The rooms can be occupied by people engaged in different kinds of publicness. To this end, the proposed design (fig. 7) takes the Common as a large urban room (fig. 8) and divides it into indoor and outdoor rooms where publics might form in close proximity to each other.

Figure 7.   The proposed design in plan

Figure 8. A figure-ground plan shows how the Common is one large room, surrounded by urban walls.

The proposed design gathers many kinds of public rooms together to allow for plural publics to form (fig. 9). This diversity is in contrast to the existing Common (fig. 10), with its nine softball fields, no gardening, no facilities for seniors, and a small playground for children that sits in grassy field, far from everything else. The new design increases the diversity of existing public rooms, and then consolidates these rooms to maximize the number of bodies in space that might gather together. The adjacency of a diversity of public rooms leads to the possibility that a diversity of people come together and see each other.

The design depends on two types of principal thresholds. The first separate the Common from the surrounding neighbourhoods; the second separate its two main circulation corridors from the rooms that adjoin them. These two corridors are the paths alongside a daylighted brook and a branching promenade. Both of these corridors become rooms in their own right within the scheme of gathered rooms. People will congregate by the brook and on the promenade, but these gatherings also might blend into the those within adjacent public rooms.

1. willow tree
2. hall
3. dialogue centre
4. playground
5. skate park
6. youth and music centre
7. campfire/viewing tower
8. stage
9. cricket/festival ground
10. beer garden
11. amphitheatre
12. public art gallery
13. pyramidal berm
14. skating pavillion and oval
15. community garden
16. community kitchen
17. indoor pool
18. friendship centre
19. citadel
20. town clock
21. softball fields (x4)
22. giant trellis/backstops
23. gymnasiums
24. theatres
25. science museum
26. horse stables
27. lawn bowling court
28. soccer field
29. pond in public garden
30. historic cottage

brook and path

branching promenade

0m   300m

Figure 9.   A program diagram of the proposed Common

33

4.   playground*
5.   skate park*
6.   youth + music*

9.   cricket grounds*

14. skating pavillion and oval

17. indoor pool

19. citadel
20. town clock
21. softball fields (x9)*

23. gymnasiums
24. community theatre
25. science museum
26. horse stables*
27. lawn bowling court
28. soccer field
29. pond in public garden
30. historic cottage
31. fountain**
32. basketball hoops**
33. small outdoor pool**
34. tennis courts**

*   redesigned/relocated
**   removed from proposal

0m   300m

Figure 10.   A program diagram of the existing Common

The public rooms within the proposal have the potential to house publics with particular focuses and levels of engagement. For instance, some public rooms strongly suggest a particular activity: skateboarders in a skate park or gardeners in a community garden. A range of bodily proximities are possible within these well-defined public rooms. The publics of skateboarding and gardening change by how many others are similarly engaged in skateboarding or gardening and how many others are observing. Some publics would occur in rooms that can be occupied by different groups. The hall can house a youth dance, the meeting of a civic society, a cultural festival or a political rally. The physical dimensions of the hall suggest a few densities of gathering. A maximum occupancy of standing people yields a different kind of public room than a few people gathered at a table in its centre. Among these well defined rooms are rooms with less-defined programs. These are the paths, corridors and edges of indoor and outdoor rooms. They provide opportunities for spontaneous gatherings, running into acquaintances and the spillover of people from adjacent rooms. The design, in gathering many different kinds of rooms together (fig. 11), creates the potential for passersby to join or observe an adjacent public. This adjacency also increases the likelihood of a person moving from one public to another, or of two publics merging together.

The proposed design creates the opportunity for plural
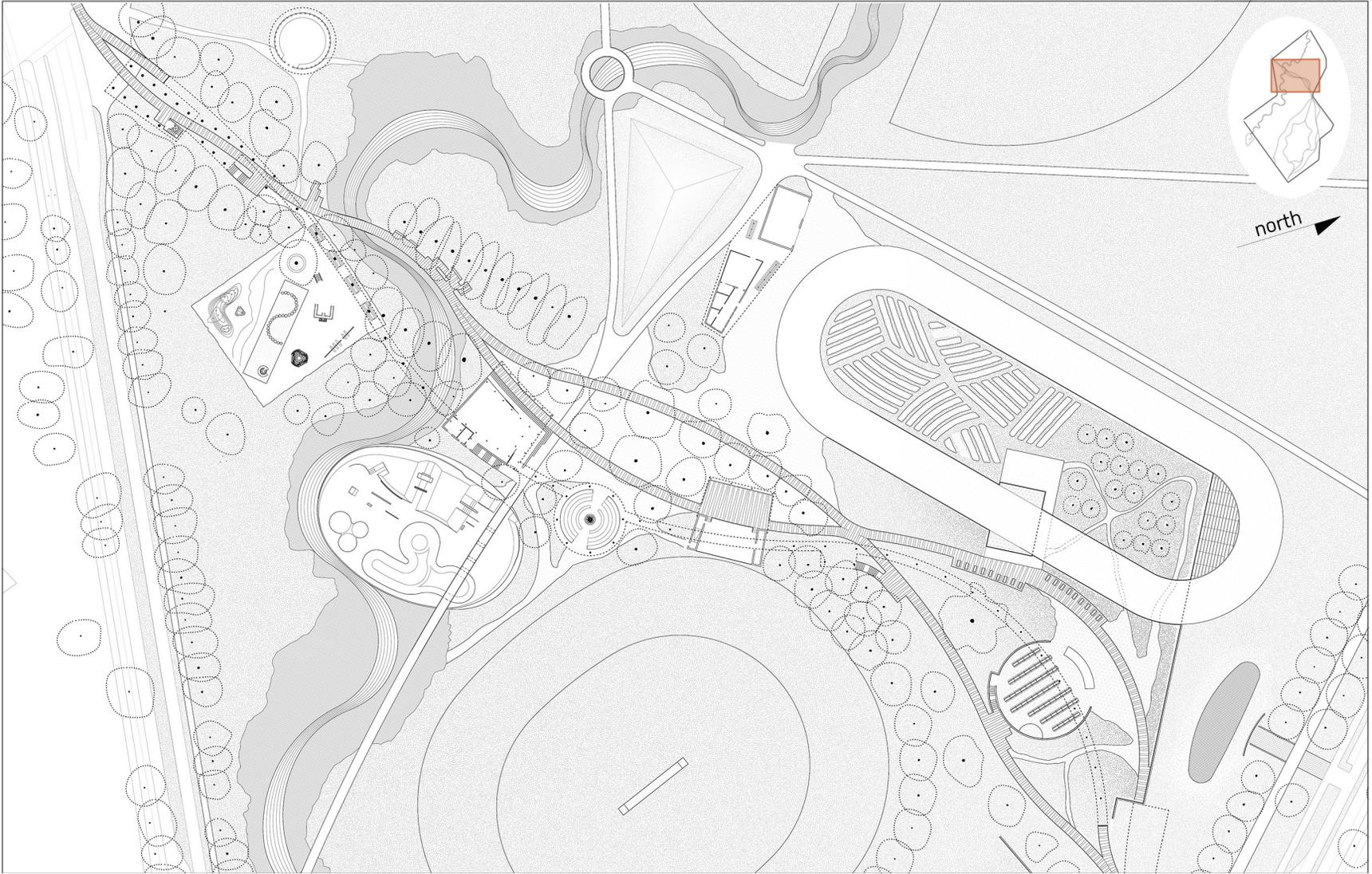
Figure 11.   Enlarged plan, highlighting key public rooms

north

0m   100m

publics by rethinking the circulation of the Common.
Figure 12 shows how much of the existing Common is
covered in asphalt for roadways and parking. The few
formal paths contort around existing softball fields,
ignoring the desire lines of pedestrians and cyclists. The
proposed design streamlines the size and number of
paved roadways and then stitches the consolidated green
space together with paths. The brookside path follows
the northeast-southwest axis through flatter portions of
the Common, while the branching promenade follows
the perpendicular axis before wrapping around Citadel
Hill. These smaller paths represent desire lines that the


existing   proposed
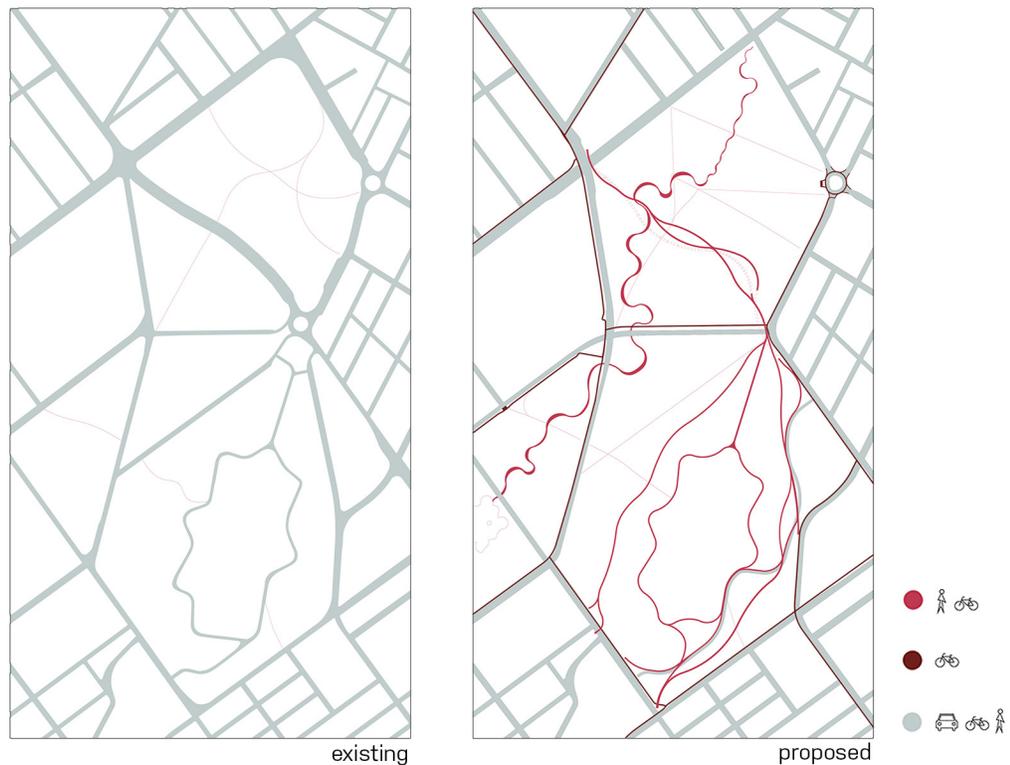
Figure 12. The circulation of the proposed design removes
redundant roadways and adds pathways and
cycling lanes following desire lines.

public rooms, including softball fields, gather around, and dare not obstruct.

