

**University of Pretoria, etd - Human, M (2003)**

**Encore Performing Arts Centre**  
an investigation into the contribution of  
performing arts education to urban renewal

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Architecture can without a doubt be considered one of the most difficult but exciting and necessary art forms because of its links with functionality and reality. Where other art forms usually have either a visual or a time component, these are of equal importance in architecture.

The theme of this dissertation is to make an attempt to contribute to the urban domain, i.e. To the renewal and vitality of the Berea precinct in Pretoria. This particular development should be driven by its context - sociological, physical and hypothetical. Thus the final function and accommodation schedule would be derived from the investigation of the context.

The site is situated in Skinner Street, next to the Unisa Little Theatre, across the street from the Doxa Deo Church. The site forms part of the Berea precinct as proposed by Holm Jordaan Holm in their Apies River Urban Design Framework.

After the completion of the context study the project can be defined as a centre for the development of performing arts. Its main function will be the development of a campus for the SCC, the School of Creative Communication, which will initially be funded by collaboration between Doxa Deo and a capital provider such as the Nedbank Arts Affinity Trust and Business Arts South Africa.

***For 30 years architects have been providing the outside for man, even on the inside. But that is not their job at all. Architecture means providing inside for men even outside.*** (Aldo van Eyck, Otterlo, 1959)

This dissertation explores the notion of creating space, but without the idea of an enclosed room that immediately springs to mind. It will be a search to define physical and sociological boundaries, to adhere, and in some cases, after careful consideration, transgress. The building will be explored as a piece of performing art in itself, exploring all the opportunities and limitations of other art forms. This implies that the building will have a beginning and an end, actors an audience..., and rhythm, beat and proportion.

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*The present is not a time of style whatsoever, it is a time of groping – a time of discovery. It is a time, you might say, of realisation. Our problems are all new, our spatial demands are new, and it is time, therefore, more concerned with trying to create better institutions from those we have already established.*

(Louis Khan, Otterlo, 1959)

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### Problem statement

"The World Bank's central mission is to fight poverty. Over 2 billion people around the world live in poverty. With such pressing concerns, why bother about arts and culture. Because we must accept the importance of social well-being, educational and intellectual fulfilment. Culture is profoundly important. We need to understand the cultural dimension of development: for example effective educational projects must take into account the cultural expression and language of the community. We have moved from involvement solely with financial capital to a financial being balanced with social and structural factors, a more holistic view that incorporates lending criteria that accommodate 'social capital'. We will do our utmost to make a difference. Bank finance in culture is truly complementary to that of others.

A Kenyan proverb displayed at the Museum of Natural History in New York reads: "*Let us treat nature well. It was not given to us by our fathers but it was lent to us by our children*". I suggest we insert 'cultural heritage' for nature."

Ian Johnson - Vice President Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development, The World Bank (<http://www.arts&culture.trust.htm>)

The Inner City of Pretoria is rapidly degrading. Businesses are moving out and poorer people are moving in. To create a place for real people, more than just economic stability is needed. At the Vienna Architecture Conference in 1993 "The End of Architecture?" Zaha Hadid stated: "*Being an architect today one is faced with the challenge of a profession torn in two distinct aspects. On the one hand architecture became pure technique, as if it were a branch of engineering; on the other hand, it becomes image production, as if it were a branch of advertising.*" (Noever, 1992; 27)

The theme at the conference alluded to the fact that architecture for architecture's sake no longer predominates, and it now seems that only fashion is being rewarded. Architecture for architecture's sake cannot be the solution, cannot be the antidote to fashion; only a social purpose to architecture, publicly formulated, can be such an antidote. There can be no great architecture without a social programme. A visionary architecture has to take part in a political vision, and its reality presupposes a political process, which puts a new architecture on the agenda and thus transforms the profession into a movement with new aims and inspirations.

What matters to the inhabitants of the Inner City, apart from the fundamentals for physical survival, is the quality of buildings and the in-between spaces that they generate. Keeping this in mind one should realise that designing outside spaces is as important as designing buildings. There has always been a distinction between interior and exterior space, with architects and interior architects responsible for the latter and landscape architects responsible for the first. If one intends to create a real people's place there should be a fusion between these two elements. They should be perceived as spaces created for people, without drawing a distinction between inside and outside.

