

Part C: Response to the built environment

a) Protection and celebration of heritage in the built environment including buildings, spaces, movement patterns, rituals, cultural events.

According to Article 1 of the Venice Charter by the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

“The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time.”

This would have dual implication for the site around the Campanile and the entrance to the harbour. The first and most obvious item is the Campanile itself. The development of the Campanile and its setting has been explained as a context

element. Secondly the Northern most extension of the Apple Express narrow gauge rail.

The Campanile is a typical monument and was built to be a monument. There are however two points of importance when considering development around it.

- Protection and revitalization of the monument
- Recognition and re-establishment of the Campanile’s urban-spatial significance.

The former is a management concern and must be developed with other management and tourist programs. The latter concerns the spatial use of the Campanile.

As was explained in the section on ‘context’ it is clear how the Campanile was systematically put aside. Today it stands relatively uncelebrated. The current project will re-establish the spatial formula that the Campanile was originally designed for - as a node where movement paths cross. It would be a significant

indicator of the future of South African cities if these paths will, instead of motor vehicle paths, be pedestrian paths. In this manner the Campanile’s ‘repositioning’ could also carry meaning in the collective memory of the city.

Furthermore, an opportunity to fully exploit the significance of the monument could be gained by placing it on or closer to a public square. This would enhance the quality of urban spaces available in the city in that it provides opportunity more interaction with such meaningful spaces. This would be especially powerful if coupled with the Donkin Hill green square (urban historical) and Market Square (civil).

A further opportunity to expose evidence of history is the still existing Apple Express. The future of the urban role of the Apple Express is part of the MBDA’s mandate. The Apple express is a narrow-gauge train and one of few in the world. There are several international organizations that celebrate the history of these

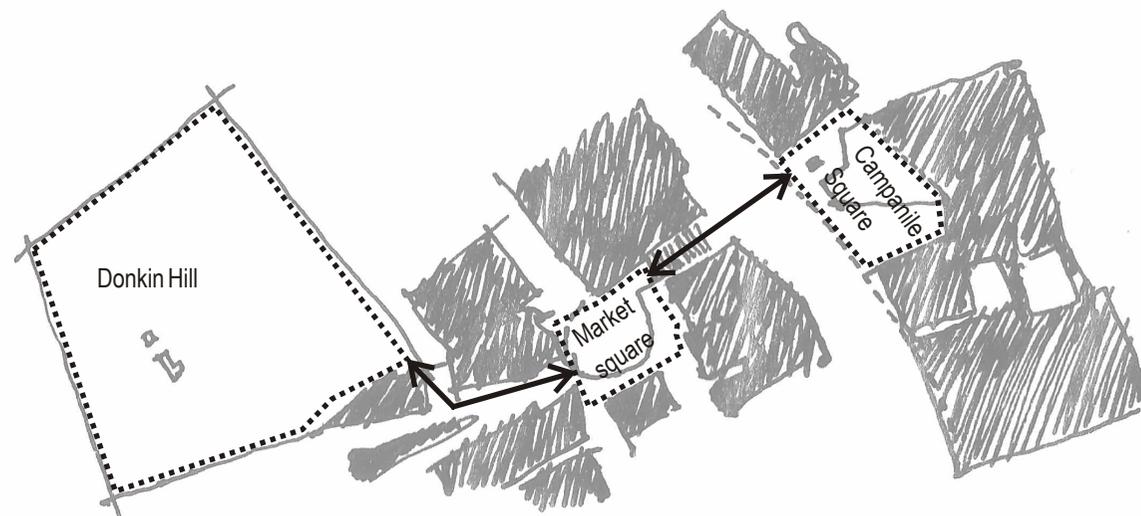


Figure 47. Chain of public spaces linking CBD to Waterfront



© Photo: Sda Lawrence 1984
Class NG15 124 heads Apple Express from Humewood Road to Lorie 1984



Figure 48. An annual “race against the machine”. Athletes compete with the Apple Express in a long distance race that starts in the street under a bridge. Would it not have urban significance if the race could start on Campanile Square where the train used to pick up its passengers?

trains. The Apple Express was a regional freight train that collected citrus products from local farmers at the many stations in the region. Today it is a recreational train. Very significantly it annually “competes” with humans in a “long-distance” running event. The event has a “Man Against Machine” slogan and starts from Apple Express station a few kilometres away from the Campanile. The runners gather in the street and set off from there. However, in the past when the train carried passengers it used to come all the way to the train station just below the Campanile. The rail still exists and lies intact across roads, paving and parking. It could be a significant addition to the development if the annual event could set off from the square below the Campanile. This would ‘inscribe’ the race, and the square, with the historical significance that lies dormant in the tarmac.

Article 5 of the Venice Charter supports this concept. It states: “The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose.”

b) Support of small to medium enterprises.

Apart from the many valid causes for supporting entrepreneurship, the project would have a mandate, given it by the MBDA, to support not only informal traders but another category namely Small to Medium Enterprises. This may imply a design effort beyond allowing for sellers to set up a stall. The development of SME’s implies more the development of industry, workmanship, business acumen and higher levels of service. How can a building achieve all this? By writing in more functions into its programme. Yes, but more than that. A large scale urban intervention should consider those things that make industry and service work - Transport; markets for produce; business services, access to labour and, significant for developing cities, higher density of diverse enterprises.

c) Develop the quality of the surrounding urban environment.

This refers directly to experience of spaces between buildings. The integration of the whole scheme into an urban framework is considered hereafter. At issue here are the things that make any urban space acceptable. Some have called it ‘Landscaping.’