The design provides for the range of bodily proximities that Baird describes (fig. 13). Rooms that are closest to the main paths encourage the greatest density of gathering and allow the intermixing of different publics engaged in their specific activity or type of publicness. The large sports fields act as a buffer between the street edges and these dense internal streets at the Common's centre. This strategy is best illustrated by the inversion
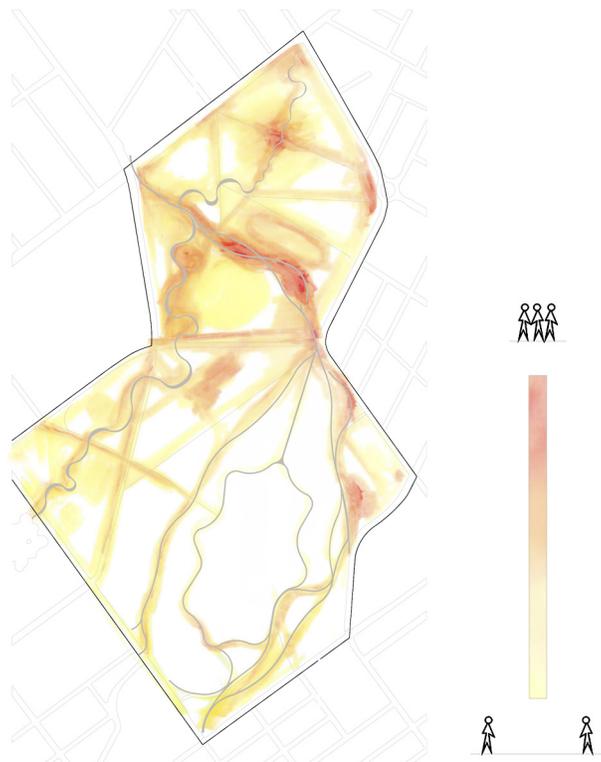
Figure 13. Propinquity increases where rooms are gathered most densely so that overlap and thresholds multiply among them.

of four softball fields at the top of the design (fig. 14).
The existing fields point their outfields toward a shared
centre. This orientation makes the centre impassible by
others and segregates the infields of the four playing
surfaces. Inverting the fields brings the infields together,
allowing for exchanges among the players and their
friends. But more critically, the inversion directs paths
within the cluster of the fields and players' benches.
There is a great opportunity for recognition between
those engaged in the publicness of softball and those
passing through that publicness. The intersection of
so many people would also concentrate their spoken
voices. This situation could become quite loud. The
quality of this loudness is uncertain. It could be a
euphony of many people coming together as much as
it could be a cacophony of yelling fans, arguments, and
fights. This strategy of encouraging friction occurs
at many thresholds among the gathered rooms in the
proposal. I will review many of them later in two
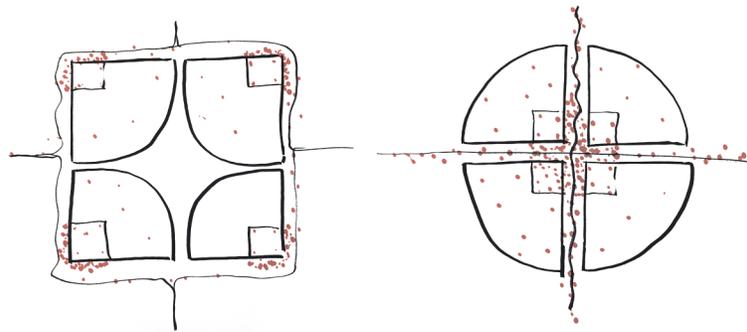
Figure 14.   Inverting the four softball fields gathers the areas
             of highest use: the team benches, the paths, and the
             brook.

narrative walkthroughs as the citizen and as the flâneur. The walkthroughs will also show how this intense propinquity is counterbalanced by less inhabited peripheral rooms for those who wish to avoid more intense gathering.

The plural publics, as described so far, depend upon the architectural qualities of propinquity and visibility, but do not, so far, suggest any kind of materiality. The gathered rooms bring people together, so what materials define their enclosures? The rooms allow people to see each other, so what frames these views? It could be said that the only material I have discussed so far is program itself. An architect can work with program like a material, according to Bernard Tschumi, and then resolve the physical materials and site as a second step.[60] The limited concept of gathered rooms, as I have described it, is program acting as a material, with the physical materials only mattering when the concept intertwines with the site.

Treasure

> My experience, everything within me, is
> against an abstract approach to land and nature
> and for the profound assets rooted in each site
> and buried in it like a treasurable wonder.
>
> –Richard Neutra[61]

To encourage plural publics with gathered rooms requires a careful uncovering of the facts peculiar to the

specific site. David Leatherbarrow describes this process as a tension between the will of the designer and the constraints of the land. On the one hand is Vitruvius, who believed that design requires understanding and abiding by the constraints of external natural laws.[62] In contrast, Peter Eisenman believes that design principles come from the designer himself; to pretend that there is a shared validity among designers is foolish.[63] The happy medium of these views comes from Richard Neutra. Leatherbarrow sees in Neutra a beautiful balance between the agency of the designer and the assets of the site. Neutra has a set of internal principles, but he does not impose them, choosing instead to discover the materials of the site, thus uncovering its latent qualities.[64] This overlaying of idea over site is similar to Steven Holl's notion of intertwining a limited concept with the facts of a site, the story of its palimpsest. It is the reading of a site through the lens of an idea that is critical to building a pluralist architecture.

The design work of this thesis entailed a reading of the palimpsest of human and natural activity on the site, as well as imagining future activity. The Halifax Common has many qualities that make it an attractive site for plural publics. Some of these qualities are so old that they give the place a sense of timelessness. 20,000 years ago, sheets of ice retreated from the land,

scouring the earth in a visible direction.[65] When they finally melted, we were left with drumlins, teardrop hills of loosened soil. The scraped hollows alongside them became lakes and swamps, where thousands of years of erosion further deposited sediment.[66] Citadel Hill is one such drumlin, while the Common is a saucer-shaped hollow beside it. With such a shallow change in topography, the Common was likely a swamp, surrounded by virgin Arcadian forests. Its trees were likely alders, black spruce, beech and other water-resistant trees. Due to its location, it would have been sheltered from most inclement weather. I can find no evidence of how Mi'kmaq people beforehand had used the site, although it would be unsurprising if they gathered cranberries grew there or if it were a part of their traditional hunting grounds. The current Common is covered in European grass and surrounded by streets, houses, towers, and large institutional buildings.

The overall design takes advantage of these natural characteristics. The shallow depression of the Common provides a subtle sense of enclosure that is reinforced by the urban walls that surround the site. The edge of this depression is ringed by roadways and walking paths, with larger open spaces providing a buffer to the more intimate spaces in the centre. The concentration of publics at the centre allows people gathered there to

be in close proximity, with the benefit of an expansive view of the larger outdoor room of the Common. The vegetative plan (fig. 15) completes a existing partial border of trees around the low-lying areas of the Common. Two tree-lined internal paths cross the central Common. These east-west paths enjoy summer shade, as well as providing needed windbreaks in winter from prevailing northeasterly winds. Excessive heat and cold currently prevent people from enjoying the Common, so these design moves would encourage people to use it more. Citadel Hill, in contrast to the
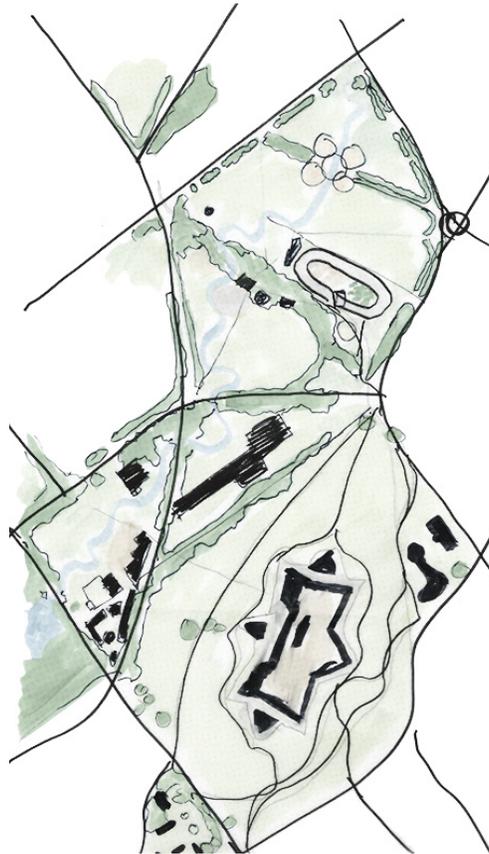
Figure 15.   Vegetation frames outdoor rooms in the proposed
             design.

low-lying areas, is more exposed to the elements and more likely to be sporadically inhabited. Passage upon and around it is either an act of necessity for people in transit or a privilege for everyone when the weather allows. The potential for universal access is important to plurality, so the branching promenade ascends the hill with the minimum of incline and leaves one minor roadway for those with reduced mobility, as well as for servicing the historic site of the Citadel. In addition to these natural conditions, the design also needs to consider the cultural landscape.