This is one of the elements which the city lacks most. The open spaces in the Berea precinct are either not planned or not utilised in the way they were planned. Today cities may be increasingly sophisticated in meeting technical needs, but now is the time to bring deeper human needs into the brief.

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## Design discourse

**“Architecture is clearly a product of the human mind, reflecting the capacity and character of the individuals involved. In this respect the source of inspiration always remains within the imagination”** (Hughes, 1996; 226).

The aim of this design essay is to explain decisions made whilst designing the building. It is important to mention that by trying to put the design into words one runs the risk of oversimplifying.

In 2002, at the International Union of Architects (IUA) congress A.G. Hempel, the president of the IUA Congress, said **“the primary aim of architecture in urban and landscape planning is to ensure the sustainable development and enhancement of urban civilisations”** (Architectural Review, July 2001; 33).



1

Throughout this discourse the main aim was not only to create a building, but to create spaces according to the different functions they needed to perform. To achieve this, the potential of the existing city fabric like the Doxa Deo Church in Visagie Street, the Unisa Little Theatre and Burgers Park was investigated to determine design decisions.

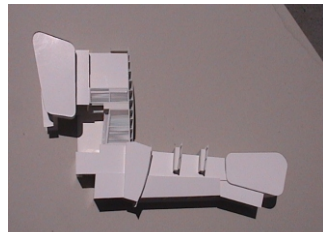
### Urban investigation

In around 1730, when Caneletto painted the Piazza San Marco in Venice, the richness, quality and diversity of public life was already visible. This painting portrays people engaged in conversation, children running around, street vendors and hawkers, and people passing through. All of the abovementioned are needed to create an active urban space. The most important prerequisite for creating good public space remains the ongoing existence of public life. Our cities today seem to consist of fully public spaces and completely private spaces, missing most of the nuances in between. The Berea precinct consists mostly of medium-rise apartment buildings, so compared to, for instance, a suburban area, a greater number of people will spend various parts of their day in the public sphere. Because of the location of the site between the Paul Kruger Station and the CBD, the urban intervention should also cater for the ebb and flow of pedestrians through the area.



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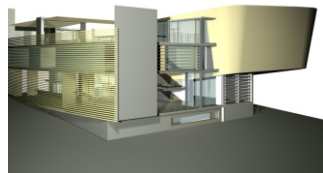
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This dissertation aims to initiate urban renewal in the Berea precinct through redesigning lost space. The site extends from Burgers Park up to Skinner Street. The proposed campus for the School of Creative Communication and the Original Arts Company is intended for public use, whereas campuses in the traditional sense are for use of the students only. Seen on an urban scale the campus forms a green link from Burgers Park through to Skinner Street, and aims to vitalise the whole neighborhood.

On this scale a spatial framework was created setting design guidelines for movement, public space, the Performing Arts Centre and workshops, and for two proposed multi-functional buildings. These guidelines were set in order to ensure that a variety of conditions and overlapping activities will occur in this space to make it vibrant and viable. Emphasis was placed on creating a sequence of outdoor and indoor spaces rather than individual spaces and buildings, on the site as a whole.



4

- 1 top view of site model
- 2 view to the south west
- 3 top view of model
- 4 view from Skinner Street

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### Links

In *Investigations into Collective Form*, Fumihiko Maki addresses linkage as the most important characteristic of urban exterior space, stating that: **“Linkage is simply the glue of the city. It is the act by which we unite all the layers of activity and resulting physical form in the city...urban design is concerned with the question of making comprehensible links between discrete things”** (Trancik, 1986; 107).

The linkage theory, as described by R. Trancik in *Finding Lost Space*, involves the organisation of lines connecting different parts of the city in order to design a spatial datum to relate buildings to spaces. An analogy is drawn between the datum and a musical staff on which notes are composed. The staff acts as a datum providing the composer with continuous lines of reference, enabling him to compose notes in an infinite number of ways. In this case, existing links with the broader city and links with the immediate surroundings were investigated to determine a datum.

