Cracking the Concrete
A   Search   for   PLACE   at   the   Suburban   Shopping   Mall

by Kirstie Sheldon

A Practicum Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Landscape Architecture

Department of Landscape Architecture
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CRACKING THE CONCRETE:
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KIRSTIE SHELDON

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

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of

Master of Landscape Architecture

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Dedicated to the memory of Carl R. Nelson Jr.

...for his inspiration and his honesty,
and for showing me where to get the best cup of cappuccino in Rome.

Thirty Second Sketch, by Carl, at the Giardino Giusti, in Verona Italy, 11 June 1998

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ABSTRACT

Suburbia is a perplexing spatial and social phenomenon. It is bewildering that a place of such immense social importance has been allowed to evolve into something that is continually criticized as placeless in educated design circles. The subject of the North American suburban condition has been saturated with critical theory and proposals for improving its spatial and social quality. A common criticism is that suburbs lack the social and cultural significance of urban environments. Yet many new suburbs (and their various components) continue to be designed in the ubiquitous, monotonous style we have become accustomed to. There is a lack of thought toward the very element that defines the culture of an urban environment, public space. Because the North American landscape today is dominated by suburban development, the pressing issue is no longer how to design new and improved suburbs, but how to create meaningful public open space in the ones that exist.

A component of the existing suburbs that begs for closer inspection in this manner is the suburban regional shopping centre. Contemporary popular media demonstrates the increasing social relevance of the shopping mall in post modern culture. The appearance of the suburban shopping mall as the central location in numerous popular movies speaks to the emergent role of the mall as a setting for social interaction, beyond consumerism, to occur. The movies demonstrate how the shopping mall is more than a shell for commerce, it is an essential part of the cultural and social experience of the suburbs. In an inreasingly consumerist culture suburban malls have been described as the new town centres, with suburbs now being built around the malls. (Silverstone, 1997, p. 8) If shopping malls are indeed beginning to take on the role of new town centres in a social and cultural sense, they must also do the same in the physical and spatial sense.

The driving force behind suburban commercial development is typically economic, and their standardized forms echo this. Unfortunately, most architects and landscape architects have not willingly accepted the shopping mall as a legitimate building type that is worthy of their design expertise. Thus developers have found a structural and aesthetic formula for commercial success and have proceeded to replicate it shamelessly. These monolithic structures, moated by an expanse of asphalt parking, have invaded the suburban landscape with little conscience of their aesthetic, social or ecological effects on the surrounding community. Much has been written about the interior shopping center design, but rarely has the design of the exterior environment been discussed. This

lack of regard is evident in the placelessness of the exterior environment of most suburban shopping centers. Upon the initial conception of these controlled commercial environments in the suburbs, one of the primary design intentions was to recreate "the one thing missing from the suburbs, the city". (Margaret Crawford "The World in a Shopping Mall" in Sorkin, 1992, p. 22) **Why is it then that the prospect of creating meaningful public open space, the cornerstone of the urban setting, within the suburban commercial environment has been largely ignored? Why is it simply accepted that the exterior of commercial environments be a parking lot and nothing more? At present, the immense size of these developments and the frequency with which they appear in the North American landscape renders them impossible to ignore any longer. Closer consideration is necessary into creating a commercial environment that contributes to the suburban condition in a more significant way. As shopping malls have become pseudo-recreation centers for the suburbs, there is an opportunity to develop meaningful public open space in these environments.**

This study develops strategies for the suburban commercial environment that challenge the spatial and social praxis of suburban shopping centre site design, through the reconsideration of the exterior conditions of an existing regional shopping center in a suburban location. The primary goal is to generate a sense of place, an emotive space that is relevant to the suburban environment in which it exists. This study challenges the legibility of the regional shopping center within a suburban fabric, by focusing on the physical and social presence of the center in the surrounding community. This study challenges the mundane spatial nature of parking, an seeks an effective method of merging the circulation needs of the automobile and the pedestrian in the parking environment. The process is a search for a new approach for large-scale suburban commercial development, one that is adaptable to projects of a similar typology in a diferent locale. A new Suburban Shopping Centre Park, which strengthens the capacity of the mall as a social space and begins to establish an identity, a sense of place for the suburbs. The practical application that is proposed here focuses on the insertion of public space into the typically private, or pseudo-public suburban realm, and is intended as a catalyst for future revival of the ailing form of regional shopping centres. The proposed redesign demonstrates a symbiotic relationship between pubilc open space and the suburban shopping mall.

"The potential for change in the suburbs is largely unexploited." (Rogers and Powers, 2000, p. 249) **This study, above all, explores that potential.**

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METHODS

In order to establish design goals and provide this exploration with a well-informed basis of criticism, background research for this practicum was performed from both a historical and theoretical foundation, through a comprehensive literature review. The development of placelessness in the suburban landscape with particular focus on commercial environments, parking, streets and open space was considered. A discussion of the history of the suburban commercial environment with consideration of the past, present and future conditions of this type of development and its social relevance set the stage for the practical application of this study.

The practical application of this study began with an analysis of the chosen study site, an existing suburban shopping mall, and its context. This analysis will include existing circulation and parking patterns, as well as lighting, signage and structural relationships. In addition to the site analysis a series of informal discussions will be conducted with various individuals involved with the existing mall, with a focus on personal interpretation of the development.

Inspired by the language of fragmentation (social and spatial) ubiquitous to suburban discourse, a second literature review was performed on the subject of Deconstruction as an alternative approach to spatial design. Background research on the philosophical underpinnings of Deconstruction was considered, with a focus on its relationship with the field of architecture. A critical review of deconstructionist architecture projects provided a conceptual basis for the spatial development of the design proposal. Deconstruction was considered not as an architectural style, but as a basis for challenging accepted practices of suburban spatial planning. Further consideration of the applicability of this theory of design to the particular issue and study site followed.

The synthesis of this research has been demonstrated in a design proposal for reinvigorating the study site. The proposal displays a site-specific reaction to creating place and identity in the suburban commercial environment, but is a strategy that may be adapted to various suburban commercial sites. The proposal is exhibited graphically through a series of plan, section and perspective drawings. The relevance of the design proposal in relation to the literature reviews is considered in the epilogue.

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a note about the title of this document...

*The title Cracking the Concrete is a double entendre.
In a metaphorical sense, it refers to the challenge or
reconsideration of the accepted suburban shopping
mall architectural typology. The act of cracking is the
demonstration of an alternative approach to the design of
these prototypical, or concrete, structures. It also refers to
the design concept employed in the practical application of
this study which involves the physical act of the cracking
of concrete site features in order to establish new spatial
relationships.*

a note about the character of this document...

*This document chronicles the long journey of this Landscape
Architecture Practicum. It has been organized in a linear
manner that is intended to convey the actual process of
arriving at the proposed design intervention as accurately
as possible. It should be noted, however, that this practicum
journey was not linear, and that it did not always move
foreward in a rational manner. There were many lateral
paths explored, some enriching the journey, and some that
simply prolonged it.*

*At the beginning of the journey, the literature research was
performed as a means to an end...for the express purpose
of arriving at a design solution. But the research took on
a life of its own, and for a long time the design portion of
this practicum was all but forgotten. It could only resurface
when the background research had been synthesized to a
level that could inspire and inform a physical solution to a
predominantly social ailment.*

*The document has thus been divided into three sections that
utilize the language of fragmentation, that is so common in
suburban discourse, in the section titles. The terms cracks,
fissures and chasms are used as editorial devises that link
the written document to the proposed design intervention.
Cracks are the investigation of the lack of place in suburbia.
Fissures are the process of searching for a means of creating
place in suburbia. Chasms are the presentation of a specific
design proposal that generates place in suburbia.*

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PREFACE

Why Consider a Suburban Shopping Mall?

This practicum began as an understanding of the suburban imperative through the visual narrative of film and television. It was to be attempt at grasping just what it is about suburbia, the cultural and sociological qualities of it, that entices people to want to live there. The suburban lifestyle is somewhat of a cultural phenomenon, dominating many aspects of contemporary media. Throughout this initial study of suburban media culture, the shopping mall appeared as a recurring theme. The study began to look more specifically at the suburban shopping mall and its social relevance to contemporary culture.

In a predominantly consumerist culture, the suburban shopping mall has developed an increased level of social relevance. The mall is more than a space of commerce, it is a social gathering space, an entertainment space and a recreational space, although centered on the activity of consumption. The shopping mall is one of our most successful contemporary public spaces due to its success of manifesting activity within our present urban situation of sprawl and low density. Unfortunately, the design professions have, in general, been loathe to engage the shopping mall as a legitimate architectural exercise. A 1993 arcticle by Jon Goss titled "The Magic of the Mall" reports the following charactersitics of contemporary culture:

- Shopping is the second most important leisure activity (after television watching).

- 1990 market research reported that people prefer shopping over sex.

- Time spent at shopping centres in North America follows only the time spent at home and at work/ school.

(Jon Goss in Mc Dowell,1997, p 266)

The emergence of the shopping mall as an important public space has been demonstrated through the modern medium of popular film. The movies Dawn of the Dead (1979), Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) and Mall Rats (1999) portray the mall as physical refuge and microcosm of society, as social hub and as entertainment space respectively. Excerpts from these movies demonstrate a legitimization of the suburban shopping mall as more than a space of consumption. The study thus becomes a consideration of how the cultural relevance of the suburban shopping mall can inform a more socially responsible design for these suburban monuments.

A few scenes from the movie *Mall Rats*
(by Kevin Smith 1999)

Brodie and T.S. entering the mall.

Set-up: The two characters (Brodie and T.S.) have recently been dumped by their girlfriends…

Brodie – "Why are we trying to figure out where we went
        wrong?"
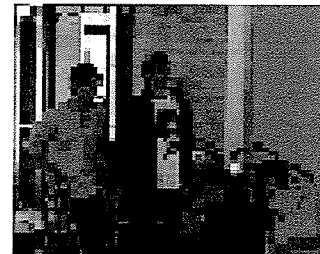**T.S.** – "We nailed it, in your case."
Brodie – "There is something out there that can help ease our
        simultaneous double loss."
T.S. – "Ritual suicide ?"
Brodie – "No, you idiot ! The f***in' mall !"
T.S. – "I prefer ritual suicide."
Brodie – "Come on, it'll be great. They have these new cookies
        at the cookie stand. They're awesome."

(entering the mall)

Brodie – "I love the smell of commerce in the morning…"

Set-up: T.S. realizes his ex-girlfriend is going to be in a dating game show at the mall...

T.S. – [Sighs] could this week get any worse ? Now she's
        gonna be auctioned off on live T.V. from a mall.

Brodie – "Not a mall. *The mall.* Show some respect."

Set-up: Brodie finds his ex-girlfriend Rene at the mall...

Brodie – "Okay, okay, I see you wanna continue with this
        charade of ending our union. Fine, I'll play
        along. If we're divorced, we're gonna have to
        divide our possessions."
Rene – "What the hell are you talking about?"
...
Brodie – "Let's talk about a schedule. For visitation rights?"
Rene – "For what?"
Brodie – "For the mall. You can have the odd days, I'll take
        the even days and weekends.When there's any special
        function like a sidewalk sale..."

Brodie and Rene discussing visitation rights for the mall.

A Scene from the movie *Dawn of the Dead*
(by George A. Romero   1979)

Set up: On a whim, they (Roger, Fran and Stephen) drop the helicopter on top of a gigantic indoor mall. The mall is totally deserted, except for the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of living dead roaming the halls and stores. Flying over the complex they can see that the dead are wandering aimlessly about the parking lot, not really knowing why they choose to come here. The dead gaze into store windows, claw mindlessly at material items, and shuffle through the corridors with no real sense of purpose...

Fran – "What the hell is it?"
Stephen – "Looks like a shopping centre, one of those big indoor malls."
Fran – "What are they doing? Why do they come here?"
Stephen – "Some sort of instinct, a memory of what they used to do. This was an important place in their lives."

(http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/8458/dawn.html)

Zombies (the 'undead') wandering in the mall parking lot

A Scene from the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*
(by Cameron Crowe   1982)

Set-up: opening shot...

FADE IN:
EXT. RIDGEMONT CENTER MALL – NIGHT

From the outside parking lot it looks like an enormous beached whale. It is the prime hangout for all the teenagers in the area. Kids mill around the parking lot or stand by the mall entrance.

INT. RIDGEMONT CENTER MALL

There are three levels of stores underneath a massive fluorescent roof. Different music comes from each store. It looks seventies-modern, but already used and run-down. Groups of kids cruise the mall, eyeing each other and acting cool.

(http://sfy.iv.ru/scripts.html?range=f)

Sherman Oaks Galleria (aka Ridgemont Center Mall)

CRACKS

(Background)

crack

noun   3a. a narrow opening; formed by a break.
        b. a partial fracture, with the parts still
           joined.

verb   1. break without a complete separation of the
        parts.

(The Canadian Oxford Compact Dictionary)

A LACK OF PLACE

"Among critics of suburbia, it's a common refrain: the sense of placelessness. But the suburban dream has always valued space above place."

(Joe Chidley. "The New Burbs" in Maclean's, vol.110, no.29, July 21, 1997, p. 16)

Subdivisions, Miami Florida (image from Girling and Helphand)

Place and Placelessness

The original impetus of the flight from the city to the suburbs was a desire for the best of both worlds, the urban and the rural, without the negative implications of either. The desire was for wide-open space, away from the density of the city, while maintaining many of the conveniences of urban living. This wish, however, "rarely recognized the need for the types of open space left behind, the community of street and public spaces". (Girling and Helphand, p. 1) A move to the suburbs meant an acquisition of private open space, and a forfeiting of public open space. The mass appeal of suburbia over the last five decades indicates this was considered a small sacrifice. People continued to heavily choose suburban over urban living and it did not take long for commerce and employment to follow them there. Leaving the suburbs today has become unnecessary as they have developed into cities of their own, providing most of the conveniences of urban living yet still missing the most important quality, a sense of place. The suburbs have, from the beginning, been a space in-between, struggling to achieve an identity. A disconnection with place is an undesirable side effect of life here, a life in a placeless place. To create a suburban landscape supportive of individual fulfillment and community life requires a more comprehensive approach to open space design than current practice, one that is rooted in place. (ibid., p 3)

It is useful, for the purpose of this discussion, to expand upon 'place' and 'placelessness'. Lucy Lippard, in her book The Lure of the Local, contends that place arises from a connection with the surroundings, and depends upon lived experience and a topographical intimacy. (Lippard, p.33) A sense of place is a product of both the physical setting and human experience and is fundamental to human communities, as an expression of the personal and local. (Cowie, p 52) A sense of place is a product of community expression, in the sense that a home is a product of personal expression. The décor of one's house is an extension of their singular personality, and the sense of place

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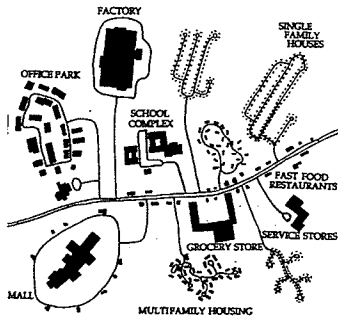
typical suburban zoning practice
(image from Kunstler, 1996, p 109)

of a community is an expression of the character of that community. A sense of place develops from an authentic attitude toward spatial design. Placelessness develops from an inauthentic attitude toward spatial design, the effect of today's global culture. Placeless spaces ignore the physical, historical and cultural context in which they exist. They lack a distinct identity, and are often rooted in a particular style rather than the region in which they exist. They may imitate another place but are not a place themselves, and are interchangeable in locations across the globe. (McDowell, 1997, p.260) Placeless spaces are the mundane environments we encounter everyday without ever seeing. Placeless spaces are not memorable and do not provoke emotion. James Howard Kunstler asserts that the most essential act of overcoming placelessness is to challenge existing suburban zoning laws. Suburban zoning separates human activities into remote locations, resulting in suburban sprawl. (Kunstler, 1996, p 109-112)

Identity

Identity is a key concept in creating a sense of place. The lack of identity that is characteristic of today's suburbs provides the opportunity for a mediocre human experience that is possible anywhere in North America. The public sphere in the suburbs is dominated by a commercialism that has removed all sense of place from the landscape. Public space in the suburbs is generally limited to the quasi-public common spaces of suburban shopping malls. Architect Jon Jerde questions what public spaces, plazas, parks or public squares, have been built in major cities over the past fifty years? He asserts that postmodern culture is developing a community of consumers. (Klein, in Bradbury, 1999, p.114) Suburbanites have become consumers more than citizens, their personal identity defined by what they possess. The common good is non-existent, as the individual is highly favored over the group. This dominance

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of the private over the public in the suburban lifestyle is reflected in the physicality of the suburban landscape. "In America, the last vestiges of community are a parade, a football game and a shopping center." (Jon Jerde in ibid., p. 100) Public open space is deemed unnecessary because suburbia offers direct access to nature via private open space. A sense of community has been lost and long forgotten, with little interaction occurring between residents. There is a uniform sameness in the suburban design across North America that is a result of a global design formula that is profitable for developers, especially for the main public domain of suburbia, the suburban shopping mall. A 'regional' mall in an Ottawa suburb is difficult to distinguish from one in a Calgary suburb, despite the physical and cultural differences of the locale. There is no connection to place, to context, historical, cultural or physical, only placelessness exists. The monolithic proportions of shopping malls render them a dominant physical presence in communities, transferring the sense of placelessness they portray to the community as a whole and contributing to the lack of place so criticized in suburbia.

There have been attempts in the past twenty years at suburban placemaking. The most highly documented of these is the New Urbanist movement, championed by Andres Duaney and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk with their traditional neighborhood designs for the Florida communities of Seaside and Celebration. These communities favour the pedestrian over the automobile, emulating historical American town planning practices where the walk from the edge to the center of the community is within five minutes. "Cars parked parallel-wise line these streets, as they might in any small town. Otherwise, there are no parking lots or special accommodation for cars." (Kunstler, 1993, p 253) Strict design codes have been established to maintain the desired Victorian/Colonial character of the neighborhoods. Duaney and Plater-Zyberk have been criticized as neotraditionalists who use overt sentimentalism in their design sketches and in the character of their designs, which are essentially commercial ventures. Community is marketed as

commodity. (Cowie, 2002, p 63) **This may be true, but the intentions of the designers are genuine.**

"Their mission is to alert us to the consequences of pursuing this future (of suburban sprawl) by emphasizing the cost at which conveniences such as easy mobility and a preference for privacy over sociability have been purchased."

(Krieger, 1992, p 10)

Duaney and Plater-Zyberk, along with Peter Calthorpe in his Pedestrian Pockets, postulated through their designs that pedestrian friendly communities would effectively reduce the frequency of automobile trips, increasing the social life of the community. (Girling and Helphand, 1994, p 173) **The sense of community in these developments is highly idealized. This is most effectively measured by the use of Seaside as the perfect neighborhood setting for the highly satirical 1998 movie *The Truman Show*. The movie portrays the ideal life of the lead character, in his ideal community with his ideal wife and ideal job. The ideal life, however, is completely fabricated, and the lead character realizes that he lives on a sound stage (essentially a bubble enclosing the community of Seaside) and his entire life has been orchestrated for the sheer viewing pleasure of millions of Americans. His friends, even his wife, are all actors. Nothing is real. In the end the central character risks his life in an attempt to escape his 'ideal existence' and experience an authentic life. This movie is a bold comment on the nature of the design of traditional neighborhood developments such as Seaside as commercial, idealized, inauthentic places. The New Urbanist approach of utilizing the past to correct the suburban planning ills of the present and future is perhaps not the most relevant method of generating an authentic place. Today's suburbs require a more contemporary approach that is rooted in a specific, local contextual character. The approach to public open space must be innovative, incorporating the necessities of**
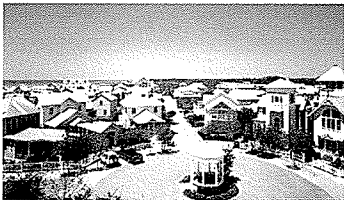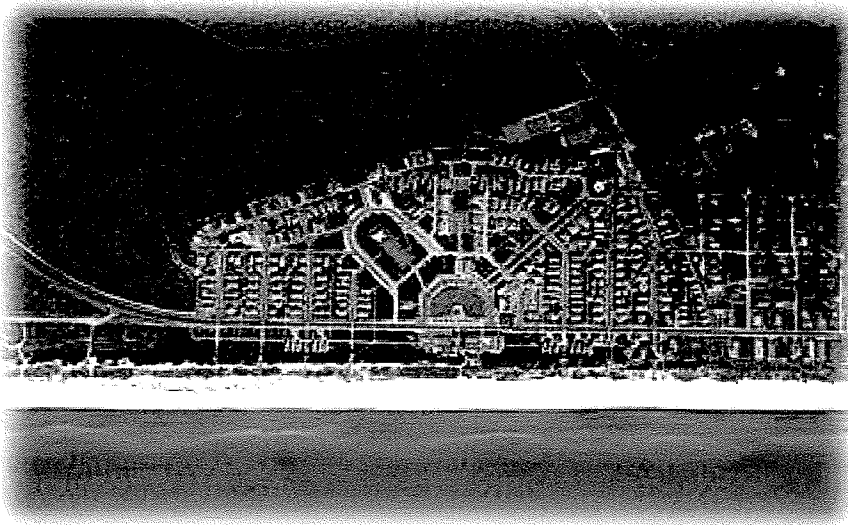

Seaside, Florida
(photo from www.eslarp.uiuc.edu)

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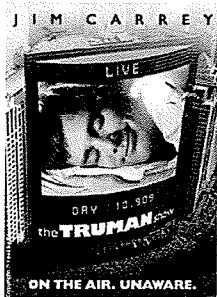
the everyday such as parking (which, as stated above is largely ignored in New Urbanist designs) with human scaled, place specific design. "Altogether, though, Seaside works as it was intended. It proves most of its major points: that buildings must be used to define public space, and that a public realm of quality makes the difference between a real town and a mere housing development; that building to the human scale nourishes the human spirit; that people desperately want to be able to walk to shopping, and that shopping does not ruin neighborhoods; that streets can be designed for human beings and cars to share equitably. Otherwise, Seaside ought to be regarded as an experiment in progress." (Kunstler, 1996, pp151-152)

To design new communities that attempt to minimize the automobile is a valid approach, however, suburbs that do not do this are already in existence across the continent, and something must be done to improve the quality of life in these places.

aerial view of Seaside, Florida by Andres Duaney and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk
(photo from www.theseasideinstitute.org)

A Paved Paradise – Streets, Parking and Open Space in Suburbia

A majority of the suburbs of today have been designed around the automobile and the freeway, and thus have lost spatial significance. Much of our surroundings are experienced through a windshield at more than sixty kilometres per hour, altering perceptions of what the built environment truly is. "Cars have deprived us of the skill of "good place-making" by helping people to escape their own reality." (Kunstler, 1993, p ?). Most people spend more time in their vehicles than they do in the exterior environment, thus the planning and construction of freeways and off-ramps is more significant than the consideration allotted to the design of quality public open space. Most people today are more than willing to sacrifice community and nature in favour of conveniences for the car. Suburban streets are wider than their urban counterparts and sidewalks are sparse. In many suburban settings pedestrians must settle for walking along on the street and dodging vehicles. Cyclists have the choice of riding on the road and annoying vehicle drivers, or riding on the sidewalks and annoying pedestrians. Buildings and houses are setback great distances from the street to allow for parking in front. An active, lively street character is sadly lacking in both residential and commercial environments.

"Despite all our protests against cars and their effects, we love to drive. To condemn the car outright denies most people's everyday experience. A more sophisticated response is needed."

(Bell, 2001, p. II)

The prevalence of the automobile has allowed the proliferation of the suburban zoning practice of a separation of activities that was previously discussed. Traditional town planning had stores located

in the center of town, side-by-side and close to the street, with curbside parking in front. There was an overlap of retail facilities and public open spaces, creating an active community street life. The suburban planning agenda, however, is focused on residential development. The location of commercial zones on the perimeter of suburban developments is intended to maintain the residential character of neighborhoods and keep high-volume traffic from residential streets. This agenda pays little attention to the public qualities of suburbia. It is a perpetual cycle, the nature of suburban shopping promotes the necessity of a private vehicle, while the necessity of the private vehicle pushes suburban shopping further away from the city as more and more land is needed to supply ample parking space. The result is commercial development that is segregated from the surrounding neighborhood. A 1992 survey reported only eleven of 111 respondents considered a regional shopping mall as part of their neighborhood. (Howe and Rabiega, 1992, p215) This is, in part, because the forbidding form of the mall disassociates it from the surrounding community, and secondly because residents cannot conveniently and safely walk to these developments. Before the appearance of the automobile, suburbs such as Olmstead and Vaux's Riverside, Illinois had nearly achieved the desired ideal balance of city and rural life. Life in these suburbs was not centered upon the automobile it was centered on the railroad. There were no super highways dividing communities and impossible to traverse on foot, and all residents enjoyed equal access to the city via the train. (Kunstler, 1993, p51)

The prominence of the individually owned automobile in today's cities has created a much different environment, one in which *parking* is the greatest determinant of spatial layout and appearance. A 2001 article in *Architecture* (Washington, D.C.) magazine by Jane Holtz Kay chronicles the history of parking, stretching back to the time of horse-drawn carriages. She points out that parking was an unforeseen side-effect of the wide accessibility of the privately owned automobile. "An outward (and most unpredictable thing) the motorcar brought was the
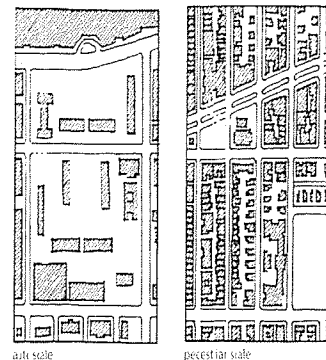
left: automobile scaled community
right: pedestrian scaled community

by Calthorpe and Asscociates

(image from Kelbaugh, 1997, p 120)

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need for its own storage." (Kay, 2001, p 76) **As the vehicle became more popular, the demand for convenient storage space became stronger. Double parking, angled parking, curb-side parking was deemed too inconvenient (for ease of movement), so large expanses of surface parking began to appear on the landscape. Soon these 'space grabbing' storage spaces proliferated in urban and suburban environments.** (ibid., p 77)

They took all the trees
And put them in a tree museum
And they charged all the people
A dollar and a half to see 'em
Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And they put up a parking lot.

an excerpt from the song *Big Yellow Taxi,* by Joni Mitchell (1975)

Parking lots appear as the largest and most frequent suburban open spaces, contributing little to the sense of place of the community. Suburban parking lots are anything but inviting, especially to the pedestrian. Landscape elements, such as signage and lighting, are generally designed to the scale and movement of the automobile. These vast, unfriendly environments promote even more individual car trips, further perpetuating suburban sprawl and the sense of placelessness being considered here. Perhaps this is accepted because planners, developers and the general public have not considered an alternative. It is possible to design environments that harmoniously accommodate the vehicle, the pedestrian, the cyclist and public transit, allowing for the option of an alternate mode of transportation to the private vehicle. Attention should

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be given to creating a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists, meaning the inclusion of human scaled elements and spaces in the parking lot design. As culture is changing, so to is the nature of suburban open space. The commercial parking lot could be thought of as more than simply a space to store vehicles. As Crawford notes, "the spread of malls around the world has accustomed large numbers of people to behavior patterns that inextricably link shopping with diversion and pleasure". (Crawford, in Sorkin, 1992, p. 28) Although her remark is made with regards to the interior commercial environment, why not utilize this connection as an opportunity to develop the exterior environment as well? Why not develop pedestrian plazas and outdoor recreational facilities in these locales, why not develop parks in combination with shopping malls?