The proposed design harnesses the human idea of the Common and works with previous human manipulations of the environment. These manipulations include: the draining of the swamp that was once there to provide grazing land, the infill of the land with various public and private buildings, the planting of trees and formal gardens mentioned earlier, and the presence of clear urban walls and roads that provide a sense of enclosure for the low-lying areas. The Citadel itself offers large symbolic potential. The Citadel acts as a memory of a previous age, sounding a daily noon-hour cannon. What if, beyond this quaint anachronism, the site became an inhabitable place dear to the hearts of residents as well as visitors? The proposed design aims for this endearment by formalizing the informal paths that follow the topography of the hill as well

as removing excessive roadways so that the brow of the hill can be inhabited by people on foot, bicycle or wheelchair without fear of being struck by cars. A number of benches provide places of respite, including large common benches that capitalize on views of the city and of the open ocean beyond the mouth of the harbour. This strategy connects people to the protective backdrop of the defensive moat, with the view outward from the hill. The monument would then be reduced to the area within the walls of the Citadel itself, a compromise that preserves the ramparts for occasional visits, but increases the cultural reach of the entire hill as a place of wonder and history, as well as daily life. In general, the design aims to enrich the public lives of Haligonians by offering phenomena of wonder and surprise.

People want to go up. Trees, mountains, towers, and snowbanks are all challenges to ascend with the payoff of reaching the top and surveying the ground below. One branch of the promenade invites people up into the trees (fig. 16). The grade never exceeds 1 in 20, so everyone is welcome. The promenade widens in a number of places to form elevated plazas: one plaza is on top of the stage, another is midway-up the observation tower. An elevated plaza forms a loggia for the youth centre entrance, another is the forecourt

canopy

ground

0m   100m   200m

Figure 16.   Willow Tree Gate and Canopy Promenade

of the community hall. The community hall sits on columns among the trees, so its underside forms an arcade-like roof that acts as a gate from inside the Common the nearby street intersection with a willow tree planted on one corner. The flâneur takes great pleasure in taking this walk in the upcoming narrative.

People want to do down. Caves, sunken gardens, snow forts, and tunnels are adventures to descend into. Another branch of the promenade invites people into the earth (fig. 17) The grade never exceeds 1 in 20, so everyone is welcome. The promenade widens and narrows in a number of sunken plazas and underground lobbies. One plaza is an understated entrance to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. This entrance leads to a gracious underground lobby for the art gallery that is public and always open. This lobby would be a comfort centre for warming and cooling in extreme weather and during power outages. Light permeates the space from its two entrances and two giant light-wells. One light-well is also an amphitheatre so that a passerby can see a gathered crowd from windows behind the performers. The other sunken plaza is a hubbub of activity with a beer garden, community kitchen, community garden, and a sculpture court. The flâneur takes great pleasure walking underground in the upcoming narrative.

People want to be near water. Daylighting a buried

ground

underground

0m   100m   200m
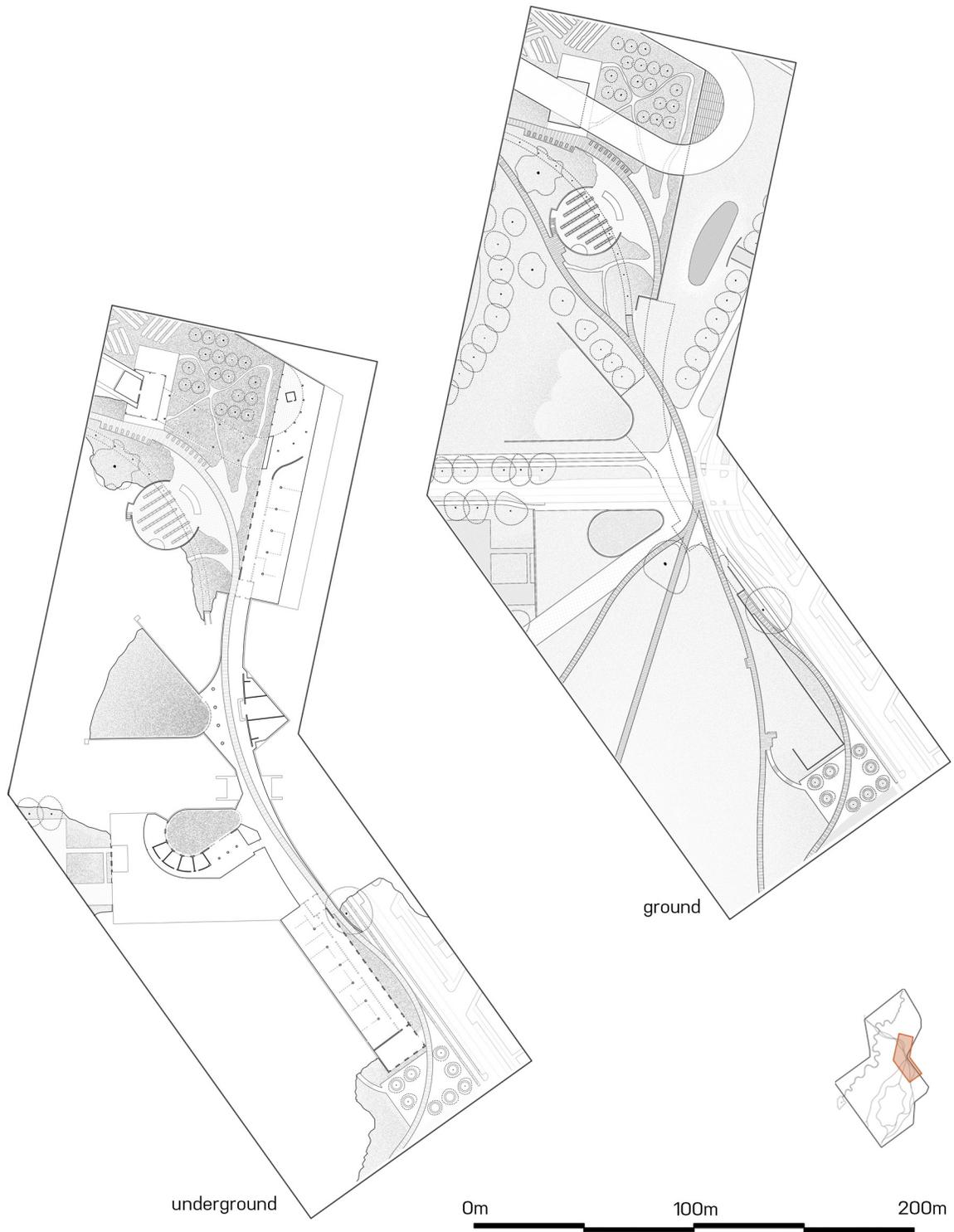
Figure 17.   AGNS Gate and Underground Promenade

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brook would re-introduce surface water to the Common. The early Common needed to be good for grazing, requiring the draining of the swamp and the eventual burying of a stream that settlers called Freshwater Brook.[67] Today, the only remains of this brook are visible in the Victorian-era Public Gardens as a pond with no visible inflow that supplies a stream a short stream that soon disappears underground. The technical elements of daylighting the brook are extensive, so for the purposes of this exploration we will turn a blind eye to the sewage mixed with surface drainage in Halifax's system. It might be possible to at least collect the surface drainage in the daylighted brook, perhaps augmented with some treated water as in Kim Mi Young's Cheongyecheon project in Seoul.[68] A paver system allows people to sit or walk along the edge of the daylighted brook, providing multiple opportunities for bodies to come together in space, as is needed for plural publics. The day-lit brook becomes a magnet for activity in the same spirit as the pedestrianization of the Citadel or the upstairs-downstairs promenades.

Yellow Brick Roads

The gathered rooms of the proposed design rest on two major design moves, the daylighted Freshwater Brook

and the branching promenade. These design moves are rooms themselves, but are also the architectural element that is arguably the most fundamental: the path. The brookside path follows the topography of the low-lying Common, which, even with the brook in its buried state, is a desire line. The second path, the branching promenade, acts like a yellow brick road upon which the stories of passersby can be situated. Everyone knows that the yellow brick road leads to Oz, and so everyone will know that the promenade originates at the willow tree at the end of Quinpool Road and terminates where the Common meets downtown. Everyone will know that the brookside path begins at an artesian well in the Common's northwest corner and ends where the brook empties into the pond in the Public Gardens (fig. 18). This kind of wayfinding provides the continuity requisite of public space for plurality. The effect of this continuity is evident in how Charles Garnier described the grand staircase of the then-new Paris opera house:

> one is not or need be in a rush to take one's seat; one can wait a moment or two or walk around a bit. But for this pause to be even more pleasant and for one's assurance to be all the more complete, one ought to be able to see, from this introductory vestibule, the flight of stairs and the ticket booths. One knows at this point where one is going to go, there is no mistaking the way one will take, and the certainty permits you to be in no hurry. Indeed, it invites you not to be. [69]

The effect of Garnier's design is that people are freed
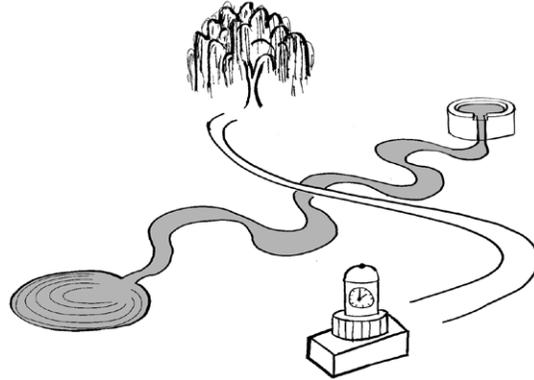
Figure 18.   The design uses iconic landmarks for wayfinding
on the branching promenade and brookside paths.

from the confusion of wayfinding and able to see the
people around them. This continuity partly stems
from the memory of previous visits, but also from the
visibility of the path, and of key moments such as the
staircase and the ticket booths. The proposed Common
design aims for a similar architectural quality. The
stream path originates in the well and terminates in the
pond. Its paver patterning provides a sense of certainty
that the path will persist, even as it encounters roads and
crosswalks mid-way. The promenade uses a basic pre-
cast concrete unit to create a sense of unity. It begins (or
ends) quite simply at a willow tree that references the
traditional name of the intersection where it sits. But its
other connections with the city are likewise memorable.
One branch terminates at an old tree on the Garrison
grounds and leads to a commercial district on nearby
Spring Garden Road. Another ends at the confluence of
Duke and Gottingen Streets, at the site of the proposed

Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre. This terminus allows one to walk downtown on Duke Street, to the North End on Gottingen Street or to stay at a community centre that serves the regions' first peoples while also serving as a bridge to the larger community. The third terminus allows one to head downtown on Sackville Street or to Spring Garden Road on Brunswick. It passes the Town Clock which acts as a designator of that entrance. The architectural continuity that these paths can provide make it possible for people to take their time on their journey. Combined with other architectural elements, the chance becomes greater and greater that people will take that extra attention to view a plurality of people around them.

