Between the Seats

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BETWEEN THE SEATS
BETWEEN THE SEATS
ARCHITECTURAL EVOLUTION OF MODERN THEATERS

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF THESIS RESEARCH
PROJECT BOOK PRESENTED TO:

SELEN OKCU

AND TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

Cinema and Movie Theater spaces are dwindling in attendance, while community-gathering areas are thriving. Digital media platforms have taken over the need for an extra expense in the household. People download movies as quickly as they can instead of going out to the theater to experience a movie on the big screen the way it was supposed to be enjoyed. Why is it better to go spend money, when you could just stay at home? The goal of this project is to increase the community members’ attendance rate to their local theatre through the development of innovative design solutions that amplify social component of theaters. More specifically, the project aims to turn a local theatre complex into a community hub. Which will incorporate social spaces along with designated theatrical spaces that are responsive to emerging cultural, social, and technological demands via design.

According to trend of the national statistics, the attendance rate of theaters has decreased drastically over the last 10-15 years. So why are the theaters not peoples’ first choice anymore? The answer to this question is in two folds. Due to technological advances, people now have more alternative resources. These opportunities allow them to watch movies virtually from anywhere. Second, the discrepancy between responsiveness of the physical space to new demands and peoples’ preferences is growing. The stereotype design of the traditional theatrical spaces limits any customization per the needs of the audience or the nature of the performance. On the other hand, ability to flex design and acoustic features allows spatial reconfiguration by an engaging audience, maximizing interaction and allowing audience to take the ownership of the space.

This project aims to remove the dictating theater based program idea of the current design by assembling and incorporating flexible design features throughout the community hub including social spaces and designated acoustic spaces. This will be achieved by re-purposing the existing local theatre building. While maximizing the indoor and outdoor connectivity, the parking lot will transform into a walkable green outdoor space that will also contain designated open-air acoustic spaces, as well as an underground drive in theater. Overall, it is not unrealistic to assume that in 5-10 year time period movie theaters will be fully discarded. Without any intervention, there will be no designated physical space for theaters. We need new design solutions to enhance the theatrical experience of community members. This project aims to re-purpose local theaters, and the parking lot at a chosen site in Woodstock, Georgia with a focus on community needs and emerging social, technological and cultural demands. However, many other communities nationwide can benefit from the design approach incorporated in this study, as their experience with the recession of the local theaters may be similar to theater attendance at the chosen theater.
THEESIS STATEMENT

The goal of this thesis is to remove the empty, dead, wasted spaces off the abandoned or almost abandoned idea of enjoying going to a movie theater and to create a template for future reconstruction. Not only for revenue of theaters and cinemas but to develop a way to bring the **Community** back to the theatre instead of just watching movies at home. The design plan for this construction is to allow for the **Community** to engage more in their surrounding instead of barricading themselves at home. By pulling in outside programs the **site** can develop into something new. Bringing back the **Community** into this **site** creates a higher source of revenue for the surrounding area. By creating more opportunities through possibly re-purposing half of the theatre into an open **Community** space. I intend to use this thesis as an avenue to expand the entertainment opportunities of my chosen theater, and, potentially, become an example for the future of theaters across the country. Through breaking the physical and social boundaries of this traditionally built environment, I intend to transform the theater and its grounds to make multi-functional, and **Flexible** spaces that will entice the **Community** to, once again, make the theater a social staple. By activating the interior and exterior spaces, the theater will be so much more than a place to simply consume the cinema. It will act as the vessel that will reconcile the past caused by the rift that hand held technology has created.
The oldest still operating theater in the United States is the Bijou Theatre. It opened as a movie theater in 1909 with live performance spaces available as well and the building is still operating to this day.

Movie theaters have been a major form of entertainment since the 1930’s. At that time, more than 65% of the United States population attended a showing each week. In 2000 that number dropped to only 9.7% of the population attending each week. The dramatic drop in attendance has slowly been killing the theater industry. While movies will continue to be made, a consistent place to view them is dwindling.