"Suburbs have nascent gathering places in unconventional locations: in super market checkout lines, on fast-food drive-in strips, at school doorways, at video stores, in parking lots, and at shopping malls. These must be looked to for the potential they offer as open spaces. Such nontraditional places may offer the most promise for places of socialization. Why not "mall-parks" to replace those vast unused sectors of parking lots? The interiors have already assumed many traditional Main Street and downtown public square functions, albeit in a privatized form. But what of making parks in areas that are potential places of congregation, within the vast parking reserves surrounding shopping centers of all scales? Commerce and open space are not antithetical..."

(Girling and Helphand, 1992, p 224)

*The public realm is the connective tissue of our everyday world. It is made of those pieces of terrain left between the private holdings. It exists in the form of streets, highways, town squares, parks and even parking lots. It includes rural or wilderness landscape: stretches of seacost, national forests, most lakes and rivers, and even the sky....The public realm exists mainly outdoors because most buildings belong to private individuals or corporations. Exceptions to this are public institutions such as libraries, museums, zoos, and town halls, which are closed some hours of the day, and airports and train stations, which may be open around the clock. Some places, while technically private, function as quasi-public realm - for instance, college campuses, ballparks, restaurants, theatres, nightclubs, **and yes, shopping malls, at least the corridors between the private shops. Their owners retain the right to regulate behavior within, particularly the terms of access, and so the distinction must be made that they are only nominally public.** The true public realm then, for the sake of this arguement, is that portion of our everyday world which belongs to everybody and to which everybody ought to have equal access most of the time. The public realm is therefore a set of real places possessing physical form.*

(James Howard Kunstler, 1996, p 36)

SUBURBAN COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

"The (North) American genius for turning a profit seems, in suburbia, to be wedded to a distressing penchant for bringing merchandising blight to the land as part of the process. In terms of logic, convenience, or physical delight, the typical suburban shopping center offers little."

(James Hornbeck, 1962, p. 89)

A mecca for suburbanites

by Gary Cohen.
(US News cover story, Dec. 27, 1999)

"The press releases were lyrical, avoiding any mention of crass commercialism. Instead, in October 1956, when the Dayton Co. unveiled Southdale Center, carved out of the cornfields of Edina, Minnesota, outside Minneapolis, it extolled the exotica of what would soon become known as the nation's first fully enclosed shopping mall.

With its "Garden Court of Perpetual Spring," Southdale boasted orchids and azaleas blooming beneath a 25-foot indoor magnolia tree, canaries fluttering inside a 21-foot atrium birdcage, and skylights that created "the illusion of an outside garden-one that knows no killing winter snow."

If such climate control seems humdrum now, it was revolutionary in the mid-1950s when Southdale's Austrian-born architect Victor Gruen devised a novel heat pump to encapsule his entire two-level shopping center in a perpetual bubble of 72 degrees, impervious to Midwestern blizzards or scorching summers. As developers across the country, even those in the balmiest of climes, deluged Gruen with commissions for their own enclosed malls, Southdale became the model for an architectural form that has become synonymous with both American suburbia and its flip side, suburban sprawl. For better or worse, Gruen changed the landscape of the continent.

Other shopping centers had existed before. As early as 1922, J. C. Nichols built Country Club Plaza on the outskirts of Kansas City, Mo., and by 1928, Grandview Avenue Shopping Center in Columbus, Ohio, provided the model for later strip malls. Many historians consider Hugh Prather's 1931 Highland Park Shopping Village in Dallas the original planned mall, controlled by a single landlord with its storefronts facing an inner courtyard. But all of them exposed shoppers to the elements.

American by way of Europe. Gruen, a refugee who had fled the Nazis and arrived in New York in 1938 with $8 in his pocket and little more than his T-square in his luggage, had worked on some of those early open-air shopping centers. Then Detroit's J. L. Hudson department store chain commissioned him to design a center 8 miles away from its flagship downtown store to take advantage of the recent suburban developments spawned by the city's postwar expressways.

In 1954, when it opened, the Northland Center was the world's largest shopping mall-one in which Gruen had experimented with central air conditioning and heating. But it was his perfection of that climate-controlled enclosure at Southdale that allowed other American developers not only to defy the weather but to create a sense of euphoria and well-being in a protected, Muzak-laced retail environment.

Gruen's inspiration had come from medieval street markets of Europe. And two years before Southdale opened, he spoke of the shopping mall's possibilities as a civic and cultural gathering place-one where, as in European plazas, "people may relax, not just shop."

But by the mid-'60s, when shopping centers studded every suburban expressway, they were already prompting a mass exodus from America's downtowns. Cities like Fort Worth and Fresno, Calif., hired Gruen to bring new life back to their abandoned centers, and he came up with the notion of the first urban pedestrian malls. But the trend toward ever bigger enclosed malls had already been cemented. And by 1967, Gruen retired to his native Vienna, disillusioned with the unalloyed commercialism of the architectural form he had wrought.

"I refuse to pay alimony," he scoffed, "for those bastard developments."

A Brief Historical Timeline of Shopping Centre Development

1888
The electric streetcar developed in Richmond, VA made possible "streetcar suburbs" and decentralized commercial centers.

1891
Edward Bouton built Roland Park near Baltimore that included a "store block" arranged in a linear pattern along a street to serve the commercial needs of a planned residential community. Similar store blocks were built in Los Angeles 1908 for the College Tract on West 48th St.

1916
Chicago architect Arthur Aldis builds Market Square in Lake Forest, Illinois, an integrated shopping complex of 28 stores, 12 office units, 30 apartments, gymnasium, clubhouse and landscaping. Market Square was perhaps the first business district to be laid out specifically to accommodate motor vehicles." (p. 152) The National Register of Historic Places has listed Market Square as the first planned shopping district in the Unites States.

1922
Country Club Plaza opens in Kansas City, Mo., designed by J.C. Nichols. It is the first shopping district to be developed away from a downtown. It featured unified architecture, paved and lighted parking lots, and was managed and operated as a single unit.

1928
Grandview Avenue Shopping Center in Columbus, Ohio, opens as the first suburban strip shopping center. The design was a straight line of stores with space for parking in front, and included 30 shops and parking for 400 cars. In New Jersey, Radburn was built as a planned city with parks and walkways and decentralized shopping areas.

1931
Highland Park Shopping Village in Dallas, Tex., developed by Hugh Prather, opened. It is considered by many to be the first planned shopping center because it occupied a single site and was not bisected by public streets. The storefronts faced inward, away from the streets, the beginning of the introverted mall trope.

1930-1940
Sears Roebuck & Co. and Montgomery Ward set up large, freestanding stores with on-site parking, away from the centers of big cities.

1950
The first two shopping centers anchored by full-line branches of downtown department stores open. Northgate in Seattle, Wash., (two strip centers face-to-face with a pedestrian walkway in between) opened in 1950, and Shoppers World in Farmingham, Mass. (the first two-level center), debuted the following year.

1954
Northland Center in Detroit, Mich., used a "cluster layout" with a single department store at the center and a ring of stores around it. The parking lot completely surrounded the center. Northland was also the first center to have central air-conditioning as well as heating.

1956
Southdale Center in Edina, Minn., outside of Minneapolis, designed by Victor Gruen, opened as the first fully enclosed mall

with a two-level design. It had central air-conditioning and heating, a comfortable common area and, more importantly, it had two competitive department stores as anchors. Southdale is considered by most industry professionals to be the first modern regional mall.

1964
7,600 shopping centers are in operation in the United States. Suburban development and population growth after World War II created the need for more housing and more convenient retail shopping. Most of the centers built in the 1950s and 1960s were strip centers serving new housing developments.

1972
13,174 shopping centers are operating in the United States. Regional malls like Southdale Center and The Galleria in Houston, Tex., had become a fixture in many larger markets, and Americans began to enjoy the convenience and pleasure of mall shopping.

1976
The Rouse Co. developed Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston, Mass., which was the first of the "festival marketplaces" built in the United States. The project, which revived a troubled downtown market, was centered on food and retail specialty items. Similar projects were built in Baltimore, Md., New York, N.Y., and Miami, Fla., and have been emulated in a number of urban areas.

1980
More than 16,000 shopping centers are built between 1980 and 1990 in the United States. Superregional centers (malls larger than 800,000 square feet) became increasingly popular with shoppers.

1981
The first phase of West Edmonton Mall, the largest shopping center in the world, opens. It is the beginning of the romance between retail and entertainment, offering (in subsequent phases) seven 'world class entertainment attractions'. The mall is in the Guinness Book of World Records as having the world's largest parking lot.

1989-1993
New shopping center development dropped nearly 70%, from 1,510 construction starts in 1989 to 451 starts in 1993. The sharp decline in new center starts was attributed to the Savings and Loan crisis, which helped precipitate a severe credit crunch. While overbuilding occurred among small centers in some regions of the United States, shopping centers remained the most attractive and best-performing real estate category for investors during this difficult period.

1992
The American version of West Edmonton Mall, the Mall of America, opens in Bloomington, Minnesota (developed by the same group of investors). It is the largest shopping center in the United States, attracting nearly twice as many visitors/year as West Edmonton Mall, though it is not as big.

1993
A new retail format is developed, the Power Center (a center between 250,000 and 600,000 square feet, with approximately 75% to 90% of its space occupied by category killers or destination anchor stores). Power centers are often located near regional and superregional malls. In 1993, 16 power centers opened in the United States, compared with only four superregional malls.

2000
Factory outlet centers were one of the fastest growing segments of the shopping center industry in the 1990s. In 1990, there were 183 outlet centers. Today, there are over approximately 312 outlet centers in the United States.

The Suburban Shopping Mall Paradigm

three shopping malls
designed by Victor Gruen
(photo from Hornbeck, 1962,
p 95)

West Edmonton Mall -
interior (photo from
www.westedmontonmall.com)

The basic regional mall paradigm was perfected and systematically replicated between 1960 and 1980 (a regional mall, by definition, has at least two department or anchor stores, and at least one hundred other shops and services). As mentioned in the previous US News arcticle, architect Victor Gruen is considered to be the father of the enclosed suburban regional shopping center because of his "ground breaking design" for Southdale Center. His goal for Southdale Center was to create an ideal city. "Gruen wanted, above all, to create a center where people would want to stay well beyond their shopping time to enact the rituals of urban life." (Herman, 1997) Gruen felt that the provision of additional, non-consumerist amenities (such as recreational, educational and social facilities) within shopping centers would extend the pedestrian use of the facility beyond regular business hours, improving the surrounding residential area by providing a space for communal interaction.

Thus, the concept of creating public space within the suburban commercial environment is by no means a new one. Creating public open space however, is a different issue. Gruen may have considered public space with regards to the interior of the mall, but he gave little consideration to the site on which the edifice sits, the exterior environment. So thrilled were the public and retail developers with the economically successful and climatically convenient mall trope, that the outdoor portion, the site, was all but forgotten. Margaret Crawford, in her article "The World in a Shopping Mall", describes Victor Gruens basic mall trope as "an inverted space whose forbidding exteriors hid paradisiacal interiors". (Crawford in Sorkin ed., 1992, p. 22) Typical suburban shopping malls look inward, turning their backs on the public street, reinforcing the anti-urban sentiment that streets are for cars only. Economics prevail over aesthetics in these environments, with exterior detail limited to "informal open areas landscaped with brick flower beds and spindly
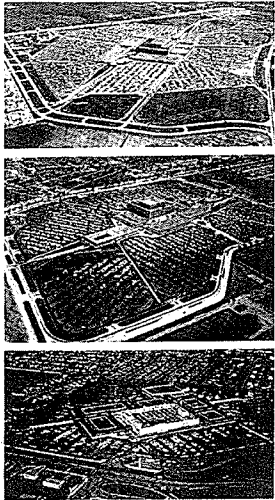
31

trees (that) echoed front yard imagery". (ibid., p. 21) **Crawford's description of West Edmonton Mall can easily be applied to almost any suburban mall in North America:**

"Seen from above, the mall resembles an ungainly pile of oversized boxes plunked down in the middle of an enormous asphalt sea, surrounded by an endless landscape of single family houses."

(ibid., p. 3)

West Edmonton Mall - exterior (photo from www.westedmontonmall.com)

In an 1962 article titled "Retailing and the Automobile", Gruen cites the "rapid and frenzied" pace of suburban expansion in North America as the reason why little attention was paid to "good planning for schools, shopping facilities, community centers, and churches". (Gruen in Hornbeck, ed. ,1962, p. 99) **Quality community design and the construction of infrastructure simply could not keep up with the demand for housing in the suburbs, and the resulting landscape became one of widely dispersed monotony. The retailer no longer had a focused geographical location for development as the availability of the automobile meant consumers were everywhere. "Under such conditions, the best retailing locations seemed centers on highways."** (ibid. p. 100) **Gruen points out that the shopping center was conceived from purely practical needs, the needs of the shopper, that provided for, and promoted, a maximum level of consumption. These needs were; convenient, plentiful free parking, a large quantity and wide variety of stores, and a protected pedestrian environment connecting the stores.**(ibid. p. 101) **Gruen discusses the strong influence of the automobile on the development of retail centers. Long before James Howard Kunstler, Gruen recognized the role of the automobile in destroying the "last vestiges of community coherence".** (ibid. p. 98) **Commercial development that had in the past been restricted to urban environments thrived on the periphery of the city. The automobile has hastened the expansion of suburbia while catapulting the**

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a typical suburban commercial parking lot (photo from Lang and Miller, 1997, p35)

success of the suburban shopping mall (Lippard, 1997, p.240). **Witold Rybczynski, in his book City Life, credits the shopping mall with destroying downtown businesses. People need somewhere to park their precious automobiles. The lure of convenient, free parking is the cornerstone of the success of the suburban shopping mall. The general consensus is that more parking spaces equal more consumers, which generate more revenue. Parking is seldom dealt with in suburban commercial situations beyond a strictly utilitarian nature. The result of this thinking is the ubiquitous cold and foreboding expanse of asphalt that suburban culture has unquestionably accepted.**

"There have been good results from the large amount of study devoted to the location, planning and servicing of retail stores; and their grouping into smoothly functioning center that performs as a profitable mechanism for sales. But there has been far less accomplishment in the design of the spaces between and around these stores; their parking areas; the relationship of such centers to the highway and community; in brief - the shopping environment."

(Hornbeck, 1962, p. 89)

Developers have now, finally, realized the importance of creating a "sense of place" in the retail environment. At an International Council of Shopping Centers Conference in the spring of 1997, developers agreed that the "theme had reached its saturation point" in shopping centers. "What was now needed was compelling public space, something architectural. It should offer an experience that is particular to a given place." (Herman, 1998) **It was agreed that authenticity was the key to achieving the much-needed sense of place. This concept was discussed in the previous chapter of this study as a valid method of placemaking. The question that remains is how to design authentic spaces in a retail environment?**

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The very nature of the word authentic implies a non-consumerist agenda. Victor Gruen believed that "a true public place is inclusive of all kinds of people in whatever combinations they might choose, and that the value of events rests in their ability to surprise and thus to liberate." (ibid.) Must an authentic place, then, have these possibilities also? Developers like to be in control of the shopping mall, they are not fans of anything unplanned. Yet this is the key aspect of the type of place they, themselves, stated must be achieved. Geoff Cowie writes:

"Despite a façade of authentic urbanity, the shopping mall is not open to the range of activities or people consistent with public space."

(Cowie, 2002, p. 38)

Times Square, New York City
(photos by author)

There are, however, public qualities existing in suburban shopping centers. Shopping malls are undeniably a social space. They may be a social space centered upon the act of consumption, but most social and cultural activities today are. Two of the most public spaces in the world, Times Square in New York and Picadilly Circus in London, are consumption driven. These spaces are essentially three-dimensional, interactive advertisements, yet few would argue that they are indeed public places. The argument being made here is that a space is not necessarily 'placeless' because it is consumption driven, but that other qualities are equally important in contributing to the lack of place. These are physical and cultural isolation, or disconnection from context. A shopping center that is connected to its surroundings, that embraces its context, will have an established identity. It has been argued in the previous chapter that place cannot be designed, that a sense of place can only develop over time with the occurrence of various unplanned events. A space, however, must be designed in which these events may occur, and that space should contribute to the experiential quality of the events. Experience is a key aspect of this discussion;

memorable experiences are rooted in place. So, while the particular design of a space may not singularly create a 'sense of place', it can set the stage for one to evolve. An expression of local character and identity are essential to this goal.

Architect Jon Jerde is often considered to be as much an innovator of commercial environments as Victor Gruen. His approach to retail design is rooted in place and in creating experience. Like Gruen, he is concerned with public spaces and the public life of communities, but his approach to designing for this is much different. Jerde began designing shopping centers in the late 1960's for a large commercial firm, producing standardized malls that followed the developer's formula. The goal of mall development at this time was to generate the maximum dollar per square foot yield, architecture fell a distant second and place-making was non-existent. Jerde was depressed by the soulless retail design of the 1970's, but he understood the opportunities provided by the consumerist realm to enforce his ideas of communal life, and left the firm to begin his goal of place-making. His first opportunity to realize his vision was in 1985 at Horton Plaza in San Diego. The design of this retail facility, no matter how kitschy it may seem on the surface, is important because it is a departure from the introverted stereotype of large shopping centers. The main element in Horton Plaza is an open air shopping 'street' that connects within the development, as well as connecting the development to the surrounding streets. The design of Horton Plaza is the beginning of experiential retail design. "Jerde has taken the most maligned building type, the shopping center, and has helped to transform it into a public venue that has in turn transformed urban centers and suburbs..." (Frances Anderton in Bradbury, ed., 1999, p. 9)
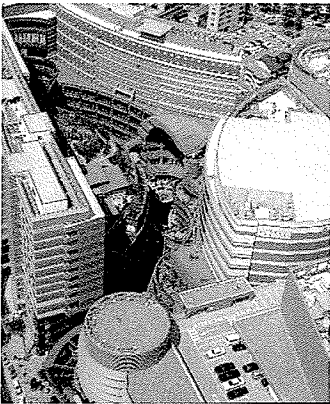
Canal City Hakata, Japan
(photo from Gandel, 2000, p 20)

Critics have accused Jon Jerde of parodying traditional public space and the vitality of communal experience in his designs, rather than creating true public spaces. Regardless, his form of placemaking is an important topic of study as it addresses many issues that are central to the debate of placelessness. (ibid, p 10) He is concerned

with site-specific solutions that create public, civic space in the commercial private realm. (ibid, p 14) Jerde's designs reflect a desire to make a special event out of the everyday experience of shopping. In his own words,

"Relating to the common man in an uncommon way is the goal."

(Jon Jerde quoted in Bradbury ed., 1999)

His design for Canal City Hakata in Japan integrates the nearby water feature into a combined retail, hotel and entertainment development that is anything but ordinary. Again he forges a connection between commerce and its surroundings, and uses images and forms that convey the physical and cultural context of the development. The resulting spaces and activities allow for a unique public experience, centered on the act of consumption. Urban critics have "attacked Jerde's mall imagery and creative collectivity as part of a larger culture of spectacle and simulation that had replaced 'real' social relations and authentic public spaces". (Margaret Crawford in Bradbury, ed., 1999, p 54) His Rinku Masterplan for a shopping/business district in Japan has an eight-story 'parkscape' designed to celebrate the union of air, land and water. (Bradbury, ed., 1999, p 67) This design demonstrates an approach to placemaking that has been considered essential in the act of reclaiming the retail environment as a public space. Jon Goss, in his article 'The Magic of the Mall', asserts that reclaiming the shopping environment entails opening it to all activities consistent with public space, even those that may affront the sensibilities of the consumer or disrupt the smooth process of consumption. (Goss in McDowell, ed., 1997, p 279) This is exactly what Jon Jerde's designs attempt to do. Although he has been associated with the 'theming of America' (in his design of the Universal City Walk in California by architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable), what remains is that he has based his career on the creation of experiential public spaces in an environment that is generally spurned by architects as unworthy
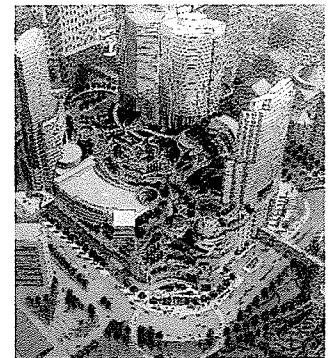
Rinku Masterplan, Japan
(image form Bradbury, 1999, p 68)

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of critical design consideration. Although all of his designs may not be critical successes (Mall of America, for example, reverts back to the introverted mall trope), he does take an alternative approach to retail design that considers many aspects of communal life that is absent in this consumption driven field.

A 1994 article titled Reinventing the Regional Mall discusses the need for developers to reconsider the success formula for suburban shopping mall design. (Ian F. Thomas, in Urban Land, vol 53, n. 4, p. 24-27) The article states that between 1982 and 1992 both the average frequency and length of regional shopping center visits decreased. In order to survive in a competitive retail environment of big box discount centers and factory outlets, regional malls "must diversify and create more reasons for people to visit" (ibid., p.24). The most valuable advice given by this article is that mall development must reflect the needs and desires of its users, of the public. In a landscape that is saturated by large-scale commercial development, suburban shopping malls must "better satisfy the needs and wants of their customers within the community while ensuring an adequate return on investment" (ibid. p 26).   To remain economically successful, it is essential for regional malls to include public uses in their design. The article goes on to suggest that the best method attracting new and repeat consumer traffic is to embrace the town center concept. This concept has been latched onto voraciously, and perhaps too literally, in the eight years since this article was written, with great financial success. The concept however is closely tied to the New Urbanist movement previously discussed, and the same criticisms can apply. What is admiral about the concept is the attempt to develop memorable gathering spaces where civic celebrations and community gatherings may take place. Expanding on the town center concept and combining it with other types of public outdoor space such as active and passive recreational and leisure areas is perhaps a more applicable approach for the present. J. William Thompson , in a 1999 article titled "Can We Retrofit Suburbia?", asks the question

"How...do you turn the seas of parking around a mall into a place?"

(J. William Thompson in Landscape Architecture, July 1999, vol 89, no.7, p.79).

The solution suggested here is to divide the parking environment with these types of public spaces, plazas for outdoor performances and community celebrations, leisure spaces for casual strolls or challenging physical activity, patios for social interaction and gardens for private contemplation. Not only will these spaces begin to create a sense of place in the suburban commercial environment, they will also provide a more convenient, safer condition in which pedestrians may reach the shopping center. This methodology will be explored in the practical application of this project.

FISSURES

(Process)

fissure

noun   **1.an opening; usu. long and narrow, made by cracking splitting or separation of esp. rock or ice.**

             2.a division or split.

(The Canadian Oxford Compact Dictionary)

Ottawa Area

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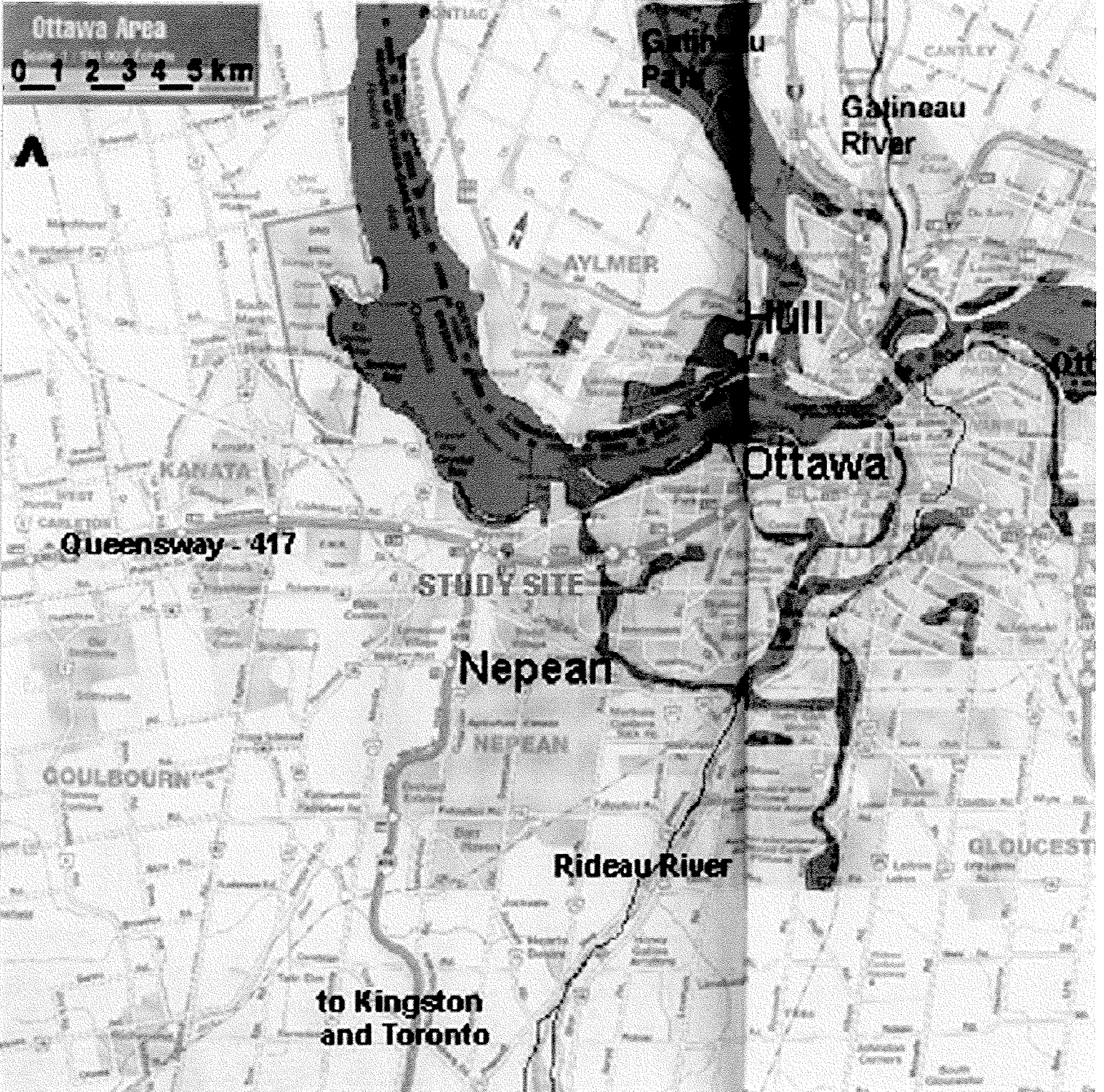
Queensway - 417

Gatineau
Park

Gatineau
River

Hull

Ottawa

Ott

STUDY SITE

Nepean

NEPEAN

Rideau River

GOULBOURN

GLOUCEST

to Kingston
and Toronto

THE STUDY SITE

The chosen study site is Bayshore Shopping Centre, a regional mall in Nepean, Ontario, a suburb of the Canadian capital of Ottawa.