The brookside paths present more possibilities for plural publics to gather. The phenomenon of gently moving water will become a primordial attraction, with people touching fresh water, listening to its sound, crossing over it on stepping stones, and enjoying its cooling effect in the summer heat. Ground-lighting at night can create a magical path that allows for romantic moments. In winter the stream can be slightly heated so that, in the cold, a misty wall rises from it. The mist would affect how one would see an other on the opposite bank, and frequent opportunities to cross would allow one to cross that emphasized threshold. The brook can frame how we see others around it. It can direct bodies

to move with or against its flow. I can also provide a sense of continuity within the larger urban fabric. Walking uphill leads to the highest parts of the Halifax peninsula, while walking down leads to the Public Gardens and eventually to the harbour and Atlantic Ocean beyond. A consistent shaped paver (fig. 19) makes up the paths alongside the brook and provides a tactile and visual connection to the way-points from which it begins and ends: the well at the high end of the Common to the pond at the low end.
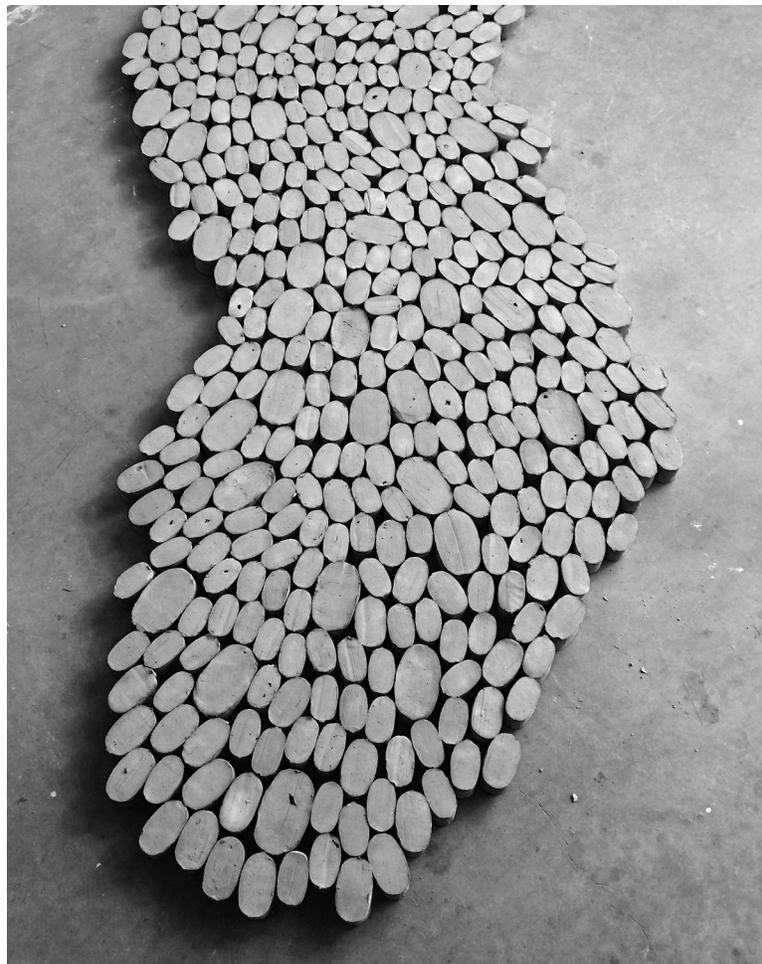
Figure 19.   Pavers for brookside path

The physical dimensions of the branching promenade encourage particular types of inhabitation. The promenade is a minimum of three metres wide in the low-lying areas of the Common, but only two and a half metres on some of the promenade branches over and around Citadel Hill. The three-metre standard allows the comfortable passage of 30 pedestrians per minute during festivals and other busy times.[70] During less busy times, this width allows people to stop at their leisure without fear of impeding other pedestrians or cyclists. The narrow two and a half metres allows those less-used paths to feel just as inhabited with fewer people. It also encourages movement along the path, deliberate stops at wider areas with benches, or leaving the path to set on the steep grassy slope of the hill itself. The pre-cast wedges derive from a uniform master. This master is truncated to the desired path width, with only the most public location in front of the stage showing the full units. These unaltered 10-metre long wedges form the plaza on the north side of the stage. This location implies the place where protests, performances, or informal speeches could take place and people could stop to occupy this plaza in order to see and to listen. Similarly, in other areas, the character of the path changes curvature and width to encourage movement in some places and lingering in others (fig. 20). The concrete units will be flush on the surface with each other and flush with the ground around
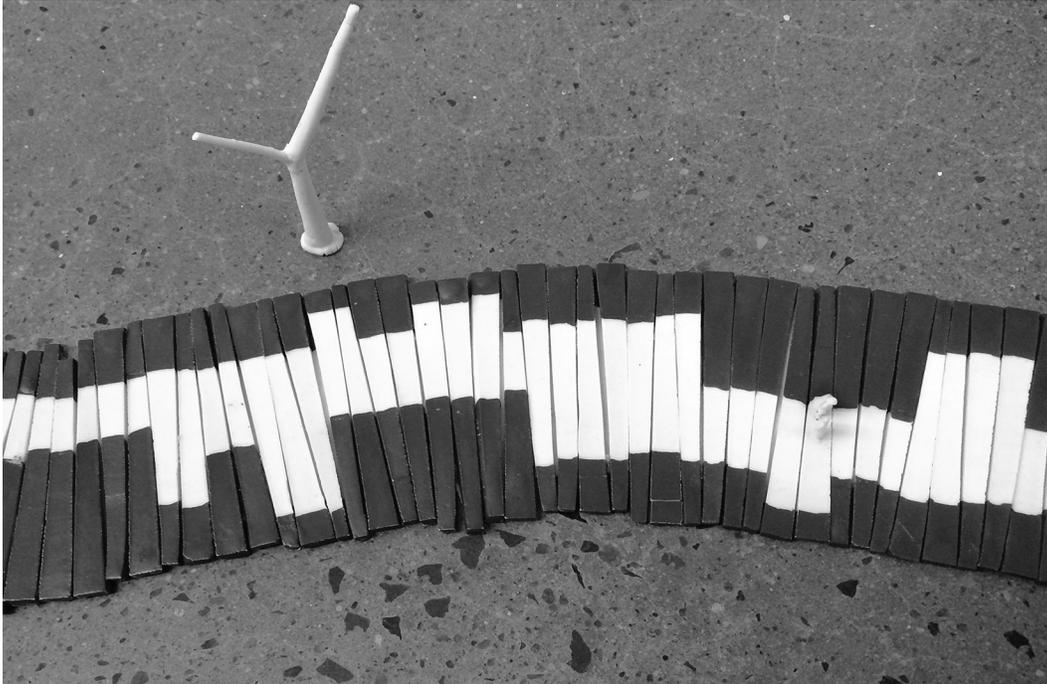
Figure 20.   Pavers for branching promenade

them, necessitating a robust system of pile foundations and sleepers, similarly to how the system works on Diller Scofidio+ Renfro's High Line in New York. This zero threshold detail allows people on the path to universally access all parts of it, and to concentrate on other people rather than their footfalls. The promenade and brook are the armature upon which all other public rooms depend. It is the thresholds among these rooms where plural publics might occur.

Stories

I am about to tell a few stories that illustrate how the gathered rooms and the thresholds among them could

encourage plural publics to form. The first stories will take the perspective of the flâneur. As with the rest of the document, I use the male pronoun for this character. I similarly only use the female pronoun for the citizen. The individuality of people is so central to this thesis that a clear singular pronoun trumps gender neutrality. My hope, in telling these stories, is to show possible futures where plurality in public space is a reality.

Flâneur

The flâneur is an observer who drifts through public space in a state of distraction. The flâneur is a spaceship who maintains a distance from the world outside his body, observing that outer world through the windows. I submit that the flâneur can be part of a plural public if and only if he retains his individuality, and can be seen by others as an individual. As this lowest level of engagement in a plurality, it is possible to think that even if the flâneur is not able to see and hear others as individuals, at least he is being an individual.

I begin with the flâneur before describing the citizen, because his experience is "scenographic."[71] In this sense, he is better able to drift and see the connectedness of the design, whereas the citizen who is fully engaged would become enlodged in a particular public and only those gathered around her would matter. The flâneur likely spends most of his time on the paths and in rooms that

allow a freedom of movement. The visibility of others is critical to his introverted publicness. The movement of the flâneur suggests a cinematic sequence of moments, unlike the citizen's grounded vantage point.

The experience of the flâneur represents the minimum level of engagement that one can have in a plural public. The quality of the architectural quality must ensure he is not easily lost in space, even if distracted by the activity around him. He should be able to see the plural publics that manifest themselves in the outdoor and indoor rooms he passes beside, between, or through them. It is unlikely that any of the engaged publicness around him will pull him out of his distracted state which is the state in which Walter Benjamin observes most of us spend most of our time in public space.[72] The moments of collision or gathering of bodies in space represent moments where the facts of the situation, the people and the architecture, may appropriate the flâneur rather than him appropriating them. This appropriation shift pulls the flâneur in the direction of the Arendtian citizen who is so engaged in the facts of her situation that the situation has appropriated her being fully.

Town Clock

—The flâneur begins his journey. He walks up the hill on Sackville Street, leaving downtown Halifax behind him. The branching promenade greets him on the street corner at the top of the hill. He takes his first step on the promenade's even concrete surface. This is a path that he will not leave until he reaches the willow tree at its western end. The path forks. Following the topography is much easier than ascending the hill.

The Town Clock catches the attention of the approaching flâneur. The sound of a cannon firing resonates from the ramparts above. It's twelve noon. Tourists and residents climb an intersecting staircase from the street below to the Citadel entrance above.