Which brings into question, how can one develop a theater such as the Bijou Theater that adapts.
Based on the numbers shown in the graphs to the left, you can see the fluctuation in the numbers from 1995 to 2020.
SITE SCALE
FUNCTION – DESIGN – TERRACING – WALKABILITY
This project is located in Midwest China in a central city called Chengdu. The design of the site was drawn out as a stress-free, calm environment similar to the culture of the locals. In the site itself, the design reflects an expression of the culture based on activities known in the culture. The landscape of this sectional space could be very experiential based on the time of the year and the growth/liveliness of the greenery. This space is adamant about using every inch of the space in a way to offer a different experience, thought material changes to natural designs, seating openness but also smaller designed areas this space created its own topology through material and experience analysis.
This mixed use landscape is designed for the people of the space. Extremely thought out for pathways to walk along as well as places to sit and rest or chat. As well as the open spaces there was also private spaces created to separate the space to allow for more intimate moments in the site.
This park has something new around every corner. The park itself is a combination of an outdoor contemporary art space to display and experience in a new setting. The design of this park was designed on a piece of land that provides an exploratory setting to take in all the work surrounding you. The project itself is made to leave you wondering what else is there, did I miss anything. While studying this project I found the design to be like nothing I had ever seen. The connection between different programmatic areas flow so fluidly that the contemporary pieces are not disturbed. Opening up the possibility for anything to be displayed anywhere within the site.
The Olympic Sculpture Park is designed to hold multiple programmatic functions in different areas while adapting to the space and creating a walkable site.
The studies shown below go into detail on how the shape of the building formed from the site itself.
Study Model:

This design I looked at the connection between spaces and allowing for gaps, extrusions and creating programs in different spaces that are able to function separately and together.
In Thailand, a custom is passing on symbolic items to the following generations. As a major part of the community, the design of this space is passed on a connection between past and future. By developing a value to the site and landscape within the space, the architects were able to design a sustainable design based on the passing down of generations. The trees on the site are all of original decent and the topography was designed in a way to express the history in a type of layer. This is expressed in forming different levels of topography, one on top of another.

I enjoy the aspect of the view this terraced site gives while going down it still creates an interesting pattern provided. And utilizes the concrete pathways to connect to each other in a way. This gives the space a full connection which is what I strive to complete in my project. Make the space one.
The tiers created in this portion of the design show the changes in landscape at a dramatic level. Each tree has been there for years and was left in place for the design of the landscape. Pathways were created to absorb the history of the space.
Design Concept:

The concept behind this design was to not take away from the history that was left behind in this area, but to build off of it. So the designers found a way to develop using a historical design highlighting the pathways and avoiding the destruction of any wildlife.
Study Model:

From this model I learned the aspect the architect focused on within the site as a layering system. The Tiered landscape provides a distinct and hard design which makes the site stand out.
An award-winning architecture firm that focuses on landscape design completed a new project. Found in Beijing, Martha Schwartz Partners developed a project combining mixed-use space at a large scale. After the design went into place, there built a community of focus to sustainability and architectural landscape at a whole new level. The design is built to create spaces for anyone to express themselves. Similar situation with the offset of plant-ers, break-down of stairs and seating within this small area. There is a separation between the space past the planters and the space beyond the deck. Giving the area in-between a more intimate experiential feel.
**Study Model:**

This design was built with the intent to express the human interaction through private and public space development in a park like setting. This allowed for the space to be inhabited by any individual or group looking to chat hangout or just overall walk through the space.
Found in a city called Orestad stands a building shaped like tiered topography. Designed to accommodate for people working within the city where everything is hectic, but also being able to provide a sense of the suburban lifestyle. The closest city is Copenhagen. At first glance this design grabbed my attention based on the structural extraction of the building. The design grows on top of a relatively flat piece of land, providing a topography like form to the site. From further analysis I held onto the pattern created from the apartment designs and plan to replicate the process used by the designer to better understand the process within the final design.
Study Model:

From this model I learned the importance of layering a building. I truly enjoyed experimenting with this project in a way to really push the means of a site. This case study is a building but I used it to study the shape and design on how to explore how it would work if it was the topography instead.
CASE STUDIES

BUILDING SCALE

FLEXIBILITY - OPEN SPACE - EXPERIENCE - COMMUNITY
This theater leaves nothing behind within its design. The architects focused on developing an urban center that also supports other uses of space. Inside the building you will find movie theaters, office spaces, studios, and places to eat.