This particular site was chosen because although it suffers from the typical ailments of the suburban regional shopping mall, the site is atypical in the sense that it features multi-level parking. The brutal nature of the existing site that is revealed in the following pages requires a dramatic intervention. This provides an opportunity to demonstrate an atypical proposal to the previously discussed design problems evident in shopping mall design across North America.

primary street entrance to Bayshore Shopping Centre (photo by author)

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Bayshore Shopping Centre

The study site, Bayshore Shopping Centre, is the largest retail centre in the West End of Ottawa, and the third largest in the city as a whole. In typical suburban fashion, the site sits at the intersection of two major highways. The Queen's Expressway (no. 417) borders the shopping center on the south side and is the main east-west route through the Ottawa-Carlton area with typical traveling speeds of over 120 km/h. The Veterans' Memorial Highway (no. 416) extends south from the site, and is the main connecting route to southern Ontario and the United States. Traversing the Queensway from the southwest to the northeast is the busy arterial route of Richmond Road, the main collector-street for the immediately surrounding residential area. One kilometer to the north, the Ottawa River widens into a bay called Lac Deschenes, which is home to three sailing clubs. The community and the shopping center take the name Bayshore from this area. There is a cycling trail that connects the Bayshore community to the Ottawa River, and follows along the river through a naturalized setting to the Parliament Buildings in downtown Ottawa.

The community directly to the north of Bayshore Shopping Centre consists of middle-income townhouses and high-rise apartment buildings, as well as two schools with a shared playground. A large percentage of the residents of this neighborhood are senior citizens. To the northeast, east, southeast and south is middle income, single family housing, in the traditional, curving cul-de-sac, suburban form. The site sits on the inside cusp of the Greenbelt, a tract of land that loops around the city of Ottawa and has been federally established as natural greenspace where residential, commercial or other built development is not permitted. As such, the area to the south west of the mall is agricultural in character. There is further residential development outside of the Greenbelt to the south and the west. Directly to the west of the shopping center is the newly built Bayshore
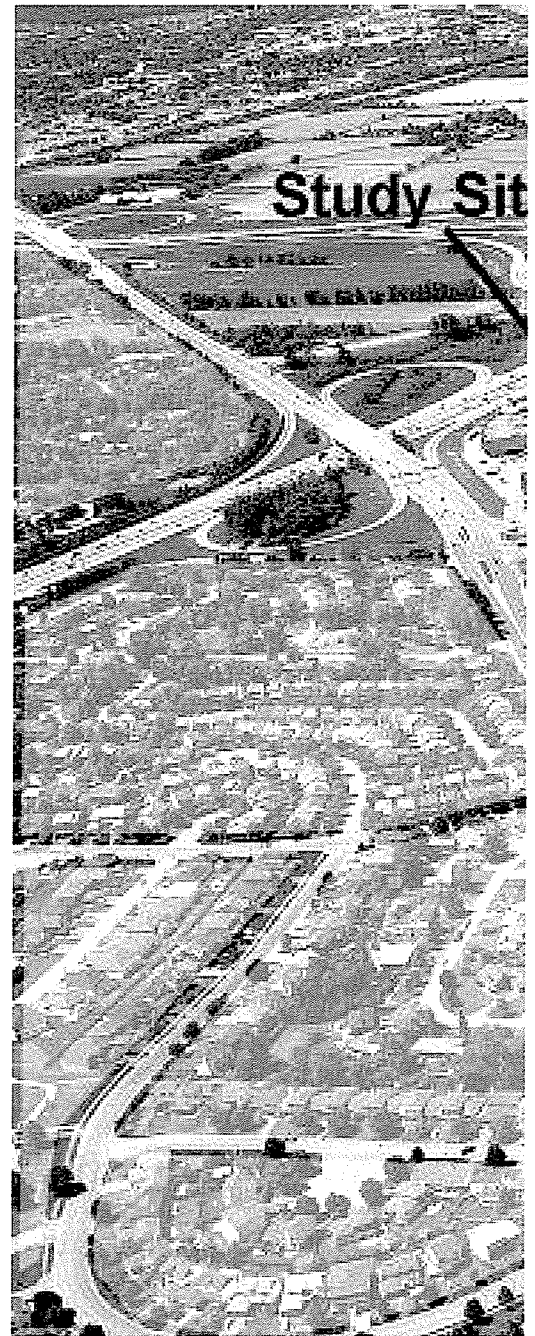
Community of Bayshore - Suburban Zoning

yellow - single family residential

orange - medium density residential

red - high density residential

green - public/institutional

purple - commercial

Carling Avenue

bicycle path

Woodridge Crescent

Crescent

school

playing field

school

north parking structure

Stud

Shop

Cen

West parking garage

vacant lot

Bayshore
Transpo
Station

417 - Queensway

N

0   100   200

(M)
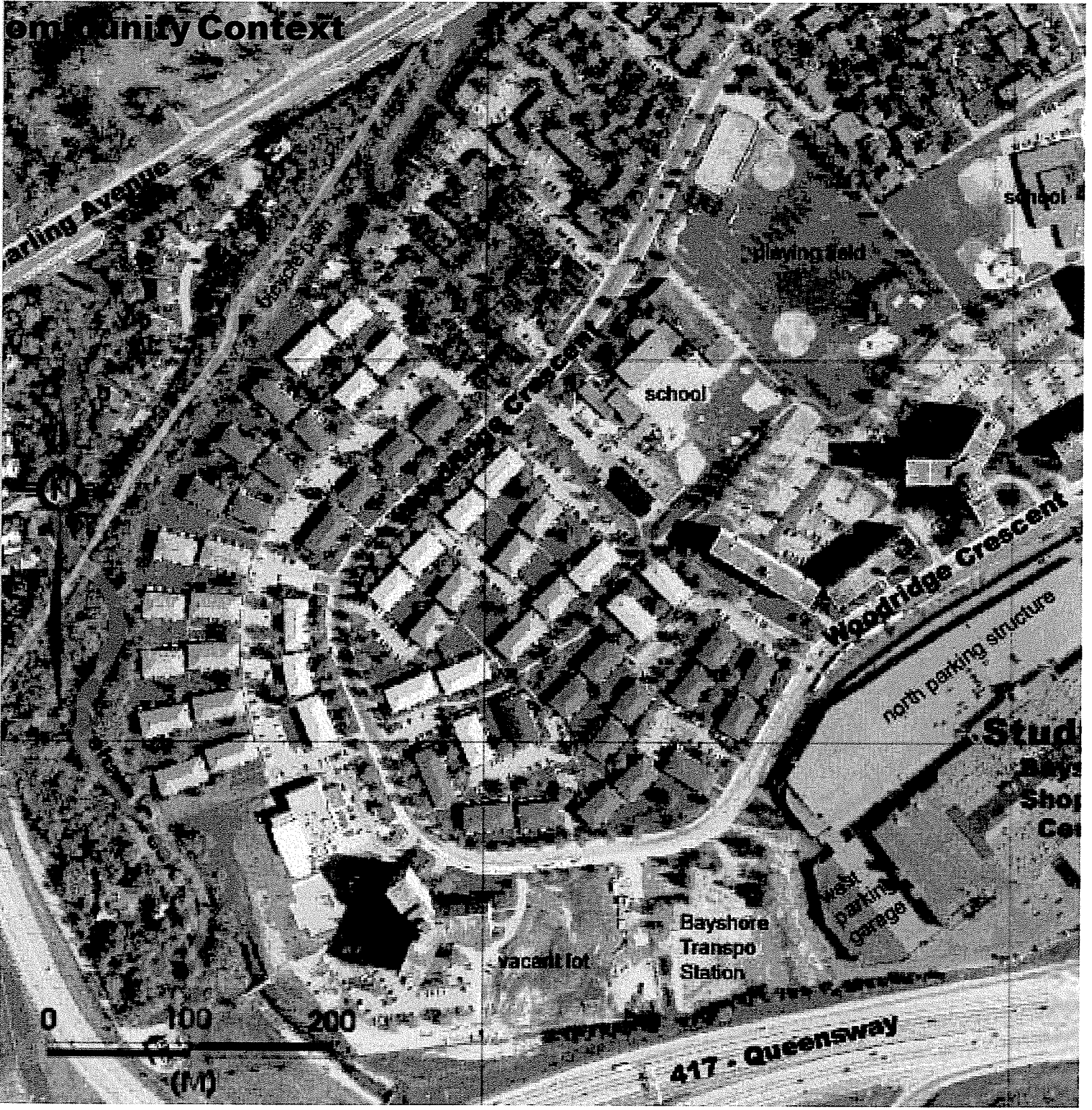
Transpo Station, a component of the Ottawa-Carlton Transit System. Beyond that is a vacant site that has been zoned for the development of an eight-story office building since December of 2000, it is undetermined as to when development of this site will occur. At the western edge of this site is Graham Creek, flowing from the Ottawa River to the north it has spawned high-income residential development along its banks. Bordering the north side of the site is Woodridge Crescent, from where any non-freeway vehicular traffic accesses the shopping center.

Site Development

The design of the mall has been described as "simple but effective, eye catching but not distracting", and "the exterior (has) retained a touch of Ottawa with dormer windows reflecting the architecture of Ottawa's Parliament buildings." (Wilson, 1989, p107). The contextual reference mentioned here, however, is not a strong one, the dormer windows are on the third level of the mall and not within view. The site is sandwiched between a residential neighborhood, a busy arterial street and a freeway. The total site area is 26 acres, with 14 acres devoted to multi-level parking and 12 acres to the building footprint. This site has long been zoned as commercial, with the first development being a strip mall. In 1973, the strip mall was bulldozed, and the original two-story structure of the present Bayshore Shopping Centre was built. Over the years a number of renovations have been performed on the centre, including the addition of a third level of shops and services in 1987. "Bayshore's success is attributed to its location in a rapid growth area and the convenience of free parking in its multilevel, 4000 car capacity lot." (Wilson, 1989, p. 107) The original site plan for the centre included ground level parking only. As

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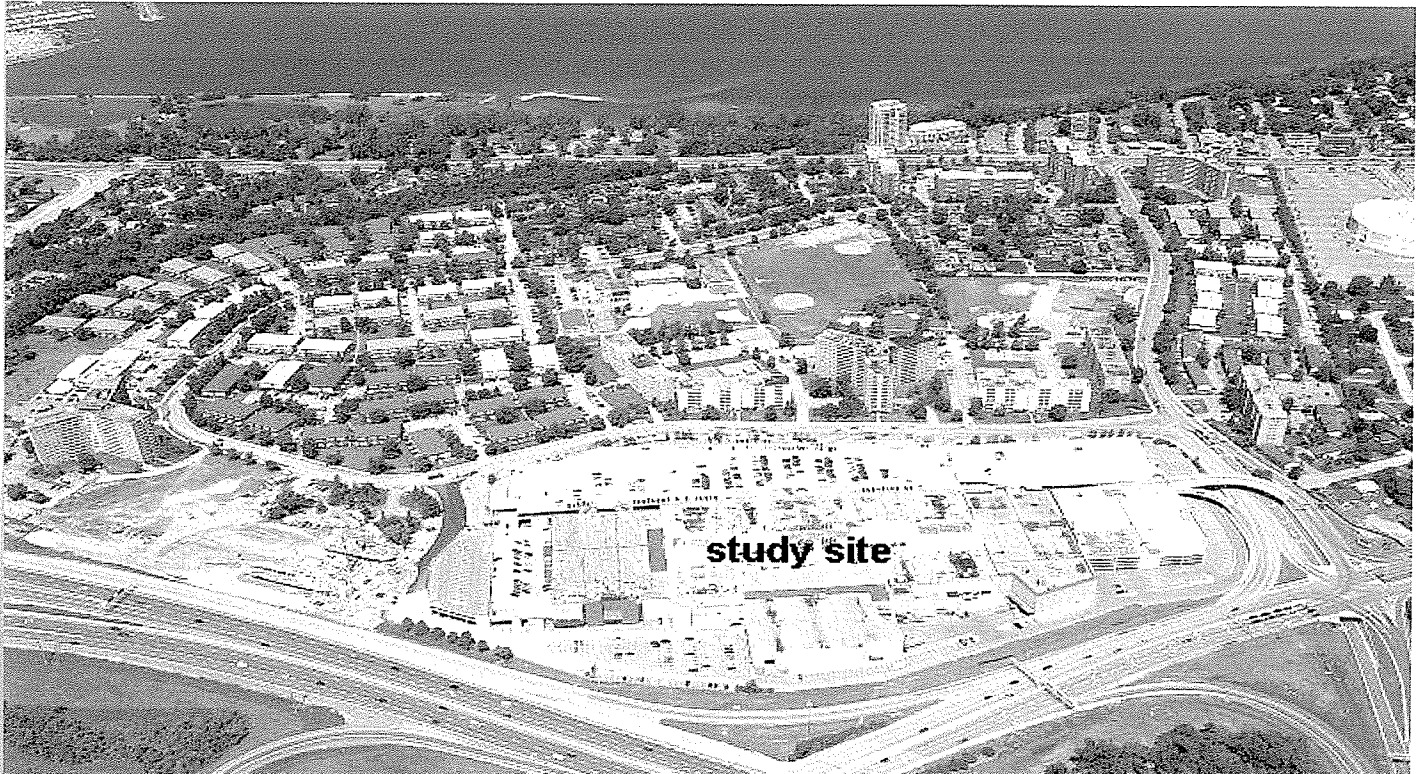
aerial view of Bayshore Shopping Centre from south (photo by Murray Mosher at Canadian Aerial)

the popularity of the private automobile increased in the 1980's, so did the volume of traffic at the centre, and a second level of parking was added in a raised, free-standing structure on the north side of the mall. The structure of this second level is one level double tees with precast beams and columns. The anchor stores at either end of the centre (now Zellers and The Bay) have their own separate parking structures, accessible at the second level from the north parking deck, and directly joined to the building. The structure of the east parkade and entry/exit overpasses is a post-tension slab with pre-cast box girders and cast-in-place support structure. The west parking garage was originally a two level flat slab structure.

The addition of the third level of shops in 1987 also brought the addition of a third level of parking on the north that is a one level post-tensioned slab and beam structure. The west parking garage was subdivided from its original 2 levels into the existing 5 levels to achieve the desired parking to rental space ratio of 5.33 spaces per 1000 square feet. Both levels of the north parking structure are connected to the shopping center building by a number of

pedestrian bridges. The east parkade provides access to the building at the second and third floor levels, while the west parkade provides access only at the second floor level. The City of Ottawa-Carlton Fire Code requires that a structure of this size have fully enclosed pedestrian staircases no more than 30 metres apart between the parking levels. There are many such staircases in the existing parking structures; however, the near solid brick exterior renders them as somewhat unsafe and uncomfortable to pedestrians. Approximately $500 000.00 is allocated each year as a preventative and corrective maintenance program for all three of the parking structures. The south side of the site has been developed as primarily a service area, with some ground level parking, creating a very unattractive view for motorists on the adjacent arterial road and freeway from where the majority of patrons access the shopping center.

aerial view of Bayshore Shopping Centre from west (photo by Murray Mosher at Canadian Aerial)
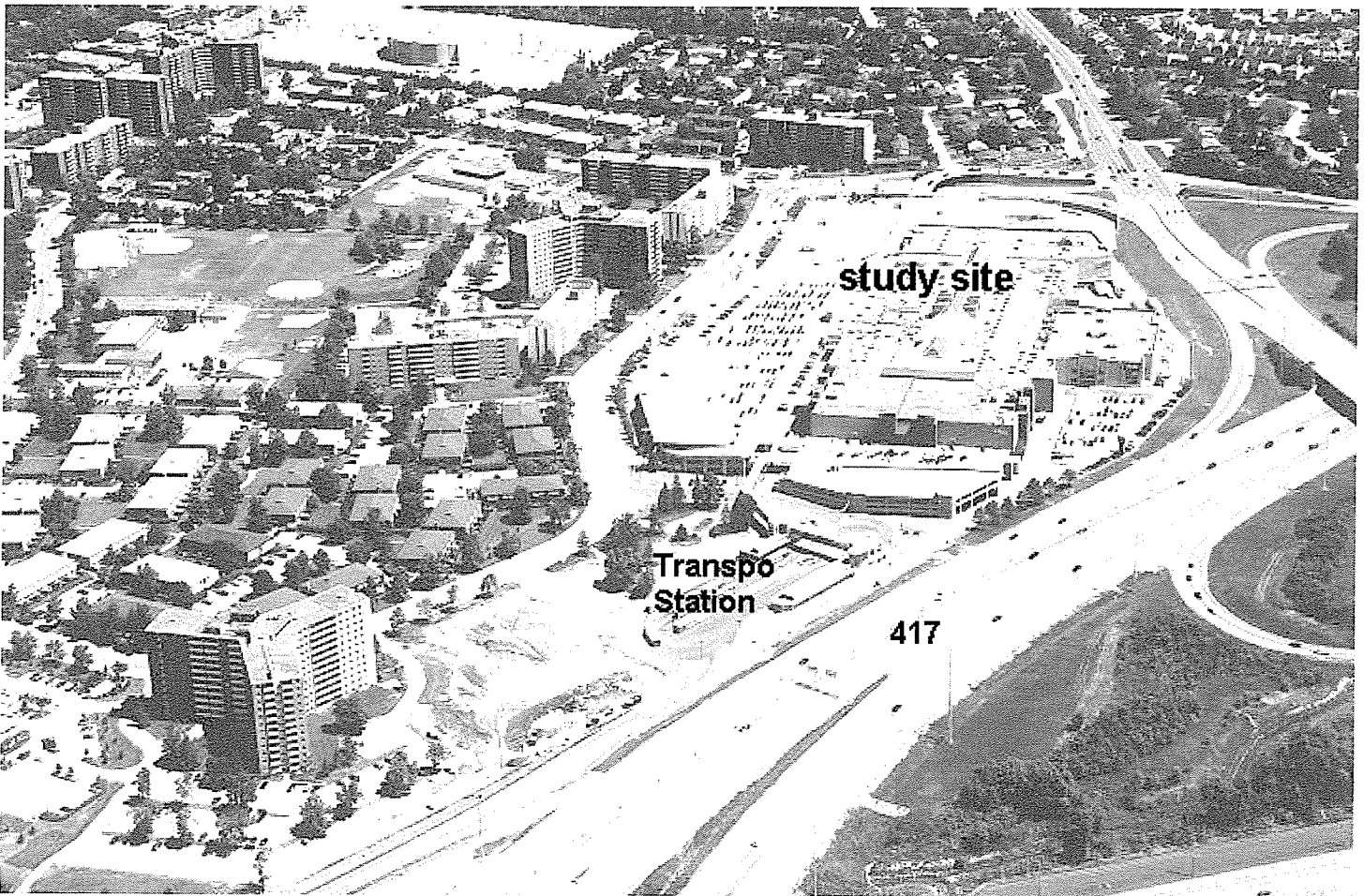
**access ramp
(from Richmond Rd. and 417)**
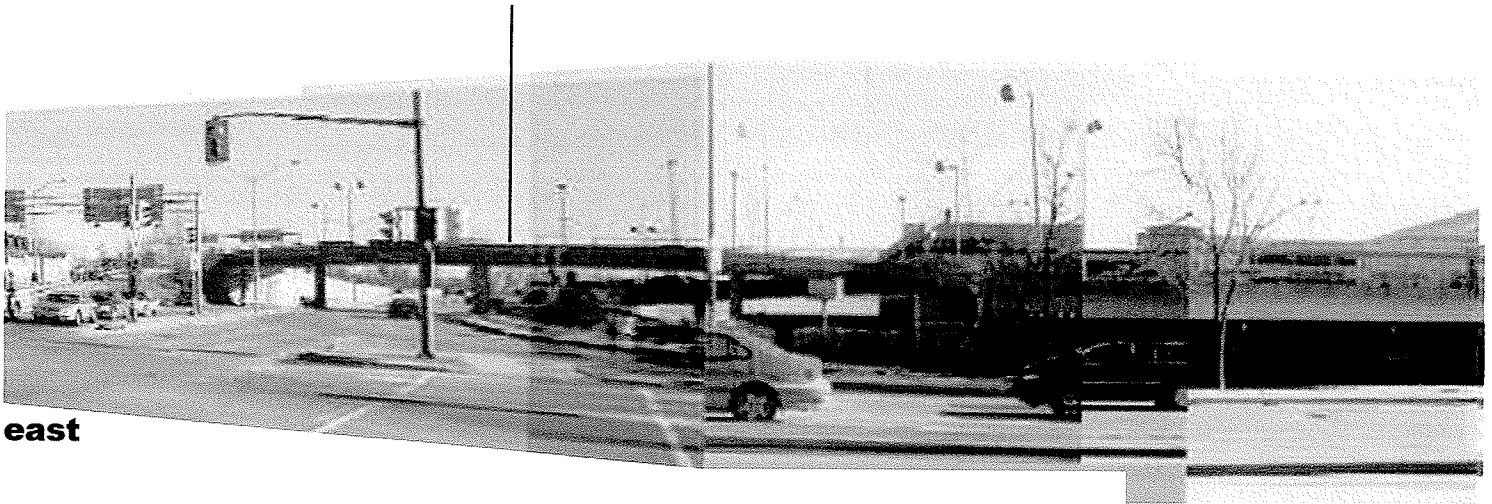
east

Site Accessibilty

Access to Bayshore Shopping Centre is difficult and confusing for motorists and pedestrians alike. There is a vehicular access ramp from the street level of Richmond Road to the second level of parking at the north-east end of the site available to vehicles travelling east on the Queensway (form the western suburbs), which is indirect and inefficient. Vehicles travelling west on the Queensway (from downtown Ottawa) must proceed under this ramp on to Bayshore Drive, turn left on Woodridge Crescent, and access the mall from either a single ground level entry, or the ramp at the north-west end of the site. During peak shopping periods, such as Christmas, parking lot attendants are required to direct mall traffic that is usually backed up to the freeway exit from both directions. The location of the mall has forced the adjacent Woodridge Crescent, a residential street, to become a busy collector for mall traffic. The opening of the Bayshore Transpo Station in December of 2000 (by the city of Ottawa-Carleton)
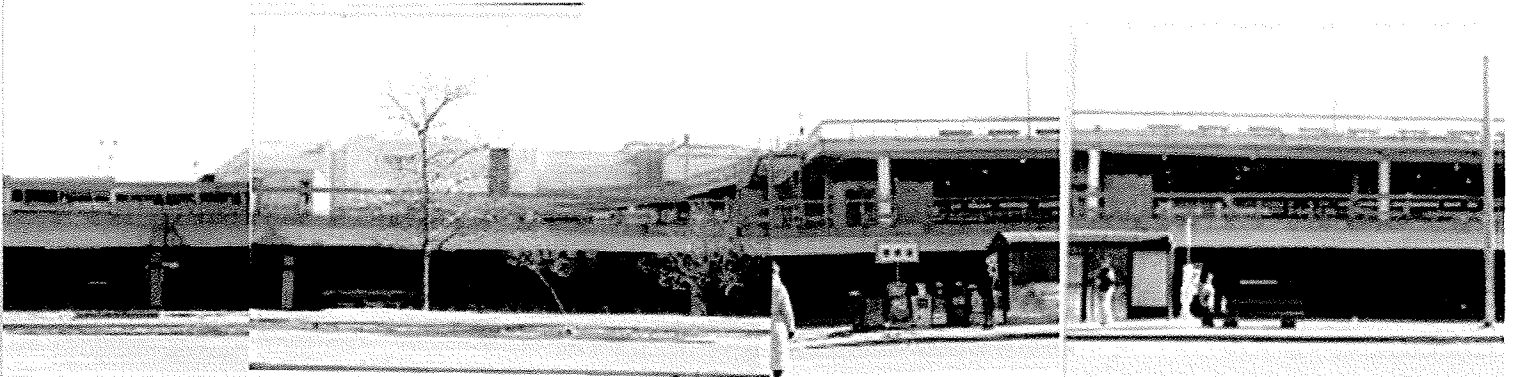
has greatly improved public transit access, and alleviated some of the traffic congestion on Woodridge Crescent. There is a pedestrian bridge that connects the Transpo Station to the second level of the mall; this is the only direct pedestrian linkage in the existing site design. Pedestrians accessing the shopping centre from Woodridge Crescent must share the access points with the vehicles, and once on the site take their chances at actually reaching the building. The only areas on the site designated as pedestrian only are directly adjacent to the building at each of the six main entrances. There is also a sidewalk running along Woodridge Crescent, the northern border of the site. It is possible for pedestrians to reach the second and the third levels of parking on the north side directly from ground level, and vise-versa, by separate staircases. It is not, however, possible to reach the third level from the second level, and vise-versa.

main entry
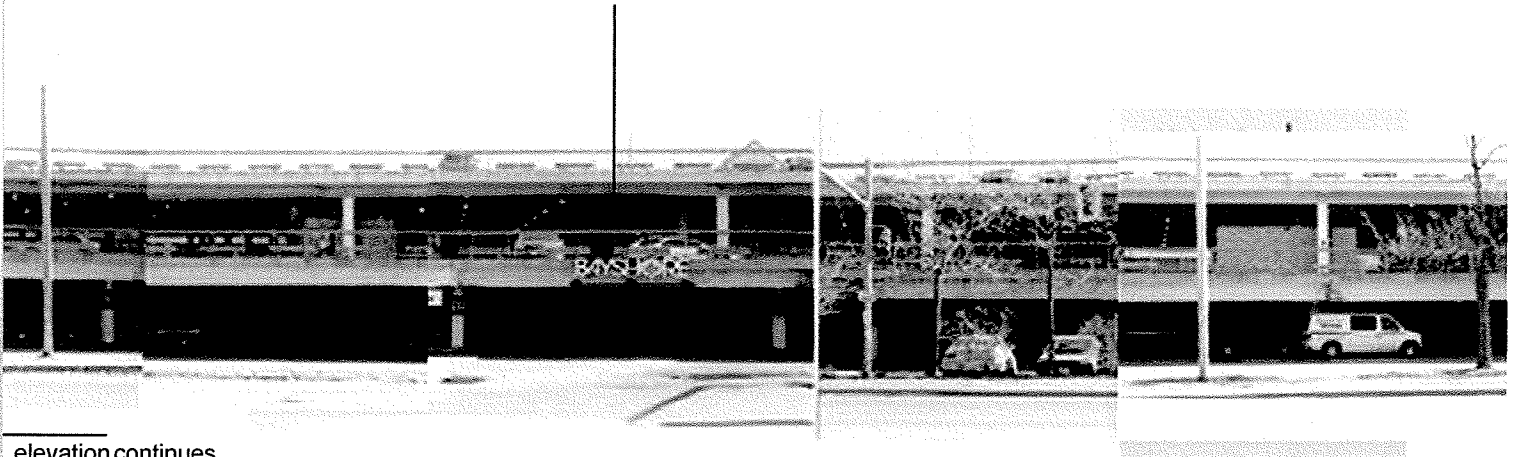
elevation continues

The result of all of the somewhat unpremeditated additions and renovations to the Bayshore Shopping Centre described above is a very disjointed site plan, and a configuration of parking structures that not only impedes circulation through the site but also is physically an eyesore. There is not an established 'front' or 'back' to the shopping center, inadvertently it has been hidden behind a fortress of parking on three sides, in complete isolation from the surrounding community. A more logical site layout would have been to locate the building closer to the north boundary of the site, with the multi-level parking on the south side. This would have allowed the development of a 'pedestrian face' adjacent to the community, and a 'vehicular face' adjacent to the freeway.