The flâneur is interested in moving through, so he mostly ignores these passersby. He moves around them in the plaza where the two paths intersect. He could rest on a distant bench. He remembers the other day when he ran into an old friend at this very spot. The flâneur enjoys the openness of the hillside, the visibility it allows, and the distance he can maintain if he so chooses.
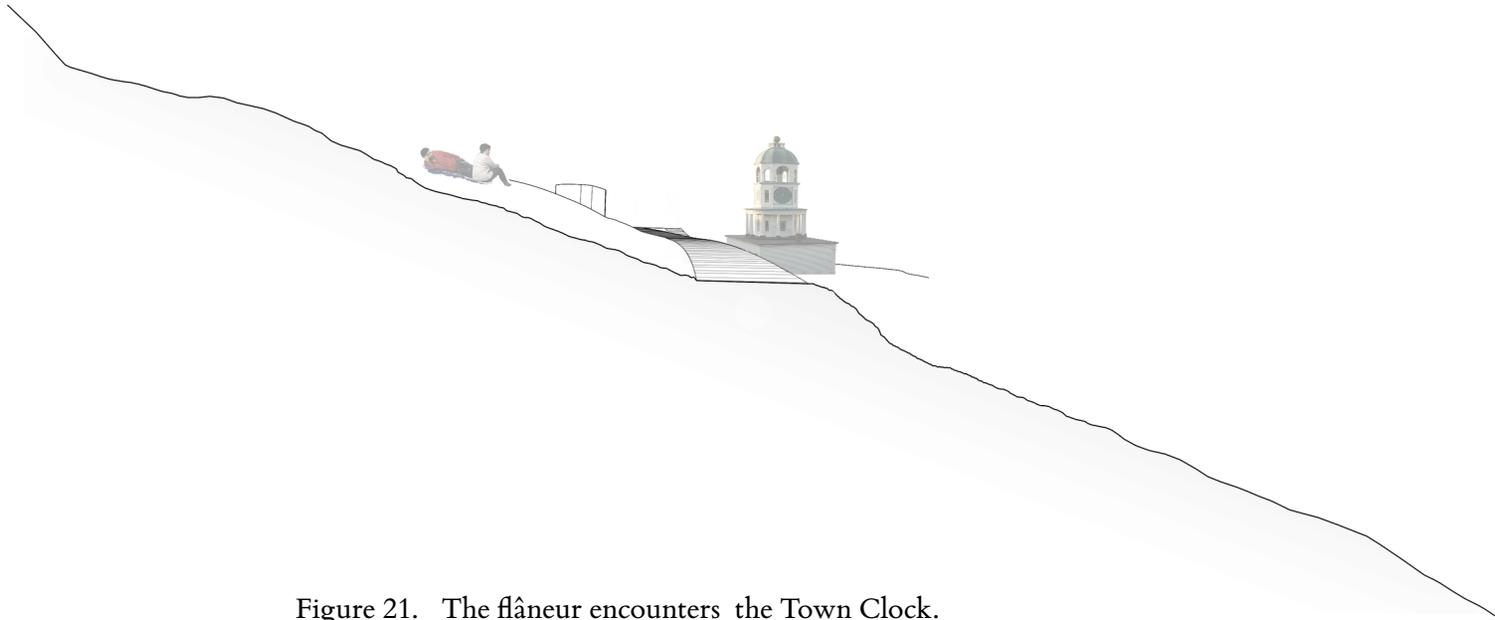
Figure 21.   The flâneur encounters the Town Clock.

Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre

—The promenade rounds the hill. It reaches its highest point at a plaza in front of the Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre. This high point allows the flâneur maximum visibility. He overlooks the flat Common grounds in the distance, and the sunken plaza of the art gallery below. He could turn around for one last look at the clock tower, but its image is fresh in his mind, and he doesn't bother.

The path itself is sparsely inhabited and featureless with the exception of benches in the distance. The flâneur notices activity in the Friendship Centre's plaza. Elders, some with mobility issues, spill out of the centre into the open air. The weather is fair, so people sit outside the centre's cafe, engaged in conversation and soaking up the sun.

These activities pull the flâneur out of his distracted state for a moment. He takes in the activities around him. Should he stop for a coffee? His attention shifts to a mass of trees in the distance that indicate the next stage of his journey.

He takes the most direct and level route to the willow tree— or he descends to the art gallery below.
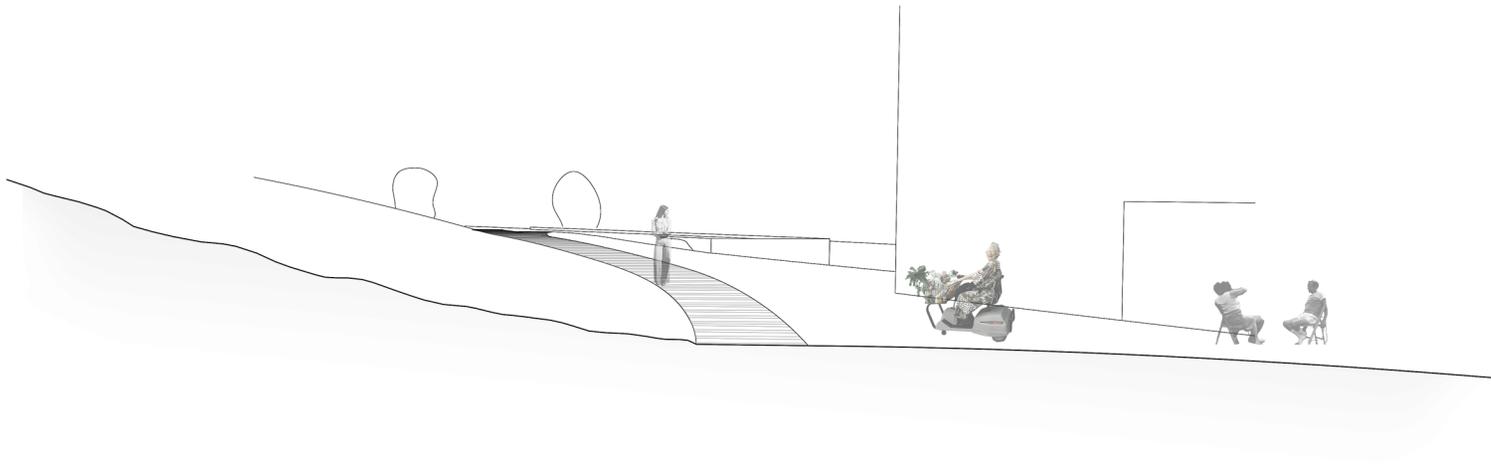
Figure 22.   The flâneur passes the plaza in front of the
            Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre and overlooks the
            AGNS and its sunken plaza.

Division

—The flâneur continues on the main promenade. The muffled sounds of car traffic filter over the parapet railing of the art gallery he knows is underneath him. He might wonder what is happening below. He might look over the edge for a moment. He might be paying more attention to the few people on the path with him. The trees in the distance become larger as he approaches the flatter section of the Common. The flâneur realizes he's walked 100 m and can't remember any of it.

—The flâneur takes the sunken path. He finds himself sandwiched within a series of parallel thresholds. On one side, he can see into a corridor and then a gallery of the AGNS. He knows the overpassing path is hiding behind the parapet above. Someone could peer over it at any moment. On the other side, a sidewalk continues alongside the street. Cyclists speed down an adjacent cycle path, followed by a layer of parked cars and finally the car traffic of Cogswell Avenue. The movement of people in the gallery are slow compared to the traffic on his other side. The flâneur feels an inertia pull him toward the underground world of the promenade, and he makes no effort to resist the impulse to enter.
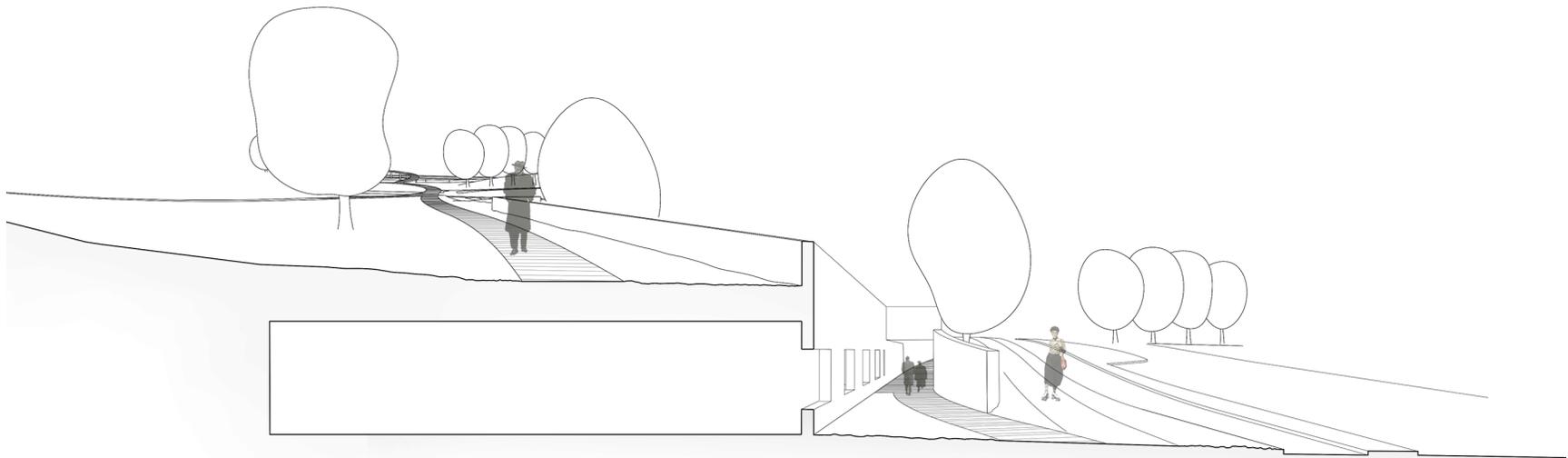
Figure 23. The flâneur walks toward the underground
entrance of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia— or
he walks on top of the AGNS toward a major
intersection and a plaza beyond.

Over- and Under-ground

—The flâneur encounters the entrance plaza in which a number of streets, walking paths, and bicycle paths meet. This plaza feels much more intense than his walk on Citadel Hill. He has arrived at the central Common. He's arrived where things happen.