Vegetation: Port Elizabeth falls within the Alexandria Forest biome. According to Gavin Brand, a fellow student in landscape architecture, smaller plants and shrubs are indigenous to this region. It is however important to consider the scale of the built fabric in relation to the vegetation that is planned for this project. In response to this Brand suggested using other larger trees that are indigenous to South Africa but not necessarily to the biome. These include *Celtis africana* (White Stinkwood) and *Schefflera umbellifera* (False Cabbage tree). The white stinkwood has the advantage of losing its leaves all in one go. This means that raking leaves is a time-efficient exercise. Both trees however, are deciduous and will give shadow in summer and allow sun in the winter. Benches, light



Figure 49. What would normally be a concrete island in a sea of tarmac is turned into a green spot of seemingly indigenous vegetation and a pleasant footpath that puts pedestrians in closer contact with natural elements.



Figure 50. Port Elizabeth has made Govan Mbeki Drive a more pedestrian-friendly environment by pacifying traffic, planting of trees, and allowing small enterprises to flourish.

fittings, trash receptacles, bollards, paving materials and patterns, vegetation and its concomitant maintenance programs and irrigation, kerbs, canopies, exterior handrails and steps, signage, fences, gates, booms, security structures, sound baffles to the elevated expressways and any wind attenuation elements - all should be integrated aesthetically to give a recognizable appearance to the environment around the buildings.

This is even more important considering that Port Elizabeth is a regular winner of the Blue Flag award which rewards cleanliness and beauty in respect of tourist destinations.

Part D: Urban Obligation

The Madiba Bay Development Agency (MBDA), as one of the initiators of the scheme, have stated that urban revitalization is one of their main objectives. This goes beyond promotion of the inner city as an investment and residential destination by such measures as relocating state offices to the CBD, tax deductions for inner city development and promotion of residential remodelling of old buildings. These measures have become the order of the day in many cities around the world and in South Africa and are very important. However, more is needed to ensure that real quality living environments are established. Moreover, the city as an artefact of a modern globalised civilization, is an opportunity for *Dasein* people to experience a revelation of meaning (even though the message might be that there is very little meaning - especially in a post-colonial, post-apartheid, late capitalist, proto-nationalist, African non-city). The keyword in inscribing meaning is - *order*.

The most criteria for the establishment of order in the current project are stated below:

1. Integrating the scheme with the Interim Spatial Development Framework:

i) Transport Node: the SDP calls for the development of transport infrastructure. The current scheme is built with the train station, bus station and several taxi junctions in very close proximity. The development of a transport node would benefit by the following:

- Public Parking to promote the use of public transport.
- Development of amenity-value and aesthetic coherence of an identifiable transport node through landscaping, benches, toilets accessible by public, lighting, security, protection from rain and wind etc.

ii) Development of a major centre: The project scale would

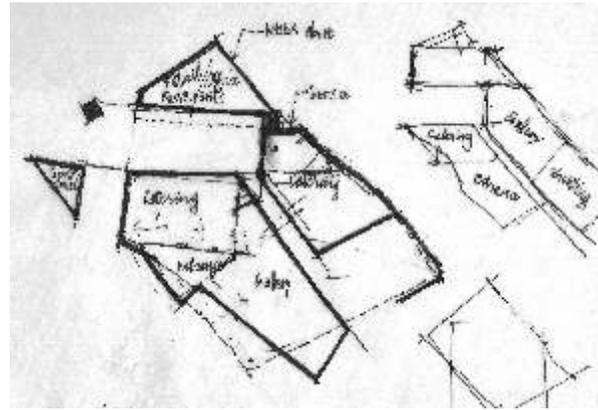
suggest that has already been met but the nature of the project in a pure form would preclude real integration of public access especially on the grounds of security issues. A special requirement is therefore added to the role that the building has to perform - above its original programmatic requirement.

iii) Development of the Waterfront: The waterfront scheme has come a long way and still is not beyond the realm of early concepts and paperwork. It does however, present the special opportunity of connecting the CBD to the ocean waterfront - as the title would have one believe. It is, in fact, not an easy task to make this connection because the harbour, railway and industrial areas have all been developed in between. With the promise of moving the oil tank farms and ore dumps to Coega harbour, a real opportunity could open up. The area that would be released for development of a waterfront is also not directly between the CBD and the foreshore. It lies some 5 kilometres to the south. Therefore, not only the revitalization of the CBD and the development of the Waterfront would have to be done to achieve the above stated goal but also the development of a viable connection between the two precincts! It is the author's opinion that the Waterfront scheme in Cape Town, which was otherwise a great success, disappointed somewhat in this regard.

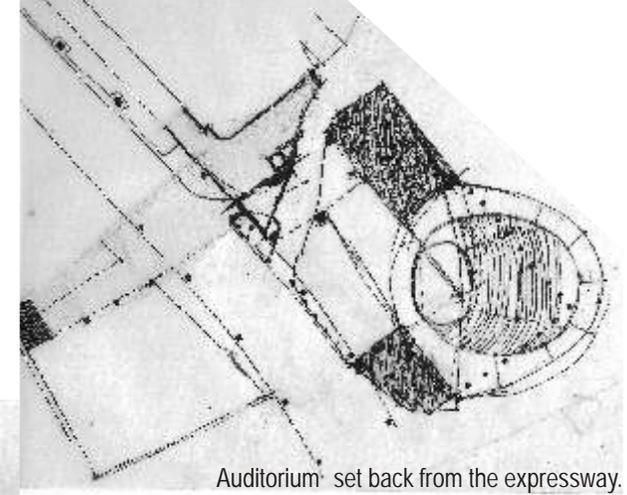
The task therefore is to establish a pedestrian link between the civil and historical centre (Donkin Hill - Market Square axis) and the Waterfront. This will not be achieved merely by a footpath. Here is need for something more substantial. A chain of urban spaces is required.