The link between Burgers Park and Skinner Street, the pedestrian routes on Van Der Walt and Visagie Street, and the link between Van Der Walt Street and the Unisa Little Theatre are considered as the main spatial datums acting as form generators for the movement routes, public open spaces and proposed buildings. Through using these linkages continuity is created across streets and property lines to establish urban cohesiveness.

There is no singular unobstructed view through the campus, but a series of views exist, each ending at a focus point like the sculptural staircase in the public square or a projection on an external wall of the Little Theatre. These lines of sight ending at focus points are used to connect elements, by presenting spaces as a series of snapshots of memorable events along the route.

### Urban pauses

**“When public life and public space are lacking or neglected, people become isolated, eroding any sense of communal spirit and cohesion”** (Architectural Review, April 2001; 36).

To be able to create public space that is poetic as well as pragmatic it is important to realise that the relationship between public life and public space is directly proportional to each other. In order to humanise the space, pedestrian friendly edges such as animated facades are used and special attention is given to materials and textures where people are in direct contact with them. Public activities are integrated and overlapped to create a robust public space. The public space will be used for shows and projections in the amphitheatre, as an exterior extension for the restaurant and cafeteria, as a movement route for students using the campus, or the public using the proposed community or commercial facilities in the proposed buildings, and as a spill-over space for the workshops. The layout of the public spaces is created in such a way as to provide a variety of urban pauses in the pedestrian realm. Rather than using a collage of individual spaces creating different qualities in urban life in order to offer people choice and variety, each space is viewed as a fragment of a thread woven through the urban environment.

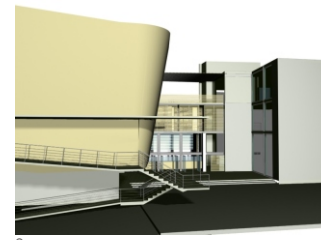
The most important individual public space is situated between the Unisa Little Theatre and the Performing Arts Centre. The Centre sits between the Unisa Little Theatre and the Lutheran Church, forming a respectful counterpoint. The experience of the route and the sculptural as well as geometric planes and surfaces of the new building encourage appreciation of the existing buildings. The main courtyard reinforces the link between the new and existing, and can be used as an outdoor arena with the landing of the external staircase forming a podium. Enclosure created by the Unisa Little Theatre and Performing Arts Centre is the most important physical they



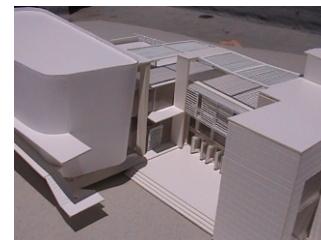
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- 1 south east view
- 2 main public space
- 3 view towards courtyard
- 4 main entrance

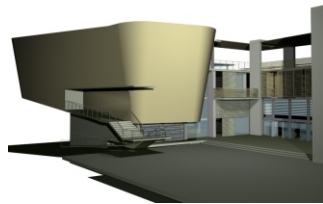
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quality used to create this space. Rather than using these facades as boundaries between the building and outdoor space they are designed as transition elements creating an opportunity for the integration of indoor and outdoor space.

### Performing Arts Centre

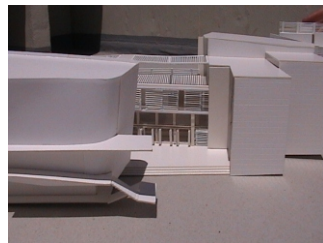
**“Architects may not be able to do much to alleviate the crisis of education, but at least they can invent humanely intelligent physical devices to help to resolve them”** (Davey, 2002; 34).

an



1

For centuries, schools were private buildings surrounded by high blank walls. This building challenges this idea by being a public building surrounded by public spaces. Instead of being an introverted used only part-time, building this building takes part in the whole life of the precinct. The building offers flexibility, contact with the outdoors, light, and the wider urban environment.