In 1990, the City of Nepean adopted a set of guidelines for the future growth and development of the City, titled the Official Plan. Many of the objectives set forth here are consistent with aspects of the discussion of place and placelessness in the first section of this study. With

**access ramp
(from Woodridge Cres.)**

west

the objective of establishing *a sense of place*, the guidelines, although intended for future development, are perhaps more importantly applied to the retrofitting of much of the existing development in the City. The Official Plan states that the location and design of commercial uses shall permit ease of access by pedestrians, bicycles, public transit riders and automobiles, while at the same time ensuring safety, aesthetic quality and compatibility with other land uses. It further states that commercial facilities shall achieve integration within the community. The City of Nepean Official Plan also supports efforts to reduce dependence on the private automobile, and to ensure the provision of efficient forms of public transit. It emphasizes the provision of accessibility to shopping areas, stating safety and convenience must be maximized without adversely affecting residential or ecologically sensitive areas. Unfortunately, the existing design of Bayshore Shopping Centre is lacking these design criteria. It is, however, possible to retrofit the site and achieve the objectives laid out in the Official Plan. The pratical application of this study demostrates this implementation.

Site Surfaces
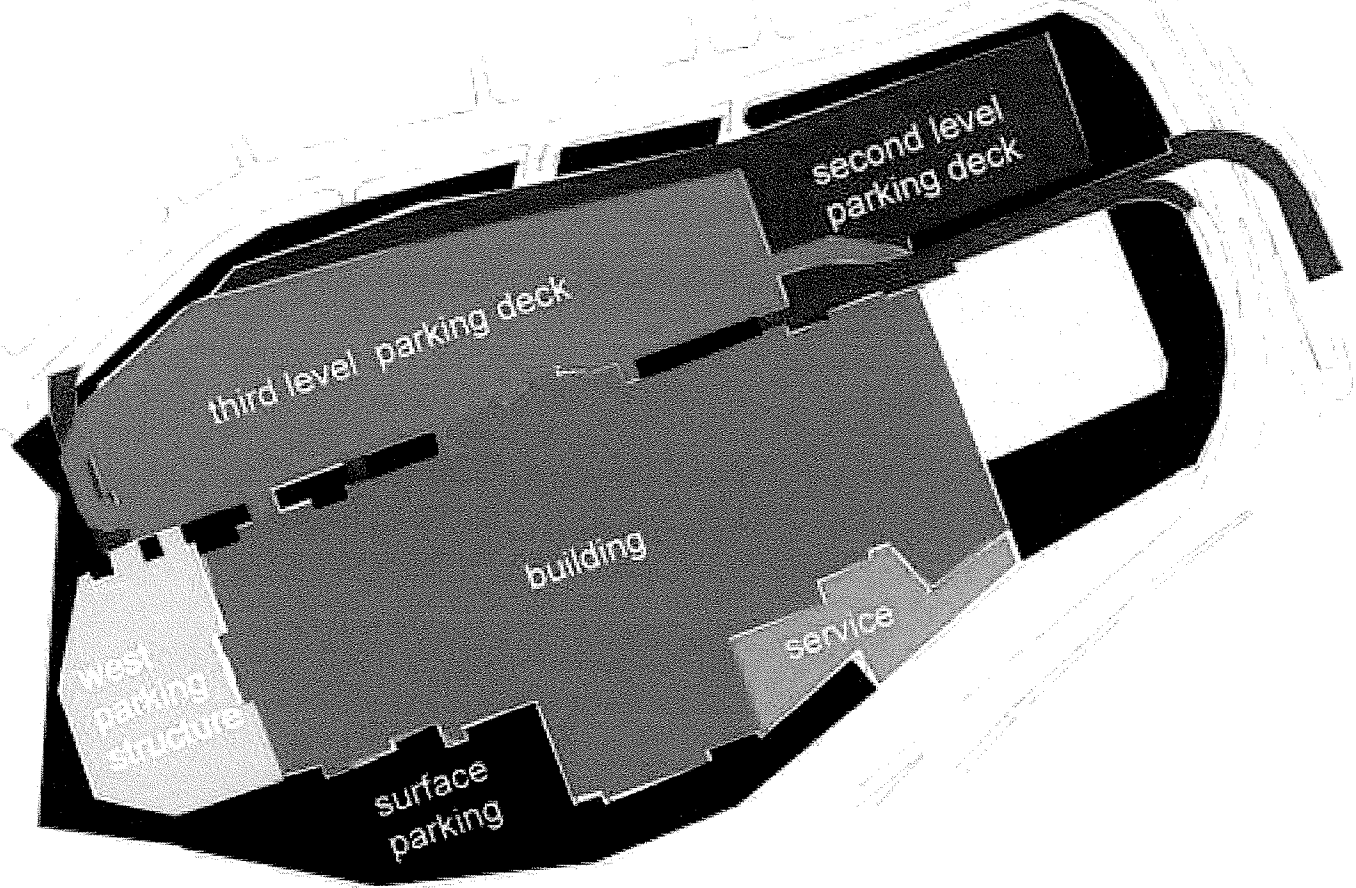
Pedestrian Circulation
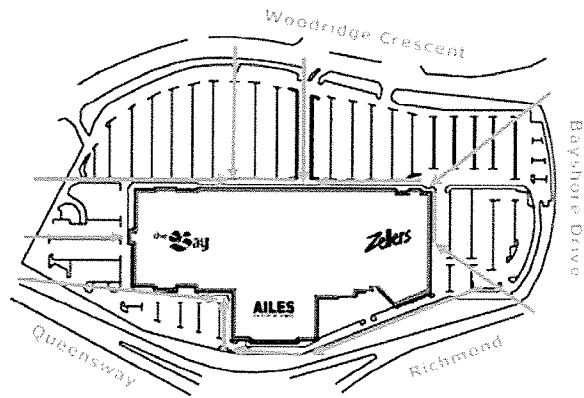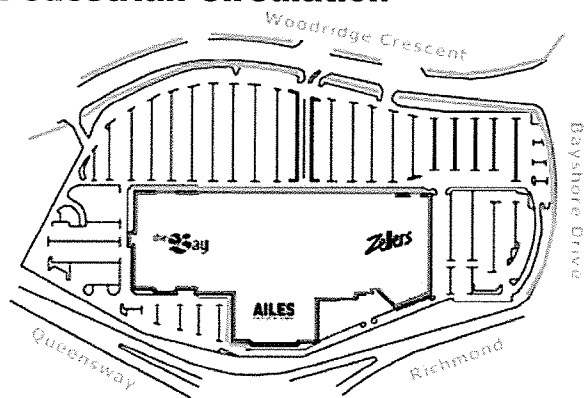
desirable pedestrian connections (ground level)

Vehicular Circulation (North Parking Structure)
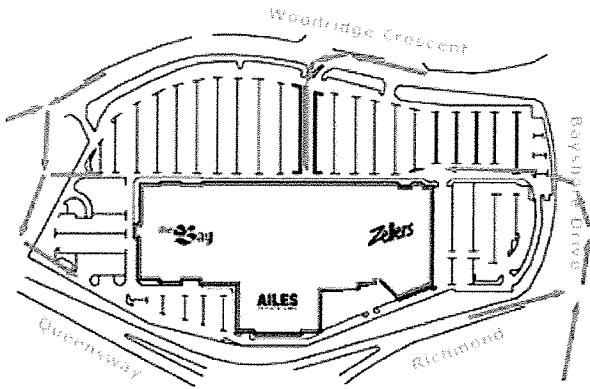
ground level vehicular access
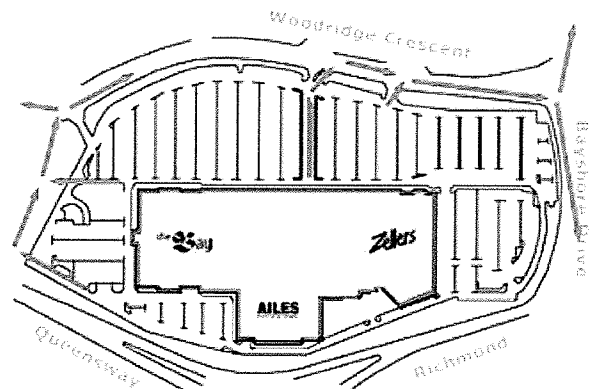
ground level vehicular egress
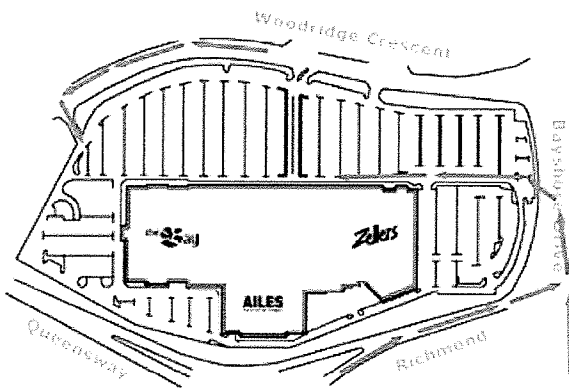
second level vehicular access
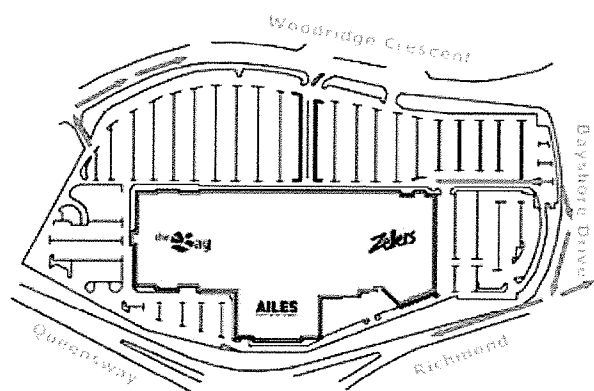
second level vehicular egress
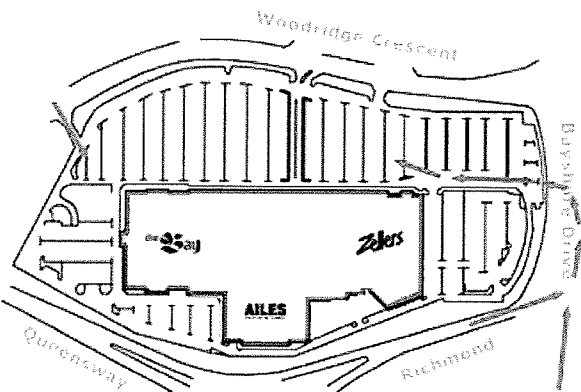
third level vehicular access
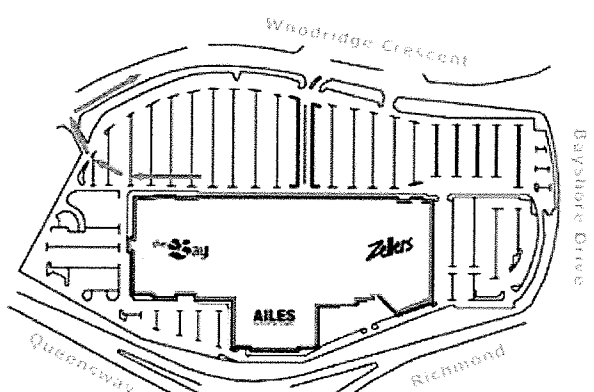
third level vehicular egress

Site Images

(all photos by author)

North side of site
(Woodridge Cresent)

West end of site
(parking structure access ramp)
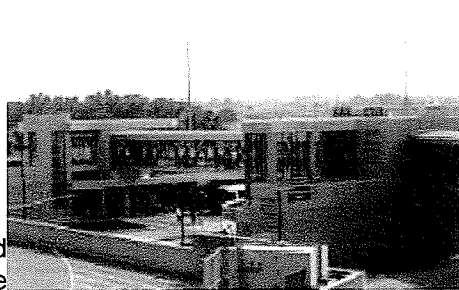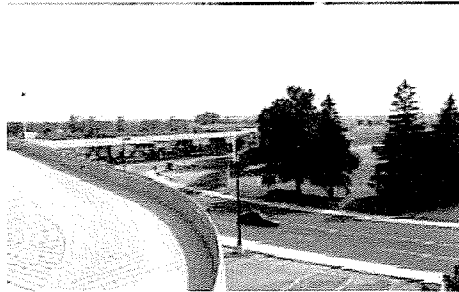
Bayshore Transpo Station and the Bay Parking Garage
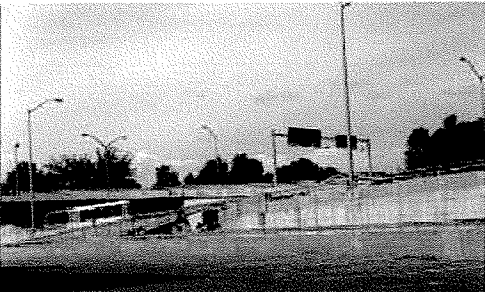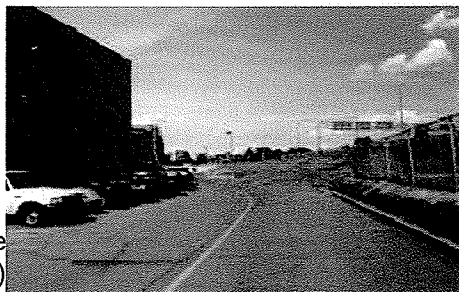
South side of site (adjacent to freeway)

Site Images
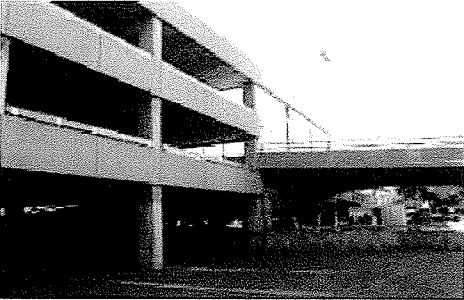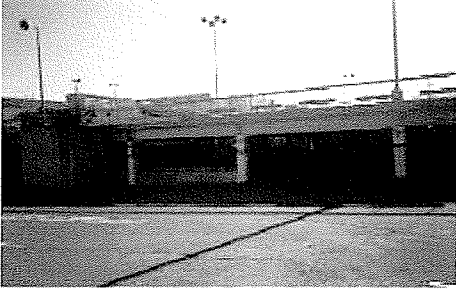
East end of site
(Zellers Parking Garage and
North Parking Structure)
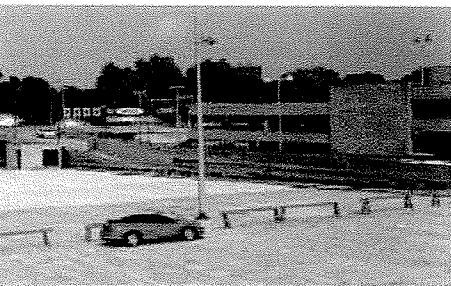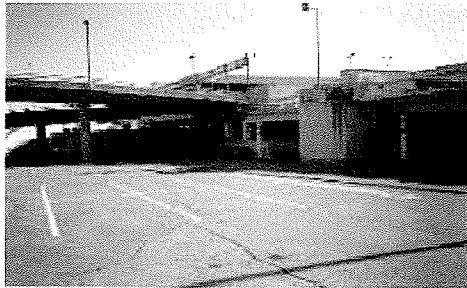
North-east corner of site
(Zellers Parking Garage and
North Parking Structure 2nd
level)
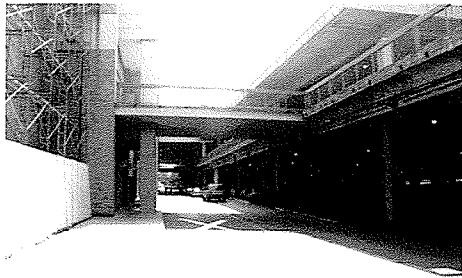
Interior of North Parking Structure
and bridging to mall
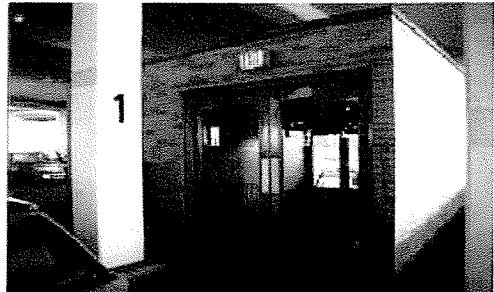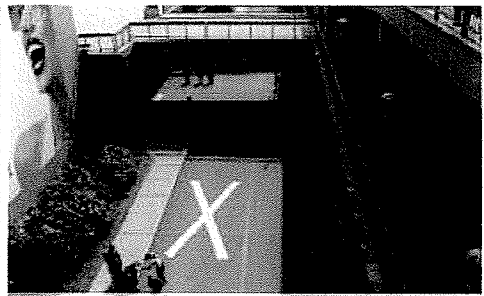
Interior of North Parking
Structure and bridging to
Transpo Station.

he city of Ottawa is situated at the juncture of three rivers (and a canal)

Regional Context - The Capital Region

The city of Ottawa and its surroundings are commonly referred to as the Capital Region. This is an area that is rich in history and culture as well as diverse in landscape. The city of Ottawa is situated at the confluence of three waterways, the Ottawa, Gatineau and Rideau Rivers.

The Ottawa River with the Parliament Buildings in the background

The Ottawa River acts as the provincial boundary between Ontario and Quebec, separating Ottawa from its mainly French sister-city, Hull. Water is an integral part of the geography and history of the region. The city of Ottawa takes its name from a tribe of fur traders, the Outaouak, meaning 'near the water'. The Gatineau and Ottawa Rivers were used as the main transport route for the logging industry for many years. White pines were floated down the Gatineau River, into the Ottawa River, and carried eastward to the St. Lawrence Seaway. The last log run occurred only 10 years ago in 1992, the trees are now transported east in trucks. The city was originally settled in 1613 by explorer Samuel de Champlain, but permanent settlement did not occur until 1827 by Colonel John By, after the Rideau Canal was built.

The Rideau Canal is a man-made diversion from the Rideau River south of the city that culminates in a series of locks at the Ottawa River directly adjacent to Parliament Hill in downtown Ottawa. In the summer the Canal traveled by many houseboats and pleasure crafts who patiently await the long process of manually opening and closing the four locks in order to reach the Ottawa River. Approximately four boats (depending on their size) may pass through the locks at a time, with the process generally taking more than an hour. There are consistent crowds of tourists watching this spectacle. In the winter (when temperatures are cold enough to permit) the Rideau Canal becomes the world's longest skating rink, stretching over eleven kilometers.
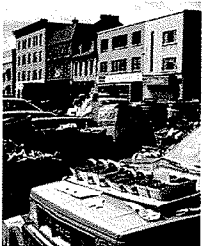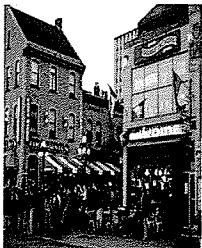

Rideau Canal Locks

skating on the Rideau Canal (all photos on this page from www.abcgallery.com)

*The Byward Market
(photos from
www.canadascapital.gc.ca)*

*The Peace Tower
(photo from
www.ottawplus.ca)*

Until 1854, Ottawa was called Bytown, after its principal settler. One of the most popular areas in the city for tourists and locals, the Byward Market, pays homage to this heritage. The Byward Market is a historical district of individual specialty shops, restaurants, pubs and courtyard cafes (although there is now a rather large Chapters Bookstore on one street corner, and a Hooters Restaurant on another) located just east of the Rideau Canal and Parliament Hill. It is a pedestrian environment that is full of people for most hours of the day, a shopping district during the daylight hours, a restaurant district in the evening, and a lively nightclub district into the late night/early morning hours. On summer weekends the area hosts a market of locally grown vegetables, fruits and flowers, as well as many buskers and street performers. Here shops open directly onto the sidewalks and restaurant patios spill into the streets. There is limited angled street parking as well as pocket surface lots and a few multi-level garages (that are cleverly disguised in the historical character of the district).
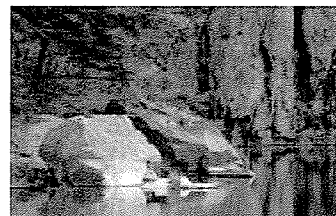
The skyline and character of downtown Ottawa is quite unique for a city of its size (roughly 1.2 million people) as buildings are not permitted to exceed the modest height of the Peace Tower, the central clock tower of the main Parliament Building. The absence of skyscraper style towers lends a human scale to the city than is lacking in other major cities, and allows stunning views of the surrounding landscape.

Across the Ottawa River in Quebec is 'the backyard playground' of Ottawa and Hull, Gatineau Park. The park has been characterized as having a "subtle beauty, charm and grace", and "a sense of tranquility, permanence and serenity". (Andrews, 1994, p 97) These 75 000 acres of unspoiled wilderness provide a picturesque backdrop to Ottawa, visible from most parts of the city and its suburbs. Gatineau Park lies over the igneous rock base of the Precambrian Shield, also known as the Canadian Shield. As such, the park is home to a variety of landscapes, including rolling hills, occasional flatlands, bare rock or thin soils, naked escarpments and an abundance of marshes, lakes and streams. The most common rock found in the park is gneiss, a greyish, striated stone. Limestone and sandstone bedrock

are also found throughout the region. Many lichen covered rocks, or 'erratics' (boulders of various sizes gouged from the mountains to the north and carried by glaciers) are located sporadically throughout the park, as if haphazardly dropped into place. Gatineau Park is home to a great variety of flora. Tree species include Sugar Maple, White Birch, Trembling Aspen, Balsam Fir, White Spruce, Eastern Hemlock, Red and White Pine, and American Beech. The forest under-story is diverse with ferns, wild strawberry, and bunchberry, as well as wildflowers such as trillium, wild ginger, and trout lilies. The park is also home to many old farm fields that have evolved into beautiful, colorful wildflower meadows, boasting various species of asters, agrimonies, daffodils, daisies, wild columbine and clover and grasses such as cow vetch and timothy grass.

granite boulders in Gatineau Park (photo from Andrews, 1994, p 132)

Approximately 80 percent of the Park is blanketed in forests; most commonly mixed forests of maple, beech, birch and pine, providing a stunning display of fall foliage color that attracts photographers, painters and many tourists to the region. The park offers different attractions in each season, and is popular for a wide range of activities. During the spring the park is home to cyclists, roller skiers and hikers, as well as tourists strolling the gardens and ruins of the McKenzie King Estate. The summer months bring swimmers, picnickers and campers to the many lakes and beaches within the park (The politically famous Meech Lake is located in Gatineau Park). The granite cliffs of the Eardley Escarpment provide a venue for hang-gliding and rock-climbing. The winter months attract both downhill and cross-country skiers to the many hills and trails within the park.

fall foliage of Harrington Lake in Gatineau Park (photo from Andrews, 1994, p 61)

At the edge of the metropolitan area of Canada's capital, Gatineau Park is a wilderness oasis. *"Today the valley before us is a mosaic of roads, farm fields, sprawling suburbs and strip-malls, but all that stops at the base of the escarpment. Like an impenetrable barrier to human progress, the escarpment has helped preserve the primeval wilderness of the Gatineau forests.* (Andrews, 1994, p. 19)


Pink Lake, Gatineau Park (photo from www.magma.ca/rob/ gallery)

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A SEARCH FOR PLACE

"We must begin by understanding architecture as a critical investigation and as an act of perception that will allow us to remake a community in which we can mirror our humanity - a true unity: The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression...is also a remaking of the experience of community in the direction of greater order and community."

Aaron Betsky, 1990, p. 32

cks in the surface of Bayshore Shopping Centre parking structures (photos by author)
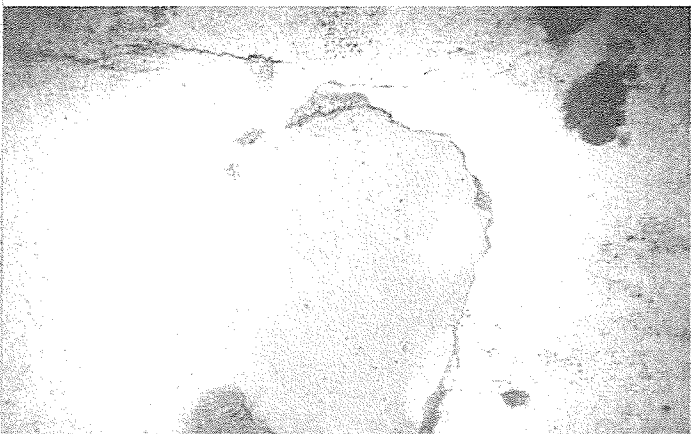
Manipulations - The Design Concept

The original vision for the retrofitting of this site involved a desire to manipulate the existing parking structures in an attempt to decrease the monolithic proportions of the site to a human scale, and allow light to penetrate the structures and vegetation to creep onto the site.

An exploration into the different ways the site may be manipulated ensued. It began with the simple idea to puncture the structure, allowing shafts of light to reach all levels and the structural integrity of the existing parking structures to remain. Vegetation would penetrate the structures and more humanistic spaces would result. Penetration evolved into fragmentation, a dividing of the elements into concentrated locations that would open up spaces on the site in which public activities could begin to occur. Various methods of fragmentation (such as fractures, cuts and slices) and possibilities for their physical manifestation were considered.

The final concept is inspired by the arbitrary nature of cracking in the concrete surface of parking lots and sidewalks. These cracks are sometimes simply lines that are ignored and walked over, or subconsciously avoided ("step on a crack and you'll break you mother's back"). They sometimes widen to become long narrow splits that separate the surface and are consciously realized or felt as they are stepped or driven over (fissures). Sometimes the cracks intersect, dividing the surface into separate portions that may disintegrate into large gaps, where pieces of the concrete disappear (chasms).

A series of cracks, fissures and chasms are applied to the existing site structures. In order to establish practical inspiration for this concept, research was performed on the subject of deconstructionist architecture as an alternative approach to spatial design. A discussion of this follows.

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An Alternative Approach to Space-Deconstructionist Architecture

As stated in the design concept, the initial appraoch to retrofitting this site was to decrease the monolithic scale of the existing site structures through a process of fragmentation, in order to allow various types of public open space to infiltrate the parking lot. The strategy is one of exposition and insertion. Exposition of the physical and social weaknesses of the existing structure, and an insertion of elements that begin to create a different spatial typology for shopping centre site design. A precise precendent for this approach to shopping centre site design could not be found. Strategies of deconstruction were explored as a means of developing a basis for the practical application of this study.