Initial Conceptualization

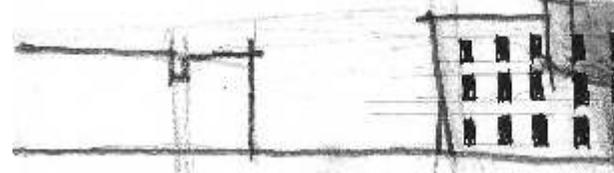
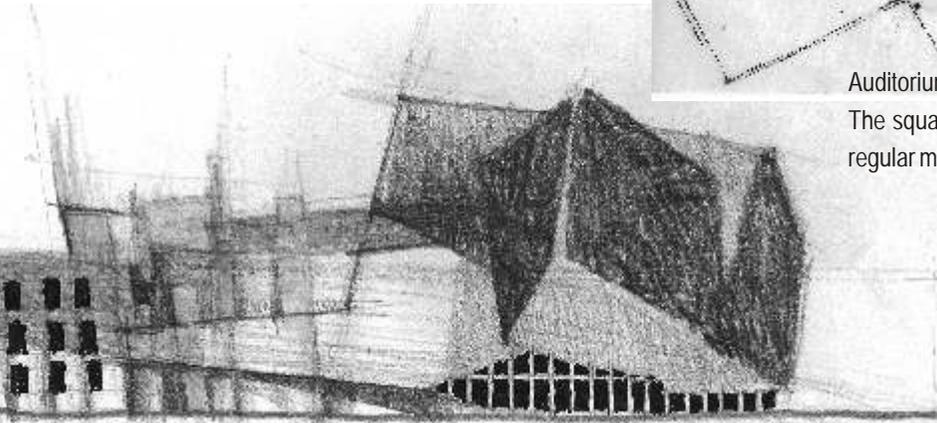
Starting from a vision of explosive masses the sculptural potential of a large building was very seductive in the beginning. Right from the start it was important that the height and distribution of mass was seen as a mediator between the height of the city's hill and the extreme flatness of the harbour. Another driver of early conceptualization was establishing the direction that the building had to face. The site was extremely un-directed - rail tracks follow efficient curves from one point to the other straight across the site. The city's own grid runs parallel to the shoreline but the site is almost as big as the entire CBD area so it could reasonably have its own direction. The roads that entered the site also did not have a strong sense of direction. In the end the best option seemed to extend the existing grid of the city in keeping with the desire for the city to grow towards the harbour. This would inevitably lead to the next big problem: the very large and closed-up building did not want the city pass through it.



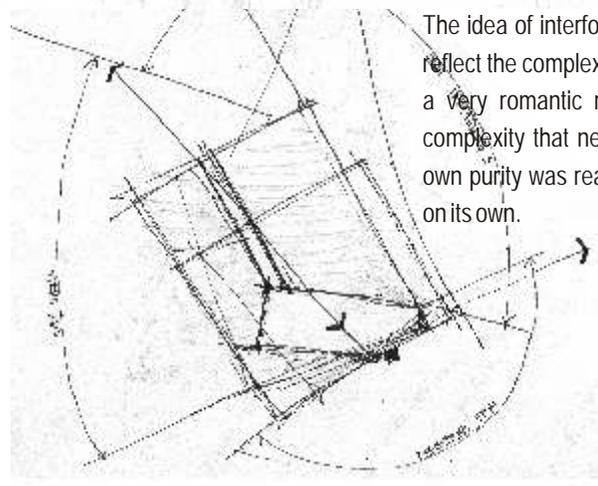
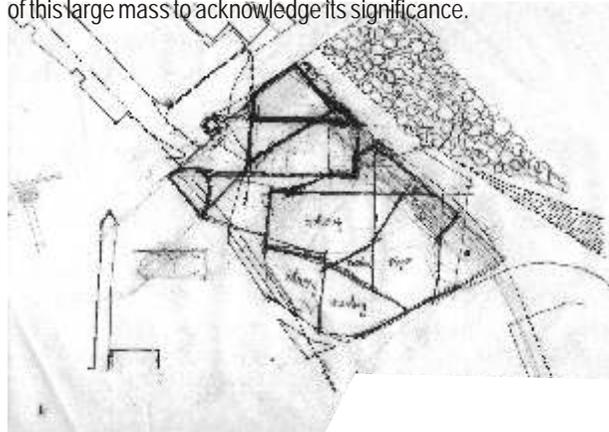
CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT



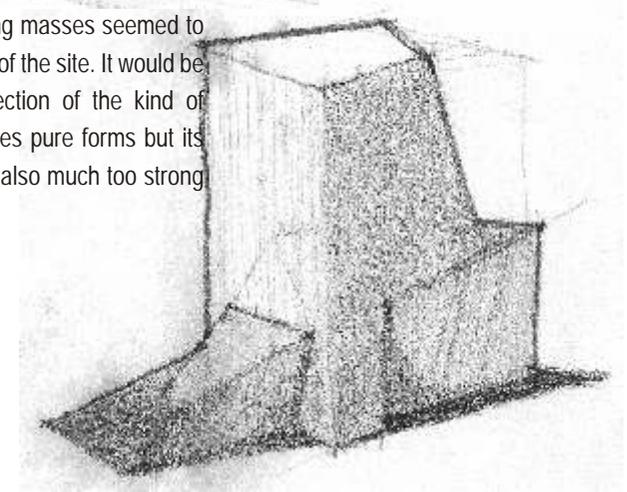
Auditorium set back from the expressway. The square is further defined by two more regular masses

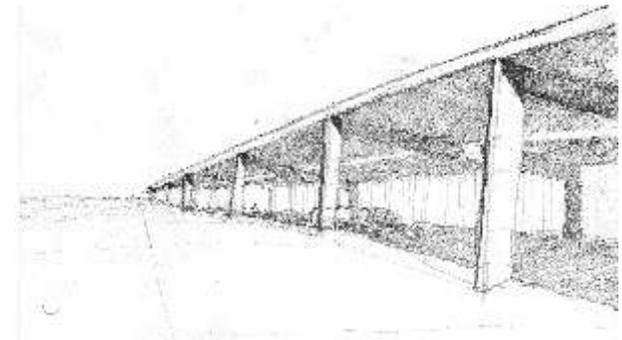


The Campanile also seemed to demand some kind of square or at least a decent spatial inflection from the side of this large mass to acknowledge its significance.