2

The building tries to take advantage of the implicit contradictions in the program me, like education and catering, private and public, lectures and music. Through exploiting cohabitation as far as possible, spaces serving dual functions are created. By grouping the educational functions with the auditorium and theatres, students will be introduced to the professional world of performing arts, stimulating a synergy between amateurs, professionals and different types of performing arts. It is especially important from a financial point of view that the building is utilised by as many people as possible for the maximum amount of time per day. Through grouping the functions, spaces can be used optimally, for instance when no events are scheduled for the theatres they can be used by the students. The shape and geometry of the building is strongly influenced by its function, and it tries to be a poetic expression of this function.



3

The more public functions of the building, the auditorium, theatres and restaurant, are located to the north of the site, fronting on Skinner Street, with the educational functions located between this part and Van Der Walt Street. The main circulation and service shaft forms a spatial hinge connecting these two parts. The auditorium and dance studio serve as two focal points in the urban landscape. These two elements will be visible from a distance, particularly the dance studios when illuminated at night. They are used to announce the campus to people travelling in an east-west as well as in a north-south direction. The shapes of these two elements are juxtaposed with the geometry of the rest of the Performing Arts Centre and that of the surrounding buildings. Their main objective is to aid orientation in the public domain.

3

### Circulation



4

The two main entrances to the campus are next to the dance studios and auditorium respectively. When entering under the auditorium, a straight ramp connected to the building is juxtaposed with the curved wall, to heighten the user's experience of the space. The ramp running next to a solid off-shutter concrete wall leads the eye to the sculptural staircase which forms the focal point of the public space. The other route starts next to the dance studios, where the glazed staircase where dancers warm-up is used as an active shop front to draw pedestrians into the campus. At night, multi-media projections of the events in the amphitheatre will be thrown onto a blank wall of the Unisa Little Theatre, to draw people in from the street. The two routes of entry culminate in a mixed-use space containing the reception area, bar and restaurant. In our electronic age tickets for the various shows will mostly be bought beforehand via the internet, but to cater for exceptions the reception area will also serve as a small box office. Throughout this more public part of the building furniture is used to define, shape and articulate space and movement routes. In this way

- 1 main entrance and auditorium
- 2 view into courtyard
- 3 dance studios
- 4 north facade



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the interior is kept fairly free from vertical obstructions, creating the opportunity for natural light to flood in through the facades. The ground floor has a generous four-and-a-half metre floor-to-ceiling height, because of the large numbers of people expected to use the space. This fact also makes the introduction of mezzanine floors possible. A triple-volume atrium ending one metre above roof level is used to bring natural light into the centre of the space down to basement level, and also to introduce a vertical connection between the floors, in the same manner as is done in the courtyard.

### Restaurant

The restaurant opens onto a balcony fronting Skinner Street, which is one of the main pedestrian routes. The balcony is raised one-and-a-half meters, using the natural slope of the site, to maintain a certain degree of privacy. It is like a stage, offering the opportunity to the pedestrians passing by to observe the theatre of people using the restaurant.

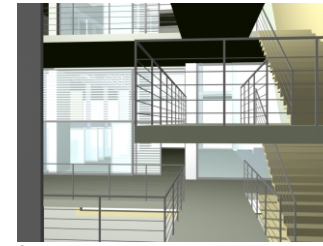
The kitchen is divided so that one part is open in order for people to see the activities inside, even from the outside courtyard. This heightens the idea of a very lively and active space. The storage, dishwashing area and cold room are situated in the basement, connected to the kitchen with a dumb waiter, freeing up valuable space on ground level.

### Auditorium

The staircase connecting spaces from the basement foyer up to the roof is located next to the atrium. The first entrance into the auditorium is on mezzanine floor level and the other on first floor level. On the first floor level a spill-over space for the auditorium is created, with a glazed façade offering a view over what the ISDF proposes to be the Skinner Street Boulevard. To deal with the high noise levels from Skinner Street, a concrete shell structure is used for the auditorium. For acoustic insulation the mass of the concrete along with timber cladding and particle insulation, is used. At the sides, convex timber panels are used to diffuse and reflect sound waves to the audience and also to house the electrical and air-conditioning services. Timber ceiling panels float as acoustical clouds to reflect sound back to the audience. At the back of the auditorium, timber cladding with absorbent material is used to absorb sound. The landing of the emergency staircase cuts into the auditorium, forming a stark contrast with the solidity of the auditorium.