To seek out the root of deconstruction as a theory, one is lead back to French philosopher Jacques Derrida and his numerous writings on the subject. However, to try to understand deconstruction from this basis alone is a difficult task, unless one is experienced in the art of rendering philosophical discourse legible. To read Derrida is to be swept into an uncanny stream of argument, exposition, and altered terminology that knows no rest or single direction. Perfectly good sense is present, but just out of reach. Very few people understand Derrida in any detail. (Benedikt, 1991, p. 9) When interviewed, Derrida himself, whom is often referred to as the inventor of deconstruction, offers only a vague definition of deconstruction saying it is difficult to gather in a simple formula, but is emphatic that does not denote any theory, method or univocal concept. It is interesting to note that Derrida does not consider himself to be the originator of deconstruction. In his book *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes his theory this way:

"The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they

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take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not expect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally....."

(Quoted from Derrida's *Of Grammatology* by Mark Wigley, in Brunette and Wills, 1994, p. 226)

Michael Benedict describes deconstruction as "primarily a philosophy of writing and reading philosophy, but also an enquiry into the workings of language, ideas and the whole human cultural enterprise". (Benedikt, 1991, p.1) He states that deconstruction is "generative: of arguments, colloquia, papers, books of critical theory and criticism, and, perhaps of buildings". (Ibid. p.9) Deconstruction has become a common topic of discourse among intellectuals and critics. It is a pattern of thinking that has spread across multiple disciplines, from art to literature to architecture, and has even crept into science. The writings of Michael Benedikt are particularly useful to this study, as he attempts to describe the relationship between the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida and the Deconstructionist/ Deconstructivist movement in architecture. Benedikt points out that the attraction of architects to Derrida is no accident, as architectural metaphors abound in Derrida's writing, and can be thoughtfully translated into built form. The connection between the philosophy of deconstruction and the same named architectural movement will be further discussed in the next section. Benedikt most intelligibly describes Derrida's deconstructive method as:

"Foregrounding what has been in the background, making explicit what was implicit,

**isolating what was incorporated, naming what
was un-named, and regrouping phenomena by
re-view ...Derrida himself does not claim to do
anything more than show us how the literary
and metaphysical work *works*."**

(Ibid. p.4)

**Mark Wigley outlines Derrida's deconstructive philosophy as
the 'soliciting' of an edifice, in the sense that sollicitare, in old
Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety. If
deconstructive discourse is anything, it is a form of interrogation
that shakes structures in a way that exposes structural
weaknesses.** (Wigley, 1993, p.35) **According to Wigley, Derrida's
architectural thoughts depend much upon the earlier such
thoughts of philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger formulated
it as "destruction" or "critical unbuilding", which was further
translated into "critical dismantling" and then "de-construction".
The concept was formally introduced in Heidegger's 1927
publication *Being and Time*. There is a relationship between the
professions of philosophy and architecture, according to Derrida,
based on the fact that philosophy constructs arguments like a
building is constructed.** (Wigley, in Brunette and Wills, 1994, p. 203)
**Wigley discusses in great detail the importance of the house (as
the primary architectural structure) in Derrida's writings. Similar
to Benedikt, Wigley discusses the presence of architecture as a
spatial medium in Derrida's work, even before Derrida specifically
wrote about the relationship of architecture and deconstruction.
Wigley himself uses architectural language to describe Derrida's
theory:**

**"Deconstruction is likewise understood as
an affirmative appropriation of structures
that identifies structural flaws, cracks in the
construction that have been systematically
disguised, not in order to collapse the those**

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structures but, on the contrary, to demonstrate the extent to which the structures depend on both these flaws and the way they are disguised."
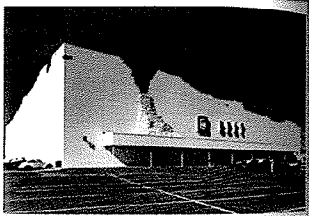
(Ibid., p. 207)

When first confronted with the notion of a deconstructive discourse in architecture, Jacques Derrida was surprised and suspicious. "I thought at first that perhaps this as an analogy, a displaced discourse, and something more analogical than rigorous. And then...I realized on the contrary, the most efficient way of putting Deconstruction to work was by going through art and architecture." (Jacques Derrida in Papadakis ET al, 1989, p. 71) **Derrida admits to the ubiquitousness of architectural metaphor in his philosophy, but asserts that deconstruction is in fact related to** *structuralism,* **sharing motifs with the structuralist project while attacking it. Deconstruction is not only "to destroy something which is built – physically built or culturally built – just in order to reveal a naked ground on which something new could be built"** (ibid., p.73)**, but also a questioning of this architectural model.**

"Now as for architecture, I think that Deconstruction comes about when you have deconstructed some architectural philosophy, some architectural assumptions – for instance, the hegemony of the aesthetic, of beauty, the hegemony of usefulness, of functionality, of living, of dwelling. But then you have to reinscribe these motifs within the work."

(Jacques Derrida in in Papadakis, Cooke, Benjamin, 1989, p. 71)

The first public recognition of the notion of deconstruction in architecture was a 1988 publication of an issue of *Architectural Design* **devoted to the subject (by the Academy Forum at London's**

Tate Gallery). Soon after Philip Johnson and Peter Eisenman organized an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York titled *Deconstructivist Architecture.* This exhibition spawned a debate in architectural circles as to what constitutes a deconstructivist architectural project, a debate that has yet to be solved. Some of the views of the main participants of this debate will be outlined here, followed by a discussion of which of these opinions is most relevant to this design project.

Mark Wigley, in a presentation at the Deconstruction Symposium at the Tate Gallery in March 1988, describes Deconstuctivist Architecture as "an architecture of distortion, disruption, dislocation, deflection and deviation, and not of demolition, dismantling, decay, decomposition and disintegration." (Wigley, in Papadakis ET al, 1989, p. 133) He does not consider James Wines (and SITE) or Peter Eisenman to be deconstructivist architects because he feels they do not "exploit the unique condition of the architectural object". (ibid. p. 132) It is argued here that the work of SITE does exactly this, exploits the structure in a way that causes the user to perceive a typically mundane building type in a different manner. This is demonstated by the BEST Products Company showroom facade series designed by SITE between 1975 and 1984. This facade series reconsidered the standardized big box, featureless exterior shell of suburban highway commercial development by bringing it into the realm of public art.

SITE: Notch Showroom, Sacramento, California, 1977
SITE's BEST Showroom facade series (photos from Wines, 1987, p 144-151)

Wigley sees the work of SITE as "a simple breaking of an object", and of Eisenman as a "complex dissimulation of an object into a collage of traces". (ibid. p. 133) He feels that true deconstructivist architecture seeks the unfamiliar within the familiar, displaying the structure rather than destroying it. He points out that a deconstuctivist project is not anti-contextual, but that it makes a specific intervention where contextual elements are de-familiarized. Some part of the context must be activated in order to disturb the rest of it. The status of the inside/outside relationship is radically disturbed, possibly through a reconsideration of the

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presence/absence or orientation of the walls or roof of a structure as in the work of Arquitectonica. Deconstructivist Architecture exposes the unfamiliar that is hidden within the traditional and exploits the weaknesses in the tradition in order to disturb, but not conquer, it. It is essential, according to Wigley, that the center of the tradition is confronted, along with the margins.

"In each (deconstructivist) project, the traditional structure of parallel planes stacked up horizontally from the ground plane within a regular form is twisted, the frame and even the ground plane is warped."
(ibid. p. 134)

There is a shaking of the structure, without collapsing it. Form does not follow function in Wigley's Deconstructivist Architecture, "forms are distributed and only then given a functional programme" (ibid. p. 134), function follows *deformation*. These ideas of the reconsideration of traditional built form are explored through the practical application of this study, and documented in the Design Process section of this document.

Wigley observes that though deconstruction was indeed a 'new movement' in architecture, the attachment to Derrida was tenuous. He is emphatic that Deconstructivist Architecture is not a style or an 'ism'. He asserts that the architects that he considers to be deconstructivist are in fact "strikingly different" (from each other), but that there is "curious point of intersection between their projects while they move in different directions". The essential aspect of his definition of a deconstructivist project is that it "interrogate pure form in a way that exposes the repressed horror of architecture". (ibid. p. 134) He feels that the architects share an unsettling quality to their projects, a repression of cultural assumptions that isolates the perception of the viewer from the intentions of the author. The viewer is not alienated, but instead is allowed to form his or her own perception. Wigley does not

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think that the deconstructivist architect expresses any personal values or style, nor is the deconstructivist project a reflection of an unsettled culture, but that the architect is simply providing the opportunity for the tradition to "deform itself".

James Wines, in his similarly timed article "A Slippery Floor", presents a different take on deconstruction in architecture than Mark Wigley. He labels the movement De-architecture, rather than Deconstructionist or Deconstructivist Architecture. He considers the following to be among the true deconstructionist architects; Nigel Coates, Eric Owen Moss, Stanley Saitowitz, Morphosis, SITE and especially Gordon Matta-Clark. Although trained as an architect, Matta-Clark's work, like that of SITE, looks at buildings as objects of art more than functional edifices. "Matta-Clark's art seized upon the paradoxical realtionship between the American dream of progress and the willful destruction that accompanies it." (Wines, 1987, p 139) His 'Splitting' project reconsiders an ordinary, banal home in suburban New Jersey that is planned to be demolished. He made two parallel cuts through the middle of the house, and titled away the back section and set it back on its foundation. The result is a wedge shaped void through the center of the structure, that gains its meaning from the cultural impications of the strucutre itself. In his 'Conical Intersect' project, Matta-Clark cut a series of concentric holes through the facade and floor planes of a seventeenth century townhouse slated for demolition in Paris. He called it "non-umental, that is an expression of the commonplace that might encounter the grandeur and pomp of architectural structures and their self-glorifying clients." (ibid.) Matta-Clark's interventions give cultural meaning to otherwise mundane building forms. This is precisely what is intended with this study, to add a social relevance to the shopping centre that reaches beyond consumerism. Matta-Clark's work is thus of particular significance to this study.

James Wines questions the connection of Jaques Derrida to the architectural movement of deconstruction, suggesting that ground

Gordon Matta-Clark, Splitting, Englewood, New Jersey, 974
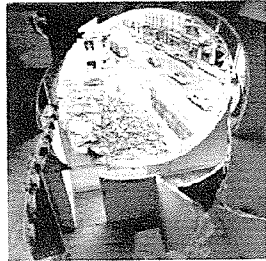
Gordon Matta-Clark, Conical Intersect, Paris, 1975
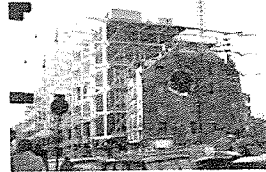
Matta-Clark's 'Splitting' (top) and 'Conical Intersect' (middle and bottom) (photos from Wines, 1987, p 139)

rules are necessary if this leap is to be made. He states that a true deconstructivist process in architecture, in the sense of linguistics and philosophy, calls for the "identification of an archetype", to serve as the equivalent for the archetext which is the starting point of Derrrida's philosophy. An archetype is described as a recognizable, identifiable building form, such as a "Greco-Roman banks and civic buildings", and more recently, "high-rise housing blocks and shopping centres". (bid, p. 137) **Wines disagrees with Wigley's dismissal of "fragmented and dematerialized elements in buildings" as "illegitimate deconstructivist exercises" that are directly associated with "demolition and ruin", considering the dismissal "un-critical and superficial".** (ibid. p. 136) **In his book** *De-architecture*, **Wines outlines how "one of the main tenets of de-architecture is that even conventions and cliches, if seen in new ways, can be used as raw material to provide new levels of perception."** (Wines, 1987, p.118) **He stresses the basic premise of de-architecture is that "art, not design, is the supreme mission of a building, and that the creative process must be revised to reflect this objective."** (ibid. p. 119) **He emphasizes the conflict between public accessibility in design and a defensive, overly private view, proposing that this conflict should be expressed in the design, specifically in the walls, of the building. Wines discusses the media and the car with relation to architecture. He feels architecture is rendered invisible because the street façade's former role of conveying information is done by the media and because both the media and the automobile isolate people from public interaction. It is these deonstructionist ideals of James Wines that are most relevant to the practical application of this study.**

"An edifice that reveals its own biography in public has a greater possibility of generating interest than a structure that exposes only the established rituals of service."

(ibid. p.125)

Charles Jencks describes deconstruction in architecture as "an informal style appealing to a substantial taste for the discordant and ephemeral, the unpretentious and tough." (Charles Jencks, in Papadakis et al, 1989, p. 119) Jencks states that Deconstructionist architecture "works best as an exception within a strongly defined norm." (ibid., p. 120) This is in agreement with James Wines' opinion that an archetype is necessary as the starting point of deconstruction (i.e. a recognizable architectural form, such as a schoolhouse). Jencks continues his thought by stating that Deconstruction in architecture "always depends for its meaning on that which is previously constructed" (ibid., p.120), and, "Deconstruction is most effective when norms of construction and ornament are also there to be resisted" (ibid., p. 121). "Deconstruction makes contact with what exists by contrast and aggression." (ibid., p. 121) He discusses the architecture of Frank Gehry as a "method of Deconstruction (that) can be quite literal at times, since he will smash an existing building into parts..." (ibid., p. 120) This is the type of deconstruction most relevant to this project.

J. Hillis Miller, in an article titled "Beginning From the Ground Up", describes deconstruction in architecture as a text in progress to be actively read as it is inhabited or used. He states that the deconstructivist project is "without fixed origin, end, organic continuity, narrative, hierarchical or dialectical form....it resists totalization....and establish(es) and invite(s) interruptions, discontinuities, dissociations.... it appropriates, displaces, transfers, transforms, decomposes the old architecture and its reason for being....above all it reads this (brings its principles to light)...it plays on assumptions of what a building must be to look like architecture". (in Lilyman, Moriarty, Neuman, *Critical Architecture and Contemporary Culture*, ????, p. 17) Miller further defines the theory in terms of what message deconstructive buildings portray. "Deconstructive buildings demonstrate the "fissures and tensions" of postmodern architecture. (p. 13) Buildings that result from this philosophy are a stage in a potentially endless series of

drawings or schemes, the traces of earlier stages of the life of the building remain, and the potential for later stages is evident. A deconstructive building "is performative and participatory... oriented toward the not yet of an unknown and unknowable future rather than fixing in concrete already fixed civic or domestic meaning". (ibid. p.18)

A deconstructivist project, above all, invites those who use it to give it meaning.

The Relevance of Deconstruction

This section will describe how the process of deconstruction can be employed as a method of creating a sense of place in the suburban commercial landscape, and why this is a valid design process. The objectives of this project have been outlined as: to generate a sense of place, to challenge the legibility of the regional shopping center within a suburban context, and to challenge the mundane spatial nature of parking. The process is a search for a new prototypical image for large-scale suburban commercial development, one that will be applicable to projects of similar typology. The initial approach to the task of placemaking on the chosen site was to manipulate the existing structure by a process of cracking and puncturing, with the intentions of decreasing the sheer magnitude of the structure and allowing natural light to penetrate through it. The research of the philosophy of deconstruction and its connection to architecture was performed as a post-rationalization, and further development, of this idea. It would be an overstatement to say that the roots of this particular design project are Derridean in nature, as his philosophies will not be directly applied, but the influence of his philosophy on

the similarly named architectural movement is not argued here. However, the intents of this project are more closely related to the previously discussed tenets of James Wines, and to his work with SITE, as well as the works of Gordon Matta-Clark. The project attempts to redefine the shopping centre typology, much as SITE redefined the big box typology with the BEST Showroom facade series. Both SITE and Matta-Clark quite literally deconstruct builidngs by removing parts of the structure that are expected to be present, thus altering public perception. This design proposal will also adopt a literal approach to deconstruction, a physical removal of portions of the existing structure through a process of cracking.

The intents of this project also closely follow the aforementioned descriptions of deconstructive projects by J. Hillis Miller. The design proposal directly challenges what the exterior of a shopping centre 'must look like', as well as the activities that 'should' take place there. This project is a questioning of the status quo of the consumerist driven suburban shopping centre design through a pulling apart, or dismantling of the structure. This method is exactly what Mark Wigley asserts is *not* deconstructivist architecture (Papakis ET al, 1989, p. 133), but exactly what James Wines argues is (ibid. p. 137). It is confusing though that Wigley later states how in deconstructivist architecture "the structure is shaken but does not collapse". (ibid. p. 134) Is this not at least a partial dismantling? The intent of this project is not to destroy the existing structure, but to display a different potential for it. The structure will not be completely dismantled, but it will definitely be broken into pieces and reorganized in a new manner. The aim is to provide a new opportunity for the perception of the suburban shopping centre, one that looks beyond the consumerist edifice that it currently is.

The design process for this project similarly relates to part of Wigley's view of deconstruction in architecture. The edifice is stripped of all function and meaning, and considered only as object. The object, or in this case, objects, are then manipulated.

Function is then reinscribed on the new forms. Wigley describes a similar process:

"In Deconstructivist architecture, forms are distributed, and only then are given a functional programme. The distortion of pure form provides a complexity of local conditions congruent with functional complexity. Function follows deformation."

(Wigley in Papadakis ET al, 1989, p. 134)

The theoretical removal of function from the existing site structures allows a reconsideration of the pure aesthetics of the site, or in this case, the lack of. The physical breaking of the planes (of the parking structures) creates an opportunity for different types of public leisure space to evolve within the strictly utilitarian realm of parking. The removal of pieces of each of the planes breaks up the visual monotony of the monolithic parking structures with spaces that are visually stimulating, while allowing an increased amount of natural light to penetrate the structures. This is especially important in improving the perceived, an actual, public safety of the site, a grave concern. With the reapplication of function, the fragmentation of the parking structures provides an opportunity to improve vehicular circulation between the different planes through the addition of more access ramps. The process of deconstructing the existing structures of this site is an alternative approach to creating space within a concrete object. By considering the parking structures as objects (as SITE and Matta-Clark often did), the shopping centre takes on a new meaning, one that is not completely centered upon consumption. The mall becomes a truly public place, a leisure destination for the region.

CHASMS

(Design Proposal)

chasm

1. *noun*   **1. a deep fissure or opening in the earth, rock, etc.**

(The Canadian Oxford Compact Dictionary)

GENERATING PLACE
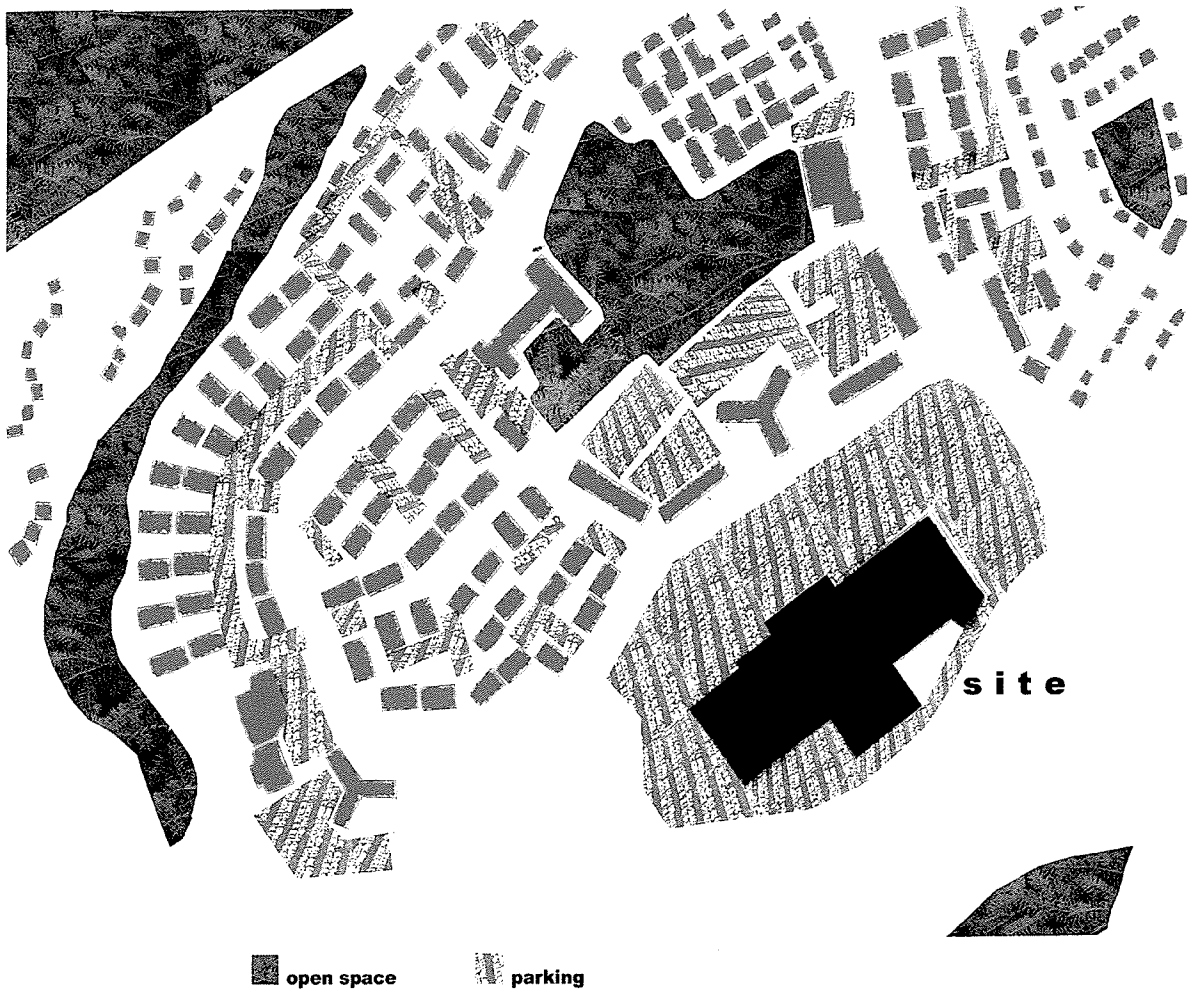
open space   parking

Community Context - Existing Open Space and Parking

-community open space is fragmented into small isolated pockets
-the design site is a continuous mass of parking
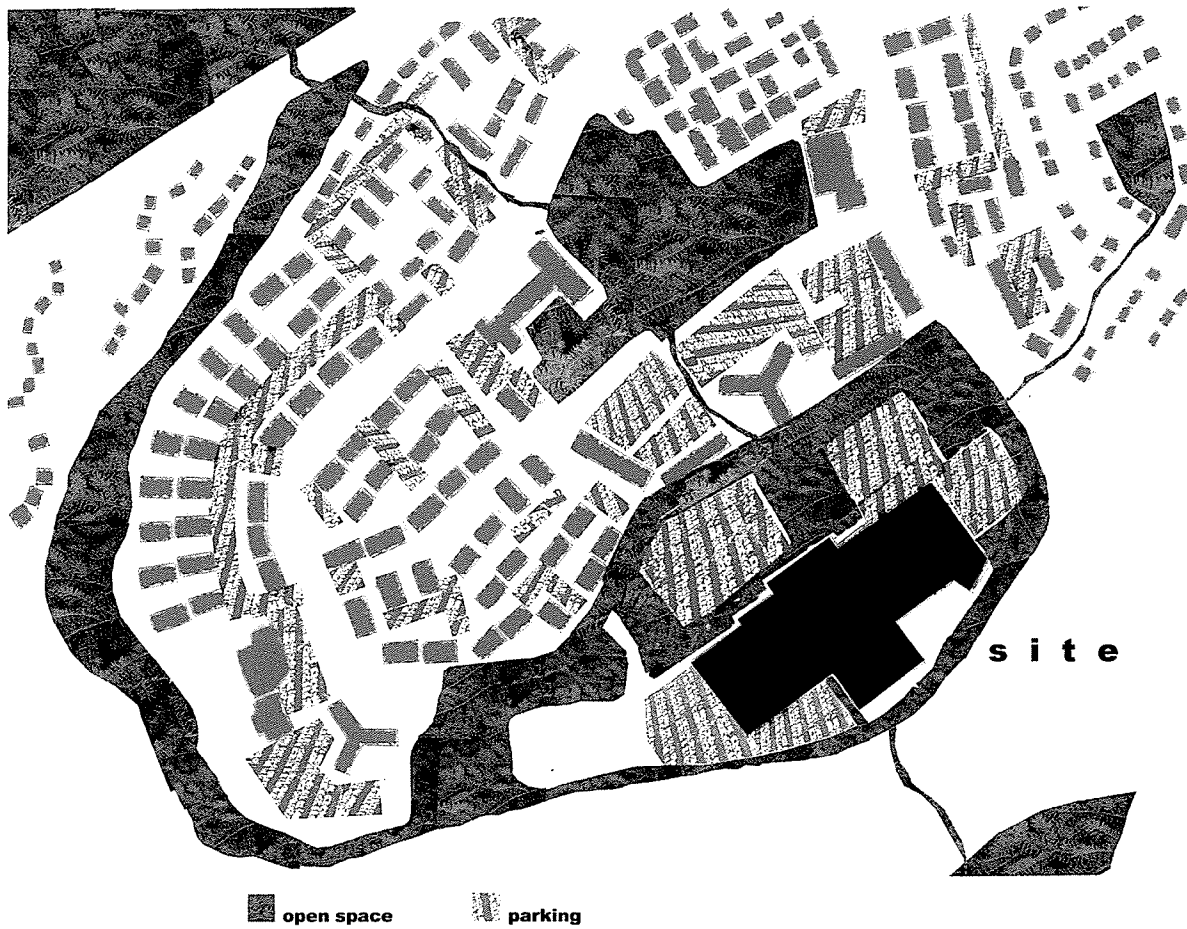
open space   **parking**

Community Context - Proposed Open Space and Parking

-the fragmentation of the design site allows for public open space to penetrate the
otherwise sterile parking area
-a network of open space is developed in the community, linking new open spaces to
the existing open spaces