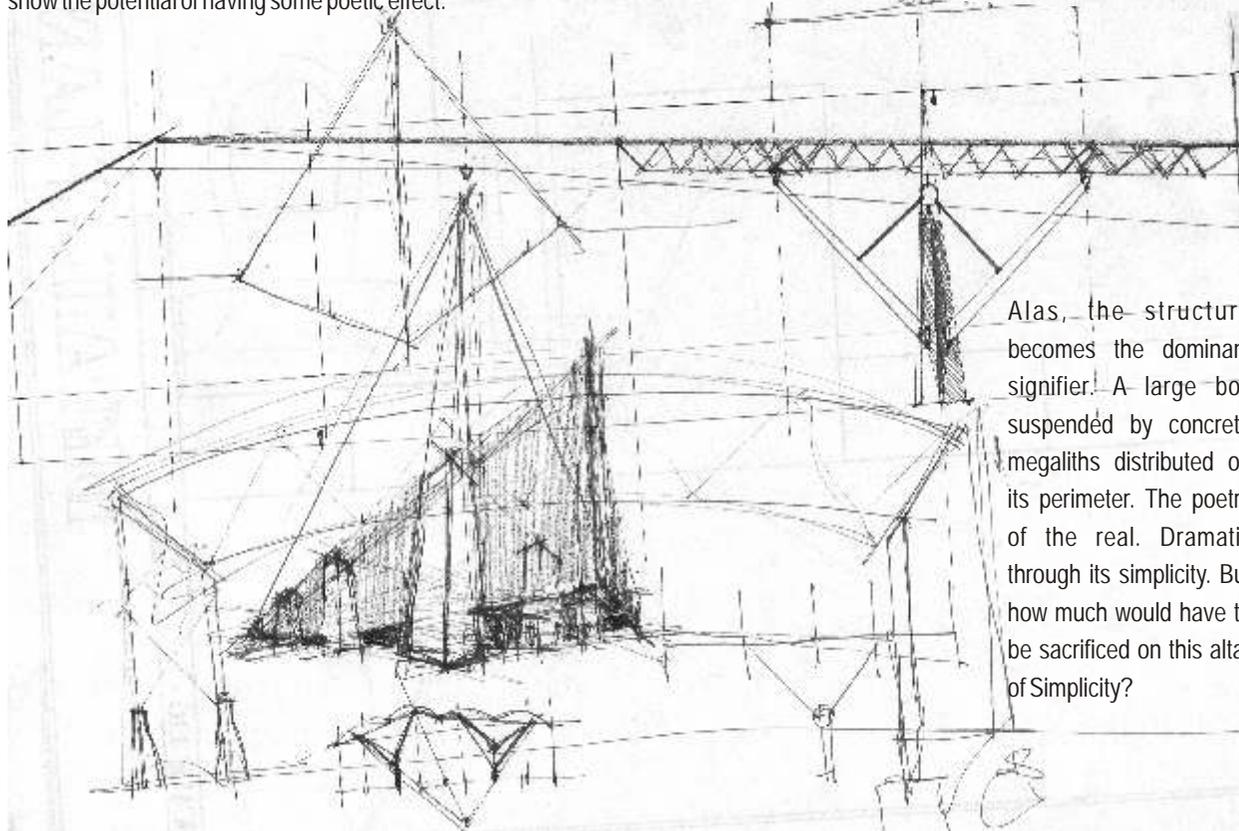


The idea of interfolding masses seemed to reflect the complexity of the site. It would be a very romantic reflection of the kind of complexity that negates pure forms but its own purity was really also much too strong on its own.





The sculptural play with large mass migrates to the interior of the shed. Meanwhile the mechanics of spanning the large spaces also show the potential of having some poetic effect.