### Theatres

Two small theatres are located in the basement, connected by a foyer where people can socialize before the shows. Two windows on opposite sides of the foyer offering glimpses of the performers to, on the north side, pedestrians in Skinner Street looking into the foyer, and on the other side, to people waiting for a performance to start. By being sunk into the earth good thermal and more important in this case acoustic insulation is achieved. Because of the simultaneous presence of the architecture and work on stage it is important that the space heightens the experience of viewing and involves the viewer more. Through the use of concrete and timber finishes, an unpretentious space is created to enhance, and not distract from, the performance on stage. A raked floor is used in both theatres, with a staggered seating arrangement to ensure that each audience member has a clear line of vision to the stage. One of the theatres will mainly be used for cabarets and solo performances and the other for complete small productions. There is also a complete backstage area with cloakrooms, a greenroom and a hydraulic platform to make it possible to lift sets from the basement.



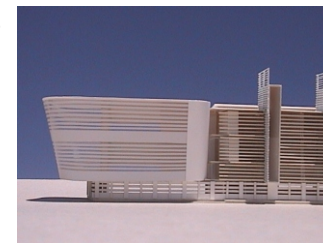
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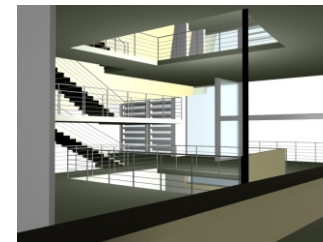
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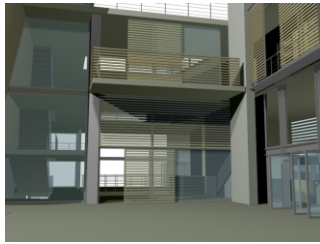
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- 1 interior view towards the courtyard
- 2 view from the south west
- 3 public roof space
- 4 dance studios from the north
- 5 restaurant view from the kitchen

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1

### Library

In the educational part of the centre, it was important to achieve a more human scale and intimacy than that of the public part, in order to nurture students and make them want to continue with their art. The library is a place for private contemplation and activity, relating to the exterior space between itself and the Lutheran Church. It is far more complex than just a storage place for facts. In the electronic age we are in now, vast amounts of information can be accessed through the internet, but we still need physical libraries where readers can be part of a scholarly community. The library is subject specific and offers multi-media rooms where students can watch videos and listen to music. These are located on mezzanine floor level. By using a mezzanine floor in the library the scale is reduced to a more human scale, heightening privacy.



2

A central corridor is used in this part of the building, so that valuable façade area can be used in the drama and music rooms to the north, and lecture rooms to the south of the corridor. On ground floor level natural light is allowed into this space through a glass plane that is used to divide the library from the corridor. To get light into the corridor on the first floor, small windows above eye level are introduced in the drama rooms, and the ventilation stack serves a dual purpose allowing light to penetrate from the north side. On the second floor, north facing clerestory windows admit light into the corridor. The corridor forms the movement spine through the educational part of the building, each time ending in a social space.



3

### Dance studios

The landings of the stairs leading up to the dance studios are used as stretching zones. Pedestrians walking by in Van Der Walt Street will see silhouetted figures in motion, advertising the presence of the building. The dance studios are naturally ventilated with glazed facades to the north and east. Diffused natural light is allowed into the spaces through a timber shading device. This provides privacy, but allows dancers a view to the outside. Light is reflected from the timber sprung floor and mirrored wall to create a light and airy effect. The timber, glass and off-shutter concrete finishes used create a soft backdrop to allow the dancers to be the most important elements in the space.

5

### Indoor and outdoor fusion

**“Buildings should respond to outdoor conditions. They should be able to transform their own cloths, their own different skins, to open them up or to change them”** (Hughes, 1996; 64).



4

The façade is seen as an envelope containing the space forming the building, as an imprint of interior and exterior spaces affecting it. It becomes the element negotiating between urban environment and architecture. The facade is made up of different skins and filters, not only influenced by atmospheric conditions but by social conditions as well. The skin is widely used as a metaphor for facades when their response to environmental conditions is discussed. When the design of the façade is discussed, people can be used as metaphors, especially their reactions to things they like or dislike. As people do, this façade is able to exclude things it dislikes by closing screens, doors and windows, and to open up to things it favours, whether these things are atmospheric or social. The above is important because the façade is not only the interruption between exterior and interior, but between private and public, silent and not silent, still and active. The façade in this case is the face of the building, enabled to be transformed into different expressions when necessary.