—The flâneur crosses the underground lobby of the art gallery. Light from the outside world penetrates through windows that line the back of the stage of a grassy amphitheatre. The flâneur can see that this grassy outdoor room connects the floor of the lobby through a zero threshold in the curtain-wall, up the grassy slope to the main surface of the Common. The 3-metre-wide paving is the same as he has been walking on, so he knows that it can lead him to the willow tree or back the way he came. A group of women shelter themselves in the coolness of the lobby. The flâneur realizes he could drop off his things at the coat check and perambulate through the galleries for which there is no entry fee. He is under the ground. He sees multiple exits. The flâneur imagines the promise of shelter from winter wind, summer heat, the darkness of night. Should he stay here for a while? He wonders if he should have taken the more direct route above ground.
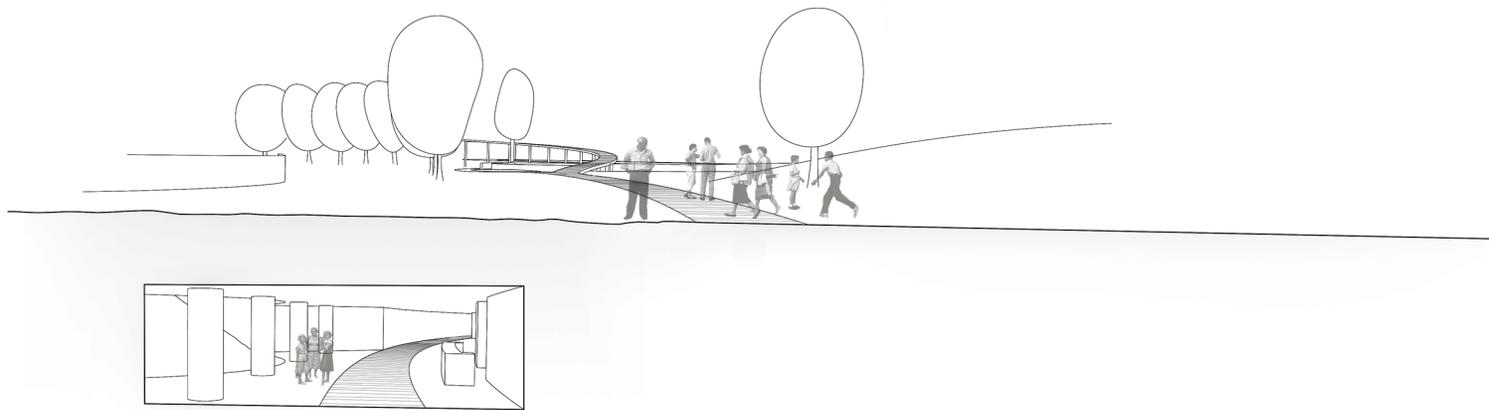
Figure 24. The flâneur enters the main Common on the surface— or he enters through an underground lobby.

Hubbub

—The flâneur encounters another fork in the promenade.

—He continues on the main branch of the promenade. A hubbub of sound drifts up from the beer garden. He thinks about stopping by to see if any of his friends are there. He takes the steps down to meet them, or he continues on his journey.

— The flâneur takes the canopy promenade. He ascends a gentle slope and the ground falls away beneath him. He is removed from any action on the ground. His experience is more like being on Citadel Hill. He can pass fellow strangers on the sparsely occupied path and briefly overlook the beer garden.

—Below ground, the flâneur exits the AGNS lobby to the open sky of a sunken plaza. He hears the hubbub of a beer garden that he can't quite see into. He sees people sitting outside the community kitchen and notices an apple orchard in the sunken centre of the skating oval above him. He remembers attending last year's Lebanese festival. The plaza was packed for days.
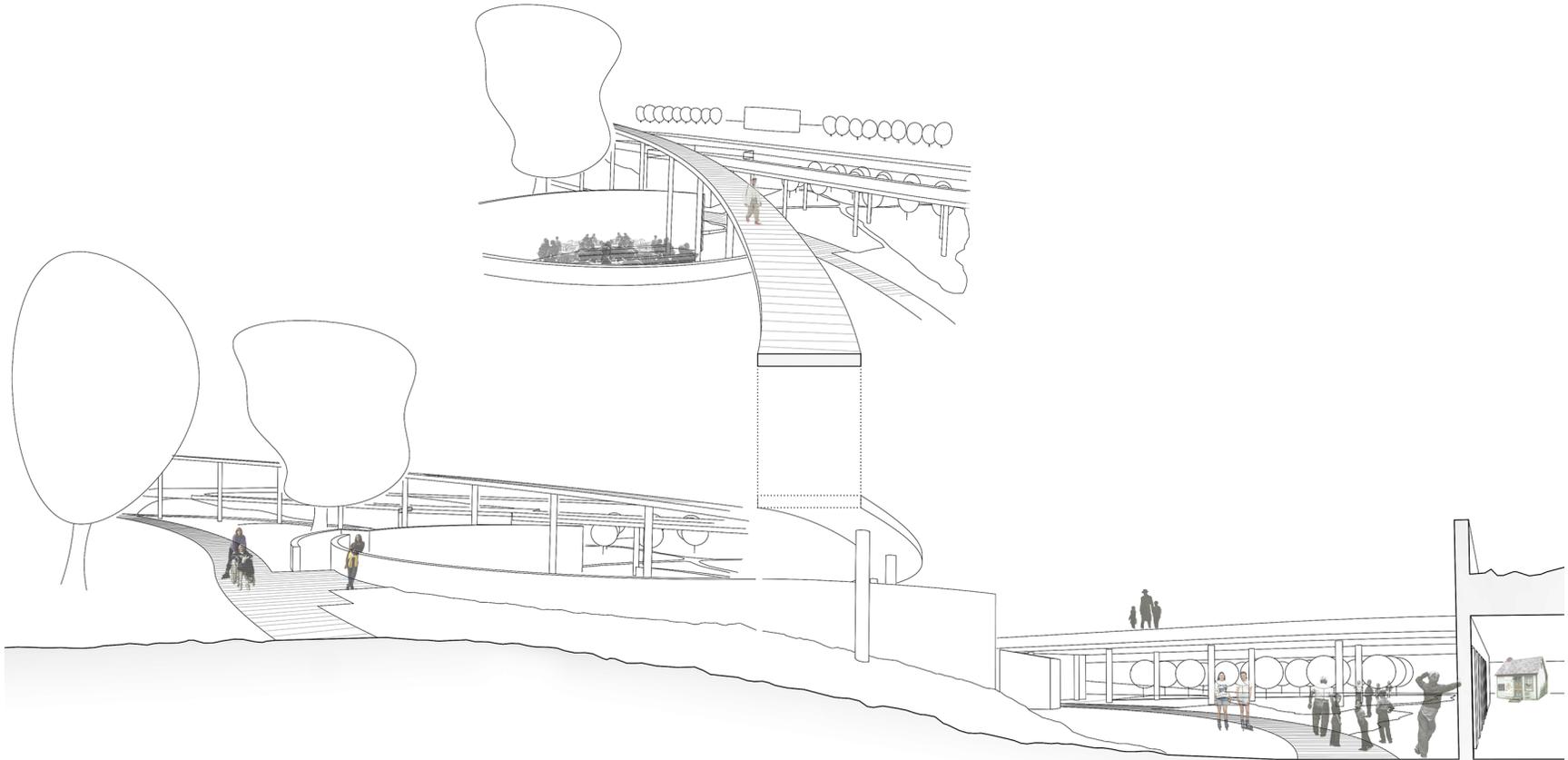
Figure 25. The flâneur walks beside the beer garden— or he walks into the treetops of the canopy promenade— or he emerges from the underground AGNS to find a sunken plaza. The intersection of so many rooms creates a hubbub.

Public Stage

—The flâneur is within the canopy of trees. From on top of the public stage, he can overlook gatherings below. The tower in the distance provides an observation level that exceeds the tallest trees, and is fully removed from activity on the ground. There might be a gathering of people up there. People in the shared act of observing, in the same way that those on the brow of the citadel look out over the city, the mouth of the harbour, to the ocean beyond.

—The flâneur is on the ground. He can't decide if he wants to walk in front of the stage or take the alternate route that avoids the it. The stage is empty, so he makes a flippant choice. The stage is occupied by an impromptu speaker, by a group of musicians. His choice is more interesting. Should he pause within the small crowd gathered in front of the stage? Should he pause at one of the more remote areas to gaze from a distance?
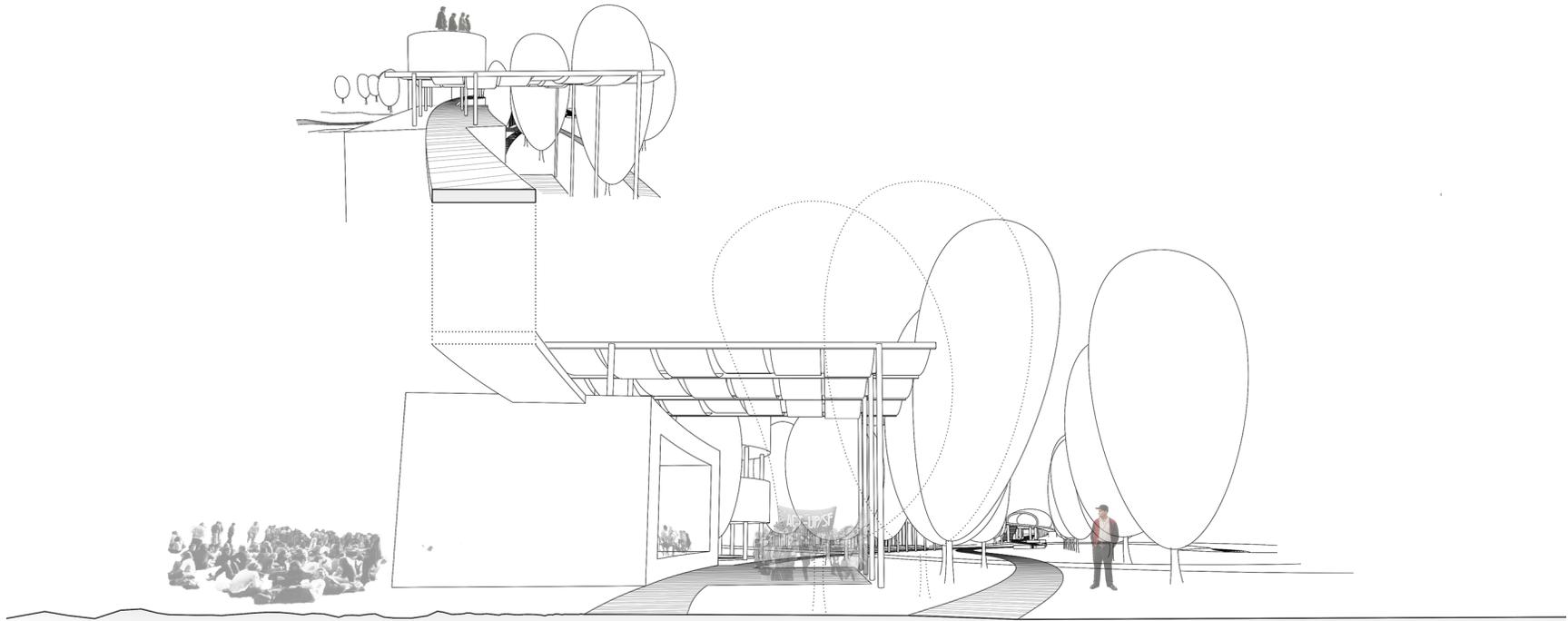
Figure 26.   The flâneur encounters the public stage on the
              ground— or he avoids the stage by taking a
              parallel path— or he walks to the roof of the stage,
              which is an elevated plaza.