As you proceed to the exterior portion you will find that all the spaces connect and flow together. Outside the building you will find an exterior theater which can hold just about 4,000 people. Designed as a large plaza to pull people in this space is covered with a ceiling of LED lighting sequence that displays digital images and videos. This multifunctional development holds multiple functions and countless events every year.
Study Model:

The grouping of program in this case study pushed my boundaries of what I believed was a theater. With exterior features and showings as well as interior this peaked my curiosity at how developing a multi functioning theater would work in a different location.
In the world of theater, there is one program that has been losing its touch. Drive in theaters are slowly becoming extinct. However, in the small town of Marfa, Texas, they are bringing the drive in back to life. Basing the theater within a park there is a pedestrian portion as well as a vehicular portion to entertain everyone. This community was built on drive in theaters and created a modern swing on the design to attract more people to the space. The area surrounding is a landscape built like a desert. To create something to pull people in would have to be a dramatic design and expressive piece to capture the attention of those from all around.
This design really got me thinking back to drive in theaters. This one in particular is designed as a drive in and as a pedestrian space. From further study of this development I really moved forward with the thought process of bringing back drive in movie theaters. Community spaces are hubs for all ages there is no discrimination. Modern Technology follows us everywhere we go. Why not find a way to take a step back in-time instead of keeping our head down and moving only forward.
Performing arts centers do not normally speak much in the design world as architectural masterpieces. This veined marble wrapped design however speaks for itself, from the interior to the exterior. The design is based on creating as much mixed use flexible space as possible. The material on the outside of the building was designed to show the functions within the space at night as if a nightlight glowing. This building was designed with such high flexibility levels and large amount of design opportunity to change and rearrange. With four major spaces the largest room space will hold just under 500 people.
Flexibility of this building is a true act of architectural design. The space itself is solid but allows for interior changes to occur without anyone on the outside the wiser. Through studying this precedent I found interesting ways to allow for a space to change without having to push or move anything out of the way.
While searching for assembly structures this design stood out at the level of change that is produced throughout the possibilities. To the right are just a few of the possible flex spaces that can be made. Rex, an architecture firm based in NY put together the designs for a building that is like no other. Designed with high tech, flex features, adaptability, while still being able to incorporate the scale and feel of an intimate space. On a college campus this project functions with everyday activities but also provides entertainment options for many different expressions of art.
Flexible areas are a modern take on how to use as much space as possible to make sure that there is a constant use. Which is the best way to design. By developing multi-functional spaces there is a greater possibility for the space to be used instead of the design being abandoned after a certain time period.
This theater piques the interest of spatial separation through existing space. The end of the theater has a massive wall that opens up into the space and combines indoor and outdoor spaces into one. As it was built in the 1960s and developed from then on, it used to be a fully functioning factory but closed. Now with the design of incorporating theater and entertainment the old factory is bringing people back in.
Theaters can be made of anything and can go anywhere. Developing a theater in a space such as an abandoned factory is the perfect use for wasted space. How else can a design like a theater change empty or abandoned spaces. What gives people a reason to actually go in for entertainment.
The shed is a well known design by Diller, Scofidio, and Renfro. Located in New York the design is a mainly a building with a giant protective covering. The covering can adapt to any use or need the building has in store for that day. Each portion of the building is unique in its own way to produce and develop a large fully functional flexible building. This design is useful in the separation of space to open and create new spaces. The goal for this use is to create separate spaces into multi-functional spaces which are available in flex spaces. The scale of this project inspired my thoughts of the combination of an indoor and outdoor experience within the site.
As my major inspiration for my design, Diller and Scofidio designed this as a way to create flexibility if needed and to really give the building the ability to do anything it possibly could with the attachment of the she. Which is absolutely incredible in size and structure. This gave my project ideas a push towards the development of a modern take on a theater space.

Exploded Axonometric
Study Model:

This model let me work with a movable design to envision what I could push my project to do to incorporate flexible features.
SITE ANALYSIS