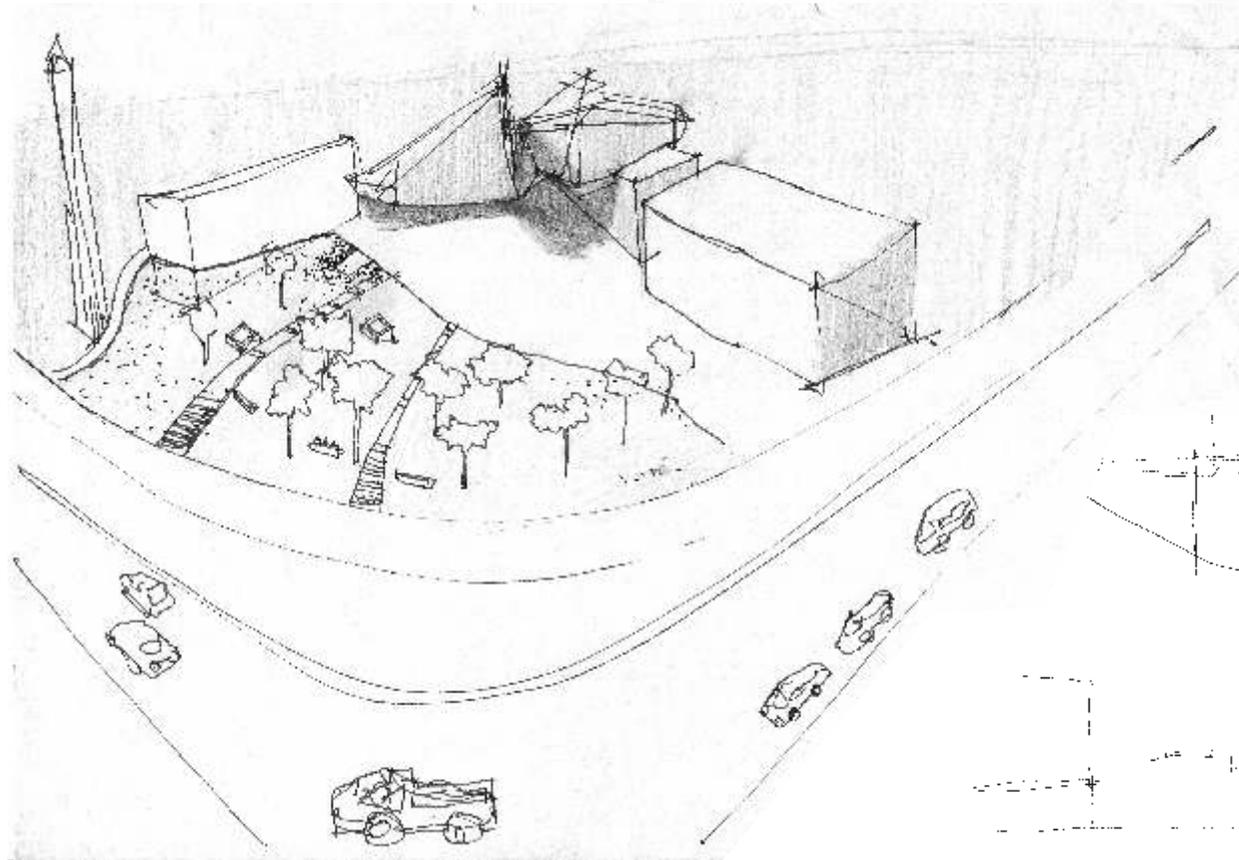
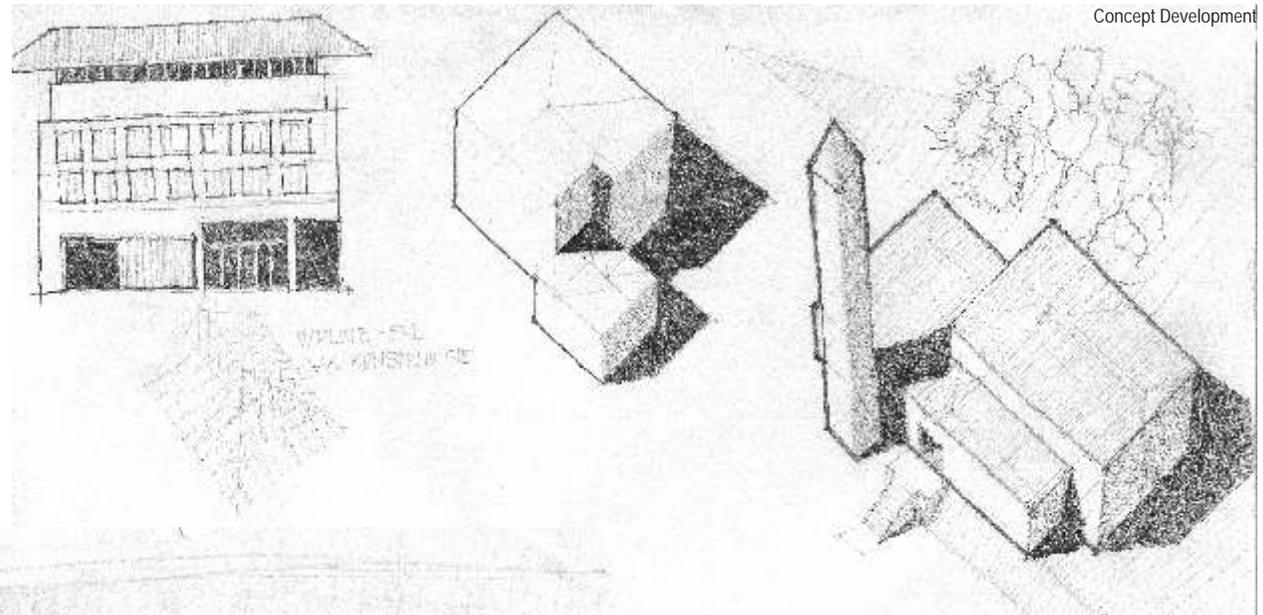


Alas, the structure becomes the dominant signifier. A large box suspended by concrete megaliths distributed on its perimeter. The poetry of the real. Dramatic through its simplicity. But how much would have to be sacrificed on this altar of Simplicity?

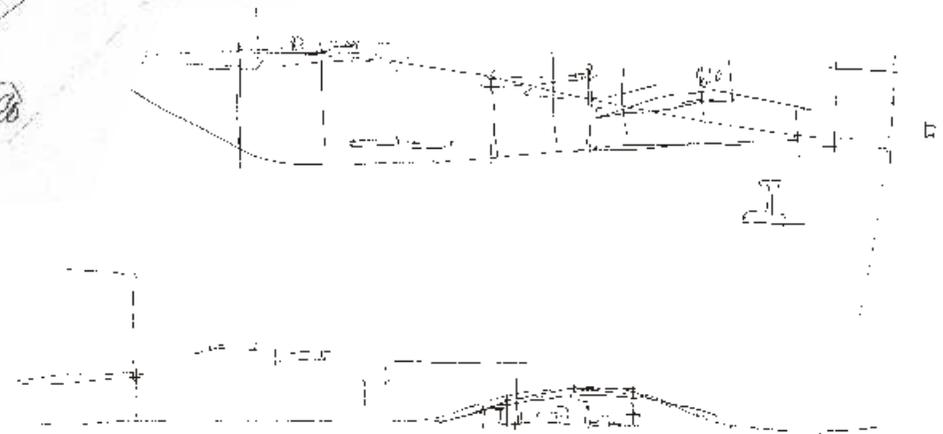
A sudden mental revisit to the site. See the expressway in the glaring sun. The cars uncaringly rushing by. The rest - Tabula Rasa. The size of the project precludes the little intricacies of 'context'.