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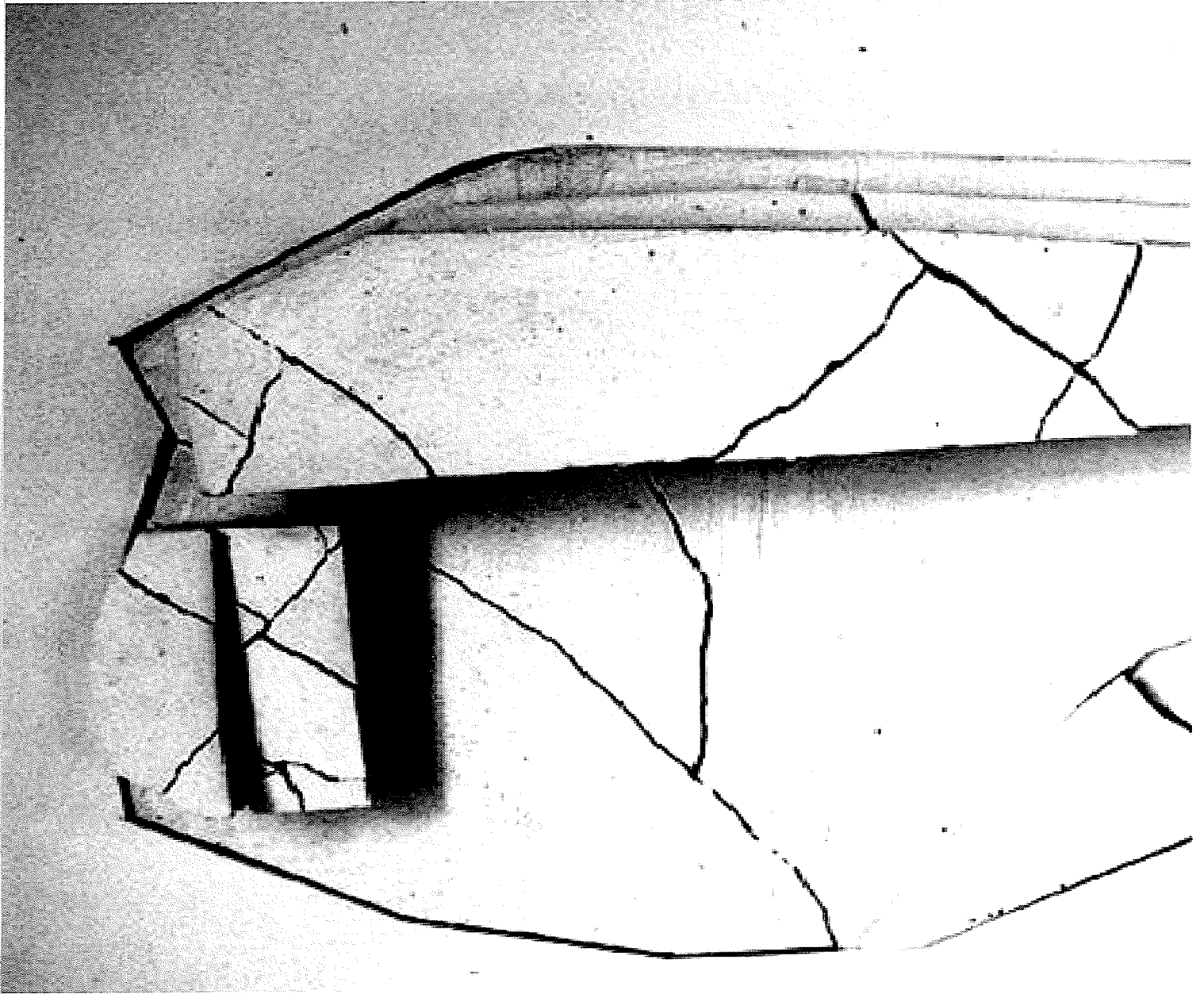
Design Process

A study model was constructed by pouring plaster of paris into foam core molds (representational of the different planes of the existing site structures). In the manner of early Russian Constructivism (thought to be the precurser to deconstruction), these planes were considered as individual entities (contect was removed).
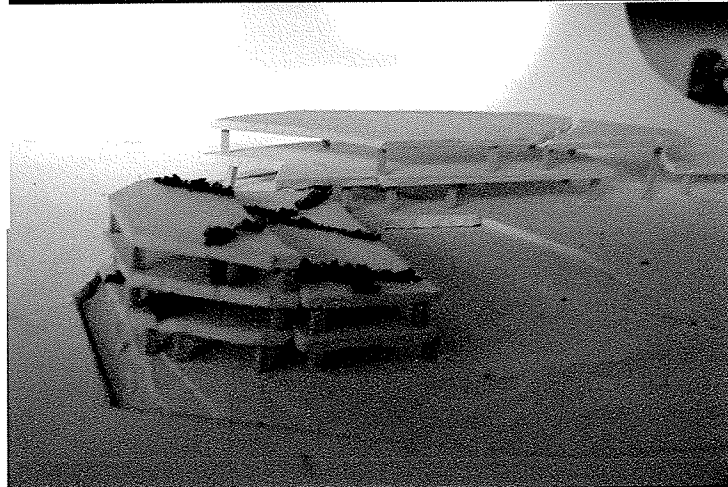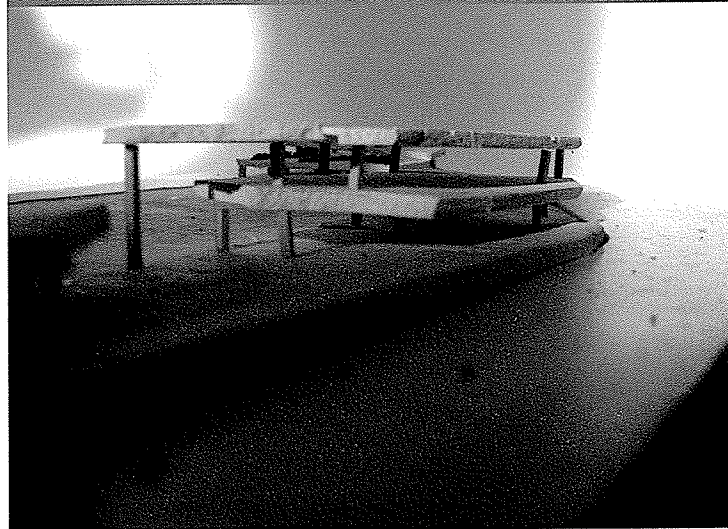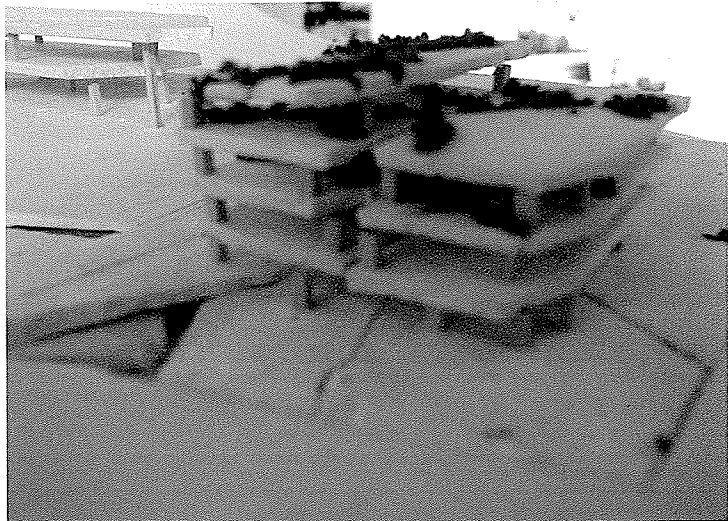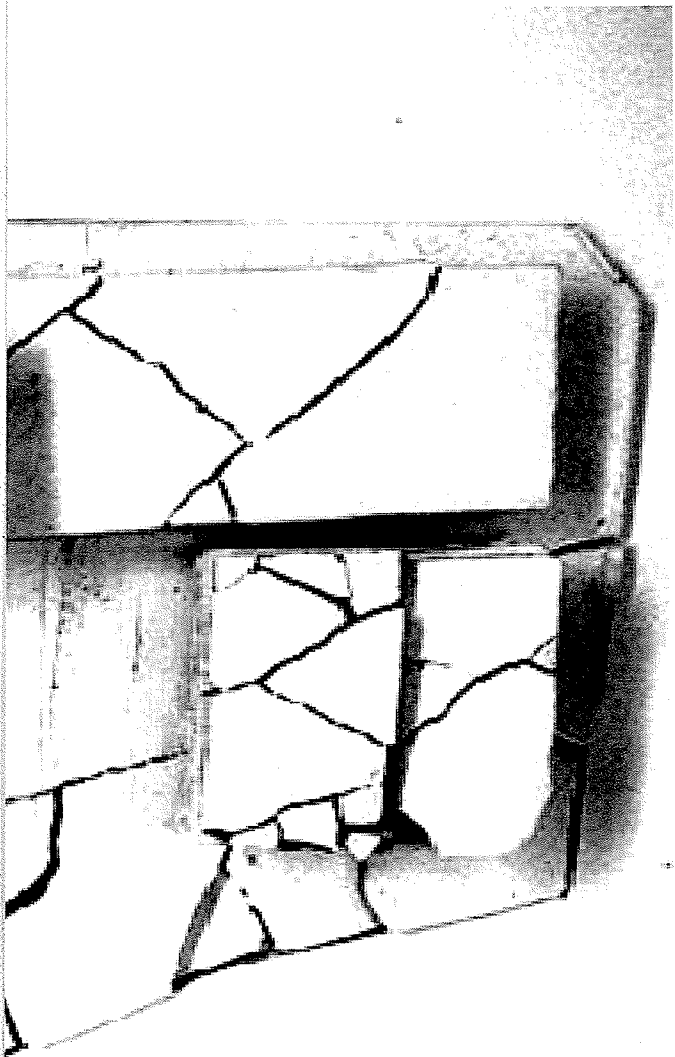
Each plane was fractured through a twisting of the molds - resulting in faults that could begin to inform the fragmentation process.
The language of cracks, fissures and chasms was developed and applied to the faults, with each fault became one of these elements.
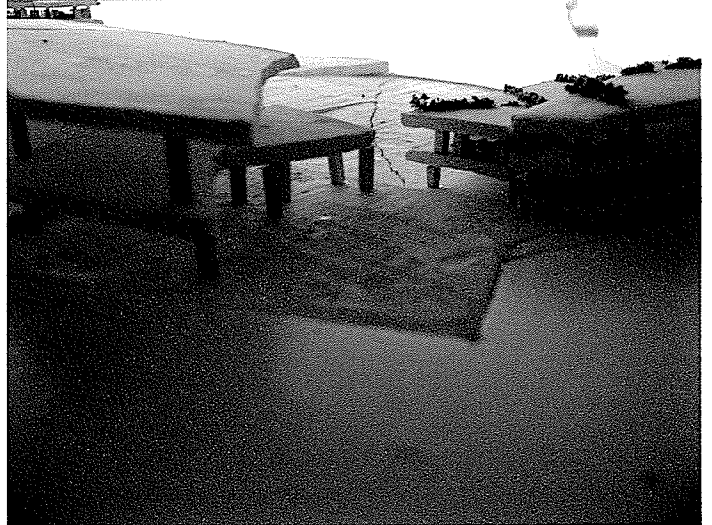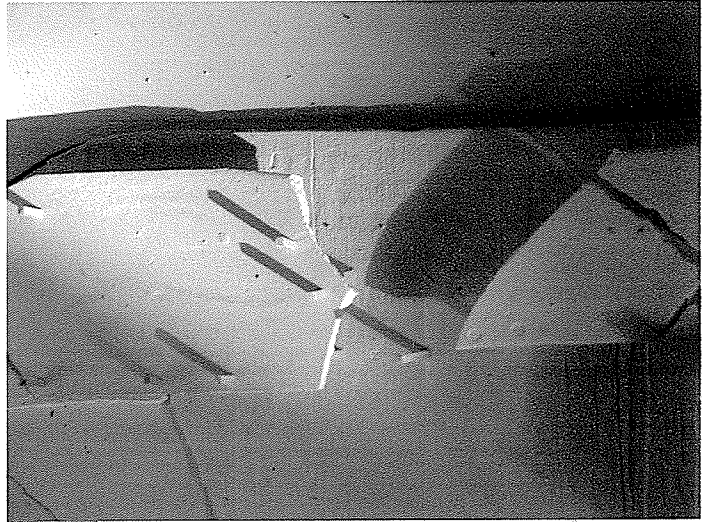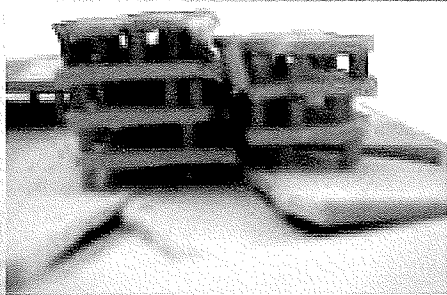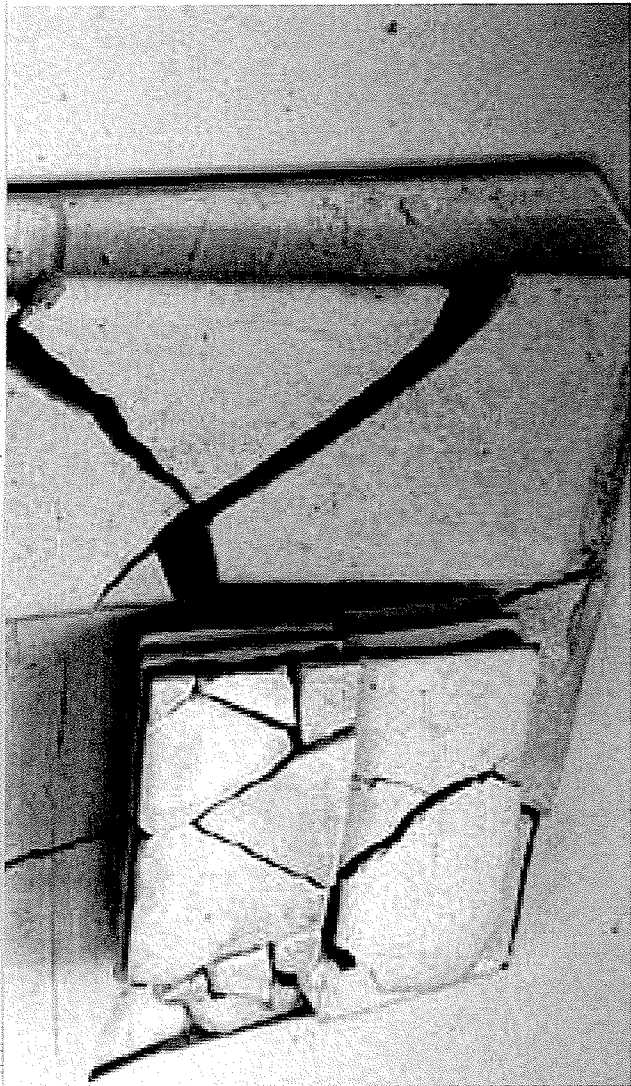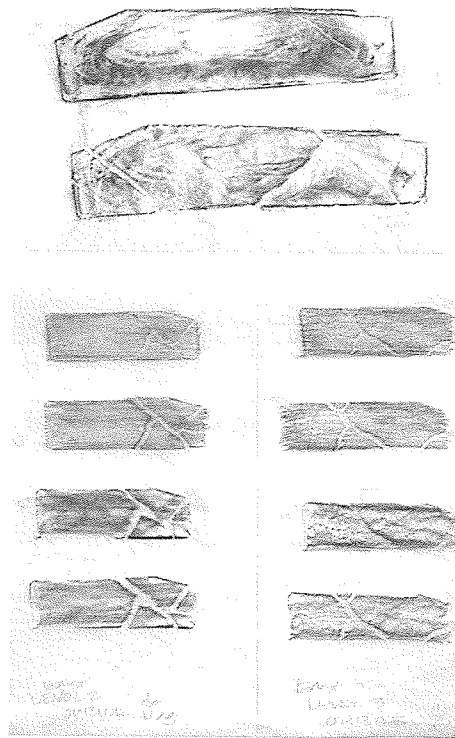
ground plane

inbetween plane two

Graphite rubbings of each of the fragmented planes were done, and the fault lines were applied to the existing site structures (ie. context was reinscribed).
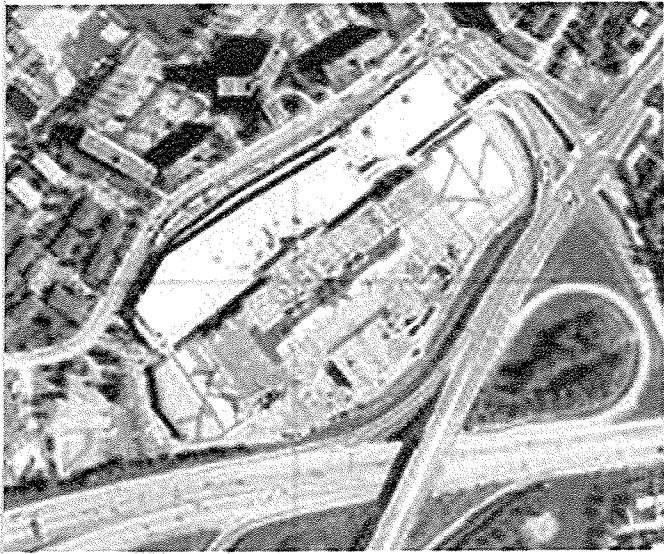
inbetween plane one

second plane

third plane

composite

The Design Program

Primary Program:

The first act of the design program is the addition of a new layer of elements that aim to evolve the site into an alternative type of suburban open space. The new program has the primary goal of reclaiming a sense of place by subduing consumerist attitudes towards space, in favour of social values and contextually based design. The existing quantity of parking spaces on the study site is able to handle vehicle loads for all but the busiest ten days of the year (the peak consumer season, Christmas). This leaves many parking spaces, thus much of the site, largely unused during much of the year. The new program will aim to demonstrate a more efficient use of space through the addition of elements that will extend the daily and seasonal hours of usage of the site. It will include some loosely programmed spaces that are transformable into uses other than parking for off-peak vehicle hours and seasons. It follows that the extended use of the site will also improve issues of safety. It is intended that the addition of spaces of a non-commercial nature to the site will attract a new and diverse group of potential consumers. The new program will not destroy the existing site structures and begin with a *tabula rasa,* but rather reconsider them, maintaining their existing structural integrity while developing a new aesthetic. Elements of the new design program are derived from the research discussed in the introductory literature review of placelessness in the suburban landscape. The aim is to integrate/intertwine activities that are disparate in typical suburban zoning practices. These elements are:

- a space for congregation- including outdoor entertainment/dining (Civic Plaza)
- a space for contemplation (Community Plaza)
- a space for recreation (Suburban Wilderness Trail)
- a pedestrian friendly/human scaled public street (new Woodridge Cresent)

Secondary Program:

As the project that has been outlined here is a reparation project; there is an existing design program that must be considered as an essential act of the design exercise. Elements of the existing design program are:

· 4000 parking spaces (dispersed over 3 separate structures)
· vehicular circulation - access and egress points/routes and connections between different structures and levels
· pedestrian circulation – bridges connecting parking structure to the shopping centre and staircases between levels
· signage – one 'pylon sign' on south side and overhead signage at entry/exit points
· lighting – pole lighting, overhead lighting, soffit and canopy lighting
· service vehicle access areas – north and south sides of shopping centre
· landscaped areas – limited to areas adjacent to anchor stores on south and north sides of shopping centre, and along Woodridge Cresent

The next step of this secondary design process is to identify those aspects of the existing design program that require reparation, based upon careful site analysis and discussions with mall management, tenants, clients, and residents of the surrounding community. The reparation program will eventually emerge simultaneously with the new program. Elements of the reparation program are:

· improve/clarify vehicular circulation
· improve/increase signage
· improve/increase lighting (natural and artificial)
· improve/enhance pedestrian circulation (increase pedestrian safety and pleasure) improve/focus service vehicle access and circulation

plaza
recreation
new street
parking

Proposed Site Program

The new programmatic elements are dispersed over the site, breaking up the monolithic scale of the parking structure to create a human-scaled, public environment.

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cracks, fissures and chasms (the rules)

- cracks are interruptions of a horizontal or vertical surface- they may be a change of paving material, a planting strip, or a small elevation change.

- fissures are openings in a surface - they separate a plane into different portions - they may also be a vertical slit or gateway in a façade that allows pedestrians to pass through.

- chasms are large gaps in a surface that are formed by the removal of portions of the plane - they result in the spaces that hold the new programmatic elements.

crack
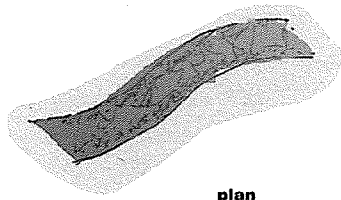
plan
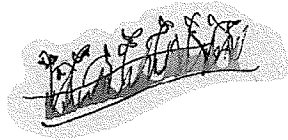
elevation
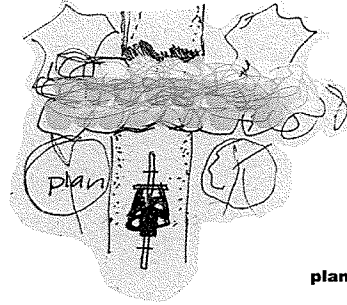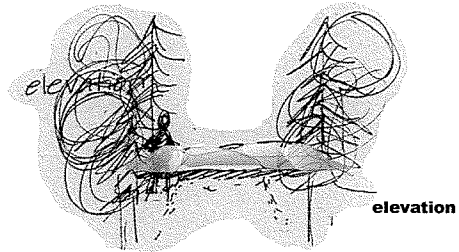
fissure

plan

elevation

crack
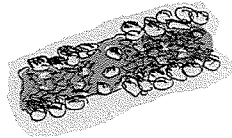
plan

elevation
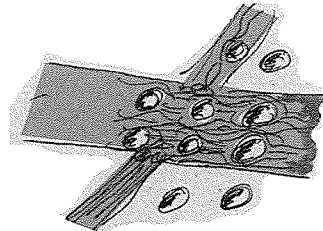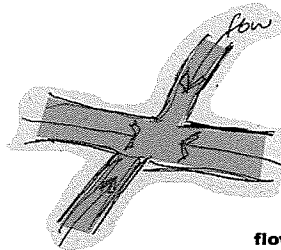
fissure

plan

flow of water plan

crack
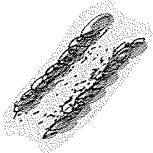
plan

section
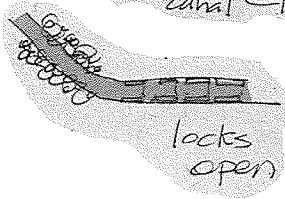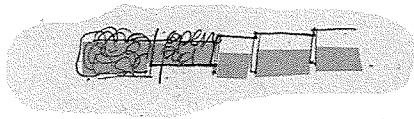
fissure

canal locks
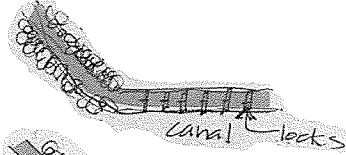
locks open

plan

section

Character of Cracks and Fissures

Recreational Chasm
(opposite page top)

Congregation Chasm
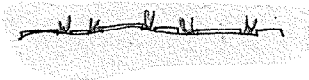(opposite page bottom)

Contemplation Chasm
(top left)

Parking Chasm
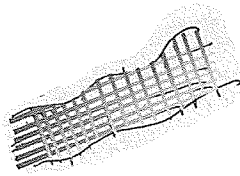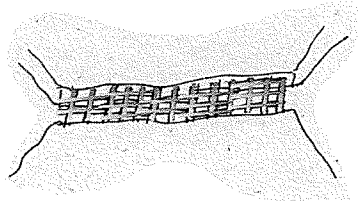(bottom left)

Neighborhood Chasm
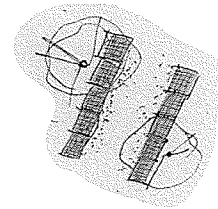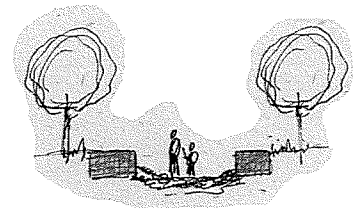(below)

crack

plan

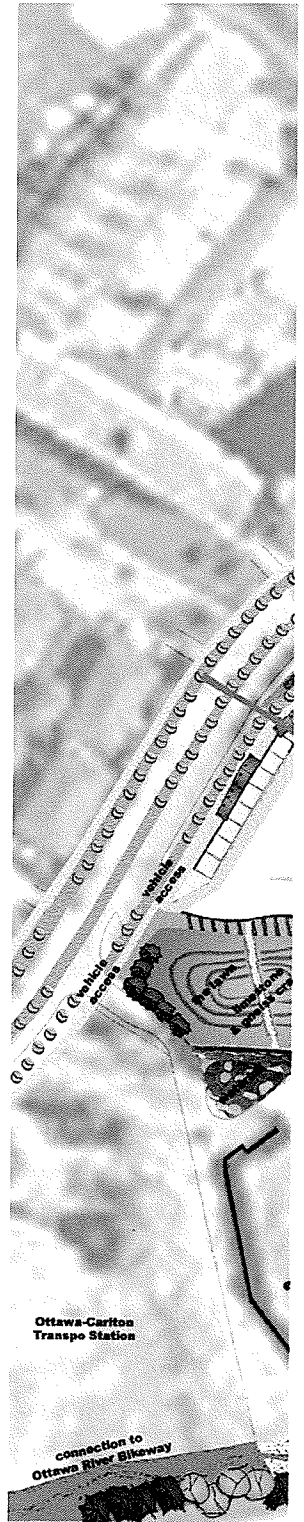elevation

fissure

plan
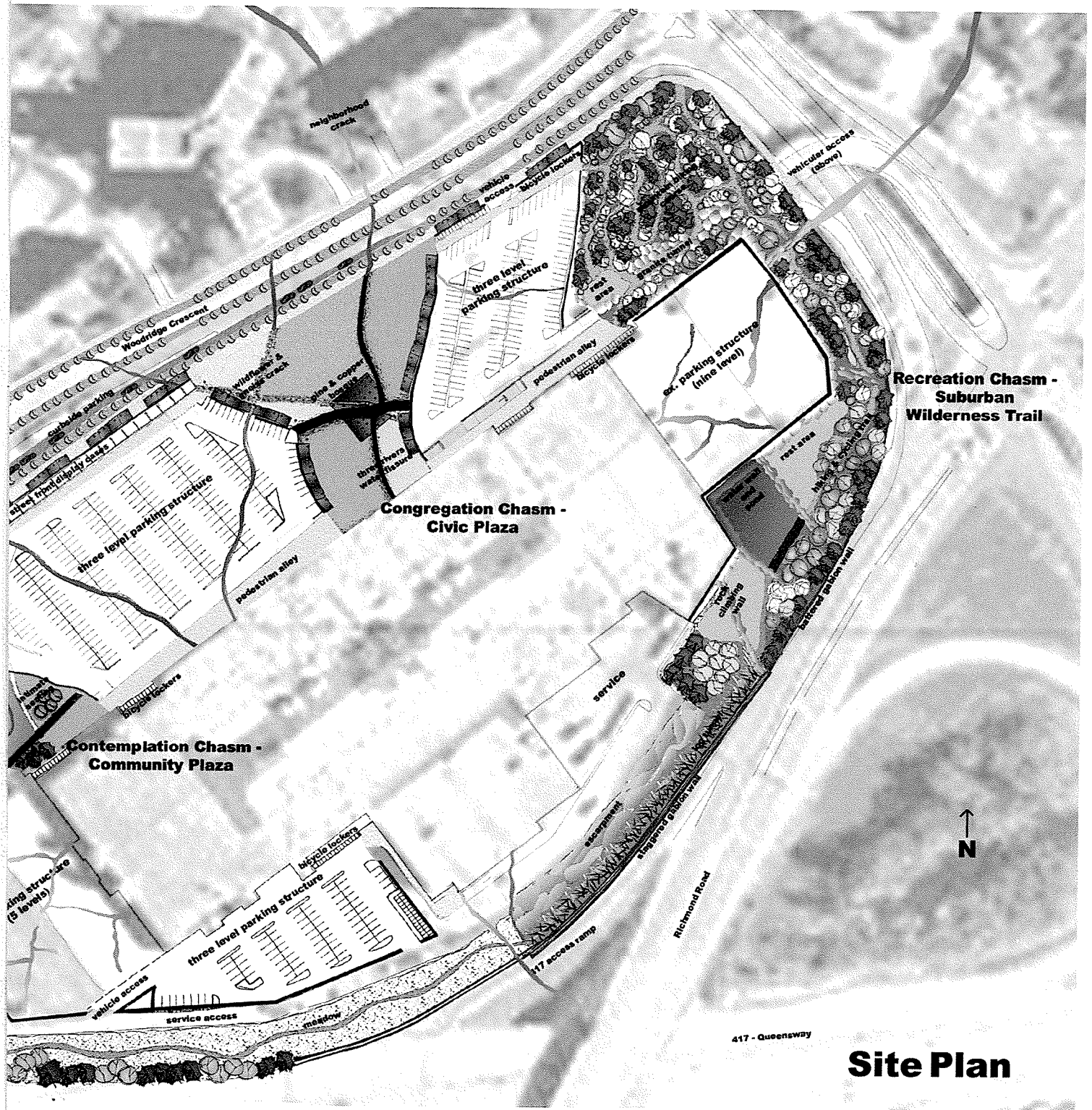
section

crack

plan

section

The Design Proposal

The design proposal is a synthesis of all of the material discussed in the previous sections of this study, demonstrated through a practical application. The design combines issues of place and identity, of regional contextualism, of scale and legibility, of accessibility, of community connectivity, of combined programming, and finally, of aesthetics. It an attempt to most thoroughly, and clearly, convey these ideas and their physical manifestation on the study site, the design proposal will be related in story format .