355 CINEMA VIEW, 2295 TOWNE LAKE PKWY SUITE 116, WOODSTOCK, GA

The chosen theater is located on the top of a hill overlooking Woodstock, Georgia. Surrounding the theater is apartments, restaurants, gas stations, liquor stores and convenience stores so there is little need within the area. However, the location of the cinema itself on top of the hill is surrounded by highly unpopulated parking lots and less populated restaurants and building spaces. Less than one third of the parking lot is ever actually filled up. Leaving an abundance of dead space surrounding the area. As the site is higher up than the main street, there is a chance of a view with the possibility of designing vertically over the theatre for an even wider scope.
The site for my proposed thesis is a Theater in Woodstock Georgia, which was built in 1997 and has not seen much improvement since. In choosing this site I looked for ways to develop a space with open versatile areas, which I see as a key aspect in getting someone away from their home. All around the outside of the building are large empty parking spaces, with so much potential to be recreated into something that gives more to its community than just somewhere to park. The emptiness is even more visible, surrounding the ambiance of the theatre. Choosing this location gave me the ability to visit and learn more about the space and how it functions. The vast empty parking lot is almost useless as people are not in attendance of the theater therefore the parking lot could have a better use.
Break building up with the site. Use tiering to create a direct path between first and the second building.

Building split up to allow for different programs within. Attempt to keep building at a consistent height.

Flatten site completely and develop little moments within the space to reiterate the importance of site over building.

Development of building introduces a wrap around building to capture all angles overlooking Woodstock, Ga.

Both sides of the site create a grand entrance up to the buildings with a drive under to show the building as a whole.

Buildings split but would be connected underground and by a garden that allows for emotional experience as walk through.
SITE DESIGN INTENT

Tiering effect with highest point in the center of the site as if to look over the building and embrace the site over building.

Continuous building allows for site to develop and function between the two. Making this opens space for new programs.

Flattened site allows for fluctuation of program along the site. Connecting drives by one main road that leads under building.

Looking into the angle of the site and how the sun breaks through the space how can it be harnessed and captured in an experience within the building itself.
SITE AXIAL DESIGN

After choosing the site the next step was to design the site and building within the site. After analyzing the space I broke the space down into how I found its importance. The bottom right corner is the key view out over the mountain. I chose to use this area as my building’s axial point to pull people in through the building. From these axial points below I built the shape of my building and expressed the shape through the design of the topography to reflect the key aspect of the site.
SITE PROGRAM BREAKDOWN

The site is broken down into different sections based on programs implemented from research. To best bring people into a space it truly needs to have a pull. This site is extremely large and can be altered as time goes on. The break down is as following.

KEY

1 Community Space
2 Grand Entry
3 Vehicular Entrance
4 Light Wells
5 Building Area
6 Overflow Flex Area
SKYLIGHT DEVELOPMENT

Below is the final design of the topography of the site. After defining the layout and topography of the site there needed to be a way to let light into the underground drive in theater to allow for natural light. The following diagrams show how I altered the site to create the light-wells. The first design focused on a straight down to differ the light into the space below.

SKYLIGHT DESIGN 1
The diagrams below show how the second design created light-wells at an angle. The sun roughly penetrates the site at an angle of 33 degrees. To best allow for the largest amount of direct light the light-well design was rotated towards the sun. With the sunlight entering the space at this way there is more room to change the way the light reflects into the space.
SITE DEVELOPMENTS

During the design phase of the site I found many different ways to develop my project. This diagram visually shows the final decisions made to the site.

The final decision was made to create a tiered topography to emphasize the dramatic changes in the current topography.

1

CURRENT
Cherokee 16 in Woodstock, GA at its current functioning state

2

LEVEL
Removal of the current program and flattening of the site

3

EXTRACT
Digging down into the site to create underground experiential spaces
4

**Addition Above**
Building placed on top of site with intent to pull people into and through the building.

5

**Site**
Finalized changes to come.

6

**Addition Below**
Program developed below the surface of the site to accommodate for intended pedestrian use above.
SECOND FLOOR
Scale: 1/100" = 1'

Program Key

1 Foyer/Entry
2 Flex Theater
3 Grand Hallway
4 Overhead Seating
5 Lookout Bar
6 Small Flex Theater
7 Small Flex Theater
FIRST FLOOR
Scale: 1/100" = 1’

PROGRAM KEY

1 Foyer/Entry
2 Flex Theater
4 Ticket Counter
6 Snack Bar
7 Small Flex Theater
8 In the ground Theater
9 Theater Flex Spaces
10 Adult Arcade
11 Children’s Arcade
12 Restaurant
13 Kitchen
14 Rent-able Room
15 Open Auditorium Space
16 Seating with Tables
LOWER FIRST FLOOR
Scale: 1/100" = 1'

Program Key
8 In the ground Theater
15 Open Auditorium Space
17 Storage
PARKING
Scale: 1/100" = 1'