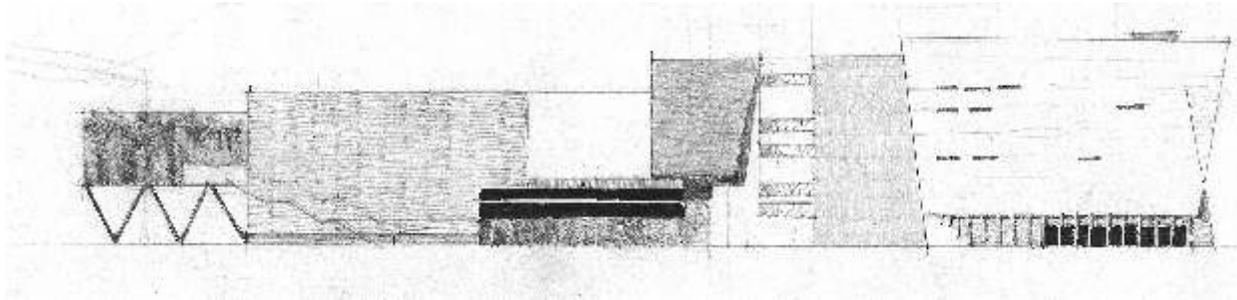
The problem of establishing a humane threshold between the congress centre and the city. How to make the square a safe and respectable place. An artificial vegetated hill is shoved in between the expressway and the square - the cars driving by ignorant of the urban paradise behind the obscure cave of concrete. Taxi's and other unlucky pedestrians are also stuck under this embankment against the people of the street. Relief is however possible on the hill but how long would the grass be maintained before it becomes a muddy, dusty block?

The congress centre is still distributed over smaller buildings - sculptures backed up against the railway line.



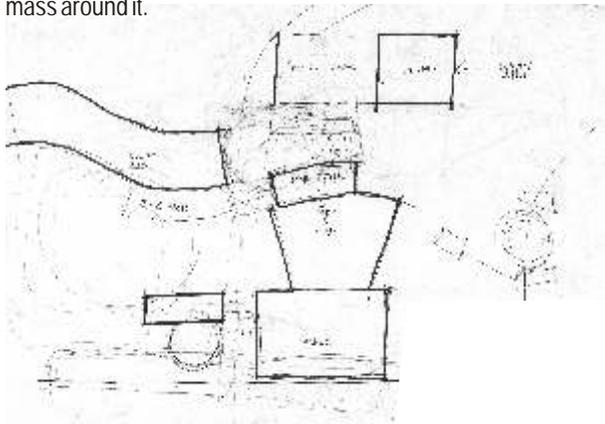
Testing the assumption of raking the city towards the harbour. Should there not rather be a climactic monument visible from the waterfront? The bridge over the railway is questioned as a really appropriate 'gateway' to the harbour.