Ottawa-Carlton
Transpo Station

connection to
Ottawa River Bikeway

Site Plan

Recreation Chasm - Suburban Wilderness Trail

Congregation Chasm - Civic Plaza

Contemplation Chasm - Community Plaza

three level parking structure

three level parking structure

three level parking structure
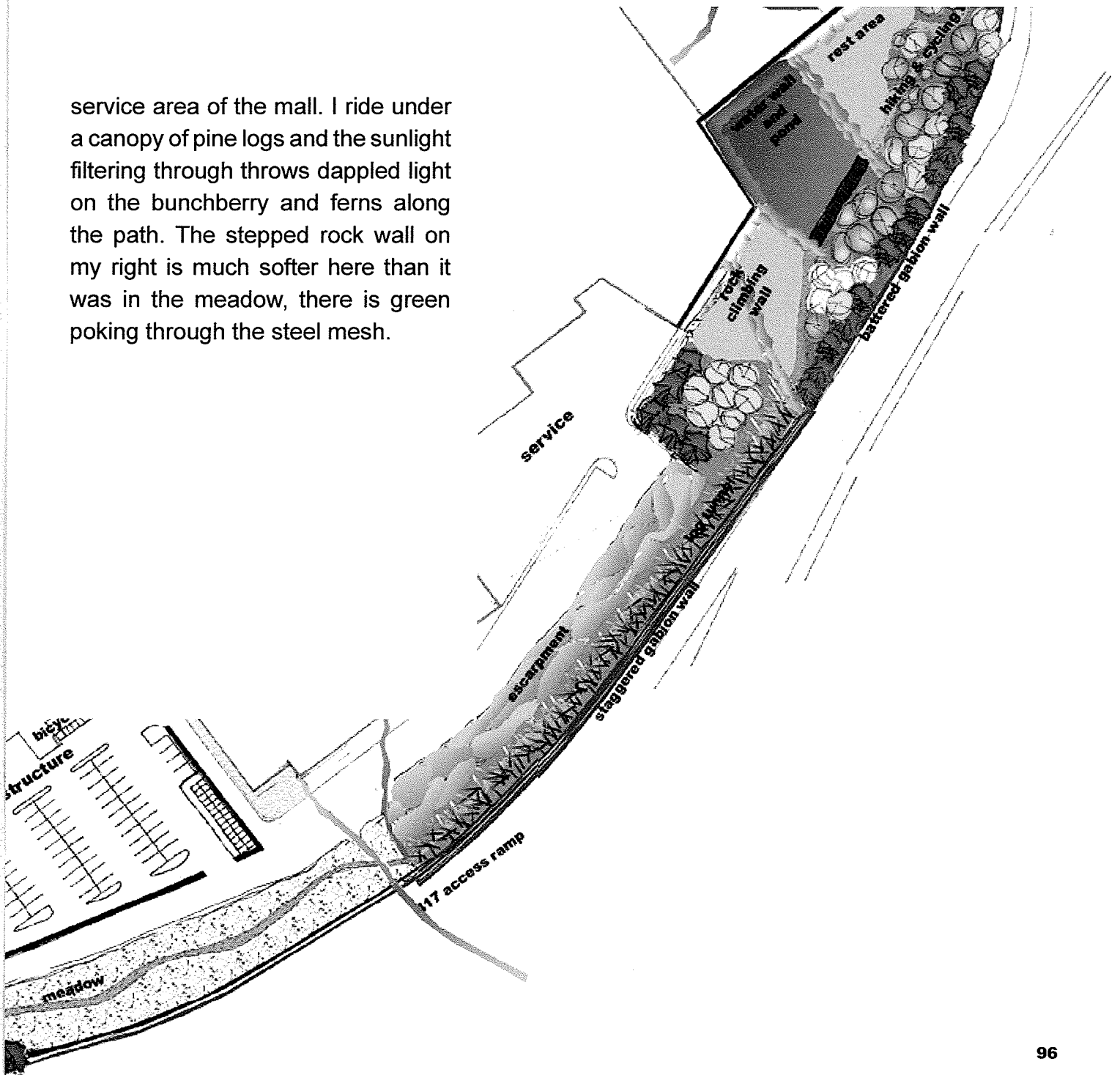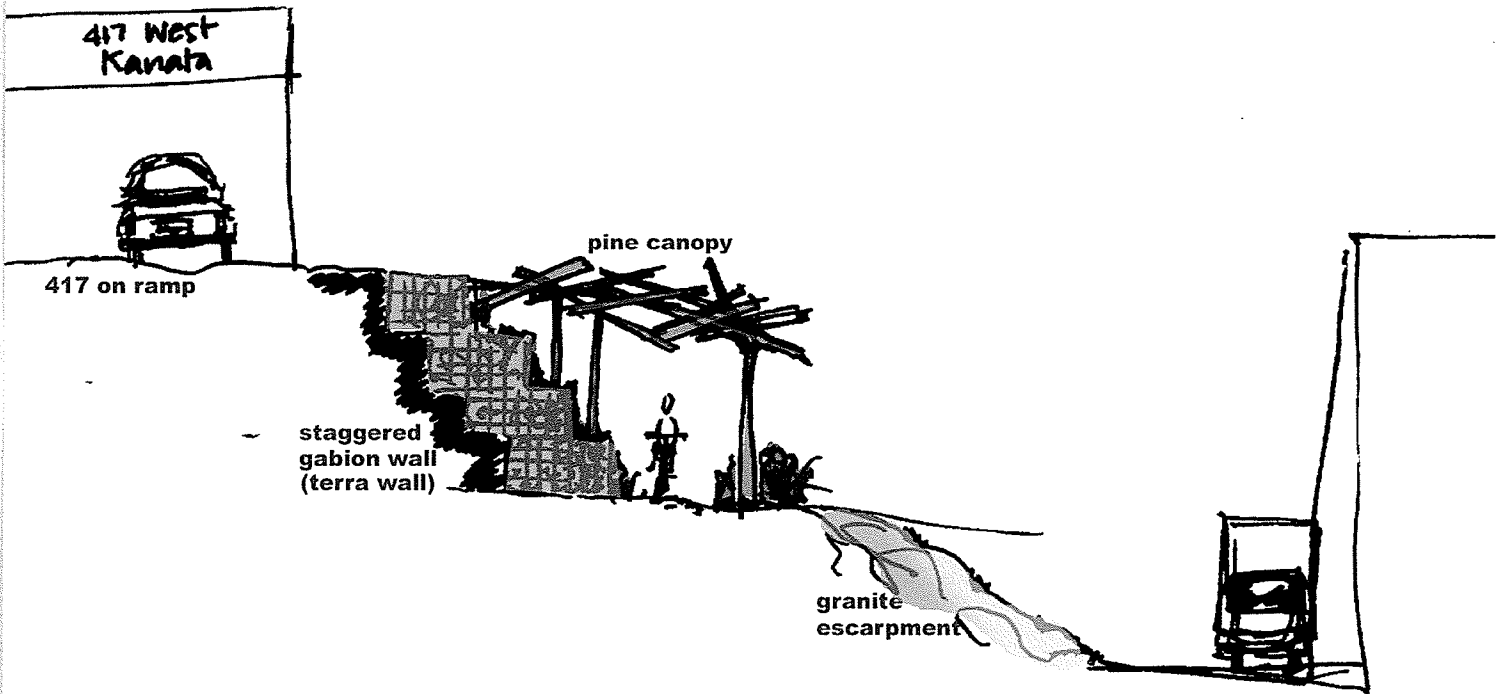
Woodridge Crescent

Richmond Road

417 - Queensway

N

I am riding my bike along the Ottawa River on a sunny Sunday afternoon. Just after I pass Brittania Beach, I decide to veer off of the river parkway and head to Bayshore Mall to pick up a few things at the weekend market. I follow the bicycle path behind the numerous townhouses that line the north section of Woodridge Cresent, this path used to come to an end at Graham Creek, but now I can follow it directly to the mall. I ride past Balsam Firs and Trembling Aspen on my right, the freeway is just beyond the trees but I can barely hear the cars traveling by. As I approach the mall I pass the Bayshore Transpo Station and the trees dissolve into a serene meadow of native wildflowers such as asters, wild columbine, daisies, buttercups and irises. I remember being here in the spring when the daffodils, trillium and arctic poppies were in bloom; it was equally as beautiful then. On my left is a new parking structure where there used to be surface parking only. I like this new structure because it announces the mall automobiles on the freeway without imposing upon the pedestrians and cyclists on the site. The limestone façade of the ground level decomposes into a limestone filled, steel gabion wall on the second level, and into a steel mesh on the third level, the structure appears as though it is disappearing into the sky. There is a new, extremely large, Bayshore Shopping Centre sign worked into the steel mesh of the third level that renders the shopping centre much more visible/recognizable from the freeway. I cross a strip of tall spikes of timothy grass and my surroundings are altered. To my left is a shallow granite escarpment that acts as a barrier between the path and the
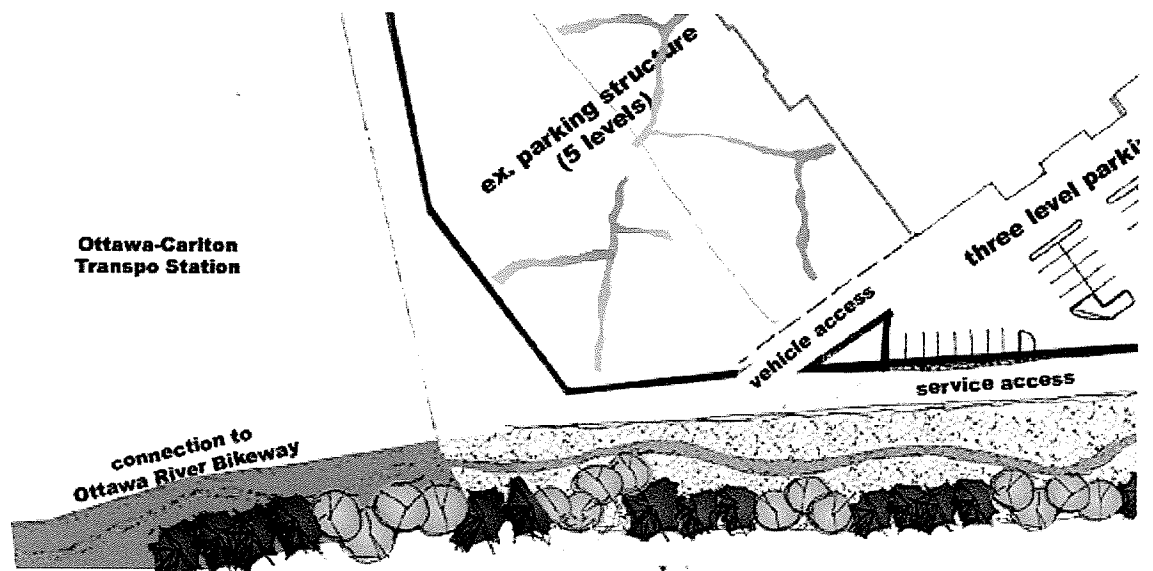
service area of the mall. I ride under a canopy of pine logs and the sunlight filtering through throws dappled light on the bunchberry and ferns along the path. The stepped rock wall on my right is much softer here than it was in the meadow, there is green poking through the steel mesh.

rest area

hiking & cycling

climbing wall and plaza

rock climbing wall

battered gabion wall

service

escarpment

staggered gabion wall

bicyc...

...ructure

meadow

...17 access ramp

417 West Kanata

417 on ramp

pine canopy

staggered
gabion wall
(terra wall)

granite
escarpment

section through timber canopy   nts

417 on ramp

staggered
gabion wall

typical
false facade

steel mesh

gabion wall

limestone face
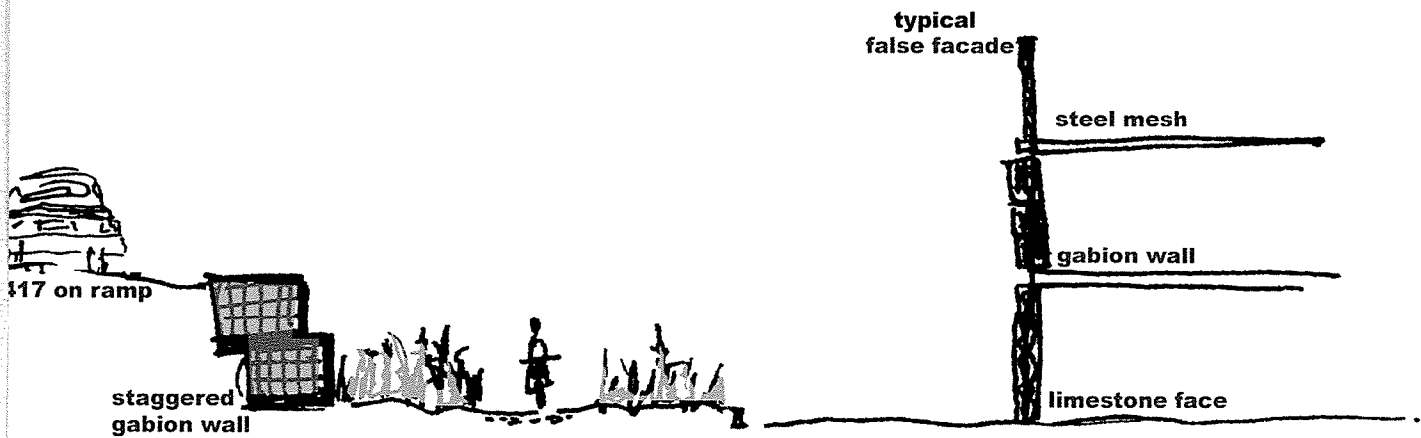
section through meadow   nts

Gabion Wall Systems
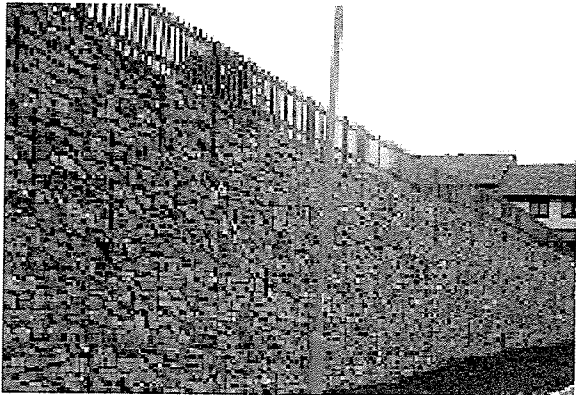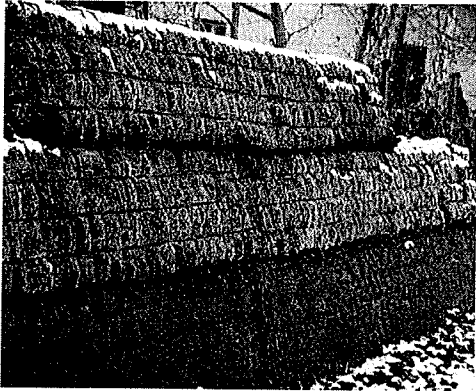
The log tunnel ends, and to my left are rock climbers halfway up the granite face of the new Mall Climbing Wall. I approach a footbridge and the sound of water falling is near deafening. I can no longer hear the vehicles on the freeway at all. The waterfall and pond catch my attention, so I pull off of the trail for a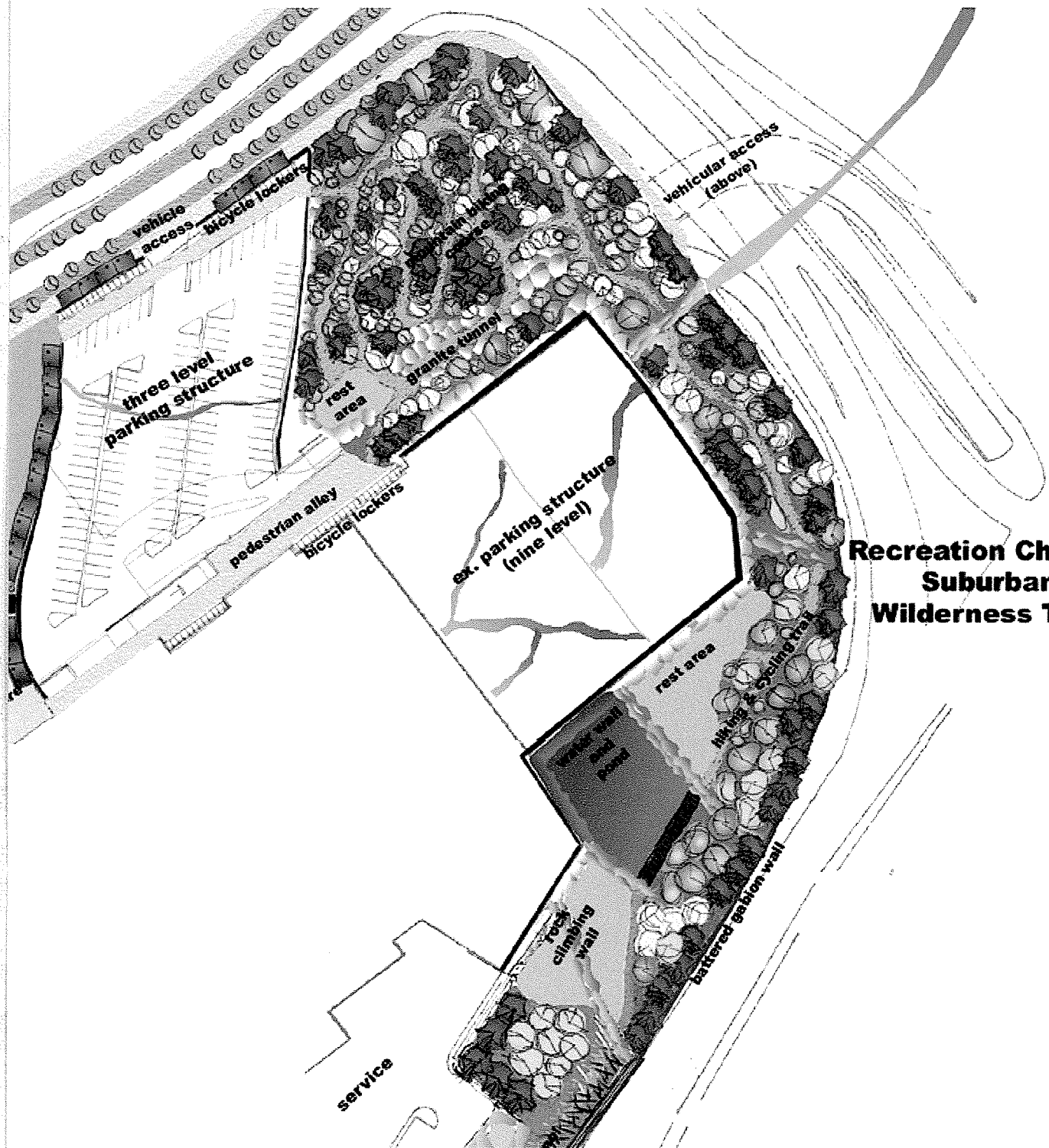 quick rest and cool revival in the mist. I have seen the waterfall used for ice climbing in the winter, but I have not yet been brave enough to attempt it. There are a few others in the rest area, hikers and mountain bikers, so I sit on a large granite boulder. I am reminded of a place I visited in Seattle, a wilderness supply store called REI (Resource Equipment Inc.). Specializing in outdoor gear, the store has developed an exterior that corresponds to the products being sold inside. The site is a compilation of various Washington State ecosystems, with a waterfall, a mountain bike test track, a hiking trail and over 60 different species of flora, all within 21 000 square feet of urban forest sitting atop a parking garage for 530 cars. I felt immersed in the peacefulness of the vegetative environment, but always was aware of the adjacent retail store being the main reason people were there. This environment here, at Bayshore Shopping Centre, is of a similar quality but the character is a local one. The vegetation and rock structure here are inspired by Gatineau Park, across the Ottawa River in Quebec. The canopy of Sugar Maples, Beech, White Birch and White Pine will provide spectacular fall color. Well-rested, I get back on my bike and continue along the trail traveling north. At various points along the trail there are small elevation changes where I ride over a narrow, smooth granite rock-face. I pass by the new mountain bike course, but I am not up for the strenuous activity today, it is time to get to the market. I follow the trail right into the new parking structure and lock up my bike in the bicycle lockers that line Woodridge Crescent.
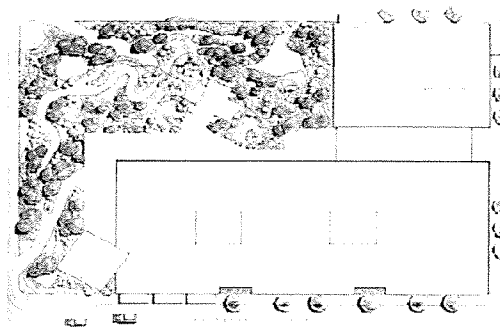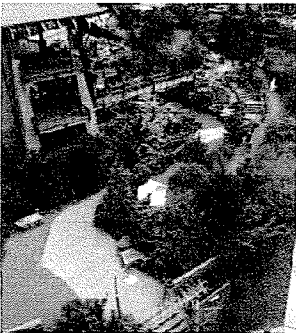
Design Precedent - REI, Seattle Location
(images from Landscape Architecture, vol. 89, no. 7, July 1999, p 62-67)

vehicle access

bicycle lockers

vehicular access (above)

three level parking structure

granite tunnel

rest area

pedestrian alley

bicycle lockers

ex. parking structure (nine level)