PROGRAM KEY

3 Underground Drive in
18 Parking
19 Entrance to Drive in
20 Exit Drive in
21 Vertical Circulation
22 Vehicular Entry/Exit
EXPLODED AXON
BUILDING SCALE

Roof Level

Second Floor Level
Flexible Theater

Ground Floor Level
Main Entry
ENTRY SPACE

The entry point of a building says everything you need to know about a space. Developing this open inviting two story foyer broke down the stuffiness normally found in theaters. As soon as you enter through the doors there is an explosion of light and space. Ramps or stairs to accommodate for all. Even an area to sit and wait while you wait for your friends, family or just want to sit and relax.
STUDY MODELS

THE FOLLOWING MODELS ARE DIFFERENT ITERATIONS OF WAYS TO DEVELOP THE FRONT ENTRY SPACE OF THE BUILDING TO BEST CREATE AN INVITING AND OPEN ENVIRONMENT.
LARGE SCALE MODEL
Theaters these days are static in place and never change, besides the movie playing on the screen. This theater however is a flexible theater that opens up to add additional seating to the theater room or can change into a few other settings. The purpose of this space is to push the boundaries of theaters as a static box but to allow for them to change as our entertainment does.
FLEX DIAGRAMS

**Half Up Half Down Iteration**
Seats fold into the floor to open the space for option functions.

**Flat Iteration**
Seats fold into the floor and into the back wall to create a completely open rentable space.

**Completely Open Iteration**
Exterior wall extends as well as seats roll out into the space from under the floor. All seats are extended into usable positions.
STUDY MODELS

These models show the changes that are made based on the diagrams on the previous slide.

Right: Half up half down

Right: Flat

Left: Completely open
LARGE SCALE MODEL
Drive in theaters are few and far between now days. With the closest one in the middle of Atlanta there needed to be a second option. Due to limited time of use drive in theaters do not normally create a large profit. However this one is does not leave that as an option. Developing a drive in theater underground allows for the theater to be used at all times during the day. Giving the community and extra place to enjoy some old fashioned entertainment.
STUDY MODELS

The following three models show the different iterations designed while looking solely at the site and how I could change the topography and allow for the programs to still function and allow light into the drive in Theater underground.
Above: Lower level theaters are available to allow handicapped and other unaccessible individuals to have the opportunity to sit at the top of a theater for once.

Below: Our communities are built on a range of people. Inside however we are all the same. Looking for ways to find entertainment.
EAST ELEVATION
SECTION ONE

ENTRY CALL OUT
Scale: 1/16" = 1'-0"

OPEN AUDITORIUM CALL OUT
Scale: 1/16" = 1'-0"
CIRCULATION DIAGRAM

This diagram explains the pathways through the building as well as entry and exit points.

KEY
- LARGE FLEX THEATER
- RESTROOM
- ARCADE
- RESTAURANT
- OUTDOOR THEATER
- ENTRY AND EXIT
- EMERGENCY EXIT
- CONCESSIONS AND BAR
- LOUNGING/FLEX AUDITORIUM
- TABLES AND SEATING
Proposed Site Analysis

The following diagram proposes to eliminate the use of vehicular traffic along the proposed site. Surrounding the area is extremely walkable and gives a reason for the user to enter the site, park utilize the community spaces, building amenities, visit friends walk off the site to explore the town all while your car is parked safely under the site in our parking garage to keep it safe and out of the sun. The proposal for this site is to increase pedestrian traffic in any way possible. Community spaces retain large numbers of people every day. To implement the idea of pulling in the community with the declining theater will allow for the space to be utilized to its full potential.
PHYSICAL MODELS
renderings
Behind the scenes of theater development is a process of developing a way to best create a product that will be utilized in all aspects. This project concludes my findings of production of a modern theater that is open to the community. Each program within the site gives back to the community in a different way. The three main focuses of my thesis established a means of connection between the site and the community. As humans we change and adapt constantly, with the design implemented of creating flexibility in a normally rather static program, I have found a way to bring the community back into a public setting and away from the technological trap of cornering yourself off at home. A community is built on people who help each other, there is no way to get that if you are sitting on your couch. As I bring this thesis into the light there is possibility for change in the uses of public areas and repurposing theater spaces into more multifunctional zones. Hopefully you will find yourself somewhere in and between the seats soon.

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