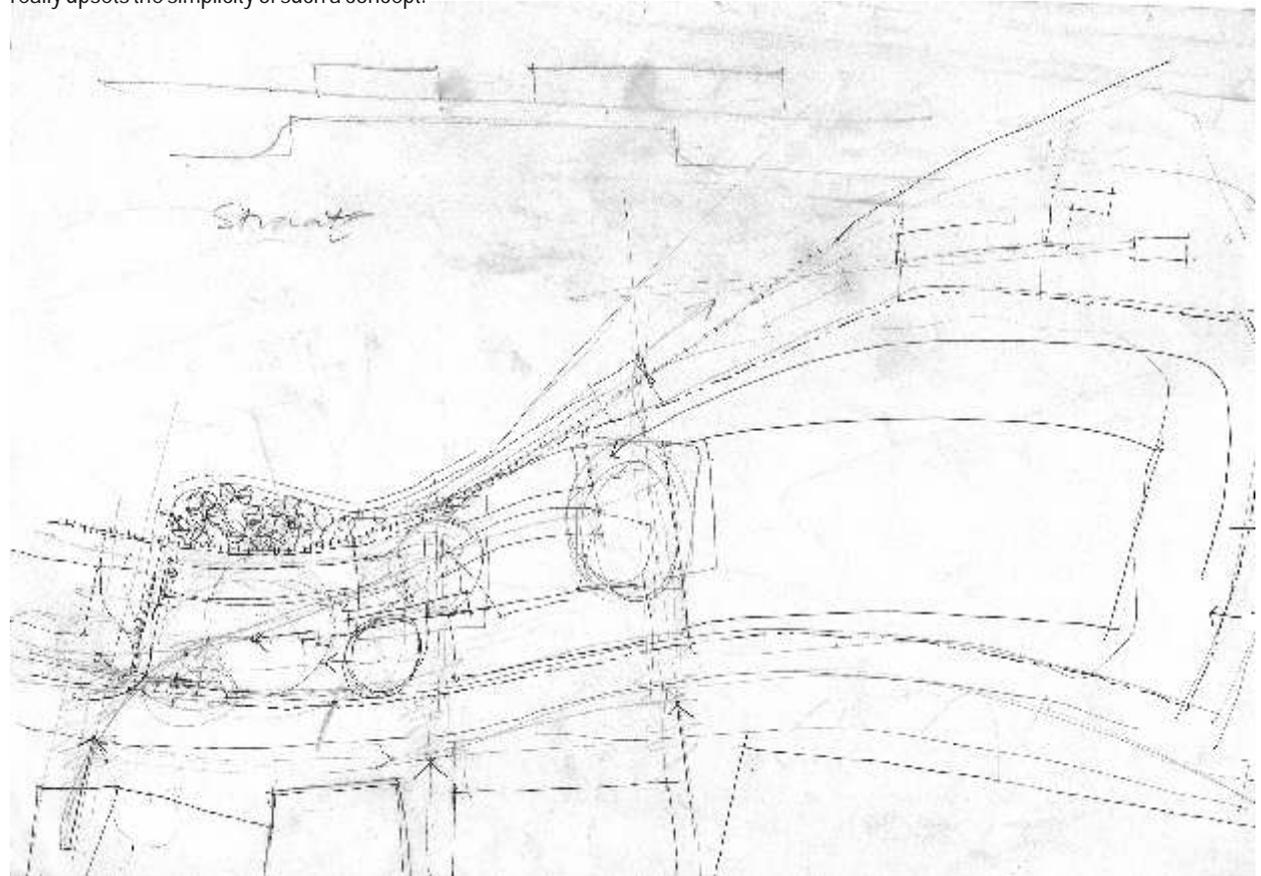


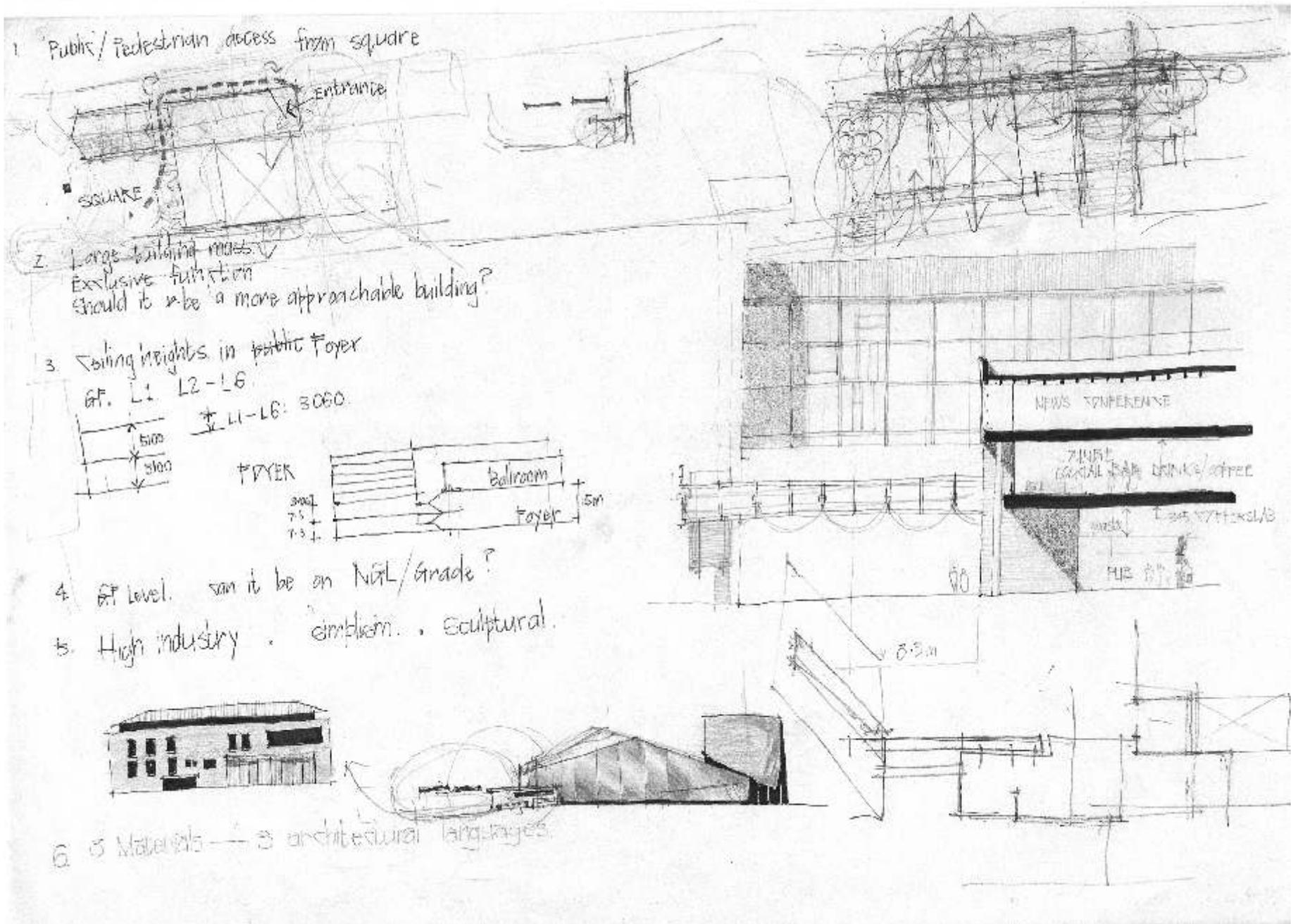
Sometimes it does not seem so terrible in your mind - until you put pencil to paper. The Last signs of a the sculpture disappear over the horizon. But what is to follow? The drama of technology - louvres, a large hall balanced on a truss-like colonnade. The pedestrian bridges lightly spanning the pedestrian gateway to the harbour. This is as far as one can go without a plan. The dominance of the plan shuffles around in the dark corners of the concept. It is the silent ruler - the generator. The search for a building elevation has proven itself utterly superficial.