- 1 main entrance
- 2 north facade
- 3 view from Skinner Street
- 4 timber shading on north facade

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The above discussed the way users of the building can manipulate the façade, but the opposite of this is the way in which the façade manipulates the user. All views and connections to the exterior are determined by the façade. The notion that a transparent sheet of glass connects the interior and exterior is far from true, because not only is this not a mono-dimensional relationship, but a physical barrier still exists. Where the functions of the space permit, the façade is openable to allow the interior to extend into the exterior, and visa versa. Although the façade is seen as an element wrapping around the building, it consist of fragments influenced by the nature of the space it contains.

### Timber screen cladding

Timber screens and cladding are used throughout the building as a constant which binds different spaces. The character of each of these screens is determined by the particular function it needs to serve in the allocated space. Sometimes the screen forms the cladding in front of a solid wall, sometimes the screen disappears and the wall continue or vica versa, and at times both disappears altogether, revealing large openings.

### Materials

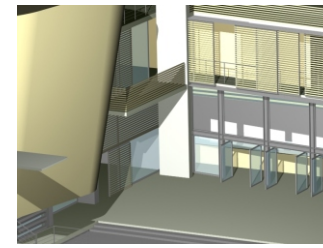
At the beginning of the design process lines on paper were given physicality through the use of physical models. At this stage, the first decisions concerning materials were made because of their sensory qualities as well as technical potential. Materials like timber and concrete appear raw or defined, depending on the use and character of the space. Detailing is expressed robustly, with joints and junctions exposed. Materials are expressed independently of the structural steel frame, which adds to the easy and simplistic comprehensibility of the building.

### Light

The building depends on light to reveal its true form and nature. During the day sunlight is used to enhance textures formed by the pre-cast concrete elements, and the timber slats from the dance studio on the exterior. In the interior, sunlight is used in various ways to fill and define space. In the library and exhibition space, pre-cast concrete elements surround small glass panes to create a gentle luminance surrounding the spaces. In the drama and music rooms, light is filtered through timber screens to provide as much illuminance as possible without direct sun entering the spaces. Where the function permits it, like in circulation spaces, direct sunlight is allowed to enter the building. The two ventilation stacks are used to enable light to penetrate to the corridor. Painted white on the inside, they reflect light to create illuminated planes in the corridor. This means that light conditions range from possible total darkness in the theatres and auditorium, to diffused light, to filtered light, to the total opposite of direct sunlight in the building, in order to heighten the sensory experience of people passing through the building. During the evening, light from the inside of the dance studios will enhance their importance as focal points in the urban landscape.

The design of the public spaces, links and Performing Arts Centre can be summarised as an infill project in the existing fabric of the Berea precinct, to promote urban renewal in Pretoria. The campus is created for community use in order to have a positive influence on the quality of life of people resident in the precinct. It is an investigation into using performing arts and architecture as a tool to return life to the city.

- 1 courtyard with timber screens
- 2 roof space
- 3 movable screens
- 4 view from the north
- 5 view towards main Entrance



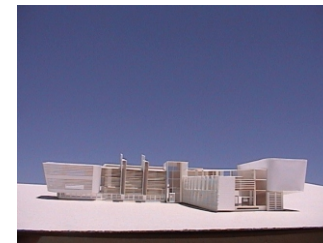
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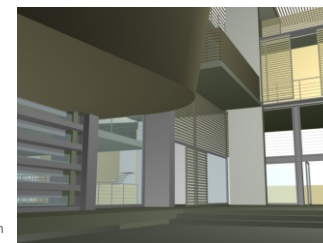
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5

**What distinguishes architecture from painting and sculpture is its spatial quality. In this, and only in this, no other artist can emulate the architect. Thus the history of architecture is primarily a history of man shaping space** (Johnston & Vulker, 1997; 11).