rest area

hiking & cycling trail

water wall and pond

rock climbing wall

battered gabion wall

service

Recreation Chasm - Suburban Wilderness Trail

100
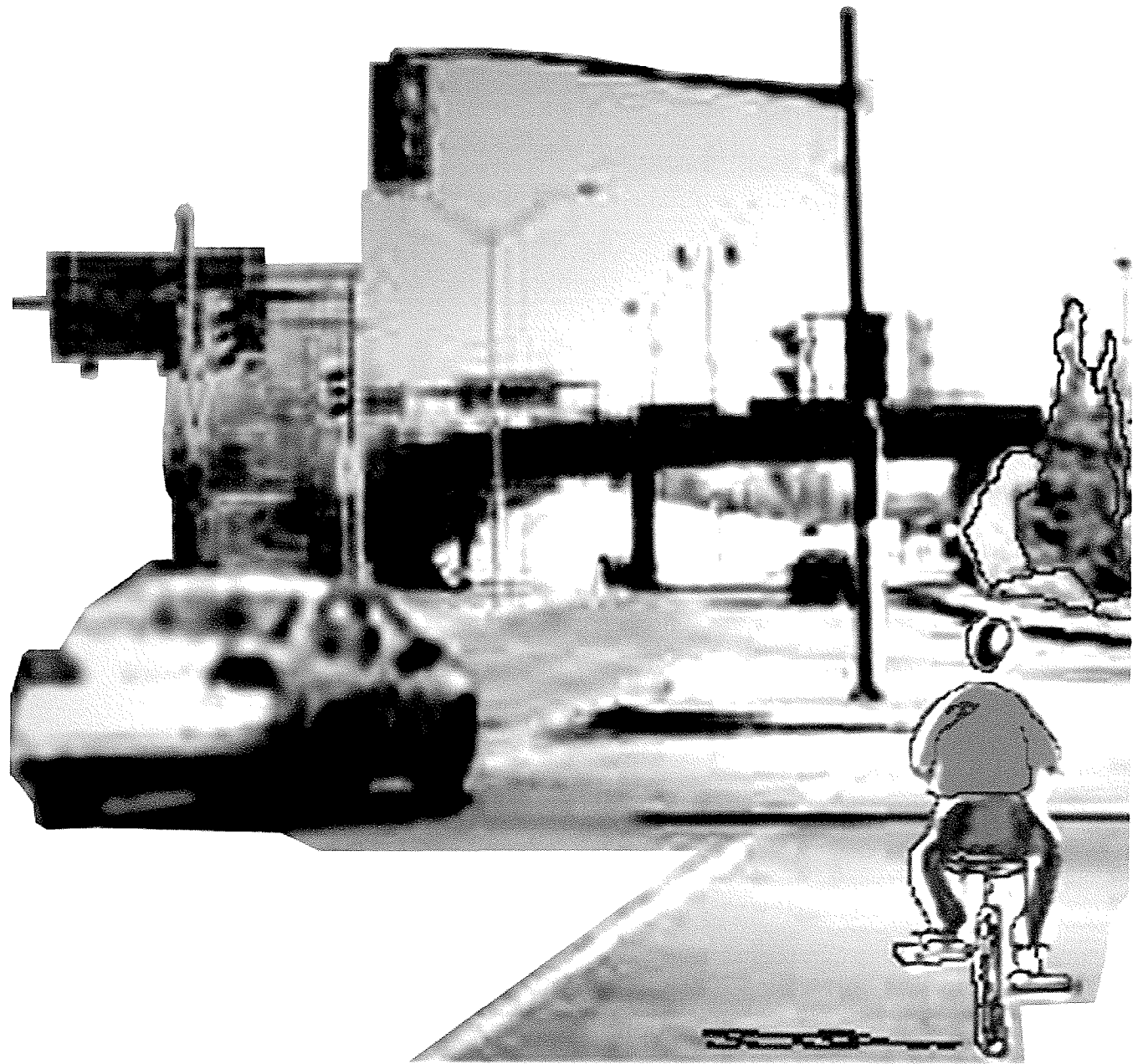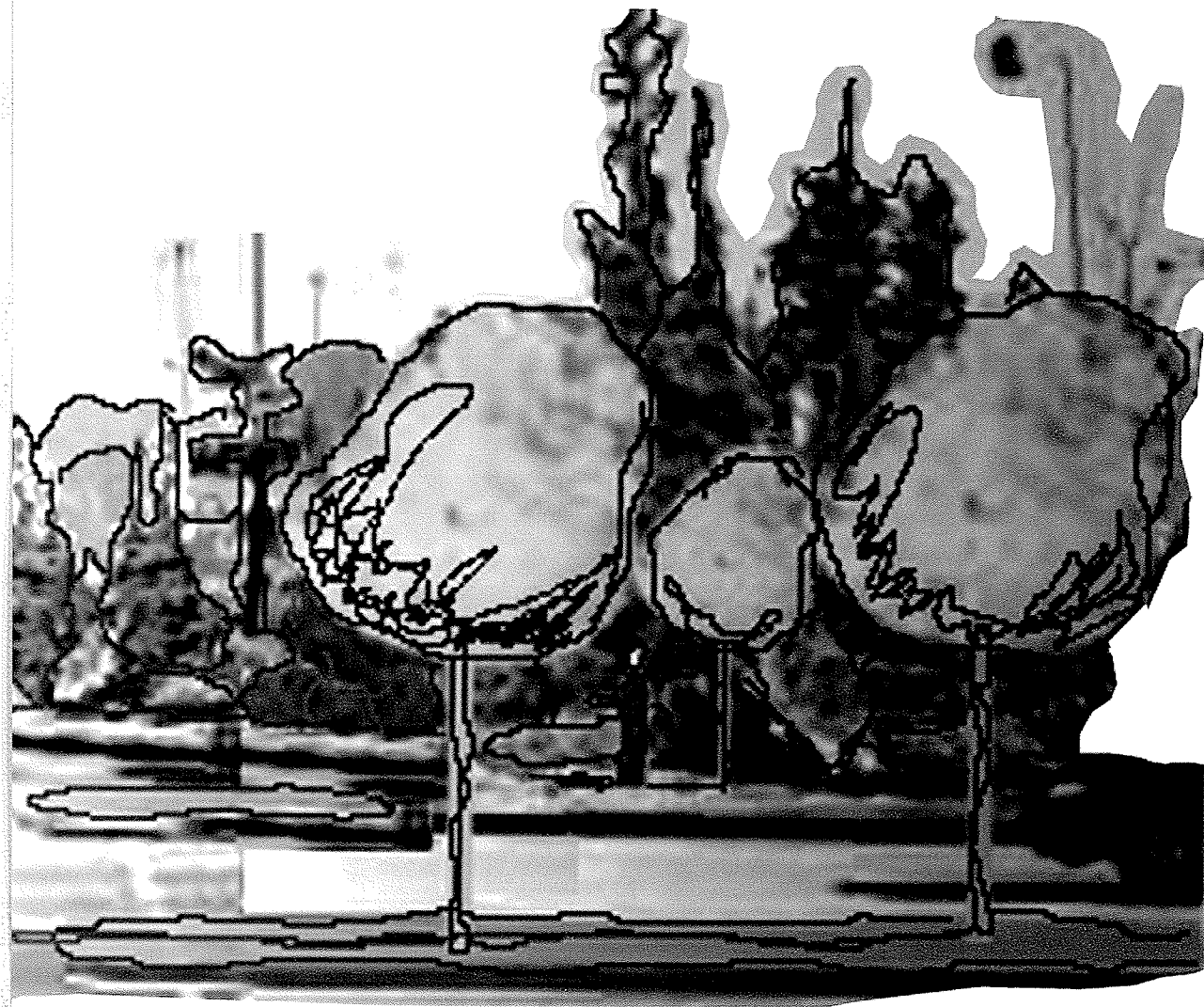
Suburban Wilderness Trail Entry
(corner of Woodridge Crescent and Bayshore Drive)

neighborhood crack

vehicle access

bicycle lockers

three level parking structure

Woodridge Crescent

pedestrian alley

wildflower & encrise crack

pine & copper bosque

curbside parking

front display cases

three level parking structure

pedestrian alley

three rivers water fissure

Congregation Chasm - Civic Plaza

103
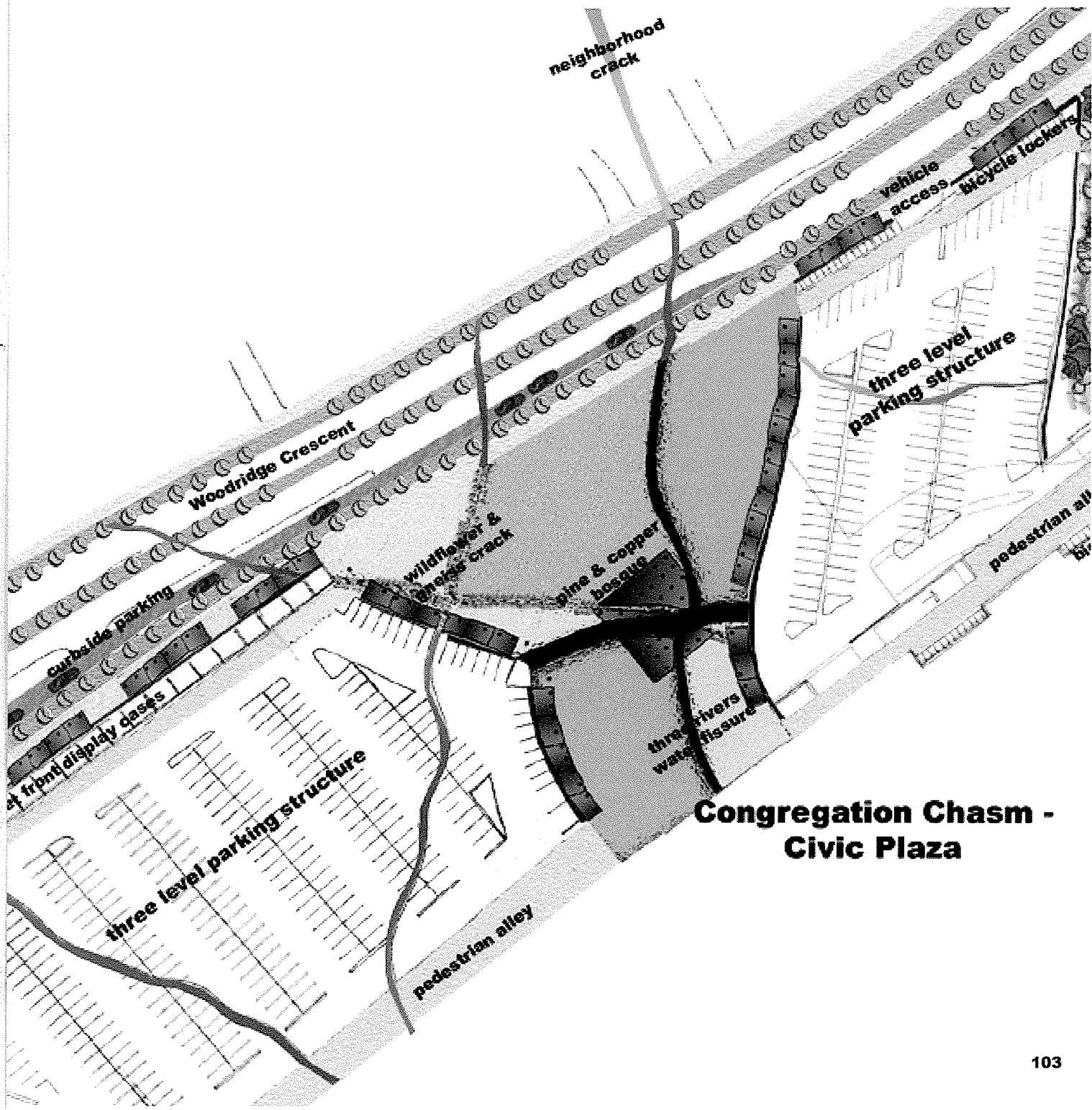
I continue on foot into the large Civic Plaza that welcomes pedestrians to the main mall entrance doors. I am immediately reminded of the spaces of the grand piazzas of Italy; Piazza del Campo in Sienna, Piazza San Marco in Italy, Piazza Navona in Rome, complete with a copper canopied arcade lining the parking structures on either side of the plaza and providing an integral human scale to the facades. The combination of limestone and copper on the parking structure facades is suggestive of the Federal Parliament Buildings here in the nation's capital. The plaza is full of activity with the market stalls of fresh, locally grown vegetables and fruits and flowers, handcrafted clothing and artifacts, and various types of artwork. Some people are enjoying the market, and others simply relaxing and taking in all of the activity while sitting casually on large gneiss boulders. The boulders create a random border for the colorful planting strip of wildflowers that meanders through the plaza. I feel connected to my surroundings in a regional sense as I walk along the water feature that is inspired by the juncture of the Ottawa, Rideau and Gatineau Rivers in downtown Ottawa. Where the three water channels meet in the middle of the plaza is a bosque (or grid) of pine logs that speaks to the logging history of the Gatineau River. The bosque has a copper canopy that is spliced into pieces by the water channels. The canopy sections gleam in the sun at varying angles, while providing shelter in the wide-open space of the plaza. I walk over the varying hard surfaces of local limestone, sandstone and granite and into the mall. I head immediately up to the third level and out onto the new patio to buy a drink at the outdoor kiosks. I sit at an umbrella table and watch the activity in the plaza below. It has a much different feel when the Sunday Market takes it over. On non-market days it is often used for large civic gatherings, festivals, exhibits and celebrations.
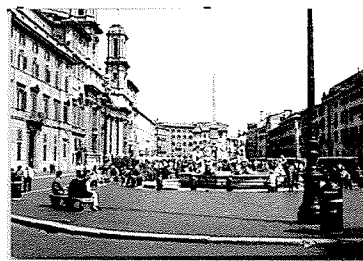
Design Inspirations
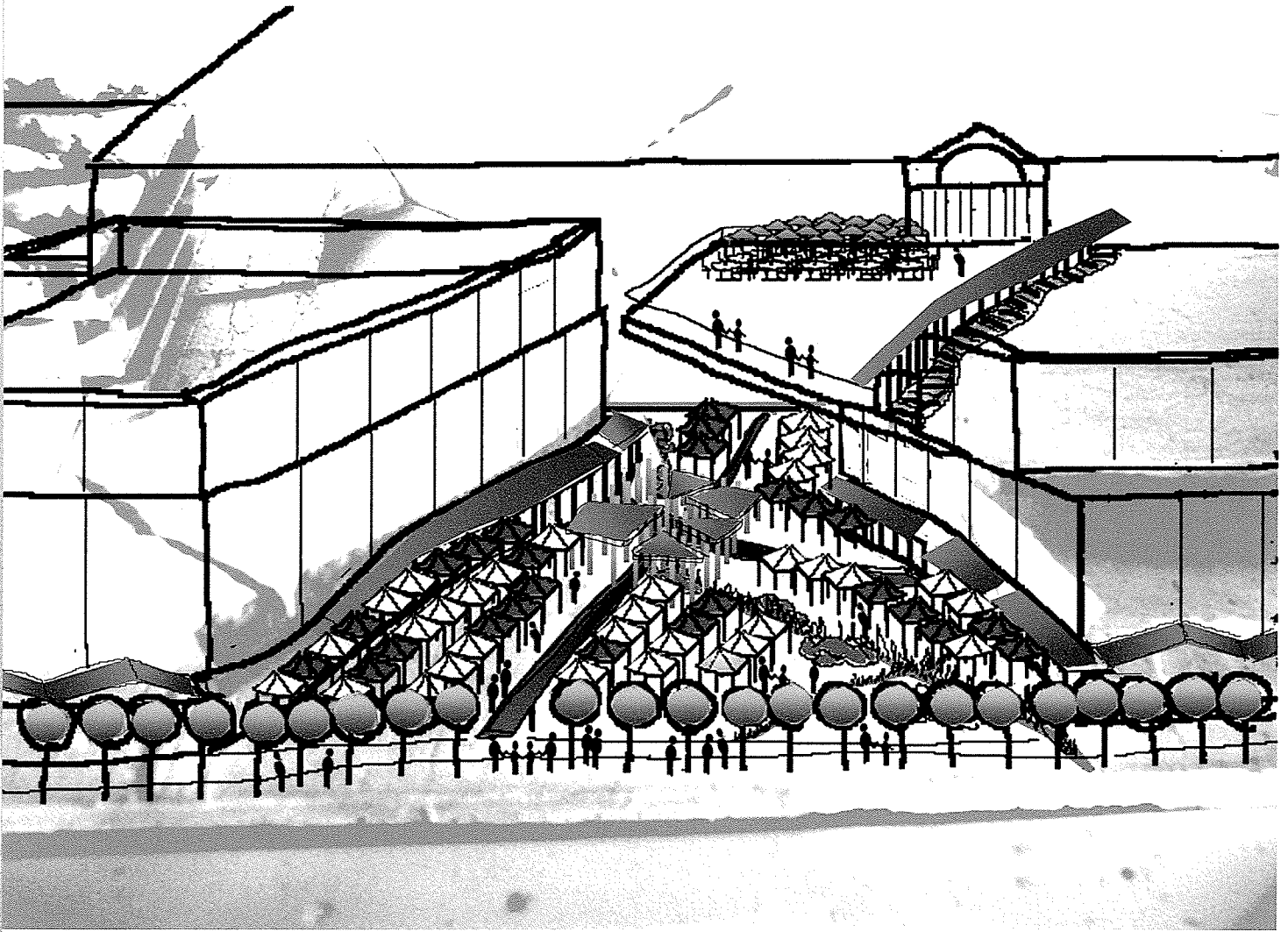(photos by author)

Piazza del Campo, Sienna, Italy
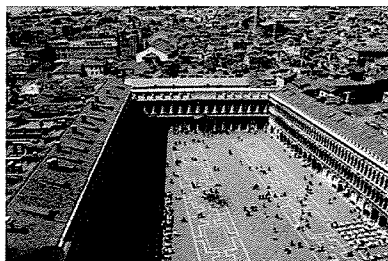
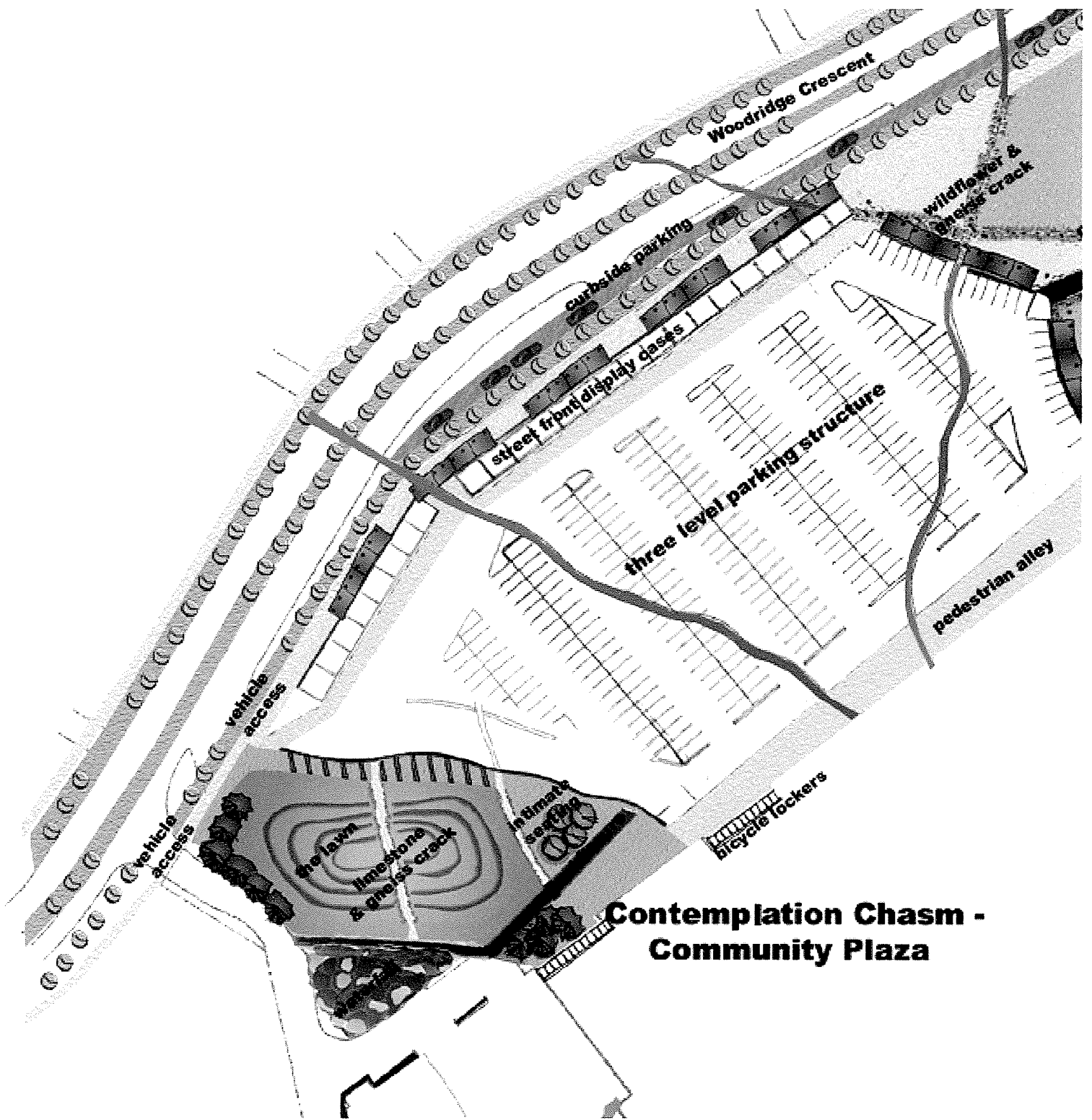Piazza San Marco, Venice, Italy

Piazza Navona, Rome, Italy

Civic Plaza - aerial perspective during weekend market

Civic Plaza - perspective of pine and copper bosque during weekend market

I take an exterior staircase down to the plaza and walk west along Woodridge Crescent. The character of this street has definitely changed. It used to be a dismal four-lane collector street that was almost threatening to pedestrians. Now it reminds me more of a tree-lined pedestrian boulevard in the style of the Ramblas in Barcelona, Spain or the Champs Elysee in Paris, France. There is curb-side parking along the edge of the Shopping Centre site, separated from the wide sidewalk by an allee of Basswoods. The beautiful fragrance of the trees makes this a most enjoyable walk in the early spring. Each of the apartment complexes across Woodridge Crescent is connected to the mall by a wide crosswalk of limestone slabs. The difference in the paving material causes vehicles traveling on Woodridge to involuntarily slow down, allowing pedestrians to cross. The street front façade of the parking structure is lined with display cases that mall merchants may advertise their wears in. I see that there are a number of sales on in the mall, and decide to walk head back in via the west mall entrance for some shopping, before heading home. The character of the display windows and the copper canopy are reminiscent of the character of the historic Byward Market and Elgin Street in downtown Ottawa.

I round a bend and come upon the smaller, more intimate Community Plaza. A gently rolling green lawn slopes towards a rugged waterfall in the fare corner of the plaza. People are strewn casually about the lawn, enjoying the peacefulness of the sound of the water. I follow a crushed limestone path that is lined with a rugged gneiss retaining wall that cuts through the slope of the lawn. I consider the how the materiality of this plaza is the near opposite of the Civic Plaza, with its surface of stone that is interrupted by a strip of planting. Here a strip of stone interrupts the soft surface of the lawn. I walk along the canal-like water feature that circulates the run-off from the waterfall, to an intimate seating area shaded by an overhead balcony. This is a peaceful area, with the seating interspersed with granite planters. In the late spring these planters are filled with a mass of color as the Tulip Festival takes place throughout Ottawa.

Woodridge Crescent

curbside parking

street front display cases

wildflower & gneiss crack

three level parking structure

pedestrian alley

vehicle access

vehicle access

the lawn

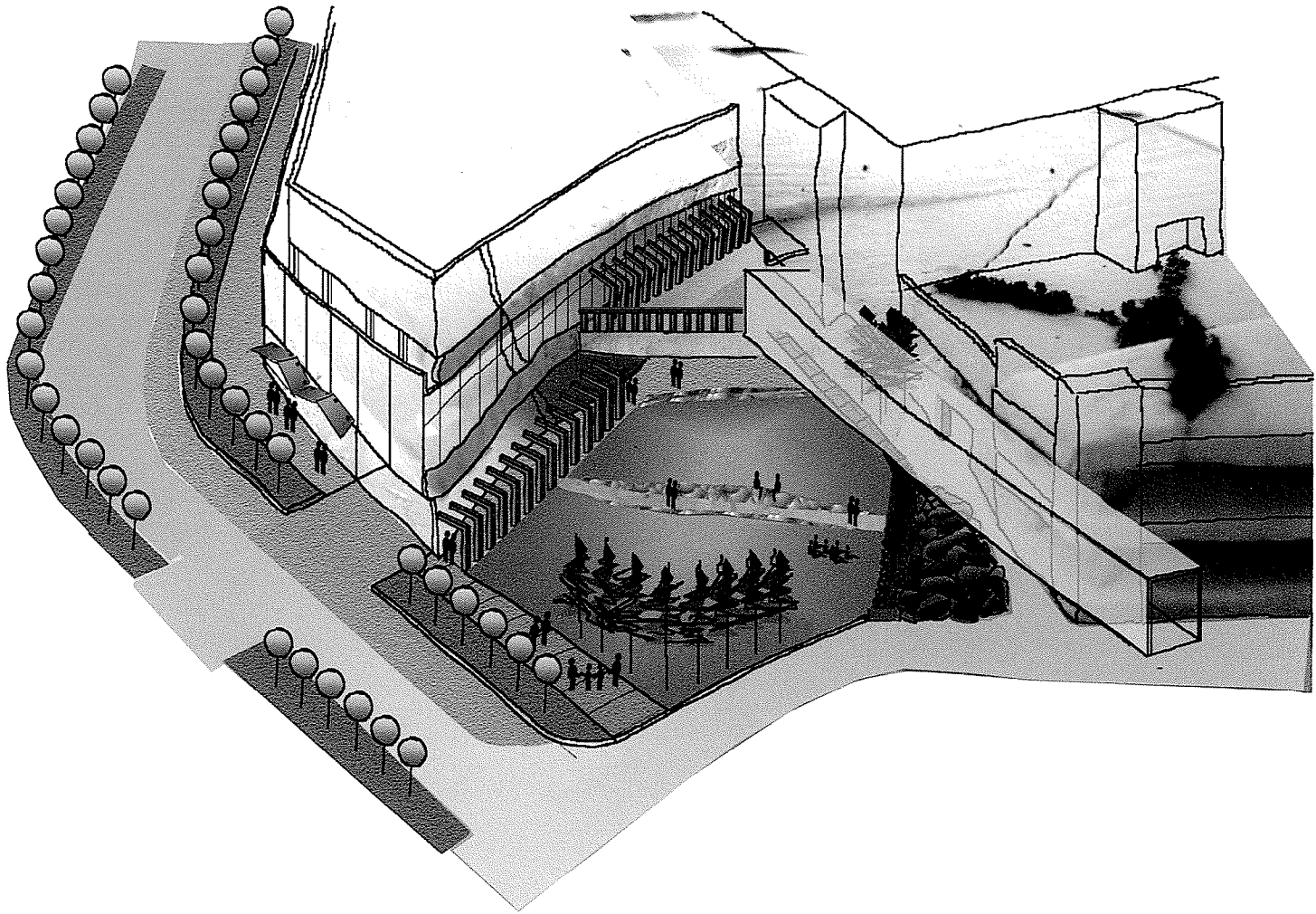limestone & gneiss crack

intimate seating

bicycle lockers

Contemplation Chasm - Community Plaza

I continue down the pedestrian corridor that separates the mall from the parking structure. I notice that the parking structure is much brighter than it used to be. There are openings in the concrete plane of the upper levels that allow natural light to pass through. Wide strips of green grass and flat pieces of limestone interrupt the asphalt-parking surface and provide a walking surface for pedestrians to reach the mall form their vehicles. The lighting within the parking structures has been enhanced with the addition of many new lighting fixtures. I enter the mall and do a little shopping, then decide it's time to head home. I walk back through the Civic Plaza and retrieve my bicycle from its locker. I decide to take the quickest route back to the Ottawa River Parkway, and cut through the neighborhood on the new trail. The trail cuts through the surface slightly below grade and is lines on either side with low limestone walls. The character of the path emotes a feeling of connectedness to the Shopping Centre, though I have left the site. I reach the parkway and head home, reflecting upon the diverse shopping experience I have just had.

double paned window

display area

moveable panel

storage area

overhead garage door
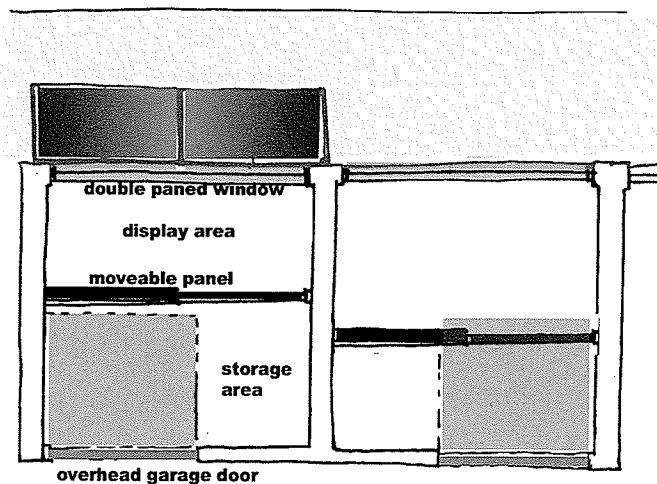
Street Front Display Case - detail plan

Community Plaza -aerial perspective

EPILOGUE

The process of *fragmentation* is a bold, brutal gesture that responds to the bold, brutal nature of the site. It is an 'in your face' commentary on the current suburban condition. The term fragmentation is ubiquitous in discussions of suburbia. The suburbs are fragmented spatially and fragmented socially.

The proposed design presented here demonstrates a fragmentation of the existing site in order to insert *public space*. Thus the fragmentation creates *space*, and the addition of contextual relevance to this space establishes *identity*. Public space and identity are the key aspects of making *place*.

The process of *cracking* (in the design) is a method of fragmentation, and thus becomes both a social and spatial commentary, in the manner of deconstructionist architecture. The literal cracking of the structure makes the statement that suburbia desparately needs to be *defragmented,* both socially and spatially. The fragmentation of the structure allows this defragmentation process to begin, as it creates collective, non-exclusive public spaces in the otherwise semi-private realm of the suburban shopping mall.

fragmentation

through

cracking

creates

public space

where the addition of

contextualism

establishes

identity

resulting in

P   L   A   C   E

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