The buildings start moving closer together and the spaces in between become the centre-pieces. The relationships between functions become the dominant constraint. A road from the other side of the expressway, an ambassador of the city, is extended through the site and enters the harbour. On this road, in the middle of the site, a courtyard starts to grow from the gathering of mass around it.

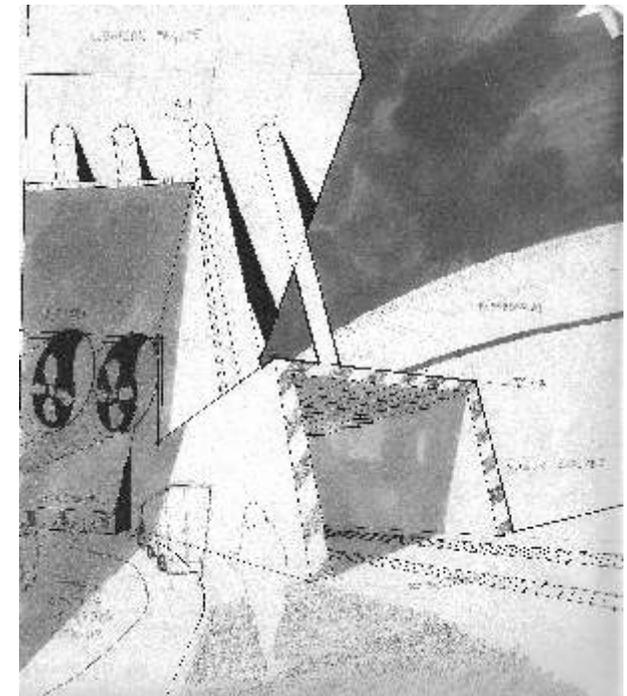
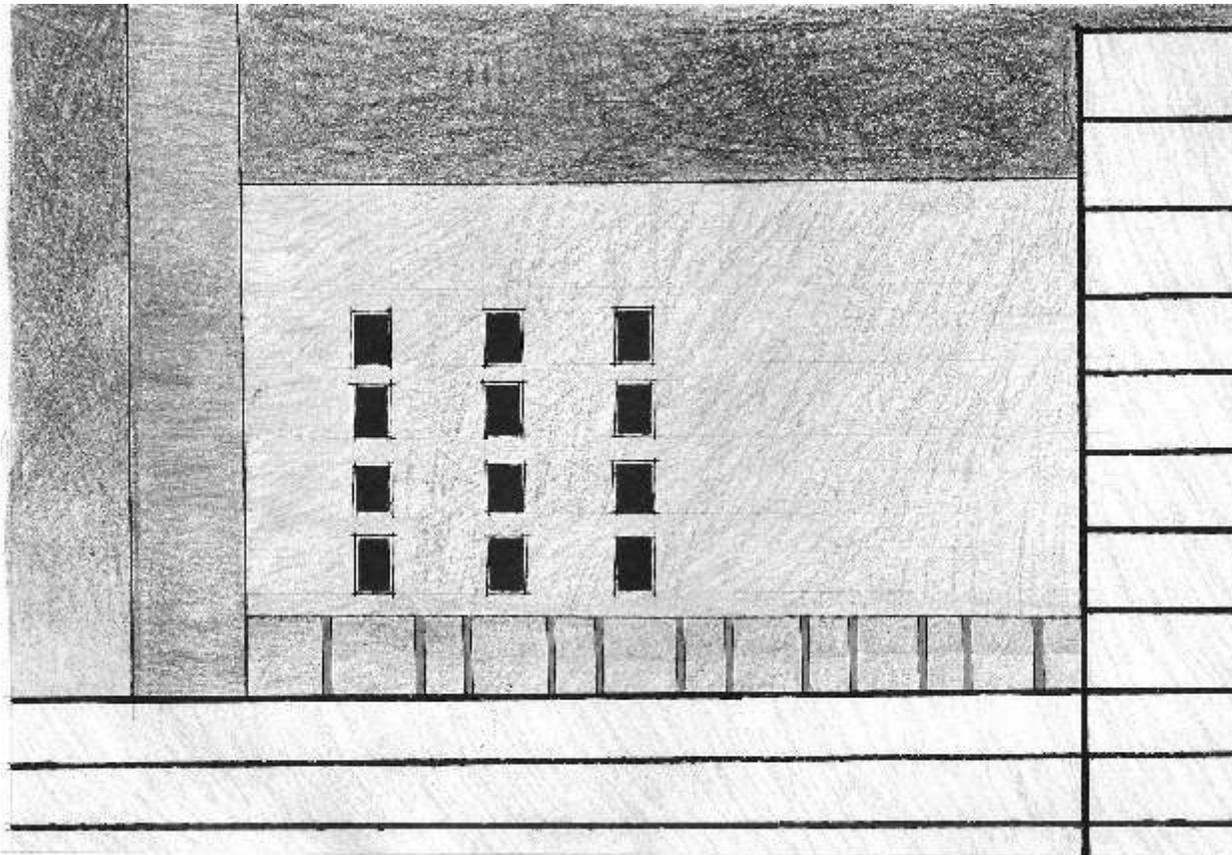


How to maintain that benevolent relationship with the extended road, the courtyard and keep the courtyard. Could the courtyard and the Campanile's square be the same thing. Is it not just the same concept with a road added to it. The length of the site and railway really upsets the simplicity of such a concept.





Aesthetic cynicism gains momentum until every beginning of a concept shrivels away in the glare of self-consciousness. What remains is a humble appreciation of the "simple and innocent" - back to beginning where shape and elevation dominates. Only this time the details have to be unspoilt and spontaneous.



Instead, the arbitrariness of construction, services, a railway servitude and the necessity of large civil engineering elements, combined with the essential trivialities of commercial decorations - "high quality finishes" - are the things that characterise this building. This is the complexity that silently demands expression.