Music and Youth

The flâneur is on the ground. The main promenade passes through a loggia in which a varied crowd of people sit. They listen to music filtering from the music cooperative behind them. It's an *engawa*-type condition with sliding doors and a zero threshold. Right now, the glass doors are closed. It reminds him of time he spent in Japan. The music today is a battle of teen-aged bands. It's a jam session of Halifax's most talented. It's a ukulele orchestra. The flâneur pauses for a second and wonders if he should sit down for a minute among these relaxed strangers.

—The flâneur in the canopy encounters the "street front" of the youth centre. He can look down at the skatepark, left into the youth centre, or directly into the path in front of him. He's 14 years old, so he stops out of interest. He's 65, so he walks with apprehension. An awkward confrontation with gathered adolescents ensues. Everyone is overcome with suspicion, curiosity, indifference, and a moment of mutual recognition.
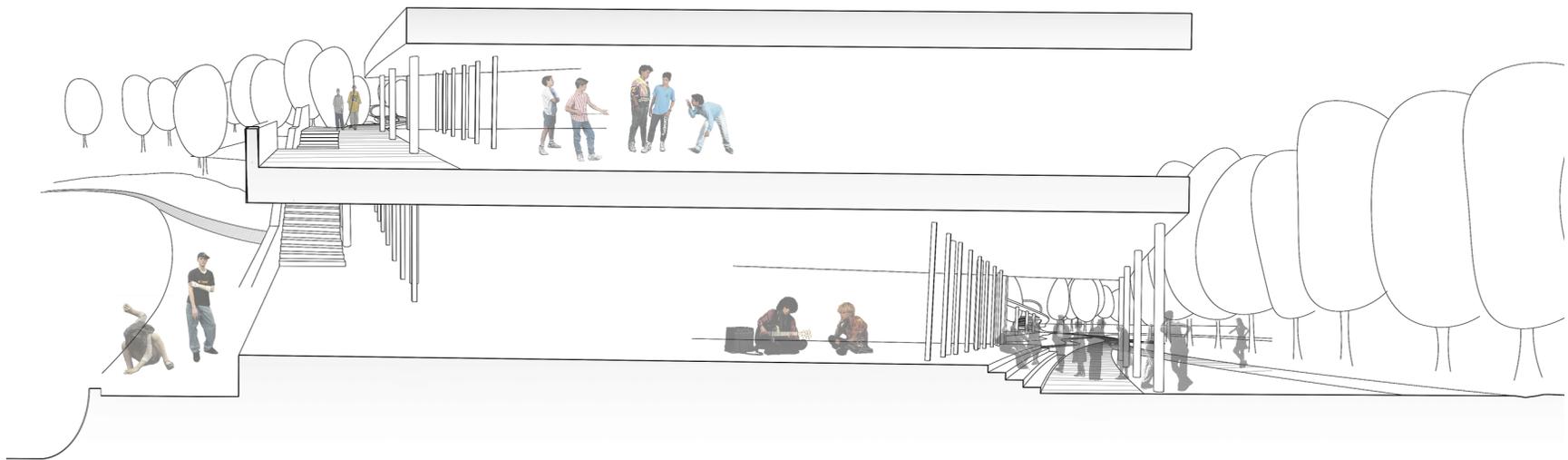
Figure 27.   The flâneur passes through a loggia where music
drifts from within the building— or he encounters
the youth centre entrance with a view over the
skate park and much of the Common.

Play

The flâneur approaches the sound of the gently moving Freshwater Brook. He leaves the promenade for a second to touch the cool water. He knows he could follow its paver-lined edges on a tangential adventure. He could save the willow tree destination for later. From across the stream, he hears the sounds and sees the movement of children playing in the distance. Parents sit on benches in the mid-ground so he can gaze upon the lively scene for second without eliciting unfounded fears of stranger danger. He returns to the promenade to cross the stream on its bridge and passes by the playground on his way to the end of the promenade.

—The flâneur is in the canopy and can hear activity below, but sees none of it. He could peer over the edge for a time, but he can just as easily stare into the horizon or watch the clouds for a second. There are no benches here, so the path suggests a gentle and continuous descent from the treetops.
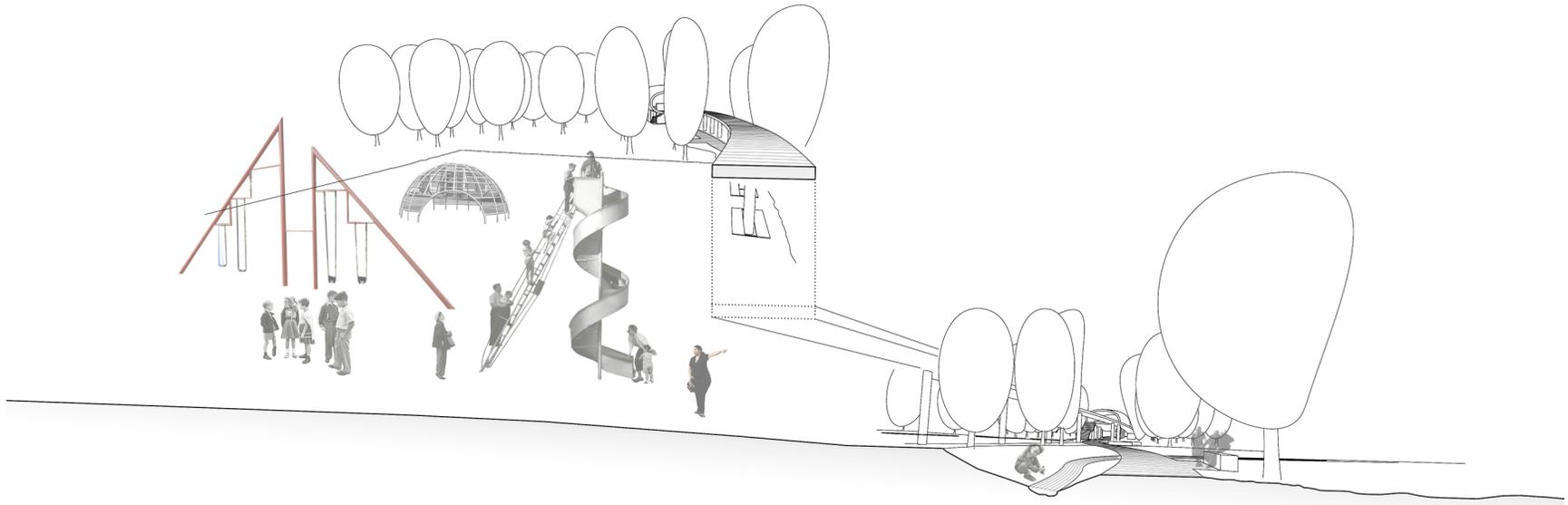
Figure 28. The flâneur crosses the brook to the other side
where children play— or he walks through the
treetops immersed in playground chatter.

Hall and Willow Tree

—The flâneur encounters the elevated forecourt of the community hall. He can see through the large windows on its front and back like a telescope pointed out of the Common. He sees a glimpse of the willow tree in the distance. Bingo ends and the patrons empty out into the forecourt in waves. A high school prom is about to begin, a community dinner is underway. Tickets are 20 dollars. The flâneur wonders if he is hungry.

—The flâneur encounters the underside of the community hall. It is sheltered from the rain and sun, but the curved shape of the building allow plenty of light to filter in. It does not feel foreboding. He glimpses the willow tree in the distance. There is no question. It's time to finish his journey. It's time to head home.

Figure 29. The flâneur passes under the hall, which frames
his exit from the Common to the willow tree in the

distance— or he arrives at a raised plaza in front of the
hall with the willow tree beyond.

Citizen

The citizen is a person who is fully engaged within one of the plural publics of the new Halifax Common design. Unlike the flâneur, the citizen can and does see her peers and the individuals around her. She speaks and listens to the speeches of others. She is engaged in protest, community building, debate, and other forms of Arendtian action. Unlike the drift of the flâneur, the citizen is rooted in a particular place at a particular moment in time. She is rooted in the peculiarity of her situation. This narrative will show how the citizen occupies a number of the proposal's gathered rooms, engaged in various publics within those rooms. It will show how, in that engagement, the citizen can recognize the worth and dignity of those around her. These stories do not prove that her state of engagement stems from certain architectural conditions. They illustrate a plausible state of engagement within the architectural conditions that I describe.

The citizen is invariably surrounded by more distracted persons, some distracted to the point of being flâneurs. They serve as a counterpoint to her engagement. The balance of her focus with these others illustrates Baird's supposition that while most people are distracted for much of the time, moments of focus and engagement are always possible in a healthy pluralist public.

Autumn

It's early October.

—The citizen activist stands on a patio in the sunken centre of the skating oval. She is giving a talk on food security to a community group. As she speaks, they peel potatoes freshly dug from the community garden. She is engaged fully in those who are around her and fails to notice roller skaters and skateboarders who lackadaisically roll around the oval overlooking the garden. These onlookers could pause and listen to the citizen engaged in speech. They could descend through the community garden from the end where it meets the skating surface to where the citizen stands in front of the kitchen. A child trips and falls into a garden bed. A middle-aged man is incensed that she has flattened his lettuce. A staff member reminds the man of the time he spilled a whole wheelbarrow of soil onto the skating surface. Twenty minutes later, the gardener shares conversation and peas from the pod with a stranger. In indignation and admiration, these people are seeing each other as human. Meanwhile the citizen is giving her impassioned speech while others peel potatoes and listen.

—In the adjacent apple orchard and sculpture court, the citizen is an artist. She unloads a truckload of clay onto old plywood. The orchard has the potential for harvest,

but today its role its to stage the citizen's work. In plain view of anyone, she works on a sculptural installation of raw clay. She intends the work to degrade over time in the elements. Some passersby chat with her while she works. When she leaves for the day, there is the potential of vandalism to add its own dimension to her art. A glass threshold separates her from the AGNS's permanent collection of Maude Lewis's paintings, which represents an idyllic notion of Nova Scotia and its art. Her diminutive house, hand painted all over, sits at the centre of the exhibit, as if at the edge of the orchard where the citizen as artist makes her statement.

—To the west, the citizen is a concerned citizen. She meets with others in a dialogue centre that sits in a lonesome grassy area. Here, this thoughtful citizen engages in careful discussion about the issues of the day. Perhaps the topic is rather academic, or pertinent to action that can be taken now. She might be engaged in debate with other citizens or planning a protest together with them. The round form of the dialogue centre creates a focus that occupies the centre of the room, and citizens gather in engagement around it.

Winter

It's mid December.

—The first snow lays on the ground. The citizen is

standing in a crowd in front of the Common stage, where a union leader makes a speech. She holds a placard and is ready to march down the hill to the provincial legislature. Her compatriots likewise hold placards, and although they are now facing the stage, they stand openly in the gaze of bystanders. These bystanders judge the protesters or at least stare in curiosity, pausing to linger on the path. It is unlikely that they join them, unless they happen to believe in the particular cause.

—The citizens are absent from the beer garden. Everyone else is engaged in their particular situation, but they are more interested in relaxation than Arendtian action. Space heaters and the enclosure of the pit allows the crowd to enjoy a micro climate in the outdoor room, even in winter weather.

—The citizen engages with others at the fire pit beneath the observation tower. They are discussing politics in front of a warm flame. Other conversations take place in nearby groups. The citizen is open to the gaze of passersby, but she is too engaged in her companions and their conversation to take notice. When a woman with a loud voice does break her concentration, the citizen engages with that person. Perhaps she tells her off, or simply joins her conversation.

—The citizen is a musician. She spends time with

other musicians in the coop in the full view of anyone passing by. The performative nature of this effort gives a public flavour to what might normally be a private pursuit. Above, adolescents are practicing an emergent publicness in the youth centre. They can overlook the activity below without being seen from below, but those walking on the canopy promenade are able to observe their observing.

Spring

It's late May.

—The citizen skateboards with her adolescent peers. The skate park is in the full view of anyone, so her performance presents a great risk of humiliation, but a tempting opportunity for glory. The adolescent citizen has an Arendtian moment. She builds up speed on the far side of the skate park, shoots under the pedestrian bridge and though a number of ramps and street skating features. As a final move, she has a choice. Should she slide across the rim of the final quarter-pipe or not? If she takes this risk and falls, she lands in Freshwater Brook and her clothes become completely soaked. She risks destroying the smart phone in her pocket. The choice is made. She lingers on the rim for its full length, appearing fully in control, and comes to rest on the flat of the park in full view of her peers. She resists smiling, and feels the admiration of those around her. Passersby

on the bridge over the skate probably missed her feat, but may have stopped to take notice.

—Across the stream, a future citizen plays with her childhood peers. She assesses the risks of falling as she and her friends climb trees and play equipment. Their parents may or may not keep a close eye on them from the sideline. The playground is visible from the main promenade and from the canopy walk, so the future citizen can be seen by and can see numerous passersby. The lesson is that to be in public carries risks, but it also offers the reward of acknowledging others and being acknowledged by them.

Chapter Three: Conclusion

Fostering an architecture for plurality in the Halifax Common is ambitious and perhaps impossible. I have addressed this challenge in a speculative redesign of the Common by applying the limited concept of "gathered rooms" to the material facts of the site. In the design process, I relegated these physical aspects as well as building materials to the second step. The first step was to treat program as a material and to place, size, and gather rooms while keeping in mind how plural publics might form within them. This process included asking where and how people might want to gather. I asked where a public protest might begin, and what rooms should go near a community garden. I asked if a path should intersect a playground or a skate park. Many of these kinds of questions led to programmatic choices that had to do more than simply lay out activities or provide a new spacial order. These choices needed to balance the urban needs for mobility, history, and plurality. These choices needed to provide the architectural qualities of visibility, continuity and propinquity, qualities that encourage individuals to contend with the publicity of the Common. These choices needed to shape the soul of the institution itself.

The Common began as an idea to provide equal access to agricultural land, but now it has the opportunity to fulfil a different role. It could be the institution that

provides universal access to public rooms where plural publics might form. This Common would allow for a plurality in which each person has the opportunity to be her best self. Each person would be able to see others as humans, worthy of dignity. It is true that such an architecture may be impossible, but it is also true that the reward of such an architecture is too great to ignore.

Endnotes

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 57.

2. Ibid., 50.

3. George Baird, *Public Space: Cultural/political Theory; Street Photography* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2011), 51.

4. Ibid., 52.

5. Ibid., 97-99.

6. Steven Holl, *Parallax* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2000), 346.

7. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 50.

8. Ibid., 57.

9. Ibid.

10. Hannah Arendt, "Hannah Arendt im gespräch mit Günter Gaus," interview by Günter Gaus, Zur Person, produced by Ingeborg Wurster (Mainz, West Germany: Zweite Deutsche Fernsehen, 1964).

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 5.

14. Ibid., 57.

15. Ibid., 7.

16. Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 80.

17. Baird, *Public Space,* 51.

18. Ibid., 52.

19. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 241.

20. Estelle Murail, "A body passes by: the flâneur and the senses in nineteenth-century London and Paris," *The Senses and Society* 12, no. 2 (2017): 162.

21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 162.

22. Baird, *Public Space,* 98.

23. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 57.

24. Ibid., 5.

25. Baird, *Public Space,* 116.

26. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet,* act 1, sc. 1.

27. Ibid.

28. Baird, *Public Space,* 106.

29. Ibid., 115-16.

30. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 198.

31. Baird, *Public Space,* 10.

32. Baird, *Space of Appearance*, 347.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Steven Holl, *Urbanisms: Working with Doubt* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 13.

36. Ibid.

37. Steven Holl, *Anchoring: Selected Projects, 1975-1991*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989), 12.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Baird, *Space of Appearance*, 314.

41. Arendt, "Interview."

42. Holl, *Anchoring*, 12.

43. Holl, *Parallax,* 346.

44. Holl, *Anchoring*, 12.

45. Parks Canada, *Halifax Citadel National Historic Site* (2018), https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/ns/halifax.

46. British North America, Nova Scotia, "Halifax Common Crown Grant," (1763), in *Nova Scotia Land Grants*, Old Book 3, 166-67.

47. Friends of the Halifax Common, *Celebrate the Common 250* (Halifax: co.&co. design, 2013), 2.

48. Janet Knox, quoted in *Nova Scotia Health Authority* (2018). http://www.nshealth.ca/news/next-stepsqeii-new-generation-project-announced.

49. Canada, Nova Scotia, *An Act to Provide for the Protection of Cemeteries*, 1st Sess., 57th Assembly (1998), https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/bills-statutes/bills/assembly-57-session-1/bill-58.

50. The proposal for a new Mi'kmaw Freindship Centre was completed by Ekistics Planning and Design, now rebranded as Fathom Studio. See Fathom Studio, *Mi'kmaw Freindship Centre* (2019), https://fathomstudio.ca/our-work/mikmaw-native-friendship-centre.

51. Baird, *Space of Appearance*, 18.

52. Ibid.

53. Friends, *Celebrate the Common*, 2.

54. Baird, *Space of Appearance*, 314.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 323.

57. Steven Holl, *Intertwining: Selected Projects 1989-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 11.

58. Baird, *Space of Appearance*, 334.

59. Holl, *Anchoring*, 12.

60. Bernard Tschumi, quoted in Ana Miljacki, Amanda Reeser Lawrence and Ashley Shafer, "2 Architects / 10 Questions / on Program / Rem Koolhaas + Bernard Tschumi," *Praxis* 8 (2006): 6-15.

61. Richard Neutra, *Mystery and Realities of the Site: Richard Neutra on Building* (Scarsdale, NY: Morgan, 1951),22.

62. David Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 87.

63. Ibid., 91.

64. Ibid., 113.

65. Canada, Natural Resources Canada, *The Origin of Halifax Harbour* (2010), http://www.bedfordbasin.ca/halifaxharbour/origin_halifax_harbour-eng.php.

66. Ibid.

67. Friends, *Celebrate the Common*, 2.

68. The author visited the newly open Cheonggyecheon project many times in 2005 and 2006. He observed that the water at the source of the river was clear and smelled slightly of chlorine.

69. Charles Garnier, quoted in David van Zanten, "Architectural Composition at the Ecole des Beaux-arts, from Charles Percier to Charles Garnier," in *The Architecture of the Ecole des Beaux-arts*, ed. Arthur Drexler (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 268.

70. Jan Gehl, *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold),10.

71. Murail, "A body passes by," 162.

72. Benjamin, "Work of Art," 241.

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